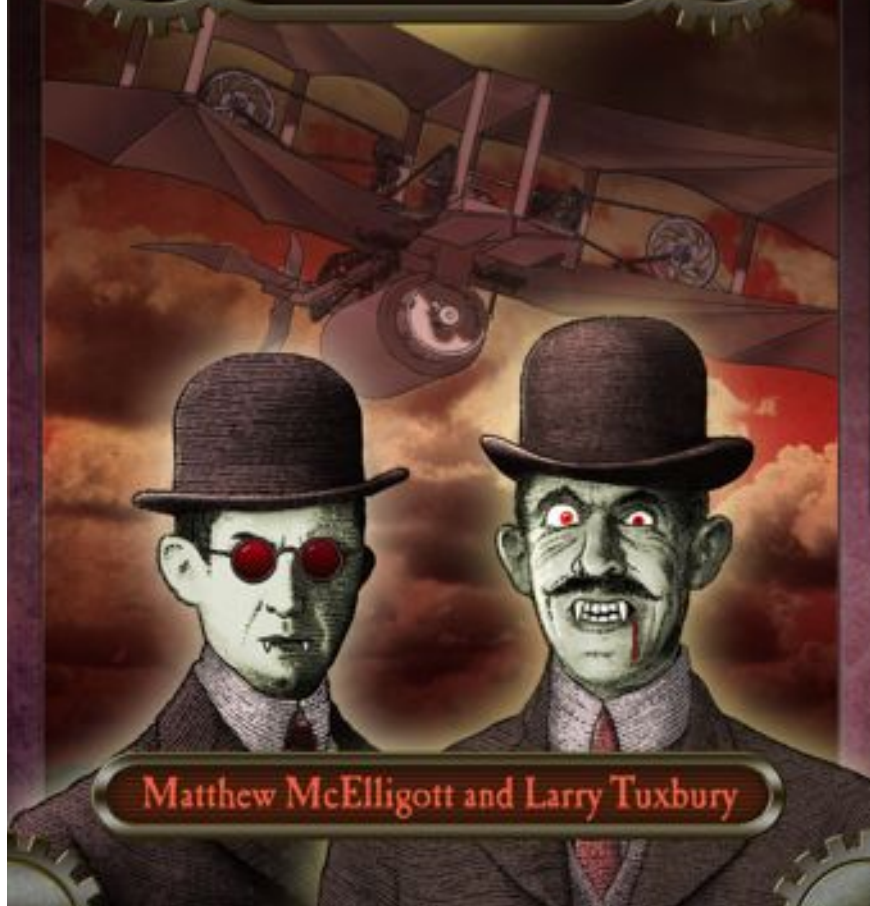




BENJAMIN
FRANKLINSTEIN
MEETS THE
FRIGHT BROTHERS



Matthew McElligott and Larry Tuxbury

Also by
MATTHEW McELLIGOTT
& LARRY TUXBURY

**BENJAMIN
FRANKLINSTEIN
LIVES!**

Wherein is contained
an Accounting of the Preparation,
Suspension, and eventual Reawakening of the Subject in Modern Day,
and his Quest to discover the Great Emergency.

BENJAMIN
FRANKLINSTEIN
MEETS THE
FRIGHT BROTHERS



Wherein is contained
an Accounting of the Quest by our Subject
and his Young Compatriots to solve a Mystery of Vampires
terrorizing the Great City of Philadelphia.

By MATTHEW McELLIGOTT
& LARRY TUXBURY. PHILOM.

Illustrated by Matthew McElligott
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*For Christy and Anthony, and especially to Larry,
wordsmith extraordinaire. —M.M.*

*For Melanie, Nina, and Ella.
Also for Matt, a great judge of talent. —L.T.*

*And for Tim, the spark that
brought Ben to life. —M.M. & L.T.*

“Fear not death;
for the sooner we die,
the longer shall we be immortal.”

