



UTTERPANTS

THE LORD OF THE SCROLLS

A shocking tale of literary plagiarism,
ruthless ambition, revenge
and underdone mushrooms...

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AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION

"The Lord of the Scrolls" is a very, very LONG parody of Chapter Two ("The Shadow of the Past"), of Book I ("The Fellowship of the Ring"); the first part of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy, "The Lord of the Rings". It was jointly written by Mercedes Dannenberg and Derek Tree when the film producer, Peter Jackson, began work on his hugely successful film adaptation of the books, in 2001.

Mercedes takes up the story:

"We were so pissed off with what Jackson appeared to be doing to Tolkien's inspired books, that we felt compelled to re-write the beginning of Book I with Jackson cast in the role of the Dark Lord, intent on unleashing a tide of cinematic mediocrity on Middle, Upper and Lower Earth. Since then, we've seen the film trilogy, and whilst we still believe it is no substitute for the books, we cannot say the films are mediocre. Given the many difficulties of translating Tolkien's complex mythology to the silver screen, and the pressures of the Hollywood money men, we have revised our opinion of Peter Jackson, and feel he is to be congratulated for producing one of the most entertaining and compelling fantasy films of all time. Which is not to say we agree with everything he has done (or left undone) but that's another story... At least it lets us off the hook. We did not relish re-writing Tolkien's epic -- one chapter was quite enough!"

We thought a few explanations for those who may not be very familiar with the story, would not go amiss:

"The Academics" are Tolkien's Elves. "Robbits" are, of course, "Hobbits", and Randolf is the famous wizard, "Gandalf". "Fido Faggins" is "Frodo Baggins", "Bingo Faggins" is "Bilbo Baggins", "Jam Spongee" is "Sam Gamgee", "Hokum" is "Gollum/Smeagol", and the "Dark Director", "Evil Power" and "Jackass" are, of course, the New Zealand film producer, Peter Jackson. "Snowdrop" is a replacement for "Merry and Pippin" in the original. We make no excuses for slipping a hot Hobbit babe into the story. Call us old fashioned, but we feel it simply "taint nat'ral" for a healthy young Hobbit to be on the road without some female company! You should be able to work out the rest. *Now enjoy!*

Nerdy note by Derek Tree regarding "Bingo":

Readers of the books may not be aware that in J.R.R. Tolkien's earliest draughts of the "Fellowship of the Ring", the hero later named "Frodo", was actually called "Bingo", so we feel we are taking no liberties by using that name in our parody. What the author would have made of "Jam Spongee" is another matter, but we like to think it would have amused him. Like us, he had a very *simple* sense of humour!

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Book I: Part 1 - "The Fellowship of the Scroll"

Chapter One - "The Shadow of Evil"

The Wizard leaned back in his chair, carefully filled his pipe with the best Rondorian weed, lit up, and sent a stream of multi-coloured smoke rings up Fido's nose. "Sorry about that, my dear Robbit, I was aiming for the chimney. To tell the truth, I am rather out of sorts this morning, and my mind is filled with thoughts of grim forebodings... and, of course, I fear the mushrooms were not entirely cooked." With that, Randolph (for it was he) shifted his position and broke wind rather noisily.

"I am sorry to hear that," said the Robbit with a blush.

"It can't be helped," replied the Wizard, "Underdone mushrooms will out. We will all have to face more unsavoury things before the year is out. Dark days are ahead, my lad."

"What do you mean? Last night you began to tell me strange things about my magic scroll, and then you stopped because you said that you had run out of pipeweed. Don't you think you had better finish the tale now? You said the scroll was perilous."

"It is far more perilous than a very perilous thing that has 'PERILOUS' written all over it in red letters, and is covered in dangerous, poisoned spines - and that's saying a lot, I can tell you! So very perilous, that it would completely corrupt anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would utterly warp them beyond all hope of healing. Long ago many scripts, or 'magic scrolls' as you would call them, were written by an ancient Professor of Oxford, which existed in the far West that is now hidden beneath the rolling billows of the sea. They were of many kinds: some were more readable than others. The lesser scripts were only rough drafts before the Professor's art was fully grown, and to the Academic scribes they were often trifles - indeed some *were* recipes for trifle, though in those times they had not yet learned to add the sherry to the biscuit base. Yet even these raw essays, unhewn and coarse as they were, and filled with grammatical errors and split infinitives, were not without their power, and dangerous in the hands of cinematographers. But the GREAT SCROLLS, the SCROLLS of POWER, which were plain and unadorned, and without writing of any visible kind, were and are, exceedingly perilous.

A film director, my dear Robbit, who possesses one of the Great Scrolls does not suffer writer's block, but neither does he improve, or obtain more renown, he merely continues producing incomprehensible drivel, until every waking moment is a weariness to him, and a torment to his befuddled viewers. And if he should be so foolhardy as to use the Scroll to make himself famous, he will be assailed on all sides by his literary critics, until, in the end, he becomes a nonentity, walking permanently in the shadow of the Dark Power that rules the Scrolls. Yes, sooner or later—later if he was only interested in improving a few of his mother's cake recipes, sooner if he is a money-grubbing script-writer from the Holly Wood without an ounce of decency in his mercenary soul—the Dark Power will eat him up entirely."

"How horrible!" said Fido. "Did Bingo know all this when he gave me the scroll?"

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"Bingo?" queried the Wizard. "Bingo knew half the tale half as well as he might, and understood less than half of it, half as well as he should. Had he been wiser, or had I not been called away on urgent business by my Publishers, things might not have come to this sorry pass."

"Eh?" Said Fido, trying desperately hard to work out whether the Wizard's words added up to an explanation, or were merely the effects of the Rondorian pipeweed... after a long and pregnant silence Fido repeated his question.

