

THE OTHERWORLDERS - Excerpts

Book 1:

"Hyacinth was right, war hath truly broken out," cried Mayblossom, as she and Chong came nearer.

"Tell!"

"Chong can do that better - he saw everything " said Mayblossom.

"Well Chong, what hath taken place?"

Chong gave a huge yawn. In no hurry, he sat himself down, languidly lifted a velvet paw, and began washing himself. Inside, however, he was fuming. Mayblossom had interrupted a most promising mouse-hunt, had given him no peace until he'd answered all her questions, and had then had the cheek to make him carry her here and tell the whole story all over again – and he hadn't dared say no!

Normally Chong was fearless and proud of his courage. All the more did it gall him that he didn't dare disobey the fairies. The TreeBlossomFolk were unpredictable and powerful, and here before him sat the mightiest of them all - Belladonna, a beon of royal blood and almost boundless might. If he annoyed her she was quite capable of turning him into a mouse and feeding him to his own sister Cheech. So he would do her bidding, but he'd take as much time about it as he could. Let her wait!

The tall fairy, Belladonna, regarded him with obvious dislike and visibly growing displeasure. She could read his thoughts, knew exactly what was going on in his head.

"Come Chong! We cannot wait all day while thou dost make thyself beautiful!"

Chong sighed aggrievedly. Reluctantly he opened his mouth and grumpily mumbled some indistinct miaows.

"Speak thou the BigFolk tongue! The childer yonder shall hear all thou hast to tell."

Robin and Jana turned pale with fright, and Chong's head shot up in surprise, the inscrutable green eyes open wide.

"You don't mean that the BigFolk spawn can see and hear you?" he asked in astonishment.

"They most certainly can! Yonder two shall learn to what their mischief and moans have led. I know not what hath happened, but if war hath really broken out then only because those two yonder know not how to behave themselves and the animals imitate all they do. Even thou and Cheech have altered, whether thou knowest it or not. Thy manners lately have become intolerable! "

The tomcat's eyes narrowed to thin green slits, and for a moment it looked as if he would protest,

but fairies are moody beons with great magical gifts, so he swallowed his rage and his face took on its usual aloof expression. Nevertheless he could not resist one indignant objection:

"If the children know I speak the BigFolk tongue they'll never leave me in peace" he complained.¹ "They'll get on my nerves with their everlasting, dim-witted questions and their tiresome chatter and noise!"

"That is thy problem!" said Belladonna, unmoved.

"Once again Chong's green eyes flashed with rage, and once again it seemed that he would defy the tall fairy, and once again he held back and swallowed his anger.

"Where shall I begin?" he asked curtly.

"The beginning would be a good place!" said Belladonna acidly.

The tomcat lifted a hind leg and scratched himself busily behind an ear, wasting time. Belladonna's eyes gleamed dangerously.

"*Cho-o-ong!*" she hissed warningly: Her wings unfolded, quivered faintly, and lifted her slightly off the roseleaf on which she sat. Chong hastily lowered his paw and, a wary eye on the fairy, finally began to tell his tale...

"Well to begin with, it had absolutely nothing at all to do with the BigFolk children" he purred, happy for the chance to contradict Belladonna unpunished. "It began with a joke - a very bad joke thought up by Steve Snail, Billy Beetle and The Woodlouse Gang. They wanted to revenge themselves on the ants, and..."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did they want to take revenge upon the ants?"

Chong let out a long-suffering sigh.

"Because, without realising it, an ant colony had settled down in The Gang's favourite flowerbed

¹ The grown-ups already knew this (at least they knew that cats could understand the human tongue, not however that they could also *spea*k it). They'd found out one day in autumn when Mum, annoyed with Cheech who kept disturbing her while she was gardening, took the cat to task: "You're a stupid cat, too daft to understand that I can't work when you keep lying down under my nose! Go and catch mice like your brother Chong. It's harvest time, and hard-working and swift though he is, he still has all paws full keeping the field mice out of the house. But no! You're too brainless to catch a mouse!" Cheech had gazed at Mum for a long moment out of her enigmatic cat-eyes; then she'd leisurely got up and disappeared round the corner of the hedge. Two minutes later she was back again, a fat, squeaking field mouse in her jaws. As soon as she was certain that Mum had seen the mouse, Cheech opened her jaws, let the frightened creature escape, looked Mum full in the face, and settled down again on the earth in front of Mum's feet. True, she hadn't said a word, but the message was clear: "I'm not stupid, I don't want to kill mice, and I'll lie down wherever I please"

