

The Aether Chronicle

The Imaginary Alternate History of the Steampunk Empire

From Friday September 5, 2014 to Friday September 19, 2014



THE DOORS LOCK BEHIND THE PLAYERS, NOT NECESSARILY WITH LOCKS, AND KEYS, BUT THE PLAYERS ARE TRAPPED...

NEW FAD OF BEING “LOCKED IN” CAPTURES LONDON THRILL-SEEKERS

THE MUSIC HALLS, THEATRES, AND TAVERNS HAVE BEEN PRACTICALLY EMPTY FOR THE LAST MONTH. LOCAL LONDON ADVENTURE-SEEKERS ARE FLOCKING TO A NEW AND MODERN FORM OF FRIDAY NIGHT ENTERTAINMENT: ESCAPE ROOMS. WHILE BEING LOCKED IN A ROOM MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE FATE FOR SENTENCED CRIMINALS, NOW THERE IS APPARENTLY A NEW FAD FOR BEING INCARCERATED. THE ROOMS ARE CLEVERLY DESIGNED “SETS”, WITH REAL LOCKS AND BARS, AND STURDY WALLS; FOR EACH ROOM, THERE IS ONE WAY OF ACHIEVING FREEDOM, USUALLY FIENDISHLY DIFFICULT, LIKE A PUZZLE, OR A RIDDLE. THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE ONE HOUR TO UNCOVER THE KEY AND ESCAPE THE ROOM, THEY MUST WORK TOGETHER IN ORDER TO ESCAPE, THUS THE COINED TERM “ESCAPE ROOMS.”

THIS REPORTER TRACKED THE FIRST OF SUCH “DIVERSIONS” TO BATHURST, WHERE THE ESCAPE ROOM RESEMBLED AN OLD DUNGEON CELL. THIS REPORTER TOOK NOTES WHILE PLAYERS TORE THE ROOM APART, UNCOVERING CLUES. AFTER INTERVIEWING SEVERAL PAST PLAYERS, THIS REPORTER LEARNED THAT IN ORDER TO ESCAPE THE VARIOUSLY THEMED ESCAPE ROOMS, PLAYERS OFTEN HAVE TO UNRAVEL RIDDLES, DECIPHER CIPHERS, UTILIZE PROPS, AND EVEN INTERROGATE ONE ANOTHER AS TO EVERY PLAYER’S SKILLS IN ORDER TO PROPERLY UTILIZE ALL OF THE “TOOLS” AT THEIR DISPOSAL. “THE GAMES ARE PERSONALIZED TO EACH PARTICULAR GROUP,” ONE MORRIS HELSING EXPLAINED, AS A VETERAN OF THE ESCAPE ROOMS. “THE GAMES ARE VERY CHALLENGING, THEY REQUIRE PLAYERS ARMED WITH LOGIC, SKILL, AND THE ABILITY TO WORK AS A TEAM.” APPARENTLY THE ESCAPE ROOMS ARE BEING WELL RECEIVED BY A CERTAIN BREED OF THE INTELLECTUAL SET. “I’VE ALWAYS BEEN ONE FOR PUZZLES,” WALLACE ENDING, OF THE DARBYSHIRE ENDINGS,

COMMENTED, “I WAS NEVER ONE FOR RUNNING HERE AND THERE, UP AND DOWN A CRICKET FIELD, OR WHACKING A BIRDIE OVER A NET. WHAT’S THE POINT? PUZZLES, NOW, RIDDLES AND NUMERIC DEVICES, THOSE ARE A REAL CHALLENGE, DESIGNED TO IMPROVE THE MIND AND HONE ONE’S PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS.” MR. ENDING HAS NOT YET “HAD THE PLEASURE” OF TAKING PART IN AN ESCAPE ROOM.

NOW READERS, THIS REPORTER DID NOTE—AND THIS OPINION IS BASED PURELY IN OBJECTIVE, RATIONAL OBSERVATION—THAT MR. ENDING, IN HIS TAILORED WOOL SUIT, STARCHED WHITE COLLAR, AND SILK RED HANDKERCHIEF, RATHER SET HIM APART FROM THE OTHER PLAYERS, WHO WERE DISTINCTLY BENEATH HIM IN SOCIAL CLASS. THE OTHER PLAYERS HELD THEMSELVES A LITTLE ALOOF FROM HIM, AND HAD INSTEAD FORMED THEIR OWN TIGHT LITTLE KNOTS OF PLAYERS AND COMMENTATORS, MIXING AND NETWORKING AMONGST THEMSELVES RATHER FREELY.

UPON FURTHER INVESTIGATION, THIS REPORTER DISCOVERED THAT VERY FEW OF THE PLAYERS HAD EVER MET BEFORE THEY WERE PLACED INTO AN ESCAPE ROOM TOGETHER. “WE ALL RECEIVE NOTES,” AN OXFORD STUDENT, ONE MISSY ALEXANDRIA EXPLAINED, “EITHER BY POST, OR TUCKED INTO OUR CUBBIES AT SCHOOL, OR SLID UNDER THE DOOR OF OUR APARTMENTS. THE NOTES LIST AN ADDRESS, AND A TIME. I WALKED INTO THE STORAGE FACILITY ON THE DOCKS, THE DOOR SLAMMED SHUT BEHIND ME, AND I WAS IN TOTAL DARKNESS. I ALMOST PANICKED. BUT FUMBLING AROUND I KNOCKED SOMETHING OVER, WHICH TURNED OUT TO BE A STORM LANTERN. THEN THERE WERE OTHER SCUFFLINGS, AND SOMEONE MUTTERED, “WHO’S THERE?” AS A CHORUS OF NAMES RANG OUT IN THE DARKNESS, I REALIZED I WAS IN THE ROOM WITH THE OTHER PLAYERS! WE ALL MANAGED TO FIND SOME SORT OF TOOL IN THE DARK LITTLE BUNKER: ONE OF THOSE TOOLS WAS MATCHES, SO I LIT THE STORM LANTERN, AND THEN I SAW THE OTHER PLAYERS. FROM THERE, WE SET TO WORK.”

