Games from Folktales

TRANSCRIPTS FOR JUNE 2018

The Magical Realm is Meinong's Jungle
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An experiment in podcasting for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

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The Magical Realm is Meinong's Jungle

If I were to say "Unicorns have wings." you might reply "No, Timothy: that's Pegasus. Unicorns have horns." A third person, listening in would agree with you. Unicorns have horns. Pegasus has wings. The problem is: there are no unicorns: so how can that statement "Unicorns have horns" be more true than the statement that "Unicorns have wings."? This is called the Empty Name problem, and many months ago I tried to script a podcast about how the accidental use of empty names is what causes spellcasting to fail in Ars Magica. You try to create a thing, and the thing does not exist, so your magical energy courses through you, to stop you damaging the Universe.

There's a problem, though, and its a couple of lines in Realms of Power : Magic, where it says that impossible objects can be bought back to the mortal realm from the Dream part of the Realm of Magic. The example it gives is a living platinum peacock. This means that platinum peacocks are not real, in the physical sense, but have the potential to be real, because they exist in supernormal space and can be drawn into the real world.

Here here, we strike philosophy, and we have one of our regular infodumps.

Meinong was an Austrian philosopher, who tried to work around the Empty Name problem by suggesting there were no empty names. It gets a little weird, but if you want to know what gears are grinding far back in the Magic Realm, enigmatic seems to be inevitable. Meinong believed that everything that you thought about was an object, and that all objects exist in a sense, even though there are some objects which both exist and have no material being. Those of you into linguistics will note that what he is doing here is redefining the word "is" so that it's not a binary switch. He's also taking liberties with the definition of "object" and that matters to us because, in game, objects are targets. If you can broaden the class of objects, you can broaden the targets for spellcasting.

Lets imagine a taxonomy of objects. First, let's discard nonsense. Meinong defines nonsense as ideas so badly formed that they cannot be thought about or used to communicate anything. He gives examples like "an inkblot whittled down from a piano". Nonsense does more than not exist: it's not an object. Objects, to Meinong exist ambivalently to their material state: that is, there are material objects , immaterial objects, and objects which are not definitely tied to either state. Nonsense is outside of this framework: it doesn't just not exist materially, it's not just defined as non-existent, it goes further than that into a sort of utter negation.

All objects: which is to say all things which can be meaningfully thought about, have a quality called absistence. They exist-as-such, which is why we can talk about them. Within the set of absistent objects is a smaller set of subsistent objects, which in some sense might materially exist. Within this is a smaller set again, of material objects.

These three categories can be divided further, but let's make things easier by cutting out the simplest: real objects. My phone is on the desk in front of me. My phone, and my desk exist, subsist and absist. In Mythic Europe, existent objects litter the landscape, because they are the landscape. They are "complete" objects, which means all of their properties are known, and describable, and, in this case, are coherent. They are targeted by Muto, Perdo, Rego and Intellego magic.

One step away are objects which do not have material existence, but subsist. Meinong calls these Ideal Objects, but they differ from what we are meaning in Ars Magica when we talk about Platonic Forms as Ideal Objects. Ideal Objects are complete, and have a material effect, but are not material. For example: my phone is a material object. That my phone is on the table in front of me is something I can think about, and measure, so its a complete object, but the relation of the table to the phone, despite being in the material world, is not held in a single object I could pick up and call "the state of my phone being on the table". In Ars Magica, if you are a theurgist, you may well be able to talk to these ideal objects: arguably that's what you are doing when you cast spells. When you make the branch of a tree whip about to harm your enemies, are you talking to the tree, or are you talking to the state of the universe defining the position of the branch? Arguably the great spirits which touch the world through Aspects are in this part of the Realm.

For Meinong, numbers are in this category. That I have one phone, rather than three phones, is not a property of the phone: it's a state of affairs which, because I can consider it and it is material in a sense, is an Ideal Object. Hermetic magic can't deal with number, save at the basest material level. You have more phones by adding more physical objects, not by saying that, for example, the number of objects has changed. Let's use a folkloristic example: there are some quivers which are always full. How many arrows do they have in them? Let's say 20. That number doesn't change just because you pull arrows out. Hermetic magic can simulate that by making new arrows when the old ones are taken out, but it can't define the quiver as innately always possessing arrows. Faeries can, by the way, because their props aren't objects: they are inherent properties of the glamour of the faerie.

Having dealt with nonsense, material objects and states of being between material objects, it's time to head into the Jungle, which is a joke at Meinong's expense in the real world. The question posed to him was if unicorns, square circles and mountains of gold exist, where do they exist? Meinhold's Jungle is the answer given by detractors of his theory, but in Ars Magica, we know that at least some of the inhabitants of the Jungle are in the Magic Realm, so let's head in there and see if we can find viable spell targets.

Let's break up the objects in the Jungle.

Some objects are defined as having non-being. That is, they are not material. These are divided into two types: objects whose properties are not contradictory, and objects whose properties are contradictory.

Let's look at that first one, which I'd also divides into two types: complete and non-complete objects. As an example, I have a real phone on my desk, which is an HTC. The iPhone on my desk is, by comparison, not real, but doesn't have inherently contradictory properties, and its properties are known ("complete") because we know what I mean when I say an iPhone. This little subsection is important, because this is where Meinong places Platonic Forms, but only if Platonic Forms are not real. He leaves himself a loophole here, so that if it turns out the Neoplatonists were right all along, and the material world is designed by emanations from the Forms, they can be moved across into Ideal Objects. That's where they land in Ars Magica, I believe, although that's arguable. Aristotle seems to, for example.

