



Making History

by Oris Bracken

“Chad. --I found the hand lamp.” Dr. Judith Moore balances a heavy battery lantern with both hands. She aims the yellow beam at a small lift-seat, swinging empty, twenty meters above the cavern floor.

“Ugh.” Dr. Chad Robert used his shirttail to wipe the sweat from his face. “Engine rotor must have slipped out of gear. Rewound the damned cable.”

The old man and young woman stand beside each other looking at the ceiling. Appraising a dark gash dabbled by stars. Their entrance. She points the beam at the hole. “By now, the lift generator has burned its petrol. I don’t hear chugging.”

“You’re right.” Dr. Robert heard his voice reverberate over subterranean dripping.

“We shouldn't be down here after dark.”

“I should have waited till morning. My stupidity. I just had to get another look at those fingers, for my report. Especially that thumb.”

“Don’t blame yourself. I wanted to come.”

“Stupid.”

Dr. Moore tilts the hand lamp downward, illuminating stone walls glistening with moisture. She pans the cavern, slowly passing dozens of unique formations until she comes to a nine-foot tall stalagmite. It has a thick trunk topped by a wet, shiny bulb. Her eyes widen: “Ho!”

“Wow. I have a great name for that....”

“I’ll bet you do.” Dr. Moore tossed her head, flinging back loose strands of long red hair. She switched off the hand lamp to preserve its nickel-plated tubes and tungsten filament.

Pitch black.

Sound of water dripping.

“A boy scout’s fantasy,” Dr. Robert said. “Male anthropologist spends the night in a cave with female archaeologist.”

“A girl scout’s dream. But, there’s a damper on this unique moment of adolescent *eros*...we’re up to our asses in bat guano.”

Dr. Robert laughed and unbuckled two heavy cartridge belts crisscrossing his chest. “I feel silly wearing these. Wish I’d brought the salamander instead of my carbine.”

“Heat would be nice. It’s damp. I hate this ammonia reek.”

“That new Ruhmkorff coil is in my rucksack. We could radio for help...if I could find the sending key. Damn.”

“You and your wireless gadgets. At least we have tarp and blanket.”

Dr. Robert smiles in the darkness. He imagines her youthful figure, the trimness of her bare legs in khaki shorts and knee socks. Dr. Moore intuitively smiles back at the elderly man. “No lusting allowed, sir.”

“When we get back people will talk, but it won’t be about us sleeping together.”

“I know they’ll all be shocked. Our discovery changes the history of humans, Chad.” She pulls a large wool blanket from their bulky duffel bag. “Bible preachers won’t like it.”

“No, they won’t. That’s why, young lady, we need to construct our formal written report. Expect a hostile assortment of devil’s advocates. No ad-lib. Your rehearsed Nobel speech will have to blow them away, pun intended.”

She laughs.

“Judith, wait until your British Museum underwriters hear about this. You’ll be the talk of Russell Square.”

“I’m anxious to get news of London. I worry about my parents back home, on Marchmont Street --number 39”. She paused and felt saddened. “I fear by now, the Prussians have attacked the Isles. Kaiser is crazy as hell.”

“Thank god President Wilson promised he wouldn’t sacrifice our American boys to those greedy Wall Street gamblers.”

“Unfortunately for us Brits, your unrelated namesake, Lord Robert, is calling the shots.”

“I’d rather have Prince Peter in charge.

“Peter the anarchist?”

“Why not?”

“An anarchist?”

“I suggest you read his book, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.”

“Lets get back on top the tarp, Chad.”

Dr. Robert takes up the lamp and illuminates their orange canvas tarpaulin. He places his rifle and cartridge belts on one corner. Then, each sitting on opposite corners, they remove their boots. Hunks of bat guano stick to the soles. They put the four boots on the remaining corner.

Dr. Moore spreads and folds back their blanket.

She tucks her knees up under her chin. Her khaki walking shorts rise to expose a hint of buttocks. “We’ll write a best seller, Chad.”

“A scientific romance, trapped at midnight in an underground cathedral.” He chuckles. “It’s a script for a bioscope. I see our faces on the silver screen.”

