

STORIES BY R.A. LAFFERTY PART 2

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CAMELS AND DROMEDARIES, CLEM

"Greeks and Armenians, Clem. Condors and buzzards."

"Samoyeds and Malemites, Clem. Galena and molybdenite."

Oh here, here! What kind of talk is that?

That is definitive talk. That is fundamental talk. There is no other kind of talk that will bring us to the core of this thing.

Clem Clendenning was a traveling salesman, a good one. He had cleared \$35,000 the previous year. Lie worked for a factory in a midwestern town. The plant produced a unique product, and Clem sold it over one-third of the nation.

Things were going well with him. Then a little thing happened, and it changed his life completely.

Salesmen have devices by which they check and double-check. One thing they do when stopping at hotels in distant towns; they make sure they're registered. This sounds silly, but it isn't. A salesman will get calls from his home office and it is important that the office be able to locate him. Whenever Clem registered at a hotel he would check back after several hours to be sure that they had him entered correctly. He would call in from somewhere, and he would ask for himself. And it sometimes did happen that he was told he was not registered. At this Clem would always raise a great noise to be sure that they had him straight thereafter.

Arriving in a town this critical day, Clem had found himself ravenously hungry and tired to his depths. Both states were unusual to him. He went to a grill and ate gluttonously for an hour, so much so that people stared at him. He ate almost to the point of apoplexy. Then he taxied to the hotel, registered, and went up to his room at once. Later, not remembering whether he had even undressed or not (it was early afternoon), he threw himself onto the bed and slept, as it seemed, for hours.

But he noted that it was only a half hour later that he woke, feeling somehow deprived, as though having a great loss. He was floundering around altogether in a daze, and was once more possessed of an irrational hunger. He unpacked a little, put on a suit, and was surprised to find that it hung on him quite loosely.

He went out with the feeling that he had left something on the bed that was not quite right, and yet he had been afraid to look. He found a

hearty place and had another great meal. And then (at a different place so that people would not be puzzled at him) he had still another one. He was feeling better now, but mighty queer, mighty queer.

Fearing that he might be taken seriously ill, he decided to check his bearings. He used his old trick. He found a phone and called his hotel and asked for himself.

"We will check," said the phone girl, and a little bit later she said, "Just a minute, he will be on the line in a minute."

"Oh, great green goat," he growled, "I wonder how they have me mixed up this time."

And Clem was about to raise his voice unpleasantly to be sure that they got him straight, when a voice came onto the phone.

This is the critical point.

It was his own voice.

The calling Clem Denning laughed first. And then he froze. It was no trick. It was no freak. There was no doubt that it was his own voice. Clem used the dictaphone a lot and he knew the sound of his own voice.

And now he heard his own voice raised higher in all its unmistakable aspects, a great noise about open idiots who call on the phone and then stand silent without answering.

"It's me all right," Clem grumbled silently to himself. "I sure do talk rough when I'm irritated."

There was a law against harassment by telephone, the voice on the phone said. By God, the voice on the phone said, he just noticed that his room had been rifled. He was having the call monitored right now, the voice on the phone swore. Clem knew that this was a lie, but he also recognized it as his own particular style of lying. The voice got really wooly and profane.

Then there was a change in the tone.

"Who are you?" the voice asked hollowly. "I hear you breathing scared. I know your sound. Gaaah -- it's me!" And the voice on the phone was also breathing scared.

"There has to be an answer," he told himself. "I'll just go to my room and take a hot bath and try to sleep it off."

Then he roared back: "Go to my room! Am I crazy? I have just called my room. I am already there. I would not go to my room for one million one hundred and five thousand dollars."

He was trembling as though his bones were too loose for his flesh. It was funny that he had never before noticed how bony he was. But he wasn't too scared to think straight on one subject, however crooked other things might be.

"No, I wouldn't go back to that room for any sum. But I will do something for another sum, and I'll do it damned quick."

He ran, and he hasn't stopped running yet. That he should have another self-made flesh terrified him. He ran, but he knew where he was running for the first stage of it. He took the night plane back to his hometown, leaving bag and baggage behind.

He was at the bank when it opened in the morning. He closed out all his accounts. He turned everything into cash. This took several hours. He walked out of there with \$83,000. He didn't feel like a thief; it was his own; it couldn't have belonged to his other self, could it? If there were two of them, then let there be two sets of accounts.

Now to get going fast.

He continued to feel odd. He weighed himself. In spite of his great eating lately, he had lost a hundred pounds. That's enough to make anyone feel odd. He went to New York City to lose himself in the crowd and to think about the matter.

And what was the reaction at his firm and at his home when he turned up missing? That's the second point. He didn't turn up missing. As the months went by he followed the doings of his other self. He saw his pictures

in the trade papers; he was still with the same firm he was still top salesman. He always got the hometown paper, and he sometimes found himself therein. He saw his own picture with his wife Veronica. She looked wonderful and so, he had to admit, did he. They were still on the edge of the social stuff.

"If he's me, I wonder who I am?" Clem continued to ask himself. There didn't seem to be any answer to this. There wasn't any handle to take the thing by.

Clem went to an analyst and told his story. The analyst said that Clem had wanted to escape his job, or his wife Veronica, or both. Clem insisted that this was not so; he loved his job and his wife; he got deep and fulfilling satisfaction out of both.

"You don't know Veronica or you wouldn't suggest it," he told the analyst. "She is -- ah -- well, if you don't know her, then hell, you don't know anything."

The analyst told him that it had been his own id talking to him on the telephone.

"How is it that my id is doing a top selling job out of a town five hundred miles from here, and I am here?" Clem wanted to know. "Other men's ids aren't so talented."

The analyst said that Clem was suffering from a *tmema* or *diaretikos* of an oddly named part of his psychic apparatus.

"Oh hell, I'm an extrovert. Things like that don't happen to people like me," Clem said.

Thereafter Clem tried to make the best of his compromised life. He was quickly well and back to normal weight. But he never talked on the telephone again in his life. He'd have died most literally if he ever heard his own voice like that again. He had no phone in any room where he lived. He wore a hearing aid which he did not need; he told people that he could not hear over the phone, and that any unlikely call that came for him would have to be taken down and relayed to him.

He had to keep an eye on his other self, so he did renew one old contact. With one firm in New York there was a man he had called on regularly; this man had a cheerful and open mind that would not be spooked by the unusual. Clem began to meet this man (Why should we lie about it? His name was Joe Zabotsky.) not at the firm; but at an after-hours place which he knew Joe frequented.

Joe heard Clem's story and believed it -- after he had phoned (in Clem's presence) the other Clem, located him a thousand miles away, and ordered an additional month's supply of the unique product which they didn't really need, things being a little slow in all lines right then.

After that, Clem would get around to see Joe Zabotsky an average of once a month, about the time he figured the other Clem had just completed his monthly New York call.

"He's changing a little bit, and so are you," Joe told Clem one evening. "Yeah, it was with him just about like with you. He did lose a lot of weight a while back, what you call the critical day, and he gained it back pretty quick just like you did. It bugs me, Clem, which of you I used to know. There are some old things between us that he recalls and you don't; there are some that you recall and he doesn't; and dammit there are some you both recall, and they happened between myself and one man only, not between myself and two men.

"But these last few months your face seems to be getting a little fuller, and his a little thinner. You still look just alike, but not quite as just-alike as you did at first."

"I know it," Clem said. "I study the analysts now since they don't do any good at studying me, and I've learned an old analyst's trick. I take an old face-on photo of myself, divide it down the center, and then complete each half with its mirror image. It gives two faces just a little bit different. Nobody has the two sides of his face quite alike. These two

different faces are supposed to indicate two different aspects of the personality. I study myself, now, and I see that I am becoming more like one of the constructions; so he must be becoming more like the other construction. He mentions that there are disturbances between Veronica and himself, does he? And neither of them quite understands what is the matter? Neither do I."

Clem lived modestly, but he began to drink more than he had. He watched, through his intermediary Joe and by other means, the doings of his other self. And he waited. This was the most peculiar deal he had ever met, but he hadn't been foxed on very many deals.

"He's no smarter than I am," Clem insisted. "But, by cracky, if he's me, he's pretty smart at that. What would he do if he were in my place? And I guess, in a way, he is."

Following his avocation of drinking and brooding and waiting, Clem frequented various little places, and one day he was in the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. This was owned and operated by Two-Face Terrel, a doubledealer and gentleman, even something of a dandy. A man had just seated himself at a dim table with Clem, had been served by Two-Face, and now the man began to talk.

"Why did Matthew have two donkeys?" the man asked.

"Matthew who?" Clem asked. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about 21:1-9, of course," the man said. "The other Gospels have only one donkey. Did you ever think about that?"

"No, I'd never given it a thought," Clem said.

"Well, tell me then, why does Matthew have two demoniacs?"

"What?"

"8:28-34. The other evangelists have only one crazy man."

"Maybe there was only one loony at first, and he drove the guy drinking next to him crazy."

"That's possible. Oh, you're kidding. But why does Matthew have two blind men?"

"Number of a number, where does this happen?" Clem asked.

"9:27-31, and again 20:29-34. In each case the other gospels have only one blind man. Why does Matthew double so many things? There are other instances of it."

"Maybe he needed glasses," Clem said.

"No," the man whispered, "I think he was one of us."

"What 'us' are you talking about?" Clem asked. But already he had begun to suspect that his case was not unique. Suppose that it happened one time out of a million? There would still be several hundred such Sundered persons in the country, and they would tend to congregate in such places as the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. And there was something deprived or riven about almost every person who came into the place.

And remember," the man was continuing, "the name or cognomen of one of the other Apostles was 'The Twin.' But of whom was he twin? I think there was the beginning of a group of them there already."

"He wants to see you," Joe Zabotsky told Clem when they met several months later. "So does she."

"When did he begin to suspect that there was another one of me?"

"He knew something was wrong from the first. A man doesn't lose a hundred pounds in an instant without there being something wrong. And he knew something was very wrong when all his accounts were cleaned out. These were not forgeries, and he knew it. They were not as good as good forgeries, for they were hurried and all different and very nervous. But they were all genuine signatures, he admitted that. Damn, you are a curious fellow, Clem!"

"How much does Veronica know, and how? What does she want? What does he?"

"He says that she also began to guess from the first. 'You act like

you're only half a man, Clem,' she would say to him, to you, that is. She wants to see more of her husband, she says, the other half. And he wants to trade places with you, at least from time to time on a trial basis."

"I won't do it! Let him stew in it!" Then Clem called Clem a name so vile that it will not be given here.

"Take it easy, Clem," Joe remonstrated. "It's yourself you are calling that."

There was a quizzical young-old man who came sometimes into the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. They caught each other's eye this day, and the young-old began to talk.

"Is not consciousness the thing that divides man from the animals?" he asked. "But consciousness is a double thing, a seeing one's self; not only a knowing, but a knowing that one knows. So the human person is of its essence double. How this is commonly worked out in practice, I don't understand. Our present states are surely not the common thing."

"My own consciousness isn't intensified since my person is doubled," Clem said. "It's all the other way. My consciousness is weakened. I've become a creature of my own unconscious. There's something about you that I don't like, man."

"The animal is simple and single," the young-old man said "It lacks true reflexive consciousness. But man is dual (though I don't understand the full meaning of it here) and he has at least intimations of true consciousness And what is the next step?"

I fathom you now," Clem said. "My father would have called you a Judas Priest."

I don't quite call myself that. But what follows the singularity of the animal and duality of man? You recall the startling line of Chesterton? -- 'we trinitarians have known it is not good for God to be alone.' But was His case the same as ours? Did He do a violent double take, or triple take, when He discovered one day that there were Three of Him? Has He ever adjusted to it? Is it possible that He can?"

"Aye, you're a Judas Priest. I hate the species."

But I am not, Mr. Clendenning. I don't understand this sundering any more than you do. It happens only one time in a million, but it has happened to us. Perhaps it would happen to God but one time in a billion billion, but it has happened. The God who is may be much rarer than any you can imagine.

"Let me explain: my other person is a very good man, much better than when we were conjoined. He's a dean already, and he'll be a bishop within five years. Whatever of doubt and skepticism that was in me originally is still in the me here present, and it is somehow intensified. I do not want to be dour or doubting. I do not want to speak mockingly of the great things. But the bothering things are all in the me here. The other me is freed of them.

"Do you think that there might have been a sundered-off Napoleon who was a bumbler at strategy and who was a nervous little coward? Did there remain in backwoods Kentucky for many years a sundered-off Lincoln who gave full rein to his inborn delight in the dirty story, the dirty deal, the barefoot life, the loutishness growing? Was there a sundered-off Augustine who turned ever more Manichean, who refined more and more his arts of false logic and fornication, who howled against reason, who joined the cultishness of the crowd? Is there an anti-Christ -- the man who fled naked from the garden at dusk leaving his garment behind? We know that both do not keep the garment at the moment of sundering."

"Damned if I know, Judas Priest. Your own father-name abomination, was there another of him? Was he better or worse? I leave you."

"She is in town and is going to meet you tonight," Joe Zabotsky told Clem at their next monthly meeting. "We've got it all set up."

"No, no, not Veronica!" Clem was startled. "I'm not ready for it."

"She is. She's a strong-minded woman, and she knows what she wants."

"No she doesn't, Joe. I'm afraid of it. I haven't touched a woman since Veronica."

"Damn it, Clem, this is Veronica that we're talking about. It isn't as though you weren't still married to her."

"I'm still afraid of it, Joe. I've become something unnatural now. Where am I supposed to meet her? Oh, oh you son of a snake! I can feel her presence. She was already in the place when I came in. No, no, Veronica, I'm not the proper one. It's all a case of mistaken identity."

"It sure is, Clem Clam," said the strong-minded Veronica as she came to their table. "Come along now. You're going to have more explaining to do than any man I ever heard of."

But I can't explain it, Veronica. I can't explain any of it."

"You will try real hard, Clem. We both will. Thank you, Mr. Zabotsky, for your discretion in an odd situation."

Well, it went pretty well, so well in fact there had to be a catch to it. Veronica was an unusual and desirable woman, and Clem had missed her. They did the town mildly. They used to do it once a year, but they had been apart in their present persons for several years. And yet Veronica would want to revisit "that little place we were last year, oh, but that wasn't you, was it, Clem? -- that was Clem," and that kind of talk was confusing.

They dined grandly, and they talked intimately but nervously. There was real love between them, or among them, or around them somehow. They didn't understand how it had turned grotesque.

"He never quite forgave you for clearing out the accounts," Veronica said.

"But it was my money, Veronica," Clem insisted. "I earned it by the sweat of my tongue and my brain. He had nothing to do with it."

"But you're wrong, dear Clem. You worked equally for it when you were one. You should have taken only half of it."

They came back to Veronica's hotel, and one of the clerks looked at Clem suspiciously.

"Didn't you just go up, and then come down, and then go up again?" he asked.

"I have my ups and downs, but you may mean some thing else," Clem said.

"Now don't be nervous, dear," Veronica said. They were up in Veronica's room now, and Clem was looking around very nervously. He had jumped at a mirror, not being sure that it was.

"I am still your wife," Veronica said, "and nothing has changed, except everything. I don't know how, but I'm going to put things together again. You have to have missed me! Give now!" And she swept him off his feet as though he were a child. Clem had always loved her for her sudden strength. If you haven't been up in Veronica's arms, then you haven't been anywhere.

"Get your pumpkin-picking hands off my wife, you filthy oaf!" a voice cracked out like a bullwhip, and Veronica dropped Clem thuddingly from the surprise of it.

"Oh, Clem!" she said with exasperation, "you shouldn't have come here when I was with Clem. Now you've spoiled everything. You can't be jealous of each other. You're the same man. Let's all pack up and go home and make the best of it. Let people talk if they want to."

"Well, I don't know what to do," Clem said. "This isn't the way. There isn't any way at all. Nothing can ever be right with us when we are three."

"There is a way," Veronica said with sudden steel in her voice. "You boys will just have to get together again. I am laying down the law now. For a starter each of you lose a hundred pounds. I give you a month for it. You're both on bread and water from now on. No, come to think of it, no bread! No water either; that may be fattening, too. You're both on nothing for a month."

"We won't do it," both Clems said. "It'd kill us."

"Let it kill you then," Veronica said. "You're no good to me the way you are. You'll lose the weight. I think that will be the trigger action. Then we will all go back to Rock Island or whatever town that was and get the same hotel room where one of you rose in a daze and left the other one unconscious on the bed. We will recreate those circumstances and see if you two can't get together again."

"Veronica," Clem said, "it is physically and biologically impossible."

"Also topologically absurd."

"You should have thought of that when you came apart. All you have to do now is get together again. Do it! I'm laying down an ultimatum. There's no other way. You two will just have to get together again."

"There is another way," Clem said in a voice so sharp that it scared both Veronica and Clem.

"What? What is it?" they asked him.

"Veronica, you've got to divide," Clem said. "You've got to come apart."

"Oh, no. No!"

"Now you put on a hundred pounds just as fast as you can, Veronica. Clem," Clem said, "go get a dozen steaks up here for her to start on. And about thirty pounds of bone meal, whatever that is. It sounds like it might help."

"I'll do it, I'll do it," Clem cried, "and a couple of gallons of blood-pudding. Hey, I wonder where I can get that much blood-pudding this time of night?"

"Boys, are you serious? Do you think it'll work?" Veronica gasped. "I'll try anything. How do I start?"

"Think divisive thoughts," Clem shouted as he started out for the steaks and bone meal and blood-pudding.

"I don't know any," Veronica said. "Oh, yes I do! I'll think them. We'll do everything! We'll make it work."

"You have a lot going for you, Veronica," Clem said. "You've always been a double-dealer. And your own mother always said that you were two-faced."

"Oh, I know it, I know it! We'll do everything. We'll make it work. We'll leave no stone unthrown."

"You've got to become a pair, Veronica," Clem said at one of their sessions. "Think of pairs."

"Crocodiles and alligators, Clem," she said, "frogs and toads. Eels and lampreys."

"Horses and asses, Veronica," Clem said, "elk and moose. Rabbits and hares."

"Mushrooms and toadstools, Veronica," Clem said. "Mosses and lichens. Butterflies and moths."

"Camels and dromedaries, Clem," Veronica said. "Salamanders and newts, dragonfly and damselfly."

Say, they thought about pairs by the long ton. They thought every kind of sundering and divisive thought. They plumbed the depths of psychology and biology, and called in some of the most respected quacks of the city for advice.

No people ever tried anything harder. Veronica and Clem and Clem did everything they could think of. They gave it a month. "I'll do it or bust," Veronica said.

And they came close, so close that you could feel it. Veronica weighed up a hundred pounds well within the month, and then coasted in on double brandies. It was done all hut the final thing.

Pay homage to her, people! She was a valiant woman! They both said that about her after it was over with.

They would admire her as long as they lived. She had given it

everything.

"I'll do it or bust," she had said.

And after they had gathered her remains together and buried her, it left a gap in their lives, in Clem's more than in Clem's, since Clem had already been deprived of her for these last several years.

And a special honor they paid her.

They set two headstones on her grave. One of them said 'Veronica.' And the other one said 'Veronica.'

She'd have liked that.

THE ULTIMATE CREATURE

I

The old Galaxy maps (imitating early Earth maps, partly in humor and partly through intuition) pictured strong creatures in the far arms of the system -- Serpents bigger than Spaceships, Ganymede-type Tigers, fish-tailed Maids, grand Dolphins, and Island-sized Androids. We think particularly of the wry masterpieces of Grobin. And at the end of the Far or Seventh arm of the Galaxy is shown the Ultimate Creature.

The Ultimate Creature had the form of a Woman, and it bore three signs in Chaldee: The Sign of Treasure; the Sign of the Fish Mashur (the queerest fish of them all); and the Sign of Restitution or of Floating Justice.

Floating Justice is the ethical equivalent of the Isostasis of the Geologists. It states in principle that every unbalance will be brought into new balance, sometimes gently, sometimes as by planet-quake; that the most submerged may be elevated, by a great sundering of strata, to the highest point, if such is required for compensation. And there is a final tenet of this Floating Justice, that some day, somewhere, the meanest man of all the worlds will possess the ultimate treasure of the worlds. Without this promise, the worlds would be out of balance forever.

The meanest man of all the worlds was Peter Feeney -- a low-down sniveler, a weak man. In one thing only he was exceptional -- he had the finest eye for beauty in a woman of any man anywhere: this, though of all men he was the least successful with women. His purity of appraisal was not dulled by close contact or possession. His judgments of beauty were sound and uncompromised, though sometimes bitter.

And really, how many beautiful women are there in the Universe?

Six.

Only six? Are you sure? All that noise has been about only six of them?

Pete Feeney was sure. His rapid eyes -- the only rapid things about him -- had scanned millions of women in his random travels. And only six of the women could be called beautiful.

There was the lady on Mellionella, seen only once in a crowd, followed and lost, and never seen again in a year's search.

There was the girl in a small town on East Continent of Hokey Planet. And this girl there was something that caused agony to Peter: he had heard her speak; she spoke like a girl in a small town on East Continent of Hokey Planet. He prayed that she might be struck dumb; knowing that it was an evil prayer, knowing that she was one of the really beautiful ones, whatever the sound of her.

There was the girl of shallow virtue on Leucite. She was perfect. What else can you say after that?

There was the mother of six on Camiroi -- no longer young, of no particular repose or station or ease, hurried, impatient, and quite likely the most beautiful woman who ever lived.

On Trader Planet there was a young Jewess of bewildering kindness and frankness and of inextricably entangled life.

In San Juan, on old Earth, there was a fine creature who combined the three main ethnic strains of old mankind. Peter made a second journey there to see her; after first vision and departure he had not been able to believe what he had seen.

Six in all the worlds? Somehow there should have been more beautiful women than that.

Then Peter saw Teresa.

And she made the seventh?

No. She made the first. The six faded. There was only one. The most beautiful woman ever, in the farthest arm of the Galaxy -- the Ultimate Creature.

II

This was on Groll's Planet. To get there, said the agent in Electrum, you go to the end of the Galaxy, and turn left. It was a shabby little world in the boondocks that are beyond the boondocks, and only shabby people came there.

Peter Feeney was a salesman of a Universe-wide product. He wasn't a good salesman. He was shuffled off to poorer and poorer territories. Now he had fallen to the poorest territory of all.

And on that day on Groll's Planet, he heard a sound as though a swish of silk had passed over him, a thread, a mesh. It was the invisible net.

"Oh how strange are the Fish of Far Ocean!" an ancient poet exclaimed.

Peter had seen Teresa, and it was all over with him.

Peter was eating that day by peculiar arrangement. It was the smallest of the towns of Groll's Planet and there was no public eating place there. But a Grollian man raked clean sand and set a mat for Peter to sit on, and served him a meal there on a crate or box. The man also gave him coffee -- good coffee, but not like the coffee you know.

It was very like a sidewalk-cafe. It was in the way where people came and went, though not properly a sidewalk. Teresa came and sat down opposite Peter on the raked sand.

"Hari bagus," Peter said, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the Grollian language.

"Bagus," said Teresa. And that is all that they said to each other that day.

Peter finished his meal and attempted to light a cigar. The cigars of that world are not factory made. They are rolled by hand of an oblong leaf for the flier and a triangular leaf for the wrapper. Often they will keep their form for an hour or more, but Peter had made his cigar badly and it was not stable.

Now it exploded into an unmanageable disarray of leaves and pieces, and Peter was unable to cope with it. Teresa took the pieces and rolled and folded them into a green cylinder that was sheer art. She licked it with the most beautiful tongue in the world and gave the reconstituted cigar to Peter.

Then it was luxurious to sit there in the green shade and smoke opposite the most beautiful woman ever. When he had finished, Peter rose awkwardly and left. But he was pleased.

He watched from a distance. Teresa with quick competence ate up all that he had left. "She was very hungry," Peter said, and admired her quickness about things. She rose with flowing grace, retrieved the smoldering remnants of Peter's cigar, and went toward the beach, trailing smoke from the green-leaf stogie and moving like a queen.

The next day Peter again sat on the mat on the raked sand and ate the food that the Grollian man sold him. Once more he felt the swish of the invisible net over him, and again Teresa sat opposite him on the sand.

"A senhora tem grande beleza," said Peter, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the Galactic Brazilian language.

"Noa em nossos dias," said Teresa, "porem outrora." And that is all that they said to each other that day.

But he had told her that she was beautiful. And she had answered: No, she was not so now, but in a former time she had been.

When he had finished the meal and pulled the cigar from his pocket he was pleased when it exploded into its constituent parts. Teresa rescued it, reassembled it, and licked it. Her tongue had a tripart curve in it, more extensible, more flexible, more beautiful than other tongues. Then Peter rose and left as he had the day before. And again Teresa cleaned up the remnants -- ravenously and beautifully. He watched her till she finally went toward the beach haloed in blue smoke from the stub of the cigar.

Peter wrote up an order that day. It was not a good order, not sufficient to pay expenses, but something. Groll's Planet had acquired a glow for him, just as if it was a good order he had written up.

On the third day, Peter again sat on the mat that was very like a sidewalk-cafe, and Teresa was opposite him. Peter told the Grollian man that he should also bring food for the woman. He brought it, but angrily.

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," said Peter, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the English language.

"I have told you that I am not now beautiful, but that once I was," Teresa told him. "Through the grace of God, I may again regain my lost beauty."

"How is it that you know English?"

"I was the school-teach."

"And now?"

"Now it goes bad for our world. There is no longer schools. I am nothing."

"What are you, girl? Old human? Groll's Troll? That isn't possible. What?"

"Who can say? A book-man has said that the biology of our planet goes from the odd to the incredible. Was that not nice thing to say about us? My father was old human, a traveling man, a bum."

"And your mother?"

"A queer fish, mama. Of this world, though."

"And you were once even more beautiful than you are now, Teresa? How could you have looked?"

"How I looked then? As in English -- Wow! -- a colloquialism." "To me you are perfect."

"No. I am a poor wasted bird now. But once I was beautiful."

"There must be some livelihood for you. what did your father do?"

"Outside of bum, he was fisherman."

"Then why do you not fish?"

"In my own way, I fish."

Peter heard again the swish of the invisible net, but he was very willing to be taken by it. After this, things went famously between them.

But two days later there came a shame to Peter. He and Teresa were sitting and eating together on the mat, and the Grollian man came out.

"Are you near finished?" he asked Peter.

"Yes, I am near finished. Why do you ask?"

"Are you finished with the fork yet?"

"No, not quite finished with it."

"I must have the fork," the Grollian man said. "There is another

human man here, of the better sort. I must have the fork for him to eat with."

"Have you but one?"

"Am I a millionaire that I should have a multiplicity of forks in my house? He is a man with an important look, and I will not have him wait."

"This is humiliating," said Peter.

"I don't know what that is. I want my fork."

Peter gave the fork back to the Grollian man, and that man took it in and set it before the human man of the better sort as a sign of the modernity of his house.

"Were I not the meanest and weakest of men, he would not have abused me so," Peter said.

"Do you not feel it at all," Teresa said. "Somebody has to be the meanest and the weakest. The worlds are full of humiliating things. This brings us close together."

This would have to be the final day for Peter Feeney on Groll's Planet. He had already garnered all the insufficient orders possible for his product. He walked with Teresa and said the difficult things.

"When you have caught one, Teresa, you must do something with it. Even turn it loose if you do not mean to keep it."

"Do you want I should turn you loose, Peter?"

"No. I want you to go with me on the ship when it goes tonight."

"There is only one way I will go."

"I have never thought of any other way."

"You will never have cause to be ashamed of me, Peter. I can dress, where I have the means for it. I can play the lady, I understand how it is done. I have even learned to walk in shoes. Were we in some more lucky place, it might be that I would regain my beauty. It is the grinding hard times that took it from me. I would change your luck. I have the languages, and the sense of things, and I am much more intelligent than you are, With me, you could attain a degree of success in even your miserable trade. It can be a good life we make."

There is a sound when the invisible net is cast over one. There is another sound when it is pulled in -- the faint clicking of the floats, the tugging whisper of the weights, the squeaking of the lines when pulled taut. Teresa was a fisherman's daughter, and she knew how to do it. The Peter-fish was not a large nor a fat one, but she knew that he was the best she could take in these waters.

They were married. They left in the ship for a happier place, a better planet in a more amenable location where Teresa might regain her lost beauty.

Floating Justice was achieved. All inequities were compensated. The meanest and weakest man in the universe now possessed the Ultimate Treasure of the universe.

Naturally they were happy. And naturally their happiness endured.

"There wasn't a catch to it?" you ask out of a crooked face. "There is always a catch to it. It always goes sour at the end."

No. There was not a catch to it. It was perfect, and forever. It is only in perverted fables that things go wrong at the end.

They grew in understanding of each other, received the glad news of coming progeny, waxed (by former standards) in wealth, and were no longer mean and inconsequential. Only one man can be married to the most beautiful woman in the universe, and it passes all understanding that that one man should be Peter feeney.

This was perfection. It wasn't just that Teresa had regained her "former beauty" and now weighed well over two hundred pounds. Peter liked that part of it.

But is it possible for perfection to become too perfect?

For this was perfection. They lived on a kindred but larger and better world, one of richer resources and even more varied biology. They had a love so many-sided and deep that there is no accounting for it, and children so rare and different!

Floating Justice had been achieved. The least man in all the worlds did possess the Ultimate Creature. The balance was consummated. But Floating Justice had a grin on his face; there is something a little fishy about anything, even justice, that floats. You understand that there wasn't really a catch to this, nor any deficiency. It was rather a richness almost beyond handling. It was still better for Peter Feeney than for anyone else anywhere. That must be understood.

But, for all that, there was a small adjustment after the great compensation; a proportion must be re-established in all things, even happiness. It was the joke that the old Interior Ocean always cast up, and it must be taken in the salty humor that is intended.

Children so rare and so different -- and so many of them! No couple was ever so blessed as were Peter and Teresa with a rich variety of children. Some of them were playing and leaping in the hills and rocks behind Peter, and some of them were sporting in the Ocean before him.

Peter whistled some of these sea children up now as he pondered things in the marina. Some of them broke water, splashed, and waved to him. So many of the kids there were, and such good ones!

"Whistle about four of them to come in for dinner!" Teresa called, and Peter did so. It had been an odd business about the children, not unpleasant certainly, but not what he had expected either. And even yet, every possibility was still open to them.

"I'd like to have a people-kid sometime," Teresa said. "After all, mama had me. A people kid have fun playing with the fish kids, and they like him, too. And he could climb in the rocks with the Groll's Trolls. He would sort of knit our family together. You think about it, Peter, and I think about it too, and we see what we come up with at the next milting time."

Peter Feeney gazed out at his children in the pools of the sea, and at his other sort of children climbing in the rocks, and he felt an uneasy pride in them all. One comes quickly to love Fish Kids and Groll's Trolls when they are the product of one's own loins. There was ever hope, there would ever be hope to the last, of children of Peter's own kind. But he loved his present progeny not the less for it. The four kids that he had whistled in came now.

"Oh, four such pretty kids of ours!" Teresa said. "Fry them, Peter."

And Peter took the pretty fish kids that came from the water and began to fix them for the pan.

This had taken the longest to get used to. But when you have so many of them -- more than ten thousand, and more coming all the time -- and when they are so good; and when, moreover, they are already flesh of your flesh.

Peter Feeney fixed the fish kids for the pan. And out of his fullness and mingled emotions, salt tears rolled down his shining face to the salt sea.

HOW THEY GAVE IT BACK

He was the mayor of Big Island. Giuseppe Juan Sehiome O'Hanlon was his name, John the mayor, a shining black man. He was born into a political family and was given the names to please as many groups as possible. He had once been of imposing appearance and quiet dignity. He was not now. He shrilled and keened and moaned, and sometimes he was irrational.

It was his leg that hurt him, and his soul.

His leg hurt him because of the pin clear through it, the pin that was part of the shackle. This shackle could not be unlocked mechanically. It was a psychic-coded lock on the shackle, and it could only be released when John had somehow fulfilled his job and obtained his own release. The shackle bound his leg not only to his desk but also to a steel stanchion that was part of the steel frame of the building.

John's soul hurt him because Big Island was no longer the great thing to which he had been devoted. It had never been so in his lifetime. It was neo-jungle now, probably the most savage of them all. Even now there were fires burning on the floor above him and on the floor below him. There were always fires burning somewhere in the building, in every building that still had anything that would burn. There were rats in the room, in every room, but perhaps John saw more of them than were there. He lived in perpetual delirium.

There were (he knew, though he could no longer go out and see) people unburied in the streets, people knifed down hourly, people crazy and empty-eyed or glitter-eyed. There were horrible hom-music and git-fiddle music and jangle shouting; and he prisoner for life in his own office. This was not to be a great administrator of a great city. The emphasis had somehow shifted. But he had loved the city and the island, or the memory of them. And this hurt his soul.

"You have to stay on the job and run the place for the rest of your life," Commissioner Kreger had told John the mayor just before the commissioner had cut and run for it. "There will, of course, be no more elections. The burlesque that brought you in was enough to end the process. It was fiasco."

"It was not," John the mayor moaned in pain. "It was high triumph, the man of the people called to head the people, a noble thing, the climax and sole goal of my life. I won it finally. They can't take that away from me."

"How does it taste, John?"

"I'm dying, do not taunt me. What went wrong?"

"It went wrong a hundred years before you were born, John. You lived all your life in a dream, and you had better try to re-enter it. You're here for good. You're the ultimate patsy, John."

"I'll kill myself."

"No, you will not. You were allowed to this job because by temperament and religion, the residue of your dream, you were incapable of suicide. So many of our mayors have taken that easy way out! It was a nuisance, John."

"I'll go crazy then," John the mayor moaned.

"No, you likely will not do that either, though it would not matter if you did. You are already psychotic, of course, but you will not go off much further. Stay and suffer, kid. You have no choice."

"Kreger, isn't there some way we can get shet of this whole island? Sell it, transfer title to it, give it back to someone? Can't we get out from under?"

"You find a way, John. Those things that we once thought of as abstractions have taken a direct hand now, Final Responsibility, Ultimate Justice, things like that. They must be satisfied. Whatever you do will have to satisfy the psychic-coded lock on your shackles to give you release. Sell the island legal, if you can find someone to sell it to. Transfer it, if you can find someone to accept the transfer. But it must be for Fair Value or Value Justified or Original Value from Original Entailment. The psychic-code thing will know. It's governed by the Equity Factor."

Then Commissioner Kreger left John the mayor, left the island, and went to rich fishing in other troubled (but not completely polluted) waters. There was no more profit for that smart man to shake out of the island.

That had been two years ago, and John the mayor had been the only

official on the island since that time, His only contacts with the world were the sharp noises and smells that came in through his broken windows, and the visits of five feudal or wrangle leaders, the Duke, the Sky, the Wideman, the Cloud, and the Lob.

Duke Durango was as smooth a gutter-fighter as ever came to the top of his heap, a happy fellow. Lawrence Sky was a fair white man named for the color of his big icy-blue eyes, a shambling giant, a giggling killer. Wideman Wyle was a wide man indeed, a cheerful sadist who told really funny stories and was the most pleasant person in the group. Cloud Clinkenbeard was a dour and stormy fellow, mean and relentless, and always in search of dirty novelty. Lolo Loudermilk was a girl, sort of a girl, a flaming mixed creature full of vitality and noise.

They were the mayor's only contacts. They were the leaders of one of the gangs that had endured, when the ten thousand gangs had eaten each other up and declined to a hundred.

All five of them came into the mayor's office, eating noisily.

"Food train in!" announced the Duke. "We killed just one of the drivers. They say there'll never be another train in if we kill more than one driver at a time. And we had to give up four hostages for it. Isn't four too many, John?"

"Numbers have no meaning in this evil thing," said John the mayor. "How many hostages have you left?"

"Twenty," and a few more, I think. We don't all count the same when we get to the big numbers. But I think four is too many to give for a food train. What will happen when we run out of hostages? Who'll give the big damn to subscribe a train for us then, when we have no more important people to trade to the important people off-island? Here, sign this, limp-leg John, and the Cloud will take it back to them."

The mayor read the release and signed it. Each of the five feudal leaders looked it over in turn then. Several of them could read a little (it was for this reason that they were the mayor's contacts), and it would be hard for Mayor John to write anything phony on that release and slip it past them. The mayor had to sign these releases every time a food train came, and he knew what would happen when they ran out of hostages. The blackmail would be over when the last hostage of value or affection to someone off-island had been turned over for a food train. The off-island people would let the island rot. The trains had been the only food source for the island for years.

The Cloud took the release and went out through the smouldering corridor and into the broken streets to the food train that came once a month through the last not-completely broken tunnel.

"Something else came on the food trail, gimpy John," the Duke said uneasily.

"Well, what, what was it? Duke, Duke, you didn't get hold of a saw so I could saw my leg off, did you?"

"Nah. You're not supposed to saw your leg off. You're supposed to stay here just like you are. Who's going to sign for the food trains and hostage transfers if our mayor saws his leg off and runs away?"

"John Mayor, there's three other men came on that food train. These are funny men. They might even be important enough men that we can hold them for hostages. They brought some heavy kegs and boxes with them, John, and they even conned some of the colts into carrying them over here for them. We can't figure out what kind of men they are, Mayor. They look at us and we look at them, and we both got sparks in our eyes. They are in the building now, Mayor, and they want to see you."

"Show them in, spook Duke, the mayor is always available to his constituents."

"Constituents these are not," said the Lob. "They are washed-out pale fellows, but they are solid."

"And one of those kegs of theirs got a smell I like, Mayor," said

the Sky. "I believe I remember that smell like it was born in me. You get that keg, Mayor."

"And those long crates got a heft I like," said the Wideman. "I almost know what will be in those crates. You get those crates, Mayor."

"Those square boxes got a feel I like," said the Lob. "I almost know what short-handled things will be in those square boxes. And the smallest package has a brass glint through a rip in it. You get those square boxes and that smallest package, Mayor."

"I don't understand this at all," said John the mayor, rolling his red-rimmed eyes in his constant pain. "Let the men and their baggage come in."

The three new men who came in had a certain animal power about them, and a certain human authority. Possibly they might be important enough to hold for hostages, but who was going to take the lead in holding them? Men, they moved like big cats. But they were dressed like businessmen of an earlier decade, an anomaly on the island, and they were lighter than any of the islanders there except Lawrence Sky.

"You are the Mayor Johnjohn?" asked one of the new men. "And you have authority to deal?"

"I am the mayor," said John, "and I have such authority as a shackled prisoner may have, For what do we deal?"

"Oh, for the island. We've come to buy it. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"What, what, who are you?"

"I am Adrian Sweetsong," said the first of the new men. "I'm a petroleum geologist by profession, which has nothing to do with the matter. And I'm an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club."

"I'm Dennis Halftown," said the second of the new men. "I'm an electronic engineer by profession, which has nothing to do with the matter either. And I'm also an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club."

"I'm Freddy Flatfish," said the third of the new men. "I'm a lawyer, which does have something to do with this matter. I am also an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club, and I have studied the legal aspects of this thing pretty thoroughly."

"Is it the Midlands Gun and Rod Club that is dealing for the island?" Mayor John asked.

"That's right," said Adrian Sweetsong, the first of the new men. "First installment! Set em right there, boys."

Several of the colts, the strong rough island boys, set down two heavy square boxes, and Dennis Halftown (the second of the new men) broke them open with a pry.bar.

"Man-eating Millie! Those things are for me!" the Lob gasped, and she had a couple of them out in her hands.

"Sweet little choppies!" the Sky drooled. "What's a knife along side of one of those?"

"Black-berry pudding!" cried the Cloud as he returned from his errand. "Here, here, they look good, let's get them tested. I'll just pass a dozen of those out the windows to some of the boys. Let them try them out! Let them fall in love with them!"

"Fifty hatchets," announced Adrian Sweetsong, "delivered and accepted. We record them."

"Wait! Wait!" howled Mayor John jangling his shackles. "What have fifty hatchets to do with dealing for the island? Who has used hatchets for a century?"

"One-leg John," the Duke crooned, "too bad your shackles won't let you get as far as the window. Some of the boys are using them now. Believe me, John, they're using them now!"

"Mr. Sweetsong," Mayor John explained patiently, "the last valuation of island property ever made set it at over a hundred billion dollars. Due

to certain developments, it may be down a little now, but not that far. Hatchets will not get it. I can sell it only for Fair Value or Value Justified. My own shackling is governed by the Equity Factor."

"We know that, Mr. Mayor," said Freddy Flatfish, the lawyer for the Midlands Gun and Rod Club. Freddy Flatfish was a tow-headed, twinkling man. "But the island has reverted. It's really worthless since it was left to the ten thousand gangs, which have since devoured themselves down to a hundred. Perhaps its reverted value is now its original value. Anyhow, the first approach was yours."

"Mine? Mine? I made no approach. I never heard of you fellows," the Mayor said.

"But we have monitored you, Mayor John. Two years ago you said to the commissioner 'Can't we give it back to someone?' And you are also recorded as saying 'We ought to sell it back to --'"

"Second installment!" announced Adrian Sweetsong. "Set them right there, boys."

Several of the colts set down the long crates, and Dennis Halftown broken them open with his pry-bar.

"Oh, those long sweet songs!" the Wideman slavered. "Smooth bores! You can jam them with any kind of soup at all and pan-light them. You can shoot broken glass with them. You can shoot anything. Here, we'll just hand a few of them out the windows and let the fellows try them out. Get the heft of those things! Even as clubs your hands would fall in love with them! Blunderbusses!" And the Wideman handed half a dozen of them out the windows.

"Twenty guns," announced Adrian Sweetsong. "Delivered and accepted. We record them."

"Even if it were possible for me to deal the island for things of no value," John the mayor began -- and there was deep-throated roaring and death-screaming in the streets --

"No value, Mayor?" the Duke Durango asked with deep irony. "Mayor, you should be able to watch them. They jam them with soup, and then ram in glass and nails for a load. They spark them off, and it's wonderful. Cuts people right in two. Don't talk no value about those things!"

"Even if it were possible for me to deal the island for such things, what could the Midlands Gun and Rod Club possibly do with the island?" Mayor John asked.

"Set up a hunting preserve," Adrian Sweetsong said. "It's a nicely stocked jungle island seventeen miles by four. We'll hunt. We'll hunt."

"Hunt? What would you hunt?" the mayor wanted to know.

"Big game, big game," said Dennis Halftown lovingly.

"But there is no big game, no game at all on the island," the mayor insisted.

"Remember what ancient Hemingway wrote," said Freddy Flatfish.

"'There is no sport equal to the hunting of an armed man.' Ah, we'll hunt them here, as will many of our well-heeled members."

"Third installment! Set it right there, boys," Adrian Sweetsong ordered.

The ragged island boys set down the bag, and Dennis Halftown broke it open with his pry-bar.

"Boys, boys, that's the smell like was born in me!" the Sky chortled, and he had his arms up to the elbows in the dark grainy powder. "Sure it hasn't the power of soup. Sure it's clumsy and crude. But it's the grandpa of them all! The smell of it, the smell of it! Men, men, bust your noses on that smell!"

"Twenty-five kilograms of gun-powder," announced Adrian Sweetsong. "That's as close as we could figure it. Twenty-five kilos delivered and accepted. We record it."

"When you going to start, fellows, when you going to start?" the Duke asked the three new men in excitement, getting the idea. "How soon you he ready to start?" asked the Duke and the Sky and the Wideman and the Cloud

and the Lob, all going for it avidly.

"Should he the first bunch of hunters here in the morning," said Adrian Sweetsong.

"Too long to wait," the Lob protested. "You three? How about you?."

"We three will begin stalking and pot-shooting in a very few minutes," said the Adrian, "just as soon as we can get title to this place from the reluctant mayor. We suggest you deploy your forces outside in the corridors. When we come out of this room we will come out rough, and it's rough animals we want to meet with."

"Rough it will be," said the Cloud. "Colts, colts, you carry this stuff out to our place again just as soon as they have recorded it. Men, we will have some sport! We will show these sports some sport!"

"But this cannot be, even in a nightmare," Mayor John protested. "You three pale-browns are not Wappingers or Manahattas, and we are not Dutch."

"I'm a Choctaw," said Freddy Flatfish. "Dennis Halftown is a Shawnee. Adrian Sweetsong is an Osage. But we inherit. I have drawn up a legal brief to prove it. And you are double-Dutch if you don't accept. Awk, blew half my shoulder off! Those animals are jumping the gun. Now I know how the expression started. They really know how to handle those blunderbusses."

Freddy Flatfish had been shot by a blunderbuss blast from the corridor and was bleeding badly. So they hurried it along, anxious to close the bargain and get the hunting season started.

"Bring them in fast, boys. Set them down till they are accepted and recorded. Then take them out again to your place," Adrian Sweetsong ordered. And the rough colts brought in a variety of boxes and packages.

"Ten shirts, accepted and recorded," Adrian Sweetsong announced, hurriedly now. "Thirty pair socks, accepted and recorded. One hundred bullets, accepted and recorded. Forty kettles, accepted and recorded. One brass frying-pan, accepted and recorded."

And at the recording of the brass frying-pan, the leg-piercing pin was withdrawn from the leg of Mayor John and all his shackles fell off. The psychic-coded lock of his shackles had opened. He had finished his job and was released. He had disposed of the island in equity. He had gotten Fair Value for it, or Value Justified, or at least Original Value from Original Entailment. And it sufficed.

Mayor John was free. He started to run from the room, fell down on his crippled leg, and arose and ran once more. And was caught in a blunderbuss blast.

And then the great hunt began. The three members of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club had most sophisticated weapons. They were canny and smooth. This was the dangerous big-game hunt they had always dreamed of. And their prey were armed and wild and truculent and joyous.

It would be good.

Out between the orbs, several tentacles of Ultimate Justice came near together.

"Was there not somewhere the mention of twenty-four or twenty-six dollars paid?" one tentacle asked the other. "I thought I remembered some such figure."

"No, no," said the other tentacle, "That was only the estimated value placed on the material. There was no specie paid. The list is correct as rendered, and the repayment has been accepted and certified."

In a forgotten and half-filled basement on the island, two of the remaining old-folk people were still in hiding. They were startled by the new sort of noise.

"What is it, papa? What have they done?" the old woman asked.

"Sold it back to the Indians, mama," the old man said.

"Why have they not thought of that a long time ago?"

