



The Begum's Fortune

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Le roman commence dans la chambre d'hotel de Brighton du docteur. Son fils, Octave, est un etudiant moyen de l'Ecole centrale. Il s'est lie d'amitie a Marcel Bruckmann, qui est un etudiant brillant et qui sert de mentor pour Octave. En apprenant la nouvelle de l'heritage, Octave est rempli de joie, alors que Marcel est plus reserve sur cette nouvelle. Pendant ce temps, le docteur Sarrasin, toujours a Brighton, decide d'utiliser l'argent pour la construction d'une cite modele basee sur les principes scientifiques, Franceville. La nouvelle de cet heritage se repand dans l'Europe et jusqu'au professeur Schultze, professeur allemand antifrancais, qui pretend lui aussi a l'heritage. En se rendant en Angleterre, un accord est trouve: l'heritage est divise entre les deux hommes. Cinq ans plus tard, Johann Schwartz (qui est en fait Marcel Bruckmann) se fait engager comme ouvrier a Stahlstadt, la cite de l'acier et cite personnelle du professeur Schultze. Stahlstadt est une immense cite dediee a la construction de canons. Johann espionne le professeur afin de s'assurer que celui-ci n'a pas de mauvaises intentions contre France-Ville. Par son travail applique, Marcel reussi a devenir le collegue de travail et confident du professeur allemand. Celui-ci lui devoile alors son projet: il veut detruire France-Ville grace a un nouveau canon tirant un enorme obus. Malheureusement, Marcel est condamne a mort par le professeur pour avoir eu connaissance de son macabre projet. Marcel s'echappe alors de Stahlstadt et part prevenir Franceville du plan machiavelique du professeur Schultze, mais l'obus tire par le canon de Stahlstadt et destine a detruire Franceville a acquis une telle vitesse qu'il ne peut retomber: il devient le premier satellite artificiel de la Terre. Quelques jours plus tard, la Bourse de San Francisco annonce que Stahlstadt ne paie plus ses creanciers faute d'argent. De plus, le professeur est annonce disparu. Marcel, accompagne d'Octave, se rend a Stahlstadt pour essayer de comprendre ce qu'il est advenu du professeur. Ils decouvrent ce dernier mort par un de ses engins de destruction. Marcel propose alors de reprendre Stahlstadt et d'en faire un centre de production pour les industries utiles, dirige par Marcel. Marcel epouse finalement la fille du docteur et devient ainsi un membre a part entiere de la famille"

The Begum's Fortune Details

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Aleksandar Obradovi? says

Libernovus je definitivno napravio pun pogodak ovom edicijom. Opet jedan zanimljiv naslov i prosto fascinantno kako Vern lako plete zaplete i istovremeno pokazuje da je bio jedan od pisaca sa najve?im kvantumom op?teg znanja.

John says

This book creates a very interesting situation but ends with a very abrupt anticlimax. A French doctor (Sarrasin) and a German professor (Schulze) inherit shares in an immense Indian fortune.

Both create ideal communities in Oregon (but legally autonomous). The Frenchman's community, Frankville, is a peaceful, artistic, fanatically hygienic community. (One point Verne makes, which modern medicine seems now to be realizing, is that concentrating sick people together in large hospitals increases the spread of infections.) The German's city, Stahlstadt, is a vast industrial complex with its own coal mines and steel foundries, devoted to producing

ever larger and more effective weapons, especially cannon.

Max Bruckmann, an Alsatian loyal to the French, infiltrates

the German city and learns Schulze's plans for destroying

Frankville; he then escapes by a very neatly foreshadowed variation on the old swim-through-the flooded-tunnel trick, and returns to organize the defense of Frankville. Schulze's

first attack fails by an unlikely error, and then Schulze vanishes, abruptly ending the great struggle before it has really begun. At first the people of Stahlstadt are merely confused, but later they all seem to have abandoned the town.

(there is a very awkward sudden transition). All in all, the story gives a feeling that Verne decided to abandon the project and huddled together the disappointing ending.

Patrick Gibson says

This is an exceptional novel -- and very unusual for Verne. Part of a 'Complete Works of' I had never heard of this and once I started reading had no idea where the story was going. I kept thinking: I'm reading Sinclair Lewis. It's a parable for our times, and remarkable in its insights.

Here is the summary from Wikipedia:

Two men receive the news that they are part-inheritors to a vast fortune. They are the last surviving descendants of a French soldier-of-fortune who many years before settled in India and married the immensely rich widow of a native prince -- the begum of the title.

