

## Praise for the Blood-Thirsty Agent Series

### *The Adventure of the Incognita Countess*

On 2017 Recommended Reading Lists  
of *Locus* and *Tangent Online*.

“[A] brisk novella...it draws deeply from the well of 19th and early 20th century speculative literature. In that much, it reminds me no small part of Penny Dreadful. It has the same gleeful delight in its own references, the same playfully gothic geekery.”

—Liz Bourke, *Tor.com*

“[G]rand and smashing recursive steampunk...a splendid romp indeed.”

—Paul Di Filippo, *Asimov's*

“Ward deftly incorporates details that heighten the realism of Harker’s bizarre cross-genre world, from Harker’s dismissal of classism, to the clean energy of the Martian-inspired Titanic engines. Lucy’s philosophical musings and delectable vocabulary recall the style of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle while delving into questions of emotion and personhood, responsibility and morality, in a way that emphasizes the dehumanization of the other—the other species, the other class, the other gender.”

—Michelle Ristuccia, *Tangent Online*

### *The Adventure of the Dux Bellorum*

“[A] gleeful mashup of historical and fictional characters...all good fun, not without more serious rumination on issues like colonialism and women’s suffrage.”

—Rich Horton, *Locus*, April 2019

“This tale of two monsters, at once romantic and action-packed, is fun and thought-provoking, giving readers everything they want.”

—*Publisher's Weekly* (starred review)

“[T]he book takes all the elements of the first installment and builds on it. The action is more visceral, the cast larger, the stakes much higher. There are sapient dinosaurs, vampire vs. wolfman fights, and a particularly evil German scientist who just won’t seem to die. Plus there are moments where the characters must confront their missions and the legacies of their nations...”

—Charles Payseur, *Quick Sip Reviews*

*The Adventure of the Naked Guide*

“Cynthia Ward’s Lucy Harker novellas give the modern reader an updated frolic through avant-garde genre fiction, a frolic frosted with a myriad of clever fandom-esque references sure to delight adventurous readers.”

—Michelle Ristuccia, Tangent, February 2020

“Cynthia Ward continues her “Blood-Thirsty Agent” series with *The Adventure of the Naked Guide*, in which Lucy Harker, Dracula’s daughter and so a dhampir, and her lover Clarimal Stein, an upiór, find themselves in Lutha, helping the British free that somewhat “Ruritanian” country from Austrian domination. ... There’s some exciting steampunkish action, but the story turns more on what she learns about her mothers, what she and Clarimal come to understand about their own relationship, and the implications of their work for the British Empire. This is enjoyable, as all of these stories have been.... The main purpose is more serious now (as long hinted)...

—Rich Horton, *Locus* 2020

The Adventure  
of the Golden Woman



# Conversation Pieces



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## About the Aqueduct Press Conversation Pieces Series

The feminist engaged with sf is passionately interested in challenging the way things are, passionately determined to understand how everything works. It is my constant sense of our feminist-sf present as a grand conversation that enables me to trace its existence into the past and from there see its trajectory extending into our future. A genealogy for feminist sf would not constitute a chart depicting direct lineages but would offer us an ever-shifting, fluid mosaic, the individual tiles of which we will probably only ever partially access. What could be more in the spirit of feminist sf than to conceptualize a genealogy that explicitly manifests our own communities across not only space but also time?

Aqueduct's small paperback series, *Conversation Pieces*, aims to both document and facilitate the "grand conversation." The *Conversation Pieces* series presents a wide variety of texts, including short fiction (which may not always be sf and may not necessarily even be feminist), essays, speeches, manifestoes, poetry, interviews, correspondence, and group discussions. Many of the texts are reprinted material, but some are new. The grand conversation reaches at least as far back as Mary Shelley and extends, in our speculations and visions, into the continually created future. In Jonathan Goldberg's words, "To look forward to the history that will be, one must look at and retell the history that has been told." And that is what *Conversation Pieces* is all about.