"Bingo never connected the possession of the scroll—or Great Scroll as you now know it to be—with his literary endeavours. He thought the scroll was 'cool', and very useful to break the ice at dinner parties when he wished to bore unwelcome guests like the Deville-Fagginses into leaving. But he said it was 'doing my head in', and he was always worrying someone would steal it... never stopped to consider that the scroll itself was to blame. He quickly found out that it needed careful watching; it was not always of the same length; it shrank and expanded in strange ways, and might suddenly manifest many paragraphs of the most florid and verbose prose, where a moment before it had been as bereft of content as a Rondorian eunuch's trousers."

"How long have you known this?" asked Fido.

"Known?" retorted Randolf testily. "I know a very great deal that only really clever buggers know, Fido Faggins! But if you mean 'when did I learn about this scroll' - well I guessed a good deal, but there is only ONE test that will confirm my suspicions."

"And what did you guess?" asked Fido again.

"That Bingo's story about 'finding the scroll' was nonsense", replied the Wizard. He settled deeper into his chair, knocked the dottle from his pipe onto Fido's best Shag-pile hearthrug, and fixed the Robbit with his steely gaze.

Fido leapt off the old leather pouffe and feverishly tried to extinguish the small fire that sprang up with a copy of 'Mushroom Growing Monthly'.

"Sit, Fido!" commanded the Wizard.

"B-but the f--fi--f--fire..." expostulated the flustered Robbit, flailing ineffectually at the flames which were now half as high as himself, and threatening to singe the Wizard's magnificent beard.

"SIT!"

Frodo edged back to the pouffe. The Pouffe squealed with delight as the Robbit's firm young bottom compressed it.

"Tara baraboom didlo di whoosh!" muttered the Wizard, and the fire was extinguished in a puff of fragrant smoke.

"Yikes!" exclaimed Fido.

"It was nothing," said the Wizard mildly. "I have a way with fires and lights that exceeds the silly party-tricks I used to play with your uncle Bingo when he was young."

Fido blushed deeply.

"No, not THOSE tricks, my boy. I gave those up some time ago. Now where was I?"

"Playing with Bingo?"

"Ah-- yes, let me see... it was about the time of the Annual General Meeting of the Writers Council that we drove the evil from the Holly Wood, just before the battle of the five moguls, that Bingo found his scroll. My heart forebode evil even

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then, for I wondered how that sad gangrel creature Hokum came by such a Great Scroll—for such it plainly was—that much was 'crystal' as we Wizards say.

When at last I forced the truth out of Bingo by threatening to expose him as a plagiarist to the Writers Council, I saw that he had been trying to pass it off as his own work. Much the same as Hokum did with his laughable tale of having found it quite by chance while shopping for a present for his Grandmother. Both their lies were too uncanny for comfort. The truth is that the Great Scroll develops an unhealthy hold upon its keeper at once. That was my first intimation that things were decidedly dodgy. I immediately told Bingo that such scrolls are better kept out of sight of publishers readers, but he would not listen to me, and angrily retorted: 'You're jealous I'll outdo you in literary circles, you broken-down old hack'. There was nothing I could do short of exposing him to the Writers Council, or taking the scroll by force. Either course would have done greater harm, so I could only watch and wait. I didn't have long to wait. One particularly dark and filthy night I watched as he left Fag End poorly disguised as a script-editor, and followed him to a small Robbit hole on the other side of Bywater, where he said and did things that even I, with my wide experience of sexual peccadilloes, found intriguing."

"There wasn't any real harm done, was there?" asked Fido, "I mean, the operation DID remove the obstruction from his bottom, didn't it?"

"He regretted the incident almost as quickly as the sheep did, but not before he had added a whole new chapter to the annals of Robbit depravity. Fortunately Doctor Rogerghast, my fellow Wizard and acknowledged expert on animal husbandry, was at hand to save the sheep. The Academics did the rest, ensuring that the memories of that evil day were wiped from his mind. I don't think we need worry about Bingo anymore. The scroll has passed on. It has passed to YOU, my lad! Ever since, I have been very troubled and concerned about you, and about all you charming, rosy-cheeked, precocious, firm-thighed, healthy young Robbits and Robbitesses-- ahem! If the Dark Director overcomes you, the lot of you will become his abject, groveling sycophants!"

Fido gawped in horror: "But why should we be? Why would the Dark Director want us as his 'sycophants?'" Fido was not altogether clear what a 'sycophant' was, but it was clearly very, very, bad. Worse even than becoming the dirty old Robbit his mother had warned him against, when first he discovered that what was in his pants was of considerable interest to many of the more precocious young Robbit lasses in the Shire.

"Not to put too fine a point on it my lad, he is a ruthless, unprincipled Kiwi, with an appallingly bad haircut, who will stop at nothing to get back what he considers you STOLE from him! Or, to be precise, what Hokum stole and Bingo acquired through deviousness and good fortune. Though it has not served him well. Then there is Professional Pride."

"Professional Pride?" repeated Fido, "Pride in what? I still don't see what all this has to do with Bingo and me and our magic scroll?"

"It has everything to do with it," said Randolf. "Give it to me!"

Fido took the scroll from its leathern pouch and handed it very reluctantly to the Wizard.

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Randolf held it up and slowly unrolled it. It appeared to be made of some unknown paper. Light, transparent and extremely thin. "Can you see any writing on it?" he asked.

"No," said Fido. "But yesterday there was an unpublished novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald on one side and a recipe for sauteed mushrooms in white wine sauce on the other. Last week the complete works of Marcel Proust appeared during teatime and--"

"Never mind that now!" snapped the Wizard. "Watch and learn!" To Fido's consternation and distress, the Wizard threw the scroll into the sink where it landed amidst the washing-up. Fido lunged for the crockery brush, but Randolf held him back. "Wait!" he said, in ringing tones, giving Fido a very queer look from under his felt hat that made the young Robbit remember incidents from his childhood that he would rather have forgotten...

