

LEVIATHAN • BEHEMOTH • GOLIATH



THE  
LEVIATHAN  
TRILOGY

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE UGLIES SERIES

SCOTT WESTERFELD

ILLUSTRATED BY KEITH THOMPSON

# Contents

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Leviathan

Behemoth

Goliath

# ◉ LEVIATHAN ◉

Written by

**MR. SCOTT WESTERFELD**

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**SIMON PULSE**

New York • London • Toronto • Sydney

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Also by Scott Westerfeld

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This book is a work of fiction. Any references  
to historical events, real people, or real locales are used fictitiously.  
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Alek, on the run from the Clanker powers who are attempting to take over  
the globe using mechanical machinery, forms an uneasy alliance with  
Deryn, who, disguised as a boy to join the British Air Service, is  
learning to fly genetically engineered beasts.

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To my NYC writing crew,  
for knowing the importance of Craft

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The Austrian horses glinted in the moonlight, their riders standing tall in the saddle, swords raised. Behind them two ranks of diesel-powered walking machines stood ready to fire, cannon aimed over the heads of the cavalry. A zeppelin scouted no-man's-land at the center of the battlefield, its metal skin sparkling.

The French and British infantry crouched behind their fortifications—a letter opener, an ink jar, and a line of fountain pens—knowing they stood no chance against the might of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But a row of Darwinist monsters loomed behind them, ready to devour any who dared retreat.

The attack had almost begun when Prince Aleksandar thought he heard someone outside his door.

He took a guilty step toward his bed—then froze in place, listening hard. Trees stirred in a soft breeze outside, but otherwise the night was silent. Mother and Father were in Sarajevo, after all. The servants wouldn't dare disturb his sleep.



Alek turned back to his desk and began to move the cavalry forward, grinning as the battle neared its climax. The Austrian walkers had completed their bombardment, and it was time for the tin horses to finish off the woefully outnumbered French. It had taken all night to set up the attack, using an imperial tactics manual borrowed from Father's study.

It seemed only fair that Alek have some fun while his parents were off watching military maneuvers. He'd begged to be taken along, to see the mustered ranks of soldiers striding past in real life, to feel the rumble of massed fighting machines through the soles of his boots.

It was Mother, of course, who had forbidden it—his studies were more important than “parades,” she called them. She didn't understand that military exercises had more to teach him than musty old tutors and their books. One day soon Alek might be piloting one of those machines.

War was coming, after all. Everyone said so.

The last tin cavalry unit had just crashed into the French lines when the soft sound came from the hallway again: jingling, like a ring of keys.

Alek turned, peering at the gap beneath his bed chamber's double doors. Shadows shifted along the sliver of moonlight, and he heard the hiss of whispers.

Someone was right outside.

Silent in bare feet, he swiftly crossed the cold marble floor, sliding into bed just as the door creaked open. Alek narrowed his eyes to a slit, wondering which of the servants was checking on him.

Moonlight spilled into the room, making the tin soldiers on his desk glitter. Someone slipped inside, graceful and dead silent. The figure paused, staring at Alek for a moment, then crept toward his dresser. Alek heard the wooden rasp of a drawer sliding open.

His heart raced. None of the servants would dare steal from him!

But what if the intruder were something worse than a thief? His father's warnings echoed in his ears... .

*You have had enemies from the day you were born.*

A bell cord hung next to his bed, but his parents' rooms were empty. With Father and his bodyguard in Sarajevo, the closest sentries were quartered at the other end of the trophy hall, fifty meters away.

Alek slid one hand under his pillow, until his fingers touched the cold steel of his hunting knife. He lay there holding his breath, grasping the handle tightly, repeating to himself his father's other watchword.

*Surprise is more valuable than strength.*

Another figure came through the door then, boots clomping, a piloting jacket's metal clips jingling like keys on a ring. The figure tromped straight toward his bed.

"Young master! Wake up!"

Alek let go of the knife, expelling a sigh of relief. It was just old Otto Klopp, his master mechanic.

The first figure began rifling through the dresser, pulling at clothes.

"The young prince has been awake all along," Wildcount Volger's low voice said. "A bit of advice, Your Highness? When pretending to be asleep, it is advisable not to hold one's breath."

Alek sat up and scowled. His fencing master had an annoying knack for seeing through deception.

"What's the meaning of this?"

"You're to come with us, young master," Otto mumbled, studying the marble floor. "The archduke's orders."

"My father? He's back already?"

"He left instructions," Count Volger said with the same infuriating tone he used during fencing lessons. He tossed a pair of Alek's trousers and a piloting jacket onto the bed.

Alek stared at them, half outraged and half confused.

