

'It stands above all other works of its type'

MICHAEL MOORCOCK



# TITUS ALONE

MERVYN PEAKE

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## MERVYN PEAKE

Mervyn Peake was born in 1911 in Guling, Central Southern China, where his father was a medical missionary. Within a year, the family moved to the northern city of Tianjin. Peake was educated at Tianjin Grammar School then at Eltham College in South East London. During the Second World War, while serving with the army, he established a reputation as a gifted book illustrator with his pictures for *Ride a Cock Horse* (1940), *The Hunting of the Snark* (1941) and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1943). *Titus Groan* was published in 1946 and was followed, in 1950, by *Gormenghast*. The third volume of the Gormenghast saga, *Titus Alone*, was published in 1959. His other works include *Shapes and Sounds* (1941), *Rhymes Without Reason* (1944), *Letters from a Lost Uncle* (1948) and *Mr Pye* (1953), and a play, *The Wit to Woo* (1957). He died in 1968.

ALSO BY MERVYN PEAKE

*Titus Groan*  
*Gormenghast*

*Shapes and Sounds*  
*The Craft of the Lead Pencil*  
*Letters from a Lost Uncle*  
*Mr Pye*  
*Peake's Progress*

POEMS

*Rhymes Without Reason*  
*The Glassblowers*  
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FOR CHILDREN

*Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor*

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Penguin  
Random House  
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This edition published in Vintage Classics in 2023  
First published in Great Britain by Eyre & Spottiswoode in 1959

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House  
Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780749394875

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# TITUS ALONE

## *Publisher's Note*

TITUS ALONE as originally published in 1959 was printed from a typescript prepared from the notebooks in which Mervyn Peake always wrote. Recent examination of the manuscripts showed that the 1959 version was not complete and in this revised edition various omissions have been restored. These principally affect Chapters 24 (an entirely new episode), 77, 89, and from Chapters 99 to the end where the original published text has been considerably built up. In re-issuing this text the publishers are pleased to be carrying out the author's intentions and wish to join with Mrs Maeve Peake in recording their thanks to Mr Langdon Jones for the long hours and meticulous care he has spent on comparing the various versions and discovering the author's real intentions.

Mr Langdon Jones writes:

When I came to the reconstruction of *Titus Alone* I was working from three different versions. The most important was the first typescript. This was the version that had been first submitted for publication, and on which most of the alterations had been made. The first third consisted of a carbon copy with no markings at all. The second typescript was the version that had been prepared to the editor's directions in his attempt to make the book coherent, for Mervyn Peake was already suffering from his final illness at the time of submission. The first third of this consisted of the original sheets taken from the first script, marked by Peake and the editor. The last two thirds (in which the bulk of the modifications had occurred) were re-typed according to the editor's specifications, although there were sporadic corrections by Peake. The other script, to which recourse was made to check illegibilities and for those sections which had disappeared

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from the typescripts, was the first draft, which had been handwritten in a variety of notebooks.

Thus while reconstructing this book I worked primarily from the first typescript, constantly checking the second to ensure that I incorporated those alterations made by Peake, at a later date, to the sections that had not been modified by the editor.

My aim has been to incorporate all Peake's own corrections while ignoring all other alterations. It has also been to try to make the book as consistent as possible with the minimum of my own alterations.

I have been forced to exercise my own judgement only in a few places, where normally one would have been obliged to consult the author. I have changed several inconsistencies, the only important alteration being the reluctant deletion of twenty-five words of Titus's delirium, in which he remembered characters whom only the reader, not he, had met.

Had Peake been able to continue there is no doubt that he would have polished the story still more. But I believe that in this version the factory has become a much more powerful expression of that evil which attained for Peake its supreme manifestations when, having been commissioned as a war artist, he entered Belsen at the end of the war. Peake seemed to regard evil and tragedy as a tangible force, and the book reflects a struggle that was taking place in reality, when Peake himself was facing a horror more dreadful and more protracted than that endured by Titus, and to which, after ten years, he succumbed.

