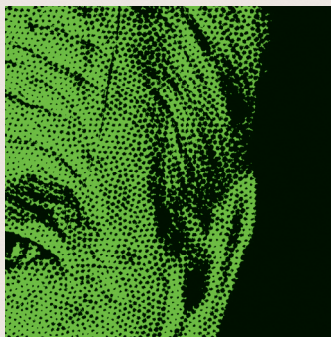
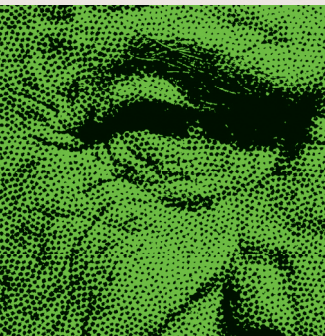




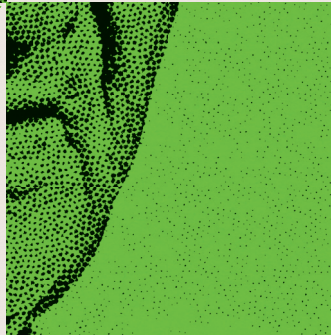
# Michael Gilbert Game Without Rules



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*Game Without Rules*



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## *Game Without Rules*

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*To Jacques Barzun  
of Columbia University,  
an amateur of detection*

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## Contents

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| <i>The Road to Damascus</i>   | 1   |
| <i>On Slay Down</i>           | 25  |
| <i>The Spoilers</i>           | 36  |
| <i>The Cat Cracker</i>        | 81  |
| <i>Trembling's Tours</i>      | 98  |
| <i>The Headmaster</i>         | 118 |
| <i>Heilige Nacht</i>          | 133 |
| <i>'Upon the King . . . '</i> | 156 |
| <i>Cross-Over</i>             | 175 |
| <i>Prometheus Unbound</i>     | 213 |
| <i>A Prince of Abyssinia</i>  | 233 |

## *Samuel Behrens*

Born 1910, second son and fourth child of Alfred Behrens and Marie Messenger, of Highgate, London.

*Educated:* Shrewsbury (Oldhams House) and London University, and Heidelberg University. Specialized European languages. Taught at Munich High School 1929–32, Baden-Baden 1932–33, Leipzig 1933–35, Berlin 1935–39.

Recruited to MI6, 1933.

*Languages:* (A) +Standard-German

A) Standard-French

(A) Standard-Greek, Italian, Russian

*War service:* Still classified (it has been mentioned in *Reminiscences* of Franz Mulbach, Bonn, 1963, that S. B. was in Germany for two months prior to the first attempt on Hitler's life and supplied the sabotage device which failed to detonate in the Fuehrer's plane).

Joined JSSIC(E) 1956.

*Special interests:* Beekeeping, chess.

*Club:* Dons-in-London.

*Residence:* The Old Rectory, Lamperdown, Kent. Tel: Lamperdown 272

*Blood group:* O.Rh +

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## *Daniel Joseph Calder*

Born 1913, only son of Rev. Joseph Calder (Canon of Salisbury) and Sandra Kisfaludy (Hungarian).

*Educated:* Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury and Università di Perugia.

Reuters Foreign Correspondent, Athens, 1932; Budapest, 1934; Baghdad, 1937; Bucharest, Head Office, 1938.

Recruited to MI6, 1935.

*Languages:* (A) Standard-Albanian and Hungarian

(B) Standard-Greek, Italian, Arabic, Russian

*War service:* Partly still classified. 1939–41 at Blenheim and Hatfield Special Interrogation Centers. Member of British Military Mission to Albania, 1944.

Joined JSSIC(E) June, 1958.

*Special interests:* Small arms; cello; history of the Peninsular War.

*Club:* R.A.C.

*Residence:* The Cottage, Hyde Hill, near Lamperdown, Kent.

Tel: (ex-directory)

*Blood Group:* AB. Rh+

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## *Rasselas*

Persian deerhound; by Shah Jehan out of Galietta.

*Height:* 32 inches. *Weight:* 128 pounds.

*Color:* Golden with darker patches. Eyes amber. Nose blue-black. Hair rough, with distinctive coxcomb between ears. Neck, long. Quarters exceptionally powerful. Legs, broad and flat.

*Club:* Kennel Club.

*Blood group:* (canine classification) A5

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## *The Road to Damascus*

Everyone in Lamperdown knew that Mr Behrens, who lived with his aunt at the Old Rectory and kept bees, and Mr Calder, who lived in a cottage on the hilltop outside the village and was the owner of a deerhound called Rasselas, were the closest of close friends. They knew, too, that there was something out of the ordinary about both of them.