Dr. Moore touches Dr. Robert’s knee, then softly takes his hands in hers. Her voice is pensive: “Chad, we’re fortunate...beyond words. You and I get to make a major contribution to science. This is every professional’s dream. No one could ever have guessed we’d find the missing link in the Andes.

“I mean ... how do we explain finding these bones in South America? This stuff is supposed to be found in Africa, maybe China.”

“Maybe of another world.”

“Not from Earth?”

“Late night talk, not serious.”

“That still wouldn’t disqualify the bones from being the Missing Link.”

“Hmm.”

“Evolutionist’s delight, Chad. This will eclipse the Neanderthal Valley.”

“Hmm. I wonder what’s below this room.” He pulls the blanket up to cover them.

Now they rest side by side.

Drip...drip...drip...

Sleep.

Near dawn. Dr. Moore is fully awake. “Do you know what?” She rolls onto her right side.

“Ummm.”

“Judging by the size of this mountain of guano, bats must have lived here thousands of years.”

“Ummm.”

“They lived here millions of years ago. But this top layer is fresh, bats still use this cave.”

“It’s a good shelter.”

“You amaze me, Chad.” Dr. Moore faces him in the blackness. “I heard, when you were but a tiny tyke--a pampered rich kid--the Huxleys would invite you into their home. Mrs. Huxley would fill you with fresh baked molasses cookies, the kind with raisins and nuts ... and a tall cool glass of goat’s milk.”

Dr. Robert rolls over on his back. “Where’d you hear that?”

“Also heard, your family moved from Spokane so you could school in London. Heard you went on a summer field trip with the younger Darwin. That you had the notorious Professor Bateson for a private tutor.”

“I was fortunate.”

“Now, here you are, old man. Alone with me! And together we find these fossils. Fortunate? I’d say you’ve led a charmed life.”

Dr. Robert coughs to the dark, to cover his pride.

Water dripping.

“Must be a melting glacier that keeps this cave alive,” Dr. Moore guessed.

“There’s a large lake further up the slope, fed by snowcaps.”

The two scientists lie still on the dry tarp, but with minds active.

“I can’t wait till we’re back in your lab, Chad. I’m so honest-to-god excited about finding those pelvis bone fragments. We have a whole hand preserved in guano. Pre-homo, to use Darwin’s logic. And, oh, that skull, with its tuft of hair, its pointed jaw, small teeth.”

“I’m eager to show Father Teilhard.”

“Chad, this find is major --like Dubois’.

“Except this is much older.”

“Major, like that jawbone Charles Darwin recently found in the Piltdown quarry.”

“That was Charles Dawson...this is much older.”

“Eerie.” She shakes her head, dizzy from all her new thoughts. “I can easily imagine reading about our mysterious cave in a Doyle novel, a lost world.”

“Ha, ha. Yes. Including those red handprints on the back wall.”

“Plus this snowflake obsidian blade.” Dr. Moore fingers the sharpened stone hanging from a leather thong around her neck. “This represents advanced knapping techniques, several million years ago. How could that be?” She turns on her back. The dim beginning of twilight brightens the entrance slit high above them.

“Our camp guides are starting the search for us now. They’ll soon find our flag and generator.” Dr. Robert, too, is on his back. “When we return to camp, remember, be cautious with our report. Nothing controversial. I don’t want our wireless transmitter used to spread fund-killing rumors.”

“You’re the boss.”

“I’d wager that somewhere down here we’ll find more bones. Possibly, mummified flesh. Bat guano is a remarkable preservative.”

The old man is now silent. The young woman listens to the dripping water. Her mind churns with the possibility of finding a preserved carcass. Might happen. What if we find an entire body encased in solidified guano?

“You brought us here, Chad. There weren’t supposed to be any people living in the Americas a hundred thousand years ago. Some one was dead wrong about South America and pre-human tribes.”

“Archaeologists and anthropologists, by necessity, have a stumbling history of mistakes.”

“For instance?”

“Burials. Prehistoric burials. It’s in my book.” Dr. Robert rests his hands behind his head and stares toward the brightening slit. “Think Judith, how many years did we run around talking about early belief in a hereafter, and all because of Neanderthal burials? The thought was: why else would they bury their dead with belongings, except to prepare for afterlife? A mortal belief in the eternal soul.

