

THE TIME TRAVELER PROFESSOR:
BOOK 2

A POCKETFUL OF LODESTONES

1914-1917

And long before and after that



PRAISE FOR ELIZABETH CROWENS

A Pocketful of Lodestones is a heady mix. A time-tunnel roller coaster ride with mystery, suspense, hairpin turns and thrills. Elizabeth Crowens combines fact, fiction, historical vignettes and her rich imagination in a kaleidoscopic journey that is always surprising and never less than entertaining.

Jeffrey Hatcher playwright and screenwriter of films *The Good Liar*, *Mr. Holmes*, *The Duchess* and *Casanova*

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“Crowens has one-upped her brilliant Victorian time travel mashup with a romp with familiar and new face that’s sure to keep you turning pages through this delightful sequel.”

Jim Freund, Producer/host of *Hour of the Wolf* over WBAI-FM in NYC since 1972.

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“*A Pocketful of Lodestones* is a worthy continuation of its award-winning predecessor in the Time Traveler Professor series, *Silent Meridian*. Even while serving in the trenches on the Great War’s Western Front for much of the book, music professor and ghost writer John Patrick Scott takes us on a well-written romp through time and space via past-life regression, astral projection, telepathy, and telekinesis.

Along the way he interacts not only with Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G. Wells, Harry Houdini, and Carl Jung, but with such Elizabethan figures as John Dee and Sir Walter Raleigh. This paranormal adventure contains enough Sherlockian Easter eggs to delight the

most devoted admirer of the Great Detective. And the story ends on a cliffhanger. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it opens the door to the eagerly anticipated Book Three of the series.”

Dan Andriacco, Sherlockian and author of the Sebastian McCabe – Jeff Cody mystery series and host/editor of the Baker Street Beat.

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A Pocketful of Lodestones is a head-spinning thrill ride through time, space, and history, featuring intrepid time-traveler John Patrick Scott, who is caught in the trenches of the Western Front, circa 1916. And it's a horrible, frightening, brutal and strangely beautiful place. But he has friends from other times and places, real historical friends in fascinating places, and they are part of the story, too. So suspend your disbelief, let your imagination loose, and follow Elizabeth Crowens, wherever she takes you. You'll be glad you did. Grand imaginative entertainment.

William Martin, *New York Times* Bestselling Author of *Back Bay* and *Bound for Gold*

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A Pocketful of Lodestones is a book full of unpredictable delights, a panoply of beloved "guest stars," and a crisscross of ley lines that point to another winner from Elizabeth Crowens. What a fun read--what a writer. I can't wait for the next book in the Time Traveler series!

Nancy Holder, *New York Times* Bestselling Author, *The Wicked Saga* (cowritten with Debbie Vignié) and recipient of the IAMTW Faust Lifetime Achievement Award.

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"*A Pocketful of Lodestones* sweeps effortlessly through time, space and reality. Familiar characters and locations are made wonderfully strange and fresh through Crowens' endless creativity. Inventive, magical, and unexpected, *A Pocketful of Lodestones* awes as often as it enchants."

Matthew Kressel, Three-time Nebula Award, World-Fantasy Award, and Eugie Award finalist and Co-Chair of the KGB Fantastic Fiction reading series in Manhattan

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I have always been a huge fan of classic thriller, and detective novels, especially the stories of Sherlock Holmes' exploits. I greatly admire Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and his work, so after reading 'The Time Traveler Professor', Book One: Silent Meridian, I felt as though I had read another of his famous novels. Elizabeth Crowens' written descriptions, and her way of playing out the story, was so believable, that I found myself immersed in the scene, along with the characters. It was such a huge treat to read, and I highly recommend this book, to anyone who enjoys a bit of classic crime.

Dea Walliams, reviewer at Blue Skies and Librarything

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Elizabeth Crowens began writing for us two years ago, and she quickly became one of the most popular writers in the Black Gate community. She's interviewed a host of fascinating subjects -- including Martin Page, Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman, Nancy Kilpatrick, Charlaïne Harris, Gail Carriger, Jennifer Brozek, and many others -- and collected her lengthy interviews in two highly readable volumes of *The Poison Apple*.

Many BG readers are unaware that Elizabeth is also a talented and successful fiction writer. Her first novel *Silent Meridian*, which James A. Moore (*Seven Forges, Tides of War*) called "fun, entertaining and delightfully different... a rollercoaster ride with a side of the sublime," was published to wide acclaim in 2016. This summer *A Pocketful of Lodestones*, the second volume in *The Time Traveler Professor*, arrives from Atomic Alchemist Productions, and expectations are high among Crowens' many fans.

The Time Traveler Professor is a game-changer of a series. Jonathan Maberry calls it "a delightful genre-twisting romp through time and possibilities," and *A Pocketful of Lodestones* significantly ups the ante. This installment is fast-paced and exciting, and jumps into the action immediately. It introduces ghosts, a series of supernatural murders, and a strange and fascinating form of magic. Crowens expertly juggles a complex and engaging plot involving Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the outbreak of World War I, an enigmatic time traveler, and the mysterious red book that tantalized readers in the first volume, *The Thief of Tales*.

Bill O'Neill, Editor in Chief of Black Gate, online magazine and winner of the World Fantasy Award and Alfie Award (George R. R. Martin's Hugo Loser's Award).

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BOOK TWO: A POCKETFUL
OF LODESTONES

THE TIME TRAVELER PROFESSOR



ELIZABETH CROWENS



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Elizabeth Crowens

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All characters appearing in this work are fictitious or used fictitiously. Except for certain historical personages, any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. The opinions expressed are those of the publisher, Atomic Alchemist Productions LLC.

*To Lola Levitt,
Without whom this book wouldn't be possible*

*Dorothy Dobbins
who never doubted my creative abilities*

*Sir Author Conan Doyle,
Then, now and in the future*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author strongly suggests reading **Book One: Silent Meridian** first to understand the main characters, their backstory and the book's theory behind time travel and metaphysics before proceeding to **A Pocketful of Lodestones**. Therefore, Atomic Alchemist Productions LLC will be offering discounts on E-book versions of **Silent Meridian** as an incentive.

To get you up to speed, **Book One: Silent Meridian** begins in 1898 Scotland. The reader is introduced to John Patrick Scott, a music student at the University of Edinburgh, who meets with Arthur Conan Doyle and assumes if he is clever enough to write the Sherlock Holmes stories then he can solve the mystery why he was drugged by a group of mysterious men on a train and initiated into a Masonic-like order. Doyle, on the other hand, confides with him his interest in the paranormal (telepathy, ghost sightings, telekinesis, etc.) and Spiritualism (proof of life after death) and proposes that they conduct confidential experiments. However, his main interest is an esoteric red book that John received as a result of his initiation. Supposedly it has the power to write its own stories, which might resolve his dilemma of being weary of writing about Sherlock Holmes.

