

THE CANONICAL EFFECT

By David Benz

“I say, out with it boy!” thundered Professor Challenger. “Surely a conversation with a mere cabby shouldn’t be the source of this much consternation.”

Despite the authority in his booming voice, I hesitated. How could I tell the Professor and the other renowned adventurers in the room what had just happened to me? Anyone who knows of Challenger’s reputation will find my pause reasonable enough: his brains are matched only by his temper. So I stood there shaking in my boots, wondering if I should continue.

But maybe I ought to start at the beginning. Allow me to introduce myself; Sebastian Lambert, at your service. For the past three years I’ve manned the entrance to the secret hall where each month gather some of the most famous and daring men ever to grace this earth. They come to plot adventures, recognize deeds of daring do and to share each other’s good company over brandy and cigars.

Mind you I’m not often privy to what goes on inside the hall, it being my task to keep the door secure and to tend to any needs that might arise. But now and again I’ve overheard some of the talk which goes on inside and I believe you me, many a strange and exciting adventure has been shared amongst these fine gentlemen. Some of these tales are so bizarre, so outlandish as to stretch credibility in the mind of an average working lad such as myself. But no tale is more strange, more mind-boggling than the one the members of the Wanderer’s Club now refer to as *The Canonical Effect*.

Ordinarily I wouldn’t divulge anything which took place inside the club, but due to my rather ill-fated involvement in the events that took place, I feel it necessary to defend my good name in the hope that anyone who has heard the facts will agree that it was more a matter of bad luck than bad judgment.

I was catching a quick smoke outside the door, listening to the droning voice of the pompous Prussian Colonel Reinsch as he launched into another load of his usual malarkey:

“Mr. Fry, thank you for sharing that thrilling tale of your adventure in [Northern Africa](#). Perhaps you’d like to sit down and rest a bit – you seem to be still suffering some, er...ill-effects from your journey. That’s it, have a seat there next to the fire and catch your breath. Excellent idea, light yourself a cigarette, but perhaps you’ve had enough brandy for one afternoon. Now, I too have been to North African and I too found adventure there. If the group will indulge me, I’d like to share it, hopefully in a more linear and straightforward manner than did poor Mr. Fry. Now then it was some years back when I discovered the lost temple of Khepri. The journey set out in the most humble of fashions and with an agenda of simple commerce; I’d signed on with a Prussian mining firm to unearth, quite literally, natural resources on the eastern-most ridges of the Jebel Uweinat Mountains. We set out from Siwah in early August with an expedition of 20 men and twice as many mules seeking a rich copper vein rumored to be nestled in the rugged steppes near the western border. Sadly a mere fortnight later the only survivors were myself, my trusted guide Fadil and a solitary mule. How could anyone have foretold the perils and

carnage that awaited our party? Had I known I assure all of you that I would never have accepted the assignment!”

God but I was bored already. Just between you and me, Reinsch is a bit of a windbag. I started humming a little tune to myself in the hopes of drowning out his Germanic accent. It was then that I saw some vagabond just walking right up to the front door like he owned the place. I shouted out a “Hey there!” causing him to jump. I tossed my fag on the ground and approached him, preparing myself to send yet another beggar on his way. But to my surprise he leapt for the double doors and started to open them. I dived and caught him about the legs as the doors swung open, sending us sprawling into the room. The members of the club looked on in various states of bemusement and surprise, and in the case of Herr Reinsch, obvious annoyance.

Professor Challenger, never one to hesitate, drew a long pistol from under his jacket and leveled it at the intruder – and at yours truly. “Decease this instant or I will send you back to whatever hole you crawled out of.” My opponent ceased struggling and I stood up, panting and rather embarrassed and more than a trifle concerned that Challenger might choose to use the pistol on the both of us. The intruder remained sprawled on the floor at my feet, staring wild-eyed at the members of the club, particularly at the tall and daunting figure of Challenger. I got a good look at the bum for the first time: his clothes were torn, his face and hands dirty, his skin jaundiced. His foul odor filled the large room. Slowly, he reached out for his battered bowler and set it on his matted hair.

“If your lordship would give me a---“

“Silence, dog!” Professor Challenger kept the pistol trained on the trespasser (and thankfully not me) choosing instead to give me the evil eye. “Sebastian, what is the meaning of this intrusion?”

“Forgive me, my lord, he caught me by surprise.” I kicked the intruder sharply in the ribs. “He’s ragged as an orphan and smells like a stableman but I assure you his strength and determination belie his bedraggled appearance. I’ll have him removed at once.” I bent down and started to drag the vagrant from the room but again the miscreant pled to the group:

“My lords, I beseech you, a moment of your time.” To my utter horror the slippery miscreant twisted out of my arms and rushed toward the gathered adventurers. Fortunately the quick thinking Chancellor Simmons unceremoniously struck him down with a silver-tipped cane. The interloper sat down hard on the floor, his nose and mouth bloodied by the blow; he wiped the blood onto his sleeve and snorted loudly. Otherwise, he seemed unfazed by his injury, although it was certainly a blow that could’ve rendered anyone unconscious. “Hear me out, my lords, hear me out! I beg you to forgive my uncouth entrance and my disheveled appearance, but I have a tale for you so fantastic it can only be told to the esteemed gentlemen here gathered.”

He was then interrupted by several shouts of protest from the group and I readied myself yet again to toss him onto the street. He spoke over the din with a surprisingly strong and stern voice. “Don’t look long upon my unkempt visage or dally your eyes upon these soiled rags. For it was not so long ago that I sat among men of similar stature as yourselves, though admittedly of more humble origin.”

