

STORIES BY R.A. LAFFERTY

* indicates outstanding stories
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THE SIX FINGERS OF TIME

He began by breaking things that morning. He broke the glass of water on his night stand. He knocked it crazily against the opposite wall and shattered it. Yet it shattered slowly. This would have surprised him if he had been fully awake, for he had only reached out weakly for it.

Nor had he wakened regularly to his alarm; he had wakened to a weird, slow, low booming, yet the clock said six, time for the alarm. And the low boom, when it came again, seemed to come from the clock.

He reached out and touched it gently, but it floated off the stand at his touch and bounced around slowly on the floor. And when he picked it up again it had stopped, nor would shaking start it.

He checked the electric clock in the kitchen. This also said six o'clock, but the sweep hand did not move. In his living room the radio clock said six, but the second hand seemed stationary.

"But the lights in both rooms work," said Vincent "How are the clocks both stopped? Are the receptacles on a separate circuit?"

He went back to his bedroom and got his wristwatch. It also said six; and its sweep hand did not sweep.

"Now this could get silly. What is it that would stop both mechanical and electrical clocks?"

He went to the window and looked out at the advertising clock on the Mutual Insurance Building. It said six o'clock, and the second hand did not move.

"Well, it is possible that the confusion is not limited to myself. I heard once the fanciful theory that a cold shower will clear the mind. For me it never has, but I will try it. I can always use cleanliness for an excuse."

The shower didn't work. Yes, it did: the water came now, but not like water; like very slow syrup that hung in the air. He reached up to touch it hanging down there and stretching. And it shattered like glass when he touched it, and drifted in fantastic slow globs across the room. But it had the feel of water. It was wet and pleasantly cool. And in a quarter of a minute or so it was down over his shoulders and back, and he luxuriated in it. He let it soak on his noggin, and it cleared his wits at once.

"There is not a thing wrong with me. I am fine. It is not my fault that the water is slow this morning and other things are awry."

He reached for the towel and it tore to pieces in his hands like porous wet paper.

He now became very careful in the way he handled things. Slowly, tenderly and deftly he took them so that they would not break. He shaved himself without mishap in spite of the slow water in the lavatory also.

Then he dressed himself with the greatest caution and cunning, breaking nothing except his shoe laces, and that is likely to happen at any time.

"If there is nothing the matter with me, then I will check and see if there is anything seriously wrong with the world. The dawn was fairly along when I looked out, as it should have been. Approximately twenty minutes have passed; it is a clear morning: the sun should now have hit the top several stories of the Insurance Building."

But it had not. It was still a clear morning, but the dawn had not brightened at all in the twenty minutes. And that big clock still said six. It had not changed.

Yet it had changed, and he knew it with a queer feeling. He pictured it as it had been before. But the sweep second hand had moved. It had swept a third of the dial.

So he pulled up a chair at the window and watched it. He realized that, though he could not see it move, yet it did make progress. He watched it for perhaps five minutes. It moved through a space of perhaps five seconds.

"Well, that is not my problem. It is that of the clock maker, either a terrestrial or a celestial one."

But he left his rooms without a good breakfast, and he left them very early. How did he know that it was early since there was something wrong with the time? Well, it was early at least according to the sun and according to the clocks, neither of which institutions seemed to be working properly.

He left without a good breakfast because the coffee would not make and the bacon would not fry. And in plain point of fact the fire would not heat. The gas flame sprung up from the pilot like a slowly spreading stream or an unfolding flower. Then it burned far too steadily. The skillet remained cold when placed over it; nor would water even heat. It had taken at least five minutes to get the water out of the faucet in the first place.

He ate a few pieces of leftover bread and some scraps of meat.

In the street there was no motion, no real motion. A truck, first seeming at rest, moved very slowly. There was no gear in which it could move so slowly. And there was a taxi which crept along, but Charles Vincent had to look at it carefully for some time to be sure that it was in motion. Then he received a shock. He realized by the early morning light that the driver of it was dead. Dead with his eyes wide open!

Slow as it was going, and by whatever means it was moving, it should really be stopped. Vincent walked over to it, opened the door, and pulled on the brake. Then he looked into the eyes of that dead man. Was he really dead? It was hard to be sure. He felt warm. But, even as Vincent looked, the eyes of the dead man had begun to close. And close they did and open again in a matter of about twenty seconds.

This was weird. The slowly closing and opening eyes sent a chill through Vincent. And the dead man had begun to lean forward in his seat. Vincent put a hand in the middle of the man's chest to hold him upright, but he found the forward pressure to be as relentless as it was slow. He was unable to keep the dead man up.

So he let him go, watching curiously; and in a few seconds the driver's face was against the wheel. But it was almost as if it had no intention of stopping there. It pressed into the wheel with dogged force. The man would surely break his face. Vincent took several holds on the dead man and counteracted the pressure somewhat. Yet the face was being damaged, and if things were normal blood would have flowed.

The man had been dead so long however, that though he was still warm his blood must have congealed, for it was fully two minutes before it began to ooze.

"Whatever I have done, I have done enough damage," said Vincent. "And, in whatever nightmare I am in, I am likely to do further harm if I meddle more. I had better leave it alone."

He walked on down the street. Yet whatever vehicles he saw now were moving with an incredible slowness as though driven by some fantastic gear reduction. And there were people here and there frozen solid. It was a chilly morning, but it was not that cold. They were immobile in positions of motion, as though they were playing the children's game of Statues.

"How is it," said Charles Vincent, "that this young girl, who I believe works across the street from us, should have died standing up and in

full stride? But, no. She is not dead. Or if so she died with a very alert expression. And, oh my God, she's doing it too!"

For he realized that the eyes of the girl were closing, and in a space of a few seconds they had completed their cycle and were open again. Also, and this was even stranger, she had moved, moved forward in full stride. He would have timed her if he could. How could he time her when all the clocks in the world were crazy? Yet she must have been taking about two steps a minute.

Vincent went into the cafeteria. The early morning crowd that he had often watched through the window was there. The girl who made flapjacks in the window had just flipped one and it hung in the air. Then it floated over as though caught by a slight breeze, and sank slowly down as if settling in water.

The early morning breakfasters, like the people in the street, were all dead in this new way, moving with almost imperceptible motion. And all had apparently died in the act of drinking coffee, eating eggs, or munching toast. And if there was only time enough, there was an even chance that they would get the drinking, eating, and munching done with, for there was a shadow of movement in them all.

The cashier had the register drawer open and money in her hand, and the hand of the customer was out-stretched for it. In time, somewhere in the new leisurely time, the hands would come together and the change be given. And so it happened. It may have been a minute and a half, or two minutes, or two and a half. It is always hard to judge time, and now it had become all but impossible.

"I am still hungry," said Charles Vincent, "but it would be foolhardy to wait on the service here. Should I help myself? They would not mind if they are dead. And, if they are not dead, in any case it seems that I am invisible to them."

He wolfed several rolls. He opened a bottle of milk and held it upside-down over his glass while he ate another roll. Liquids had all become so perversely slow.

But he felt better for his erratic breakfast. He would have paid for it, but how?

He left the cafeteria and walked about the town as it seemed still to be quite early, though one could depend on neither sun nor clock for the time any more. The traffic lights were unchanging. He sat for a long time in a little park and watched the town and the big clock in the Commerce Building tower; but like all the clocks it was either stopped or the hand would creep too slowly to be seen.

It must have been just about an hour till the traffic lights changed, but change they did at last. By picking a point on the building across the street and watching what moved by it, he found that the traffic did indeed move. In a minute or so, the entire length of a car would pass a given point.

He had, he recalled, been very far behind in his work, and it had been worrying him. He decided to go to the office, early as it was or seemed to be.

He let himself in. Nobody else was there. He resolved not to look at the clock and to be very careful of the way he handled all objects because of his new propensity for breaking things. This considered, all seemed normal here. He had said the day before that he could hardly catch up on his work if he worked for two days solid. He now resolved at least to work steadily until something happened, whatever it was.

For hour after hour he worked on his tabulations and reports. Nobody else had arrived. Could something be wrong? Certainly something was wrong. But today was not a holiday. That was not it.

Just how long can a stubborn and mystified man work away at his task? It was hour after hour after hour. He did not become hungry nor particularly tired. And he did get through a lot of work.

"It must be half done. However it has happened, I have caught up at least a day's work; I will keep on."

He must have worked silently for another eight or ten hours.

He was caught up completely on his back work.

"Well, to some extent I can work into the future. I can head-up and carry over. I can put in everything but the figures of the field reports."

And he did so.

"It will be hard to bury me in work again. I could almost coast for a day. I don't even know what day it is, but I must have worked twenty hours straight through and nobody has arrived. Perhaps nobody ever will arrive. If they are moving with the speed of the people in the nightmare outside, it is no wonder they have not arrived."

He put his head down in his arms on the desk. The last thing he saw before he closed his eyes was the misshapen left thumb that had always been his and which he had always tried to conceal a little by the way he handled his hands.

"At least I know that I am still myself. I'd know myself anywhere by that."

Then he went to sleep at his desk.

Jenny came in with a quick click-click-click of high heels, and he wakened to the noise.

"What are you doing dozing at your desk, Mr. Vincent? Have you been here all night?"

"I don't know, Jenny. Honestly I don't."

"I was only teasing. Sometimes when I get here a little early I take a catnap myself."

The clock said six minutes till eight, and the second hand was sweeping normally. Time had returned to the world. Or to him. But had all that early morning of his been a dream? Then it had been a very efficient dream. He had accomplished work he could hardly have done in two days. And it was the same day that it was supposed to be.

He went to the water fountain. The water now behaved normally. He went to the window. The traffic was behaving as it should. Though sometimes slow and sometimes snarled, yet it was in the pace of the regular world.

The other workers arrived. They were not balls of fire, but neither was it necessary to observe them for several minutes to be sure that they weren't dead.

"It did have its advantages," Charles Vincent said. "I would be afraid to have it permanently, but it would be handy to go into the state for a few minutes a day and accomplish the business of hours. I may be a case for the doctor. But just how would I go about telling a doctor what was bothering me?"

Now it had surely been less than too hours from his first rising till the time that he wakened from his second sleep to the noise of Jenny. And how long that second sleep had been, or in which time enclave, he had no idea. But how account for it all? He had spent a long time in his own rooms, much longer than ordinary in his confusion. He had walked the city mile after mile in his puzzlement. And he had sat in the little park for hours and studied the situation. And he had sat and worked at his own desk for an outlandish long time.

Well, he would go to the doctor. A man is obliged to refrain from making a fool of himself to the world at large, but to his lawyer, his priest, or his doctor he will sometimes have to come as a fool. By their callings they are restrained from scoffing openly.

He went to the doctor at noon.

Dr. Mason was not particularly a friend. Charles Vincent realized with some unease that he did not have any particular friends, only acquaintances and associates. It was as though he were of a species slightly apart from his fellows. He wished a little now that he had a particular

friend.

But Dr. Mason was an acquaintance of some years, had the reputation of being a good doctor, and besides, Vincent had now arrived at his office and been shown in. He would either have to -- well, that was as good a beginning as any.

"Doctor, I am in a predicament. I will either have to invent some symptoms to account for my visit here, or to make an excuse and bolt, or tell you what is bothering me, even though you will think that I am a new sort of idiot."

"Vincent, every day people invent symptoms to cover their visits here, and I know that they have lost their nerve about their real reason for coming. And every day people do make excuses and bolt. But experience tells me that I will get a larger fee if you tackle the third alternative. And, Vincent, there is no new sort of idiot."

"It may not sound so silly if I tell it quickly," Vincent said. "I awoke this morning to some very puzzling incidents. It seemed that time itself had stopped, or that the whole world had gone into super-slow motion. The water would neither flow nor boil, and the fire would not heat food. The clocks, which I at first believed had stopped, crept along at perhaps a minute an hour. The people I met in the streets appeared dead, frozen in life-like attitudes. It was only by watching them for a very long time that I perceived that they did indeed have motion. One taxi I saw creeping slower than the most backward snail, and a dead man at the wheel of it. I went to it, opened the door, and put on the brake. I realized after a time that the man was not dead. But he bent forward and broke his face on the steering wheel. It must have taken a full minute for his head to travel no more than ten inches, yet I was unable to prevent him from hitting the wheel. I then did other bizarre things in a world that had died on its feet. I walked many miles through the city, and then I sat for countless hours in the park. I went to the office and let myself in. I accomplished work that must have taken me twenty hours. I then took a nap at my desk. When I awoke on the arrival of others it was six minutes till eight in the morning of the same day, today. Not two hours had passed from my rising, and time was back to normal. But there were things that happened in that time that could never be compressed into two hours."

"One question first, Vincent. Did you actually accomplish the work, the work of many hours?"

"I did. It was done and done in that time. It did not become undone on the return of time to normal."

"A second question: had you been worried about your work, about being behind in your work?"

"Yes. Emphatically."

"Then here is one explanation. You retired last night. But very shortly afterward you arose in a state of somnambulism. There are facets of sleep-walking which we do not at all understand. The time-out-of-focus interludes were parts of a walking dream of yours. You dressed and went to your office and worked all night. It is possible to do routine tasks while in a somnambulist state, rapidly and even feverishly, to perform prodigies. You may have fallen into a normal sleep there when you had finished, or you may have been awakened directly from your somnambulist trance on the arrival of your co-workers. There. That is a plausible and workable explanation. In the case of an apparently bizarre happening it is always well to have a rational explanation to fall back on. This will usually satisfy a patient and put his mind to rest. But often the explanation does not satisfy me."

"Your explanation very nearly satisfies me, Dr. Mason, and it does put my mind considerably at rest. I am sure that in a short while I will be able to accept it completely. But why does it not satisfy you?"

"One reason is a man, a taxi-driver, whom I treated very early this morning. He had his face smashed, and he had seen -- or almost seen -- a

ghost: a ghost of in credible swiftness that was more sensed than seen. The ghost opened the door of his car while it was going a full speed, jerked on the brake, and caused him to crack his head. This man was dazed and had a slight concussion. I have convinced him that he did not see an ghost at all, that he must have dozed at the wheel and run into something. As I say, I am harder to convince than my patients. But it may have been coincidence.

"I hope so. But you also seem to have another reservation as to my case.

"After quite a few years in practice, I seldom see or hear anything new. Twice before I have been told a happening or a dream on the line of what you experienced."

"Did you convince your other patients that they were only dreams?"

"I did. Both of them. That is, I convinced them the first few times it happened to them."

"Were they satisfied?"

"At first they were. Later not entirely. But they both died within a year of their coming to me.

"Of nothing violent, I hope."

"Both had the most gentle deaths. That of senility extreme."

"Oh. Well I'm too young for that."

"Vincent, I would like you to come back in a month or so."

"I will, if the delusion or the dream returns. Or if I do not feel well."

After this Charles Vincent began to forget about the incident. He only recalled it with humor sometimes when again he was behind in his work.

"Well, if it gets bad enough I may do another sleepwalking jag and catch up. But if there is another aspect of time and I could enter it at will, it might often be handy."

Charles Vincent never saw the man's face at all. It is very dark in some of those clubs and the Coq Bleu is like the inside of a tomb. Vincent went to the clubs only about once a month, sometimes after a show when he did not want to go home to bed, sometimes when he was just plain restless.

Citizens of the more fortunate states may not know of the mysteries of the clubs. In Vincent's the only bars are beer bars, and only in the clubs can a person get a drink, and only members are admitted. It is true that a small club as the Coq Bleu had thirty thousand members, and at a dollar a year this is a nice sideline. The little numbered membership cards cost a penny each for the printing, and the member wrote in his own name. But he was supposed to have a card or a dollar for a card to gain admittance.

But there could be no entertainment in the clubs. There was nothing there but the little bar room in the near darkness. The near darkness of the clubs was custom only but it had the force of the law.

The man was there, and then he was not, and then he was there again. And always where he sat it was too dark to see his face.

"I wonder," he said to Vincent (or to the bar at large, though there were no other customers and the bartender was asleep). "I wonder if you have read Zubarin on the relationship of extradigitalism to genius?"

"I have never heard of the work nor of the man," said Vincent. "Doubt if either exist."

"I am Zubarin." said the man.

Vincent instinctively hid his misshapen left thumb. Yet it could not have been noticed in that light, and he must have been crazy to believe that there was any connection between it and the man's remark. It was not truly a double thumb. He was not an extradigital, nor was he a genius.

"I refuse to become interested in you," said Vincent. "I am on the verge of leaving. I dislike waking the bartender, but I did want another drink."

"Sooner done than said."

"What is?"

"Your glass is full."

"It is? So it is. Is it a trick?"

"Trick is a name for anything either too frivolous or too mystifying for us to comprehend. But on one long early morning a month ago you also could have done the trick, and nearly as well."

"Could I have? How do you know about my long early morning -- assuming there to have been such?"

"I watched you for a while. Few others have the equipment with which to watch you when you're in the aspect."

So they were silent for some time, and Vincent watched the clock and was ready to go.

"I wonder," said the man in the dark, "if you have read Schimmelpenninck on the sexagintal and the duodecimal in the Chaldee Mysteries."

"I have not, and I doubt if anyone else has. I would guess that you are also Schimmelpenninck, and that you have just made up the name on the spur of the moment."

"I am Schimm, it is true, but I made up the name on the spur of the moment many years ago."

"I am a little bored with you," said Vincent, "but I would appreciate it if you'd do your glass-filling trick once more."

"I have just done so again. And you are not bored; you are frightened."

"Of what?" asked Vincent, whose glass had in fact filled again.

"Of reentering a dream that you are not sure was a dream. But there are often advantages to being both invisible and inaudible."

"Can you be invisible?"

"Was I not so when I went behind the bar just now and fixed you a drink?"

"How?"

"A man in full stride goes at the rate of about five miles an hour. Multiply that by sixty, which is the number of time. When I leave my stool and go behind the bar I go at the rate of three hundred miles an hour. So I am invisible to you, particularly if I move while you blink."

"One thing does not match. You might have got around there and back. But you could not have poured."

"Shall I say that mastery over liquids and other objects is not given to beginners? But for us there are many ways to outwit the slowness of matter."

"I believe that you are a hoaxer. Do you know Dr. Mason?"

"I know of him, and that you went to see him. I know of his futile attempts to penetrate a certain mystery. But I have not talked to him of you."

"I still believe that you are a phony. Could you put me back into the state of my dream of a month ago?"

"It was not a dream. But I could put you again into that state."

"Prove it."

"Watch the clock. Do you believe that I can point my finger at it and stop it for you? It is already stopped for me."

"No, I don't believe it. Yes, I guess I have to, since I see that you have just done it. But it may be another trick. I don't know where the clock is plugged in."

"Neither do I. Come to the door. Look at every clock you can see. Are they not all stopped?"

"Yes. Maybe the power has gone off all over town."

"You know it has not. There are still a few lighted windows in those buildings, though it is quite late."

"Why are you playing with me? I am neither on the inside nor the outside. Either tell me the secret or say that you will not tell me."

"The secret isn't a simple one. It can only be arrived at after all philosophy and learning has been assimilated."

"One man cannot arrive at that in one lifetime."

"Not in an ordinary lifetime. But the secret of the secret, if I may put it that way, is that one must use part of it as a tool in learning. You could not learn all in one lifetime but, by being permitted the first step, to be able to read, say, sixty books in the time it took you to read one, to pause for a minute in thought and use up only one second, to get the day's work accomplished in eight minutes and so have time for other things -- by such ways one may make a beginning. I will warn you, though. Even for the most intelligent it is a race."

"A race? What race?"

"It is a race between success, which is life, and failure, which is death."

"Let us skip the melodrama. But how do I get into the state and out of it?"

"Oh, that is simple, so easy that it seems like a gadget. Here are two diagrams I will draw. Note them carefully. This first -- invision it in your mind, and you are in the state. Now the second one -- invision, and you are out of it."

"That easy?"

"That deceptively easy. The trick is to learn why it works -- if you want to succeed, meaning to live."

So Charles Vincent left him and went home, walking the mile in a little less than fifteen seconds. But he still had not seen the face of the man.

There are advantages intellectual, monetary, and amorous in being able to enter the accelerated state at will. It is a fox game. One must be careful not to be caught at it, nor to break or harm that which is in the normal state.

Vincent could always find eight or ten minutes unobserved to accomplish the day's work. And a fifteen-minute coffee break could turn into a fifteen hour romp around the town.

There was this boyish pleasure in becoming a ghost: to appear and stand motionless in front of an onrushing train and to cause the scream of the whistle, and to be in no danger, being able to move five or ten times as fast as the train; to enter and to sit suddenly in the middle of a select group and see them stare, and then virtually to disappear from the middle of them; to interfere in sports and games, entering the prize ring and tripping, hampering, or slugging the unliked fighter; to blue-shot down the hockey ice, skating at fifteen hundred miles an hour and scoring dozens of goals at either end while the people only know that something odd is happening.

There is pleasure in being able to shatter windows by chanting little songs, for the voice (when in the state) will be to the world at sixty times its regular pitch, though normal to oneself. And for this reason also he was inaudible to others.

There was fun in petty thieving and tricks. He could take a wallet from a man's pocket and be two blocks away when the victim turned at the feel. He could come back and stuff it into the man's mouth as he bleated to a policeman.

He could come into the home of a lady writing a letter, snatch up the paper and write three lines on it and vanish before the scream got out of her throat.

He could take shoe and sock off a man's foot while he was in full stride. No human face since the beginning of time ever showed such a look of pure astonishment as that of the man to whom this first happened. Discovering oneself half barefoot of a sudden in a crowded street has no parallel in all experience.

Vincent could paint the eyeglasses of a man dark green, and this would somehow alter the man's whole personality. He'd gulp and wave his arms and develop new mannerisms. Or as a victim took the first puff of a cigarette Vincent would take it from his mouth, smoke it quickly down to the hot nub, and replace it.

He would take food off forks on the way to mouths, put baby turtles and live fish into bowls of soup between spoonfuls of the eater. And, as a cook cracked an egg over the griddle, he would scoop up the soft contents in mid-air and set down a full-grown quacking duck to the discomfort of both cook and bird.

He would lash the hands of hand-shakers tightly together with stout cord, and tie together the shoe laces of dancing partners. Or he would remove the strings of guitars while they were being played, or steal the mouthpiece of a horn while the operator paused for breath. He unzipped persons of both sexes when they were at their most pompous, and it was on his account (probably) that Feldman was not elected mayor. This was something that happened on the public platform, and Feldman was completely undone.

This thing can remain a pleasant novelty for some time. There was, of course, the difficulty of moving large objects. Vincent always wanted to intrude a horse into the midst of a certain assembly. But a horse is too large to be moved in an accelerated time. Vincent drew out the diagram that the faceless man had given him, and presented it to the only horse he knew. But the horse did not get the idea. It would not go into the accelerated state.

"I will either have to find a smarter horse or a new method of moving heavy objects," said Charles Vincent.

Vincent would sometimes handcuff two strangers together as they stood waiting for a traffic light to change. He would lash leaners to lamp posts, and steal the teeth from the mouths of those afflicted with dentures.

He would write cryptic and frightening messages in grease pencil on a plate just as a diner began to fill it. He changed cards from one player's hands to another's while play was in progress, and he interfered perversely with billiard balls.

He removed golf balls from tees during the back swing, and left notes written large "YOU MISSED ME" pinned to the ground with the tee.

He stole baseballs from catchers' mitts at the instant of impact, and left instead small unfledged live sparrows. It was found that there is nothing in the rule book to cover this.

Or he shaved moustaches and heads. Returning repeatedly to one woman he disliked, he clipped her bald and gilded her pate.

With tellers counting their money he interfered outrageously and enriched himself. He snipped cigarettes in two with a scissors and blew out matches and lighters, so that one frustrated man actually broke down and cried at his inability to get a light.

He removed the weapons from the holsters of policemen and put cap pistols and water guns in their places. And he liked to rip off one sleeve only from the coat of a walking gentleman. There is something funnier about one sleeve missing than two.

He unclipped the leashes of dogs and substituted little toy dogs rolling on wheels. He put frogs in water glasses and left lighted firecrackers on bridge tables. He reset wristwatches on wrists; and played cruel tricks in mens' rooms, causing honest gentleman to wet themselves.

"I was always a boy at heart," said Charles Vincent.

Also during those first few days of the controlled new state, he established himself materially, acquiring wealth by devious ways, and opening bank accounts in various cities under various names, against a time of possible need.

Nor did he ever feel any shame for the tricks that he played on

unaccelerated humanity. For the people, when he was in the state, were as statues to him, hardly living, barely moving, unseeing, unhearing. And it is no shame to show disrespect to such comical statues.

And also, and again because he was a boy at heart, he had fun with the girls.

"I am one mass of black and blue marks," said Jenny one day. "My lips are sore and my front teeth are loosened. I don't know what in the world is the matter with me."

Yet he had not meant to bruise or harm her. He was rather fond of her and he resolved to be much more careful. Yet it was fun, when he was in the state and so invisible to her because of his speed, to kiss her here and there in out-of-the-way places and show her other hallmarks of affection. She made a nice statue and it was good sport. And there were others.

"You look suddenly older," said one of his co-workers one day. "Are you taking care of yourself? Are you worried?"

"I am not," said Vincent. "I was never happier in my life."

But now there was time for so many things, in fact, everything. There was no reason why he could not master anything in the world, when he could take off for fifteen minutes and gain fifteen hours. Vincent was a rapid but careful reader. He could now read from a hundred and twenty to two hundred books in an evening and night; and he slept in an accelerated state and could get a full night's sleep in eight minutes.

He first acquired a knowledge of the languages. A quite extensive reading knowledge of a language can be acquired in three hundred hours of world time, or three hundred minutes (five hours) of accelerated time. And if one takes the tongues in order, from the most familiar to the most remote, there is no real difficulty. He acquired fifty for a starter, and could always add another any evening that he found he had a need for it.

And at the same time he began to assemble and consolidate knowledge. Of literature, properly speaking, there are no more than ten thousand books that are really worth reading and falling in love with. These were gone through with high pleasure, and two or three thousand of them were important enough to be reserved for future rereading.

History, however, is very uneven. It is necessary to read texts and sources that for form are not worth reading. And the same with philosophy. Mathematics and science, pure or physical, could not, of course, be covered with the same speed. Yet, with time available, all could be mastered. There is no concept ever expressed by any human mind that cannot be comprehended by any other normal human mind, if time is available, and if it is taken in the proper order and context and with the proper preparatory work.

And often, and now more often, Vincent felt that he was touching the fingers of the secret. And always, when he came near it it had a little bit of the smell of the Pit.

For he had pegged out all the main points of the history of man, or rather most of the tenable, or at least possible theories of the history of man. It was hard to hold the main line of it: that double road of rationality and revelation that should lead always to a fuller and fuller development, to an unfolding and growth and perfectibility. Sometimes he felt that he was trespassing on the history of something other than man.

For the main line of the account was often obscure and all but obliterated, and traced through fog and miasma. Vincent had accepted the Fall of Man and the Redemption as the cardinal points of history. But he began to feel now that neither had happened only once, that both were of constant recurrence; that there was a hand reaching up from that old Pit with its shadow over man. And he came to picture that hand in his dreams -- for his dreams were especially vivid when in the state -- as a six-digitated monster reaching out. He began to realize that the thing he was caught in was dangerous and deadly.

Very dangerous.

Very deadly.

One of the weird books that he often returned to and which continually puzzled him was *The Relationship of Extradigitalism to Genius*, written by the man whose face he had never seen, in one of his manifestations.

It promised more than it delivered, and it intimated more than it said. Its theory was tedious and tenuous, holstered with undigested mountains of doubtful data. It left Vincent unconvinced that persons of genius -- even if it could be agreed who or what they were -- had often the oddity of extra fingers or toes, or the vestiges of them. And it puzzled him what possible difference it could make.

Yet there were hints here of a Corsican who commonly kept a hand hidden; of an earlier and more bizarre commander who always wore a mailed glove; of another man with a glove between the two; hints that the multiplex adept, Leonardo himself, who sometimes drew the hands of men and more often those of monsters with six fingers, had had the touch. There was a comment on Caesar, not conclusive, to the same effect.

It is known that Alexander had a minor deformity. It is not known what it was. This man made it seem that this was it. And it was averred of Gregory and Augustine, of Benedict and Albert and Aquinas. Yet a man with a deformity could not enter the priesthood; if they had it, it must have been in vestigial form.

There were cases for Charles Magnus and Mahmud, for Saladin the horseman and for Akhnaton the king; for Homer -- a Seleucid-Greek statuette shows him with six fingers strumming an unidentified instrument while reciting; cases for Pythagoras, for Buonottoti, Santi, Theotokopolous, van Bijn, Robusti. And going farther back in time, and less subject to proof, they became much more numerous.

Zurbarin cataloged eight thousand of them. He maintained that they were geniuses. And that they were extra digitals.

Charles Vincent grinned and looked down at his misshapen or double thumb.

"At least I am in good though monotonous company. But what in the name of triple time is he driving at?"

And it was not long afterward that Vincent was examining cuneiform tablets in State Museum. These were a broken and not continuous series on the theory of numbers, tolerably legible to the now encyclopedic Charles Vincent. And the series read in part:

On the divergence of the basis itself and the confusion caused by -- for it is Five, or it is Six, or Ten or Twelve, or Sixty or One Hundred, or Three hundred and Sixty or the Double Hundred, the Thousand. The reason, not clearly understood by the People, is that Six and the Dozen are First, and Sixty is a compromise in condescending to the people.

For the Five, the Ten are late, and are no older than the People themselves. It is said, and credited, that the People began to count by Fives and Tens from the number of fingers on their hands. But before the People the --, for the reason that they had --, counted by Sixes and Twelves. But Sixty is the number of time, divisible by both, for both must live together in Time, though not on the same plane of time --

Much of the rest was scattered. It was while trying to set the hundreds of unordered clay tablets in proper sequence that Charles Vincent created the legend of the ghost in the museum.

For he spent his multi-hundred-hour nights there studying and classifying. Naturally he could not work without light, and naturally he could be seen when he sat still at his studies. But as the slow-moving guards attempted to close in on him, he would move to avoid them, and his speed made him invisible to them. They were a nuisance and had to be

discouraged. He belabored them soundly and they became less eager to try to capture him.

His only fear was that they would sometime try to shoot him to see if he were ghost or human. He could avoid a seen shot which would come at no more than two and a half times his own greatest speed. But an unperceived shot could penetrate dangerously, even fatally, before he twisted away from it.

Vincent had fathered legends of other ghosts, that of the Central Library, that of the University Library, that of the John Charles Underwood Jr. Technical Library. This plurality of ghosts tended to cancel out each other and bring believers into ridicule. Even those who had seen him as a ghost did not admit that they believed in ghosts.

Charles Vincent had gone back to Dr. Mason for his monthly checkup.

"You look terrible," said the doctor. "Whatever it is, you have changed. If you have the means you should, take a long rest."

"I have the means, said Vincent, "and that is just what I will do. I'll take a rest for a year or two."

He had begun to begrudge the time that he must spend at the world's pace. From this time on he was regarded as a recluse. He was silent and unsociable, for he found it a nuisance to come back to the common state to engage in conversation, and in his special state the voices were too slow-pitched to intrude on his consciousness.

Except that of the man whose face he had never seen.

"You are making very tardy progress," said the man. Once more they were in a dark club. "Those who do not show more progress we cannot use. After all, you are only a vestigial. It is probable that you have very little of the ancient race in you. Fortunately those who do not progress destroy themselves. You had not imagined that there were only two phases of time, had you?"

"Lately I have come to suspect that there are many more," said Charles Vincent.

"And you understand that one step only cannot succeed?"

"I understand that the life that I have been living is in direct violation of all that we know of the laws of mass, momentum and acceleration, as well as those of conservation of energy, the potential of the human person, the moral compensation, the golden mean, and the capacity of human organs. I know that I cannot multiply energy and experience sixty times without increase of food intake, and yet I do it. I know that I cannot live on eight minutes of sleep in twenty-four hours, but I do that also. I know that I cannot reasonably crowd four thousand years of experience into one life time, yet unreasonably I do not see what will prevent it. But you say that I will destroy myself?"

"Those who take only the first step will destroy themselves."

"And how does one take the second step?"

"At the proper moment you will be given the choice."

"I have the most uncanny feeling that I will refuse the choice."

"Yes from present indications you will refuse it. You are fastidious."

"You have a smell about you, Old Man Without a Face. I know now what it is. It is the smell of the Pit."

"Are you so slow to learn that? But that is its name."

"It is the mud from the Pit, the same from which the clay tablets were found, from the old land between the rivers. I've dreamed of the six-fingered hand reaching up from that Pit and overshadowing us all. From that slime!"

"Do not forget that according to another recension Another made the People from that same slime."

"And I have read, Old Man: 'The People first counted by Fives and Tens from the number of fingers on their hands. Put before the People the

--, for the reason that they had --, counted by Sixes and Twelve, But time has left blanks on those tablets."

"Yes. Time, in one of its manifestations, has deftly and with a purpose left those blanks."

"I cannot discover the name of the thing that goes into one of those blanks. Can you?"

"I am part of the name that goes into one of those blanks."

"And you are the Man without a Face. But why is it that you overshadow and control people? And to what purpose?"

"It will be long before you know those answers."

"When the choice comes to me, it will bear very careful weighing. But tell me, Man without a Face who comes from the Pit, are not pits and men without faces very nineteenth-century Gothic?"

"There was a temper in that century that came very close to uncovering us."

After that a chill descended on the life of Charles Vincent, for all that he still possessed his exceptional powers. And now he seldom indulged in pranks.

Except with Jennifer Parkey.

It was unusual that he should be drawn to her. He knew her only slightly in the common world, and she was at least fifteen years his senior. But she now appealed to him for her youthful qualities, and all his pranks with her were gentle ones.

For one thing this spinster did not frighten, nor did she begin the precaution of locking her doors, never having bothered with such things before. He would come behind her and stroke her hair, and she would speak out calmly with that sort of quickening in her voice:

"Who are you? Why won't you let me see you? You are a friend, aren't you? Are you a man, or are you something else? If you can caress me why can't you talk to me? Please let me see you. I promise I won't hurt you."

It was as though she could not imagine that anything strange would hurt her. Or again when he hugged her or kissed her on the nape, she would call: "You must be a little boy, or very like a little boy, whoever you are. You are good not to break my things when you move about. Come here and let me hold you."

It is only very good people who have no fear at all of the unknown.

When Vincent met Jennifer in the regular world, as he now more often found occasion to do, she looked at him apprisingly, as though she guessed some sort of connection.

She said one day, "I know it is an impolite thing to say, but you do not look well at all. Have you been to a doctor?"

"Several times. But I think it is my doctor who should go to a doctor. He was always given to peculiar remarks. But now he is becoming a little unsettled."

"If I were your doctor, I believe that I would also become a little unsettled. But you should find out what is wrong. You look terrible."

He did not look terrible. He had lost his hair, it is true, but many men lose their hair by thirty, though not perhaps as suddenly as he had. He thought of attributing it to air resistance. After all, when he was in the state he did stride at some three hundred miles an hour. And enough of that is likely to blow the hair right off your head. And might that not also be the reason for his worsening complexion and the tired look that appeared in his eyes? But he knew that this was nonsense. He felt no more air pressure when in his accelerated state than when in his normal state.

He had received his summons. He chose not to answer it. He did not want to be presented with the choice; he had no wish to be one with those in the Pit. But he had no intention of giving up the great advantage which he now held over nature.

"I will have it both ways," he said. "I am already a contradiction

and an impossibility. 'You can't have your confection and eat it too.' The proverb was only the early statement of the law of moral compensation. 'You can't take more out of a basket than it holds.' But for a long time I have been in violation of the laws and the balances. 'There is no road without a turning,' 'Those who dance will have to pay the fiddler,' 'Everything that goes up comes down.' But are proverbs really universal laws? Certainly. A sound proverb has the force of universal law, is but another statement of it. But I have contradicted the universal laws. It remains to be seen whether I have contradicted them with impunity.

"'Every action has its reaction.' If I refuse to deal with them, I will provoke a strong reaction. The Man without a Face said that it was always a race between full knowing and destruction. Very well, I will race them for it."

They began to persecute him then. He knew that they were in a state as accelerated from his as his was from the normal. To them he was the almost motionless statue, hardly to be told from a dead man. To him they were by their speed both invisible and inaudible. They hurt him and haunted him. But still he would not answer their summons.

When the meeting took place, it was they who had to come to him, and they materialized there in his room, men without faces.

"The choice," said one. "Well, you force us to be so clumsy as to have to voice it."

"I will have no part of you," said Charles Vincent. "You all smell of the Pit, of that old mud of the cuneiforms of the land between the rivers, of the people who were before the People."

"It has endured a long time," one of them said, "and we consider it as enduring forever. But the Garden, which was quite in the neighborhood -- do you know how long the Garden lasted?"

"I don't know."

"Not even a day. It all happened in a single day, and before nightfall they were outside. You want to throw in with something more permanent, don't you?"

"No. I don't believe that I do."

"What have you to lose?"

"Only my hope of eternity."

"But you don't believe in that. No man has ever really believed in eternity."

"No man has ever either entirely believed or entirely disbelieved in it," said Charles Vincent.

"At least it can never be proved," said one of the faceless men. "Nothing is proved until it is over with. And in this case, if it is ever over with, then it is disproved. And all that time would one not be tempted to wonder 'What if, after all, it ends in the next minute?'"

"I imagine, if we survive the flesh, we will receive some sort of surety," said Vincent.

"But you are not sure either of surviving or receiving, nor could you accept the surety as sure. Now we have a very close approximation of eternity. When Time is multiplied by itself, and that repeated again and again, does that not approximate eternity?"

"I don't believe that it does. But I will not be of you. One of you has said that I am too fastidious. So now will you say that you'll destroy me?"

"No. we will only let you be destroyed. By yourself, you cannot win the race with destruction."

After that Charles Vincent somehow felt more mature. He knew he was not really meant to be a poltergeist or a six-fingered thing out of the Pit. He knew that in some way he would have to pay for every minute and hour that he had gained. But what he had gained he would use to the fullest. And whatever could be accomplished by sheer acquisition of human knowledge, he

would try to accomplish.

And he now startled Dr. Mason by the medical knowledge he had picked up, the while the doctor amused him by the concern he showed for Vincent. For he felt fine. He was perhaps not as active as he had been, but that was only because he had become dubious of aimless activities. He was still the ghost of the libraries and museums, but was puzzled that the published reports intimated that an old ghost had replaced a young one.

He now paid his mystic visits to Jennifer Parkey less often. For he was always dismayed to hear her exclaim to him in his ghostly form, "Your touch is so changed. You poor thing! Is there anything at all I can do to help you?"

He decided that somehow she was too immature to ever understand him, though he was still fond of her. He transferred his affections to Mrs. Milly Maitby, a widow at least thirty years his senior. Yet here it was a sort of girlishness in her that appealed to him. She was a woman of sharp wit and real affection, and she also accepted his visitations without fear, following a little initial panic.

They played games, writing games, for they communicated by writing. Milly would scribble a line, then hold the paper up in the air whence he would cause it to vanish into his sphere. He would return it in half a minute, or half a second of her time, with his retort. He had the advantage of her in time with greatly more opportunity to think up responses, but she had the advantage over him in natural wit and was hard to top.

They also played checkers, and he often had to retire apart and read a chapter of a book on the art between moves; and even so she often beat him. For natural talent is likely to be a match for accumulated lore and codified procedure.

But to Milly also he was unfaithful in his fashion, being now interested -- he no longer became enamored or entranced -- in a Mrs. Roberts, a great-grandmother who was his elder by at least fifty years. He had read all the data extant on the attraction of the old for the young, but he still could not explain his successive attachments. He decided that these three examples were enough to establish a universal law: that a woman is simply not afraid of a ghost, though he touches her and is invisible, and writes her notes without hands. It is possible that amorous spirits have known this for a long time, but Charles Vincent had made the discovery himself independently.

When enough knowledge is accumulated on any subject, the pattern will sometimes emerge suddenly, like a form in a picture revealed where before it was not seen. And when enough knowledge is accumulated on all subjects, is there not a chance that a pattern governing all subjects will emerge?

Charles Vincent was caught up in his last enthusiasm. On one long vigil, as he consulted source after source and sorted them in his mind, it seemed that the pattern was coming out clearly and simply, for all its amazing complexity of detail.

"I know all that they know in the Pit," said Vincent, "and I know a secret that they do not know. I have not lost the race -- I have won it. I can defeat them at the point where they believe themselves invulnerable. If controlled hereafter, we need at least not be controlled by them. It is all falling together now. I have found the final truth and it is they who have lost the race. I hold the key. I will now be able to enjoy the advantage without paying the ultimate price of defeat and destruction, or of collaborating with them.

"Now I have only to implement my knowledge, to publish the fact, and one shadow at least will be lifted from mankind. I will do it at once. Well, nearly at once. It is almost dawn in the normal world. I will sit here a very little while and rest. Then I will go out and begin to make contact with the proper persons for the disposition of this thing. But first I will sit here a little while and rest."

And he died quietly in his chair as he sat there.

Dr. Mason made an entry in his private journal:

Charles Vincent, a completely authenticated case of premature aging, one of the most clear-cut in all gerontology. This man was known to me for many years, and I here aver that as of one year ago he was of normal appearance and physical state, and that his chronology is also correct, I having also known his father. I examined the subject during the period of his illness, and there is no question at all of his identity, which has also been established for the record by fingerprinting and other means. I aver that Charles Vincent at the age of thirty is dead of old age, having the appearance and organic state of a man of ninety.

Then the doctor began to make other notes: "As in two other cases of my own observation, the illness was accompanied by a certain delusion and series of dreams, so nearly identical in all three men as to be almost unbelievable. And for the record, and no doubt to the prejudice of my own reputation, I will set down the report of them here."

But when Dr. Mason had written that, he thought about it for a while.

"No, I will do no such thing," he said, and he struck out the last lines he had written. "It is best to let sleeping dragons lie."

And somewhere the faceless men with the smell of the Pit on them smiled to themselves in quiet irony.

ADAM HAD THREE BROTHERS

In the town there are many races living; each in its own enclave, some of many square miles, some of a few acres only, some of but one or two streets. Its geographers say that it has more Italians than Rome, more Irish than Dublin, more Jews than Israel, more Armenians than Yerevan.

But this overlooks the most important race of all. There is the further fact (known only to the more intense geographers): it has more Rrequesenians than any town in the world. There are more than a hundred of them.

By the vulgar the Rrequesenians are called Wrecks, and their quarter is Wreckville. And there is this that can be said of them that cannot be said of any other race on earth: Every one of them is a genius.

These people are unique. They are not Gypsies, though they are often taken for them. They are not Semites. They are not even children of Adam.

Willy McGilley, the oldest of the Wrecks (they now use Gentile names) has an old baked tablet made of straw and pressed sheep dung that is eight thousand years old and gives the true story of their origin. Adam had three brothers: Etienne, Yancy, and Rreq. Etienne and Yancy were bachelors. Rreq had a small family and all his issue have had small families; until now there are about two hundred of them in all, the most who have ever been in the world at one time. They have never intermarried with the children of Adam except once. And not being of the same recension they are not under the same curse to work for a living.

So they do not.

Instead they batten on the children of Adam by clever devices that are known in police court as swindles.

Catherine O'Conneley by ordinary standards would be reckoned as the most beautiful of the Wrecks. By at least three dozen men she was considered the most beautiful girl in the world. But by Wreckian standards she was plain. Her nose was too small, only a little larger than that of ordinary women; and she was skinny as a crow, being on the slight side of a hundred and sixty. Being beautiful only by worldly standards she was reduced even more than the rest of them to living by her wits and charms.

She was a show girl and a bar girl. She gave piano lessons and drawing lessons and tap-dancing lessons. She told fortunes and sold oriental rugs and junk jewelry, and kept company with lonely old rich men. She was able to do all these things because she was one bundle of energy.

She had no family except a number of unmarried uncles, the six Petapolis brothers, the three Petersens, the five Calderons, the four Oskamans; and Charley O'Malley, nineteen in all.

Now it was early morning and a lady knocked at her door.

"The oil stock is no good. I checked and the place would be three hundred miles out to sea and three miles down. My brother says I've been took."

"Possibly your brother isn't up on the latest developments in offshore drilling. We have the richest undeveloped field in the world and virtually no competition. I can promise we will have any number of gushers within a week. And if your brother has any money I can still let him have stock till noon today at a hundred and seventy-five dollars a share."

"But I only paid twenty-five a share for mine."

"See how fast it has gone up in only two days. What other stock rises so fast?"

"Well all right, I'll go tell him."

There was another knock on the door.

"My little girl take piano lessons for six weeks and all she can play is da da da."

"Good. It is better to learn one note thoroughly than just a little bit of all of them. She is not ready for the other notes yet. But I can tell you this: she is the most intelligent little girl I have ever seen in my life and I believe she has a positive genius for the piano. I truly believe she will blossom all at once and one of these days she will be playing complete symphonies."

You really think so?"

I do indeed."

"Well then I will pay you for six more weeks, but I do wish she could play more than da da da."

There was another knock at the door.

"Honey Bun, there was something wrong. I give you ten dollars to bet on Summertime in the first race at Marine Park; you say it's a sure thing and fifty to one. But now I find there isn't any such track as Marine Park and nobody ever heard of the horse. Huh, Honey Bun? What you do to your best boy friend?"

"O, we use code names. What if all these hot tips ever got out? Summertime of course was Long Day and Marine Park was Jamaica. And he only lost by about six noses. Wasn't that good for a fifty to one? And now I have an even better tip. It's so hot I can't even tell you the name of the horse, but I feel sure that twenty would get you a thousand."

"All the time I give you money but never I win yet, Honey Bun. Now you give a little kiss and we talk about another bet."

"I had surely thought our attachment was on a higher plane."

"Words, Honey Bun, always words. But you give, um, um, urn, that's good. Now I bet again, but I bet I better win someday."

There was another knock on the door.

"How come you let my brother-in-law in on a good thing and never tell me? For a hundred he'll have two hundred and fifty in a week, and you never tell me, and I'm your friend and never persecute you when you don't pay your bill."

So she had to give her caller the same deal she had given his brother-in-law.

After that she went out to take the game out of her traps. She had set and baited them some days before. She had gone to see five hundred people, which took quite a while even for one with her excess of energy. And to each she said this:

"I have just discovered that I have an infallible gift of picking winners. Now I want you to give it a test. Here is a sure winner I have picked. I ask you bet it, not with me, not with one of my uncles, but with a bookie of your own choice. I prefer not to know with whom you bet."

Of the five hundred there were a hundred and forty-four winners, very good. So the next day she went to the hundred and forty-four with even more assurance and offered them the same proposition again. And of the hundred and forty-four there were fifty-six winners. Very good, for she really could pick them.

To these fifty-six she went the third day and offered them the third sure bet free. And incredibly of the fifty-six there were nineteen winners.

This was repeated the next day, and of the nineteen there were seven winners.

Now she went to talk money. The seven lucky clients could not deny that she indeed had the gift of picking winners. She had given them all four straight in four days and her secret should surely be worth money. Besides, they had all let their bets ride and they had won a lot, an average of more than six hundred dollars.

But she would give no more free tips. She would only sell her complete and exclusive secret for a thousand dollars. And she collected from six of them. The seventh was Mazuma O'Shaunessey.

"I have given you four straight winners, but I cannot give you any more free tips. We will now talk cold turkey."

"I put it in a basket, Katie."

"Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"I learned it in my cradle. The Inverted Pyramid. You tapped five hundred, and you got besides me how many? Five?"

"Six besides you, seven in all."

"Very good. You pick them nice for a little girl. But isn't that a lot of work for no more than a hatful of money?"

"Six thousand dollars is a large hatful. And there is always one smart alec like you who knows it all."

"Now Kate dear, let's look at it this way. I can really pick all the winners, not seven straights in five hundred, but all five hundred if I wished."

"O hah, you can't fool this little-goose."

"O, I could prove it easily enough, but that's showy and I hate to be a show-off. So I suggest that you take my word for it and share my secret with me and give up this penny ante stuff."

"And all you want for your sure thing secret is five thousand dollars or so?"

"Why Kate, I don't want your money. I have so much that it's a burden to me. I only want to marry you."

She looked at him and she was not sure. O, not about marrying him, he was nice enough. She was not sure, she had never been sure, that he was a Wreck.

"Are you?"

"Why Kate, does one Wreck have to ask another that question?"

"I guess not. I'll go ask my uncles what they think. This is something of a decision."

She went to see all her bachelor uncles and asked them what they knew about Mazuma O'Shaunessey.

He was known to all of them.

"He is a competent boy, Kate," said Demetrio Petapolis. "If I do not

miscount I once came out a little short on a deal with him. He knows the Virginia City Version, he knows the old Seven-Three-Three, he can do the Professor and His Dog, and the Little Audrey. And he seems to be quite rich. But is he?"

He meant, not is he rich, but -- is he a Wreck?

"Does one Wreck have to ask another that question?" said Kate.

"No, I guess not."

Hodl Oskanian knew him too.

"That boy is real cute. It seems in the last deal I had with him he came out a little ahead. It seems that in every deal I have with him he comes out a little ahead. He knows the Denver Deal and the Chicago Cut. He does the Little Old Lady and the Blue Hat. He knows the Silver Lining and the Doghouse and the Double Doghouse. And he seems quite likeable. But is he?"

He meant, not was he likeable, but -- was he a Wreck?

"Cannot one Wreck always tell another?" said Kate loftily.

Lars Petersen knew Mazuma too.

"He is a klog pog. He knows the Oslo Puds and the Copenhagen Streg. He knows the Farmer's Wife and the Little Black Dog. He can do the Seventy-Three and the Supper Club. And he runs more tricks with the Sleepy River than anyone I ever saw, and has three different versions of the Raft and four of Down the Smoke Stack. And all the officers on the bilk squad give him half their pay every week to invest for them, He seems quite smart. But is he?"

He meant, not was he smart, but -- is he a Wreck?

"Should one have to ask?" said Kate haughtily.

Her uncle Charley O'Malley also thought well of Mazuma.

"I am not sure but that at last count he was a raol or so ahead of me. He knows the Blue Eyed Drover and the Black Cow. He can do the Brandy Snifter with the best of them, and he isn't bashful with the Snake Doctor. He does a neat variation of the Bottom of the Barrel. He can work the Yellow Glove and the Glastonburry Giveaway. And he seems affable and urbane. But is he?"

He meant, not was he affable and urbane (he was), but -- is he a Wreck? Ah, that was the question.

"How can you even ask?" said Kate.

So they were married and began one of the famous love affairs of the century. It went on for four years and each day brought new high adventure. They purged for the good of his soul a Dayton industrialist of an excessive sum of cash and thus restored his proper sense of values and taught him that money isn't everything. They toured the world in gracious fashion and took no more than their ample due for their comfortable maintenance. They relaxed the grip of tight-fisted Frenchmen and retaught them the stern virtues of poverty. They enforced an austere regime of abstinence and hard work on heretofore over-wealthy and over-weight German burghers and possibly restored their health and prolonged their lives. They had special stainless steel buckets made to bury their money in, and these they scattered in many countries and several continents. And they had as much fun as it is allowed mortals to have.

One pleasant afternoon Mazuma O'Shaunessey was in jail in a little town in Scotland. The jailer was gloomy and suspicious and not given to joking.

"No tricks from you now. I will not be taken."

"Just one to show I have the power. Stand back so I can't reach you."

"I'm not likely to let you."

"And hold up a pound note in one hand as tightly as you can. I will only flick my handkerchief and the note will be in my hand and no longer in yours."

"Man I defy you. You cannot do it."

He held the note very tightly and closed his eyes with the effort. Mazuma flicked his handkerchief, but the Scotsman was right. He could not do it. This was the only time that Mazuma ever failed. Though the world quivered on its axis (and it did) yet the note was held so tightly that no power could dislodge it. But when the world quivered on its axis the effect was that Mazuma was now standing outside the cell and the Scotsman was within. And when the Chief came some minutes later Mazuma was gone and the Scotch jailer stood locked in the cell, his eyes still closed and the pound note yet held aloft in a grip of steel. So he was fired, or cashiered as the Old Worlders call it, for taking a bribe and letting a prisoner escape. And this is what usually comes as punishment to overly suspicious persons.

Katie still used the Inverted Pyramid and very effectively Mazuma did not really have an unfailing talent for picking winners. He'd only said that to get Kate to marry him, and it was the best lie he ever told. But he did have an infallible talent for many things, and they thrived.

The first little cloud in the sky came once when they passed a plowman in a field in the fat land of Belgium.

"Ah, there is a happy man," said Mazuma. "Happy at work."

"Happy at work? O my God, what did you say? What kind of words are these, my husband?"

But in the months and years that followed, this frightening incident was forgotten.

The couple became the pride of Wreckville when they returned as they did several times a year and told their stories. Like the time the state troopers ran them down and cornered them with drawn guns.

"O, we don't want to take you in. We'll report that we couldn't catch you. Only tell us how you do it. We don't want to be troopers all our lives."

And the time they ran a little house in Faro Town itself. It was a small upstairs place and Katie played the piano, and they had only one bartender, a faded little blonde girl with a cast in one eye, and only one table where Mazuma presided. And this where all the other Casinos were palaces that would make Buckingham look like a chicken coop.

And the funny thing is that they took in no money at all. The barmaid would always say all drinks were ten dollars, or failing that they were on the house; as they used no coin and had trays in the register for only tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands. It was too much trouble to do business any other way.

Katie would bait her money jar with several hundred dollar bills and one or two larger, and demurely refuse anything smaller for selections as she didn't want the jar filled up with wrapping paper. So she would tinkle along all night and all drinks were on the house, which was not too many as only three could sit at the bar at once.

And Mazuma never shook or dealt a game. He had only blue chips as he said any other color hurt his eyes. And no matter what the price of the chips, it was legendary and gained zeros as it was retold.

Several of the larger sports came up the stairs out of curiosity. And their feelings were hurt when they were told they were too little to play, for they weren't little at all. So Mazuma sat all night Monday through Friday and never cut a hand or shook a bone.

Then on Saturday night the really big boys came upstairs to see what it was about. They were the owners of the nine big Casinos in town, and six of these gentlemen had to sit on boxes. Their aggregate worth would total out a dollar and thirteen cents to every inhabitant of the U.S.

Katie tinkled tunes all night for a hundred to five hundred dollars a selection, and Mazuma dealt on the little table. And when the sun came up they owned a share of all nine of the big Casinos, and had acquired other assets besides.

Of course these stories of Katie and Mazurna were topped, as about half the Wrecks went on the road, and they had some fancy narrations when they got back to Wreckville.

And then the bottom fell out of the world.

They had three beautiful children now. The oldest was three years old and he could already shake, deal, shuffle, and eon with the best of them. He knew the Golden Gambit and the Four Quarters and the Nine Dollar Dog and Three Fish Out. And every evening he came in with a marble bag full of half dollars and quarters that he had taken from the children in the neighborhood. The middle child was two, but already she could calculate odds like lightning, and she picked track winners in her dreams. She ran sucker ads in the papers and had set up a remunerative mail-order business. The youngest was only one and could not yet talk. But he carried chalk and a slate and marked up odds and made book, and was really quite successful in a small way. He knew the Four Diamond trick and the Two Story Chicken Coop, the Thimbling Reverse and the Canal Boat Cut. They were intelligent children and theirs was a happy home.

One day Mazuma said, "We ought to get out of it, Kate."

"Out of what?"

"Get out of the business. Raise the children in a more wholesome atmosphere. Buy a farm and settle down."

"You mean the Blue Valley Farmer trick? Is it old enough to be new yet? And it takes nearly three weeks to set it up, and it never did pay too well for all the trouble."

"No, I do not mean the Blue Valley Farmer trick. I don't mean any trick, swindle, or con. I think we should get out of the whole grind and go to work like honest people."

And when she heard these terrible words Katie fell into a dead faint.

That is all of it. He was not a Wreck. He was a common trickster and he had caught the sickness of repentance. The bottom had fallen out of the world indeed. The three unsolvable problems of the Greeks were squaring the circle, trisecting the angle, and re-bottoming the world. They cannot be done.

They have been separated for many years. The three children were reared by their father under the recension and curse of Adam. One is a professor of mathematics, but I doubt if he can figure odds as rapidly as he could when he was one year old. The middle one is now a grand lady, but she has lost the facility of picking track winners in her dreams and much else that made her charming. And the oldest one is a senator from a state that I despise.

And Katie is now the wisest old witch in Wreckville. But she has never quite been forgiven her youthful indiscretion when she married an Adamite who felt like his ancient father and deigned to work for a living.

SNUFFLES

I

"I always said we'd find one of them that was fun remarked Brian. "There's been entirely too much solemnity in the universe. Did you never panic on thinking of the multiplicity of systems?"

"Never," said Georgina.

"Not even when, having set down a fine probability for the totality of worlds, you realized suddenly that you had to raise it by a dozen powers yet?"

"What's to panic?"

"Not even when it comes over you, 'This isn't a joke; this is serious; every one of them is serious'?"

"'Cosmic intimidation,' Belloc called it And it does tend to minimize a person."

"And did you never hope that out of all that prodigality of worlds, one at least should have been made for fun? One should have been made by a wild child or a mixed-up goblin just to put the rest of them in proper perspective, to deflate the pomposity of the cosmos."

"You believe this is it, Mr. Carroll?"

"Yes. Bellota was made for fun. It is a joke, a caricature, a burlesque. It is a planet with baggy pants and a putty nose. It is a midget world with floppy shoes and a bull-roarer voice. It was designed to keep the cosmos from taking itself too seriously. The law of levity here conspires against the law of gravity."

"I never heard of the law of levity. And Mr. Phelan believes that he will soon have the explanation for the peculiar gravity here."

"The law of levity does not apply to you, Georgina. You are immune. But I spoke lightly."

The theory that Bellota was made for a joke had not been proved; no more than the other theories about it. But it was a sport, a whole barrelful of puzzles, a place of interest all out of proportion to its size, eminently worthy of study. And the six of them had been set down there to study it.

Sociability impels -- and besides they weren't a bad bunch at all. Meet them now, or miss them forever. They were six.

1. John Hardy. Commander and commando. As capable a man as ever lived. A good-natured conglomerate of clanking iron who was always in control. A jack of all techniques, a dynamic optimist. He had the only laugh that never irritated, however often heard, and he handled danger cavalierly. He was a blue-eyed, red-headed giant, and his face was redder than his hair.

2. William Malaquais (Uncle Billy) Cross. Engineer, machinist extraordinary, gadgeteer, theorist, arguefier, first mate, navigator, and balladeer. Billy was a little older than the rest of them, but he hadn't mellowed. He said that he was still a green and growing boy.

3. Daniel Phelan. Geologist and cosmologist, and holder of heretical doctrines about field forces. "Phelan's Corollary" may be known to you; and, if so, you must be both intrigued and frustrated by the inherent contradictions that prevented its acceptance. A highly professional man in the domain of magnetism and gravity, he was so a low amateur rake and a determined wolf. A dude. Yet he could carry his share of the load.

4. Margaret Cot. Artist and photographer, botanist and bacteriologist. Full of chatter and a sort of charm. Better looking than anyone deserves to be. Salty, really the newest thing in salinity. A little bit wanton. And a little kiddish.

5. Brian Carroll. Naturalist. And natural. He had been hunting for something all his life, but did not know what it was, and was not sure that he would know it when he found it, but he hoped that it would be different.

"O Lord," he would pray, "however it ends don't let it have a pat ending. That I couldn't stand." He believed that anything repeated was trite. And it was for that reason that there were pleasant surprises for him on Bellota.

6. Georgina Chantal. Biologist and iceberg. But the capsule description may be unjust. For she was more than biologist and much more than iceberg. Frosty only when frostiness was called for, she was always proper and often friendly. But she was no Margie Cot, and in contrast perhaps she was a little icy.

Actually there wasn't a bad apple in that basket.

