

16th August 1923

A few days ago, I received an invitation from Lady Charteris to visit, with a number of the other members of the League, her country house at Shining Cliff near Ambergate, which arrived with a neatly drawn map showing how to get to a small village somewhere in the Midlands. I was delighted to discover that Lady Charteris' house was within easy driving distance of Nottinghamshire county ground at Trent Bridge, where the South African touring side was challenging England in the third match of the test series, and made my plans accordingly.

Despite the vagaries of the traffic where the Lady Bay Bridge crosses the Trent, I was able to arrive at my seat shortly before Mr. Taylor won the toss and elected to put his South Africans in to bat. The blue sky promised a warm day and Mr. Laver and Mr. Thompson relieved the English team of a number of hats and jumpers as they took possession of the field under the redoubtable Mr. Mann. The South African openers, Mr. Catterall and Mr. Hearne, were welcomed onto the field with warm applause and strode out to stand guard over their respective wickets. With the series balanced at one test all, there were reputations to be defended amongst the players of both teams and both teams had elected to bring in young bowlers to improve their attacks - Macaulay for England and Hall for South Africa.

Kennedy opened the bowling for England with an impressively tight over from which Catterall at the Radcliffe Road End scored nothing. Macaulay certainly justified his inclusion in the team as he struck in his first over, encouraging Hearne to attempt a pull shot at a ball which was neither short enough nor sufficiently outside his off stump for him to achieve anything except to loft it to Fender in the outfield [ 1 - 0 ]. Hearne was replaced by Taylor, the South African captain, whose calming influence helped settled Catterall into a slow but steady accumulation of runs for the next ten overs.

Mr. Mann's experience showed as the ball began to roughen and he replaced Macaulay with Fender at the Pavilion End. Despite the clear air, Fender managed some inswing and Catterall's tickle at a ball outside his off stump merely lifted it to the wicketkeeper Brown. Although he may occasionally let bowlers get past him, Brown is not known for putting chances like that down and duly claimed the wicket of the other South African opener [ 2 - 22 ]. The experienced Nourse joined his captain in the field and for five overs these two old hands controlled the match, seemingly able to score where they wanted until Taylor somehow played around a delivery and lost his middle wicket to Fender's accuracy [ 3 - 31 ].

For his first few deliveries, Ling seemed to have difficulty keeping his eye on the ball and only survived because the English captain dropped him at mid-off, a mistake that Mr. Mann would later correct. Nourse continued to build his score and, once he had settled, was joined by Ling to make a respectable partnership, taking South Africa past the half century and virtually doubling the team total before Nourse was caught reaching for a delivery from Fender's last over of the session which swung back and caught him squarely in the middle of his pad [ 4 - 60 ].

Brann replaced Nourse at the Radcliffe Road End and watched as Ling played a series of magnificent strokes to Macaulay, scoring one run a ball thanks to the inaccuracy of the young man's bowling under pressure. Despite this encouragement, Brann looked uncomfortable, shying away from the ball and dropping his bat on deliveries that seemed to demand instead a firm drive. Macaulay continued to get the worst of the battle between himself and Ling at the other end, and although many of the runs have gone down on the score card as byes, it was clear to the spectators that Macaulay had little idea how to cope with Ling's beautifully classical stroke play. Brann's apparent

reluctance to put willow on leather was punished the next over when Kennedy crashed through his rather ineffectual defences and knocked him over [ 5 - 67 ]. He was replaced by the all-rounder Blanckenberg who seemed determined to make a more confident showing.

To maintain the momentum, Mr. Mann brought Fender back on to replace Macaulay at the Pavilion End and the wisdom of this was shown on his very first ball, when Ling badly mistimed his swing and the ball looped up off the shoulder of the bat and straight to the English captain [ 6 - 67 ]. Francois replaced Ling at the Pavilion End and play continued. Although not an entirely impartial observer, I would say that the England strike bowlers rested on their laurels somewhat, and fifteen overs passed without threat to either batsman. A better batsman than a bowler, Francois proved his ability again and again against the best that Kennedy and Fender could deliver, scoring with equal facility on both the onside and offside, before and behind the wicket. Blanckenberg was less fluid, relying on nudging the ball behind and running. To try to move things along and break the batsmen's rhythm, Mann brought back the off-spinner Jupp who had almost immediate success when Blanckenberg tipped Jupp's third delivery to Carr at silly mid-on [ 7 - 96 ].

