

MIKE RESNICK

THE ROOSEVELT DISPATCHES

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Mike Resnick's story, "The Roosevelt Dispatches," is the first of the War of the Worlds stories mentioned in the editorial. In Wells' novel, the Martians land in England. Wells deals with Europe, ever so slightly, but never examines what happens in the rest of the world:

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Mike, whose Roosevelt stories have become classics in the alternate history field, puts the Martians in contact with one of the last century's most enterprising men, a far-ranging intellect who never saw a puzzle he didn't want to solve. One Theodore Roosevelt, freedom fighter, big game hunter, and future President of the United States.

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Excerpt from the Diary of Theodore Roosevelt (Volume 23):

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July 9, 1898:

Shot and killed a most unusual beast this afternoon. Letters of inquiry go off tomorrow to the various museums to see which of them would like the mounted specimen once I have finished studying it.

Tropical rain continues unabated. Many of the men are down with influenza, and in the case of poor Westmore it looks like we shall lose him to pneumonia before the week is out. Still awaiting orders, now that San Juan Hill and the surrounding countryside is secured. It may well be that we should remain here until we know that the island is totally free from any more of the creatures that I shot this afternoon.

It's quite late. Just time for a two-mile run and a chapter of Jane Austen, and then off to bed.

Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to F. C. Selous, July 12, 1898:

My Dear Selous:

I had a most remarkable experience in Cuba this week, one that I feel compelled to share with you. I had just led my Rough Riders in a victorious campaign in Cuba. We were still stationed there, awaiting orders to return home. With nothing better to do, I spent many happy hours bird-watching, and the event in question occurred late one afternoon when I was making my way through a riverine forest in search of the Long-billed Curlew.

Afternoon had just passed into twilight, and as I made my way through the dense vegetation I had the distinct feeling that I was no longer alone, that an entity at least as large as myself was lurking nearby. I couldn't imagine what it might be, for to the best of my knowledge the tapir and the jaguar do not inhabit the islands of the Caribbean.

I proceeded more cautiously, and in another twenty yards I came to a halt and found myself facing a thing the size of one of our American grizzlies. The only comparably sized animal within your experience would probably be the mountain gorilla, but this creature was at least thirty percent larger than the largest of the silverbacks.

The head was round, and was totally without a nose! The eyes were large, dark, and quite widely spread. The mouth was V-shaped and lipless, and drooled constantly.

It was brown -- not the brown of an impala or a koodoo, but rather the slick moist brown of a sea-slug, its body glistening as if greased. The thing had no arms as such, but it did have a number of long, sinewy tentacles, each seemingly the thickness and strength of an elephant's trunk.

It took one look at me, made a sound that was half-growl and half-roar, and charged. I had no idea of its offensive capabilities, but I didn't like the look of those tentacles, so I quickly raised my Winchester to my shoulder and fired at almost point-blank range. I could hear the smack! of the bullet as it bounced off the trunk of the beast's body. The creature continued to approach me, and I

hurled myself aside at the last instant, barely avoiding two of its outstretched tentacles.

I rolled as I hit the ground, and fired once more from a prone position, right into the open V of its mouth. This time there was a reaction, and a violent one.

The thing hooted noisily and began tearing up pieces of the turf, all the while shaking its head vigorously. Within seconds it was literally uprooting large bushes and shredding them as if they were no more than mere tissue paper.

I waited until it was facing in my direction again and put a bullet into its left eye. Again, the reaction was startling: the creature began ripping apart nearby trees and screaming at such a pitch that all the nearby bird life fled in. By that point I must confess that I was looking for some means of retreat, for I know of no animal that could take a rifle bullet in the mouth and another in the eye and still remain not just standing but aggressive and formidable. I trained my rifle on the brute and began backing away.

My movement seemed to have caught its attention, for suddenly it ceased its ravings and turned to face me. Then it began advancing slowly and purposefully -- and a moment later it did something that no animal anywhere in the world has ever done: it produced a weapon.

The thing looked like a sword, but when the creature pointed it at me, a beam of light shot out of it, missing me only by inches, and instantly setting the bush beside me ablaze. I jumped in the opposite direction as it fired its sword of heat again, and again the forest combusted in a blinding conflagration.

