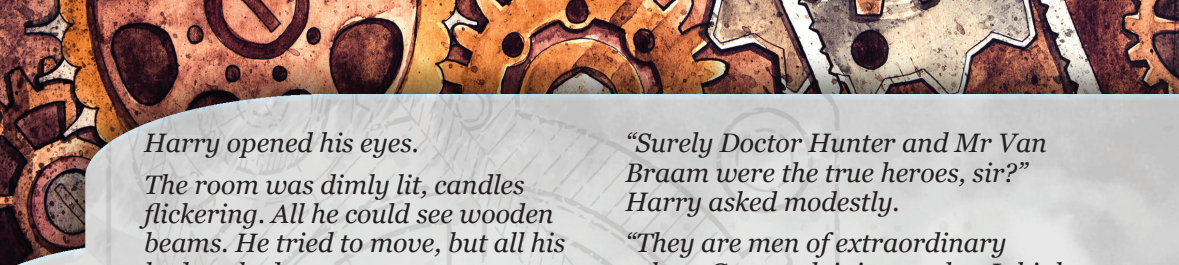




**S**ection **T**wo

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- CHOLER -  
CHARACTERS



Harry opened his eyes.

The room was dimly lit, candles flickering. All he could see wooden beams. He tried to move, but all his body ached.

“Corporal Cook?” a voice asked, “are you awake?”

“I suppose,” Harry groaned.

A face loomed over him – the surgeon, Hunter. Light flashed in his eyes. He grimaced and tried to shut them, but Hunter forced his lids open, checking him for something unknown to Harry.

“Are you up for a visit? The colonel said he wanted to see you the moment you awoke. Your captain’s eager to see you, too.”

“Yes, I’ll see them,” Harry said.

“Good.” Hunter left the room. shortly after an orderly entered and added some cushions so that Harry could sit up. His whole body ached as he moved but was surprised that there wasn’t a sharp pain from the wound in his side, only a dull numbness.

The door swung open as Colonel Washington swept into the room, Hunter and Mackay hot on his heels. Harry snapped a salute as quick as his body would allow him.

“Corporal Cook,” Washington returned the salute with vigour, “the men of Fort Necessity owe you their life. You, sir, are a hero. You took out their Automateur and rendered the clockwork men useless. The battle swung in our favour and the French were broken. And to think you did all this after receiving what could have been a fatal blow. Captain Mackay will be writing a letter of commendation of your bravery.”

Washington grasped his hand and shook firmly, his grip like iron.

“Surely Doctor Hunter and Mr Van Braam were the true heroes, sir?” Harry asked modestly.

“They are men of extraordinary talent, Corporal, it is true, but I think even they would not have been able to hold off those devilish French machines for ever. The wall had already been breached in several places. Your intervention was timely, indeed.”

The colonel’s eyes flicked momentarily to his wound, and a frown creased his brow. “I am afraid I must now leave you in the good doctor’s hands. He has much to speak to you about. And I have a fort to rebuild. But know that the gratitude of all the Virginian regiment is with you.”

Washington snapped a quick salute and left. Mackay gave him a solemn nod, adding his thanks and showing his respect in his own way. Then Harry was left alone with Hunter.

“That wound should have killed you.” Hunter said.

“Private Harrington kept you alive until I could get to you, but even then, I had to take quite drastic action to save you. The surgery is difficult, and one that few survive. But you would have been dead if I had not tried. Your spleen was ruptured, and you were bleeding at an astonishing rate.”

Hunter paused and looked down to Harry’s wound. “Would you try to stand?”

Harry nodded and swung his legs around so and put pressure on his legs, his legs ached, but responded without a sign of weakness.

“Let’s take a look at the results.” Hunter said, gesturing to Harry to stand in front a mirror in the corner of the room. “Take off your shirt.”

Harry did as he was instructed. The wound revealed appeared to have been healed with the use of a metal

plate. A small hexagonal brass plaque of about 2 inches across, with what looked like a keyhole in the centre, sat just below his ribs, the flesh around it pink but healthy. Tentatively he touched it. It felt cold to the touch, and any sensation he felt in the flesh around was dull and muted.

