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MICHAEL
MOORCOCK

THE WARLORD
OF THE AIR

A NOMAD OF THE TIME STREAMS NOVEL **1**

COMING SOON FROM TITAN BOOKS

A NOMAD OF THE TIME STREAMS

The Land Leviathan (April 2013)

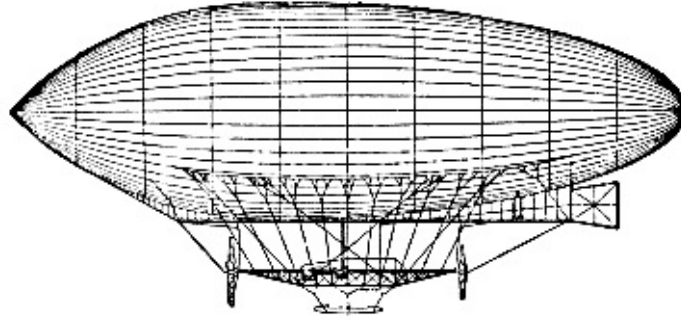
The Steel Tsar (August 2013)

A NOMAD OF THE TIME STREAMS NOVEL

THE FIRST ADVENTURE

THE WARLORD OF THE AIR

A SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE



MICHAEL MOORCOCK

TITAN BOOKS

The Warlord of the Air

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For Michael Cornelius Dempsey, who died, as he had lived, a captain of his own ship

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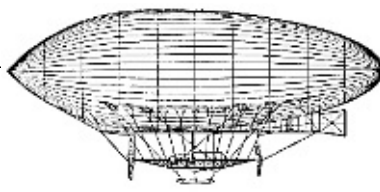
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FOREWORD

First published between 1971 and 1981, Michael Moorcock's *The Warlord of the Air* (or is it *The War Lord of the Air*?—editions vary), *The Land Leviathan* and *The Steel Tsar*—three books known collectively as “The Oswald Bastable Trilogy” or “A Nomad of the Time Streams”—look backwards, forwards and sideways at the same time.

In 1969, there were people going around seriously saying that science fiction would die as a genre after the moon landing. The future was here, so we didn't need to think about it any more. Certainly the genre had been around long enough by then for its earlier examples to seem comically outdated—all those books and stories where there's a breathable atmosphere on the moon, or astro-navigators fiddle with slide rules on their faster-than-light spaceships. Still, there were people who saw the beauty and the terror and (most importantly) the continued relevance of the futures which didn't happen.

In Moorcock's novels, army officer Oswald Bastable—the name comes from a series of books by E. Nesbit, author of *Five Children and It*—comes unstuck in time from his own era (1903) and tours three overlapping, yet different, imagined versions of the twentieth century... where the British Empire persists into the 1970s, technological advances lead to a war that leaves the world in ruins in the early 1900s and a Russian revolution did not lead to a Soviet state. Constant in all these fractured mirrors of our own history are airships, stately hold-overs from the exciting books of Jules Verne (*The Clipper of the Clouds*) and George Griffith (*The Angel of the Revolution*), and the atomic bomb (which arrived in fiction in 1914 in H.G. Wells' *The World Set Free*). The point is not, as in some meticulously constructed and argued alternative histories, to imagine how things might have been, but to confront the way things really were, as our collective urges for incompatible utopias brought about horrors beyond imagining. Though not averse to blaming individuals, these books are strong on collective responsibility: there are versions here of Joseph Stalin, Ronald Reagan, Enoch Powell and Harold Wilson, as sad little men whose small-minded blind spots, ambitions and cruelties bring about personal and global disasters. But no one is let off the hook, and we're all to blame.

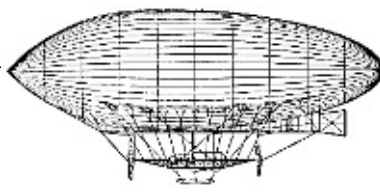
The voice of these novels is a perfect match for the Victorian and Edwardian authors evoked over and over in them... not just Wells, Nesbit and Griffith, but Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling (*With the Night Mail*), Saki (*When William Came*—a novel Moorcock brought back into print in the anthology *England Invaded*), George Tomkyns Chesney (*The Battle of Dorking*) and many other scientific romancers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moorcock can embrace, with

love, the idealism and imagination expressed in these writers' works, though as many were catastrophists as utopians, but recognises that they share in the collective responsibility for the way the world really turned out. A key influence on the steampunk movement in contemporary fantasy, these books are spikier, more clear-sighted and complicated than most superficially similar visions of technological Victoriana.

