

GRIMES AT GLENROWAN by A. Bertram Chandler

Captain Chandler reports that he wrote his first story after meeting John W. Campbell, the late, great editor of Astounding/Analog SF, during WWII. During the war years, the author became a regular contributor to the SF magazines, but almost dropped out of the field when he was promoted to Chief Officer in the British-Australian steamship service. His second wife, Susan, encouraged him to take up writing again; the Rim Worlds and the Rim Runners series is a result.

Commodore John Grimes of the Rim Worlds Naval Reserve, currently Master of the survey ship *Faraway Quest*, was relaxing in his day cabin aboard that elderly but trustworthy vessel. That morning, local time, he had brought the old ship down to a landing at Port Fortinbras, on Elsinore, the one habitable planet in orbit about the Hamlet sun. It was Grimes's first visit to Elsinore for very many years. This call was to be no more—and no less—than a showing of the flag of the Confederacy. The *Quest* had been carrying out a survey of a newly discovered planetary system rather closer to the Shakespearian Sector than to the Rim Worlds and Grimes's lords and masters back on Lorn had instructed him, on completion of this task, to pay a friendly call on their opposite numbers on Elsinore.

However, he would be seeing nobody of any real importance until this evening, when he would attend a reception being held in his honour at the President's palace. So he had, time to relax, at ease in his shipboard shorts and shirt, puffing contentedly at his vile pipe, watching the local trivi programmes on his playmaster. That way he would catch up on the planetary news, learn something of Elsinorian attitudes and prejudices. He was, after all, visiting this world in an ambassadorial capacity.

He looked with wry amusement into the screen. There he was or, to be more exact, there was *Faraway Quest*—coming down. *Not bad*, he admitted smugly, *not bad at all*. There had been a nasty, gusty wind at ground level about which Aerospace Control had failed to warn him—but he had coped. He watched the plump, dull-silver spindle that was his ship sagging to leeward, leaning into the veering breeze, then settling almost exactly into the centre of the triangle of bright flashing marker beacons, midway between the Shakespearian Line's *Oberon* and the Commission's *Epsilon Orionis*. He recalled having made a rather feeble joke about O'Brian and O'Ryan. (His officers had laughed dutifully.) He watched the beetle-like ground cars carrying the port officials scurry out across the grey apron as the *Quest's* ramp was extruded from her after airlock. He chuckled softly at the sight of Timmins, his Chief Officer, resplendent in his best uniform, standing at the head of the gangway to receive the boarding party. Although only a reservist—like Grimes himself—that young man put on the airs and graces of a First Lieutenant of a Constellation Class battlewagon, a flagship at that. But he was a good spaceman and that was all that really mattered.

After a short interval, filled with the chatter of the commentator, he was privileged to watch himself being interviewed by the newsman who had accompanied the officials on board. Did he really look as crusty as that? he wondered. And wasn't there something in what Sonya, his wife, was always saying—and what other ladies had said long before he first met her—about his ears? Stun's'l ears, jughandle ears. Only a very minor operation would be required to make them less outstanding, but . . . He permitted himself another chuckle. He liked him the way that he was and if the ladies didn't they had yet to show it.

The intercom telephone buzzed. Grimes turned to look at Timmins's face in the little screen. He made a downward gesture of his hand towards the playmaster, and his own voice and that of the interviewer at once faded into inaudibility. "Yes, Mr. Timmins?" he asked.

"Sir, there is a lady here to see you."

A *lady*? wondered Grimes. Elsinore was one of the few worlds upon which he had failed to enjoy a temporary romance. He had been there only once before, when he was a junior officer in the Federation's Survey Service. He recalled (it still rankled) that he had had his shore leave stopped for

some minor misdemeanor.

"A lady?" he repeated. Then, "What does she want?"

"She says that she is from Station Yorick, sir. She would like to interview you."

"But I've already been interviewed," said Grimes.

"Not by Station Yorick," a female voice told him. "Elsinore's purveyors of entertainment and philosophy."

Timmins's face in the little screen had been replaced by that of a girl—a woman, rather. Glossy black hair, short cut, over a thin, creamily pale face with strong bone structure and delicately cleft chin . . . a wide, scarlet mouth . . . almost indigo blue eyes set off by black lashes.

"Mphm," grunted Grimes approvingly. "Mphm. . ."

"Commodore Grimes?" she asked in a musical contralto. "*The Commodore Grimes?*"

"There's only one of me as far as I know," he told her. "And you?"

