

THE ADVENTURES OF  
**ISRAEL ST. JAMES**  
THE TALONS OF THE EAGLE

**NATHANIEL HICKLIN**

*[This story is a chapter excerpted from the forthcoming book [The Adventures of Israel St. James](#) from [Sic Semper Serpent Books](#). Israel is a globe-trotting collector of magical relics, who travels through history in search of humanity's most dangerous and wondrous artifacts. In this story, Israel heads to Chicago to confront absolute power before it corrupts an entire nation.]*

## THE PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY

The Pinkerton Agency, established by Allan Pinkerton in 1850, is responsible for the modern image of the private detective. They were hired by various businesses, as well as the federal government, to perform duties ranging from personal security to private military contracts. The Pinkertons quickly became the primary agency hired by businesses to oppose union actions during the labor unrest of the late 19th century. At their peak, the Pinkertons were the largest private law enforcement agency in the world, employing a greater standing roster than the United States Army.

- summarized Department of Justice internal memorandum  
*The Rise of the American Detective*

I stepped off the train in Chicago, the location of the Novoscope's most recently detected event. I had been born in New York City, a great American metropolis, one of the oldest in the nation. Nonetheless, I could feel the vibrant energy of Chicago, a brand-new city in the heart of America—the fastest growing in the world—a city champing at the bit to get on with its day.

I took my suitcase from the overhead rack on the train and headed for the door. I had packed a large trunk for my last trip

to the States, and in retrospect, it seemed to have been a bit cumbersome and overcomplicated. I was experimenting on this trip with a lighter load to make traveling easier. After all, I'd traveled to a major American city, not some minor resort town in the middle of the forest. I figured I could easily acquire anything I hadn't brought from Cambridge.

The one thing I made sure to bring, however, was secreted in an inside pocket of my waistcoat. Outwardly, it appeared to be a letter opener with an ornately detailed handle, entirely made from steel. However, the handle was actually hollow. The flat front of the handle could be slid down over the blade to reveal the Titania's Kiss gemstone I recovered from Monticello two years earlier.

With the click of a button, the thumbprint-sized stone rose proud of the handle on a spring. Contact with the stone for one second would render someone unconscious for twenty-four hours, casting their mind away to play with the fairies. A catch on the back of the handle, when pressed, retracted the stone back into its housing, rendering the device into an ordinary letter opener once again.

I had commissioned the device from a craftsman in London upon returning from New York with the stone. The trick letter opener allowed me to wield the stone safely, keeping it handy for rapid deployment.

With a quick flick of the cover, I could quickly tap someone

for an easy eight hours of sleep. If I wished, I could hold the stone to them for longer, putting my assailant down for years, though I couldn't conceive of a circumstance where I would need to send someone to sleep for longer than one day.

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I asked a ticket-taker for directions to the nearest hotel and bought a newspaper from a street vendor, looking for any clues about my quarry. From my experiences with the Titania's Kiss stone and the St. Jerome Reliquary, it seemed likely that the relic I sought would have caused enough of a stir in the community to merit the attention of the media. Most of the items in the paper, however, seemed like much the ordinary fare.

The one unusual thing seemed to be the abundance of stories about petty crime. My experience with large American cities was limited to New York City, so I had little basis on which to judge the apparent level of crime in Chicago, but the Letters to the Editor page was crowded with editorials decrying the rise in crime and criticizing the police for their seeming incompetence in combating the trend.

One recent article mentioned an increased law enforcement presence in the city to help maintain order; however, it was unclear to me whether the presence denoted police,

government, or some independent third party. The final item of note consisted of a small column near the back, advertising a speech the Mayor of Chicago was due to give at the founding ceremony of a new park nearby. The speech was set to begin at two o'clock that day.

As I sat reading the paper on a bench, I noticed that everyone in the street seemed to be walking in the direction of the park nearby. The Novoscope had put me in the right place for certain.

*Well, why not,* I thought to myself. If the rise in crime was due to a relic, then the Mayor's address might give me a sense of the city's general mood concerning the matter. If not, it might at least be an amusing diversion. Lord knew I hadn't taken many opportunities for fun while sitting in my office researching day-in and day-out waiting for the Novoscope to activate.

I followed the crowd to the local park, where I saw a stage, bleachers, and a lectern set up. Various well-dressed people already occupied the stands, whom I presumed to be Chicago's dignitaries. A small white gazebo bandstand stood alongside the stage. A huge crowd had gathered. It seemed that half of Chicago had shown up. The beautiful sunny day helped, I'm sure.