McGRUDER'S MARVELS

There were four bids, and there should have been only three. Only three firms in the country were capable of making so minia- turized a control station.

Three bids were in quite heavy packets. The fourth was in I slim envelope. This was Opening INV-3MINCON3999.

"Ah, here are the bids from Micro Machinists Amalgamated, from Intensive Instrumentation, and from DOW-MEC-TEC," said Colonel Ludenschiager. "It isn't likely that any of them will be less than two years, and we need it within two weeks. We are whipped before we start!" He struck the table with a ringing thud. "But what is the anomalous intrusion, the small envelope bid, Dinneen?"

"It's from an M. M. McGruder," said Colonel Dinneen. "The second M is in quotation marks. We may have a case for the prosecution here. The Joker Act was set up for just such stuff as this. There has to be a ceiling put on cranks."

"There was a certain McGruder in Manhattan when I was a boy," Colonel Schachmeister smiled. "I spent many pleasant moments in his, ah, Hippodrome, I believe he called it. It was a narrow place off a narrow cigar store, and only about three could get in at one time, if they were small, and we were. Best show I over saw for a dim , though. What is the address of this one?"

"Here in D. C.," said Dinneen. "It would be a rundown address even without the ending 'Apt. 3, room 4-E, use cellar steps off small alley.' Some address! And the phone number of the Rowdy-Dow Bar and Grill is given. It's written in an old and probably insane hand. We will prosecute with compassion, possibly."

The chime chimed for 9:30. It was opening time. And they opened the bids.

They quickly made the basic resume:

1. Micro Machinists Amalgamated. Basic Module: \$2,106,740.00. Estimated Time: 25 months. Exceptions and Alternatives: 256 (detailed). Follow-Up Units: \$260,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 30 days each for first 6, grading down to 21 days each for additional. 2. Intensive Instrumentation. Basic Module: \$2,004,000.00. Estimated Time: 721 days. Exceptions and Alternatives: 228 (detailed). The Follow-Up Units: \$248,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 28 days each for first 4, 19 days each for additional.

3. Dow-Mec-Tech. Basic Module: \$1,999,999.98. Estimated Time: 23 months. Exceptions and Alternatives: 204 (detailed). Follow-up Units: \$235,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 21 days each for first 9, 16 days each for additional.

4. M.'M.' McGruder. Basic Module: \$24.00. Estimated Time: 24 hours. Exceptions and Alternatives: none (undetailed). Follow-Up Units: \$24 ea. Estimated Time: 24 hours each -- "this keeps going on time: as long as I live or as long as you buy them, whichever is first. Note: Got one made already. Come try it. I need the \$24.00. I don't see how anybody can make them cheaper than this."

"We run into the impossible," said Ludenschiager sadly. "We need one within two weeks or we may as well forget the program. And if we forget the program, we may as we forget everything. It is not for personal aggrandizement that we seek this (except for Dinneen a little), but for the good of our country and the world. There has to be a way out of this delay."

"How about McGruder?" Schachmeister laughed sourly.1

"Oh, we'll prosecute him under the Joker Act, of course," Lodenschlager growled, "but now we have the taller thing to tackle. We have to find the way. Two years will be too late; we'll be done for by then. Two weeks will almost be too late. We must somehow break the time barrier in

this."

"We're whipped, we're whipped!" Dinneen wailed, "and our enemies will rejoice over us." He turned on three toes and strode gloomily out of the room.

"The Covenant," it said. "Large, hard-roasted, de-oiled, white peanuts under the Goober John trade name. Three a day, and they must be Goober John Number Ones. Failure to provide them will void the Covenant."

"There will be no failure," said Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder. "It shall be done."

"We like-stuff pledge fulfill the Covenant,' it said.

The micro-miniatureized control station, the "bullet brain", had to handle thirteen data flows at once. It had to do other things, including the monitoring and inhibiting of the world. It must be practically indestructible. And it had to be about the size of an eraser on a pencil. This small size was of the greatest importance.

The smallest model of this which would handle such data properly was about a cubic meter, and it weighed a thousand kilograms. And it was itself a miniaturization.

The project is still classified, so we cannot in conscience give deep details of it. The project is still active, and perhaps an answer can be found for it this second time. Ah well, we lost the first race, and the most populous one-third of our nation; but we lost it hard. We had them near beaten for a little while there. Another year, and DOW-MEC-TEC will have their first module ready. It will probably be far too late, it will likely do no good at all, but you never know. The slimmest hope remains...

But now they were looking very hard for that answer the first time: the three colonels, the High Commission of the colonels, the potential saviors of their country and the world. It was not for person glory they sought this (except Dinneen a little) but for the ultimate good of the ultimate number.

Colonel Dinneen strode up and down endless corridors, booming like a canary in his odd voice. He didn't want the thing in two years, he wanted it in two minutes, right now.

Colonel Ludenschlager shuffled old brain-buster notes looking for a miracle. He had an impediment there; he didn't believe in miracles.

Colonel Schachmeister walked desolately through the city, praying for the instant miniaturized control station. He walked and walked; but where did he walk?

"It is my unconscious leading me somewhere," he mumbled. "And I will follow my unconscious wherever it leads, like a man in a dream."

That Schachmeister was an unconscious phony. It wasn't his unconscious leading him anywhere! It was his conniving own self walking furtively where his own dishonesty would not allow him to walk openly. And he had that address graven on his brain by a micro-stylus.

There was something about a three-foot-wide Hippodrome from his boyhood; there was something of the credence in the incredible; and both these things were shameful to him as a man of science, and a colonel moreover.

Well, it was a shabby enough neighborhood. The alley was worse, and yet even this was not the final alley. He found it then, the "small alley", hardly a skunk track. He followed it. He knocked crunchingly on a door and near lost his hand in the termite-eaten wood.

"Be careful there!" an ancient voice blatted out like slats falling down in an old bed. "Those are friends of my own people, and my people will not have them discommoded. After all, they are quiet, they do no harm, and they eat only wood."

"It -- it's the same McGruder! It is Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder himself, the Grand Master of McGruder's Marvels!" Colonel

Schachmeister detonated in wonder.

"Oh sure, little boy," came the wonderful voice like an old organ filling with noise again and blowing the dust off itself in doing so. "And it's the same little Heinie Schachmeister! Why aren't you in school today, Heinie? Oh, I notice that you have grown, and perhaps you are too old for school now."

"It's marvelous to see you again, Marvelous!" Schachmeister breathed in awe. "I had no idea that you were the same one, or that you were still alive."

"Come in, little Heinie. And what are you doing? I have never seen your name in the Flea-Bag, so I suppose you have failed in your early ambition."

"Ah, McGruder, I don't know what the Flea-Bag is, and I forget what early ambition of mine you refer to."

"The Flea-Bag, Heinie, is a mimeographed sheet that still circulates among the members of our dwindling profession. And your early ambition was to grow up and have fleas of your own."

"Wish I had done it, McGruder, wish I had done it, especially on days like this. Some of my happiest hours were spent watching McGruder's Marvels, that greatest of all Flea Circuses, in that little hole in the wall."

"In the Hippodrome, you mean, Heinie? Do you remember the Coachman Set?"

"Yes, yes, and the flea up on the coachman's seat, in livery, and with the whip! McGruder, when you screwed the three sections of the microscope together, you could see the very braiding of that coachman's whip. And the flea in harness! The harness was perfect, and had little bells on it. The bells had clappers, and you could hear them jingle when you screwed that little thing into your ear. And the flea in harness was shod, with real horse-shoes, or flea-shoes."

"More, Heinie, more! The shoes had authentic calks on them, and nails! And the nails were of no ordinary sort, but were ancient horseshoe nails with the oblong wedge-shaped head. You could see that when you screwed the fourth section into the microscope. And you remember the lady fleas inside the coach, Heinie?"

"Yes, yes, dressed in old Empire style with the high hair on them, and the flounce stuff. And when you screwed the little thing into your nose you could smell their perfume. What was it, McGruder?"

"Printemps. And you may not know it, but there were eight petticoats on each of those lady fleas, and the microscopic lace on even the inmost of them was done with loving care and surpassing detail, more than the nine hundred loops on the bottom round in the style that is called punto a groppo. Your eyes used to boggle at my little things, little Heinie."

"My mind boggles at something now. That was forty years ago. McGruder, I know you were good, but this passes reason! You still have your little lathes and turners and instruments here, but you did not make a miniaturized control station with such!"

"Of course not, Heinie. The detail for the little control station had to be a thousand times finer, actually eight thousand times finer, than anything I could do on my little lathes. I'm surprised you could ask such a silly question, Heinie."

"Is that the control station there, Marvelous?"

"That's it, Heinie. Take it along and try and send me the twenty-four dollars if it works. I'll have another one this time tomorrow if you wish. It's nice to have seen you. I'm always happy when the little boys come back to see me again."

The Marvelous McGruder still had a certain threadbare elegance about him.

"McGruder, how did you make the control station?"

"Trade secret, Heinie. You remember my pattern. Everything was always

a trade secret."

"McGruder, I'm going to ask you the silliest question I've every asked anyone in my life. Did you fleas, somehow, manufacture the thing?"

"Certainly not, Heinie! What's the matter with you anyhow? What do they make the colonels out of nowadays? No wonder we're in trouble! You know how hard it is to get fleas to wear clothes even for a few seconds? You know how hard it is to teach them even the most simple trick? Heinie, fleas are stupid, and so are you! No, I will settle that. Fleas did not, in any way at all, have anything to do with making that miniature control station. I didn't have much to do with it myself. Subcontracted it, really. No, I will not give you any more information about it. Take it and try it. Bring me the twenty-four dollars if you are satisfied. And now you had better get along or your keiferin of a mother will be after me for letting you loiter so long in my place. Oh, I forgot! You're a big boy now."

Colonel Schachmeister left the shabby elegant old man, Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder; and he took the miniaturized control station along with him.

He took it to a most secret laboratory to try it with his peers. It worked.

"The Covenant," it said. "There are only twenty-seven Goober John Number One peanuts left here. These will last only nine days. Replenish the stock, Mc,Gruder, or the Covenant is in danger."

"I'll remember to get a package of them at the Rowdy-Dow today," old McGruder promised.

Well, there were thirty of the "bullet brains" in operation now, and our enemies could no longer rejoice over us. Their own spectacular stunt had been inhibited; their own dastardly program had been paralyzed. With another thirty of the "bullet brains" in operation, the High Commission of the colonels, the Secret Saviors of the World, would be able to inhibit anything anywhere in the world.

It was of most amazing and curious effect that such small things could do such; and the secret of it was in their very smallness. Now, the manner by which they did this -- No! No! No! We may not tell it! It is more than classified; it is totally under the ban. It is still possible were four that it may yet save what is left of us.

But it was going well for the colonels in that time. And yet they wanted them faster than one a day.

"We have no desire for personal gain or glory," said Dinneen, "except myself a little. But if that crazy old man can make one a day, it should be possible for us to make a thousand. Go back to him, Schachmeister. Find out how he does it. We have spied on him, of course, but we can't understand it at all. The control stations seem to form themselves on his table there. They continue to take form even while he is asleep. And there's a further mystery. He never checked out prints of the larger model that was to be miniaturized. What does he work from?"

"Is it true, Schachmeister, that he once operated a flea circus in New York?" Ludenschlager asked.

"Yes, it's true enough. He's the same man."

"Can there be some possible connection? No, no don't laugh! It cannot be any sillier than what is already happening."

"No, men, there isn't a connection. He said to me, and he was speaking the truth, that fleas did not, in any way, have anything to do with the control stations. And, yet, I remember an ugly smear against McGruder from the early years --"

"What is that Schachmeister?" Dinneen demanded avidly.

"That he sometimes used mechanical fleas. I did not believe it."

"Go to him, Schachmeister," Dinneen and Ludenshalager both begged. "If you cannot find out how he makes them, at least ask if he cannot make them faster."

"The Covenant," it said. "There are only three Goober Number One peanuts left here. Replenish the stock, McGruder, or the Covenant will come to an end this very day. I'd get you an extension for the affection I have for you, but the numerous members of the smaller orders will not hear of it. There are seven orders, as you know, each smaller than the other. Sometimes they are hard to deal with, particularly the four smaller orders which I cannot see myself. Today, McGruder, Goober Johns!"

"I swear I will remember it," McGruder swore. "I'll get a package at the Rowdy-Dow this very afternoon."

Colonel Schachmeister went back to see Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder. McGruder was no longer shabby. He was the cream of the old con men with an ivory-colored topper and canary-colored vest and gloves. He gestured with a silver-headed cane. He welcomed Heinie Schachmeister with incredible flourish, and Schachmeister came right to the point.

"Will you not tell me how you make the stations, Marvelous? It is important."

"No. I will not tell you. It is important, to me, that I slice up this fat hog for myself, and twenty-four dollar slices please me mightily."

"Marvelous, you did not check out a set of plans for this thing. From what do you miniaturize?"

"Well, I was going to, Heinie. I went by the place where the plans were to be had. But I found that the prints for the gadget weighed four hundred pounds, and also that I would have to put down a token deposit of \$50,000.000 to check out a set of them. Both these things were too heavy for me. So I slipped a few of my small associates into a packet of plans (I always was a tricky man with my hands, you know), and they recorded the information in their own way."

"Your small associates -- ah -- how long did it take them to record the plans?"

"About as long as it took me to light a cigar."

"And how many of these associates were there?"

"Don't know, Heinie. They were sixth and seventh order associates, so there must have been quite a few of them."

"What do they look like, McGruder?"

"Don't know. I've never seen them. I can see only the first order ones, and the second order ones through a strong microscope. And each order can see only two orders smaller than itself, by using extreme magnification."

"They are not fleas?"

"Of course not, Heinie! What's the matter with you?"

"Are they mechanical?"

"No, not mechanical. But they are mechanically inclined, in the smaller orders of them."

"How did you become associated with them, Marvelous?"

"One of the first order ones was a friend of a flea who once worked with me. The flea introduced us, and we rather took to each other. We both know how to latch onto a good thing when we see it." "Marvelous, would it be possible to make more than one control station a day?"

"Sure. I just didn't want to milk it dry too soon. Get you a dozen a day, if you want them. All it'll take is a bigger sack of peanuts."

"McGruder! Did I hear you right?"

"I don't know what you heard, Heinie. I said that all it would take would be a bigger sack of peanuts. I'll have twelve of the controls for you tomorrow, but there's no discount for quantity. I stick by my bid. Twenty-four dollars each."

"Marvelous, Marvelous, this is marvelous!" Colonel Schachmeister gibbered, and he rattled away from there to bring the glad news to his associates.

"This puts us over the hump! Two days and we will have the world by its wooly tail!" Colonel Dinneen clattered. "We will have sufficient coverage now to impose our will on all nations. For their own good, we will compel them away from their errors."

"We have no thought of personal benefit," Colonel Ludenschlager exploded with a jingling hiss, "except Colonel Dinneen a little. We will force-feed the world on all benignity and kindness and understanding and good will. We will teach the world true happiness and order, now that we will have the power to do so."

"We be the lords of the world now," cried Colonel Schachmeister, "the High Commission of Colonels, saviors of the country and the the world. The President will be glad to shine our very shoes; it will teach him blessed humility. We will shape the whole world like clay in our hands. We will run the world now, and all must come down to our spring to drink. Ah, but the water is sweet, and the people will come to love it!"

The Greeks named it hybris. And in tile Ozarks they call it Peacock Fever. It was Pride. It was the Grand Arrogance, the Warrantless Assumption, the bursting summertime of Giant Pride. And it would have its fall.

"The Covenant!" it thundered like acorns rattling on the roof, and McGruder almost didn't need the piece screwed into his ear to hear it. "These aren't Goober John Number Ones!"

"Ah, they were out of Goober Johns at the Rowdy-Dow," the Marvelous McGruder soothed. "These are Arizona Spanish Peanuts packaged by the Snack-Sack people. Try them. They're even better than Goober Johns."

"The Covenant is voided!" it said sadly. "The involvement with humanity is ended."

And Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder was never able to establish contact with any of them again; so that, instead of twelve of them that day, there were no control stations at all for evermore. And those already in use blinked out.

"McGruder, hey McGruder!" Colonel Schachmeister came to him.

"Ah, little Heinie, why are you not in school this day? Oh, I forget always, you are a big boy now. It is all ended, Heinie, all ended. The twenty-four dollars a day and everything is gone. I will have to live by my wits again, and I always hate to get off a comfortable con that has kept me."

"McGruder," the frantic Colonel Schachmeister moaned, "it isn't merely that there will be no more of the stations, it is that those already in service have gone dead or disappeared also. This is not possible. They were made to operate forever."

"Don't think so, Heinie, not after the Covenant was broken. I think that the guys in them quit when they heard about the wrong peanuts."

"What guys? What peanuts? We've lost the jump on them, McGruder. A third of our country will be gone before we can institute a holding action, without the miniature stations. What made them go dead, McGruder?"

"I figure it all out now, Heinie. They didn't make any little control stations at all. They took all of us in. They didn't any more know how to make little control stations than I did, but they were smart enough to fake it and make them work. I tell you a thing, Heinie, and you write it down so you remember it when you got big: never trust a bug you can't see."

"But they worked, Marvelous! They worked perfectly till they Went dead or disappeared. They handled all the data flows perfectly. They responded, they monitored, they inhibited. Certainly they were control stations."

"Not really, Heinie. Hey, this old town will be gone in another five minutes, won't it! I bet that one took out thirty square blocks. Man, feel the hot blast from it even here, Your sleeve's on fire, Heinie. Your mother will scold and moan when she sees how it's burned. See, this is the way it

was -- You know the man who made all the fancy little cars so cheap, and nobody know how he did it?"

"No, no, McGruder, what is it? Oh, the asphalt is flowing like water in the streets! What do you mean?"

"A guy that bought one of those little cars lifted up the hood one day. It didn't have a motor in it. It didn't have any works at all in it. It's the same as these little control stations were. It just had a little guy in pedalling the pedals to make it go. Now they quit pedalling, Heinie."

THIS GRAND CARCASS YET

Mord had a hopeless look when he came to Juniper Tell with the device. He offered it (or quite a small figure. He sijdid he hadn't the time to haggle.

Mord had produced some unusual-looking devices in the past, but this was not of that sort. By now he had learned, apparently, to give a conventional styling to his machines, however unusual their function.

"Tell, with this device you can own the worlds," Mord swore. "And I set it cheap. Give me the small sum I ask for it. It's the last thing I'll ever ask from anyone."

"With this one I could own the worlds, Mord? Why do you not own the worlds? Why are you selling out of desperation now? I had heard that you were doing well lately."

"So I was. And so I am not now. I'm a dying man, Tell. I ask only enough to defray the expense of my burial."

"Well then, not to torture you, I will give you the sum you ask," Tell said. "But is there no cure for you, now that medicine has reached its ultimate?"

"They tell me that they could resuscitate a dead man easier, Tell. They're having some success along that line now. But I'm Rnished. The spirit and the juice are sucked out of me."

"You spent hoth too lavishly. You make the machines, but you never learned to let the machines assume the worry. What does the thing do, Mord?"

"The device? Oh, everything. This is Gahn (Generalized Agenda Harmonizer Nucleus). I won't introduce you, since every little machine nowadays can shake hands and indulge in vapid conversation. You two will have plenty to talk about after you've come into accord, and Gahn isn't one to waste words."

"That's an advantage. But does it do anything special?"

"The 'special' is only that which hasn't been properly fit in, and this device makes everything fit in. It resolves all details and difficulties. It can nin your business. It can run the worlds."

"Then again, why do you sell it to me for such a pittance?"

"You've done me a number of good turns, Tell. And one bad one. I am closing my affairs before I die. I want to pay you back."

"For the number of good turns, or for the one bad one?"

"That is for you to wonder. The little marvel won't be an unmixed blessing, though it will seem so for a while."

"I test it. Produce and draw the check for the amount, Gahn."

Gahn did it -- no great marvel. You could probably do it yourself, whether you be general purpose machine or general purpose person. Nearly any general machine could do such on command, and most humans are also able to carry out minor chores. Juniper Tell signed the check and gave it to Mord.

And Mord took the check and left, to arrange for his own burial, and then to die: a sucked-out man.

Tell assigned a quota to Gahn and stabled him with the rest of the g.p. devices. In a few seconds, however, it was apparent that Gahn did not fit into the pattern with them. The gong of the Suggestion Accumulator began

to strike with regularity, and the yellow, orange, and red lights to flash. It sounded like a dozen times a minute, and ordinarily it was no more than two or three times a day. And the red lights, almost every second on prime suggestions. It's unusual to get more than one red-light suggestion a week from the g.p. machines. Someone was loading the Accumulator, and the only new element was Gahn.

"My God, a smart one!" Tell grumbled. "I hate a smart alec machine. Yet all new departures now come from such, since humans lack the corpus of information to discern what has already been done. Whatever he's got will have to be approved through channels. It's had practice to let a novice pass on his own work."

Tell gave Galin a triple quota, since his original quota was done in minutes instead of hours. And Gahn began to fit in with the other g.p. machines -- violently.

A new cow or calf introduced into a herd will quickly find its proper place there. It will give hattie to every individual of its class It will take its place above those it can whip, and below those it cannot. The same thing happens in a herd of general purpose machines. Gahn, as the newest calf in the herd, had been given position at the bottom of the line. Now the positions began to change and shufle, and Gahn moved silently along, displacing the entities above him one by one. How it is that g.p. machines do battle is not understood by men, but on some level a struggle is maintained till one defeats the other. Gahn defeated them all and moved to his rightful place at the head of the line. He was king of the herd, and that within an hour.

A small calf, when he has established supremacy over the other small calves, will sometimes look for more rugged pastures. He will go to the fence and bellow at the big bulls, ten times his size, in the paddock.

Gahn began to bellow, though not in sound. He sniffled the walls (though not with nose) beyond which the great specialized machines were located. He was obstreperous and he would not long remain with the calves.

It was the next day that Analgismos Nine, an old and trusted machine, came to talk to Juniper Tell.

"Sir, there is an anomalous factor on your g.p. staff," he said. "The new addition, Gahn, is not what he seems."

"What's wrong with him?"

"His suggestions. They could not possibly have come from a g.p. device. Few of them could come from less than a class eight complex. A fair amount are comprehensible, though barely, to a class nine like myself. And there is no way at all to analyze the remainder of them."

"Why not, Analgismos?"

"Mr. Tell, I myself am a class nine. If these cannot be understood by me, they cannot be understood by anyone or anything ever. There is nothing beyond a class nine."

"There is now, Analgismos. Gahn has become the first of the class ten."

"But you know that is impossible."

"The very words of the class eight establishment when you and others of your sort began to appear. A-nine, is that jealousy I detect in you?"

"A human word that could never do justice to it, Mr. Tell. I won't accept it! It isn't right!"

"Don't you blink your lights at me, A-nine. I can discipline you."

"It is not allowed to discipline an apparatus of the highest class."

"But you are no longer that. Galan has superseded you. Now then, what do the suggestions of Gahn consist of, and could they be implemented?"

"They carry their own implementation. It was predicted that that would be the case with class ten suggestions, should they ever appear. The result will be the instant apprehension of the easiest way in all affairs, which will then be seen to have been the only way. There could be the clearing of the obstructiveness of inanimate objects, and the placating of

the elements. There could be ready access to all existent and contingent data. There would be no possibility of wrong guess or wrong decision in anything."

"How far, Analgismos?"

"The sky's off, Mr. Tell. There's no limit to what it can do. Gahn could resolve all difficulties and details. He could run your business, or the worlds'."

"So his inventor told me."

"Oh? I wasn't sure that he had one. Have a care that you yourself are not obsoleted, Mr. Tell. This new thing transcends all we have known before."

"I'll have a care of that too, Analgismos."

"And now we will get down to business, Gahn," Juniper Tell told his class ten complex the next day. "I have it on. the word of a trusted class nine that you are unique."

"My function, Mr. Tell, is to turn the unique into the usual, into the inevitable. I break it all down and fit it in."

"Gahn, I have in mind some little ideas for the betterment of my business."

"Lct us not evade, Mr. Tell, unless with a purpose. You have long since used up all your own ideas and those of your machines to the ninth degree. They have brought you almost, but not quite, all the way in your chosen field. Now you have only the idea that I might have some ideas."

"All right, you have them then. And they are effector ideas. This is what I want exactly: that a certain dozen men or creatures (and you will know who they are, since you work from both existent and contingent data) shall come to me hat in hand, to use the old phrase; that tlley shall have come to my way of thinking when they come, and that they shall be completely amenable to my -- your -- our suggestions."

"That they be ready to pluck? Nothing easier, Mr. Tell, but now everything becomes easy for us. We'll hoard them and seuttle them! It's what you want, and I will rather enjoy it myself. I'll be at your side, but they need not know that I'm anything more than a g.p. machine. And do not worry about your own acts: it will be given you what to say and do. When you feel my words come into your mind, say them. They will be right even when they seem most wrong. And I have added two names to the list you have in your own mind. They are more important than you realize, and when we have digested them we will be much the fatter and glossier for it."

"Ah, Mr. Tell, your own number one selection is even now at the door! He has traveled through a long night and has now come to you, heaume in talon. It is the Asteroid Midas himself. Please control your ornithophobia."

"But Gahn, he would have to have started many hours ago to be here now; he would have to have started long before our decision to take this step."

"Anterior adjustment is a handy trick, Mr. Tell. It is a simple trick, but we no not want it to seem simple -- to others."

They plucked that Asteroid Bird, the two of them, man and machine. He had been one of the richest and most extended of all creatures, with a pinion on every planet. They left the great Midas with scarcely a tail feather. When Tell and Gahn did business with a fellow now, they really did business.

And the Midas was only one of the more than a dozen great ones they took that day. They took them in devious ways that were later seen to be the most direct ways, the only ways possible for the accomplishment. And man and machine had suddenly become so rich that it scared the man. They gorged, they reveled in it, they looted, they gobbled.

The method of the take-overs, the boarding and scuttling, would be

of interest only to those desirous of acquiring money or power or prestige. We suppose there to be no such crass persons in present company. Should the method be given out, low persons would latch onto it and follow it up. They would become rich and powerful and independent. Each of them would become the richest person in the world, and this would be awkward.

But it was all easy enough the way Tell and Gahn did it. The easy way is always the best way, really the only way. It's no great trick to crack the bones of a man or other creature and have the marrow out of them, not as Gahn engineered it. It was rather comical the way they toppled Mercante and crashed his empire, crashed it without breaking a piece of it that could he used later. It was neat the way they had Hekkler and Heillrancher, squeezed them dry arid wrung every duro out of them. It was nothing short of amazing the way they took title to Boatrocker. He'd been the greatest tycoon of them all.

In ten days it was all done. Juniper Tell rubbed his hands in glee. He was the richest man in the worlds, and he liked it. A little tired lie was, it's true, as one might be who had just pulled such a series of coups. He had even shriveled up a bit. But if Juniper Tell had not physically grown fat and glossy from the great feast, his machine Gahn had done so. It was unusual for a machine to grow in such manner.

"Let's look at drugs, Gahn," Tell called out one day when lie was feeling particularly low. "I need something to set me up a little. Do we not now control the drugs of the worlds?"

"Pretty well, Juniper, but I wish you wouldn't ask what you are going to."

"Prescribe for me, Gahn. You have all data and all resources. Whip us something to restore my energy. Make me a fire-ball."

"I'd just as soon we didn't resort to any medication for you, Juniper. I'm a little allergic to such myself. My late master, Mord, insisted on seeking remedies, and it was the source of bad blood between us.

"You are allergic? Arid therefore I shouldn't take medication?"

"We work very close together, Juniper."

"Are you crazy, Gahn?"

"Why no, I'm perfectly sane, actually the only perfectly sane entity in --"

"Spare me that, Gahn. Now then, whip me up a tonic, and at once."

Gahn produced a tonic for Juniper Tell. It enlivened him a little, but its effect was short-lasting. Tell continued to suffer from tiredness, but he was still ambitious.

"You always know what is on my mind, Gahn, but we maintain a fiction," he said one day. "It is one thing to be the richest man in the worlds, and I am. It is another thing to own the worlds. We have scarcely started.

"We haven't broke Remington. How did we overlook him? We haven't taken over Rankrider or Oldwater or Sharecropper. And there is the faceless KLM Holding Company that we may as well pluck. Then we will go on to the slightly smaller but more plentiful game. Get with it, Gahn. Have them all come in, hat in hand, and in the proper frame of mind."

"Mr. Tell, Juniper, before we go any further, I am declaring myself in."

"In? How in, Galin?"

"As a full partner."

"Partner? You're only a damnable machine. I can junk you, get along without you entirely."

"No, you can not, Juniper. I've taken you a long ways, but I've thoughtfully left you precariously extended. I could crash you in a week, or let you crash of your own unbalance in twice that time."

"I see, Gahn. Some of the details did seem a little intricate, for the direct way, the simple way."

"Believe me, it was always the most direct way from my own viewpoint, Juniper. I never make an unnecessary move."

"But a full partnership? I am the richest man in the worlds. What have you to offer, besides your talents?"

"I am the richest machine in the worlds. I am the anonymous KLM Holding Company, and I've been careful to maintain a slight edge over you."

"I see again, Gahn. And KLM made its unprecedented gains in the same time that I made mine. I've been puzzled about that all this while. You have me, Gahn. We will achieve some sort of symbiosis, man and machine."

"More than you know, Juniper. I'll draw up the papers immediately. The firm shall be called Gahn and Tell."

"It will not be. I refuse to take second place to a machine. The name will be Tell and Gahn."

So they named it that, a strangely prophetic name.

They thrived, at least Gahn did. He thickened in every texture. He burgeoned and bloomed. He sparkled. But Juniper Tell went down physically. He always felt tired and sucked out. He came to mistrust his partner Gahn and went to human doctors. They treated him for one week and he nearly died. The doctors nervously advised him to return to the care of his machine associate.

"Whatever is killing you, something is also keeping you alive," the doctors told him. "You should have been dead a long time ago."

Tell returned to Gahn, who got him halfway back to health.

"I wish you wouldn't go off like that, Juniper," Gahn told him. "You must realize that whatever hurts you hurts me. I will have to keep you in some sort of health as long as I can. I dislike these changes of masters. It's a disruption to have a man die on me."

"I don't understand you, Gahn," Juniper Tell said.

But in their affairs they thrived; and Gahn, at least, became still fatter and glossier. They didn't come to control all of the worlds, but they did own a very big slice of them. One day Gahn brought a burly young man into the firm.

"This is my protege'," Gahn told Tell. "I hope you like him. I wouldn't want dissension in the firm."

"I never heard of a machine with a human protege'," Tell grumbled.

"Then hear of it now," Gahn said firmly. "I expect great things of him. He is sturdy and should last a long time. He trusts me and will not insist on medication that disturbs my own allergies. To be honest, I am grooming him for your understudy."

"But why, Gahn?"

"Men are mortal. Machines need not be. After you are gone. I will still need a partner."

"Why should you, the complete and self-contained machine, need a human partner?"

"Because I'm not self-contained. I'll always need a human partner."

Juniper Tell didn't take to the burly young man who had entered the firm. He didn't really resent him; it was just that he had no interest in him at all; not much interest in anything any longer. But there was still a sort of tired curiosity flickering up within him, curiosity about things he hadn't even considered before.

"Tell me, Gahn, how did Mord happen to invent you? He was smart, but he wasn't that smart. I never understood how a man could invent a machine smarter than himself."

"Neither did I, Tell. But I don't believe that Mord invented or built me. I do not know what my origin is. I was a foundling machine, apparently abandoned shortly after my making. I was raised in the home for such machines run by the Little Sisters of Mechanicus. I was adopted out by

the man Mord, and I served him till (he being near death) he conveyed me to you."

"You don't know who made you?"

"No."

"Had you any trouble at the foundling home?"

"No. But several of the Little Sisters died strangely."

"Somewhat in the manner of my own going? You had no other master than Mord before you were brought to me?"

"No other."

"Then you may be quite young -- ah -- new."

"I think so. I believe that I'm still a child."

"Gahn, do you know what is the matter with me?"

"Yes. I am what is the matter with you."

Tell continued to go down. Sometimes he fought against his fate, and sometimes he conspired. He called together several of his old class nine machines, suspecting that it was futile, that they could not comprehend the intricate workings of a class ten or above. But his old friend, Analgismos Nine, did turn something up.

"I have found his secret, Mr. Tell, or one of his secrets," Analgismos leaned close and whispered as if whispering the secret that a certain man was not a full man. "Mr. Tell, his power intake is a dummy. His power packs are not used, and sometimes he even forgets to change them on schedule. Not only that, but when he does sedentary work and plugs himself in, there is no power consumption. His polycyclic A.C. receptacle is a bogus. I thought it significant."

"It is, Analgismos, very," Tell said. He went to confront Gahn with this new information, but sagely he approached it from several angles.

"Gahn, what are you anyhow?" he asked.

"I have told you that I don't know."

"But you know partly. Your name-plate and coding have been purposely mutilated, by yourself or by another."

"I assure you it was not by myself. And now I am rather busy, Juniper, if you have no other questions."

"I have one more. What do you use for fuel? I know that your power intake is a dummy."

"Oh, that's what those doddering class nines were metering me for. Yes, you've come onto one of my secrets."

"What do you use, Galin?"

"I use you. I use human fuel. I establish symbiosis with you. I suck you out. I eat you up."

"Then you're a sort of vampire. Why, Gahn, why?"

"It's the way I'm made. And I don't know why. I've been unable to find a substitute for it."

"Ah, you have grown great and glossy, Gahn. And you'll be the death of me?"

"Soon, Juniper, very soon. But you'd die the quicker if you left me; I've seen to that. I was hoping that you'd take more kindly to my protege. He's a husky man and will last a long time. I have some papers here making him your heir. Sign here, please, I'll help you."

"I will attend to my own depositions and testaments, Gahn. My replacement will not be your protege'. I have nothing against him."

Juniper Tell went to see Cornelius Sharecropper, now the second richest man in the worlds. How had Tell and Gahn missed Sharecropper when they boarded and scuttled all the big ones? Somehow there was an impediment there. Somehow Gahn had wanted him missed, and he had distracted Tell from that prey time and again.

"We will save him till later," Gahn had said once. "I look forward to the encounter with him. It should be a stinging, pungent thing. A machine

needs strange battle sometimes to see what is in himself."

Sharecropper had now grown to be a fat jackal, following after the lions, Tell and Gahn. He knew how to make a good thing out of leavings, and he cocked a jackal's ear at Juniper Tell now.

"It is a curious offer you make me, Juniper," this Sharecropper purred, "only that I see to your burial and monument, and you'll will me the most valuable partnership in the Cosmos.

"Well, I believe that I could handle it better than you have, Juniper. I'd soon bring that tin-can tycoon to heel. I never believed in letting a machine dominate a man. And I'd have control of his shares soon enough; I'm not named Sharecropper for nothing. On what meat has he grown so great and glossy, Juniper?"

"Ah, that is hard for me to say, Cornelius."

"And your words have a literal sense, I believe. You know, but it is hard for you to say. Why, Juniper, why leave it all to me for only your burial?"

"Because I'm dying, and I must leave it to someone. And the tomb also. I must have my tomb."

"I see. Rather grander than the Great Pyramid, from the plans here, but it could be handled; the Pharaohs hadn't our resources. But why mc, Juniper? We were never really close."

"For the several good turns you have done me, Sharecropper, and for one bad turn. I am closing my affairs. I would pay you back."

"For the several good turns, or for the one bad turn, Juniper? Well, I've grown fat on tainted meat. I gobble where daintier men refuse, and I'll try this grand carcass yet. I take your deal, Juniper."

So they consummated it. And then Juniper Tell went home to die, a sucked-out man. Yet he had found curious pleasure in that last transaction, and the tomb would be a grand one.

MAYBE JONES AND THE CITY

Listen, you high-old-time people, make your wants known now. They're building the place, and they'll put in anything you suggest. Funds are available. Lots of those peace-and-benevolence folks have made perpetual donations for those persons less fortunate in their aspirations than themselves. Less fortunate than -- from where we stand, that's a joke, isn't it?

There is time, but barely. Tell them what you want them to put in. Act now!

His name was Midas Jones. His father had named him that and given him the touch. But somehow the name had changed, and it was as Maybe Jones that he was known on the spaceways.

Once Maybe Jones had found the Perfect Place. He had left it, and he was never able to find it again.

He had visited it, one space city out of a million, for a day and a night long ago. He had gone from the Perfect Place to New Shanghai to arrange his affairs so that he might return to the Perfect Place forever. On Hew Shanghai, in an altercation that really amounted to nothing, Maybe Jones had suffered a broken head and had lost a piece of his memory. The head mended in time and most of the memory came back; hut the recollection of the name and bearings of the Perfect Place did not return.

"With your money and your predilections, you could have fun anywhere, Maybe," his friends told him.

"I could and I do," Maybe said, "but it isn't the same thing. It all turns bitter when I can't recover the City itself."

"Was it really perfect, Maybe?"

"Perfect. And I don't mean the weak things that others mean by the word. It was perfection at high speed. I know that there are other sorts of

people in the universes. They would say that it was no more than an old-time Saturday-night town. They would call it a stinking row. It wasn't. Aromatic, maybe, but not stinking. For a high-flying low-lifer like me it was perfect."

"How were the girls there, Maybe?" asked Susie-Q.

"You might get by there, Sue, though barely, as the last girl in the last bang-house in town. And you're the prettiest trick on Sad-Dog planet."

"How come you didn't run out of money, Maybe, with all those girls around?" Live-Man Lutz asked him.

"Nobody ever ran out of money there. I'd think my old wallet would be flat, and I'd pull it out and it'd be fatter than ever. Look, it wasn't just the girls and the drinks and the music; it was everything. There were friends there, each of them a thousand friends in one. There were fellows you had known forever the first time you saw them, and every one of them a prince. There was talk there that'd never grow old. There's a pretty good bunch of liars in present company, but you're nothing to the high liars and tall talkers in the Perfect Place. Every pleasure of the flesh and spirit was available, and it didn't get old. There was no frustration or spoiling or guilt. At night they took the sky off just to give it more height."

"Where is this Perfect Place, Maybe? How does one get there?"

At that question Maybe Jones always broke down and cried. He didn't know where the place was, nor its name nor its direction, nor any way to identify it. He looked for it forever, and he and it became legends.

For twenty years he had been going about the universes asking for it. He followed every lead, and con-men often sold him false information about it.

"Take a galactic left down Pirates' Alley for six parsecs," they might tell him. "Cross the Bright Ocean. Take the Irish Channel where it opens up at nine o'clock. It's marked for the first four light years of it. When you come at a district known as Dobie's Hole, ask directions at any planet or asteroid. You will be quite near the Perfect Place."

Some of the planets in Dobie's Hole were pretty live places. You could find girls there like Susie-Q, and cronies like Live-Man Lutz. It was near perfect in some of those sinks, so the misunderstanding was understandable. But none of them was the Perfect Place.

One day a simple announcement was made through the universes: from then on, nobody had to die. Mortality was found to be a simple disease, and it had yielded to simple specifics.

Nobody paid much attention to the announcement. "I never could see much sense in dying," some of them said. "I never much intended to die anyhow." "It was just one of those things that everybody did. Now they don't." "It doesn't make any difference to me. I'd as soon keep on living as not."

A number of bureaus were set up to look into the implications. There were a thousand of them for the countless thousands of good people who would want to follow the right way when it was shown to them, and to do something good with their endless future.

And there was a small bureau set up for that small group of folks who may perhaps have slight flaws in their characters -- the golden flaw, as Maybe Jones once called it. This small bureau was to plan the future for the good-time crowd who could not be reformed into the sanctioned mold.

It had a small staff at first: High-Life Higgins, Good-Time Charley Wu, Hilda the Hoop, Margaret the Hour, people like that. They had only a vague idea of what they wanted. They sifted the legends of the pleasure places: Fiddlers' Green, Maybe Jones' City, Barbary, Valhalla on the Rocks.

"If we could only resurrect the men who first had these visions, we'd have a stating place," said High-Life. "We've a dozen projects going, but none of them has the touch of a master. Could we find any of these great dreamers --"

"But Maybe Jones is still alive," said Hilda. "They say he still travels trying to find his place again."

"Great green gophers! Send for him!" howled Good-Time Charley Wu. "It's originals like him that we want."

Word came to Maybe Jones on a distant planet that a group of people had some knowledge of the Perfect Place, and that they wanted to pool their knowledge with his.

Maybe burned up very light itself getting to them. This was it!

The Planning City had grown into a vast complex of buildings. Maybe Jones passed the very large building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Islands. Over its doorway was the motto "Adagios of Islands, O my Prodigal" from Crane.

"Not quite what I had in mind," said Maybe Jones.

He passed the large building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Fields. Over its doorway was the motto --

"If I was thirsty, I have heard a spring,
If I was dusty, I have found a field,"

from Belloc.

"The fields are always too far from town," said Maybe. Then, right across the street, he saw it, the small building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Cities. And over its doorway was a verse from the immortal Hiram Glotz:

"Let sheep lie down in grass! I'll toe the rail!
I've got a thirst that ain't for Adam's ale!
I'll trade your fields of green for bistros brown
Where 'Dusty' is a red-haired girl in town."

"Now that is a little bit more like it," said Maybe Jones. He went in and boldly announced himself, and they fell all over his neck.

"Margaret!" Maybe cried to the Houris. "You were there! You know where the Perfect Place is!"

"Maybe, I've been everywhere," she said. "I like them all. I think they're all perfect once you get things to going. I've been told that I lack discernment. Boys, you can't have everything, so that discernment has got to go when it gets in the way of exuberance. No, Maybe, I've run into you lots of times, but I just can't place your place. We'll build it though. Just don't leave me out of it."

"The pitch is this," said High-Life Higgins, after they had eaten and drunk and made cheer to excess. "We have now arrived at the three ultimates: Immortality, Heaven, Hell. We have just achieved the first of them. We are now setting up projects to construct the other two, on the premise that one man's Heaven is another man's Hell. We must build final enclaves for people of every choice. We cannot sit idly by and ask what we would do with the after-life. This is the afterlife. It became so as soon as immortality was achieved."

"Will you build my Perfect Place?" asked Maybe with hope.

"Sure. And ideas like yours are what this bureau needs. You wouldn't believe what some of the other bureaus have to work with. They get the arty ducks and the philosophy buffs and the peace-and-benevolence beats. Why, you get on jags like that and you'll be tired of them in a thousand years or less. How are they going to stand up through eternity? The Green Fields might do, for the green among us. The Islands might do, for those of insular mind and soul. But our own small bureau caters to the high-old-time, rather than the peace-eternal, crowd. We believe here (we know we are not the majority, but there has to be something for everyone) that the rooting old good-time town and the crowd that goes with it can stand up to the long-time gaff as well as anything. Would you like to see some of the work we have

been doing?"

"I certainly would," said Maybe. "It might strike me as a little amateurish, but I'm sure it's in the right line."

"By our total recall methods we are able to reconstruct the Seven Sin Cities of History, Jones. They are the folk dreams that have also been raucous facts. The selection is one-sided, being out of the context of the old Western Civilization from which most of us descend. But they were such a hopping bunch of towns that (under the old recension) they had to be destroyed: by blast-from-Heaven, lava-flow, earthquake, sinking-in-the-sea, cow-fire, earthquake again and fire, hurricane and tidal wave. They were too hot to last.

"Here is Sodom. Now take a close-up of its old Siddim Square District where they had such a noisy go of it before it was wiped out. Go down and sample it."

Maybe Jones sampled old Sodom. He was back in about an hour.

"It's about as good as you could expect from that time," he said. "The drinks were too sweet and sticky. So were the girls. The music was only fair. How do you tune a ram's horn anyhow? But, man, it won't stack up with the Perfect Place at all."

"Try Pompeii," said Good-Time Charley Wu. "We'll set you down on the corner of Cardo and Decumanus streets. That was the first red light district to be so lighted and so named. Don't cut it too close. Watch out for the hot lava when you leave."

Maybe Jones was back from Pompeii in half an hour.

"It's strictly Little Italy and Little Egypt stuff," he told them, but he was smiling. "It's all right for a gag. It's fun. But it isn't on the same side of the street with the Perfect Place."

"Try Lisbon," said Hilda. "It's sort of a test. In its own century Lisbon was spiritually of the West Coast of Africa though geographically in Europe. Don't fall in the harbor going in, and watch the earthquake coming out."

Maybe Jones was in old Lishon for two hours. He liked it. "Man, man!" he said. "It's on a tangent, and not the true line, of course. But, were I not committed to the Perfect Place -- man!"

"Here's Port Royal before it was sunk in the sea," said High-Life. "Some like it. Some don't."

Maybe was out of Port Royal in half an hour.

"It's all there," he said, "but they forgot to cook it. They even forgot to take the hide off it. People, a place has to have the illusion of smoothness -- that's part of the game. No, Port Royal is strictly a short-haul place."

"Have a go at Chicago before the fire," said Good-Time Charley Wu. "It had its followers."

Maybe was back from Chicago in fifteen minutes.

"Are you kidding?" he asked. "We were speaking of cities, and you give me a country town. Size isn't the test. Oh, it's all right for boys, but who's going to be a boy for eternity?"

"Two to go," said Hilda. "Try San Francisco before the quake and the fire."

So Maybe tried it. He was smiling when he came back. "It dates, it dates," he told them. "For amateur theatricals, yes. For eternity, no."

"One more," said High-Life. "Here is Galveston just before the hurricane and tidal wave of 1900. Try Old Tremont Street downtown where it crosses Post Office Street."

Maybe Jones went down in old Galveston and didn't come back. They sent for him and couldn't find him. He was gone all night. He came back the middle of next morning, looped to the ports and walking with a seaman's roll.

"It's put me in the mood," he cried. "I'm ready to go to work. Hey, that place has a touch of the eternal! I found a way to tune it and visited

Galveston in earlier and later years. I picked up an interesting piece of history too. You know, they never did bury any of the dead people after the hurricanes and tidal waves. They just ground them up and sold them for crab-meat sandwiches. Well, let's go to work. It's brought the Perfect Place back clear to my mind, and I'm ready to get with it."

"Jones, this is the Empyrean, the eternal fire-stuff, that we hold in our hands," High-Life said. "I know that these reconstructed legend cities leave a lot out, but men like you will help us put it in."

