

Primeval by Gaslight

Louise Sellers

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The “missing scene” at the end is a remix of a short story by “fiffolle” from livejournal. It was beta read by “fredbassett” from livejournal who counseled against the shifting tenses (I ignored her).

Chapter 1

Primeval by Gaslight

A Primeval Short Story

ON THE TRANSMUTATION OF SPECIES

by Connor Temple

In this essay I seek to outline a theory about the processes that shaped the numerous species that live on our world, both in the present and in the far past as evidenced by the fossil record. The theory draws upon the myriad folk legends that may be encountered among the common sort to hypothesize the existence of beings of great power that exist among us, as yet undetected, and which have the power to influence the formation of animal species.

Mr. Temple you were set an essay on the transmutation of species. The intention, as you are no doubt well aware, was that you provide an exhaustive survey of the existing literature on the subject NOT that you put forward a theory of your own - Professor N. Cutter.

Monday 11th July, 1858

Sightings of a Mysterious Large Reptile from the Forest of Dean

Last Wednesday Richard Withings, a labourer, reported that he had witnessed a large reptile, in appearance like a dragon, on his way home in the evening. He reported this sighting to Sir John Lytton, a local landowner. Sir John gave his opinion that Mr. Withings was in his cups. Mr Withings retorted that he was no more in his cups than Sir John and that he had seen what he had seen. This dispute was witnessed by several persons taking place, as it did, outside the Church Sunday last. Mr Withings subsequently led a group of ten men into the forest and the party found a number of large footprints as well as evidence of damage to fences and agricultural buildings.

Nicholas Cutter
Merton College
Oxford

Charles Darwin
King's Hotel
Shanklin
Isle of Wight

18th July,

Dear Charles

I enclose a newspaper cutting dug up by an undergraduate student of my acquaintance. It seems likely to be nothing more than a the hyperactive imagination of one of the lower classes but I have resolved to investigate it. Mr. Temple, the undergraduate in question, observed that my wife was last sighted in the area which, I admit, also spurs me on to treat the story with, perhaps, more interest than it deserves. I mention Mr. Temple to you since he is a talented young student with a good grasp of natural history. He has a number of wild theories on the transmutation of species and I am eager to discuss your own ideas with him.

I was sorry to miss the meeting of the Linnean Society on the 1st and so am unable to send you a personal report of the event. Lyell writes that the reception of the papers by yourself and Wallace was subdued. I agree with his assessment that people needed time to reflect on these matters before pronouncing an opinion. Hopefully there will be a wider debate once the proceedings are published, which I understand is to be late next month. Lyell also tells me that you are now resolved on full publication and hope to have a book ready for next year. This is good news for, as you know, I have been anxious to see your theories in print for some time.

I was deeply sorry to hear of the death of your son. Stephen also sends his condolences to you and your wife. You have both been in our thoughts and prayers these past weeks.

Yours etc.,

Sir James Lester
Enforth House
Gloucestershire.

19th July

Dear Sir

I hope you will forgive my having the temerity to contact you like this. I live in the hundred of St. Briavels in the Forest of Dean not so far from your own estates. My son, Benjamin, has discovered a strange reptilian creature the like of which neither I, nor Mr. Sandford the schoolmaster, recognise. I am told that you have an extensive private zoological garden and therefore wondered if you would be interested in purchasing the animal. I enclose a sketch of the creature which Mr. Sandford has been so good as to supply.

Yours etc.,

Mrs Jane Trent

Miss C. Brown
The Three Tuns Guesthouse
St. Briavels

Sir James Lester
Enforth House
Gloucestershire

23rd July,

Dear Sir

I write, as requested, in order to keep you informed of the progress of your ward's efforts to procure the new reptilian creature. Miss Maitland assures me that the animal is, indeed, previously unknown and I have deferred to her more extensive knowledge of natural history. The owner, Mrs Trent, is a respectable widow. As suggested, I have made discrete inquiries to her character of the local vicar. I can see no danger in purchasing the animal from her and have given Miss Maitland permission to proceed with the transaction. Your ward has become fascinated by the question of the origin of the creature. This interest has been further inflamed by the presence in our guesthouse of three gentlemen from Oxford investigating some wild tale of large reptiles in the forest. The gentlemen in question are a Professor Cutter, a Mr Hart and a Mr Temple. Professor Cutter I understand to be an Oxford don and Mr. Temple is one of his students. Mr. Hart puzzles me somewhat but my understanding is that he is a man of independent means who has an interest in Professor Cutter's work. My impression of Professor Cutter is of a sober and responsible gentleman. My first thought was to dismiss their quest as a wild goose chase but his calm and learned demeanor lends me to give some credence to their investigations. I have some concerns about the two other gentlemen. Mr. Temple is an earnest young man and his admiration of Miss Maitland is clear for all to see. Mr. Hart is more guarded in his manner but older and more assured in his bearing. I am concerned that there may be some little danger from that quarter so await your instructions whether your ward is to be allowed to observe these investigations or whether we should procure the new creature with all expedition and return home.