"That," said Hunter, "is your Newtonium Motor."

Hunter lifted his own shirt to reveal a similar panel, but on the opposite side of his body. "Van Braam has one, also. It is the source of the feats you saw us achieve on the battlefield."

"Will I be able to move like Van Braam? Or command the very earth itself?" Harry asked in wonder.

"Not quite," Hunter explained. "The device responds differently, accordingly with the organ to which it has been grafted. Yours is grafted to your spleen, the source of choler, one of the four vital humours of the body. The humours dictate our health and vitality, and our tempers. Choler gives us drive and ambition, aggression."

Hunter reached over to a drawer and pulled out a small brass key. He placed it carefully in Harry's hand.

"This is the key to the motor. Guard it well and keep it to hand at all times." Hunter revealed his wrist, where his key was attached by a simple leather cord.

"Try the motor. Give it a turn."

Harry took hold of the key and gently placed it in the lock on his abdomen. As he turned the key, he felt an unusual energy flood his body. His muscles felt warm and limber. He could feel the blood moving through his body, he could even feel his wounds healing; sense the flesh knitting itself back together.

Hunter smiled at him, his pleasure at the sensation clearly showing on his face.

"It will take three turns but leave it at one for now. Your body will need to get used to the sensation. The power does come with side effects, so we'll take things carefully to begin with."

Harry felt a rush of anger and reached for his key. Who was this man, doctor or no, to tell him what to do?

"And that," Hunter explained, calmly intercepting Harry's hand, "is one of the side effects. When you turn the key, your choler is raised. It can make you quick to anger. Be aware of this and temper your actions with resolve and forethought. And only use the motor when you are in need.

"Now," Hunter continued, "Close your eyes. Open your mind to what is around you. What do you feel?"

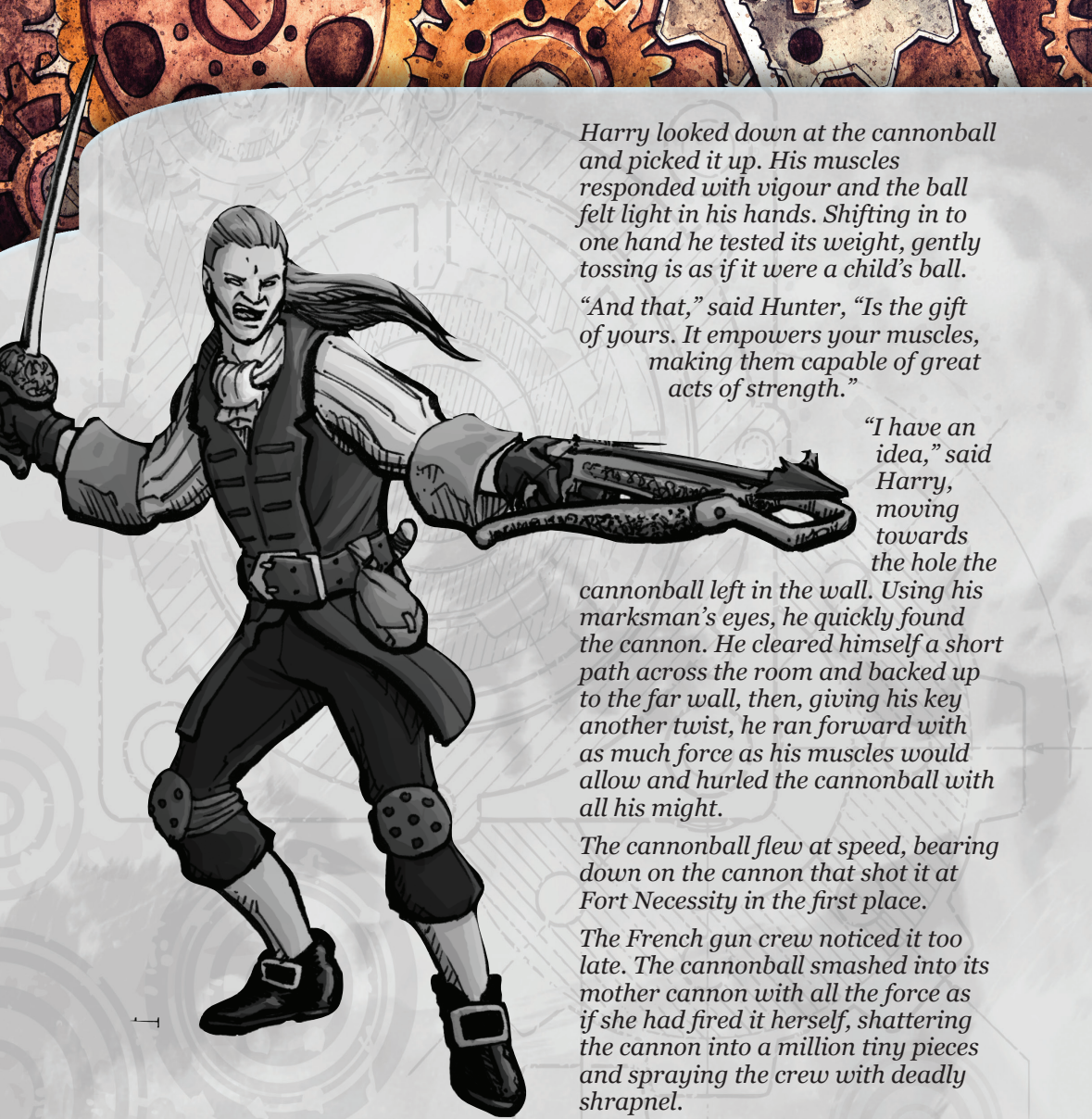
Harry closed his eyes and blanked out what he could, trying his best to focus on what he could sense around him. Slowly he began to notice little dancing prickly hot sensations around him. The candles, he realised. He could sense the flame. As his attention was drawn to them, the sensation grew, hotter and faster.

