

**Sir Edward Veltgar**



**and the  
Great Flying  
Noodlenergle**

**Richard Leonard**

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# *For the Grandchildren*

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All characters in this story are fictional.  
Illustrations by the author.

Not many visitors call at Heathewycke. Set, as it is, in the Great Fens of Grampshire, it can be reached only by crossing several streams and threading one's way between areas of low-lying marshland. For most travelers, such a journey would be a forbidding one indeed. But Heathewycke is in the ideal location to be the Veltgar family's ancestral home—for such it is. And the neighborhood is well suited to their many reptile and amphibian colleagues.

Sir Edward Veltgar surveyed the familiar scene from his study window. He had spent the earlier part of the morning at his work, as editor and publisher of the *Reptile & Expositor*. But now he laid aside his quill, stuffed his monacle into his coat pocket, and arose. Stepping to the door of the sitting-room, he called to his wife. "Lady Cynthia!"

"Yes, Sir Edward?" Lady Cynthia Veltgar looked up from her embroidery.

"'Tis such a fine day, and it seems a shame to remain in these confines. Shall we take a motor trip across the Fens?" asked the distinguished gentleman. "I should like to call upon our dear friend near Shropshire, T. Tertius Turtle."

"That would be splendid, Sir Edward," replied the gracious Lady Veltgar. "Had you some particular reason for this trip?"

"Yes, my dear. I should like to take T. Tertius a copy of the latest volume of the *Reptile & Expositor*. As you know, it contains my article about 'Amphibian Antiphony,' where I describe the responsorial chanting of several tribes of toads, in amphictyonic amplitude. Surely you do recall my discussing it with you."

"I do not recall that, Sir Edward," answered the lady. "But I seem to recall it has not been so long since we visited T. Tertius."

"It must be quite some time," replied Sir Edward. "For we have been much occupied of late with shriving the

sheaves and filling the firkins. But now that the work of our estate has slowed for a season, let us take this fine day for a visit to our good friend."

"If T. Tertius were not so penurious, he would subscribe for himself to the *Reptile & Expositor*," said Lady Cynthia. "Then this trip would be unnecessary. But, as you say, it is a good day for an outing. I shall gather my things while you arrange for the vehicle." Indeed, T. Tertius's home near Shropshire was some distance across the marsh, and the trip would require the automobile.



Sir Edward Summons James to Prepare the Automobile.

"I say, James!" called the dignified reptile gentleman. "James!"

"At your service, Sir Edward," called the voice of James the chauffeur, as he hurried in from the scullery. That is, to-

day James was to be the chauffeur. At other times he assumed the role of chef, butler, or gardener. James, also a Veltgar, was a distant relative of Sir Edward's.

"James, prepare the automobile for an excursion. Lady Veltgar and I should like to pay a call upon Mr. Turtle."

"Yes indeed, Sir Edward. Did you wish the limousine, or the town car?" In truth, there was only one auto, an ancient vehicle which Sir Edward nevertheless insisted was still quite serviceable—when service could be obtained, that is, which was not often here in the Fens.

"Hmmm. Now that you mention it, James, bring the limousine around today. Lady Veltgar much prefers it."

"If we are going to Shropshire," stated James, "I shall make the necessary special preparation." And opening a cabinet, he removed several rolls of brightly coloured crepe paper and put them into his travelling-case. But he did not explain further, and the elderly reptile editor had already turned to go back to his study.

Shortly a great coughing and clanking was heard, and clouds of smoke emerged from the old stable as James cranked up the auto's engine. Before long, he met Sir Edward and Lady Veltgar at the front portico of the manor house.

"I hope you don't mind, sir," apologized James, "but the brakes failed some weeks ago, and there is no one nearby who can repair them. Therefore, we have to carry the yacht's anchor in the event we need to stop of a sudden."

"No matter," replied Sir Edward. "We shan't be using the yacht any time soon."

"We don't have a yacht," Lady Veltgar reminded him. "We sold it years ago, to that reptile in Lower Uppington. Or was it Upper Lowington?"

"Then it is all the more true that we shan't be using the yacht any time soon," declared Sir Edward with some irritation.

“But it would have been pleasant to take the yacht to visit T. Tertius Turtle,” said Lady Cynthia. “If only we had a yacht, and if only there were a sea between here and Shropshire.”

“You speak of it overmuch,” complained her husband. “Truly I say to you, not a yacht, not a turtle, shall pass from your jaw till all is accomplished. Come, let us go hence.”

