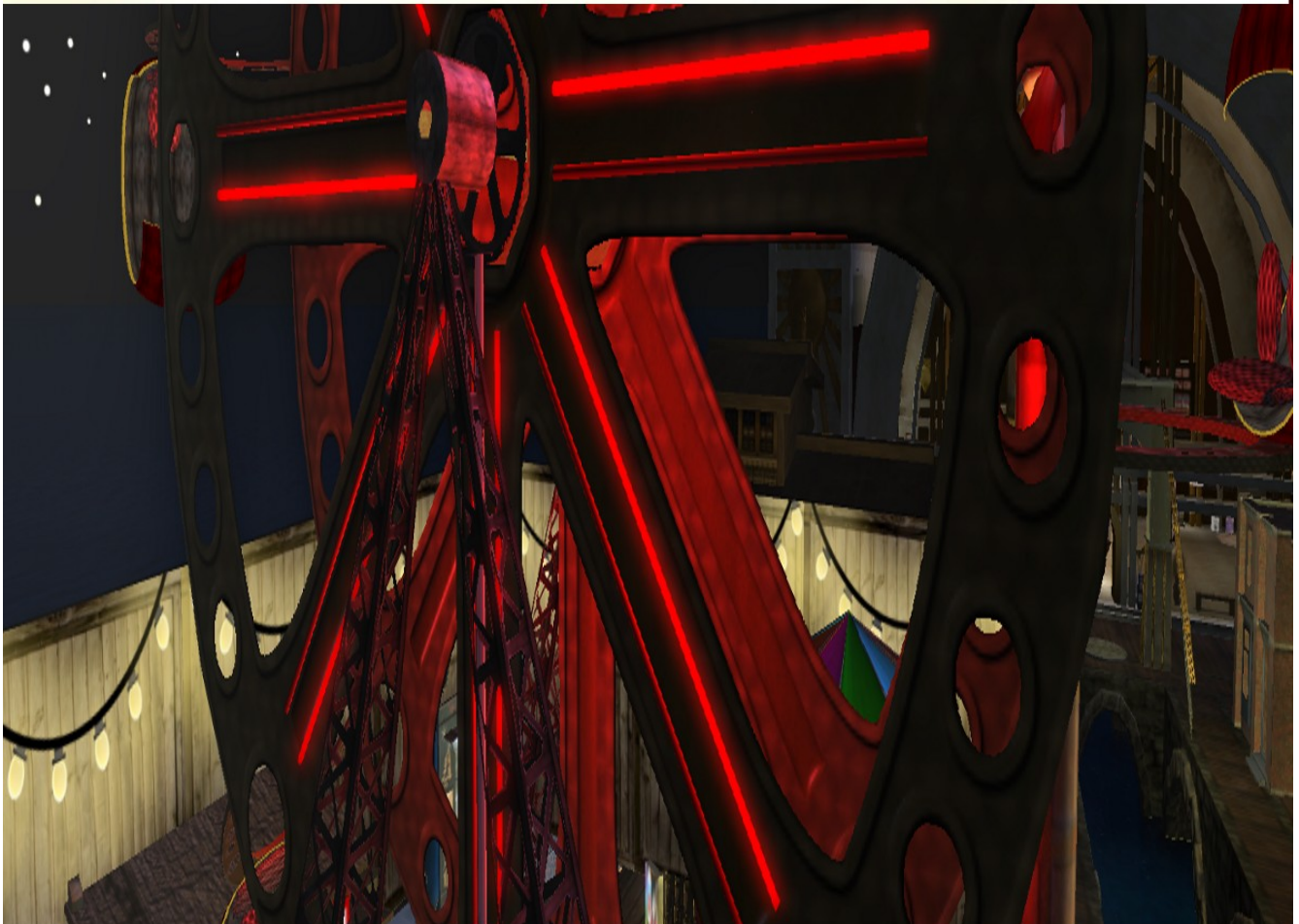




# STEAMPUNK ROAD ADVENTURES



With stories by:  
Crap Mariner/Mariyta Halasy  
C.J. Casey/O.M. Grey

Issue 7  
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## **Steampunk Adventures**

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**Publisher:** Cathy Haystack

**Editor:** June Faramore

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## The Shaping of Steam

Editor's Notes

by June Faramore

This is my first issue editing Steampunk Adventures, and I hope you enjoy it. The stories contained within have been chosen carefully, with a focus on trying to include a little bit of all aspects of steampunk. We have some airship and subterfuge from Gordon Soleil in "The Puppeteer War", a look at a carnival in "The Not So Merry Go Round", a 100 word story from R. Crap Mariner, and dragon riding action in "Friendly Fire", by Mariyta Halasy. These are names from the grid, but real names have been added when provided by our authors.

The second half of our offering this month includes poems from Stereo Nacht, another installment of the adventures of Violet, maid on the Mungo Park, and a trip into a steam powered office in C.J. Casey's "The Magickal Steamfaerie Machine". We close out our issue with a love story from O.M. Grey, "Of Æther and Æon".

I had a wonderful time working with all of our authors this issue, and wish to see more of their work. My thanks is offered to Ms. Haystack for letting me take on the hat of editor for this edition of Steampunk Adventures.

Please contact us at [steampunkadventurers@gmail.com](mailto:steampunkadventurers@gmail.com) with any comments, suggestions, or submissions.

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## The Puppeteer War

A Serial Adventure Novel

By Gordon Soleil

### **IV: Response**

*Excerpts from the Rocky Mountain News*

*Denver, Colorado*

*April 6, 1881.*

**FREEDMANTOWN FLATTENED!**

Amazing Stories From A Town Destroyed

Mysterious "Air-Ship" Reported by Survivors

Freedmantown, one of the biggest success stories of the Reconstruction, was leveled last night in a stunning attack from a mysterious "air-ship".

The attack came at six in the evening, when most of the town was settling down to dinner in their homes. Surviving witnesses claim that the first attack leveled most of the residential area, killing thousands. Most of the survivors fled to the base of the local mountain as the shelling continued, leveling the financial district, the university, and the workshop district—currently working on the revolutionary Trackless Train project in cooperation with the federal government to provide rail service to those citizens who do not live near a main rail line...

The death total is, as of this writing, at 16,000, and is expected to climb as members of the state militia continue to find bodies underneath the rubble...

Witnesses reported that the "air-ship" was flying the Confederate battle standard. When asked about this development, Captain Andrew McCullough of the 10th Artillery Brigade had this to say: "We are currently in pursuit of the vessel; our Indian scouts have seen it on the edge of the border with Kansas. We have telegraphed the Army, who are preparing a significant response for when they see it."

*Transcript – Wireless Telegraph Message*

*Heinrich Engel to "W", Translated from German*

*April 6, 1881*

W,

Test successful. Regret being unable to be on the ground when it happened, but will have to content self with picture of town devastated. Will send to you later. Patterson increasingly erratic; chastisement of vessel captain in its ninth hour. Quite entertaining, even if methods are crude.

Would like to know more about the project in Congo; resource extraction techniques may be necessary to control native population in this sector.

Fellow workers holding up well; they look forward to their new homes.

On your recommendation, keeping mechanicals offline until we reach capital. Will serve as excellent shock troops and defense when we seize local potentate.

Smith reliable as ever. Have sent him to restrain Patterson from killing captain and make inspection of the vessel. Will report when new developments arise.

Engel

*Transcript – Personal Audio Diary of Zechariah McCannon*

*Location Unknown – Colorado*

*April 6, 1881*

Those bastards went ahead and did it! They actually bombed a town! That's it, I'm grabbing the information and blowing this thing back to hell. Lemme just pack my stuff away here...

[sound of rustling on the recording horn]

Okay, knife's stowed, guns're in their holsters, recorder's in my hip bag...I'm set. Now then...I'm heading to the office at the center of the ship. I just have to hope that creepy son-of-a-gun Engel isn't in there. He looks like he'd take more bullets than I have to take him down.

[Sound of conversations and clanking machinery. At one point, a gentlemanly southern drawl can be heard, saying, "Terrible thing, Nathaniel. There was no need for him to do that...another brandy, if you'd be so good." The speaker sounds rather maudlin, and slightly slurred. The sounds die out slowly as the recording goes on.]

Okay, that's most of the job done. Now...

[sound of a door being opened carefully]

Alright, he's not here. Let's see what the old bastard's got in here...

[sound of papers being rustled]

Hm...blueprints, contact information...weird writing on this one, never seen anything like it. Like...circles, lines and dots...I'll give that to Mr. Macheath later, maybe he can have someone decode it...well, what do you know. Papers in German...hm. My German's kind of rusty...I'll take it and get them to translate it when I get back east. Now then...

[sound of a door being opened, followed by a voice with a Received Pronunciation British accent saying, "What are you doing here, Mr. McCannon? This is a private office."]

Sorry, Mr. Smith, I kind of got lo...what the hell is that?

