

Sample chapter from...

THE HAGS OF TEEB

by

David S. Leyman

Copyright © 2011 EBB and Folks Enterprise

All rights reserved. No part of this book shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher and author.

1st edition May 2011

www.EBBnFolks.com

www.DavidLeyman.com

www.iQliptiQ.com

Also by David S. Leyman

Crater

Meevo

Three's Company

A Simple Guide to Understanding Jet Engines

Coming soon

The Adepts - Book 1 - Furato

Ruthermore Heidigens and the Fifth Planet

The Hags of Teeb

Chapter 1

Gasping for breath I turned and looked down the long, long, flight of steps that we had just climbed. It had seemed interminable. The trek across the scrubby, dusty plains and then the climb up the foothills of this mountain range until, unexpectedly, we came across this staircase hewn out of the volcanic rock. The steps seemed to climb up all the way into the sky.

Gaspard, my companion of the last seventeen days was gaunt. "*Food. Zat is what it is zat we are needing—food.*" He said. His squeaky voice now made even thinner by wheezing through the scant air that existed at this altitude. "*I am, 'ow you say, a 'usk. Zere must be somezing, somewhere zat it is zat we can edible.*"

"Eat, Gaspard. Eat."

"*What? Zere is nozzing. 'Ow can you say to eat?*"

"No. What I meant is, the word you require is 'eat' not 'edible'."

"*How is it zat you ze words bandy when we 'ave nozzing to eat like ze horses.*"

I let it go. He was, as usual, confusing two English colloquialisms. "We must press on, Gaspard. There are riches to be had—they must not be allowed to fall into the hands of some Johnny Foreigner. Present company excepted, you understand. No offence, what?"

"*What? You 'ave found somezing to, what, eat? Eh? So it is zat we can continue after nourishing our leedl man?*"

"I am at a complete loss to understand that a race, such as yours, that will consume just about anything that crawls on, or grows out of, the earth will balk at putting such nourishing grub as tripe and onions in their mouth. How do you think we British forged an empire, eh? By dining on rubbish? No, by God! We always made sure that we always had good, wholesome food with us—so as not to rely on that foreign garbage that you insist on forking into your heads. Look where it got you—nowhere, that's where! We, on the other hand, ruled the world; well, the best part of it, anyway. We left the worse bit for you bloody foreigners, what? No offence, and all that, Gaspard. The upshot is that, if you will not eat then neither

will I. I will not ask you to do something that I cannot do.”

“You ruled ze world because you are all crazy on zat leedl island of yours. Even when death stares you in ze face you cannot admit defeat. It is ze same now, peut etre. We are dead and it is zat you do not know eet. It is only ze matter of ‘ours now and our bones will be bleaching ‘appily away on zis deserted mountain. Zen you will eat zat... zat... merde you ‘ave in your leedl baglet ‘anging from your belt.”

“You have no faith. No staying power. This is because you are foreign. I, on the other hand, am British and born to succeed. We will not die shortly. We shall, on the contrary, be extremely well fed and watered within the hour. Now, we have rested so we may continue. The bags, Gaspard, if you please.”

“Ze bags, ze bags. Nom d’un chien, ze bags. Why is it zat it is zat you carry no bags. No! Do not tell me. I do not wish to be reminded once more of my racial inferiority! Mais, zut alors—how is it zat we are to be so fortunated? Eh?”

“Fortunate, my dear chap. Fortunate. Because I can smell food and wood smoke. It is emerging from the rocks at some point a small distance ahead.”

“Zere is no smoke of ze wood up ‘ere—zere is no wood up ‘ere. ‘Oo is it zat can bring ze wood up ‘ere to make ze firing to cook ze food? Eh? Ce n’est pas possible.”

“‘Oo is it zat make ze steps, eh?” I cruelly paraphrased him and regretted it instantly. It is always easy to bring oneself down to somebody else’s level—always harder to bring them up to your own standards. I must remember that it is my bounden duty, as an Englishman, to bring British Standards to the world—a world that thirsts for all that is decent, proper and... well... British, damn it! “Come, Gaspard. We progress—onwards and upwards, as they say.”

“As ‘oo is it sez?”

“Oh, dear. It’s just an expression, Gaspard.”

“Like ze smile? Or ze frown, peut etre?”

Sometimes I wondered if Gaspard was really as dense as he made out or whether he was trying to be clever at my expense. Clearly, he would fail miserably if that were to be the case. My superior intellect would crush him without mercy in a moment. Fortunately, I am the merciful type and will treat him kindly as befits a superior person dealing with a person of a lower order. Why, he is little more than a pet—a beast of burden, if you will.

Once more my feet rose one after the other, heaving my exhausted body up the stairs. If only Gaspard could realise how fortunate he is—being of peasant stock he would have no

concept of physical fatigue any more than he would have any notion of death. These unfortunates are used to dying—it's in their blood, you know, thin 'though it is well known to be.