She smiled whitely. "Kitty, of Kitty's Korner. With a `K'. And I'd like a *real* interview for *my* audience, not the sort of boring question-and-answer session that you've just been watching."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes again. What harm could it do?, he asked himself. This would be quite a good way of passing what otherwise would be a dull afternoon. And Elsinore was in the Shakespearian Sector, wasn't it? Might not he, Grimes, play Othello to this newshen's Desdemona, wooing her with his tall tales of peril and adventure all over the Galaxy? And in his private grog locker were still six bottles of Antarean Crystal Gold laid aside for emergencies such as this, a potent liquor coarsely referred to by spacemen as a leg-opener, certainly a better loosener of inhibitions than the generality of alcoholic beverages. He would have to partake of it with her, of course, but a couple or three soberups would put him right for the cocktail party.

"Ask Mr. Timmins to show you up," he said.

He looked at her over the rim of his glass. He liked what he saw. The small screen of the intercom, showing only her face, had not done her full justice. She sat facing him in an easy chair, making a fine display of slender, well-formed thigh under the high-riding apology for a skirt. (Hemlines were down again, almost to ankle length, in the Rim Worlds and Grimes had not approved of the change in fashion.) The upper part of her green dress was not quite transparent but it was obvious that she neither wore nor needed a bust support.

She looked at him over the rim of her glass. She smiled. He said, "Here's to Yorick, the Jester. . ."

She said, "And the philosopher: We have our serious side." They sipped. The wine was cold, mellow fire.

He said, "Don't we all?"

"You especially," she told him. "You must be more of a philosopher than most men, Commodore. Your interdimensional experiences—"

"So you've heard of them . . . Kitty."

"Yes. Even here. Didn't somebody once say, 'If there's a crack in the Continuum Grimes is sure to fall into it—and come up with the Shaara Crown Jewels clutched in his hot little hands.?'"

He laughed. "I've never laid my paws on the Shaara Crown Jewels yet—although I've had my troubles with the Shaara. There was the time that I was in business as an interstellar courier and got tangled with a Rogue Queen—"

But she was not interested in the Shaara. She pressed on, "It seems that it's only out on the Rim proper, on worlds like Kin-solving, that you find these . . . cracks in the Continuum. . . ."

Grimes refilled the glasses saying, "Thirsty work, talking. . . ."

"But we've talked hardly at all," she said. "And I *want* you to talk. I want *you* to talk. If all I wanted was stories of high adventure and low adventure in *this* universe I'd only have to interview any of our own space captains. What I want, what Station Yorick wants, what our public wants is a story such as only *you* can tell. One of your adventures on Kinsolving. . ."

He laughed. "It's not only on Kinsolving's Planet that you can fall through a crack in the Continuum." He was conscious of the desire to impress her. "In fact, the first time that it happened was on Earth. . . ."

She was suitably incredulous.

"On Earth?" she demanded.

"Too right," he said.

I'm a Rim Worlder now [he told her] but I wasn't born out on the Rim. As far as the accident of birth is concerned I'm Terran. I started my spacefaring career in the Interstellar Federation's Survey Service. My long leaves I always spent on Earth, where my parents lived.

Anyhow, just to visualise me as I was then: a Survey Service JG Lieutenant with money in his pocket, time on his hands and, if you must know, between girlfriends. I'd been expecting that—What was her name? Oh, yes. Vanessa. I'd been expecting that she'd be still waiting for me when I got back from my tour of duty. She wasn't. She'd married—of all people!—a sewage conversion engineer.

Anyhow, I spent the obligatory couple of weeks with my parents in The Alice. (The Alice? Oh, that's what Australians call Alice Springs, a city in the very middle of the island continent.) My father was an author. He specialised in historical romances. He was always saying that the baddies of history are much more interesting than the goodies—and that the good baddies and the bad goodies are the most fascinating of all. You've a fine example of that in this planetary system of yours. The names, I mean. The Hamlet sun and all that. Hamlet was rather a devious bastard, wasn't he? And although he wasn't an out and out baddie he could hardly be classed as a goodie.

Well, the Old Man was working on yet another historical novel, this one to be set in Australia. All about the life and hard times of Ned Kelly. You've probably never heard of him—very few people outside Australia have—but he was a notorious bushranger. Bushrangers were sort of highway robbers. Just as the English have Dick Turpin and the Americans have Jesse James, so we have the Kelly Gang. (Australia had rather a late start as a nation so has always made the most of its relatively short history.)

