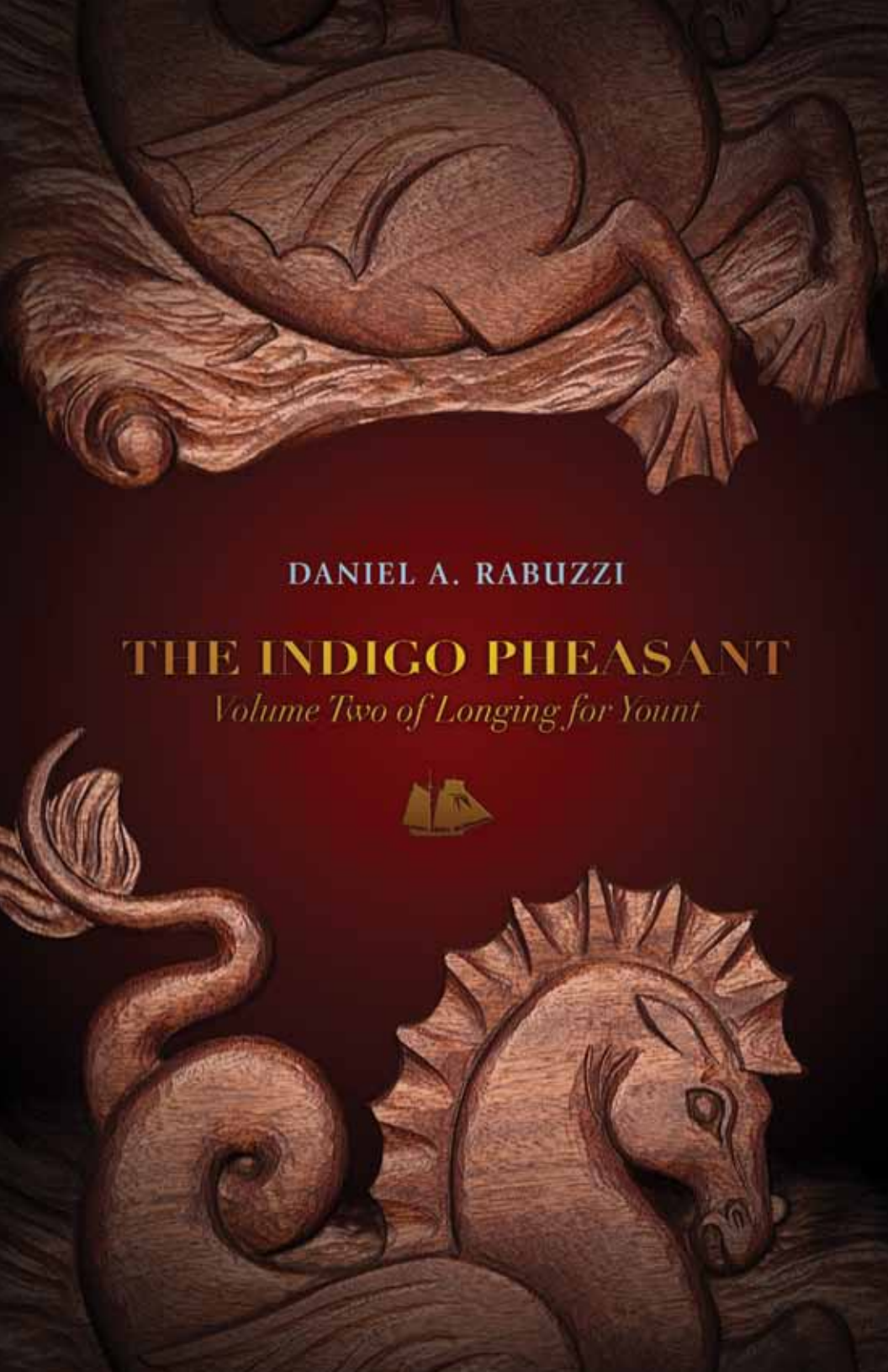
DANIEL A. RABUZZI
THE INDIGO PHEASANT
Volume Two of Longing for Yount

Praise for Daniel A. Rabuzzi's *The Choir Boats: Volume 1 of Longing for Yount*

"*The Choir Boats* is *Gulliver's Travels* crossed with *The Golden Compass* and a dollop of *Pride and Prejudice* . . . An instant classic of fantasy . . ."

—John Ottinger,
***Grasping for the Wind* blog**

"(A)n auspicious debut . . . a muscular, Napoleonic-era fantasy that, like Philip Pullman's Dark Materials series, will appeal to both adult and young adult readers."

—Paul Witcover,
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"(A) fantastic and deeply entertaining debut novel . . . Part steampunk adventure, part classic fantasy, *The Choir Boats* might be earmarked for young adults, but anyone to whom this sounds like a rich ride will be surprised and delighted."

—Lincoln Cho,
January Magazine

"With full flanks ahead, *The Choir Boats* charts a magical course of verve and wit through a richly detailed nineteenth-century world, spinning off little arabesques of wonderment with every turn of the page."

—Matt Kressel,
host of *KGB reading series*,
founder of Senses Five Press

"*The Choir Boats* is the most underrated young adult title of 2009, although it's by no means limited to young readers. It's a gorgeous and light-hearted story, chock-full of clever words, characters, surprises, and one truly spectacular twist at the end. If you're seeking an engrossing and entirely unique world to sweep you off your feet, look no further."

***—The Ranting Dragon* blog**

DANIEL A. RABUZZI

THE INDIGO PHEASANT

Volume Two of Longing for Yount

Illustrated by
DEBORAH A. MILLS

ChiZine Publications

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Dedicated to my wife, best friend, and creative partner: the artist Deborah A. Mills. She knows Yount in the crook of the osprey's wing, in the grain of the wood, in the flower-glow of twilight.

Continuing the story started in *The Choir Boats (Volume I of Longing for Yount)*, by Daniel A. Rabuzzi (Toronto: Chizine Publications, 2009). For notes to the text and more information about Maggie, the McDoons and Yount, see: *www.danielarabuzzi.com*.

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THE INDIGO PHEASANT

Prologue

"Thou, who didst put to flight
Primeval Silence, when the morning stars,
Exulting, shouted o'er the rising ball;
O Thou, whose word from solid darkness struck
That spark, the sun; strike wisdom from my soul . . ."

—Edward Young,
The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts On Life, Death & Immortality,
First Night, lines 35-39 (published 1742)

"The fowl digs out the blade that kills it."

—Traditional Igbo proverb

"The mother that bare them saith unto them, Go your way, ye children; for I am a widow and forsaken. / I brought you up with gladness; but with sorrow and heaviness have I lost you for ye have sinned . . ."

—4 Ezra 2, 2-3

"Blood," said Maggie. "I can see no other way, Mama—it needs blood. Blood to make it work properly."

Maggie emptied the afternoon ashes in the bin at the bottom of the garden behind the Sedgewicks's house on Archer Street by Pineapple Court. She listened to the bells tolling the end of the Lesser Feast of the Vicissitudes on a chilly day in May of 1816.

"Mama," she said to the growing shadows on the wall. For over a year, ever since the great singing with the white girl and the brown girl that brought the ship out of Silence, Maggie had been designing a machine in her head.

"I wish there was another way, I do," she thought. "Why blood? I fear it, I don't want it so. But I can taste it in my mind. Aceldama in the music, blood on the tonal fields."

A grey thrush landed on top of the wall, started his vespers.

"A musical instrument like no one has ever seen," Maggie said, admiring the fieldfare in song as the light turned wan.

She envisioned a structure larger than a house, with wires and gears, struts and enjambments, a tabernacular engine.

"Like in size to the organ at St. Macrina's, but much more . . . complex."

She arranged in her mind levers and pipes, knobs and buttons.

"The method of fluxions will not be enough," said Maggie, scratching out a calculation with a stick in the ash-kettle. "To build and steer this choir-boat, we will need Mr. Laplace's celestial mechanics, Mama, and something of his latest on probability—if only I knew French better. Not neglecting the monadology either."

Maggie had spent hours by candlelight alone in her tiny attic room dissecting a broken timepiece she got from the rag-and-bone man, contriving models made from scraps she found in refuse heaps and middens, drafting schematics and charts with pencil and a pale blue crayon. She read every book and paper on mathematics that she could convince Mrs. Sedgewick to buy or borrow for her. On her Saturday afternoons, she haunted the watchmakers' district in Clerkenwell, and once she spent a day's wages to visit the Mechanical Museum on Tichbourne off

Haymarket, having first been denied entrance at the Adelaide National Gallery of Practical Science on the Strand (serving as it did, "only the most esteemed and genteel elements of the Publick.")

Night by night, the plan became clearer.

"*Chi di*, we need seven singers," she whispered to the thrush. "Not you, little friend, but six others besides me. The white girl and the brown girl . . . they are two. I heard others when those two sang, but I cannot see them."

Maggie traced a pattern on the brick of the wall below the thrush.

"The ghost-stitches of our wanderings," she explained to the bird. "Another girl also sings alone, like me. A girl with black hair, very straight, and she has pale golden skin. I see her when I dream, I watch her sing, but I hear no music from her. She is very, very far away. I think she must come to me or else the great machine cannot work."

Maggie shivered and wondered if the machine needed the distant girl to be the seventh singer or to be something else.

"Ancestors—*ndichie*—help me," thought Maggie.

Only the thrush responded, singing more loudly as night fell and the moon rose.

"Seven singers . . . and blood to glaze the enamel, burnish the copper, oil the engine, to wax the casings. I wish, oh Mama I wish it wasn't so . . . but I see blood in the machine's making . . . I fear this, but the calculations are quite clear on the matter."

The head-maid called from the house, sharp words. Maggie sighed and hoisted the ash-pot.

"Here I am little better than a slave," Maggie said. "That Mrs. Sedgewick treats me like her pet, a fancy monkey who does tricks."

Maggie walked towards the house.

"White folks think they know us but they don't, not at all," she whispered. "Not sure but I should take my machine to Maryland, Mama, when I am through with it in the other place."

At that moment, a phantom echo—a shriek not heard but

felt in the marrow—crossed the moon and the thrush stopped singing. Maggie did not flinch. She shook her fist at the sky.

"You are not seen, but I feel you," she said.

Halting at the doorway to the house, she sensed that the thrush was gone from the wall. He would sing no more this night.

"No more pint o'salt," she said and went inside.

Sally had the carriage stopped at the corner of Mincing Lane, unable to go on.

"What is it, niece?" said Barnabas.

Sally could not say. Ever since landing at London's East India Docks that morning, on the Lesser Feast of the Vicissitudes, a chilly day in early May of 1816, Sally had felt uneasy. In the carriage, passing what should have been familiar places, she could not shake the feeling that something was—as Mr. Sanford would put it—"out of place."

"Figs and fiddles," said her uncle, when she confessed her fear to him. "Just getting your land-legs back is all, I reckon, after all our months at sea, first on *The Gallinule* through the foggy, complainin' places, now so many more months on an East Indiaman from the Cape."

