

An Evening at the Palace

The Astonishing Adventures of Heracles Flint

by

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www.theastonishingadventures.com

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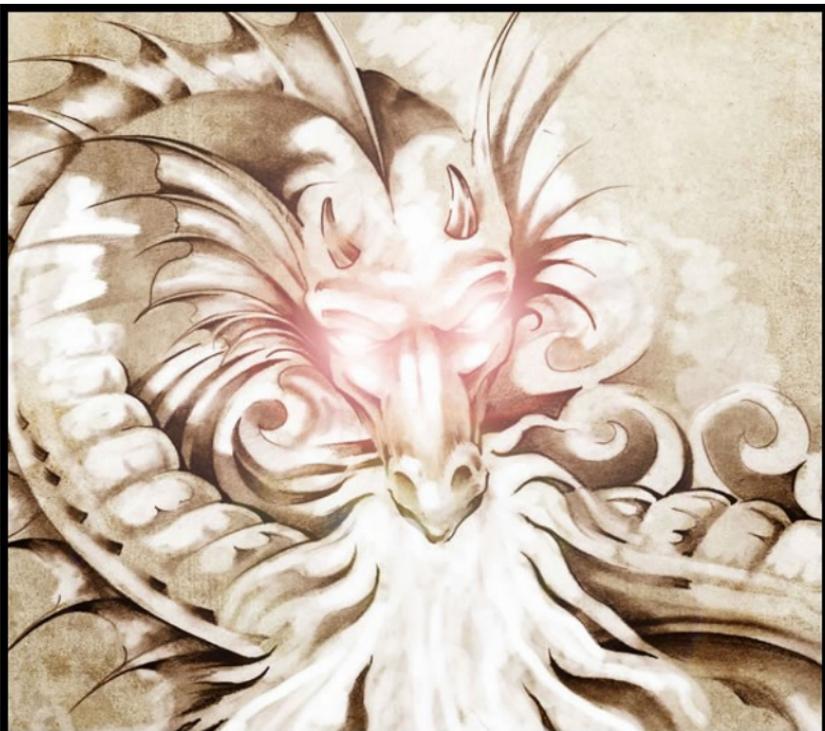
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THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURES

IN A WORLD WHERE
CREATURES OF LEGEND ARE REAL,
AND FANTASY IS FACT,
ASTONISHING ADVENTURES ABOUND...



HERACLES FLINT

ADVENTURER, INVENTOR, SCIENTIST,
MASTER SWORDSMAN, VICTORIAN GENTLEMAN

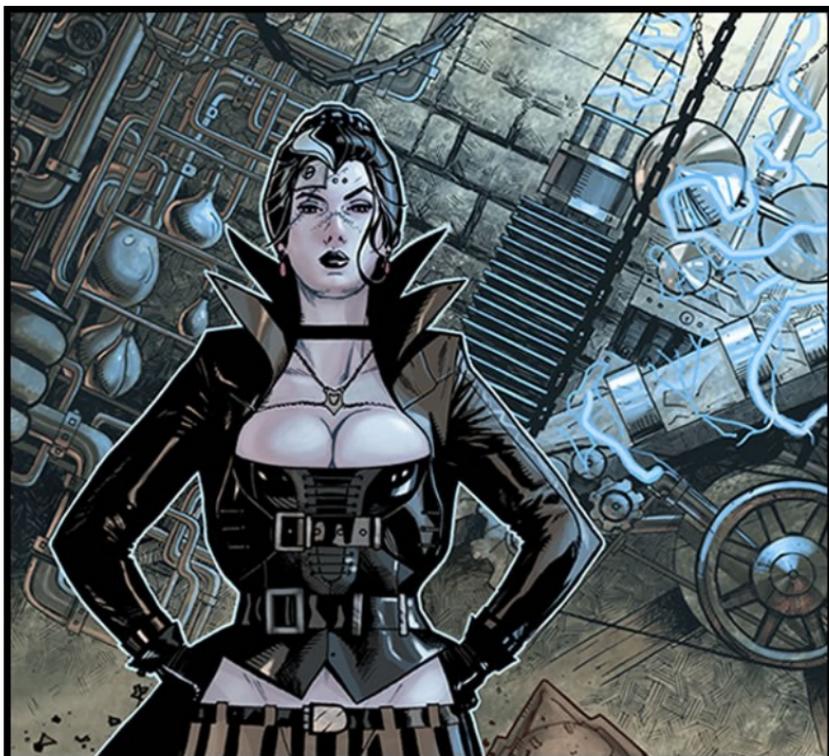
THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURES OF

HERACLES  FLINT



CHARLES BRASS
MECHANICAL MAN OF MYSTERY

THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURES OF
HERACLES ⚡ **FLINT**



DIANA VON STORM

BRIDE OF THE MONSTER,
POWERFUL, UNKILLABLE

THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURES OF

HERACLES ⚡ **FLINT**



ALEXANDRIA

QUEEN, WARRIOR, WOLF

THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURES OF

HERACLES  **FLINT**

“Do not let her watch this.”

An almost full moon shines bright between gaps in the clouds on a frosty October night. A blanket of smoke, from fires keeping households warm across Victorian London, hangs in the still air. The moonshine gives it a phosphorescent glow, and casts an ethereal light on rooftops. At the end of the mall, the grand façade of Buckingham Palace shimmers, and its many windows sparkle.

The Queen is once again restless, tossing and turning, unable to find comfort in her bed. Despite the heat of her bed warmer, her leg aches as it always does on a cold night. Yet again she curses her stupidity at falling down the palace stairs nearly half a decade ago, an act of carelessness that left her lame for months, and still pains her after so long.

She throws the covers off and stands, her leg buckling slightly, slow to take her weight. Rubbing vigorously at her thigh she hopes to push the pain from her bones, but to no avail. Victoria pulls her night gown from the chair by the bed and wraps herself in it; she knows sleep will again elude her tonight. She moves to her dresser by the window,

and taking a match from a small ornate box, lights a paraffin lamp. Glancing out of her window to the gardens below, an unusual light mist swirls amongst the bushes, an odd sight, and one she has not seen before in all the years she has called the palace home.

