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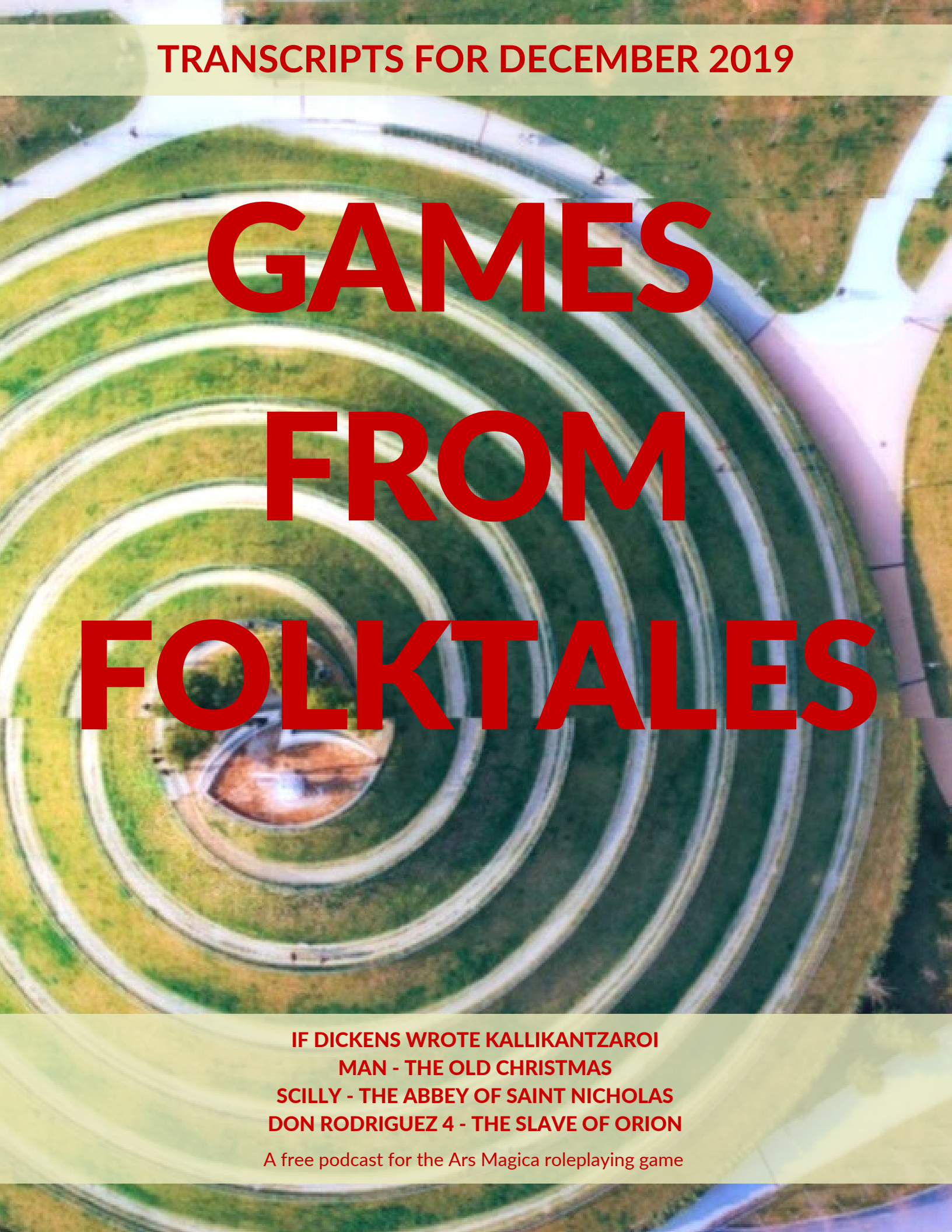

GAMES FROM FOLKTALES

IF DICKENS WROTE KALLIKANTZAROI
MAN - THE OLD CHRISTMAS
SCILLY - THE ABBEY OF SAINT NICHOLAS
DON RODRIGUEZ 4 - THE SLAVE OF ORION

A free podcast for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

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IF DICKENS WROTE KALLIKANTZAROI

There's an impish faerie that is only seen in Mythic Europe during the twelve days of Christmas, the kallikantzaros, which has never been used in any of the supplements. As the Yule is approaching, I'd like to bring them out, but give them a fresh coat of paint by combining them with "The Goblins Who Stole A Sexton" which was the first of the papers of the Pickwick Club, provided by Mr Dickens.

The creature that speaks to the sexton is apparently a king of these goblins. It's convenient to give him different statistics, to grant him the power to perform the two magical effects that occur in the story, but are not common to this goblin tribe.

The recording used in this episode was released into the public domain by Neslihan Stamboli through LibriVox.

Stats after the story. It includes the stats from Realms of Power: Faerie p. 87.

If you've read Hedge Magic you might recall ekstasis, the Virtue of straying in spirit form. In some areas, children born during the Twelve Days of Christmas can stray as kallikantzaroi. This can be prevented with folk charms, like binding the child in special herbs, or singeing its toenails.

THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON

In an old abbey town, down in this part of the country, a long, long while ago—so long, that the story must be a true one, because our great-grandfathers implicitly believed it—there officiated as sexton and grave-digger in the churchyard, one Gabriel Grub. It by no means follows that because a man is a sexton, and constantly surrounded by the emblems of mortality, therefore he should be a morose and melancholy man; your undertakers are the merriest fellows in the world; and I once had the honour of being on intimate terms with a mute, who in private life, and off duty, was as comical and jocose a little fellow as ever chirped out a devil-may-care song, without a hitch in his memory, or drained off the contents of a good stiff glass without stopping for breath. But, notwithstanding these precedents to the contrary, Gabriel Grub was an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow—a morose and lonely man, who consorted with nobody but himself, and an old wicker bottle which fitted into his large deep waistcoat pocket—and who eyed each merry face, as it passed him by, with such a deep scowl of malice and ill-humour, as it was difficult to meet, without feeling something the worse for.

"A little before twilight, one Christmas Eve, Gabriel shouldered his spade, lighted his lantern, and betook himself towards the old churchyard; for he had got a grave to finish by next morning, and, feeling very low, he thought it might raise his spirits, perhaps, if he went on with his work at once. As he went his way, up the ancient street, he saw the cheerful light of blazing fires gleam through the old casements, and heard the loud laugh and the cheerful shouts of those who were assembled around them; he marked the bustling preparations for next day's cheer, and smelt the numerous savoury odours consequent thereupon, as they steamed up from the kitchen windows in clouds. All this was gall and wormwood to the heart of Gabriel Grub: and when groups of children bounded out of the houses, tripped across the road, and were met, before they could knock at the opposite door, by half a dozen curly-headed little rascals who crowded round them as they flocked up-stairs to spend the evening in their Christmas games, Gabriel smiled grimly, and clutched the handle of his spade with a firmer grasp, as he thought of measles, scarlet-fever, thrush, hooping-cough, and a good many other sources of consolation besides.

Original illustration published with this story

“In this happy frame of mind, Gabriel strode along: returning a short, sullen growl to the good-humoured greetings of such of his neighbours as now and then passed him: until he turned into the dark lane which led to the churchyard. Now, Gabriel had been looking forward to reaching the dark lane, because it was, generally speaking, a nice, gloomy, mournful place, into which the townspeople did not much care to go, except in broad daylight, and when the sun was shining; consequently, he was not a little indignant to hear a young urchin roaring out some jolly song about a merry Christmas, in this very sanctuary, which had been called Coffin Lane ever since the days of the old abbey, and the time of the shaven-headed monks. As Gabriel walked on, and the voice drew nearer, he found it proceeded from a small boy, who was hurrying along, to join one of the little parties in the old street, and who, partly to keep himself company, and partly to prepare himself for the occasion, was shouting out the song at the highest pitch of his lungs. So Gabriel waited until the boy came up, and then dodged him into a corner, and rapped him over the head with his lantern five or six times, to teach him to modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away with his hand to his head, singing quite a different sort of tune, Gabriel Grub chuckled very heartily to himself, and entered the churchyard: locking the gate behind him.

“He took off his coat, put down his lantern, and getting into the unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so, with right good will. But the earth was hardened with the frost, and it was no very easy matter to break it up, and shovel it out; and although there was a moon, it was a very young one, and shed little light upon the grave, which was in the shadow of the church. At any other time, these obstacles would have made Gabriel Grub very moody and miserable, but he was so well pleased with having stopped the small boy’s singing, that he took little heed of the scanty progress he had made, and looked down into the grave, when he had finished work for the night, with grim satisfaction: murmuring as he gathered up his things:‘Brave lodgings for one, brave lodgings for one,A few feet of cold earth, when life is done;A stone at the head, a stone at the feet,A rich, juicy meal for the worms to eat;Rank grass over head, and damp clay around,Brave lodgings for one, these, in holy ground!’

“‘Ho! ho!’ laughed Gabriel Grub, as he sat himself down on a flat tombstone which was a favourite resting-place of his; and drew forth his wicker bottle. ‘A coffin at Christmas! A Christmas Box. Ho! ho! ho!’

“‘Ho! ho! ho!’ repeated a voice which sounded close behind him.

“Gabriel paused, in some alarm, in the act of raising the wicker bottle to his lips: and looked round. The bottom of the oldest grave about him was not more still and quiet than the churchyard in the pale moonlight. The cold hoar-frost glistened on the tombstones, and sparkled like rows of gems, among the stone carvings of the old church. The snow lay hard and crisp upon the ground; and spread over the thickly-strewn mounds of earth, so white and smooth a cover, that it seemed as if corpses lay there, hidden only by their winding-sheets. Not the faintest rustle broke the profound tranquillity of the solemn scene. Sound itself appeared to be frozen up, all was so cold and still.

“‘It was the echoes,’ said Gabriel Grub, raising the bottle to his lips again.“‘It was not,’ said a deep voice.“Gabriel started up, and stood rooted to the spot with astonishment and terror; for his eyes rested on a form that made his blood run cold.“Seated on an upright tombstone, close to him, was a strange unearthly figure, whom Gabriel felt at once, was no being of this world. His long fantastic legs, which might have reached the ground, were cocked up, and crossed after a quaint, fantastic fashion; his sinewy arms were bare; and his hands rested on his knees. On his short round body, he wore a close covering, ornamented with small slashes; a short cloak dangled at his back; the collar was cut into curious peaks, which served the goblin in lieu of ruff or neckerchief; and his shoes curled up at his toes into long points. On his head he wore a broad-brimmed sugar-loaf hat, garnished with a single feather. The hat was covered with the white frost; and the goblin looked as if he had sat on the same tombstone, very comfortably, for two or three hundred years. He was sitting perfectly still; his tongue was put out, as if in derision; and he was grinning at Gabriel Grub with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

“‘It was not the echoes,’ said the goblin.

“Gabriel Grub was paralysed, and could make no reply.