One of the inheritors is a gentle French physician, Dr. Sarrasin, who has long been concerned with the unsanitary conditions of European cities. He decides to use his share of the inheritance to establish a utopian model city which would be constructed and maintained with public health as the primary concern of its

government.

The other inheritor is a far from gentle German scientist Prof. Schultze – very stereotypically presented as an arrogant militarist and racist, who becomes increasingly power-mad in the course of the book. Though having had himself a French grandmother, (otherwise he would not have gotten the inheritance), he is completely convinced of the innate superiority of the "Saxon" (i.e., German) over the "Latin" (primarily, the French) which would lead to the eventual total destruction of the latter by the former. When first introduced to the reader, he is in the process of composing a supposedly scholarly paper entitled "Why do all French people suffer, to one degree or another, from hereditary degeneration?", to be published in the German journal *Physiological Annals* (though his official academic specialty is chemistry). Later it is disclosed that Schultze had done considerable "research" and published many articles conclusively "proving" the superiority of the German race over the rest of humanity.

The Utopian plans of his distant French cousin not only seem to Schultze stupid and meaningless, but are positively wrong. They issue from a Frenchman and are designed to block "progress" which decreed that the degenerate French are due to be subdued by the Germans. Schultze proposes to use his half of the inheritance for constructing his own kind of utopia – a city devoted to the production of ever more powerful and destructive weapons – and even before the first stone was laid in either city, vows to destroy Sarrasin's creation.

The two (each one separately) quite improbably manage to get the United States to cede its sovereignty over large parts of the Pacific Northwest, in order to enable the creation of two competing city-states, located in southern Oregon at a distance of forty kilometres of each other on either side of the Cascades. One is a tranquil French city of 100,000 on the western side; the other is a bustling German city of 50,000 to the east, with its industrial and mining operations extending far eastward, causing extensive pollution and environmental destruction as far as the Red Desert in Wyoming.

Verne gives the precise location of Sarrasin's "Ville-France" (France-Ville or Frankville in English translations) – on the southern Oregon coast, eighty kilometres north of Cape Blanco, at 43°11'3" North, 124°41'17" West. This would place it at the southern end of Coos County, Oregon – a county which already existed at the time, though very thinly populated (and has remained so, having 62,779 inhabitants as of 2000).

The nearest real-life town seems to be Bandon (population 2,833 in the same 2000 census), located slightly north-east of the site of Ville-France, and which was founded by the Irish peer George Bennet in 1873 – one year after Verne's date for the creation of Ville-France. The Coquille River, on whose southern bank Bandon is located, is presumably the unnamed "small river of sweet mountain waters" which Verne describes as providing Ville-France's water.

As depicted by Verne, brief negotiations with the Oregon Legislature in December 1871 suffice to secure the grant of a 16 kilometre-wide area extending from the Pacific shore to the peaks of the Cascades, "with a sovereignty similar to that of Monaco" and the stipulation that after an unspecified number of years it would revert to full US sovereignty (Verne does not mention any United States Department of State or Congressional involvement in the deal). Actual construction begins in January 1872, and by April of the same year the first train from New York pulls into the Ville-France Railway Station, a trunk line from Sacramento having been completed.

The houses and public facilities of Ville-France are constructed by a large number of Chinese migrant workers - who are sent away once the city is complete, with the payment of their salaries specifically

dependent on their signing an obligation never to return. Reviewer Paul Kincaid noted that "The Chinese coolies employed to build the French utopia are then hurriedly dispatched back to San Francisco, since they are not fit to reside in this best of all cities."

The book justifies the exclusion of the Chinese as being a precaution needed in order to avoid in advance the "difficulties created in other places" by the presence of Chinese communities. This might be an oblique reference to the Chinese Massacre of 1871, when a mob entered Los Angeles' Chinatown, indiscriminately burning Chinese-occupied buildings and killing at least 20 Chinese American residents out of a total of some 200 then living in the city.

Most of the action takes place in Schultze's Stahlstadt ("Steel City"). Steel City a vast industrial and mining complex, where ores are taken out of the earth and made into steel, and the steel is made into ever more deadly weapons. Steel city becomes in a few years the world's biggest producer of arms. The now immensely rich Schultze is Steel City's dictator, whose very word is law and who makes all significant decisions personally. There is no mention of Steel City's precise legal status vis-à-vis the Oregon or US Federal authorities, but clearly Schultze behaves as a completely independent head of state (except that he uses Dollars rather than mint his own currency).

