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opening extract from

The Rainbow Orchid: The Adventures of Julius Chancer Volume Two

written by

Garen Ewing

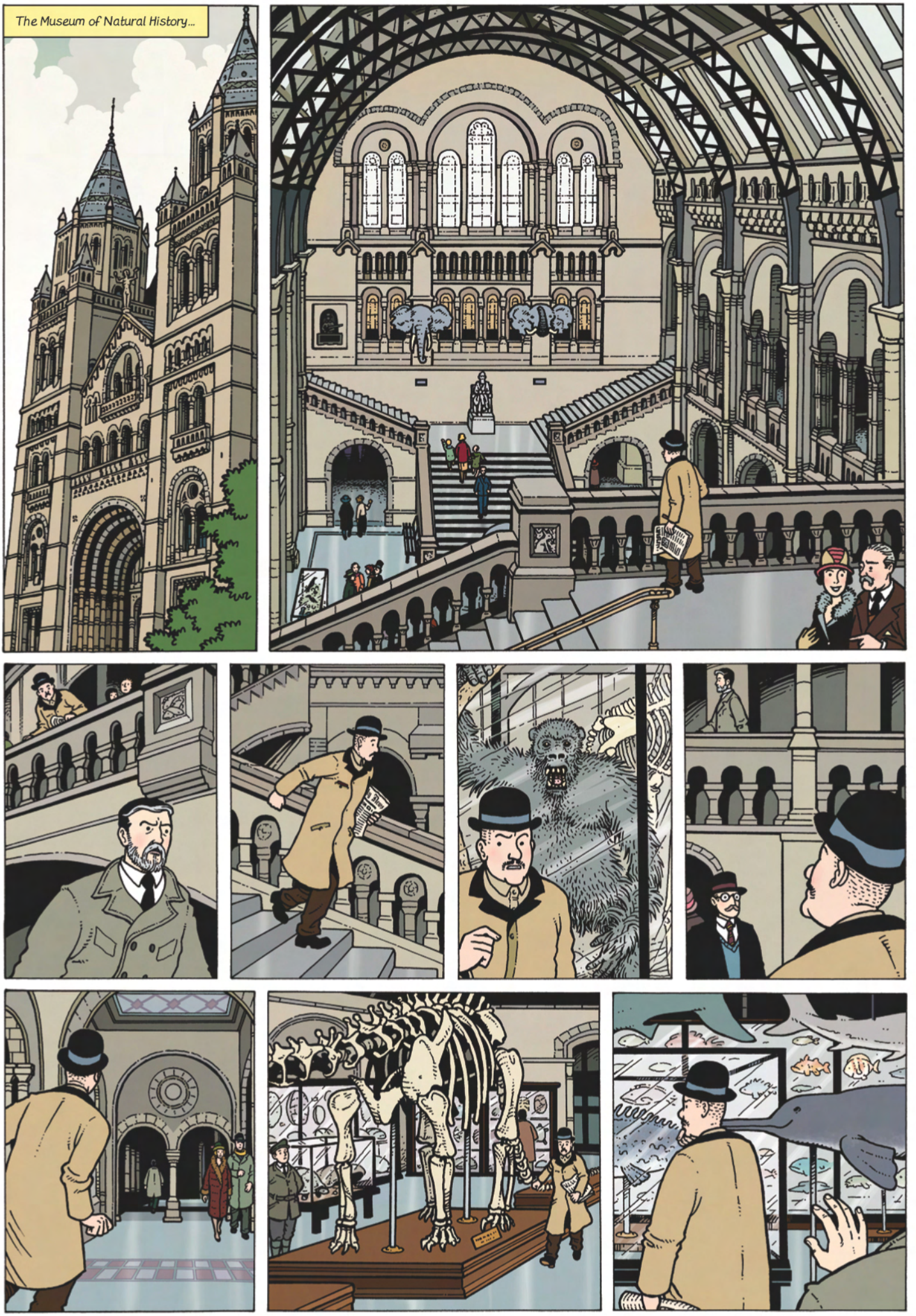
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The Museum of Natural History...


Is it dolphins in general you're interested in, or *Platanista minor*, specifically?
I'm sorry?
The Indus river dolphin. It's quite blind, you know, but still has an excellent sense of what's going on around it. A useful trait wouldn't you say, Mr Drubbin?
You know my name, I see, but... I don't believe I, er, know you...
Very admirable, but as you've been following me for three days now, you should know me quite well!
Or does Winston Attle keep such vital information from his men?
Ah. Well, as you know who I work for too, my game is up.
I recognised you straight away. You were a new recruit to the Empire Survey Branch in my last week as director.
Of course, you had more hair then, Mr Drubbin.
Heh. I'm impressed, Sir Alfred. I shouldn't say this, but many of the senior agents look back on your time at the Branch with great fondness. They don't like what happened.
Agents? Branch members used to be explorers, researchers, archaeologists and adventurers. It was an organisation for enlightenment. Now you're more like secret policemen!
This missing reporter, William Pickle, is that you lot? Do you have him?
No, sir. I assumed it was just another newspaper stunt.
The Daily News
DISAPPEARANCE OF PICKLE STILL A MYSTERY
Our correspondent still missing
No, something's going on. Pickle's the one who stirred up this orchid business. I presume that's why Attle has you watching me, the rainbow orchid?
Er... well, yes. The orchid is something we have an interest in.
So Pickle's report that you have one for the Wembley Exhibition...
Balderdash. No one has one. It's most probably a myth.
Maybe our friend from the Indus here has seen one?
Ah! You're not completely ignorant about it then, Mr Drubbin?
Well, we both know of the stone tablet in the vaults at the British Museum, and the Branch has acquired something new recently.
Perhaps you have something else we're unaware of?
All right, I'm not going to play games. Tell Winston I'll come to see him, and then we'll talk.
Now, I'm here to consult the museum's orchid library. Against my better judgement, Urkaz Grope's black pearl orchid has me intrigued.
Do you still intend to follow me?
No! Not at all! I'll see you at the Branch soon, sir.