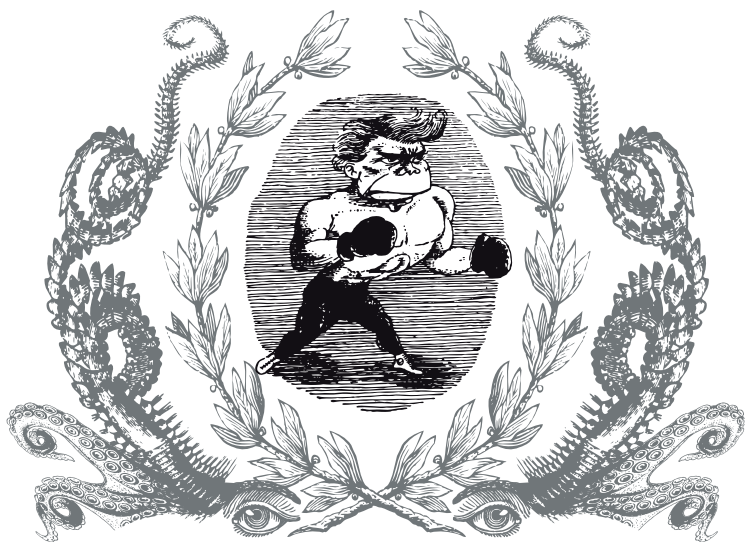


**FROM THE CHRONICLES OF THE
SURREALIST SPORTSMAN'S CLUB**

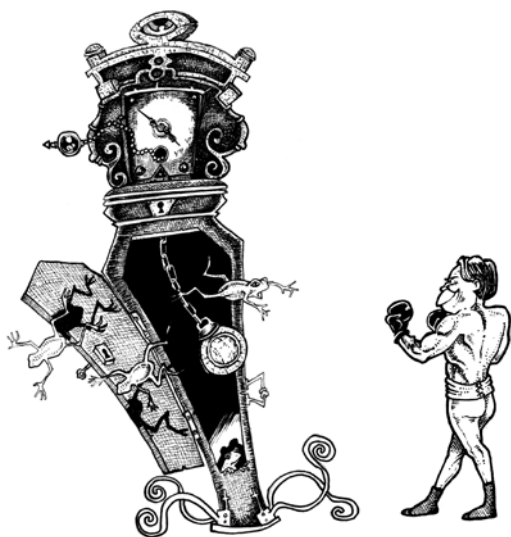
THE EXPLOITS OF ENGELBRECHT



With many fine illustrations by
James Boswell, Ronald Searle & Gerard Hoffnung

MAURICE RICHARDSON

S A Y O Y B O O K S



THE SAVOY EDITION OF THE EXPLOITS OF ENGELBRECHT WAS
FIRST PUBLISHED VIA THE PRICELESS GIFT OF CONSCIOUSNESS
IN GREAT BRITAIN 2000

THIS NEW EDITION PUBLISHED 2010

SAVOY BOOKS
446 WILMSLOW ROAD, WITHINGTON,
MANCHESTER, M20 3BW, UK
OFFICE@SAVOY.ABEL.CO.UK
WWW.SAVOY.ABEL.CO.UK

COPYRIGHT © THE ESTATE OF MAURICE RICHARDSON
ALL ARTWORK COPYRIGHT © THE INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS
THIS EDITION COPYRIGHT © SAVOY 2010

A CIP CATALOGUE RECORD FOR THIS BOOK
IS AVAILABLE AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY

ISBN: 978-0-86130-119-5

PRODUCTION:	DAVID BRITTON & MICHAEL BUTTERWORTH
DESIGN:	JOHN COULTHART
TYPESETTING:	SARAJANE INKSTER



THE NIGHT OF THE BIG WITCH SHOOT



“ . . . they beat about the gravestones . . . ”

THIS IS A SAMPLE CHAPTER FROM MAURICE RICHARDSON'S
NOVEL. TO PURCHASE THE BOOK, VISIT SAVOY BOOKS AT
WWW.SAVOY.ABEL.CO.UK

I'LL NEVER forget the time I met Engelbrecht, the surrealist boxer, and I don't suppose he will either. We were both staying down at Nightmare Abbey, old Iddesleigh's place, for the Walpurgis Night Witch Shoot. It was long after breakfast when he arrived and I'd gone to bed, so we didn't meet till supper, just before the shoot. We found we'd drawn stands next to each other for the last drive of the night. Engelbrecht seemed a pleasant enough little chap – a dwarf, of course, like nearly all surrealist boxers who do most of their fighting with clocks. It was his first Witch Shoot and he was keen and, I thought, a little nervous.

