

INFINITY WANDERERS 11



Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Contents](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Breakdown - Ali Ashhar](#)

[Greek Fire - Matoas Travieso-Diaz](#)

[Pembrokeshire Farm Holiday](#)

[Night Blues - Matthew Spence](#)

[Poetry - Ben McNair](#)

[Arming Our Enemies - L. G Parker](#)

[Slender Threads by L.G. Parker](#)

[Poetry - Grey Wolf](#)

[To My Grey/Black Friend](#)

[Art by Davyd Meyrick Griffiths](#)

[Book Review - The Governess of Greenmere](#)

[On Writing 'The Governess of Greenmere' - Paul Leone](#)

[20th - Rick Barooah](#)

[Money Problems - Nicholas Woods](#)

[A Glimpse of Heaven in NW Devon - Brian G. Davies](#)

[A Road So Travelled by Brian G. Davies](#)

[Poetry - Pawel Markiewicz](#)

[Good Enough Pt1 - Drew Concord](#)

[The Finest Purveyor of Dreams on Titan - Ruth E. Thomas](#)

[Stripes](#)

[Yob - E.F. Hay](#)

[Poems from 'Objectives' - Gary Beck](#)

[Hannibal Ad Portas - L. G. Parker](#)

[Better Men by L. G. Parker](#)

[Book Promotion - Corina Apostu](#)

[ADVERT](#)

[ADVERT](#)

[ADVERT](#)

[ADVERT](#)

[ADVERT](#)

[ADVERT](#)

Greek Fire

Matias Travieso-Diaz

History is a constant race between invention and catastrophe.

Frank Herbert

The acrid smell of burning wood and papyrus penetrated Iahmesuti's nostrils and forced the sleeping boy to wake up. He rose from his straw mat and, as he walked the few paces from his quarters to the main hall of the Mouseion, he immediately choked from the smoke and trembled in terror as orange flames engulfed his workplace, the Great Library of Alexandria.

Iahmesuti, a fifteen-year-old slave, was one of the clerks that supported the upkeep of the library's scroll collection. He was one of three clerks assigned to the *epistemi* (science) portion of the collection, which included numerous treatises on mathematics, science, and technology. He had been taught the rudiments of written Greek so he could recognize the identification labels on the outside of each scroll, but was ignorant of the contents of any of the manuscripts.

Iahmesuti ran into the room that held the epistemi scrolls and picked up an armful of manuscripts, intending to move them to a safe place and return to retrieve others. As he reached the outside, he became aware of the magnitude of the disaster: the Mouseion was in flames, as were several surrounding buildings. The entire port area of Alexandria's Great Harbor, from the docks all the way to the buildings in that part of the city, had caught fire.

Iahmesuti realized that even outdoors he was in danger, as burning debris was being carried by the wind; returning to the library would probably have been suicidal. Still holding six scrolls across his chest he ran wildly towards the southern quarter of Alexandria, where the poor Egyptians lived. He was struck painfully in the shoulder by a sliver of burning timber, but kept running and reached safety in a narrow alley out of harm's way. As he struggled to catch his breath, he was able to laboriously read by the light of the moon the titles of the scrolls he had rescued: they were the treatises labelled *Belopoeica* ("On War Machines") and *Automata* ("On Automatic Machines.") Iahmesuti had no idea what the writings on those scrolls meant.

The fire that consumed much of the Alexandria port area lingered on for several days, and by the time Iahmesuti attempted to return to the Great Library he had learned the probable cause of the conflagration. It appeared that a Roman general named Caesar was waging war on pharaoh Ptolemy XIII and had barricaded himself in the royal palace. Besieged in the palace by Egyptian troops loyal to Ptolemy, Caesar had sought to remove a blockade imposed by the Ptolemaic naval forces stationed at the Alexandria harbor by setting those ships afire. The fires had spread ashore and had reached the Mouseion and the library it housed, partially destroying them.

Iahmesuti attempted to reenter the Mouseion but was stopped by Egyptian soldiers patrolling the area. "I need to return these scholarly writings that I rescued from the library" he pleaded, gesturing at the scrolls he held in his arms. He was rebuffed by a guard: "The Mouseion has been evacuated and all its occupants sent away to safety. There is no one left to whom you can return those scrolls."

Iahmesuti became confused. "What am I going to do with them?" "Throw them away or sell them for kindling" replied the guard dismissively. "Many scrolls have been lost already. What difference does it make whether these get to burn outside or inside?"