I'd argue that you can make this class of objects with Creo Magic. Even if you don't know all of the details, this object acts as a template for your magical powers to latch onto. This is why you don't need to know how many toenails an elephant has to create an elephant. You just need to know how to designate this object. That is you need to name it, or do the theurgic equivalent of pointing at it.

The closest relative of the objects described above are objects which have non-being, non-contradictory properties, and are incomplete. These are presupposed not to materially exist: that is, you can talk about them as if they were real, but they are never detailed enough, or solid enough, to be real. These are interesting to us, because these are the things people can bring back from the Dream or Magical Realm, but can't make with standard Creo magic. A living peacock made of platinum, for example, arguably doesn't have any inherently contradictory qualities, but there's no clear way of understanding how it works. It joins other things, like perpetual motion machines and mountains of phones, as things you can understand on their own terms, but can't comfortably slide into the workings of the world.

This is what Hermetic researchers writing rituals do, I'd argue: they make non-contradictory, incomplete objedcts sufficently complete that they can be called up with Creo Magic. You can summon a dragon with a Creo Ritual, because someone who knew a lot about dragons coded that into the description of dragons embodied in the ritualized version of the name "dragon".

Pause now in this clearing in the Jungle and consider what we have seen: we have seen the things which Creo Magic can make, and we have seen the things which Creo Magic cannot effectively make but which can be bought back from Dream, which is the Magic Realm. We have waved to the magi trying to drag things from one side of that division to the other, by defining the incomplete objects to such a degree they can be made by Creo magic in the mundane world. We stand at the edge of the shallow Magic realm, and we are about to head out into the theoretical territory where Criamon magi strive to break the clockwork of the universe.

Let's head out.

The first set of objects we find are those which have contradictory properties. The round square is a particular favourite of people who come to the Jungle. You can't bring a round square back from Dream, but if you could it would be incredibly useful because geometry matters in magic, and it would have the properties of both a square and a circle at the same time. From a play perspective, though, its hard to see how, if you laid out a tower on a floorplan of rounded squares, you'd map it. It's cosmetic in game because we can't grapple with it in any other way, and so it's Engimatic, or impossible. It's here you'd find Magi in Twilight. They are both human and not human - embodying a contradiction that precludes them returning to the mortal realm.

Further out, we reach the final class of objects: these are ambivalent about being, non-contradictory and incomplete. Here is the triangle which is both not equilateral, and not not equilateral (which, to Meinong, is not the same as being equilateral - remember, no binary "is"). Here we find objects which are so ill-defined they have only one property, for example, being the colour yellow, without, at the same time, being the Form of Yellow (which is defined by its emminative relation to the material world). You can't bring these into the real world, because they lack sufficient completeness to become embodied.

I was listening to Rusty Quill Gaming, and a character they have, Sir Bertram MacGuffin, reminded me of Bertrand Russell. I have no idea why, but let's charge on...Russell said some interesting things about the meaning of sentences, which may have effects in the spoken component of spellcasting.

So, Russell starts off being big on Meinong, who has his own episode. He likes the idea that a word is defined by the thing it denotes. It does not, crucially, reflect an object out in the Realm of Forms. Russell isn't a fan of the emporium that is Meinong's Jungle. His initial way around this is to suggest that words don't denote things. Well, actually only four words denote things: this; that; these; those. The other words which you think are denoting things are actually just describing them. When you cast a spell on an orange, Russell's argument is that you are casting a spell of that thing (denotation) which is an orange (description),

Russell's longer form of this argument is that when you say "The current king of France is bald" you sense it is false, but what's the logical form of the argument for falseness? You can't test it. He argues that this appears to be a single sentence, but is actually three.

There is a type of thing which is "King of France".
That thing which uniquely has the properties of "King of France" is the King of France.
A property of the thing mentioned above is baldness.

The second line is to take care of the "the". in the original sentence - and it's the one which fails when a modern person is targeting "The King of France". Meinong's Jungle may well have a "King of France" in it, because its something you can coherently discuss, but that doesn't mean that in a realistic, denotative, sense, there is a person who is the king of France.

Russell uses this to enforce a sort of bivalency in his language. There is either a King of France, or not a King of France: there is no quality of King of Francishness which is seeping out of the Magic Realm into the material, as per Plato and Meinong. When you say "I cast a Pilum of Fire at my enemy." you are clearly in Russell's sort of world, because the magic spirit that guides the pilum doesn't go through a list of who you hate most to find what you mean by "enemy". There's an implied "that enemy", and the spirit follows that implication unless you fumble the spell. This is also handy because it prevents self-reference in Perdo Vim spells.

So, grammatical form seems to be different from logical form in Mythic Europe, because we are playing in modern English. The magi do seem to know: they have spotted there's a difference between signifier and signified, because they have translated spells into multiple languages. They also know faeries speak a language that is basically a jumble of metasyntax, so that people hear what is intended in their own language, rather than in a separate, Faerie language.

For Russell, from this emerges the idea of a "logical fiction". Logical fictions are things we can talk about, and they have meaning, and are embodied, but in a real sense don't exist. They function is a shorthand for complexity. An example is when we discuss what a committee, or covenant, decides. The committee really doesn't decide anything: each person on the committee decides and this gets aggregated. Similarly, the average grog in a covenant may have 1.94 legs, but that doesn't mean a particular grog has 1.94. An "average person" is not embodied in a single person. To me, these logical fictions are a new class of faerie in need to think about. They are a story, after all.