THIS REPORTER HAS FOUND A SIMILAR THREAD THROUGHOUT THE STORIES OF VARIOUS ESCAPE ROOMS. THERE IS A DARKER ELEMENT BORN OUT OF THE GAMES: THE NEED TO SURVIVE. DEPRIVED OF OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE, OFTEN IN DARKNESS, OR HEAT, OR COLD, TOTAL STRANGERS MUST BAND TOGETHER IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THEIR FREEDOM.

THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING THESE ESCAPE ROOMS IS PART OF THE ALLURE. NO ONE KNOWS WHO CREATED THEM, WHO MAINTAINS THEM, AND HOW SUCH PERSONAL INFORMATION ABOUT EVERY PLAYER IS KNOWN. WHAT IS THE PROCESS BY WHICH SUCH ELABORATE “TEAMS” ARE CONSTRUCTED? PAST ACCOUNTS CONFIRM THAT IN THE ESCAPE ROOMS EACH PLAYER HAS A SELECT TALENT NEEDED BY THE OTHERS IN

ORDER TO WIN THE GAME. HOW DO THE ORGANIZERS KNOW THE PLAYERS PERSONAL ADDRESSES? WHEN QUESTIONED, PLAYERS ADMITTED THEY WERE CONCERNED WHEN THE NOTES ARRIVED, HOWEVER, THE ALLURE OF THE ESCAPE ROOMS WAS TOO SEDUCTIVE, SO THE PLAYERS ABANDONED CAUTION AND SHOWED UP TO PLAY THE GAME.

DESPITE THE GROWING ENTHUSIASM FOR THIS TYPE OF THRILL, THIS REPORTER WAS SHOCKED TO LEARN THAT ALMOST ALL OF THE TEAMS EVIDENTLY FAILED TO FIND THE KEY AND OPEN THE DOOR. “IT’S NOT MEANT TO BE EASY,” ONE DORIS DORM, WASHER WOMAN, INSISTED, “IF IT WAS EASY, THEN WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT?” IN FACT, ONLY SIX OUT OF 145 TEAMS HAVE ACTUALLY ACHIEVED THE KEY AND WON THE GAME.

READERS, THIS REPORTER IS SOMEWHAT AT A LOSS WHEN FACED WITH THIS BIZARRE FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT. IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE THRILL OF HAVING ONE’S FREEDOM USURPED KEEPS LONDON RESIDENTS COMING BACK FOR MORE. THE GAME LOCATIONS ARE KEPT SECRET FROM ALL EXCEPT THE FEW TEAMS WHO PLAY THERE, AND NEW ESCAPE ROOMS ARE CONSTANTLY BEING ADDED, AS WELL AS THEMED ROOMS (PSYCHIATRIC WARD, MUMMY’S TOMB, GRAVEYARD, FARMHOUSE CELLAR...). APPARENTLY, THERE ARE NOW CHAMPION LEVELS TO THE ESCAPE ROOMS, AND THIS REPORTER WAS SHOCKED TO DISCOVER THAT PLAYERS WHO MASTER THE GAME CAN “BUY” THEIR WAY INTO TRYING THE MORE ADVANCED LEVELS...FOR 1£ PER TICKET, PER GAME! WHOMEVER IS RUNNING THESE ESCAPE ROOMS CLEARLY HAS A MARKETING STRATEGY IN MIND: THE BEGINNER LEVELS ARE FREE, TO GET THE PLAYERS HOOKED, BUT THE MORE ADVANCED LEVELS ARE COSTLY, AND THOSE ROOMS ARE THE MOST ADDICTIVE.

THE METAPHOR BEHIND THESE ESCAPE ROOMS IS INTRIGUING: CITIZENS OF LONDON WILLINGLY PLACE THEMSELVES INTO CAPTIVITY, AND OFTEN INTO UNBEARABLE CONDITIONS, FOR 1 HOUR. THEY ARE SHOVED TOGETHER WITH STRANGERS, AND FORCED TO OVERCOME VARIOUS OBSTACLES IN ORDER TO REGAIN THEIR FREEDOM! IT IS ALMOST A SOCIAL COMMENTARY ON THE STATE IN WHICH WE LIVE OUR LIVES: WHILE LONDONERS MIGHT CONSIDER THEMSELVES FREE, ARE THEY REALLY SO RESTLESS AND BORED WITH THE DAY-TO-DAY TRIVIALITIES THAT THEY WILLINGLY SURRENDER THEIR FREEDOM TO ESCAPE THE MONOTONY, TO ENGAGE IN A SUSPENSEFUL, FRIGHTENING FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL?



AN ARTIST'S INTERPRETATION OF THE DARING DUO WHO SAVED MISS WALTON'S LIFE.

RIPPER SIGHTINGS BRING STRANGE RESCUE

BY KENT EDWARD WHITTINGTON

TERROR STRUCK WHITECHAPEL ONCE AGAIN LAST NIGHT WHEN WITNESS ELLIE WALTON WAS ATTACKED BY JACK THE RIPPER/SPRINGHEEL JACK. MISS WALTON, A LOCAL DOLLYMOP, WAS PLYING HER TRADE IN THE CHAPEL WHEN SHE CLAIMS SHE WAS SOLICITED BY JACK.

"HE WAS A RIGHT GENTLEMAN WHEN I SAW HIM FIRST," WALTON WAS QUOTED AS SAYING, "ASKED ME IF I WAS GOOD FOR A DAB? I SAYS TO HIM, 'A DOWNER WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR COMPANY.' I TOOK HIM TO THE ALLEY AND THE NEXT I KNOW THE HE'S ALL OVER ME! PAWING AND TRYING TO RIP ME KNICKERS HE WAS!"