According to my respected father this Ned Kelly was more, much more, than a mere bushranger. He was a freedom fighter, striking valiant blows on behalf of the oppressed masses, a sort of Robin Hood. And, like that probably-mythical Robin Hood, he was something of a military genius. Until the end he outwitted the troopers—as the police were called in his day—with ease. He was a superb horseman. He was an innovator. His suit of homemade armour, breast and back-plates and an odd cylindrical helmet—was famous. It was proof against rifle and pistol fire. He was very big and strong and could carry the weight of it.

It was at a place called Glenrowan that he finally came unstuck. In his day it was only a village, a hamlet. (No pun intended.) It was on the railway line from Melbourne to points north. Anyhow, Ned had committed some crime or other at a place called Wangaratta and a party of police was on the way there from Melbourne by special train, not knowing that the Kelly gang had ridden back to Glenrowan. Like all guerrilla leaders throughout history Kelly had an excellent intelligence service. He knew that the train was on the way and would be passing through Glenrowan. He persuaded a gang of Irish workmen—platelayers, they were called—to 'tear up the railway tracks just north of the village. The idea was that the train would be derailed and the policemen massacred. While the bushrangers were waiting they enjoyed quite a party in the Glenrowan Hotel; Kelly and his gang were more popular than otherwise among the locals. But the schoolmaster—who was *not* a Kelly supporter—managed to creep away from the festivities and, with a lantern and his wife's red scarf, flagged the train down.

The hotel was besieged. It was set on fire. The only man who was not killed at once was Kelly himself. He came out of the smoke and the flames, wearing his armour, a revolver (a primitive multi-shot projectile pistol) in each hand, blazing away at his enemies. One of the troopers had the intelligence to fire at his legs, which were not protected by the armour, and brought him down.

He was later hanged.

Well, as I've indicated, my Old Man was up to the eyebrows in his research into the Ned Kelly legend, and some of his enthusiasm rubbed off on to me. I thought that I'd like to have a look at this Glenrowan place. Father was quite amused. He told me that Glenrowan *now* was nothing at all like Glenrowan *then*, that instead of a tiny huddle of shacks by the railway line I should find a not-so-small

city sitting snugly in the middle of all-the-year-round-producing orchards under the usual featureless plastic domes. There was, he conceded, a sort of reconstruction of the famous hotel standing beside a railway line—all right for tourists, he sneered, but definitely not for historians.

I suppose that he was a historian—he certainly always took his researches seriously enough—but I wasn't. I was just a spaceman with time on my hands. And—which probably decided me—there was a quite fantastic shortage of unattached popsies in The Alice and my luck might be better elsewhere.

So I took one of the tourist airships from Alice Springs to Melbourne and then a really antique railway train—steam-driven yet, although the coal in the tender was only for show; it was a minireactor that boiled the water—from Melbourne to Glenrowan. This primitive means of locomotion, of course, was for the benefit of tourists.

When I dismounted from that horribly uncomfortable coach at Glenrowan Station I ran straight into an old shipmate. Oddly enough—although, as it turned out later, it wasn't so odd—his name was Kelly. He'd been one of the junior interstellar drive engineer officers in the old *Aries*. I'd never liked him much—or him me—but when you're surrounded by planetlubbers you greet a fellow spaceman as though he were a long-lost brother.

"Grimes!" he shouted. "Gutsy Grimes in person!"

[No, Kitty, I didn't get that nickname because I'm exceptionally brave. It was just that some people thought I had an abnormally hearty appetite and would eat *anything*.]

"An' what are *you* doin' here?" he demanded. His Irish accent, as Irish accents usually do, sounded phoney as all hell.

I told him that I was on leave and asked him if he was too. He told me that he'd resigned his commission some time ago and that so had his cousin, Spooky Byrne. Byrne hadn't been with us in *Aries* but I had met him. He was a PCO—Psionic Communications Officer. A Commissioned Teacup Reader, as we used to call them. A trained and qualified telepath. You don't find many of 'em these days in the various merchant services—the Carlotti Communications System is a far more reliable way of handling instantaneous communications over the light-years. But most navies still employ them—a telepath is good for much more than the mere transmission and reception of signals.