Russell also had an interesting idea on how we know about things. He has two classes of knowing. He denies that to know a thing, you need to completely comprehend the thing: at that level of detail you could never know anything. You either know a thing by personal experience, or you know of a type of thing, and that there is one object which fulfils the description of the thing.

His ideas illuminate a question about the workings of Hermetic magic, which fills in the rough details when you create things. You say you want to make a lion, and you get a lion, even if you only know lions by a drawing in a bestiary. The usual explanation is that the spell gets the extra detail from the Realm of Forms, but that doesn't make sense, even in Platonic magic, because the whole point of Forms is they don't have accidents. Plato's sword is not sharp or blunt, because it has only swordishness, but nothing that is not swordishness. Plato's lion has no colour, and no appetite, and no fur, because it's not detailed enough to be material. How can the Form tell you how many hairs are on the head of a lion, or what colour they are? How can you dredge a Form for accidents, when by definition they have none?

Russell says that most things you know, because you are familiar with then. You have direct contact with the thing, or memory of that contact. Your other way of knowing things is because you are aware that there is a type of thing, and that a particular object has the properties of that thing. Your magus knows that Prima of House Tremere is Poena, even though he has never met Poena, because he is aware that there is a class of things called "Primi" which intersects with a class of things called "Tremere magi" and that there is an object which is called Poena that is in the intersection of those classes.

He later suggests your knowledge of types of things derives from acquaintance, so the later type of knowing is due to the accumulation of objects in direct, sensory experience. In much Hermetic magic you can strike things which are in the first class, but not the second, unless you have an Arcane Connection, which allows you to say "That!" to the spirit in your spells. A name is not a definite description, lacking a "that!", but a True Name is a definite description.

So, to wrap it up, in Russell's view, the only real things in targeting instructions are: this; that; these; those. Everything else is description. A name is a description. A noun is a description. "I create a lion" is really "I create -this- lion". The lion is extrapolated from your experience, rather than the form of lions. Arcane connections allow you to state a "this" or "that" beyond you immediate sensory experience. In the gap between the logical and grammatical form is likely a new form of faerie.

Dunsany: The Watchtower

I sat one April in Provence on a small hill above an ancient town that Goth and Vandal as yet have forborne to "bring up to date."

On the hill was an old worn castle with a watch-tower, and a well with narrow steps and water in it still.

The watch-tower, staring South with neglected windows, faced a broad valley full of the pleasant twilight and the hum of evening things: it saw the fires of wanderers blink from the hills, beyond them the long forest black with pines, one star appearing, and darkness settling slowly down on Var.

Sitting there listening to the green frogs croaking, hearing far voices clearly but all transmuted by evening, watching the windows in the little town glimmering one by one, and seeing the gloaming dwindle solemnly into night, a great many things fell from mind that seem important by day, and evening in their place planted strange fancies.

Little winds had arisen and were whispering to and fro, it grew cold, and I was about to descend the hill, when I heard a voice behind me saying, "Beware, beware."

So much the voice appeared a part of the evening that I did not turn round at first; it was like voices that one hears in sleep and thinks to be of one's dream. And the word was monotonously repeated, in French.

When I turned round I saw an old man with a horn. He had a white beard marvellously long, and still went on saying slowly, "Beware, beware." He had clearly just come from the tower by which he stood, though I had heard no footfall. Had a man come stealthily upon me at such an hour and in so lonesome a place I had certainly felt surprised; but I saw almost at once that he was a spirit, and he seemed with his uncouth horn and his long white beard and that noiseless step of his to be so native to that time and place that I spoke to him as one does to some fellow-traveller who asks you if you mind having the window up.

I asked him what there was to beware of.

"Of what should a town beware," he said, "but the Saracens?"

"Saracens?" I said.

"Yes, Saracens, Saracens," he answered and brandished his horn.

"And who are you?" I said.

"I, I am the spirit of the tower," he said.

When I asked him how he came by so human an aspect and was so unlike the material tower beside him he told me that the lives of all the watchers who had ever held the horn in the tower there had gone to make the spirit of the tower. "It takes a hundred lives," he said. "None hold the horn of late and men neglect the tower. When the walls are in ill repair the Saracens come: it was ever so."

"The Saracens don't come nowadays," I said.

But he was gazing past me watching, and did not seem to heed me.

"They will run down those hills," he said, pointing away to the South, "out of the woods about nightfall, and I shall blow my horn. The people will all come up from the town to the tower again; but the loopholes are in very ill repair."

"We never hear of the Saracens now," I said.

"Hear of the Saracens!" the old spirit said. "Hear of the Saracens! They slip one evening out of that forest, in the long white robes that they wear, and I blow my horn. That is the first that anyone ever hears of the Saracens."

"I mean," I said, "that they never come at all. They cannot come and men fear other things." For I thought the old spirit might rest if he knew that the Saracens can never come again. But he said, "There is nothing in the world to fear but the Saracens. Nothing else matters. How can men fear other things?"

Then I explained, so that he might have rest, and told him how all Europe, and in particular France, had terrible engines of war, both on land and sea; and how the Saracens had not these terrible engines either on sea or land, and so could by no means cross the Mediterranean or escape destruction on shore even though they should come there. I alluded to the European railways that could move armies night and day faster than horses could gallop. And when as well as I could I had explained all, he answered, "In time all these things pass away and then there will still be the Saracens."