The most obvious peculiarity of Bellota was its gravity, which was half that of Earth's, though the circumference of the globe was no more than a hundred miles. It was on account of this peculiarity that Daniel Phelan was on the little planet in the first place. For it was held by those who decide such things that there was a bare chance that he could find the answer: no one else had found it. His own idea was that his presence there was fruitless: he already had the answer to the gravity behavior of Bellota; it was contained in Phelan's Corollary. Bellota was the only body that behaved as it should. It was the rest of the universe that was atypical.

And in other ways Bellota was a joker. Fruits proved noisome and thorns succulent. Rinds and shells were edible and heartmeat was not. Proto-butterflies stung like hornets and lizards secreted honeylike manna. And the water -- the water was soda water -- sheer carbonated soda water.

If you wanted it any other way, you caught rain water, and this was so highly nitric that drinking it was something of an experience also; for the thunderstorms there were excessive.

No, they were not excessive, claimed Phelan, they were normal. It was on all other atmospheric planets known that there was a strange deficiency of thundershowers.

Here, at least, there was no deficiency: it rained about five minutes out of every fifteen, and the multi-colored lightning was omnipresent. In all their stay there, the party was never without the sound of thunder, near or distant, nor of the probe of lightning. For this reason there could be no true darkness there, not even between the flashes; there were flashes between the flashes. Here was meteorology concentrated, without dilution, without filler.

"But it is always different," said Georgina. "Every lightning flash is entirely different, just as every snowflake is different. Will it snow here?"

"Certainly," said Phelan. "Though it did not last night, it should tonight. Snow before midnight and fog by morning. After all, midnight and morning are only an hour apart."

At that time they had been on the planet only a few hours.

"And here the cycle is normal," said Phelan. "It is normal nowhere else. It is natural for humans and all other creatures to sleep for two hours and to wake for two hours. That is the fundamental cycle. Much of our misbehavior and perversity comes from trying to adapt to the weird day-night cycle of whatever alien world we happened to be born on. Here within a week we will return to that normal that we never knew before."

"Within what kind of week?" asked Hardy.

"Within Bellota's twenty-eight-hour week. And do you realize that the projected working week here would be just six and two-thirds hours? I always thought that that was long enough to work anyhow."

There were no seas there, only the soda-water lakes that covered a third of the area. And there were flora and fauna that burlesqued more than they really resembled Earth's and kindred worlds.

The trees were neither deciduous nor evergreen (though Brian Carroll said that they were ever-green), nor palm. They were trees as a cartoonist might draw them. And there were animals that made the whole idea of animals ridiculous.

And there was Snuffles.

Snuffles was a bear - possibly -- and of sorts. The bear is himself a caricature of animalkind, somehow a giant dog, somehow a shaggy man, an ogre, and also a toy. And Snuffles was a caricature of a bear.

Billy Cross tried to explain to them about bears. Billy was an old bear man.

"It is the only animal that children dream of without having seen or been told about. Moncrief by his recall methods has studied thousands of early childhood dreams. Children universally dream of bears, Tahitian

children subject to no ursine influence in themselves or their ancestry, Australian children, town tikes before they ever saw a bear toy. They dream of bears. The bear is the boogerman. Bears live in the attics of old childhood houses. They did in my own and in thousands of others. Their existence there is not of adult suggestion, but of innate childhood knowledge.

"But there is a duality about this boogerman. He is friendly and fascinating as well as frightening. The boogerman is not a story that adults tell to children. It is the only story that children tell to adults who have forgotten it."

"But how could you know?" asked Margie Cot. "I had no idea that little boys dreamed of bears. I thought that only girls did. And with us I had come to believe that the bear dreams symbolized grown man in his fundamental aspect, both fascinating and frightening."

"To you, Marie, everything symbolizes grown man in his fundamental aspect. Now the boogerman is also philologically interesting, being actually one of the less than two hundred Indo-European root words. Though Bog has come to mean God in the Slavic, yet the booger was earlier an animal-man demiurge, and the Sanskrit bhaga is not without this meaning. In the sense of a breaker, a smasher, it is in the Old Irish as bong, and the early Lithuanian as banga. In the sense of a devourer, it survives in the Greek root phag, and as one who puts to flight it is in the Latin fug. We have, of course, the Welsh bwg, a ghost, and bogey has been used in the meaning of the devil. And we have bugbear, which rounds out the circuit."

"So you make God and the Bear and the Devil one," said Georgina.

"In many mythologies it was the bear who made the world," said John Hardy. "After that he did nothing distinguished. It was felt by his devotees that he had done enough."

Snuffles was not a bear exactly. He was a pseudoursine. He was big and clumsy, and bounced around on four legs, and then up on two. He was friendly, chillingly so, for he was huge. And he snuffled like some old track-eating train.

He was a clown, but he seemed to observe the line that the visitors drew. He did not come really close, though often too close for comfort. He obeyed, or when he did not wish to obey, he pretended to misunderstand. He was the largest animal on Bellota, and there seemed to be only one of him.

"Why do we call him he?" asked Brian Carroll, the naturalist. "Only surgery could tell for sure, but it appears that Snuffles has no sex at all. There is no way I know of that he could reproduce. No wonder there is only one of him; the wonder is that there should be any at all. Where did he come from?"

"That could be asked of any creature," said Daniel Phelan. "The question is, where is he going? But he shows a certain sophistication in this. For it is only with primitives that toy animals (and he is a toy, you know) are sexed. A modern teddy bear or a toy panda isn't. Nor were the toys in the European tradition except on the fringes (Tartary before the ninth century, Ireland before the fifth) since pre-classical times. But before those times in its regions, and beyond its pale even to-day, the toy animals are totems and are sexed, exaggeratedly so."

"Yes, there is no doubt about it," said Brian. "He does not have even the secondary characteristics of mammal, marsupial, or what you will. But he has characteristics enough of his own."

Snuffles was, among other things, a mimic. Should a book he left around, and they were a bookish bunch, he would take it in his forepaws and hold it as to read, and turn the pages, turning them singly and carefully. He could use his padded paws as hands. His claws were retractable and his digits projective. They were paws, or they were claws, or they were hands and he had four of them.

He unscrewed caps and he could use a can opener. He kept the visitors in firewood, once he understood that they had need of it, and that

they wanted dry sticks of a certain size. He'd bite the sticks to length, stack them in small ricks, bind them with lianas, and carry them to the fire. He'd fetch water and put it on to boil. And he gathered bellotas by the bushel.

Bellota means an acorn, and they had named the planet that from the profusion of edible fruit-nuts that looked very like the acorn. These were a delicacy that became a staple.

And Snuffles could talk. All his noises were not alike. There was the "snokle, snoke, snokle" that meant he was in a good humor, as he normally was. There was a "snook, snook" and a "snoff." There were others similar in vocables but widely varied in tone and timbre. Perhaps Billy Cross understood him best, but they all understood him a little.

In only one thing did Snuffles become stubborn. He marked off a space, a wild old pile of rocks, and forbade them to enter its circle. He dug a trench around it and he roared and bared foot-long fangs if any dared cross the trench. Billy Cross said that Snuffles did this to save face; for Commander John Hardy had previously forbidden Snuffles a certain area, their supply dump and weapons center. Hardy had drawn a line around it with a mattock and made it clear that Snuffles should never cross that line. The creature understood at once, and he went and did likewise.

The party had been set down there for two Earth weeks -- twelve Bellota weeks -- to study the life of the planetoid, to classify, to take samples, tests, notes, and pictures; to hypothesize and to build a basis for theory. But they ventured hardly at all from their original camp site. There was such an amazing variety of detail at hand that it would take many weeks even to begin to classify it.

A feature there was the rapidity of enzyme and bacterial action. A good wine could be produced in four hours, and a fungus-cheese made from grub exudations in even less time. And in the new atmosphere thoughts also seemed to ferment rapidly.

"Every person makes one major mistake in his life," said John Hardy to them once. "Were it not for that, he would not have to die."

"What?" quizzed Phelan. "Few die violently nowadays. How could all die for a mistake?"

"Yet it's a fact. Deaths are not really explained, for all the explanations of medicine. A death will be the result of one single much earlier rashness, of one weakening of the mind or body, or a crippling of the regenerative force. A person will be alive and vital. And one day he will make one mistake. In that moment the person begins to die. But if a man did not make that one mistake, he would not die."

"Poppycock," said Daniel Phelan.

"I wonder if you know the true meaning of 'poppycock'?" asked Billy Cross. "It is poppy-talk, opium-talk, rambling of one under the narcotic. Now the element 'cock' in the word is not (as you would imagine) from either the Norwegian kok, a dung heap, nor from coquarde in the sense that Rabelais uses it, but rather from --"

"Poppycock," said Phelan again. He disliked Billy Cross's practice of analyzing all words, and he denied his assertion that a man who uses a word without feeling its full value is a dealer in false coinage, in fact a liar.

"But if a person dies only by making a mistake, how does an animal die?" asked Margie Cot. "Does he also make a mistake?"

"He makes the mistake of being an animal and not a man," said Phelan.

"There may be no clear line between animal and man," Margie argued.

"There is," said Phelan, and three others agreed.

"There is not," said Billy Cross

"An animal is paradoxically a creature without an anima -- without a soul," said Phelan. "This comes oddly from me because I also deny it to man in its usual connotation. But there is a total difference, a line that the

animal cannot cross, and did not cross. When we arrive at wherever we are going, he will still be skulking in his den."

"Here, at least, it is the opposite of that," said Brian Carroll. "Snuffles sleeps in the open, and it is we who den."

It was true. Around their campsite, their supply dump and weapons center, there were three blind pockets; grottoes hack in the rocks. Billy Cross, Daniel Phelan and Margie Cot each had one of these, filled with the tools of their specialties. Here they worked and slept. And these were dens.

John Hardy himself slept in the weapons center, inside the circle where Snuffles was forbidden. And the hours that he did not sleep he kept guard. Hardy made a fetish of security. When he slept, or briefly wandered about the region, someone else must always take a turn at guard, weapon at hand. There was no relaxation of this, no exception, no chance of a mistake.

And Snuffles, the animal, who slept right out in the open ("Is it possible," Brian asked himself, "that I am the only one who notices it? Is it possible that it happens?") did not get wet. It rained everywhere on that world. But it did not rain on Snuffles.

"The joy of this place is that it is not pat," said Brian Carroll. As previously noted, he hated anything that was pat. "We could be here for years and never see the end of the variety. With the insects there may be as many species as there are individuals. Each one could almost be regarded as a sport, as if there were no standard to go by. The gravity here is cock-eyed. Please don't analyze the word, Billy; I doubt myself that it means rooster-eyed. The chemistry gives one a hopeful feeling. It uses the same building blocks as the chemistry elsewhere, but it is as if each of those blocks were just a little off. The lightning is excessive, as though whoever was using it had not yet tired of the novelty; I never tired of the novelty of lightning myself. And when this place ends, it will not have a pat ending. Other globes may turn to lava or cold cinders. Bellota will pop like a soap bubble, or sag like spaghetti, or turn into an exploding world of grasshoppers. But it won't conform. I love Bellota. And I do hate a pat ending."

"There is an old precept of 'Know thyself,'" said Georgina Chantal. They talked a lot now, as they were often wakeful, not yet being accustomed to the short days and nights of Bellota. "Its variant is 'Look within.' Look within, but our eyes point outward! The only way we can see our faces is in a mirror or in a picture. Each of us has his mirror, and mine is more often the microscope. But we cannot see ourselves as we are until we see ourselves distorted. That is why Snuffles is also a mirror for all of us here. We can't understand why we're serious until we know why he's funny."

"We may be the distortion and he the true image," said Billy Cross. "He lacks jealousy and pomposity and greed and treachery -- all the distortions."

"We do not know that he lacks them," said Daniel Phelan.

So they talked away the short days and nights on Bellota, and accumulated data.

II

When it happened, it happened right in narrow daylight. The phrase was Brian's, who hated a pat phrase. It happened right in the middle of the narrow two-hour Bellota day.

All were awake and aware. John Hardy stood in the middle of the weapons center on alert guard with that rifle cradled in the crook of his arm. Billy and Daniel and Margaret were at work in their respective dens; and Brian and Georgina, who did not den, were gathering in-sects at the open lower end of the valley, but they had the center in their sight.

There was an unusual flash of lightning, bright by even Bellota standards, and air snapped and crackled. And there was an unusual sound from Snuffles, far removed from his usual "snokle, snokle" talk.

And in a moment benignity seemed to drain away from that planet.

Snuffles had before made as if to cross the line, and then scooted off, chortling in glee, which is perhaps why the careful John Hardy was not at first alarmed. Then Snuffles charged with a terrifying sound.

But Hardy was not tricked entirely; it would be impossible for man or beast to trick him entirely. He had a split second, and was not one to waste time making a decision; and he was incapable of panic. What he did, he did of choice. And if it was a mistake, why, even the shrewdest decision goes into the books as a mistake if it fails.

He was fond of Snuffles and he gambled that it would not be necessary to kill him. It was a heavy rifle; a shoulder shot should have turned the animal. If it did not, there would not be time for another shot.

It did not, though, and there was not. Commander John Hardy made one mistake and for that he died. He died uncommonly, and he did not die from the inside out, as meaner men do.

It was ghastly, but it was over in an instant. Hardy's head was smashed and his face nearly swiped off. His back was broken and his body almost sheared in two. The great creature, with the foot-long canines and claws like twenty long knives, mangled him and crushed him and shook him like a red mop, and then let go.

It may be that Brian Carroll realized most quickly the implications. He called to Georgina to come out of the valley onto the plain below, and to come out fast. He realized that the other three still alive would not even be able to come out.

Incongruously, a thing that went through Brian Carroll's mind was a tirade of an ancient Confederate general against ancient General Grant, to the effect that the blundering fool had moved into a position that commanded both river and hill and blocked three valley mouths, and it could only be hoped that Grant would move along before he realized his advantage.

But Brian was under no such delusion. Snuffles realized his advantage; he occupied the supply dump and weapons center, and commanded the entrances to the three blind pockets that were the dens of Billy Cross and Daniel Phelan and Margie Cot.

With one move, Snuffles had killed the leader, cornered three of the others, and cut off the remaining two from base weapons, to be hunted down later. There was nothing unintentional about it. Had he chosen another moment, when another than John Hardy was on guard, then Hardy alive would still somehow have been a threat to him, even weaponless. But, with Hardy dead, all the rest were no match for the animal.

Brian and Georgina lingered on the edge of the plain to watch the other three, though they knew that their own lives depended on getting out of there.

"Two could get away," said Georgina, "if a third would make a rush for it and force Snuffles into another charge."

"But none of them will," said Brian. "The third would die."

It was a game, but it couldn't last long. Phelan whimpered and tried to climb the rock wall at the blind end of his pocket. Margie cajoled and told Snuffles how good friends they had always been, and wouldn't he let her go? Billy Cross filled his pipe and lit it and sat down to wait it out.

Phelan went first, and he died like a craven. But no one, not sure how he himself might die, should hold that overly against a man.

Snuffles thundered in, cut him down in the middle of a scream, and rushed back to his commanding spot in the middle of the weapons center.

Margie spread out her hands and began to cry, softly, not really in terror, when he attacked. The pseudo-bear broke her neck, but with a blow that was almost gentle in comparison with the others, and he scurried again to center.

And Billy Cross puffed on his pipe. "I hate to go like this, Snuff, old boy. In fact, I hate to go at all. If I made a mistake to die for, it was in being such a pleasant, trusting fellow. I wonder if you ever noticed,

Snuff, what a fine, upstanding fellow I really am?"

And that was the last thing Billy Cross ever said, for the big animal struck him dead with one tearing blow. And the smoke still drifted in the air from Billy's pipe.

Then it was like black thunder coming out of the valley after the other two, for that clumsy animal could move. They had a start on him, Brian and Georgina had, of a hundred yards. And soon their terror subsided to hall-terror as they realized that the shoulder-shot bear animal could not catch them till they were exhausted.

In a wild run, they could even increase their lead over him. But they would tire soon and they did not know when he would tire. He had herded them away from the campsite and the weapons. And they were trapped with him on a small planet.

Till day's end, and through the night, and next day (maybe five hours in all) he followed them, until they could hardly keep going. Then they lost him, but in the dark did not know if he was close or not. And at dawn they saw him sitting up and watching them from quarter of a mile away.

But now the adversaries rested and watched. The animal may have stiffened up from his shot. The two humans were so weary that they did not intend to run again till the last moment.

"Do you think there is any chance that it was all a sudden fury and that he may become friendly again."

Georgina asked Brian.

"It was not a sudden fury. It was a series of very calculated moves."

"Do you think we could skirt around and beat him back to the weapons center?"

"No. He has chosen a spot where he can see for miles. And he has the interceptor's advantage -- any angle we take has to be longer than his. We can't beat him back and he knows it."

"Do you think he knows that the weapons are weapons?"

"Yes."

"And that all our signal equipment is left at the center and that we can't communicate?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he's smarter than we are?"

"He was smarter in selecting his role. It is better to be the hunter than the hunted. But it isn't unheard of for the hunted to outsmart the hunter."

"Brian, do you think you would have died as badly as Daniel or as well as Billy?"

"No. No to both."

"I was always jealous of Margie, but I loved her at the end. She didn't scream. She didn't act scared. Brian, what will happen to us now?"

"Possibly we will be saved in the nick of time by the Marines."

"I didn't know they had them any more. Oh, you mean the ship. But that's still a week away, Earth time. Do you think Snuffles knows it is to come back for us?"

"Yes, he knows. I'm sure of that"

"Do you think he knows when it will come?"

"Yes, I have the feeling that he knows that too."

"But will he be able to catch us before then?"

"I believe that all parties concerned will play out the contest with one eye on the clock."

Snuffles had now developed a trick. At sundown of the short day, he would give a roar and come at them. And they would have to start their flight just as the dark commenced. They ran more noisily than he and he would always be able to follow them; but they could never be sure in the dark that he was following, or how closely. They would have to go at top panting, gasping, thumping speed for an hour and a half; then they would

ease off for a little in the half hour before dawn. And in the daytime one of them had to watch while the other slept. But Snuffles could sleep as he would, and they were never able to slip away without his waking instantly.

Moreover, he seemed to herd them through the fertile belt in their night runs and let them rest on the barrens in the daytime. It wasn't that food was really scarce; it was that it could only be gathered during time taken from flight and sleep and guard duty.

They also came on a quantity of red fruit that had a weakening and dizzying effect on them, yet they could hardly leave it alone. There was a sort of bean sprout that had the same effect, and a nut, and a cereal grass whose seed they winnowed with their hands as they went along.

"This is a narcotic belt," said Brian. "I wish we had the time to study it longer, and yet we may get all too much of studying it. We have no idea how far it goes, and this method of testing its products on ourselves may be an effective one, but dangerous."

From that time on, they were under the influence of the narcotics. They dreamed vividly while awake and walking. And they began to suffer hallucinations which they could not distinguish from reality.

It was only a Bellota day or so after their dreaming began that Brian Carroll felt that the mind of Snuffles was speaking to him. Carroll was an intelligent amateur in that field and he put it to the tests; there are valid tests for it. And he concluded that it was hallucination and not telepathy. Still (and he could see it coming) there would be a time when he would accept his hallucination and believe that the ursine was talking to him. And that would signal that he was crazy and no longer able to evade death there.

Carroll renounced (while he still had his wits) his future belief in the nonsense, just as a man put to torture may renounce anything he concedes or confesses or denies under duress.

Yet, whatever frame it was placed in, Snuffles talked to him from a distance. "Why do you think me a bear, because I am in a bear skin? I do not think you a mam though you are in a man skin. You may be a little less. And why do you believe you will die more bravely than Daniel? The longer you run, the nearer will be your death. And you still do not know who I am?"

"No," said Brian Carroll aloud.

"No what?" asked Georgina Chantal.

"It seems that the bear is talking to me, that he has entered my mind."

"Me also. Could it be, or is it the narcotic fruit?"

"It couldn't be. It is hallucination brought on by the narcotics, and tiredness from travel, and lack of sleep -- and our shock at seeing our friends killed by a boy turned into a monster. There are tests to distinguish telepathic reception from hallucination: objective corroboration, impossible at this time (with Snuffles in his present mood) and probably impossible at any time; sentient parallelism -- surely uncertain, for I have more in common with millions of humans than with one pseudo-ursine; circumstantial validity and point-for-point clarity -- this is negative, for I know myself to be fevered and confused and my senses unreliable in other matters. By every test that can be made, the indication is that it is not telepathy, that it is hallucination."

"But there isn't any way to be sure, is there, Brian?"

"None, Georgina; no more than I can prove that it is not a troupe of Boy Scouts around a campfire that is causing pain and burning in my gullet, that it is really the narcotic fruit or something else I have eaten conspiring with my weariness and apprehension to discomfort me. I cannot prove it is not Boy Scouts and I cannot prove it is not telepathy, but I consider both unlikely."

"I don't think it is unlikely at all, Brian. I think that Snuffles is talking to me. When you get a little nuttier and tireder, then you'll believe it too."

"Oh, yes, I'll believe it then -- but it won't be true."

It won't matter if it's true or not. Snuffles will have gained his point. Do you know that Snuffles is king of this world?"

"No. What are you talking about?"

"He just told me he was. He told me that if I would help him catch you, he would let me go. But I won't do it. I have become fond of you, Brian. Did you know I never did like men before?"

"Yes. You were called the iceberg."

"But now I like you very much."

"You have no one else left to like."

"It isn't that. It's the mood I'm in. And I won't help Snuffles catch you unless he gives me very much better reasons for it."

Damn the girl! If she believed Snuffles talked to her, then for all practical purposes he did. And, however the idea of a trade for her life had been implanted in her mind, it would grow there.

Now Snuffles talked to Brian Carroll again, and it was somehow a waste of time to intone the formality that it was hallucination only.

"You still do not know what I am, but you will have to learn it before you die. Hardy knew it at the last minute. Cross guessed it from the first. Phelan still isn't sure. He goes about and looks back at his body lying there, and he still isn't sure. Some people are very hard to convince. But the girl knew it and she spread out her hands."

In his fever, that was the way the bear animal talked to him.

They ate leaves now and buds. They would have no more of the narcotic fruits even if they had to starve. But narcosis left them slowly, and the pursuit of them tightened.

It was just at sunset one day that disaster struck at Brian. The bear had nearly hypnotized him into immobility, talking inside his head. Georgina had started on before him and repeatedly called for him to follow but for some reason he loitered. When Snuffles made his sudden sundown charge, there seemed no escape for him. Brian was trapped on a rimrock. Georgina had already taken a winding path to the plain below. Brian hesitated, then held his ground for the bruin's charge. He believed that he could draw Snuffles on, and then break to the left or the right at the last instant, and perhaps the animal would plunge over the cliff.

But old Snuff modified but did not halt his charge the last minute. He came in bottom-side first, like an elephant sliding bases, and he knocked Brian off the cliff.

There are few really subjective accounts of dying, since most who die do not live to tell about it. But the way it goes is this:

First one hangs in space; then he is charged by the madly rising ground armed with trees and rocks and weapons. After that is a painful sleep, and much later dazed wakening.

III

He was traveling upside-down, that was sure, and roughly, though at a slow rate of speed. Perhaps that is the normal way for people to travel after they are dead. He was hung from the middle in an odd doubled-up manner, and seemed supported and borne along by something of a boatlike motion, yet of a certain resilience and strength that was more living than even a boat. It had a rough softness, this thing, and a pleasant fragrance.

But, though it was bright morning now, it was hard to get a good look at the thing with which he was in contact. All he could see was grass flowing slowly by, and heels.

Heels?

What was this all about? Heels and backs of calves, no more.

He was being carried, carried slung like a sack over her shoulder by Georgina. For the thing of the pleasant fragrance was Georgina Chantal.

She set him down then. It was a very rough valley were in, and he

saw that they had traveled perhaps four miles from the base of the rimrock; and Snuffles had settled down in the morning light a quarter of a mile behind them.

"Georgina, did you carry me all night?"

"Yes."

"How could you?"

"I changed shoulders sometimes. And you aren't very heavy. This is only a half-gravity planet. Besides, I'm very strong. I could have carried you even on Earth."

"Why wasn't I killed by the fall?"

"Snuffles says he isn't ready to kill you yet, that he could kill you any time he wanted to with the lightning or rock or poison berry. But you did hit terribly hard. I was surprised to be able to pick you up in one piece. And now Snuffles says that I have lost my last chance."

"How?"

"Because I carried you away from him before he could get down the cliff in the dark. Now he says he will kill me too."

"Snuff is inconsistent. If he could kill me any instant with the lightning, why would he be angered if you carried me away from him?"

"I thought of that too. But he says he has his own reasons. And that lightning -- do you know that it doesn't lighten all the time everywhere on Bellota? Only in a big circle around Snuffles, as a tribute to him. I've noticed myself that when we get a big lead over him, we almost move clear out of the lightning sphere."

"Georgina, that animal doesn't really talk to us. It is only our imaginations. It is not accurate to so personify it."

"It may not be accurate, but if that isn't talk he puts out, then I don't know talk. And a lot of his talk he makes comes true. But I don't care if he does kill me for saving you. I'm silly over you now."

"We are both of us silly, Georgina, from the condition we are in. But he can't talk to us. He's only an animal run amok. If it was anything else, it would mean that much of what we know is not so."

Brian had the full effect of it one sunny afternoon couple of Bellota days later. He was dozing and Georgina was on guard when Snuffles began to talk inside his head.

"You insult me that you do not recognize my identity. When Hardy said that in many mythologies it was the Bear who made the world, he had begun to guess who I was. I am the creator and I made the world. I have heard that there are other worlds besides Bellota, and I am not sure whether I made them or not. But if they are there, I must have made them. They could not have made themselves. And this I did make.

"It isn't an easy thing, or all of you would have made them, and you have not. And there is pride in creation that you could not understand. You said that Bellota was made for fun. It was not made for fun. I am the only one who knows why it was made, for I made it. And it is not a little planet; it is a grand planet. I waited for you to confess your error and be amazed at it. Since you did not, you will have to die. I made you, so I can kill you if I like. I must have made you, since I made all. And if I did not, then I made other things, red squirrels and white birds.

"You have no idea of the achievement itself. I had very little to work with and no model or plans or previous experience. And I made mistakes. I would be the last to deny that I miscalculated the gravity, a simple mathematical error that anyone could make. The planet is too small for the gravity, but I had already embodied the calculated gravity in other works that I did not choose to undo, and I had no material to make a larger planet. So what I have made I have made, and it will continue so. An error, once it is embodied, becomes a new truth.

"You may wonder why my birds have hair. I will confess it, I did not know how to make feathers, nor would you without template or typus. And you are puzzled that my butterflies sting and my hornets do not? But how was I

to know that those fearfully colored monsters should have been harmless? It ill befits one who has never made even the smallest -- but why do I try to explain this to you?

"You wonder if I am talking to you or if it is only a delusion of your mind. What is the difference? How could there be anything in your mind if I did not put it there? And do not be afraid of dying. Remember that nothing is lost. When I have the pieces of you, I will use them to make other things. That is the law of conservation of matter as I understand it.

"But do you know that the one thing desired by all is really praise? It is the impelling force, and a creator needs this more than anyone. Things and beings are made to give praise, and if they do not, they are destroyed again. You had every opportunity to give it, and instead you jeered.

"Did any of you ever make a world? I tell you that there are a million things to remember all at once. And there can be no such thing as a bad world, since each of them is a triumph. Whether it was that I made the others and I forgot them is only a premise; or whether I will make them in the future, and they are only now talked of out of their proper time. But some of your own mythologies indicate that I made your own.

"I would tell you more, only you would not understand it. But after I have conserved your matter, then you will know all these things."

"Snuffles is cranky with me today," said Georgina Chantal. "Is he also cranky with you?"

"Yes," said Brian Carroll.

"He says that he made Bellota. Did he tell you that too? Do you believe it?"

"He told me. I do not believe it. We are delirious. Snuffles cannot communicate."

"You keep saying that, but you aren't sure. He told me that when he chews us up he will take a piece of me and a piece of you and chew them together and make a new thing, since we are belatedly taken with each other. Isn't that nice?"

"How cozy."

"I wonder why he made the grass so sharp, though. There is no reason for it to be like that."

"Why, and what?"

"Snuffles. Why did he make the grass so sharp? My toes are nearly gone and it's killing me."

"Georgina, hold onto what's left of your mind. Snuffles did not make the grass or anything else. He is only an animal, and we are sick and walking in delirium." So they walked on a while, for evening had come. Then the voice of Snuffles came again inside the head of Brian.

"How was I to know that the grass should not be sharp? Are not all pointed things sharp? Who would have guessed that it should be soft? If you had told me gently, and without shaming me, I would have changed it at once. Now I will not. Let it wound you!"

So they walked on a while, for evening had come. Then days and nights.

"Brian, do you think that Snuffles knows the world is round?"

"If he made it, he must know it."

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten."

"Dammit, girl, I was being ironic! And you are now quite nutty, and I hardly less so. Of course he didn't make it. And of course he doesn't know that it's round. He's only an animal."

"Then we have an advantage back again."

"Yes. I'd noticed it before if I hadn't been so confused. We are more than halfway around the little planet. He is no longer between us and our weapons center, but he behaves as though he thought he was. We have no more than forty miles to go to it. We will step up our pace, though gradually. Our old camp valley is prominent enough so that we could recognize it within several miles either way, and we can navigate that

close. And if he seems to say in your mind that he is onto our trick, do not believe him. The animal does not really talk in our minds."

But their narcosis still increased. "It isn't a narcotic belt," said Brian. "It is a narcotic season on all Bellota - a built-in saturnalia. But we have not been able to enjoy the carnival."

"Snuffles shows up well as a carnival king, though, don't you think? It is easier to believe in time of carnival that he made the cosmos. I went to the big carnival once in Nola when I was a little girl. There was a big bear wearing a crown on one of the floats, and I believe that he was king of the carnival. It wasn't an ordinary bear. I am sure now that it represented Snuffles, though I was only six years old when I saw it. Do you think that Snuffles' explanation of the law of gravity here is better than Phelan's?"

"More easily understandable at least than the corollary, and probably more honest. I always thought that the corollary also embraced a simple mathematical error and that Phelan stuck to it out or perversity."

"It is one thing to stick to an error. It is another to build a world to conform to it. Brian do you know what hour it is?"

"It is the three hundred and twelfth since we were set down."

"And they return for us at the three hundred and thirty-sixth. We will be back at our campsite and in control by then, won't we?"

"If we are ever to make it back and be in control, we should make it by then. Are you tired, Georgina?"

"No. I will never be tired again. I have been walking in a dream too long for that. But I never felt more pleasurable than now. I look down at my feet which are a sorry mess, but they don't seem to be my feet. Only a little while ago I felt sorry for a girl in such a state, and then I came to half realize that the girl was me. But the realization didn't carry a lot of conviction. It doesn't seem like me."

"I feel disembodied myself. But I don't believe that this comical old body that I observe will carry me much farther."

"Snuffles is trying to talk to us."

"Yes, I feel him. No, dammit, Georgina, we will not give in to that nonsense. Snuffles is only a wounded old bear that is trailing us. But our hallucination is coming again. It will take a lot of theory to cover a dual hallucination."

"Hush, I want to hear what he says."

Then Snuffles began to talk inside the heads of the two of them.

"If you know and do not tell me, then you are guilty of a peculiar affront. A maker cannot remember everything, and I had forgotten some of the things that I had made before. But we are coming on a new world now that is very like Bellota. Can it be that I have only repeated myself, and that I did not improve each time? These hills here I made once before. If you know, then you must tell me now. It may be that I cannot wait to chew your brains to find out about it. How will I ever make a better world if I make them all alike?"

"He has forgotten that he made it round, Brian."

"Georgina, he did not make anything. It is our own minds trying to reassure us that he does not know we are ahead of him and going toward our weapons."

"But how do we both hear the same thing if he isn't talking to us?"

"I don't know. But I prefer it the way it is. I never did like easy answers."

Then there came the evening they were within sight of their original valley, and, if they moved at full speed through the night, they should reach their campsite very soon after dawn.

"But the weariness is beginning to creep up through the narcosis," said Brian. "Now I'm desiring the effect that we tried to avoid before."

"But what has happened?"

"I believe that the narcotic period of the planet is over. The

carnival is coming to an end."

"Do you know something, Brian? We did not have to go around the world at all. At any time we could have separated and outmaneuvered him. He could not have intercepted both of us going toward the weapons pile if we went different ways. But we could not bear to part."

"That is a woman's explanation."

"Well, let's see you find another one. You didn't want to be parted from me, did you, Brian?"

"No, I didn't."

It was a rough, short night, but it would be the last. They moved in the agony of a cosmic hangover.

"I've become addicted," said Brian, "and the fruit has lost its numbing properties. I don't see how it is possible for anyone to be so tired."

"I'd carry you again if I weren't collapsing myself."

"Dammit, you couldn't! You're only a girl!"

"I am not only a girl! Nobody is only anything. Our trouble here may have started with your thinking that Snuffles was only an animal; and he read your thoughts and was insulted."

"He did not read my thoughts. He is only an animal. And I will shoot his fuzzy hide full of holes when we get to our campsite. Let's keep on with it and not take any chances of his catching or passing us in the dark."

"How could Phelan's corollary apply to this planet and no other when he had never been here then?"

"Because, as I often suspected, Phelan had a touch of the joker in him and he composed it sardonically."

"Then he made it for fun. And do you still think that Bellota was made for fun?"

"The fun has developed a grotesque side to it I am afraid I will have to put an end to a part of that fun. The dark is coming, and there is our campsite, and we are in the clear. I'll make it before I drop if I have to bust a lung. There's an elephant gun with a blaster attachment that I'll take to that fur-coated phony. We're going to have bear steak for breakfast."

He achieved the campsite. He had reached the wobbly state, but he still ran. He was inside the circle and at the gun stack, when a roar like double thunder froze his ears and his entrails.

He leaped back, fell, rolled, crawled, snaked his way out of reach; and the sudden shock of it bewildered him.

And there was Snuffles sitting in the middle of the supply dump and smoking the pipe of Billy Cross.

And when the words rattled inside Brian's head again, how could he be sure that it was hallucination and not the bear talking to him?

"You thought that I had forgotten that Bellota was round? If you knew how much trouble I had making it as round as it is, you would know that I could never forget it."

Georgina came up, but fell to her knees in despair when she saw that Snuffles was there ahead of them. "I can't run any more, Brian, and I know that you can't. I am down and I can never get up again. How soon will they get here?"

"The Marines?"

"Yes, the ship."

"Too late to help us. I used to wish they would be late just once. I am getting that wish, but it isn't as amusing as I anticipated."

Snuffles knocked out his pipe then, as a man would; and laid it carefully on a rock. Then he came out and killed them: Georgina, the friendly iceberg, and Brian, who did hate a pat ending.

And Snuffles was still king of Bellota.

The report of the ship read in part:

No explanation of the fact that no attempt seems to have been made to use the weapons, though two of the party were killed nearly a week later than the others. All were mangled by the huge pseudo-ursine which seems to have run amok from eating the local fruit, seasonally narcotic. Impossible to capture animal without unwarranted delay of takeoff time. Gravitational incongruity must await fuller classification of data."

The next world that Snuffles made embodied certain improvements, and he did correct the gravity error but it still contained many elements of the grotesque. Perfection is a very long, very hard road.

IN THE GARDEN

The protozoic recorder chirped like a bird. Not only would there be life traces on that little moon, but it would be a lively place. So they skipped several steps in the procedure.

The chordata discerner read Positive over most of the surface. There was spinal fluid on that orb, rivers of it. So again they omitted several tests and went to the cognition scanner. Would it show Thought on the body?

Naturally they did not get results at once, nor did they expect to; it required a fine adjustment. But they were disappointed that they found nothing for several hours as they hovered high over the rotation. Then it came, clearly and definitely, but from quite a small location only.

"Limited7" said Steiner, "as though within a pale. As follow the rest of the surface to find another, or concentrate though there were but one city, if that is its form. Shall we on this? It'll be twelve hours before it's back in our ken if we let it go now.

"Let's lock on this one and finish the scan. Then we can do the rest of the world to make sure we've missed nothing," said Stark.

There was one more test to run, one very tricky and difficult of analysis, that of the Extraordinary Perception Locator. This was designed simply to locate a source of superior thought. But this might be so varied or so unfamiliar that often both the machine and the designer of it were puzzled as how to read the results.

The E.P. Locator had been designed by Glaser. But when the Locator had refused to read Positive when turned on the inventor himself, bad blood developed between machine and man. Glaser knew that he had extraordinary perception. He was a much honored man in his field. He told the machine so heatedly.

The machine replied, with such warmth that its relays chattered, that Glaser did not have extraordinary perception; he had only ordinary perception to an extraordinary degree. There is a difference, the machine insisted.

It was for this reason that Glaser used that model no more, but built others more amenable. And it was for this reason also that the owners of Little Probe had acquired the original machine so cheaply.

And there was no denying that the Extraordinary Perception Locator (or Eppel) was a contrary machine. On Earth it had read Positive on a number of crack-pots, including Waxey Sax, a jazz tootler who could not even read music. But it had also read Positive on ninety percent of the acknowledged superior minds of the Earth. In space it had been a sound guide to the unusual intelligences encountered. Yet on Suzuki-Mi it had read Positive on a two-inch long worm, one only out of billions. For the countless identical worms no trace of anything at all was shown by the test.

So it was with mixed emotions that Steiner locked onto the area and got a flick. He then narrowed to a smaller area (apparently one individual, though this could not be certain) and got very definite action. Eppel was busy. The machine had a touch of the ham in it, and assumed an air of importance when it ran these tests.

Finally it signaled the result, the most exasperating result it ever

produces: the single orange light. It was the equivalent of the shrug of the shoulders in a man. They called it the it "You tell me light."

So among the intelligences on that body there was at least one that might be extraordinary, though possibly in a crack-pot way. It is good to be forewarned.

"Scan the remainder of the world, Steiner," said Stark, "and the rest of us will get some sleep. If you find no other spot then we will go down on that one the next time it is in position un(ler us, in about twelve hours."

"You don't want to visit any of the other areas first? Somewhere away from the thoughtful creature?"

"No. The rest of the world may be dangerous. There must be a reason that Thought is in one spot only. If we find no others then we will go down boldly and visit this."

So they all, except Steiner, went off to their bunks then: Stark, the captain; Caspar Craig, supercargo, tycoon and fifty-one percent owner of the Little Probe; Gregory Gilbert, the executive officer; and F. R. Briton, S. J., a Jesuit priest who was linguist and checker champion of the craft.

Dawn did not come to the moon-town. The Little Probe hovered stationary in the light and the moon-town came up under the dawn. Then the Probe went down to visit whatever was there.

"There's no town," said Steiner. "Not a building. Yet we're on the track of the minds. There's nothing but a meadow and some boscage, a sort of fountain or pool, and four streams booming out of it."

"Keep on toward the minds," said Stark. "They're our target."

"Not a building, not two sticks or stones placed together. It looks like an Earth-type sheep there. And that looks like an Earth-lion, I'm almost afraid to say it. And those two -- why they could be Earth-people. But with a difference. Where is that bright light coming from?"

"I don't know, but they're right in the middle of it. Land here. We'll go to meet them at once. Timidity has never been an efficacious tool with us."

Well, they were people. And one could only wish that all people were like them. There was a man and a woman, and they were clothed either in very bright garments or no garments at all, but only in a very bright light.

"Talk to them, Father Briton," said Stark. "You are the linguist."

"Howdy," said the priest.

He may or may not have been understood, but the two of them smiled at him so he went on.

"Father Briton from Philadelphia," he said, "on detached service. And you, my good man, what is your handle, your monicker, your tag?"

"Ha-Adamah," said the man.

"And your daughter, or niece?"

It may be that the shining man frowned momentarily at this; but the woman smiled, proving that she was human.

"The woman is named Hawwah," said the man. "The sheep is named sheep, the lion is named lion, the horse is named horse, and the hoolock is named hoolock."

"I understand. It is possible that this could go on and on. How is it that you use the English tongue?"

"I have only one tongue; but it is given to us to be understood by all; by the eagle, by the squirrel, by the ass, by the English."

"We happen to be bloody Yankees, but we use a borrowed tongue. You wouldn't have a drink on you for a tubful of thirsty travelers, would you?"

"The fountain."

"Ah -- I see."

But the crew all drank of the fountain to be sociable. It was water, but water that excelled, cool and with all its origina bubbles like the first water ever made.

"What do you make of them?" asked Stark.

"Human," said Steiner. "It may even be that they are a little more

than human. I don't understand that light that surrounds them. And they seem to be clothed, as it were, in dignity."

"And very little else," said Father Briton, "though that light trick does serve a purpose. But I'm not sure they'd pass in Philadelphia."

"Talk to them again," said Stark. "You're the linguist."

"That isn't necessary here, Captain. Talk to them yourself." "Are there any other people here?" Stark asked the man. "The two of us. Man and woman."

"But are there any others?"

"How would there be any others? What other kind of people could there be than man and woman?"

"But is there more than one man or woman?"

"How could there be more than one of anything?" The captain was a little puzzled by this, but he went on doggedly: "Ha-Adamah, what do you think that we are? Are we not people?"

"You are not anything till I name you. But I will name you and then you can be. You are named captain. He is named priest. He is named engineer. He is named flunky."

"Thanks a lot," said Steiner.

"But are we not people?" persisted Captain Stark.

"No. We are the people. There are no people but two. How could there be other people?"

"And the damndest thing about it," muttered Steiner, "is how are we going to prove him wrong? But it does give you a small feeling."

"Can we have something to eat?" asked the captain.

"Pick from the trees," said Ha-Adamah, "and then it may be that you will want to sleep on the grass. Being not of human nature (which does not need sleep or rest), it may be that you require respite. But you are free to enjoy the garden and its fruits."

"We will," said Captain Stark.

They wandered about the place, but they were uneasy.

There were the animals. The lion and lioness were enough to make one cautious, though they offered no harm. The two bears had a puzzling look, as though they wanted either to frolic with you or to mangle you.

"If there are only two people here," said Caspar Craig, "then it may be that the rest of the world is not dangerous at all. It looked fertile wherever we scanned it, though not so fertile as this central bit. And those rocks will bear examining."

"Flecked with gold, and possibly with something else," said Stark.

"A very promising site."

"And everything grows here," added Stark. "Those are Earth-fruits and I never saw finer. I've tasted the grapes and plums and pears. The figs and dates are superb, the quince is as flavorsome as a quince can be, the cherries are excellent. And I never did taste such oranges. But I haven't yet tried the-" and he stopped.

"If you're thinking what I'm afraid to think," said Gilbert, "then it will be a test at least: whether we're having a pleasant dream or whether this is reality. Go ahead and eat one."

"I won't be the first to eat one. You eat."

"Ask him first. You ask him."

"Ha-Adamah, is it allowed to eat the apples?"

"Certainly. Eat. It is the finest fruit in the garden."

"Well, the analogy breaks down there," said Stark. "I was almost beginning to believe in the thing. But, if it isn't that, then what? Father Briton, you are the linguist, but in Hebrew does not Ha-Adamah and Hawwah mean --?"

"Of course they do. You know that as well as I."

"I was never a believer. But would it be possible for the exact same proposition to maintain here as on Earth?"

"All things are possible."

And it was then that Ha-Adamah, the shining man, gave a wild cry:
"No. No. Do not approach it. It is not allowed to eat of that one."

It was the pomegranate tree, and he was warning Craig away from it.

"Once more, Father," said Stark, "you should be the authority; but does not the idea that it was an apple that was forbidden go back only to a medieval painting?"

"It does. The name of the fruit is not mentioned in Genesis. In Hebrew exegesis, however, the pomegranate is usually indicated."

"I thought so. Question the man further, Father. This is too incredible."

"It is a little odd. Adam, old man, how long have you been here?"

"Forever less six days is the answer that has been given to me. I never did understand the answer, however."

"And have you gotten no older in all that time?"

"I do not understand what 'older' is. I am as I have been from the beginning."

"And do you think that you will ever die?"

"To die I do not understand. I am taught that it is a property of fallen nature to die, and that does not pertain to me or mine."

"And are you happy here?"

"Perfectly happy according to my preternatural state. But I am taught that it might be possible to lose that happiness, and then to seek it vainly through all the ages. I am taught that sickness and aging and even death could come if this happiness were ever lost. I am taught that on at least one other unfortunate world it has actually been lost."

"Do you consider yourself a knowledgeable man?"

"Yes, since I am the only man, and knowledge is natural to man. But I am further blessed. I have a preternatural intellect."

Then Stark cut in once more: "There must be some one question you could ask him, Father. Some way to settle it. I am becoming nearly convinced."

"Yes, there is a question that will settle it. Adam, old man, how about a game of checkers?"

"This is hardly the time for clowning," said Stark.

"I'm not clowning, Captain. How about it, Adam? I'll give you choice of colors and first move."

"No. It would be no contest. I have a preternatural intellect."

"Well, I beat a barber who was champion of Germantown. And I beat the champion of Morgan County, Tennessee, which is the hottest checker center on Earth. I've played against, and beaten, machines. But I never played a preternatural mind. Let's just set up the board, Adam, and have a go at it."

"No. It would be no contest. I would not like to humble you."

They were there for three days. They were delighted with the place. It was a world with everything, and it seemed to have only two inhabitants. They went everywhere except into the big cave.

"What is there, Adam?" asked Captain Stark.

"The great serpent lives there. I would not disturb him. He has long been cranky because plans that he had for us did not materialize. But we are taught that should evil ever come to us, which it cannot if we persevere, it will come by him."

They learned no more of the real nature of the sphere in their time there. Yet all but one of them were convinced of the reality when they left. And they talked of it as they took off.

"A crowd would laugh if told of it," said Stark, "but not many would laugh if they had actually seen the place, or them. I am not a gullible man, but I am convinced of this: this is a pristine and pure world and ours and all the others we have visited are fallen worlds. Here are the prototypes of

our first parents before their fall. They are garbed in light and innocence, and they have the happiness that we have been seeking for centuries. It would be a crime if anyone disturbed that happiness."

"I too am convinced," said Steiner. "It is Paradise itself, where the lion lies down with the lamb, and where the serpent has not prevailed. It would be the darkest of crimes if we or others should play the part of the serpent, and intrude and spoil."

"I am probably the most skeptical man in the world " said Caspar Craig the tycoon, "but I do believe my eyes. I have been there and seen it. It is indeed an unspoiled Paradise; and it would be a crime calling to the wide heavens for vengeance for anyone to smirch in any way that perfection."

"So much for that. Now to business. Gilbert, take a gram: Ninety Million Square Miles of Pristine Paradise for sale or lease. Farming, Ranching, exceptional opportunities for Horticulture. Gold, Silver, Iron, Earth-Type Fauna. Terms. Special rates for Large Settlement Parties. Write, gram, or call in person at any of our planetary offices as listed below. Ask for Brochure-Eden Acres Unlimited."

Down in the great cave that Old Serpent, a two-legged one among whose names was "Snake-Oil Sam," spoke to his underlings: "It'll take them fourteen days to get back with the settlers. We'll have time to overhaul the blasters. We haven't had any well-equipped settlers for six weeks. It used to be we'd hardly have time to strip and slaughter and stow before there was another hatch to take care of."

"I think you'd better write me some new lines," said Adam. "I feel like a goof saying those same ones to each bunch."

"You are a goof, and therefore perfect for the part. I was in show business long enough to learn never to change a line too soon. I did change Adam and Eve to Ha-Adamah and Hawwah, and the apple to the pomegranate. People aren't becoming any smarter -- but they are becoming better researched, and they insist on authenticity.

"This is still a perfect come-on here. There is something in human nature that cannot resist the idea of a Perfect Paradise. Folks will whoop and holler to their neighbors to come in droves to spoil it and mar it. It isn't greed or the desire for new land so much, though that is strong too. Mainly it is the feverish passion to befoul and poison what is unspoiled. Fortunately I am sagacious enough to take advantage of this trait. And when you start to farm a new world on a shoestring you have to acquire your equipment as you can."

He looked proudly around at the great cave with its mountains and tiers of material; heavy machinery of all sorts, titanic crates of foodstuff space-sealed; wheeled, tracked, propped, vanned, and jetted vehicles; and power packs to run a world.

He looked at the three dozen space ships stripped and stacked, and at the rather large pile of bone-meal in one corner.

"We will have to get another lion," said Eve. "Bowser is getting old, and Marie-Yvette abuses him and gnaws his toes. And we do have to have a big-maned lion to lie down with the lamb."

"I know it, Eve. The lion is a very important prop. Maybe one of the crack-pot settlers will bring a new lion."

"And can't you mix another kind of shining paint?" asked Adam. "This itches. It's hell."

"I'm working on it."

Caspar Craig was still dictating the gram: "Amazing quality of longevity seemingly inherent in the locale. Climate Ideal. Daylight or half-light all twenty-one hours from Planet Delphina and from Sol Caspar Craig Number Three. Pure water for all industrial purposes. Scenic and Storied. Zoning and pre-settlement restrictions to insure congenial neighbors. A completely planned globular settlement in a near arm of our own

galaxy. Low taxes and liberal credit. Financing our specialty --"

"And you had better have an armed escort when you return," said Father Briton.

"Why in cosmos would we want an armed escort?"

"It's as phoney as a seven-credit note."

"You, a man of the cloth, doubt it? And us ready skeptics convinced by our senses? Why do you doubt?"

"It is only the unbelieving who believe so easily in obvious frauds. Theologically unsound, dramaturgically weak, philologically impossible, zoologically rigged, salted conspicuously with gold, and shot through with anachronisms. And moreover he was afraid to play me at checkers."

"What?"

"If I had a preternatural intellect I wouldn't be afraid of a game of checkers with anyone. Yet there was an unusual mind there somewhere; it is just that he chose not to make our acquaintance personally."

They looked at the priest thoughtfully.

"But it was Paradise in one way," said Steiner.

"How?"

"All the time we were there the woman did not speak."

ALL THE PEOPLE

Anthony Trotz went first to the politician, Mike Delado.

"How many people do you know, Mr. Delado?"

"Why the question?"

"I am wondering just what amount of detail the mind can hold."

"To a degree I know many. Ten thousand well, thirty thousand by name, probably a hundred thousand by face and to shake hands with."

"And what is the limit?"

"Possibly I am the limit." The politician smiled frostily. "The only limit is time, speed of cognizance, and retention. I am told that the latter lessens with age. I am seventy, and it has not done so with me. Whom I have known I do not forget."

"And with special training could one go beyond you?"

"I doubt if one could -- much. For my own training has been quite special. Nobody has been so entirely with the people as I have. I've taken five memory courses in my time, but the tricks of all of them I had already come to on my own. I am a great believer in the commonality of mankind and of near equal inherent ability. Yet there are some, say the one man in fifty, who in degree if not in kind does exceed his fellows in scope and awareness and vitality. I am that one man in fifty, and knowing people is my specialty."

"Could a man who specialized still more -- and to the exclusion of other things -- know a hundred thousand men well?"

"It is possible. Dimly."

"A quarter of a million?"

"I think not. He might learn that many faces and names, but he would not know the men."

Anthony went next to the philosopher, Gabriel Mindel.

"Mr. Mindel, how many people do you know?"

"How know? Per se? A Se? Or In se? Per suam essentiam, perhaps? Or do you mean ab alio? Or to know as hoc aliquid? There is a fine difference there. Or do you possibly mean to know in subsiantia prima, or in the sense of comprehensive noumena?"

"Somewhere between the latter two. How many persons do you know by name, face, and with a degree of intimacy?"

"I have learned over the years the names of some of my colleagues, possibly a dozen of them. I am now sound on my wife's name, and I seldom stumble over the names of my offspring -- never more than momentarily. But

you may have come to the wrong man for... whatever you have come for. I am notoriously poor at names, faces, and persons. I have even been described (vox faucibus haesit) as absentminded."

"Yes, you do have the reputation. But perhaps I have not come to the wrong man in seeking the theory of the thing. What is it that limits the comprehensive capacity of the mind of man? What will it hold? What restricts?"

"The body."

"How is that?"

"The brain, I should say, the material tie. The mind is limited by the brain. It is skull-bound. It can accumulate no more than its cranial capacity, though not one-tenth of that is ordinarily used. An unbodied mind would (in esoteric theory) be unlimited."

"And how in practical theory?"

"If it is practical, a pragma, it is a thing and not a theory."

"Then we can have no experience with the unbodied mind, or the possibility of it?"

"We have not discovered any area of contact, but we may entertain the possibility of it. There is no paradox here. One may rationally consider the irrational."

Anthony went next to see the priest.

"How many people do you know?" he asked him.

"I know them all."

"That has to be doubted," said Anthony after a moment.

"I've had twenty different stations. And when you hear five thousand confessions a year for forty years, you by no means know all about people, but you do know all people."

"I do not mean types. I mean persons."

"Oh, I know a dozen or so well, a few thousands somewhat less."

"Would it be possible to know a hundred thousand people, a half million?"

"A mentalist might know that many to recognize; I don't know the limit. But darkened man has a limit set; on everything."

"Could a somehow emancipated man know more?"

"The only emancipated man is the corporally dead man. And the dead man, if he attains the beatific vision, knows all other persons who have ever been since time began."

"All the billions?"

"All."

"With the same brain?"

"No. But with the same mind."

"Then wouldn't even a believer have to admit that the mind which we have now is only a token mind? Would not any connection it would have with a completely comprehensive mind be very tenuous? Would we really be the same person if so changed? It is like saying a bucket would hold the ocean if it were fulfilled, which only means filled full. How could it be the same mind?"

"I don't know."

Anthony went to see the psychologist.

"How many people do you know, Dr. Shirm?"

"I could be crabby and say that I know as many as want to; but it wouldn't be the truth. I rather like people, which is odd in my profession. What is it that you really want to know?"

"How many people can one man know?"

"It doesn't matter very much. People mostly overestimate the number of their acquaintances. What is it that you are trying to ask me?"

"Could one man know everyone?"

"Naturally not. But unnaturally he might seem to. There is a delusion to this effect accompanied by euphoria, and it is called --"

"I don't want to know what it is called. Why do specialists use

Latin and Greek?"

"One part hokum, and two parts need; there simply not being enough letters in the alphabet of exposition without them. It is as difficult to name concepts as children, and we search our brains as a new mother does. It will not do to call two children or two concepts by the same name."

"Thank you. I doubt that this is delusion, and it is not accompanied by euphoria."

Anthony had a reason for questioning the four men since (as a new thing that had come to him) he knew everybody. He knew everyone in Salt Lake City, where he had never been. He knew everybody in Jebel Shah, where the town is a little amphitheater around the harbor, and in Batangas and Weilmi. He knew the loungers around the end of the Galata bridge in Istanbul, and the porters in Kuala Lumpur. He knew the tobacco traders in Plovdiv, and the cork cutters of Portugal. He knew the dock workemen in Djibouti, and the glove makers in Prague. He knew the vegetable farmers around El Centro, and the muskrat trappers of Barrataria Bay. He knew the three billion people of the world by name and face, and with a fair degree of intimacy.

"Yet I'm not a very intelligent man. I've been called a bungler. And they've had to reassign me three different times at the filter center. I've seen only a few thousands of those billions of people, and it seems unusual that I should know them all. It may be a delusion, as Dr. Shirm says, but it is a heavily detailed delusion, and it is not accompanied by euphoria. I feel like green hell just thinking of it."

He knew the cattle traders of Letterkenny Donegal; he knew the cane cutters of Oriente, and the tree climbers of Milne Bay. He knew the people who died every minute, and those who were born.

"There is no way out of it. I know everybody in the world. It is impossible, but it is so. And to what purpose? There aren't a handful of them I could borrow a dollar from, and I haven't a real friend in the lot. I don't know whether it came to me suddenly, but I realized it suddenly. My father was a junk dealer in Wichita, and my education is spotty. I am maladjusted, introverted, incompetent and unhappy, and I also have weak kidneys. Why should a power like this come to a man like me?"

The children in the streets hooted at him. Anthony had always had a healthy hatred for children and dogs, those twin harassers of the unfortunate and the maladjusted. Both run in packs, and both are cowardly attackers. If either of them spots a weakness he will not let it go. That Anthony's father had been a junk dealer was no reason to hoot at him. And how did the children even know about that? Did they possess some fraction of the power that had come on him lately?

But he had strolled about the town for too long. He should have been at work at the filter center. Often they were impatient with him when he wandered off from his work, and Colonel Peter Cooper was waiting for him when he came in now.

"Where have you been, Anthony?"

"Walking. I talked to four men. I mentioned no subject in the province of the filter center."

"Every subject is in the province of the filter center. And you know that our work here is confidential."

"Yes, sir, but I do not understand the import of my work here. I would not be able to give out information that I do not have."

"A popular misconception. There are others who might understand the import of it, and be able to reconstruct it from what you tell them. How do you feel?"

"Nervous, unwell, my tongue is furred, and my kidneys --"

"Ah yes, there will be someone here this afternoon to fix your kidneys. I have not forgotten. Is there anything that you want to tell me?"

"No, sir."

Colonel Cooper had the habit of asking that of his workers in the manner of a mother asking a child if he wants to go to the bathroom. There

was something embarrassing in his intonation.

Well, he did want to tell him something, but he didn't know how to phrase it. He wanted to tell the colonel that he had newly acquired the power of knowing everyone in the world, that he was worried how he could hold so much in a head that was not noteworthy in its capacity. But he feared ridicule more than he feared anything and he was a tangle of fears.

But he thought he would try it a little bit on his co-workers.

"I know a man named Walter Walloroy in Galveston," he said to Adrian. "He drinks beer at the Gizmo bar, and is retired."

"What is the superlative of so what?"

"But I have never been there," said Anthony.

"And I have never been in Kalamazoo."

"I know a girl in Kalamazoo. Her name is Greta Harandash. She is home today with a cold. She is prone to colds."

But Adrian was a creature both uninterested and uninteresting. It is very hard to confide in one who is uninterested.

"Well, I will live with it a little while," said Anthony. "Or I may have to go to a doctor and see if he can give me something to make all these people go away. But if he thinks my story is a queer one, he may report me back to the center, and I might be reclassified again. It makes me nervous to be reclassified."

So he lived with it a while, the rest of the day and the night. He should have felt better. A man had come that afternoon and fixed his kidneys; but there was nobody to fix his nervousness and apprehension. And his skittishness was increased when the children hooted at him as he walked to work in the morning. That hated epithet! But how could they know that his father had been a dealer in used metals in a town far away?

He had to confide in someone.

He spoke to Wellington; who also worked in his room. "I know a girl in Beirut who is just going to bed. It is evening there now, you know."

"That so? Why don't they get their time straightened out? I met a girl last night that's cute as a correlator key, and kind of shaped like one. She doesn't know yet that I work in the center and am a restricted person. I'm not going to tell her. Let her find out for herself."

It was no good trying to tell things to Wellington. Wellington never listened. And then Anthony got a summons to Colonel Peter Cooper, which always increased his apprehension.

"Anthony," said the colonel, "I want you to tell me if you discern anything unusual. That is really your job, to report anything unusual. The other, the paper shuffling, is just something to keep your idle hands busy. Now tell me clearly if anything unusual has come to your notice."

"Sir, it has." And then he blurted it out. "I know everybody. I know everybody in the world. I know them all in their billions, every person. It has me worried sick."

"Yes, yes, Anthony. But tell me, have you noticed anything odd? It is your duty to tell me if you have."

"But I have just told you! In some manner I know every person in the world. I know the people in Transvaal, I know the people in Guatemala. I know every body."

"Yes, Anthony, we realize that. And it may take a little getting used to. But that isn't what I mean. Have you, besides that thing that seems out of the way to you, noticed anything unusual, anything that seems out of place, a little bit wrong?"

"Ah, besides that and your reaction to it, no, sir. Nothing else odd. I might ask, though, how odd can a thing get? But other than that, no, sir."

"Good, Anthony. Now remember, if you sense anything odd about anything at all, come and tell me. No matter how trivial it is, if you feel that something is just a little bit out of place, then report it at once. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

But he couldn't help wondering what it might be that the Colonel would consider a little bit odd.