I turned and raced back the way I had come. After perhaps sixty yards I chanced a look back, and saw that the creature was following me. However, despite its many physical attributes, speed was not to be counted among them. I used that to my advantage, putting enough distance between us so that it lost sight of me. I then jumped into the nearby river, making sure that no water should invade my rifle. Here, at least, I felt safe from the indirect effects of the creature's heat weapon.

It came down the path some forty seconds later. Rather than shooting it immediately, I let it walk by while I studied it, looking for vulnerable areas.

The thing bore no body armor as such, not even the type of body plating that our mutual friend Corbett describes on the Indian rhino, yet its skin seemed impervious to bullets. Its body, which I now could see in its entirety, was almost perfectly spherical except for the head and tentacles, and there were no discernable weak or thin spots where head and tentacles joined the trunk.

Still, I couldn't let it continue along the path, because sooner or later it would come upon my men, who were totally unprepared for it. I looked for an earhole, could not find one, and with only the back of its head to shoot at felt that I could not do it any damage. So I stood up, waist deep in the water, and yelled at it. It turned toward me, and as it did so I put two more bullets into its left eye.

Its reaction was the same as before, but much shorter in duration. Then it regained control of itself, stared balefully at me through both eyes -- the good one and the one that had taken three bullets -- and began walking toward me, weapon in hand . . . and therein I thought I saw a way by which I might finally disable it.

I began walking backward in the water, and evidently the creature felt some doubt about the weapon's accuracy, because it entered the water and came after me. I stood motionless, my sights trained on the sword of heat. When the creature was perhaps thirty yards from me, it came to a halt and raised its weapon -- and as it did so, I fired.

The sword of heat flew from the creature's hand, spraying its deadly light in all directions. Then it fell into the water, its muzzle -- if that is the right word, and I very much suspect that it isn't --pointing at the creature. The water around it began boiling and hissing as steam rose, and the creature screeched once and sank beneath the surface of the river.

It took about five minutes before [felt safe in approaching it -- after all, I

had no idea how long it could hold its breath -- but sure enough, as I had hoped, the beast was dead.

I have never before seen anything like it, and I will be stuffing and mounting this specimen for either the American Museum or the Smithsonian. I'll send you a copy of my notes, and hopefully a number of photographs taken at various stages of the post mortem examination and the mounting.

I realize that I was incredibly lucky to have survived. I don't know how many more such creatures exist here in the jungles of Cuba, but they are too malevolent to be allowed to survive and wreak their havoc on the innocent locals here. They must be eradicated, and I know of no hunter with whom I would rather share this expedition than yourself. I will put my gun and my men at your disposal, and hopefully we can rid the island of this most unlikely and lethal aberration.

Yours,

Roosevelt

Letter to Carl Akeley, hunter and taxidermist, c/o The American Museum of Natural History, July 13, 1898:

Dear Carl:

Sorry to have missed you at the last annual banquet, but as you know, I've been preoccupied with matters here in Cuba.

Allow me to ask you a purely hypothetical question: could a life form exist that has no stomach or digestive tract? Let me further hypothesize that this life form ingests the blood of its prey-- other living creatures-- directly into its veins.

First, is it possible?

Second, could such a form of nourishment supply sufficient energy to power a body the size of, say, a grizzly bear?

I realize that you are a busy man, but while I cannot go into detail, I beg you to give these questions your most urgent attention.

Yours very truly,

Theodore Roosevelt

Letter to Dr. Joel A. Allen, Curator of Birds and Mammals, American Museum of Natural History, July 13, 1898:

Dear Joel:

I have a strange but, please believe me, very serious question for you.

Can a complex animal life form exist without gender? Could it possibly reproduce-- don't laugh-- by budding? Could a complex life form reproduce by splitting apart, as some of our single-celled animals do?

Please give me your answers soonest.

Yours very truly,

Theodore Roosevelt

Excerpts from monograph submitted by Theodore Roosevelt on July 14, 1898 for publication by the American Museum of Natural History:

. . . The epidermis is especially unique, not only in its thickness and pliability, but also in that there is no layer of subcutaneous fat, nor can I discern any likely source for the secretion of the oily liquid that covers the entire body surface of the creature.

One of the more unusual features is the total absence of a stomach, intestine, or any other internal organ that could be used for digestion. My own conclusion, which I hasten to add is not based on observation, is that nourishment is ingested directly into the bloodstream from the blood of other animals.