Despite being sandwiched between a plate of underdone, soggy mushrooms and the remains of a particularly fine salmon en-croute, the scroll was unchanged.

After an eternity of watching the scroll sink ever deeper into the soapy water, the Wizard strode to the window, slammed it shut, and drew the curtains. The room became suddenly dark and ominously silent and only the distant whirr of Jam Spongee's electric-mower could still be faintly heard from the garden. For a moment the Wizard considered pulling out the plug from the wall socket, then he considered silencing Jam by slowly choking him to death with the cord, because, truth to tell, Randolf hated electric-mowers with a passion nearly as intense as his hatred of Oiks - the fell creatures bred by the Dark Director in imitation of decent gentlemen, but he did none of these things. Instead, he stooped and lifted the dripping, sodden scroll from the sink.

Fido gulped.

"Take it", said the Wizard, "it is quite dry". And strange to tell - it was.

Fido received it in his trembling hand, it seemed to have grown larger and heavier and a mysterious light shone from it.

"Hold it up to the light", said Randolf, "and examine it carefully!"

"But there is no light. You closed the window and drew the curtains."

"Silly Robbit, light a candle!"

Fido did not dare to question the Wizard even though there was a very serviceable electricity supply laid on to the hole, to which Jam's noisy, horticultural activities outside, bore testimony. Instead he lit a candle, and held the scroll up to it.

"What do you see?!" asked the Wizard.

"Nothing, nothing at all."

"Look more closely!"

Before Fido's startled eyes faint letters began to take shape upon the snow-white scroll. Finer than the finest calligraphy; finer even than the fur on his shapely Robbit footses. They shone brightly, as if illuminated from within. "I cannot read the words; they are in a language unknown to me," said Fido in a faltering voice.

"No," said Randolf. "But I can. The letters are Gibberish, in an arcane mode, of a dialect called by the lore masters of old - 'Amurkan', but the language is that of Kiwidor, which I will not speak without my literary agent being present, but in plain Robbitish this is what is written, near enough:

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'One Scroll to rule them all. One Script to blind them, One Scroll to bring them all to heel and in the darkness bind them.' It is only a line or two from an unpublished rhyme, long rejected by discerning literary agents in the Holly Wood:

'Three Scrolls for the Academics who refuse to deal, Seven for the Producers with a stake, Nine for the Script-Editors filled with zeal, One for the Dark Director on the make, in the land of Kiwidor, where the Actors kneel. One Scroll to rule them all. One Script to blind them, One Scroll to bring them all to heel, and in the darkness bind them.'"

Randolf sighed, and then said bitterly in a hushed voice:

"This is the Master-Scroll. The ONE Scroll to rule them all. The BIG SCRIPT he lost ages ago, to the great weakening of his creative output. He desires it more than gold, or mind-altering drugs, or strawberry cream served on the thighs of a Rondorian virgin who has just discovered she is a nymphomaniac.

HE MUST NOT GET IT!"

Fido sat dumbfounded and motionless. Stark terror laid its icy fingers upon his stalwart, Robbit heart, and slowly squeezed it until it shot into his mouth and threatened to escape to somewhere where it would be of no earthly use to him.

"Th-this Scroll," he spluttered. "How on Middle-Earth did it come to me?!"

"Ah," said Randolf portentously, "that is a long story whose beginnings lie in the distant time of the Black Age, which only the lore-masters of Oxfodian can now recall. Last night I told you of JACKASS the Mighty, the Dark Director. He has arisen from the obscurity with which his mediocrity hitherto cloaked his evil ambitions and has appeared in Kiwidor - his ancient stronghold. That name even Robbits have heard of, like a terror that creeps stealthily upon us with the coming of night, and prevents us doing what comes naturally to healthy young lads and lasses at bedtime-- ahem! But I digress..."

"I wish it had never come to me", said Fido.

"So do I," said Randolf. "But wishes don't butter any parsnips, as Gaffer Spongee is wont to say. We have to decide what to do with it, and quickly. Time is running out and even now the Enemy is drawing his forces together for the final assault. We should be hard pressed to resist him at any time, but if he obtains the Great Scroll we are utterly doomed. As yet he lacks the one thing that would give him absolute power to destroy his critics, and unleash a storm of cinematographic mediocrity such as the world has not seen since the coming of Police Academy to Middle-Earth. He lacks the One Scroll.

The three, most precious of all, the Academics hid from him, and his hand has never edited them. Seven the producers possessed, but three he has stolen from them, and the others, the movie-moguls long ago consumed. Nine he gave to some leading script-editors, haughty and famous, and so ensnared them. Long ago they fell under the spell of the One Scroll, and became scribblers, talentless ghost writers under his greater shadow, his most zealous admirers and our most deadly foes. It is long since the Nine showed their work to any publisher's agents. Yet who knows? As his evil shadow grows longer, they may publish again. It stands thus: Nine he has found, the Seven also, or else they have been adapted into novellas which have fallen into ignominy, and been remaindered. The Three are still up for grabs, but that no longer concerns him as they were never made to capture a mass audience, and have been largely forgotten. He only needs the One; for he made that Scroll himself and allowed much of his former creativity to

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pass into it. It is altogether his. If he recovers it, he will command all the scrolls again, even the Three, though he never made them, and he will be stronger than ever. He now knows that the One has not been destroyed by the Academics, as it SHOULD have been, and that it has been found. So he is even now seeking it, and all his evil will is bent upon its recovery."

"Why wasn't it taken from him and destroyed?" asked Fido.