[pause, followed by a meaty sound, presumably the sound of McCannon's fist hitting Smith in the gut. This is followed by the sound of running]

Shit, shit, shit, this is exactly what I was afraid would happen. This is going to make things really goddamn complicated.

[the sound of a far-off explosion and the rattling of a few knick-knacks can be heard]

Okay...sounds like it's already complicated. Okay, all right.

[the sound of a revolver being drawn and cocked.]

Let's throw another wrench into the works.

### *Miss Jennifer Stone's Diary*

*Location Unknown – Presumably the Colorado-Kansas border*

*April 6, 1881 – recording date April 8*

Honestly, diary, I don't know where to start. So much has happened since my last entry that I just sort of feel numb inside. I guess I should start where I left off in the last entry. After getting the two Negro women to help me out of that dress and loosen the corset they put on me to the point where I could breathe, I dressed in my old dress, grabbed the decorative poker over by the fireplace (or rather, glowspace, since the logs had been replaced with a glowing electrical coil), and started making my way downward, thinking that the escape boats or whatever they're called would be down there.

It was...harrowing. I started at every single noise, and had to duck into alcoves and hide whenever I saw or heard anyone coming. One time, just before I got to the bottom part of the ship, two of Patterson's men passed by the laundry chute I was hiding in. They were talking about how Patterson was beating my father for not firing on the town. I wanted to out of the chute and hit them both, but I didn't think I could pull myself up and knock both of them out,

so I just listened to them, my blood feeling like it was boiling as they described the punishment being inflicted on my father.

As they left, I started feeling my fingers give out on the lip of the chute. I tried pulling myself up, but my arms just wouldn't do it. I tried to hang on, but my fingers went limp and I started falling down the chute. I panicked for a second or so before I realized it was starting to turn into a slide as it curved downward. A few seconds later, I landed in the middle of a huge basket full of smelly underthings. Scrambling out of the basket, I looked around into a small laundry, filled with people washing things. I asked one of the ladies working a drying board how they managed to get so much water to scrub them with, but she ignored me.

Come to think of it, they didn't seem to notice when I fell into the basket, either.

I managed to get the door open and away from the laundry, apologizing for intruding on their time. Thankfully, the laundry was facing a stairwell with a map to one side, showing I was on the bottom floor of the ship. Since one direction seemed as likely to lead to an exit as another, I picked one at random, heading to the back of the ship.

As I was walking along, I heard someone walking toward me, whistling a rather mangled version of Dixie. Panicking, I ran into one of the side rooms and hid behind a crate while he passed.

As the man's voice died away, I looked around where I had hidden, and saw what looked like a rust-red armored foot not four inches away from my face. Looking slowly upward, I saw that it belonged to an enormous mechanical man, seven feet tall and covered in armor plating. Its head looked like an skull, its eyes dull and blank, its face utterly expressionless. Behind it, marked with odd circles and lines, were a set of six dull metal cylinders chained to a rack on the wall.

Before I could scream, an explosion a few yards away shook the ship, knocking me off my feet. I didn't know it at the time, but the explosion was from the Army. We'd crossed into Kansas, and the ship was being shelled. It was all too much for me to take, and I fainted dead away.

\*

Will our heroes survive the Kansas militia's shelling of the CAS Monitor? What is in the mysterious cylinders in the ship's hold, and why is there a mechanical man guarding them? Will Mr. Beauregard sing embarrassing songs as he gets more and more drunk? The only answers to be had are in the upcoming chapters of *The Puppeteer War*, serialized exclusively in *Steampunk Adventures!*

## The Not So Merry Go Round

by R. Crap Mariner/Laurence Simon

Here we sit on the merry-go-round.  
Where some aren't so merry at all.  
Some kids are reaching for brass rings.  
Others hold on and laugh.  
And then there's those crybabies, clutching with fear and screaming  
Mooooooooooooommmmmmmmyyyyyyy!

I'll just sit on the bench, wondering.  
All those tattoos on the arm of the operator.  
The smoke oozing out from the machinery.  
The gears grind louder.  
Which the music almost covers up.  
It's a lot happening at once.  
I just want to sit here on the bench.  
And watch everything go by.  
And listen to the music.  
With a few folks, humming along.

\*

## Friendly Fire

by Mariyta Halasy/Samantha Warren

"Left! No, I said left! Belv, watch that line! Hold tight, everyone!"

Anabelle Strang pulled herself upright in the saddle, gripping the reins tightly. The dragon beneath her careened in an impossibly tight circle, bending itself nearly in half, almost squishing the woman on its back. Melinda Belvedere and Jenna Wilson clung to their chairs, which swayed wildly beneath the beast's belly. A strap that securing the machine gun Belvedere manned snapped in the air, leaving a red welt across the girl's face.

"Son of a monkey's uncle, that hurt!" she cried as she grabbed for the thin leather. Annabelle felt the gun move beneath her as she balanced against it, securing the strap before it could loosen itself further.

The dragon straightened out and the women trained their weapons on the enemy in front of them.

"Give up, Anders," Strang shouted over the wind through the amplifier situated in front of her mouth. "You won't win this one!"

The man on the blue beast pulled his own dragon around, gearing up for a head-to-head assault. He stood up in his saddle and grinned. "There's a first time for everything, darlin'."

Strang sighed and leveled her shotgun at the man. "Dammit Anders! Surrender!"

"Not today, my dear!"

She glanced at the women beneath her. They were both prepared to fire on the approaching dragon, their faces grim, hands steady.

Gritting her teeth, she counted down for her gunners. "Ready, aim...." Silently, she sent up a prayer that Anders would pull off and hightail it home. When he failed to do so and closed within range, she screamed at her soldiers.

"Fire!"

The rattle of the guns echoed through the clouds, accompanied by the screams of the men hanging below Anders' dragon. Anger, fear, and respect combined into a muddled mess on the man's face. He looked at Strang, eyes dark, then leaned over and touched the dragon. It hissed once, a bitter, vile sound, before pulling up and swinging around. Within moments, the pair had disappeared into the white, taking their dead counterparts with them.

Strang watched them go, then touched her own dragon's neck. The creature looked back at her, nodding once, and turned, making a beeline for their home. As they approached the compound, she could see several anti-dragon guns pointing skyward. Using a flag shoved in her boot, she waved a signal to the captain of the guard, who gave her the okay to land. The dragon continued past the barrier, the guns tracking her all the way.

She steered the beast into a clearing, where it settled down on all fours, sinking close to the ground. The two gunners scrambled from their seats and began unhooking the weaponry as Strang proceeded to do the same for her saddle. They hefted the equipment and carried it to a storage shed. Belvedere retrieved a bucket of soapy water and several cloths while Wilson trotted across the clearing to a field on the far side. As Belvedere and Strang wiped down the dragon, cleaning her of dust and dirt and checking for wounds, Wilson tied a terrified cow to a post located near the dragon's resting spot. As the woman left the clearing ten minutes later, they heard a strangled cry emanating from the bovine.

Strang loved her life as an aviator. She'd been involved in some way since she was thirteen, first as a stable-hand caring for the dragons, then as a machine gunner before making her rise to captain. She was good at what she did and she knew it. So did everyone else, including Aiden Anders.

They had been in academy together and friendship bloomed through competition and adversity. The rest of the class hated them. Strang always took first in anything they did, and Anders was always second. It was a running joke that he was second best. He took it well, but she knew deep down it felt like he'd swallowed a porcupine.

When the civil war came, they were both faced with a choice. She was elected senior captain of the Risers, the highest position an aviator could achieve. He was handed the position of her second. He almost took it, until the Beaters made him an offer he couldn't refuse--senior captain on their side. He leapt at the chance, even though it meant going against everything he knew.

Now the only times she saw him were on the battlefield. He was an ace, undefeated except by her. And he was still second best in those battles. It wasn't often that she took out both of his gunners, but he usually sustained damage of some sort. The pain of it ripped through Strang like a fresh wound every time, not fading with age. He'd been her best friend, and whenever they met now, he still held a smile for her, even though he knew every meeting could be their last.

Strang slept fitfully that night, haunted by dreams of her former friend and his unavoidable demise. When she at last rose before the first rays of sun pierced the sky, her sheets were soaked with night sweat and her head ached tremendously. After making herself presentable, she headed to the mess hall for her traditional three cups of coffee. She'd only made it through one before the air raid siren went ballistic.

Tossing down their last bit of liquid heaven, Strang and her team raced through the halls with the other aviators, desperate to reach the clearing and get aloft. After securing her saddle, she climbed up and barked impatiently at Belvedere and Wilson, whose jobs of securing the heavy machine guns took more than twice as long. Strang was triple-checking her shotgun when a cry to her right stole her attention.

The dark sky was filled with shapes resembling dragons. And they weren't Risers. The clearings around the compound were all still bustling with frantic activity and none of the aviators had yet to leave the ground.

Screams began echoing from near the barrier and Strang leaned forward, squinting through the lightening sky. She could see two dragons battling on the ground, which meant one of the Beaters had made it through the air defenses.

