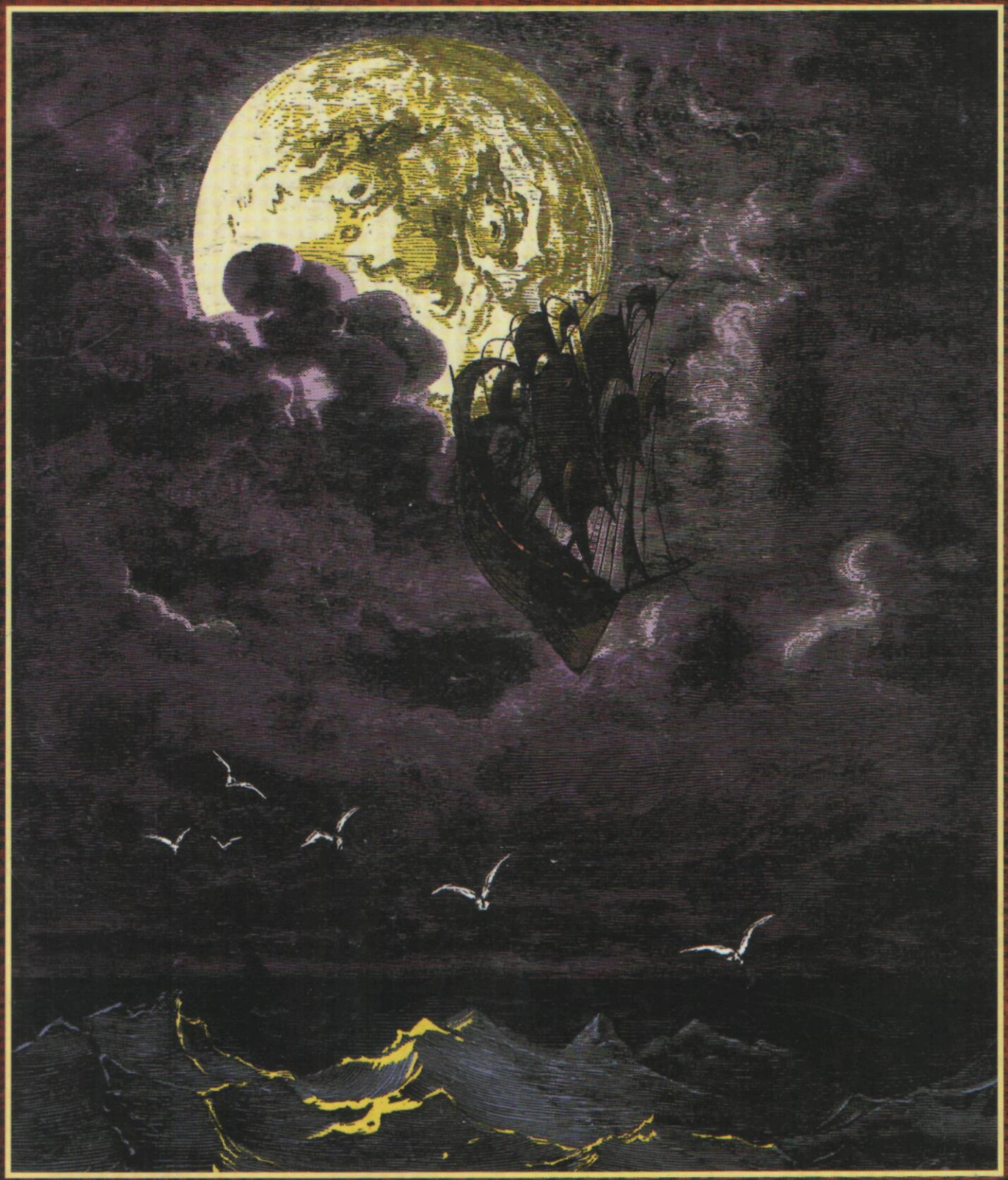
The Extraordinary Adventures of

BARON MUNCHAUSEN™



A Role-Playing Game in a New Style
Devised & Written by Baron Munchausen

The Extraordinary Adventures of
Baron Munchausen

A SUPERLATIVE Role-Playing Game
in a New Style
by BARON MUNCHAUSEN

HOGSHEAD PUBLISHING

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"Brevior vita est quam pro futumentibus negotiam agendo"
Making fine games since 1787

transcribed and edited by James Wallis, gentleman
With assistance from Mr Derek Pearcy and Mr Michael Cule
Ably illustrated by Mr Gustave Doré
Presented in the modern style by Mr Derek Pearcy
Moral support provided by the delightful Miss Kate Berridge

With grateful thanks to Mr Philip Masters, Mr Steffan O'Sullivan, Rev. Garett Lepper, Mr Marc Miller, Mr Kenneth Walton and Mr Christopher Hartford for their invaluable advice

DISCLAIMER: The words 'he', 'him' and 'his' are used throughout this book as generic third-person singular pronouns. With this usage the author, a man of great gallantry, does not wish to imply that members of the fairer sex are any less likely to have astonishing adventures than their male counterparts despite their frailty, lack of education and great aptitude for giggling and fainting. He does not assume that flouncy crinolines and a décolletage like alabaster might make them any less able to engage in espionage against the French while disguised as a haddock, or that their extensive skills in needlepoint and household management would be anything but an asset when seducing the Empress of Russia. In short, he believes that in many ways women are just as brave, capable and interesting as men, and in occasional circumstances more so. Bless their little hearts.

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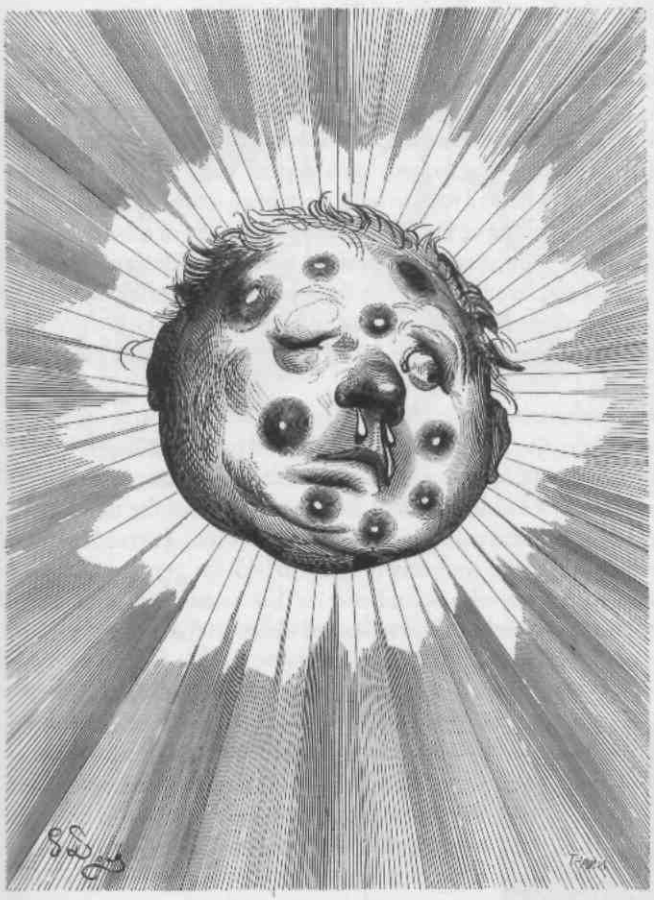
C · O · N · T · E · N · T · S

PREFACE

The name of Baron Munchausen is one which scarcely needs any introduction at any level of society: all England — nay, all the world — has resounded to the telling and re-telling of the stories of his adventures and deeds of great heroism. Some regard his tales as exaggerations or as boasts; some see them as fables or metaphors; but there are some still who believe them to be nothing less than the unvarnished truth, and I number myself among that company.

It was my great fortune to meet the Baron a handful of years before his untimely death, in the port of Dover. He had, he claimed, ridden over from France on the back of a sea-horse in order to visit Lord K—, whom a few years previously he had saved from a sudden death at the rim of the volcano Ætna during a military campaign against the fire-sprites which had recently laid waste to so much of Italy. (The Baron contended that it was these sprites, and not the barbarian hordes, which had caused the fall of the Roman Empire). He professed to a great love of our capital city and an unfortunate shortage of capital wealth, and accordingly I suggested to him that after he had visited the noble lord, he should spend a few days in London to enjoy the hospitality of my brother and myself, and where he could create a new game for us, based on his famous travels and adventures.



His majesty, King of the Sun

It had been the Baron's scheme to proceed from Lord K—'s estate in H—shire to Scotland, where he proposed to harness a carriage to a flock of golden eagles and fly them to the Sun, as a gift for his friend the King of that sphere. However, he agreed to honour us with his presence in London, and duly arrived with us a few weeks later, where we began to essay the creation of his game.

Perhaps it was my fault for an excess of zeal at the prospect of publishing the design of so august a nobleman; or perhaps it was a mistake to leave him under the sole editorship of my son Edward, who had of late been spending much time visiting gin-shops and dens of ill-repute in the company of younger designers of games from the Americas. Whatever the problem, and whereinsoever lay the blame, the manuscript which the two of them produced had, I discovered soon after the Baron's departure, captured altogether too much of the Baron's style as a raconteur and bon viveur, and little of the rigour which must inform great designs, such as Edward can produce when not under the influence of foreigners and other undesirables. (I recommend his game *An Arithmetical Pastime*, published this year, as a fine example of his work. He is not a bad lad.) A game of such a radical type would, I know, have no success in the London of the eighteenth century nor, I believe, of the nineteenth century neither.

It is therefore my intention to seal this valuable — and, I should add, expensive; the Baron being a man accustomed to the grandest living, and the finest wines and liqueurs, of which he completely emptied my cellar — manuscript, together with this letter, in a place wherein one of my descendants may find it and, recognising that the fashion in games has changed sufficiently for a curiosity such as this to find its audience at last, may publish it to the acclaim it deserves.

John Wallis, publisher of games of quality
No. 42 Skinner Street, Snow Hill, London
this year 1798.

What he said.

James Wallis, director of Hogshead Publishing Ltd
June, 1998.

INTRODUCTION

In which the Baron explains the reasons for his game

As I am a man who is known as much for his scrupulous honesty in the telling of his tales as for his amazing adventures around, across and in some cases through the circumference of the globe, I am constantly asked by my friends why I should wish to put my name — an old and most distinguished name: according to my family records there was a Munchausen stowed away upon the Ark — to a game for the telling of extraordinary tales and unlikely anecdotes.

My answer is simple. My reputation, and with it the retelling of several of my astounding adventures, have spread throughout the civilised world, across oceans, to deepest Afrique and farthest Nippon, to the twin worlds of the Sun and the Moon and the strange peoples who live there, and even into France. Therefore, wherever I travel I find myself constantly prevailed upon to tell these stories, which requests I never refuse, being a man of noble breeding.

Accordingly, I find myself without a moments' peace from nincompoops who would hear once again the tale of how my companions and I were swallowed by a whale, or how I rode a cannonball through the sky over Constantinople. And often I am rewarded with nothing but a small glass of the roughest brandy, or even nothing at all! Am I some story-teller to act for their amusement? No! I am a nobleman, a soldier and an adventurer, while they are ninnies all, and I will have naught more to do with them, or be damned.

With the publication of this game (which I here humbly dedicate to the two people most important in its writing: viz. myself and the Empress of Russia) I mean to provide those who would prevail upon me with the means to tell astounding stories to each other out of my presence. This, not solely a great boon to civilization and a source of minor income to myself — which reason, I assure my diligent readers, was hindmost in my mind during the composition of this work — will also mean that I am able to spend more time with those to whom my presence and charisma is more desirable: to wit, the ladies of the company. I believe that this may be the greatest innovation in game design since the Collectible Tarot Deck, which I invented while incarcerated in the Bastille on a spurious charge of importing quinces on a Sunday. But I digress.

I shall begin to describe the game presently, but first I must remind my readers of one important fact. This is a game of telling stories, and each of those stories will be based on the astonishing adventures I have had — in their style, if not in their content. But, while the stories you tell are fictions, my adventures are all true in every detail. To say otherwise is to call me a liar, and to pretend your fancies happened to me is to call me a charlatan, and sirrah, if you do either I shall take you outside and give you such a show of swordsmanship that will dazzle you so greatly that you will be blinded by its sparks for a month. I am a nobleman, sir, and I am not to be trifled with.

Now pass the cognac. No, clockwise, you oaf.