At the stroke of two o'clock, the band struck up a small fanfare while the master of ceremonies introduced the mayor

of Chicago, who took to the podium to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

His Honor the Mayor of Chicago wore a top hat and tailed formal suit with bright brass buttons and red, rosy cheeks. He had exactly the sort of face that belonged on posters and campaign buttons. I didn't know people really looked like that.

When the enthusiastic applause had died, the mayor began his speech, inaugurating the new parkland with a statue of its benefactor. I could feel no aura of magic washing over me. Archimedes' Insight didn't trigger an overwhelming rush of understanding.

As I weaved my way toward the front of the crowd to get a better look at the other dignitaries in the stands, I heard a commotion from the foot of the stage. A man shouted imprecations at the mayor, drew a revolver, and fired. The bullet struck the mayor in his left chest, spinning him around and dropping him to the boards, a spray of blood painting the faces of the men seated behind him.

Panic spread through the crowd like a brush fire. The assembled multitude began running to and fro like panicked cattle. Some people stumbled to the ground, crying out as thousands of feet trampled them. A small cadre of men, whom I had not hitherto noticed, pushed through the crowd to locate the gunman, but it was no use.

Any pursuit had no hope for success. There was just too

much chaos on the grounds. Nobody had taken any notice of the shooter until he fired, and after the chaos started, none could remember any details about him. The shooter was gone.

Just when it seemed that the day had turned to complete disastrous ruin, one of the men shouted: “By the authority of the office of His Honor the Mayor, I order all of you to get down on the ground!” Then, he took out a leather wallet and showed a badge to the gathering throng.

Immediately, the badge elicited in me an overwhelming sense of incontrovertible authority. A foggy feeling of submission took me over, a sense of *knowing* that the man brandishing the badge held unimaginable power.

No law-abiding citizen present that day could have possibly resisted the weight carried by that badge. His word was law. His every utterance was as good as gospel. This man had the right, nay, the duty, to bestride the nation with Justice and Truth. His eyes shone in a way that said he was answerable to none but the very highest authority—himself.

I stopped in my tracks, along with everyone else in the crowd, and I calmly lowered myself to the pavement and lay on my stomach. The gunman, still trying to stroll nonchalantly away from the scene, now stood out from the throng like a lighthouse on a rocky shore.

As the subduing influence of the badge flooded my mind, it interacted with Archimedes’ Insight and revealed that the

Authority of the badge had a greatly-reduced effect on those with little regard for law and order.

Of course, it soon became clear that the man with the badge hadn't wanted to stop the assailant. He merely wanted a clearer view.

The man on the stage drew his revolver, took careful aim, and fired. The shooter's head fountained blood like a dandelion shedding its fluff, and he collapsed to the ground.

As the authorities hauled away the attacker's body, the man with the badge ordered the crowd to disperse. Every single one of them turned around silently and walked away from the park without a single complaint, their empty, contented faces slack and fallen.

I had found my relic.

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Having experienced the full force of the badge once, I felt that I would not be so easily swayed by its mandate the second time, but I still needed more information.

"Who were those men?" I asked a middle-aged couple walking near me.

"You mean you don't know?" said the man, as he and his wife began to come to their senses, looking around as though waking from a lucid dream.



“I’ve only just arrived by train today,” I said. “I’ve been overseas for several years.”

“Those are the Pinkertons,” said the man. “The Mayor uses a squad of them as his personal bodyguards. Word has it that President Grant has a team of Pinkertons of his own.”

The two of them quickly walked away from the park as the crowd dispersed, and I hurried to keep up.

“I’m glad they were able to stop that man before he hurt any more people,” said the woman. “I hope the Mayor will be all right.”

“Those men work for the government?”

“In a way,” said the man. “They’re private detectives, hired by the government to protect important people and investigate nefarious goings-on, I imagine.”

“I should think that to be the job of the police, wouldn’t you say?”

“I gather that they’re a sort of private police now.”

“Private police? Seems to me to be a highly corruptible situation. What’s to keep them from rushing into our homes and ordering everyone about at their whim?”

“Look, friend,” he said, “I don’t worry myself about things like that, nor should you. It doesn’t pay to cross people like that, not with the kind of friends they have in Washington. If you’ll take my advice, you’ll stay well away from them.”

“Thanks for the advice.”