So, Kelly and Spooky Byrne, both in Glenrowan. And me, also in Glenrowan. There are some locations in some cities where, it is said, if you loaf around long enough you're sure to meet everybody you know. An exaggeration, of course, but there *are* focal points. But I wouldn't put the Glenrowan Hotel—that artificially tumbledown wooden shack with its bark roof—synthetic bark, of course—in that category. It looked very small and sordid among the tall, shining buildings of the modern city. Small and sordid? Yes, but—somehow—even though it was an obvious, trashy tourist trap it possessed a certain character. Something of the atmosphere of the original building seemed to have clung to the site.

Kelly said, using one of my own favourite expressions, "Come on in, Grimes. The sun's over the yardarm."

I must have looked a bit dubious. My onetime shipmate had been quite notorious for never paying for a drink when he could get somebody else to do it. He read my expression. He laughed. "Don't worry, Gutsy. I'm a rich man now—which is more than I was when I was having to make do on my beggarly stipend in the Survey Service—may God rot their cotton socks! Come on in!"

Well, we went into the pub. The inside came up to—or down to—my worst expectations. There was a long bar of rough wood with thirsty tourists lined up along it. There was a sagging calico ceiling. There was a wide variety of antique ironmongery hanging on the walls—kitchen implements, firearms, rusty cutlasses. There were simulated flames flickering in the glass chimneys of battered but well-polished brass oil lamps. The wenches behind the bar were dressed in sort of Victorian costumes—long, black skirts, high-collared, frilly white blouses—although I don't think that in good Queen Victoria's day those blouses would have been as near as dammit transparent and worn over no underwear.

We had rum—not the light, dry spirit that most people are used to these days but sweet, treacly, almost-knife-and-fork stuff. Kelly paid, peeling off credits from a roll that could almost have been used as a bolster. We had more rum. Kelly tried to pay again but I wouldn't let him—although I hoped this party wouldn't last all day. Those prices, in that clipjoint, were making a nasty dent in my holiday money.

Then Spooky Byrne drifted in, as colourless and weedy as ever, looking like a streak of ectoplasm frayed at the edges.

He stared at me as though he were seeing a ghost. "Grimes, of all people!" he whispered intensely. "Here, of all places!"

[I sensed, somehow, that his surprise was not genuine.]

"An' why not?" demanded his burly, deceptively jovial cousin. "Spacemen are only tourists in uniform. An' as Grimes is in civvies that makes him even more a tourist."

"The . . . coincidence," hissed Spooky. Whatever his act was he was persisting with it.

"Coincidences are always happenin'," said Kelly, playing up to him.

"Yes, Eddie, but—"

"But what?" I demanded, since it seemed expected of me.

"Mr. Grimes," Spooky told me, "would it surprise you if I told you that one of your ancestors was *here*? Was *here then*?"

"Too right it would," I said. "Going back to the old style Twentieth Century, and the Nineteenth, and further back still, most of my male forebears were seamen." The rum was making me boastfully talkative. "I have a pirate in my family tree. And an Admiral of the Royal Navy, on my mother's side. Her family name is Hornblower. So, Spooky, what the hell would either a Grimes or a Hornblower have been doing here, miles inland, in this nest of highway robbers?" Both Kelly and Byrne gave me dirty looks. "All right, then. Not highway robbers. Bushrangers, if it makes you feel any happier."

And not bushrangers either!" growled Kelly. "Freedom fighters!"

"Hah!" I snorted.

"Freedom fighters!" stated Kelly belligerently. "All right, so they did rob a bank or two. An' so what? In, that period rebel organisations often robbed the capitalists to get funds to buy arms and all the rest of it. It was no more than S.O.P."

"Mphm," I grunted.

"In any case," said Kelly, "your ancestor was so here. *We know*. Come home with us an' we'll convince you."

So I let those two bastards talk me into accompanying them to their apartment, which was a penthouse a-top the Glenrowan Tower. This wasn't by any means the tallest building in the city although it had been, I learned, when it was built. I remarked somewhat enviously that this was a palatial pad for a spaceman and Kelly told me that he wasn't a spaceman but a businessman and that he'd succeeded, by either clever or lucky investments, in converting a winning ticket in the New Irish Sweep into a substantial fortune. Byrne told him that he should give some credit where credit was due. Kelly told Byrne that graduates of the Rhine Institute are bound, by oath, not to use their psionic gifts for personal enrichment. Byrne shut up.

The living quarters of the penthouse were furnished in period fashion—the Victorian period. Gilt and red plush—dark, carved, varnished wood heavily framed, sepia-tinted photographs—no, not holograms, but those old *flat* photographs—of heavily bearded worthies hanging on the crimson-and-gold papered walls. One of them I recognised from the research material my father had been using. It was Ned Kelly.

