

Their Coats All Red

Guidelines

18thWall Productions

Anthology Curated by John Linwood Grant and Matt Willis

To the office of the Prime Minister:

As you have no doubt been made aware from previous correspondence, Mr. Gladstone, problems of an unusual nature still arise in the further reaches of Her Majesty's empire.

You remember the transport we lost in the Chinese seas, and manpower spent keeping it from the press. One of the officer's wives, a Mrs. Kathleen Morland, was found drifting in the same waters. Yes, two years later. She wore strange finery, speaking in a language that we still haven't placed, and only telling a broken story through far more broken English. She complains of voices from some long ago time, saying things she wishes she could forget. The ship which rescued was followed to port by strange lights.

One exploratory party Africa reported total darkness for a period of 106 hours. No trace of the sun. Light suddenly returned around noon. When their guide returned the following day, he was nearly mad with grief. "The darkness now resides within us. Our light has faded."

Just as I was about to hand this to my secretary, one more report arrived. Trouble along the Indian border, as ever. Word is fragmentary, also as ever, but suggests something unhealthy and alive in the biting wind.

While troubling, I don't believe there is anything the foreign office can do at this time. We'll continue to look into these on a case by case basis—but the difference in geography, actors, and dates seems to suggest we can do little but watch, record, and pray.

Yours truly,

[The signature is missing, crumbling away to a burnt-out blackness. The letter shows signs of having been thrust into the fire, but saved before the letter was wholly consumed.]

What We Want

Their Coats All Red: Dark Tales of Empire is seeking strange stories which are steeped in the history of the British Empire from about 1880 to 1905. These must be tales which capture the feel of the high Victorian era.

We don't want stories of the Empire itself—we want stories of the weirdness underneath. Ghosts, spirits, madness and monstrosities are all welcome. Make it psychological or physical, but make it good.

Crucially, every submission must contain an element of the weird, the uncanny, the supernatural, or the paranormal. This may be in the form of spirits, hauntings, monstrosities, folklore and folk-horror from the region in question, or simply the completely inexplicable. Dark,

foreboding, or unsettling are good keywords. Weird fiction also encompasses dark fantasy, of a sort, opening the door for dark historical fantasy a la Manly Wade Wellman, Neil Gaiman, or Tim Powers.

We are looking for stories which reflect the vastness and variety of the Empire, and so **suggested geographical settings include, but are not limited to:**

- India and the Raj
- The East Indies in general
- China up to and including the Boxer Rebellion
- Egypt and the Sudan,
- West Africa and the later Ashanti Wars
- South Africa, both the Zulu Wars and the Boer War
- At sea, around, or going to or from, any of the above

We want to see the impact of Empire and its infrastructure, from any viewpoint. The military side of life on the frontier is an obvious one, and an encouraged one, but not the only approach.

We will check your history.

Characters of any relevant culture, ethnicity, or allegiance are welcome, not only the British soldiers. The lost, bewildered British soldier or colonial administrator; the embittered Indian servant or Rajah; the scorned Egyptian woman and the dying Boer farmer are all equally possible protagonists. What we do not want are stereotypes. **Think real people in strange situations.** No cartoon racists or noble savages.

Farmers marching under a parched South African noon to fight the Boer, with whom they often had more in common than they had with their own officers. Young London women shipped with their husbands to quarters in Calcutta with little company save their Indian servants. Traders and planters in Malaya, fighting the monsoon shadows, and the forlorn garrisons in the Sudan. The sailors of the West Africa squadron, seizing slave ships off the Gold Coast.

The Bombay char wallah, beaten once too often by the English Major for being too slow with his tea. The Zulu who trades his ikhwa for a Martini rifle. The Egyptian woman who finds her officer lover will not acknowledge her in the street.

Complex and human are the watchwords. Be sensitive to the humanity of characters on all sides.

We would also like to encourage stories with female central characters. The high Victorian era is when women began *seriously* entering their own careers, studying science, and starting their own businesses. While there were many problems in the era, it would be exciting to see achievements celebrated, in fiction, instead of the era's failings presented as the *only* path for women. This is, after all, also the era of Nellie Bly, Annie Oakley, Mary Kingsley, Isabella Bird, Marie Curie, Cristina Trivulzio Belgiojoso, Harriet Martineau, and Jane Addams, among many others.

Using the Cthulhu Mythos is acceptable, however we do not want simple retreads, pastiche, or Lovecraft-lite. Write something fresh, creative, and, of course, deeply embedded in the Empire if you choose to try this route.

If you would like to write a story regarding an earlier event (such as the Sepoy Rebellion), please query the editors.

What We Don't Want

Don't rely on ahistorical cliché. Corsets **weren't** that tight (except for a hot five minutes in 1850s France). The English **weren't** repressed, and all the evidence usually carted out to prove it is a hoax ("Lie on your back and think of England") or a joke that started about Americans ("They cover the most scandalous, shapely legs in their house—the piano legs!"). Falling into ahistorical cliché is a serious black mark against stories.

We're looking for realistic takes on the Empire itself. In other words, the Empire was neither cartoon monstrosity nor entirely wonderful. Like so many things, it was a mix of positive and negative. If stories try to address empire as a concept, or the English Empire in particular, it's essential to keep this in mind. Stories which fail to keep this in mind will be an increasingly hard sell.

This does not mean we're looking for stories where "The English only *thought* they were doing positive things in their Empire building." We're not interested in anything so dismissive of the past. We're *not* looking for comments on Empire along the lines of "actual evil" versus "perceived good," but the much more difficult and human, "actual evil" vs. "actual good."

A general historical story of the period, however weird and unnatural, will not cut any ice—it needs to be rooted in the Empire.

We are not interested in political screeds for or against the English Empire, or empires in general.

We'd rather not receive missionary stories. It's an over-used take on colonial issues, and unless it's astonishing or very, very different, we're not likely to let you get away it.

Stories set in locations such as America, Canada, Australasia, and the West Indies are also feasible, but they will be a harder sell unless they have directly relevance to the theme of Empire. Stories may be set in Britain, but they would have to relate to an aspect of Empire. No Victorian gents merely musing how they got shot in the leg in Afghanistan, please.

Payment: 5% of the gross profit will be paid for each accepted story. These payments will be issued to you at quarterly intervals. Stories under 1,500 words will only receive 4% of the gross profit.

Rights: First World Digital and Print.

Deadline: April 15th, 2017

Word Count: 4,000-16,000

How to Submit your Story:

- All stories should be sent, as an attachment, to \.
- The file must be formatted in .doc or .docx.
- The interior of the document must be in double spaced Times New Roman (12 point font).
- Indents must be placed through your system's Paragraph function; do not set indents by pressing tab or space. If you already have tabbed or spaced indents, please remove them first. Please use full em dashes (—).
- At the top of your document, please include William Shunn's submission header.
- Tell us a bit about yourself in the body of your email. Don't stress this, it won't make or break your submission.
- Place the collection you're submitting to, your name, and your story title in the subject line of your email. For example, "Their Coats All Red / Rudyard Kipling / The Mark of the Beast"

John Linwood Grant is a writer of strange period tales and dark fiction, author of the *Tales of the Last Edwardian* series, including *A Study in Grey*, and co-editor of *Occult Detective Quarterly*.

Matthew Willis is a journalist and writer, author of a period sea novel *Daedalus and the Deep*, and editing credits include the recent *Stalking Leviathan* anthology.