



*The Hollow Chocolate
Bunnies of the Apocalypse*

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*The Hollow
Chocolate Bunnies
of the Apocalypse*

ROBERT RANKIN



*This book is dedicated to
the memory of Jon Jo*

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1

‘Once upon a time,’ said the big fat farmer, ‘it was all fields around here.’

The traveller glanced all around and about. ‘It’s still all fields,’ said he.

‘And there you have it.’ The farmer grinned, exposing golden teeth. ‘Nothing ever changes in these parts. Nothing. Nor will it ever. And so much the better for that, says I. Though so much the worse, say others. It all depends on your point of view. But isn’t this ever the way?’

‘I suppose that it is.’ The traveller nodded politely. He was hot and he was weary. He had wandered many miles this day. His feet were sore and he was hungry. He took off his blue felt cap and mopped it over his brow.

‘The colour’s coming out of your cap,’ the farmer chuckled. ‘Your forehead’s gone all blue.’

‘Which, you must agree, is different,’ said the traveller. ‘And admits, at the very least, to the possibility of change in these parts.’

‘On the contrary.’ The farmer dug about in his voluminous patchworked smock, brought forth something chewable and thrust it into his mouth for a chew. ‘To me it admits something else entirely. To me, it admits that you, a ruddy-faced lad—’

‘Tanned,’ said the lad. ‘Tanned from travel.’

‘All right, tanned, then. That you, a tanned lad, of, what would it be, some sixteen summers?’

‘Thirteen,’ said the travelling lad. ‘I’m tall for my age. Thirteen I am, which is lucky for some.’

‘All right then yet again. That you, a tanned lad, thirteen years and lucky for some, scrawny-limbed and—’

‘Spare,’ said the tall, tanned lad. ‘Spare of frame and wiry of limb and—’

‘Dafter than a box of hair,’ said the farmer. ‘That you are a gormster and a dullard, with a most inferior cap, who understands little of the world and will surely come to grief in a time not too far distant.’

‘Oh,’ said the lad. ‘Indeed?’

‘Indeed.’ The farmer spat with practised ease across the field of flowering crad. ‘Nothing ever changes in these parts and there’s a truth for you to be going along with.’

‘And going along I mean to be.’ The lad wrung sweat from his most inferior cap and

replaced it upon his tanned and heated head. 'Just as soon as you have furnished me with answers to questions I must ask. You see, I have wandered from the road. I followed a sign that said shortcut, and now I find myself here.'

'It happens,' said the farmer. 'More often than you might suppose.'

'As *rarely* as that?' said the lad, who was never one prone to extravagant speculation.

'At the very least, but mostly a whole lot more.'

The travelling lad whistled.

'Please don't whistle,' said the farmer. 'It aggravates my Gout.'

'I am perplexed,' said the whistler. 'How can whistling aggravate Gout?'

'Gout is the name of my goat,' the farmer explained. 'I have a pig called Palsy and a cat called Canker. Once I owned a dog by the name of Novinger's syndrome, but his howling upset my wife, so I sold him to a tinker.'

'Oh,' said the lad once more.

'Yes, oh. And whistling aggravates my goat. As does poking him in the ear with a pointy stick. Which, in all truth, would aggravate me. And I'm not easily upset.'

'Righty oh.' The lad shifted from one weary foot to the other, and his stomach growled hungrily. 'But regarding these questions that I must ask.'

'Are they questions of an agricultural nature?' the farmer enquired.

'Not specifically.' The lad shook his heated head.

'That's a pity,' said the farmer. 'Because my knowledge on the subject is profound. I trust it's not a question regarding clockwork motors. Because, for all the life that's in me, I cannot make head nor toe of those infernal machines.' The farmer made a sacred sign above his treble chin.

'It's not clockwork motors.' The lad made exasperated sighing sounds. 'I was lately apprenticed in that trade and I know everything I need to know regarding them.'

'Cheese, then?' said the farmer. 'I know much about cheese.'

'Directions only.' The lad blew droplets of bluely-tinted sweat from the tip of his upturned nose. 'All I wish for are directions. How do I get to the city from here?'

'*The city?*' The farmer almost choked upon his chewable. 'Why would a lad such as yourself be wanting to be going to the city?'

'I mean to seek my fortune there,' the lad replied, with candour. 'I am done with toiling in a factory. I will seek my fortune in the city.'