“‘What do you do here on Christmas Eve?’ said the goblin, sternly.

“‘I came to dig a grave, sir,’ stammered Gabriel Grub.

“‘What man wanders among graves and churchyards on such a night as this?’ cried the goblin.

“‘Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!’ screamed a wild chorus of voices that seemed to fill the churchyard. Gabriel looked fearfully round—nothing was to be seen.

“‘What have you got in that bottle?’ said the goblin.

"'Hollands, sir,' replied the sexton, trembling more than ever; for he had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought that perhaps his questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

"'Who drinks Hollands alone, and in the churchyard, on such a night as this?' said the goblin.

"'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!' exclaimed the wild voices again.

"The goblin leered maliciously at the terrified sexton, and then raising his voice exclaimed:

"'And who, then, is our fair and lawful prize?'

"To this inquiry the invisible chorus replied, in a strain that sounded like the voices of many choristers singing to the mighty swell of the old church organ—a strain that seemed borne to the sexton's ears upon a wild wind, and to die away as it passed onward; but the burden of the reply was still the same, 'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!'

"The goblin grinned a broader grin than before, as he said, 'Well, Gabriel, what do you say to this?'

"The sexton gasped for breath.

""'What do you think of this, Gabriel?' said the goblin, kicking up his feet in the air on either side of the tombstone, and looking at the turned-up points with as much complacency as if he had been contemplating the most fashionable pair of Wellingtons in all Bond Street.

"'It's—it's—very curious, sir,' replied the sexton, half dead with fright; 'very curious, and very pretty, but I think I'll go back and finish my work, sir, if you please.'

"'Work!' said the goblin, 'what work?'

"'The grave, sir; making the grave,' stammered the sexton.

"'Oh, the grave, eh?' said the goblin; 'who makes graves at a time when all other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?'

"Again the mysterious voices replied, 'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!'

"'I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,' said the goblin, thrusting his tongue further into his cheek than ever—and a most astonishing tongue it was—'I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,' said the goblin.

"'Under favour, sir,' replied the horror-stricken sexton, 'I don't think they can, sir; they don't know me, sir; I don't think the gentlemen have ever seen me, sir.'

"'Oh yes, they have,' replied the goblin; 'we know the man with the sulky face and grim scowl, that came down the street to-night, throwing his evil looks at the children, and grasping his burying-spade the tighter. We know the man who struck the boy in the envious malice of his heart, because the boy could be merry, and he could not. We know him, we know him.'

"Here the goblin gave a loud shrill laugh, which the echoes returned twenty-fold: and throwing his legs up in the air, stood upon his head, or rather upon the very point of his sugar-loaf hat, on the narrow edge of the tombstone: whence he threw a somerset with extraordinary agility, right to the sexton's feet, at which he planted himself in the attitude in which tailors generally sit upon the shop-board.

"'I—I—am afraid I must leave you, sir,' said the sexton, making an effort to move.

"'Leave us!' said the goblin, 'Gabriel Grub going to leave us. Ho! ho! ho!'

"As the goblin laughed, the sexton observed, for one instant, a brilliant illumination within the windows of the church, as if the whole building were lighted up; it disappeared, the organ pealed forth a lively air, and whole troops of goblins, the very counterpart of the first one, poured into the churchyard, and began playing at leap-frog with the tombstones: never stopping for an instant to take breath, but 'overing' the highest among them, one after the other, with the utmost marvellous dexterity. The first goblin was a most astonishing leaper, and none of the others could come near him; even in the extremity of his terror the sexton could not help observing, that while his friends were content to leap over the common-sized gravestones, the first one took the family vaults, iron railings and all, with as much ease as if they had been so many street posts.

"At last the game reached to a most exciting pitch; the organ played quicker and quicker; and the goblins leaped faster and faster: coiling themselves up, rolling head over heels upon the ground, and bounding over the tombstones like footballs. The sexton's brain whirled round with the rapidity of the motion he beheld, and his legs reeled beneath him, as the spirits flew before his eyes: when the goblin king, suddenly darting towards him, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him through the earth.

“When Gabriel Grub had had time to fetch his breath, which the rapidity of his descent had for the moment taken away, he found himself in what appeared to be a huge cavern, surrounded on all sides by crowds of goblins, ugly and grim; in the centre of the room, on an elevated seat, was stationed his friend of the churchyard; and close beside him stood Gabriel Grub himself, without power of motion.

“‘Cold to-night,’ said the king of the goblins, ‘very cold. A glass of something warm, here!’

““At this command, half a dozen officious goblins, with a perpetual smile upon their faces, whom Gabriel Grub imagined to be courtiers, on that account, hastily disappeared, and presently returned with a goblet of liquid fire, which they presented to the king.

“‘Ah!’ cried the goblin, whose cheeks and throat were transparent, as he tossed down the flame, ‘this warms one, indeed! Bring a bumper of the same for Mr. Grub.’

“It was in vain for the unfortunate sexton to protest that he was not in the habit of taking anything warm at night; one of the goblins held him while another poured the blazing liquid down his throat; the whole assembly screeched with laughter as he coughed and choked, and wiped away the tears which gushed plentifully from his eyes, after swallowing the burning draught.

“‘And now,’ said the king, fantastically poking the taper corner of his sugar-loaf hat into the sexton’s eye, and thereby occasioning him the most exquisite pain: ‘And now, show the man of misery and gloom, a few of the pictures from our own great storehouse!’

“As the goblin said this, a thick cloud which obscured the remoter end of the cavern rolled gradually away, and disclosed, apparently at a great distance, a small and scantily furnished, but neat and clean apartment. A crowd of little children were gathered round a bright fire, clinging to their mother’s gown, and gambolling around her chair. The mother occasionally rose, and drew aside the window-curtain, as if to look for some expected object; a frugal meal was ready spread upon the table; and an elbow chair was placed near the fire. A knock was heard at the door: the mother opened it, and the children crowded round her, and clapped their hands for joy, as their father entered. He was wet and weary, and shook the snow from his garments, as the children crowded round him, and seizing his cloak, hat, stick, and gloves, with busy zeal, ran with them from the room. Then, as he sat down to his meal before the fire, the children climbed about his knee, and the mother sat by his side, and all seemed happiness and comfort.

“But a change came upon the view, almost imperceptibly. The scene was altered to a small bed-room, where the fairest and youngest child lay dying; the roses had fled from his cheek, and the light from his eye; and even as the sexton looked upon him with an interest he had never felt or known before, he died. His young brothers and sisters crowded round his little bed, and seized his tiny hand, so cold and heavy; but they shrunk back from its touch, and looked with awe on his infant face; for calm and tranquil as it was, and sleeping in rest and peace as the beautiful child seemed to be, they saw that he was dead, and they knew that he was an Angel looking down upon, and blessing them, from a bright and happy Heaven.

“Again the light cloud passed across the picture, and again the subject changed. The father and mother were old and helpless now, and the number of those about them was diminished more than half; but content and cheerfulness sat on every face, and beamed in every eye, as they crowded round the fireside, and told and listened to old stories of earlier and bygone days. Slowly and peacefully the father sank into the grave, and, soon after, the sharer of all his cares and troubles followed him to a place of rest. The few, who yet survived them, knelt by their tomb, and watered the green turf which covered it, with their tears; then rose, and turned away: sadly and mournfully, but not with bitter cries, or despairing lamentations, for they knew that they should one day meet again; and once more they mixed with the busy world, and their content and cheerfulness were restored. The cloud settled upon the picture, and concealed it from the sexton’s view.

“‘What do you think of that?’ said the goblin, turning his large face towards Gabriel Grub.

“Gabriel murmured out something about its being very pretty, and looked somewhat ashamed, as the goblin bent his fiery eyes upon him.

“‘You a miserable man!’ said the goblin, in a tone of excessive contempt. ‘You!’ He appeared disposed to add more, but indignation choked his utterance, so he lifted up one of his very pliable legs, and flourishing it above his head a little, to insure his aim, administered a good sound kick to Gabriel Grub; immediately after which, all the goblins in waiting crowded round the wretched sexton, and kicked him without mercy: according to the established and invariable custom of courtiers upon earth, who kick whom royalty kicks, and hug whom royalty hugs.

“‘Show him some more!’ said the king of the goblins.

“At these words, the cloud was dispelled, and a rich and beautiful landscape was disclosed to view—there is just such another to this day, within half a mile of the old abbey town. The sun shone from out the clear blue sky, the water sparkled beneath his rays, and the trees looked greener, and the flowers more gay, beneath his cheering influence. The water rippled on, with a pleasant sound; the trees rustled in the light wind

“that murmured among their leaves; the birds sang upon the boughs; and the lark carolled on high, her welcome to the morning. Yes, it was morning: the bright, balmy morning of summer; the minutest leaf, the smallest blade of grass, was instinct with life. The ant crept forth to her daily toil, the butterfly fluttered and basked in the warm rays of the sun; myriads of insects spread their transparent wings, and revelled in their brief but happy existence. Man walked forth, elated with the scene; and all was brightness and splendour.

“‘You a miserable man!’ said the king of the goblins, in a more contemptuous tone than before. And again the king of the goblins gave his leg a flourish; again it descended on the shoulders of the sexton; and again the attendant goblins imitated the example of their chief.

“Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to Gabriel Grub, who, although his shoulders smarted with pain from the frequent applications of the goblins’ feet, looked on with an interest that nothing could diminish. He saw that men who worked hard, and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and happy; and that to the most ignorant, the sweet face of nature was a never-failing source of cheerfulness and joy. He saw those who had been delicately nurtured, and tenderly brought up, cheerful under privations, and superior to suffering, that would have crushed many of a rougher grain, because they bore within their own bosoms the materials of happiness, contentment, and peace. He saw that women, the tenderest and most fragile of all God’s creatures, were the oftenest superior to sorrow, adversity, and distress; and he saw that it was because they bore in their own hearts, an inexhaustible well-spring of affection and devotion. Above all, he saw that men like himself, who snarled at the mirth and cheerfulness of others, were the foulest weeds on the fair face of the earth; and setting all the good of the world against the evil, he came to the conclusion that it was a very decent and respectable sort of world after all. No sooner had he formed it, than the cloud which closed over the last picture, seemed to settle on his senses, and lull him to repose. One by one the goblins faded from his sight; and as the last one disappeared, he sunk to sleep.

“The day had broken when Gabriel Grub awoke, and found himself lying, at full length, on the flat grave-stone in the churchyard with the wicker bottle lying empty by his side, and his coat, spade, and lantern, all well whitened by the last night’s frost, scattered on the ground. The stone on which he had first seen the goblin seated, stood bolt upright before him, and the grave at which he had worked, the night before, was not far off. At first, he began to doubt the reality of his adventures, but the acute pain in his shoulders when he attempted to rise, assured him that the kicking of the goblins was certainly not ideal. He was staggered again, by observing no traces of footsteps in the snow, on which the goblins had played at leap-frog with the grave-stones, but he speedily accounted for this circumstance when he remembered that, being spirits, they would leave no visible impression behind them. So, Gabriel Grub got on his feet as well as he could, for the pain in his back; and brushing the frost off his coat, put it on, and turned his face towards the town.

