

Nazis and Dinosaurs and Airships! Oh My!

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With thanks to Fredbassett for beta-reading.

Chapter 1

Nazis and Dinosaurs and Airships! Oh My!

A Primeval Short Story

Private Tanya Lacey felt as though she'd been on a long distance run. She stood gasping for breath. The air felt strange.

"Back! Back!" Lieutenant Tremayne seemed to be saying. Her voice sounded a long way off though. Everything seemed to be growing dark.

Hands grasped her from somewhere. "Don't just stand there! Move!" It was Taylor Crane, the team Science Advisor.

There was a glitter of light and suddenly she was breathing in deep, welcome breaths, full of sweet oxygen. Lacey realised she was lying on her back in the snow.

"What the hell happened there?" demanded Tremayne.

"Really early time period, I'd guess," said Crane. "Pre-Cambrian probably. Very little life, not much oxygen."

"Bugger! Why the hell doesn't someone think of these things? We should take oxygen through as standard. Don't you think so, Ma'am?" Lacey growled. It had been a bad day so far, full of frozen pipes, broken household appliances, snotty letters from the bank, whinging phone calls from an ex-boyfriend about how he had nowhere to stay for Christmas, the most horrendous drive on ungritted roads to an anomaly and now nearly getting suffocated in some godforsaken pre-historic era.

There was a pause.

"Ma'am? Ma'am?"

"Fuck," said Crane. "Something's changed."

Lacey sat up. They appeared to be alone in the field. Captain Becker and the other Special Forces soldiers were conspicuous by their absence. “They could have been called off somewhere,” she hazarded.

“We weren’t on the other side for more than a minute,” muttered Tremayne. “Shit! What could we have bloody changed in under a minute?”

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” said Crane.

Lacey and Tremayne both looked at her. Research Assistant Crane was an anomaly in her own right. She and two others had turned up out of nowhere to rescue Stephen Hart with some tale of a future ‘anomaly mapping team’. Crane claimed to have met the ARC forces as a child but no trace of a Taylor Crane or her family had ever been found. However, in so far as they had one, Crane was their expert on shifting time lines.

“Tell me what you’re thinking,” said Tremayne.

“Butterfly effect, pre-Cambrian, oxygen is probably mixing into the air back then as we speak. All sorts of odd chemical reactions will be happening out of sequence.”

“And that implies?” asked Tremayne.

Crane shrugged. “Fuck knows, but I’ll bet you anything you like it isn’t good.”

Lacey stood up and took a good look around them. There had been pylons on the distant hills, no more, and sounds of the busy M6 had echoed from beyond the tree-line. She realised she was listening to bird song. But the field was surrounded by a neat hedge and she could see some kind of buildings in the distance. So at least there were humans. She felt a wave of reassurance.

Then a massive airship loomed over the hills. “Holy fucking shit!” she said and pointed.

“Fight or flight?” asked Crane as the monstrosity gradually descended towards them.

“Neither,” said Tremayne, “they’ll have seen us already. Running away will make them suspicious, fighting may not be necessary.”

As the airship touched the ground, men and women in dirty brown dungarees, flat caps and goggles emerged and ran around the ship, grabbing ropes and fixing them into the ground. A small team of soldiers emerged in bright red uniforms with gold brocade and elaborate moustaches. They marched in an orderly fashion up to the three women.

The man in the lead was, unmistakably, the much-mourned Captain Ryan, only with a moustache. “Well I’ll be d—d!” he said.

Lacey could hear the dashes replacing the letters.

“Sir!” Tremayne threw a salute.

“I suppose you know you’re dead, Lieutenant.”

“No sir! I wasn’t aware of that sir! I was under the impression you were supposed to be dead, sir!”

Ryan’s eyebrows shot up. “Goodness gracious me! How jolly confusing!”

Lacey could hear Crane suppressing a snigger.

“Indeed,” said Tremayne with an admirably straight face.

“I knew it. There’s no way the anomalies could exist without the possibility of temporal changes!”

Lacey frowned at the figure that had suddenly nipped around Ryan. He was wearing a black suit which appeared a little small for him, with shirt cuffs and white socks visible at the ends of the legs and sleeves. A bowler hat was firmly pulled down onto his head and he, like the workers on the airship, wore goggles. Around his neck hung a large wooden box with brass handles and dials.

“I see Mr Temple is the same person, in both our histories,” said Tremayne.

Connor straightened suddenly and looked affronted. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Best not to ask, Connor,” said an amused voice.

Three women had followed Connor’s figure from the airship. Abigail Maitland was wearing tweed breeches, what looked like a moleskin waistcoat, knee-length boots and had a flat cap perched jauntily on blonde hair that was piled up on top of her head. Behind her, Jenny Lewis was dressed in a vivid scarlet ankle length dress with a bustle. Neat little boots were just visible beneath the hem of the dress. She was wearing a top hat. Behind her Helen Cutter was wearing a pith helmet, and looked like a typical Victorian explorer in a beige jacket and more breeches. Lacey knew she was gaping.

“Ah Miss Maitland, Miss Brown, Professor Cutter, maybe you can help with our little conundrum?”

Miss Brown! Lacey couldn’t help looking sideways at Taylor Crane who’s eyes were wide and staring. They all knew Professor Cutter, *their* Professor Cutter’s story of the missing Claudia Brown who had been replaced by Jenny Lewis.

Miss Brown, who looked so like Jenny Lewis, smiled at them, though there was steel in her eyes. “Best take them back to London. Sir James and I can debrief them. I see we have Lieutenant Tremayne and Private Lacey and…” her voice tailed away as she looked at Crane.

“Taylor Crane, ma’am. Research Assistant, Anomaly Mapping Team, 2015, lately seconded to the ARC because of a temporal mix up.”