Anthony left the center and walked. He shouldn't have. He knew that they became impatient with him when he wandered off from his work.

"But I have to think. I have all the people in the world in my brain, and still I am not able to think. This power should have come to someone able to take advantage of it."

He went into the Plugged Nickel Bar, but the man on duty knew him for a restricted person from the filter center, and would not serve him.

He wandered disconsolately about the city. "I know the people in Omaha and those in Omsk. What queer names have the towns of the earth! I know everyone in the world, and when anyone is born or dies. And Colonel Cooper did not find it unusual. Yet I am to be on the lookout for things unusual. The question rises, would I know an odd thing if I met it?"

And then it was that something just a little bit unusual did happen, something not quite right, a small thing. But the Colonel had told him to report anything about anything, no matter how insignificant, that struck him as a little queer.

It was just that with all the people in his head, and the arrivals and departures, there was a small group that was not of the pattern. Every minute hundreds left by death and arrived by birth. And now there was a small group, seven persons; they arrived into the world, and they were not horn into the world.

So Anthony went to tell Colonel Cooper that something had occurred to his mind that was a little bit odd.

But damn-the-dander-headed-two-and-four-legged devils, there were the kids and the dogs in the street again, yipping and hooting and chanting:

"Tony the tin man, Tony the tin man."

He longed for the day when he would see them fall like leaves out of his mind, and death take them.

"Tony the tin man. Tony the tin man."

How had they known that his father was a used metal dealer?

Colonel Peter Cooper was waiting for him.

"You surely took your time, Anthony. Tell me at once what it is and where. The reaction was registered, but it would take us hours to pinpoint its source without your help. Now then, explain as calmly as you can what you felt or experienced. Or, more to the point, where are they?"

"No. You will have to answer certain questions first."

"I haven't the time to waste, Anthony. Tell me once what it is and where."

"No. There is no other way. You have to bargain with me."

"One does not bargain with restricted persons."

"Well, I will bargain till I find out just what it means that I am a restricted person."

"You really don't know? Well, we haven't time to fix that stubborn streak in you now. Quickly, just what is that you have to know?"

"I have to know what a restricted person is. I have to now why the children hoot 'Tony the tin man' at me. How can they know that my father was a junk dealer?"

"You had no father. We give to each of you a basic collection of concepts and the vocabulary to handle them, a sufficient store of memories, and a background of a distant town. That happened to be yours, but there is no connection here. The children call you Tony the Tin Man because, like all really cruel creatures, they have an instinct for the truth that can hurt; and they will never forget it."

"Then I am a tin man?"

"Well, no. Actually only seventeen percent metal. And less than a third of one percent tin. You are compounded of animal, vegetable, and mineral fiber, and here was much effort given to your manufacture and

programming. Yet the taunt of the children is essentially true."

"Then, if I am Tony the Tin Man, how can I know all the people of the world in my mind?"

"You have no mind."

"In my brain then. How can all that be in one small brain?"

"Because your brain is not in your head, and it is not small. The longest way around may take the shortest time here. Come, I may as well show it to you. I've told you enough that it won't matter if you know a little more. There are few who are taken on personally conducted sightseeing tours of their own brains. You should be grateful."

"Gratitude seems a little tardy."

They went into the barred area, down into the bowels of the main building of the center. And they looked at the brain of Anthony Trotz, a restricted person in its special meaning.

"It is the largest in the world," said Colonel Cooper.

"How large?"

"A little over twelve hundred cubic meters."

"What a brain! And it is mine?"

"You share it with others. But, yes, it is yours. You have access to its data. You are an adjunct to it, a runner for it, an appendage, inasmuch as you are anything at all."

"Colonel Cooper, how long have I been alive?"

"You are not."

"How long have I been as I am now?"

"It is three days since you were last reassigned, since you were assigned to this. At that time your nervousness and apprehensions were introduced. An apprehensive unit will be more inclined to notice details just little out of the ordinary."

"And what is my purpose?"

They were now walking back to the office work area, and Anthony had a sad feeling at leaving his brain behind him.

"This is a filter center," said Colonel Cooper, "and your purpose is to serve as a filter, of a sort. Every person has a slight aura about him. It is a characteristic of his, and is part of his personality and purpose. And it can be detected, electrically, magnetically, even visually under special conditions. The accumulator at which we were looking (your brain) is designed to maintain contact with all the auras in the world, and to keep running and complete data on them all. It contains a multiplicity of circuits for each of its three billion and some subjects. However, as aid to its operation, it was necessary to assign several artificial consciousnesses to it. You are one of these."

Anthony looked out the window as the Colonel continued his explanation.

The dogs and the children had found a new victim in the streets below, and Anthony's heart went out to him.

"The purpose," said Colonel Cooper, "was to notice anything just a little peculiar in the auras and the persons they represent, anything at all odd in their comings and goings. Anything like what you have come here to report to me."

"Like the seven persons who recently arrived in the world, and not by way of birth?"

"Yes. We have been expecting the first of the aliens for months. We must know their area, and at once. Now tell me."

"What if they are not aliens at all? What if they are restricted persons like myself?"

"Restricted persons have no aura, are not persons, are not alive. And you would not receive knowledge of them."

"Then how do I know the other restricted persons here, Adrian and Wellington, and such?"

"You know them at first hand. You do not know them through the

machine. Now tell me the area quickly. The center may be a primary target. It will take the machine hours to ravel it out. Your only purpose is to serve as an intuitive shortcut."

But Tin Man Tony did not speak. He only thought in his mind -- more accurately, in his brain a hundred yards away. He thought in his fabricated consciousness:

The area is quite near. If the Colonel were not burdened with a mind, he would be able to think more clearly. He would know that cruel children and dogs love to worry what is not human, and that all the restricted persons for this area are accounted for. He would know that they are worrying one of the aliens in the street below, and that is the area that is right for my consciousness.

I wonder if they will be better manners? He is an imposing figure, and he would be able to pass for a man. And the Colonel is right: the center is a primary target.

Why! I never knew you could kill a child just by pointing a finger at him like that! What opportunities I have missed! Enemy of my enemy, you are my friend.

And aloud he said to the Colonel:

"I will not tell you."

"Then we'll have you apart and get it out of you mighty quick."

"How quick?"

"Ten minutes."

"Time enough," said Tony.

For he knew them now, coming in like snow. They were arriving in the world by the hundreds, and not arriving by birth.

NAME OF THE SNAKE

When Pio Quindecimo -- Confiteantur Domino Misericordia ejus -- had proclaimed it, it was received, even by the faithful, with a measure of ennui. Contingent, speculative, rhetorical -- it was not thought of as touching on practicality. Pio was not one of the outstanding Popes The century.

The encyclical was titled modestly "Euntes Ergo DoCete Omnes": "Going therefore Teach Ye All." Its substance was that this was a literal command of the Lord, and that the time had come to implement that command in its extreme meaning; that when the Lord had said "Go into all lands," He had not meant to go into lands of one narrow earth only; that when the Lord had said "Teach Ye All," it was not meant to teach all men only... within the narrow,, framework in which we have considered the term "men."

Should the command be taken literally, its implementation would cause far-reaching activity. It was in the implementation of the command that Padreco Barnaby was now on that remote planet, Analos.

Could one call the Anabi humans? Had their skeletal remains been discovered on old Earth, they would unhesitatingly have been classed as human. The oddly formed ears -- not really as large as they seemed -- somewhat Gothic in their steepled upsweep, their slight caudal appendage, their remarkable facial mobility and chameleon-like complexions, these could not have been read from their bone remains. But how are we to say that their ears were more grotesque than our own? When did you last look at your own ears objectively? Are they not odd things to be sticking on the sides of a person's head?

"They are gargoyles," said an early visitor from Earth. Of course they were. The gargoyles had been copied by a still earlier visitor to Analos from Earth. But they were a lively and interesting bunch of gargoyles: mechanically civilized, ethically weird, artistically exciting. They were polished and polyglot, and in many ways more human than the humans.

On Analos, the Padreco was at first a guest of Landmaster, a leading citizen. Here the priest, speaking of his mission, first came up against the Wall.

"I can see what this might lead to, little priest," Land-master told him when they discussed the situation. "It might even become bothersome to us -- if we ever let anything bother us -- if we had not passed beyond the stage where annoyance was possible. So long as you confined your activity to resident Earthlings and humans or that recension, there was no problem. Fortunately we do not fall within those categories. That being so, I do not see how your present aspirations can have any point of contact with us."

"You Anabi are sentient creatures of great natural intelligence, Landmaster. As such it is even possible that you have souls."

"We have souls that are fully realized. What could humans give to us who transcend humanity?"

"The Truth, the Way, the Life, the Baptism."

"We have the first three greatly beyond yourselves. The last -- the crabbed rite of a dying sect -- what could that give us?"

"Forgiveness of your sins."

"But we haven't any sins. That's the whole point about us. We've long since passed beyond that. You humans are still awkward and guilt-ridden. You are of a species which as yet has no adult form. Vicariously we may be the adult form of yourselves. The idea of sin is an aspect of your early awkwardness."

"Everybody has sins, Landmaster."

"Only according to your own childish thesis, little priest. And consequent to that, you would reason that everybody must be saved-and by yourselves, a race of crop-eared, flat-faced children."

"But consider how meaningless it becomes in relation to ourselves, the Analoi. How could we sin? What would we have to sin about? Our procreation no longer follows the grotesque pattern of your own, and ours is without passion. You can see that ninety percent of your sin is already gone."

"What else is left to us? What other opportunity -- if that is the word for it -- have we for sinning? We have no poverty, no greed, no envy. Our metabolism is so regulated that neither sloth nor hysterical activity is possible. We have long ago attained a balance in all things; and 'sin' is only a form of unbalance."

"I have forgotten, little priest. What are the '5ins' of the childish races?"

"Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth," said Padreco Barnaby. "These are the capital sins and the sources of sin. All others derive from them."

"Spoken like a valiant little mime. And nothing is derived but from a source. But you can see how completely we lack these seven stumbling blocks of children. Pride is only a misunderstanding of the nature of achievement; covetousness disappears when all that could be coveted has been acquired; lust is an adjunct of an arrangement that no longer has a counterpart in ourselves. Anger, gluttony, envy, sloth are only malfunctions. All malfunctions are subject to adjustment and correction, and we have corrected them."

Padreco Barnaby was defeated for the while, and he let his mind wander. He gazed over the countryside of Analos.

An early explorer has given his impression of that world:

"It was as though I were walking under water," he wrote. "This was not from any obstruction or resistance, for the atmosphere is lighter than Earth's. It was from a sort of shimmering and wavering of the air itself and from the 'air shadows,' not clouds, that pass along like the running shadows of overhead waves. This, coupled with the flora (very like the underwater plants of Earth, though free-standing) gave me the feeling that I was walking on the bottom of the ocean."

To the Padreco it seemed as though he had been talking under water and that he had not been heard.

"What is the meaning of that giant kettle in the center of your main plaza, Landmaster?" he finally asked. "It seems quite old."

"It is a relic of our old race, and we keep it. We have a certain reverence for the past -- even the obsoleted past In minds as great as ours there is room even for relics."

"Then it has no present use?"

"No. But under a special condition we could revert to an ancient use of it. That need not concern you now."

A kettle, a giant kettle! You have no idea how grotesquely pot-bellied the thing was!

But the Padreco returned impotently to his main theme.

"There has to be sin, Landmaster! How else can there be salvation?"

"We have salvation, little priest You haven't How could you bring it to us?"

So Padreco Barnaby left Landmaster and went out to see if he could not discover sin somewhere on Analos. He asked a small boy about it.

"Sonny, do you know what sin is? Have you ever run across the thing?"

"Sir and stranger, sin is an archaic word for an outmoded thing. It is an appurtenance to an unclarified state of mind that still obtains on the more benighted worlds. The word and the concept behind it will pass into oblivion as soon as true light can be brought into those dark places."

Damnation! -- a meaningless word on Analos: even the children of the gargoyles were too polite to be human.

"You little monster, do all the children on Analos talk like that?"

"All who are not deviationists would of necessity talk as I do. And 'monster,' as you call me with disapprobation, means a 'show-piece,' that which is displayed, a wonder. The late meaning of the word in the sense of a grotesque animal is an accretion. I gladly accept the name of monster in its true meaning. We are the Monsters of the Universe."

"Damme, I believe that you are," the Padreco said to himself. Polygot little prig! He couldn't even cope with the children of the things.

"Sonny, do you ever have any fun?" he finally asked.

"Fun is another archaic word; but I am not sound on its meaning," said the boy. "Is it not related to the obsolete concept of sin?"

"Not directly, boy. Fun is the third side of a two-headed coin. It slips in. Or it used to."

"Sir and stranger, it is possible that you should take course in corrective semantics."

"I may be taking one now. But what of the children are deviationists? Where are they? And what are like?"

"I don't know. If they don't pass their probationary period, we don't see them any more. I believe they are sent to another place."

"I have to find a little bit of sin somewhere," the Padreco mumbled to himself. "An honest man should be able to find it anywhere if he really inquires. On Earth the saying was that a taxi-driver would always know where to find it."

The Padreco hailed a taxi. A taxi is a circle. That is to say that one clambers over and sits in the single circular seat that faces inward. The Analoi are gregarious and like to gaze on the faces of their fellows. Only the shame-capable humans would wish to sit in Unfacing rows. The driver sits above in an open turret, and dangles his head down to talk.

"Where would you go, stranger?" the driver asked the Padreco. There was one other passenger, a thoughtful man of early middle age.

"I'm looking for sin," the Padreco told the driver. "It's a tradition that taxi-drivers always know where to find it."

"Riddles is it, stranger? Let me deliver my other customer while I puzzle this one out. It's his last ride and that makes it important."

"How is it your last ride?" Padreco Barnaby asked the thoughtful man. Conversation was unavoidable in such a taxi. The facing was too direct to get out of it.

"Oh, my time has come," said the man, "a little earlier than with most. I've drunk the cup empty, so there's nothing left. It was a nice life -- well, I suppose it was. Rather expected more out of it, but I see now that I shouldn't have. An adult will know when it's over. And they do make a clean end of it for you."

"Deus meus; is that the way it ends on Analos?"

"How else? Natural death has been pushed back so far that nobody could contemplate waiting for it. Should we drag out our lives and become abridged repetitious creatures like those of the lesser races? One goes quietly when he realizes that he has covered it all."

"But that is despair!"

"A little boy's word for a little boy's thing. Termination with dignity -- that's the only way. Goodbye to you both. And to all."

The thoughtful man got out and entered the Terminators.

"Now what was the name of that thing you wanted to be taken to, stranger?" the taxi-driver asked the Padreco.

"Never mind. I may have found it already. I'll walk back."

There was something here that needed a name.

He walked till he came to the buildings of the city again, and the buildings distorted as he neared them. The edifices of Analos seem bulbous at near view, and indeed they are built slightly so. Yet when seen at a distance, due to a vagary of atmosphere called Towering by Earth meteorologists, they appear normal and straight. The few buildings built to Earth specifications seemed pinched-in when viewed from afar, almost collapsing on themselves. But to the Padreco, the pot-bellied buildings of Analos made him feel a complete alien. He was lost in this world, and he cried out:

"Oh, for the old familiar sins that one can get hold of and denounce! In my book, Termination is not the only way, and Dignity has another meaning. Where are the people who sin like people? Is there nowhere a healthy case of d.t.s or a hoppy in need of reform? Is there no burglar I can call my brother? No golden-hearted chippy who needs only be shown the right way? Is there no thief or usurer or politician to strike a note of reality? Hypocrites, wife-beaters, seducers, d8magogues, sleazy old perverters, where can I find you? Answer me! I need you now!"

"Sir, sir, you are crying out in the street," a young Anabi lady told him. "Are you ill? What are you calling out for?"

"Sin. A little sin, please, for the love of Christ. If there is no sin in my cellar, then the foundation of my house is not what I supposed."

"Hardly anyone uses sin any more, sir. What a peculiar thing to be crying out in the street for! But I believe there is one shop that still handles it. Here. I will write you the address."

Padreco Barnaby took the address and ran to the shop. It was not what he sought. Sin was an old name of a scent, but the name had been changed as no longer conveying a meaning.

There were very many of these scent shops. Too many. And the scent of the scent shops was not the odor of sanctity. Was it possible that a new sensuality had taken the place of the old?

And the other shops -- block after block of them -- what were they for? What were the uses of the strange apparatus displayed in them? And why should they give that sticky feeling of menace?

The Padreco spent a long day wandering through the capital city of Analos. The pavements were green and artfully shadow-painted so as to resemble turf. The effect, however, was not that of placid nature; it was of a primordial wildness able to break through the thin shell at any time. And what was the new weirdness that came over him when he walked through the parks. The earlier explorer had been mistaken: the plants of Analos did not

resemble the undersea plants of Earth; they resembled the undersea animals. They leered like devilfish and grinned like sharks.

It was here everywhere. But it had changed its name.

It was with shameful triumph that Padreco Barnaby first uncovered the sweeping outlines of the thing. It was with growing horror that he amassed the details. When he had enough of it, he went back to Landmaster, who was now with several others of his kind.

"Repent! Repent!" the Padreco called to them. "The ax is already laid to the roots. The tree that bears evil fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire!"

"Of what should we repent, little priest?" Landmaster asked.

"Of your sins! At once! Before it is too late!"

"I have explained to you that we have no sins, little priest; and that we could not have them according to our developing nature. Your repetition would annoy us... if we ever let anything annoy us."

Landmaster made a sign to one of his fellows, who left them at once.

"What were the rather humorous names you gave them this morning?" Landmaster asked, turning again to the priest.

"You remember the names I gave. Now I give others. Too effete for the ancient sins themselves, you have the deadly shadows of them: presumption, establishment, ruthlessness, selfishness, satiety, monopoly, despair."

"An interesting argument. We have a Department of Interesting Arguments. You should go there and have it recorded."

"I will record it here. You practice infanticide, juvenicide senectucide, suicide."

"Yes, the Gentle Terminators."

"You murder your own children who do not measure up to your atrocious norm."

"Judicious Selection."

"You have invented new lusts and perversions."

"Refined Amusements."

"There are the evil who are evil openly. There are the evil who hide their evil and deny that they are venomous. There are the ultimate in evil who keep the venom and change the Name of the Snake."

"I'm happy that we're the ultimate," said Landmaster. "We would be affronted by a lesser classification."

Padreco Barnaby raised his head.

"I smell wood burning," he said suddenly. "You no longer use wood for fuel here."

"In one case only," said Landmaster. "An ancient and seldom employed ritual of ours."

"Which?"

"You do not understand, little priest? Ten million Earth cartoons of the thing and still you do not understand them or comprehend their origin. What is the unvarying fate of the Missioner cast up on the Savage Shore?"

"You are not supposed to be savage."

"We revert, little priest. In this one case we revert. It is our ancient answer to the obstreperous missioner who persists in asking us the irksome question. We cannot allow ourselves to be irked."

Padreco Barnaby couldn't believe it. Even after they put him in the monstrous kettle he couldn't believe it. They were setting the long tables for the feast -- and surely it was all a mistake!

"Landmaster! You people -- you creatures -- can't be serious!"

"Why no, little priest. This is a comical affair. Why should we be serious? Do you not think it comical that the missioner should be boiled in a pot?"

"No! No! It's ghastly!"

This had to be a dream -- an underwater nightmare.

"Why did you make ten million comical cartoons of the thing if you

didn't find it comic?" Landmaster asked with black pleasure.

"I didn't make them! Yes, I did -- two of them -- when I was a seminarian, and for our own little publication. Landmaster! The water is hellish hot!"

"Are we magicians that we can boil a man in cold water?"

"Not -- not shoes and all?" the Padreco gasped. That seemed to be the ultimate outrage.

"Shoes and all, little priest. We like the flavor. What was your own favorite caption for the race-memory cartoons, Padreco?"

"You can't do this to me!!"

"Yes, that was a good one. But it was the subscript, as I remember it, and the caption was 'Famous Last Words.' However, my own favorite, while it concerns anthropophagi, does not concern a missionary. It was the cannibal chief who said, 'My wife makes a fine soup. I'll miss her.' What was your favorite of the kettle jokes, Shareshuffler?"

Shareshuffler had a great two-tined fork, and he stuck it into Padreco Barnaby to see if he was done yet. The Padreco was far from done, and the clamor he set up made it impossible to hear Shareshuffler's own favorite of the folk jokes. This is a loss, for it was one of the best of them all.

How loud the little priest was against the Anabi carrying out their ancient custom!

"A lobster doesn't make such a noise when he's boiled," chided Landmaster. "An oyster doesn't, and a Xtleconutlico doesn't. Why should a man make such a noise? It would be irritating to us -- if we ever let anything irritate us."

But they didn't -- nothing at all. They were too developed a race to allow themselves to be irritated.

When the Padreco was finally done, they had him out of the kettle and polished him off. They dealt in the prescribed manner with the ancient menace, and they had a superb feast out of it too.

The Anabi weren't quite what they seemed. They had hid from themselves, and dealt in shadows instead of things. They had even changed the name of their nature... but they hadn't changed their nature.

But on occasion they could still revert. They could stage an old-time, red-blooded, slumgullion-slurping, bone-gnawing dangeroo of a feast. Men and monsters, they did have one now!

Citizens, that Padreco had good stuff in him!

THE WEIRDEST WORLD

As I am now utterly without hope, lost to my mission and lost in the sight of my crew, I will record what petty thoughts I may have for what benefit they may give some other starfarer. Nine long days of bickering! But the decision is sure. The crew will maroon me. I have lost all control over them.

Who would have believed that I would show such weakness when crossing the barrier? By all tests I should have been the strongest. But the final test was the event itself. I failed.

I only hope that it is a pleasant and habitable planet where they put me down...

Later. They have decided. I am no longer the captain even in name. But they have compassion on me. They will do what they can for my comfort. I believe that they have already selected my desert island, so to speak, an out-of-the-way globe where they will leave me to die. I will hope for the best. I no longer have any voice in their councils...

Later. I will be put down with only the basic survival kit: the ejection mortar and sphere for my last testament to be orbited into the Galactic drift; a small cosmoscope so that I will at least have my bearings; one change of blood; An abridged universal language correlator; a

compendium of the one thousand philosophic questions yet unsolved to exercise my mind; a small vial of bug-kill.

Later. It has been selected. But my mind has grown so demoralized that I do not even recognize the system, though once this particular region was my specialty. The globe will be habitable. There will be breathable atmosphere which will allow me to dispense with much bothersome equipment. Here the filler used is nitrogen, yet it will not matter. I have breathed nitrogen before. There will be water, much of it saline, but sufficient quantities of sweet. Food will be no problem; before being marooned, I will receive injections that should last me for the rest of my probably short life. Gravity will be within the range of my constitution.

What will be lacking? Nothing, but the companionship of my own kind, which is everything.

What a terrible thing it is to be marooned!

One of my teachers used to say that the only unforgivable ~n in the universe is ineptitude. That I should be the first to succumb to space-ineptitude and be an awkward burden on the rest of them! But it would be disastrous for them to try to travel any longer with a sick man, particularly as their nominal leader. I would be a shadow over them. I hold them no rancor.

It will be today

Later. I am here. I have no real interest in defining where "here" is, though I have my cosmoscope and could easily determine it. I was anesthetized a few hours before, and put down here in my sleep. The blasted half-acre of their landing is near. No other trace of them is left.

Yet it is a good choice and not greatly unlike home. It is the nearest resemblance I have seen on the entire voyage, which is to say that the pseudodendrons are enough like trees to remind me of trees, the herbage near enough to grass to satisfy one who had never known real grass. It is a green, somewhat waterlogged land of pleasant temperature.

The only inhabitants I have encountered are a preoccupied race of hump-backed browsers who pay me scant notice. They are quadruped and myopic, and spend nearly their entire time at feeding. It may be that I am invisible to them. Yet they hear my voice and shy away somewhat from it. I am able to communicate with them only poorly. Their only vocalization is a sort of vibrant windy roar, but when I answer in kind they appear more puzzled than communicative.

They have this peculiarity: when they come to an obstacle of terrain or thicket, they either go laboriously around it or force their way through it. It does not seem to occur to them to fly over it: They are as gravity-bound as a newborn baby.

What air-traveling creatures I have met are of a consider-ably smaller size. They are more vocal than the myopic quadrupeds, and I have had some success in conversing with them, but my results still await a more leisurely semantic interpretation. Such communications of theirs as I have analyzed are quite commonplace. They have no real philosophy and are singularly lacking in aspiration; they are almost total extroverts and have no more than the rudiments of introspection.

Yet they have managed to tell me some amusing anecdotes. They are quite good natured, though moronic.

They say that neither they nor the myopic quadrupeds are the dominant race here, but rather a large grublike creature lacking a complete outer covering. From what they are able to convey of this breed, it is a nightmarish kind of creation. One of the flyers even told me that the giant grubs travel upright on a bifurcated tail, but that is difficult to credit. Besides, I believe that humor is at least a minor component of the mentality of my airy friends. I will call them birds, though they are but a sorry caricature of the birds at home...

Later. I am being hunted. I am being hunted by the giant grubs. Doubling back, I have seen them on my trail, examining it with great

curiosity.

The birds had given me a very inadequate idea of these. They are indeed unfinished -- they do lack a complete outer covering. Despite their giant size, I am convinced that they are grubs, living under rocks and in masses of rotten wood. Nothing in nature gives the impression of so lacking an outer covering as the grub, that obese, unfinished worm.

There are, however, simple bipeds. They are wrapped in a cocoon which they seem never to have shed, as though their emergence from the larval state were incomplete. It is a loose artificial sheath covering the central portion of the corpus. They seem unable to divest themselves of it, though it is definitely not a part of the body. When I have analyzed their minds, I will know the reason for their carrying it. Now I can only conjecture. It would seem a compulsion, some psychological bond that dooms them in their apparent adult state to carry their cocoons with them.

Later. I am captured by three of the giant grubs. I had barely time to swallow my communication sphere. They pinned me down and beat me with sticks. I was taken by surprise and was not momentarily able to solve their language, though it came to me after a short interval. It was discordant and vocal and entirely gravity-bound, by which I mean that its thoughts were chained to its words. There seemed nothing in them above the vocal. In this the giant grubs were less than the birds, even though they had a practical power and cogency that the birds lacked.

"What'll we do with the blob?" asked one.

"Hy," said the second, "you hit it on that end and I'll hit it on this. We don't know which end is the head."

"Let's try it for bait," said the third. "Catfish might go for it."

"We could keep it alive till we're ready to use it. Then it would stay fresh."

'is. "No, let's kill it. It doesn't look too fresh, even the way it "Gentlemen, you are making a mistake," I said. "I have done nothing to merit death. And I am not without talent. Besides, you have not considered the possibility that I may be forced to kill you three instead. I will not die willingly. And I will thank you to stop pounding on me with those sticks. It hurts."

I was surprised and shocked at the sound of my own voice. It was nearly as harsh as that of the grubs. But this was my first attempt at their language, and musicality does not become it.

"Hey fellows, did you hear that? Was that the blob talking? Or was one of you playing a joke? Harry? Stanley? Have you been practicing to be ventriloquists?"

Not me."

"Not me either. It sure sounded like it was it."

"Hey blob, was that you? Can you talk, blob?"

"Certainly I can talk," I responded. "I am not an infant. Nor am I a blob. I am a creature superior to your own kind, if you are examples. Or it may be that you are only children. Perhaps you are still in the pupa stage. Tell me, is yours an early stage, or an arrested development, or are you indeed adult?"

Hey fellows, we don't have to take that from any blob. I'll cave in his blasted head."

"That isn't its head, it's its tail."

"Gentlemen, perhaps I can set you straight," I said. "That is my tail you are thwacking with those sticks, and I am warning you to stop it. Of course I was talking with my tail. I was only doing it in imitation of you. I am new at the language and its manner of speaking. Yet it may be that I have made a grotesque mistake. Is that your heads that you are waving in the air? Well, then, I will talk with my head, if that is the custom. But I warn you again not to hit me on either end with those sticks."

"Hey, fellows, I bet we could sell that thing. I bet we could sell it to Billy Wilkins for his Reptile Farm."

"How would we get it there?"

"Make it walk. Hey blob, can you walk?"

"I can travel, certainly, but I would not stagger along precariously on a pair of flesh stilts with my head in the air, as you do. When I travel, I do not travel upside down."

"Well, let's go then. We're going to sell you to Billy Wilkins for his Reptile Farm. If he can use a blob, he'll put you in one of the tanks with the big turtles and alligators. You think you'll like them?"

"I am lonesome in this lost world," I replied sadly, "and even the company of you peeled grubs is better than nothing I am anxious to adopt a family and settle down here for what years of life I have left. It may be that I will find compatibility with the species you mention. I do not know what they are."

"Hey, fellows, this blob isn't a bad guy at all. I'd shake your hands, blob, if I knew where they were. Let's go to Billy Wilkins's place and sell him."

II

We traveled to Billy Wilkins's place. My friends were amazed when I took to the air and believed that I had deserted them. They had no cause to distrust me. Without them I would have had to rely on intuition to reach Billy Wilkins, and even then I would lack the proper introductions.

"Hey, Billy," said my loudest friend whose name was Cecil, "what will you give us for a blob? It flies and talks and isn't a bad fellow at all. You'd get more tourists to come to your reptile show if you had a talking blob in it. He could sing song', and tell stories, and I bet he could play the guitar."

"Well, Cecil, I'll just give you all ten dollars for it and try to figure out what it is later. I'm a little ahead on my hunches now, so I can afford to gamble on this one. I can always pickle it and exhibit it as a genuine hippopotamus kidney."

"Thank you, Billy. Take care of yourself, blob."

"Good-bye for now, gentlemen," I said. "I would like you to visit me some evening as soon as I am acclimated to my new surroundings. I will throw a whing-ding for you -- as soon as I find out what a whing-ding is."

"My God," said Billy Wilkins, "it talks, it really talks!"

"We told you it could talk and fly, Billy."

"Talks, it talks," said Billy. "Where's that blasted sign painter? Eustace, come here. We got to paint a new sign."

The turtles in the tank I was put into did have a sound basic philosophy which was absent in the walking grubs. But they were slow and lacking inner fire. They would not be obnoxious company, but neither would they give me excitement and warmth. I was really more interested in the walking grubs.

Eustace was a black grub, while the others had all been white; but like them he had no outside casing of his own, and like them he also staggered about on flesh stilts with his head in the air.

It wasn't that I was naive or hadn't seen bipeds before. But I don't believe anyone ever becomes entirely accustomed to seeing a biped travel in its peculiar manner.

Good afternoon, Eustace," I said pleasantly enough. The eyes of Eustace were large and white. He was a more handsome specimen than the other grubs.

"That you talking, bub? Say, you really can talk, can't you? I thought Mr. Billy was fooling. Now just hold that expression a minute and let me get it set in my mind. I can paint anything, once I get it set in my mind. What's your name, blob? Have blobs names?"

"Not in your manner. With us the name and the soul, I believe you call it, are the same thing and cannot be vocalized. I will have to adopt a

name of your sort. What would be a good name?"

"Bob, I was always partial to George Albert Leroy Ellery. That was my grandfather's name."

"Should I also have a family name?"

"Sure."

"What would you suggest?"

"How about McIntosh?"

"That will be fine. I will use it."

I talked to the turtles while Eustace was painting my portrait on tent canvas.

"Is the name of this world Florida?" I asked one of them. "The road signs said Florida."

"World, world, world, water, water, water, glub, glug, glub," said one of them.

"Yes, but is this particular world we are on named Florida?"

"World, world, water, water, glub," said another.

"Eustace, I can get nothing from these fellows," I called. "is this world named Florida?"

"Mr. George Albert, you are right in the middle of Florida, the greatest state in the universe."

"Having traveled, Eustace, I have great reservations that it is the greatest. But it is my new home and I must cultivate a loyalty to it."

I went up in a tree to give advice to two young birds trying to construct a nest. This was obviously their first venture.

"You are going about it all wrong," I told them. "First consider that this will be your home, and then consider how you can make your home most beautiful."

"This is the way they've always built them," said one of the birds.

"There must be an element of utility, yes," I told them. "But the dominant motif should be beauty. The impression of expanded vistas can be given by long low walls and parapets."

"This is the way they've always built them," said the other bird.

"Remember to embody all the new developments," I said. "Just say to yourself 'This is the newest nest in the world.' Always say that about any task you attempt. It inspires you."

"This is the way they've always built them," said the birds. "Go build your own nest."

"Mr. George Albert," called Eustace. "Mr. Billy won't like your flying around those trees. You're supposed to stay in your tank."

"I was only getting a little air and talking to the birds," I said.

"You can talk to the birds?" asked Eustace.

"Cannot anyone?"

"I can, a little," said Eustace. "I didn't know anyone else could."

But when Billy Wilkins returned and heard the report that I had been lying about, I was put in the snake house, in a cage that was tightly meshed top and sides. My cell mate was a surly python named Pete.

"See you stay on that side," said Pete. "You're too big for me to swallow. But I might try."

"There is something bothering you, Pete," I said. "You have a bad disposition. That can come only from bad digestion or a bad conscience."

"I have both," said Pete. "The first because I bolt my food. The second is because -- well I forget the reason, but it's my conscience."

"Think hard, Pete," I said, "why have you a bad conscience?"

"Snakes always have bad consciences. We have forgotten the crime, but we remember the guilt."

"Perhaps you should seek advice from someone, Pete."

"I kind of think it was someone's smooth advice that started us on all this. He talked the legs right off US."

Billy Wilkins came to the cage with another "man" as walking grubs call themselves.

"That it?" asked the other man. "And you say it can talk?"

"Of course I can talk," I answered for Billy Wilkins. "I have never known a creature who couldn't talk in some manner. My name is George Albert Leroy Ellery McIntosh. I don't believe that I heard yours, sir."

"Bracken. Blackjack Bracken. I was telling Billy here that if he really had a blob that could talk, that I might be able to use it in my night club. We could have you here at the Snake Ranch in the daytime for the tourists and kids. Then I could have you at the club at night. We could work out an act. Do you think you could learn to play the guitar?"

"Probably. But it would be much easier for me merely to duplicate the sound."

"But then how could you sing and make guitar noises at the same time?"

"You surely don't think that I am limited to one voice box?"

"Oh, I didn't know. What's that big metal ball you have there?"

"That's my communication sphere to record my thoughts. I would not be without it. When in danger, I swallow it. When in extreme danger, I will have to escape to a spot where I have concealed my ejection mortar, and send my sphere into the Galactic drift on a chance that it may be found."

"That's no kind of gag to put in an act. What I have in mind is something like this."

Blackjack Bracken told a joke. It was a childish one and in poor taste.

"I don't believe that is quite my style," I said.

"All right, what would you suggest?"

"I thought that I might lecture your patrons on the higher ethic." Look, George Albert, my patrons don't even have the lower ethic."

"And just what sort of recompense are we talking about?" I asked.

"Billy and I had about settled on a hundred and fifty a week."

"A hundred and fifty for whom?"

"Why, for Billy."

"I say a hundred and fifty for myself, and ten percent for Billy as my agent."

"Say, this blob's real smart, isn't he, Billy?"

"Too smart."

"Yes sir, George Albert, you're one smart blob. What kind of contract have you signed with Billy here?"

"No contract."

"Just a gentlemen's agreement?"

"No agreement."

"Billy, you can't hold him in a cage without a contract. That's slavery. It's against the law."

"But, Blackjack, a blob isn't people."

"Try proving that in court. Will you sign a contract with me, George Albert?"

"I will not dump Billy. He befriended me and gave me a home with the turtles and snakes. I will sign a joint contract with the two of you. We will discuss terms tomorrow -- after I have estimated the attendance both here and at the night club."

III

Of the walking grubs (who call themselves "people") there are two kinds, and they place great emphasis on the difference. From this stems a large part of their difficulties. This distinction, which is one of polarity, cuts quite across the years and ability and station of life. It is not confined only to the people, but also involves apparently all the beings on the planet Florida.

It appears that a person is committed to one or the other polarity at the beginning of life, maintaining that polarity until death. The

interlocking attraction-repulsion complex set up by these two opposable types has deep emotional involvements. It is the cause of considerable concern and disturbance, as well as desire and inspiration. There is a sort of poetic penumbra about the whole thing that tends to disguise its basic simplicity, expressible as a simultaneous polarity equation.

Complete segregation of the two types seems impossible. If it has ever been tried, it has now been abandoned as impractical.

There is indeed an intangible difference between the two types, so that before that first day at the Reptile Ranch was finished, I was able to differentiate between the two more than ninety percent of the time. The knowledge of this difference in polarity seems to be intuitive.

These two I will call the Beta and Gamma, or Boy and Girl types. I began to see that this opposability of the two types was one of the great driving forces of the people.

In the evening I was transported to the night club and I was a success. I would not entertain them with blue jokes or blue lyrics, but the patrons seemed fascinated by my simple imitations of all the instruments of the orchestra and my singing of comic ballads that Eustace had taught me in odd moments that day. They were also interested in the way that I drank gin, that is emptying the bottle without breaking the seal. (It seems that the grub-people are unable to absorb a liquid without making direct contact with it.)

And I met Margaret, one of the "girl" singers. I had been wondering to which type of people I might show amnity. Now I knew. I was definitely a Beta type, for I was attracted to Margaret, who was unmistakably a Gamma. I began to understand the queer effect that these types have on each other.

She came over to my cage.

"I want to rub your head for luck before I go on," she said.

Thank you, Margaret," I replied, "but that is not my head."

She sang with incomparable sadness, with all the sorrow and sordidness that appear to be the lot of the unfortunate Gammas. It was the essence of melancholy made into music. It was a little bit like the ghost music of the asteroid Artemis, a little like the death chants on Dolmena. Sex and sorrow. Nostalgia. Regret.

Her singing shook me with a yearning that had no precedent.

She came back to my cage.

"You were wonderful, Margaret," I said.

"I'm always wonderful when I'm singing for my supper. I am less wonderful in the rare times when I am well fed. But are you happy, little buddy?"

"I had become almost so, till I heard you sing. Now I am overcome with a sorrow and longing. Margaret, I am fascinated with you."

"I go for you too, blob. You're my buddy. Isn't it funny that the only buddy I have in the world is a blob. But if you'd seen some of the guys I've been married to -- boy! I wouldn't insult you by calling them blobs. Have to go now. See you tomorrow night if they keep us both on."

Now there was a problem to face. It was necessary that I establish control over my environment, and at once. How else could I aspire to Margaret?

I knew that the heart of the entire place here was neither the bar nor the entertainment therein, nor the cuisine, nor the dancing. The heart of the enterprise was the casino. Here was the money that mattered; the rest was but garnish.

I had them bring me into the gambling rooms.

I had expected problems of complexity here where the patrons worked for their gain or loss. Instead there was an almost amazing simplicity. All the games were based on a system of first aspect numbers. Indeed everything on the Planet Florida seemed based on first aspect numbers.

Now it is an elemental fact that first aspect numbers do not carry

within them their own prediction. Nor were the people even possessed of the prediction key that lies over the very threshold of the second aspect series.

These people were actually wagering sums -- the symbols of prosperity -- blindly, not knowing for sure whether they would win or lose. They were selecting numbers by hunch or at random with no assurance of profit. They were choosing a hole for a ball to fall into without knowing whether that was the right hole.

I do not believe that I was ever so amazed at anything in my life.

But here was an opportunity to establish control over my environment.

I began to play the games. Usually I would watch a round first, to be sure that I understood just what was going on. Then I would play a few times... as many as it took to break the game.

I broke game after game. When he could no longer pay me, Blackjack closed the casino in exasperation.

Then we played poker, he and I and several others. This was even more simple. I suddenly realized that the grub-people could see only one side of the cards at a time.

I played and won.

I owned the casino now, and all of those people were now working for me. Billy Wilkins also played with us, and in short order I also owned the Reptile Ranch.

Before the evening was over, I owned a race-track, a beach hotel, and a theatre in a place named New York.

I had, in sufficient extent for my purpose, established control over my environment...

Later. Now started the golden days. I increased my control and did what I could for my friends.

I got a good doctor for my friend and roommate the python, and he was now receiving treatment for his indigestion. I got a jazzy sports car for my friend Eustace imported from somewhere called Italy. And I buried Margaret in mink, for she had a fix on the fur of that mysterious animal. She enjoyed draping it about her in the form of coats, capes, cloaks, mantles, and stoles, though the weather didn't really require it.

I had now several banks, a railroad, an airline, and a casino in somewhere named Havana.

"You are somebody now," said Margaret. "You really ought to dress better. Or are you dressed? I never know. I don't know if part of that is clothes or if all of it is you. But at least I've learned which is your head. I think we should be married in May. It's so common to be married in June. Just imagine me being Mrs. George Albert Leroy Ellery McIntosh! You know, we have become quite an item. And do you know there are three biographies of you out, *Burgeoning Blob*; *The Blow from Way Out*; *The Hidden Hand Behind the Blob*, *What Does It Portend?* And the Governor has invited us to dine tomorrow. I do wish you would learn to eat. If you weren't so nice, you'd be creepy. I always say there's nothing wrong with marrying a man, or a blob, with money. It shows foresight on the part of a girl. You know you will have to get a blood test? You had better get it tomorrow. You do have blood, don't you?"

I did, but not, of course, of the color and viscosity of hers. But I could give it that color and viscosity temporarily. And it would react negative in all the tests.

She mused, "They are all jealous of me. They say they wouldn't marry a blob. They mean they couldn't. Do you have to carry that tin ball with you all the time?"

"Yes. It is my communication sphere. In it I record my thoughts. I would be lost without it."

"Oh, like a diary. How quaint."

Yes, those were the golden days. The grubs now appeared to me in a new light, for was not Margaret also a grub? Yet she seemed not so unfinished as the rest. Though lacking a natural outer covering, yet she had not the appearance of crawling out from under a rock. She was quite an attractive "girl." And she cared for me.

What more could I wish? I was affluent. I was respected. I was in control of my environment. And I could aid my friends of whom I had now acquired an astonishing number.

Moreover my old space-ineptitude sickness had left me. I never felt better in my life. Ah, golden days, one after the other like a pleasant dream. And soon I am to be married.

IV

There has been a sudden change. As on the Planet Hecube, where full summer turns into the dead of winter in minutes, to the destruction of many travelers, so was it here. My world is threatened!

It is tottering, all that I have built up. I will fight. I will fight. I will have the best lawyers on the planet. I am not done. But I am threatened

Later. This may be the end. The appeal court has given its decision. A blob may not own property in Florida. A blob is not a person.

Of course I am not a person. I never pretended to be. But I am a personage. I will yet fight this thing...

Later. I have lost everything. The last appeal is gone. By definition I am an animal of indeterminate origin, and my property is being completely stripped from me.

I made an eloquent appeal -- and it moved them greatly. There were tears in their eyes. But there was greed in the set of their mouths. They have a vested interest in stripping me. Each will seize a little.

And I am left a pauper, a vassal, an animal, a slave. This is always the last doom of the marooned, to be a despised alien at the mercy of a strange world.

Yet it should not be hopeless. I will have Margaret. Since my contract with Billy Wilkins and Blackjack Bracken, long since bought up, is no longer in effect, Margaret should be able to handle my affairs as a person. I believe that I have great earning powers yet, and I can win as much as I wish by gambling. We will treat this as only a technicality. We shall acquire new fortune. I will re-establish control over my environment. I will bring back the golden days. A few of my old friends are still loyal to me, Margaret, Pete the python, Eustace...

Later. The world has caved in completely. Margaret has thrown me over.

"I'm sorry, blobby," she said, "but it just won't work. You're still nice, but without money you are only a blob. How would I marry a blob?"

"But we can earn more money. I am talented."

"No, you're box-office poison now. You were a fad, and fads die quickly."

"But Margaret, I can win as much as I wish by gambling."

"Not a chance, blobby. Nobody will gamble with you any more. You're through, blob. I will miss you, though. There will be a new blue note in my ballads when I sing for my supper, after the mink coats are all gone. Bye now."

"Margaret, do not leave me. What of all our golden days together?"

But all she said was "bye now." And she was gone forever.

I am desolate and my old space-ineptitude sickness has returned. My recovery was an illusion. I am so ill with awkwardness that I can no longer fly. I must crawl on the ground like one of the giant grubs. A curse on this planet Florida, and all its sister orbs! What a miserable world this is!

How could I have been taken in by a young Gamma type of the walking grub? Let her crawl back under her ancestral rocks with all the rest of her kind... No, no, I do not mean that. To me she will always remain a dream, a broken dream.

I am no longer welcome at the casino. They kicked me down the front steps.

I no longer have a home at the Reptile Ranch.

"Mr. George Albert," said Eustace, "I just can't afford to be seen with you any more. I have my position to consider, with a sport car and all that."

And Pete the python was curt.

"Well, big shot, I guess you aren't so big after all. And you were sure no friend of mine. When you had that doctor cure me of my indigestion, you left me with nothing but my bad conscience. I wish I could get my indigestion back."

"A curse on this world," I said.

"World, world, water, water, glug, glug," said the turtles in their tanks, my only friends.

So I have gone back into the woods to die. I have located my ejection mortar, and when I know that death is finally on me, I will fire off my communication sphere and hope it will reach the Galactic drift. Whoever finds it -- friend, space traveler, you who were too impatient to remain on your own world -- be you warned of this one! Here ingratitude is the rule and cruelty the main sport. The unfinished grubs have come out from under their rocks and they walk this world upside down with their heads in the air. Their friendship is fleeting, their promises are like the wind.

I am near my end.

ALOYS

He had flared up more brightly than anyone in memory. And then he was gone. Yet there was ironic laughter where he had been; and his ghost still walked. That was the oddest thing: to encounter his ghost.

It was like coming suddenly on Halley's Comet drinking beer at the Plugged Nickle Bar, and having it deny that it was a celestial phenomenon at all, that it had ever been beyond the sun.

For he could have been the man of the century, and now it was not even known if he was alive. And if he were alive, it would be very odd if he would be hanging around places like the Plugged Nickel Bar.

This all begins with the award. But before that it begins with the man.

Professor Aloys Foulcault-Oeg was acutely embarrassed and in a state of dread.

"These I have to speak to, all these great men. Is even glory worth the price when it must be paid in such coin?"

Aloys did not have the amenities, the polish, the tact. A child of penury, he had all his life eaten bread that was part sawdust, and worn shoes that were part card-board. He had an overcoat that had been his father's, and before that his grandfather's, willed for generations to the eldest son.

This coat was no longer handsome, its holes being stuffed and quilted with ancient rags. It was long past its years of greatness, and even when Aloys had inherited it as a young man it was in the afternoon of its life. And yet it was worth more than anything else he owned in the world.

Professor Aloys had become great in spite of -- or because of? -- his poverty. He had worked out his finest theory, a series of nineteen interlocked equations of cosmic shapeliness and simplicity. He had worked it out on a great piece of butchers' paper soaked with lamb's blood, and had so given it to the world.

And once it was given, it was almost as though nothing else could be added on any subject whatsoever. Any further detailing would be only

footnotes to it and ~ the sciences no more than commentaries.

Naturally this made him famous. But the beauty of it was that it made him famous, not to the commonalty of mankind (this would have been a burden to his sensitively tuned soul), but to a small and scattered class of extremely erudite men (about a score of them in the world). By them his worth was recognized, and their recognition brought him almost complete satisfaction.

But he was not famous in his own street or his own quarter. And it was in this stark conglomerate of dark-souled alleys and roofs that Professor Aloys had lived all his life till just thirty-seven days ago.

When he received the announcement, award, and invitation, he quickly calculated the time. It was not very long to allow for traveling halfway around the world. Being locked out of his rooms, as he often was, he was unencumbered with baggage or furniture, and he left for the ceremony at once.

With the announcement, award, and invitation, there had also been a check; but as he was not overly familiar with the world of finance or with the English language in which the check was drawn, he did not recognize it for what it was. Having used the back of it to write down a formula that had crept into his mind, he shoved the check, forgotten, into one of the pockets of his greatcoat.

For three days he rode the riverboat to the port city hidden and hungry. There he concealed himself on an ocean tramp. That he did not starve on this was due to the caprice of certain lowlifes who discovered him, for they made him stay hidden in a terrible bunker, and every day they passed in a bucket to him. And sometimes this contained food. But sometimes offal.

Then, several ports and many days later, he left the ship like a crippled, dirty animal. And it was in That City and on That Day. For the award was to be that evening.

"All these I have to speak to, all these wonderful men who are higher than the grocers, higher even than the butchers. These men get more respect than a policeman, than a canal boat captain. They are wiser than a mayor and more honored than a merchant. They know arts more intricate than a clock-maker's and are virtuous beyond the politicians. More perspicacious than editors, more talented than actors, these are the great men of the world. And I am only Aloys, and now I am too ragged and dirty even to be Aloys anymore. I am no longer a man with a name."

For he was very humble as he walked the great town where even the shop girls dressed like princesses, and all the restaurants were so fine that only the rich people would have dared to go into them at all. Had there been poor people (and there were none) there would have been no place for them to eat. They would have starved.

"But it is to me that they have given the prize. Not to Schellendore and not to Ottleman, not to Francks nor Timiryaseff, not even to Piritim-Kess, the latchet of whose shoe I am not -- but why do I say that? -- he is not after all very bright -- all of them are inadequate in some way-the only one who was ever able to get to the heart of these great things was Aloys Foulcault-Oeg, who happens to be myself. It is a strange thing that they should honor me, and yet I believe they could not have made a better choice."

So pride and fear warred in him, but it was always the pride that lost. For he had only a little bit of pride, undernourished and on quaking ground, and against it were a whole legion of fears, apprehensions, shames, dreads, embarrassments, and nightmarish bashfulnesses.

He begged a little bit when he found a poor part of town. But even here the people were of the rich poor, not of the poor as he had known them.

When he had money in his pocket, he had a meal. Then he went to the Jiffy Quick While You Wait Cleaners Open Day and Night to have his clothes

cleaned. He wrapped himself in dignity and a blanket while he waited, as many years before he had had to forego the luxury of underclothes. And as the daylight was coming to an end they brought his clothes back to him.

"We have done all we could do," they told him. "If we had a day or a week or a month we might do a little more, but not much. We have not done anything at all to the greatcoat. The workers were afraid of it. They said it barked at them."

"Yes, sometimes it will do that."

Then he went out into the town, cleaner than he had been in many days, and he walked to the hall of the Commendation and Award. Here he watched all the great men arrive in private cars and taxis: Ergodic Eimer, August Angstrom, Vladimir Vor. He watched them and thought of what he would say to them, and then he realized that he had forgotten his English.

"I remember Sir or Madam as the Case May Be. I remember Dog, that is the first word I ever learned, but what will I say to them about a dog? I remember house and horse and apple and fish. Oh, now I remember the entire language. But what if I forget it again? Would it not be an odd speech if I could only say apple and fish and house and dog? I would be shamed."

He wished he were rich and could dress in fine white like the streetsweepers, or in black leather like the newsboy on the corner. He saw Edward Edelsteim and Christopher Cronin enter and he cowed on the street and knew that he would never be able to talk to those great men.

A fine gentleman came out and walked directly to him.

"You are the great Professor Foulcault-Oeg? I would have known you anywhere. True greatness shines from you. Our city is honored tonight. Come inside and we will go to a little room apart, for I see that you will have to compose yourself first. I am Graf-Doktor Hercule Bienville-Stravrogueine."

Why he ever said he was the Graf-Doktor is a mystery, because he was Willy McGilly and the other was just a name that he made up that minute.

Within they went to a small room behind the cloak room. But here, in spite of the smooth kindness of the gracious gentleman, Aloys knew that he would never be able to compose himself. He was an epouvantail, a pugalo, a clown, a ragamuffin. He looked at the nineteen-point outline of the address he was to give. He shuddered and quaked, he gobbled like a turkey. He sniffled and he wiped his nose on his sleeve. He was terrified that the climax of his life's work should find him too craven to accept it. And he discovered that he had forgotten his English again.

"I remember bread and butter, but I don't know which one goes on top. I know pencil and penknife and bed, but I have entirely forgotten the word for maternal uncle. I remember plow, but what in the world will I say to all those great men about a plow? I pray that this cup may pass from me.

Then he disintegrated completely in one abject mass of terror.

Several minutes went by.

But when he emerged from that room he was a different man entirely. Erect, alive, intense, queerly handsome, and now in formal attire, he mounted with the sure grace of a panther to the speaker's platform.

Once only he glanced at the nineteen-point outline of his address. As there is no point in keeping it a secret, it was as follows: 1. Cepheid and Cerium -- How long is a Yardstick? 2. Double Trouble -- Is Ours a Binary Universe? 3. Cerebrum and Cortex -- The Mathematics of Melancholia. 4. Microphysics and Megacyclic Polyneums. 5. Ego, No, Hemeis -- The Personality of the Subconscious. 6. Linear Convexity and Lateral Intransigence. 7. Betelgeuse Betrayed -- The Myth of Magnitude. 8. Mu-Meson, the Secret of the Metamorphosis. 9. Theogony and Tremor -- The Mathematics of Seismology. 10. Planck's Constant and Agnesi's Variable. 11. Diencephalon and Di-Gamma -- Unconscionable Thoughts About Consciousness. 12. Inverse Squares and the Quintesimal Radicals. 13. The Chain of Error in the Linear-B Translation --

Or Where the Cretans Really Came From. 14. Cybernetics -- Or a Brain for Every Man. 15. Ogive and Volute -- Thoughts of Celestial Curvature. 16. Conic Sections -- Small Pieces of Infinity. 17. Eschatology -- Medium Thoughts About the End. 18. Hypolarity and Cosmic Hysterisis. 19. The Invisible Quadratic -- or This Is All Simpler Than You Think.

You will immediately see the beauty of this skeleton, and yet to flesh it would not be the work of an ordinary man.

He glanced over it with a sure smile of complete confidence. Then he spoke softly to the master of ceremonies in a queer whisper with a rumble in it that could be heard throughout the Hall.

"I am here. I will begin. There is no need for any further introduction. It will be late by the time I finish."

For the next three and a half hours he held that intelligent audience completely spellbound, enchanted. They followed, or seemed to follow, his lightning flashes of metaphor illumining the craggy chasms of his vasty subjects.

They thrilled to the magnetic power of his voice, urbane yet untamed, with its polyglot phrasing and its bare touch of accent so strange as to be baffling; ancient surely and European, and yet from a land beyond the pale. And they quivered with interior pleasure at the glorious unfolding in climax after climax of these before only half-glimpsed vistas.

Here was the world of mystery revealed in all its wildness, and it obeyed and stood still, and he named its name. The nebula and the conch lay down together, and the ultra-galaxies equated themselves with the zeta mesons. Like the rich householder, he brought from his store treasures old and new, and nothing like them had ever been seen or heard before.

At one point Professor Timiryaseff cried out in bafflement and incomprehension, and Doctor Ergodic Eimer buried his face in his hands, for even these most erudite men could not glimpse all the shattering profundity revealed by the fantastic speaker.

And when it was over they were delighted that so much had been made known to them like a great free gift. They had the crown without the cross, and the odd little genius had filled them all with a rich glow.

The rest was perfunctory: commendations and testimonials from all the great men. The trophy, heavy and rich but not flashy, worth the lifetime salary of a professor of mathematics, was accepted almost carelessly. And then the cup was passed quietly, which is to say the tall cool glasses went around as the men lingered and talked with hushed pleasure.

"Gin," said the astonishing orator. "It is the drink of the bums and impoverished scholars, and I am both. Yes, anything at all with it."

Then he spoke to Maecenas, who was at his side, the patron who was footing the bill for all this gracious extravagance.

"The check I have never cashed, having been much in movement since I have received it. And as to me it is a large amount, though perhaps not to others, and as you yourself have signed it, I wonder if you would cash it for me now.

"At once," said Maecenas, "at once. Ten minutes and we shall have the sum here. Ah, you have endorsed it with a formula! Who but the Professor Aloys Foulcault-Oeg could be so droll? Look, he has endorsed it with a formula."

"Look, look, let us copy. Why, this is marvelous. It takes us even beyond his great speech of tonight. The implications of it!"

"Oh, the implications!" they said as they copied it off, and the implications rang in their heads like bells of the future.

Now it has suddenly become very late, and the elated little man with the gold and gemmed trophy under one arm and the packet of bank notes in his pocket disappeared as by magic.

Maecenas went to his villa in the province, which is to say Long Island. And all the Professors, Doctors, and erudite gentlemen went to their

homes and lodgings.

But later, and after the excitement had worn off, none of them understood a thing about it at all, not even those who had comprehended part of it before the talk. And this was odd.

They'd been spooked.

Professor Aloys Foulcault-Oeg was not seen again; or, if seen, he was not known, for hardly anyone would have known his face. In fact, when he had painfully released the bonds by which he had been tied in the little room behind the back room, and had removed the shackles from his ankles, he did not pause at all. Not for many blocks did he even remove the gag from his mouth, not realizing in his confusion what it was that obstructed his speech and breathing. But when he got it out it was a pleasant relief.

A kind gentleman took him in hand, the second to do so that night. He was bundled into a kind of taxi and driven to a mysterious quarter called Wreckville. And deep inside a secret building he was given a bath and a bowl of hot soup. And later he gathered with others at the festive board.

Here Willy McGilly was king. As he worked his way into his cups, with the gold trophy in front of him, he expounded and elucidated.

"I was wonderful. I held them in the palm of my hand. Was I not wonderful, Oeg?"

"I could not hear all, for I was on the floor of the little room. But from what I could hear, yes, you were wonderful."

It wasn't supposed that Aloys made that speech, was it? It was stated that when he came out of that room he was a different man entirely. Nobody but Willy McGilly would give a talk like that.

"Only once in my life did I give a better speech," said Willy. "It was the same speech, but it was newer then. That was in Little Dogie, New Mexico, and I was selling a snake-oil derivative whose secret I yet cannot reveal. But I was good tonight and some of them cried. And now what will you do, Oeg? Do you know what we are?"

"Moshennekov."

"Why, so we are!"

"Schwindlern."

"The very word."

"Lowlife con men. And the world you live on is not the one you were born on. I will join you if I may."

"Oeg, you have a talent for going to the core of the apple."

For when a man (however unlikely a man) shows real talent, then the Wreckville bunch have to recruit him. They cannot have uncontrolled talent running loose in the commonalty of mankind.

THE UGLY SEA

"The sea is ugly," said Sour John, "and it's peculiar that I'm the only one who ever noticed it. There have been millions of words written on the sea, but nobody has written this. For a time I thought it was just my imagination, that it was only ugly to me. Then I analyzed it and found that it really is ugly.

"It is foul. It is dirtier than a cesspool; yet men who would not willingly bathe in a cesspool will bathe in it. It has the aroma of an open sewer; yet those who would not make a pilgrimage to a sewer will do so to the sea. It is untidy; it is possibly the most untidy thing in the world. And I doubt if there is any practical way to improve it. It cannot be drained; it cannot be covered up; it can only be ignored.

"Everything about it is ignoble. Its animals are baser than those of the land. Its plant life is rootless and protean. It contaminates and wastes the shores. It is an open grave where the living lie down with dead."

"It does smell a little, Sour John, and it is untidy. But I don't

think it's ugly. You cannot deny that sometimes it is really beautiful."

"I do deny it. It has no visual beauty. It is monotonous, with only four or five faces, and all of them coarse. The sun and the sky over it may be beautiful; the land that it borders may be fair; but the old sewer itself is ugly."

"Then why are you the only one who thinks so?"

"There could be several reasons. One, that I've long suspected, is that I'm smarter than other people. And another is that mankind has just decided to deny this ugliness for subconscious reasons, which is to say for no reason at all. The sea is a lot like the subconscious. It may even be the subconscious; that was the teaching of the Thalassalogians. The Peoples of the Plains dreamed of the Sea before they visited it. They were guilty dreams. They knew the sea was there, and they were ashamed of it. The Serpent in the Garden was a Hydra, a water snake. He ascended the river to its source to prove that nothing was beyond his reach. That is the secret we have always to live with: that even the rivers of Paradise flow finally into that evil grave. We are in rhythm with the old ocean: it rises irregularly twice in twenty-four hours, and then repents of rising; and so largely do we."