WALTON WENT ON INTO SOME DETAIL THAT THIS REPORTER DARE NOT REPEAT IN THIS ARTICLE. SUFFICE IT TO SAY, AS WITH THE LAST WITNESS, WALTON CLAIMS THAT THE GENTLEMAN UNDERWENT A DRASTIC AND SUDDEN TRANSFORMATION AS HIS GENTLEMAN'S DRESS DISSOLVED, REVEALING THE OILSKIN SHIRT AND HELMET. WALTON SAID THAT HIS EYES GLOWED RED AND FIRE

SHOT FROM HIS MOUTH AS HE ATTEMPTED TO HAVE HIS WAY WITH HER.

WALTON THEN CLAIMS THAT BEFORE JACK COULD BEGIN HIS GORY DEED WITH THE AID OF HIS CLAWED GLOVE, HIS EFFORTS WERE THWARTED BY TWO INDIVIDUALS, A MAN AND A WOMAN.

"SHE WAS DRESSED LIKE AN AMERICAN COWBOY AND WORE THESE QUEER GOGGLE THINGS," WALTON WENT ON TO SAY. OF



HER GENTLEMAN COMPANION, HE WAS APPARENTLY VERY NONDESCRIPT AS WALTON PROVIDED

LITTLE INFORMATION. WALTON CLAIMS THAT THE TWO POUNCED UPON HER ATTACKER, WHO THREW THEM OFF AND LEAPT STRAIGHT INTO THE AIR ATOP A NEIGHBOURING WALL OF A HEIGHT NO NORMAL HUMAN COULD ATTAIN WITHOUT HELP. THE TWO RESCUERS FIRED GUNS THAT WALTON CLAIMED SHOT "LIGHTNING FROM THEIR BARRELS" AND GAVE CHASE ON FOOT, BUT WEREN'T SEEN AGAIN BY MISS WALTON THAT EVENING.

THE TWO WERE WITNESSED BY SEVERAL OTHERS AS THEY FOLLOWED JACK, WHO EVENTUALLY MANAGED TO ELUDE THEM. WHEN ACCOSTED BY A CONSTABLE, THE TWO CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO FIND AND CAPTURE JACK BY ORDER OF THEIR BENEFACTOR; NONE OTHER THAN LORD RANSOM, HEAD OF "THE MOTHERHOUSE," AN ORGANISATION SHROUDED IN NO SMALL AMOUNT OF MYSTERY.

THE MOTHERHOUSE IS DESCRIBED BY SOME AS A VERY EXCLUSIVE GENTLEMAN'S CLUB, AND LITTLE IS KNOWN OF ITS TRUE USAGE. RUMOURS ABOUND, CLAIMING THE MOTHERHOUSE AS ANYTHING FROM THE AFOREMENTIONED TO A TYPE OF SPIRITUALIST'S CABAL. MY OWN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MATTER HAS REVEALED THAT THE ORGANISATION HAS HAD A HAND IN WHAT THEY CLAIM ARE "SPIRITUAL EVICTIONS" WHICH, IN EFFECT RID ONE OF SUPERNATURAL TERRORS. WHETHER THIS CLAIM IS TRUE IS UNKNOWN, BUT THOSE WHO WERE INTERVIEWED CLAIM TO BE IN THE MOTHERHOUSE'S DEBT.

LORD RANSOM HAS

BEEN KNOWN TO DABBLE IN THE SPIRITUAL AND IT IS CONFIRMED THAT HE HAS ATTENDED MORE THAN HIS FAIR SHARE OF SÉANCES IN HIS DAY. A FEW INDIVIDUALS WHO KNOW THE MAN CLAIM THAT HE SEEKS TO REACH BEYOND THE GRAVE TO CONTACT HIS SON, WHO DIED SIX YEARS AGO IN A FIRE WHEN A SHIP HE HAD BOARDED IN NEWCASTLE EXPLODED AS IT RETURNED TO THE LONDON HARBOUR, ALL SOULS LOST, INCLUDING YOUNG RANSOM.

WHAT IS CURIOUS IS, IF THESE SO CALLED RESCUERS OF MISS ELLIE WALTON ARE AFFILIATED WITH AN ALLEGED SPIRITUAL ORGANISATION SUCH AS THE MOTHERHOUSE, WHY WOULD THEY BE PURSUING A FLESH AND BLOOD CREATURE LIKE OUR ELUSIVE FRIEND, JACK? THIS REPORTER INTENDS TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH OF IT.

Welcome to The Aether Chronicle!



KENT EDWARD WHITTINGTON, NEW FEATURE REPORTER

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION WITH REGARDS TO THIS DEMON, PLEASE CONTACT KENT EDWARD WHITTINGTON, WHO IS CURRENTLY COLLABORATING WITH SCOTLAND YARD.

The Aether Review Of Books

Not Quite Dead, By Sela Carson

WSABINE HARPER STOOD IN FRONT OF A CRUMBLING CRYPT WITH HER YOUNGER COUSIN, LILY, WAITING FOR THE ORIGINAL AIRHEAD TO TRY TO RAISE THE DEAD. AFTER YEARS OF QUESTIONABLE DECISIONS, SHE COULD NOW CATEGORICALLY STATE THAT THIS WAS THE STUPIDEST THING SHE HAD EVER, EVER DONE IN HER LIFE.