Helen’s eyebrows shot up into her pith helmet. “Anomaly mapping team?”

“2015!” added Connor.

“It’s a long story,” said Tremayne.

“Get them back to London, Miss Brown,” said Ryan. “We can get up to speed later. Right now, there’s an anomaly to deal with.”

Tremayne coughed. “Leads to the pre-Cambrian. You’ll want oxygen.”

“Botheration!” said Connor. “I knew we should have packed some as standard.”

“We’ll load some on the airship and send it back to you,” said Miss Brown with a laugh.

“Not much life in the pre-Cambrian though,” said Helen. “I’ll stick my head through quickly to verify what they said but after that a minimal guard detail will probably be sufficient. Everyone can go home in one cosy trip.”

“Anomaly mapping team?” asked Helen. Her expression was distinctly arch. She sat down in one of the plush chairs that were scattered around the airship’s observation deck. She sat elegantly in contrast to the Helen that Tremayne was used to. However her expression was as closely guarded as ever.

“You’ll forgive us if we don’t say any more, ma’am, but we’d prefer to wait until we’ve been debriefed,” said Tremayne swiftly.

“Really, and why is that?” Helen smiled sweetly.

“You’re not exactly a trusted member of the team where we come from,” said Lacey bluntly.

Tremayne saw Claudia Brown smile teasingly at Helen. “You see, my dear. I said that husband of yours would cause no end of trouble.”

“Quite the opposite, in fact,” said Tremayne, stoutly. “Professor *Nicholas* Cutter has been a valuable asset to the team.”

“He has? How droll!” said Helen. She reached for the teapot that had been placed on a little table in front of them and began to pour it out. “Along with his pretty assistant, Mr. Hart, no doubt. I knew there must be a universe where the lure of the Gentleman Adventurer didn’t hold sway.”

Tremayne realised she had no answer to that.

Lester had sideburns. Taylor Crane was trying, very, very hard, not to stare. They suited him, in a bizarre kind of way, though they made him look a bit like some kind of monkey at the same time. A very dignified monkey though, Crane felt the monkey would have been flattered by the comparison.

Lester had his hands steepled in front of him. They'd been through the standard 'who are you?', 'what is your background?' process. This was the second time Taylor had turned up out of time so she was feeling almost relaxed about the whole affair. This world change was very different from the last but she'd had comparatively few ties. In fact when she counted it up in her head there was a mild flirtation with Finn and a friendship of necessity with Hugh McAllister and Shane Wells, her fellow displaced anomaly mappers and that was it.

"I'm going to assume that you remain loyal servants of King and country," Lester said.

"King?" asked Tremayne.

Lester closed his eyes. "Yes, King. Don't tell me, I shudder to think. You and Connor can go over the time-line differences later and give me a precis. I have no doubt it will be both terrifying and illuminating."

"King and country! Yes, sir!" said Tremayne.

"Quite."

"Will that be all, sir?"

"No, I'm afraid it will not."

Crane glanced anxiously at Lacey and Tremayne.

"Sir?" asked Tremayne.

"You and Private Lacey died recently."

"An unfortunate lab accident, I was told," said Tremayne woodenly.

"Indeed, the kind of unfortunate lab accident that tends to make cynical hatchet men, such as myself, think of sabotage. I don't suppose you can assist at all?"

"I'm not sure, sir. Do you have an Oliver Leek working here?"

"Oh, him! No, no, we dealt with him a few months ago. Turned out he was working for the French, a terribly untidy affair."

"We never found out if he was working with someone," admitted Tremayne.

"The French, no doubt about it!"

"Unlikely, sir, given our time-line's politics."

Crane exchanged a glance with Lacey. "No EU?" she whispered.

Lester looked at them. "I heard that, and I dread to think!"

"European Union, one of the outcomes of the Second World War."

"I'm pleased to say we've so far managed to avoid a first world war. However we're engaged in what some are calling an arms race with Germany and they have this distinctly unpleasant little man in charge, name of Adolf Hitler."

All three of them jumped. "I take it you've heard of the man."

"He's been dead sixty years or more," said Tremayne. "But yes. The Second World War was fought against him."

"Something for us all to look forward to then. I'll need a dossier on him for the Foreign Office as soon as possible. Talk to Claudia Brown. She'll also bring you up to speed on the so-called lab accident angle. I'd very much like to know what your other selves were up to in Professor Cutter's lab. Officially you're all off duty pending investigation. Unofficially, I want you to find out as much as possible about what your alter egos knew. Your deaths haven't been announced yet. Get Claudia Brown to hand over your personnel files. I'll need you to talk to your families."

Tanya Lacey sat awkwardly in the Tremayne drawing room sipping tea out of a china cup and eyed the photograph on the wall that announced it was of King Francis II. She was uncomfortable in a corset and bustle but Claudia Brown had insisted on skirts.

"Your behaviour is likely to cause enough comment, without adding eccentric dress to the list," she had said.

"I just don't believe those terrible Germans," said Mrs Tremayne. "Your brains appear quite scrambled."

"I know, mother. It was a truly infernal device." Lieutenant Tremayne had latched onto their cover story with gusto. "I hardly know if I'm coming or going. It had cogs," she concluded darkly.

"These days everything does. I wonder what the world is coming to."

Lacey began to wonder if she wouldn't have been better off accompanying Crane to the British Museum to consult Dr Sarah Page, well-known Egyptologist and adventuress who was, apparently, briefly in Britain before heading off to the sands of Cairo.

"How jolly!" Crane had said which, it had to be said, had earned her a strange look from Claudia Brown.

What with the clothes and the mother downstairs, Lacey felt distinctly girlish as they headed up to Tremayne's bedroom.

"Why are we up here?" she asked.

"Loose floorboard. I used to hide stuff under it. Bet I'm still using it."