Isaak stood with her two back legs anchored in Sally's lap, peering here and there and back again through the carriage window, face framed by her two front paws. Isaak lashed her tail, a threat and a greeting combined.

"Perhaps Uncle, and maybe," Sally said, holding Isaak by the belly. But she thought the streets of London felt even narrower and more askew than she remembered, the rooflines subtly unbalanced, the dome of St. Paul's minutely off centre. The rooks overhead seemed even shiftier and louder than she remembered.

"I fear a trick of the Owl," she said to Reglum and Dorentius. "Might he not have altered our course, magicked the Fulginator to send us to some *other* London on some other Karket-soom?

"Especially with me so badly hurt, that's your thought is it not?" said Dorentius, shifting his amputated leg as the carriage jounced along a particularly poorly surfaced section of the Great East Road.

"No, no, dear Dorentius, I did not mean . . ." said Sally, putting her hand out to the place where his leg used to be, then withdrawing it with a little gasp.

"You could never offend me, Sally, you know that," said the Yountish chief-fulginator. "Only Reglum here can do that, given that he insists on Oxonian superiority in all matters!"

Sally smiled at the jibe, her heart full of relief and love for the brave Dorentius, whose leg had been shattered by a cannonball as *The Gallinule* escaped from Yount Great-Port. The night Afsana fell, shot by the Arch-Bishop's Guards . . . Sally's smile was short-lived.

"I do not doubt the Wurm has power to cozen even the leys and vortices of the Interrugal Lands, but I do not think our Fulginator played us false, especially not with both of you doing the fulginating," said Reglum.

"Could be just that we have been away so long," said Sanford. The others listened intently—his pronouncements were famously laconic. "Bonaparte's been defeated, for one. For the other, we McDoons have grown accustomed to being very nearly the only white people in our gatherings. It is strange to say it, but it is odd now to see so very few brown and black faces."

His speech at an end, Sanford settled back into customary silence, his eyes keen and bright as they surveyed the London cityscape through the carriage window. He looked for all the world like an old setter, nose outthrust.

"Why, 'tis true, of course, old Sanford has it precisely, in fact, I declare that I never saw so many pairs of blue eyes in all my life!" said Barnabas. "There, Sally, your fancy is nothing more than getting your senses reacquainted with what has now become foreign to us."

Still, Sally could not bring herself to travel the final hundred yards to the house on Mincing Lane.

Sally thought of Tom, as she did every day. She looked at Tom's boon companion Billy Sea-Hen, sitting quietly next to Mr. Sanford. She thought of Afsana . . . dead? She thought of Jambres, the Cretched Man. She thought of the Fraulein Reimer.

"She'll never come back," Sally whispered. "'The solace of salvation', that's what she put on the needlework. . . ."

"Ah, alas, well no, she cannot come back," said Barnabas, blowing his nose to hide tears.

"Dearest," said Reglum, clearing his throat, holding Sally's hand, offering a handkerchief to dry her tears. "I feel this to be London, the real and true London, not some Wurm's illusion . . . and surely you know London far better than I do."

"Dear, sweet Reglum," she thought, looking at Reglum, dabbing at her cheeks.

And then there *he* was, alive in all his pleadings, uncoiling in her mind: James Kidlington.

"James!" she shouted in her mind. "No, no, not you, James Kidlington . . . 'I speak not, I trace not, I breathe not thy name' . . ."

"Sally?" said Reglum.

Sally sat up, squeezing and then releasing Reglum's hand.

"'Tis nothing, dearest," she said. "Verily."

She folded Isaak to her breast, and said, "I can go on."

Sanford rapped on the roof of the carriage and the horses moved.

Suddenly there it was, their home on Mincing Lane, with its blue trim (recently repainted, as Sanford noted with satisfaction) and its dolphin door knocker. They had sent a messenger on ahead of them from the dock, so they were expected. The door to the house flew open even as they spilled out of the carriage and Isaak bounded up the steps.

"Salmius Nalmius!"

"Why, Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Harris in the flesh, looking very well indeed!"

"I must ask you straight away, lads, about my smilax root . . ."

Sally did not dismiss her fears even then, not until. . . .

"Here now, you lot, let me through this moment or I will clout you black and blue!" said the cook, pushing her way past her niece and Mr. Brandt and all the others. A fleshy avalanche, smelling of dough and mustard-sauce, the cook enveloped Sally.

"Mr. Sanford, Mr. McDoon, sirs, it is good to have you back at last!" said the cook. "And here is our Isaak-tiger come home to us as well!"

The cook fair thundered her next:

"Best of all, may all saints and their servants be praised, sirs, it's Miss Sally, our own little smee! Welcome home, welcome home, welcome home!"

James Kidlington marvelled at his clean fingernails, at his fresh-pressed clothes, and the new hat on his head.

Standing on Effra's Bridge, where the Fleet River met the Thames, James shifted his attention from himself to the spectacle of London on a cold day in May of 1816. He followed the movement of barges and wains, loaded with coal and grain, and the rumbling of great carriages bearing travellers from as far away as Glasgow and Liverpool. He listened to a thousand voices raised in devotion to commerce, finding one among the clamour especially intriguing.

"Wheaten buns," sighed James, as he tracked the vendor who dodged and danced his way through the crowd. Not even the tannic stink of the rivers could blunt James's craving for a hot, blanch'd bun.

James made as if to approach the bun-seller but stopped at the sight of the tall figure next to him.

"Might I just pause for . . . ?" said James.

"No time," said the man. "No time, we are late enough as it is."

James sighed again, gave one last lingering look at the blanch'd bun, quieted his lust, and resignedly followed his escort. After all, the man had a gun and an evident ability to use it, while James was unarmed . . . and his hands were bound.

"Well," thought James. "No bun for now, but I had lost all hope of ever eating one again anyhow, so I can wait another few hours for that. In the meantime, I will at last be enlightened on the not-so-minor matter of my liberation. This fellow, and all the other guardians who have been with me every hour of every day since I was released from the . . . that hell-hole in Australia, they've all been as talkative as the dead, no word of explanation from them no matter how hard I tried. Not that I quibble, mind you, since I am free in comparison to where I was. But James Kidlington knows that no one is doing this as a favour. Oh no, oh no, the labour and the . . . torment . . . have not dulled my wits to that degree. What I want to know is: who is my 'benefactor,' and what does he want from me in return?"

With competence born of long practice, Mr. and Mrs. Sedgewick ignored each other as they breakfasted on the morning after the Lesser Feast of the Vicissitudes.

". . . back at last from their myriad adventures, the palmers return from the Land of Prester-John or the Golden Chersonese or wherever they may have been," said Mr. Sedgewick, contemplating the note just delivered from the McDoons. "And we are bid to see them this very afternoon, my dendritic day-lily."

Mrs. Sedgewick nodded, but listened more closely to her buttered toast than to her husband.

"Now we shall hear the truth of all the rumours and speculation," continued the lawyer, remarking naught of his wife's inattention. "Certainly and manifestly not lost like poor Mungo Park seeking Timbuktoo! So that's one hypothesis reduced to marmalade! But what transpired at the Cape? Did they, as some suggest, roam to India? To the wild Carmanian waste? We shall shortly hear all, direct and unimpeded from the mouths of the McDoons themselves. No longer will we rely on the hearsay of others. Nay, *nullius in verba* . . ."

Mrs. Sedgewick heard only the echo in her mind of the whispers she'd listened to in the dark. Of late she had dreamed of a man—at least something in a man's tall shape—dressed in a white fancy-coat, with cut-away tails reaching to his calves. He, or it, was tall but stocky, with a barrel chest and a power in his arms even as they hung at his sides. She could not fully make out his face, but thought it must be very round, plate-like, with two great unblinking yellow eyes.

The man muttered in the darkness, half-whistling in broken Latin, punctuating phrases with snappings, clickings, sounds of whetting.

Morning after morning she awoke, with a lingering image in her mind of this unwanted visitor, an abscess in the half-light. She could not tell Mr. Sedgewick; he would only scoff. Oddly, she thought of telling Maggie, but what sense could there be in confiding in a servant, no matter how skilled in arts and letters? Sally, Sally . . . she wanted to share this dream with Sally; Sally would know what it meant and perhaps how to end it.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Sedgewick to Mr. Sedgewick. "Yes, the Miss Sally, as you say, it will be very fine to renew my conversations with her. I am most glad she is back, you are as always quite and irrefutably right."

The Mejouffrouw Termuyden met her husband at the front-door of The Last Cozy House, as winter approached the Cape in May of 1816.

"Here you are, at last!" she said in English, less to her husband than to the three people he ushered into the house.

"You must be Mary," said the Mejouffrouw to the Chinese girl—twelve, maybe thirteen years old—standing before her. "You can have no idea how delighted we are to meet you. We have heard so much about you from our colleagues in the East."

"Her English is not good," said the lean young man standing close behind her. "I am her older brother. You can speak to me."

"Very well," said the Mejouffrouw, peering at the young man (perhaps eighteen or nineteen years old) for the first time.

"Her name is not Mary, it is Mei-Hua, but none of you have the tongue to say that, so you all say instead Mary. Misfortunate. Mei-Hua means 'Beautiful Flower.'"

The third guest—around sixty years of age— stepped forward and said, "Please forgive Shaozu. He sometimes forgets his manners. Allow me, please: I am Tang Guozhi, special sending from his excellence, the Jiaquing Emperor . . ."

All three Chinese bowed at the name of the emperor, prompting a bow and a curtsy from the Termuydens.

". . . Xie Shaozu and Xie Mei-Hua are my responsibilities. We thank you for receiving us. His heavenly Emperorship himself has much interest in this matter."

"We are indeed flattered, then," said the Mejouffrouw. "But it is we who forget our manners! Let us understand each other better over tea and small-cakes in our withdrawing room—the tea is genuine oolong, brought to us on an East Indiaman much like the one that brought you here yourselves."

An hour later, under the gentle ministrations of the Termuydens and the benevolent influence of The Last Cozy House, even the stand-offish Shaozu began to feel at home.

Offering Shaozu yet another slice of gingerbread, the Mejouffrouw said, "Tell us again about the wisdom Mary studies . . . we cannot pronounce it, I am so sorry . . . the . . . ?"

"The *luli yuanyuan* . . . it means . . . wait, I have written it down for you in English," said Shaozu, taking the gingerbread with one hand, while drawing a paper from his satchel with another. He gave the paper to his hostess.

"*Sources of Musical Harmonics and Mathematical Astronomy,*" read the Mejouffrouw, her brow furrowed. "Ah, hmm, *precies* . . ."

"Mei-Hua is . . ." the young man paused. "I have not the word. She is the . . . she is special. She can do the *jie-fang-shen* in her head. That is what you call the al-ge-bra. Mei-Hua is blessed, that is the word. She can do *huan zhong shu chi* better than anyone in China, and that means the world."