Concerned that the book might do more harm than good, Scott keeps it at arm's length from Doyle. Meanwhile, Doyle makes a secret arrangement with Scott to ghostwrite some of his stories, but each has his own agenda. Doyle wants the red book. Scott knows that Doyle has the fame and influence to help him not only get ahead in his musical career, but he'd also like to be introduced to some of Doyle's publishers to promote his own original work. Doyle, however, is fearful of blowing his cover and refuses to make their association public. At one point Scott loses the book but keeps stringing Doyle along making him assume he still has it.

Whether it's through letters or through their deliberately orchestrated telepathic exercises, they continue to stay in communication even while Doyle goes off to serve in the Boer War, and Scott winds up with a music scholarship in Germany. While working a job to earn money on the side, Scott comes to the rescue of Sophia Poincaré at a carnival in Germany where Houdini is the featured performer. Doyle swears that one day he and Houdini will hook up and also study preternatural phenomena. Eventually Scott becomes entangled in a love triangle with his aristocratic patrons, Francois and Sophia Poincaré, who own a lavish estate in Bavaria.

Hermann Hesse invites Scott is to join the H.G.A. Society, a secret consortium that meets in Munich. Membership includes Freud, Jung and Einstein among others. Scott, who has had a history of strange dreams and is concerned they might mean something, consults with both Freud and Jung.

In his memoirs, Scott notes that there is a difference between time travel and entering a realm known as the Secret Library, akin to the Theosophical or Buddhist concept of the Akashic Records. The latter can explain some of the reasons why telepathy works along with the ability of getting true facts about the present and the past which can be slanted by those in political power. To get access to the Secret Library, one needs a guide. John's guide is Finn, short for Finneas Fertle. Since nothing escapes his scrutiny and he's constantly criticizing Scott of being inattentive to details, Scott has given him the nickname of Sherlock. (The reader will be briefly

introduced to Doyle's guide who will play a prominent role in Book Two.)

Add another factor into the mix: Scott's favorite novel is H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* and has managed to build a working model. At first he experiments with it with his best friend from the university, Wendell McKenzie, but when Doyle catches wind that there is more than one of these mysterious red books and the original came from ancient China, he is game to try Scott's invention. Ironically, Doyle's nemesis winds up being H.G. Wells who thinks he's gone bonkers between his Spiritualist beliefs and insistence that he can travel in time, which Wells is convinced is purely fiction.

Doyle and Scott attempt to go to ancient China to find the book but wind up in feudal Japan, discovering that their time travel experiments are tied into personal karma and there's a metaphysical method to the madness of not being able to have control as to where they'd wind up. As they relive their soul's journeys from previous lives, both discover that karmic ties and unconscionable crimes have followed them like ghosts from the past, wreaking havoc on the present and possibly the future.

As the book comes to a close, Doyle still yearns for the elusive red book. Scott is still determined to change Doyle's mind about lending a helping hand and is now a music professor at the Conservatory of Music in Stuttgart, Germany. While Scott is on summer break and visiting relatives back in Edinburgh, WWI breaks out. Realizing he can no longer return to his comfortable life in Germany and unable to find suitable work in Edinburgh, John Patrick Scott heads off to fight on the Western Front.

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There were debates about certain Victorian Scottish/English spellings and vernacular versus modern usage. It's always a tough call when one has an international readership in the 21st century and needs authenticity as well as reliability for today's audience when depicting 19th century characters. Therefore, the author has

AUTHOR'S NOTE

used combinations such as spelling whisky without the “e” or in the Scottish way as opposed to whiskey, which is the common American spelling or moustache versus mustache or likeable versus likable, among versus amongst. Regarding speech from different time periods or other cultures, that was a judgement call. Personally, the author doesn't like to feel like she needs a dictionary to translate “Klingon” and doesn't like to get bogged down.

The Time Traveler Professor series is a mixed genre epic science fiction/fantasy, technically subcategorized as an alternate history/fictional memoir of the protagonist character of John Patrick Scott. All characters appearing in this work are fictitious or used fictitiously. Except for certain historical personages, any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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**The Time Traveler Professor, Book Two: A Pocketful of
Lodestones Awards & Honors: First Prize:** CHANTICLEER REVIEW'S
PARANORMAL AWARD

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KITCHENER'S CALL TO ARMS



AUGUST 1914

“*H*ave you ever killed a man before?”

I had, but close to three hundred years ago. So, I lied and just shook my head.

“Your name, son?” the recruitment officer asked.

“John Patrick Scott,” I said, with pride.

The officer handed me a card to fill out. “Write your date of birth, where you live and don’t skip any questions. When finished, bring this over to Line B.”

Born during the reign of Queen Victoria, somehow or another I managed to travel to the 23rd century, feudal Japan, and ancient China long before the Great War started. The army wanted to know all the places I had traveled, but it was doubtful that much information was required.

Since the war to end all wars commenced, recruiting centers sprang up like wildflowers. This one took over an Edinburgh public library. If unaware as to why the enthusiastic furor, one would’ve guessed the government was giving away free land tracts with titles.

“Let’s see how clever you blokes are. Tell me the four duties of a soldier,” another enlistment administrator called out.

An overeager Glaswegian shouted, "Obedience, cleanliness, honesty and sobriety, sir!"

The chap next to him elbowed his side. "Takes no brains to read a bloody sign."

Propaganda posters wallpapered the room with solicitous attempts at boosting morale. Kitchener wanted us and looked straight into our eyes. Proof of our manhood or perhaps stupidity. Queues of enthusiasm wound around the block. Impatient ones jumped the lines. We swore our allegiance to the King over a bible. As long as the war lasted, our lives were no longer our own.

Voices from men I'd never see again called out from the crowd.

"It'll be over in six weeks."

"Are you so sure?"

"Check out those men. All from the same cricket team. Play and die together. Medals of Valor in a blink. Local heroes with celebrations."

"I'll drink to that."

A crusty old career soldier yelled out to the volunteers, "Does anyone speak Flemish?"

Suddenly the place got quiet. Then he looked at me. "Soldier, do you know anything besides the King's English? French?"

"Fluent German," I said. "That should be helpful."

"Since when were you with the Bosches?"

"Fourteen years, sir. Before the war."

"And what were you doing in enemy territory?"

"Worked as a teacher. A music professor and a concert pianist when I could get the engagements and sometimes as an amateur photographer. They weren't our enemies then, sir."

"Have you ever shot a rifle, son?"

"Actually, I have..."

He cut our conversation short. "Find a pair of boots that fits you, lad. Hustle now. Time's a wasting."

The Allied and German armies were in a Race to the Sea. If the Germans got there first, then England was in danger of invasion. Basic training opened its arms to the common man, and it felt strange to be bedding alongside Leith dockworkers and farmers,

many underage, versus the university colleagues from my recent past. Because of the overwhelming need for new recruits, training facilities ran out of room. The army took over church halls, local schools and warehouses in haste. Select recruits were billeted in private homes, but we weren't so fortunate.

Except for acquired muscles, I slimmed down and resembled the young man that I was in my university days except with a tad more gray hair, cut very short and shaved even closer on the sides. At least keeping a clean-shaven face wasn't a challenge since I never could grow a beard. Wearing my new uniform took getting used to. Other recruits laughed, as I'd reach to straighten my tie or waistcoat out of habit despite the obvious fact that I was no longer wearing them.

