

THE

Extraordinary

ADVENTURES OF

Baron Munchausen

A Game

of telling tales and playing roles

BY

Baron Munchausen

A NEW EDITION
REVISED AND EXPANDED

A Game of Wagers, Wine and Competitive Adventuring

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The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen contains full rules, more than two hundred adventures ready to be played, mechanics that replace dice and pencils with money and fine wine, quick-start rules and many insults against the inhabitants of various nations, but principally the French.

This expanded edition, a facsimile of a suppressed volume originally released in 1808, adds rules for playing the game in an Arabian style and a complete supplementary game, 'My Uncle the Baron', designed for children, the inbred and those who are very drunk.

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—John Kovalic, creator of *Dork Tower*

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The
EXTRAORDINARY
ADVENTURES
of
BARON MUNCHAUSEN

TOLD IN THE FORM OF
A NEW STYLE OF GAME
TERMED RÔLE-PLAY

BY
BARON MUNCHAUSEN.

*A new edition,
Considerably enlarged by the Baron's own hand,
with many remarkable stories and advice to his readers.
Ornamented with several fine engravings
by the Frenchman Mr Gustave Doré.*

THIS DIFFERENCE ENGINE NO.3 EDITION IS SUITED
FOR MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY, INHABITANTS OF LAPUTA,
MOON-GAZERS, GALVINISTS AND OTHER SORTS OF AMIABLE LOON
WHO MAY READ IT WITHOUT BECOMING AGITATED.

LONDON. Printed for John & Edward Wallis, Snow Hill, 1808
This facsimile edition is compiled and edited by James Wallis.
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THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES
OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

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MAGNUM·OPUS·PRESS

*Dedicated, humbly, to the ladies—
Catherine & Eliza*



PREFACE TO THE 1998 EDITION

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 re-telling 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 brother and myself, 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 with his presence in London, 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 where-insoever 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 neither. 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 Ltd
London, 1998.*

PREFACE TO THE 2008 EDITION

... or so I thought.

After Hogshead Publishing released *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* in 1998, a member of my extended family wrote to say that they hadn't known I was interested in the works of John and Edward Wallis, and enclosed various family papers concerning the two men 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 19th 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 and, it therefore 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 trace that this book had ever actually existed.

And then I found a copy.

I won't go into the details of how I located what I believe is the sole remaining example of the 1808 book titled ‘The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen, told in the form of a New Style of Game termed Rôle Play, by Baron Munchausen’ because they are irrelevant and quite dull. What is more interesting is the story of the book 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 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 Blucher 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 was 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 early years of the nineteenth century, had not thought to have the Baron’s game read for libel, and apparently did not consult 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 loss to his business were both severe, and he handed most of the control of it over to his son Edward in 1813, preferring to spend his remaining years in designing variants for the Game of the Goose. Though the Baron wrote to him several more times, so far as I can tell he did not respond. 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

DISCLAIMER.

The words 'he', 'him' and 'his' are used throughout this book as generic pronouns of the third-person singular. With such usage the author, a man of great gallantry, wishes it to be understood he is in no way implying that members of the gentler sex are any less likely to have extraordinary adventures than their male counterparts despite their seeming frailty, lack of education and aptitude for gossiping, giggling and fainting. He does not assume that flouncy crinolines and a décolletage like alabaster would not be of the greatest use when engaging in espionage against the French while disguised as a Corinthian column, or that extensive skills in needlepoint, household management and whist would be anything but an asset for single-handedly invading Abyssinia. To put it shortly, he believes that in many ways women are just as brave, capable and interesting as men, and in occasional circumstances more so. Bless their little hearts.

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The BARON journeys to visit the Emperor of the Moon, during which voyage he learned the rules to this Game from an inhabitant of the Dog-Star (page 26).