LILY, IN HER NEWLY PURCHASED GOTH-GIRL GARB, RAISED HER BLACK MANICURED HANDS AND BEGAN TO INTONE WHAT SHE PROBABLY THOUGHT WAS A SPELL FOR DISINTERMENT. IT SOUNDED LIKE PIG LATIN. THE REST OF THE MORON SQUAD MARCHED SOLEMNLY AROUND THE GRAVE, CARRYING BLACK CANDLES. SABINE BACKED AWAY AND LEANED AGAINST A CONVENIENT CYPRESS TREE, WAITING FOR THE DRAMA TO BE OVER SO SHE COULD GO BACK TO HER BORING, WARM, WELL-LIT HOME.

THE INCANTATION SEEMED TO BE OVER. LILY AND HER GHOULISH FRIENDS WATCHED THE GRAVE EXPECTANTLY, UNTIL THE FLAME FROM ONE OF THE CANDLES LICKED UP THE COWL OF A GIRL WHO SPORTED ENOUGH BODY PIERCINGS TO SET OFF AIRPORT METAL DETECTORS. SHE SHRIEKED, DROPPED THE CANDLE, AND WHISKED OFF THE CAPE BEFORE IT DID ANY DAMAGE. NO GIRL GOING UP IN FLAMES. NO ZOMBIE RISING FROM THE GRAVE. THE AIR OF ANTICIPATION FADED AND THE LITTLE GROUP SAT DOWN DEJECTEDLY.

SABINE, WHO HAD STARTED WHEN THE GIRL SCREAMED, SETTLED BACK AGAINST THE TREE TO WAIT THROUGH THE DEBRIEFING AND COMMISERATIONS. AS IRRITATING AS IT HAD BEEN TO DISRUPT HER EVENING FOR THIS FUNERAL LITTLE DISPLAY, IT WAS A LOT MORE EXCITING THAN WHAT SHE HAD PLANNED – EATING A BOWL OF CEREAL WHILE WATCHING A BAD SCI-FI MOVIE ON TV. A STEP SOUNDED NEXT TO HER AND SHE JUMPED AGAIN, THIS TIME WITH A SCREAM HALF CAUGHT IN HER THROAT. SHE LOOKED AROUND AND SAW A TALL MAN COME OUT OF THE SHADOWS BEHIND THE TREE. HIS MANNER SEEMED DIRECT, NOT FURTIVE AS ONE WOULD EXPECT FROM A MAN WHO WALKED THROUGH CEMETERIES IN THE DARK. STILL, IT WAS HARDLY REASSURING. “SORRY TO STARTLE YOU,” HE SAID. “NO PROBLEM.” THERE WERE PEOPLE ALL AROUND, BUT SHE WAS WARY.

“WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?” HE WAS EVEN TALLER THAN SHE FIRST THOUGHT, SHE REALIZED AS HE STOOD BESIDE HER. HE HAD TO BEND DOWN TO SPEAK SOFTLY TO HER. SHE COULDN’T SEE MUCH OF HIS FACE IN THE DARK, BUT HIS FEATURES SEEMED REGULAR, HIS EYES DARK, AND HIS TEETH WHITE. SHE GLANCED BACK AT LILY. “THEY’RE RAISING THE DEAD.”

HE LOOKED OVER AT THE GRAVESIDE GATHERING AND RAISED AN EYEBROW. “IS IT WORKING?” SHE ANGLED HER HEAD TO LOOK AT HIM DISBELIEVINGLY AND HE GRINNED DOWN AT HER. SHE SMILED BACK AS THEY LEANED INTO THE STURDY TRUNK OF THE TREE.

“NOT SO FAR.” “AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, SINCE YOU OBVIOUSLY DON’T BELIEVE IN THIS?” “SEE THAT LITTLE BLONDE OVER THERE? THE ONE WITH THE SPIKES IN HER HAIR? THAT’S MY COUSIN. I’M HERE BECAUSE MY AUNT WOULD DIG ME A GRAVE IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO HER DURING THIS PHASE SHE’S GOING THROUGH OF THINKING SHE’S A WITCH.”

THE MAN NODDED. “IF YOU DON’T MIND MY ASKING, WHY ARE YOU HERE?” SHE ASKED. “JUST CHECKING ON AN OLD FRIEND.” “I’M SORRY.” SHE PLACED HER HAND ON HIS ARM FOR A MOMENT. “WHERE IS HE?” “RIGHT OVER THERE.” HE POINTED AT THE TOMB WHERE LILY AND HER FRIENDS WERE SITTING. THE TOMB WHOSE INHABITANT THEY HAD TRIED TO RAISE. SABINE GASPED IN HORROR.

“OH MY GOSH. I AM SO SORRY,” SHE SAID AS SHE PUSHED AWAY FROM THE TREE. SHE STARTED TOWARD THE GROUP, READY TO TELL THEM OFF FOR DISTURBING THE GRAVE, WHEN CANDLELIGHT FLICKERED OVER THE DATE OF DEATH ON THE VAULT. 1882.

SHE STOPPED AND TURNED BACK TO THE MAN, WHO SMILED AT HER AGAIN, SHOWING HIS FANGS THIS TIME. SHE LUNGED FOR THE GROUP AT THE SAME TIME CHAOS ERUPTED ALL AROUND HER. THE STONE COVERING OF THE RAISED GRAVE EXPLODED AND A FIGURE SPRANG OUT OF MORE THAN A CENTURY OF DUST AND DECAY. SABINE WATCHED IN HORRIFIED SILENCE AS THE SCREAMS OF THE WANNABE WITCHES ECHOED IN HER EARS. THE FORMER OWNER OF THE GRAVE, WHOLE, UNDECAYED EXCEPT FOR HIS CLOTHING, AND COVERED IN STONE DUST, BEGAN TO WALK WITH MALICIOUS INTENT

