



# IN AN IRON CAGE

**The Magic of Steampunk**

Edited by Danielle Ackley-McPhail,  
Elektra Hammond, and Neal Levin

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Dark Quest, LLC  
Howell, New Jersey

## PUBLISHED BY

Dark Quest, LLC  
Neal Levin, Publisher  
23 Alec Drive,  
Howell, New Jersey 07731  
[www.darkquestbooks.com](http://www.darkquestbooks.com)

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Interior art ©2011 by Linda Saboe  
Cover art ©2011 by Remi Le Capon

ISBN (trade paper): 978-0-9830993-0-7

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Interior and Cover Design:  
Danielle McPhail  
Sidhe na Daire Multimedia  
[www.sidhenadaire.com](http://www.sidhenadaire.com)

Cover Art: Remi Le Capon



# ON THE WINGS OF AN ANGEL

Danielle Ackley-McPhail

**C**AN'T SAY AS I DIDN'T RECKON I WAS GOING MAD. It wouldn't have surprised me if'n it were so. I already reckoned I was in hell, that's enough to turn anyone's mind....

But first, I call myself Miss Sadie Angelina Carlisle, though I don't bother much with any name but the middle one anymore. Not since takin' up residence at the Lucky Strike Saloon in Dead Dog, Montana, anyway. See, the proprietor, Mr. Clayton, he says men are happier pretendin' they're keepin' company with an angel, rather than a common whore. I do as I'm told, else Mr. Clayton might forget he likes havin' an angel below stairs temptin' and teasin' the custom, rather than just another girl entertainin' above stairs. Men don't pay near so much for common. They have to save up for an angel, even a fallen one; unless they hit a strike. That ain't happened yet. Till then, I sing.

"Sadie! Sun's settin', quit wool-gatherin' and get yourself into your rig afore I find someone else as fits it!"

Lordie, but that black-hearted Clayton can bellow. I can't help but shudder at his bald-faced threat though. That happen, and I might as well drop the name Angel

too. Ain't none of us outta reach of his temper. I'd do to remember that. And I reckon he's been givin' me looks makin' me wonder will I be below stairs much longer anyhow. Looks that make me think he's tired of waitin' for a prospector with that big strike to come along. I've no doubt I've only been spared entertainin' the custom 'cause there ain't anyone come in able to pay the price Mr. Clayton has set on my innocence.

I flinch at the thought and rush to do as I'm bid, my mind near jibberin' half-formed pleas for deliverance, but not hardly expectin' it will ever come. I'm already wearin' my white satin gown and matchin' slippers with the thick leather soles; now for the rest. Quick-like I beckon over Shelby, one of the above stairs ladies, for some help 'cause I plum can't suit up all myself.

See, our Mr. Clayton, he's into mods and mechanicals. Show him somethin' with gears and I reckon he starts breathin' like he's been with a five-dollar whore. There are bits of invention all over the saloon I can scarce make sense of. They're most nothin' much but tinker's toys like the little metal birds what can't fly, but sing pertier than me...if'n only ever just one song, and miniature carriages made for Cook's son movin' by themselves on tiny puffs of steam....The bartender is flesh enough, but there ain't a bottle of liquor to be seen—nor broke, if'n the custom gets rowdy. Drinks is portioned out by a clockwork contraption of gears and pipes that can take a dent and keep on pourin' the next drink in just as precise a measure as the last. Then there's the player piano what plays itself like any other, but ain't no crank involved, just lotsa steam and valves and whatnot. It's an amazin' thing of copper and brass instead of wood, with gold-plated keys, and not soundin' no more tinny than any other upright I ever heard.

But all of that ain't nothin' compared to my rig.

I can't help but think about that with longin' and loathin' mixed, rememberin' when and how it came to be. There were a tinker come through town. An odd, dirt-smudged, little man what made me more nervous than an uncooped hen after dark. The first he scurried into the saloon and looked his fill at every one of us, we felt near stripped bare down to our very souls, though there weren't nothin' to it that was lecherous or mean. More like Mr. Edward S. Curtis, what came through with his pho-tography equipment once on his way to visit the Blackfoot injuns; he used to look just so at near everythin', like he was searchin' for the perfect picture it would make.

I swear if I didn't feel the tinker's gaze linger just the same on me, though I can't fathom why. I was a young'n yet at the time, and nothin' special to catch the custom's eye. Like now, I sang for my place, when I weren't cleanin'.

Was the tinker first called me Angel, with a nervous-makin' gleam in his eye—like he saw more to me than I right knew was there—and him not even knowin' my given name. That amused Mr. Clayton so much it stuck.

Then that there tinker set to catch Mr. Clayton's attention with such contraptions as you can't never imagine and I can scarce describe. The things that came