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 moments' 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 cannonball 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 storyteller 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

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—which reason, I assure my diligent readers, was 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 fact. 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

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 he who has told the best story buys drinks for his companions 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 of 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 ; and 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

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 warm beneath the counterpane of the Duke of N—'s daughter, whose beauty 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 potboy to do it for you. Make sure that each player has a purse of coins before them equal to the total number of players—do not ask a servant to do this, servants being by nature

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 eaten the missionaries, 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. 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 necessary 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

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 to write, your name at the top of the paper, with the prefix 'Baron'—or 'Count', 'Lord', 'Duke', 'Archbishop' or whatsoever honorific 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 gainsaid for generations, to own property, we must not forget the frailer sex too : 'Baroness', 'Countess',

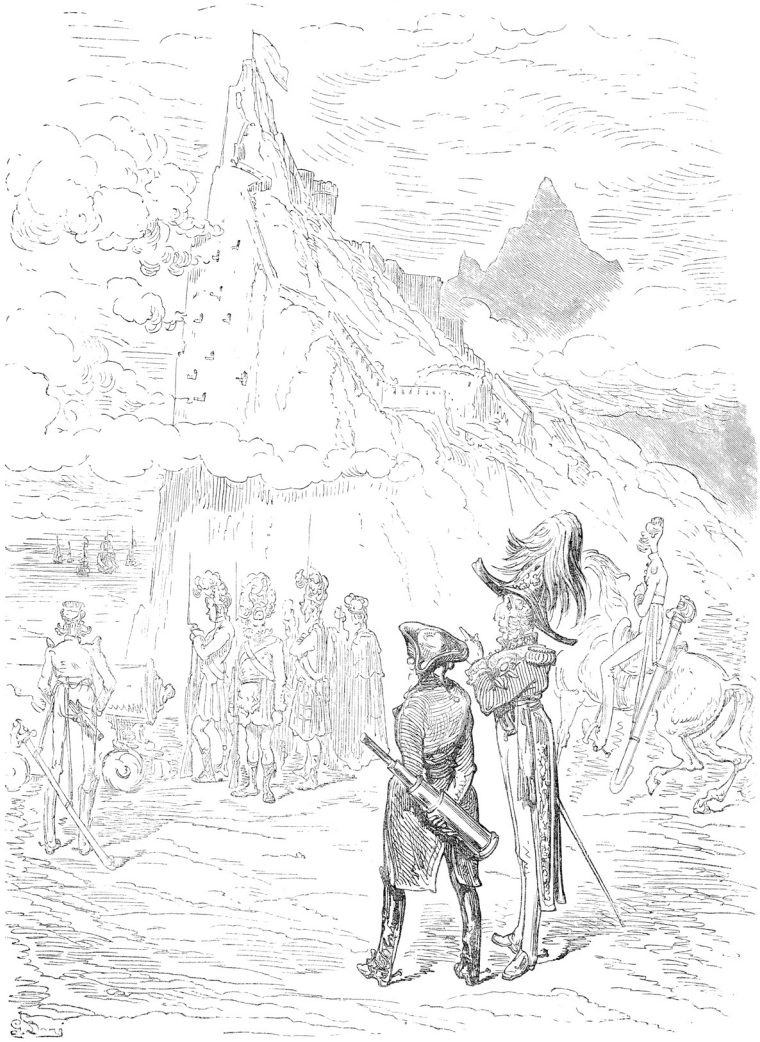
tess', 'Empress' and so forth are equally permissible, on the sole condition that they promise not to dot their 'i's with small love-hearts.

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 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 pedigree 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.

BEGINNING



The BARON discusses with a fellow officer the etiquette of who is to start a new game (page 9).

BEGINNING THE PLAY.

ONCE ALL the company have either generated characters or discoursed 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, number of estates or centuries that the title has been in the family; 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 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 pinch-penny. 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 :

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 examples or one of 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 they must start their 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 by commencing his tale by exclaiming, “ *Ab!* ” and then perhaps adding, “ *Yès!* ” 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, conjurors and 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

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 do.

Having so declined, and the drinks having been ordered, the player in question shall turn to the player on their right hand and, as is the form, propose the subject of a tale for them 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 storyteller with an objection or a correction

tion 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 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 Umbumbumbu, 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 a hatred of giraffes after her lap-dog was eaten by a mad one” ;

OR :

“ But Ducheſs, at the time of which you ſpeak the Coloffus 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-a-vis* the 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 he

must

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' below, 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 "bigbestvantage point it offered, and so I ordered my sedan-chair to be "carried to the top of the Coloffus that stands astride the harbour "there."*

LORD

LORD HAMPTON (interrupting most rudely, with his mouth full of petits-fours): “ *But Duchefs, at the time of which you speak the Coloffus of Rhodes had been a fallen ruin for fifty years, fo you could not poffibly have climbed it. I faw it fo myfelf a few months previously.*”

As he fo does, he pushes a fovereign toward her.