"Isn't that a bit unprofessional?"

"Lacey, if I've learned one thing, it is that this world and professional have only a passing acquaintance. Everyone is a bloody freelance adventurer!"

"Yes, but we're army."

Tremayne fished a small card out of a pouch at her waist and handed it to Lacey wordlessly.

Lieutenant Mary Tremayne
Royal Marines Rtd. French Foreign Legion Rtd.
Freelance Adventuress.

No problem too trivial for the dashing Lieutenant and her Chums.

"Am I a chum?" asked Lacey suspiciously.

"I expect so. We were hired in by Lester as extra security and ended up moonlighting undercover because we suspected a Nazi plot to infiltrate the ARC. At least that is apparently what I told Lester before I carelessly got myself killed."

"My day isn't getting any better," muttered Lacey darkly, and fiddled with her corset. Somewhere a bone was digging into her.

With a grunt, Tremayne pulled up the floorboard. Underneath was a hefty-looking leather-bound tome.

"I suppose it's too much to hope you didn't handwrite it all?" said Lacey. Tremayne's handwriting was a minor legend.

They met to compare notes in the tea room of the Savoy, at Claudia's recommendation. Apparently even the Germans wouldn't consider bugging the tea room. While she delicately sipped at what seemed to be her 500th cup of tea of the day, Tremayne eyed her fellow clientele warily and concluded that if anyone were to bug the place there wouldn't be a European secret they didn't know.

"Oil!" Lacey said, loudly enough to be heard at the neighbouring table where the Maharajah of Tashkent was eating Battenburg cake with the Shah of Persia.

At least the waitress had said that was who they were. Tremayne was already beginning to disapprove of the girl's indiscretion.

Crane scowled at Lacey. "Yes, oil. There just don't seem to be that many accessible deposits. Same with coal and with silicon, while we're about it. They've just about got industrial scale coal mining organised. To access deep coal deposits you need engines to pump the air. To run the engines you need coal. It's a bit of a chicken and egg situation. Anyway, they've got coal mining up and running, but oil's going to take them a while. In the meantime there are half a dozen different minerals and gases that are plentiful. Most of them I've never heard of. Science has taken a seriously weird route around here." Crane grinned and rubbed her hands together. There was a dangerous glint in her eye.

"So how did spending 30 seconds in the pre-Cambrian effect the distribution of oil and coal deposits?"

"Butterfly effect, small atmospheric disturbances, the oxygen that came in with us, large, wide area effect on the whole atmosphere fundamentally effecting geography."

"And yet, here we are in Great Britain, working for Sir James Lester at the ARC."

Crane shrugged. "Temporal elasticity. Besides, have you looked at a map? We're not where you may think we are."

"What's temporal elasticity?"

"Something Sarah and I just came up with. Temporal changes are transmitted in order to minimize effects."

"Total redistribution of mineral resources doesn't sound that minimal to me."

"It probably was though. Sarah's very excited about the idea. She's going to consult with a boffin in Cambridge. We might write a monograph."

"Explain about the maps," said Lacey suspiciously.

"We're on large peninsula, sticking out into the Atlantic. Imagine the Iberian peninsula only long and thin and sticking out sideways. Basically, this is Spain insofar as any comparison makes sense."

"I wish I hadn't asked now," said Lacey drily.

"So did you two find anything out?" asked Crane.

"There is a traitor at the ARC."

"Who?"

"No idea."

"Not only did she handwrite her notes, she handwrote them in code," said Lacey, pointedly.

“Okay,” said Crane slowly. “So back to square one. Maybe Lester has someone who can crack your code.”

“We also have tickets to Edinburgh. I found them in the diary. We leave from platform 9 3/4 at King’s Cross in about three hours.”

“You’re kidding me,” said Crane. “9 3/4?”

“It really exists. They started building it for a planned expansion of King’s Cross. Then it was mothballed during a market collapse. They extended elsewhere but re-opened the platform when the new London-Edinburgh line was built last year. Officially it’s platform 16, but it’s between platforms 9 and 10 so everyone calls it platform 9 3/4.”

“How do you know this?” asked Crane.

“She bought a guide book,” said Lacey, “to the British Empire.”

Tremayne shrugged. “We’ll need something to read on the train anyway.”

“Edinburgh, really!” Lester’s eyebrows shot up.

Tremayne shrugged. “It’s the only clue we’ve got until your boffins decrypt that diary.”

Lester sighed. “That could take a while. What are you planning to do when you reach Edinburgh? In case you hadn’t noticed it’s Christmas Eve tomorrow.”

“Send them anyway,” said Helen suddenly from where she’d been sitting. “They’ve done well so far and we may need to move fast.”

“I have an aunt who spends every Christmas in Edinburgh,” said Claudia suddenly. “I’ll wire her and she can meet you at the station.”

“Does she have clearance?” asked Lester.

“Ex-SAS sir.”

“Jolly good.”

Three compartments had been reserved for them. A shared bunk for Crane and Lacey and a tiny bedroom for Tremayne with a little sitting room squashed in between.

The porter managed to indicate surprise at their lack of luggage with a twitched eyebrow and the polite question ‘will this be all?’. Tremayne told him they were

en route from Peking and their luggage had been stolen by pirates in the South China Seas. Lacey was beginning to feel Tremayne was enjoying herself just a little bit too much. They had two bags of ‘essentials’, one from Claudia and one from Connor.

On investigation, Claudia’s idea of essentials appeared to mean three pistols, a cavalry sabre, a hip flask of whiskey, copious quantities of tea cake and a framed photograph of His Majesty.

“What’s wrong with a change of underwear and a toothbrush?” complained Lacey.

Connor’s idea of essentials turned out to be a tangle of brass, clockwork and tubing. It took them an hour simply to separate it out into what looked like five different devices, function unknown. At least two were flying machines of some kind.