"It was taken from him," replied Randolph. "The standing of Academics was higher then than it is now, and not all writers were in competition with them for literary prizes. The Guild of Romance Writers came to their aid. It was Professor Ronald, a leading Oxford academic and his live-in help, Ellen Dildo, who defeated the Jackass, though they themselves perished in the struggle; Then Issy Dors, Ellen Dildo's step-daughter, ripped the scroll from Jackass's grasp and took it for her own, saying: 'This I will have for my Mummy's legacy, you talentless, fat old git!' Issy Dors was professor Ronald's love-child according to the Lore-masters; but that is a chapter of family history that it may be better not to recall just now; for there was deep regret and shame in those events, not to mention considerable litigation, but also much sacrifice, and some great sex that is not wholly without interest to a scholar like myself. One day, perhaps, I will unravel the sordid tale to you, or you can read about it in my memoirs when I publish them. Issy Dors was a sexually precocious and very fetching lass, much given to 'all-night Raves', as the youthful entertainments of those days were known, and in a moment of thoughtless abandonment with the worst dregs of Rondorian high society, she lost the scroll, her maidenhead and, sad to tell, her young life. The scroll fell, or was thrown (opinion is divided on this), into a passing garbage wagon which later deposited its cargo on the municipal dump.

There it remained, lost for ages, until even the memory of its existence faded from the minds of all but a few ageing Academics. Even the Writers Council could discover no more. Long afterwards, long before the ancestors of the Robbits peopled this land, there existed a vagabond band of story-tellers who eaked out a miserable existence selling third-rate manuscripts to unscrupulous publishers of scurrilous pamphlets. I think they were of the Robbit-kind; lazy, self-indulgent, dim-witted folk, but not without their own unique courage and culinary skills. They lived off the detritus of the rubbish dump, and often found the cast off first draughts of dyspeptic authors amidst its myriad mounds and winding tunnels, which they sold to pay for food and clothing, and the occasional night out at Old Mother Miggins Dancehall and Gin shop. The most odious and scheming of this rascally rabble was one 'Hokum'. He was not interested in anything except literary acclaim, casual sex, and a cure for his disfiguring facial dermatitis. All his efforts were bent on writing the 'great novel', or 'my magnificent Octopus' as he called it, that would make his fortune, ensure his immortal fame, and pay for cosmetic surgery. But since he could not write a line, and had no desire to learn, he stole. In a word, my dear Robbit, he was the worst of criminals in literary circles: an unashamed plagiarist!

One day, whilst he was scrambling over the old dump as usual, his hand touched something hard and round, and very warm.

'Oh... Hokum! You naughty boy, I had no idea you thought that way about me!'

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But even Hokum drew the line at playing those games with his own sister, and pushing her angrily away, dived deeper into the labyrinthine tunnels of the dump. It was there that he eventually found the scroll - the very scroll that you hold in your hand. Of course, he did not know then what it was, except that it was quite obviously very magical. He also did not know that his sister had found it first, and had hidden it deep within the dump to give to Mother Miggins as a 'birthday present'. Unfortunately, his sister had followed him into the tunnels and a desperate struggle for possession of the scroll ensued.

'Give us that' Bunkup, my sweet,' hissed Hokum menacingly. For that was the gangling, asthmatic girl's name. 'I wants it!'

'Shan't - it's my birthday preseee to Ma Miggins and I seed it first,' replied Bunkup.

'Give us it now, you trollop or it'll be the worse for you,' said Hokum, ripping the bodice from her pert young breasts."

Randolf coughed self-consciously and Fido felt himself getting hot as the Wizard continued.

"Though Bunkup struggled fiercely, Hokum was the stronger and his sweaty hands tore her skimpy knickers from her trembling thighs. Soon he was astride her, his foul breath coming in short pants. How she hated him! But her body wouldn't obey her and soon it was she who was coming in even shorter pants. His dirty fingernails raked her silken thighs, his vile lips fastened on her tender neck-- Ahem! Soon it was all over and Hokum waved the scroll triumphantly aloft while his sister crawled away into the darkness to be violently sick."

The Wizard paused and re-lit his pipe.

"What happened then?" asked Fido.

"What you would expect," replied the Wizard. "Within a week Hokum was under contract to write a new biography for the biggest publishing house in Rondor. Within two, he was being lionized by those who would not have stooped to clean him off their shoes a month before. Soon he was the talk of the land. He was THE HOKUM - literary prodigy and author of the century, and the rich and famous flocked from far and wide to bask in his reflected glory. But the good times were not to last. All too soon he began to put the scroll to evil uses. He stole the manuscripts of the leading literary lights of his day, and passed them off as his own. He deflowered Rondorian maidens by the score and became a notorious Numenorian Rug trafficker. He gate-crashed publisher's parties to which he had not been invited, and blackmailed the husbands of the wives he had compromised. It was not to be wondered at that he soon became very unpopular.

His agents deserted him. Prizes formerly his for the asking were bestowed elsewhere. Literary lunches were cancelled. So he put his sister on the game and lived off her immoral earnings. Before long his relatives disowned him, the Rug barons put out contracts on him for non-payment of his debts, and his publishers returned his work unread. Even his sister deserted him for a minor poet, and filed charges for statutory rape and incest. Finally he was banished from Rondor, and wandered, lonely and friendless, cursing the hardness of literary agents, the shortcomings of nepotism, and the futility of vanity publishing. Eventually he wormed his evil way into the good graces of a kind, but rather stupid Academic, who kept a second-hand book shop in Gladstone's Inn Fields, and there Bingo

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found him, quite by chance it seemed to all but the Wise, one afternoon before you were born."

"Hokum!" ejaculated Fido.

"No, it's all true, I assure you," said the Wizard.

"No, I mean Hokum was that loathsome creature Bingo met? How dreadful!"

