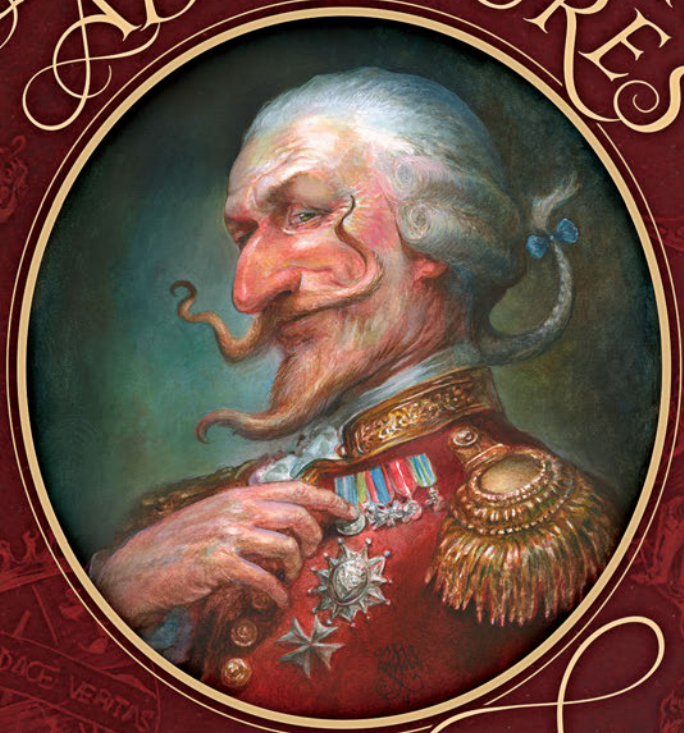


THE
EXTRAORDINARY
ADVENTURES



OF
BARON
MUNCHAUSEN

*A Game of Tall Tales and Playing Roles
as told by*

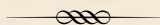
JAMES WALLIS

THE
EXTRAORDINARY
ADVENTURES
OF
BARON
MUNCHAUSEN



*Told in the form of
a NEW STYLE of GAME
termed RÔLE-PLAY*

by
BARON MUNCHAUSEN



*The THIRD EDITION,
Considerably enlarged by the Baron's own hand,
with many remarkable stories and advice to his readers.
Ornamented with many fine illustrations by Omar Rayyan.*



Originally printed for John & Edward Wallis, Snow Hill, 1808.
This edition compiled by James Wallis and published by Fantasy Flight Games, 2016.

Dedicated, humbly, to the ladies—Catherine, Eliza, and Florence



A Note to the Reader: The Baron uses "he" as a generic pronoun in much of this book. This is because the Baron was born in 1720. We apologise to any offended by this usage or any other unfavourable language, and also to any politicians, lawyers and other reprobates and scoundrels who may find themselves insulted in the course of this text, as well as the inhabitants of many nations, but principally the French.



**FANTASY
FLIGHT
GAMES**

Fantasy Flight Games
1995 West County Road B2
Roseville, MN 55113
USA

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SO YOU wish me to regale the group with the tale of how I found and then lost the fabled continent of Atlantis, do you? I remember it well indeed, a stirring event filled with swords, seduction, and saltwater, and one that none should dare question! It began last June when, due to an ill-considered bet, I had become the cook on a pirate vessel in the Atlantic. I was roused one day by the sound of the crew desperately fighting off a gigantic monstrosity that sought to pull our ship down to its abyssal home. A ravenous kraken!

But sir, I had heard that the French Navy controlled those monsters?

Indeed so, a fact I could tell from the beret it wore. I grasped my sushi knives and sprang into action, not only driving back its foul tentacles but also turning them into lunch. As the terror slithered down into the briny depths, I decided to follow it to learn what its French masters intended and leapt onto its back. As it surged away, and I clung on for dear life, in the distance I could glimpse shining towers appearing from the churning waters.

A likely story. I'll wager it was the towers of Paris!

That, my friend, depends entirely on the size of your wager.

THUS BEGINS a new story in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, the unique game of tall tales and grand boasts. Here, you and your fellow players adopt fictional guises and challenge each other to tell stories of your incredible feats and gallant adventures. You're also competing to make your tale the most fantastical and outlandish, for surely your own escapades are the greatest of them all! You can even dispute each other's stories, forcing players to accept objections or add new details, thus making their stories even more extraordinary.

Each session is a memorable experience filled with original stories that can never be topped—at least, not until the next time you play. Above all, though, the game is about having a fine time in the spirit of the Baron himself, who was known far and wide not only for his own impressive exploits but also for the skill in which he related his tales to spellbound listeners. Playing the Baron's Game requires no dice or pencils, just your wits and imagination in crafting wondrous stories for everyone's enjoyment, plus a few coins to use for your wagers.

This new edition includes expanded ways of playing the Baron's Game, filled with new plot ideas, game variations, story settings, and more to ensure even more opportunities for creating fantastical adventures. So, in the spirit of the Baron, pull up a chair, pour yourself a glass to keep your throat from drying out, and prepare to be dazzled and delighted by the most extraordinary adventures you've ever heard!





PREFACE



THE NAME OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN IS ONE THAT scarcely needs introduction at any level of society: all England—nay, all of the world—has resounded to the telling and retelling of his adventures and deeds of great heroism and renown. Some claim these stories to be exaggerations or boasts; some see them as fables or metaphors; but there are some still who believe them to be nothing less than the unvarnished truth, and I number myself among that company.

It was my great fortune to meet the Baron a handful of years before his untimely death, in the port of Dover. He had, he claimed, ridden over from France on the back of a sea-horse in order to visit Lord K—, whom a few years previously he had saved from perishing at the rim of the volcano Vesuvius during the military campaign against those fire-sprites which had laid waste to so much of Italy. (It was the Baron's contention after examination of the ruins at Pompeii that it had been the ancestors of these sprites, and not the barbarian hordes, that had caused the fall of the Roman Empire.) He professed to a great love of our capital city and an unfortunate shortage of capital wealth, and accordingly I suggested to him that after he had visited the noble lord he should spend a few days in London in order that he might enjoy the hospitality of my family, and during which time he could create a new game for us, based on his famous travels and adventures, to be published by my company for the enjoyment and edification of the reading public.

It had been the Baron's scheme to proceed from Lord K—'s estate in H—shire to Scotland, where he proposed to harness a carriage to a flock of golden eagles and fly them to the Sun, as a gift for his friend the King of that sphere. However, he agreed to honour our house in London with his presence, and duly arrived with us a few weeks later, where we began to essay the creation of this manuscript.

Perhaps it was my fault for an excess of zeal at the prospect of publishing the design of so august a nobleman, or perhaps it was a mistake to leave him under the sole editorship of my son Edward, who had of late been spending much time visiting gin-shops and dens of ill-repute

in the company of several young designers of games from the Americas. Whatever the problem and whereinsoever lay the blame, the manuscript which the two of them produced had, I learned soon after the Baron's departure, captured altogether too much of the Baron's style as a *raconteur* and *bon viveur* and too little of the rigour which must inform great designs, such as Edward can produce when not under the influence of foreigners and other undesirables. (I recommend his game *An Arithmetical Pastime*, published this year, as a fine example of his better work. He is not a bad lad.)

A game of such radical type as is contained herein will, I know, have no success in the London of the eighteenth century nor, I believe, of the nineteenth century. It is therefore my intention to seal this valuable—and, I should add, expensive, the Baron being a man accustomed to the grandest living and the finest wines and liqueurs, of which he completely emptied my cellar—manuscript, together with this letter, in a place wherein one of my descendants may find it and, recognising that the fashion in games has changed sufficiently for a curiosity such as this to find its audience at last, may publish it to the acclaim it deserves.

*John Wallis, publisher of games of quality.
No. 42 Skinner Street, Snow Hill, London
this year 1798.*

What he said.
*James Wallis, director of Hogshead Publishing
London, 1998.*

But see page 43.
*James Wallis, director of Magnum Opus Press
London, 2008.*

And also page 85.
*James Wallis
London, 2016.*

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INTRODUCTION

*Wherein Baron Munchausen explains the reasons
for the writing of his game.*



AS I AM A MAN WHO IS KNOWN AS MUCH FOR HIS scrupulous honesty in the retelling of his tales as for his amazing adventures around, across, and in some cases through the circumference of the globe, I have been asked by my friends why I should wish to put my name—an old and most distinguished name: according to the family records, there was a Munchausen stowed away upon the Ark—to a game for the telling of extraordinary tales and unlikely anecdotes.

My answer is simple. My reputation, and with it the retelling of several of my astounding adventures, has spread throughout the civilised world, across oceans, to deepest Afrique and farthest Nippon, to the twin worlds of the Sun and the Moon and the strange peoples who live there, and even into France. Therefore, wherever I travel, I find that I am constantly prevailed upon to retell these stories, which requests I feel unable to refuse, being a man of noble breeding.

Accordingly, I find myself without a moment's peace from nincompoops who would hear once again the tale of how my companions and I were swallowed by a whale, or how I rode a cannon-ball through the sky over Constantinople. And often I am rewarded with nothing but a small glass of the roughest brandy, or even water! Am I some marketplace story-teller to act and jig for their amusement? No! I am a nobleman, a soldier, and an adventurer, while they are ninnies all, and henceforth I will have naught else to do with them, or be damned.

With the publication of this game (which I here humbly dedicate to the two people most important in its writing, viz., myself and the Empress of Russia) I mean to provide those who would harass me with the means to tell astounding stories to each other without my presence. This, not solely a great boon to civilisation and a source of minor income to myself—reasons, I assure my diligent readers, that were hindmost in my mind during the composition of this work—will also mean

that I am able to spend more time with those to whom my presence and charisma is more desirable: to wit, the ladies of the company. I believe that this may be the greatest innovation in game design since the Collectible Tarot Deck, which I invented while incarcerated in the Bastille on a spurious charge of importing quinces on a Sunday. But I digress.

I shall begin to describe the game presently, but first I must remind my readers of one important matter. This is a game of telling stories, and many of those stories will be based on the astonishing adventures I have had—in their style, if not in their precise content. But while the stories you tell are fictions, my adventures are all true in every detail. To say otherwise is to call me a liar, and to pretend your fancies happened to me is to call me a charlatan, and sirrah, if you do either, I shall take you outside and give you a show of swordsmanship that will dazzle you so greatly you will be blinded by its sparks for a month. I am a nobleman, sir, and I am not to be trifled with.

Now pass the cognac. No, clockwise, you oaf.



THE PLAY OF THE GAME

MY GAME is a simple one. The players sit around a table, preferably with a bottle of a decent wine or an interesting liqueur to moisten their throats, and each takes a turn to tell a story of an astonishing exploit or adventure. The subject of the tale is prompted by one of the others, and the rest of the company may interrupt with questions and observations, as they see fit, and which it is the task of the tale's teller to rebut or avoid. When all are done, the one who has told the best story buys drinks for everyone else who participated, and the players being suitably re-fortified, the game may begin again.

The inspiration for my en-gamification of this ancient and noble pursuit comes not from a ritual I witnessed among the tribes of the Amazon River, as I have claimed in the past (their game, I am reminded by several noted authorities, is more along the line of spillikins; in my defence, I confess that the tribesmen had forced me to consume a great quantity of sage and onion prior to roasting me, and my senses were confused), but instead from a memorable evening I spent in a coaching-inn outside St Petersburg, in the late winter of 17—.

Myself and several other travellers, many of us adventurers and soldiers of great renown, had been caught by a sudden blizzard and forced to spend the night in the same inn. However, being suddenly crowded, the inn had fewer beds than patrons. Having firstly allowed the ladies of the company to retire to sleep, the gentlemen agreed to a contest to see who would receive the remaining unoccupied rooms, and who would be forced to seek their repose in the stables or—worse—with the servants.

Accordingly, we sat down to a contest or wager, and when it was discovered that none of the company had cards, dice, teetotums, or backgammon board about them, we agreed to a contest of stories. Each man among our number took a turn to ask the neighbour on his right hand to recount one of his most extraordinary adventures; the others of us then tested the tale on the wheels of veracity, credibility, and laudability.

When all were done, a vote was taken and I, by sheer cunning, came fifth. This position exiled me to a tiny attic garret, the location of which allowed me to sneak out when the rest of the company was asleep, to spend the rest of the night warmed by the counterpane and company of the Duke of N—'s daughter, whose beauty, interest, and proximate room number I had noted before the game began. Herein lies one of the central principles of the pastime I will shortly describe, and the core of its philosophy: it counts not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.

This game itself follows in similar fashion, but without the presence of the noble Duke's daughter. More is the pity.



EQUIPMENT

TO PLAY my game, you will require three or more stout friends, preferably of noble or at least gentle birth; a table; several chairs; a copious supply of drinks, preferably with a charming wench to serve them; and some coins to serve as stakes and to pay the reckoning when all is done. If you have such things to hand, then some parchment, pens, and ink; a cold night; a roaring fire; and a good supply of food are also advised, and it is always provident to have a manservant or two in attendance. You will need naught else, save for a few trifles such as I shall set forth hereto.



STARTING THE GAME

GATHER THE company and count its members. If it is late in the evening, then ask a manservant or pot-boy to do it for you. Make sure that each player has a PURSE of coins before him equal to the total number of players—do not ask a servant to do this, servants being by nature a shifty and feckless lot who will as soon rob a man blind as help him out of a ditch, and I have been robbed in enough ditches to know. If your company numbers less than five, then give each one five coins. If it numbers more than twenty, then think not of playing the game; instead, I advise you to pool your purses, hire some mercenaries, and plan an invasion of Belgium.

The exact nature of the coin you use is not important, but I will make a few salient observations on the subject, drawn from my experiences of testing this game in the courts of the Orient, where, despite the fact that I spoke none of their language and they none of mine, it played tolerably well. First, all the coins should be of the same value, to save on arguments. Second, they need not actually be coins—I have played with coloured glass baubles in darkest Afrique, where the natives possess such things in abundance—they are given them by missionaries and, having sent the missionaries packing, have no more use for the beads. Third, anyone who proposes playing with paper money (fit for nothing more than wiping one's a—e) is clearly no gentleman and should be drummed out of your company and your club forthwith.

If the company are not too drunk, tired, or bored, then you should move to Character Generation on the page that follows. Otherwise you may omit it. Or omit it altogether.

CHARACTER GENERATION

MY PUBLISHER'S son, who serves me in the office of scribe and editor, claims that he has consulted with the greatest living authorities on such matters, and that it is essential for games such as this, in which one must "play" a "role," to have a section of this ilk if they are to find any success with the educated reading public. I am hoping that these few lines will suffice, and that he will have been so far in his cups last night that he will recognise the heading above and will not notice, his senses still befuddled by cheap gin, that below it I have merely made a few pointed observations to my readers on the perils of dealing with such Grub Street types.

No. It seems he has detected my subterfuge and has confiscated the second bottle of the excellent cognac which we had been enjoying. I am not accustomed to giving in to kidnapping, blackmail, and threats of ransom, but in this case it seems preferable to spilling my host's son's blood on his drawing-room carpet.

To the matter then. In essaying the business of character generation, you will require a piece of parchment and a pen—I assume that, having received a proper education, you are able to read and write, in Latin at least. If not, it is my experience that passing priests will often agree to perform the service of writing your name for you. If no priest or clerk is handy, summon one. If one is not to be found, or you are unable to procure the services of one through pecuniary difficulties, say by having lost your purse in an ill-advised bet on the growth of an asparagus-spear with the King of the Moon, then I advise you to pass this section without a second thought.

Write, or ask your companion (or a priest or clerk) to write, your name at the top of the paper, with the prefix "Baron"—or "Count," "Lord," "Duke," "Archbishop," or whatsoever honourific is appropriate. If your company includes those of foreign extraction, they may instead wish to use titles such as "Graaf," "Don," "Sultan," "Sheikh," "Amir," or as I gather is the fashion in the Americas "Chief Executive Officer." In this age of universal suffrage, now that women have finally won the right they have been gainsaid for generations, to own property, we must not forget the frailer sex: "Baroness," "Countess," "Empress," and so forth are equally permissible, on the sole condition that they promise not to dot their "i"s with small love-hearts.

If you were not born to such rank, then, since this is naught but a game, you may write whatever takes your fancy. But sirrah, I warn you that should I meet a man who claims to be of noble blood but who is not—and with my age, experience, and prodigious nose, together with the art of scent-scriving as taught to me by an Esquimau in reward for saving him from a herd of mad walruses, I can smell them, sirrah, I can smell them—then I shall so dizzy him with my rapier that he shall be unable to remember his own name and the direction he faces, much less the noble title he pretends to.

Beneath this, write whatsoever takes your fancy. I have found it most useful for recording the calling-addresses and pedigrees of any especially charming ladies who catch my eye during the evening. This is the most important purpose of one's "character sheet," or with any so-named "character" thus created.

For character, as the most oafish baronet's son can tell you, is not generated but forged on the anvil of life. It is only when the blows of experience ring in our ears that we move another step on life's path, becoming by stages more rounded or sharpened, our corners knocked off or our features more pointedly defined, and not by some artificial process of tossing teetotums or juggling figures like some ink-stained clerk in a windowless cellar hard by Threadneedle Street. Our souls are formed by first doing and then recollecting the experience of those deeds so that we and others might learn from them, and that is the very process which my game—nay, my life—describes. Character generation? *{Here the Baron made an unpleasant noise in his throat.}* I'll none of it.



Fig. 3. The Baron's bauta mask made for the Carnevale in Venice, and the cause of the outlawing of the festival by the King of Austria in 1797.

BEGINNING THE PLAY

ONCE ALL the company have either generated characters or dis-coursed themselves on the foolishness of such an undertaking, then you are ready to commence the play of the game proper.

The player to start is the member of the company with the highest rank in society. Standard rules of etiquette apply: religious titles are always deemed greater than hereditary titles, and those higher than military titles; if of similar rank, then compare subsidiary titles, numbers of estates, or centuries that the titles have been in the players' families; youth defers to age; when in doubt, the highest military decoration takes seniority; and for the rest, I refer you to the works of Messrs Debrett or Collins.

If by some mischance of birth or the poor organisation of your host you are all commoners, then the first player shall be he who was wise enough to purchase the most recent edition of my game. If several have, then I thank them all; if none have, then I worry if you possess sufficient understanding of the nature and responsibilities of nobility to play a game such as this, relying as it does on good judgement; generosity of spirit; proper understanding of the necessity of the patronage of worthy artists, writers, and publishers; and not being a pinchpenny. If this manner of beginning is not agreeable, then the player to start should be he who was last to refill the company's glasses.

However you do so, once the person to start has been determined, he must begin the game. To do that, he must turn to the person sitting at his right hand and ask him to tell the company the tale of one of his famous adventures. By way of example, therefore: "*Dear Baron, entertain us with your recollections of the war of 17—, which you fought single-handed against the French and won,*"

or: "*Most honoured and noble Prince, if you could refrain momentarily from the gracious attentions you are paying to my sister, mayhap you might satisfy our curiosity on the matter of how it was that you escaped from the prison of Akkra after you had been burned at the stake there two days earlier?*"

For those unable to think of a sufficiently extraordinary and humorous topic for a story, I have included in an appendix some two hundred of the subjects drawn from my own exploits, a mere fraction of the total, which the less quick-witted player may use for inspiration. Whether you choose to use one of my completely factual examples or one out of your own imagination, remember at all times that the subject of the story

to be told should only be revealed to the person who will tell it a few seconds before he must start his narrative. Through this surprise, much good humour may be gained.

The player thus surprised must now recount the story that has been demanded—perhaps based upon a story of mine, perhaps on an adventure of his own, or perhaps from the whole cloth of his imaginings. He may, however, pause for a moment of thought, commencing his tale by exclaiming, “*Ah!*” and then perhaps adding, “*Yes!*” Any further procrastination is unseemly. Throw a bread-roll at any recondite fellows to hurry them along.

Tales should be short, of around five minutes, and told at a good pace without hesitation or undue pausings for thought. Inflections, gestures, mimes, props, and strange voices may all be used, although the narrator is warned not to go too far: he is, after all, born to the aristocracy—or pretending to be so. I well remember playing this game with the Grand Seignior of Turkey while he held me for ransom in Constantinople. For one story he hired a troupe of actors, a band of tumblers, several conjurors, assorted dancing girls, and six elephants. The tale lasted three days and four nights, and when the company did not elect it the best, preferring my own anecdote on how I discovered the seedless grape, he had us all beheaded...but enough of that for now.



WHAT IF THE STORY-TELLER SHOULD PULL UP

IF A PLAYER is unwilling to tell his story to the company, or falters in the recounting, then he may plead that his throat is too dry to tell the tale, and good manners demand that the company let him retire honourably. However, good manners also demand that he must then obtain a drink to wet his throat, and in doing so, it would be greatly impolite not to furnish the rest of the company with refreshment also. In short, a player may decline to tell a story, but must stand each member of the company a drink if he so does.

Having so declined, and the drinks having been ordered, the player in question shall turn to the player on his right hand and, as is the form, propose the subject of a tale for him to tell.

OBJECTIONS, CORRECTIONS, AND WAGERS

FOR THE benefit of my duller readers, I should point out that this section on challenges and wagers is the cleverest part of my game—although due to the unnecessarily rigid structure imposed on me by my diligent but perhaps over-strict publisher, I must wait until later to explain exactly why this is so.

The course of a narrative never shall run smooth, as the poet has it, for the other players of the game may at any point INTERRUPT the story-teller with an objection or a correction in the form of a wager. They may do this because they have spotted a flaw or inaccuracy in the teller's tale, or because they wish to trip him up with spurious information, or to test his truthfulness and mettle, or because the fellow is drawing dull and needs spice.



A WAGER is accomplished by the player's pushing forward one (never more than one) of the coins in his purse—we shall call it the STAKE—and breaking into the flow of the tale. A wager would be cast in the manner of these examples:

“Baron, I believe the King of the Moon at the time was Umbum-Mumbumbu and not, as you say, Louis XIV, who, as King of the Sun, was his mortal enemy.”

or "You claim, my gentle friend, that the Earth travels around the Sun, but the Royal Society has proved comprehensively that the opposite is true and that Galileo's publications on the subject were merely part of an *Opus Dei* disinformation plot."

or "But Count, it is well known that the Empress has had a hatred of giraffes ever since her lapdog was eaten by a mad one."

or "But Duchess, at the time of which you speak, the Colossus of Rhodes had been a fallen ruin for fifty years, so you could not possibly have climbed it."

or "My dear Contessa, I have heard you avow that you have a mortal allergy to cats. How is it, then, that you say you married one?"

or any of a thousand other possibilities or curious and relevant objections. A wager need not be strictly correct, *vis-à-vis* the bothersome matter of evidence or facts, but it must be amusing or interesting.

If the matter of the interrupter's insertion is correct—in other words, if the teller of the story decides to take the proffered detail and build it into his anecdote—then the teller must agree with his fellow and may keep the coin that was pushed forward. However, he must then perforce explain how the events introduced in his fellow's interruption did not impede him in the adventure he is describing.

If, however, the teller of the story does not wish to build the objection or correction into his story, then he may push the interrupter's coin away along with a coin from his own purse, and inform the other that he is a dolt who knows nothing of what he speaks and gets his information from the tittle-tattle of old maids in gin-houses.

In this latter case, if the one who interrupted is not prepared to stand this insult to his honour and veracity, he may add another coin to the pile and return it to the story-teller, making his case for the interruption more forcefully and returning the insult with interest. The story-teller may again turn the stake away by adding another coin and another insult, and so on until one side withdraws his objection and accepts the insult (thus keeping the pile of coins), or one party has exhausted his funds but will not stand down—in which case a duel must be fought. (See "Duelling" on page 18, the writing of which section I am anticipating with not a little relish.)

To give a sample of this process in the passage of a game, which I have carefully based on one of the examples I gave above, imagine that the Duchess of Dunstable is engaged in the telling of a tale that she has based on my noted exploit wherein, due to a misunderstanding of the ancient proverb, I led the city of Rhodes to Rome. However, as shall be

seen, she is enfuzzled of the details. To give a snippet of the story, then, as the Duchess might tell it:

DUCHESS: *"...I required a view over the city of Rhodes from the highest vantage point it offered, and so I ordered my sedan-chair to be carried to the top of the Colossus that stands astride the harbour there."*

LORD HAMPTON (interrupting most rudely, with his mouth full of petits fours): *"But Duchess, at the time of which you speak, the Colossus of Rhodes had been a fallen ruin for fifty years, so you could not possibly have climbed it. I saw it so myself a few months previously."*

As he so says, he pushes a sovereign towards her.

What is the Duchess to do? She is in a quandary. For the sake of her honour she must continue, but that needs an investment of one coin. Shall she make that investment? She shall!

DUCHESS: *"My dear Lord Hampton, I know not the state of your eyes when you failed to see the Colossus of Rhodes, but I suspect that they were befuddled by the strong wine of that place, or possibly they were confused by one of the fallen women of low repute and low-cut dresses who frequent the area of the harbour."*

Here she places a second sovereign atop his, and pushes them back to him.

Nota bene, the Duchess could easily have claimed Lord Hampton's sovereign for her own by saying that of course she had only meant the rubble of the Colossus, and continued—but such an early retreat is not for her, nor for any who would narrate extraordinary adventures, for rubble has no place in a grand tale such as this.