"Sour John, I will still love the sea though you say it is ugly."

"So will I. I did not say I did not love it. I only said it was ugly. It is an open secret that God was less pleased with the sea than with anything else he made. His own people, at least, have always shunned it.

"O, they use it, and several times they have nearly owned it. But they do not go to sea as seamen. In all history there have been only three Jewish seamen. One was in Solomon's navy; he filled a required berth, and was unhappy. One served a Caliph in the tenth century; why I do not know. And the third was Moysha Uferwohner."

"Then let us hear about Moysha."

"Moysha was quite a good man. That is what makes it sad. And the oddest thing is what attracted him to the evil sea. You could not guess it in ten years."

"Not unless it was a waterfront woman."

"That is fantastic. Of all unlikely things that would seem the most unlikely. And yet it's the truth and you hit it at once. Not a woman in being, however, but in potential (as the philosophers have it); which is to say, quite a young girl.

"Likely you have run across her. So I will tell it all."

This begins ten years ago. Moysha was then a little short of his majority, and was working with his father in an honorable trade not directly connected with the sea, that of the loan shark. But they often loaned money to seamen, a perilous business, for which reason the rates were a little higher than you might expect.

Moysha was making collections and picking up a little new trade. This took him to the smell of the sea, which was painful to him, as to any sensible man. And it took him to the Blue Fish, a water front cafe, bar, and lodging house.

A twelve-year-old girl, a cripple, the daughter of the proprietor, was playing the piano. It was not for some time, due to the primacy of other matters, that Moysha realized that she was playing atrociously. Then he attempted to correct it. "Young lady, one should play well or not at all. Please play better, or stop. That is acutely painful."

She looked as though she were going to cry, and this disconcerted Moysha, though he did not know why it did. Half an hour later the fact intruded itself on his consciousness that she was still playing, and still playing badly; but now with a stilted sort of badness.

"Young lady, this is past all bearing. I suggest that you stop playing the damned thing and go to your bed. Or go anywhere and do anything. But this is hideous. Stop it!"

The little girl really did cry then. And as a result of it Moysha got into an altercation, got his head bloodied, and was put out of the place; the first time that such a thing had ever happened to him. Then he realized that the seamen liked the little girl, and liked the way she played the piano.

This does not seem like a good beginning for either a tender love or a great passion. But it had to be the beginning; that was the first time they ever saw each other.

For the next three days Moysha was restless. A serpent was eating at his liver and he could not identify it. He began to take a drink in the middle of the day (it had not been his custom); and on the third day he asked for rum. There was a taste in his mouth and he was trying to match it. And in the inner windings of his head there was an awful smell, and it made him lonesome.

By the evening of the third day the terrible truth came to him: he had to go down for another whiff of that damned sea; and he possibly could not live through another night unless he heard that pretty little girl play the piano again.

Bonny was pretty. She had a wise way with her, and a willful look. It was as though she had just decided not to do something very mean, and was a little sorry that she hadn't.

She didn't really play badly; just. out of tune and as nobody else had ever played, with a great amount of ringing in the ballad tunes and a sudden muting, then a sort of clashing and chiming. But she stopped playing when she saw that Moysha was in the room.

Moysha did not get on well at the Blue Fish. He didn't know how to break into the conversation of the seamen, and in his embarrassment he ordered drink after drink. When finally he became quarrelsome (as he had never been before) they put him out of the place again.

Moysha lay on a dirty tarp out on a T head and listened while Bonny played the piano again. Then she stopped. She had probably been sent to bed. But instead she came out to the T head where he was.

"You old toad, you give me the creeps.

"I do, little girl?"

"Sure you do. And papa says 'Don't let that Yehude in the place again, he makes everybody nervous, if someone wants to borrow money from him let them borrow it somewhere else.' Even the dogs growl at you down here."

"I know it."

"Then why do you come here?"

"Tonight is the only time I ever did come except on business."

"Tonight is what I am talking about."

"I came down to see you."

"I know you did, dear. O, I didn't mean to call you that. I call everybody that."

"Do you want to take it back?"

"No, I don't want to take it back. You old toad, why aren't you a seaman like everybody else?"

"Is everybody else a seaman?"

"Everybody that comes to the Blue Fish. How will you come to the Fish now when Papa won't let you in the place?"

"I don't know."

"If you give me one of your cards I'll call you up."

"Here."

"And if you give me two dollars and a half I'll pay you back three dollars and a quarter Saturday."

"Here."

"I can't play the piano any other way. If you were a seaman I bet you'd like the way I play the piano. Good night, you old toad."

"Good night, Bonny."

And it was then that the dismal thought first came to Moysha: "What

if I should be a seaman after all?"

Now this was the most terrible thing he could have done. He could have become a Christian, he could have married a tramp, he could have been convicted of embezzlement. But to leave his old life for the sea would be more than he could stand and more than his family could stand.

And there was no reason for it: only that a twelve-year-old girl looked at him less kindly than if he had been a seaman. It is a terrible and empty thing to go to sea: all order is broken up and there are only periods of debauchery and boredom and work and grinding idleness, and the sickening old pond and its dirty borders. It was for such reasons that Moysha hesitated for three months.

Bonny came to see him for possibly the tenth time. She was now paying him interest of sixty cents a week on an old debt which, in the normal state of affairs, she would never be able to clear.

"Bonny, I wish there was something that I could say to you."

"You can say anything you want to me."

"O Bonny, you don't know what I mean."

"You want to bet I don't?"

"Bonny, what will you be doing in four years?"

"I'll be getting married to a seaman if I can find one to take me."

"Why shouldn't one take you?"

"For a seaman it is bad luck to marry a crippled woman."

So on the first day of summer Moysha went off to sea as a lowly wiper. It broke his heart and shamed his family. He woke and slept in misery for the foulness of the life. He ate goy food and sinned in the ports in attempting to be a salty dog. And it was nine weeks before he was back to his home port; and he went to the Blue Fish with some other seamen.

It was afternoon, and Bonny went for a walk with him across the peninsula and down to the beach.

"Well, I'm thunderstruck is all I can say. Why in the world would a sensible man want to go to sea?"

"I thought you liked seamen, Bonny."

"I do. But how is a man going to turn into a seaman if he isn't one to start with? A dog could turn into a fish easier. That's the dumbest thing anyone ever did. I had an idea when you came to the place today that you turned into a seaman just for me. Did you?"

"Yes."

"I could be coy and say 'Why Moysha, I'm only twelve years old,' but I already knew how you felt. I will tell you something. I never did a mean thing, and I never saw anybody I wanted to be mean to till I met you. But I could be mean to you. It would be fun to ruin you. We aren't good for each other. You oughtn't to see me ever again."

"I have to."

"Then maybe I have to be mean to you. It's for both of us that I ask you not to see me again. I don't want to ruin you, and I don't want to be a mean woman; but I will be if you keep coming around."

"Well, I can't stay away."

"Very well, then I'll be perverse. I'll shock you every time I open my mouth. I'll tell you that I do filthy things, and you won't know whether I'm lying or not. You won't know what I mean, and you'll be afraid to find out. You'll never be able to stay away from me if you don't stay away now. I'll have husbands and still keep you on a string. You'll stand outside in the dark and look at the light in my window, and you'll eat your own heart. Please go away. I don't want to turn mean."

"But Bonny, it doesn't have to be that way."

"I hope it doesn't, but it scares me every time I see you. Now I'll make a bargain with you. If you try to stay away I'll try to stay good. But if you come back again I won't be responsible. You ought to go back uptown and not try to be a seaman any more."

After that the little girl went back to the Blue Fish.

Moysha did not go back uptown. He returned to the sea, and he did not visit that port again for a year. And there was a change in him. From closer acquaintance he no longer noticed that the sea was foul. Once at sunset, for a moment, he found something pleasant about it. He no longer sinned excessively in the ports. Ashore he traveled beyond the waterfront bars and visited the countries behind and met the wonderful people. He got the feel of the rough old globe in his head. In a pension in Holland he played chess with another girl, who was not precocious, and who did not dread turning into a mean woman. In a pub in Denmark he learned to take snuff like the saltiest seaman of them all. In an inn in Brittany he was told that the sea is the heritage of the poor who cannot afford the land. It was in Brittany that he first noticed that he now walked like an old salt.

After a year he went back to his home port and to the Blue Fish.

"In a way I'm glad to see you," said Bonny. "I've been feeling contrary lately and you'll give me an excuse. Every morning I wake up and say 'This day I'm going to raise hell.' Then I can't find anyone to raise hell with. All those water rats I like so well that I can't be mean to them. But I bet I know how to be mean to you. Well go get a room and tell me where it is, and I'll come to you tonight."

"But you're only a little girl, and besides you don't mean it."

"Then you're going to find out if I mean it. I intend to come. If you think you love me because I'm pretty and good, then I'll make you love me for a devil. There's things you don't even know about, and you've been a seaman for a year. I'll make you torture me, and it'll be a lot worse torture to you. I'll show you what unnatural really means. You're going to be mighty sorry you came back."

"Bonny, your humor is cruel."

"When did I ever have any humor? And you don't know if I'm kidding, and you never will know. Would you rather I did these things with someone else than with you?"

"Well I will. If you don't tell me where your room is, I'll go to someone else's room tonight. I'll do things so filthy you wouldn't believe it. And even if I don't go to somebody, I'll tell you tomorrow that I did."

But Moysha would not tell her where his room was. So late that night when he left the Blue Fish she followed him. It was fantastic for a grown man to walk faster and faster to escape a thirteen-year-old crippled girl, and finally to run in panic through the dark streets. But when finally she lost him she cried out with surprising kindness: "Goodnight Moysha, I'm sorry I was mean."

But she wasn't very sorry, for the next night she was still mean.

"You see that old man with the hair in his ears? He's filthy and we don't even understand each other's language. But he understood what I wanted well enough. He's the one I spent last night with."

"Bonny, that's a lie, and it isn't funny."

"I know it isn't funny. But can you be sure that it's a lie? I only he part of the time, and you never know when. Now tonight, if you don't tell me where your room is, I'm going to take either that old red-faced slobberer or that black man. And you can follow me, since you run away when I follow you, and see that I go with one of them. And you can stand out in the street and look up at our light. I always leave the light on."

"Bonny, why are you mean?"

"I wish I knew, Moysha, I wish I knew."

After a week of this he went to sea again, and did not come back to his home port for two years. He learned of the sea-leaning giants.

"I do not know the name of this tree," said Sour John, "though once I knew it. This is the time of a story where one usually says it's time for a drink. However, for a long time I have been worried about my parasites who are to me almost like my own children, and this constant diet of rum and redeye cannot be good for them. I believe if the young lady would fry me a

platter That's the nicest present anyone ever gave me. What do you call him?"

"Why, just a snake. Ular, that is, he's a foreign snake."

So he went back to sea and left the little girl there with the snake in her hands.

Bonny was a widow when she was sixteen, as every-one had known she would be. It's no joke about it being bad luck for a seaman to marry a cripple. They seldom lose much time in perishing after they do it. Oglesby died at sea, as all the Ogburns did; and it was from a trifling illness from which he was hardly sick at all. It was many weeks later that Moysha heard the news, and then he hurried back to his home port.

He was too late. Bonny had married again.

"I thought you'd probably come, and I kind of wanted it to be you. But you waited so long, and the summer was half over, that I decided to marry Polycarp Melish. I'm halfway sorry I did. He wouldn't let Ular sleep with us, and he killed him just because he bit him on the thumb.

"But I tell you what you do. What with the bad luck and all, Polycarp won't last many months. Come around earlier next year. I like to get married in the springtime. I'll be a double widow then."

"Bonny, that's a terrible way to talk even when kidding."

"I'm not kidding at all. I even have an idea how we can beat the jinx. I'll tell you about it after we get married next year. Maybe a crippled girl gets to keep her third husband."

"Do you want Polycarp to die?"

"Of course I don't. I love him. I love all my husbands, just like I'll love you after I marry you. I can't help it if I'm bad luck. I told him, and he said he already knew it; but he wanted to do it anyhow. Will you bring me another snake the next time you're in port?"

"Yes. And you can keep the monkey in place of it till I come back. But you can't have the bird yet. I have to keep someone to talk to."

"All right. Please come in the spring. Don't wait till summer again or it'll be too late and I'll already be married to someone else. But whether we get married or not, I'm never going to be mean again. I'm getting too old for that."

So he went to sea again happier than he ever had before.

When she was seventeen Bonny was a widow again as everyone had known she would be. Polycarp had been mangled and chopped to pieces in an unusual accident in the engine room of his ship.

Moysha heard of it very soon, before it could have been heard of at home. And he took council with his talking bird, and with one other, technically more human.

"This other," said Sour John, "was myself. It was very early spring, and Moysha was wondering if it were really best to hurry home and marry Bonny.

"I am not at all superstitious," he said. "I do not believe that a crippled woman is necessarily bad luck to seamen. But I believe that Bonny may be bad luck to everyone, including herself."

"We were on a chocolate island of a French flavor and a French name. On it were girls as pretty as Bonny, and without her reputation for bad luck: girls who would never be either wives or widows. And there is a way to go clear around the world from one such place to another.

"The Blue Fish is not necessarily the center of the earth," I told him. "I have always necessarily believed the to be a little left of center. And Bonny may not be the queen. But if you think that she is, then for you she is so. Nine months, or even a year is not very long to live, and you will be at sea most of the time. But if you think a few weeks with the little girl is enough, then it is enough for you. A lot of others who will not have even that will be dead by next Easter." I said this to cheer him up. I was always the cheerful type.

"And what do you think?" Moysha asked the talking bird.

"'Sampah,' said the bird in his own tongue. This means rubbish. But whether he meant that the superstition was rubbish, or the idea of marrying with a consequent early death was rubbish, is something that is still locked up in his little green head."

Moysha hurried home to marry Bonny. He brought a brother of Ular for a present, and he went at once to the Blue Fish.

"Well you're just in time. I was going to have the banns read for me and somebody tomorrow, and if you'd been an hour later it wouldn't have been you."

"I was halfway afraid to come."

"You needn't have been afraid. I told you I knew a way to beat the jinx. I'm selling the Blue Fish. I wrote you that Papa was dead. And we're going to take a house uptown and forget the sea."

"Forget the sea? How could anyone forget the sea?"

"Why, you're only a toy seaman. You weren't raised to it. When you go away from it you won't be a seaman at all. And crippled women are only bad luck to seamen, not to other men."

"But what would I do? The sea is all I know."

"Don't be a child, Moysha. You hate the sea, remember? You always told me that you did. You only went to sea because you thought I liked seamen. You know a hundred ways to make a dollar, and you don't have to go near the sea for any of them."

So they were married. And they were happy. Moysha discovered that Bonny was really an angel. Her devil talk had been a stunt.

It was worth all five dark years at sea to have her. She was now even more lovely than the first night he had seen her. They lived in a house uptown in the heart of the city, and were an urbane and civilized couple. And three years went by.

Then one day Bonny said that they ought to get rid of the snake, and maybe even the monkey. She was afraid they would bite one of the children, or one of the children would bite them.

The talking bird said that if his friends left he would leave, too.

"But Bonny," said Moysha, "these three are all that I have to remind me of the years when I was a seaman."

"You have me, also. But why do you want to be reminded of those awful days?"

"I know what we could do, Bonny. We could buy the Blue Fish again. It isn't doing well. We could live there and run it. And we could have a place there for the snake and the monkey and the bird."

"Yes, we could have a place for them all, but not for the children. That is no place to raise children. I know, and I was raised there. Now my love, don't be difficult. Take the three creatures and dispose of them. And remember that for us the sea isn't even there any more."

But it was still there when he went down to the Blue Fish to try to sell the three creatures to the seaman. An old friend of his was present and was looking for an engineer first class to ship out that very night. And there was a great difficulty in selling the creatures.

He could not sell them unless he put a price on them, and he was damned if he'd do that. That was worse than putting a price on his own children. He had had them longer than his children, and they were more peculiarly his own. He could not sell them. And he could not go home and tell his wife that he could not sell them.

"He went out and sat on the horns of the dilemma and looked at the sea. And then his old friend (who coincidentally was myself)," said Sour John, "came out and said that he sure did need an engineer first class to leave that very night."

"And then what do you think that Moysha did?"

"Oh, he signed on and went back to sea."

Sour John was thunderstruck.

"How did you know that? You've hit it again. I never will know how you do it. Well, that's what he did. In the face of everything he left his beautiful wife and children, and his clean life, and went to the filthy sea again. It's incredible."

"And how is he doing now?"

"God knows. I mean it literally. Naturally he's dead. That's been a year. You don't expect a seaman married to a crippled woman to live forever do you?"

"And how is Bonny?"

"I went to see her this afternoon; for this is the port where it all happened. She had out an atlas and a pencil and piece of string. She was trying to measure out what town in the whole country is furthest from the sea.

"She is lonely and grieves for Moysa, more than for either of her other husbands. But O she is lovely! She supports herself and her brood by giving piano lessons."

"Is there a moral to this?"

"No. It is an immoral story. And it's a mystery to me. A man will not normally leave a clean home to dwell in an open grave, nor abandon children to descend into a sewer, nor forswear a lovely and loving wife to go faring on a cesspool, knowing that he will shortly die there as a part of the bargain.

"But that is what he did."

RAINBIRD

Were scientific firsts truly tabulated the name of the Yankee inventor, Higgston Rainbird, would surely be without peer. Yet today he is known (and only to a few specialists, at that) for an improved blacksmith's bellows in the year 1785, for a certain modification (not fundamental) in the moldboard plow about 1805, for a better (but not good) method of reefing the lateen sail, for a chestnut roaster, for the Devil's Claw Wedge for splitting logs, and for a nutmeg grater embodying a new safety feature; this last was either in the year 1816 or 1817. He is known for such, and for no more.

Were this all that he achieved his name would still be secure. And it is secure, in a limited way, to those who hobby in technological history.

But the glory of which history has cheated him, or of which he cheated himself, is otherwise. In a different sense it is without parallel, absolutely unique.

For he pioneered the dynamo, the steam automobile, the steel industry, ferro-concrete construction, the internal combustion engine, electric illumination and power, the wireless, the televox, the petroleum and petrochemical industries, monorail transportation, air travel, worldwide monitoring, fissionable power, space travel, group telepathy, political and economic balance; he built a retrogressor; and he made great advances towards corporal immortality and the apotheosis of mankind. It would seem unfair that all this is unknown of him.

Even the once solid facts -- that he wired Philadelphia for light and power in 1799, Boston the following year, and New York two years later -- are no longer solid. In a sense they are no longer facts.

For all this there must be an explanation; and if not that, then an account at least; and if not that, well-something anyhow.

Higgston Rainbird made a certain decision on a June afternoon in 1779 when he was quite a young man, and by this decision he confirmed his inventive bent.

He was hawking from the top of Devil's Head Mountain. He flew his falcon (actually a tercel hawk) down through the white clouds, and to him it was the highest sport in the world. The bird came back, climbing the blue

air, and brought a passenger pigeon from below the clouds. And Higgston was almost perfectly happy as he hooded the hawk.

He could stay there all day and hawk from above the clouds. Or he could go down the mountain and work on his sparker in his shed. He sighed as he made the decision, for no man can have everything. There was a fascination about hawking. But there was also a fascination about the copper-strip sparker. And he went down the mountain to work on it.

Thereafter he hawked less. After several years he was forced to give it up altogether. He had chosen his life, the dedicated career of an inventor, and he stayed with it for sixty-five years.

His sparker was not a success. It would be expensive, its spark was uncertain and it had almost no advantage over flint. People could always start a fire. If not, they could borrow a brand from a neighbor. There was no market for the sparker. But it was a nice machine, hammered copper strips wrapped around iron teased with lodestone, and the thing turned with a hand crank. He never gave it up entirely. He based other things upon it; and the retrogressor of his last years could not have been built without it.

But the main thing was steam, iron, and tools. He made the finest lathes. He revolutionized smelting and mining. He brought new things to power, and started the smoke to rolling. He made mistakes, he ran into dead ends, he wasted whole decades. But one man can only do so much.

He married a shrew, Audrey, knowing that a man cannot achieve without a goad as well as a goal. But he was without issue or disciple, and this worried him.

He built a steamboat and a steamtrain. His was the first steam thresher. He cleared the forests with wood-burning giants, and designed towns. He destroyed southern slavery with a steampowered cotton picker, and power and wealth followed him.

For better or worse he brought the country up a long road, so there was hardly a custom of his boyhood that still continued. Probably no one man had ever changed a country so much in his lifetime.

He fathered a true machine-tool industry, and brought rubber from the tropics and plastic from the laboratory. He pumped petroleum, and used natural gas for illumination and steam power. He was honored and enriched; and, looking back, he had no reason to regard his life as wasted.

"Yes, I've missed so much. I wasted a lot of time. If only I could have avoided the blind alleys, I could have done many times as much. I brought machine tooling to its apex. But I neglected the finest tool of all, the mind. I used it as it is, but I had not time to study it, much less modify it. Others after me will do it all. But I rather wanted to do it all myself. Now it is too late."

He went back and worked on his old sparker and its descendents, now that he was old. He built toys along the line of it that need not always have remained toys. He made a televox, but the only practical application was that now Audrey could rail at him over a greater distance. He fired up a little steam dynamo in his house, ran wires and made it burn lights in his barn.

And he built a retrogressor.

"I would do much more along this line had I the time. But I'm pepper-bellied pretty near the end of the road. It is like finally coming to a gate and seeing a whole greater world beyond it, and being too old and feeble to enter."

He kicked a chair and broke it.

"I never even made a better chair. Never got around to it. There are so clod-hopping many things I meant to do. I have maybe pushed the country ahead a couple of decades faster than it would otherwise have gone. But what couldn't I have done if it weren't for the blind alleys! Ten years lost in one of them, twelve in another. If only there had been a way to tell the true from the false, and to leave to others what they could do, and to do myself only what nobody else could do. To see a link (however unlikely) and

to go out and get it and set it in its place. Oh, the waste, the wilderness that a talent can wander in! If I had only had a mentor! If I had had a map, a clue, a hatful of clues. I was born shrewd, and I shrewdly cut a path and went a grand ways. But always there was a clearer path and a faster way that I did not see till later. As my name is Rainbird, if I had it to do over, I'd do it infinitely better."

He began to write a list of the things that he'd have done better. Then he stopped and threw away his pen in disgust.

"Never did even invent a decent ink pen. Never got around to it. Dog-eared damnation, there's so much I didn't do!"

He poured himself a jolt, but he made a face as he drank it.

"Never got around to distilling a really better whiskey. Had some good ideas along that line, too. So many things I never did do. Well, I can't improve things by talking to myself here about it."

Then he sat and thought.

"But I burr-tailed can improve things by talking to myself there about it."

He turned on his retrogressor, and went back sixty-five years and up two thousand feet.

Higgston Rainbird was hawking from the top of Devil's Head Mountain one June afternoon in 1779. He flew his bird down through the white fleece clouds, and to him it was sport indeed. Then it came back, climbing the shimmering air, and brought a pigeon to him.

"It's fun," said the old man, "but the bird is tough, and you have a lot to do. Sit down and listen, Higgston."

"How do you know the bird is tough? Who are you, and how did an old man like you climb up here without my seeing you? And how in hellpepper did you know that my name was Higgston?"

"I ate the bird and I remember that it was tough. I am just an old man who would tell you a few things to avoid in your life, and I came up here by means of an invention of my own. And I know your name is Higgston, as it is also my name; you being named after me, or I after you, I forget which. Which one of us is the older, anyhow?"

"I had thought that you were, old man. I am a little interested in inventions myself. How does the one that carried you up here work?"

"It begins, well it begins with something like your sparker, Higgston. And as the years go by you adapt and add. But it is all tinkering with a force field till you are able to warp it a little. Now then, you are an ewer-eared galoot and not as handsome as I remembered you; but I happen to know that you have the makings of a fine man. Listen now as hard as ever you listened in your life. I doubt that I will be able to repeat. I will save you years and decades; I will tell you the best road to take over a journey which it was once said that a man could travel but once. Man, I'll pave a path for you over the hard places and strew palms before your feet."

"Talk, you addeleated old gaff. No man ever listened so hard before."

The old man talked to the young one for five hours. Not a word was wasted; they were neither of them given to wasting words. He told him that steam wasn't everything, this before he knew that it was anything. It was a giant power, but it was limited. Other powers, perhaps, were not. He instructed him to explore the possibilities of amplification and feedback, and to use always the lightest medium of transmission of power: wire rather than mule-drawn coal cart, air rather than wire, ether rather than air. He warned against time wasted in shoring up the obsolete, and of the bottomless quicksand of cliché, both of word and of thought.

He admonished him not to waste precious months in trying to devise the perfect apple corer; there will never be a perfect apple corer. He begged him not to build a battery bobsled. There would be things far swifter than a bobsled.

Let others make the new hide scrapers and tanning salts. Let others aid the carter and the candle molder and the cooper in their arts. There was need for a better hame, a better horse block, a better stile, a better whetstone. Well, let others fill those needs. If our button-hooks, our firedogs, our whiffletrees, our bootjacks, our cheese presses are all badly designed and a disgrace, then let someone else remove that disgrace. Let others aid the cordwainer and the cobbler. Let Higgston do only the high work that nobody else would be able to do.

There would come a time when the Carrier himself would disappear, as the fletcher had all but disappeared. But new trades would open for a man with an open mind.

Then the old man got specific. Lie showed young Higgston a design for a lathe dog that would save time. He told him how to draw, rather than hammer wire; and advised him of the virtues of mica as insulator before other material should come to hand.

"And here there are some things that you will have to take on faith," said the old man, "things of which we learn the 'what' before we fathom the 'why'."

He explained to him the shuttle armature and the self-exciting field, and commutation; and the possibilities that anternation carried to its ultimate might open up. He told him a bejammed lot of things about a confounded huge variety of subjects.

"And a little mathematics never hurt a practical man," said the old gaffer. "I was self-taught, and it slowed me down."

They hunkered down there, and the old man cyphered it all out in the dust on the top of Devil's Head Mountain. He showed him natural logarithms and rotating vectors and the calculi and such; hut he didn't push it too far, as even a smart boy can learn only so much in a few minutes. He then gave him a little advice on the treatment of Audrey, knowing it would be useless, for the art of living with a shrew is a thing that cannot be explained to another.

"Now hood your hawk and go down the mountain and go to work," the old man said. And that is what young Higgston Rainbird did.

The career of the Yankee inventor, Higgston Rainbird, was meteoric. The wise men of Greece were little boys to him, the Renaissance giants had only knocked at the door but had not tried the knob. And it was unlocked all the time.

The milestones that Higgston left are breathtaking. He built a short high dam on the flank of Devil's Head Mountain, and had hydroelectric power for his own shop in that same year (1779). He had an arc light burning in Horse-Head Lighthouse in 1781. He read by true Incandescent light in 1783, and lighted his native village, Knobknocker, three years later. He drove a charcoal fueled automobile in 1787, switched to a distillate of whale oil in 1789, and used true rock oil in 1790. His gasoline powered combination reaper-thresher was in commercial production in 1793, the same year that he wired Centerville for light and power. His first diesel locomotive made its trial run in 1796, in which year he also converted one of his earlier coal burning steamships to liquid fuel.

In 1799 he had wired Philadelphia for light and power, a major breakthrough, for the big cities had manfully resisted the innovations. On the night of the turn of the century he unhooded a whole clutch of new things, wireless telegraphy, the televox, radio transmission and reception, motile and audible theatrical reproductions, a machine to transmit the human voice into print, and a method of sterilizing and wrapping meat to permit its indefinite preservation at any temperature.

And in the spring of that new year he first flew a heavier-than-air vehicle.

"He has made all the basic inventions," said the many-tongued people. "Now there remains only their refinement and proper utilization."

"Horse hokey," said Higgston Rainbird. He made a rocket that could carry freight to England in thirteen minutes at seven cents a hundredweight. This was in 1805. He had fissionable power in 1813, and within four years had the price down where it could be used for desalting seawater to the eventual irrigation of five million square miles of remarkably dry land.

He built a Think Machine to work out the problems that he was too busy to solve, and a Prediction Machine to pose him with new problems and new areas of breakthrough.

In 1821, on his birthday, he hit the moon with a marker. He bet a crony that he would be able to go up personally one year later and retrieve it. And he won the bet.

In 1830 he first put on the market his Red Ball Pipe Tobacco, an aromatic and expensive crimp cut made of Martian lichen.

In 1836 he founded the Institute for the Atmospheric Rehabilitation of Venus, for he found that place to be worse than a smokehouse. It was there that he developed that hacking cough that stayed with him till the end of his days.

He synthesized a man of his own age and disrepute who would sit drinking with him in the after-midnight hours and say, "You're so right, Higgston, so incontestably right."

His plan for the Simplification and Eventual Elimination of Government was adopted (in modified form) in 1840, a fruit of his Political and Economic Balance Institute.

Yet, for all his seemingly successful penetration of the field, he realized that man was the one truly cantankerous animal, and that Human Engineering would remain one of the never completely resolved fields.

He made a partial breakthrough in telepathy, starting with the personal knowledge that shrews are always able to read the minds of their spouses. He knew that the secret was not in sympathetic reception, but in arrogant break-in. With the polite it is forever impossible, but he disguised this discovery as politely as he could.

And he worked toward corporal immortality and the apotheosis of mankind, that cantankerous animal.

He designed a fabric that would embulk itself on a temperature drop, and thin to an airy sheen in summery weather. The weather itself he disdained to modify, but he did evolve infallible prediction of exact daily rainfall and temperature for decades in advance.

And he built a retrogressor.

One day he looked in the mirror and frowned.

"I never did get around to making a better mirror. This one is hideous. However (to consider every possibility) let us weigh the thesis that it is the image and not the mirror that is hideous."

He called on an acquaintance.

"Say, Ulois, what year is this anyhow?"

"1844."

"Are you sure?"

"Reasonably sure."

"How old am I?"

"Eighty-five, I think, Higgston."

"How long have I been an old man?"

"Quite a while, Higgston, quite a while."

Higgston Rainbird hung up rudely.

"I wonder how I ever let a thing like that slip up on me?" he said to himself. "I should have gone to work on corporal immortality a little earlier. I've bungled the whole business now."

He fiddled with his prediction machine and saw that he was to die that very year. He did not seek a finer reading.

"What a saddle-galled splay-footed situation to find myself in! I never got around to a tenth of the things I really wanted to do. Oh, I was

smart enough; I just ran up too many blind alleys. Never found the answers to half the old riddles. Should have built the Prediction Machine at the beginning instead of the end. But I didn't know how to build it at the beginning. There ought to be a way to get more done. Never got any advice in my life worth taking except from that nutty old man on the mountain when I was a young man. There's a lot of things I've only started on. Well, every man doesn't hang, but every man does come to the end of his rope. I never did get around to making that rope extensible. And I can't improve things by talking to myself here about it."

He filled his pipe with Red Ball crimp cut and thought a while.

"But I hill-hopping can improve things by talking to myself there about it."

Then he turned on his retrogressor and went back and up.

Young Higgston Rainbird was hawking from the top of Devil's Head Mountain on a June afternoon in 1779. He flew his hawk down through the white clouds, and decided that he was the finest fellow in the world and master of the finest sport. If there was earth below the clouds it was far away and unimportant.

The hunting bird came back, climbing the tall air, with a pigeon from the lower regions.

"Forget the bird," said the old man, "and give a listen with those outsized ears of yours. I have a lot to tell you in a very little while, and then you must devote yourself to a concentrated life of work. Hood the bird and clip him to the stake. Is that bridle clip of your own invention? Ah yes, I remember now that it is."

"I'll just fly him down once more, old man, and then I'll have a look at what you're selling."

"No. No. Hood him at once. This is your moment of decision. That is a boyishness that you must give up. Listen to me, Higgston, and I will orient your life for you."

"I rather intended to orient it myself. How did you get up here, old man, without my seeing you? How, in fact, did you get up here at all? It's a hard climb."

"Yes, I remember that it is. I came up here on the wings of an invention of my own. Now pay attention for a few hours. It will take all your considerable wit."

"A few hours and a perfect hawking afternoon will be gone. This may be the finest day ever made."

"I also once felt that it was, but I man fully gave it up. So must you."

"Let me fly the hawk down again and I will listen to you while it is gone."

"But you will only be listening with half a mind, and the rest will be with the hawk."

But young Higgston Rainbird flew the bird down through the shining white clouds, and the old man began his rigmarole sadly. Yet it was a rang-dang-do of a spiel, a mummywhammy of admonition and exposition, and young Higgston listened entranced and almost forgot his hawk. The old man told him that he must stride half a dozen roads at once, and yet never take a wrong one; that he must do some things earlier than on the alternative had been done quite late; that he must point his technique at the Think Machine and the Prediction Machine, and at the unsolved problem of corporal immortality.

"In no other way can you really acquire elbow room, ample working time. Time runs out and life is too short if you let it take its natural course. Are you listening to me, Higgston?"

But the hawk came back, climbing the steep air, and it had a gray dove. The old man sighed at the interruption, and he knew that his project was in peril.

"Hood the hawk. It's a sport for boys. Now listen to me, you spraddling jack. I am telling you things that nobody else would ever be able to tell you! I will show you how to fly falcons to the stars, not just down to the meadows and birch groves at the foot of this mountain."

"There is no prey up there," said young Higgston.

"There is. Gamier prey than you ever dreamed of. Hood the bird and snaffle him."

"I'll just fly him down one more time and listen to you till he comes back."

The hawk went down through the clouds like a golden bolt of summer lightning.

Then the old man, taking the cosmos, peeled it open layer by layer like an onion, and told young Higgston how it worked. Afterwards he returned to the technological beginning and he lined out the workings of steam and petro- and electromagnetism, and explained that these simple powers must be used for a short interval in the invention of greater power. He told him of waves and resonance and airy transmission, and fission and flight and over-flight. And that none of the doors required keys, only a resolute man to turn the knob and push them open. Young Higgston was impressed.

Then the hawk came back, climbing the towering air, and he had a rainbird.

The old man had lively eyes, but now they took on a new light.

"Nobody ever gives up pleasure willingly," he said, "and there is always the sneaking feeling that the bargain may not have been perfect. This is one of the things I have missed. I haven't hawked for sixty-five years. Let me fly him this time, Higgston."

"You know how?"

"I am adept. And I once intended to make a better gauntlet for hawkers. This hasn't been improved since Nimrod's time."

"I have an idea for a better gauntlet myself, old man."

"Yes. I know what your idea is. Go ahead with it. It's practical."

"Fly him if you want to, old man."

And old Higgston flew the tercel hawk down through the gleaming clouds, and he and young Higgston watched from the top of the world. And then young Higgston Rainbird was standing alone on the top of Devil's Head Mountain, and the old man was gone.

"I wonder where he went? And where in apple knocker's heaven did he come from? Or was he ever here at all? That's a danged funny machine he came in, if he did come in it. All the wheels are on the inside. But I can use the gears from it, and the clock, and the copper wire. It must have taken weeks to hammer that much wire out that fine. I wish I'd paid more attention to what he was saying, but he poured it on a little thick. I'd have gone along with him on it if only he'd have found a good stopping place a little sooner, and hadn't been so insistent on giving up hawking. Well, I'll just hawk here till dark, and if it dawns clear I'll be up again in the morning. And Sunday, if I have a little time, I may work on my sparker or my chestnut roaster."

Higgston Rainbird lived a long and successful life. Locally he was known best as a hawker and horse racer. But as an inventor he was recognized as far as Boston.

He is still known, in a limited way, to specialists in the field and period: known as contributor to the development of the moldboard plow, as the designer of the Nonpareil Nutmeg Grater with the safety feature, for a bellows, for a sparker for starting fires (little used), and for the Devil's Claw Wedge for splitting logs. He is known for such, and for no more.

DREAM

He was a morning type, so it was unusual that he should feel depressed in the morning. He tried to account for it, and could not.

He was a healthy man, so he ate a healthy breakfast. He was not too depressed for that. And he listened unconsciously to the dark girl with the musical voice. Often she ate at Cahill's in the mornings with her girl friend.

Grape juice, pineapple juice, orange juice, apple juice... why did people look at him suspiciously just because he took four or five sorts of juice for breakfast?

"Agnes, it was ghastly. I was built like a sack. A sackful of skunk cabbage, I swear. And I was a green-brown color and had hair like a latrine mop. Agnes, I was sick with misery. It just isn't possible for anybody to feel so low. I can't shake it at all. And the whole world was like the underside of a log. It wasn't that, though. It wasn't just one bunch of things. It was everything. It was a world where things just weren't worth living. I can't come out of it..."

"Teresa, it was only a dream."

Sausage, only four little links for an order. Did people think he was a glutton because he had four orders of sausage? It didn't seem like very much.

"My mother was a monster. She was a wart-hoggish animal. And yet she was still recognizable. How could my mother look like a wart hog and still look like my mother? Mama's pretty!"

"Teresa, it was only a dream. Forget it."

The stares a man must suffer just to get a dozen pancakes on his plate! What was the matter with people who called four pancakes a tall stack? And what was odd about ordering a quarter of a pound of butter? It was better than having twenty of those little pats each on its coaster.

"Agnes, we all of us had eyes that bugged out. And we stank! We were bloated, and all the time it rained a dirty green rain that smelled like a four-letter word. Good grief, girl! We had hair all over us where we weren't warts. And we talked like cracked crows. We had crawlers. I itch just from thinking about it. And the dirty parts of the dream I won't even tell you. I've never felt so blue in my life. I just don't know how I'll make the day through."

"Teresa, doll, how could a dream upset you so much?"

There isn't a thing wrong with ordering three eggs sunny-side up, and three over easy, and three poached ever so soft, and six of them scrambled. What law says a man should have all of his eggs fixed alike? Nor is there anything wrong with ordering five cups of coffee. That way the girl doesn't have to keep running over with refills.

Bascomb Swicegood liked to have bacon and waffles after the egg interlude and the earlier courses. But he was nearly at the end of his breakfast when he jumped up.

"What did she say?"

He was suprised at the violence of his own voice.

"What did who say, Mr. Swicegood?"

"The girl that was just here, that just left with the other girl."

"That was Teresa, and the other girl was Agnes. Or else that was Agnes and the other girl was Teresa. It depends on which girl you mean. I don't know what either of them said."

Bascomb ran out into the street.

"Girl, the girl who said it rained dirty green all the time, what's your name?"

"My name is Teresa. You've met me four times. Every morning you look like you never saw me before."

"I'm Agnes," said Agnes.

"What did you mean it rained dirty green all the time? Tell me all about it."

"I will not, Mr. Swicegood. I was just telling a dream I had to Agnes. It isn't any of your business."

"Well, I have to hear all of it. Tell me everything you dreamed."

"I will not. It was a dirty dream. It isn't any of your business. If you weren't a friend of my Uncle Ed Kelly, I'd call a policeman for your bothering me."

"Did you have things like live rats in your stomach to digest for you? Did they --"

"Oh! How did you know? Get away from me. I will call a policeman. Mr. McCarty, this man is annoying me."

"The devil he is, Miss Ananias. Old Bascomb just doesn't have it in him any more. There's no more harm in him than a lamppost."

"Did the lampposts have hair on them, Miss Teresa? Did they pant and swell and smell green--"

"Oh! You couldn't know! You awful man!"

"I'm Agnes," said Agnes; but Teresa dragged Agnes away with her.

"What is the lamppost jag, Bascomb?" asked Officer Mossback McCarty.

"Ah -- I know what it is like to be in hell, Mossback. I dreamed of it last night."

"And well you should, a man who neglects his Easter duty year after year. But the lamppost jag? If it concerns anything on my beat, I have to know about it."

"It seems that I had the same depressing dream as the young lady, identical in every detail."

Not knowing what dreams are (and we do not know), we should not find it strange that two people might have the same dream. There may not be enough of them to go around, and most dreams are forgotten in the morning.

Bascomb Swicegood had forgotten his dismal dream. He could not account for his state of depression until he heard Teresa Ananias telling pieces of her own dream to Agnes Schoenapfel. Even then it came back to him slowly at first, but afterwards with a rush.

The oddity wasn't that two people should have the same dream, but that they should discover the coincidence, what with the thousands of people running around and most of the dreams forgotten.

Yet, if it were a coincidence, it was a multiplex one. On the night when it was first made manifest it must have been dreamed by quite a number of people in one medium-large city. There was a small piece in an afternoon paper. One doctor had five different worried patients who had had dreams of rats in their stomachs, and hair growing on the insides of their mouths. This was the first publication of the shared-dream phenomenon.

The squib did not mention the foul-green-rain back-ground, but later investigation uncovered that this and other details were common to the dreams.

But it was a reporter named Willy Wagoner who really put the town on the map. Until he did the job, the incidents and notices had been isolated. Doctor Herome Judas had been putting together some notes on the Green-rain Syndrome. Doctor Florenz Appian had been working up his evidence on the Surex Ventriculus Trauma, and Professor Gideon Greathouse had come to some learned conclusions on the inner meaning of warts. But it was Willy Wagoner who went to the people for it, and then gave his conclusions back to the people.

Willy said that he had interviewed a thousand people at random. (He hadn't really; he had talked to about twenty. It takes longer than you might think to interview a thousand people.) He reported that slightly more than sixty-seven percent had had a dream of the same repulsive world. He reported that more than forty-four percent had had the dream more than once, thirty two percent more than twice, twenty-seven percent more than three times.

Many had had it every damned night. And many refused frostily to answer questions on the subject at all.

This was ten days after Bascomb Swicegood had heard Teresa Ananias tell her dream to Agnes.

Willy published the opinions of the three learned gentlemen above, and the theories and comments of many more. He also appended a hatful of answers he had received that were sheer levity.

But the phenomenon was not local. Wagoner's article was the first comprehensive (or at least wordy) treatment of it, but only by hours. Similar things were in other papers that very afternoon, and the next day.

It was more than a fad. Those who called it a fad fell silent after they themselves experienced the dream. The suicide index rose around the country and the world. The thing was now international. The cacophonous ditty Green Rain was on all the jukes, as was The Wart Hog Song. People began to loath themselves and each other. Women feared that they would give birth to monsters. There were new perversions committed in the name of the thing, and several orgiastic societies were formed with the stomach rat as a symbol. All entertainment was forgotten, and this was the only topic.

Nervous disorders took a fearful rise as people tried to stay awake to avoid the abomination, and as they slept in spite of themselves and suffered the degradation.

It is no joke to experience the same loathsome dream all night every night. It had actually come to that. All the people were dreaming it all night every night. It had passed from being a joke to being a universal menace. Even the sudden new millionaires who rushed their cures to the market were not happy. They also suffered whenever they slept, and they knew that their cures were not cures.

There were large amounts posted for anyone who could cure the populace of the wart-hog-people dreams. There was presidential edict and dictator decree, and military teams attacked the thing as a military problem, but they were not able to subdue it.

Then one night a nervous lady heard a voice in her noisome dream. It was one of the repulsive cracked wart-hog voices. "You are not dreaming," said the voice. "This is the real world. But when you wake you will be dreaming. That barefaced world is not a world at all. It is only a dream. This is the real world." The lady awoke howling. And she had not howled before, for she was a demure lady.

Nor was she the only one who awoke howling. There were hundreds, then thousands, then millions. The voice spoke to all and engendered a doubt. Which was the real world? Almost equal time was now spent in each, for the people had come to need more sleep and most of them had arrived at spending a full twelve hours or more in the nightmarish world.

"It Could Be" was the title of a headlined article on the subject by the same Professor Greathouse mentioned above. It could be, he said, that the world on which the green rain fell incessantly was the real world. It could be that the wart-hogs were real and the people a dream. It could be that rats in the stomach were normal, and other methods of digestion were chimerical.

And then a very great man went on the air in worldwide broadcast with a speech that was a ringing call for collective sanity. It was the hour of decision, he said. The decision would be made. Things were at an exact balance, and the balance would be tipped.

"But we can decide. One way or the other, we will decide. I implore you all in the name of sanity that you decide right. One world or the other will be the world of tomorrow. One of them is real and one of them is a dream. Both are with us now, and the favor can go to either. But listen to me here: whichever one wins, the other will have always been a dream, a momentary madness soon forgotten. I urge you to the sanity which m a measure I have lost myself. Yet in our darkened dilemma I feel that we yet have a

choice. Choose!"

And perhaps that was the turning point.

The mad dream disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. The world came back to normal with an embarrassed laugh. It was all over. It had lasted from its inception six weeks.

Bascomb Swicegood, a morning type, felt excellent this morning. He breakfasted at Cahill's, and he ordered heavily as always. And he listened with half an ear to the conversation of two girls at the table next to his.

"But I should know you," he said.

"Of course. I'm Teresa."

"I'm Agnes," said Agnes.

"Mr. Swicegood, how could you forget? It was when the dreams first came, and you overheard me telling mine to Agnes. Then you ran after us in the street because you had had the same dream, and I wanted to have you arrested. Weren't they horrible dreams? And have they ever found out what caused them?"

"They were horrible, and they have not found out. They ascribe it to group mania, which is meaningless. And now there are those who say that the dreams never came at all, and soon they will be nearly forgotten. But the horror of them! The loneliness!"

"Yes, we hadn't even pediculi to curry our body hair. We almost hadn't any body hair."

Teresa was an attractive girl. She had a cute trick of popping the smallest rat out of her mouth so it could see what was coming into her stomach. She was bulbous and beautiful. "Like a sackful of skunk cabbage," Bascomb murmured admiringly in his head, and then flushed green at his forwardness of phrase.

Teresa had protuberances upon protuberances and warts on warts, and hair all over her where she wasn't warts and bumps. "Like a latrine mop!" sighed Bascomb with true admiration. The cracked clang of Teresa's voice was music in the early morning.

All was right with the earth again. Gone the hideous nightmare world when people had stood barefaced and lonely, without bodily friends or dependents. Gone that ghastly world of the sick blue sky and the near absence of entrancing odor.

Bascomb attacked manfully his plate of prime carrion. And outside the pungent green rain fell incessantly.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH, TEXAS

Manuel shouldn't have been employed as a census taker. He wasn't qualified. He couldn't read a map. He didn't know what a map was. And he only grinned when they told him that North was at the top. He knew better.

But he did write a nice round hand -- like a boy's hand. He did know Spanish, and enough English. For the sector that was assigned to him, he would not need a map. He knew it better than anyone else, certainly better than any mapmaker.

Besides, he was poor and needed the work.

They instructed him and sent him out. Or they thought that they had instructed him. They couldn't be sure.

"Count everyone? All right. Fill them all in? I need more papers.

"We will give you more papers if you need more, Manuel, but there aren't so many in your sector."

"Lots of them, lobos, tejones, zorros, even people."

"People only, Manuel. Do not take the animals. How would you write them up? They have no names."

"Oh, yes. All have names. Might as well take them all."

"Only people, Manuel."

"Mulos?"

"No."

"Conejos?"

"No, Manuel, no."

"No trouble. Might as well take them all."

"Only people -- God give me strength! -- only people, Manuel."

"How about little people?"

"Children, yes, that has been explained to you."

"Little people. Not children. Little people."

"If they are people, take them."

"How big they have to be?"

"It doesn't make any difference how big they are. If they are people, take them."

Manuel took Mula and went. His sector was the Santa Magdalena -- a scarp of baldheaded and desolate mountains, steep hut not high, and so torrid in the afternoons that it was said that the old lava sometimes began to writhe arid flow again from the sun's heat alone.

In the Center Valley, there were five thousand acres of slag and glassified rock from some forgotten old blast that had melted the hills and destroyed their mantle, reducing all to a terrible flatness. This was Sodom-strewn with low-lying ghosts as of people and objects, formed when the granite bubbled like water.

Away from the dead center, the ravines were body-deep in chapparal, and the mountains stood gray-green in old cactus. The stunted trees were lower than the giant bushes and yuccas.

Manuel went with Mula -- a round easy man and a spare gaunt mule. Mula was a mule, but there were other inhabitants of the Santa Magdalena whose genus was less certain.

Yet even about Mula there was an ancestral oddity. Her paternal grandfather had been a goat. Manuel once told Mr. Marshal about this, but Marshal had not accepted it.

"She is a mule," he said. "Therefore, her father was a jack. Therefore his father was also a jack, a donkey. It could not be any other way, Manuel."

Manuel often wondered about this, for he had raised the whole strain of animals and he remembered who had been with whom.

"A donkey! A jack! Two feet tall, and with a beard and horns! I always thought he was a goat."

Manuel and Mula stopped at noon on Lost Soul Creek. There would be no travel in the hot afternoon. But Manuel had a job to do and he did it. He took the forms from one of the packs that he had unslung from Mula and counted out nine of them. He wrote down all the data on nine people. He knew all there was to know about them -- their nativities and their antecedents. He knew that there were only nine regular people in the nine hundred square miles of the Santa Magdalena.

But he was systematic, so he checked the list over again and again. There seemed to be somebody missing. Oh yes, himself. He got another form and filled out all the data on himself.

Now -- in one way of looking at it -- his part in the census was finished. If only he had looked at it that way, he would have saved worry and trouble for everyone, and also ten thousand lives. But the instructions they had given him were ambiguous, for all that they had tried to make them clear.

So very early the next morning, Manuel rose and cooked bean and said, "Might as well take them all."

He called Mula from the thorn patch where she was grazing and gave her salt and loaded her again. Then they went to take the rest of the census -- but in fear. There was a clear duty to get the job done, but there was also a dread of it that the superiors did not understand. There was reason also why Mula was loaded with packs of census forms till she could hardly

walk.

Manuel prayed out loud as they climbed the purgatorial scarp above Lost Soul Creek "-- ruega por nosotros pecadores ahora" -- the very gulches stood angry and stark in the hot early morning -- "y en la hora de nuestra muerte."

Three days later an incredible dwarf staggered into the outskirts of High Plains, Texas. He was followed by a dying wolf-sized animal that did not look like a wolf.

A lady called the police to save the pair from rock-throwing kids who would have killed them; and the two as yet unclassified things were taken to the station house.

The dwarf was three feet high-a skeleton stretched over with brown-burnt leather. The other was an uncanine looking dog-sized beast so full of burs and thorns that it might have been a porcupine. But it was more a nightmare replica of a shrunken mule.

The midget was mad. The animal had more presence of mind; she lay down quietly and died. That was all she could do considering the state she was in.

"Who is census chief now?" asked the mad midget. "Is Mr. Marshal's little boy the census chief?"

"Mr. Marshal is, yes. Who are you? How do you know of Marshal? And what is that which you are pulling out of your pants -- if they are pants?"

"Census list. Names of everyone in town. I had to steal it."

"It looks like microfilm-the writing is so small. And the roll goes on and on. There must be a million names here."

"Little bit more, little bit more. I get two bits a name."

They got Marshal there. He was very busy, but he came. He had been given a deadline by the mayor and the citizen's group. He had to produce a population of ten thousand persons for High Plains, Texas. This was difficult, for there weren't that many people in the town. He had been working hard on it, though. But he came when the police called him.

"You Marshal's little boy?" the mad midget asked him. "You look just like your father."

"That voice -- I should know that voice even if it's cracked to pieces," said Marshall. "That has to be Manuel's voice."

"Sure, I'm Manuel, just like when I left thirty-five years ago."

"You can't be Manuel -- shrunk three feet and two hundred pounds and aged a million."

"You look here at my census slip, Mr. Marshal. It says I'm Manuel. And here are nine more of the regular people, and one million of the little people. I couldn't get the little ones on the regular forms. I had to steal their list."

"You can't be Manuel," said Marshal.

"He can't be Manuel," said the big policemen and the little policemen.

"Maybe not then. I thought I was. Who am I then? Let's look at the other papers to see which one I am."

"No, you can't be any of them either, Manuel. And you surely can't be Manuel."

"Give him a name anyhow and get him counted," said the head of the citizens' group. "We got to get to that ten thousand mark."

"Tell us what happened, Manuel -- if you are -- which you aren't -- but tell us."

"After I counted the regular people, I went to count the little people. I took a spade and spaded the top off their town to get in. But they put an encanto on me and made me and Mula run a treadmill for thirty-five years."

"Where was this, Manuel?"

"At the Little People Town -- Nuevo Danae. But after thirty-five

years, the encanto wore off, and Mula and I stole the list of names and ran away."

"But where did you really get this list of so many names written so small, Manuel?"

"Suffering saddle sores, Marshal, don't ask the little bug so many questions! You got a million names in your hand. Certify them! Send them in! There's enough of us right here to pass a resolution. We declare that place annexed forthwith. This will make High Plains the biggest town in Texas."

So Marshal certified the names and sent them in to Washington. This gave High Plains the largest percent increase of any city in the nation -- but it was challenged. There were some soreheads in Houston who said that it wasn't possible -- that High Plains had nowhere near that many people and that there must have been a miscount.

In the days that the argument was going on, they cleaned up and fed Manuel -- if it were he -- and tried to get from him a cogent story.

"How do you know it was thirty-five years, Manuel?"

"On the treadmill, it seemed like thirty-five years."

"It could have been only about three days."

"How come I'm so old then?"

"We don't know that Manuel. We sure don't know that. How big were these people?"

"Who knows. A finger long, maybe two."

"And what is their town?"

"It's an old prairie dog town that they fixed up. You have to dig down with a spade to get to the streets."

"Maybe they really were prairie dogs, Manuel. Maybe the heat got you and you only dreamed that they were little people."

"Prairie dogs can't write as good as on that list," said Manuel.

"Prairie dogs can't write hardly at all."

"That's true. The list is hard to explain. And such odd names on it, too."

"Where is Mula? I don't see Mula since I came back."

"Mula just lay down and died, Manuel."

"Gave me the slip. Why didn't I think of that? I'll do it too. I'm too worn out for anything else."

"Before you do, Manuel, just a couple of last questions."

"Make them real fast then. I'm on my way."

"Did you know there little people were there before?"

"Oh sure. Everybody in the Santa Magdalena see them. Eight, nine people know they are there. 'Who wants to be laughed at?' they say. They never talked about it."

"And, Manuel, how do we get to the place? Can you show us on a map?"

Manuel made a grimace and died quietly. He didn't understand those maps, and he took the easy way out. They buried him -- not knowing for sure whether he was Manuel or not. There wasn't much of him to bury.

It was the same night -- very late, and after he had been asleep -- that Marshal was awakened by the ring of an authoritative voice. He was being harangued by a four-inch-tall man on his bedside table -- a man of dominating presence and acid voice.

"Come out of that cot, you clown! Give me your name and station!"

"I'm marshal, and I suspect that you're a late pig sandwich. I shouldn't eat so late."

"Say 'Sir' when you reply to me! I am no pig sandwich and I do not commonly call on fools. Get on your feet, you clod!" Wondering, Marshal did.

"I want the list that was stolen. Don't gape. Get it! Don't stall, don't stutter. Get me that tax list! It isn't words I want from you."

"Listen, you cicada," said Marshal with his last bravery, "I'll take you and --"

"You will not! You will notice that you are now paralyzed from the

neck down. I suspect that you were always so from there up. Where is it?"

"S -- sent it to Washington."

"You bug-eyed behemoth! Do you realize what a trip that will be? You grandfather of inanities, it will be a pleasure to destroy you."

"I don't know what you are," said Marshal. "I don't believe you even belong on the world."

"Not belong on the world? We own the world. We can show written title to the world. Can you?"

"I doubt it. Where did you get the title?"

"We got it from a promoter of sorts, a con man really. I have to admit that we were taken, but we were in a spot and needed a world. He said that the larger bifurcates were too stupid to be a nuisance. We should have known that the stupider the creature the more of a nuisance it is."

"I have decided the same thing about the smaller the creature. We may have to fumigate that old mountain mess."

"Oh, you can't harm us. We're too powerful. But we can obliterate you in an instant."

"Hah!" exploded Marshal.

"Say 'hah, sir' when you address me. Do you know the place in the mountain that is called Sodom?"

"I know the place. It was caused by a large meteor."

"It was caused by one of these," said the small creature, and what he held up was the size of a grain of sand. "There was another city of you bug-eyed beasts there," continued the small martinet. "You wouldn't know about it. It's been a few hundred years. We decided it was too close. Now I have decided that you are too close."

"A thing that size couldn't crack a walnut," said Marshal.

"You floundering fop, it will blast this town flat."

"And if it does, what will happen to you?"

"Nothing. I don't even blink for things like that. I haven't time to explain it to you, you gaping goof. I have to get to Washington."

It may be that Marshal did not believe himself quite awake. He certainly didn't take the threat seriously enough. For, in a manner still not understood, the little man did trigger it off.

When the final count was in, High Plains did not have the highest percentage gain in the Nation. Actually it showed the sharpest decline of any town -- from 7313 to nothing. It is believed that High Plains was destroyed by a giant meteor. But there are eight, nine people in the Santa Magdalena who know what really happened, and they won't tell.

They were going to make a forest preserve out of the place, except that it has no trees worthy of the name. Now it is proposed to make it the Sodom and Gomorrah State Park from the two mysterious scenes of desolation there just seven miles apart.

It is an interesting place, as wild a region as you will ever find, and is recommended for the man who has seen everything.

THE TRANSCENDENT TIGERS

This was the birthday of Carnadine Thompson. She was seven years old. Thereby she left her childhood behind her, and came into the fullness of her powers. This was her own phrase, and her own idea of the importance of the milestone.

There were others, mostly adult, who thought that she was a peculiarly backward little girl in some ways, though precocious in others.

She received for her birthday four presents: a hollow, white rubber ball, a green plastic frog, a red cap and a little wire puzzle.

She immediately tore the plastic frog apart, considering it a child's toy. So much for that.

She put on the cap, saying that it had been sent by her Genie as a

symbol of her authority. In fact none of them knew who had sent her the red cap. The cap is important. If it weren't important, it wouldn't be mentioned.

Carnadine quickly worked the wire puzzle, and then unworked it again. Then she did something with the hollow, white rubber ball that made her mother's eyes pop out. Nor did they pop all the way in again when Carnadine undid it and made it as it was before.

Geraldine Thompson had been looking pop-eyed for a long time. Her husband had commented on it, and she had been to the doctor for it. No medical reason was found, but the actual reason was some of the antics of her daughter Carnadine.

"I wonder if you noticed the small wire puzzle that I gave to my daughter," said Tyburn Thompson to his neighbor, H. Horn.

"Only to note that it probably cost less than a quarter," said Horn, "and to marvel again at the canny way you have with coin. I wouldn't call you stingy, Tyburn. I've never believed in the virtues of understatement. You have a talent for making stingy people seem benevolent."

"I know. Many people misunderstand me. But consider that wire puzzle. It's a very simple-appearing puzzle, but it's twenty-four centuries old. It is unworkable, of course, so it should keep Carnadine occupied for some time. She has an excess of energy. This is one of the oldest of the unworkable puzzles."

"But, Tyburn, she just worked it," said his wife Geraldine.

"It is one of the nine impossible apparatus puzzles listed by Anaximandros in the fifth century before the common era," continued Tyburn. "And do you know, in all the centuries since then, there have been only two added to the list."

"Carnadine," said her mother, "let me see you work that again."

Carnadine worked it again.

"The reason it is unworkable," said Tyburn, "though apparent to me as a design engineer, may not be so readily apparent to you. It has to do with odds and evens of lays. Many of the unworkable classic puzzles are cordage puzzles, as is this actually. It is a wire miniature of a cordage puzzle. It is said that this is the construction of the Gordian knot. The same, however, is said of two other early cordage puzzles."

"But she just worked it, Tyburn, twice," said the wife.

"Stop chattering, Geraldine. I am explaining something to Horn. Men have spent years on the puzzle, the Engineering Mind and the recognition of patent impossibility being less prevalent in past centuries. And this, I believe, is the best of all the impossible ones. It is misleading. It looks as though there would surely be a way to do it."

"I just believe that I could do it, Tyburn," said Horn.

"No, you could not. You're a stubborn man, and it'd drive you crazy. It's quite impossible. You would have to take it into another dimension to work it, and then bring it back."