Now South Africa's main batsmen were gone and although the wicketkeeper Ward can sometimes provide a good show with a bat, all hopes rested on Francois, and for a time this hope seemed justified as he defied Macaulay's speed and Wooley's seam and kept putting runs on the board. At the other end, Ward seemed solid in defence and took the South Africans past the century mark, although he only added four runs to the team total before Jupp's looping spin sneaked through between bat and pad and claimed his off-stump [ 8 - 108 ]. With his departure, play was suspended for the lunch interval. Although I have rarely had the opportunity to eat at the restaurant of the Imperial in Birmingham, the quality both of the service and the food have been rather excellent there and I can heartily recommend it to any and all.

As play resumed, the end was clearly in sight for the South African tail-enders and Nupen's enthusiastic swings of the willow only added two to the score before he drove the ball straight back at the bowler Macaulay who held him with a wonderful show of reflex catching [ 9 - 111 ]. Hall was the last man in for the visitors, and his inexperience was exposed in the worst way when, after a number of wild and incautious swings at the ball, he drove the ball straight down the wicket and called "Run!" Eager to take the strike from the youngster, Francois set off at a sprint, only to hear Hall call, "Er, no. Stop." Of course, by that time he was quite a way out of his wicket and had no chance to make it back before Macaulay took his bails [ all out - 113 ].

It was a ludicrously poor ending to what had been a reasonable showing against the speed and accuracy of the English attack and all South Africa could hope to do now was take the field and earn some respect. Mistakes had been made, but they were the mistakes of enthusiasm and inexperience, which can be understood and even forgiven in a team so much younger than their opponents. I wouldn't want to take anything away from the English game; their concentration was exceptional and the encouragement they gave young Macaulay when he suffered the unwelcome attentions of Francois was good to see. They took their chances and made the most of them; Taylor's men just gave them too many chances.

After a short interval for drinks, the English openers made their way from the pavilion to the wicket whilst the South Africans took possession of the field. The initial attack was led by the experienced bowlers Nupen and

Blanckenberg, but to be honest, neither made a very good showing at the start. Both bowlers looked tired, resulting in loose balls, and neither bowler could duplicate the English accuracy in line or length. The English openers passed the half-century mark without loss when Russell stepped smartly down the wicket and lofted a short ball from Nupen almost to the boundary.

With clouds slowly drawing in from the south east, play was suspended for the tea interval and Taylor's men obviously took the opportunity to discuss their predicament for when they took to the field again, the youngster Hall was brought on from the Pavilion end in place of Nupen. Despite his inexperience, in Hall's first over he managed to be both fast and accurate and even to derive some swing from somewhere. This was enough to make the English batsmen nervous and although Hall didn't achieve the breakthrough that Taylor and his men had been looking for, Sandham managed to get completely beneath the full toss with which Blanckenberg's ended his first over. As it soared upwards behind the wicket, Sandham and Russell managed a final run before the sprinting Francois threw himself full length and clutched the ball less than a foot above the turf [ 1 - 59 ].

The very next ball, the newly-arrived and obviously nervous Woolley showed a thin edge to Hall and the bowler claimed his first test wicket when Francois took a second, easier, catch and the Englishman went for a duck [ 2 - 59 ]. Mead came out to replace Woolley at the crease and took the opportunity of a rather short bowl from the exuberant Hall to tip a single and put Russell on strike. Despite the English opener having his eye in, he was deceived by Hall's pace and mistimed an attempted pull shot which drifted over midwicket and straight to the welcoming hands of Catterall [ 3 - 60 ].

It was a magnificent start of the session for the visiting side, threatening an unprecedented England collapse. That it was too good to last was made abundantly clear upon the arrival of Carr whose flamboyant flair and unconventional stroke play seemed perfectly suited to the South African bowling. With Carr's flair supported by the unadventurous reliability of Mead, Taylor's side struggled to threaten the batsmen despite the South African captain using his three bowlers in all combinations and even calling on Francois for three overs of medium pace leg-break. With surpassing ease, Carr took England past the century and then past South African total for their first innings. The sun was starting to drop below the wall of the ground when a good length delivery from Hall caught Carr with his bat extended a second too long, took a thick edge and dropped into the gloves of wicketkeeper Ward [4 - 128 ].

