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HUGO WINNER

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The TWO GEORGES

A NOVEL OF ALTERNATE AMERICA, 1996

THE
TWO GEORGES

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Richard Dreyfuss
&
Harry Turtledove



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
New York

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this novel are either fictitious or are used fictitiously.

THE TWO GEORGES

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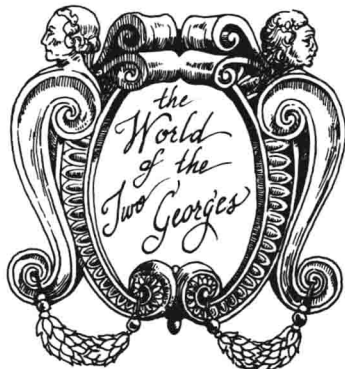
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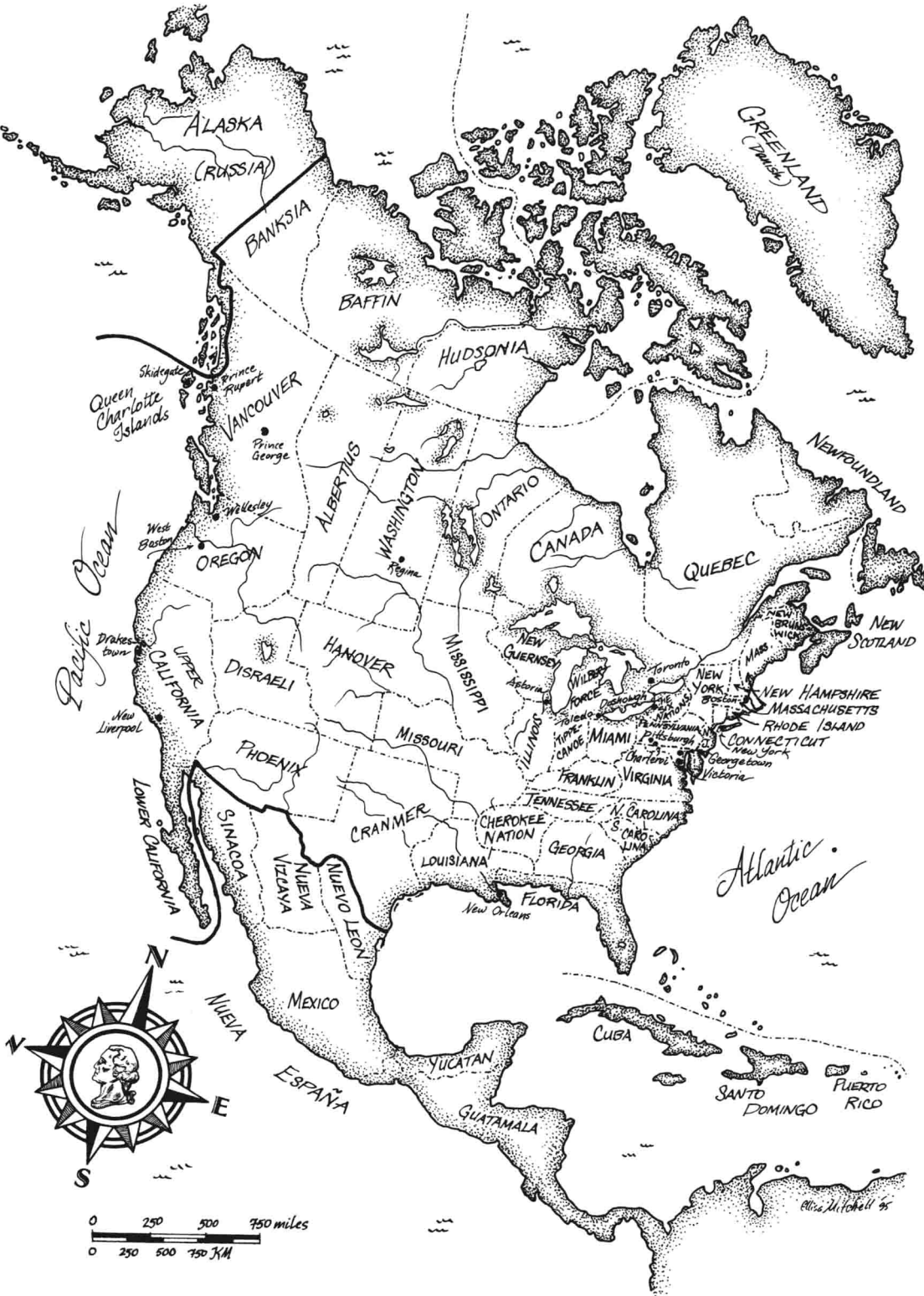
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ALASKA
(RUSSIA)