The Play of the Game

My game is a simple one, based upon a ritual I observed in the tribes of the remote Amazon, which they practise while preparing food. I was able to study the ritual in some depth since I had undergone the misfortune of being captured and was indeed the food in preparation. The ritual is used to purify and entertain the food, and to dedicate it to their barbarous gods; and once I had escaped by convincing them I was in sooth one of those gods — ah, but I am meandering again.

The game is simple. The players sit around a table, preferably with a bottle of an interesting liqueur or a decent wine to moisten their throats, and each takes a turn to tell a story of an astonishing exploit or adventure. The telling of the tale is prompted by one of the others, and the rest of the company may interrupt with questions and observations, as they see fit, and which it is the job of the tale's teller to rebut or avoid. When all are done, he who has told the best story buys drinks for his companions and, the players being suitably fortified, the game may begin again.

I well remember one evening in a coaching-inn outside St. Petersburg, in the early spring of 17—. Myself and several other travellers, many of us adventurers and soldiers of great renown, were caught there by a sudden blizzard and forced to spend the night there. However, the inn had a startling lack of rooms. Having agreed firstly to allow the ladies of the company to retire to bed, the gentlemen agreed to a contest to see who would receive the remaining unoccupied rooms, and who would be forced to bed down in the stables or — an even worse prospect — with the servants.

Accordingly we agreed to a contest or wager, and when it was discovered that none of the company had cards, dice, teetotums or backgammon board about them, we agreed to a contest of stories. Each member of the company took a turn at asking his neighbour to recount one of his most extraordinary adventures; and the others of us then tested the tale on the wheels of veracity, credibility and laudability. When all were done a vote was taken and I, by sheer cunning, came third — which position exiled me to a tiny attic garret, the location of which allowed me to sneak out when all were asleep and enjoy a most remarkable night warmed by the caresses of the Duke of Normandy's daughter, whose beauty and room I had noted before the game began. In truth, I tell you, it counts not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.

This game itself follows in similar fashion, but without the presence of the noble Duke's aforementioned daughter. More's the pity.

Equipment

To play my game, you will require three or more stout friends, preferably of noble or at least gentle birth; a table; several chairs; a copious supply of drink, preferably with a charming wench to serve it; and some coins to serve as stakes and to pay the reckoning when all is done. If you have such things to hand, then some parchment, pens and ink, a cold night, a roaring fire and a good supply of food are also advised, and it is always provident to have a manservant or two in attendance. You will need naught else, save for a few trifles such as I shall set forth hereto.

Starting the Game

Gather the company and count its members. If it is late in the evening then ask a manservant or pot-boy to do it for you. Make sure that each player has a purse of coins before them equal to the total number of players — do not ask a servant to do this, servants being by nature a shifty and feckless lot who will as soon rob a man blind as help him out of a ditch, and I have been robbed in enough ditches to know. If your company numbers less than five, then give each man five coins. If it numbers more than twenty, then think not of playing the game: instead I advise you to pool your purses, hire some mercenaries and plan an invasion of Belgium.

The exact sort of coin you use is not important but I will make a few salient observations on the subject, drawn from my experiences of testing this game in the courts of the Orient where, despite the fact that I spoke none of their language and they none of mine, it played tolerably well. Firstly, all the coins should be of the same value, to save on arguments. Secondly, they need not actually be coins — I have played with coloured glass baubles in darkest Afrique, where the natives possess such things in abundance — they are given them by missionaries and, having eaten the missionaries, have no use for the beads. Thirdly, anyone who proposes playing with paper money — fit for nothing more than wiping one's a—e — is clearly no gentleman and should be drummed out of your company and your club forthwith.

If the company are not too drunk, tired or bored, then you should move to Character Generation. Otherwise you may omit it. Or simply omit it altogether.

Character Generation

My publisher claims that he has consulted with the greatest living authorities on such matters, and tells me that it is necessary for games such as mine to have a section of this ilk. I am hoping that these few lines will suffice, and that my publisher will have been so far in his cups last night that he will recognise the heading above and will not notice, his eyes still befuddled by cheap gin, that I have merely made a few pointed observations to my readers on the perils of dealing with such Grub Street types.

No. It is scarcely credible that a man who has drunk so much gin could form even one syllable, let alone the stream of foul oaths which are pouring forth from his blistered lips, but it seems that my game will be forced to include some words on character generation after all.

To the matter then. To essay the business of character generation you will require a piece of parchment and a pen — I assume that, having received a proper education, you are able to read and write; in Latin at least. If not, it is my experience that passing priests will often agree to perform this service for you. If no priest or clerk is handy, summon one. If one is not to be found, or you are unable to procure the services of one through pecuniary difficulties, say by having lost your fortune in an unwise bet on the growth of an asparagus-spear with the King of the Moon, then I advise you to pass this section without a second thought.

Write, or ask your companion to write, your name at the top of the paper, with the prefix 'Baron' — or 'Count', 'Lord', 'Duke' or whatsoever honorific is appropriate. If your company includes those of foreign extraction, you may instead wish to use a title such as 'Graaf', 'Don', 'Sultan', 'Sheikh', 'Amir' or, as I gather is the fashion in the Americas, 'Chief Executive Officer'. In this age of universal suffrage, now that they have finally won the right they have gainsaid for generations, we must not forget the frailer sex too: 'Baroness', 'Countess' and so forth are equally permissible. If you must.

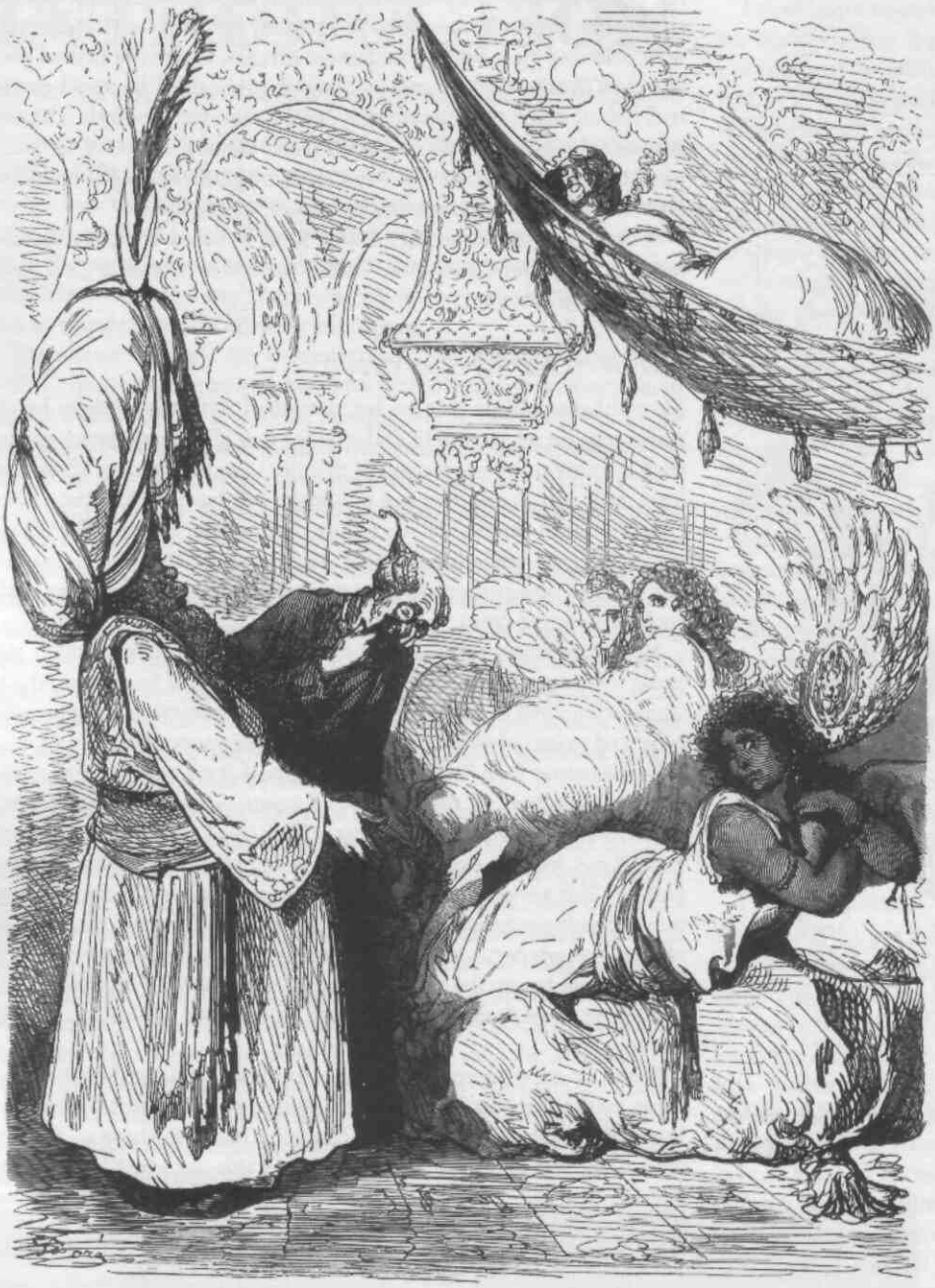
If you were not born to such rank then, since this is naught but a game, you may write whatever takes your fancy — but sirrah, I warn you that should I meet a man who claims to be of noble blood but who is not — and with my age, experience and prodigious nose, together with the art of scent-scrying as taught to me by an Esquimau in reward for saving him from a herd of walruses, I can smell them, sirrah, I can smell them — then I shall so dizzy him with my rapier that he be unable to remember his own name and the direction he faces, much less the noble title he pretends to.

Underline your name. Nay, underline it again, for its importance is uttermost.

Below your name, add the place of your birth (and, I presume to presume, your estate), and its country. Medals and other decorations are best left unrecorded at this stage.

Beneath this, write whatsoever takes your fancy. I have found it most useful for recording the calling-addresses and pedigree of any young ladies who catch my eye during the evening.

So much for character generation.



The Turk allowed me to choose which woman I would like.

Beginning the Play

Once all the company have generated characters, or not — and I recommend not — then you are ready to commence the play of the game itself. The player to start is the member of the company with the highest rank in society (standard protocol applies: religious titles are always deemed greater than hereditary titles, and those higher than military titles; if of similar rank then compare subsidiary titles, number of estates or centuries that the title has been in the family; youth defers to age; when in doubt the highest military decoration takes seniority; and for the rest I refer you to the works of Messrs Debretts or Burkes).

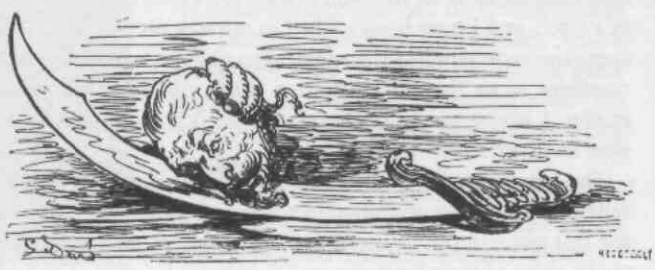
If by some mischance of birth or the poor organisation of your host you are all commoners then the first player shall be he who was wise enough to purchase this game. If several have, then I thank them all; if none have then I worry if you possess sufficient altitude of attitude to play a game such as this, which relies on nobility, generosity of spirit and purse, and not being a miser. If this manner of beginning is not agreeable, then the player to start should be he who was last to refill the company's glasses.

However you do so, once the person to start has been determined, he must begin the game. To do that, he must turn to the person sitting at his right hand and ask him to tell the company the tale of one of his famous adventures. By way of example, therefore: "Dear Baron, entertain us with your recollections of the war of 17—, which you fought single-handed against the French and won," or: "Most honoured and noble prince, if you could refrain from the gracious compliments you are paying to my sister for a moment, mayhap you might satisfy our curiosity on the matter of how it was that you escaped from the prison of Akkra after you had been hanged there two days earlier?"

For those unable to think of a sufficiently extraordinary and humorous topic for a story, I have included in an appendix some two hundred of the subjects of my own exploits, a mere fraction of the total, which the less quick-witted player may use for inspiration. Whether you choose to use one of my examples or one of your own mind, remember at all times that the subject of the story to be told should only be revealed to the person who must tell it a few seconds before they start their narrative. Through this surprise, much good humour may be gained.

The player thus surprised must now recount the story — perhaps basing it on an adventure of his own, or creating it from the whole cloth of his imaginings. He may, however, pause for a moment of thought before commencing his tale by exclaiming, "Ah!" and then perhaps adding, "Yes!" Any further prevarication is unseemly. Throw a bread-roll at the fellow to hurry him along.