After a brief discussion with Taylor, the umpires agreed that it was too dark to bring on the English captain to start his innings, and so drew an end to the first day's play. Upon presenting my card at the pavilion, I was allowed to join the tourists in their sitting room where a full and frank discussion of the day's play was underway. I passed on my congratulations to Hall and Francois and was drawn into a lengthy debate about the "leg before wicket" issue, the different interpretations of which above and below the equator seem to threaten the unified game. Some went as far as to suggest that the cricketing world may split into a northern and southern hemisphere, which play by different rules!

Fascinating though this ongoing conversation seemed likely to prove, I was aware of the passing of time and of my obligation to Lady Charteris, so after wishing my compatriots luck in the rest of the game, I made my departure. The sun was already touching the horizon ahead of me as I headed through of Nottingham in a general north-westerly direction. After a few miles, I found myself in the country, on a network of small, winding roads

devoid of the slightest vestige of a road sign. Knowing that I had already driven further than I had expected to, I stopped in the small and delightfully named village of Belper and asked for directions.

I have always found it such an endearing trait of the English that they will never hesitate to provide detailed and inordinately lengthy instructions on how to get from one place to another, despite the fact that their apparent ignorance of where they are is exceeded only by their utter incomprehension as to where you want to be. This behaviour seems inherent amongst all stations, but seems most pronounced amongst the middle aged men of rural England. It would not be so bad if it were possible to obtain unambiguous advice that one could follow, but a combination of mumbled non-sequiturs, incomprehensible local terminology and unrelated hand gestures makes this impossible. Worse, if you are unlucky enough to ask two people for directions at the same time, you will be provided with two conflicting sets of instructions, neither of which bear a more than passing resemblance to the piece of countryside where you may find yourself.

In fact, amongst older gentlemen of the countryside, this tendency is so pronounced that they seem to be willing to break into a discussion on the best way to travel between any two points on the slightest provocation, or even on no provocation at all, especially when they are ensconced in a public house. The absence of anyone actually wanting to travel between these two places is, of course, of no importance.

Despite the best efforts of the locals, I eventually found myself in the gravelled area indicated on the map that Lady Charteris had been kind enough to supply with my invitation, and I pulled to a standstill alongside the other parked cars. It being quite dark by this time, I took my electric pocket torch from the glove compartment and, without consciously thinking about it, slipped the adjacent revolver into my pocket; something for which I would be all too soon extremely grateful. In the light from my pocket torch, I found a small map fastened to the gatepost of the parking area that showed an outline of the surrounding wood with Lady Charteris' house marked in the centre of it and a dotted line indicating a path from the gravelled area to the house.

Needless to say, the single, straight dotted line on the map seemed to have little relationship to the numerous winding tracks and paths which formed my route through the woods. Where the map offered no choices and demanded no decisions, I found myself offered a number of options, each seemingly having something to recommend it. The paths turned left and right in apparently senseless meanderings, turning back on themselves and crossing one another in a bewildering maze which would have defied the best of my African scouts in Groote Kierkevaal.

In short, I became lost.

At first, my situation was one of amused resignation rather than of concern; I had travelled the Skeleton Coast in Namibia, navigated along the Zaire and Zaruba rivers and ridden through three hundred miles of South African brush, how could I be lost in a dozen acres of English woodland? If I kept to the paths, I would be sure to come to the house eventually.

My confidence seemed to be justified, for after a few minutes walking, I saw a man ahead of me on the path, walking slowly in the same direction as myself. I had turned off my torch to conserve the battery, and didn't recognise the figure before me in what dim light filtered through the heavy cloud cover, but whether it was a local man returning home or one of Lady Charteris' guests, they would probably be able to help me find her house. I tried hailing the man, but he didn't respond so I assumed he must be a

little hard of hearing. Accordingly, I lengthened my stride and caught up with the fellow and tapped him smartly on the shoulder to attract his attention.

As the moon made a brief appearance through a break in clouds, the figure turned towards me and I clearly saw its face for the first time. I had been expecting the noble features of one of Lady Charteris' gentleman guests, or perhaps the somewhat coarser, homely physiognomy of a rural labourer, but the *thing* that faced me now had no face at all, merely a few tattered shreds of skin that clung to the mouldering bones of its skull. The creature's appearance was so shockingly unexpected that I inadvertently let slip an expletive. My instinctive recoil took me several steps backwards, which was fortunate as the thing took a swipe at me with a hand from which the flesh had fallen to expose a bony claw. A moment later, the moon hid herself behind the clouds and the details of the frightful horror before me were lost in the general gloom.