L. Timmel Duchamp

Jonathan Goldberg, "The History That Will Be" in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996)

Additional Titles in the  
Blood-Thirsty Agent Series

Book 1: The Adventure of the Incognita Countess

Book 2: The Adventure of the Dux Bellorum

Book 3: The Adventure of the Naked Guide

Note: To read free samples, link to each book's webpage from the author's page at Aqueduct Press,  
*<http://www.aqueductpress.com/authors/CynthiaWard.php>*

Conversation Pieces  
Volume 81

# The Adventure of the Golden Woman

Book 4: Blood-Thirsty Agent Series

by  
Cynthia Ward





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All mistakes are mine.



*For Dr. J. Comer, without whom I would not  
have dared this series of adventures*



Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries.

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

To think of these stars that you see overhead at night, these vast worlds which we can never reach. I would annexe the planets if I could; I often think of that. It makes me sad to see them so clear and yet so far.

—Cecil Rhodes, The Last Will and Testament  
of Cecil John Rhodes

When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so damning becomes a clue to the truth.

—Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Problem of  
Thor Bridge”



Berlin, Prussia, German Protectorate,  
17 January 1931

In its wisdom, the British Empire ignores its pressure valves, legal and illegal: the brothels, jazz clubs, dance halls, pansy clubs, cafés, cabarets, and the rest. Berlin has as many valves as London. I'm bound for one: an unlicensed bar called the Lady Windermere.

On this subject, at least, the dossier I received in London proves accurate. The place is just off the Tauentzienstrasse. The space is packed with artists and other undesirables. The décor is Left Bank.

Though I've arrived an hour early, I've been preceded by the man who runs Station G. He faces the small stage, forelocks half obscuring his view of the expressionless chanteuse butchering the German language. I've never seen the man before, but the Secret Intelligence Service dossier included a studio portrait and several candid snapshots, so I recognise my mission supervisor immediately. But as I check my overcoat, I make a point of staring at him and blinking, as if trying to get a better look through the dim light and layered smoke.

Finally, I bend my steps to the small table, where he sits with claret-cup and cigarette, and call out in English. "Christopher! Lord above. Is that *you?*"

Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't know my mission supervisor's true name, and an invert wouldn't have any position whatsoever within the Empire's Secret Intelligence Service. Sometimes, however, it's best

to hide an agent in plain sight. The director of Station G, based in the decadent German capitol, is an openly homosexual writer.

At my call, he turns his head. Squinting in my direction, he brushes the dark hair from his right eye. His expression changes to one of amazed recognition, although he knows me only from my dossier.

“Lucy Strong?” he exclaims.

On this mission, as on most, I operate under a *nom de guerre*. I’m entirely too well known in the Empire to do otherwise. I’m Lucy Harker, the legal daughter of the reputed slayer of Dracula, and the stepdaughter of Sherlock Holmes’s smarter brother.

“I can’t believe my eyes!” my new supervisor says, rising to clasp my hand with the warmth one reserves for a long-lost friend.

Christopher shows no reaction to being almost a head shorter than me. He’s slight and wiry, with an outsized head, long arms, and short legs. With his smooth pink complexion and boyish grin, he looks closer to twenty than thirty. He smells pleasantly of wine and borage and Turkish tobacco.

His deceptively innocent smile widens. “I thought you’d run away to London to elope.”

“It didn’t work out,” I merrily reply, “so I’ve run away to Berlin to write.”

The singer, a woman with short black hair and a dead-white face, is no longer expressionless. She’s staring at us as if I’ve begun making love to her husband. However, she’s stuck on the stage. She’s already wrapped the garrotte of her vocal cords around a new song (this

one's mostly in pellucid English, obviously her native language).

Christopher releases my hand. "It's so wonderful to see you."

He offers to remove my jacket, though he must know I'll refuse. It conceals a firearm.