"Hurry it up! They need our help!" She looked at the women who were strapping themselves into their seats. They both raised their hands, two fingers in the air—the signal that they were ready.

"Up," she cried at the beast, and it hefted itself into a standing position before beating its wings. After several tense moments, they began rising into the air.

"Over there." Strang pointed to the battle happening at the edge of the compound and the dragon swung around, making a beeline for the foray.

Strang raised her shotgun and took aim, setting her sights on a dragon she didn't recognize. As they pulled into range of the fight, she recognized the insignia of the Beaters sewn into the rider's saddle and pulled the trigger. The man slumped over, pulling on the reins, and the dragon, confused, swerved off its path. Belvedere and Wilson swiftly dispatched the gunners on the dragon's belly and Strang signaled to another aviator, who swept in to intercept the enemy beast.

Strang yanked on the reins of her own dragon, turning it toward the melee in the sky. They sped through the air, the gunners firing at the swarm of enemies on either side of them. The compound was located near a sea cliff, and Strang watched as men and women fell from

their mounts to land in the surf below. Screams of pain and terror echoed through the pink sky.

As Strang's dragon swiped its claws at an enemy, she heard a gasp come from below. Wilson dangled from her seat, held perilously in place by the leather straps. Her hands clutched at a wound in her side, blood streaming through her fingers and soaking her shirt.

“Willy? You ok?”

Two fingers raised and Wilson righted herself, her lips set in a grim, determined line. Placing her hands on the triggers, she got back to work, the epitome of professionalism.

The trio of women worked their way methodically through the enemy fighters and more than a dozen fell to their bullets as the crowd of dragons thinned noticeably. As she looked around, Strang caught sight of a familiar dragon battling one of her comrades. She brought her dragon around, heading for the pair.

Her intent was to scare Anders off, make him flee as he often did when they met in battle. He noticed her as she drew close and his familiar grin crossed his face. He raised a hand off his shotgun, saluting her. She shook her head, smiling at his bravado even in the face of being outnumbered.

As she returned his wave, his body jerked and his face fell. A hand went to his chest and came away red. Strang stared in horror as he leaned over, pulling a knife from his boot. He slit the leather straps holding him in and tumbled from the seat. As he fell through the air, his eyes met hers. She froze, watching him slam heavily into the waves and sink below them.

A call from Belvedere brought Strang around and she had the dragon dive. She searched the sea, desperate for any sign of her friend, but all she saw were dead strangers.

\*

Hours later, the dragon and women exhausted, they returned to the compound. The Risers had been successful, repelling the ill-fated attack, but many were lost. At the mass wake held later that evening, Strang wept for none as much as she did her lost enemy and friend.

When the grieving party broke up, Strang excused herself and slipped out of the compound through a side exit. She made her way down the rough stone path to the beach below. The shore had been scoured earlier for victims, both living and deceased. Anders was not among the bodies retrieved. Despite the impossibility of it, Strang held onto the faint hope that he managed to survive, somehow.

As she walked she allowed her mind to turn inward, reliving both the good times and the bad that she shared with the man. She was so focused on the past that she only noticed the body on the beach after she tread on its hand. The sky was dark but the moon was bright, which gave her enough light to see the Beaters emblem rising and falling on the person's chest. With the face turned away from her, Strang could not tell if she knew them, but the figure was definitely male.

She bent over, putting two fingers to the wrist she nearly crushed. It held a pulse, faint but present. A cloud passed over the moon, making the area darker. She leaned over, brushing sand and blood from the face. As the moon reappeared, Strang gasped.

Anders had a gash out of his nose, but it was already scabbed over, the blood dried and dark. She searched his visible body, checking for breaks and other wounds before pulling her knife from her boot. She sliced through his vest and the shirt underneath, exposing his chest and abdomen to the air.

There, on his lower left side, she found the wound she'd believed to be fatal. It was still bleeding, but not profusely. She slipped her hand inside the fabric, feeling for an exit hole. When she found it, she sighed with relief, and her eyes closed as a pleased smile came to her lips.

“You're so pretty when you smile.”

The voice, raspy and quiet, made her jump and she pulled her hand away. Anders grabbed her wrist weakly, keeping her from standing up. She gazed at him, into eyes bluer than the bluest sea. They stayed there, him laying in the sand, her on her knees beside him, for what seemed like an eternity. Strang brushed more sand from his face, reveling in the feel of his skin against hers. He reached a hand up, running his fingers along her cheek, and she leaned into his touch.

“I thought I lost you,” she whispered.

“You could never lose me.”

She heard the grin in his voice and smiled in spite of herself. Laughing slightly, she pulled his hand away. She ripped several strips from his shirt and used them to bind his stomach wound. After seeing that he had nothing else needing immediate attention, she helped him to his feet. She knew of a cave half a mile from the compound that was unused and undiscovered by most of the Risers. The only ones she'd ever seen in there were herself, Belvedere, and Wilson.

With Anders leaning on her shoulder for support, they made their way up the beach to the secluded hideaway. She settled him in the back, away from any idly wandering eyes. Once he was as comfortable as was possible in such a situation, she bid him farewell, promising to return soon with medical supplies and food.

As she turned to leave, he gripped her wrist again. She turned back, expecting a question or request. Instead, he pulled her tight against him, pressing his lips to hers. Her breath caught in her throat for several moments, this unexpected development breaking through the decades-old barrier around her heart. The passion in his kiss had her lips yielding to his and she melted against him. When their bodies parted, she smiled, lowering her eyes and blushing like a schoolgirl. He laughed and kissed her once more.

“You better go before someone notices you're missing.”

“I'll be back tomorrow. I promise.”

Strang, the toughest aviator to ever fly the skies, skipped as she headed back to the compound, heart soaring even as she contemplated the how to get away with treason.

\*

## Three Poems

by Stereo Nacht

### **Revelation**

Here I stand, wide awake in a deep dream  
Contemplating the universal wheel;  
Its multiple depths before me reveal  
Foggy secrets of superheated steam  
High and low, under the light of science  
A rainbow born from droplets of wisdom  
To apprehend it all turns quite fearsome  
Without education's patient guidance.

The sun rises, brightening out the features:  
It all becomes clear - yes! - this I can do!  
My faded star, at last, will shine anew!  
And I will be master amongst teachers!  
I reach out for my pen to take a note  
And wake up with my sheets stuck at my throat.

### **The Joy of Science**

For the love of Biology  
I will make no apology  
When in my lab I give new shape;  
Boundaries of nature I traipse -

For my beloved physics I play  
And try to reshape, all awry

The handsome universal laws  
Into work of art, just because!

Geology I try to please  
As from its depths I seek to squeeze  
Ores, and smelt them till they shine  
Then, with Chemistry, I combine -

The one science I can't distort  
The set of rules I cannot thwart  
The base of all fields of study  
Mathematics, my old buddy!

### **Steampunk Lullaby**

(This lullaby can be adapted for the need of the singer, mother, father or nurse; spark or minion. So I have added alternate wording in parentheses.)

(Chorus:)

Quiet, darling  
Sleep fast, knowing  
No clank will come hurt you  
Sleep now, darling  
Your dad's wishing (alt: Your mom's; Nanny's)  
That you'll have sweet dreams too

You'll get to play  
Another day  
Please, darling, cry no more!  
Science to learn  
I'm sure you yearn  
A spark in you will soar

(Chorus)

There's no monster  
Hiding under  
Your bed [crib], don't be afraid  
The sun will rise  
You will likewise,  
To see, touch and explore

(Chorus)

The day's been long  
Running along (alt: Running around)  
Obeying the Master (alt: Hard to be master)  
Constructs to mend  
Machines to tend  
Still have to work faster (alt: Get minions work faster)

(End chorus:)

Good night, darling  
Sleep tight, knowing  
No harm will come to you  
Good night, darling  
Your dad's hoping  
He'll get to sleep soon too (alt: She'll) .

\*

## Her Majesty's Misfortunate Maid and the Butler

by Alana Steamweaver

Aboard Her Majesty's Airship Mungo Park there was a special guest. Lord Rodney Pickering was a famous explorer, having managed to find his way through the most dangerous parts of the Congo, Burma, and Portsmouth. While cruising past the Nile Delta, the Mungo Park had been approached by a small airship carrying the distinguished Lord, who had recently finished exploring Cairo's famous exotic quarters. Captain Morgan was delighted to bring the man aboard as a guest until such time as the airship made port.

This proved to be a welcome boon for Violet Jessup, First Class Maid. Oh, it wasn't Lord Rodney who had proven such a pleasant distraction for her. Certainly the man exuded charm and had the sort of look that made many a woman swoon, collapsing onto her exotic quarter. His voice was very smooth and velvety, causing the melting of many a heart. And his fortune was certainly well enough endowed to cause many a speculative blush.