Deciding to investigate further, she slips on her shoes and makes her way to the bedroom door; suddenly there are three loud sharp knocks, as if a hammer were tapping the wood. Victoria opens the door, and is confronted by a well-dressed man in a tweed suit and bowler hat. As he raises his head she is startled to see his face is a brass mask, illuminated by glowing amber eyes. She opens her mouth to cry out, but has not the breath to make a sound. A thin strip of glass, between a curled black metal moustache, and similarly fashioned black pointed beard, flashes amber with each word the stranger speaks, his voice resonating with a deep electronic tone.

“Your Majesty, I beg your forgiveness for this intrusion, my name is Charles Brass, assassins are at large in the palace and I am here to protect you, please, would you step back inside.”

Victoria retreats from the doorway without uttering a sound, and the finely dressed metal man enters the room, turns, and closes the door.

“I know this is a shock for you but I assure you...”

As Brass turns to address the Queen a bed warmer smashes over his head, crushing his hat and showering him with embers and ash. Victoria stands with the broken shaft of the bed warmer held ready to strike again.

“Your armour is most impressive Mr Brass, but you will not find me such an easy target.”

Brass dusts himself down, discarding his ruined bowler, and stamping out the few embers with a little life left in them.

“Well I suppose I did have that coming, and it's honestly quite refreshing to see you're not a soft cosseted royal like others I've met. I give you my word I'm here to protect you, and given that your blow had no effect other than to ruin a nice suit and fine hat, should my intention have been to harm you, this conversation wouldn't be happening, would it?”

Victoria slowly lowers the handle of her bed warmer.

“Oh and as for armour, not that I wish to make a liar of a queen, but what you see is all that I am.”

Brass' face separates into plates that, with a rush of pneumatics, move out of position leaking light from within. The plates move out a few inches on small pistons, revealing a mass of whirling cogs and gears within his head, surrounding a glass sphere with multicolored lights dancing inside of it.

Victoria gazes in awe at the inner workings of the impossible man standing in her bedroom.

“I have seen a great many things in my travels, but nothing quite compares to what you are revealing to me Mr Brass. I have seen automatons before, sophisticated toys, but you; what are you?”

Brass' face closes again, the plates sealing away all traces of the workings within.

“Actually Ma’am I prefer the term mechanical man, and had we time I would gladly chat to you more about myself, but I'm afraid we have more pressing concerns.” Brass moves past the Queen towards the window. “How secure is this room, was it chosen because it prevents access from outside?”

“No, I am only here temporarily as my usual chambers are being decorated.”

Suddenly a man smashes through the window, swinging in on a rope, and knocking over the dresser, forcing Brass back a few steps. As glass, wood, and lead flashing, fall around him, he draws a knife from his belt. Charles steps forward and delivers a straight punch to the would-be assassin's chest. The sharp thump of metal on flesh, lifts the attacker into the air and out through the broken window. As Charles lowers his arm; the sharp noise of bone hitting stone from below signals an abrupt end to the assault.

“I think perhaps we should go for a dander, see if we can find a safer harbour Ma’am, follow me and stay close.” As Brass moves towards the door, Victoria grabs his arm.

“Wait, Patsy, we have to get Patsy”

“Your granddaughter, Prince Arthur's child?” asks Brass.

“Yes she is staying with me for a fortnight, her parents returned to Bagshot Park just yesterday. She's in a room down the hallway with her nanny Mary.”

“Would Mary be a young girl in her late teens, blond hair?”

“Yes, but how do you know?”

“Your guards, and other staff on the ground floor level of the palace, have been incapacitated by a noxious gas, thankfully weak enough to render them unconscious rather than dead. We discovered a young girl in night attire in the kitchens with a few other house staff.”

“Patsy is alone then, we must get to her immediately, she is more important than I and should be the focus of your protection Mr Brass.”

“Show me the way and I'll endeavor to shield you both from harm, while my associates deal with the invaders.”

“Your associates?” asks Victoria.

“I have not come alone, and my friends are currently tackling the dozen or so men we saw entering the palace. Hurry now, stay quiet, and let's move quickly to your granddaughter's room.”

Brass opens the door and peers outside, looking both ways down the moonlit corridor either side of the Queen's bedroom. He leads the way as they both exit the room; Victoria motions right to a room several doors away. As they move quickly along a door opens, and Brass raises his hand to halt the Queen. A small child rubbing her eyes steps out.

“Patsy!” whispers Victoria loudly, “Come to me my dear quickly.”

“Where Mary?” asks the little girl in a loud voice that abruptly breaks the silence. Another door opens further down the corridor, and five men rush into view brandishing cutlasses and clubs.

“Run Patsy!” screams Victoria as Brass holds her back.

The men charge towards them with one ahead of the rest. Little Patsy is frozen in confusion and fear as the man approaches, raising his cutlass to strike. As Brass rushes forward the man brings his sword down on the child, only for it to be stopped by another blade that suddenly appears above her head. The polished intercepting sword flicks up, sending the cutlass flying to the ceiling where it lodges in the plaster.

Curtains part by a window and a well-dressed man in a suit, a long black coat, top hat, and brandishing an ornate double edged rapier, steps out; the attacker's accomplices rush forward. He strikes the child's assailant across the face with the basket of his sword, sending him reeling towards his fellow assassins.

“Stand your ground!” The man's voice is commanding and tinged with anger. “Cowardly rabble you may be, but you will conduct yourselves with some modicum of decency. Children are never to be harmed.”

The man brings his sword around behind him hiding it from view, and kneels down to Patsy's level, his face obscured by the shadow cast by the rim of his hat, only his neatly trimmed goatee and a smile are revealed.

“Run to your grandmother little miss, and I shall make these bad men go away.”