“No manual,” muttered Crane.

“You were expecting one?” asked Lacey.

Crane grinned happily, produced a screwdriver from her boot and started taking the devices apart.

By the time they reached Doncaster, Lacey had got over the excitement of travelling on a real live steam train. Not that she had been that excited in the first place, you understand.

Tremayne had spent most of the journey devouring her guide book to the British Empire. She had an obscure family tradition which forbade her to set foot outside its dominions. The world, it would seem, had just become much larger. Lacey thought the tradition and the family as a whole were probably certifiable. Tremayne, however, had decided that, once the Germans were foiled, they should embark on a grand tour, first stop the clockwork towers of Bombay.

Crane had got one of Connor’s devices sort of working. It buzzed around the compartment, clockwork wings flapping frantically. After a minute or so the clockwork would run down and it would drop to the floor like a stone. Beyond that its purpose remained a mystery.

The Yorkshire moors stretched gloomily on either side of them as far as the eye could see in the twilight. Scrubby gorse bushes grew close to the track. It looked a grim and desperate landscape. Stuck out into the Atlantic, as the British peninsula was, meant it got more than its fair share of rainfall, even if the temperature was higher.

It was getting dark. Lacey thought she could see forms pacing alongside the train in the moorland outside. From somewhere came a long drawn out howl.

“The wolves are restive tonight,” said the guard, sticking his head through their door. “Make sure you keep the windows shut.”

“Wolves?” asked Crane.

The guard nodded. “They inhabit the Yorkshire moors.”

“Oh.” Crane’s face hardly changed.

‘Oh, indeed,’ thought Lacey.

Their sleeping compartment consisted of two bunks and minimal extra space. Crane found herself squeezed into a corner as Lacey entered.

Tanya Lacey scowled. The expression was beginning to become habitual. “This looks uncomfortable.”

“Bags I top bunk, if you’re going to be such a misery.” Crane climbed up onto the top bunk and bounced on the mattress. “Mind you I think the mattress has lumps.”

Lacey sighed. “Everything in this bloody world is uncomfortable or crazy. Usually uncomfortable and crazy.”

“Don’t you think it’s kind of fun?”

“No, I don’t.”

Crane wrinkled her nose. “Can you smell something?”

“No.”

“Come on, Tanya! Get into the spirit of things.”

“Lacey.”

“We’re chums now, not soldiers. Call me Taylor and I’ll call you Tanya. I think I can hear hissing as well.”

Tanya Lacey frowned. “Now you mention it.”

Taylor couldn’t help grinning. “You know, Former Private Tanya Lacey, now my good chum. I do believe the Germans are trying to gas us.”

“Uncomfortable, crazy and surprisingly devoid of imagination.”

Taylor slipped off her bunk and tried the door. She was unsurprised to find it locked. Tanya sighed and her face set in a pained expression. She hitched up her skirts, pulled the pistol out of her garter and fired through the window.

Cold air immediately blew into the cabin. There was a barking sound and something thudded against the window.

Taylor Crane caught a glimpse of snapping jaws and malevolent eyes. “Those creatures are going to give wolves a bad name,” she said.

“Wolves have a good name?”

“Wolves are greatly misunderstood,” there was another thud, “except around here obviously. Those look like bloody big buggers. I wonder if they are more like dire wolves.”

“Let’s not get close enough to find out.”

Mary Tremayne reached instinctively for her gun when she heard the shot. She was about to dash out into the shared sitting room when she heard the sound of footsteps and low voices outside the door. Quickly she strapped on the cavalry sabre, grabbed the pistol and positioned herself next to the door.

It burst inwards and three men tumbled into the room. Almost without thought, Mary placed a shot neatly through the head of the first and second men. The third backed out into the sitting room area. Tremayne heard a sound that reminded her distinctly of old war movies. She dropped to the floor of the carriage, even as bullets rained through the walls, splintering the panelling and filling the carriage with downy feathers as they hit the bedding.

“That’s automatic fire!” shouted Taylor.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” muttered Tanya. She aimed a sharp kick at the door. It shuddered against the frame, but held. The hinges didn’t look that strong though. She readjusted herself and then kicked once more, this time aiming at the hinge stress points. The door burst open.

The two of them hid either side of the opening. The sound of automatic gun fire continued in a second burst. Tanya held up three fingers. Taylor nodded. Tanya began counting up silently, ‘one, two, three’. On three she stepped smartly into the lounge area, gun aimed ahead of her.

Two men were crouched over what looked like some kind of ancient machine gun. Their backs were to her and they were firing directly into Mary’s room. Tanya paused just long enough to aim and then shot. The first man fell with a cry. The second began to turn towards her and she shot him as well.

“Mary!” Tanya shouted.

Mary Tremayne burst out of her room, a pistol in one hand and a cavalry sabre in the other.

“Quick, the corridor!” she shouted.

Even as Tanya turned towards the door she could hear more footsteps. “More outside.”

Taylor swung the machine gun affair to cover the door. “Not much ammunition left here,” she reported.

“Fire a burst!” ordered Mary. “That will make them think.”

“Then what?” asked Tanya. “These revolvers only contain six shots. How much ammo do we have?”

“None, we were supposed to get more in Edinburgh. Someone must have tipped them off that we were here.”

“Lester, Claudia, Connor or Helen,” said Taylor.

“My money’s on Helen,” said Tanya.

“Doesn’t matter right now,” said Mary. “What do they think we know?”

“They tried to gas us,” said Taylor. “Why did they try to kill you?”

The door handle turned and Taylor fired a burst. Then she picked up the gun, carried it into the bunk room and tossed it out of the shattered window. “At least that way they don’t get to use it.”

“We need to get to the rest of the train,” muttered Mary. “We can’t hold here for long.”