Carnadine once more did something with the hollow rubber ball.

"How did you make the rubber ball turn red and then white again, Carnadine?" her mother asked her.

"Turned it inside out. It's red on the inside."

"But how did you turn it inside out without tearing it?"

"It'd spoil it to tear it, mama."

"But it's impossible to turn it inside out without tearing it."

"Not if you have a red cap it isn't."

"Dear, how do you work the puzzle that your father says can't be worked?"

"Like this."

"Oh, yes. I mean, how does it happen that you can work it when nobody else could ever work it before?"

"There has to be a first time for everything, mama."

"Maybe, but there has to be a first-class explanation to go with

that first time."

"It's on account of the red cap. With this cap I can do anything."

So Carnadine Thompson in the fullness of her powers, and in her red cap, went out to find the rest of the Bengal Tigers. This was the most exclusive society in the world. It had only one full member, herself, and three contingent or defective members, her little brother Eustace, Fatty Frost, and Peewee Horn. Children all three of them, the oldest not within three months of her age.

The Bengal Tigers was not well known to the world at large, having been founded only the day before. Carnadine Thompson was made First Stripe for life. There were no other offices.

Yet, for a combination of reasons, the Bengal Tigers now became the most important society in the world. The new power was already in being. It was only a question of what form it would take, but it seemed to show a peculiar affiliation for this esoteric society.

Clement Chardin, writing in Bulletin de la Societe' Parahistorique Francaise, expressed a novel idea:

It is no longer a question whether there be transcendent powers. These have now come so near to us that the aura of them ruffles our very hair. We are the objects of a visitation. The Power to Move Mountains and Worlds is at hand. The Actuality of the Visitation is proved, though the methods of the detection cannot now be revealed.

The question is only whether there is any individual or group with the assurance to grasp that Power. It will not be given lightly. It will not come to the craven or contabescent. There is the sad possibility that there may be none ready in the World to receive the Power. This may not be the first Visitation, but it may well be the last. But the Power, whatever its form and essence (it is real, its presence had been detected by fine instrumentation), the Power, the Visitation may pass us by as unworthy.

This parenthetical for those who might not have read it in the journal.

That which struck just West of Kearney, Nebraska, was an elemental force. The shock of it was heard around the world, and its suction flattened farmhouses and barns for miles.

The area of the destruction was an almost perfect circle about two miles in diameter, so just over two thousand acres were destroyed. The first reports said that it was like no disaster ever known. Later reports said that it was like every disaster ever known; and it did have points of resemblance to all.

There was the great crater as though a meteorite had struck; there was the intense heat and the contamination as though it had been of fissionable origin; there was an afterflow of lava and the great ash clouds as though it were the super volcanic explosion of another Krakatoa. There was the sudden silence of perhaps two seconds actually, and perhaps two hours as to human response. And then the noise of all sorts.

The early reports said that the hole was three miles deep. That was said simply to have a figure and to avoid panic. It was not known how deep the hole was.

But it was very much more than three miles -- before the earthquake had begun to fill and mask it -- before the hot magma had oozed up from its bottom to fill those first miles. It was still very much more than three miles deep after the rapid gushing had declined to a slow waxlike flowing.

Had anyone heard the preceding rush, or seen a meteor or any other flying object? No. There hadn't been a sound, but there had been something pitched a little higher than sound.

There hadn't been a meteor or a flying ball. But there had been what some called a giant shaft of light, and others a sheen of metal: a thing too big to be believed, and gone too soon to be remembered.

One farmer said that it was like the point of a giant needle quickly becoming more than a mile thick, and a hundred thousand miles long.

Did he know how to judge distances? Certainly, he said, I know how to judge distances. It is ninety yards to that tree; it is seven hundred yards to that windmill. That crow is flying at right onto eighty yards above the earth, though most would guess him higher. And that train whistle is coming from a distance of five and one-quarter miles.

But did he know how to judge great distances? Did he know how far was a hundred thousand miles? Certainly, he said, a great distance is easier to judge than a small one. And that sudden bright shaft was one hundred thousand miles long.

The farmer was the only one who offered any figures. Few had seen the thing at all. And all who had seen it maintained that it had lasted only a fraction of a second.

"There should be something to take the minds of the people from the unexplained happening near Kearney, Nebraska," said a group of advisors who had national status. "It will not be good for too much notice to be taken of this event until we have an explanation of it."

Fortunately something did take the minds of the people off the unexplained happenings near Kearney. What took their minds from the unusual happenings in Nebraska were the happenings at or near Hanksville, Utah, Crumpton, Maryland, Locust Bayou, Arkansas, and Pope City, Georgia. All of these sudden destructions were absolutely similar in type and vague in origin. National panic now went into the second stage, and it was nearly as important to halt it as to solve the disasters them selves.

And what in turn took the minds of the people off these disasters were the further disasters at Highmore, South Dakota, Lower Gilmore, New Hampshire, Cherryfork, Ohio, and Rowesville, South Carolina.

And what took the minds of the people off these later disasters were still further disasters at -- but this could go on and on.

And it did.

So with the cataclysmic disasters erupting over the country like a rash, there wasn't a large audience for the academic discussions about the New Potential of Mankind. There were those, concerned about the current catastrophes, who said that Mankind might not last long enough to receive the New Potential -- or anything else.

But Winkers observed from the Long Viewpoint -- paying no more attention to the destructions than if they had been a string of firecrackers, such not being his field:

It is paradoxical that we know so much and yet so little about the Power Immanent in the World: the Visitation, the Poyavlenie, as it is now called internationally.

It has been detected, but in ways twice removed. An earlier statement that it had been detected by instrumentation is inaccurate. It has not been detected by instrumentation, but by para-instrumentation. This is the infant science of gathering data from patterns of failure of instruments, and of making deductions from those failure patterns. What our finest instruments fail to detect is at least as important as what they do detect. In some cases it is more so. The patterns of failure when confronted with the thesis of the Visitation have been varied, but they have not been random. There appears to be a validity to the deductions from the patterns.

The characteristics of the Power, the Visitation, as projected by these methods (and always considered in the Oeg-Hornbostel framework) is that it is Aculciform, Hoinodynamous, Homochiral, and (here the intelligence reels with disbelief, yet I assure the Jector that I am deadly serious)

Homoeoteleutic.

For there is a Verbal Element to it, incredible as it seems. This raises old ghosts. It is almost as if we hear the returning whisper of primitive magic or fetish. It is as if we were dealing with the Logos -- the word that was before the world. But where are we to find the logic of the Logos?

Truly the most puzzling aspect of all is this Verbal Element detected in it, even if thus remotely. Should we believe that the Power operates homeopathically through some sort of witches' rhyming chant? That might be an extreme conclusion, since we know it only by an implication. But when we consider all the foregoing in the light of Lauder milk's Hypothesis, we are tempted to a bit of unscientific apprehension.

How powerful is the Power? We do not know. We cannot equate it in dynes. We can only compare effect with effect, and here the difference is so great that comparison fails. We can consider the effect of the Titter-Stumpf Theory, or of the Krogman-Keil Projection on Instrumentation and Para-instrumentation. And we humbly murmur "very powerful indeed."

Carnadine Thompson had begun to read the newspapers avidly. This was unexpected, since reading was her weak point. She had had so much trouble with the story of the Kitten and the Bell in the First Reader that her mother had come to believe that she had no verbal facility at all. This had been belied a moment later when Carnadine had torn the offending pages out of the Reader and told her mother and the world just what they could do with that kitten, and told it with great verbal facility. But it seemed that for reading Carnadine had no talent.

But now she read everything she could find about the new disasters that had struck the country -- read it out loud in a ringing voice in which the names of the destroyed places were like clanging bells.

"How come you can read the paper so well, Carnadine?" her mother asked her. "How do you know how to say the names?"

"Oh, it's no great trick, mama. You just tie into the stuff and let go. Crumpton! Locust Bayou! Pope City! Cherryfork! Rowesville!"

"But how can you read all those hard names in the paper when you couldn't even read the story about the little kitten?"

"Mama, with things going the way they are, I think there's a pretty good chance that that damned kitten will get what's coming to her."

Far out, very far out, there was a conversation.

This was on a giant world of extreme sophistication nondependence on matter. It was such a world as which Lauder milk's Hypothesis was built. That such a world existed, even in a contingent sense, was a triumph for Lauder milk.

"Then you have invested one?" asked Sphaeros, an ancient rotundity of that advanced world.

"I have invested one," said Acu, the eager young sharpie, and bowed his forehead to the floor. The expression was figurative, since there was neither forehead nor floor on that world.

"And you are certain that you have invested the correct one?"

"You toy with me. Naturally I am not certain. Every investiture may not be successful, and every seed may not grow. One learns by experience, and this is my first experience on such a mission.

"I examined much of that world before I found this person. I thought first that it would be among the masters of the contrapuntal worlds -- for even there they have such and masters of such. But none of these persons -- called by themselves actors and impresarios and promoters and hacks -- none of these qualified. None had the calm assurance that is the first requisite. What assurance they had was of another sort, and not valid. Also, their contrapuntal worlds were not true creations in our sense -- not really worlds at all."

"Then where did you look?" asked Sphaeros.

"I looked to the heads of the apparatus. On retarded worlds there is often an apparatus or 'government.' On that world there were many. But the leaders of these-though most showed an avidity for power-did not show the calm assurance that should go with it. Their assurance, if it could be called such, was of an hysterical sort. Also, most of them were venal persons, so I rejected them."

"And then?"

"Then I explored remote possibilities. Those who employ in their work a certain power over another species -- jockeys, swineherds, beekeepers, snake-charmers. But with them I didn't find what I looked for -- the perfect assurance of the truly superior being."

"And then, Acu?"

"Then I went into instruments, not trusting my own judgment. I set the Calm Assurance Indicator on automatic and cruised about that world. And on that whole world I found only one person with perfect assurance -- one impervious to doubt of any kind and totally impervious to self-doubt. On this one I made the investiture and conferred the concept of great Power and Sharpness.

"You have made a mistake. Fortunately it is not a great mistake as it is not a great world. You were too anxious to make a good showing on your first attempt. When nothing can be found, you should leave that world alone. On very many of them nothing can be found. Assurance is not the only quality that makes up this competence; it is simply the quality for which we look first on alien spheres.

"The one on whom you made the Investiture, though full of assurance, was not full of other qualities equally important. It was in fact a pupa form, a child of the species, known locally as a kid. Well, it's done and cannot be undone. Fortunately such power conferred carries its own safety factor. The worst it can do is destroy its own world and seal it off safely from others. You made the Investiture correctly?"

"Yes. I left the Red Cap, the symbol of authority and power. There was instant acceptance and comprehension."

"Now we'll do the big towns," screamed Carnadine Thompson in the clubhouse of the Bengal Tigers.

"Peas and Beans -- New Orleans!"

She jabbed the needle into New Orleans on the map, and the great shaft a hundred thousand miles long came down into the middle of the Crescent City.

A needle? Not a pin? No. No. Pins won't work. They're of base metal. Needles! Needles!

"Candy store -- Baltimore," howled Carnadine and jabbed in another needle, and the old city was destroyed. But there was never a place that screamed so loudly over its own destruction or hated so much to go.

"Fatty's full of bolonio --
San Antonio."

And Carnadine stuck it in with full assurance of her powers, red cap atilt, eyes full of green fire. There were some of us who liked that place and wished that it could have been spared.

"Eustace is a sisty -- Corpus Christi."

"I know one," said Eustace, and he clapped the red cap on his own head:

"Eggs and Batter -- Cincinnati."

He rhymed and jabbed, manfully but badly.

"That didn't rhyme very good," said Carnadine. "I bet you botched it."

He did. It wasn't a clean-cut holocaust at all. It was a clumsy, bloody, grinding job -- not what you'd like.

"Eustace, go in the house and get the big world map," ordered

Carnadine, "and some more needles. We don't want to run out of things."

"Pee wee is a sapolis -- Minneapolis."

"Let me do one," pleaded Peewee, and he snatched the red cap:

"Hopping Froggo -- Chicago."

"I do wish that you people would let me handle this," said Carnadine. "That was awful."

It was. It was horrible. That giant needle didn't go in clean at all. It buckled great chunks of land and tore a ragged gap. Nothing pretty, nothing round about it. It was plain brutal destruction.

If you don't personally go for this stuff, then pick a high place near a town that nobody can find a rhyme for, and go there fast. But if you can't get out of town in the next two minutes, then forget it. It will be too late.

Carnadine plunged ahead:

"What the hecktady -- Schenectady."

That was one of the roundest and cleanest holes of all.

"Flour and Crisco -- San Francisco."

That was a good one. It got all the people at once, and then set up tidal waves and earthquakes all over everywhere.

"Knife and Fork --

MAD MAN

The too-happy puppy came bounding up to him -- a bundle of hysterical yipes and a wagging tail that would bring joy to the soul of anyone. The pathetic expectation and sheer love in the shining eyes and woolly rump was something to see. The whole world loves a puppy like that.

And George Gnevni kicked the thing end over end and high into the air with a remarkably powerful boot. The sound that came from the broken creature as it crash-landed against a wall was a heart-rending wail that would have melted the heart of a stone toad.

Gnevni was disgusted with himself.

"Less than ten meters. Should have hooted him twelve. I'll kill the blood-sucking cod-headed little cur the next time. Nothing goes right today."

It was not a real puppy; it was better than a real one. There is something artificial in the joy and carrying on of a real puppy as well as in its hurt screaming. But the antics of this one rang true. The thing was made by a competent artist, and it was well made.

It could be set to go through the same routine again at a moment's notice.

A Crippled Old Lady came up shaking with palsy. There was real beauty in her face yet, and a serenity that pain could never take away from her.

"A glorious morning to you, my good man," she said to Gnevni.

And he kicked her crutches out from under her.

"I am sure that was an accident, sir," she gasped as she teetered and nearly fell. "Would you be so kind as to hand them to me again? I'm quite unable to stand without them."

Gnevni knocked her down with a smacking blow. He then stomped up and down on her body from stem to stern. And with a heavy two-footed jump on her stomach he left her writhing on the pavement.

Gnevni was again disgusted with himself.

"It doesn't seem to do a thing for me today," he said, "not a thing. I don't know what's the matter with me this morning."

It was a real lady. We are afraid of dog-lovers, but we are not afraid of people-lovers. There are so few of them. So the lady was not an artificial

one. She was real flesh and blood, and the least of both. However, she was neither crippled nor old. She was a remarkably athletic woman and had been a stunt girl before she found her true vocation. She was also a fine young actress and played the Crippled Old Lady role well.

Gnevni went to his job in the Cortin Institute Building that was popularly known as the Milk Shed.

"Bring my things, crow-bait," he grumbled at a nice young lady assistant. "I see the rats have been in your hair again. Are you naturally deformed or do you stand that way on purpose? There's a point, you know, beyond which ugliness is no longer a virtue."

The nice young lady began to cry, but not very convincingly. She went off to get Gnevni's things. But she would bring only a part of them, and, not all of them the right ones.

Old George isn't himself this morning," said the underdoctor Cotrel.

I know," said under-doctor Devon. "We'll have to devise something to get him mad today. We can't have him getting pleasant on us.

The required paranexus could not be synthesized. Many substances had been tried and all of them had been found insufficient. But the thing was needed for the finest operation of the Programmeds. It had to be the real thing, and there was only one way to get a steady supply of it.

At one time they had simplified it by emphasizing the cortin and adrenalin components of it. Later they had emphasized a dozen other components, and then a hundred. And finally they accepted it for what it was too complex for duplication, too necessary an accessory for the programmeds to be neglected, too valuable at its most effective to be taken from random specimens. It could be had only from Humans, and it could be had in fine quality only from a special sort of Humans. The thing was very complex, but at the Institute they called it Oil of Dog.

Peredacha was a pleasant little contrivance -- a "Shadler Movement" or "female" of the species that had once been called homo canventus or robot and was now referred to as "Programmed Person."

She had a sound consciousness, hint of developing originality, a capacity for growth and a neatness of mechanism and person. She might be capable of fine work of the speculative sort. She was one of those on whom the added spark might not be wasted.

Always they had worked to combine the best elements of both sorts.

The Programmed Persons were in many respects superior to the Old Becension Persons or Humans. They were of better emotional balance, of greater diligence, of wider adaptability, of much vaster memory or accumulation and of readier judgment based on that memory. But there was one thing lacking in the most adept of the Programmed that was often to be found in the meanest of the humans. This was a thing very hard to name.

It was the little bit extra; but the Programmed already had the very much extra. It had something of the creative in it, though the Programmed were surely more creative than the Humans. It was the rising to the occasion; the Programmed could do this more gracefully, but sometimes less effectively, than could the Humans. It was the breaking out of a framework, the utter lack of complacency, the sudden surge of power or intellect, the bewildering mastery of the moment, the thing that made the difference.

It was the Programmed themselves who sought out the thing, for they were the more conscious of the difference. It was the Programmed technicians who set up the system. It cost the Humans nothing, and it profited the Programmed very much in their persons and personalities.

On many of them, of course, it had little effect; but on a select few it had the effect of raising them to a genius grade. And many of them who could never become geniuses did become specialists to a degree unheard of before -- and all because of the peculiar human additive.

It was something like the crossing of the two races, though there could never be a true cross of species so different--one of them not being of

the reproductive sort. The adrenal complex sometimes worked great changes on a Programmed.

There were but a few consistent prime sources of it -- and each of them somehow had his distinguishing mark. Often a Programmed felt an immediate kinship, seldom reciprocated, with the Human donor. And Peredacha, a very responsive Programmed, felt the kinship keenly when the additive was given to her.

"I claim for paternity," she cried. It was a standard joke of the Programmed. ~'I claim as daughter to my donor! I never believed it before. I thought it only one of those things that everybody says. The donors are such a surly bunch that it drives them really violent til one of us seeks their acquaintance on this pretext. But I'm curious. Which one was it?"

She was told.

"Oh no! Not him of the whole clutch! How droll can you get? He is my new kindred? But never before did I feel so glorious. Never have I been able to work so well."

The assigned job of George Gnevni was a mechanical one. In the ordinary course of things this would be all wrong, for George had less mechanical aptitude than any man ever born. George had very little aptitude for anything at all in the world -- until his one peculiar talent was discovered.

He was an unhandsome and graceless man, and he lived in poverty. Much has been said about the compensations of physical ugliness -- mostly the same things that have been said about poverty. It is often maintained that they may be melded behind the dross front, that the sterling character may develop and shine through the adversity.

It is lies, it is lies! It happens only rarely that these things are ennobling. With persons of the commoner sort it happens not at all. To be ugly and clumsy and poor at the same time will finally drive a man to raving anger against the whole world.

And that was the idea.

Gnevni was assigned a mean lodging, and his meal tickets were peculiar ones. He could not obtain what he wanted to eat. He could have only what was on the list for him to eat, and this was evilly contrived to cover everything that disagreed with him. As a result he was usually in gastric pain and in seething anger at his own entrails. He had an ugly nature to begin with, but the form of life forced upon him deepened and nurtured it.

Gnevni's voice was harsh and jangling, though there was real mastery of resonance in his powerful howling when his anger reached high form. He was denied wifing privileges, and no woman would have had him in any case. He was allowed just enough of bad whoa-johnny whisky to keep him edgy and mean, but not enough to bring him solace.

He was an oaf -- an obscene distasteful clod of humanity. He knew it and he boiled and seethed with the shoddy knowledge. He was no better than a badger in a cage, but those things are terrific snappers.

For his poor livelihood he was given a quota of mechanical tasks to complete every day, and he had no meehanical aptitude at all. They were simple assembly jobs. A competent Programmed Person could do in minutes what it took Gnevni all day to do.

Most children of the human species could do the same things easily and quickly -- though some might not be able to do them at all, for the Humans are less uniform in their abilities than the Programmed. The things that Gnevni was to assemble were never all there, some of them were the wrong things, and some of them were defective. A Programmed would have spotted the off stuff at once and sent it back, but ugly George had no way of telling whether things were right or not. He sweated and swore his days away at the grotesque labor and became the angriest man alive.

Joker tools were sometimes substituted on him for the true with shafts as flexible as spaghetti, key-drifts with noses as soft as wax,

box-end wrench sets that were sized to fit nothing, soldering guns that froze ice on their tips, mismarked calipers with automatic slippage, false templates, unworkable crimpers, continuity testers that shocked a man to near madness.

It is a legend that humans have an affinity for mechanical things. But normal humans have an innate hatred for machinery, and the accommodation that has grown up between them is a nervous one. The damned stuff just doesn't work right. You hate it, and it hates you. That's the old basic of it.

Swift, a wise old mad man, once wrote a piece on the "Perversity of Inanimate Objects." And they are perverse, particularly to a sick, ugly, ignorant, incompetent, poor man who fights them in a frenzy -- and they fight back.

All day long George Gnevni and a few of his unfortunate fellows attacked their tasks explosively -- the air blue with multi-syllabled profanity, and anger dancing about like summer lightning. Now and then, people came and inserted tubes into these unfortunates, and performed some other indignities upon them.

The paranexus, the complex substance, the "Oil of Dog" that was needed for stimulation of the Programmed, while it could be taken from any Humans, could only be had in its prime form from a depraved, insane sort of Very Angry Men.

But today George Gnevni was not himself. There was only a sullenness in him, not the required flaming purple anger.

"We have to prod him," said under-doctor Cotrel. "We can't waste a whole day on him. He's sick enough. He tests at a high enough pitch of excitement. Why won't he put out? Why won't he get mad?"

"I have an idea," said under-doctor Devon. "We have an inner-office memo that one of the Programmed has recognized kinship with him. You remember when Wut was in a slump? We got a Programmed up here who threw an arm around him and called him Uncle Wilbur. The way Wut exploded, seismographs must have recorded the shock at a considerable distance. We had to move fast to prevent him from damaging the Programmed. And then Wut was so mad that we were able to use him around the clock for seventy-two hours. How our Very Angry Men do hate the Programmed! They call them the things."

"Good. Anything that worked on Wet ought to work double on Gnevni. Get the Programmed Person up here. We'll have him at ugly George."

"Her. She's a Shadier Movement Programmed and so technically a female."

"Better yet. I can hardly wait, Gnevni is the most spectacular of them all when he really goes wild. We should get a good production from him."

Peredacha, the talented little Shadier Movement Programmed, came to the Cortin Institute Building -- the Milk Shed. She understood the situation and enjoyed it. The Programmed have their humor -- more urbane than that of Humans, and yet as genuine -- and they appreciate the hilarity of an incongruous confrontation.

Peredacha was something of an actress, for all the Programmed have a talent for mimicry. She considered the role for a moment, and she put all her talent into it.

And she did it! She made herself into the most pathetic urchin since the Little Match Girl. Yet she was a Programmed and not a Human; it was as though a gear box should put on a waif's shawl and turn tear-jerker.

They brought her in.

"Papa!" Peredacha cried and rushed toward Gnevni.

The attendants had closed between them to prevent damage when the anger of the low man should rise like a jagged wave.

The show should have been greater than the one that Wut had once put on for less reason. Gnevni was a bigger man with more power of anger, and

the situation was even more ridiculous. It should have set records on the decibel-recorder, filled the room with brimstone, and enriched the vocabulary of scatology.

But it didn't.

The face of George Gnevni was slack, and he shook his heavy head sadly.

"Take the child away," he said dully. "I will not be responsible for my feelings today."

It was a new morning and George Gnevni must return to his brutal livelihood.

A too-happy puppy came bounding up to him -- a bundle of hysterically gay yipes with a waggling rump and tail hitclied on to them.

"Hello, little fellow," Gnevni said and bent down to pet it. But the puppy was not programmed for such treatment. It was made to be kicked by angry men. It threw itself into a series of reverse somersaults and heart-rending wails as though it had been kicked indeed.

"Oh, the poor little toy!" said Gnevni. "It has never known kindness."

"Look, Gnevni," said an inferior sort of man who came up, "the dog was made for one thing only -- so that twelve or thirteen of you hotfires could kick it every morning and get into your mood. Now kick too."

"I won't do it."

"I'll report you."

"I don't care. How could anyone harm that poor little tyke?" The Crippled Old Lady came up, shaking as with palsy. "A glorious good morning to you, my good man," she said to Gnevni.

"And a fine morning to you, my lady," he said.

"What? You're not supposed to say that! You're supposed to kick my crutches out from under me and then knock me down and trample on me. It helps get you in your mood. Crippled Old ladies are infuriating sights to the Very Angry Men; they make them even angrier. Everybody knows that."

"I just don't believe that I will do it today, ah -- Margaret, is that not your name? A fine day to you, my dear."

"Knock off that fine day stuff! I have my job to do. I'm a mood piece. You blow-tops are supposed to kick out my crutches and tromp me down to get in your mood. Now start kicking or I'll report you."

"Do so if you must, my dear."

Gnevni went to his job in the Cortin Institute Building, and there he was good for nothing.

Mad? He wasn't even sullen. He was puzzled and pleasant, and when you have one of the old stand-bys go pleasant on you you're in trouble. He was civil to everybody and gave them all the jitters. He completed his mechanical tasks in an hour -- finding them much easier when he attacked them calmly. But he wasn't supposed to find them easier.

So there was ecostemation in the Department. Gnevni had been the best producer of them all. They couldn't let him go by like that.

"Damn you, get mad!" under-doctor Cotrel shouted and shook him. "We won't have any malingering on the job. Get mad and start putting out."

"I just don't seem able to get mad today," said Gnevni honestly. "You double-damned will get mad, you crudhead!" pursued under-doctor Cotrel. Cotrel seemed rather upset himself. "Under-doctor Devon! Over-doctor Ratracer! Director Duggle! Come help me with this pig-headed fellow. He won't get mad."

"He's got to get mad," said underdoctor Devon. "We'll make the filth-eating fink get mad."

"It looks bad," said Director Duggle. "He was at only half efficiency yesterday, and today he's good for nothing at all. Well, put him through the routine. We can't have him going sour at us."

They put him through the routine. It was brutal. It would have made a roaring devil out of the sweetest saint. Even spectators commonly became white with fury when such a thing was put on, and there was no limit to the effect on the victim. Gnevni endured it with composed sorrow but without anger. And when even the routine didn't work what more could you do to him?

Under-doctor Cotrel began to cuff and kick him: "Get mad, you slimy sulphurous son of a she shink! Get mad, you mud-headed old monkey! Get mad, you dirt-eating mutt-head! You slobber-mouthed donkey, get mad!"

They brought in others. They even brought in Peredacha -- hoping she would have a more positive effect on him than she had had the day before. But Gnevni brightened up to see her.

"Ah, it is my little daughter! I sent you notes at intervals through the evening and night, but I guess you did not receive them. It is so wonderful just to see you again."

"Why you bat-whiskered old bum, was it you who sent those notes? 'Sweet papa.' You? By the shop where I was made, I never heard of anything like it before!"

"Do not be cruel, Peredacha. You are all that I care for in the world. With you I could become a new man."

"Well, not being human I guess I can be humane. I'll look after you, ugly papa. But they don't want you to become a new man; as the old one you were the best they had. Come now, get mad for the people. It's your job."

"I know, but I'm unable to do it. I have been thinking, Peredacha, that since you are my daughter in a way -- cortin of my cortin and adrenalin of my adrenalin -- perhaps the two of us might go off somewhere and --"

"Holy howling hog!" Under-doctor Cotrel took off in a screech too high for the human ear to follow, so perhaps only Peredacha heard and flushed. And then Cotrel broke up completely. He kicked and beat on Gnevni. He shrilled and sobbed and gobbled. And when his sounds once more became intelligible it was a screaming, "Get mad, damn you, get mad!"

Cotrel was a lean man, hut powerfully corded and muscled, and now every cord of muscle and nerve stood glaringly out on him black and purple.

That man was plain frantic in his displeasure at Gnevni. The flying foam from his lips flecked the room--something you would not have expected from under-doctor Cotrel.

"It is all right," said Director Duggle. "Gnevni was about finished in any case. The best of them are only good for a year or two -- the pace is a terrific one. And we are lucky to have his replacement ready at hand."

"Replacement?" roared the livid Cotrel. "He's got to get mad! There isn't any replacement." And he continued to strike Gnevni.

"I believe that the director has you in mind, Cotrel," said over-doctor Ratracer. "Yes. I am sure of it."

"Me? I am under-doctor Cotrel! I make five hundred Guzman d'or a month!"

"And now you will make five," said Director Duggle. "Grinding poverty is a concomitant of your new job. I had suspected you had a talent for it. Now I am sure. You begin immediately. You become the latest, and soon I hope the best, of the Very Angry Men."

Cotrel became so, and immediately. Gnevni had been good. Wut before him had been one of the best. But for carrying-on noise and stink generally, there was never such an exhibition as Mad Man Cotrel now put on -- getting into the spirit of his new job -- he was the maddest man you ever saw!

THE MAN WITH THE SPECKLED EYES

In those days there had been a clique of six men who controlled it all. Any new thing went to one of them -- or it went nowhere. Discovery and invention cannot be allowed to break out all over the lot.

These six men did not work in particular harmony. They were called the clique because they were set apart from others by their influence; and

because of their names, which were: Claridge, Lone, Immermann, Quinn, Umholtz, and Easter.

Now the six men were reduced to two. On successive days, Claridge, Lone, Immermann, and Quinn had disappeared -- and they had done it pretty thoroughly. In each case, somebody had to know something about their disappearance; and in each case, that somebody refused to tell.

Claridge's man, Gueranger, had been with Claridge at the time of the disappearance or shortly before. He admitted that much. But nothing intelligent could be got from him.

"The truth of it is that I don't know the truth of it," Gueranger insisted. "Yes, I was there, but I don't know what happened."

"Don't you know what you saw?" asked the investigator.

"No, I don't. That's the whole point of the matter: I will not accept, and will not tell, what I saw. Certainly I know that I'm held on suspicion of murder. But where is the body? You find it - anywhere -- in any shape and I'll sure sleep better."

In the second case, Ringer and Mayhall both seemed to know something of the disappearance of their employer, Lone. The three of them had walked in the plaza at evening. Only two of them had come back -- and they much shaken.

"I know what I seemed to see," Ringer ventured, "and I will not tell it. I'm not stubborn and I'm not sensitive to laughter, but I've sealed the whole thing off in a corner of my mind and I won't disturb it. I've hopes of hanging on to some pieces of my reason, and to open this again would set me back."

"Loric?" Mayhall grunted. "I guess the damned fool swallowed himself. He's sure gone completely. Yes, I was with him, and I won't say any nearer than that what happened."

"I simply will not explain," said Immermann's advisor, Hebert. "He is gone, and I do not believe he will be back. No. If it was a hoax, I wasn't in on it, and I don't understand it. Do I believe that he wished to disappear for a private reason? Did he -- wherever he has gone -- go willingly? No, gentlemen, he did not go willingly! I never saw a man so reluctant to go."

"I will not say what happened to Mr. Quinn," said Pacheco, Quinn's assistant. "Of course I know that he was an important man -- the most important in the world to me. You say that you will have answers out of me one way or the other? Then you'll have nothing but babbling out of a crazy man."

"Why, yes, I suppose that you can hang me for murder. I don't know how those things are worked. It seems extreme, however. I thought there was a Latin phrase involved, about a body being required. Lay off now, fellows. I'm cracking up, I tell you."

The investigators didn't lay off, but so far they had got nothing out of any of the witnesses. The four disappearances had to be as one, and the witnesses were certainly of a pattern.

"Are Extraterrestrials Kidnapping Our Top Talent?" the news banners read.

"Oh, hell," said Umholtz in his cluttered office. "Hell," said Easter in his clean one. They both knew that they were not men of any particular talent, and that the four men who had disappeared were not. They were shufflers and dealers in talent, that is all. In popular idea, they were responsible for the inventions they marketed. But off-Earth people -- bent on such showy kidnappings -- would have picked off seminal geniuses and not talent brokers.

Four gone, two to go. Would the next one be Umholtz or Easter? Umholtz felt that it would be himself. He and his assistant, Planter, were worrying about it together when Shartel the aide came in to them.

"There's one to see you, Mr. Umholtz," said Shartel with diffidence, for he was only half the bulk of his employer.

"An inventor?" Umholtz always sneered with his eyebrows when he spoke that word, although inventors were the only stock he dealt in.

"Who else comes to see us, Mr. Umholtz? This one may be worth investigating, though probably not for any invention he has."

"A crackie? What does he have?"

"A crackie from end to end, and he won't say what he has."

"We're not scanning clients these days, Shartel. I explain that to you every ten minutes. We're spending all our time worrying about the disappearances. Creative worry, Planter here calls it, and I don't appreciate his humor. I haven't time for a crackie today."

"He got to see Claridge, Lone, Immermann, and Quinn -- all a couple of hours before their disappearance."

"All inventors make the same rounds. There's nobody else they can go to. And weren't there a couple of others who saw them all?"

"The others have all been checked out clean. This is the last one. The authorities have been looking for him and have left word to call if he showed. I'll ring them as soon as he's in here. There's a slim chance that he knows something, but he sure doesn't look it."

"Send him in, Shartel. Has he a name?"

"Haycock. And he looks as though he had slept in one."

Haycock didn't really have hay in his hair -- that was only the color and lay of it. He had blue eyes with happy, dangerous gold specks in them, and a friendly and humorous sneer. He looked rather an impudent comedian, but inventors come in all sizes. He had something of the back-country hayseed in him. But also something of the panther.

"I have here what may turn out to be a most useful device," Haycock began. "Good. You have sent the underlings away. I never talk in their presence. They're inclined to laugh at me. I am offering you the opportunity to get in on the top floor with my device, Mr. Umholtz."

"Haycock, you have the aspect of a man entranced by one of the four basic fallacies. If so, you are wasting my time. But I want to question you on a side issue. Is it true that you visited all four of them -- Claridge, Lone, Immermann, and Quinn -- on the days of their disappearances?"

"Sounds like their names. Four blind bats! None of them could see my invention at first. All of them laughed at it. Forget those fools, Umholtz. You can grow new fools, but what I have here is unique. It is the impossible invention."

"By the impossible inventor, from the looks of you. I hold up four fingers, and one is it. Tell it in one word, Haycock!"

"Anti-grav."

"Fourth finger. It's not even the season for anti-grav, Haycock. These things go in cycles. We get most of the anti-gravs in early winter. All right, I give you four seconds to demonstrate. Raise that table off the floor with your device."

"It's barely possible that I could raise it, Umholtz, but not in four seconds. It would take several hours; instant demonstration is out. It's a pretty erratic piece of machinery, though I've had good luck on my last several attempts. It isn't really very impressive, and a lot of what I tell you you'll have to take on faith."

"Haven't any, Haycock. Even a charlatan can usually put on a good show. Why the two pieces? One looks like a fishing tackle box, and the other like a sheaf of paper."

"The papers are the mathematics of it, Umholtz. Look at the equations carefully and you'll be convinced without a demonstration."

"All right. I pride myself on the speed I bring to spotting these basic errors, Haycock. They seem very commonplace equations, and then they break off when it's plain that you're getting nowhere. What happened to the

bottom of these sheets?"

"Oh, my little boy ate that part of them. Just go ahead and you'll pick up the continuity again. Ah, you're at the end of it and you laugh! Yes, is it not funny how simple every great truth is?"

"I've seen them all, Haycock, and this is one of the most transparent. The only thing wrong with it is that it won't work and it's as full of holes as a seine."

"But it does work part of the time, Umholtz, and we'll fill up the holes till it's practical. Well, is it a deal? It'll take a couple of years; but if you'll start plenty of money rolling, I'll get on with the project in a big way. Why do you roll your eyes like that, Umholtz? Is there a history of apoplexy in your family?"

"I will be all right in a moment, Haycock. I am afflicted by inventors, but I recover quickly. Let us set the gadget aside for the moment. Do you know where the four now-celebrated men have gone?"

"Papers said it was as if they had disappeared from the Earth. I imagine they sent a reporter or someone to check on it."

"Take Claridge, for instance," said Umholtz, "Did he seem disturbed when you last saw him?"

"I think he was the little one. He was kind of boggle-eyed, just like you were a minute ago. Kind of mad at me for wasting his time. Well pig's pants! I wasted my time, too! Blind as a bat, that man. Don't think he was convinced that my thing would work till maybe right at the end. Now let's get back to my instrument. It will do a variety of jobs. Even you can see where it would be useful."

"It would be, if it worked, and it won't. Your piece of mathematics is childish, Haycock."

"Might be. I don't express myself well in that medium. But my machine does work. It creates negative gravity. That is, it works quite a bit of the time."

Umholtz laughed. He shouldn't have, but he didn't know. And he did have an ugly sort of laugh.

"You laugh at me!" Haycock howled out. Gold fire popped from his eyes and he was very angry. The hayseed began to look like the panther. He touched his machine, and it responded with a sympathetic ping! to the anger of its master.

Umholtz was having fun with the now-blazing inventor.

"What do you do, Haycock and bull, turn that machine on and point it at something?" he guffawed. Umholtz enjoyed deriding a fellow.

"You hopeless hulk! I turned it on a minute ago when you laughed at me. It's working on you now. You'll be convinced in the end," Haycock threatened.

"Do you not know, Haycock, that anti-grav is the standing joke in our profession? But they still come in with it, and they all have that same look in their eyes."

"Umholtz, you lie! Nobody else ever had this look in his eye!"

That was true. The gold specks in the blue eyes glinted in a mad way. The eyes did not focus properly. It seemed to Umholtz that Haycock did not look at him, but through him and beyond. The man might well be a maniac -- the sort of maniac who could somehow be involved in the four disappearances. Never mind, they were coming for him. They'd be here any minute.

"Anti-grav is a violation of the laws of mass and energy," Umholtz needed.

"To change the signature of a mass from plus to minus is not a violation of any law I recognize," said Haycock evenly. "It is no good for you to justify now, Umholtz, or to find excuses. It is no use to plead for your life. Are you deaf as well as blind and stupid? I told you plainly that the demonstration had already begun. You were all a stubborn lot, but I convinced all four of them in the end, and I'll convince you. I tell you,

Umholtz, that entrenched stupidity makes me mad, and when I get mad I sure do get mean. I've cancelled you out, you open idiot! Umholtz, I'll send you away screaming!"

"Rather I'll send you away in that act," Umholtz purred, for the men in black were now into the room, and they laid legal hands on Haycock.

"Take him away," Umholtz grunted out. "He's fishier than Edward's Ichthyology."

Haycock didn't go away screaming, but he went roaring and fighting. That man was very mean, and those gold specks in his eyes were really sulphur.

Say, they couldn't get a thing out of that fellow. Haycock was an odd one, but that was all. They went over him from the beginning. He was known in his own neighborhood for his unsuccessful inventions and for his towering temper, but he hadn't any bodies lying around, and he hadn't been anywhere near any of the four men at the time of their disappearances.

He was a crackie from end to end, but he hadn't a handle they could get hold of.

"I am not ghoulish," Umholtz said to his men Planter and Shartel, "but the disappearance of four of my five competitors has opened up some pretty obvious opportunities for me. Oh, other men will be designated to replace them, hut it'll be a long time before they get that sharp."

"What did the crackie have this afternoon, Mr. Umholtz?" Planter asked him.

"It isn't worth mentioning. One of the oldest and silliest."

The three of them were walking in the park in the evening.

"I suddenly feel odd," said Umholtz and he placed one hand on his head and the other on his paunch. "Something I ate for supper didn't agree with me."

"It's the worry," said Planter. "The disappearances have upset you. With the thought that you might be next on the list, there has been a great weight on you."

"I really feel as though a great weight has been lifted off me," said Umholtz, "but I don't like the feeling. I'm light-headed."

"The walk will do you good," Planter told him. "You look well to me. I've never seen you move with so light a step."

"No, no, I'm sick," Umholtz moaned, and he began to look up in the air as though fearful of an attack from that sector. "My feet don't track right. There's a lightness in me. My stomach is turning inside out. Lord, but it would be a long way to fall!"

Umholtz flopped his way forward, his feet slipping on the grass as though he had lost traction. He got hold of the tree -- a small elm.

"I'm starting to go!" he howled in real terror.

He put a bear hug around the tree, locking on to it with both arms and legs. "Great dancing dogfish, don't let me fall," he sobbed. "How did I ever get so high up?"

"Umholtz, you are six inches from the ground," Planter told him.

"The man's gone mad, Shartel. Let's pry his legs loose first. When we get his feet on the ground he may get over his mania about falling."

"Fools! Fools! You'll let me fall all the way down," Umholtz screamed, but he was looking upward, and his face was flushed as though all the blood had run to his head.

"He was right," Umholtz sniffled wetly in an interlude from his screaming and sobbing. "I'm finally convinced."

"There's one leg loose, Shartel," said Planter as he worked on Umholtz, "but for some reason it seems pretty difficult to hold it to the ground. Now the other leg, and we'll set him down on his feet. Whoops! What's wrong? You're going up with him, Shartel!"

Shartel did go up with him at first, for Umholtz was much the

heavier man. But Shartel broke away and fell a dozen feet down to the grass.

Umholtz grabbed a precarious lodging in the tree top, but he was shearing off fronds and branches and going fast.

"For God's sake, get me up from here!" Umholtz screamed, hanging upward from the topmost branch. He was like a tethered balloon tugging at its mooring.

"Throw a rope down to me! Do something!" he sobbed upsidedownly from the tree top. "I'll fall all the way, and I can't even see bottom."

The topmost branch broke, and Umholtz fell off the world.

He fell upward into the evening sky, his scream drop-ping in pitch as he accelerated. He fell end over end, diminishing till he was only a dot in the sky. Then he was gone.

"What will we tell people - what -- what can we say -- however explain -- how explain what we seen seem --" Shartel rattled, the bones in his body shaking like poker dice in a toss box.

"You tell your he and I'll tell mine," Planter grumbled. "I'm crazy, but I'm not crazy enough to have seen that."

Of the clique, only Easter was left. He was the most even-minded of the bunch and the least inclined to worry. It had been a peculiar series of events that had devoured his competitors, but he hadn't been able to base any theory on the disappearances. If he continued, he would he next.

"I may try a little worrying myself," he mused. "A man of my sort shouldn't neglect any field of cogitation. I'll give it a try. It should come easy for me today."

So Easter worried, but he didn't do it well. It isn't easy if you haven't the lifetime habit of it.

Then a man came in to him unannounced.

This was a man with hay-colored hair, with blue eyes with happy dangerous gold specks in them, a man with a friendly and humorous sneer. He had something of the hayseed in him. But also something of the panther.

"I have here what may turn out to be a most useful device," Haycock began.

PIG IN A POKEY

This was on Hippodamia. The name isn't important. There were ten thousand asteroid-stations as undistinguished.

Netter settled back into the soft live-moss chair and prepared to talk the Creature out of the impasse. Then he saw the big moustached thing on the wall and he began to tremble.

After all, that was one of the things he had come to find-it was pait of it. It was the great beefy, bearded, moustached head of Captain Kalbfleish mounted on the wall like a trophy, and amid the other trophies of the room.

"Great God, Man!" -- and it wasn't a man to whom he spoke -- "That's a human head you have mounted on the wall," Netter crackled.

"Which Great God, yours or mine?" Porcellus grunted. "They aren't the same, or they have been described badly. Yes, a human head. I had always wanted one. You notice that I have given it the favored position in the center of the great wall. I now have at least one of the heads of every species that interests me. Some of the heads are much larger than that of your friend Kalbfleish and have ornamentals that his lacks. It's a pity that humans don't have sweeping horns; that would make them perfect. But even without them, the head of Kalbfleish is the finest in my collection. It's a truly magnificent head!"

It was. "Kalbfleish has a fine head on him" they wed to say, and laugh. The big Captain, for all his remarkable courage and spirit, had not

been long on brains. It was a huge, wild, hairy head with a stark and staring expression -- as though Kalbfleish had died in terror and agony.

"You killed him, of course," said Netter dryly as he braided a romal in his nervous hands. "So, one way or the other, I will have to kill you, or you me.

"Not I," said Porcellus -- a moist and hog-fat creature -- "I would not even kill an insect. Your friend had a violent heart and it finally ruptured on him. He was uncommonly energetic, especially so on the day of his death."

"Where is his body, you fat pig?"

"My translator has only a rough idea of pig, and I suppose you intend it for an insult; but I have a tough hide. I couldn't do a thing with his body, Netter, it was putrid in no time. It seems that when you humans know you are going to die you would begin to give yourself the injections three or four basic days before the time; then your bodies would not turn foul after death. I had no idea he had neglected it, so I wasn't prepared. I was lucky to save the head."

"We humans don't know when we are going to die," said Netter. "What is this you give me to eat? It's good."

"Yes, I remember now Kalbfleish saying he didn't know when he would die, but I supposed he spoke in humor. Since you also sayv it, it must be true of your species. The name of the food would mean nothing to you, but you have a close parallel to its method of preparation. I have read about geese in an Earth book of the captains, though I overlooked pigs. You sometimes put live geese -- to dance on hot griddles before they are killed. This excites and alarms them, and enlarges their livers. The livers then become delicacies. The creatures whose meat you are eating also died of excitement and alarm, and they are delicious through and through."

Well, the meat was certainly delicious. That fat hog of a creature knew how to live well. Netter finished the meal and set it aside. Once more he braided the romal in his hands while he grasped for words.

"I suppose all the creatures whose heads you have here died by accident, Porcellus?" he asked.

"Well, all but one of them died," said Porcellus, "and I did not kill them. One of them died at a great distance from here; he willed me his head and had it sent to me because I had admired it. And one of them, so far as I know, is still alive. He was a being of multiplex heads. He hacked one of them off quite willingly when I praised it, and he cured and mounted it himself. A queer chap. He is staring down at you now and it will amuse you to guess which lie is."

Porcellus didn't actually speak like that. He spoke in a series of grunts, some verbal and some ventral. But the Console Translator of Netter had a selector dial. Netter could dial translation in pidgin, in cut and dry, in bombast, in diplomatic pleasantries, in old southern U.S. soft4alk or Yiddish dialect if he wished, or in the manner. Whenever he encountered a creature who was curtly repulsive to him -- as Porcellus was -- he dialed the courtly manner of speech. This was somehow easier on his ears and his nerves.

"We waste time," Netter told the creature. "I have come to pursue claim to this asteroid. We now need it for a way-station, and it has never worked well for two such different species to share a station. We had first claimn here long ago; and we abandoned it. Then you set up your station here; and you also abandoned it."

"Never," said Porcellus. "Would I abandon my cozy home and my trophies? Would my masters wish the removal of so fine a station-master as myself? I was called Home on urgent business. I was go lie but for a basic year, and the odds were very high against any other claimer coming while I was gone."

"The rules state that a live and competent agent must be in residence at all times or the asteroid can be declared abandoned," Netter

said. "The asteroid was plainly abandoned when Kalbfleish arrived; you were gone. He so reported it, and he claimed it for us. The claim was approved and accepted."

"True," said the creature Porcellus. "What is that thing you play with in your hands? But Captain Kalbfleish -- following the awkward interval after I had returned -- also abandoned the station by dying. I so reported his death, and claimed the station for ourselves once more. The claim was approved and accepted. Now you are here as my guest only and, I tell you in all kindness, not a very welcome one."

"But a proved murder will void your claim," said Netter.

"So prove it, fine man," said the creature Porcellus. "Yours is a smaller head than Kalbfleish's but it has a certain distinction. I could make room for it among my trophies. We have each of us sent various reports, and the matter is under litigation. In the meanwhile, the accidental death of either of us would void his claim and settle the matter. We cannot kill directly. Investigators are already on the way and we are both prime suspects; we are the only ones here. What is the leather thing with which you play?"

"A romal, Porcellus. A short quirt braided onto a rein. They made them in Old Mexico and in California and Texas, but they were mostly ornamental."

"Earth places all three, my translator says. Were they used with a creature?"

"With a pony, a horse."

"Haven't I stumbled onto the information that the horse is extinct?"

"Yes. The braiding of the little thing is only a hobby of mine."

"A hobby, according to my comprehensive translator, is a sort of vicarious horse -- a mental surrogate which one rides. Is that correct?"

"Correct, Porcellus. Haven't you a hobby?"

"My hobby is heads," said the thing.

Netter started to leave the creature then to go to his own camp. "To the early and accidental death of one of us," he toasted with the last of the drink that Porcellus had given him.

"Shoals!" toasted Porcellus. "I believe that is your word. And a warning: stay away from the low dome which you will see on the plain. It's dangerous."

Netter went to his own camp.

Now Porcellus wanted him to go to the curious dome -- or he would not have warned him away from it. Was it dangerous? Or did the thing merely want to divert him? Porcellus must have known that he would explore every feature of landscape on the small asteroid. Perhaps it was only to worry him, as Porcellus himself had seemed to be worried. And what in hog heaven can worry a hog? Netter had it after a while. "He knows when he's going to die. He's surprised that humans haven't that knowledge. But can I depend on it? It's only a twice removed guess."

Netter left the dome till last. He circumnavigated the asteroid in a brisk six-mile walk and found nothing of interest. He came thoughtfully to the dome on the plain.

The dome rose to no more than the height of his head in the center, was about sixty feet in diameter, was symmetrical in general outline but with a slightly roughened surface, and was probably artificial. "I believe it is an old direction beacon of the Forcines," he said. "Yes, this is certainly the top of an obsolete hemisphere, and the most of it is under ground. They were no good. I believe that we had them once."

Netter stepped gingerly onto the sphere. It was certainly firm enough. He knew a firm thing when he met one. There was no danger of him crashing through. He climbed the steep, then the less steep elevation of it and came to the center. "Nice," he said, "but nothing." Then he felt it activated. "So Porcellus still uses it," he said, "I didn't realize that

they were so backward."

He walked around on it, and it rotated gently under him, compensating for him. He strode down the side a little way, and it quickly brought him back to the top. "This could be fun," he said.

He could take three, four quick steps away from the top, and he would still be on top. He could tense to jump sideways, and the sphere would compensate before he left the surface; he'd still land exactly on the center whichever way he jumped. The thing rolled easily and noiselessly and anticipated or reacted immediately to every movement. He walked, he ran, he laughed, he trotted half a mile and stood where he had stood before.

"You know tricks and I know tricks, old sphere," he shouted, "let's see who's the smarter." He feinted, he broke, he dodged, he ran crazy-legged as though he were broken-field dribbling at Galactic-rules football. He shucked off tacklers, he scored countless goals in his mind, but he always ended on the very center top of the dome.

He lay down and rolled, trying to go down the steep far slopes as though they were grass banks. He stopped rolling and lay on his back, and he was still on the top of the rotating compensating sphere or dome.

"I haven't had so much fun since I was a boy in an amusement park," he said.

He hadn't? Then why did he suddenly begin to tremble? Why did he begin to whistle so off-key if he wasn't scared? "Stone walls do not a pokey make nor locks a --" it was the Cross-Bar Hotel Blues he was whistling and he had to stop it.

He was locked tight in jail on a little hillock in the middle of a plain, and there was no barrier in sight. There was no possible way he could get off the compensating dome.

He was imprisoned in the highest most open spot on the asteroid. In an hour of cavorting and hopping about he had not got one full step from where he started, and there was no possible way that he could.

He thought about it for a full Hippodamia day and night-forty-five minutes basic time. He couldn't come up with a thing.

"If I had a rope and you had a stump," he said talking to no one, "I'd rope the stump -- I'm good at that -- and pull myself off this thing."

But he didn't have a rope and the plain sure didn't have a stump. It had hardly a pebble as big as his thumb.

"This is where Kalbfleish died," said Netter. "You said it right, pig man, my friend had a violent heart and it finally ruptured on him. You didn't have to murder him directly. You let him run himself to death. He was uncommonly energetic, as you said' and especially so on the day of his death. I can see it all now. He could never stand to be confined. He would have gone wild when he found himself confined in what seemed the most open space on the asteroid. He'd have run till he ruptured every thing in him. It is no wonder that he died with that look of horror."

This was a jail that nobody could break. Why try more tricks on the sphere? It could compensate for every trick that was.

A creature that could fly in zero atmosphere could get off of this, he mused. "Even a worm couldn't crawl off unless he were too small to affect the compensators. If I had two cant hooks I might be able to fool the thing, but it could no doubt compensate for the resolution of forces. If I had a weight on a line I might puzzle it a little, but not much. Porkey has it made. I'll die either of starvation or exertion or insanity, but the investigation will not show that I was murdered. 'Why have two humans died of heart attack here?' is the most they can ask him, and Porkey will rub his hands and say 'Bad climate.'"

But what Porky Porcellus really said was:

"Fine man, why do you play like a boy on top of that thing? Is that any way for a hopeful asteroid agent to conduct himself?"

"Porcellus, you think you've trapped me, do you?" flared Netter.

"I trap you? My hands are clean. Is it my fault that two humans develop the strange mania of running themselves to death in a weird game?"

How far away was Porcellus from the edge of the dome? Too far. Too far by several yards.

"Porcellus, what is this thing?" Netter cried out.

"Once it was a beam sphere, as you have probably guessed, and it is obsolete. I have altered it to something else. Now it is an intelligence test. To fail it is to die."

"Did anyone ever get off it?" Netter called. He had to get Porcellus interested. He had to get him to come several feet closer before he turned away.

"Only one passed the intelligence test," said the creature, "and he had unusual natural advantages. He was a peculiar fellow of the species Larrik who visited me some basic years ago. He simply broke himself into two pieces and walked off in opposite directions. The globe couldn't compensate for both of them. One got clear, obtained a line, pulled his other half off; both halves laughed at me, and then they rejoined themselves. But you haven't his advantage, Netter. You have failed the test."

"I'll find a way," swore Netter. "I'll find a trick." Just a little bit closer now would do it.

"You lose, Netter," said Porcellus. "There is no fixed thing on the plain you could tie to even if you had a way of reaching it. The longest thing you have with you is what you call the romal, and it's no longer than your arm.

Porcellus was close enough. Right at the end of the dome. When he turned it would be perfect -- somewhere between thirty-two and thirty-five feet. There was no fixed thing on the plain, but there was a thing heavy enough to serve for a fixed thing. The romal of Netter was no longer than his arm, but it was a romal rey, a king romal.

Porcellus turned away in his triumph. The light-thin lariat flew and dropped over his bulk. And Netter pulled himself off the dome in less time than you can say Porky Porcellus.

The fat hulk was no match for Netter when he was on solid non-compensating ground. He hog-tied the Hog-man with the thin leather line and rolled him onto the dome. And Porcellus was immediately on the center top of the dome to stay there till he died of hunger or uncommon exertion or porcine apoplexy.

Netter was moving things about in the fine Trophy Room which he had recently inherited. He set a fine hard wood peg into the wall and hung on it the king romal for which he now had especial affection. The king romal is so intricately braided that one moment it will be a thick quirt no longer than your arm; but unlace one keeper and it immediately becomes a thin strand lariat forty foot long counting the loop. Hardly anyone knows how to braid a romal rey nowadays.

He moved many things in the trophy room. He wanted the set thing to be just right. He knew just what space it should occupy on that great wall. The investigation was over with and Netter's claim had been accepted. He was now asteroid station-master -- a good job.

The head was ready. It had been cured out and tanned and treated, and the eye-tushers were polished till they gleamed.

Porcellus had a truly magnificent head!

SLOW TUESDAY NIGHT

A panhandler intercepted the young couple as they strolled down the night street.

"Preserve us this night," he said as he touched his hat to them, "and could you good people advance me a thousand dollars to be about the

recouping of my fortunes?"

"I gave you a thousand last Friday," said the young man.

"Indeed you did," the panhandler replied, "and I paid you back tenfold by messenger before midnight"

"That's right, George, he did," said the young woman. "Give it to him, dear. I believe he's a good sort."

So the young man gave the panhandler a thousand dollars, and the panhandler touched his hat to them in thanks and went on to the recouping of his fortunes.

As he went into Money Market, the panhandler passed Ildefonsa Impala, the most beautiful woman in the city.

"Will you marry me this night, Ildy?" he asked cheerfully.

"Oh, I don't believe so, Basil," she said. "I marry you pretty often, but tonight I don't seem to have any plans at all. You may make me a gift on your first & second, however. I always like that."

But when they had parted she asked herself: "But whom will I marry tonight?"

The panhandler was Basil Bagelbaker, who would be the richest man in the world within an hour and a half. He would make and lose four fortunes within eight hours; and these not the little fortunes that ordinary men acquire, but titanic things.

When the Abebajos block had been removed from Human minds, people began to make decisions faster, And often better. It had been the mental stutter. When it was understood what it was, and that it had no useful function, it was removed by simple childhood metasurgery.

Transportation and manufacturing had then become practically instantaneous. Things that had once taken months and years now took only minutes and hours. A person could have one or several pretty intricate careers within an eight-hour period.

Freddy Fixico had just invented a manus module. Freddy was a Nyctalops, and the modules were characteristic of these people. The people had then divided themselves -- according to their natures and inclinations -- into the Aureoreans, the Hemerobians, and the Nyctalops -- or the Dawners, who had their most active hours from four A.M. till noon; the Day-Flies, who obtained from noon to eight P.M.; and the Night-Seers, whose civilization thrived from eight P.M. to four A.M. The cultures, inventions, markets and activities of these three folk were a little different. As a Nyctalops, Freddy had lust begun his working day at eight P.M. on a slow Tuesday night; Freddy rented an office and had it furnished. This took one minute, negotiation, selection and installation being almost instantaneous. Then he invented the manus module; that took another minute. He then had it manufactured and marketed; in three minutes it was in the hands of key buyers.

It caught on. It was an attractive module. The flow of orders began within thirty seconds. By ten minutes after eight every important person had one of the new manus modules, and the trend had been set. The module began to sell in the millions. It was one of the most interesting fads of the night, or at least the early part of the night.

Manus modules had no practical function, no more than had Sameki verses, They were attractive, of a psychologically satisfying size and shape, and could be held in the hands, set on a table, or installed in a module niche of any wall.

Naturally Freddy became very rich. Ildefonsa Impala, the most beautiful woman in the city, was always interested in newly rich men. She came to see Freddy about eight-thirty. People made up their minds fast, and Ildefonsa had hers made up when she came. Freddy made his own up quickly and divorced Judy Fixico in Small Claims Court. Freddy and Ildefonsa went honeymooning to Paraiso Dorado, a resort.

It was wonderful. All of Ildy's marriages were. There was the

wonderful floodlighted scenery. The recirculated water of the famous falls was tinted gold; the immediate rocks had been done by Rambles; and the hills had been contoured by Spall. The beach was a perfect copy of that at Merevale, and the popular drink that first part of the night was blue absinthe.

But scenery -- whether seen for the first time or revisited after an interval -- is strring for the sudden intense view of it. It is not meant to be lingered over. Food, selected and prepared instantly, is eaten with swift enjoyment; and blue absinthe lasts no longer than its own novelty. Loving, for Ildefonsa and her paramours, was quick and consuming; and repetition would have been pointless to her. Besides, Ildefonsa and Freddy had taken only the one-hour luxury honeymoon.

Freddy wished to continue the relationship, but Ildefonsa glanced at a trend indicator. The manus module would hold its popularity for only the first third of the night. Already it had been discarded by people who mattered. And Freddy Fixico was not one of the regular successes. He enjoyed a full career only about one night a week.

They were back in the city and divorced in Small Claims Court by nine thirty-five. The stock of manus modules was remandered, and the last of it would be disposed to bargain hunters among the Dawners, who will buy anything.

"Whom shall I marry next?" Ildefonsa asked herself. "It looks like a slow night."

"Bagelbaker is buying," ran the word through Money Market, but Bagelbaker was selling again before the word had made its rounds. Basil Bagelbaker enjoyed making money, and it was a pleasure to watch him work as he dominated the floor of the Market and assembled runners and a competent staff out of the corner of his mouth. Helpers stripped the panhandler rags off him and wrapped him in a tycoon toga. He sent one runner to pay back twentyfold the young couple who had advanced him a thousand dollars. He sent another with a more substantial gift to Ildefonsa Impala, for Basil cherished their relationship. Basil acquired title to the Trend Indication Complex and had certain falsifications set into it. He caused to collapse certain industrial empires that had grown up within the last two hours, and made a good thing of recombining their wreckage. He had been the richest man in the world for some minutes now. He became so money-heavy that he could not maneuver with the agility he had shown an hour before. He became a great fat buck, and the pack of expert wolves circled him to bring him down.