No, it was, in fact, the butler that did it. Mr. Francis Dauntless was a handsome fellow in his own right, and always impeccably dressed. His skills as a butler won him nearly as much renown as his famous master, whether it was in his ability to lay table in the bush, remove spitting cobra venom from a smoking jacket, or hold off an entire tribe of aborigines with a butter knife and serving spoon. Violet, indeed most of the female staff, held him in a position of some awe.

For the Head Butler of Her Majesty's Airship Mungo Park Mr. Dauntless was a less than welcome guest. Oh, Jeeves would never have so much as whispered a disparaging word about the man. He was a proper British Butler, after all, and would not embarrass Captain Morgan that way. But to those who knew him well it was clear that Jeeves was displeased by the presence of such a charismatic butler, and more so by the effect on his staff.

"Miss Jessup," Jeeves snapped, his voice very proper but also quite clearly impatient. "I asked you a question. I expect answers to be prompt and informed."

"Oh! I'm so very sorry," Violet responded, her skin flushing red with embarrassment. She'd been in the midst of a particularly lurid daydream involving Mr. Dauntless, twenty yards of silk cloth and an entire place setting when Jeeves snapped at her. "I'm afraid I was rather lost in thought."

"Rather." Jeeves' tone was withering. "I was asking if you needed any help counting the linens today."

“Oh, no sir. I think I will be fine. Thank you.” Violet curtsied and hurried away.

The linen closet wasn't really a closet so much as an entire room. After all, even though it wasn't a big ship, the Mungo Park was still a ship, and there needed to be enough linen for everyone. Shortages of sheets just wouldn't have done on a British ship.

Jeeves had begun to harbor a nasty suspicion that such an impending shortage might be eminent, and wanted to be satisfied as to whether that was the case or not. Violet was inclined to agree. After the incident with The Magnificent Martin and his Marvelous Massage Machine, a goodly number of sheets required discarding, so no one was quite sure how many remained. It was unfortunate for her that she'd been the one to get the count.

Her musings on the subject were cheerfully interrupted as she rounded a corner to see Francis Dauntless emerging from the linen closet.

“Oh! Mr. Dauntless!” Violet clapped a hand to her chest and smiled. “How are you, sir?”

Mr. Dauntless turned quickly, slapping at a bright red spot on his neck and scratching.

“Oh! Miss Violet, however are you?” He smiled, still scratching at his neck. “I'm quite well, aside from these African flies. Have you noticed them?”

“I haven't, not at all!” Violet exclaimed. “We'll have to do something about them at once. Mr. Jeeves will be most displeased if we allow pests to continue to gad about biting guests.”

“No fear, miss.” Mr. Dauntless gave a little bow, hand still to his neck. “I'll see to it myself. What sort of butler would I be if I could not handle such a trivial thing? Don't bother yourself or Mr. Jeeves with such a trifle.” With that he swept up her hand and placed his lips to the back of it. “It will be my honor to do this task for you.”

Violet felt herself to be a little light headed. “Why, I suppose that would be wonderful,” she replied, a remote part of her noting that her voice seemed a bit breathy. “I am sure you shall do your best.”

With a wink and a nod, Mr. Dauntless hurried away, clearly eager to rid the world, or at least the ship, of all insects that might inconvenience its passengers. Violet stood, hands clasped over her chest admiringly. She remained there after he disappeared around a corner, until a squeak of surprise interrupted her less than maid-like attention.

“Ah! Violet! I didn't see you there! You surprised me.”

Violet turned to see one of the laundry ladies peering out at her from the linen closet, her skin flushed almost as bright red as her lips. Violet immediately grew a touch alarmed. “Oh look at you, Julie! I must have given you such a start. Quick, let's get you a seat and a glass of water.”

“Oh,” Julie fluttered. “I’ll be fine, just give me a moment to catch my breath.” The girl waved a hand airily, declining Violet’s efforts to give her a hand. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh!” Violet remembered her task. “Mr. Jeeves wanted me to give an accounting of the linen stocks.”

“I see!” Julie gave a cheerful smile. “Oh thank goodness that’s it!”

Violet cocked her head at Julie’s odd response. “You certainly seem pleased by this.”

Julie’s eyes grew wide. “Oh, er... well...” Then she laughed. “It’s just that we’ve been so worried that we were going to run low. But hearing of the Head Butler’s interest is so very reassuring.”

“Yes, isn’t it?” Violet gave a smile. “Well, let’s get to work counting so I can give him what he needs to see that we do not disgrace the name of Her Majesty.”

“Of course.”

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Some time later Violet stood before Jeeves once more. Again, however, her mind was elsewhere. Again she found herself being sharply brought back to reality by the stern voice of the Head Butler.

“Miss Jessup!” Jeeves looked particularly irritated. “Please keep your mind on the subject at hand. The correct answer to ‘How many sheets do we still have?’ is not ‘Silky soft white gloves’ but instead a number.”

Violet immediately colored. She had indeed been thinking about how soft a certain set of silk gloves would be on her cheek and quite lost herself to it. She shuffled awkwardly and coughed. “Forgive me sir. We have enough for two changes of every bed aboard without washing.”

Jeeves grunted softly. “We shall be wanting to resupply then. I will speak with the Captain about the matter. But that leads to another question.” Jeeves sat back and steepled his fingers before him. “If we must stop in and re-provision on linens we should be thorough. Do run down to the menagerie and see if the Handler is running low on food for the beast collection.”

“Right away, sir.” Violet scuttled away on her new mission before her wandering mind could cause another embarrassing lapse. So intent was she on this particular need to perform no further gaffes that she was almost to the hold before it occurred to her what an unusual task she had been dispatched on. Providing for provisioning was not the normal sort of thing a

maid would be involved in. Rather one might expect that the purser and a clerk would investigate the matter of stocks.

“Why would I have been sent on this task?” Violet thought as she turned into the cargo bay section holding the various creatures that had been collected (or manufactured) during the voyage thus far. Suddenly she brightened up. “It must be because he relies on me so!”

“Ah! Miss Jessup, of course he does!”

Violet expressed her surprise in a shrill wordless exclamation. She nearly bounced off the ceiling, both walls, the adjacent hatch, and an emu who shouldn't have been there as they hadn't visited Van Dieman's Land yet. Once she sufficiently recovered her faculties she discovered Mr. Dauntless, emerging from the Menagerie.

“Mr. Dauntless, forgive me. I wasn't expecting to find you here.” Violet put her hand to her chest, feeling her heart throbbing within it. She was certain it was from being startled.

“Yes, well, I was interested in a close examination of a cat.” Mr. Dauntless smiled.

“A cat?” Violet looked puzzled. “Whatever for?”

“Ah, it's related to those African flies from earlier, Miss Jessup. They tend to come together.”

Violet clapped her hands together. “Marvelous! Do you think that you will be able to eliminate the flies?”

“It is my desire to examine every cat aboard ship and verify they all are healthy.” Mr. Dauntless took Violet's hand and bowed over it, his eyes looking up towards hers. “It is my duty towards such a lovely young lady as yourself to see that you are well cared for.”

Violet could feel her heart rate double. “Such a gentleman,” she whispered. “I am ever so grateful you are aboard, sir.”

A set of footsteps began to echo in the Menagerie. The sound reminded Violet she had come on a mission. “Oh!” she exclaimed. “That must be the Handler. I need to speak with him.”

“Yes, well,” Mr. Dauntless nodded graciously. “I must be about my duties as well. I shouldn't keep you. I would be glad to spend some time speaking with you later about this matter?”

“Of... of course,” Violet replied. Her stomach was all a flutter, and she almost forgot her task once more.

“Perhaps I shall call on you this evening then, after we are done with our duties.”

“That would be wonderful.” Violet smiled, then turned and stepped into the Menagerie in a daze. She barely noticed the young woman walking the opposite direction as she passed the monkey cages. “Oh, hello Catherine,” she said once she noticed her. “Is the Handler in?”

Catherine stopped, and fidgeted in place. “No, but can I help you? I’m the assistant, after all.”

“I just needed to check on how we were doing on feed for the animals. Mr. Jeeves was wanting to know.”

“Fine. We’re fine. We have plenty. Nothing to worry about.” Catherine shimmied.

“Thank you, I’ll let him know.” Violet smiled and left the compartment. As she walked she began to contemplating the evening to come.

“I do hope I’m not too much of a bore for him. I mean, I’m just a plain maid. I’ve never done anything adventurous while he... He’s done everything! Still,” she fretted. “I think it would be nice to spend a while talking. Perhaps he’ll read me some romantic poetry as we watch the sunset from the observation deck. Why, he may even take my hand again. I can’t imagine anything more exciting!” She took a moment to catch her breath.

“Still, Violet, you’re such a simple person. He’ll won’t see you as very exciting or interesting in your own right. Not one bit. Unless...” Violet began to smile, then to beam outright as the idea took hold.

She hurried as quickly as she could without violating proper decorum. She didn’t want to lose the idea while reporting her findings to Jeeves. Given that there would be little time before the evening came she also felt a little rushed to get things done on time.