—Benjamin Franklin

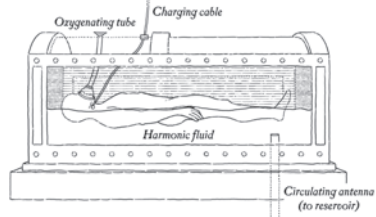
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about Benjamin Franklinstein

Is Benjamin Franklin
still alive?



Yes.

How is that possible?



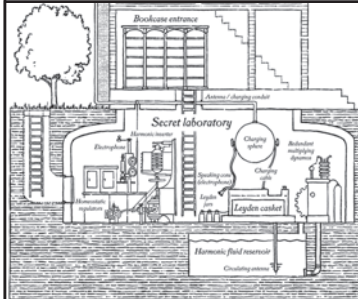
Centuries ago, Franklin and a group of scientists called the *Modern Order of Prometheus* invented the Leyden casket. It preserved Franklin for over two hundred years.

What was the mission of the
Modern Order of Prometheus?



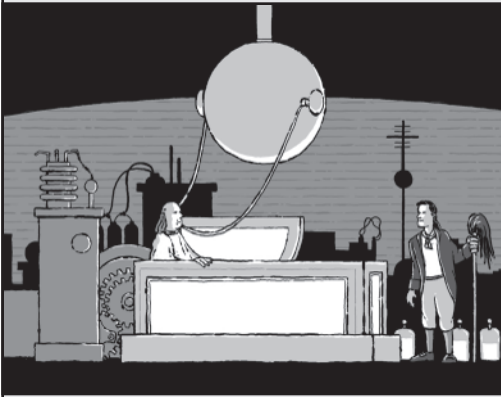
Its mission was to preserve the world's greatest scientists, awakening them when the world needed them most.

Where was Franklin preserved?



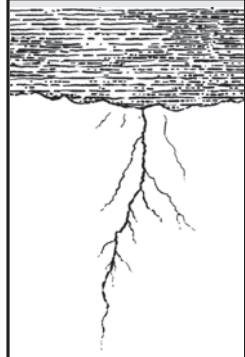
In a secret basement laboratory beneath a house in Philadelphia. This house is currently owned by *Mary Godwin* and her son, *Victor*.

Who took care of Franklin while he slept?



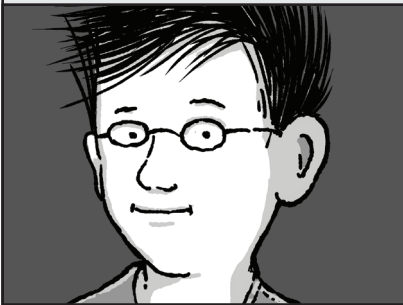
For centuries, a series of Custodians of the Order watched over Franklin's sleeping body. But several months ago, his last Custodian, Mr. Mercer, died unexpectedly, leaving Franklin unattended.

So what woke up Franklin?



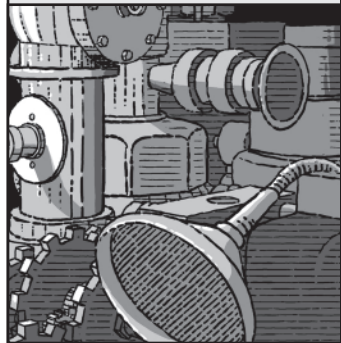
Apparently, a freak lightning strike on an otherwise cloudless evening.

Who knows that Franklin is alive?