I don't know if you've ever shot the Nightmare coverts, but the last drive on Walpurgis Night is something special, quite a to-do. The vicar with Bell, Book and Candle and holy water spray leads the choir through the cemetery and they beat about among the gravestones shouting: 'Hi cock! C'mon out of that, granny! Get crackin' there! Only another

half hour till day-break.' Then you hear them yell: 'Witch over! Mark Warlock! Wizard on the left', and what with the screeching of the witches and the whirring of the broomsticks there's row enough to put up the devil himself.

That drive ought by rights to make the heaviest contribution of any to the night's bag, but the churchyard is on a cliff and the shooters' stands are at the bottom, down by the river, so if there's anything of a wind – and there nearly always is – the witches come rocketing over at a fearful angle, and unless there's a moon – which there generally isn't by then – you're left with nothing to shoot at except a screech.

Sometimes it's so darned infuriating the amount of game that gets away that the Id swears he'll have searchlights mounted on top of the church tower. But of course he's only fooling. He'd never do such an unsporting thing as that. I mean to say shooting witches by artificial light is definitely barred. I'll never forget the row there was the night Tommy Prenderghast bribed the head keeper to set fire to Gallows Wood, which is another very tricky covert. I must say the light, as all that dry bracken flared up, was marvellous; it gave you a simply tophole shot as the witches came over silhouetted black against the red glow. I blazed away with the rest, but there was barely time to get in a left and right before old Iddesleigh came cursing and swearing along the line, telling us the shoot was off and we were to go straight home. He sacked his head keeper on the spot, and when we got back to the Abbey Tommy Prenderghast found his bags had all been packed and a huge black Fly was waiting to take him to the station to catch the milk train to London. I need hardly tell you he wasn't asked there to shoot again.

FOR this last drive Engelbrecht, the surrealist boxer, and I had drawn the best stand of the lot. They call it the Island Stand. It's a narrow strip of earth sticking up in the middle of the river, overgrown with nettles and brambles,



WITCHES IN FLIGHT — AND GROUNDED

After Gustave Doré

Plate No 6666 from 'The Witch-Shooters Vade Mecum'

old bedsteads and the intestines of worn-out agricultural machinery. You get to it by stepping stones. There's a bend in the river just there, and the other side is the steep sandstone cliff or bluff on top of which is the churchyard, so the guns on the island are right out in front of the rest and get first shot at the covens as they come over. It's the finest witch stand in England, and they say the splash as the witches plop into the water all round you is the most exciting sound in the world for a witch shooter and one he never forgets.

There's always a goodish wait before the start of the drive, so I strolled over to Engelbrecht, to ask him how he'd been getting on.

I'd been having pretty poor sport myself. Indeed my bag was practically empty except for a little runt of a warlock, not worth stuffing, and the handle of a broomstick which I was taking home as a souvenir. Luckily I hadn't got a bet on with anyone about the weight of our bags or I'd have had to try the Kaiser's trick. The Kaiser, as I expect you know, came to stay with the Id's grandfather, and they bet on their bags at the witch shoot. Old Iddesleigh's bag was the heavier by a brace of Worcestershire Warlocks, and the Kaiser, who was always a very bad loser, was absolutely livid, so much so that on the way home he shot his host's grandmother to level things up. It wasn't considered very sporting of him, although there was no doubt the old girl was a witch all right.

I had some difficulty in finding Engelbrecht at first, as the nettles were taller than he was. I couldn't catch what he said as his teeth were chattering so with cold, but his loader whispered into my ear: 'The little gentleman's a guid plucked un, sir, but he's a verra puir shot. He couldna hit a sitting wizard.'

I haven't told you yet about these loaders, but they're rather important. The fact is that all the loaders at a witch shoot are chaplains. They have to be, of course, in order to finish off any witches that get winged. Sometimes it's difficult

to get hold of enough of them for a big shoot, and the Id has to scour the country far and wide.