GREENLAND
(DANISH)

BANKSIA

BAFFIN

HUDSONIA

Shedden
Queen Charlotte Islands
Prince Rupert
VANCOUVER
Prince George

ALBERTUS

WASHINGTON
Regina

CANADA

NEWFOUNDLAND
QUEBEC

OREGON
West Boston
Wesley

Pacific Ocean
Drakes town
New Liverpool
UPPER CALIFORNIA

DISRAELI

HANOVER

MISSISSIPPI

ONTARIO

NEW GUERNEY
Aspen

NEW JERSEY
NEW HAMPSHIRE
MASSACHUSETTS
RHODE ISLAND
CONNECTICUT
New York
New York
George town
Victoria

PHOENIX

MISSOURI

NEW YORK
Toronto
WILBY
Poleo
DANBURGH
Pittsburgh
PITTSBURGH
MARIETTA
MIAMI
Charlton
FRANKLIN
VIRGINIA

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New York
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Victoria

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SINCOA

CRANMER

LOUISIANA

TENNESSEE
CHEROKEE NATION
S. CAROLINA
GEORGIA

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MASSACHUSETTS
RHODE ISLAND
CONNECTICUT
New York
New York
George town
Victoria

NUEVA

VIZLAVA

NUEVO LEON

FLORIDA
New Orleans

N. CAROLINA
S. CAROLINA
GEORGIA

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THE
TWO GEORGES

THOMAS BUSHELL BENT OVER THE LITTLE desk in his stateroom, drafting yet another report. From Victoria, the capital, it was two days by airship west across the North American Union to his home in New Liverpool. He'd taken advantage of that to catch up on his paperwork, the bane of every police officer's life.

The stateroom speaker came to life with a burst of static. Then the captain announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are nearing the famous Meteor Crater. Those interested in observing it are invited to gather in the starboard lounge. We'll pass it in about five minutes, which gives you plenty of time to walk to the lounge and find yourself a seat. Thank you."

More static, then silence again. Bushell glanced down at the report. He laid his pen on the desk and got to his feet—it could wait. He salved his conscience by reminding himself they'd soon be serving luncheon anyhow.

He needed only a couple of quick strides to reach the door; the stateroom's mirrored wall made it seem larger than it was. He paused a moment to adjust his cravat, run a comb through his hair, and smooth down his sleek brown mustache with the side of a forefinger. He was a compact, solidly made man who looked younger than his forty-eight years . . . until you noticed his eyes. Police officers see more of the world's seamy side than most mortals. After a while, it shows in their faces. Bushell had seen more than most policemen.

He locked the door behind him when he went out into the corridor. Any thief without a mad love for paper would have come away from his stateroom disappointed, but he was not a man who invited misfortune. It came too often, even uninvited.

The lounge was decorated in the Rococo Revival style of King-Emperor Edward VIII; after half a century, the Revival was being revived once more. Plump pink cherubs fluttered on the ceiling. No wooden surface was without a coat of gold leaf, an elaborately carved curlicue, or an inlay of contrasting wood or semi-precious stone.

Bushell took a chair well away from the chattering group who'd got there ahead of him. Even after the lounge grew full, he sat in the center of a small island of privacy; studying the ground a quarter of a mile below, he made it plain he did not welcome even the most casual companionship.