"Fascinating," I said.

"This atmosphere is necessary to our researches," said Byrne. Then, "But come through to the laboratory."

I don't know what I was expecting to see in the other room into which they led me. Certainly not what first caught my attention. That caught my attention? That *demand*ed my attention. It was, at first glance, a Mannschenn Drive unit—not a full sized one such as would be found in even a small ship but certainly a bigger one than the mini-Mannschenns you find in lifeboats.

[You've never seen a Mannschenn Drive unit? I must show you ours before you go ashore. And you don't understand how they work? Neither do I, frankly. But it boils down, essentially, to gyroscopes precessing in time, setting up a temporal precession field, so that our ships aren't really breaking the light barrier but going astern in time while they're going ahead in space.]

"A Mannschenn Drive unit," I said unnecessarily.

"I built it," said Kelly, not without pride.

"What for?" I asked. "Time Travel?" I sneered.

"Yes," he said.

I laughed. "But it's known to be impossible. A negative field would require the energy of the entire galaxy—"

"Not physical Time Travel," said Spooky Byrne smugly. "Psionic Time Travel, back along the world line stemming from an ancestor. Eddie's ancestor was at Glenrowan. So was mine. So was yours."

"Ned Kelly wasn't married," I said triumphantly.

"And so you have to be married to father a child?" asked Byrnes sardonically. "Come off it, Grimes! You should know better than that."

[I did, as a matter of fact. This was after that odd business I'd gotten involved in on El Dorado.]

"All right," I said. "Your ancestors might have been present at the Siege of Glenrowan. Mine was not. At or about that time he was, according to my father—and he's the family historian—second mate of a tramp windjammer. He got himself paid off in Melbourne and, not so long afterwards, was master of a little brig running between Australia and New Zealand. He did leave an autobiography, you know."

"Autobiographies are often self-censored," said Byrne. "That long-ago Captain Grimes, that smugly respectable shipmaster, a pillar, no doubt, of Church and State, had episodes in his past that he would prefer to forget. He did not pay off from his ship in Melbourne in the normal way. He—what was the expression?—jumped ship. He'd had words with his captain, who was a notorious bully. He'd exchanged blows. So he deserted and thought that he'd be safer miles inland. The only work that he could find was with the Irish labourers on the railway."

"How do you know all this?" I asked. "*If it's true—*"

"He told me," said Byrne. "Or he told my ancestor—but I was inside his mind at the time. . . ."

"Let's send him back," said Kelly. "That'll convince him."

"Not . . . yet," whispered Byrne. "Let's show him first what will happen if the special train is, after all, derailed. Let's convince him that it's to his interests to play along with us. The . . . alternative, since Grimes showed up here, is much . . . firmer. But we shall need—did need?—that British seaman Grimes, just as George Washington needed his British seaman John Paul Jones. . . ."

"Are you trying to tell me, " I asked, "that the squalid squabble at Glenrowan was a crucial point in history?"

"Yes," said Kelly.

I realised that I'd been maneuvered to one of the three chairs facing the Mannschenn Drive unit, that I'd been eased quite gently on to the seat. The chair was made of tubular metal, with a high back, at the top of which was a helmet of metal mesh. This Kelly rapidly adjusted over my head. The only explanation that I can find for my submitting so tamely to all this is that Spooky Byrne must have possessed hypnotic powers.

Anyhow, I sat in that chair, which was comfortable enough. I watched Kelly fussing around with the Mannschenn Drive controls while, Byrne did things to his own console—which looked more like an aquarium in which luminous, insubstantial, formless fish were swimming than anything else. The drive rotors started to turn, to spin, to precess. I wanted to close my eyes; after all, it is dinned into us from boyhood up never to look directly at the Mannschenn Drive in operation. I wanted to close my eyes, but couldn't. I watched those blasted, shimmering wheels spinning, tumbling, fading, always on the verge of invisibility but ever pulsatingly a-glimmer. . . .

I listened to the familiar thin, high whine of the machine. . . .

