



*The*  
**EXPLORERS GUILD**



**VOL. 1**

*by*  
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*&*  
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. . .

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**ATRIA BOOKS**

*New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi*



"THERE IS A QUALITY IN THESE ANCIENT VISTAS, AS THEY BREAK  
UPON THE LONE RIDER, IN THE STILL HOURS OF THE MORNING..."

**THE**  
**EXPLORERS**  
**GUILD**

VOLUME  
ONE

A PASSAGE to SHAMBHALA

.....

Being an INTRODUCTION  
to that SECRET SOCIETY  
.....

And an Account of CERTAIN  
TRAVELERS in their  
FAR-FARING SEARCH  
for the SACRED CITY

— Yrs. 1912-1918 —



## GENTLE READER:

The cities of the world—or the decent ones, I should say—have in common a certain unassuming door, and you may find it if you are hunting in the quieter districts with an eye to things that are not exactly hidden, but designed rather to discourage notice. The tourist's literature will carry nothing about it, and it will be so familiar to the mind of the local that he would not dream of pointing you there. But I can tell you, by way of helping you along, that there are typically three things on or about this door: a flagstaff, a weather-effaced coat-of-arms and, always, some representation of the Latin motto *Cognoscere*.

Your next discovery, unless you are only noting the door and passing on (which I understand counts for sport among a certain class of traveler)—But I say, you will find next that the door has no lock; and that no matter where you are, in whatever corner of the world, once you have entered through it you will set foot on a Turkey runner, and you will hear a muffled creaking as the planks beneath it take your weight. You will be assailed by smells of sandalwood, cigar smoke, gun oil, aged paper and preserved animal hide. And you will see all about you the trophies



*Scarab compact case with false bottom, from Mozayaf Castle, Marrakesh. Held poisoned pastilles given to Moulay ben Walad "The Boy Pasha" by his Sudanese concubine.*

*.....  
Coll. Ex. Gld.  
Hong Kong*

and mementos of travel, and recurring motifs of cartography and navigation. There is, in fact, such a pronounced uniformity to the scene that if you have relived it in more than one city you will experience a moment's dislocation or *déjà vu*, as though there were a thousand doors from Boston to Bangalore all giving into this same vestibule.

In the colder latitudes, there will be a fire kept in the front hall; if ice is available, you will hear it rattling in tumblers. The language of conversation—for there is always a drone of conversation—will vary by locale, as will the complexion of the speakers (though not, again, as much as you might suppose). Otherwise, the gentlemen of the outer rooms tend to be 'citizen of the world' types, inclining to stoutness and to age, most of them considerably well-off, and all with at least one story of personal exploit they are keen to share.

They will tell you (certainly if asked; even odds if not) that *Cognoscere* means 'to know,' from the Latin. They may also tell you this motto comes from an old fable, in which a boy vanishes from a cathedral in Manila and appears three days later, calling up from a storm drain outside the Bruneian summer palace. The boy, pulled from the drain and carried half-dead to his mother, utters the word *cognoscere* and faints into that good lady's arms.

It is not the most entertaining fable, as these things go. But the gentlemen who tell it say this is the very model of adventure, and a fine illustration of *cognoscere*, as they construe the word in these halls: a boy, you see, desires *to know* where the Spanish catacombs lead. And with no more motive than this, carrying his life in his hands, expectant of I know not what, he goes headlong into the darkness. For his pains he finds not only the answer to the catacombs' riddle, but an old escape tunnel of the maharajahs as well, a thing disused for centuries, which you might pay eight Philippine pesos for a tour of today.

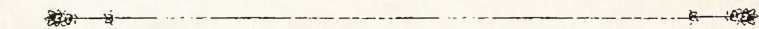
'And the boy's name,' the old men will conclude, with a portentous lift

of eyebrow, dipping a match to a pipe-bowl—'... That boy's name was Augustus.' Which I don't suppose will mean very much to you. But they will take a few meditative puffs and add: 'Founder of our *little club*, you know.'