These books are Griffith-like yarns—full of scrapes, adventures, exotica, jokes, plot reversals and charm—but they're at heart serious, sobering visions. I am delighted they are available again, and I will you be.

KIM NEWMAN

London, 2013



DEAR READER

One of my favourite childhood writers was E. Nesbit, creator of *The New Treasure Seekers*, *The Railway Children*, *Five Children and It* and Oswald Bastable.

Nesbit was a socialist, a Fabian, a friend of H.G. Wells, G.B. Shaw and others. Her wit, irony, common sense and humanity informed her stories, especially those about Oswald Bastable, who was probably the first “unreliable narrator” I had encountered. It seemed to me that she put the very best of herself into those books, and I continue to value them for the way she made me see things freshly without ever appearing to preach. With Richmal Crompton’s William stories, E. Nesbit’s are among the few books specifically published for children that I remember enjoying.

I have always had an enthusiasm for late-Victorian and Edwardian fiction and look forward to a time when Arthur Morrison, W. Pett Ridge, Israel Zangwill and many others will at least be represented by a paperback or two. We let too much that is good and valuable in our culture slip away from us and almost vanish. We are inclined to mock writers for their “clichés”, when frequently they were the first to solve their technical problems with methods which only *became* clichés in the hands of later people. To read them in the context of their times is, perhaps a little paradoxically, to appreciate them as they were when they were first popular.

I am a huge admirer of Shaw and Wells and, while I never quite accepted their particular politics I find it difficult to understand why, supposedly because of the fall of the Eastern autocracies, so many people now patronise socialism as if it were merely an aberration or a “wrong path”. As I suggested to John Major when he told us that socialism was dead, he should not be too triumphant. After all, until his predecessor revived it, we thought feudalism pretty much over and done with, too.

Paternalism and centralism, the bane of capitalist as well as socialist politics, are for me the permanent enemy of democracy. It was my wariness of paternalism, especially as it is these days applied, which inspired this sequence. Paternalism (and its associated centralism) still deeply infects much of our modern political thinking. Apart from Prince Kropotkin, that most kindly of anarchist intellectuals, few of the great thinkers and artists of Wells’ day (including Wells) perceived or wished to examine what Rosa Luxemburg was to perceive—and for which she was attacked with brutal rhetoric by much of the orthodox left—that their social solutions, however well-meant, however they hoped to achieve the millennium, to give self-respect to “minorities” and the poor, were always doomed while they kept to their prescriptions. Still later, Orwell was attacked by the left for pointing this out and, most recently Andrea Dworkin has received similar criticism for refusing to accept the

consensual, easier view.

If we continue to make any sort of social progress, I suspect that the political battle lines of the twenty-first century will not be between socialism and capitalism but democracy and paternalism. The answer to paternalistic socialism (characteristic of almost all socialist states) is not *laissez-faire* capitalism, or centralized corporatism or monetarism, with all their attendant ills and intrinsic injustices, but real equality under the law—where all of us have equal voice, equal access to our democratic institutions and equal responsibility. Sadly, some of the democratic infrastructure in our society seems seriously under threat at present—is often attacked in the name of “freedom” (by which is usually meant freedom of choice of washing powder or telephone company or porn video)—and it is up to us, I think, to examine those institutions, remember why they were developed in the first place and perhaps protect them.

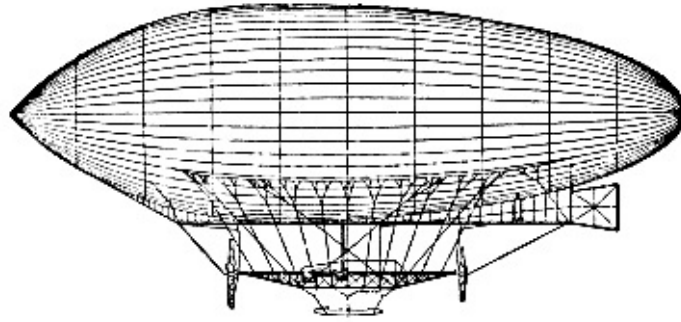
Together with *The Land Leviathan* and *The Steel Tsar*, these three simple stories attempted to explore some of the ideas— especially about imperialism and racialism—which I have explored in different ways in my Jerry Cornelius and Colonel Pyat books. The sequence is also my homage to those not-quite-forgotten writers of pre-1914 Britain whose humanity, curiosity and urgent sense of justice make their work as relevant—and as entertaining—to our time as it was to theirs, and I am dedicated with respect to W. Pett Ridge (author of *Mord Em'ly*) and to “Pett”, his son, whose interest in these books will probably have less to do with their didacticism than with their aeronautical credibility!