“But he was an altered man, and he could not bear the thought of returning to a place where his repentance would be scoffed at, and his reformation disbelieved. He hesitated for a few moments; and then turned away to wander where he might, and seek his bread elsewhere.

“The lantern, the spade, and the wicker bottle, were found, that day, in the churchyard. There were a great many speculations about the sexton’s fate, at first, but it was speedily determined that he had been carried away by the goblins; and there were not wanting some very credible witnesses who had distinctly seen him whisked through the air on the back of a chestnut horse blind of one eye, with the hind-quarters of a lion, and the tail of a bear. At length all this was devoutly believed; and the new sexton used to exhibit to the curious, for a trifling emolument, a good-sized piece of the church weathercock which had been accidentally kicked off by the aforesaid horse in his aërial flight, and picked up by himself in the churchyard, a year or two afterwards.

“Unfortunately, these stories were somewhat disturbed by the unlooked-for reappearance of Gabriel Grub himself, some ten years afterwards, a ragged, contented, rheumatic old man. He told his story to the clergyman, and also to the mayor; and in course of time it began to be received as a matter of history, in which form it has continued down to this very day. The believers in the weathercock tale, having misplaced their confidence once, were not easily prevailed upon to part with it again, so they looked as wise as they could, shrugged their shoulders, touched their foreheads, and murmured something about Gabriel Grub having drunk all the Hollands, and then fallen asleep on the flat tombstone; and they affected to explain what he supposed he had witnessed in the goblins’ cavern, by saying that he had seen the world, and grown wiser. But this opinion, which was by no means a popular one at any time, gradually died off; and be the matter how it may, as Gabriel Grub was afflicted with rheumatism to the end of his days, this story has at least one moral, if it teach no better one —and that is, that if a man turn sulky and drink by himself at Christmas time, he may make up his mind to be not a bit the better for it: let the spirits be never so good, or let them be even as many degrees beyond proof, as those which Gabriel Grub saw in the goblins’ cavern.”

KALLIKANTZAROI (ORIGINAL)

Faerie Might: 5 (Corpus)
Characteristics: Int −1, Per +1, Pre −2, Com 0, Str −6, Sta +1, Dex +3, Qik +3
Size: −3
Virtues and Flaws: Faerie Sight, Faerie Speech, Feast of the Fae, Hybrid Form, 2 x Personal Faerie Powers; Little, Sovereign Ward (Religion*), Incognizant, Traditional Wards (fire, counting games**, burning shoes in some places)
* Religion doesn't work in this story. They have a very narrow victim group. Sunlight works.
** They can be stopped by counting the holes in colanders or spilled grains.
Personality Traits: Destructive +3
Combat:
Brawl (bite): Init +3, Attack +10, Defense +9, Damage −1
Brawl (talons): Init+2, Attack +11, Defense +9, Damage −2
Soak: +3
Wound Penalties: −1 (1-2), −3 (3-4), −5 (5- 6), Incapacitated (7-8), Dead (9+)
Abilities: Athletics 1 (climbing)*, Awareness 1 (shiny things), Brawl 3** (each other), Faerie Speech 5.
* Has virtue allowing supernatural athletics.
** Some of the king's subjects pin the sexton. He's very drunk, but they might have a higher Brawl score, specialised in their victims.
Powers:
Silent Motion: 1 point, constant, Imaginem.
These faeries are capable of silent motion, but make noise by damaging things in the excitement of their revels.
Supernatural Agility: 0 points, constant, Animal (3 intricacy points spent on cost).
Vis: 1 pawn (Animal)
Appearance: Kallikantzaroi have different appearances in different areas, but they are generally small faeries that have mixed human and animal characteristics. They are usually black and furred, with glowing, red eyes and extended tongues. They often have the ears of donkeys or goats, and
many have animal feet. They may have tusks and have sharp, curved claws.

KING OF THE KALLIKANTZAROI

Faerie Might: 25 (Corpus)
Characteristics: Int +2, Per +1, Pre +1, Com +1, Str +2, Sta +1, Dex +1, Qik +1
Size: −1
Virtues and Flaws: Faerie Sight, Faerie Speech, Feast of the Fae, Greater Faerie Powers, Hybrid Form, 2 x Personal Faerie Powers; Little, Sovereign Ward (Sunlight), Incognizant, Traditional Wards (fire, counting games, burning shoes in some places)
Personality Traits: Spirit of the Season +6
Combat:
Brawl (talons): Init+5, Attack +16, Defense +14, Damage +9
Soak: +3
Wound Penalties: −1 (1-4), −3 (5-8), −5 (9-12), Incapacitated (13-16), Dead (17+)
Abilities: Athletics 3 (climbing)*, Awareness 5 (victims), Brawl 3 (each other), Faerie Speech 5.
* Has virtue allowing supernatural athletics.
Powers:
Oppression: 1 point, Sun, Imaginem
Can create a dream state (expressed as a cloud in which the person sees visions) that forces Personality Trait checks against Spirit of the Season 6. Using this power, over and over in the warped time of his cave, allows the King to grind down the vices of the people he kidnaps.
Silent Motion: 1 point, constant, Imaginem.
These faeries are capable of silent motion, but make noise by damaging things in the excitement of their revels.
Spirit Away: 2 points, weird and special, Corpus
Lets the Goblin King drag people into his cavern, where time travles at a different rate.
Supernatural Agility: 0 points, constant, Animal (3 intricacy points spent on cost).
Vis: 5 pawns (Rego)
Appearance: There's an image above.

SCILLY : THE GIANT AND THE DWARF

I recorded a Christmas episode earlier this year, but because of the vagaries of podcast production, it drifted to early December. Here's a replacement, about the Abbey of Saint Nicholas at Tresco. Nicholas, in local lore, is a fearsome chap : he's far more similar to the weapon smuggler who turns up in the Narnia novels than the jolly old elf that the Dutch took to America.

We also meet a persistent culture of pirates, who may make suitable Enemies for a covenant, and we learn what service was due for the lands about Ennor castle.

The recording which was used in the episode was one of mine, through Librivox. It comes from "Scilly and Its Legends" by James Whitfeld. In the new year, when my current Librivox projects are done, I'll be asking the Patreons to pick my next book from a list I've prepared.. If they pick a book on Man, or one on Venice, for example, it'll help decided the shape of the next big series of epsiodes.

IT was a goodly pile, that Abbey of St. Nicholas in Tresco, or, as it was then called, Iniscaw, embosomed, like a picture, in the setting of its brown hill, gleaming with heather blooms, and with golden furze. In every direction around it lay hamlets, and comfortable farm-houses, surrounded by cultivated lands, and meadows of deep green. Surely the good Fathers owned a fair heritage; and the state of their dependencies showed that, while enjoying a pleasant lot themselves, they dealt gently and kindly with those beneath their sway. So was it in those days. Not then, as now, was the pilgrim or the wayfarer compelled to seek a venal welcome at the wayside inn.

Not then, as now, was hospitality only to be bought. The first of the monastic virtues, and the one most worthily practised, was charity. Far and wide, through Christendom, were scattered those memorials of our Fathers' piety, those solemn Abbeys and Priories, buried in the dim religious shade of trees coeval with the foundation of the buildings, over which they bent so gracefully. And wherever arose one of those grey piles, there was to be found a sacred hospitality,—a kindness dispensed alike to rich and poor,— a practical lesson of love for God and man. Under the shelter of those walls grew up a loving tenantry, and, still lower in the scale, a body of peasants, connected with their superiors by ties of affection, and of reverence, and of benefits, both given and received.

Go now to Scilly, and seek out the Abbey gates. Where are they? In a bright garden, full of the luxuriant beauty of tropical flowers and shrubs, you pass by two glorious aloes, and behold a grey wall, and a fine pointed arch. Is there anything more? Yes, there is yet one relic more. A few antique graves are scattered around; for this place, redolent of perfumes, was the burial ground of the Abbey. There is nothing here to remind you of death.

The ground is covered with a Mosaic of bright-eyed blossoms, and the air is heavy with fragrance. These grey stones, and ancient tombs, are all that is left of the great Abbey. If you would ask for the old Catholic hospitality on this spot, as of yore, it must be from the dead, whose mansions are lying about, and whose spirits may, peradventure, brood over the scene of a majesty decayed, and spoiled, and utterly laid waste. A hind, passing by, looks at you through the mossy arch; the wind moans round the fragments that remain, and the saddened stranger, gazing for a moment on the ruins of God's house, remembers what it once has been, and, with a sigh, turns sorrowfully away.

Not such, however, was the appearance of the stately Abbey of St. Nicholas, in Tresco, about the middle of the fourteenth century, on one fine morning, in May. The peace and dignified tranquillity, that generally characterised it, were gone. All was hot haste, and confusion, and hurrying to and fro. The reverend brethren paced the lofty walls, or passed from chamber to court, and from court to chamber, or gazed through the great gates, now opened wide, with distress and terror painted upon their countenances. From time to time a string of cattle, or of sheep, or of beasts of burden, entered the sacred precincts, while their drivers, accompanied by troops of women and children, outvied each other in their dismal tales, to which the monks listened, with faces as pale as those of the speakers. Every now and then, amid the disarray and uproar, there arrived a band of armed men, headed by some one of higher rank, who held lands of the Abbey by bridle and spear, and came, with his vassals, to discharge his feudal devoirs, by protecting it, and doing battle in its cause.

As troop after troop filed in, the military garnishing of the place became very respectable; and a casual observer would have smiled at the idea of danger to a stronghold so well defended. But the peril that menaced it was apparently of no common kind. In spite of the formidable muster of men-at-arms, and spearmen, and archers, and cross-bow men, that crowded the Abbey courts, the terror that existed before their coming did not seem to cease, nor were its inmates reassured by their presence.

In the midst of the discordant shouting, and the absence of all order, and of all authority, the monks, and peasants, and troops, were mixed up together in a medley of inextricable confusion. No one was there of rank or of talent sufficient to entitle him to take the lead, as well as for others to acquiesce in his superiority. The only person to whom men would naturally have turned was the Abbot. But the good priest was well-nigh beside himself with dismay. He moved backwards and forwards, amid the crowd, as it ebbed and flowed, like a man paralyzed by some great shock. "Monseigneur St. Nicholas," was his constant and dolorous cry, "pity us, and come to our aid. Save us, for we perish, and there is none to deliver us. Monseigneur St. Nicholas, pray for us!"

The prayers and ejaculations of the worthy Abbot were, naithless, of small avail, towards the restoration of the peace so rudely disturbed. As drove, and flock, and horseman, and footman, passed into the monastery, it became evident that, spacious as were its limits, they would soon prove insufficient to accommodate the new comers.