That is to say, it is not just a fable, this story. Some very real boy had this very same ordeal beneath the Philippine city—and had a great many adventures besides—and lived eventually to found this not-altogether-secret order of kindred souls into which you have stumbled. For you are among *explorers* now, if you have not yet guessed it. It is their object, and the *raison d'être* of this society, to throw light into the shadowed corners of the earth, just as the boy Augustus must map out the darkness beneath Manila in his own day. The desire *to know* as the impetus to *action*, you see. Ideally with an element of risk, and crowned with some revelation or discovery in *Terra Incognita*.

It may surprise you, as you survey the rather settled old types in the club's outer rooms, that each man here has inked in his own blank space on the map of the world. Indeed, it is a requisite of membership that he would have done so; and I believe most here can represent credibly that they *have*. It may be some of the new memberships were won by dint of 'discovering' a novel way up Kilimanjaro, or by standing for a portrait in some square of desert or jungle where Christian man had so far, strictly, omitted to set his foot. But what of that? We needn't all be da Gamas. And I should think, what with the advance of man, and the dwindling of the undiscovered places and so forth, that the opportunities for today's explorer mightn't be what they once were.

Now: you are free to form your own opinion of these men, but I would hesitate to call them ridiculous. As dinner company, for one thing,



*Miniature sarcophagus from the tomb of Pharaoh Semerkhet II. Stolen shortly after excavation and believed accursed. Appeared 1907, Vakkil Bazaar (Persia). Trader who had re-fashioned relic into a cigarette lighter had also presumably died in result. His name & date of decease inscribed on reverse.*

*.....  
Coll. Ex. Gld. San Francisco*





*Pickled death's-head  
soldier from 'Terry's  
Breadfruit Army.'  
Mannikin of carved  
breadfruit, reeds  
and boot-polish, used  
in the rescue of Sir  
Terrence Glyde,  
Tonga Islands, 1789.*

*.....  
Coll. Ex. Gld.  
Rangoon (Burma)*

they are first-rate, and I say this having a wide experience of tables. Nor have they misled you, exactly, on the origins or the purpose of our club (though the story of young Augustus is on several points fallacious; let us set that aside). Yet just as all about the place there are wheels within wheels and meanings within meanings, so we draw both a literal and figurative distinction between the club's inner and outer rooms. And to know what truly goes on here, you and I will have to leave these bluff old men to their pipes and papers, and venture in a bit deeper....

You will learn, for instance, on penetrating to the quiet inner rooms of the club, that the motto *Cognoscere* is imperfectly rendered as 'to know.' For the Greeks and Romans it meant something more like 'to acknowledge a thing that is *already known*.' Which will give you a slightly developed sense of our mission. We are constituted to explore and to extend man's knowledge of the world, it is

true; but never with the sense that the Unknown is unknown to anyone but man himself.

It is the boast of modernity, you see, that man has mapped and measured, claimed and contested this earth down to its last inch. He has tamed its moods and subdued its monsters, and lit it from end to end with the fires of his ingenuity, till it holds no more horrors for him. So we are assured. Yet we who have been canvassing this same earth through the centuries—who have been every place on it that you would care to go, and many more that you would not—we incline to a different view. We find there are elements and beings and systems of intelligence that our sciences would scarcely suspect; and that these not only exist but coexist with the ones we know, in places and in ways and that our reason must refuse outright. There is a whole Unknown World, as we see it, that does

not diminish with the advance of man or with the spread of civilization. One does not dispatch it from the world simply by throwing light upon it, as you would drive rats from a home. More often, as we discover, these points of meeting between Reason and Science and the Dark Unknown are only where one's troubles begin.

This will all sound a bit wild to you, I do not doubt. Yet I have been myself in the margins of the world and have seen such things at first-hand. I would tell you this Unknown World is like nothing you have ever dreamt, but that you might have dreamt it exactly. I would tell you it lies far removed from you, who read these pages in your rooms well-lit and warm, but that it features in all things, and the night like a tide brings it right to your window.

And just as this Unknown World lies at the heart of all enquiry in the inner chambers of our club, so it represents the subject of the accounts that follow. I would give you, in these pages, a glimpse into *Terra Incognita*, and a view of its inhabitants and its strange workings, now that you have found your own door, as it were, into the Explorers Guild.