We parted ways, and I hastened to the hotel, still carrying my suitcase and newspaper. Once I checked into my room, I asked the bellboy for any back copies of the paper they had lying around. I went up to my room to examine the latest edition for any articles about the Pinkertons.

Some minutes later, the bellboy brought up an armload of old papers he had scrounged for me. I tipped him well for his efforts. I got down to business reading the last two weeks of news. By evening I had a pretty good idea of what had transpired in Chicago to occasion my arrival.

According to the papers, a session of Congress two weeks previous had approved funding for the Department of Justice to create an agency for investigating federal crimes. The Department of Justice — believing the funding inadequate to create a truly integrated agency whole cloth — awarded the money to the Pinkerton Agency, effectively contracting them as government investigators.

By bolstering the Authority of the Pinkerton Agency with the might of an entire nation, the United States government had created a relic of unimaginable power.

I thought back to the shooting in the park when I felt the full force of the badge. The agent wielded a staggering level of power, enough to level a death sentence with nothing but pure will. Normally only kings and emperors wielded such absolute Authority, but Congress had granted it to an ordinary

detective agency with a mandate to fight crime in a city rife with it.

Once the Pinkerton Agency became a federally-sanctioned authority, one of their badges had become saturated with the essence of that authority, a defense against the numerous challenges to their power in their own city. As long as they held the badge in their possession, they would be as the fist of God Himself.

No man could handle that kind of Authority without extreme discipline and caution. The man I had seen at the park did not seem the sort to take such care. I left the papers in my room and got a street directory from the concierge desk, where I found the address of the Pinkerton Detective Agency's national headquarters.

I cannot honestly say I felt safe with such a direct approach. I was accustomed to dealing with people who had fallen victim to relics, not to those who wielded them, knowingly or not. If I inquired too closely into the circumstances surrounding the empowerment of the badge, they would likely become defensive. And unlike my escapade with Deirdre, Titania's emissary in the Catskills, these men were bound to have firearms.

Well, there was nothing for it. If my quarry was in the hands of a mortal man, I needed to size him up, look into his eyes, and appraise his character. I needed to know if he was

concerned about the harm he was doing, or if he had let the lust for power taint his judgment.

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I walked into the Pinkerton offices and asked to see the agent in charge. A stink of tobacco smoke permeated the room and seemed to stain the air. Men buzzed in and out, writing reports and passing messages. It felt like the nerve center of some kind of hunting hound, a beast that bestrode the nation with a revolver on its hip.

While I waited, another agent walked in from a side office holding a file folder. I immediately recognized him as the agent from the park, the one who had the badge. He wore an impressive mustache large enough that eating would require special precautions, but it hadn't been waxed or otherwise treated like an ornament. He seemed to see through everything he looked at, as though he were trying to spot hidden interlopers around every corner.

"Excuse me," I said as I approached him, "but I was wondering if I could have a few minutes of your time."

"No press," said a gaunt, balding man seated at a desk near me. "If you want to talk to one of my agents, you go through me," he growled, puffing away at a large tobacco pipe. Then he turned and addressed the agent from the park. "Carver, you

get yourself to Cook County Hospital. One of the mayor's aides asked for you personally."

"Yessir, chief," said Agent Carver.

He eyed me suspiciously, as though to wonder what crimes I might have committed, and stepped out into the street, pausing to collect his hat and jacket from a rack by the door.

"As for you," said the chief, "I'll need to know who you are before telling you anything."

"Certainly," I said. "Dr. Israel St. James, from the University of Cambridge. I'm doing some research on your agency, and I hoped that you could tell me something about your mission and most recent efforts."

"Why is an English university interested in an American detective agency?"

He seemed determined to take control of the conversation. Well, I had dealt with enough elderly professors to know how to handle that.

"We're doing a study of modern law enforcement methods. I would like to shadow one of your agents on his rounds to learn more about your astonishingly effective tactics. By a stroke of luck, I happened to witness the event in the park earlier today, when your Agent Carver mightily smote the man who wounded the Mayor. Tell me, would you consider that event a typical example of the Pinkerton Agency's performance?"

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but I can't comment on an ongoing

investigation.”

He didn't sound very sorry, but I pressed on.

“Ongoing? Surely the case is solved. Agent Carver caught the perpetrator *in flagrante delicto* and defeated him before he could escape.”

He gave me the kind of smirk people give to children and idiots.

“Look, I don't have time to explain investigative procedure to some nosy academic, and as I said, the investigation is ongoing. When we have the complete picture, you'll be able to read about it in the paper. If you want to accompany one of my agents, your university may submit a request in writing. Good day.”

