



*Fotherington-Tomas and
the Mephostus Meeting*

R.A. Gregory

Fotherington-Tomas and the Mephostus Meeting
By R.A. Gregory

Copyright © 2019 Robin Alexander Gregory

All Rights Reserved

This is a work of fiction. None of the characters in this book are based on real people, alive or dead. Any resemblance to an actual person in name or otherwise is purely coincidental.

Begin Reading...

Two besuited figures, one far larger than the other, sat in high, wing-backed, leather armchairs, and sipped glasses of brandy, while the crackling flames danced in the fireplace before them.

On the other side of the room, squeezed into the far corner, were two other figures in dinner suits. Both were similarly mismatched in terms of their relative scale. The larger of the two individuals cast a long glance towards the two chairs in front of the fire, then turned to regard his colleague over the top of his tumbler.

“Would’ve been nice to have sat by the fire on an evening like this, but someone had to go and have the last slice of apple pie, didn’t they?” he rumbled, like a troll gargling granite.

“Sorry, FT. But you know how much I adore apple pie and it would have been a crime to let it go to waste. And we did manage to get seats in the drawing-room, unlike those poor chaps over there,” said Maxwell. He mopped up a lone droplet of cream that was dangling from the tip of his waxed moustache and sat back in his chair.

Fotherington-Tomas looked at the group of glum ex-diners, who were huddled over the Deluxe Scrabble and Cluedo boards in the Games Room. “I just fancied warming my bones a bit, that was all. I’m not getting any younger, you know and in our line of work, you have to learn to take your leisure whenever you can,” he said. A quick snap of his fingers summoned a passing butler. “Another brandy, please,” he barked at the manservant.

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you, FT,” said Maxwell. He regarded his long-time friend with concern. “I mean, it’s not like it is the depth of midwinter and we’ve been here for most of the day, bathed in centrally-heated bliss, so I can’t really see how you’ve got any reason to be chilled, let alone so miserable.”

By here, Maxwell was referring to Haggrid’s, the oldest and most exclusive gentleman’s club in all of London Town. Founded in fourteen-forty-four, by the son of a Spanish whelk-peddler, it was steeped in history

and more than a little mystery, to boot. Rumour had it that the Lord Chief Mason kept a private room on the top floor of the building, for his mistress and her pet chinchilla, while others said that there was a fully functional, antique S&M dungeon located in the basement. Both were true and a lot more besides. But the only things that mattered were that the male heirs of the Fotherington-Tomas clan were granted membership in perpetuity, as a result of a blood debt owed to them from the fifteen-hundreds and that the club was so old-fashioned that it insisted on painting its blackballs white.

“You wouldn’t understand, Maxwell. After all, you were at the start of your first term at Oxford, when it happened,” said Fotherington-Tomas.

“When what happened, FT?” said Maxwell. He lifted his eyebrows in anticipation at the thought of his mentor sharing some private and long-suppressed angst that was gnawing at his indomitable soul.

“Well, if you must know, it is forty years to the day, when I first met Doctor Mephostus,” replied Fotherington-Tomas.

“I never knew that Doctor Mephostus was at Oxford!” exclaimed Maxwell. “You never told me that before.”

“Well, as I mentioned, you hadn’t even matriculated at the time and were studying the History of Art, if I remember correctly, so there would have been little chance that your paths would have crossed,” said Fotherington-Tomas. He took a large swig of brandy from his glass, as if to gird his loins before beginning his confession.

“Ah, yes. The History of Art. The noblest of all the academic pursuits,” said Maxwell. “Two hours of lectures a week and a stipend that you could drown a rugby team on. I must admit that I don’t recall it too well, these days, although I do believe that my initials are still to be found carved in a lintel above one of the cubbies in The Lamb and Flag.”

“That particular admission wouldn’t surprise me in the least, knowing what a rascally rascal you were back in those days,” answered Fotherington-Tomas. He looked at his protégé and friend, with a mixture of admonishment and admiration.