Yours etc.,

24th July

Dear Diary

Such excitement! I contrived this morning to slip away from under the weather eye of Miss Brown and meet with Benjamin Trent, as agreed. Our plan was to visit the location where Ben discovered Rex, for so we have named his strange reptilian creature. Our journey into the forest started well and I observed several interesting varieties of local flora. For a young boy, Ben's conversation is remarkably informed, displaying a genuine interest in the local wildlife. We proceeded for some distance before being arrested by the sight of a cow in a tree. It was obviously dead and you will be proud of me, dear diary, when I say that I suffered not a single palpitation, nor was there any risk of fainting. I have often maintained, as you will know, that I am made of sterner stuff than many of my sex, a circumstance I attribute to my upbringing by Sir Lester and his well-meaning but unconventional view of a well-rounded education. Today I had opportunity to confirm my opinion and I passed the test with flying colours. Unfortunately my young companion was much alarmed by the sight and ran away with the avowed intention of reaching home before "the dragon" should catch him. I would have kept pace with him but my skirts somewhat impeded running and I fell behind. I was carrying Rex at this point and, dear diary, most wonderful discovery! He can fly. I had tripped over a petticoat and was, I fear, cursing in a fashion that would cause Miss Brown to deliver another of her lectures. His wings had been folded along his back and almost entirely concealed. He sits before me as I write this and I can see the faintest indication of where they are, but this was entirely obscured from me before since I suspected no such thing. Rex also set up a high-pitched sound which reminded me of the warning calls of several birds. Resolving that discretion was the better part of valour and, if I confess, anxious not to be discovered wandering alone in the forest with muddy petticoats only too visible, I concealed myself in a bush. It is as well that I did for, at this moment, the largest reptile I have ever seen appeared on the path. I do not exaggerate. I judge it to have been the size of one of the larger bears at London zoo. It walked on all fours and looked somewhat like a dog, in shape, but with a large snout and wide neck. It had the teeth of a carnivore and, as you can imagine, I was relieved to find myself well-concealed and out of sight.

Extract from Portal to Another World by Benjamin Trent

Let us pause for a moment to imagine the fear felt by young Jack as he ran through the forest. Many of you, perhaps all of you, would upbraid him for the cowardly fashion in which he had abandoned his companion, but you must recall that, at the time, he was but a young boy and had not yet grown into the heroic adventurer he was to become in later years. Indeed the knowledge of this failing was to remain ever with him and his extreme care for the gentler sex was often a cause for remark by his companions.

No matter. Jack ran through the forest and, in his fear, rapidly lost his way. His flight was halted, however, by the appearance of a strange and wondrous sight. Words can not do justice to the strange phenomenon he found before him. It was as if a star had fallen from the heavens and rested, sparkling and glittering, just hovering above the forest floor. Shards of light darted in and out of it and beyond Jack could just about discern the faint cry of animals. Overcome by his strong sense of curiosity Jack stepped forward into the light and found himself in another world entirely.

It was a world of sparse vegetation. The sands of a vast desert shifted under his feet and in the distance he could see the tall spires of volcanoes spewing forth their perilous load into the sky. Above his head strange creatures swooped and whirled, identical in appearance to the lizard, named Rex, he had rescued from the forest. It was a sight that never entirely left his imagination and, although in later years he dismissed it as a strange dream, the vision haunted his thoughts. This, dear reader, was the abode of the dragons that had come to plague the forest.

Jack returned home but his adventures of the day were not yet concluded. On his return from the forest he was forced, by reason of having lost his way, to climb a fence. Jack cut his finger on the top, a circumstance to which he paid little mind, but which was to result in a trail of fresh blood that lead from the forest to his small home. A trail such as could be followed as easily by a dragon, as by any other hunting beast.

Jack had hardly settled himself by the hearth when there was a huge commotion outside the small cottage he shared with his mother. Jack bolted the doors and retreated to the hearth where a fire burned in the grate. His mother was absent, still at Church, he judged. The door was of little use however for the creature batted

it aside with one blow of its head. Steeling his courage, young Jack grabbed a burning brand from the fire and struck out at the creature with it. Unaccustomed to meeting such resistance, the dragon withdrew its head from the cottage and retreated into the night.