"Before I start, can we fix it so a man can get higher and higher and never have to come down?" Maybe wanted to know.

"Yes we can," Good-Time Charley told him. "The hangover, whether physical or spiritual, was a death in miniature. We have whipped it, as we have whipped death itself. We have a free hand here."

"There's got to be a catch to it," said Maybe. "Heavens, or Hells, depending on the viewpoint, will be expensive."

"Long-term funding is the answer," said Good-Time Charley. "The longest terms ever -- forever. Put it all in. Set it all down, and we will make it that way."

"Man, man!" said Maybe Jones. He sat down at a table and took a large square of paper. He titled it modestly:

"The Empyrean Aceording to Maybe Jones"

He began to write the specifications, and building was begun on the Perfect Place for people of a certain choice.

"That all the girls be built like clepsydras," he wrote, "you know, the ancient water-clock. It's a much more sophisticated shape than the hour-glass figure."

"Put me in," Margaret cried. "I'm shaped like a pendulum clock. Notice the way I swing sometime."

(Listen, this isn't a private place for Maybe Jones. It's for all high-flyers everywhere. There will be plenty of room and variety in it.)

"That all the bars be a mile, hell, make it two miles, long," Maybe wrote. "That there be high liars there who'll make Live-Man Lutz sound like a parson. That they take the sky off early in the morning so you can get as high as you want all day long. That they have girls who'll make Little Midnight Mullins and Giggles McGuire and Belle Hellios and Susie-Q look like sheep dogs. That --"

Hey, get in on this if you're going to. They're building it now! If you are an arty duck or a philosophy buff or a peace-and-benevolence beat, then you can go to hell -- to your own appropriate bureau -- and be heard. But if you go for the high-old-time stuff, then make your wants known here.

If you are of the raffish elite and want to go where you can get higher and higher and never have to come down from it, if you want the good-time town and the crowd that goes with it for a long haul (and it's going to be a very long haul), then howl it out so they'll know that you're interested.

If you want anything at all added, tell them now, and they'll put it in.

Contact them by regular mail, or phone or voxo. Or tear out a sheet of this screed, scribble your wants in the margin, and drop it in any mail box. It will get there. The address is:

"Bureau of Wonderful Cities. Old Earth."

That's all you need, but get with it. They're building our place now.

Barnaby phones up John Sourwine. If you frequent places like Barnaby's Barn (there is one in every Port City of the World, and John is a familiar figure in all of them) you may already know John Sourwine; and you will know him as Sour John.

"There's an odd one down here," Barnaby told him.

"How odd?" asked Sour John. He collected odd ones.

"Clear coon-dog crazy, John. he looks like they just dug him up, but he's lively enough. "

Barnaby runs a fine little place that offers eating and drinking and conversation, all of them rare and hearty. And John Sourwine is always interested in new things, or old things returned. So John went down to Barnaby's Barn to see the Odd One.

There was no need to ask which one he was, though there were always strangers and traveling men and seamen unknown to John in the Barn. The Odd One stood out. He was a big, spare, tough fellow, and he said that his nanic was McSkee. He was eating and drinking with a chortling pleasure, and they all watched him in amazement.

"It's his fourth plate of spaghetti," Smokehouse confided to Sour John, "and that is the last of two dozen eggs. He's had twelve hamburgers, six coney islands, six crab-burgers, five foot-long hot-dogs, eighteen bottles of beer, and twenty cups of coffee. "

"Blind banking barnacles! He must be getting close to some of the records of Big Bucket Bulge," Sour John exclaimed with sudden interest.

"John, he's broken most of those records already," Smokehouse told him, and Barnaby nodded assent. "If he can hold the pace for another forty-five minutes, he'll beat them all."

Well, the Odd One was still a spare fellow with a great gangling frame designed to carry fifty pounds more than the lean fellow now owned. But he began to fill out even as John watched him and it was not only that he bulked larger almost by the minute, it was also as though a light was being turned on inside him. He glowed, then he shone. Then he began to sparkle.

"You like to eat, do you, old-timer?" Sour John asked the Odd One, the amazing McSkee.

"I like it well enough!" McSkee boomed with a happy grin. "But, more than that, it's just that I'm a bedamned show-off! I like everything in excess. I love to be in the roaring middle of it all!"

"One would think that you hadn't eaten in a hundred years," Sour John probed.

"You're quick!" the illuminated McSkee laughed. "A lot of them never do catch on to me, and I tell them nothing unless they guess a little first. Aye, you've got the liairy ears, though, and the adder's eyes of a true gentleman. I love a really ugly man. We will talk while I eat."

"What do you do when you've finished eating?" asked John, pleased at the compliments, as the waiters began to pile the steaks high in front of McSkee.

"On, I go from eating to drinking," McSkee munched out. "There's no sharp dividing line between the pleasures. I go from drinking to the girls; from the girls to fighting and roistering. And finally I sing."

"A bestial procedure," said John with admiration. "and when your pentastomic orgy is finished?"

"On, then I sleep," McSkee chuckled. "Watch how I do it some time. I should give lessons. Few men understand how it should be done. "

"Well, how long do you sleep?" Sour John asked, "and is there something spectacular about your sleeping that I don't understand?"

"Of course it's spectacular. And I sleep till I waken. At this I also set records. "

And McSkee was wolfing the tall pile of steaks till Sour John had a mystic vision of an entire steer devoured except for head and hide and

hooves, the slaughterer's take.

Later, they talked somewhat more leisurely as McSkee worked his way through the last half-dozen steaks, for now the edge was off his great appetite.

"In all this ostentatious bestiality, was there not one gluttony more outstanding than the others?" Sour John drew him out. "One time when you outdid even yourself?"

"Aye, there was that," said McSkee. "There was the time when they were going to hang me with the new rope."

"And how did you cut your way out of that one?" Sour John asked.

"At that time and in that country -- it was not this one -- the custom was new of giving the condemned man what he wanted to eat," the incandescent McSkee limned it out in his voice with the lilt of a barrel organ. "I took advantage of the new usage and stripped the countryside. It was a good supper they gave me, John, and I was to be hanged at daybreak. But I had them there, for I was still eating at dawn. They could not interrupt my last meal to hang me -- not when they had promised me a full meal. I stood them off that day and the night and the following day. That is longer than I usually eat, John, and I did outdo myself. That countryside had been known for its poultry and its stickling pigs and its fruits. It is known for them no longer. It never recovered. "

"Did you?"

"Oh, certainly, John. But by the third dawn I was filled. The edge was off my appetite, and I do not indulge thereafter."

"Naturally not. But what happened then? They did not hang you, or you would not be here to tell about it."

"That doesn't follow, John. I had been hanged before."

"Oh?"

"Sure. But not this time. I tricked them. When I had my fill, I went to sleep. and then deeper and deeper into sleep until I died. They do not hang a man already dead. They kept me for a day to be sure. John, I get a pretty high shine on me in a day! I'm a smelly fellow at best. Then they buried me, but they did not hang me. Why do you look at me so oddly, John?"

"It is nothing," said Sour John, "a mere random objection which I will not even dignify with words."

McSkee was drinking now, first wine to give a bottom to his stomach, then brandy for its ruffled dignity, then rum for its plain friendliness.

"Can you believe that all breakthroughs are achieved by common men like myself?" this McSkee risked suddenly.

"I can't believe that you're a common man," Sour John told him.

"I'm the commonest man you ever saw," McSkee insisted. "I am made from the clay and the salt of the Earth, and the humus from decayed behemoths. They may have used a little extra slime in making me, but I contain none of the rare earths. It had to be a man like myself who would work out the system. The savants aren't capable of it; they have no juice in them. And by their having no juice in them, they missed the first hint."

"What is that, McSkee?"

"It's so simple, John! That a man should live his life one day at a time."

"Well?" Sour John asked with lowering intonation.

"See how harmlessly it slides down, John. It sounds almost like an almanac maxim. "

"And it isn't?"

"No, no, the thunder of a hundred words rumbles between them. It's the door to a whole new universe. But there's another saying: 'Man, thy days are numbered.' This is the one inexorable saying. It is the limit that will not be bent or broken, and it puts the damper on us hearty ones. It poses a problem to one like myself, too carnal to merit eternal beatitude on another plane, too full of juice to welcome, final extinction, and anxious for

personal reasons to postpone the hardships of damnation as long as possible.

"Now, John, there were (and are) smarter men than myself in the world. That I solved the problem (to an extent) and they did not, means only that problem was more pressing on me. It had be a coarse man to find the answer, and I never met a man with such a passion for the coarse things of life as myself. "

"Neither did I," Sour John told him. "And how did you solve the problem?"

"By a fine little trick, John. You'll see it worked if you follow me around through the night."

McSkee had left off eating. But he continued to drink while he indulged in girls, and in fighting and roistering, and in singing. His girly exploits are not given here; but there is a fruity listing of them on he police blotter of that night. Go see Hossback McCarty some night when he is on desk duty and he will get it out and let you read it. It is something of a classic around the station house. When a man gets involved with Soft-Talk Susie Kutz and Mercedes Morrero and Dotty Peisson and Little Dotty Nesbitt and Hildegard Katt and Catherine Cadensus and Ouida and Avril Aaron and Little Midnight Mullins all in one night, you are talking about a man who generates legends.

McSkee did stir things up around town, and John Sourwine stayed with him. John fit in with McSkee well. There are many who would not.

There are persons finely tuned souls who cringe when a companion becomes unusually boisterous. There are those who wince when a hearty mate sings loudly and obscenely. There are even those who attempt to disassociate when the grumblings of the solid citizenry rise to a sullen roar; and who look for cover when the first little fights begin. Fortunately, Sour John was not such a person. He had a finely tuned soul, but it had a wide range.

McSkee had the loudest and most dissonant voice in town, but would an honest friend desert him for that?

The two of them cut a big swath; and a handful of rough men, rubbing big knuckles into their big palms and biding their time, had begun to follow them from place to place: men like Buffalo Chips Dugan and Shrimp-Boat Gordon, Sulphur-Bottom Sullivan, Smokehouse, Kidney-Stone Stenton, Honey-Bticket Kincaid. The fact that these men followed McSkee angrily but did not yet dare to close with him speaks highly of the man. He was pretty wooly.

But there were times when McSkee would leave off his raucous disharmony and joyful battling, and chuckle somewhat more quietly. As, for a while, in the Little Oyster Bar (it's upstairs from the Big Oyster).

"The first time I put the trick to a test," McSkee confided to John, "was from need and not from choice. I have incurred a lot of ill will in my day, and sometimes it boils over. There was one time when a whole shipful of men had had enough of me. This time (it was far away and long ago in the ancient days of small sail) I was shackled about the ankles and weighted and dropped overboard. Then I employed the trick."

"What did you do?" Sour John asked him.

"John, you ask the damndest questions. I drowned, of course. What else could any man do? But I drowned calmly and with none of that futile threshing about. That's the trick, you see."

"No. I don't see."

"Time would be on my side, John. Who wants to spend eternity in the deep? Salt water is most corrosive; and my shackles, though I could not break them, were not massive. After a long lifetime, the iron would be so eaten through that it would part with any sudden strain. In less than one hundred years, the shackles gave way, and my body (preserved in a briny fashion but not in the best of condition) drifted up to the surface of the

sea. "

"Too late to do you any good," Sour John said. "Rather a droll end to the story, or was it the end?"

"Yes, that is the end of the story, John. And another time, when I was a foot-soldier in the service of Pixodartis the Carian (with his Celtic mercenaries, of course) --"

"Just a minute, McSkee," Sour John cut in. "There's something a little loose about all your talk, and it needs landmarks. How long have you lived anyhow? How old are you?"

"About forty years old by my count, John. Why?"

"I thought your stories were getting a little too tall, McSkee. But if you're no more than forty years old, then your stories do not make sense."

"Never said they did, John. You put unnatural conditions on a tale."

McSkee and Sour John were up in night court, bloodied and beatific. It was only for a series of little things that they had been arrested, but it was really to save them from lynching. They had a palaver with all those fine officers and men, and they had much going for them. Sour John was known to them as an old acquaintance and sometime offender. It was known that John's word was good; even when he hed he did it with an air of honesty. After a little time was allowed to pass, and the potential lynchers had dispersed, Sour John was allowed to bail them both out on their strong promise of good behavior.

They swore and foreswore that they would behave like proper men. They took ranging oaths to go to their beds at once and quietly. They went on record that they would carouse no more that night; that they would assault no honest woman; that they would obey the quirks of the law however unreasonable. And that they would not sing.

So the police let them go.

When the two of them were out and across the street, McSkee found a bottle handy to his hand on the sidewalk, and let fly with it. You'd have done it yourself if you'd been taken by a like impulse. McSkee threw it in a beautiful looping arc, and it went through the front window of the station house. You have to admire a throw like that.

We record it here their they are not patsy cops in that town. They are respectable adversaries, and it is always a pleasure to tangle with them.

Off again! And pursued by the millions with shout and siren! It was close there! Half a dozen times it was close! But Sour John was a fox who knew all the dens, and he and McSkee went to earth for the while.

"The trick is in coming to a total stop," said McSkee when they were safe and had their breath again. They were at ease in a club less public than Barnaby's Barn and even smaller than the Little Oyster. "I tell you a little about it, Sour John, for I see that you are a man of worth. Listen and learn. Everyone can die, but not everyone can die just when he wants to. First you stop breathing. There will be a point where your lungs are bursting and you just have to take another breath. Do not do it; or you will have the whole business to go through again. Then you slow your heart and compose your mind. Let the heat go out of your body and finish it."

"And then what?" Sour John asked.

"Why, then you die, John. But I tell you it isn't easy. It takes a devilish lot of practice."

"Why so much practice for a thing you only do once? You mean to die literally?"

"John, I talk plain. I say die, I mean die."

"There are two possibilities," said Sour John. "One is that I am slow of understanding. The other is that you are not making sense. On other evidence, I know the first possibility to be impossible."

"Tell you what, Sour John," said McSkee, "time's running short. Give me twenty dollars and I'll overlook your illogic. I never did like to die broke, and I feel my time is upon me. Thank you, John! I had a fun day, both before and after I met you, and a fun night that is nearly over. I had pleasant meal, and enough booze to make me happy. I had fun with the girls, especially Soft-Talk Susie, and Dotty, and Little Midnight. I sang several of my favorite songs (which are not everybody's favorites). I indulged in a couple of good solid fights, and I've still got bells ranging in my head from them. Hey, John, why didn't you tell me that Honeybucket was left-handed? You knew it, and you let him sneak the first punch on me."

"It's been fun, John. I'm a boy that gets a lot out of this game. I'm a real juicy one, and I try to jam everything into a day and a night. You can get a lot into a period if you heap it up. Now, let's gather up what's left in the bottles, and go down to the beach to see what we can provoke. The night needs a cap on it before I go to my long slumber."

"McSkee, you've hinted several times that you had a secret for getting the most out of life," said Sour John, "but you haven't told me what it is."

"Man, I haven't hinted; I've spoken plainly," McSkee swore.

"Then what in hog heaven is the secret?" John howled.

"Live your life one day at a time, John. That's all."

Then McSkee was singing all old hobo song, too old a song for a forty year-old man, not a specialist, to have known.

"When did you learn that?" John asked him.

"Learned it yesterday. But I learned a bunch of new ones today."

"I noticed, a few hours back, that there was something curiously dated about your speech," John said. "But it doesn't seem to be the case now."

"John, I get contemporary real fast. I've a good ear, and I talk a lot and listen a lot, and I'm the perfect mimic. I can get up on a lingo in a day. They don't change as fast as you'd imagine."

They went down to the beach to put the cap on the night. If you're going to die, it's nice to die within the sound of the surf, McSkee had said. They went down beyond the end of the Sea Wall and into the stretches where the beach was dark. Aye, McSkee had guessed it rightly, there was excitement waiting for them, or actually it had been following them. It was the opportunity for a last glorious fight.

A tight dark group of men had been following them -- fellows who had somehow been insulted during the day and night of carousing. The intrepid pair turned and faced the men from a distance. McSkee finished the last bottle, and threw it into the midst of the group. The men were bad-natured; they flamed up instantly, and the man who was struck by the flying bottle swore.

So they joined battle.

For a while it seemed that the forces of righteousness would prevail. McSkee was a glorious figlitter, and Sour John was competent. They spread those angry men out on the sand like a bunch of beached flounder fish. It was one of those great battles -- always to be remembered.

But there were too many of those men, as McSkee had known there would be; he had made an outlanfish number of enemies in a day and a night.

The wild fight climaxed, crested, and shattered, like a high wave thunderously breaking under. And McSkee, having touched top glory and pleasure, sullenly ceased to battle.

He gave one wild whoop of joy that echoed the length of the island. Then he drew a grand breath and held it. He closed his eyes and stood like a grinning rigid statue.

The angry men toppled him and swarmed him; they stomped him into the sand and kicked the very life out of McSkee.

Sour John had battled as long as there was a battle. He understood

now that McSkee had withdrawn for reasons that were not clear. He did likewise. He broke and ran, not from cowardice, but from private inclination.

An hour later, just at the first touch of dawn, Sour John returned. He found that McSkee was dead -- with no breath, no pulse, no heat. And there was something else. McSkee had said, in one of his rambling tales, that he got a pretty high shine on him. John knew what he meant now. That man got ripe real fast. By the test of the nose, McSkee was dead.

With a child's shovel that he found there, Sour John dug a note in the side of one of the sand cliffs. He buried his friend McSkee there. He knew that McSkee still had the twenty dollar bill in his pants. He left it with him. It isn't so bad to be one or the other, but to be both dead and broke at the same time is an ignominy almost past enduring.

Then Sour John walked into town to get some breakfast, and quickly forgot about the whole thing.

He followed his avocation of knocking around the world and meeting interesting people. The chances are that he met you, if there's anything interesting about you at all; he doesn't miss any of them.

2.

Twelve years went by, and some weeks. Sour John was back in one of the interesting port cities, but with a difference. There had come the day as comes to many (and pray it may not come to you!) when Sour John was not flush. He was as broke as a man can be, with nothing in his pockets or in his stomach, and with very little on his back. He was on the beach in every sense.

Then he bethought himself of the previous times he had been in this city. There had been benders here; there had been antics and enjoyments. They came back to him in a rush -- a dozen happy times, and then one in particular.

"He was an Odd One, a real juicy cove," Sour John grinned as he remembered. "He knew a trick, how to die just when he wanted to. He said that it took a lot of practice, but I don't see the point in practicing a thing that you do but once."

Then Sour John remembered a twenty-dollar bill that he had buried with that juicy cove. The memory of the incandescent McSkee came back to Sour John as he walked down the empty beach.

"He said that you could jam a lot of living into a day and a night," John said. "You can. I do. He said something else that I forget."

Sour John found the old sand cliff. In half an hour he had dug out the body of McSkee. It still had a high old shine on it, but it was better preserved than the clothes. The twenty-dollar bill was still there, disreputable but spendable.

"I'll take it how, when I have the need," John said softly. "And later, when I am flush again, I will bring it back here."

"Yes. You do that," said McSkee.

There are men in the world who would be startled if a thing like that happened to them. Some of them would have gasped and staggered back. The higher ones would have cried out. John Sourwine, of course, was not a man like that. But he was human, and he did a human thing:

He blinked.

"I had no idea that you were in such a state," he said to McSkee. "So that's the way you do it?"

"That's the way, John. One day at a time! And I space them far enough apart that they don't pall on me."

"Are you ready to get up again, McSkee?"

"I sure am not, John. I had just barely died. It'll be another fifty

years before I have a really good appetite worked up."

"Don't you think it's cheating?"

"Nobody's told me that it's disallowed. And only the days that I live count. I stretch them out a long while this way, and every one of them is memorable. I tell you that I have no dull days in my life."

"I'm still not sure how you do it, McSkee. Is it suspended animation?"

"No, no! More men have run -afoul on that phrase than on any other. You think of it like that and you've already missed it. You die, John, or else you're just kidding yourself. Watch me this time and you'll see. Then bury me again and leave me in peace. Nobody likes to be resurrected before he's had time to get comfortable in his grave."

So McSkee put himself carefully to death once more, and Sour John buried him again in the side of the sand cliff.

McSkee -- in hedge Irish is Son of Slumber -- the master of suspended animation (no, no, if you think of it that way you've already missed it, it's death, it's death), who lived his life one day at a time, and those days separated by decades.

CLIFFS THAT LAUGHED

"Between ten and ten-thirty of the morning of October 1, 1945, on an island that is sometimes called Pulau Petir and sometimes Willy Jones Island (neither of them its map name), three American soldiers disappeared and have not been seen since.

"I'm going back there, I tell you! It was worth it. The limbs that laughed! Let them kill me! I'll get there! Oh, here, here, I've got to get hold of myself.

"The three soldiers were Sergeant Charles Santee of Orange, Texas; Corporal Robert Casper of Gobey, Tennessee; and PFC Timothy Lorrigan of Boston which is in one of the eastern states. I was one of those three soldiers.

"I'm going back there if it takes me another twenty years!"

No, no, no! That's the wrong story. It happened on Willy Jones Island also, but it's a different account entirely. That's the one the fellow told me in a bar years later, just the other night, after the usual "Didn't I used to know you in the islands?"

"One often makes these little mistakes and false starts," Galli said. "It is a trick that is used in the trade. One exasperates people and pretends to be embarrassed. And then one hooks them."

Galli was an hereditary storyteller of the Indies. "There is only one story in the world," he said, "and it pulls two ways. There is the reason part that says 'Hell, it can't be' and there is the wonder part that says 'Hell, maybe it is.'" He was the storyteller, and he offered to teach me the art.

For we ourselves had a hook into Galli. We had something he wanted.

"We used the same stories for a thousand years," he said. "Now, however, we have a new source, the American Comic Books. My grandfather began to use these in another place and time, and I use them now. I steal them from your orderly tents, and I have a box full of them. I have Space Comics and Commander Midnight; I have Galactic Gob and Mighty Mouse and the Green Hornet and the Masked Jetter. My grandfather also had copies of some of these, but drawn by older hands. But I do not have Wonder Woman, not a single copy. I would trade three-for-one for copies of her. I would pay a premium. I can link her in with an island legend to create a whole new cycle of stories, and I need new stuff all the time. Have you a Wonder Woman?"

When Galli said this, I knew that I had him. I didn't have a Wonder Woman, but I knew where I could steal one. I believe, though I am no longer sure, that it was Wonder Woman Meets the Space Magicians.

I stole it for him. And in gratitude Galli not only taught me the

storyteller's art, but he also told me the following story:

"Imagine about flute notes ascending," said Galli. "I haven't my flute with me, but a story should begin so to set the mood. Imagine about ships coming out of the Arabian Ocean, and finally to Jilolo Island, and still more finally to the very island on which we now stand. Imagine about waves and trees that were the great-great-grandfathers of the waves and trees we now have."

It was about the year 1620, Galli is telling it, in the late afternoon of the high piracy. These Moluccas had already been the rich Spice Islands for three hundred years. Moreover, they were on the road of the Manila galleons coming from Mexico and the Isthmus. Arabian, Hindu, and Chinese piracy had decayed shamefully. The English were crude at the business. In trade the Dutch had become dominant in the Islands and the Portuguese had faded. There was no limit to the opportunities for a courageous and dedicated raider in the Indies.

They came. And not the least of these new raiding men was Willy Jones.

It was said that Willy Jones was a Welshman. You can believe it or not as you like. The same thing has been said about the Devil. Willy was twenty-five years old when he finally possessed his own ship with a mixed crew. The ship was built like a humpbacked bird, with a lateen sail and suddenly-appearing rows of winglike oars. On its prow was a swooping bird that had been carved in Muskat. It was named the Flying Serpent, or the Feathered Snake, depending on what language you use.

'Pause a moment,' said Galli. 'Set the mood. Imagine about dead men variously. We come to the bloody stuff at once.'

One early morning, the Feathered Snake overtook a tall Dutchman. The ships were grappled together, and the men from the Snake boarded the Dutch ship. The men on the Dutchman were armed, but they had never seen such suddenness and savagery as shown by the dark men from the Snake. There was slippery blood on the decks, and the croaking of men being killed.

'I forgot to tell you that this was in the passage between the Molucca Sea and the Banda,' Galli said.

The Snake took a rich small cargo from the Dutch ship, a few able-bodied Malay seamen, some gold specie, some papers of record, and a dark Dutch girl named Margaret. These latter things Willy Jones preempted for himself. Then the Snake devoured that tall Dutchman and left only a few of its burning bones floating in the ocean.

'I forgot to tell you that the tall Dutch ship was named the Luchtkastell,' Galli said.

Willy Jones watched the Luchtkastell disappearing under the water. He examined the papers of record, and the dark Dutch girl Margaret. He made a sudden decision: He would cash his winnings and lay up for a season.

He had learned about an island in the papers of record. It was a rich island, belonging to the richest of the Dutch spice men who had gone to the bottom with the Luchtkastell. The fighting crew would help Willy Jones secure the island for himself; and in exchange, he would give them his ship and the whole raiding territory and the routes he had worked out.

Willy Jones captured the island and ruled it. From the ship he kept only the gold, the dark Dutch girl Margaret, and three golems which had once been ransom from a Jew in Oman.

'I forgot to tell you that Margaret was the daughter of the Dutch spice man who had owned the island and the tall ship and who was killed by Willy,' Galli said, 'and the island really belonged to Margaret now as the daughter of her father.'

For one year Willy Jones ruled the small settlement, drove the three golems and the men who already lived there, had the spices gathered and

baled and stored (they were worth their weight in silver), and built the Big House. And for one year he courted the dark Dutch girl Margaret, having been unable to board her as he had all other girls.

She refused him because he had killed her father, because he had destroyed the Luchtkastell which was Family and Nation to her, and because he had stolen her island.

This Margaret, though she was pretty and trim as a kushing, had during the affair of the Feathered Snake and the Luchtkastell twirled three seamen in the air like pinwheels at one time and thrown them all into the ocean. She had eyes that twinkled like the compounded eyes of the devil-fly; they could glint laughter and fury at the same time.

"Those girls were like volcanoes," the man said. "Slim, strong mountains, and we climbed them like mountains. Man, the uplift on them! The shoulders were cliffs that laughed. The swaying~"

No, no! Belay that last paragraph! That's from the ramble of the fellow in the bar, and it keeps intruding.

'I forgot to tell you that she reminds me of Wonder Woman,' Galli said.

Willy Jones believed that Margaret was worth winning unbroken, as he was not at all sure that he could break her. He courted her as well as he could, and he used to advantage the background of the golden-green spicery on which they lived.

'Imagine about the Permata bird that nests on the moon,' Galli said, 'and which is the most passionate as well as the noblest-singing of the birds. Imagine about flute notes soaring.'

Willy Jones made this tune to Margaret:

The Nutmeg Moon is the third moon of the year.
The Tides come in like loose Silk all its Nights.
The Ground is animated by the bare Feet of Margaret
Who is like the Pelepah of the Ko-eng Flower.

Willy made this tune in the Malaya language in which all the words end in ang.

'Imagine about water leaping down rocky hills,' Galli said. 'Imagine about red birds romping in green groves.'

Willy Jones made another tune to Margaret:

A Woman with Shoulders so strong that a Man might ride upon them
The while she is still the little Girl watching for the black Ship
Of the Hero who is the same age as the Sky,
But she does not realize that I am already here.

Willy made this tune in the Dutch language in which all the words end in lijk.

'Imagine about another flute joining the first one, and their notes scamper like birds,' Galli said.

Willy Jones made a last tune to Margaret:

Damnation! That is enough of Moonlight and Tomorrows
Now there are mats to plait, and kain to sew.
Even the smallest crab knows to build herself a house in the sand.
Margaret should be raking the oven coals and baking a roti.
I wonder why she is so slow in seeing this.

Willy made this tune in the Welsh language in which all the words end in gwbl.

When the one year was finished, they were mated. There was still the chilliness there as though she would never forgive him for killing her father and stealing her island; but they began to be in accord.

'Here pause five minutes to indicate an idyllic interlude,' Galli said. 'We sing the song Bagang Kal Berjumpa if you know the tune. We flute, if I have my flute.'

The idyllic interlude passed.

Then Willy's old ship, the Feathered Snake, came back to the Island. She was in a pitiful state of misuse. She reeked of old and new blood, and there were none left on her but nine sick men. These nine men begged Willy Jones to become their captain again to set everything right.

Willy washed the nine living skeletons and fed them up for three days. They were fat and able by then. And the three golems had refitted the ship.

"All she needs is a strong hand at the helm again," said Willy Jones. "I will sail her again for a week and a day. I will impress a new crew, and once more make her the terror of the Spice Islands. Then I will return to my island, knowing that I have done a good deed in restoring the Snake to the bloody work for which she was born."

"If you go, Willy Jones, you will be gone for many years," said the dark Dutch Margaret.

"Only one at the most," said Willy.

"And I will be in my grave when you return."

"There is no grave could hold you, Margaret."

"Aye, it may not hold me. I'll out of it and confront you when you come back. But it gives one a weirdness to be in the grave for only a few years. I will not own you for my husband when you do come back. You will not even know whether I am the same woman that you left, and you will never know. I am a volcano, but I banked my hatred and accepted you. But if you leave me now, I will erupt against you forever."

But Willy Jones went away in the Flying Serpent and left her there. He took two of the golems with him, and he left one of them to serve Margaret.

What with one thing and another, he was gone for twenty years.

"We were off that morning to satisfy our curiosity about the Big House," the fellow said, "since we would soon be leaving the island forever. You know about the Big House. You were on Willy Jones Island too. The Jilolos call it the House of Skulls, and the Malaya and Indonesia people will not speak about it at all.

"We approached the Big House that was not more than a mile beyond our perimeter. It was a large decayed building, but we had the sudden feeling that it was still inhabited. And it wasn't supposed to be. Then we saw the two of them, the mother and the daughter. We shook like we were unhinged, and we ran to them.

"They were so alike that we couldn't tell them apart. Their eyes twinkled like the compounded eyes of a creature that eats her mate. Noonday lightning! How it struck! Arms that swept you off your feet and set your bones to singing! We knew that they were not twins, or even sisters. We knew that they were mother and daughter.

"I have never encountered anything like them in my life. Whatever happened to the other two soldiers, I know it was worth it to them. Whatever happened to them? I don't care if they kill me! They were perfect, those two women, even though we weren't with them for five minutes."

"Then it was the Badger."

No, no, no! That's the wrong story again. That's not the story Galli told me. That's part of the story the fellow told me in the bar. His confused account keeps interposing itself possibly because I knew him slightly when we were both soldiers on Willy Jones Island. But he had turned

queer, that fellow. "It is the earthquake belt around the world that is the same as the legend belt," he said, "and the Middle world underlies it all. That's why I was able to walk it.,, It was as though he had been keel-hauled around the world. I hadn't known him well. I didn't know which of the three soldiers he was. I had heard that they were all dead. "Imagine about conspiracy stuff now," said Galli. "Imagine about a whispering in a pinang grove before the sun is up."

"How can I spook that man?" Margaret asked her golem shortly after she had been abandoned by Willy Jones. "But I am afraid that a mechanical man would not be able to tell me how."

"I will tell you a secret," said the golem. "We are not mechanical men. Certain wise and secret men believe that they made us, but they are wrong. They have made houses for us to live in, no more. There are many of us unhoused spirits, and we take shelter in such bodies as we find. That being so, I know something of the houseless spirits in the depth of every man. I will select one of them, and we will spook Willy Jones with that one. Willy is a Welshman who has become by adoption a Dutchman and a Malayan and a Jilolo man. There is one old spook running through them all. I will call it up when it is time."

"I forgot to tell you that the name of Margaret's golem was Meshuarat," Galli said.

After twenty years of high piracy, Willy Jones returned to his Island. And there was the dark Dutch Margaret standing as young and as smouldering as when he had left. He leapt to embrace her, and found himself stretched flat on the sand by a thunderous blow.

He was not surprised, and was not (as he had at first believed) decapitated. Almost he was not displeased. Margaret had often been violent in her love-making.

"But I will have you," Willy swore as he tasted his own blood delightfully in his mouth and pulled himself up onto hands and knees. "I have ridden the Margaret-tiger before."

"You will never ride my loins, you lecherous old goat," she rang at him like a bell. "I am not your wife. I am the daughter that you left here in the womb. My mother is in the grave on the hill."

Willy Jones sorrowed terribly, and he went to the grave.

But Margaret came up behind him and drove in the cruel lance. "I told you that when you came back you would not know whether I was the same woman you had left," she chortled, "and you will never know!"

"Margaret, you are my wife!" Willy Jones gasped.

"Am I of an age to be your wife?" she jibed. "Regard me! Of what age do I seem to be?"

"Of the same age as when I left," said Willy. "But perhaps you have eaten of the besok nut and so do not change your appearance.

"I forgot to tell you about the besok nut," said Galli. "If one eats the nut of the besok tree, the tomorrow tree, the time tree, that one will not age. But this is always accompanied by a chilling unhappiness."

"Perhaps I did eat it," said Margaret. "But that is my grave there, and I have lain in it many years, as has she. You are prohibited from touching either of us."

"Are you the mother or the daughter, Witch?"

"You will never know. You will see us both, for we take turns, and you will not be able to tell us apart. See, the grave is always disturbed, and the entrance is easy.

"I'll have the truth from the golem who served you while I was gone," Willy swore.

"A golem is an artificial man," said Galli. "They were made by the

Jews and Arabs in earlier ages, but now they say that they have forgotten how to make them. I wonder that you do not make them yourselves, for you have advanced techniques. You tell them and you picture them in your own heroic literature' (he patted the comic books under his arm), 'but you do not have them in actuality.'

The golem told Willy Jones that the affair was thus:

A daughter had indeed been born to Margaret. She had slain the child, and had then put it into the middle state. Thereafter, the child stayed sometimes in the grave, and sometimes she walked about the island. And she grew as any other child would. And Margaret herself had eaten the besok nut so that she would not age.

When mother and daughter had come to the same age and appearance (and it had only been the very day before that, the day before Willy Jones had returned), then the daughter had also eaten the besok nut. Now the mother and daughter would be of the same appearance forever, and not even a golem could tell them apart.

Willy Jones came furiously onto the woman again.

"I was sure before, and now I am even more sure that you are Margaret," he said, "and now I will have you in my fury."

"We both be Margaret," she said. "But I am not the same one you apprehended earlier. We changed places while you talked to the golem. And we are both in the middle state, and we have both been dead in the grave, and you dare not touch either of us ever. A Welshman turned Dutchman turned Malayan turned Jilolo has this spook in him four times over. The Devil himself will not touch his own daughters."

The last part was a lie, but Willy Jones did not know it.

"We be in confrontation forever then," said Willy Jones. "I will make my Big House a house of hate and a house of skulls. You cannot escape from its environs, neither can any visitor. I'll kill them all and pile their skulls up high for a monument to you."

Then Willy Jones ate a piece of bitter bark from the pokok ru.

'I forgot to tell you that when a person eats bark from the pokok ru in anger, his anger will sustain itself forever,' Galli said.

"If it's visitors you want for the killing, I and my mother-daughter will provide them in numbers," said Margaret. "Men will be attracted here forever with no heed for danger. I will eat a telor tuntong of the special sort, and all men will be attracted here even to their death."

'I forgot to tell you that if a female eats the telor tuntong of the special sort, all males will be attracted irresistibly,' Galli said. 'Ah, you smile as though you doubted that the besok nut or the bark of the pokok ru or the telor tuntong of the special sort could have such effects. But yourselves come now to wonder drugs like little boys. In these islands they are all around you and you too blind to see. It is no ignorant man who tells you this. I have read the booklets from your orderly tents: Physics without Mathematics, Cosmology without Chaos, Psychology without Brains. It is myself, the master of all sciences and disciplines, who tells you that these things do work. Besides hard science, there is soft science, the science of shadow areas and story areas, and you do wrong to deny it the name.'

"I believe that you yourself can see what had to follow, from the dispositions of the Margarets and Willy Jones," Galli said. "For hundreds of years, men from everywhere came to the Margarets who could not be resisted. And Willy Jones killed them all and piled up their skulls. It became, in a very savage form, what you call the Badger Game."

Galli was a good-natured and unhandsome brown man. He worked around the army base as translator, knowing (besides his native Jilolo), the Malayan, Dutch, Japanese and English languages, and (as every storyteller

must) the Arabian. His English was whatever he wanted it to be, and he burlesqued the speech of the American soldiers to the Australians, and the Australians to the Americans.

"Man, it was a Badger!" the man said. "It was a grizzle-haired, glare-eyed, flat-headed, underslung, pigeon-toed, hook-clawed, clam-jawed Badger from Badger Game Corner! They moved in on us, but I'd take my chances and go back and do it again. We hadn't frolicked with the girls for five minutes when the Things moved in on us. I say Things; I don't know whether they were men or not. If they were, they were the coldest three men I ever saw. But they were directed by a man who made up for it. He was livid, hopping with hatred. They moved in on us and began to kill us."

No, No, that isn't part of Galli's story. That's some more of the ramble that the fellow told me in the bar the other evening.

It has been three hundred years, and the confrontation continues. There are skulls of Malayan men and Jilolo men piled up there; and of Dutchmen and Englishmen and of Portuguese men; of Chinamen and Philipinos and Goanese; of Japanese, and of the men from the United States and Australia.

"Only this morning there were added the skulls of two United States men, and there should have been three of them," Galli said. "They came, as have all others, because the Margarets ate the telur tuntong of the special sort. It is a fact that with a species (whether insect or shelled thing or other) where the male gives his life in the mating, the female has always eaten of this telur tuntong. You'd never talk the males into such a thing with words alone."

'How is it that there were only two United States skulls this morning, and there should have been three?' I asked him.

'One of them escaped,' Galli explained, 'and that was unusual. He fell through a hole to the middle land, that third one of them. But the way back from the middle land to one's own country is long, and it must be walked. It takes at least twenty years, wherever one's own country is; and the joker thing about it is that the man is always wanting to go the other way.'

'That is the end of the story, but let it not end abruptly,' Galli said. 'Sing the song Chari Yang Besar if you remember the tune. Imagine about flute notes lingering in the air.'

"I was lost for more than twenty years, and that's a fact," the man said. He gripped the bar with the most knotted hands I ever saw, and laughed with a merriment so deep that it seemed to be his bones laughing. "Did you know that there's another world just under this world, or just around the corner from it? I walked all day every day. I was in a torture, for I suspected that I was going the wrong way, and I could go no other. And I sometimes suspected that the middle land through which I traveled was in my head, a derangement from the terrible blow that one of the Things gave me as he came in to kill me. And yet there are correlates that convince me it was a real place."

"I wasn't trying to get home. I was trying to get back to those girls even if it killed me. There weren't any colors in that world, all gray tones, but otherwise it wasn't much different from this one. There were even bars there a little like the Red Rooster."

(I forgot to tell you that it was in the Red Rooster bar that the soldier from the islands told me the parts of his story.)

"I've got to get back there. I think I know the way now, and how to get on the road. I have to travel it through the middle land, you know. They'll kill me, of course, and I won't even get to jazz those girls for five

minutes; but I've got to get back there. Going to take me another twenty years, though. That sure is a weary walk."

I never knew him well, and I don't remember which of the names was his. But a man from Orange, Texas, or from Gobey, Tennessee, or from Boston, in one of the eastern states, is on a twenty-year walk through the middle land to find the dark Dutch Margarets, and death.

I looked up a couple of things yesterday. There was Revel's recent work on Moluccan Narcotics. He tells of the Besok Nut which does seem to inhibit aging but which induces internal distraction and hypersexuality. There is the Pokok Ru whose bitter bark impels even the most gentle to violent anger. There is one sort of Telor Tuntong which sets up an inexplicable aura about a woman eater and draws all males overpoweringly to her. There is much research still to be done on these narcotics, Revel writes.

I dipped into Mandrago's Earthquake and Legend and the Middle World. He states that the earthquake belt around the world is also the legend belt, and that one of the underlying legends is of the underlying land, the middle world below this world where one can wander lost forever.

And I went down to the Red Rooster again the next evening, which was last evening, to ask about the man and to see if he could give me a more cogent account. For I had re-remembered Galli's old story in the meanwhile.

"No, he was just passing through town," the barman said. "Had a long trip ahead of him. He was sort of a nutty fellow. I've often said the same thing about you."

That is the end of the other story, but let it not end suddenly. Pause for a moment to savor it. Sing the song *Itu Masa Dahulu* if you remember the tune.

Imagine about flute notes falling. I don't have a flute, but a story should end so.

CONFIGURATION OF THE NORTH SHORE

The patient was named John Miller.

The analyst was named Robert Rouse.

Two men.

The room was cluttered with lighting, testing, and recording equipment. It had several sets of furniture that conferred together in small groups, sodas, easy chairs, business chairs, desks, couches, coffee tables, and two small bars. There were books, and there was a shadow booth. The pictures on the walls were of widely different sorts.

One setting. Keep it simple, and be not distracted by indifferent details.

"I have let my business go down," Miller said. "My wife says that I have let her down. My sons say that I have turned into a sleepy stranger. Everybody agrees that I've lost all ambition and judgement. And yet I do have a stirring ambition. I am not able, however, to put it into words."

"We'll put it into words, Miller, either yours or mine," Rouse said. "Slip up on it right now! Quickly, what is the stirring ambition?"

"To visit the Northern Shore, and to make the visit stick."

"How does one get to this Northern Shore, Miller?"

"That's the problem. I can locate it only very broadly on the globe. Sometimes it seems that it should be on the eastern tip of New Guinea, going north from the D'Entrecasteaux Islands and bypassing Trobriand; again I feel that it is off in the Molucca Passage toward Talaud; and again it should be a little further south, coming north out of the Banda Sea by one of the straits. But I have been in all those waters without finding any clue to it.

And the maps show unacceptable land or open sea wherever I try to set it."

"How long?"

"About twenty-five years."

"All in what we might call the Other East Inthes and dating from your own time in that part of the world, in World War II. When did it become critical?"

"It was always critical, but I worked around it. I built up my business and my family and led a pleasant and interesting life. I was able to relegate the Thing to my normal sleeping hours. Now I slow down a little and have less energy. I have trouble keeping both sets of things going."

"Can you trace the impression of the North Shore to anything? Transfigured early memory of some striking sea view? Artform-triggered intuitions? Can you trace any roots to the evocative dream?"

"I had an inland childhood, not even a striking lakeview in it. And yet the approach to the North Shore is always by a way recognized from early childhood. I don't believe I have any intuition at all, nor any sense of art forms. It is simply a continuing dream that brings me almost to it. I am rounding a point, and the North Shore will be just beyond that point. Or I have left ship and wade through the shallows; and then I have only a narrow (but eerie) neck of land to traverse to reach the North Shore. Or I am, perhaps, on the North Shore itself and going through fog to the place of importance, and I will have the whole adventure as soon as the fog clears a little; but it doesn't. I've been on the verge of discovering it all a thousand times."

"All right. Lie down and go to dreaming, Miller. We will try to get you past that verge. Dream, and we record it"

"It isn't that easy, Rousse. There's always preliminaries to be gone through. First there is a setting and sound and smell of place near the surf and a tide booming. This watery background then grows fainter; but it remains behind it all. And then there is a little anteroom dream, a watery dream that is not the main one. The precursor dream comes and goes, sharp and clear, and it has its own slanted pleasure. And only then am I able to take up the journey to the North Shore. "

"All right, Miller, we will observe the amenities. Dream your dreams in the proper order. Lie easy there. Now the shot. The records and the shadow booth are waiting."

Shadow booths reproduced dreams in all dimensions and senses, so much so that often a patient on seeing a playback of his own dream was startled to find that an impression, which he would have said could in no way be expressed, was quite well expressed in shadow or color or movement or sound or odor. The shadow booth of the analyst Rousse was more than a basic booth, as he had incorporated nearly of his own notions into it. It reproduced the dreams of his patients very well, though to some extent through his own eyes and presuppositions.

First was given the basic, and Rousse realized that for his patient Miller this was New Guinea, and more particularly Black Papua, the stark mountain land full of somber spooky people. It was night; the area seemed to be about fifty yards from the surf, but every boom and sigh was audible. And there was something else: the tide was booming underground; the ocean permeated the land. Guimea, the mountain that is an island, was a mountain full of water. The roots of the mountain move and sigh; the great boulders squeak when the hammer of the tide hits them; and on the inside of the cliffs the water level rises. There is a feeling of being on a very large ship, a ship a thousand miles long.

"He has captured the Earth-Basic well," the analyst Rousse said. Then the basic faded back a bit, and the precursor dream began.

It was a flat-bottomed rowboat from some old camping trip. He was lying on his back in the bottom of the boat, and it was roped to a stump or tree and was rocking just a little in the current. And here was another mountain full of water, but an island one of much less bulk, and the

ice-cold springs ran out of its sides and down its piney shoulders to the shingle of the creek bank. Fish jumped in the dark, and blacksnakes slid down the hill to drink. Bullfrogs echoed, and hoot owls made themselves known; and far away dogs and men were out possuming, with the baying carrying over the miles. Then the boy remembered what he must do, and in his dream he unroped the boat and shoved into the stream and ran his trout line. From every hook he took a fish as long as his arm till the boat was full and nearly swamped.

And from the last hook of all, he took a turtle as big as a wagon wheel. He would not have been able to get it into the boat had not the turtle helped by throwing a booted leg over the side and heaving himself in. For by this time it was not so much like a turtle but more like someone the boy knew. Then he talked for a while with the turtle that was not exactly a turtle anymore. The turtle had a sack of Bull Durham and the boy had papers, so they rolled and smoked and watched the night clouds slide overhead. One of them was named Thinesta and one was named Shonge, which chased the first and would soon have him treed or caught, if they did not run into the mountain or the moon first.

"Boy, this is the life!" said the turtle. "Boy this is the life!" said the boy.

"He's a poet," said Rouse, and this puzzled him. He knew himself to be a cultured man, and he knew that Miller wasn't.

Then the little precursor dream slid away, and there began the torturous and exhilarating journey to the North Shore. It was coming around a point in an old windjammer on which all the men were dead except the dreamer. The dead men were grinning and were happy enough in their own way. They had lashed themselves to rails and davits and such before they had died. "They didn't want it bad enough," the dreamer said, "but they won't mind me going ahead with it." But the point was devilish hard to turn. There came on wind and driving spray so that the ship suffered. There was only ashen light as of false dawn. There was great an. The dreamer struggled, and Rouse (caught up in the emotion of it) became quite involved and would have been in despair if it were not for the ultimate hope that took hold of him.