The retainers of the house, armed and equipped for service, stood in groups, or seated themselves to rest, here and there, while their leaders seemed to have abandoned the idea,—if such a one ever existed,—of establishing some discipline. After a few ineffectual efforts, they let things take their course, and looked listlessly on. Now an order was issued to send forth scouts, to ascertain what was passing on the side from which danger was dreaded, and then it was countermanded, until thin lines of bluish smoke dotted the landscape, in ominous proximity to the Abbey, and the command was repeated, but it was unheard, or, if heard, unheeded. From time to time the man, stationed on the top of the great tower, as a lookout, reported the progress of the enemy, and, at every fresh intimation of the spoiler's approach, the Abbot's agony increased, and his appeals to Monseigneur St. Nicholas became more incessant.

One or two of the chief tenants tried to arrest the disorder that prevailed, and to induce the Abbot to second them. There could be but one result, were this state of things to continue. They saw this, and made an effort to amend matters. "Holy Father," they said, " it is time to hang out from the tower the great banner of the house, and to man the walls."

But to these appeals the priest turned a deaf ear. His reply was still the same. "God, and Monseigneur St. Nicholas, be our aid!" he cried, "what can I, or what can any man, do in such a strait? Lo', I am a man of peace, what then know I of the battle or of blood? I will not trust in the arm of flesh, but in the weapons of the Spirit, and of prayer. Monseigneur St. Nicholas, aid us!"

And the good followers of the Abbey, thoroughly disheartened, shrugged their shoulders, and, great as might be the Abbot's faith in the help of his Patron Saint, seemed themselves to share but little in his devout trust. They went back to their men, with a look on their weather- beaten brows that spake, as plainly as glance ever spake, of minds made up to meet the impending danger, but of hopelessness, and utter despair of success.

One of these men, who was past the prime of life, and had apparently seen some service, from the broad scar that traversed his sun-burnt forehead, was disposed to give vent to his discontent in words. He gazed sternly round upon the increasing crowds, whose din had become almost deafening, with no friendly or placable look. Then his eye wandered to the figure of the Abbot, who was standing still, in a lamentable state of bewilderment and indecision.

"Aye," muttered the stout veteran, half in soliloquy, and half addressing himself in to his companion, " Heaven helps him who helps himself. My old captain, Sir John Chandos, whose one eye nothing ever escaped (on his soul be peace!), could do nought with such a scum as this. Would that I and my men were safely back, and housed within the walls of my manor at Samson. There might I at least strike a good stroke for mine

own, or make some composition with these rovers. But the Abbot can neither fight, nor bid others do it for him. Marry, he will find his prayers but a sorry defence against lance-heads, and sword points, and blazing brands. I would give the value of ten arpents of my best land, sith the fight must be fought against such odds, if Bras-de-fer were but here."

Most of this long monologue had fallen unheeded upon the tympanum of the Abbot's ears, but they caught its conclusion. The effect was electric. The name pronounced seemed even as is a beacon to a storm-tost mariner,—as a straw to a drowning man. He was in a moment absorbed by the one idea that he had just received, as though it were an inspiration from on high. Turning to William le Poer, the speaker, he demanded, in an agitated voice, where Bras- de-fer was, and bade them summon him instantly.

The attempt indeed was made, but it was made in vain. To the cries that resounded on every side, coupled with his name, no answer was returned, save the significant one of silence. Bras-de-fer was nowhere to be found; and the Abbot's distress grew again to a height that would have been amusing, had it not also been sincere and real.

A new cause for alarm was now superadded to those already existing. The warder on the tower announced the appearance of one of the scouts, who had been sent out to explore the neighbourhood. At the same moment with the announcement, in he rode, spurring his panting hob, or cob, whose bloody sides, and foaming mouth, gave tokens of his rider's headlong speed. In he rode, breathless, and almost without tongue to tell his tale. The crowd, as he entered, made way for him silently, and then closed round him, and asked him for his tidings. They were soon told.

The fleet of pirates, whose threatened presence had frightened the Islands from their propriety, was the naval portion of those dreaded and detested routiers, who scorched their track upon the shores they visited with sword and flame. Like locusts, they had passed over the fair lands of France and Italy, and left a desert behind them. The fatal legacy of the English wars, they had lingered on, sometimes, by the temptation of pay and plunder, bribed into the service of one of the neighbouring sovereigns; sometimes put down by the united forces of the crown, and of the great Barons ; and, sometimes, for lack of prey to feed upon, dwindling into mere herds of robbers. Still, however, they continued to exist, and were ever ready, at times of civil discord, to start up into unnatural strength and stature.

Such a' portentous gathering was it that swept, like a hurricane, over the ancient Hesperides, the Fortunate Isles, now called Scilly, and threatened pillage and death against the fair Abbey of Tresco. This formed the substance of the hobbler's tale.

The modern Vikingir, the routiers, had swooped upon the rich booty, from far and near. Their united bands, seizing upon all the shipping within their reach, came down upon the monastery, in which, in addition to wealth of its own, was deposited much belonging to others. Those, however, who put trust in its broad moat and frowning towers, might now feel some apprehension for the result. Fenced cities had stooped, and given way, before these terrible bands. Princes had condescended to treat with them, and to pay a species of black-mail for their protection or their forbearance. And now, like a multitude of ravening wolves, they made right for the treasures of the Sanctuary, even as the Assyrian yearned for the wealth of Zion.

They disdained to summon a place, the wealth of which gave a spur to their covetousness, and which for its weakness they despised. They made, therefore, no overtures to the monks. Their terms were simply surrender and submission. Between that, and resistance to the uttermost, there was no medium. The choice was given to the community, and a dreadful choice it was.

Like the memorable message and reply at Saragossa, the leader of the robbers might have demanded an instant capitulation; and who was there, amid that panic-stricken mob, to reply to his insolent summons, in the words of Palafox to the Frenchman, " Guerra al cuchillo"—War to the knife? When it was known that the great host of routiers had disembarked, and were coming in force against the Abbey, their advanced parties being seen already on the side of Bryher hill, the very magnitude of the danger produced a sort of calm.

Men were stunned into order, and began to feel the necessity of subordination. By a sort of tacit and spontaneous movement, some of those better equipped and disciplined fell in together, and proceeded to man the wall. Some mangonels, and military machines, were carried thither, and prepared for use. The old captain, William le Poer, took advantage of this mute submission to post the troops to the best advantage, and to place the non-combatants in a situation where they would, at least, be out of the way. After doing all in his power, he had descended to consult the Abbot on some doubtful point, and had just found the reverend Father in the great court, when both soldier and priest were startled by a shout, that made the welkin ring, and was re-echoed by the grey pile around them.

The stout veteran cut short his speech, and listened for a repetition of the cries. When it came, he then knew the reason for that burst of enthusiasm. None can feel the value of an able leader, when the question is one .of life and death, so well as a soldier. And therefore it was with no common joy or exultation that he gathered the meaning of that warlike welcome. It was the greeting of his followers to a well proved chief. William le Poer's heart leapt within him, as the air shook with one unanimous acclaim,—" Bras-de-fer, Bras-de-fer, St. Nicholas for Bras-de-fer!"

"Marry," said the worthy Abbot, "Sir Bras-de-fer is somewhat slow in making his appearance, but right glad am I that he is come at last. Peradventure he has gathered his vassals, and the knaves loitered, and delayed the good knight. I trust that his band is neither scanty nor ill- equipped, for he holdeth broad lands of the Church, and, as a certain Father hath it —" here he broke off, and stood with silent amazement, gazing on the scene that presented itself. First, his hands bound behind his back with a cord, his head drooped in a hang-dog fashion upon his breast, and his whole figure bearing unmistakeable signs of dogged, . insolent, ruffianly fear, came a man, clad in half-armour, but possessing no offensive weapons. His steel cap, or salade, as -well as his breast and back plate, were stained with rust and dirt, and his swarthy face, and untrimmed beard, and garments of buff, were in perfect keeping with the rest of his equipments. He looked what he really was, a common routier, or condottiero, of the day. Behind him, and quickening his pace occasionally by a sharp prick of his lance, rode one of a far different stamp.

As if in' con- trast to the mere mercenary, the base trafficker in war, appeared one of those martial and chivalrous warriors, whom Froissart painted and loved so spiritedly, followed, as his whole train, by two well appointed esquires. Of great stature, far exceeding the usual height of men, and of enormous strength, he yet sate bis powerful Norman destrier, with the ease and grace of a page mounting his first war- horse. He was clad in complete armour, and over his bright bassinet, and shadowing his open and honest features, floated a long white plume. His whole bearing was a model of noble and manly vigour, and the very smile upon his firm resolute mouth, was an augury of victory.

The fathers of the men of those days, who had fought in the wars of the giants, when England and France had met so often in stricken fields, face to face, looked frequently upon such champions, and spoke of Edward Plantagenet in his black mail, and Chandos, and Audley, and Felton; and, on the opposite side, the brothers du Guesclin, and the Marshals de Lignac and de Passac, and Comminges, and Perigord, who, though simple Counts only, dared to send their gloves in defiance to the Prince of Wales. In the days of which I am writing, however, the heroic mould was well nigh worn out. In the words of Ariosto,— "Natura la fece, et poi ruppe la stampa." •The eleventh Louis loved chivalry but little, and if he was served by such men as Dunois, it was almost against his will. Even in the wars then terminated, few had seen a more perfect or a more gallant cavalier than he, who, with his visor up, and with his brave spirit stamped upon his face, rode into the Abbey court, amid waving of caps, and gratulatoiy shouts, and a wild welcome, uttered in chorus by a hundred tongues.

Bras-de-fer spake not a word in reply, but threw a bright glance over the crowd, and then went straight up to the Abbot. The holy man was paralyzed. He gazed in utter astonishment upon the good knight, then upon his prisoner, and lastly upon his esquires. When, however, he was convinced of the reality of what he saw; when, by the existence of his senses, he became certain that the four, now grouped in his presence, composed the whole attendance of his redouhted vassal, astonishment gave place to anger,—anger too great to find expression in words. All that he could say was, " Monseigneur St. Nicholas, aid us!" in a manner so ludicrously plaintive, as to bring a smile on the lips of Bras-de-fer.

"Aye" said he "my Lord Abbot, I trust he will help us, for we lack his aid, and, if legends tell truth, he was a rude adversary in his day. Do ye know with whom ye have to deal?" As no one answered the question, he continued. "If all the fiends of hell were let loose, saving your presence, my reverend friend, they could have no more fitting leader than the master-spirit of that murthering and pillaging horde. As I rode in, I chanced to light on this villainous routier, overthrew him horse and man, and got from him all the news he could furnish. I am ill at telling a story, so the sum of the whole is this. All the sea-kings, as they are pleased to call themselves, are collected in one band, to fall upon us, and at their head is that devil incarnate, Jean l'Ecorcheur, who flays his captives alive."