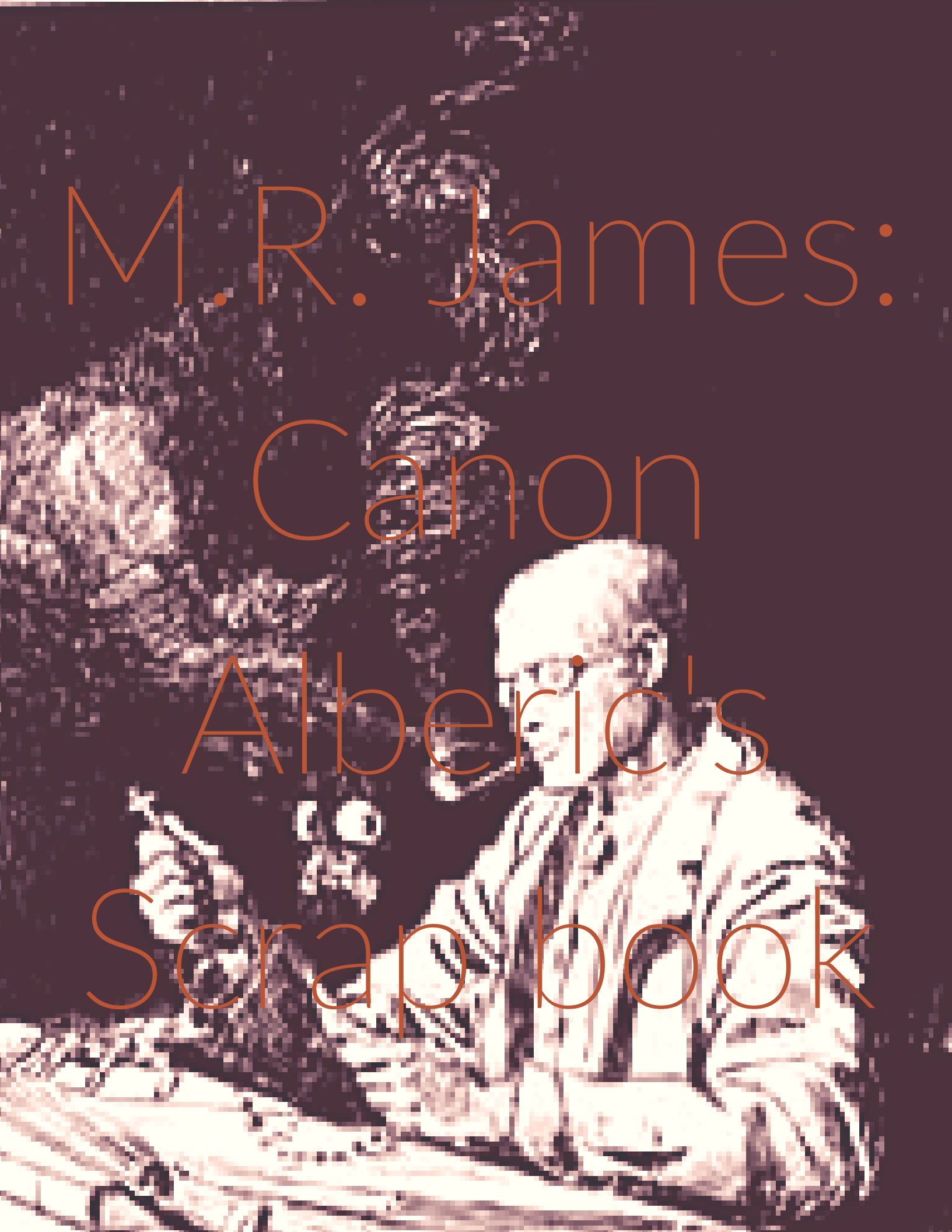
And then I said, "There has not been a Saracen either in France or Spain for over four hundred years."

And he said, "The Saracens! You do not know their cunning. That was ever the way of the Saracens. They do not come for a while, no not they, for a long while, and then one day they come."

And peering southwards, but not seeing clearly because of the rising mist, he silently moved to his tower and up its broken steps.

This short story by Lord Dunsany is a character study of a ghost. It demonstrates the tragedy of that type of undeath in Mythic Europe. Ghosts do not learn, and that means that sometimes their task cannot be completed. They linger on pointlessly: senselessly suffering.

Imagine your covenant has a similar sort of ghost. Should you keep him as a guard, or find a way to convince him to rest? If a rival covenant had a ghostly watcher like this, how could you lay it to rest at just the right time for maximum advantage?



M.R. James: Canon Alberic's Scrap-book

St. Bertrand de Comminges is a decayed town on the spurs of the Pyrenees, not very far from Toulouse, and still nearer to Bagnères-de-Luchon. It was the site of a bishopric until the Revolution, and has a cathedral which is visited by a certain number of tourists. In the spring of 1883 an Englishman arrived at this old-world place—I can hardly dignify it with the name of city, for there are not a thousand inhabitants.

He was a Cambridge man, who had come specially from Toulouse to see St. Bertrand's Church, and had left two friends, who were less keen archæologists than himself, in their hotel at Toulouse, under promise to join him on the following morning. Half an hour at the church would satisfy them and all three could then pursue their journey in the direction of Auch.

