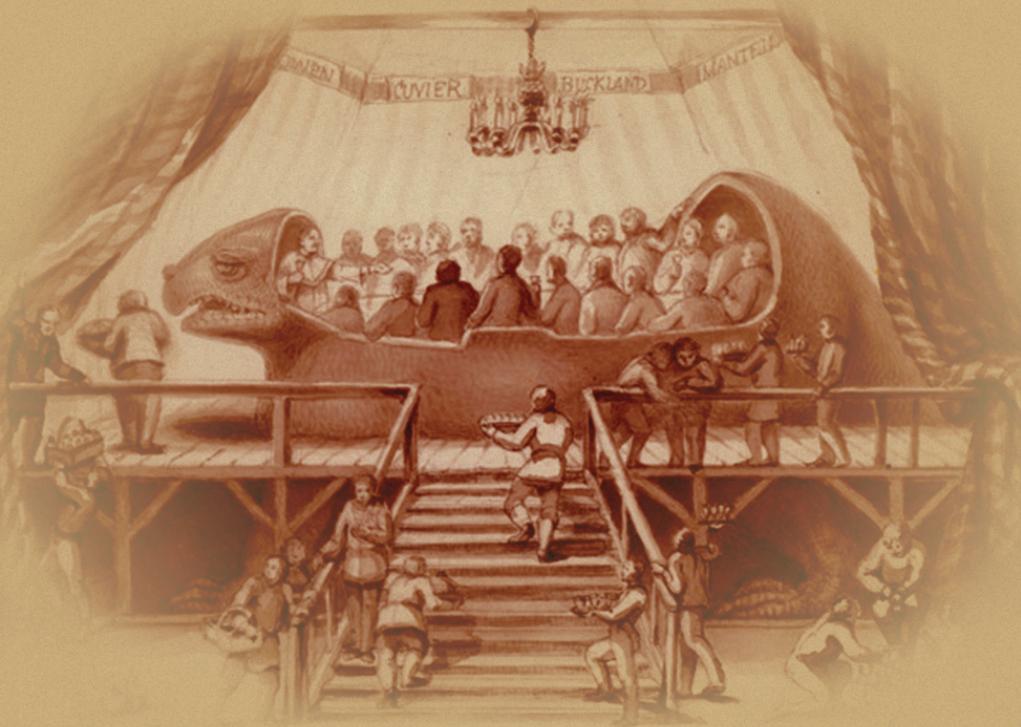


Seasons' Eatings

and a snappy new year!



L.R.G.Carter

Seasons' Eatings and a snappy new year!

L. R. G. Carter

Cover illustration: *The Dinner in the Mould of the Iguanodon Given By Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins.*

Drawn by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins.

Location: Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University.

Confessions of a Researcher

Nobody knows who wrote the Horolog but whoever they are I owe them an apology.

I selected the following extracts to accompany a forthcoming story. The plan is for every chapter to begin with a journal fragment which will eventually influence the main narrative.

Pretty standard stuff, lots of precedent, etc.

The thing is the account presented in the journal wasn't written to be read like that. It wasn't meant to be chopped into chunks or scattered through an entirely different story.

So it quickly became apparent I needed to do some editing. Adjust the first lines to remind readers what had happened before. Tweak the closing lines to provide closure and/or cliffhangers. I *really* needed to remove the libellous accusations concerning the death of Gideon Mantell.

As I say, journal extracts are a standard storytelling device, yet I don't think I've ever seen anyone admit to these kinds of transcription crimes. Others must have performed similar butchery, right?

Here I present my current edit as a seasonal present for my friends. This transcription may change before the final story is published. Given all I have on my plate right now, that may well be somewhere in 2025, 2026? A lot of time for me to change my mind about the entire thing.

If you wish to read the original Horologue yourself, it is kept in the Mernanshire Town Library and Archive, catalogue number GB****_****_**** [reminder - look this up before you publish]

So here's seasons' eatings, chums, and I hope you all have a snappy new year!

Louis Carter

1

December, 1853.