I backed away, but the creature followed me, shambling towards me with its arms outstretched. Leaving the path, I turned and fled blindly into the adjacent woods. It wasn't until I stumbled and put out my hand to prevent a fall that I realised I had drawn my revolver. The heft of the weapon steadied my nerves somewhat and I began once more to take note of my surroundings. By the carefully shielded light of my torch, I set off between the trees, calling on the skills I learned in the African bush to make as little disturbance as possible.

Suddenly, a roaring shriek split the night. The sound reminded me of the furious howl of a lioness in pain or rage, but this lioness was grown huge beyond anything I'd ever seen. Although several hundred yards away, the creature that made that noise was far too close and I felt the hairs rise on the back of my neck as I speeded up my progress through the woods. At least I had a direction now; I did not know where the house was, but I knew I didn't want to get any closer to whatever made that scream.

After a few minutes, I stepped out onto another path, somewhat wider and better tended than the one I had left. Two figures were stood about twenty feet away and as my foot crunched on the gravel of the path, they turned and started reeling brokenly towards me, reaching for me with hands rotted into bony claws. Almost of its own accord, my arm lifted to level my revolver at the shambling figures and I pulled the trigger. Although not as well practised as I have been, I couldn't miss at that range and I saw the nearest of the creatures stumble as my shot struck home. To my horror, the thing didn't fall and seemed barely slowed by a bullet that should have put it down. My finger tightened again and again, and I saw broken bone and rotten flesh burst from the creature as my shots ripped through it, but it kept coming. At almost point blank range, one of my shots caught the advancing monstrosity full in the face. Its rotten skull shattered and it finally fell to twitch spasmodically on the gravel.

The second horror was only a few steps away as I carefully took aim at its head and squeezed the trigger. There was a loud click. Frantically backing away, I searched my pockets for my spare rounds, but I had either neglected to bring them or had lost them during my flight through the woods. Ramming the useless pistol back into my pocket, I turned and ran along the path, hoping to outdistance my pursuer until I could break off a suitable tree limb to act as a cudgel. As happenstance would have it, I didn't need to for a few dozen yards down the path I came across a small potting shed with trowels, forks, shovels and an axe. I hefted the latter and turned to face my attacker. Although immensely strong and inhumanly durable, the creature was quite slow and clumsy in a fight, and its skull proved to be as fragile as its comrade's had been.

I stood, panting gently in the darkness, whilst I considered what I should do next. Although I had now bested two of them, I had no idea how many of the creatures there might still be in the wood, and I certainly did not want to meet whatever it was that had roared whilst armed only with an axe. Although my friends may be in some danger, I hoped that they would be safe in the house and amongst the gentlemen there were some who were familiar with arms. Alone and lost in the woods, there was little I could offer by way of succour until daylight showed me more of my situation.

I doubted that the things I had fought had the skill to climb. Accordingly I found myself a suitable tree and settled myself in the branches, cradling the axe in my arms, and drew my coat about me to wait for daylight.

Nothing came to disturb me as I lay half-dozing in a crook of the tree throughout the night, although I was roused to full wakefulness several times by distant gunfire and by the horrible howling noise, although the latter never sounded as close as it had the first time I heard it. By the time the sun lightened the eastern horizon, I was cold and stiff but had reached some conclusions about my situation.

The three creatures I had encountered were clearly dead. I had come across stories of the walking dead before; native witch doctors practising *dijumbe* claimed to be able to restore a semblance of life to the recently deceased so as to make *zoumbé*, slaves who never tired. This same belief had been carried to the American colonies amongst slaves to form one of the basic beliefs of the practise of *voudoun*. Clearly, some powerful malign magic was in force. Although the ones that I fought had moaned and mumbled, I didn't believe them capable of the roaring I had heard. I had only ever heard one roar at a time, so there was something else out in the woods but it was probably alone. Judging solely from the sound, it was large, strong, angry and powerful.

The first thing I needed to do was to see if I could get some more ammunition. When it was light enough, I climbed down to the ground and set off towards where I believed I had left my car, navigating largely by luck. By going cautiously, and by walking through the woods parallel to the paths rather than along them, I eventually made my way back to my car without having to confront any of the creatures, although I saw a few of them lurching along in the distance.

I was extremely glad to find Mr. Braithwaite and Sergeant Baxter at the cars. They had been with the rest of Lady Charteris' guests in the house overnight and had set off this morning to see if they could start any of the cars. I told them what I had seen during the night and they told me what they knew of what had happened in the house. Some of the following I learned later from others of the party, but I present it here as a coherent whole.