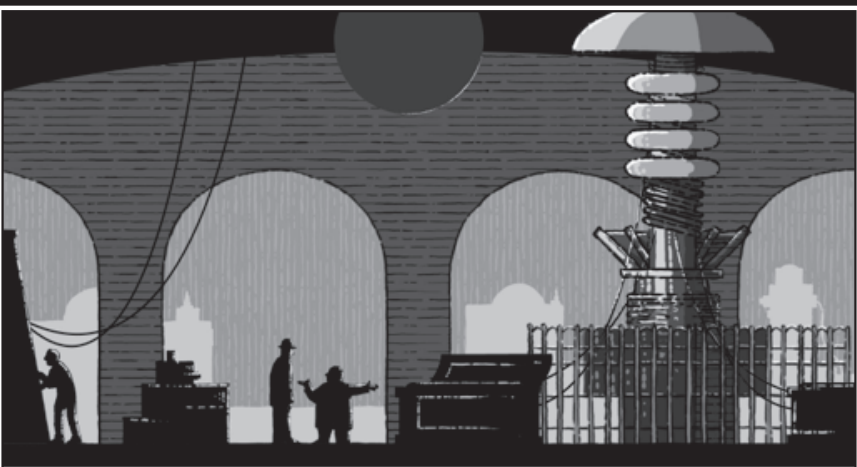


Only Victor Godwin, the boy who lives in the apartment above Franklin's, knows his secret. Victor has been helping Franklin adjust to life in the twenty-first century.

Was Benjamin Franklin the only scientist preserved by the Modern Order of Prometheus?



No...



PROLOGUE

Philadelphia, 1948

It had taken a long time for the elevator to stop. Orville shivered. As a man accustomed to soaring high above the earth, he found it unsettling to be so deep beneath it.

His fingers traced the fresh scar on his temple.

“You will soon grow used to the harmonium plate,” said the short man in the neat suit standing beside him. “Consider yourself lucky. In the Order’s early days, the electrical contacts were not hidden beneath the skin. Instead, our scientists had crude bolts implanted into their necks.”

“Either way,” scoffed Orville, “I feel like a machine.”

The short man smiled as he pulled open the safety gate. He waved a hand, gesturing for Orville to exit.

Orville stepped into a cavernous laboratory filled with pulsating, electrified equipment.

“Good lord, Enbée,” he said, gawking up at the colossal machine in the center. “What is it?”

“That, *mon ami*,” the short man replied, “is our Tesla coil. The great Serbian scientist Nikola Tesla designed it especially for the Modern Order of Prometheus, just before he went into his own deep sleep five years ago.”

Orville circled the device, awestruck. “What does it do?”

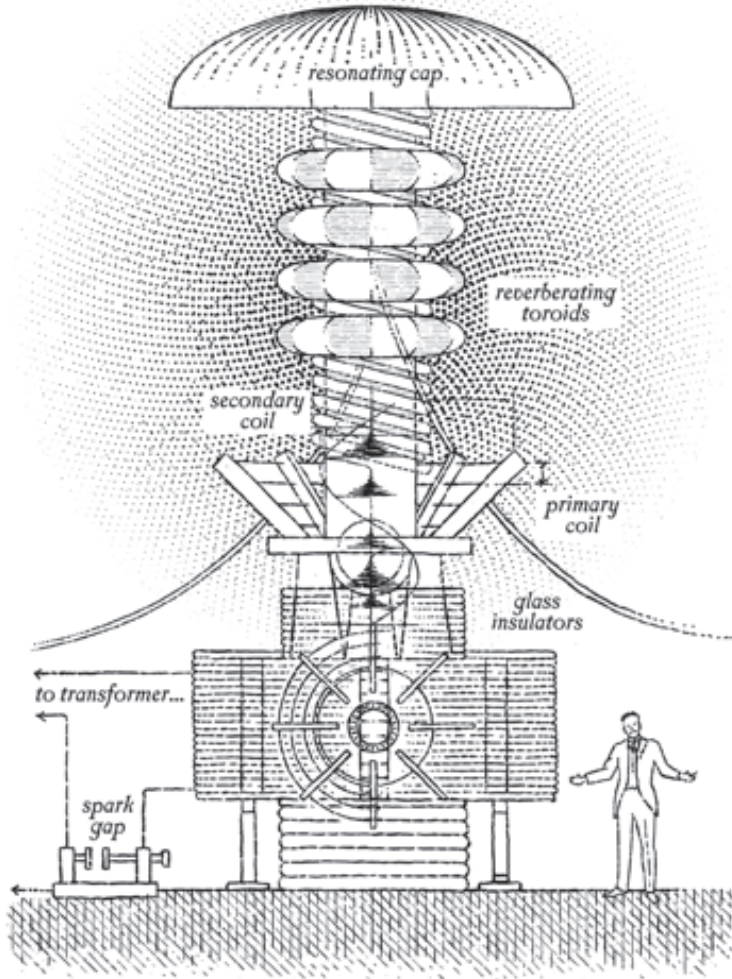
“It is our power source,” Monsieur Enbée said. “It is capable of producing electrical vibrations in excess of one hundred million volts. Think of it, Mr. Wright: *man-made lightning*.”