“Then I discover--burying a person alive was a common Paleolithic form of execution. They had no electric chair. No rope. No pyre. So it’s stone or cudgel, then bury the body. And bury their belongings with them. Swish. Out of sight out of mind.”

Dr. Moore contributed. “Difficult to know where a person went.”

“Or, given the lack of material evidence, if they had ever lived at all.”

Long silence.

“Another similar example is the common fetal-style burial.” Dr. Robert continues, propped on one elbow. “How many cockamamie theories came from respected archeologists and anthropologists about why Stone Age bodies were buried fetal position?”

“In my book, I demonstrate that it’s simply easier to bury someone with their knees underneath the chin and trunk bent. Takes a smaller hole than someone laid straight. Much less

digging. Functional. Nothing mystical. No return-to-the-womb symbolism, as Freud theorized.”

“Fascinating.” Dr. Moore had already read his book, but she loves hearing its radical ideas spoken directly to her by the old man himself. She could not have a better mentor. It’s a bonus that at age seventy-five he’s yet handsome and virile.

“OK, it’s your turn,” Dr. Robert said.

“Me?”

“Of course. You have earned a reputation for milking hidden knowledge from prominent Cambridge professors.”

She blushes.

“Now, you have a year of Harvard and two years of Princeton under your belt. Great minds earn their sustenance in those schools. Let’s hear your most radical ideas.”

“Oh, a challenge.” Dr. Moore pushes back her long hair and with a twinkle in her blue eyes, smiles. “Alright. Let me step up to the podium. I’ll address the awards committee.”

He chuckles.

“Gentlemen, last month, in the northern Andes, my esteemed colleague and I discovered Darwin’s famous Missing Link.

“Link is a mutated protohomo female ape who lived among three types of subhuman anthropoids.

“In addition to true apes, there were apemen: animals who were more apes than men. And, there were manapes, who were more men than apes.

“I believe our female could mate with all three, but her offspring were mostly manapes.

“When this female mated with apes, their children were often freaks, or like mules. When our promiscuous apewoman mated with apemen, she would produce a manape in, perhaps, one of seven pregnancies. But whenever she mated with a manape, her child was always humanesque, always like the father. It would be a manape or womanape.

“I’ll let the audience murmur here.”

“Good idea, you’ll need to.” Dr. Robert chided his assistant. “Why don’t you say something controversial?”

“Right.

“To continue...” she cleared her throat, “there arose in Africa, several species of both apemen and manapes. They shared the jungle bounty.

“Then, unexpectedly, species separation occurred during a mighty deluge. The apemen couldn’t swim. The aquatically adapted manapes survived by riding atop rising waters on vine-lashed rafts, guided by pontoon dugouts.

“Thus, the manapes transported harems of womanapes and their apewomen slaves across the ocean. Macchu Picchu was their seaport.”

Dr. Moore sighs. “Up till now, this is just my theory. But finally --we found the bones! We found an apewoman to link it all together. I have named her Eve. This is a great step in understanding. But, ultimately, Eve confronts this committee more with questions than answers.

“Thank you.”

Dr. Robert interjects his fanfare: “Tat daa dhaa! They cheer. We humbly bow. They cheer some more. We bow again.”

Dr. Moore applauds, too. Her gay clapping echoes off the cavern walls.

“Hey, listen,” Dr. Robert said. “I’m becoming a pretty good trumpeter.” He takes a deep breath-- “Ta-Dooouuum!”

“Lovely.” Dr. Moore grins and starts pulling on her boots. “But fame must wait. May I have the Eveready flashlight, please?”

“Sure.” Dr. Robert feels in his rucksack for the small flashlight and slides it to her, “Here...”

“Thank you.” She pulls on her other boot and stands, holding the tube. Flicks on its narrow ray.

“Where are you going?”

“Nature calls.”

“Better you than me. I hate walking over that sticky bat shit.”

“Please...guano is the proper description. I'll be back in a minute.” Dr. Moore walks off lifting knees high, her boots making sucking sounds.

“God, Chad, ammonia smell is awful over here, could knock you out. Must be a vent to the lower chambers.”