MICHAEL MOORCOC

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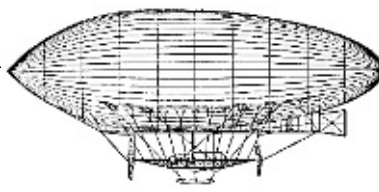
THE WARLORD OF THE AIR

A SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE



“The War is ceaseless. The most we can hope for are occasional moments of tranquility in the mid
of the conflict.”

—Lobkowi



EDITOR'S NOTE

I never met my grandfather Michael Moorcock and knew very little of him until my grandmother's death last year when I was given a box of his papers by my father. "These seem to be more in your line than mine," he said. "I didn't know we had another scribbler in the family." Most of the papers were diaries, the beginnings of essays and short stories, some conventional Edwardian poetry—and a typewritten manuscript which, without further comment, we publish here, perhaps a little later than I would have hoped.

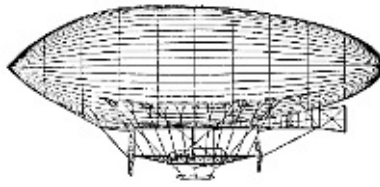
MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Ladbroke Grove

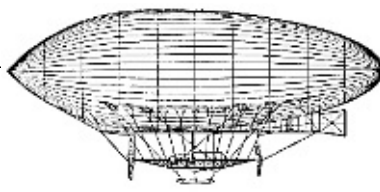
London

January 1971

BOOK ONE



HOW AN ENGLISH ARMY OFFICER ENTERED THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE AND WHAT HE SAW THERE



CHAPTER ONE

The Opium Eater of Rowe Island

In the spring of 1903, on the advice of my physician, I had occasion to visit that remote and beautiful fragment of land in the middle of the Indian Ocean which I shall call Rowe Island. I had been overworking and had contracted what the quacks now like to term “exhaustion” or even “nervous debility”. In other words I was completely whacked out and needed a rest a long way away from anywhere. I had a small interest in the mining company which is the sole industry of the island (unless you count religion!) and I knew that its climate was ideal, as was its location—one of the healthiest places in the world and fifteen hundred miles from any form of civilization. So I purchased my ticket, packed my boxes, bade farewell to my nearest and dearest, and boarded the liner which would take me to Jakarta. From Jakarta, after a pleasant and uneventful voyage, I took one of the company boats to Rowe Island. I had managed the journey in less than a month.

Rowe Island has no business to be where it is. There is nothing near it. There is nothing to indicate that it is there. You come upon it suddenly, rising out of the water like the tip of some vast underwater mountain (which, in fact, it is). It is a great wedge of volcanic rock surrounded by a shimmering sea which resembles burnished metal when it is still or boiling silver and molten steel when it is testy. The rock is about twelve miles long by five miles across and is thickly wooded in some places, bare and severe in other parts. Everything goes uphill until it reaches the top and then, on the other side of the hill, the rock simply falls away, down and down into the sea a thousand feet below.