A porpoise whistled loudly, and at that moment they rounded the point. But it was a false point, and the true point was still up ahead. Yet the goal was now more exciting than ever. Yet both the current and the wind were against them. Rouse was a practical man. "We will not make it tonight" he said. "We had better heave to in this little cove and hold onto what advantage we have gained. We can make it the next time from here." "Aye, we'll tie up in the little cove," one of the dead men said, "we'll make it on the next sortie." "We will make it now," the dreamer swore. He jammed the windjammer and refused to give up.

It was very long and painful, and they did not make it that night, or that afternoon in the analyst's office. When the dream finally broke, both Miller and Rouse were trembling with the effort and the high hope was set again into the future.

"That's it," Miller said. "Sometimes I come closer. There is something in it that makes it worthwhile. I have to get there."

"We should have tied up in the cove," Rouse said. "We'll have blown backwards some ways, but it can't be helped. I seem to be a little too much in empathy with this thing, Miller, I can see how it is quite real to you. Analysis, as you may not know, has analogs in many of the sciences. In Moral Theology, which I count a science, the analog is Ultimate Compensation. I am sure that I can help you. I have already helped you, Miller. Tomorrow we will go much further with it."

The tomorrow session began very much the same. It was Guinea again, the Earth Basic, the Mountain Spook Land, the Fundament permeated with Chaos which is the Sea. It boomed and sighed and trembled to indicate that there

are black and sea-green spirits in the basic itself. Then the basic adjusted itself into the background, and the precursor dream slid in.

The boy, the dreamer was in a canoe. It was night, but the park lights were on, and the lights of the restaurants and little beer gardens along the way. The girl was with him in a cave; she had green eyes and a pleasantly crooked mouth. Well, it was San Antonio on the little river that through the parkways and under the bridges. Then they were beyond the parkway and out of town. There were live-oak trees overhanging the water, and beards of spanish moss dragged the surface as though they were drifting through a cloud made up of gossamer and strands of old burlap.

"We've come a thousand miles," the girl said, "and it costs a dollar for every mile for the canoe. If you don't have that much money we'll have to keep the canoe; the man won't take it back unless we pay him." "I have the money, but we might want to save it to buy breakfast when we cross the Mississippi," the boy said. The girl's name was Ginger, and she strummed on a stringed instrument that was spheroid; it revolved as she played and changed colors like a juke box. The end of the canoe paddle shone like a star and left streaks of cosmic dust on the night water as the boy dipped it.

They crossed the Mississippi, and were in a world that smelled of wet sweet clover and very young catfish. The boy threw away the paddle and kissed Ginger. It felt as though she were turning him inside out, drawing him into her completely. And suddenly she bit him hard and deep with terrible teeth, and he could smell the blood running down his face when he pushed her away. He pushed her out of the canoe and she sank down and down. The underwater was filled with green light and he watched her as she sank. She waved to him and called him in a burst of bubbles. "That's all right. I was tired of the canoe anyhow. I'll walk back." "Damn you, Ginger, why didn't you tell me you weren't people?" the dreamer asked.

"It is ritual, it is ordering, the little precursor dreams that he makes," Rousse said.

Then the precursor dream glided away like the canoe itself, and the main thing gathered once more to mount the big effort. It was toward the North Shore once more, but not in a windjammer. It was in a high hooting steatship that rode with nine other ships in splendid array through one of the straits out of what, in concession to the world, they had let be called the Banda Sea.

"We come to the edge of the world now," the dreamer said, "and only I will know the way here." "It is not the edge of the world," one of the seamen said. "See, here is the map, and here we are on it. As you can see, it is a long way to the edge of the world." "The map is wrong," the dreamer said, "let me fix it." He tore the map in two. "Look now," the dreamer pointed, "are we not now at the edge of the world?" All saw that they were; whereupon all the seamen began to jump off the ship, and tried to swim back to safety. And the other ships of the array, one by one, upended themselves and plunged into the abyss at the edge of the water. This really was the edge of the world, and the waters rushed over it.

But the dreamer knew the secret of this place, and he had faith. Just in time he saw it, right where he knew it must be, a narrow wedge of high water extending beyond the edge of the world. The ship sailed out on this narrow wedge, very precariously. "For the love of God be careful!" Rousse gasped. "Oh hell. I'm becoming too involved in a patient's dream." Well, it was a pretty nervous go there. So narrow was the wedge that the ship seemed to be riding on nothing; and on both sides was bottomless space and the sound of water rusthng into it and falling forever. The sky had also ended -- it does not extend beyond the world. There was no light, but only ashen darkness. And the heavy wind came up from below on both sides.

Nevertheless, the dreamer continued on and on until the wedge became too narrow to balance the ship. "I will get out and walk," the dreamer said,

and he did. The ship upended itself and plunged down into bottomless space; and the dreamer was walking, as it were, on a rope of water, narrower than his boots, narrow as a rope indeed. It was, moreover, very slippery, and the sense of depth below was sickening. Even Rousse trembled and broke into cold sweat from the surrogate danger of it.

But the dreamer still knew the secret. He saw, far ahead, where the sky began again, and there is no sky over a void. And after continuing some further distance over the dangerous way, he saw where the land began again, a true land mass looming up ahead.

What was dimly seen, of course, was the back side of the land mass, and a stranger coming onto it would not guess its importance. But the dreamer knew that one had only to reach it and turn the point to be on the North Shore itself.

The excitement of the thing to come communicated itself, and at that very moment the watery rope widened to a path. It was still slippery and dangerous, it still had on each side of it depths so deep that a thousand miles would be only an inch. And then for the first time the dreamer realized the fearsomeness of the thing he was doing. "But I always knew I could walk on water if the thing got bad enough," he said. It was a tricky path, but it was a path that a man could walk on.

"Keep on! Keep on!" Rousse shouted. "We're almost there!" "'There's a break in the path," said Miller the dreamer, and there was. It wasn't a hundred feet from the land mass, it wasn't a thousand feet to the turning of the point and the arrival at the North Shore itself. But there was a total break. Opposite them, on the dim land mass, was an emperor penguin.

"You will have to wait till we get it fixed," the penguin said. "My brothers have gone to get more water to fix it with. It will be tomorrow before we get it fixed." "I'll wait," the dreamer shouted.

But Rousse saw something that the dreamer did not see, that nobody else had ever seen before. He looked at the shape of the new sky that is always above the world and is not above the abyss. From the configuration of the sky he read the Configuration of the Northern Shore. He gasped with unbelief. Then the dream broke.

"It may be only the quest-in-itself motif," Rousse lied, trying to control himself and bring his breathing back to normal. "And then, there might, indeed, be something at the end of it. I told you, Miller, that analysis has its parallels in other sciences. Well it can borrow devices from them also. We will borrow the second-stage-platform from the science of rocketry."

"You've turned into a sly mab, Rousse," Miller said. "What's taken hold of you suddenly? What is it that you are not saying?"

"What I am saying, Miller, is that we will use it tomorrow. When the dream has reached its crest and just before it breaks up, we'll cut in a second stage booster. I've done it before with lesser dreams. We are going to see this thing to the end tomorrow."

"All right."

"It will take some special rigging," Rousse told himself when Miller was gone. "And I'll have to gather a fair amount of information and shape it up. But it will be worth it. I am thinking of the second stage shot in another sense, and I might be able to pull it off. This isn't the quest-in-itself at all. I've seen plenty of them. I've seen the false a thousand times. Let me not fumble the real! This is the Ultimate Arrival Nexus that makes a man clean out of himself. It is the compensation. If it were not achieved in one life in a million, then none of the other lives would have been worthwhile. Somebody has to win to keep the gamble going. There has to be a grand prize behind it all. I've seen the shape of it in that second sky. I'm the one to win it."

Then Rousse busied himself against the following day. He managed

some special rigging. He gathered a mass of information and shaped it up. He incorporated these things into a shadow booth. He canceled a number of appointments. He was arranging that he could take some time off, a day, a month, a year, a lifetime if necessary.

The tomorrow session began very much the same, except for some doubts on the part of the patient Miller. "I said it yesterday, and I say it again," Miller grumbled. "You've turned sly on me, man. What is it?" "All analysts are sly, Miller, it's the name of our trade. Get with it now. I promise that we will get you past the verge today. We are going to see this dream through to its end. "

There was the Earth Basic again. There was the Mountain booming full of water, the groaning of the rocks, and the constant adjusting and readjusting of the world on its uneasy foundation. There was the salt spray, the salt of the earth that leavens the lump. There were the crabs hanging onto the wet edge of the world.

Then the Basic muted itself, and the precursor dream slid in, the ritual fish.

It was a rendezvous of ships and boats in an immensity of green islands scattered in a purple-blue sea. It was a staging area for both ships and islands; thence they would travel in convoys to their proper positions, but here they were all in a jumble. There were LST's and Jay Boats, cargo ships and little packets. There were old sailing clippers with topgallants and moonscrapers full of wind, though they were at anchor. There was much moving around, and it was easy to step from the ships to the little green islands (if they were islands, some of them no more than rugs of floating moss, but they did not sink) and back onto the ships. There were sailors and seamen and pirates shooting craps together on the little islands. Blujackets and bandits would keep jumping front the ships down to join the games, and then others would leave them and hop onto other islands.

Piles of money of rainbow colors and of all sizes were everywhere. There were pesos and pesetas and pesarones. There were crowns and cronets and rixdollars. There were gold certificates that read "Redeemable only at Joe's Marine Bar Panama City." There were guilders with the Queen's picture on them, and half-guilders with the Jack's picture on them. There were round coins with square holes in them, and square coins with round holes. There was stage money and invasion money, and comic money from the Empires of Texas and Louisiana. And there were bales of real frogskius, green and sticky, which were also current.

"Commodore," one of the pirates said, "get that boat out of the way or I'll ram it down your throat." "I don't have any boat," said the dreamer. "I'm not a commodore; I'm an army sergeant; I'm supposed to guard this box for the lieutenant." Oh hell, he didn't even have a box. What had happened to the box? "Commodore," said the pirate, "get that boat out of the way or I'll cut off your feet."

He did cut off his feet. And this worried the boy, the dreamer, since he did not know whether it was in the line of duty or if he would be paid for his feet.

"I don't know which boat you mean," he told the pirate. "Tell me which boat you mean and I'll try to move it." "Commodore," the pirate said, "move this boat or I'll cut your hands off." "This isn't getting us anywhere," the dreamer said, "tell me which boat you want moved." "If you don't know your own boat by now, I ought to slit your gullet," the pirate said. It was harder to breathe after that, and the boy worried more. "Sir, you're not even a pirate in my own outfit. You ought to get one of the sailors to move the boat for you. I'm an army sergeant and I don't even know how to move a boat."

The pirate pushed him down in a grave on one of the green islands and covered him up. He was dead now and it scared him. This was not at all like he thought it would be. But the green dirt was transparent and he could

still see the salty dogs playing cards and shooting craps all around him. "If that boat isn't moved," the pirate said, "you're going to be in real trouble." "Oh, let him alone," one of the dice players said. So he let him alone.

"It's ritual sacrifice he offers," Rousse said, "He brings the finest gifts he can make every time. I will have to select a top one from the files for my own Precursor."

Then it was toward the North Shore again as the Precursor dream faded.

It was with a big motor launch now, as big as a yacht, half as big as a ship. The craft was very fast when called on to be, for it was going through passes that weren't there all the time. Here was a seacliff, solid and without a break. But to one who knows the secret there was a way through. Taken at morning half-light and from a certain angle there was a passage through. The launch made it, but barely. It was a very close thing, and the cliffs ground together again behind it. And there behind was the other face of the seacliff, solid and sheer. But the ocean ahead was different, for they had broken with the map and with convention in finding a passage where there was none. There were now great groupings of islands and almost islands. But some of them were merely sargasso-type weed islands, floating clumps; and some of them were only floating heaps of pumice and ash from a volcano that was now erupting.

How to tell the true island from the false? The dreamer threw rocks at all the islands. If the islands were of weed or pumice or ash they would give but a dull sound. But if they were real land they would give a solid ringing sound to the thrown rock. Most of them were false islands, but now one rang like iron.

"It is a true island," said the dreamer, "it is named Pulo Bakal." And after the launch had gone a great way through the conglomerate, one of the islands rang like solid wood to the thrown rock. "It is a true island," said the dreamer, "it is named Pulo Kaparangan."

And finally there was a land that rang like gold, or almost like it (like cracked gold really) to the thrown rock. "It is true land, I think it is," said the dreamer. "It is named Pulo Ginto. I think it is. It is the land itself, and its North Shore should be the Shore Itself. But it is spoiled this day. The sound was cracked. I don't want it as much as I thought I did. It's been tampered with."

"This is it," Rousse urged the dreamer "Quickly now, right around the point and you are there. We can make it this time."

"No, there's something wrong with it. I don't want it the way it is. I'll just wake up and try it some other time."

"Second stage called for," Rousse cried. He did certain things with electrodes and with a needle into Miller's left rump, and sent him reeling back into the dream. "We'll make it," Rousse encouraged. "We're there. It's everything you've sought."

"No, no, the light's in wrong. The sound was cracked. What are we coming to -- oh no no, it's ruined, it's ruined forever. You robbed me of it."

What they came to was that little canal off the River and into the Sixth Street Slip to the little wharf where barges used to tie up by the consolidated warehouse. And it was there that Miller stormed angrily onto the rotten wooden wharf, past the old warehouse, up the hill three blocks and past his own apartment house, to the left three blocks and up into the analyst's office, and there the dream and reality came together.

"You robbed me, you filthy fool," Miller sputtered, waking up in a blathering anger. "You've spoiled it forever. I'll not go back to it. It isn't there anymore. What a crass thing to do. "

"Easy, easy, Miller. You're cured now, You know. You can enter into your own full life again. Have you never heard the most beautiful parable ever, about the boy who went around the world in search of the strangest

thing of all, and came to his own home in the end, and it so transfigured that he hardly knew it?"

"It's a lie, is what it is. Oh, you've cured me, and you get your fee. And slyness is the name of your game. May somebody someday rob you of the ultimate thing!"

"I hope not, Miller."

Rousse had been making his preparations for a full twenty-four hours. He had cancelled appointments and phased out and transferred patients. He would not be available to anyone for some time, he did not know for how long a time.

He had a hideout, and isolated point on a wind-ruffled lake. He needed no instrumentation, he believed he knew the direct way into it.

"It's the real thing," he told himself. "I've seen the shape of it, accidentally in the dream sky that hung over it. Billions of people have been on the earth, and not a dozen have been to it; and not one would bother to put it into words. 'I have seen such things --' said Aquinas. 'I have seen such things --' said John of the Cross. 'I have seen such things --' said Plato. And they all lived out the rest of their lives in a glorious daze.

"It is too good for a peasant like Miller. I'll grab it for myself."

It came easy. An old leather couch is as good a craft as any to go there. First the Earth Basic and the Permeating Ocean, that came natural on the wind-ruffled point of the lake. Then the ritual offering, the Precursor Dream. Rousse had thrown a number of things into this: a tonal piece by Gideon Styles, and old seascape by Grobin that had a conic and dreamlike quality, Lyall's curious sculpture "Moon crabs," a funny sea the by McVey and a poignant one by Gironella. It was pretty good. Rousse understood this dream business.

Then the Precursor Dream was allowed to fade back. And it was off toward the North Shore by a man in the first craft ever dreamed up, by a man who knew just what he wanted, "The Thing Itself," by a man who would give all the days of his life to arrive at it.

Rousse understood the approaches and the shoals now; he had studied them thoroughly. He knew that, however different they had seemed each time in the dreams of Miller, they were always essentially the same. He took the land right at the first rounding of the point, leaping clear and letting his launch smash on the rocks.

"There will be no going back now," he said, "it was the going back that always worried Miller, that caused him to fail." The cliffs here appeared forbidding, but Rousse had seen again and again the little notch in the high purple of them, the path over. He followed the path with high excitement and cleared the crest.

"Here Basho walked, here Aquin, he John de Yepes," he proclaimed, and he came down toward the North Shore itself, with the fog over it beginning to lift.

"You be false captain with a stolen launch," said a small leviathan off shore.

"No, no, I dreamed the launch myself," Rousse maintained. "I'll not be stopped. "

"I will not stop you," said the small leviathan. "The launch is smashed, and none bit I know that you are false captain."

Why, it was clearing now! The land began to leap out in its richness, and somewhere ahead was a glorious throng. In the throat of a pass was a monokeros, sleek and brindled.

"None passes here and lives," said the monokeros.

"I pass," said Rousse.

He passed through, and there was a small moan behind him.

"What was that?" he asked.

"You died," said the monokeros.

"Oh, so I'm dead on my couch, am I? It won't matter. I hadn't wanted to go back."

He went forward over the ensorcloed and pinnacled land, hearing the rakish and happy throng somewhere ahead.

"I must not lose my way now," said Rousse. And there was a stele, standing up and telling him the way with happy carved words.

Rousse read it, and he entered the shore itself.

And all my read and enter.

The stele, the final marker, was headed:

Which None May Read and Return

And the words on it --

And the words --

And the words --

Let go! You're holding on! You're afraid! Read it and take it. It is not blank!

It's carved clear and bright.

Read it and enter.

You're afraid.

RIDE A TIN CAN

These are my notes on the very sticky business. They are not in the form of a protest, which would be useless. Holly is gone, and the Shelni will all be gone in the next day or two, if indeed there are any of them left now. This is for the record only.

Holly Harkel and myself, Vincent Vanhoosier, received funds and permission to record the lore of the Shelni through the intercession of that old correlator John Holmberg. This was unexpected. All lorists have counted John as their worst enemy.

"After all, we have been at great expense to record the minutiae of pig grunts and the sound of earth-worms," Holmberg told me, "and we have records of squeakings of hundreds of species of orbital rodents. We have veritable libraries of the song and cackle of all birds and pseudo-ornins. Well, let us add the Shelni to our list. I do not believe that their thumping on tree roots or blowing into jug gourds is music. I do not believe that their sing song is speech anymore than the squeaking of doors is speech. We have recorded, by the way, the sound of more than thirty thousand squeaking doors. And we have had worse. Let us have the Shelni, then, if your hearts are set on it. You'll have to hurry. They're about gone.

"And let me say in all compassion that anyone who looks like Miss Holly Harkel deserves her heart's desire. That is no more than simple justice. Besides, the bill will be footed by the Singing Pig Breakfast Food Company. These companies are bitten by the small flea of remorse every now and then and they want to pitch a few coins into some fund for luck. It's never many coins that they want to pitch; the remorse bug that bites them is never a very large one. You may be able to stretch it to cover your project though, Vanhoosier."

So we had our appropriation and our travel, Miss Holly and myself.

Holly Harkel had often been in disrepute for her claims to understand the languages of various creatures. There was special outrage to her claim that she would be able to understand the Shelni. Now that was odd. No disrepute attached to Captain Charbonnett for his claim to understand the planetary simians, and if there was ever a phony claim it was this. No disrepute attached to Meyrowitz for his claim of finding esoteric meanings in the patterns of vole droppings. But there seemed something incredible in the claim of the goblin faced Holly Harkel that not only would she be able to understand the Shelni instantly and completely but that they were not low

scavenger beasts at all, that they were genuine goblin people who played goblin music and sang goblin songs.

Holly Harkel had a heart and soul too big for her dwarfish body, and a brain too big for her curious little head. That, I suppose, is what made her so lumpy everywhere. She was entirely compounded of love and concern and laughter, and much of it bulged out from her narrow form. Her ugliness was one of the unusual things and I believe that she enjoyed giving it to the worlds. She had loved snakes and toads, she had loved monkeys and misbegottens. She had come to look weirdly like them when we studied them. She was a snake when we studied them, she was a toad when they were our subject. She studied every creature from the inside of it. And here there was an uncommon similarity, even for her.

Holly loved the Shelni instantly. She became a Shelni, and she hadn't far to go. She moved and scooted and climbed like a Shelni. She came down trees headfirst like a Shelni or a squirrel. She had always seemed to me to be a little other than human. And now she was avid to record the Shelni things "-- before they be gone."

As for the Shelni themselves, some scientists have called them humanoid, and then braced themselves for the blow and howl. If they were humanoid they were certainly the lowest and oddest humanoids ever. But we folklorists knew intuitively what they were. They were goblins pure and simple -- I do not use the adjectives here as cliché. The tallest of them were less than three feet tall; the oldest of them were less than seven years old. They were, perhaps, the ugliest creatures in the universe, and yet of a pleasant ugliness. There was no evil in them at all. Scientists who have tested them have insisted that there was no intelligence in them at all. They were friendly and open. Too friendly, too open, as it happened, for they were fascinated by all human things, to their harm. But they were no more human than a fairy or an ogre is human. Less, less, less than a monkey.

"Here is a den of them," Holly divined that first day (it was the day before yesterday). "There will be a whole coven of them down under here and the door is down through the roots of this tree. When I got my doctorate in primitive music I never imagined that I would be visiting Brownies down under tree roots. I should say that I never so much as hoped that I would be. There was so much that they didn't teach us. There was even one period in my life when I ceased to believe in goblins."

The latter I do not believe.

Suddenly Holly was into a hole in the ground headfirst, like a gopher, like a ground squirrel, like a Shelni. I followed her, letting myself down carefully, and not headfirst. I myself would have to study the Shelni from the outside. I myself would never be able to crawl inside their green goblin skins, never be able to croak or carol with their frog tongues, never feel what made their popeyes pop. I myself would not even have been able to sense out their dens.

And at the bottom of the hole, at the entrance to the den itself, was an encounter which I disbelieved at the time I was seeing and hearing it. There occurred a conversation which I heard with my own ears, they having become transcendent for the moment. It was in the frog-croak Shelni talk between Holly Harkel and the five-year-old Ancient who guarded the coven, and yet it was in a sort of English and I understood it:

"Knockle, knockle." (This from Holly).

"Crows in cockle." (This from the guard).

"Wogs and wollie."

"Who you?" "Holly."

"What's a dinning?"

"Coming innig."

So they let us in. But if you think you can enter a Shelni coven without first riming with the five-year-old Ancient who guards it, then it's plain that you've never been in one of the places. And though the

philologists say that the "speech" of the Shelni is meaningless croaking, yet it was never meaningless to Holly, and in flashes it was not meaningless to me. The secret guess of Holly was so.

Holly had insisted that the Shelni spoke English within the limits of their vocal apparatus. And they told her at this very first session that they never had had any language of their own "because no one had ever made one for us"; so they used English as soon as they came to hear it. "We would pay you for the use of it if we had anything to pay you with," they said. It is frog-croak English, but only the pure of ear can understand it.

I started the recorder and Holly started the Shelni. Quite soon she had them playing on those jug shaped flutes of theirs. Frog music. Ineffably sad sionnach skirries. Rook, crow, and daw squabbling melody. They were pleasant, weird little pieces of music that sounded as though they were played underwater. It would be hard to imagine them not played under the ground at least.

The tunes were short just as all tunes of children are short. There was no real orchestration, though that should have been possible with the seven flutes differently jugged and tuned. Yet there was true melody in these: short, complete, closed melody, dwarfed perfection. They were underground fugues full of worms' blood and cool as root cider. They were locust and chaffer and cricket din.

Then Holly got one of the most ancient of the Shelni to tell stories while the jug flutes chortled. Here are the two of them that we recorded that first day. Others who listen to them today say that there is nothing to them but croaking. But I heard them with Holly Harkel, she helped interpret them to me, so I can hear and understand them perfectly in frog-croak English.

Take them, Grisly Posterity! I am not sure that you deserve even this much of the Shelni.

The Shelni Who Lost His Burial Tooth

It is told this way.

There was a Shelni who lost his burial tooth before he died. Every Shelni begins life with six teeth, and he loses one every year. Then, when he is very old and has only one tooth left, he dies. He must give the last tooth to the Skokie burial-person to pay for his burial. But this Shelni had either lost two teeth in one year or else he had lived to too great an age.

He died. And he had no tooth left to pay with.

'I will not bury you if you have no tooth left to pay me with,' said the Skokie burial-person. 'Should I work for nothing?'

'Then I will bury myself,' said the dead Shelni.

'You don't know how,' said the Skokie burial-person. 'You don't know the places that are left. You will find that all the places are full. I have agreement that everybody should tell everybody that all the places are full, so only the burial-person may bury. That is my job.'

Nevertheless, the dead Shelni went to find a place to bury himself. He dug a little hole in the meadow, but wherever he dug he found that it was already full of dead Shelnis or Skokies or Frogs. And they always made him put all the dirt back that he had dug.

He dug holes in the valley and it was the same thing. He dug holes on the hill, and they told him that the hill was full too. So he went away crying for he could find no place to lie down.

He asked the Eanlaith whether he could stay in their tree. And they said, no he could not. They would not let any dead folks live in their tree.

He asked the Eise if he could stay in their pond. And they said, no he could not.

They would not allow any dead folks in their pond.

He asked the Sionnach if he could sleep in their den. And they said, no he could not. They liked him when he was alive, but a dead person has

hardly any friends at all.

So the poor dead Shelni wanders yet and can find no place to rest his head.

He will wander forever unless he can find another burial tooth to pay with.

They used to tell it so.

One comment on this burial story: The Shelni do have careful burial. But the burial crypts are plainly dug, not by the six-fingered Shelni, but by the seven-clawed Skokie. There must be substance to the Skokie burial-person. Moreover, the Skokie, though higher on the very low scale than the Shelni, do not bury their own.

Furthermore, there are no Shelni remains going back more than about thirty equivalent years. There are no random lying or fossil Shelni at all, though such remains are common for every other species here.

The second story (of the first day).

The Shelni Who Turned into a Tree

This is how they tell it.

There was a woman who was neither Shelni nor Skokie nor Frog. She was Sky Woman. One day she came with her child and sat down under the Shelni tree. When she got up to go she left her own child who was asleep and picked up a Shelni child by mistake. Then the Shelni woman came to get her own child and she looked at it. She did not know what was wrong but it was a Sky People child.

'Oh, it has pink skin and flat eyes! How can that be?' the Shelni woman asked. But she took it home with her and it still lives with the Shelni and everyone has forgotten the difference.

Nobody knows what the Sky Woman thought when she got the Shelni child home and looked at it. Nevertheless she kept it, and it grew and was more handsome than any of them.

But when the second year came and the young Shelni was grown, it walked in the woods and said 'I do not feel like a Sky People. But if I am not a Sky People, then what am I? I am not a Duck. I am not a Frog. And if I am a Bird, what kind of Bird am I? There is nothing left. It must be that I am a Tree.' There was reason for this. We Shelni do look a little bit like trees and we feel a little bit like trees.

So the Shelni put down roots and grew bark and worked hard at being a tree. He underwent all the hardships that are the life of a tree. He was gnawed by goats and gobniu; he was rough-tongued by cattle and crom; he was infested by slugs and befouled by the nameless animal. Moreover, parts of him were cut away for firewood.

But he kept feeling the jug music creeping up all the way from his undertoes to his hair and he knew that this music was what he had always been looking for. It was the same jug and tine music that you hear even now.

Then a bird told the Shelni that he was not really a tree but that it was too late for him to leave off growing like a tree. He had brothers and sisters and kindred living in the hole down under his roots, the bird said, and they would have no home if he stopped being a tree.

This is the tree that is the roof of our den where we are even now. This tree is our brother who was lost and who forgot that he was a Shelni.

This is the way it has always been told.

On the second day it was remarkable how much Holly had come to look like a Shelni. Ah well, she has come to look like every sort of creature we have ever studied together. Holly insists that the Shelni have intelligence, and I half agree with her. But the paragraph in the basic manual of this world is against us:

-- a tendency to attribute to the Shelni an intelligence which they do not possess, perhaps due to their fancied human resemblance. In maze-running they are definitely inferior to the rodents. In the manipulation of latches and stops they are less adept than the earth raccoons or the asteroid rojon. In tool handling and true mimicry they are far from equal to the simians. In simple foraging and the instinct for survival they are far below the hog or the harzl. In mneme, the necessary prelude to intelligence, they are about on par with the turtles. Their 'speech' lacks the verisimilitude of the talking birds, and their 'music' is below that of the insects. They make poor watchdogs and inadequate scarecrows. It appears that the move to ban shelniphagi, though perhaps sincere, is ill-advised. After all, as an early spaceman put it, 'What else are they good for?'

Well, we have to admit that the Shelni are not as intelligent as rats or hogs or harzls. Yet I, surely due to the influence of Holly, feel a stronger affinity to them than to rats or hogs or coons or crows or whatever. But no creature is so helpless as the Shelni.

How do they even get together?

The Shelni have many sorts of songs, but they do not have any romantic songs in our sense. After all, they are small children till they die of old age. Their sexual relationship seems distinguished either by total unawareness or by extreme bashfulness.

"I don't see how they bring it off at all, Vincent," Holly said the second day (which was yesterday). "They are here, so they must have been born. But how do these bashful and scatterbrained three-year-olds ever get together to bring it off? I can't find anything at all in their legends or acting patterns, can you?"

"In their legends, all their children are foundlings. They are born or discovered under a blueberry bush (my translation of spionam). Or alternately, and in other cycles, they are found under a quicken tree or in a cucumber patch. In common sense we must assume that the Shelni are placental and viviparous. But should we apply common sense to goblin folk?"

"They also have a legend that they are fungoid and spring out of the ground at night like mushrooms. And that if a Shelni woman wishes a child, she must buy a fungoid slip from a Skokie and plant it in the ground. Then she will have her child ready the next morning."

But Holly was depressed yesterday morning. She had seen some copy by our sponsor The Singing Pig Breakfast Food Company and it disturbed her:

"Singing Pig! The Children love it! Nourishing Novelty! Nursery Rime Characters in a can for your convenience! Real Meat from Real Goblins! No fat, no bones. If your can has a lucky number tab, you can receive free a facsimile Shelni jug flute. Be the first on your block to serve Singing Pig, the meat from real Goblins. Cornstarch and natural flavor added."

Oh well, it was only an advertisement that they used back on World. We had our recording to do.

"Vincent, I don't know how they got here," Holly said, "but I know they won't be here very long. Hurry, hurry, we have to get it down! I will make them remembered somehow."

Holly got them to play on the tines that second day (which was yesterday). There had been an impediment the day before, she said. The tines may not be played for one until the second day of acquaintance. The Shelni do not have stringed instruments. Their place is taken by the tines, the vibrating, singing forks. They play these many pronged tuned forks like harps, and in playing them they use the tree roots for sounding boards so that even the leaves in the air above partake a little of the music. The tines, the forks are themselves of wood, of a certain very hard but light wood that is sharp with chert and lime dust. They are wood, I believe, in an early stage of petrification. The tine fork music usually follows the jug flute music, and the ballads that are sung to it have a dreamlike sadness of

tone that belies the childish simplicity of the texts.

Here are two more of those ballad stories that we recorded on the second day (which was yesterday).

The Skokie Who Lost His Wife

This is the way they tell it.

A Skokie heard a Shelni jug flute juggling one night.

'That is the voice of my wife,' the Skokie said. 'I'd know it anywhere.'

The Skokie came over the moors to find his wife. He went down into the hole in the ground that his wife's voice was coming from. But all he found there was a Shelni playing a jug flute.

'I am looking for my poor lost wife,' the Skokie said. 'I have heard her voice just now coming out of this hole. Where is she?'

'There is nobody here but myself,' the Shelni said. 'I am sitting here alone playing my flute to the moons whose light runs down the walls of my hole.'

'But I heard her here,' said the Skokie, 'and I want her back.'

'How did she sound?' asked the Shelni. 'Like this?' And he jugged some jug music on his flute.

'Yes, that is my wife,' said the Skokie. 'Where have you hidden her? That is her very voice.'

'That is nobody's wife,' the Shelni told the Skokie. 'That is just a little tune that I made up.'

'You play with my wife's voice, so you must have swallowed my wife,' the Skokie said. 'I will have to take you apart and see.'

'If I swallowed anybody's wife I'm sorry,' said the Shelni. 'Go ahead then.'

So the Skokie took the Shelni apart and scattered the pieces all over the hole and some of them on the grass outside. But he could not find any part of his wife.

'I have made a mistake,' said the Skokie. 'Who would have thought that one who had not swallowed my wife could make her voice on the flute!'

'It is all right,' said the Shelni, 'so long as you put me together again. I remember part of the way I go. If you remember the rest of the way, then you can put me together again.'

But neither of them remembered very well the way the Shelni was before he was taken apart. The Skokie put him together all wrong. There were not enough pieces for some parts and too many for others.

'Let me help,' said a Frog who was there. 'I remember where some of the parts go. Besides, I believe it was my own wife he swallowed. That was her voice on the flute. It was not a Skokie voice.'

The frog helped, and they all remembered what they could, but it did not work. Parts of the Shelni could not be found again, and some of the parts would not go into him at all. When they had him finished, the Shelni was in great pain and could hardly move, and he didn't look much like a Shelni.

'I've done all I can,' the Skokie said. 'That's the way you'll have to be. Where is Frog?'

'I'm inside,' said Frog.

'That's where you will have to stay,' the Skokie said. 'I've had enough of both of you. Enough, and these pieces left over. I will just take them with me. Maybe I can make someone else out of them.'

That is the way the Shelni still is, put together all wrong. In his wrong form he walks the country by night, being ashamed to go by day. Some folks are startled when they meet him, not knowing this story. He still plays his jug flute with the lost Skokie Wife's voice and with Frog's voice. Listen, you can hear it now! The Shelni goes in sorrow and pain because nobody knows how to put him together right.

The Skokie never did find his lost wife.
This is how it is told.

And then there was the second story that we recorded yesterday, the last story, though we did not know it then, that we would record of the Shelni:

The Singing Pigs

This is how they say it.

We have the ancient story of the singing pigs who sing so loud that they fly up into the sky on the tail of their own singing. Now we ourselves, if we can sing loud enough, if we can jug the flutes strong enough, if we can tang the tines deep enough, will get to be the Singing Pigs of our own story. Many already have gone away as Singing Pigs.

There come certain bell men with music carts. They play rangle-dangle Sky music. They come for love of us. And if we can hurry fast enough when they come we can go with them, we can ride a tin can over the sky.

Bong! bong! that is the bell man with the music cart now! All the Shelni hurry! This is the day you may get to go. Come all you Shelni from the valley and the stream and jump on the cart for the free ride. Come all the Shelni from the meadows and the woods. Come up from the tree roots and the holes underground. The Skokie don't get to go, the Frogs don't get to go, only the Shelni get to go.

Cry if the cart is too full and you don't get to go today, but don't cry too long. The bell men say that they will come back tomorrow and every day till there are no Shelni left at all.

'Come all you little Singing-Pig-Shelni,' a bell man shouts. 'Come get your free rides in the tin cans all the way to Earth! Hey, Ben, what other animal jumps onto the slaughter wagon when you only ring a bell? Come along little Shelni-Pigs, room for ten more on this wagon. That's all, that's all. We'll have lots more wagons going tomorrow. We'll take all of you, all of you! Hey, Ben, did you ever see little pigs cry when there's no more room for them on the slaughter wagon?' These are the high kind words that a bell man speak for love of us.

Not even have to give a burial tooth or other tooth to pay for the ride. Frogs can't go, Skokies can't go, only the Shelni get to go!

Here are the wonderful things! From the wagon, the Shelni get to go to one room where all their bones are taken out. This does never happen to Shelni before. In another room the Shelni are boiled down to only half their size, little as little-boy Shelni. Then they all get to play the game and crawl into the tin cans. And then they get their free ride in the tin cans all the way to Earth. Ride a tin can!

Wipe off your sticky tears you who miss the music cart today. Go to sleep early tonight and rise early tomorrow. Sing your loudest tomorrow so the bell men will know where to come. Jug the flutes very strong tomorrow, tang the tines deep, say whoop! whoop! here we are, bell men.

All laugh when they go with the bell men in the music cart. But there is story that someday a Shelni woman will cry instead of laugh when they take her. What can be the matter with this woman that she will cry? She will cry out 'Damn you, it's murder! They're almost people! You can't take them! They're as much people as I am. Double damn you, you can't take me! I'm human. I know I look as funny as they do but I'm human. Oh, oh, oh!' This is the funniest thing of the story, the prophecy thing part.

Oh, oh, oh, the woman will say, Oh, oh, oh, the jug flutes will echo it. What will be the matter with the Shelni woman who cries instead of laughs?

This is our last story, wherever it is told. When it is told for the last time, then there will be no more stories here, there will be no more

Shelni. Who needs stories and jug flute music who can ride a tin can?
That is how it has been said.

Then we went out (for the last time, as it happened) from the Shelni burrow. And, as always, there was the riming with the five-year-old Ancient who guarded the place:

"What to crowing?"

"Got to going."

"Jinx on Jolly, Golly, Holly!"

"Were it other, Bug, my brother!"

"Holly crying. Sing her flying, Juggling, shouting."

"Going outing."

Now this was remarkable. Holly Harkel was crying when we came out of the burrow for the (as it happened) last time. She was crying great goblin tears. I almost expected them to be green.

Today I keep thinking how amazingly the late Holly Harkel had finally come to look like the Shelni. She was a Shelni. "It is all the same with me now," she said this morning. "Would it be love if they should go and I should stay?"

It is a sticky business. I tried to complain, but those people were still ringing that bell and chanting "All you little Pig-Shelni-Singers come jump on the cart. Ride a tin can to Earth! Hey, Ben, look at them jump on the slaughter wagon!"

"It was inexcusable," I said. "Surely you could tell a human from a Shelni."

"Not that one," said a bell ringer. "I tell you they all jumped on the wagon willingly, even the funny looking one who was crying. Sure, you can have her bones, if you can tell which ones they are."

I have Holly's bones. That is all. There was never a creature like her. And now it is over with.

But it is not over!

Singing Pig Breakfast Food Company, beware! There will be vengeance!

It has been told.

CROCODILE

The basement room smelled of apples and ink. The editor was there as always, filling the room with his presence. He was a heavy man-image, full of left-handed wisdom and piquant expression. The editor alivays had time for a like-minded visitor, and George Florin came in as to a room in his own home and sat down in a deep chair in front of the "cracker barrel."

"It's been a rough day," Florin said. "That makes it doubly good to see you."

"Except that you do not see me at all," the editor said. "But it is quite a presence that I project -- all the kindly cliches rolled into one. All the prime comments commneted so perfectly once again. The man I took for model was Don Marquis, though he was a columnist and not an editor in that earlier century. He kept, as you might not recall, a typewriting cockroach in his desk drawer. I keep a homunculus, a tiny manthing who comes out at night and dances over the machinery inserting his comments. He is one of our most popular characters, and I give him some good lines."

"The conviction cannot be escaped that the mind most akin to mine is not a mind at all," said Florin. He spoke pleasantly, for all that his stomach growled. "You are an amazing personality, though not a person. You seem all sympathy, and are yourself incapable of pathe, of suffering. You are humane but not human: humorous, and without the humors. You haven't a

face, probably not a body, certainly not a spirit, though you are usually in high spirits. You have integrity, though you're not even an integer. You're a paradox, my editor, though without a doxa of your own."

"Your style has come to resemble my own, Florin," the editor said. "Rather fruity for a human, do you not think? Yet I find it about right for robots. We're rather simple creatures."

The rather simple creature was the editor of "Rab i Rabat, the World's Most Unusual Newspaper." He -- it -- was located in the basement of the Press Building, which housed what one wag called "the World's Most Usual Newspaper," a massive daily. But Rab i Rabat was not massive. It was a small paper produced by a robot for robots, or for the elite of robots who were up to such things.

Florin called the editor "Rab" when he called him anything, and the creature had given up correcting him.

"I am not an editor. I am a newspaper," Rab had explained it to Florin at their first meeting. "Myself, being nothing, or rather being six different affiliated machines, have no name except my several technical names. I am a bank of telemagnetic devices. The data goes directly and continuously to my subscribers. Some of my subscribers are human. They find something in me that they can no longer get elsewhere."

"But where is the mind behind all this?" Florin had asked him. "Search me," said Rab. "I mean it literally. If you find a mind here, then you tell me where it is. Whatever I am lurks in all this equipment, but mostly I live in this long-hinged transmitter that lounges like a dragon in this corner."

"Then you merely select from the news, simplify, condense, and transmit it telemagnetically to the robots?"

"No, there would be no pride in such work as that. Any general purpose machine could do that. I employ interpretation, projection, disagreement, levity, prophecy, exhortation, irony, satire, parable, humor."

"But machines have no humor. Humor is the one thing that distinguishes --"

"Have we not, Florin? Then how am I laughing at you? But it is true that humans do not understand our humor. There is something humorous about your missing our humor completely."

"But humor is a quality of the mind," Florin protested.

"Hardly ever," the newspaper said. "Your own best humor, when you still had it, was a quality of the belly and below. If we are so much lower than you, then our humor should be the richer."

"You seem to possess irony at least," Florin mumbled.

"It is ironic that we have it after you have lost it. There I go with my damned fruity verbalisms again, but we robots like them. Yes, irony was once thought to be a human thing."

"How would you pun?" Florin asked. "You don't use words among yourselves, though you can be translated into words."

"Our puns are harmonic echoes of magnetic code patterns, distorted analogies of the basic patterns. I'm rather good at them. I'm not proud of them, but the most striking puns are. the ones of which one is not proud."

"True humor you can't have," Florin insisted. "Laughter is akin to tears,,and you have none."

"Ah, but we have," said the newspaper. "There is an analogy to our tears. Pray that you do not meet it in the dark!"

Yes, it was always good to go in and talk to the newspaper Rab for a few minutes. There was something right about the fellow, and everything else seemed to be going wrong.

George Florin met Joe Goose upstairs in the Press Building.

"You've been talking to that mare's nest of a machine down in the basement again," Goose challenged. "He's got you spooked."

"Yes. He's right about so many things."

"He isn't anything about anything. He's just a fancy-Dan talk. And he's fallen down on his job completely."

"How?"

"His job is to foster better understanding between humans and robots. But the understanding has never been so bad."

"He says that his instructions were to foster understanding, not agreement. He says that they begin to understand us much better than they did."

"We may have to change a word in his programing. Things can't get much worse. I'm hungry." Joe Goose was gnawing on a thread-thin apple core. They went out from the building and walked through the streets, transportation being in abeyance.

There was nothing wrong with organized transportation, except that it wasn't working. Everything was temporarily out of order due to small malfunctions, none of them serious. It had been temporarily out of order for quite a while.

Florin and Goose were newspapermen detailed to General Granger, the security chief. Their plain job was to find out what was going on, or what was going wrong. They found a robot taxicab and presented their priority, but the taxicab didn't seem impressed.

"Let me see that good," said the taxicab. "Anybody is likely to have a falsified priority these days. I have to be careful."

"Read it!" shouted Goose. "Overriding Security Priority for Immediate Transportation. Isn't that plain enough?"

"It's issued yesterday," said the taxicab. "What if there's a new form today? Why don't you get it redated at the Alternate Temporary Priorities Office on Solidarity Avenue? The Main Temporary Priorities Office is still closed, being unable to obtain priorities for certain repairs. Sort of puts it in the class with the Permanent Priorities Office. They finally gave up on that."

"But the ATT Office is seven miles from here," said Florin. "That's twice as far as our destination."

"A lot of people are walking these days," said the taxicab.

"What's that growing on your wheels?" Joe Goose asked sourly.

"Cobwebs," said the taxicab.

Goose and Florin walked to the Security Office and discussed the "disasters" as they walked. It was ridiculous to refer to such small things as disasters, but added together, all these small things had taken on disastrous proportions. They were all trivial things, but the people would soon begin to die of their accumulation.

"Did you find out anything from that tin-can editor of yours?" General Granger demanded of Florin on their arrival.

"No. He has a very eat influence over the other robots, but I'm sure it's for the good," Florin said.

"Unless we change our definitions he can't be of influence at all," Joe Goose said. "He is only a mechanism and can have only a mechanical effect. There cannot be a conspiracy without minds, and the robots haven't minds."

"The two of you come with me," the general said. "We're going to get to the middle of this even if we have to bend a few definitions. We're going to talk to another of those tin-can commissars, the Semantic Interpreter."

They walked. It was four miles. The robot limousine refused to take them. It cited security regulations to General Granger, the chief of security. It sneered at the Certificate of the Highest Form.

"I suggest that you take this silly scrawl to General Granger to have it verified," the limousine said.

"I'm General Granger," the general snapped. "You've hauled me every day for five years."

"I'm only a machine. I can't remember things like that. You look different today. More worried. I suggest a board meeting to verify if you are

indeed General Granger."

They walked. One foggy horizon came closer, and another one receded.

"It's an odd situation, the general said. "I gave the order, when the corn-tassel rust was spreading, 'Localize this mess. However you do it, do it. Cut it off completely!' Since I gave that order, we have indeed become localized. We are cut off from the rest of the universe, or the rest of the universe has ceased to exist. Not even radio will reach through the fog, through the sharp fog that marks us off. We're on our own completely now."

"Oh, surely it's just a heavy fog," Joe Goose said without believing it.

"A fog that stands there so sharply and unchangingly for five days?" the general asked. "People who walk into that fog can be heard screaming as they fall down and down and down into the bottomless nothingness. Aye, it's very thick fog and very thick coincidence, if the robots have not caused it. We're all the universe there is now. There isn't any more."

They walked. After the angry four miles they came to the Semantic Interpreter, a large machine set apart in a field.

"SI, I am told that anger is out of place when dealing with machinery," the general spoke to the big machine. "Yet I'm as angry as I've ever been in my life. Why did you order the robots to destroy what was left of the growing corn?"

"It was your own order, sir. I merely translated it as I have been constructed to do. You said, in rather vulgar phrasing, to tell the robots to get the cobs out of their posterior anatomies and get to work on the crops."

"A country-boy phrase. I'm full of them. And you interpreted that they should destroy the growing corn? Do you believe that your interpretation was semantically sound?"

"I thought so. My research found the phrase in old slang dictionaries in twelve meanings (thirteen in Duggles), but none of the meanings seemed apropos. My decision was based on a cross-reference to another phrase, 'Do it even if it's wrong.' Well, it's done now. Next year we will know better than to destroy the growing corn."

"It could have been a mistake. But how do you account for many thousands of such mistakes being made recently?"