The Mejouffrouw said, "That's what we were told as well. That's why we were asked to inquire about Mary. She is needed."

The emperor's emissary, Tang Guozhi, said, "The philosophers in The Forbidden City have studied these things for many lives. I remember their conversations with the English when the Lord MacCartney visited China."

"Ah, so you met Lord MacCartney," said Mr. Termuyden. "Did you know Sir John Barrow, his secretary? Sir John stayed here with us many times during his long stay in South Africa, after the end of the Chinese embassy."

"Yes, I knew Sir John a little," said Tang Guozhi. "I knew the boy best, the one who spoke Chinese so well: Thomas Staunton. He was then about the same age as our Mei-Hua is now."

"Curious thing, as you mention Staunton (Sir Staunton and now a baronet like his father); he is here in Cape Town as we speak," said Mr. Termuyden. "He is assistant-commissioner in Lord Amherst's embassy to China. Their two ships landed not a week ago for replenishment on the way to Canton. A curious coincidence . . ."

Tang Guozhi nodded but said nothing.

Mei-Hua broke the ensuing silence with a query in Chinese to her brother and Tang Guozhi.

"What Mei-Hua asks is . . ." began Shaozu.

"In my head," said Mei-Hua, speaking in English directly to the Termuydens. "What is the place I hear in my head? When I dream?"

The Mejouffrouw put down the tea-canister, and said, "Yount. It is called Yount, in English. We will tell you all you need to know. Your journey has, I fear, only just begun."

A dirigible he was, floating over endless plains of pocked and riddled dust and the frozen spume of long-dead volcanoes. In the distance were the teterrimous mountains, with peaks of sheared bronze. On the horizon, beyond the mountains, burned cold fires.

It might have been May of 1816, possibly on The Lesser Feast of the Vicissitudes. Here was all time and no time at the same time.

His shadow, sleek, loomed alternately larger and smaller as he flew over ridges, incising the earth with the shadow of his scissor-tail. That shadow, cast by the moon, lingered for a moment or two after he had sped on far above.

"I have seen Orpheus fail here," he said to himself, and his thoughts caused the dust down below to eddy upwards.

"No door will open easily here," he thought, and that thought became a whisper that became a wind through the mountains.

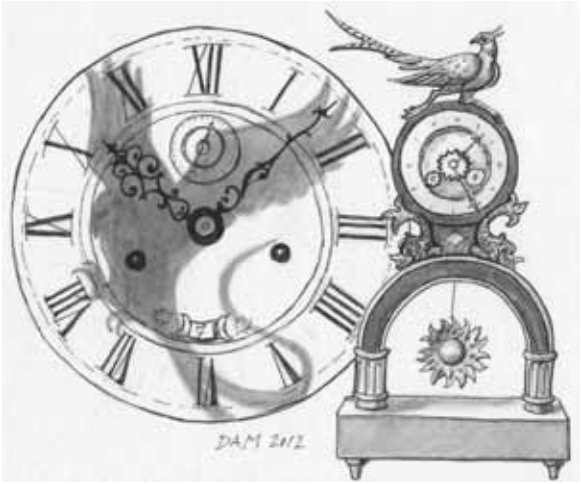
His vast whiteness sailed through the darkness, smothering any pretense of hope that distant atmospheres might conspire to insert into his domain.

Yet, he was troubled deep inside the sines and secants of his being. With his tympannic ears, he heard a humming, a very far-off music in many voices.

"Oh no, oh no," he boomed. "Orpheus could not do this thing, and neither can you!"

On he cruised, eyes seeing every grain of grey sand, every sliver of mica, every edge and ripple of every mountain-side.

On he cruised into the dark, straining to hear the music on his borders.



Chapter 1: Many Plans, or, The Most Superbly Ludicrous Project Ever Devised

"They who find themselves inclined to censure new undertakings, only because they are new, should consider, that the folly of projection is very seldom the folly of a fool; it is commonly the ebullition of a capacious mind, crowded with variety of knowledge, and heated with intenseness of thought; it proceeds often from the consciousness of uncommon powers, from the confidence of those who, having already done much, are easily persuaded that they can do more.

"Projectors of all kinds agree in their intellects, though they differ in their morals; they all fail by attempting things beyond their power, by despising vulgar attainments, and aspiring to performances to which, perhaps, nature has not proportioned the force of man: when they fail, therefore, they fail not by idleness or timidity, but by rash adventure and fruitless diligence.

"Whatever is attempted without previous certainty of success, may be considered as a project, and amongst narrow minds may, therefore, expose its author to censure and contempt; and if the liberty of laughing be once indulged, every man will laugh at

what he does not understand, every project will be considered as madness, and every great or new design will be censured as a project. [… . . . .] Many that presume to laugh at projectors, would consider a flight through the air in a winged chariot, and the movement of a mighty engine by the steam of water as equally the dreams of mechanick lunacy."

—Samuel Johnson,
"Projectors Injudiciously Censured and Applauded,"
in *The Adventurer*, nr. 99 (October 15, 1753)

"We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropped the breeze, the sails dropped down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean."

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
"Rime of the Ancient Mariner,"
Part II (published 1798)

"We own you, Mr. Kidlington," said the one on the left, an angular man, a knitting needle come to life. "Understand me well. Notwithstanding the change last century in the laws of this United Kingdom, to wit, forbidding such things, His Majesty's Government in effect and for all intents and purposes . . . owns you."

Kidlington gazed coolly at the speaker, who was dressed in black but for a shockingly white, old-fashioned neck-cloth.

"How do you receive this intelligence?" said the one on the right, similarly dressed, rounder in outline, with enormous hands splay-gripping the mahogany table behind which he sat.

Kidlington adjusted his own neck-cloth and examined his own hands before responding.

"I thank m'lords for their candour," he said. "If I may be so forthright in return, I find all that has happened to me since your man plucked me from the shores of Australia to be wondrous strange indeed, a torquing of fortune that I can only be grateful for."

Kidlington hated his interlocutors as a matter of the marrow, his right by birth. He knew their type: the second sons of great landed families, bullied by custom and thwarted by the laws of inheritance, seeking retribution, recompense and glory on the backs of others.

"If, as you assert, I am owned still by the Crown, well, that is no change from my status on the wrong side of the Earth, is it?"

Kidlington looked from one to the other, and back again. "Needle and Ripper," he thought. "Dart and Harrow. That's what I shall call you."

"Still and all, 'tis yet a form of lenity contrasted with my most recent circumstance, so for that I thank His Majesty for his wisdom and his mercy."

The only immediate sound in the ensuing pause was the ticking of a large ormolu clock, flanked by ebony hippocamps, sitting on the mantlepiece behind Kidlington's two questioners.

… . . .

… . . .

From outside the Admiralty came dimly the cry of rooks, the muffled sounds of the Horse-Guard filing down Whitehall, the dull susurrus of movement from Birdcage Walk and St. James, of traffic on the Thames.

"Do you know why we called you hence?" said Needle.

"It is a curious tale, to be sure," said Harrow.

"I cannot say aught, m'lords, than that I am all ears for the hearing," said Kidlington.

"Indeed, you cannot," said Needle, smiling. His teeth were long and yellow.

"Mr. Kidlington, have you ever heard of a place called Yount?" said Harrow. "Ah, you have, we see the truth in your eyes, so do not deny it. No coyness in here, no need to pretend ignorance, we are His Majesty's most special branch, the Admiralty's bureau of inquiry and subtle response."

"The Crown's *agentes in rebus*," said Needle. "The House Venatical, his Majesty's most devoted hunters."

"The Office of the Caviards, the Arm of Redaction," said Harrow.

"In short: we seek, we find, we solve . . . if necessary, we erase," said Needle.

"Which brings us back to you and your case, and what that has to do with Yount," said Harrow. "We aim for panopticality, Mr. Kidlington, and this is what we saw: a promising young man, with a medical bent, who got himself imbricated with the worst sorts of people here in London, and who then further entangled himself with a highly respectable merchant and especially said merchant's niece, until you yourself could not differentiate where your loyalties lay, not until the whole wretched mess collapsed about your ears. Am I on the slot so far?"

Kidlington gave the barest of nods.

"Why would this sordid petty affair trouble His Majesty's Government?" said Needle. "Because we caught wind of Yount being somehow a thread in it. Ah yes, Yount . . . a whisper, a rumour, tales told by rummy old sailors in harbourside taverns, stories that also appear in learned texts, all the way back to Plato."

"Great Britain has an interest in discovering the truth about Yount," said Harrow. "*Raison d'état*, old chap, the needs of state: colonies, commerce, the expanding imperium, all the more so now that Napoleon is vanquished and our glorious nation has a window of opportunity through which to thrust."

Needle said, "A jailor at the Cape, on Robbens Island, passed along to the magistrate an odd tidbit (for money, of course; we do not assume all His Majesty's subjects are as selfless as those who serve the Admiralty). He revealed this—inadvertently, as we specialize in gleanings, half-truths and keyhole observations—to one of our men. In any event, the jailor overheard one day, from within one of the cells, a most queer sort of confession. By a young Englishman accused of larceny and unbecoming conduct towards a young lady . . . whose name was Sarah . . . Sally to you, yes? . . . I hardly need spell this out, do I?"

Kidlington shook his head once. "Not you, James Kidlington," rose through the walls of his mind's defenses; he used all his will not to slump in his seat—he would not give the Admiralty that satisfaction.

"Do not rebuke yourself too much, Kidlington," said Harrow. "We have long had certain individuals at the Cape under surveillance as it relates to Yount. Meaning those eccentric Dutch personalities, the Termuydens. Ah, that brings back memories for you, doesn't it?"

The clock ticked in the lull.

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"Oh yes, the Termuydens," said Needle. "Our propinquity goes back a long way. Why, the Second Secretary himself, Sir John Barrow, was their guest on many occasions in the nineties. Quite a file we have on the Termuydens, a long prolix archive."

"Do you wonder what happened to your Sally, to the McDoons, after your unfortunate detention?" said Harrow.

"So do we," said Needle. "We have pieced together bits of their story. A strange story, not to be believed . . . but we believe it."

"And now the McDoons have returned to London," said Harrow. "Ah, ah . . . you did not know this? But how could you? How does this revelation find you?"

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"As we thought it would," continued Harrow. "Which is why we come now to the pith of the matter."

"We will have you reunited with the McDoons," said Needle. "Return of the lover wronged, of the resurrected hero. You *will* be a hero, won't you Kidlington? Such a turn—it is ludicrous, is it not? So sublimely ridiculous that only Jonson or Shakespeare—or His Majesty's most secret instrumentality—could concoct its like."

"We will house you in modest but respectable accommodations, just off Fenchurch, not far from Mincing Lane," said Harrow. "We remand you to the oversight of a lawyer we know, a Mr. Sedgewick. Talks in circles, does Mr. Sedgewick, but do not be fooled: he thinks in very straight lines, and the shorter the better. He has done Admiralty work for years, and is the essence of discretion."