What is the Duchess to do? She is in a quandary. For the fake 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 ftate of your eyes when you failed to fee the Coloffus of Rhodes, but I fufpect that they were befuddled by the ftong wine of that place, or poffibly turned by one of the women of low repote and low-cut drefses who frequent the area of the harbour.*”

Here she places a fecond fovereign atop his, and pushes them back to him.

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

But my Lord Hampton has felt his pride ftung by the Duchess’s spirited riposte! Will he ftand for fuch denigration? He will not! With a flourish he fwallows his cake, adds another coin to the STAKE, returns it to the Duchess and rejoins thus:

LORD HAMPTON: “ *Since our moft noted hiftorians have defcribed the fall of the Coloffus fome years before your noble birth, milady, if we are to believe the age you claim, might I fuggelt that you had*
“ *become*

“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 dog-skin 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 a sovereign): *“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

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.

I 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 the 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 Baldesar 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 un-
able

able 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
“ing



The BARON displays his understanding of horsemanship, dancing and making polite conversation at the tea-table (page 19).

“ing 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 God’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 nobleman 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

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 traveling 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

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 hot-air balloon, and at length revealed himself to be a woman, a fish-seller's wife from Calais, and mightily in love with me. This would have been the source of much embarrassment to us both, had he not been conveniently hanged for treason. I will not deny that it was I who planted on his person the map of the secret tunnel under the English Channel, 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,

gression, 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 ALL 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 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

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 one occurs, that they 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 in this volume, 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

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 the more properly born, so I must perforce describe it after all. Anyone with a hereditary title or who has ever

served

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 bloodsport 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

efit 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 by my friends Masters Cruikshank and Dore. 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 Welsh ; 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

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 toward 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 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.



Not the stag that the BARON killed with a cake, but a different stag entirely (page 27).

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 Jugemanland, 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 hope 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 ate 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 but-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 to 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-

‘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 cissies and or 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 man of us—a not unusual happening, I learn from my conversations with maritime adventurers, but peculiar

culiar 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, and 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—fear not, gentle reader, I have not forgot—I shall explain 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

brings the greatest enjoyment and astonishment to his listeners. At this point the tale is done, and the audience should respond with a hearty "*Huzzab!*" 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 given below.

If a story-teller finishes his tale and there is none to cry "*Huzzab!*", 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 which a dull tale invokes, and muster a few token "*Huzzab!*"s 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 bring 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, "*Ab!*", 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

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 names an adventure. With that he must put forward one coin. If others of the company agree then

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— commences the tale of the new adventure. If less, then he 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's *Ars Poetica* 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

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 plebians 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 “ *Huzzab !*” 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 they have accumulated as their BOUNTY may not be—nay, in my experience



Some players of the BARON'S game may prove thirstier than others, especially if they have been in recent battle with the Turks (page 32).

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,

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 them all before you have your turn at story-telling. Without coins in your purse you can not 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 read this.)

In the final round of the game, if your company has admitted women to the play, 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.

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 retitle 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 power of the Church is crumbling, and Europe is civilised at last. The Turk 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—both 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,

golfer, 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 deviz'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 making 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 which can 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

ton 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

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, living 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 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 footservant.

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

How



The BARON survives the attack of a lion and a crocodile at the same time (page 43).

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 it was that you became betrothed to the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

The time you ate the King of Norway's 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 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 asses' 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

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 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 200 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 20 turned blue.

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

How you succeeded in 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 Bonny Prince
Charlie

Charlie.

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

The incident where you accidentally impregnated the Pope.

The 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 where you became an ape for a week.

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

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

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 Botanical Gardens at Kew has classified your moustache as a 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 who 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

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 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' trick of parting the Red Sea.

How you visited both North and 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

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 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 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.

How you captured the entire French fleet with a leaky rowing-boat.

How

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 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

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

How you replenished the empty treasury of Liechtenstein in 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 Kent.

How you 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 to accidentally invent Morris dancing.

