

Stubbs' own aspirations ...

The main-floor joists and planks above Stubbs' head still shivered with the clomping shoes and boots of the fleeing crowd, and for a moment it seemed as if the entire building were about to topple. Erratic vibrations, though dwindling, continued to knock clumps of spiders loose from wherever it was they had materialized among the basement-ceiling timbers.

Commissioner Footman lay on the floor, having apparently settled into his faint, for he was now snoring peacefully despite the legions of spiders that freely crisscrossed his vast bulk.

Angus Stubbs, for his part, stood like an upright oak on a battlefield, rooted amidst the debris of overturned booths and computers. Unlike Footman, however, Stubbs was daunted neither by the thought, the appearance, nor even the touch of so many spiders. He simply ignored the arachnoid army still swinging on its ropes. Good proprietor that he was, Stubbs was stoically assessing the damage to his assets, especially the computers.

It was his patron's instinct, then, that first drew Stubbs' eye to the blinking cursor on one particular computer screen, the same one, in fact, on which CedrosCM had so recently conjured the wave of spiders that had cleared the basement.

Checking the time-stamp on the monitor, Stubbs found less than a minute remaining on Cedros' time-chit. Something about the hypnotic blinking of the cursor compelled Stubbs to punch an override key-code, erasing the time-limit. Now the computer would stay online as long as Stubbs wished. Moving as if in a trance, he picked

up an overturned chair and sat down. Another keystroke brought the last-opened page back onto the screen. There, Stubbs read what appeared to be the final line of a conversation, followed by a block of lively text.

The last sentence of the conversation read, “Commissioner Footman will be picking you up shortly.” A few line-spaces followed, then began a paragraph of lyric text:

“Beneath the hand-hewn, oaken floorboards of the Chelsea Internet Café, there lurked the foul nest of an unusual and prolific species of spider. Propagation of this beastly creature, normally achieved through sexual means, was also possible through employment of the ‘spermatic word.’ With nothing more than a simple narrative command—poking the Send button—acclaimed author and DCL Grand Prize Winner CedrosCM fended off the Queen’s thugs by generating thousands of black, creepy spiders in one bold narrative stroke: Thus!”

“Hmmm,” murmured Stubbs. “Bloke’s a writer, I’d say. Here’s where all them bloody spiders came from. I’d bet ten quid on it. Sure, look here. He just wrote ‘em up, plain as day!”

Intrigued, Stubbs keyed the back-button until he’d read several pages of preceding text. Soon he was immersed in a gripping narrative of space aliens, sewers, galactic probing protocols, prison cells, wormholes, the living dead—even some saucy, though discreet, hanky-panky in the Queen’s privy chambers.

Finally Stubbs zeroed in on the title of the folder: “CedrosCM Narratives—the Deathling Crown Lottery.” There were dozens of entries. As he scrolled, it soon became evident to Stubbs that the comment about Commissioner Footman’s coming to pick up CedrosCM had been issued by none other than the Queen herself. Stubbs had stumbled

upon a *secret communication* between Her Majesty and the DCL Grand Prize Winner, CedrosCM.

This presented Stubbs with a dilemma. There was no more faithful servant or intelligence agent of Her Majesty than Stubbs, who considered himself to be “the loyalest of the loyal.” He was loyal, yes, and modest, but he was not stupid. In fact, it was Stubbs who had supplied the crucial links enabling Alan Turing to break the German Enigma code during the War. Characteristically, Stubbs took no credit for that exploit. “Let Turing roast in the bloody spotlight,” was how, after seventeen pints one night, Stubbs explained his patriotic modesty to Miles, a drinking buddy who lagged a good five pints behind.

Stubbs understood immediately that his primary duty was to call the Queen back immediately and deliver a full report on this fiasco, what with CedrosCM gone missing again, the Commish passed out on the floor at Stubbs’ feet, and even down to the spiders swinging in the dank air.

But his dilemma consisted in this: Since childhood Stubbs had entertained his own secret desire to write, and his dream had always been to narrate something alluring, dramatic, *vital*—something, in other words, very much like the Deathling Crown Lottery.