There was nothing simulated, now, in the dead silence that fell upon the crowd. The champing of the charger's bit sounded loud and harsh in the interval of that awful pause. It seemed a sentence of death, so stern was the intelligence, and so crushing in its effects. It were as though one of those avenging seers of old had descended suddenly with a message from on high, and had proclaimed "thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live."

Bras-de-fer alone appeared utterly unconscious of the heavy nature of the tidings he had brought. Springing lightly from his selle, he gave his steed to one of his esquires, and broke the spell, by crying, in a loud hearty tone,—" To the ramparts, my merry men, to the ramparts, an ye would not have this bloodsucker make a meal of us!" And he was turning away, for the purpose of ascending the flight of steps leading to the

walls, when he was arrested by the Abbot, who now, for the first time since the knight's coming, found power to speak.

"Tarry awhile, Sir Bras-de-fer," said he, " for I would fain question you. If it be sooth that the fiend l'Ecorcheur (whom may God and St. Nicholas confound!"—here the Abbot piously crossed himself) "be bound hitherward, and seeks to lay his sacrilegious hands upon the patrimony of the blessed Church, wherefore does it chance that her first vassal, Sir Dreux de Barentin, rides to her defence with such a scanty train? Is it possible that he comes alone, and not, as of old, with banner displayed, and a goodly power of bowmen, and spearmen, and with all the strength of carnal war?"

"It is even so, my reverend friend," replied Sir Dreux, or rather, as he was commonly called, Bras-de-fer, indifferently, while his skilful eye took in at a glance all that was passing with the troops posted above, "it is even so. All my gathering consists but of myself, with Richard and Anthony yonder, unless ye would count Bayard in the roll."

"False man, and false knight!" shouted the churchman, who began to lose both patience and his senses, at once, under this new shock, " I rede ye to know that St. Nicholas can resume his grants; aye, and he shall do it. Did we not give thee lands, wide and fair, to hold of the Abbey by bridle and spear, and art thou not, as leal servant of the Church, vowed to bring to her aid, whenever, and by whomsoever, attacked, ten men-at-arms, each of them fully equipped, and followed by two bowmen and a jackman? Where be they, thou faithless vavasour? God and St. Nicholas help us in our extremity, for, of a verity, we perish, and there is none to succour us!"

During the first part of this speech, Bras-de-fer had been leisurely scanning the military preparations, going on under the ordering of William le Poer, and had evidently paid but slight attention to the angry priest. But the tone of anguish that marked the closing sentence touched him. Kindly lay- ing his hand on the Abbot's arm, he said to him, in a voice of singular gentleness and feeling, " Pause, my good old friend, ere you condemn me. I must be brief, for I am sadly wanted yonder, but the matter stands thus. Last night, when I received tidings of this pestilent invasion, I sent out, as was my duty, to summon to my standard all,—and more than all,—who were bound to bear arms in your defence. By sunrise, this morning, the whole were reported, by my muster-master, to be in waiting, and ready to set out. But, as untoward fortune would have it, the Lady Claude, my wife, was taken with labour throes. I could not move her hither, nor could I leave her r unguarded at home. I did what necessity compelled me to do. To defend my castle of Ennour, and her, I left my contingent, and surely it is a feeble garrison enough, but hither I came myself, as bound in honour, and in my devoir, to fight, and, if need be, to die in your cause. So courage, my dear Lord, we shall beat off these routiers, stout knaves though they be, and with the more credit, seeing the feebleness of our means of defence."

The Abbot groaned in spirit, most dismally. "Ever have I found," he sighed, " that a woman is at the bottom of all evil or mischance. For what saith a certain Father,' Ubi fcemina, ibi diabolus.' And as for the glory of which you speak, my fair son, would that in its place we had the two score soldiers, who are now waiting the pleasure of the Lady Claude."

"Sith it may not be mended, my Father," answered Bras-de-fer, as he prepared to depart, " we must endure it as well as we can, which is a piece of philosophy taught me by old Froissart. Yet cheer up and fear not. I am no braggart, God knows, still bethink thee that perchance my arm and my leading may well balance, aye, and outweigh, the services of a few hirelings. There are in Scilly scores of such to be had for the buying, but there is only one Bras- de-fer." So saying he ascended the steps, leading to the outer rampart, and left the Abbot standing alone.

The latter felt the justice of his remark. Bras-de-fer, as a leader, had a reputation of the highest order. His military skill and judgment were unrivalled. Yet to lose the best contingent of the house was mortifying enough. "Surely" quoth the priest, "Sir Bras-de-fer hath reason on his side. The best lance in merry England is worth a score of common men. I would, however, that his fair wife had chosen her time better. She is a woman, and it is ill dealing with that troublesome sex. As old Sir John hath it, we must remedy it as best we may." And the Abbot walked slowly after Bras-de-fer, sorely vexed in spirit. But the presence of his warlike vassal had inspired him with something like confidence. He sought the ramparts, to look around on what was passing, not indeed in a cheerful mood, but less downcast than before. So true it is that the courage and high qualities of one man will often fill a host of waverers with hope and alacrity, and infuse into their bosoms the energy that is all his own.

No sooner had Bras-de-fer taken the command, than he proved how correct was his estimate of his own value. All the vassals capable of bearing arms were mustered, and passed in review, and were then told off in divisions, each of which was placed under the leadership of some veteran soldier. The archers and cross-bow men were posted on the walls, which were both crenelated and machicolated, and preparations were made for pouring melted pitch, and boiling water, on the heads of the assailants, in case they should, attempt a storm. The pontlevis was raised, and between it and the great gate, a wicket of which only was allowed to be open, there was

constructed a semicircular embankment or breast-work, one end of which terminated at the wall, and the other joined the hill side. It was the height of a man's shoulders, and was defended by ten picked cross-bow men. It could only be approached in front, as the ground on the right was precipitous, and on the left the slope was swept and commanded by the great tower.

The best and most disciplined of the whole array were drawn up in reserve, in the Abbey court. Having thus put everything in train, Bras-de-fer ordered a manchet of bread and beef, with a good black-jack of humming ale, to be served out to every man under arms; and then, cautioning all to be on their guard, and to quit themselves like men, and faithful children of the Church, he sought the Abbot, who was gazing fearfully abroad.

The scene that met their eyes was one of stirring interest, to a mere spectator, though, to those then looking upon it, it possessed a sterner and more terrible character. At the end of the wide slope before them, as it rose from the valley, under Bryher hill, was seen advancing, with some pretence to discipline, a vast body of men. They were marshalled in several divisions, each headed by its own leader. They consisted, as might have been expected, principally of foot, a few only being mounted on the small active horses called hobs, from which their riders in the military language of the time were called hobbilers or hobblers, and whence we also derive our name of cob. They were preceded by numbers of bowmen, who acted as scouts, and explored the ground.

Generally speaking, their equipments were heterogeneous, and dimmed by use; but the experienced eye of Bras-de-fer remarked that the spear heads were bright and clean, from which he augured that, however rusty their defensive armour might be, their weapons of offence would be found service- able enough. In the rear of the several columns was beheld a mixed multitude, together with some captives, and a few carts charged already with plunder. At the head of the whole, clad in complete steel, rode the redoubtable l'Ecorcheur.

He was followed by a man-at-arms, who filled the office of an esquire, and bore his lance. His arms were handsome, and his whole bearing that of one who affected some degree of state, either from vanity, or as a means of overawing others by that pomp and show, which always has its effect upon the multitude. As soon as he had arrived within two bowshots of the Abbey, he halted his men, and drew them up in regular order, as well as the inequalities of the ground would allow. He then rode forward alone, taking care to keep out of the reach of an enemy's arrow.

After making a careful survey of the place, he paused exactly opposite to that part of the walls, on which were the Abbot and Bras-de-fer. The latter, who had been watching his adversary's movements with great interest, came to the edge of the parapet, and stood there, erect and still, so that the whole of his gigantic proportions were visible to the besiegers. The two celebrated champions remained, for a time, face to face, neither of them speaking a word, and the eyes of all men being; directed on them alone. Those, who were near to 1'Ecorcheur, might behold a shade of disappointment and vexation cross his brow, but in no other way did be betray his annoyance, at finding himself thus confronted by one of the boldest warriors of the day. Bras-de-fer, on his part, looked with curiosity on the chief, whose name had become invested with so much unenviable notoriety. The silence that followed this reciprocal survey was first broken by the Reiter, who, advancing a few paces nearer to the Abbey, summoned it, loudly and peremptorily, to surrender.

"And what if we like it not, Sir 1'Ecorcheur? " inquired Bras-de-fer.

"Death to every living soul within the walls," was the reply; "death to all alike, but, as you are the leader, a higher bough for your hanging."

"Gramercy for your courtesy, Sir Routier," said Bras- de-fer, "the walls of St. Nicholas are high, and his servants stout of heart, so we will strike a stroke in defence of holy Church, the more readily, too, since we like not to trust to your word, should we yield ourselves to your mercy, and crave grace. May it please you then, Sir Flayer, to retire out of arrow-flight, for if you remain longer where you are, we will try the temper of your corslet. Shoot, men, shoot! Arrows to the head! Shoot, trebuchet! St. Nicholas to the rescue, and set on!"

It was well at the moment, for 1'Ecorcheur, that he took Bras-de-fer's advice. He escaped unharmed himself, but two arrows struck his charger, which bounded furiously, and nearly dismounted its rider. He became livid with passion, and gave orders instantly to commence the attack; while the manner, in which his commands were carried into effect, showed the defenders of the Abbey that they were dealing with no common foe.

A number of men first advanced, bearing before them those large pavoises, or pavises, which were used in opening approaches against a fortified place. These were shields, of about the soldier's height, and broad enough to cover him completely. Being of stout wickerwork, bound over with leather, they were sufficiently light to be manageable. Be- hind this shelter, which was borne by one man, followed an archer or cross-bow man, keeping himself protected from the hostile shot, and looking warily out for an opportunity of sending an arrow, or a bolt, at those who manned the walls.

Several large vans, or moveable towers, which could be taken to pieces, or joined together, at pleasure, succeeded these; and, as soon as they were well posted, mangonels, and machines for throwing large stones, were brought for- ward. A sharp fire was maintained, without intermission, for nearly half-an-hour, at the end of which time there was a pause, as if by mutual consent.

Both parties, as it were, drew off, to ascertain their respective damages, and to prepare for a fresh onset and defence. The result of the inquiry was in favour of the Abbey. Not a man on the walls had been hurt. Two'or three of the non-combatants, huddled together in the precincts and courts, had been slightly touched by spent shafts, but no serious casualty had occurred.

On the side of the besiegers the list of wounded was far heavier. Nearly a dozen had been killed or severely injured by the Abbey men, who shot coolly from under cover. The bodies of the slain, and those pierced by arrows, as they were carried, or as they staggered, to the rear, were, in the eyes of both parties, an omen of success or failure. The defenders were animated with hope and courage, and the attacking forces were equally dispirited and depressed.

