

THE RELUCTANT CAPTAIN



MICHAEL TEFFT

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By

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DEDICATION

It's been said it takes a village to raise a child; I don't know if that's true, but I do know it takes a village to write a book. This book would not be possible without the comments and feedback of Melanie and Keven Simmons, Stacey Miller, and especially Donna Moren and my wife, Colleen, who both read it sentence by sentence and picked up all of the blemishes. This book wouldn't exist without your help and feedback. A special thanks goes to Emilee Jayne Smith for bringing the Daedalus to life with her wonderful cover illustrations and Megan McDowell for doing the final editing. Thank you!

This book is dedicated to all of those people who are good at science and math, and were looked at as misfits in high school. Whether you are designing our future, pushing the boundaries of scientific knowledge, keeping our infrastructure running, toiling away in the IT department, or anyone who uses their technical knowledge to solve problems, this book is dedicated to you.

Additionally, I dedicate this book to my family: to my mother Myrtle who emigrated from England and imparted to me a love of British (and Scottish) culture and cuisine (steak and kidney pudding); to my father Marvin who cultivated in me a love of science and science fiction; to my sister Michelle who constantly surprises me by her ability to overcome challenges in her life; and finally to my wife Colleen and son Alex who are the foundation of my life. Without their love and support, this novel would never exist.

CHAPTER 1

"Bloody hell! Is that really four bells?" cursed Malcolm. Lieutenant Commander Malcolm Robertson, Chief Engineer of the Her Majesty's Airship Daedalus, was up to his elbows in the main drive motor. Malcolm always tinkered with the engines to get the last bit of efficiency. Tearing down an engine while wearing his dress uniform was a first, even for Malcolm.

Malcolm had not meant to make engine adjustments in his dress uniform. He merely meant to stop by and ensure that his assistant Mr. Frye had everything under control. Upon entering the engine room, he heard a telltale vibration alerting him that something in the motor was out of synch. It was subtle to be sure, but Malcolm knew that if left too long, it might cause bigger problems. It was a minor adjustment; it would only take a moment.

The engine room bustled with noise and activity. Malcolm worked on the center of the three large motor casings. The mighty motors thrummed as they turned the three propellers used to push the Daedalus through the sky. The steady hum of the engines was the soundtrack to the activity in the engine room. Crewmen monitored the control panels for each engine, noting the temperature, revolutions and oil pressure from the gauges on each control panel. Another mate manned the engine control levers, matching the speed indicator with the speed relayed from the bridge. The smell of diesel permeated the air. The Air Service had used diesel since the days when the airships were filled with hydrogen and the danger of an open flame made coal too risky. For that, Malcolm was grateful, as he no longer had to shovel coal like he had when serving on the coal powered steam ships of the Royal Navy.

"Aye," replied a hesitant Mr. Frye. He was young, not long out of his engineering courses. His yellow hair and sharp blue eyes gave him a perpetually cheery countenance. "Aren't you supposed to be taking mess with the captain at four bells?"

"Yes," hissed Malcolm. "Just give me a moment. I've almost got it adjusted.... there." Malcolm pulled his hands out of the engine and they were covered with grease. He instinctually went to wipe them on his overalls, but caught himself when he realized that he was wearing his dress uniform. "Mr. Frye, fire it up and let's see how she's running now. And could you get me something to wipe this grease off my hands?"

Mr. Frye sent one of the mates to find a rag while he went over to restart the engine. The engine started immediately and as Frye gradually increased the power, its purr crescendoed into a low roar. Malcolm concentrated for a moment, his brows knit together in a scowl as he listened to the engine. He listened for the telltale vibration and after a few seconds more, nodded his head in approval before yelling, "Where the bloody hell is that rag?"

A nervous mate showed up and pressed the rag into Malcolm's hand. "Thank you," Malcolm said. As he wiped, he examined his hands. "Damn," he thought to himself. "I'm going to have to go back to the cabin to get this grease off."

"Mr. Frye, you have the engine room. If you need me for anything, anything at all, come and get me," he urged, hoping that Mr. Frye would get the hint and save him from dinner with the captain.

"Oh, Commander, I wouldn't want to deprive you of such an opportunity. The boys and I have everything under control here," he replied mischievously. He liked Malcolm, but couldn't help but enjoy a little fun at Malcolm's expense.

"Thank you, Mr. Frye. I'll have to find some way to pay you back for your... helpfulness," he said playfully.

"I'm sure you will," Frye replied. "Sir, you better get going, the captain will have your head if you're much later."

"Bloody hell, you're right," Malcolm cursed as he half-ran to the engineering bulkhead. "Remember, get me if you need anything.... I mean anything," he said, placing special emphasis on the last word.

"Aye, sir," Frye replied. Malcolm hesitated at the door taking one last look around the engine room. He sighed wistfully, wishing he were spending the evening here rather than in the stuffy officer's mess. In fact, he decided, he would rather shovel coal on a leaky old destroyer than go to the captain's dinner.

"Sir, you're going to be even later...." urged Frye.

"What? Yes, right. Carry on." And with that, Malcolm turned and closed the bulkhead to the engine room. Malcolm half-ran, half-walked down the hallway, still rubbing at the recalcitrant grease on his hands. He gave half salutes to all of the crewmen who saw him and stopped to salute. To each, he muttered a hasty "Carry on," and hurried down the hall.

Malcolm reached his room, Spartan by even Air Service standards. To the right of the door was a simple desk that was actually more like a table with drawers attached. A sea of paper and journals covered its surface. A single bed was attached to the left wall so that it could swing up and be secured out of the way. A built-in dresser bordered the door to his left. A shaving kit, a comb, and several jars of some sort of cream lay on its top. To the right was a closet filled with his uniforms. Other than the shaving kit and the sea of paper, there was almost no indication that anyone lived in this room.

Malcolm took a towel out of a drawer, quickly opened up one of the jars, scooped out a liberal amount of the cream, and slathered it over his hands. After a few seconds, he wiped the cream off his hands, its soap-like scent reminding him of his mother and home.