I'm now in London. A group of carol singers saw me arrive but I escaped with the aid of a well placed smoke bomb. My usual crude yet effective lock pick techniques made it a simple matter to acquire fresh clothes. Does it still count as lock picking if you don't leave the lock on the door? Yes. I picked myself a lock. That's self evident; I have it here with me.

Spent the night familiarising myself with the area. Crowded and claustrophobic, rich yet mostly poor. Same old London, no matter when you visit. They've recently been getting into Christmas in a big way. Why shouldn't I join them? After everything that happened in America, don't I deserve a little 'me time'?

By morning the newspapers were already announcing 'The Return of Spring-Heeled Jack; dressed in silver and flying through the smog'. I suspect those carol singers had been at the mulled wine. Doubt they could pick me out of a line-up. I'm probably safe. Anyway, I've been called worse things.

“If you find yourself somewhere new and everyone’s speaking English, just infiltrate the nearest secret society and get them to tell you what’s going on.”

That’s what my parents always used to teach me, and their advice has never led me wrong. London has plenty of societies, but they’re nowhere close to secret. I found one such club stumbling between beerhouses; trying and failing to drag a park bench between them. Some of the crowd started insisting that the world was in desperate need of lighter street furniture. Others asked why they were trying to steal the bench in the first place. Then a man climbed onto the bench, causing those still carrying it to drop their load and fall all over the pavement. The man began a speech about how humans will always reshape the world to ensure their best fit, and thus it was inevitable that some public facilities would need to be rearranged.

There was no doubt in my mind that I had discovered one of England’s famous societies of scholarly expertise.

3

One of the scholars noticed me watching and came over to apologise for their public display. He assured me that he was the designated sober-man; tasked with fixing damage and paying bail. I remarked that he had his hands full. He sighed in agreement, nodding back towards the lecturing bench climber. “We always start off wanting a quiet one. Then Darwin keeps going and the rest of us can but follow.”

Charles Darwin! Confident that I could dredge up enough half remembered general knowledge, I pushed on with the conversation. Indeed, the danger was that I might say too much. I stuck to sea voyages and finch beaks, and soon found myself ingratiated with the crowd.

Someone asked how I was so fluent in matters of natural history. Flailing for an acceptable answer, I claimed I was taught everything I know by that other famous name; Mary Anning. Given how the scientific community treated Mary, I guessed nobody would reach out for references. Later I discovered this would have certainly been impossible, as she had died a few years earlier.

I have struck up a friendship with three of the group in particular. They are the sort of clique that exclusively uses each other's surnames. That's both weird and something we've all encountered, right?

Darwin needs little introduction, though he isn't what you might expect. Younger for one thing, even though he's the oldest. He recently overcame some long term illness and is keen to do everything he couldn't before. His appetite for life embarrasses us youngsters.

The sober-man is Huxley. He's technically in the navy, but it's complicated. When last at sea, Huxley spent his time either catching fish or studying fish or writing reports about fish. Now he wants the navy to pay to publish those reports. This certainly surprised the navy, who did not consider marine research to be part of an assistant doctor's job description. They believe they gave Huxley quite enough support simply by indulging him in his hobby. The resulting correspondence quickly became less than cordial, and Huxley has remained on land ever since.

Finally we have Hooker. Upon introduction I could not help but blurt out, "You've been to Antarctica?" He looked surprised, asking how I knew. "I have friends with similar eyes," I responded. "Eyes that have seen things that can never be shared."

Hooker smiled so softly then, knowing in me a friend that would never demand explanation.

Women aren't allowed to join scholarly societies, nor are we allowed into their society clubhouses. Which is obviously pants. We *are*, however, allowed to attend the *Imperial Cognoscenti Christmas Party*; a great big gathering of 'the greatest English minds', as well as their wives and children. Huxley invited me as his plus-one, what with his fiancé currently living in Australia.

Upon arrival my friends quickly claimed a corner as their own. They sat there most of the night; pointing out the guests they found agreeable, listing every flaw of those they did not. Of that second set the most talked about was the despised Richard Owen. Huxley's seething over a sub-standard letter of reference opened the floor to everyone's complaints. Plagiary, libel, failure to provide proper citations, there was no end to this man's malpractice.

The most curious accusation came from Huxley's old tutor, Professor Jones. He sat beside me, eyeing Owen across the room, then leaned in close to share his secret.