And with much clattering and rattling the Veltgars set off across the Great Fens, James at the wheel and Sir Edward and Lady Veltgar in the passenger compartment.

Presently they arrived at Seven Roads Crossing, the place in the Fens where seven roads cross at once, each one going in its own direction as only roads can go. Though as for that, the passing there had worn them really about the same, and each that morning equally lay in leaves no step had trodden black. But I digress.

“I always lose my way here, Sir Edward,” said James. “I don’t remember which road will take us to Shropshire.”

“Perhaps you could ask directions,” suggested Lady Cynthia.

“Ask directions!” burst out Sir Edward. “A typical proposal from a representative of the female amongst our species, who always wish to ask directions instead of just muddling through on their own!”

“If I may say so, Sir Edward,” James put in, “asking for directions is not such an untoward idea. In fact, let us inquire of yon approaching reptile.”

For indeed, a reptile was proceeding towards them at a rapid pace, if one can be said to pace who has no legs, for the Veltgars soon spied the familiar visage of Sammy the Snake, if a snake may be said to possess a visage.

“Sir Edward, Lady Veltgar, my good friend James!” greeted the snake in his histrionic hiss, as he slithered alongside the auto. “What brings you today to thissssss neck of the Fen? And may I be of servisssss?”

"Yes, you may," replied James, "for we are bound for Shropshire, but have lost the way. Perhaps you could direct us to the proper road."

"There issssss no proper road to Shropshire," answered Sammy. "There issssss only a very improper road. And, I must say, if I were going to Shropshire I shouldn't start from here."

"But we didn't start from here," protested Lady Veltgar. "We started from Heathewycke."

"In that casssse, I ssssssuppose you could continue from here," the snake replied. "Very well, I think the road for Shropshire would be the one that has the ssssssign pointing To SHROPSHIRE."

"I don't believe in signs," stated James. "I'm a cessationist. I believe that signs have ceased."

"Never mind," cut in Sir Edward. "Let us try that road anyway. And thank you, Sammy, for your assistance. We shall be seeing you again, no doubt, at the annual Sheave and Firkin Festival?"

"Right-ho, Sssssssir Edward," exclaimed the snake. "Hi-ho, a good day to one and all." And off he slithered along his road. Though as for that, the passing there had worn them really about the same, and each that morning equally lay in leaves no step had trodden black. But I digress.

"It was good of Mr. Snake to direct us to the sign," commented Lady Cynthia as the superannuated auto was coaxed into resuming its trek across the Fens. "I fear I should have quite entirely forgotten it, for all that we have so often passed this way."

And on they went, this time on the improper road to Shropshire. But as they motored further, the road grew even more improper, until it was not even an improper road but only a trail through the low hills and marshlands. Rounding a corner, they came suddenly to a place where the road ended at the bank of a stream, and began again on the other side. James quickly threw out the anchor and brought the car to a halt at the water's edge.

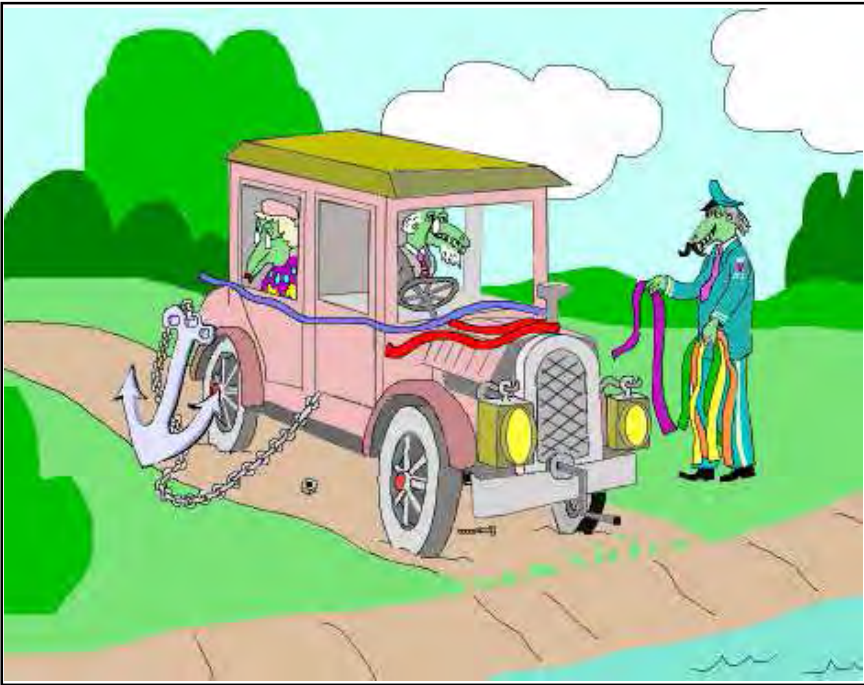


“Have we not taken this road before?” asked the reptile gentleman. “It does seem familiar to me.”