It seems that a number of the League had taken up Lady Charteris' invitation and had met to discuss progress with our various investigations. Lady Charteris had also had her husband brought from his residence in the Scottish borders. Hugo, Lord Elcho, was an unfortunate who still suffered from his part in the Great War and Lady Charteris had brought him so that Dr. Lawrence would be able to spend some time with him.

The unexpected events of the weekend seem to have started when Mr. Flynn accidentally burned himself on a hot kettle. Although the wound itself caused little concern, the burn blistered Mr. Flynn's arm,

marring a black sun tattoo he had there and releasing a powerful and malevolent invisible spirit, which had been bound within it. This, it seems, was the awful beast I had heard roaring in the woods. It seems that many years ago, Mr. Flynn had been present at the opening of an Egyptian tomb which had been guarded by some sort of demonic spirit. This terrible guardian had pursued Mr. Flynn and his companions as they fled across the desert, killing them one by one until only Mr. Flynn survived. Staggering through the blazing sands, he had come across an ancient monastery and the monks had taken him in. Recognising the nature of that which pursued him, the monks realised that it could not be defeated or evaded, only contained. They somehow managed to fight the beast until it was weakened enough for them to bind it into the tattoo on Mr. Flynn's arm.

Now the creature was free again and apparently intended to complete its task of slaying Mr. Flynn and all his companions, albeit that these were new companions. As a sort of *uber*-psychopomp, the demon had powers over the dead and had restored a semblance of life to a number of local bodies to act as its agents. These were the *zoumbé* I had encountered and which had been making attacks against Lady Charteris' house at irregular intervals throughout the night.

Shortly after sunset the previous night, Miss Celia Blume had located a spider, which had been mounted as part of a display until it had been animated by the demon. Unfortunately, Miss Blume found the spider when it bit her in her bed and only the swift intervention of Dr. Lawrence prevented the action of its enlivened venom.

After the accidental release of the demon, Hugo Lord Elcho had been disturbed by visions of impending danger. After covering the walls of his rooms with scrawled pictures of bodies, demons, eyes and triangles, Hugo had broken out of the house and fled into the surrounding woodland, screaming that death was coming, had been talking to him and that he knew its name. Two rescue missions were attempted by those within the house, but the *zoumbé* proved to be too strong. Poor Hugo had been found dead near the house shortly after dawn. His eyes had been extracted and were found in the hands of Captain Leighton when he awoke.

Lady Charteris' house is built in the lee of a rock formation known as the Shining Cliff, due to a preponderance of quartz in the oolitic matrix, which gives a glittering appearance when the sun strikes it. At the foot of the cliff, just behind the house, is a small cave, which had been home to a number of witches in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. True to the nature of the times, these poor unfortunates were dragged from their cave and burned by religious zealots and their bodies had been dumped in the woods.

Earlier in the day, members of the League had found the cave and Miss Fawcett had translated the ancient inscription in the wall, which talked of the witches' ability to summon spirits and talk to the dead. Another of the witches' texts explained that the witches had hidden their books and three amulets when they began to fear an attack from their neighbours, and described where these items could be found. One of the amulets was snatched from a *zoumbé* that made an ill-advised attempt to enter the house through a window. The witches used a triangular wooden shape as a protective symbol and several of these had appeared in the vicinity of the house during the night.

During our conversation, Mr. Braithwaite and Sergeant Baxter had been working on the cars but unfortunately they had been impossible to start,

although there didn't seem to be anything mechanically wrong with them. I determined that I had no additional ammunition in my car, but decided to carry my empty pistols in the hope that one of the gentlemen at the house might be able to give me a spare round or two; a hope which in the end proved unfounded despite the number of 'last' bullets Mr. Flynn was able to find. Mr. Braithwaite, Sergeant Baxter and I returned to Lady Charteris' house and I made my apologies for my late arrival, which Lady Charteris graciously accepted.

Given the events of the previous evening, our course of action was plain; we needed to bind the demon once more into a suitable host. To do this we would need to summon it and weaken it. To weaken it, we would have to fight it somehow. To summon it, we would need to use the witches' ritual, which required the demon's name. To learn the demon's name, we would have to use another of the witches' spell to talk to Hugo. To use the witches' spells, we would have to visit the locations described in their texts and recover their spell books.