A long howl sounded from outside the carriage.

While Taylor and Tanya did what they could to barricade the door, Mary leaned out the window of the bunk room and fired at the dire wolves that were running alongside the train. She had picked off a couple of them, but there were a lot left. She was aiming for the leader of the pack, hoping if she took the alpha male out then the others would drop back. She was running out of bullets.

The leader was a huge creature, in the light cast from the ‘ether lamp’ in the carriage she could make out the heavy muscles and see the salt and pepper grey-black of its fur. It turned its head and stared balefully at her. Then it jumped. Mary fired as the huge mouth loomed towards her. Instinctively she stepped back from the broken window as the huge body crashed into the tiny room.

At that moment, Taylor burst into the compartment carrying a large blanket in her arms. She threw the heavy cloth around the creature, grabbing hold of its

neck. Mary placed the gun against its head and fired her last bullet into its brain.

“Onto the roof, now!” she ordered.

Taylor needed no second bidding and climbed out of the window.

“Tanya! We need to get out now!” Mary shouted back into the living area.

She could hear the sounds of banging and shots being fired. Someone was attacking their makeshift barricade and Tanya was obviously firing back.

Mary tossed aside her useless pistol, shoved the sabre back in its sheath and climbed out of the window. She scabbled at the top edge and hauled herself up. Once perched on the sill, she was able to catch hold of the top of the carriage and climb out onto the roof. She fought to keep her balance on the top of the moving train. Not only was there a fierce wind but the train seemed to shake unpredictably, even more so than when she had been inside. Taylor was crawling along the roof of the carriage on hands and knees.

“Here!” came a shout from below.

Mary looked down to see Tanya handing up Connor’s bag of tricks to her. Not a bad idea. She caught hold of it and dragged it up onto the roof of the car. Tanya scrambled up after it.

“That door’s not going to hold long,” she gasped. “I’ll stay here. Take pot shots at anyone who sticks their head out of the window.”

Mary nodded and set off down the carriage roof after Taylor. Ahead of her she could see the younger woman had reached the end of the car. She realised Taylor was peering over the end. Then there was a sharp cry and Taylor vanished.

Mary staggered to her feet, drawing the sword, and crept forward warily.

A head appeared above the carriage top.

“Give me a moment to get on top of the carriage, old thing!” a man’s voice shouted.

“Not on your life!” Mary hurried forwards and stamped on the fingers that were just clutching the edge. The man cried out and vanished.

She heard a low chuckle down below her. “Very resourceful, Lieutenant. However, I have what I came for.”

“Who is that?”

“I’m Herr Walther, Lieutenant Tremayne. I’d remind you that we have crossed swords several times in the past, except that I gather you have never met me. I find that terribly fascinating.”

“What are you doing?”

“Really, Lieutenant, matters are at far too delicate a moment for me to reveal my hand. However if you and Private Lacey care to remain where you are, we shall trouble you no further.”

“What have you done with Taylor?”

“That’s for me to know and you to worry about.”

Mary swayed on top the carriage, unwilling to let her guard drop sufficiently to climb down the ladder ahead of her. But she really had to if she was to have any chance of rescuing Taylor. She realised, suddenly, that the train was slowing down, balancing was becoming easier. There appeared to be a signal ahead.

Mary crouched, gripping the edge of the carriage, the sabre in one hand. The moment the train lurched to a halt she sprang across the gap between the carriages and then whirled around to face the other way. Men were already dragging what looked like Taylor’s unconscious form from the train and loading her onto a large vehicle which looked something like a tank.

At that moment she heard a sound behind her. She whirled to see the man whose fingers she had previously stamped on, standing on top of the carriage, sword drawn. He lunged at her and she riposted with the cavalry sabre. At that moment the train lurched, preparatory to moving. Mary swayed with the effort of keeping upright. The man lunged for her once more but she blocked the blow and thanked her childhood fencing classes. She pressed an attack forward, uncomfortably aware that she stood at the very edge of the carriage.

The steam train let out a blast of its whistle. Mary saw the man’s eyes suddenly widen and then a small device whirled past her ear. The man ducked and she stepped forward, knocking him sideways off the train with a hearty push. Looking back she could see Tanya standing on the carriage behind her, Connor’s bag of tricks at her feet.

A second steam whistle went off and she saw the tank-like thing suddenly rise up on two legs. It lumbered forwards running along the length of the train.

“Carry on to Edinburgh!” Mary shouted at Tanya. “Link up with Claudia’s aunt!” Then she started running down the top of the train to catch up with the tank. It was already picking up speed and then the steam train let out a further whistle and also started to move forwards. Mary was just about level with the walking tank. She grabbed her skirts and jumped across the gap between the two vehicles, landing with a clatter on the outside of the tank.

“Lieutenant Tremayne?” asked a doubtful voice.

Tanya found herself staring into the eyes of a tiny old lady, dressed in yards of black satin.

“Private Lacey, I’m afraid Lieutenant Tremayne got distracted en route.”

“That doesn’t sound good. I’m Captain Letitia Brown, former SAS.” Tanya’s hand was pumped in a surprisingly firm fashion. “Is this your luggage?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Don’t apologise, dear. It’s always good to travel light. Now, I’ve booked us into the Forces’ Women’s Club on Prince’s Street. I stay there every Christmas with some of the girls. I assume you’ll come to Christmas dinner with us.”

“Well, that rather depends, doesn’t it?” asked Tanya cautiously.

“Not at all, my dear. I’m sure we’ll have these Nazis dealt with by Christmas lunchtime. Now where’s a porter? I’ll get them to move your luggage for you.”

“We don’t even know where the Nazis are.”

“Oh, they’ll be in the undercity. That’s where all the secret bases are.”

“All? The secret bases?”

“Yes dear. No imagination these hunns.”