Kidlington roused himself and said, "What am I to do? "

Harrow and Needle laughed.

"Nothing you have not done before and with agility! You will be a spy, of course," said Harrow. "Contrive to re-attach yourself to the McDoons, most particularly to the Miss Sally. Learn all you can covertly about their whereabouts once they sailed from the Cape. We find no record of them reaching Bombay or anywhere on the Malabar, nor the Bengal, nor Madras or any lesser port on the Coromandel. No trace of them exists in the Water Indies or on the Manilhase Islands or on any coast of China."

"They appear to have sailed, as the Bard puts it, to the equinoctial of Queubus, the torridity lying somewhere beyond three o'clock in the morning," said Needle.

"In an eggshell: we believe they sailed to Yount," said Harrow. "We want every sliver, every shard, of information you can procure for us about that."

Kidlington shrugged, his laughter laced with rue and hellebore, "Seeing as I have no other choice . . ."

"We knew you were a man of reason," said Harrow.

"Yount," said Kidlington. "Yount would seem a grail for others as well."

The two spectres of the Admiralty scythed Kidlington with their gaze, eyebrows raised.

"What I mean to say," said Kidlington, "is that the Admiralty is not alone in its investigation, even here in London, I think."

"Perspicacious, you are," said Needle.

"We know those others to whom you refer," said Harrow. "In fact, we extinguished your debts to them, as part of our arrangement. Would not do to have our chief informant found floating in the Thames, missing his eyes and tongue, would it?"

"Nevertheless, be wary still of those others," said Needle. "We eye them and they eye us, like a tiger and a leopard do, who encounter each other over a kill each claims."

"How shall I report?" said Kidlington. "What do I even call you?"

"Call us?" said Harrow. "We do not exist! We are the greyest of *éminence grise*—a grey that turns to white and then becomes transparent."

"If you must, think of us as Ithuriel and Zephon," said Needle.

"Sent by the archangel to discover Satan's whereabouts in the Garden," said Harrow. "With winged speed, leaving no nook unsearched, and all that. Protecting Adam and Eve."

"So, to you Kidlington, we are Mr. I. and Mr. Z.," said Needle.

Kidlington bowed his head slowly and just two inches.

"As for reporting . . ." said Harrow, picking up and ringing a small bell.

Almost immediately, a man opened a door on the far side of the room and entered.

"This is Lieutenant Thracemorton," said Harrow. "He will

be your handler. He is not of the smiling persuasion, so do not attempt japes, jests or jokes in his presence."

"He served with the famous Captain Sharpe in Spain," said Needle. "Salamanca in '12, I believe. He also assisted Maturin in Brest and other parts of France. You won't find better."

Lieutenant Thracemorton inclined his head but said nothing.

"Well, go on Kidlington," said Harrow. "Tick-tock, tick-tock."

Kidlington made to leave with the lieutenant. As the pair reached the door, the needle (was that Mr. I or Mr. Z.?) said, "Remember, Kidlington. We own you and we do not exist—you are the property of ghosts! *You* do not exist! Should you breathe a word of this to anyone. . . ."

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". . . besides, even if you did, and we know you won't, who would believe you?" said Harrow. "They'd clap you in Bedlam as soon as Michaelmas."

Kidlington turned on his heel and, escorted by the unsmiling lieutenant, left the hidden room by an unmarked door in Admiralty House.

The harrow turned to the needle.

"What do you think of our newly sprung gamecock?"

"Useful. Highly intelligent. Motivated."

"Agreed. But also headstrong, cunning, untrustworthy."

"Agreed. In short: he's a poet, Childe Harold, a damned romantic."

The harrow rang the bell again. Another man entered the room.

"Captain Shufflebottom," said the harrow.

"Your humblest servant, m'lords," said Captain Shufflebottom, peering through grey-lensed spectacles.

"You will shadow those two," said the needle. "Unobserved, undetected even by our own lieutenant."

"At all costs, protect our asset," said the harrow. "He is not to leave our care, ever. Report only and directly to us, unless

we are not accessible, in which case you may debrief with our confidential secretary, Mr. Tarleton."

"Keep Kidlington alive, using all your guile and all your strength," said the needle. "But, if conditions warrant it, if you cannot obtain our instructions prior, then you are hereby licensed to kill."

"I understand, m'lords," said Mr. Shufflebottom. "Off now to do your bidding, m'lords."

The door closed behind him. The clock on the mantlepiece ticked and tocked.

Then the harrow said to the needle, "We have waited a long time for this moment."

"Agreed. A profoundly long time."

"Lord Melville will be pleased. Sir John even more so."

"The French are well out of the game, at least for now. The Dutch and Danes likewise. No more interference from the Casa in Seville either. The Moghuls we have also sent to the sidelines."

"The Turks still dabble, and the Persians, but they are toothless old lions, content to gnaw bones under the shade tree."

"The Chinese, on the other hand . . ."

"The Chinese, . . . yes, but that's why we sent Lord Amherst on his embassy to Peking, so recently set sail . . ."

"And the . . . others . . . the strangers . . ."

"Still, this round goes to us today, I should think."

"Agreed. So long as our Mr. Kidlington is as we think he is."

"Oh, he will prove to be, you mark my words, Mr. I."

"We shall see, Mr. Z."

"Impossible," said Mr. Sedgewick. "*Affenspiele*. A mandrill's conspiracy."

He said this to his wife, ignoring Maggie who sat in front of them on the other side of the table. On the table, between Maggie and the Sedgewicks, sprawled the source of the lawyer's scornful

disbelief: Maggie's latest model, three feet tall, a construction of wires and gears, the Tower of Babel in miniature.

Neither Mrs. Sedgewick nor Maggie responded right away. The ticking of the clock under the trumeau mirror pricked the silence. Outside, along Archer Street by Pineapple Court, and from elsewhere in the City, came the shouts of the water-seller and the scissor-grinder, of a huckster selling chapbooks ("read 'ere the mir'cles of Saints Florian an' Evaristus!"), of a carter berating a neighing horse. As always, threading their voices throughout the human cries of London, rooks cawed, magpies chacked and daws charked.

Mrs. Sedgewick stole a glance at Maggie while replying to her husband. She said, "You go too far, sir, with your accusations . . ."

He cut her off, his belly jouncing in agitation.

"Madam, do not presume . . ." he said. "What am I supposed to think, when confronted with this improbable monstrosity?"

Maggie choked back tears. "Mother guide me," she thought. "*Chi di*. This man, this so-very-white man, so learned, so self-respecting, so very high on his very tall horse, is so very wrong. I hate him."

Mr. Sedgewick was still belabouring Mrs. Sedgewick. "This is all *your* fault, you know, my dear. You encourage her in these whims and wigmaleeries. Or rather, you indulge and coddle her, as if she were your prize spaniel. But you raise up her hopes unjustly. You delude yourself and—worse—allow this girl to delude herself."

Mrs. Sedgewick, eyes glistening, made to speak, but Mr. Sedgewick slashed forward.

"No one can believe this child of Africa has made such a thing," he said. "Its sophistication, its refinement, . . . no, 'tis not possible from such a mind as hers."

Maggie made to speak, but Mr. Sedgewick brooked no interruption.

"*Corchorus inter olea*," he said. "A weed among the herbs, that's what she is, and that's all she is."

"May this weed speak, master?" said Maggie, half-rising from her chair.

Mr. Sedgewick finally looked at Maggie, shifting the sesquipedality of his mind and belly in his chair.

"It seems I cannot stop you," he said.

"Whatever you believe you know, master, I *did* make this thing," Maggie said.

Mr. Sedgewick examined the model, fascinated despite himself. His gaze lingered on the intricate array of pipes and the series of cantilevered struts.

"I may begrudge you, oh cleverest of servants, the fact that you assembled the pieces," he said. "Nicely done, I admit, yet 'tis only insect architecture. Who instructed you? Whose was the mind that conceived this machine? Who imagined the design?"

"Must I forgive him?" thought Maggie. "Mother, he is so unfair."

"I did, sir, and only I," she said.

"Why do you persist so?" said Mr. Sedgewick. "Patently not true, girl! I have a reputation, this house has a reputation, and you sully it with lies! Now, tell me the truth!"

Maggie rose from her chair, her body so taut she thought she would break. Her tongue nearly cleaved to her palate. Her eyes stung.

"I did not steal this idea, I swear to Saint Macrina!" she said.

"There, surely that suffices, cease this interrogation!" said Mrs. Sedgewick.

"No, my dear, there is more here than your pet reveals," said Mr. Sedgewick. "She plays Caliban. I sense a Prospero in all this. That's it: I shall call her henceforth 'Calibanna.'"

Maggie stood as still as a pillar while her mind steeplechased.

"'I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none,'" Maggie said.

"So you know the reference, do you? Well, do not quote *The Tempest* back to me," said Mr. Sedgewick. "You test my limits, girl."

As Maggie measured her own temerity, the clock ticked onward from under the mirror.

"It's not *The Tempest*, master sir," she said. "It's *Macbeth* I quote."

The lawyer heaved himself up, jowls quivering.

"Out, out, out!" he said. "I will not abide your insolence any longer, leave us now, back to the kitchen or wherever your duties require you!"

Maggie left, bumping into a small table as tears blinded her.

"Oh great Mother," she thought. "What am I to do? I cannot leave this house, it is all I have but I cannot stand that man. Show me the way, please help me."

But, if the Mother heard, deep in her ancient slumber, she gave no sign.

Mr. and Mrs. Sedgewick quarrelled long that afternoon. In the end, they declared a stalemate and Mrs. Sedgewick withdrew.

Alone, the lawyer contemplated Maggie's model and felt rising the checks of remorse.

"Perhaps you were too harsh," he said, looking up into the trumeau mirror. "Yes perhaps you were. She quotes Shakespeare. She knows the algebra and—*mirabile dictu*—even the calculus."

He poured himself a glass of sherry.

"Nay, this girl could not . . . she is a creature of Demerary," he said.

He inspected the model, with only the ticking of the clock for company.

"Ingenious," he said. "A bizarre clockwork, I make it. Tick tock. A meditation on torsion and balance, *multum in parvo*. But what is it for, I wonder? Beneath these salpincial tubes and nautiloid 'scapments, what is its purpose?"

He sipped his sherry.

"More to the point," he thought. "What is *her* purpose? Calibanna! *Fateor, paradoxa haec assertio.* Mystery walks with her, and something dangerous lives within her. If only I could tell Mrs. Sedgewick . . . which I must, and then the McDoons! But how?"

He looked at himself in the mirror again and spoke aloud.

"Diplomacy won't work here," he said. "The plainest of plain talk only. They must know what the Scottish court papers document, which I have validated by my own means: that this little daughter of Caliban is a member of the McDoon family.

There, I have said it aloud, and no devil or angel has stopped my mouth."

Mr. Sedgewick finished the sherry and said:

"Maggie is a cousin to Miss Sally, a niece of sorts to Barnabas. Whatever is the world become?"

