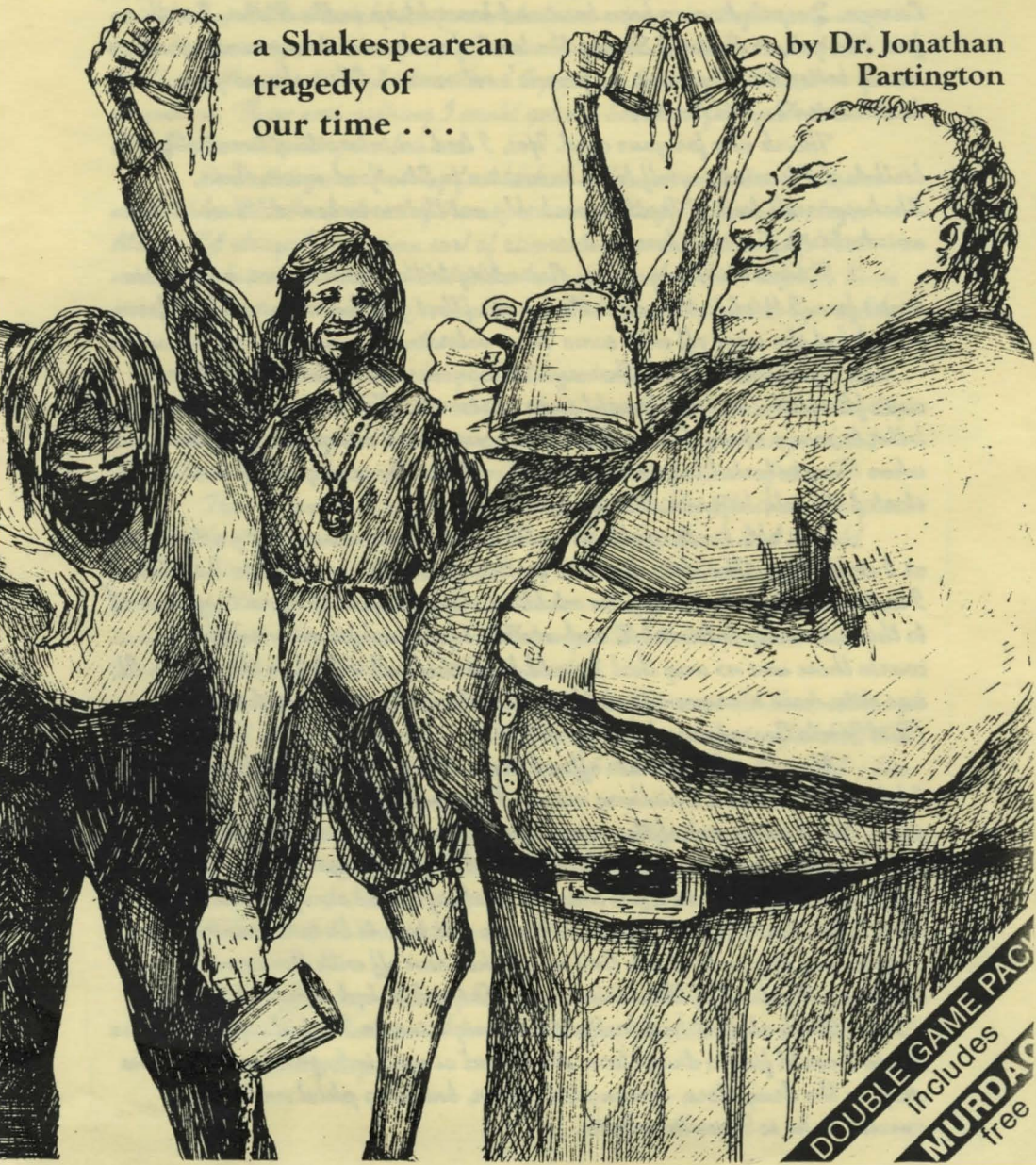


AVON

a Shakespearean
tragedy of
our time . . .

by Dr. Jonathan
Partington



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Little Seedbottom
Near Stratford
ENGLAND

Hotel Topologika

1st April 1989

My Dear Aunt Jocasta

How are you? How is Uncle George? I hope you got my letter from Paris. The Louvre was just amazing, and the hamburgers in the fast food opposite Gare du Nord were nearly as good as yours.

I will be eternally grateful to you both for enabling me to see Europe. Despite having been born and brought up in the States, I still feel, like you, so British! Seeing the land of one's ancestors in one's youth is surely better than hanging on for one's retirement. It's a shame your health wasn't up to the trip.

Thank you for your card. Yes, I had an interesting twentieth birthday. I treated myself to an excursion to Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's town. 'Treat' is probably not the correct word. It was the weirdest trip I've ever known.