The Notebooks of Professor Cutter

22nd July

We were approached after morning service by Miss Brown. It seemed she had mislaid her charge, a circumstance I gathered was not entirely unusual. It had not been our intention to continue our investigation within the Forest today, it being a Sunday, however Miss Brown's concern was genuine and, I confess, I was not entirely sanguine about the thought of a young girl, even one as apparently level headed as Miss Maitland, alone in the forest.

There was some little concern about Miss Brown accompanying us but she felt it necessary that she fulfil her role of chaperone once we discovered Miss Maitland. As Stephen pointed out, I am a married man, which should suffice for decency. Miss Brown appears a most sensible young woman. A little limited in her education and horizons, as are so many of her sex, but not a woman prone to flights of fancy nor hysterical outbursts and in our conversation she revealed a keen intelligence and an interest in the matters we were investigating.

Once again Stephen's experience in the Amazon proved invaluable. We proceeded swiftly. We found more signs that an unusually large creature had passed but they continued to prove insufficient for identification. I was still pre-disposed to assume some large animal must have escaped from a local zoo, even though there had been no report of such in the paper.

We encountered Miss Maitland just as dark was falling. She provided us with a remarkably clear account of a large reptilian beast. I confess to some concern at the time that she may have become hysterical on finding herself, as she had, abandoned and alone in the forest. However she delivered her report in a calm voice with a certainty of manner that gave no hint of hysteria. Miss Brown assured me that Miss Maitland was not prone to fantasy so I suppressed my doubts and we set about to return to St. Briavels.

It was at this point we were all witness to a beast. Miss Maitland insists that

it was different from the creature she witnessed earlier. I have set Mr. Temple to sit with her, under Miss Brown's careful eye, to try and produce accurate sketches of both creatures. Mr. Temple, I have discovered, is a talented draftsman and I suspect this skill may prove invaluable to us. The creature we saw was about eight feet in height with a bony head, like a cobbled street, and what appeared, in the half-light, to be an armoured body. The closest creature I can think of is Mantell's Hyleosaurus although there were clearly many differences. This has led me to tentatively assign the creature to the previously considered extinct Dinosauria group. I have requested Mr. Temple make several copies of his illustrations and will write to Darwin as soon as they are available.

Following our encounter, and informed by Miss Maitland's account, we returned to question Benjamin Trent. We found his house in an uproar and his mother alarmed, having returned home to find the door broken down and young Benjamin insistent he had seen a dragon. After some effort we managed to elicit an account from him that revealed the existence of some kind of a source for the creatures in the forest. We have resolved to investigate further in the morning.

ALARMING DEVELOPMENTS STOP FORGIVE A HUMBLE WOMAN AN OPINION
COMMA BUT SUGGEST HOME OFFICE TAKES AN INTEREST STOP C B

Urgent Report to Mr Walpole, Secretary of State for the Home Department

24th July 1858

Sir, as I outlined to you in our brief meeting, an alarming situation has arisen in the Forest of Dean over the weekend. It is my opinion that steps need to be taken as a matter of urgency to contain matters.

A rag-tag team of scientists from the University of Oxford have discovered a kind of portal within the forest from which large beasts emerge. My ward, Miss Maitland and her chaperone, Miss Brown, were witness to one such late on Sunday Night. It was at this point that Miss Brown, with great presence of mind, contrived to wire me a message and I proceeded to the forest with great

haste Monday morning. Events had proceeded apace while I travelled and on arrival my ward, backed up in places by Miss Brown, was able to relate to me how Professor Cutter of Oxford was able to locate the portal. My understanding is that, with the assistance of his companion, Mr. Hart, he tracked down the beast and then succeeded in so frightening it that the animal set off at great pace. The Professor rightly assumed that it was returning home and so the party were led to the portal. Much as I would like to report that all five persons were inebriated or feverish, as poorly as that would reflect on the conduct of my ward and Miss Brown were it true, I am unable to do so. I reluctantly conclude, therefore, that they did indeed see something resembling a large reptile.

I enclose with this report three sketches by Professor Cutter's student Mr. Temple illustrating the beasts so far witnessed. Two of these are, by all accounts, extremely large. The third is a small lizard which I currently have in my possession. The scientists, of course, are at a loss to explain both the portal and the origin of the creatures. Professor Cutter, however, likens the creatures to the many fossils that have appeared and insists that they could provide important scientific insights. I have seen the portal with my own eyes although I have not witnessed any of the creatures described.