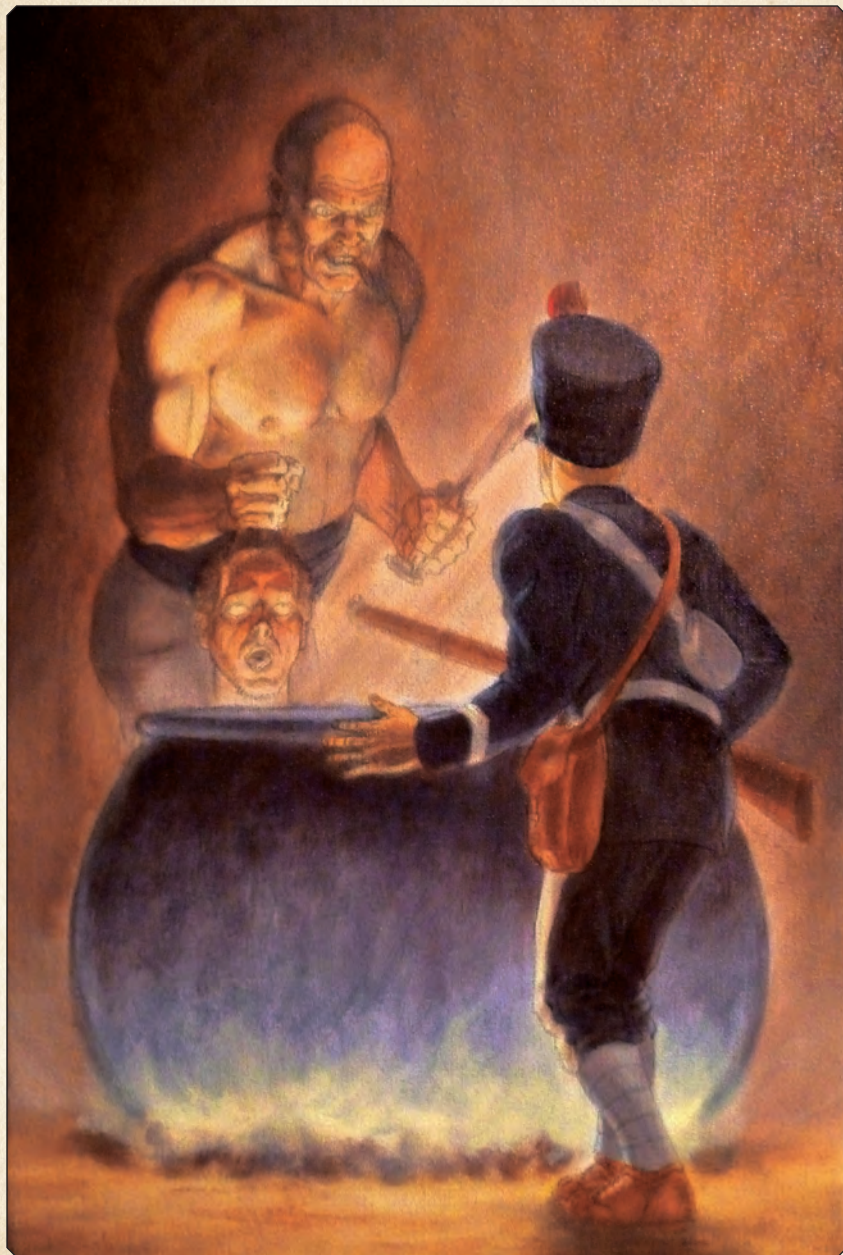
— E. W. Blake

*Series Curator*

*Lowring-on-Hudson, NY*

19—





"THE BRAVERY OF THE COMPANY'S RUNNERS IS SOMETHING OF A BY-WORD IN INDIA, BUT IT DOES HAVE ITS LIMITS; AND HERE, IF YOU LIKE, IS ONE OF THEM."

