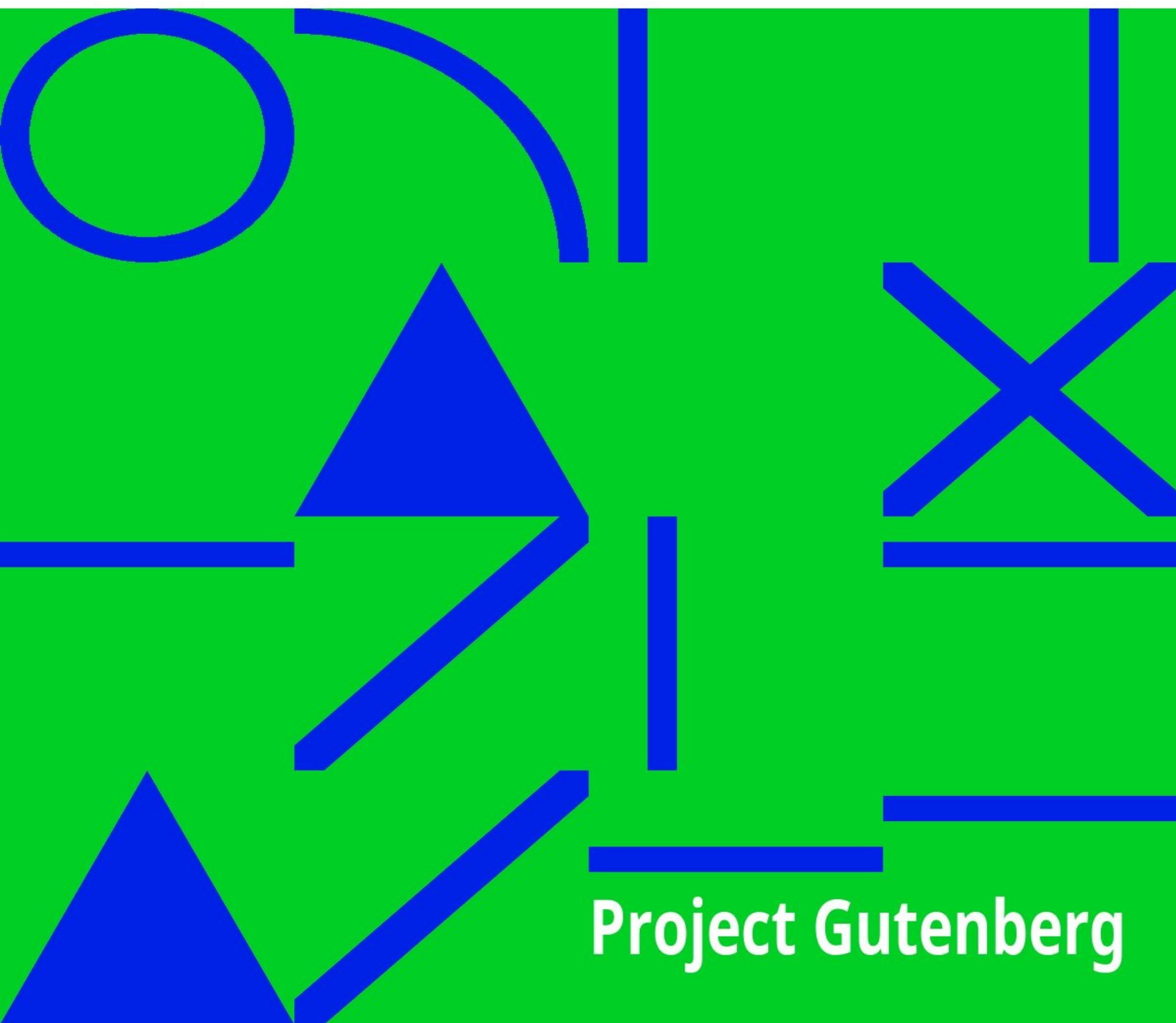


With a Vengeance

J. B. Woodley



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With a Vengeance

By J. B. WOODLEY

*Keep this in mind in teaching apprentices:
They are future journeymen—and even
masters!*

October 10, 2119
New San Francisco

TODAY, at precisely 9:50 a.m., Kyle became First Imperator of Terra. His coup was so fantastically direct and facile that I am almost tempted to believe that old cliché "the time was right."