That sound persisted; otherwise the experience was like watching one of those ancient silent films in an entertainments museum. There was no other noise, although that of the Drive unit could almost have come from an archaic projector. There were no smells, no sensations. There were just pictures, mostly out of focus and with the colours not quite right. But I saw Kelly—the here-and-now Kelly, not his villainous ancestor—recognisable in spite of the full beard that he was wearing, in some sort of sumptuous regalia, a golden crown in which emeralds gleamed set on his head. And there was Byrne, more soberly but still richly attired, reminding me somehow of the legendary wizard Merlin who was the

power behind King Arthur's throne. And there were glimpses of a flag, a glowing green banner with a golden harp in the upper canton, the stars of the Southern Cross, also in gold, on the fly. And I saw myself. It was me, all right. I was wearing a green uniform with gold braid up to the elbows. The badge on my cap, with its bullion-encrusted peak, was a golden crown over a winged, golden harp. . . .

The lights went out, came on again. I was sitting in the chair looking at the motionless machine, at Kelly and Byrne, who were looking at me.

Kelly said, "There are crucial points in history. The 'ifs' of history. *If* Napoleon had accepted Fulton's offer of steamships . . . just imagine a squadron of steam frigates at Trafalgar! *If* Pickett's charge at Gettysburg had been successful . . . *If* Admiral Torrance had met the Waverley Navy head on off New Dunedine instead of despatching his forces in a fruitless chase of Commodore McWhirter and his raiding squadron.

"And

If Thomas Curnow had not succeeded in flagging down the special train before it reached Glenrowan.

"You've seen what could have been, what can be. The extrapolation. Myself king. Spooky mr chief minister. You—an admiral."

I laughed. In spite of what I'd just seen it still seemed absurd. "All right," I said. "You might be king. But why should I be an admiral?"

He said, "It could be a sort of hereditary rank granted, in the first instance, to that ancestor of yours for services rendered. When you're fighting a war at the end of long lines of supply somebody on your staff who knows about ships is useful—"

"I've looked," said Spooky Byrne. "I've seen how things were after the massacre of the police outside Glenrowan. I've seen the rising of the poor, the oppressed, spreading' from Victoria to New South Wales, under the flag of the Golden Harp and Southern Cross. I've seen the gunboats on the Murray, the armoured paddlewheelers with their steam-powered Gatling cannon, an' the armoured trains ranging up an' down the countryside. An' it was yourself, Grimes—or your ancestor—who put to good use the supplies that were comin' in from our Fenian brothers in America an' even from the German emperor. I've watched the Battle of Port Phillip Bay—the English warships an' troop transports, with the Pope's Eye battery wreakin' havoc among 'em until a lucky shot found its magazine. An' then your flimsy gasbags came a-sailin' over, droppin' their bombs, an' not a gun could be brought to bear on 'em. . . ."

"Airships?" I demanded. "You certainly have been seeing things, Spooky!"

"Yes, airships. There was a man called Bland in Sydney, some-thin' of a rebel himself, who designed an airship years before Ned was ever heard of. An' you—or your ancestor—could have found those plans. You, in your ancestor's mind, sort of nudgin'—just as Eddie an' meself '11 be doing our own nudgin'. . . ."

I wasn't quite sober so, in spite of my protestations, what Spooky was saying, combined with what I had seen, seemed to make sense. So when Kelly said that we should now, all three of us, return to the past, to the year 1880, old reckoning, I did not object. I realised dimly that they had been expecting me, waiting for me. That they were needing me. I must have been an obnoxious puppy in those days—but aren't we all when still wet behind the ears? I actually thought of bargaining. A dukedom on top of the admiral's commission . . . the Duke of Alice. . . ? It sounded good.

Kelly and Byrne were seated now, one on either side of me. There were controls set in the armrests of their chairs. Latticework skeps, like the one that I was wearing, were over their heads. The rotors started to spin, to spin and precess, glimmering, fading, tumbling, dragging our *essences* down the dark dimensions while our bodies remained solidly seated in the here and now.

I listened to the familiar thin, high whine of the machine. . . .

To the babble of rough voices, male and female. . . . To the piano-accordion being not too inexpertly played. . . . An Irish song it was—*The Wearin' Of The Green*... I smelled tobacco smoke, the fumes of beer and of strong liquor. . . . I opened my eyes and looked around me. It was real—far more real than the unconvincing reconstruction in the here-and-now Glenrowan had been. The slatternly women were a

far cry from those barmaids tarted up in allegedly period costume. And here there were no tourists, gaily dressed and hung around with all manner of expensive recording equipment. Here were burly, bearded, rough-clad men and it was weapons, antique revolvers, that they carried, not the very latest trivoders.