I'd never seen Engelbrecht's loader before, but that didn't signify anything. My own loader was a very old retired prison chaplain, so old I felt ashamed to be keeping him out of his bed, and when I got back to my stand and found he'd fallen asleep with his old head on my game bag I simply hadn't the heart to wake him. I loaded both my guns with No 3 – silver witch shot – took a swig of holy water from my flask and stood at the ready with ears cocked, listening for the first thwack of the choir-boys' sticks against the gravestones in the churchyard up over the sandstone bluff.



Presently I heard it. Then came the first screech, followed by another and another and another. I yelled to Engelbrecht to get ready and put my gun up to my shoulder. There was no light to speak of and I missed with both barrels as the first coven went over. I tried a snap shot at something that whizzed by, and missed again.

Then suddenly the moon broke through the clouds for a moment and I managed to get a shot at a big witch who came rocketing over very high. There was a terrific double explosion on my right which sounded as if Engelbrecht had loosed both barrels at once. Maybe it was poaching a bit, but I liked his keenness. Then silence for a second. Then I heard a whirring, screeching noise like a power-dive, and caught a glimpse of a huge black figure spinning down, broomstick hopelessly out of control. And then there was an almighty splash just in front of Engelbrecht's stand.

I distinctly remember feeling rather relieved that the witch had fallen nearer Engelbrecht than me because I should have had to send my poor old loader into the river after her.

I started to run over to Engelbrecht, but an iron bedstead caught me by the foot, and after a nasty tussle threw me heavily into a bramble bush. I lay there with my ankle hurting like the devil, unable to move. I could hear a confused muttering coming from my right. 'For heaven's sake send your loader in after her,' I shouted to Engelbrecht. 'What the hell's he waiting for? We don't want her to float down stream and have someone else claim her. Besides, she may only be winged.'

There was more muttering. Then Engelbrecht shouted back: 'He refuses. Says he's unfrocked. An unfrocked college chaplain...!'

Well, of course, that did put rather a different complexion on things. An unfrocked chaplain is no more qualified to retrieve a witch than you or me. I shouted back to Engelbrecht telling him I'd broken my ankle and couldn't move, and he was to come over and wake my loader. But he couldn't have heard me, because the next moment there was a load splash and I heard the chaplain cry out: 'Lord have mercy on us! The little gentleman's gone in after her!' And as I lay helpless on my back in the bramble bush I took off my hat to Engelbrecht, the surrealist boxer, the pluckiest dwarf I ever knew, and the boldest lay witch-retriever since Beowulf



went into the Mere after Grendel's mother.

What happened after that was just what I'd feared. I'll spare you the unfrocked chaplain's hysterical running commentary by which I was able to follow the course of the struggle. The witch, it appears, was hardly winged at all. Our flak had merely made her lose control of her broomstick and drop it in midstream. When Engelbrecht swam up to her she'd just come up from diving for the stick and had it in her mouth. She caught Engelbrecht by the scruff of the neck with one claw, hauled him on to the bank, and clouted him with her broomstick. Then she popped him into his own game bag, straddled her broomstick, which was fairly dry by now, and took off flying low upstream away from the guns. It all happened before you could say Jack Ratcatcher.

Well, I said to myself, that's the last we shall see of Engelbrecht, the surrealist boxer, and I proceeded to give that unfrocked college chaplain the telling off of his life.

THEY carried me back to Nightmare Abbey on a hurdle. I had to put up with a good deal of chaff, and Charlie Wapentake kept on asking how much witchie had bribed me to let her make away with Engelbrecht.

But lo and behold, that evening as I lay in bed I heard a great cheer, and a few minutes later who should walk into my room but little Engelbrecht, covered in filth but looking quite chirpy. It seems he'd been too heavy for the witch; he could hear her cursing like one o'clock, complaining of his weight all the time. Apparently if they don't make their landing field before dawn they get fined. So after a bit she let him drop and he landed soft but smelly in a farmyard fifteen miles away.

Altogether, Engelbrecht said, it was the narrowest squeak he'd ever had, with the possible exception of his famous fight with a Grandfather Clock. But that is another story.