

To Bag A Basilisk

A Blysterverse Tale

by *Clyde Wolfe*

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Mr. Monocle unscrewed the outer compartment of his oculus device. It hadn't been working correctly when he tried to use the heat ray. Perhaps something wrong with a lens?

He was just beginning to pry the delicate lens wafers free when the interruption came.

"Bully, old boy! Bully!"

The heavy clomping of the Marvelous Mustache's footfalls carried to his ears directly after the slamming shut of his lab door. His *private* lab.

Mr. Monocle chose not to look up, but a suffering heave of breath passed his lips.

"Look what they've sent us, old boy." The Marvelous Mustache tossed something on the workbench. It landed next to the delicate ocular apparatus Mr. Monocle used to filter his powers as it lay open and exposed in front of him. The bag jostled the intricate device, but, mercifully, caused no damage.

"Candy?" Mr. Monocle asked, resuming his work on the harness and pushing the bag aside with his forearm.

The Marvelous Mustache scoffed. "Candy? Not just candy, my good fellow! Look at them." Rather than allow Mr. Monocle to reach for the bag and inspect the contents—which Mr. Monocle possessed absolutely no inclination to do—he dumped the colorful round pieces all over the tabletop.

"You see?" The Marvelous Mustache sifted through a few pieces and held a pair up for his partner to view. "Some have a little round circle thing to indicate your weapon of choice, and look here," he said, shoving the second piece directly under Mr. Monocle's nose, "a veritable facsimile of mine own marvelous armament—a mustache!" To emphasize his point, he wiggled the styled curves of his fabulous facial hair, the simple motion giving way to an intricate tap dance above his upper lip. He wasn't called the Marvelous Mustache

for nothing.

With the tiny candy so close to his face, Mr. Monocle could not make out the symbol etched onto the shell. He gently pushed Mustache's arm away, still not looking up from his work. "I'll take your word for it, John. But I've work to accomplish. Please, take your confectionery delights and remove them from my workspace. If they scratch my lenses, I will be well put out."

"But, Harrison," Mustache said, with the beginnings of a pout behind that fabulous work of art on his upper lip. "They want to sponsor us. Think about it; special Monocle and Mustache bags sold around the country! We can make a mint, old boy!"

Mr. Monocle focused on sliding a wafer lens clear of the ocular apparatus before replacing it with a new one. He regarded the removed disc and held it up to the light; a minute, jagged tear ran from the center of the lens three-quarters of the way to an edge. "Well, that explains that," he muttered.

The Marvelous Mustache crossed his arms over a beefy chest and waited for his partner's attention to slide his way once more.

He wanted to ignore his superheroing partner, but Mr. Monocle knew that to do so would only entice the Marvelous Mustache to find some new way to intrude. With a heavy sigh, Mr. Monocle looked up, fixing his friend with his eyes—one green, one white as frost. "Why should they bother? Together we possess more money than several small countries combined. It's not like we need more."

A mustachioed frown was his answer. Mr. Monocle returned to his work.

Now that he had replaced the lens—one of myriad filters for the stream of power constantly flowing out of his left eye—he began to reassemble the housing. Without the apparatus, Mr. Monocle had no way of utilizing the fantastic

power of his white eye. Every known energy was cascading from the orb at a non-stop rate. The plethora of powers, however, wound up canceling one another out, rendering his naked gaze harmless. Years of experimentation had seen three dozen lenses manufactured, each permitting only a single energy signature to escape.

The ocular apparatus, while itself was a wonder of science and engineering, was further complimented by the control box which fitted to Mr. Monocle's left arm. With it he could deftly switch between lenses and powers. All told, it was only thirty or forty million in research and manufacturing costs.

Chump change.

Mustache made a raspberry sound, the hairs of his mustache twisting about one another to resemble a tongue, mimicking the action of his mouth if not the sound. "I swear, my dear Harrison, you have no marketing sense. What better way to propagate the Monocle and Mustache brand than by letting them run a special set of these delightful sweets?" He tossed a few of the colorful treats into his mouth and chewed contentedly.

The gear Monocle was fiddling with finally popped into place. Still not looking up from his work, it was Mr. Monocle's turn to scoff. "I think you may have that backwards. I'd wager my yacht in the Caymans that they want to trade off *our* names."