TO NORTH, south, east or west, turning at will, it was not long before his landmarks fled him. Gone was the outline of his mountainous home. Gone that torn world of towers. Gone the grey lichen; gone the black ivy. Gone was the labyrinth that fed his dreams. Gone ritual, his marrow and his bane. Gone boyhood. Gone.

It was no more than a memory now; a slur of the tide; a reverie, or the sound of a key, turning.

From the gold shores to the cold shores: through regions thighbone-deep in sumptuous dust: through lands as harsh as metal, he made his way. Sometimes his footsteps were inaudible. Sometimes they clanged on stone. Sometimes an eagle watched him from a rock. Sometimes a lamb.

Where is he now? Titus the Abdicator? Come out of the shadows, traitor, and stand upon the wild brink of my brain!

He cannot know, wherever he may be, that through the worm-pocked doors and fractured walls, through windows bursted, gaping, soft with rot, a storm is pouring into Gormenghast. It scours the flagstones; churns the sullen moat; prises the long beams from their crumbling joists; and howls! He cannot know, as every moment passes, the multifarious action of his home.

A rocking-horse, festooned with spiders' rigging, sways where there's no one in a gusty loft.

He cannot know that as he turns his head, three armies of black ants, in battle order, are passing now like shades across the spines of a great library.

Has he forgotten where the breastplates burn like blood within the eyelids, and great domes reverberate to the coughing of a rat?

He only knows that he has left behind him, on the far side of the skyline, something inordinate; something brutal; something tender; something half real; something half dream; half of his heart; half of himself.

And all the while the far hyena laughter.

2

THE sun sank with a sob and darkness waded in from all horizons so that the sky contracted and there was no more light left in the world, when, at this very moment of annihilation, the moon, as though she had been waiting for her cue, sailed up the night.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, young Titus moored his small craft to the branch of a riverside tree and stumbled ashore. The margins of the river were husky with rushes, a great militia whose contagious whisperings suggested discontent, and with this sound in his ears he dragged his way through the reeds, his feet sinking ankle-deep in ooze.

It was his hazy plan to take advantage of the rising ground that was heaping itself up upon the right bank, and to climb its nearest spur, in order to gain a picture of what lay ahead of him, for he had lost his way.

But when he had fought his way up-hill through the vegetation, and by the time he had fallen in a series of mishaps and had added to the long tears in his clothes, so that it was a wonder that they held together at all – by this time, though he found himself at the crown of a blunt grass hill, he had no eyes for the landscape, but fell to the ground at the foot of what appeared to be a great boulder that swayed; but it was Titus who was swaying, and who fell exhausted with fatigue and hunger.

There he lay, curled up, and vulnerable it seemed in his sleep, and lovable also as are all sleepers by reason of their helplessness; their arms thrown wide, their heads turned to some curious angle that moves the heart.

But the wise are careful in their compassion, for sleep can be like snow on a harsh rock and melt away at the first fleck of sentience.

And so it was with Titus. Turning over to relieve his tingling arm he saw the moon and he hated it; hated its vile hypocrisy of

light; hated its fatuous face; hated it with so real a revulsion that he spat at it and shouted, 'Liar!'

\*

And then again, and not so far away, came the hyena laughter.

### 3

WITHIN a span of Titus's foot, a beetle, minute and heraldic, reflected the moonbeams from its glossy back. Its shadow, three times as long as itself, skirted a pebble and then climbed a grassblade.

Titus rose to his knees, the aftermath of a dream remaining like remorse, though he could remember nothing of it save that it was Gormenghast again. He picked up a stick and began to draw in the dust with the point of it, and the moonlight was so fierce that every line he drew was like a narrow trench filled up with ink.

Seeing that he had drawn a kind of tower he felt involuntarily in a pocket for that small knuckle of flint which he carried with him, as though to prove to himself that his boyhood was real, and that the Tower of Flints still stood as it had stood for centuries, out-topping all the masonry of his ancient home.

He lifted his head and his gaze wandered for the first time from all that was immediately at hand, wandered away to the north, across great phosphorescent slopes of oak and ilex until it came to rest upon a city.