It began like any other. According to the coach driver, we had six hours free. I tried to stay with Araminta (that girl I wrote you about from Paris) but she went off with some 'Nam veteran.

Anyway, Ann Hathaway's cottage was out of this world. I had a cup of English tea, then bought some postcards (I've put one in with this letter to save a stamp), then found this quaint old antique shop. That's when things started to go wrong. Well, not exactly wrong. They just started to, well, happen. I'll try to explain.

This old, brass cauldron in the shop window caught my attention as I walked by. The shop was run by three old ladies, and when I said that I was interested in viewing the cauldron, they flipped. I mean they seemed to think I really did want it, and wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. Of course there was no way that I could have shipped it back to the States. It was even more enormous than that old rocking chair you used to have! (Did Uncle George ever fix it for you?)

My refusal seemed to offend them. They began to cluck and moan. I felt like I was in a Spielberg movie! I was out of there quick, I can tell you. I could swear one of them was after me with a broom. Outside the shop was this enormous pine tree which seemed to groan – yes, groan – as I ran past it. I took refuge in a pet shop a couple of blocks away, where an asp tried to bite me! I dived into the museum (strange to be in a country where people have to pay to check that no one has run off with their own heritage). I got out of there when an ass's head looked me up and down.

Well, all this had brought on a migraine, so I asked a policeman where I could find a drug store. He looked at me kinda strange, as did the chap in the drug store, showing this green, bubbling phial under the counter as he sold me some pills.

Outside, the spring sun was still up, so I headed for the river. The Avon was as beautiful as Fodor's said it would be. I began to feel a whole lot better, strolling along, letting the pills and the fresh English air do their thing. Maybe I'd imagined it all. Maybe I was just overtired. I'd sure done a heck of a lot of travelling in the last few days. Maybe it was all just a bad dream, and I'd wake up in a minute or two back on the coach.

I must have taken a wrong turning. Suddenly I had the strangest of feelings. Don't ask me how, but right then I began to realise what was going on, and the thought sent a shock down my spine. Before my very eyes, the scenery was changing. The woods across the river looked like Scotland, the streets might have been Egypt, or London or Venice – anywhere. There was nothing I could get my bearings from. Modern Stratford was leaving me behind.

Even the ground at my feet looked different, unnatural. It was made of boards. I wondered if I was on some sort of platform or stage. Maybe I'd strayed onto some sort of riverside film set, I thought: that would explain some things. But the whole area looked too realistic: those were real trees, real buildings, and across the river, the suddenly muddy, boiling river, were real people.

But wait: why were they pointing at me? It was horrible; I hate people staring at me. This was worse: they were talking about me too, their voices drifting across the churning water: "Marry, 'tis a strange churl, that standeth over there. Methinks it knoweth not the time of day!"

Then I realised something even more horrible. Their clothing was completely different to mine. Where I was wearing Levis and my old football shirt (I know you disapprove of that, Auntie, but when one is travelling) these olde worlde hippies had on long flowing garments that swung stiffly in the increasingly chill breeze. It felt like winter, was winter, and it would be dark within minutes.

To cut a long story short, I was standing in a world that, although it was at that moment definitely NOT Stratford-upon-Avon, still had this Shakespearian flavour. I'd been transported into The Bard's world – the world of his plays – and players.

You're thinking your nephew's gone nutty, I suppose, that Europe has gone to my head. Please please believe me, Auntie. This REALLY happened. I had to use all my wits to get back to the modern world. Luckily I didn't need to know all that much about the Bard himself – or his works.

No time for any more right now, Auntie. I'll write again in a day or so. Don't worry about me. How is Uncle George getting on in Kashmir?

Your loving nephew

Jonathan

***'All hail, great master, grave sir!
Hail! Welcome ever smiles, and
farewell goes out sighing . . .'***

In this light-hearted but immensely challenging look at The Bard's world through the keyboard of modern man, you find yourself, after watching too many Shakespeare plays (or perhaps reading them) wandering around a strange land. Here they use a richer language than usual, and some of the scenes remind you of certain Shakespeare plays. How you are going to return successfully to the present day is something that you will have to find out for yourself!

Why does the adventure take place on three different dates? What is the significance of the lady Portia's caskets? Why does Yorick sometimes say "Golesida" and sometimes something else? Why do you suddenly find yourself wearing an ass's head? These are just some of the tantalising puzzles that you'll meet when you welcome AVON . . . An exhaustive knowledge of the Shakespearean Canon is not necessary as, in most cases, just the problems rather than the solutions are taken from Shakespeare. If you get really stuck, Topologika's much-praised on-line 'Help' system is there to stop the sighing . . .

AVON is Jonathan Partington's first release since his best-selling 'KINGDOM of HAMIL' (also available from TOPOLOGIKA).

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