I gritted my teeth and strove on, cursing the damn bad luck that caused my stick to snap as I was urging Gaspard on in the foothills. How difficult it was to explain to him that I had only brought him with me as a kindness. 'You'd be better off with a Jenny Mule' my father had advised. 'And you'd have much the same quality of conversation'. If only I had listened to Pater—as ever. But the past is always in the past. The decision was made and now I must live with it and make the most of it. Gaspard, the family retainer, was chosen over a mule and Gaspard it is that must be tolerated.

After several dozen steps I turned to check that Gaspard was keeping approximate pace with me. Of course, he would never be as strong or as determined as I but he would have to do his utmost best or, as well he knows, I should have to bring up the rear and goad him on from behind; a poor place for a natural leader of men to be.

"The scent of success grows stronger. Have courage, have faith."

"Quelle damage. Vien, vien le mort!"

Sometimes I wish I had spent more time studying this gibber that Gaspard breaks into from time to time. Sadly, he learnt it at an early age and so the English that all babies are born with has been suborned in his mind by this unintelligible foreign trash. Of course, in the normal course of events one would merely have to speak louder and more slowly to re-awaken the innate ability of all races and cultures to speak and understand their natural English language but, sadly, with Gaspard, the nonsense had burned too deep; he was impervious to all suggestion. It was a wonder that he had managed to acquire any understanding of decent and proper language at all—somebody must have had enormous patience with him.

"Ah! Here we are."

There was a small cleft in the rock. Big enough, just, for a normal person to slip through. Gaspard, being of slight build, would manage it easily. The smell of wood smoke was quite strong here—as was the mouth-watering odour of stew on the boil. I could almost taste the cabbage already.

Coughing and wheezing, Gaspard eventually caught up.

"Come along there, Gaspard. Can't have you dithering around all day—things to do, don't you know? Now, step through this crack and tell me what you see."

"Perhaps it is zat zere is zings zat are dangerous zere."

He made the word 'dangerous' sound almost like 'kangaroos'.

"There is nothing dangerous, merely somebody preparing lunch. Don't be silly, off you go."

"If it is zat it is zat zere is nozzing dangerous in zere why is it zat it is zat you do not yourself go première? Uh?"

"Really, Gaspard. Clearly this is why the French have never won a battle in your entire existence except when you had that manic little Corsican in charge of you. You have no concept of tactics and strategy. You slip through and, while you are vulnerable to attack from behind I will cover your rear."

Gaspard peered around me, looking up the mountain. Then he turned and examined the view below. *"I zink zat it is zat zere is no danger from below or above. On ze uzzer 'and je ne le pense pas zat I am liking ze idée of an Englishman be'ind moi while I am bending to slip into ze crack in ze rock. Peut etre ze Englishman 'e 'as similar idées of 'is own. Mais oui?"*

"I have no idea, Gaspard, what it is that you are gabbling on about in your Pidgin English. If, as is typical, you are frightened of the tiniest challenge, I shall take the lead. Watch out for danger from behind and let me know if anything untoward occurs. Are you able to manage that small task?"

Gaspard gave me one of his lingering and vacant gazes. How often I marvelled at the way his bovine features can be so animated one moment and so dull the next.

"*Oui.*" He said at length.

"Thank you for that torrent of spontaneous eloquence. Hand me the torch." Observing his continued look of dumbness I continued. "The lamp. The electric light."

He muttered something that I didn't quite catch, probably reprimanding himself on his own stupidity, reached into one of the bags and pulled out my large 'Maglight' type 14" aluminium flashlight (Black) containing 5 D-Cells. Still looking as if I had hit him smartly between the eyes, which, I assure you, I had not been required to do today, he slowly handed me the torch. 'If only I had brought the mule' was the thought that flashed through my mind.

"Do try to keep alert. The world is not a safe place for explorers such as we, you know." There was no change. I turned and peered into the cleft in the rock, shining my torchlight

around in a, more or less, circular manner. Just rock. The slot extended beyond my vision and appeared to become larger as it went into the rock. Cocking my leg over the boulder at the entrance I managed to nimbly hop into the crevice. Springing like a young gazelle, I leapt around the corner and into a large cave, crouched and ready for immediate action should it become necessary for me to defend myself from, well, who knows what. To my right, at a point that would seem to be level with several more steps up the staircase outside, was a large, wooden door. Immediately to the right of the door was a bell that, at first sight, was possibly operated by a cord leading through a hole in the doorframe.

To my left, probably about twenty yards from my ten o'clock* was a fire under a large, black pot supported by a tripod and suspended from that tripod by a hook and chain. Sitting either side of the pot were two very old, very wrinkled and very sombre, crones.

To read the rest of THE HAGS OF TEEB, buy now from Amazon!