The Tesla coil towered over them. A pole wrapped in tightly wound wire reached up twenty feet and was capped near the ceiling by a great metal dome. A circular metal cage surrounded the pole to prevent the foolhardy from stepping too close.

On either side of the Tesla coil lay large caskets, one open, one closed. Orville trudged to the closed casket and put his hand on it. It was made of a thick glass bound by strips of steel. Inside, he could make out a shadowy shape floating in a glowing blue liquid. A soft blip sounded from a speaker mounted on its side.

Orville peered into the glass and gazed upon the face he had not seen in over thirty-five years.

THE PROMETHEAN TESLA COIL



“Brother,” he whispered.

“My friend,” Monsieur Enbée said, “I am pleased that you have at last agreed to join the Order.”

Orville frowned. “At this point, what do I have to lose? My heart is weak. Whether I climb into that terrible box or not, I’m likely to die.”

“Have faith,” Monsieur Enbée said, looking up into the frail man’s eyes. “True, you have resisted for decades. Not like your brother. Ah, his enthusiasm for the Order was intoxicating!”

“I remember,” Orville said. “It was a lifetime ago. We were both young, but his spirit of adventure was much bolder than mine.” Wright looked sharply at the short man. “I’m curious, Enbée. The last time we both stood in this room was thirty-six years ago, when Wilbur joined your secret society. Since then, I have grown old and weak. You, however—you haven’t aged a day. How can that be?”

“Witness the scientific marvels around you,” the short man proclaimed. “We have the technology to make a man live indefinitely. Does it not make sense that I, as director of the Order, extend my own life span? I am older than you think. And just as your brother and I have benefited from these miracles of science, so will you.”

Despite Monsieur Enbée’s reassuring words, there was something about him that Orville didn’t trust. “But you promise,” Orville insisted, waving a finger at the Leyden

caskets. “You promise that when we awaken, we shall awaken together.”

Monsieur Enbée smiled thinly. “*Mais, bien sûr . . .* of course. If ever the world faces a great emergency, history’s finest scientists and inventors will all be awakened to come to its rescue. That is the purpose of the Modern Order of Prometheus, as determined by our founder, Benjamin Franklin.”

Benjamin Franklin, Orville thought. *There was a great man.*

“But what of my family?” pressed Orville. “And the affairs of my life?”

“All has been arranged. Your family will be well cared for, and the details of your ‘funeral’ are already in place. I assure you, we take good care of our own.” He put his hand on Orville’s shoulder. “Trust me, Mr. Wright. Trust the Order.”

Orville nodded. “Very well. What must I do?”

“We shall leave it to your Custodian.” He gestured to a tall man who waited silently behind the open Leyden casket. Orville had not noticed him standing there. “He will perform the suspension-of-life procedure.”

The Custodian led Orville up a small step to the casket, assisting him into the blue liquid. The fluid immediately began to glow. The Custodian gently fitted a rubber mask over the old man’s mouth and nose.

“Do not worry,” the Custodian said. “I am told it is like sleep. You and your brother will be reunited, one day. And it will seem as only an instant.”

Orville looked at his brother’s casket. It had been so many years. So many decades. He sighed, closed his eyes, and lowered the rest of his body into the fluid. The Custodian closed the lid and sealed the latch. Air bubbles rose to the top of the casket. Orville Wright was breathing normally.