Another raspberry gave voice to the Marvelous Mustache's displeasure. "Posh, old boy! Bunk!"

"But I suppose that isn't the only reason you have chosen to disturb my work." Another gear snapped into place. Mr. Monocle looked back up at his companion as only a long time, suffering partner-in-heroing could. "Is it?"

"Bully, old boy! Knew you'd figure out my game." The Marvelous Mustache plopped a newspaper on the workbench. He didn't bother spinning it around; Monocle

could read it upside-down as easily as right-side-up. "There," he stabbed a workman's finger down onto a particular section. "What do you make of that, chap?"

Mr. Monocle read the headline:

Supervillain, the Basilisk, Continues to Terrorize Banks Across the Nation!

He skimmed the article at a glance. Speed reading was just one of the many talents Mr. Monocle employed in both his everyday life and as a hero of the people. Several pertinent facts stuck out: the Basilisk had hit no fewer than six banks in the last month, that he had eluded capture by local law enforcement and three separate costumed heroes, and that there were at least six fatalities during the robberies. One had been a costumed hero known as Flint Man, up in Boston. It didn't matter to Mr. Monocle that two of those fatalities had been members of the Basilisk's gang during a shoot-out with police, a death was a death. The Basilisk should be held accountable for any life lost in the commission of his crimes.

"We can beat the old dog," Mustache said, not waiting to hear his partner's thoughts on the matter. "We simply figure out where his gang will strike next, and we make sure we're in place to foil the commission of his nefarity."

Monocle finally put down the ocular apparatus. He had to admit, his interest was piqued. "And I assume you know where that will be."

Of course Mustache would. The man was a wizard at projection models; predictive mathematics being just one of the fields John Mason held a doctorate in. If anyone could form a more-than-reasonable guess as to where the Basilisk and his gang would strike next, it would be the Marvelous Mustache.

Mr. Monocle realized that he would have to put his latest experiments on hold. Once his partner formed a plan, it was best to join in on the ground floor, or else find himself

swept up in the swirling eddies of motion when they came knocking on his door. And they inevitably would.

The Marvelous Mustache grinned like a carnival barker who had just gulled a new customer into spending his hard-earned cash on the freak show. "Indeed, Mr. Garrett. Indeed."

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The bullet from the guard's gun ricocheted off the Basilisk, hitting an innocent patron in the thigh instead of its intended target. The man, already face down on the floor, curled up, hugging his wounded limb and crying.

The Basilisk turned his debilitating gaze on the guard. "That wasn't nice of you."

It took a second for their eyes to lock. Another heartbeat later and the guard felt his muscles seize and go limp. As hard as he tried, he could not pull the trigger. The guard lowered to his knees, then his belly. All the while he could not break the Basilisk's hold, every iota of strength fleeing his body. Just before he lost consciousness, the guard felt his heart flutter.

The Basilisk finally looked away. His captives cringed and cowered from the display of power. Several attempted to block his gaze with upraised hands, for all the good that would do them. It only took a single glance and the Basilisk could incapacitate. His victims need not return his stare.

Behind him the gunshot man continued to writhe and mewl. "Somebody shut that excuse for a man up before I do."

One of the villain's five cohorts pulled the bleeding man away from the other hostages. The Basilisk didn't know which of his cronies was enacting the deed, didn't care, either. They were all expendable chaff.

A moment later there came the report of a gunshot, and then silence.

"Excellent. Now to the task at hand." The Basilisk

swept his gaze over the hostages. As one, they cowered back. "Which one of you can get me into that vault?"

After the display of power and cruelty, it was less than a heartbeat before a shaky hand was raised.

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The sound of the first gunshot could be heard from the building next door. It was a simple delicatessen, an unassuming little business notable only at the moment for housing the superheroic team Monocle and Mustache. The pair had been carousing the shop for the last three hours. Their tailored attire and high-class demeanor marked them out to the other patrons as not quite belonging, but as long as they continued to purchase an array of sandwiches with the deli counter, the proprietor didn't give the men more than a curious glance or two. Of all the things to garner attention, it was Monocle's top hat and Mustache's bowler which received the most.

"Did you hear that, Harrison?" Mustache asked.