But my Lord Hampton has felt his pride stung by the Duchess' spirited riposte! Will he stand for such denigration? He will not! With a flourish, he swallows his cake, adds another coin to the stake, returns it to the Duchess, and rejoins thus:

LORD HAMPTON: *"Since our most noted historians have described the fall of the Colossus some years before your noble birth, milady, if we are to believe the age you claim, might I suggest that you had become so enchanted with one of the burly sailors of Rhodes that in a daze you climbed upon his torso, thinking it was that of the Colossus?"*

Ah! An accusation of infidelity to the memory of her late husband, the notorious Duke! All eyes are now on the Duchess. Pretty blushes tint her face, just as the dew of dawn tints the perfect pink of a new-opened rose at the break of day (a fine arrangement of words, if I say so myself). Hurriedly she counts her money—but alas, that morning she

has bought herself a new muff and some dogskin gloves, and her purse is near empty. Prudence is her middle name, literally as well as figuratively, and prudence dictates that she must accept this insult, lest she bankrupt herself. There are now three coins at stake; if she gives way, then they are hers. The temptation is too strong for one of her gentle sex and she snatches up the stake with the following:

DUCHESS: *“Not at all, dear Lord Hampton, but when I refer to the Colossus, I mean, of course, my travelling companion Thomas Highfellow, who as you know is the tallest man in the world, and who was born in Rhodes, where he is known as the New Colossus, or ‘Col’ to his friends. He stood astride the entrance to the harbour, one foot on either shore, and I instructed the bearers of my sedan-chair to climb into the palm of his hand, which he raised so that we could see the panorama of the great city. As I was saying, we had just reached the level of his knee when—”*

BARON EDGINGTON (as he pushes forward one of his sovereigns): *“But surely, Duchess...”*

At that point we must leave the Duchess and her troubled tale—which if she had but stayed on the path of my original, she would have put aside all objection and opposition without troubling her exquisite brow or her largely vacant mind—and return to our purpose of describing the rules of the game. This is tedious work, and not the stuff for which the noble-born brain was made. Rules be d—ned! I am in the spirit for a digression.



ON BEING NOBLE

UNDERSTAND THAT there will be many among the readers of this game who have not been blessed with the good fortune that smiled upon myself at my birth. Indeed, in this age of the printing press in which even the lowliest born may be taught to read and write a little, it is possible that this book has fallen into the hands of some in whose blood the signs of greatness do not flow, whose minds and souls lack the clarity and sure-headedness that comes only after generations of the finest breeding and tutelage—to wit, in short, commoners. Such people are not to be despised but pitied, and it is for them that this section is intended, as I describe the rudiments of what a man of lowly birth requires to attain the stature of a perfect specimen of the noble order such as myself.

Noblemen conform to a template laid out by the Almighty and first described by Baldassare Castiglione in his work *The Book of the Courtier*. His words hold true today, despite the fact that—due to a misfortune of birth—he was Italian. I shall take the liberty of quoting that august gentleman without asking his permission, since he has been dead for nigh on two hundred years. It is true that in the past I have played chess with Pythagoras (I won), Julius Caesar (I lost), and Cleopatra (game abandoned), all several centuries after their respective deaths, but that was with the aid of an Indian mystic whom I subsequently converted to the Protestant faith, whereupon he became unable to perform any of his pagan rituals—but once again I have meandered from my proper course.

Castiglione wrote—in the form of a most amusing conversation between a prince and his companions—

“I would wish our courtier to be well built, with finely proportioned members, and I would have him demonstrate strength and lightness and suppleness and be good at all the physical exercises befitting a warrior. Here, I believe, his first duty is to know how to handle expertly any kind of weapon, either on foot or mounted, to understand all their finer points, and to be especially well informed about all those weapons commonly used among gentlemen. For apart from their use in war, when perhaps the finer points may be neglected, often differences arise between one gentleman and another and lead to duels, and very often the weapons used are those that come immediately to hand.

“I also believe that it is of the highest importance to know how to wrestle—”

—and here I shall pass over a few lines, for they teach us nothing about gentlemen but much about Italians. He resumes:

“I wish our courtier to be an accomplished and versatile horseman, and as well as having a knowledge of horses and all the matters to do with riding, he should put every effort and diligence into surpassing the rest just a little in everything, so that he may always be recognised as superior. And as we read of Alcibiades, that he surpassed all those people among whom he lived, and each time in regard to what they claimed to be best at, so this courtier of ours should outstrip all others, and in regard to the things they know well...

“So I would like the courtier sometimes to descend to calmer and more restful games, and to escape envy and enter pleasantly into the company of all the others by doing everything they do, although he should never fail to behave in a commendable manner and should rule

all his actions with that good judgement which will not allow him to take part in any foolishness. Let him laugh, jest, banter, romp, and dance, though in a fashion that always reflects good sense and discretion, and let him say and do everything with grace.”

To this I would add: that the nobleman is the highest of G-d's creations, brought to a peak of excellence through centuries of good breeding, education, culture, and diet, and he should never forget that. The aristocracy of France forgot it recently and in result found themselves having a short audience with a certain Madame Guillotine—a fate from which I was able to rescue many, through a number of disguises, a Portuguese-English phrasebook, and a herd of hollow cows—but once more I am deviating, and I shall return to my subject forthwith, except to say that I shall be happy to recount my recent experiences in France for the benefit of any nobleman who would do me the honour of inviting me to dinner.

The member of the gentry sets an example to the rest of humanity. He must be at all times civil and courteous, even to his social inferiors, foreigners, and the better sort of servant. His behaviour is the touchstone of all civilisation, for without nobility there would be no patronage of the sciences, the arts, literature, or music, and only common arts like theatre, country dancing, politics, and the mercantile trades would remain.



Naturally, no nobleman has any truck with magic, on the entirely reasonable grounds that it does not exist. Science, logic, philosophy, and enlightenment all demonstrate that it cannot work—a view I ascribe to fully, although I am at a loss to explain why, after arguing with some gypsies in Roumania, I spent a week in the belief that I was a duck.

Although you, my reader, may not be in any whit like the paragons of humanity I have delined above, in order to play my game you must pretend to be nobly born, and, in telling the stories of the great adventures you are claiming to have made, you should portray yourself and your actions as noble in thought and deed. You may find the experience disturbing to your low-born mind, but I hope most earnestly that it may serve as an interesting lesson, and that it may teach the most doltish amongst my readers some decent manners.

Naturally, any nobleman worth his salt will be accompanied on his travels and adventures by servants and travelling companions. As befits this, there will follow in the next section a discourse on the nature of companions, during which another opportunity shall be taken to be gratuitously rude about the French.



COMPANIONS

AS HE WENDS his way through life's travails, a nobleman must perforce be accompanied by many companions, who will assist him, support him, keep him company, and enliven his spirits with their wit and learning. Companions are men of rare abilities, some so rare that they are positively unique. I well remember my dear friend Octavus, who aided me so ably in the capture of the entire Turkish fleet at Ankara by means of his prodigious breath, whereby he blew all the ships from their moorings and down the coast, where they became entrapped in a fence of fishing-nets which I had stretched across the sea. Or there was Wolfgang, whose great skill as an artist aided me in scaring the French fleet into full retreat by painting a most realistic facsimile of a thousand frigates of the Royal Navy, using as his canvas the White Cliffs of Dover...but that is another story, and shall be told another time.

Companions are, in short, the men and women who may help you in your adventures. Thus, should your narrative require a person of prodigious abilities to help you from a particular escapade, you may introduce one such as you wish. But take care not to use the services of more than one such companion in each story, for so to do would be considered greedy.

(It need not be said that companions are not servants. A nobleman has servants as a French dog has fleas, and if they be French servants, they will serve the nobleman in much the same office as the flea serves the dog, viz., a constant source of irritation and nuisance. I remember one French manservant who was with me during my campaigning on the Russian Front; he drank lustily, swore abominably, scorched my shirts, knew not a handkerchief from a half-coat, and at length was revealed to be a woman, a fish-seller's wife from Calais who was acting as a spy, and mightily in love with me. This would have been the source of much embarrassment to us both, had she not been conveniently caught and hanged for treason. I will not deny that it was I who planted on her person the map of the secret tunnel under the English Channel—a false one, of course, not the real one—which I had acquired by—ah, but once more I have strayed off the path of my story.

(Which reminds me in timely fashion that this chapter itself is naught but an extended digression, and thus I should—if only to placate my outraged editor, whose cheeks are so flushed with red anger—like rosy-bottomed Dawn after she has been spanked by her father the Sun for dallying too long with her lover—who I must confess was myself—and not attending to her business of breaking the day for two-and-a-half weeks—my editor, I say, whose eyes flash with rage and hair stands on end in resemblance of the giant hedgehog I once defeated in Scotland by turning it inside-out, thus stabbing it to death on its own spines—my editor I fear shall die of an apoplexy unless I end this digression—close these brackets and return to the subject of Objections, Corrections, and Wagers forthwith. Frankly, I find this business of rules more than a little tedious, particularly now that this bottle of tokay is finished. Yes, that was a hint, which I observe he has not taken. What? Oh, closing the brackets. Very well.)

OBJECTIONS, CORRECTIONS, AND WAGERS, *continued*

AS THOSE of truly noble blood are aware, there are a handful of wagers and objections that should never be made. Principally, in the round of insults, no nobleman would ever insult another's breeding and pedigree, or his veracity. In plain terms, you may not directly call another player a liar (although you may safely question his accuracy, inform him of new discoveries, or remind him of facts he may have forgot), cast into doubt his claim to noble rank, or insult his mother. Indeed, I lie: you may do any of these things, but so to do is proof of your utter caddishness, and the person you have insulted is at liberty to challenge you at once to a duel. I shall expand on the subject of duelling shortly, a topic on which I am particularly well versed since the day in Königsberg when I insulted the King's 12th Hussars at the moment that very regiment was parading outside my open window, and I was forced to fight a duel with every soldier of them, at the same time. I confess I am looking forward to the chapter on duels with no little relish, but like an errant schoolboy I must finish my bread-and-cheese before I may have my plum. Onwards! There is not far to go.

It may seem passing strange that if the wagerer loses his bet, then he recovers his STAKE, or if he wins, then his STAKE is lost. This is so, but when the wagerer makes his claim, he is in truth saying, "Ha, my fine fellow, here is a pretty tid-bit that I wager you cannot make a part of your story," and if it is pushed back to him, then indeed he has won the wager and doubled his STAKE.

It is therefore clear that, since money is the way that the game is won or lost, and making wagers is the only way that the money on the table may be moved between players, a wagerer should essay to make wagers that he can win—that is to say, which the story-teller cannot build into his tale, and must turn away. Meanstwhile, a great story-teller will construct his tale so that it invites the greatest possible number of wagers, which the teller has with great cunning already anticipated, and thus can claim each wagerer's STAKE. Within these two stratagems lies the central skill of my game: that is to say, one part of the skill of my game, the other parts to be explained in further chapters. Duller readers need have no fear: I shall take pains to point out these tactics whenever they occur, that such readers may have the satisfaction of knowing wherein these points lie, if not the wit to use them in the game.

DUELLING

I AM ADVISED that it is the fashion to name this part of the rules the "Combat System." That is an ugly phrase which stumbles off the tongue and sounds like a Prussian manual on methods of elementary sabre-play. I disdain it. Should its coiner take exception to my contempt for him and his phrase, let him challenge me and we will see if he knows aught of real systems of combat, while I reduce his britches to lace.

As I have observed earlier, if in the matter of an objection or a wager a player should insult another's veracity, title, or pedigree, then the injured party has the right—nay, the obligation—to challenge his insulter to a duel. Such a trial by combat may also come about if, during the course of a wager, one party finds his purse exhausted but does not have the grace or good sense to withdraw, in which case he may demand that the other stand down his claim or face him on the field of honour.

The calling of a duel will cause an unfortunate interruption in the flow of the game's stories, but so be it: where the honour of a nobleman is concerned, everything else must stand aside while he defends himself. Fighting over matters of honour is a dangerous business which may bring poverty, injury, death, or—a worse horror—ridicule to the participants, but it is as necessary as beefsteak to an Englishman, gold to a Swiss, or avoiding baths to a Frenchman.

The system for fighting a duel is simplicity itself. Once the injured party has issued the challenge, the two duellists must choose friends or companions to be their seconds, agree on a weapon—rapiers are traditional and come easily to hand at most parties or places where the genteel and well-educated gather—and then go outside to a convenient courtyard, colonnade, or garden, where they fight. The duel need only progress until first blood, as this is naught but a friendly disagreement, but I have seen my game give rise to duels that were fought to incapacitation, dismemberment, or death over such matters as a carelessly split infinitive.

As the art of duelling is so widespread across Europe and the other civilised areas of the globes, and so well known to all people of good breeding, I need not describe it here—Ah, my editor reminds me again that some copies of this game will inevitably find their way to the unwashed hands and uneducated eyes of the lower orders as well as to the more properly born, so I must perforce describe it after all. Anyone with a hereditary title or who has ever served as an officer in one of the better armies of the world (Russian, Prussian, English, Spanish, Italian,



or, for that matter, Cathayan, Ethiopian, Persian—indeed, now that I think of it, all but the Turks, Poles, and Irish) should pass to the next section. The rest of you, read on.

The art of duelling is one of great refinement and is conveyed equally by good teaching, fine upbringing, the proper blood, and the willingness to spill some of it. There are any number of textbooks on the subject, which I advise a novice to purchase and, if you are serious about your studies, to read. The acquisition of a tutor is necessary for the perfection of the art—I recommend employing a German duelling-master for brutality, a Spaniard for flair, or, for matches which may last up to five days and be either rained off or end in a draw, an Englishman. You should also set aside three, perhaps four, years for study, and a decade for practice.

Naturally, the procedure of duelling is fraught with danger and difficulty. A number of unenlightened states have declared this traditional blood sport illegal, so the participants run the risk of interruption by members of the lower orders brandishing truncheons and warrants, which is enough to put even the finest duellist off his stroke. I have found few remedies to this, save the usual methods of duelling in a secluded spot, winning as quickly as possible, and keeping a hot-air balloon tethered nearby in case a swift exit is required. The more adventurous may wish to try duelling within a hot-air balloon, but I do not recommend it: it is hot air that got you into this situation, depend on it not to get you out.

I was planning to digress at this point on the matter of seconds, the proper choosing thereof, and how best to find one at two o'clock of the morning in Prague—a problem that has bedevilled me since my sixth birthday. Despite the lack of scholarship on this subject, and the undoubted benefit that such a section would add to this book I have been persuaded—under my strongest protest, I must add—to omit it by the same bleary-eyed editor who not three paragraphs ago convinced me that such a thing should be included. His wits, I fear, are addled by cheap gin and the profits from his last tawdry publication.

Nevertheless, it is my contention that my public would wish to see such a book, embellished with several anecdotes and stories of my duelling experiences and victories, and further illustrated with colour plates showing duelling styles and various of the most beautiful ladies in Europe over whose honour I have fought. If you agree, gentle reader, then I humbly request that you write to the publisher, demanding to see this new work. Its publication would be assured if you would be good enough to subscribe to it: a mere matter of three guineas, which should be enclosed—take care to wrap them well and send them via a trusted messenger—with your letter.



DUELLING FOR COWARDS

IF YOU are weak of blood, soft of flesh, or lilled of the liver, or—by way of furnishing you with a convenient excuse—you are in a hurry to finish the game, or there are ladies present who would be shocked at the sight of blood, or you are unable to retain the rôle you are playing at the thought of noble combat and find yourself reduced to a common peasant once more, or if you are Swiss: if any of these things be true, then you may avoid the physical combat of a duel. Instead, just as you are playing at being a nobleman in my game, you may play at fighting a duel with a set of rules I have devis'd for that very purpose.

I say "devis'd." In fact, I was taught the game by an inhabitant of the Dog-Star, whom I encountered a great distance from his home on the last occasion I visited the Moon. I understand that the game was originally taught to these astral canines by no less a traveller than the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama, who, on his final voyage, set his course towards the island of Ceylon, missed by several thousand leagues,

and sailed off the edge of the world. I blame the quality of Portuguese sea-charts for this, though doubtless the Portuguese would blame the compass, or the wind, or the water, or Ceylon, or the shape of the world, or the Moon, or anything else that might absolve them of their own slack-handed work.

Da Gama called the rules "Bottle—Glass—Throat" (he was Portuguese, as I mentioned), and those of the Dog-Star know it as "Bone—Stick—Ball." I shall call it "Stone—Knife—Paper" and...I see. My editor tells me I have been overtaken by fate, that the game is already known by a similar name to all the world, and I should strike out the paragraph above. I shall do no such thing; I shall let it stand as a treatise on the history of the game, and scholars may depend on my well-known love of the truth if they doubt any part of it. None the less, I admit myself disgruntled by this turn of events, and will break my narrative here to restore my spirits with a hearty dinner.



I return much refreshed for my interval, although I confess I have drunk deep of Lord Bootlebury's dark port and his youngest daughter's darker eyes, as soft and deep as those of the stag I killed in the Black Forest by stuffing it with cake—its flavour, I must say, was not improved by this method of dispatch—and accordingly I am distracted and have lost my thread. No matter. I will instead regale you with a story of my travels until the plot returns to me, or my editor wakes from the noisy slumber he has embarked on at the far end of the table to remind me where we were.

I recall a time in the winter of 17—, when I was riding into the interior parts of Russia. I found travelling on horseback rather unfashionable in winter; therefore I submitted, as I always do, to the custom of the country, took a single-horse sledge, and drove briskly towards St Petersburg. I do not exactly recollect whether it was in Eastland or Jugemal-land, but I remember that in the midst of a dreary forest, I spied a terrible wolf making after me, with all the speed of ravenous winter hunger. He soon overtook me. There was no possibility of escape. Mechanically I laid myself down flat in the sledge, and let my horse run for our safety.

What I wished, but hardly hoped or expected, happened immediately after. The wolf did not mind me in the least, but took a leap over me, and falling furiously on the horse, began instantly to tear and devour the

hind-part of the poor animal, which ran the faster for his pain and terror. Thus unnoticed and safe myself, I lifted my head slyly up, and with horror I beheld that the wolf had eaten his way into the horse's body; it was not long before he had fairly forced himself into it, when I took my advantage, and fell upon him with the butt-end of my whip.

This unexpected attack in his rear frightened him so much, that he leaped forward with all his might; the horse's carcass dropped on the ground; but in his place the wolf was in the harness, and I on my part whipping him continually, we both arrived in full career safe at St Petersburg, contrary to our respective expectations, and very much to the astonishment of—

I recall it now: we were discussing duelling. Rather, I was discussing, you were learning, and my editor was hogging the kerren wasser and making loud interruptions. He is a most irritating fellow, but having now waked, he has left for the tavern on the corner, and I may continue without his assistance.

“Stone—Knife—Paper” is the game. On a count of three, one should form one's hand into the shape of a stone, a blade, or a piece of paper, the rule being that a knife beats paper (it cuts it), paper beats a stone (it wraps it), and a knife beats a stone (it whets it...no, I have it wrong; ask your manservant how the d—ned game plays). The faint-hearted faux duellists must play three hands of it, discounting draws, and whosoever wins two or more is declared the victor. I will waste no further words on this subject, destined as it is only for namby-pambies and he who is afraid of the sight of a little blood, or of adding another death or two to his conscience. Real noblemen have no such qualms, particularly if they are dealing with peasants or foreigners. Play your rôle properly or not at all, say I.



THE RESULT OF A DUEL

THE RESULTS of a duel can be deadly, even if you lack the *esprit* to essay it in the proper fashion. Assuming that both parties are still alive at its end, the upshot of a duel is as follows: the loser must make over his entire purse to the victor, and must retire from the game. If one of the two parties has lost his life in the conflict, then his second should carry out these instructions. However, his BOUNTY—if such he has—must remain untouched until the end of the game.

A final word on duelling: it is considered unsporting to provoke a duel or issue a challenge once all the stories are finished and the bounty is being dispensed and received. I remember one memorable game I played with a crew of swarthy pirates, while they and I were trapped inside the belly of a mighty sea-beast which had regrettably swallowed every soul of us—a not unusual happening, I learn from my conversations with maritime adventurers, but peculiar in this instance in that I had been climbing the Matterhorn at the time of my ingestion.

We had reached the end of the game, and as was to be expected, the coins were piling into my bounty, when the pirate captain, angered at the failure of his tale of herring-do, drew his cutlass and with a mighty oath swung it at my head. I stepped away, and the blade sliced through the great beast's spleen, on which I had been seated, which gushed forth such quantities of bile that—ah, but my editor, who has just returned from the tavern with the smell of the tap on his breath and the rouge of the tap-girl on his lips, reminds me that my deadline is close, my remaining pages are running short, and I must cease my digression forthwith. As before, if any of my readers should wish to hear the remainder of the story, I will be happy to recount it over dinner at their club and their expense.

Now, perforce, I must move to explain how a story is brought to a conclusion and the manner that a game is won, in which explanation—fear not, gentle reader, I have not forgot—I shall elucidate what on earth a “BOUNTY” is.



FINISHING A STORY

IN MY experience, a good tale should last no more than five minutes, for beyond that, the listeners begin to grow bored and listless and talk among themselves and throw bread rolls and play at dice or cards and call for musicians and dance upon the table and seduce the hostess and distribute seditious or revolutionary literature and plot land wars in Asia, and other such distractions as might put even the finest *raconteur* off his stride—particularly if he has designs on the hostess himself.

The story-teller should therefore bring his tale to its natural conclusion at its proper length and in a way that brings the greatest enjoyment and astonishment to his listeners. At this point, the tale is done, and the audience should respond with a hearty “*Huzzah!*” and exclamations of “*By my*

oath, Baron, that is the most remarkable story I have ever heard, and I drink to it. Bring more wine! Open a cask of the '77! (Which is always pleasing).

However, it has not escaped the eye of a soldier such as I that there are several story-tellers who either cannot tell when their story has finished, and must perforce prattle on until doomsday or until the wine is finished, or who are so ill-skilled in the art of *racontage* that neither they nor their audience can tell when their tale is done. I have applied my military mind to both these problems, and the solutions are here below.

If a story-teller finishes his tale and there are none to cry "*Huzzah!*" for they are all asleep or otherwise occupied, then he should signify to the company that an end has been reached by standing and loudly proclaiming: "*That is my story, true in every word, and if any man doubts it, I'll make him drink a barrel of brandy in a single swallow.*" This serves as a signal to the company, by its volume if not by its words, that they should rouse themselves from the torpor that a dull tale invokes, and muster a few token shouts of "*Huzzah!*" to tell the story-teller that they have understood his tale is at an end.



A word of a tactic for those without the wit to discern it for themselves: if you find a problem in bringing your narrative to a fitting close, instead recounting on and on because you know not how to lead the tale to a conclusion, then I have the trick for you. When the noble personage on your left gives you the subject of your tale, you should say, “*Ah!*,” reach for your glass, and take a long swallow. In the few seconds this will afford, you can decide how it is that your story will conclude. This gives your narrative path a destination, without which it may ramble aimlessly and endlessly, and the rest is simplicity. A good ending trumps a good beginning, for people remember it with greater strength of emotion: one may start badly and recover to win, but to start well and falter is to lose the race.



PASSING THE STORY

WHETHER A TALE ends well or ill, once the usual toasts have been drunk (to the story, the story-teller, the host, the monarch, the most attractive woman present, the second most attractive woman present, the most attractive woman in the story, absent friends, &c.), the one who has just finished his narration must turn to the person sitting at his right hand and, in an interested tone (for to do otherwise could be taken as an insult and lead to a regrettable duel, or a mild-mannered bun-fight, or any other manner of unnecessary distraction from the business at hand), say, “*So, Baron, tell us the story of...*” and here, as at the start of the game, describe in brief synopsis a suitable adventure, whether from one of my own escapades, or from the list in the appendix of this work, or from his own experiences or imaginings. The person thus addressed should pick up the tale and proceed as described above, with the other players preparing wagers, interruptions, duels, and so forth to throw him off the stride of his narration.

If, however, a story-teller should have become so wrapped up in his tale that he has failed to see the company has lost interest and has commenced cock-fighting or badger-baiting instead, then any of the company may interrupt at a suitable juncture with the words, “*That reminds me of the story I have heard told of Baron N— M—*” (naming the player sitting to the right of the present story-teller) “*in which he...*” and the naming of an adventure. With that, he must put forward one coin. If others of the company agree, then they should add coins of their own, and if fully half

the company is in agreement that the mantle of story-teller should pass, then Baron N— M— should commence the tale of the new adventure. If less than half, then the story-teller may continue. In either case, the accumulation is given to the pot-boy to pay for more wine.

I see thus far I have failed to explain the BOUNTY. Never fear. There are still several pages to go, and I am certain it shall follow in the next chapter, or the one after that.



DETERMINING THE WINNER

WHEN ALL are done with their stories, there should be a moment of pause. Sit back in your chair and permit the pot-boy to recharge your glass. Think on the stories you have heard, and decide in your own mind which was the best. If you are of a scholarly bent, you may wish to debate the matter with your companions, making reference to Aristotle, Horace, and the recent critical works of the poet Dryden. Or if not, then not. 'Tis of small importance.

While you are so debating, either with your soul or with your fellows, count up the coins you have left in your purse. These now become the tokens with which each of the company shall decide whose story is the finest, the most outstanding, the most memorable, the most authentic, and the most heroic, showing its teller in the finest light. In common parlance, you shall each vote for a winner.

Commencing with the person who began the game, and in rotation and in turn, each player must take his purse of coins, and with words such as: "*Gentlemen, I have never heard such a surprising collection of stories, but upon my honour, the one told by my dear friend—*" (here he names the nobleman whose anecdote he considers the finest of the evening) "*is the most astonishing tale I have encountered in my life.*" If you are English, then at this juncture you may wish to add "*Pon my soul*" or "*Wot wot.*" I know not why, but it appears obligatory.

(My editor is protesting, and also English. My explanation must perforce pause a moment while I hush him by refilling his glass with the last of his father's whisky.)

With these words, the player places his entire purse in front of the fellow he has named. It must be all of his coins; it does not befit a gentleman to split his bets or spread his favours too widely. Nor should

the recipient add the coins to his own purse. Be not hasty; simply leave them where they lie. This pile is termed the BOUNTY, at last.

Once every player has said his piece, cast his vote, and distributed his bounty (and I must perforce remind the sluggards, commoners, and plebeians among my readers that no true nobleman would even consider the idea of voting for himself), then each player should count out the number of coins cast for him and his story. (*Sotto voce*, naturally; there is nothing so unbecoming as a nobleman who cannot count but out loud, and if your grasp of numerology does not extend beyond five then you should immediately give up all thoughts of playing this game and find yourself a pastime more suited to your nature, such as turnip-farming or government.)



ENDING THE GAME

THE PLAYER with the greatest BOUNTY is declared to have won the game. All must give a loud “*Huzzah!*” and more wine is ordered to drink to the health of the victor. It is accepted as a point of etiquette that the victor shall pay for this wine, and it is also accepted that the money he has accumulated as his BOUNTY may not be—nay, in my experience is never—sufficient to cover the cost. But that is of no matter: we are noblemen, and we overlook such trifles as fair payment, money, debts, &c. Besides, the sweet taste of victory will more than wipe out the sour tang of the evening’s reckoning, when the innkeeper brings it.