This is not to say the Walther PPK in my shoulder holster is my only weapon. I've a British Navy jack knife in one pocket of my jacket, a skeleton grip Beretta .25 in the other, and a Webley .25 in my garter holster. Add a Tommy gun and you might suppose I'm a gangster.

A serving girl takes my order for an Ohio cocktail. As she departs, Christopher draws back a chair for me. When I'm seated, he extends a packet of Salem Aleikum cigarettes.

I take one. "Thank you."

Striking a match, he leans close. As he lights my cigarette, his hands linger on mine. My eyes hold his gaze.

Then, my head still lowered, I glance about the space.

Our performance seems to have convinced the singer, whose enormous eyes are riveted on us. A few patrons regard us with raised eyebrows. As the dossier said, Christopher's proclivities are known here. That only makes our charade more convincing. Berlin is so dissolute, heterosexuals sleep with the same sex and homosexuals with the opposite.

As Christopher settles in his chair, I exhale smoke. "I understand you teach writing?"

"I *am* scraping by as a teacher," he says, "but of the English language, I fear."

I lean back, raising my cigarette. "If you're scraping by," I say, "I daresay it's time to expand your subject matter."

The singer puts “Mein Herr” out of its misery and makes her way through the crowded bar, exchanging greetings or flirtations with nearly every male she passes. As single-minded as a bullet, she moves in our direction. I realise her thickly powdered face and heavily made-up eyes have led me to overestimate her age by somewhere between five years and two decades. She’s nineteen or twenty. A black beauty mark perches like a little round bug on one cheek, and her green fingernails resemble the bright hard chitin of tiger beetles. Her eyes, whenever she glances our way, are candidly curious.

“I shouldn’t care to charge an old friend for writing advice,” Christopher tells me. “Why don’t we exchange typescripts?”

“I should be happy to trade editorial suggestions,” I reply, “if that’s what you mean.”

“You know—” Christopher leans forward “—I know a writer who’s in contact with several literary agents, both here and abroad. Dolf might be able to find you an agent. At the very least, he might be interested in exchanging typescripts with you. He writes in German, though.”

“I’m fluent.”

“Very good,” Christopher says. “I’ll talk to Dolf—”

“Dolf Hiedler?” The white-faced singer’s accent is posh as double cream, but fails to drown the hint of Lancashire bourgeoisie.

Appropriating a chair from the table of an elderly, well-tailored Hebrew preoccupied with lighting a fresh Eckstein from the stump of his old, she seats herself at our table.

“Oh, Christopher darling,” she says, as she helps herself to one of his cigarettes. “Dolf’s a nasty sort, for all his love of his adopted country.”

Christopher lights her gasper and provides introductions. “Lucy, this is Sally Bolle, my dearest friend in Berlin. Sally, this is Lucy Strong, an old friend from London.” He cocks his head at me. “Dolf’s Austrian. Although how Sally knows anything about his manner, I couldn’t say.”

“*Everyone* knows he’s Austrian, darling,” Sally replies, as if he’s addressed her. Her husky contralto is pleasant, now she’s not singing. “And *everyone* knows he hates the Jews worse than any German. If Germany weren’t part of the British Empire, he’d be agitating against Jews instead of English sympathizers.”

I elevate my eyebrows. The young lady’s not addressing a covert political gathering, or fulminating behind a pen name. Addressing such blatantly indiscreet talk to a complete stranger isn’t much more sensible than punching a lion in the nose.

“I cannot see how anyone in Germany can speak against the British Empire,” I say. “If we hadn’t stabilised the rule of the Kaiser, Germany would have collapsed following the Great War. And if it weren’t for our wars against China and the United States, the whole of the Continental economy would be in shambles. Instead, nearly every man in Europe is employed.”

“Sweet, I’ve no doubt everything would be a perfect shambles.” The girl’s tone indicates the matter is more dry and remote than the Martian sea-bottoms.

As she turns back to Christopher, a member of the Berliner Polizei enters the Lady Windermere with a

Luger on his gun-belt. He's followed by a mechanical man which carries a Mauser rifle at right shoulder arms. The mechanical's iron exterior is enameled in the same shade of blue as the Polizist's uniform.