"Like young Mozart," Otto said softly. "In the arch-duke's stories."

Alek frowned, remembering Father's favorite tales about the great composer's upbringing. Supposedly Mozart's tutors would wake him in the middle of the night, when his mind was raw and defenseless, and thrust musical lessons upon him. It all sounded rather disrespectful to Alek.

He reached for the trousers. "You're going to make me compose a *fugue*?"

"An amusing thought," Count Volger said. "But please make haste."

"We have a walker waiting behind the stables, young master." Otto's worried face made an attempt at a smile. "You're to take the helm."

"A walker?" Alek's eyes widened. Piloting was one part of his studies he'd gladly get out of bed for. He slipped quickly into the clothes.

"Yes, your first night lesson!" Otto said, handing Alek his boots.

Alek pulled them on and stood, then fetched his favorite pilot's gloves from the dresser, his footsteps echoing on the marble floor.

"Quietly now." Count Volger stood by the chamber doors. He cracked them and peered out into the hall.

"We're to sneak out, Your Highness!" Otto whispered. "Good fun, this lesson! Just like young Mozart!"

The three of them crept down the trophy hall, Master Klopp still clomping, Volger gliding along in silence. Paintings of Alek's ancestors, the family who had ruled Austria for six hundred years, lined the hallway, their subjects staring down with unreadable expressions. The antlers of his father's hunting trophies cast tangled shadows, like a moonlit forest. Every footstep was magnified by the stillness of the castle, and questions echoed in Alek's mind.

Wasn't it dangerous, piloting a walker at night? And why was his fencing master coming along? Count Volger preferred swords and horses over soulless mechaniks, and had little tolerance for commoners like old Otto. Master Klopp had been hired for his piloting skills, not his family name.

"Volger ...," Alek began.

"*Quiet, boy!*" the wildcount spat.

Anger flashed inside Alek, and a curse almost burst from his mouth, even if it ruined their stupid game of sneaking out.

It was always like this. To the servants he might be "the young archduke," but nobles like Volger never let Alek forget his position. Thanks to his mother's common blood, he wasn't fit to inherit royal lands and titles. His father might be heir to an empire of fifty million souls, but Alek was heir to nothing.

Volger himself was only a wildcount—no farmlands to his name, just a bit of forest—but even he could feel superior to the son of a lady-in-waiting.

Alek managed to stay quiet, though, letting his anger cool as they stole through the vast and darkened banquet kitchens. Years of insults had taught him how to bite his tongue, and disrespect was easier to swallow with the prospect of piloting ahead.

One day he would have his revenge. Father had promised. The marriage contract would be changed somehow, and Alek's blood made royal.

Even if it meant defying the emperor himself.

By the time they reached the stables, Alek's only concern was tripping in the darkness. The moon was less than half full, and the estate's hunting forests stretched like a black sea across the valley. At this hour even the lights of Prague had died out to a mere inkling.

When Alek saw the walker, a soft cry escaped his lips.

It stood taller than the stable's roof, its two metal feet sunk deep into the soil of the riding paddock. It looked like one of the Darwinist monsters skulking in the darkness.

This wasn't some training machine—it was a real engine of war, a Cyklop Stormwalker. A cannon was mounted in its belly, and the stubby noses of two Spandau machine guns sprouted from its head, which was as big as a smokehouse.

Before tonight Alek had piloted only unarmed runabouts and four-legged training corvettes. Even with his



“STEALING AWAY.”

sixteenth birthday almost here, Mother always insisted that he was too young for war machines.

“I’m supposed to pilot *that*?” Alek heard his own voice break. “My old runabout wouldn’t come up to its knee!”

Otto Klopp’s gloved hand patted his shoulder heavily. “Don’t worry, young Mozart. I’ll be at your side.”

Count Volger called up to the machine, and its engines rumbled to life, the ground trembling under Alek’s feet. Moonlight shimmered from the wet leaves in the camouflage nets draped over the Stormwalker, and the mutter of nervous horses came from the stable.

The belly hatch swung open and a chain ladder tumbled out, unrolling as it fell. Count Volger stilled it from swinging, then planted a boot on the lowermost metal rung to hold it steady.

“Young master, if you please.”

Alek stared up at the machine. He tried to imagine guiding this monster through the darkness, crushing trees, buildings, and anything else unlucky enough to be in his path.

Otto Klopp leaned closer. “Your father the archduke has thrown us a challenge, me and you. He wants you ready to pilot any machine in the House Guard, even in the middle of the night.”

Alek swallowed. Father always said that, with war on the horizon, everyone in the household had to be prepared. And it made sense to begin training while Mother was away. If Alek crashed the walker, the worst bruises might fade before the princess Sophie returned.