Patsy runs down the corridor and into her grandmother's arms. The man stands up and removes his hat. Victoria immediately recognizes her granddaughter's savior.

“Heracles Flint!?”

Flint smiles and bows, “Queen Victoria; please excuse me for a moment.” He nods to Brass, “Charles.”

He turns once again to the gang several feet down the corridor, and places his hat on a small table by the wall.

“I shall make this as simple as possible for you gentlemen, surrender, or die.”

“Kill him!” shouts one of the men and they rush forward.

“The latter it is.” says Flint raising his rapier.

The first to approach raises his cutlass screaming furiously, and as Flint lowers his blade he simply runs onto it.

“Not exactly a skilled bunch it would seem.” declares Flint, as he withdraws his rapier and blocks the sword of the next attacker. He spins around throwing the man off balance and he trips past Flint, who then runs his blood stained rapier under his left arm, and pierces the back of the stumbling thug.

Three members of the gang are left, and the first of these charges at Flint with a club. Heracles first swipe cuts the club in two, the next slashes across the man's knees dropping him to the floor, the final strike runs the rapier through the center of his head. Of the final two that remain, one runs dropping his club, but Flint pulls a knife from

under his coat and tosses it after the coward. It lodges between his shoulder blades and he tumbles lifelessly to the carpet. The last man hesitates, panic in his eyes, then commits to throwing himself at Flint wildly swinging his cutlass. The sword lodged in the ceiling moments ago drops, Flint snatches it from the air, and brings it down on the man's skull with enough force to drive it half way into his head. The man stops dead, and then crumples lifelessly at Heracles' feet. Flint pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and runs it the length of his sword, wiping it clean of blood, then tosses the cloth on to the face of the man he just felled.

He turns and makes his way towards Charles and the Queen straightening his clothes.

“That was a tad unfair do you not think? They were little more than cannon fodder, very cheap cannon fodder no doubt.”

Brass looks past his friend at the collection of bodies.

“Yes cheap indeed, whatever they were paid wasn't even enough for a decent outfit for the occasion. This does of course mean they, and the others we saw entering the grounds, are a distraction, a warm up for the main show perhaps. Oh, and impeccable timing as always my friend.”

“As usual that was luck more than timing Charles, but thank you anyway. Queen Victoria an honor to meet you, though I must say I had not expected an evening at the palace to be quite so, well, life threatening.” says Heracles with a smile.

“This is most certainly not a regular evening's activity Mr Flint. What pray tell is the country's foremost adventurer

and industrialist doing skulking around my home at this hour, not that your intervention and that of your friend are unwelcome.”

“We were merely passing overhead when Charles saw your guards lying incapacitated, and we felt compelled to investigate your Majesty.”

Victoria is confused, “Passing overhead?”

“Yes Ma'am in our airship, it is the only way to travel.”

Victoria looks him square in the eye, and with an angry tone to her voice scolds Flint. “I thought perhaps you'd come with an explanation for rejecting the honors bestowed upon you, and embarrassing me in the press Mr Flint.”

Brass attempts to interject. “Excuse me both of you but we have...”

Flint cuts him off.

“Your Majesty, there was no attempt to embarrass you on my part I assure you. I simply felt there were others more deserving of such recognition, and I informed your court of such by letter.”

“I received no such letter and I was told you had rejected it out of hand with no explanation, no sorry I'll correct myself, you had complained of my, what was it, empire building.”

Brass again tries to make himself heard, “We really don't have time for...”

“I most certainly did not.” Flint counters forcefully, “I

have complained about your government's short sighted policies before yes, forcing their broken systems of regulation and rule on people who, if they had the care to actually visit and learn about, they would benefit greatly. It would seem that has ruffled someone's feathers, enough that they would childishly attempt to besmirch my good name. Perhaps we both need to have words with whoever passes such messages to you."

As Victoria draws breath, Brass' hand comes up between them.

"I shouldn't need to remind you, but a sizable group of people are roaming the halls here intent on killing us all. Perhaps we could debate foreign policy at a later date, yes?"

Little Patsy lifts her head from her grandmother's shoulder and points at Brass, "Toy!" she exclaims loudly.

"Indeed miss." replies Brass.

"You're right Mr Brass, Mr Flint it would seem someone has been making mischief, we shall leave this for another day."

Flint bows slightly and smiles, "I look forward to that your Majesty."

"Right then a truce it is." declares Brass turning to his friend, "Have you seen Diana or Alexandria?"

Flint moves to a nearby window and looks out into the enclosed courtyard of the palace. Nothing stirs in the bright moonlight. "No my friend, not since they pursued a gang each in different wings of the building."

Victoria looks surprised. “You've sent women to challenge these thugs?”

“I have sent two friends who are more able combatants than I, and uniquely skilled, fear not for them but rather for those they pursue.” says Flint with a smirk.

“We are uncertain of the number loose on the grounds, and I think the best thing to do would be to get you and the young lady off site, until the threat has been neutralized. We need to get down to the quadrangle; we have a vehicle that can take you to safety. Which is the quickest way down?”

Flint's question is slightly drowned out by what sounds like a wrecking ball striking the palace. The walls shake with two impacts, then a final huge strike shakes the very foundations of the building. Both Flint and Brass move close to the Queen to shield her, though they aren't sure from what.

“A bomb?” queries Flint.

Brass shakes his head, “Neither flash nor shock wave, it's more like something physically hit the building.”

Flint turns to the window again. “It would have to have been something...”

His query is interrupted by the window and frame exploding into the corridor, as an eight foot tall faceless clay man smashes in. The creature grabs Flint with its huge arms, and crashes through the wall behind them into an adjoining room. Flint's rapier is left stuck in the floor, swaying back and forth like the ticking hand of a metronome.

“What in God's name was that!?” shouts Victoria as young Patsy screams.

“A sign things are about to get much worse, time to leave, right now.” says Brass.