\*

It was a city asleep and deathly silent in the emptiness of the night and Titus rose to his feet and trembled as he saw it, not only with the cold but with astonishment that while he had slept, and while he had drawn the marks in the dust, and while he had watched the beetle, this city should have been there all the time and that a turn of his head might have filled his eyes with the domes and spires of silver; with shimmering slums; with parks and arches and

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a threading river. And all upon the flanks of a great mountain, hoary with forests.

But as he stared at the high slopes of the city his feelings were not those of a child or a youth, nor of an adult with romantic leanings. His responses were no longer clear and simple, for he had been through much since he had escaped from Ritual, and he was no longer child or youth, but by reason of his knowledge of tragedy, violence and the sense of his own perfidy, he was far more than these, though less than *man*.

Kneeling there he seemed most lost. Lost in the bright grey night. Lost in his separation. Lost in a swath of space in which the city lay like one-thing, secure in its cohesion, a great moon-bathed creature that throbbed in its sleep as from a single pulse.

#### 4

GETTING to his feet, Titus began to walk, not across the hills in the direction of the city, but down a steep decline to the river where his boat lay moored, and there in the dark of the wet flags he found her tethered and whispering at the water-line.

But as he stooped to slip the painter, two figures, drawing apart the tall rushes, stepped forward towards him, and the rushes closed behind them like a curtain. The sudden appearance of these men sent his heart careering and before he knew well what he was doing he had sprung into the air with a long backward bound and in another moment had half fallen into his boat, which pitched and rocked as though to throw him out.

They wore some kind of martial uniform, these two, though it was difficult to see the form it took, for their heads and bodies were striped with the shadows of the flags and streaked with slats of radiance. One of the heads was entirely moonlit save for an inch-thick striation which ran down the forehead and over one eye, which was drowned in the dark of it, then over the cheekbone and down to the man's long jaw.

The other figure had no face at all; it was part of the annihilating

darkness. But his chest was aflame with limegreen fabric and one foot was like a thing of phosphorus.

On seeing Titus struggling with his long bow-oar they made no sound but stepped at once and without hesitation into the river and waded into the deepening bed, until only their plumed heads remained above the surface of the unreflecting water; and their heads appeared to Titus, even in the extremity of his escape, to be detached and floating on the surface as though they could be slid to and fro as kings and knights are slid across a chessboard.

This was not the first time that Titus had been suddenly accosted in regions as apparently remote. He had escaped before, and now, as his boat danced away on the water, he remembered how it was always the same – the sudden appearance, the leap of evasion, and the strange following silence as his would-be captors dwindled away into the distance, to vanish . . . but not for ever.

## 5

HE HAD seen, asleep in the bright grey air, a city, and he put aside the memories of his deserted home, and of his mother and the cry of a deserter in his heart; and for all his hunger and fatigue he grinned, for he was young as twenty years allowed, and as old as it could make him.

He grinned again, but lurched as he did so, and without realizing what he was doing he fell upon his side in a dead faint, and his grin lost focus and blurred his lips and the oar fell away from his grasp.

## 6

OF THE bulk of the night he knew nothing; nothing of how his small boat twisted and turned; nothing of the city as it slid towards him. Nothing of the great trees that flanked the river on either side, with their marmoreal roots that coiled in and out of

the water and shone wetly in the moonlight; nothing of how, in the half-darkness where the water-steps shelve to the stream, a humpbacked man turned from untangling a miserable net, and seeing an apparently empty boat bearing down upon him, stern first, splattered his way through the water and grabbed at the rowlocks and then, with amazement, at the boy, and dragged him from his moon-bright cradle so that the craft sped onward down the broad stream.

Titus knew nothing of all this; nor of how the man who had saved him stared blankly at the ragged vagrant beneath him on the shelving water-steps, for that is where he had laid the heap of weariness.

Had the old man bent down his head to listen he might have heard a faraway sound, and seen the trembling of Titus's lips, for the boy was muttering to himself:

‘Wake up, you bloody city . . . bang your bells!  
I’m on my way to eat you!’

## 7

THE city was indeed beginning to turn in its sleep, and out of the half-darkness figures began to appear along the waterfront; some on foot hugging themselves in the cold; some in ramshackle mule-drawn carriages, the great beasts flaring their nostrils at the sharp air, their harsh bones stretching the coarse hide at hip and shoulder, their eyes evil and their breath sour.