He picked up one of the many papers from his tray and bent over it intently, shutting me out entirely. I had been dismissed. I thought about pressing further, but as I looked around the office, I saw several officers staring at me as though I were a cat that had wandered into a dog kennel.

I got up and left the office without another word, trying not to look as though I had done something wrong. Trying not to look scared.

Since official channels had proved impassable, the next option was to confront Agent Carver directly. I needed to know how much he had been corrupted by the badge, and if possible, convince him to turn away from his course of action

before it was too late.

The chief detective had sent Carver to Cook County Hospital, so presumably, the Mayor's wounds were being treated there. The hospital was as good a place as any to meet the man, and this time, he would not have a room full of Pinkerton agents at his back.

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The Cook County Hospital was easy enough to find, but reaching the Mayor's ward proved rather more difficult. A small mob of reporters hounded a squat, middle-aged nurse at the admissions desk with questions. In the hubbub, I did my best to look down my nose and appear as though journalists were beneath me, in the hopes that the nurse would not lump me in with them.

"And what do you want?" said the nurse. "Another reporter?"

"Certainly not," I said. "I'm here to see Agent Carver."

The moment I said his name, the nurse's face went slack and her eyes glazed. She seemed to recede into herself, to a hidden place where people go to escape and submit.

"Oh, o-of course," she said. "Go through that door and take the stairs on the left up two floors. He's at the third door on your right. Y-you can't miss him," she said, sounding

panicked, as though she feared ultimate and total retribution if she did anything to displease him.

“Thank you very much,” I said, turning for the door as the flood of questions from the reporters recommenced.

Agent Carver couldn't have been here for longer than ten minutes, but he already appeared to have the hospital in an iron grip. A peaceful resolution to the situation seemed a remote possibility at this point.

When I reached the third floor, I saw that the nurse had not been exaggerating when she said that I couldn't miss the agent. He had established a military-style cordon around the Mayor's room, and he sat on a chair outside the door. I half expected him to ask me for my passport when I approached.

“Excuse me,” I said, doing my best to put him at his ease, “but do I have the honor of addressing the famous Agent Carver?”

“How do you know my name?” he said. “Who have you been talking to?”

The tone of his voice told me that, no matter how congenial I acted, his state of hyper-awareness made it impossible for me to put him at ease.

“I spoke to your superior earlier, at your office.”

“That's right,” he said. “The reporter.” He pronounced the word as though it rhymed with vermin.

“In point of fact, I am here from Cambridge University,” I



said. “Dr. Israel St. James.” I extended my hand, but I retracted it after an icy stare from Agent Carver, as though I had offered him a bribe. “I am performing a study of the methods of the Pinkerton Agency. I witnessed your actions in the park earlier today. Quite remarkable, taking control of the entire crowd like that—just by showing them your badge!”

“Of course. The purpose of a badge is to convey authority. The people at the park behaved as they ought when presented with a badge.”

A manic edge tinged his voice. An edge of entitlement. That was somewhat worrying. Not only was he comfortable with the ability to bend people to his will, but he seemed to believe it his right to do so.

“May I see the badge that carries such power?”

He gave a grim little smile. “Certainly,” he said, reaching into an inside pocket of his jacket and removing the leather wallet containing the badge. He opened it. The gleaming brass of the badge shone into my mind, bringing back the feeling of insignificance and powerlessness I had experienced at the park that morning. I felt as though some great hand had gripped my spine, demanding I bow down before him with my head to the ground.

Fortunately, my ability to identify and analyze these feelings gave me the opening I needed to fight the badge’s influence. I battled to keep my mind free, and the Insight enabled me to

see the man for what he was: a person in unjust possession of the power of a tyrant.

No piece of metal gave this man the right to rule over me. My awareness of magical influence and my strong sense of self kept me free.

Agent Carver must have read in my expression that I was less cowed by his badge than I should have been. He looked confused and angry, an unpleasant combination in a man who had already executed a fleeing criminal in full daylight in front of several thousand people.

“Tell me, Agent Carver,” I said, “do you ever worry that you may be overstepping your bounds as an investigator?”

“The law knows no bounds,” said Agent Carver, “unlike Cambridge University. Foreign academics have no jurisdiction in this country, doctor. If you will not yield to my authority as you should, then you will yield to this.” He pulled his revolver and pointed it at my forehead. “Leave.”