The chaos generated by the fire at the Mouseion opened an opportunity for Iahmesuti to seek his freedom. Prior to that night, he had given little thought to escaping from captivity; as a slave under the supervision of Neferhotep, the manager of the Mouseion property, Iahmesuti was often beaten and abused, but otherwise he was treated as well as a slave could expect. Now, for the first time, he pondered whether and how he could get away. There was desert in all directions east and west of Alexandria, so an escape by land would be perilous; on the other hand, if he sought refuge in a faraway temple and agreed to

become indented to its service, custom dictated that he would be able to evade capture.

With that thought in mind, Iahmesuti took off south from Alexandria, following the Nile until reaching Heliopolis a week later. Before he left, Iahmesuti sold the *Automata* scrolls to an artisan who removed the writings and resold the rolls as new. The proceeds of the sale kept the boy alive for the duration of his trip south.

Upon arrival in Heliopolis, Iahmesuti went into the famed temple of the sun god Re-Horakhty, offered to serve as an attendant, and was accepted. He became a minor priest and lived at the temple the rest of his days. Upon his death, his meager possessions were stored in a cubicle pending destruction, but somehow were overlooked. They included the *Belopoeica* scrolls, which he had kept in memory of the early years of his life as a slave.

Centuries passed and the cult of the sun god fell out of fashion and its temples went into disuse. Four centuries after the period of Iahmesuti's stay, zealots seeking to implement the anti-pagan policies of the Christian Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius sacked the virtually abandoned Re-Horakhty temple and carted all its potentially valuable contents to Constantinople for disposition. One of the looters discovered the rotting remains of Iahmesuti's possessions, including the three *Belopoeica* scrolls. The scrolls were in good condition, since the dry climate had protected the papyri from water or mold damage, so the looter added the scrolls to the temple belongings to be shipped away.

The scrolls were given a cursory initial review by the Emperor's clerical staff and would have been tossed away except that the subject of the work, weapons of war, suggested it could contain some useful information. Thus, the scrolls were delivered to the imperial army, where they apparently were found to be of little use but worthy of preservation and were consigned to storage in the army's archives.

Two more centuries passed. Towards the end of the seventh century CE, the Eastern Roman Empire was consumed in a struggle for survival against the all-conquering Muslim forces that had swept through Asia and Africa. The Arabs had taken Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and were poised to capture the imperial capital of Constantinople. It was then that one Kallinikos, a skilled craftsman in the imperial army, was rummaging through the ancient army records when he discovered the *Belopoeica* scrolls. They described several inventions by an ancient Greek inventor named Hero who had lived in Alexandria some time before Egypt became part of the Roman Empire.

Most of the inventions described in the scrolls related to armored, horse drawn carriages that could be of use in infantry or cavalry encounters. Kallinikos glossed over these armaments as lacking current interest. Near the end of the third roll, however, there was a detailed description of a weapon that caught Kallinikos' attention: an incendiary chemical device that could be mounted on a battleship and used to spray a devastating fiery liquid on an enemy vessel. Hero's manuscript included both the chemical formulation of the combustible liquid and schematic representations of the siphoning mechanism that would be used to spray the incandescent liquid on the enemy. A preface by the author to the description of the weapon asserted that it could possibly be used as a means "to defend Greece against its enemies, should they ever become capable of overthrowing the greatest civilization the world has ever known."

Kallinikos realized that the ancient invention, if proved effective, could help resist an impending Arab attack on the imperial capital of Constantinople. He alerted his superiors of his finding and, after a crash testing program that demonstrated its effectiveness, "Greek fire" dispensers were installed in the imperial warships and used to great effect against the Muslim fleet, becoming the key to repelling successive Arab sieges of the city; the Greek fire went on to defend the Empire in many subsequent wars, allowing the Empire to survive for centuries after its initial use.

The *Belopoeica* scrolls were carefully guarded as a top military secret but were lost in the civil turmoil that preceded the occupation of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1203. Their loss was perhaps prophetic, since the Empire went into a steady decline ending with its demise in 1453. Hero would have mourned the loss, but would have been proud of how his work had been of great and lasting value to his nation.

Who knows what other inventions were contained in the *Belopoeica* and other of Hero's writings, and what if any

impact their use have would made on the course of history.

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over one hundred and sixty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in a wide range of anthologies and magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A first collection of his stories, "The Satchel and Other Terrors" is available on Amazon and other book outlets; additional anthologies of his work are scheduled for publication in 2025.