“Something to drink, sir?” Like any servant, the tuxedoed waiter slipped unnoticed past personal boundaries the upper classes respected.

Without taking his eyes off the approaching crater, Bushell nodded. “Irish whiskey—Jameson—over ice, please.”

“Very good, sir.” The waiter hurried away. Bushell went back into the little bubble of reserve he’d put up around himself. The drone of the dirigible’s engines, louder here than in the staterooms at the center of the passenger gondola, blurred the conversations in the lounge and helped him maintain his isolation.

The airship’s whale-shaped shadow slowly slid across Meteor Crater. The crater was about three quarters of a mile across; the shadow took the same fraction of a minute to traverse it from east to west.

Someone not far from Bushell said, “Looks as if God were playing golf in the desert here and didn’t replace His divot.”

“If God played golf, could He take a divot?” the fellow’s companion asked, chuckling. “There’s one I’d wager the Archbishop of Canterbury has never pondered.”

Meteor Crater did not remind Thomas Bushell of a golfer’s divot. To him, it looked like a gunshot wound on the face of the world. Murders by gunfire, thankfully, were rare in the civilian world, but he’d seen more gunshot wounds than he cared to remember in his days in the Royal North American Army. The British Empire and the Franco-Spanish Holy Alliance were officially at peace, so skirmishes between the North American Union and Nueva España seldom made the newspapers or the wireless, but if you got shot in one, you died just as dead as if it had happened in the full glare of publicity.

The waiter returned and went through the lounge with a silver tray. When he came to Bushell, he said, “Jameson over ice,” and handed him the glass. “That will be seven and sixpence, sir.”

Bushell drew his wallet from the left front pocket of his linen trousers. He took out a dark green ten-shilling note and handed it to the waiter. Like all NAU banknotes, whatever their color and denomination, the ten-shilling green bore a copy of Gainsborough’s immortal *The Two Georges*, which celebrated George Washington’s presentation to George III as the leading American member of the privy council that oversaw British administration of the colonies on the western shore of the Atlantic.

The waiter set the banknote on his tray. As he gave Bushell a silver half-crown in change, he remarked, “Exciting to think the original *Two Georges* is touring the original NAU, isn’t it, sir? And it’ll be coming to New Liverpool next. I hope I have the chance to see it, don’t you?”

“Yes, that would be very fine,” Bushell said. Ever since it was painted, *The Two Georges* had symbolized everything that was good about the union between Great Britain and her American dominions.

Bushell did not tell the waiter he would be the man chiefly responsible for keeping *The Two Georges* safe while it was in New Liverpool. For one thing, in that kind of job anonymity was an advantage. For another, he had enough work to catch up on back in the stateroom that he preferred not to think about what lay ahead till it actually arrived.

From speakers mounted in the ceiling of the lounge, the airship captain said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to remind you luncheon will be served in the dining room in ten minutes. I trust you'll enjoy the cuisine that's made the *Upper California Limited* famous all over the world."

The alacrity with which the lounge emptied said the passengers trusted they would enjoy the cuisine, too. Thomas Bushell had seated himself a long way from the exit, and in any case was in no hurry. He left a shilling for the servitor who'd brought him his drink, then followed the crowd to the dining room.

A bowing waiter escorted him to a seat. Because he was one of the latecomers, he did not have a table to himself, which disappointed him, but he was near a window; though the company might prove uncongenial, the scenery never would.

The dining room would have done credit to a fine restaurant down on the ground. Bushell's feet sank deep into colorful Persian carpets as he approached his place. Starched white linen, crystal goblets, and heavy silver flatware greeted him there.

"Fred Harvey food!" boomed the man who sat across the table from him. He smacked his lips in anticipation. "We couldn't eat better at Claridge's, sir, nor even in Paris, by God." His red, jowly face and the great expanse of white shirt-front beneath his jacket said his opinion was to be reckoned with when it came to food.