As Charles takes the Queen by the arm and heads down the hallway, someone smashes through the exterior wall from the courtyard, bounces off the wall of the hallway, and crashes to the floor. The figure, a woman, throws back her long black hair, its color broken by a streak of white running through it. She brushes glass and bits of masonry from her long black leather coat, and inspects a tear on the thigh of her black and white striped trousers. She swears in Italian “Argilla bastardo!” as she pulls a broken piece of wood from her knee high leather boots.

“Diana!” shouts Brass as he rushes to her side. “What happened?”

As Victoria draws close she gets a better look at the woman's face. Her skin is pale with a hint of blue, and her otherwise beautiful face is affected by large scars running across it, and over the bridge of her nose. One eye is a piercing blue colour, her other hazel, and above her right eye is a polished strip of metal that runs up into her hair.

Victoria has seen corpses with a similar deathly pallor, whoever this woman was; she surely was not long for this world she thought.

Diana looks up, and with a strong Italian accent calmly states. “Charles my friend, this is going to be one of those nights I'm afraid.”

“What appeared to be a golem just tackled Heracles, big chap, about eight foot tall.” says Brass as he helps Diana up from the floor.

Diana shakes her head, “No Charles, that is a big chap.” and she points out of the hole in the wall she made a moment earlier.

Charles looks out to be greeted by the sight of a fifty foot tall golem, made up of clay earth embedded with rocks, lumbering around the palace quadrangle below. It appears to be looking around, despite having no eyes on its huge featureless face.

“Hell's bells that's something new!” says Brass, running his hand over his metal head.

Diana looks at Victoria suddenly realizing who it is and curtsies, “Queen Victoria, an honor, stay by Charles and he will keep you both safe.”

Patsy stares at Diana, who smiles at her, causing her to tighten her grip on her grandmother.

Diana rests her hand on Charles' shoulder, “I'll try to bring him down Charles, it'll be easier to dismantle him on the ground, but I believe I'm going to need help on this one.”

She positions herself at the edge of the breach in the wall.

“I'd say I'll need that help sooner rather than later.”

She winks at Charles, then pushes off from the wall, launching at speed toward the giant clay man. Diana slams

her shoulder into the huge creature's face, staggering him. She spins in the air and lands on the ground, looking up at the golem as it regains its footing. She jumps up and smashes her fists into its jaw, then somersaults past the clay beast, landing several yards behind, steeling herself for another attack.

Victoria and Charles watch awestruck from above, as Diana leaps again but the golem grabs her mid-flight, and throws her through a ground floor window.

Charles steps back from the window surveying the corridor, "Let's go your Majesty before things get any worse."

Victoria is still transfixed on the bizarre spectacle outside.

"Victoria!" he says sharply.

The Queen is shaken by his bluntness.

"I don't recall being on first name terms Mr Brass."

"Forgive me your Majesty; I sought only to grab your attention. Please, which way is out?" asks Brass.

As she turns to speak two clay arms burst through the wall behind Charles, and clamp his head in their monstrous muddy hands. Brass grabs one arm and his vice like grip crushes the clay. He tears the arm off, tosses it past Victoria, and out through the hole in the wall. His head is still trapped in the monster's grip, and it starts repeatedly slamming him back against the wall.

"Wait; right; here!" shouts Brass, above the noise of his

own head striking the wall and cracking the plaster. The wall suddenly gives way, and he's dragged through into the dark room behind.

"Charles!" screams Victoria, Patsy is crying loudly in her arms, terrified by the noise of the fight.

Both jump as an explosion blasts fire, smoke, and debris, out from the room where the other golem had taken Flint.

"There she is!" someone shouts amongst the noise and confusion. Victoria turns to see four men at the end of the corridor, three brandishing guns, the other an axe. She looks to the room where Charles was dragged, but can't see anything in the darkness inside, hearing only the sound of a struggle from within.

She cradles Patsy close shielding her eyes from what is about to happen, "I'm so sorry my child."

A figure swathed in a black cloak and hood leaps in through the hole in the wall, and stands fast between Victoria and the gang at the end of the hallway. She turns to the Queen, lifting her hood from her face.

"Queen Victoria, I am Queen Alexandria, a friend of Heracles. Please stay low by the wall until I deal with this scum."

She motions to the floor, and Victoria kneels down keeping Patsy close. She gets a better look at Alexandria, and through her slightly open cloak, sees a barefoot, young, athletic, woman, in a loose Grecian style short black dress. Her long black hair falls out from her hood as she kneels beside Victoria, and strokes Patsy's hair smiling.

“Do not let her watch this.” she tells Victoria, as she covers her face with her hood, stands, and strides toward the advancing gang.

One of the men levels his gun at Alexandria and fires three shots, the two other armed attackers follow suit, and a volley of bullets tear into the cloaked woman, two passing through her striking the wall above Victoria. The men stop their advance as the hooded figure drops to her knees a few yards in front of them, her cloak drawn around her, obscuring her from view.

A low growling reverberates in the air, and the shape under the cloak begins to grow, slowly rising up. A hand slips out from under the edge of the cloak grabbing at the carpet. It quickly lengthens, and the skin turns black, as the fingernails grow to become claws, and the sinew of the hand ripples and distorts. The low growl is replaced by a roar as the cloak is cast into the air.

Before the men rises a wolf-like creature twice the size of any of them, its muscles flexing under thick black fur. Alexandria’s small dress is now just a band of black cloth tightly binding her monstrous form. The gang stand aghast, unable to process what they are seeing. Alexandria looks back over her now huge muscular shoulders at Victoria, and bares her long sharp teeth. The Queen holds Patsy tight and buries her head in her chest, realizing all too well the violence about to occur.

In an instant the men awaken from their daze and fire again on the werewolf. Alexandria swipes a large clawed hand at the closest man, cleaving his jaw from his face, and sending it tumbling across the floor. His eyes convey the

horror of what has happened to him, as a gurgling scream splutters from his torn asunder face. Her second returning swipe guts him, spilling blood and organs on the palace carpet.