But Alek still hesitated. The belly hatch of the rumbling machine looked like the jaws of some giant predator bending down to take a bite.

“Of course, we cannot force you, Your Serene Highness,” Count Volger said, amusement in his voice. “We can always explain to your father that you were too scared.”

“I’m *not* scared.” Alek grabbed the ladder and hoisted himself up. The sawtooth rungs gripped his gloves as Alek climbed past the anti-boarding spikes arrayed along the walker’s belly. He crawled into the machine’s dark maw, the smell of kerosene and sweat filling his nose, the engines’ rhythm trembling in his bones.

“Welcome aboard, Your Highness,” a voice said. Two men waited in the gunners’ cabin, steel helmets glittering. A Stormwalker carried a crew of five, Alek recalled. This wasn’t some little three-man runabout. He almost forgot to return their salutes.

Count Volger was close behind him on the ladder, so Alek kept climbing up into the command cabin. He took the pilot’s seat, strapping himself in as Klopp and Volger followed.

He placed his hands on the saunters, feeling the machine’s awesome power trembling in his fingers. Strange to think that these two small levers could control the walker’s huge metal legs.

“Vision at full,” Klopp said, cranking the viewport open as wide as it would go. The cool night air spilled into the Stormwalker’s cabin, and moonlight fell across dozens of switches and levers.

The four-legged corvette he’d piloted the month before had needed only control saunters, a fuel gauge, and a compass. But now uncountable needles were arrayed before him, shivering like nervous whiskers.

What were they all *for*?

He pulled his eyes from the controls and stared through the viewport. The distance to the ground gave him a queasy feeling, like peering down from a hayloft with thoughts of jumping.

The edge of the forest loomed only twenty meters away. Did they really expect him to pilot this machine through those dense trees and tangled roots ... *at night*?

“At your pleasure, young master,” Count Volger said, sounding bored already.

Alek set his jaw, resolving not to provide the man with any more amusement. He eased the saunter forward, and the huge Daimler engines changed pitch as steel gears bit, grinding into motion.

The Stormwalker rose from its crouch slowly, the ground slipping still farther away. Alek could see across the treetops now, all the way to shimmering Prague.

He pulled the left saunter back and pushed the right forward. The machine lumbered into motion with an inhumanly large step, pressing him back into the pilot’s seat.

The right pedal rose a little as the walker’s foot hit soft ground, nudging Alek’s boot. He twisted the saunters, transferring weight from one foot to the other. The cabin swayed like a tree house in high wind, lurching back and forth with each giant step. A chorus of hissing came from the engines.

below, gauges dancing as the Stormwalker's pneumatic joints strained against the machine's weight.

"Good ... excellent," Otto muttered from the commander's seat. "Watch your knee pressure though."

Alek dared a glance down at the controls, but had no idea what Master Klopp was talking about. *Knee pressure?* How could anyone keep track of all those needles without driving the whole contraption into a tree?

"Better," the man said a few steps later. Alek nodded dumbly, overjoyed that he hadn't tipped them over yet.

Already the forest was looming up, filling the wide-open viewport with a dark tangle of shapes. The first glistening branches swept past, thwacking at the viewport, spattering Alek with cold showers of dew.

"Shouldn't we spark up the running lights?" he asked.

Klopp shook his head. "Remember, young master? We're pretending we don't want to be spotted."

"Revolting way to travel," Volger muttered, and Alek wondered again why the man was here. Was there to be a *fencing* lesson after this? What sort of warrior-Mozart was his father trying to make him into?

The shriek of grinding gears filled the cabin. The left pedal snapped up against Alek's foot, and the whole machine tipped ominously forward.

"You're caught, young master!" Otto said, hands ready to snatch the saunters away.

"I know!" Alek cried, twisting at the controls. He slammed the machine's right foot down midstride, its knee joint spitting air like a train whistle. The Stormwalker wavered drunkenly for a moment, threatening to fall. But long seconds later Alek felt the machine's weight settle into the mud and dirt. It was balanced with one foot stretching back, like a fencer posing after a lunge.

He pushed on both saunters, the left leg pulling at whatever had entangled it, the right straining forward. The Daimler engines groaned, and metal joints hissed. Finally a shudder passed through the cabin, along with the satisfying sound of roots tearing from the ground—the Stormwalker rising up. It stood high for a moment, like a chicken on one leg, then stepped forward again.

Alek's shaking hands guided the walker through its next few strides.

"Well done, young master!" Otto cried. He clapped his hands once.