“Yes, Sir Edward, it seems we come this way at least twice a year,” replied James.

“But I had forgotten there was no bridge here,” said Sir Edward. “It appears we shall have to ford the stream.”

“I am quite prepared to do that, sir,” answered James. And opening his travelling-case, he began to affix the coloured strips of crepe paper to various parts of the automobile, and to wrap them festively around the passenger compartment.



**James Uses the Gaily Coloured Streamers.**

“Whatever are you doing now?” burst out Sir Edward.

“I am streaming the Ford, sir, just as you asked.”

“Streaming the Ford!” exclaimed the aged Veltgar. “My dear James, I instructed you to ford the stream, not to stream the Ford!”

“Somehow I always have trouble distinguishing the two,” answered the chauffeur. “I came prepared to stream the Ford.”

I fear I am not well prepared to ford the stream. I truly regret the misapprehension."

"No matter," said Sir Edward. "But we now have a stream to ford, and let us get on with it."

Gathering up the anchor and resuming his place at the wheel, the chauffeur timidly inched the vehicle into the water. The auto sank lower and lower, till the water lapped at the floorboards. Just as they approached midstream, the car drew to a halt.

"What seems to be the matter?" asked Sir Edward.

"It appears we are mired. We cannot go forward."

"Then go backward," ordered the senior Veltgar. "Perhaps we can try another spot." But for all his efforts, James could not get the ancient vehicle to go either forward or backward. Every attempt to move only caused its wheels to sink deeper and deeper into the now-muddy waters. Finally the engine stopped.

"We have certainly muddied the waters," observed Lady Cynthia. "Is this what you mean by muddling through?"

"I will be muddling through with this auto one day, Sir Edward," James declared. "But look! We have become an object of curiosity. The fish are gathering to watch us." For several large fish had swum into view and were observing their plight with an obvious air of superiority.

"I believe they are carp," said Lady Cynthia. "I have heard that carp prefer muddy water."

"Yes, we are carp," bubbled the largest of the fish. "And you look like reptiles. But now that you're stuck in the stream, you're like fish out of water, so to speak."

"Or reptiles out of land," gurgled a second fish.

"Enough carping!" exclaimed Sir Edward. "Help us get out of here."

"Why don't you try to pull yourselves out?" suggested the largest carp. "Throw that anchor over a tree limb and draw yourselves up by the rope."

“It might work, Sir Edward,” said James. “If you’ll handle the anchor, I’ll steer and perhaps we can extricate ourselves.”

Sir Edward agreed it was worth a try, and gave the anchor a vigorous heave towards a tree on the opposite bank. But as he did so, his wallet slipped out of his coat pocket and fell into the water.

“My wallet! I shall have to enter the water to retrieve it,” cried Sir Edward. “And ruin my clothing for our visit to T. Tertius Turtle.”



### A Game of Catch with Sir Edward's Wallet.

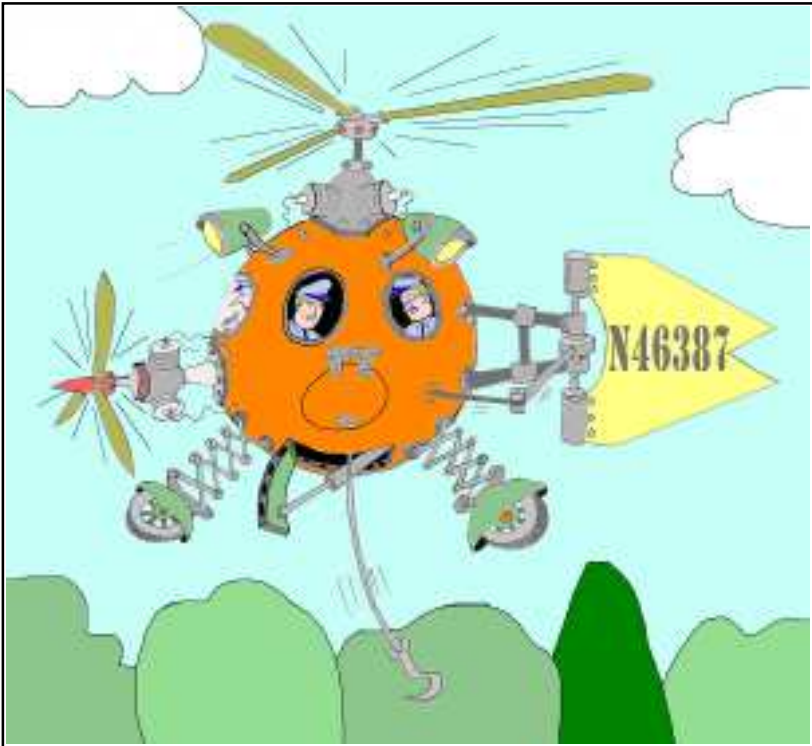
But as he spoke the largest of the fish seized the wallet in his mouth and tossed it over the stream to the second fish, who caught it in his mouth and hurled it to a third. And back and forth went Sir Edward's wallet, from fish to fish, like a regular game of catch.