How

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

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

Why you caused the ancient Battle of Marathon to be re-staged in every detail on the outskirts of Bouloigne.

Your smuggling trips to the Sun, and how it 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 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

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 with a good stock of wine, and 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 their PURSE. The person who last filled the party's glasses turns to the noble on their right hand, and asks them 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 them 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, wilder and places more glory upon themselves. Stories are told in the first person and not be too long—about five minutes is good.

Other players may interrupt the story-teller with objections or elaborations to points of their story. This is done by pushing a coin—the STAKE—to them and saying, "*But {Baron} ...*" (or in the grown-up version draining one's glass, pushing a coin to them 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

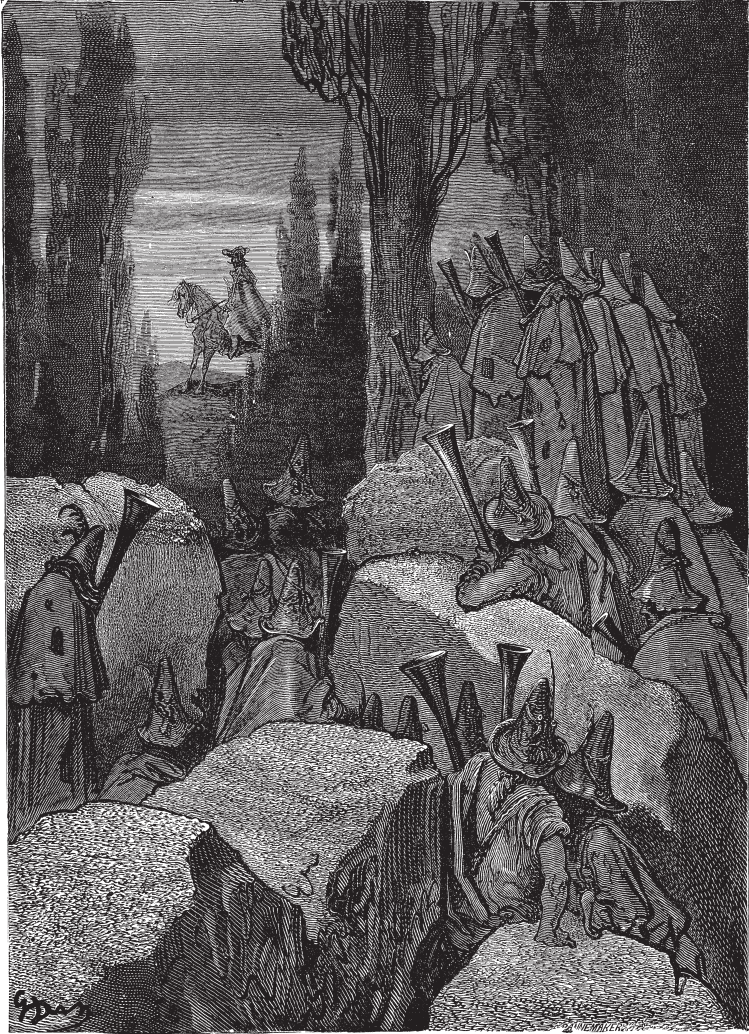
The story-teller may accept the interruption (and the STAKE) and either explain it away or build it into his story; or he may disagree with it. If he disagrees, he may add one of his coins to the STAKE and dismiss the interruption out of hand. He may also ridicule the asker for believing anything so 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 they are wrong claims the entire STAKE ; if it is the story-teller then they must build the interruption into their 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 begins 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.

THE



The BARON'S skill at duelling is so renowned throughout Europe that his opponents require not only seconds but thirds, fourths, fifths and sometimes more (page 59).

THE BARON'S LATE ADVENTURES IN ARABY.

A variation on the previous 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 62 degrees to the vertical (I have seen it measured) and

and when cooked produce pear pies, 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 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 that in the Americas there is much talk that 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 Welchman.

At this juncture I should apologize 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

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 included 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 very 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 Hussar 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

ficient to show these impudent knaves not to trifle in my business, or eavesdrop 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 had 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 embroidery 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 concerns 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 before.

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 sealing 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 venerable 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 two and a half thousand 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



Giant birds like the RUKH are a hazard that is feared by almost all renowned adventurers (page 63).