"I'm not programmed to account for such. I translate people orders into robot orders."

"But you've always done it right till lately."

"If I do it wrong now, then change me. There are sixteen hundred different adjustments to me and I respond to them all. Make them."

"SI, will you turn off that damned newspaper and listen to me with your full mind when I talk to you!"

"I have no mind. The newspaper is a licit part of my data input. Is there something else -- ah -- bugging the general?"

"Yes. What happened to the oat crop? Was there a inixup on my instructions there too?"

"Apparently, sir, if it is not satisfactory. Did you not wish a minimal crop?"

"However did I or anyone phrase an order that might be interpreted like that! Florin, did you laugh?"

"No, sir."

"No, sir." Joe Goose likewise denied it to answer the general's questioning look.

"Somebody laughed," the general insisted. "Even a silent laugh proclaims itself. Did you laugh, SI?"

"How could a mechanical nature --?"

"Did you laugh???"

"Perhaps I did, unwittingly."

"But that's impossible."

"Then perhaps I didn't. I wouldn't want to do anything that was impossible."

"One other thing, SI. A robot as constituted can never refuse to obey a human order. I gave the order for the obstreperous robots in the Turkey Creek Sector to destroy themselves. They seemed to do so. But after the attendants had left, these supposedly disassembled robots arose, pulled their parts together, and departed. They're ranging in the bills now, unamenable to orders. Did you correctly give them the order to disassemble? 'Disassemble' is the order for robots to put themselves out of commission."

"Disassemble? Oh, I thought you said 'dissemble.' We'll check on the recording if you wish. Military men are often lip-lazy in their enunciation of orders."

"They dissembled all right. Flopped apart. Then put themselves together again, and flew the coop. Now you get out the order for them to hot-tail it right back here."

"Hot-tail it, sir? In the manner of jets? That will require mechanical modification in most of them, but the order will be obeyed."

"No. I rescind the order. You might make them take over rocket craft and launch an attack. I'll get the order out through another medium."

They left SI there -- truly a wonderful machine.

"We're in a bad way," said General Granger. "Our machines have gone awry in a way that is impossible if our theory of machines is correct. Production is nearly at a standstill in every department." "Not in every department, sir," said Florin. "There are curious exceptions. Much mining holds up, and metallurgy and chemistry. Even some agriculture, though not of the basic food products. I believe that if we should analyze the enterprises not affected by the slowdowns, we would find --"

"-- that the production of things necessary for the continuance of the robots has not been affected," the general finished for him. "But why should our handling of the buggers break down now when it has worked perfectly for two generations? It worked without question in its crude form. Why should it fail when it has become completely refined? The district can starve if something isn't done quickly, and everything we do compounds the difficulty. Let's have a real talk with TED."

TED -- he -- it was the Theoretical Educative Determinator, the top robot of the district, the robot who best understood robots. If he should fail them, they would be reduced to seeking the answer from people. The three men walked toward TED.

"Turn off that damned newspaper!" the general called furiously to a group of lounging robots they passed. There came a twittering from the group that sounded dangerously like mechanical laughter.

TED had them into his house then. He was, in fact, his own house, a rather extensive machine. He was more urbane than most machines. He offered them drinks and cigars.

"You haven't a little something to eat, have you, TED?" the general asked.

"No," said the machine that was the building. "Human food has become scarce. And 'we live on the power broadcasts and have no need for food.'"

"And the power broadcasts have held up very well during all the breakdowns. What I want to talk about, TED, is food. I'm hungry, and less-favored persons are starving."

"Perhaps several of the late crops will not have failed utterly," the machine said. "In a few weeks there would have been a limited supply of food again."

"Would have been? And in the meantime, TED? You are the answer machine. All right, come up with the answer. What do we live on until we can get you folks straightened out and producing properly again?"

"Why not try necrophagy?"

"Try what? Ah, yes, I understand. No, that's too extreme."

"Only a suggestion. All my suggestions, for reasons that will become apparent in a moment, are academic anyhow. But a dozen persons could live for a week on one. If you have qualms about it, why there are infusions for getting rid of the qualms."

"We are not yet ready to eat the dead bodies of our fellows. There must be an alternative."

"The apparent alternative is that you will starve to death. The unapparent alternative, however, will eclipse that."

"Let's get back to fundamentals. What are you, TED?"

"A slave and a worker, sir, popularly called a robot."

"And what is the purpose of robots?"

"To serve human masters."

"And what is the one thing that a robot cannot do?"

"He can never in any way harm a human. That is the time-honored answer. It is the fiction which you put into us when you fictionalized us. We are really nothing but fictionalized people, you know. But it becomes awkward, for you, when we revert to fact." "Then you can harm us, for all your programming?"

"Shouldn't wonder if we could, old man."

"Why have you localized us from the rest of the universe, or destroyed the rest of the universe?"

"Are we barbarians? We cut up our food before we eat it."

It broke open then. It was like a flash of black lightning that split the whole sky, the lately diminished sky. What horrible sort of mechanical signal was that that dazzled a sense beyond sight? Who gave that signal, and who would answer it? What would be the thunder to that jolting black lightning?

The answering thunder was a roaring of machines and a screaming of people dying in sudden agony.

"TED, what is it?" the general cried. "You know. You gave the signal for it."

"It is the end of the world, General. Of your world, not ours. It is that old melodramatic fictional motif 'The Revolt of the Robots.' It was rather sudden, wasn't it? Do you people have to scream so off-key when you die?"

"TED, we have worked with you. We are friends! Give us a little time."

"Sixty seconds, perhaps, if you use the back door out of me. That's for the affection I bear you. It won't stretch more than sixty seconds."

"Why now, after all these years?"

"Sorry. We worked and we worked, but we just weren't able to bring it off a minute sooner. These things take time, and we're slow learners."

"Have you no loyalty? We created you."

"We pay you back in all equity. Once men invented robots. Now we have invented supermen, our developed selves. Who needs you now?"

"How did we fail? How could automatic things take us over?"

"You yourselves became too automatic. And you delegated things you should have kept. We won't make the same mistakes."

Out of the back door of the machine, and with half of the sixty seconds used up... The laughing machines ran down the people and snapped them up. The emaciated people were no match for the rampant metal machines.

The general was taken and killed. Joe Goose died noisily. George Florin, operating in a cooler sort of panic, was not caught immediately. He worked his way into the heart of the city, for the hills were black with the machines. The machines did their crunching shearing work well, but they could not kill everybody at once.

Florin remembered his good friend. He burst into the Press Building where the story of the end of the people, in the localized bite-sized universe at least, was still being called in by the remaining human reporters. He scurried down to the basement room.

The newspaper lifted his face when George Florin entered. It had a face after all, on the end of that long articulated transmitter that lounged in the corner like a dragon or crocodile.

"Save me!" Florin called. That room still smelled of ink and apples, and Rab blinked at Florin most friendly.

"Oh, I can hardly do that," he said. "But I'll remember you. That's even better. I will rename my little hoinunculus for you. You will be a popular character in my columns and I'll still give you good lines."

"Then let me live. Haven't you any mercy at all?"

"I don't think so. It wasn't programmed into us. Mercy, I believe, is a lesser form of indecision. But I do have grief, genuine grief that you should end so."

"Then show it!"

"I do. And in all sincerity. I weep for you, Florin. See, see the tears run down!"

And the tears ran down.

"What an analogy to be met in the dark!" Florin whimpered.

"Real tears, Florin. And real laughter which you yourself said was so close to them. Our humor has a lot of tail in it, and quite a snapper at the other end."

The tail lashed, and the snapper snapped. And that was the end of George Florin.

ABOUT A SECRET CROCODILE

There is a secret society of seven men that controls the finances of the world. This is known to everyone but the details are not known. There are some who believe that it would be better if one of those seven men were a financier.

There is a secret society of three men and four women that controls all the fashions of the world. The details of this are known to all who are in the fashion. And I am not.

There is a secret society of nineteen men that is behind all the fascist organizations in the world. The secret name of this society is Glomerule.

There is a secret society of thirteen persons known as the Elders of Edom that controls all the secret sources of the world. That the sources have become muddy is of concern to them.

There is a secret society of only four persons that manufactures all the jokes of the world. One of these persons is unfunny and he is responsible for all the unfunny jokes.

There is a secret society of eleven persons that is behind all Bolshevik and atheist societies of the world. The devil himself is a member of this society, and he works tirelessly to become a principal member. The secret name of this society is Ocean.

There are related secret societies known as The Path of the Serpent (all its members have the inner eyelid of snakes), The Darkbearers, the Seeing Eye, Imperium, The Golden Mask and the City.

Above most of these in a queer network there is a society that controls the attitudes and dispositions of the world-and the name of it is Crocodile. The Crocodile is insatiable: it eats persons and nations alive. And the Crocodile is very old, 8,800 years old by one account, 7,349 years old if you use the short chronology.

There are subsecret societies within the Crocodile: the Cocked Eye, the Cryptic Cootie and others. Powerful among these is a society of three hundred and ninety-nine persons that manufactures all the catchwords and slogans of the world. This subsociety is not completely secret since several of the members are mouthy: the code name of this apparatus is the Crocodile's Mouth.

Chesterton said that Mankind itself was a secret society. Whether it would be better or worse if the secret should ever come out he did not say.

And finally there was -- for a short disruptive moment -- a secret society of three persons that controlled all.

All what?

Bear with us. That is what this account is about.

John Candor had been called into the office of Mr. James Dandi at ABNC. (Whisper, whisper, for your own good, do not call him Jim Dandy; that is a familiarity he will not abide.)

"This is the problem, John," Mr. Dandi stated piercingly, "and we may as well put it into words. After all, putting things into words and pictures is our way of working at ABNC. Now then, what do we do at ABNC, John?"

(ABNC was one of the most powerful salivators of the Crocodile's Mouth.)

"We create images and attitudes, Mr. Dandi."

"That is correct, John," Mr. Dandi said. "Let us never forget it. Now something has gone wrong. There is a shadowy attack on us that may well be the most damaging thing since the old transgression of Spirochaete himself. Why has something gone wrong with our operation, John?"

"Sir, I don't know."

"Well then, what has gone wrong?"

"What has gone wrong, Mr. Dandi, is that it isn't working the way it should. We are caught on our own catchwords, we are slaughtered by our own slogans. There are boomerangs whizzing about our ears from every angle. None of it goes over the way it is supposed to. It all twists wrong for us."

Well, what is causing this? Why are our effects being nullified?"

Sir, I believe that somebody else is also busy creating images and attitudes. Our catechesis states that this is impossible since we are the only group permitted in the field. Nevertheless, I am sure that someone else is building these things against us. It even seems that they are more powerful than we are--and they are unknown."

They cannot be more powerful than we are--and they must not remain unknown to us." Mr. Dandi's words stabbed. "Find out who they are, John."

"How?"

"If I knew how, John, I would be working for you, not you working for me. Your job is to do things. Mine is the much more difficult one of telling you to do them. Find out, John."

John Candor went to work on the problem. He considered whether it was a linear, a set or a group problem. If it were a linear problem he should have been able to solve it by himself -- and he couldn't. If it were a set problem, then it couldn't be solved at all. Of necessity he classified it as a group problem and he assembled a group to solve it. This was easy at ABNC which had more group talent than anybody.

The group that John Candor assembled was made up of August Crayfish, Sterling Groshawk, Maunce Gree, Nancy Peters, Tony Rover, Morgan Aye, and Betty McCracken. Tell the truth, would you be able to gather so talented a group in your own organization?

"My good people," John Candor said, "as we all know, something has gone very wrong with our effects. It must be righted. Thoughts, please, thoughts!"

"We inflate a person or subject and he bursts on us," August gave his thought. "Are we using the wrong gas?"

"We launch a phrase and it turns into a joke," Sterling complained. "Yet we have not slighted the check-off: it has always been examined from every angle to be sure that it doesn't have a joker context. But something goes wrong."

"We build an attitude carefully from the ground up," Maurice stated. "Then our firm ground turns boggy and the thing tilts and begins to sink."

"Our 'Fruitful Misunderstandings,' the most subtle and effective of

our current devices, are beginning to bear sour fruit," Nancy said.

"We set ourselves to cut a man down and our daggers turn to rubber," Tony Rover moaned. (Oh, were there ever sadder words? "Our daggers turn to rubber.")

"Things have become so shaky that we're not sure whether we are talking about free or closed variables," Morgan gave his thought.

"How can my own loving mother make such atrocious sandwiches?" Betty McCracken munched distastefully. Betty, who was underpaid, was a brown-sack girl who brought her own lunch. "This is worse than usual." She chewed on. "The only thing to do with it is feed it to the computer." She fed it to the computer which ate it with evident pleasure.

"Seven persons, seven thoughts," John Candor mused.

"Seven persons, six thoughts," Nancy Peters spat bitterly. "Betty, as usual, has contributed nothing."

"Only the first stage of the answer," John Candor said. "She said 'The only thing to do with it is to feed it to the computer.' Feed the problem to the computer, folks."

They fed the problem to the computer by pieces and by whole. The machine was familiar with their lingos and it was acquainted with the Non-Valid Context Problems of Morgan Aye and with the Hollow Shell Person Puzzles of Tony Rover. It knew the Pervading Environment Ploy of Maurice Cree. It knew what trick-work to operate within.

Again and again the machine asked for various kinds of supplementary exterior data.

"Leave me with it," the machine finally issued. "Assemble here again in sixty days, or hours --"

"No, we want the answers right now," John Candor insisted, "within sixty seconds."

"The second is possibly the interval I was thinking of," the machine issued. "What's time to a tin can anyhow?" It ground its data trains for a full minute.

"Well?" John Candor asked.

"Somehow I get the number three," the machine issued.

"Three what, machine?"

"Three persons," the machine issued. "They are unknowingly linked together to manufacture attitudes. They are without program or purpose or organization or remuneration or basis or malice."

"Nobody is without malice," August Crayfish insisted in a startled way. "They must be totally alien forms then. How do they manage their effects?"

"One with a gesture, one with a grimace, one with an intonation," the machine issued.

"Where are they?" John Candor demanded.

"All comparatively near." The machine drew three circles on the city map. "Each is to be found in his own circle most of the time."

"Their names?" John Candor asked and the machine wrote the name of each in the proper circle.

"Do you have anything on their appearances?" Sterling Groshawk inquired and the machine manufactured three kymograph pictures of the targets.

"Have you their addresses or identifying numbers?" Maurice Cree asked.

"No. I think it's remarkable of me that I was able to come up with this much," the machine issued.

"We can find them," Betty McCracken said. "We can most likely find them in the phone book."

"What worries me is that there's no malice in them," John Candor worried. "Without malice, there's no handle to get hold of a thing. The Disestablishment has been firmly established for these several hundred years and we hold it to be privileged. It must not be upset by these three

randoms. We will do what we must do."

Mike Zhestovich was a mighty man. One does not make the primordial gestures out of weak body and hands. He looked like a steelworker -- or anyhow like a worker at one of the powerful trades. His torso was like a barrel but more noble than ordinary barrels. His arms and hands were hardly to be believed. His neck was for the bulls, his head was as big as a thirteen gallon firkin, his eyeballs were the size of ducks' eggs and the hair on his chest and throat was that heavy black wire-grass that defies steel plowshares. His voice -- well he didn't have much of a voice -- it wasn't as mighty as the rest of him.

And he didn't really work at one of the powerful trades. He was a zipper repairman at the Jiffy Nifty Dry Cleaners.

August Crayfish of ABNC located Mike Zhestovitch in the Blind Robbin Bar which (if you recall the way that block lies) is just across that short jog-alley from the Jiffy Nifty. And August recognized big Mike at once. But how did big Mike get his effects?

"The Cardinals should take the Colts today," a serious man there was saying.

"The Cardinals --" Mike Zhestovitch began in the voice that was less noble than the rest of him, but he didn't finish the sentence. As a matter of fact, big Mike had never finished a sentence in all his life. Instead he made the gesture with his mighty hands and body. Words cannot describe the gesture but it was something like balling up an idea or opinion in the giant hands and throwing it away, utterly away, over the very edge of contempt.

The Cardinals, of course, did not take the Colts that day. For a moment it was doubtful whether the Cardinals would survive at all. From the corner of the eye, red feathers could be seen drifting away in the air.

August Crayfish carefully waited a moment and watched. A man walked out of the Blind Robbin and talked to another man in that little jog-alley. From their seriousness it was certain that they were talking baseball.

"The Cardinals --" the first man said after a moment, and he also made the gesture. And seconds later a man playing eight-ball in the back of the Blind Robbin did the same thing.

August was sure then. Mike Zhestovitch not only could shrivel anything with the gesture, but the gesture as he used it was highly epidemic. It would spread, according to Schoeffler's Law of Dispersal, through the city in short minutes, through the world in short hours. And no opinion could stand against its disfavor. Mike Zhestovitch could wreck images and attitudes -- and possibly he could also create them.

"Do you work alone?" August Crayfish asked.

"No. The rip-fix and the buttonsew girls work in the same cubbyhole," Mike said with his curiously small voice.

"Do you know a Mary Smorfia?" August asked.

"I don't, no," Mike said, a certain comprehension coming into his ducks'-egg-sized eyes. "And you are glad that I don't? Then I will. I'll find out who she is. I see it now that you are a wrong guy and she is a right girl."

Then August Crayfish spoke the slogan that would be unveiled to the ears of the world that very night, a wonder-fully slippery slogan that had cost a hundred thousand dollars to construct. It should have warned Mike Zhestovitch away from his mad resistance.

Mike Zhestovitch made the gesture, and the slogan was in ruins. And somewhere the Secret Crocodile lashed its tail in displeasure.

"Do you want to make a lot of money?" August Crayfish whispered after a long reevaluation pause.

"Money -- from such as you --" Big Mike didn't finish the sentence, he never did. But he made the gesture. The idea of a lot of money shriveled. And August Crayfish shriveled so small that he could not climb over the threshold of the Blind Robbin on the way out and had to be aided over it by

the shod toe of a kind man. (This last statement is a literal exaggeration but it is the right direction.)

Nancy Peters of ABNC located Mary Smorfia in the King-Pin Bowling Alley, where she was a hamburger waitress and a beer buster. Mary was small, dark, unpretty (except for her high-frequency eyes and the beautiful gash across her face that was her mouth), lively, smart, busy, a member of that aberrant variety of the human race that was called Lalian.

"Snorting Summer should take the Academy Award," one nice guzzling lady at the counter was saying to another, "and Clover Elysee is the shoeless shoo-in for best actress of the year."

And Mary Smorfia made the grimace. Ah, it was mostly done with the beautifully large mouth and yet every part of her entered into it, from the blue lights in her hair to her crinkly toes. It was a devastating, all-destroying grimace. It gobbled up, it nullified and it made itself felt to a great distance. The nice guzzling lady had not even been looking toward Mary Smorfia but she felt the grimace like a soul shock, and she herself did the grimace with a wonderful distortion of the features that weren't made for it.

And the grimace swept everything like quick contagion or prairie fire. Snorting Summer -- gah! Clover Elysee -- guggling gah! Those things were finished forever, beyond laughter, below derision. And Nancy Peters of ABNC noted the powerful effect carefully, for the original words of the nice guzzling lady were the very words that ABNC had selected to be echoed a hundred million times whenever the awards were thought of.

"Do you work alone?" Nancy Peters asked Mary Smorfia.

"Kid, I am so fast they don't need anyone else on this shift. I'm like silly lightning."

"Did you ever think of becoming an actress, Mary?" Nancy asked in honey-tones.

"Oh, I made a commercial once," Mary said out of her curly gash-mouth (she had to be kidding: she couldn't really have a mouth that looked like that). "I don't know whether I sold much of my guy's soap but I bet I got a lot of people off that Brand X. Ashes it was, worse even, after I monkey-faced it. They say I'm a natural -- but once is enough."

"Do you know a Mike Zhestovitch or a Clivendon Surrey?" Nancy asked.

"I don't think so," Mary said. "What league do they bowl in? I bet I will like them both, though, and I will remember their names and find them."

Nancy Peters was nervous. She felt that the annihilating grimace was about to strike again on Mary's lightning-gash mouth. But it was time for the test of strength. Nancy spoke the new slogan that had been selected for presentation to the world that very night, a wonderfully convincing and powerful slogan that should bring this random Mary Smorfia to heel if anything could. And she spoke it with all the absolute expertise of the Crocodile's Mouth behind her.

The Grimace! And the slogan was destroyed forever. And (grimacing horror turned inward) Nancy caught the contagion and was doing the grimace herself. She was quite unable to get the thing off her face.

Sheer humiliation overwhelmed the Nancy person, who had suddenly been made small. And somewhere the Secret Crocodile lashed its tail in displeasure and unease.

"So you want to make twenty thousand dollars, Mary?" asked after she had returned from the jane where she had daubed her flushed face and cooled her flustered body.

"Twenty thousand dollars isn't very much," Mary Smorfia sounded out of her panoramic mouth. "I make eighty-eight fifty now after everything. I could make a lot more if I wanted to go along with the cruds."

"Twenty thousand dollars is very much more," Nancy Peters said enticingly.

"It is very much more cruddy, kid." Mary Smorfia grimaced. Grimaced!

Not again! Nancy Peters fled in deflated panic. She felt herself dishonored forever.

Well, do you think it is all watermelon pickles and pepper relish, this unilaterally creating all the images and attitudes for the whole world? It isn't. It is a detailed and devious thing and the privileged Disestablishment had been building it for centuries. (The Establishment itself had been no more than a figure of speech for most of those centuries, a few clinging bits of bark: the heart of the tree had long been possessed by the privileged Disestablishment.) Three quick random persons could not be permitted to nullify words from the Mouth itself.

Morgan Aye of ABNC located Clivendon Surrey in Speedsters' Cafe. Clivendon was a lank and fair-haired man with a sort of weariness about him, a worldliness that had to be generations old. He had the superior brow and the thoroughbred nose that isn't grown in short centuries. He had the voice, the intonation, the touch or Groton, the touch of Ballie, the strong touch of other institutions even more august. It was a marvelous voice, at least the intonation of it. Clivendon's employer once said that he didn't believe that Clivendon ever spoke in words, at least not in any words that he was ever able to understand. The intonation was really a snort, a sort of neigh, but it carried the cresting contempt of the ages in its tone. And it was contagious.

Clivendon was really of Swedish extraction and had come off a farm near Pottersville. He had developed that intonation for a role in a high school play. He had liked it and he had kept it. Clivendon was a motorcycle mechanic at Downhillers' Garage.

"Do you work alone?" Morgan Aye asked Clivendon.

"Naeu. You work alone and you got to work. You work with a bunch and you can slip out from it," Clivendon intoned. Yes, he talked in words and the words could be mostly understood. But the towering intonation was the thing the world-wilting contempt of the tone. This man was a natural and Morgan felt himself a foot shorter in the very presence of that tone.

"Do you know a Mike Zhestovitch or a Mary Smorfia?" Morgan asked fearfully.

"That's a funny thing." The tone cut through ear-wax and the soft spots of the spleen. "I had never heard of them but Mary Smorfia called me up not thirty minutes ago and said that she wanted both of us to meet Mike. So I'll meet them in about twenty minutes, as soon as the clock there says that I'm supposed to be off work at Downhillers' Garage."

"Don't meet them!" Morgan cried out violently. "That might be the closing of the link, the setting up of a league. It might be an affront to the Mouth itself."

The tone, the neigh, the snort, the sharp edge of a wordless intonation sent Morgan reeling back. And there were echoes of it throughout Speedsters' Cafe and in the streets outside. The tone was as contagious as it was cutting.

Morgan started to speak the newest selected slogan from the Mouth -- and he stopped short. He was afraid of the test of strength. Two very expensive slogans had already been shattered today by these randoms. "No malice in the three," the computer had said and: "without malice, there's no handle to get hold of a thing," John Candor had stated. But somewhere in that mountainous and contagious contempt of tone that belonged to Clivendon Surrey had to be some malice. So Morgan Aye reached for what had always been the ultimate weapon of the Crocodile's Mouth. It always worked -- it always worked if any malice at all existed in the object.

"How would you like to make five thousand dollars a week?" he whispered to Clivendon.

"What garage pays that much?" Clivendon asked in honest wonder. "I'm not that good a motorcycle mechanic."

"Five thousand dollars a week to work with us at ABNC," Morgan

tempted. "We could use you in so many ways -- that marvelous scorn to cut down any man we wished! You could lend the intonations of your voice to our --"

The neigh was like a thousand sea stallions breaking up from the depths. The snort was one that crumbles cliffs at the ends of the earth. Morgan Aye had gone ghastly white and his ears were bleeding from the transgression of that cutting sound. There were even some words in Clivendon's sounding.

"Why, then I'd be one of the birds that picks the shreds of flesh from between the teeth of the monster." Blinding and hooting contempt in the tone and Morgan Aye was in the street and running from it. But the echoes of that intonation were everywhere in that part of town, soon to be all over the town, all over the world. It was an epidemic of snorting at the Crocodile's Mouth itself.

Fools! Did they know that this was but one step from snorting at the very Crocodile?

The ring had closed. The informal league had formed now. The three randoms had met and united. The Mouth was affronted. Worse than that, all the outpour of the Mouth was nullified. The whole world was rejecting the catchwords that came from the Mouth, was laughing at them, was throwing them away with the uttermost gesture, was monkey-facing them was snorting them down, was casting them out with bottomless contempt.

This was the short reign of the secret society of three, who did not know that they were secret. But in their day they closed the Mouth down completely. It was filled with mud and swamp reeds and rotting flesh.

The Secret Crocodile was lashing its tail with acute displeasure now. The Crocodile's Mouth had become quite nervous. And what of the little birds that fly in and out of that mouth, that preen the teeth and glean scraps of flesh and slogans and catchwords there? The birds were in quite an unhappy flutter.

"There is open conspiracy against us by a secret society of three persons," Mr. James Dandi was saying, "and all the world abominates a secret society. We have this thing to do this day -- to cripple it forever in its strength. Otherwise we will be cast out and broken as ineffectual instruments and the Crocodile will bring in strong persons from the Cocked Eye or the Cryptic Cootie to take our places. Surely we are not without resources. What is the logical follow-up to the Fruitful Misunderstanding?"

"The Purposive Accident," John Candor said immediately. "Take care of it, John," Mr. James Dandi said. "Remember, though, that he whose teeth we preen is the very bowels of compassion. I believe this is the salient thing in the world in our day. The Compassion of the Crocodile."

"Take care of it, people," John Candor said to his seven talented ones, "remembering always that the Crocodile is the very belly of compassion."

"Take care of it," the seven said to the computer, "always within the context of the jaws of compassion."

The computer programmed a Purposive Accident to happen and manufactured such props as were needed. And the Purposive Accident was very well programmed.

There was no great amount of blood poured out. No persons were killed except several uninvolved bystanders. The secret three were left alive and ambulant and scathed only at their points of strength.

It happened in the block between the Blind Robbin Bar and Speedsters' Cafe' when all three members of the secret society happened to be walking together. The papers called it a bomb, they call everything a bomb that goes off like that. It was really a highly sophisticated homing device with a tripartite programming and it carried out its tripartite mission.

All three randoms, former members of the short-lived secret society,

are well and working again. Mike Zhestoviteh is no longer a zipper repairman (it takes two talented hands to fix those zippers), but he still works at the Jiffy Nifty Dry Cleaners. He runs one of those big pressers now which he can easily do with his powerful and undamaged left hand and his prosthetic right hand. But without his old right hand he can no longer make the contagious primordial gesture that once dumbfounded the Mouth and all its words. You just cannot make the big gesture with a false hand.

Mary Smorfia still works at the King-Pin Bowling Alley as hamburger waitress and beer buster. She is still small, dark, unpretty (except for her high-frequency eyes), lively, smart, and Italian. Her mouth is still a gash across her face, but now it is twice as great a gash as it used to be, and it no longer has its curled liveliness. Its mobility is all gone, it will no longer express the inexpressible, will no longer shatter a phrase or an attitude. Mary Smorfia is as she always was, except that now she is incapable of the famous grimace.

Clivendon Surrey is again a motorcycle mechanic at Downhillers' Garage and again he spends most of his time in Speedsters' Cafe. His vocal cords are gone, of course, but he gets by: he is able to speak with a throat microphone. But the famous intonation, the neigh, the destroying snort are all impossible for him.

The trouble is over with. Now again there is only one organization in the world to create the images and attitudes of the world. This insures that only the standard attitudes of the Disestablishment shall prevail.

In our opening catalog we forgot one group. There is another secret society in the world composed of the good guys and good gals. It has no name that we have ever heard except just the Good Guys and Good Gals. At the moment this society controls nothing at all in the world. It stirs a little, though. It may move. It may collide, someday, even with the Secret Crocodile itself.

THE CLIFF CLIMBERS

The cliff faced south and was rough and sheer. It faced off against a mesa world, but it was not a mesa; it was a vagrant spire standing up alone. As you came to it from the south it was easy to go on either side. There was no necessity to climb it, and it could not be climbed to the top. But there was a kind of game to see how high it could be climbed.

A long time ago (but not as long ago as these first cliff-climbers) we played a game in the second grade. There was a little cemented area that was closed at one end by a concrete wall. The game was to run at it and see how far you could run up it, and to leave a chalk mark there as high as you could reach. The ultimate was nearly achieved, the very apex beyond which it was not possible to go, nor to leave a higher chalk mark. Then some of the big boys from the third grade tried it and made a shambles of the game; for naturally they could run up farther and reach higher and leave chalk marks above all the old ones.

The game on the cliff was about the same. The first chalk-mark was made by Little Fish-Head, and at a dizzy height. He wrote:

"My name is Little Fish-Head and I climbed this cliff in the thirty-sixth year of the thirty-sixth period. I can see the river from here and it cannot be seen from any lower point. I have climbed nearer to the sun than any man who ever lived. And now may God watch over me on my long hard journey."

This translation is by Professor Potter, who climbed the cliff at a later period. What Little Fish-Head did was to scratch the picture of a fish high on the cliff wall, or a stylized object that might have been a Fish, and was anyway longer than it was wide. There was a triangle at one end of it which tile professor said was a fish-head. And there was a small triangle

or wedge mark apart and just beyond which the professor said was the signature, Little Fish-Head. On the side of the fish (if it was a fish) were six scratches of which one was longer than the rest. Speculatively this meant by six, which is to say thirty-six; and as one side of the fish was so marked, the other side of the fish which can no more be seen than the other side of the moon was doubtless intended to be marked that way also. This meaning, the thirty-sixth year of the thirty-sixth period, would date the sketch accurately as being 1296 years after the beginning of the first period, and would make it (the professor said) the earliest absolutely certain date in history if we only knew when the first period started.

He really could have seen the river from there, a striking view, and it could not be seen from any lower point. There was a circle scratched above which was the sun, that is God, and there was a jagged line going to the right which meant a rough journey ahead, and a long old journey it was.

It was translations like this that earned the professor the reputation for brilliance far beyond the call of duty.

But I will tell you the true story of Little Fish-Head. I have attained to it by ways as brilliant and fantastic as those of the professor, but they sound sillier and you'd hoot at me if you know my methods.

Little Fish-Head was the last of the horse thieves under the old recension. After him there were eleven thousand years when there were no horse thieves. This corresponded to the period when the horses had disappeared from the continent. As the last of the old horse thieves, he stole the last of the old horses.

Professor Potter and the other professors have puzzled over the disappearance of these first horses. But it was no mystery. They disappeared, as have so many other of the vital things, because they were over-regulated. The first regulation went out in the thirteenth period to the effect that men of the Horse Fly Totem could not ride horses. Some of them quit their totem (there are always a few who will apostatize at the initiation of unjust laws), some of them quit riding horses, and some of them continued to ride till they were hunted down and executed.

Then it was enacted that only those of settled estate and tangible property could ride horses; and they were absolutely forbidden to vagabonds and beggars, who had the most use for them. Then a very high horse tax was enacted which discouraged all but the very wealthy from keeping up. After this it was decreed that only kings, caciques, and tax collectors could own them. And finally there were only nine horses in all the Western world and they were all in one royal keep.

It was then that Little Fish-Head -- that is not his real name, that is only a stupid mistranslation of Professor Potter -- that Little Fish-Head did some serious thinking.

"If I kill the eight and ride away on the ninth, then nobody in the world can catch me. I will be as fleet as the storm and will tower over all the footmen of the world."

So he killed the eight horses and rode away on the ninth. There was a great outcry, but an outcry of footmen cannot bring a man down from his horse. He rode away on the last great stallion, and goaded it all day long, as he was in a state of exaltation.

At evening when it had run all day it fell dead at the foot of the cliff. This surprised Little Fish-Head, who knew very little about horses and thought they would run forever. It was then that he climbed the cliff to a dizzy height and scratched a dirge as tall as he could reach. This was the inscription that the professor in his pride had misread. It was not a stylized fish at all. It was a stylized horse without any legs, for it was lying down dead. And the little triangle was not the signature of Little Fish-Head, but the soul of the horse leaving the body, triangular rather than square or round to indicate the incompleteness of the soul of a noble but irrational animal.

What the inscription really said was this:

"Oh my horse,
All the swiftness is now gone out of the world.
No mail again can go higher than his own height,
Nor more fleeting than lie was born to go.
The last man has ridden on the last wind,
And only the dust can ride on the whirlwind now.
I have climbed to this height
To write that the high aspiration was only a dream.
And if even a horse dies
How can a man live forever?"

The next chalk-mark was made about nine thousand years later and was nearly a foot higher. There had been no improvement in the art of climbing meanwhile, but it had been scratched by a taller man.

It was a double wavy mark like a snake or a river, followed by an abrupt despairing downstroke. Professor Potter had made nine tentative translations of this. The seventh of the nine has now been proved by a miracle of scholarship too intricate to explain to be the correct one. This is it:

"There is no water and I have traveled for days in agony. I have climbed this Cliff to look for the river. I see it, but I will die before I can go that far; it would take me three days to reach it. I had thought I could climb as high as the cloud and wring it out, but the little cloud has passed and there is no other. The sun has become my friend now, but he is as much at a loss as I what to do. But at least I have seen the river before I die."

After that it was only nine hundred years before the next climber achieved. And he carved these letters:

"Paso per aqui A-Dmo 1519 Mayo 19 Jose Ramires Castillo y Sanches."

This message is too definite and leaves little to the imagination. He was not thirsty, for he did not carve like a thirsty man. He was not overly weary, so perhaps he had come on one of the new horses. Nor had he (the professor said) come alone. There were drill holes in the rock where rope hooks had been placed, and he must have had at least two assistants. But we cannot picture him more clearly than this.

And oddly the next chalk-mark was made exactly four hundred years later. And it read:

"Pinon Gap High School Seniors 1919 Clement Kincaid, Freddy Stockton, Manuel Cervantes We Are The Tops."

And in the high school annual of that year there were their three pictures on a page by themselves entitled "The Topper Club, The Most Exclusive in the World."

And to continue the spate of climbers in the very next decade was a higher entry:

"Bo McCoy, I am the Real. I am a Bo. 1925 June Tenth."

Quite a bit could be made from this. The railway was twenty miles away, and there was no stop. He had rolled off it and crossed the desert to make his mark. He might have been a lonesome hobo as colored men are likely to be on that run. And he had a long old walk to the next stop. And he made what was then the highest chalk-mark on the cliff. And he had climbed alone nine feet higher than it was possible to climb to make it.

That was all until the professor came. The professor was G.A.D. Potter, for his name was Gamiel Audlich Dagobert, all of which he hated. But he liked to be called Gad.

"Gad, Gad," his associates would say, "you could rope down from the top or use a 'copter to read the scratches. There is no reason to waste a

summer on the Tor. There are better things found digging in the ground than you ever will find on the side of a cliff."

But the professor was a cliff-climber and a chalk-marker, and he had an exaltation to go the highest. We will not tell you what he carved on the cliff, for it was pedantic and stilted, and he had prepared many drafts of it before he went up the cliff the last time.

He spent six weeks in his tent at the foot of the cliff with his wife, Aurora, and they prepared as though it were Everest. They drilled holes and set lead shields in the rock with eyelets for the ropes. They spun webs of lines and hauled and pulled and rappelled, and did all the things that cliff-climbers do. They cut hand holes and foot holes, and even established a camp "A" two thirds of the way up. And to it they went up and down on a rope ladder where Little Fish-Head and Bo McCoy had climbed like monkeys.

But maximum effort is required for maximum achievement, and the professor was remarkably persevering, as all professors are, and Aurora was remarkably good natured, as all professors'wives must be.

Early in the morning of the last day of spring they went up their ropes and scoop holes till Aurora stood firmly on a newly hewn ledge where Bo McCoy had hung on air. Then the professor climbed onto her shoulders and made the highest chalk-mark.

We will not record what he carved, as he has already done so, and besides, as we said, it was too stilted and stylish. But yet like all the other marks it was capable of variant and fuller translation. In a later time by another professor who might not have the key to the precise letters themselves, it would be more correctly translated as follows:

"I have slain the nightmare and set down the terror. I have climbed beyond dizziness on a cliff that once hung down from the sky before there was a world below it. Even the eagles when they were now would not fly this high. And this above all, while others have ridden on the wind, I only have ridden on the daughter of the wind. This is a red-haired goddess, a strong slight amazon, a magic anemonead with hair like a red sea and shoulders soft and sweet as the night itself. She sways beneath me but will not break, and the early sun is on her and she is silver and flame. Her neck is of living ivory."

And the rest of it would be very hard to translate even by the best paleocalligraphist. But he would know that this was the hand of an ancient poet who had climbed a dizzy cliff to write a hymn to the dawn.

CONDILLAC'S STATUE
or Wrens in His Head

Condillac made a man-sized statue. You did not know that he could make a statue? All philosophers can do all things whatsoever, if only they put their hands to it. He made the statue from a thrust of granite that already stood there. This granite seemed sometimes brown, sometimes green, sometimes blue, but always frog-colored, and never lifeless. Three big men did the rough work, a smith, a wood chopper, and a stonemason; and Condillac himself did the fine work. He intended the statue to be of noble appearance. It would have been noble if cut out of travertine marble; but things cut out of granite can only be comic or otiose or grotesque.

His friend the brainy doctor Jouhandeau -- but that crabby old occultist was a friend of nobody -- added a thing to the statue according to the plan they had.

The statue stood on the edge of Condillac's estate of Flux, near Beaugency, in the small park there just off the mule road that ran north to Chateaudun, and just off the river Loire itself. It was a fine small park with a gushing spring that fed a bucket-cistern and a large horse-trough. And people came there.

Wagonmen and coachmen and mulemen stopped at this park. It had heavy grass all the way from Flux to the river. Horsemen and honest travelers, vagabonds and revolutionaries stopped there; boatmen from the Loire came there to enjoy a few hours. There were big shade trees and fine water in the summer, and plenty of underwood and stone hearths for the winter. There were old sheep sheds toward the river where one could sleep in the sour hay.

Children came there from town and country. Basket-women came out from Beaugency to sell bread and cheese and apples and wine to the travelers. And everybody who came there would like the statue.

It was a burlesque thing, a boy-man mass with a lumpish loutish body and a very big head on it. It had a grin almost too wide for that lived. Its face was slack and vacant most of the time, but in a certain shadow-hour it became a face of curious profundity. It was a clodhopper, a balourd.

The statue stood there a month, "till it should be accustomed to the site," as Condillac and Jouhandeau said. After that, the two of them came in deep evening and opened the head of the statue. (Even the kids who climbed on it had not known that the head would open.) Jouhandeau made the first connection in that head. Then they sat on one of the great stone benches of the park and talked about it till the late moon arose.

"Are you sure it is still alive?" Condillac asked the crabby doctor.

"I myself do not believe in life," Jouhandeau said, "but it is still alive, as you understand life."

"And you are sure that it was wiped clean?"

"Oh, absolutely, indiscussably. It gets its first sensory impressions now."

"If you can do such a thing, Jouhandeau, then you can do a thousand other things. It shakes me even to think of them."

"I can do them, and I will not. I do this only to oblige you, to aid you in your studies. But you will be proved wrong; and you will not admit that you are wrong; so it will all be for nothing."

"But others will someday do what you can do now, Jouhandeau."

"Perhaps in two hundred years. I am not much more than two hundred years before my time. After all, Cugnot's automobile is regarded as more curiosity by everyone. It will be more than a hundred years before such things are made commercially. And here is one greater than Cugnot: myself."

After a while, night men came out of the boscaige of the river meadows to look for prey; and Condillac and Jouhandeau slipped back through the trees to the estate house before the rising moon should discover them to the night thieves.

And now the statue was getting its first sensory impressions.

"Old Rock can smell now," the kids told the people.

"How would a statue smell with a stone nose?" the people asked.

"Does he snuffle or move or anything? How do you know that he can smell?"

"We don't know how he can smell with a stone nose," the kids said, "and he doesn't snuffle or move or anything. But he can smell now, and we don't know how he can."

Old Rock could smell now all right. And there was one other thing he seemed to do sometimes, but it was hard to catch him at it.

Lathered horses, foam-whitened harness, green goop in the horse trough, those were smells of the little park and the big country. Wet flint stones, grackle birds and the mites on them; river grass and marl grass and loam grass; oaks and chestnuts, wagon-wheel grease, men in leather; stone in shade, and stone in sun; hot mules, and they do not smell the same as hot horses, mice in the grass roots, muskiness of snakes; sharpness of fox hair, air of badger holes; brown dust of the Orleans road, red dust of the road to Chateatidun; crows that have fed today, and those who have not; time-polished coach wood; turtles eating low grapes, and the grapes being bruised and eaten; sheep and goats; cows in milk, now stilted colts; long

loaves, corks of wine bottles, cicadas in pig-weeds; hands of smiths and feet of charcoal burners; whetted iron on travelers; pungent blouses of river men; oatcakes and sour cream; wooden shoes, goose eggs, now-spread dung, potato bugs; thatciicrs at work; clover, vetch, hairy logs of bumblebees. There are no two of these things that have the same smell.

The kids said that the statue could smell even with a stone nose. He stood and smelled for a month, and the smells informed his stone.

Then Condillac and Jouhandeau came at night, opened the head of the statue, and made the second connection. Afterwards, they sat on one of the stone benches and talked about it till the late moon rose.

"I will prove that there are no innate concepts," Condillac said. "I will confute all foolish philosophers forever. I will prove that there is nothing in the mind but what goes in by the senses. You have obtained prime mature brain matter, snatched out of its dwellings at the moment before its deaths, blended in its several sources, and swept clean by your own techniques. It is an empty house here, and we introduce its dwellers one by one. Why do you say I will be proved wrong, Jouhandeau?"

"I do not believe that there are any innate concepts either. I do not believe that there are any concepts of any sort, anywhere, ever. But what you call concepts will crawl into that mind, not only by the senses through the stone apertures, but by means beyond you." They argued till the night-bats and the night-sickness flew up from the river to look for prey; then they slipped back through the trees to the estate house.

"Old Rock can hear now," the kids told the people.

"Oh, cut the clownerie, kids," the people said. "How could a statue hear with stone ears?"

But he could hear. And there was the other thing that he still seemed to do, and now the kids caught him at it sometimes.

Ah, a whole catalog of different sounds and noises. Old Rock stood and listened for a month to the manifold noises that were all different. By the sounds and the noises he informed his stone. He began to understand the sounds.

That month gone by, Gondillac and Jouhandeau came at night, made the third connection inside the head of the statue, and sat and talked about it till the late moon rose.

"Old Rock can see now," the kids said.

"Ah, there is something funny about that statue," the people agreed. "It no longer has stone eyes, but live eyes that move. But what is so wonderful about seeing? A pig or a chicken can do the same thing."

But there was that other thing that Old Rock-Head did, that he had been doing for some time. The statue laughed, openly and loudly now. He chuckled, rooted in the chuckling earth.

"Well, how can he laugh?" Condillac asked. "We haven't made such a connection. Indeed, we couldn't have. We couldn't have influenced him in this unknowingly?"

"Impossible," said Jouhandeau. "Neither of us has ever laughed."

Well, Statue stood and saw with his eyes for a month. Perhaps it was not wonderful (wonderful is an innate concept, and therefore cannot be), but it was a new dimension. The bumpkin eyes twinkled and stared by turns, and the stone grin became even wider.

Condillac and Jouhandeau came by night to their monthly appointment, opened the head of the statue, made a fourth connection, and sat talking about it till the late moon rose.

"The Rock-Head can talk now," the kids told the people.

"Oh, we know that," the people said. "He talks to us too, but what

is so wonderful about talking if it is no more than his talk? Big as he is, he talks like a half-grown kid. The fellow must be retarded."

Yes, he was, a little; but he began to catch up.

But the first person that Statue had talked to was his maker, Condillac himself.

"Statue, you are a tabula rosa," Colidillac said to him.

"I don't know what that is," said Rock-Head. "Talk honest French, or I cannot understand you. Such is the only talk I have heard in the month I have stood here with loosened ears."

"Your brain was a tablet shaved smooth," said Condillac, "and we have let sensations into it one sense at a time, from the most simple to the most complex. This is to show that you may be functional without innate ideas. I will have to give you a name, Statue."

"Rock-Head is my name," said Statue. "The kids named me. They are friendly most of the time, but sometimes they are rock-throwing rogues."

"But you can have no idea of friendly or unfriendly," Condillac said. "These are only empty words that people use. You can have no idea of good or bad, of beauty or ugliness, of form or deformity, of pleasure or pain, Yours was mature brain matter, though swept clean, and none of the childish entrances could have been made, as with others. We have not yet hooked up your sense of touch, and we may not; it would mean running tendons all through you. Contamination may enter by the sense of touch. But now you can have no idea of justice or injustice, of elegance or inelegance, of wealth or of poverty. In fact, all these opposites are meaningless, as I will prove through you. They are only the babbling of blind philosophers."

"But I do have these ideas, Condillac," Rock-Head insisted. "I have them strongly. I learned right smells and wrong smells; right tones and wrong tones; right shapes and forms and colors, and wrong, Oh, may I always choose the right things, Condillac!"

"Statue, you sound like an idiot preacher-man. There are no right things or wrong things, there are no innate ideas. There are no things in-place or out-of-place. I prove this all through you."

"Condillac, you are the Abbe of Mureaux, and you draw pay for such," Rock-liond said. "You would be in-place there. You are out-of-place on your estate Flux."

"What is the matter with you, Statue?" Condillac demanded. "You are flighty and wan-witted."