Built around the harbour is a largish town which, as you approach it, resembles nothing so much as a prosperous Devon fishing village—until you see the Malay and Chinese buildings behind the façades of the hotels and offices which line the quayside. There is room in the harbour for several good-sized steamers and a number of sailing vessels, principally native dhows and junks which are used for fishing. Further up the hill you can see the workings of the mines which employ the greater part of the population, which is Malay and Chinese labourers and their wives and families. Prominent on the quayside are the warehouses and offices of the Welland Rock Phosphate Mining Company and the great white and gold façade of the Royal Harbour Hotel, of which the proprietor is one Minhe Olmeijer, a Dutchman from Surabaya. There are also an almost ungodly number of missions, Buddhist temples, Malay mosques and shrines of more mysterious origin. There are several less ornate hotels than Olmeijer’s, there are general stores, sheds and buildings which serve the tiny railway which

brings the ore down from the mountain and along the quayside. There are three hospitals, two of which are for natives only. I say "natives" in the loose sense. There were no natives of any sort before the island was settled thirty years ago by the people who founded the Welland firm; all labour was brought from the Peninsula, mainly from Singapore. On a hill to the south of the harbour, standing rather aloof from the town and dominating it, is the residence of the Official Representative, Brigadier Bland, together with the barracks which house the small garrison of native police under the command of a very upright servant of the Empire, Lieutenant Begg. Over this spick-and-span collection of whitewashed stucco flies a proud Union Jack, symbol of protection and justice to all who dwell on the island.

Unless you are fond of paying an endless succession of social calls on the other English people, most of whom can talk only of mining or of missions, there is not a great deal to do on Rowe Island. There is an amateur dramatic society which puts on a play at the Official Representative's residence every Christmas, there is a club of sorts where one may play billiards if invited by the oldest member (I was invited once but played rather badly). The local newspapers from Singapore, Sarawak and Sydney are almost always at least a fortnight old, when you can find them, *The Times* is a month to six weeks old and the illustrated weeklies and monthly journals from home can be anything up to six months behind by the time you see them. This sparsity of up-to-date news is, of course, a very good thing for a man recovering from exhaustion. It is hard to get hot under the collar about a war which has been over a month or two before you read about it or a stock market tremor which has resolved itself one way or the other by the previous week. You are forced to relax. After all, there is nothing you can do to alter the course of what has become history. But it is when you have begun to recover your energy, both mental and physical, that you begin to realize how bored you are—and within two months this realization had struck me most forcibly. I began to nurse a rather evil hope that something would happen on Rowe Island—an explosion in the mine, an earthquake, or perhaps even a native uprising.

In this frame of mind I took to haunting the harbour, watching the ships loading and unloading with long lines of coolies carrying sacks of corn and rice away from the quayside or guiding the trucks of phosphate up the gangplanks to dump them in the empty holds. I was surprised to see so many women doing work which in England few would have thought women *could* do! Some of these women were quite young and some were almost beautiful. The noise was deafening when a ship or several ships were in port. Naked brown and yellow bodies milled everywhere, like so much churning mud, sweating in the intense heat—a heat relieved only by the breezes off the sea.

It was on one such day that I found myself down by the harbour, having had my lunch at Olmeijer's hotel, where I was staying, watching a steamer ease her way towards the quay, blowing her whistle at the junks and dhows which teemed around her. Like so many of the ships which ply that part of the world, she was sturdy but unlovely to look upon. Her hull and superstructure were battered and

needed painting and her crew, mainly laskars, seemed as if they would have been more at home on some Malay pirate ship. I saw the captain, an elderly Scot, cursing at them from his bridge and bellowing incoherently through a megaphone while a half-caste mate seemed to be performing some peculiar, private dance of his own amongst the seamen. The ship was the *Maria Carlson*, bringing provisions and, I hoped, some mail. She berthed at last and I began to push my way through the coolies towards her, hoping she had brought me some letters and the journals which I had begged my brother to send me from London.

The mooring ropes were secured, the anchor dropped and the gangplanks lowered and then the half-caste mate, his cap on the back of his head, his jacket open, came springing down, howling at the coolies who gathered there waving the scraps of paper they had received at the hiring office. As he howled he gathered up the papers and waved wildly at the ship, presumably issuing instructions. I hailed him with my cane.

“Any mail?” I called.

“Mail? Mail?” He offered me a look of hatred and contempt which I took for a negative reply to my question. Then he rushed back up the gangplank and disappeared. I waited, however, in the hope of seeing the captain and confirming with him that there was, indeed, no mail. Then I saw a white man appear at the top of the gangplank, pausing and staring blankly around him as if he had not expected to find land on the other side of the rail at all. Someone gave him a shove from behind and he staggered down the bouncing plank, fell at the bottom and picked himself up in time to catch the small seabag which the mate threw to him from the ship.