and the soldier ants wouldn't let Steve, Billy and the woodlice forage there. The ants said there were plenty of other flowerbeds in The Garden, and that snails, beetles and woodlice could easily seek food elsewhere, whereas the ants had already set up their nurseries, kindergartens, schools, factories and farms, and it was unreasonable to expect them to dismantle everything and begin again elsewhere".

"Oh... I see... good... carry on!"

"Now, where was I?" he growled. "I've completely lost the thread!"

"*Cho-o-ong!*"

"Okay! Okay! Well, as I was saying, Steve, Billy Beetle and The Woodlouse Gang wanted to pay the ants back, and thought up what seemed to them a huge joke. Last night they waited until the whole ant colony had settled down and only the sentries were awake. Now everybeon in The Garden knows that the sentries only patrol the boundaries of the ant colony, and that the aphid [plant-louse] herds outside these boundaries are guarded not by trained soldier-ants but by just a few herd-ants. Usually these doze off to sleep because the worst that can happen is that a couple of aphids get loose from their tethers or a storm comes up and the herds must be driven into cover.

"So first of all Steve, Billy and The Gang counted the number of aphid herds, and then they split up into small groups - one group to each herd. Each group crept up on a herd and then they... they ...

Chong hesitated.

"Go on!" Belladonna ordered curtly.

"They killed the herd-ants!" he sighed.

Belladonna stiffened, her face darkened and her eyes glowed with anger. Like the rest of the animal kingdom, GardenFolk kill only for food or in defence. Only when hungry or when in danger of its life or to defend the lives of its own family or friends may one animal kill another. This is the first and chief rule of the animal kingdom, and it may never be broken. Steve, Beetle Bill and the Woodlouse Gang had done just that.

"Go on," she said again, with tightened lips.

Chong's rosy tongue flicked nervously round the corner of his mouth. What he now had to tell was even worse, and he feared the fairy's anger. True, he was in no way responsible for what had happened, but Belladonna was known for her explosive temperament, volcanic! And every beon knows what happens when one is near a volcano and this erupts!

Belladonna smiled - a grim, rather malicious little smile. She knew just what he was thinking.

"Fear not, Chong! I shall not touch thee. Thou hast my word!"

"They... they... Steve... Billy Beetle... The Woodlouse Gang..." Chong stuttered as he recalled the terrible events of the preceding night.

"They untethered the herds... drove the aphids asunder... as far away from their pasture grounds as possible... most of them right out of The Garden. S-some didn't want to go, and kept running back again to the leaf-pastures... and... and" Chong swallowed, "... and so they k-killed them too!"

He fell silent for a moment, and then went on...

"Early this morning, at dawn, the milkmaids went to the leaf-pastures to milk the aphids and carry the milk to the nurseries, and found the murdered herd-ants and the butchered aphids. They immediately gave alarm, and the entire ant colony - nurses, harvesters, cleaner-ants, builders, soldiers, scouts...oh simply everyant - set out in search of the plant-lice. But driving such large herds together takes a lot of time, and first they had to be found, and that villainous pack had driven the aphids off in all directions, far beyond the borders of The Garden. Besides, many aphids had seen their friends butchered and, terrified, had hidden themselves in the darkest holes they could find. The ants found but a few... a very, very few.

He began to stutter again; his voice faltered.

"The whole AntFolk searched and searched; a-adults and ch-children, all hunting for the missing herds, b-but as I s-said, f-finding few. The lice-cows they did find were immediately milked, but there wasn't enough of their m-milk, the honeydew, for all ant-babes, n-not enough by far, and some of the aphid cows had received such a sh-shock that their milk had dried up. It's early summer, when the nurseries are p-packed to overflowing, and there was very little milk, so v-very little. There was n-not enough milk to go round, simply not enough! Only a f-few ant-babes could be fed, the others, the the others, m-most of them," Chong paused, then "Most of them died - almost all!" he burst out.