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, and we spent two happy days comparing our histories and debating whether the giant *rukbb*-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 so many of 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 wrote for you in London. Es-Sindibad
begged

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 *rûkb*-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

spect. 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 can imagine the sight of Baghdad from the air, though its magnificence brought joy to my soul, occasioned only the most distressed shrieks of terror from Es-Sindibad. 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 *forty 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

is remarkably like wild cotton—and used it to fashion a larger version of the toy para-chutes 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 the story of this his eighth voyage.

I perceived that the winds of the upper stratos-sphere had carried us near to Mount Ararat, and sensed that the great djinni above was becoming restless at the sight of its 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 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 snowball 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

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 where the Bible says it should rest, and herewith I furnish you with 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-Sindbad. 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 BARON returns to the shores of Europe after his adventures in Araby and Africa (page 67).

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 fire-side, 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 remembered by Baron Munchausen

THE STORY-TELLERS gather together in a circle, the relative heights and decorative splendour of their seating arrangements denoting their status *vis-a-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, and come to it neither can I. I will let both stand.)

The second and second most important point, Es-Sindibad stressed to me, is the omission of all forms of alcohol from the play of the game. This seems to me a great error, not least because it removes from the room the presence of attentive serving-girls, but he assured me that dates and mint tea would make a very acceptable substitute.

The wagering system is also to be altered, for Es-Sindibad informs me that no zealous Moslem would dream of wagering in any form, for such things are against the teachings of their religion, and therefore all coins and other sums of money should be replaced once again by dates, or if you have no dates then possibly mint tea. I confess I may be unclear on this point, but if the matter concerns you then I am sure that Es-Sindibad will welcome your correspondence on the subject.

Each story-teller takes their turn to recount the story of one of their voyages to the distant parts of the world, what misfortunes befell them when they reached there, and how they returned safely to Baghdad with sufficient goods of a value that would make the Sultan himself gulp and blush. This therefore is the format of each teller's story : the voyage

age out ; the misfortune ; the recovery therefrom ; and the return home, often in spectacular style.

Since the fame of each story-teller has spread far and wide, it is assumed that all the others have heard the tales of their exciting voyages to the reaches of the world and are asking to hear the tale retold. Rather than each member of the circle demanding a story from the one to their right (as with my own game play passes to the right, since to pass to the person on one's left hand would be the gravest of insults in Araby), instead the first player requests to hear the story of the next teller's voyage to a specific location, and the player beyond them adds a detail—one only—and then the next adds another, till all in the circle bar the story-teller himself have contributed something to the outline. Thus :

YAMAN : “ *My friend Basbaar, pray tell us the famous tale of your voyage to the island of the flesh-eating ifrit.*”

SHAREEF : “ *Yes ! Do not shirk on the details of how all your travelling companions were torn limb from limb and devoured by the fearful creatures.*”

JAMAAL : “ *And also how you seduced one of them.*”

NABHAN : “ *And how the child it bore you helped in your escape.*”

FAARIS : “ *For myself, I am most interested to hear about how you acquired the prodigious quantity of honey you sold on your return to Bagdad.*”

Putting aside the fact that Faaris is a bore and over-preoccupied with matters mercantile and how this clearly demonstrates the deficiencies of the game when played without the use of fine wines to clear the mind and loosen the tongue, the system that underlies this variation should be now as clear as the waters of the Tigris.

The teller must now recount their story, incorporating all the details requested by the other players. As with mine

own game the other players may break into the story with interruptions, but these may only take one of two forms :

1. The asking of a question on a matter that requires greater explanation
2. The question : “ *But my friend, were you not killed ?*”

Although it is clear that the teller was not killed, since they are here present and very much alive (at least one hopes they are very much alive ; strange things are known to happen in the mystic heat of Araby and it may be a wise precaution to check the status of all participants with regards to vivacity before the game begins ; a drop of holy water in the mint tea will most often do the trick), the asking of this question forces them to explain precisely how and why they were not killed, and creates many amusing diversions.

This restriction on the liberty of the listeners to ask any questions that occur to them is, I am assured, on the grounds of the politeness that is customary to the people of Baghdad.

When the storyteller finishes recounting the tale of his voyage the listeners applaud in the usual fashion, but any who can claim that the part of the story they asked to hear was omitted or elided may claim a coin (or a date, or a cup of mint tea).