At that moment, a man in a suit—presumably one of the Mayor’s aides—came around the corner. I turned to him, appealing for his help in talking Agent Carver down from his megalomania. Instead, the slender young man just stood by, his bland eyes content to let Agent Carver have the upper hand. He acted as though government agents threatened people with guns in hospitals all the time.

“On my authority as an agent of the Pinkertons and a duly

appointed representative of the United States government, I order you to vacate the premises immediately and to cease your interference with my affairs.”

I tried to keep my voice steady. I like to think that I was at least marginally successful. “You would gun-down an innocent man in front of a witness, Agent Carver?”

“Mr. Crewe here is well aware of my credentials and reputation, and he knows the penalty for interfering with a sworn agent in the course of his duties. Besides that, Dr. St. James, there are no innocent men. Everybody is guilty of something. If you don’t want to answer your charges before the gates of St. Peter, then you will go back to your university and tell them that the Pinkerton Agency will suffer no interference.”

I said nothing. I just turned around and walked out. As I left, I could hear Mr. Crewe approach Agent Carver to consult him on a law enforcement matter. I heard Agent Carver begin to issue his order as I descended the stairs.

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I made it about thirty feet down the street before I collapsed onto a bench and started shaking. I had never had a gun pointed at me before. No one had threatened my life since the expedition to the House of Wisdom eight years earlier, when I

used the Rod of Asclepius to survive being run through with a sword.

Without the Rod, a single bullet from the Pinkerton agent's revolver could easily wound me beyond all hope of recovery, even if it didn't strike me in the head at point-blank range. I kicked myself for my foolishness and resolved never to embark on a recovery mission again without the Rod at my side.

I had seen in Agent Carver's eyes a manic fury under the influence of the badge. If he felt I was attempting to question his authority again, he'd likely shoot me. Given his present mental state, he might shoot me on sight if I so much as showed my face.

He could slaughter me with impunity, and the badge would convince any witnesses that I surely had it coming. I would have to stay well away from the muzzle of that man's weapon. From what I had observed at the hospital, I had no time to waste in getting the badge away from him.

Agent Carver had already started to take advantage of the Mayor's ill health, instituting himself as the central authority figure of his staff and, by extension, the entire city. Soon, perhaps the entire nation.

I felt absolutely certain that if the Mayor's convalescence went on long enough, or he died, Agent Carver would exploit the power of the Badge to put himself in charge of the city's governance. He might even institute martial law entirely and

turn Chicago into his own little kingdom.

I needed to make a plan, so I headed back to my hotel room to have a drink and clear my head.

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The next morning, I went to the offices of the *Chicago Tribune*. The reporters in this town seemed to have a reputation for sleuthing and sticking their noses everywhere, so I might as well use their knowledge to my advantage.

I approached their chief archivist and told him I was researching the Pinkertons on behalf of Cambridge, and I requested anything that the *Tribune* had relating to Agent Carver. I expected another stonewall, but the bespectacled old archivist was more than willing to put me in touch with a young reporter named Turvold, who had been covering the Pinkertons for months.

Miss Turvold proved an eager young woman with so much energy I felt surprised she didn't blur. Her clothes seemed like a combination of the typical skirt and blouse of a middle-class woman in Chicago and the traditional cloth cap of a newsboy. Her eyes had both the sparkle of youth and the piercing steel of a hard-bitten reporter, a look I wouldn't have expected of someone her age.

She was the kind of newshound that would tackle a

behemoth like the Pinkerton Agency, consequences be damned. She invited me to a working supper at a local tavern, and I gladly accepted. She brought with her pages and pages of notes on the Pinkerton Agency's activities in Chicago in general, and on Agent Carver in particular.

The documents painted a vivid picture of the effect of the badge on the city's atmosphere. James Carver had once been just another face in the Pinkerton Agency's roster, another gun for hire. He had been prepared to defend a company's interests against its own workers or protect important figures from attack. He hadn't been especially brutal or benevolent. He had just done his job.

Miss Turvold's tone changed at the point when Congress awarded federal backing to the Pinkertons.

"Agent Carver suddenly saw himself as a living bastion of law and order, prepared to take on the whole world if he saw fit," the young woman said, surprisingly aware of Carver's change in personality. "He's become more aggressive and forthright in executing his duties. I've heard reports of him accusing upstanding and well-liked street vendors of selling short measure, impounding horses whose owners left them tied on public streets for too long, and beating vagrants who were a little too ambitious in their panhandling."