"Beans and bacon, it will cost a considerable great sum," said Barnabas.

"Thirty-five thousand pounds at 25 pounds per ton," said Sanford. "And that with much hard bargaining. Copper bottoming, iron for the knees and braces, good Suffolk oak, scantlings more robust and spacious than is the norm . . ."

"Which only covers the ship itself," said Reglum. "Then there will be the cost of outfitting and victualling . . ."

"Precisely," said Sanford. "Say, another 4,000 pounds at the least on the one, and—with 120 crew and maybe 230 souls recruited by Billy Sea-Hen—that's, let's see . . ."

"Eighteen guns, at least," said Reglum. "With their ordnance . . ."

"It will take some years to complete," said Barnabas.

"Two years at the earliest," said Sanford. "If fortune favours us."

"It will mean a rigorous focus of our minds, a *menagement* of colossal proportions," said Barnabas.

"Especially as it will need be done in complete secrecy," said Reglum.

"Not to mention—oh, figs and farthings!—the cost of the Fulginator," said Barnabas.

"Which none of us knows can even be built, let alone the cost of building it," said Reglum.

Sally waited, holding Isaak in her lap.

After a long meeting, they had just bid goodbye to three visitors: the owner of the Blackwall shipyard on the Thames, his master marine architect, and the surveyor-general of the Honourable East India Company. Outside the house with its

dolphin door-knocker on Mincing Lane, a woman hawked eggs and a linnet sang from the lone lime tree adorning the entire street. The endless traffic on Fenchurch, Cornhill and Leadenhall thrummed under one's feet, mixed with the distant lowing of cattle being driven to Smithfield and punctuated with the calls of rooks and choughs from the Tower. Inside the McDoon office ticked a clock framed by Prudence and Alacrity wrought in bronze.

Sally spoke, "Yet it must be done, whatever the expense, however long it takes, no matter the challenges of oversight and governance."

Barnabas, Sanford and Reglum nodded, with varying degrees of reluctance.

"Yes, of course, Sally dearest," said Reglum. "We're just considering the logistics."

"As we must," said Sally. "But not too long or with too much parsimony."

Sanford flinched almost imperceptibly.

"I'm sorry dear Sanford, I meant that not so barbed," laughed Sally.

"Oh, we'll stretch the shilling, to be sure," said Sanford, with one of his rare half-smiles. "But not at the risk of failure."

"Having said that, we cannot merely wish away the costs," said Reglum.

"Quite right," said Barnabas. "Hence the need to find investors. Quiet partners, investors who won't ask too many questions."

"The East India Company appears willing to commit," said Reglum. "And without probing too far into the nature of the voyage, so long as we guarantee them a specific profit."

Sanford clamped his jaws.

"The Landemanns and the Brandts will invest; they know all about Yount," said Barnabas. "Most likely our good friends Matchett & Frew also—they suspect we are up to something, and probably know more than they let on."

"The Gardiners don't know, but they trust us and will follow our lead," said Sanford. "Droogstoppel in Amsterdam, I'll wager,

and possibly Buddenbrooks in Luebeck. Old Osbaldistone might take a punt. Chicksey Stobbles & Veneering, the drug merchants . . ."

". . . such snobs," said Barnabas.

"Yes, well, be that as it may, their money is solid."

"Those newcomers said to be risk-hungry, what is their name?"

"Dawes, Tomes Mousley & Grubb?"

"That's the very one!"

"We'll get the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan & Life with us, they won't delve too deeply. We could ask Domby but his son is so sick, I wonder . . ."

Isaak toured the office as the McDoons, including Reglum, debated investment strategies and ship design for the rest of the afternoon.

"We need a name for the ship," said Sanford.

"Sally, this is your conception," said Barnabas. "What do you propose?"

"Thank you. I have thought long on the matter. What keeps coming to mind are the birds that have inspired us on our journey so far. The *Gallinule*. The *Lanner*. All the ospreys. The nursery rhyme runs in my head: 'White crow, blue gawk, black swan, red hawk/ Fetch you home yon'digo pheasant.' So let it be the *Indigo Pheasant*."

The three men smiled and shouted, "Huzzah, huzzah! To the *Indigo Pheasant*! Godspeed the *Indigo Pheasant*!"

At that moment, the cook appeared in the doorway.

"Well, as a quab is a queen: call it coincidental, or call it what you will, but an indigo pheasant is printed on the pattern of the china plates I just laid out for your dinner," she said. "I am serving good English plaice in a butter sauce, with roast potatoes in their jackets and mashed peas. Come along now, all of you, tick tock, before your food gets cold."

Isaak followed them into the dining room.

"Ah, the echoes of this orb, the colliding humours of this world," said N.C. Strix Tender Wurm. He had just stepped through the casement of a long-case clock into a quiet house off Hoxton Square in London.

He moved his jaws from side to side, licked his lips. It had been a very long time since he wore this form. His words came out with a spilching sound.

His skin was the white of mutings and sputum and ash. His head was too large for his body, a great round head, bald, with enormous, yellow-tinged eyes set far forward. His lips were thin but a vivid dark red, a colour darker than brick, almost black. His legs were long, sheathed in tight silk the colour of an old tooth; his barrel chest stretched out a white coat with long, cut-away tails that reached well below his knees. Small black chevrons ran intermittently in hatched bands across the back and sleeves; his high stiff collar was cottised with the same.

Of the millions of worlds God created, the Wurm liked this one best, with its Cairo and its Delhi, its Peking and its London. Of the millions upon millions of species that Goddess created to inhabit those worlds, Wurm liked the ones on this world best. Humans, above all. Humans, who most closely resembled the creatures he imagined as his own children, step-children of his cold fever-dreams.

He loved (if such a word could be applied to the Wurm) the sounds here. He widened his ears and sucked in a river of human sound: the ceaseless murmurs, pleas, vain invocations, threats, idle boasts, a mussitation of folly, greed, lust, arrogance and every variety of venality, a chorus of cruelty interlarded with occasional notes of mercy ("ah, but 'nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy,' he thought, "To that extent, they know themselves full well.") He chuckled an awful wheezing chuckle.

He looked around his house. The long-case clock kept several forms of time, the time of London being only one of those. Its face was a dusky ozmilt-grey and featured white owls pursuing dryads and satyrs—at midnight the owls caught and devoured their prey. Inscribed around the clock in gold were "Ex Hoc

Momento Pendet Aeternitas" and "Qua Redit Nescitis Horam."

"'On This Moment Hangs Eternity' and 'We Do Not Know the Hour of His Return,'" he read the inscriptions. The Wurm chuckled again, at his own wit.

"Ah, I have returned, and soon you will know this hour all too well."

He looked around the house, long unused, only partly in this world, shielded from the eyes of all but the most perceptive. He sat in chairs, not having done so for so many centuries. He walked up the stairs to the second floor, just to experience again the sensation of human motion. He riffled through books and hefted cutlery. He opened drawers and doors and windows.

At the topmost window, he stopped and looked out over Hoxton Square. The sun was setting. He savoured the sounds of the street traffic: comings and goings at the fruiterers (he always liked their traditional sign, depicting Adam & Eve), drinkers at the Eagle & Child trying to out-sing their counterparts next door at the Boar & Bible, dogs whining, ballad-rollers and running patterers debouching their rat-rhymes and hornpipe verses into the evening air, pious folk gathering at the Three Cranes meeting house, lullabies sung by young mothers and old grans. He nodded at the rooks and magpies that swirled noisily around the rooftops, told them to hold their tongues and mind their manners or he'd have them in a pie for his supper. The birds flew off.

The Wurm sent his thought out across London. He touched on Little St. Helen's in Bishopsgate, on the workhouse at St. Leonard's in the Kingsland Road, on St. Anne's-upon-Hemsworth, and on the Geffrye almshouses. His mind swooped over the great hospitals in Whitechapel and by London Bridge, crossed Old Street, over Finsbury Circus and the Wall, soared down Fenchurch to pause at Dunster Court and finally hover over Mincing Lane.

"Hmmmm . . ."

The sky was moleskin black before the Wurm's thought left the airs above Mincing Lane. He could not see all clearly, his will was frustrated, but he knew his opponents were at home below.

"Machinations, plots and devisements. . . ."

Nearby was another coney in its huddle, in the area of Pineapple Court, he thought, but the Wurm was doubly frustrated there—his thought could find no purchase, slipping and slitching around the flanks of an opacity he could not define.

"Nothing eludes me forever . . ."

He retrieved his winged thought into himself and turned from the window.

"The hunt is on," said the Wurm. "Here shall I gather my lieutenants. Except not the traitorous one, the one whose crimson coat I shall sear onto his body for all time when I find him. And find him I will."

The Wurm stretched his long, long arms and smiled with his razor-thin, deep-red lips. Even though his powers were greatly diminished in this world, encased in human flesh as he was, and needed to be, for entrance, his powers were nonetheless very great still. He relished the sense of cold empty force that flowed through his arms and out, like a bright ramifying darkness, into the space about him.

"A plan they have, the most preposterous and ridiculous project ever conceived—as worthy a piece of hubristic nonsense as I have seen since their forefathers sought to raise the city and its tower on the plains of Shinar. Hoo, hoom!"

He rubbed his long fingers together.

"The game is afoot. I shall call all my tribes of sullied santrels, pious imps, and minor mulcibers. Shamble forth noctambules and quasi-gorgons! Now is the time, tick tock tick tock."

His breath whistled and slurred. His teeth clacked.

"Come serpent-bearded Byatis and my wild-eyed Moriarty! To me, all you changelings, double-walkers, crafty men and conjure-wives."

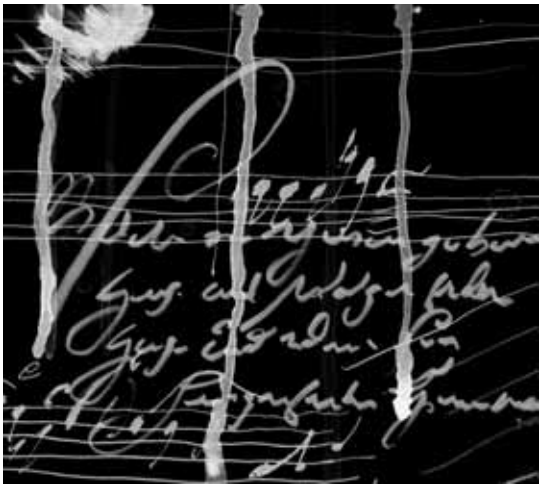
Wurm shifted with precise and deliberate grace from one foot to the other, hunching his shoulders and thrusting his head forward and back in time to the clock.

"Tick tock, tick tock. I call the shoggoths and bear-ghasts,

the gallows mannekin and *les dames blanches*. Arise Old Gammer Gurton and Saint Nycticorax, your time is at hand."

Wurm tapped his sharp nose with his fingers, licked his fingers with his rubaceous tongue.

"Hoo-HOOM! The game is afoot my lovelies!"