While still in Scotland during basic training, I started to have a series of the most peculiar dreams. My boots had not yet been muddied with the soil of real battlefields, and new recruits such as I had difficult adjustments transitioning from civilian life. Because of my past history of lucid dreaming, trips in time travel and years of psychical experimentation I conducted both on my own and with my enthusiastic and well-studied mentor, Arthur Conan Doyle, my nightmares appeared more real than others. My concerns were that these dreams were either actual excursions into the Secret Library where the circumstances had already occurred or premonitions of developments to come.

The most notable of these episodes occurred toward the end of August in 1914. In this dream, I had joined another British platoon other than my own in Belgium on the Western Front. We were outnumbered at least three to one, and the aggressive Huns surrounded us on three sides.

Whistles blew. "Retreat!" yelled our commanding officer, a privileged Cambridge boy, barely a man and younger than I, who looked like he had never seen the likes of hardship.

We retreated to our trenches to assess what to plan next, but instead of moving toward our destination everyone froze in their tracks. Time was like a strip of film that slowed down, spooled off track, and jammed inside a projector. Then the oddest thing

happened to our enemy. For no apparent reason, their bodies jerked and convulsed as if fired upon by invisible bullets over the course of an hour.

When the morning fog lifted, the other Tommies and I broke free from our preternatural standstill and charged over the top of the trenches with new combat instructions. Half of our platoon dropped their rifles in shock. Dead Huns, by the thousands, littered No man's land long before we had even fired our first retaliatory shot!

I woke up agitated, disoriented and in a cold sweat. Even more disturbing was finding several brass shell casings under my pillow — *souvenirs* or proof that I had traveled off somewhere and not imagined it. I roused the sleeping guy in the next bed and couldn't wait to share this incredible story.

"Shush!" he warned me. "You'll wake the others."

Meanwhile, he rummaged inside his belongings and pulled out a rumpled and grease-stained newspaper clipping that looked and smelled like it had originally been used to wrap up fish and chips.

He handed it to me with excitement. "My folks sent this me from back home."

The headlines: "Angels sited at the Battle of Mons"

Almost as notable was the article's byline written by my best friend from the University of Edinburgh, Wendell Mackenzie, whom I had lost track of since the war started.

He begged me to read on.

"Hundreds of witnesses claimed similarities in their experiences. There were rumors aplenty about ghostly bowmen from the Battle of Agincourt where the Brits fought against the French back in 1415. Inexplicable apparitions appeared out of nowhere and vanquished German enemy troops at the recent Battle of Mons."

"This looks like a scene from out of a storybook." I pointed to an artist's rendition and continued.

"Word spread that arrow wounds were discovered on corpses of the

enemy nearby, and it wasn't a hoax. Others reported seeing a Madonna in the trenches or visions of St. Michael, another saint symbolizing victory."

I handed the newspaper article back to my comrade. "Now, I don't feel so singled out."

For weeks, I feared talking to anyone else about it and insisted my mate keep silent. Even in wartime, I swore that I'd stay in touch with my closest acquaintances, Wendell Mackenzie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It was easier to keep abreast of Arthur's exploits, because of his public celebrity. On the other hand, Wendell, being a journalist, could be anywhere in the world on assignment.

* * *

DEAR MR. AND MRS. MACKENZIE,

I regret having missed Wendell when he never made it over to visit Scotland, and you wonder if someone up above watches over us when we make decisions where to go and when. In my case it was when I decided to take a summer vacation and travel to Edinburgh before the war. Those without passports or proper documentation endured countless detours and delays getting back to their respective homelands. One of Mrs. Campbell's lodgers had been detained in France.

With nothing to return to back in Germany, I joined the Royal Scots. Military training commenced in Edinburgh, and at least they had us wearing uniforms of pants tucked into gaiters as opposed to the Highland troops who wore kilts. Although I was born and bred in Scotland, as a Lowlander that's one outfit you'd have to force me into with much duress.

Our tasks would be in the Scots Territorial units deployed on our coastline in case of an enemy invasion. Potential threats could come from spies or submarines, but most say that the worst enemy has been the frigid wind blowing off the North Sea.

As there is always talk about combining forces and transfers, my aunt can always forward letters. It would mean more than the

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world to hear from Wendell saying that not only is he all right, but also in good spirits.

Yours most devoted,
Private John Patrick Scott

* * *

DEAR ARTHUR,

In our last correspondence, I conveyed that I was unable to return to my teaching post in Stuttgart. With your tour in the Boer War as my inspiration, I joined the military. We learned the basics: how to follow commands, first aid, march discipline and training in all matters of physical fitness. My feet have been in a constant state of rebellion, since my previous profession as a pianist was a sedentary occupation.

Deployment was supposed to be along the coast of Scotland, but the army reassigned me despite initial promises because of too many staggering losses on the Western Front. I requested to be part of the air corps and a pioneer in new battle technology, but my recruiting officers had other plans. Our regiment left for Ypres in Belgium. None of the Tommies could pronounce the name of this place, so everyone called it *Wipers*. You're no stranger to war, but everyone has been surprised that it lasted longer than anticipated.

Yours Most Devoted,
Private John Patrick Scott

* * *

TROOPS from all over under the wing of the British Expeditionary Forces piled on to ships to sail out to the continent. The locals from Edinburgh didn't expect to leave bonnie ole Scotland. They told us we'd defend our shores from foreign invasions. I'd crossed the North Sea before, but then it was a sea of hope and a new life full of opportunity when I got my scholarship to continue my musical studies in Germany, now the enemy.

I turned to the nearest stranger, hoping that a random conver-

sation would break the monotonous and never-ending wait until we set anchor in Belgium. “How was your basic training?”

“Three months at an abandoned amusement park,” the soldier replied. “We trained for the longest time in our street clothes and were told they ran out of uniforms. Probably sent recycled ones after the first troops died. Used wooden dummy rifles until the real ones arrived. What about you?”

“We used an dance hall that was no longer in business. Never could get used to waking at 5:30 a.m.”

“Word got around that in Aldershot soldiers had luxury facilities with a billiards room, a library, private baths and a buffet. I suspect that was for the regulars, the old-timers, not new recruits like us.”

“I should’ve enlisted elsewhere,” I grumbled, not that it would’ve made much of a difference if we’d all die in the end.

He pointed to my face and examined my flawless hands. “You don’t look like much of an outdoorsman. Pale, hairless complexion. No scars.”

“I’m a concert pianist.”

“Not much use on the Front.”

“Probably not. Excuse me, I need some air.” I bundled up in my great coat, wrapping my muffler a wee bit tighter.

Wasn’t sure which were worse — the soldiers with their asphyxiating cigarettes or numbing sleet turning into ice pellets. Hadn’t gotten my sea legs, yet. Stormy swells churned my stomach. Sweet Scotland. Lush green grass and the sky the color of blue moonstone. Never thought I’d be so sentimental. Continued staring until brilliant hues of the shoreline merged into dismal grays of a foggy horizon. In the transition from civilian to soldier, I stepped through a door of no return unless I desired to come back home in a coffin.

