CLOCKWORK LIVES



I AM MANY THINGS, UNDER MANY GUISES.

YOU HELPED MARTIN WHEN HE NEEDED IT YEARS AGO, AND I WATCH HOW WELL YOU TAKE CARE OF MY CLOCKS. NOW I NEED YOUR HELP AGAIN. COME WITH ME. I HAVE PREPARED EVERYTHING FOR YOU. I HAVE ALL THE TOOLS AND SPARE PARTS YOU WILL REQUIRE.

YOU... YOU NEED ME TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS HERE, SIR?

NO... NOT THAT. I WANT YOU TO FIX MY ANGELS.

I CREATED THEM LONG AGO TO REPLACE SOMETHING I LACKED. THEY ARE FAR BETTER CRAFTED THAN MARTIN. FAR BETTER THAN...OTHER EXPERIMENTS OF MINE. THE CLOCKWORK ANGELS ARE THE PINNACLE OF MY ACHIEVEMENT. THEY ARE PERFECTION ITSELF.

EVERYONE IN ALBION KNOWS THAT, SIR.

IT SEEMS THAT EVEN PERFECTION HAS A TIME LIMIT. I HAVE GIVEN THE FOUR OF THEM ALL THE CARE IT IS POSSIBLE TO GIVE. BUT SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH THEIR HEARTS.

SEE IF YOU CAN FIX THEM...

SEE IF YOU CAN MAKE THEM REMEMBER HOW TO LOVE ME AGAIN.

CLICK

As I touched the Clockwork Angels and accessed their internal workings, I found the spark of quintessence and the complex machinery of their delicate hearts. I was afraid.

I knew that I was seeing things, learning things that no human was meant to know.

The Clockwork Angels were sacred, symbolic foundations of the Stability. All of Albion worshipped them.

How could there be a flaw?

I used all my skills, studying each component. I tinkered and adjusted for days.

But before long, I came to realize that the fundamental flaw was nothing I could ever fix.

With great sorrow, I knew that I had failed our loving Watchmaker.

I STRIVED TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY, SIR. BUT TRY AS I MIGHT, I CAN'T MAKE THE ANGELS LOVE YOU. IT'S NOT SOMETHING I CAN ADJUST.

When I saw his intense sorrow, I realized that I had not only failed the Watchmaker, but I had also destroyed his last vestige of hope.

Elitia had a hunger that consumed me and consumed all common sense, and we traveled the land, saw all that Albion had to offer.

At night there were stars in her eyes and stars in the sky, and we talked about the future, the routes we could explore, the places we would go.

When we reached the Mainspring Hub in Crown City, I was able to shift my schedule, receive a new route assignment that would keep us away from Lugtown.

I had a feeling we would no longer be welcome there...

My airship hauled lumber, grains, construction stone, even livestock. The passenger gondolas carried people from Crown City to the outer villages and back.

And very often, securely locked and armored cars carried the Watchmaker's gold...

Cargo workers and porters traveled in the steamliner's back compartments. They were considered low-class citizens, unruly and unreliable.

That worked to our advantage, for if we were to become outlaws, we would need people of flexible morals and ill-defined schedules.

And whenever I couldn't convince them, Elitia could always change their minds.

IT'LL CERTAINLY BE A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE.

DON'T YOU WANT SOMETHING EXCITING IN YOUR LIFE?

We chose our crew carefully.

SO MANY ADVENTURES ALREADY, BUT I'M AFRAID WE'RE SETTLING INTO A NEW ROUTINE...

ADVENTURE IS IN MY BLOOD, MY DEAR! DID I TELL YOU THAT ONE OF MY ANCESTORS WAS A FAMOUS OUTLAW?

HE WAS QUITE A TERROR IN THE LAWLESS DAYS BEFORE THE WATCHMAKER'S STABILITY. I HAVE A WHOLE BOOK ABOUT HIM.