The other men are upon her at once in a melee of violence, punching, kicking, and firing the last couple of shots from their guns, one man trying to find a space between his accomplices to swing his axe. Alexandria rams her claws into the stomach of one traveling upwards piercing lungs, liver, stomach, and heart en route, lifting him from the floor. He vomits blood as his insides churn, and she tosses him against the wall like a rag doll. The axe man finds his mark and lodges his weapon in the center of the wolf's back; she roars in pain. Alexandria turns to him and lashes out with a clawed foot gouging his groin, opening his lower abdomen, and relieving him of his manhood. She swings her arm down striking him dead center on the crown of his skull, breaking his neck, and collapsing his skull with a sickening crunch. The final thug throws his gun in a futile attack, and it bounces harmlessly off Alexandria's chest. He pulls a knife from his jacket and lunges forward, but is stopped by her powerful hands grasping his head with a smack, and she sinks her teeth into his face, tearing at his weak flesh.

The Queen of the wolves spits a chunk of the man's head at the floor, and casts his lifeless body aside. The axe is still lodged in her back, and she tries reaching around with both arms, but doesn't have the flexibility to grab it. She turns to Victoria who sits shaking on the floor, having witnessed every detail of the horrific attack. As the werewolf begins walking toward her, Victoria hugs Patsy tighter as tears

uncontrollably well in her eyes, and panic threatens to wash over her.

Alexandria towers over her breathing hard, pausing for a moment, then turning and motioning to the axe in her back. Victoria gets up on her knees, being careful to keep Patsy shielded from seeing the beast before them. She reaches forward, her hand shaking, and grasps the axe handle; Alexandria lets out a bark in pain. Victoria pulls sharply causing her royal counterpart to wince then growl, but the axe remains stuck firmly in place. She shifts her weight to try again, when an explosion from behind them causes them both to jump and Victoria wrenches the axe free. Alexandria howls in pain, the sound causing Patsy to scream in her grandmother's arms.

Dropping the axe, the Queen turns to see Flint stumble out of the hole in the wall made by the golem, surrounded by a cloud of smoke. He trips and falls to the floor, mutters an inaudible complaint, then picks himself up, dusting debris from his worse for wear suit. Pulling his sword from the floor he walks toward Alexandria and the Queen, rubbing at his right ear, his hearing affected by the blast.

From the room Charles was dragged into comes a low frequency drumming noise, causing the windows in the corridor to shake in their frames. Brass suddenly emerges, covered in mud, startling Flint who raises his sword in defense.

“What happened to you?” asks Flint.

“Same problem as you, but a good dose of sonics causing liquefaction soon sorted the blighter.” replies Brass,

straightening his tie.

“Smart thinking; I just blew us both up.” says Flint nonchalantly. Both men advance down the hallway to join the two royals.

“Your Majesty my apologies for the damage, I will have the necessary repairs made forthwith.” He looks past the panting Alexandria at the bloody mess a few feet away; “and have the carpets cleaned.”

The palace again shakes, and they look out of a window to the courtyard below, to see the huge golem trying to stamp on Diana as she dodges between his legs.

“I appear to have missed a few developments.” says Flint looking puzzled.

“Just that large one, so far at least, Diana is struggling to contain it however.” replies Charles surveying the battle below.

Alexandria snorts and pushes past everyone, heading for the breach in the wall.

Flint calls after her, “Alexandria wait, I need your nose.”

She stops and turns to him, air blasting from her flaring nostrils.

Flint reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a tattered scroll tied with a red ribbon. Alexandria steps close to him looking at the parchment.

“The golem’s instructions to kill Victoria?” asks Brass.

“Yes, but it is more than that. The enchanted writing that

drives the creature to achieve that goal is on the parchment.”

Several more stamps of the giant golem’s feet shake the palace.

“The ribbon however has the words KILL THE MAN IN THE SUIT WITH THE SWORD.” says Flint reading from the cloth binding.

Brass looks out of the window, “Which would mean whoever wrote that would firstly have to be using an auto-writing spell of some sort, and secondly be close enough to see us.”

“Exactly.” replies Flint.

He turns to Alexandria, “If you can pick anything up from this, see if you can catch the scent of the bugger.”

Alexandria sniffs the scroll, then takes it from Flint’s hand and tosses it into her mouth. She bares her teeth in what could almost be called a smile, if werewolves can do such a thing, gently pats Flint’s face twice, turns and runs for the hole in the wall. She pauses briefly looking below, then leaps out.

“Heracles, with the courtyard a battleground should we forget about getting the Queen to the Faraday?” asks Brass.

“No it is still the best way to get her and the little one clear of here. Ma’am please lead Charles to the nearest door to get you outside, we have a ship below that can fly you out of danger.”

Flint walks toward the shattered wall Alexandria left

through.

“Where are you going, it’s this way.” asks Victoria motioning in the opposite direction.

“I have a quicker way down your Majesty, move fast as this beast will notice the Faraday start up, and undoubtedly make a bee line for it.”

Heracles reaches under his coat to the rear of his belt, pulling out a T shaped device with a reel at the center. He adjusts a few buttons on it, stands at the hole in the wall, and holds it aloft. Twin blasts from either end shoot harpoons out, one into the wall behind him, and the other flies across the courtyard dragging a snaking wire behind it. It lodges in a wall and the reel spins pulling the wire taut.

“Hurry along now, your chariot will be waiting.” says Flint as he leaps out and races along the wire. It relaxes as he gets further along and he descends to the quadrangle.

Victoria turns to Brass, “He enjoys this chaos doesn’t he?” she asks.

“Oh most definitely,” replies Charles, “Lead the way Ma’am.”

They step over the bodies of Alexandria’s victims as they make their way to a door ahead of them.

“My God the smell!”