The Custodian flicked a switch, and the steady rhythm of Orville’s heartbeat blipped from a speaker. He gripped a lever and pushed it up. The Tesla coil hummed. At first it gave off a low, soft buzz, but within seconds the noise grew louder, more high-pitched, deafening.

Sparks wheeled off from the coil at the center. Suddenly, the room was awash in bolts of lightning that sliced the air, crackling from the dome at the top. Ribbons of raw energy flashed, racing around the cage. The Leyden caskets were bathed in electricity. Monsieur Enbée and the Custodian shielded their eyes.

An alarm blared from the control panel, and red lights flashed a warning.

“Quick!” shouted Monsieur Enbée. “Stabilize the neutron flow!”

The Custodian reached for the lever but snapped his hand back, howling in pain. “It’s hypercharged!”

He flung open a cabinet and snatched out two vulcanized rubber gloves. "Stand back, Monsieur Enbée!"

The small man retreated into a corner as the Custodian gripped the lever and pulled down with his full weight. Slowly, it descended. As it did, the lightning that had filled the room drew back into the Tesla coil. The crackle and hum of pure energy softened and then vanished.

The Custodian pounded a large button with his fist. The flashing red lights and buzzing ceased. He removed his goggles and gloves. "It's safe. We've reached bioelectric homeostasis."

Monsieur Enbée slowly approached Orville Wright's Leyden casket. "Did it work? I'm not hearing a heartbeat. The Order cannot afford to lose another one."

"Wait," the Custodian said.

They waited. Ten seconds . . . twenty seconds . . . thirty seconds . . .

Blip! . . . Blip! . . .

"Ah," Monsieur Enbée said, with a sigh of relief. "He lives."

"But we almost lost him," the Custodian said. "I warned you, Enbée. Tesla's machine is dangerous."

"You just keep him alive," the short man snapped back. "As long as I am in charge, it is not your place to question the Order's methods."

"Yes, sir. My apologies, sir."

The small man stepped into the elevator and pushed the button. “And in the future, you will remember to refer to me as *Monsieur Enbée*. *Comprenez-vous?*”

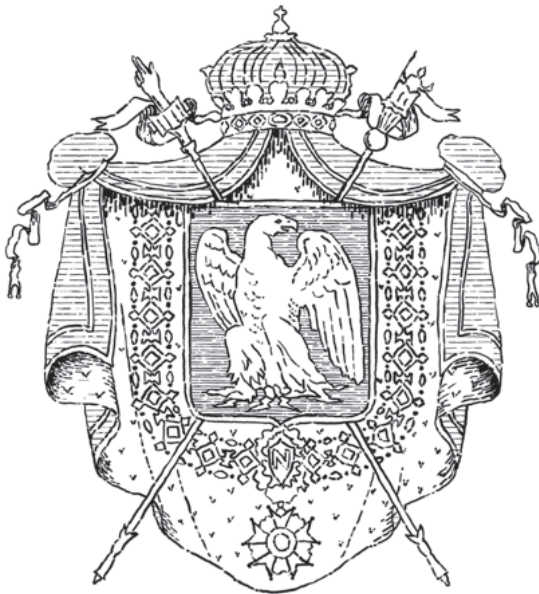
“Yes, Monsieur Enbée,” the Custodian said. “I understand.”

The doors closed on the small man. The elevator began to grind its way to the surface.

“Know your place, Custodian,” called Monsieur Enbée, “and remember your duty. I have put great trust in you!”

Then why, the Custodian thought, do I find it so difficult to trust you?

IMPERIAL COAT OF ARMS OF FRANCE (EARLY 19TH CENTURY)





CHAPTER ONE

Philadelphia, Today

It was a typical, sunny summer afternoon on Karloff Avenue. A woman was watering the plants in her garden. A mailman was making his daily rounds. Two mothers with strollers chatted on the sidewalk.

And high above them, balanced precariously on the chimney of the oldest house on the block, Benjamin Franklin was disco dancing while mooing like a cow.