THIS IS FASCINATING, AND QUITE SALACIOUS!

THE INFAMOUS PENNROSE CLAN! WHAT DARK AND TROUBLED TIMES...!

LET'S DO IT OURSELVES!

It was a foolish, insane idea, but Elitia Peake had a way about her. And because I feared I might be losing her, I became even more foolish.

Together, we grew giddy with our plans.

We decided to rob my own steamliner.

And when we were ready, we stole the gold right out from under their noses!

This was a cargo haul, with no passengers. I chose an isolated spot in the unpopulated northlands...far from the Watchmaker's prying eyes.

The excitement of planning such a caper made Elitia a wild and passionate lover, and that made me forget my concerns, for a while. But now it was time...

WHERE DID YOU FIND THOSE, ELITIA? MORE FOR OUR GANG?

IT'S NOT HARD TO FIND LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE...

Even the greatest excitement becomes prosaic after a time, and Elitia wanted each new robbery to be more spectacular, more audacious than the previous one. And I felt something hard and heavy gnawing inside me as the months went by.

STORIES OF YOUR ROBBERIES ARE ALL OVER THE LAND. THE BLACK WATCH HAVE FAILED TO FIND YOU...

...BUT THE WATCHMAKER KNOWS WHAT TO EXPECT.

THEREFORE, WE HAVE TO BE EVEN MORE BOLD! EVEN MORE DARING!

...IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK...AND HOW TO ASK.

TELL THEM YOUR IDEA, GLENDON.

Another camp, where no one could find us. But we couldn't hide from what we had done.

THOSE GUARDS ARE DEAD, AND THE WATCHMAKER WILL SEND HIS ARMIES AFTER US NOW. WE CAN'T LET THIS HAPPEN AGAIN!

GOLD IS GOLD...BUT BLOOD IS TOO HIGH A PRICE!

DON'T BE SILLY, BROCK! WE GOT THE TREASURE, WE GOT AWAY.

AND I'VE ALREADY GOT AN IDEA FOR OUR NEXT ONE.

WE HAVE TO BE MORE DARING, STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THEM!

Whenever Elitia talked me into an even more dangerous plan, I convinced myself it was my own idea.

But I was kidding myself. And even I knew it.

But even as our new recruit Glendon prepared for more daring robberies, so did the Watchmaker.

The Watchmaker wasn't as big a fool as we had guessed.

HALT! SURRENDER, IN THE NAME OF THE WATCHMAKER!

And I knew Elitia was insatiable. There would be another robbery, and another...until we were all destroyed.

HOW MUCH GOLD IS ENOUGH? HOW MUCH EXCITEMENT?

Though I had spent months with these people and committed crimes at their sides, I didn't really know them at all.

I had lost control.

They didn't need me for planning their next caper, and I needed to be alone.

I walked for hours under the empty loneliness of the night, with only the grasses for company.

IT'S A TRAP!

KILL THE WATCHMAKER'S GUARDS OR YOU DON'T GET YOUR GOLD!

I'VE GOT TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE, ELITIA! IT'S NOT SAFE!

NO! I WANT TO FIGHT! THIS IS *MY* ROBBERY!

SERVES THEM RIGHT! TAKE OUR GOLD, AND LET'S BE OUT OF HERE! BACK TO THE HIDEOUT.

Though I stayed away for much of the night, I came back much too soon.

Elitia had been faithless to her own husband and daughter... Why had I expected her to be faithful to me?

Another journey through the mirror, another dark, faintly lit Underworld Books. But this time we had an unexpected visitor.

WHUMP WHUMP WHUMP

HELP! LET ME IN! YOU'VE GOT TO LET ME IN!

OMAR, WHAT'S THAT?

QUICK, THE GREEN WATCH IS AFTER ME!

AND IF THEY CATCH ME, THEY'LL TAKE ME TO THE WATCH-KEEPER.

WATCHKEEPER?