This concludes the play of the game.

Should the majority of the company wish, and not be so out of pocket or in its cups that it cannot continue, another round of the game may be played. The victor of the previous round—being the person who has most recently recharged the company's glasses—shall commence the play by challenging his right-hand man to tell another tale.



A FRESH WORD ON TACTICS

IT SHOULD be observed—indeed, it will already have been so by my more intelligent and well-bred readers, of whom I trust there are many—that there are two ways to succeed at my game. Firstly, one may play with ultimate strategy and guile, in order to relieve as many of the company of as much of their wealth as can be done, in order to amass the greatest purse. Secondly, one may tell the finest story one is able. Naturally, all players should aim to tell the finest story, for that is the only way that they may win the contest.

If you play strategically so that you gain the greatest purse, then I can assure you that you are practically certain to lose the game, partly because your purse must be given to someone else, and partly because you will have aroused such enmity in the rest of the company that none of them will cast their vote for you. Yet by this tactic, you can give yourself the honour of determining who shall win the game and thus gain advantage with the one whose victory you have assured.

Naturally, although many noblemen and particularly their sons are known to be profligate with their money, it is poor play to empty your purse before the end of the game, and worse play to spend all your coins before you have your turn at story-telling. Without coins in your purse, you cannot interrupt a comrade, rebut interruptions to your tale, or cast votes for a winner. And since it is beneath a nobleman to either beg or steal, once you have no funds then the only method to accrue more is to tell a fine story that attracts many interruptions from your fellows, and turn those interruptions aside with speed of wit and the dexterity of your tongue. (I feel an urge to digress about the dexterity of tongues I have known, but I shall forbear. Ladies may be reading this.)

In the final round of the game, if you have affectionate feelings for another player, I do not recommend that you vote for your paramour, or for the member of the company who has taken your fancy. In my experience, it rarely leads to success, and your fellows will notice and make fun of your noble gesture for weeks.



IN CONCLUSION

IN THESE pages, I have essayed three things. Firstly, to bring—
what is it now, man?

I apologise to you, my reader. I had thought we had almost run our course, and was about to gallop for the finishing post, but it has been slurred in my ear that I have neglected a section which my contract obliges me to write. I will be most glad to have this game finished. Such things are not suited to a noble temperament, which admirably explains why so few scribblers have been elevated to the ranks of nobility.



BACKGROUND

I WISH TO explain that this section has been imposed on me: my editor tells me that such things are these days expected from the creator of a game. For the life of me, I cannot understand the reason or purpose for enquiring into my background: I am a nobleman and a Munchausen, and those facts, which suffice as my passport across all the borders and into the royal chambers in every country in Europe, should surely be sufficient to—

Ah. I am informed by the mangy-headed fellow that I have missed the point. Naturally, I have done no such thing, although I may be guilty of a little wilful misinterpretation of his meaning. However, I suggest that we retitile the section “Historical Setting” and start again.

HISTORICAL SETTING

MUCH BETTER.

It is, of course, the eighteenth century, for surely there has never been a finer time to be alive. More particularly, it is the year of Our Lord 17—. The Renaissance is over, the arrogant power of the Church is crumbling, and Europe is civilised at last. The Turks are in Constantinople and indeed all over the place, the French are making trouble again, Sweden is in decline, the Russians are invading the Crimea at regular intervals, the King of England is both German and mad—fine conditions for ruling that isle—and somewhere across the Atlantic Ocean, a few colonists are beginning to think a little too much of their own importance.

The wonder of this age of marvels is without question the astonishing flying-balloon of the brothers Montgolfier, which can carry people and animals high into the air in perfect safety, transporting them over cities, rivers, forests, and mountains, and even—it is said—as high as the Moon itself. That the brothers devis'd their invention solely as a way of leaving France has been glossed over in most accounts of their success.

Speaking of France, it is troubled greatly by short men wearing tall hats, who, in an effort to bring the nobility down to their own level, have chopped off the heads of many of that country's finest citizens, and not only to relieve them of the weight of their enormous wigs. This has led to many escapades for young bloods who wish to prove themselves by attempting to rescue the younger and more beautiful members of French society from such a fate, and over whom they inevitably lose their heads one way or another. It has also led to a regrettable surfeit of French aristocracy in the coffee-houses and salons of the other capitals of Europe. However, it is to our great fortune that so many of these refugees were able to bring their chefs with them.

Science, discovery, and philosophy are advancing with great strides. The French have created a rational system of measuring all things, which they call "the Metrics." It will never catch on. Now that the Australias have been located, they are being put to use as a depository for all the undesirables of Europe. A young English fellow called Watt has created a giant kettle able to power a factory—by providing enough hot tea to keep the workers contented, I think—and another, named Stephenson, is said to have made one that runs on wheels, for the purpose of scaring horses and running over members of Parliament. This is an enterprise to be applauded.

Those of the lower orders who believe that money is an acceptable substitute for nobility have been swift to take advantage of these innovations, and are busy building factories and employing women called Jenny to spin cotton for them. Some fool in Norfolk has entirely spoiled the winter's hunting by ploughing up the fallow fields and growing turnips on them. Much of London's trade seems centred on pieces of paper bearing promises, mostly to do with a great bubble which appeared in the South Seas some years ago. I confess I understand none of this, but it appears that Britain may be developing an empire of some kind—based upon, of all things, trade, money, and root vegetables. May G-d help us all.



IN CONCLUSION

IN THESE pages, I have essayed three things. First, to bring a little of the excitement of my life into the lives of others, so that they may the better appreciate the nature of my astonishing adventures. Second, to educate the lower orders in the matter of how their betters live, behave, and think, in my attempt to heighten their understanding of exactly why it is that we are superior to them, and thus to avoid, I hope, any further outbreaks of the unpleasant doings that have been going on in France.

And third, in giving you an appreciation of myself and my adventures, I hope that I have rekindled that spark of adventurousness and gallantry in the soul of man—and the occasional rare woman, it being my opinion that too much adventurousness in a woman is often a bad thing—dampened of late by lumpen pursuits such as theatre-going, novel-reading, and the earning of money. Cease using the fruits of the imaginations of others; instead, use the visions of great achievements that my game may place in your mouth—such achievements performed, moreover, not for fame or gain but solely for the enjoyment of the undertaking, whether it succeed or fail—to spur yourself onwards to great thoughts, great deeds, and great actions.

Every word I have ever spoken is completely true (barring three, and they were said to Turks), and I am by no means an exceptional man; I have merely lived in exceptional times. Any man of noble spirit, born in times such as these, could have achieved the same. My deeds are only known so widely because I have had what some term the ill-grace to recount them over a drink or two. And I say that you too, gentle reader,

have the capacity within you to experience adventures as great as my own, if only you have the ambition to raise your sights high enough.

One man, it is said, may change the world. I deny that I ever did so—I may have saved it once or twice, but that is not the same thing—but the ability is within you to perform that or any other feat save one. It is not, I regret to tell you, within your capacity to make love to the Empress of Russia, for the reason that her honour is under my protection, and sirrah, if I catch you near her, I will give you such a drubbing as will so bruise your legs and your a—e that you will be incapable of either standing up or sitting down, and will therefore be forced to spend a month spinning in the air like a top, a foot above the ground. Consider that a warning.

Mendace veritas!

*Baron Munchausen, by his hand,
London, this year of Our Lord 17—*



APPENDIX ONE

TELL US, BARON, THE STORY OF...

...How you discovered the source of the Nile by accident.

...How you survived the simultaneous attack of a lion and a crocodile at the same time.

...How your hunting-dog Beauty caught seven hares at once.

...How you were able to reach the Moon using only twenty feet of rope—and how you returned.

...How you survived being swallowed by a whale, and what you encountered inside its mighty belly.

...The time that your fur coat attacked you on the road to Cologne.

...How you escaped from the dungeons of the Grand Seignior of Turkey, with the help of a Dutch cheese.

...Your encounter with a floating island in the Sargasso Sea.

...How your horse came to be hanging from a church steeple, and how you freed it.

...How you discovered the Island of Cheese, and how you escaped from its inhabitants.

...How you circumnavigated the world without leaving your house.

...How you cured the Empress of France's hiccoughs from the other side of the English Channel.

...Your discovery of the efficacy of swallowing frogs as a cure for leprosy.

...How you accidentally started the Americas' war of independence.

...How you convinced the King of Sardinia to become your foot-servant.

...The occasion on which you duelled all the members of a regiment of Prussian hussars simultaneously.

...How it was that you met Helen of Troy.

...How you saved the life of a man who had died fifty years ago.

...How you survived your fall from the Moon to the Earth.

...How you became betrothed to the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

...The time you ate the King of Norway's favourite horse in most curious circumstances.

...Your discovery of the lost city of Atlantis, and why it sank ten minutes afterwards.

...How, due to a meal of oatcakes, you destroyed the city of Tobruk.

...How it was you were able to pass as a native among the little people of Lilliput.

...The time your post-horn played for half an hour with nobody blowing it.

...Why, during the Great Siege of Gibraltar, you invented the continuous-action loom.

...How you recognised a sheep as the long-lost second son of the Earl of Bath.

...Your prodigious marksmanship, and how it saved last year's champagne vintage from ruination.

...How you started the French Revolution for a bet, and who won.

...Your argument with the noted sorcerer Doctor Dee, and how you finally rid yourself of the ass's ears he gave you.

...How you earned the hatred of every Freemason in Poland.

...Why, during thunderstorms, you insist on riding stark naked.

...How you forced the surrender of the Turkish armies at Constantinople with a chicken.

...Why you have drunk every bottle of cognac bottled in the year 17— in the world.

...Why it is that in France you are known as the Fifth Musketeer.

...How a portrait of Henry VIII saved you from being attacked by lions.

...The sad occasion of your funeral, and how it is that you are sitting here now.

...Why you showed the Empress of Sweden's bloomers to the town of Dusseldorf.

...How you bear a rather striking resemblance to the Sphinx of the Egyptian desert.

...How you used a cannon to spy out the Turkish lines at the Siege of Constantinople.

...How it is that your portrait has been hanging in the water closet at the Palace of Versailles for the past two hundred years.

...How you came to be burnt at the stake for witchcraft in Barcelona, and how you survived.

...How it was, the night you passed in Florence last year, that the hair of every citizen over the age of twenty turned blue.

...Your hunting trip that led to the downfall of the Ming Dynasty in China.

...How you succeeded in the enterprise of cross-breeding elephants and peacocks—and why.

...Your discovery of the effects of lion-dung as a cure for rheumatism.
...How the table-manners of the inhabitants of the Sun aided you in the mapping of Australia.

...How you acquired one of the Moon-People as your manservant.

...How you proved to the Royal Society that the world is not round.

...The mistake with your laundry which saved the court of France from drowning.

...The Venetian masqued ball where no man, but every woman, recognised you.

...How your choice of cummerbund decided the Battle of Rhodes.

...How you were principal in the safe escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie.

...How and why it was that you once had to fight a duel with yourself—to the death.

...The incident in which you accidentally impregnated the Pope.

...The royal banquet in Prussia at which all the servants were executed for witchcraft.

...How you removed the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London.

...Why you refuse to wear scarlet, eat eggs, or ride a horse on a Tuesday.

...The occasion in Paris when you became an ape for a week.

...The bridge you built between Europe and Afrique, and what happened to it.

...How a bottle of schnapps in Russia saved you from a beheading by the Sultan of Turkey.

...Why every blacksmith in London owes you three guineas.

...How the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci helped you to prevent the assassination of our beloved monarch.

...How you righted the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

...Why the keeper of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew has classified your moustache as an herb.

...The peculiar results of your having fallen asleep in a cannon.

...Why every fifth child born in Brussels is named after you.

...Why and how you once swam the entire length of the Danube.

...How you survived your descent into the volcano Vesuvius, and whom you met there.

...What happened when the primitives of the Polynesian islands offered you as a sacrifice to their native gods.

...How, after a mighty earthquake, you arranged for Rome to be rebuilt in a day.

...How you seduced the Queen of the Moon, even though she stands three hundred feet tall.

...The matter of the dog who spoke French and the tragic history of its master.

...How you became King of Mkolo-Mbeleland.

...How a sprig of pussy-willow saved your life.

...Why you were forced to act all the parts in a production of *Hamlet* at Covent Garden—and how you staged the duel scene.

...How it is you incurred the wrath of the god Vulcan.

...Why you claim to be the husband of Cleopatra.

...How you stopped a charging herd of elephants from destroying the city of Edinburgh.

...The most outrageous wager you ever took.

...How you saved the life of the King of the Cats.

...What you did with the arms of the Venus de Milo.

...How you located the Garden of Eden, and what you found there.

...How you captured the phoenix, which you later presented to Queen Anne.

...Why the race of Pygmy-People from Yolimba-Yp worship you as their god.

...What caused the fall of London Bridge, and how you survived it.

...The duel you were forced to fight against a swarm of bees.

...Your creation of a tunnel underneath the Straits of Gibraltar, and what happened to it.

...Your invasion of Italy with an army of three hundred tigers.

...How you learned of the true resting-place of Noah's Ark, and what you found there.

...How you repeated Moses's trick of parting the Red Sea.

...How you visited both the North and the South Poles during dinner one evening.

...How you lifted the ancient curse on the royal family of Sweden.

...How you learned to speak the language of the elephant.

...How you and your companions completely emptied the treasure-room of the Sultan of Mahmood.

...How your life was saved by the ticking of your pocket-watch.

...How you caused Princess Mary of the Netherlands to be married in a pigsty.

...How you and three rabbits lifted the Great Siege of Gibraltar.

...How it was that you and not Francis Bacon wrote the plays of William Shakespeare.

...How you recovered the treasure of the sunken Spanish Armada without wetting a hair of your head.

...Why, when you appeared before the court of the King of the Low Countries, did all present think you were a ghost.

...Why, on your return from the Indies, your father did not recognise you.

...How you stole the Empress of France's diamond studs from under her very nose.

...Your encounter with the Sirens of legend, and how you responded to their seductive songs.

...The hunting trip in Scotland, on which you shot twelve grouse, three lions, a camel, and a sea-serpent.

...How you caused a German serving-maid to be crowned Emperor of India.

...The great discoveries you have lately made concerning tea, and how you made them.

...How you defeated a gigantic Roc high in the air.

...How you became the first man to climb Mont Blanc.

...How you became the first man to descend Mont Blanc, before any man had climbed it.

...How you prevented the White Cliffs of Dover from turning blue.

...How, on your celebrated crossing of the Sahara Desert, you were able to eat your camel one night and yet ride it the following day.

Fig 4: Having defeated a Roc, the Baron not only safely returns to Earth, but also invents the new sport of Strato-Spherical Surfing.



...How you captured the entire French fleet with a leaky rowing-boat.
...How you deduced that all the monks of Westminster Abbey were devil-worshippers, and what you did about it.

...Why members of the Polish Army salute you and address you as General Bock.

...Why you never remove your hat in the company of Greeks.

...How you invented the national dish of Italy.

...How you detected that the French were digging a tunnel under the English Channel, and the remarkable action you took as a result.

...Why it is that half the fish brought into Antwerp Harbour belong to you.

...How the largest diamond in the world came to be in the oyster you presented to the Empress of Russia.

...How you caused the Pope to parade naked through the crowded streets of Vienna.

...Why a man in Dublin has a contract stating that he owns your right leg.

...How your luncheon with the Duke of Strathcarn started the Industrial Revolution.

...Your encounter with the Great White Whale.

...What you did to cause the year 1752 to lose the days between the third and the fourteenth of September.

...Your unusual method of espionage in the recent invasion of Poland.

...Your involvement in the Royal Society's scheme to extract sunlight from cucumbers.

...How you claimed the planet Neptune for the British Empire.

...Whether you have, as was reported, located the source of the Amazon, and if so, what flavour of sauce it was.

...How you wrote a ten-volume history of Iceland in a day, despite never having been there.

...The bet you made with the Count of Monte Hall, that you could outrun a hare over fifty yards, and how you won it.

...How you navigated the ancient labyrinth of Minos, and what you found at its centre.

...How you replenished the empty treasury of Liechtenstein in but a single day.

...Why you were imprisoned in the cell next to the Man in the Iron Mask, what passed between you, and how you escaped.

...Your shipwreck and sojourn on a small island inhabited only by man-eating savages.

...How you discovered that your manservant was the Emperor of Prussia, and what you did about it.

...How you escaped from the Turks on half a horse.

...How you accidentally executed the King of Norway.

...The time a cat insulted the honour of your family, and how you restored that honour.

...How you sailed across the Mediterranean without a boat.

...How you moved Leeds Castle to its present location in Kent.

...How you curiously removed one letter from the alphabet without anyone noticing.

...Your encounter with the ghost-ship the *Flying Dutchman*, and how you brought its cargo to harbour.

...How you melted the swords of the French Army into ploughshares without attracting the attention of the soldiers carrying them.

...How you laid the ghost of Anne Boleyn.

...How you eradicated the Black Plague from Hamburg in an afternoon.

...Why your moustache never needs to be trimmed.

...How you stopped the eruption of Mount Vesuvius with only the contents of your saddlebags and the help of your companions.

...Why the apes on the Rock of Gibraltar regard you as the leader of their pack.

...How you mined for gold in Saint Peter's Square in Rome.

...How you came accidentally to invent Morris dancing.

...How your discovery of the Sphinx's nose saved you from an unpleasant fate.

...How you rescued the race of Houyhnhnms from their life of slavery under their cruel masters.

...Why you caused the ancient Battle of Marathon to be restaged in every detail on the outskirts of Boulogne.

...Your smuggling trips to the Sun, and how they led to your exile from that place.

...How you lost both your legs at the Battle of Utrecht, and how you recovered them.

...How, if you are the greatest swordsman in Europe, the Count of Basle can claim truthfully to be the greatest swordsman in Belgium.

...How you invented the tomato.

- ...How you found the Crown Jewels of Sweden hidden inside a live cow.
- ...How you wrote Mozart's *Requiem*.
- ...How you succeeded where King Canute failed and stopped the tide from advancing.
- ...How you caused the English flag to be flown over the Palace of Versailles in France.
- ...How you tamed the wild swine of Gloucester.
- ...How you discovered every Italian spy in Germany with the use of a bowl of porridge.
- ...How you converted three covens of Spanish witches to the Protestant faith in a single night.
- ...Of your sojourn in Hades, from whence no mortal ever returns, and how it is that you are with us now.
- ...How a flight of swans helped you free the kidnapped Prince of Persia.
- ...How you captured the last unicorn, and why you let it go again.
- ...How your famous love-affair with the daughter of the Earl of Cadogan was cut short by a moth.
- ...How it is that you captained a ship in the Swiss Navy, even though you are German by birth and Switzerland does not have a navy.
- ...How you proved that the monster of Loch Ness does not exist.
- ...How your circumnavigation of the globe led to the invention of the four-field rotation system.
- ...Why you are forbidden from wearing the colour yellow on the streets of Naples.
- ...The great trifle of Antwerp.
- ...The flood of Vienna.
- ...The biggest pig in the world.
- ...On what evidence you believe apes and men to be cousins.
- ...The five bonfires of Rome, and what they caused.
- ...Why the river Danube ran red with blood one Easter.
- ...Why the river Thames ran green one midsummer day.
- ...Why the river Liffey ran black last Saint Patrick's Day.
- ...Why the lagoon of Venice became a desert, and how you remedied that unfortunate situation.
- ...How, alone in a forest, you blew up a bear.
- ...How you arrived in St Petersburg in a sledge drawn by a huge wild wolf.
- ...How, on a hunting trip, you turned a wolf inside-out.
- ...How you came to write this game.

APPENDIX TWO

THE RULES IN BRIEF

A synopsis for those who have not been paying attention.

IT IS the year 17—. A group of noble persons are gathered together with a good stock of wine, and they pass the long evening by entertaining each other with tales of their travels and surprising adventures. Little respect is paid to historical details, scientific facts, or the bounds of credibility.

Each player begins the game with a number of coins equal to the total number of players. This is his PURSE. The person who last filled the party's glasses turns to the noble on his right hand, and asks him to tell a story on a particular theme by saying, "So, {Baron}, tell us the story of..."

The player thus addressed responds with "Yes," in which case he must tell the story, or with "No, my throat is too dry," in which case he forfeits his turn but must buy a round of drinks for the company. Thus becoming the person who last filled the party's glasses, he turns to the person on his right and gives him a subject for a story in the same way.

In telling his story, each player should outdo the previous story-teller with a tale that is bigger and wilder and places more glory upon himself. Stories are told in the first person and should not be too long: about five minutes is good.

Other players may INTERRUPT the story-teller with objections or elaborations to points of his story. This is done by pushing a coin—the STAKE—to the story-teller and saying, "But {Baron}..." (or in the grown-up version, draining one's glass, pushing a coin to him, and saying, "But {Baron}..."), followed by the objection. Interruptions should put amusing and challenging obstacles in the way of the teller's story, not nit-pick. A player with no coins may not interrupt.

The story-teller may accept the interruption (and the stake) and either explain it away or build it into his story, or he may disagree with it. If he disagrees, he may add one of his coins to the stake and dismiss the interruption out of hand. He may also ridicule the asker for believing anything so stupid and for doubting the word of a nobleman. The interrupting player may counter by adding another coin to the stake



and another insult, and so on. The one who first admits that he is wrong claims the entire stake; if it is the story-teller, then he must build the interruption into his story, as above.

Direct insults to a player's truthfulness, parentage, or claim to noble rank may be answered by a challenge to a DUEL, which is settled by three rounds of rock-scissors-paper. The winner receives the loser's purse; the loser must drop out of the game.

A story finishes in one of two ways. Either the story-teller concludes it with a vow as to the truthfulness of the matter or an offer to duel anyone who does not believe his word, or one of the other players drinks a toast to the player's health and his story. The story-teller then challenges the person seated on his right to tell a new story, as described above. There are other ways to end a story in an emergency: these are described in the main text.

Once all the players have each told a story, the player who began the game now initiates the round of voting. "*By my word,*" he says, "*I declare that the story about —, told by Baron —, was the most extraordinary story I have ever heard,*" and passes his purse to that player. (The coins are not added to this player's purse, but become part of his BOUNTY.) In order, each player pledges the whole of his purse to his favourite tale, and the player with the largest bounty at the end is declared the winner and must buy a final round of drinks. However, he may also pose the question for the first story of the next game, whenever that may be played.



VOLUME II



PREFACE, PART 2

AND THERE I BELIEVED THE MATTER ENDED. BUT I was wrong. After Hogshead Publishing released *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* to modest success in 1998, members of my extended family wrote to say that they hadn't known I was interested in John and Edward Wallis, and enclosed various family papers concerning the two and their game-publishing business. This allowed me to put together a rough timeline of the history of the Baron's game, during which I realised that everything I had written about it thus far was wrong.

It became clear that Baron Munchausen had maintained an occasional correspondence with John Wallis after 1798, for another nine years—that is, the Baron had written asking for information on the book's success and any monies that might be owed to him, and John had occasionally responded to say that the market was still not ready for the game. Shortly after the turn of the century, the Baron sent John an extension to his original rules, based on his recent journey to Baghdad—the original manuscript survives, albeit stained with something that is either Banyuls or cloudberry wine—but this was still not enough to convince John that the game was sufficiently commercial to be released.

Things went quiet until 1807, when there was a new flurry of letters. John told the Baron that games were a “childish pursuit” and “for the education of the young,” and since the rules of his game were without educational merit and not suitable for younger players, therefore the game was not publishable. (One might then ask why John had commissioned the game in the first place; I believe that he had originally thought the Baron would create a map-game similar to John's

best-selling *Tour through England and Wales* of 1794.) Three hours later—if the given dates are to be believed—the Baron responded with a new set of rules for younger players, “for the edification of children,” which, after a few days of consideration, John agreed to publish.

I cannot describe how I felt as I stared for the first time at this exchange of letters. No games historian I had consulted had any record of the publication of the Baron’s game, with or without these new rules, and neither did the British Library. There was no other trace of evidence that this book had ever actually existed.

And then I found a copy.

I won’t go into the tortuous details of how I obtained what I believed at the time was the sole remaining example of the 1808 book *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen, told in the form of a New Style of Game termed Rôle-Play, by Baron Munchausen*,¹ because they are irrelevant, quite dull, and illegal in at least nineteen countries and four US states. More interesting is the story that I pieced together from surviving fragments of notes, business records, and journal entries made by John, Edward, and John Junior.

The game was ready to be published in April of 1808. John Wallis sent proof copies to the Baron, who gave them to his friends to publicise the long-awaited release. One of these was Generalmajor Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher of the Prussian Army, who seems to have passed his copy to his brother Albrecht, the commander of the King’s 12th Hussars. Within a week, a letter was delivered to London, notifying John that the officers of the 12th considered the contents of the book a “gross defamation; a criminal, obscene, treasonous, and blasphemous libel; and moreover, untrue,” and that if it were published, the entire regiment would sue.

John Wallis, being a games publisher by trade and not used to the cut-and-thrust (in some cases literal) of the bookselling trade in the nineteenth century, had not had the Baron’s game read for libel, and apparently had not consulted a lawyer on the matter. Despite the Baron’s assurances that he had duelled the King’s 12th before and would do it again, John panicked and ordered the entire print run destroyed before a single copy was sold to the public. The shock and the financial

¹After the publication of the facsimile edition of the game in 2008, I was informed of the existence of another copy of the original, owned by a collector in Australia. Even though his is in better condition than mine, and was cheaper, I am delighted to know of it.

loss to his business were both severe, and he handed control of the latter to his son Edward in 1813, preferring to spend his remaining years designing variants for the Game of the Goose. He died in 1818.

Luckily for us, the King's 12th Hussars ceased to exist in 1893, and the threat of a present-day libel case is therefore diminished. Sadly, all that remains from the original incident is some scraps of letters and a single damaged copy of the Baron's book. Nevertheless, I believe that this represents an important—not to say unique—addition to our understanding of European games-design techniques and culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Therefore, on behalf of my beleaguered forebears and the illustrious Baron himself, I am proud to finally present to the games-playing public the full rules for the Baron's game, almost completely as he intended.

James Wallis
London, 2008





THE BARON'S LATE ADVENTURES IN ARABY

A variation on the Baron's original game told in the form of a letter, containing strange & curious matters, including a meeting with a sailor of legend and the true location of Noah's Ark.