Very soon he would lose that first fortune of the evening. The secret of Basil Bagelbaker is that he enjoyed losing money spectacularly after he was full of it to the bursting point.

A thoughtful man named Maxwell Mouser had just produced a work of actinic philosophy. It took him seven minutes to write it. To write works of philosophy one used the flexible outlines and the idea indexes; one set the activator for such a wordage in each subsection; an adept would use the paradox feed-in, and the striking-analogy blender; one calibrated the particular-slant and the personality-signature. It had to come out a good work, for excellence had become the automatic minimum for such productions.

"I will scatter a few nuts on the frosting," said Maxwell, and he pushed the lever for that. This sifted handfuls of words like chthonic and heuristic and prozymeides through the thing so that nobody could doubt it was a work of philosophy.

Maxwell Mouser sent the work out to publishers, and received it back each time in about three minutes. An analysis of it and reason for rejection was always given -- mostly that the thing had been done before and better. Maxwell received it back ten times in thirty minutes, and was discouraged. Then there was a break.

Ladion's work had become a hit within the last ten minutes, and it was now recognized that Mouser's monograph was both an answer and a supplement to it. It was accepted and published in less than a minute after

this break. The reviews of the first five minutes were cautious ones; then real enthusiasm was shown. This was truly one of the greatest works of philosophy to appear during the early and medium hours of the night. There were those who said it might be one of the enduring works and even have a holdover appeal to the Dawners the next morning.

Naturally Maxwell became very rich, and naturally Ildefonsa came to see him about midnight. Being a revolutionary philosopher, Maxwell thought that he might make some free arrangement, but Ildefonsa insisted it must be marriage. So Maxwell divorced Judy Mouser in Small Claims Court and went off with Ildefonsa.

This Judy herself, though not so beautiful as Ildefonsa, was the fastest taker in the city. She only wanted the men of the moment for a moment, and she was always there before even Ildefonsa. Ildefonsa believed that she took the men away from Judy; Judy said that Ildy had her leavings and nothing else.

"I had him first," Judy would always mock as she raced through Small Claims Court.

"Oh that damned urchin!" Ildefonsa would moan. "She wears my very hair before I do."

Maxwell Mouser and Ildefonsa Impala went honeymooning to Musicbox Mountain, a resort. It was wonderful. The peaks were done with green snow by Dunbar and Fittle. (Back at Money Market Basil Bagebaker was puffing together his third and greatest fortune of the night, which might surpass in magnitude even his fourth fortune of the Thursday before.) The chalets were Switzier than the real Swiss and had live oats in every room. (And Stanley Skuldugger was emerging as the top Actor-Imago of the middle hours of the night.) The popular drink for that middle part of the night was Glotzenglubber, Eve Cheese and Rhine wine over pink ice. (And back in the city the leading Nyctalops were taking their midnight break at the Toppers' Club.)

Of course it was wonderful, as were all of Ildefonsa's -- But she had never been really up on philosophy so she had scheduled only the special thirty-five-minute honeymoon. She looked at the trend indicator to be sure. She found that her current husband had been obsoleted, and his opus was now referred to sneeringly as Mouser's Mouse. They went back to the city and were divorced in Small Claims Court.

The membership of the Toppers' Club varied. Success was the requisite of membership. Basil Bagelbaker might be accepted as a member, elevated to the presidency and expelled from it as a dirty pauper from three to six times a night. But only important persons could belong to it, or those enjoying brief moments of importance.

"I believe I will sleep during the Dawner period in the morning," Overcall said. "I may go up to this new place, Koimopolis, for an hour of it. They're said to be good. Where will you sleep, Basil?"

"Flop house."

"I believe I will sleep an hour by the Midian Method," said Burnbanner. "They have a fine new clinic. And perhaps I'll sleep an hour by the Prasenka Process, and an hour by the Dormidjo."

"Crackle has been sleeping an hour every period by the natural method," said Overcall.

"I did that for half an hour not long since," said Burnbanner. "I believe an hour is too long to give it. Have you tried the natural method, Basil?"

"Always. Natural method and a bottle of red-eye."

Stanley Skuldugger had become the most meteoric actor-imago for a week. Naturally he became very rich, and Ildefonsa Impala went to see him about three A.M.

"I had him first!" rang the mocking voice of Judy Skuldugger as she skipped through her divorce in Small Claims Court. And Ildefonsa and Stanley-boy went off honeymooning. It is always fun to finish up a period

with an actor-imago who is the hottest property in the business. There is something so adolescent and boorish about them.

Besides, there was the publicity, and Ildefonsa liked that. The rumor-mills ground. Would it last ten minutes? Thirtry? An hour? Would it be one of those rare Nyctalops marriages that lasted through the rest of the night and into the daylight off-hours? Would it even last into the next night as some had been known to do?

Actually it lasted nearly forty minutes, which was almost to the end of the period.

It had been a slow Tuesday night. A few hundred new products had run their course on the market. There had been a score of dramatic hits, three-minute and five-minute capsule dramas, and several of the six minute long-play affairs. Night Street Nine -- a solidly sordid offering -- seemed to be in as the drama of the night unless there should be a late hit.

Hundred-storied buildings had been erected, occupied, obsoleted, and demolished again to make room for more contemporary structures. Only the mediocre would use a building that had been left over from the Day Fliers or the Dawners, or even the Nyctalops of the night before. The city was rebuilt pretty completely at least three times during an eight-hour period.

The period drew near its end. Basil Bagelbaker, the richest man in the world, the reigning president of the Toppers' Club, was enjoying himself with his cronies. His fourth fortune of the night was a paper pyramid that had risen to incredible heights; but Basil laughed himself as he savored the manipulation it was founded on.

Three ushers of the Toppers' Club came in with firm step.

"Get out of here, you dirty bum," they told Basil savagely. They tore the tycoon's toga off him and then tossed him his seedy panhandler's rags with a three-man sneer.

"All gone?" Basil asked. "I gave it another five minutes."

"All gone," said a messenger from Money Market. "Nine billion gone in five minutes, and it really pulled some others down with it."

"Pitch the busted bum out!" howled Overcall and Burnbanner and the other cronies.

"Wait, Basil," said Overcall. "Turn in the President's Crosier before we kick you downstairs. After all, you'll have it several times again tomorrow night."

The period was over. The Nyctalops drifted off to sleep clinics or leisure-hour hideouts to pass their ebb time. The Auroreans, the Dawners, took over the vital stuff.

Now you would see some action! Those Dawners really made fast decisions. You wouldn't catch them wasting a full minute setting up a business.

A sleepy panhandler met Ildefonsa Impala on the way.

"Preserve us this morning, Ildy," he said, "and will you marry in the coming night?"

"Likely I will, Basil," she told him. "Did you marry Judy during the night past?"

"I'm not sure. Could you let me have two dollars, Ildy?"

"Out of the question. I believe a Judy Bagelbaker was named one of the ten best-dressed women during the frou-frou fashion period about two o'clock. Why do you need two dollars?"

"A dollar for a bed and a dollar for red-eye. After all, I sent you two million out of my second."

"I keep my two sorts of accounts separate. Here's a dollar, Basil. Now be off! I can't be seen talking to a dirty panhandler."

"Thank you, Ildy. I'll get the red-eye and sleep in an alley. Preserve us this morning."

Bagelbaker shuffled off whistling "Slow Tuesday Night."

And already the Dawners had set Wednesday morning to jumping.

GUESTING TIME

Things were a bit crowded where they came from -- and were getting that way here!

Winston, the Civil Servant in Immigration and Arrivals, was puzzled when he came that morning. There were several hundred new people behind the cyclone fences, and no arrivals had been scheduled.

"What ships landed?" he called out. "Why were they unscheduled?"

"No ships landed, sir," said Potholder, the senior guard.

"Then how did these people get here? Walk down from the sky?"

Winston asked snappishly.

"Yes, sir, I guess so. We don't know who they are or how they keep coming here. They say they are from Skandia."

"We have few Scandinavian arrivals, and none of such appearance as this," said Winston. "How many are there?"

"Well, sir, when we first noticed them there were seven, and they hadn't been there a moment before."

"Seven? You're crazy There are hundreds."

"Yes, sir. I'm crazy. A minute after there were seven, there were seventeen. But no more had come from anywhere. Then there were sixty. We separated them into groups of ten and watched them very closely. None crossed from one group to another, none came from anywhere else. But soon there were fifteen, then twenty-five, then thirty in each group. And there's a lot more of them there now than when you started to talk to me a moment ago, Mr. Winston."

"Corcoran is my superior and will be here in a minute," Winston said. "He'll know what to do."

"Mr. Corcoran left just before you arrived, sir," said Potholder. "He watched it a while, and then went away babbling."

"I always admired his quick grasp of a situation," said Winston. He also went away babbling.

There were about a thousand of those Skandia people, and a little later there were nine times that many. They weren't dowdy people, but the area wouldn't hold any more. The fences all went down, and the Skandias spread out into the city and towns and country. This was only the beginning of it. About a million of them materialized there that morning, then the same thing happened at ten thousand other Ports of Entry of Earth.

"Mama," said Trixie, "there are some people here who want to use our bathroom." This was Beatrice (Trixie) Trux, a little girl in the small town of Winterfield.

"What an odd request!" said Mrs. Trux. "But I suppose it is in the nature of an emergency. Let them in, Trixie. How many people are there?"

"About a thousand," said Trixie.

"Trixie, there can't be that many."

"All right, you count them."

All the people came in to use the Trux's bathroom. There were somewhat more than a thousand of them, and it took them quite a while to use the bathroom even though they put a fifteen-second limit on each one and had a timekeeper with a bell to enforce it. They did it all with a lot of laughter and carrying on, but it took that first bunch about five hours to go through, and by that time there were a lot more new ones waiting.

"This is a little unusual," Mrs. Trux said to some of the Skandia women. "I was never short on hospitality. It is our physical resources, not our willingness, that becomes strained. There are so many of you!"

"Don't give it a thought," the Skandia women said. "It is the intent that counts, and it was so kind of you people to invite us. We seldom get a chance to go anywhere. We came a little early, but the main bunch will be along very soon. Don't you just love to go visiting."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Mrs. Trux. "I never realized till now just how

much I wanted to go visiting."

But when she saw the whole outdoors black with the new people, Mrs. Trux decided that she had better stay where she was.

Truman Trux was figuring with a pencil.

"Our lot is fifty feet by a hundred and fifty feet, Jessica," he said. "That is either 7,500 or 75,000 square feet depending on how many zeroes you carry it out to."

"You were always good at math," said Mrs. Trux. "How do you do it anyhow?"

"And do you know how many people are living with us here on this lot, Jessica?" Truman asked.

"Quite a few."

"I am guessing between six and seven thousand," said Truman. "I found several more blocks of them this morning that I didn't know about. They have a complete city built in our back yard. The streets are two and a half feet wide; the houses are eight feet by eight feet with six foot ceilings, and most of them are nine stories high. Whole families live in each room and cook there besides. They have shops and bazaars set up. They even have factories built. I know there is an entire wholesale textile district in our back yard. There are thirteen taverns and five music halls in our yard to my own knowledge, and there may be more."

"Well, some of those places are pretty small, Truman. The Little Hideout is the broom closet of the Big Hideout, and I don't know if we should count it as a separate tavern. You have to go into the Sideways Club side-ways; the Thinman Club is only nine inches wide from wall to wall and it's quite a trick to bending an elbow there; and the Mouse Room is small. But the better clubs are up in our attic, Truman. Did you ever count them? The Crazy Man Cabaret is up there, and the After Hours Club. Most of the other attic clubs are key clubs and I'm not a member. They've set up the Skandia Art Theater in our basement now, you know. They have continuous performances."

"I know it, Jessica, I know it."

"Their comedies are so funny that I nearly die. The trouble is that it's so crowded there that you have to laugh in when the one next to you laughs out. And I cry just like they do at their tragedies. They're all about women who can't have any more children. Why don't we have a bunch more, Truman? There's more than twenty shops in our yard where they sell nothing but fertility charms. I wonder why there aren't any children with the Skandia?"

"Ah, they say that this is just a short first visit by a few of them and they didn't presume to bring their children with them. What is that new racket superimposed on the old?"

"Oh, that's the big drums and the cymbals. They're having a political campaign to elect temporary officials for the time of their visit here. Imperial City, that's the town in our yard, and our house, will elect delegates to go to Congress to represent this whole block; The elections will be tonight. Then we'll really hear some noise, they say. The big drums don't really waste space, Truman. There are people inside them and they play them from the inside. Some of our neighbors are getting a little fussy about the newcomers, but I always did like a house full of people."

"We have it now, Jessica. I never got used to sleeping in a bed with nine other people, even if they are quiet sleepers. I like people, and I am fond of new experiences. But it is getting crowded."

"We have more of the Skandia than anyone else in the block except the Skirveys. They say it's because they like us more than some of the others. Mamie Skirvey is taking four kinds of the fertility pills now. She is almost sure she will be able to have triplets. I want to too."

"All the stores are stripped, Jessica, and all the lumber yards and lumber camps; and the grain elevators will be empty in two more days. The Skandia pay for everything in money, but nobody knows what it says on it I

haven't got used to walking on men and women when I go out, but there's no avoiding it since the ground is covered with them."

"They don't mind. They're used to it. They say it's crowded where they come from."

The Winterfield Times-Tribune Telegraph had a piece about the Skandia:

The plain fact is that for two days the Earth has had ten billion visitors from Skandia, wherever that is. The plain fact is that the Earth will die of them within a week. They appear by invisible transportation, but they have shown no inclination to disappear in the same manner. Food will be gone, the very air we breathe will be gone. They speak all our languages, they are polite, friendly and agreeable. And we will perish from them.

A big smiling man broke in on Bar-John, who was once again president of Big State Amalgamated, former U.S.A.

"I'm the president of the Skandia Visitation," he boomed. "We have come partly to instruct you people and we find that you do need it. Your fertility rate is pathetic. You barely double in fifty years. Your medicine, adequate in other fields, is worse than childish in this. We find that some of the nostrums peddled to your people actually impede fertility. Well, get in the Surgeon General and a few of the boys and we'll begin to correct the situation."

"Gedoudahere," said President Bar-John.

"I know you will not want your people to miss out on the population blessing," said the Skandia Visitation President. "We can aid you. We want you to be as happy as we are."

"Jarvis! Cudgelman! Sapsucker!" President Bar-John called out. "Shoot down this man. I'll implement the paper work on it later."

"You always say that but you never do," Sapsucker complained. "It's been getting us in a lot of trouble."

"Oh, well, don't shoot him down then if you're going to make an issue of it. I long for the old days when the simple things were done simply. Dammit, you Skandia skinner, do you know that there are nine thousand of you in the White House itself?"

"We intend to improve that this very hour," the Skandia president said. "We can erect one, two, or even three decks in these high-ceilinged rooms. I am happy to say that we will have thirty thousand of our people quartered in the White House this night."

"Do you think I like to take a bath with eight other persons -- not even registered voters -- in the same tub?" President Bar-John complained. "Do you think I like to eat off a plate shared by three or four other people? Or to shave, by mistake, faces other than my own in the morning?"

"I don't see why not," said the Skandia Visitation president. "People are our most precious commodity. Presidents are always chosen as being those who most love the people."

"Oh, come on, fellows," said President Bar-John. "Shoot down the ever-loving son. We're entitled to a free one now and then."

Jarvis and Cudgelman and Sapsucker blazed away at the Skandia, but they harmed him not at all.

"You should have known that we are immune to that," the Skandia said. "We voted against its effect years ago. Well, since you will not cooperate, I will go direct to your people. Happy increase to you, gentlemen."

Truman Trux, having gone out from his own place for a little change, was sitting on a park bench.

He wasn't actually sitting on it, but several feet above it. In that particular place, a talkative Skandia lady sat on the bench itself. On her lap sat a sturdy Skandia man reading the Sporting News and smoking a pipe.

On him sat a younger Skandia woman. On this younger woman sat Truman Trux, and on him sat a dark Skandia girl who was filing her fingernails and humming a tune. On her in turn sat an elderly Skandia man. As crowded as things had become, one could not expect a seat of one's own.

A fellow and his girl came along, walking on the people on the grass.

Mind if we get on?" asked the girl.

"Quite all right," said the elderly gentleman on top. "'Sall right," said the girl working on her nails. "Certainly," said Truman and the others, and the Sporting News man puffed into his pipe that it was perfectly agreeable.

There was no longer any motor traffic. People walked closely packed on streets and sidewalks. The slow stratum was the lowest, then the medium, then the fast (walking on the shoulders of the mediums and combining the three speeds). At crossings it became rather intricate, and people were sometimes piled nine high. But the Earth people, those who still went out, quickly got onto the Skandia techniques.

An Earthman, known for his extreme views, had mounted onto a monument in the park and began to harangue the people, Earth and Skandia. Truman Trux, who wanted to see and hear, managed to get a nice fifth-level seat, sitting on the shoulders of a nice Skandia girl, who sat on the shoulders of another who likewise to the bottom.

"Ye are the plague of locusts!" howled the Earth-side crank. "Ye have stripped us bare!"

"The poor man!" said the Skandia girl who was Truman's understeady. "He likely has only a few children and is embittered."

"Ye have devoured our substance and stolen the very air of our life. Ye are the Apocalyptical grasshoppers, the eleventh plague."

"Here is a fertility charm for your wife," said the Skandia girl, and reached it up to Truman. "You might not need it yet, but keep it for the future. It is for those who have more than twelve. The words in Skandia say 'Why stop now?' it is very efficacious."

"Thank you," said Truman. "My wife has many charms from you good people, but not one like this. We have only one child, a young girl."

"What a shame! Here is a charm for your daughter. She cannot begin to use them too early."

"Destruction, destruction, destruction on ye all!" screamed the Earth-side crank from atop the monument.

"Quite an adept," said the Skandia girl. "To what school of eloquence does he belong?"

The crowd began to break up and move off. Truman felt himself taken down one level and then another.

"Any particular direction?" asked the Skandia girl. "This is fine," said Truman. "We're going toward my home."

"Why, here's a place almost clear," said the girl. "You'd never find anything like this at home." They were now down to the last level, the girl walking only on the horizontal bodies of those lounging on the grass. "You can get off and walk if you wish," said the girl. "Here's a gap in the walkers you can slip down into. Well, toodle."

"You mean toodle-oo?" Truman asked as he slid off her shoulders.

"That's right. I can never remember the last part of it."

The Skandia were such friendly people!

President Bar-John and a dozen other regents of the world had decided that brusqueness was called for. Due to the intermingling of Earth and Skandia populations, this would be a task for small and medium arms. The problem would be to gather the Skandia together in open spots, but on the designated day they began to gather of themselves in a million parks and plazas of the Earth. It worked perfectly. Army units were posted everywhere and went into action.

Rifles began to whistle and machine guns to chatter. But the effect on the Skandia was not that expected.

Instead of falling wounded, they cheered everywhere.

"Pyrotechnics yet!" exclaimed a Skandia leader, mounting onto the monument in one park. "Oh, we are honored!"

But, though the Skandia did not fall from the gunshot, they had begun to diminish in their numbers. They were disappearing as mysteriously as they had appeared a week before.

"We go now, said the Skandia leader from the top of the monument. "We have enjoyed every minute of our short visit. Do not despair! We will not abandon you to your emptiness. Our token force will return home and report. In another week we will visit you in substantial numbers. We will teach you the full happiness of human proximity, the glory of fruitfulness, the blessing of adequate population. We will teach you to fill up the horrible empty places of your planet."

The Skandia were thinning out. The last of them were taking cheering farewells of disconsolate Earth friends.

"We will be back," they said as they passed their last fertility charms into avid hands. "We'll be back and teach you everything so you can be as happy as we are. Good increase to you!"

"Good increase to you!" cried the Earth people to the disappearing Skandia. Oh, it would be a lonesome world without all those nice people! With them you had the feeling that they were really close to you.

"We'll be back!" said the Skandia leader, and disappeared from the monument. "We'll be back next week and a lot more of us," and then they were gone.

"-- And next time we'll bring the kids!" came the last fading Skandia voice from the sky.

IN OUR BLOCK

There were a lot of funny people in that block.

"You ever walk down that street?" Art Slick asked Jim Boomer, who had just come onto him there.

"Not since I was a boy. After the overall factory burned down, there was a faith healer had his tent pitched there one summer. The street's just one block long and it dead-ends on the railroad embankment Nothing but a bunch of shanties and weed-filled lots. The shanties looked different today, though, and there seem to be more of them. I thought they pulled them all down a few months ago."

"Jim, I've been watching that first little building for two hours. There was a tractor-truck there this morning with a forty-foot trailer, and it loaded out of that little shanty. Cartons about eight inches by eight inches by three feet came down that chute. They weighed about thirty-five pounds each from the way the men handled them. Jim, they filled that trailer up with them, and then pulled it off."

"What's wrong with that, Art?"

"Jim, I said they filled that trailer up. From the drag on it it had about a sixty-thousand-pound load when it pulled out. They loaded a carton every three and a half seconds for two hours; that's two thousand cartons."

"Sure, lots of trailers run over the load limit nowadays; they don't enforce it very well."

"Jim, that shack's no more than a cracker box seven feet on a side. Half of it is taken up by a door, and inside a man in a chair behind a small table. You couldn't get anything else in that half. The other half is taken up by whatever that chute comes out of. You could pack six of those little shacks on that trailer."

"Let's measure it," Jim Boomer said. "Maybe it's bigger than it looks." The shack had a sign on it: Make Sell Ship Anything Cut Price. Jim

Boomer measured the building with an old steel tape. The shack was a seven-foot cube, and there were no hidden places. It was set up on a few piers of broken bricks, and you could see under it.

"Sell you a new fifty-foot steel tape for a dollar," said the man in the chair in the little shack. "Throw that old one away." The man pulled a steel tape out of a drawer of his table-desk, though Art Slick was sure it had been a plain flat-top table with no place for a drawer.

"Fully retractable, rhodium-plated, Dort glide, Ramsey swivel, and it forms its own caring case. One dollar," the man said.

Jim Boomer paid him a dollar for it. "How many of them you got?"

"I can have a hundred thousand ready to load out in ten minutes," the man said. "Eighty-eight cents each in hundred thousand lots."

"Was that a trailer-load of steel tapes you shipped out this morning?" Art asked the man.

"No that must have been something else. This is the first steel tape I ever made. Just got the idea when I saw you measuring my shack with that old beat-up one."

Art Slick and Jim Boomer went to the rundown building next door. It was smaller, about a six-foot cube, and the sign said Public Stenographer. The clatter of a typewriter was coming from it, but the noise stopped when they opened the door.

A dark pretty girl was sitting in a chair before a small table. There was nothing else in the room, and no typewriter.

"I thought I heard a typewriter in here," Art said.

"Oh that is me." The girl smiled. "Sometimes I amuse myself make typewriter noises like a public stenographer is supposed to."

"What would you do if someone came in to have some typing done?"

"What are you think? I do it of course."

"Could you type a letter for me?"

"Sure is can, man friend, two bits a page, good work, carbon copy, envelope and stamp."

"Ah, let's see how you do it. I will dictate to you while you type."

"You dictate first. Then I write. No sense mix up two things at one time."

Art dictated a long and involved letter that he had been meaning to write for several days. He felt like a fool droning it to the girl as she filed her nails. "Why is public stenographer always sit filing her nails?" she asked as Art droned. "But I try to do it right, file them and grow them out again, then file them down some more. Been doing it all morning. It seems silly."

"Ah -- that is all," Art said when he had finished dictating.

"Not P.S. Love and Kisses?" the girl asked.

"Hardly. It's a business letter to a person I barely know."

"I always say P.S. Love and Kisses to persons I barely know," the girl said. "Your letter will make three pages, six bits. Please you both step outside about ten seconds and I write it. Can't do it when you watch." She pushed them out and closed the door.

Then there was silence.

"What are you doing in there, girl?" Art called.

"Want I sell you a memory course too? You forget already? I type a letter," the girl called.

"But I don't hear a typewriter going."

"What is? You want verisimilitude too? I should charge extra." There was a giggle, and then the sound of very rapid typing for about five seconds.

The girl opened the door and handed Art the three page letter. It was typed perfectly, of course.

"There is something a little odd about this," Art said.

"Oh? The ungrammar of the letter is your own, sir. Should I have correct?"

"No. It is something else. Tell me the truth, girl: how does the man next door ship out trailer-loads of material from a building ten times too small to hold the stuff?"

"He cuts prices."

"Well, what are you people? The man next door resembles you."

"My brother-uncle. We tell everybody we are Innominee Indians."

"There is no such tribe," Jim Boomer said flatly.

"Is there not? Then we will have to tell people we are something else. You got to admit it sounds like Indian. What's the best Indian to be?"

"Shawnee," said Jim Boomer.

"Okay then we be Shawnee Indians. See how easy it is."

"We're already taken," Boomer said. "I'm a Shawnee and I know every Shawnee in town."

"Hi cousin!" the girl cried, and winked. "That's from a joke I learn, only the begin was different. See how foxy I turn all your questions."

"I have two-bits coming out of my dollar," Art said.

"I know," the girl said. "I forgot for a minute what design is on the back of the two-bitser piece, so I stall while I remember it. Yes, the funny bird standing on the bundle of firewood. One moment till I finish it Here." She handed the quarter to Art Slick. "And you tell everybody there's a smoothie public stenographer here who types letters good."

"Without a typewriter," said Art Slick. "Let's go, Jim."

"P.S. Love and kisses," the girl called after them.

The Cool Man Club was next door, a small and shabby beer bar. The bar girl could have been a sister of the public stenographer.

"We'd like a couple of Buds, but you don't seem to have a stock of anything," Art said.

"Who needs stock?" the girl asked. "Here is beers." Art would have believed that she brought them out of her sleeves, but she had no sleeves. The beers were cold and good.

"Girl, do you know how the fellow on the corner can ship a whole trailer-load of material out of a space that wouldn't hold a tenth of it?" Art asked the girl.

"Sure. He makes it and loads it out at the same time. That way it doesn't take up space, like if he made it before time."

"But he has to make it out of something," Jim Boomer cut in.

"No, no," the girl said. "I study your language. I know words. Out of something is to assemble, not to make. He makes."

"This is funny." Slick gaped. "Budweiser is misspelled on this bottle, the i before the e."

"Oh, I goof," the bar girl said. "I couldn't remember which way it goes so I make it one way on one bottle and the other way on the other. Yesterday a man ordered a bottle of Progress beer, and I spelled it Progers on the bottle. Sometimes I get things wrong. Here, I fix yours."

She ran her hand over the label, and then it was spelled correctly.

"But that thing is engraved and then reproduced," Slick protested.

"Oh, sure, all fancy stuff like that," the girl said. "I got to be more careful. One time I forget and make Jax-taste beer in a Schlitz bottle and the man didn't like it. I had to swish swish change the taste while I pretended to give him a different bottle. One time I forgot and produced a green-bottle beer in a brown bottle, 'It is the light in here, it just makes it look brown,' I told the man. Hell, we don't even have a light in here. I go swish fast and make the bottle green. It's hard to keep from making mistake when you're stupid."

"No, you don't have a light or a window in here, and it's light," Slick said. "You don't have refrigeration. There are no power lines to any of the shanties in this block. How do you keep the beer cold?"

"Yes, is the beer not nice and cold? Notice how tricky I evade your question. Will you good men have two more beers?"

"Yes, we will. And I'm interested in seeing where you get them," Slick said.

"Oh look, is snakes behind you!" the girl cried. "Oh how you startle and jump!" she laughed. "It's all joke. Do you think I will have snakes in my nice bar?"

But she had produced two more beers, and the place was as bare as before.

'How long have you tumble-bugs been in this block?' Boomer asked.

"Who keep track?" the girl said. "People come and go."

"You're not from around here," Slick said. "You're not from anywhere I know. Where do you come from? Jupiter?"

"Who wants Jupiter?" the girl seemed indignant. "Do business with a bunch of insects there, is all! Freeze your tail too."

"You wouldn't be a kidder, would you, girl?" Slick asked.

"I sure do try hard. I learn a lot of jokes but I tell them all wrong yet. I get better, though. I try to be the witty bar girl so people will come back."

"what's in the shanty next door toward the tracks?"

"My cousin-sister," said the girl. "She set up shop just today. She grow any color hair on bald-headed men. I tell her she's crazy. No business. If they wanted hair they wouldn't be bald-headed in the first place."

"Well, can she grow hair on bald-headed men?" Slick asked.

"Oh sure. Can't you?"

There were three or four more shanty shops in the block. It didn't seem that there had been that many when the men went into the Cool Man club.

"I don't remember seeing this shack a few minutes ago," Boomer said to the man standing in front of the last shanty on the line.

"Oh, I just made it," the man said.

Weathered boards, rusty nails... and he had just made it.

"Why didn't you - ah -- make a decent building while you were at it?" Slick asked.

"This is more inconspicuous," the man said. "Who notices when an old building appears suddenly? We're new here and want to feel our way in before we attract attention. Now I'm trying to figure out what to make. Do you think there is a market for a luxury automobile to sell for a hundred dollars? I suspect I would have to respect the local religious feeling when I make them though."

"What is that?" Slick asked.

"Ancestor worship. The old gas tank and fuel system still carried as vestiges after natural power is available. Oh' well, I'll put them in. I'll have one done in about three minutes if you want to wait."

"No. I've already got a car," Slick said. "Let's go, Jim."

That was the last shanty in the block, so they turned back.

"I was just wondering what was down in this block where nobody ever goes," Slick said. "There's a lot of odd corners in our town if you look them out."

"There are some queer guys in the shanties that were here before this bunch," Boomer said. "Some of them used to come up to the Red Rooster to drink. One of them could gobble like a turkey. One of them could roll one eye in one direction and the other eye the other way. They shoveled hulls at the cottonseed oil float before it burned down."

They went by the public stenographer shack again.

"No kidding, honey, how do you type without a typewriter?" Slick asked.

"Typewriter is too slow," the girl said.

"I asked how, not why," Slick said.

"I know. Is it not nifty the way I turn away a phrase? I think I will have a big oak tree growing in front of my shop tomorrow for shade. Either of you nice men have an acorn in your pocket?"

"Ah -- no, How do you really do the typing, girl?"

"You promise you won't tell anybody."

"I promise."

"I make the marks with my tongue," the girl said. They started slowly on up the block.

"Hey, how do you make the carbon copies?" Jim Boomer called back.

"With my other tongue," the girl said.

There was another forty-foot trailer loading out of the first shanty in the block. It was bundles of half-inch plumbers' pipe coming out of the chute -- in twenty-foot lengths. Twenty-foot rigid pipe out of a seven-foot shed.

"I wonder how he can sell trailer-loads of such stuff out of a little shack like that," Slick puzzled, still not satisfied.

"Like the girl says, he cuts prices," Boomer said. "Let's go over to the Red Rooster and see if there's anything going on. There always were a lot of funny people in that block."

HOG-BELLY HONEY

I'm Joe Spade -- about as intellectual a guy as you'll find all day. I invented Wotto and Voxo and a bunch of other stuff that nobody can get along without anymore. It's on account of I have so much stuff in my head that I sometimes go to a head-grifter. This day all of them I know is out of town when I call. Lots of times every body I know is out of town when I call. I go to a new one. The glass in his door says he is a anapsychologist, which is a head-grifter in the popular speech.

"I'm Joe Spade the man that got everything," I tell him and slap him on the back in that hearty way of mine. There is a crunch sound and at first I think I have crack his rib. Then I see I have only broke his glasses so no harm done. "I am what you call a flat-footed genius, Doc," I tell him, "with plenty of the crimp-cut greenleaf."

I take the check card away from him and mark it up myself to save time. I figure I know more about me than he does.

"Remember, I can get them nine-dollar words for four eighty-five wholesale, Doc," I josh him and he looks me painful.

"Modesty isn't one of your failings," this head-grifter tell me as he scun my card. "Hum. Single... Significant."

I had written down the "single" in the blank for it, but he had see for himself that I am a significant man.

"Solvent," he read for the blank about the pecuniary stuff; "I like that in a man. We will arrange for a few sessions."

"One will do it," I tell him. "Time is running and I am paying. Give me a quick read, Doc."

"Yes, I can give you a very rapid reading," he says. "I want you to ponder the ancient adage: It is not good for Man to be alone. Think about it a while, and perhaps you will be able to put one and one together."

Then he add kind of sad, "Poor woman!" which is either the non-secular of the year or else he is thinking of some other patient. Then he add again, "That will be three yards, in the lingo."

"Thanks, Doc," I say. I pay the head-grifter his three hundred dollars and leave. He has hit the nail on the noggin and put his toe on the root of my trouble.

I will take me a partner in my business.

I spot him in Grogley's, and I know right away he's the one. He's about half my size but otherwise he's as much like me as two feet in one shoe. He's real good-looking -- just like me. He's dressed sweet, but has a little blood on his face like can happen to anyone in Grogley's for five minutes. Man, we're twins! I know we will talk alike and think alike just like we look alike.

"Eheu! Fugaces!" my new partner says real sad. That means "Brother, this has been one day with all the bark on it!" He is drinking the Fancy and

his eyes look like cracked glass.

"He's been having quite a few little fist fights," Grogley whispers to me, "but he don't win none. He isn't fast with his hands. I think he's got troubles."

"Not no more he don't," I tell Grogley; "he's my new partner."

I slap my new partner on the back in that hearty way I have, and the tooth that flew out must have been a loose one.

"You don't have no more troubles, Roscoe," I tell him, "you and me is just become partners." He looks kind of sick at me.

.Maurice is the name," he says, "Maurice Maltravers. How are things back in the rocks? You, sir, are a troglodyte. They always come right after the snakes. That's the only time I wish the snakes would come back."

Lots of people call me a troglodyte.

"Denied the sympathy of humankind," Maurice carries on, "perhaps I may find it in an inferior species. I wonder if I could impose on your ears -- gahhhh!" (he made a humorous sound there) "are those things ears? -- What a fearsome otological apparatus you do have! -- the burden of my troubles."

"I just told you you don't have none, Maurice," I say. "Come along with me and we'll get into the partner business."

I pick him up by the scruff and haul him out of Grogley's.

"I see right away you are my kind of man," I say. "My kind of man -- putridus ad volva," Maurice gives me the echo. Hey, this guy is a gale! Just like me.

"My cogitational patterns are so intricate and identatic oriented," says Maurice when I set him down and let him walk a little, "that I become a closed system -- unintelligible to the exocosmos and particularly to a chthonian like yourself."

"I'm mental as hell myself, Maurice," I tell him, "there ain't nothing the two of us can't do together."

"My immediate difficulty is that the University has denied me further use of the computer," Maurice tells me. "Without it, I cannot complete the Ultimate Machine."

"I got a computer'll make that little red schoolhouse turn green," I tell him.

We come to my place which a man have call in print "a converted horse barn, probably the most unorthodox and badly appointed scientific laboratory in the world." I take Maurice in with me, but he carries on like a chicken with its hat off when he finds out the only calculator I got is the one in my head.

"You livid monster, I can't work in this mares'-nest," he screeches at me. "I've got to have a calculator, a computer."

I tap my head with a six-pound hammer and grin my famous grin. "It's all inside here, Maurice boy," I tell him, "the finest calculator in the world. When I was with the carnivals they billed me as the Idiot Genius. I run races with the best computers they had in a town, multiplying twenty-place numbers and all the little tricks like that. I cheated though. I invented a gadget and carried it in my pocket. It's jam the relays of the best computers and slow them down for a full second. Give me a one-second hop and I can beat anything in the world at anything. The only things wrong with those jobs is that I had to talk and act kind of dumb to live up to my billing the idiot Genius, and that dumb stuff was hard on an intellectual like I."

"I can see that it would be," Maurice said. "Can you handle involuted matrix, Maimonides-conditioned, third-aspect numbers in the Cauchy sequence with simultaneous non-temporal involvement of the Fieschi manifold?"

"Maurice, I can do it and fry up a bunch of eggs to go with it at the same time," I tell him. Then I look him right in the middle of the eye. "Maurice," I say, "you're working on a nullifier."

He look at me like he take me serious for the first time. He pull a

sheaf of papers out of his shirt, and sure enough he is working on a nullifier -- a sweet one.

"This isn't an ordinary nullifier," Maurice points out, and I see that it ain't. "What other nullifier can posit moral and ethical judgments? What other can set up and enforce categories? What other can really discern? This will be the only nullifier able to make full philosophical pronouncements. Can you help me finish it, Proconsul?"

A proconsul is about the same as an alderman, so I know Maurice think high of me. We throw away the clock and get with it. We work about twenty hours a day. I compute it and build it at the same time -- out of Wotto-metal naturally. At the end we use feedback a lot. We let the machine decide what we will put in it and what leave out. The main difference between our nullifier and all others is that ours will be able to make decisions. So, let it make them!

We finish it in about a week. Man, it is a sweet thing. We play with it a while to see what it can do. It can do everything.

I point it at half a bushel of bolts and nuts I got there. "Get rid of everything that ain't standard thread," I program it. "Half that stuff is junk."

And half that stuff is gone right now! This thing works! Just set in what you want it to get rid of, and it's gone without a trace.

"Get rid of everything here that's no good for nothing," I program it. I had me a place there that has been described as cluttered. That machine blinked once, and then I had a place you could get around in. That thing knew junk when it saw it, and it sure sent that no-good stuff clear over the edge. Of course anybody can make a nullifier that won't leave no remains of whatever it latches on to, but this is the only one that knows what not to leave no remains of by itself. Maurice and me is tickled as pink rabbits over the thing.

"Maurice," I say, and I slap him on the back so his nose bleeds a little, "this is one bushy-tailed gadget. There ain't nothing we can't do with it."

But Maurice looks kind of sad for a moment.

"A quo bono?" he ask, which I think is the name of a mineral water, so I slosh him out some brandy which is better. He drink the brandy but he's still thoughtful.

"But what good is it?" he ask. "It is a triumph, of course, but in what category could we market it? It seems that I've been here a dozen times with the perfect apparatus that nobody wants. Is there really a mass market for a machine that can posit moral and ethical judgments, that can set up and enforce categories, that is able to discern, and to make philosophical pronouncements? Have I not racked up one more triumphant folly?"

"Maurice, this thing is a natural-born garbage disposal," I tell him. He turn that green color lots of people do when I shed a big light on them.

"A garbage disposal!" he sing out. "The aeons labored to give birth to it through the finest mind - mine -- of the millennium, and this brother of a giant ape says it is a garbage disposal! It is a new aspect of thought, the novo instauratio, the mind of tomorrow fruited today, and this obscene ogre says it is a Garbage Disposal!! The Constellations do homage to it, and Time has not waited in vain, and you, you splay-footed horse-herder, you call it a GARBAGE DISPOSAL!"

Maurice was so carried away with the thought that he cried a little. It sure is nice when someone agrees with you as long and loud as Maurice did. When he was run out of words he got ahold of the brandy bottle with both hands and drunk it all off. Then he slept the clock around. He was real tired.

He looked kind of sheepful when he finally woke up.

"I feel better now, outside of feeling worse," he say. "You are right, Spade, it's a garbage disposal."

He programmed it to get all the slush out of his blood and liver and kidneys and head. It did it. It cured his hangover in straight-up no time at all. It also shaved him and removed his appendix. Just give it the nod and it would nullify anything.

"We will call it the Hog-Belly Honey," I say, "on account of it will eat anything, and it work so sweet."

"That is what we will call it privately." Maurice nodded. "But in company it will be known as the Pantophag." That is the same thing in Greek.

It was at the time of this area of good feeling that I split a Voxo with Maurice. Each of you have one-half of a tuned Voxo and you can talk to each other anywhere the world, and the thing is so nonconspicuous that nobody can see it on you.

We got a big booth and showed the Hog-Belly Honey, the Pantophag, at the Trade Fair.

Say, we did put on a good show! The people came in and looked and listened till they were walleyed. That Maurice could give a good spiel, and I'm about the best there is myself. We sure were two fine-looking men, after Maurice told me that maybe I detracted a little bit by being in my undershirt, and I went and put a shirt on. And that bushy-tailed machine just sparkled -- like everything does that is made out of Wotto-metal.

Kids threw candy-bar wrappers at it, and they disappeared in the middle of the air. "Frisk me," they said, and everything in their pockets that was no good for nothing was gone. A man held up a stuffed briefcase, and it was almost empty in a minute. A few people got mad when they lost beards and moustaches, but we explained to them that their boscaje hadn't done a thing for them; if the ornaments had had even appearance value the machine would have left them be. We pointed out other people who kept their brush; whatever they had behind it, they must have needed the cover.

"Could I have one in my house, and when?" a lady asks.

"Tomorrow, for forty-nine ninety-five installed," I tell her. "It will get rid of anything no good. It'll pluck chickens, or bone roasts for you. It will clear out all those old love letters from that desk and leave just the ones from the guy that meant it. It will relieve you of thirty pounds in the strategic places, and frankly, lady, this alone will make it worth your while. It will get rid of old buttons that don't match, and seeds that won't sprout. It will destroy everything that is not so good for nothing."

"It can posit moral and ethical judgments," Maurice tells the people. "It can set up and enforce categories."

"Maurice and me is partners," I tell them all. "We look alike and think alike. We even talk alike."

"Save I in the hieratic and he in the demotic," Maurice say. "This is the only nullifier in the world able to make full philosophical pronouncements. It is the unfailing judge of what is of some use and what is not. And it disposes neatly."

Man, the people did pour in to see it all that morning! They slacked off a little bit just about noon.

"I wonder how many people have come into our booth this morning?" Maurice wondered to me. "I would guess near ten thousand."

"I don't have to guess," I say. "There is nine thousand three hundred and fifty-eight who have come in, Maurice," I tell him, for I am always the automatic calculator. "There is nine thousand two hundred and ninety-seven who have left," I go on, "and there are forty-four here now."

Maurice smiled. "You have made a mistake," he says. "It doesn't add up."

And that is when the hair riz up on the back of my neck.

I don't make mistakes when I calculate, and I can see now that the Hog-Belly Honey don't make none either. Well, it's too late to make one now if you're not trained for it, but it might not be too late to get out the

way of the storm before it hits.

"Crank the cuckoo," I whisper to Maurice, "make the bindlestiff, hit the macadam!"

"Je ne comprends pas," says Maurice, which means "Let's hit the road, boys," in French, so I know my partner understands me.

I am out of the display hall at a high run, and Maurice racing along beside me so lightfoot that he don't make no noise. There is a sky-taxi just taking off.

"Jump for it, Maurice!" I sing out I jump for it myself, and hook my fingers over the rear rail and am dangling in the air. I look to see if Maurice make it. Make it! He isn't even there! He didn't come out with me. I look back, and I see him through a window going to his spiel again.

Now that is a mule-headed development. My partner, who is as like me as two heads in one hat, had not understand me.

At the port I hook onto a sky-freight just going to Mexico.

I don't never have to pack no bag. I say that a man who don't always carry two years' living in that crimp green stuff in his back pocket ain't in no condition to meet fait. In thirty minutes I am sit down in a hotel in Cueva Peoquita and have all the pleasantries at hand. Then I snap on my Voxo to hear what Maurice is signaling about.

"Why didn't you tell me that the Pantophag was nullifying people?" he ask kind of shrill.

"I did tell you," I say. "Nine thousand two hundred and ninety-seven added to forty-four don't come to nine thousand three hundred and fifty-eight. You said so yourself. How are things on the home front, Maurice? That's a joke."

"It's no joke," he say kind of fanatic like. "I have locked myself in a little broom closet, but they're going to break down the door. What can I do?"

"Why, Maurice, just explain to those people that the folks nullified by the machine were no good for nothing because the machine don't make mistakes."

"I doubt that I can convince the parents and spouses and children of the nullified people of this. They're after blood. They're breaking down the door now, Spade. I hear them say they will hang me."

"Tell them you won't settle for anything less than a new rope, Maurice," I tell him. That's an old joke. I switch off the Voxo because Maurice is not making anything except gurgling noises which I cannot interpret.

A thing like that blow over real fast after they have already hang one guy for it and are satisfied. I am back in town and am rolling all those new ideas around in my head, like a bunch of rocks. But I'm not going to build the Hog-Belly Honey again. It is too logical for safety, and is a little before its time.

I am looking to get me another partner. Come into Grogley's if you are interested. I show up there every hour or so. I want a guy as like me as two necks in one noose -- what make me think of a thing like that? -- a guy look like me and think like me and talk like me.

Just ask for Joe Spade.

But the one I hook onto for a new partner will have to be a fellow who understands me when the scuppers are down.

NINE HUNDRED GRANDMOTHERS

Ceran Swicegood was a promising young Special Aspects Man. But, like all Special Aspects, he had one irritating habit. He was forever asking the question: How Did it All Begin?

They all had tough names except Ceran. Manbreaker Crag, Heave Huckle, Blast Berg, George Blood, Move Manion (when Move says "Move," you

move), Trouble Trent. They were supposed to be tough, and they had taken tough names at the naming. Only Ceran kept his own -- to the disgust of his commander, Manbreaker

"Nobody can be a hero with a name like Ceran Swicegood!" Manbreaker would thunder. "Why don't you take Storm Shannon? That's good. Or Gutboy Barrelhouse or Slash Slagle or Nevel knife? You barely glanced at the suggested list."

"I'll keep my own," Ceran always said, and that is where he made his mistake. A new name will sometimes bring out a new personality. It had done so for George Blood. Though the hair on George's chest was a graft job, yet that and his new name had turned him from a boy into a man. Had Ceran assumed the heroic name of Gutboy Barrelhouse he might have been capable of rousing endeavors and man-sized angers rather than his tittering indecisions and flouncy firues.

They were down on the big asteroid Proavitus -- a sphere that almost tinkled with the potential profit that might be shaken out of it. And the tough men of the Expedition knew their business. They signed big contracts on the native velvet-like bark scrolls and on their own parallel tapes. They impress, inveigled and somewhat cowed the slight people of Proavitus. Here was a solid two-way market, enough to make them slaver. And there was a whole world of oddities that could lend themselves to the luxury trade.

"Everybody's hit it big but you," Manbreaker crackled in kindly thunder to Ceran after three days there. "But even Special Aspects is supposed to pay its way. Our charter compels us to carry one of your sort to give a cultural twist to the thing, but it needn't be restricted to that. What we go out for every time, Ceran, is to cut a big fat hog in the rump -- we make no secret of that, But if the hog's tail can be shown to have a cultural twist to it, that will solve a requirement. And if that twist in the tail can turn us a profit, then we become mighty happy about the whole thing. Have you been able to find out anything about the living dolls, for instance? They might have both a cultural aspect and a market value."

"The living dolls seem a part of something much deeper," Ceran said. "There's a whole complex of things to be unraveled. The key may be the statement of the Proavitoi that they do not die."

"I think they die pretty young, Ceran. All those out and about are young, and those I have met who do not leave their houses are only middling old."

Then where are their cemeteries?"

"Likely they cremate the old folks when they die."

"Where are the crematories?"

"They might just toss the ashes out or vaporize the entire remains. Probably they have no reverence for ancestors."

"Other evidence shows their entire culture to be based on an exaggerated reverence for ancestors."

"You find out, Ceran. You're Special Aspects Man."

Ceran talked to Nokoma, his Proavitoi counterpart as translator. Both were expert, and they could meet each halfway in talk. Nokoma was likely feminine, There was a certain softness about both the sexes of the Proavitoi, but the men of the Expedition believed that they had them straight now.

"Do you mind if I ask some straight questions?" Ceran greeted her today.

"Sure is not. How else I learn the talk well but by talking?"

"Some of the Proavitoi say that they do not die, Nokoma. Is this true?"

"How is not be true? If they die, they not be here to say they do not die. Oh, I joke, I joke. No, we do not die. It is a foolish alien custom which we see no reason to imitate. On Proavitus, only the low creatures die."

"None of you does?"

"Why, no. Why should one want to be an exception in this?"

"But what do you do when you get very old?"

"We do less and less then. We come to a deficiency of energy. Is it not the same with you?"

"Of course. But where do you go when you become exceedingly old?"

"Nowhere. We stay at home then. Travel is for the young and those of the active years."

"Let's try it from the other end," Ceran said. "Where are your father and mother, Nokoma?"

"Out and about. They aren't really old."

"And your grandfathers and grandmothers?"

"A few of them still get out. The older ones stay home."

"Let's try it this way. How many grandmothers do you have, Nokoma?"

"I think I have nine hundred grandmothers in my house. Oh, I know that isn't many, but we are the young branch of a family. Some of our clan have very great numbers of ancestors in their houses."

"And all these ancestors are alive?"

"What else? Who would keep things not alive? How would such be ancestors?"

Ceran began to hop around in his excitement.

"Could I see them?" he twittered.

"It might not be wise for you to see the older of them," Nokoma cautioned, "It could be an unsettling thing for strangers, and we guard it. A few tens of them you can see, of course."

Then it came to Ceran that he might be onto what he had looked for all his life. He went into a panic of expectation.

"Nokoma, it would be finding the key!" he fluted. "If none of you has ever died, then your entire race would still be alive!"

"Sure. Is like you count fruit. You take none away, you still have them all."

"But if the first of them are still alive, then they might know their origin! They would know how it began! Do they? Do you?"

"Oh, not I. I am too young for the Ritual."

"But who knows? Doesn't someone know?"

"Oh, yes, All the old ones know how it began."

"How old? How many generations back from you till they know?"

"Ten, no more. When I have ten generations of children, then I will also go to the Ritual."

"The Ritual. What is it?"

"Once a year, the old people go to the very old people. They wake them up and ask them how it all began. The very old people tell them the beginning. It is a high time. Oh, how they bottle and laugh! Then the very old people go back to sleep for another year. So it is passed down to the generations. That is the Ritual."

The Proavitoi were not humanoid. Still less were they "monkey-faces," though that name was now set in the explorers' lingo. They were upright and robed, and swathed, and were assumed to be two-legged under their garments. Though, as Manbreaker said, "They might go on wheels, for all we know."

They had remarkable flowing hands that might be called everywhere-digitated. They could handle tools, or employ their hands as if they were the most intricate tools.

George Blood was of the opinion that the Proavitoi were always masked, and that the men of the Expedition had never seen their faces. He said that those apparent faces were ritual masks, and that no part of the Proavitoi had ever been seen by the men except for those remarkable hands, which perhaps were their real faces.

The men reacted with cruel hilarity when Ceran tried to explain to

them just what a great discovery he was verging on.

"Little Ceran is still on the how-did-it-begin jag," Man-breaker Jeered. "Ceran, will you never give off asking which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

"I will have that answer very soon," Ceran sang. "I have the unique opportunity. When I find how the Proavitoei began, I may have the clue to how everything began. All of the Proavitoei are still alive, the very first generation of them."

"It passes belief that you can be so simpleminded," Manbreaker moaned. "They say that one has finally mellowed 'when he can suffer fools gracefully. By God, I hope I never come to that."

But two days later, it was Manbreaker who sought out Ceran Swicegood on nearly the same subject. Manbreaker had been doing a little thinking and discovering of his own.

"You are Special Aspects Man, Ceran," he said, "and you have been running off after the wrong aspect."

"What is that?"

"It don't make a damn how it began. What is important is that it may not have to end."

"It is the beginning that I intend to discover," said Ceran.

"You fool, can't you understand anything? What do the Proavitoei possess so uniquely that we don't know whether they have it by science or by fool luck?"

"Ah, their chemistry, I suppose."

"Sure. Organic chemistry has come of age here. The Proavitoei have every kind of nexus and inhibitor and stimulant. They can grow and shrink and telescope and prolong what they will. These creatures seem stupid to me; it is as if they had these things by instinct. But they have them, that is what is important. With these things, we can become the patent medicine kings of the universes, for the Proavitoei do not travel or make many outside contacts. These things can do anything or undo anything. I suspect that the Proavitoei can shrink cells, and I suspect that they can do something else."

"No, they couldn't shrink cells. It is you who nonsense now, Manbreaker."

"Never mind. Their things already make nonsense of conventional chemistry. With the pharmacopoeia that one could pick up here, a man need never die, That's the stick horse you've been riding, isn't it? But you've been riding it backward with your head to the tail. The say that they never die."

"They seem pretty sure that they don't. If they did, they would be the first to know it, as Nokoma says."

"What? Have these creatures humor?"

"Some."

"But, Ceran, you don't understand how big this is."

"I'm the only one who understands it so far. It means that if the Proavitoei have always been immortal, as they maintain, then the oldest of them are still alive. From them I may be able to learn how their species -- and perhaps every species -- began."

Manbreaker went into his dying buffalo act then. He tore his hair and nearly pulled out his ears by the roots. He stomped and pawed and went off bull-bellowing: "It don't make a damn how it began, you fool! It might not have to end!" so loud that the hills echoed back:

"It don't make a damn -- you fool."

Ceran Swicegood went to the house of Nokoma, but not with her on her invitation. He went without her when he knew that she was away from home. It was a sneaky thing to do, but the men of the Expedition were trained in sneakery.

He would find out better without a mentor about the nine hundred grandmothers, about the rumored living dolls. He would find out what the old

people did do if they didn't die, and find if they knew how they were first born. For his intrusion, he counted on the innate politeness of the Proavitoi.

The house of Nokoma, of all the people, was in the cluster on top of the large flat hill, the Acropolis of Proavitus. They were earthen houses, though finely done, and they had the appearance of growing out of and be a part of the hill itself.

Ceran went up the winding, ascending flagstone paths, and entered the house which Nokoma had once pointed out to him. He entered furtively, and encountered one of the nine hundred grandmothers -- one with whom nobody need be furtive.

The grandmother was seated and small and smiling at him. They talked without real difficulty, though it was not as easy as with Nokoma, who could meet Ceran halfway in his own language. At her call, there came a grandfather who likewise smiled at Ceran. These two ancients were somewhat smaller than the Proavitoi of active years. They were kind and serene. There was an atmosphere about the scene that barely missed being an odor-not unpleasant, sleepy, reminiscent of something, almost sad.

"Are there those here older than you?" Ceran asked earnestly.

"So many, so many! Who could know how many?" said the grandmother. She called in other grandmothers, and grandfathers older and smaller than herself, these no more than half the size of the active Proavitoi -- small, sleepy, smiling.

Ceran knew now that the Proavitoi were not masked. The older they were, the more character and interest there was in their faces. It was only of the immature active of the Proavitoi that there could have been a doubt. No masks could show such calm and smiling old age as this. The queer textured stuff was their real faces.

So old and friendly, so weak and sleepy, there must have been a dozen generations of them there back to the oldest and smallest.

"How old are the oldest?" Ceran asked the first grandmother.

"We say that all are the same age since all are perpetual," the grandmother told him. "It is not true that all are the same age, but it is indelicate to ask how old."

"You do not know what a lobster is," Ceran said to them, trembling, "but it is a creature that will boil happily, if the water on him is heated slowly. He takes no alarm, for he does not know at what point the heat is dangerous. It is that gradual here with me. I slide from one degree to another with you and my credulity is not alarmed. I am in danger of believing anything about you if it comes in small doses, and it will. I believe that you are here and as you are for no other reason than that I see and touch you. Well, I'll be boiled for a lobster, then, before I turn back from it. Are there those here even older than the ones present?"

The first grandmother motioned Ceran to follow her. They went down a ramp through the floor into the older part of the house, which must have been under ground.

Living dolls! They were here in rows on the shelves, and sitting in small chairs in their niches. Doll-sized indeed, and several hundred of them.

Many had wakened at the intrusion. Others came awake when spoken to or touched. They were incredibly ancient, but they were cognizant in their glances and recognition. They smiled and stretched sleepily, not as humans would, but as very old puppies might. Ceran spoke to them, and they understood each other surprisingly.

Lobster, lobster, said Ceran to himself, the water has passed the danger point! And it hardly feels different. If you believe your senses in this, then you will be boiled alive in your credulity.

He knew now that the living dolls were real and that they were the living ancestors of the Proavitoi.

Many of the little creatures began to fall asleep again. Their

waking moments were short, but their sleeps seemed to be likewise. Several of the living mummies woke a second time while Ceran was still in the room, woke refreshed from very short sleeps and were anxious to talk again.

"You are incredible!" Ceran cried out, and all the small and smaller and still smaller creatures smiled and laughed their assent. Of course they were, All good creatures everywhere are incredible, and were there ever so many assembled in one place? But Ceran was greedy. A roomful of miracles wasn't enough.

"I have to take this back as far as it will go!" he cried avidly. "Where are the even older ones?"

"There are older ones and yet older and again older," said the first grandmother, "and thrice-over older ones, but perhaps it would be wise not to seek to be too wise. You have seen enough. The old people are sleepy. Let us go up again."

Go up again, out of this? Ceran would not, He saw passages and descending ramps, down into the heart of the great hill itself. There were whole worlds of rooms about him and under his feet. Ceran went on and down, and who was to stop him? Not dolls and creatures much smaller than dolls.

Manbreaker had once called himself an old pirate who reveled in the stream of his riches. But Ceran was the Young Alchemist who was about to find the Stone itself.

He walked down the ramps through centuries and millennia. The atmosphere he had noticed on the upper levels was a clear odor now -- sleepy, half-remembered, smiling, sad and quite strong. That is the way Time smells.

"Are there those here even older than you?" Ceran asked a small grandmother whom he held in the palm of his hand.

"So old and so small that I could hold in my hand," said the grandmother in what Ceran knew from Nokoma to be the older un-compounded form of the Proavitus language.

Smaller and older the creatures had been getting as Ceran went through the rooms. He was boiled lobster now for sure. He had to believe it all: he saw and felt it. The wren-sized grandmother talked and laughed and nodded that there were those far older than herself, and in doing so she nodded herself back to sleep. Ceran returned her to her niche in the hive-like wall where there were thousands of others, miniaturized generations.

Of course he was not in the house of Nokoma now. He was in the heart of the hill that underlay all the houses of Proavitus, and these were the ancestors of everybody on the asteroid.

"Are there those here even older than you?" Ceran asked a small grandmother whom he held on the tip of his finger.

"Older and smaller," she said, "but you come near the end."

She was asleep, and he put her back in her place. The older they were, the more they slept.

He was down to solid rock under the roots of the hill. He was into the passages that were cut out of that solid rock, but they could not be many or deep. He had a sudden fear that the creatures would become so small that he could not see them or talk to them, and so he would miss the secret of the beginning.

But had not Nokoma said that all the old people knew the secret? Of course. But he wanted to hear it from the oldest of them. He would have it now, one way or the other.

"Who is the oldest? Is this the end of it? Is this the beginning? Wake Up! Wake up!" he called when he was sure he was in the lowest and oldest room.

"Is it Ritual?" asked some who woke up. Smaller than mice they were, no bigger than bees, maybe older than both.

"It is a special Ritual," Ceran told them. "Relate to me how it was in the beginning."

What was that sound -- too slight, too scattered to be a noise? It was like a billion microbes laughing. It was the hilarity of little things waking up to a high time.

"Who is the oldest of all?" Ceran demanded, for their laughter bothered him. "Who is the oldest and first?"

"I am the oldest, the ultimate grandmother," one said gaily. "All the others are my children. Are you also of my children?"

"Of course," said Ceran, and the small laughter of unbelief flittered out from the whole multitude of them.

"Then you must be the ultimate child, for you are like no other. If you be, then it is as funny at the end as it was in the beginning."

"How was it in the beginning?" Ceran bleated. "You are the first. Do you know how you came to be?"

"Oh, yes, yes," laughed the ultimate grandmother, and the hilarity of the small things became a real noise now.

"How did it begin?" demanded Ceran, and he was hopping and skipping about in his excitement.

"Oh, it was so funny a joke the way things began that you would not believe it," chittered the grandmother. "A joke, a joke!"

"Tell me the joke, then. If a joke generated your species, then tell me that cosmic joke."