But the group of men of whom I was one were not armed. They were labourers, not bushrangers—but they looked up to the arrogant giant who was holding forth just as much as did his fellow . . . criminals? Yes, they were that. They had held up coaches, robbed banks, murdered. Yet to these Irish labourers he was a hero, a deliverer. He stood for the Little Man against the Establishment. He stood for a warmly human religion against one whose priests were never recruited from the ranks of the ordinary people, the peasants, the workers.

Mind you, I was seeing him through the eyes of that ancestral Grimes who was (temporarily) a criminal himself, who was (temporarily) a rebel, who was on the run (he thought) from the forces of Law and Order. I had full access to his memories. I was, more or less, him. More or less, I say. Nonetheless, I, Grimes the spaceman, was a guest in the mind of Grimes the seaman. I could remember that quarrel on the poop of the *Lady Lucan* and how Captain Jenkins, whose language was always foul, had excelled himself, calling me what was, in those days, an impossibly vile epithet. I lost my temper, Jenkins lost a few teeth, and I lost my job, hastily leaving the ship in Melbourne before Jenkins could have me arrested on a charge of mutiny on the high seas.

And now, mainly because of the circumstances in which I found myself, I was on the point of becoming one of those middle class technicians who, through the ages, have thrown in their lot with charismatic rebel leaders, without whom those same alleged deliverers of the oppressed masses would have gotten no place at all. I—now—regard with abhorrence the idea of derailing a special train on the way to apprehend a rather vicious criminal. That ancestral Grimes, in his later years, must have felt the same sentiments—so much so that he never admitted to anybody that he was among those present at the Siege of Glenrowan.

But Ned Kelly. . . . He was in good form, although there was something odd about him. He seemed to be . . . possessed. So was the man—Joe Byrne—standing beside him. And so, of course, was John Grimes, lately second mate of the good ship *Lady Lucan*. Kelly—which Kelly?—must have realised that he was drawing some odd looks from his adherents. He broke the tension by putting on his famous helmet—the sheet-iron cylinder with only a slit for the eyes—and singing while he was wearing it. This drew both laughter and applause. Did you ever see those singing robots that were quite a craze a few years back? The effect was rather similar. Great art it was not but it was good for a laugh.

Nobody saw the schoolmaster, Thomas Curnow, sneaking out but me. That was rather odd as he, fancying himself a cut above the others making merry in the hotel, had been keeping himself to himself, saying little, drinking sparingly. This should have made him conspicuous but, somehow, it had the reverse effect. He was the outsider, being studiously ignored. I tried to attract Kelly's attention, Byrne's attention, but I might as well just not have been there. After all I—or my host—was an outsider too. I was the solitary Englishman among the Australians and the Irish. The gang with whom I'd been working on the railway had never liked me. The word had gotten around that I was an officer. The fact that I was (temporarily, as it happened) an ex-officer made no difference. I was automatically suspect.

But I still wanted to be an admiral. I still wanted to command those squadrons of gunboats on the Murray River, the air fleet that would turn the tide at Port Phillip Bay. (How much of my inward voice was the rum speaking, how much was me? How much did the John Grimes whose brain I was taking over ever know about it, remember about it?)

I followed Curnow, out into the cold, clear night. The railway track was silvery in the light of the lopsided moon, near its meridian. On either side, dark and ominous, was the bush. Some nocturnal bird or animal called out, a raucous cry, and something else answered it. And faint—but growing louder—there was a sort of chuffing rattle coming up from the south'ard. The pilot engine,

I thought, and then the special train.

Ahead of me Curnow's lantern, a yellow star where no star should have been, was bobbing along between the tracks. I remembered the story. He had the lantern, and his wife's red scarf. He would wave them.. The train would stop. Superintendent Hare, Inspector O'Connor, the white troopers, and the

black trackers would pile out. And then the shooting, and the siege, and the fire, and that great, armoured figure, like some humanoid robot before its time, stumbling out through the smoke and the flame for the final showdown with his enemies.

And it was up to me to change the course of history.

Have you ever tried walking along a railway line, especially when you're in something of a hurry? The sleepers or the ties or whatever they're called are spaced at just the wrong distance for a normal human stride. Curnow was doing better than I was. Well, he was more used to it. Neither as a seaman nor as a spaceman had I ever had occasion to take a walk such as this.

And then—he fell. He'd tripped, I suppose. He'd fallen with such force as to knock himself out. When I came up to him I found that he'd tried to save that precious lantern from damage. It was on its side but the chimney was unbroken, although one side of the glass was blackened by the smoke from the burning oil.