Mr. Monocle nodded, putting down his roast beef sandwich. "The Basilisk has made his move. You were right about which bank they would hit."

"Of course, old boy." A piece of pastrami hung off the edge of Mustache's trim beard. One of the ends of his amazing mustache twisted out like a tendril, plucked the errant lunch meat from his face, and plopped the morsel into his waiting mouth. "Shall we?" he asked around chewing.

A second gunshot sounded. This time even the other patrons heard it and worried faces started searching for the source of danger.

Mr. Monocle rose from his chair. "Past time." He reached into the breast pocket of his tailored Kiton K-50 suit. "Good sir," he called to the proprietor standing behind the counter, the man looking as nervous as his customers.

"For the damage."

A thick, rolled wad of hundred dollar bills sailed from Monocle's hand, bounced over the counter, and landed at the feet of the deli's owner. The man looked down in abject confusion.

The Marvelous Mustache was busy shooing away a young couple having lunch at a table along the rear wall of the store. "Let's go. Up and away!"

Mr. Monocle helped his partner move several tables away from the wall. They ignored the deli owner's questions and protests.

"Are you sure this is the spot?" Monocle asked.

The Marvelous Mustache rapped on the wall with a facial appendage. "Indeed, old boy. Indeed."

"Very good, then." Mr. Monocle removed his top hat and set the oculus device over his head. He clicked through a number of lenses while he said, "Be a dear, John, and move away from the wall."

With a deep, rumbling laugh, Mustache stepped aside.

A moment later and a thin, red beam of destruction lanced from Monocle's eyepiece, carving a new doorway between the delicatessen and the bank.

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This robbery was going as smooth as the others. His crew had rounded up the employees and the customers in moments. So far as he could tell, no silent alarms had been tripped. Even if they had, the Basilisk was confident they would get what he wanted and get out before the authorities arrived. The Basilisk preferred to avoid the mess that would entail.

In fact, they were right about wrapped up here. Two of his goons lugged the last few sacks out of the vault even now. Plenty would be left behind, but it was a small price to pay for

making cleaner getaways. Only a handful of times had things ever gone squirrely.

And one of those times the Basilisk had had the pleasure of killing a stupid would-be superhero. What kind of name was Flint Man, anyway? The kind a dead hero would pick. The memory caused a chuckle to form in the Basilisk's head.

"Let's wrap this up." The Basilisk surveyed the building. The cattle were still sufficiently cowed. Putting down two morons in the span of a minute usually did that.

"Hey," one of his thugs said. Again, he didn't recall a name. Guys like that were a dime a dozen. "Anybody hear that?"

"What?" the Basilisk snapped. Any delay now could cause them to run afoul of police or SWAT units. As much as he loved to teach the fools a lesson, a fatal lesson, the indulgence was just another opportunity for things to go haywire.

"I heard something thump in the office, there." The thug pointed to one of the walled off rooms on the left.

The Basilisk was about to wave it off, but he reasoned that if someone had escaped his thugs' search, they could have tripped an alarm and he wouldn't know until he stepped outside and directly into a sniper's crosshairs. Better to be sure.

"You and you." The villain pointed at two of his goons. "Check that room. The rest of you, lets get moving."

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Monocle and Mustache entered the bank through the improvised doorway. As the Marvelous Mustache had predicted, they had come through into a walled off office room.

"You see, dear Harrison," Mustache said, his facial

appendages swiping errant pieces of sheet rock from his path. "Blueprints don't lie."

While his partner never modulated his booming voice, Mr. Monocle chose to speak in a more subdued tone. "How should we go about this?"

The Marvelous Mustache cracked his knuckles. "Only one way that I can see. We play this like gentlemen."

Mr. Monocle reached out to stop his partner—he knew *exactly* what Mustache was driving at—yet was too slow to stop him. Mustache bulled through the office space, heading for the door leading into the main lobby. Monocle sighed.

More often than not, the Marvelous Mustache's idea of gentlemanly discourse involved a heavy dose of brawling.

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The Basilisk heard a shout. He whipped around to witness the two goons he'd detailed with checking the office come flying back into the lobby. Literally. A rather large man in a well-cut suit barreled out of the office after them. A strange pair of brown tendrils hovered on either side of the man. The Basilisk could swear that the tips resembled oversized fists.