Both had a habit of disappearing. When Mr Calder went he left the great dog in charge of the cottage; and Mr Behrens would plod up the hill once a day to talk to the dog and see to his requirements. If both men happened to be away at the same time, Rasselas would be brought down to the Old Rectory where, according to Flossie, who did for the Behrens, he would sit for hour after hour in one red plush armchair, staring silently at Mr Behrens' aunt in the other.

There were other things. There was known to be a buried telephone line connecting the Old Rectory and the cottage; both houses had an elaborate system of burglar alarms; and Mr Calder's cottage, according to Ken who had helped to build it, had steel plates inside the window shutters.

The villagers knew all this and, being countrymen, talked very little about it, except occasionally among themselves toward closing time. To strangers, of course, they said nothing.

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That fine autumn morning Rasselas was lying, chin on ground, watching Mr Calder creosote the sharp end of a wooden spile. He sat up suddenly and rumbled out a warning.

‘It’s only Arthur,’ said Mr Calder. ‘We know him.’

The dog subsided with a windy sigh.

Arthur was Mr Calder’s nearest neighbor. He lived in a converted railway-carriage in the company of a cat and two owls, and worked in the woods which cap the North Downs from Wrotham Hill to the Medway – Brimstone Wood, Molehill Wood, Long Gorse Shaw, Whitehorse Wood, Tom Lofts Wood and Leg of Mutton Wood. It was a very old part of the country and, like all old things, it was full of ghosts. Mr Calder could not see them, but he knew they were there. Sometimes when he was walking with Rasselas in the woods, the dog would stop, cock his head on one side and rumble deep in his throat, his yellow eyes speculative as he followed some shape flitting down the ride ahead of them.

‘Good morning, Arthur,’ said Mr Calder.

‘Working, I see,’ said Arthur. He was a small, thick man, of great strength, said to have an irresistible attraction for women.

‘The old fence is on its last legs. I’m putting this in until I can get it done properly.’

Arthur examined the spile with an expert eye and said, ‘Chestnut. That should hold her for a season. Oak’d be better. You working too hard to come and look at something I found?’

‘Never too busy for that,’ said Mr Calder.

‘Let’s go in your car, it’ll be quicker,’ said Arthur. ‘Bring a torch, too.’

Half a mile along a rutted track they left the car, climbed a gate and walked down a broad ride, forking off it onto a smaller one. After a few minutes the trees thinned, and Mr Calder saw that they were coming to a clearing where wooding had been going on. The trunks had been dragged away and the slope was a litter of scattered cordwood.

‘These big contractors,’ said Arthur. ‘They’ve got no idea. They come and cut down the trees, and lug ’em off, and think they’ve finished the job. Then I have to clear it up. Stack the cordwood. Pull out the stumps where they’re an obstruction to traffic.’

What traffic had passed, or would ever pass again through the heart of this secret place, Mr Calder could hardly imagine. But he saw that the workmen had cleared a rough path which followed the contour of the hill and disappeared down the other side, presumably joining the track they had come by somewhere down in the valley. At that moment the ground was a mess of tractor marks and turned earth. In a year the raw places would be skimmed over with grass and nettles and bluebells and kingcups and wild garlic. In five years there would be no trace of the intruders.

‘In the old days,’ said Arthur, ‘we done it with horses. Now we do it with machinery. I’m not saying it isn’t quicker and handier, but it don’t seem altogether right.’ He nodded at his bulldozer, askew on the side of a hummock. Rasselas went over and sneered at it, disapproving of the oily smell.

‘I was shifting this stump,’ said Arthur, ‘when the old cow slipped and came down sideways. She hit t’other tree a proper dunt. I thought I bitched up the works, but all I done was shift the tree a piece. See?’

Mr Calder walked across to look. The tree which Arthur had hit was no more than a hollow ring of elm, very old and less than three feet high. His first thought was that it was curious that a heavy bulldozer crashing down onto it from above should not have shattered its frail shell altogether.

‘Ah! You have a look inside,’ said Arthur.

The interior of the stump was solid concrete.

‘Why on earth,’ said Mr Calder, ‘would anyone bother – ?’

‘Just have a look at this.’

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The stump was at a curious angle, half uprooted so that one side lay much higher than the other.

‘When I hit it,’ said Arthur, ‘I felt something give. Truth to tell, I thought I’d cracked her shaft. Then I took another look. See?’

Mr Calder looked. And he saw.

The whole block – wooden ring, cement center and all – had been pierced by an iron bar. The end of it was visible, thick with rust, sticking out of the broken earth. He scraped away the soil with his fingers and presently found the U-shaped socket he was looking for. He sat back on his heels and stared at Arthur, who stared back, solemn as one of his own owls.