In short, Angus Stubbs recognized this moment as the chance of a lifetime. He glanced once at the snoring Footman, once at his silent cell phone, then he turned his gaze back to the blinking computer screen and began typing:

“Angus Stubbs swallowed the last of the 12-year Macallan and set the heavy, cut-crystal goblet aside, wiping his lips with the back of his hairy hand. He leered at Her

Majesty, who shiveled under his manly gaze. Next, he stood to unbuckle his ponderous claymore sword, placed it on the damask love-seat, stepped out of his kilt and strode slowly toward the supine Queen. She whimpered as Stubbs advanced, but he would not relent. On he strode, until finally he covered the trembling Royal like an Arabian stallion covering a brood mare.”

After some minor tweaking for grammar, dramatic impact, and to remove two typos, Stubbs paused. “Well, Angus, me boy, what are ye waiting for?” he said aloud. Then he pressed the “Send” button.

Stubbs, Tubs, and Lusting the Lily ...

While Stubbs was nearing the climax of his narrative intent, and the Queen's squeals were filling the royal bedchamber, Tubs, the 38-pound ever-present royal feline of pure white Persian ancestry, hopped atop Stubbs's backside, and in spite of the awkward footing, managed to gain purchase on this mobile scratching post, wasting no time in digging in.

Tubs's timing was perfect, having had lots of practice, truth be told, at bringing forth a cacophonous mix of ecstatic pleasure with overtones of screeching pain. Stubbs unhooked himself from the royal grasp and did a flip over to his back, at the same time trying to swat away the furry beast. But Tubs was much too alert to be caught unaware and abandoned ship just in time, landing on all fours at the foot of the Queen's immense four-poster bed. Tubs proceeded to lick her bloody paws.

The Queen always found this scene to be funny beyond words and her high-pitched laughter filled the chamber. Meanwhile, Stubbs, though exhausted by his efforts at "Lusting the Lily," to use the Queen's own expression for her nightly pleasures, was trying to console his bloody bottom.

"You must think of it as a badge," the Queen offered up. "In fact, there is an informal group of badgers, which I call the Order of Inscribed Buttocks, and now, Agent Stubbs you are a proud member of the OIB. I hear tales of badgers comparing their markings, you know how men are always comparing. And speaking of members, my good man, your Scottish endowments do you proud, I must say."

Agent Stubbs was engaging in a quiet moan as the Queen caught her breath before continuing.

“But I must warn you, Agent Stubbs. There must be no further narration on your part concerning the topic of the Queen's person, or else next time, unless it is by my invitation, Tub's will focus her efforts not on your backside, but on your grand privates, if you catch my drift.”

The Queen bent over the still supine Scot and looked him in the eye.

“Understood?”

“Yes, your Majesty,” came the almost inaudible, mousy reply.

“Now get your things, and be off with you. The old gent at the door will show you to the Royal Infirmary. Nurse Cutler will take care of your wounds. Don't want to risk infection, now do we? No telling where old Tubs has been digging.”

Stubbs was up at last and, inching his kilt up gingerly, he gathered his brogues and the rest and waddled toward the door.

“And Stubbs, one last thing. I want you to keep up the narration; you are showing some promise. But please, focus your efforts on CedrosCM and leave off your more adolescent themes.”

The Queen petted the loud-purring Tubs, muttering “Good girl, good girl,” and planting a Royal Peck on the cat's head. She slumped back into bed, her head now filled with “narrative possibilities.” Though warning off Stubbs from his adolescent fantasies, she was having a bit of trouble inhibiting her own. Tubs, sensing some good old-

fashioned furry comfort was in order, planted herself atop the Royal Bosom, the intensity of her purring acting as a rhythmic hypnotic sedative pulling the Queen into the first stages of slumber.

At 2:37 AM, the Queen sat bolt upright. Tubs was nowhere in sight. But the Queen, shouted out, “That's it! That's it! Mr. CedrosCM, you have met your match.” With this, her majesty leapt out of bed, fully aroused—well, awake, to be more exact—and sat herself down in her Royal Chair, at her Royal Desk, pushing the start button on her Royal Computer, and booted up. Never had the French phrase “the pleasure of the text,” been so clear to her as it was in what she was about to write.

Meanwhile, Zane Sharp searches for Arthur Compton ...

“Hey, Superman, are you asleep?” It was Clive Harbaugh at Transition, trying to get Zane Sharp’s attention. “Got a phone call for you, guy. You can take it on Line One, butcha better hurry, ‘cause it sounds Long Distance.”