The man was dressed in a filthy linen suit, had no hat, no shirt. He was unshaven and there were native sandals on his feet. I had seen his type before. Some wretch whom the East had ruined, who had discovered a weakness within himself which he might never have found if he had stayed safely at home in England. As he straightened up, however, I was startled by an expression of intense misery in his eyes, a certain dignity of bearing which was not at all common in the type. He shouldered his bag and began to make his way towards the town.

“And don’t try to get back aboard, mister, or the law will have you next time!” screamed the mate of the *Maria Carlson* after him. The down-and-out hardly seemed to hear. He continued to plod along the quayside, jostled by the coolies, frantic for work.

The mate saw me and gesticulated impatiently. “No mail! No mail!”

I decided to believe him, but called: “Who is that chap? What’s he done?”

“Stowaway,” was the curt reply.

I wondered why anyone should want to stowaway on a ship bound for Rowe Island and on impulse I turned and followed the man. For some reason I believed him to be no ordinary derelict and he had piqued my curiosity. Besides, my boredom was so great that I should have welcomed any relief from it. Also I was sure that there *was* something different about his eyes and his bearing and that, if

could encourage him to confide in me, he would have an interesting story to tell. Perhaps I felt sorry for him, too. Whatever the reason, I hastened to catch him up and address him.

“Don’t be offended,” I said, “but you look to me as if you could make some use of a square meal and maybe a drink.”

“Drink?”

He turned those strange, tormented eyes on me as if he had recognized me as the Devil himself. “Drink?”

“You seem all up, old chap.” I could hardly bear to look into that face, so great was the agony I saw there. “You’d better come with me.”

Unresistingly, he let me lead him down the harbour road until we reached Olmeijer’s. The Indian servants in the lobby weren’t happy about my bringing in such an obvious derelict, but I led him straight upstairs to my suite and ordered my houseboy to start a bath at once. In the meantime I sat my guest down in my best chair and asked him what he would like to drink.

He shrugged. “Anything. Rum?”

I poured him a stiffish shot of rum and handed him the glass. He downed it in a couple of swallows and nodded his thanks. He sat placidly in the chair, his hands folded in his lap, staring at the table.

His accent, though distant and bemused, had been that of a cultivated man—a gentleman—and this aroused my curiosity even further.

“Where are you from?” I asked him. “Singapore?”

“From?” He gave me an odd look and then frowned to himself. He muttered something which I could not catch and then the houseboy entered and told me that he had prepared the bath.

“The bath’s ready,” I said. “If you’d like to use it I’ll be looking out one of my suits. We’re about the same size.”

He rose like an automaton and followed the houseboy into the bathroom, but then he re-emerged almost at once. “My bag,” he said.

I picked up the bag from the floor and handed it to him. He went back into the bathroom and closed the door.

The houseboy looked curiously at me. “Is he some—some relative, sahib?”

I laughed. “No, Ram Dass. He is just a man I found on the quay.”

Ram Dass smiled. “Aha! It is the Christian charity.” He seemed satisfied. As a recent convert (the pride of one of the local missions) he was constantly translating all the mysterious actions of the English into good, simple Christian terms. “He is a beggar, then? You are the Samaritan?”

“I’m not sure I’m as selfless as that,” I told him. “Will you fetch one of my suits for the gentleman to put on after he has had his bath?”

Ram Dass nodded enthusiastically. “And a shirt, and a tie, and socks, and shoes—everything?”

I was amused. "Very well. Everything."

My guest took a long time about his ablutions, but came out of the bathroom at last looking much more spruce than when he had gone in. Ram Dass had dressed him in my clothes and they fitted extraordinarily well, though a little loose, for I was considerably better fed than he. Ram Dass behind him brandished a razor as bright as his grin. "I have shaved the gentleman, sahib!"

The man before me was a good-looking chap in his late twenties, although there was something about the set of his features which occasionally made him look much older. He had golden wavy hair, a good jaw and a firm mouth. He had none of the usual signs of weakness which I had learned to recognize in the others of his kind I had seen. Some of the pain had gone out of his eyes, but had been replaced by an even more remote—even dreamy—expression. It was Ram Dass, sniffing significantly and holding up a long, carved pipe behind the man, who gave me the clue.