Tales should be short, of around five minutes, and told at a good pace without hesitation or undue pausings for thought. Inflections, gestures, mimes, props and strange voices may all be used, although the narrator is warned not to go too far: he is, after all, born to the aristocracy — or pretending to be so. I well remember playing this game with the Grand Seignior of Turkey while he held me for ransom in Constantinople. For one story he hired a troupe of actors, a band of tumblers, conjurors and dancing girls, and six elephants. The tale lasted three days and four nights, and when the company did not elect it the best, preferring my own anecdote on how I discovered the seedless grape, he had us all beheaded . . . but enough of that for now.



If the Story-Teller Should Pull Up

If a player is unwilling to tell his story to the company, or falters in the recounting, then he may plead that his throat is too dry to tell the tale; and good manners demand that the company must let him retire honourably. However, good manners also demand that he must obtain a drink to wet his throat, and in doing so it would be greatly impolite not to furnish the rest of the company with refreshment also. In short, a player may decline to tell a story, but must stand each member of the company a drink if he so does.

Having so declined, and the drinks having been ordered, the player in question should turn to the player on their right hand and, as is the form, propose the subject of a tale for them to tell.

Objections & Wagers

For the benefit of my duller readers I should point out that this section on challenges and wagers is the cleverest part of my game — although due to the ridiculously rigid structure imposed on me by my diligent but perhaps over-strict publisher, I must wait until later to explain exactly why this is the clever part.

The course of a narrative never shall run smooth, for the other players of the game may at any point interrupt the story-teller with a wager or an objection. This is accomplished by the player pushing forward one (and never more than one) of the coins before him — we shall call it the stake — and breaking into the flow of the tale. A wager would be cast in the manner of these examples:

"I'll wager, Baron, that beyond the door you mentioned was an entire dragoon of fusiliers waiting in ambush," or:

"I'll wager, Count, that the Empress was not impressed with your gift of two giraffes and ordered you out of her bedchamber immediately."

Objections, by contrast, are cast thus:

"But Count, it is well known that the Empress has a hatred of giraffes after her lap-dog was eaten by one"; or:

"But Duchess, at the time of which you speak the Colossus of Rhodes had been a fallen ruin for fifty years, so you could not possibly have climbed it"; or any of a thousand thousand other possibilities.

If the interrupter's wager or objection is correct — in other words, if the teller of the story decides to build this detail into his anecdote — then he must agree with his fellow and may keep his coin. However, he must then perforce explain how the events introduced in his fellow's interruption did not impede him in the adventure he is describing.

If, however, the interruption is deemed incorrect — if the teller of the story does not wish to build the wager or objection into his story — then he may push his fellow's stake away *along with a coin of his own*, and inform the other that he is a dolt who clearly knows nothing of what he speaks and gets his information from the tittle-tattle of old maids in gin-houses. If the one who interrupted is not prepared to stand this insult to his honour, he may add another coin to the pile and return it to the story-teller, making his case for the wager more forcefully and returning the insult with interest. The story-teller may again turn the wager away with another coin and another insult; and so on until one side withdraws his objection and accepts the insult (thus keeping the entire stake), or one party has exhausted his funds but will not stand down — in which case a duel must be fought. (See 'Duelling', a section I believe I shall enjoy writing.)

To give a sample of this in the passage of a game, which I have carefully based on one of the examples I gave above, imagine that the Duchess of Sutherland is telling a tale based on my noted exploit wherein, due to a misunderstanding of the ancient proverb, I led the city of Rhodes to Rome. To give a snippet of the story, as the Duchess might tell it:

Duchess: "... I required a view over the city of Rhodes from the highest vantage point it offered, and so I ordered my sedan-chair to be carried to the top of the Colossus that stands astride the harbour there."

Lord Hampton (interrupting most rudely, with his mouth full of petits-fours): "But Duchess, at the time of which you speak the Colossus of Rhodes had been a fallen ruin for fifty years, so you could not possibly have climbed it. I saw it so myself a few months previously." As he says this, he pushes a sovereign toward her.

What is the Duchess to do? She is in a quandary. For the sake of her honour she must continue but that needs an investment of one coin. Shall she make that investment? She shall!

Duchess: "My dear Lord Hampton, I know not the state of your eyes when you saw no Colossus of Rhodes, but I suspect that they were befuddled by the strong wine of that place, or possibly turned by one of the women of ill-repute who frequent the harbour area." She places a second sovereign atop his, and pushes them back to him.

A spirited riposte! Will my Lord Hampton stand for this? He will not! With a flourish he swallows his cake, adds another coin to the stake, returns it to the Duchess and rejoins thus:

Lord Hampton: "On the contrary, since many of our most outstanding historians have described the fall of the Colossus some years before your noble birth, if we are to believe the age you claim, might I suggest that you had become so enchanted with one of the burly sailors of Rhodes that you climbed upon his torso, thinking it was that of the Colossus?"

Ah! An accusation of infidelity to the memory of her late husband, the notorious Duke! All eyes are now on the Duchess. Pretty blushes tint her face, just as the dew of dawn tints the perfect pink of a new-

opened rose at the break of day (a fine arrangement of words, if I say so myself). Hurriedly she counts her money — but alas that morning she has bought herself a new muff and some dogskin gloves, and her purse is near empty. Prudence is her middle name, literally as well as figuratively, and prudence dictates that she must accept this insult, lest she bankrupt herself. She briefly considers asking Baron Edgington for a loan or a gift, but guesses — correctly — in what form the Baron would demand his repayment, and so she abandons that speculation. Besides, there are now three coins at stake; if she gives way then they are hers. The temptation is too strong for one of her gentle sex and she snatches up the stake with the following:

Duchess: "Not at all, dear Lord Hampton, but when I refer to the colossus I mean, of course, my travelling companion Thomas Highfellow, the tallest man in the world. He merely stood astride the entrance to the harbour, one foot on either shore, and I instructed the carriers of my sedan-chair to climb up his massive frame until we could see the entire city. As I was saying, we had just reached his knee when —"

Baron Edgington: (pushing forward a coin) "But surely, Duchess . . ."

At that point we must leave the Duchess and her troubled tale — which if she had but stayed on the path of my original she would have put aside all objection and opposition without troubling her exquisite brow or her largely vacant mind — and return to the tedium of describing the rules. This is tedious work, and not the stuff for which the noble-born brain was made. Rules be d––ned! I am in the spirit for a digression.

On Being Noble

I understand that there are many among the readers of this game who have not been blessed with the good fortune that smiled upon myself at my birth. Indeed, in this age of the printing press in which even the lowliest-born may be taught to read and write a little, it is possible that this book has fallen into the hands of some in whose blood the signs of greatness do not flow, whose minds and souls lack the clarity and sure-headedness that comes only after generations of the finest breeding and tutelage — to wit, in short, commoners. Such people are not to be despised, but pitied, and it is for them that this chapter is intended, as I describe the rudiments of what a man of lowly birth requires to attain the stature of a perfect specimen of the noble order such as myself.

Noblemen conform to a template laid out by Almighty God and first described by Baldesar Castiglione in his work *The Book of the Courtier.* His words hold true today, despite the fact that — due to a misfortune of birth — he was Italian. I shall take the liberty of quoting that august gentleman without asking his permission, since he has been dead close on two hundred years. It is true that in the past I have conversed with Pythagoras, discussed military strategy with Julius Caesar (an offensively short man, I found) and dallied with Cleopatra, all several centuries after their respective deaths, but that was with the aid of an Indian mystic whom I subsequently converted to the Protestant faith, whereupon he became unable to perform any of his pagan rituals — but once again I digress.

Castiglione wrote — in the form of a most amusing conversation between a prince and his companions — "I would wish our courtier to be well built, with finely proportioned members, and I would have him demonstrate strength and lightness and suppleness and be good at all the physical exercises befitting a warrior. Here, I believe, his first duty is to know how to handle expertly any kind of weapon, either on foot or mounted, to understand all their finer points, and to be especially well informed about all those weapons commonly used among gentlemen. For apart from their use in war, when perhaps the finer points may be neglected, often differences arise between one gentleman and another and lead to duels, and very often the weapons used are those that come immediately to hand.

"I also believe that it is of the highest importance to know how to wrestle" and here I shall pass over a few lines, for they teach us nothing about gentlemen but much about Italians. He resumes: "I wish our courtier to be an

accomplished and versatile horseman and, as well as having a knowledge of horses and all the matters to do with riding, he should put every effort and diligence into surpassing the rest just a little in everything, so that he may always be recognised as superior. And as we read of Alcibiades, that he surpassed all those people among whom he lived, and each time in regard to what they claimed to be best at, so this courtier of ours should outstrip all others, and in regard to the things they know well . . . .

"So I would like the courtier sometimes to descend to calmer and more restful games, and to escape envy and enter pleasantly into the company of all the others by doing everything they do; although he should never fail to behave in a commendable manner and should rule all his actions with that good judgement which will not allow him to take part in any foolishness. Let him laugh, jest, banter, romp and dance, though in a fashion that always reflects good sense and discretion, and let him say and do everything with grace."

To this I would add: that the nobleman is the highest of God's creations, brought to a peak of excellence through centuries of good breeding, education, culture and diet; and he should never forget that. The aristocracy of France forgot it recently and resultingly found themselves having a short audience with Madame Guillotine — a fate from which I was able to rescue many, through a number of disguises, a Portuguese-English phrasebook and a herd of hollow cows — but once more I am deviating, and I shall return to my subject forthwith, except to say that I shall be happy to recount my recent experiences in France for the benefit of any nobleman who would do me the honour of inviting me to dinner.

The noblemen sets an example to the rest of humanity. He must be at all times civil and courteous, even to his social inferiors and foreigners (although naturally servants and the French are excluded here). His behaviour is the touchstone of all civilisation, for without nobility there would be no patronage of the sciences, the arts, literature or music; and only common diversions like the theatre, country dancing, politics and the mercantile trades would remain.

Naturally no nobleman has any truck with magic, on the entirely reasonable grounds that it does not exist. Science, logic, philosophy and enlightenment all demonstrate that it cannot work — a view I ascribe to fully, although I am at a loss to explain why, after insulting some gypsies in Rumania, I spent a week believing I was a chicken.

Although you, my reader, may not be in any whit like the paragons of humanity I have delined above, in order to play my game you must pretend to be nobly born and, in telling the stories of the great adventures you are claiming to have made, you should portray yourself and your actions as noble in thought and deed. You may find the experience disquieting, but I hope most earnestly that it may serve as an interesting lesson, and that it may teach the most doltish amongst my readers some decent manners.

Naturally, any nobleman worth his salt will be accompanied on his travels and adventures by servants and travelling companions. As befits this, there will follow in the next section a discourse on the nature of companions, during which another opportunity shall be taken to be gratuitously rude about the French.