The strongly fortified city is built in concentric circles, each separated from the next by a high wall, with the mysterious "Tower of the Bull" – Schultze's own abode – at its center. The workers are under a semi-military discipline, with complex metallurgical operations carried out with a Teutonic split-second precision. A worker straying into where and what he is not authorized to see and know is punished with immediate expulsion in the outer sectors and with death in the sensitive inner ones. However, the workers' conditions seem rather decent by Nineteenth Century standards: there are none of the hovels which characterized many working-class districts of the time, and competence is rewarded with rapid promotion by the paternalistic Schultze and his underlings.

Dr. Sarrasin, in contrast, is a rather passive figure – a kind of non-hereditary constitutional monarch who, after the original initiative to found Ville-France, does not take any significant decision in the rest of the book. The book's real protagonist, who offers active resistance to Schultze's dark reign and his increasingly satanic designs, is a younger Frenchman – the Alsatian Marcel Bruckmann, native of the part of France forcibly annexed by Germany in the recent war.

The dashing Bruckmann – an Alsatian with a German family name and fiercely patriotic French heart – manages to penetrate Steel City. As an Alsatian, he is a fluent speaker of German, an indispensable condition for entering the thoroughly Germanised Steel City, and is able to pass himself off as being Swiss – "Elsässisch", the German dialect spoken in Alsace, being very close to Swiss German. He quickly rises high in its hierarchy, gains Schultze's personal confidence, spies out some of the tyrant's well-kept secrets, and sends a warning to his French friends. It turns out that Schultze is not content to produce arms, but fully intends to use them himself – first against the hated Ville-France, as a first step towards his explicit ambition of establishing Germany's worldwide rule. (He casually mentions a plan to seize "some islands off Japan" in order to further the same.)

Two fearsome weapons are being made ready – a super-cannon capable of firing massive incendiary charges over a distance of 40 km (just the distance from Steel City to Ville-France), and shells filled with gas. The latter seems to give Verne credit for the very first prediction of chemical warfare, nearly twenty years before H. G. Wells's "black smoke" in *The War of the Worlds*. Schultze's gas is designed not only to suffocate its victims but at the same time also freeze them. A special projectile is filled with compressed liquid carbon dioxide that, when released, instantly lowers the surrounding temperature to a hundred degrees Celsius

below zero, quick-freezing every living thing in the vicinity.

Ville-France prepares as well as it can, but there is not very much to do against such weapons. Schultze, however, meets with poetic justice. Firstly, the incendiary charge fired by the super-cannon at Ville-France not only renders the cannon unusable, but also misses its mark. The charge flies harmlessly over the city and into space, apparently owing to Schultze's failure to account for the roundness of the globe when firing a projectile over such distances. Secondly, as Schultze sits in his secret office, preparing for the final assault and writing out the order to his men to bring him the frozen bodies of Sarrasin and Bruckmann to be displayed in public, a gas projectile which he kept in the office accidentally explodes and feeds him his own deadly medicine.

The entire edifice of "Steel City" collapses, since Schultze had kept everything in his own hands and never appointed any deputy. It goes bankrupt and becomes a ghost town. Bruckmann and his friend, Dr. Sarrasin's son, take it over with the only resistance offered being from two rather dimwitted Schultze bodyguards who stayed behind when everybody else left. Schultze would remain forevermore in his self-made tomb, on display as he had planned to do to his foes, while the good Frenchmen take over direction of Steel City in order to let it "serve a good cause from now on." (Arms production would go on, however, so as "to make Ville-France so strong that nobody would dare attack it ever again".)

Sandy says

I am by no means a student of world history, but as far as I can make out, the Franco-Prussian War, which began in July 1870 and ended some 10 months later, had some fairly significant and long-lasting aftereffects. As a result of its surrender, France had to cede over to Germany the bulk of the Alsace-Lorraine territory, while Germany emerged a unified empire, effectively altering the balance of European power. For Frenchman Jules Verne, the Germans would never be regarded in the same way again, and his sentiments toward the former enemy would be abundantly displayed in his novel "The Begum's Fortune." This was to be the 18th novel for the so-called "Father of Science Fiction," out of an eventual 54 to be published during his lifetime; eight more would be released posthumously. As were all of the previous 17 titles, "The Begum's Fortune" was released by arrangement with the Parisian publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel, who had bought Verne's first novel, "Five Weeks in a Balloon," in 1863. Until his death in 1905, Verne would write a novel (or two) every year, in a series of books known as "Les Voyages Extraordinaires." "The Begum's Fortune" was initially released in 1879, when Verne was 51; his 19th novel, "Tribulations of a Chinaman in China," an adventure tale, would also be published that same year! "The Begum's Fortune," though not as sci-fi oriented as some of his earliest works, yet features some interesting predictions that put it marginally in the science fiction realm. It is a short, fast-moving novel, and one ripe for reappraisal today. Sadly, it has been infrequently reprinted, and I was fortunate indeed to have acquired my 1968 Ace edition--aka the "Fitzroy edition"--with a cover price of 60 cents.