"Have at thee!" the man roared and came running.

As this new arrival drew closer, using those odd limbs to leap into the air and land amid the rest of the criminal gang, the Basilisk realized the appendages were attached to the man's face. A mustache!

The villain wanted to groan when he realized who had just crashed his party.

"The Marvelous Mustache," the Basilisk sneered. That meant the top hat wearing Mr. Monocle was somewhere close, as well. "Of course you two would come running when money was involved."

While his gang engaged the Marvelous Mustache in a

hurly burly round of fisticuffs—involving the hero's legs and extra 'arms'—the Basilisk kept his gaze trained on the office. His thugs were getting the short end of the stick, even at five-to-one odds. But the loot wasn't all loaded up; he still needed the henchmen.

"I've had enough of this," the Basilisk hissed. "Every time I turn around there's another set of you freaks chasing me. Enough is enough."

The Basilisk tore his eyes from the office when Mr. Monocle failed to show, and sighted on the Marvelous Mustache. When the hero had battered a goon away with a double-fisted pounding, the villain summoned his power and sent his life-sapping ocular rays at his foe.

The hero went down. Hard.

"Grab his arms," the Basilisk ordered. He kept his debilitating gaze locked on the Marvelous Mustache, being rewarded with a groan from the hero.

His underlings secured Mustache's burly arms, pulling the hero up onto his knees. One of the thugs pulled back on Mustache's scalp, forcing him to face down the Basilisk's ominous approach. Pain wavered across his dapper face.

"There, you see? Do you feel it?" the Basilisk taunted. "Feel your life ebbing away beneath my gaze? Does the weakness frighten you? Does the spiraling away of your life cause you pain?"

The Marvelous Mustache tried to grin up at his captor. The debilitating powers of the Basilisk made the expression look more like the sloppy, lop-sided joy of a drunkard.

"Well?" the Basilisk demanded.

Mustache's speech slurred, "Prolly not as mush's this woll."

In the blink of an eye, the hairs of the hero's upper lip, the very strands of amazing follicular wondrousness, shot outward. The hairs elongated so that they stretched directly beneath the Basilisk's legs. They wound around themselves,

forming a rudimentary mallet.

Then they slammed upward, into the Basilisk's crotch.

The debilitating gaze of the villain fell away from him. Mustache was freed! Vitality flooded back into Mustache's limbs as the Basilisk's eyes crossed and he slumped to the ground, cradling his genitals. The two goons holding the hero's arms stared, dumbfounded as their boss went down.

"Looks like I was right," Mustache said, craning his neck to look up at the thugs. "Wouldn't you say, gents?"

The Basilisk curled into a ball. "K-kill h-him!" he ordered through clenched teeth.

Without realizing the hero had regained his strength, the thugs loosened their holds and reach for weapons. Their mistake.

Mustache surged to his feet. He flexed his muscular biceps and heaved. The two thugs staggered away. "A-ha!"

Reaching for their guns again, the Marvelous Mustache quirked an eyebrow. "Not so hasty, gents," he said. His prehensile facial hair elongated once more, curving around behind the criminals' heads. The ends of this mustache expanded to the size of catcher's mitts, and then shoved against the back of their skulls until they collided. A considerable *crack* announced the exiting of those two thugs from the situation.

Mustache flexed like a body builder. "Bully!"

Behind him, the Basilisk recovered his constitution, using one arm to crawl away while clutching his sore testicles. If only the codpiece had had some extra cushioning!

"Now then," Mustache said, towering over the downed villain before he had gone half a dozen paces. "Let's get you well trussed."

The hero reached for the Basilisk.

A voice cried out, "John! Down!"

The sharp report of gunfire filled the bank.

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Mr. Monocle watched the rest of the Basilisk's thugs train semi-automatic rifles on his partner and a cold wave of dread blossomed in his chest.

He called out for the Marvelous Mustache to hit the floor. Muzzle flashes and the stink of gunpowder filled the building. He didn't see if his partner had been hit or not, but Mustache was on the floor, laid out beside their quarry. The three gunmen never changed their angle of fire, however, so Mr. Monocle was reasonably sure that if Mustache had avoided the initial barrage, he would be fine.

