

PRESENTING PART TWO OF 'THE WALL OF THE 1970s' WRITTEN THIS TIME BY RO AND DARROLL PARDOE...

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It was the first Thursday in the month. From a building in Hatton Garden emerged the Pardoes, who with others had been celebrating the ancient rites observed by British fans at this auspicious time. As he steered his wife towards their car, Darroll's thoughts drifted back over a conversation earlier in the evening. A few days earlier, he had received a letter, postmarked Brighton, and ostensibly from Phil Spencer, in which Phil had claimed that the Tolkien Society was too loosely run, and ought to be tightened up with a much more detailed Constitution and more officers. That evening, Phil had denied all knowledge of the letter, and pointed out that on the day indicated by the postmark he was laid low in bed with a rather painful disease. So, the mysterious letter writer had struck again. The envelope, Darroll mused, would have to be sent to CC for analysis by Timothy Barrell...

At that moment his thoughts were rudely shattered. A cloth liberally soaked in chloroform was clamped over his nose and mouth, and he knew no more.

Awakening, Darroll found himself (and Ro, next to him) bound hand and foot to a chair in a large room. Facing the chairs was a desk, and on the far wall a large map of Britain, in which coloured pins were stuck. As his eyes refocussed and the chloroform fumes cleared, Darroll could see the clusters of pins on the map... they seemed to be massed in places like Birmingham; London; Liverpool; Sheffield; Brighton; Leeds; Scunthorpe... in fact, the places where fans lived. He could see some outliers - a bright red pin in Cornwall, and a blue one in Haverfordwest.

"Are you all right, Ro?" he called, and was relieved to get an affirmative response. It was a pity, though, that the bonds didn't permit his head to turn sufficiently to see Ro, as well as hear her. As he spoke, a door opened, and in came a familiar figure. There was no mistaking that well-known face - every feature from the soles of the shoes to the bright colours of the whirling propellor beanie belonged to that person. All, that is, except one, for the reek of soy sauce that emanated from the figure was not in Darroll's experience a normal feature of its character. It spoke.

"Ah... so. You have been spying on us, yes? This we can not allow. You must be exterminated, but not of course until you tell us what you have learned. And your friend, the Eye of the Cat, soon we will have him also. Talk now, or the rest of your short lives will be very painful to you."

"So the Tong is back in Business" said Darroll. "I thought as much. But you will never make us talk, you oriental swine. But I never knew that you, of all people, was an initiate of the Tong."

"And after all the times we've drunk Blog together, too..." added Ro. "How could you?"

"You will talk, enemies of the Tong" the BNF said (for such he was) "I will go now to fetch my fiendish oriental torturers; soon we will return, and then you will tell us all you know." Saying this, he left the room, which Darroll and Ro could see was entered by a small room with no other exits. A lift, perhaps?

The door closed and the two guardians of trufandom were alone in the room once more - or so they thought. But suddenly, from behind, a familiar voice purred out. "Merroww... hold shhtill, now..." A gnawing noise followed, and suddenly Darroll felt his bonds loosen and snap. He got up and rubbed the circulation back into his limbs. Pollethy moved to Ro and released her too. "Follow me" merrowed Pollethy. She went over to the door, stared at it for a moment, and it slid silently open. They went through and it closed behind them.

The room in which they found themselves was about four feet square, and on the wall by the door was a row of buttons labelled from A to R in red and from 0 to 12 in green and blue. "Merroww... press A34K1-12-4C" said Pollethy "That leads to the surrface". Ro did this, and the lift rose. After a while the rising sensation stopped, but instead of the door opening it began to move sideways. When it stopped, after a couple of minutes, the door slid open to reveal open countryside. They stepped out, and looked back. Nothing could be seen of the lift door; there was just a blank wall behind them. "Cunning" said Darroll "But so like the Tong." For on the wall some wielder of chalk had scrawled AARDVARKS FOR EVER in foot-high letters.

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Catseyes Cheslin sat in his chair and listened to Darroll's account of the adventure. "But I don't see" Darroll said "how Pollethy got into the place at all. And how did she know the secret code that would take the lift to the surface",

"Clever, the merrowans" said CC..."I don't know the half of their abilities myself yet." Timothy and Pollethy were concentrated on a catnip jar (closed) in the corner and gave no sign of paying attention to the conversation. "But to fight the Tong we need them. You didn't know, did you, that they have reason enough of their own to want the Tong eliminated."

Darroll leaned forward. "Do you know, CC, who that fan was who threatened us in the Tong hide-out?" "I was wondering when you'd get round to it" said Cheslin.

"It was... Terry Jeeves." said Darroll. CC leaped from his chair in astonishment, and the merrowans ceased their efforts with the catnip jar and looked in his direction.

"Are you sure, Darroll?" said CC... "It can't have been. Terry was here visiting me that night. He was on his way down to Cornwall to visit Archie and Beryl and stopped over to break the journey. So whoever you saw, it can't have been Terry Jeeves."

"But it was, CC" said Darroll. "I know Terry when I meet him. Everything was exactly right. I admit that what he said wasn't exactly his normal conversation, though his voice sounded like him... and there was that damn smell of soy sauce."

"He can hardly have been in two places at once" said CC. "But if you saw the real TJ, who stayed here with us? And he's the last person I'd have thought would be a Tong member."

"We'll all have to go down to Cornwall and confront Terry with the problem" said Darroll... "And we can ask Archie his opinion too while we're there - you remember how he helped us in that little problem of the sweet and sour duplicating ink the Tong tried to smuggle into the country?"

"Right" said CC. "We'll start tomorrow. But now, let's relax with a good fanzine or two. I hope we don't have to call in the Secret Master Guild on this one. They tend to be more of a handrance than a help."

... to be continued.