'Fortune?' coughed the farmer. 'In the city? Hah and hah again.'

'And why "hah", you farmer?' asked the lad.

‘Because, my tanned and wiry boy, you’ll find no fortune there. Only doom awaits you in that direction. Turn back now, say I. Return to the mother who weeps for you.’

‘I have no mother,’ said the lad. ‘I am an orphan boy.’

‘A little lost waif; my heart cries bloody tears.’ The farmer mimed the wiping of such tears from the region of his heart.

‘Let not your heart weep for me.’ The lad straightened his narrow shoulders and thrust out his chest – what little he had of a chest. ‘I know how to handle myself.’

‘Turn back,’ advised the farmer. ‘Return the way you came.’

The lad sighed deeply. ‘And what is so bad about the city, then?’ he asked.

‘Where to start?’ The farmer puffed out his cheeks. ‘And where to end? So many evil things I’ve heard.’

‘And have you ever been to the city yourself?’

‘Me?’ The farmer placed his hands upon his over-ample belly and gave vent to raucous sounds of mirth.

‘And why now the raucous sounds of mirth?’

‘Because what do I look like to you, my poor lost laddo?’

‘You look like a big fat farmer, as it happens.’

‘And what would a big fat farmer be doing in the city?’

‘Trading produce, perhaps? This crad that flowers all around and about us in these fields that never change.’

The farmer scratched his big fat head. ‘And why would I want to trade my crad?’

‘For money. To buy things.’

‘What sort of things?’

‘Food, perhaps?’

The farmer gave his big fat head a slow and definite shaking. ‘You are indeed a mooncalf,’ said he. ‘I am provided here with all the food that I need.’

‘Other things then. Consumer durables, perhaps.’

‘What?’

‘Consumer durables. I am not entirely sure what they are. But I am informed that the city holds them in abundance. And I mean to acquire as many as I possibly can.’

The farmer shook his head once more, and there was a certain sadness in the shaking.

‘Clothes then,’ said the lad. ‘Everyone needs new clothes at one time or another.’

‘And do I look naked to you?’

The lad now shook *his* head, spraying the fully clothed farmer with sweat. The farmer was certainly clothed – although his clothing was strange. His ample smock was a patchwork, as if of a multitude of smaller clothes all stitched together.

‘My wife and I have all we need, my sorry orphan boy,’ said the farmer. ‘Only disappointment and despair come from wanting more than you need.’

‘I’ve no doubt that there’s wisdom in your words,’ said the lad. ‘But as I have nothing at all, anything more will represent an improvement.’

‘Then return the way you came. Weave clockwork motors if you must. Hard work, well achieved, is sometimes rewarded.’

‘No,’ said the lad. ‘It’s the city for me. My mind is set on this. But listen, if you have never visited the city, why not accompany me? Your gloomy opinion of it might be modified by experience.’

‘I think not. The city is for city folk. There are those who toil there and are miserable and those who prosper and are happy. The toilers exceed the prosperers by many thousands to one. So much I have been told, and what I’ve been told is sufficient to inform my opinion.’

‘Perhaps I will return one day and alter this opinion.’

‘Be assured by me that you will do no such thing. Many have travelled this way before you, seeking wealth in the city. None have ever returned wealthy. In fact, none have ever returned at all.’

‘Perhaps they became wealthy and so felt no need to return.’

‘Your conversation tires me,’ said the farmer. ‘And as I can see that you are adamant in your convictions and eager to be on your way, I suggest that we speak no more. I have discharged my responsibilities. My job is done.’

‘Responsibilities?’ asked the lad. ‘Job?’

‘My responsibility and my job is to stand in this field of flowering crad and discourage young lads such as you from travelling towards the city. Such was my father’s job, and his father’s before him.’

‘Why?’ asked the lad.

‘Because that’s the way we do business in these parts. Nothing ever changes around here. If you travel on towards the city, you will surely meet your doom. And when you do, you will blame me for it.’

‘Why should I?’ asked the lad.

‘Because I know that you will come to grief. I know it. And if you were in my position and knew that travellers, should they travel in a certain direction, would come to grief, would you not advise them against it?’

‘Of course I would,’ said the lad. ‘But—’

‘But me no buts. I have advised you. I have warned you of an inevitable consequence. What more can I do?’

‘You could be a little more specific,’ said the lad, ‘regarding the manner of this imminent and inevitable doom that lies ahead for me.’

‘That I cannot do.’