"You can tell just by looking at him, that's a man who dabbles with corpses."

6

The professor's accusation of necromancy could not fail to pique my interest. It turned out that in his youth he had worked for the doctor that purchased cadavers from legendary murderers Burke and Hare.

Small world.

Jones had even been involved in some of the body buying himself, though not in any way large enough to have landed him in trouble. Then, somewhere between fleeing Scotland and becoming Huxley's professor, he enjoyed a good few years working as an occultist.

"There's a shadow over that man," he said to me. "A fetid aura if ever I saw one."

Darwin suggested this was an overzealous metaphor and began a lacklustre defence of Owen on the basis of some old cataloguing assistance. The conversation rapidly bounced to other topics, as conversations in such large gatherings have a tendency to do.

For my part, when someone with such a history as Jones starts talking as he did, experience has taught me that it's best to pay attention. So it was that I began my investigation of the potentially diabolical Richard Owen.

Following the party we all ended up crashing in Huxley's front parlour. That wasn't originally the plan, but Darwin once again led the pace. I alone stayed dry, wishing to prevent any slip of the tongue casting doubt on my identity. So it was that I was the only one waking up that morning. I left the others strewn over the furniture and made my way into town.

I had already learnt that Owen worked at the Royal College of Surgeons. It was easy enough to find the right part of town, but how was I to find out more about my quarry? I could hardly just approach random people on the street and ask if they had seen anyone *evil-looking* recently.

As it was, I could pretty much do exactly that. Richard Owen is perceived by many as a staunch defender of England's imperial status quo. London is filled with Irish people who understandably hate England; generally for the centuries of colonialism, specifically for the famine and mass evictions and everything else about the current situation.

I came looking for just one person who might provide some subtle clue. I found instead countless abandoned refugees, all ready to grass up a pillar of their oppression.

Owen's critics at the party had left me in little doubt that the man was a wrong'un. Now the regular folk of London were enflaming this poor opinion. I heard all about Owen pushing into shops against those trying to exit, abusing retail and service staff, then lingering past closing despite polite indication of the time. When walking around town with friends they would straddle the entire pavement, forcing those coming the other way off into the road. This they did even to individual people who obviously never had a chance of walking any more single-file. I learnt that Queen Victoria had given him a cottage, for obviously no one else in London had such a need as he. Others told me of a suspicious building beside the Thames which Owen frequented at various hours. Something about this last lead grabbed me, and I quickly followed it down to the river.

What I found was certainly *suspicious*, but *building* was too grand a word. It was a ramshackle shed sat in a discrete spot amid tidal silt. I approached on a path that would have been impassable at high tide, yet the shed seemed somehow untouched by shifting waters. Having grown up in Neo-Mernanshire learning all its local history, this was raising all sorts of alarm bells.

Then a man stepped out from behind the shed, pistol fixed in my direction, and I completely lost my train of thought.

The gunman encouraged me into nearby shadows. A tense encounter followed as he accused me of tracking his own hunt for Owen. We spent some time swapping platitudes and one-liners until I finally convinced him we shared the same goal.

His name is Wallace. He's another scientist. His whole thing is that geography splits the world into several distinct areas. I couldn't figure out how to write that without it sounding obvious.

Wallace had been exploring the Amazon when his path was blocked by insurmountable cliffs. Searching for a way forward, he found fresh remains of animals previously presumed extinct. He reasoned they had fallen from the plateau above, that the cliffs isolated a lost world, and that this private ecosystem was thus unaffected by goings on in the world beyond.

Eager for funding to investigate further, Wallace loaded the carcasses onto the next ship home. This voyage proved disastrous. A fire consumed the vessel, destroying the collection. Wallace was left with nothing but a watch, some notes, and the subsequent insurance payout.

Not wishing to be laughed out of the insurance offices, Wallace had listed the specimens as insects and fish. He had not mentioned the dinosaurs. He also kept to himself that, while checking on the cargo, he had witnessed the start of the fire.

Wallace vowed that the ship's destruction was no accident. The fire had been set by something he could only describe as a phantom. A phantom made of smog and odour. A phantom with the face of Richard Owen.