Jean l'Ecorcheur himself, who was utterly unaccustomed to reverses, actually foamed with rage. He was beside himself. He shook his clenched fist at the Abbey, and addressed its guardians with the foulest blasphemies. At the same time he directed his men to begin the assault anew. Long ladders were prepared, and brought to the front, while a fresh band of archers came forward, and watched every portion of the walls.

While this was passing without, Bras-de-fer was not idle within. His eye, and his over- looking care, were everywhere. Amid a hail of arrows, he seemed to bear a charmed life. Armed cap-a-pied, a bright and lofty mark, he moved from post to post, advising some, cautioning others, and speaking to all in that clear bold tone of confidence, which a soldier loves. At last, he came to the spot, where, sheltered by a corner tower, the Abbot stood to watch the progress of the fray.

"What think you, Sir Bras-de-fer?" said he, as the knight rejoined him, "how speeds the day with those sons of Belial?"

"An' they succeed no better than hitherto" answered the knight, " their's is but labour thrown away. Not a step has been gained yet; but they have lost some of their best men. Courage, my reverend friend, the Abbey of St. Nicholas will be a virgin fortress still. But what is this?" he added, pointing to a figure on the ramparts, at no great distance from them.

On a nearer approach, it was seen to be the Abbot's favourite dwarf, dragging after him, with difficulty, a weapon of antique form, and of enormous size and weight. The sight seemed to rouse the Abbot's indignation and surprise to the highest pitch.

"Anathema maranatha!" he cried, " the profane imp of evil has laid his sacrilegious hands upon the feudal arbalete of the blessed Monseigneur St. Nicholas, which he wrested from the Cornish giant, who robbed Lombard merchants, coming hither to traffic, and pious pilgrims, as they crossed the Abbey lands; yea, and slew the heathen with his own bow. Thou misshapen knave, knowest thou not the sanctity of that consecrated weapon? Answer me, thou misbegotten and mischievous varlet!"

"And knowest thou not, holy Lord Abbot," replied the dwarf, "that a bolt from it hath pierced a coat of Spanish mail, at five hundred good paces?" With these words, much to the amusement of Bras-de-fer, and to the wrath of the Abbot, he proceeded to drag his load to the parapet, on which, with much trouble, he rested it. He then attempted to string it, but in vain. The bow and cord, alike of steel, resisted his efforts, and he chafed with rage, at seeing himself thus foiled. Bras-de-fer walked to his side, and watched him, as well as the weapon, with a curious eye.

While this scene was passing within, the attack without was recommenced, more hotly than ever. Jean l'Ecorcheur stormed with fury, like a fiend. He rode in among the pavoises, cursing and shouting to his men, who exerted themselves desperately, in hopes of gaining distinction under the eye of a leader, who never rewarded with a niggard hand. Their shot flew thick and fast, and wounded some of the besieged. At last he espied the Abbot in his place of safety. The sight of the good Priest seemed almost to drive him mad. He overwhelmed the Abbey, and all connected with it, with the vilest abuse. Raising himself in his stirrups, and shaking his mailed hand at the walls, he bade their defenders yield instantly, and be at his mercy.

"Thou dog of an Abbot!" he cried, "for the slaughter of my men, I will take with thee a reckoning, that shall deter others from following thy example. By all the fiends in. hell, I will roast together, in a slow fire, thee, and the image of thy mock Saint, Nicholas, whom may Beelzebub "— the rest of the sentence was never spoken, for word passed not those brutal lips again.

Bras-de-fer, as was related above, stood by the dwarf, and watched his abortive efforts to bend the mighty bow of St. Nicholas. Suddenly, an idea seemed to strike him. Pushing the little man gently aside, he seized the string, and drew it to the spring, as lightly, as though it were a silken cord. Then he adjusted a bolt to the groove, and took a deliberate aim. And at the very moment when 1'Ecorcheur was pouring forth his blasphemies against St. Nicholas, the bow of St. Nicholas avenged him. The bolt, entering his mouth, passed into his brain; and the routier, springing convulsively up into the air, fell upon the plain, a lifeless corse.

“As it crashed through the brain of the infidel,
round he spun, and down he fell.
Ere his very thought could pray,
Unanealed he passed away,
Without a hope from mercy’s aid,
To the last, a renegade.”

“Well shot, quarrell,” cried the exulting dwarf, but Bras- de-fer preserved a stern and thoughtful silence. He waved with his hand a signal for his men to cease their discharge, and then stood watching the effect of his blow. That effect was, indeed, decisive.

L’Ecorcheur, like Bras-de-fer, was a leader, who had no second to supply his place. At first there was a confused rush to the spot where his body lay, but when he was discovered to be past all aid, a panic fell on the great host, that had so lately obeyed him as one man, and it began to melt away, like the mists on a mountain-side.

All the military train, with the plunder, was left standing. Before twilight came down, not a routier was in the island of Tresco. Their white sails gleamed upon the waves. The deliverance of the Abbey was complete. Bras-de-fer, with the Priest, watched their rapid and disorderly retreat, along the margin of the broad lake, which then, as now, occupied the valley.
“

Thine was a happy shot, Sir Knight,” said the Abbot, “surely it was a blessed deed. St. Nicholas nerved thy arm, to smite that spoiler, hip and thigh. Thou hast slain the accursed Philistine, even while he railed against the servant of God.”

“Sir Monk,” replied Bras-de-fer, with unusual gravity, “I do not gainsay you, neither do I deny that the fall of Jean l’Ecorcheur, by my hand, has preserved your Abbey. I cannot expect you to feel as a soldier feels. But this I will say. He, whom men call the Flayer, routier as he was, still was a valiant soldier. Truly, I slew him, and I did it in a good cause. Yet he and I have ridden together under the same banner, and fought in many a bloody field. It would have pleased me better had we met, on yonder open plain, horse to horse, and man to man, in fair and knightly strife. As it is I smote him, after the fashion of the simple dwarf, from under cover; as I have heard, in your holy- book, that Abimelech, a stout Jewish captain, was stricken by the hand of a woman. Me seemeth it was not thus that Bras-de-fer should have conquered in your cause.”

Tush, my son,” said the Abbot, impatiently, “these be silly questions of what is called honour. What matters it, so long as the mad wolf be killed, by what hand, or by what weapon, he falls?”

“True, Father,” replied Bras-de-fer, “I believe you are in the right. After all, our little friend here deserves more credit than I. God inspired him with the idea, which I put in practice. He conceived, and I only executed. Thus God rebukes our pride, for He made Bras-de-fer second to this feeble child. It is God alone who is our Deliverer. To Him, and to His Name, be praise!”

THE OLD CHRISTMAS

This week another one of our folktales from Man by Sophia Morrison. This is The Old Christmas, which was read into the public domain through LibriVox by Larry Wilson. Thanks to him and his production team at LibriVox.

I just like to stress that this folktale comes from at least the Sixteenth Century because the Old Christmas is a transposition of the date of the Christmas in the Julian calendar onto the Gregorian calendar, once it replaces the Julian in 1582. The difference is ameliorated a little by some folk traditions that have 12 Days of Christmas. Little Christmas – or Old Christmas or Women's Christmas depending on where you come from – can still be celebrated within that 12 day period, becoming a sort of culminating festival.

In 1220, when most sagas are set, there is no question as to which is the appropriate Christmas (at least within the Western Church) and so the Christmas miracles which are about to be discussed are observable on a known day.Those of you familiar with later Catholic theology would point out that the idea of demanding miracle is tempting God and is theoretically sacrilegious, but folk traditions don't care about these sorts of things.

In the days of our grandmothers, Old Christmas Day, the fifth of January, was believed to be the true Christmas. On Black Thomas's Eve, which was the first day of the Christmas holidays, the spinning wheels all had to be put away, the making of nets ceased, and no work of any kind must be done until after Twelfth Day.

But there was once an old woman named Peggy Shimmin, at Ballacooil, and she was bent on finishing some spinning that she had begun, so on Old Christmas Eve she said to herself:

'The New Christmas is pas' an' surely it's no wrong to do a bit o' spinning to-night,' though she doubted in her heart if she were not sinning. So when Himself and the rest were in bed, she called her young servant-girl, lil Margad, and said:[150]

'Margad, me an' you will finish the spinning to-night.' Margad was frightened, terrible, but she got out her wheel and sat beside her mistress. The two began to spin, and they were spinning and spinning till near midnight, and behold ye, just before midnight old Peggy saw the flax she was drawing from the distaff grow blacker and blacker till it was as black as tar. But Margad's flax did not change colour because she had only done what her mistress bade her. Peggy dropped the flax quick, put away her wheel, and crept in fear to bed. She knew now which was the true Christmas Day and never more did she spin on Old Christmas Eve.

Margad was left alone in the kitchen when her mistress had gone to bed, and at first she was trembling with fright; but she was a middling brave girl, and she took a notion, as there was no person to stop her, to see if all the things were true that she had heard about Old Christmas Eve.

'They're saying,' she thought, 'that the bees are coming out, an' the three-year-old bullocks going down on their knees, an' the myrrh coming up in bloom.' Then she says to herself:

'I'm thinking I'll go out an' watch the myrrh.' So she put a cloak round her and crept out at the door into the cold frosty moonlit night, and midnight had just struck as she put her foot outside. She stooped to look on the spot where the myrrh root was buried, and as she was looking, the earth began to stir and to crack, and soon two little green shoots pushed up to the air. She bent closer to see what would happen, and to her great wonder the leaves and stalks grew big and strong before her eyes, and then the buds began to show, and in a few minutes the lovely white flowers were in bloom and the garden was sweet with their fragrance. Margad could do nothing but stare at them at first, but at last she dared to gather one small piece of the blossom, and she kept it for luck all her life. Then she went to the cowhouse and peeped through the door. She heard a groaning sound and there were the young bullocks on their knees, moaning, and the sweat was dropping from them. Margad knelt down, too, and put up a bit of a prayer to the Holy Child that was born in a stall. But the wonders were not over yet, for as she went silently back to the house she noticed that the bees were singing and flying round the hive—they were inside again, when she shut the door of the house behind her.

Always after that, when the neighbours would ask her if she believed in the wonders of the Old Christmas Eve, she would say:

'I know it's true, for I've seen it myself.'

CHRONICLES OF SHADOW VALLEY 4

Here Dunsany has a little side story, a phantastical episode, but for us it's a useful snippet. The hero meets a magician who keeps forcing him to undergo mystogogic initiations. The recording used was by Ed Humpel, through Librivox.

It was dark now, and the yellow lights got larger as they drew nearer the windows, till they saw large shadows obscurely passing from room to room. The ascent was steep now and the pathway stopped. No track of any kind approached the house. It stood on a precipice-edge as though one of the rocks of the mountain: they climbed over rocks to reach it. The windows flickered and blinked at them.