July, 18—

MY DEAR John,

It has been some years since I enjoyed your abundant hospitality and the fine company of your excellent son Edward at Skinner Street in London, and we passed a pretty evening in the concoction of a game which I hope has brought amusement and edification to many, and much gold and good fortune to yourself.

I have not heard from you since those happy days, and it is my fervent hope that this does not betoken any ill fortune or ill will. As for myself, you will be glad to hear that the reports of my death are mostly in error. Rather than passing the intervening years under the ground, I have passed them far above it, on the planet Mars. As you will know from the renowned scientific writings of Dean Swift, the Newtonian Laws of that far place were written by a being with a most unclear script: telescopes enlarge not the image of an object but the object itself, apples fall at an angle of sixty-two degrees to the vertical (I have seen it measured) and when cooked produce plum puddings, and time passes at a rate altogether different to that on our globe.

I spent what seemed to me to be a pleasant month as a guest of a prince of that sphere, strolling along the banks of its canals—in disposition the planet seems much like Holland, but with finer cheese—but when I returned to *terra firma*, I discovered that twelve years had gone, I had been adjudged dead, and my estate and goods had been passed to distant relatives who had frittered the money away on orphanages and schools for the poor and other such fiddle-faddle. I am endeavouring to prove to them that I have never been so filled with life as now, but it seems my relatives have been meticulous in filing the correct paperwork with the authorities, and in Germany a properly completed death certificate trumps a living body.

In all of this turmoil and strife, the only source of constancy and reassurance to me is that once again, the whole world is at war with the French, and that once again the French are losing. It is worrying to me that I can think of the French as constant and reassuring in any respect, but I am sure it will not last.

And I hear from the Americas of much talk that all slaves should be free. While there can be no doubt that this would be a great boon to the poorest and most disadvantaged in the world, I think it a manifestly unwise idea. In my experience, a slave acquired for free, or for any price under two guineas, is likely to be as uncouth, untrustworthy, and unsuitable for hard work as a Welshman.

At this juncture, I must apologise for the poor state of my handwriting. There is a good reason for this, which I am sure you have grasped: it is not my handwriting. Present circumstances demand that I must dictate the body of this letter to a scrivener, those circumstances being that I am in the midst of fighting a prolonged duel, or to be accurate, a succession of duels. The cause of this will surely amuse you. As you will recall, in my earlier game I described the occasion in Königsberg in 17—, when, as part of recounting an anecdote of great hilarity to the Hapsburg Court, I insulted the honour of the King's 12th Hussars, unaware that the same entire regiment was at that moment parading beneath the window of the room where I was sitting, and as a consequence every man of their number challenged me to a duel. The rest of the story is scarcely worth repetition; I am certain you recall it.

It happened that some days ago my affairs brought me back to Königsberg, where the story of my duel is still much repeated in the coffee-houses and taverns, and the tale has grown in the retelling until it trespasses beyond the bounds of credibility. As you know, my love of the truth is second to no man's, so when several of the citizens of this fine city requested that I recount for them the authentic version of the cause of the duel, I was glad to oblige them.

Such was my regard for veracity and accuracy that I described every detail, including the original insult to the King's 12th. But I had not reckoned with the power of coincidence, or the possibility that I had offended some minor deity or nether spirit, for at that very instant the forces of the unknowable had sent that same regiment to parade beneath the window once again. The insult was heard a second time, and once again I found myself challenged to a duel by the entire complement of the regiment, down to the stable-boy, the cook, and the regimental cat.

It is in this predicament that you find me—unfortunate in that I must waste the best part of a fine spring day in teaching these fellows a lesson in when to leave a thing alone. I tell you, John, that if these Hus-sar hoorahs are a representation of the standard of soldiery today, then it is little wonder that the fat Corsican and his camp-followers are leaving their sabot-prints across the fields of Europe. One would have thought that one drubbing would be sufficient to show these impudent knaves not to trifle in my business or eavesdrop on my conversations, but they have forced me to administer their education in these matters a second time, and as you know, if there is one thing I detest more than any other, it is having to repeat myself.

In order to divert myself during this tedious succession of conflicts, I have hired the services of a scribe and am catching up on my correspondence, composing and dictating with one half of my mind—the front—while the rear is occupied with riposting and dispatching the remaining two-thirds of the regiment.

“But Baron!” I hear you cry. “Can you not fight your duels with your right hand and write your letters with the left, as you demonstrated before King Olav of Sweden?” Indeed I cannot, for the good reason that I am fighting with a sword in each hand, undertaking two duels at a time, the quicker to dispatch this tiresome task and equally tiresome regiment.

I confess that this is a risky enterprise, but I have not had an adventure in some days, and remembering my previous encounter with the King’s 12th, I had judged the risk to my person to be slim. It seems I was wrong: I have already lost two buttons, the frill of my collar, and a length of embrocade to their blades, and I fear the wrath of my tailor.

The trick of separating the two halves of my mind and using each for a separate purpose is one I learned on my recent travels to the city of Baghdad, and it is the matter of what befell me there which engenders this, my letter to you.

Baghdad, as you know, has been occupied of late by a hostile and uncivilised foreign power, viz., the Turks, who have made the city their own, setting their barbarous camps in the royal palaces, abusing and imprisoning the innocent natives, throwing the books from the libraries, looting the museums, imposing their own customs and values on the old and venerable natives of the place, and generally behaving in as boorish a manner as can be imagined.

I had been asked to visit the city by Sir G— H— with a mission of the greatest confidentiality and importance: that was, to *{here the letter is torn, as if by the thrust of a poorly aimed cavalry sabre}*. I had been there a handful of days, disguised as an Ottoman, when it became clear that to complete my purpose I must gain an audience with one of the most respected elders of the city. I could not send a visiting card declaring myself to be Baron Munchausen, for the Turk has spies everywhere, and if word had got out that I was in Baghdad, I would have been captured and beheaded—not for the first time, but it is an unpleasant experience and one I wish to undergo as infrequently as possible. Therefore I determined to gain entry to this elder's palace not by announcing myself, but by means of a gift the like of which he had never seen.

I will not tire you with the story of how I tracked a djinni to its lair atop Mount Ararat, nor how I fought it to a standstill and then tricked it while it was dazed into entering the gold lamp I had brought with me and sealed it within that vessel using the signet ring that I had borrowed from Solomon for the purpose, for I am sure you have heard the narrative before: it is already much circulated. On my return to Baghdad, I sent the lamp to the august elder with a letter requesting his permission to visit him, and accordingly, the next day I was shown into the mansion and made the acquaintance for the first time of the venerable and learned Es-Sindibad of the Sea—or, as you will have heard of him, Sindbad the Sailor.

I hear you gasp as you read that name (I assure you that I do, even from six hundred miles away, for I keep my ears meticulously scrubbed and greased with hare-fat), for are you not about to tell me that you have caught me out in a lie? Is it not the case, you will declare, that an early edition of my *Travels and Surprising Adventures* contained as a preface a letter sworn at the Guildhall in London, attesting to its veracity and signed in the presence of the mayor by three noted authorities of the fantastick, being Sinbad, Aladdin, and Lemuel Gulliver?

It is true that the book contained such a preface; I cannot deny it. But on my honour, I declare the page was not there inserted by my instruction but as a knavish jest by that rogue Smith in Oxford, to whom I had entrusted the safe publishing of my instructive volume, and if you should ever meet him, then box his nose and give him my regards. The low humour of the passage should give away the poor

birth of its author to any with an ear for words. Besides, to my certain knowledge, Aladdin has never visited the shores of England, and when the book was brought to press in 1785, Lemuel Gulliver had been twenty years in his grave.

But I am wandering far from the subject. Once he had received my gift and seen my name attached to it, Es-Sindibad welcomed me into his home with open arms, professing that he had heard marvellous stories of my travels. We spent two happy days comparing our histories and debating whether the giant *ruk*-bird that had carried him out of the Valley of Diamonds was a relative to either the giant kingfisher I had met on the Island of Cheese or the great eagle that had carried me from Thanet to Margate via the Americas, and whether the prodigious fish on which he had landed in the supposition that it was an island could be the same huge whale that my ship had encountered some years later. It was a most edifying experience, to meet one who did not treat my stories with incredulity, but was able to confirm much of the information therein from his own experiences on so many of his own renowned voyages.



Late on the second day, the conversation beginning to lull, I searched my mind for another novelty with which to interest Es-Sindibad's august personage, and I brought to mind the game I had written for you in London. Es-Sindibad begged me to demonstrate it for him and his household, which I did to much laughter and applause, and we played late into the night.

When we gathered over breakfast the following day, the old merchant informed me that in the night he had thought of several new rules for my game that would make it work better with tales in the Arabian style. Moreover, he confessed that my pastime had given him an idea for a story-telling game of his own, and while it was not finished, he was confident that in a few days he would have the work completed.

I begged him to tell me more, but while he was explaining his new rules to me, we were interrupted by a dreadful noise from without. It was the Turks, who, having been told of my presence in Es-Sindibad's house by an untrustworthy cook (French), had surrounded the place with cannon and musketry and were demanding the surrender of "the infidel Munchausen" and, as an afterthought, "also the liar Es-Sindibad."

Es-Sindibad and I needed to exchange no words to know that the surrender of either party to the Turk was unthinkable: our honours and reputations would never survive it, to say nothing of our lives. Escape over the rooftops was out of the question, as since his encounter with the *ruk*-bird Es-Sindibad had succumbed to a mortal fear of heights, and even now, mounting higher than the second storey of his mansion was an impossibility for him. Clambering down into the sewers was likewise unthinkable, since I had bought the britches and boots I was wearing new just three days previously. But how then to escape?

Es-Sindibad mooted the idea of pretending to be as one dead, being cast into a deep cave with other corpses, and waiting for others to be cast down with us, but while he was still expositing his plan, my eyes happened across the golden lamp I had presented to him as a token of my respect. In a moment I had rubbed it against my sleeve, and the great djinni issued forth from within to do our bidding. But I had not considered that it would still be weak from the blows it had sustained in our struggle on Mount Ararat and therefore lacked the strength to lift both of us and itself to safety.

In a flash I had struck a light to the lamp, and the heat from its flame billowed upwards (the mornings in Baghdad are surprisingly chilly), filling the djinni's enormous pantaloons and causing them to swell

outwards in a manner much like the great balloon of the Montgolfier brothers. As the hot gases lifted the djinni into the air, Es-Sindibad and I leaped into the turn-ups of the pantaloons and in this manner were able to soar away over the astonished heads of the Turkish Army. For the djinni was still attached to the lamp and could not rise above it, so therefore as long as it remained lit, he and we his passengers continued to rise.

As you may imagine, though the magnificent sight of Baghdad from high in the air brought joy to my soul, it occasioned only the most distressed shrieks of terror from Es-Sindibad, who was less used to adventuring at altitude than myself. I took the liberty of tugging his turban down over his eyes and reassuring him that what he had seen was nothing but a great illusion created by the djinni for the confusion of our enemies and we were still safe in the courtyard of his house, thus quieting his panic.

Our escape seemed certain, but I had reckoned without the curious phenomenon of the temperature of the air growing colder the higher one goes (caused, I believe, by the heat of the furnaces of Vulcan under the surface of the earth). As we rose into the sky, the faster became our ascent until we were hurtling upwards towards the Sun at a speed, by my reckoning, in excess of *thirty miles an hour!*

I feared for the safety of Es-Sindibad, who has grown old since his last voyage, and therefore as we passed close to a bank of clouds I grasped some of their substance—it is remarkably like wild cotton—and used it to fashion a larger version of the toy parachutes that children use to essay the safe descent of dolls, puppies, and diminutive servants from high windows to the ground. With a brief farewell and an instruction to not raise his turban above his eyes until he felt a tap on his heels, I pushed Es-Sindibad from the djinni's pantaloons and watched as he descended to Earth, where, I believe, he has since gained much capital from this story of his eighth voyage.

I perceived that the winds of the upper atmosphere had carried us near to Mount Ararat, and sensed that the great djinni above was becoming restless at the sight of his old home. I promised him his freedom in return for two of his long curved eyelashes, which I attached to my feet like the runners of a sleigh. As the last of the lamp's oil was extinguished and the djinni roared away into the sky, I dropped from its trouser-hem towards the mountain's snow-capped peak, it being my intention to ski on the eyelashes down to level ground. I confess I had never essayed the sport of skiing, but I had seen it done and it appeared an exercise of

almost child-like simplicity that a gentleman of any sophistication could learn in a matter of moments, since it had been invented by Norwegians.

This was, I now admit, a misapprehension. No sooner had my eyelash-skis touched the snow than I found myself wrong-footed, overbalanced, and catapulted head-first into a snow-drift on the edge of a mighty cliff. Such was my momentum that I rolled through the drift and on, gathering snow and other debris around my person, all the way down the side of Mount Ararat.



Such is the size of the mountain that by the time I reached its foot, the snow-ball with myself at its centre had attained a diameter of some half a mile, together with such a velocity that it and I rolled unstopably across Araby, through Egypt, and out into the Sahara Desert, where the extreme heat of the Sun melted the snow and freed me from my icy prison.

As I surveyed my surroundings, I found myself standing not on sand but on the deck of some great and ancient ship. With a moment's investigation, I understood that it was nothing other than Noah's Ark, picked up by my giant snow-ball as it rolled down from the summit of Mount Ararat and deposited here in the middle of the desert. I believe that the recent expedition by Doctor Friedrich Parrot has failed to find any trace of the Ark on the mountain whereon the Bible says it should rest, and herewith I furnish you the explanation. If you could pass this information to Doctor Parrot should you encounter him in London, I will demonstrate my gratitude at some future date.

I will not trouble you with the extraordinary story of my return to Europe, for that is not the purpose of this letter. I am writing to provide you with the additional rules for my game, as composed by Es-Sindibad. Perhaps with these new informations you will be able to publish an expanded edition of the game, and it is with this thought in mind that I feel able to request the sum of twenty guineas from you as an advance payment on the wealth that such a desirable production will surely bring to you and your family. I regret pressing you on this matter, but my current circumstances make it necessary.

By way of encouragement, I am happy to tell you that this morning I received a letter from Baghdad, sent by Es-Sindibad. He is well, and reports that he is hard at work on his own game based on the stories of his famous voyages, which—remembering the fine reports I made to him about your business, hospitality, and kindness—he promises to forward to you at the earliest opportunity, for publication by yourself and your dynasty.

I see that the King's 12th are beginning to bring up their artillery pieces, so for the sake of decorum I shall leave you here: the next few minutes will require me to extinguish the cannon-fuses by spitting fifty feet at them, an art of which I am unusually qualified, since according to the distaff side of my lineage, I am in small part cobra, being descended not from the union of Adam and Eve but from Eve and the Serpent. But all this is a tale for another time, a warm fireside, good friends, and a bottle or two of excellent tokay. The spitting is an unpleasant spectacle to witness and plays a merry havoc with the pronunciation of vowels, so I shall cease my dictation here.

With best wishes and fervent hopes that our paths cross soon and our swords never.

Mendace veritas!

Baron Munchausen
(dictated but not read)

ES-SINDIBAD'S RULES

As interpreted by Baron Munchausen

IN THE last edition of my game, I included some preliminary notes towards a variant game, recalled from my conversation with Es-Sindibad along with his promise that he would in time send me a full set of rules that he had devised. Doubtless his schedule has been interrupted by calls to prayer, occasional adventures, visits from beggars also called Es-Sindibad, and invasions by Turks, but I have at last received the letter from the man of legend himself. He reports that his health is good, though several paragraphs are wasted in describing a recent turmoil in his abdomen to a level of detail that is unnecessary and distasteful and strains many things, of which credulity is the least.

He has attached the rules for his game, which I reproduce below with only a few small alterations to spelling, grammar, choice of words, choice of rules (since I am now renowned as an expert in such matters), and penmanship, the latter so deplorable in the original that I feel it must have been connected in some way with the business in his internal parts. My version is, I feel, a considerable improvement on a rough and unshaped prototype by a fledgling game designer who shows a little promise.

The letter follows:

MY MOST esteemed and excellent friend Baron Hieronymous,

It is with the utmost joy that I send this letter to you, as we agreed I would shortly before you left Baghdad in such a surprising manner, about a game wherein adventurers may tell the stories of their adventures, and also the small matter of the unpaid... *{Here I have deleted several paragraphs that are not necessary. —Munchausen}*

The one thousand and one stories of Arabia are different to your Western anecdotes, richer in their depth and history, and the manner in which they are recounted is also different. Your tales are like strong cords and long chains of connected links, while ours are tapestries and carpets woven of many threads, and this latter is the material I have endeavoured to capture in my game.

The players come together in a circle. The relative heights and decorative splendour of their seating arrangements should denote their status *vis-à-vis* one another, from throne to cushions. *{I have no idea what purpose this serves in the game, but Es-Sindibad tells me he could not understand the purpose of the Character Generation section within my original design on page 5, and come to it neither can I. I will let both stand. —Munchausen}*

The set-up of the game is similar to your own, but for three principal changes. Firstly, since gambling and games of chance are forbidden to Moslems, the gold coins of your rules are replaced in mine with dates. The date is a hardy and versatile fruit, and may also be eaten if the game goes on too long and the players become hungry. Likewise, since alcohol is forbidden to Moslems, its place within the workings of the rules is taken by a refreshing draught of mint tea, and it is my experience that the game suffers not at all from this substitution.

The final change is that all the stories to be told are requested at the start of the game. Since the fame of each story-teller has spread far and wide, it is to be assumed that all the others have heard the tales of their exciting voyages to the reaches of the world and are asking to hear a favourite one retold. The first player requests to hear the story of the second's voyages, the second then asks the third for a tale, the third asks the fourth, and so on until all know the tale they must tell.

Thus:

YASMIN: *"Shareef, I desire to hear from you the tale of the time you were chased through the streets of Riyadh by a thousand goats."*

SHAREEF: *"A story that is surely worthy of a dinner! For myself, Faaris, please tell me how you were kidnapped by hummingbirds and what transpired thereafter."*

FAARIS: *"It will be my pleasure. My dear Layla, I wish to learn of the customs of the Magyan fire-worshippers, who were set to sacrifice you to their flaming deity."*

LAYLA: *"Of course I shall recount that adventure. And Yasmin, my dear, do tell us all of the time you were imprisoned by a hunchback, and of the magical table that aided your escape."*

The first story-teller is the one among the company with the highest status, or if this cannot be easily determined, then the one with the greatest girth, for a full waist-band is the sign of a good life lived well. This one must commence the telling of his tale. The other players may listen or interrupt.

TO LISTEN is to pay the respect that is due to stories and their tellers, and the players are commended for this action. However, as I have mentioned, the stories of our culture are not individual strands but a woven cloth, and it is the job of each story-teller to interweave his own story with that of his fellows. In this case, Yasmin begins:

YASMIN: "*It was in the great port of Abu Dhabi where I acquired the strange talisman that was to bring me so much ill fortune. {...} And in this dark den of iniquity, this wretched hive, I recognised a face among the traders. Selling the bodies of rats he had caught and killed with his own teeth, it was my cousin Faaris.*"

FAARIS: "*Me?*"

YASMIN: "*The same.*"

Here three things may happen (and are resolved in this order):

1. The story-teller may pay one date [or coin] to the one who has been named, and this one must continue the story from here.
2. The one named may pay one date [or coin] to the story-teller and wrest control of the tale.
3. If neither of the above happens, the story-teller is free to continue.

Whoever is the story-teller, the story he is telling must be his own. He cannot tell the story of any of his friends or fellow travellers. Yasmin should continue with her own tale, which may involve Faaris to some degree, but she may not digress to tell his story and not her own. When Faaris gains control of the story, which he should do unless he is a very poor player or so hungry he has eaten all his dates, it is for him to explain how he came to be an itinerant rat-catcher, and how that relates to his having been kidnapped by hummingbirds.

TO INTERRUPT is close to the form it takes within the Baron's game. Any player may introduce an objection, question, or clarification to the story-teller's tale by pushing forward a date [or coin]. The story-teller may turn away the claim through using a date, or accept it. However, in this game to accept an interruption is to relinquish the reins of the story to the one who interrupted. The new teller continues, but now recounts his or her own story—with a short explanation of how the two characters met in the narrative, and how the usurper assisted the other in correcting the mistake or misapprehension that was the subject of the interruption.

There is but one additional rule. When one has given up control of the story to another or had it taken away, then it may not take it back at once. He or she must wait for a third in the company to take on the mantle of story-teller from the second, and only then may interrupt again. Of course,



the second may choose to twist the strands of the current story back to tie a knot with the strand of the original story-teller, and this is permitted.

This means that my game works best in groups of larger numbers, but this, added to the rule above to respect friends as they tell their tales, captures the way that we Arabs prefer to spend time with our friends. Do not play with too many or the game will run too long: it should be long enough to last out the heat of the day, to allow one to resume business in the cool of the afternoon with feelings of tranquillity, satisfaction, and what our Greek friend Aristotle would call “Catharsis.”

THE WINNER is the first player to complete a narrative to the satisfaction of those present, through a simple majority vote. Players who do not gain victory can certainly strive to improve their tales through remembering new details or finding other ways to further their sagas, and thus attempt to gain victory in later votes. There is therefore much skill in the manipulation and even the strategic eating of the dates, so as to manoeuvre the field into a state where none may interrupt. This gives my game an edge of tactics and negotiation that I found to be sorely lacking in... *{I have removed some unnecessary description that was making this section over-long. —Munchausen}*



Here Es-Sindibad’s game ends. I have not tried it myself, having no stomach for dates, but I applaud its sentiments and believe it would serve as an admirable pastime. As to “Catharsis,” of which Aristotle wrote, I myself have visited this ancient town in North Africa, as a guest of its famous son Hannibal. I have gazed over the fields of verdant salt-bushes that the Romans thoughtfully sowed there, and I can see how memories of such delightful vistas would be a fitting end to any game.



MY UNCLE THE BARON

A simpler version of the game described in the first part of this work, intended for children, the inbred, and those who are very drunk.

FINDING OURSELVES buried in a snow-drift near Salzburg four days ago and seeking ways to pass the time, the Empress of Russia asked me what I would take for a family motto if "*Mendace Veritas*" were torn from me as a mandrake root is torn from the Earth, screaming and writhing, and when I gave her my answer—"Children should be seen and not heard"—she laughed daintily and congratulated me on a most excellent jest. I assure you, as I assured her, that I am in sober earnest: I believe it to be among the most excellent maxims ever coined.

For a child who is both seen and heard is naught but a gadfly, interrupting its betters as a horsefly irritates a horse, while you can be sure that a child who is neither seen nor heard is under the table tying together the bootlaces of his uncles, or in the kitchen wrapping the cat in ham, or exchanging racing tips with one's postillion (not that I disparage an early education in matters of the turf, but postillions are notoriously ill-informed on the subject of choosing winners, else they would not be postillions), or down a rabbit-hole, or up a chimney, or being swapped for a changeling by imps, or somesuch other childish nonsense.

Meanwhile, a child who is heard but not seen is either being loud in a nearby room or has mastered the art of invisibility, and both states are to be deplored in those below the age of ten. Therefore, a child who is seen but not heard is the ideal: one knows that the infant is safe, and one can be reasonably sure that one is as well. As a footnote, I am compelled to add that the use of a gag is a poor substitute for good parenting, though it may sometimes be preferable to the alternative.

There are, however, times when it is greatly to be desired to let children speak: in the classroom, for an example, or when about to be ambushed by bears. And I say all this as a way to preface my philosophy that if they speak then they should speak wisely, and if they are to be wise then they must be educated, and if they are to be educated then they must be taught all the subjects that, when assembled in the correct proportions in a vessel of the proper sturdiness and stirred by the thoughts and examples of great men, will produce a mind fit to run an empire or, if no empire is at hand, then to conquer someone else's. "*Mens sana in*

corpore sano," as the poet Juvenal has it, though I am informed by one who met him that he was in size something of a bloater.

It is therefore my purpose to describe a variation on my celebrated game for the diversion and education of those who lack the years to play its full-grown sibling. It retains the dedication to wit, imagination, family pride, and the Empress of Russia of the original, but without the drinking, gambling, duelling, and coarse oaths that children are supposed by their parents not to understand. I have dubbed this cut-down and soft-faced version, this eunuch game, "My Uncle the Baron."

The play of the game is in most matters different.—But wait, I have prefaced insufficiently. As we broach this new century, it is my experience that the Age of Reason has given way to an Age of Science, and that the Ages of Exploration, Adventure, and Heroes are so far off in the mist of history that their shapes are dim and oft mistook for passing fancies. This age of ours, this brave new world, has much to recommend it (I think here particularly of the new coffee beans lately arrived from Sumatra), but I have observed in my travels—on this sphere, at least—that rationality and the scientific method have brought two unpleasant changes to our young people in their personality and outlook, viz., a dearth of imagination and a lack of heroes.

To be without imagination is to be as a blinkered horse, unable to see but a small portion of the world's wonders and able only to make progress in a straight line, to the urging of an unseen master on our backs. It is not imagination but its absence that bedevils us as a race: the blinkered soul knows only that he follows a path, not where it leads or why he follows it, merely that he must because he can see no alternative.

And to be without heroes is to lack both aspiration and role-model (for which term I am indebted to the scholar Mr Robert Merton; he may have it back when I am done with it), which is alike to lacking a destination and a guide whose advice and example will lead us there. And I tell you, no society can prosper long if it knows neither its course nor why it travels so.

Contrariwise, a life governed only by imagination without aim or guide is a life that will be spent meandering without aim or purpose—unless, as I noted, one is brought to a straight road not by a blinkered mind but by the unfettered and clear sight of an intellect able to see and understand the panorama of every path and opportunity open to it, and able to steer a course by following the example of those who have travelled this way before.

Therefore it is my argument that our world needs young people with imagination and the example of great men to lead them forward. And when I say "great men," I do not mean those who excel at a popular trade, like handsome stage-actors or singers, or those who have achieved fame through sporting triumph, or exposure in the popular press, or politicians: they are but flashes in the pan of history's musket. I mean men of genuine accomplishment, those who have pulled back the curtains of ignorance, doubt, misunderstanding, and fear that are the chief cause of mankind's unhappiness. I mean explorers and leaders, men of great thoughts and great deeds, innovators and pioneers of all warps and woofs, through whose actions the human condition is improved or enlightened. In short, I speak of men like myself.