"I think it is a very sad tale," said Randolph, "and it might have happened to any Robbit whose literary ambitions exceeded their talent."

"I can't believe that Hokum was remotely connected with Robbits. What a horrible idea!"

"Nonetheless it is true. There was a great deal in their backgrounds that was similar. They both desired literary fame and both had a fondness for Mushrooms. Think of the cheap novels they both enjoyed, for instance."

"I suppose so," admitted Fido reluctantly. "Though other folk apart from Robbits read soft porn. And Robbits don't cheat. Hokum meant to cheat Bingo from the moment he came into the shop and asked him if he had any first editions of 'Spanking for Pleasure'. And I daresay it tickled his wicked mind to start haggling with Bingo. He knew he couldn't lose because the only two copies in stock were both fakes."

"All too true," agreed Randolph. "But there was another reason too, which you haven't considered. Hokum was not completely ruined. He had put by a few shekels for a rainy day - as even a Robbit might. There was a tiny corner of his addled brain that still hoped his misfortunes might be overcome, and his literary fame regained. It was actually pleasant to hear a cultured voice again, re-kindling memories of sumptuous literary lunches, glittering prizes, orgiastic picnics with the cream of Rondorian maidenhood, and such half-remembered delights. But, alas, that would only make the wicked part of him more evil and worsen his facial eczema - unless it could be cured. Sadly, there was now little hope of that. Yet, not *no* hope."

"What do you mean?" asked Fido.

"Although he possessed the scroll for ages, further back than even he could now remember, it was long since he had used it. In the shop it was not needed, for there were stacks of porn to keep him amused; and when that bored him, he would nibble on the few remaining scraps of Numenorian rugs he still hoarded, and be transported to another, pleasantly hallucinogenic world, where he was still THE HOKUM, the envy of the publishing world. Certainly he never entirely faded. Even in that forsaken spot he would occasionally come upon one of his remaindered novels, and that kept him going. But the scroll was eating up his mind, and the torment of obscurity became almost unbearable. All his dreams of fame and fortune had turned to dust and ashes.

There were no new sexual positions to try out, nothing worth doing that he hadn't done a thousand times before, only nasty, furtive practices that sapped his strength and exacerbated his appalling skin condition. He was completely wretched. He hated obscurity and he hated fame more; he hated everything including himself, and the scroll most of all."

"Why?" asked Fido. "Surely the scroll was his most treasured possession; his precious, his magic talisman and the only thing he truly cared for? If he really did hate it, why didn't he just throw it away?"

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"You still do not understand the power of this thing, Fido," said the Wizard, sending a stream of smoke-rings up the chimney. "He hated it and loved it, just as he hated and loved himself. He could not bare to part with it. A scroll of power looks after itself, my lad. It may desert its keeper as it did Issy Dors, but its keeper never deserts it. It maintains an iron grip upon the mind of its slaves. It was not Hokum who who let the scroll go to Bingo, but the scroll itself which choose Bingo as its new keeper."

"Wouldn't a literary agent have suited it better?" asked Fido.

"No. The scroll was trying to get back to its master. It left Issy the moment she dropped her drawers—for a bunch of Rondorian ne'er do wells—and so brought about her own death. When by chance it came to Hokum it devoured his mind and then deserted him when it had no further use for him. He had become small and petty-minded; overly obsessed with satisfying his personal literary ambitions, and indulging his strange sexual appetites. It had finished with him. He would never leave his dingy shop again. So when it's master re-awakened, and once again sent forth his evil thoughts from Kiwidor, it abandoned Hokum for Bingo. Yet, beyond that, there was another mind at work, beyond any desire of the Scroll-maker. I can say no more than this: Bingo was meant to find the scroll, but not by its maker. As you were meant to receive it from Bingo. And in that lies our geatest hope, and the enemy's weakness."

"So this really is the One Scroll? You are not just putting two and two together and coming up with five?" said Fido hesitantly.

"No. The history of Professor Ronald, Ellen Dillo and Issy Dors, and the One Scroll of the Dark Director, is only too well known in academic circles. Your scroll is proved to be that very scroll by the literary masterpieces it has engendered from the pens of half witted, talentless scribblers like Hokum, not to mention the sacred rhyme that was revealed when the scroll was immersed in water."

"And when did you find that out?" asked Fido.

"Just now, you half-witted Robbit!" replied the Wizard sharply. "In your washing-up bowl. But I fully expected to find it. It is the last proof of its authenticity. Making out Hokum's role and fitting it into the whole required considerable research and out-of-pocket expenses, but I fully expect to be reimbursed in the fullness of time. I no longer need to guess - I know! In any event I have also seen Hokum and that beats the backside off thinking, as we Wizards are wont to say."

"Seen Hokum?!" exclaimed Fido in astonishment.

"Yes. It seemed the logical thing to do. I tried many times but the tricky little blighter always managed to change jobs and shops. So I had to resort to subterfuge. I paid some Oiks to deliver free samples of rather harder porn than Hokum is accustomed to, to every shop in the land, and waited until someone placed an order for more. Then I pounced, and found him gloating over his new purchases in a dingy basement off the King's road."

"So how did Bingo make off with the scroll?"

"As I told you last night, the scroll has many powers. It simply disguised itself as a bookmark, and Bingo went away with it tucked into his copy of 'Spanking for Pleasure.'"

"So what happened to Hokum after Bingo tricked the Scroll out of him. Do you know that?"

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"Yes and no. What I told you was what Hokum confessed after I promised to have a whip round amongst his friends to get up a literary subscription to put him back on his feet. What I actually did was to have him roundly whipped by his friends until he confessed. For starters, he called the Scroll his 'Birthday present' from Mother Miggins, and so told two falsehoods in one. A preposterous tale.