A roar of disapproval came from a majority of my employers. The trespasser cowered unthreateningly but when he spoke again his voice was somehow commanding.

“A group of likeminded and noble gentlemen known as the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee.” Though I had no idea what the loon was spouting on about, the group was silenced by his statement. I suspect he sensed an opening as he kept speaking, standing up and making eye contact directly with each member in turn (save me), as a man addressing his peers. Or perhaps a lawyer pleading his case to a skeptical jury.

“Lend me your ears, if only for a few minutes – I assure each and every one of you that the tale I tell will be worth this smallest of indulgences. It is my understanding that you meet here monthly to share tales so fantastic as to be dismissed save for the learned nature and august reputations of those seated in this hallowed chamber. Is one more such tale too much to be heard?”

Dr. Hyde interrupted, nodding at me and gesturing lavishly with his arm. “I say there Sebastian, earn your keep! Mr. Fry’s wavering lucidity has already tested our patience enough for one day. After his tale about a [Short Flight From a Tall Tree](#), I don’t think the club could endure another tale from a less than stable mind. Throw this ragamuffin out on his ear so we might get back to Colonel Reinsch’s anecdote about Egypt, a tale no doubt grounded in fact and worthy of our attentions.” The suggestion was met with grumbles of approval and an exaggerated nod from the Colonel.

But before I could move, Professor Challenger waved them all silent and spoke through his full beard. “Let the knave have his say for there can be no harm in it. And Sebastian, when he’s concluded, call upon the local constabulary so that his reeking corpus can be placed among his true peers: in the stockade.” He turned to the intruder. “You sir, tell us your name forthwith, and then get on with this yarn of yours. Are you expecting this assembly to believe that you sat at a table in East London with the purpose of finding and stopping the killer now known as Jack the Ripper?”

“Aye my lord, it’s true. Though I must confess that my motive for seeking a seat at the table was not in the interest of keeping the peace or enabling the continued flow of commerce in the area. No, I was there for a far more nefarious purpose, one I dared not divulge until now. For as I sat there among the traders and businessmen of Whitechapel, I carried in my heart a horrible secret: *the identity of the killer himself.*”

“Must we listen to this drivel, Challenger? You know full well that in 1889 I traveled to London on behalf of this group to consult with Commissioner Warren on this very subject, whereupon it was determined that despite numerous suspects, there was insufficient evidence to indicate any particular individual as the killer bearing the moniker of Jack the Ripper.” Duke Williamsburg paused for dramatic effect; typical, he’s all flourish except when it comes to tipping a humble doorman. “And again, in the year 1894, I returned to offer my services to Sir Melville Macnaghten, newly placed in charge of the investigation, only to determine once again that no one suspect met the needed criteria and after studying the killer’s modus operandi and taking into account the abrupt truncation to the murders, the only logical conclusion was that the killer was either dead or otherwise imprisoned on an unrelated charge. For this...this filthy beggar to come here and expect us to believe that he has divined the long

sought identity of the most notorious unsolved crime in English history is an insult to the London Metropolitan Police, Scotland Yard and most certainly to me and *my* reputation.”

“There is truth in your words, Duke Williamsburg; we have no reason to believe this man.” Challenger nodded his giant head in the Duke’s direction. “And our sterling reputation as skeptics is well known throughout the continent and the Americas. But I say that this rogue offers us a diversion from our stuffy routine, as the works of Carroll and Poe entertain us though we know them to be nothing more than imaginative fiction. And don’t we owe it to ourselves and our reputations to debunk any unfounded claims such as this? I admit his appearance gives me pause but as Milton once famously said, ‘Truth never comes into the world but like a bastard, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth.’ Let this man speak, I say; he has obviously suffered much and risked more. Surely he must have a steadfast belief in the legitimacy of his words to have endured what by his appearance he must have suffered.”

I had no idea what Challenger was going on about, but that part about the bastard, well that sure enough made sense to me. And apparently to our unwanted guest as well. Because he then bowed graciously before the group despite their groans and mumbles of disapproval. He removed his ragged cap and swept it dramatically before him and in a clear, steady voice, he began his tale, which I will try to recite as best I can:

“My story is fantastical beyond the wildest dreams of even this noble group. If it all be determined false, so be it, and upon such verdict I will resign myself to whatever fate you shall impose upon me. And if they all be lies then let me tell the largest lie first. My name is Joseph Lawende and I was born in the year of our Lord, 1985.”

Shouts and groans of disbelief again filled the room but Professor Challenger waved them silent with one huge hairy paw. After an encouraging nod from Challenger, the man who called himself Lawende continued:

“T’is true I came here from the future. I know, I know, it’s an incredible claim and most impossible to believe even considering that assembled here are some of the most open-minded and educated thinkers of the world today. But before I’m finished I warrant that each of you will have incontrovertible proof that my words are true.

“I am but a humble man, lacking the education and opportunities afforded to you gentlemen, even though the time from which I hail is in many ways enlightened and even the most common laborer is afforded educational opportunities. True, wars and famine still plague the world of my time, but also in my era there are many fantastic inventions such as you would call flying machines, electronic calculating apparatuses, long range communication devices and, sadly, weapons of a devastating nature. Advances in the realm of science that would amaze even you, good sirs.”

“You speak of fantastic inventions, sir. Perhaps you could share some details with us,” said the Colonel his voice ringing with the kind of scorn only a good Hessian can muster. “Would you like a few moments to concoct them?”