"Fred Harvey is a man of whom the Empire may be proud," Bushell answered, "and his sons and grandsons have maintained his tradition." He waved out the window to the grand aerial vista spread out before them.

A waiter handed out menus, then retired to give the diners time to make their choices. Bushell was torn between the salmon poached in white wine and the larded tenderloin of beef in Madeira sauce. At last he chose the latter because it would go well with a Bordeaux whose acquaintance he'd been lucky enough to make the night before.

"A very sound selection," his corpulent table companion said when he gave his choice to the waiter. "A splendid year, 1981, and just now coming into full maturity." He picked the salmon himself, and a pinot blanc of formidable heritage.

Far below, dust devils swirled over the red-brown desert ground. The wind that kicked them up also beat against the airship. The passenger gondola rocked slightly, as if it were a boat on a rippling pond. The sommelier arrived just then with the wine. After the ritual of the cork, he poured. The headwind made the wine stir in its goblet, but it did not come close to spilling.

"Better than traveling by sea," the fat man said as the wine steward poured his fancy white. "There they put the tables on gimbals, to keep the food from winding up in the passenger's laps. And it would be a pity to waste this lovely wine on my trousers. They haven't the palate to appreciate it." He chuckled wheezily.

Bushell raised his goblet in salute. "His Majesty, the King-Emperor!" he said. He and his companion both sipped their wine to the traditional toast heard round the world in the British Empire.

"I drink to headwinds," the fat man said, lifting his glass in turn. "If they make us late getting into New Liverpool, we shall be able to enjoy another supper in this splendid establishment."

"I shouldn't drink to that one," Bushell said. "I have enough work ahead of me to want to get to it as soon as I can. However—" He paused, remembering supper the night before, then brought the goblet to his lips. The fat man laughed again.

The waiters began serving. Conversation in the dining room ebbed, supplanted by the gentle music of silver on silver. Meals aboard the *Upper California Limited* deserved, and got, serious attention. Bushell's tenderloin was fork-tender and meltingly rich, the dry wine in the Madeira sauce bringing out the full flavor of the beef. The tenderloin was a generous cut, but when it was gone he found himself wishing it had been larger.

Across the table from him, the fat man methodically demolished his salmon. Bushell had chosen a plate of cheese and apple slices for dessert, but the fat man devoured something Teutonically full of chocolate and cream and pureed raspberries. When he leaned back in his chair, replete at last, he was even more florid than he had been before the meal.

He drew a silver case from the inner pocket of his jacket. "D'you mind, sir?"

"By no means." Bushell took out his own case, chose a cigar from it, and struck a lucifer. He savored the mild smoke. The aroma of the fat man's panatela said he was as much a connoisseur of tobacco as he was of fine wine.

Bushell savored his feeling of contentment with the world; he knew it too seldom. He leaned back in his chair, peered out the window once more. Suddenly he pointed. "Look! There's an aeroplane!"

"Where?" The fat man stared. "Ah, I see it. Not a sight one comes across every day."

"Not in peacetime, certainly," Bushell said. The aeroplane flashed by at breathtaking speed, twin wings above and below its lean, sharklike fuselage providing lift. It was gone before Bushell got more than a glimpse of the blue, white, and red roundel on its flank that announced it belonged to the Royal North American Flying Corps.

The fat man puffed moodily on his cigar. "So much speed is vulgar, don't you think?"

"Useful for the military," Bushell answered. "In civilian life, though, there's not usually much point to dashing across the continent in ten or twelve hours. You hardly have the time to accomplish anything while you're traveling."

"Quite, quite." The fat man's jowls wobbled when he nodded. "If you need to get anyplace in such a tearing hurry, chances are you've either started too late or, more likely, put less thought into your journey than you should have."

"Just so." Bushell finished his cigar and then, with a nod to his table companion, excused himself and went back to his stateroom. He knew how much he still had to accomplish before the *Upper California Limited* docked itself to the mooring mast in New Liverpool.

When he got back to his desk, he lit another cigar and plunged once more into paperwork. As much as anything could, the smoke relaxed him. In the early