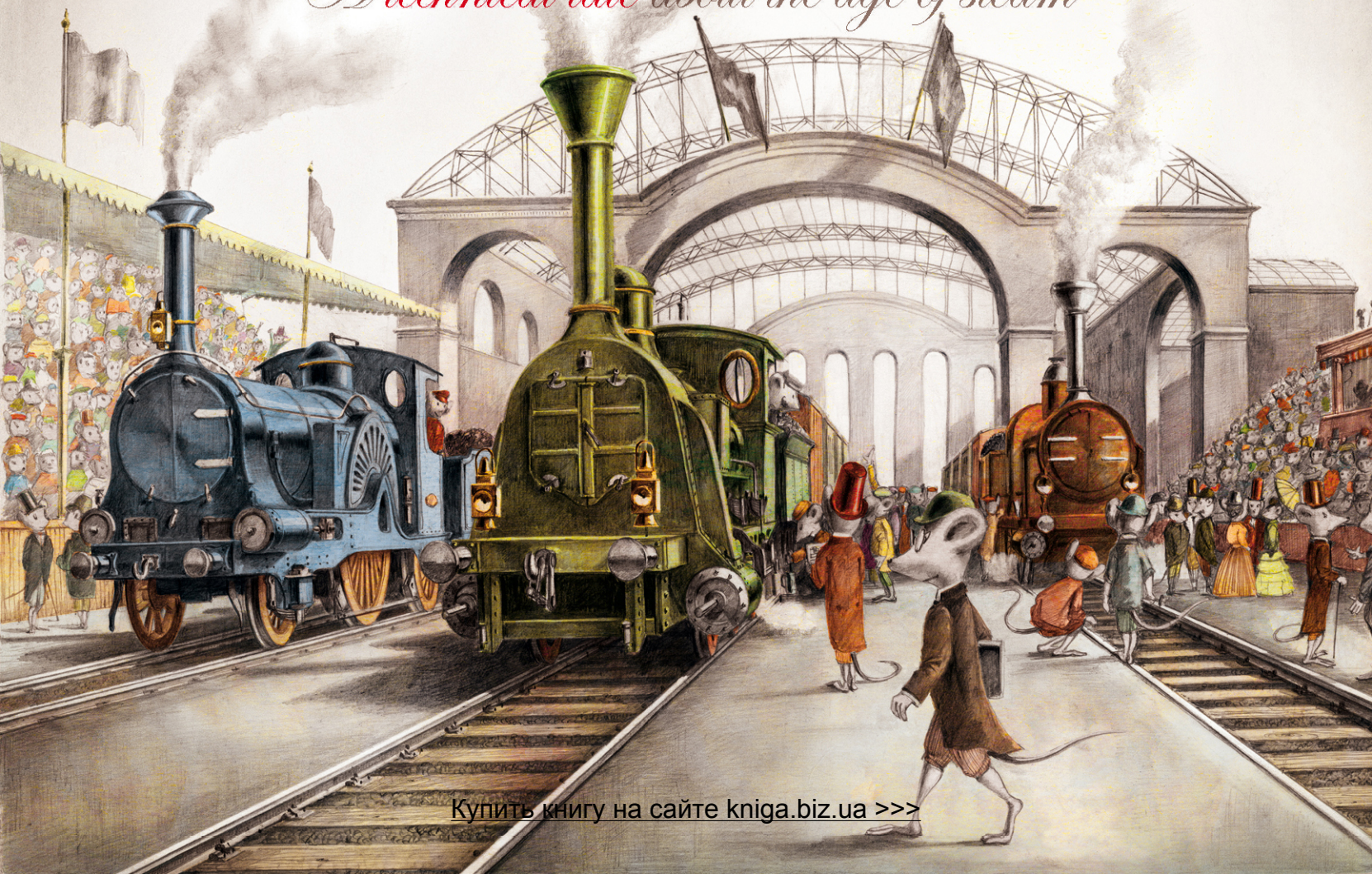




MARTIN SODOMKA

HOW TO BUILD A RAILWAY

A technical tale about the age of steam



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As the daylight faded over the factory quarter in Manadam, Max Rezner was making his way home after a full day's work at Baron Koch's Associated Engineering Works. He had started there just recently, and right now he was wondering if he had made a mistake. Max had been received in person by Johannes Koch, who had been very friendly and assigned to him the position of assembly worker. Max had been rather taken aback by this: he had studied very hard for several years and he was now a fully qualified mechanical engineer. But the Baron insisted that every new employee worked the round, as he called it, no matter how many formal qualifications that employee had. This meant starting at the bottom as an assistant's assistant and gradually getting to know the workings of the whole factory. Today, after two months at the place, Max had had about as much of it as he could take. His hope of ever getting off the bottom was beginning to disperse like the steam over a cooking pot. "Steam," he thought, "is the only thing worth staying here for."



STEAM

Take a look some time at how the soup for your Sunday lunch is boiled. As the lid jumps merrily about on top of the saucepan, clouds of steam are formed. You wouldn't believe how much energy you are seeing. This same steam is capable of driving machines in factories and setting trains that weigh a thousand tons in motion; it also enables ocean-going liners to travel between continents without stopping. Those innocent little white clouds once changed our world.

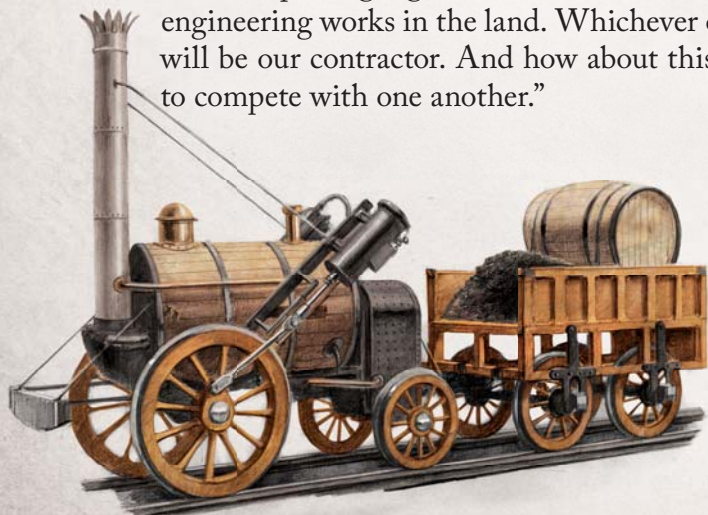
As chance would have it, on the day that Max was in such a gloomy mood, a large meeting of ministers was held in the Royal City, in the presence of King Joseph I. The main, indeed only, subject of the meeting was the building of a railway network. The Monarchy was the only one of the great powers yet to start work on a network for this new, fast and safe means of transport, and the young king was very keen for it to happen. He had acceded to the throne only recently, following the death of his father