Charges of astral projection and pyrokinesis sat comfortably atop my mounting suspicions. I declared my intent to break into Owen's shed and Wallace was happy to help. Having long traced Owen's movements, he predicted there were a good few hours before we risked discovery. Then again, Christmas plays havoc with everyone's schedules.

The lock was picked and we quickly slipped inside. Wallace gasped. He fell back through the door, circled the exterior, then returned to declare it all impossible. I remained unfazed. This wasn't my first building bigger within than it was without, and I dare say it won't be the last. I even felt some small relief that the interior wasn't *that* much bigger. An outhouse filled with a modest workshop. Concerning, but hardly requiring an apocalyptic grasp of metaphysics.

The floor, walls, and ceiling were covered in predictable scribblings. Colliding parallel lines, triangles with angles that didn't add up, all the usual arcane guff. Around the room were tables filled with strange scientific apparatus and interesting looking rocks. Paper was piled onto every obliging surface; fresh pages filled with modern hand, others seemingly drenched in tea and smothered with ancient spider scrawl.

Wallace started reading what turned out to be rough drafts of an obituary. Something he saw angered him enough to make him punch the worktop.

"Everyone *knew* he wrote it. Gideon Mantell, you shall be avenged!"

This seemed somewhat personal, so I removed myself to the next table over.

My attention settled on a line of crystal balls. At first I assumed these were common music hall props, but closer inspection revealed something more. Far from being solid lumps of glass, they were each a collection of chambers individually formed and fused together.

I held one up to study it in the light of the closest window. This was in itself a remarkable feat, for on the outside this building had no windows at all. I watched as reflections bounced back and forth and up and down between those chamber walls. Trying to follow the path of the light became a meditative act. My mind drifted away, lost in a timeless kaleidoscope of this small, dirty, sphere of London. I only snapped back to the present upon seeing Richard Owen through the ball, climbing down the riverbank.

I threw down the glass and hissed a warning to Wallace. Instinct sent a hand clutching at papers, trusting the mess to conceal their absence. We left the shed and fled back into riverside shadows. With Owen approaching on the only available path, it seemed escape was impossible.

Wallace, however, had vowed in the Amazon that he would never again be stopped by a lack of equipment. He reached into his coat and pulled out rope and grappling hook. The hook was thrown, the rope scaled, and we dusted ourselves off on the street above. Then we began a nonchalant walk, as though completely innocent of suspicious activities.

That was when we passed Owen climbing down the riverbank. The exact same climb I had seen from the shed a few minutes before, happening only now as we passed unnoticed.

Removed from the immediacy of the moment, it was obvious what had happened. I had not seen Owen through the window; I had seen him through the sphere. Those crystal balls had a strange affect on time.

I was so very tempted to write that twice.

We found ourselves somewhere private to review the stolen papers. First up was a list of names. Two were marked 'loyal to the cause'. The rest were more widely spaced, the gaps between filled with dated blackmail material. Wallace recognised this as a register of the Crystal Palace Company. These investors had bought the titular Crystal Palace, former home of the Great Exhibition. Said exhibition was a display of everything the British Empire had been able to achieve while everyone else did their housework. It had closed after less than six months.

The next piece was a letter from an artist named Benjamin Hawkins. It cryptically thanked Owen for the final design, promising to scale up the prototype before the feast of Ianus. Then there was a load of casual chat about Crystal Palace being moved to a new location.

Finally there were some RSVPs for a seven course meal inside a dinosaur. This magical event would take place amid the construction site of the new and improved Crystal Palace; apparently *the* hip new property to have in your portfolio.

Owen, his artist, and those blackmailed into 'the cause' would all be at this dinosaur dinner. It seemed like the perfect place to find out more.

13

Wallace told me he had ways of making people talk. Then he said he hadn't meant for that to sound so ominous. He needed to find some volcanic feldspar or something. I left him to it and returned home.

I arrived to find Darwin dishing up dinner. I joined the table, recounted my day, and explained how I planned to proceed.