Accordingly I recommend this my game to all those of noble families whose children have become pale, listless, and artistic through too much reading of novels, drinking of tea, or dancing to the new Viennese waltzes. I recommend it also to parents whose money may not be as old as that of their betters but who aspire for their children to achieve greatness, as well as to anyone who has a shilling and a half for the book.



TO PLAY THE GAME

PRESENT HERE two versions of my game, the first for younger children or older children who have fallen on their heads (or other peoples' heads) or those whose imaginations have grown atrophied and sponge-ish like the brains of the giant crabs of old Nippon. The second version is for their older siblings, who will not burst into tears and run to hide in their nurse's skirts at the hint of a challenge or an insult. But first, as this room is too hot and the chimney is smoking, I will pause for a refreshment.



Though you, my readers, will be unaware that seven months have passed since I penned those last words, I proffer my apologies all the same. In the midst of my repast, I was alerted by the shouts of my host's servants to the approach of an enormous vortex or whirl-wind that stretched from the Earth to the skies like a great funnel and approached the house

at alarming speed. Wasting not a moment, I demanded that the stoutest barrel in the place be brought before me, for I had formed a notion to explore this vortex, to determine its cause and where it led, and also to endeavour to save my host's house, land, and family from destruction. The barrel was brought to the door of the hall, where I leaped into it and instructed the servants to roll it into the path of the vortex, which they duly did.

No sooner had the wind lifted the barrel and thrown it into the heart of the raging storm than I raised the wooden lid and peered out. In part, this was to give me a commanding view of the interior of the vortex, and in part because the barrel had previously been employed for the storage of strong cheese and therein had acquired an odour quite offensive to my nose, as well as a prodigious number of mice that had made it their home. I stared out and watched the land below me soon disappear from view as the Æolian currents whipped my transport higher and higher.

As I neared the top of the whirling wind, I saw shapes circling in the clouds above me. It was not, as I had first guessed, some mischievous god or nature-spirit of a neglected pantheon making trouble upon the Earth nor, as you may have conjectured from my previous adventures, one of the djinni of Persia strayed far from home. No, I tell you, as one of them broke from its circling and swooped down towards me, I saw it for what it was: a witch astride a broomstick, her face twisted by evil into a monstrous visage.

In a flash, I understood their devilry: through an incantation and circling motion of their brooms, they had conjured and sustained the vortex and were guiding its path across the landscape to bring destruction upon their enemies and those of their infernal lord—for my host was not only a noted officer of the law zealous in bringing witches to justice but also a pillar of the church, who the Sunday before had instructed the parson to make a sermon on the very subject of idolatry.

With a cry, the witch drew the attention of her diabolic sisters to my presence in their midst and directed her flight towards me. At this, I perceived that, like the rest of her sisterhood, she carried behind her a familiar spirit in the form of a black cat, and that the besom of the broom was fashioned from twigs of the pussy-willow, still fresh with the catkins of spring.

As the rest of the ærial coven broke away from their circling, my sense of danger at last overcame my sense of astonishment, and I conned the peril in which I lay. Therefore in a trice, I snatched up two handfuls

of mice from the base of the barrel and flung them into the air. As one, the cats screeched and the catkins of the pussy-willow brooms flexed at the sound, since although they are made of wood, their feline nature is strong; indeed the only part of them not imbued with essence of cat is their bark. Accordingly the brooms themselves gave chase to the falling creatures, pulling cats and witches with them in a dive towards the ground. (I heard it said that the mice fell to Earth in the town of Hamelin in Germany, where they were the cause of much trouble, but what happened to the witches and their cats I know not.)

Without the presence of the witches to sustain its energies, the winds of the vortex began to dissipate, and I feared greatly for my life, being at such an altitude that the fall would surely have killed me. But a moment later I felt myself and my hooped craft caught up, and the lid of the barrel was plucked from my hands. I found myself in a golden chariot. I realised at once that it must be that of one of the many Sun-gods that crowd our skies today, and on discerning his statuesque proportions, lack of clothes, and smell of olive oil, I divined I had been rescued by the Grecian master of the Sun, Phœbus, whose halo lights our world as he commutes across the sky.

I bowed to my celestial saviour, who told me that he had mistaken my transport for a cask of best champagne, lifted aloft by the great quantity of bubbles within it, and had grasped it from the air with the intention of quenching the thirst inspired by the heat of his divine task. I explained the reason for his misapprehension and beseeched him that if he would let me alight as he approached close to the earth at the onset of evening, I would ensure that he received two cases of the finest Riesling in my cellar. To this he agreed, and so as the sky began to darken with eve's approach, I re-entered my barrel and was pushed from Phœbus' chariot, down the curve of a convenient rainbow and once more to *terra firma*.

Upon my landing, I was horrified to see a pair of legs stuck out from under my cask and was greatly afeared that I had killed one of the inhabitants of this strange new land, particularly as by this time I was surrounded by a curious group of these people. A moment's deduction allowed me to realise that the skin of these natives was coal-black (little wonder, if the chariot of Phœbus passes so close to them every evening), while that of my victim was white, and I understood that through fortunate accident, I had killed one of the witches who had summoned the vortex and who had clung to my barrel in its transport.



The local people were overjoyed by the death of the witch, being much plagued by their kind, and welcomed me to their country, which they told me was named Oz. From this, I understood that they meant the distant land of Australia, and thus that I had travelled full half-way around the globe. This meant that—

Pray forgive me: I was quite lost in the retelling of my story and had forgot that I was to describe to you the matter of my new game. To bring my narration of this extraordinary tale to a swift conclusion: I and my new companions travelled through several surprising adventures before our curious path led us to a wizard or shaman who taught us the mysteries of his people's world of spirits, which they term the "dream-time." After much instruction from this wizard, I learned how to navigate a course through this time of dreams, and so it was that I returned to the civilised world by travelling through the dream-time while the rest of the world was asleep and climbing back into this country through a convenient portal in a mortal's dreams. And I tell you truly, this is how it came to be that I was discovered in the bed of the Prime Minister's wife this morning.

Disbelieve this story though you may, I can prove the truth of its every word and by a very simple method. I brought the selfsame barrel back with me from the land of Oz and will produce it for the edification of any doubters, who, if they dare to place their heads inside its mouth, will discover that it still retains its same distinct odour of cheese and the original colony of mice.

Now that I have recovered my breath and my spirits, I shall proceed with my description of the game, as I had declared I would. Surprising adventures are all very well, but beware: they interfere greatly with a well-ordered publishing schedule.



TO PLAY THE GAME

I SHALL DIVIDE this chapter into two parts, for that is the number of parts into which it falls: a simpler version for the younger members of the company, and a more challenging set of rules for their older siblings and cousins, or any that have mastered the simpler game and wish to challenge their wits and skill still further. I will not prescribe the ages at which children should be introduced to each version, for I have found that so to do makes young people with a gift for story-telling over-proud and conceited, while there are many older youngsters who are built with the stature of an ox, yet who have been graced by nature with a wit and intelligence equally bovine.

Therefore, I shall commence by describing the more detailed version of my game, in the form that I intend for the more mature among my younger audience, and shall then proceed to the simpler set of rules. In this fashion, my reader, who I presume has already read my description of the full version of my game, may track the system I have devis'd to whittle away at the structure of my first game to create these two new—

But I crave your indulgence, for I grow weary of writing (as I am sure you grow just as weary of reading) new synonyms for these three different volumes of game rules, and I have determined in this moment to create proper names for each. Therefore let us call the grown-up set of rules *Ludens Maximus*, the revised version for older children *Ludens Major*, and that for younger children *Ludens Minor*. This leaves the *minimumus* to be employed once I have devis'd a set of rules for those not yet capable of speech.

—as I say, in this fashion the reader will have—but hold—I have forgot my train, and espy another of more pleasing form and more first-class carriage. Let us make a second sally.

TO PLAY THE GAME

I HAVE CHANGED my mind. I shall begin by describing the simpler form of this new game, or *Ludens Minor*, and shall then expand it in a second section to explain the additional rules by which the play of *Ludens Major* may be achieved. Accordingly I now realise that this section should rightly be titled "*Ludens Minor*," and I have started upon this sally in error. Which reminds me of another Sally upon whom I started in error, but I am reminded that this work is intended for my younger readers, and shall desist.



LUDENS MINOR

TO THE game, then. It is a game with a history almost as long and noble as my nose, having come down to us from ancient Greece, where it was used, so I am informed, as a diversion by the poets Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Apollodorus, and their friends, and which they called "My mythical hero is greater than your mythical hero," except in Greek, a language I have learned four times and forgotten five.

I was told this story and taught an early version of the Greek game not by Phœbus, as you may guess, but by another divinity, Vulcan, whom I met some years ago after jumping into the volcano Etna—the tale is so well known as to not bear a further recounting—who said that he had it from his brother Hephæstus, who in turn had heard the ancients playing it upon Mount Lemnos as he hammered at his forges below the Earth. Vulcan also informed me that when the poets were joined by Æsop, the name of the game was changed to "Your mythical hero may learn an important moral lesson from my talking crow," but I do not know whether I can trust him on this matter. I fear he may have been jesting with me.

The central argument of "My Uncle the Baron," as with my first game, is a sequence of stories, of which each must be grander in scope and vision than the one that came before it. However, in this version each story must follow the theme of the tale that preceded it, and none should be longer than a single line.

To play the game—no, I had the title of the section right before. I shall change it back.

TO PLAY THE GAME

IF I may paraphrase Mrs Glasse, "*First catch your children.*" A selection of between four and six should be sufficient, though more is possible. It may be necessary to provide cakes to bring their attention to the task, though you run the risk of making their focus the cakes and not the game. If this is the first time any of these young people have played the game, then let one or two adults sit among them so that the rules and style of play may be more easily explained.

The game is a game of boasting, as is my more majest— I mean, my *Ludens Maximus*. But in this case, the children must boast not of their own exploits, for two very good reasons: firstly such boasting is unseemly in the young, and secondly if they have had adventures worth the telling at such a tender age, then they are extraordinary indeed. Instead, they tell of the stories they have heard at the knee of their favourite uncle, whom I am too modest to name.

The play proceeds as follows: the player who is to start (being either the oldest or the one who has read these rules, and if they are not the same person, then any dispute should be settled in the traditional way, with fisticuffs when Nurse's back is turned) begins the round by naming or describing one of his famous relative's exploits, for example:

"*My uncle the Baron once duelled with two men at the same time.*"

Though suitable for our purposes here, I believe this is one of my least remarkable stories. Other examples that would suffice include:

"*My uncle the Baron raced on foot against a horse from Vienna to Prague and won.*"

"*My uncle the Baron once shot a deer by loading his musket with cherry-stones.*"

"*My uncle the Baron was once swallowed by a giant whale.*"

"*My uncle the Baron beat the Sultan of Turkey at chess.*"

"*My uncle the Baron discovered an island made of cheese.*"

"*My uncle the Baron once rode upon a fired cannon-ball for a quarter mile.*"

—and if I do not fall asleep too early this evening, I shall add a list of more such to the end of these pages.

If the poor child cannot remember any of his uncle's adventures, or has no uncles to tell him tales of their travels, or worst of all three, has only uncles who are dull, lifeless creatures over-concerned with politics, estate management, and the trading of promissory notes, who do not tell him stories, produce half-crowns from his ears, take him to the theatre, give him his first sword, and show him that not every grown-up is as dull as his parents—if this be the case, then the child is permitted to make up a story of his own out of whole and new cloth: that is to say, from the cloth he imagines himself wearing when he is grown to manhood.



THE FIRST ROUND

THE FIRST child tells his tale, and turns to he who is sitting to his left, who must better the tale with one of his own. Let us return to our first story, for the sake of an example:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with two men at the same time.”

If that is the first child's story, then the second child must tell one that is on the same theme but larger in all natures. Thus he might ponder a moment (give him a few in which to think) and say:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with three men at the same time.”

Though this is a dull reply, lacking in the imagination it is my purpose to encourage, you will see—as any child with an ounce of sense can see—that three men are harder to duel than two. So the story is more extraordinary than the one from which it was spawned, and its teller turns now to the one on his left, who thinks for a moment, and says:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with three men at the same time, using but one pistol.”

or perhaps:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with three men at the same time and convinced them to fight each other, not him.”

Again the tale exceeds its forebear, and again the reasons should be clear: though the number of combatants remains the same, the method by which they were dispatched is remarkable. So we applaud the teller and pass to the next child, who might add as his offering:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with an entire regiment of Prussian hussars.”



What a fine generation we have wrought! What wit and understanding are theirs! What exceptional uncles they have!



CHANGING TACK

IT IS desirable if not essential that each growth of the story take a different tack to the one before. I realise I am not entirely clear in what I say. I have been sampling a dark beer called “Porter,” devised in London some years ago, and I believe I now understand how Britain came to lose the Americas. I shall try to explain a second time.

It is generally agreed (that is to say, I wrote it down and when I read it back I found I agreed with it) that if successive players amplify only one aspect of the story—had the youth above not escalated the story to the level of my feud with the King’s 12th Hussars, a subject which I shall return to shortly, but had told of “my uncle the Baron who fought four men at once,” with or without a single pistol—as I say, it is agreed that while such things are not against the word of the rules, they go against its spirit, and therefore may be CHALLENGED by the company if the company is so inclined. I shall come to CHALLENGES forthwith.

The teller need not amplify all aspects of the story; it is his choice. To follow on with our example, after the tale of the uncle, his three adversaries, and the one pistol, then the next child could have made this response:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with three giants at the same time, using but one pistol.”

or this response:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with three men at the same time, using but one pistol, and that not loaded.”

or, if a bright and educated chit, she might combine the two thus:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with three giants at the same time, using but one unloaded pistol.”



FALTERING AND FALLING

IF THERE be no CHALLENGE to the story, the play continues until a child falters. This must happen to us all: it is a lesson well to be understood that to fail is not to be disgraced, and is a necessity of learning. In the *Ludens Minor*, a child may fail in one of two ways.

In the first way, he may become tongue-tied or confused and unable to recollect or imagine a variation on the previous story before the company tires of waiting.

In the second, he may produce a story that the party judges to be insufficiently extraordinary: that is to say, not more extraordinary than the one that preceded it.

To take an example, one of our young friends might have chosen to follow the tale about the uncle who faced three duellists with but a single pistol with:

“My uncle the Baron once duelled with a great herd of sheep, armed only with a jar of mint sauce.”

What deplorable uncles this child surely possesses, so lacking in both valour and taste. While the tale might lend itself to an amusing anecdote, I doubt that it will exceed the story of fighting three men with but one pistol, and therefore it deserves to be challenged. Press on, my good fellow, for the information on CHALLENGES surely awaits on the following page.

CHALLENGES

ANY MEMBER of the company may make a CHALLENGE to the story-teller if he believes that:

i. The story-teller takes too long to concoct his tale. “Too long” is a matter of taste, and to pull one’s new French half-hunter from one’s waistcoat to dispute the time taken is evidence only of excessive zeal and too much pocket money.

ii. The tale just told is not sufficiently more extraordinary than the one that came before.

I find I have already explained this above, and have thus repeated myself. No matter. The great benefit, I find, of putting one’s thoughts on paper instead of recounting them out loud is that one may go back later and cross out all duplicated, verbose, irrelevant, incoherent, offensive, or libellous material (and among that I include this unnecessary paragraph) before sending the draft to one’s publisher—assuming one remembers, which I assume I will. I shall have these rules down to a single sentence with no more than two commas by the time I am done, I assure you.

If a player is CHALLENGED, he may respond briefly to justify himself, and then it is a matter for the group to decide on the merits of said challenge: a simple vote will suffice, or in many cases the grumbles of the other players will prove sufficient. It is a short rule. I commend it as such.

If the CHALLENGE is declared unfounded, then the player (or if he has finished his turn, then the player to his left) may continue with the game.

If the challenge is found valid, then in all cases the result is the same. That player must absent himself from the play and the table for the rest of the game, and a new round of play is begun, with the child sitting to the left of the now-empty chair of the child who faltered. For though I may have said that there is no disgrace in failure, there should be at least a little punishment.

Though absented players have no more part in the story-telling of this round and may not challenge another player, they may still partake in the discussion concerning a challenged tale. Should they be found to be speaking with cake in their mouths, they should be sent to bed early.

CONTINUING THE PLAY AFTER A
SUCCESSFUL CHALLENGE HAS BEEN MADE,
BUT I SHOULD ADD THAT NO POINTS OR
MERIT ARE GIVEN TO THE CHALLENGER FOR
A SUCCESSFUL CHALLENGE, AND NOW I FEAR
THIS HEADING HAS GROWN TOO LONG AND
MY PUBLISHER SHALL BE CROSS

AND SO we begin a new round, with a new story that each successive player must better or be removed from the circle of play. After a few rounds, there will be but two players left. In this case—as with some of the earlier rounds—a child may find that he must surpass a story that is spawned from one he originally started. Well, I say good for him and better for his imagination. And if there are two players, then at the end of the round there will be just one, and he will be the victor and is allowed first choice of the cakes.

The game in this format is suitable for those who have not yet acquired much learning or who have lost it through an excess of wine, though I have an apprehension that those who have imbibed too much may find even these simple rules too much for them. Should this be the case, I recommend the well-known pastime of “*Quis exit?*,” in which one person leaves the room and the others take turns to remember who it was. If none can recall then they must ask the person on his return, and if he cannot remember either, then it is time to retire to bed. In my experience, this game has but one winner, the innkeeper, who will have been serving inferior claret at a superior price for the last three hours, and for this reason I do not play it myself above two or three times a month.



LUDENS MAJOR

LUDENS MAJOR plays in almost all its manners like *Ludens Minor* save one, and that is in the matter of challenges. As before, any member of the company can challenge on the grounds of excessive

time-wasting or a failure to surpass the previous story, but there is now a third form, this one open only to the player who is next to play.

If it seems fortuitous or opportune, or desirable, or amusing, or the next player is unable to think of any way to surpass the preceding story or has not been paying attention, then instead of telling a tale of greater deeds than the one of the previous teller, he may instead turn back to said teller (*viz.*, the player on his right) to say,

“*Extraordinary! Pray tell us, how did he do that?*”

and we shall call this a PRAY-TELL-US.

The previous story-teller must then expand his previous sentence to the size of a paragraph or so, adding details and decoration to his earlier words as a chef adds herbs, spices, and seasonings to a basic potage to make it into a dish fit for heroes.

If he cannot explain his uncle’s accomplishments to the satisfaction of the company, then he is OUT, and the one who demanded an explanation becomes the one to begin the next round of the game. But if he succeeds, then he is applauded, and he who made the demand is out.

While the teller is providing his explanation, the company may not interrupt to demand expansion or introduce objection, for the matter of interruptions is saved for the clearly superior form of the game, the *Ludens Maximus*.

Which topic reminds me of a rule I have omitted from my original game, my *Ludens Maximus* of ten years past, concerning the matter of WAGERS and STAKES. It is this: that if the company is somewhat drunk, or somewhat impecunious, or without the use of its hands, or without hands altogether, then the matter of STAKES and WAGERS may be omitted entirely, as may the matter of determining a winner. If time is short, then you may also omit the interruptions, the telling of stories, the wine, and even the need for other players, though your enjoyment of the game may suffer in consequence.

I fear I have strayed from my path, and not for the first time. Therefore, to pull myself and my game back to its course, I will furnish a brief conversation in the form of a play, by way of an example of the workings and function of the *Ludens Major*.

BY WAY OF AN EXAMPLE

WHILE THEIR fathers are discussing war and their mothers are discussing their fathers, we find gathered four young members of the nobility of Europe. They are named Albrecht, Bertrand, Clarissa, and Douglas. Albrecht has been taught the *Ludens Major* by his older brother Adolf, and explains it to his friends. Since he understands the game, he commences thus:

ALBRECHT: "*My uncle the Baron once flew to Scotland on the back of a giant eagle.*"

(OMNES: "*Oh! Wonders!*")

BERTRAND: "*My uncle the Baron once flew to India on the back of a giant wasp.*"

(OMNES: "*The Indies! Such a journey!*")

BERTRAND: "*May I have a cake now?*"

NURSE: "*Shush, for it is the turn of Clarissa.*"

CLARISSA: "*My aunt the Baroness once flew to an undiscovered land in the South Seas on the back of the winged horse Pegasus.*"

(OMNES: "*A new land! And a mythic creature! What superior relatives Clarissa has!*")

DOUGLAS: "*My uncle the Baron once flew into the interior of the hollow globe of the Earth on the back of a flying fish!*"

(OMNES: "*A flying fish! How rare!*")

BERTRAND: "*Cake please?*"

CLARISSA: "*Excuse my impertinence, Douglas, but I believe that the winged horse of Greek legend is a more extraordinary being than a flying fish.*"

Here I interrupt my young friends to explain: this is a CHALLENGE, as per the rules of the *Ludens Minor*, not a PRAY-TELL-US. Nonetheless Douglas has a chance to explain himself:

DOUGLAS: "*Perhaps, my lady, but consider that a horse, even one with wings, is a beast fashioned by G-d to be ridden, while a flying fish cannot be saddled and its scales make it slippery to sit upon.*"

(OMNES: "*Good point, good point.*")

Clarissa's challenge is thus overturned by general agreement from the group, and the game continues. Albrecht is sat to the left of Douglas, and so must proceed:

ALBRECHT: "*My uncle the Baron once flew to the Moon on the back of a dragon.*"

(OMNES: "We fear that tale will be hard to beat.")

BERTRAND: "My uncle the Baron once flew to the planet Venus on the backs of two dragons, and found much cake there."

I interrupt again: should Clarissa care to introduce three dragons in her tale, this rash action could give rise to a CHALLENGE; a simple increase in numbers is rarely sufficient to satisfy the company. She would be advised to try another tack, and she does:

CLARISSA: "My aunt the Baroness once flew to the Sun on the back of the Emperor Napoleon Buonaparte."

(OMNES: *alarums and excursions*)

DOUGLAS: "My lady! The Emperor Napoleon!"

CLARISSA: "Indeed, Douglas. It is a most extraordinary story. I would be happy to expand it for you, if you wish..."

Should Douglas call my lady Clarissa's bluff? Has she a story ready prepared? He wilts before her steely eye and her enigmatic smile—a smile much like that of a young Italian lady whose portrait I once commissioned to be painted by an Italian fellow from Vinci during one of my brief visits to the Renaissance; I wonder whatever became of it and him?—and decides instead to tell his own tale:

DOUGLAS: "My uncle the Baron once arose to Heaven itself using only two planks of wood."

Two planks of wood! A derogatory reference perhaps to the cunning and wisdom of the aforesaid Emperor of France? But more to our purpose, is such a diminution of scale satisfactory to the game—from an Emperor to two pieces of wood? Truly, to rise to Heaven with such meagre tools is extraordinary indeed, but whether it is a satisfactory response depends entirely on the decision of those who are playing.

Any member of the company may CHALLENGE Douglas, but Albrecht, being next to play, is the only one who may ask a PRAY-TELL-US question. Which indeed he does:

ALBRECHT: "Extraordinary! Pray tell us, Douglas, how it was your uncle achieved such a remarkable feat?"

A hush falls over the group as Douglas prepares his response:

DOUGLAS: "I am surprised that you ask, Albrecht, for I am sure you will have heard the story before. The two planks of wood were fastened in the shape of a cross by some Romans in Jerusalem, and my uncle was nailed to it, a crown of thorns fixed to his head, and—"

(OMNES: "*Horrors! Blasphemy! Heresy! Cleanse the blasphemer! Call for a priest! Bring wood and a flaming brand! Burn the devil out of him!*")

Though burning one of the participants at the stake is not a usual way to finish a round of my game—unless one is playing in Spain, of course—there is no doubt that Douglas has lost that particular round and will be forced to retire from the game, most likely at sword-point. Once his bone-fire has died down, a new round shall be started; Albrecht shall be the one to begin it with a fresh tale, and it shall be discovered that while the others were watching the *auto-da-fé*, Bertrand has devoured all the cakes.

All in all, I must advise my younger readers to stay well clear of matters of religion in their stories, and in particular those pertaining to sensitive topics such as the bloodline, heritage, and possible descendants of our Lord. Though now I mention the subject, I have recalled what happened with that fellow da Vinci.

I trust from the above that the play of the game is now clear, and there remains nothing further but for me to retire to my bed with the satisfaction of a good evening's work behind—

—but no, for one of my lately arrived company has been perusing the early pages of this my manuscript, and has asked me how it was that I became stuck in a snow-drift near Salzburg with the Empress of Russia, when the Empress is known to have a great allergy to Salzburg such as would bring her out in vapours, fits, and the dropsy should she venture within a hundred miles of that town.

There is a grand answer to this question, and to many others arising from it, but I find that some fool hath finished the last bottle of Madeira-wine. It may have been me, in which suit I must observe it is a filthy sour brew fit only for flavouring sauces, curing shoe-leather, and selling to the Dutch, and moreover the bottles are too small. While I wait for my glass to be filled with something more palatable, I shall turn my mind to the list of stories I mentioned earlier. A Munchausen is only as good as his word, and though I may say it myself, I believe my words here have surpassed even the highest standards of this Age of Letters. Should any man disagree, I will see him at Chalk Farm, with as many friends and whichever weapons he may care to bring, to give him a lesson in literary criticism and when it is best to hold one's tongue, lest someone else hold it for you.

MY UNCLE THE BARON ONCE...

Being a selection of brief stories suitable for commencing the game, for those without the imagination or the uncles to provide their own.

- ...crossed the English Channel on a sea-horse.
- ...found a gold mine in Wales.
- ...shot two pheasants with the same bullet.
- ...built a bridge across the Rhine in a single day.
- ...drank a whole gallon of milk.
- ...met the ghost of William Shakespeare.
- ...swallowed a guinea.
- ...was fired a hundred yards from a cannon.
- ...saw a hawk before the hawk could see him.
- ...made fire by striking two flints together.
- ...lead a flotilla of airships into the future.
- ...captured a platoon of Turkish soldiers by pretending to be a bear.
- ...caught a musket-ball that a bandit had fired at him.
- ...found the Empress of Russia's ring inside a hen's egg.
- ...escaped the Siege of Vienna in a hot-air balloon.