‘Someone,’ said Mr Calder slowly, ‘– God knows why – took the trouble to cut out this tree stump and stick a damned great iron bar right through the middle of it, fixed to open on a pivot.’

‘It would have been Dan Owtram who fixed the bar for ’em, I don’t doubt,’ said Arthur. ‘He’s been dead ten years now.’

‘Who’d Dan fix it for?’

‘Why, for the military.’

‘I see,’ said Mr Calder. It was beginning to make a little more sense.

‘You’ll see when you get inside.’

‘Is there something inside?’

‘Surely,’ said Arthur. ‘I wouldn’t bring you out all this way just to look at an old tree stump, now would I? Come around here.’

Mr Calder moved round to the far side and saw, for the first time, that when the stump had shifted it had left a gap on the underside. It was not much bigger than a badger’s hole.

‘Are you suggesting I go down *that*?’

‘It’s not so bad, once you’re in,’ said Arthur.

The entrance sloped down at about forty-five degrees and was only really narrow at the start, where the earth had caved in.

After a short slide Mr Calder's feet touched the top of a ladder. It was a long ladder. He counted twenty rungs before his feet were on firm ground. He got out his torch and switched it on.

He was in a fair-sized chamber, cut out of the chalk. He saw two recesses, each containing a spring bed on a wooden frame; two or three empty packing cases, upended as table and seats; a wooden cupboard, several racks, and a heap of disintegrating blankets. The place smelled of lime and dampness and, very faintly, of something else.

A scrabbling noise announced the arrival of Arthur.

'Like something out of one of them last war films,' he said.

'*Journey's End!*' said Mr Calder. 'All it needs is a candle in an empty beer bottle and a couple of gas masks hanging up on the wall.'

'It was journey's end for him all right.' Arthur jerked his head toward the far corner, and Mr Calder swung his torch round.

The first thing he saw was a pair of boots, then the mildewy remains of a pair of flannel trousers, through gaps in which the leg bones showed white. The man was lying on his back. He could hardly have fallen like that; it was not a natural position. Someone had taken the trouble to straighten the legs and fold the arms over the chest after death.

The light from Mr Calder's torch moved upward to the head, where it stayed for a long minute. Then he straightened up. 'I don't think you'd better say much about this. Not for the moment.'

'That hole in his forehead,' said Arthur. 'It's a bullet hole, ennit?'

'Yes. The bullet went through the middle of his forehead and out at the back. There's a second hole there.'

'I guessed it was more up your street than mine,' said Arthur. 'What'll we do? Tell the police?'

'We'll have to tell them sometime. Just for the moment, do

you think you could cover the hole up? Put some sticks and turf across?’

‘I could do that all right. ’Twont really be necessary, though. Now the wooding’s finished you won’t get anyone else through here. It’s all preserved. The people who do the shooting, they stay on the outside of the covers.’

‘One of them didn’t,’ said Mr Calder, looking down at the floor and showing his teeth in a grin.

Mr Behrens edged his way through the crowd in the drawing room of Colonel Mark Bessendine’s Chatham quarters. He wanted to look at one of the photographs on the mantelpiece.

‘Thats the *Otrango*,’ said a girl near his left elbow. ‘It was Grandfather’s ship. He proposed to Granny in the Red Sea. On the deck-tennis court, actually. Romantic, don’t you think?’

Mr Behrens removed his gaze from the photograph to study his informant. She had brown hair and a friendly face and was just leaving the puppy-fat stage. Fifteen or sixteen he guessed. ‘You must be Julia Bessendine,’ he said.

‘And you’re Mr Behrens. Daddy says you’re doing something very clever in our workshops. Of course, he wouldn’t say what.’

‘That was his natural discretion,’ said Mr Behrens. ‘As a matter of fact, it isn’t hush-hush at all. I’m writing a paper for the Molecular Society on Underwater Torque Reactions and the Navy offered to lend me its big test tank.’

‘Gracious!’ said Julia.

Colonel Bessendine surged across.

‘Julia, you’re in dereliction of your duties. I can see that Mr Behrens’ glass is empty.’

‘Excellent sherry,’ said Mr Behrens.

‘Tradition,’ said Colonel Bessendine, ‘associates the Navy with rum. In fact, the two drinks that it really understands are gin and sherry. I hope our technical people are looking after you?’

‘The Navy have been helpfulness personified. It’s been particularly convenient for me, being allowed to do this work at Chatham. Only twenty minutes’ run from Lamperdown, you see.’