## BOOK ONE

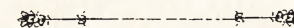
*- of Five -*



*Introduces a*  
**STRANGE DIVERSION**  
*alongside the*  
**ROAD OF HISTORY;**

. . .

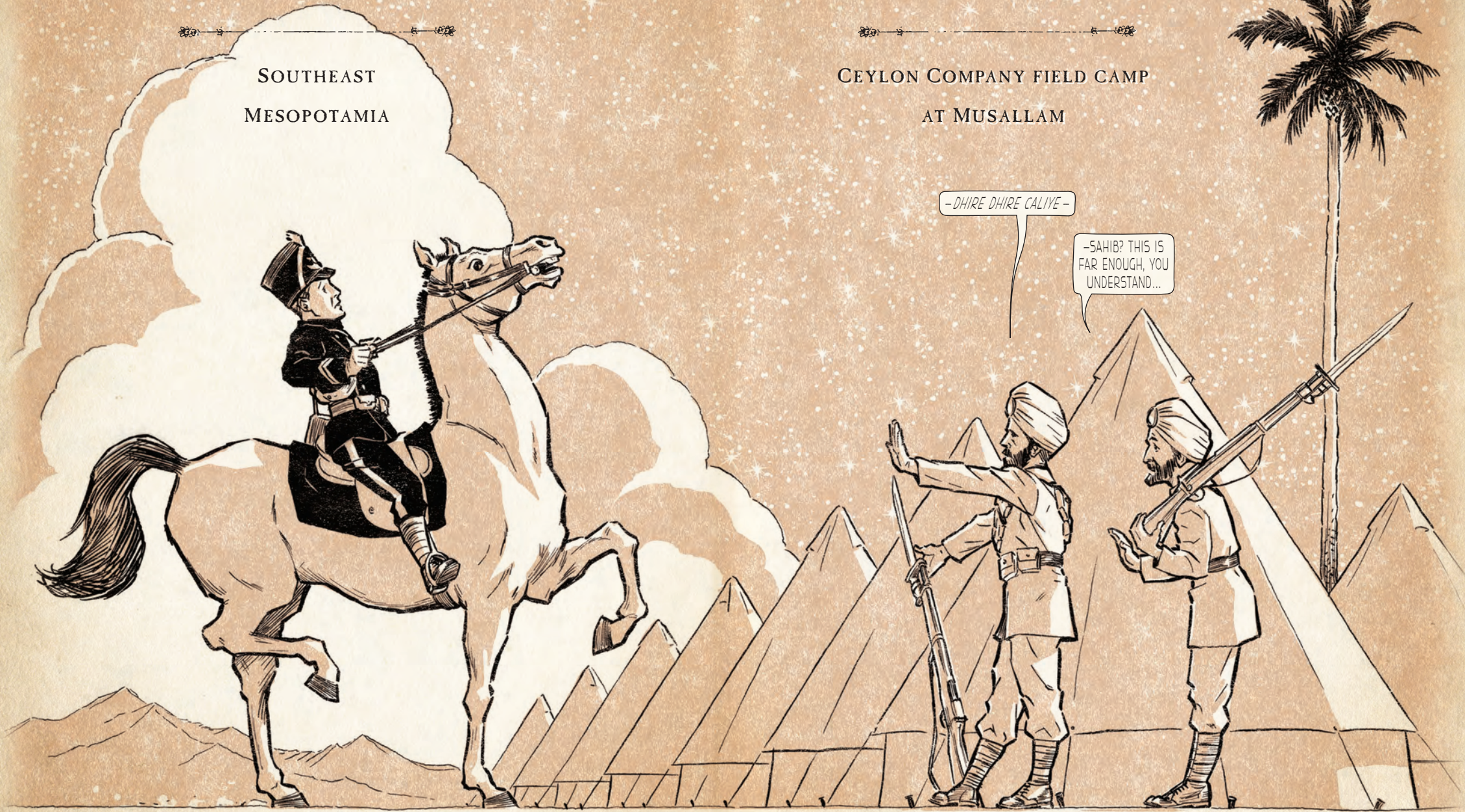
*While the*  
**GREAT WAR**  
*proves*  
**INSUFFICIENTLY GREAT**  
*for one*  
**CORPORAL BUCHAN**



30° 29' 33" N LAT | 47° 50' 39" E LONG

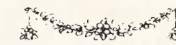
SOUTHEAST  
MESOPOTAMIA

CEYLON COMPANY FIELD CAMP  
AT MUSALLAM





I.