But our Englishman had come early on the day in question, and proposed to himself to fill a note-book and to use several dozens of plates in the process of describing and photographing every corner of the wonderful church that dominates the little hill of Comminges. In order to carry out this design satisfactorily, it was necessary to monopolize the verger of the church for the day. The verger or sacristan (I prefer the latter appellation, inaccurate as it may be) was accordingly sent for by the somewhat brusque lady who keeps the inn of the Chapeau Rouge; and when he came, the Englishman found him an unexpectedly interesting object of study. It was not in the personal appearance of the little, dry, wizened old man that the interest lay, for he was precisely like dozens of other church-guardians in France, but in a curious furtive, or rather hunted and oppressed, air which he had. He was perpetually half glancing behind him; the muscles of his back and shoulders seemed to be hunched in a continual nervous contraction, as if he were expecting every moment to find himself in the clutch of an enemy.

The Englishman hardly knew whether to put him down as a man haunted by a fixed delusion, or as one oppressed by a guilty conscience, or as an unbearably henpecked husband. The probabilities, when reckoned up, certainly pointed to the last idea; but, still, the impression conveyed was that of a more formidable persecutor even than a termagant wife.

However, the Englishman (let us call him Dennistoun) was soon too deep in his note-book and too busy with his camera to give more than an occasional glance to the sacristan. Whenever he did look at him, he found him at no great distance, either huddling himself back against the wall or crouching in one of the gorgeous stalls. Dennistoun became rather fidgety after a time. Mingled suspicions that he was keeping the old man from his déjeuner that he was regarded as likely to make away with St. Bertrand's ivory crozier, or with the dusty stuffed crocodile that hangs over the font, began to torment him.

'Won't you go home?' he said at last; 'I'm quite well able to finish my notes alone; you can lock me in if you like. I shall want at least two hours more here, and it must be cold for you, isn't it?'

'Good heavens!' said the little man, whom the suggestion seemed to throw into a state of imaccountable terror, 'such a thing cannot be thought of for a moment. Leave monsieur alone in the church? No, no; two hours, three hours, all will be the same to me. I have breakfasted, I am not at all cold, with many thanks to monsieur.'

'Very well, my little man,' quoth Dennistoun to himself: 'you have been warned, and you must take the consequences.'

Before the expiration of the two hours, the stalls, the enormous dilapidated organ, the choir-screen of Bishop John de Mauléon, the remnants of glass and tapestry, and the objects in the treasure-chamber, had been well and truly examined; the sacristan still keeping at Dennistoun's heels, and every now and then whipping round as if he had been stung, when one or other of the strange noises that trouble a large empty building fell on his ear. Curious noises they were sometimes.

'Once,' Dennistoun said to me, 'I could have sworn I heard a thin metallic voice laughing high up in the tower. I darted an inquiring glance at my sacristan. He was white to the lips. "It is he—that is—it is no one; the door is locked," was all he said, and we looked at each other for a fall minute.'

Another little incident puzzled Dennistoun a good deal. He was examining a large dark picture that hangs behind the altar, one of a series illustrating the miracles of St. Bertrand. The composition of the picture is well-nigh indecipherable, but there is a Latin legend below, which runs thus:

'Qualiter S. Bertrandus liberavit hominem quern diabolus diu volebat strangulare.' (How St. Bertrand delivered a man whom the Devil long sought to strangle.)
Dennistoun was turning to the sacristan with a smile and a jocular remark of some sort on his Ups, but he was confounded to see the old man on his knees, gazing at the picture with the eye of a suppliant in agony, his hands tightly clasped, and a rain of tears on his cheeks. Dennistoun naturally pretended to have noticed nothing, but the question would not away from him, 'Why should a daub of this kind affect anyone so strongly?' He seemed to himself to be getting some sort of clue to the reason of the strange look that had been puzzling him all the day: the man must be a monomaniac; but what was his monomania?

It was nearly five o'clock; the short day was drawing in, and the church began to fill with shadows, while the curious noises—the muffled footfalls and distant talking voices that had been perceptible all day—seemed, doubt because of the fading light and the consequently quickened sense of hearing, become more frequent and insistent.

The sacristan began for the first time show signs of hurry and impatience. He heaved a sigh of relief when camera and note-book were finally packed up and stowed away, and hurriedly beckoned Dennistoun to the western door of the church, under the tower. It was time to ring the Angelus. A few pulls at the reluctant rope, and the great bell Bertrande, high in the tower, began to speak, and swung her voice up among the pines and down to the valleys, loud with mountain-streams, calling the dwellers on those lonely hills to remember and repeat the salutation of the angel to her whom he called Blessed among women. With that a profound quiet seemed to fall for the first time that day upon the little town, and Dennistoun and the sacristan went out of the church.

On the doorstep they fell into conversation.

'Monsieur seemed to interest himself in the old choir-books in the sacristy.'

'Undoubtedly. I was going to ask you if there were a library in the town.'

'No, monsieur; perhaps there used to be one belonging to the Chapter, bit it is now such a small place——' Here came a strange pause of irresolution, as it seemed; then, with a sort of plunge, he went on: 'But if monsieur is amateur des vieux livres, I have at home something that might interest him. It is not a hundred yards.'