THE OTHER LOST WORLD



YPRES, BELGIUM LATE FALL, 1914

A sea of strange men, but all comrades-in-arms, all recent transplants marched to their assignments and followed orders without question to who-knows-where on the way to the battlefield sites. We sallied forth, anonymous troops with a distorted sense of time and distance through the streets of has-been cities, once thriving communities. Poetry in ruination.

As we marched through the *Grote Markt* (Grand Market) heading out toward the *Menenpoort* (or Menen Gate) I didn't expect to get an education. The soldier to my left kept talking out loud and compared notes of local tourist attractions. He was probably unaware that anyone else had overheard his comments.

"That long, distinctive building with the church hiding behind it must be the *Hallen*... or their Cloth Hall. There were impressive paintings on the interior walls of the Pauwels Room depicting the history of this town and its prosperous textile trade."

"How do you know this?" I asked, trying not to attract too much attention.

"I'm a historian. Used to teach at a priory school in Morpeth."

Perhaps I was naïve, but I asked, "Why would the armed forces recruit someone with a background in history?"

"That didn't influence my enlistment although I'm sure it'll

come in handy somewhere. Before the war, I traveled all over Europe when time permitted. I brought original postcards with me as to what this town used to look like. It's frightening to see the difference."

"Your name?" I asked.

"Private Watson. What about you?"

"Not John Watson, by any chance?"

"No, Roger Watson, why?"

I shook my head thinking about Arthur and bit my lip to hide a slight smile. "Oh nothing... My name is Private Scott, John Patrick Scott."

"What brings you to this dismal corner of the earth?"

"*Ich war ein Musiklehrer*. Pardon me, sometimes I break into German. I'm from Edinburgh but was living in Germany as a music teacher. Can't be doing that sort of thing now."

"I suppose not."

"Roger, sorry to have eavesdropped, but are you familiar with the area we just marched through?"

"That was the central merchant and trading hub of Ypres and has been since the mid-fifteenth century. On the north side over there is St. Martin's Cathedral. You can already see the damage from German attacks."

There was no escaping the needless destruction by aggressive enemy bombing. We continued marching forward in formation. A little way beyond the city gate, we passed by the remains of a park and children's playground. The soldiers took a rest break and snacked on portable rations. Many of them took off their boots and massaged their feet. Not too far away, I found a shattered brick in the rubble of what had been a schoolhouse and brought it back to where everyone was having his makeshift picnic.

Watson noticed that I kept twirling the small fragment in my hand while intermittently closing my eyes. "Scott, what are you doing?"

"Pictures form in my mind similar to movies. It's the art of psychometry," I replied.

"Psycho — what?" Another soldier overheard us talking.

“Sounds like something from Sigmund Freud,” one called out.

“Not at all, it’s like a psychical gift or talent. It has nothing to do with psychoanalysis.”

“What’s the point?” the first one asked.

I felt under pressure to put my thoughts into words. “I can understand what building this brick was part of when it was intact and what was here before it was destroyed.”

“That’s incredible!” Watson exclaimed. “If you are able to uncover bygone times by psychical means, I am all ears.”

When everyone else discounted my talent, Watson gave it full praise. Others became impatient and weren’t interested in our sidebar history lesson.

“Can you use those skills beyond inanimate objects?” one soldier asked.

“Find me an object, someone’s former possession,” I said.

Another soldier found a broken pocket watch not far from a trampled garden. He tossed it over, and I caught it with both hands. When I closed my eyes, the images materialized in my mind’s eye.

“A loving grandfather was reading to his grandchildren from an illustrated story book. He was balding. Wore spectacles. Had a trimmed white beard.

“‘Time for bed,’ he said, looking at his watch. *Tick tock, tick tock.* It was a gift from his father.

“He kissed each grandchild on the forehead as they scampered off. Two girls, one boy, all in their nightgowns. The tallest girl was a redhead with... pink ribbons in her long, curly hair. Then the bombs dropped. Fire. The roof collapsed. All was lost. Then... then... Oh my God!”

“Scotty, what’s wrong?” Watson asked.

I looked at the blank faces around me. “You don’t see him?”

Watson was baffled. “See who?”

“That grandfather,” I said, horrified and clutching onto that timepiece. *His ghost was standing right in front of me!*

Then I realized that no one else was capable of seeing him. Inside, I panicked until my frozen fingers let go of the watch, and it tumbled into the dirt. That’s when his phantasmal form vanished,

but there were still indelible memories impressed upon the ether that refused to fade with the passage of time.

Warning bells tolled from a nearby church. "Quick, run for cover!" our commanding officer shouted.

Double-time over to shelter. Incoming bombs whistled and boomed in the distance. Civilians followed, carrying their most precious possessions, also fleeing for their lives.

The sanctuary already suffered from shell damage that left large gaping holes in its roof. Birds nested above the pulpit. Cherished religious statuary had been knocked over and broken. Several nuns rushed up and motioned the way for us to take refuge in the basement. We joined the crowd of scared families, members of the local community.

"Isn't Britain giving them haven?" I asked Watson. "I thought most of the civilians evacuated by now."

"There are still the ones who want to hold out," he explained. "Wouldn't you if your entire life and livelihood were here for multiple generations? That's why they're counting on us, but the Germans are relentless. Ypres is right on the path of strategic routes to take over France."

When several farmers brought over their pigs and chickens, our retreat began to resemble a biblical nativity scene. From inside the cellar, we could hear the rumble of the outside walls collapsing.

"We'll be trapped!" People yelled out in panic.

A group of sisters prayed in the corner. Our trench diggers readied themselves to shovel us out if it came to that. One terror-stricken woman handed me a screaming baby.

"I found him abandoned." At least that's what I thought she said in Flemish, but none of us could understand her. Confused and without thinking, I almost spoke in Japanese, but that would've been for the wrong place and an entirely different century during a different lifetime.

"What will I do with him?" I said to her in German, but she didn't comprehend me either. I couldn't just place him down in a corner. We'd be marching out in a matter of minutes.

I approached a man with his wife and three other children. First

I tried English, then German, random words of French, and then I tried Greek and Latin from my school days. Finally I resorted to awkward gestures to see if he'd take the child. But he shook his head, gathered his brood and backed off.

Troops cleared a path out of the cellar. We needed to report to our stations before nightfall.

"Sister, please?" I begged one nun, interrupting her rosary. To my relief, she took the infant.

"*Oh Mon Dieu!*" I cried out in the little French that I knew. "*Danke*, thank you, *merci beaucoup*." Then I ran off to join the others.

Watson slapped me on the back. "Looked like you were going to be a father, mate."

"Not yet. Got a war to fight," I replied.

HIGH RISE MOON FROM THE LOWER
DEPTHS OF BELGIUM



DECEMBER 23, 1914

*A*n ominous fog rolled over the battered and blighted farmland, scoured clean of life and hope, once a promise of plentitude.

