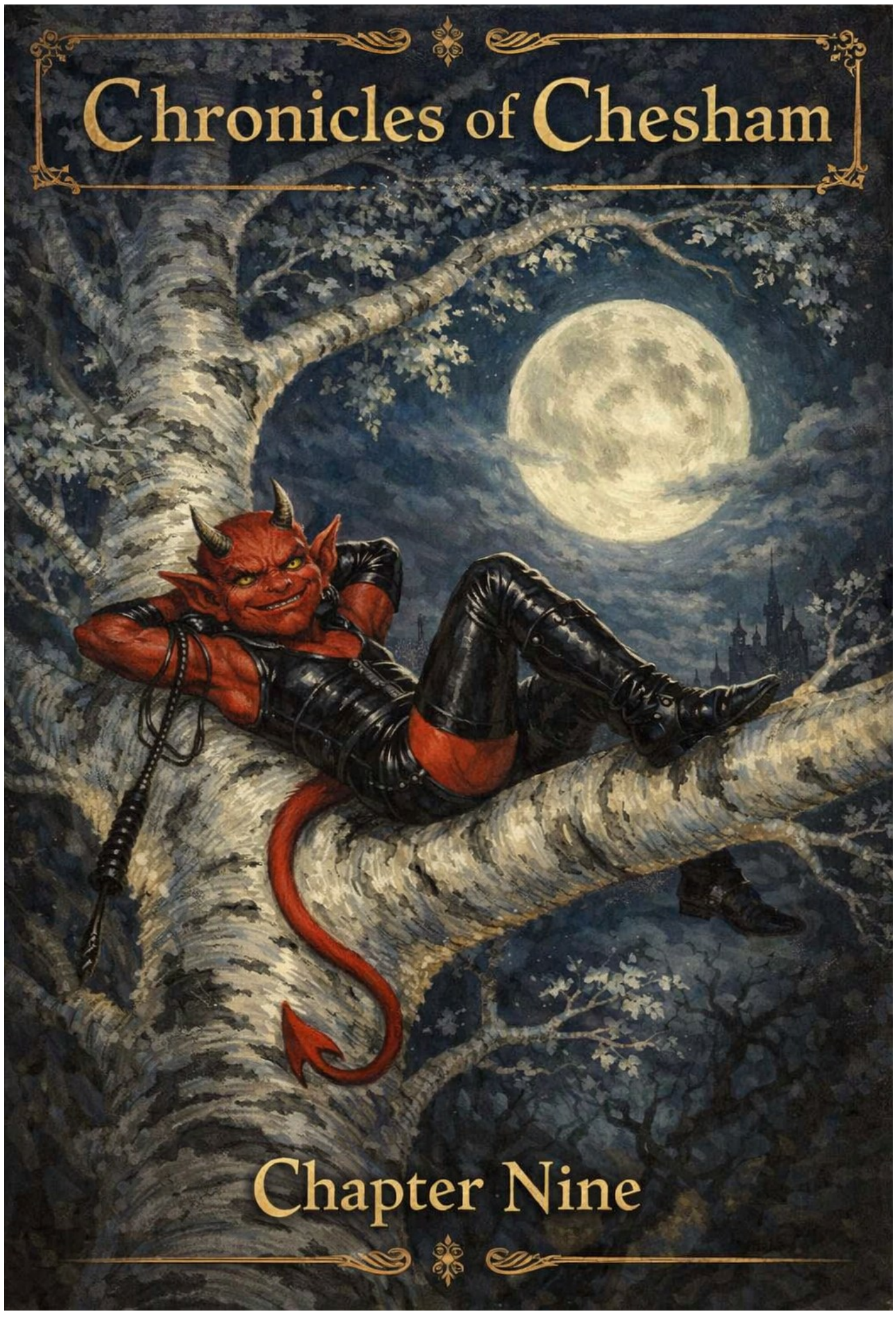


Chronicles of Chesham



Chapter Nine

CHAPTER NINE – BARK OF SILVER TREE

The bark of silver tree task had been bestowed upon Jeff, the engineer (not a wizard).