Darwin wasn't happy. Years of illness had made him a magnet for snake oil merchants. Talk of phantoms and crystals sent him on an entirely correct rant about psychic healing and homeopathy. Huxley began a 'more things in heaven and Earth' type defence, which only encouraged Darwin to make his own argument louder.

Then Hooker reached over and took Darwin's hands. Everyone else fell silent.

"I've never told fully what I saw at the great ice barrier. I just don't know how to do the telling. Even if I worked something out, nobody would understand. Sure, they might recognise the words, but they wouldn't know my meaning, not really.

"Sounds like our friend has seen something similar. If we are to understand, we need to see for ourselves. Then together we'll find the best words within us. Maybe one day, others will see what we've seen, and having read our words understand it all the better. I think that's the only way that anyone can really understand anything."

Silence returned. Darwin locked eyes with Hooker, their hands still entangled.

"You are my best friend. If this has so stirred your passion, my scepticism will not stop me following you."

Dinner was scheduled to start at 4pm on New Year's Eve. That morning Wallace joined myself, Darwin, Hooker, and Huxley as we made our way to Crystal Palace. We got there well in advance of the guests to secretly infiltrate the catering team.

I was worried these skilled professionals would be resistant to my mob of amateur scientists but Darwin eased our introductions with a big bag of cash. Turns out his wife and mother are both Wedgewoods, so their family has no shortage of money. The caterers assumed we were doing some sort of prank that only academics would understand. As long as we didn't get in their way we could do whatever we want.

The event was not to be held in Crystal Palace itself. That was still under construction; swaddled in scaffolding away in the distance. Attendees were instead directed to a marquee erected in the palace grounds. Inside this tent stood the guest of honour; a massive, four legged, concrete dinosaur. Given that it was based on just a few teeth and some leg bones it was probably at least a little inaccurate, but artistic ambition more than made up for the odd inconsequential mistake.

The model was surrounded by stairs and walkways that allowed us to climb up into the creature's back. Here, tables had been laid for such a crowd that the dining platform expanded well beyond the dinosaur itself.

"Owen's put himself in the dinosaur's head," said Huxley, studying the seating. The others smirked and chortled but I didn't get the joke.

"You know," said Darwin. "Because he's *the brains*."

I chose to interpret this as a sign that we were perfectly matched against our foe. The alternative was too depressing.

I was concerned that the guests might recognise my friends. Though still early in their careers, they could hardly be described as academic nonentities. I need not have worried. Dressed in service industry uniforms, we were essentially invisible. We moved unnoticed among the diners; biding our time, dishing up food, and keeping wine glasses constantly full.

When the time came to ring in the New Year, everyone was endlessly repeating a song they had written about the dinosaur; a sure sign that we had plied them with quite enough alcohol.

We moved to the next phase of our plan. Wallace was adamant that we should start with artist Hawkins. Darwin and Huxley kept their distance. The others kept close, but not *too* close. I continued working around the table, topping up glasses along the way.

And upon reaching Hawkins, I tipped the rest of my jug right into his lap.

There was a flurry of shock and apologies, of jumping back from the table and dabbing at the mess with napkins. Everyone nearby laughed; partly because they were drunk, mostly because they were jerks. Hooker and Wallace closed in on either side. Together we steered Hawkins away under the pretence of finding dry trousers. Leaving Darwin and Huxley to watch the crowd, we led Hawkins out of the tent. He was now all alone in the night with just myself, Hooker, and Wallace for company.

And that's when Wallace took out his rock.

When Wallace told me he had ways of making people talk, I had not anticipated that he was talking about mesmerism. He held out his piece of volcanic feldspar and beckoned Hawkins to look within.

Before the intoxicated artist had even managed to focus, Hooker snatched the rock from Wallace's hand.

"What do you have there? Where did you get this?"

Wallace fumbled for words, surprised by Hooker's violent reaction.

"Um, well, it's passed through a few hands, I suppose. My supplier promised me this one was fished from a river by missionaries in Africa—"

"Africa? No, that doesn't make sense," interrupted Hooker. "Unless McCormick was right? Their reach spanned from pole to pole? But he said himself he based that just on hunches gleaned from dreams! If they prove right, what does that mean? Lamarck has obvious flaws, but a parent's trauma *can* be inherited by their children. Those *things* used these rocks to chain ancestors older than any family name, yet we can still dimly glimpse the scars even if only with our unconscious minds ..."