Home. He hadn't thought about his home in a very long time. Malcolm's home was the tiny village of Kilmacolm, some fifteen miles west of Glasgow, the great ship and airship building heart of the British Empire. His grandfather was a blacksmith, serving the local farming community around Kilmacolm. When the railway connected Kilmacolm to Glasgow, the little village became flooded with people seeking to live in its modest homes away from the noise and crowds of Glasgow. The train now made living in Kilmacolm and working in Glasgow a realistic proposition. Soon the young men who used to work the farms around Kilmacolm were drawn to the money available working at the shipbuilding companies. Malcolm's grandfather's smithy got less and less business. Seeing the future, Malcolm's grandfather gradually turned his trade to repairing the new steam-powered contraptions, as he called them. With his knowledge of metalworking and his smithy, he could fabricate many parts himself, allowing him to repair machines others deemed hopeless. Malcolm's grandfather's reputation as someone who could fix anything grew and he was often called to assist the railroad. While the wave of industrialization around the country made it easier to buy something new when a device broke, the frugal people of Kilmacolm went to Malcolm's granda to repair their new devices.

Malcolm's father George had no desire to run the repair shop. George assisted his father since he was old enough to hold a broom and hated it. George saw the comparatively big money in shipbuilding and went to Glasgow to earn his way. Shipbuilding was hard work—12-hour

shifts of welding and riveting. It was hot, sweaty, dangerous work. Malcolm's father had many burn scars to show for the long hours. For Malcolm's father, the chance to make his own way was worth the risk.

His mother Kate worked as a housekeeper. She was often not home to take care of Malcolm, so she sent Malcolm to assist in his granda's shop. At first, Malcolm could only clean the shop. Gradually, his granda taught him the names and functions of the tools in the shop. He became his granda's assistant, passing him tools, and holding the contraption so his granda could get at the repair work. By the time Malcolm reached ten, his granda's health began to fail. His eyes dimmed from too many years staring into the fire of the hearth and his hands began to shrivel into claws from arthritis. His infirmities did little to stop Malcolm's granda; his mind and ears were still sharp. He could tell if a machine was running correctly by the vibrations it made. He taught these skills to Malcolm who soon became the old man's eyes and hands.

Malcolm rose every day before dawn, going downstairs to his granda's shop and organizing anything his granda would need for the work of the day before leaving for school. Many days, his hands and school uniform were dirty from work begun on repairing some device left at the shop. After many notes from the school regarding Malcolm's disheveled appearance, Kate developed her special grease-cleaning cream that helped to make sure that at least Malcolm's hands were clean before school and she prevented him from ruining at least some of his school uniforms.

Malcolm smiled as he recalled this period of his life. It was the perfect life for an inquisitive boy who liked to know how things worked. By day, he studied composition, arithmetic, and science. He excelled at math; the algebra problems were little puzzles that he just had to apply the right knowledge to solve. But science was his first love and he easily mastered the subject. Years of tinkering showed him how sciences were applied; now he understood why machines worked the way they did as he began to grasp the laws that governed them.

When Malcolm was thirteen, his granda caught pneumonia. As the days wore on, it became apparent that little could be done but to ease his suffering. One night, his father told him that the end was near and he should go to say goodbye to his granda.

As Malcolm opened the door to his granda's bedroom, he saw his granda was failing. His skin had a gray cast and Malcolm could hear the wheezing in his labored breathing. His granda's eyes were closed. He hesitantly entered the room and whispered, "Granda?"

At the sound, his granda's eyes shot open. "Malcolm, my boy. Please come here. I want to talk to you." Malcolm hesitantly brought a chair next to the bed and sat down. Granda reached over and grabbed hold of Malcolm's hand.

"Don't cry, laddie," he said. "I'm an old man and I've lived a long, full life. I'm finally going to join your gram. But before I go, there are a few things you should know. The first is that when I'm gone, your da intends on closing the shop, getting rid of all me junk, as he likes to call it, and rent it out to a proper storekeeper."

"He can't sell the shop. I'll quit school and run the shop!"

"No, you won't, laddie. Your da is doing the right thing. You're a bright boy; you shouldn't be hanging around Kilmacolm scratching out a piss poor living fixing everyone's broken things. You should be designing ships or discovering some new scientific theory. You're a bright boy

and you can do so much more. That's why I told yer da to close the store. I want the money from that sale to be used for your education. Go to college. Promise me that you'll go."

"I will Granda," he said, fighting the lump that was rising in his throat.

"But," his grandfather added mischievously, "if there is anything in the shop that you'd like to keep, you best smuggle it out before your father gets around to selling the shop." This brought a chuckle from Malcolm and temporarily kept the tears from welling in his eyes.

"And there's one more thing. There's something I want you to have," Granda said as he groped on the nightstand next to the bed. "Ah, here it is." He pushed a golden pocket watch into Malcolm's hand. "The railroad gave me this for helping them fix one of their locomotives. I fabricated a replacement part for their engine. It wasn't fancy, but it got them to the depot where they could repair it properly. The bloody watch stopped working about a year after they gave it to me. I could never get the bloody thing to work. I want you to have it. If there's anyone that can get that bloody thing working, it's you. When you get it working, think of your old granda and all you learned in the shop."

"Thank you, Granda. I'll not forget," Malcolm croaked in response.

"Good boy. I never told your own da how proud I was of the man he became. I probably should have; maybe we wouldn't be at each other's throat all the time. But I'll not miss the chance to tell ye I'm proud of you, Malcolm Robertson and me only regret is that I willna get to see the fine man you'll grow into one day."

"Oh, Granda," Malcolm half-sobbed as he reached over to hold his granda. Granda feebly returned the hug.

"Alright, Malcolm, me lad. It'll be fine. 'Tis life. Could you do me another favor?" he asked conspiratorially.

"Anything, Granda," he said, wiping the tears from his face.

"In me dresser, in the third drawer down, you'll find a scarf all wrapped up in a ball. Bring it over here." Malcolm obediently went to the drawer and returned after a moment with the scarf. It felt oddly heavy for just a scarf.

"Let me have it, me boy," Granda said. Even with hands nearly crippled with arthritis, he expertly unwound the scarf until, much to Malcolm's surprise, he held a small flask.

"Now, here's me true medicine. Whisky is all I need to make me feel better." He unscrewed the flask and took a long draught. After a sigh of pleasure, he pushed the flask to Malcolm. "Here, laddie. You're nearly a man. It's about time you embraced your heritage."

Malcolm raised the flask like his granda when Granda warned, "You best be careful, if you haven't had it before." Malcolm, wanting to show his granda he was a man, took a big swallow. The liquid fire washed down his throat and he was sure that he no longer had a throat or even a stomach, just a gaping pit of fire. His eyes filled with tears and he sputtered as he tried to breathe.