My concerns are practical and I request that a division of Her Majesty's forces be stationed within the Forest of Dean forthwith. Outlandish as the claims sound I feel we have no option but to assume that there is indeed something unknown taking place within the forest. Until we can ascertain exactly what the phenomenon is, we need to keep the general public away from the area and prevent the appearance of inflammatory stories in the Press. There is already much local talk of dragons which needs but little encouragement to become a panic.

I have been at some pains to investigate this trio of scientists. Professor Cutter is well known in his field and academically respectable. Unfortunately there is some scandal surrounding his wife Helen Cutter who, it appears, ran off with another man some eight years past and has not been heard of since. She was, it would appear, always unconventional and had personally accompanied the Professor on his trips to remote parts of the world under conditions no lady should be expected to endure. No one appears to know who she absconded with although I gather the event was a surprise to no one apart from the Professor himself. Her morals are not held in high regard among the dreaming spires. Mr. Hart is a young man of private fortune who has funded a number of the Professor's expeditions. He is of good family and there are, I suppose, worse eccentricities into which the idle rich may fall. He generally lives in Oxford, where he shares lodgings with the good Professor. Mr. Temple is the son of a clergyman from Yorkshire. His

background is modest but respectable. He is, I understand, destined for the cloth like his father.

I have impressed upon this team the need for secrecy and, despite their eccentricities, I believe they comprehend the severity of the situation.

Nicholas Cutter
Oxford and Cambridge Club
London

Charles Darwin
King's Hotel
Shanklin
Isle of Wight

25th July,

Dear Charles,

I am writing to you with some urgency in order to commend to you the three young people who will be delivering this letter. I do not wish to trouble you at a time like this but the Home Office were greatly impressed when I mentioned your name. It would appear that Sir James Lester, to whom I am suddenly required to report, has read *The Voyage of the Beagle* and is impressed by your Royal Medal. It seems he is, therefore, more prepared to accept your word on the matter than my own.

I send to you Mr. Temple, about whom I have written to you before. With him you will find Sir James' ward, Miss Abigail Maitland and her chaperone Miss Claudia Brown. In Miss Abigail's possession is a strange lizard found in the Forest of Dean about whom your opinion is sought. Mr. Temple will be able to recount further details of the matter, which relate to the letter I sent you on the 18th.

Please examine the lizard and write a brief opinion on it for Sir James. I feel that further investigation is required, and urgently. Yet the man will not allow me to proceed without a second opinion from someone "respectable" which I take to be a jibe at my missing wife. My apologies, once again, for involving you in the matter at a time such as this but I feel I have no other recourse.

Yours etc.;

Connor Temple
King's Hotel
Shanklin
Isle of Wight

Clara Temple
The Vicarage
Appleton Roebuck
Yorkshire

27th July

Dear Clarrie

Sorry I have not written in so long, dear sister. I appear to have gained a mentor, of sorts, in one Professor Nicholas Cutter and he has kept me busy rushing all over the country. When I have not been on a train, or being thrown about on some coach, carriage or ferry I have been producing illustrations for him. I enclose a couple I managed to make for myself of some of the flora to be found in the Forest of Dean. I hope you like them.

I am currently on the Isle of Wight, as you will observe. Professor C. has trusted me to convey an important message to Charles Darwin, of whom you have heard me speak before. The Professor himself is busy in town and only reluctantly consented to allow me to travel in his place. Believe me that I am fully cognizant of the honour thus conveyed and took pains to assure the Professor of the seriousness with which I undertook the mission, though I fear he did not fully comprehend my references to the works of R. M. Ballantyne. The Professor has hinted to me that Mr. Darwin is due to publish shortly a ground-breaking paper, so I am greatly anticipating our meeting tomorrow and hope I will not embarrass myself by appearing too eager.

I travelled to the island in the company of Miss Abigail Maitland, the ward of Sir James Lester. She is the owner of a specimen lizard that the Professor wishes Mr. Darwin to examine. Oh Clarrie! how can I describe her! She is very neat about her person with a delicate frame and very pale skin. Her hair is a pale blond in colour and she wears it charmingly. I have never really grasped the details of women's fashions but her taste in clothes looks well enough to me. I understand that her mother was Sir James' sister and that her parents both died in India when she was just a small child, leaving her in the care of her uncle. He has provided her with the best education from a succession of private tutors. Professor Cutter

seems to be of the opinion that he both neglected and over-indulged her somewhat and I have heard him use the phrase “run wild like a savage”. In this I feel he is too harsh. She has a pleasingly forthright disposition but there is nothing that is vulgar or rude in her speech and I admire her adventurous spirit.