“Your sarcasm injures me not, good sir. I came here knowing full well the skepticism I was certain to encounter. But I appeal to your imaginations as well as your intellects. For if this be pure fiction, it be fiction beyond your wildest dreams. And if it be true, well I assure you that none of you will ever look upon this world the same.”

“It’s best not to test the patience of my colleagues, Mr. Lawende,” chided Challenger with a sigh. “Carry on good sir, and kindly give us some details.”

“Of course. As previously noted, I am a layman, not a scientist. But I will endeavor to describe to you a device beyond the scope of your imaginations. Early in the 21st Century the greatest minds of Europe collaborated on an experiment aimed at divining the mysteries of the very universe itself. Just a few miles from Geneva a device has been, or excuse me, sirs, *will be* built the like of which the world has never seen. Stretching underneath the ground for over 16 miles, this gigantic device is called a supercollider. Its purpose, in the most laymen of terms, is to accelerate particles to enormous speeds in the hopes of studying the effects of their collision and thereupon drawing conclusions about the very origins of the universe itself.”

“Interesting,” said Challenger thoughtfully, as if he’d encountered some such device before. “A disintegration machine, so to speak.”

“Not exactly, sir. Though I must confess that during the construction of the device there was much speculation and consternation as to what would finally happen when it was activated. But the fears ebbed when it was engaged with no ill effects. At least at first.

“In the year 2015, I was working as a simple guard maintaining security at the site when a horrific explosion rent the structure. For a moment all around me the air crackled, and then I felt myself being pulled into a void. I sensed darkness rushing around me though I could see or feel nothing. Then the darkness enveloped me and I succumbed to unconsciousness. When I awoke, I found myself still on the outskirts of Geneva *but in the year 1885*.

“Good sirs, imagine my confusion and horror, my utter discombobulation! Stranded in a time that wasn’t my own, penniless and frightened, possessing only the few meager items I happened to have in my pockets at the time of the explosion. For weeks I stumbled around the fields and farms outside of Geneva, unable to communicate, eating what I could scavenge.

“Eventually a Swiss family took me in and thanks to a daughter who was studying English at school I was able to piece together that I was no longer in my own time though I of course continued to be completely befuddled as to how or why. I stayed there working in the stables long enough to save up a few coins and to learn some rudimentary phrases in French, then I set out on foot. It took me two long years to make my way out of Switzerland and through France.

“In Marseilles I stowed away on a fishing vessel bound for Dover. Once ashore and at last able to fully converse with the locals, I made my way to London in hopes of finding men educated and enlightened

enough to be trusted with my story. But my tale fell upon deaf ears. I was mocked, beaten, even locked up in a mental institution where I suffered unspeakable horrors.”

I hate to admit it, but the vagabond’s story was starting to interest me. I’d almost forgotten the shame of my poor guarding of the door, so entranced was I. Right then William of Derby interrupted by loudly clearing his throat. “If nothing else, sir, you have an amazing imagination on par with the likes of Wells and Verne. Not to belittle your plight or to make light of your suffering, but do I not recall that you mentioned the Whitechapel murders?”

“Ah, true, that I did. I won’t bore you fine gentlemen with any further disclosures of my suffering and misery. Suffice to say that despite the ignorance and malevolence I encountered, I managed to survive the horrors of London Town, though I cannot say unscathed.” He coughed, a shudder passing through his thin frame. “And like so many lacking means, I ended up in a part of London that no respected gentleman should ever wander to: Whitechapel.

“But before I continue I implore you to ponder this question, one that has plagued me for many years: Does time run like a steady river, moving inexorably in one direction? Or does it grow like a plant, with vines, twisting together, interwoven but growing separately? Is there only one path which time can tread or are there infinite possibilities, and with that an infinite number of possible universes? Contemplate though we might, we cannot know. Many great minds have speculated about the nature of time, including a young man not yet famous born here in your time by the name of Einstein. Oh that I could cross paths with this great man, but this was not to be my fate. Instead I’ve had the gross misfortune of brushing against an infamous evil that causes men to shudder even in my time: a dread killer known as Jack the Ripper.” Lawende coughed, wiped some more spittle on his sleeve and gave us all a crazy look.

Colonel Reinsch rose from his chair with a huff, his belly protruding over his belt even more than usual. “Professor Challenger, I believe this vagabond has wasted enough of our time. With each word he utters his tale become more incomprehensible. I fear if he speaks even another five minutes he will be telling us that he saw Cain slay Able.”

Reinsch can be an imposing figure, what with his medals and sword and such. But this Lawende fellow ignored him and talked over the chuckles and chortles of the group. “Please kind sirs, another five minutes of your time. I assure you that you will all find merit to my words.”

Most of the others loudly began to echo the Colonel’s disapproval. I myself thought the story a load of codswallup, but at least for now no one was talking about me and my failure at securing the door. But before the group completely drowned the fool out with their objections, Challenger’s imposing presence and booming voice kept them in their seats. “Let him finish. If nothing else, I find this flight of fancy a welcome diversion.”

Lawende nodded and surveyed his reluctant audience with yellowy eyes. “I made my way to the den of inequity known as Whitechapel. Lacking money and of failing health I was forced to travel to the dreaded East End where others of my destitute nature gathered in search of food, shelter and the baser needs that are so often coveted by the less fortunate. And believe me good sirs no amount of study

could have prepared me for what I found in Whitechapel, a place where the fabled Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse would find no further need to wreak their collective havoc. Conditions so deplorable as to be unfit for cattle. Brothels three to a block. No sanitation to speak of. Horse droppings, sewer and garbage covering the streets and gutters. Rats the size of my head. And fog the likes of which I'd never imagined. A thick, oily miasma layering the city in an impenetrable shroud, turning the labyrinthine streets and alleyways into an indecipherable maze. Squalor, poverty, disease, destitution. The place practically seethed with violence and hate.