AUGUST, 1917. Balmy days, you may recall, for the Ceylon Company and the Anglo-Indian Arms. The 6th (Poona) Rifles have landed at Fao and chased the Sultan up through his crumbling forts on the Tigris, howling behind him like the loosed inmates of Bedlam. The Ottoman 38th, put to school under General Nixon, lies strewn now across the sands in ones and twos. Their commander has presented himself alone and barefoot at the gates of the capital, and will shoot himself there before the week is out.



The Company, in fine, is having a good run so far in Mesopotamia. And as the Near-East sun salaams to the tents and pavilions of her Indian guests, as the sentries challenge a young rider on the Basra Road, we find Lieutenant-General Sir John Nixon, our red-phized John Bull, commander of the Company armies in the theater, behaving precisely as he would at this hour at his club in Madras. Which is to say, he



has got himself staggering tight.

Sir John sifts through old intelligence reports, German propaganda fliers, bawdy prints from France, alternately scowling over one or another, holding them to the light.... This is strictly for show, you understand. Reading is out of the question for a man with this much liquor on board. Anyway, he has left his reading glasses at cantonments in India.

Seated beside General Nixon is his second, a Major-General Sir Charles Townshend, K.C.B., still known in 1915 as the hero of Chitral Fort. Like Nixon, Sir Charles is

regaling himself with 'Kabul whisky,' an unholy brand of arrack wine browned with tobacco juice. Unlike Nixon, Sir Charles is making no other pretense of effort.

It is easy—it is tempting—to see nothing out of the way here. Just two officers of the Company, taking their ease in the approved manner, as little excited as two bachelor baronets (which they are) whiling the evening at some country shooting lodge (which you're aware this is not).

But stay a moment. You may find the quiet a bit too perfect, and not just in the commanders' tent: silence, you will observe, overhangs the camp like a pall. And now you'll see Sir John is shifting in his seat, gnawing a section of his lip, his face flushed not just with drink but with an effort to subdue his thoughts. You'll see that even the mild eyes of



Sir Charles apprehend the view outside with something like dread.