The traveller shrugged. ‘So which way *is it* to the city?’ he asked.

‘The city lies five miles to the south.’ The farmer pointed. ‘Cross yonder stile and follow the path. The path leads eventually to the outskirts of the city, but—’

‘But *me* no buts,’ said the lad. ‘Thank you and farewell.’

*

The lad stepped carefully across the field of flowering crad, swung his long and agile legs over the stile and proceeded southwards down the path. Sparrows sang in the hedgerows, trees raised their leafy arms towards the sky of blue and the sun continued its shining down.

‘A strange old breed are farmers,’ said the lad to no one other than himself. ‘And many folk hold to the conviction that the rustic mind, attuned as it is to natural lore, possesses a raw wisdom which is denied to the over-civilised city dweller, whose sophisticated intellect is—’

But he said no more as he tripped upon something and then plunged forward and down.

And then down some more.

Presently he awoke from unconsciousness to find that he was lying at the bottom of a pit. Rubbing at his head and peering blearily about, he became aware of a movement someways above. Looking up, he espied the face of the farmer.

‘Thank goodness,’ said the lad. ‘Please help me. I appear to have fallen into a hole.’

‘You have fallen into *my* hole,’ said the farmer, ‘the hole that a distant ancestor of mine dug to receive the bodies of the foolhardy boys who failed to heed his advice.’

‘Oh,’ said the lad, rubbing some more at his head and blinking his bleary eyes.

‘A hole maintained by and through generations, and now by myself. Although it would appear that I must furnish its bottom with a few more sharpened spikes; you have missed those that there are, by the looks of you.’

‘Oh,’ said the lad once more.

‘Nothing ever changes around here,’ said the farmer. ‘My forebears feasted upon the flesh of foolish boys, and so do I. It’s a family tradition. Their meat fills my belly and their clothing covers my person. I would hardly be so big and fat and well-dressed if I subsisted upon crad alone, now, would I?’

‘I suppose not,’ said the lad, dismally.

‘I gave you warnings,’ said the farmer. ‘I gave you opportunity to avoid travelling to your inevitable doom. But did you listen?’

‘Perhaps if you *had* been more specific,’ the lad suggested. ‘I took your warnings to mean that the city spelled my doom.’

‘You didn’t listen carefully enough,’ said the farmer. ‘But doom is doom, no matter how you spell it. Unless, of course, you spell it differently from doom. But then it would be another word entirely, I suppose.’

‘I suppose it would,’ the lad agreed, in the tone of one who now knew exactly how doom was spelled. ‘But I have no one to blame but myself.’

‘Well said.’ The farmer grinned. ‘And so, as the spikes have failed to do their job, I must do it with this rock.’ The farmer displayed the rock in question. It was round and of a goodly size. ‘Perhaps you’d care to close your eyes whilst I drop it onto your head?’

‘Not so fast, please.’ The lad tested his limbs for broken bones, but found himself intact, if all-over bruised. ‘How do you mean to haul my body from this pit?’

‘I have grappling hooks,’ said the farmer, ‘fashioned for the purpose.’

‘Hot work on such a day,’ said the lad. ‘Hard work, but honest toil justly rewarded, I suppose.’

‘In that you are correct.’

‘But *very* hard work, nonetheless.’

‘And me with a bad back,’ said the farmer. ‘But what must be done, must be done.’

‘Would it not make your job easier if you were to help me from the hole? Then I might walk with you to your farmhouse, where you could brain me at your leisure?’

‘Well, certainly it would,’ said the farmer.

‘Thus also sparing you all the effort of dragging my body.’

‘You are most cooperative,’ said the farmer. ‘But there’s no dragging involved. I have my horse and cart with me.’

‘Then let me climb aboard the cart. It’s the least I can do.’

‘I appreciate that,’ said the farmer.

‘It’s only fair,’ said the lad. ‘You *did* warn me, and I failed to heed your warning.’

The farmer leaned over and extended his hand. ‘Up you come, then,’ said he.

The lad took the farmer’s hand and scrambled from the hole.

‘There now,’ said the farmer. ‘Onto the cart if you please, and let’s get this braining business out of the way.’

The lad glanced over at the farmer's cart. And then he smiled back towards the farmer. 'I think not,' he said. 'Your purse, if you will.'

'Excuse me?' said the farmer. 'My purse?'

'I will have your purse. Kindly hand it over.'