"But let me accelerate my tale and take you to that infamous day, 31 August, 1888. For it was on that very day the killer struck for the first time. As you all no doubt know, the victim was a prostitute named Mary Ann Nichols, a down and out whore with a penchant for drink. And I was there on Bucks Row when she met her most grisly demise." Lawende paused, I suspect for a dramatic effect. "With little more than a farthing to my name, I was in need of shelter and hoped to flop at one of the many workhouses crammed into Whitechapel. I paused to rest my weary feet in one of the long shadows, shivering in the darkness despite the warmth of the night. Little did I know that evil lurked about in those same thickening shadows. Then quite suddenly did a commotion wrest me from my uneasy repose. I heard a muffled shout, then around the corner came a man dragging a young woman. He wore a long cloak and top hat. Even in that pervasive dark I could see the cruel gleam of his long razor and no stretch of the imagination was needed to discern his evil purposes. He pushed the woman against the blackened brick of the alleyway and slashed down with such strength and vigor that her scream died in her throat and blood spilled out in its stead.

"I watched in utter revulsion, gagging at the sight of his maniacal handiwork. But to my horror the fiend wasn't done! Even though the young harlot was already quite dead, he bent over her still quivering frame and began to slash away at her abdomen in a manner both concise and frenzied. It was too much for me to witness, more than my soul could bear. Despite my fear (and the obvious futility of my ill-advised chivalry) I leapt out of the shadows and fell upon him with the only weapon I could readily find, a loose brick of considerable heft. I caught the demon completely off guard and struck him heavily upon the crown whilst he was busy eviscerating the corpse.

"He collapsed soundlessly upon the grisly remains of his victim, quite as dead as she. I watched in bewilderment as a vapor emitted from his crushed skull and for a brief moment I stood thusly enveloped in a fine mist. Was it moisture escaping from his pulverized cranial cavity? Or perhaps it was a residual mist of the night's tepid fog? Or something otherworldly, perchance his evil life force leaving his mortal coil once and for all, thus exposing me to its malevolence? Gentlemen, I cannot say. But hear me now as I tell you that upon breathing that mist I became a changed man. A man living in a dream, stumbling through a phantasmal nightmare, a reluctant participant in what had already transpired – and in what was to come.

For the identity of the poor woman at my feet was yet unknown to me. But upon rifling through what remained of her bodice I fell upon a terrible truth. Tucked into a locket near her mutilated breast I discovered papers identifying the recently deceased as one Mary Ann Nichols. This name struck terror into my heart for even in the future the horrible misdeeds of Jack the Ripper are well known – the

names of his victims are bandied about still. I had been studying to become a law enforcement officer, my detail as a security guard being merely at temporary situation. In the course of my studies, the infamous case of the Ripper was examined in some detail for as one of the most notorious unsolved crimes in history, studying it can lend an appreciation for the foils the can befall a police investigation. Thus was the name well known to me.

“And it was then that I realized what I’d done. There at my feet lay the infamous killer’s first victim. And next to her mutilated corpse lay *Jack the Ripper himself!* Ah, my good lords I know what each and every one of you is wondering. Did I pause to gaze upon his evil visage? Did I plunder through his clothes in hopes of determining his identity? Did I at last discern the truth behind the infamous Whitechapel murders? It is with considerable shame that I answer in the negative. For I was gripped by a fear so stark and dreadful that all curiosity about the killer’s identity vanished and my befuddled brain could only grapple with a single, terrible thought: with one heft of a brickbat I very well may have upset the precarious balance of time itself. If one believes that time is malleable and can thus be changed, then consider the gravity of what I’d done. Could I have even altered the past enough to obliterate my future existence? So altered the course of history as to cause entire generations to never be born? A grandiose conundrum to be sure, but what struck me at the moment was a much more immediate and decidedly more grisly concern: I had to dispose of the killer’s corpse before his victim was discovered.

“I accomplished this by dragging the carcass some three blocks to a heaping pile of stinking trash. Of course it would be unearthed at some point but I could only hope that no one would connect this body to that of poor Ms Nichols. After I disposed of the corpse I became violently ill, emptying the meager contents of my stomach onto the curb alongside other equally foul and odorous wastes. Then I wrapped my cloak about my shoulders like a shroud and slunk off to an alley to await the dawn.

“I’d hoped that with the dissipation of the night the entire episode would fade and be forgotten but the cold light of the morning brought me no relief. By then of course the body had been discovered and I steered clear of the commotion on Bucks Row and walked in the opposite direction with my head down and my cape pulled up high on my shoulders. I used my last two pence for a taste of coffee at a Jewish bakery stand and then sat down on a street-side bench to attempt to put the previous night’s events in some perspective.