Companions

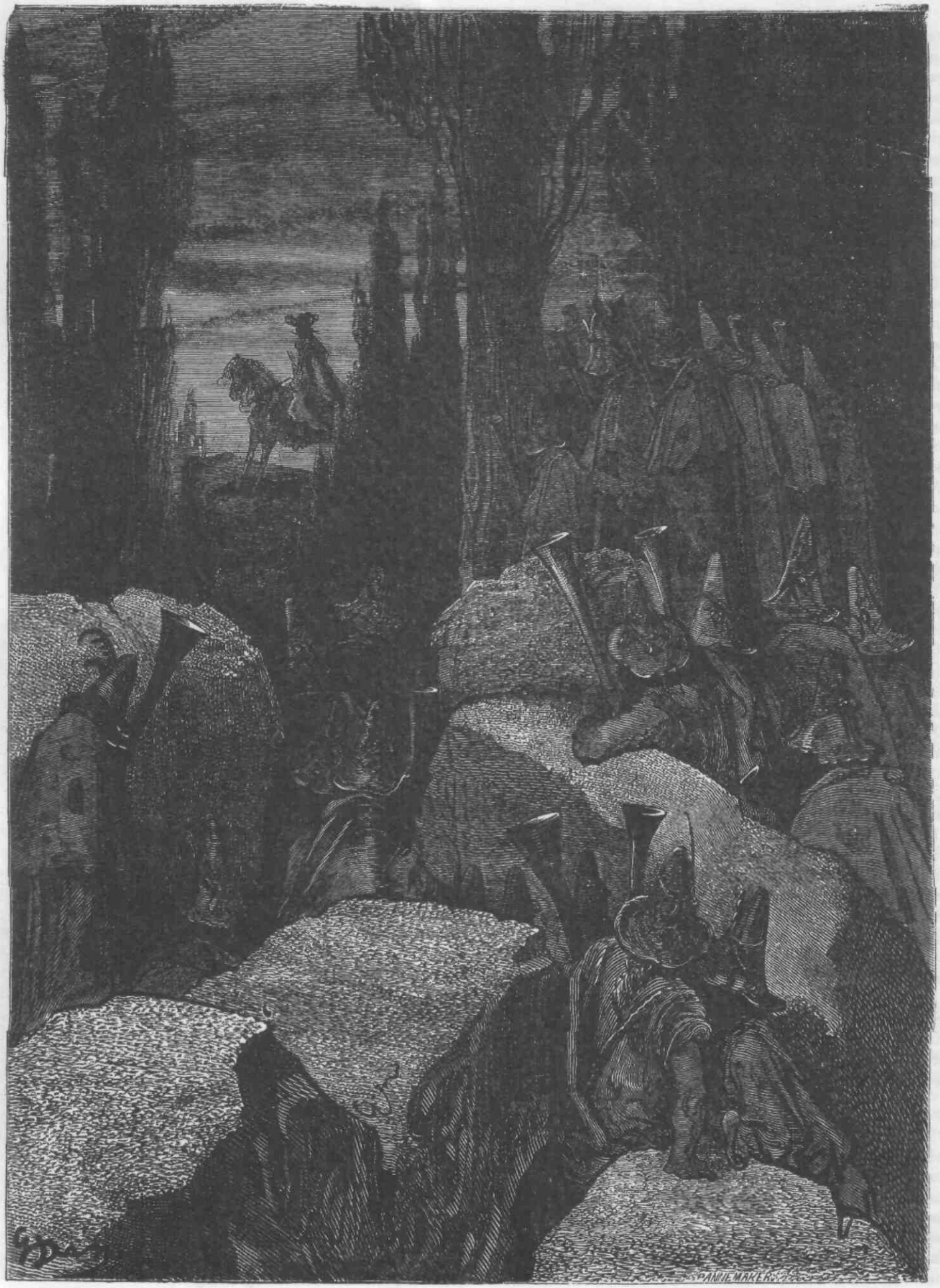
As he wends his way through life's travails, a nobleman must perforce be accompanied by many companions, who will assist him, support him, keep him company and enliven his spirits with their wit and learning. Companions are men of rare abilities, and some so rare that they are positively unique. I well remember my dear friend Octavus who assisted me so ably in the capture of the entire Turkish fleet at Ankara by means of his prodigious breath, whereby he blew all the

One of my many companions.

ships from their moorings and down the coast, where they became entrapped in a fence of fishing-nets which I had stretched across the sea. Or there was Wolfgang, whose enormous skill at gardening enabled him to turn the Black Forest into the Black Rose-Garden in two days, allowing me to win my bet with Baron Scourt and charm his lovely daughter into . . . but that is another story, and shall be told another time.

Companions are, in short, the men and women who may help you in your adventures. Thus, should your narrative require a person of prodigious abilities to help you from a particular escapade, you may introduce one such as you wish. But take care not to use the services of more than one such companion in each story, for so to do would be considered greedy. Noblemen, I need hardly remind you, are not greedy fellows – well, not for the most part, and we are only concerned with the finest part of nobility here. This is, after all, about fictions.

(It need not be said that companions are not servants. A nobleman has servants as a French dog has fleas, and if they be French servants, they will serve their master in much the same office as the flea serves the dog: viz. a constant source of irritation and nuisance. I remember one French manservant who served me during my campaigning on the Russian border; he drank lustily, swore abominably, scorched my shirts, knew not a handkerchief from a hot-air balloon, and at length revealed himself to be a woman, a fishseller's wife from Calais, and mightily in love with me. This would have been the source of much embarrassment to us both, had he not been conveniently hanged for treason. I will not deny that it was I who planted on his person the map of the secret tunnel under the English Channel, which I had acquired by — ah, but once more I am digressing.



Many times I have taken on entire regiments single-handed.

(Which reminds me in timely fashion that this chapter itself is naught but an extended digression, and I should — if only to placate my outraged publisher, whose cheeks are so flushed with red anger — like rosy-bottomed Dawn after she has been spanked by her father the Sun for dallying too long with her lover — who I must confess was myself — and not attending to her business of breaking the day for two and a half weeks — my publisher, I say, whose eyes flash with rage and hair stands on end in resemblance of the giant hedgehog I once defeated in Scotland by turning it inside out, thus stabbing it to death on its own spines — my publisher, I fear, shall die of an apoplexy unless I end this digression, close these brackets and return to the subject of Objections and Wagers forthwith. Frankly, I am finding this business of rules more than a little tedious, particularly now that this bottle of cognac is finished. Yes, that was a hint, which I observe he has not taken. What? Oh, closing the brackets. Very well.)

Objections & Wagers, continued

As all those of truly noble blood are aware, there are a handful of wagers and objections that should never be made. Firstly, no listener may ask the question, "But my dear Baron, were you not killed?" It is palpably obvious to even the most slack-jawed nitwit that the story-teller has not been killed, for he is here telling the story, and if such an objection be made then the story-teller may pocket the objector's coin, and all the company stare at the dull chap with undisguised contempt. Throwing bread rolls may be called for; but setting dogs on such a fellow is generally thought uncouth.

Secondly, in the round of insults, no nobleman would ever insult another's breeding and pedigree, or his veracity. In plain terms, you may not directly call another player a liar (although you may safely question his accuracy or remind him of facts he may have forgot), doubt his claim to noble rank, or insult his mother. Indeed I lie: you may do any of these things, but so to do is proof of your utter caddishness, and the person you have insulted is at liberty to challenge you at once to a duel. I shall expand on the subject of duels shortly, a topic on which I am particularly well versed since the day in Vienna when I insulted the King's 47th Hussars at the moment that very regiment was parading outside my window, and I was forced to fight a duel with every soldier of them, at the same time. I confess I am looking forward to the chapter on duels with no little relish, but like an errant schoolboy I must finish my bread–and–cheese before I may have my plum. Onwards! There is not far to go.

It may seem strange that if the wagerer loses his bet then he recovers his stake, or if he wins then his stake is lost. This is so, but when the wagerer makes his claim, he is in truth saying, "Ha, my fine fellow, here is a pretty tid-bit that I wager you cannot make a part of your story."

It is therefore clear that, since money is the way that the game is won or lost, and making wagers is the only way that the money on the table may be moved around, a wagerer should essay to make wagers which he can win — that is to say, which the story-teller cannot build into his tale, and must turn away. Meanstwhile a great story-teller will construct a tale so that it invites the greatest possible number of wagers, which the teller has with great cunning already anticipated. Herein lies the skill of my game; that is to say, one part of the skill of my game, the other part to be explained in further chapters. Duller readers need have no fear: I shall take pains to point out these tactical points whensoever one occurs, that they may have the satisfaction of knowing wherein these points lie, if not the wit to use them in the game.

Duelling

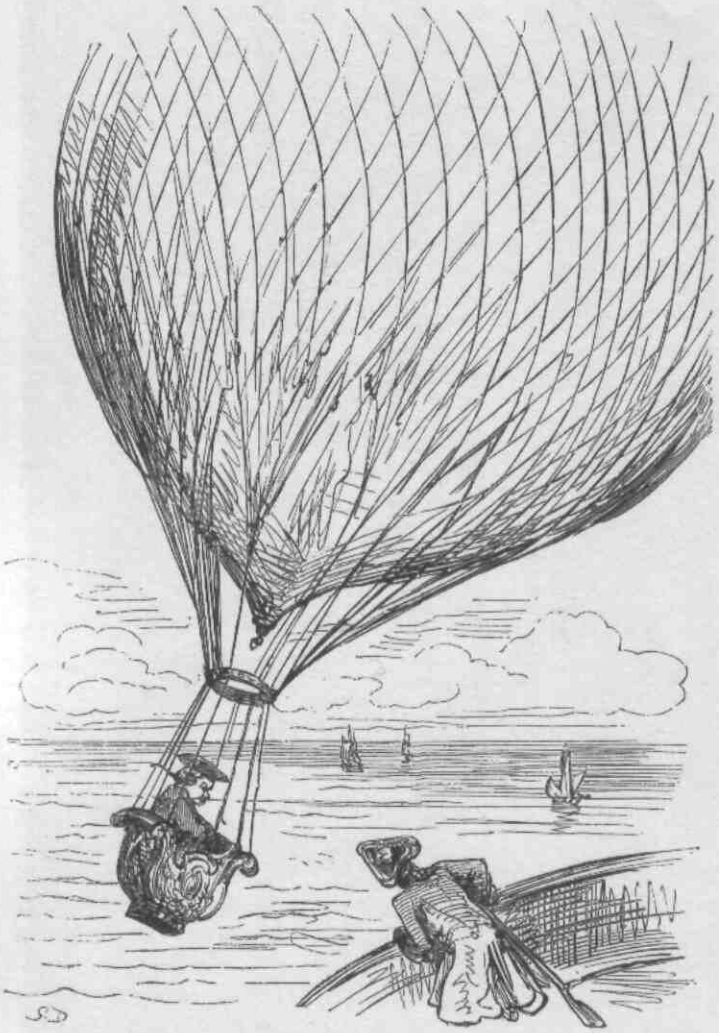
(I am advised that it is the fashion to name this part of the rules the 'Combat System'. That is an ugly phrase which stumbles off the tongue,

and sounds like a Prussian manual on methods of elementary sabre-play. I disdain it. Should its coiner take exception to my contempt for him and his phrase, let him challenge me and we will see if he knows aught of real 'combat systems', as I reduce his britches to lace.)

As I have observed earlier in this volume, if in the matter of an objection or a wager a player should insult another's veracity, title or pedigree, then the injured party has the right — nay, the obligation — to challenge his insulter to a duel. This will cause an unfortunate interruption in the normal flow of the game's stories, but so be it: where the honour of a nobleman is concerned, everything else must stand aside while he defends himself. Fighting over matters of honour is a dangerous business which may bring poverty, injury, death or — a worse horror — ridicule to the participants, but it is as necessary as beefsteak to an Englishman, gold to a Swiss, or avoiding baths to a Frenchman.

The rules for fighting a duel is simplicity itself. Once the insult has been made and the injured party has issued the challenge, the two duellists must choose friends or companions to be their seconds, agree on a weapon — rapiers are traditional, and come easily to hand at most parties or places where the genteel and well-educated gather, although of late pistols have become popular in some quarters — and then go outside to a convenient courtyard or colonnade, where they fight. The duel need only progress until first blood or incapacitation, as this is naught but a friendly disagreement, but I have seen duels fought to dismemberment or death over such matters as a carelessly split infinitive.

As the art of duelling is so widespread across Europe and all other civilised areas of the globes, and so well known to all people of good breeding, I need not describe it here — Ah, my publisher reminds me that this game is destined for the unwashed hands and uneducated eyes of the lower orders as well as the more properly born of us, so perforce I must describe it after all. Anyone with a hereditary peerage or who has ever served as an officer in one of the better armies of the world (German, Prussian, English, Spanish, Italian, or for that matter Cathayan, Ethiopian, Persian – indeed, now that I think of it, all but the Turks, Poles and Irish) should move on to the next section. The rest of you, read on.



The art of duelling is one of some great refinement, and is conveyed equally by good teaching, fine upbringing, the proper blood and the willingness to spill some of it. There are any number of textbooks on the subject, which I advise any novice to purchase and, if you are serious about your studies, to read. The acquisition of a tutor is necessary for the perfection of the art — I recommend employing a German duelling-master for brutality, a Spaniard for flair or, for matches which may last up to five days and either be rained off or end in a draw, an Englishman. You should also set aside three, perhaps four years for study, and a decade for practice.

Naturally the procedure of duelling is fraught with danger and difficulty. A number of unenlightened states have declared duelling illegal, so the participants run the risk of interruption by members of the lower orders brandishing truncheons and warrants, which is enough to put even the finest duellist off his stroke. I have found few remedies to this, save the usual methods of duelling in a secluded spot, making the combat as short as possible, and keeping a hot-air balloon tethered nearby in case a swift exit is required.

I was planning to digress at this point on the matter of seconds, the proper choosing thereof, and how exactly you can find one at two o'clock of the morning in Prague — a problem that has bedevilled me since my sixth birthday. Despite the lack of scholarship on this subject, and the undoubted benefit that such a section would add to this book, I have been persuaded — under my strongest protest, I must add — to omit it by the same bleary-eyed publisher who not three paragraphs ago convinced me that such a thing should be included. His wits, I fear, are addled by cheap gin and the profits from his last tawdry publication. Nevertheless it is my contention that my public would wish to see such a book, embellished with several anecdotes and stories of my duelling prowess, and further illustrated by my friend Master Doré. If you agree, gentle reader, then kindly write to the publisher, demanding to see this new work. Its publication would be doubly assured if you would be good enough to subscribe to it: a mere matter of three guineas, which should be enclosed — take care to wrap them well and send them via a trusted messenger — along with your letter.