Granda laughed, "I warned ya, laddie. You have to sip it. This isn't beer. This is a real drink. Now, try again. This time go a little slower and try not to drink the whole flask in one go." Malcolm did and this time, to his amazement, it tasted like something other than liquid fire. He

could taste hints of honey and even nuts. It still burned, but this time it felt warming, and not like a raging inferno.

"Much better this time, eh? You have to sip it slowly. Now give me that flask back before your mother catches me. She'll have me hide if she catches us drinking. Best not trying to rush my inevitable demise," he sighed as he placed the cap back on the flask and hid it under his pillow.

"I'm feeling tired, laddie. I think it's time I got some rest. Would ya turn off the lamp on the way out?"

"Yes, Granda," he said. Before he turned the lamp off, Malcolm looked up. "Granda?"

"What?" he replied groggily, sleep already beginning to overtake him.

"Thank you," Malcolm said.

"Thank you for what?" Granda murmured.

"For the watch, the whisky. For everything."

"You're welcome, laddie."

Malcolm turned out the light and as he reached the door, he whispered, "I love you, Granda."

"I love you too, laddie," came the whispered reply, the old ears still as sharp as ever.

Malcolm wiped the tears from his eyes and left the room. The next morning, Malcolm's mother told him that his grandfather had passed on that night. And true to his granda's words, his father set about to sell the shop that very day. Malcolm made away with a set of wrenches that had been his granda's favorite.

Malcolm caught his reflection in the mirror above what served as his dresser. Twenty years had passed since that young boy said goodbye to his granda. The man who returned his gaze had a strong, square chin and bright blue eyes. His was a strong, dependable face that some might consider ruggedly handsome. His black hair, although longer on top, tapered abruptly to a shaved area just above his ears. As he wiped his mother's cream from his hands, he smiled as he thought of her insistence of giving him several jars of her homemade concoction. She knew that her son would be right in the machinery and forever covered in oil or grease. He noticed how calloused, blistered, and rough his hands were compared to the other officers of the ship.

Suddenly, he broke out of his thoughts. The other officers, hell and blast! I've got to be at dinner, he thought. When he was satisfied that his hands were reasonably free of grease, he checked his granda's pocket watch. He was five minutes late. Damn it to Hell, why did the captain have to have these damn dinners on the first night of departure? There was always so much for the airship's engineer to do.

He looked at this reflection, straightened his uniform, ran his fingers through his hair to arrange it in a somewhat presentable fashion, and hurried out of the room to meet his fate.

CHAPTER 2

"Where do you suppose our engineer could be found?" drawled Commander Arthur Bromley. "Do you think he'll arrive all covered in grease or will he come smelling of that foul concoction he uses to remove it?"

His joke brought a chuckle from several of the other officers in the room, with a few notable exceptions: Captain Archibald Collins, Ship Surgeon Doctor Edward Jenkins, and the young Gunnery Lieutenant Charles Saxon. The officers began to gather around the table in preparation of the evening meal. Wherever one looked in the officer's mess, one saw mahogany and brass polished like mirrors. The brightness was subdued by the deep burgundy and browns of the upholstered chairs. On the wall behind the head of the table directly behind the captain's chair was a large oil painting of the Daedalus made for the occasion of its christening.

"Perhaps, unlike others here," Doctor Jenkins said looking squarely at Bromley, "his duties require constant attention."

"Yes, yes," said Bromley disgustedly. "We all know how hardworking our chief engineer is, but he is an officer after all. He doesn't have to get his hands dirty doing the work. That's why he has an engineering crew."

"So, when you're wounded, I should leave you to the tender mercies of my assistants rather than 'dirtying my hands' with actual work," Jenkins suggested pointedly.

"No, that's different. You're a doctor; it's your job to attend to the wounded."

"And Robertson's job is to attend to the ship. Mark my words, there will come a day when you're glad he spends so much time doing the dirty work," Jenkins remarked.

Bromley snorted. "I think our Mr. Robertson is in love with the ship. You never see him looking for companionship when we have shore leave. He's always in his bunk reading technical journals or tinkering with some contraption or another."

"Perhaps he's more interested in bettering himself than chasing women," retorted Jenkins.

"Well, that's just it, isn't it?" Bromley replied sarcastically. "It wouldn't be very hard for him to improve himself. He is a stupid jock after all. He already has rank far exceeding his station. How does he think he could possibly be an officer like us?"

"Not all of us have been privileged to have been born with a silver spoon in our mouths," retorted Jenkins, in a tone of anger. "Some of us have to work for what we have. I, for one, am very grateful that our so-called jock works as hard as he does. On more than one occasion, he's saved everyone on this ship. Did you forget Constantinople?"

Bromley's face immediately reddened. "I have not forgotten, Jenkins," he said coldly. Bromley had been the commander of the watch as they approached Constantinople. In order to reach the city ahead of schedule, he had ordered Robertson to run the engines at full all night. Robertson strenuously objected, telling Bromley that running the engines for that period of time would cause them to seize up as they had not had a proper retrofit in months and were scheduled for such in Constantinople. Bromley insisted, to the point that he threatened to throw Robertson in the brig for insubordination. Robertson relented, but insisted that the log clearly state he was against the order, but following it nonetheless.

As Robertson predicted, first the starboard engine seized up, followed by the port engine and ending with the main engine itself. The heat from running the engines at top speed for several hours had caused the engine chambers to warp just enough that the pistons refused to move, despite Robertson's attempts to cool the engines. Malcolm tore the engines apart without waiting for them to cool and received several nasty burns for his efforts. He had opened the engine room windows as well as the service bay doors in order to have as much cool air circulate in the room as possible, in the hopes of cooling the overworked engines.

It was Malcolm himself who made an improvised forge using a welding torch as the heat source and reshaped the combustion chambers so that the pistons could move. They weren't perfectly aligned and it caused much sputtering, and it was Malcolm himself who manually adjusted the fuel flow so that the engines would continue to fire.

Bromley received a rebuke from the captain as a result of this episode. Malcolm, despite his near insubordination, received a commendation for technical expertise for allowing the Daedalus to complete its mission to Constantinople only slightly behind schedule. Bromley resented the fact that this uncultured jock had been right and made Bromley look like an idiot in front of the captain and crew.

Captain Archibald Collins, sensing that Jenkins's rebuke would provoke a much stronger response from Bromley, cleared his throat. "Whatever, the state of our chief engineer, the issue is not his heritage, station, or technical acumen. The real issue is that he's delaying our meal." Captain Archibald Collins locked his steely gaze on both Doctor Jenkins and Commander Bromley. Jenkins nodded slightly, understanding the captain's silent order to disengage from his verbal confrontation with Bromley. Bromley was much slower to take the meaning of the captain's gaze and several awkward seconds passed before Bromley, too, nodded his acquiescence.