Sticking her head in the door to Jeeves’ little office, Violet blurted out, “The menagerie is fine, they don’t need anything sir. Pardon me!” She pulled her head back quickly and began quick marching down the hallway.

“Miss Jessup!” Jeeves called.

Violet slid to a halt and turned, placing her hands demurely before her. “Yes, sir?”

“Where are you off to in such a rush?” Jeeves looked slightly cross as he stood in the hallway outside his door.

“I’m terribly sorry, sir, but I had a task come up that I needed to hurry and do. It should be of great help to our guests, and I wanted to get to it at once.” Violet swallowed. “You don’t have an immediate need of me, do you sir?”

“Our guests?” Jeeves arched an eyebrow slightly.

“Mr. Dauntless, in particular,” Violet responded.

“Based off your eagerness, I dare say it’s another of your dubious contraptions, is it not?” Jeeves lowered the eyebrow into a more contemplative position.

Violet sighed, feeling her shoulders sag. She tried to prevent the slump lest Jeeves see it and chastise her for a distinctly non-British posture. “Yes, sir.”

Jeeves stood silently in the hallway a moment, seeming to think. After a few breaths during which Violet’s heart filled with a proper London fog, he stirred. “I suppose that I should exercise greater faith in your abilities, Miss Jessup.” He turned and re-entered his cabin. “I have no further duties for you for the remainder of the day. Do try to keep from getting too much grease on your smock.”

Violet gasped, then bounced three times with glee. “Thank you, sir! I’ll do my best!” With that she spun about and began moving quickly enough to elicit a “Decorum!” from Jeeves’ office. She slowed to something barely inside the bounds of reasonable behavior and began making her way to the labs. She knew just where the parts she needed were.

After a couple of hours tinkering with specimen storage tanks, articulated legs left over from a failed experiment with a self cleaning chimney sweeper, a number of ladies’ hat pins, ten gallons of Dr. Methuselah’s Elixir of Longevity, five spools of twine, and a rolling pin liberated from the kitchen, Violet was done. She quickly changed out of her now very greasy smock into something far more presentable, swept up her contraption, and swept out of the lab.

“I’ll just take this up to the guest wing and turn it on outside Mr. Dauntless’ room. Why, when he sees what it does about the flies he’ll be more than eager to see me as someone interesting! Someone exciting! Someone he might even... Dare I say it? Kiss on the cheek!” She blushed at her extremely inappropriate thought and made her way to the guest quarters.

Upon reaching the space before Mr. Dauntless’ quarters, Violet bent down as demurely as she could. She placed her device on the floor, then began winding away at the little key sticking out of the back. Once completed she rose and opened the door just enough for the device to spin and then scuttle away in precisely the opposite direction.

“Where are you going? Mr. Dauntless’ room is that way!” Violet exclaimed, and gave chase. Unfortunately for her, the design was quite agile. It zipped along on its eight ungainly legs, leaving her behind even when she abandoned decorum for panic and began to run after it. “Stop! Come back!” Soon it was out of sight.

“Oh no. Whatever shall I do this time?” Violet wailed. She reached a cross passage and found herself wondering which way the device might have taken.

“What in blazes!”

Violet darted down the direction the mild vulgarity had come from, blushing slightly at the impropriety of the language. She quickly found Professor Goldbloom. The man was exerting himself a good deal attempting to remove his arm from the wall. Unfortunately a stringy mass was resisting all of his efforts. “When I find out who made that mechanical spider, I shall challenge the man to a duel for this affront! Academic papers at 20 paces! To the first papercut!”

Violet hurried past, saying nothing. She was clearly headed in the right direction. A growing number of artificial webs began to be seen, creating a trail for her to follow. It led out of the guest quarters, through the shooting gallery (where the webbing would prove to be excellent for catching ricochets), past the engine room (where it would gum up three auxiliary generators and the port side static discharger for weeks), through the chapel (no one would notice until the next Candlemass), and onward into the tailor’s compartment.

By this point Violet was having slight issues moving forward. Her dress was reasonably full, and so she was having to take great care to keep any of it from catching any of the bits of webbing strewn about. She had passed several others who had been less cautious, giving them a quick apology as she had hurried by in pursuit of her wayward machine. Cautiously she slipped into the tailor’s and began looking about for the device.

She found more than the device. It had, fortunately, snapped its spring and gone quite inert over in the corner where it now rested in the middle of a half-spun web. What caught her eye, however, were the two unfortunates next to it, also entangled in the web.

“Angelina?” Violet gasped at seeing the seamstress tangled up as she was. “Mr. Dauntless?” She gasped even more at seeing the man next to the seamstress.

“Oh, er...” Mr. Dauntless seemed very nervous. “Hello Miss Violet.”

Violet gaped. “Mr. Dauntless, where are your vest and jacket? And trousers?” She began to color quite brightly.

“Well, that is...” Mr. Dauntless tried to cover his long johns with his hands, but the webbing refused to cooperate. “They were torn while looking for flies, don’t you see? So I came down here to have them repaired by Miss Angelina.”

Violet turned to the indicated woman. “Is that true?”

Angelina tried to nod, but suffered the same difficulties as Mr. Dauntless’ hands. “Yes, of course. Why else would he be here?” She looked quite uncomfortable.

“Well, that makes sense,” Violet agreed. “But whatever are you doing in only a camisole and bloomers?”

“Well.” The woman grew even more uncomfortable. “It wouldn’t have been fair to have him in his undergarments while being fully dressed.”

Violet just stared at the two. The two remained quiet as they dangled in the web.

“Disgraceful.”

Violet nearly jumped three feet in the air as the voice of the Head Butler sounded behind her. She was prevented from doing so by the fact that, in her surprise at what she found in the web, she stepped into a stray bundle of webbing and her right foot was now well and truly anchored. Instead she settled for proceeding to hyperventilate.

“Miss Jessup, it seems that Mr. Dauntless here has literally been caught in the act. He’s been rather the Casanova aboard this ship, disgracing the Butler’s kit he seems to not quite be wearing at the moment.”

Mr. Dauntless flushed, his head lowered in shame. “It’s true,” he sighed. “I have a terrible problem. I can’t help myself. I’ve tried, but it’s like an addiction. Like the strongest opium in the world, only far more pleasurable.” He sighed and looked at Violet, his eyes watery. “Can you ever find it in your heart to forgive me?”

Jeeves snorted, though he did so softly enough to avoid the appearance of being anything other than composed and disciplined. For her part Angelina remained tactfully silent, though she certainly seemed displeased at the current conversation.

Violet felt her heart melting. The poor man was confessing to enduring an awful condition. She knew that it should hurt, but she couldn’t help but feel compassion for the fellow, suffering and humiliated as he was. She gave a smile. “Of course, I can forgive you.”

Mr. Dauntless smiled from the web, eyes and teeth sparkling. “Thank you. I just regret that you were hurt as the result of an unfortunate incident caused by someone’s shoddily constructed aberration.”

“Shoddily constructed aberration?” Violet’s voice was flat.

“Yes,” Mr. Dauntless replied. “That spider-like device next to me. Clearly it was the ill conceived work of a diabolical mind meant to ensnare the entire crew of this vessel. Thank goodness it simply, mindlessly ran amok do to a poorly ordered Babbage Controller and then broke down due to its inferior construction.”

“Ill-conceived?” Violet bent over and savagely unlaced her boot. “Poorly Ordered?” She stepped out of it and ripped the contraption out of the web next to Mr. Dauntless. “INFERIOR CONSTRUCTION?”

“Why, Miss Jessup?” Mr. Dauntless looked alarmed. “Whatever is the matter? Surely this wasn’t something you constructed?”

Violet didn’t answer. Instead she simply popped open a panel on the device, reached into it, and gave a pump inside a vicious squeeze. Mr. Dauntless gaped at the sudden blast of sticky adhesive and string that came spraying out for a dismayingly long time. At last the string gave out. Violet spun about and proceeded to march out of the compartment.

“Miss Jessup,” Jeeves said as she began to brush past him.

She froze, suddenly feeling a blast of terror. She’d made quite the fool of herself. Worse, she’d made a fool of a guest. She’d acted quite out of place in public. Jeeves would be livid. He would throw her off the ship. He’d make her clean the grease traps for a month first. And before that, he’d speak sternly to her. She could feel the doom descending up her.

“Yes, sir?” she responded quietly.

“May I recommend a hot bath, a glass of sherry, and some Nathaniel Hawthorne? I find that when I have an evening off those can be most relaxing.”

“Sir?”

“I did give you the rest of the day off, did I not?” Jeeves arched an eyebrow.

“Yes, sir,” Violet nodded.

“Then off with you. I’ve rather a mess to clean up here.”

“Will you manage, sir?” Violet was feeling a bit confused.

“Of course. I am, after all, a Proper English Butler,” he responded, giving Mr. Dauntless a sharp look as he emphasized the word ‘Proper’.