- ...wrote a play in an afternoon.
- ...crossed the Charing Cross Road in a single leap.
- ...saved the infant Princess of Spain from a wild lion.
- ...caught a salmon in his boot.
- ...heard a cock crow from a mile away.
- ...escaped from the Turkish Army on half a horse.
- ...captured a French cannon single-handed.
- ...shot a giant rabbit and dined off it for a week.
- ...turned an oak tree into a ship in a single day.
- ...invented the sandwich.
- ...bit a mad dog, causing it to become sane.
- ...discovered a cave wherein lay a pirate's treasure.
- ...grew a beanstalk as high as a house.
- ...stole a diamond as big as a pigeon's egg from the Tower of London.
- ...rode his horse backwards for half a mile.
- ...hid a dog under his hat.
- ...caused the White House in Washington to turn blue.
- ...built a house out of glass.
- ...was swallowed by a huge fish.
- ...fetched a bottle of brandy from Moscow in less than a day.
- ...talked to King Louis XVI half an hour after his head was cut off.
- ...bought a horse for a penny.
- ...escaped from the Bastille by tunnelling under the wall with a spoon.
- ...composed the National Anthem of Lichtenstein with the aid of a sparrow.
- ...rescued a princess from the harem of the Grand Seignior of Turkey.
- ...swam the length of the River Thames in a day.
- ...tamed a wild boar and kept it as a pet.
- ...escaped from a pursuing bandit by borrowing a hot-air balloon.
- ...used his hunting-dog's sense of smell to find the Queen of England's lost handkerchief.
- ...fell from a barn roof without injuring himself.
- ...escaped from a crocodile in Africa.
- ...caught a cloud.
- ...built a bridge across the Grand Canal in Venice in a day.
- ...invented the continuous-action loom.
- ...met a man who had eaten a kettle.
- ...owned a parrot that could count to five.
- ...sneezed so hard that his nose flew off.



MY SHORTER UNCLE THE BARON

The rules of the game explained in briefer style by one among the Baron's good friends.

THE PLAYERS gather in a circle. The oldest begins the game by briefly describing an extraordinary feat that his uncle may have performed. Proceeding clockwise, each player must describe a similar story built on the one before it but with the details changed to make the new tale different from, and even more extraordinary than, the ones before.

If a player is unable to think of a better story than the one told by the player on his right, or if he is CHALLENGED by another player and the company agrees that his story is less good than the one before, then he is eliminated from the game.

After a CHALLENGE, a new round starts. The player who was CHALLENGED, or the player to the left of his empty chair, describes a new feat, and the game continues as above.

The game continues until all players but one have been eliminated. The remaining player is the winner. Eliminated players may still take part in discussions and votes on the quality or otherwise of stories told.

Optionally, the player whose turn it is may, instead of telling a greater story, turn to the preceding player and ask for him to expand his story by saying, "PRAY TELL US, how did he do that?" The preceding player must furnish a short explanation of the story he has outlined, to the satisfaction of the company. If he succeeds, then his challenger is eliminated. If he fails, he is eliminated. In either case, a new round is begun.

EPILOGUE

I HAVE BEEN joined by some grand fellows who know me of old, lately returned from Hungary, and they have brought with them some rare tokay of seven *puttonyos*—"but Baron," you exclaim, "there is no tokay rated above six *puttonyos*," and I say that in this you speak truly, for now we have drunk the last of it—and I feel my spirits lifted as if my collar had been grasped by the gryphon that lifted me from the midst of a banquet in Copenhagen some years ago.

In that matter the fault was mine, for I was wearing a coat with a rabbit-fur collar that the gryphon, which had been asleep in the rafters for some two centuries, where it had been mistaken for an heraldic carving, in its turn mistook for its wild prey. A simple error, one both easy to make and easy to rectify, for as the mythic beast flew with me towards the great west window of the hall, I snatched up the hat of one of the entertainers, conveniently a magician, and produced from it a real rabbit that convinced the great creature to let me go in exchange for that more palatable morsel. But I am digressing.



The friends I mentioned have prevailed upon me to tell one of my tales, and I find, having made mention of it above and also in the earlier parts of this work, that the time has come for me to spread abroad the true story of the King's Own 12th Hussars and how I earned their ire so long ago.

I have heard it said by others that this is truly the most extraordinary of my adventures, involving as it does not just the Hussars but also incidents of misadventure, peradventure, high adventure, high treason, a different snow-drift near Salzburg and indeed a different Empress of Russia, and the transmission of a curious and painful ailment that I can only call “Munchausen by doxy”—and I am pleased to agree with these august critics. This story is indeed my finest, and I am pleased to at last commit it to the printed word and thus to immortality.

How many stories of history have been lost because of a lack of a suitable recorder to recall the details, or a narrator to give sufficient gravitas to its retelling? Like a cannon-ball, a good tale requires enough force to propel it through the zephyrs of history. Would we today know the history of Macbeth if Shakespeare had not rescued that monarch from the mire of Scottish history and held him up as an example to the world of why we should not trust men who wear skirts? Would Odysseus still be sailing the Mediterranean if Homer had not guided him home to Ithaca every time that he sung his story? Would I myself have any legacy if I had not thrown aside a nobleman’s customary robe of modesty and recounted my stories? (That last question is rhetorical, since I have known its answer ever since I travelled to the year 2057 with the aid of a miraculous machine created by my late friend Mr Benjamin Franklin. In that year, the whole world is flooded and the cities are suspended in the air by great balloons called *Munchausens* for the quantity of rare hot gases in them, so I know I have an immortality of a strange, bulbous kind.)

But my friends are becoming ribald, and I must proceed with my tale.

It so happened that I was travelling through the Alps during the winter of 17— when, in a remote pass, I came across a curious sight: a field of snow covered entirely in the uniforms of the King’s Own 12th Hussars, with weapons, medals, saddles, tack, and all, as if an entire regiment had vanished suddenly into the air. No footprints or marks of horses were visible to mine eye, but at the centre of the field stood a small child whose laughter rang out through the cold air. In a moment I realised that the figure was no child but someone, or in truth something, that I had met before upon my travels: that most bone-chilling of...

But the main course has arrived, I am famished, and now that I recall it, the story is perhaps not so interesting as a really good steak of venison. I shall return to this subject another time; fear not.





VOLUME III



PREFACE, PART 3

AT LAST WE HAVE COME TO THE POINT WHERE the streams cross, where the tiny tributary of this game, having branched away from the great current of the River Munchausen and wended its way through English counties for two centuries, comes back at last to the spring that gave it birth.

It was at the Internationale Spieltage Game Festival in Essen last year that I was approached by a gentleman some years my senior, of distinguished bearing and distinctive nose, who introduced himself as Alexandyr Hieronymous Grigoriyev Munchausen, formerly of Saint Petersburg and before that of Leningrad, but now a resident of Vienna and no less a person than a descendant—the sole surviving descendant, so he said—of the great and late Baron of similar name.

Over a dinner of a great quantity of cooked meats and local wines, I learned more of his lineage and history. He was of Russian extraction, being part of a dynasty that had sprung from a secret dalliance between the Baron and a Russian lady of high station, who for reasons of decorum and not upsetting historians must remain anonymous, though I gather that a snowdrift near Salzburg may have been involved. Our conversation roved far and wide, for Alexandyr was a man of a certain vintage who claimed a profusion of extraordinary adventures of his own: he had pursued a number of careers in the former Soviet bloc before the drawing of the Iron Curtain, and an equally diverse number of different careers since.

The dinner was long and well lubricated. Many of my companion's delightful anecdotes have since slipped my mind, but I particularly recall the story of his involvement with the Russian space programme to land remotely controlled vehicles on the Moon in the late 1960s: the Lunokhod missions. He told me how it was discovered at the last minute that the electric apparatus within the vehicles would fail in the freezing tem-

peratures of space, how he bravely volunteered to travel hidden within the probe and operate it on the lunar surface so that the Soviet Union would not lose face, and how the mission proceeded, thus making him secretly the fourth man on the Moon (his illustrious ancestor being the first, of course, and Armstrong and Aldrin the second and third) in a manner that meant his accomplishment could never be publicly acknowledged.

Sadly, I do not recall the manner in which he returned from the Moon, though I do remember his tragic description of the ruins of the civilisation of “Moon-People” he found there—brought low, he claimed, by the bacteria within a careless sneeze from Neil Armstrong, clearly audible in the recordings of the American’s brief time on the lunar surface. I also remember Alexandyr’s assertion that on his return he was awarded the Order of Lenin, not by General Secretary of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev, but by Lenin himself, roused from his ageless sleep in his so-called “tomb” in Red Square specially for the occasion.

He told me how he had grown rich under communism, having supplied not only the iron for the Iron Curtain but also all the pigs at the Bay of Pigs and the salt for the SALT II meetings. But since the fall of the Berlin Wall, such opportunities had been snatched away from him by bureaucrats, lawyers, and criminals—“but I repeat myself,” he said—and he had been reduced to living at the level of the ordinary citizens of his country. Alexandyr had earned a meagre wage as a speechwriter and as the performer inside the Boris Yeltsin fat-suit that was deployed for occasions of state when the great leader was incapable of attending himself.

He spoke too of the collapse of the Soviet Union and his own part in it. During the 1980s, he had been involved in a top-secret project: working within the Dorodnicyn Computing Centre in Moscow to create a new form of brick that would allow the USSR to enlarge and strengthen the Berlin Wall by stealth. Alexandyr had designed not one but seven different types of brick that fitted together in endless permutations to form stable yet unpredictable structures. Alas, he claimed, one of his colleagues had stolen his code and rewritten it into a surprisingly popular computer game. Moreover, although the bricks were used in the Berlin Wall and a number of other notable Russian construction projects in the 1980s, they also had been part of the reason behind the fall of the Wall.

“One long, thin one dropped in the wrong place,” he observed, shaking his head ruefully, “and the whole business came tumbling down.”

As the meal drew to a close, Alexandyr Grigoriyev Munchausen made clear to me that he had sought me out for a specific reason. Our



meeting was not, as I had imagined, an effect of the strange field of synchronicity and random adventure that surrounds all those whose paths intertwine with the Munchausen lineage. Nor was it fate that had brought him to Germany, to Essen, and into my presence. No, it was the hand of purpose that had manoeuvred us together, and moreover a hand that was shortly to be extended for money.

Alexandyr made it known that he had become aware of my publishing of my ancestor's commission and his ancestor's work, and he expressed his gratification at the reception and audience it had received. In particular, he was glad it had sold so well, since by his calculation I owed him back-royalties for two centuries of sales of the game, not to mention interest on the unpaid advance on the original printing of the book (destroyed save for a single copy in 1808; see page 44) and other such sundry monies as would bankrupt me entirely.

In vain I tried to explain the intricacies of modern international copyright legislation to him. He produced from his case a yellowed document with two illegible signatures that he claimed was the original contract between his ancestor and mine, clearly stating that royalties were to be paid "in perpetuity until the Last Trump, or the end of the World, or until this contract is ended by mutual agreement." No record existed of any such mutual agreement and the world is still here, and therefore, he argued, his paperwork was still legally binding.

Now, he said, if I did not agree to make payment in an amount agreeable to him and particularly disagreeable to myself, he would be forced to resort to the law to obtain the pecuniary rewards that he felt were due to his family.

I explained the nature of games publishing, and that the best way to make a small fortune in the games business is to start with a large one, but he would have none of it.

“Is there no alternative?” I asked.

“I could challenge you to a duel,” he suggested, and I saw a twinkle in his eye that I believe my ancestor John would have recognised. I declined the offer of a fight—to the death or anywhere else—and as I did I saw his attention slip for a moment across the room, not to the array of bottles behind the bar but to a pile of games that another Spiel attendee had left on a table. I saw a possible advantage, and pressed it.

“Do you have an interest in games?” I enquired.

My lucky suspicion proved correct. The ludic atmosphere of the Spiel festival had turned Alexandyr’s head and awakened in him a forgotten or suppressed desire to be a game designer. (I have long held that these urges have a genetic basis, as demonstrated in my own case.) On the back of a napkin, we devised and signed an agreement: I would give him a trial as a designer, and if the results were satisfactory we would proceed to a full release of a new game, the revenue of which would be offset against the royalties owed.

“What manner of trial do you have in mind?” he asked.

I was about to voice some suggestions when he interrupted:

“I have been thinking on the matter of the game that—that my ancestor Hieronymous wrote two centuries ago. Perhaps we could discuss another expansion for that?”

Suspicious that I was stepping into a trap, I cautiously agreed. Alexandyr clapped his hands with pleasure and, seeing that the noise had summoned the wine-waiter, ordered a bottle of Trockenbeerenauslese to celebrate, charging it nonchalantly to my room. It was clear that the apple had not fallen far from the tree, nor the grape from its vine.

We sat up the rest of the night concocting an additional set of rules for the game—I had suggested a single expansion; he obliged with twelve—along with some opinions and exposition from the author that would have not sounded amiss coming from his great ancestor. What follows is the largely unedited transcript of those hours, during which Alexandyr reclined in an armchair beside the fire in the bar of my hotel, and I sat at the table transcribing. The bartender gave up around half-way through and left the keys with us.

The results were, I hope you will agree, extraordinary.

COMRADES

AND SO TO begin,” declared the Baron’s descendant Alexandyr, pouring himself a glass of cognac, “let us first explore a territory familiar to me, being the homeland of many of my own feats of extraordinary ability. I speak, of course, of my former mother country Russia, as it was in the golden age of communism, together with its little brothers that came together to form the great and extended family of the Soviet Union.

“The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a place where all men and women were equal, or at least were equal in the eyes of society, and it may be fairly said that if ever there was a Society of Spectacles then this was it, for its shortsightedness in this regard could have been considered a national policy of state-ordered myopia. Still, though, it was a country whose disdain for those of noble birth made it a modern utopia and an example to the rest of the world, albeit one where it was sometimes difficult to obtain bread.

“Therefore, without further ado, let us describe how to transform the Baron’s game into what became known in the streets, apartments, and KGB listening centres of Russia as:”

*The People’s Glorious Storytelling Game for the Collectivisation
of Moral Lessons and Potato Harvesting, or
SOVIET IT GOES*

THE GAME is set against the background of the Soviet Union in its heyday. Each of the players must take on the role of a member of its mighty Proletariat, which is to say they are all people—and not just any people but comrades and heroes of the USSR, each responsible for a great and glorious endeavour that has strengthened the State, brought joy to the hearts of his fellow comrades, unearthed the scurrilous deeds of the counterrevolutionaries, and sent the capitalists running home to their paymasters to have their wounds licked.

These heroes are gathered together, perhaps after a glorious and successful meeting of the local Communist Party Committee on the Maintenance of Pavements, Cobblestone Subcommittee. They sit and drink vodka, and reminisce about their great deeds in the service of the Revolution, the Party, the Proletariat, the Soviet, the Cobblestone Subcommittee, and Mother Russia herself. These deeds may include the

achievement of scientific advances (“Tell me, comrade, how it was you discovered that penicillin could be distilled from tractor parts?”), feats of bravery or cunning (“How was it that you prevented the capitalist stooges Pink Floyd from knocking down the Berlin Wall, comrade?”), subterfuge against the enemy (“Describe once more how you persuaded the CIA to build a replica of the Kremlin in Disneyland”), valour in war (“The Eastern Front...that was you, was it not, comrade?”), secret projects (“The Tunguska Event...that also was you, was it not, comrade?”), or simply great works in the service of our fellow men and women (“How was it that you served borscht to every family in Lenin-grad, comrade?”)

Play progresses as in the Baron’s game, with the twin substitution that fine wines and liquors must be replaced with vodka, and the coins that would normally clatter across the table should have their places taken by potatoes. If potatoes are not available, another root vegetable will suffice. Myself, I find that round slices of carrot or parsnip work well.

In addition, since no true-blooded member of the Communist Party should accept undue reward for his services to the state, each story must conclude with the phrase “For these actions, I was awarded the Order of Lenin.” This signals the end of each tale and prepares the gathering for the commencement of the next.

All stories are equal, but comrades may decide among themselves which is the most equal. Moreover, once a comrade has amassed sufficient pieces of root vegetable before him, he must go and prepare a stew for the others.

Fig 5: The even more rare and prized Order of Munchausen. Only one of these medals was ever struck, but no official records exist as to whom it was awarded.



PROTAGONISTS

“DO NOT recall” said Alexandyr, refreshing his glass from a new bottle, “whether my ancestor revealed to your ancestor one of his most intriguing stories—of the time he became lost in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and was only able to find his way out by opening a book he knew well, reading until he became immersed within it, then making his way through the locations it described until he reached a passage that led him to an exit in the bedchamber of the Marquise de Pompadour in Versailles. You do not know it? Perhaps it is one of the tales that is only recorded in our family lore. I have relatives who dismiss it as an excuse concocted by the Baron on being discovered *in flagrante delicto* with the King’s—well, precisely, you have the thing in a nutshell, and I have never seen a reason to doubt the Baron’s veracity here or anywhere else. But the matter puts me in mind of another angle for my game: that of the world of literary characters and their various exploits.”

The Baron’s Game for Those Who Have Read Too Many Novels, or GUTENBERG’S REVENGE

IN THIS style of play, all the members of the company take on the roles of well-known characters from well-known literary works. Before the play begins, each identifies himself to the company, as the following examples show:

“*I am Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. I am interested in the theatre, swordfighting, and the supernatural,*”

or “*Though it is very forward of me to introduce myself, I am Elizabeth Bennet of Meryton, a young lady apparently much in want of a husband,*”

or, quite simply, “*Me Tarzan,*”

or something else along those vines—er, lines. It is important that the character be able to (a) speak, and (b) speak English, or at least a language that the rest of the company can understand. I recall one evening when one who was in his cups insisted that he would play the role of the Gadarene swine, which he did to such a realistic and unpleasant degree that the thing was only brought to a conclusion when I sold him to a pig farmer for half a guinea.

Play proceeds as usual, with the following two alterations to the basic game:

1. The stories that each participant is challenged to tell must be based upon a well-known literary work, in a manner thus:

“Miss Bennet, if I may be so bold to impose on a young lady of your delicate sensibilities, would you share with the company the enlightening story of how your quest for a husband caused the decline and fall of the Roman Empire?”

or *“Prince Hamlet, I once heard you comment that a cloud you saw in the sky was very like a whale. Being a white cloud, it could only have resembled the great white whale Moby Dick, which I know you played a part in locating and killing. Pray tell us more,”*

or *“Doctor Frankenstein, I am intrigued to hear your insights into a perplexing case that I know you investigated, that of a patient of yours who awoke to discover he had turned into a giant beetle,”*

or *“My dear Mr Holmes, now that you have restrained your monstrous hound, would you be so generous as to tell us how you brought to justice the true killer of Romeo and Juliet?”*



2. The storyteller must then tell the story as requested. Bonus points are awarded for combining one's own narrative with the one demanded: Hamlet, therefore, would do well if he described how he set out to avenge the deaths at sea of his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and fought a mighty duel with the whale—which, having been discovered to be a narwhal, was equipped with a fierce rapier of its own suitable to the challenge. Indeed, that is such a fine tale that I regret not having thought of it myself, having heard it from the late Prince of the Danish myself, via the lips of a young actor so caught up in his part that the ghost of the tragic hero was able to possess his body and give what I can only call a most spiritual performance. But I fear I am straying from the purpose, and the night is playing out. Is there any more of that cognac? A little? Very well, pass it here.

One can, if one is so moved, do a similar thing with characters and well-known stories from the modern idioms of cinematic and televisual entertainment. For example, "Tell me, Mister Bond Jamesbond, of the time that you saved London from the threat of— of—"

Here my collaborator seemed to falter. "Daleks?" I suggested.

He drained his glass with a deep draught, and as he lowered it and held it out for more, I noticed his face was paler than I had seen it before. "Do not speak to me of such things," he said.

STORY IDEAS FOR THE UNDERLITERATE

Part of the pleasure of this iteration of the Baron's pursuit is in the juxtaposition of character and narrative, so the tales below may not be suitable for every occasion. Mix and match or fix and hatch to the content of your heart and the confusion of your enemies.

"Tell us, my dear [name], of the time you tripped down a rabbit hole and what you found there."

"My dear [name], I desire to hear of your role in the arrival of and ensuing unpleasantness with the denizens of the Red Planet."

"I am most desirous to hear why you took it into your head to destroy the last representative of that ancient and noble European lineage, the Dracula family."

"Do recount for us the tale of the practical joke you visited upon old Ebenezer Scrooge last Christmas."

"What exactly was your involvement in the matter known as 'the Cinderella catastrophe'?"

INVENTORS

TALK HAD turned to the new games on show at Essen, and Alexandyr had been praising their inventiveness. “I have great respect for both the engines of creation and the creation of engines,” he said, “and that includes game engines. Indeed, my admiration goes to all who build new things, whether from whole cloth or by reassembling what has gone before. And since we are dealing with a game about creation—”

“In what sense?” I asked. “Surely the stories on which the Baron based his game were true in every word!”

“Every word indeed,” Alexandyr said, “but what is created by the play of the game is an environment within which the less high-born and fortunate may experience for themselves what it is like to be an adventurer and hero, and to spend time in the company of such. Not that anyone is truly high-born these days. But to return to my subject, a game of creation should pay homage to other forms of creation, and thus I propose to you—”

*The Baron's Game of Improving the World
through Invention and Novelty, or
PATENT NONSENSE*

IN THIS alteration of the game, it is the Age of Invention, viz., the reign of Queen Victoria, an era when any person could rise to fortune and greatness through the creative power of the mind, and the world was changed almost daily by new machines, the discovery of new substances, and the devising of fresh scientific principles.

All the players take the parts of scientists, inventors, and other geniuses of engineering and creativity at a gathering where they discuss each other's work and enquire of each other's recent advances.

Story seeds in this version take one of four forms:

1. An enquiry after a particular invention of the storyteller (“So tell us, Sir Charles, how go the tests on your Prolific Delunafying Ray for removing excess moons from the sky?”)

2. A request for description of a scientific discovery or principle revealed by the storyteller, together with its practical application (“Lady Roberts, how was it that your recent work upon the theory of evolution aided you in defeating the vampiric plague in Glasgow?”)



3. A question of how one solved a particular problem, whether scientific (“Have you cured your invisibility yet, Carruthers? Carruthers?”) or more mundane (“Congratulations on your eradication of the Great Stink in London, Professor. I know you have been sworn to secrecy by the Prime Minister, but surely you can tell us how you achieved it?”)

4. A question of how a rival scientist’s or inventor’s discovery can be disproved or done away with (“I gather Tompkinson’s Self-Guided Chimney-Sweeping Automaton is still at large in the sewers of Manchester. Surely, Lord Tooting, you can devise a way to bring its reign of terror to an end and let the populace sit upon a water closet again without fearing the thrust of a broom from below?” or “I gather that prize ass Röntgen has demonstrated what he calls the X-ray. Can’t you do something to discredit his nonsense, Your Highness?”)

Thereafter, play proceeds as in the standard game, with stakes, challenges, and so on. One must take care to ensure that the more mechanical of the company do not substitute brass washers and cogwheels for their coins. Such things are held to be without value by innkeepers and sommeliers, and there is always the risk that someone might use them to construct an alcohol-powered automaton before the evening is out, which is always disruptive to a well-ordered session.

SUPERNATURAL

ALEXANDYR RAISED himself from his armchair to stoke the fire, which had not benefited from the inferior claret he had poured on it some moments previously, and I took the opportunity to begin a different topic of conversation. "One of the things I have always enjoyed about your ancestor's game," I said, "is the amalgam of two opposing points of view that together give it a delightful mix of rational and irrational elements, arising from the year in which it is set."

"17—?" Alexandyr asked rhetorically. "A fine year. A couple of notable battles and some very good vintages."

"I do not mean 17— precisely," I replied, "but the period around it. The moment when the Age of Enlightenment gave way to the Age of Science and the Industrial Revolution was about to hit full speed, yet magic and mythology held as much sway in the minds of the people as it had in the Dark Ages. People still believed in these things with sober earnest—"

"What things?" Alexandyr asked.

"Monsters," I said, "mysticism, mumbo-jumbo, manias, mythological, and melanges of magical mysteries. The folktales and superstitions of centuries of country stories, the—" but I could tell from his expression that my companion did not agree.

"All true," he said.

"True?"

"To a greater or lesser degree, but all true. Strange phenomena that were previously ascribed to gods, magic, or the devil are now put down to science. Today, a shape in the sky or a wandering dot against the darkness of night is an aeroplane or a satellite, or Chinese fire lanterns, or luminous bats escaped from a CIA laboratory. A hundred years ago they were phantom airships; a hundred earlier, they were floating islands; and before that, they were angels or witches on broomsticks. The lights remain the same; only the explanations change."

"What are they, though?" I asked. "These lights in the sky?"

"Venus," Alexandyr said. "Always Venus. She loves a practical joke. But as I was saying, it was Malaclypse the Younger who observed that all things are true, even false things. And the supernatural denizens of yesterday have made homes for themselves in today's world, if you only know where to look—which reminds me of a drinking session with some compadres in the recent past. Is your pen charged?"

The Baron's Game for Metaphysical and Metamental Beings, or
THE MONSTER MASH-UP

WITHIN THIS variant of the game, players are respected and accomplished members of modern society, and also secretly supernatural beings. The stories they tell are based on the problems of balancing the two sides of their lives: facets of everyday existence in this century that conflict directly with the bizarre and unique issues that stem from being a monster. It is the job of the storytellers to explain how they have reconciled the two.

Players may be any manner of non-normal humanlike entities, including ghosts and other spirits, werewolves, vampires, humanoid aliens, humanoid robots, animated statues, living dolls, angels, demons, elementals, elves, dwarves, orcs, ogres, naiads, dryads, maenads, muses, beast-creatures such as minotaurs or a collection of small dogs inside a greatcoat, golems, homunculi, and all the varieties of undead.

However, it is not the players who choose their own identities, but the person who gives them the cues for their stories. Therefore, when player A is giving player B a seed for a story, that seed must contain both a role or even a name for the player's character and a secret supernatural nature at odds with that role. Thus:

"Tell us how you became the first person on the Moon while you were infected with lycanthropy."

"How is it you have become England's top goal-scorer despite being a ghost and therefore unable to make physical contact with a football, or indeed anything else?"

"Brain surgery... not an obvious career for a zombie."