Alternatively you may adopt the manner of the storytellers and audiences so often found in the marketplaces of Araby. In this system any listener may interrupt to raise an objection to any point of the teller’s tale. The teller may ignore the interruption, or may answer it as a part of their tale ; in the latter case the listener must throw the teller a coin once the subject of the interruption has been explained away or involved into the matter of the story.

According to Es-Sindibad, it is of crucial importance that you praise, bless and thank Allah for everything good
that

that happens in the story. You must not, however, make the mistake of blaming him for anything bad that happens or you will be asked to leave the room, and on the other side of the door a large eunuch will remove your head from your shoulders with a sword and a grin. This at least is the case if you play in Araby ; I am reasonably sure that the same thing will not happen in the environs of St James, though one cannot be too careful.

Shortly before his descent from the pantaloons, Es-Sindibad also made a reference to “ *Strange Customs on Table* “ *H*” but I failed to ask him what he meant by this. I assume it refers to some act of hideous depravity that befel him on one of his voyages—atop a table, one would surmise—that he has cautiously omitted from the public versions of his tales, and scholars of the Eastern tales may care to take note of this.



A prank by one of the BARON's mischievous nephews goes badly awry (page 75).

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 snowdrift near Saltzburg 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 that 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

visibility, 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

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, only 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 to it. 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 hand-
some

some 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.

I 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 spongeish like the brains of the giant crabs of old Nippon, in which weak spot they may be struck for massive damage. The second is for their older sblings, 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

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 vortex 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, the djinni of Persia strayed far from home. No sir, I tell you, as one of them broke from its circling and swooped down toward 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

jured 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 aerial 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 though made of wood their feline nature could not be denied. 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 whirl-wind 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 realized at once that it must be that of one of the many Sun-gods that crowd our skies today, and on discerning

cerning his large nose, short stature 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 Reisling 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's 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 the edge of 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 realize 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

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 their 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 a-sleep, 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 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

lence 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 devised 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 *minimus* to be employed once I have devised 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



When meeting pagan deities such as Vulcan and Venus, the BARON advises his friends to bow low, fix their gaze on the ground and not to comment on their raiment (page 85).

additional rules by which the play of *Ludens Major* may be achieved. Accordingly I now realize 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 the ancient Greeks 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, who 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

the

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 Glass, “*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, who 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 as is traditional, 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

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 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

“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 will see—that three men are harder to duel than two. So the story is more extraordinary than the one from which it 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 buffars.”

What

What a fine generation we have wrought ! What wit and understanding are theirs ! What sublime 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 “his uncle the Baron who had 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 their 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,

or, if a bright and educated fellow, he 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 learned 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, they 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, they 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 should therefore deserve to be challenged. Press on, my good fellow, for the information on challenges awaits below.

CHALLENGES

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 their 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, they may respond briefly to justify themselves 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 they have finished their turn then the player to their left) may continue with the game.

If the challenge is found valid then in all cases the result
is



The BARON recalls where he parked his horse (page 110).

is the same. That player must absent themselves from the play and the table for the rest of this game, and a new round of play is begun, with the child sat to the left of the now-empty chair of the falterer. 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 stories—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

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 inn-keeper, 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 storyteller must then expand their previous sentence to the size of a paragraph or so, adding details
and

and decoration to their 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 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

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 Baronefs 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

Clarissa's challenge is thus overturned by general agreement 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 back 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 Baronefs 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 caused to be painted by a fellow called Da 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 arofe to Heaven itself using only two planks of wood.*"

Two planks of wood ! A derogatory reference perhaps
to

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 faggots and a flaming brand ! Burn the devil out of him !* ”

Though burning one of the participants at a 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 bonfire has died down to embers 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-fe* Bertrand has devoured all the cakes.

All

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 snowdrift near Saltzburg with the Empress of Russia, when the Empress is known to have a great allergy to Saltzburg such as would bring her out in *vapours*, *fits* and the *dropfy* should she venture within an 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 Madiera-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.



In matters of horsemanship during battle, the BARON finds it advisable to carry a spare (page 114).

