

Excerpt from Cavalcade Of Fancy Ladies-

By Brian Thomas

It was late, much later than the women had intended, but people had been lingering along the street well past dusk. A gaggle of pram-pushing young mothers had stood gossiping in front of the house for hours. A little Asian girl wearing shiny shoes and a big pink bow had spent the evening admiring an old man's cart of brightly colored rubber balloons while scolding a kitten, keeping both the old man and the kitten out on the street well past the time when little girls, old men and kittens should be home enjoying supper.

Cavalcade watchers had notified Sister Lillette when the street had finally cleared and the two women glided through the deep shadows of the park like a pair of graceful dark spirits while the rest of the Cavalcade camp distracted any lingering nightlife. Now Sister Lillette and Sister Dolcina of The Cavalcade Of Fancy Ladies danced around the pools of light cast by the streetlights and flowed up and over the ivy covered wall like wraiths.

The two women stealthily circled the house, examining the windows on all three floors. It was close to eleven pm now and the only lights visible in the house were on the third floor, where according to the provided floor plan, Dr Malphurgis kept his study.

The Cavalcade's instructions were rather straightforward: Abduct Dr Malphurgis, and recover his research materials. If neither of these were possible the Fancy Ladies was instructed to destroy the doctor and all records of his current work. The sisters of the Cavalcade didn't know what that work was, but they were not paid to know. They were paid to perform.

At the back of the house, tucked between the trellises, Sister Lillette found what she wanted- a pair of storm doors to the basement. The doors were wood and a quick peek through a barred basement window showed the single bolt on the inside face of the doors. Lillette shut her piercing blue eyes as the location of the bolt was burned onto her mind's eye. With the location of the bolt now fixed in her head, she moved to the door and set out her tools.

Lillette pulled what looked like a constable's baton from the folds of her caftan. The wand was dark and seemed to be made of heavy rubber. She then drew a small but complex looking device from a pocket inside her sash. Light from the moon winked off the teeth of a tiny saw blade. Lillette held the wand, and flicked open a cap at the base of the handle with one well manicured thumb. She checked the tiny gauge there and then plugged the clever little omni tool's cord into the exposed socket. She gave the wand two gentle shakes. There came the familiar scent of ozone and the omni tool hummed to life.

Purring saw blade met wooden door and purring saw blade won the contest. Midway through cutting the hole the blade seemed to slow its progress, and Lillette gave the black wand a sharp tap. The tool's power surged, and a section of the door fell into the darkness.

"You know smacking it like that just makes it angry," commented Dolcina dryly.

"That's pretty much the point" replied Lillette smugly as she unplugged the omni tool and placed it back into her sash. Without further comment she reached into the hole and threw the bolt, then lifted the storm door and the two Fancy Ladies quietly entered the doctor's basement.

The basement of Dr. Malphurgis' house was a cavernous space.

The basement was not completely dark. Stacks of boxes and crates were everywhere and numerous machines crowded the huge room. The various pieces of machinery quietly hummed and glowed softly. Lillette spotted one big crate was full of bullets.

As Sister Dolcina's eyes adjusted to the low light she stopped short, grabbed her companion's arm and gave a little gasp.

A giant was hanging from the ceiling of the basement.

As the two shapely burglars crept closer they could see it wasn't a giant man, it was a giant suit. It had a round blunt head and oversized thick limbs. It looked vaguely like a deep-sea diving suit, though both women doubted there was much call for deep sea diving in Bjornston Harbor. The enormous suit was hanging from chains with its arms forward, and it reminded Sister Dolcina of a giant discarded puppet. She shuddered. Sister Dolcina hated puppets.

Lillette moved around behind the dangling metal suit and saw a tangle of pipes and wires all terminating at a point on its back.

"Something's missing," she whispered.

The various pipes and wires looked like they were meant to plug into something, and a space for that something was now obvious in the center of the suit's back. Lillette glanced around. Although the basement was scattered with crates and equipment nothing looked like it fit the puzzle. Any further investigation was cut short as the basement gaslights were suddenly dialed up.

Like performers in a choreographed dance the two women simultaneously dropped to the floor behind a large machine that periodically went "meep". From this beeping hiding spot they watched a young man descend the basement steps. The lad was totally absorbed with the bulky camera he was carrying, and didn't

look up until he was well into the basement workshop. Lillette nudged her companion as she considered the young man's details.

Dark hair peeked out past pale skin from under a knit cap, and a bulky wool coat hid his clothing. Sister Lillette could easily detect the scent of hair palmate as well as a smoky fish smell. Herring and hair oil thought the Fancy Lady...a Russian.