Duelling for Cowards

If you are weak of blood, soft of flesh or lilied of the liver, or — by way of furnishing you with an excuse — you are in a hurry to finish the game, or there are ladies present who would be shocked at the sight of blood, or you are unable to retain the rôle you are playing at the thought of noble combat, and find yourself reduced to a common peasant once more, or if you are Welsh; if any of these things be true then you may wish to avoid the physical combat of a duel. Instead, just as you are playing at being a nobleman in my game, you may play at fighting a duel with a set of rules I have devised for that very purpose.

I say 'devised'. In fact I was taught the game by an inhabitant of the Dog-Star, whom I encountered a great distance from his home, on the last occasion I visited the Moon. I understand that the game was originally taught to these astral canines by no less a traveller than Vasco da Gama who, on his final voyage, set his course towards the island of Ceylon, missed by several thousand leagues, and sailed off the edge of the world. I blame the shoddy quality of Portuguese sea-charts for this, though doubtless the Portuguese would blame the compass, or the wind, or the water, or the Ceylonese, or the shape of the world, or the Moon, or anything else that might absolve their own slack-handed workmanship.

Da Gama called the rules 'Bottle–Glass–Throat' (he was Portuguese, as I mentioned), and the those of the Dog-Star know it as 'Bone–Stick–Ball'. I shall call it 'Knife–Stone–Paper', and .... Ah. My publisher tells me I have been overtake by fate, that the game is already known by that name to all the world, and I should strike out the paragraph above. I shall do no such thing; I shall let it stand as a treatise on the history of the game, and scholars may depend on my well-known love of the truth if they doubt any part of it. None the less, I admit myself disgruntled by this turn of events, and will break my narrative here to restore my spirits with a hearty dinner.

I return much refreshed for my interval, although I must confess I have drunk deep of Lord Bootlebury's dark port and his youngest daughter's tawny eyes, as big and deep as those of the stag I killed in the Black Forest by stuffing it with cake — its flavour, I must say, was not entirely enhanced by this method of dispatch — and accordingly I am distracted and have lost the thread. No matter. I will instead regale you with a story of my travels until the plot returns to me, or my publisher wakes from the noisy slumber on which he has embarked at the far end of the table, and reminds me where we were.

I recall a time in the winter of 17—, when I was riding into the interior parts of Russia. I found travelling on horseback rather unfashionable in winter; therefore I submitted, as I always do, to the custom of the country, took a single horse-sledge, and drove briskly towards St Petersburg. I do not exactly recollect whether it was in Eastland or Jugemanland, but I remember that in the midst of a dreary forest, I spied a terrible wolf making after me, with all the speed of ravenous winter hunger. He soon overtook me. There was no possibility of escape. Mechanically I laid myself down flat in the sledge, and let my horse run for our safety.

What I wished, but hardly hope or expected, happened immediately after. The wolf did not mind me in the least, but took a leap over me, and falling furiously on the horse, began instantly to tear and devour the hind part of the poor animal, which ran the faster for his pain and terror. Thus unnoticed and safe myself, I lifted my head slyly up, and with horror I beheld that the wolf had ate his way into the horse's body; it was not long before he had fairly forced himself into it, when I took my advantage, and fell upon him with the but-end of my whip.

This unexpected attack in his rear frightened him so much, that he leaped forward with all his might; the horse's carcass dropped on the ground; but in his place the wolf was in the harness, and I on my part whipping him continually, we both arrived in full career safe to St Petersburg, contrary to our respective expectations, and very much to the astonishment of —

I recall it now; we were discussing duelling. Rather, I was discussing, you were learning, and my publisher was hogging the brandy and making loud interruptions. He is a most irritating fellow, but he has now gone to the tavern on the corner, and I may continue.

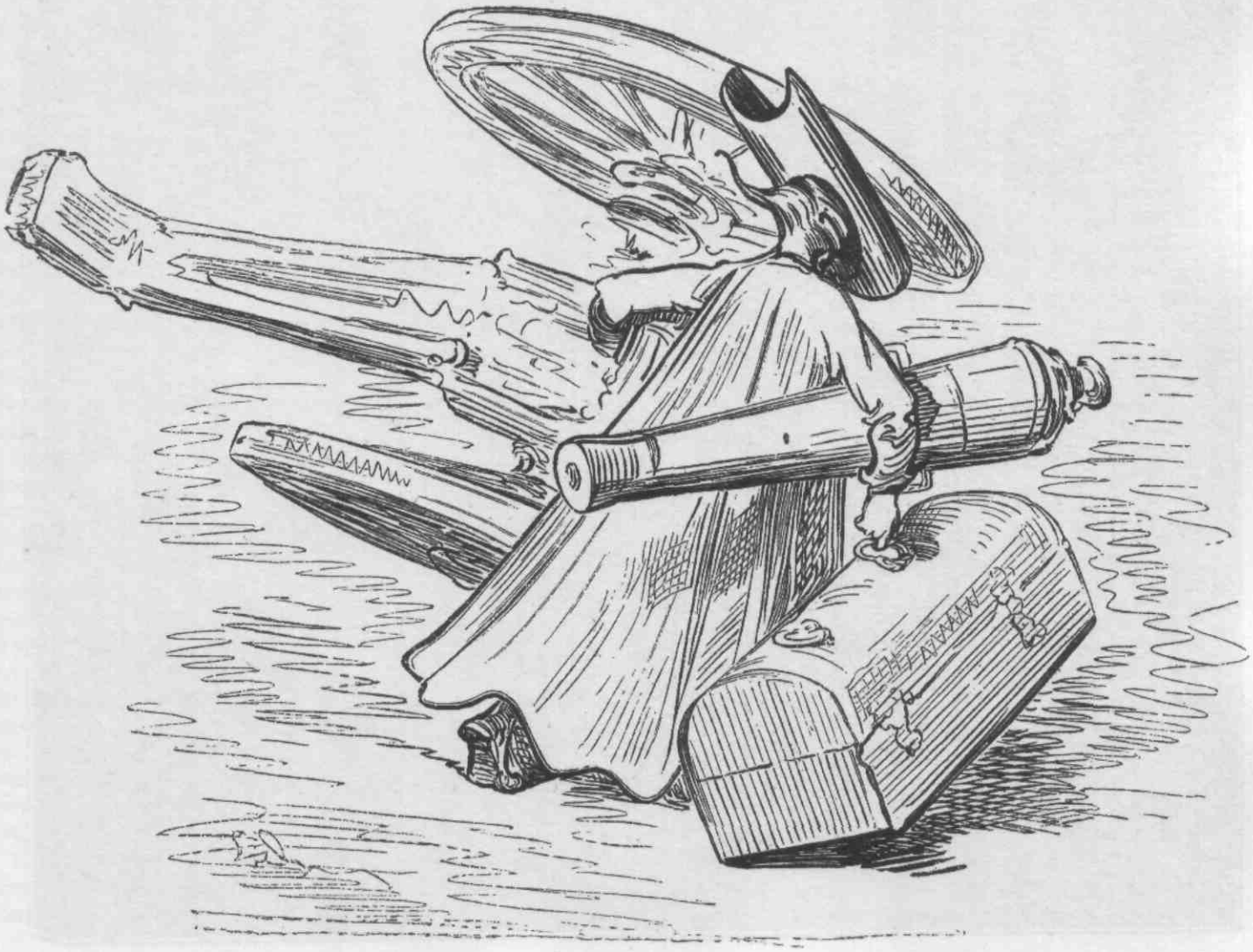
Knife–stone–paper is the game. On a count of three, one should form one's hand into the shape of a blade, a stone or a piece of paper; the rule being that knife beats paper (it cuts it); paper beats stone (it wraps it); and knife beats stone (it whets it . . . No, I have it wrong. Ask your manservant how the d—ned game plays). The faint-hearted *faux*-duellists must play three hands of it, discounting draws, and whosoever wins two or more is declared the victor. I could say more, but I will waste no further words on this subject, destined as it is only for cissies and or he who is afraid of the sight of a little blood, or of adding another death or two to his conscience. Real noblemen have no such qualms, particularly if they are dealing with peasants or foreigners. Play your rôle properly or not at all, say I.

The Result of a Duel

The results of a duel can be deadly, even if you lack the esprit to essay it in the proper fashion. Assuming that both parties are still alive, the upshot of a duel is as follows: the loser must make over his entire purse to the victor, and must retire from the game. If one of the two parties has lost his life in the conflict, then his second should carry out these instructions. However, his bounty — if such they have — remains untouched.

A final word on duelling: it is considered unsporting to provoke a duel or issue a challenge once all the stories are finished and the bounty is being dispensed and received. I remember one memorable game I played with a crew of swarthy pirates, while they and I were trapped inside the belly of a mighty sea-beast which had regrettably swallowed every man of us — a not unusual happening, I learn from my conversations with maritime adventurers, but peculiar in this instance in that we had been climbing the Matterhorn at the time of the swallowing.

We had reached the end of the game and, as was only to be expected, the coins were piling into my bounty, when the pirate captain, angered at the failure of his tale, drew his cutlass and, with a mighty oath,



At times even a nobleman must carry his own trunk and artillary.

I have several times found myself in the company of enormous fish.

swung it at my head. I stepped away and the blade sliced through the great beast's spleen, on which I had been seated, which gushed forth such quantities of bile that — ah, but my publisher, who has just returned from the tavern with the smell of the tap on his breath and the rouge of the tap-girl on his lips, reminds me that my deadline is close, and my remaining pages are running short, and I must cease my digression forthwith. As before, if any of my readers should wish to hear the remainder of the story, I will be happy to recount it over dinner at their club and their expense.

Now, perforce, I must move to explain how a story is brought to a conclusion and how a game is won, in which — fear not, gentle reader, I have not forgot — I shall explain what on earth a 'bounty' is.

Finishing a Story

In my experience a good tale should last no more than five minutes; for beyond that the listeners begin to grow bored and listless and talk among themselves and throw bread rolls and play at dice or cards and call for musicians and dance upon the table and seduce the hostess and distribute seditious or revolutionary literature and plot Asiatic land-wars, and other such distractions as might put the finest raconteur off his stride — particularly if he has designs on the hostess himself.

The story-teller should therefore bring his tale to its natural conclusion at its proper length, and in a way that brings the greatest enjoyment and astonishment to his listeners. At this point the tale is done, the audience should respond with a few hearty "Huzzah!"s and exclamations of "By my oath, Baron, that is the most remarkable story I have ever heard, and I drink to it. More wine!" which is always pleasing.

However, it has not escaped the eye of a soldier such as I that there are several story-tellers who either cannot tell when their story has finished, and must perforce prattle on until Doomsday or until the wine is finished; or who are so ill-skilled in the art of racontage that their audience cannot tell when their tale is done. I have applied my military mind to both these problems, and the solutions are below.

If a story-teller finishes his tale and there is none to cry "Huzzah!", for they are all asleep or otherwise occupied, then he should signify to the company that he has come to an end by standing and loudly proclaiming: "That is my story, true in every word, and if any man doubts it I'll make him drink a barrel of brandy in a single swallow." This serves as a signal to the company, by its volume if not by its words, that they should rouse themselves from the torpor which a dull tale invokes, and muster a few token "Huzzah!"s to tell the story-teller that they have understood his tale is over.

However a tale ends, once the usual toasts have been drunk (to the story, the story-teller, the host, the monarch, the most attractive woman present, the second most attractive woman present, the most attractive woman in the story, absent friends, *et cetera*) the one who has just finished his narration must turn to the person sitting at his right hand and, in an interested tone (for to do otherwise could be taken as an insult and lead to a regrettable duel, or a mild-mannered bun-fight, or any other manner of unnecessary distraction from the business at hand), say, "So, Baron, tell us the story of . . . " and here, as at the start of the game, describe a suitable adventure, whether from one of my own escapades, or from the list in the appendix of this work, or from his own experiences or imaginings. The person thus addressed should pick up the tale and proceed as described above, with the other players preparing wagers, interruptions, duels and so forth to put him off the stride of his description.

If, however, a story-teller should have become so wrapped up in his narrative that he has failed to see the company has lost interest and has commenced cock-fighting or badger-baiting instead, then any of his

I invariably find myself outside their company as well.

fellows may interrupt at a suitable juncture with the words, "That reminds me of the story I heard told of Baron N— M— (naming the player sitting to the right of the present story-teller) in which he . . . " and names an adventure. With that he must put forward one coin. If others of the company agree then they should add coins of their own; and if fully half the company is in agreement that the mantle of story-teller should pass, then Baron N— M— commences the tale of the new adventure. The previous story-teller, overcome by shame and disgrace, may add the company's money to his purse by way of recompense. If fewer than half the company pledge coins to the cause then the accumulation is given to the pot-boy, to pay for more wine.