Sharp’s eyelids continued flickering for a few seconds, in what lab scientists call *REM sleep*. When the phone had first rung, Sharp was dreaming a scene from childhood, chasing rabbits with his hound-dog, Rufus. By the time Clive gently shook Sharp awake, however, the dream had morphed into a cackling ceremony of sacrificed chickens over a makeshift altar.

“Mr. Sharp, I don’t think you want to miss this call,” insisted Clive, “so I’ll just plug in this extension phone here.” And before the caller could ring off, Sharp was rubbing his eyes with one hand and holding the receiver with the other.

“Yeah?” grumbled Sharp.

“Zane? That you? Where the hell you been?” It was Ruby Randolph calling from Biloxi. Her rural upbringing, like Zane’s, required two syllables in any reference to the infernal regions: hay-ell.

“I got them-there names you was wantin’. You ready?”

Zane inscribed squiggles into the air, signaling to Clive for pencil and paper. Clive had been hovering, tidying up bottles of pills and liquids on the nightstand, and he’d brought writing tools along with the phone. There was little enough excitement around Transition as it was—except for the occasional Grand Prize prep, of course—so Clive didn’t want to miss this opportunity to participate.

“Here you go, big fella,” said Clive, who admired Zane’s husky, cigarettes-and-whiskey voice.

“OK, Ruby, go ahead,” rasped Zane.

“Chango says that guy who thought he was you? His name’s Arthur Compton. And the other guy what was messin’ with you? His name don’t come out so clear, but it’s somethin’ like CedrosCM. Don’t make no sense, I know, but that’s what Chango says. That’s all I got.”

“What about addresses, Ruby? Phone numbers? Them names ain’t gonna do me no good if’n I cain’t find ‘em.”

Zane’s accent dictated the opening up of certain vowels. “Find them,” for example, had to be pronounced “fand ‘em.”

“Look, Mr. Know-it-All, you wanna talk to Chango yerself, you go sacrifice some chickens and stay up all night!” Ruby was getting steamed.

“Now, wait just a damn minute, Ruby. Don’t get so dang riled. Just think for a second. Sometimes you go into them trances and you forget stuff. So just hold yer horses and see if you cain’t come up with a number or somethin’. Do yer trance thang.” That accent again.

Ruby calmed down and dropped back into her voodoo trance, which wasn’t difficult because she had been smoking rope-sized cigars of ganja weed for two days straight.

“Says ... somepin’ ‘bout Compton’s shacked up with some nurse. Like Agatha. Yeah, I got it now. ‘Agatha Crossworthy.’ You’re gonna hafta look in the phone book ‘fyou want more’n that.”

No sooner had Zane slammed down the phone than he was out of bed, asking Clive to look up Crossworthy's address. Clive was thrilled with the sudden action, so he quickly scanned the directory, found the address and pressed a ten-pound note into Sharp's hand.

"Good luck, big guy! You can pay me back whenever," said Clive.

"Yeah, it'll be whenever," shouted Sharp over his shoulder, as he ran out the door of Transition, onto the streets of London.

Twenty-five minutes later, Zane Sharp stood at the damaged entrance to Nurse Crossworthy's building, shouting into the intercom.

"Ah'm lookin' fer Arthur Compton. He there?"

"Why, no, Mr. Compton's not at home at the moment," said Crossworthy. "Who shall I say is calling?"

"This here's Zane Sharp. I need to find him real bad. Got some bidness with him."

"Well, I don't know what to say, Mr. Sharp. How tall did you say you were?"

"Ah didn't. Ah'm six-two, fer what it's worth."

"Oh, my, six-two. I'd say that's worth something indeed. Perhaps you'd like to come up to my flat and ... ah ... wait for Mr. Compton."

"Yeah, well, I could use a little cleanin' up, too, while I'm at it. That work for you?" Zane could feel the electricity crackling over the intercom. L EPISODE 11.1

"Why, yes, that does work for me. As a matter of fact, I'm a nurse, and I'm quite used to these ... procedures. I'll buzz you in, Mr. Sharp. I'm in Number Three, but I suppose you already know that. You can come in and make yourself ... ah ... comfortable, until Mr. Compton returns."

And with that, the buzzer sounded, the electric latch disengaged and Zane Sharp entered the dim foyer. When he reached the door to Unit Three it was already open. Nurse Crossworthy stood waiting for him, holding out a neatly folded pink towel and a soft sponge.