“Ghosts roam these fields, don’t they?” Private Duff asked, puffing on his cigarette and inspecting his rifle.

I nodded. “That wouldn’t be surprising.”

Bibles had been issued for good luck. Moffat was two meters away squatting in the mud and reading his. Mine was inside my jacket pocket, buttoned up and secure. When I joined the Royal Scots, I brought my grandfather’s heirloom timepiece that served as my time machine and two other books — my journal and that mysterious red book that everyone and their uncle wanted to get their hands on.

“Fire in the hole!”

Boom! Feet scrambling everywhere. As I hit the ground, covered with a sudden shower of dirt and debris, my diary flew out of my hand.

Sergeant Hodges blew his whistle. We took cover inside the dugout and huddled together, crouching in four inches of water while sinking into the bowels of the earth and waiting out the

unexpected assault. I dropped my diary during the skirmish when we bolted for shelter. By now, it was buried in mud.

Duff offered me a swig of rum. “The German’s won’t get our goats on Christmas. Drink up, mate.”

“If we live to see the Lord’s birthday.” Moffat added his two pence from the sidelines.

I took a sip of rum and handed it back. Flashbacks of another celebration: New Year’s Eve in Berlin, 1907. My best friend, Wendell Mackenzie and I, two crazy Scotsmen, two sheets to the wind and bickering like children after unpleasant discoveries during time travel . Memories could be just as destructive as machine guns.

“Pass it over to Moffat,” he called out. None of us had any of rations left.

Rich man or poor, we were all in this bloody war together — equal in the eyes of God and willing to take the King’s shilling. Privates Duff, Moffat, Craig, Mackie, Simpson, Gilmore and I, John Patrick Scott, were fresh recruits, otherwise known as Hodges’ Hedgehogs. Our subaltern was Lieutenant McFadden, always off at the officer’s camp, but the ornery, domineering Sergeant Angus Hodges, a man that nary had a smile on his face, presided over our clan that hailed from Scotland.

We started out with a few extras, the temporaries, Welsh coal miners borrowed from another company, professionals who could do the dirty work in their sleep. Taught us how to thrust our shovels into Mother Earth, paying homage to the Goddess of the Underworld whether it was to dig trenches or to bury the dead. We were nocturnal and lived in burrows, thus the *nom de guerre* of hedgehogs.

I closed my eyes and focused on where my diary might’ve fallen and disengaged my consciousness to achieve a second set of eyes. Concerned, Duff leaned in so close that I sensed his body heat as he reached out to grab my shoulder.

“Scotty, you’re not falling asleep on us?” he asked.

“Shush,” I said.

“Leave him alone,” Moffat said. “He’s doing that *stuff* again.”

Private Gilmore piped in. “Mad as a hatter, I tell ya. Someone should’ve locked him in one of those lunatic asylums where people howl at the moon and bark like dogs.”

Duff waddled over to join Moffat. If they thought I was insane enough, they’d back off. Hodges always enjoyed it when he had the opportunity to torture me with disciplinary action.

But now I had to concentrate and command my *second body*, the one impervious to bullets but the one that had etheric eyes and ears, and send it out into the trench to search for my diary. While going to the trouble, I might as well have a peep over the top and get a clue when the Germans would cease-fire.

My *astral form* advanced like an Olympiad out of our entrenchment, across a barren wasteland into rolling hills spreading toward decrepit farmland and the enemy encampment. Took inventory and made mental notes, so by the time I opened my eyes, I could recount every detail — a howitzer, several other cannon-type of devices. German technology put ours to shame. Then I took a few deep breaths and fetched my *astral attachment*.

“Welcome back to the land of the living,” Moffat said.

Without a moment to waste, I reached for a piece of stationery in my pack and started sketching what I witnessed before my memory faded. One of our team was missing. “Where’s Hodges?” I asked.

“He’s with communications trying to send a wireless to McFadden,” Moffat replied.

Ignoring the wretched weather, I stuffed my drawing into my pocket and galloped off to find our telegrapher. Still under the threat of fire, I visualized a protective psychic shield around me as I scurried off with news for our sergeant.

“Private Scott! What the hell are you doing over here?” Hodges cried out, surprised I left our dugout against orders.

I was out of breath when I handed him my rough sketches. “Sergeant, we’re up against these German munitions. You must tell the lieutenant.”

“Private, explain where you got this information?”

“Call it intuition, perhaps. I don’t know what all these weapons are called, but I drew what I saw.”

He looked it over with suspicion. “If you’ve been with the Hedgehogs this whole time, how could you have done that?”

“Well...” I gulped and was tongue-tied.

“Unless you’re working for the other side, I don’t recall assigning you to intelligence. If you’re a spy for *them*... you’ll understand what’ll happen.”

I swallowed hard. “Aye, a swift trial by a firing squad.”

“How you did you get those diagrams?”

“I must’ve envisioned them in a bad dream, sir.” I replied, eating my words.

The ground rumbled with a deafening roar. The ceiling buckled and began caving in.

Both he and the telegrapher sprang to their feet. “Get the hell out of here, Scott!” he commanded.

Angry and scared for my life, I threw the rough draft on the ground and raced back to our shelter. One day, before we all had our heads blown off, I hoped he would listen.

THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE



DECEMBER 24, 1914

*A*n unofficial Christmas truce was declared. Fighting was suspended, and since fires posed no danger in giving away our position, our company celebrated with hot meals. Our quartermaster surprised us with a generous replenishment of rum, and it felt so good to stand up straight where the trenches were shallow and not worry about getting shot. Thus, the men were eager to stretch their legs and initiated a soccer match. However Hodges, with a little extra rum in his belly, showed his true colors with humor, which we didn't all share.

"Who's up for a Christmas tree?" he shouted.

We were perplexed where he'd find one. The barren and stark Belgian landscape was No man's land for a reason.

Sergeant Hodges exuded a rare burst of gaiety. Most of the time, our NCO fulfilled the role of the brutal taskmaster. "I'll promise you that tree if you can scrounge for ornaments."

The Hedgehogs set out on a mission picking up whatever ephemera they could find to serve as holiday trench art — empty cartridges, a torn and vulgar postcard, even broken parts from a confiscated pistol. Simpson decided to get creative, found empty shell casings, wired them together and called them his "little stars." Gilmore sought out the ordnance team and returned with a

colorful variety of empty grenade cases. He demonstrated to us that if dangled from string, they resembled something close to Christmas ornaments. Moffat tried to piece together a dented and discarded miniature signal lantern to serve as the star on top, but couldn't get it to work. Duff, the perpetual joker, added a dead, trampled rat despite great protest from the rest of the group.

Hodges took our collection, climbed over the top of the trench and disappeared for over an hour. Meanwhile my companions reminisced about Christmases past with their families and loved ones. Craig kept a photo of his sweetheart close to his heart. Duff kept the one of his ladylove in a locket, but he also grew up on a large farm and insisted on showing off his collection of pictures of his pigs and horses. How he managed to pose with them and get them to stand still long enough to expose the film was beyond me. There were twelve bairns in the Mackie house, so any holiday was a big affair. In contrast, I had a solitary life. My parents left me with relatives when I was six years old.