Well, however badly it can be expressed, I suppose the world *was* ripe for this sort of thing. I can remember when much the same used to happen in elections. One man would win over another by a tremendous majority, and historians would then set about to show how "the time was right."

Why do I persist in tormenting myself with that phrase! Analytically, I might say I resent this new aristocracy of politics. Specifically, I might say I resent Kyle.

And both are true, both are true.

This swing, though, to absolute monarchy, complete with the installation of the Kyle Dynasty—damn him! This is something which psychologists, not historians, must explain. Has the age of the Common Man, so bravely flaunted for over one hundred years, truly come to nothing? Would people really prefer a figurehead and a

symbol of undisputed authority?

In this instance, one may again conclude that "the time was right." Contact with planets like Mars and Venus undoubtedly had its influence. I must confess that the televised audiences with the Mrit of Venus and the Znam of Mars *did* make Terra's President—I should say, late President—look a bit seedy. I daresay there is such a thing as a too common Common Man.

Kyle was such, twenty years ago. His name wasn't Kyle then, although it was something very like that. I must see if any of the old ledgers are about! I'd like to see what the Emperor's name was when His Most Imperial Majesty was an apprenticed nobody!

October 12, 2119
New San Francisco

I FOUND it! Buried in stacks of dust behind the old printing press that was once the heart of my *Beacon-Sentinel*. There were others there too. Spent a delightful morning with them, reading back through those old account books.

I wonder whatever happened to Hastings? And Drew? Best linotype men I ever had. They became pilots, or something, as I recall. Too bad, too bad. They could have had such brilliant futures, both of them. Why they felt they must ally themselves with the non-thinking, muscle-flexing variety of mankind—of which our Ruler is an excellent example—I'll never know.

Ah, yes, Kyle! In those days he was Kilmer Jones. I don't remember him too well, actually, except for the day I fired him.

I suppose he was right in changing his name. We couldn't very well have an Emperor named Kilmer the First, or Jones the First. Much too common, not at all in keeping.

Gawky fellow—that Kilmer. When Bard brought me a sample of his work—I guess I'll have to call it that—we both had a good laugh over it! Atrocious spelling! Couldn't follow the proofreader's marks. Indeed, I wonder if the fellow could even read! The punctuation! And the grammar!

I called the boy to the office that morning—or was it the next day? No matter. I called him in and told him, as kindly as possible, that I thought there were other vocations to which he might be better suited. The irony of it! Kilmer Jones—Kyle I!

And he stood there, I remember, with those seventeen-year-old hands that were all knuckles and bone and chapped skin, twisting those hands and shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"Please, Mr. Booth," he said, his voice cracking. "I ain't got no other job in mind. I wanna be a noospaper man. I ain't got no—"

If not for that "ain't got no," I think I might have relented. But no one is going to ruin the English language as he did! Not in my offices!

I took him to task severely for his offensive usage, outlined a correct example of what he had attempted to say, gave him a brief lesson in the history of the tongue, and explained why it had been chosen as the official Terran speech. I think my conclusion was, "You'll be much better off in a position which requires you to quote neither Milton nor Shakespeare nor any author save possibly those who write the comic strips."

"Got no training," he said softly. (I supposed it was to keep his voice from exhibiting its usual adolescent gymnastics.)

I shuddered slightly, I remember. "You mean, 'I *have* no training.'"

"Yeah ..." softly again. "Yeah, Mr. Booth."

"Yes!" I cried impatiently. "Not 'yeah,' but *yes*!"

I searched for his severance pay on my desk, wondering who the devil had hired him in the first place. Gave him three weeks pay, as I recall it, one more than necessary.

Unmannerly pup! He just stood there for a minute and then finally left without even a "Thank you," or "Good-by."

And this is the man who is Kyle the First, Ruler of Terra at the age of thirty-seven! I wonder what he is like now....