Flint touches down and makes a quick assessment of the battle at hand. Diana shoulder charges the giant golem’s leg, causing it to step back to regain its footing. Alexandria scrambles up its other leg, over its back, and upon reaching its head starts tearing at it furiously, sending chunks of clay and dirt flying in all directions.

He runs towards the golem, passing between its legs heading for Diana.

“Will you hurry up and sort this beast!” shouts Flint jokingly.

“Sfacciato!” she says pushing him. “This thing is most difficult. It’s too soft to smash, and even when I tear a piece off, water flows out from it dissolving the debris and immerso, it’s reabsorbed.

“Water?” queries Flint.

“Sì, it flows through it like blood.”

The pair watch as the huge creature flails its arms around trying to snatch Alexandria, as she races around it in a blur,

clawing its clay flesh.

“I know how to stop it, but I will need a few more minutes to get something from the ship, keep him busy.” and he slaps Diana on the back.

“Nessun problema.”

Diana takes a deep breath then leaps into the air hurtling towards the golem. She smashes her fists into its arm, knocking it away from Alexandria who was almost in his grasp.

Flint runs to a dark corner of the quadrangle shadowed from the moonlight. He reaches the Faraday, which is a twenty foot long boat, with a few notable differences from a regular sea going vessel, the first being that it's floating a few feet off the ground.

At its stern are two large enclosed fans attached to a complex looking engine, a mass of pipes, hoses, and metal work. Along each side of her hull are three large coils, connected to the engine by a daisy chain of twisted cabling. Heracles grabs hold of a small fixed ladder on the boat's side and jumps up. He gets into the pilot's chair in front of a control console made up of various dials, levers, and small control wheels. Pressing pedals at his feet, he looks back to the fans confirming that small rudders are moving back and forth. He pulls a lever on the console and a high pitched whine begins to build in volume.

Steam suddenly blasts from valves atop the engine at the stern, and electricity arcs between the coils, lighting up the small ship's hiding place. Lightning crackles between the coils building in intensity, some escaping and striking the

ground. The valves shut and the blades of the fans begin to spin, blowing dust up from the ground as the Faraday rises into the air.

The golem has noticed the noise and strobe light of the coils, and turns towards the boat. Diana appears in the air behind its head kicking it, but having little effect. With a swing of its arm the beast finally swats Alexandria away, and she smashes into the tiled roof of the palace, bounces twice, then disappears over the apex of the roof.

The Faraday lifts off; as he steers Flint pulls on another lever, causing a rod with small discs along its length to emerge from the center of the prow. He presses a button and lightning shoots from the rod striking the golem. It recoils as electricity dances across its body, but there's little harm done. Heracles withdraws the rod, then spins a small wheel on the console to his left as the boat lifts higher into the air, now level with the roof of the palace. The golem steps forward, water on its surface sizzling from the lightning charge, and reaches out for the Faraday, but it's just beyond its clutches. From either side of the prow small ports open, from one a Gatling gun emerges, from the other a small cannon.

Flint presses one of two buttons by the small wheel, and the Gatling gun spits fire and smoke as bullets rain down on the golem. They all strike their target but simply disappear into the dirt. He presses the other button and the cannon fires, pushing the boat backwards slightly with the recoil. A cannonball races forward blasting into the beast's shoulder and exiting its back, blowing a crater in the courtyard below.

Knowing he can do no more, Flint pulls back on the yoke in front of him and the Faraday turns, pitches up, and heads for a dense low cloud directly above the palace.

Brass and Victoria emerge from a corridor, arriving at the top of Buckingham Palace's Grand Staircase.

"Down there Charles not far to go." says Victoria, switching Patsy from one arm to the other. As she moves to the top of the stairs her weak leg again buckles slightly, and Brass steadies her. He reaches out his arms to Patsy.

"You're getting a little bit too heavy for your grandmother young lady, can I carry you for a bit?"

Patsy reaches out to him, Charles takes her in his arms, and they all make their way down the stairs.

A shabbily dressed man appears ahead, drawing a gun from his coat as he runs towards them.

"Oh hell." declares Charles, turning his back to the man and roughly pulling Victoria close to him. Shots ring out as the attacker empties his six bullets into Brass' back. In quick succession four metallic thuds hit Charles followed by two ricochets. The man turns his gun into a club and draws closer. Handing Patsy back to the Queen, Brass turns to meet the man, and with a thunderous upper cut, strikes him under his chin. The force of the punch stretches his neck to twice its length, as tendons over-extend and his spine separates. He's dead before his body hits the stairs and rolls away.

"Let's go." says Brass taking Patsy again, and they continue on their way.

Two men of the Household Cavalry rush to meet them at the bottom of the stairs, both brandishing swords.

“You’re finally awake gents.” says Brass.

“Step away from the Queen monster!” shouts one of the guards.

Victoria steps in front of Charles, “This man and his associates are my protectors; they are battling the creature outside who intends to kill me. Follow us at once!”

The soldiers follow them to the door at the Grand Entrance, and look out at the gigantic golem once again trying to stamp on Diana who leaps clear.

“What the bloody hell!?” remarks a shocked guard.

Charles hands Patsy back to Victoria; “I have to get outside to help Ma’am, you men protect the Queen, there may be more assassins running around here, the regular type you’ll be glad to know. I’ll come back for you your Majesty.”

“Good luck Charles.” says Victoria smiling. Brass bows, and runs out to the quadrangle.

She turns to the soldiers, one a Sergeant, the other a Corporal.

“Sergeant remain with me, Corporal, take my granddaughter to the white drawing room, or better yet the closet adjoining it.”

“Your Majesty we should get you away from the battle.” says the Sergeant.

“I will see this through Sergeant, besides; I doubt there is anywhere truly safe from that abomination.”

She hands Patsy to the Corporal as two other soldiers arrive on the scene.

“Go with my soldiers Patsy they’ll keep you safe, I’ll be with you soon.” says Victoria touching Patsy’s face.

“One of you stay here the other go with the Corporal, move out.” orders the Sergeant.