Accordingly, the greater part of the League set off together to find an island in a lake described in one of the witches' documents and recognised by Lady Charteris as one that she and her siblings would play on in their childhoods. We reached the lake without incident, to learn that the small boat used by the young Charteris children had not been maintained and that the only way to reach the island was now to swim. Mr. Braithwaite gallantly offered to brave the chilly waters and after doffing his outer garments, he boldly threw himself into the lake. The island in question was some fifty yards from the shore where we stood and reaching it was the work of but a few minutes. Concealed by the dense undergrowth at the margins of the island, Mr. Braithwaite spent some time searching between the trees before he located a small box buried in a shallow depression beneath a wooden triangle. With some care, Mr. Braithwaite uncovered the box and returned to the lake shore, keeping one arm aloft so as to keep the box contents dry.

After a brief examination to confirm the apparent age of the box and to establish that the seals upon it remained in place, the group returned to Lady Charteris' house with the shivering Mr. Braithwaite. Once returned to the relative safety of the house, and with Mr. Braithwaite ensconced in a hot bath, we cautiously broke the seals on the witches' box and opened it to find another amulet and a number of papers. Whilst Miss Fawcett set about the laborious work of translating the witches' barely legible scrawl, the rest of the League debated our other main obstacle - how to weaken the demon sufficiently to allow us to bind it again. Our debate on this point was abruptly terminated by Lord Arthur, who simply said that he would "deal with it at the appropriate time", if he could have the assistance of Captain Leighton, who had been able to see it when it appeared from Mr. Flynn's arm, despite it being invisible.

A small group of the more physical members of the League set off to try to locate the rest of the witches' ritual paraphernalia, which had been concealed in a number of small caves along the Shining Cliff. Despite occasional clashes with the demon's *zombé* servants, we succeeded in this mission without injury and returned to Lady Charteris' house with the final amulet.

Whilst we had been out, Miss Fawcett had made a startling and rather unpleasant discovery. It seemed that it would be possible for us to summon the shade of the unfortunate Hugo, Lord Elcho, and ask him the name of the demon with which we contested, but to do so we would have to take his heart from his cadaver and burn it to ash under the newly-risen moon. As a qualified nurse, Mrs. Flora Darling volunteered to both obtain the necessary organ and then to wash and dress Hugo for burial.

Just after this was completed, the roaring of the demon, which had been heard throughout the day from a lesser or greater distance as we had travelled through the woods, suddenly sounded from very nearby. Lord Arthur rushed to the door, bearing a huge sword of ancient appearance, which seemed to be crafted of a dense and heavy metal and which bore a black sun symbol near the cross-piece. With this sword lifted in one hand and his other hand on the shoulder of Captain Leighton, Lord Arthur led a number of us, who had accompanied him to lend what support we could in his endeavours, down the path which leads from the door of Lady Charteris' house. Although we could see nothing except the trees and bushes, reddened by the setting sun, the captain gave every appearance of being able to see something on the path below us.

Pushing Captain Leighton behind him, Lord Arthur stood in the middle of the path and raised his sword into an *en garde* position. The roar sounded again, so loud and close that I couldn't tell where it came from. Captain Leighton screamed and tried to throw himself forwards at something only he could see. At Lord Arthur's request, myself and Mr. Braithwaite restrained the captain as well as we could whilst he tried to follow the directions that Captain Leighton shouted to him; forwards, strike high, duck, back, and so forth.

Although we could only see one side of the fight, it was clearly a titanic battle. Lord Arthur struck mighty blows at his invisible assailant and the demon's attacks rocked Lord Arthur, knocking him across the ground and at one point bringing him to his knees. With Captain Leighton screaming that the demon was charging at him, Lord Arthur made an immense effort and raised himself to his feet with his sword held out before him. Almost instantly he was knocked sideways and lay where he fell on the muddy ground, his sword at his side. At the same moment, a huge figure of dark, swirling air with glowing red eyes and long claws appeared, crouched over the fallen Lord Arthur.

With a visible foe before us, several of us leapt in wielding axes and clubs and rained blows on the demon. Although they didn't seem to actually hurt it, these were enough to drive the creature some paces up the path, which allowed us to recover Lord Arthur. Mr. Braddock reached down and took Lord Arthur's sword but was barely able to lift it. Using both hands, he raised it and swung it once at the demon, which backed further away, apparently having learned some respect for the strange weapon. With all his might, Mr. Braddock swung the sword again, but the demon stepped in past the wild blow and swept a clawed hand out to stretch his opponent on the ground.