I made some notes from Miss Turvold's files and promised her an exclusive for anything further I turned up on Carver.

Then, I thanked her and left. I turned in early at the hotel that night, intending to begin surveillance of Agent Carver the following morning.

He seemed the sort to rise early.

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Among Miss Turvold's files, I found the address of Agent Carver's tenement apartment in downtown Chicago, and I decided that would be my first stop. When I arrived, the property manager told me that Agent Carver hadn't been back since yesterday.

Presumably, he was on some all-night sleuthing job, or perhaps he was simply prowling the streets looking to exercise his overzealous vigilantism. The manager told me that Carver had threatened him with imprisonment only the previous week.

"I just asked him to pay rent," said the portly, disheveled man. "According to Carver, his duties and his authority meant he didn't need to pay rent. He made me sign an affidavit saying that he could keep his rooms free of charge." His expression turned helpless. "I have no idea why I did that, but now I'm stuck with it. Everyone in the building avoids him. He used to be alright, but now he's scary. Some spirit of evil's gotten into him."

I thanked the manager and made my way back to the Pinkerton headquarters, reasoning that it was the second most likely place for Agent Carver to be. I settled down on a bench down the block from the building with a morning paper. A big story dominated the front page about the previous day's assassination attempt, but most of the article was speculation and hearsay.

The article did correctly state that Agent Carver was overseeing both the investigation into the shooter's motives and the security of the mayor's room at the hospital. There was also speculation that he was acting as a de facto deputy to the mayor on all security-related issues in the city. His takeover had already started, as I had feared.

I tried to keep my surveillance of the Pinkerton headquarters discreet, to avoid being spotted by anyone whom Carver may have enlisted to watch for me.

Before long, Carver stepped out into the street and set off at a brisk pace. I followed him at a long distance, trying to avoid getting within a block of him without losing sight. Staying on Carver's trail required me to take the long route around several buildings at a quick canter.

As I followed him through Chicago, the air filled with an increasingly-powerful smell of blood and manure. We were heading for the massive city-within-a-city that was the Union Stock Yards, a 375-acre spread of animal pens,



slaughterhouses, and meatpacking plants. This batch of buildings produced more than three-quarters of America's meat.

Agent Carver entered the stock-yards and quickened his pace. I had to step lively to stay on his heel without being seen. I kept my head down below the level of the fences and snorting cattle as I stayed on Carver's trail, trying to avoid catching my breath without suffocating on the stench of the countryside.

I managed to follow Agent Carver up a set of steps to the office of the foreman. From a window overlooking a large paved square between buildings, I could see a huge crowd of protesting workers.

Each picketer marched through the square holding a sign bemoaning their poor working conditions and measly pay. Small groups of strikers sat in tight clumps in front of the various slaughterhouses and factories, refusing to let anyone in to work. This sort of action implied a massive loss of revenue until the strike ended, which was clearly why Agent Carver had been called in. I also spotted Miss Turvold among the mob, interviewing strikers for the *Tribune*.

Carver didn't seem like the kind of arbitrator who sat around a table to work out a reasonable compromise. In his mind, if the Pinkertons had been called in to end a dispute, it was because the time for peaceful negotiation had passed. I

could not sit by and wait to witness what Agent Carver believed he had the right to do. My mind's eye fed me images of workers kneeling on the ground and being shot by Carver in the back of the head—execution-style.

I shuddered at the thoughts and pushed them from my mind. I would have to stay focused and not let my fear control me. My only hope for getting the upper hand on Agent Carver was to create enough chaos to distract him, thus enabling me to subdue him with the Titania's Kiss stone and take the badge. I couldn't use the workers to cause upset, because Agent Carver would simply use the badge to calm them, and there was no telling whether Miss Turvold's presence would be a help or a hindrance.

I thought back to when Carver used the badge to catch the would-be assassin, how the whole crowd ducked to the ground while the assailant remained standing. I thought I understood how that happened, and I was hoping to use the same strategy to defeat his Authority.

Careful not to be seen, I moved among the strikers and informed several of them that Agent Carver of the Pinkerton Agency had arrived to quell their movement. I told them everything I had learned about him from Turvold's files, making sure they knew he was prepared to use an iron fist to suppress their rights.

My incendiary words riled the strikers, arising in them a

deep desire to beat him bloody with their signs if they had to. As the hubbub grew, Carver emerged from the foreman's office and shouted at the workers to disperse. One of the younger workers levered loose a paving brick from the ground and threw it at his head, missing by mere inches.