“A sight I never thought I should see,” laughed Lady Veltgar. “Carp-to-carp walleting! Somehow, Sir Edward, that reminds me—I have been meaning to speak with you about redecorating the manor house.”

“We shall speak of that another time,” responded her husband. “Our concern at the moment is a different one, and I

am at a loss as to how to resolve it. But, I say, here comes my wallet, at least!" For one of the carp swam toward the car and returned the wallet, almost dry now from having been tossed through the air. And off went the fish, leaving the Veltgars wondering how they might be rescued.

And then the sound was heard, very faintly at first, and then growing ever louder: the sound of an aircraft. And soon it became the unmistakable sound of the Great Flying Noodlenergle, with its "*wurgly-burgly, wurgly-burgly, wurgly-burgly, WURGLY-BURGLY.*"



The Great Flying Noodlenergle Comes to the Rescue.

"Flag them down, James!" called Sir Edward, but James had already mounted to the roof of the auto and was vigorously waving a handful of the coloured streamers he had brought to stream the Ford.

"WURGLY-BURGLY, *wurgly-burgly, wurgly-burgly, wurgly-burgly*" went the Noodlenergle as it passed over them

and disappeared behind a row of trees on the far side of the stream.

“They didn’t see us!” cried Lady Cynthia. But her alarm was premature, for in a moment they heard the sound once again: “*wurgly-burgly, wurgly-burgly, wurgly-burgly, WURGLY-BURGLY.*” And soon the Great Flying Noodlenergle was hovering over the spot where the Veltgar vehicle was stuck.

There was no need to explain their plight, and no explanation could have been heard anyway over the *wurgly-burgly* sound of the Noodlenergle’s engines. Soon a door opened in the bottom of the Noodlenergle, and a stout cable with a hook at its end descended toward the mired auto. When it reached him, James grabbed the hook and passed it through the passenger compartment, reattaching it to the cable above. Quickly he took the wheel and did his best to steer the car as the Noodlenergle slowly pulled it toward the opposite bank.

Detaching the cable, James and the others waved their gratitude as the Great Flying Noodlenergle resumed its errand, whatever it may have been, and disappeared quickly beyond the horizon.

“It was a fortunate circumstance,” declared Sir Edward, “that the Great Flying Noodlenergle should be passing over us at precisely this time.”

“And a lucky one as well,” agreed Lady Cynthia.

“Providential also,” James added. “And well timed.”

And as soon as they could start the battered auto’s well-soaked engine, off they went again in the direction of Shropshire. At length they reached a dwelling made of rocks by the river’s edge, which they recognized as the residence of T. Tertius Turtle. Leaving James to monitor the vehicle, Sir Edward and Lady Veltgar approached the door.

“Perhaps it is T. Tertius’s nap time,” observed Lady Cynthia. “He’s often a bit crusty when freshly awakened.”

“We’ll have to chance it,” replied her husband. “But, if you recall, he’s crusty all the time.” The Veltgars rang the bell.

Lady Cynthia's fears were well founded, for it was several moments before the door opened and T. Tertius's beaked head peered out.

"Disturb my nap time, will you? Begone! Oh! It is you, Sir Edward and Lady Veltgar. I am sorry. Do come in." The Veltgars accepted his invitation.



T. Tertius Turtle Greet the Arriving Veltgars.

"A lovely day," commented the turtle. "And what a pleasure to see you both. I'll ring for tea. Now tell me, how is everything at Heathewycke?"

"The sheaves have been shriven and the firkins have been filled," replied Sir Edward.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the turtle. "I shall look forward to the annual festival. But no doubt you did not come all this way simply to tell me that. Surely you came with another purpose."