Hyacinth was crying again, and Mayblossom, still perched on Chong's neck, was bent forward, face hidden in hands. Tiny teardrops trickled through her fingers and dripped onto Chong's left ear, which twitched at every *plop*.

Belladonna didn't cry. Chong watched her furtively out of the corner of his eye. Her face was expressionless, carved in stone, her lips pressed firmly together in a thin hard line. Still as a statue she sat.

In truth she was deeply upset and dismayed. She could not think clearly; the full extent of the disaster was difficult to grasp; there had been nothing like it since The Garden came into being. Her thoughts went round and round in her head... what would the AntFolk do now? Mayblossom had said that war had broken out...

Here Belladonna's eye fell again on Tomcat Chong. She'd never had much time for him. Firstly, he was a housecat and, unlike the rest of the animal kingdom (including wild cats such as lions, leopards and tigers), housecats always tease and torment their prey cruelly before killing and eating it (all housecats do this and the fairies find it atrocious). Secondly, although all housecats are

arrogant, Chong was excessively so. Conceited and supercilious, he lorded it over the other GardenFolk as if they were dirt beneath his feet. Thirdly, he had always seemed indifferent, even heartless and pitiless, to the sufferings of others. Strangely this tragedy really seemed to have upset him. His face wore its usual bored expression, but the fairy wasn't deceived. The tomcat was truly distressed. Well, well, well! Whoever would have thought it? She cleared her throat.

"Hyacinth and Mayblossom say that war hath broken out".

Chong nodded.

"Between whom?"

"Between the ants and their friends on the one side and Steve, Billy and The Woodlouse Gang and their friends on the other - who else!?"

"Check thy impudent tongue, Chong!" warned Belladonna. "Who exactly is on the side of the ants? Come now! Let me not squeeze each word from thee like a pea from its pod!"

"Well I don't know what *every* beon is going to do!" grunted Chong huffily. "But on the ants' side are, among others, the snails (they're absolutely horrified at Steve's behaviour), earthworms, field mice, frogs, crickets, bees, moles, earwigs and butterflies. On the side of Steve, Billy and The Gang are naturally the woodlice and stone-lice, but also the caterpillars, voles, toads, grasshoppers, slugs, cockroaches, and the moths.

"The wasps, hornets and mosquitoes don't seem to have taken sides – I think they intend to attack everybeon; and as far as the bluebottles, rats, crows and other carrion eaters are concerned, well they're just reckoning up how many corpses they can expect and are promising themselves a huge 'wake'."²

"Are they indeed!?" snapped Belladonna. "Are they indeed? Then I fear they are in for a *big* disappointment!"

Ignoring Chong's impatience, she thought things over. The true reasons for this war, she mused, were the same as those for BigFolk wars, namely the lazy versus the diligent, the envious versus the envied, the have-nothings versus the have-alls. She was well aware of the rivalries and differences, resentments and jealousies that seethed below the outwardly harmonious daily life of the GardenFolk and that had their roots in events that had happened thousands of years earlier.

"There's something else," murmured Chong, interrupting her thoughts.

Something in his voice disturbed her. She raised her head and looked at him enquiringly. He hesitated again. What he was going to say now would put her in a white-hot rage. He stroked a

2: A 'wake' is held in some countries when somebody dies. After the funeral, the family and friends of the person who has died gather together and make merry with lots of food and drink and dancing to celebrate the fact that the dead person has entered heaven. (Carrion eaters celebrate their wakes by eating whoever has died)

whisker with a paw, wondering how best to put it.

“Out with it! Thou hast my word that thou shalt not suffer for whatever tale thou dost relate - so out with it!”

“The... the elves” he faltered. He avoided her blazing eyes and stared down at the grass.

“The elves... the elves are siding with Steve, Beetle Bill and The Woodlouse Gang.” His words fell over each other in his eagerness to get them out and have done with it.