'I fail to understand you,' said the farmer.

'I demand compensation,' said the lad, dusting himself down. 'For injuries incurred through falling into your hole. I am severely bruised and more than a little shaken. I'll take whatever money you have upon your person and we'll speak no more of this regrettable incident.'

'Climb onto the cart,' said the farmer. 'I will brain you immediately. Think not of fleeing; I am an accurate hurler of rocks.'

'Be that as it may,' said the lad, 'I will have your purse and then be off to the city.'

'This is ludicrous. Idiot boy.' The farmer raised his rock.

The lad produced a pistol from his sleeve.

'What is this?' the farmer asked.

'A weapon,' said the lad. 'A clockwork weapon. I built it myself for use in such eventualities as this. Its spring projects a sharpened metal missile at an alarming speed. Far faster than one might hurl a rock.'

'Bluff and bluster,' growled the farmer, swinging back his rockholding hand, preparatory to a hurl.

The lad raised his clockwork pistol and shot off the farmer's left ear. Which came as a shock to them both, though possibly more to the farmer.

'Waaaaaaaah!' shrieked the man, dropping his unhurled rock onto his foot, which added broken toes to his woeful account.

'Your purse,' said the lad, waving his gun in a now most shaky hand.

'Waaaaaaaah! I am wounded!' The farmer took to hopping and clutching at his maimed head.

'The next shot will pass directly through your heart.'

'No,' croaked the farmer, 'no no no.'

'The world will be a better place without you in it.' The lad steadied his pistol with both hands. 'You are a monster.'

'And you are an iconoclast,' moaned the farmer, still hopping. 'With no respect for tradition.'

'Such is indeed the truth. Now hand me your purse. You are losing a great deal of blood. It would be well for you to return to your farmhouse and have your wife dress your wounds.'

‘Damn you,’ said the farmer, adding profanities to these words.

‘Your purse, *now!*’

The farmer grudgingly produced his purse. It was a weighty purse, full as it was with the gold of a foolish boy who had passed that way earlier in the day and failed to heed the farmer’s advice. This foolish boy presently hung in joints in the farmer’s smoking house.

‘On second thoughts,’ said the lad, ‘I think it would be for the best if you went down into the hole.’

‘What?’ cried the farmer. ‘*What?*’

‘The path is narrow,’ said the lad. ‘Your horse might stumble into that hole, if it doesn’t have something to place its hoof upon.’

‘What?’ the farmer cried again.

‘I mean to borrow your horse; I have walked enough for one day.’

‘This is outrageous. Preposterous.’

‘Best to get it over with as quickly as possible. Before you bleed to death.’

‘But the hole.’ The farmer ceased his hopping and stared down into the hole. ‘The spikes. I am not so scrawny as you.’

‘Spare,’ said the lad. ‘Wiry.’

‘I will puncture myself.’

‘That’s a chance we’ll have to take. The hole, or die where you stand.’

‘But the spikes ...’

‘Perhaps fate will smile upon you.’

‘Fate wears a somewhat glum face at present.’

‘Really? Yet I would swear that it grins in my direction.’

‘You ...’ The farmer spoke further profanity.

‘The hole, and now.’ The lad cocked his clockwork pistol.

The farmer, groaning and moaning, lowered himself into the hole.

The lad tucked his weapon back into his sleeve, stepped over to the farmer’s horse and detached it from the cart. Then he leapt onto the horse’s back and prepared to gallop away. ‘I’ve never ridden a horse before,’ he called down to the farmer, ‘so this should be something of an adventure.’

‘I hope you are thrown and break your neck,’ called the farmer.

‘What was that?’

‘Nothing. May good luck attend you.’

‘Thank you very much. And what is the name of this mount, farmer?’

‘Anthrax,’ called the farmer. ‘But he’ll not answer to your commands. Quite the reverse, in fact.’

‘I’m sure Anthrax and I will get along fine.’ The lad held Anthrax by his reins. ‘And so we say farewell, master farmer. Our acquaintance has been brief, but it has been instructive. We have both learned something, so let us not part upon bad terms.’

‘I am stuck fast.’ The farmer huffed and puffed and moaned and groaned. ‘I might well die in this hole.’

‘If no one comes looking for you, then in a day or two you’ll be slim enough to climb out. Or perhaps loss of blood will facilitate a more immediate shrinkage and you’ll be home in time for tea.’

‘You filthy ...’