Dave the Bastard had explained to Jeff that the Silver Tree was known to grow along the Loop of Pednor, not far from Church Street but not as far as Herberts Hole.

“If you find yourself in Herberts Hole, then you have gone too far and haven’t been paying attention,” Dave the Bastard had told him. “And be careful of the wildlife, some of them have become infected by the bats.”

It was still dark outside, and Jeff led the intrepid explorers away from Church Street, and into the even darker beginning of the Pednor Loop. As the gang moved further away from the lamps that lit Church Street and into the gloom, Jeff thought he could see a lady, somewhat in her older years, but with a perm of blue hair. She wore practical clothing for long walks and appeared to be holding two sticks, for balance. She was examining a plant with some red berries on it and appeared to be stripping the berries from the vine and putting them in a brown leather satchel.

As they approached Jeff cleared his throat, and asked “Everything alright madam?”

The woman looked startled, and then rather cross as she turned towards the crew and snarled “I reserve my right to

forage!”

Timmy clutched at Jeff’s arm and whispered in his ear, “Don’t mess about with her, she’s a Rambler.”

Ah yes, the rambles, a relatively new phenomenon in Chesham, people who liked to exercise their rights to use public footpaths and annoy private landowners with their exquisite knowledge of where they are allowed to walk without impediment – you don’t start an argument with these people, for you will surely lose to their untamed wit, intelligence and gravitas.

The team pushed on carefully past the Rambler, until they were into the loop proper. It was dark and cold and miserable but at the same time somehow beautiful.

Up ahead in the distance, the full moon was creating a glow on small batch of trees – these surely must be the silver trees.

Jeff hurried forward, eager to get his task completed and get back to the pub. He led the group into a small clearing, where he could have sworn he heard a goat bleating. As the team entered the clearing, they could see the beautiful shine of the silver tree bark, they had made it.

Jeff made his way towards the nearest tree in order to strip some bark when suddenly ...

CRACK, a whip struck Jeff on the hands and he yelped and moved backwards, they all looked up to see what had



happened and the most curious sight met their eyes.

Laying across one of the lower branches of the tree was a curious red creature, with horns and a tail, but wearing the most curious clothing of shiny leather, almost plastic. It had thigh high boots on and a leathery basque but was clearly a male of the species – this was an imp.

“Uh, uh, uh,” said the

Imp. “I own this clearing, and you will not touch a single part of it, not at all.”

Mick stepped forward, “You can’t just claim this clearing, this is an area of outstanding natural beauty, there are rules!”

“Only my rules darling, I do what I want.”

This was making Mick very cross indeed, and he vowed to contact his local council representative.

Jeff decided he would engage, “What are you anyway?”

“I am Gee, the Imp – magical creature of mischief, and bringer

of doom on those that oppose me.”

“You’re a Gimp?” Asked Jeff.

“What? No, my name is G and I am an Imp.”

“You look well Gimpy to me,” muttered Jeff.

Mick was by now raging and had decided that he was going to bash this creature into next week.

He ran towards it, sword raised but with a click of it’s fingers Mick finally found himself lying on his side with his arms and legs somehow magically bound by leather straps. Even more worryingly, he had a leather strap around his face and a round orange ball in his mouth. Rather embarrassingly, the “maintenance” hatch at the rear of his suit of armour had swung open and everyone could see his backside. Everyone had seen it before anyway.

“Are you sure you’re not a gimp?” Asked Jeff.

“What? No, no I am not.”

Jeff realised that this annoying creature was probably too powerful to overcome so decided perhaps another tactic was required.

“Look, we need some bark of silver tree or some echoey, crazed supernatural voice is going to destroy the whole of Chesham, what do you want for it?”

“Oh, an exchange, an agreement, a contract. I will tell you what I want, I want a mad squirrel – not all of it, but enough that I

can use to conjure a portal to the Imp domain.”

“Gimp domain!” Muttered Jef.

“What! No,” protested the Gimp, erm Imp.

“How do you even know that a squirrel is mad?” Enquired Jeff.

“You need to check his nuts!” Countered the Imp.

“There is a Sumo competition on at the Temperance Hall, the lead competitor is Gila, the Giant Squirrel. You must go there and defeat him, and then bring me part of him back.”