So that was it! My guest was an opium eater! He was addicted to a drug which some had called the Curse of the Orient, which contributed much to that familiar attitude of fatalism we equate with the East, which robbed men of their will to eat, to work, to indulge in any of the usual pleasures with which others beguile their hours—a drug which eventually kills them.

With an effort I managed to control any expression of horror or pity which I might feel and said instead:

"Well, old chap, what do you say to a late lunch?"

"If you wish it," he said distantly.

"I should have thought you were hungry."

"Hungry? No."

"Well, at any rate, we'll get something brought up. Ram Dass? Could you arrange for some food? Perhaps a cold collation? And tell Mnr. Olmeijer that I shall have a guest staying the night. We'll need sheets for the other bed and so on."

Ram Dass went away and, uninvited, my guest crossed to the sideboard and helped himself to a large whisky. He hesitated for a moment before pouring in some soda. It was almost as if he were trying to remember how to prepare a drink.

"Where were you making for when you stowed away?" I asked. "Surely not Rowe Island?"

He turned, sipping his drink and staring through the window at the sea beyond the harbour. "The what? Is Rowe Island?"

"Yes. The end of the world in many respects."

"The what?" He looked at me suspiciously and I saw a hint of that torment in his eyes again.

"I was speaking figuratively. Not much to do on Rowe Island. Nowhere to go, really, except back to where you came from. Where did you come from, by the way?"

He gestured vaguely. "I see. Yes. Oh, Japan, I suppose."

"Japan? You were in the foreign service there, perhaps?"

He looked at me intently as if he thought my words had some hidden meaning. Then he said, "Before that, India. Yes, India before that. I was in the Army."

"How—?" I was embarrassed. "How did you come to be aboard the *Maria Carlson*—the ship which brought you here?"

He shrugged. "I'm afraid I don't remember. Since I left— since I came back—it has been like a dream. Only the damned opium helps me forget. Those dreams are less horrifying."

"You take opium?" I felt like a hypocrite, framing the question like that.

"As much as I can get hold of."

"You seem to have been through some rather terrible experience," I said, forgetting my manners completely.

He laughed then, more in self-mockery than at me. "Yes. Yes. It turned me mad. That's what you'd think, anyway. What's the date, by the way?"

He was becoming more communicative as he downed his third drink.

"It's the twenty-ninth of May," I told him.

"What year?"

"Why, 1903!"

"I knew that really. I knew it." He spoke defensively now. "1903, of course. The beginning of our bright new century— perhaps even the last century of the world."

From another man, I might have taken these disconnected ramblings to be merely the crazy utterances of the opium fiend, but from him they seemed oddly convincing. I decided it was time to introduce myself and did so.

He chose a peculiar way in which to respond to this introduction. He drew himself up and said, "This is Captain Oswald Bastable, late of the 53rd Lancers." He smiled at this private joke and waved his hand and sat down in an armchair near the window.

A moment later, while I was still trying to recover myself, he turned his head and looked up at me in amusement. "I'm sorry, but you see I'm in a mood not to try to disguise my madness. You're very kind." He raised his glass in a salute. "I thank you. I must try to remember my manners. I had some once. They were a fine set of manners. Couldn't be beaten, I dare say. But I could introduce myself in several ways. What if I said my name was Oswald Bastable—Airshipman."

"You fly balloons?"

"I have flown *airships*, sir. Ships twelve hundred feet long which travel at speeds *in excess of one hundred miles an hour!* You see. I am mad."

"Well, I would say you were inventive, if nothing else. Where did you fly the airships?"

"Oh, most parts of the world."

"I must be completely out of touch. I knew I was receiving the news rather late, but I'm afraid I haven't heard of these ships. When did you make the flight?"

Bastable's opium-filled eyes stared at me so hard that I shuddered.

"Would you really care to hear?" he said in a cold, small voice.

My mouth felt dry and I wondered if he were about to become violent. I moved towards the belt rope. But he knew what was in my mind because he laughed again and shook his head. "I won't attack you, sir. But you see now why I smoke opium, why I know myself to be mad. Who but a madman would claim to have flown through the skies faster than the fastest ocean liner? Who but a madman would claim to have done this in the year 1973 A.D.—nearly three-quarters of a century in the future?"

"You believe that you have done this? And no-one will listen to you. Is that what makes you so bitter?"