Then there was Arthur Conan Doyle. Some divine Fate desired to drive a wedge between us. He was my substitute father, a trusted friend and mentor, but often I wondered if I was merely a pawn to a self-serving end. I'll be forever grateful for the experiences and experiments we shared exploring the psychical "pseudo" sciences on our quest for the unknown. But our ghostwriting agreement? That allowed him the freedom for these endeavors, but to continue to deny me public recognition for my own achievements was absurd. What about that time I overheard him muttering to himself that *Bertie* was the reason for all that secrecy? Secrecy about what, and who was *Bertie* other than H.G. Wells?

Wasn't there a way to turn back the clock? It would've been useful in feudal Japan where I was responsible for the death of Arthur's father? If only I could make amends.

My old German and Swiss friends? Lost contact with them. Was afraid to disclose too much of my personal affairs and metaphysical leanings to any of my platoon mates. Comrades today, blown to kingdom come tomorrow. I prayed the same wouldn't happen with my closest associates, Wendell and Arthur. Wartime was unpre-

dictable, the ultimate Trickster. Even to a mystic with budding clairvoyant capabilities.

WHILE THE HEDGEHOGS were bragging about their Christmas presents, I wrote a long overdue letter.

DEAR ARTHUR,

I have no idea where this course of events takes you, but I know that your wife will keep the home fires burning and will see to it to forward this letter. It's been so difficult to comprehend that those people whom I once considered friends are now my enemies. War censorship prevents me from inquiring about the safety or whereabouts of my friends such as Hermann Hesse, Doctor Jung; the Poincaré family or former associates from the Conservatory of Music.

Often, I wonder why I am carrying a rifle instead of a conductor's baton. To find myself knee deep in mud is quite unsettling. Day after day I sleep in the same filthy clothes with the luck of bathing in frigid water once a week. You must've been used to hardships during the Boer War and when you had lived aboard whaling ships a while back. It's even harder to believe I volunteered for this, but what was the alternative? My comfortable life in Stuttgart ended the moment I heard that Britain had declared war.

Meanwhile, despite all pertinent matters, you'd be pleased that I'm continuing to have thoughts about our friend, Sherlock Holmes. Random ideas for future stories might be the key to my sanity of life beyond Front. Our new adversary would be a detective from Scotland Yard, but in the end we'd discover he's a thief and he'd betray Holmes. I've written down a few thoughts as they come but no complete stories yet, however I dare say that your publisher would like it. Be that as it may, I'm assuming that our editorial arrangement will have to be curtailed until our country can see its way through this bloody conflict. It's unfortunate that my musical ambitions will also have to be postponed.

Do you want to resume our telepathic conversations or just attempt them on a catch as catch can basis? I apologize for not being faithful to our midnight regimen. When we started our telepathic experiments, there was more regularity to my schedule. Now, it's been nothing but chaos since I joined the military. Time and distance should not be an issue according to your doctrines. We must get through these troubling times to see each other again.

Yours most devoted,
John Patrick Scott

* * *

I ALWAYS BELIEVED Sergeant Hodges had a secret desire to undermine me in one way or another. He took great delight in choosing me for the most distasteful duties such as burying corpses and cleaning latrines. Maybe he was jealous that I was so well educated and despised what he called a “girlish” attitude against *drecksarbeit* or dirty work and manual labor. Whether it was an attack on my artistic sensitivities and musical education, or my apparent lack of attraction to those of the weaker sex compared to the unsatisfied appetites of my fellow comrades, he loved to give me hell about my former associations with Germans. I had many fond memories of my studies and students at the Conservatory of Music and forged incredible friendships. Therefore, it was unfair to assume that I had tossed aside my loyalties to Britain or for Scotland.

These thoughts brought torment every day, but what Hodges did to spread Christmas cheer was unconscionable. When the sergeant returned he asked us to follow him to a location known only to him.

“Cease fire today, lads. Time to venture out.”

ALL OF US speculated where he could've been taking us. What could he have hidden in this land of desolation with a few clumps of life here and there but not much more? We were about to witness one of the worst abominations that war had on the minds of men —

where hatred churned out atrocities and unthinkable crimes were committed against the human race. It was so shocking that I regurgitated my breakfast while bracing myself on the remains of a dead, charred tree.

“Scotty, weren’t you a friend with these monsters?” Hodges asked with evil intent.

Upon first discovery, we gagged and covered our noses from the stench which Hodges seemed impervious. Before us was a truncated, dead German soldier from the waist up with his lower half missing, already attracting flies and most likely killed in yesterday’s grenade attack. Hodges propped him up in a pile of rubble and covered him with barbed wire, which substituted for tinsel and trimmings that held his outstretched arms in place like Christ nailed to a crucifix. The motley assortment of ornaments we gathered clung to the wire, and from that cursed spike on that pitiful soldier’s Pickelhaube helmet was the stub of a single burning candle. Dried blood dripped from the corpse’s mouth.

“Joy to the world!” Hodges exclaimed with morbid delight.

If it weren’t evident by now, on the day when we should have been celebrating and praying for peace on earth, the horrors of war were upon us.

THE ZIGZAG EFFECT



JANUARY 1915

If the enemy threw a grenade or explosive device into a trench the zigzag configuration was the best buffer to diminish any damage. That same zigzag effect metaphorically applied in regards to acquiring outside knowledge. Once news reached a corner of the “Z” formation, it stopped right there as if it slammed into the retaining wall and continued no further. Communication beyond the trenches was on a need-to-know basis.

That was another reason why it was even more important that I stay in constant touch with my guide, Finn, short for Finneas Fertle. I could’ve called him my invisible companion, but he claimed his assignment was to act as my metaphysical mentor from the beginning of time. Yes, and that meant long before I remembered taking my first baby steps upon the cobblestone streets of Edinburgh.

I was supposed to believe that I had lived many lives before this one, and he was a type of trustee — someone responsible for keeping me on the straight and narrow although I feared that I’d make innumerable blunders and ill-advised choices. With his assistance, I could access the Secret Library or travel in time — enabling ways of finding out information otherwise unavailable by ordinary or mundane means. Every person had one of these guides,

although most weren't aware of it. Once again, I was like Pinocchio, the fractious child know-it-all who thought he understood the workings of the world, and Finn was that noisome talking cricket.

The Hedgehog team members traded off sentry duty during the night with someone always on watch. No one understood why I preferred the 2:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. shift and depending upon circumstances sometimes I'd extend it until 5:00 a.m. It was never fun to wake in the middle of the night after falling asleep from a long, exhausting and often physically agonizing day, but that was the time when it was the quietest, and it gave me a chance to think and sort things out.

"Finn?" I whispered, peering off to see if there was any movement in the mist. "Finn, are you there?"

A heavy hand landed on my shoulder. I turned around sensing his presence.

"Never left, John," he replied.