I have no doubt that Mother Miggins was the worst scoundrel in Rondor with no more literary appreciation than a brood of dyslexic Oiks with really loud ties. The idea of her possessing such a literary treasure and giving it to an illiterate nonentity like Hokum is - well, complete hokum. But the lies contained a grain of truth. Hokum was haunted by the rape of his sister, indeed, I think he was literally haunted by her, since she had died in the most hideous conditions in a knocking shop, some years earlier, and the very mention of her name sent him into paroxysms of terror.

I suffered him longer than any man should stomach such a minor author, and in the end I had to be rather firm with him. I put the fear of writers block on him, and slowly but surely wrung the truth from him, amidst much whining about the dishonesty of literary agents, the liberties taken by pedantic sub-editors, and the snubs of arrogant publishers. He claimed he was misunderstood and abused, but would not tell me all the tale. Some terror greater than the fear of literary failure and the dread spectre of his dead sister, was upon him. He droned on about revenge and betrayal. Publishers would see if he would stand being rejected, driven onto the remaindered lists, and robbed of his rightful place in literature. Hokum had powerful friends now, good friends, who would help him. Faggins would pay dearly for his crime. That was his chief complaint. He hated Bingo with a passion and cursed his name at every opportunity. What is more, he knew where Bingo lived and was going to see to it that he was 'dead meat'—those were his exact words—before the year was out."

"But how did he find out Bingo's address?" asked Fido fearfully.

"Well, Bingo foolishly used his credit card to pay for his copy of 'Spanking for Pleasure'. After Hokum left the Second-hand book shop it did not take him long to discover Bingo's address. Oh yes, Hokum came out. The desire for the scroll proved stronger than his fear of the Oiks who hung around the entrance in dirty old raincoats, or even of The Enemy in Kiwidor. After a while he left the shop and began to revive a little. Although he was still enslaved to it, the scroll was no longer eating up his mind. Yet he felt old, his eczema was worse than ever, yet less timid, and he was desperately short of readies.

He still feared and hated Academics, and he always will, but he was nothing if not devious. He found he could hide from them and the major publishers and their literary agents by getting into vanity publishing in a small way. He caught stupid, young writers whose literary ambitions exceeded their meagre talents with small ads in the local papers, and quickly relieved them of their savings. He grew stronger and bolder with the cash he made. Eventually he found his way into the Holly Wood, as one would expect."

"Is that where you found him?" asked Fido.

"Yes. I met him briefly at a small luncheon given by a minor script-writer down on her luck. Before that, Hokum had wandered a great deal, always following Bingo's career as a historian with undiminished hatred. It was difficult to learn anything worthwhile from him on that occasion, for he was very drunk, and

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his talk consisted almost entirely of imprecations against Bingo and smutty innuendos about the guests. 'Faggins is dead meat. We will choke the little rotter with his own manuscriptsss. Look at the titsss on that... I wouldn't say no to a quickie, my sweet. Thieving Robbitsess! They cheated us, they did -hic- out of my inheritance. What we wouldn't give to shag the arse on that! We hates the filthy Faggins for ever! We should have knifed the dungball when we had the chansssshh, my precioussss, oh yes. Let us sit on your face, my pretty! Faggins is dead meat. We will squeeze it, my precioussss, squeeze it's filthy little neck. Oh yesshh we will.'

That is a sample of his conversation. If you want any more you will have to read my memoirs. But from the hints he dropped I found out that he had wormed his miserable way into the confidences of one or two less scrupulous agents of the Holly Wood, and so discovered Bingo's new address."

"Then why didn't he find Bingo?"

"He tried to. He was not short of the fare, nor the desire. But something stronger turned him aside from his plans of vengeance. Well that was many years ago now. After Bingo moved for the fourth time I took up the trail again. But by then it was cold. The Academics had tracked him first, an easy task for them, since Hokum left a trail of third-rate novels behind him which even a second rate publishers's reader could have followed from a fourth rate critical review. The fringes of vanity publishing were full of rumours about him; shocking tales of spurious apostrophes, pedantic parentheses (and excessive hyphenation) abounded—not to mention copyright infringements and blatant plagiarism—which chilled the marrow of even the most broken-down old hacks inured to the worst excesses of literary mendacity. Lexicographers went in terror of their reputations. The critics said that some new scoundrel was at work; a writer that not only sucked the life-blood from any manuscript that fell into his evil clutches, but who crept into writers' garrets at the dead of night and stole their note books without so much as a marginal citation.

But at last, when I had given up all hope, Hokum was found by a young Academic and dragged, kicking and screaming to me. What he had been working on he would not say. He only called me cruel and vindictive, and the more I beat him, the more he whined and complained; as if recalling some ancient torture of which the light taste of my stick, was an unbearable reminder. But I fear there can be no doubt where he had been. He had made his slow, painful progress from the outer circle of vanity publishing through the rejected scripts of the Holly Wood, to the realm of the Dark Director himself. He had been to; KIWIDOR!"

A heavy silence fell on the room, it pressed on Fido's head and made his legs buckle. It pushed the Wizard's hat down over his eyes and oppressed the mice in the wainscoting, who paused in their torture of the cat they had trussed up just behind Fido's elegant writing-desk, and held their breath. Even the sound of Jam Spongee's electric mower was heard no more. In a word, it was very, very quiet.

"Yes... to KIWIDOR," repeated Randolf in a hushed voice. "Alack! Kiwidor draws all evil things to it's disinspirational shores. There sits the Dark Power on his set, bending all it's will to gather the talentless detritus of the cinematic world to its side. The Great Scroll of the Enemy had long enslaved and corrupted Hokum. Wicked Fool. In that land of mendacious mediocrity he would learn much that any dyspeptic author with delusions of literary grandeur would sell his

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publisher's reader to know. Too much! Sooner rather than later, he would be caught and taken for the talentless scribbler he was. And there, beneath the lidless eye of the Dark Director and the dregs of the publishing community, he would be subjected to literary criticism.