Fotherington-Tomas drained his glass and then indicated to the steward that he should bring him yet another brandy and one more for Maxwell besides. After a short delay, the drinks arrived and were placed on a tiny, oak table, nestled between the pair of clandestine, gentleman agents. Then, Fotherington-Tomas continued: “Yes, Mephostus was indeed an Oxford boy. An old Mortonian, like myself, in fact. We used to knock around together quite a bit, back then. Along with old Aldo Passlington, the Yorkshire Yippmaster, don’t you know? He was studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the time. Aldo, that was, not Mephostus. We were quite the inseparable threesome, until Aldo’s tastes turned a bit too militant for my liking and he started drinking in The Three Goat’s Heads.”

“Another nugget of glimmering information that I was hitherto unapprised of,” said Maxwell. He shifted his narrow rump and settled himself further into his seat, as the story began to unfold.

“Indeed, but it is Mephostus who is the subject of my woes this evening,” said Fotherington-Tomas. He swirled his brandy around in his glass and watched the legs of alcohol, as they dribbled down the glass towards the dark, amber meniscus. “At that time, he was a brilliant young chemistry student, indentured at the Dyson Perrins Workhouse for Boys, on South Parks Road. And when I say brilliant, he was far ahead of anyone else in his year, and well beyond most of the seasoned Dons who were tutoring him. At one point, they were fighting each other in the street, for the honour of having him do his doctoral thesis under them. How wrong that went in the end, when that poor old organ grinder and his monkey came around the corner...” His voice dropped into silence and he lost himself for a moment or two, in the depths of his glass.

Maxwell sipped his own brandy and savoured the warm smell of the time-aged liquor, which hit his nose, before evaporating in his throat, like high octane jet fuel. He remained quiet and watched Fotherington-Tomas, until the great man tore himself from his personal reminiscence and carried on.

“We were the best of friends, old Mephostus and I, at Oxford. I was finishing my first degree in Zoology and it was he who convinced me to

contemplate the study of chemistry for my D.Phil. Well, not pure chemistry, to be precise. Rather the biology of chemistry, and not biochemistry, before you ask. No, we were going to open up a whole new field of human endeavour, Mephostus and I. We would have been Nobel Laureates, for sure, the pair of us. Were it not for the incident.”

“Incident?” queried Maxwell. He set his empty glass on the table as quietly as he could, so as not to disturb Fotherington-Tomas from his memories.

“Yes, the incident. And how very unfortunate it was for the both of us, upon reflection,” said Fotherington-Tomas. His voice lay heavy with uncharacteristic sadness. “We both played rugby for the College and bloody good we were, too. I was in the front row, while he was one of the most talented scrum-halves that I have ever seen on the field. You should have been there, Maxwell. We were something else to behold. The way that he could run rings around men thrice the size of him was nothing short of amazing. He could have played for England, had his heart been in it, which, for a short while, at least, I believe that it was. Anyway, we were both in our final year, when the bi-annual, Army versus Oxford, rugby match, was announced. Of course, we were both selected for the team and never before, or since, for that matter, have two men trained so hard for an amateur sporting event.”

Maxwell dared to interrupt the human mammoth in his captivating monologue: “So, it was an injury that did him in, was it, FT?” he asked.

“No, nothing of the sort!” roared Fotherington-Tomas. The sudden ejaculation caused several of the older members in the establishment to clutch their hands to their chests, for fear of having another heart attack, and so soon after dinner, too.

“No, Maxwell. We were both at the peak of physical fitness, when we took to the field that day. It was a glorious June afternoon and a sizeable portion of the University had turned out to watch us play, including, I should point out, most of the chemistry professors from Dyson Perrins. The Army team were drawn from the Household Cavalry, with a few Royal Marines thrown in, to bolster the back row, but what we didn’t know, was that there

was a minor Royal, the nephew of one of the Princes or some other, playing on their side. It was a great game, with plenty of playful gouging going on and a bit of harmless biting in the mauls. Then, just after half-time, Mephostus was sent off for a high tackle on the Royal in question.”

