
The Missing Medium

Book Two of the Utgarda Series

Joab Stieglitz





Chapter 2

July 11, 1929

Shortly after 8:00 a.m., Anna and the doctor were negotiating the crowds on the main concourse. The hall was packed with hurried commuters and luggage-laden travelers. Here and there children ran through the crowds hawking newspapers. “Rome throng greets American Fliers,” cried one boy over the din of the crowd, “Yancey and Williams meet with Mussolini.”

“Here you go, son,” Lamb said, handing the boy a coin. The child pocketed it, handed the doctor a copy of the *New York Herald*, and disappeared into the throng before Lamb had unfolded it. Glancing at the headlines, Lamb turned to Anna, who walked beside him. “It’s quite the accomplishment,” he said, turning the paper to show her the cover. “Roger Williams and Lewis Yancey broke the over-water flying record flying from Old Orchard Beach, Maine, to Santander, Spain,” he read aloud. “The 3,400 mile flight took 31 hours and 30 minutes.”

But Anna was not listening. She was wary of the crowds. Having grown up in Brooklyn as a woman of means, she had been approached by would-be thieves on more than one occasion. The first time, the young immigrant surrendered the money she had on her person. But she never let anyone take advantage of her again. The few occasions when she was

taken by surprise, Anna was more than able to resist, yelling, screaming, and even fighting back. She had left more than one assailant with a bloody nose or black eye.

Anna knew that this mass of distracted humanity was a prime target for pickpockets, and she eyed the passersby closely. The doctor seemed heedless of the potential dangers of their surroundings, so she took it upon herself to be diligent.

“We need to take the IRT subway to get to Brooklyn,” she said as she handed him his suitcase, took hold of Lamb’s arm, and guided him through the crowd toward the tunnel to the Interborough Rapid Transit platforms. “It will take a couple of hours to get to the Teplov house in Bushwick. We will need to change trains at Canal Street.”

“How do you know so much about the subway?” Lamb asked, looking up from his newspaper when the light dimmed as they entered the tunnel.

“I lived in Brighton Beach when I first came to America,” she replied. “I took the subway to Manhattan several times before I moved to Westerberg.” The tunnel was choked with passengers from a train that had debarked on the platform before them. The commuters were as rude as she remembered, shouldering their way past the pair and complaining about their luggage. Anna gave as good as she got, and with some effort, they traversed the tunnel to an alcove containing a stairway that went over two pairs of tracks to the downtown platform. As they crossed the bridge over the tracks, Anna heard the growing rumbling of approaching trains. When they descended onto the platform, there was a crowd of people there. Anna and Lamb put their bags down.

The uptown train appeared first, rumbling through the station at a rapid pace. Anna glanced at the passengers. Most were just looking forward. Some were reading. Anna made eye contact with a child who waved at her. She smiled as she watched the last car disappear through the next tunnel.

When she looked back, the opposite platform was gone. Instead, she saw a flat, barren, rocky plain. In the distance was a line of tall mountains beneath a pink sky with an enormous full moon hovering over them. Anna was mesmerized by the scene. The landscape was completely empty, save for two massive, rough, brownish-green pillars perhaps fifty feet past the tracks.

As she took in the strange scenery, a shadow passed over her. Looking up, she realized that the two pillars were in fact scaly legs. Directing her gaze higher, she saw a giant, humanoid torso sitting atop of them. Two lanky arms stretched out to the sides ending in clawed hands. One of them turned its palm toward her revealing a large, malevolent eye in its

center. The shadow passed over again and Anna followed the torso up to a hairless head bearing an enormous, red, elephantine trunk that whipped around in the air chaotically.

Suddenly, the downtown train emerged from its tunnel with a deafening toot of its horn and sped by, capturing Anna's attention. A few seconds later, it disappeared into the downtown express tunnel, and Anna was again looking at the uptown platform. A handful of people stood about waiting for the next train.