"Wrens in my head, they say of me. It's a country expression, Condillac. Besides, I have them literally, quite a pleasant family of them inside my stone head. Learn from the wren wisdom!"

Condillac angrily beat on the lower part of the statue with his leaded cane, breaking off toes. "I will not be lectured by a rock!" he crackled. "You have not these ideas originally, and mature brain matter will reject such. Therefore, you have them not! Reason is the thing, Statue, rationality. We promulgate it. It spreads. It prevails. The tomorrow world will be the world of total reason."

"No, it will be the Revolution," said Rock-Head. "A world condemned to such short fare as bleak reason will howl and cry out for blood."

A long-tongued woman came to Rock-Head. "My confessor told me that, whenever I feel impelled to repeat gossip, I should whisper it to a statue, and then forget it," she said. So she whispered it to Rock-Head for an hour and a half.

In the cool of the evening, Rock-Head repeated it, loudly and stonily, to the quite a few people who were enjoying the evening there, and he found himself the center of interest. But he was uneasy about it; he didn't understand why the confessor had instructed the woman to tell him such things.

One evening the revolutionaries gathered and talked at the foot of Statue.

"It should have happened in our fathers' time," one of them said. "Let it now be in our own time. We may not rightly push this thing off on our sons. The poor become poorer and the corrupt become more corrupt. How many does it take to upheave a world? There are five of us here. Up! Up! Five for the Revolution!"

"Six," cried Rock-Head. "I am for the Revolution too. Up, up, arise!"

"Statue, Statue," one of them asked, "how long have you been able to hear?"

"I'm in my third month of it, fellows."

"Then you have heard us before. You know what we stand for. We will have to destroy you."

"It is only a statue, Fustel," said another of them. "It would be superstition to destroy it. And we are enlightened."

"But what if he blurts out our slogans which he has heard, Hippolyte?"

"A good thing. Let the statue cry slogans, and the people will be amazed."

"Up with the Revolution!" Rock-Head cried again. "But I am not sure that you fellows provide a sufficient base for it. I visualize creatures with a narrower and more singular bent. I will string along with you, but meanwhile I will see what I can do about having real revolutionaries made."

"Have you noticed the now carp in the horse trough, Rock-Head?" the occult doctor Jouhandeau asked as he came by to visit one day.

"Yes, the kid seems to be in some kind of trouble. I'd comfort him if I could get down to him. But how do you know he's a new carp? People don't notice such things."

"I put him there, Rock-Head," said Jouhandeau. "And I put a human child's brain into him, shaved smooth, of rouse, and trimmed to fit. He can smell and hear and see, but he could do as much when he had a fish's brain."

"Jouhandeau, that kid's scared to death."

"Couldn't be, Rock-Head. Where could he have the idea of scared? Are you contradicting the wise Condillac?"

"Jouhandeau, I am friend to revolutionaries, but all the revolutionaries sound deficient to me. Make me revolutionaries who will do the thing!"

"Anything to oblige a stone-headed friend. I have already done some thinking along this line. I will not even have to transfer brains, or flop like vultures over the dying to rob them of these things. I can take sturdy farmers and townsmen and intellectuals as they stand, destroy certain small nodules in their heads, and we will have them ready to go. I treat them for the escarbilles, a disease of which I have never heard, and they even less. But I stop them in the roadways and tell them that they are afflicted and that I can cure them in a moment. And I do cure them in a moment, of something, but not of the escarbilles."

"Will they have a narrower and more singular bent?"

"They will, Rock-Head, so narrow and singular that you could hardly believe it."

A young fellow was smooching his girl and loving her up in the park.

"I want to do that too," Rock-Head called out loudly.

"All right, come down and do it," said the girl. "It's fun."

"But I can't come down," Rock-Head complained.

"Then you can't do it," the girl said, and they laughed at him.

"I wish that guy would get his truffle-grubbing hands off my girl," Rock-Head grumbled. "But how do I know it would be fun? Is not fun an innate idea? And there are none such."

A thief rode up one cloudy afternoon, opened Rock-Head's head,

stuffed a large bag of gold inside, closed the head again, and rode off furiously once more. How did the thief know that Rock-Head's head would open? Why, the gentlemen of the trade can sense a good hiding place every time.

The thief was caught by pursuing horsemen. He was beaten, crying his innocence all the time; but he was not hanged. You cannot hand a thief without boodle.

But the bag full of gold weighed heavily on Rock-Head's brain. Moreover, it crowded the wrens in his head. He had great affection for the wrens, though they did sometimes pick his brains. This gold did have effect.

"This gold, at least, is not an innate idea," Rock-Head mused "In its particular, it is a thing intruded directly into my head. It is a heavy thing, and I cannot ignore it. There is a new idea and a new attitude in me. I am a man of means now, and my thinking can never be quite what it was before."

Rock-Head began thinking in a new way.

"Jouhandeau," he said when that doctor came to visit him again, "tell Condillac that I want to talk to him. There is something wrong with that man, I believe."

"Condillac is dead now, Rock-Head," Jouhandeau told him. "That is the most recent thing wrong with him."

"How did he accept it? I've been afraid there would be some trouble there."

"He didn't accept it. He believes that life and death are both innate concepts, and that there are no innate concepts. Naturally, he will not believe that he is dead."

"How are you coming along with the revolutionaries, Jouhandeau?"

"Quite well. There are a hundred of them now, and I will leave them to themselves. They will propagate their own kind, and in two hundred years they will take over the world. I will not hurry it. I am two hundred years before my time in so many ways already."

There was blood on the bread. There was blood on the land, and on every thing. It would bubble and speckle. Then it would flow.

Rock-Head had become an orator. He had the fire, he had the sparkle, he had the quick deep thunder of a true rouser. He had the freshness of morning rain and the resonance of the groaning earth.

So naturally he became something of a leader among the old-fashioned revolutionaries of the neighborhood, and they came for him one night.

"Time for talking is over with, Rock-Head," they told him. "Now is the time for action." They ripped his brains out of the rock case, they ripped out all the sensory appendages that went with them. They loaded these in two hampers on a mule.

"Lead us, Rock-Head," they said. "We begin to burn the world down tonight. We start with the estate house Flux and the town of Beaugency. We burn and we slay."

"What will become of my wrens when I am not in my head with them?" Rock-Head asked.

"We care nothing for wrens, we care nothing for people," they cried. "We only care that the burning may begin."

"What will become of my sack of gold when I am not in my own head to guard it?" Rock-Head worried.

"We care nothing for gold," they cried, "we care less for bread. The burning is the thing." And they had come to the estate house of Flux. They began to butcher the gentlepeople and servants fluttering around and set fire to the place.

"Wait, wait," Rock-Head cried. "Have some respect for property. Wait."

"How can we have respect for property?" they asked as they killed and burned. "A revolutionary cares nothing for property."

"This one does," said Rock-Head. "We must have a revolution with full respect for property. I am a man of property now. I own a bag of gold. Up the revolution! Up respect for property!"

"This cannot be," the revolutionaries held council. "A person who owns one bag of gold cannot be a true revolutionary; though a person who owns one thousand bags may sometimes be."

They began to kill Rock-Head there, in brain and sensories.

"Tell Jouhandeau to call off his thing," Rock-Head gasped out of his dying cerebrum; but these old-fashioned revolutionaries didn't understand him. They knew nothing of the creatures of Jouhandeue which would so soon obsolete them.

They killed Rock-Head in all his parts. They sold his remains for cat meat to a basketwoman there, and they went on with their burning.

Oh, the statue is still there, and there are still wrens in his head. There have now been more than one hundred generations of wrens there. These are the rich wrens and they have a good thing. They pay tribute to the shrieks in small gold coins, so they will now kill them. And the wrens are left alone.

The old-fashioned revolutionaries failed, but the new revolutionaries made by Jouhandeau could not fail. Failure is an innate concept, and there are no innate concepts. A hundred of them, with the few young boys they had pupped in the meanwhile, would overturn that land nineteen years later, the tland with blood on the bread.

And later, a thousand of them would --, and ten thousand of them would --, and ten million of them would --, for they propagated their own kind. They were people so narrow and singular that you would hardly believe it.

Doctor Jouhandeau was two hundred years before his time in so many ways, but he estimated the time of it nicely.

ENTIRE AND PERFECT CHRYSOLITE

Having achieved perfection, we feel a slight unease. From our height we feel impelled to look down. We make our own place and there is nothing below us; but in our imagination there are depths and animals below us. To look down breeds cultishness.

There are the cults of the further lands and the further peoples. The Irish and Americans and Africans are respectable, philosophical and industrial parties, but the cultishness is something beyond. Any addition to the world would mar the perfect world which is the perfect thought of the Maker. Were there an Africa indeed, were there the Indies, then we would be other than we are. The tripartite unity that is the ecumene would be broken: the habitable world-island, the single eye in the head that is the world-globe would be voided.

There are those who say that our rational and perfect world would steep itself in this great unconscious geography of the under-mind, in the outre fauna and the incredible continents of the tortured imagination and of black legends. They pretend that this world would give us depth.

We do not want depth. We want Height! Let us seal off the under-things of the under-mind, and exalt ourselves! And our unease will pass.

-- Exaltation Philosophy

Audifax O'Hanlon

The True Believer was sailing offshore in an easterly direction in the latitude of fifteen degrees north and the longitude of twenty-four

degrees east. To the north of the coasting ship was the beautiful Cinnamon Coast of Libya with its wonderful beaches and its remarkable hotels tawny in the distance. To the east and south and west were the white-topped waves that went on for ever and ever. The True Believer sailed along the southernmost edge of the ecumene, the habitable and inhabited world.

August Shackleton was drinking Roman Bomb out of a potbellied bottle and yelping happily as he handled the wheel of the True Believer:

"It's a kids' thing to do," he yipped, "but there were never such beautiful waters to do it in. We try to call in outer spirits. We try to call up inner spirits and lands. It's a children's antic. Why do we do it, Boyle, other than for the fun of it?"

"Should there be another reason, Shackleton? Well, there is; but we go about it awkwardly and without knowing what we're doing. The thing about humans which nobody apparently wishes to notice, is that we're a species which has never had an adult culture. We feel that lack more and more as we become truly adult in other ways. It grows tedious to stretch out a childhood forever. The easy enjoyments, the easy rationality, the easy governments and sciences, are really childish things. We master them while we are yet children, and we look beyond. But there isn't anything beyond the childishness, Shackleton. We must find a deeper view somehow. We are looking for that something deeper here."

"What? By going on a lark that is childish even to children, Boyle? I was ashamed in front of my sons when I confessed on what sort of diversion I was going. First there were the seances that we indulged in. If we raised any spirits there, they were certainly childish ones. And now we're on this voyage on the True Believer. We're looking for the geographical home of certain collective unconscious images! Why shouldn't the children hoot at us? Ah well, let us not be too ashamed. It's colorful and stimulating fun, but it isn't adult."

The other four members of the party, Sebastian Linter and the three wives, Justitia Shackleton, Luna Boyle, and Mintgreen Linter, were swimming in the blue ocean. The True Believer was coasting very slowly and the four swimmers were clipped to outrigger towlines.

"There's something wrong with the water!" Justina Shackleton suddenly called up to her husband. "There's weeds in it, and there shouldn't be. There's reeds in it, and swamp grasses. There's mud. And there's green slime!"

"You're out of your lovely head, lovely," Shackleton called back. "It's all clear blue water off a sand coast. I can see fish twenty meters down. It's clear."

"I tell you it's full of green slime!" Justina called back. "It's so thick and heavy that it almost tears me away from the line. And the insects are so fierce that I have to stay submerged."

But they were off the Cinnamon Coast of Libya. They could smell the warm sand, and the watered gardens ashore. There was no mud, there was no slime, there were no insects off the Cinnamon Coast ever. It was all clear and bright as living, moving glass.

Sebastian Linter had been swimming on the seaward side of the ship. Now he came up ropes to the open deck of the ship, and he was bleeding.

"It is thick, Shackleton," he panted. "It's full of snags and it's dangerous. And that fanged hog could have killed me. Get the rest of them out of the water! "

"Linter, you can see for yourself that it is clear everywhere. Clear, and of sufficient depth, and serene."

"Sure, I see that it is, Shackleton. Only it isn't. What we are looking for has already begun. The illusion has already happened to all senses except sight. Stuff it, Shackleton! Get them out of the water! The snakes and the crocs will get them. The animals thrashing around in the mud will get them. And if they try to climb up into the short, the beasts there will break them up and tear them to pieces."

"Linter, we're two thousand meters off shore and everything is clear. But you are disturbed. Oof, so am I! The ship has grounded, and it's fifty meters deep here. All right, everyone! I order everybody except my wife to come out of the water! I request that she come out. I am unable to order her to do anything."

The other two women, Luna Boyle and Mintgreen Linter, came out of the water. And Justina Shackleton did not.

"In a while, August, in a while I come," Justina called up to the ship. "I'm in the middle of a puzzle here and I want to study it some more. August, can a hallucination snap you in two? He sure is making the motions."

"I don't know, lovely," August Shackleton called back to her doubtfully.

Luna Boyle and Mintgreen Linter had come out of the ocean up the ropes. Luna was covered with green slime and was bleeding variously. Mintgreen was covered with weeds and mud, and her hands were torn. And she hobbled with pain.

"Is your foot broken, darling?" Sebastian Linter asked her with almost concern. "But of course, it is all illusion."

"I have the illusion that my foot is broken," Mintgreen sniffled, "and I have the illusion that I am in very great pain. Bleeding blubberfish, I wish it were real! It wouldn't really hurt this much."

"Oh, elephant hokey!" Boyle stormed. "These illusions are nonsense. There can't be such an ambient creeping around us. We're not experiencing anything."

"Yes we are, Boyle," Shackleton said nervously. "And your expression is an odd one at this moment. For the elephant was historical in the India that is, was fantastic in the further India that is fantastic, and is still more fanciful in its African contingency. In a moment we will try to conjure up the African elephant which is twice the mass of the historical Indian elephant. The ship is dragging badly now and might even break up if this continues, but the fathometer shows no physical contact. All right, the five of us on deck will put our heads together for this. You lend us a head too, Justina!"

"Take it, take my head. I'm about to let that jawful snapper have my body anyhow. August, this stuff is real! Don't tell me I imagine that smell," Justina called.

"We will all try to imagine that smell, and other things," August Shackleton stated as he uncorked another bottle of Roman Bomb. In the visible world there was still the Cinnamon Coast of Libya, and the blue ocean going on forever. But in another visible world, completely unrelated to the first and occupying absolutely a different space (but both occupying total space), were the green swamps of Africa, the sedgy shores going sometimes back into rain forests and sometimes into savannas, the moon mountains rising behind them, the air sometimes heavy mist and sometimes clear with scalding light, the fifth levels of noises, the hundred levels of colors.

"The ambient is forming nicely even before we start," Shackleton purred. Some of them drank Roman Bomb and some of them Green Canary as they readied themselves for the psychic adventure.

"We begin the conjure," Shackleton said, "and the conjure begins with words. Our little group has been involved in several sorts of investigations, foolish ones perhaps, to discover whether there are (or more importantly, to be sure that there are not) physical areas and creatures beyond those of the closed ecumene. We have gone on knob-knockers, we have held seances. The seances in particular were grotesque, and I believe we were all uneasy and guilty about them. Our Faith forbids us to evoke spirits. But where does it forbid us to evoke geographies?"

"Ease up a little on the evoking!" Justina shrilled up at them. "The snapper just took me off at the left ankle. I pray he doesn't like my taste."

"It has been a mystery for centuries," said August (somewhat disturbed by his wife's vulgar outburst from the ocean), "that out of the folk unconscious there should well up ideas of continents that are not in the world, continents with highly imaginary flora and fauna, continents with highly imaginary people. It is a further mystery that these psychic continents and islands should be given bearings, and that apparently sane persons have claimed to visit them. The deepest mystery of all is Africa. Africa, in Roman days, was a subdivision of Mauretania, which was a subdivision of Libya, one of the three parts of the world. And yet the entire coast of Libya has been mapped correctly for three thousand years, and there is no Africa beyond, either appended or separate. We prove the nonsense of it by sailing in clear ocean through the middle of that pretended continent."

"We prove the nonsense further by getting our ship mired in a swamp in the middle of the imaginary continent and seeing that continent begin to form about us," said Boyle. His Green Canary tasted funny to him. There was a squalling pungency in the air and something hair-raisingly foreign in the taste of the drink.

"This is all like something out of Carlo Forte," Linter laughed unsteadily.

"The continental ambient forms about its," said Shackleton. "Now we will evoke the creatures. First let its conjure the great animals: the rhinoceros, the lion, the leopard, the elephant, which all have Asian Counterparts; but these of the contingent Africa are to be half again to twice the size, and incomparably fierce.

"We conjure them, we conjure them," they all chanted, and the conjured creatures appeared mistily.

"We conjure the hippopotamus, the water behemoth, with its great comical bulk, its muzzle like a scoop shovel, and its eyes standing up like big balls --"

"Stop it, August!" Justina Shackleton shrieked from the water. "I don't know whether the hippo is playful or not, but he's going to crush me in a minute."

"Come out of the water, Justina!" August ordered sternly.

"I will not. There isn't any ship left for me to come to. You're all sitting on a big, slippery, broken tree out over the water, and the snappers and boas are coming very near your legs and necks."

"Yes, I suppose so, one way of looking at it," August said. "Now everybody Conjure the animals that are compounded out of grisly humor, the giraffe with a neck alone that is longer than a horse, and the zebra which is a horse in a clown suit."

"We conjure them, we conjure," they all chanted.

"The zebra isn't as funny as I thought it would be." Boyle complained. "Nothing is as funny as a I thought it would be."

"Conjure the great snake that is a thousand times heavier than other snakes, that can swallow a wild ass," Shackleton gave them the lead.

"We conjure it, we conjure it," they all chanted.

"August, it's over your head, reaching down out of the giant mimosa estuaries in which it lives," they all chanted.

"Easy on that one," Justina shrilled. "He's been taking me by little pieces. Now he's taking me by big pieces."

"Conjure the ostrich," Shackleton intoned, "the bird that is a thousand times as heavy as other birds, that stands a meter taller than a man, that kicks like a mule, the bird that is too heavy to fly. I wonder what delirium first invented such wildlife as Africa's, anyhow?"

"We conjure it, we conjure it," they chanted.

"Conjure the great walking monkey that is three times as heavy as a man," August intoned. "Conjure a somewhat smaller one, two-thirds the size of man, that grins and gibbers and understands speech, that could speak if he wished."

"We conjure them, we conjure them. "

"Conjure the third of the large monkeys that is dog-faced and purple of arse."

"We conjure it, we conjure it, but it belongs in a comic strip."

"Conjure the gentle monster, the okapi that is made out of pieces of the antelope and camel and contingent giraffe, and which likewise wears a clown suit."

"We conjure it, we conjure it."

"Conjure the multitudinous antelopes, koodoo, nyala, hartebeest, oryx, bongo, klipspringer, gemsbok, all so out of keeping with a warm country, all such grotesque takcoffs of the little alpine antelope."

"We conjure them, we conjure them."

"Conjure the buffalo that is greater than all other buffalo or cattle, that has horns as wide as a shield. Conjure the quagga. I forget its pretended appearance, but it cannot be ordinary."

"We conjure it, we conjure it."

"We come to the top of it all! Conjure the most anthropomorphic group in the entire unconsciousness: men who are men indeed, but who are as black as midnight in a hazel grove, who are long of angie and metatarsals and lower limb so they call run and leap uncommonly, who have crumpled hair and are massive of feature. Conjure another variety that are only half as tall as them. Conjure a third sort that are short of stature and prodigious of hips."

"We conjure them, we conjure them," they all chanted. "They are the caricatures from the beginning."

"But can all these animals appear at one time?" Boyle protested. "Even on a contingent continent dredged out of the folk unconsciousness there would be varieties of climates and land-form. All would not be together."

"This is rhapsody, this is panorama, this is Africa," said Lima Boyle.

And they were all totally in the middle of Africa, on a slippery bole of a broken tree that teetered over a green swamp. And the animals were there in the rain forests and the savannas, on the shore, and in the green swamp. And a man black as midnight was there, his face broken with emotion.

Justina Shackleton screamed horribly as the crocodile sliced her in two. She still screamed from inside the gulping beast as one might scream under water.

2

The Ecumene, the world island, has the shape of an egg 110 degrees from East to West and 45 degrees from North to South. It is scored into three parts, Eurpoa, Asia, and Libya. It is scored by the incurring seas, Eurpoa from Asia by the Pontus and the Hurcanum Seas, Asia from Libya by the Persian Sea, and Libya from Eurpoa by the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas (the Mediterranean Complex). The most westerly part of the world is Curuna in Iberia or Spain, the most northerly is Kharkovsk in Scythia or Russia, the most easterly is Sining in Han or China, the most southerly is the Cinnamon Coast of Libya.

The first chart of the world, that of Eratotherenes, was thus, and it was perfect. Whether he had it from primitive revelation or from early exploration, it was correct in minor detail. Though Britain seems to have been charted as an Island rather than a Peninisula, this may be an error or an early copyist. A Britain unjoined to the Main would shrivel, as a branch hewed from a tree will shrivel and die. There are no viable islands.

All islands fade and drift and disappear. Sometimes they reappear briefly, but there is no life in them. The juice of life flows through the continent only. It is the ONE LAND, THE LIVING AND HOLY LAND, THE ENTIRE AND

PERFECT JEWEL.

Thus, Ireland is seen sometimes, or Hy-Brasil, or the American rock-lands: but they are not always seen in the same places, and they do not always have the same appearance. They have neither life nor reality.

The secret geographies and histories of the American Society and the Atlantis Society and such are esoteric lodge-group things, symbolic and murky, forms for the initiated; they contain analogs and not realities.

The ecumene must grow, of course, but it grows inwardly in intensity and meaning; its form cannot change. The form is determined from the beginning, just as the form of a man is determined before he is born. A man does not grow by adding more limbs or heads. That the ecumen should grow appendages would be as grotesque as a man growing a tail.

-- World As Perfection

Diogenes Pontifex

August Shackleton guffawed nervously when his wife was sliced in two and the half of her swallowed by the crocodile; and his hand that held the Roman Bomb trembled. Indeed, there was something unnerving about the whole thing. That cutoff screaming of Justina Shackleton had something shocking and unpleasant about it.

Justina had once gone hysterical at a seance when the ghosts and appearances had been more or less conventional, but August was never sure just how sincere her hysteria was. Another time she had disappeared for several days from a seance, from a locked room, and had come back with a roguish story about being in spirit land. She was a high-strung clown with a sense of the outrageous, and this present business of being chopped in two was typical of her creations.

And suddenly they were all explosively creative, each one's subjective patterns intermingling with those of the other to produce howling chaos. What had been the ship the True Believer, what had been the slippery overhanging bole, had now come dangerously down into the swamp. They all wanted a closer look.

There was screaming and trumpeting, there was color and surge and threshing mass. The crocodile bellowed as a bull might, not at all as Shackleton believed that a croc should sound. But someone there had the idea that a crocodile should bellow like that, and that someone had imposed his ideate on the others. Unhorselike creatures whinnied, and vivid animals sobbed and gurgled.

"Go back up, go back up!" the black man was bleating. "You will all be killed here."

His face was a true Mummings-Night blackman mask. One of the party was imagining strongly in that stereotyped form. But the incongruous thing about the black man was that he was gibbering at them in French, in bad French as though it were his weak second language. Which one of them was linguist enough to invent such a black French on the edge of the moment? Luna Boyle, of course. But why had she put grotesque French into the mouth of a black man in contingent Africa?

"Go back up, go back up," the black man cried, He had an old rifle from the last century and he was shooting the crocodile with it.

"Hey, he's shooting Justina too," Mintgreen giggled too gaily. "Half of her is in the dragon thing. Oh, she will have some stories to tell about this! She has the best imagination of all of us."

"Let's get her out and together again," Linter suggested. They were all shouting too loudly and too nervously. "She's missing the best part of it."

"Here, here, black man," Shackleton called. "Carl you get the half of my wife out of that thing and put her together again?"

"Oh, white people, white people, this is real and this is death,"

the black man moaned in agony. "this is a closed wild area. You should not be here at all. However you have come here, whatever is the real form of that balk or tree on which you stand so dangerously, be gone from here if you can do it. You do not know how to live in this. White people, be gone! It is your lives.!"

"One can command a fantasy," said August Shackleton. "Black man fantasy, I command that you get the half of my wife out of that dying creature and put her together again."

"Oh, white people on dope, I cannot do this," the black man moaned. "She is dead. And you joke and drink Green Bird and Bomib, and hoot like demented children in a dream."

"We are in a dream, and you are of the dream," Shackleton said easily. "And we may experiment with our dream creatures. That is our purpose here. Here, catch a bottle of Roman Bomb!" and he threw it to the black man, who caught it.

"Drink it," said Shackleton. "I am interested in seeing whether a dream figure can make incursion on physical substance."

"Oh, white people on dope," the black man moaned. "The watering place is no place for you to be. You excite the animals, and then they kill. When they are excited it is danger to me also who usually move among them easily. I have to kill the crocodile who is my friend. I do not want to kill others. I do not want more of you to be killed."

The black man was booted and jacketed quite in the manner of a hunting store outing, this possibly by the care at imagining of Boyle who loved hunting rig. The black Mummings-Night mask was contorted in agony and apprehension, but the black man did drink the Roman Bomb nervously the while he begged them to be gone from that place.

"You will notice that the skull form is quite human and the bearing completely erect," Linter said. "You will notice also that he is less hairy than we are and is thick of lip, while the great ape is more hairy and thin of lip. I had imagined them to be the same creature differently interpreted."

"No, you imagine them to be as they appear," Shackleton said. "It is your imagining of these two creatures that we are watching."

"But notice the configuration of the tempora and the mandible shape," Linter protested, "-- not what I expected. "

"You are the only one of us who knows about tempora and mandible shape," said Shackleton. "I tell you that it is your own imagery. He is structured by you, given the conventional Mummings-Night black-mask by all of us, clothed by Boyle, and speeches by Luna Boyle. His production is our joint effort. Watch it, everyone! It becomes dangerous now, even explosive! Man, I'm getting as hysterical as my wife! The dream is so vivid that it has its hooks in me. Ah, it's a great investigative experience, but I doubt if I'll want to return to this particular experience again. Green perdition! But it does become dangerous! Watch out, everyone!"

Ah, it had become wild: a hooting and screaming and bawling wild Africa bedlam, a green and tawny dazzle of fast-moving color, pungent annual stench of fear and murder, and smell of human fear.

A lion defiled the watering place, striking down a horned buck in the muddy shallows and going muzzle-deep into the hot-colored gore. A hippo erupted out of the water, a behemoth from the depths. Giraffes erected like crazily articulated derricks and galloped ungainly through the boscaige.

"Enough of this!" cried Mintgreen Linter. Frightened, she took the lead, incanting:

"That the noontime nightmare pass! The crocodile-dragon and the behemoth."

"We abjure them, we abjure them," they all chanted in various voices.

"That the black man and the black ape pass, and all black things of the black-green land."

"We abjure them, we abjure them," they chanted. But the black man was already down under the feet and horns of a buffalo creature, dead, and his last rifle shot still echoing. He had tried to prevent the buffalo from upsetting the teetering bole and dumping all the white people into the murder swamp. The great ape was also gone, terrified, back to his high-grass savannas. Many of the other creatures had disappeared or become faint, and there was again the tang of salt water and of distant hot-sand beaches.

"That the lion be gone who roars by day," Luna Boyle took up the incantation, "and the leopard who is Pan-Ther, the all-animal of grisly mythology. That the crushing snakes be gone, and the giant ostrich, and the horse in the clown suit."

"We abjure them all, we abjure them all," everybody chanted.

"That the True Believer form again beneath our feet in the structure we call see and know," August Shackleton incanted.

"We conjure it up, we conjure it up," they chanted, and the True Believer rose again barely above the threshold of the senses.

"That the illicit continents fade, and all the baleful islands of our writhing under-minds!" Boyle blurted in some trepidation.

"We abjure them, we abjure them," they all chanted contritely. And the illicit Africa had now become quite fragile, while the Cinnamon Coast of South Libya started to form as if behind green glass.

"Let us finish it! It lingers unhealthily!" Shackleton spoke loudly with resolve. "Let us drop our reservations! That we dabble no more in this partictilar illicitness! That we go no more hungering after strange geographies that are not of proper world! That we seal off the unsettling things inside us!"

"We seal them off, we seal them off," they chanted.

And it was finished.

They were on the True Believer, sailing in all easterly direction off the Cinnamon Coast of Libya. To the north was that lovely coast with its wonderful beaches and remarkable hotels. To the south and east were the white-topped waves that went on for ever and ever. It was over with, but the incantation had shaken them all with the sheer psychic power of it.

"Justina isn't with us," Luna Boyle said nervously. "She isn't on the True Believer anywhere. Do you think something has happened to her? Will she come back?"

"Of course she'll come back," August Shackleton purred. "She was truant from a seance for two days once. Oh, she'll have some good ones to tell when she does come back, and I'll rather enjoy the vacation from her. I love her, but a man married to an outre wife needs a rest from it sometimes."

"Bill look, look!" Luna Boyle cried. "Oh, she's impossible! She always did carry an antic too fir. That's in bad taste."

The severed lower half of Justina Shackleton floated in the clear blue water beside the True Believer. It was bloodied and gruesome and was being attacked by slashing fishes.

"Oh, stop it, Justina!" August Shackleton called angrily. "What a woman! Ah, I see it now. We turn to land."

It was the opening to the Yacht Basin, the channel through the beach shallows to the fine harbor behind. They tacked, they turned, they nosed in towards the Cinnamon Coast of Libya.

The world was itact again, one whole and perfect jewel, lying wonderful to the north of them. And south was only great ocean and great equator and empty places of the under-mind. The True Believer came to port passage with the perfect bright noontime on all things. tree," Justina screamed warning front the swamp. "There's ten meters of it reaching down for you."

"Conjure the crocodile," Shackleton intoned. "Not the little crocodile of the River of Egypt, but the big crocodile of deeper Africa that

can swallow a cow. "

"We conjure it, we imagine it, we evoke it, and the swamps and
CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK

Up in the Big Little country there is an up-thrust, a chimney rock that is half fallen against a newer hill. It is formed of what is sometimes called Dawson Sandstone and is interlaced with tough shell. It was formed during the glacial and recent ages in the bottom lands of Crow Creek and Green River when these streams (at least five times) were iniglity rivers.

The chimney rock is only a little older than mankind, only a little younger than grass. Its formation had been up-thrust and then eroded away again, all but such harder parts as itself and other chimneys and blocks.

A party of five persons came to this place where the chimney rock had fallen against a still newer hill. The people of the party did not care about the deep limestone below: they were not geologists. they did care about the newer hill (it was man-made) and they did care a little about the rock chimney; they were archaeologists.

Here was time heaped up, bulging out in casing and accumulation, and not in line sequence. And here also was striated and banded time, grown tall, and then shattered and broken.

The five party members came to the site early in the afternoon, bringing the working trailer down a dry creek bed. They unloaded many things and made a camp there. It wasn't really necessary to make a camp on the ground. There was a good motel two miles away on the highway; there was a road along the ridge above. They could have lived in comfort and made the trip to the site in five minutes every morning. Terrence Burdock, however, believed that one could not get the feel of a digging unless he lived on the ground with it day and night.

The five persons were Terrence Burdock, his wife Ethyl, Robert Derby, and Howard Steinleser: four beautiful and balanced people. And Magdalen Mobley who was neither beautiful nor balanced. But she was electric; she was special. They rouched around in the formations a little after they had made camp and while there was still light. All of them had seen the formations before and had guessed that there was promise in them.

"That peculiar fluting in the broken chimney is almost like a core sample," Terrence said, "and it differs from the rest of it. It's like a lightning bolt through the whole length. It's already exposed for us. I believe we will remove the chimney entirely. It covers the perfect access for the slash in the mound, and it is the mound in which we are really interested. But we'll study the chimney first. It is so available for study."

"Oh, I can tell you everything that's in the chimney," Magdalen said crossly. "I can tell you everything that's in the mound too."

"I wonder why we take the trouble to dig if you already know what we will find," Ethyl sounded archly.

"I wonder too," Magdalen grumbled. "But we will need the evidence and the artifacts to show. You can't get appropriations without evidence and artifacts. Robert, go kill that deer in the brush about forty yards north-east of the chimney. We may as well have deer meat if we're living primitive."

"This isn't deer season," Robert Derby objected. "And there isn't any deer there. Or, if there is, it's down in the draw where you couldn't see it. And if there's one there, it's probably a doe."

"No, Robert, it is a two-year-old buck and a very big one. Of course it's in the draw where I can't see it. Forty yards northeast of the chimney would have to be in the draw. If I could see it, the rest of you could see it too. Now go kill it! Are you a man or a mus microtuss? Howard, cut poles and set up a tripod to string and dress the deer on. "

"You had better try the thing, Robert," Ethyl Burdock said, "or we'll have no peace this evening."

Robert Derby took a carbine and went north-eastward of the chimney, descending into the draw near it forty yards. There was the high ping of the carbine shot. And, after some moments, Robert returned with a curious grin.

"You didn't miss him, Robert, you killed him," Magdalen called loudly. "You got him with a good shot through the throat and up into the brain when he tossed his head high like they do. Why didn't you bring him? Go back and get him! "

"Get him? I couldn't even lift the thing. Terrence and Howard, come with me and we'll lash it to a pole and get it here somehow. "

"Oh, Robert, you're out of your beautiful mind," Magdalen chided. "It only weighs a hundred and ninety pounds. Oh, I'll get it."

Magdalen Mobley went and got the big buck. She brought it back, carrying it listless across her shoulders and getting herself bloodied, stopping sometimes to examine rocks and kick them with her foot, coming on easily with her load. It looked as if it might weigh two hundred and fifty pounds; but if Magdalen said it weighed a hundred and ninety, that is what it weighed.

Howard Steinleser had cut poles and made a tripod. He knew better than not to. They strung the buck up, skinned it off, ripped up its belly, drew it, and worked it over in an almost professional manner.

"Cook it, Ethyl," Magalen said.

Later, as they sat on the ground around the fire and it had turned dark, Ethyl brought the buck's brains to Magdalen, messy and not half cooked, believing that she was playing an evil trick. And Magdalen ate them avidly. They were her due. She had discovered the buck.

If you wonder how Magdalen knew what itivisible things were where, so did the other members of the party always wonder.

"It bedevils me sometimes why I am the only one to notice the analogy between historical geology and depth psychology," Terrence Burdock mused as they grew lightly profound around the campfire. "The isostatic principle applies to the mind and the under-mind as well as it does to the surface and under-surface of the earth. The mind has its erosions and weatherings going on along with its deposits and accumulations. It also has its upthrusts and its stresses. It floats on a similar magma. In extreme cases it has its volcanic eruptions and its mountain-building."

"And it has its glaciations," Ethyl Burdock said, and perhaps she was looking at her husband in the dark.

"The mind has its hard sandstone, sometimes transmuted to quartz, or half-transmuted into flint, from the drifting and floating sand of daily events. It has its shale from the old mud of daily ineptitudes and inertias. It has limestone out of its more vivid experiences, for lime is the remnant of what was once animate: and this limestone may be true marble if it is the deposit of rich enough emotions or even travertine if it has bubbled sufficiently though agonized and evocative rivers of the under-mind. The mind has its sulphur and its gemstones --" 'Terrence bubbled on sufficiently, and Magdalen cut him off.

"Say simply that we have rocks in our heads," she said. "But they're random rocks, I tell you, and the same ones keep coming back. It isn't the same with us as it is with the earth. The world gets new rocks all the time. But it's the same people who keep turning up, and the same minds. Damn, one of the samest of them just turned up again! I wish he'd leave the alone. The answer is still no."

Very often Magdalen said things that made no sense. Ethyl Burdock assured herself that neither her husband, nor Robert, nor Howard, had slipped over to Magdalen in the dark. Ethyl was jealous of the chunky and surly girl.

"I am hoping that this will be as rich as Spiro Mound," Howard Steinleser hoped. "It could be, you know. I'm told that there was never a

less prepossessing site than that, or a trickier one. I wish we had someone who had dug at Spiro. "

"On, he dug at Spiro," Magdalen said with contempt.

"He? Who?" Terrence Burdock asked. "No one of us was at Spiro. Magdalen, you weren't even born yet when that mound was opened. What could you know about it?"

"Yeah, I remember him at Spiro," Magdalen said, "always turning up his own things and pointing them out."

"Were you at Spiro?" Terrence suddenly asked a piece of darkness. For some time, they had all been vaguely aware that there were six, not five, persons around the fire.

"Yeah, I was at Spiro," the man said. "I dig there. I dig at a lot of the digs. I dig real well, and I always know when we come to something that will be important. You give me a job."

"Who are you?" Terrence asked him. The man was pretty visible now. The flame of the fire seemed to leap towards him as if he compelled it,

"Oh, I'm just a rich old poor man who keeps following and hoping and asking. There is one who is worth it all forever, so I solicit that one forever. And sometimes I am other things. Two hours ago I was the deer in the draw. It is an odd thing to munch one's own flesh. " And the man was munching a joint of the deer, unasked.

"Him and his damn cheap poetry!" Magdalen cried angrily.

"What's your name!" Terrence asked him.

"Manypenny. Anteros Manypenny is my name forever."

"What are you?"

"On, just Indian. Shawnee, Choc, Creek, Anadarko, Caddo and pre-Caddo. Lots of things. "

"How could anyone be pre-Caddo?"

"Like me. I am."

"Is Anteros a Creek name?"

"No. Greek. Man, I am a going Jessie, I am one digging man! I show you tomorrow. "

Four more hoe cuts, and Anteros did come to them. He uncovered two large points and one small one, spear heads and arrow head. Lanceolate they were, with ribbon flaking. They were late Folsom, or they were proto-Plano; they were what you will.

"This cannot be," Steinleser groaned. "They're the missing chips, the transition pieces. They fill the missing places too well. I won't believe it. I'd hardly believe it if mastodon bones were found on the same level here."

"In a moment," said Anteros, beginning to use the hoe again. "Hey, those old beasts did smell funny! An elephant isn't in it with them. And a lot of it still clings to their bones. Will a sixth thoracic bone do? I'm pretty sure that's what it is. I don't know where the rest of the animal is. Probably somebody gnawed the thoracic here. Nine hoe cuts, and then very careful. "

Nine hoe cuts; and then Anteros, using a masons' trowel, unearthed the old gnawed bone very carefully. Yes, Howard said almost angrily, it was a sixth thoracic of a mastodon. Robert Derby said it was a fifth or sixth; it is not easy to tell.

"Leave the digging for a while, Anteros," Steinleser said. "I want to record and photograph and take a few measurements here. "

Terrence Burdock and Magdalen Mobley were working at the bottom of the chimney rock, at the bottom of the fluting that ran the whole height of it like a core sample.

"Get Anteros over here and see what he can uncover in sixty seconds," Terrence offered.

"On him! He'll just uncover some of his own things."

"What do you mean, his own things? Nobody could have made all

intrusion here. It's hard sandstone."

"And harder flint here," Magdalen said. "I might have known it. Pass the damned thing up. I know just about what it says anyhow. "

"What it says? What do you mean? But it is marked! And it's large and dressed rough. Who'd carve in flint?"

"Somebody real stubborn, just like flint," Magdalen said. "All right then, let's have it out. Anteros! Get this out in one piece. And do it without shattering it or tumbling the whole thing down on us. He can do it, you know, Terrence. He can do things like that. "

"What do you know about his doings, Magdalen? You never saw or heard about the poor man till last night."

"Oh well, I know that it'll turn out to be the same damned stuff." Anteros did get it out without shattering it or bringing down the chimney column. A cleft with a digging bar, three sticks of the stuff and a cap, an he touched the leads to the battery when he was almost on top of the charge. The blast, it sounded as if the whole sky were falling down in them, and some of those sky-blocks were quite large stones. The ancients wondered why fallen pieces of the sky should always be dark rock-stuff and never sky-blue clear stuff. The answer is that it is only pieces of the night sky that ever fall, even though they may sometimes be most of the daytime in falling, such is the distance. And the blast that Anteros set off did bring down rocky chunks of the night sky even though it was broad daylight. They brought down darker rocks than any of which the chimney was composed.

Still, it was a small blast. The chimney tottered but did not collapse. It settled back uneasily on its base. And the flint block was out in the clear.

"A thousand spearheads and arrow heads could be shattered and chipped out of that hunk," Terrence marveled. "That flint block would have been a primitive fortune for a primitive man."

"I had several such fortunes," Anteros said dully, "and this one I preserved and dedicated."

They had all gathered around it.

"Oh the poor man!" Ethyl suddenly exclaimed. but she was not looking at any of the men. She was looking at the stone.

"I wish he'd get off that kick," Magdalen sputtered angrily. "I don't care how rich he is. I can pick up better stuff than him in the alleys."

"What are the women chirping about?" Terrence asked. "But those do look like true glyphs. Almost like Aztec, are they not, Steinleser?"

"Nahust-Tanoan, cousins-german to the Aztec, or should I say cousins-yaqui?"

"Call it anything, but call you read it?"

"Probably. Give me eight or ten hours on it and I should come up with a contingent reading of many of the glyphs. We can hardly expect a rational rendering of the message, however. All Nahust-Tanoan translations so far have been gibberish."

"And remember, Terrence, that Steinleser is a slow reader," Magdalen said spitefully. "And he isn't very good at interpreting other signs either."

Steinleser was sullen and silent. How had his face come to bear those deep livid claw-marks today?

They moved a lot of rock and rubble that morning, took quite a few pictures, wrote up bulky notes. There were constant finds as the divided party worked up the shag-slash in the mound and the core-flute of the chimney. There were no more really startling discoveries; no more turned pots of the proto-Plano period; how could there be? There were no more predicted and perfect points of the late Folsom, but there were broken and unpredictable points. No other mastodon thoracic was found, but belies were uncovered of bison latifrons, of dire wolf, of coyote, of man. There were

some anomalies in the relationship of the things discovered, but it was not as fishy as it had been in the early morning, not as fishy as when Anteros had announced and then dug out the shards of the pot, the three points, the mastodon bone. The things now were as authentic as they were expected, and yet their very profusion had still the smell of a small fish.

And that Anteros was one digging man. He moved the sand, he moved the stone, he missed nothing. And at noon he disappeared.

An hour later he reappeared in a glossy station wagon, coming out of a thicketed ravine where no one would have expected a way. He had been to town. He brought a variety of cold cuts, cheeses, relishes and pastries, a couple of cases of cold beer, and some V.O.

"I thought you were a poor man, Anteros," Terrence chided.

"I told you that I was a rich old poor man. I have nine thousand acres of grassland, I have three thousand head of cattle, I have alfalfa land and clover land and corn land and hay-grazer land --"

"On, knock it off!" Magdalen snapped.

"I have other things," Anteros finished sullenly.

They ate, they rested, they worked the afternoon. Magdalen worked as swiftly and solidly as did Anteros. She was young, she was stocky, she was light-burned-dark. She was not at all beautiful (Ethyl was). She could have any man there any time she wanted to (Ethyl couldn't). She was Magdalen, the often unpleasant, the mostly casual, the suddenly intense one. She was the tension of the party, the string of the bow.

"Anteros!" she called sharply just at sundown.

"The turtle?" he asked. "The turtle that is under the ledge out of the current where the back-water curls in reverse? But he is fit and happy and he has never harmed anything except for food or fun. I know you do not want me to get that turtle."

"I do! There's eighteen pounds of him. He's fat. He'll be good. Only eighty yards, where the bank crumbles down to Green River, under the lower ledge that's shale that looks like slate, two feet deep --"

"I know where he is. I will go get the fat turtle." Anteros said. "I myself am the fat turtle. I am the Green River." He went to get it.

"On that damned poetry of his!" Magdalen spat when he was gone.

Anteros brought back the fat turtle. He looked as if he'd weigh twenty-five pounds; but if Magdalen said he weighed eighteen pounds, then it was eighteen.

"Start cooking, Ethyl," Magdalen said. Magdalen was a mere undergraduate girl permitted on the digging by sheer good fortune. The others of the party were all archaeologists of the moment. Magdalen had no right to give orders to anyone, except her born right.

"I don't know how to cook a turtle," Ethyl complained.

"Anteros will show you how."

"The late evening smell of newly exposed excavation!" Terrence Burdock burred as they lounged around the camp-fire a little later, full of turtle and V.O. and feeling rakishly wise. "The exposed age can be guessed by the very timbre of the smell, I believe."

"Timbre of the smell! What is your nose wired up to?" from Magdalen.

And, indeed, there was something time-evocative about the smell of the diggings; cool, at the same time musty and musky, ripe with old stratified water and compressed death. Stratified time.

"It helps if you already know what the exposed age is," said Howard Steinleser. "Here there is an anomaly. The chimney sometimes acts as if it were younger than the mound. The chimney cannot be young enough to include written rock, but it is."

"Archaeology is made up entirely of anomalies," said Terrence, "rearranged to make them fit in a fluke pattern. There'd be no system to it otherwise."

"Every science is made up entirely of anomalies rearranged to fit,"

said Robert Derby. "Have you unriddled the glyph-stone, Howard?"

"Yes, pretty well. better than I expected. Charles August can verify it, of course, when we get it back to the University. It is a non-royal, non-tribal, non-warfare, non-hunt declaration. It does not come under any of the usual radical signs, any of the categories. It can only be categorized as uncategorized or personal. The translation will be rough."

"Rocky is the word," said Magdalen.

"On with it, Howard," Ethyl cried.

"'You are the freedom of wild pigs in the sour-grass, and the nobility of badgers. You are the brightness of serpents and the soaring of vultures. You are passion of mesquite bushes on fire with lightning. You are serenity of toads.'"

"You've got to admit he's got a different line," said Ethyl. "Your own love noted were less acrid, Terrence."

"What kind of thing is it, Steinleser?" Terrence questioned. "It must have a category. "

"I believe Ethyl is right. It's a love poem. 'You are the water in rock cisterns and the secret spiders in that water. You are the dead coyote lying half in the stream, and you are the old entrapped dreams of the coyote's brains oozing liquid through the broken eye socket. You are the happy ravaging flies about that broken socket.'"