Charles runs outside and peers up at the enormity of the golem.

“This is not going to be easy.” he says thinking out loud.

Diana lands beside him. “Come to join the fun?” she says placing her hand on his shoulder.

“Rather be at the pub to be honest, where’s Heracles?”

“Fetching something from above to hopefully end this, we’re at bat till he returns.”

“Let’s get to it then, care to bowl?” says Brass holding his hands out.

Diana smiles, takes his hands, and begins spinning him around until he’s off the ground and turning in circles. She lifts him higher still, turning, aiming him at the golem, then let’s go. Charles flies towards the creature curling into a tight ball, and strikes it in the chest, ricocheting off. The golem staggers backwards with the impact struggling to stay upright. Charles lands heavily, but on his feet, and Diana rushes to his side.

“If we can’t stop this thing and it breaches the quadrangle, it’ll cause chaos in the city.” declares Diana.

“You hit him high, I’ll hit him low, let’s see if we can topple him.” says Charles.

Diana starts running; “Go for his left leg, I’ll hit his right shoulder, see if we can spin him!”

She runs around behind the golem as it starts walking towards Charles. Brass readies himself then rushes forward as Diana jumps. He slams into the clay behemoths leg, as Diana strikes its back near its right shoulder, causing it to turn, loose its footing, and finally fall face down to the ground with a huge crash.

Almost immediately it rolls over onto its side in an effort to get back up. Brass runs in but the golem punches him, knocking him back into the wall of the palace, cracking the stone, and leaving a man shaped imprint as he falls away staggered by the impact.

It reaches for him and Charles raises his hand. A fan of metal emerges from his wrist, which spreads out forming a cone around his hand. As the golem’s hand opens to grab him, Brass’ hand vibrates, producing low frequency sonic waves that begin dissolving the monsters fingers, as waves of sound energy ripple through them.

The golem recoils, withdrawing its disintegrating hand, throwing huge chunks of earth into the air. Some of these hit Diana, who was mid-air launching another attack, and she falls surrounded by rubble between the golem’s legs. It smashes its knees together crushing her, and when they open, she falls unconscious to the ground.

It continues the slow process of getting to its feet, as Alexandria appears at the apex of the palace roof. She sniffs the air detecting something, and looks down at the golem who is beginning to stand upright once again. Its damaged hand is reforming, showering water and mud as it swiftly regrows.

Leaping up from the roof her silhouette crosses the bright moon, then she falls towards the ground. She lands first on the beast's arm, she then jumps for Diana, landing beside her. Alexandria scoops her up in her powerful arms and throws her out of harm's way. This gives the golem enough time to snatch her from the ground as it stands fully upright.

She claws at its hand in a futile attempt to break free, as the creature swings her low towards the ground. It raises its arm in a long arc, and at great speed, throws her straight up into the night sky. Spinning uncontrollably, Alexandria disappears into the cloud hanging above palace.

Charles has reached Diana's side as she begins to regain her senses. The golem turns towards them, its featureless face staring down at them. Over its shoulder they see blue flashes in the cloud above.

The Faraday breaches the cover of the cloud at speed, lightning flashing from its levitation coils, and Alexandria perched on its bow, the wind ruffling her fur.

Flint drives the flying boat straight for the golem, its drive fans spinning at full speed. As it draws close he pulls the bow up, and Alexandria jumps clear, landing on the palace roof. Heracles smashes the keel of the Faraday into the monster's back, causing the coils to discharge vast

amounts of electricity that wash over its body. The impact throws the creature forward and it collapses to the ground once more.

Alexandria is on it immediately tearing at its back, digging furiously into the dirt. The Faraday comes to a stop a few feet from the ground, and Flint jumps overboard. On his back is a small engine with four pipes on top of it, and three small turbines protruding from its rear. Several bound together hoses connect the base of the backpack, to a long brass tube with a handle in Flint's hand.

"Bloody hell, must try to reduce the weight of this." he says, shifting the pack higher on his back.

He runs towards the prone creature's arm as Diana and Charles join him.

"Fingers crossed this works." says Flint as he flicks a switch on the base of the engine, and the turbines spring to life, drawing up dust from the ground into the device. He points the tube at the golem's arm, and a jet of cloudy air blasts forth causing Flint to grip the device tighter. Ice starts forming on the huge arm, and loud cracks echo around the quadrangle as it freezes, and begins breaking under its own weight.

"All yours!" shouts Heracles, over the noise of the turbines and breaking ice. He shuts off the air and runs towards the golem's legs.

Brass follows Flint as Diana charges at the frozen arm. She smashes through it, scattering ice and earth in all directions.

“Magnifico!” she shouts.

“Go around!” Brass tells Heracles, as they reach the still moving legs of the golem. Charles constructs his sonic gun again and dissolves the leg above the knee, then starts pushing it clear of the body to stop it reattaching.

Flint arrives at the other leg and begins freezing it. As it struggles to move the leg begins to break off, when Diana suddenly drops on it from above, completely severing it. She follows Charles’ lead and rolls it clear across the quadrangle.

“Other arm, other arm!” shouts Flint.

Charles grabs him and he jumps them both up onto the golem’s back, beside where Alexandria is still digging. Flint freezes the golem’s remaining arm, as Charles severs its head with sound waves. Diana kicks the frozen arm off and pushes it clear.

Heracles shuts off the stream of super cooled air and turns to Alexandria, who stops digging and looks at him.

She takes a breath, swallows, and in a low growling voice says; “Inside.”

Flint looks confused; “What!?”

The penny suddenly drops for Charles; “Son of a bitch is inside the thing!”

“Get back!” shouts Heracles, and he turns the freezing gun on the spot where Alexandria was digging. As it ice’s up Diana leaps up onto the golem’s back. She raises her hand and Flint turns off the engine on his weapon.