And there were some, for the most part the old and the worn, who evolved out of the shades like beings spun from darkness. They made their way to the river in wheel-barrow, pushed by their sons and their sons' sons; or in carts, or donkey wagons. All with their nets or fishing-lines, the wheels rattling on the cobbled waterfront while the dawn strengthened; and a long shadowy car approached with a screech out of the gloom. Its bonnet was the colour of blood. Its water was boiling. It snorted like a horse and shook itself as though it were alive.

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The driver, a great, gaunt, rudder-nosed man, square-jawed, long-limbed, and muscular, appeared to be unaware of the condition of his car or of the danger to himself or to the conglomeration of characters who lay tangled among their nets in the rotting 'stern' of the dire machine.

He lay, rather than sat, his head below the level of his knees, his feet resting lazily on the clutch and the brake, and then, as though the snorting of a distant jackass were his clue, he rolled out of the driver's seat and on to his feet at the side of the hissing car, where he stretched himself, flinging his arms so wide apart in doing so that he appeared for a moment like some oracle, directing the sun and moon to keep their distance.

Why he should trouble so often to bring his car at dawn to the water-steps and so benefit whatever beggars wished to climb into the mouldering stern, it is not easy to fathom, for he was eminently a man of small compassion, a hurtful man, brazen and loveless, who would have no one beside him in the front of the car, save occasionally an old mandrill.

Nor did he fish. Nor had he any desire to watch the sun rising. He merely loomed out of the night-old shadows and lit an old black pipe, while the cold and hungry began to pour towards the bank of the river, a dark mass, as the first fleck of blood appeared on the skyline.

And it was while he stood this particular morning, with arms akimbo, and while he watched the boats being pushed out and the dark foam parting at the blunt prows, that he saw, kneeling on the water-steps, the humpbacked man with a youth lying prostrate below him.

## 8

THE old hunchback was obviously at a loss to know what to do with this sudden visitant from nowhere. The way he had clawed at Titus and dragged him from the sliding boat might well have suggested that he was, for all his age, a man of rapid wit and action. But no. What he had done was something which never afterwards

failed to amaze him and amaze his friends, for they knew him to be clumsy and ignorant. And so, reverting to type, now the danger was over, he knelt and stared at Titus helplessly.



The torches further down the stream had been lit and the river was ruddy with reflected light. The cormorants, released from their wicker-work cages, slid into the water and dived. A mule, silhouetted against the torchlight, lifted its head and bared its disgusting teeth.

Muzzlehatch, the owner of the car, had wandered over to the hunchback and the youth and was now bending over Titus, not with any gentleness or concern, so it seemed, but with an air of detachment – proud, even in the face of another's plight.

‘Into the chariot with it,’ he muttered. ‘What it *is* I have no idea, but it has a pulse.’

Muzzlehatch removed his finger and thumb from Titus’s wrist

and pointed to his long vibrating car with a massive index-finger.

Two beggars, pushing forward through the crowd that now surrounded the prostrate Titus, elbowed the old man out of their way and lifted the young Earl of Gormenghast, as ragged a creature as themselves, as though he were a sack of gravel, and shuffling to the car they laid him in the stern of the indescribable vehicle – that chaos of mildewed leather, sodden leaves, old cages, broken springs, rust and general squalor.

Muzzlehatch, following them with long, slow, arrogant strides, had reached about half-way to his diabolical car when a pelt of darkness shifted in the sky and the scarlet rim of an enormous sun began to cut its way up as though with a razor's edge, and immediately the boats and their crews and the cormoranteers and their bottle-necked birds, and the rushes and the muddy bank and the mules and the vehicles and the nets and the spears and the river itself, became ribbed and flecked with flame.

But Muzzlehatch had no eye for all this and it was well for Titus that this was so, for on turning his head from the daybreak as though it were about as interesting as an old sock, he saw, by the light of what he was dismissing, two men approaching smoothly and rapidly, with helmets on their identical heads and scrolls of parchment in their hands.