"Well said, Captain," ventured Lieutenant Charles Saxon. "I, for one, will be glad of a meal and look forward to finding out more about our mysterious mission that had us leave in such a hurry."

Captain Archibald Collins nodded to Saxon. "In due time, my young lieutenant. Until then, perhaps some more wine." Collins indicated to the midshipmen to top off the men's glasses. The captain found he liked the young lieutenant who never seemed to take sides and was always quick with a quip or remark to lighten the mood. He was glad to have someone on board with this ability because he sensed that Bromley's enmity towards Robertson was a powder keg ready to be ignited, probably at the worst possible time.

He was tired of this bickering. In fact, he felt tired of the burden of command. He had seen much in his long and distinguished career as a naval officer. He had started as a midshipmen aboard the HMS Agamemnon, one of the early steam-powered battleships—so early in fact, that it continued to use sails for propulsion. He had been part of the bombardment of Sevastopol and had not forgotten its horrors. From there he took positions on many ships of various configurations until he rose to the rank of captain. Seeing the exciting possibilities of airships and the ability to sail not just over the seas but over land as well, Collins volunteered to join the nascent Royal Air Service and captained many of the early airships. When the HMA Daedalus was built, Collins was the most qualified captain in the Air Service and received the honor of captaining the Air Service's flagship.

A ship run by Captain Archibald Collins ran with the precision of a fine watch. Discipline and adherence to naval regulations and traditions were paramount. Crews around the Royal

Navy and Air Services used the nickname "Iron Neck Collins" to describe his rigid attention to regulations and protocol. From most, this nickname was given in loving tribute. Although Collins expected the most out of his men, he treated those who responded well. And those who did not respond had a very difficult tour of duty until a transfer could be arranged.

But Collins was tired. The dark hair and beard of his youth had long since turned silver. Years of service on the sea and in the sky had etched deep wrinkles in his face. The fire in his fierce grey eyes did not burn with the same intensity of youth. Nearly forty years of sailing on sea and air was enough. He wished to see his wife and get to know the children, although now grown, who had not known their father except through letters from exotic, far away locations and precious few trips home. He knew in his heart that this would be his last voyage. He would ask for a desk job in the Admiralty, or retire outright.

Just then, the clatter of boots approaching quickly could be heard. "I believe that is our tardy engineer," said the captain. The boots slowed to a measured step shortly before a knock was heard on the bulkhead door.

Malcolm burst through the door, saying, "My apologies, Captain Collins, I was detained in Engineering. Please forgive my lateness."

"Anything serious?" asked the captain.

"There was a slight vibration in the main engine. One of the drive gears was a bit dodgy so I stopped to realign it before it could cause a bigger problem."

"And this had to be dealt with now?" asked the captain.

"Better now than after the engine stops," joked Malcolm. He caught the captain's stern gaze. "Um, no, sir, it didn't have to be done now. It probably could have waited until later. I apologize, Captain. I just don't like to wait for small problems to become big problems when you can nip them in the bud."

"Yes, Mr. Robertson. Small problems need to be dealt with early before they become large problems... like tardiness."

"Sorry, Captain. It won't happen again."

A flicker of an amused smile crossed Captain Collin's face. "Of course it will, Mr. Robertson. Your dedication to ship is admirable, if somewhat misplaced at times. You must remember, Mr. Robertson, a machine is a tool. A tool only does what a man directs it to do. This ship is also a tool—a tool for His Majesty's will. We serve His Majesty, not the tool."

"Yes, sir," Malcolm said quietly.

"Very well. Mr. Robertson, please sit down. Midshipman Brown, fill Mr. Robertson's glass and tell Chef that we are ready for dinner."

As midshipmen hustled about with the food and quietly served the officers, Malcolm was silent. He tried to be on time, but he just hadn't liked the sound of the vibration. And the captain's rebuke stung. He was in danger of becoming like that gear—something that needed to be replaced to keep the ship running as a whole.

As the soup was served, Malcolm always dreaded this part; which of the damnable utensils was he supposed to use? He could never remember whether the utensils were used from inside out or outside in. He was thankful that his wine glass had been filled so he knew which was for wine and which was for water. He decided to put off the decision of which spoon to use by drinking some wine. As he raised his glass, he saw Bromley watching him with a bemused look; he knew Malcolm was stalling and Bromley was waiting to make sure Malcolm's social inadequacy was made obviously apparent.

Just then, a sputtering cough came up from Lieutenant Saxon seated across from Malcolm. As Malcolm shifted his gaze to the lieutenant to see if he was alright, he had the sense that the lieutenant had pointed to the correct spoon as he raised his napkin to his mouth to cover his cough. "Here's a word of advice," he said when he recovered his breath. "Don't attempt to breathe the wine... it's much better to drink it instead."

The crew laughed quietly. Malcolm looked at the lieutenant, nodding ever so slightly. He kept an eye on Bromley who was ready to pounce. Malcolm's hand descended toward the wrong spoon, but at the last minute he moved to grasp his soup spoon. Bromley took a breath, about to say something, when he noticed Malcolm holding the correct spoon. Malcolm smiled and looked inquisitively at Bromley as if waiting for him to say something. Bromley glowered and returned to his meal.

The soup, the chef's infamous pea soup, was better than usual. Malcolm was pleasantly surprised when he was able to pick up the spoon from the bowl without bringing the bowl with it. Malcolm had heard the riggers say that they used Chef's pea soup to patch holes in the airship's skin and he never wondered at it. Despite its adhesive properties, Malcolm did have to admit that the soup was very good. Conversation came to a stop as all of the men concentrated on their meals.

The soup gave way to roast duck, potatoes, peas with mint, cheeses, and finished in a lemon pudding for dessert that was very delicate and flaky, much to everyone's surprise. All during the meal, Bromley and Malcolm exchanged looks—Bromley hoping to catch Malcolm in a faux pas, and Malcolm returning an inquisitive look that further infuriated Bromley. On those occasions where Malcolm's certainty of dining etiquette wavered, he shot a furtive look at Lieutenant Saxon who would take the opportunity to extravagantly praise Chef's culinary skills and with a gesture, point to the correct implement.

The midshipmen hustled the dishes away and brought out the port. Malcolm thought it a hideous replacement for a dram of whisky, but kept that thought strictly to himself. When the midshipmen left the room, Captain Collins drew himself out of his chair and addressed the officers.