The gunmen still needed to be stopped. A single stray bullet could be lethal.

Mr. Monocle reached up and clicked the dial of his oculus, selecting the lens which would filter out the rest of the energies except for the white light of a stunning ray. One of the thugs was reloading when he popped up from behind the kiosk. He hit the other two gunmen with the stun first, judging them to be the greater threats.

One tap of the trigger mechanism nestled in the palm of his left hand. A second. The beams of white light followed Mr. Monocle's line of sight, spearing the two targets within a heartbeat of each other. The gunmen each went rigid, and then dropped to the tile floor. The third shooter stared at him with an open jaw until a final beam of white light flashed over the distance and rendered him a non-factor.

A sudden wave of nausea and weakness overcame him. Mr. Monocle dropped to one knee. Physically weakened, his mind still worked at full tilt. Only one reason why he would lose equilibrium and strength so quickly would be the Basilisk's power.

Mr. Monocle used the strength he still possessed to search for the villain. Sure enough, the criminal mastermind was likewise on one knee, training his gaze against Mr.

Monocle. Lucky for him, the villain still hadn't recovered from the one-sided game of roshambo with the Marvelous Mustache; the Basilisk's focus wasn't strong enough to incapacitate Monocle just yet. Depressing the trigger mechanism in his hand, Mr. Monocle sent a white beam of stun at the villain.

The shot hit, but not dead on. The villain grunted as the stun clipped his shoulder. Between the carapace body-armor and the lack of accuracy, the Basilisk dropped to his hands and knees, but didn't fall completely out of the game.

A surge of fresh strength flooded Monocle's limbs as soon as that debilitating gaze was removed from his personage. Mustache was on his feet and moving for the downed villain, the hairs of his famed namesake were a good five feet long and opened wide, as if ready to give the criminal a unique hug.

Monocle could see the villain was far from out of it and shouted a warning to his partner. Too late. The Marvelous One was wrapping the limbs of his prehensile mustache around the Basilisk. The villain had been ready for the move, surging upward and gripping the lapels of Mustache's suit. The Basilisk executed a perfect judo roll and throw. He hadn't counted on Mustache's reflexes, however, and the two tumbled together, a two person tumbleweed of facial hair.

The pair rolled together like a pair of circus acrobats, forming a wheel of their bodies and one superpowered mustache. They executed a set of spins before splitting apart. Mustache flew through the air at Monocle.

"Gangway!" Mustache called, at the same time Mr. Monocle shouted, "Look out!"

They crashed together. Down they went in a jumble of limbs and hair. Mr. Monocle's top hat rolled away, the oculus apparatus skewing on his head.

In a moment, the two heroes were back on their feet.

But the Basilisk was already on them. The villain arrived with a leaping kick that landed square on Mustache's chest. A solid *whoosh* of air escaped the Marvelous Mustache's lungs as he flew away. Monocle dropped to the side just in time to avoid a punch. On the Basilisk came, striking out again and again, never letting Monocle set his feet.

The Basilisk's attack missed. Barely. Mr. Monocle could see the flash of steel as the villain's metallic knuckle-claws swiped by his face. The villain cursed and came on again.

A dull ache suffused his ribs when he hit the tile, but Mr. Monocle was no novice when it came to the arts of fighting. He scissored his legs around the Basilisk's lead foot and twisted. With another curse, the villain came down atop Mr. Monocle. They scrambled together, each seeking to gain the upper hand.

Luck was against him now. The oculus skewed further, blinding Mr. Monocle at a crucial moment of their tussle. He jerked aside on instinct, feeling the razor-sharp steel of the Basilisk's knuckle-seated claws rake the left side of his neck. The villain's other hand smushed to the oculus apparatus farther out of line. Without the proper filter lens, the myriad energies emanating from Mr. Monocle's left eye were all but useless.

He looked up at the villain with his naked, white eye. The Basilisk grinned down at him. A breath later and Mr. Monocle felt his life ebbing away once more, victimized by the Basilisk's deadly power.

"Looks like I get to add another super-fool to my kill count," the Basilisk intoned. Even with his gaze fixed on Mr. Monocle, draining his life away, the villain wrapped his hands around the hero's throat. Throttling him for extra measure.