Anna looked to the doctor, but his head was buried in his newspaper. He had missed the whole scene. Unless she had imagined it. The doctor noticed her glancing at him.

"Are you alright?" he asked with an expression of friendly concern. "You look like you saw a ghost."

"Something like that," she replied and quickly glanced at the newspaper to deflect his question. "What has you so engrossed in the paper?" Lamb glanced from Anna to the paper and back.

"Oh," he said, indicating a small article on one of the interior pages. "There's an article about Brian Teplow here. It says that his agent, Woody Frank, has not been seen in over a week. Unnamed sources suggest that he may have been the victim of foul play." He pointed to the article, but Anna's attention was attracted to an advertisement at the bottom of the page. Next to the "Church of Cosmic Understanding" was a familiar image.

"Does that look familiar?" Anna asked, tapping the ad with her finger. Lamb's eyes widened.

"Arthur Copen showed me that symbol when we first met at O'Malley's church. He didn't offer to help you until after we had said that we hadn't seen it before."

"We will have to look into that after we meet with Mrs. Teplow," Anna said. The doctor nodded his agreement as the the lights from their train crept out from the tunnel to their left. They pressed into the crowd when the doors opened and boarded, but there were no seats available. They migrated to the open space in the center of the car.

Ten minutes later, the train stopped at Canal Street. This time, Lamb ushered Anna and their luggage through the crowded car and onto the platform just before the doors closed. They were being herded with the mass of travelers toward the exit when Anna diverted the pair to a stairwell leading down. Once out of the steady stream of people, the noise level dropped significantly.

“This way leads to the Brooklyn trains,” Anna said to the doctor. “We need to find the train that goes to,” she glanced at the sheet Feldman had given them before departing, “Halsey Street on the Broadway Line.”

Descending the steps, they found themselves on a long, practically-empty platform, illuminated periodically by electric lamps in the ceiling. Painted on the wall beneath one were the words “BMT BRIGHTON BEACH LINE,” and beneath that was “EASTBOUND.” Another sign said “BMT BROADWAY LINE,” with an arrow indicating the far side of the platform.

“Our train appears to be that way,” Lamb said, pointing at the sign. Anna casually lowered his hand. The doctor was acting like every tourist who came to the city and made an attractive target for unsavory elements. The two proceeded down the platform. The alternating light and dark seemed to make the platform extend continuously.

They had progressed out of sight of both ends of the platform when an unseen man, his worn and disheveled clothing stained to match the dust-covered patina of the platform, burst up from the shadows, pointing at Anna and the doctor.

“It can’t be!” he cried. “I saw you die! You and Khan-Tral and Deb-Roh.” The man rubbed his face with his hands neurotically. “At the mercy of Gho-Bazh!” He shuddered. “I saw you blasted by them Pointee bolts in the Dirge!”

The man backed away in the direction the pair were heading. They continued down the platform, ignoring the man, who disappeared into a gap in the wall. As they passed, they saw him rummaging through a Great War-era backpack.

“What an odd fellow,” Lamb said with curious expression. Anna was taken aback. She stopped and stared at the doctor with an expression of disgust.

“After the war, New York was flooded with returning soldiers,” she said clearly and directly. “The war changed a great many men. Some of them found themselves shunned and made homes in the subway.” She was about to continue when the vagrant grabbed her shoulder and pushed his way between them. In his hand he held a weathered piece of animal skin parchment with an almost-lifelike black and white drawing of five people.

“See,” the man said with a hopeful expression, his demeanor now amicable. “We were all there.” The figures in the drawing were dressed for an overland expedition in a mountainous terrain. “You remember me,” he said, pointing at one of the figures, “don’t you?” At their blank expressions, he added, “Ganon. Do you remember now?”

"I'm afraid you have us confused with someone else," Lamb said politely. Ganon put the drawing in front of his face and pointed.