"Tell yourself," tinkled the grandmother. "You are a part of the joke if you are of my children. Oh, it is too funny to believe. How good to wake up and laugh and go to sleep again."

Blazing green frustration! To be so close and to be balked by a giggling bee!

"Don't go to sleep again! Tell me at once how it began!" Ceran shrilled, and he had the ultimate grandmother between thumb and finger.

"This is not Ritual," the grandmother protested. "Ritual is that you guess what it was for three days, and we laugh and say 'No, no, no, it was something nine times as wild as that. Guess some more.'"

"I will not guess for three days! Tell me at once or I will crush you," Ceran threatened in a quivering voice.

"I look at you, you look at me, I wonder if you will do it." the ultimate grandmother said calmly.

Any of the tough men of the Expedition would have done it -- would have crushed her, arid then another and another and another of the creatures till the secret was told. If Ceran had taken on a tough personality and a tough name he'd have done it. If he'd been Gutboy Barrelhouse he'd have done it without a qualm. But Ceran Swicegood couldn't do it.

"Tell me," he pleaded in agony. "All my life I've tried to find out how it began, how anything began. And you know!"

"We know. Oh, it was so funny how it began. So joke! So fool, so clown, so grotesque thing! Nobody could guess, nobody could believe."

"Tell me! Tell me!" Ceran was ashen and hysterical. "No, no, you are no child of mine," chortled the ultimate grandmother. "Is too joke a joke to tell a stranger. We could not insult a stranger to tell so funny, so unbelieve. Strangers can die. Shall I have it on conscience that a stranger died laughing?"

"Tell me! Insult me! Let me die laughing!" But Ceran nearly died crying from the frustration that ate him up as a million bee-sized things laughed and hooted and giggled:

"Oh, it was so funny the way it began!"

And they laughed. And laughed. And went on laughing... until Ceran Swicegood wept and laughed together, and crept away, and returned to the ship still laughing. On his next voyage he changed his name to Blaze Bolt and ruled for ninety-seven days as king of sweet sea island in M-81, but that is another and much more unpleasant story.

The man who entered, though quiet and soft-stepping, was none of your tame animals. He'd kill for the one thing he wanted and couldn't get enough of; but he hardly knew what to do with the packet of it he had under his arm. The man had a slight green tinge to him, and Patrick T. K. guessed that what he carried would have it also.

In an earlier era the man would have been tagged immediately as a seaman. Plainly he was still that, but of a more ethereal sea. Under his arm he had a package wrapped in newspaper, and more sturdily wrapped beneath. It was not a large package, but it was quite heavy.

The faring man was slim but amazingly wiry. Patrick T. K. was fat but with a lean and hungry eye that couldn't be fooled. Patrick set the weight of the package carried by the man at a hundred and twenty pounds.

If it were iron of such bulk it would weigh hardly a third that. If it were lead it would not be that heavy. Patrick studied the tendons on the side of the man's neck and the bulging veins on the back of his hand. He studied the set of his feet as he stood there, and he calculated the man's center of gravity, package included. Mercury would not be that heavy. Platinum would be heavier by a tenth. Patrick T. K. sometimes made mistakes in his judgment, but he never made mistakes by as much as ten percent.

So the seaman had a lump of gold to sell him. Nothing unusual about that. Patrick T. K. bought more sly gold than anyone in town.

"I've been told," said the seaman, "and it doesn't matter by whom, that you might be able to give me good cash for what I have here. But I won't be beaten down. I know my price."

And I know mine," said Paddy T. K. "Twenty thousand. How do you want it? Well, come, come, how? Twenties, fifties, hundreds, thousands or a king's mixture?"

"I had priced it a little higher," said the man.

"What? For that undersized loaf of bread under your arm? Two hundred dollars a pound for a hundred pounds is as close as I can figure."

"It weighs more."

"I know what it weighs. But I like to use round figures."

"Shall I unwrap it here? Have you a place to test it?"

"Leave it wrapped. Here is the sum And if you find it short a bill or two, be assured it is a dishonest mistake."

"There is more where this comes from."

"I can take this much every two weeks. Now be off."

"You're not going to look at it? How can you be sure what it is?"

"I have X-ray eyes."

"Oh."

But when Paddy T. K. was alone he put other things away and locked the door. He took the package to a back room, puffing heavily, for it was just as heavy as he knew it must be. He unwrapped it.

There was little that Patrick did not know about gold. He knew the greenishness of African gold, whether of the Gold Coast or the South; the greasiness of Kolyma gold and also its extreme unavailability; the cupric tinge of Sierra Madre gold whether from the Guatemala or Mexico district. He was familiar with the sudden brightness of Milne Bay gold, with the granularity of the Canadian, the musclelike texture of that of Witwatersrand, the lightness of color of the gold of California and nearby Sonora, and the white gold (almost electrum) of New Guinea above Milne Bay.

This was none of them. It was raw but fine, and very, very slightly cupric. The green tint in it was about the same as that in the complexion of the man. Patrick set down the weight in a notebook. And at the column for the origin he did not hesitate. He wrote down "Extraterrestrial."

That was the first written note of the thing.

Later, this gold would be known as St. Simeon gold (from a station on its route, not from its origin), but Patrick T. K., the old jewelry

factor and sly gold dealer, was not fooled.

Within a month, the Wall Street Journal had also referred to the new gold as extraterrestrial. The boys on that sheet also knew about gold, wherever they got their knowledge. But the Journal was derided for its correct guess. Gold cargo had never been authorized. No such gold had been mined except for pilot digs in conjunction with other operations. The cost would have been prohibitive, considering the cargo of necessary production machinery and the rudimentary state of exploration and the rarity of any solid finds. Off-Earth gold was still a generation away.

It was a four-man corporation made up of: Robert Fountain, an unobstructed genius; George Grinder, a ruthless ruffian; Carlos Trevino, the last of the Conquistadores and perhaps the first of a new kind of man; and Arpad Szild, a murderous Irishman who used a dead man's papers and a dead man's name.

Three of them had been dining in quiet luxury one evening at Trevino's when Szild appeared in the midst of them, "the doors and windows being closed," as Fountain related it with his biting humor, but that part of it may not be true.

"I've been there. I can take you to it," Szild said suddenly. He sat down and began to eat with his hands from the bowls.

"I grind up better stuff than you for feed supplement for my cattle," Trevino said. "Who are you? What can you take us to?"

"To the Trabant. You were talking about the legend."

All right. You talk about the legend, real fast," Robert Fountain said. "You haven't much time." He laid a hog-nosed gun in front of him on the table.

"It's shaped like a balk or a beam," Szild said. "Its greater diameter is twenty-five hundred meters, and its lesser is fifteen hundred -- a little less than two cubic miles. It's a misshapen tapered beam or egg with a cleft at its minor end. Its rotation is a tumble, and the period of the tumble is just short of thirty minutes. It's as bad-natured a rock as can be found. Cuts you to pieces. Shouldn't have an atmosphere, but there's something that tears up your lungs no matter how you're suited. It's an angry place, I tell you. But it's gold."

That was the Golden Trabant, one of the smaller of the eighteen hundred significant asteroids orbiting between Mars and Jupiter. When finally charted several years after this, it would be given the noxious name Venenatus -- but that was after it had been treated and its nature changed.

"We have a nice sketchy catalog of every asteroid down to about that size," said Grinder. "Nobody knows much about their details, but they are numbered and given their relative positions and speeds in the asteroid stream. Can you tell us which it is?"

"Can. Won't," said Szild. "But I'll take you there."

Szild had known that he would have to play his ace on the first round. After he had taken them to it, they would have no reason to keep him alive: but he had gambled his life before.

He said he had been there and knew where it was. The odds were high enough for them to take a chance on believing him. They acquired a ship and mounted a flight.

The ship was old and had been deactivated. Carlos Trevino bought it at surplus and had it towed down by tug and beached at a remote spot on the holdings of the Trevino family. It was activated by the genius of Fountain and the driving energy of Grinder. They took twelve young Hispanic technicians, none of whom are alive to give their versions. They hadn't known what they would run into nor what the labor would be at breaking up and loading the cargo. They went up, and they loaded the cargo.

They came back, the four of them without the twelve young technicians. Their first cargo. A trip of only five weeks. The Trabant was not distant.

Szild showed an exceptional talent at remaining alive. It is hard to kill a man as tough and canny as he, one who is never off guard. He spent the two weeks of the return barricaded in a little compartment, and the three leaders had to postpone Szild's killing till their earthing. Szild knew that they had mostly delegated such jobs as that. He himself had had to kill the twelve young technicians for them.

He bulled his way out when they were busy with earthfall and secure landing.

"He can't get away," Trevino said.

He couldn't get clear of the surrounding jungle; he did. Trevino who knew his own land minutely could track Szild down; he couldn't. He couldn't take much with him; he took a hundred and twenty pounds of it. That wasn't much out of a cargo like theirs, and whatever story Szild might tell would not be believed. He had no reason to tell any story at all; he didn't.

But somehow he reached port and took passage to the North, for Szild was the man who sold that first lump of gold to Patrick T. K.

Another man would have been satisfied with that and steered clear of them. Not Szild. Nevertheless, they were surprised when he returned to them just at second take off time, as they were going now with a ship that was really a ship. He came on foot across the savanna from the inland side.

"Something like this happens every time I leave the house for a minute," as the woman said as she examined the mandible and two parietal bones of her newly eaten child," Szild greeted them. "Would you be going without me? The news I had of you was sketchy and I am barely here in time."

"Kill him!" said Robert Fountain.

"Kill him, Fountain says, and the other two look at each other. Was it not better, Fountain, to have a man who will kill when you say kill, and avoid these awkward pauses? But I kill hard, Fountain. I go as long as anybody goes, and afterwards."

Szild went with them. They would kill him after the hard work of loading was done. They would kill him after he had done his turn at the instruments out and back. By and by they would kill him.

They brought back two hundred tons on that second voyage. They made a third voyage and a fourth and a fifth.

The establishment of the Commonwealth of San Simeon did not shake the world. Not at first. Nobody had ever heard of the place. It seemed a prank. Possibly a name given to a rebel hold.

Yet the Commonwealth was recognized that first day by its two adjacent Central American neighbors. They constituted themselves coprotectors of the new country. One of them, indeed, had ceded the land for it, the ancient and run-down rancho of the Trevino family. Some consideration had surely been paid for this protection.

It was soon after this that the heavy San Simeon Duros (fifty dollar gold pieces) began to appear around the world.

The appearance of these Duros caused a nervousness all out of proportion to the number of them. It is possible that not more than twenty million of them (that is, a billion dollars' worth) went into circulation that first year. That is a large amount coming from a new small country, but it shouldn't be enough to unhinge the world. Yet it did almost that.

Gold had gotten out of the habit of showing itself in society. For years it had sat at home in vaults, and a multiplier had been used to equate it with credit money. Nobody knew what to make of naked gold returning to the market. And what if this stream should be but the beginning of a veritable river?

And the stream was spreading. Three Central American countries were on a gold spree. It was slopping over into others.

The mystery of San Simeon was not solved. The exact location of the country was unknown to the world at large. Its form of government was not to

be ascertained. Its statistics softened and disappeared when examined. It had a president, Fuentes. It had a prime minister, Moliner -- the miller, the grinder. It had a foreign minister, Trevino. It had the hardest currency in the world. Its national game was playing hob with the currencies of the rest of the world.

If one small shrew is put into a warren of mice or rats, it causes panic. The shrew is smaller than any of them and it may be one against hundreds. But it will eat them; it will eat them alive. And given time, it will eat them all.

Something like this happened to the green money, the white money, the rainbow-colored money of the world. Token shrivels before the thing itself. It could not stand up to free and growing gold.

But if the warren is big enough, the shrew can be contained. There will be some of the rats knowing and political enough to go out and hire shrews of their own. The source of the gold stream could not be hidden forever.

One thing (Szild always said it was a mistake and Robert Fountain agreed that it was, but they couldn't hold the other two in line) was that the first ships begat others. Trevino and Grinder Molinero became too hasty in their greed. In that second year they had twelve ships in the service instead of one. That meant that somewhere between fifty and a hundred men knew the source.

The shores began to cave. The golden stream was a river. It crested to a torrent. One ship defected, then another. They came back to Earth in other lands than those of their departure. And wherever they came down they spawned other ships.

A dozen other countries were in the race by the third year. Now there was privateering and open piracy. The ships became battle boats, death spheres, and the attrition was terrifying. But the inward flood of the metal continued.

The world importation by the fourth year had risen to five hundred billion dollars annually, if it could any longer be equated in dollars. The gold dollar itself was not as hard as it had been.

The Trabant had changed. The period of its tumble was now only twenty-three minutes. The egg had been cracked and gutted in many places, and the cleft at the minor end had become a chasm between two horns. There was a project to shear off one of the horns and tow it to Earth in hunks of a million cubic yards each. This would be a lot of gold.

It was time for oblique measures, and they were found. The effect of the gold on the world had not really been bad. The effect on most people had been marvelous. But there was a small group that had always borne the burden of currency decisions. They were made nervous by this unbridled activity. Their hold was slipping. They took measures.

A small commission of not overly intelligent men found an answer. In their own field they understood cause and effect. They acted on doubtful authority, and they were not of one mind about the action. But they did it.

They killed Trabant.

One treatment was enough for the little rock. It couldn't be cleansed; it couldn't be unpoisoned after that. It would be deadly for a thousand years. Then they gave it its first official name, Venenatus, the poison asteroid. A near approach would radiate the flesh off a man's bones.

Things came back to normal in about three years. The shrews had killed each other, and the wise rats once more ran the warren. The new fortunes tottered and fell back into the bags of the old.

Somewhere, we never did know its exact location, San Simeon (no longer able to pay the high price for protection) lost its independence and became again a run-down rancho.

Gold stuck to some fingers longer than to others. Fuentes and Grinder will never run out of it. Trevino was choked to death by the

political strings on his. He died along with his small country, and he hadn't intended to.

Szild didn't know what he did with all his money. He paid little attention to it, and he suspected that he hadn't received nearly as much of it as had his nervous partners.

He spent it manfully. He threw it away. It gave him a dour pleasure to go from billionaire to bum. Then Arpad Szild was down to his last San Simeon Duro.

He laughed. Something had been missing from his life. Now it might be back. His gold was gone. So what to do?

He went up for some more.

Up to Venenatus the poison asteroid that would radiate a man's flesh off?

Sure. Szild didn't believe a lot of that stuff.

Patrick T. K. was alone in his shop when there entered a hooded man with a small heavy package.

"I was beginning to think I would see you no more," said Patrick. "I was told that that traffic had ended. I should have known better. I believe you are the same man, my first supplier of it, though I cannot see your face."

"I have none," said the hooded man. "How much for this?"

"Oh, ten dollars."

"A pound?"

"No. The lot. I figure about eight cents a pound. That's as high as I can go on contaminated gold. Oh sure, I can clean it. It's only the smart men who say it can't be done. It will even leave a handy profit for myself, though not for you. Gold's about done for."

"That isn't much. I have more of the stuff, a fair small load."

"I can take about this much a week. Can you live on ten dollars a week?"

"Yes. I don't eat any longer -- no stomach. I don't sleep. I just keep moving. I can live on that."

"And when your fair small load is gone?"

"I go up for another."

"They say nobody goes there and returns."

"I do. But it isn't crowded there now."

"I've a feeling that comes to me rarely. I'd like to help you. Are you blind?"

"I believe so. I have pooled what is left of each of my senses, and somehow it serves. I need no help. I'm the only happy man in the world, the one who found the pot of gold. They can't take that from me. I'll go get it forever."

"After you're dead?"

"Oh, yes. I've known space ghosts. Now I'll be one. It isn't any one line you cross. I live in delirium, of course. It doesn't blunt pain, but it does change the viewpoint. On my last trip down, after I knew that I was already dead, that both I and the gold were ghosts, it was easier. Oh, those are long nights in purgatory I tell you, but I'm not irrevocably damned. There's still the gold, you see."

"You're a happier man than I am. So pass it over."

"Here it is."

But when Szild passed the heavy small package to Patrick, he did it with a hand that was stark splintered hones with only a little black flesh around the heel of it.

Patrick T. K. raised an eyebrow at this, but he didn't raise it very high. A sly gold dealer meets all types.

AMONG THE HAIRY EARTHMEN

There is one period of our World History that has aspects so afferent from anything that went before and after that we can only gaze back on those several hundred years and ask:

"Was that ourselves who behaved so?"

Well, no, as a matter of fact, it wasn't. It was beings of another sort who visited us briefly and who acted so gloriously and abominably.

This is the way it was:

The Children had a Long Afternoon free. They could go to any of a dozen wonderful places, but they were already in one.

Seven of them -- full to the craw of wonderful places -- decided to go to Eretz.

"Children are attracted to the oddest and most shambling things," said the Mothers. "Why should they want to go to Eretz?"

"Let them go," said the Fathers. "Let them see -- before they be gone -- one of the few simple peoples left. We ourselves have become a contrived and compromised people. Let the Children be children for half a day."

Eretz was the Planet of the Offense, and therefore it was to be (perhaps it recently had been) the Planet of the Restitution also. But in no other way was it distinguished. The Children had received the tradition of Eretz as children receive all traditions -- like lightning.

Hobble, Michael Goodgrind, Ralpha, Lonnie, Laurie, Bea and Joan they called themselves as they came down on Eretz -- for these were their idea of Eretzi names. But they could have as many names as they wished in their games.

An anomalous intrusion of great heat and force! The rocks ran like water where they came down, and there was formed a scarp-pebble enclave.

It was all shanty country and shanty towns on Eretz -- clumsy hills, badly done plains and piedmonts, ragged fields, uncleansed rivers, whole weedpatches of provinces -- not at all like Home. And the Towns! Firenze, Praha, Venezia, Londra, Colonia, Gant, Roma -- why, they were nothing but towns made out of stone and wood! And these were the greatest of the towns of Eretz, not the meanest.

The Children exploded into action. Like children of the less transcendent races running wild on an ocean beach for an afternoon, they ran wild over continents. They scattered. And they took whatever forms first came into their minds.

Hobble -- dark and smoldering like crippled Vulcan.

Michael Goodgrind -- a broken-nosed bull of a man. How they all howled when he invented that first form!

Ralpha -- like young Mercury.

And Lonnie -- a tall giant with a golden beard.

Laurie was fire, Bea was light, Joan was moon-darkness.

But in these, or in any other forms they took, you'd always know that they were cousins or brethren.

Lonnie went pure Gothic. He had come onto it at the tail end of the thing and he fell in love with it.

"I am the Emperor!" he told the people like giant thunder. He pushed the Emperor Wenceslas off the throne and became Emperor.

"I am the true son of Charles, and you had thought me dead," he told the people. "I am Sigismund." Sigismund was really dead, but Lonnie became Sigismund and reigned, taking the wife and all the castles of Wenceslas. He grabbed off gangling old forts and mountain-rooks and raised howling Eretzi armies to make war. He made new castles. He loved the tall sweeping things and raised them to a new height. Have you never wondered that the last of those castles -- in the late afternoon of the Gothic -- were the tallest and oddest?

One day the deposed Wencesas came back, and he was possessed of a new power.

"Now we will see who is the real Emperor!" the new Wenceslas cried like a rising storm.

They crashed their two forces and broke down each other's bridges and towns and stole the high ladies from each other's strongholds. They wrestled like boys. But they wrestled with a continent.

Lonnie (who was Sigismund) learned that the Wenceslas he battled was Michael Goodgrind wearing a contrived Emperor body. So they fought harder.

There came a new man out of an old royal line.

"I am Jobst," the new man cried. "I will show you two princelings who is the real Emperor!"

He fought the two of them with overwhelming verve. He raised fast-striking Eretzi armies, and used tricks that only a young Mercury would know. He was Ralph, entering the game as the third Emperor. But the two combined against him and broke him at Constance.

They smashed Germany and France and Italy like a clutch of eggs. Never had there been such spirited conflict. The Eretzi were amazed by it all, but they were swept into it; it was the Eretzi who made up the armies.

Even today the Eretzi or Earthers haven't the details of it right in their histories. When the King of Aragon, for an example, mixed into it, they treated him as a separate person. They did not know that Michael Goodgrind was often the King of Aragon, just as Lonnie was often the Duke of Flanders. But, played for itself, the Emperor game would be quite a limited one. Too limited for the children.

The girls played their own roles. Laurie claimed to be thirteen different queens. She was consort of all three Emperors in every one of their guises, and she also dabbled with the Eretzi, She was the wanton of the group.

Bea liked the Grande Dame part and the Lady Bountiful bit. She was very good on Great Renunciations. In her different characters, she beat paths from thrones to nunneries and back again; and she is now known as five different saints. Every time you turn to the Common of the Mass of Holy Women who are Neither Virgins nor Martyrs, you are likely to meet her.

And Joan was the dreamer who may have enjoyed the Afternoon more than any of them.

Laurie made up a melodrama -- Lucrezia Borgia and the Poison Ring. There is an advantage in doing these little melodramas on Eretz. You can have as many characters as you wish -- they come free. You can have them act as extravagantly as you desire -- who is there to object to it? Lucrezia was very well done, as children's burlesques go, and the bodies were strewn from Napoli to Vienne. The Eretzi play with great eagerness any convincing part offered them, and they go to their deaths quite willingly if the part calls for it.

Lonnie made one up called The Pawn-Broker and the Pope. It was in the grand manner, all about the Medici family, and had some very funny episodes in the fourth as Lonnie, who was vain of his acting ability, played Medici parts in five succeeding generations. The drama left more corpses than did the Lucrezia piece, but the killings weren't sudden or showy; the girls had a better touch at the bloody stuff.

Ralph did a Think Piece called One, Two, Three -- Infinity. In its presentation he put all the rest of the Children to roast grandly in Hell; he filled up Purgatory with Eretzi-type people -- the dullards; and for the Paradise he did burlesque of Home. The Eretzi use a cropped version Ralph's piece and call it the Divine Comedy, leaving out a lot of fun.

Bea did a poetic one named the Witches' Bonfire. All Children spent many a happy evening with that one, and they burnt twenty thousand witches. There was something satisfying about those Eretzi autumnal twilights with the scarlet and the frosty fields and the kine lowing in the meadows the evening smell of witches burning. Bea's was really a pastoral piece.

All the Children ranged far except Hobble. Hobble (who was Vulcan) played with his sick toys. He play at Ateliers and Smithies, at Furnaces and Carousels. And often the Children came and watched his work, and joined in while.

They played with the glass from the furnaces. They goldtoned goblets, iridescent glass poems, figures spheres, goblin pitchers, glass music boxes, gargoyle heads, dragon chargers, princess salieras, figurines of lovers, So many things to make of glass! To make, and to smash when made!

But some of the things they exchanged as gifts instead of smashing them -- glass birds and horses, fortune-telling globes that swowed changing people and scenes within, tuned chiming balls that rang like bells, glass cats that sparkled when stroked, wolves and bears, witches that flew.

The Eretzi found some of these things that the Children discared. They studied them and imitated them.

And again, in the interludes of their other games, the Children came back to Hobble's shops where he sometimes worked with looms. They made costumes of wool and linen and silk. They made trains and cloaks and mantles, all the things for their grand masquerades. They fabricated tapestries and rugs and wove in all sorts of scenes: vistas of Home and of Eretz, people and peacocks, fish and cranes, dingles and dromedaries, larks and lovers. They set their creations in the strange ragged scenery of Eretz and in the rich contrived gardens of Home. A spark went from the Children to their weaving so that none could tell where they left off and their creations began.

Then they left poor Hobble and went on to their more vital games.

There were seven of them (six, not counting the backward Hobble), but they seemed a thousand. They built themselves castles in Spain and Gardes in Languedoc. The girls played always at Intrigue, for the high pleasure of it, and to give a causus for the wars. And the wars were the things that the boys seldom tired of. It is fun to play at armies with live warriors; and the Eretzi were live... in a sense.

The Eretzi had had wars and armies and sieges long before this, but they had been aimless things. Oh, this was one field where the Eretzi needed the Children. Consider the battles that the Children engineered that afternoon:

Gallipoli -- how they managed the ships in that one! The Fathers could not have maneuvered more intricately in their four-dimension chess at Home.

Adrianople, Kunovitzza, Dibra, Varna, Hexamilion! It's fun just to call out the bloody names of battles.

Constantinople! That was the one where they first used the big cannon. But who cast the big cannon for the Turks there? In their histories the Eretzi say that it was a man named Orban or Urban, and that he wis Dacian, or he was Hungarian, or he was Danish. How many places did you tell them thalt you came from, Michael Goodgrind?

Belgrade, Trebizond, Morat, Blackheath, Napoli, Donach!

Capua and Taranto -- Ralpha's armies beat Michael's at both of those.

Carignola -- Lonnie foxed both Michael and Ralpha there, and nearly foxed himself. (You didn't intend it all that way, Lonnie. It was seven-cornered luck and you know it!)

Garigliano where the sea was red with blood and the ships were like broken twigs on the water!

Brescia! Ravenna! Who would have believed that such things could be done with a device known as Spanish infantry?

Villalar, Milan, Pavia! Best of all, the sack of Rome! There were a dozen different games blended into that one. The Eretzi discovered new emotions in themselves there -- a deeper depravity and a higher heroism.

Siege of Florence! That one called out the Children's trick. A

wonderfully well played game!

Turin, San Quentin, Moncontour, Mookerhide!

Lepanto! The great sea-siege where the castled ships broke asunder and the tall Turk Ochiali Pasha perished with all his fleet and was drowned forever. But it wasn't so forever as you might suppose, for he was Michael Goodgrind who had more bodies than one. The fish still remember Lepanto. Ne there been such feasting.

Alcazar-Quivar! That was the last of the excellent ones -- the end of the litany. The Children left off the game. They remembered (but conveniently, and after they had worn out the fun of it) that they were forbidden to play Warfare with live soldiers. The Eretzi, left to themselves again, once more conducted their battles as dull and uninspired affairs.

You can put it to a test, now, tonight. Study the conflicts the earlier times, of this high period, and of the time that followed. You will see the difference. For a short two or three centuries you will find really well contrived battles. At before and after there is only ineptitude.

Often the Children played at Jealousies and raised up all the black passions in themselves. They played at Immoralities, for there is an abiding evil in all children.

Maskings and water-carnivals and balls, and forever the emotional intrigue!

Ralpa walked down a valley,, playing a lute and wearing the body of someone else. He luted the birds out of the trees and worked a charm on the whole countryside.

An old crone followed him and called, "Love me when I'm old."

"Sempremai, tuttava," sang Ralpa in Eretzi or Earthian. "For Ever, For Always."

A small girl followed and called, "Love me when I'm young."

"Forever, for always," sang Ralpa.

The weirdest witch in the world followed him and called, "Love me when I'm ugly."

"For always, forever," sang Ralpa, and pulled her down on the grass. He knew that all the creatures had been Laurie playing Bodies.

But a peculiar thing happened: the prelude became more important than the play. Ralpa fell in love with his own song, and forgot Laurie who had inspired it. He made all manner of music and poem -- aubade, madrigal, chanson; and he topped it off with one hundred sonnets. He made them in Eretzi words, Italy words, Languedoc words, and they were excellent. And the Eretzi still copy them.

Ralpa discovered there that poetry and song are Passion Deferred. But Laurie would rather have deferred the song. She was long gone away and taking up with others before Ralpa had finished singing his love for her, but he never noticed that she had left him. After Hobble, Ralpa was the most peculiar of them all.

In the meanwhile, Michael Goodgrind invented another game of Bodies. He made them of marble -- an Eretzi limestone that cuts easily without faulting. And he painted them on canvas. He made the People of Home, and the Eretzi. He said that he would make angels.

"But you cannot make angels," said Joan.

"We know that," said Michael, "but do the Eretzi know at I cannot? I will make angels for the Eretzi."

He made them grotesque, like chicken men, like bird men, with an impossible duplication of humeral function. And the Children laughed at the carven jokes. But Michael had sudden inspiration. He touched his creations up and added an element of nobility. So an icon was born.

All the Children did it then, and they carried it into other mediums. They made the Eretzi, and they made themselves. You can still see their deep features on some of those statues, that family look that was on

them no matter what faces they wore or copied.

Bronze is fun! Bronze horses are the best. Big bronze doors can be an orgy of delight, or bronze bells whose shape is their tone.

The Children went to larger things. They played at Realms and Constitutions, and Banks and Ships and Provinces. Then they came down to smaller things again and played at Books, for Hobble had just invented the printing thing.

Of them all, Hobble had the least imagination. He didn't range wide like the others. He didn't outrage the Eretzi. He spent all his time with his sick toys as though he were a child of much younger years.

The only new body he acquired was another one just like his own. Even this he didn't acquire as did the other Children theirs. He made it laboriously in his shop, and Hobble and the Hobble Creature worked together and you could not tell them apart. One was as dull and laboring as the other.

The Eretzi had no effect whatsoever on the Children, but the Children had great effect on the Eretzi. The Children had the faculty of making whatever little things they needed or wanted, and the Eretzi began to copy them. In this manner the Eretzi came onto many tools, processes, devices and arts that they had never known before. Out of ten the were these:

The Astrolabe, Equatorium, Quadrant, Lathes and Traversing Tools, Ball-Bearings, Gudgeons, Gig-Mills, Barometers, Range-Finders, Cantilever Construction, Machine-Saws, Screw-Jacks, Hammer-Forges and Drop-Forges, Printing, Steel that was more than puddled Iron, Logarithms, Hydraulic Rams, Scrcw-Dies, Spanner-Wrenches, Flux-Solder, Telescopes, Microscopes, Mortising Machines, Wire-Drawing, Stanches (Navigation-Locks), Gear Trains, Paper Making, Compass and Wind-Rhumb, Portulan Chairs and Projection Maps, Pinnule-Sights, Spirit-Levels, Fine Micrometers, Porcelain, Fire-Lock Guns, Music Notation and Music Printing, Complex Pulleys and Snatch-Blocks, the Secd-Drill, Playing Cards (the Children's masquerade faces may still be seen on them), Tobacco, the Violin, Whisky, the Mechanical Clock.

They were forbidden, of course, to display any second-aspect powers or machines, as these would disrupt things. But they disrupted accidentally in buidling, in tooling, in armies and navies, in harbors and canals, in towns and bridges, in ways of thinking and recording. They started a thing that couldn't be reversed. It was only the One Afternoon they were here, only two or three Eretzi Centuries, but they set a trend. They overwhelmed by the very number of their new devices, and it could never be simple on Eretz again.

There were many thousands of Eretz days and nights in that Long Afternoon. The Children had begun to tire of it, and the hour was growing late. For the last time they wandered off, this time all Seven of them together.

In the bodies of Kings and their Ladies, they strode down a High Road in the Levant. They were wondering what last thing they could contrive, when they found their way blocked by a Pilgrim with a staff.

"Let's tumble the hairy Eretzi," shouted Ralpa. "Let him not stand in the way of Kings!" For Ralpa was King of Bulgaria that day.

But they did not tumble the Pilgrim. That man knew how to handle his staff, and he laid the bunch of them low. It was nothing to him that they were the high people of the World who ordered Nations. He flogged them flat.

"Bleak Children!" that Pilgrim cried out as he beat them into the ground. "Unfledged little oafs! Is it so that you waste your Afternoon on Earth? I'll give you what your Fathers forgot."

Seven-colored thunder, how he could use that staff! He smashed the gaudy bodies of the Children and broke army of their damnable bones. Did he

know that it didn't matter? Did he understand that the bodies they wore were only for an antic?

"Lay off, old Father!" begged Michael Goodgrind, bleeding and half beaten into the earth. "Stay your bloody bludgeon. You do not know who we are."

"I know you," maintained the Pilgrim mountainously.

"You are ignorant Children who have abused the Afternoon given you on Earth. You have marred and ruined and warped everything you have touched."

"No, no," Ralpa protested -- as he set in new bones for his old damaged ones -- "You do not understand. We have advanced you a thousand of your years in one of our afternoons. Consider the Centuries we have saved you! It's as though we had increased your life by that thousand years."

"We have all the time there is," said the Pilgrim solidly. "We were well and seriously along our road, and it was not so crooked as the one you have brought us over. You have broken our sequence with your meddling. You've set us back more ways than you've advanced us. You've shattered our Unity."

"Pigs have unity!" Joan shouted. "We've brought you diversity. Think deep. Consider all the machines we have showed you, the building and the technique. I can name you a thousand things we've given you. You will never be the same again."

"True. We will never be the same," said the Pilgrim. "You may not be an unmixed curse. I'm a plain man and I don't know. Surety is one of the things you've lost us. But you befouled us. You played the game of Immoralities and taught it to us earthlings."

"You had it already," Laurie insisted. "We only brought elegance instead of piggishness to its practice." Immoralities was Laurie's own game, and she didn't like to hear it slighted.

"You have killed many thousands of us in your battles," said the Pilgrim. "You're a bitter fruit -- sweet at the first taste only."

"You would yourselves have killed the same numbers in battles, and the battles wouldn't have been so good," said Michael. "Do you not realize that we are the higher race have roots of great antiquity."

"We have roots older than antiquity," averred the Pilgrim. "You are wicked Children without compassion."

"Compassion? For the Eretzi?" shouted Lonnie in disbelief.

"Do you have compassion for mice?" demanded Ralph

"Yes. I have compassion for mice," the Pilgrim said softly.

"I make a guess," Ralpa shot in shrewdly after they had all repaired their damaged bodies. "You travel as a Pilgrim, and Pilgrims sometimes come from very far away. You are not Eretzi. You are one of the Fathers from Home going in the guise of an Eretzi Pilgrim. You have this routine so that sometimes one of you comes to this world -- to see how it goes. You may come to investigate an event said to have happened on Eretz a day ago."

Ralpa did not mean an Eretzi day ago, but a day ago at Home. The High Road they were on was in Coele-Syria not far from where the Event was thought to have happened, and Ralpa posted his point:

"You are no Eretzi, or you would not dare to confront us, knowing what we are."

"You guess wrong in this and in everything," said the Pilgrim. "I am of this Earth, earthly. And I will not be intimidated by a gangle of children of whatever species! You're a weaker flesh than ourselves. You hide in other bodies, and you get earthlings to do your slaughter. And you cannot stand up to my staff!"

"Go home, you witless weanlings!" and he raised his terrible staff again.

"Our time is nearly up. We will be gone soon," said Joan softly.

The last game they played? They played Saints -- for the Evil they had done in playing Bodies wrongly, and in playing Wars with live soldiers. But they repented of the things only after they had enjoyed them for the Long Afternoon. They played Saints in hairshirt and ashes, and revived that affair among the Eretzi.

And finally they all assembled and took off from the high hill between Prato and Firenze in Italy. The rocks flowed like water where they left, and now there would be a double scarp formation.

They were gone, and that was the end of them here.

There is a theory, however, that one of the Hobbles remained and is with us yet. Hobble and his creature could not be told apart and could not finally tell themselves apart. They flipped an Eretzi coin, Emperors or Shields, to see which one would go and which one would stay. One went and one stayed. One is still here.

But, after all, Hobble was only concerned with the sick toys, the mechanical things, the material inventions. Would it have been better if Ralpa or Joan stayed with us? They'd have burned us crisp by now! They were damnable and irresponsible children.

This short Historical Monograph was not assembled for a distraction or an amusement. We consider the evidence that Children have spent their short vacations here more than once and in both hemispheres. We set out the theses in ordered parallels and we discover that we have begun to tremble unaccountably.

When last came such visitors here? What thing has beset us during the last long Eretzi lifetime?

We consider a new period -- and it impinges on the Present -- with aspects so different from anything that went before that we can only gasp aghast and gasp in sick wonder:

"Is it ourselves who behave so?"

"Is it beings of another sort, or have we become beings?"

"Are we ourselves? Are these our deeds?"

There are great deep faces looking over our shoulder, there are cold voices of ancient Children jeering "Compassion? For Earthlings?" there is nasty frozen laughter that does belong to our species.

NARROW YALLEY

In the year 1893, land allotments in severalty were made to the remaining eight hundred and twenty-one Pawnee Indians. Each would receive one hundred and sixty acres of land and no more, and thereafter the Pawnees would be expected to pay taxes on their land, the same as the White-Eyes did.

"Kitkehahke!" Clarence Big-Saddle cussed. "You can't kick a dog around proper on a hundred and sixty acres. And I sure am not hear before about this pay taxes on land."

Clarence Big-Saddle selected a nice green valley for his allotment. It was one of the half dozen plots he had always regarded as his own. He sodded around the summer lodge that he had there and made it an all-season home. But he sure didn't intend to pay taxes on it.

So he burned leaves and bark and made a speech:

"That my valley be always wide and flourish and green and such stuff as that!" he orated in Pawnee chant style. "But that it be narrow if an intruder come."

He didn't have any balsam bark to burn. He threw on a little cedar bark instead. He didn't have any elder leaves. He used a handful of jack-oak leaves. And he forgot the word. How you going to work it if you forget the word?

"Petahauerat!" he howled out with the confidence he hoped would fool the fates.

"That's the same long of a word," he said in a low aside to himself. But he was doubtful. "What am I, a White Man, a burr-tailed jack, a new kind of nut to think it will work?" he asked. "I have to laugh at me. Oh well, we see."

He threw the rest of the bark and the leaves on the fire, and he hollered the wrong word out again.

And he was answered by a dazzling sheet of summer lightning.

"Skidi!" Clarence Big-Saddle swore. "It worked. I didn't think it would."

Clarence Big-Saddle lived on his land for many years, and he paid no taxes. Intruders were unable to come down to his place. The land was sold for taxes three times, but nobody ever came down to claim it. Finally, it was carried as open land on the books. Homesteaders filed on it several times, but none of them fulfilled the qualification of living on the land.

Half a century went by. Clarence Big-Saddle called his son.

"I've had it, boy," he said. "I think I'll just go in the house and die."

"Okay, Dad," the son Clarence Little-Saddle said. "I'm going in to town to shoot a few games of pool with the boys. I'll bury you when I get back this evening." So the son Clarence Little-Saddle inherited. He also lived on the land for many years without paying taxes.

There was a disturbance in the courthouse one day. The place seemed to be invaded in force, but actually there were but one man, one woman, and five children. "I'm Robert Rampart," said the man, "and we want the Land Office."

"I'm Robert Rampart Junior," said a nine-year-old gangler, "and we want it pretty blamed quick."

"I don't think we have anything like that," the girl at the desk said. "Isn't that something they had a long time ago?"

"Ignorance is no excuse for inefficiency, my dear," said Mary Mabel Rampart, an eight-year-old who could easily pass for eight and a half. "After I make my report, I wonder who will be sitting at your desk tomorrow."

"You people are either in the wrong state or the wrong century," the girl said.

"The Homestead Act still obtains," Robert Rampart insisted. "There is one tract of land carried as open in this county. I want to file on it."

Cecilia Rampart answered the knowing wink of a beefy man at the distant desk. "Hi," she breathed as she slinked over. "I'm Cecilia Rampart, but my stage name is Cecilia San Juan. Do you think that seven is too young to play ingenue roles?"

"Not for you," the man said. "Tell your folks to come over here."

"Do you know where the Land Office is?" Cecilia asked.

"Sure. It's the fourth left-hand drawer of my desk. The smallest office we got in the whole courthouse. We don't use it much any more."

The Ramparts gathered around. The beefy man started to make out the papers.

"This is the land description," Robert Rampart began. "Why, you've got it down already. How did you know?"

"I've been around here a long time," the man answered.

They did the paper work, and Robert Rampart filed on the land.

"You won't be able to come onto the land itself though," the man said.

"Why won't I?" Rampart demanded. "Isn't the description accurate?"

"Oh, I suppose so. But nobody's ever been able get to the land. It's become a sort of joke."

"Well, I intend to get to the bottom of that joke," Rampart insisted. "I will occupy the land, or I will fin out why not."

"I'm not sure about that" the beefy man said. "The last man to file on the land, about a dozen years ago, wasn't able to occupy the land. And he

wasn't able to say why he couldn't. It's kind of interesting, the look on their faces after they try it for a day or two, and then give it up."

The Ramparts left the courthouse, loaded into their camper, and drove out to find their land. They stopped it at the house of a cattle and wheat farmer named Charley Dublin. Dublin met them with a grin which indicated he had been tipped off.

"Come along if you want to, folks," Dublin said. "The easiest way is on foot across my short pasture here. Your land's directly west of mine."

They walked the short distance to the border.

"My name is Tom Rampart, Mr. Dublin." Six-year old Tom made conversation as they walked. "But my name is really Ramires, and not Tom. I am the issue of an indiscretion of my mother in Mexico several years ago."

"The boy is a kidder," Mr. Dublin," said the mother Nina Rampart, defending herself. "I have never been in Mexico, but sometimes I have the urge to disappear there forever."

"Ah yes, Mrs. Rampart. And what is the name of the youngest boy here?" Charley Dublin asked.

"Fatty," said Fatty Rampart.

(But surely that is not your given name?"

"Audifax," said five-year-old Fatty.

"Ah well, Audifax, Fatty, are you a kidder too?"

"He's getting better at it, Mr. Dublin," Mary Mabel said. "He was a twin till last week. His twin was named Skinny. Mama left Skinny unguarded while she was out tippling, and there were wild dogs in the neighborhood. When Mama got back, do you know what was left of Skinny? Two neck bones and an ankle bone. That was all."

"Poor Skinny," Dublin said. "Well, Rampart, this is the fence and the end of my land. Yours is just beyond."

"Is that ditch on my land?" Rampart asked.

"That ditch is your land."

"I'll have it filled in. It's a dangerous deep cut even if it is narrow. And the other fence looks like a good one, and I sure have a pretty plot of land beyond it."

"No, Rampart, the land beyond the second fence belongs to Holister Hyde," Charley Dublin said. "That second fence is the end of your land."

"Now, just wait a minute, Dublin! There's something wrong here. My land is one hundred and sixty acres, which would be a half mile on a side. Where's my half-mile width?"

"Between the two fences."

"That's not eight feet."

"Doesn't look like it, does it, Rampart? Tell you what -- there's plenty of throwing-sized rocks around. Try to throw one across it."

"I'm not interested in any such boys' games," Rampart exploded. "I want my land."

But the Rampart children were interested in such games. They got with it with those throwing rocks. They winged them out over the little gully. The stones acted funny. They hung in the air, as it were, and diminished in size. And they were small as pebbles when they dropped down, down into the gully. None of them could throw a stone across that ditch, and they were throwing kids.

"You and your neighbor have conspired to fence open land for your own use," Rampart charged.

"No such thing, Rampart," Dublin said cheerfully. "My land checks perfectly. So does Hyde's. So does yours, if we knew how to check it. It's like one of those trick topological drawings. It really is half a mile from here to there, but the eye gets lost somewhere. It's your land. Crawl through the fence and figure it out."

Rampart crawled through the fence, and drew himself up to jump the gully. Then he hesitated. He a glimpse of just how deep that gully was. Still, it wasn't five feet across.

There was a heavy fence post on the ground, designed for use as a corner post. Rampart up-ended it with some effort. Then he shoved it to fall and bridge the gully. But it fell short, and it shouldn't have. An eight-foot post should bridge a five-foot gully.

The post fell into the gully, and rolled and rolled and rolled. It spun as though it were rolling outward, but it made no progress except vertically. The post came to rest on a ledge of the gully, so close that Rampart could almost reach out and touch it, but it now appeared no bigger than a match stick.

"There is something wrong with that fence post, or with the world, or with my eyes," Robert Rampart said. "I wish I felt dizzy so I could blame it on that."

"There's a little game that I sometimes play with my neighbor Hyde when we're both out," Dublin said. "I've heavy rifle and I train it on the middle of his forehead as he stands on the other side of the ditch apparently eight feet away. I fire it off then (I'm a good shot) and I hear it whine across. It'd kill him dead if things were as they seem. But Hyde's in no danger. The shot always bangs into that little scuff of rocks and boulders about thirty feet below him. I can see it kick up the rock dust there, and the sound of it rattling into those little boulders comes back to me in about two and a all seconds."

A bull-bat (poor people call it the night-hawk) raveled around in the air and zoomed out over the narrow ditch, but it did not reach the other side. The bird dropped below ground level and could be seen against the background of the other side of the ditch. It grew smaller and hazier as though at a distance of three or four hundred yards. The white bars on its wings could no longer be discerned; then the bird itself could hardly be discerned; but it was far short of the other side of the five-foot ditch.

A man identified by Charley Dublin as the neighbor Hollister Hyde had appeared on the other side of the little ditch. Hyde grinned and waved. He shouted something, but could not be heard.

"Hyde and I both read mouths," Dublin said, "so we can talk across the ditch easy enough. Which kid wants to play chicken? Hyde will barrel a good-sized rock right at your head, and if you duck or flinch you're chicken."

"Me! Me!" Audifax Rampart challenged. And Hyde, a big man with big hands, did barrel a fearsome jagged rock right at the head of the boy. It would have killed him if things had been as they appeared. But the rock diminished to nothing and disappeared into the ditch. Here was a phenomenon: things seemed real-sized on either side of the ditch, but they diminished coming out over the ditch either way.

"Everybody game for it?" Robert Rampart Junior asked.

"We won't get down there by standing here," Mary Mabel said.

"Nothing wenchered, nothing gained," said Cecilia. "I got that from an ad for a sex comedy."

Then the five Rampart kids ran down into the gully. Ran down is right. It was almost as if they ran down the vertical face of a cliff. They couldn't do that. The gully was no wider than the stride of the biggest kids. But the gully diminished those children, it ate them alive. They were doll-sized. They were acorn-sized. They were running for minute after minute across a ditch that was only five feet across. They were going, deeper in it, and getting smaller. Robert Rampart was roaring his alarm, and his wife Nina was screaming. Then she stopped. "What am I carrying on so loud about?" she asked herself. "It looks like fun. I'll do it too."

She plunged into the gully, diminished in size as the children had done, and ran at a pace to carry her a hundred yards away across a gully only five feet wide.

That Robert Rampart stirred things up for a while then. He got the sheriff there, and the highway patrolmen. A ditch had stolen his wife and five children, he said, and maybe had killed them. And if anybody laughs,

there may be another killing. He got the colonel of the State National Guard there, and a command post set up. He got a couple of airplane pilots. Robert Rampart had one quality: when he hollered, people came.

He got the newsmen out from T-Town, and the eminent scientists, Dr. Velikof Vonk, Arpad Arkabaranan, and Willy McGilly. That bunch turns up every time you get on a good one. They just happen to be in that part of the country where something interesting is going on.

They attacked the thing from all four sides and the top, and by inner and outer theory. If a thing measures half a mile on each side, and the sides are straight, there just has to be something in the middle of it. They took pictures from the air, and they turned out perfect. They proved that Robert Rampart had the prettiest hundred and sixty acres in the country, the larger part of it being a lush green valley, and all of it being half a mile on a side, and situated just where it should be. They took ground-level photos then, and it showed a beautiful half-mile stretch of land between the boundaries of Charley Dublin and Hollister Hyde. But a man isn't a camera. None of them could see that beautiful spread with the eyes in their heads. Where was it?

Down in the valley itself everything was normal. It really was half a mile wide and no more than eighty feet deep with a very gentle slope. It was warm and sweet, and beautiful with grass and grain.

Nina and the kids loved it, and they rushed to see what squatter had built that little house on their land. A house, or a shack. It had never known paint, but paint would have spoiled it. It was built of split timbers dressed near smooth with ax and draw knife, chinked with white clay, and sodded up to about half its height. And there was an interloper standing by the little lodge.

"Here, here what are you doing on our land?" Robert Rampart Junior demanded of the man. "Now you just shamble off again wherever you came from. I'll bet you're a thief too, and those cattle are stolen."

"Only the black-and-white calf," Clarence Little-Saddle said. "I couldn't resist him, but the rest are mine. I guess I'll just stay around and see that you folks get settled all right."

"Is there any wild Indians around here?" Fatty Rampart asked.

"No, not really. I go on a bender about every three months and get a little bit wild, and there's a couple Osage boys from Gray Horse that get noisy sometimes, but that's about all," Clarence Little-Saddle said.

"You certainly don't intend to palm yourself off on us as an Indian," Mary Mabel challenged. "You'll find us a little too knowledgeable for that."

"Little girl, you might as well tell this cow there's no room for her to be a cow since you're so knowledgeable. She thinks she's a short-horn cow named Sweet Virginia; I think I'm a Pawnee Indian named Clarence. Break it to us real gentle if we're not."

"If you're an Indian where's your war bonnet? There's not a feather on you anywhere."

"How you be sure? There's a story that we got feathers instead of hair on -- Aw, I can't tell a joke like that to a little girl! How come you're not wearing the Iron Crown of Lombardy if you're a white girl? How you expect me to believe you're a little white girl and your folks came from Europe a couple hundred years ago if you don't wear it? There are six hundred tribes, and only one of them, the Oglala Sioux, had the war bonnet, and only the big leaders, never more than two or three of them alive at one time, wore it."

"Your analogy is a little strained," Mary Mabel said. "Those Indians we saw in Florida and the ones at Atlantic City had war bonnets, and they couldn't very well have been the kind of Sioux you said. And just last night on the TV in the motel, those Massachusetts Indians put a war bonnet on the President and called him the Great White Father. You mean to tell me that they were all phonies? Hey, who's laughing at who here?"

"If you're an Indian where's your bow and arrow?" Tom Rampart interrupted. "I bet you can't even shoot one."

"You're sure right there," Clarence admitted. "I never shot one of those things but once in my life. They used to have an archery range in Boulder Park over in T-Town, and you could rent the things and shoot at targets tied to hay bales. Hey, I barked my whole forearm and nearly broke my thumb when the bow-string thwacked home. I couldn't shoot that thing at all. I don't see how anybody ever could shoot one of them."

"Okay, kids," Nina Rampart called to her brood. "Let's start pitching this junk out of the shack so we can move in. Is there any way we can drive our camper down here, Clarence?"

"Sure, there's a pretty good dirt road, and it's a lot wider than it looks from the top. I got a bunch of green bills in an old night charley in the shack. Let me get them, and then I'll clear out for a while. The shack hasn't been cleaned out for seven years, since the last time this happened. I'll show you the road to the top, and you can bring your car down it."

"Hey, you old Indian, you lied!" Cecilia Rampart shrilled from the doorway of the shack. "You do have a war bonnet. Can I have it?"

"I didn't mean to lie, I forgot about that thing," Clarence Little-Saddle said. "My son Clarence Bare-Back sent that to me from Japan for a joke a long time ago. Sure, you can have it."

All the children were assigned tasks carrying the junk out of the shack and setting fire to it. Nina Rampart and Clarence Little-Saddle ambled up to the rim of the valley by the vehicle road that was wider than it looked from the top.

"Nina, you're back! I thought you were gone forever, Robert Rampart jittered at seeing her again. "What -- where are the children?"

"Why, I left them down in the valley, Robert. That is, ah, down in that little ditch right there. Now you've got me worried again. I'm going to drive the camper down there and unload it. You'd better go on down and lend a hand too, Robert, and quit talking to all these funny-looking men here."

And Nina went back to Dublin's place for the camper. "It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for that intrepid woman to drive a car down into that narrow ditch," the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk said.

"You know how that camel does it?" Clarence Little-Saddle offered, appearing of a sudden from nowhere. "He just closes one of his own eyes and flops back his ears and plunges right through. A camel is mighty narrow when he closes one eye and flops back his ears. Besides, they use a big-eyed needle in the act."

"Where'd this crazy man come from?" Robert Rampart demanded, jumping three feet in the air. "Things are coming out of the ground now. I want my land! I want my children! I want my wife! Whoops, here she comes driving it. Nina, you can't drive a loaded camper into a little ditch like that! You'll be killed or collapsed!"

Nina Rampart drove the loaded camper into the little ditch at a pretty good rate of speed. The best of belief is that she just closed one eye and plunged right through. The car diminished and dropped, and it was smaller than a toy car. But it raised a pretty good cloud of dust as it bumped for several hundred yards across a ditch that was only five feet wide.

"Rampart, it's akin to the phenomenon known as looming, only in reverse," the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan explained as he attempted to throw a rock across the narrow ditch. The rock rose very high in the air, seemed to hang at its apex while it diminished to the size of a grain of sand, and then fell into the ditch not six inches of the way across. There isn't anybody going to throw across a half-mile valley even if it looks five feet. "Look at a rising moon sometimes, Rampart. It appears very large, as though covering a great sector of the horizon, but it only covers one-half of a degree. It is hard to believe that you could set seven hundred and

twenty of such large moons side by side around the horizon, or that it would take one hundred and eighty of the big things to reach from the horizon to a point overhead. It is also hard to believe that your valley is twelve hundred times as wide as it appears, but it has been surveyed, and it is."

"I want my land. I want my children. I want my wife," Robert chanted dully. "Damn, I let her get away again."

"I tell you, Rampy," Clarence Little-Saddle squared on him, "a man that lets his wife get away twice doesn't deserve to keep her. I give you till nightfall; then you forfeit. I've taken a liking to the brood. One of us is going to be down there tonight."

After a while a bunch of them were off in that little tavern on the road between Cleveland and Osage. It was only half a mile away. If the valley had run in the other direction, it would have been only six feet away.

"It is a psychic nexus in the form of an elongated dome," said the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk. "It is maintained subconsciously by the concatenation of at least two minds, the stronger of them belonging to a man dead for many years. It has apparently existed for a little less than a hundred years, and in another hundred years it will be considerably weakened. We know from our checking out folk tales of Europe as well as Cambodia that these ensorceled areas seldom survive for more than two hundred and fifty years. The person who first set such a thing in being will usually lose interest in it, and in all worldly things, within a hundred years of his own death. This is a simple thanato-psychic limitation. As a short-term device, the thing has been used several times as a military tactic.

"This psychic nexus, as long as it maintains itself, causes group illusion, but it is really a simple thing. It doesn't fool birds or rabbits or cattle, or cameras, only humans. There is nothing meteorological about it. It is strictly psychological. I'm glad I was able to give a scientific explanation to it or it would have worried me."

"It is continental fault coinciding with a noospheric fault," said the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan. "The valley really is half a mile wide, and at the same time it really is only five feet wide. If we measured correctly, we would get these dual measurements. Of course it is meteorological! Everything including dreams is meteorological. It is the animals and cameras which are fooled, as lacking a true dimension; it is only humans who see the true duality. The phenomenon should be common along the whole continental fault where the earth gains or loses half a mile that has to go somewhere. Likely it extends through the whole sweep of the Cross Timbers. Many of those trees appear twice, and many do not appear at all. A man in the proper state of mind could farm that land or raise cattle on it, but it doesn't really exist. There is a clear parallel in the Luftspiegelungthal sector in the Black Forest of Germany which exists, or does not exist, according to the circumstances and to the attitude of the beholder. Then we have the case of Mad Mountain in Morgan; County, Tennessee, which isn't there all the time; and also the Little Lobo Mirage south of Presidio, Texas, from which twenty thousand barrels of water were pumped in one two-and-a-half-year period before the mirage reverted to mirage status. I'm glad I was able to give a scientific explanation to this or it would have worried me."

"I just don't understand how he worked it," said the eminent scientist Willy McGilly; "Cedar bark, jack-oak leaves, and the world 'Petahauerat.' The thing's impossible! When I was a boy and we wanted to make a hide-out, we used bark from the skunk-spruce tree, the leaves of a box-elder, and the word was 'Boadicea.' All three elements are wrong here. I cannot find a scientific explanation for it, and it does worry me."

They went back to Narrow Valley. Robert Rampart was still chanting dully: "I want my land. I want my children. I want my wife."

Nina Rampart came chugging up out of the narrow ditch in the camper

and emerged through that little gate a few yards down the fence row.

"Supper's ready and we're tired of waiting for you, Robert," she said. "A fine homesteader you are! Afraid to come onto your own land! Come along now; I'm tired of waiting for you."

"I want my land! I want my children! I want my wife!" Robert Rampart still chanted. "Oh, there you are, Nina. You stay here this time. I want my land! I want my children! I want an answer to this terrible thing."

"It is time we decided who wears the pants in this family," Nina said stoutly. She picked up her husband, slung him over her shoulder, carried him to the camper and dumped him in, slammed (as it seemed) a dozen doors at once, and drove furiously down into the Narrow Valley, which already seemed wider.

Why, that place was getting normaler and normaler the minute! Pretty soon it looked almost as wide as was supposed to be. The psychic nexus in the form an elongated dome had collapsed. The continental fault that coincided with the noospheric fault had faced facts and decided to conform. The Ramparts were in effective possession of their homestead, and Narrow Valley was as normal as any place anywhere.

"I have lost my land," Clarence Little-Saddle moaned. "It was the land of my father Clarence Big-Saddle, and I meant it to be the land of my son Clarence Bare-Back. It looked so narrow that people did not notice how wide it was, and people did not try to enter it. Now I have lost it."

Clarence Little-Saddle and the eminent scientist Willy McGilly were standing on the edge of Narrow Valley, which now appeared its true half-mile extent. The moon was just rising, so big that it filled a third of the sky. Who would have imagined that it would take a hundred and eight of such monstrous things to reach from the horizon to a point overhead, and yet you could sight it with sighters and figure it so.

"I had a little bear-cat by the tail and I let go," Clarence groaned. "I had a fine valley for free, and I have lost it. I am like that hard-luck guy in the funny-paper or Job in the Bible. Destitution is my lot."

Willy McGilly looked around furtively. They were alone on the edge of the half-mile-wide valley.

"Let's give it a booster shot," Willy McGilly said.

Hey, those two got with it! They started a snapping fire and began to throw the stuff onto it. Bark from the dog-elm tree -- how do you know it won't work?

It was working! Already the other side of the valley seemed a hundred yards closer, and there were alarmed noises coming up from the people in the valley.

Leaves from a black locust tree--and the valley narrowed still more! There was, more over, terrified screaming of both children and big people from the depths of Narrow Valley, and the happy voice of Mary Mabel Rampart chanting "Earthquake! Earthquake!"

"That my valley be always wide and flourish and such stuff, and green with money and grass!" Clarence Little-Saddle orated in Pawnee chant style, "but that it be narrow if intruders come, smash them like bugs!"

People, that valley wasn't over a hundred feet wide; now, and the screaming of the people in the bottom of the valley had been joined by the hysterical coughing of the camper car staring up.

Willy and Clarence threw everything that was left on the fire. But the word? The word? Who remembers the word?

"Corsicanatexas!" Clarence Little-Saddle howled out with confidence he hoped would fool the fates.

He was answered not only by a dazzling sheet of summer lightning, but also by thunder and raindrops.

"Chahiksi!" Clarence Little-Saddle swore. "It worked. I didn't think it would. It will be all right now. I can use the rain."

The valley was again a ditch only five feet wide.

The camper car struggled out of Narrow Valley through the little gate. It was smashed flat as a sheet of paper, and the screaming kids and people in it had only one dimension.

"It's closing in! It's closing in!" Robert Rampart roared, and he was no thicker than if he had been made out of cardboard.

"We're smashed like bugs," the Rampart boys intoned. "We're thin like paper.

"Mort, ruine, ecrasement!" spoke-acted Cecilia Rampart like the great tragedienne she was.

"Help! Help!" Nina Rampart croaked, but she winked at Willy and Clarence as they rolled by. "This homesteading jag always did leave me a little flat."

"Don't throw those paper dolls away. They might be the Ramparts," Mary Mabel called.

The camper car coughed again and bumped along on level ground. This couldn't last forever. The car was widening out as it bumped along.

"Did we overdo it, Clarence?" Willy McGilly asked. "What did one flat-lander say to the other?"

"Dimension of us never got around," Clarence said. "No, I don't think we overdid it, Willy. That car must be eighteen inches wide already, and they all ought to be normal by the time they reach the main road. The next time I do it, I think I'll throw wood-grain plastic on the fire to see who's kidding who."

PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI

ABSTRACT FROM JOINT REPORT TO THE GENERAL DUBUQUE PTA CONCERNING THE PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI, Subtitled Critical Observations of a Parallel Culture on a Neighboring World, and Evaluations of THE OTHER WAY OF EDUCATION.