TOWARD THE MAN WITH WHOM SABINE HAD SPOKEN. THE DEAD MAN STOPPED. HE TURNED HIS HEAD AND PINNED HER WITH HIS GAZE. HE TOOK ONE STEP IN HER DIRECTION, THEN SEEMED TO CHANGE HIS MIND AGAIN AND RAN OFF INTO THE DARKNESS—AFTER THE GUY WITH THE DENTAL ISSUES. THE MORON SQUAD HAD SCATTERED, LEAVING THE COUSINS ALONE IN THE DARK—ALONE IF YOU DIDN’T COUNT FANG BOY AND ZOMBIE. LILY AND SABINE BACKED AWAY FROM THE RUINED GRAVE. “IT WORKED,” LILY WHISPERED, HER PUPILS SO DILATED THAT ONLY A THIN RIM OF BLUE SHOWED AROUND THE BLACK. SABINE GRABBED HER HAND AND FOUND HER VOICE. “RUN!” THE DEAD MAN HAD LOOKED AT HER—RIGHT AT HER AS THOUGH HE RECOGNIZED HER. SABINE PULLED HER STUMBLING CHARGE BETWEEN THE MONUMENTS TO THE PARKING LOT AND SHOVED LILY INTO THE PASSENGER SEAT OF THE CAR. SHE DASHED AROUND TO GET IN HER SIDE WHEN SHE RAN INTO A WALL OF SOLID, COLD FLESH AND LOOKED UP INTO THE FACE OF THE MAN WITH WHOM SHE HAD SPOKEN BY THE TREE. SABINE GLANCED AROUND HIS SHOULDER, CHECKING FOR THE ZOMBIE. “SORRY, BELLE. HE ALWAYS NEEDED COFFEE THE MOMENT HE WOKE UP. OUR DEAR WILLEM ISN’T FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS YET, SO I GAVE HIM THE SLIP.” THE VAMPIRE’S VOICE WAS SHEER HEAVEN WITH THE PUREST UPPER-CRUST CREOLE ACCENT. HE SOUNDED LIKE A BEIGNET TASTED, CRISP, SMOOTH AND SWEET. THEN HE DESTROYED THE ILLUSION BY SMILING AT HER AGAIN. HE DIDN’T BOTHER TO HIDE HIS LONG CANINE TEETH AS HE WRAPPED ONE HAND AROUND HER LEFT ARM. WHICH LEFT HER RIGHT ARM FREE. SABINE DIDN’T EVEN THINK. SHE DID THE VERY THING ALL THE SELF-DEFENCE ARTICLES TALKED ABOUT AND USED THE WEAPONS SHE HAD AT HAND. HER RIGHT HAND STILL HELD HER CAR KEYS AND SHE SLAMMED THEM UP, LEAVING A BLOODY GASH DOWN THE FACE WHICH, IN THE WHITE-GREEN GLARE OF THE STREET LIGHT, SHE COULD NOW SEE WAS ANGELICALLY BEAUTIFUL. HE LET GO AND STUMBLED BACK, CURSING AS HE RETREATED INTO THE DARKNESS. SHE GOT INTO THE CAR, GUNNED THE ENGINE, AND SQUEALED OUT OF THE LOT, LOCKING HER DOORS AND HER MIND TO THE HORROR SHE HAD JUST SEEN.

The Aether Review Of Books

Not Quite Dead, By Sela Carson

WELL, DEAR READERS, THIS WEEK'S STORY SUBMISSION IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM OUR USUAL FARE. AUTHOR SELA CARSON HAS PROVIDED STORY CONTENT TO DELIGHT OUR VARIOUS VAMPIRE-STEAMPUNK/GOTHIC STEAMPUNK CITIZENS OF THE EMPIRE. ONE MIGHT MAKE OBJECTION TO THE TIME DISCREPANCY; CLEARLY WE ARE NOT IN OUR PREFERRED ERA WITH THIS STORY. BUT THAT, DEAR READERS, IS WHAT PROVIDES A DELIGHTFUL CONTRAST TO THE USUAL STEAMPUNK GENRE FEATURED IN THIS NEWSPAPER.

THE CHARM OF THE AUTHOR'S WORK, *NOT QUITE DEAD*, CAN BE FOUND IN THE JUXTAPOSITION OF THE CHARACTERS. CERTAINLY, OUR STEAMPUNK CITIZENS FIND A LINK TO THE STEAMPUNK WORLD IN THE VAMPIRE, WHO COMES FROM AN ERA AND CULTURE THAT HAS ALWAYS FOUND PROMINENCE IN THE STEAMPUNK WORLD. THE FIRST GENTLEMAN, WHOM WE HAVE NOT BEEN FORMALLY INTRODUCED TO, ARRIVES AT THE CEMETERY TO GREET HIS FRIEND WILLEM UPON HIS RESURRECTION. CERTAINLY, HE DIDN'T EXPECT TO FIND A HANDFUL OF MODERN TEENAGERS ATTEMPTING A CRUDE SEANCE OVER THE GRAVE OF HIS FRIEND. STRANGELY ENOUGH, THE VAMPIRE INTERACTS WITH THESE YOUNGSTERS, ADMITTING HE IS IN THE GRAVEYARD TO "CHECK ON A FRIEND." OUR HEROINE, SABINE, IS APPALLED THAT HER COUSIN AND HER SILLY FRIENDS WERE ESSENTIALLY USING THIS MAN'S FRIEND AS A GUINEA PIG, AND PLANS TO CHASTISE THEM.

SABINE'S TIRADE IS INTERRUPTED, HOWEVER, WHEN SHE GLANCES AT THE DATE ON THE GRAVE: 1882. WHEN SHE TURNS, THE GENTLEMAN HAS UNVEILED HIS SHARPENED CANINES. THEN, OF COURSE, THE GRAVESTONE EXPLODED, EXPELLING THE FRIEND OF THE CURRENT VAMPIRE, WILLEM, IN THE MIDST OF A TERRIFIED GROUP OF GIRLS HOLDING BLACK CANDLES. PANIC ENSUED.