“Oi!” shouted Lacey suddenly, feeling a small hand at her waist. Without thought she reached down and grabbed hold.

“Sorry, miss! I didn’t mean anything by bumping into you, miss!”

Tanya found herself looking into the extremely grubby face of a small girl. She was thin as a rake and covered in soot or possibly engine grease.

“Ah! A guttersnipe! Just what we’re going to need. Well done, Private. Bring her with you as we go.”

Captain Brown’s ‘club’ turned out to be a grand Georgian building. Inside women were everywhere. Women *in trousers* were everywhere. Women *in trousers smoking pipes* were everywhere.

“Jennings! See Private Lacey’s belongings are taken up to her rooms and see if you can’t order something more practical for her to wear. There is devilry afoot,” ordered Captain Brown.

“Very good, Ma’am,” a matronly looking lady in her fifties saluted smartly, and grinned at Tanya. “There’s tea in the Waterloo room while you wait. Will the urchin be accompanying you?”

Captain Brown eyed the guttersnipe, name of Maggie MacDonald, warily. “Take her away and wash her. Bring her back when you’ve done. Now, Private, you need to fill me in on events and then we must start planning.”

Mary Tremayne was jammed awkwardly underneath the tank. Her arms ached from where she had hung onto the thing as it lurched and lumbered across the Scottish borders. She cursed this crazy, crazy timeline. In the first light of Christmas Eve it had ducked into some kind of tunnel underneath Arthur's Seat and eventually brought her into what appeared to be a mad scientist's lair.

The walls were made of wattle and daub and hefty beams held up the roof. Every available surface seemed to be filled with clockwork, jars and tools. Large metal statues adorned the walls and strange exo-skeleton-like devices, in the shape of dinosaurs and the future predators were lined up along one wall. As the tank thing ground to a halt, Mary had just had time to climb down from it and slide underneath between the vast mechanical feet.

She could hear booted feet marching up and down. Herr Walther and about a dozen jackbooted soldiers descended from the creature. Taylor Crane was being escorted by two of them. Her hands were securely tied. Then a second woman's skirts came into view.

"Nick!" That was Helen's voice.

"Helen, thank god you're safe."

"No thanks to you. So careless of you to get yourself captured, dear, though I imagine it was all Stephen's fault. I've had to go to no end of trouble to secure your release."

Mary strained to see and realised that Nick Cutter and Stephen Hart were both being held in some kind of cage, suspended from the ceiling of the laboratory. Helen, in a vivid blue dress, had run across the space and now stood before the cage.

"How touching," said Herr Walther. "I must say Dr. Cutter that your wife has proved most helpful, as have you."

"Nick, what have you done?"

"I had no choice, Helen. The villain was threatening your life and Stephen's. But there's no need to worry, it'll take him years to get the data he needs to make his fiendish device to work."

"What data?" Helen sounded worried.

"What the fuck is going on here!" demanded Taylor. "What the fuck is that machine. Helen, you're a fucking traitor!"

"Goodness! Your time line must have been most unrefined, Miss Crane," said Herr Walther.

Mary realised that Nick, Helen and Stephen were standing before a large machine that stretched from floor to ceiling. It looked a little like an organ, albeit one with columns of bubbling chemicals connected up to it rather than pipes. She could see Herr Walther, a blond man dressed in a black SS uniform, complete with knee length jackboots and a swastika. He strode up and down in front of the machine.

“I suppose it can do no harm to reveal my plans now,” he said. Tremayne rolled her eyes. “As Miss Crane’s story confirms, history may be altered. The smallest tweak can have the strangest effects. This machine, when loaded with the existing information on the anomalies will be able to predict and control those changes?”

Nick laughed from within his cage. “You’ll need far more than existing knowledge on the anomaly network. There simply isn’t enough information.”

“That is where I had a stroke of luck! Miss Taylor Crane here comes from the future where she is a member of the Anomaly Mapping Team. All I have to do is access that information.”

“I’m not telling you anything,” spat Taylor.

“My dear girl, you make it sound like you think you have a choice.”

“To what end though?” asked Helen. “Do you plan to blackmail the crowned heads of Europe?”

“Oh no! Why bother when we can simply change history to our liking. Think of it! The Aryan race striding across the continents, unencumbered by lesser people. We will be gods!”

“Fucking Nazi!” shouted Taylor. “What makes you think I’m going to help you?”

The man shrugged. “Your co-operation isn’t necessary. The machine is built and the data I need is handily stored in your mind.”

“You fiend!” shouted Nick. “Use of the mind probe is forbidden on four continents!”

“Connect the girl up!” ordered the Herr Walther.

Tanya was wearing tight leather trousers and a red velvet waistcoat. This apparently passed for practical in Jennings’ mind. Maggie MacDonald had scrubbed up well and appeared to be a blonde-haired urchin of uncertain age. She wore

trousers and waistcoat that matched Tanya's own. At that very moment Maggie was rifling through Connor's emergency bag with an air of authority.

"Guttersnipes are always good at identifying machinery," confided Captain Brown. "Now I think you're going to need this."

This was large, very large. It was long with blue glass tubing encased in brass filigree. It was undoubtedly a gun.

"I've never seen anything like it," confessed Tanya.

"Not many people have, dear. It works on the same principle as an elephant gun."

"It does?" Tanya was sure it didn't. She wasn't entirely clear what an elephant gun was but she was pretty sure that, in her world at least, they didn't involve blue glass.

"Yes, dear. It packs a bit more of a punch though. We always called it the Dinosaur Gun. Given the circumstances, that seems like a nicely appropriate name. I'd watch out though. It has quite a kick, oh and it's liable to backfire."

"An etheric beam source!" cried Maggie, from somewhere near Tanya's feet.

"A what?"

"It'll be handy in the undercity. It casts lots of light."