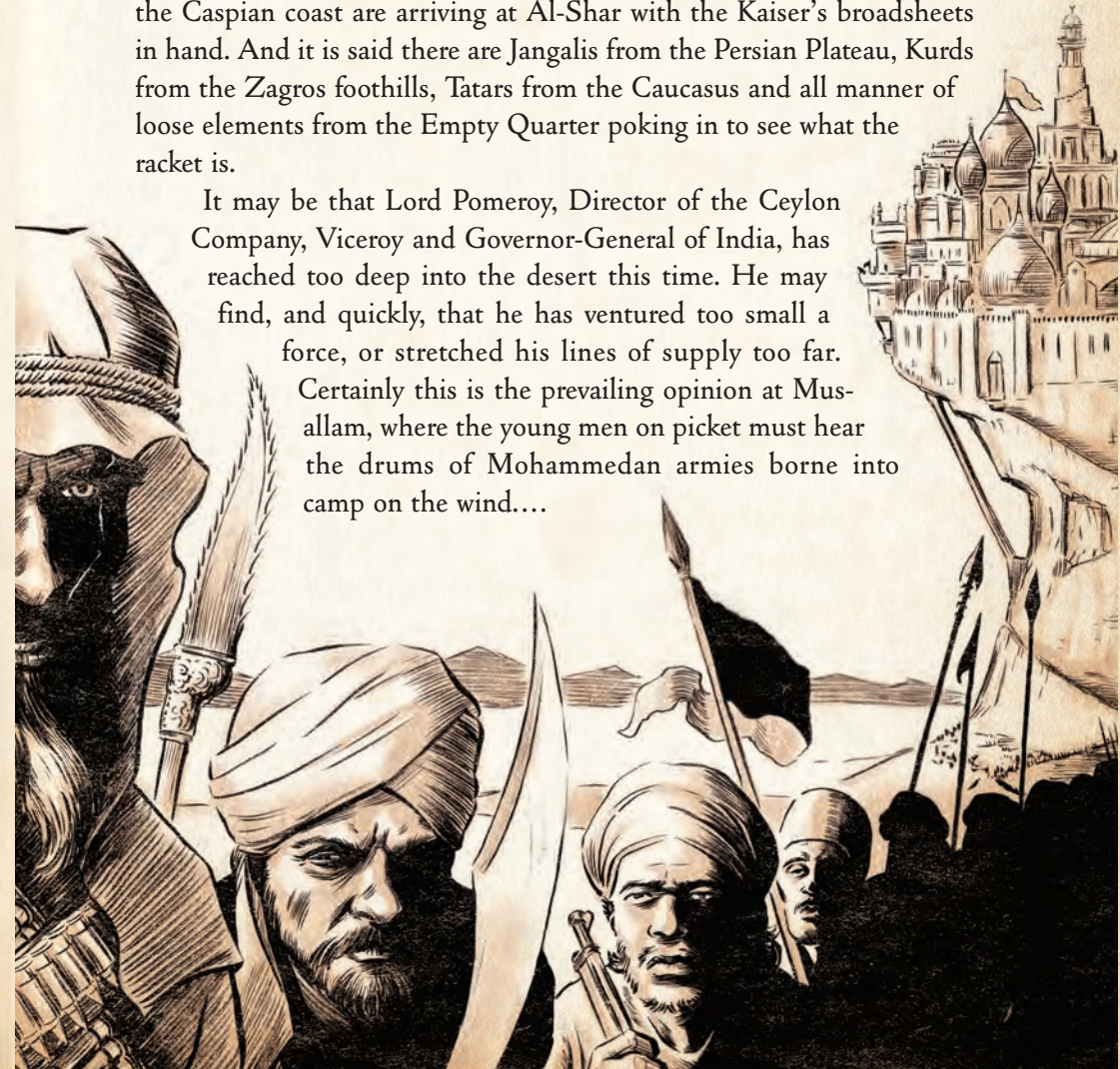
For the road to Baghdad is long, gentle reader. And the signs are everywhere tonight that Nixon and Townshend are headed the wrong way on it.

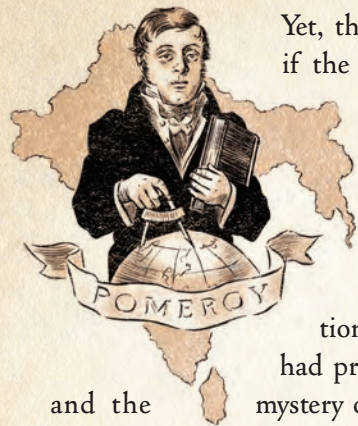
There's an Ottoman division, for one, whispered coming south from the Dardanelles at speed. Two thousand fighting Turkmen sprung from their trenches at Gallipoli, with a vanguard reported already at Al-Shar, just a day's march north of Nixon's position.

Berlin, too, has issued a rather lurid account of the Hindu-Christian crusade under way on the Tigris, and the German propaganda seems to have run the width of Araby. Jihadis from as far away as Palestine and the Caspian coast are arriving at Al-Shar with the Kaiser's broadsheets in hand. And it is said there are Jangalis from the Persian Plateau, Kurds from the Zagros foothills, Tatars from the Caucasus and all manner of loose elements from the Empty Quarter poking in to see what the racket is.

It may be that Lord Pomeroy, Director of the Ceylon Company, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, has reached too deep into the desert this time. He may find, and quickly, that he has ventured too small a force, or stretched his lines of supply too far.

Certainly this is the prevailing opinion at Musallam, where the young men on picket must hear the drums of Mohammedan armies borne into camp on the wind....