"I believe that you combine two careers: Archbishop of Canterbury by day and Arch-Prince of the Hordes of Hades by night. Surely there are problems with crucifixes and midnight mass and such things?"

"Nice tan, Lady Dracula. How did you get it?"

and so on.

Beyond that, the game proceeds by the standard rules. At the end, the players vote for the person who has described a double life in the most convincing and amusing fashion, and then all vow to never reveal each other's secrets to the outside world.

VETERANS

WHILE I APPLAUD the many advances of this modern world and its society, so different from the time of my youth,” Alexandyr mused, “I deplore the recent trend of scepticism, the idea that an opinion is as valid as a fact, and moreover, the way that people today feel they have a right of reply, to say nothing of answering back.”

“I agree,” I said, testing the bottle of Sauternes that Alexandyr had left next to my pad of paper and finding it empty. “The tendency to be disrespectful of the knowledge and experience of their elders is a sad indictment on the lack of moral fibre in young people today.”

“I said nothing of the young,” said Alexandyr, who had acquired a fresh bottle from somewhere and was not offering it to me. “I was thinking more of underlings, orderlies, and junior officers, and their deplorable habit of correcting their superiors’ reports with their half-cocked ideas about what really went on. Fog of war—pfaugh! The steam of an overheated sense of self-importance, more like it. Have you ever sat in on a proper after-battle debrief?”

I owned that I had not.

“The amount of to-and-fro, the one-upmanship, the relentless attempts at point-scoring by aggrandising one’s own feats and putting down one’s fellows’: it is remarkable. It puts me in mind of something... what is it; it lies on the tip of my tongue...”

I asked if he meant his ancestor’s game.

“No, that’s not it. Politics: that’s the beast I was thinking of. But now that you mention the game, there’s an overlap there that we might use to our advantage. Put down that glass—it’s empty anyway—and prepare to flex your scribbling muscles for...”

The Baron’s Game of Possibly Inaccurate Historical Recollections, or REWRITE-ONLY MEMORIES

IN THIS version, all the players are characters who were involved in an important event that happened many years ago. They all remember it slightly differently, and the purpose is to establish once and for all what happened and who the true heroes of the day were.

The person who owns the game goes first. That person briefly describes a chosen event—battles are popular, though so are expeditions, disasters, shipwrecks, and weddings—as well as the role the game owner played in it. Events can be real (the Battle of Waterloo, the Great Fire of London, the Russian Revolution), fictional but well known (the War of the Worlds, the Marriage of Figaro), made up on the spot by the storyteller, or any mixture of the three.

For example:

“I am Admiral Nicholas Haddock, Commander of the British fleet during the War of Jenkins’ Ear which, as anyone knows, was the opening engagement of the Hundred Ears’ War.”

The other players now go around introducing themselves and giving a very brief description of their role or duties during the event in question. They should all be at least nominally on the same side of any conflict that is about to be described. So, following on from the admiral’s introduction above:

“I am Toby Pode, a powder monkey on the ship Revolve. I am eleven years old.”

“I am Christian Fletcherson, Captain of the Revolve, the flagship of Admiral Haddock’s fleet.”

“I am Admiral Benedict Fletcherson, commanding the Second Squadron of the fleet. I am Christian Fletcherson’s older brother.”

“I am Polly, ship’s parrot on the Orbital, the leading ship of the Second Squadron.”

The storyteller begins to recount memories of the event, particularly describing actions the character personally undertook to make the day a glorious triumph. At any point, another player may interrupt, as per the usual Munchausen rules, but saying, “I don’t believe you recall that correctly,” and proceeding to put forward another version of the action in question, which will naturally cast some shadows over the highlights of the storyteller’s version, while shining brightly on the challenger’s part in it.

A storyteller or a challenger is also permitted to introduce the other players into the speaker’s version of the history and to describe what they were doing (and how lamentably they were failing at their duties due to incompetence, cowardice, lack of physical or mental agency, being a spy for

the enemy, having soiled themselves, or so on). A person so included may challenge or, if a challenge is already underway, may pass coins to one or another of the parties involved in the dispute. However, that party is under no obligation to use those coins in the dispute.

This sprightly exchange is accompanied by the simultaneous exchange of coins, mentioned briefly above but not properly explained there: an omission for which I apologise, the fault being with the Englishman who has failed to keep my glass sufficiently filled. What is this? Patxaran? It'll do. Anyway, these things are resolved with the usual Munchausen rules for such things. Whoever wins the bidding contest is (a) the person whose version of that particular action is correct in this instance, and (b) now the storyteller until someone else interrupts to take control of the story. The other person takes the money.

A typical exchange might go like this:

ADMIRAL HADDOCK: "*The day dawned fair, and I gave the order for all ships to strike the gunwale lanyards and sail tackwise to lubbard of the Spanish fleet with canvas half-bent and full ahead all—*"

CAPTAIN FLETCHERSON: "*But Admiral, you recall that incorrectly. The order to sail was given by Polly, the parrot of the Orbital, who had flown to the Revolve with a message attached to its leg requesting more grog.*"

HADDOCK: "*Nonsense! I was firm in my resolve...*"

CAPTAIN FLETCHERSON: "*You were asleep in your cabin.*"

POLLY: "*Do I get a say in this?*"

CAPTAIN FLETCHERSON: "*Not unless it's 'Pretty Polly.' But you may give myself or the Admiral some coin to intercede on your behalf.*"

POLLY (passes two coins to Admiral Haddock): "*Object to this vile libel against us both!*"

HADDOCK (studying the coins and putting them in his pocket, as well as the ones upon the table): "*Upon recollection, I believe you are right, Fletchererson. The parrot did give the order. What else do you recall?*"

POLLY: "*Treachery! Betrayal! Polly shall have revenge!*"

CAPTAIN FLETCHERSON: "*The brave ship Revolve led the First Squadron into the attack, the Second Squadron being delayed in chasing a rather pulchritudinous mermaid that its commanding officer claimed to have sighted...*"

Once a fact is established by dint of being argued over, it becomes set in stone and cannot be revisited or changed.

If any player runs out of coins, then that player is declared the scapegoat. Lacking the capital for further defence, such a player must take the blame for everything that has gone wrong. The pauper may take no further part in the recollection of the event until the player can gain any additional coins, because it has already been established that it is all the player's fault, and who would trust the word of such a person anyway?

The game ends when the current storyteller decides it should end, declaring, "And the rest is history." Coins are added up and pocketed, and play no further part in the game. Starting with the player to the left of the storyteller, each person gives a brief overview of how history regards that person's participation in and contributions to the success or otherwise of the event, and the other players vote on whether this is in fact the case. If the vote fails, each player gets to describe one facet of how that character is truly memorialised in the annals of time. Thus, in the case of Admiral Haddock:

HADDOCK: "*After the battle, I was elected to Parliament, and a grateful nation placed a statue of me upon a column next to that of Nelson in Trafalgar Square, but slightly taller.*"

(The vote upon this is taken among all the players, and fails 4–1.)

TOBY PODE: "*Admiral Haddock bribed his way into Parliament, where he attempted to pass a bill for his own column. Enough money was raised for a small plinth but no column or statue.*"

CAPTAIN FLETCHERSON: "*A plaque was attached to the base of the plinth, on which the Admiral's name was misspelled as 'Headache.'*"

ADMIRAL FLETCHERSON: "*Soon the plinth and plaque were quite eroded away, such was the great number of dogs encouraged to widdle upon it by their patriotic owners.*"

POLLY: "*The whole thing was torn down three months later when the Spanish conquered these islands, emboldened by their recent naval victory; it is now the site of the latrines for their cavalry stables.*"

History, it is observed, is written by the winners.

NEOLITHICS

I HAVE READ the works of Frazer, Lévi-Strauss, and other anthropologists,” Alexandyr observed, relaxing back into his fireside chair with a fresh schooner of Eiswein, “and, speaking generally, I find their arguments on the matter of the ascent of Humankind persuasive. In the point of fact, if I did not know for a sure and certain truth that the great universe in which we exist is no more than an N-dimensional holographic simulation, run within the confines of a massive and futuristic computing device some decades in what you would perceive as the future, the program of which encompasses not only every thinking being on our world but also what they believe to be their memories and all that they perceive of human history, and which was only brought into existence in its entirety some fifteen minutes before our reader commenced perusing this book in which we reside—

“—a matter I know to be true, for I not only have had the remarkable opportunity to communicate with the executors of this simulation, but also have ventured forth beyond its digital boundaries into what I can only call the true world, in order to help the programmers with a tricky piece of floating-point logic that was causing some trouble in the area around Bermuda—

“—but I see I am boring you with this talk, so I shall speak no further of it. As I say, the arguments of the anthropologists are convincing in their protestations that *ceteris paribus* Humankind arose to their present stature and estate from out of the dirt of the ground. More specifically, they arose from the stones, and from what we call the Stone Age, and with that in mind I have devised this variant of the Baron’s game, thus:”

*The Baron’s Game for the Early Settlers of the Stone Age,
Being the People of Caves, or
CAVE CATAN*

IN THIS version of the game, our players take upon themselves the roles of the early inhabitants of the Earth in those antediluvian times when dinosaurs still roamed the continents and the continents roamed the seas, some years prior to the invention of almost anything. They are cave-people, primitives unacquainted with the refined niceties of the modern world such as politics, credit on demand, public transport, soap, fermentation, and long words.

To set the scene, a group of these stony folk are gathered around one of their latest inventions, this being a fire, and making use of another clever scheme one of them has dreamed up to converse with each other—I speak, of course, of language. By way of diversion, they challenge each other to a duel of stories concerning their great feats of primitive intellect. In the main, these will fall into three categories:

i. How these early inhabitants recently discovered or invented a certain necessity of life.

ii. Feats of great valour, for example at hunting, in making a plucky escape from dinosaurs and the like, waging war on neighbouring tribes and driving rival species to extinction, daring to touch humming monoliths, and so forth.

iii. Everything else.



*Fig 6: The Baron would
never claim that his
ancestor created the first
fire, but may have
hinted that it was a
Munchausen who stole
it from Olympus,
and Prometheus was
only the fall-guy.*

The play must be conducted in the simple language of these originals, to give the players an insight into the lives and thoughts of our ancestors, or at least their ancestors. Since I fear that only a few of my audience will be fluent in Cro-Magnon, a few simple rules must suffice:

When speaking, a player must speak in words of one syllable. The player may use one multisyllabic word per sentence, but no more. The penalty for transgression—if noticed and pointed out by another player—is to be bopped lightly on the head.

Players must refer to themselves and all others in the third person, by using the name of the participant in question. All players have the name “Ug” (or possibly “Ugga” for those of the fairer sex, though “Ug” will suffice for them too, “Ugga” having too many syllables for our ancestors to have dealt with), unless one player is challenged to describe how an ancestor devised a clever system of giving things names to differentiate them.

Adjectives must be kept to a minimum, and adverbs should not be used at all, since they were not invented until Miss Jane Austen first brought them into use in her famous work *Pride and Prepositions*. In addition, gerunds did not evolve until some years after the landing of the Ark, and therefore they are not only anachronistic but also too easily confused with gnus. There should be no gnus, either.

Since these simple folk have not yet learned the manner of counting, the normal system of coins and stakes in my game is not to be included here, for reasons of historical and anthropological verisimilitude. Instead, each player may interrupt as often as desired, but may not interrupt twice in succession—another player must interrupt before the first may intercede a second time.

Once all the stories are finished, a winner is announced. Since these simple folk are beyond both counting and the most basic elements of democracy, no vote or tally can be taken. Instead, the tribe looks to its smartest member (the one who has been bopped upon the head the least—note this is not the wisest member, but the one who has worked out how best to avoid physical pain, though some would argue that may well be the same thing) to nominate a winner, and then grunts its approval or disapproval of this nominee. If the nominee is disapproved, then the second-least bopped is asked to nominate someone else, and so on until a victor is found, no victor is found, or the tribe is attacked and eaten by sabre-toothed tigers.

SUPERVILLAINS

WE HAD MOVED on to a bottle of rather fine vodka, drunk neat on the rocks, and Alexandyr was staring at the ice in his glass, chinking the pieces together. One of them shifted as it melted, and he sighed. “If I had only thought to use the atom bomb in the suitcase to blow off the bottom of the iceberg, causing it to overturn...” he said, and his tone was wistful.

“That sounds like an extraordinary adventure,” I commented.

“It was, but not so much for me.” Alexandyr reached for the bottle and topped off his glass. “You remember the late 1960s? Ah, forgive me, naturally you do not. It was a wild time for those of us in the intelligence community. The Cold War was at its height, and many advances had changed the playing field forever: transistors had revolutionised surveillance, the space race had put satellites and space stations in orbit, battery technology had increased the range and duration of remote communications, the scuba tank had made underwater missions much easier, and of course the Aston Martin DB5 had also made its impact, as had the adoption of the bikini and the knowledge of how to mix a really good Martini. To say nothing of the breeding of certain hybrid strains of piranhas and killer bees...”

“Are you—were you a spy?” I asked.

“I am afraid I am still bound by the long cords of secrecy,” Alexandyr said, tapping his nose with a hollow sound. “But this has put me in mind of a splendid addition to my game. Take this down.”

The Baron's Variant of International Supervillainy, or SMERSH AND GRAB

THE PLAYERS all take the roles of supervillains of the pulp espionage novel style, hell-bent on dominating the world, crushing its governments beneath their respective heels, looting its central banks for their reserves of gold, and demanding absolute compliance, enforcing their will via threat of attack by orbiting laser platforms, piranha/killer bee hybrids, or both.

Each story in this version of the game runs in two parts. In the first part, the storyteller is asked to describe plans and arrangements for carrying out a diabolical scheme, via such requests as:

“My dear Count, please tell us how it was you were going to steal all the oil from Texas?”

or *“R, the last time we spoke, you were about to replace Chairman Mao with an android duplicate?”*

or *“Your Most Terrible Majesty, how proceeds your scheme to retake the British Empire?”*

The storyteller then describes the plans, how they are to be carried out, and what items and arrangements (rockets, asteroids, giant sharks, secret mountaintop bases, voodoo priestesses, clones, diseases, autogyros, the certain death of prominent secret agents, *et cetera*) have been secured to further these aims. Interruptions may be made, as usual, by comrades seeking clarification or pointing out errors, employing the standard coin-based mechanic.

Once another player judges that the house of cards has been built high enough, that player may bring it down with a single phrase. Some favour a simple:

“So what went wrong?”

while others prefer to provide a catalyst:

“But you had reckoned without...”

and here may be named a person, perhaps a notorious agent; an unforeseen factor or discovery; or anything that might topple such vaunted ambitions. Cats, more often than one might expect, are responsible for such things, but usually it's that chap with the Oh's in his name.

Now the storyteller must describe how this catalytic agent brought about the complete downfall and destruction of the glorious scheme—and what the teller is plotting in revenge.

Interruptions and final-round scoring to determine a winner are administered as in the standard manner.

Optionally, players may arrange themselves as the members of a committee for worldwide espionage and villainous exploits, each called by the Sinister Leader to report in on a sector of operations, by means of a directive along the lines of:

“Very well. Number 154, please give your report on the progress of the construction of the orbital station designed to steal all the world's sunlight.”

The so-numbered player must report on the project in as optimistic a tone as possible, given the problems that the other agents around the table are likely to lay at the door of the player's secret hideout. Any player reduced to zero coins is adjudged to have failed at the assigned task, and at the discretion of the Sinister Leader, that player's chair drops through a concealed trapdoor into the pool of shark/crocodile hybrids awaiting below.



OCCULTISTS

ALEXANDYR OBSERVED my writing through the end of a glass that had recently been filled with cognac, holding it as if it were a bulbous telescope. Translated through the stem, the image of his eye appeared like a giant sapphire.

"You know the motto of the French Navy?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"*A l'eau, c'est l'heure*," he informed me. I waited for him to make a point. Eventually, he sighed and shook his head.

"Much underestimated, the French Navy," he said. "Most know so little about it, beyond Trafalgar and the 'Raft of the *Medusa*' incident, and that was sadly misrepresented—"

"Not a medusa?"

"Not a raft. Should have been called the 'Giraffe of the *Medusa*.' Hard to understand how such a mistake could have happened." I waited for more. He refilled his glass. "Particularly considering the long history of the French Navy's involvements with the mythical and supernatural. It was the sailors of La Royale who were last to see the city of R'lyeh, you know."

Having been born near the village of Dunwich in Suffolk, I pricked up my ears at this. "The French Navy saw R'lyeh?"

"They sank it. In 1902. By accident, of course. The destroyer *Flamberge*, on its way across the Atlantic, detected the island-city from the smell of decay wafting out across the sea, closely resembling a ripe Roquefort, and the captain demanded they adjust their course and sail to it with all speed. As they approached, they—" he spread his hands in a gesture that almost sent his glass flying. "You've seen how the French drive. The

structure of the island was fractured by the impact, causing it to disappear below the waves, but not before the crew had collected a number of idols, tablets, inscriptions, prescriptions, non-Euclidean geometry sets, and so forth, which have been the cause of so much trouble since.

“All of which puts me in mind of an invigorating evening I spent with a group of investigators some years ago, which I believe would serve our current purpose admirably under the title of:”

The Baron's Game in the Eldritch Realms of That Lovecraft Fellow, or
THE RECALL OF CTHULHU

THE PARTICIPANTS are all investigators into the eldritch and occult, and it can be assumed that they have each had at least one horrible experience associated with those investigations that they would prefer not to remember. Nevertheless, it is important to the group that their information be shared, and so it is the function of the other players to compel them to tell their stories.



The game operates much like the Baron's regular game, except:

i. There is a strict time limit of five minutes on each story.

ii. Storytellers must attempt to avoid reaching the conclusion of their story before their time elapses, through digressions, obfuscations, avoidances, distractions, narcolepsy—perhaps not narcolepsy, but other narrative devices. They may not use deliberate time-wasting, talk particularly slowly, or employ arcane devices of unknown manufacture to alter the speed of time's passage.

iii. The other players must use their interruptions and objections to bring the storyteller back on track, in order to force the teller to reach some kind of climax or revelation of dreaded terrors or things man was not meant to know and woman has probably known all along but wisely decided to keep to herself. (A hint to the conclusion is usually given in the story idea proposed at the beginning of each tale.)

iv. Such is the unremitting horror of what the storyteller has witnessed that if forced to reach the climax of the story within the given time, the teller inevitably collapses into gibbering, quivering, ranting insanity. A storyteller who has gone insane can continue to participate in the game, but cannot win.

v. It is possible that through strenuous efforts to avoid reaching the end of a tale, a storyteller may descend into madness anyway. If more than half the players nod sadly at the same time and say, "Quite mad, poor thing," or words to that effect, the storyteller is adjudged to have succumbed to mental frailty, and the teller's tale and turn is over.

vi. Once all players have recalled their tales (or not), the winner is the sane player whose experiences are adjudged to have been the most frightening—that is to say, the one whose story most people wanted to hear finished. On no account is the player to finish the story, however. (Alternatively, the penalty for winning is to be forced to conclude one's tale, and therefore to descend into the lunatic abyss. It's all for the good of humanity.)

As usual, the player on the left of each new storyteller gives the teller the germ of a tale. The player on the teller's right should hold and monitor the stopwatch, egg timer, or other chronometric device for measuring the time.

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICS

BUT TELL ME of your life in London. Is it lavish?" Alexandyr enquired; then, having ascertained the details of the guest room in my house and the small size of my wine cellar, he appeared to lose interest in the subject and diverted himself with a number of anecdotes on the backwardness and inhospitality of the English, with particular reference to their inability to handle criticism, which I have omitted for their lack of relevance and accuracy. We were about to move to another topic when he spoke of how much he desired to visit my city.

"Where do you most wish to visit?" I enquired.

"Mornington Crescent," he said, "for then I shall have won the game of life."

I understood from this that he was a fellow practitioner of the Great Game, which takes its name from that singular station in North London, and we passed a few minutes replaying and discussing Haskins' famous victory over Glopson in the 1988 Grand Cru.

"But perhaps there is a way of combining MC with the Baron's game?" I asked.

Alexandyr shifted impatiently in his chair. "Do you not know that the former is derived from the latter? From a particular tale of a hunt after a monstrous fox across the fields north of London in 18—, where the quarry was finally brought to ground in Mornington Crescent?"

I reeled in amazement, exclaiming, "But that would mean the game of Mornington Crescent predates the existence not only of the London Underground station of the same name, but of the London Underground system itself!"

"Quite so," Alexandyr said. "In truth, I believe it was the great dig to unearth the fox that became the first excavation for that network. The whole endeavour was propelled into existence after Stephenson's steam-powered engine 'the Rocket,' being driven across open country at high speed—I shall not name the pilot, nor which princess was on the footplate with him—fell into the excavation by misadventure. The owners of the locomotive calculated that the price of bringing cranes and devices to extract it would be higher than building a new railway within the hole, and so decided to...but this is all ancient history, and it is recorded for those who care to read it within the pages of that

well-woven repository of the basket of history named ‘Wickerpedia,’ I believe. The rules of the game have been refined much in the intervening centuries, but it should not be hard to roll it backwards to recover its original form. Let me see...”

*The Baron's Game of Storytelling upon the
Public Transport System of London, or
MUNCHAUSEN CRESCENT*

MUNCHAUSEN CRESCENT is a departure from the standard form of the Baron's game, and also from the usual rules of Mornington Crescent, which are, of course, so well known to all as to be not worth repeating here. Players take turns, each describing a part of a journey that player has taken around the greatest city in the world (here Alexandyr turned away and muttered something about Vienna), with the aim of being the first to connect the trip's travels and travails to Mornington Crescent.

But whereas the conventional version of Mornington Crescent is based in and upon the actual city, this game is less literal and more liminal. Not to put too fine a point on it, it is a psychogeographic ramble through the capital, making links not by notionally travelling from one point to another, but by making connections between them of memory and association. Thus, players each take their own journey, but play off the connection provided by the player before them, best demonstrated with an example:

ABERNATHY (with the Ackroyd opening): *“I begin at Charing Cross, so called for the crucifix I burned into the ground here to exorcise a coven of witches who had set up camp nearby with plans to turn Nelson's Column into a great phall— er, Palladian shrine to their goatish master Pan.”*

BAKERS: *“Charing Cross stands on the Strand, and like a strand of pearls bejewelling the capital's neck, it leads around the Circle Line to its namesake, King's Cross, where I crossed swords with George V in that clandestine duel of which you have heard, the unfortunate outcome of which forced me to pose as the King of England for the next fifteen years.”*

CORKE: *“And from King's Cross it is a single stop to Morn—”*

BAKERS: *“Wrong branch of the Northern line, Charles.”*

ABERNATHY: *“You've failed to traverse the Regent's Park canal. Schoolboy error.”*

CORKE: *"Bother. You're quite right. But I think I can reverse here?"*

ABERNATHY: *"Of course. Nobody has declared rush hour yet."*

CORKE: *"In that case, I travel two stops to the duelling fields of Chalk Farm, where I once had to recover a single drop of my blood that I had spilled there two decades earlier, before a South Seas sorcerer could find it and use it to create a homunculus of me."*

DALRYMPLE: *"I recently visited the homunculus collection in the Supernatural History Museum in South Kensington, positioned directly between the Science Museum and Natural History Museum, but only accessible by an invisible door."*

ABERNATHY: *"Was that oblique?"*

DALRYMPLE: *"No, there's no obliquing on an overground segment. I was opaquing via Earls Court."*

ABERNATHY: *"That makes sense, but it means that the primaries are doubled for the rest of the round. Very well. From South Kensington to Greenwich and the Royal Observatory, in the cellar of which lies a door that, if given the correct password in Hebrew, will open into the throne room of the King of the Moon."*

BAKERS: *"Mornington Crescent!"*

I trust that's so clear that it is practically invisible.

In all other matters, the game hews to Parkinson's 1986 rules (the "Standard Version Revised") with the 1999, 2010, and 2013 appendices for new and altered routes, if you must. No double-reversing, beware of cycle paths, and do not forget that Blackfriars is now a station and a bridge at the same time.

Play is easily adaptable to any large metropolis with a suitably developed system of public transport and a suitably erudite and urban group of players who understand the workings of the Great Game. Indeed, such is the sheer perfection of the game (especially once the celebrated 1980 lateral updrafting rules were introduced through the revised Cambridge technique) that it is also imminently suitable for play using global aeronautical portals, motorcarriage roadways that connect distant cities, interstellar port-gates, or even destinations within large structures such as the various rooms and halls within centres for conventions.

Any other means of locomotion or carteological passage are nominally valid as well. If there are concerns, of course, they should be addressed in the customary manner and using the standard rules clarification procedures outlined in the latest edition of the core rules (except where that they would conflict with local passing lane ordinances).

FORCES

THE NIGHT WAS a clear one, and a gibbous Moon hung in the sky outside the window, its every detail crisp in the autumnal air.

"That reminds me," Alexandyr said, "we could do with a good deal more cheese."

"Your ancestor claimed there was no cheese to be found on the Moon," I said, "if his descriptions of his travels are to be believed."

"I found no cheese there, either," Alexandyr observed, "unless its æons of airless baking under the Sun had reduced it to a rock-hard whitish substance like an aged Parmesan. I did not think to check. But to which ancestor were you referring?"

I was momentarily taken aback. "I meant the good Baron Hieronymous, of course. Surely he is the only one among your forebears who undertook such journeys?"

"The only one who wrote them down," Alexandyr replied. "But I have discovered records of earlier generations of Munchausens who explored among the stars. It seems that there is an adventuring spirit and something that attracts stories of the extraordinary to those of my lineage."

"Genes?" I queried.

"More of a force, I believe." He swirled the remaining pertsivka around its glass. "Something that surrounds us and assists us as we explore farther than ever the good Baron Hieronymous progressed: upwards and outwards to journey between the very constellations, where a mighty empire was held at bay by a ragtag band of ne'er-dowells, minor royalty, farm-boys, tin men, and circus freaks. Such adventures those were, such staunch comrades, such a struggle against the forces of darkness."

I thought I knew my new friend's family tree well, but this tallied with no ancestors I knew of. "Was this the second Baron, with his marvellous sedan chair raised by migrating storks?" I asked. "Because surely—"

Alexandyr dismissed my half-formed question with a wave of his hand. "Nothing so mundane," he said, "and much before the life of the second Baron. This is a story that begins very, very far away."