"That? No! Why should it? It is the thought of my own folly which torments me. I should be dead—that would be just. But instead I am half-alive, hardly knowing one dream from another, one reality from another."

I took his empty glass from his hand and filled it for him. "Look here," I said. "If you will do something for me, I'll agree to listen to what you have to say. There's precious little else for me to do anyway."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to eat some lunch and try to stay off the opium for a while—until you've seen a doctor, at least. Then I want you to agree that you'll put yourself in my care, perhaps even return with me to England when I go back. Will you do that?"

"Perhaps." He shrugged. "But this mood could pass, I warn you. I've never had the inclination to speak to anyone about—about the airships and everything. Yet, perhaps history is alterable..."

"I don't follow you."

"If I told you what I know, what happened to me—what I saw—it might make a difference. If you agreed to write it down, publish it, if you could, when you got back."

"When we got back." I said firmly.

"Just as you like." His expression altered, became grim, as if his decision had a significance I had not understood.

And so the lunch was brought up and he ate some of the cold chicken and the salad. The meal seemed to do him good, for he became more coherent.

"I'll try to begin at the beginning," he said, "and go through to the end—telling it as it happened."

I had a large notebook and several pencils by me. In the early days of my career I had earned my living as a Parliamentary reporter and my knowledge of shorthand stood me in good stead as Bastable began to speak.

He told me his story over the next three days, in which time we scarcely left that room, scarcely

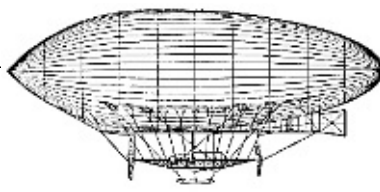
slept. Occasionally Bastable would revive himself by recourse to some pills he had—which he swore to me were not opium—but I needed no other stimulant than Bastable's story itself. The atmosphere that hotel room became unreal as the tale unfolded. I began by thinking I listened to the fantastical ravings of a madman but I ended by believing without any doubt that I had heard the truth—or, at least, *a* truth. It is up to you to decide if what follows is fiction or not. I can only assure you that Bastable said it was not fiction and I believe, profoundly, that he was right.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Three Chimney

Mitcham, Surrey

October 1960



CHAPTER TWO

The Temple at Teku Benga

I don't know if you've ever been in North-East India (began Bastable) but if you have you'll know what I mean when I say it's the meeting place of worlds both old and immeasurably ancient. Where India, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan come together, about two hundred miles north of Darjiling and about a hundred west of Mt. Kinchunmaja, you'll find Kumbalari: a state which claims to be older than Time. It's what they call a "theocracy"—priest-ridden in the extreme, full of dark superstitions and darker myths and legends, where all gods and demons are honoured, doubtless to be on the same side. The people are cruel, ignorant, dirty and proud—they look down their noses at all other races. They resent the British presence so close to their territory and over the past couple of hundred years we've had a spot or two of trouble with them, but never anything much. They won't go far beyond their own borders, luckily, and their population is kept pretty low thanks to their own various barbaric practices. Sometimes, as on this occasion, a religious leader pops up who convinces them of the necessity of some kind of *jihad* against the British or British-protected peoples, tells them they're impervious to our bullets and so forth, and we have to go and teach them a lesson. They are not regarded very seriously by the army, which is doubtless why I was put in charge of the expedition which, in 1902, set off for the Himalayas and Kumbalari.

It was the first time I had commanded so many men and I felt my responsibility very seriously. I had a squadron of a hundred and fifty sowars of the impressive Punjabi Lancers and two hundred fierce, loyal little sepoy of the 9th Ghorka Infantry. I was intensely proud of my army and felt that it had had to it could have conquered the whole of Bengal. I was, of course, the only white officer, but I was perfectly willing to admit that the native officers were men of much greater experience than myself and whenever possible I relied on their advice.

My orders were to make a show of strength and, if I could, to avoid a scrap. We just wanted to give the beggars an idea of what they would come up against if we started to take them seriously. Their latest leader—an old fanatic by the name of Sharan Kang—was their King, Archbishop and C-in-C all rolled into one. Sharan Kang had already burned one of our frontier stations and killed a couple of detachments of Native Police. We weren't interested in vengeance, however, but in making sure it didn't go any further.

We had some reasonably good maps and a couple of fairly trustworthy guides—distant kinsmen

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