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 seahorse.
- ... found a goldmine 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.
- ... stole a diamond as big as a pigeon's egg from the Tower of London.
- ... 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.
- ... shot a hat from a man's head at fifty paces.
- ... 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.
- ... was swallowed by a huge fish.
- ... hunted, caught and cooked a rabbit in ten minutes.
- ... rode from Paris to Madrid in an hour.
- ... 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

- ... 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.
- ... 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.
- ... 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 prison 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 Seigneur 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.

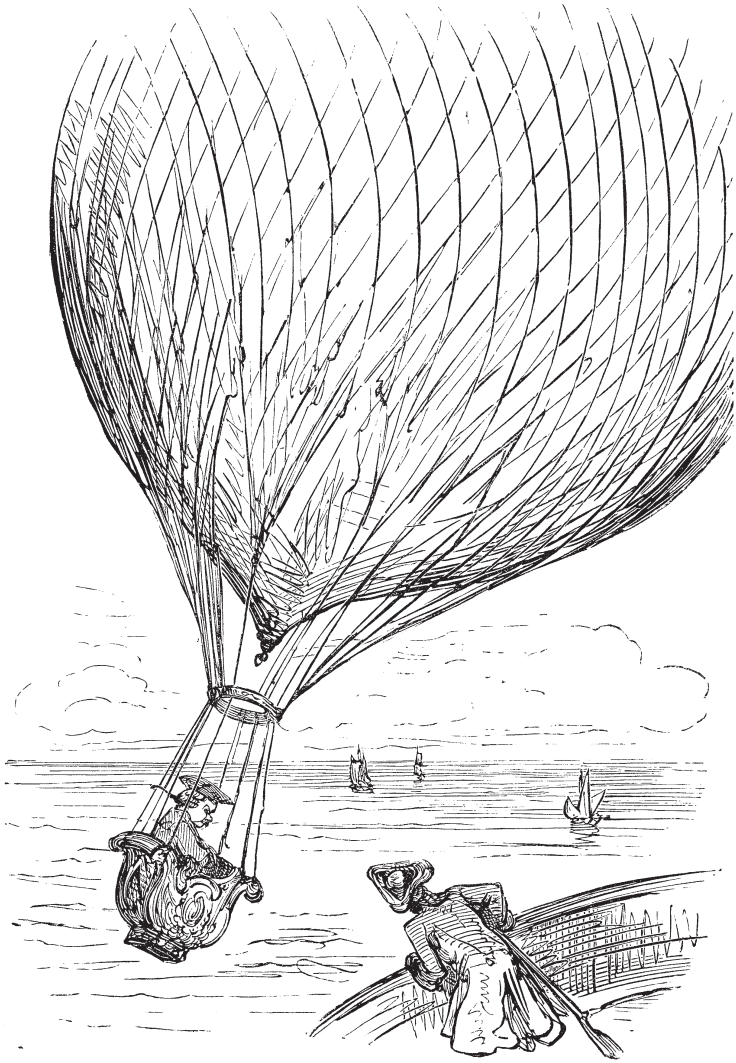
If a player is unable to think of a better story than the one told by the player on his right, or if he is challenged by another player and the company agrees that his story is less good than the one before, then he is eliminated from the game.

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, may turn to the preceding player and ask for them to expand their story by saying, "PRAY TELL us, how did he do that?" The preceding player must furnish a short explanation of the story they have outlined, to the satisfaction of the company. If they succeed then their challenger is eliminated. If they fail they are eliminated. In either case, a new round is begun.

EPILOGUE



The BARON encounters a Munchausen of another sort (page 106).

EPILOGUE.

I HAVE BEEN joined by some 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 toward 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 extra-ordinary of my adventures, involving as it does not just the Hussars but also incidents of misadventure, peradventure, high adventure, high treason, a different snowdrift near Saltzburg 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

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 re-telling? 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 Scotch 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 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 eldritch

(the remaining pages of the book have been torn out)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS.

BARON MUNCHAUSEN was the greatest adventurer and raconteur the world has ever known. According to historical record he died in 1797.

GUSTAVE DORÉ was the finest illustrator of the nineteenth century, and is best known for his engravings of scenes from the Bible and Dante's *Inferno*. He died in 1883.

JAMES WALLIS is a Origins Award-winning games designer, author and publisher, fortunate in having high-quality ancestors.