In that moment I felt that everything was falling apart. Wallace was practically climbing over Hooker to try and retrieve the rock. Hooker was unrelenting, clutching at this new fixation, rambling on about things I do not care to remember.

Without the aid of my friends, I was left alone with Hawkins. The confusing struggle seemed to have a sobering effect on him. He turned, locked eyes with mine, and said in a moment of threatening clarity, "Oh, I see, *you're* one of *us*!"

I hesitated, unsure how to react to this claim of kinship.

“Oh, I don’t mean you’re part of our Fraternity,” Hawkins continued, “but I understand the lower classes have illuminated equivalents; guilds and unions and cults and the like. You’re going to love what we’re doing here! Master Owen has seen further through the aether than any previous magister. Do you know of the unbreakable bond between *light* and *time*? Dominion over one is dominion over the other! Glass has long been used for divination, but *our* crystal ball is engineered to unprecedented precision! It has been placed atop the palace, that it may catch the first light of changing years. The walls will supplement the orb, a maze of luminous paths that will twist the light around itself. Spun like flax on a wheel, the threads of fate will be ours to weave. Thus will we realise the grand design, to revivify the ancient world, to call up from the abyss of time and from the depths of the earth those vast forms and gigantic beasts which the Almighty Creator designed with fitness to inhabit and precede us in this part of the earth called Great Britain …”

He kept going on like this for some time, freely divulging the entire nefarious scheme. It was enough to end Wallace and Hooker’s struggle, and they joined me in listening with nervous apprehension.

“That’s why I wanted to start with Hawkins,” said Wallace. “Artists trapped in their patron’s shadow will always be eager to explain their work’s true meaning.”

Back in the tent everything kicked off, reminding me of the restrictions of journaling as a medium. Darwin and Huxley later told me what happened, and I see no reason not to believe them.

Tasked with making sure that nobody followed us, my friends continued topping up drinks. Then someone cracked wise that his waiter was the spitting image of Charles Darwin. The joke bounced back and forth; an expanding riff on the idea that Ol' Doctor Darwin had an affair with some servant girl leaving Charlie with an estranged, working class twin. What brilliant wits we are ruled by.

The levity ended when Owen actually looked at the servants for the first time that night.

"*You fool! That is Charles Darwin! Seize him!*"

Half the diners stumbled to their feet and started drunkenly grabbing at Darwin. Huxley leapt to Darwin's defence, landing punch after punch on appropriately glassy jaws. The real caterers saw only comrades in need and launched themselves into the fight. The rest of the guests, evidently uninitiated into Hawkins' Fraternity, had no idea what was happening. Futile attempts to pacify the situation served only to get them consumed by the cycle of violence.

Wallace, Hooker and I pushed through the brawl to find Darwin and Huxley. Dragging them out of the tent, we took a moment to regain our breath. This placed us in an opportune position to spot Owen cutting his way free of the riot. He fled across the palace grounds and we as one gave chase.

Owen raced toward Crystal Palace with impossible speed. Then black skies bled red and yellow, and I realised what was happening.

“Sunrise?” shouted Wallace as we ran. “We’ve only just passed midnight!”

I attempted concise explanation. “When the year’s first light hits the palace, Owen will use it to gain control of time. Holding the palace at dawn allows him to distort *his* past, *our* present!”

“How does that make any sense?” cried Darwin, who had missed Hawkins’ earlier exposition.

“Time travel is weird. Try not to worry about it!”

The world around us visibly twisted. Things began leaking into the Now that should have stayed in the deepest Then; creatures from a prehistory exactly matching Owen’s design. Naturally, this legion of monsters started trying to eat us.

You will never want for improvised weapons on an unregulated construction site. I grabbed a convenient iron rod, the others followed suit, and we fought our way forward.

Increasingly elastic time allowed us to close in on Owen as he scaled the palace scaffolding. He was just seconds ahead of us when we reached the roof. That same elastic time ensured those seconds were all he needed.