"Gentlemen, these orders come directly from the First Lord of the Admiralty McKenna himself. We are to fly at best speed to St. Petersburg. Once there, we will take on a number of passengers and await further instruction."

"St. Petersburg? What are we doing in St. Petersburg? And since when have we become a passenger service?" asked Bromley.

"The orders say nothing of this, except that this is a mission of the utmost importance and secrecy is a must. Only those of us here must know our destination until we are within sight of St. Petersburg. Is that understood?"

The officers agreed.

Lieutenant Saxon ventured, "Is it to be some sort of cultural exchange? It was widely reported that the tsar and the king talked frequently at King Edward's funeral. Perhaps, this is some gesture of goodwill between our two nations."

"Perhaps," agreed Captain Collins, "but that is merely conjecture. And I insist that you all keep such conjecture to yourselves until such time as the Admiralty provides further orders."

"The Admiralty, like our Lord, moves in mysterious ways," offered Doctor Jenkins.

This brought a chuckle to all. "Indeed it does. And sometimes I think not even the Lord knows what the Admiralty is up to. Be that as it may, I need all of you to make sure your men are ready for any situation. Commander Bromley, you will be in charge of the navigators. Our orders are to take us over the North Sea, across Norway and Sweden, across the Baltic, entering Russia near St. Petersburg. The course is explicitly laid out in the orders. Under no circumstances is the Daedalus to fly over or near Germany. Got that Bromley?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lt. Commander Robertson, we'll need all and more that you can coax out of our engines. Since we're taking the long way to get there, we need best available speed and then some. Please use your magic to coax every bit of power out them."

"Aye, Captain," Malcolm replied.

"Lt. Saxon, I want you to keep the gunnery crews on high alert. Run fire control drills steadily. I'm not expecting any trouble, but I'm concerned about what's left unsaid in our orders and I'd rather not be caught unawares."

"Yes sir," replied Lt. Saxon.

Captain Collins continued to give orders to the other officers, leaving Dr. Jenkins to last.

"Well, Doctor, I have nothing specific for you other than to hope to God we don't need your services. I believe that's it. We all have our jobs to do, so I believe we should all retire for the evening."

As the officers filed out of the officer's mess one by one, Doctor Jenkins hung back. "Captain, may I have a word with you in private?"

"By all means, Doctor. Care for another port?"

"Don't mind if I do," Jenkins said. He didn't want to bring this up, but with what appeared to be such an urgent mission, he thought it best to get it out in the open. When the last officer had filed out, Jenkins closed the door, took the proffered port and sat in a chair facing the captain. "Captain, I have some concerns."

"Damn it, Edward. Call me Archie. None of that formal 'Captain Collins' claptrap. We've been friends for too long to stick to protocol." The captain passed the doctor another glass filled with port.

"Archie, that's why I want to talk to you." He paused, taking a sip of port and gathering his thoughts before he continued. "What do you think of Bromley?"

"Very good executive officer. Does what he's told, keeps the crew disciplined. Might be a bit too ambitious for his own good," he added, remembering the near debacle of Constantinople. His ambition nearly cost the Empire the aid of the Ottomans. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm concerned about his attitude. Particularly his attitude to our chief engineer."

"What do you mean, Edward?"

"He takes every opportunity he can to make Robertson look like less of an officer to anyone who will listen. You heard his little dissertation before the meal. That kind of talk is dangerous."

"Well, Bromley does have a point. It is a bit preposterous that someone like that could be an officer, and third in the chain of command."

Jenkins looked at Collins with shock. "You really think that? You don't think someone who used only his God-given brains and talents to forge a position for himself is worthy of his commission? Is that what you think of me? Do you remember, Archie, when I first served with you? Do I merit that level of contempt?"

Collins reached over and put his hand on Jenkins' shoulder. "God, Edward, no that's not what I meant. I just meant... I don't know. Maybe I'm getting too old for this." He sighed heavily before continuing. "Do you remember what it was like to serve on the old ships, before steam ran everything? You could tell by the feel of the wind how fast you were going and with a sexton, always know where you're going. Officers were sailors first and foremost. Now, we have officers that know nothing about sailing or even flying. I guess I miss the old days when you had to be a sailor to be a captain."

"For crying out loud, Archie, you're remembering a past that never was. Do you remember that idiot captain we had when we sailed to India? What was his name?"

"Barclay."

"Right, Captain Owen Barclay. What a right git he was. I'll never forget when Commander Ferrence actually talked him ashore for a snipe hunt and Barclay led the hunting team himself."

Both men chuckled at the memory. Collins sighed. "I think I'm too old for this, Edward. This piloting is a young man's game. I think my time is past. Between you and me, this will be my last mission as captain of the Daedalus. I intend to retire when this mission is complete."

"I'll miss you, old friend," Jenkins said soberly. "Have you thought of who will take over for you?"

"Bromley, of course. Why?"

"I'm not sure he really is the right man for the job."

"What do you mean?"

"Does he know how to do anything other than give orders? Have you ever seen him actually perform any duties?"

"He's the first officer. He doesn't have to do the work, he's there to direct it."

"Aye, but look at Robertson. He has a full team of men and yet he almost always comes to mess with grease under his fingernails. His hands are those of a sailor—hard, calloused, scarred. Bromley's hands, I'm sure, are lily-white and soft. You were just lamenting missing men who knew something about being a sailor. I think what you meant is you missed men who knew hard work was part of an officer's life. Robertson wouldn't have any of his men do anything he himself wouldn't do. I don't think the same can be said of Bromley."

"Why have you soured so much on Bromley?" inquired Captain Collins.

"He's a nice enough fellow, I suppose. But he is ambitious and impatient—a dangerous combination in someone responsible for the lives of everyone on this ship. And dare I say, a bit of a bully. I think he thinks his name can shield him from much."

"Alright, I'll take your words under advisement. When did you take such a shine to our Scot?"

"I think it was the whole Constantinople affair. He could have made things even worse for Bromley if he wanted. When the time came to testify, he downplayed the damage that Bromley had wrought and even tried to downplay his role. That's when I realized that he was a remarkable man."

"Thank you Edward. Your counsel, as always, is most welcome. But as I have to make first rounds in the morning, I must retire for the night."

"Good night, Archie," Jenkins said as he left the officer's mess.

Archibald Collins stopped for a minute and stared at the place where Malcolm Robertson had sat at dinner. Was he truly that bad a judge of character? Had the years finally made him senile? He would watch both Bromley and Robertson with a much closer eye in the days to come, he thought to himself as he shut the door to the officer's mess and retired to his quarters.