"Thank you, Klopp," Alek said in a dry voice, feeling sweat trickle down his face. His hands clenched the saunters tight, but the machine was walking smoothly again.

Gradually he forgot that he was at the controls, feeling the steps as if they were his own. The swaying of the cabin settled into his body, the rhythms of gears and pneumatics not so different from his own runabouts, only louder. Alek had even begun to see patterns in the flickering needles of the control panel—a few leapt into the red with every footfall, easing back as the walker straightened. *Knee pressure*, indeed.

But the sheer power of the machine kept him anxious. Heat from the engines built in the cabin, the night air blowing in like cold fingers. Alek tried to imagine what piloting would be like in battle, with the viewport half shut against flying bullets and shrapnel.

Finally the pine branches cleared before them, and Klopp said, "Turn here and we'll have better footing, young master."

"Isn't this one of Mother's riding paths?" Alek said. "She'll have my hide if we track it up here. Whenever one of Princess Sophie's horses stumbled on a walker footprint, Master Klopp, Alek, and even Father felt her wrath for days."

But he eased back on the throttle, grateful for a moment of rest, bringing the Stormwalker to a halt.

on the trail. Inside his piloting jacket Alek was soaked with sweat.

“Disagreeable in every way, Your Highness,” Volger said. “But necessary if we’re to make good time tonight.”

Alek turned to Otto Klopp and frowned. “Make good time? But this is just practice. We’re not going anywhere, are we?”

Klopp didn’t answer, his eyes glancing up at the count. Alek pulled his hands from the saunters and swiveled the pilot’s chair around.

“Volger, what’s going on?”

The wildcount stared down at him in silence, and Alek felt suddenly very alone out here in the darkness.

His mind began to replay his father’s warnings: How some nobles believed that Alek’s muddled lineage threatened the empire. That one day the insults might turn into something worse... .

But these men *couldn’t* be traitors. Volger had held a sword to his throat a thousand times in fencing practice, and his master of mechanics? Unthinkable.

“Where are we going, Otto? Explain this *at once*.”

“You’re to come with us, Your Highness,” Otto Klopp said softly.

“We have to get as far away from Prague as possible,” Volger said. “Your father’s orders.”

“But my father isn’t even ...” Alek gritted his teeth and swore. What a *fool* he’d been, tempted in the forest with tales of midnight piloting, like luring a child with candy. The whole household was asleep, his parents away in Sarajevo.

Alek’s arms were still tired from fighting to keep the Stormwalker upright, and strapped into the pilot’s chair he could hardly draw his knife. He closed his eyes—he’d left the weapon back in his room, under the pillow.

“The archduke left instructions,” Count Volger said.

“You’re *lying!*” Alek shouted.

“I wish we were, young master.” Volger reached into his riding jacket.

A surge of panic swept into Alek, cutting through his despair. His hands shot to the unfamiliar controls, searching for the distress whistle’s cord. They couldn’t be far from home yet. Surely *someone* would hear the Stormwalker’s shriek.

Otto jumped into motion, grabbing Alek’s arms. Volger swept a flask from his jacket and forced it open mouth to Alek’s face. A sweet smell filled the cabin, sending his mind spinning. He tried not to breathe, struggling against the larger men.

Then his fingers found the distress cord and pulled—

But Master Klopp’s hands were already at the controls, spilling the Stormwalker’s pneumatic pressure. The whistle let out only a miserable descending wail, like a teakettle pulled from the fire.

Alek still struggled, holding his breath for what felt like minutes, but finally his lungs rebelled. He scooped in a ragged breath, the sharp scent of chemicals filling his head ...

A cascade of bright spots fell across the instruments, and a weight seemed to lift from Alek’s shoulders. He felt as though he were floating free of the men’s grasp, free of the seat straps—free of gravity, even.

“My father will have your heads,” he managed to croak.

“Alas not, Your Highness,” Count Volger said. “Your parents are both dead, murdered this night in Sarajevo.”

Alek tried to laugh at this absurd statement, but the world twisted sideways under him, darkness and silence crashing down.

“Wake up, you ninny!”

Deryn Sharp opened one eye ... and found herself staring at etched lines streaming past an airbeast’s body, like a river’s course around an island—an airflow diagram. Lifting her head from the aeronautics manual, she discovered that the open page was stuck to her face.

“You stayed up all night!” The voice of her brother, Jaspert, battered her ears again. “I told you to get some sleep!”

Deryn gently peeled the page from her cheek and frowned—a smudge of drool had disfigured the diagram. She wondered if sleeping with her head in the manual had stuffed still more aeronautics into her brain.

“Obviously I *did* get some sleep, Jaspert, seeing as you found me snoring.”