Muzzlehatch lifted his eyebrows so that his somewhat louring forehead became rucked up like the crumpled leather at the back of his car. Turning his eyes to the machine, as though to judge how far it was away, he continued walking towards it with a barely perceptible lengthening of his stride.

The two men who were approaching seemed to be not so much walking as gliding, so smoothly they advanced, and those fishers who were still left upon the cobbled waterfront parted at their approach, for they made their way unswervingly to where Titus lay.

How they could know that he was in the car at all is hard to conceive; but know it they did, and with helmets glittering in the dawn rays they bore down upon him with ghastly deliberation.

IT WAS then that Titus roused himself and lifted his face from his arms and saw nothing but the flush of the dawn sky above him and the profuse scattering of the stars.

What use were *they*? His stomach cried with hunger and he shook with the cold. He raised himself upon one elbow and moistened his lips. His wet clothes clung to him like seaweed. The acrid smell of the mouldering leather began to force itself upon his consciousness, and then, as though to offer him something different by way of a change, he found himself staring into the face of a large rudder-nosed man who at the next moment had vaulted into the front seat, where he slid into an all but horizontal position. Lying at this angle he began to press a number of buttons, each one of which, replying to his prodding finger, helped to create a tumult quite vile upon the eardrums. At the height of this cacophony the car backfired with such violence that a dog turned over in its sleep four miles away, and then, with an upheaval that lifted the bonnet of the car and brought it down again with a crash of metal, the wild thing shook itself as though bent upon its own destruction, shook itself, roared, and leapt forward and away down tortuous alleys still wet and black with the night shadows.

Street after street flew at them as they sped through the waking town; flew at them and broke apart at the prow-like bonnet. The streets, the houses, rushed by on either side, and Titus, clinging to an old brass railing, gasped at the air that ran into his lungs like icy water.

It was all that Titus could do to persuade himself that the impetuous vehicle was, in fact, being driven at all, for he could see nothing of the driver. It seemed that the car had an existence of its own and was making its own decisions. What Titus *could* see was that instead of a normal mascot, this stranger who was driving him (though why or where he did not know) had fixed along the brass cap of the radiator the sun-bleached skull of a crocodile. The cold air whistled between its teeth and the long crown of its skull was flushed with sunrise.

For now the sun was clear of the horizon, and as the world

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flew past, it climbed, so that for the first time Titus became aware of the nature of the city into which he had drifted like a dead branch.

A voice roared past his ears, 'Hold tight, you pauper!' and the sound flew away into the cold air as the car swerved in a sickening loop, and then again and again as the walls reared up before them, only to stream away in a high torrent of stone; and then, at last, diving beneath a low arch, the car, turning and slowing as it turned, came to rest in a walled-in courtyard.

The courtyard was cobbled and in between the cobbles the grass flourished.

## 10

AROUND three sides of the yard the walls of a massive stone-built building blocked the dawn away, save in one place where the slanting rays ran through a high eastern window and out of an even higher western window to end their journey in a pool of radiance upon a cold slate roof.

Ignorant of its setting and of the prodigious length of its shadow; ignorant that its drab little breast glowed in the sunrise, a sparrow pecked at its tinted wing. It was as though an urchin, scratching himself, absorbed in what he was doing, had become transfigured.

Meanwhile Muzzlehatch had rolled out of the driver's seat and lashed the car, as though it were an animal, to the mulberry tree which grew in the centre of the yard.

Then he meandered with long, lazy, loose-jointed strides towards the dark north-western corner of the yard and whistled between his teeth with the penetration of a steam whistle. A face appeared at a window above his head. And then another. And then another. There was then a great rattling to be heard of feet upon stairs, and the jangling of a bell, and behind these noises a further noise, more continuous and more diverse, for there was about it the suggestion of beasts and birds; of a howling and a coughing and a screaming and a kind of hooting sound, but all of it in the distance and afar

from the foreground noises, the feet loud upon the stairs and the jangling of a near-by bell.

Then out of the shadows that hung like black water against the walls of the great building a group of servants broke from the house and ran towards their master, who had returned to his car.