I see that thus far I have failed to explain the bounty. Never fear. There are still several pages to go, and I am certain it shall follow in the next chapter.

Determining a Winner

When all are done with their stories, there should be a moment of pause. Sit back in your chair and permit the serving girl or pot-boy to recharge your glass. Think on the stories you have heard, and decide in your own mind which was the best. If you are of a scholarly bent you may wish to debate the matter with your companions, making reference to Aristotle's *Ars Poetica* and the recent critical works of the poet Dryden. Or if not, then not. 'Tis of no importance.

While you are so debating, either with your soul or with your fellows, count up the coins you have left in your purse. These now become the tokens with which each of the company shall decide whose story is the finest, the most outstanding, the most memorable and most authentic, and the most heroic, showing its teller in the finest light. In common parlance, you shall each vote for a winner.

Commencing with the person who began the game, and in rotation and in turn, each player must take his stack of coins, and with words such as: "Gentlemen, I have never heard such a surprising collection of stories, but upon my honour the tale of Baron — (here he names the nobleman whose anecdote he considers the finest of the evening) is the most astonishing tale I have encountered in my life." If you are English you may wish to add "'Pon my soul" here, but thankfully most of us are not.

(My publisher is protesting, and also English. My explanation must perforce pause a moment while I hush him by refilling his glass with the last of his father's cognac.)

With these words, the player places his entire purse in front of the fellow who he has just named. It must be all of his coins; it does not befit a gentleman to split his bets or spread his favours too widely. Nor should the recipient add the coins to his own purse. Be not hasty; simply leave them where they lie. We shall call them the player's 'bounty', for a reason which I am too bored to explain.

Once every player has said his piece, cast his vote and distributed his bounty (and I must perforce remind the sluggards, commoners and plebians among my readers that no true nobleman would even consider the idea of voting for himself), then each player should count out the number of coins cast for him and his story. (*Sotto voce*, naturally; there is nothing so unbecoming as a nobleman who cannot count but out loud; and if your grasp of numerology does not extend beyond five then you should immediately give up all thoughts of playing this game and find yourself a pastime more suited to your nature; such as turnip-farming, bear-baiting or waging war against the Turks.)

Ending the Game

The player with the greatest bounty is declared to have won the game. All give a rousing "Huzzah!" and more wine is ordered to drink to the health of the victor. It is accepted as a point of etiquette that the victor shall pay for this wine, and it is also accepted that the money they have accumulated as their bounty may not be — nay, is never — sufficient to cover the cost. But that is of no matter: we are noblemen and we overlook such trifles as fair payment, money, *et cetera*. Besides, the sweet taste of victory will more than wipe out the sour tang of the evening's reckoning, when the innkeeper brings it.

At this point the game is over.

Should the majority of the company wish, and not be so out of pocket or in its cups that it cannot continue, another round of the game may be played. The victor of the previous round — being the person who has most recently recharged the company's glasses — shall commence the play.

a Word on Tactics

It should be noted — indeed, it will already have been noted by the more intelligent and well-bred readers — that there are two ways to play my game. Firstly, one may play with ultimate strategy and guile, in order to relieve as many of the company of as much of their wealth as is strategically possible, to amass the greatest stake. Secondly, one may tell the finest story one is able. Naturally all players should aim to tell the finest story, for that is the only way that they may win the contest. If you play strategically so that you gain the greatest stake, then I can assure you that it is practically definite that you will lose the game; partly because your stake must be given to someone else, and partly because you will have aroused such enmity in the rest of the company that none of them will cast their vote for you. Yet by this tactic you can give yourself the honour of being the one who shall decide which player wins the game.

Naturally, although many noblemen and particularly their sons are known to be profligate with their money, it is poor play to empty your purse before the end of the game, and worse play to spend it all before you have your turn at story-telling. Without coins you can not interrupt a comrade, rebut interruptions to your own tale, or cast votes for the winner. And, since it is beneath a nobleman to either beg or steal, once you have no funds then the only way to accrue more is to tell a fine story that attracts many interruptions from your fellows, and turn those interruptions aside with the dexterity of your tongue. (I feel an urge to digress here about the dexterity of tongues I have known, but I shall forbear the temptation.)

In the final round of the game, if your company has admitted women to the play, I do not recommend that you vote for your paramour, or for the member of the company who has taken your fancy. In my experience it rarely leads to success; and your fellows will notice and make fun of your noble gesture for some weeks.

In Conclusion

In these pages I have essayed three things. Firstly, to bring — what is it now, man?

My apologies to you. I had thought we had run our course, but it has been slurred in my ear that I have neglected a section which my contract obliges me to write. I will be most glad to have this game finished. Such things are not suited to a noble temperament; which admirably explains why so few publishers have ever been elevated to the ranks of nobility.

Background

I wish to explain that this section has been imposed on me: my publisher tells me that such things are these days expected of the creator of a game. For the life of me I cannot understand the reason or purpose for enquiring into my background: I am a nobleman and a Munchausen and those facts, which suffice as my passport across all the borders and into the royal chambers in every country in Europe, should surely be sufficient here.

Ah. I am informed by the mangy-headed fellow that he believes I have missed the point. Naturally I have done no such thing; although I may be guilty of a little wilful misinterpretation of his meaning. However, I suggest that we retitle the section 'Historical Setting' and start again.

Historical Setting

Much better.

It is, of course, the eighteenth century; for surely there has never been a finer time to be alive. More particularly, it is the year of our Lord 17—. The Renaissance is over, the power of the Church is crumbling, and Europe is civilised at last. The Turks are in Constantinople and indeed all over the place, the French are making trouble again, Sweden is in decline, the Russians are invading the Crimea at regular intervals, the King of England is German and mad — both fine conditions for ruling that isle — and somewhere on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean a few colonists are beginning to think a little too much of their own importance.

The wonder of the age is, without question, the marvellous flying-balloon of the brothers Montgolfier, which can carry people and animals high into the air in perfect safety, transporting them over cities, rivers, forests and mountains, and even — I know from experience — as high as the Moon itself. I believe that the brothers devised their invention solely as a way of leaving France.

Speaking of France, it is troubled greatly by short men wearing tall hats who, in an effort to bring the nobility down to their own level, have chopped off the heads of many of that country's finest citizens. This has led to many escapades for young bloods who wish to prove themselves by attempting to rescue the younger and more beautiful members of French society from such a fate, and over whom they inevitably lose their heads one way or another. It has also led to a regrettable surfeit of French aristocracy in the coffee-houses and salons of the other capitals of Europe. However, it is our great fortune that these upsets seem to have done little to disturb the fine vintages emerging from that country's wine-presses and cellars.

Science, discovery and philosophy are making great strides. The French have created a rational system of measuring all things, which they call the Metrics. It will never catch on. Now that the Australias have been located, they are being put to use as a depository for all the undesirables of Europe. A young English fellow called Watt has created a giant kettle which can power a factory — by providing enough hot tea to keep the workers contented, I imagine — and another named Stephenson is said to have made one that runs on wheels, for the purpose of scaring horses and running over members of Parliament. This is an enterprise to be applauded.

Those of the lower orders who believe that money is an acceptable substitute for nobility have been swift to take advantage of these innovations, and are busy building factories and employing women called Jenny to spin cotton for them. Some fool in Norfolk has entirely spoiled the winter's hunting by ploughing up the fallow fields and growing turnips on them. Much of London's trade seems centred on pieces of paper bearing promises, mostly sold in coffee-houses, and all to do with a great bubble which appeared in the South Seas some years ago. I confess I understand none of this, but it appears that Britain may be developing an empire of some kind — based upon, of all things, trade, money and root vegetables. May G–d help us all.

In Conclusion

In these pages I have essayed three things. Firstly, to bring a little of the excitement of my life into the lives of others, so that they may appreciate my astonishing adventures the better. Secondly, to show the lower orders a little of how their betters live, behave and think, in my attempt to heighten their understanding of exactly why it is that we are superior to them, and thus to avoid, I hope, any further outbreaks of *the unpleasant doings that have been going on in France of late.*

And thirdly, by giving you an appreciation of myself and my adventures, I hope to rekindle the spark of adventurousness in the soul of man — and the occasional rare woman; it being my opinion that too much adventurousness in a woman is generally a bad thing — which has become so dampened of late by lumpen pursuits such as theatre-going, novel-reading and the playing of whist. Cease using the fruits of the imaginations of others; instead use the visions of great achievements that my game has placed in your mouth to spur yourself onwards to great thoughts, great deeds and great actions.

Every word I have ever spoken is completely true (barring three; they being 'Helen', 'amontillado' and 'Tuesday') and I am by no means an exceptional man. I have merely lived in exceptional times; any man of noble spirit, living in times such as mine, could have achieved the same. My deeds are only known so widely because I have had what some would term the ill-manners to boast of them over a drink or two. And I say that you too, gentle reader, have the capacity within you to experience adventures as great as my own, if only you have the ambition to raise your sights high enough.

One man, it is said, may change the world. I deny that I ever did so – I may have saved it once or twice, but that is not the same thing – but the ability is within you to perform that, or any other feat, save one. It is not, I regret to tell you, within your capacity to make love to the Empress of Russia, for the reason that her honour is under my protection and sirrah, if I catch you near her, I will give you a drubbing which will so bruise your feet and your a—e that you will be incapable of either standing up or sitting down, and will therefore be forced to spend a month spinning in the air like a top, several inches above the ground. Consider that a warning.

"Tell us, Baron, the story of how your horse came to be hanging from a church steeple, and how you freed it."

APPENDIX ONE

Tell us, Baron, the story of . . .

How you discovered the source of the Nile by accident.

Your discovery of the efficacy of swallowing frogs as a cure for leprosy.

How you survived the attack of a lion and a crocodile at the same time.

How your hunting-dog Beauty caught seven hares at once.

How you circumnavigated the world without leaving your house.

How you cured the Empress of France's hiccoughs from the other side of the English Channel.

How you carried the news from Aix to Ghent.

How you survived being swallowed by a whale; and what you encountered inside its mighty belly.

How you were able to reach the Moon using only twenty feet of rope — and how you returned.

The time that your fur coat attacked you on the road to Cologne.

How you accidentally started the Americas' war of independence.

How you escaped from the dungeons of the Grand Seignior of Turkey, with the help of a pound of Dutch cheese.

How you convinced the King of Sardinia to become your footservant.

The occasion on which you gave birth to an elephant.

Your encounter with a floating island in the Sargasso Sea.

The occasion on which you duelled all the members of a regiment of French hussars simultaneously.

How it was that you met Helen of Troy.

How you saved the life of a man who had died fifty years ago.

Your invention of the hot-air balloon, and how two Frenchmen took the credit.

How you survived your fall from the Sun to the earth.

How it was that you became betrothed to the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

The time you ate the King of Norway's horse in most curious circumstances.

How you singed the King of Spain's beard.

Your discovery of the lost city of Atlantis, and why it sank ten minutes afterwards.

How, due to a meal of oatcakes, you destroyed the city of Tobruk.

How your horse came to be hanging from a church steeple, and how you freed it.

How the town of Salisbury insulted the King of the Moon, and how you persuaded that monarch not to go to war because of it.

How it was you were able to pass as a native among the little people of Lilliput.

The time your post-horn played for half an hour with nobody blowing it.

Why, during the siege of Gibraltar, you invented the continuous-action loom.

How you recognised a sheep as the long-lost second son of the Earl of Bath.

Your prodigious marksmanship, and how it saved last year's champagne vintage from ruination.

How you used Stephenson's 'Rocket' locomotive to cure Prince Augustus of the gout.

How you started the French Revolution for a bet, and who won.

The origins of the dance you performed on the table at the Empress of Russia's banquet last spring.

Your argument with the noted sorcerer Doctor Dee, and how you finally rid yourself of the asses' ears he gave you.

How you earned the hatred of every freemason in Poland.

Why, during thunderstorms, you insist on riding stark naked.

How you forced the surrender of the Turkish armies at Constantinople with a chicken.

Why you have drunk every bottle of cognac bottled in the year 17— in the world.