Maggie was holding a large green sphere on top of some kind of wooden handle. It was attached to a heavy backpack that looked a bit like diving tanks. Maggie MacDonald struggled into the backpack, which dwarfed her small frame. "I'll be your light man, miss."

"Why are you helping me?" Tanya asked her weakly.

"Can't have the Hun getting a drop on us, can we miss? That wouldn't be patriotic."

"Quite right, young guttersnipe," said Captain Brown. "Now, Private, I want you and Miss MacDonald here to head into the undercity straight away. I'm going to round up some of the girls and we'll see if we can get the College of Surgeons to let us in to the undercity via their morgue. That's closer to where Mary here says the secret base is, but it may take us some time to talk the good Surgeons round."

"How do I get into the undercity?"

"Oh, the club has an entrance. The Duchess of Wellington had it put in, in case of troglodyte invasion."

Maggie MacDonald led them through a maze of tight alleyways where the empty houses towered over them oppressively almost joining at the top. The tips of their roofs almost touched the bricked up ceiling of the undercity.

“What is this place?” asked Tanya.

“Plague city, miss. They built over it. Bricked up the houses of the sick and dying and left them to rot. The undercity has been here ever since.”

“Well, bugger me!” muttered Tanya.

“Language, miss!”

“Don’t you start. We’re the only people down here apart from Nazi spies. I don’t care if they are shocked by a bit of swearing. Since you’ve lived on the streets all your life, I imagine you’ve heard worse.”

“Excuse me, miss! But there are the little ones as well.”

“Little ones?”

“Behind us, miss. I thought we might need help.”

Tanya looked behind her and saw a crowd of small children creeping along the street, and over the rooftops, and running along planks and ropes stretched between the buildings.

“Who the fuck are they?” she asked.

“Language!” said Maggie again. “If you can’t talk nice we will withdraw our support.”

Two dozen filthy urchins stared at her with a mixture of eagerness and disapproval.

“Oh f... bother it! Whatever, which way now?”

“Main Street but...:

Tanya stepped round the corner into a much wider street. Stone columns ran down its centre, supporting the arched roof above.

“We don’t use the Main Street, miss. Big Harry likes to roam up and down it.”

“Who’s big Harry?” asked Tanya, not budging from where she stood.

At that moment the ground shook.

“That’s him coming!” said Maggie Macdonald.

“Holy Sh... Sheep!” said Tanya.

A large Tyrannosaurus rex lumbered down the street. It broke into a run and Tanya could feel the acceleration as the vibrations of its footsteps fell closer and closer together. Some kind of metal contraption was clasped around its head with a small glowing red light at the top.

She shouldered Captain Brown’s Dinosaur Gun and pulled the trigger.

Taylor Crane was strapped into Herr Walther's device. Mary Tremayne had no idea how it was working, but what it was doing was clear enough. A bronzed helmet covered Taylor's face and wires led from it to the organ contraption. An assistant was reading times and locations off a small dial in front of him. Herr Walther played the keys and pedals maniacally, apparently in relation to the data that was arriving. In the middle of the room, a huge clockwork model was forming made of wires and that intersected and glittered where they did so. Electricity sparked along it. It was a map of the anomaly network, one that could be moved, manipulated and changed.

"You can't do this! It won't work," Helen was shouting. She had been locked in the cage with Nick and Stephen.

"It's too late, Helen," said Nick. "We've been out-manoeuvred."

"It's never too late."

"You shouldn't have helped them. Why did you tell them about Miss Crane?"

"He shouldn't have been able to do anything with her information and she was enough of a prize to get me access to you. Together we were bound to figure a way out. But, oh no! you had to go and build him a temporal manipulator!"

"This is not my fault!"

"How did you manage to get captured anyway? I thought you and Stephen had gone sight-seeing in the Permian? Didn't you take precautions?"

"It wasn't Nick's fault. I got bitten by something and fell ill. He had to get medical assistance," Stephen began sulkily.

Mary closed her eyes and tried to block out the squabbling.

"Großer Harry is getötet worden, Herr Walther!" shouted one of the soldiers. He had been sitting in an exo-skeleton affair, shaped a little like a rearing T. Rex.

"Jene Gossekinder! Geben Sie die Fleischfresser frei!"

Mary's German struggled to keep up, but she understood that there were children and that predators were to be released. To her horror she saw Herr Walther's men climbing into some of the exo-skeletons. Exo-skeletons shaped like the future predators.

"Fuckity, fuck, fuck, fuck!" said Tanya. "And the next person who says 'language' is going to be sent to the front!"

A swarm of predators was racing down the tunnels towards them, red lights flashing from the metallic frames strapped to their heads.

The gutter children cowered behind her.

“Run! Hide! They hunt by sound. Find somewhere to hide and keep really still.”

The children scattered. She braced her feet and fired the dinosaur gun again. A blaze of blue light shot out of its end. She staggered backwards, but managed to stay upright this time. Three predators fell to the ground. It wasn't enough.

Wires hung from the backs of all the predator exo-skeletons and seem to attach to a large pulsing glass tank. Sparks of electricity flashed deep within the liquid.

“Es gibt eine Frauen mit den Kindern,” one of the soldiers said, “und eine Gewehr.”

Three of the chairs suddenly sparked and the exo-skeleton limbs fell limp.

Mary Tremayne surged out from under the tank and ran down behind the row of predator machines, slashing at the wires with the cavalry sabre. Behind her showers of sparks danced, followed by explosions.

Tanya watched in amazed relief as, one by one, the predators fell from the columns and ceiling and lay twitching on the ground. She had no doubt however, that someone knew she was here.

“I think we had better hurry,” said Tanya. “Which way to this secret German base?”