“Imagine if you will, gentlemen, sitting on a bare bench and mulling such weighty matters! My thoughts wallowed in my brain like recalcitrant leviathans whose destinations were beyond my control. Eventually I was able to focus and it was then that I realized my tribulations had only just begun. Four more women were walking the streets of Whitechapel right at that moment, four women who were, one by one, supposed to become the killer’s victims. And because of my misguided chivalry they would live out their natural lives. There would be no Jack the Ripper and Mary Ann Nichols would become a forgotten murder in a town that suffered dozens each year. A grim reality struck me with the same abrupt ferocity as a fist in the face: there was only one way I could mitigate the damages of my illicit intervention: *I had to complete the Ripper’s grim undertaking.*

"I was dumbstruck by the magnitude of this dour epiphany. My senses were numbed, my nerves frayed. How could I, a most genteel and civilized man slay and butcher four young women? But there was no turning back, no backing out. For my purpose was far greater than my own misgivings, the consequences far outweighed my wavering spirit. The very history of the world depended upon me, I was obligated, gentleman, *obligated* to take up the Ripper's vile blade and odious mission in order to ensure that his name would be etched in the minds of men for decades to come. At that moment, good sirs, *I became Jack the Ripper.*

"And thus it was in a state of mind bordering on somnambulistic that I wandered throughout the darkest alleyways of Whitechapel for the next six weeks, finding, stalking and brutally murdering, in turn Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly. And oh, the first one, the first was the most terrible of all. Not that repetition lends itself an air of ease whence comes to murder, but how that first one has tarnished my very soul.

"It was in the grimmest predawn hours of 8 September, 1888, scarcely more than a week since the ill-fated intervention that began my descent into hell. I came upon her on Hanbury Street and engaged her to employ her services of ill-repute. She willingly entered a nearby alley with me, stinking of booze and possessing a pragmatic enough disposition to propose an isolated spot consisting of several bags of rubbish for which to service me in some comfort and seclusion. But when she began to arrange her bodice in such a manner as to grant me access to her wares I fell upon her with a fury that was not my own, as if some dread force had been conjured up from the depths of hell, overcoming me with its malice. As I slashed at the poor woman, I remembered the evil mist that enveloped me those few days before and in some disassociated sense I wondered if evil could manifest itself outside of a man, becoming a wandering spirit seeking an able vessel in which to infect. But alas my mental musings could not block out the corporeal acts I was bent upon. I pierced her throat with two deep gashes then bared the skin from her abdomen and slashed it open. In the papers some weeks hence I read in horror that the woman's uterus was removed and whilst I cannot with any certainty deny it was of my doing, I swear upon all that is holy I have no memory of its removal.

"By the next morning the local papers had seized upon the story and sensational accounts of the murder were splashed across every front page. These vile publications would stop at nothing to prop up their flagging sales and two vicious murders of a similar nature fit the bill quite nicely. Reading their scandalous speculations somewhat set me at ease, for in these seedy stories lay the beginnings of the Ripper's legacy, a legacy that but for my fortitude would never have been birthed.

"Finding and tracking my victims became considerably more difficult henceforth. The newspapers ran daily stories, mostly speculation and slander but it was enough to excite and terrorize the populace into a heightened vigilance. But because I was acutely aware of the magnitude of my grisly quest, I became more determined to complete the Herculean task at hand. And so I cleaned up my appearance as best was possible and endeared myself to a group of local businessmen who sought an end to the killings as murder is most certainly bad for business. This fine group of merchants met weekly under the name of the Whitechapel Vigilance Society. They divided the area into sections and assigned stout men to patrol them, armed with torches, keen eyes and whatever weaponry each might have chosen of their own

accord. It was not difficult to volunteer for such duties and not much persuading was needed to adequately procure an area known by me to be in the vicinity of the next killing. And thus it was I struck again.

“Her name was Elizabeth Stride, a name that has since been etched into the history books in blood. But on the night of September 30 of that infamous year she was but another drunken woman staggering out of a shabby bar on Berner Street. Moments later she lay dead from my blade, the artery in her neck severed, her blood splayed across the cobblestones of Dutfield’s Yard. But before I could set upon her again with the blade to render her corpse in the Ripper’s grisly trademark style, the sounds of drunken revelry fell upon my ear. A group of imbibers drew near, their voices raised, slurring their way through some ribald Scottish ditty. I stood quickly and made my escape, leaving the corpse marred by nothing more than the previously described death blow.

“I made good time from Dutfield’s Yard to Mitre Square which is, of course, in London proper. There I fell upon one Catherine Eddows moments after she was released from a nearby police station. I followed her through the shadows for ten minutes, finding myself intoxicated by the drunken weave of her steps, simultaneously exhilarated and sickened by the act of stalking her. She fell quickly when I slashed her throat from behind. I turned her over there on the fog obscured streets and exposed her innards with a deep slash across her abdomen, letting my keen blade plunge deep into the large organs nestled therein. And thus in one grim night did I end two young lives.

“Five my lords, as you know there were five murders attributed to the Ripper. Somewhat bombastically known down through the ages as the Canonical Five. And so my work, my destiny, was not yet complete. And for that last victim awaited the most heinous of fates.

“I murdered Mary Jane Kelly in her shabby flat on 9 November of the same year. A bottle of cheap whisky was all that was required for me to gain entrance to her dilapidated domicile. So grateful was she for that bottle she wasted little time inviting me to her bed. I accepted the invite by plunging my blade so savagely into her throat that only the spine stopped the wicked instrument from severing her neck in twain. Moments later her abdomen had been exposed in the Ripper’s customary manner, allowing me to remove the stomach, thus satisfying the legendary *modus operandi* in sufficient enough detail.