Your loving brother

C. Temple

P.S. Tell father I am managing very well and Professor Cutter is covering all the expenses, so not to worry.

P.P.S. I enclose an essay I wrote for Professor Cutter on the Transmutation of Species. He did not like it very much but I am sure it will interest you. Write back and tell me what you think of it. I am considering showing it to Miss Maitland.

P.P.P.S I am hoping, while on the Island, that we may be able to go hunting for fossils. Wouldn't that be grand! To have one of our very own!

Reptiles appearing in the Forest of Dean

28th July

Summary

I have today had reason to examine a small gliding reptile, of unknown species, and view a number of sketches of other creatures supplied by Professor Cutter. I can confirm his view that these creatures are not natives of the British Isles, nor is it plausible that should have remained here, undetected, for any length of time.

I agree with Professor Cutter's opinion that the creatures bear most similarity to the Dinosauria group identified by Owen. This makes their existence a strange anomaly but one which is likely to have a significant impact on the field of paleontology and the question of the transmutation of species. They are, in short, living fossils.

Charles Darwin

Nicholas Cutter
The Three Tuns Guesthouse
St. Briavels

Charles Darwin
King's Hotel
Shanklin
Isle of Wight

30th July,

Dear Charles,

Sir James Lester has kindly agreed that I may keep you informed of events here in the Forest of Dean as they progress. We gained permission to investigate Benjamin's portal on Thursday thanks, in no small part, to your support for my theories. We proceeded as fast as we could to the forest, not even stopping in Oxford for a change of clothing. Last night found us back at the welcoming guesthouse in St. Briavels.

We were somewhat surprised to find Miss Maitland and Miss Brown awaiting us. I understand they have been here several days, having travelled directly from the Isle of Wight because Miss Maitland enjoys the countryside. I suppose this to be a ruse of some kind, an opinion deepened by their decorative presence at the portal site this morning. Sir Lester brushed off my concerns with a casual remark about broadening his ward's education and I suppose he knows best. Miss Maitland bade Rex a tearful farewell as I entered the anomaly (for such is the preferred Home Office terminology, they appear unwilling to admit even that it might be a portal to somewhere, let alone the distant past). Much as I am anxious to study Rex further, my conscience tells me we should take care to disturb matters on the far side of these portals as little as possible. I mentioned this concern to Sir James who agreed that all caution should be adopted until more was known of the situation and he approved the return of Rex, despite the not inconsiderable sum he paid to acquire him.

I entered the anomaly accompanied by a Captain Ryan who was charged to watch over my safety. The Captain is a taciturn man and I have never had much liking for the military mindset which seems, to me, to be all too inclined to shoot first and ask questions later. Miss Brown recommended him to me, however, and I suspect she may be a sounder judge of character than I am, as you know only too well. Sir James made it clear that I enter the anomaly with a guard or not at

all so I had little choice in the matter.

I am sure it will come as no surprise to you if I reveal that I have suspected, ever since I spoke to master Trent of his experiences, that the portal may have existed for some time and that it could provide some clue to Helen's fate. I know it is widely believed that she left me for another man but I never saw any evidence of attachment to anyone but myself. We frequently disagreed over our interpretation of the fossil record and over your own theories. Since her last known location was a hotel close to St. Briavels it does not seem unreasonable to me to suppose that she may have located and explored this portal. The presence of Captain Ryan was, therefore, something of a blow to my plans to seek evidence of her on the other side.

The landscape beyond the portal coincided with the description supplied by young Trent. I am of the opinion that his description is reminiscent of Murchison's Permian era, and I understand from Mr. Temple that you also tentatively agree with this hypothesis. I am more convinced than ever that this is correct. Sir James Lester remains skeptical but even he can not provide a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon and some sort of gateway through time remains the reluctantly preferred explanation, although it is impossible to rule out the possibility that the anomaly merely leads to some part of the Earth as yet unexplored by naturalists. I brought back some samples of the flora and enclose sketches of these from the skilful hand of Mr. Temple.