Agent Carver dodged the lobbed brick and turned back to the crowd with murder in his eyes. He took out his badge and brandished it at the strikers.

“On the authority of the City of Chicago and the Pinkerton Agency, you will cease your unlawful demonstration and return to your duties!” he said, his unassailable Authority echoing within each person. The workers stopped shouting and waving their signs. They stood stock-still but didn't bow their heads. Instead, each glared at Agent Carver, as though daring him to go further.

It was as I had suspected. The badge was a symbol of authority, infinitely adept at controlling those given to obey authority. A man willing to shoot the mayor would not be affected by a badge. In the same way, a giant group of laborers furious at their bosses and tired of being stepped on would resist the badge. When the workers lost their belief in the superiority of others, they were rendered able to shrug off the power of Authority.

The crowd of workers advanced on Agent Carver, clutching their signs before them like shields, but not one raised a fist in

anger. A few of the men in front extended their hands to grab Agent Carver and restrain him. Miss Turvold wrote feverishly in her notebook as the strike progressed, wisely avoiding the front lines. As Carver backed away from the oncoming horde, he glanced at Miss Turvold, drew his pistol, and shot the oldest striker between the eyes.

Time stopped. For an eternal moment, Carver and the workers just looked each other in the eyes. Carver's glare dared them to take another step forward. The shocked workers couldn't believe one of their own had just been gunned-down without provocation. The only movement was Miss Turvold's pencil as it blazed across the pages of her notebook.

As Carver surveyed the mob, he saw me through the forest of bodies. Our eyes met.

If he was angry before, he was furious now. He immediately raised his gun and pointed it at me, but before he could fire, a dozen strikers mobbed him from all sides.

I looked over at Miss Turvold, who appeared to have been quietly egging on the strikers from the rear. I caught her eye and she nodded at me as if to say: *Go get him*. I smiled and doffed my hat slightly in thanks.

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I didn't wait for Carver to regain his aim. In the struggle, I turned and ran away from the administration section toward the massive labyrinth of cattle pens. With all haste, I opened every gate I passed.

I heard a shout of rage behind me as Agent Carver threw the workers aside and gave chase. I turned every corner I could to avoid presenting a target for his revolver, but there were a few long stretches where I could only bob and weave as he fired on me.

The hot lead ricocheted off of steel fences on either side of me. Adrenaline helped me find the extra speed to open the gap between myself and my pursuer.

I must have released thousands of cows as I ran zigzag through the Union Stock Yards, perhaps even tens of thousands. Soon a panicked herd of cattle surrounded me, grunting and pounding along like a river of beef. They escaped the boundary of the stock-yards, stampeding through the streets of Chicago, causing angry shouts and chaos.

Agent Carver remained hot on my heels, though his weapon had long since run dry. I didn't know how much spare ammunition he was carrying, but he was clearly too blinded by fury to stop and reload. I had been counting on that.

The main streets quickly filled up with beef on the hoof, so I had to stick to the back alleys to avoid the fate of a would-be Pamplona toreador. I didn't want Agent Carver to lose me, nor

did I want him to get too close until I was ready for him. Unfortunately, he was far fitter than me, and I had to cut through the hordes of cattle several times to gain ground.

In his time wielding the badge, he had grown to depend on its power to do his job. He brandished the badge ahead of him, keeping pedestrians out of his path. Cows, though, were immune to Authority.

No level of coercion could turn aside a bullock weighing three-quarters of a ton.

After a mile and a half of panicked running, I started to stagger. With my last ounce of strength, I approached an overturned hansom cab and unhitched the horse, hauling myself over its back and holding on for dear life as the horse carried me away from Agent Carver. I looked behind and saw Agent Carver flag down a passing mounted policeman, flash his badge, and pull him bodily from the saddle.

I headed north through the city, away from the chaos of the stampede. I rode for a long time, long enough for Agent Carver to no longer see me directly, but I knew he was behind me somewhere, looking for signs of my passage. I slipped from my horse in front of a small barn on the outskirts of the city. Though exhausted, I went inside to establish a battleground for my final confrontation with Agent Carver.

I found an old butter churn in the corner and pulled out the dasher-staff. The stick was innocent enough when used to turn

cream into butter, but free of its normal surroundings, it was nothing but a thick, flat piece of wood on the end of a long handle. This would do nicely.