Dapper as usual, he looked like he had just come from a Bond Street tailor's shop while I, in contrast, wore mud-sodden boots and the soiled woolens of a low-ranking private's uniform under a massive greatcoat. He tipped his pristine bowler hat in acknowledgment, and I gave him a tip of my steel helmet in return. Despite the fact that he insisted that none of my fellow soldiers could see him, I was nervous nonetheless.

"You have a question, my dear lad?" he asked.

"Still calling me that? Don't you think I've grown up by now?"

"You still have a lot of growing up to do in my book. Lessons to learn. Past wrongs that need to be set straight this time around unless you want to repeat those mistakes again."

Bemused, I asked, "So, are you saying that you knew I'd find myself in this wartime predicament?"

He raised his eyebrows in an "I told you so" manner. "You'd have to learn these lessons one way or another. In this sense the whole European continent has been forced into this initiatory mission."

"Even the enemy?"

"Without exception."

“For years I felt that with the ability to travel in time, I could possess a limitless expansion of my consciousness. Now, I’m feeling quite the opposite.” I took pause and pulled out my binoculars to see if I spotted any movement.

“Paranoid?” Finn asked.

Maybe my ears were deceiving. In darkness, one’s imagination knew no bounds.

“Shush.” I warned him, but he laughed assuring me that no one here had the fine-tuned psychic abilities to be able to hear him.

Finn continued with no concern. “John, have you forgotten about the Secret Library? Your knowledge of the workings of the universe should be second nature to you by now. How soon you forget!”

I took a deep breath to calm my nerves but my nostrils quivered from the putrid scents inside the trench. Often we were living in our sewage.

“Re-educate me then. Remind me how I can rise above these pits of pestilence and a world that has contracted to the size of my toenail.”

I leaned my heavy rifle against the side of the trench but still within arm’s reach and tried to make myself comfortable on a sandbag.

“Stop viewing the world in a literal fashion,” he explained while he placed his hand over my eyes.

Admittedly, every moment in his presence was unpredictable. In this altered state, he transformed the surrounding trench encampment into moving images projected onto the retaining walls. There were flashbacks of real physical libraries — the University of Edinburgh, the Edinburgh Central Library, the King’s Library at the British Museum, François Poincaré’s *Grande Bibliothèque* and even Ding Dalrymple’s Rare Books, the antiquarian bookshop that provided gateways into the nether realms. I felt as if I were stepping into each one of them at the same time while falling into a hallucinatory quixotic continuum.

“To a simple mind this would appear complex,” Finn explained

while relishing my disgruntled reaction. “Time is the limitation factor of concrete reality. Through your psychical studies you’ve experienced and accessed alternative realms of existence. The fact is that all realities perpetuate simultaneously. However, one must focus this energy to take it one-step beyond pure manifestation. The point. The line. The enclosed polygon in its simplest form is the triangle. The next step is to take that newfound form into space, and one must co-exist in time for his or her brain to perceive it. You need to readjust your perceptual tuning fork to a different pitch altogether. Are you following me?”

I nodded to appease him and hoped that I was interpreting this correctly.

He went into a further explanation. “If you could disengage from your most mundane form of consciousness and suspend your disbelief in logic and how you believe the physical universe works, you can access this *center of being* through time travel or as information in the Secret Library. Unfortunately, in the event of wartime, every blast and every bomb that goes off has the ability to shake and split open the foundations of such a universal matrix, thus making connection more difficult.”

Albeit confusing, it did begin to explain Finn’s paradox how I could extract selective information about what was happening to others I cared for either in the present or very recent past. The main challenge was concentration, and battlefield conditions made that difficult. Letters, telegrams and newspapers, albeit biased, were easier to believe than clairvoyant or psychical renderings. But then there was propaganda and outright lying, and that changed the playing field.

“John, are you going to argue with me how and where you are going to access the Library?” Finn asked with an air of indignation. “By now, you should understand enough in the arcane arts that we’d be beyond this juvenile conversation.”

I shrugged, resigned that he was always at least ten steps ahead of any brilliant answer I could come up with. “Finn, we’re a far cry from Edinburgh and finding an entryway at Ding Dalrymple’s antiquarian bookshop.”

“Then what did you do when you lived in Germany?” He prodded my memory like a branding iron.

“I used my grandfather’s silver timepiece for time travel. Gateways were always available at the Poincaré estate hidden inside their complex and elaborate gardens. There was also Francois’s *Grande Bibliothèque*. It was only a matter of one’s imagination, but any spell books were either left behind in Germany or Auld Reekie.”

“How did you communicate with Arthur?”

“Telepathy.”

“And how did you conduct those experiments?”

“We picked a conducive time. I quieted my thoughts, concentrated and closed my eyes. Do you mind giving me a wee hint?” I was getting anxious. The longer this conversation dragged out *ad infinitum* the greater the chance of missing potential danger from the Huns since my attention was split from my sentry duty.

“John, pick a place where you’d desire to go right now.”

I laughed. “Right off the Marienplatz in Munich. There was a delightful café not far from the Hotel Torbräu where Doctor Jung stayed when he was in town for our H.G.A. Society meetings. A Linzer torte and strong coffee would hit the spot for an early breakfast.”

“What’s stopping you?” Finn asked.

I pointed to my current surroundings and chuckled.

“You have several options available,” Finn explained in his convoluted manner. “With my help, of course, as a passive observer of either the present or the past you can access the Library. Astral projection is the more active approach. For a more immersive experience, time travel is by far the better choice if you wished to explore the past, or if I dare to say... tread lightly into the future. However, in regards to your question, anything that triggers the right neural response is your answer, you idiot. At this point in your metaphysical development charms and spell books are mere crutches. You’ve already demonstrated that you’re able to travel in time without a clunky and sometimes unreliable contraption like

the ones your built for Wendell Mackenzie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.”

It happened that I had my deck of playing cards in my pocket. Could he be referring to any sourced object even if it were intangible as long as it allowed me to concentrate? Therefore, it was my personal duty to remind myself that I was different and not just a common soldier paid to obey orders.

Finn said, “Ta-ta,” and flicked a pebble that pinged off the metallic surface of my helmet.

After Finn left, I continued my watch. The Germans were quiet, so to pass the time I took out a deck of cards.

“Nine of diamonds? Ah hah, the *Curse of Scotland*. Next, uh, Ace of hearts? Perfect score.”

“Counting cards?”

“Huh?” Unaware that anyone had been watching, I shoved the deck into my pocket, but Simpson confiscated it when he came to relieve me and start his 4:00 a.m. watch.

“What were you doing?” he asked.

“Trying to see if I could predict which card was in my hand without looking at it.” I was telling the truth, but nervous, nonetheless.

The bright moon overhead shadowed his face making it look sinister. I shivered, but it was cold outside.

“Trying to cheat at poker?”

“To pass the time, I was playing a game to test my ability to predict upcoming events and outcomes. You can learn it, too. Anyone can.”

“It’s that easy?”

“Hand me the cards.”