“Yes, sir,” Violet smiled and scooted out of the compartment with only one boot on. As she left, she could hear Jeeves begin sorting out the mess.

“Now, Mr. Dauntless, about the proper treatment of subordinate staff...”

\*

What outrageous contraption will Violet invent for the next problem on the airship Mungo Park? Find out in the Fall edition of Steampunk Adventures.

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## The Magickal Steamfaerie Machine

by C.J. Casey/Bovis Rex

*Another convention*, Jack thought. He was about sick of the damn things. If someone told him when he'd hired on at the DoubleTree Hotel that the biggest part of security there was coming in on the weekends and keeping happy people from being happy idiots, he might have ripped up the application, recession or no. But he hadn't, and on second (and third) thought, Detroit wasn't exactly known for its employment opportunities. He was pretty much stuck here for the nonce.

He mentally slapped himself for saying 'the nonce.' He blamed the company he was keeping.

If this had been his first convention, he might have been okay with everything. This was his fourth. And while the first two were typical dry business expos, it was the third convention that damn near drove him to therapy. The toy convention.

It wasn't that he didn't like kids, or didn't like noise, and indeed, if it had just been a bunch of kids running around and looking at the toy displays, he would have been fine. But as everyone except him knew, kids were not the primary attendees of a toy fair... it was their parents, or adults old enough to be their parents. And while they were enraptured over a new game or a like-new old toy, the kids they did bring got to entertain themselves. And one of the things two particular little boys decided to do was play with some of the action figures. Particularly, a Darth Vader action figure, complete with original vinyl cape, original telescoping light saber, original packaging, and a price tag around \$6000.00. Not that he could blame the kids-he'd played with the things himself when he was a child. But the collector (after recovering from his heart attack) blamed the parents, the parents blamed hotel security, and while the hotel officially ate the cost, his boss told him in no uncertain terms nothing like that would happen again without Jack getting thrown to the Jedis.

His boss didn't have the strongest grasp on Star Wars mythology.

Of course, his next convention couldn't be something simple and easy like an office supplies show, or perhaps Weight Watchers. Nope, it was the "Motor City By Gaslight!" convention. Nothing but rooms and hallways and balconies filled with Neo-Victorian steampunk gadgetry, all gears and brass and leather and steel knobs. And people in

costume. They all wandered around in thousand-dollar getups of glass and metal and leather. There were a lot of capes, too. Capes that could easily knock something valuable off of a table and onto his paycheck. Every hour, every minute, he walked around the display table, trying to watch Every Single Hand that picked anything up. It was more stressful than his first prom or his first car accident or his first time being shot at by an irate father.

After lunch on the second day, though, he had almost let his guard down. Almost. Occasionally, he'd let himself actually talk to one of the other guards, even joke a little bit. A little. He was still on the lookout for anyone who would destroy his life and put him out on the streets, but he was no longer hounding every person who walked around and looked at the wares on display. So he almost missed the two kids in full costume (one with a top-hat and monocle, one with a flowing cape, old-fashioned pilot's helmet, and hip-high boots). And they seemed to be awfully, awfully interested in a laptop made to look like an old round-key typewriter, complete with mechanical display and USB ports on the side.

"Jack," someone said to him from a table away. He ignored it, though, since there were few things more important than watching a possible thief in this room full of things that liked to walk away, and not just under steam power. But then the voice said "Mr. Parsons!" and since the only people who called him that were his Grandma and his Boss, and his Grandma was in Kentucky, he turned around.

Mr. Ullman looked none too happy at having to say his name twice, and he let him know that, though his news would have been bad no matter what mood he was in.

"Your relief called in sick. You're working until ten tonight."

"Sir... I have plans. And that will mean a sixteen-hour day."

"Well, it's up to you. You can work the rest of this convention, or you can attend the job fair they're having next week." He spun around, found one of the managers of the hotel, and immediately put on a smile more synthetic than the stuff laying around them.

And of course, to make matters more pleasant, when he finished telling his boss where he could stick his head, he saw the altered laptop was gone and the two kids in costume were already walking away with it.

He almost yelled, but he was sure his employers would consider what they'd done to be theft enough. Instead, he speed walked between the tables, dodged a group of cosplayers, and jumped over three kids who were walking in with their parents, and caught up with the two thieves just as they were ducking into a broom closet. One of them was fishing around in a toolkit and already had something that looked like a round brass watch. And both of them

were so intent on what they were doing that they didn't even notice him until he clapped a hand on their shoulders.

"Alright, guys..." he said, and that was all he was able to get out.

There was a flash.

\*

When the light died down, the three of them were standing inside another small closet. It was hotter here, and there was an immense din of noise and clatter and banging from just outside the door. Both of the kids... wait... extremely short people... looked up at him with wide eyes and pointed ears.

"How did you follow us?" the one holding the laptop said.

"Never mind that. Why?"

Jack took a deep breath. He'd been in some pretty bizarre situations before... Detroit was known for them. And as he was rationalizing that the thieves had probably banged him on the head and dragged him to another part of the hotel, one of them threw open the door and he saw a whirling collection of pipes, pneumatic tubes, and Elves in leather flying gear and goggles carrying packets and portfolios around in their hands. Some of them were even walking, but the rest skimmed along the ceiling.

"Where the Hell am I?"

The first of the two thieves shook his head and said, "Come with me, and we'll get you back home in a minute, okay?"

"I'm not going anywhere until you give me that laptop back. Period."

"Fine, Grizztle," the second one said. "We'll pay him for it, okay?"

"Whatever, Gruffin," the first one said. "I say their rules don't apply to us. This isn't their world."

"Can you answer my question?" Jack said.

"You're in the First Realm," Gruffin said. "We're Dwarfs, and we work for Lord Greyson." They stepped out of the closet and began making their way over to a tiny office. "As you can see, our Lord has quite the love of technology."

"But... all of this is like the Convention. It's all steampunk!"

"Of course it is," Grizztle said. "What do you expect us to use?"

"Have you ever heard that the Faerie Folk can't use silver? Or certain refined metals?" Gruffin said.

"I think so. They didn't cover that in Chemistry class."

“Well, silicon and niobium and all those semi-conductors and rare earths that you guys use also do a number on us. So when Lord Greyson decided to modernize, he invented steampunk.”

“Every so often, he sends us over for supplies,” Grizztle said. “Whaddya think, Gruffin,” he asked, before ducking into the office.

“Usual. Double just in case.”

When he left, Jack looked around a little more. There seemed to be a system, mostly involving packets getting shoved into pneumatic tubes and orders shouted into huge flared brass horns. Each desk had a microphone of sorts hanging overhead, and about half of them had weird variations of typewriters on them, most connected with fabric-covered umbilicals. He had indeed seen most of the stuff at the convention, though it looked less used. He also finally understood why so much came up missing.

He paced the room, back, forth, up, down, left, right. He still didn't know exactly where he was, or much care for the explanation he'd been given. The Dwarf (if he really was what he said he was) told him he would be back soon, and since he was supposed to be doing his real job in another room... in another building... in another reality, he thought that it would be a damned good idea to get back as soon as possible. Especially since his job was security. Especially especially since there were a couple million dollars' worth of gear and collectibles and such waiting for someone to knock over, or steal, or God Forbid, try to operate. The other Dwarf hadn't even stuck around to answer his questions... he was off talking to one of the Elves in flight gear.

"Jack?" Grizztle said. He was holding two small leather pouches in his hands. Next to him, a large brass speaking tube blared out commands in some form of Scandinavian, maybe Finnish. The minute the voice stopped barking, little weasel critters, some with pouches tied around their necks as well, took off into all corners of the hectic workroom.

"Why," Jack asked. "Okay, I get that maybe you guys thought the 'steampunk computer' was nice looking, and I get that you might not have the money to pay for it, but..."

"I've been authorized to pay you three gold coins," the Elf who'd walked up next to Grizztle said, and the Dwarf handed him the smaller pouch. Inside, Jack could see three coins, each probably about an ounce. His hands started to vibrate.

“Three ounces of gold?”

The Dwarf glared at him, then gave him three more pieces from his bag. “Alright, six, but that's all we can do. Is that enough? I'm sorry, I'm not up on US dollar prices.”

*And thank God for that*, Jack thought.

“That will work,” he said, trying to make his voice sound steady. “What’s in the other pouch?”

“Faerie dust,” Grizztle said. “Only use a little bit of it at a time. It’s for your troubles.”

“What? I’m not really into drugs or anything.”

“It just brings out the absolute best in everyone. Little bit of that in someone’s tea, he’ll do anything you want and thank you for the privilege.”

Jack snatched the pouch before he could talk himself out of it. He figured he could sell the gold to a coin collector somewhere, they looked like old gold liberty dollars, and then replace the laptop.

“And where do I go from here?”

“Gruffin!” Grizztle said, and the second Dwarf ran back.

“You ready?” he said, grabbing Jack’s elbow and dragging him back to the little closet.