Colonel Bessendine said, ‘My last station was Devonport. A ghastly place. When I was posted back here I felt I was coming home. The whole of my youth is tied up with this part of the country. I was born and bred not far from Tilbury and I went to school at Rochester.’

His face, thought Mr Behrens, was like a waxwork. A clever waxwork, but one which you could never quite mistake for human flesh. Only the eyes were truly alive.

‘I sometimes spent a holiday down here when I was a boy,’ said Mr Behrens. ‘My aunt and uncle – he’s dead now – bought the Old Rectory at Lamperdown after the First World War. Thank you, my dear, that was very nicely managed.’ This was to Julia, who had fought her way back to him with most of the sherry still in the glass. ‘In those days your school,’ he said to the girl, ‘was a private house. One of the great houses of the county.’

‘It must have been totally impracticable,’ said Julia Bessendine severely. ‘Fancy trying to *live* in it. What sort of staff did it need to keep it up?’

‘They scraped along with twenty or thirty indoor servants, a few dozen gardeners and gamekeepers, and a cricket pro.’

‘Daddy told me that when he was a boy he used to walk out from school, on half holidays, and watch cricket on their private cricket ground. That’s right, isn’t it, Daddy?’

‘That’s right, my dear. I think, Julia –’

‘He used to crawl up alongside the hedge from the railway and squeeze through a gap in the iron railings at the top and lie in the bushes. And once the old lord walked across and found him, and instead of booting him out, he gave him money to buy sweets with.’

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‘Major Furlong looks as if he could do with another drink,’ said Colonel Bessendine.

‘Colonel Bessendine’s father,’ said Mr Behrens to Mr Calder later that evening, ‘came from New Zealand. He ran away to sea at the age of thirteen, and got himself a job with the Anzac Shipping Line. He rose to be head purser on their biggest ship, the *Otrango*. Then he married. An Irish colleen, I believe. Her father was a landowner from Cork. That part of the story’s a bit obscure, because her family promptly disowned her. They didn’t approve of the marriage at all. They were poor but proud. Old Bessendine had the drawback of being twice as rich as they were.’

‘Rich? A purser?’

‘He was a shrewd old boy. He bought up land in Tilbury and Grays and leased it to builders. When he died, his estate was declared for probate at £85,000. I expect it was really worth a lot more. His three sons were all well educated and well behaved. It was the sort of home where the boys called their father “sir,” and got up when he came into the room.’

‘We could do with more homes like that,’ said Mr Calder. ‘Gone much too far the other way. What happened to the other two sons?’

‘Both dead. The eldest went into the Army: he was killed at Dunkirk. The second boy was a flight lieutenant. He was shot down over Germany, picked up and put into a prison camp. He was involved in some sort of trouble there. Shot, trying to escape.’

‘Bad luck,’ said Mr Calder. He was working something out with paper and pencil. ‘Go away.’ This was to Rasselas, who had his paws on the table and was trying to help him. ‘What happened to young Mark?’

‘Mark was in the Marnes. He was blown sky high in the

autumn of 1940 – the first heavy raid on Gravesend and Tilbury.’

‘But I gather he came down in one piece.’

‘Just about. He was in hospital for six months. The plastic surgeons did a wonderful job on his face. The only thing they couldn’t put back was the animation.’

‘Since you’ve dug up such a lot of his family history, do I gather that he’s in some sort of a spot?’

‘He’s in a spot all right,’ said Mr Behrens. ‘He’s been spying for the Russians for a long time and we’ve just tumbled to it.’

‘You’re sure?’

‘I’m afraid there’s no doubt about it at all. Fortescue has had him under observation for the last three months.’

‘Why hasn’t he been put away?’

‘The stuff he’s passing out is important, but it’s not vital. Bes-sendine isn’t a scientist. He’s held security and administrative jobs in different naval stations, so he’s been able to give details of the progress and success of various jobs – where a project has run smoothly, or where it got behind time, or flopped. There’s nothing the other side likes more than a flop.’

‘How does he get the information out?’

‘That’s exactly what I’m trying to find out. It’s some sort of post-office system, no doubt. When we’ve sorted that out, we’ll pull him in.’

‘Has he got any family?’

‘A standard pattern Army-type wife. And a rather nice daughter.’

‘It’s the family who suffer in these cases,’ said Mr Calder. He scratched Rasselas’ tufted head, and the big dog yawned. ‘By the way, we had rather an interesting day, too. We found a body.’

He told Mr Behrens about this, and Mr Behrens said, ‘What are you going to do about it?’

‘I’ve telephoned Fortescue. He was quite interested. He’s put

me on to a Colonel Cawston, who was in charge of Irregular Forces in this area in 1940. He thinks he might be able to help us.'