Yet, there are other sounds at Musallam, too. And if the men are merely quiet—if they have not yet deserted outright—you may credit another rumor that has come in with the late watches.

A mixed detail of sepoy and Midlands companies (and they all are mixed now, irrecoverably) had returned to camp short one lieutenant of grenadiers, you see. Questioned by the relieving officer, men of the detail had proved 'indisposed to speak, not to say dodgy;' and the mystery of the missing grenadier was not solved till he had rolled with an empty bottle of *eau-de-vie* from a credenza in the enlisted mess, rather surprising a steward who was laying tables for breakfast.

The grenadier's testimony had perforce been slight and a bit difficult to follow, but he seemed to have witnessed a company of cavalry skirting the camp by night, some two-score men wildly turned out and bristling with weapons, heading north and bent (according to the grenadier) on the Fiend's own errands. He would not be induced to say more and, on



sobering, had ceased speaking altogether (though it was demonstrated that the name 'Ogden,' pronounced in the grenadier's hearing, would send him into a kind of fugue, from which he was summoned with difficulty). His fellows on picket had denied his account out of hand, and recommended him for discipline at Fao. Thus, anyway, for the matter on record.

Now, the Indian Governor-General is known—is *believed*, I should say—to have chartered a company of deserters and mutineers under a man called Ogden. These Fifth Dragoon Guards—known widely as 'Ogden's Horse,' and as utter devils—represent just forty-odd men from the frontiers of India; yet they are credited with horrors out of counting on five continents and on the ships at sea. And though Pomeroy disclaims any knowledge of Ogden's dragoons, he is believed capable of raising them at any time and in all corners of the empire, like his own *djinn* of the lamp.

It may be, then, that he has conjured them once more for his Mesopotamian venture. Certainly the number counted by the grenadier, and their appearance, and the state of the witness—these were all consistent with the Fifth's reputation. They might be reducing Al-Shar at this very

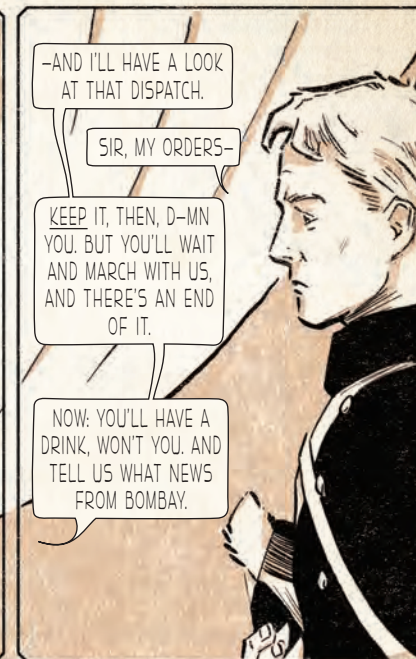
hour, beating a path north for Nixon's advance. Though again, as Nixon must reflect, they would be as apt to wait and train their guns at him, for this was their reputation also....

In any event—and here is the point—Nixon has been ordered ahead without delay. It is this fact rising out of all his calculations and looming incontrovertibly over all these shades and rumors. Tomorrow, Sir John will march into whatever happy mess the fates have prepared for him. And if his little expeditionary force isn't swallowed whole, if he doesn't end his war on the Sultan's rack or pegged out on the roadside by Ogden and his merry band, he will be spurred on to Baghdad, where Pomeroy would have him by the Christmas holiday, leading a choir of Imams in 'Silent Night,' I do not doubt.

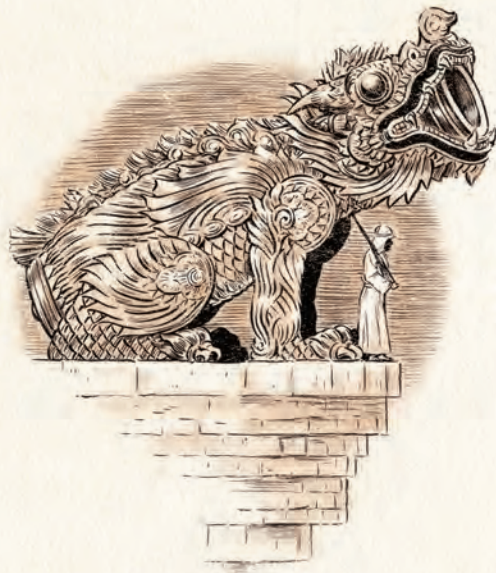
It is an unhealthy and undignified state of affairs all round, thinks Sir John, who was still, this morning, entertaining ideas of a leisurely run to the capital, a tour of the landmarks, laurels from HRH, speeches and portraits, &c. &c. And who now, if you must know, has had quite all the Mesopotamia he needs for this life.