"Not with a porpoise," answered Lady Cynthia. "Only with James. But we left him to monitor the auto."

"But I should think it quite useless to monitor the vehicle, seeing it has no processor," T. Tertius replied. "Tell me, did he stream the Ford again?"

"He always does," answered Lady Cynthia.

"And I suppose you ran into that Needle-gurgle thing, as usual."

"We didn't exactly run into it," Sir Edward protested. "But the Great Flying Noodlenergle did come by, and just at the right time to perform a great service."

"Needle-gargle, schmeedle-griddle!" the turtle burst out, without waiting for a further explanation. "The main thing is, you are here, and to what end?"

"I came to present you with a copy of the latest volume of the *Reptile & Expositor*," explained the reptile editor. "It contains my essay on 'Amphibian Antiphony,' in which I comment on the responsorial chanting of toad to toad. I know the subject is of interest to you."

"Sir Edward, you illiterate, incompetent imbecile!" exclaimed the turtle with his usual grace. "You brought that article to me to proofread, some months ago! Surely you have not forgotten?"

"I was certain we had been here recently," said Lady Veltgar, "just as I said to you, Sir Edward, before we started out. Yes, now I remember. It was the day we came to Shropshire to shrop our shears."

"Your shears were surely shropped that day, I should shay," the turtle replied. "And no doubt we shall shee you shortly, when shear shropping sheashon comes again."

"Then our trip today was all in vain," complained Sir Edward. "Except that you rang for tea, and I am quite hungry after such an arduous journey."

"Yes, I did ring for tea," agreed T. Tertius. "But it won't be coming. Today is the servants' day off."

"It was kind of you to ring, anyway," said Lady Cynthia.

After a few more moments of conversation, Sir Edward announced, "It has been good to visit with you, sir, but now it is time to take our leave."

"But these are not your leaves," objected the turtle, pointing to his dining-table. "These are my leaves! You did not leave any leaves here, and I'd as lief you would leave my leaves alone."

And so, as they motored back across the Great Fens to Heathewycke, the only leaves the Veltgars took were those upon the improper road. Though as for that the passing there had worn them really about the same, and each that morning equally lay in leaves no step had trodden black. But I digress.



This whimsical tale featuring the imaginary Veltgars — sort of humanoid crocodiles — has its origin in the author's family history, being told first to his children and then to his grandchildren before morphing into its present illustrated form. The very term "veltgar" was invented, in fact, by the author's youngest daughter during a kind of hide-and-seek game played with her father. Soon the principal Veltgar became Sir Edward Veltgar, by near-homonymy with the British composer Sir Edward Elgar, and the scene of the story became the fen country of England where the Veltgars encounter their reptilian neighbors. (Church organists may also recognize the play on the name of the liturgical composer T. Tertius Noble in the crusty friend to whom the Veltgars pay a visit.)

Our narrative is replete with formal diction, archaisms, echoes of Scriptural phrases, allusion to a theological issue, and even a quotation from a famous poem by Robert Frost — not to mention some simply outrageous puns and word plays, even one involving computer technology. In the title of the scholarly publication Sir Edward edits, the *Reptile & Expositor*, theologians may recognize a play on the name of a certain academic journal.

Then there is the Great Flying Noodlenergle, a kind of spherical helicopter the origin of which predates even that of the Veltgars, being the invention of an imaginary mad scientist in the author's youthful cartooning efforts. But in its current form the Noodlenergle is benevolent, its *wurgly-burgly* coming to the rescue from "out of the blue" like the proverbial sky hook. This tale is not the only one in which this technically unflyable craft so appears.

How, then, should we categorize our story? On the surface it is a children's story in its characters and simple plot. Yet it is told at the intellectual level of a broadly cultured adult, and many of its attempts at humor will be lost upon the juvenile mind. Perhaps the tale is best treated as a story to be read to children, while being equally enjoyed at another level by the adult reader.

*"I hope you don't mind, sir," apologized James, "but the brakes failed some weeks ago, and there is no one nearby who can repair them. Therefore, we have to carry the yacht's anchor in the event we need to stop of a sudden."*

*"No matter," replied Sir Edward. "We shan't be using the yacht any time soon."*

*"We don't have a yacht," Lady Veltgar reminded him. "We sold it years ago, to that reptile in Lower Uppington. Or was it Upper Lowington?"*

*"Then it is all the more true that we shan't be using the yacht any time soon," declared Sir Edward with some irritation.*

This improbable story about improbable characters on an improbable journey, with an improbable outcome, will probably amuse you. At least, I hope it does. But I digress.



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