In the book, the reader encounters a Frenchman named Dr. Sarrasin, who, as Verne's story begins, is attending a scientific convention in Brighton. While there, he is given some extraordinary news by a London solicitor: He, Sarrasin, has just inherited some 21 million pounds following the death of his great-uncle, who had been living in India with his magnificently wealthy begum wife of the book's title. Sarrasin immediately decides to use his windfall in the furtherance of a pet scientific project: the building of a model city that will demonstrate to mankind the epitome of safe and hygienic living. Troubles quickly arise, however, when the German professor Schultz, a chemistry teacher in Jena, makes a rival claim on the vast fortune. After a short legal battle, convincingly detailed by the author (like this reader's favorite author, H. Rider Haggard, Verne

had been a law student before dedicating himself full-time to writing), it is decided that the money will be split between the two. Sarrasin, after a period of five years, succeeds in constructing his model city, dubbed Frankville, on the coast of southern Oregon, while Schultz uses his 10 million pounds to build the world's largest munitions factory, Stahlstadt (German for "Steeltown"), on the other side of Oregon's Cascade Mountains. But unfortunately for Dr. Sarrasin and the thousands of peaceful folks living in his little utopia, Schultz turns out to be quite the madman indeed, toiling ceaselessly to invent weapons of unprecedented deadliness, with which to wipe the model city off the map....

In "The Begum's Fortune," Verne not only foresees the German empire (as exemplified by Schultz) as a dangerously belligerent world power, but predicts the use of such wartime weapons as incendiary bombs and deadly gas. (Schultz does not use mustard gas, as would be seen in the WW1 trenches 35 years later, but rather liquid CO2 bombs that freeze their victims to death!) In this book the author also predicts man-made satellites being shot into outer space, as well as a primitive telephone and videoconferencing arrangement. His description of a telephone that "stereographs" information directly to newspapers, however, was a little harder for this reader to envisage. Care is taken by the author to contrast the totalitarian setup of the nightmarish and grimy Stahlstadt to the sparkling and airy Frankville, and one entire chapter is given over to detailing all the sanitary, architectural, social, dietary, educational and civic innovations that Verne felt were necessary for a healthful life. It's some pretty fascinating stuff, really.

Schultz, I should add, is a wonderful "bad guy"--practically a prototype for the 007 villain--who grows more and more demented as the book proceeds; his ultimate fate is both haunting and memorable. In a speech that could almost be plopped down into an Ian Fleming thriller, Schultz at one point declares "...we act in just the opposite way from the founders of Frankville. We search for the secret of abridging the lives of men, whilst they seek to lengthen them...." You've gotta love it! "The Begum's Fortune" features any number of wonderful sequences, perhaps the two finest being when Max Bruckmann (the Alsatian best friend of Dr. Sarrasin's son, Otto) goes undercover to spy on the Stahlstadt operations (a bravura segment that comprises a full third of the book), and the scene in which Max returns to the munitions city with Otto and battles Schultz's hulking bodyguards, Sigimer and Arminius, before encountering the evil professor one last time. It is an exciting book, capped with a shoehorned-in romantic ending (for the ladies?), and one that should surely please most readers.

All of which is not to say that the book does not come with some regrettable problems. Verne can justly be accused of racism in this novel (the Chinese coolies who had constructed Frankville are not permitted to live there, as they "would otherwise have infallibly lowered the tone and standard of the new city") and of buying into any number of stereotypes (the German people are all sauerkraut and sausage lovers; the English have no ear for music; the French are "the most perfect dancers in the world"). The author also gets some basic facts wrong here. He tells us that one Stahlstadt mine shaft is 1,800 feet deep, or "14 times the height of the Great Pyramid." But since the Great Pyramid is just under 500 feet tall, shouldn't that be more like 'four times the height'? He also tells us at one point that 10,000 yards (30,000 feet) is equal to nine miles. Wouldn't nine miles be at least 45,000 feet? He also has a notification bell in Frankville ring, at 8:30, for a town meeting to convene. The crowd takes 45 minutes to assemble, and the meeting then commences at...8:30?!?! Finally, Verne mentions that the capital of California is San Francisco, whereas it had been Sacramento in name for quite a while previous to 1879, and in actual fact starting in 1879.