Sumo was a relatively new competition for Chesham, imported from foreign parts (probably Amersham), and involved very, erm, large individuals wearing special pants and slapping each other until one or the other fell out of the ring. There were not many Sumo experts in Chesham, although looking at the Shouty Wednesday Crew, any one of them could have made a pretty good contender.

And so, after untying Mick, they left, back along the Loop, out of the darkness into the dimly lit Church Street, until at the very end they arrived, they were at the Temperance Hall.

Now Temperance Hall was not a place that was frequented by the Shouty Crew, mainly because it belonged to a society that did not believe that alcohol consumption was in any way a good idea at all, you could say that this was a clash of philosophies with our adventurers.

Knowing that this was going to be a dry one, Ben had taken the very sensible precaution of getting 8 Ales to take away from the Queens Head, and they stood outside and finished their beer and discussed tactics.

“I am not sure if I am the one for this job,” said Jeff.

“I can do it,” said Russ, “I came third in the hand to hand combat finals when I was 9, how hard can this be?” Russ looked very proud of his ancient achievement but it was broadly agreed that Russ had a round quality and low centre of gravity that could be very useful indeed. They entered the hall.

As the opened the door, quite by surprise what looked like a troll in swimming trunks came flying out of the door and across the street. They all peered into the hall.

What was before them was quite a sight, in the middle of the hall was a ring, and around the edges of the ring were spectators, the great and the not so great residents of Chesham, in all their glory, placing bets on who was going to win the next round.

And in the middle of the ring was the biggest black squirrel that anyone had ever seen, it was enormous. It stood some seven feet high, had a huge bushy tail and wore very unusual underpants. They were quite tight, so much so that a hairy round ball of fluff was stick out of each side of the front of them, squirrel nuts. There was no question in anyone’s mind that this squirrel was indeed, quite mad.



This was Gila, the Mad Squirrel. It is believed that Gila had been smuggled into Chesham as a young pup by the Pirate, Ryan the Ruiner and had escaped into the wild where it had become infected by a magical fluid somewhere near the curious stones. It now made it's living by fighting all comers in Temperance Hall, and had never lost a single round.

Russ was beginning to regret his decision to fight the squirrel, he had somewhat imagined that it would be a tad smaller, and less mad looking.

"Who is next," shouted the squirrel, much to every ones surprise (a talking squirrel, whatever next).

"It's me," Russ said, trying not to sound too frightened.

Russ stepped into the ring, and stripped down to his pants, Jeff put an arm around him and placed a small object in his hand.

"Russ, get this gadget on the back of his sumo pants, and press the button."

Russ looked down at the curious object which was essentially a clip with a button on it. He looked at Jeff, "You are an engineer, aren't you."

"Told you," said Jeff as Russ stood up and rubbed chalk into his hands.

A crowd had now amassed but all Russ could see was the two hairy squirrel gonads, straining under the squirrels attire.

They looked at each other, the squirrel narrowed its eyes, Russ narrowed his eyes.

The squirrel pulled a growly face, Russ pulled a growly face.

Russ was not aggressive by nature but in his fight or flight instincts he was sure he was not going to end up with a face full of evil heaving squirrel nuts.

The squirrel shouted in a deep booming voice, "I am going to kick your ass."

They ran towards each other, and incredibly Russ remained in the ring as they made contact, he pushed against the squirrel who was extremely taken aback by the low level of gravity that Russ had attained and was starting to slide backwards.

The squirrel grabbed the back of Russ underpants and gave the a sharp tug upwards, an evil verminous wedgie that made Russ yelp in quite a girly voice and sent him slightly cross eyed.

Russ was not having this, and also reached around the squirrel and pulled his sumo pants upwards, the squirrel (who had previously had a deep voice) also yelped in pain. Whilst administering the counter wedgie, Russ slipped the device that Jeff had given him onto the Squirrel sumo pants and pressed the button.

The squirrel began to pause and look down in panic, the contraption that Jeff had given to Russ was pulling the squirrel sumo pants tighter, Russ stood back as the squirrel began

clutching at the pants, as they got tighter and tighter, and had completely forgotten that it was in a fight. Clawing and scratching in desperation, two main things were now happening.