I stepped forwards and, dropping the axe I held, took hold of the sword's grip. Taking a firm grip with both hands and exerting all my strength, I remained unable to lift the point. It came as little surprise to me that I am not of the right heroic mould, and I gladly yielded the sword to Mr. Braithwaite who was stood next to me. He seemed to have little trouble in wielding the arcane weapon and, flanked by myself and others armed with more mundane weapons, advanced upon the demon. It retreated before us and we pursued it slowly, swinging our varied arms at it whenever it seemed to gather itself again. Suddenly it lunged at us and caught Mr. Braithwaite with a clawed hand across the abdomen. Barely pausing, Mr. Braithwaite struck at the demon and we all followed up. For a moment it stood its ground, but then it turned and moved swiftly into the woods, whereupon some stood guard whilst others of the League gathered the wounded and made their way back to Lady Charteris' house.

It transpired that Mr. Braddock had merely received a glancing blow from the creature and that his apparent collapse had been due more to shock than to any debilitating injury. The wound that Mr. Braithwaite had taken, however, was more severe and it was a wonder to me how he had continued to belabour the demon after receiving it. Mrs. Darling took some pains over binding up his ribs and stated that he might be able to move, carefully, after some rest. Unfortunately, Lord Arthur was another matter. I am not alone amongst the League in having undertaken military service, and I have seen enough injured men to know at first glance that Lord Arthur was now beyond any aid we might provide for him, other than perhaps if any of our number had been ordained. The League stood or sat uncomfortably around Lady Charteris' parlour, our silence broken only by Lord Arthur's laboured breathing. After some final words to the devoted Mrs. Darling, Lord Arthur sank into his final, endless sleep.

Disheartened by our loss, the members of the League debated how we should proceed with the various magical rituals we intended to undertake. Several rôles were defined in the witches' documents and we discussed who should essay each of them. Dr. Lawrence professed some experience in such matters and offered to act as the master of the ritual whilst Mr. Riley proposed himself as a tattooist for Mr. Flynn, since the sun design would need to be re-applied as part of the binding ceremony. As the hours slowly wore on towards evening, our nerves became somewhat frayed by anticipation of the night's events and by the irregular howling of the demon in the woods. Some members of the League allowed this tension to get the better of them; more than one voice was raised in altercation and I understand that two members of the League came to blows, although I was not present to witness that myself.

One of the witches' documents mentioned a clearing in the forest that was particularly potent for the workings of their magics, and we had determined to make our attempt there. Accordingly, as the sun began to set, we formed up with what weapons we had and the pieces of equipment we needed for the ritual and set off through the woodland gloaming. In the clearing, a fire had been set in which to incinerate Hugo's heart. Whilst those who would be performing the rituals disposed themselves around the fire, the rest of us dispersed amongst the trees to act as guards against the *zoumbé* attacks we anticipated when the demon learned of our plans.

We stood in the darkness between the trees for what felt like more than an hour but which was no more than fifteen minutes by my watch, trying not to attract attention to ourselves and remaining alert to any sound from the woods around us. Eventually the moon rose and cast a silvery light between the boughs to splash on the leaf-littered floor. Now every breeze stirred moving shadows and distracting patterns in the moonlight glow and we redoubled our efforts to keep watch. In the centre of the clearing behind us, Dr. Lawrence started the first ritual and we heard those taking part struggling with the unfamiliar words and phrases.

I lost track of how many creatures shambled in from the darkness to fight. Lady Evelyn Herbert stood to my right with a shotgun and unloaded shell after shell at the monsters that attacked us. The impact from her shots was enough to knock the *zoumbé* down so that I could step in with my wood axe. Working as a pair, Lady Herbert and I managed to despatch half a dozen of the monsters and I could hear shouts and the sporadic sounds of combat at other places around the clearing.

Some people say that once a man is past the age of thirty, he is no longer able to learn new things; this is enshrined in the old see about teaching old dogs new tricks. I can personally refute this claim, for on this evening I myself learned an important new fact - never approach a fallen

zoumbé casually. In my case, the price I paid was to have my leg savagely bitten by the creature before I could crush its skull. The pain was intense, but not intolerable, and I was able to make my way to the centre of the clearing where Mrs. Darling was providing emergency first aid. Now one of the walking wounded, I became part of the inner ring of League members who were combating any *zoumbé* that made it past the outer cordon of guards.