“The rotter!” said Maxwell. “I knew that he was no good, even from the start. What a terrible thing for him to do and to a member of the Royal Family at that!”

“Far from it,” replied Fotherington-Tomas. “It was the referee’s fault. It was never a high tackle, not even close to one, but the foolish fellow couldn’t bear the thought of impugning the good name of the Monarchy. So, he castigated Mephostus in the most public way that he knew how, with a red card, held aloft, for all who were gathered there to see.”

“Two sides to every story, eh, FT?” said Maxwell. Before Fotherington-Tomas could interject, Maxwell summoned the waiter for yet another glass of brandy for the pair of them.

“Yes, Maxwell. Two sides, indeed. However, we were left without our best scrum-half in the process and ended up losing the match because of that fateful decision. From that day on, Mephostus swore to bring down the Royal Family, not to mention the entire British Empire, as well. If the referee had just made the right call, then I wouldn’t be left where I am today, battling a nemesis of considerable guile, who was once my closest friend. I tried to remonstrate with him, in the changing rooms, after the match. Mephostus, that was, not the referee, but the damage was done. I don’t mind admitting that he frightened me to the very core, such was the bitterness with which he took the referee’s pronouncement. Never have I heard such vehemence from the lips of an Englishman in all my life and that is God’s honest truth. It changed my opinion of him in an instant. You know me, Maxwell, old boy. I stand for Queen and Country, no matter what the cost and to hear the blasphemous slander that issued from his lips on that day, with nothing but an Egyptian cotton towel wrapped around his waist, turned my heart into stone. I remember that I slammed his bony frame against the wall of the changing room, as I left the building, and never again did I spare even the most-paltry word of acknowledgement for his existence as a man born of English parents.”

“I understand your position, FT. But, you did, indeed, make a mortal enemy of him on that day. And the problem with Doctor Mephostus, as you know only too well, is that you can never predict where he is going to strike next.”

“Indeed, Maxwell. Indeed. He has proven to be as slippery an eel off the pitch, as he was on it,” said Fotherington-Tomas. He lifted his glass to his lips and drained the brandy with a single gargantuan gulp.

Maxwell reached for his own glass. “What was that, FT? I didn’t say anything,” he replied.

Maxwell’s fingers were inches away from the table, when Fotherington-Tomas dashed his glass to the floor and scrabbled at his tie. “Poison, Maxwell! Don’t touch it!” he gasped. His round, moon-like face turned bright red and his eyes bulged from their sockets.

“The waiter! It must have been Doctor Mephostus in disguise!” cried Maxwell. He scanned the room for the ancient, grey-haired, manservant, who had brought their drinks, but there was no sign of the fellow in amongst the mass of shuffling butlers.

Fotherington-Tomas started to tremble, while Maxwell looked on in horror. He had no idea how to help the great man in front of him and his own face was as pale as his friend’s was flushed. The trembling grew worse with every passing second, until Fotherington-Tomas jerked around in his seat, like a condemned man, who was riding the blue-limned lightning of the electric chair.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the shaking stopped, and Fotherington-Tomas sat bolt upright. His eyes stared straight ahead of him and his breathing slowed to a halt. Maxwell watched, as a river of perspiration broke out on Fotherington-Tomas’ forehead and ran down his face. Soon, a small pool of sweat could be seen beneath the vast man and Maxwell was aware of a vile odour that hung in the air between them. He cast his eyes around the room, to see if any of the more antiquated members had passed wind and not admitted it. Then he noticed that the hubbub, which

had accompanied his mentor's initial outburst, had died away, to be replaced by a reverential silence, as every single man in the room stared at the pair of them in mounting anticipation.

After what seemed like an age, Fotherington-Tomas' glassy stare faded, and his breathing returned to normal. He rolled his shoulders in displeasure at finding that his clothes were soaked with sweat, then shook himself and rose from his chair.