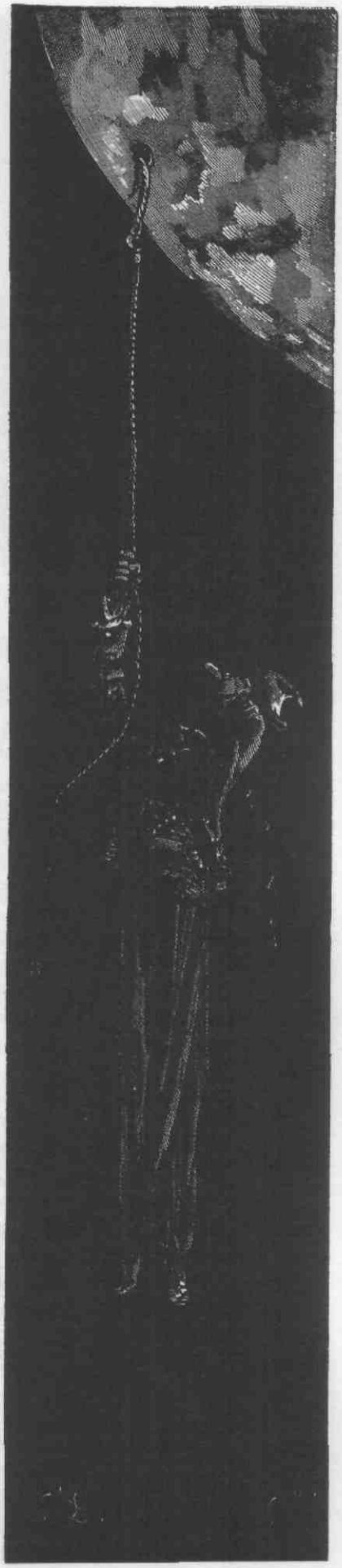
Why it is that in France you are known as the Fifth Musketeer.

The wager you made with the Queen of the Fairies concerning Marie Antoinette, and how you won it.

How a portrait of Henry VIII saved you from attack by lions.

The sad occasion of your funeral, and how it is that you are sitting here now.

Why you showed the Empress of Sweden's bloomers to the town of Dusseldorf.



Why you bear such a striking resemblance to the Sphinx of the Egyptian desert.

How you used a cannon to spy out the Turkish lines at the siege of Constantinople.

How it is that your portrait has been hanging in the water-closet at the Palace of Versailles for the past 200 years.

How you survived being burnt at the stake for witchcraft in Barcelona.

Why you saved that notorious brigand Jonathan Wild from execution.

How it was, the night you passed in Florence last year, that the hair of every citizen over the age of 20 turned blue.

Your hunting trip that led to the downfall of the Ming dynasty in China.

How you succeeded in cross-breeding elephants and peacocks – and why.

The table-manners of the inhabitants of the Sun, and how these manners aided you in the mapping of Australia.

How you acquired one of the Moon-People as your manservant.

How you burst the great bubble which appeared in the South Sea some years ago.

How you proved to the Royal Society that the world is not round.

The mistake with your laundry which saved the court of France from drowning.

The Venetian masqued ball where no man but every woman recognised you.

How your choice of cummerbund decided the Battle of Rhodes.

How you were principal in the safe escape of Bonny Prince Charlie.

How and why it was that you once had to fight a duel with yourself – to the death.

The incident where you accidentally impregnated the Pope.

How you mistook the King of Spain for a fishwife, and your amusing conversation with his chief executioner the following morning.

The banquet in Prussia at which all the servants were executed for witchcraft.

How you saved the coastline of Portugal from flooding through a case of mistaken identity.

Why you refuse to wear scarlet, eat eggs or ride a horse on a Tuesday.

The occasion in Paris where you became an ape for a week.

Your encounter with the female pirates Mary Bonny and Anne Read, and how you survived.

How a bottle of schnapps in Russia saved you from a beheading by the Turkish Sultan.

Why every blacksmith in London owes you three guineas.

How something in the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci helped you to prevent the assassination of our beloved monarch.

How you came to fight a duel at the summit of the Matterhorn, and how you survived the ensuing fall.

How you righted the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Your discovery of the Floating Island of Cheese in the southern seas, and how you escaped from it.

Why the keeper of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew has classified your moustache as a herb.

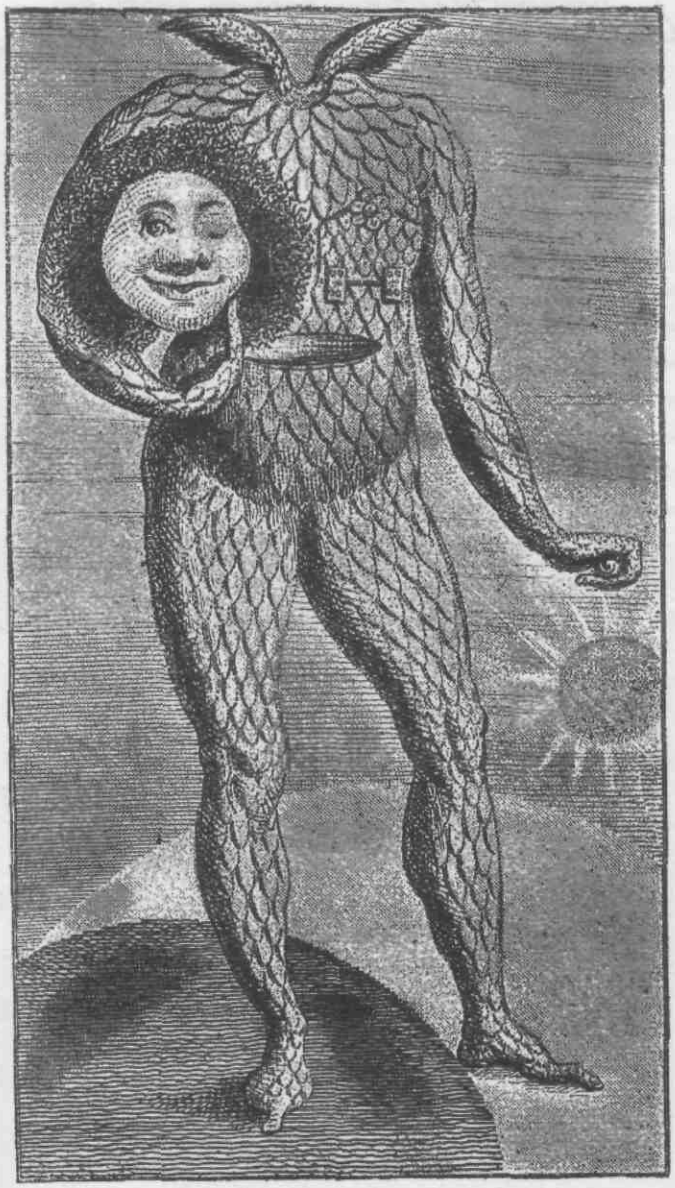
The peculiar results of your having fallen asleep in a cannon.

Why every fifth child born in Brussels is named after you.

Why you once swam the entire length of the Danube — and how.

How it is that Plato mentions a dialogue he had with you in his book 'The Republic', written two thousand years ago.

How you survived your descent into the volcano Vesuvius.



An Inhabitant of the Moon

What happened when the primitives of the Polynesian islands offered you as a sacrifice to their native gods.

How, after a mighty earthquake, you arranged for Rome to be rebuilt in a day.

How you seduced the Queen of the Moon, even though she stands three hundred feet tall.

The matter of the dog who spoke French and the tragic history of its master.

How you became King of Mkolo-Mbeleland.

How a sprig of pussy-willow saved your life.

Why you were forced to act all the parts in a production of Hamlet at Covent Garden — and how you succeeded in staging the duel scene.

Why you claim to be the husband of Cleopatra.

How you stopped a charging herd of elephants from destroying Edinburgh.

The most outrageous wager you ever took.

How you saved the life of the King of the Cats.

What became of the arms of the Venus de Milo.

How you located the Garden of Eden, and what you found there.

How you captured the phoenix which you later presented to Queen Anne.

Why it is that you tell every beggar you meet that you knew their mother.

Why the strange race of pygmy-people from Yolimba-Yp worship you as their god.

What caused the fall of London Bridge, and how you survived it.

The duel you were forced to fight against a swarm of bees.

Your creation of a tunnel underneath the Straits of Gibraltar, and what happened to it.

How you escaped from the Great Pyramid of Gisa, and what you were doing in there in the first place.

Your invasion of Italy with an army of three hundred tigers.

How you learned of the true resting-place of Noah's Ark, and what you found there.

How you repeated Moses' trick of parting the waters of the Red Sea.

How you used the True Cross to build a bridge across the Hellespont.

How you visited both North and South Poles during dinner one evening.

How you lifted the ancient curse on the royal family of Sweden.

How it was that you learned to speak the language of the giraffe.

How you and your companions completely emptied the treasure-room of the Sultan of Mahmood.

How your life was saved by the ticking of your pocket-watch.

How you caused Princess Mary of the Netherlands to be married in a pigsty.

How you and three rabbits lifted the siege of Gibraltar.

How it was that you and not Francis Bacon wrote the plays of William Shakespeare.

How you recovered the treasure of the sunken Spanish Armada without wetting a hair of your head.

Why, when you appeared before the court of the King of the Low Countries, did all present think you were a ghost.

Of your trip to the city of Mecca, and your subsequent capture by Magyan fire-worshippers.

Why, on your return from the Indies, did your father not recognise you?

How you stole the Empress of France's diamond studs from under her very nose.

Your encounter with the Sirens of legend, and how you responded to their seductive songs.

Where you came by the unusual gift you lately presented to the Duchess of Normandy.

The hunting trip in Scotland, on which you shot twelve grouse, three lions, a camel and a sea-serpent.

How you caused a German serving-maid to be crowned Emperor of India.

The great discoveries you have lately made concerning tea.

How you became the first man to climb Mont Blanc

How you became the first man to descend Mont Blanc, before any man had climbed it, and how you managed the descent.

How you prevented the White Cliffs of Dover from turning blue.

How, on your celebrated crossing of the Sahara desert, you were able to eat your camel one night and still ride it the following day.

How you revived the lapdog of the Queen of Spain, and what honour she did you in return.

How you captured the entire French fleet with a leaky rowing-boat.

How you deduced that all the monks of Westminster Abbey were devil-worshippers and what you did about it.

Why members of the Prussian army salute you and address you as General Bock.

Why you never remove your hat in the company of Greeks.

How you invented the national dish of Italy.

How you detected that the French were digging a tunnel under the English Channel, and the remarkable action you took as a result.

Why it is that half the fish brought into Antwerp harbour belong to you.

How the largest diamond in the world came to be in the oyster you presented to the Empress of Russia.

How you caused the Pope to be stripped naked and paraded through the streets of Vienna.

Why you owe your gall-bladder to a man in Dublin.

How your luncheon with the Duke of Strathcarn started the Industrial Revolution.

Your encounter with the Great White Whale.

Why you call your horse Apollyon on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays, and Bucephalus every other day.

What you did to cause the year 1752 to lose the days between the third and the fourteenth of September.

Your unusual method of espionage in the recent invasion of Poland.

Your involvement in the Royal Society's scheme to extract sunlight from cucumbers.

How you claimed the planet Neptune for the British Empire.

How you discovered Eris, the Greek goddess of Chaos, and what you did to her when you found her.

Whether you have, as was reported, located the source of the Amazon, and if so, what kind of sauce it was.

How you retrieved the King of England's sword from his sunken frigate the Royal George in fifty fathoms of water.

How you wrote a ten-volume history of Iceland in a day, despite never having been there.

Who forced you to use a herring to chop down the tallest tree in the Black Forest.

The bet you made with the Count of Monte Hall, that you could outrun a hare over fifty yards, and how you won it.

The strange circumstances under which you met the Devil, and how you sent him back to Hell empty-handed.

The baby you found in your saddlebags between London and Bath, and the locket around its neck.

How you navigated the ancient labyrinth of Minos, and what you found at its centre.

How you replenished the empty treasury of Liechtenstein in a single day.

Why you were imprisoned in the cell next to the Man in the Iron Mask, what passed between you, and how you escaped.

Your shipwreck and sojourn on a small island inhabited only by man-eating savages.

How you discovered that your manservant was the Emperor of Prussia, and what you did about it.

How you escaped from the Turks on half a horse.

How you accidentally executed the King of Norway.

The time a cat insulted the honour of your family, and how you restored that honour.

How you sailed across the Mediterranean without a boat.

How you moved Leeds Castle to Kent.

Your encounter with the ghost-ship the Flying Dutchman, and how you brought its cargo to harbour.

How you melted the swords of the French Army into ploughshares without attracting the attention of the soldiers carrying them.

The three nights you stayed at the castle of the Count of Transylvania.

How you laid the ghost of Anne Boleyn.

How you eradicated the Black Plague from Hamburg in an afternoon.