"A long time ago?" I queried.

"Just so."

"In a galaxy or similar large astronomical feature?"

"So I am led to believe."



The Baron's Extraordinary Stories Concerning a War among the Stars, or
SPACING VADERS

THE CONTESTANTS challenge each other to tell tales of their exploits as explorers, travellers, adventurers, fighters, and warriors in an ancient noble order in a galaxy-spanning conflict that happened some while ago and a considerable distance from their present location. Challenges can include a short description of the exploit to be told, even setting the scene for the point where a contestant begins the story. That such challenges can stage the contestant in a rather precarious position where true stellar heroics would be needed to survive is quite probable.

Storytellers must each give their tale a number. The numbers need not follow in any logical sequence but may serve to establish continuity between the various tales, determining who is already dead, who has run away to a distant planet, and which characters may be improbably related to which other characters.

Once per story, the storyteller may choose to dismiss another player's interruption or objection by meeting the interrupter's gaze, making an arcane gesture, and employing a short phrase redolent with import, such as, "You don't need to interrupt my story," or "This is not the distraction you're looking for." The would-be interrupter must repeat the line back in a monotone, and must then wait until someone else has interrupted before making another sally at breaking the storyteller's flow.

It is traditional to let the hairiest player win.

CATS

“OR PERHAPS,” Alexandyr said pensively, “a set of the game in which all of the players are most egregious liars.”

I was about to draw him forth on how such a version would work when he became more animated. “Like cats,” he said. “Cats are the most appalling liars I have ever met. Not a word of truth have I ever heard a single one of them say.”

“How is it you are able to speak to cats? And what stories do they tell?” I asked, marvelling.

“Oh, anyone may speak to a cat,” Alexandyr replied. “It is the simplest thing imaginable, though the trick is in knowing whether the cat is bothering to listen to you, and then whether it can understand what you have said—for of course, cats do not speak the language of humans. No, I am fluent in the feline tongue, having spent two months of my youth in the form of a tomcat, living in an unruly house in Prague.”

The hour was late and the bar bill already considerable, so I decided to let this hook go past unbitten. “What stories do house cats tell?” I asked again.

“Oh, great stories of how they saw off packs of dogs, saved sacks of kittens from rivers, brought down one of the great roaring silver birds that fly so high in the sky, slept on a cloud, conquered a city, learned to wear a foppish hat and fight with a rapier, claimed the right to rule the entire land by pissing on every corner of it, ate a ghost, walked to the realm of the dead to return a mouse that had got out, the sort of fantastic imagining that a creature with a brain the size of a walnut will get up to while staring at you and pretending that it loves you. I truly believe they have no way of telling the difference between fact and fantasy. I once met one who claimed to have caught the Angel Gabriel and toyed with him all night, though Gabriel denies the incident absolutely; another said she had been thrown out of Disneyland for killing Mickey and Minnie Mouse; and a third insisted he had been the star of a dancing show upon the London stage. Nonsense, the lot of it.”

“Would the stories of cats make a suitable chapter for the game?” I asked.

“No,” Alexandyr said. “Well, perhaps. See if you can mug together some rules for it in the morning; there’s a fellow. Is there any more of that schnapps?”

The Baron's Game of Catting About, or
ONCE MORE WITH FELINE

IN THIS version of the game, all the players take the roles of members of the cat family, which includes big cats, small cats, fat cats, bureaucats, plutocats, and aristocats. Being all of the same family, they have little love lost between them, and their attitudes towards each other are likely to be cattish.

Stories are proposed in the usual way, but with an element of disdain or disbelief: "My dear Mister Snookums, it is said—mostly by yourself—that you once ate not only the whole of the dog's dinner but also the dog. While this would explain your girth, it seems highly improbable. Please explain how you were able to do this."

The storyteller undertakes the tale. The other players may interrupt without placing a coin, but only to make cattish remarks on the narrative and its qualities or lack of them. They may not make a true CHALLENGE until the storyteller pauses—deliberately or by accident. Challenges must take the form of one cat or another claiming to have personal experience in the area being discussed.

Challenges are administered in the usual way. What cats would be doing with a purse of coins is unclear, as is how they would carry such a thing, but by this stage Alexandyr was hardly in a fit state to give a concise answer. Nevertheless, as the sages who write roleplaying games remind us over and over again, even a lowly giant rat is usually in possession of several copper pieces, a random potion, and a rusty dagger. Cats being a breed superior even to rats of unusual size, it stands to reason that they would carry a reasonable quantity of pocket money despite their lack of pockets.

If the storyteller pauses and there are no challenges, the uncompleted story is over. The assembled cats have indicated they are not interested in hearing more of that tale. Be careful of snubbing a player this way; a player who has been snubbed is unlikely to be generous with coin in later rounds.

Once all the stories are done, the cats vote for a winning story. This is done simultaneously: each cat conceals a number of its coins in its paw, and on a count of three, all point at the teller of the tale they wish to win, opening their paw to show how much they value the tale. The cat with the most coins at the end is the victor. Only tales that were completed are eligible to win; if no cat was able to finish its own tale, then all slink off in disgrace, pretending that they meant to do that.

IMMORTALS

ROSY-FINGERED DAWN tinted the sky outside, displacing the cirrhotic glow of her nocturnal half-brother Sodium. I felt a yawn coming on, and let it come. Alexandyr, observing the lightning skyline, made no reaction.

“I feel that we have done good work this night,” I said, “but it is time to retire for an hour or two of sleep before we must brave the game-filled trade halls of the Messe Essen again. Come, one more, and then we bid each other goodnight.”

“A final drink or a final reinvention of the Baron’s game?” Alexandyr asked. “Both would be best, by my troth. I had quite forgot what thirsty work this game designing is.”

“I thought you were a newcomer to the art of game design,” I said, and noticed my companion hesitate. I expected a retort or an excuse, but none came. Two or three things fell into place within my mind then, and I felt emboldened. “There are other matters,” I said, “where I would have pushed a gold coin across the table and challenged you.”

“What matters?” Alexandyr asked, still watching the window.

“The story you told me—almost the first story—of how you were concealed inside the Lunokhod automated spacecraft that flew to the Moon. Firstly, you are too large to fit inside the carapace of a Lunokhod. Secondly, I recall where I heard it before, and it is not your story to tell. It is the plot of the novel *Omon Ra*, by the Russian writer Victor Pelevin.”

Alexandyr turned, his glass empty in his hand. He did not meet my eye. “Pelevin...that was the fellow’s name. I mentioned, I am sure, that after my Soviet businesses collapsed, I engaged in a spot of ghost writing to make ends meet? He came to me the day before his deadline, and just as we two have done this night, the tale was written in a single session, combining my reminiscing, his speed at typing, and vodka.”

“I don’t know if I can believe you,” I said. I felt my faith in my co-author shaken, my sense of trust betrayed. “What else is an embellishment? Are you really a descendant of the Baron? Does the royal blood of Russia truly run in your veins? Did—”

“DO NOT DEFAME THE HONOUR OF THE EMPRESS OF RUSSIA!” he thundered, and his right hand went to his hip, perhaps to draw a sword that was not there. I stammered an apology. He strode to the window, flung it wide, gave a piercing whistle into the sky, and paused as if listening for something.

“I will not be joining you at the Spieltage today, alas,” he said. “I have a meeting in Paris that I must attend.”

“Who are you meeting?” I asked.

Normally when he diverted the subject it was done so neatly that one hardly noticed, but not this time. “One last game,” he said. “Take this down.”

The Baron's Game of the Nature and Discussion of Life Without End, or
ETERNAL AFFAIRS

LET US say, for the sake of a good argument, that there walk upon this venerable Earth a number of individuals blessed or cursed with life eternal. They cannot or will not die, and some of them have been not dying for a considerable time. A few perish and are reborn as themselves, others have yet stranger forms of persistence, some of which I confess I do not fully understand.

Some of them you know of: Cain, Count Dracula, the Wandering Jew, the Flamels, the Comte de Saint Germain, Rasputin, some minor gods who survived Ragnarok or the fall of Olympus, an angel and a devil or two stuck on Earth. Others are less well known, or have a reputation elsewhere. Some look as old as they are, others as young as the day the hands of their clock ceased to move, and one looks like a small copper teapot with a face.

Let us say also that if you live so long, your skein of life becomes enwoven with the warp and woof of humanity, as Es-Sindibad described in his game. Your affairs become the world's affairs, and when you pull the end of your thread the world moves too.

So they work to steer the course of humanity, these schemers—

“Surely you are talking of the Illuminati?” I asked. Alexandyr turned to fix me with an eye both piercing and weary. “That child Weishaupt and his idiot disciples?” he rhetoricated. “Certainly not.”

—as I was saying, they scheme. They guide forces, devise plots to play out over centuries, and slowly turn the tides of history in the way that King Canute never could. But Canute was only mortal.

Unfortunately they do not agree on what is best for history, humanity, this planet, or anything else. And so their intentions clash, and they do not like each other at all. And yet they realise that if you are going to share a world with people forever, it is necessary to stay on speaking terms with them.

Hypothetically, then, these immortals might meet once a century, under a flag of truce and truthfulness, for a single evening, to renew their acquaintances. Much is discussed and much is not, but the night passes agreeably well.



*Fig 7. A quiver
of lightning bolts,
taken from a
young god who
was in his cups
by the Baron,
and later given
to his friend
Nikola Tesla.*

How then, you ask, do we make a game of this?

You and your long-lived companions sit round a table in a private room in a good restaurant whose discretion can be trusted. You each give your name, because your appearance may be much changed since your last meeting. Then one—he, she, or it adjudged the youngest—may ask any of the company to describe that immortal’s involvement in anything that has beset the world in the last hundred years. Thus:

“My dear Merlin, please reveal why it was so important that the Voyager spacecraft left the Solar System on the date it did?”

“Come, Sir Galahad, tell us what this global warming business is for?”

“I believe, Countess Bathory, that you had something to do with Abba?”

The one asked must tell the story. In each sitting every sitter asks for one tale and tells one tale, but the order is left up to them.

Any of the others may interrupt using the usual system of tokens. However in this game these interruptions are not questions but revelations that a passing detail of the story was in fact part of the schemes of another of the sitters. To give an example:

MR JAMESON: *“Having learned the French were building an interplanetary vehicle in Paris under the guidance of M. Eiffel, I discovered they were deathly afraid of an invasion from Mars—”*

TITHONUS (pushing a coin forward): *“That was my fault.”*

JAMESON: "*The building of the craft?*"

TITHONUS: "*The threat from Mars. A hoax. A distraction so the French would be ill-prepared for the coastal invasion of my crab-folk.*"

JAMESON (accepting the coin): "*Just so. But—*"

THE ANCIENT MARINER (with a coin): "*The towering craft, on the other hand, was part-designed by myself, with an actual destination of Saturn.*"

JAMESON: (pushing the coin back, with one of his own): "*I don't believe—*"

THE ANCIENT MARINER (takes the coins): "*No, you're right, I was thinking of the Statue of Liberty.*"

This is jolly, but has two effects on the game. First, when a sitter is challenged to tell a tale, that player should be asked to expand on one or more of the matters earlier mentioned in interruptions to the tales of others. Moreover, this story should incorporate as many of the player's earlier interjections as possible. So it is best for the storyteller who has just finished a tale to challenge another of the company who has been vocal in offering interruptions.

Second, once one has told a tale, that player's interruptions for the remainder of the game should cleave to the tale offered to the others, making it clear how grand and far-reaching that immortal's schemes are.

A winner is decided in the usual way, with the coins, but decisions should be based on whose scheme is judged to be the most excellent. Then the company breaks apart for another century.

("What sort of tales do the immortals tell?" I asked. "Are they all schemes to enslave and direct the human race? Surely the immortals do not all regard us as ants and playthings? Surely they concern themselves with bettering our race, and reaching new pinnacles of art and music?")

Indeed so. I remember one tale in which the Emperor had heard tell of an expedition that one of those gathered had mounted, to sneak into Heaven and borrow the trumpet of the Seventh Angel, for he desired to hear Miles Davis play it. As I recall he said if there was to be a Last Trump then it might as well be blown by the musician they called the Prince of Darkness. And so it came to pass, and the trump was indeed glorious. Upon my word, there was such a confusion! The Last Trump had been sounded, and no one was prepared! I believe it took them half an æon of accelerated time to sort out the paperwork, and there are still servitors in the vaults of Elysium who swear in a very un-angel-like fashion upon the merest whisper of my name.



EPILOGUE

YOUR ANCESTOR'S name, you mean," I said. For once there was no reply.

By now, the room was bright with the rays from the arising Sun, reflecting prisms of greenish rainbows from the small mountain of empty bottles that covered almost every surface. I was finding it hard to keep my eyes open, but an idea crossed with a memory slowly percolated its way through the night's grounds, dark and rich. I felt in my pocket for my phone, on which I had snapped a picture of the contract that Alexandyr had shown me on the previous day. I found it and enlarged the image to check the wording. The room was quiet. The incongruous sound of a horse's hooves on the street below struck out a military rhythm, and I marshalled my thoughts.

"Alexandyr, my dear fellow," I said, "I have you. This contract between the Baron and my ancestor clearly states that it is voided by the sounding of the Last Trump, which you have just told me happened during the lifetime of Miles Davis. Davis passed away in 1991, seven years prior to my discovery of your ancestor's manuscript and the publication of the first edition of his game. Therefore no back-royalties are due to you, and our arrangement must be renegotiated."

Again there was no reply.

I rose from my chair and walked over to the bar to see what liquors remained, and as I did, a second thought struck me. It had been knocking on the back of my mind for some time but had received no reply, and so decided to make its presence felt with a sharp twin blow, a two-part rat-tat of realisations striking deep inside my skull, like the hoofbeats that were drawing closer in the street. I actually clutched at my head. Such a fool. I had been such a fool.

“Tell me this Alexandyr: how is it that you are invited to the gathering of the immortals, for I assume that is the meeting you will be attending today?” I asked.

Silence.

“What happened in that Alpine field in 17—? What event caused your own relatives to think you dead for ten years? What was the bizarre occurrence that you refuse to speak of, even when among friends and drunk on the finest Tokaji, and that the King’s Own 12th Hussars were determined to silence you over?”

Silence.

“Surely, Baron...?”

A gentle breeze caressed my cheek. I had not noticed that the window had been opened. I turned from the bar and staggered over to it, through the bottles. I had forgotten that the room was three storeys above the ground, and the height and the fresh air caused me to reel, clutching at the railing as I gazed out.

In the distance, a white horse was galloping south down Bismarckstrasse, away from my hotel and in the general direction of Paris. The figure on its back was already so far away that it was hardly recognisable, but just as the horse was about to turn the corner by the Museum Folkwang I could hear a voice I would have recognised anywhere—and I am certain that my forebears John and Edward would have recognised it too—directed at an early-morning bus, telling the driver to get that graceless carriage out of the way and comparing the operator’s driving skills to that of a charioteer with no wheels on his chariot. I remember wondering, as the horse and its rider disappeared from view, where he had acquired a tricorne hat.

I have not seen nor heard from the gentleman since. In truth, I suspect that the only royalty in which he is truly interested is the Empress of Russia, and she has been dead for more than two centuries; I suspect I cannot help him.

I expect this report to be met with incredulity and queries about dates, places, bar bills, and the minutiae of some of the rule sets. I confess that in places my notes are not so much incoherent as anticoherent, and my memories of the evening are coloured all the hues of a very expensive wine list. But the parts that I can remember, I will remember for a very long time, and in the dark moments of soul-searching and quests for purpose and meaning that we all face from time to time as we make our way from cradle to grave, I draw solace and confidence from the knowledge that out there in the wider world, new stories of extraordinary adventures are being created every day.

You may well question this, as do I. It is clear that parts of the tale do not tally with the checksum of the whole. But for those who ask how any of the things in this book are possible, there can be only one answer. If Baron Munchausen is involved, anything is possible.

James Wallis
London, 2016



APPENDIX ONE

PLAYING ON THE LINE

A FEW YEARS ago, one of the PhD students to whom I occasionally grant access to the papers of John and Edward Wallis unearthed a curiosity, a piece of correspondence between an unknown writer and (we assume) Edward Wallis that had lain concealed within the binding of the family business's financial accounts for 1816.

The handwriting and the style of language do not match any that we have on file, and the text offers no clue as to the identity of the scribe. Even the reference to the Chappe semaphoric telegraph does not narrow down the date to anything between the closing years of the eighteenth century and the imprisonment of Napoleon in 1815. I include it in this volume as a colourful piece of historical trivia, of interest only to students of obscure systems of distance communication and the Baron's most diligent adherents.

TO EDWARD Wallis, the estimable master of games in London,

I greet you in the name of our mutual friend Baron Munchausen, who has been staying with me in the Winter Palace, during which time he has introduced me to his game. The Baron has lately been experimenting with the system of semaphoric stations that were set across France by the short Corsican, and from it he has extrapolated a device for netting the sky-fish that swim in the hinterlands between the clouds, a device he refers to as the "Hinter-net."

He believes that a similar net may also be used to play his game though the players be at great distances from each other. To this end he has been experimenting with the smarter students from the Smolny Institute for Noble Maidens, and with them has devised two systems for playing his game whilst one has a sky-fish hooked on the line (or "On-Line," if I understand him correctly), using the vibrations of the fishing line to resonate with another at a distance, so that...

Forgive me, I forget the details. We experimented until late last night, consumed much cherry brandy, and I awoke in the small hours to find a sunfish of great diameter flopping on my bed, for even when

in his cups and five hundred miles from the ocean, the Baron is a fisherman of prodigious talent. We had it smoked for breakfast. Not bad.

The students have written up his notes on this new style of his game, and the Baron requests that you include either or both of them in the next edition. For myself, I request that you consider publishing in Russia—I would bear the costs of translation. If you wish to come to Moscow to discuss it, we shall share a bottle of tokay from the palace cellars.

Mendace veritas, as our friend would put it.

{illegible}



PLAYING BARON MUNCHAUSEN'S RENOWNED GAME
VIA THE MEDIUM OF ELECTRIC MAIL, IN FORUMS,
WITH CARRIER PIGEONS, IN THE TWITTERING
LANGUAGE OF BIRDS, OR WITHIN THE PAGES OF
THE BOOK OF FACES

GATHER YOUR forum players or compile your mailing list. There should be some way of locking this, or other people are going to bumble in and try to join. Other people are idiots like that.

No coins are used in this version. That makes it less competitive. So be it. Instead, we are dealing here mostly with time, for is there not a truer currency of the human being than its measured span, divided and fractioned and parcelled out?

Agree on a unit of time, which I shall here call “[time-period X].” This can be as short as two minutes or as long as a day. This period of time should be clearly stated at the start of the game and before each new storyteller begins.

Players take their turns in alphabetical order by first name. The player with the given name closest to the start of the alphabet is the first storyteller. This player is challenged to tell a story by the next player on the list, and should begin writing and posting a tale to the group immediately. Here lies the crux: the player may post no more than two sentences, to a maximum total of sixty words, give or take, per [time-period X]. Once the teller has posted a chunk of text, a full [time-period X] must elapse before the teller may post the next bit. The storyteller may not revise or delete any chunk already so posted.

(*Nota bene*, if you are playing in the language of birds, then each message must obviously be no longer than 140 song-notes, or “characters,” for so tiny are the minds of the speakers of that tongue that they cannot retain any more information at one time. Bear this in mind when playing the game against them, and make allowance for their bird-brains.)

Emails and forum posts, you will notice, are automatically time-stamped. This is quite useful for denoting who interrupted first. On which subject—

INTERRUPTING

While [time-period X] is elapsing, any other player can post an interruption. This must be fully formed in a single post. Simply posting “But surely, Baron...” or “I have an objection, which my manservant is transcribing from the ivory tablets at this very moment and which will be with you anon” as a placeholder is not enough.

There can be only one interruption per chunk of story, and the first one to be posted is the one that counts. If you see that someone else has posted an interruption while you were writing yours, withdraw yours politely: either delete it or post a follow-up indicating that you take it back. Interruptions must refer to the most recent chunk of the story; they may mention the events of preceding ones as well, but you may not object to something that happened at the start of the story as the storyteller is about to finish his tale.



Interruptions must be dealt with within [time-period X]. This works as follows:

The storyteller has [time-period X] to post a response to any interruption. If such a response is not posted, the interruption is taken as valid and built into the story.

If the storyteller does respond to the interruption in time, then the interruption is handled with the traditional to-and-fro. Either one player agrees to accept the other's argument, in which case the game proceeds as usual, or the argument continues until the current [time-period X]—calculated from the time-stamp of the previous chunk—has ended. At that point, whoever posted the last complete riposte or refutation before the end of the time period is adjudged to have won the argument. The storyteller must either accept the interruption or not, depending on who won the argument, and a new time period begins, during which the next chunk of the story must be posted.

Late interruptions to previous chunks are ignored. Press onwards!

At the end of the game, players vote in alphabetical order, starting with the first storyteller, for their favourite story. All votes are equal; no abstentions; no voting for oneself. If your forum software supports it, create a poll and have everyone vote that way. The winner wins. All alcoholic rewards should be delivered by a trusted courier, preferably a teetotaler.



PLAYING THE AFOREMENTIONED GAME USING SYSTEMS OF SIMULTANEOUS CHATTER

THE TEXT-CHAT version of the game is played in real time. The storyteller tells the tale one sentence at a time, and anyone can interrupt at any point. There are no coins in this one, either.

As with the email/forum version above, the players arrange themselves in alphabetical order by first name, and Player Two demands that Player One should tell a particular story. Once Player One is finished, Player Three asks Player Two to tell a story, and so on.

Sentences must be at least ten words long. There is no upper limit on length, but short bursts are recommended to keep the story flowing.

To interrupt, a player just has to type “But surely, Baron...” At this point, the storyteller must pause to give the interrupter time to type an objection. Objections do not have to be about the last section of text, but they must relate to something that was mentioned recently (e.g., is still on screen, though obviously that depends on the size of one’s chat window.)

The order of an interruption, therefore, goes like this:

i. The interrupter interrupts and states an objection or request for clarification.

ii. The storyteller responds, possibly with insults.

iii. The interrupter clarifies the position that formed the original interruption, possibly with additional insults.

iv. The storyteller responds to the clarification, possibly with “*etc.*”

v. Everyone else involved in the game votes.

Players may vote to uphold the interruption by typing “Uphold,” or they may vote for it to be rejected by typing “Withdraw.” Players may also type “Abstain,” or simply refrain from answering. They may not introduce further requests for clarification or explanation, nor commentary, nor insults. Oh, all right then, insults if they must. If, after about a minute, votes of “Withdraw” are in the majority, then the interrupter must withdraw the comment and apologise; otherwise, it is upheld, and the storyteller must integrate it into the story.

If after a minute there have been no votes at all, then interrupter and storyteller must accept that they have bored the company to the point that their friends have left, and they are directed to go away and together write a book of instructive sermons.

Once the players have each told one story, it is the end of the game. Players take it in turns to vote in alphabetical order, starting with Player One, for their favourite story. All votes are equal; no abstentions; no voting for oneself. The winner receives a hearty “*Huzzah!*” message from the other players in the group for the worthy effort. The game then begins again until such time as the aetheric tubes connecting the assembled players leak so much as to make conversations impossible, or voltaic piles are drained too excessively for text-chat mechanisms to function.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

BARON MUNCHAUSEN was the greatest adventurer and *raconteur* the world has ever known. According to historical record, he died in 1797.

JAMES WALLIS is an Origins Award–winning games designer, author and publisher, fortunate in having high-quality ancestors.

The creator of this work wishes to extend his grateful thanks to Mr Paul Antonio, Mr Derek Pearcy, Mr Michael Cule, Mr Steve Jackson, Mr John Kovalic, Mr Philip Masters, Mr Steffan O'Sullivan, the Reverend Garrett Lepper, Mr Kenneth Walton, Mr Christopher Hartford, M. Gustave Doré, Mr William Caslon, Mr Simon Rogers, and the staff of the British Library's Rare Books Room.

for FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES

PRODUCER

Tim Huckelbery

EDITING AND PROOFREADING

*Christine Crabb, Mark Pollard,
and Kristopher Reisz*

MANAGING RPG PRODUCER

Sam Stewart

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Christopher Hosch with Mercedes Opheim

GRAPHIC DESIGN MANAGER

Brian Schomburg

COVER AND INTERIOR ART

Omar Rayyan

ART DIRECTION

John M. Taillon

MANAGING ART DIRECTOR

Andy Christensen

PRODUCTION COORDINATION

*Marcia Colby, Jason Glawe,
Liza Lundgren, and Johanna Whiting*

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Megan Duehn

LICENSING

Simone Elliott and Amanda Greenhart

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Andrew Navaro

EXECUTIVE GAME DESIGNER

Corey Konieczka

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Michael Hurley

PUBLISHER

Christian T. Petersen

PLAYTESTERS

*Playtest Coordinator Zach Tewalthomas;
Brad Andres, Craig Atkins,
Michael Bernabo, Suzi "Antink" Burrows,
Andrew Busam, Mark Charlesworth
Ben Davis, Emeric J. Dwyer, Andrew
Fischer, Benjamin Fribley, Molly Glover,
Tim Huckelbery, Johnathan Johnson,
Josh Jupp, Ryan Miner, Joanna Olson,
Doug Ruff, Caro Smith, Jason Walden,
Nathan Wilkinson, and Jonathan Ying*





A GAME OF WAGERS, WINE, AND COMPETITIVE BOASTING

Baron Munchausen's tales of his extraordinary adventures are legendary: riding cannonballs through the air, sailing to the Moon, meeting gods, escaping from the Turkish Army on half a horse, and many others.

Can you outdo the Baron? You can try!

Challenge your friends to tell the most extraordinary tale, interrupt to correct their boasts, and share your own amazing exploits in this renowned game of wit, riposte, and repartee, written in high style by the Baron himself. Expect no dice, counters, or pencils while playing, just fine wine and great merriment. Time to charge your glass and begin your tale!

This third edition of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* is massively expanded with new and revised material. Contained within is the original game along with Arabian style rules from Sinbad the Sailor, a simpler version for younger (or inebriated) players, and rules for online games. One of the Baron's own descendants has also added twelve new variants of the game, allowing for stories where villains concoct dastardly schemes, ancient gods return from watery depths, heroic adventurers fight evil empires in outer space, and more!



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