‘Quite enough,’ called the lad. ‘Your conversation tires me. I will now take my leave for the city. One day I will return this way with great wealth. Though not along this particular path.’

‘One thing before you go.’ The farmer raised his voice.

‘And what thing is this?’

‘Tell me only your name.’

‘My name?’ said the lad. ‘My name is Jack.’

‘That is good,’ called the farmer. ‘A man may not truly lay a curse upon another man without first knowing his name. I curse you, Jack. May you never know wealth. May all that you wish for be denied you.’

‘A spiteful sentiment,’ said Jack. ‘And so farewell.’ Jack dug his heels into Anthrax and Anthrax sprang forward.

The farmer, unable to duck his head, was heavily hooved upon.

2

Anthrax the horse jogged merrily along. There was a definite spring in his four-legged step. Freed from his death-cart constraints, he appeared a very happy horse indeed.

Jack, although pleased to be no longer walking, did not altogether share the horse's joy. Precariously perched, and lacking for equestrian skills, he clung to the horse's reins and counselled the beast to slow down a bit.

Which it didn't.

The path meandered, as paths often do, around grassy knolls and down through dingly dells. All was rural charm and niceness, all of which was lost upon Jack. He was rather peeved, was Jack. Peeved and altogether unsettled. He was peeved about falling into the farmer's hole. That had been a foolish thing to do. He should have listened more carefully to the farmer's warnings. To the phrasing of them. Jack's failure to interpret the farmer's words correctly had come close to costing him his life. That was very peevish indeed.

Regarding the altogether unsettledness, this was a twofold business. All that blood which had flowed from the farmer's maimed head: that was unsettling enough, but the fact that Jack had not actually meant to shoot the farmer's ear off in the first place was doubly unsettling. This had called into question the accuracy of Jack's clockwork pistol. He had meant to shoot the farmer in the knee. There would have to be a lot of work done upon that pistol if it was to prove any use at all as an accurate means of defence.

Anthrax kicked his back legs in the air, all but unseating Jack.

'Calm yourself,' cried the lad. 'No need to go mad, take it easy, please.'

The horse did a skip or two and settled into a trot.

'Slow down, please.'

The horse did not slow down.

The meandering path met up with a rugged track and Jack caught a glimpse of a signpost. It read TO THE CITY in fine big capitals.

'Jolly good show,' said Jack. 'Please slow down a bit, *please*.'

The horse began to canter.

'No!' Jack flung himself forward and clasped his arms about Anthrax's neck.

'Slow down!' he shouted into the horse's left ear. 'Slow down or I'll sell you for cat meat when we reach the city.'

The horse began to gallop.

‘No!’ shouted Jack, now altogether ruffled. ‘Slow down! Slow down! No!’

If there is a faster thing than galloping that horses can do, this horse began to do it now.

Jack closed his eyes tightly and steeled himself for the inevitable concussion and imminent doom that awaited him.

Anthrax thundered forward, his hooves raising sparks on the rugged track, his ears laid back and a fair old froth a-forming round his mouth. The horse appeared possessed.

Eyes tight shut and mouth shouting, ‘Slow down please,’ Jack was borne along at the speed which is commonly known as breakneck.

The horse would not obey his commands. Quite the reverse, in fact.

And then Jack opened his eyes and a very broad smile appeared on his face. ‘Faster!’ he shouted. ‘Yes boy, yes, faster! Faster! Faster!’

The horse slowed down to a gallop.

‘Faster!’ shouted Jack. ‘Come on!’

The horse slowed down to a canter.

‘Faster!’

A trot.

‘Faster!’

A jog.

‘Faster!’

The horse, all sweaty and breathless, slowed down to a gentle stroll.

‘And faster.’

Anthrax came to a halt.

Jack released his grip from the horse’s streaming neck and slid himself down onto the ground. He patted the horse on an area known as a flank, then stroked its foaming muzzle parts.

‘I should have known,’ said Jack, taking deep breaths to steady himself. ‘I’m sorry, boy. It was all my fault, wasn’t it?’

The horse made a kind of grumbling sound, as if it understood.

‘The damnable farmer trained you, didn’t he, boy? He trained you to go faster if you were told to go slower and likewise round. In case anyone stole you. I remembered what he said: “He’ll not answer to your commands. Quite the reverse in fact.” And I’m sure that when you had eventually unseated your rider and tired yourself out, you’d

have wandered home of your own accord. It seems that I have much to learn of the ways of the world. I will be very much on my guard from now on.'