Extract from the Day Book:

"Where," we asked the Information Factor at Camiroi City Terminal, "is the office of the local PTA?"

"Isn't any," he said cheerfully.

"You mean that in Camiroi City, the metropolis of the planet, there is no PTA?" our chairman Paul Piper asked with disbelief.

"Isn't any office of it. But you're poor strangers, so you deserve an answer even if you can't frame your questions properly. See that elderly man sitting on the bench and enjoying the sun? Go tell him you need a PTA. He'll make you one."

"Perhaps the initials convey a different meaning on Camiroi," said Miss Munch, the first surrogate chairman. "By them we mean --" "Parent Teachers Apparatus, of course. Colloquial English is one of the six Earthian languages required here, you know. Don't be abashed. He's a fine person, and he enjoys doing things for strangers. He'll be glad to make you a PTA."

We were nonplussed, but we walked over to the man indicated.

"We are looking for the local PTA, sir," said Miss Smice, our second surrogate chairman. "We were told that you might help us."

"Oh, certainly," said the elderly Camiroi gentleman. "One of you arrest that man walking there. and we'll get started with it."

"Do what?" asked our Mr. Piper.

"Arrest him. I have noticed that your own words sometimes do not convey a meaning to you. I often wonder how you do communicate among yourselves. Arrest, take into custody, seize by any force physical or moral, and bring him here."

"Yes, sir," cried Miss Hanks, our third surrogate chairman. She enjoyed things like this. She arrested the walking Camiroi man with force partly physical and partly moral and brought him to the group.

"It's a PTA they want, Meander," the elder Camiroi said to the one arrested. "Grab three more, and we'll get started. Let the lady help. She's good at it."

Our Miss Hanks and the Camiroi man named Meander arrested three other Camiroi men and brought them to the group.

"Five. It's enough," said the elderly Camiroi. "We are hereby constituted a PTA and ordered into random action. Now, how can we accommodate you, good Earth people?"

"But are you legal? Are you five persons competent to be a PTA?" demanded our Mr. Piper.

"Any Camiroi citizen is competent to do any job on the planet of Camiroi," said one of the Camiroi men (we learned later that his name was Talarium), "otherwise Camiroi would be in a sad shape."

"It may be," said our Miss Smice sourly. "It all seems very informal. What if one of you had to be World President?"

"The odds are that it won't come to one man in ten," said the elderly Camiroi (his name was Philoxenus). "I'm the only one of this group ever to serve as president of this Planet, and it was a pleasant week I spent in the Office. Now to the point. How can we accommodate you?"

"We would like to see one of your schools in session," said our Mr. Piper. "We would like to talk to the teachers and the students. We are here to compare the two systems of education."

"There is no comparison," said old Philoxenus, "-- meaning no offense. Or no more than a little. On Camiroi, we practice Education. On Earth, they play a game, but they call it by the same name. That makes the confusion. Come. We'll go to a school in session."

"And to a public school," said Miss Smice suspiciously. "Do not fob off any fancy private school on us as typical."

"That would be difficult," said Philoxenus. "There is no public school in Camiroi City and only two remaining on the Planet. Only a small fraction of one percent of the students of Camiroi are in public schools. We maintain that there is no more reason for the majority of children to be educated in a public school than to be raised in a public orphanage. We realize, of course, that on Earth you have made a sacred buffalo of the public school"

"Sacred cow," said our Mr. Piper.

"Children and Earthlings should be corrected when they use words wrongly," said Philoxenus. "How else will they learn the correct forms? The animal held sacred in your own near Orient was of the species bos bubalus rather than bos bos, a buffalo rather than a cow. Shall we go to a school?"

"If it cannot be a public school, at least let it be a typical school," said Miss Smice.

"That again is impossible," said Philoxenus. "Every school on Camiroi is in some respect atypical."

We went to visit an atypical school.

INCIDENT: Our first contact with the Camiroi students was a violent one. One of them, a lively little boy about eight years old, ran into Miss Munch, knocked her down, and broke her glasses. Then he jabbered something in an unknown tongue.

"Is that Camiroi?" asked Mr. Piper with interest. "From what I have heard, I supposed the language to have a harsher and fuller sound."

"You mean you don't recognize it?" asked Philoxenus with amusement "What a droll admission from an educator. The boy is very young and very ignorant. Seeing that you were Earthians, he spoke in Hindi, which the tongue used by more Earthians than any other. No, no, Xypete, they are of the minority who speak English. You can tell it by their colorless texture and the narrow heads on them."

"I say you sure do have slow reaction, lady," the little boy Xypete explained. "Even subhumans should react faster than that. You just stand there and gape and let me bowl you over. You want me analyze you and see why

you react so slow?"

"No! No!"

"You seem unhurt in structure from the fall," the little boy continued, "but if I hurt you I got to fix you. Just strip down to your shift, and I'll go over you and make sure you're all right"

"No! No! No!"

"It's all right," said Philoxenus. "All Camiroi children learn primary medicine in the first grade, setting bones and healing contusions and such."

"No! No! I'm all right But he's broken my glasses."

"Come along, Earthside lady, I'll make you so others," said the little boy. "With your slow reaction time you sure can't afford the added handicap of defective vision. Shall I fit you with contacts?"

"No. I want glasses just like those which were broken. Oh heavens, what will I do?"

"You come, I do," said the little boy. It was rather revealing to us that the little boy was able to test Miss Munch's eyes, grind lenses, make frames and have her fixed up within three minutes. "I have made some improvements over those you wore before," the boy said, "to help compensate for your slow reaction time."

"Are all the Camiroi students so talented?" Mr. Piper asked. He was impressed.

"No. Xypete is unusual," Philoxenus said. "Most students would not be able to make a pair of glasses so quickly or competently till they were at least nine."

RANDOM INTERVIEW5: "How rapidly do you read?" Miss Hanks asked a young girl.

"One hundred and twenty words a minute," the girl said.

"On Earth some of the girl students your age have learned to read at the rate of five hundred words a minute," Miss Hanks said proudly.

"When I began disciplined reading, I was reading at the rate of four thousand words a minute," the girl said. "They had quite a time correcting me of it. I had to take remedial reading, and my parents were ashamed of me. Now I've learned to read almost slow enough."

"I don't understand," said Miss Hanks.

"Do you know anything about Earth History or Geography?" Miss Smice asked a middle-sized boy.

"We sure are sketchy on it, lady. There isn't very much over there, is there?"

"Then you have never heard of Dubuque?"

"Count Dubuque interests me. I can't say as much for the city named after him. I always thought that the Count handled the matters of the conflicting French and Spanish land grants and the basic claims of the Sauk and Fox Indians very well. References to the town now carry a humorous connotation, and 'School-Teacher from Dubuque' has become a folk archetype."

"Thank you," said Miss Smice, "or do I thank you?"

"What are you taught of the relative humanity of the Earthians and the Camiroi and of their origins?" Miss Munch asked a Camiroi girl.

"The other four worlds, Earth (Gaea), Kentauron Mikron, Dahae and Astrobe were all settled from Camiroi. That is what we are taught We are also given the humorous aside that if it isn't true we will still hold it true till something better comes along. It was we who rediscovered the Four Worlds in historic time, not they who discovered us. If we did not make the original settlements, at least we have filed the first claim that we made them. We did, in historical time, make an additional colonization of Earth. You call it the Incursion of the Dorian Greeks."

"Where are their playgrounds?" Miss Hanks asked Talarium.

"Oh, the whole world. The children have the run of everything. To set up specific playgrounds would be like setting a table-sized aquarium down in the depths of the ocean. It would really be pointless."

CONFERENCE: The four of us from Earth, specifically from Dubuque, Iowa, were in discussion with the five members of the Camiroi PTA.

"How do you maintain discipline?" Mr. Piper asked,

"Indifferently," said Philoxenus. "Oh, you mean in detail. It varies. Sometimes we let it drift, sometimes we pull them up short. Once they have learned that they must comply to an extent, there is little trouble. Small children are often put down into a pit. They do not eat or come out till they know their assignment."

"But that is inhuman," said Miss Hanks.

"Of course. But small children are not yet entirely human. If a child has not learned to accept discipline by the third or fourth grade, he is hanged."

"Literally?" asked Miss Munch.

"How would you hang a child figuratively? And effect would that have on the older children?"

"By the neck?" Miss Munch still was not satisfied.

"By the neck until they are dead. The other children always accept the example gracefully and do better. Hanging isn't employed often. Scarcely one child in a hundred is hanged."

"What is this business about slow reading?" Miss Hanks asked. "I don't understand it at all."

"Only the other day there was a child in the third grade who persisted in rapid reading," Philoxenus said. "He was given an object lesson. He was given a book of medium difficulty, and he read it rapidly. Then he had to put the book away and repeat what he had read. Do you know that in the first thirty pages he missed four words? Midway in the book there was a whole statement which he had understood wrongly, and there were hundreds of pages that he got word-perfect only with difficulty. If he was so unsure on material that he had just read, think how imperfectly he would have recalled it forty years later."

"You mean that the Camiroi children learn to recall everything that they read?"

"The Camiroi children and adults will recall for life every detail they have ever seen, read or heard. We on Camiroi are only a little more intelligent than you on Earth. We cannot afford to waste time in forgetting or reviewing or in pursuing anything of a shallowness that lends itself to scanning."

"Ah, would you call your schools liberal?" Mr. Piper asked.

"I would. You wouldn't," said Philoxenus. "We do not on Camiroi, as you do on Earth, use words to mean their opposites. There is nothing in our education or on our world that corresponds to the quaint servility which you call liberal on Earth."

"Well, would you call your education progressive?"

"No. In your argot, progressive, of course, means infantile."

"How are the schools financed?" asked Mr. Piper.

"Oh the voluntary tithe on Camiroi takes care of everything, government, religion, education, public works. We don't believe in taxes, of course, and we never maintain a high overhead in anything."

"Just how voluntary is the tithing?" asked Miss Hanks. "Do you sometimes hang those who do not tithe voluntarily?"

"I believe there have been a few cases of that sort," said Philoxenus.

"And is your government really as slipshod as your education?" Mr. Piper asked. "Are your high officials really chosen by lot and for short periods?"

"Oh yes. Can you imagine a person so sick that he would actually desire to hold high office for any great period of time? Are there any

further questions?"

"There must be hundreds," said Mr. Piper, "But we find difficulty putting them into words."

"If you cannot find words for them, we cannot find answers. PTA disbanded."

CONCLUSION A: The Camiroi system of education is inferior to our own in organization, in buildings, in facilities, in playgrounds, in teacher conferences, in funding, in parental involvement, in supervision, in in-group out-group accommodation adjustment motifs. Some of the school buildings are grotesque. We asked about one particular building which seemed to us to be flamboyant and in bad taste. "What do you expect from second-grade children?" they said. "It is well built even if of peculiar appearance. Second-grade children are not yet complete artists of design."

"You mean that the children designed it themselves?" we asked.

"Of course," they said. "Designed and built it. It isn't a bad job for children."

Such a thing wouldn't be permitted on Earth.

CONCLUSION B: The Camiroi system of education somehow produces much better results than does the education system of Earth. We have been forced to admit this by the evidence at hand.

CONCLUSION C: There is an anomaly as yet unresolved between Conclusion A and Conclusion B.

APPENDIX TO JOINT REPORT

We give here, as perhaps of some interest, the curriculum of the Camiroi Primary Education.

FIRST YEAR COURSE:

Playing one wind instrument

Simple drawing of objects and numbers.

Singing. (This is important Many Earth people sing who cannot sing. This early instruction of the Camiroi prevents that occurrence.)

Simple arithmetic, hand and machine.

First acrobatics.

First riddles and logic.

Mnemonic religion.

First dancing.

Walking the low wire.

Simple electric circuits.

Raising ants. (Eoempts, not Earth ants).

SECOND YEAR COURSE

Playing one keyboard instrument

Drawing, faces, letters, motions.

Singing comedies.

Complex arithmetic, hand and machine.

Second acrobatics.

First jokes and logic.

Quadratic religion.

Second dancing.

Simple defamation. (Spirited attacks on the character of one fellow student, with elementary falsification and simple hatchet-job programming.)

Performing on the medium wire.

Project electric wiring.

Raising bees. (Galelelea, not Earth bees.)

Reading and voice. (It is here that the student who may have fallen into bad habits of rapid reading is compelled to read at voice speed only.)

Soft stone sculpture.

Situation comedy.

Simple algebra, hand and machine.

First gymnastics.
Second jokes and logic.
Transcendent religion.
Complex acrobatic dancing.
Complex defamation.
Performing on the high wire and the sky pole.
Simple radio construction.
Raising, breeding and dissecting frogs. (Karakoh, not Earth frogs.)

FOURTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, basic and geological.
Decadent comedy.
Simple geometry and trigonometry, hand and machine.
Track and field.
Shaggy people jokes and hirsute logic.
Simple obscenity.
Simple mysticism.
Patterns of falsification.
Trapeze work.
Intermediate electronics.
Human dissection.

FIFTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, technological.
Introverted drama.
Complex geometries and analytics, hand and machine.
Track and field for fifth form record.
First wit and logic.
First alcoholic appreciation.
Complex mysticism.
Setting intellectual climates, defamation in three dimensions.
Simple Oratory.
Complex trapeze work.
Inorganic chemistry.
Advanced electronics.
Advanced human dissection.
Fifth Form Thesis.

The child is now ten years old and is half through his primary schooling. He is an unfinished animal, but he has learned to learn.

SIXTH YEAR COURSE:

Reemphasis on slow reading.
Simple prodigious memory.
History reading, Camiroi and galactic, economic.
Horsemanship (of the Patrushkoe, not the Earth horse.)
Advance lathe and machine work for art and utility.
Literature, passive.
Calculi, hand and machine pankration.
Advanced wit and logic.
Second alcoholic appreciation.
Differential religion.
First business ventures.
Complex oratory.

Building-scaling. (The buildings are higher and the gravity stronger than on Earth; this climbing of buildings like human flies calls out the ingenuity and daring of the Camiroi children.)

Nuclear physics and post-organic chemistry.
Simple pseudo-human assembly.

SEVENTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, cultural.
Advanced prodigious memory.
Vehicle operation and manufacture of simple vehicle.
Literature, active.

Astrognosy, prediction and programming.

Advanced pankration.

Spherical logic, hand and machine.

Advanced alcoholic appreciation.

Integral religion.

Bankruptcy and recovery in business.

Commanship and trend creation.

Post-nuclear physics and universals.

Transcendental athletics endeavor.

Complex robotics and programming.

EIGHTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, seminal theory.

Consummate prodigious memory.

Manufacture of complex land and water vehicles.

Literature, compenduous and terminative. (Creative book-burning following the Camiroi thesis that nothing ordinary be allowed to survive.)

Cosmic theory, seminal.

Philosophy construction.

Complex hedonism.

Laser religion.

Commanship, seminal.

Consolidation of simple genius status.

Post-robotic integration.

NINTH YEAR COURSE:

History reading, Camiroi and galactic, future and contingent.

Category invention.

Manufacture of complex light-barrier vehicles.

Construction of simple asteroids and planets.

Matrix religion and logic.

Simple human immortality disciplines.

Consolidation of complex genius status.

First problems of post-consciousness humanity.

First essays in marriage and reproduction.

TENTH YEAR COURSE:

History construction, active.

Manufacture of ultra-light-barrier vehicles.

Panphilosophical clarifications.

Construction of viable planets.

Consolidation of simple sanctity status.

Charismatic humor and pentacosmic logic.

Hypogyroscopic economy.

Penentaglossia. (The perfection of the fifty languages that every educated Camiroi must know including six Earthian languages. Of course the child will already have colloquial mastery of most of these, but he will not yet have them in their full depth.)

Construction of complex societies.

World government. (A course of the same name is sometimes given in Earthian schools, but the course is not of the same content. In this course the Camiroi student will govern a world, though not one of the first aspect worlds, for a period of three or four months.)

Tenth form thesis.

COMMENT ON CURRICULUM:

The child will now be fifteen years old and will have completed his primary education. In many ways he will be advanced beyond his Earth counterpart. Physically more sophisticated, the Camiroi child could kill with his hands an Earth-type tiger or a cape buffalo. An Earth child would perhaps be reluctant even to attempt such feats. The Camiroi boy (or girl) could replace any professional Earth athlete at any position of any game, and could surpass all existing Earth records. It is simply a question of

finer poise, strength and speed, the result of adequate schooling.

As to the arts (on which Earthlings sometimes place emphasis) the Camiroi child could produce easy and unequalled masterpieces in any medium. More important, he will have learned the relative unimportance of such pastimes.

The Camiroi child will have failed in business once, at age ten, and have learned patience and perfection of objective by his failure. He will have acquired the techniques of falsification and conmanship. Thereafter he will not be easily deceived by any of the citizens of any of the worlds. The Camiroi child will have become a complex genius and a simple saint; the latter reduces the index of Camiroi crime to near zero. He will be married and settled in. those early years of greatest enjoyment.

The child will have built, from materials found around any Camiroi house, a faster-than-light vehicle. He will have piloted it on a significant journey of his own plotting and programming. He will have built quasi-human robots of great intricacy. He will be of perfect memory and judgment and will be well prepared to accept solid learning.

He will have learned to use his whole mind, for the vast reservoirs which are the unconscious to us are not unconscious to him. Everything in him is ordered for use. And there seems to be no great secret about the accomplishments) only to do everything slowly enough and in the right order: thus they avoid repetition and drill which are the shriveling things which dull the quick apperception.

The Camiroi schedule is challenging to the children, but it is nowhere impossible or discouraging. Everything builds to what follows. For instance, the child is eleven years old before he is given post-nuclear physics and universals. Such subjects might be too difficult for him at an earlier age. He is thirteen years old before he undertakes category invention, that intricate course with the simple name. He is fourteen years old when he enters the dangerous field of panphilosophical clarification. But he will have been constructing comprehensive philosophies for two years, and he will have the background for the final clarification.

We should look more closely at this other way of education. In some respects it is better than our own. Few Earth children would be able to construct an organic and sentient robot within fifteen minutes if given the test suddenly; most of them could not manufacture a living dog in that time. Not one Earth child in five could build a faster-than-light vehicle and travel it beyond our galaxy between now and midnight. Not one Earth child in a hundred could build a planet and have it a going concern within a week. Not one in a thousand would be able to comprehend pentacosmic logic.

RECOMMENDATIONS: a.) Kidnapping five Camiroi at random and constituting them a pilot Earth PTA. b.) A little constructive book-burning, particularly in the education field. c.) Judicious hanging of certain malingering students.

POLITY AND CUSTOM OF THE CAMIROI

ABSTRACT FROM REPORT OF FIELD GROUP FOR EXAMINATION OF OFF-EARTH CUSTOMS AND CODEXES TO THE COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT RENOVATION AND LEGAL RETHINKING.

Extract from the day book of Paul Piggott, political analyst:

Making appointments with the Camiroi is proverbially like building with quicksilver. We discovered this early. But they do have the most advanced civilization of any of the four human worlds. And we did have a firm invitation to visit the planet Carnfroi and to investigate customs. And we had the promise that we would be taken in hand immediately on our arrival by a group parallel to our own.

But there was no group to meet us at the Sky-Port. "Where is the Group for the Examination of Customs and Codexes?" we asked the girl who was

on duty as Information Factor at the Sky-Port.

"Ask that post over there," she said. She was a young lady of mischievous and almost rakish mien.

"I hope we are not reduced to talking to posts," said our leader, Charles Chosky, "but I see that it is some sort of communicating device. Does the post talk English, young lady?"

"The post understands the fifty languages that all Camiroi know," the young lady said. "On Camiroi, even the dogs speak fifty languages. Speak to it."

"I'll try it," said Mr. Chosky. "Ah, post, we were to be taken in hand by a group parallel to our own. Where can we find the Group for the Examination of Customs and Codexes?"

"Duty! Duty!" cried the post in a girlish voice that was somehow familiar. "Three for a group! Come, come, be constituted!"

"I'll be one," said a pleasant-looking Camiroi, striding over.

"I'll be another," said a teen-age sproutling boy of the same species.

"One more, one more!" cried the post. "Oh, here comes my relief. I'll be the other one to form the group. Come, come, let's get started. What do you want to see first, good people?"

"How can a post be a member of an ambulatory group?" Charles Chosky asked.

"Oh, don't be quaint," said the girl who had been the information factor and also the voice of the post. She had come up behind us and joined us. "Sideki and Nautes, we become a group for cozening Earthlings," she said. "I am sure you heard the rather humorous name they gave it."

"Are you as a group qualified to give us the information we seek?" I asked.

"Every citizen of Camiroi is qualified, in theory, to give sound information on every subject," said the teen-age sproutling.

"But in practice it may not be so," I said, my legal mind fastening onto his phrase.

"The only difficulty is our over-liberal admission to citizenship," said Miss Diayggeia, who had been the voice of the post and the Information Factor. "Any person may become a citizen of Camiroi if he has resided here for one oodle. Once it was so that only natural leaders traveled space, and they qualified. Now, however, there are subsidized persons of no ability who come. They do not always conform to our high standard of reason and information."

"Thanks," said our Miss Holly Holm, "and how long is an oodle?"

"About fifteen minutes," said Miss Dia. "The post will register you now if you wish."

The post registered us, and we became citizens of Camiroi.

"Well, come, come, fellow citizens, what can we do for you?" asked Sideld, the pleasant-looking Camiroi who was the first member of our host group.

"Our reports of the laws of Gamirci seem to be a mixture of travelers' tales and nonsense," I said. "We want to find how a Camiroi law is made and how it works."

"So, make one, citizens, and see how it works," said Sideki. "You are now citizens like any other citizens, and any three of you can band together and make a law. Let us go down to Archives and enact it And you be thinking what sort of law it will be as we go there."

We strode through the contrived and beautiful parklands and groves which were the roofs of Camfroi City. The extent was full of fountains and waterfalls, and streams with bizarre bridges over them. Some were better than others. Some were better than anything we had ever seen anywhere.

"But I believe that I myself could design a pond and weir as good as this one," said Charles Chosky, our leader. "And I'd have some of those bushes that look like Earth sumac in place of that cluster there; and I'd

break up that pattern of rocks and tilt the layered massif behind it, and bring in a little of that blue moss --"

"You see your duty quickly, citizen," said Sideki. "You should do all this before this very day is gone. Make it the way you think best, and remove the plaque that is there. Then you can dictate your own plaque to any of the symbouleutik posts, and it will be made and set in. 'My composition is better than your composition,' is the way most plaques read, and sometimes a scenery composer will add something humorous like 'and my dog can whip your dog.' You can order all necessary materials from the same post there, and most citizens prefer to do the work with their own hands. This system works for gradual improvement. There are many Consensus Masterpieces that remain year after year; and the ordinary work is subject to constant turnover. There, for instance, is a tree which was not there this morning and which should not be there tonight. I'm sure that one of you can design a better tree."

"I can," said Miss Holly, "and I will do so today." We descended from the roof parklands in the lower streets of Camiroi City, and went to Archives.

"Have you thought of a new law yet?" Miss Dia asked when we were at Archives. "We don't expect brilliance from such new citizens, but we ask you not to be ridiculous."

Our leader, Charles Chosky, drew himself up to full height and spoke:

"We promulgate a law that a permanent group be set up on Camiroi to oversee and devise regulations for all random and hasty citizens' groups with the aim of making them more responsible, and that a fullscale review of such groups be held yearly."

"Got it?" Miss Dia called to an apparatus there in Archives.

"Got it," said the device. It ground its entrails and coughed up the law, inscribed on bronze, and set it in a law niche.

"The echo is deafening," said our Miss Holly, pretending to listen.

"Yes. What is the effect of what we have done?" I asked.

"Oh, the law is in effect," said young Nautes. "It has been weighed and integrated into the corpus of laws. it is already considered in the instructions that the magistrate coming on duty in a short time (usually a citizen will serve as magistrate for one hour a month) must scan before he takes his seat. Possibly in this session he will assess somebody guilty of a misdemeanor to think about this problem for ten minutes and then to attach an enabling act to your law."

"But what if some citizens' group passes a silly law?" our Miss Holly asked.

"They do it often. One of them has just done so. But it will be repealed quickly enough," said Miss Dia of the Camiroi. "Any citizen who has his name on three laws deemed silly by general consensus shall lose his citizenship for one year. A citizen who so loses his citizenship twice shall be mutilated, and the third time he shall be killed. This isn't an extreme ruling. By that time he would have participated in nine silly laws. Surely that's enough."

"But, in the meantime, the silly laws remain in effect?" our Mr. Chosky asked.

"Not likely," said Sideki. "A law is repealed thus: any citizen may go to Archives and remove any law, leaving the statement that he has abolished the law for his own reasons. He is then required to keep the voided law in his own home for three days. Sometimes the citizen or citizens who first passed the law will go to the house of the abolitionist. Occasionally they will fight to the death with ritual swords, but most often they will; parley. They may agree to have the law abolished. They may agree to restore the law. Or they may together work out a new law that takes into account the objections to the old."

"Then every Camiroi law is subject to random challenge?" Chosky

asked.

"Not exactly," said Miss Dia. "A law which has stood unchallenged and unappealed for nine years becomes privileged. A citizen wishing to abolish such a law by removal must leave in its place not only his declaration of removal but also three fingers of his right hand as earnest of his seriousness in the matter. But a magistrate or a citizen going to reconstitute the law has to contribute only one of his fingers to the parley."

"This seems to me to favor the establishment," I said.

"We have none," said Sideki. "I know that is hard on Earthlings to understand."

"But is there no senate or legislative body on Camiroi, or even a president?" Miss Holly asked.

"Yes, there's a president," said Miss Dia, "and he is actually a dictator or tyrant. He is chosen by lot for a term of one week. Any of you could be chosen for the term starting tomorrow, but the odds are against it. We do not have a permanent senate, but often there are hasty senates constituted, and they have full powers."

"Such bodies having full powers is what we want to study," I said. "When will the next one be constituted and how will it act?"

"So, constitute yourselves one now and see how you act," said young Nautes. "You simply say, 'We constitute ourselves a Hasty Senate or Camiroi with full powers. Register yourselves at the nearest symnbouleutic post, and study your senate introspectively.'"

"Could we fire the president-dictator?" Miss Holly asked.

"Certainly," said Sideki, "but a new president would immediately be chosen by lot; and your senate would not carry over to the new term, nor could any of you three partake of a new senate until a full presidential term had passed. But I wouldn't, if I were you, form a senate to fire the present president. He is very good with the ritual sword."

"Then citizens do actually fight with them yet?" Mr. Chosky asked.

"Yes, any private citizen may at any time challenge any other private citizen for any reason, or for none. Sometimes, but not often, they fight to the death, and they may not be interfered with. We call these decisions the Court of Last Resort."

Reason says that the legal system on Camiroi cannot be as simple as this, and yet it seems to be. Starting with the thesis that every citizen of Camiroi should be able to handle every assignment or job on Camiroi, these people have cut organization to the minimum. These things we consider fluid or liberal about the legal system of Camiroi. Hereafter, whenever I am tempted to think of some law or custom of Earth as liberal, I will pause. I will hear Camiroi laughing.

On the other hand, there are these things which I consider adamant or conservative about the laws of Camiroi:

No assembly on Camiroi for purposes of entertainment may exceed thirty-nine persons. No more than this number may witness any spectacle or drama, or hear a musical presentation, or watch a sporting event. This is to prevent the citizens from becoming mere spectators rather than originators or partakers. Similarly, no writing -- other than certain rare official promulgations -- may be issued in more than thirty-nine copies in one month. This, it seems to us, is a conservative ruling to prevent popular enthusiasms.

A father of a family who twice in five years appeals to specialists for such things as simple surgery for members of his household, or legal or financial or medical advice, or any such things as he himself should be capable of doing, shall lose his citizenship. It seems to us that this ruling obstructs the Camiroi from the full fruits of progress and research. They say, however, that it compels every citizen to become an expert in everything.

Any citizen who pleads incapacity when chosen by lot to head a

military operation or a scientific project or a trade combine shall lose his citizenship and suffer mutilation. But one who assumes such responsibility, and then fails in the accomplishment of the task, shall suffer the loss and the mutilation only for two such failures.

Both cases seem to us to constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

Any citizen chosen by lot to provide a basic invention or display a certain ingenuity when there is corporate need for it, and who fails to provide such invention, shall be placed in such a position that he will lose his life unless he displays even greater ingenuity and invention than was originally called for.

This seems to us to be unspeakably cruel.

There is an absolute death penalty for impiety. But the question of what constitutes impiety, we received a startling answer:

"If you have to ask what it is, then you are guilty of it. For piety is comprehension of the basic norms. Lack of awareness of the special Camiroi context is the greatest impiety of all. Beware, new citizens! Should a person more upright and less indulgent than myself have heard your question, you might be executed before nightrise."

The Camiroi, however, are straight-faced kidders. We do not believe that we were in any danger of execution, but we had been told bluntly not to ask questions of a certain sort.

CONCLUSION: Inconclusive. We are not yet able to understand the true legal system of Camiroi, but we have begun to acquire the viewpoint from which it may be studied. We recommend continuing study by a permanent resident team in this field.

-- Paul Piggott, Political Analyst

From the journey book of Charles Chosky, chief of field group:

The basis of Camiroi polity and procedure is that any Camiroi citizen should be capable of filing any job on or pertaining to the planet. If it is ever the case that even one citizen should prove incapable of this, they say, then their system has already failed.

"Of course, it fails many times every day," one of their men explained to me. "But it does not fail completely. It is like a man in motion. He is falling off-balance at every step, but he saves himself, and so he strides. Our polity is always in motion. Should it come to rest, it would die."

"Have the Camiroi a religion?" I asked citizen after citizen of them.

"I think so," one of them said finally. "I believe that we do have that, and nothing else. The difficulty is in the word. Your Earth English word may come from religionem or from relegionem; it may mean a legality, or it may mean a revelation. I believe it is a mixture of the two concepts; with us it is, Of course we have a religion. What else is there to have?"

"Could you draw a parallel between Camiroi and Earth religion?" I asked him.

"No, I couldn't," he said bluntly. "I'm not being rude. I just don't know how."

But another intelligent Camiroi gave me some idea on it.

"The closest I could come to explaining the difference," he said, "is by a legend that is told (as our Camiroi phrase has it) with the tongue so far in the cheek that it comes out the vulgar body aperture."

"What is the legend?" I asked him.

"The legend is that men (or whatever local creatures) were tested on all the worlds. On some of the worlds men persevered in grace. These have become the transcendent worlds, asserting themselves as stars rather planets and swallowing their own suns, becoming incandescent in their merged persons living in grace and light. The more developed of them are those closed bodies which we know only by inference, so powerful and contained that they

let no light or gravity or other emission escape them. They become of themselves closed and total universes, of their own space and outside of what we call space, perfect in their merged mentality and spirit.

"Then there are the worlds like Earth where men did fall from grace. On these worlds, each person contains an interior abyss and is capable both of great heights and depths. By our legend, the persons of these worlds, after their fall, were condemned to live for thirty thousand generations in the bodies of animals and were then permitted to begin their slow and frustrating ascent back to remembered personhood.

"But the case of Camiroi was otherwise. We do not know whether there are further worlds of our like case. The primordial test-people of Camiroi did not fall. And they did not persevere. They hesitated. They could not make up their minds. They thought the matter over, and then they thought it over some more. Camiroi was therefore doomed to think matters over forever.

"So we are the equivocal people, capable of curious and continuing thought. But we have a hunger both for the depths and the heights which we have missed. To be sure, our Golden Mediocrity, our serene plateau, is higher than the heights of most worlds, higher than those of Earth, I believe. But it has not the exhilaration of height."

"But you do not believe in legends," I said.

"A legend is the highest scientific statement when it is the only statement available," the Camiroi said. "We are the people who live according to reason. It makes a good life, but it lacks salt. You people have a literature of Utopias. You value their ideals highly, and they do have some effect on you. Yet you must feel that they have this quality of the insipid. And according to Earth standards, we are a Utopia. We are a world of the third case.

"We miss a lot. The enjoyment of poverty is generally denied to us. We have a certain hunger for incompetence, which is why some Earth things find a welcome here: bad Earth music, bad Earth painting and sculpture and drama, for instance. The good we can produce ourselves. The bad we are incapable of, and must import. Some of us believe that we need it in our diet."

"If this is true, your position seems enviable to me," I said.

"Yours isn't," he said, "and yet you are the most complete. You have both halves, and you have your numbers. We know, of course, that the Giver has never given a life anywhere until there was real need for it, and that everything born or created has its individual part to play. But we wish the Giver would be more generous to us in this, and it is in this particularly that we envy Earth.

"A difficulty with us is that we do our great deeds at too young an age and on distant worlds. We are all of us more or less retired by the age of twenty-five, and we have all had careers such as you would not believe. We come home then to live maturely on our mature world. It's perfect, of course, but of a perfection too small. We have everything -- except the one thing that matters, for which we cannot even find a name."

I talked to many of the intelligent Camiroi on our short stay there. It was often difficult to tell whether they were talking seriously or whether they were mocking me. We do not as yet understand the Camiroi at all. Further study is recommended.

-- Charles Chosky
Chief of Field Group

From the ephemeris of Holly HoIm, anthropologist and schedonahthropologist:

The word Camiroi is plural in form, is used for the people in both the single and plural and for the planet itself.

The civilization of Camiroi is more mechanical and more scientific than that of Earth, but it is more disguised. Their ideal machine shall have no moving parts at all, shall be noiseless and shall not look like a

machine. For this reason, there is something pastoral about even the most thickly populated districts of Camiroi City.

The Camiroi are fortunate in the natural furnishings of their planet. The scenery of Camiroi conforms to the dictate that all repetition is tedious, for there is only one of each thing on that world. There is one major continent and one minor continent of quite different character; one fine cluster of islands of which the individual isles are of very different style; one great continental river with its seven branches flowing out of seven sorts of land; one complex of volcanoes; one great range of mountains; one titanic waterfall with her three so different daughters nearby; one inland sea, one gulf, one beach which is a three hundred and fifty mile crescent passing through seven phases named for the colors of iris; one great rain forest, one palm grove, one leaf-fall grove, one of evergreens and one of eodendrons; one grain bowl, one fruit bowl, one pampas; one parkland; one desert, one great oasis; and Camiroi City is the one great city. And all these places are unexcelled if their kind.

There are no ordinary places on Camiroi!

Travel being rapid, a comparatively poor young couple may go from anywhere on the planet to Green Beach, for instance, to take their evening meal, in less time than the consumption of the meal will take them, and for less money than that reasonable meal will cost. This easy and frequent travel makes the whole world one community.

The Camiroi believe in the necessity of the frontier. They control many primitive worlds, and I gather hints that they are sometimes cruel in their management. The tyrants and proconsuls of these worlds are young, usually still in their teens. The young people are to have their careers and make their mistakes while in the foreign service. When they return to Camiroi they are supposed to be settled and of tested intelligence. The earning scale of the Camiroi is curious. A job of mechanical drudgery pays higher than one of intellectual Interest and involvement. This often means that the least intelligent and least able of the Camiroi will have more wealth than those of more ability. "This is fair," the Camiroi tell us. "Those not able to receive the higher recompense are certainly entitled to the lower." They regard the Earth system as grossly unequal, that a man should have both a superior job and superior pay, and that another man should have the inferior of both.

Though official offices and jobs are usually filled by lot, yet persons can apply for them for their own reasons. In special conditions there might even be competition for an assignment, such as directorship of trade posts where persons (for private reasons) might wish to acquire great fortunes rapidly. We witnessed confrontations between candidates in several of these campaigns, and they were curious.

"My opponent is a three and seven," said one candidate, and then he sat down.

"My opponent is a five and nine," said the other candidate. The small crowd clapped, and that was the confrontation or debate.

We attended another such rally.

"My opponent is an eight and ten," one candidate said briskly.

"My opponent is a two and six," said the other, and they went off together.

We did not understand this, and we attended a third confrontation. There seemed to be a little wave of excitement about to break here.

"My opponent is an old number four," said one candidate with a voice charged with emotion, and there was a gasp from the small crowd.

"I will not answer the charge," said the other candidate shaking with anger. "The blow is too foul, and we had been friends."

We found the key then. The Camiroi are experts at defamation, but they have developed a shorthand system to save time. They have their decalogue of slander, and the numbers refer to this. In its accepted version it runs as follows:

My opponent (1) is personally moronic. (2) is sexually incompetent. (3) flubs third points in Chuki game. (4) eats Mu seeds before the time of the summer solstice. (5) is physically pathetic. (7) is financially stupid. (8) is ethically weird. (9) is intellectually contemptible. (10) is morally dishonest.

Try it yourself, on your friends or your enemies! Works wonderfully. We recommend the listing and use to Earth politicians, except for numbers three and four which seem to have no meaning in Earth context.

The Camiroi have a corpus of proverbs. We came on them in Archives, along with an attached machine with a hundred levers on it. We depressed the lever marked Earth English, and had a sampling of these proverbs put into Earth context.

A man will not become rich by raising goats, the machine issued. Yes, that could almost pass for an Earth proverb. It almost seems to mean something..

Even buzzards sometimes gag. That has an Earth 30und also.

It's that or pluck chickens.

"I don't believe I understand that one," I said.

"You think it's easy to put these in Earth context, try it sometime," the translation machine issued. "The proverb applies to distasteful but necessary tasks."

"Ah, well, let's try some more," said Paul Piggott. "That one."

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, the machine issued abruptly.

"But that is an Earth proverb word for word," I said.

"You wait until I finish it, lady," the translation machine growled. "To this proverb in its classical form is always appended a cartoon showing a bird fluttering away and a man angrily wiping his hand with some disposable material while he says, "A bird in the hand is not worth two in the bush."

"Are we being had by a machine?" our Charles Chosky asked softly.

"Give us that proverb there," I pointed one out to the machine.

There'll be many a dry eye here when you leave, the machine issued. We left.

"I may be in serious trouble," I said to a Camiroi lady of my acquaintance, "Well, aren't you going to ask me what it is?"

"No, I don't particularly care," she said. "But tell me if you feel an absolute compulsion to it."

"I never heard of such a thing," I said. "I have been chosen by lot to head a military expedition for the relief of a trapped force on a world I never heard of. I am supposed to raise and supply this force (out of my private funds, it says here) and have it in flight within eight oodles. That's only two hours. What will I do?"

"Do it, of course, Miss Holly," the lady said. "You are a citizen of Camiroi now, and you should be proud to take charge of such an operation."

"But I don't know how! What will happen if I just tell them that I don't know how?"

"Oh, you'll lose your citizenship and suffer mutilation. That's the law, you know."

"How will they mutilate me?"

"Probably cut off your nose. I wouldn't worry about it. It doesn't do much for you anyhow."

"But we have to go back to Earth! We are going to go tomorrow, but now we want to go today. I do anyhow."

"Earth kid, if I were you, I'd get out to Sky-Port awful fast."

By a coincidence (I hope it was no more than that) our political analyst, Paul Piggott, had been chosen by lot to make a survey (personally, minutely and interiorly, the directive said) of the sewer system of Camiroi City. And our leader, Charles Chosky, had been selected by lot to put down a rebellion of Groll's Trolls on one of the worlds, and to leave his right

hand and his right eye as surety for the accomplishment of the mission.

We were rather nervous as we waited for Earth Flight at Sky-Port, particularly so when a group of Camiroi acquaintances approached us. But they did not stop us. They said goodbye to us without too much enthusiasm.

"Our visit has been all too short," I said hopefully.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," one of them rejoined. "There is a Camiroi proverb --"

"We've heard it," said our leader, Charles Chosky. "We also are dry-eyed about leaving."

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: That another and broader field group be sent to study the Camiroi in greater detail. That a special study might fruitfully be made of the humor of the Camiroi. That no members of the first field group should serve on the second field group.

-- Holly Holm

GINNY WRAPPED IN THE SUN

"I'm going to read my paper tonight, Dismas" Dr. Minden said, "and they'll hoot me out of the hall. The thought of it almost makes the hair walk off my head."

"Oh well, serves you right, Minden. From the hints you've given me of it, you can't expect easy acceptance for the paper; but the gentlemen aren't so bad."

"Not bad? Hauser honks like a gander! That clattering laugh of Coldbeater! Snodden sniggers so loud that it echoes! Cooper's boom is like barrels rolling downstairs, and your own -- it'll shrivel me, Dismas. Imagine the weirdest cacophony ever -- Oh no! I wasn't thinking of one so weird as that!"

Musical screaming! Glorious gibbering with an under-tone that could shatter rocks! Hooting of a resonance plainly too deep for so small an instrument! Yowling, hoodoo laughing, broken roaring, rhinoceros runting! And the child came tumbling out of the tall rocks of Doolen's Mountain, leaping down the flanks of the hill as though she was a waterfall. And both the men laughed

"Your Ginny is the weirdest cacophony I can imagine, Dismas," Dr. Minden said. "It scares me, and I love it. Your daughter is the most remarkable creature in the world."

"Talk to us, Ginny! I wish I could fix it that you would be four years old forever."

"Oh, I've fixed it myself, Dr. Minden," Ginny sang as she came to them with a movement that had something of the breathless grace of a gazelle and something of the scuttering of a little wild pig. "I use a trick like the hoodoo woman did. She ate water-puppy eggs. She never got any older, you know."

"What happened to her, Gin?" Dr. Minden asked Ginny Dismas.

"Oh, after a while she got gray-headed and wrinkled. And after another while her teeth and hair fell out, and then she died. But she never did get any older. She had everybody fooled. I got everybody fooled too."

"I know that you have, Ginny, in very many ways. Well, have you eaten water-puppy eggs to get no older?"

"No. I can't find out where they lay them, Dr. Minden. I've got my own trick that's even better."

"Do you know, Ginny, that when you really cut loose you are the loudest little girl in the world?"

"I know it. I won it yesterday. Susanna Shonk said that she was the loudest. We hollered for an hour. Susanna's home with a sore throat today, but there isn't anything the matter with me. Hey, has that house ever been there before?"

"That house? But it's our own house, Ginny," her father, Dr. Dismas,

said softly. "You've lived in it all your life. You're in and out of it a thousand times a day."

"I never saw it before," Ginny said. "I better go see what it looks like on the inside." And Ginny hurtled into the house that she was in and out of a thousand times a day.

"I'll tell you a secret, Dismas," Dr. Minden said. "Your small daughter Ginny is not really beautiful."

"Everybody thinks that she is, Minden."

"I know. They all believe her the most beautiful child in the world. So did I till a moment ago. So will I again in minute when I see her come out of the house. But her contemporary, my small son Krios, told me how to look at her; and I do so. For an instant, out of her incessant movement, I forced myself to see her as stopped cold, at rest. She is grotesque, Dismas. If ever she pauses, she is grotesque."

"No, she is like ultimate matter. Existence and motion are the same thing for her, and there cannot be the one without the other. But I've never seen her stopped, even in sleep. She's the liveliest sleeper anyone ever watched -- a laughing and singing sleeper. Her mother calls her our beautiful goblin."

"Exactly, she's a goblin, a monkey, a kobald. She's even grown a little pot like one of them. Dismas, she has a monkey face and bandy legs and a goblin's own pot."

"No, she hasn't! There she goes! Out of the house and up into the rocks again, and she's so beautiful that it shakes me. Four years old -- and she can still look at the world and say, 'Funny I never saw you before!' Yes, I've got a multidimensional daughter, Minden. Also a neighbor who is either deep or murky. You keep feeding me snatches of that paper of yours so I suppose that you want to excite my curiosity about it. And the title -- The Contingent Mutation. What is? Who is?"

"We are, Dismas. We are contingent, conditional, temporary, makeshift and improbable in our species. Mine is a paper badly conceived and badly put together, and I shiver at the reception that it will get. But it is about man, who is also badly conceived and badly put together. The proposition of my paper is that man is descended, recently and by incredible mutation, from the most impossible of ancestors, Xauenanthropus or Xauen Man. The answer of that descent scares me."

"Minden, are you out of your mind? Where is the descent? Where is the mutation? The Xauens were already men. No descent and no mutation was required. The finds are all fifteen years old. One look at Xauen, and everybody saw instantly that the Neanderthals and Grimaldi and Cro-Magnon were all close cousins of the same species -- ourselves. They were the template, the master key. They unriddled every riddle. We saw why the chin or lack of chin was only a racial characteristic. We saw it all. There is nothing to distinguish the Xauens from ourselves except that their adults were badly made ganglers, and probably unhealthy. The Xauens are modern men. They are ourselves. There is nothing revolutionary about stuttering out fifteen-year-old certainties, Minden. I thought your paper was to be a giant stride. But it is only stepping off a two-inch curb."

"Yes, an abysmal step off a two-inch curb, Dismas, backward and around the world, and standing on one's head and turning into a howling monkey in the process. It isn't a simple step. If I am correct, Dismas, then our descent from the Xauens was by an incredible, sudden and single mutation; one that has been misunderstood both as to effect and direction."

"I've never been quite satisfied with the Xauens myself. There is something misshapen about the whole business. Of course we know the Xauens only by the skeletons of ninety-six children, three adolescents, and two adults. We are bound to find more."

"If we do, we will find them in the same proportion. Oh, we will not recognize them at all. But does it not seem an odd proportion to you? How come there were so many kids? And how come -- think about this a long, long

time, will you? -- that eighty-six of those kids were of the some size and apparently of the same age? The Xauen skeletons came out of nine digs, close together both in location and age. And of the total of one hundred and one skeletons, eighty-six of them are of four-year-old kids, Sure the Xauens are modern man! Sure they are ourselves chin to chin. But eighty-six four-year-old kids out of a hundred and one people is not a modern proportion."

"You explain it then, Minden. I suppose that your paper attempts to. Oh, scatter-boned ancestors! Here come the religious nuts!"

Drs. Dismas and Minden had been sitting in the open parkland in campesino chairs, in their own fine neighborhood between Doolen's Mountain and the lower brushland. Dr. Dismas drew a hog-nosed pistol from under his arm at the sight of the nuts who had shuffled up that way several times before.

"Be off!" Dismas barked as the nuts crowded and shuffled up closer from the lower brushland. "There's nothing around here you want. You've been here a dozen times with your silly questions.

"No, only three times," the nut leader said. He was clean-shaven and short-haired in the old manner still affected by fanatics, and he had fool written in every line of him. "It's a simple thing we seek," the leader sniffled. "We only want to find the woman and kill her. I believe that you could help us find the woman."

"There is no woman here except my wife!" Dr. Dismas said angrily. "You have said yourselves that she isn't the woman. Be gone now, and don't come back here again."

"But everything that we know tells us that the woman is somewhere near this place," the nut leader insisted. "She is the woman who will bear the weird seed."

"Oh, well, there are some who say that my daughter Ginny is a weird seed. Be off now."

"We know Ginny. She comes down sometimes to mock us. Ginny is not the seed, but there is something of it about her. Ginny is born and already four years old. The seed that we are seeking to kill is still in the womb. Are you sure that your wife --"

"Damnit, do you want a public pregnancy test? No, my wife is not!"

Dr. Dismas shot a couple of times around the feet of the nut leader, and the whole gaggle of the nuts shuffled off again. "It is only a little thing we seek, to find and kill the woman," they sniffled as they went.

"They may be right, Dismas," Dr. Minden said. "I've been expecting the weird seed myself. I believe that it may already have appeared several times, and such nuts have killed it several times. The contingent mutation can come unhinged at any time. It always could. And when it does, the human world can well pass away. But this time they won't be able to find the woman to kill her."

"This is fishier than Edward's Ichthyology, as we used to say in school. I begin to understand why you're afraid of the reception that your paper might get. And you, as well as I, seem to have developed a little weird seed lately."

"Yes, my young and my older son are both acting most peculiar lately, particularly in their relation to the Dismas family. My son Dall has been jilted by your daughter Agar, or is it the other way around? Or have they both been jilted by your small daughter Ginny? As far as I can arrive at it, Ginny told them that that sort of stuff is out, no longer necessary, not even wanted on their parts. She is obsoleting them, she says.

"And my four-year-old son Krios is about out of his mind over your Ginny. He is so advanced in some ways and so retarded in others. It seems as though he grew unevenly and then stopped growing. I worry about him."

"Yes. Ginny has acquired several more small boyfriends now. She says that you break the fort with a big ram and you break the ram at the same time and throw it away. And then you find better tools to take it over. I

don't know what she's talking about. But Krios is jealous as only a passionate four-year-old can be."

"Krios says that Ginny is bad and she made him bad. He says that he doesn't know the words for the way they were bad, but that he will go to Hell for it."

"I had no idea that children were still taught about Hell."

"They aren't. But they have either intuitive knowledge of the place, or a continuing childhood folk legend of it. Oh, here comes bad Ginny and her mother, and they both have that stubborn look on them. You have two strong women in your house, at least. I wish that Agar were; for my son Dall isn't, and one of them should be."

Ginny and her mother Sally came hand in hand with the air of something needing to be settled.

"I want to be fair about this, Father," Ginny called solidly. "What I like about me is that I am always so fair."

"That's also what I like about you, Ginny," said Dr. Dismas, "and what is the argument?"

"All I asked of Mother is that she make me three thousand seven hundred and eighty peanut butter sandwiches. Isn't that a fair request?"

"I'm not sure that it is, Ginny," Dr. Dismas said. "It would take you a long time to eat that many."

"Of course it will, twelve hundred and sixty days. But that makes only three a day for the time I have to stay hidden in my nest up in the rocks. I figured that out by myself without paper. A lot of kids that have been to school already can't figure as well as I can."

"I know. A precocious daughter is a mixed blessing," her father said.

"Oh, Ginny, you're going to get a paddling," her mother said. "I made you three of them, and you said that you weren't even hungry for them."

"Father, who is this woman who talks to me so brusquely?" Ginny demanded.

"She is your mother, Ginny. You have been with her every day of your life and before. You have just come out of the house with her, and you still stand hand in hand with her."

"Funny I never saw her before," Ginny said. "I don't believe that this woman is my mother at all. Well, I will get my servants to make the sandwiches for me. Serpents kill you, woman! -- Oh, no, no, nobody touches me like that!"

Musical screaming! Wailing of a resonance too deep for so small an instrument, as Ginny was dragged off by her mother to get paddled. Howling to high Heaven, and the plainting of wild hogs and damned goblins!

"She is in good voice," Dr. Minden said. "When she speaks of her servants, she means your daughter Agar and my son Dall. It scares me, for I almost know what she means. It is eerie that two compatible young people say they will not marry because a four-year-old child forbids them to do it. It scares me still more when I begin to understand the mechanism at work."

"What is the mechanism, Minden?"

"The mutational inhibitions. It's quite a tangled affair. Do you remember the Screaming Monkeys of boondocks Rhodesia twenty years ago?"

"Vaguely. Bothersome little destructive monkeys that had to be hunted down and killed -- hunted down by a sort of religious crusade, as I remember it. Yes, a mutation I suppose. A sudden wildness appearing in a species. What is the connection?"

"Dismas, they were the first, the initial probe that failed. Others are on the way, and one of them will not fail. The story is that the religious crusaders said that no human child could be born while the howling monkeys flourished, for the monkeys themselves were human children. Well, they were. Well, no they weren't children. And they weren't human. But, in a way, they had been both. Or at least --"

"Minden, do you know what you do mean?"

"I hardly do, Dismas. Here come the 'servants.'"

Dall Minden and Agar Dismas drove up in a little roustabout car and stopped.

"What is this nonsense I hear that you two are not going to get married?" Dr. Dismas demanded.

"Not unless Ginny changes her mind, Father," Agar said. "Oh, don't ask us to explain it. We don't understand it either."

"You are a pair of damned useless drones," Dismas growled.

"Don't say that, Dismas," Dr. Minden gasped. "Everything begins to scare me now. 'Drones' has a technical meaning in this case."

"Ginny has just suffered an ignominy past bearing," Agar grinned. She was a nice pleasant girl. "Now she's sulking in her cave up in Doolen's Mountain and has sent word for us to come at once."

"How has she sent word?" Dr. Dismas demanded. "You two have just driven up."

"Oh, don't ask us to explain, Father. She sends us word when she wants us. We don't understand it either. Well go up on foot."

"Where is all this going to end?" Dr. Dismas asked when the two grinning young drones had left them and were ambling up the mountain.

"I don't know, Dismas," Minden told him. "But I believe it may as well begin with a verse:

Salamanders do it,
Tadpoles and newts do it.
Why can't me and you do it?

"It's a verse that the four-year-olds have been chanting, and you may not be tuned in on them. And the peculiar thing is that the salamanders and newts and tadpoles are doing it now, more than ever before. It's worldwide. See Higgleton's recent paper if you don't take my word for it."

"Oh, great blithering biologists! What are the squigglers doing more than ever before?"

"Engaging in neotic reproduction, of course. In many pocket areas, tadpoles have been reproducing as tadpoles for several years now, and the adult frog species is disappearing. There have always been cases of it, of course, but now it is becoming a pattern. The same is true of the newts and salamanders. And remember that all three are like man, contingent mutations. But how do the four-year-old children know about it when it is still one of the best-kept secrets of the biologists?... Here comes my wife. Is it more family trouble, Clarinda?"

"Oh, Krios has locked himself in the bathroom, and he won't come out or answer. He's been acting abominable all morning. Have you that emergency key you made?"

"Here. Now get the boy out, whip him gently but painfully. then explain to him that we love him very much and that his troubles are our troubles. Then get dinner. This family here never eats, unless it is peanut butter sandwiches, and has not thought to ask me to dine with them. Get back next door and with it, Clarinda. and stop bubbling."

"There is something really bothering Krios," Clarinda Minden bubbled yet, but she got herself back next door,

"Where shall we take it up, Dismas?" Doctor Minden asked. "With the howling monkeys of boondocks Rhodesia who may once have been human children? But nobody believes that. With the neotic salamanders and newts and pollywogs? With the Xauens who were either our grandparents or our grandchildren? Or with ourselves?"

"Roost on the Xauens a while," Dr. Dismas said. "You didn't quite finish your screed on them."

"Humans descend from the Xauens. Australopithecus, no. Sinanthropus, no. They were creatures of another line. But Neanderthal, Cro-Magnon, Grimaldi and ourselves are all of one species, and we descend from the

Xauens. It is not true, however, that we have only one hundred and one skeletons of the Xauens. We have more than twenty thousand of them, but most of them are called Ouezzane monkeys."

"Minden, you're crazy."

"I am talking about the three-foot-tall, big-headed running monkeys who were mature and full grown at four years of age and very old at fourteen. They threw a few sports, steers and freemartins, who passed the puberty age without effect and continued to grow. They were gangling drones, servants of the active species, and of course sterile. They were the one in one hundred occurrence and of no importance. And one day they bred, set up a mutational inhibition against the normal; and mankind -- the privileged mutation -- was born.

"The Onezzane monkeys, of whom the Xauens were the transitional state, were the same as the howling monkeys of boondocks Rhodesia -- going in the other direction. They had no speech, they had no fire, and they made no tools. Then one morning they were the Xauens, and the next morning they were humans. They passed all the highly developed apes in an instant. They were the privileged mutation, which is not, I believe, permanent.

"Dismas, the one hundred and one recognized Xauen skeletons that we possess are not of ninety-six children (eighty-six of them apparent four-year-olds), three adolescents and two adults. They are of ten infants and children, eighty-six adults, two mutants and three filial-tuos.

"Let's take it from the flank. A few years ago, a biologist amused himself by making a table of heartbeat life lengths. All the mammals but one, he found, live about the same number of heartbeats, the longer-living species having correspondingly slower heartbeats. But one species, man, lives four or five times as long as he should by this criterion. I forget whether the biologist implied that this makes man a contingent species living on borrowed time. I do imply it. In any case, since the biologist was also involved in science fiction, his implications were not taken seriously.

"From the other flank. Even before Freud there were studies made of false puberty, the sudden hot interest and activity that appears about age four and then goes away for another ten years. It's been many times guessed that back in our ancestry our true puberty was at such an early age."

"Minden, no species can change noticeably in less than fifty thousand years."

"Dismas, it can change in between three and nine months, depending on the direction traveled. Here they come back! Well, drones, did you settle Ginny down? Where are you going now?"

Agar Dismas and Dall Minden had sauntered down from Doolen's Mountain.

"We're going to get four hundred and seventy-three loaves of bread and four hundred and seventy-three jars of peanut butter," Agar said rather nervously.

"Yes, Ginny says to use Crispy-Crusty bread," Dall Minden detailed. "She says it has sixteen slices to a loaf, so we can make eight sandwiches to a loaf and to a jar. There will be four sandwiches left over, and Ginny says we can have them for our work. She's going to stay in her cave for twelve hundred and sixty days. She says it will take that long to get her thing going good so nobody can bust it up. I think she's a numerologist at heart. This is going to take more than four hundred dollars. That's more than Agar and myself have saved up together. Ginny says to do it, though, even if we have to steal the money for it. And she says to be quick about it."

"Here come the religious nuts again," Doctor Dismas said. "I may have to kill one of the fools if they keep coming back."

"They won't come here this time," Agar said. "They'll prowl Doolen's Mountain from now on. They know it'll be there. But I don't think they'll kill Ginny. They don't understand what she is. They didn't understand the first time either; they didn't guess that it could possibly be one of the

big ones. We are all hoping that they will kill me and be satisfied and think that they have done it. They will find me there where they think the woman should be, and that may fool them. Well, tootle! We have to hurry with everything or Ginny will be angry."

"No species can count itself secure that has not endured for ten million years," said Dr. Minden. "We still hear that old saying that evolution is irreversible. Hogwats! I have myself studied seven species of hogs washed away before one endured. The human race is so new that it has no stability. The majority of species do not survive, and we have lived only one tenth of the span that would tilt the odds for survival in our favor. Even the species that finally survive will commonly revert several times before acquiring stability. We could revert at any time."

"Revert to what?"

"To what we were, to what we still are basically, little three-foot-high, big-headed, howling monkeys, without tools, and with only a fifth of our present life span."

"Reversions are like cosmic disasters, Minden. They take a few thousand years to happen, and by that time we'll be gone."

"No, this can happen instantly, Dismas, by a single neotic conception. And then it becomes the norm by the mechanics of mutational inhibition. The reversion will inhibit the old normal. We have already seen that inhibition at work."

The very stones crying out like demented rooks! Bushes barking like coyotes! Green-colored yowling, and laughter that sang like a band-saw. And Ginny was in the middle of them again.

She was the howlingest kid ever pupped.

"I don't think that I will talk any more after today, Father," she said solemnly after she had cut off her other noises. "I think I'll just forget how. I'll just holler and hoot and cary on. That's more fun anyhow."

"Why aren't my servants back with my provisions? They've had almost time to get back if they did everything at breakncck speed and had good luck. They might have had to go to more than one place to get that much bread and peanut butter, though. I doubt if I'll eat it. I just want to have it if I need it, and I wanted to teach them obedience. I'll probably start to eat meadow mice and ground squirrels tomorrow."

"Here comes Mrs. Minden crying over that Krios. What's the good of that?"

There was a keening. Clarinda was running and crying, and Sally Dismas had rushed out of the house and met her.

"Clarinda, what in the world has happened?" Dr. Minden cried, rushing to his tearful wife.

"Our baby Krios has killed himself."

"I told him to," said Ginny. "I'd gotten everything I wanted from him. I'll find better ones for the other times."

"Ginny!" Her mother was horrified. "I'll whip --"

"Don't punish the child, Sally," Clarinda Minden said. "She's beyond good and evil. Whatever was between her and my baby Krios, it's better that I never know."

"Did I say something wrong?" Ginny asked. "The last thing I ever say, and it should be wrong? Dr. Minden, you know about things like that. What are you creatures, anyhow?"

"People, Ginny," Dr. Minden said miserably.

"Funny I never saw any of you before. I sure don't intend to get involved with people."

Raucous rowling! Hound-dog hooting! Hissing of badgers, and the clattering giggle of geese! Shag-tooth shouting and the roaring of baby bulls!

And a screaming monkey leaped and tumbled up the rocks like crazy water.