“And thus my role in the Whitechapel murders came to an end. But what’s this, you all ask? There is so much more to the story than just murder. Well that may be true, and if I can take you back to the morning after I had finished my unholy tasks I think I can assuage your collective curiosity. I awoke that morning in the small room I had rented feeling as I did after every murder: nauseated and weakened. Yet I cannot deny that a small sense of satisfaction also settled upon me, like a common day laborer gazing in contentment at the ditch he has just finished digging. For I had risen to the task at hand, set aside my civilized leanings, and acted in a manner truly befitting of a murderous madman. And all of London, yea all the world, was none the wiser.

“My temporary ease of mind was jarred by the reality of what still lay at hand. For murder is only part of the Ripper’s legacy. As you are all well aware in the following weeks and months there were letters,

cryptic graffiti messages, numerous other suspected victims – even a kidney sent through the mail! But I found I no longer had the energy to keep the ruse afoot. After all, I am but single man, a man in an alien time and even then I could feel my health failing. But in the coming weeks I was shocked to find that no other action was required of me. The letters were written, the graffiti was painted and lo and behold a partial human kidney delivered in the post! It was then that I realized the pervasive reach of the evil I'd interrupted and then, at great personal sacrifice, perpetuated. Good sirs, it's larger than the sum of its parts, a blind behemoth that knows not what it does but lumbers on inexorably seeking what it will never find. And so it has ever since, sweeping along England and the world beyond in its cumbersome wake. And all the speculation and fear, all the rumors and theories, every word written or spoken about Jack the Ripper, every last bit of it is due to my bold actions.

"And that is my story. I do not know if I have preserved the precious future from whence I sprang or if all of humankind's history has been forever altered due to my one great rash act. But I do know one thing: I am not well and my days are numbered. My time spent among the filth and rodentia of 18th Century London has not been kind of my 21st Century constitution. I am dying lords, as surely as I stand before you, so please understand my petulant persistence in coming here. Who else could I bring such a tale to?

"Oh, but this pains me. As I look around this grand room at each of your faces I see some brows arched in disbelief and others furrowed with the passing of judgment. To you of the former mindset, I can only say that no man here more keenly wishes that my story were false than I, for it is its veracity that so weighs upon my soul. Many a time I have awoken from fitful slumber hoping that it was all some terrible nightmare dreamt so vividly as to deceive the dreamer into thinking it all true. But alas, no night's sleep no matter how uneasy could ever provide the subconscious such fertile ground as to birth such horrors. I fear my lords that I will never wake from this nightmare.

"And to you who sit there with your fine cigars and aged brandy and call me not a liar but a murderer I ask not for your forgiveness. It's evident that you do not comprehend the magnitude of my conundrum; the almighty need not pass judgment upon my poor soul as I am already condemned as surely as if Beelzebub himself had wrapped his cloak around my shoulders and cast me into a pit of fire. For if it has not been a nightmare I've been living these past years than it's my own personal hell. And trust me good lords Dante could not have conceived of an underworld so horrible as mine.

"When I took up the Ripper's blade I did so in good faith; I hope I have described for you in sufficient detail the manner in which I agonized over the implications of my grim deeds. How could I have ever predicted the layers of complexity that my actions would birth? For in completing the Ripper's murders I in essence repaired the fracture in time I unknowingly created when I killed him, thus guarantying that I will forever be trapped in the past with five murders on my conscience. For you see, I am still here, still moving about, still creating ripples in time. Am I doomed to spend the rest of my days in a constant state of agitation, wondering if any interaction I partake in will change enough in the present to obliterate the future as I know it? A fate that even Prometheus wouldn't dare trade for. At least each day when his flesh is gorged upon by that insatiable bird, he feels the pierce of that razor sharp beak and knows that he is indeed a living being. Whereas I am more dead than alive, a ghost that dares not live, a

spirit wandering forlorn through a world he dare not touch, taste or feel. A victim of happenstance and my own bold choices.

“And this is why I have come to you my lords, as you are surely the most esteemed and educated gentlemen of this generation, and I know full well that only this group possesses the progressive thinking and enlightened imaginations to grasp the implications of what I’ve told you.”

“Was für ein Stuss!” scoffed Colonel Reinsch, so outraged that he reverted to his natural tongue. “You sir are a liar! Such an outlandish and self-serving tale can only be considered absolute nonsense. Look upon him, good colleagues. There is no indication on his person of futuristic inclinations. His clothes are common rags, his sickly body normal enough. He claims he was working in Geneva at the time of the accident and then later in his rambling account he claims not to speak any French whatsoever. In fact his vernacular is that of a common Londoner of this era – admittedly well-educated but a commoner just the same. Any visitor from the future would betray that fact in his clothing and his speech patterns and in other manners we cannot imagine but would surely recognize if they were displayed before us. It’s clear that what we just heard was a concocted tale of pure and utter fiction.”

Challenger frowned. “What the colonel says is true – your story while certainly fantastic is so bizarre, so outlandish that it roils the imagination. Even if we believe you – and I’m not certain any of us do – what would you ask us to do for you? We are not a court of law and cannot absolve you of the murders, nor are any of us clergy, able to forgive your confessed sins. And we certainly don’t possess the machinery required to send you back to your own time.”

Lawende cautiously approached the group, as a prisoner granted one last request. “I’ve pondered this for long nights and I believe that the only solution is for me to be banished to some remote isle where I can live out my days in isolation, accompanied solely by the whispering spirits of the women I’ve killed.”