Captain Ryan and I explored for some distance, giving me the opportunity to make many observations which I will write up in full and convey to you with my next letter. We also discovered the remains of a human body and, by it, a daguerrotype. I am certain that the body is that of a man, which was some relief at least, although it therefore provides no clue to Helen's location. The daguerrotype is currently in the hands of the Home Office who entertain an, I suspect forlorn, hope that they may be able to develop the plate. I will confess that I behaved rather foolishly at this point, so convinced was I that if one person had found their way to this side of the portal then so too might another. I determined to remain and seek out my wife but Captain Ryan, none too gently, convinced me otherwise. On calm reflection I have to agree that this is an investigation to be pursued with great care. In particular, it appears that these portals may open and close at random and it would not do to become trapped on the far side of one. I will write to you further tomorrow when I have had the opportunity to put my notes in better order.

Yours etc.

Stephen Hart
Merton College
Oxford

George Hart
Abbey House
Kent

6th August

Dear Sir

Thank you for your letter of the 2nd August. It was with surprise and pleasure that I learn Sir James Lester has spoken so highly of my actions in his correspondence with you. As you are aware I am promised to secrecy and I will confess to a little uncertainty about how much I am permitted to discuss with you. Suffice it to say that I discovered a large beast had got lose in a school building. Fortunately, given the lateness of the hour, there was no one in the building apart from the schoolmaster and a young boy. I had tracked the animal there and had some notion of what I was dealing with. When I arrived the schoolmaster had, with great presence of mind, barricaded himself and his young charge into a classroom. I therefore distracted the creature and set off, at a run, in the direction of Sir James Lester and her Majesty's forces, who I knew to be nearby. There is, to be honest, little else to tell. I do not believe that many men would have acted any differently and I was armed which no doubt gave me some small measure of courage. There was a nasty moment when the creature managed to bring one of the doors to the schoolhouse down on my head, causing momentary confusion. Fortunately the creature failed to observe me in those moments and continued its progress on into the forest.

Sir James is correct in saying that he has employed both Professor Cutter and myself as advisors to the Home Office. I will certainly bear your advice in mind and see if the position can be made a permanent one.

Your loving son,

Stephen Hart.

Report to Mr Walpole, Secretary of State for the Home Department

31st July 1858

I have now had time to debrief Captain Ryan following the events of yesterday. As you know, I had given permission for Professor Cutter to essay a trip through the anomaly in the Forest of Dean.

All proceeded smoothly until they discovered a body and a daguerrotype. At this point Professor Cutter began raving about his wife and appeared determined to remain on the far side of the portal to search for her. Captain Ryan, I understand, found himself forced to use violence against the Professor in order to bring him back. Fortunately the Professor is no fighter and was easily subdued. I understand that, in the end, they reached an accommodation. They observed that the anomaly appeared to be on the point of closing, a circumstance which came of some surprise to us all. The good Captain made it clear that he intended to remain with the Professor to protect him should the anomaly indeed vanish. The Professor thus came to his senses and, unwilling to risk the Captain's life in some damn fool quest, consented to return to our time.

After their return I also observed that the Professor became engaged in a long conversation with Miss Brown. She has given me to understand that he believes his missing wife to have entered an anomaly and seeks to find her. Miss Brown is under the impression that she has convinced him that hasty action could leave him as lost in time as his wife may be and that he has agreed to a disciplined and careful investigation. I hope she is correct but I fear she may underestimate the effect of her own charms. Much as it offends me to use a woman in such a way, I fear Miss Brown's influence may prove invaluable in future in keeping the Professor in line.

As you will realise, despite the many reservations I have about Professor Cutter, I feel I have no option but to recommend that he be retained by the Home Office, together with his two associates, in order to investigate these matters. It seems to me to be of utmost importance that as few people learn of these events as possible. The Professor would appear to be qualified to look into them and the only other academic who is aware of the situation, Mr. Darwin, suffers from ill-health and has expressed a disinclination to become involved in any fieldwork

related to the matter. Moreover I doubt we can successfully keep Professor Cutter away from this anomaly and any others that may appear. The documents you had delivered to me were most informative and I agree that it appears we may be facing a previously unrecognised, but nevertheless not uncommon, phenomenon. I have no doubt that, in due course, the good Professor will locate these other examples and we may as well make use of his energy, while at the same time ensuring we remain fully informed of his activities.

Dear Diary.

We are once again back in the Forest of Dean. It took the combined efforts of myself and Miss Brown to persuade Sir James that we should be allowed to accompany the team of scientists and soldiers, but he is an honourable man and had to acknowledge that, were it not for my interest in reptiles, the phenomenon would never have been identified. He also acknowledged that I deserved the opportunity to make a final farewell to Rex who Professor Cutter had resolved to return to his original place by way of precaution.