“Aye, but not properly in bed.” He was moving around the small rented room in the darkness, piecing together a clean airman’s uniform. “One more hour of studying, you said, and you’ve burnt our last candle down to a squick!”



Deryn rubbed at her eyes, looking around the small, depressing room. It was always damp and smelled of horse clart from the stables below. Hopefully last night would be the last time she slept here, in bed or not. “Doesn’t matter. The Service has its own candles.”

“Aye, if you pass the test.”

Deryn snorted. She’d studied only because she hadn’t been able to sleep, half excited about finally taking the airman middy’s test, half terrified that someone would see through her disguise. “No need to worry about that, Jaspert. I’ll pass.”

Her brother nodded slowly, a mischievous expression crossing his face. “Aye, maybe you’re crack hand with sextants and aerology. And maybe you can draw any airbeast in the fleet. But there’s one test I haven’t mentioned. It’s not about book learning—more what they call ‘air sense.’”

“*Air sense?*” Deryn said. “Are you winding me up?”

“It’s a dark secret of the Service.” Jaspert leaned forward, his voice dropping to a whisper. “I’ve risked expulsion for daring to mention it to a civilian.”

“You are full of *clart*, Jaspert Sharp!”

“I can say no more.” He pulled his still-buttoned shirt over his head, and when his face emerged,



had broken into a smile.

~~Deryn scowled, still not sure if he was kidding. As if she weren't nervous enough.~~

Jaspert tied his airman's neckerchief. "Get your slops on and we'll see what you look like. All that studying's going to waste if your tailoring don't persuade them."

Deryn stared sullenly down at the pile of borrowed clothes. After all her studying and everything she'd learned when her father was alive, the middy's test would be easy. But what was in her head wouldn't matter unless she could fool the Air Service boffins into believing her name was Dylan, not Deryn.

She'd resewn Jaspert's old clothes to alter their shape, and she was plenty tall—taller than most boys of midshipman's age. But height and shape weren't everything. A month of practicing on the streets of London and in front of the mirror had convinced her of that.

Boys had something else ... a sort of *swagger* about them.

When she was dressed, Deryn gazed at her reflection in a darkened window. Her usual self stared back: female and fifteen. The careful tailoring only made her look queerly skinny, not so much a boy as some tattie bogle set out in old clothes to scare the crows.

"Well?" she said finally. "Do I pass as a Dylan?"

Jaspert's eyes drifted up and down, but he said nothing.

"I'm plenty tall for sixteen, right?" she pleaded.

Finally he nodded. "Aye, I suppose you'll pass. It's just lucky you've no diddies to speak of."

Deryn's jaw dropped open, her arms crossing over her chest. "And you're a bum-rag covered clart!"

Jaspert laughed, slapping her hard on the back. "That's the spirit. I'll have you swearing like a navvy lad yet."

The London omnibuses were much fancier than those back in Scotland—faster, too. The one that took them to the airship field at Wormwood Scrubs was drawn by a hippoesque the breadth of two oxen across the shoulders. The huge, powerful beast had them nearing the Scrubs before dawn had broken.

Deryn stared out the window, watching the movements of treetops and windblown trash for hints about the day's weather. The horizon was red, and the *Manual of Aerology* claimed, *Red sky morning, sailors take warning*. But Da had always said that was just an old wives' tale. It was when you saw a dog eating grass that you knew the heavens were about to split.

Not that a drop of rain mattered—the tests today would be indoors. It was book learning the Air Service demanded from their young midshipmen: navigation and aerodynamics. But staring at the sky was safer than reading the glances of the other passengers.

Since getting on the bus with Jaspert, Deryn's skin had itched with wondering what she looked like to strangers. Could they see through her boy's slops and shorn hair? Did they really think she was a young recruit on his way to the Air Proving Ground? Or did she look like some lassie with a few screws loose, playing dress-up in her brother's old clothes?

The omnibus's next to last stop was at the Scrubs' famous prison. Most of the passengers disembarked there, women carrying lunch pails and gifts for their men inside. The sight of barred windows made Deryn's stomach churn. How much trouble would Jaspert be in if this ruse were wrong? Enough to lose his position in the Service? To send him to jail, even?

It just wasn't *fair*, her being born a girl! She knew more about aeronautics than Da had ever crammed into Jaspert's attic. On top of which, she had a better head for heights than her brother.

The worst thing was, if the boffins didn't let her into the Service, she'd be spending tonight in the

horrible rented room again, and headed back to Scotland by tomorrow.

Her mother and the aunties were waiting there, certain that this mad scheme wouldn't work and ready to stuff Deryn back into skirts and corsets. No more dreams of flying, no more studying, no more *swearing!* And the last of her inheritance wasted on this trip to London.