Colonel Reinsch shook his oversized head. “Challenger, I must insist that this gibberish stop here and now! I do not think it’s appropriate for this body to even consid—”

We all looked as one toward the front doors, which I’d once again left unguarded, so caught up was I in the tale Lawende had told. They burst open so violently that one of them was left hanging on its hinges. Four large men dressed in all white entered the room, moving with a military-like efficiency. One of them wielded a long rod and two of the others carried long white sacks. We were all too shocked to move; even Challenger stood and stared, frozen still by the suddenness of the breach. But Lawende, oh he reacted all right – the little bugger was absolutely terrified. He shrieked like a child and scuttled back on his haunches.

Challenger regained his composure and usual bearing and angrily surveyed the intruders with his menacing eyes. “What is the meaning of this? Disperse from our doorway before I call the authorities.” The authorities, that’d be a good idea, I thought. Just so long as he didn’t ask me to deal with the oversized foursome.

“That will not be necessary, Professor.” A bespectacled older gentleman spoke from behind the white-clad quartet. “We mean no harm to you or your group.” He was almost as tall as Challenger but gaunt and wearing a suit of a material I didn’t recognize. “Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Dr. Nusquam of the Mercy Care Home for the Insane and these are my orderlies. We’ve merely come to collect *Mr. Smith* here and take him back to the hospital where he belongs.”

“He lies! He lies!” screamed Lawende casting a baleful look at Professor Challenger. “In the name of all that is good and holy I beseech you to grant me sanctuary here.”

Before anyone could object, the doctor nodded at the nearest orderly who then approached Lawende with the rod. Lawende screamed and tried to duck under the polished wooden table in the middle of the room but the approaching orderly, well he moved as like a cat pouncing on a mouse. He jabbed out with the rod and caught pitiful Lawende in the shoulder, causing him to crumple silently to the floor. I’d never seen the like of it; the poor fellow was sprawled on the floor, his legs quivering, his arms twitching.

“Hey there,” said Challenger. “Are such drastic measures really necessary to secure such a pathetic creature?”

“Do not be deceived by *Mr. Smith’s* appearance, Professor,” said the doctor gravely. “This man is utterly insane and poses a danger to himself and others. Trust me, he’s been in my care since 1888.” And with that this doctor gent nodded to the orderlies and they quickly put a large cloth sack over Lawende’s head and another one over his legs and the largest of the four lifted the alleged madman over his shoulder and awaited further instructions.

“A thousand pardons for the intrusion, gentlemen.” The doctor bowed stiffly. “Now that the patient has been secured we will leave you to your scholarly ruminations.” He nodded again and the four orderlies moved in near lockstep unison toward the exit. At the door the doctor paused and held Challenger’s stern, hooded eyes. “I assure you, Professor, this young man will be best served at the mental institution. Any tales he might have told you were nothing but the paranoid delusions of a madman and should be dismissed as such. Good day.” And with that he followed the orderlies out the door.

For a moment we all sat there; even though in that room sat the finest men of sword and pen in the entire continent, none could muster a single word. Finally Chancellor Simmons broke the silence with a statement I completely agreed with:

“So that decides it – he was a loon after all.”

“It would appear that you are correct,” said Challenger. “Though something about our recent visitors seemed a bit off. Those orderlies appeared more similar than different. Furthermore, that self-proclaimed doctor had a most dipped and stern accent which I am unable to place.” He paused to rub his unruly beard. “And how strange to see such an educated fellow so unfashionably hatless in weather such as this.”

"I disagree," said Dr. Hyde gravely. "What I believe we have here is a misdiagnosed medical situation. I'm afraid it's an all too common occurrence – unfortunately our mental institutions house more than just the insane. Think back upon that poor man's appearance. Did you notice his wide gait? His trembling fingers and lips? His jaundiced skin? The urine stains upon his unkempt clothes? The man had all the symptoms of advanced neurosyphilis, a disease all too common amongst those who frequent Whitechapel. If his disease was in an advanced enough stage – and I most certainly believe it was – then it could certainly cause auditory and visual hallucinations. In short, the poor fellow had no idea what he was saying and wouldn't be able to recall what happened to him ten days ago much less ten years ago."

That old windbag Colonel Reinsch glanced at the still agape doorway and snorted in satisfaction. "As I proclaimed prior, the man was nothing but a charlatan!"

"These matters are not for us to decide, gentle colleagues. I fear there is only one way we will ever know if this sad soul's confession was well-wrought chicanery or the babblings of a madman." Professor Challenger gestured to me. "Sebastian, catch a hansom and proceed directly to the mental hospital and inquire about the condition of our recent guest. And make arrangements with Dr. Nusquam for me to visit his patient at the first opportunity."

"You're not seriously entertaining the notion of entering the asylum?" asked Dr. Hyde. "T'is no place for the meek."

"Aye, I am. Something tells me there's much more going on here than any of us can fathom. Sebastian, post-haste!"

"Yes, Professor." I grabbed my coat and hat and slipped out through the damaged front doors, Dr. Hyde's warning ringing in my head.

I returned an hour later – Challenger was brooding over by the fireplace, poking at a burning log with the toe of his boot. His head whipped around when he saw me enter. "Have you been to the hospital?"

"Aye m' lord, I have," said I.

"And what of our young visitor?"

Right about then I'd have rather been anywhere but there, even back at the orphanage in Middlesborough facing down the nuns or bullies. "I don't know, m' lord."

He took three giant steps toward me. "What do you mean you don't know? Don't speak in riddles, man out with it!"

"Easy Challenger, you're upsetting the lad." Duke Williamsburg gently put a hand on my shoulder. "Maybe you should start at the beginning, son."

I tried to gulp but my mouth was too dry. If my earlier lack of vigilance was likely to get me fired, I thought that surely what I was about to say would lead to me being tarred and feathered. "It was my

good fortune to find a hansom cab waiting right outside the steps, as I believe our Prince Nabukubu prefers to retain one for the day to avoid lengthy waits.”