During the *zoumbé* onslaught and the consequent binding of my injury I had been somewhat distracted and unable to watch the ritual taking place in the centre of the clearing, so it came as a great shock to me to suddenly see the demon appear at the edge of the woods and slowly move towards us. The chanting from those near the fire increased in volume and pitch as the dark and monstrous form glided silently towards them across the forest floor. A few gunshots echoed through the trees but either their instigators missed their target or bullets were ineffective against the demon since its approach was not slowed. The ritualists intoned the syllables of the monster's name over and over again, louder and louder. Without warning, a *zoumbé* reared up from the darkness in front of me and I swung at it to keep it back. The demon stepped within the circle of light cast from the fire in the middle of the clearing. The chanting reached a crescendo and the creature's roar screamed out across the clearing, echoed by one from Mr. Flynn.

There was a sudden stillness and we realised that the form of the demon had vanished, returned once more to captivity within a tattoo. At the same moment, the *zoumbé* we were fighting returned to lifeless flesh, dropping where they had stood. Silence reigned for several seconds through the woods as we came to understand that we had been victorious, and then many people started talking all at once, congratulating each other and discharging the release of tension in an almost jocular manner. It was some minutes before we had sobered enough to gather ourselves and our equipment together and start the walk back to Lady Charteris' house.

With my injured leg, it was a painful distance to walk and I was very glad when Mr. Braithwaite offered himself as an ersatz crutch. Despite the extremely severe wound he had himself received earlier in the evening, he proved a most able support in my hour of need, although he seemed distracted by some matter and was wont to stare thoughtfully out at the darkened woods as we made our way through them. We formed a rearguard for the returning party although it seemed that all the *zoumbé* must have fallen with their creator for we saw nothing to threaten us. After assisting me to a comfortable chair in Lady Charteris' sitting room, Mr. Braithwaite returned to the verandah outside from which he continued to stare at the woods as if in some dark humour. I later learned that he left the house and spent the night in the woods, as I had done the previous night, although by breakfast he seemed to have recovered his spirits.

To be honest, it was not a boisterous evening despite our success and the confinement of the demon. The loss of Lord Arthur was sorely felt by the League, although I heard a number of stories which acted in some way to mitigate against the sadness; that Lord Arthur was not entirely human - immensely strong, hundreds of years old, possibly a later King Arthur. I cannot recall with whom these tales originated, but by the end of the evening it seemed to be accepted by common assent that the League had harboured some 'power of good' which had expended itself in our defence.

I suspect that some of the League had looked upon membership of it as a pastime, not necessarily frivolous but certainly not bearing a level of responsibility and danger which might lead to one's demise. The death's of Lords Elcho and Arthur had put paid to this belief, and it was clear that

some members were reconsidering their agreement to participate in the investigations.

A lesser concern which weighed upon our consideration was that although we had overcome the demon and confined it once again, it remained within Mr. Flynn and could re-emerge any time the new tattoo was damaged in the same way that the old one was. This would be dangerous for Mr. Flynn and any who were with him at the time; we were fortunate in some respects that this should happen whilst we were secluded from others and had a number of competent members of the League to render assistance. What might happen next time hardly bore thinking about. Mr. Flynn was advised to purchase a leather bracer to wear over the tattoo as some protection.

Even in the morning, when, after a hearty breakfast, we learned that our automobiles were operable again (although, of course, with my injured leg I had to rely on a lift from the taxicab Lady Evelyn had ordered), the general mood of the ensemble was somewhat subdued. We held a brief meeting of the League members who remained (Miss Sarah Hunter-Fitzsimmons had departed during the night having apparently had some news of her father), during which we agreed that Mr. Braddock and Mr. Slim would travel to Egypt to pursue lines of enquiry about the artefacts uncovered by Lady Evelyn's father there. Mr. Black had sent several members of the League a letter asking us to remember that we would be unable to claim expenses for our investigation without rendering up some account of what we had done. I brought up the issue of Sir Reginald's other deposit box and the League agreed to ask me to follow it up with Mr. Black as trustee of the estate.

So we concluded the weekend, successful in the main part and considerably wiser about the risks we may face.

#### Post scriptum

Some few weeks after these events, several members of the League met in York to attend the theatre for a performance of Noël Coward's amusing new comedic piece, *Private Lives*.

As we waited for the curtain to lift for the first act, our conversation turned to the events of the weekend at Lady Charteris'. Mr. Flynn made us aware that if he were to fall, we would be able to prevent the emergence of the demon through the preservation of his tattoo by means of embalming or mummifying his body. Mr. Riley immediately offered his family's services should this become necessary.