“Who knows what we'll find down there.”

“Maybe, your space ship.”

“Yeah.”

A long pause. The cavern is silent but for dripping. Faint colors return to the dark chamber walls.

“Wow. Judith, check the entrance... spectacular. Here comes the sun.”

Early light from below the horizon seeped a warm pink glow in the room. The last crickets of night and the first birds of morning announce the event. A fine ending for their overnight adventure.

“Oh my god. Agh! Chad --look at this.”

Dr. Robert can see a jiggling yellow ray hurriedly coming toward him. Loud, sucking footsteps coming closer. He flips on the hand lantern just in time to see an alarmed woman step out of the guano and onto their clean tarpaulin.

“Hey!” He points at her gummy boots.

“Chad. Look at this.” Dr. Moore stretches her arm straight out and hands over the injured, furry, frightened animal to Dr. Robert. Its satin black wings hang limp and one is broken and torn. The bat is quite large.

“Looks like he's been in a skirmish.”

“Skirmish? That's not what I'm saying ... this is a mutant specie, and furthermore it's a...
My god!

At the intrusive sound of beating air they had simultaneously lifted their faces toward the entrance gash. The dawnlight streaks the high cavern walls in red and yellow.

“Look!” Dr. Robert points up. Several black streams had converged into one great river. The shifting form was racing ahead of the eastern sunrise. “There must be a million of them....”

Dr. Moore gasped. “We're making history again, Chad.”

“Huh?”

“We’re standing in the anteroom to the world's largest *vampire* bat cave.”

“Vampires?” His jaw drops. He blinks. “Here they come!”

The front edge of the black horde fills the entry slit. The morning hews of sunlight are now blocked by the hoard’s giant shadow. They instantly fill the large room with flapping wings in their rush to escape sunlight.

A million open mouths. Blood caked on their lips.

Fangs white.

How long does it take a vampire bat’s olfactory receptors to report warm blood? How long before their echolocation sensors receive the first reflections from two large warm-blooded animals?

An old man and young woman huddled in fear.

Two hearts pumping.

The first time a bat brushes Dr. Moore's cheek, she didn't want to scream. But she does! Another flutter. This one against her exposed and shapely thigh. “AIEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!! -- MYGOD!”

Dr. Robert grabs her hand. “Under the tarp!” He pulls the canvas over their heads.

They push through the darkness. Each with one free hand struggling to protect their eyes and still swat the frantic bats trapped inside with them. They hear incessant squeaks and feel the constant thumping of small bodies ricocheting off their covering.

They can’t see.

He knows they're stumbling in needless circles. She trips over the rucksack and falls.

Their tarp pulls free!

He trips over her.

He rolls in the sticky guano, coughing, inhaling the strong ammonia. "--Jesus Christ."

Dr. Robert reaches blindly to pull the tarp back over them. What's that tingling?

Something crawling?

Larvae!

Beetle larvae!

Oh my God! "Get up, Judith!" He pulls her arm. Blood oozes from his cheeks. Larvae in his hair. "Run! The lower room...."

The couple lunges forward. In a few steps they blunder into a pit of fresh dropped guano!

Dr. Robert finds he can't move. The sticky filth is almost up to his knees. Larvae crawling inside his shirt. He and his young student frantically clinging to one another. She feels him shudder in her arms. Dr. Robert stiffens. Heart failure.

He's dead.

The unexpected shift of his now dead weight makes Dr. Moore fall backward. Flat on her back, knees bent. Her feet and lower legs remain glued in the guano. She clings to Dr. Robert's lifeless body, not wanting to let him go. Not wanting to be left alone.

The signal goes out: injured animal!

Large mammal down!

Thousands of hungry bat mouths respond. Countless white worms squirm over each other to get to their hot food. The larvae crawl over her bloody face and enter into her nose and ears. Dr. Moore lies frozen in shock. Unable to move. The ammonia forces her to drift in and out of consciousness. She can't pass out.

Hideous death.

Dr. Judith Moore was fully aware of the vampire bats lapping her blood, and beetle larvae eating her flesh. She lived until sundown.

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Making History from *ChronosomeCircular*

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