She glared at the three boys riding in the front of the bus, jostling each other and giggling nervously as the proving ground drew closer, happy as a box of birds. The tallest hardly came up to Deryn's shoulder. They couldn't be so much stronger, and she didn't credit that they were as smart or as brave. So why should *they* be allowed into the king's service and not her?

Deryn Sharp gritted her teeth, resolving that no one would see through her disguise.

There couldn't be *that* much trick to it, being a stupid boy.



The line of recruits on the ascension field weren't impressive. Most looked barely sixteen, sent off by their families to find fortune and advancement. A few older boys were mixed in with the others, probably middies coming over from the navy.

Looking at their anxious faces, Deryn was glad to have had a father who'd taken her up in hot-air balloons. She'd seen the ground from on high plenty of times. But that didn't keep her nerves from playing up. She almost reached for Jaspert's hand before realizing how *that* would look.

"All right, *Dylan*," he said quietly as they neared the desk. "Just remember what I told you."

Deryn snorted. Last night Jaspert had demonstrated how a proper boy checked his fingernails—looking at his palm, fingers bent, whereas girls looked at the backs of their hands, fingers splayed.

"Aye, Jaspert," she said. "But if they ask me to do my nails, don't you think the jig's up already?"

He didn't laugh. "Just don't draw attention to yourself, right?"

Deryn said nothing more, following him to the long table set up outside a white hangar tent. Three officers sat behind it, accepting letters of introduction from the recruits.

"Ah, Coxswain Sharp!" one said. He wore the uniform of a flight lieutenant, but also the curved brimmed bowler hat of a boffin.

Jaspert saluted him smartly. "Lieutenant Cook, may I present my cousin Dylan."

When Cook held out his hand to Deryn, she felt the moment of British pride that boffins always gave her. Here was a man who'd reached into the very chains of life and worked them to suit his purposes.

She gave his hand the firmest shake she could. "Nice to meet you, sir."

"Always a pleasure to meet a Sharp fellow," the boffin said, then chuckled at his own joke. "Your cousin speaks highly of your comprehension of aeronautics and aerology."

Deryn cleared her throat, using the soft, low voice she'd been practicing for weeks. "My da—the boffin is, my uncle—taught us all about ballooning."

"Ah, yes, a brave man." He shook his head. "A tragedy he isn't here to see the triumphs of living flight."

"Aye, he would've loved it, sir." Da had gone up in only hot-air balloons, not hydrogen breather like the Service used.

Jaspert gave her a nudge, and Deryn remembered the letter of recommendation. She pulled it from her jacket and offered it to Flight Lieutenant Cook. He pretended to study it, which was silly because he'd written it himself as a favor to Jaspert, but even boffins had to follow Royal Navy form.

"This seems to be in order." His eyes drifted up from the letter and traveled across Deryn

borrowed outfit, looking troubled for a moment by what he saw.

~~She stood stiffly under his gaze, wondering what she'd done wrong. Was it her hair? Her voice~~  
Had the handshake somehow gone amiss?

“Bit spindly, aren't you?” the boffin finally said.

“Aye, sir. I suppose so.”

His face broke into a smile. “Well, we had to fatten up your cousin too. Mr. Sharp, please join the line!”

The sun was just starting to creep above the tree line when the proper military men arrived. They rolled across the field in an all-terrain carriage drawn by two lupine tigers, pulling up smartly before the line of recruits. The beasts' muscles bulged under the leather straps of the carriage rig, and when one shook itself like a monstrous house cat, sweat flew in all directions.

In the corners of her vision Deryn saw the boys around her stiffen. Then the carriage driver set the tigers growling with a snap of his whip, and a nervous murmur traveled down the line.

A man in a flight captain's uniform stood in the open carriage, a riding crop under one arm. "Gentlemen, welcome to Wormwood Scrubs. I trust none of you is frightened by the fabrications of natural philosophy?"

No one answered. Fabricated beasts were everywhere



"ADDRESSING THE APPLICANTS."

in London, of course, but nothing so magnificent as these half-wolf tigers, all sinews and claws, crafty intelligence lurking in their eyes.

Deryn kept her eyes forward, though she was dying to take a closer look at the tigers. Before today she'd seen military fabs only in the zoo.

"Barking spiders!" the young boy next to her whispered. He was nearly as tall as her, and his short blond hair stuck straight up into the air. "I'd hate to see those two get loose."

Deryn resisted the urge to explain that lupines were the tamest of the fabs. Wolves were really just a kind of dog, and could be trained almost as easily. Airbeasts came from trickier stock, of course.