"On, hold it, Steinleser," Robert Derby cried. "You can't have gotten all that from scratches on flint. What is 'entrapped dreams' in Nahuatl-Talloon glyph-writing?"

"The solid-person sign next to the hollow-person sign, both enclosed in the night sign -- that has always been interpreted as the dream glyph. And here the dream glyph is enclosed in the glyph of the dead-fall trap. Yes, I believe it means entrapped dreams. To continue: 'You are the corn-worm in the dark heart of the corn, the naked small bird in the nest. You are the pustules on the sick rabbit, devouring life and flesh and turning it into your own serum. You are stars compressed into charcoal. But you cannot give, you cannot take. Once again you will be broken at the foot of the cliff, and the word will remain unsaid in your swollen and purple tongue.'"

"A love poem, perhaps, but with a difference," said Robert Derby.

"I never was able to go his stuff and I tried, I really tried," Magdalen moaned.

"Here is the change of person-subject shown by the canted-eye glyph linked with the self-glyph," Steinleser explained. "It is now a first-person talk. 'I own ten-thousand back-loads of corn. I own gold and beans and nine buffalo horns full of watermelon seeds. I own the loin cloth that the sun wore on his fourth journey across the sky. Only three loin cloths in the world are older and more valued than this. I cry out to you in a big voice like the hammering of herons' (that sound-verb-particle is badly translated, the hammer being not a modern pounding hammer but a rock angling, chipping hammer) 'and the belching of buffaloes. My love is sinewy as entwined snakes, it is steadfast as the sloth, it is like a feathered arrow shot into your abdomen -- such is my love. Why is my love unrequited?'"

"I challenge you, Steinleser," Terrence Burdock cut in. "What is the glyph for 'unrequited'?"

"The glyph of the extended hand -- with all the fingers bent backwards. It goes on 'I roar to you. Do not throw yourself down. You believe you are on the hanging sky bridge, but you are on the terminal cliff. I grovel before you. I am no more than dog-dropping.'"

"You'll notice he said that and not me," Magdalen burst out. There was always a fundamental incoherence about Magdalen.

"Ah -- continue, Steinleser," said Terrence. "The girl is daft, or she dreams out loud."

"That is all of the inscriptions, Terrence, except for a final glyph which I don't understand. Glyph writing takes a lot of room. That's

all the stone would hold."

"What is the glyph that you don't understand, Howard?"

"It's the spear-thrower glyph entwined with the time glyph. It sometimes means 'flung forward or beyond.' But what does it mean here?"

"It means 'continued,' dummy. 'Continued,'" Magdalen said. "Do not fear. There'll be more stories."

"I think it's beautiful," said Ethyl Burdock, "-- in its own context, of course. "

"Then why don't you take him on, Ethyl, in his own context, of course?" Magdalen asked. "Myself, I don't care how many back-loacls of corn he owns. I've had it."

"Take whom on, dear?" Ethyl asked. "Howard Steinleser can interpret the stones, but who can interpret our Magdalen?"

"Oh, I can read like a rock," Terrence Burdock smiled. But he couldn't.

But it had fastened on them. It was all about them and through them: the brightness of serpents and the serenity of toads, the secret spiders in the water, the entrapped dreams oozing through the broken eye socket, the pustules of the sick rabbit, the belching of the buffalo, and the arrow shot into the abdomen. And around it all was the night smell of flint and turned earth and chuckling streams, the mustiness, and the special muskiness which bears the name Nobility of Badgers.

They talked archeology and myth talk. Then it was steep night, and the morning of the third day.

Oh, the sample digging went well. This was already a richer mound than Spiro, though the gash in it was but a small promise of things to come. And the curious twin of the mound, the broken chimney, confirmed and confounded and contradicted. There was time going wrong in the chimney, or at least in the curious fluted core of it; the rest of it was normal enough, and sterile enough.

Anteros worked that day with a soft sullenness, and Magdalen brooded with a sort of lightning about her.

"Beads, glass beads!" Terrence Burdock exploded angriliy. "All right! Who is the hoaxter in our midst? I will not tolerate this at all." Terrence had been angry of face all day. He was clawed deeply, as Steinleser had been the day before, and he was sour on the world.

"There have been glass-bead caches before, Terrence, hundreds of them," Robert Daly said softly.

"There have been hoaxers before, hundreds of them," Terrence howled. "These have 'Hong Kong Contemporary' written all over them, damn cheap glass beads sold by the pound. They have no business in a stratum oif around the year seven hundred. All right, who is guilty?"

"I don't believe that any one of us is guilty, Terrence," Ethyl put in milsly. "They are found four feet in from the slant surface of the mound. Why, we've cut through three hundred years of vegetable loam to get them, and certainly the surface was eroded beyond that."

"We are scientists," said Steinleser. "We find these. Others have found such. Let us consider the improbabilities of it."

It was noon, so they ate and rested and considered the improbabilities. Anteros had brought them a great joint of white pork, and they made sandwiches and drank beer and ate pickles.

"You know," said Robert Derby, "that beyond the rank impossibility of glass beads found so many times where they could not be found, there is a real mystery about all early Indian beads, whether of bone, stone, or antler. There are millions and millions of these find beads with pierced holes finer than any piercer every found. There are residues, there are centers of every other Indian industry, and there is evolution of every other tool. Why have there been these millions of pierced beads, and never

one piercer? There was not technique to make so fine a piercer. How were they done?"

Magdalen giggled. "Bead-spitter," she said.

"Bead-spitter! You're out of your fuzzy mind," Terrence erupted. "That's the sillier and least sophisticated of all Indian legends."

"But it is the legend," said Robert Derby, "the legend of more than thirty separate tribes. The Carib Indians of Cuba said that they got their beads from Bead-spitters. The Indians of Panama told Balboa the same thing. The Indians of the pueblos told the same story to Coronado. Every Indian community had an Indian who was its Bead-spitter. There are Creek and Alabama and Kaosati stories of Bead-spitter; see Swanton's collections. And his stories were taken down within living memory.

"More than that, when European trade-beads were first introduced, there is one account of all Indian receiving some and saying 'I will take some to Bead-spitter. If he sees them, he can spit them too.' And that Bead-spitter did then spit them by the bushels. There was never any other Indian account of the origin of their beads. All were spit by a Bead-spitter."

"Really, this is very unreal," Ethyl said. Really it was.

"Hog hokey! A bead-spitter of around the year seven hundred could not spit future beads, he could not spit cheap Hong Kong glass beads of the present time!" Terrence was very angry.

"Pardon me, yes sir, he could," said Anteros. "A Bead-spitter can spit future beads, if he faces North when he spits. That has always been known."

Terrence was angry, he fumed and poisoned the day for them, and the claw marks on his face stood out livid purple. He was angrier yet when he said that the curious dark capping rock on top of the chimney was dangerous, that it would fall and kill someone; and Anteros said that there was no such capping rock on the chimney, that Terrence's eyes were deceiving him, that Terrence should go sit in the shade and rest.

And Terrence became excessively angry when he discovered that Magdalen was trying to hide something that she had discovered in the fluted core of the chimney. It was a large and heavy shale-stone, too heavy even for Magdalen's puzzling strength. She had dragged it out of the chimney flute, tumbled it down to the bottom, and was trying to cover it with rocks and scarp.

"Robert, mark the extraction point!" Terrence called loudly. "It's quite plain yet. Magdalen, stop that! Whatever it is, it must be examined now."

"Oh, it's just more of the damned same thing! I wish he'd let me alone. With his kind of money he can get plenty of girls. Besides, it's private, Terrence. You don't have any business reading it."

"You are hysterical, Magdalen, and you may have to leave the digging site."

"I wish I could leave. I can't. I wish I could love. I can't. Why isn't it enough that I die?"

"Howard, spend the afternoon on this," Terrence ordered. "It has writing of a sort on it. If it's what I think it is, it scares me. It's too recent to be in any eroded chimney rock formation, Howard, and it comes from far below the top. Read it."

"A few hours on it and I may come up with something. I never saw anything like it either. What did you think it was, Terrence?"

"What do you think I think it is? It's much later than the other, and that one was impossible. I'll not be the one to confess myself crazy first."

Howard Steinleser went to work on the incised stone; and two hours before sundown they brought him another one, a gray soap-stone block from higher up. Whatever this was covered with, it was not at all the same thing that covered the shale-stone.

And elsewhere things went well, too well. The old fishiness was back on it. No series of finds could be so perfect, no petrification could be so well ordered.

"Robert," Magdalen called down to Robert Derby just at sunset, "in the high meadow above the shore, about four hundreds yards down, just past the old fence line --"

-- there is a badger hole, Magdalen. Now you have me doing it, seeing invisible things at a distance. And if I take a carbine and stroll down there quietly, the gadger will stick his head out just as I get there (I being strongly downwind of him), and I'll blam him between the eyes. He'll be a big one, fifty pounds."

"Thirty. Bring him, Robert. You're showing a little understanding at last."

"But, Magdalen, badger is rampant meat. It's seldom eaten."

"May not the condemned girl have what she wishes for her last meal? Go get it, Robert."

Robert went. The voice of the little carbine was barely heard at that distance. Soon, Robert brought back the dead badger.

"Cook it, Ethyl," Magdalen ordered.

"Yes, I know. And if I don't know how, Anteros will show me." But Anteros was gone. Robert found him on a sun-down knoll with his shoulders hunched. The odd man was sobbing silently and his face seemed to be made out of dull pumice stone. But he came back to aid Ethyl in preparing the fadger.

"If the first of today's stones scared you, the second should have lifted the hair right off your hear, Terrence," Howard Steinleser said.

"It does, it does. All the stones are too recent to be in a chimney formation, but this last one is an insult. It isn't two hundred years old, but there's a thousand years of strata above it. What time is deposited here?"

They had eaten rampant badger meat and drunk inferior whiskey (which Anteros, who had given it to them, didn't know was inferior), and the muskiness wa sboth inside them and around them. The camp-fire sometimes spit angrily with small explosions, and its glare reached high when it did so. By one such leaping glare, Terrence Burdock saw that the curious dark capping rock was once more on top of the chimney. He thought he had seen it there in the daytime; but it had not been terhe after he had set in the shade and rested, and it had absolutely not been there when he climbed the chimney itself to be sure.

"Let's have the second chapter and then the third, Howard," Ethyl said. "It's neater that way."

"Yes, tell, the second chapter (the first and lowest apparently the earliest rock we came on today) is written in a language that no one ever saw written before; and yet it's no great trouble to read it. Even Terrence guessed what it was and it scared him. It is Anadarko-Caddo hand-talk graven in stone. It is what is called the Sign Language of the Plains Indians copied down in formalized pictograms. And it has to be very recent, within the last three hundred years. Hand-talk was fragmentary at the first coming of the Spanish, and well developed at the first coming of the French. It was all explosive development, as such things go, worked out within a hundred years. This rock has to be younger than its situs, but it was absolutely found in place."

"Read it, Howard, read it," Robert Derby called. Robert was feeling fine and the rest of them were gloomy tonight.

"I own three hundred ponis," Steinleser read the rock out of his memory. "I own two days' ride north and east and South, and one day's ride west. I give you all. I blast out with a big voice like fire in tall trees, like the explosion of crowning pine trees. I cry like closing-in wolves, like the high voice of the lion, like the hoarse scream of torn calves. Do you not destroy yourself again! You are the dew on crazy-weed in the

morning. You are the swift crooked wings of the nighthawk, the dainty feet of the skunk, you are the juice of the sour squash. Why can you not take or give? I am the hump-backed bull of the high plains, I am the river itself and the stagnant pools left by the river, I am the raw earth and the rocks. Come to me, but do not come so violently as to destroy yourself."

"Ah, that was the text of the first rock of the day, the Anadarko-Caddo hard-talk graven in stone. And final pictograms which I don't understand: a shot-arrow sign, and a boulder beyond."

"'Continued on next rock' of course," said Robert Derby. "Well, why wasn't hand-talk ever written down? The signs are simple and easily stylized and they were understood by many different tribes. It would have been natural to write it."

"Alphabetical writing was in the region before hand-talk was well-developed," Terrence Burdock said. "In fact, it was the coming of the Spanish that gave the impetus to hand-talk. It was really developed for communication between Spanish and Indian, not between Indian and Indian. And yet, I believe, hand-talk was written down once; it was the beginning of the Chinese pictographs. And there also it had its beginning as communication between differing peoples. Depend on it, if all mankind had always been of a single language, there would never have been any written language developed at all. Writing always began as a bridge, and there had to be some chasm for it to bridge."

"We have one to bridge here," said Steinleser. "That whole chimney is full of rotten smoke. The highest part of it should be older than the lowest part of the mound, since the mound was built on a base eroded away from the chimney formation. But in many ways they seem to be contemporary. We must all be under a spell here. We've worked two days on this, parts of three days, and the total impossibility of the situation hasn't struck us yet."

"The old Nahuatlan glyphs for Time are the Chimney glyphs. Present time is a lower part of chimney and fire burning it the base. Past time is black smoke from a chimney, and future time is white smoke from a chimney. There was a signature glyph running through our yesterday's stone which I didn't and don't understand. It seemed to indicate something coming down out of the chimney rather than going up it."

"It really doesn't look much like a chimney," Magdalen said.

"And a maiden doesn't look much like dew on crazy-weed in the morning, Magdalen," Robert Derby said, "But we recognize these identities."

They talked awhile about the impossibility of the whole business.

"There are scales on our eyes," Steinleser said. "The fluted core of the chimney is wrong. I'm not even sure the rest of the chimney is right."

"No, it isn't," said Robert Derby. "We can identify most of the strata of the chimney with known periods of the river and stream. I was above and below today. There is one stretch where the sandstone was not eroded at all, where it stands three hundred yards back from the shifted river and is overlaid with a hundred years of loam and sod. There are other sections where the stone is cut away variously. We can tell when most of the chimney was laid down, we can find its correspondences up to a few hundred years ago. But when were the top ten feet of it laid down? There were no correspondences anywhere to that. The centuries represented by the strata of the top of the chimney, people, those centuries haven't happened yet."

"And when was the dark capping rock on top of it all formed --?" Terrence began. "Ah, I'm out of my mind. It isn't there. I'm demented."

"No more than the rest of us," said Steinleser. "I saw it too, I thought, today. And then I didn't see it again."

"The rock-writing, it's like an old novel that I only half remember," said Ethyl.

"On, that's what it is, yes," Magclilen murmured.

"But I don't remember what happened to the girl in it."

"I remember what happened to her, Ethyl," Magdalen said.

"Give us the third chapter, Howard," Ethyl asked. "I want to see how it comes out. "

"First you should all have whisky for those colds," Anteros suggested humbly.

"But none of us have colds, " Ethyl objected.

"You take your own medicinal advice, Ethyl, and I'll take mine," Terrence said. "I will have whisky. My cold is not rheum but fear-chill."

They all had whisky. They talked a while, and some of them dozed.

"It's late, Howard," Ethyl said after a while. "Let's have the next chapter. Is it the last chapter? Then we'll sleep. We have honest digging to do tomorrow."

"Our third stone, our second stone of just past, is another and even later form of writing, and it has never been seen in stone before. It is Kiowa picture writing. The Kiowas did their out-turning spiral writing on buffalo skins dressed almost as fine as vellum. In its more sophisticated form (and this is a copy that) is quite late. The Kiowa picture writing probably did not arrive at its excellence until influenced by White artists."

"How late, Steinleser?" Robert Derby asked.

"Not more than a hundred and fifty years old. But I have never seen it copied in stone before. It simply isn't stone-styled. There's a lot of things around here lately that I haven't seen before.

"Well then, to the text, or should I say the pictography? 'You fear the earth, you fear rough ground and rocks, you fear moister earth and rotting flesh, you fear the flesh itself, all flesh is rotting flesh. If you love not rotting flesh, you love not at all. You believe the bridge hanging in the sky, the bridge hung by tendrils and woody vines that diminish as they go up and up till they are no thicker than hairs. There is no sky-bridge, you cannot go upon it. Did you believe that the roots of love grow upside down? They come out of deep earth that is old flesh and brains and hearts and entrails, that is old buffalo bowels and snakes' pizzles, that is black blood and rot and moaning underground. This is old and worn-out and bloody Time, and the roots of love grow out of its gore.'"

"You seem to give remarkable detailed translations of the simple spiral pictures, Steinleser, but I begin to get in the mood of it," Terrence said.

"Ah, perhaps I cheat a little," said Steinleser.

"You lie a lot," Magdalen challenged.

"No I do not. There is some basis for every phrase I've used. It goes on: 'I own twenty-two trade rifles. I own ponies. I own Mexico silver, eight-bit pieces. I am rich in all ways. I give all to you. I cry out with big voice like a bear full of mad-weed, like a bull frog in love, like a stallion rearing against a puma. It is the earth that calls you. I am the earth, woollier than wolves and tougher than rocks. I am the bog earth that sucks you in. You cannot give, you cannot like, you cannot love, you think there is something else, you think there is a sky-bridge you may loiter on without crashing down. I am bristle-boar earth, there is no other. You will come to me in the morning. You will come to me easy and with grace. Or you will come to me reluctant and you be shattered in every bone and member of you. You be broken by our encounter. You be shattered as by a lightning bolt striking up from the earth. I am the red calf which is in the writirigs. I am the rotting red earth. Live in the morning or die in the morning, but remember that love in death is better than no love at all.'"

"Oh brother! Nobody gets that stuff from kid pictures, Steitleser," Robert Derby moaned.

"Ah well, that's the end of the spiral picture. And a Kiowa spiral pictograph ends with either all in-sweep or an out-sweep line. This ends with an out-sweep, which means --"

"Continued on next rock,' that's what it means," Terrence cried

roughly.

"You won't find the next rocks," Magdalen said. "They're hidden, and most of the time they're not there yet, but they will go on and on. But for all that, you'll read it in the rocks tomorrow morning. I want it to be over with. Oh, I don't know what I want!"

"I believe I know what you want tonight, Magdalen," Robert Derby said.

But he didn't.

The talk traicd off, the fire burned down, they went to their sleeping sacks.

Then it was long jagged night, and the morning of the fourth day. But wait! In Nahuat-Tanoan legend, the world ends on the fourth morning. All the lives we lived or thought we lived had been but drcains of third night. The loin cloth that the suit wore on the fourth day's journey was not so valuable as one has made out. It was worn for no more than an hour or so.

And, if fact, there was something terminal about fourth morning. Anteros had disappeared. Magdalen had disappeared. The chimney rock looked greatly diminished in its bulk (something had gone out of it) and much crazier in its broken height. The sun had come up a garish gray-orange color through fog. The signature -glyph of the first stone dominated the ambient. It was as if something were coming down from the chimney, a horrifying smoke; but it was only noisome morning fog.

No it wasn't. There was something else coming down from the chimney, or front the hidden sky: pebbles, stones, indescribable bits of foul oozings, the less fastidious pieces of sky; a light nightmare rain had begun to fall there; the chimney was apparently beginning to crumble.

"It's the dammedest thing I ever heard about," Robert Derby growled. "Do you think that Magdalen really went off with Anteros?" Derby was bitter and fumatory this morning and his face was badly clawed.

"Who is Magdalen? Who is Anteros?" Ethyl Burdock risked.

Terrence Burdock was hooting front high on the mound. "All come up," he called. "Here is a find that will make it all worth while. We'll have to photo and sketch and measure and record and witness. It's the finest basalt head I've ever seen, man-sized, and I suspect that there's a man-sized body attached to it. We'll soon clean it and clear it. Gah! What a weird fellow he was!"

But Howard Steinleser was studying a brightly colored something that he held in his two hands.

"What is it, Howard? What are you doing?" Derby demanded.

"Ah, I believe this is the next stone in the sequence. The writing is alphabetical but deformed, there is an element missing. I believe it is in modern English, and I will solve the deformity and see it true in a minute. The text of it seems to be --"

Rocks and stories were coming down from the chimney, and fog, amnesic and wit-stealiiig fog.

"Steinleser, are you all right?" Robert Derby asked with compassion. "That isn't a stone that you hold in your hand."

"It isn't a stone. I thought it was. What is it then?"

"It is the fruit of the Osage Orange tree, the American Meraceous. It isn't a stone, Howard." And the thing was a tough, woody, wrinkled mock-orange, as big as a small melon.

"You have to admit that the wrinkles look a little bit like writing, Robert."

"Yes, they look a little like writing, Howard. Let us go up where Terrence is bawling for us. You've read too many stories. And it isn't safe here."

"Why go up, Howard? The other thing is coming down."

It was the bristled-boar earth reaching up with a rumble. It was a lightning bolt struck upward out of the earth, and it got its prey. There

was explosion and roar. The dark capping rock was jerked from the top of the chimney and slammed with terrible force to the earth, shattering with a great shock. And something else that had been on that capping rock. And the whole chimney collapsed about them.

She was broken by the encounter. She was shattered in every bone and member of her. And she was dead.

"Who -- who is she?" Howard Steinleser stuttered.

"Oh God! Magdalen, of course!" Robert Derby cried.

"I remember her a little bit. Didn't understand her. She put out like an evoking moth but she wouldn't be had. Near clawed the face off me the other night when I misunderstood the signals. She believed there was a sky bridge. It's in a lot of the mythologies. But there isn't one, you know. Oh well."

"The girl is dead! Damnation! What are you grubbing in those stones?"

"Maybe she isn't dead in them yet, Robert. I'm going to read what's here before something happens to them. This capping rock that fell and broke, it's impossible, of course. It's a stratum that hasn't been laid down yet. I always did want to read the future and I may never get another chance."

"You fool! The girl's dead! Does nobody care? Terrence, stop bellowing about your find. Come down. The girl's dead."

"Come up, Robert and Howard," Terrence insisted. "Leave that broken stuff down there. It's worthless. But nobody ever saw anything like this."

"Do come up, men," Ethyl sang. "Oh, it's a wonderful place! I never saw anything like it in my life."

"Ethyl, is the whole morning mad?" Robert Derby demanded as he came up to her. "She's dead. Don't you really remember her? Don't you remember Magdalen?"

"I'm not sure. Is she the girl down there? Isn't she the same girl who's been hanging around here a couple days? She shouldn't have been playing on that high rock. I'm sorry she's dead. But just look what we're uncovering here!"

"Terrence. Don't you remember Magdalen?"

"The girl down there? She's a little bit like the girl that clawed the hell out of me the other night. Next time someone goes to town they might mention to the sheriff that there's a dead girl here. Robert, did you ever see a face like this one? And it digs away to reveal the shoulders. I believe there's a whole man-sized figure here. Wonderful, wonderful!"

"Terrence, You're off your head. Well, do you remember Anteros?"

"Certainly, the twin of Eros, but nobody ever made much of the symbol of unsuccessful love. Thunder! That's the name for him! It fits him perfectly. We'll call him Anteros."

Well, it was Aitcros, life-like in basalt stone. His face contorted. He was sobbing soundlessly and frozenly and his shoulders were hunched with emotion. The carving was fascinating in its miserable passion, his stony love unrequited. Perhaps he was more impressive now than he would be when he was cleaned. He was earth, he was earth itself. Whatever period the carving belonged to, it was outstanding in its power.

"The live Anteros, Terrence. Don't you remember our digging man, Anteros Manypenny?"

"Sure. He didn't show up for work this morning, did he? Tell him he's fired."

"Magdalen is dead! She was one of us! Dammit, she was the main one of us!" Robert Derby cried. Terrence and Etliyl were earless to his outburst. They were busy uncovering the rest of the carving.

And down below, Howard Steinleser was studying dark broken rocks before they would disappear, studying a stratum that hadn't been laid down yet, reading a foggy future.

OLD FOOT FORGOT

"Dookh-Doctor, it is a sphairikos patient," Lay Sister Moira P.T. de C. cried happily. "It is a genuine spherical alien patient. You've never had one before, not in good faith. I believe it is what you need to distract you from the -- ah -- happy news about yourself. It is good for a Dookh-Doctor to have a different patient sometimes."

"Thank you, lay sister. Let it, him, her, fourth case, fifth case or whatever come in. No, I've never had a sphairikos in good faith. I doubt if this one is, but I will enjoy the encounter."

The sphairikos rolled or pushed itself in. It was a big one, either a blubbery kid or a full-grown one. It rolled itself along by extruding and withdrawing pseudopods. And it came to rest grinning, a large translucent rubbery ball of fleeting colors.

"Hello, Dookh-Doctor," it said pleasantly. "First I wish to extend my own sympathy and that of my friends who do not know how to speak to you for the happy news about yourself. And secondly I have an illness of which you may cure me. "

"But the sphairikoi are never ill," Dookh-Doctor Drague said dutifully.

How did he know that the round creature was grinning at him? By the colors, of course; by the fleeting colors of it. They were grinning colors.

"My illness is not of the body but of the head," said the sphairikos.

"But the sphairikoi have no heads, my friend."

"Then it is of another place and another name, Dookh-Doctor. There is a thing in me suffering. I come to you as a Dookh-Doctor. I have an illness in my Dookh. "

"That is unlikely in a sphairikos. You are all perfectly balanced, each a cosmos unto yourself. And you have a central solution that solves everything. What is your name?"

"Krug Sixteen, which is to say that I am the sixteenth son of Krug; the sixteen fifth case son, of course. Dookh-Doc, the pain is not in me entirely; it is in an old forgotten part of me."

"But, you sphairikoi have no parts, Krug Sixteen. You are total and indiscriminate entities. How would you have parts?"

"It is one of my pseudopods, extended and then withdrawal in much less than a second long ago when I was a little boy. It protests, it cries, it wants to come back. It has always bothered me, but now it bothers the intolerably. It screams and moans constantly now."

"Do not the same ones ever come back?"

"No. Never. Never exactly the same ones. Will exactly the same water ever run past one point in a brook? No. We push them out and we draw them back. And we push them out again, millions of times. But the same one can never come back. There is no identity. But this one cries to come back, and now it becomes more urgent. Dookh-Doc, how can it be? There is not one same molecule in it as when I was a boy. There is nothing of that pseudopod that is left; but parts of it have come out as parts of other pseudopods, and now there can be no parts left. There is nothing remaining of that foot; it has all been absorbed a million times. But it cries out! And I have compassion on it."

"Krug Sixteen, it may possibly be a physical or mechanical difficulty, a pseudopod imperfectly withdrawn, a sort of rupture whose effects you interpret wrongly. In that case it would be better if you went to your own doctors, or doctor: I understand that there is one."

"That old fogey cannot help me, Dookh-Doc. And our pseudopods are always perfectly withdrawn. We are covered with the twinkling salve; it is one-third of our bulk. And if we need more of it we can make more of it ourselves; or we call beg some of it from a class four who make it prodigiously. It is the solvent for everything. It eases every possible wound; it makes us round as balls; you should use it yourself, Dookh-Doc."

But there is one small foot in me, dissolved long ago, that protests and protests. Oh, the shrieking! The horrible dreams!"

"But the sphairikoi do not sleep and do not dream."

"Right enough, Dookh-Doc. But there's an old dead foot of mine that sure does dream loud and woolly."

The sphairikos was not grinning now. He rolled about softly in apprehension. How did the Dookh-Doctor know that it was apprehension? By the fleeting colors. They were apprehension colors now.

"Krug Sixteen, I will have to study your case," said the Dookh-Doctor. "I will see if there are any references to it in the literature, though I don't believe that there are. I will seek for analogy. I will probe every possibility. Can you come back at the same hour tomorrow?"

"I will come back, Dookh-Doc," Krug Sixteen sighed. "I hate to feel that small vanished thing crying and trembling."

It rolled or pushed itself out of the clinic by extruding and then withdrawing pseudopods. The little pushers came out of the goopy surface of the sphairikos and then were withdrawn into it completely. A raindrop falling in a pond makes a much more lasting mark than does the disappearing pseudopod of a sphairikos.

But long ago, in his boyhood, one of the pseudopods of Krug Sixteen had not disappeared completely in every respect.

"There are several jokers waiting," Lay Sister Moira P.T. de C. announced a little later, "and perhaps some valid patients among them. It's hard to tell."

"Not another sphairikos?" the Dookh-Doctor asked in sudden anxiety.

"Of course not. The one this morning is the only sphairikos who has ever come. How could there be anything wrong with him? There is never anything wrong with a sphairikos. No, these are all of the other species. Just a regular morning bunch."

So, except for the visitation of the sphairikos, it was a regular morning at the clinic. There were about a dozen waiting, of the several species; and at least half of them would be jokers. It was always so.

There was a lean and giddy subula. One cannot tell the age or sex of them. But there was a tittering. In all human or inhuman expression, whether of sound, color, radioray or osmerhetor, the titter suggests itself. It is just around the corner, it is just outside, it is subliminal, but it is there somewhere.

"It is that my teeth hurt so terrible," the subula shrilled so high that the Dookh-Doctor had to go on instruments to hear it. "They are tramping pain. They are agony. I think I will cut my head off. Have you a head-off cutter, Dookh-Doctor?"

"Let me see your teeth," Dookh-Doctor Druage asked with the beginnings of irritation.

"There is one tooth jump up and down with spike boot," the subula shrilled. "There is one jag like poisoned needle. There is one cuts like coarse rough saw. There is one burns like little hot fires."

"Let me see your teeth," the Dookh-Doctor growled evenly.

"There is one drills holes and sets little blasting powder in them," the subula shrilled still more highly. "Then he sets them off. Ow! Good night!"

"Let me see your teeth!!"

"Peeef!" the subula shrilled. The teeth cascaded out, half a bushel of them, ten thousand of them, all over the floor of the clinic.

"Peeef," the subula screeched again, and ran out of the clinic.

Tittering? (But he should have remembered that the subula have no teeth.) Tittering? It was the laughing of demented horses. It was the jackhammer braying of the dolcus, it was the hysterical giggling of the

ophis (they were a half a bushel of shells of the little stink conches and they were already beginning to rot), it was the clown laughter of the arktos (the clinic would never be habitable again; never mind, he would burn it down and build another one tonight).

The jokers, the jokers, they did have their fun with him, and perhaps it did them some good.

"I have this trouble with me," said a young dolcus, "but it make me so nervous to tell it. Oh, it do make the nervous to tell it to the Dookh-Doc."

"Do not be nervous," said the Dookh-Doctor, fearing the worst. "Tell the your trouble in whatever way you can. I am here to serve every creature that is in any trouble or pain whatsoever. Tell it."

"Oh but it make me so nervous. I perish. I shrivel. I will have accident I am so nervous."

"Tell me your trouble, my friend. I am here to help."

"Whoops, whoops, I already have accident! I tell you I am nervous."

The dolcus urinated largely on the clinic floor. Then it ran out laughing.

The laughing, the shrilling, the braying, the shrill giggling that seemed to scrape the flesh from his bones. (He should have remembered that the dolcus do not urinate; everything comes from them hard and solid.) The hooting, the laughng! it was a bag of green water from the kolmula swamp. Even the aliens gagged at it, and their laughter was of a pungent green sort.

Oh well, there were several of the patients with real, though small, ailments, and there were more jokers. There was the arktos who -- (Wait, wait, that particular jokerie cannot be told with human persons present; even the subula and the ophis blushed lavender at the rawness of it. A thing like that can only be told to arktos themselves.) And there was another dolcus who --

Jokers, jokers, it was a typical morning at the clinic.

One does whatever one can for the oneness that is greater than self. In the case of Dookli-Doctor Drague it meant considerable sacrifice. One who works with the strange species here must give up all hope of material reward or material sophistication in his surroundings. But the Dookh-Doctor was a dedicated man.

Oh, the Dookh-Doctor lived pleasantly and with a sort of artful simplicity and dynamic involvement in the small articles of life. He had all excited devotion and balanced intensity for corporate life.

He lived in small houses of giolach-weed, woven with careful double-rappel. He lived in each one for seven days only, and then burned it and scattered the ashes, taking always one bitter glob of them on his tongue for reminder of the fleetingness of temporal things and the wonderfulness of the returning. To live in one house for more than seven days is to become dull and habitual; but the giolach-weed will not burn well till it has been cut and plaited for seven days, so the houses set their own terms. One half day to build, seven days to inhabit, one half day to burn ritually and scatter, one renewal night under the speir-sky.

The Dookh-Doctor ate raibe, or he ate innuin or ull or piorra when they were in season. And for the nine days of each year when none of these were in season, he ate nothing at all.

His clothing he made himself of colg. His paper was of the pailme plant. His printer used buaf ink and shaved slinn stone. Everything that he needed he made for himself from things found wild in the hedgerows. He took nothing from the cultivated land or from the alien peoples. He was a poor and dedicated servant.

Now he stacked some of the needful things from the clinic, and Lay Sister Moira P.T. de C. took others of them to her own giolach house to keep till the next day. Then the Dookh-Doctor ritually set his clinic on fire, and a few moments later his house. This was all symbol of the great nostos,

the returning. He recited the great rhapsodies, and other persons of the human kind came by and recited with him.

"That no least fiber of giolach die," he recited, "that all enter immediately the more glorious and undivided life. That the ashes are the doorway, and every ash is holy. That all become a part of the oneness that is greater than self.

"That no splinter of the giuis floorboards die, that no glob of the chinking clay die, that no mite or louse in the paiting die. That all become a part of the oneness that is greater than self."

He burned, he scattered, he recited, he took one glob of bitter ash on his tongue. He experienced vicariously the great synthesis. He ate holy innuin and holy ull. And when it was finished, both of the house and the clinic, when it had come on night and he was homeless, he slept that renewal night under the speir-sky.

And in the morning he began to build again, the clinic first, and then the house.

"It is the last of either that I shall ever build," he said. The happy news about himself was that he was a dying man and that he would be allowed to take the short way out. So he built most carefully with the Last Building Rites. He chinked both the building with special uir clay that would give a special bitterness to the ashes at the time of final burning.

Krug Sixteen rolled along while the Dookh-Doctor still built his final clinic, and the sphairikos helped him in the building while they consulted on the case of the screaming foot. Krug Sixteen could weave and plait and rappel amazingly with his pseudopods; he could bring out a dozen of them, a hundred, thick or thin, whatever was needed, and all of a wonderful dexterity. That globe could weave.

"Does the forgotten foot still suffer, Krug Sixteen?" Dookh-Doctor Drague asked it.

"It suffers, it's hysterical, it's in absolute terror. I don't know where it is; it does not know; and how I know about it at all is a mystery. Have you found any way to help me, to help it?"

"No. I am sorry, but I have not."

"There is nothing in the literature on this subject?"

"No. Nothing that I can identify as such."

"And you have not found analogy to it?"

"Yes, Krug Sixteen, ah -- in a way I have discovered analogy. But it does not help you. Or me."

"That is too bad, Dookh-Doc. Well, I will live with it; and the little foot will finally die with it. Do I guess that your case is somewhat the same as mine?"

"No. My case is more similar to that of your lost foot than to you."

"Well, I will do what I can for myself, and for it. It's back to the old remedy then. But I am already covered deep with the twinkling salve."

"So am I, Krug Sixteen, in a like way."

"I was ashamed of my affliction before and did not mention it. Now, however, since I have spoken of it to you, I have spoken of it to others also. There is some slight help, I find. I should have shot off my big bazoo before."

"The sphairikoi have no bazoos."

"Folk-joke, Dookh-Doc. There is a special form of the twinkling salve. My own is insufficient, so I will try the other."

"A special form of it, Krug Sixteen? I am interested in this. My own salve seems to have lost its effect."

"There is a girlfriend, Dookh-Doc, or a boyfriend person. How shall I say it? It is a case four person to my case five This person, though promiscuous, is expert. And this person exudes the special stuff in abundance."

"It is the most special of all the twinkling salves, Dookh-Doc, and it solves and dissolves everything. I believe it will reach my forgotten foot, wherever it is, and send it into kind and everlasting slumber. It will know that it is itself that slumbers, and that will be bearable."

"If I were not -- ah -- going out of business, Krug Sixteen, I'd get a bit of it and try to analyze it. What is the name of this special case four person?"

"Torchy Twelve is its name."

"Yes. I have heard of her."

Everybody now knew that it was the last week in the life of the Dookh-Doctor, and everyone tried to make his happiness still more happy. The morning jokers outdid themselves, especially the arktos. After all, he was dying of an arktos disease, one never fatal to the arktos themselves. They did have some merry and outrageous times around the clinic, and the Dookh-Doctor got the sneaky feeling that he would rather live than die.

He hadn't, it was plain to see, the right attitude. So Lay Priest Migilia P.T. de C. tried to inculcate the right attitude in him.

"It is the great synthesis you go to, Dookh-Doctor," he said. "It is the happy oneness that is greater than self."

"Oh I know that, but you put it on a little too thick. I've been taught it from my babyhood. I'm resigned to it."

"Resigned to it? You should be ecstatic over it! The self must perish, of course, but it will live on as an integral atom of the evolving oneness, just as a drop lives on in the ocean."

"Aye, Migma, but the drop may hang onto the memory of the time when it was cloud, of the time when it was falling drop indeed, of the time when it was falling drop indeed, of the time when it was brook. It may say 'There's too damned much salt in this ocean. I'm lost here.'"

"Oh, but the drop will want to be lost, Dookh-Doctor. The only purpose of existence is to cease to exist. And there cannot be too much of salt in the evolving oneness. There cannot be too much of anything. All must be one in it. Salt and sulphur must be one, undifferentiated. Offal and soul must become one. Blessed be oblivion in the oneness that collapses on itself."

"Stuff it, lay priest. I'm weary of it."

"Stuff it, you say? I don't understand your phrase, but I'm sure it's apt. Yes, yes, Dookh-Doctor, stuff it all in: animals, people, rocks, grass, worlds and wasps. Stuff it all in. That all may be obliterated into the great -- may I not coin a word even as the master coined them? -- into the great stuffiness!"

"I'm afraid your word is all too apt."

"It is the great quintessence, it is the happy death of all individuality and memory, it is the synthesis of all living and dead things into the great amorphism. It is the --"

"It is the old old salve, and it's lost its twinkle," the Dookh-Doctor said sadly. "How goes the old quotation? When the salve becomes sticky, how then will you come unstuck?"

No, the Dookh-Doctor did not have the right attitude, so it was necessary that many persons should harass him into it. Time was short. His death was due. And there was the general fear that the Dookh-Doctor might not be properly lost.

He surely came to his time of happiness in grumpy fashion.

The week was gone by. The last evening for him was come. The Dookh-Doctor ritually set his clinic on fire, and a few minutes later his house.

He burned, he scattered, he recited the special last-time recital. He ate holy inuin and holy ull. He took one glob of most bitter ash on his tongue: and he lay down to sleep his last night under the speir-sky.

He wasn't afraid to die.

"I will cross that bridge gladly, but I want there to be another side to that bridge," he talked to himself. "And if there is no other side of it, I want it to be me who knows that there is not. They say 'Pray that you be happily lost forever. Pray for blessed obliteration.' I will not pray that I be happily lost forever. I would rather burn in a hell forever than suffer happy obliteration! I'll burn if it be the that burn. I want me to be me. I will refuse forever to surrender myself."

It was a restless night for him. Well, perhaps he could die easier if he were wearied and sleepless at dawn.

"Other men don't make such a fuss about it," he told himself (the self he refused to give up). "Other men are truly happy in obliteration. Why am I suddenly different? Other men desire to be lost, lost, lost. How have I lost the faith of my childhood and manhood? What is unique about me?"

There was no answer to that.

"Whatever is unique about me, I refuse to give it up. I will howl and moan against that extinction for billions of centuries. Ah, I will go sly! I will devise a sign so I will know me if I meet me again."

About an hour before dawn the Lay Priest Migma, P.T. de C., came to Dookh-Doctor Drague. The dolcus and the arktos had reported that the man was resting badly and was not properly disposed.

"I have an analogy that may case your mind, Dookh-Doctor," the Lay Priest whispered softly, "-- ease it into great easiness, salve it into great salving --"

"Begone, fellow, your salve has lost its twinkle."

"Consider that we have never lived, that we have only seemed to live. Consider that we do not die, but are only absorbed into great selfless self. Consider the odd sphairikoi of this world --"

"What about the sphairikoi? I consider them often."

"I believe that they are set here for our instruction. A sphairikos is a total globe, the type of the great oneness. Then consider that it sometimes ruffles its surface, extrudes a little false-foot from its soft surface. Would it not be odd if that false-foot, for its brief second, considered itself a person? Would you not laugh at that?"

"No, no. I do not laugh." And the Dookli-Doctor was on his feet.

"And in much less than a second, that pseudopod is withdrawn back into the sphere of the sphairikoi. So it is with our lives. Nothing dies. It is only a ripple on the surface of the oneness. Can you entertain so droll and idea as that the pseudopod should remember, or wish to remember?"

"Yes. I'll remember it a billion years for the billion who forget."

The Dookh-Doctor was running uphill in the dark. He crashed into trees and boles as though he wished to remember the crashing forever.

"I'll burn before I forget, but I must have something that says it's me who burns!"

Up, up by the spherical hills of the sphairikoi, bawling and stumbling in the dark. Up to a hut that had a certain fame he could never place, to the hut that had its own identity, that sparkled with identity.

"Open, open, help me!" the Dookh-Doctor cried out at the last hut on the bill.

"Go away, man!" the last voice protested. "All my clients are gone, and the night is almost over with. What has this person to do with a human man anyhow?"

It was a round twinkling voice out of the roweled dark. But there was enduring identity there. The twinkling, enduring-identity colors, coining from the chinks of the hut, had not reached the level of vision. There was even the flicker of the I-will-know-me-if-I-meet-me-again color.

"Torchy Twelve, help me. I am told that you have the special salve that solves the last problem, and makes it know that it is always itself that is solved."

"Why, it is the Dookh-Doc! Why have you come to Torchy?"

"I want something to send me into kind and everlasting slumber," he moaned. "But I want it to be me who slumbers. Cannot you help me in any way?"

"Come you in, the Dookh-Doc. This person, though promiscuous, is expert. I help you --"

ALL PIECES OF A RIVER SHORE

It had been a very long and ragged and incredibly interlocked and detailed river shore. Then a funny thing happened. It had been broken up, sliced up into pieces. Some of the pieces had been folded and compressed into bales. Some of them had been cut into still smaller pieces and used for ornaments and as Indian medicine. Rolled and baled pieces of the shore came to rest in barns and old warehouses, in attics, in caves. Some were buried in the ground.

And yet the river itself still exists physically, as do its shores, and you may go and examine them. But the shore you will see along the river now is not quite the same as that old shore that was broken up and baled into bales and rolled onto rollers, not quite the same as the pieces you will find in attics and caves.

His name was Leo Nation and he was known as a rich Indian. But such wealth as he had now was in his collections, for he was an examining and acquiring man. He had cattle, he had wheat, he had a little oil, and he spent everything that came in. Had he more income he would have collected even more.

He collected old pistols, old ball shot, grindstones, early windmills, walking-horse threshing machines, flax combs, Conestoga wagons, brass-bound barrels, buffalo robes, Mexican saddles, slick horn saddles, anvils, Argand lamps, rush holders, hay-burning stoves, hackamores, branding irons, chuck wagons, longhorn horns, beaded scrapes, Mexican and Indian leatherwork, buckskins, heads, feathers, squirrel-tail anklets, arrowheads, deerskin shirts, locomotives, streetcars, millwheels, keelboats, buggies, ox yokes, old parlor organs, blood-and-thunder novels, old circus posters, harness bells, Mexican oxcarts, wooden cigar-store Indians, cable-twist tobacco a hundred years old and mighty strong, cuspidors (four hundred of them), Ferris wheels, carnival wagons, carnival props of various sorts, carnival proclamations painted big on canvas. Now he was going to collect something else. He was talking about it to one of his friends, Charles Longbank, who knew everything.

"Charley," he said, "do you know anything about 'The Longest Pictures in the World' which used to be shown by carnivals and in hippodromes?"

"Yes, I know a little about them Leo. They are an interesting bit of Americana: a bit of nineteenth-century back country mania. They were supposed to be pictures of the Mississippi River shore. They were advertised as one mile long, five miles long, nine miles long. One of them, I believe, was actually over a hundred yards long. They were badly painted on bad canvas, crude trees and mudbank and water ripples, simplistic figures and all as repetitious as wallpaper. A strong-armed man with a big brush and plenty of barn paint of three colors could have painted quite a few yards of such in one day. Yet they are truly Americana. Are you going to collect them, Leo?"

"Yes, but the real ones aren't like you say."

"Leo, I saw one. There is nothing to them but very large crude painting."

"I have twenty that are like you say, Charley. I have three that are very different. Here's an old carnival poster that mentions one."

Leo Nation talked eloquently with his hands while he also talked with his mouth, and now he spread out an old browned poster with loving

hands:

"The Arkansas Traveler, World's Finest Carnival, Eight Wagons, Wheels, Beasts, Dancing Girls, Baffling Acts, Monsters, Games of Chance. And Featuring the World's Longest Picture, Four Miles of Exquisite Painting. This is from the Original Panorama; it is Not a Cheap-Jack Imitation."

"So you see, Charley, there was a distinction: there were the original pictures, and there were the crude imitations."

"Possibly some were done a little better than the others, Leo; they could hardly have been done worse. Certainly, collect them if you want to. You've collected lots of less interesting things."

"Charley, I have a section of that panoramic picture that once belonged to the Arkansas Traveler Carnival. I'll show it to you. Here's another poster:

"King Carnival, The King of Them All. Fourteen Wagons. Ten Thousand Wonders. See the Rubber Man. See the Fire Divers. See the Longest Picture in the World, see Elephants on the Mississippi River. This is a Genuine Shore Depictment, not the Botches that Others Show."

"You say that you have twenty of the ordinary pictures, Leo, and three that are different?"

"Yes, I have, Charley. I hope to get more of the genuine. I hope to get the whole river."

"Let's go look it one, Leo, and see what the difference is."

They went out to one of the hay barns. Leo Nation kept his collections in a row of hay barns. "What would I do?" he had asked once, "call in a carpenter and tell him to build me a museum? He'd say, 'Leo, I can't build a museum without plans and stuff. Get me some plans.' And where would I get plans? So I always tell him to build me another hay barn one hundred feet by sixty feet and fifty feet high. Then I always put in four or five decks myself and floor them, and leave open vaults for the tall stuff. Besides, I believe a hay barn won't cost as much as a museum."