Professor Cutter was present at the site together with a number of soldiers. Mr. Hart was sadly absent. Apparently Professor Cutter had sent him to scour the forest for more of the creatures despite the assurances of the soldiers that none had exited the anomaly during their guard.

It was all, I must confess, extremely dull for much of the afternoon and I sat around mourning Rex's departure and the absence of Mr. Hart. Then, towards evening, we noticed some strange behaviour from the anomaly. Mr. Temple who had made a careful study of the portal, including the discovery that it had magnetic properties, gave his opinion that it was, in fact, about to close. We all observed, with considerable anxiety, aware that two men were missing on the far side. At the last moment Professor Cutter returned with his escort, Captain Ryan, and the air of a man whose plans have been frustrated. As they jumped through the ball of light, it closed behind them plunging us into the darkness of the late evening, for such it was.

It was then that the creature I originally witnessed in the forest made its appearance, pursued by Mr. Hart who had discovered it near the school house. He later retold how he had decoyed it into the forest and away from the children at no small risk to himself.

Several of the soldiers opened fire at once but their efforts appeared to have little effect on the gargantuan beast which blundered towards us at a great pace.

The Professor grabbed Miss Brown and pulled her from its path. I confess I hitched up my skirts with no great dignity and fled. It was just as I thought I was done for that Mr. Hart emerged from the bushes, also armed with a rifle and opened fire on the beast in turn. I do not know what effect the bullets had but they were sufficient to turn the animal from its path so that it passed us by. Moments later, under a second barrage of fire from the soldiers, it collapsed to the ground.

What none but I observed in the fracas, was Rex, hiding behind a tree. I feel sure he has returned to us by the hand of divine providence and that his presence will prove of value in future as we investigate more of these anomalies as I am sure we will. I currently have him concealed in a cage in my luggage, awaiting transportation home.

The Notebooks of Professor Cutter

1st August 1858

I have just returned from the Home Office where I was able to view an extremely pale daguerrotype image which nevertheless showed my wife Helen, in shockingly unsuitable attire, against the Permian landscape. I fear that I have lost further ground in the eyes of the respectable Sir James Lester, now he has seen this image of my lost wife. I am convinced that the skeleton we found was that of a man, a fact that does not improve Sir James' opinion of my wife's morals but that leaves me with some hope and the nagging question "Where is Helen?"

I returned to my rooms this evening, in a contemplative mood to discover an ammonite on my desk. Of itself this is not a matter of note. Such fossils are easy enough to discover if you know where to look, however this one appeared to me, as I entered, to be in remarkably good condition. To my surprise, when I examined it further, I realised it was in fact, alive. A genuine example of another living fossil.

1.1 Missing Scene: Examination by Lamp Light

Letter, Capt. T. Ryan to Lt. J. Lyle

My Friend,-

I've found myself caught up in a bit of an adventure back here in Blighty. I've been seconded to a group under the aegis of Sir James Lester, from the Home Office. He isn't a military man but, so far, he has impressed me with his good sense. I think you would like him. I'm afraid I am not at liberty to give many details but I am no longer as sorry as I was to be unable to accompany you to India.

The job involves working with an Oxford don called Professor Nicholas Cutter. I will tell you of a conversation we had, since I think it will amuse you and provide a character sketch of the man which you might find of interest.

I will describe his looks first. He is past the first flush of youth but still, I think, very young to be a professor. He has blond hair which he wears to just below his ears, as is the fashion. His chin is clean-shaven but he does have a creditable moustache. He does not, I think, exercise a great deal although he is by no means fat and he has certainly never studied the pugilistic arts which brings me to the start of my brief scene.

The Professor and I had just returned from a dangerous expedition. During the course of this, we had engaged in a disagreement which unfortunately came to blows. Unsurprisingly, the Professor had come off the worse and, in fact, I had had cause to knock him out with the butt of my Enfield.

This event gave me some concern, as you can imagine. A knock-out blow is never a good thing and the effects can take a while to show. You and I know this, but I was less sure of the Professor's acquaintance with such facts.

When I had resolved to take the matter up with him he was talking to his colleague, a young man by the name of Stephen Hart, and a Miss Claudia Brown, an employee of Sir James'. His face was pleasantly animated and it was clear that he appreciated the company.

I walked up to the little group and broke into their conversation with an: "Excuse me, Professor, can I have a word, please?"

"What about, Captain?" he asked. His tone was challenging. He had not, I think, forgiven the blow.