January 1, 1
New San Francisco

THERE is no longer any need to wonder. Surprisingly few heads have rolled, but apparently Jonesy chooses to exhibit his power in other ways.

Thanksgiving Day, a custom preserved in certain portions of the Directorate of North America, is three weeks away—even though it is January.

The Year One. There used to be some childish joke about the Year One. Don't remember it just now.

Thanksgiving harvest in January. Christmas celebration in February. Spring planting in July! To say nothing of the inconvenience this has caused in my bookkeeping department! I suppose the man will now

try to change the weather to suit his new calendar!

January 8, 1
New San Francisco

HE can't last! He can't! A dictator is one thing. A monarch is another. But Kyle is something else!

Naturally he had to remove certain persons from his way. And his summer palace in the plains region of America—that's all right, that's all right! An authority of Kyle's stature is expected to remove undesirables, and to have a summer palace, and a winter palace, and anything else he wants! Of course!

But why this? Why *this* of all things!

No newspapers! Just like that! *He* waves an edict, and just like that, *no newspapers!* The *Beacon-Sentinel* has been a great paper for the last twenty-five years! It was nothing, and I was nothing, and together we became a Voice! And now again, we are nothing!

Oh, I see what's behind it! It's revenge, that's what it is! Because he once couldn't become a "noospaper" man, he's taking his vengeance this way.

A man as petty as that shall be overthrown! Mark my words! And the clumsiness of it!

I see what he is! I know him! He's still that pup of seventeen, playing king with the world, twisting his hands in glee over his childish triumph.

No subtlety! Just a direct pushing over an applecart he couldn't steer! Doesn't matter whose apples you destroy, does it, Jonesy? Just push it over—push it over!

January 16, 1
New San Francisco

CLOSED the *Beacon-Sentinel* yesterday. My savings are enough to take care of me for a few years. After that—ah, well, I am no longer a young man. I am glad that Elsa is not here to see this.

February 12, 1
New San Francisco

RECEIVED a letter this morning, requesting me to appear at the chambers of His Most Imperial Majesty, Kyle the First, on Tuesday of next week. His Most Imperial Majesty can see me between 10:15 and 10:25 on that morning.

Ten minutes—rather a brief spell in which to roll another head.

I find myself amazed, though. Is this man so truly powerful that he needs no police to make his arrests for him? Can he really send messages via jetmail and be certain his enemies will not try to escape?

I don't want to attempt flight. Life without my work is no longer life.

February 17, 1
Kyleton Palace, North America

I DON'T understand. I've gone over it twice, and I don't understand. If only Elsa were still with me! I could talk to her. She would help me decipher what it's all about.

This morning, at 10:15 sharp, I was taken to the public audience chamber in the palace.

His Majesty was seated behind a desk facing the doors. Behind him, on the wall, was His Coat of Arms.

He stood up and walked toward me, waving away the guards. "How are you, Mr. Booth?" he said. And offered me His Hand!

I recovered my presence of mind, of course, and replied as was fitting.

And then He said it! "I shall be at liberty later this week to discuss more fully the details of these past years." (Shades of "ain't got no!") "Meanwhile, my secretary will give you a complete dossier on my planned Official Bulletin." He lighted a cigarette after offering me one. "I should deem it an honor," he continued, "to have a man of your literary versatility and—I must add—your vast practical experience become Chief Editor of that Bulletin. The publication, which I should enjoy christening *The Terran Beacon-Sentinel*—with your permission, sir—shall be more than my official organ. It shall set the standards for the coming newspaper world."

He cocked an eyebrow at me and smiled. "I believe we are in perfect accord about certain standards, are we not, Mr. Booth? The deplorable grammatical practices of some newspapers! Well, really, Mr. Booth! I feel assured of your agreement!"

He led me around the desk and pointed to the Coat of Arms. As He

stood silent, I felt obliged to look more closely. I had seen it before, of course, but seeing it now, greatly enlarged, I was able to make out its detail.