Nothing invited them there in the look of that house, but they were now in such a forbidding waste that shelter had to be found; they were all among edges of rock as black as the night and hard as the material of which Cosmos was formed, at first upon Chaos' brink. The sound of their climbing ran noisily up the mountain but no sound came from the house: only the shadows moved more swiftly across a room, passed into other rooms and came hurrying back. Sometimes the shadows stayed and seemed to peer; and when the travellers stood and watched to see what they were they would disappear and there were no shadows at all, and the rooms were filled instead with their wondering speculation. Then they pushed on over rocks that seemed never trodden by man, so sharp were they and slanting, all piled together: it seemed the last waste, to which all shapeless rocks had been thrown.

Morano and these black rocks seemed shaped by a different scheme; indeed the rocks had never been shaped at all, they were just raw pieces of Chaos. Morano climbed over their edges with moans and discomfort. Rodriguez heard him behind him and knew by his moans when he came to the top of each sharp rock.

The rocks became savager, huger, even more sharp and more angular. They were there in the dark in multitudes. Over these Rodriguez staggered, and Morano clambered and tumbled; and so they came, breathing hard, to the lonely house.

In the wall that their hands had reached there was no door, so they felt along it till they came to the corner, and beyond the corner was the front wall of the house. In it was the front door. But so nearly did this door open upon the abyss that the bats that fled from their coming, from where they hung above the door of oak, had little more to do than fall from their crannies, slanting ever so slightly, to find themselves safe from man in the velvet darkness, that lay between cliffs so lonely they were almost strangers to Echo. And here they floated upon errands far from our knowledge; while the travellers coming along the rocky ledge between destruction and shelter, knocked on the oaken door.

IThe sound of their knocking boomed huge and slow through the house as though they had struck the door of the very mountain. And no one came. And then Rodriguez saw dimly in the darkness the great handle of a bell, carved like a dragon running down the wall: he pulled it and a cry of pain arose from the basement of the house.

Even Morano wondered. It was like a terrible spirit in distress. It was long before Rodriguez dare touch the handle again. Could it have been the bell? He felt the iron handle and the iron chain that went up from it. How could it have been the bell! The bell had not sounded: he had not pulled hard enough: that scream was fortuitous. The night on that rocky ledge had jangled his nerves. He pulled again and more firmly. The answering scream was more terrible. Rodriguez could doubt no longer, as he sprang back from the bell-handle, that with the chain he had pulled he inflicted some unknown agony.

The scream had awakened slow steps that now came towards the travellers, down corridors, as it sounded, of stone. And then chains fell on stone and the door of oak was opened by some one older than what man hopes to come to, with small, peaked lips as those of some woodland thing.

"Señores," the old one said, "the Professor welcomes you."

They stood and stared at his age, and Morano blurted uncouthly what both of them felt. "You are old, grandfather," he said.

"Ah, Señores," the old man sighed, "the Professor does not allow me to be young. I have been here years and years but he never allowed it. I have served him well but it is still the same. I say to him, 'Master, I have served you long …' but he interrupts me for he will have none of youth. Young servants go among the villages, he says. And so, and so…"

"You do not think your master can give you youth!" said Rodriguez.

The old man knew that he had talked too much, voicing that grievance again of which even the rocks were weary. "Yes," he said briefly, and bowed and led the way into the house. In one of the corridors running out of the hall down which he was leading silently, Rodriguez overtook that old man and questioned him to his face.

“Who is this professor?” he said.

By the light of a torch that spluttered in an iron clamp on the wall Rodriguez questioned him with these words, and Morano with his wondering, wistful eyes. The old man halted and turned half round, and lifted his head and answered. “In the University of Saragossa,” he said with pride, “he holds the Chair of Magic.”

Even the names of Oxford or Cambridge, Harvard or Yale or Princeton, move some respect, and even yet in these unlearned days. What wonder then that the name of Saragossa heard on that lonely mountain awoke in Rodriguez some emotion of reverence and even awed Morano. As for the Chair of Magic, it was of all the royal endowments of that illustrious University the most honoured and dreaded.

“At Saragossa!” Rodriguez muttered.

“At Saragossa,” the old man affirmed.

Between that ancient citadel of learning and this most savage mountain appeared a gulf scarce to be bridged by thought.

“The Professor rests in his mountain,” the old man said, “because of a conjunction of the stars unfavourable to study, and his class have gone to their homes for many weeks.” He bowed again and led on along that corridor of dismal stone. The others followed, and still as Rodriguez went that famous name Saragossa echoed within his mind.

And then they came to a door set deep in the stone, and their guide opened it and they went in; and there was the Professor in a mystical hat and a robe of dim purple, seated with his back to them at a table, studying the ways of the stars. “Welcome, Don Rodriguez,” said the Professor before he turned round; and then he rose, and with small steps backwards and sideways and many bows, he displayed all those formulae of politeness that Saragossa knew in the golden age and which her professors loved to execute. In later years they became more elaborate still, and afterwards were lost.

Rodriguez replied rather by instinct than knowledge; he came of a house whose bows had never missed graceful ease and which had in some generations been a joy to the Court of Spain. Morano followed behind him; but his servile presence intruded upon that elaborate ceremony, and the Professor held up his hand, and Morano was held in mid stride as though the air had gripped him. There he stood motionless, having never felt magic before. And when the Professor had welcomed Rodriguez in a manner worthy of the dignity of the Chair that he held at Saragossa, he made an easy gesture and Morano was free again.

“Master,” said Morano to the Professor, as soon as he found he could move, “master, it looks like magic.” Picture to yourself some yokel shown into the library of a professor of Greek at Oxford, taking down from a shelf one of the books of the Odyssey, and saying to the Professor, “It looks like Greek”!

Rodriguez felt grieved by Morano’s boorish ignorance. Neither he nor his host answered him.

The Professor explained that he followed the mysteries dimly, owing to a certain aspect of Orion, and that therefore his class were gone to their homes and were hunting; and so he studied alone under unfavourable auspices. And once more he welcomed Rodriguez to his roof, and would command straw to be laid down for the man that Rodriguez had brought from the Inn of the Dragon and Knight; for he, the Professor, saw all things, though certain stars would hide everything

.And when Rodriguez had appropriately uttered his thanks, he added with all humility and delicate choice of phrase a petition that he might be shown some mere rudiment of the studies for which that illustrious chair in Saragossa was famous. The Professor bowed again and, in accepting the well-rounded compliments that Rodriguez paid to the honoured post he occupied, he introduced himself by name. He had been once, he said, the Count of the Mountain, but when his astral studies had made him eminent and he had mastered the ways of the planet nearest the sun he took the title Magister Mercurii, and by this had long been known; but had now forsaken this title, great as it was, for a more glorious nomenclature, and was called in the Arabic language the Slave of Orion. When Rodriguez heard this he bowed very low.

And now the Professor asked Rodriguez in which of the activities of life his interest lay; for the Chair of Magic at Saragossa, he said, was concerned with them all.

“In war,” said Rodriguez.

And Morano unostentatiously rubbed his hands; for here was one, he thought, who would soon put his master on the right way, and matters would come to a head and they would find the wars. But far from concerning himself with the wars of that age, the Slave of Orion explained that as events came nearer they became grosser or more material, and that their grossness did not leave them until they were some while passed away; so that to one whose studies were with aetherial things, near events were opaque and dim. He had a window, he explained, through which Rodriguez should see clearly the ancient wars, while another window beside it looked on all wars of the future except those which were planned already or were coming soon to earth, and which were either invisible or seen dim as through mist.

Rodriguez said that to be privileged to see so classical an example of magic would be to him both a delight and honour. Yet, as is the way of youth, he more desired to have a sight of the wars than he cared for all the learning of the Professor.

And to him who held the Chair of Magic at Saragossa it was a precious thing that his windows could be made to show these marvels, while the guest to whom he was about to display these two gems of his learning was thinking of little but what he should see through the windows, and not at all of what spells, what midnight oil, what incantations, what witchcrafts, what lonely

hours among bats, had gone to the gratification of his young curiosity. It is usually thus.

The Professor rose: his cloak floated out from him as he left the chamber, and Rodriguez following where he guided saw, by the torchlight in the corridors, upon the dim purple border signs that, to his untutored ignorance of magic, were no more than hints of the affairs of the Zodiac. And if these signs were obscure it were better they were obscurer, for they dealt with powers that man needs not to possess, who has the whole earth to regulate and control; why then should he seek to govern the course of any star?

And Morano followed behind them, hoping to be allowed to get a sight of the wars.

They came to a room where two round windows were; each of them larger than the very largest plate, and of very thick glass indeed, and of a wonderful blue. The blue was like the blue of the Mediterranean at evening, when lights are in it both of ships and of sunset, and lights of harbours being lit one by one, and the light of Venus perhaps and about two other stars, so deeply did it stare and so twinkled, near its edges, with lights that were strange to that room, and so triumphed with its clear beauty over the night outside. No, it was more magical than the Mediterranean at evening, even though the peaks of the Esterels be purple and their bases melting in gold and the blue sea lying below them smiling at early stars: these windows were more mysterious than that; it was a more triumphant blue; it was like the Mediterranean seen with the eyes of Shelley, on a happy day in his youth, or like the sea round Western islands of fable seen by the fancy of Keats. They were no windows for any need of ours, unless our dreams be needs, unless our cries for the moon be urged by the same Necessity as makes us cry for bread. They were clearly concerned only with magic or poetry; though the Professor claimed that poetry was but a branch of his subject; and it was so regarded at

Saragossa, where it was taught by the name of theoretical magic, while by the name of practical magic they taught dooms, brews, hauntings, and spells.

The Professor stood before the left-hand window and pointed to its deep-blue centre. "Through this," he said, "we see the wars that were."

Rodriguez looked into the deep-blue centre where the great bulge of the glass came out towards him; it was near to the edges where the glass seemed thinner that the little strange lights were dancing; Morano dared to tiptoe a little nearer. Rodriguez looked and saw no night outside. Just below and near to the window was white mist, and the dim lines and smoke of what may have been recent wars; but farther away on a plain of strangely vast dimensions he saw old wars that were. War after war he saw. Battles that long ago had passed into history and had been for many ages skilled, glorious and pleasant encounters he saw even now tumbling before him in their savage confusion and dirt. He saw a leader, long glorious in histories he had read, looking round puzzled, to see what was happening, and in a very famous fight that he had planned very well. He saw retreats that History called routs, and routs that he had seen History calling retreats. He saw men winning victories without knowing they had won. Never had man pried before so shamelessly upon History, or found her such a liar. With his eyes on the great blue glass Rodriguez forgot the room, forgot time, forgot his host and poor excited Morano, as he watched those famous fights.