I wished to give him an opportunity to keep our little tussle private. I had had clear orders from Sir James, so had no fear of repercussions, but I did not wish to damage his dignity before his young colleague and the lady. I did feel the need to examine his injuries, however, and wished to discuss the matter before it could fester.

"I need to check your neck, Professor. We need to talk," says I, a trifle stiffly, I imagine.

Professor Cutter nodded and smiled and, to my surprise, he said: "Oh, aye,

because you knocked me out cold? Worried you might have cracked my skull, yes?"

You will gather, from this, that the Professor originates from north of the border. An Edinburgh man, I think, though I am no expert on the Scottish accent.

The others looked shocked at this revelation but I declare his smile was genuine. I've always admired a man who can take a deserved beating with good humour. I think I began to like him then and there. While we had disagreed previously, his reasons were understandable and, all things taken together, he had handled himself well.

"Maybe," I said and then: "Will you come with me so I can take a look?"

"Yes, of course, Captain Ryan, lead the way."

So I begin to explain to him the sorts of things a soldier watches out for in such a circumstance. But he cuts me short.

"Yes, all right, Captain, no need for the lecture. I teach anatomy."

Nevertheless, he did let me examine him. The troops had set up several tents and we repaired to one where we would have a little privacy. It was growing dark but there were Davy lamps. I lit one and set it by the Professor, letting it cast its light on his head and neck. I had hit the base of the neck. It had not yet started to bruise enough for me to discern in the lamplight, but, by feeling the vertebrae and muscles, I located the place by the sound of the Professor's breath.

"Looks like you found the right b— spot," he said.

So I apologised and sat down. "I think you'll live," I said and followed it up with: "I did my job perfectly." I wanted him to understand that I know what I'm doing when I put a man down.

He was rubbing at his neck where my blow had landed. "Good for you, Captain," I heard him mutter. His brow furrowed and I could tell he was thinking about the matter further. Then he stares at me and says: "So that's why you didn't hit me again..."

"Once was more than enough," I said. "I don't think Miss Brown would have been too pleased if I'd killed you." I referred here to Sir James' pretty employee. I feel sure she admires the Professor but I was curious to see if he admired her in turn. "I had to use other tactics," I then said, for my blow to his head had not been the final end of our argument.

"Aye," he says. "Playing on my d—d emotions!"

I suspect this is a true flavour of his conversation when there are no ladies present. Some day we should invite him to the mess to meet Major Preston.

I did not comment on his language. It is refreshing at any rate to think I do not need to be overly careful with mine in his presence. So I said:-

“I thought it was the idea of being stuck with me that clinched it.” I could see, by the look in his eye, that this was not the case and, I confess, the thought that he liked me as much as I liked him, pleased me greatly. “And I avoided breaking your face, too,” I said, though I held his chin to check, for he had fallen on the ground.

He then apologised to me once more and made reference to his wife who, I understand, deserted him some years ago. I have not pressed on that matter, though it is clear there is some scandal there which must be hard for a man in his respectable position. I have always been glad that I have managed to keep my own affairs free of scandal and I am sure that you feel the same. Still, I find it hard to entirely blame a man for the behaviour of his wife and I felt a great deal of sympathy for him which I hope I managed to convey with a companionable look and touch.

I told him that I understood his position. Then he asked after my own family and confessed that he had worried that he might trap me away from them, in pursuit of his own quest. I was touched by his concern and shook my head:-

“I have no ties,” I told him and smiled to let him know that, in future, he need not hesitate on that score. Of course I know I have many friends, such as your good self, but we see each other so little, therefore I do not think the circumstances he referred to would affect us greatly.

Then he smiles back at me with mischief in his eyes: “Oh. Well then. Next time we can just stay.”

It looks likely that his wife’s behaviour may have some bearing on this strange business of Sir James’. The Professor strikes me as both honest and hot-headed. If the lady is another such we shall have some trouble with her but, I suspect, it will not be so serious. However Sir James has taken to pursing his lips and frowning when she is mentioned. I fear that this is not simply in regard to the scandal of her disappearance but that he has more concrete information. In which case, I think there may be real trouble ahead.

As we left the tent he calls out to me one more time. “Who should I contact?” says he: “if I get blurred vision?”

I was well aware that he would have no trouble in such a circumstance. This was a joke at my mother hen attitude. However, I gave him my address and told him to wire me if he needed assistance.

I see this has become a very long letter and I have yet to tell you of Sir James Lester. It will, I think, have to wait until another day. Write soon and give me your opinion on the Professor.

Yours Always Captain Thomas Ryan. ;/p;