Had anyone on the street happened to look up, it is unlikely they would have recognized the great American patriot. He wore Bermuda shorts, a tattered T-shirt, and a scarf to disguise the strange metal bolts in his neck. He danced vigorously, although there was no music playing. Two sparking electrical cables were clipped to the garters

on his tall black socks. The cables ran to a rusty old machine, which was being carefully monitored by a boy sitting on a wooden crate.

Fortunately, no one on the street happened to look up. If they had, they would surely have called the police.

“Point your left hand a little more to the west,” called Victor. He studied a gauge. “I’m certain we’ve found the right frequency. Maybe the signal strength is still too low? Try humming again.”

“Moooooooooooo . . .”

“Can you hum louder? And really swing your hips back and forth this time. We need to get you in phase with the chromatic overtones.”

Franklin nodded and intensified his dance. The wires on his socks began to crackle and flash.

“MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Victor watched the needles on the gauge swing back and forth. “That helps. Can you sense anything yet?”

Franklin huffed and shook his head. *“MOOOOOOOOOOO! . . . Nothing . . . MOOOOOOO . . . at . . . MOOOOOOO . . . all . . .”*

“Maybe if you—”

BOOM!

A bright blue flash lit the air, followed by a puff of dark black smoke. The old man tumbled off the chimney onto the roof below.

Victor raced to Franklin’s side. “Ben, are you okay?”

Franklin blinked and slowly pulled himself upright. "I'm fine," he said. "Never better."

"What happened?"

"Exactly what I feared might happen." He nodded down toward his feet, where two black rings now encircled his bare ankles. "My socks exploded."

"Yikes! I'm sorry."

"Nonsense. They were old socks. Besides, your idea was sound. What better antenna for the electrophone than my own harmonically charged body? It was a brilliant insight."

"I was so sure we were on to something. Your movements gave us great reception, and when you hummed, the resonance indicator went all the way to full. I don't understand why we didn't pick up some sort of signal."

Franklin stood and dusted himself off. "Victor, I'm afraid the evidence is clear. There is no signal. We are alone."

"I don't agree."

"We have to face facts. The electrophone is the only way to contact any remaining members of the Modern Order of Prometheus. If no one is answering, then it can mean only one thing: the Order is no more."

"We don't know that for sure." Victor walked to the edge of the roof. "Look, you were asleep in the basement for over two hundred years. Then, a few weeks ago, out of the blue, something suddenly woke you up. Why?"

“What woke me was nothing more than a random strike of lightning.”

“That’s one possibility. Another is that the Modern Order of Prometheus woke you because they need your help. Maybe whenever they’ve tried to contact you, we just haven’t been around.”

“It has been a month,” said Franklin. He stood beside Victor, watching the people go about their business on the street below. “We have monitored the electrophone regularly, in every possible way, and have yet to receive a single transmission.”

Victor turned his gaze toward the Philadelphia skyline. “You’re right. I know that. But I’m not ready to give up yet. I can’t explain why.”

Franklin smiled. “Victor, that doesn’t sound very scientific. And from you, of all people!”

Victor’s face reddened. “It’s just, you know, a gut feeling.”

“Then we press on. If there is one thing I believe in, it is following my gut. Speaking of which, how about something to eat?”



Downstairs in the Godwin apartment, Victor fixed some snacks in the kitchen while Franklin turned on the TV.

“Remind me again,” Franklin called. “Where do I find the channel with the moving drawings?”

Recently, television had become Franklin's obsession. What surprised Victor were the types of programs Franklin chose to watch. He found C-SPAN, the news, and the History Channel interesting, but what he really loved were cartoons.

"Try channel thirty-two."

Victor could hear Franklin cursing at the remote in the other room. "The blasted television wand is broken again!"

"Have you pushed the On button?"

The television clicked on. "Never mind, I repaired it!" Franklin hollered.

Victor emptied the microwave popcorn into a bowl and poured two glasses of honey lemonade. When he entered the living room, Franklin was watching an anchorman on the local news.