First, as the pants tightened, the eyes of the squirrel were beginning to bulge, but in tandem, the hairy knackers that were poking out either side were starting to bulge too, and Russ could see that something was going to give, and then it happened.

The contraption gave one final squeeze and the left testicle of the squirrel flew completely off across the room, Russ ducked out of the way but Mick was watching incredulously with his mouth open, and it was clear that the trajectory of the hairy nutball was flying straight towards Micks wide open mouth. It was then that Frank burst into action and flung himself through the air, arm straight and fist clenched and he managed to punch the squirrel nut out of the way of Micks mouth.

“Oh my god, thank you” said Mick, very relieved not to have had an unwanted snack, “where the hell did it go?”

“Over there,” chuckled Frank.

Mick, and then the others turned to where Frank was pointing, and there was Bob. Bob had also be watching incredulously but had been so sure that the squirrel projectile was going nowhere near him had no thought to close his mouth.

“erf it oot, erf it oot” muffled Bob, as Russ wandered over to where Bob was and plucked the furry ball out of Bob’s poor unassuming mouth. Bob started to spit and splutter and claw at his tongue with his hand.

The squirrel had passed out with the agony and was laying on the floor in the ring, the punters all knew that the nights festivities were over and were starting to leave and file out of the hall.

Russ gave the piece of squirrel to Jeff, “Let’s go,” said Russ and they too headed out into the night.

They headed back up Church Street, and towards the loop to find the Imp again, as they entered lower Pednor. The crew were passing the River Chess, when two animals jumped down from a branch and landed in the road directly in front of them.

“Oh my god, it’s two wild infected beavers,” said Timmy.

Timmy was right, Dave the Bastard had warned that the bats in the loop had been infecting the local wildlife and here stood two nasty looking animals that looked quite thirsty for blood.

They had protruding teeth and nasty looking red eyes but these were voles, luckily for the boys this had been a beaver free zone for some time, they would have to go back to the market square for that sort of thing.

These were not just voles, they were a vampire variety, a mutation caused by their infection. Where they would normally

have been about a foot long, these were near three feet with horrible looking and deadly teeth.

Jeff looked at them hissing, curiously. Mick stepped forward and as they continued to hiss and spit and blocked the path forward.

Then Richard/Ian had a brainwave, "Hang on, we got some holy water from the church that will sort out these two, Ben ... you had it, where is it?"

Ben looked sheepish, "I haven't got it mate."

"What? Why not, where is it?" Enquired Richard.

"I drank it," confessed Ben.

"What? Why?" Said Richard.

"I was hungover!" Said Ben

By now, Bob was wondering if his staff would count as a stake. Frank wondered if daylight was far off, Russ made an X factor sign, and as all of the classic anti-vampire techniques were being deployed there was a quick swish, splat, swish splat.

The crew looked up, and there were two horrible flattened voles, Timmy had been using his morning star again because he had got bored with everyone else.

"That sorted that then," said Timmy proudly, "they will regenerate but it will take time after being that squished."

They got back to the Imp clearing, and there he was in all of his

splendour.

“You have it?” Asked the Imp.

“Here it is,” said Jeff who handed it over and the Imp, rather curiously placed it straight down his leather pants.

Jeff took some bark from the Silver tree in return and the gang moved to go back to the Queens Head.

“Going so soon?” Asked the Imp.

“Yep,” said Jeff dismissively.

“It’s not easy being an imp, you know, it is very lonely – people judge me for how I look and what I wear and it is hard to have a conversation with strangers, can you stay a little while?”

Mick, being a part time softy and having also spent a lot of time on watch on his own was sympathetic. “Come with me.”

And so the Imp went with Mick and the Crew who took him to the side of the Chesham Gaol.

Mick helped the Imp climb into the shaft entrance and gave him instructions.

The Imp crawled along until he found the entrance to the cell he had been looking for.

“A visitor! How lovely,” cried the Spanker.

And they lived happily ever after, for one night at least.

The team returned to the Queens Head.