CHAPTER 3

Before turning in for the night, Malcolm stopped by the engine room and relayed the captain's orders that they should make best speed for the duration of the voyage. Satisfied that all was in order, Malcolm left orders for someone to get him if anything out of the ordinary happened and returned to his quarters.

Malcolm removed his dress uniform, carefully hanging it in his closet. He had learned long ago that taking a few minutes now would save him many minutes later. There was nothing that the other officers detested more than wrinkles in your dress uniform.

Collapsing on his bunk, Malcolm sighed in relief that the evening was over. He hated those dinners with a passion; with Bromley poised like a snake to point out and gloat over every faux pas. Bromley had been inclined to be like that even before Constantinople. After evenings like this, mused Malcolm, why did I ever bother to become an officer?

The answer came to him immediately: to become an engineer. Malcolm kept his promise to his granda and finished school with top marks in all his subjects with the exception of composition; he always hated the tedium of writing the essays and themes. But he finished his Leaving Certificate Examination with flying colors and was accepted to the University of Glasgow to study engineering.

In his second year of university, Malcolm's father was grievously injured at the shipyards. He was welding a large plate to the hull of a ship when the plate slipped and fell, crushing his whole left side. Malcolm left immediately for home. His father's injuries were severe. His legs and arms were broken in several places. Operations were needed to pin the bones together. Soon, all of Malcolm's tuition money had been used to pay for his father's medical bills. The Robertsons still had Kate's income as a maid and the rent from the greengrocer downstairs, but there was no longer any money for Malcolm's education. With his engineering degree incomplete, he might hope to be an apprentice draftsman, but nothing else.

Malcolm stayed with his parents for several months to help care for his father, missing not only the end of the current term, but the term after as well. As the days turned to weeks, Malcolm realized that his ability to return to university grew slimmer with each passing day and each medical bill.

Finally, one night after dinner, Malcolm informed his parent's that he was withdrawing from college to find a job at the shipyards.

"No son of mine is going to work in those bloody shipyards!" thundered George.

"Your da's right, Malcolm," his mother added. "Look what happened to him. I couldn't bear to see something like this or worse happen to you!"

"It takes money to go to university," Malcolm replied angrily. "Where's that going to come from?"

"I doona know Malcolm," his father replied, softening his tone a bit. "We'll think of something. We can sell the house, I can find other work."

"Where are you going to find work, Da?" You can't do much with your left arm and it's all you can do to walk to the privy. And selling the house won't help. At least you have income from the greengrocer downstairs."

"We'll think of something. I don't want you doing something hasty," George said.

"This isn't a hasty decision; I've been thinking about this for months. I think that maybe with some college, I might not have to work in yards. I could be a draftsman's apprentice, maybe even become a draftsman someday."

"Malcolm, no, I can't let you do that. I promised my da that I'd make sure you were an engineer, designing and building things of your own. I don't want to see you wasting your talent simply copying over someone else's designs."

"But, Da, I can't leave you and mum without anything so that I can go to university!" Malcolm protested.

"You will go to university, Malcolm Francis Robertson!!" his father thundered. "I promised my da and meself that you wouldn't work in those bloody shipyards!"

Malcolm said nothing. Knowing his father was too upset to continue, Malcolm dropped the subject and left the room. The next morning, he arose before dawn and took the early train to Glasgow. He wore his only suit, hoping that he might be able to find work as a draftsman's assistant. On the train, he pulled out a gold pocket watch, the one his granda had given him on the night he died. Malcolm had, with great difficulty, fixed the watch on his own, taking the movements apart piece by piece and carefully reassembling it until it finally kept time. But Malcolm had to wind the thing incessantly or it would start losing time almost immediately. As he wound the stem, he couldn't help but think back to that night and his promise to go to college. How could he fulfill the promise without pushing his parents to the poor house? They might be able to live on the rent for the store and his mother's meager wages as a housekeeper, but there was no way they could afford university.

Malcolm decided to try first at the university to see if there was some way he could continue. His hard luck story brought sympathy from school officials, but little else. Dejected, he started toward the shipyards when he saw a naval ship sailing up the Clyde to the shipyards, likely for repair or refitting. It was a huge ironclad battleship and appeared to be underway solely on steam power as no sails were furled. Malcolm stopped and watched as it neared, making out the name: HMS Bellerophon. He stared in wonder as the ship continued on to the shipyards and disappeared amongst the forest of masts and cranes.

Suddenly, Malcolm remembered a guest lecture in his last semester. A representative of Her Majesty's Navy had appeared to the startled class of would-be engineers, explaining that openings were now available for engineers in Her Majesty's Navy and the newly formed Her Majesty's Air Service. The officer explained that with additional training at both Keyham College in naval and aero engineering and an additional two years at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, they would become assistant engineers—commissioned officers at the rank of sub-lieutenant.

Malcolm returned to the university, trying to find someone who knew of the officer who had visited his class. Finally he had a name, Commander Hugh Oakleigh. He was head of the recruitment center near the shipyards. Malcolm went to the shipyards, but instead of begging for a draftsman's apprentice position, he met with Commander Oakleigh and discussed a future in the Royal Navy or even the new Air Service. Malcolm relayed the tale of how he had left

school because of his father's injuries in the shipyard and how he no longer had the finances to attend school. He also wanted to make sure his parents would be able to live in their home and support themselves, and perhaps even find an operation that could help his father. Commander Oakleigh was impressed with Malcolm's marks and was also impressed by Malcolm's sense of duty to his parents. He saw in Malcolm someone who believed in duty and doing the right thing. Those were qualities that the Royal Navy needed and he was anxious to bring Malcolm into the service. Oakleigh explained that to be accepted he would need a sponsor. As Malcolm was about to say that he had no sponsor, Oakleigh said, "Don't worry Malcolm. I will sponsor you." He looked at Malcolm appraisingly. "Although we've only just met, I can tell that you are honest, earnest, and loyal. You are the type of man we need in the Royal Navy." Oakleigh was ready for Malcolm to sign the enlistment contract, but Malcolm balked.

"I must talk this over with my parents; this affects them as much as me".

"I understand," said Oakleigh. "I will hear from you soon I hope?"

"If all goes well, you will see me tomorrow, pen in hand."