The V-shaped mouth was most puzzling, for what use can a mouth be to a life form that has no need of eating? But as I continued examining the creature, I concluded that I was guilty of a false assumption, based on the placement of the "mouth". The V-shaped opening is not a mouth at all, but rather a breathing orifice, which I shall not call a nose simply because it is also the source of the creature's vocalizations, if I may so term the growls and shrieks that emanate from it . . .

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the eye is not the multi-faceted' pupil, nor even the purple-and-brown cornea, which doubtless distorts its ability to see colors as we do, but rather the bird-like nictitating membrane, (or haw, as this inner eyelid is called in dogs) which protects it from harm. Notice that although it could not possibly have known the purpose or effects of my rifle, it nonetheless managed to lower it quickly enough to shield the eye from the main force of my bullet. Indeed; as is apparent from even a cursory examination of the haw, the healing process is so incredibly rapid that although I shot it three times in the left eye, the three wounds are barely discernable, even though the bullets passed entirely through the haw and buried themselves at the back of the eye.

I cannot believe that the creature's color can possibly be considered protective coloration . . . but then, I do not accept the concept of protective coloration to begin with. Consider the zebra: were it brown or black, it would be no easier to spot at, say, a quarter mile, than a wildebeest or topi or prong-horned deer-- but because God saw fit to give it black and white stripes, it stands out at more than half a mile, giving notice of its presence to all predators, thereby negating the notion of protective coloration, for the zebra's stripes are, if anything, anti-protective, and yet it is one of the most successful animals in Africa. Thus, while the creature I shot is indeed difficult to pick out in what I assume to be its natural forest surroundings, I feel that it is brown by chance rather than design.

. . . Field conditions are rather primitive here, but I counted more than one hundred separate muscles in the largest of the tentacles, and must assume there are at least another two hundred that I was unable to discern. This is the only section of the body that seems crisscrossed with nerves, and it is conceivable that if the creature can be slowed by shock, a bullet placed in the cluster of nerves and blood vessels where the tentacle joins the trunk of the body will do the trick . . .

The brain was a surprise to me. It is actually three to four times larger and heavier, in proportion to the body, than a man's brain is in proportion to his body. This, plus the fact that the creature used a weapon (which, alas, was lost in the current of the river), leads me to the startling but inescapable conclusion that what we have here is a species of intelligence at least equal to, and probably greater than, our own.

Respectfully submitted on this 14th day of July, 1898, by

Theodore Roosevelt, Colonel

United States Armed Forces

Letter to Willis Maynard Crenshaw, of Winchester Rifles, July 14, 1898:

Dear Mr. Crenshaw:

Enclosed you will find a sample of skin from a newly discovered animal. The texture is such that it is much thicker than elephant or rhinoceros hide, though it in no way resembles the skin of either pachyderm.

However, I'm not asking you to analyze the skin, at least not scientifically.

What I want you to do is come up with a rifle and a bullet that will penetrate the skin.

Just as importantly, I shall need stopping power. Assume the animal will weigh just under a ton, but has remarkable vitality. Given the terrain, I'll most likely be shooting from no more than twenty yards, so I probably won't have time for too many second shots. The first shot must bring it down from the force of the bullet, even if no vital organs are hit.

Please let me know when you have a prototype that I can test in the field, and please make no mention of this to anyone except the artisans who will be working on the project.

Thank you.

Yours very truly,

Theodore Roosevelt

Private hand-delivered message from Theodore Roosevelt to President William

McKinley, July 17, 1898:

Dear Mr. President:

Certain facts have come to my attention that make it imperative that you neither recall the Rough Riders from the Island of Cuba, nor disband them upon signing the Armistice with Spain.

There is something here, on this island, that is so evil, so powerful, so inimical to all men, that I do not believe I am exaggerating when I tell you that the entire human race is threatened by its very existence. I will make no attempt to describe it, for should said description fall into the wrong hands we could start a national panic if it is believed or become figures of public ridicule if it is not.

You will simply have to trust me that the threat is a very real one.

Furthermore, I urge you not to recall any of our troops, for if my suspicions are correct we may need all of them and still more.