Total silence! Even the soft summer breeze paused in her game with the dandelion clocks at this terrible news. The silence before the storm thought Chong, keeping his eyes fixed doggedly (or perhaps I should say cattily) on the grass (“Don’t look up,” he told himself, “Whatever you do, don’t meet her eyes!”)

“*I BEG THY PARDON !?*”

He gave no answer. She didn’t expect one. She had understood only too well.

Book 2:

V: Peacemakers & Misrepresentatives

Pollytykers always believe they know and want the best for everybeon - at least they *say* they want the best for everybeon, but strangely it is only the pollytykers themselves who end up with the best.

They go back to prehistoric times, when the moor still teemed with life and *Man* had not yet invented himself. He was already there, but had not yet decided that he was *Man* and therefore something special, and so he still lived together with the other animals. In fact he occupied the very lowest place in the animal hierarchy - he wasn’t strong, or fast or big, had no sharp teeth, claws or talons, couldn’t fly and was altogether pretty useless.

Indeed, so unimportant was he and so despised by the other animals, that none found it necessary to give him a name and just called him *It*. *It* liked nothing better than to feed, laze, smooch, snooze, grunt (*It* couldn’t yet talk) and scratch itself. *It*’s only sports were brawling and breeding, *It*’s only activity sneaking food and running away. *It* ate whatever it could filch from other animals or the leftovers from their kills, or even the corpses of creatures who had died a natural death. When there was nothing to steal and no carrion around, *It* ate berries, worms, caterpillars, grubs and grass, or starved.³

Nowadays, as far as *Man*’s *natural* position in the hierarchy of the animal world is concerned,

³ The appendix, that useless wormy bit in human bodies, wasn’t always useless - we once needed it to digest grass

nothing has changed: Sometimes a big-cat or chimpanzee attacks the human who brought it up, who lavished care, love and attention upon it, and with whom it had lived peacefully and contentedly for years. One day, for no apparent reason, it falls savagely upon this person and literally tears him or her to bits (a chimpanzee is at least twice as strong as a man). This is put down to ‘the killing instinct’, or to a carcinoma, a heatstroke, or the wrong medicine; but I think that the ‘alpha urge’, the inborn urge to be top dog, is to blame.

In nature, big cats and apes live in small groups ruled by the strongest male member, the alpha. His position as leader is constantly threatened by younger members of the tribe who, as they grow older and stronger, test their strength on less important members of the tribe before challenging the alpha. However, when a big-cat or ape lives with *a human* it has no such opportunities of testing its strength; it has but *one* tribe member to challenge - its owner, who is physically no match for it at all. In nature when the alpha animal is defeated (as, when grown old, it inevitably *is*) it generally lives to lick its wounds, but a human seldom survives such an attack - our teeth, nails and puny frames are no match for fangs, talons and powerful muscles. I don’t think the pets intend to *kill* their owners; they just want to be *boss*.

Well, to get back to the story (which *does* have the sad habit of straying off into side-tracks), all animals fought bitterly amongst themselves, and murder and mayhem were the order of the day. This upset some moor-dogs of a certain gentle, peace-loving race called The Samyells⁴, and these, in their friendly obliging way, set about trying to calm, console and reconcile their scrapping, biting, scratching neighbours. “*Pouring ye Oyle on ye Stormey Warts of Dyscontente*“, was how they put it. They managed this so well that many beons hired them as ‘fight-negotiators’ - not to negotiate a fight, but to negotiate a *solution* to one.

The negotiators were very successful, and soon played an indispensable role in the animal kingdom. They were called *pollytykers*; *polly* because they chattered as much as parrots (all parrots were called Polly in those days), and *tykers* from ‘tyke’, an Ymcir Caelig word meaning not just *dog*, but also *talk*.

Now the first pollytykers really *did* work for the well-being of the community, and the community rewarded their efforts richly with food and all kinds of personal services, though *these* pollytykers never asked for anything in return for their efforts, and were indeed taken aback and rather embarrassed by the overwhelming number of gifts and services heaped upon them from all sides⁵. Nevertheless, they were soon living in luxury, and this inevitably brought acquisitive beasts of prey upon the scene - predators ever lusting for profit and gain, taking advantage wherever they could.