YOU'RE HANNEKE LAKOTA! I RECOGNIZE YOU FROM THE CHRONOGRAPHS IN ALL YOUR BOOKS.

YES, I'M HANNEKE. AND THIS IS MY NEW JOURNAL.

YOU HAVE TO KEEP IT SAFE, GIVE IT TO THE READERS. YOU HAVE A BACK DOOR TO THE SHOP?

HALT! IN THE NAME OF THE WATCHKEEPER!

BUT THIS IS... WRONG! GREEN WATCH? WATCH-KEEPER?

IT'S HANNEKE! TAKE THE BOOK AND ESCAPE HOME THROUGH THE MIRROR. I'LL HOLD THEM OFF SO YOU BOTH HAVE TIME TO ESCAPE!

I'LL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU.

OOOOF! OH NO, THE MIRROR!

UNDER WORLD BOOKS

I passed through the mirror countless times, month after month after month, never giving up, and it all grows hazy now.

I'm not sure I even know which one is my original home anymore.

OMAR! ARE YOU HERE?

I didn't even think about the probabilities. If there was even a ghost of a chance, I would find my husband.

I went farther and farther afield, into worlds that had never known the Watchmaker, where the bookshop was empty...

And sometimes I even found a note he left behind. Once, even a full diary -- like the journals of Hanneke Lakota -- telling me of all his adventures.

In search of home.
In search of me.

Desperation soon leads to exhaustion, and I realized I could not flail about through alternate worlds forever.

I still own the bookshop. It belongs to me, and to Omar. Whenever he comes home...

I have kept every note, every letter...

Someday I will find him. I will not give up hope.

"I CALL THIS PIECE *EXALTATION.*"

THE PERCUSSOR WAS A MELODY OF MECHANICAL MOVEMENT, SMOOTH JOINTS, GLIDING PISTONS, ALL IN PERFECT RHYTHM.

OTHER INSTRUMENTS JOINED IN-- RHYTHMIC SLASHES AND MELODIC BURSTS, EXPANDING CHORDS AND FLOURISHES OF BASS NOTES.

MY MUSIC SPARKLED AND GLOWED. A POUNDING WHIRLWIND BUILT TO A PEAK OF TENSION, THEN I TRIGGERED A RELEASE.

CHORDS SWIRLED AROUND THE ROOM LIKE DESERT DUST DEVILS, WHILE FRANTIC BURSTS OF NOTES FLASHED LIKE LIGHTNING.

AS THE LAST VIBRATIONS FELL SILENT, I STOOD DIZZY, WITH SHAKING JOINTS. I KNEW IT HAD BEEN GOOD. MY PERCUSSOR HAD EXCEEDED ALL EXPECTATIONS.

SURELY, I HAD GOTTEN THROUGH TO THE WATCHMAKER.

IT IS AN ADMIRABLE EXAMPLE OF CLOCKWORK MOTION AND THE INTRICATE SYNERGY OF COMPONENTS, BUT I FAIL TO GRASP THE PURPOSE. WHAT DOES IT *DO?*

BUT...IT'S *MUSIC,* SIR!

I'VE NEVER BEEN FOND OF MUSIC, THOUGH OVER THE YEARS I HAVE COME TO TOLERATE IT.

YOUR GRASP OF CLOCKWORK ENGINEERING IS INDEED IMPRESSIVE, PROFESSOR RUSSELL, BUT WE WILL NOT BE USING THIS DEVICE TO ACCOMPANY MY ANGELS.

I SUGGEST YOU DEVOTE YOUR EFFORTS TOWARD SOMETHING MORE USEFUL TO MY STABILITY.

I WAS CRUSHED, AND IT TOOK ME A LONG MOMENT TO UNDERSTAND ONE IMPORTANT THING ABOUT WHAT THE WATCHMAKER SAID...

HE DID NOT **FORBID** ANY FUTURE PERFORMANCES OF MY PERCUSSOR.