THE RAILWAY IS BORN

Henry IV, who had fought innovation tooth and nail. The meeting discussed who would pay for the building of the railways, who would run them, and it even addressed such apparent trifles as track gauge. When the question was raised of where a self-propelled vehicle (or locomotive, as it was now called) could be obtained, the Minister for Economic Affairs spoke up

“Your Majesty, honourable gentlemen. As I am sure you are aware, the railway originated, and has been running with great success for fifteen years now, in the Island Empire. Which would lead one to surmise that locomotives produced there are the most technically advanced. So I would suggest buying our first few engines there. Please notice that I say the first few! For both economic and military reasons, we cannot afford to import such expensive and important machines. This Monarchy must manufacture its own locomotives, and I firmly believe that we can do it. I propose that we put together a team of experts to work under the supervision of an official committee which we will appoint.”

“Forgive me, friends, forgive me,” said the King. Then he waited for the hum of conversation that had attended the minister’s speech to die down. “I am in full agreement with this solution, gentlemen, although I would propose a minor adjustment to it. Rather than putting together our own team, let us address the three most successful engineering works in the land. Whichever of them produces the best locomotive will be our contractor. And how about this for an idea? We’ll arrange for them to compete with one another.”



FIRST RAILWAY

The first working locomotive was built in the Island Empire. It served for the transportation of heavy loads in steelworks. By the time the railways came to be used as public transport, the engines were far more modern. One of the best design engineers and makers of locomotives had once been an illiterate shepherd. His most famous locomotive was called Rocket.