Yes, my lad, through Hokum, the Enemy has learned what happened when Issy's drawers fell. He knows where Hokum found the Scroll. He knows that it is a Great Scroll, for it bestowed literary genius and universal critical acclaim. He knows it is not one of the Three, for they were never his. He knows that it is not one of the Seven, for three he stole from the producers, and the others the movie-moguls long ago consumed. The Nine he gave to the script-editors, haughty and famous, and so ensnared them long ago. Are they not his most terrible servants, ready to pounce on the smallest trace of imaginative prose and edit it out of existence? No, he knows that it is THE ONE. And now, at long last he has heard of Robbits and of Faggins of the Shire, and he is COMING TO GET HIM!"

"But this is dreadful!", exclaimed Fido. "Far worse than my worst nightmares involving Bingo and the sheep! What am I to do? I am scared out of my wits! Why ever did you let Bingo keep the Scroll. Why did you let him publish anything? Why did you make him give it to me? Why didn't you make him destroy it? Oh, why did I give you underdone mushrooms for tea?"

"Why? Let you? Make him? Mushrooms?" ejaculated the Wizard, rapping his pipe upon the unfortunate Robbit's head. "Is there anything at ALL between your ears other than a furry vacuum? You are complete nincompoop, Fido Faggins, who deserves to be buried in a basket of remaindered novels! You cannot throw it away. As for taking it away by force, it would destroy your mind as surely as your culinary incompetence ruined the mushrooms we had for tea!"

"But why not destroy it?"

"Destroy it, you half witted, furry-eared Robbit. How would you accomplish that. Have you ever tried to destroy it?"

"No, b-but couldn't it be shredded or dissolved?"

"Try!" said Randolph, "Go on, try it now!"

Fido drew the scroll out of his jacket and looked at it. It was blank. Not a word or a letter sullied it's virginal purity. The parchment was white and beautifully smooth. Whiter and smoother than young Snowdrop's shapely young thighs. How perfect were her firm, well-rounded buttocks, her pert breasts, her hot, moist... he shuddered with suppressed desire. She... no, it-- it was simply too magical and altogether wonderful a thing to part with. He caressed the scroll hesitantly and lovingly, forcing himself to recall all the Wizard had told him of its evil history, but he could not bring himself to throw it away. It was his. His own dear precious talisman. He put it back in his pocket with a sigh.

"See what I mean?" said the Wizard with a sarcastic laugh. "You cannot part with it. And I could not take it from you without turning you into a bigger vegetable than you are already. It's loss would eat you up. As for shredding it, even the strongest cheese grater in Robbiton would not even scratch it. Water will not wet it, as you saw for yourself. Fire cannot touch it. Earth cannot bury it, as Hokum found. It cannot be unmade by any hands, not even mine. There is only one way to destroy it utterly. To find the Vats of Gloom, deep within the bowels of the Pulp-Paper mill in Kiwidor, and throw the scroll in there. Only then will it be completely destroyed and beyond the reach of the Enemy forever."

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"I wish I had never set eyes upon it," said Fido.

"That's as may be," said the Wizard, refilling his pipe. "The dye is cast for weal or woe. Either we let the Enemy regain the scroll or it must be put forever beyond his grasp."

"Will you not take it, Randolph?" asked the Robbit timidly.

"NO! With such power I should become too terrible for words! Over me the Scroll would have an influence greater and more perilous than you can conceive." His pipe burst into flame and his hat flew off. "Do not tempt me! For I do not desire to become another talentless film director on the make. Yet the power of the scroll over me would begin in mildness and pity. Mildness toward pedantic sub-editors. Pity for those with little talent and the desire help them develop it. I durst not take it, even to keep it from harm. The risk is too great, even for an exceedingly clever and far-sighted bugger like me."

He drew aside the curtains, and opened the window and the shutters. Sunlight and the sounds of the garden streamed back into the room. Jam Spongee passed by, a rude limerick upon his smiling Robbit lips. Even the mice woke up and began tormenting the cat again. In the loft the pigeons got on with the business of making more pigeons. In the cellar, two inquisitive young squirrels who had ventured too near a vat of 'Old Wineyards' sank into a delicious oblivion. It was a long time until Randolph spoke again.

"Well?" he asked eventually. "Are you going to stand there re-adjusting your codpiece, or are you going to say something?"

"I suppose I must keep the Scroll from the Enemy. But I feel very inadequate to the task. The Enemy is so strong and clever and I am only a weak and rather silly young Robbit," said Fido bitterly.

"My dearest furry-eared Fido," exclaimed Randolph, clapping a fatherly hand on the young Robbit's shoulders. "Robbits really are the most remarkable creatures. I did not expect to hear such an answer from one, least of all an inexperienced lad who has but recently discovered what girls are really for. You do realise that you cannot hole up here with the Scroll indefinitely, don't you? You will have to leave your comfortable burrow and the name of Faggins behind you. That name is too well known to be safe in the wide world of publishing. I shall give you a new name. When you go, go as Mr. Scribbler. You must tell no one your plans, least of all the purpose of your journey. It MUST be a SECRET. But you shouldn't go alone. It can get very lonely in literary circles. A young, unpublished author all alone on the road to popular recognition can easily stray off the path and fall into unnatural practices. That way blindness, unsightly spots and pulp fiction lie. But I digress. Take a buxom young Robbit maid who can cook and sew, and proof read, and knows how to correct grammatical indiscretions. Better still, take two, so that they will be company for one another when your mind is absorbed in literary endeavours and perhaps a Robbit lad to share the rigours of the journey and ensure--"

Suddenly the Wizard stopped and glanced sharply at the window. Fido became aware that it had become deathly quiet in the house and in the garden. The mice paused in their exploration of the cat's pain threshold. The squirrels belched. Even the pigeons stopped cooing to one another. Randolph moved silently to the window. Then, like lightning he thrust his arms through it, and swung round, holding a struggling, rather pretty Robbit-lass in his arms. "Well, blow my hat

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off," said he. "If it isn't Ms. Snowdrop. Now what were you up to outside with young Jam Spongee, eh, my lass?"