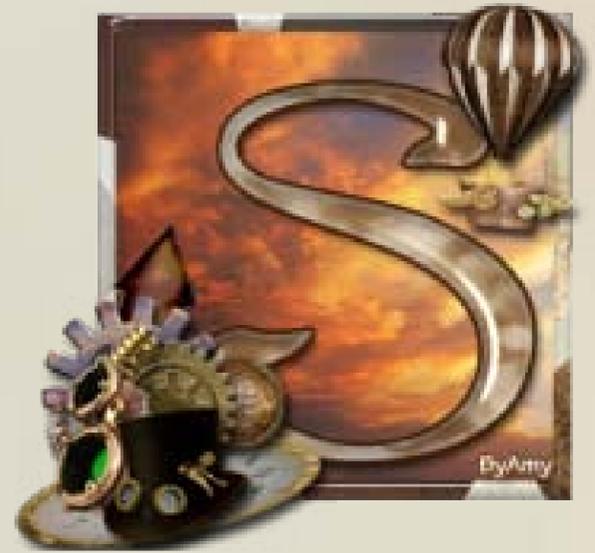
READERS WILL BE INTERESTED IN THE STRANGE TURNS THIS FIRST ENCOUNTER TAKES: FIRST WILLEM ADVANCES ON HIS FRIEND, THEN HALTS AND GAZES AT SABINE. THEN HE CHANGES HIS MIND AGAIN, AND BOLTS! IS FRIEND WILLEM ANOTHER VAMPIRE? IN HER MIND, SABINE HAS NAMED THE FIRST GENTLEMAN "VAMPIRE" AND THE SECOND GENTLEMAN "ZOMBIE"—ARE THERE ANY TRUTHS TO THESE NOMENCLATURES? WHAT WILL THIS SECOND MAN THINK, HAVING

BEEN RESURRECTED IN THE MIDST OF A GROUP OF GIRLS, WHO ALMOST CERTAINLY UNDERSTAND THAT WHAT THEY SAW WAS NOT A HALLUCINATION, OR A DREAM. WHAT WILL THE VAMPIRE THINK, HAVE SPOKEN TO SABINE A LITTLE BEFORE SHE WITNESSED THIS EVENT, AND EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO FOLLOW HER BACK TO HER CAR? WHAT WERE HIS INTENTIONS? OH ONE CAN CERTAINLY SPECULATE AS TO WHAT HIS INTENTIONS WERE—VAMPIRES DO HAVE TO EAT, YES? BUT WHY CHOOSE TO SPEAK TO HER, TO APOLOGISE FOR THE SCENE SHE JUST WITNESSED. HE EVEN MADE SOME WEAK ATTEMPTS TO MAKE LIGHT OF THE WHOLE SITUATION. WHICH, IN MY MIND, IS STRANGE BEHAVIOUR FOR A VAMPIRE.

CLEARLY THIS STORY HAS BEEN CRAFTED IN THE HOPES OF OVERTURNING CERTAIN STEREOTYPES CONCERNING THE VAMPIRE MYTHS. SETTING THE SCENE IN THE PRESENT DAY IS THE FIRST STEP TO THIS, THEREBY ENABLING VAMPIRES TO REVEAL THEMSELVES TO A MORE OPEN-MINDED, LESS RELIGIOUS SECT OF HUMANS. AS WE ALL KNOW, THE VAMPIRE MYTH HAS BEEN CO-OPTED IN FICTION LATELY, TURNING VAMPIRES INTO CREATURES OF DEEP FEELINGS AND ROMANCE. THE DIPLOMATIC BRIDGE BETWEEN VAMPIRES AND HUMANS HAS BEEN CROSSED SEVERAL TIMES IN LITERATURE, SO I WONDER WHAT OUR AUTHOR HAS PLANNED FOR YOUNG SABINE? SHE IS DEFINITELY A QUICK-THINKER AND SHE IS FAST ON HER FEET, AS SHE GRABS HER YOUNG COUSIN AND FLINGS HER INTO THEIR CAR. SHE IS MOMENTARILY PREVENTED FROM LEAVING, HOWEVER, WHEN SHE TURNS AND COLLIDES WITH SOMEONE, AND SABINE REALIZES SHE IS STANDING THERE FACE-TO-FACE WITH A REAL VAMPIRE!

THE FACT THAT SABINE DREW ON A PAST SELF-DEFENCE CLASS IN ORDER TO ESCAPE PROVES THAT SABINE IS A WOMAN WITH MORE WIT THAN HAIR. ONE WOULDN'T THINK THAT A VAMPIRE COULD BE SO EASILY INJURED BY A HUMAN, BUT THEN, VAMPIRES WERE HUMANS ONCE AS WELL. A SHARP BLOW TO THE VAMPIRE'S FACE WITH HER KEYS GIVES SABINE JUST ENOUGH TIME TO STUMBLE INTO THE CAR AND HIT THE GAS SO THEY LURCH INTO THE STREET AND BLAZE AWAY FROM THE GRAVEYARD. HOWEVER, READERS CAN IMAGINE THAT SABINE'S INTERACTIONS WITH THE VAMPIRE, AND HIS FRIEND WILLEM, ARE BY NO MEANS OVER. SHE AND HER COUSIN HAVE WITNESSED SOMETHING THAT NO HUMAN IS EVER SUPPOSED TO WITNESS. WHAT WILL THE VAMPIRE DO, TO ENSURE HER SILENCE? HOW WILL SABINE REACT, ONCE SHE HAS HAD A

CHANCE TO CALM DOWN, AND SHE REALIZES THAT SHE AND HER COUSIN ARE DOUBTLESSLY NOW IN DANGER FROM THE VAMPIRE AND HIS FRIEND? THE AUTHOR HAS SET THE SCENE, AND GIVEN THE AUDIENCE A LITTLE TASTE OF WHAT IS SURE TO BE AN ENGAGING PLOT LINE. BUT READERS, YOU WILL HAVE TO STAY TUNED IF YOU WISH TO FIND OUT MORE!