"And now for the weather. Skip, how are things looking for tomorrow? Can we count on a sunny Fourth of July?"

"Oh, hurrah!" exclaimed Franklin. "It's Skip Weaver! I wonder what sort of tomfoolery he has in store this time."

Victor sighed. For better or for worse, Skip's son, Scott Weaver, was the closest thing he had to a friend at Philo T. Farnsworth Middle School. Scott never seemed to take anything very seriously, and his dad was the same way. Victor, on the other hand, took everything seriously.

On the television, Skip Weaver rode a scooter back and forth in front of the weather map. A cardboard pizza box emblazoned with a crude Magic Marker drawing of the

sun was taped to the handlebars. On the screen behind him, animated storm clouds ran for their lives.

“The sun is chasing the clouds away!” howled Franklin. “Have you ever seen such a spectacle?”

Victor rolled his eyes.

Suddenly, the pizza box fell from the front of Skip’s scooter and caught in the wheel. Skip lost control and skidded directly toward the camera. Something heavy crashed to the floor and the entire newsroom seemed to tip on its side. The screen went black, and the station cut to a used car commercial.

“Bravo!” cheered Franklin. “Bravo! Oh, it’s pure genius!”

“It’s embarrassing,” said Victor. “If I want to see a clown, I’ll go to the circus.”

“Victor, that’s Scott’s father! Show some respect.”

Victor snorted. “Watching his forecast is like watching a cartoon.”

“My cartoons!” Franklin blurted. “Now where did I place that wand?” He reached beneath the seat cushion and rummaged for the remote. The commercial ended and the news came back on.

“Coming up, we’ll take a look at those new electricity-free miracle lightbulbs that have been showing up in stores throughout the city. Do they really work? We’ll find out! But first, we join Mayor Milstead’s press conference, already in progress.”

Mayor Milstead stood behind a podium, with two men

beside her. The first man wore a crisp blue suit and appeared to be standing at attention. The second man was much shorter. He slouched, and his beard was full of crumbs. The mayor began to speak.

"I am here today to talk about reports we have received of what some are calling giant monster bats flying over Philadelphia. In fact, some citizens have even called my office suggesting these may be vampires. Clearly, this is an overreaction to something that no doubt has a simple explanation. Still, I assure you that we take this issue very seriously . . ."

"A female mayor?" marveled Franklin. "Fascinating!"

"I've asked two authorities, Gilbert Girard from the Federal Aviation Administration and Dr. Robert Kane of the Philadelphia Zoo, to head up a special investigation. They will report directly to my office. In the meantime, we have established a toll-free hotline . . ."

"Oh, yeah, I read about this," said Victor. "Enormous bats flying around the city? It's preposterous."

"A short time ago, I would have told you that instant pudding was preposterous," said Franklin. "How can you be so certain?"

"Trust me."

"So there are no giant bats? No . . . vampires?"

"Of course not," said Victor. "It's probably just a publicity stunt. We don't have giant bats in Philadelphia, and there's no such thing as vampires."

THAT NIGHT...

Glenda Milstead, mayor of Philadelphia, poured herself a cup of tea and carried it out to the patio. A long day at City Hall had left her with a bad headache, and she needed to relax. She settled into her deck chair and gazed at the night sky.

It was dusk, and the stars were just beginning to emerge. Overhead, a bat flitted by, followed by two more. She watched them zigzag across the sky, chasing insects too small to see.

Bats. The last thing she wanted to think about.

All day long, her office had fielded more reports of giant bat sightings. Just this morning there had been almost *sixty* calls. Hopefully, the investigation would yield results. Something strange was definitely going on, and she planned to get to the bottom of it.

A soft rustling sound came from the bushes.

“Who’s there?” Mayor Milstead called.

Silence.

The wind whispered and shook the trees.

Mayor Milstead let out a long sigh. All this talk of giant bats had her spooked. She turned to head back inside, then paused. Something still didn’t feel right.

Fwoooooooosh!

Mayor Milstead felt a sharp bite on the side of her neck.