Colonel Cawston's room was littered with catalogs, feeding charts, invoices, paid bills and unpaid bills, seed samples, gift calendars, local newspapers, boxes of cartridges, and buff forms from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr Calder said, 'It's really very good of you to spare the time to talk to me, Colonel. You're a pretty busy man, I can see that.'

'We shall get on famously,' said the old man, 'if you'll remember two things. The first is that I'm deaf in my left ear. The second, that I'm no longer a colonel. I stopped being that in 1945.'

'Both points shall be borne in mind,' said Mr Calder, easing himself round onto his host's right-hand side.

'Fortescue told me you were coming. If that old bandit's involved, I suppose it's Security stuff?'

'I'm not at all sure,' said Mr Calder. 'I'd better tell you about it . . .'

'Interesting,' said the old man, when he had done so. 'Fascinating, in fact.'

He went across to a big corner cupboard, dug into its cluttered interior and surfaced with two faded khaki-colored canvas folders, which he laid on the table. From one of them he turned out a thick wad of papers, from the other a set of quarter- and one-inch military maps.

'I kept all this stuff,' he said. 'At one time, I was thinking of writing a history of Special Operations during the first two years of the war. I never got round to it, though. Too much like hard work.' He unfolded the maps, and smoothed out the papers with his bent and arthritic fingers.

'Fortescue told me,' said Mr Calder, 'that you were in charge of what he called "Stay-put Parties."'

'It was really a very sound idea,' said the old man. His frosty

blue eyes sparkled for a moment, with the light of unfought battles. 'They did the same thing in Burma. When you knew that you might have to retreat, you dug-in small resistance groups, with arms and food and wireless sets. They'd let themselves be overrun, you see, and operate behind the enemy lines. We had a couple of dozen posts like that in Kent and Sussex. The one you found would have been – Whitehorse Wood you said? – here it is, Post Six. That was a very good one. They converted an existing dene-hole – you know what a dene-hole is?'

'As far as I can gather,' said Mr Calder, 'the original inhabitants of this part of the country dug them to hide in when *they* were overrun by the Angles and Saxons and such. A sort of pre-Aryan Stay-put Party.'

'Never thought of it that way.' The old man chuckled. 'You're quite right, of course. That's exactly what it was. Now then. Post Six. We had three men in each – an officer and two NCOs.' He ran his gnarled finger up the paper in front of him. 'Sergeant Brewer. A fine chap that. Killed in North Africa. Corporal Stubbs. He's dead, too. Killed in a motor crash, a week after VE-day. So your unknown corpse couldn't be either of *them*.'

There was a splendid inevitability about it all, thought Mr Calder. It was like the unfolding of a Greek tragedy; or the final chord of a well-built symphony. You waited for it. You knew it was coming. But you were still surprised when it did.

'Bessendine,' said the old man. 'Lieutenant Mark Bessendine. Perhaps the most tragic of the lot, really. He was a natural choice for our work. Spoke Spanish, French and German. Young and fit. Front-line experience with the Reds in Spain.'

'What exactly happened to him?'

'It was the first week in November 1940. Our masters in Whitehall had concluded that the invasion wasn't on. I was told to seal up all my posts and send the men back to their units. I

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remember sending Mark out that afternoon to Post Six – it hadn't been occupied for some weeks – told him to bring back any loose stores. That was the last time I saw him – in the flesh, as you might say. You heard what happened?

'He got caught in the German blitz on Tilbury and Gravesend.'

'That's right. Must have been actually on his way back to our HQ. The explosion picked him up and pushed him through a plate-glass window. He was damned lucky to be alive at all. Next time I saw him he was swaddled up like a mummy. Couldn't talk or move.'

'Did you see him again?'

'I was posted abroad in the spring. Spent the rest of the war in Africa and Italy . . . Now you happen to mention it, though, I thought I did bump into him once – at the big reception center at Calais. I went through there on my way home in 1945.'

'Did he recognize you?'

'It was a long time ago. I can't really remember.' The old man looked up sharply. 'Is it important?'

'It might be,' said Mr Calder.

'If you're selling anything,' said the old lady to Mr Behrens, 'you're out of luck.'

'I am neither selling nor buying,' said Mr Behrens.

'And if you're the new curate, I'd better warn you that I'm a Baptist.'

'I'm a practicing agnostic.'

The old lady looked at him curiously, and then said, 'Whatever it is you want to talk about, we shall be more comfortable inside, shan't we?'

She led the way across the hall, narrow and bare as a coffin, into a surprisingly bright and cheerful sitting room.

'You don't look to me,' she said, 'like the sort of man who