I took the heavy paddle in hand, climbed onto a crate by the door, and waited for the sound of hooves, my limbs still trembling from the frantic thrill of the chase.

I had managed to breathe the fire out of my lungs by the time Agent Carver arrived. I had left my horse to drink from a trough outside, so he would know I was nearby. I heard him slowly dismount and approach the door. I hid and raised my weapon at the ready.

The first thing I saw enter the barn was his revolver. He must have taken the time to reload while searching the neighborhood for me. I swung my improvised club like a golfer at St. Andrew's, knocking the gun from his hand and snapping his wrist. He screamed as the gun flew into a corner of the barn, where it discharged.

The bullet struck a lantern hanging from the wall, which shattered and spilled burning oil all over the floor. Some of the straw began to smolder.

Agent Carver spun around to face me, kicking out at one of my ankles, dropping me painfully to the floor. He tried to give me a kick in the ribs, but I lay flat and blocked his foot with the dasher-staff. He kicked again and again while I blocked his increasingly manic attacks. The handle broke on the fourth

kick. I dropped the pieces of the staff and clambered across the floor before he could plant his shoe in my face.

Carver looked to the corner where his gun had fallen, finding it surrounded by hungry flames from the broken lamp. The fire licking the walls behind Carver gave his mad and twisted face an appropriately hellish cast. He looked ready to beat me until my ears bled.

He balled up his fists and started swinging, ignoring the pain in his wrist. His punches were powerful, but his rage made them clumsy. I dodged several wild haymakers before he caught me with a ringing blow to the face. His next punch hit me in the gut. I doubled over, gasped for breath, and kept trying to avoid his fists. In the struggle, I took from within my waistcoat the letter opener containing the Titania's Kiss stone.

He hit me once or twice more, but not as solidly as the first two times. He gradually started to tire, and I was able to take the brunt of his punches in my arms and shoulders. With a mighty roar, he reared back his arm for one last punch. Using the last of my strength, I caught his fist in my palm and held it for a split second, just long enough for me to slide open the handle of the letter opener and touch the stone to the back of his hand.

Agent Carver's bloodied face immediately went blank as the stone touched his skin and his limp body collapsed to the floor. I slid the letter opener closed and replaced it in my waistcoat.



With a certain amount of ceremony, I opened Agent Carver's jacket and took the badge from an inside pocket.

As soon as my fingers gripped the badge, the thought of commanding an entire city seemed minor. Such a little thing—a piece of tin smaller than a soup can lid, and yet it could bring an entire nation to heel. The temptation to use it was strong. I could bring the entire university under my command, ensuring funding into the foreseeable future. The council could answer to *me*, rather than the other way around. If I wanted.

I quickly shook that vision from my head and stuffed the badge into my waistcoat pocket, lest I see Agent Carver's face in the next mirror.

The barn now blazed dangerously, choking me with smoke and heat. The fire was now surely out of control and certain to spread to neighboring houses before long. I thought for a moment about leaving Agent Carver in the flames, to cleanse him from the city once and for all, but I knew intellectually that he had not truly been in his right mind.

If Agent Carver was to be punished for his actions, it would be at the hands of the city he had sought to conquer—and according to the rule of law. If I took his punishment into my own hands, I would be no better than him.

I dragged him out to the street and laid him down. I took the saddle and blanket from his horse and gave it a smack to send it on its way. Then, I dipped the horse's woolen blanket

in the water trough. I laid the wet blanket over Agent Carver to at least make sure the fire didn't consume him as the badge had. I then made all haste for my hotel.

On the way, I stopped at a local firehouse to warn them about the barn fire north of town. In a rush I collected my belongings and checked out from the hotel, passing off my injuries to the desk clerk as a result of the stampede.

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I boarded the next train back to New York, certain that the utter chaos I had caused would keep any Pinkerton agents off my trail. I kept the badge in an inside pocket of my waistcoat for safekeeping. I wanted to make sure that I knew exactly where it was at all times. It seemed to seethe in my pocket, strangely heavy.

I now knew that relics were capable of influencing the behavior of any normal person who found them. So far, I had been protected by the knowledge granted to me by the Apothecary, but anyone else would be at risk, and my knowledge wasn't bulletproof.

I ducked into an unoccupied compartment and wiped my bloody face with a handkerchief. I spit blood until the white linen turned red. My poor physical condition made me ill-suited for combat.

I needed to train myself in self-defense, and I needed to keep the Rod of Asclepius close at hand, or finding the next relic might get me killed.

*[The End]*

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