At once all Dennistoun's cherished dreams of finding priceless manuscripts in untrodden corners of France flashed up, to die down again the next moment. It was probably a stupid missal of Plantin's printing, about 1580. Where was the likelihood that a place so near Toulouse would not have been ransacked long ago by collectors? However, it would be foolish not to go; he would reproach himself for ever after if he refused. So they set off. On the way the curious irresolution and sudden determination of the sacristan recurred to Dennistoun, and he wondered in a shame-faced way whether he was being decoyed into some purlieu to be made away with as a supposed rich Englishman. He contrived, therefore, to begin talking with his guide, and to drag in, in a rather clumsy fashion, the fact that he expected two friends to join him early the next morning. To his surprise, the announcement seemed to relieve the sacristan at once of some of the anxiety that oppressed him.

'That is well,' he said quite brightly —'that is very well. Monsieur will travel in company with his friends; they will be always near him. It is a good thing to travel thus in company—sometimes.'

The last word appeared to be added as an afterthought, and to bring with it a relapse into gloom for the poor little man.

They were soon at the house, which was one rather larger than its neighbours, stone-built, with a shield carved over the door, the shield of Alberic de Mauléon, a collateral descendant, Dennistoun. tells me, of Bishop John de Mauléon. This Alberic was a Canon of Comminges from 1680 to 1701. The upper windows of the mansion were boarded up, and the whole place bore, as does the rest of Comminges, the aspect of decaying age.

Arrived on his doorstep, the sacristan paused a moment.

'Perhaps,' he said, 'perhaps, after all, monsieur has not the time?'

'Not at all—lots of time—nothing to do till to-morrow. Let us see what it is you have got'

The door was opened at this point, and a face looked out, a face far younger than the sacristan's, but bearing something of the same distressing look: only here it seemed to be the mark, not so much of fear for personal safety as of acute anxiety on behalf of another. Plainly, the owner of the face was the sacristan's daughter; and, but for the expression I have described, she was a handsome girl enough. She brightened up considerably on seeing her father accompianied by an able-bodied stranger. A few remarks passed between father and daughter, of which Dennistoim only caught these words, said by the sacristan, 'He was laughing in the church,' words which were answered only by a look of terror from the girl.

But in another minute they were in the sitting-room of the house, a small, high chamber with a stone floor, full of moving shadows cast by a wood-fire that flickered on a great hearth. Something of the character of an oratory was imparted to it by a tall crucifix, which reached almost to the ceiling on one side; the figure was painted of the natural colours, the cross was black. Under this stood a chest of some age and solidity, and when a lamp had been brought, and chairs set, the sacristan went to this chest, and produced therefrom, with growing excitement and nervousness, as Dennistoun thought, a large book, wrapped in a white cloth, on which cloth a cross was rudely embroidered in red thread. Even before the wrapping had been removed, Dennistoun began to be interested by the size and shape of the volume.

'Too large for a missal,' he thought, 'and not the shape of an antiphoner; perhaps it may be something good, after all.' The next moment the book was open, and Dennistoun felt that he had at last lit upon something better than good. Before him lay a large folio, bound, perhaps, late in the seventeenth century, with the arms of Canon Alberic de Mauléon stamped in gold on the sides. There may have been a hundred and fifty leaves of paper in the book, and on almost every one of them was fastened a leaf from an illuminated manuscript. Such a collection Dennistoun had hardly dreamed of in his wildest moments. Here were ten leaves from a copy of Genesis, illustrated with pictures, which could not be later than 700 a.d. Further on was a complete set of pictures from a Psalter, of English execution, of the very finest kind that the thirteenth century could produce; and, perhaps best of all, there were twenty leaves of uncial writing in Latin, which, as a few words seen here and there told him at once, must belong to some very early unknown patristic treatise. Could it possibly be a fragment of the copy of Papias 'On the Words of Our Lord,' which was known to have existed as late as the twelfth century at Nimes?'[1] In any case, his mind was made up; that book must return to Cambridge with him, even if he had to draw the whole of his balance from the bank and stay at St. Bertrand till the money came. He glanced up at the sacristan to see if his face yielded any hint that the book was for sale. The sacristan was pale, and his lips were working.

'If monsieur will turn on to the end,' he said.

So monsieur turned on, meeting new treasures at every rise of a leaf; and at the end of the book he came upon two sheets of paper, of much more recent date than anything he had yet seen, which puzzled him considerably. They must be contemporary, he decided, with the imprincipled Canon Alberic, who had doubtless plundered the Chapter library of St. Bertrand to form this priceless scrap-book. On the first of the paper sheets was a plan, carefully drawn and instantly recognisable by a person who knew the ground, of the south aisle and cloisters of St. Bertrand's. There were curious signs looking like planetary symbols, and a few Hebrew words in the corners; and in the north-west angle of the cloister was a cross drawn in gold paint. Below the plan were some lines of writing in Latin, which ran thus:

'Responsa 12mi Dec. 1694.
Interrogatum est: Inveniamne?
Respousum est: Invenies. Fiamne dives? Fies. Vivairine invidendus? Vives. Moriarne in lecto meo? Ita.'
(Answers of the 12th of December, 1694. It was asked: Shall I find it? Answer: Thou shalt. Shall I become rich? Thou wilt. Shall I live an object of envy? Thou wilt. Shall I die in my bed? Thou wilt.)
'A good specimen of the treasure-hunter's record—quite reminds one of Mr. Minor-Canon Quatremain in "Old St. Paul's,"' was Dennistoun's comment, and he turned the leaf.