Hesitant, Simpson handed back my deck and lit up a cigarette. Meanwhile, I shuffled the cards. This was a simple exercise I heard about but never really had time to try. At least it didn’t entail any fancy equipment, special herbs or incantations I hadn’t memorized, and soldiers always had decks of cards lying around. After shuffling, I held up a card so its face was in my direction.

“The first thing is that you need to relax, but also concentrate,” I explained.

“That’s a contradiction.”

“A bit, but try.”

“A One-eyed Jack of spades!” he called out, but it was only a Two of clubs.

I chose a different card. “Try it again.”

He squinted and held his breath. “Four of diamonds. Wrong again. This stupid game doesn’t work.”

I drew another one. “It might help to close your eyes, but try to sense what card I have.”

He closed his eyes and blurted out, “The Joker!”

Simpson clapped his hands when I proved him right and showed him the Joker card, but turned skeptical. “You didn’t put it there on purpose?”

“Of course not. See, when you relax and listen to your inner voice, it helps.”

“This is a game of odds. There must be a scientific reason behind all of it. I’m sure if we continued, I’d get the next ten cards wrong.”

“Maybe, but I know it’s supposed to work, and you’ll get better with continuous practice. Let’s switch, then. Try it with me.”

Thereby, I handed Simpson the cards requesting that he reshuffle them first. He held up the first one, and I got it correct. I missed the second time, but got the next four in a row accurate.

“Maybe I should have you as my partner next time we take bets,” he said.

He finished his smoke and left to see if everything was all right on the other side.

NEW YEAR'S IN WINDLESHAM,
CROWBOROUGH



The war created many changes in the Conan Doyle household. Arthur's brother, Innes, and his sister Lottie's husband, Leslie Oldham, were both senior officers. Kingsley, his oldest son from his first wife, Touie, volunteered for the Army Medical Corps, but was surprised that fighting seemed to drag out much longer than predicted. Even Arthur's personal secretary, Alfred Wood, was called up from the reserves. It's unfortunate the psychic dreams I had back in late August while in basic training were not so farfetched. Despite the Allied victory at Mons, there still were massive casualties, and I feared that someone close to Arthur was in part of that. Later I found out that his brother-in-law, Malcolm Leckie, was wounded at Mons and died of his injuries.

Following Finn's advice, during one of my quiet and calm, middle-of-the-night watches I had the felicitous opportunity to enter the Secret Library and view the fine details of what was happening with Arthur. It was right after the New Year in Windlesham. Outside, snow had fallen and sprinkled his frozen gardens like confectioner's treats. Festivities were winding down, and with so many of Arthur's relatives off at war his house was emptier than usual.

He was going through a pile of mail containing bills, publisher's requests and straggling Christmas cards when one of his children, five-year-old Denis, skipped into his study holding a large package. The boy placed it down on his father's desk and climbed on his lap.

"Mummy forgot to give this to you."

"A Woking return address?" Arthur said, "Who else could it be from except the original time traveler himself, H.G. Wells?"

"Papa, can I stay to see the surprise?" Denis asked.

"Not now. Best to run along." He put his son down and kissed him on the forehead. "But I promise I'll read from one of your storybooks later. Is that a deal?"

After the child ran off, Arthur closed the door and turned the key in the lock. Returning to his desk, he unwrapped the parcel to reveal a large red, leather-bound book.

"*Myths and Legends of Ancient China?* How apropos to my recent interests."

Intrigued, he browsed through a few pages and went over to the telephone and rang up the Wells household.

"Good-day, is this Bertie?"

"By Jove, is this the illustrious Arthur Conan Doyle?"

"None other."

"So you got my package, I presume?"

"Indeed, with serendipitous timing. I've been thinking a lot about red books and China as of late."

"I'm sure you have, but I regret this is probably not the book you've been seeking," Wells replied.

"Nonetheless, it looks fascinating."

"I think you'll enjoy it. Found it off Cecil Court and couldn't pass it up. By the way, remember that anti-war declaration, the *Author's Manifesto of 1914*, that you, Kipling, Thomas Hardy and a bunch of others and I signed?"

"How could I forget?"

"Did you hear about the Germans' outrageous response? They call it *The Manifesto of the Ninety-three*, where an even larger association of authors, artists and scientists have denied any wrongdoing in Belgium."

"I didn't read it per se but heard about it. Has the war been keeping you busy?"

"Between my health and my age, enlistment is out of the question, but the War Office has requested I get involved with their propagandist campaigns. And you?"

"Didn't I warn everyone that Germany would declare war? The Schlieffen Plan would never work, and no one would listen about the danger from their submarines. I hope someone decides to implement body armor for land soldiers and floatation devices for those at sea. It's too bad I gave up on my political career when I ran for a seat in Edinburgh. Meanwhile everyone worries about what's next for Sherlock Holmes."

"Are you going to let your great detective go off to the Front?"

"Nay, but I wish the military would accept me. It's been a while since I practiced medicine, but I'd still be of value to mend ailing soldiers. I might be a spry, fifty-five, but their consensus is that I'm too old. When I organized a civilian defense over here, Kitchener wasted no time shutting it down. Authorities formed a new one, however, with the hope of training a half a million men. Every night after dinner we drill. Soon, I'll qualify as a legal combatant, signified by wearing a red arm band."

"Sounds like a noble cause. Perhaps your powers of deduction can ferret out German spies. Arthur, those Germans are crafty... and intelligent. I've warned those over at the War Office that the British educational system is way behind the times. The magistrates running our learning institutions have to stop snubbing the sciences. Classical Greek and Latin poetry will not serve our officers. It just might be that my local German immigrant butcher or the baker has been poking through my garbage to see what rough drafts I might've tossed out predicting some newfangled weapon. For all I know, in their spare time they're figuring out the ways and means to construct such a monstrosity from my fictional speculations."

"Honestly, I don't think the war will last more than a year. If it weren't for writing my history and having access to the newspapers, I would've gone mad by now."

“What about our suppressed journalistic efforts?” Wells asked. “The censors have been ruthless.”

“Be that as it may, I will take it upon myself to create a morale-building lecture called, ‘The Great Battles of the War.’ By Jove, I’ll take that to the road, because it’s important to inform the public. But changing the subject, about that book you were so generous to send me for Christmas, Bertie, were you hinting that you might want to reconsider time travel?”

“Nothing of the sort. No one’s spiked your New Years punch with absinthe, I hope.”

“Of course not!”

“No nip at the poppy, I presume?”

“Who do you take me for, Bertie?”

“Arthur, how many times do I have to tell you that there is no such thing as a viable time machine?”

“Come, let’s try an experiment together, and I’ll prove it.”

Wells yawned and looked at his pocket watch. “Supper is ready, and the misses is calling. Glad you liked the gift. Cheerio and Happy New Year.”

With that Wells hung up.

Arthur was beside himself. “One day he’ll regret having missed out on that opportunity.” He went over to his personal closet, unlocked it and bent down retrieving a suitcase. Popping the latches he looked it over.

“With John off to war, I guess I’m on my own if I ever want to find that *real* red book.”