When no one stepped forward to admit their fear, the flight captain said, "Excellent. Then you won't mind a closer look."

The driver's whip snapped again, and the carriage rumbled across the broken field, the nearest tiger passing within arm's reach of the volunteers. The snarling beasts were too much for three boys at the other end of the line. They broke ranks and ran shrieking back toward the open gates of the Scrubs.

Deryn kept her eyes focused directly ahead as the tigers passed, but a whiff of them—a mix of wild dog and raw meat—sent shivers down her spine.

“Not bad, not bad,” the flight captain said. “I’m glad to see so few of our young men succumbing to common superstition.”

Deryn snorted. A few people—Monkey Luddites, they were called—were afraid of Darwinian beasties on principle. They thought that crossbreeding natural creatures was more blasphemy than science, even if facts had been the backbone of the British Empire for the last fifty years.

She wondered for a moment if these tigers were the secret test Jaspert had warned her about, and smirked. If so, it had been a pure dawdle.

“But your nerves of steel may not last the day, gentlemen,” the flight captain said. “Before moving on we’d like to discover if you have a head for heights. Coxswain?”

“About-face!” shouted an airman. With a muddled bit of shuffling, the line of boys turned itself about to face the hangar tent. Deryn saw that Jaspert was still here, hanging off to one side with the boffins. They were all wearing clart-snaffling grins.

Then the hangar's tent flaps split apart, and Deryn's jaw dropped open... .

An airbeast was inside: a Huxley ascender, its tentacles in the grips of a dozen ground men. The beast pulsed and trembled as they drew it gently out, setting its translucent gasbag shimmering with the red light of the rising sun.

“A medusa,” gasped the boy next to her.

Deryn nodded. This was the first hydrogen breather ever fabricated, nothing like the giant living airships of today, with their gondolas, engines, and observation decks.

The Huxley was made from the life chains of medusae—jellyfish and other venomous sea creatures—and was practically as dangerous. One wrong puff of wind could spook a Huxley, sending it diving for the ground like a bird headed for worms. The creatures' fishy guts could survive almost any fall, but their human passengers were rarely so lucky.

Then Deryn saw a pilot's rig hanging from the airbeast, and her eyes widened still farther.

Was this the test of “air sense” Jaspert had been hinting at? And he'd let her believe he'd only been kidding! *That bum-rag.*

“You lucky young gents will be taking a ride this morning,” the flight captain said from behind them. “Not a long one: only up a thousand feet or so and then back down ... after ten minutes lofting in the air. Believe me, you'll see London as you never have before!”

Deryn felt a smile creeping across her lips. Finally, a chance to see the world from on high again, just like in one of Da's balloons.

“To those of you who'd prefer not to,” the flight captain finished, “we bid fond farewells.”

“Any of you little blighters want out?” shouted the coxswain from the end of the line. “Then get out now! Otherwise, it's skyward with you!”

After a short pause another dozen boys departed. They didn't run screaming this time, just slurred toward the gates in a huddled pack, a few pale and frightened faces glancing back at the pulsing hovering monster. Deryn realized with pride that almost half the volunteers were gone.

“Right, then.” The flight captain stepped in front of the line. “Now that the Monkey Luddites have been cleared out, who'd like to go first?”

Without hesitation, without a thought of what Jaspert had said about not drawing attention, and

with the last squick of nerves in her belly gone, Deryn Sharp took one step forward.

“Please, sir. I’d like to fly.”

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The pilot’s rig held her snugly, the contraption swaying gently under the medusa’s body. Leather straps passed under her arms and around her waist, then were clipped to the curved seat that she was perched on like a horseman riding sidesaddle. Deryn had worried that the coxswain would discover her secret as he buckled her in, but Jaspert had been right about one thing: There wasn’t much to give her away.

“Just ride it up, laddie,” the man said quietly. “Enjoy the view and wait for us to pull you down. Most of all, don’t do *anything* to upset the beastie.”

“Aye, sir.” She swallowed.

“If you start to panic, or if you think something’s gone wrong, just throw this.” He pressed a thick roll of yellow cloth into her hand, then tied one end around her wrist. “And we’ll wind you down steady and fast.”

Deryn clutched it tightly. “Don’t worry. I won’t panic.”

“That’s what they all say.” He smiled, and pressed into her other hand a cord leading to a pair of water bags harnessed to the creature’s tentacles. “But if by any chance you do anything *complete* stupid, the Huxley may go into a dive. If the ground’s coming up too fast, just give this a tug.”

“It spills the water out, making the beast lighter,” Deryn said, nodding. Just like the sandbags on Da’s balloons.