The young Russian photographer moved around to the back of the suit, his camera flash strobing as he recorded the details of the hanging metal giant. When the young Russian's back was to her, Lillette rose from her crouch, drew her baton and flicked a catch on the handle. The outer black rubber sheath fell to the floor exposing the core of the wand.

If the young Russian had turned around he would have seen that Lillette now held a black rubber handle fitted to a sixteen-inch brass and metal cage. If the young Russian had looked even closer he would have seen the creature that resided within the brass and metal cage. He would have seen the green and blue-pebbled skin, the snake like body, and the strangely intelligent yet wholly evil eyes.

If the young Russian had turned around he would have seen an actual Venusian Tesla Adder trapped in an Adder Wand, but unfortunately for him he never turned around. Lillette gave the wand a sharp snap of her wrist, then stepped forward and rapped the wand against the base of the young Russian's skull. This time the scent of ozone was followed by a loud "pop" and the smell of cooking bacon as the young Russian fell soundlessly into Dolcina's waiting arms.

The Tesla Adder was just one of the many deadly creatures of Venus. What was the saying-"Venus, a thousand shades of green and a million ways to die." This was hardly the only "native of

Venus” that lived in the Cavalcade nor was it arguably the most dangerous, but it was one of the more useful ones.

The Tesla Adder produced an electrical discharge whenever it was annoyed.

The best way to really annoy one was to flick its fourteen-inch body down a sixteen-inch tube and slam it snoot first into the tip. The problem was, the more annoyed a Tesla Adder became the stronger the discharge.

On a really bad day an angry adult Tesla Adder could electrocute an elephant.

“I told you it was going to get angry”, scolded Dolcina. “Instead of shocking him you fried the poor boy’s brain.”

Lillette gave a little shrug as she patted the dead man’s pockets. The man represented a complication. She highly doubted Dr Malphurgis made a habit of having Russian houseguests, especially since the Czar had declared war on “Amerikan Imperial aggressions”. She also doubted the good doctor had given permission for photographs of his large metal basement puppet, so unfortunately this meant there was probably a second performance troupe trying to take the stage.

Dolcina dragged the dead photographer behind a palette of boxes, as Lillette slid the black rubber sheath over the now sleeping alien eel’s cage.

“You know it’s just going to sleep for hours now after a jolt that strong”, complained Dolcina as she rather effortlessly dragged the dead weight of the dead man. “You really should be nicer to it.”

“Well I can’t exactly pet it now can I”, hissed Lillette in response.

With the lights now dialed up The Fancy Ladies could see more

of the basement's interior. Tables were arrayed with half built devices, and schematics and blueprints cluttered every surface. Crates of ammunition lay open and spilled onto the floor, and tools lay everywhere. Overall it looked like an army of people had recently been working in the space. The sisters even spied empty cups and discarded Greeble tins.

Lillette hated clutter and her opinion of Dr Malphurgis dipped significantly. It was one of the many reasons she did not allow men to stay with the Caravan- men meant clutter.

The women carefully crossed the basement floor avoiding the mess and had almost reached the flight of stairs heading up when they heard another set of footsteps descending the stone steps.

Lillette shoved the now dormant adder wand back into her jacket as Dolcina stepped around her and pulled a small silver pipe from her sleeve. Dolcina waited until she was sure it was just a single person coming down the stairs, then brought the puff pipe up in a straight-armed stance and squeezed the trigger.

The small fluted needle in the puff pipe benefited from another strange creature, though this one was from dear old earth. The venom that lay in the grooves of the dart came from a sea urchin of the South Seas, and the little compressed-air dart thrower could also play a merry tune if you knew where to put...and not put your lips.

The second Russian had just enough time to look confused before the venom clamped an iron fist on his muscles and then his lungs. The man teetered for a moment then fell onto his back-his body locked in a frozen pose like a cigar store skrealing.

Dolcina looked down into his frozen face and gave a little sigh. The man's mouth was open but no air was going in and his wide

opened eyes began to roll back into his head. Dolcina tilted her head to the side considering the dying man then reached into her sash and drew out small needle. Lillette gave a disgusted little huff as Dolcina pricked the side of the man's neck with the needle. She waited a moment then pressed firmly on the man's chest in three sharp pushes. The man gave a loud gasp of air and then passed out.

“See, nobody died,” said Dolcina as she smiled and stood.

“It's early, and there's probably more of them”, replied Lillette curtly. “Check his shoes”.

Dolcina looked at the man's shoes, then his jacket and his hands. He had a heavy coat, callused hands and gum-soled shoes. She glared up the stairs. “We need to move sister”, the curvy woman growled, and together they hurried up the stairs.