Interlude: Disjecta Membra

Summerwire & Son

Haberdashers and Passamentiers to the Gentry,

Bond Street, London

* **Bill of Charge,** rendered with respect this
second day after St. Adelsina
to the esteemed
Mr. Barnabas McDoon, merchant of *Mincing Lane*
payable within thirty days of receipt,
for the following items *delivered to Mr. McDoon*

One man's waistcoat, tailored, in fine lightweight Highland wool, with sherbasse silk facing, said in pale blue with a yellow floral pattern.

Idem, with a nankin silk facing, said in scarlet with a pale yellow brindille twig pattern.

Idem, with a calicosh pattern.

Idem, fawn brown in the style called acabellado.

One gentlewoman's head-scarf, watered silk, indigo, with white and black cross-hatching and mascles.

Upon St. Vanne's Recognition Day

Dear Lizzie:

Thank you for your letter of the 12th instant, which I have read multiple times. How much I long to see you and tell you what I can of all that has transpired over the past years. How much, dear Lizzie, I wish to hear all about your glorious new state, *id est*, your marriage (!) to this Mr. Darcy and your removal from Longbourne to his seat at Pemberley. I have heard much from your aunt and uncle, our old friends the Gardiners here in the City, but yearn to hear more and from your own lips.

Speaking of the Gardiners, they recommend that I speak with you also about a commercial project that involves them and the house of McDoon, and that they (or, as I should say, we) feel might be advantageous to you and your husband as well. I know that it is not normally considered an appropriate, let alone a decorous, thing for those of our sex to discuss, at least openly, matters of money and business, but—dear Lizzie—we know each other too well to adhere wholly or even in most part to such protocols. Say rather, that we might even delight explicitly in discussing such matters, since I am proud of being a merchant's niece and grown up in the trade and I know you have never been one to truckle to the opinions of others, especially in matters of pride and prejudice. At least that is how I recall your character, which I should be astonished (and dismayed) to find much changed since last we met and since your recent marriage—no matter how elevated your status may now be. Am I right in this?

The Gardiners mentioned that you might be in town in a fortnight's time, accompanied by your new sister-in-law (who sounds lovely—I am anxious to make her acquaintance, if that suits). If so, I insist that you visit with us, and for more than just a cup of tea! Let us regain our former familiarity and revel in confidences shared between us.

With much affection,
Your Sally

P.S. I may have cause—as part of this business I refer to above—to visit the West Country. It involves the procurement of "china clay," about which I can tell you more in person. I know that you—and your husband—may have reason to visit Bath from time to time;—if so, I could easily contrive to pass through that city in either direction, with the sole purpose of stopping to see you.

To Sir John Barrow, Second Secretary of the Admiralty,
to be delivered in person by Lt. Thracemorton
7th inst.

Sir, with respect and in utmost confidence:

Kidlington remains as glib and effusive as he was when first your man brought him to me, but under his pasquinades and fooleries runs a river of cankerous thought that bodes badly (in my opinion). If he be your tool, then be alert to which edge he applies towards you and your objectives, my lord.

Howsomever that might be, today I write primarily to confirm my letter of the 29th *ultimo, viz.* my concerns about possible attentions that Kidlington's activities may have attracted from dubious and insalubrious persons.

I will entrust some of my report directly and in unwritten form to Lieutenant Thracemorton (who has been exceeding competent in the discharge of his duties). For now, allow me only to say that:

a) Kidlington's old creditors, notwithstanding the full extinguishment and surcheance of all his debts (as you recall, we even had writs of decerniture issued in Edinburgh under Scottish law), clearly retain some interest in his affairs. Quilp, Merdle and others dog his steps, and Tulkinghorn has asked me also about Kidlington, which cannot augur well.

b) Yet odder names are also bandied about, many of them of foreign provenance—some of which those with long memories in London's commerce will recall with unease, *e.g.*, Coppelius, Prinn & Goethals (Widow).

Otherwise, on that other (but—I am confident—related) matter, the McDoons are taking many and concrete steps to launch, further and realize the Project, the general outline of which I described to you earlier. As I am their firm's and family's lawyer I fear I may soon come upon a severe conflict of interest, insofar as the Project is a private commercial matter, the details of which I could not in good faith reveal unless His Majesty's Government were to issue a decree so authorizing me to disclose such details, specifically commanding me in fact to do so, and waiving any and all liabilities I might incur or damages I might suffer and holding me harmless from any claims brought against me as a result of said disclosure.

I will write again as soon as fresh news comes to hand. Until then, I am your most obedient servant,

—Mr. Sedgewick, Esq.

From Sir John Barrow to Lord Melville,
First Secretary of the Navy

Memorial in greatest confidence,
on the first day after the Shad Moon.

My lord:

I recommend the Admiralty authorize an investment of ten thousand pounds sterling in the Project that is described fully in Special File 16, and that said investment be made through the Honourable East India Company, *i.e.*, in such a manner that the Admiralty's involvement is indiscernible by outsiders, as this is a matter of National Security.

Treasury will assuredly seek to deny the funding and quash this request, but can be overridden, as well you know. Enlist Lord Bathurst at the Colonial Office to ensure this—I know his Lordship often quarrels with you on issues of policy, especially when it relates to money, but in this instance I think there is common cause to be made against the parsimony of Treasury. Sir Tarleton can help you, if help you require.

My recommendation comes upon the reasoned review of trustworthy evidence brought forth by the Admiralty office responsible for Special File 16. The Admiralty's interest—financial, commercial and political—will be well safeguarded by said office. In turn, they have placed individuals under their control around the Project itself, so that we can be certain of timely, accurate and actionable intelligence.

I shall come to your chambers tomorrow afternoon with the requisite paperwork, on the assumption that you will be amenable to this request, based on our discussion in person yesterday and this morning.

Your estimable servant,
Sir John Barrow

[Excerpt from the Articles of Incorporation, Association Agreement, and Heads of Understanding and Consent, relating to the Ship Indigo Pheasant, to be built at Blackwall Yards, and owned by several parties as herein defined, as drawn up by Mr. Sedgewick, Esq. on behalf of McDoon & Co., acting as general partner, lead venturer and ship's husband]

Article 10. *Covenants Running with the Ship.*

All provisions of the Association Documents which are annexed hereto and made a part hereof, including, without limitation, the provisions of this Article, shall to the extent applicable and unless otherwise expressly herein or therein provided to the contrary, be perpetual and be construed to be covenants running with the Ship.

[... . . . .]

Article 17. *Partial or Preliminary Payment for Shares.*

A Partner may pay only a portion of his share in the Ship in cash money upon signing of the Articles of Incorporation and Association Documents, provided that the Partner pay at least one-half of his investment in cash money at that time. The balance of the Partnership investment to be made shall be made upon a series of events described and enumerated in Article 18 below, including the Laying Down of the Ship's Keel, the Final Equipage and Outfitting of the Ship, and the Launch of the Ship. The other Partners, in accordance with the governance and control protocols laid out in Article 8, shall also have the right (upon a majority vote) to demand accelerated and/or immediate payment of some or all of the outstanding Partnership investment balance unpaid.

[... . . . .]

Article 26. *Rights of Offerings and First Refusals.*

It is hereby agreed that each of the associating Partners (including, but not limited to, the General Partner), in the event that he wishes to sell any part of his share in the Ship (up to and including his full share), must first tender and offer his share to the remaining Partners, at a price that reflects prevailing market conditions, and that only in the event that (within sixty days) no market-prevalent price is forthcoming

may the Partner desirous of selling offer his share in whole or in part to another party, that is, a party not already a Partner. Conversely, any Partner obtaining thirty-three and one-third pro centum of the entire outstanding ownership shares in the Ship will have the right to buy out the remaining Partners at a price consistent with the market for such ship shares as it currently exists at the time of so bidding.

[*Advertisement in the London Argus/ Commercial News and Price-Courant, during the Week of Meditrinalia, 1816]*

Be it known to all men, that the *Matabrunian Congregation* has joined with their sisters and brothers among *Lady Huntingdon's Connection* to embrace the preacher known as *Billy Sea-Hen* into their midst, all this week at their meetinghouses at respectively the *Mulberry* in *Wapping*, near the *Finch-House Mews*, and the *Three Cranes* in *Shoreditch*, hard by *Hoxton Square*. All are welcome. *No admission is charged*.

Acknowledgements

First, as always, my deepest thanks to my wife and creative partner, Deborah Mills, whose art adorns the cover and who illustrated the novel itself. Deborah read with a keen critical eye every word—and improved both novels immensely with her comments.

For always helping me pack for my visits to Yount, and eagerly awaiting my reports once I returned: my parents Daniel D. & Kathryn; my brothers Matt and Doug; my sisters-in-law Yvonne and Jenny; my nephews Nick, Patrick, Than, Terence, and James.

For sharing early and often their delight in Yount, my "power readers": Pat McGrath, Dale Smith, Michael & Amy Tuteur, Lise Kildegaard, Phil Sisson & Susan Clark, Tom & Renee Cottrell, Kurt & Alicia Corriher, Regina Swinford, Knut & Iwona Schiander.
For their encouragement, inspiration and advice: Delia Sherman, Ellen Kushner, Matt Kressel, Pam Grossman, Sonya Taaffe, Greer Gilman, Kim Henderson and her creative writing students at the Idyllwild Arts Academy, Shira Lipkin and her colleagues at Arisia, the good folks at the Science Fiction Society of Northern New Jersey, Bill Skees at the Well Read Bookstore (Hawthorne, New Jersey), Terence Craig, Wendy Ellertson, my students at Year Up, Lisa Chin, Lisette Nieves, Rick Taubold, Andrea Pinkney, Doug Smith, and Kate Castelli.

For photographing Deborah's hippocamp, and graciously allowing us the use of the photo for the cover design, I thank Shira Weinberger (and her husband Adam).

Finally, I thank the CZP team: Brett Savory and Sandra Kasturi for believing in this project, Samantha Beiko for editing it, Danny Evarts for the fabulous book design, and Helen Marshall for her general support. I could not ask for a better publisher.

About the Author

Daniel A. Rabuzzi studied folklore and mythology in college and graduate school and keeps one foot firmly in the Other Realm. CZP published his first novel, *The Choir Boats*, in 2009.

His short fiction and poetry have appeared in *Sybil's Garage*, *Shimmer*, *ChiZine*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, *Abyss & Apex*, *Goblin Fruit*, *Mannequin Envy*, *Bull Spec*, *Kaleidotrope*, and *Scheherezade's Bequest*.