Malcolm returned home. After dinner told his parents about the meeting with Commander Oakleigh and the opportunity to continue his education while eventually being able to help his parents. At first they were reticent, but soon realized that Malcolm's arguments were sound; it allowed him to continue his education, it would get him out of shipyards, and it would give him a chance to know more of the world than Kilmacolm and Glasgow. They were concerned about him being in armed combat, and told him as much.

In the end, George looked at his son and asked "Malcolm, is this really what you want to do, laddie?"

Malcolm was about to say that it was the best he could do to keep his promise to Granda when he caught himself. "Do I really want to do this?" he asked himself. And the answer that came back surprised him.

"Yes, Da, I do. I know that it's the best way for me to keep my promise to you and Granda, but it's something more than that. I think I want to do something valuable and what's more valuable than using your talents for the good of your country?"

Tears welled in George's eyes. "That's all I wanted to hear from you, Malcolm. That you really want to do this. Because a sailor's life is hard and can be very lonely. I just wanted to know that this was your heart's wish."

"It is, Da," Malcolm replied.

"Then you have my blessing. Not that you bloody well needed it. You'd have done whatever you wanted to do anyway."

"But your blessing means a great deal to me, Da. Thank you."

"I think your granda would be proud. But most of all, I'm proud of you."

The next day, George met Commander Oakleigh to sign his enlistment contract and soon he was whisked away for two more years of engineering training and then two years of naval college. George and Kate Robertson scrimped and saved and were able to attend Malcolm's

commissioning; George himself pinning on Malcolm's new rank of sub-lieutenant, assistant engineer.

Malcolm served on a couple of naval vessels before applying to the Air Service. He returned to Keyham College for refresher courses in aerodynamics, aero propulsion, flight control, and piloting. While at Keyham, Malcolm decided to complete the command course so that he might be able to captain an airship someday. He had no strong desire to captain an airship, but felt that it might increase his chances for promotion so that he might actually design airships rather than keeping them running.

That young idealistic engineer had no idea what a struggle it would be to gain the respect of the other officers. Many came from families with long traditions of military service. In all his assignments, Malcolm had always felt like a square peg in a round hole when it came to the other officers. His run in with Commander Bromley during the Constantinople incident made him feel like even more of an outsider. Malcolm sighed; it had been going on for so long that tossing and turning over it tonight wouldn't help. He turned the lights off in his cabin and grabbed a few hours of shuteye.

The next few days were routine as the Daedalus crossed the North Sea, continuing over Norway and Sweden before making for the Baltic. The weather, which could be treacherous over the North Sea, held and the Daedalus' trip was uneventful. When Malcolm turned in for the night after their third day of travel, the Daedalus was ready to begin the final push across the Baltic Sea.

When Malcolm woke, light was just filtering in. He grabbed his day uniform—in his case, a set of grease-covered overalls, a heavy tight fitting shirt and equally tight pants. No loose clothing in the engine room. Malcolm had seen first-hand what could happen if an engine grabbed a loose piece of clothing or hair and it was a sight Malcolm never wanted to see again.

Malcolm stalked to the mess and grabbed a ship's biscuit and a mug of tea. As he sat eating the dry hard biscuit, he heard several of the crew mention that the Daedalus had made excellent speed overnight and they were already over the Baltic. Malcolm couldn't help but smile to himself, proud of the efficiency he wrung from the ship's engines. Grabbing another mug of tea, he went aft to the engine room. As Malcolm approached, he could immediately hear that something was wrong. He pushed open the door and said, "What the bloody hell is going on? Why didn't someone get me?"

Blank faces looked up at him, "Commander, everything is fine," one of the engineering mates offered.

"You can't hear that rumbling under the cycle of the engine?" Malcolm demanded.

The engineering mates stopped to listen. Slowly, the realization crept over their faces. The sound had started gradually and hearing the constant hum of the engines, it was easy to lose track of the sound.

"Alright, first thing we need to do is to shut down the engines and see what's happening. I better call the bridge." Malcolm picked up the handset and punched the button to connect to the bridge.

"Bridge. Duty Officer Kelsey."

"Kelsey, this is Engineer Robertson. I need to speak to the commander of the watch."

"That would be Commander Bromley, sir."

Bloody hell, just my bloody luck, thought Malcolm. "Put him on," he sighed.

"Aye, sir." There were sounds of muffled conversation as the young lieutenant meekly asked for the commander to take the call.

"What is it, Robertson? We have important work to do here and don't have time for your complaints."

"Sorry to be an inconvenience, sir," Malcolm said, a little more pointedly than he meant. "There's something wrong with the engines, sir. I need to take them offline so I can figure out what's happening."

"What do you mean, there's a problem? We're running at full speed, there's no problem."

"Look, I know what I'm talking about. If we continue to run all three engines without doing anything about it, we won't have engines at all."

"I'm not convinced that there's really a problem. I think you're just doing this for some misbegotten attempt at attention."

"Bromley, you should know me better than that. I don't ask for attention and praise, I just do my job to the best of my ability. And those abilities tell me that we will have serious problems if we don't do something about the engines soon."

"Why should I take your word for it? Why hasn't Frye reported any of this? I believe he's in charge of the night shift."

"Remember what happened the last time you didn't believe me, *sir*," Malcolm added with special emphasis on the title.

The line crackled with static, as there was no response. Malcolm was sure he could feel the anger emanating through the receiver.

"Very well. But take only one engine offline at a time. That way we'll still be able to make good time. If that's alright with you," Bromley added venomously.

"That will work. We'll start with the main engine. The other two engines should be able to help us maintain speed."

"Anything else, Engineer?" he added in a mocking tone.

"No, sir. I'll report when all engines are back on line and running at full capacity, sir."

"You do that, Robertson," Bromley said. Malcolm heard the receiver slam heavily before the connection was broken.

"All right, laddies. Let's get this main engine off line and take a look and see what the trouble is." Within minutes, Malcolm and his capable crew had the main engine torn apart and he didn't like what he saw.

"Ach, the whole damn thing is gummed up. Look at how the fuel lines are all clogged and there's some kind of residue in the firing chambers. It's a bloody mess. It looks like some sort of carbonization." Malcolm pulled off his gloves and scraped at some of the carbonization with a fingernail until some of it flaked off. He examined it closely and sniffed at it. It had an odd smell almost sweet, like...

"Sugar! Someone has put bloody sugar in the fuel! Mr. Chapham, come with me, you and I are going to check the fuel supply. The rest of you, clean the engine up as best you can and get ready to fire her back up on my orders."