First came the fenwolves (like tundra wolves only wetter) and then the slimecats; and these were followed by other creatures ‘on the make’.

The fenwolves were greedy, cruel robbers - just about the last creatures that anybeon should trust to

⁴Their ancestor Sam was rather deaf and had to yell in order to hear what he was saying and make sure he wasn’t talking nonsense. (Many people who are hard of hearing shout, or at least speak loudly)

⁵These services were as varied as the beons that rendered them. For instance, a bird would peck fleas out of a Samyell’s coat whilst a hedgehog brushed it; the sharp teeth of a vole would cut his claws, and the long, flickering, forked tongue of a bog snake clean his ears (the Samyells didn’t like this much because it tickled dreadfully, but the bog snakes had nothing else to offer and the Samyells didn’t want to hurt their pride by offering them freebies)

negotiate anything - but they were also cunning and clever; and these qualities they now used to (as they put it) ‘grab a piece of the pollytykal pie’, namely “The *biggest* slice, please”. They went about grabbing their pieces of pie in the following way:

After a quarrel had been patched up by a Samyell, the two beons concerned were always told to go home, think over the solution suggested, and return the following day. The Samyells never pushed or hurried beons into anything, and always insisted their clients “*Sleep on it!*”.

Well, just as the two beons were leaving a Samyell’s house to go home and think things over, a fenwolf lurking outside would take one of them aside and, under the pretence that the fenwolf himself was thinking of consulting a Samyell, would suggest a glass or two of fyrewahter (a mixture of distilled pepper and stinging-nettle juice that burns up the brain) at the nearest inn. The fenwolf would then encourage his guest to talk about his problem and the solution that had been suggested, and would praise the Samyell’s judgement fulsomely, expressing his admiration of its soundness and wisdom.

Then, however, he would weave the little word ‘*but*’ into his song of praise, something like “Excellent solution, excellent, really excellent, *but*...” and then explain how he himself could have done it better and how the Samyell had not considered this or that, and what terrible consequences could arise from this oversight; whereby the fenwolf exaggerated the drawbacks for his guest and the advantages for his guest’s opponent. *Nothing in the world is easier than convincing somebeon that some other beon has got the better of him!*

Having successfully worked his guest up into a completely dissatisfied state of mind, convinced that he’d been cheated and had got the very worst bargain possible, the fenwolf would then (reluctantly and with many assurances of the honesty, reliability and worthiness of the Samyell and his own unworthiness) allow himself to be persuaded to replace the Samyell as negotiator and find another solution to the problem - a solution more in the interests of his client.

And this he would then actually *do*, browbeating his client’s opponent unmercifully, belabouring him with legal-sounding but completely nonsensical words and phrases, citing imaginary precedents, laws and rules until the poor beon, bothered and bewildered out of his senses, was ready to agree to practically anything to get his tormentor to shut up.

The fenwolves flourished. Attracted by their claim that they could arrange more profitable agreements, clients flocked to them. They called the settlement process that they were supposed to be carrying out ‘pollytykes’, but to distinguish their own group from the Samyells they called themselves not pollytykers but *Daemocritters* after their homeland Daemheid.⁶

This in turn had been named after their first and last heid, an Irish critter who went down in history as ‘O’Kles the Daem’ because one lunchtime, for a bet (he’d dipped his nose too deep in ye olde whyskey glasse), he placed his chair under a sword hanging by a single hair from the ceiling. The hair broke, the sword fell, and O’Kles was eaten for afters; as was the custom among prehistoric wolves and cats and is still the custom of pollytykers today.⁷

⁶*Heid* being head and *Daem* being ye olde spelling of dumb

⁷*Whyskey* is an ancient brew made of burnt corn and moor-water, whereby the amount of water is kept as small as

The fenwolves were soon followed by the slimecats. Coming from the same land as the fenwolves, they called themselves *Daemotoms*.⁸

possible

⁸Females were not allowed in pollytykal circles until the rising of the female Suffera-wet-ins many years later (it was supposed to be a *sit-in*, but the monsoons came). After these got the vote, the Daemotoms changed their name to Daemomogs to avoid charges of sexual discrimination (this was long before they changed their name to Autocatz)