The Prince was gracious enough to bow, confirming my statement and causing his elaborate headdress to bob with the gesture. “This English weather is too sodden for me. I am accustomed to a more temperate climate and prefer to leave as early as possible.”

Before anyone else could interrupt, I quickly continued. “I was able to press upon the cabby the urgency of the situation and after assuring him that he’d not receive admonishment from the prince, I urged him to leave in the same direction as the previous cab. To which he said that he’d seen no such cab. So I then told him to follow whatever coach the six men who’d just left the building departed in.” At which point I nervously fingered my hatband and wished again I was somewhere else.

And that was when Challenger said: “I say, out with it boy! Surely a conversation with a mere cabby shouldn’t be the source of this much consternation.”

“My apologies, m’ lord.” I bowed, a ploy to buy time. I rubbed my temple and then reluctantly continued. “I told him to follow whatever coach that the six men had taken, and I described to him in sufficient detail the doctor, his white-dad lackeys and the unconscious Mr. Lawende. To which the cabby said, ‘Sorry sir, I’ve not seen anyone come or go this last hour.’ To which I said, ‘Surely you saw them not five minutes past come out that very door there.’ To which he said--“

“Sebastian, it’s not necessary to recite this conversation verbatim. I gather that he never saw anyone leave this building. Obviously he’d been napping or taking a nip now and then to stay warm.”

“I think not, Chancellor, sir. I reckon he was sober as a Lutheran minister and bright-eyed as a school marm.”

Prince Nabukubu nodded vigorously, again supporting my statements. “I have commissioned this very same cabby for all my previous visits and I will vouch for his sobriety – as you all know, consuming alcoholic libations is forbidden by my religion and I won’t hire any driver who’d succumb to such temptations.”

“Regardless this cabbie was not being paid to keep watch upon our building. As improbable as it might seem, he did not observe their departure. His mind or eye wandered, or perhaps he did indeed doze off, it matters not. For it is clear that they did indeed leave the premises and presumably went somewhere.” Challenger nodded sternly at me. “Continue.”

“After I’d questioned him yet again about what he’d seen – or rather what he’d not seen – I hired him to take me to the asylum as directly as possible. As each of you know, it’s not a long trip as this is not a large peninsula. I promised to double his pay for making double time and a scant ten minutes later we arrived at the gates of the sanitarium.” All too aware that I was the focus of all of these esteemed gentlemen’s attention, I wet my lips and carried on. “I assure you all that no cab could’ve made the trip quicker, and when we arrived I expected to see the doctor and his orderlies checking in at the gate, but alas there was no sign of them. I questioned the guard about the last coach he’d allowed in and after

assuaging his concerns as to my curiosity with a fiver, he assured me that only the milk truck had been through those gates this morning and that being several hours past.

“Despite my growing doubts about the outcome of my quest, I gained entrance to the grounds courtesy of another fiver and proceeded to the administration office to inquire about a patient named Lawende and was not surprised to find no patient of that name had ever been committed there. Recalling that the doctor referred to Mr. Lawende as Mr. Smith, I inquired as to that name and was told that dozens of patients had resided therein with such a name but that currently no male by that sir-name was registered there, though one Mr. Archibald Smith had committed suicide in his chamber some five months previous.”

“Sebastian,” said Challenger, his lack of patience straining his voice, “a common name such as Smith might be randomly chosen to obfuscate a patient’s true identity. Did you enquire about Dr. Nusquam?”

“Yes sir I most certainly did, describing him and his manner in admirable detail but was told no such doctor was on staff or had visiting privileges there nor ever had been. Lastly, I described the orderlies with their white robes and curious accoutrements. I was told that all orderlies there employed wore crimson aprons and in the case of an escaped detainee, the local police were called rather than sending out staff to retrieve the escapee as I was assured that the entire facility was chronically undermanned and under no circumstances would any orderlies be dispatched outside the grounds for any reason.”

“Are you telling us that six men simply *vanished into thin air*?”

“I’ve drawn no such conclusions, Herr Reinsch,” I stammered. “I’m merely reporting to you all what I saw—or, begging your forgiveness, didn’t see.”

At this point I was gratefully forgotten as a spirited debate broke out, with the different members of the Wanderer’s Club roughly separated into three groups: those who believed Lawende to be ‘nothing more than a mountebank’ led by a typically loudmouthed Colonel Reinsch; those who were of the opinion that he was a madman or ‘at the least gravely ill’, led by the self-assured Dr. Hyde; and those who chose to play devil’s advocate and argue that some or all of Lawende’s tale might be true, led by the ever curious and always dignified Prince Nabukubu.

At last Professor Challenger stood up; even though his top hat rested on the table beside his enormous hand, he was still a full foot taller than anyone else in the room and nearly two feet taller than yours truly. “I’ve seen many strange things in my journeys but nothing so strange as to rival what we’ve heard today. Lawende truly might have hailed from the future; then again he may have been nothing more than a madman. And could he have been Jack the Ripper? It’s entirely possible that his entire story was nothing but a wild justification for his murderous past. But it’s clear that such strange goings on portend more intrigue in our future. Regardless of who wielded the grim hand behind them, five gruesome murders have cast their pall upon history – and the future of mankind itself. The mysterious implications ebb out like ripples in a pond, creating possibilities we cannot dare to dream of. I daresay we haven’t seen the last of the Canonical Effect.”