And now my reader wishes to know what he saw and how it was that he was able to see it.As regards the second, my reader will readily understand that the secrets of magic are very carefully guarded, and any smatterings of it that I may ever have come by I possess, for what they are worth, subjects to oaths and penalties at which even bad men shudder. My reader will be satisfied that even those intimate bonds between reader and writer are of no use to him here. I say him as though I had only male readers, but if my reader be a lady I leave the situation confidently to her intuition. As for the things he saw, of all of these I am at full liberty to write, and yet, my reader, they would differ from History's version: never a battle that Rodriguez saw on all the plain that swept away from that circular window, but History wrote differently. And now, my reader, the situation is this: who am I? History was a goddess among the Greeks, or is at least a distinguished personage, perhaps with a well-earned knighthood, and certainly with widespread recognition amongst the Right Kind of People. I have none of these things. Whom, then, would you believe?

Yet I would lay my story confidently before you, my reader, trusting in the justice of my case and in your judicial discernment, but for one other thing. What will the Goddess Clio say, or the well-deserving knight, if I offend History? She has stated her case, Sir Bartimeus has written it, and then so late in the day I come with a different story, a truer but different story. What will they do? Reader, the future is dark, uncertain and long; I dare not trust myself to it if I offend History. Clio and Sir Bartimeus will make hay of my reputation; an innuendo here, a foolish fact there, they know how to do it, and not a soul will suspect the goddess of personal malice or the great historian of pique. Rodriguez gazed then through the deep blue window, forgetful of all around, on battles that had not all the elegance or neatness of which our histories so tidily tell. And as he gazed upon a merry encounter between two men on the fringe of an ancient fight he felt a touch on his shoulder and then almost a tug, and turning round beheld the room he was in. How long he had been absent from it in thought he did not know, but the Professor was still standing with folded arms where he had left him, probably well satisfied with the wonder that his most secret art had awakened in his guest. It was Morano who touched his shoulder, unable to hold back any longer his impatience to see the wars; his eyes as Rodriguez turned round were gazing at his master with dog-like wistfulness.

The absurd eagerness of Morano, his uncouth touch on his shoulder, seemed only pathetic to Rodriguez. He looked at the Professor's face, the nose like a hawk's beak, the small eyes deep down beside it, dark of hue and dreadfully bright, the

silent lips. He stood there uttering no actual prohibition, concerning which Rodriguez's eyes had sought; so, stepping aside from his window, Rodriguez beckoned Morano, who at once ran forward delighted to see those ancient wars.

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A slight look of scorn showed faint upon the Professor's face such as you may see anywhere when a master-craftsman perceives the gaze of the ignorant turned towards his particular subject. But he said no word, and soon speech would have been difficult, for the loud clamour of Morano filled the room: he had seen the wars and his ecstasies were ungoverned. As soon as he saw those fights he looked for the Infidels, for his religious mind most loved to see the Infidel slain. And if my reader discern or suppose some gulf between religion and the recent business of the Inn of the Dragon and Knight, Morano, if driven to admit any connection between murder and his daily bread, would have said,

"All the more need then for God's mercy through the intercession of His most blessed Saints." But these words had never passed Morano's lips, for shrewd as he was in enquiry into any matter that he desired to know, his shrewdness was no less in avoiding enquiry where there might be something that he desired not to know, such as the origin of his wages as servant of the Inn of the Dragon and Knight, those delicate gold rings with settings empty of jewels.

Morano soon recognized the Infidel by his dress, and after that no other wars concerned him. He slapped his thigh, he shouted encouragement, he howled vile words of abuse, partly because he believed that this foul abuse was rightly the due of the Infidel, and partly because he believed it delighted God.

Rodriguez stood and watched, pleased at the huge joy of the simple man. The Slave of Orion stood watching in silence too, but who knows if he felt pleasure or any other emotion? Perhaps his mind was simply like ours; perhaps, as has been claimed by learned men of the best-informed period, that mind had some control upon the comet, even when farthest out from the paths we know. Morano turned round for a moment to Rodriguez:

"Good wars, master, good wars," he said with a vast zest, and at once his head was back again at that calm blue window. In that flash of the head Rodriguez had seen his eyes, blue, round and bulging; the round man was like a boy who in some shop window has seen, unexpected, huge forbidden sweets. Clearly, in the war he watched things were going well for the Cross, for such cries came from Morano as "A pretty stroke," "There now, the dirty Infidel," "Now see God's power shown," "Spare him not good knight: spare him not," and many more, till, uttered faster and faster, they merged into mere clamorous rejoicing.

But the battles beyond the blue window seemed to move fast, and now a change was passing across Morano's rejoicings. It was not that he swore more for the cause of the Cross, but brief, impatient, meaningless oaths slipped from him now; he was becoming irritable; a puzzled look, so far as Rodriguez could see, was settling down on his features. For a while he was silent except for the little, meaningless oaths. Then he turned round from the glass, his hands stretched out, his face full of urgent appeal.

"Masters," he said, "God's enemy wins!"

In answer to Morano's pitiful look Rodriguez' hand went to his sword-hilt; the Slave of Orion merely smiled with his lips; Morano stood there with his hands still stretched out, his face still all appeal, and something more for there was reproach in his eyes that men could tarry while the Cross was in danger and the Infidel lived. He did not know that it was all finished and over hundreds of years ago, a page of history upon which many pages were turned, and which lay as unalterable as the fate of some warm swift creature of early Eocene days over whose fossil today the strata lie long and silent.

"But can nothing be done, master?" he said when Rodriguez told him this. And when Rodriguez failed him here, he turned away from the window. To him the Infidel were game, but to see them defeating Christian knights violated the deeps of his feelings.

Morano sulky excited little more notice from his host and his master who had watched his rejoicings, and they seem to have forgotten this humble champion of Christendom. The Professor slightly bowed to Rodriguez and extended a graceful hand. He pointed to the other window.

Reader, your friend shows you his collection of stamps, his fossils, his poems, or his luggage labels. One of them interests you, you look at it awhile, you are ready to go away: then your friend shows you another. This also must be seen; for your friend's collection is a precious thing; it is that point upon huge Earth on which his spirit has lit, on which it rests, on which it shelters even (who knows from what storms?). To slight it were to weaken such hold as his spirit has, in its allotted time, upon this sphere. It were like breaking the twig of a plant upon which a butterfly rests, and on some stormy day and late in the year.

Rodriguez felt all this dimly, but no less surely; and went to the other window.

Below the window were those wars that were soon coming to Spain, hooded in mist and invisible. In the centre of the window swam as profound a blue, dwindling to paler splendour at the edge, the wandering lights were as lovely, as in the other window just to the left; but in the view from the right-hand window how sombre a difference. A bare yard separated the two. Through the window to the left was colour, courtesy, splendour; there was Death at least

disguising himself, well cloaked, taking mincing steps, bowing, wearing a plume in his hat and a decent mask. In the right-hand window all the colours were fading, war after war they grew dimmer; and as the colours paled Death's sole purpose showed clearer. Through the beautiful left-hand window were killings to be seen, and less mercy than History supposes, yet some of the fighters were merciful, and mercy was sometimes a part of Death's courtly pose, which went with the cloak and the plume. But in the other window through that deep, beautiful blue Rodriguez saw Man make a new ally, an ally who was only cruel and strong and had no purpose but killing, who had no pretences or pose, no mask and no manner, but was only the slave of Death and had no care but for his business. He saw it grow bigger and stronger. Heart it had none, but he saw its cold steel core scheming methodical plans and dreaming always destruction. Before it faded men and their fields and their houses. Rodriguez saw the machine.

Many a proud invention of ours that Rodriguez saw raging on that ruinous plain he might have anticipated, but not for all Spain would he have done so: it was for the sake of Spain that he was silent about much that he saw through that window. As he looked from war to war he saw almost the same men fighting, men with always the same attitude to the moment and with similar dim conception of larger, vaguer things; grandson differed imperceptibly from grandfather; he saw them fight sometimes mercifully, sometimes murderously, but in all the wars beyond that twinkling window he saw the machine spare nothing.

Then he looked farther, for the wars that were farthest from him in time were farther away from the window. He looked farther and saw the ruins of Peronne. He saw them all alone with their doom at night, all drenched in white moonlight, sheltering huge darkness in their stricken hollows. Down the white street, past darkness after darkness as he went by the gaping rooms that the moon left mourning alone, Rodriguez saw a captain going back to the wars in that far-future time, who turned his head a moment as he passed, looking Rodriguez in the face, and so went on through the ruins to find a floor on which to lie down for the night. When he was gone the street was all alone with disaster, and moonlight pouring down, and the black gloom in the houses.

Rodriguez lifted his eyes and glanced from city to city, to Albert, Bapaume, and Arras, his gaze moved over a plain with its harvest of desolation lying forlorn and ungathered, lit by the flashing clouds and the moon and peering rockets. He turned from the window and wept.

The deep round window glowed with serene blue glory. It seemed a foolish thing to weep by that beautiful glass. Morano tried to comfort him. That calm, deep blue, he felt, and those little lights, surely, could hurt no one.

What had Rodriguez seen? Morano asked. But that Rodriguez would not answer, and told no man ever after what he had seen through that window.

The Professor stood silent still: he had no comfort to offer; indeed his magical wisdom had found none for the world.

You wonder perhaps why the Professor did not give long ago to the world some of these marvels that are the pride of our age. Reader, let us put aside my tale for a moment to answer this. For all the darkness of his sinister art there may well have been some good in the Slave of Orion; and any good there was, and mere particle even, would surely have spared the world many of those inventions that our age has not spared it. Blame not the age, it is now too late to stop; it is in the grip of inventions now, and has to go on; we cannot stop content with mustard-gas; it is the age of Progress, and our motto is Onwards. And if there was no good in this magical man, then may it not have been he who in due course, long after he himself was safe from life, caused our inventions to be so deadly divulged? Some evil spirit has done it, then why not he?

He stood there silent: let us return to our story.

Perhaps the efforts of poor clumsy Morano to comfort him cheered Rodriguez and sent him back to the window, perhaps he turned from them to find comfort of his own; but, however he came by it, he had a hope that this was a passing curse that had come on the world, whose welfare he cared for whether he lived or died, and that looking a little farther into the future he would see Mother Earth smiling and her children happy again. So he looked through the deep-blue luminous window once more, beyond the battles we know. From this he turned back shuddering.

Again he saw the Professor smile with his lips, though whether at his own weakness, or whether with cynical mirth at the fate of the world, Rodriguez could not say.

Cultic initiation here doesn't seem to suffice for him to develop any new virtues using the Ars Magica initiation rules. The initiation has taken place at a special time and place and the mystagogue is of exceptional ability however these things together don't seem to suffice, unless Rodrigo has developed a Flaw from looking in the windows. Perhaps he's lost one of his personality traits, although he seems to hold to his code of chivalry and his belief in the system of honor in later chapters. We don't see a dreadful boding in him anywhere.

Perhaps this is merely a minor preparatory ritual which purifies him for the greater suffering which he is going to have when we next visit him, in which he will face existential terror and a near-death experience.