Col. Theodore Roosevelt

"The Rough Riders"

Letter to Secretary of War Russell A. Alger, July 20, 1898:

Dear Russell:

McKinley is a fool! I warned him of perhaps the greatest threat yet to the people of America, and indeed to the world, and he has treated it as a joke.

Listen to me: it is essential that you cancel the recall order immediately and let my Rough Riders remain in Cuba. Furthermore, I want the entire army on standby notice, and if you're wise you'll transfer at least half of our forces to Florida, for that seems the likeliest spot for the invasion to begin.

I will be coming to Washington to speak to McKinley personally and try to convince him of the danger facing us. Anything you can do to pave the way will be appreciated.

Regards,

Roosevelt

Speech delivered from the balcony above the Columbia Restaurant, Tampa, Florida,
August 3, 1898:

My fellow Americans:

It has lately come to your government's attention that there is a threat to the national security -- indeed, to the security of the world -- that currently lurks in the jungles of Cuba. I have seen it with my own eyes, and I assure you that no matter what you may hear in the days and weeks to come, the danger is real and cannot be underestimated.

Shortly after my Rough Riders took San Juan Hill, I encountered something in the nearby jungle so incredible that a description of it would only arouse your skepticism and your disbelief. It was a creature, quite probably intelligent, the like of which has never before been seen on this Earth. I am and always have been a vociferous Darwinian, but despite my knowledge of the biological sciences, I cannot begin to hazard a guess concerning how this creature evolved.

What I can tell you is that it has developed the ability to create weapons unlike any we have seen, and that it has no compunction about using them against human beings. It is an evil and malevolent life form, and it must be eradicated before it can turn its hatred loose against innocent Americans.

I was fortunate enough to kill the one I encountered in Cuba, but where there is one there will certainly be more. The United States government was originally dubious about the veracity of my claim, but I gather that recent information forwarded to the White House and the State Department from England, where more of these creatures have appeared, has finally convinced them that I was telling the truth.

Thus far none of the creatures has been discovered in the United States, but I say to you that it would be foolhardy to wait until they are found before coming up with an appropriate response. Americans have always been willing to make sacrifices and take up arms to defend their country, and this will be no exception. These creatures may have had their momentary successes against Cuban

peasants and an unprepared Great Britain, but I tell you confidently they have no chance against an army of motivated Americans, driven by the indomitable American spirit and displaying the unshakable courage of all true Americans. To us as a people it has been granted to lay the foundations of our national life on a new continent. We are the heirs of the ages, and yet we have had to pay few of the penalties which in old countries are exacted by the bygone hand of a dead civilization. We have not been obliged to fight for our existence against any alien challenge-- until now. I believe we are up to the challenge, and I am convinced that you believe so too.

I am leaving for Miami tomorrow, and from there I will be departing for Cuba two days later, to lead my men into battle against however many of these creatures exist in the dank rotting jungles of that tropical island. I urge every red-blooded able-bodied American among you to join me on this greatest of adventures.

Letter to Kermit, Theodore junior, Archie and Quentin Roosevelt, August 5, 1898:

Dear Boys:

Tomorrow I embark on a great and exciting safari. I'm sure the details will be wired back to the newspapers on a daily basis, but I promise that when I return we'll sit around a campfire at Sagamore Hill and I'll tell you all the stories that the press never reported. Not only that, but I will bring back a trophy for each and every one of you.

School will be starting before I return. I expect each of you to go to class prepared for his lessons, and to apply your minds as vigorously as you apply your bodies to the games you play at home. Had I been slow of wit or of body I would not have survived my initial encounter with the creatures I shall be hunting in the coming days and weeks. Always remember that balance is the key in all things.

Love,

Father

Letter (# I,\$! 7) to Edith Carow Roosevelt, August 5, 1898:

My Dearest Edith:

My ship leaves tomorrow morning so it will perhaps be some weeks before I have the opportunity to write to you again.

Shortly I shall be off on the greatest hunt of my life. Give my love to the children. I wish the boys were just a little bit older, so that I could take them along on what promises to be the most exciting of endeavors.

I am still trying to rid myself of the cold I picked up when I plunged into that river in Cuba, but other than that I feel fit as a bull moose. It will take a lot more than a strange beast and a runny nose to bring a true American to his knees. The coming days should be just bully!

Your Theodore