"Woah there, soldier!" Hunter said. Harry opened his eyes. The room was brighter. The candles' flames were as tall as the candles themselves. He relaxed his senses and the flames died down to a more normal size.

"Choler is attuned to the element of fire. You will be able to command and control flame, just as I controlled the earth during the battle. With time you will learn how to control it, but for now, you had best take care. We don't want the fort burning down now, do we?"

Suddenly a cry rang out from the camp. They were under attack.

"Looks like the French have rallied and are back for more punishment." Hunter said, winding his Newtonium Motor.



Harry looked down at the cannonball and picked it up. His muscles responded with vigour and the ball felt light in his hands. Shifting in to one hand he tested its weight, gently tossing it as if it were a child's ball.

"And that," said Hunter, "Is the gift of yours. It empowers your muscles, making them capable of great acts of strength."

"I have an idea," said Harry, moving towards the hole the

cannonball left in the wall. Using his marksman's eyes, he quickly found the cannon. He cleared himself a short path across the room and backed up to the far wall, then, giving his key another twist, he ran forward with as much force as his muscles would allow and hurled the cannonball with all his might.

The cannonball flew at speed, bearing down on the cannon that shot it at Fort Necessity in the first place.

The French gun crew noticed it too late. The cannonball smashed into its mother cannon with all the force as if she had fired it herself, shattering the cannon into a million tiny pieces and spraying the crew with deadly shrapnel.

"It appears the Fort is in your debt once more, Corporal Cook," Hunter said as he leapt through the hole in the wall and ran at the French lines.

Harry jumped through after him, charging with all the speed his unnaturally strong muscles would allow, revelling in the battle like the berserkers of old.

Harry was about to offer his assistance when the room erupted in a shower of splinters and Hunter slammed against the far wall. The doctor groaned and stood up, pushing a twenty-four-pound cannonball off his chest as he did so.

"Are you uninjured?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Just bruises, most likely," Hunter explained, "The gift of my motor. It will take more than that to do any lasting harm."