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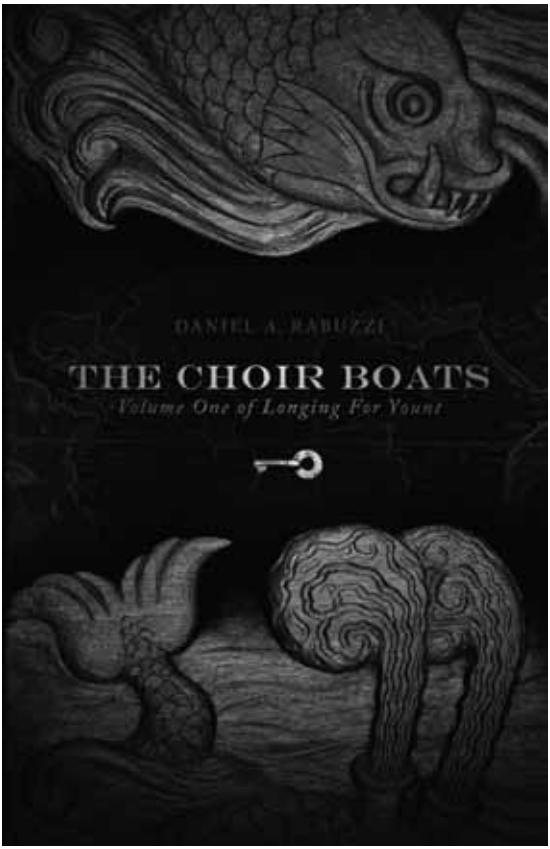

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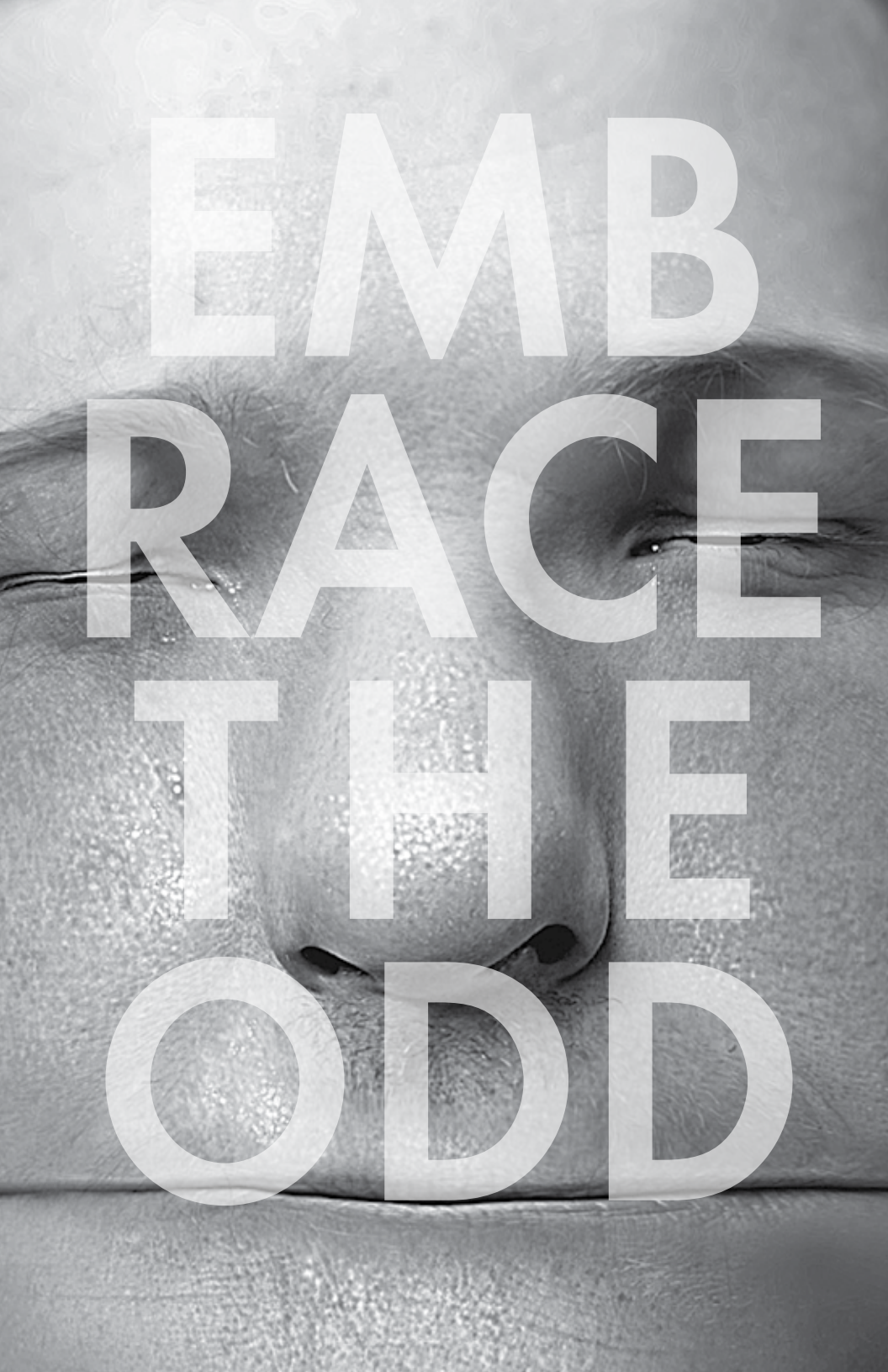
–MATTHEW KRESSEL, WORLD FANTASY AWARD NOMINEE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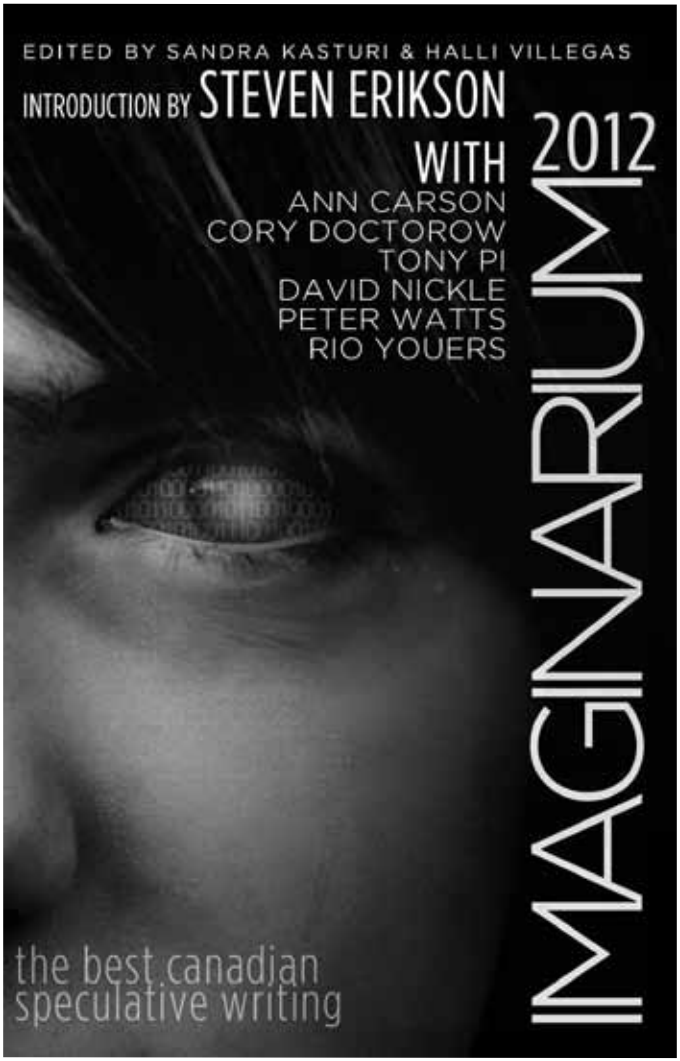

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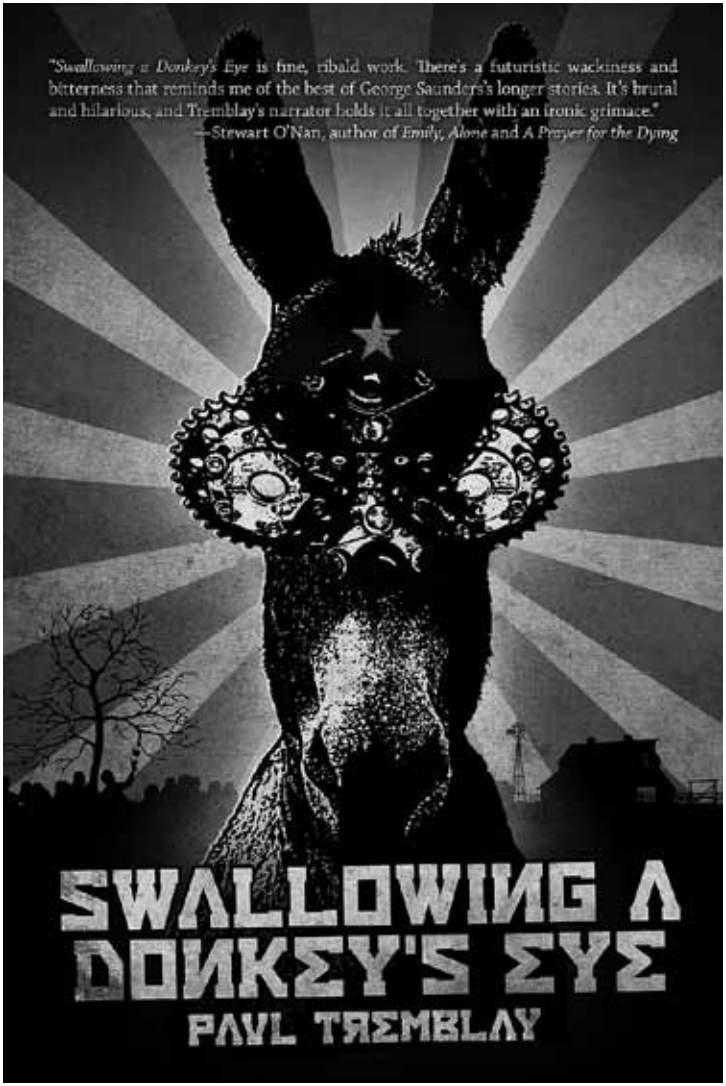