"That's you, Nab," he said, directing the doctor to a largish figure standing next to the figure Ganon had indicated as himself. "We were like this," he said, crossing his fingers in the doctor's face. Anna started to turn away when the man grabbed her wrist and thrust the drawing at her. "And that's you, Nygof." He pointed to the shorter of the two women in the group. "The five of us set out across the Endless Barrens in search of Khan-Tral and Deb-Roh." He put his hands on their shoulders. "I thought I was the only survivor, but now that you're here I can see my prayers were answered!" Anna took the drawing and moved near a lamp to examine it more closely.

"You're not going to entertain this man's delusions, are you?" Lamb asked incredulously. Anna pointed to the woman. Stature-wise, it was the correct proportions for her, and the correct height in comparison with the figure identified as Lamb. The figures were barely visible, but the scars on the side of her face from the creature Cophen had banished in Westerberg were plainly visible in the image. She turned to Ganon.

"Ganon, yes?" The man nodded. "Where can we find you? I would like to continue our conversation later."

"You can't be serious?" the doctor interjected.

"I got nowhere to be, Nygof," Ganon said with a smile. "I could come with you!"

"My name is Anna," she replied politely after glaring at Lamb, "and this is Harry. I'm afraid that we have an appointment to make, but I would like to see you later."

"I could come and wait outside..."

"No, Ganon," Anna said firmly. "We need to prepare for our meeting on our journey. Where can we find you later?" Ganon looked disappointed.

"I'll be here, I guess." He thought a moment. "But you'll be coming back, so I'll wait on the other platform," he said, pointing across the tracks.

"That would be perfect," Anna said calmly. "I do not know how long we will be, but we will come back later and find you." Ganon nodded and bowed, sitting in the darkness against the wall, where his garments camouflaged him almost perfectly.

They proceeded down the platform in silence, neither speaking to the other. Eventually they reached a stairway with a sign bearing "BMT BROADWAY LINE" with an arrow indicating to go up. Lamb led the

way. Once they had ascended out of view of the platform, the doctor turned on Anna.

“Are you insane?” he said emphatically, in a hushed tone. “Why did you encourage that man.”

Anna glared at him. “First,” she said, holding up a finger, “a little compassion does not cost anything. Second,” she held up another finger, “it was clearly me in that drawing. It had my scars.” Lamb looked incredulous. “I have seen frescoes and paintings that were less exact than that drawing, Anna continued” Lamb was still not convinced. “And there is something about the names he used for us that reminded me of something, though I cannot place it right now.”

“Fine,” the doctor conceded. “He probably won’t be there when we get back anyway. If we even come back through here again.” He turned and continued up the stairs.



At the top of the stairs, the platform was in between two tracks in each direction. A sign on a pillar indicated that the track to their right was eastbound, and the doors closed just as they reached the top of the steps. Lamb stepped forward to the nearest door, and set his suitcase down on the tiled floor. When he looked up, a woman inside the car started yelling and pointing at the doctor. As the train started moving she frantically continued toward the back of the car. Lamb could make out the words “behind you” as the train accelerated into the tunnel.

Lamb turned around to see a well-dressed man with a Homburg hat and briefcase standing a few paces behind him reading a newspaper. He did not seem to notice the doctor’s gaze. Anna approached a moment later.

“Would you have left without me?” she asked with irritation. The man with the newspaper looked up and quickly stepped aside to allow her to pass. Lamb glanced at her suitcase and realized that she had probably struggled to get it up the stairs.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “No, I wouldn’t have left you here, Anna.” A few minutes later, an eastbound BMT Broadway Line train arrived at the platform. “Allow me to take your suitcase.” Anna resisted for a brief moment, and then agreed. They boarded the train and the doors closed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joab Stieglitz is an avid tabletop RPG player and game master of horror, espionage, fantasy, and science fiction genres, which he plays 3-4 times a week.

Joab is a Senior Business Analyst for a software company. He has also worked as a software trainer, a network engineer, a project manager, and a technical writer over his 30 year career. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

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