THE EMBLEM OF NEW AUTHOR SELA CARSON.

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

Travel

Hungary, By Amelia Owen Kibbey

BUDA GRANDE EXCELSIOR: 5 STAR LODGING. PLUSH TOWELS, MARBLE FLOORING THROUGHOUT, CRYSTAL CHANDELIER IN THE RECEPTION FOYER. TWO ELEGANT RESTAURANTS, SERVING DIGNIFIED CUISINE. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

THE GOLAN: SMALL, FAMILY RUN ESTABLISHMENT THAT CATERS TO FEMALE TRAVELLERS. WON'T TURN YOU OUT FOR BEING UNESCORTED. RESTAURANT CLOSSES AT ELEVEN THIRTY. DRINKS UNTIL ONE A.M. IN THE LOUNGE. ASK FOR A ROOM THAT FACES THE DANUBE.

BEST PLACES TO EAT: ERZSÉBET FOR CHICKEN PAPRIKÁS... YAAK'S IN BELVÁROS FOR A HEAPING BOWL OF HIGHLY SEASONED, STEAMING GOULASH. CSABA SERVES THE BEST AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN BEER A GIRL COULD WANT. VLAD'S TURNS OUT MORE SZILVÁSGOMBOC (PLUM DUMPLINGS) THAN ANY OTHER RESTAURANT IN THE CITY. AND DO NOT MISS ANTONE LIBBA FOR FRIED GOOSE LIVER THAT IS TO DIE FOR.

SOMETIMES I DO FORGET THAT I AM MEANT TO ADVISE MY READERS OF WHERE TO STAY AND EAT WHILST TRAVELLING THE GLOBE. YOU HAVE MY SOLEMN WORD THAT THIS TRAVEL STORIES RUN WILL MAKE NO MENTION OF MYSTERIES, POLICE INVOLVEMENT, OR MAYHEM. ALICE AND I ARE IN THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY, EXPLORING REGIONS ALONG THE DANUBE. MAINLY WE HAVE BEEN IN THE NEWLY NAMED "BUDAPEST." SOME EXCITING EVENTS AND FESTIVITIES ARE GOING ON.

DAYS 1-3: ONE CANNOT TRAVEL WITHOUT BECOMING ADDICTED TO FOOD AND I AM NO EXCEPTION IN THIS MATTER. OUR TIMING HAS BEEN SUCH THAT WE INTERCEPTED A THREE DAY CUISINE EXTRAVAGANZA FEATURING ALL THE BEST THE REGION HAS TO OFFER. WE GORGED OURSELVES FROM ONE END OF THE BOULEVARD TO THE OTHER. THE FESTIVAL ENCOMPASSED THREE QUARTERS OF A KILOMETRE OF TERRITORY AND HAD A TROLLEY TO FERRY PATRONS WHEREVER THEY WISHED TO GO ALONG THAT PATH. THERE WAS AMPLE OUTDOOR SEATING AVAILABLE AND BITE SIZED PORTIONS OF EACH SERVING SO AS TO ENABLE THE PARTAKING OF MANY, MANY DISHES.

THE SCENT OF SPICY PAPRIKA FILLED THE AIR. AN ABUNDANCE OF SOUR CREAM THREATENED TO RENDER ME BREATHLESS; HOW I LONGED TO LOOSEN THE TIES OF MY FAVOURITE CORSET AND INDULGE LIKE A MAN! EVEN AS I SIT PENNING THIS ARTICLE I CANNOT SHOO THE TASTE OF ROASTED RED PEPPERS FROM MY MEMORY. ALICE'S PERSONAL FAVOURITE WAS THE SOUR CHERRY SOUP, SAID TO BE FLAVOURED WITH SUGAR, SOUR CREAM, AND GRANDMA'S TEARS.

DAY 4: IN ORDER TO RECUPERATE FROM SUCH INDULGENCES ALICE AND I TURNED TO ATHLETICS THE NEXT DAY AND RENTED A PAIR OF VELOCIPEDES TO RIDE ABOUT THE TERRITORY. OF ALL THE LUNACY, THE MAN RUNNING THE ESTABLISHMENT HAD THE AUDACITY TO ADVISE US TO TRY THE PENNY FARTHING! EXACTLY WHERE DID HE THINK WE WERE GOING TO GO WITH THOSE? WE DONNED OUR BIFURCATED TROUSERS AND TOOK TO THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR THREE WHOLE HOURS ON THE 'PEDES.

SUCH AVANT-GARDE CONTRACTIONS! THEY WERE MANUFACTURED IN SILVER AND TOPPED OFF WITH ALL SORTS OF NEAT GADGETRY. EVER INTREPID (AND MINUS HER ARM CAST FROM ITALY), ALICE WENT CAREENING DOWN THE DIRT ROADS, PEDALING PAST DILAPIDATED BARNs AND DETOURING THROUGH AN OLIVE GROVE, MUCH TO THE FRUSTRATION OF ITS OWNER, ALL WITH A GRIN ON HER FACE AND A WHOOP COMING FROM HER LUNGS. I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU THAT MY LEGS WERE BEGGING FOR MERCY BY THE TIME WE RETURNED THE BICYCLES AT SUNSET THAT EVENING. THEY WERE FAIRLY SHAKING BY THE TIMED I CLIMBED OFF OF THAT BEAST FOR GOOD BACK AT THE RENTAL ESTABLISHMENT. THAT NIGHT IT TOOK MASSAGE AND AN EXTREMELY HOT SHOWER, ALONG WITH A STIFF DRAUGHT OF WARMED BRANDY, TO PUT ME BACK IN ORDER.