The Berlin police don't share the British Empire's *laissez-faire* attitude towards unlicensed bars. And the Lady Windermere attracts *demi-mondaine* sorts: transvestites, poets, prostitutes, homosexuals, Lesbians, Negroes, Jews, communists, gangsters—there's even an artist in cowboy togs sketching a vampire with an anaemic-looking thrall. The cop and machine-man affect the patrons like a stone flung in a pool, sending awareness outward in ripples of tightened shoulders and averted faces.

Christopher matches my indifferent response to the newcomers. Sally stares openly at the mechanical, which would be a rare sight even in London. When its master begins quietly discussing protection money with the one-handed barman, she turns back to Christopher and me. Tilting her bowler hat back on her bob, she flashes a smile as friendly as a sabre blade.

“Have you heard about the golden woman?”

“Not a word,” Christopher says. “Is that a new torch singer or female impersonator?”

I'm tempted to ask if the phrase refers to an infamous gold-digger, but I suspect Sally might decide I'm referring to her.

She looks at me. “You haven't heard of the golden woman, either?” When I shake my head, she exhales smoke with a laugh. “But she's all the rage, sweet! A gilded Maschinenmädchen, glimpsed from the corner of people's eyes.”

“A machine maiden?” I glance at the uniform’s metal companion. “Mechanicals look like men.”

This is a generous assessment. Mechanicals resemble petrol barrels affixed with primitive approximations of limbs and heads. One might suppose them to be a poor, speechless parody of male mortals. In truth, they’re inventions of a German scientist, Herr Doktor Krüger, whose hope of creating an army immune to Allied machine-gun fire came a cropper in the Great War.

“Perhaps the golden woman is an hallucination,” Sally says. “Most of Berlin suffers from narcomania.” She crushes the stump of her cigarette in a glass ash-tray with edges which could slit a throat, then turns to me with a slow, unfriendly smile. “Are you chasing Chris?”

I dispose of my own gasper.

“Certainly not,” I assure her. “We’re just good friends.” My reply couldn’t sound more insincere.

Christopher smiles at me. “Come by tomorrow afternoon, Lucy. Bring one or two of your stories. I should be delighted to read them.” He gives a time and an address.

The tall, gaunt Hebrew at the next table leans towards us. I rarely smoke unless required by my cover, because it dulls my taste-buds and nose. To preserve them, I barely tasted my cigarette; but the man’s smell of accumulated tobacco smoke is so overwhelming, my sensitive nose goes dead in self-defence.

Focusing pale eyes on Sally like a rifle scope, he speaks in a hoarse voice, tinged with a Warsaw accent. “Für mich, Sie sind schön, Fräulein. Darf ich Sie auf ein Getränk einladen?”

“Ganz genau!” she answers, as falsely bright as a Tannenbaum ornament, and moves to his table.

When I exit the Lady Windermere, it's nearly midnight, with a wind keen enough to scrape deerskin. Still, the streets are as busy as midday. My nose is mercifully dulled to the myriad stinks of Berlin air, but my ears receive the full assault: motor-lorries and locomotives and horse-drawn charabancs; bells and sirens and horns; jazz and cabaret and laughter and radio programmes from briefly opened doors; come-ons of beggars and vendors and street-walkers; polyglot conversations climbing to be heard. It's an atonal symphony to wrack Schönberg with envy.

Surveillance reveals no loiterer, which might suggest I'm being followed. There's a tripod nearby, towering over the Wittenbergplatz like the support for a new elevated railway. The lights of the street and U-Bahn station gleam jovially on the underside of the metal hood. The underside is enameled in the colours of the Union Jack.

As I walk east, I see another "Martian" style fighting-machine in the distance. This tripod is painted with the eagle and Schwarz-Rot-Gold of Deutschland, but make no mistake. It, too, serves the British Empire.