Malcolm and Chapham left the engine room and went to Fuel Storage. "Chapham, turn off the fuel pump; I'm going to check the fuel." Malcolm went to the large primary fuel tank. He carefully opened a spigot on the side and allowed a few drops to fall on his fingers. As he brought them to his nose, he could immediately smell a sweet note that definitely should not be in the fuel. Malcolm repeated the operation on the secondary fuel tank. This time, no sweetness could be detected. Malcolm put a drop of the fuel on his tongue. It tasted like fuel.

Malcolm went to the manual override switch. Malcolm had built a switch to allow the fuel pump to automatically switch to the secondary tank when a special float he had designed reached a predefined level. Now, he was thankful that he had had the foresight to leave a manual override option in place. Malcolm turned the switch and ordered Chapham to restart the fuel pump. The pump whirled to life and fuel from the secondary tank was flowing through the lines.

By the time Malcolm and Chapham returned to the engine room, the crew had the engine put back together and ready to go. "Walters, bleed out the fuel line for about 5 seconds and then we'll try a restart."

The crew bled the fuel line and initiated the engine startup. At first, the engine started hesitantly and sputtered as some of the last of the contaminated fuel made its way through the engine. The engine soon recovered and within seconds was purring at its usual low hum and Malcolm was satisfied.

"Good job, laddies. Now we have to repeat that on the port and starboard engines. I want you to take the engines down, clean the bloody hell out of them and bleed the fuel lines for a few seconds. We have a tank full of contaminated fuel that's gummed up our engines." Malcolm reached down and held up the can of fuel bled from the engines.

"Chapham, go find Mr. Frye. I want to talk to him. He's usually in the mess after his shift."

"Yes, sir." As he opened the bulkhead to leave the engine room, he nearly bowled over a surprised Lt. Saxon who seemed about to knock on the door. Chapham excused himself for nearly knocking over the senior officer and darted down the hall towards the mess hall.

"Ah, Lt. Commander Robertson. The captain asked that you come to the bridge immediately."

"Why?" Malcolm asked, still looking at the fuel can.

"I'm not sure. He said it was important."

Probably that dust up with Bromley, Malcolm thought. That bastard really seemed to have it in for him. But right now, Malcolm needed to get to the bottom of the mysterious contaminant.

"Alright, I'll be there soon. I have a wee bit of a crisis here to handle."

"He did say it was urgent," added Lieutenant Saxon.

"I said I'll be there as soon as I can. I will tell the captain that you delivered the message and it will be my head in the noose, not yours, Lieutenant," Malcolm said, pointedly emphasizing the officer's junior rank.

"Yes, sir," Saxon said hesitantly and turned to leave, nearly bumping into a surprised Lieutenant Frye. "Excuse me," Saxon sputtered at Frye and hurried down the hallway.

"What's his problem?" asked Frye.

"I don't know. Probably thinks he's going to be in trouble with the captain for my tardiness. Never mind that. Did you supervise the refueling before liftoff?"

"You know I did. It's right there in the log, sir. Why, is something wrong?"

"You could say that," Malcolm said. "Did the fuel smell funny to you yesterday?"

"No. It smelled like fuel. What are you getting at, sir?"

"We just bled off fuel from the primary tank. Smell this."

Frye sniffed the fuel. "Smells like fuel to... hold on, do I smell something sweet?"

Malcolm nodded. "Aye, laddie. It seems someone dumped sugar in the primary fuel tank. I would bet that Chef is missing a 50 pound bag of sugar from the pantry."

"So what do we do?"

"We cleaned the main engine and I've switched us over to the secondary tank which doesn't seem to be fouled. I've got the crews tearing down port and starboard engines and once they're set, we'll be good to go. I know you just got off of your watch Matthew, but do you mind keeping an eye on things here while I go to talk with the captain?"

"Any idea what he wants?" Frye asked.

"I had a slight, very slight, dust up with Bromley this morning about the engines. Hopefully this," he said, indicating the fuel can, "will change his mind."

Frye laughed, "You really do know how to make friends."

"Aye, why do ye think they put me in the engine room?" Malcolm laughed. "I should be back shortly." Malcolm turned and left the engine room with the fuel can in hand.

Malcolm climbed the stairs going up to the main level and proceeded down the main hall.

Suddenly, there was an ear-shattering blast and the whole ship lurched up suddenly. Malcolm, unable to keep his feet, was pitched onto his back and cracked his head on the metal walkway. Shite! What the bloody hell is going on, Malcolm thought as he struggled to pull himself up. The front of the airship seemed to be tilted up at a thirty-degree angle and Malcolm felt like he was climbing a wall. The fuel can clattered down the walkway after spilling its contents everywhere.

Malcolm got to his feet and used the walls and the doors to pull his way forward. There were sounds of frantic activity all around him, but oddly, no emergency klaxon. That was not a good sign.

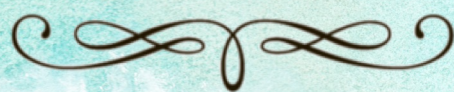
Malcolm was about twenty feet from the bulkhead to the bridge. Desperately, he hauled himself from doorway to doorway, trying not to lose his footing so that he would slide back down the hall. After minutes of effort, he braced himself against the bulkhead leading to the bridge and opened the door.

Malcolm stared incredulously out the door where he only saw sky and ocean where the bridge should have been.

*Watch for more updates on the release of
The Reluctant Captain
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WHEN A MYSTERIOUS EXPLOSION DESTROYS THE BRIDGE OF THE HIS MAJESTY'S AIRSHIP *DAEDALUS*, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER MALCOLM ROBERTSON, CHIEF ENGINEER, FINDS HIMSELF THRUST INTO THE ROLE OF CAPTAIN ON A SECREIVE MISSION TO RUSSIA.

WITH AN AIRSHIP FULL OF BRITISH AND RUSSIAN SCIENTISTS WHOSE INTELLIGENCE IS MATCHED ONLY BY THEIR EGOS, SPIES CONVINCED HE MAY HAVE SABOTAGED THE *DAEDALUS* HIMSELF, AND THE REAL SABOTEUR STILL ABOARD, MALCOLM MUST FIND A WAY TO UNCOVER THE MYSTERY ON THE RUSSIAN STEPPE AND BRING HIS CREW SAFELY HOME.



MICHAEL TEFFT IS SOFTWARE DEVELOPER, MUSICIAN, AND AUTHOR WHO LIVES IN CENTRAL NEW YORK. HIS EXPLOITS CAN BE FOUND AT RELUCTANTAUTHOR.COM