Titus was sitting up, with his face drawn, and as he sat there facing the huge Muzzlehatch, he became, without thought, without cognizance, irrationally savage, for at the back of his mind was an earlier time when for all the horror and the turmoil and the repetitive idiocy of his immemorial home, he was in his own right the Lord of a Domain.

The hunger burned in his stomach but there was another burn, the heartburn of the displaced; the unrecognized; the unrecognizable.

Why did they not know of him? What right had any man to touch him? To whirl him away on four mouldering wheels? To abduct him and to force him to his courtyard? To lean over him and stare at him with eyebrows raised? What right had anyone to save him? He was no child! He had known horror. He had fought, and he had killed. He had lost his sister and his father and the long man Flay, loyal as the stones of Gormenghast. And he had held an elf in his arms and seen her struck by lightning to a cinder, when the sky fell in and the world reeled. He was no child . . . no child . . . no child at all, and rising shakily to his feet he stood swaying in his weakness as he swung his fist at Muzzlehatch's face – a vast face that seemed to disintegrate before him, only to clear again . . . only to dissolve.

His fist was caught in the capacious paw of the rudder-nosed man, who signed to his servants to carry Titus to a low room where the walls from floor to ceiling were lined with glass cases, where, beautifully pinned to sheets of cork, a thousand moths spread out their wings in a great gesture of crucifixion.

It was in this room that Titus was given a bowl of soup which, in his weakness, he kept spilling, until the spoon was taken from him, and a small man with a chip out of his ear fed him gently as he lay, half-reclined, on a long wicker chair. Even before he was half-way through his bowl of soup he fell back on the cushions,

and was within a moment or two drawn incontinently into the void of a deep sleep.

11

WHEN he awoke the room was full of light. A blanket was up to his chin. On a barrel by his side was his only possession, an egg-shaped flint from the Tower of Gormenghast.

The chip-eared man came in.

'Hullo there, you ruffian,' he said. 'Are you awake?'

Titus nodded his head.

'Never known a scarecrow to sleep so long.'

'How long?' said Titus, raising himself on one elbow.

'Nineteen hours,' said the man. 'Here's your breakfast.' He deposited a loaded tray at the side of the couch and then he turned away, but stopped at the door.

'What's your name, boy?' he said.

'Titus Groan.'

'And where d'you come from?'

'Gormenghast.'

'That's the word. *That's* the word indeed. "Gormenghast." If you said it once you said it twenty times!

'What! In my sleep?'

'In your sleep. Over and over. Where is it, boy? This place. This Gormenghast.'

'I don't know,' said Titus.

'Ah,' said the little man with the chip out of his ear, and he squinted at Titus sideways from under his eyebrows. 'You don't know, don't you? That's peculiar, now. But eat your breakfast. You must be hollow as a kettledrum.'

Titus sat up and began to eat, and as he ate he reached for the flint and moved his hand over its familiar contours. It was his only anchor. It was, for him, in microcosm, his home.

And while he gripped it, not in weakness or sentiment but for the sake of its density, and proof of its presence, and while the midday sunlight sifted itself to and fro across the room, a dreadful

sound erupted in the courtyard and the open door of his room was all at once darkened, not by the chip-eared man but, more effectively, by the hindquarters of an enormous mule.

12

TITUS, sitting bolt upright, stared incredulously at the rear of this great bristling beast whose tail was mercilessly thrashing its own body. A group of improbable muscles seldom brought into play started, now here, now there, across its shuddering rump. It fought *in situ* with something on the other side of the door until it forced its way inch by inch out into the courtyard again, taking a great piece of the wall with it. And all the time the hideous, sickening sound of hate; for there is something stirred up in the breasts of mules and camels when they have the scent of one another which darkens the imagination.

Jumping to his feet, Titus crossed the room and gazed with awe at the antagonists. He was no stranger to violence, but there was something peculiarly horrible about this duel. There they were, not thirty feet away, locked in deadly grapple, a conflict without scale.

In that camel were all the camels that had ever been. Blind with a hatred far beyond its own power to invent, it fought a world of mules; of mules that since the dawn of time have bared their teeth at their intrinsic foe.