“Sure. Hey, if you need anything else... here’s my card.” *I only charge a pound of gold per job.*

Gruffin absently took it from him and hurried him into the closet. “Sure. We’ll have to go back soon. That convention sucked. Worst trade show I’ve ever seen.”

A moment later, there was another flash and Jack was back in the DoubleTree. After looking around to make sure that he really was back in the hotel, and that no one had seen him, he decided coffee was in order. That was one perk of the job, at least. And because he thought that he might need to have the best brought out in him right now, before he went to talk to his Boss, he put a tiny pinch of the dust into it.

Not like it affected him, though. He had the cup halfway to his lips when a hand reached out, grabbed it, sniffed it, and took a sip.

“Ah, Jack, thank you for the coffee,” his Boss said. “That was so thoughtful of you.”

A few minutes later, his Boss was thanking him very profusely for the absolutely incredible, amazing cup of coffee that Jack had brought him, and they were soon talking about promotions. Jack wasn’t completely sure he *needed* a promotion, since six ounces of gold would replace the laptop and probably let him lease a computer store, but he humored him anyway.

And a few minutes after that, the old stories of “Faerie Gold” his Irish babysitter told him all came back.

*Pricks.*

The pouch of gold was filled with ginger snaps.

\*

## Of Æther and Æon

by: O. M. Grey

Author of AVALON REVISITED

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She watched him move across the deck as she had a thousand times before. Every day, just before muster, he walked this way. And every day, she watched from behind the main canon, peering around the cascabel, hoping that one day he would see her. Notice her. Love her. If only Jonah would look at her, he would see.

It was the middle of a very long war. It began before Constance even joined the RAN nearly a decade ago. She had served as the HMS Æther's Chief Navigator for just over three years now. How time flies.

Jonah was above her in rank, but not by much. Lean and strong, his body moved with grace, and Constance felt clumsy. Even she, a woman, didn't move with such grace and poise and confident purpose. He had dark brown hair, deep chestnut, extending past his temples in cocoa colored mutton chops, following the curve of his strong jaw. The leather baldric that ran from his right shoulder to left hip accentuated the breadth of his muscular chest, even beneath both the shirt and regulation waistcoat.

"Connie," a deep voice said. "Let's go, we'll be late to the morning muster and then there will be hell to pay."

"Morning, Samuel," Constance said without taking her eyes off Jonah, who was talking with another officer on the starboard side of the airship. He laughed, and Constance found herself catching her breath at the sight of his brilliant smile. His cheek held the slightest suggestion of a dimple when he smiled.

Although they worked in close proximity, he as the Chief Engineer and she as the Chief Navigator, she effectively hid her feelings for him while on the job. It was only in the few moments of the morning that she could let her guard down.

"Mornin', Con. What's got yer interest?" Samuel followed her gaze to the handsome officer across the way. "Ah. Of course. Shoulda known."

Constance blushed and forced herself to look away. She turned to Sam and had to shade her eyes from the rising sun behind him. During the day, the great balloon that held the dirigible aloft blocked out most of the sun, but during the early morning and the late evening, it shone between the great blimp and the top deck of the battleship. The movement felt too familiar.

“Déjà vu,” she said.

“Really?” Samuel responded. “Me, too. How odd.”

“Quite,” Constance agreed. “Let’s move.”

She stepped out from behind the canon and, after a quick glance to check that the seams of her knee-high spats were running straight up the center of her shin, strode across the deck toward muster. She fell in and stood at parade rest, her feet shoulder width apart and hands folded at the small of her back over the lacing of her regulation steel-boned corset, just above the small bustle, a tie-on piece that covered the derrière and gave the appearance of the bustle sway that was so popular down below. It was a recent addition to all women’s uniforms, said to keep the men from being distracted. Although Constance felt that it did more to draw the eye.

If only it would draw his eye.

“Attention!” the first mate yelled, and the entire mustered block snapped to attention. Constance stood stiffly with the rest of her crew and listened to the Captain speak.

“At ease,” the Captain said, and the entire company returned to parade-rest, synchronized. “Today is an important day,” he continued. “Earlier this morning, the Communication Officer’s team intercepted a message from the enemy. I am confident that this piece of information might be just what we need to sway this war back into our favor. And it’s high time, too!”

Constance felt a wave of hope rush through her core. The energy of the entire muster changed, and she felt that, too. Out of the corner of her eye, she chanced a look at Jonah, and had to catch her breath when she saw that he was looking at her as well! She snapped her eyes back to the front and realized she had no idea what the Captain was saying anymore. The blood rushed into her cheeks, warming them against the cold air. The rising sunlight caught the lens of Jonah’s goggles atop his flight cap, so she knew he was still looking back at her.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

“Dismissed.”

Constance took the opportunity to duck away in the opposite direction from Jonah, hoping that Samuel would tell her what she had missed. She took the long way around to the Chart House, past the great engine cogs that pierced the floor of the port-aft deck and up the back stairs past the Signal Bridge. The Chart House was empty. Samuel was not yet here, and the night watch, already off duty, had left for the day. Bending over a large map spread over the center table, she commenced work immediately.

“Interesting turn, no?” Samuel asked as he stepped inside the small room just above the main deck in which they both worked.

“Indeed,” she responded, not wanting to admit that she had missed most of what the Captain said. Surely it would come up in conversation.

Samuel moved a tarnished astrolabe off the counter left over from the night watch and picked up a brass sextant. While Samuel took the morning readings, Constance calculated their current location on the map. She adjusted the divider based upon their speed, air velocity, and cross wind readings set down by the night watch and then walked the divider across the map from the last recorded position to their current one.

“What did you think about the Captain’s lecture?” Constance asked as she wrote the new figures down in the navigational log, but Samuel didn’t answer. He stood at the front window looking through the sextant’s eyepiece, then readjusted its arm and looked through the eyepiece again.

“Sam?” Constance said.

“Somethin’ ain’t right,” he said. “According to these here readings, we are thirty-three degrees off course.

“That can’t be right,” Constance said dropping the divider and rechecking her figures. She pulled the brass compass out from the tiny pocket on the front of her corset. “Unless the night watch wrote down the wrong calculations again.”

Sure enough. The compass confirmed it. She snapped it shut and placed it back into its pocket. The long chain bounced against the steel boning of her corset as Constance moved over to Sam. Taking the sextant from him and looking through it herself, she confirmed it once again.

“This is unacceptable,” she said, thrusting the sextant back into Samuel’s hands. “Sam, I think it’s time we split up. You will have to take the night shift with Airman Hannigan, and Sergeant Fredricks shall take the day shift with me. This is the third time this month, although it’s by far the worst.”

“Aye aye, Lieutenant Commander McCoy,” Sam said with more than a hint of sarcasm. He obviously didn’t want the night shift, but since Constance outranked him, he knew he couldn’t argue.

“You know we cannot afford mistakes like this, especially not after what the Captain said this morning. This might be the turning point for the war,” she offered, as it was truly the only thing she heard, “and we do not want a navigational error to jeopardize this mission.”

Constance pulled her bound tablet out from a pocket in her belt and scribbled down some new headings. She ripped the last page with the new headings out of her bound tablet and, handing them to Samuel, said, “Fix this. Fast.”

“Aye aye,” he said again, without the sarcasm.

Constance went over to the stock cabinet to get a new tablet, but before she could open the door, a deep, melodic voice said, “Lieutenant Commander McCoy, might I have a moment?”

It was Jonah. Her mind filled with a mixture of pleasure and fear. Perhaps he had come to berate her about the navigational error, although that would not be the responsibility of the Chief Engineer. She forced herself to be the officer she was and responded, “Of course, Commander Beaufort.” Then continuing to Samuel, she said, “Sergeant Whitford, please relay the new headings to engineering.” Samuel nodded in reply and moved over to the sound telegraph they used to communicate with other parts of the ship. Putting the flared earpiece to his ear and speaking into the similarly flared mouthpiece, he said, “Engine Room.”

Jonah stepped sideways out the doorway in which he had been standing and put his hand out, inviting her to go before him. She caught her breath, no matter how much she tried not to, when she passed so closely in front of him. The two walked down the front stairway and up toward the foremast, where he stopped her.

He just looked at her and after a moment, smiled.

“There was something you wanted to speak with me about, Commander Beaufort?” Constance said, folding her hands in front of her, as if she was a proper lady from the ton. She took very conscious deep breaths and reminded herself again that she was an officer in the Royal Air Navy.

“Of course, Constance. But, please call me Jonah. We have worked together for so long,” he started.

Breathe.

“Well,” he said rubbing his neck and looking out over the edge of the ship into the horizon. “In light of what the Captain said this morning, I seem to have new hope regarding this war and... life, I suppose.” He laughed a little here, and Constance felt her heart jump in her chest when the faint dimple appeared along with the joyous sound of his laughter. “I really should’ve done this long ago, but things have been quite dire with the war over the past months. Still, now with this new hope-”

He shuffled his weight from foot to foot and laughed again.