A crystal ball crowned the palace; those earlier prototypes vastly enlarged. The light of a future dawn hit the sphere and refracted down through the building below. Rays bounced back and forth between glass walls before being funnelled back up to the sphere, turning that crystal ball into a pulsing orb of cosmic power.

Power that Owen wielded with melodramatic delight.

In those seconds before we reached the roof, Owen had found time to tame and mount a grotesque Pteranodon. It climbed into the sky on leathery wings then hurtled down towards us.

I leapt aside. Darwin, Huxley, and Hooker followed. Wallace was not so lucky. The Pteranodon barrelled into him, throwing him from the building. As Owen's steed wheeled through the sky, the rest of us rushed to the edge of the roof.

Fortune alone had seen Wallace grab a scaffolding pole as he fell. Before we could help, Owen was back upon us, his beast lashing out with beak and claw. Darwin and I seized the Pteranodon's attention, assaulting it with our sticks as Huxley rushed to Wallace's aid.

Hooker adopted a different strategy. He still had that piece of supposedly hypnotic volcanic feldspar. Rock in hand, he drew back his arm.

Owen undoubtedly guessed what would follow. He pulled the Pteranodon back from the fray and began speaking words that burnt the air.

Glowing darkness began smoking from his fingers.

An appropriate gesture shot these shadows at Hooker.

Only to hit Darwin as he dove into their path.

As Darwin took those unnatural bullets, Hooker launched his rock. It hit the crystal sphere, sending cracks through the entire palace. Hooker and I grabbed Darwin, Huxley grabbed Wallace, and we all tumbled onto the staging platform as the building beneath us exploded.

Crystal Palace became an eruption of glass splinters and whirling rays. Imprisoned light sought the shortest path back through time. The creatures surrounding us screamed as their age caught up with them. Some rapidly decomposed, others turned to stone in a grim mockery of fossilisation.

Owen tried to out-fly his fate, spurring his Pteranodon into the returning night. We watched as the reptile disintegrated and Owen fell into the consuming dark.

That's pretty much everything that happened last night. We promptly made ourselves scarce, avoiding the torch-bearing diners that came searching for their host. The second dawn that day saw us back in the safety of Huxley's dining room. The next few hours were spent with the morning papers, trying to assess the measure of our actions' repercussions.

Crystal Palace has hit construction issues, delaying its May Day opening. No real details there. We figure the building frame is still intact, they just need to replace the glass. Shouldn't take too long. Queen Victoria has been booked in for a ribbon-cutting ceremony in June.

Hawkins has claimed the petrified creatures as his own works of art. They're going to be left adorning the grounds.

Owen, of course, survived the fall. His sort always do. My friends want to rally the full weight of the law against him. I pointed out that it isn't actually illegal to pull prehistoric monsters out of time. They grumbled and said it should be.

On the matter of the dinner party, the papers are mostly sticking to the pre-arranged press release. They're admitting that the festivities got 'rowdy and boisterous', but for some inexplicable reason they have not mentioned the dinosaurs.

It's taken over a month to get us all back together. Huxley arranged for us to meet in the British Museum's butterfly room, claiming "a fortress of wisdom is the perfect place to make a stand against supernatural ignorance." He's drawing up a list of trusted allies to work against Owen behind the scenes. Such is the lifecycle of secret societies. Whenever one grows large enough to be noticed, another is born to fight it.

This new secret war has already claimed its first casualty. Whatever strange force hit Darwin left him completely debilitated. It is as though all his past illnesses have returned, both at once and with three-fold intensity. Hooker, seeking to repay Darwin's sacrifice, immediately swore loyalty to Huxley's cause. Cynics might claim that he would better off assisting Darwin's wife Emma, who works tirelessly to provide her husband's care. It's me, I'm Cynics.

Wallace is soon sailing to Indonesia, so will not be around to join the club. This has spared him the embarrassment of discovering that Huxley wasn't going to invite him. Everyone likes Wallace well enough, but his taste for spiritualism sets the others on edge. I'm sure they'll get over it eventually.

That just left me. I informed my friends that I would also be travelling, and could not say when I would be back. They were saddened of course, but understood my "need to follow where adventure beckons." I was promised that should I ever return, I will always find a place among their number.