What a setting was that cobbled yard, now warm and golden in the sunlight, the gutter of the building thronged with sparrows; the mulberry tree basking in the sunbeams, its leaves hanging quietly while the two beasts fought to kill.

By now the courtyard was agog with servants and there were shouts and countershouts and then a horrible quiet, for it could be seen that the mule's teeth had met in the camel's throat. Then came a wheeze like the sound of a tide sucked out of a cave; a shuffle of shingle, and the rattle of pebbles.

And yet that bite that would have killed a score of men appeared to be no more than an incident in this battle, for now it was the

mule who lay beneath the weight of its enemy, and suffered great pain, for its jaw had been broken by a slam of the hoof and a paralysing butt of the head.

Sickened but thrilled, Titus took a step into the courtyard, and the first thing he saw was Muzzlehatch. This gentleman was giving orders with a peculiar detachment, mindless that he was stark naked except for a fireman's helmet. A number of servants were unwinding an old but powerful-looking hose, one end of which had already been screwed into a vast brass hydrant. The other end was gurgling and spluttering in Muzzlehatch's arms.

Its nozzle trained at the double-creature, the hose-pipe squirmed and jumped like a conger, and suddenly a long, flexible jet of ice-cold water leapt across the quadrangle.

This white jet, like a knife, pierced here and there, until, as though the bonfire of their hatred had been doused, the camel and the mule, relaxing their grips, got slowly to their feet, bleeding horribly, a cloud of animal heat rising around them.

Then every eye was turned to Muzzlehatch, who took off his brass helmet and placed it over his heart.

As though this were not peculiar enough, Titus was next to witness how Muzzlehatch ordered his servants to turn off the water, to seat themselves on the floor of the wet courtyard, and to keep silent, and all by the language of his expressive eyebrows alone. Then, more peculiar still, he was surprised to hear the naked man address the shuddering beasts from whose backs great clouds of steam were rising.

'My atavistic, my inordinate friends,' whispered Muzzlehatch in a voice like sandpaper, 'I know full well that when you smell one another, then you grow restless, then you grow thoughtless, then you go . . . too far. I concede the ripe condition of your blood; the darkness of your native anger; the gulches of your ire. But listen to me with those ears of yours and fix your eyes upon me. Whatever your temptation, whatever your primordial hankering, yet' (he addressed the camel), 'yet you have no excuse in the world grown sick of excuses. It was not for you to charge the iron rails of your cage, nor, having broken them down, to vent your spleen upon this mule of ours. And it was not for you' (he addressed the mule), 'to seek this rough-and-tumble nor to

scream with such unholy lust for battle. I will have no more of it, my friends! Let this be trouble enough. What, after all, have you done for me? Very little, if anything. But I – I have fed you on fruit and onions, scraped your backs with bill-hooks, cleaned out your cages with pearl-handled spades, and kept you safe from the carnivores and the bow-legged eagle. O, the ingratitude! Unregenerate and vile! So you broke loose on me, did you – and *reverted!*'

The two beasts began to shuffle to and fro, one on its hassock-sized pads and the other on its horny hooves.

'Back to your cages with you! Or by the yellow light in your wicked eyes I will have you shaved and salted.' He pointed to the archway through which they had fought their way into the courtyard – an archway that linked the yard in which they stood to the twelve square acres where animals of all kinds paced their narrow dens or squatted on long branches in the sun.

### 13

THE camel and the mule lowered their terrible heads and began their way back to the arch, through which they shuffled side by side.

What was going on in those two skulls? Perhaps some kind of pleasure that after so many years of incarceration they had at last been able to vent their ancient malice, and plunge their teeth into the enemy. Perhaps, also, they felt some kind of pleasure in sensing the bitterness they were arousing in the breasts of the other animals.

They stepped out of the tunnel, or long archway, on the southern side, and were at once in full view of at least a score of cages.

The sunlight lay like a gold gauze over the zoo. The bars of the cages were like rods of gold, and the animals and birds were flattened by the bright slanting rays, so that they seemed cut out of coloured cardboard or from the pages of some book of beasts.

Every head was turned towards the wicked pair; heads furred and heads naked; heads with beaks and heads with horns; heads