What he then saw impressed him, as he has often told me, more than he could have conceived any drawing or picture capable of impressing him. And, though the drawing he saw is no longer in existence, there is a photograph of it (which I possess) which fully bears out that statement.

The picture in question was a sepia drawing at the end of the seventeenth century, representing, one would say at first sight, a Biblical scene; for the architecture (the picture represented an interior) and the figures had that semi-classical flavour about them which the artists of two hundred years ago thought appropriate to illustrations of the Bible.

On the right was a King on his throne, the throne elevated on twelve steps, a canopy overhead, soldiers on either side—evidently King Solomon. He was bending forward with outstretched sceptre, in attitude of command; his face expressed horror and disgust, yet there was in it also the mark of imperious command and confident power. The left half of the picture was the strangest, however. The interest plainly centred there. On the pavement before the throne were grouped four soldiers, surrounding a crouching figure which must be described in a moment. A fifth soldier lay dead on the pavement, his neck distorted, and his eyeballs starting from his head. The four surrounding guards were looking at the King. In their faces the sentiment of horror was intensified; they seemed, in fact, only restrained from flight by their implicit trust in their master. All this terror was plainly excited by the being that crouched in their midst.

I entirely despair of conveying by any words the impression which this figure makes upon anyone who looks at it. I recollect once showing the photograph of the drawing to a lecturer on morphology—a person of, I was going to say, abnormally sane and unimaginative habits of mind. He absolutely refused to be alone for the rest of that evening, and he told me afterwards that for many nights he had not dared to put out his light before going to sleep. However, the main traits of the figure I can at least indicate.

At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearful thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered, like the body, with long, coarse hairs, and hideously taloned. The eyes, touched in with a burning yellow, had intensely black pupils, and were fixed upon the throned King with a look of beast-like hate. Imagine one of the awful bird-catching spiders of South America translated into human form, and endowed with intelligence just less than human, and you will have some faint conception of the terror inspired by the appalling effigy. One remark is universally made by those to whom I have shown the picture: 'It was drawn from the life.'

As soon as the first shock of his irresistible fright had subsided, Dennistoun stole a look at his hosts. The sacristan's hands were pressed upon his eyes; his daughter, looking up at the cross on the wall, was telling her beads feverishly.

At last the question was asked, 'Is this book for sale?'

There was the same hesitation, the same plunge of determination, that he had noticed before, and then came the welcome answer, 'If monsieur pleases.'

'How much do you ask for it?'

'I will take two hundred and fifty francs.'

This was confounding. Even a collector's conscience is sometimes stirred, and Dennistoun's conscience was tenderer than a collector's.

'My good man!' he said again and again, 'your book is worth far more than two hundred and fifty francs, I assure you—far more.'

But the answer did not vary: 'I will take two hundred and fifty francs, not more.'

There was really no possibility of refusing such a chance. The money was paid, the receipt signed, a glass of wine drunk over the transaction, and then the sacristan seemed to become a new man. He stood upright, he ceased to throw those suspicious glances behind him, he actually laughed or tried to laugh. Dennistoun rose to go.

'I shall have the honour of accompanying monsieur to his hotel?' said the sacristan.

'Oh no, thanks! it isn't a hundred yards. I know the way perfectly, and there is a moon.'

The offer was pressed three or four times, and refused as often.

'Then, monsieur will summon me if—if he finds occasion; he will keep the middle of the road, the sides are so rough.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Dennistoun, who was impatient to examine his prize by himself; and he stepped out into the passage with his book under his arm.

Here he was met by the daughter; she, it appeared, was anxious to do a little business on her own account; perhaps, like Gehazi, to 'take somewhat' from the foreigner whom her father had spared.

'A silver crucifix and chain for the neck; monsieur would perhaps be good enough to accept it?'

Well, really, Dennistoun hadn't much use for these things. What did mademoiselle want for it?

'Nothing—nothing in the world. Monsieur is more than welcome to it.'

The tone in which this and much more was said was unmistakably genuine, so that Dennistoun was reduced to profuse thanks, and submitted to have the chain put round his neck. It really seemed as if he had rendered the father and daughter some service which they hardly knew how to repay. As he set off with his book they stood at the door looking after him, and they were still looking when he waved them a last good-night from the steps of the Chapeau Rouge.

Dinner was over, and Dennistoun was in his bedroom, shut up alone with his acquisition. The landlady had manifested a particular interest in him since he had told her that he had paid a visit to the sacristan and bought an old book from him. He thought, too, that he had heard a hurried dialogue between her and the said sacristan in the passage outside the salle à, manger; some words to the effect that 'Pierre and Bertrand would be sleeping in the house' had closed the conversation.

At this time a growing feeling of discomfort had been creeping over him—nervous reaction, perhaps, after the delight of his discovery. Whatever it was, it resulted in a conviction that there was someone behind him, and that he was far more comfortable with his back to the wall. All this, of course, weighed light in the balance as against the obvious value of the collection he had acquired. And now, as I said, he was alone in his bedroom, taking stock of Canon Alberic's treasures, in which every moment revealed something more charming.

'Bless Canon Alberic!' said Dennistoun, who had an inveterate habit of talking to himself. 'I wonder where he is now? Dear me! I wish that landlady would learn to laugh in a more cheering manner; it makes one feel as if there was someone dead in the house. Half a pipe more, did you say? I think perhaps you are right.