"Nuffink, sur, honest! Leastways nuffink Mr. Fido need be ashamed for," replied the buxom beauty, catching sight of Fido's crimson face. "I was just a-helpin' Jam in the Garden. Lor, sur, I'm that fond of mushrooms, and Mr. Fido lets me weed the patch below the tater plot."

Traces of nut-brown fungi still adhered to her pretty blue and white checked dress that was just long enough to be decent, but no so long that it concealed a flash of her shapely young calves and well-turned ankles, which Fido was admiring with unashamed delight.

"And this, I suppose, is Jam Spongee, the famous gardener," said the Wizard sternly, grabbing a second Robbit by his ears. "So... my lad, it is a long time since I last heard the sound of your mower - or of your weeding, my girl. Tell me truthfully, how long have you two been earwiggling outside?"

"Earwiggling, Sir, I don't get you, begging your honour's pardon. There ain' no earwigs at Fag End. Leastways, there shouldn't be, cos I sprays 'em reglar on Mr. Fido's orders."

"Don't be cheeky, you furry-eared rascal," retorted the Wizard. Suiting his actions to his words, he grasped the Robbit more firmly by one of his magnificent aural appendages. "What did you overhear, and why did you spy on us?"

"Mr. Fido, guv!" squealed Jam, shaking with fear. "Don't let 'im hurt me! Don't let 'im turn me into an 'orrible Oik - my pater would 'ave an 'eart attack and no mistake. I meant nuffink by it, on my life, Sir, I didn't"

"Oh, Mr. Randolph, sur, please let him go, he's not done nuffink, honest he hasn't," pleaded Snowdrop, backing away towards Fido.

Fido put a reassuring arm around her. He would have done more if she had let him and the Wizard wasn't in the room. "He won't harm you if you come clean, Jam. But you'd best be straight with him, and tell him right away."

"Well, see 'ere, sir," began Jam warily, "I 'eared a bunch o' stuff that didn't make a happorth o' sense to me. About the Enema—Snowdrop 'ad to explain what that was—but I still don't get it, and I don't think I wants to. And the Scrolls, and old Mr. Bingo and 'is sheeps, and a 'orrible creature called 'okum - and Academics. I listened cos I couldn't help myself. I'm powerfully fond o' Academics, Sir, since Mr. Bingo taught me my letters. I loves tales of pure research, philological dissertations, literary criticism an' such like. Academics, Sir! I would so love to meet a real Academic, Sir. Couldn't you take me to meet Academics, Sir, when you leave?"

Randolf let out a good-natured laugh and picked up the startled Robbit and deposited him, electric mower and grass cuttings, and all, in front of Fido and Snowdrop.

"Take you to meet Academics, eh my lad? So you heard that Mr. Fido will be leaving did you?"

"No, but I did sur," said Snowdrop with a becoming blush that spread from her smiling cheeks to her firm young bosom. "That's what made me cry out which you must've heard. I tried not to. But I couldn't 'elp it, I was so 'eartbroken..."

"I wish it were not true," said Fido, wiping a tear from his eye. It has only just dawned on him that leaving his comfortable burrow in Robbiton would mean

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a lot more than just going without mushrooms for breakfast and missing the weekly poetry readings at the 'Beaver Bush'.

"I suppose I will HAVE to go, but 'tis powerful hard to leave all my friends behind." He looked longingly at Snowdrop.

Snowdrop fell to her knees and clutched at Fido, the tears streaming down her pale cheeks.

"Oh, my dearest Fido, my fluffykins, not to see you anymore, not to hear your sweet poetry, not to kiss your adorable ears, not to lick your huge, throbbing--"

"Now then!" interrupted Randolph sternly, "That's quite enough of that, my girl. Get up. I have thought of a cunning plan that will keep Fido's secret and punish both of you for earwiggling. You shall BOTH go away with Mr. Fido!"

"Me!" cried Snowdrop, leaping into Fido's arms like a practiced courtesan at the Court of Rondor. "Me, be his little Robbit-princess and go to war against the horrible bad Oikses and all?! Hooray!"

"What larks we shall have Mr. Fido, Sir," said Jam, beaming delightedly. "I shall meet Academics and listen to lectures on the adaptation of the fantasy novel to the silver screen, and join in philological disputes on the etymology of horticultural terms!"

"So you shall," said Fido, his face darkening. "But it will not be a Robbit romp, my lad. There will be trouble ahead or my name's not Faggins. We shall be hard put to it to get back at all, never mind with any sort of literary reputation."

"I fear that is only too likely," said Randolph grimly. "Indeed I hold out little hope for your quest. But no man can predict the end, not even I. Our greatest strength lies in the Enemy's overweening pride and his predeliction for wearing offensive shorts in even the most inclement weather. Hitherto he has entirely overlooked the very existence of Robbit-kind. Even now your quaint ways and literary subtleties are quite beyond his comprehension. He is a clever bugger, and clever buggers always think they can improve prose narratives by editing-in some mindless action, and slipping in a few topical allusions. In his eagerness for fame and fortune, he has completely underestimated the strength of simple-minded halfwits like you three."

The Robbits were not entirely sure whether this amounted to praise, or an insult, but like the high-spirited simpletons that they were, they cheered together and clapped their hands in rapturous joy anyway.

THE END
OF THIS CHAPTER