Jack led Anthrax on along the rugged track. Presently they came upon a horse trough and both drank from it. Suitably refreshed, Jack climbed back onto the horse.

'Stop,' said he, and the horse set off at a gentle pace.

The rugged track led now up a sizeable hill and Anthrax took to plodding. Jack sighed deeply, but, feeling for the animal which, he surmised, hadn't exactly lived a life of bliss so far, climbed down once more and plodded beside it.

The track led up and up. The sizeable hill seemed little less big than a small mountain. Jack huffed and puffed, and Anthrax did likewise.

'Good lad,' said Jack. 'We're almost there, I think.'

And almost there they were.

And then they were altogether there.

And Jack, still huffing and puffing, with blue sweat striping his face, hands upon knees and heart going bumpty-bumpty-bump, raised his squinting eyes to view what vista lay beyond.

And then he opened both his eyes and his mouth, very wide indeed.

For beyond, across a plain of grey and stunted furze, lay THE CITY.

Writ big in letters. Large and capital.

'Whoa,' went Jack, taking stock of whatever he could. 'Now that is a very BIG CITY.'

And as cities go, and in these parts, but for this one, they didn't, it was indeed a *very* BIG CITY.

And a very dirty city too, from what Jack could see of it. A great dark sooty blot upon the landscape was this city. A monstrous smut-coloured carbuncle.

Anthrax the horse made a very doubtful face. Which is quite a feat for an equine. Jack cast a glance at this very doubtful face. 'I know what you mean,' he said. 'It doesn't look too welcoming, does it?'

The horse shook its head.

'You're a very wise horse,' said Jack. 'And I apologise for that earlier remark of mine about having you converted into cat meat. If you get me in one piece to the city, I'll see that you're well cared for. But,' and he stared once more towards the distant conurbation, 'that is one ugly-looking eyesore of a city. Perhaps your previous owner was right in all he said. But we must remain optimistic. Shall we proceed?'

The horse shook its head.

'You would rather return to haul corpses?'

The horse shook its head once more.

Jack now shook his own. 'I'm talking to a horse,' he said to himself. 'The events of today have unhinged my mind.'

The sun, Jack noticed, was now very low in the heavens. The blue of the sky had deepened and the day was drawing towards night.

'We'd best get a move on,' Jack told Anthrax. 'I need to fill my belly and find myself lodgings for the night.' He shinned once more onto the horse's back, told it to stop, and set off.

The rugged track wound down the biggish hill/smallish mountain and presently joined a paved and city-bound road. This pushed onwards through the grey and stunted furze. Onwards and onwards and onwards. Ahead, the city loomed, its outlying districts becoming more clearly defined. Jack was not impressed by what he saw. The road reached peasant huts, crude and weathered. Strange and pale little faces peeped out at him through glassless windows. Jack dug in his heels. 'Slower,' he told Anthrax, 'slower, boy.'

Anthrax got a trot on.

Beyond the peasant huts lay what Jack correctly assumed to be the industrial district: grim, grey factories with chimneys coughing smoke. The air was rank, and Jack took to covering his nose.

'Not very nice around here.' Jack patted Anthrax's neck. 'This is the kind of place I left behind, factories like this. But let us not be downhearted. I'm sure we can find a pleasant hostelry in a nicer part of the city.'

The sun was beginning to set.

At length, but a length too long for Jack's liking, the industrial district lay astern, or the equine equivalent thereof. Now the buildings showed traces of colour: a hint of yellow here and a dash of orange there. A trifle dusted over, but a definite improvement.

The style of architecture was new to Jack, and therefore looked exotic. The buildings were constructed from huge square bricks, each embossed with a letter of the alphabet. But these had not been laid in order to spell out words, but apparently at random.

Suddenly something rushed past Jack and his mount, causing Anthrax to panic. Jack shouted 'Faster!' very loudly indeed and Anthrax jerked to a halt. Jack viewed the rapidly diminishing rusher: some kind of mechanical vehicle.

'Car,' said Jack. 'Nothing to be afraid of. I worked upon cars at the factory. Went like the wind, though, didn't it, boy? I'll be having one of those myself some day soon.'

Anthrax shook his head about.

'Oh yes I will,' said Jack. 'Stop then, boy. We have to find a hostelry soon or I'll fall