## II.



THE CITADEL AT AL-SHAR commands a bend in the Tigris River about fifty kilometers south of Baghdad. Here was once an important river crossing and a spur of the old Silk Road. But it has long withered under the shadows of Ctesiphon and Baghdad, and the village today is probably much as it was when it greeted the eyes of Saladin.

The gun at Al-Shar is called the *Akh-Siru*, and, like many guns christened with a name, this is a weapon of some repute. Cast in Yuang China and made to throw a 98-cm stone ball, the *Akh-Siru* is a 'bombard' or monstrous forerunner of the cannon, and was already long obsolete when rolled west by the Mongols and sunk by them in the Caspian Sea. Whatever their reasons, or their method, it appears they did not sink the thing far enough, for it was recovered by the Mamluks; and it was these great scavengers who dragged it home with them and installed it god-knows-how on the heights at Al-Shar, where it remains in 1917, too big to shift and virtually indestructible. The *Akh-Siru* sees use today only on occasions of state or to suit the more impish moods of the Sharif Al-



Shar, whose birthdays and romantic conquests and spells of boredom are all equally represented in the smashed huts and river-vessels below.

Of course, the real wonder of the *Akh-Siru* is that it doesn't topple the garrison when it's deployed, and this you would appreciate on seeing the gun's situation over the town.

The Al-Shar garrison—or palace, if you like—sits perched on a sandstone column once merely vertical but cut into by the Romans and the weather until the butte, as you see it today, is actually wider at its crest than it is a third of the way down. And as its base diminished over the centuries, so the garrison itself grew under the Parthians, Sassanids, Turkmen and Ottomans, with each new tenant enlarging on the plans of the last. The bulwarks and towers and apartments of the latest design crowd right to the edge of the precipice, where they sit in deliberate outrage to Newtonian physics, needing just that last gust of wind—or last bird settling on just the right flagstaff—to send the whole works crashing to the desert floor.

Till then, as we say, the garrison at Al-Shar presents one of the more arresting sights on the Tigris. Something like a view of Noah's Ark, come to rest atop Mount Ararat. ... Or so it strikes one Corporal Buchan, as he bears down on the village this morning. Here, he thinks, knuckling sweat from an eye—Here is where Ogden waits. He will be somewhere in this great heap of domes and towers and minarets, whether fettered in the Caliph's dungeons or drinking from the man's skull; whether sporting with his men in the seraglio or...perhaps even now he's being challenged

to drink first from the Grand Vizier's goblet, with long-nailed courtiers and almond-eyed houris looking on, and the music of unseen players building to a frenzy....

Mr. Buchan is not usually given to flights of imagination, particularly when he is riding under orders. But you will recall he is bringing a sealed, unmarked case from the Viceroy into the land of the *Arabian Nights*, and that he's awaited here by the likes of John Ogden, a man as much figment as fact and introduced by all manner of lurid tales. There is a quality, too, in these ancient vistas, as they break upon the lone rider in the silent hours of the morning, that revives some of the more romantic notions of youth. Particularly where your rider is still just nineteen and a son of the Wild Provinces, and these notions were not so deeply buried in the first place.

We find Mr. Buchan, therefore, entering Al-Shar in a mode of abstraction this morning, if not half in a dream, with the long and gainly stride of the Arabian beneath him, a warming breeze coming off of the river and a high, whining sound overhead that would seem to be some desert bird proclaiming the dawn.

...Though again, it isn't a very likely spot for birds.