What I had thought was a mere decorative border, I now realized was a motif I have seen all my life! A tiny lighthouse sending forth a beam! The trademark of my paper!

As I stood there, gaping, His Majesty laughed softly and said, "That, Mr. Booth, I felt impelled to include. For, without your most fortuitous termination of my apprenticeship in your organization, I should not have risen to my present position."

A GAIN He took my hand and shook it, warmly. His hair is just a bit gray at the temples, and there are signs of strain on His finely featured face. Those awkward hands are now strong and purposeful.

He apologized that He must return to His duties, and went with me to the door. "My secretary will fill in further details about your new position. Newspapers shall once again be published. No—don't say a word, Mr. Booth! I know what you are thinking.

"Your salary," he continued as we stood at the open door, "shall, of course, be commensurate to your high authority in this new field. Allow me, now, to thank you most deeply and sincerely for your unwitting aid in my youth. I assure you, Mr. Booth, I have often thought of that day we talked. And I hope to repay you, in some measure, for what you did."

He said more, mostly polite phrases of good-by. And then I was outside after being handed a folder by some man.

An official jetmobile took me to my residence—which turned out to be in the East Wing. Here I am, and I don't understand. I came prepared to suffer heaven only knows what as part of Kilmer Jones's childish pattern for revenge.

Instead, here I am, head of the Official Bulletin, titular ruler and ruler-in-fact of the future journalism of the world!

There is something behind this—I keep feeling there is. But what? What? Or is he truly generous, to a degree never before known among absolute monarchs?

February 13, 1
Kyleton Palace, North America

I AM a suspicious and most humble old man. I see now that Kyle's generosity amazed me only because I myself would have been incapable of such an action.

Just now, I fear for His Majesty. I was right, before, when I said there was no subtlety in the man. He is too open, too fair, too forgiving. A ruler with such greatness of heart might easily allow some small insignificant person in too far, too close. I fear for him!

February 14, 1
Kyleton Palace, North America

TOMORROW we begin publication! The pressroom is magnificent! I can hardly wait. It's been a long time since I've felt such exuberance.

This afternoon I am to conduct a conference of some eight hundred editors! His Majesty's secretary has sent me an outline on Journalistic Standards, which I shall study after lunch.

There was a note attached, in His Majesty's handwriting—such beautiful penmanship, too. "A mere formality," it said, "for, of course, you and I know full well what the future of journalism shall be, Mr. Booth."

Later—

How wrong can one man be in one lifetime?

I wonder now *why* he changed the calendar. I wonder now what poor devil he destroyed then. But *I'll* cheat him!

I'll cheat him yet!

Obituary, *Trran Bacon-Sntinl*,
Fbruary 16, 1

TH unfortunat and untimly dms of Gorg W. Booth is hrby notd with sorrow by thos who knw and lovd him.

Mr. Booth, formr ditor and publishr of th *Bacon-Sntinl* of Nw San Francisco, Dirctorat of North Amrica, had apparntly bn in poor helth for som tim. It is blivd that worry ovr th succss of his nw policy-stting *Trran Bacon-Sntinl* was a contributing factor in his suicid lat in th aftrnoon of Fbruary 14.

His Most Imprial Majsty Kyl th First has ordrd a fitting monumnt to his lat lamntd frind. A simpl shaft of granit shall b rctd in th gardn facing th Ast Wing of Kylton Palac, whr Mr. Booth mad his residnc. On th shaft shall b inscribd th lgnd:

"How bautous mankind is! Oh brav nw world,
That has much peepl in't!"

Th quotation is from *Th Tmpst*. Mr. Booth was a grat admirr of Shakspar.

An vn mor fitting and long-livd mmorial is xprssd in th dict rlasd through th offic of His Majsty on th vry day of Mr. Booth's dath. It reeds in part:

"Th nw linguistic policy on Trra, as dmonstratd
in th *Trran Bacon-Sntinl*, shall hncforth b known
as Boothtalk."

Mr. Booth bfrindd Our Imprial Rulr in His youngr days, and, as w all know, His Majsty nvr forgts a frind.

—J. B. WOODLEY

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