DAYS 5-6: OUR EUROPEAN ITINERARY IS LOOSELY PLANNED BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN PORTIONS WHICH WE TRY OUR BEST TO KEEP ON SCHEDULE FOR. A SPECIAL EVENT THAT COMES ROUND ONCE EVERY FIFTY YEARS QUALIFIES AND WHEN ALICE DISCOVERED SOME TIME AGO THAT OUR RANGE OF DATES COINCIDED WITH THE CLOSING OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL FAIR WE MADE CERTAIN TO BE HERE IN TIME TO SEE IT.

IF YOU'VE NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY, I HIGHLY RECOMMEND A NATIONAL OR WORLD'S EXPOSITION. THEY OFFER THE BEST OF WHAT TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY HAVE COMING DOWN THE PIKE FOR THE COMMUNITY AND IT'S EXCITING TO SAMPLE IT BEFORE IT BECOMES MAINSTREAM FOR THE POPULATION AT LARGE. THEY ARE LARGER THAN LIFE, COLOURFUL, OUTRAGEOUS, AND STRANGE ALTOGETHER.

ON OUR FIRST DAY WE SAW SUCH THINGS AS SELF-PROPELLED INFANT PERAMBULATORS, MECHANIZED DOLLIES (WHICH HAD A SLIGHTLY SINISTER MIEN TO ME), AND TINY AUTOMATONS NO BIGGER THAN A STUFFED TOY TO ROCK BABY CRADLES VIA MANUAL PROGRAM. THEY WERE CALLED MERRY NANNIES OF BUDA AND MANUFACTURED BY THE GROBBLER CO. I PERSONALLY WITNESSED HALF A DOZEN BABIES BEING CALMED BY THE LITTLE METAL MEN AS MOTHERS (AKA PROSPECTIVE BUYERS) STOOD BY IN AWE. TECHNOLOGY AS A MEANS TO MAKE ONE'S LIFE EASIER WILL ALWAYS ENTICE.

THERE WERE NEWER AND MORE UPDATED VERSIONS OF SCRIBBLER DEVICES WITH SHARPER HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE CAPACITY, ALONG WITH FOB WATCHES DESIGNED TO ANNOUNCE THE HOUR ALOUD WHEN A SPECIFIC BUTTON IS PRESSED. ALICE CONSIDERED INVESTING IN ONE OF THEM UNTIL SHE DISCOVERED A SLIGHT FLAW: NONE OF THE MODELS COULD DISCERN BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND ELEVEN FIFTEEN A.M., FOR THEY WERE BOTH ANNOUNCED THE SAME WAY. I THINK THAT ONCE THEY ARE ABLE TO CORRECT THE ISSUE THE LITTLE BUGGERS ARE GOING TO SELL LIKE A BROILY IN A RAINSTORM. THEY CAN SUPPOSEDLY BE PROGRAMMED TO ANSWER IN THREE LANGUAGES, INCLUDING ENGLISH FOR THOSE BRITISH READERS OUT THERE.

ONTO GRANDER AND MORE COSTLY INVENTIONS. THE HUNGARIANS LEAD THE WAY IN THE EVOLUTION OF TRANSPORTATION IN EASTERN EUROPE AND A MASSIVE HANGAR WAS DEVOTED TO ITS DISPLAY. WE BEGAN OUR SECOND DAY'S VISIT HERE. LARGER AND EVER MORE POWERFUL DIRIGIBLES, THE EVER POPULAR BARRAGE BALLOON, AND PESH'S OWN HIGHLY MANEUVERABLE STEAM ENGINE TRAM FOR TRAVEL TO AND FROM IN THE OLD CITY.

MIGHTILY IMPRESSIVE WERE THE SINGLE UNIT CARRIAGES. THEY WERE EQUIPPED WITH WINGS OVERHEAD THAT LOOKED AS DOWNY SOFT AS THE REAL THING BUT WERE, IN FACT, PIECES POWERED BY MAN. FOOT PEDALS INSIDE THE MAIN CABIN WERE WIRED SO THAT WITH A FEW GOOD PUSHES THE CARRIAGE MOVED OF ITS OWN ACCORD, SANS THE WORK CUSTOMARILY DONE BY A HORSE. IT TOOK LITTLE EFFORT TO GENERATE THE ENERGY NEEDED TO PROPEL IT.

HOW OUTRAGEOUSLY EXPENSIVE THEY WERE! I HEARD COMMENTS RANGING FROM "THAT'S SIX WHOLE MONTH'S OF WAGES!" TO "WHAT IF IT STALLS? IT'S NOT LIKE A HORSE, NOW IS IT?"

MISTER CLIPTON'S THRESHERS AND BINDERS FOR THE AGRICULTURAL FOLK HEADED UP THE FARMING DIVISION. NEW FANGLED PISTOLS, LABOUR SAVING DEVICES FOR THE HOUSEHOLD, BOOKS THAT FLIPPED THEIR OWN PAGES WITH THE TOUCH OF YOUR FINGER AND EVEN RECOGNIZED YOUR OWN PRINTS; IT WAS ALL THERE AT THE EXPOSITION. I WONDER IF AND WHEN ANY OF THEM WILL MAKE IT TO THE SHOPPING EMPORIUMS OF THE CONTINENT. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO MAKE IT OVER TO THE AMERICAS?

AFTER SIX DAYS IN BUDAPEST, OUR TIME IN THE HUNGARIAN EMPIRE HAS COME TO A CLOSE. PLEASE JOIN ME ON MY NEXT JOURNEY FOR ALL THE ANTICS, UNANTICIPATED, AND INFORMATIONAL PROSE THAT YOU CAN POSSIBLY HANDLE IN ONE ARTICLE!