Why you refuse to enter any inns that serve cherry brandy or roasted snipe.

Why your moustache never needs to be trimmed.

How you stopped the eruption of Mount Vesuvius with only the contents of your saddlebags and the help of your companions.

Why the apes on the Rock of Gibraltar regard you as the leader of their pack.

How you mined for gold in Saint Peter's Square in Rome.

How you came to accidentally invent Morris dancing.

How your discovery of the Sphinx's nose saved you from an unpleasant fate.

How you rescued the race of Houhynyms from their life of slavery under their cruel masters.

Why you caused the ancient Battle of Marathon to be re-staged in every detail on the outskirts of Bouloigne.

Your smuggling trips to the Moon, and how it led to your exile from that place.

How you lost both your legs at the Battle of Utrecht, and how you recovered them.

How your flirtation with the Duchess of Orly later caused you to fight a duel with her grandmother.

How, if you are the greatest swordsman in Europe, the Count of Basle can claim truthfully to be the greatest swordsman in Belgium.

How you invented the tomato.

How you found the Crown Jewels of Sweden hidden inside a live cow.

How you travelled from Italy to Greece entirely underwater.

How you wrote Mozart's Requiem.

How you succeeded where Canute failed and stopped the incoming tide from advancing.

How you caused the English flag to be flown over the Palace of Versailles in France.

How you tamed the wild swine of Gloucester.

How you discovered every Italian spy in Germany with the use of a bowl of porridge.

How your assignation with a widow in Cologne caused the end of the siege of Saint Petersburg.

How you met Casanova in Cairo, and what he was doing there.

How you converted three covens of Spanish witches to the Protestant faith in a single night.

Of your sojourn in Hades, from whence no mortal ever returns, and how it is that you are with us now.

How a flight of swans helped you free the kidnapped Prince of Persia.

How you travelled to the future, and the many marvels you saw there.

How you captured the last unicorn, and why you let it go again.

How you alone survived the Great Plague of Edinburgh.

How your famous love-affair with the daughter of the Earl of Cadogan was cut short by a moth.

Why it is that despite your many love-affairs, you have never married.

How it is that you captained a ship in the Swiss navy, even though you are German by birth and Switzerland does not have a navy?

How you proved that the great monster of Loch Ness does not exist.

How your circumnavigation of the globe led to the invention of the four-field rotation system.

Why you are forbidden from wearing the colour yellow on the streets of Naples.

The great trifle of Antwerp.

The flood of Vienna.

The biggest pig in the world.

On what evidence you believe apes and men to be cousins.

The five bonfires of Rome, and what they caused.

Why the river Danube ran red with blood one Easter.

Why the river Thames ran green one midsummer day.

Why the river Liffey ran black last Saint Patrick's day.

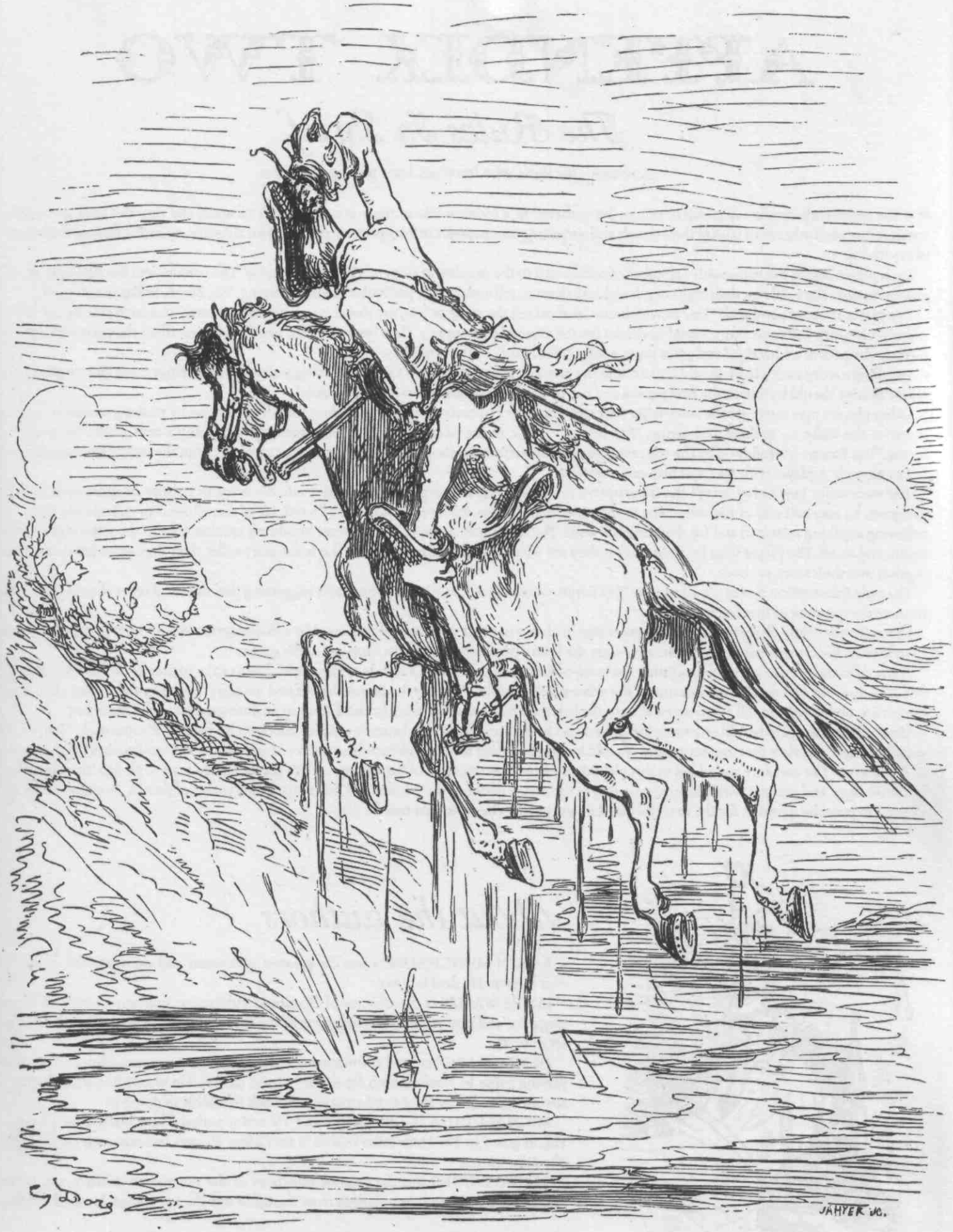
Why the lagoon of Venice became a desert, and how you remedied that unfortunate situation.

How, alone in a forest, you blew up a bear.

How you arrived in St Petersburg in a sledge drawn by a huge wild wolf.

How, on a separate occasion, you turned a wolf inside-out.

How you came to write this game.



I excel at lifting myself out of the most slippery of situations.

APPENDIX TWO

The Rules In Brief

A synopsis for those who have not been paying attention

It is the eighteenth century. A group of nobles are gathered in a location where there is a good stock of wine, and pass the long evening by entertaining each other with tales of their travels and surprising adventures. Little respect is paid to historical details, scientific facts or the bounds of credibility.

Each player begins the game with a number of coins equal to the number of players. This is their 'purse'. The person who last filled the party's glasses turns to the noble on their right hand, and asks them to tell a story on a particular theme by saying, "So, Baron, tell us the story of . . . "

The player must respond with "Yes," in which case he must tell the story, or "No, my throat is too dry for that story," in which case he is allowed to forfeit his turn but must buy a round of drinks for the assembled company. Thus becoming the person who last filled the party's glasses, he turns to the person on his right and gives them a subject for a story in the same way.

In telling a story, each player should try to outdo the previous story-teller, with a story that is bigger, wilder and brings more glory upon themselves. Stories should be told in the first person and not be too long — about five minutes is good.

Other players may interrupt the story-teller with objections or elaborations to points of their story. This is done by pushing a coin from their purse — the 'stake' — to them and saying, "But Baron . . . " (or, in the adult version, draining one's glass, pushing a coin across the table and saying, "But Baron . . . ") followed by the relevant objection. Interruptions should be used to put amusing obstacles in the way of the Baron's story, not to nit-pick. A player with no coins may not interrupt.

The story-teller may either accept the interruption (and the stake) and explain it or build it into his story, or he may disagree with it. If he disagrees, he may add one of his own coins to the stake, and dismiss the interruption out of hand. He is also allowed to ridicule the asker for believing anything so stupid and for doubting his word. The interrupting player may counter by adding another coin to the stake and another insult, and so on. The player who first admits that they are wrong claims the entire stake; if it is the story-teller then they must build the interruption into their story, as above.

The only interruption that is not allowed is "But Baron, weren't you killed?" or anything else suggesting that the story-teller should have died, because the response to that has to be "No".

Direct insults to any player's truthfulness, parentage or claims to noble rank may be answered by a challenge to a duel, which is settled by three rounds of rock–scissors–paper. The winner receives the loser's purse; the loser must drop out of the game.

A story finishes in one of two ways. Either the story-teller concludes it with a vow as to the truthfulness of the matter or an offer to duel anyone who does not believe his word; or one of the other players drinks a toast to the Baron's health and his story. The story-teller then challenges the person on his right to tell a new story, as described above. There are other ways to end a story in an emergency: see the main text.

Once all the players have told one story, the player who began announces that he must retire to check on his horses, or some such. "But, by my word," he says, "I declare that the story about —, told by Baron —, was the most extraordinary story I have ever heard," and pushes his purse over to that player. (The coins are not added to this player's purse, but become part of his 'bounty'.) Each player takes a turn to pledge his purse to his favourite story, and the one with the largest bounty at the end is declared the winner and must buy a final round of drinks. However, he is also allowed to pose the question for the first story of the next game, whenever that may be played.

About the authors

BARON MUNCHAUSEN was the greatest adventurer and raconteur the world has ever known. He died in 1797.

JAMES WALLIS is the director of Hogshead Publishing, managing editor of *Bizarre* magazine and one of the three designers of the card-game *Once Upon a Time*. This is his tenth book.

DEREK PEARCY created the magazine *Pyramid* and the American edition of the role-playing game *In Nomine*, both for Steve Jackson Games. He would like to apologize to anyone offended by the Baron's opinions, but he's incapable of doing so.

MICHAEL CULE is a film, stage and TV actor, perhaps best known for playing a Vogon guard in *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. He was recently seen exploding in *The Killer Tongue*.

GUSTAVE DORÉ was the greatest illustrator of the nineteenth century, and is best known for his engravings of scenes from the Bible and Dante's *Inferno*. He died in 1883.

A Game of Wagers, Wine, and Competitive Lying

"It has come to my notice that many games of late have been of a deplorably low quality, borrowing ideas from hither and yon, with not a shred of originality to them (I shall name no names). Therefore I, the renowned BARON MUNCHAUSEN, have created a new game of the role-playing ilk, based upon the stories of my astonishing travels and surprising adventures, for the enjoyment and edification of noblemen* and their friends."

Join the Baron as he journeys to the Moon and the Sun, rides cannon-balls, defeats the entire Turkish army with only a tame rabbit and a bottle of schnapps, meets gods, giants and heroes, and escapes from bandits on half a horse. The extraordinary stories of the legendary eighteenth-century nobleman come to life as players battle to outdo each other's fabulous feats and amazing accomplishments, stretching the bounds of truthfulness until they twang.

The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen™ contains a full set of rules, background, more than two hundred adventures ready to be played, a revolutionary system of mechanics that does away with dice or cards and uses money and fine wine instead, two combat systems ('duelling' and 'duelling for cowards'), quick-start rules and a great many insults against the inhabitants of various nations, but principally the French. This game can be learned in under five minutes, requires no GM or preparation, and takes about an hour to play. You will require pencil, paper, imagination, a manservant, money, a selection of fine wines, noble blood, a sense of flamboyance, and at least one attractive member of the opposite sex (optional).

How is all this possible? If Baron Munchausen's involved, anything is possible.

"My manservant Starke, who looks at these things for me, tells me that this is a truly astounding piece of work. And he is the finest games-player in all of Europe!"

— **Phil Masters**, author of **GURPS Discworld**

"At last, a game in which I get to recount my marvellous exploits, such as the time I taught young Don Diego de la Vega to fence, or when I suggested to Dumas that he try his hand at writing books."

— **Steffan O'Sullivan**, author of **FUDGE** and **GURPS Swashbucklers**

***Although this game is also suitable for women, children and the better sort of servant, it is not for dullards and uneducated common folk, who will find little here to divert them.**

HOGSHEAD PUBLISHING

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