"Are you alright, FT?" asked Maxwell. His voice sounded like a bomb going off, in the wood-damped hush of the oak-panelled, drawing-room.

"Had a close call there, Maxwell, but I was able to force the poison out through my pores, before it could attack my nervous system," said Fotherington-Tomas. He tried to mop his face dry with his sodden handkerchief and failed.

Maxwell handed his own, unspoiled handkerchief, to the dripping form before him. "Another victory for your training under Abbot Victor Falangies, eh?" he said.

Before Fotherington-Tomas could reply, the assembled members of Haggrid's rose to their feet and gave their most celebrated brother a standing ovation, in honour of the magnificent show of mind over matter that they had witnessed.

"Enough. Enough!" boomed Fotherington-Tomas. He waved a shovel-sized hand in the air to silence the cacophony of cheering and rampant applause that had broken out. "Thank you, my dear fellows. Thank you, but it was nothing, nothing at all. Now, if you will excuse us, Maxwell and I have a villain to apprehend."

At that moment, there was a polite tug on his arm. Fotherington-Tomas spun around to find himself face to face with a butler, who was bearing a small, silver, tray in his white, gloved hands. For a second, Maxwell thought that his mighty companion was going to strike the man down, such was the look of hostility in his eyes.

“Telegram for you, Mister Fotherington-Tomas, sir,” the terrified fellow managed to stammer.

“Thank you,” said Fotherington-Tomas in a perfunctory tone. His immaculate composure regained, he lifted the small, yellow, envelope from the tray and opened it.

Once again, the drawing-room of Haggrid’s fell silent, as Fotherington-Tomas scanned the narrow type, printed on the telegram. Then, he placed the missive down on the silver tray and turned to Maxwell. “My friend, I am afraid that capturing Doctor Mephostus will have to wait for another day. It would appear that we have been summoned by Her Majesty, to make all haste to Paris and from there, to Mont Blanc.”

“Mont Blanc. Whatever for, FT?” asked Maxwell.

“She did not say. But for us, my dear fellow, all haste can mean only one thing. And that is a trip on the Eurostar, followed by the Orient Express!”

Will Fotherington-Tomas get to the Orient Express on time, especially seeing as Network Rail has reported leaves on the line? What hideous peril awaits the brave duo at Mont Blanc? And what of evil Doctor Mephostus? Will he ever be apprehended, and the safety of The Realm assured? Stay tuned for the next exciting instalment of, The Adventures of Fotherington-Tomas...

THE END

If you liked this short story, which I hope you did, then please leave a positive review on Amazon.com

Also by the same author

The Fotherington-Tomas Series

[The Untimely Demise of Fotherington-Tomas](#)

[Fotherington-Tomas and the Christmas Crisis](#)

[Fotherington-Tomas and the Ashes Affair](#)

The DATS Trilogy

[Death and the Schoolboy \(Part 1 of the DATS Trilogy\)](#)

[Death and the Atom Bomb \(Part 2 of the DATS Trilogy\)](#)

[Death and the End \(Part 3 of the DATS Trilogy\)](#)

[The Lucius Chronicles \(The complete DATS Trilogy in one volume\)](#)

Novels

[Drywideon – The Sword Of Destiny \(Yeah, Right\)](#)

About the author

R.A. Gregory (a.k.a. Robin Alexander Gregory, or just plain old Rob Gregory) is an author and animal welfare expert, who splits his time predominantly between Northern Thailand and New Zealand, writing books and helping people to help animals. He doesn't worry too much about what he writes about, just hopes that it makes people of all ages smile and think for themselves about the world that they live in.

Connect with me

Website: <https://www.rob-gregory.com>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/theunrealrobg>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MalthusDevryn/>

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Robin-Alexander-Gregory/e/B06WLLS94D/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1518769733&sr=8-1

Goodreads:

https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/16455527.Robin_Alexander_Gregory