I wonder what that crucifix is that the young woman insisted on giving me? Last century, I suppose. Yes, probably. It is rather a nuisance of a thing to have round one's neck—just too heavy. Most likely her father has been wearing it for years. I think I might give it a clean up before I put it away.'

He had taken the crucifix off, and laid it on the table, when his attention was caught by an object lying on the red cloth just by his left elbow. Two or three ideas of what it might be flitted through his brain with their own incalculable quickness.

'A penwiper? No, no such thing in the house. A rat? No, too black. A large spider? I trust to goodness not—no. Good God! a hand like the hand in that picture!'

In another infinitesimal flash he had taken it in. Pale, dusky skin, covering nothing but bones and tendons of appalling strength; coarse black hairs, longer than ever grew on a human hand; nails rising from the ends of the fingers and curving sharply down and forward, gray, hony and wrinkled.

He flew out of his chair with deadly, inconceivable terror clutching at his heart. The shape, whose left hand rested on the table, was rising to a standing posture behind his seat, its right hand crooked above his scalp. There was black and tattered drapery about it; the coarse hair covered it as in the drawing. The lower jaw was thin—what can I call it?—shallow, like a beast's; teeth showed behind the black lips; there was no nose; the eyes, of a fiery yellow, against which the pupils showed black and intense, and the exulting hate and thirst to destroy life which shone there, were the most horrifying feature in the whole vision. There was intelligence of a kind in them—intelligence beyond that of a beast, below that of a man.

The feelings which this horror stirred in Dennistoun were the intensest physical fear and the most profound mental loathing. What did he do? What could he do? He has never been quite certain what words he said, but he knows that he spoke, that he grasped blindly at the silver crucifix, that he was conscious of a movement towards him on the part of the demon, and that he screamed with the voice of an animal in hideous pain.

Pierre and Bertrand, the two sturdy little serving-men, who rushed in, saw nothing, but felt themselves thrust aside by something that passed out between them, and found Dennistoun in a swoon. They sat up with him that night, and his two friends were at St. Bertrand by nine o'clock next morning. He himself though still shaken and nervous, was almost himself by that time, and his story found credence with them, though not until they had seen the drawing and talked with the sacristan.

Almost at dawn the little man had come to the inn on some pretence, and had listened with the deepest interest to the story retailed by the landlady. He showed no surprise.

'It is he—it is he! I have seen him myself,' was his only comment; and to all questionings but one reply was vouchsafed: 'Deux fois je l'ai vu; mille fois je l'ai senti.' He would tell them nothing of the provenance of the book, nor any details of his experiences. 'I shall soon sleep, and my rest will be sweet. Why should you trouble me?' he said.[2]

We shall never know what he or Canon Alberic de Mauléon suffered. At the back of that fateful drawing were some lines of writing which may be supposed to throw light on the situation:

'Contradicido Salomonis cum demonio nocturno.
Albericus de Mauleone delineavit.
V. Deus in adiutorium. Ps. Qui habitat.
Sancte Bertrande, demoniorum effugator, intercede pro me miserrimo.
Primum uidi nocte 12mi Dec 1694: uidebo mox ultimum. Peccaui et passus sum, plura adhuc passurus. Dec. 29, 1701.'[3]

I have never quite understood what was Dennistoun's view of the events I have narrated. He quoted to me once a text from Ecelesiasticus: 'Some spirits there be that are created for vengeance, and in their fury lay on sore strokes.' On another occasion he said: 'Isaiah was a very sensible man; doesn't he say something about night monsters living in the ruins of Babylon? These things are rather beyond us at present,'

Another confidence of his impressed me rather, and I sympathized with it. We had been, last year, to Comminges, to see Canon Alberic's tomb. It is a great marble erection with an effigy of the Canon in a large wig and soutane, and an elaborate eulogy of his learning below. I saw Dennistoun talking for some time with the Vicar of St. Bertrand's, and as we drove away he said to me: 'I hope it isn't wrong: you know I am a Presbyterian—but I—I believe there will be "saying of Mass and singing of dirges" for Alberic de Mauléon's rest.' Then he added, with a touch of the Northern British in his tone, 'I had no notion they came so dear.'

The book is in the Wentworth Collection at Cambridge. The drawing was photographed and then burnt by Dennistoun on the day when he left Comminges on the occasion of his first visit.

1 We now know that these leaves did contain a considerable fragment of that work, if not of that actual copy of it.

2 He died that summer; his daughter married, and settled at St. Papoul. She never understood the circumstances of her father's 'obsession.'

3 I .e., The Dispute of Solomon with a demon of the night. Drawn by Alberic de Mauléon. Versicle. O Lord, make haste to help me. Psalm. Whoso dwelleth (xci.). Saint Bertrand, who puttest devils to flight, pray for me most unhappy. I saw it first on the night of Dec. 12, 1694: soon I shall see it for the last time. I have sinned and suffered, and have more to suffer yet. Dec. 29, 1701. The 'Gallia Christiana' gives the date of the Canon's death as December 31, 1701, 'in bed, of a sudden seizure.' Details of this kind are not common in the great work of the Sammarthani.

In Ghosts and Scholars issue #6, Helen Grant tries to identify the demon. After a digression into the suggestion that the creature is female and related to Lilith, she suggests it is from the Testament of Solomon. Demons from this source have already appeared in some Ars Magica material (RoP: Infernal p.62). Hunt notes that there is a demon which has the same powers as the one described, but not its shape. There are also others which have its shape, but need to be stretched a little to have the correct powers.