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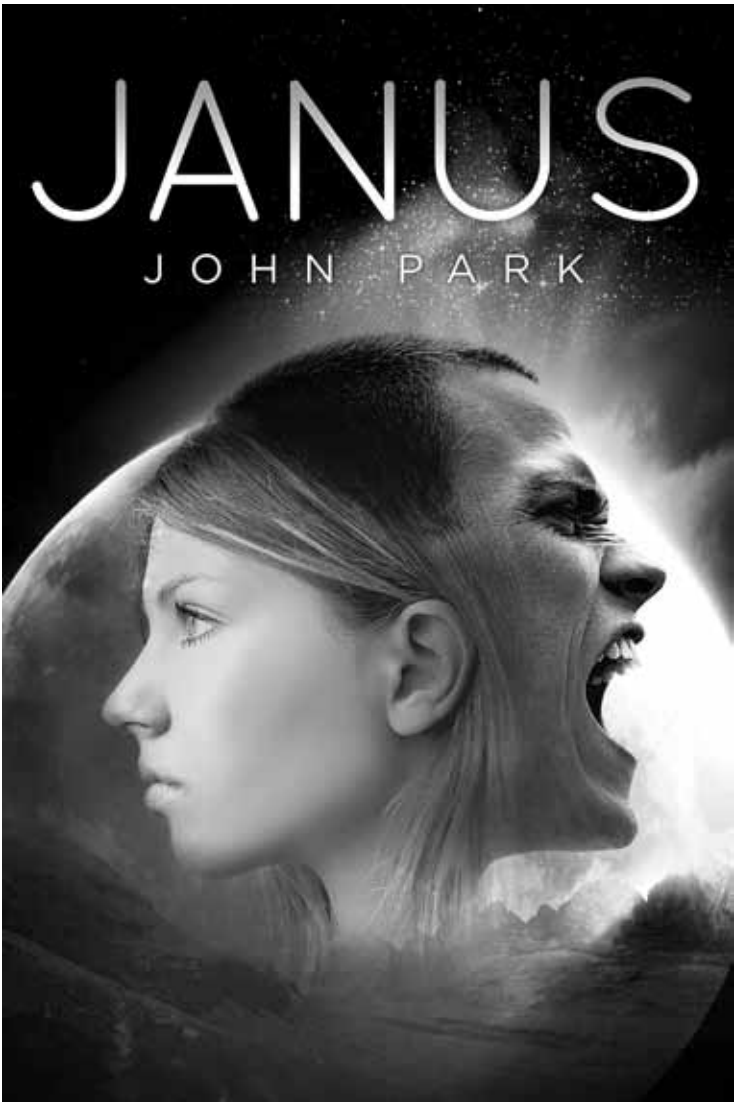

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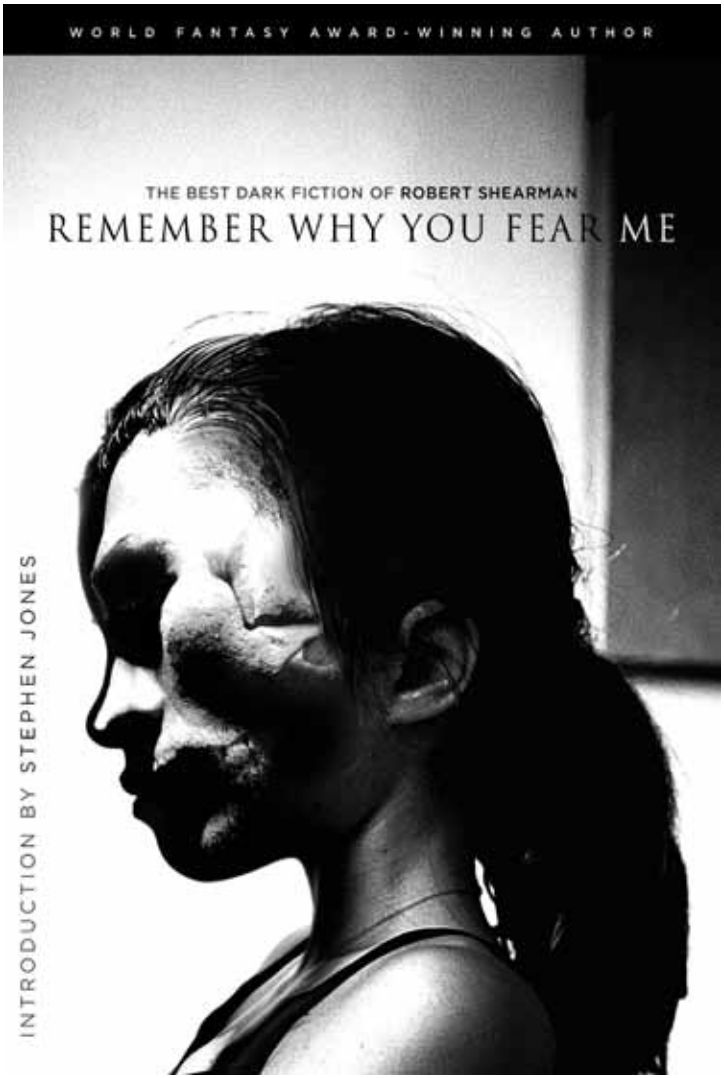

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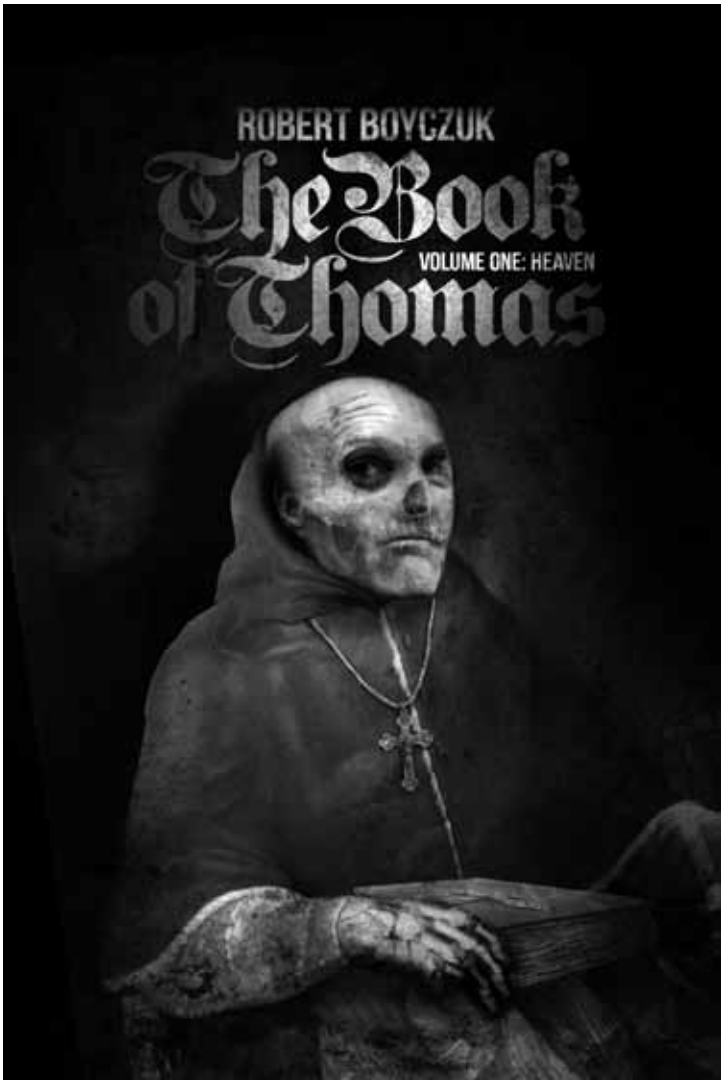

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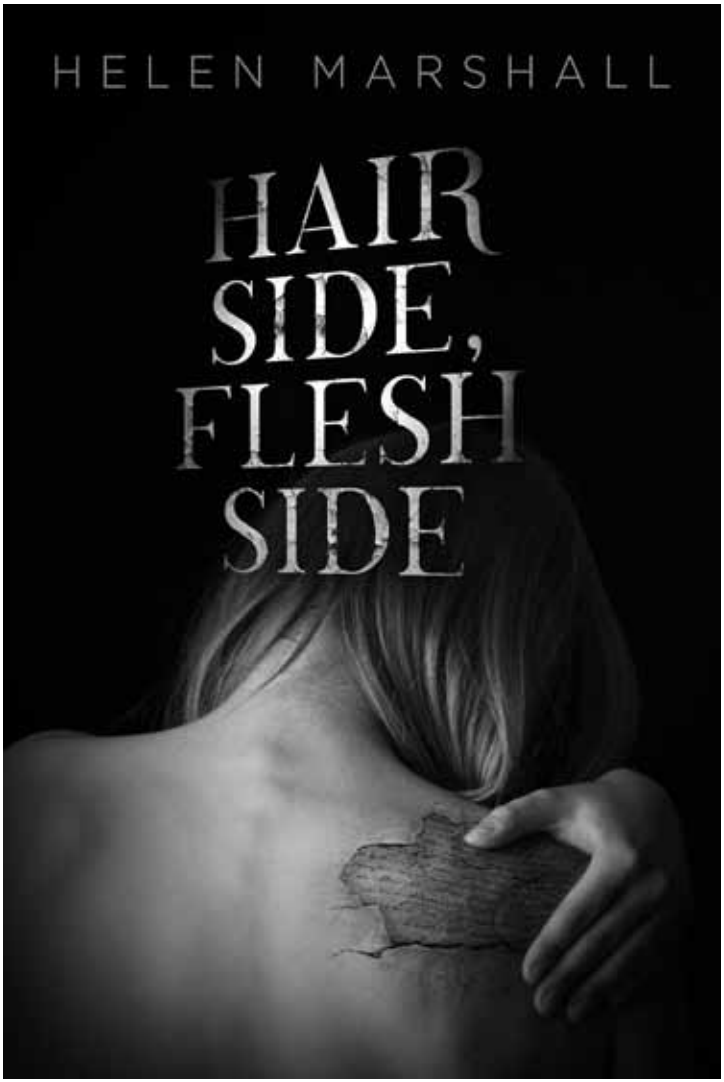

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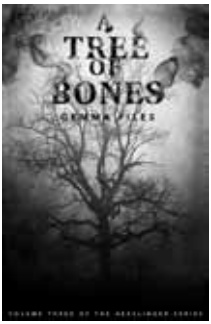

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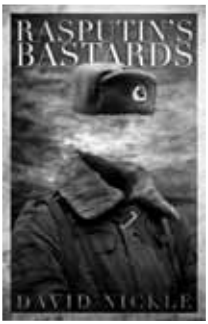

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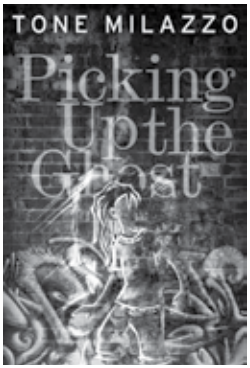

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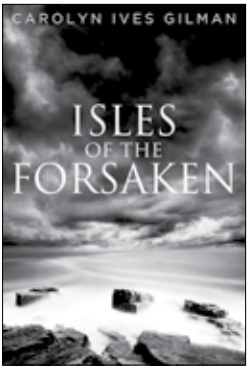

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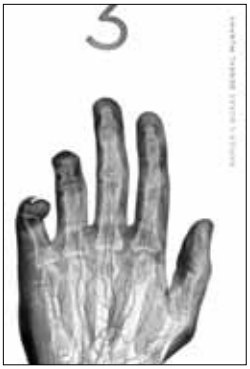

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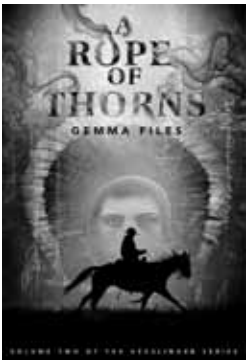

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