“Very clever, laddie,” the coxswain said. “But cleverness is no substitute for air sense, which is a Service talk for *keeping your barking head*. Understand?”

“Yes, *sir*,” Deryn said. She couldn’t wait to get off the ground, the flightless years since Da’s accident suddenly heavy in her chest.

The coxswain stepped back and blew a short pattern on his whistle. As the final note shrieked, the ground men let go of the Huxley’s tentacles all together.

The straps cut into her as the airbeast rose, like being scooped up in a giant net. A moment later the feeling of ascent vanished, as if the earth itself were dropping away... .

Down below, the line of boys stared up in undisguised



“ASCENDING.”

awe. Jaspert was grinning like a loon, and even the boffins’ faces showed squicks of fascination. Deryn felt brilliant, rising through the air at the center of everyone’s attention, like an acrobat aloft on a swing. She wanted to make a speech:

“*Hey, all you sods, I can fly and you can’t! A natural airman, in case you haven’t noticed. And in conclusion, I’d like to add that I’m a girl and you can all get stuffed!*”

The four airmen at the winch were letting the cable out quickly, and soon the upturned faces blurred with distance. Larger geometries came into view: the worn curves of an old cricket oval on the ascension field, the network of roads and railways surrounding the Scrubs, the wings of the prison pointing southward like a huge pitchfork.

Deryn looked up and saw the medusa’s body alight with the sunrise, pulsing veins and arteries running like iridescent ivy through its translucent flesh. The tentacles drifted in the soft breeze around her, capturing pollen and insects and sucking them into the stomach sack above.

Hydrogen breathers didn’t really breathe hydrogen, of course. They *exhaled* it: burped it into their own gasbags. The bacteria in their stomachs broke down food into pure elements—oxygen, carbon, and, most important, lighter-than-air hydrogen.

It should have been nauseating, Deryn supposed, hanging suspended from all those gaseous detritus and insects. Or terrifying, with nothing but a few leather straps between her and a quarter mile of tumbling to a terrible death. But she felt as grand as an eagle on the wing.

The smoky outline of central London rose up toward the east, divided by the winding, shimmering snake of the River Thames. Soon she could make out the green expanse of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. It was like looking down on a living map: the omnibuses crawling along like bugs, sailboats fluttering as they tacked against the breeze.

Then, just as the spire of St. Paul’s Cathedral rose into view, a shiver passed through the rig. Deryn scowled. Were her ten minutes up *already*?

She looked down, but the line leading to the ground hung slack. They weren't reeling her in just yet.

The jolt came again, and Deryn saw a few of the tentacles around her clench, coiling like ribbon scraped between a pair of scissors. They were slowly gathering back into a single strand.

The Huxley was nervous.

Deryn swung herself from side to side, ignoring the majesty of London to search the horizon for whatever was spooking the airbeast.

Then she spotted it: a dark shapeless mass in the north, a rolling wave of clouds spreading across the sky. Its leading edge crept forward steadily, blackening the northern suburbs with rain.

Deryn felt the hairs on her arms tingling.

She dropped her gaze to the Scrubs, wondering if the tiny airmen down there could see the storm front too, and would start to reel her in. But the proving ground still glowed with light from the rising sun. From down there they would see only clear skies above, as cheery as a picnic.

Deryn waved a hand. Could they even see her well enough? But of course they'd only think she was larking about.

"Bum-rag!" she swore, and glared at the roll of yellow cloth tied to her wrist. A real ascender would have semaphore flags, or at least a message lizard that could scamper down the line. But all they'd given her was a panic signal.

And Deryn Sharp was *not* panicking!

At least, she didn't think she was... .

She stared at the blackness in the sky, wondering if it were only a last bit of night the sunrise hadn't chased away. What if she had no air sense at all, and the height had gone to her head?

Deryn closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and counted to ten.

When she opened them again, the clouds were still there—closer.

The Huxley trembled again, and Deryn smelled lightning in the air. The approaching squall was definitely real. The aerology manual had been right after all: *Red sky in morning, sailors take warning.*

She stared again at the yellow cloth. If the officers below saw it unfurl, they'd think she was panicking. Then she'd have to explain that it hadn't been terror, just a coolheaded observation that rough weather was coming. Maybe they'd commend her for making the right decision.

But what if the squall changed course? Or faded to a drizzle before it arrived at the Scrubs?

Deryn clenched her teeth, wondering how long she'd been up here. Weren't ten minutes almost up? Or had her sense of time gone crook in the vast, cold sky?

Her eyes darted back and forth between the rolled-up yellow cloth and the approaching storm, wondering what a *boy* would do.



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