The world began to gray. Monocle wanted to fight against the pervading weakness, reach up and strike the Basilisk square in the face, but found he could do neither. Life was slowly, slowly evaporating. And that sadistic grin was

leering down at him the whole time.

Then a miracle took place. One second the grayness was giving way to black, the next, a swirl of brown wrapped around the Basilisk's head and yanked the villain off Monocle's chest.

Mr. Monocle coughed as air filtered back into his lungs. His chest expanded and contracted at a heaving rate as his body sought to normalize. He levered himself up, trying to regulate his breathing, and witnessed the Basilisk struggle in the grasp of the Marvelous Mustache.

His partner had his prehensile hairs entwined around the villain's face, blocking the use of the dangerous gaze, while his burly arms squeezed the Basilisk tight in a bear hug. The Basilisk kicked like a madman as Mustache used his extra height and strength to keep the villain off the floor. But it was like trying to wrangle a slippery eel. Even the Marvelous Mustache wouldn't be able to hold on forever.

With a final cough, Monocle rose to his feet. He approached his partner and the villain. Once he was within range, Mr. Monocle cocked back his arm and decked the Basilisk full in the face.

The impact snapped the Basilisk's head back and his body slumped. Mustache released the villain and the Basilisk slid to the floor. Defeated.

Mustache exhaled, long and slow. "Feel better, chap?"

Mr. Monocle retrieved his top hat. He shook the bits of dirt off the encompassing lip. "Why, yes, John. Yes, I do."

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They stopped at the door. Outside waited the public, complete with television cameras and journalists just looking for an inside scoop. Behind them, crime scene techs and detectives were hard at work cleaning up the mess of the foiled robbery.

"Can't we just go back to the estate?" Monocle asked with a frown. He hoped he didn't sound like he was whining. "I've had trimexal-sodium-chlorate cooking for three days and I'd like to ensure it doesn't blow up the garage. If I don't inject the tempering polymers before the fifth day—"

Mustache snorted, loud. "Do you hear yourself, Harrison? *Fifth* day. You're only on the *third*. We'll be back with at least four or five hours to spare. I, too, would rather not have to wash your pink goo off the Rolls again. It'll keep."

"But, John—"

"It'll *keep*, old boy." Mustache clapped Monocle on the back. "We just took down one of the most notorious villains at large. We were shot at. Stabbed. And the slimy wretch attempted to stare our lives away. It's time to celebrate! A great victory!"

The frown remained in place.

Mustache released a heavy sigh, one beefy hand press against the portal, but not exerting the effort to push it open. "You need to learn to have some fun. Reap the fruits of your labors, as it were."

Monocle unleashed a sigh of his own. "We have decidedly different forms of relaxation, dear chap."

"Nonsense! My taste simply encompasses a wider variety. I love the lab work as much as the next man, but there's more to life than sterile beakers and mathematical proofs." Mustache waved an arm toward the waiting public outside. "A whole other world to enjoy, my dear Harrison. Seize the day!" he finished with a raised fist.

Without further ado, Mustache shoved the door open. He ushered Monocle through the portal with a friendly hand on his partner's back.

As the strobing of camera flashes erupted around them, the Marvelous Mustache tilted his head to the side, speaking out of the side of his mouth. "Try to smile, old boy.



Enjoy the acclaim for once."

Monocle allowed a slight exhalation to escape through his nostrils. Nothing the cameras would pick up on, just enough to release some of the pent up frustration. He inclined his head and tipped his hat to the crowd, using the motion to shield his mouth from the public. "One day, John, just once I'd like to forgo the pomp."

"My dear Harrison, where's the fun in that?" the Marvelous Mustache asked before clapping his hands and opening his arms wide to the media circus. To the crowd he said, "Yes, yes, dear friends. Monocle and Mustache have saved the day once more!"

Mr. Monocle settled his top hat on his head, brushed off his somewhat torn suit, and matched his partner's stride, ready to play his part. He spotted a pair of comely young women at the front of the crowd of onlookers. They didn't look to be complete dullards like the rest of the masses. The rest of the crowd was full of eager, smiling faces, all wanting to bask in the simple glory of a job well done.

OK, *John*, he thought, sending a wink toward the two young ladies. *Maybe you have a point.*