Heart. Jump.

“Anyway, what I’m trying to say is—Would you like to have dinner with me tonight?”

His gaze turned down to her with the question, and he bit his lip, which only made to deepen his dimple, as he waited for her response.

Constance had not realized she had been holding her breath for the last several seconds until she let it out. Then she took another one and held it again.

Jonah must have taken her silence as offense, for the smile left his eyes, but still politely stayed on his lips as he said, “Forgive me, Lieutenant Commander McCoy. I have overstepped my bounds.” With a slight bow, he turned and began to walk away.

Constance forced herself out of her shocked catatonia and yelled after him,

“Yes!”

He turned back.

“Yes,” she said, breathing a little more rapidly now than normal. “Yes, Jonah, I would love to have dinner with you tonight.”

He smiled and then returned to her, sweeping her into his arms and stepping behind the great foremast to block them from view of the rest of the crew. She felt his taut body pressed up against hers, and it was a good thing his strong arm, wrapped tightly around her waist, held her against him, for her knees were weak. They most certainly would not have held her weight if he were to let her go. She prayed that he would never let her go.

His grey-blue eyes looked intently into her green ones for a moment before closing. She felt his soft lips press down over hers, and she met the kiss in kind. Her hand found the bristly chestnut chops along his jaw. His tongue brushed hers ever so slightly, and it sent a wave of longing down her entire body, settling heavy in her deepest part. He withdrew his lips, leaving her breathless.

“Until tonight,” he said. He touched her cheek and let his hand slowly trail along her jawline before removing it completely. Images of quenched longings filled her minds and she thought that there was too much time before now and dinner.

Would this day were done!

He stepped out from behind the foremast and she followed, a little wobbly, but before he could get too far away, Samuel called down to her from the Chart House stoop.

“Lieutenant Commander McCoy, get up here quickly!” he shouted.

The edge of panic in his voice caused Jonah to stop as well.

“What is it, Sergeant,” Jonah said.

“The Night Watch,” he said. “You had better see for yerself.”

Constance and Jonah rushed back up the stairs to find Airman Hannigan and Sergeant Fredricks on the floor by the supply cabinet, as if they had tumbled out of it. Both their bodies were twisted in unnatural ways, and their empty eyes stared out from their strangely angled heads at nothing.

Constance stifled a scream, but she could not look away from the horrific sight.

“Sabotage,” Samuel said. “That’s why we’re off course.”

“I shall alert the Captain,” Jonah said, touching Constance’s shoulder to show his concern.

Jonah turned and went down the stairs and Constance followed. “I shall come with you,” she said. As she reached the bottom of the stairs, she ran right into the back of Jonah who had stopped suddenly.

“Jonah, what is it?” she said. He stepped aside and, looking past him over the port side of the ship, she saw a vessel, smaller than their own but no less armed, rising to their altitude.

“Where did that come from?”

“It must have been beneath us, hiding. Waiting.” Jonah took off in a run toward the bridge, and Constance followed. But by then, the entire ship was at alert. A steam whistle sounded in alarm, piercing the quiet of the morning. The sound of panic shortly followed as the crew members crisscrossed the top deck.

They were not prepared for this. They had been miles from anyone last night.

“Battle stations!” the Master-at-Arms shouted into the increasing chaos of the crew. Men and women pulled their goggles from off their caps and covered their eyes as they manned their stations around the main deck’s peripheral cannons. Others rushed passed Constance and Jonah trying to get to the lower decks in time for the fire command.

“Get back into the Chart House, Connie,” Jonah looked back at her, and his goggles were already in place, covering his grey-blue eyes. He gently took hers from off her cap and placed them over her eyes as well. After a tender kiss, he turned to follow the others downstairs, heading to the engine room. She started back toward her station as well to await orders.

The enemy vessel had matched their altitude, and simultaneously, what seemed like every canon on their ship fired. Jonah and Constance had but a moment to catch each other’s terrified eyes before the HMS Æther was hit.

Great booming sounds in rapid succession accompanied by a blur of motion filled Constance’s mind, and she was thrown against the side of the ship.

Catching herself from going over, she saw several of her crew mates falling through the sky towards the unforgiving ground below. Frantic, she turned to see if Jonah was one of them, but all was chaos. She could not see him. The wounded cried out from all along the deck. Smoke billowed up from the lower decks through the new holes in the floorboards and from portholes on the side of the ship. Even the huge engine cogs had been broken. The largest one was broken in two, and three of the smaller ones, still larger than a man, were forced up through the now fragmented deck. She looked around for Jonah, trying to force her brain to catch up with what just happened. All was but a blur of blood and smoke and splintered wood. There, she finally saw him, laying against the large capstan, bleeding. He hadn’t gone over the side, but he was hurt. She rushed up to him as she heard the command, “FIRE!”

The HMS Æther rocked back as its canon’s fired back at the enemy.

“Jonah!” Constance shouted above the din. She got to him and knelt by his side.

It was not good. Several shards of wood stuck out from various parts of his body. His leg. His arm. His shoulder. His neck. All were bleeding. By far the worst wound was only have been inches from his heart. It was a metal rod, like the main shaft from some engine gears, and it was deep.

“Jonah!” she shouted again. She lifted the goggles from his eyes, which rolled over to focus on her. She lifted off her own goggles so that she could see him more clearly.

“Connie,” he said weakly. He reached out and touched her cheek. She felt the wetness of blood, and she clapped her own hand over his, holding on. “I guess I really should have asked you to dinner sooner. So much time. Wasted.”

“Shhhhh,” she said. “I’ll get the medic.”

“No,” he said, putting his hand on her knee as she began to rise. “Stay with me.”

She tried not to cry at the sight of the bright red blood dripping down his face and into his chestnut mutton chops. He had a head wound as well as the rest, and his breath was becoming raspy. Gurgling noises wafted out from his shallow breaths. The shaft must have punctured a lung.

“I can’t see you,” he said, rubbing his eyes with his uninjured hand. “There’s blood in my eye.” He laughed and then coughed, splattering more blood on his already darkened uniform.

“I am here, Jonah. I am here with you,” she said, and the tears came, blurring her vision as well. She wiped them away with a harsh swipe of her hand, wanting to see him clearly.

Constance knew there were but moments left, even if she could have gotten to the medic, this was not a battle one walked away from. Any of them.

“I have loved you for so long,” he said. “I should have asked you sooner.”

They had finally found each other, and now this. There was not enough time, but she would spend every last moment with him. She would hold on to every last moment with her life. There was not enough time.

“I really should have asked you sooner.”

And with that, he died.

“Jonah?” she said, shaking him, but there was no response. “Jonah! Stay with me. I’m here now. Stay with me!” But his eyes, still eerily fixed on her, were empty. Dark.

“Jonah!” she cried. “NO!” His head lolled to the side, so she pulled it close to her breast, steadying it.

“I’m here now, Jonah. Don’t leave me.”

The commotion of the surrounding havoc crept back into her consciousness as she held her lover’s dead body. It was so surreal. Just moments ago he kissed her. She could still feel the softness of his lips, his tongue. His cologne still filled her nostrils. Only a short time ago.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and it made them sting in the cold morning air.

A frantic Airman rushed by screaming, “They’re aiming for the balloon! They’re aiming for the balloon!”

“No. The hydrogen,” Constance said, to Jonah’s blank stare. There was no panic in her voice, for the pain she felt was too great. What she felt surpassed pain. Surpassed numbness. There was no escape, but she would be with Jonah again soon. Forever.

She held him to her breast and accepted her fate. Letting everything else fall away, she felt the cool morning air sting the tears on her cheeks. She blocked out the screaming and chaos around her and concentrated on Jonah’s body pressed up against her. She looked

down at his handsome, blood-stained face and brushed her hand over his jaw, feeling the roughness of his mutton chops, then with her finger she traced the place on his cheek where his dimple had been.

The blast came. It sounded faraway, as if in a dream.

Then she saw the cannonballs fly, and they appeared to be moving in slow motion. She saw them hit the great balloon, and she saw the beginning of the explosion. As the fireball rushed towards her, she felt as if she was being squeezed into a narrow tube. A horrible sensation of moving backwards, as if being yanked forcefully back into a room you had just left. A blur of brilliant lights filled her peripheral vision, forming a funnel around her and the entire ship.

Then she was standing on the deck looking into the sun rising in the East. She turned away from the brightness of it, blinking several times to clear the spots still flashing on the inside of her eyelids.

There he was.

She watched him move across the deck as she had a thousand times before. Every day, before muster, he walked this way. And every day, she watched from behind the main canon, peering around the cascabel, hoping that one day he would see her. Notice her. Love her. If only Jonah would look at her, he would see.

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That's it for this edition of Steampunk Adventures! Hope you enjoyed the stories. Look for Issue 7 in August when we explore exotic lands and celebrate the beginning of Fall. Visit our [blog](#) for submission guidelines and news.