“Just along here. Third door on the right. Don't get confused with the door on the left, that's where the Illuminati hang out. Their guardian machines are tricky.”

“Or the second door on the right. That's Aleister Crowley's Order, they're a bit strange,” said another of the children.

“Right!” said Tanya. “Third door on the right.”

The sound of safety catches being removed is unmistakable - even when the guns involved are more closely related to Winchester rifles than AK47s. Mary Tremayne skidded to a halt, a tantalising 100 yards from the temporal manipulator.

“Lieutenant Tremayne, you continue to be so troublesome,” said Herr Walther. “Surely you realise any damage you do with that sword will be easily repairable. At best you could only delay me by an hour or two. But as it stands you are already too late.”

Herr Walther pulled a large red lever. The temporal manipulator flashed and pulsed. Mary gasped as a large anomaly formed in the centre of the lab.

“Alles in die Abweichung!” shouted Herr Walther. The soldiers began to form up.

At that moment the door at the far side of the room opened and Private Lacey stepped through the gap. She was holding an extremely improbable-looking gun. A small child stood next to her and appeared to be winding up several of Connor’s devices.

“That red lever!” Mary shouted, pointing. At the same moment she threw her sabre. It arced through the air cutting the wires that held Taylor to the machine.

The child tossed a small device into the air. It swarmed across the room towards the red lever. Clockwork propellers whirring frantically as it buzzed along.

Walther whirled. “Zerstören Sie diese Vorrichtung!”

Tremayne dropped to the ground as several rifles fired. The small clockwork device buzzed up towards the ceiling, dodging the bullets.

“Automata!” shouted Herr Walther.

The large statues that had decorated the room suddenly lurched into life. Tanya swung her gun. There was a blue flash and one of the automata vanished. As Mary blinked the stars out of her eyes she could see Tanya lying flat on her back.

Taylor had managed to pull free of her wrist restraints and was tearing the strange helmet from her head. “Stop them,” she cried. “Don’t let them go through the anomaly.”

Tanya was going to have to get past the automata first, which now formed a solid wall between her and the soldiers.

“Don’t worry about these automata, miss,” shouted a high-pitched voice. “We knows how tae handle them.”

To Mary’s amazement, hordes of children seemed to be pouring into the room behind Tanya. They all wore dirty leather clothing and were armed with a selec-

tion of wrenches, goggles and screwdrivers. They swarmed over the large machines.

Herr Walther, at the head of a column of men, marched passed her towards the anomaly.

“Oh no you don’t!” muttered Mary. She threw herself at the German, bringing him to the ground with her best rugby tackle.

He struggled in her grasp and she had to duck as fist came out of nowhere. He pulled free, but Tremayne managed to grab him and throw him over her shoulder. Instinctively she knew that rifles were pointed at her back. Praying they wouldn’t shoot at their commander, Mary dragged Herr Walther to his feet and trapped him in a head lock.

There was a whine of power and a bang, followed by some unladylike swearing. It sounded like Tanya’s gun had broken.

Then there was a high pitched whistle and a clang. Mary Tremayne saw that the small flying device had successfully closed the lever. The anomaly winked out of existence.

“A minor inconvenience,” croaked Herr Walther. “Let me go otherwise my men will shoot.”

“Not if I wipe your data banks!” Taylor had snapped the restraints on her ankles and was now climbing out of the chair.

“Schießen Sie Fraulein Crane!” ordered Herr Walther.

Mary watched with horror as the rifles swung to cover Taylor.

“I don’t think so, young man!”

Mary Tremayne looked up to see what looked like half a dozen geriatric old ladies abseiling down from the ceiling, all armed with rifles. Some of them were also carrying knives in their teeth.

“Captain Brown!” shouted Tanya.

“Drop those guns immediately,” shouted Captain Brown.

“I think you’ll find this is a Mexican standoff,” said Herr Walther from where Mary held him. “My men outnumber yours and there are my automata to deal with.”

A ragged cheer went up and there was the sound of metal clattering to the floor. The remaining automata appeared to be piles of so many spare parts.

“This is great,” said a small voice. “These’ll keep us in parts for years!”

“And I have a Dinosaur Gun!” said Tanya. “I can reduce all of your men to ash with one shot!”

“That gun backfired,” sneered Herr Walther.

“And I fixed it!” piped up the small child who had come in with Tanya.

“Oh jolly good show, Miss MacDonald!” said the strange Captain. “Excellent teamwork!”

Tremayne felt Walther sag in her arms, defeated. “Lassen sie Ihre Waffen fallen,” he said.

The soldiers ranged before her dropped their guns to the floor.

Mary gathered Tanya and Taylor next to the temporal manipulator. “Can you tell how it works?” she asked Taylor.

“Oh yes! I can just work out the basic principles of a mad scientist’s machine in five minutes.”

“But you were watching what the Walther did?”

Taylor nodded reluctantly. “Yeah!”

“So you could put the world back. Back to the one we knew?”

“Probably.”

Mary glanced around. “It would have to be quick.”

“But should we?” asked Tanya.

Mary looked at her in surprise. “I thought you didn’t like it here?”

Tanya shrugged. “I dunno. I mean we’re here now. Trying to change it back seems like the sort of thing Walther would do.”

“Yeah!” said Taylor. “My time-line has changed twice now. I don’t think we should meddle more than we have to. McAllister, Wells and I agreed not to try to change things back when we got to your world. It’s not our place to judge. Besides I’m interested in their technology. I bet I could build a better temporal manipulator if we really needed one!”

“And you’ve got the whole British Empire to explore,” pointed out Tanya.

“What about you?” asked Mary. “What are you going to do here?”

She saw Tanya glance over at where Captain Brown was deep in some discussion with Maggie MacDonald.

“Well, for starters, I’ve got an invitation to Christmas dinner I think would be ungentlewomanly to turn down.”