Diana stamps on the frozen earth, revealing a wooden box below, which Alexandria promptly smashes into with her claws, turning the wooden wall to splinters. Inside is a small shivering man in a cloth diaper, obviously soiled, ice caked on his skin, belted into a seat. Above him is a periscope, and a box with bellows in it breathes by itself in a corner. Parchment, ribbons, and spilled ink, litter the inside of the box.

“My God the smell!” says Flint as he covers his face.

“It would seem toilet facilities didn’t factor into his monster building plans.” says Charles peering inside.

Diana reaches down and tears off the belts that had secured the man inside the box, grabs him by the throat, and lifts him out. Victoria and the Sergeant, accompanied by several more recovered guards, exit the palace and join Flint and his team. Alexandria slips away in the background.

“Your Majesty, the danger has passed I am glad to say.” says Flint smiling. He jumps down from the remains of the golem, which are slowly breaking apart, leaking water everywhere.

Charles is slowly sinking in the dirt as it’s unable to bear his weight any longer. Another short blast of sound at his and Diana’s feet, disintegrates the golem further, and lowers them to the ground.

Diana drops the still shivering villain at Victoria’s feet. Two Soldiers grab him and hold him fast. The Queen steps forward and stares at him.

“William Mitchell.” says Victoria; “Owner of a shipping

company, whose slave trading off India I was personally alerted to nearly a year ago. I stripped him of service medals he'd received in the Anglo-Zulu war, and had his assets seized. He had apparently committed suicide two months ago if I recall correctly.”

“A deception it would seem.” says Alexandria, appearing from behind the mound of earth that was once the golem. She has returned to her human form and adjusts her dress as she approaches. Several cuts on her arms and legs are visibly healing as she approaches. Flint unbuckles his cold gun and slips it off, then removes his coat, passing it to his scantily dressed friend.

“Thank you Heracles, there is a bit of a nip in the air.” she says smiling.

“Get him out of my sight.” orders Victoria, and the soldiers drag Mitchell away. She gazes at the collection of bizarre characters that have come to her aid, victorious against seemingly impossible odds.

“I'm not sure how I shall thank all of you for your actions this night, but know that I am forever in your debt.”

“Nonsense your Majesty, if you will pardon me, we are merely your servants, just as we are to anyone facing threats of this kind, which is more frequent than you might imagine.” says Flint smiling.

“You must all join me for dinner next week, a more civilized evening at the palace is called for I think.”

The group all nod and agree.

“It would be our pleasure, though I’m afraid I don’t actually eat.” says Charles.

“Then come because I enjoy your company Mr Brass.”

Charles bows to the Queen.

“Uh oh.” says Brass standing bolt upright; “My internal alarms have just gone off, Heracles we’ve thirty five minutes to get to Glastonbury.”

“Blast, in all the excitement I had almost forgotten about that!” exclaims Flint; “Queen Victoria we must depart immediately, a prior engagement, one I am afraid we cannot ignore.”

He hoists the heavy cold gun onto his shoulder, only for Diana to lift it off.

“Give me this before you pull something.” she orders, and slings it over her own shoulder as if it weighted nothing.

“All aboard everyone.” says Brass and makes his way to the Faraday.

Alexandria curtseys to Victoria. “A pleasure to meet you Queen Victoria.”

“Likewise Queen Alexandria.” replies Victoria.

Diana steps forward, and Victoria appreciates for the first time how tall the pale scarred woman is, towering over all who have gathered.

“I look forward to dinner next week Ma’am, arrivederci.”

“As do I Diana.” says Victoria.

As Diana turns to follow Alexandria to the Faraday, the Queen touches her arm.

“If you’ll forgive me asking, your scars my dear, from these battles and horrors you and your friends face?” she asks.

“From my birth actually, a tale to be told over dinner perhaps.” replies Diana.

Heracles and Victoria follow the others to the flying boat. As everyone boards, Flint turns and bows to the Queen.

“An honor to be of service tonight Ma’am.”

“What is this prior appointment you must rush off to? she asks.

“Well, in a nutshell, a somewhat delusional chap, intends to use the magical nexus at Glastonbury Tor, to empower a spell to breach the realm of the dead.” he says as he boards the Faraday.

“Can he do this!?” asks a bewildered Victoria.

“Well he has a book, the Crimson Grimoire, which has all the instructions to carry out his plans, and he is a pupil of the Scholomance, the school of the darkest of arts, so yes, it is quite possible.” replies Flint.

“What if you fail to stop him?”

“Well, you will know if the palace is overrun by hordes of the undead by dawn, but hopefully a new day will blossom just like any other.” says Flint with a broad smile.

“Is this the life you lead Heracles, one of never ending battles?”

“Most days!” says Brass from the pilot’s seat.

“We are The Society of Esoteric Technica your Majesty. My friends and I, and others across the globe, defend an unsuspecting world from threats beyond imagination. Those creatures that strike from the shadows, and prey on the innocent, find us ready to challenge them.” explains Flint.

“I look forward to the tale of how you best this new threat next week, all being well. Delay no longer, and good luck to you all.”

“Until next week Ma’am.” replies Heracles as Charles starts the Faraday’s engine. The coils spark with electricity once again, and the fans spin up to speed. It lifts off, and Victoria and her soldiers shield their eyes from the dust that swirls in the air.

Rising above the palace, it disappears into the mysterious cloud above. After a few seconds, flashes of blue light illuminate the entire cloud, lighting up the night sky. The cloud itself begins moving away, picking up speed as it passes out of view from the quadrangle.

“Did you believe all of that Ma’am?” asks the Sergeant.

“Before tonight I would have thought it utter madness, however, my understanding of such things has changed. While I am confident they will prevail Sergeant, it would perhaps be prudent to secure the grounds, and have troops at the ready, just until dawn passes.

“Right away your Majesty.”

Victoria looks to the sky, but the cloud has gone, and the night is still once again.

“Let us hope that this night, will become just another, astonishing adventure, Mr Flint can entertain us with.”

The Astonishing Adventures of Heracles Flint continue in

A Big Box of Death

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