But quibbles aside, "The Begum's Fortune," as I've said, is generally satisfying, and should especially appeal to fans of that old Western/espionage/sci-fi '60s TV show "The Wild, Wild West." And finally, the book contains a wonderful statement by Dr. Sarrasin, which almost negates that coolie comment just alluded to; a statement that all members of the current Trump administration would do well to consider. Regarding Frankville, Sarrasin declares "...We will invite visitors from every nation; we will offer it as a home and

refuge for honest families forced to emigrate from over-populated countries...." Bravo, Monsieur Verne!

(This review, by the way, originally appeared on the FanLit website at <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/> ... a most ideal destination for all fans of Jules Verne....)

TrumanCoyote says

The resemblance to Hitler was eerie--master race, wonder weapons and so forth (and the guys just being lost at the end without their leader--as well as his demise signifying the collapse of the whole thing). I guess Verne was actually thinking of Bismarck, but...still, it's filled with that 19th-century "They attacked us like jerks so let's go beat the hell out of them like God would've wanted it" attitude. There's always something about Verne that seems a little pat--like Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Marian says

One day, out of the blue, the unassuming Dr. Sarrasin learns he is heir to an enormous fortune. It seems he is the only living descendant of a Frenchman who married a begum - "a Muslim lady of high rank" - and, through her wealth, became rich.

As it would happen, another claimant to the fortune shows up, a German professor by the name of Schultze. To avoid an expensive court case, they agree to split the money in half and each spend it on the projects of their dreams. These projects turn out to be two new cities, both highly regulated but as different from each other as the masterminds who founded them. Away in the wilds of Oregon state, the cities are built and populated, thriving till one man's sinister ideals threaten to undermine both topias.

This is quite a page-turner and, in spite of the Vernian themes, a somewhat different read than most other of his novels I've read. The exploration of dystopia vs. utopia in the Pacific Northwest is what could bring this book back into readership, though it may be countered by the more disappointing elements (e.g. some racially prejudiced sentiments by the characters, including from the "good guys"). That said, for the times in which it was written, *The Begum's Millions* is a prescient 19th-century warning about issues that would face the following two centuries. The story is exciting and as emotional as it is scientific (if not more so). 4 stars...a good read, but not quite as good as *Magellania*, my new gold standard for Jules Verne.

Gabriela Skopalová says

Další knížka od Verna.. P?íbh?h m? ihned upoutal po pár stránkách. Je to opravdu vizioná?ský p?íbh?h a p?ed?il svou dobu (a pravd?podobn? to i stále d?lá..).

P?íbh?h je jak o vztazích, tak hlavn? i o dobrodružství! Už jsem vid?la hodn? scifi film?, ?etla hodn? knížek.. ale p?esto m? p?íbh?h bavil (od knížky jsem sama nevstala..a když po m? n?kdo n?co cht?l, tak si vysloužil opravdu mrzutý výraz)

Jules Verne m? každým svým p?íbh?hem dostane.. není to autor o kterým si ?eknete "Jo super, ale tahle bude stejná knížka jako p?edtím, jen jinde.."

pokaždé m? velice p?íjemn? p?ekvapí:)

- +Obra escrita en el ambiente de pesimismo del pueblo francés luego de la derrota en la guerra franco-prusiana,
 - +Se puede pensar que la obra es una alegoría ante la dicotomía democracia/totalitarismo o utopía/disotopía.
 - + La obra muestra de manera muy gráfica como una sociedad totalitaria, completamente centralizada en una figura se desmorona rápidamente, al faltar esta figura.
 - + El capítulo sobre la bolsa es genial.
 - + Muestra todo el proceso iniciático y ceremonial basado en la masonería, pero en un contexto diferente.
 - + Interes por las ciudades planificadas. Son un paso necesario para realizar la sociedad utópica.
 - +Preocupación por la higiene y la ecología en las ciudades planificadas. En France-Ville las alfombras y el papel tapiz están prohibidos por falta de higienes y nocivos para la salud.
 - +Herr Schultze es víctima de su odio y afán de perfeccionamiento dirigido hacia el mal.
 - +El antiheroe (Schultze) es financieramente autosuficiente y de esta manera se dedica por completo a desarrollar sus planes y proyectos. Igualmente para el Dr. Sarrasin que es la figura que apoya al heroe (Marcel).
 - +Muestra teleconferencias, gracias al uso del teléfono.
-

Benn Allen says

While I can't say I'm as impressed by Jules Verne's "predictions" in "The Begum's Fortune", I will say, I thought it was a good enough adventure tale. Maybe a bit of a precursor to stories found in the old pulp magazines from back in the day and a little sloppy in its narrative (the denouement is a little too convenient, the characters aren't very well-rounded and tend to be one dimensional), but the story does keep one's interest throughout. Not really one of Verne's better efforts, but worthwhile for us die hard fans.