And the train was coming. I could see it now—the glaring yellow headlight of the leading locomotive, the orange glow from the fireboxes, a shower of sparks mingling with the smoke from the funnels. I had to get Curnow off the line. I tried to lift him but one foot was somehow jammed under the sleeper over which he had tripped. But his lantern, as I have already said, was still burning. I hastily turned it the right side up; only one side of the chimney was smoked into opacity. And that flimsy, translucent red scarf was still there.

I lifted the lantern, held it so that the coloured fabric acted as a filter. I waved it—not fast, for fear that the light would be blown out, but slowly, deliberately. The train, the metal monster, kept on coming. I knew that I'd soon have to look after myself but was determined to stand there until the last possible second.

The whistle of the leading locomotive, the pilot engine, sounded—a long, mournful note. There was a screaming of brakes, a great, hissing roar of escaping steam, shouting. . . .

I realised that Curnow had recovered, had scrambled to his feet, was standing beside me. I thrust the lantern and the scarf into his hand, ran into the bushes at the side of the track. He could do all the explaining. I—or that ancestral Grimes—had no desire to meet the police. For all I—or he—knew they would regard the capture of a mutineer and deserter as well as a gang of bushrangers as an unexpected bonus.

I stayed in my hiding place -cold, bewildered, more than a little scared. After a while I heard the shooting, the shouting and the screaming. I saw the flames. I was too far away to see Ned Kelly's last desperate stand; all that I observed was distant, shadowy figures in silhouette against the burning hotel.

Suddenly, without warning, I was back in my chair in that other Kelly's laboratory. The machine, the modified Mannschenn Drive unit, had stopped. I looked at Byrne. I knew, without examining him, that he, too, had . . . stopped. Kelly was alive but not yet fully conscious. His mouth was working. I could just hear what he was muttering; "It had to come to this." And those, I recalled, had been the last words of Ned Kelly, the bushranger, just before they hanged him.

I reasoned, insofar as I was capable of reasoning, that Kelly and Byrne had entered too deeply into the minds of their criminal ancestors. Joe Byrne had died in the siege and his descendant had died with him. Kelly had been badly wounded, although he recovered sufficiently to stand trial. I'd been lucky enough to escape almost unscathed.

I'm not at all proud of what I did then. I just got up and left them—the dead man, his semi-conscious cousin. I got out of there, fast. When I left the Glenrowan Tower I took a cab to the airport and there bought a ticket on the first flight out of the city. It was going to Perth, a place that I'd never much wanted to visit, but at least it was putting distance between me and the scene of that hapless experiment, that presumptuous attempt at tinkering with Time.

I've often wondered what would have happened if I'd left Cur now to his fate, if I hadn't stopped the train. The course of history might well have been changed—but would it have been for the better? I don't

think so. An Irish Australia, a New Erin, a Harp in the South . . . New Erin allied with the Boers against hated England during the wars in South Africa . . . New Erin quite possibly allied with Germany against England during the First World War . . . The Irish, in many ways, are a great people—but they carry a grudge to absurd lengths. They have far too long a memory for their own wrongs.

And I think that I like me better as I am now than as an Hereditary Admiral of the New Erin Navy in an alternate universe that, fortunately, didn't happen.

She said, "Thank you, Commodore, for a very interesting story." She switched off her trivoder, folded flat its projections, closed the carrying case about it. She got to her feet.

She said, "I have to be going."

He looked at the bulkhead clock, he said, "There's no hurry, Kitty. We've time for another drink or two." He sensed a coldness in the atmosphere and tried to warm things up with an attempt at humour. "Sit down again. Make yourself comfortable. This ship is Liberty Hall, you know. You can spit on that mat and call the cat a bastard."

She said, "The only tom cats I've seen aboard this wagon haven't been of the four-legged variety. And, talking of legs, do you think that I haven't noticed the way that you've been eyeing mine?"

His prominent ears reddened angrily but he persisted. "Will you be at the cocktail party tonight?"

"No, Commodore Grimes. Station Yorick isn't interested in boring social functions."

"But I'll be seeing more of you, I hope. . . ."

"You will not, in either sense of the words." She turned to go. "You said, Commodore, that the Irish have a long memory for their own wrongs. Perhaps you are right. Be that as it may—you might be interested to learn that my family name is Kelly."

When she was gone Grimes reflected wryly that now there was yet another alternate universe, differing from his here-and-now only in a strictly personal sense, which he would never enter.