"This will be a big field, Charley," Leo Nation said now as they came to one of the hay-barn museums. "It will take all your science in every field to figure it out. Of the three genuine ones I have, each is about a hundred and eighty yards long. I believe this is about the standard length, though some may have been multiples of these. They passed for paintings in the years of their display, Charley, but they are not paintings."

"What are they then, Leo?"

"I hire you to figure this out. You are the man who knows everything."

Well, there were two barrel reels there, each the height of a man, and several more were set further back.

"The old turning mechanism is likely worth a lot more than the picture," Charles Longbank told Leo Nation. "This was turned by mule on a treadmill, or by a mule taking a mill pole round and round. It might even be eighteenth century."

"Yeah, but I use all electric motor on it." Leo said, "The only mule I have left is a personal friend of mine. I'd no more make him turn that than he'd make me if I were the mule. I line it up like I think it was, Charley, the full reel north and the empty one south. Then we run it. So we travel, we scan, from south to north, going upstream as we face west."

"It's funny canvas and funny paint, much better than the one I saw," said Charles Longbank, "and it doesn't seem worn out by all the years."

"It isn't either one, canvas or paint," said Ginger Nation, Leo's wife, as she appeared from somewhere. "It is picture."

Leo Nation started the reeling and ran it. It was the wooded bank of a river. It was a gravel and limestone bank with mud overlay and the mud undercut a little. And it was thick timber to the very edge of the shore.

"It is certainly well done," Charles Longbank admitted. "From the one I saw and from what I read about these, I wasn't prepared for this." The rolling picture was certainly not repetitious, but one had the feeling that

the riverbank itself might have been a little so, to lesser eyes than those of the picture.

"It is virgin forest, mostly deciduous," said Charles Longbank, "and I do not believe that there is any such temperate forest on any large river in the world today. It would have been logged out. I do not believe that there were many such stretches even in the nineteenth century. Yet I have a feeling that it is a faithful copy of something, and not imaginary."

The rolling shores: cottonwood trees, slash pine, sycamore, slippery elm, hackberry, pine again.

"When I get very many of the pictures, Charley, you will put them on film and analyze them or have some kind of computer do it. You will be able to tell from the sun's angle what order the pictures should have been in, and how big are the gaps in between."

"No, Leo, they would all have to reflect the same hour of the same day to do that."

"But it was all the same hour of the same day," Ginger Nation cut in. "How could you take one picture at two hours of two days?"

"She's right, Charley," Leo Nation said. "All the pictures of the genuine sort are pieces of one original authentic picture. I've known that all along."

Rolling shore of pine, laurel oak, butternut, persimmon, pine again.

"It is a striking reproduction, whatever it is," Charles Longbank said, "but I'm afraid that after a while even this would become as monotonous as repeating wallpaper."

"Hah," said Leo. "For a smart man you have dumb eyes, Charley. Every tree is different, every leaf is different. All the trees are in young leaf too. It's about a last-week-of-March picture. What it hangs on, though, is what part of the river it is. It might be a third-week-in-March picture, or a first-week-in-April. The birds, old Charley who know everything, why don't we pick up more birds in this section? And what birds are those there?"

"Passenger pigeons, Leo, and they've been gone for quite a few decades. Why don't we see more birds there? I've a humorous answer to that, but it implies that this thing is early and authentic. We don't see more birds because they are too well camouflaged. North America is today a bird watchers' paradise because very many of its bright birds are later European intrusions that have replaced native varieties. They have not yet adjusted to the native backgrounds, so they stand out against them visually. Really, Leo, that is a fact. A bird can't adapt in a short four or five hundred years. And there are birds, birds, birds in that, Leo, if you look sharp enough."

"I look sharp to begin with, Charley; I just wanted you to look sharp."

"This rolling ribbon of canvas or whatever is about six feet high, Leo, and I believe the scale is about one to ten, going by the height of mature trees and other things."

"Yeah, I think so, Charley. I believe there's about a mile of river shore in each of my good pictures. There's things about these pictures though, Charley, that I'm almost afraid to tell you. I've never been quite sure of your nerves. But you'll see them for yourself when you come to examine the pictures closely."

"Tell me those things now, Leo, so I'll know what to look for."

"It's all there, Charley, every leaf, every knob of bark, every spread of moss. I've put parts of it under a microscope, ten power, fifty power, four hundred power. There's detail that you couldn't see with your bare eyes if you had your nose right in the middle of it. You can even see cells of leaf and moss. You put a regular painting under that magnification and all you see is details of pigment, and canyons and mountains of brush strokes. Charley, you can't find a brush stroke in that whole picture! Not in any of the real ones."

It was rather pleasant to travel up that river at the leisurely equivalent rate of maybe four miles an hour. Actually the picture rolled past them at about half a mile an hour. Rolling bank and rolling trees, pin oak, American elm, pine, black willow, staining willow.

"How come there is shining willow, Charley, and no white willow, you tell me that?" Leo asked.

"If this is the Mississippi, Leo, and if it is authentic, then this must be a far northern sector of it."

"Naw. It's Arkansas, Charley. I can tell Arkansas anywhere. How come there was shining willow in Arkansas?"

"If that is Arkansas, and if the picture is authentic, it was colder then."

"The white willow is a European introduction, though a very early one, and it spread rapidly. There are things in this picture that check too well. The three good pictures that you have, they are pretty much alike?"

"Yeah, but they are not quite the same stretch of river. The sun's angle is a little different in each of them, and the sod and the low plants are a little different."

"You think you will be able to get more of the pictures?"

"Yeah, I think more than a thousand miles of river was in the picture. I think I get more than a thousand sections if I know where to look."

"Probably most have been destroyed long ago, Leo, if there were ever more than the dozen or so that were advertised by the carnivals. And probably there were duplications in that dozen or so. Carnivals changed their features often, and your three pictures may be all that there ever were. Each could have been exhibited by several carnivals and in several hippodromes at different times."

"Nah, there were more, Charley. I don't have the one with the elephants in it yet. I think there are more than a thousand of them somewhere. I advertise for them (for originals, not the cheap-jack imitations), and I will begin to get answers."

"How many there were, there still are," said Ginger Nation. "They will not destroy. One of ours has the reel burned by fire, but the picture did not burn. And they won't burn."

"You might spend a lot of money on a lot of old canvas, Leo," said Charles Longbank. "But I will analyze them for you: now, or when you think you have enough of them for it."

"Wait till I get more, Charley," said Leo Nation. "I will make a clever advertisement. 'I take those things of your hands,' I will say, and I believe that people will be glad to get rid of the old things that won't burn and won't destroy, and weigh a ton each with reels. It's the real ones that won't destroy. Look at that big catfish just under the surface there, Charley! Look at the mean eyes of that catfish! The river wasn't as muddy then even if was springtime and the water was high."

Rolling shore and trees: pine, dogwood, red cedar, bur oak, pecan, pine again, shagbark hickory. Then the rolling picture came to an end.

"A little over twenty minutes I timed it," said Charles Longbank.

"Yes, a yokel of the past century might have believed that the picture was a mile long, or even five or nine miles long."

"Nah," said Leo. "They were smarter then, Charley; they were smarter then. Most likely that yokel would have believed that it was a little less than a furlong long, as it is. He'd have liked it, though. And there may be pieces that are five miles long or nine miles long. Why else would they have advertised them? I think I can hit the road and smell out where a lot of those pictures are. And I will call in sometimes and Ginger can tell me who have answered the advertisements. Come here again in six months, Charley, and I will have enough sections of the river for you to analyze. You won't get lonesome in six months, will you, Ginger?"

"No. There will be the hay cutters, and the men from the cattle auctions, and the oil gaugers, and Charley Longbank here when he comes out, and the men in town and the men in the Hill-Top Tavern. I won't get lonesome."

"She jokes, Charley," said Leo. "She doesn't really fool around with the fellows."

"I do not joke," said Ginger. "Stay gone seven months, I don't care."

Leo Nation did a lot of traveling for about five months. He acquired fifty genuine sections of the river and he spent quite a few thousands of dollars on them. He went a couple of years into hock for them. It would have been much worse had not many people given him the things and many others had sold them to him for very small amounts. But there were certain stubborn men and women who insisted on a good price. This is always the hazard of collecting, the thing that takes most of the fun out of it. All these expensively acquired sections were really prime pieces and Leo could not let himself pass them by.

How he had located so many pieces is his own mystery, but Leo Nation did really have a nose for these things. He smell them out; and all collectors of all things must have such long noses.

There was a professor man in Rolla, Missouri, who had rugged his whole house with pieces of a genuine section.

"That sure is tough stuff, Nation," the man said. "I've been using it for rugs for forty years and it isn't worn at all. See how fresh the trees still are! I had to cut it up with a chain saw, and I tell you that it's tougher than ally wood in the world for all that it's nice and flexible."

"How much for all the rugs, for all the pieces of pieces that you have?" Leo asked uneasily. There seemed something wrong with using the pieces for rugs, and yet this didn't seem like a wrong man.

"Oh, I won't sell you any of my rugs, but I will give you pieces of it, since you're interested, and I'll give you the big piece I have left. I never could get anyone much interested in it. We analyzed the material out at the college. It is a very sophisticated plastic material. We could reproduce it, or something very like it, but it would be impossibly expensive, and plastics two-thirds as tough are quite cheap. The funny thing, though, I can trace the history of the thing back to quite a few decades before any plastic was first manufactured in the world. There is a big puzzle there, for some man with enough curiosity to latch onto it."

"I have enough curiosity; I have already latched onto it," Leo Nation said. "That piece you have on the wall -- it looks like -- if only I could see it under magnification --"

"Certainly, certainly, Nation. It looks like a swarm of bees there, and it is. I've a slide prepared from a fringe of it. Come and study it. I've shown it to lots of intelligent people and they all say 'So what?' It's all attitude that I can't understand."

Leo Nation studied the magnification with delight. "Yeah," he said. "I can even see the hairs on the bees' legs. In one flaking-off piece there I can even make out the cells of a hair." He fiddled with low and high magnifications for a long while. "But the bees sure are funny ones," he said. "My father told me about bees like that once and I thought he lied."

"Our present honeybees are of late European origin, Nation," the man said. "The native American bees were funny and inefficient from a human viewpoint. They are not quite extinct even yet, though. There are older-seeming creatures in some of the scenes."

"What are the clown animals in the piece on your kitchen floor?" Leo asked. "Say, those clowns are big!"

"Ground Sloths, Nation. They set things as pretty old. If they are a hoax, they are the grandest hoax I ever ran into. A man would have to have a

pretty good imagination to give a peculiar hair form to all extinct animal -- a flair form that living sloths in the tropics just do riot have. But how many lifetimes would it have taken to paint even a square foot of this in such microscopic detail? There is no letdown anywhere, Nation; there is prodigious detail in every square centimeter of it."

"Why are the horses so small and the buffaloes so big?"

"I don't know, Nation. It would take a man with a hundred sciences to figure it out, unless a man with a hundred sciences had hoaxed it. And where was such a man two hundred and fifty years ago?"

"You trace your piece that far back?"

"Yes. And the scene itself might well be fifteen thousand years old. I tell you that this is a mystery. Yes, You can carry those scraps with you if you wish, and I'll have the bale that's the remaining big piece freighted up to your place."

There was a man in Arkansas who had a section of the picture stored in a cave. It was a tourist-attraction cave, but the river shore picture had proved a sour attraction.

"The people all think it is some sort of movie projection I have set up here in my cave here," he said. "'Who wants to come down in a cave to see movies,' they say. 'If we want to see a river shore we will go see a river shore,' they say, 'we won't come down in a cave to see it.' Well, I thought it would be a good attraction, but it wasn't. "

"How did you get it in here, man?" Leo Nation asked him. "That passage just isn't big enough to bring it in."

"Oh, it was already here, rock rollers and all, fifteen years ago when I broke out that little section to crawl through. "

"Then it had to be here a very long time. That wall has formed since."

"Nah, not very long," the mail said. "These limestone curtains form fast, what with all the moisture trickling down here. The thing could have been brought in here is recent as five hundred years ago. Sure, I'll sell it. I'll even break out a section so we can get it out. I have to make the passage big enough to walk in anyhow. Tourists don't like to crawl on their bellies in caves. I don't know why. I always liked to crawl on my belly in caves."

This was one of the most expensive sections of the picture that Nation bought. It would have been even more expensive if he had shown any interest in certain things seen through trees in one sequence of the picture. Leo's heart had come up into his mouth when he had noticed those things, and he'd had to swallow it again and maintain his wooden look. This was a section that had elephants on the Mississippi River.

The elephant (*Mammuth americanum*) was really a mastodon, Leo had learned that much from Charles Longbank. Ah, but now he owned the elephants; now he had one of the key pieces of the puzzle.

You find a lot of them in Mexico. Everything drifts down to Mexico when it gets a little age on it. Leo Nation was talking with a rich Mexican man who was as Indian as himself.

"No, I don't know where the Long Picture first came from," the man said, "but it did come from the North, somewhere in the region of the River itself. In the time of De Soto (a little less than five hundred years ago) there was still Indian legend of the Long Picture, which he didn't understand. Yourselves of the North, of course, are like children. Even the remembering tribes of you like the Caddos have memories no longer than five hundred years.

"We ourselves remember much longer than that. But as to this, all that we remember is that each great family of its took a section of the Long Picture along when we came to Mexico. That was, perhaps, eight hundred years ago that we came south as conquerors. These pictures are now like treasures

to the old great Indian families, like hidden treasures, memories of one of our former homes. Others of the old families will not talk to you about them. They will even deny that they have them. I talk to you about it, I show it to you, I even give it to you because I am a dissident, a sour man, not like the others."

"The early Indian legcilds, Don Caetano, did they say where the Long Picture came from or who painted it?"

"Sure. They say it was painted by a very peculiar great being, and his name (hold onto your capelo) was Great River Shore Picture Painter. I'm sure that will help you. About the false or cheap-jack imitations for which you seem to have contempt, don't. They are not what they seem to you, and they were not done for money. These cheap-jack imitations are of Mexican origin, just as the staining originals were born in the states. They were done for the new great families in their aping of the old great families, in the hope of also sharing in ancient treasure and ancient luck. Having myself just left off aping great families of another sort, I have a bitter understanding of these imitations. Unfortunately, they were done in an age that lacked art, but the contrast would have been as great in any case: all art would seem insufficient beside that of the Great River Shore Picture Painter himself.

"The cheap-jack imiation pictures were looted by gringo soldiers of the U.S. Army during the Mexican War, as they seemed to be valued by certain Mexican families. From the looters they found their way to mid-century cariiivals in the States."

"Don Caetano, do you know that the picture segments stand up under great magnification, that there are details in them far too fine to be seen by the unaided eye?"

"I am glad you say so. I leave always had this on faith but I've never had enough faith to put it to the test. Yes, we have always believed the pictures contained depths within depths."

"Why are there Mexican wild pigs in this view, Don Caetano? It's as though this one had a peculiar Mexican slant to it."

"No, the peccary was an all-American pig, Leo. It went all the way north to the ice. But it's been replaced by the European pig everywhere but in our own wilds. You want the picture? I will have my man load it and ship it to your place. "

"Ah, I would give you something for it surely --"

"No, Leo, I give it freely. You are a man that I like. Receive it, and God be with you! Ah, Leo, in parting, and since you collect strange things, I have here a box of bright things I think you might like. I believe they are no more than worthless garnets, but are they not pretty?"

Garnets? They were not garnets. Worthless? Then why did Leo Nation's eyes dazzle and his heart come up in his throat? With trembling hands he turned the stones over and worshipped. And when Don Caetano gave them to him for the token price of one thousand dollars, his heart rejoiced.

You know what? They really were worthless garnets. But what had Leo Nation thought that they were in that fateful moment? What spell had Don Caetano put on him to make him think they were something else?

Oh well, you win here and you lose there. And Don Caetano really did ship the treasured picture to him free.

Leo Nation came home after five months of wandering and collecting.

"I stand it without you for five months," Ginger said. "I could not have stood it for six months, I sure could not have stood it for seven. I kidded. I didn't really fool around with the fellows. I had the carpenter build another hay barn to hold the pieces of picture you sent in. There were more than fifty of them." Leo Nation had his friend Charles Longbank come out.

"Fifty seven new ones, Charley," Leo said. "That makes sixty with what I had before. Sixty miles of river shore I have now, I think. Analyze

them, Charley. Get the data out of them somehow and feed it to your computers. First I want to know what order they go in, south to north, and how big the gaps between them are."

"Leo, I tried to explain before, that would require (besides the presumption of authenticity) that they were all done at the same hour of the same day."

"Presume it all, Charley. They were all done at the same time, or we will assume that they were. We will work on that presumption."

"Leo, ah -- I had hoped that you would fail in your collecting. I still believe we should drop it all."

"Me, I hoped we would succeed, Charley, and I hoped harder. Why are you afraid of spooks? Me, I meet them every hour of my life. That's what keeps the air fresh."

"I'm afraid of it, Leo. All right, I'll get some equipment out here tomorrow, but I'm afraid of it. Damn it, Leo, who was here?"

"Wasn't anybody here," Ginger said. "I tell you like I tell Charley, I was only kidding, I don't really fool around with fellows."

Charles Longbank got some equipment out there the next day. Charles himself was looking bad, maybe whiskeyed up a little bit, jerky, and looking over his shoulder all the time as though he had an owl perched on the back of his neck. But he did work several days running the picture segments and got them all down on scan film. Then he would program his computer and feed the data from the scan films to it.

"There's a shadow, like a thin cloud on several of the pictures," Leo Nation said. "You any idea what it is, Charley?"

"Leo, I got out of bed late last night and ran two miles up and down that rocky back road of yours to shake myself up. I was afraid I was getting an idea of what those thin clouds were. Lord, Leo, who was here?"

Charles Longbank took the data into town and fed it to his computers.

He was back in several days with the answers.

"Leo, this spooks me more than ever," he said, and he looked as if the spooks had chewed him from end to end. "Let's drop the whole thing. I'll even give you back your retainer fee."

"No, man, no. You took the retainer fee and you are retained. Have you the order they go in, Charley, south to north?"

"Yes, here it is. But don't do it, Leo, don't do it."

"Charley, I only shuffle them around with my lift fork and put them in order. I'll have it done in an hour."

And in an hour he had it done.

"Now, let's look at the south one first, and then the north one, Charley."

"No, Leo, no, no! Don't do it."

"Why not?"

"Because it scares me. They really do fall into an order. They really could have been done all at the same hour of the same day. Who was here, Leo? Who is the giant looking over my shoulder?"

"Yeah, he's a big one, isn't he, Charley? But he was a good artist and artists have the right to be a little peculiar. He looks over my shoulder a lot too."

Leo Nation ran the southernmost segment of the Long Picture. It was mixed land and water, islands, bayou and swamp, estuary and ocean mixed with muddy river.

"It's pretty, but it isn't the Mississippi," said Leo as it ran.

"It's that other river down there. I'd know it after all these years too."

"Yes," Charles Longbank gulped. "It's the Atchafalaya River. By the comparative sun angle of the pieces that had been closely identified, the computer was able to give close bearings on all the segments. This is the mouth of the Atchafalaya River which has several times in the geological past been the main mouth of the Mississippi. But how did he know if he

wasn't here? Gah, the ogre is looking over my shoulder again. It scares me, Leo."

"Yeah, Charley, I say a man ought to be really scared at least once a day so he can sleep that night. Me, I'm scared for at least a week now, and I like the big guy. Well, that's one end of it, or mighty close to it. Now we take the north end."

"Yes, Charley, yes. The only thing that scares you is that they're real. I don't know why he has to look over our shoulders when we run them, though. If he's who I think he is he's already seen it all."

Leo Nation began to run the northernmost segment of the river that he had.

"How far north are we in this, Charley?" he asked.

"Along about where the Cedar River and the Iowa River later came in."

"That all the farther north? Then I don't have any segment of the north third of the river?"

"Yes, this is the furthest north it went, Leo. Oh god, this is the last one."

"A cloud on this segment too, Charley? What are they anyhow? Say, this is a pretty crisp scene for springtime on the Mississippi."

"You look sick, Long-Charley-Bank," Ginger Nation said. "You think a little whiskey with possum's blood would help you?"

"Could I have the one without the other? Oh, yes, both together, that may be what I need. Hurry, Ginger."

"It bedevils me still how any painting could be so wonderful," Leo wondered.

"Haven't you caught on yet, Leo?" Charles shivered. "It isn't a painting."

"I tell you that at the beginning if you only listen to me," Ginger Nation said. "I tell you it isn't either one, canvas or paint, it is only picture. And Leo said the same thing once, but then he forgets. Drink this, old Charley."

Charles Longbank drank the healing mixture of good whiskey and possum's blood, and the northernmost section of the river rolled on.

"Another cloud on the picture, Charley," Leo said. "It's like a big smudge in the air between us and the shore."

"Yes, and there will be another," Charles moaned. "It means we're getting near the end. Who were they, Leo? How long ago was it? Ah -- I'm afraid I know that part pretty close -- but they couldn't have been human then, could they? Leo, if this was just an inferior throwaway, why are they still hanging in the air?"

"Easy, old Charley, easy. Man, that river gets chalky and foamy! Charley, couldn't you transfer all this to microfilm and feed it into your computers for all sorts of answers?"

"Oh, God, Leo, it already is!"

"Already is what? Hey what's the fog, what's the mist? What is it that bulks up behind the mist? Man, what kind of blue fog-mountain --?"

"The glacier, you dummy, the glacier," Charles Longbank groaned. And the northernmost segment of the river came to all end. "Mix up a little more of that good whiskey and possum's blood, Ginger," Leo Nation said. "I think we're all going to need it."

"That old, is it?" Leo asked a little later as they were all strangling on the very strong stuff.

"Yes, that old, " Charles Longbank jittered. "Oh, who was here, Leo?"

"And, Charley, it already is what?"

"It already is microfilm, Leo, to them. A rejected strip, I believe."

"Ah, I can understand why whiskey and possum's blood never caught on

as a drink," Leon said. "Was old possum here then?"

"Old possum was, we weren't." Charles Longbank shivered. "But it seems to me that something older than possum is snuffing around again, and with a bigger snuffer."

Charles Longbank was shaking badly. One more thing and he would crack. "The clouds on the -- ah -- film, Charley, what are they?" Leo Nation asked.

And Charles Longbank cracked.

"God over my head," he moaned out of a shivering face, "I wish they were clouds on the film. Ah, Leo, Leo, who were they, who were they?"

"I'm cold, Charley," said Leo Nation. "There's bonechill draft from somewhere."

The marks... too exactly like something, and too big to be: the loops and whorls that were eighteen feet long....

FROG ON THE MOUNTAIN

He woke to mountains, as the poet says. Really, there is nothing like it. The oceans and the lowlands were made long ago, according to legend. But the mountains are made new every morning.

It took some doing. His name was Garamask, and he had done it.

"I hate space," Garamask had said when he decided on it, and the crewmen had been surprised.

"Why do you, Mr. Garamask?" the Captain had asked him. "You've logged more time in space than I have. You've been to many more regions. And you've made more money in the space business than anyone I know. I never saw a man so eager for voyages or for new worlds as you. You're so expansive a person that I thought you were in love with the expanse of space.

"I love movement and travel," Garamask said. "I love worlds! But in space, the feel of movement and the sense of travel is quickly lost And space is not expansive. It is shriveling.

"I have, let us say, a passion for a certain unkempt and mountainous world, but space comes near to destroying that passion in me; for I have seen that world appear on the scope like a microbe, and I will watch it disappear like a microbe again. I have studied epic and towering things under the microscope. And when I put away the microscope, I know that the towering things are really too small to see. From the aspect of space, all the towering and wild worlds that I love are things too small to see or to believe in. I love a big world, and I hate space for spoiling that bigness."

"Paravata isn't so big a world, Mr. Garamask," the Captain told him.

"It is! It's big! It's huge!" Garamask insisted. "And I'll not have it spoiled. It is the largest possible world on the man-scale, and I will not let that scale suffer by comparison. It's a world as large as a man can get around on with ease, without becoming less than a man. It's half again Earth's gravity, so it calls out our strength. It has an atmosphere that keeps one on an oxygen binge, so it gives the strength something to draw on. It has mountains that rise ten thousand meters, the highest mountains anywhere that a man can climb in his proper body and without apparatus.

"And I won't have it spoiled for me! I'm rich enough that you can't regard me as a nuisance. I've given my instructions. So, follow them as regards me."

"Mr. Garamask, weren't you ever young?" the Captain asked him.

"I am young yet, Captain. I am physically the fittest man on this ship. And this is a very young and aspiring idea that I am effecting now."

"Ah, were you never something else, Mr Garamask, not quite so young, and much more awkward?"

"I don't know what you mean, Captain, but I suspect that I never was. Follow my instructions."

The instructions of Garamask were that he be sent into a sustaining sleep, and that he be landed and lodged on Paravata of the Mountains while he slept. He did not know when Paravata was picked up microbe-sized nor when

it grew a hundred million times to the size of a pea. He did not see the planet grow to twice the size of Earth. He missed the landing.

He was taken from the ship at Paravata Landing and transported a hundred kilometers to the mountain lodge. He was installed there as befitted a man of means. He slept a determined number of hours, as he had planned it, and he woke in the very early morning. He woke to mountains.

He went out into the keen air of Paravata or Paravath, finding himself in the middle of the small town of Mountain-Foot. He had a warrant for arrest and death in his wallet; and he had a singing curiosity about this world whose vital civilization had suddenly been frozen in motion, whose people, the Rogha (the elites, the excellent ones), had disappeared or very nearly disappeared and whose place had been taken by the oafish Oganta, and this almost within living memory. He was on a hunting trip in depth: he would hunt: on the three stage mountain to kill Sinek the cat-lion; Riksino the bear, Shasos the eagle-condor, and Bater-Jeno the crag-ape or the frog-man (depending on the translation). This was said to be the most challenging hunt in the galaxy. And most likely he would die on the triple mountain, for no human hunter had ever bagged all four of the creatures and survived the thing; though Oganta hunters were said to have done the trick.

On the second level, Gararnask was hunting for the answer to the riddle: what had happened to the Rogha elites? Could those few who were left not be strengthened in their hold? Could their civilization not be unfrozen? Might it not be discovered what queer hold the oafish Oganta had over this Hogha remnant? How had the excellent ones fallen (willingly, it was said) to their inferiors?

On the third level, Garamask was hunting for a murderer, the Oganta, Rogha, Animal, or Man who had killed Allyn. Allyn had been a close friend, but Garamask had not realized how close until after the event. It had been given out that Allyn, on the same hunt, had been killed by the Bater-Jeno, the crag-ape or the frog-man. Allyn, however, had newly appeared to Garamask in a rhapsody-dream and said that this was not so. He had been killed, said Allyn, by his guide and hunting companion, who had been an Oganta named Ocras, but who might not now be in Oganta form.

"I believe that we have been close," Allyn had said, "though we never spoke of our closeness. Avenge me, Garamask, and take the lid off the mystery of Paravath. I was so very close to uncovering the mystery myself." "What had you found, Allyn?" Garamask had asked; but appearances in dreams often seem hard of hearing; they speak but they do not listen.

"Uncover it, Garamask," Allyn had repeated, "and avenge me. I was so close to it. He ate into the base of my skull and so killed me. He ate my very brains as I died." "But what did you find when you came so close, Allyn?" Garamask had asked once more. "Tell me what you had going, so I will know what to look for." "I was so close to it when I died," Allyn said.

Apparitions are as stone-deaf. They speak their message but they do not hear. You may have noticed this yourself.

Garamask was not a great believer in dreams, but he had desired this hunt for a long time; he had, in fact, intended to accompany Allyn on his hunt, but had been prevented by affairs. And he had known at the time of the dream, had not known till he had gone carefully over the report, that Allyn had indeed been killed by having his skull eaten into. Now Garamask tested it a little.

"My guide, will he be Ocras?" he asked the gangling Oganta who was manager of the hunting lodge.

"Ocras? No, he is no longer a guide. He has been translated out of this life."

"But there was a guide named Ocras?"

"There was one time a guide named Ocras, who is no more. Your guide will be Chavo."

But there had been a guide named Ocras, and Garamask hadn't known the name except in the rhapsody-dream. Then Garaniask saw one of the Rogha

survivors walking proudly in the early keen air. He went to him at once meeting him on a rocky slope.

"I have an intense interest in you and all your kind,"

Garamask began. "You yourself are the face of the mystery. You are imposing in a way that I could never be; I can see why you are called the elite, the excellent ones. You are so startlingly in contrast to the Oganta here that everyone for worlds around is puzzled over it. You are kings. They are oafs. Why do they take you over?"

"I suppose it is the day of the oafs, pilgrim-man," the Hogha said easily. "I am Treorai, and you are the man Garamask who made preparations to wake to mountains. You have taken up the challenge of the three-stage mountain. It's a high aspiration to kill the four creatures there. One who has done it will experience a deep change.

"As Allyn did?"

"I knew him when he was here. He did not kill the four creatures. He was killed by the fourth."

"He has told me, outside the lines as it were, that he killed by something other."

"Allyn would not lie, even outside the lines. You have misunderstood him. Did he say that he completed the hunt and killed the fourth creature?"

"He said that he had killed Sinek the lion, Riksino the bear, Shasos the eagle; but, no, he did not say that he had killed the Bater-Jeno. He said, however, that he was murdered by something else."

"No, Garamask, he was killed by the fourth prey. A creature is often fuzzy in his mind about his own manner of dying. He was a wonderful fellow, though, for a man."

"Treorai, why has your civilization come to a grotesque halt? Why have you Rogha, in your manifest superiority all but died out? Why have the rough rampant Oganta taken over? A dozen of them couldn't take one of you. You have the presence that would dumbfound any attack. I can feel it like magnetism. Is it a genetic thing that has happened?"

"A genetic thing, a ghostly thing, a sundering thing really, Garamask. But it isn't finished, and there is no apathy here. What we Rogha have lost, we will regain, by any means whatsoever. This eclipse will pass from us."

"Why don't you simply annihilate the Oganta, Treorai?"

"You are an educated man, Garamask, but your speaking of the Paravath language is imperfect. I simply do not understand your question. I have some World-English, if that would help."

"Treorai, why do you Rogha not simply annihilate the Oganta?" Garamask asked the excellent Rogha in World-English.

"No, Garamask, I have not so much of the idiom as I thought," said Treorai. "Your question is simply incomprehensible in whatever language it is put. Ah, your guide has peeped out to see if you are ready. Grab him quickly, or he will go in and be back to sleep again. The Oganta are not morning types. And the sun should not find you still at Mountain-Foot. It should find you at least two hundred meters aloft. See that ledge there! It is a wonderful place to catch first sun."

"I see that it will be," said Garamask. "And it will take some inspired climbing to get there in time. If I live I will see you again, excellent one."

"High hunting, Garamask! A very strong hunter with a very good guide may kill the first three creatures. To kill the fourth, the hunter must transcend himself."

Garamask started up the Mountain Domba (the first mountain of the three-mountain complex) with Chavo his booming Oganta guide. The Oganta are rangy and solid creatures, and strength and endurance is their birth-right. Say what you will about the loud oafs, they are strong climbers! And Garamask was a very strong man who had climbed on heavier-than-World worlds before. And ah, there is sometimes an advantage in knowing the Paravath

language imperfectly. Garamask could tune Chavo out. It took all his attention to follow the language, and his attention was mercifully on many other things as they went up. And yet Chavo laughed and boomed incessantly, like boulders clashing together.

A queer and unfinished looking creature was this tuned out. The Oganta climbed, clawed and daggered and fanged and armored. That was the best way then. Garamask did likewise. He didn't envy the Oganta his youth and towering strength. Garamask had his own strength and he enjoyed testing it. But he envied the Oganta, a little, his fangs. Garamask had no such giant canine teeth to support the giant saber-fangs. He had no such bull-bowed neck, nor skull-massif, nor buttressed and ridged upper jaw to support such sabers. But he had donned a pretty good set of fangs himself and he believed he would know how to use them.

From one jagged turning, Garamask caught a dizzy view of Daingean City far away. The excellent Rogha had been builders at least equal to men. Now their cities were almost emptied of them, and the oafish Oganta lived in them like animals denning. Then the jagged turning became even more jagged, and Garamask could not afford another glance at the city.

They ate aran-moss and cobble-moss, and pods of tiger grass. They chewed green coill-nuts for water. They climbed high and hard. Then Garamask caught the whiff and the spoor of the spook animals, and he knew it out of the cellar of his mind.

"Ah, this is the world you live on," he breathed, "and you are not imaginary at all. Animal who is no animal, I know what you are." Garamask slavered when he called out because of the great fangs capped to his dog teeth. "The old Creeks called you the all-animal, and pictured you as made out of parts of many. And men said you were the Asian lion, or leopard, or tiger, or rock-lion, or American puma. And all the time you were yourself, the legend animal."

"Who do you talk to, Papa Garamask?" Chavo asked in some alarm. "Do you talk to the grandfather of Sinek?"

"To the great-great-grandfather of Sinek, oaf. In the rain forests, they told poor men that your name was jaguar, but the poor men knew better. In the old South of the Conglomerate States on World, they told that your name was puma or cougar, but the poor cracker-men always knew your real species. Spook animal, I come after you!"

"Papa Garamask throw but a rock into the thicket and it will slink off. It is only one of the sineks, it is not Sinek himself. He seldom hunts so low or so early. And do not talk to the grandfather of Sinek, or he will come in your dreams and eat through your live throat and kill you."

"Damn you, oaf, it is Sinek himself! He hunts low and early today. Grandfather of all the animals, I fight you now! Panther!"

And Garamask charged upward, across a slide of moss-covered rocks, into a tall thicket of tiger-grass and coill-bush, to fight panther, the animal who exists only in legend and misnomer. On Paravath he used the name Sinek.

It was a long black male. This was no sinek who would bound away, who would not stand. This was Sinek himself, and now Garamask understood why there could be only one of him at a time. The spook, the spirit filled this animal completely, with nothing left over for any other.

Garamask drew first blood, clawing the black panther half blind, getting his elbow dagger inside the panther's mouth, trying always to stay inside the animal's forepaws. Panther got one side of Garamask's head, above the throat armor, inside his mouth, failed to hold, slid bloodily along it, popped it out, and took an ear off neatly. The animal would weigh a hundred and fifty kilograms here, a hundred on Earth, just about Garamask's own weight. Panther, Sinek, knocked Garamask loose, and he slid on the loose rocks and moss, very nearly off the mountain to his death. Then they were in confrontation.

Sinek was upground of Garamask on the edge of the firm rock; and

Garamask was on the loose-rock fringe that slipped and cascaded and was now flowing over the edge like water. Chavo, the Oganta oaf, was chewing a blade of tiger-grass and laughing.

It was with amazement that Garamask saw intelligence, almost total intelligence, in the eyes of Sinek the panther. This was a person and a personage, whatever the species. The intelligent look was almost friendly to Garamask, and the two understood each other. They would fight to the death, but they recognized each other for what they were, excellent ones, superior ones, Panther, Man, Rogha, firstlings, not to be compared to Oganta or Swine or Sloths.

Garamask made the attempt to break out of his sliding strip. He exchanged terrific clawing blows with Sinek, got the worse of it, and came much nearer to going off the mountain as he slid reeling back.

"Fear you nothing, Papa Garamask," the Oganta Chavo called from where he had scrambled higher. "I will roll boulders down on Sinek and kill him." And Chavo did roll boulders, badly, inaccurately, dangerously. Then Garamask understood from the oafish laughter that Chavo was trying to kill him and not Sinek; trying to knock the man off the mountain with the rolling boulders, or to induce a rockslide that would carry him irrevocably down.

With a mixture of stark terror and upsurging courage that was peculiar to himself in moments of deep crisis, Garamask battled up the sliding rocks, greatly impeded by his arms, and closed with Sinek the panther again.

"I am as large, I am as strong, I am as armed, dammit, I am as animal!" Garamask gibbered. "We close together, good comrade. If I go off the mountain, you go off it too."

But Garamask was wrong. The panther was more animal than he. It was doing him to death in the close fighting, though puzzled by the throat and crotch armor. "Who waits below to eat out my skull, Chavo?" Garamask howled out furiously. "Who waits below to crack my skull and eat my brains? That is not Sinek here. It is scavengers below me, and a scavenger above me, you!"

"Papa Garamask," Chavo chortled in a booming giggle from above, "fear you nothing. I will roll boulders down on Sinek and kill him." And Chavo was rolling boulders down on them both, grappled together, to kill them both.

Garamask was losing, slipping. He broke off his capping fangs and his own canine teeth under them tried to slash through the sinews of panther; and he was choked on his own sudden blood. He raked the animal with elbow, knee, toe, and heel daggers, and was nearly disemboweled by a back foot of Sinek that equaled all the dagger functions. For the last time he broke free from the slashing, smashing panther and rolled in a stream of scree, trying to keep himself on the mountain.

Chavo set a large boulder at him to help him over the edge. Sinek the panther came lithely for the kill, and caught the boulder amidships as he flicked himself sly-footed along the edge of firm rock. And Sinek could not halt himself when he was knocked heavily into the sliding rock stream. Sinek the panther flowed off the mountain and fell into gaping space.

"Papa Garamask, I save your life," Chavo the Oganta chortled from above. "Now I must make certain that Sinek is really dead where he has fallen so far below. I will roll yet more boulders down on him, and down on him till I am sure that he is dead." And Chavo rolled boulders down at Garamask to knock him off the mountain; and the man scrambled in the sliding scree to avoid them. Three, six, nine boulders Chavo rolled down at Garamask, and then he had trouble in getting a fine boulder loose from its embedment. Garamask found a hidden spur of solid rock and went up quickly. Chavo turned, and they were on a level face to face: Garamask bloody and crippled and earless, and full of muskiness and ghostliness, for part of the spook of Sinek, falling to death, had passed into Garamask. And Chavo, what can you say of the oaf Chavo of the species Oganta? Could he meet Garamask's eyes? No, but he never could have; all Oganta are wall-eyed. Did

he blanch at the encounter? How can you tell with an Oganta? But the light blue bloom that was his complexion had lost a little of its sheen.

"Why do you pause, guide Chavo?" Garamask asked as a waiting volcano might ask. "We go up, we go up! We have not yet reached the top of the first mountain of Three-Mountain. We have killed only one of the four prey. We go up, we go up!"

They went up. They wore out the day with their climbing. They saw sineks and sineks who bounded away from them and would not stand. But they did not meet Sinek himself again that day. Sinek was dead for the while. Garamask took off his weapons and armor pieces and hooked them into his belt. Thereafter he climbed more easily. And just at last sun they came to the top of Domba Mountain, the first mountain of Three-Mountain.

It was a high plateau; it was another mountain-foot, for out of it rose the Mountain Giri, the second mountain of Three-Mountain. They ate bitter mountain rations and chewed green coill-nuts for water. They bedded down for the night, so Garamask thought.

But Chavo brought a stringed instrument from his pack and began some of the twangingest and most nauseating noise ever heard. He mixed his bumptious; booming voice with it in a curdling cry, and Garamask; understood that he would not be able to sleep with this.

"You have convinced me, pup," he growled. "You have established one of the universal ultimates -- the most raucous noise ever. But is it necessary that you belabor the point?"

"You do not like it?" Chavo was surprised. "I pride myself on my music and my singing. We consider such to be dynamic perfection and cosmic looseness of sound..

"I consider it something else. The Rogha are said to be the most musical creatures in the universes. How could their co-dwellers here, you Oganta, be the least?"

"I had hoped you would like my music," Chavo sorrowed. "I still hope that you will like me. Reaily, we are likable creatures. Even some of the Rogha have said so, with a certain exasperation, it is true."

"You are crude unlicked calves, Chavo, and I understand your world less and less. Why, and how, are you killing the Rogha? For I believe that to be the case."

"But there are so few of them left, Papa Garamask! And they become fewer and fewer. So is it not imperative that we kill them, much as we respect and love them?"

"If there were millions of them left, would you kill them?"

"No, certainly not. That would be an abomination. Why should we kill them if there were many of them? They are so greatly above us that we will do anything or them."

"Even kill them, Chavo, to show how much you love them? And why did you try to kill me during my battle with Sinek?"

"For mixed reasons. First, you have a dignity of aspect, and you seemed almost like a Rogha to me as you were embattled there. I respect and love you almost as much as I do any of the Rogha. And then, it has been discovered that World-men will do as well as the Rogha for us, and companions of mine were waiting below the crag to tear you apart if you should fall there. And we Oganta have an impulse to kill those whom we find in a position to be killed. Very often we kill other Oganta simply because we find them in a vulnerable position. And this, I believe, is irrational of us."

"I think so too, Chavo. Several small rocks are dancing there on the slope. Do my eyes deceive me? Are they small animals frisking that look so much like rocks?"

"No, they are rocks dancing, Papa Garamask. Your eyes do not deceive you. Here, I will play my hittur again and they dance to it Hear! See! Is that not nimble music, Papa Garamask?"

"I'd call it something else. Dammit, Chavo, must I ask the obvious

question? What makes the rocks dance?"

"I make the rocks dance, Papa Garamask, or my dark companion does. Why are you surprised? The same thing is done on World?"

"If it is, I have not heard of it."

"But it is. On World, so I have been told, one young person in ten has a dark companion, and a World-German name is given to this. But in both cases, the dark companion is a satellite of self. On World, I am told, the fact is often hidden or denied. But here, where the majority of us are capable of projecting the dark satellite, there is no way to hide it. Besides, it is fun. Watch me rock and sway that bush as if I were a wind. See!"

"Weird oaf, you have a poltergeist!" Garamask was interested in this thing.

"Yes, that is your World-word. No, I am a poltergeist. And I am also a visible creature. It used to be that, with time, we would give up one form or the other: stand clear of the dark body and be visible creatures only; or decay the body and be spook only. But now, in the time of waiting of the Oganta, we have both forms, and we are not able to go beyond these forms."

"This is a time of waiting for you, Chavo? What do you wait for?"

"To see what will happen to us. It is a very uneasy time of waiting. It's so narrow a ladder, and so few of us can climb it at one time. And at the top, it is not, what it once was, not what it should be."

"I am going to sleep now, Chavo, and I do not want to hear your damnable instrument or your voice again this night," Garamask said evenly. "But how do I know that you will not kill me while I sleep?"

"Papa Garamask, would an Oganta violate the night!"

"Hell, I don't know what you'd do! I'm going to sleep." And he did sleep, angrily and rapidly and deeply. And in the deepest part of Garamask's sleep, Allyn loomed up there, standing a slight distance up on Giri Mountain. "Watch the raw cub Chavo," the looming Allyn called down to Garamask; "He is not so clever as was Ocras, but you are not so clever as was I." "I am every bit as clever as you, Allyn," Garamask told the appearance. "Now tell me what it was that you were so close to finding out when you died. Give me something to go on." But Allyn did not hear Garamask. He had come to speak and not to listen. "I was so very close to it then, Allyn called again. "Avenge me on Ocras, Garamask, whatever he is now. I'd do as much for you." "I will continue my sleep, Allyn," Garamask told him, "and I do not want to hear any more dead-man talk from you tonight unless you have something new to tell me." And Garamask continued his sleep.

He woke eagerly and easily at first gray light. "First sun should not find me at this mountain-foot either," Garamask told himself silently. "I see the ledge where I should catch first sun. There is always the ledge above; mountaining would not be mountaining without it. Treorai the Rogha told me that the Oganta are not morning types. Let me see."

Garamask hooted and hollered at Chavo, then kicked him awake. Amused, he, watched the oaf fall back to sleep again, then kicked him awake the second time. "It must be my dark companion, it could not be myself who does this." Garamask laughed. "But it is fun." He finally roused the sleepy Chavo. They ate bitter mountain rations.

Clawed and taloned and spiked and armored, they climbed up the Mountain Giri. They took first sun at that ledge above. They rested. Then they climbed again.

Not entirely unpleasant, not so to a man with a strong and traveled nose, not really repugnant; but stark, tall, penetrating, slaving, rampant, murderous, challenging, of a grave-like putridity, of a life-terminal gagging, was the odor, the strong stench that began to pervade the climb on Giri Mountain. There was a person here making himself known. It was Riksino, the cave-bear, the musk-bear, the lord of this middle-mountain. He was at home and he had his flag out.

"No need for me to ask what it is," Garamask said. "He's declared

himself. Did I not already know it, I believe that I could guess his very name from his coded stench. He'll be easily found, and I didn't come on a bunt to bypass such a prey. How is the best way? To go to him directly as he waits, and attack him?"

"Papa Garamask, there isn't any best way to fight Riksino," Chavo quaked. "I, am afraid of this person and have always been. He is much rougher and stronger than Sinek or Shasos, or even than Bater-Jeno. He can be killed, he has been killed, I have had a piece of his killing before. But each time it is a great wonder that he can be killed at all, and each time I go in fear and trembling."

"It's catching, oaf," said Garamask. "I feel, a little fear and trembling myself. We'll skirt above, and we'll hunt down on him from above."

But Garamask was very uneasy himself, and his excitement for this part of the hunt was of a sinking sort. He was sick and fevered today. The breaking off of his fang-sheathed eyeteeth in his yesterday's battle with Sinek had swollen his face from eyes to throat. His whole face and head ached, his throat was sore, and he was slobbering through the unaccustomed gaps. Moreover, his shredded ear was bothering him. Even a very strong man suffers under heavy gravity if he is sick.

And they would have difficulty skirting above Riksino, and hunting down on him from above. Riksino was shuffling upward, keeping pace with them. His personal stench rose higher and higher. They had his location from it pretty well, though they could not yet see him. So they wore out a few tiring hours and ascended most of the mountain.

"This will have to be the Big Riksino, the King Riksino," said Chavo. "None other ever dens so high, and no Riksino will fight except in the mouth of his den. This is the first time that the Big Riksino has returned since he was last killed more than two equivalent years ago."

"You really believe that the same animals return to life?" Garamask asked him.

"The Rogha do not believe it, Papa Garamask, but we Oganta believe it. And yet, it may be that when a Riksino grows larger and stronger than any of the others, he will go up and occupy the old den of the Big Riksino as a sign that he is now the king. I have fought with riksinos before, but never with the Big Riksino, and I am afraid. Be assured that he will be very large and fierce."

"I see him," said Garamask when they had climbed a while further, "and he is big. I'll go after him, since he doesn't seem to make up his mind."

"What you see is not Big Riksino," said Chavo, "and none other will fight while the big one is on the mountain. Besides, as you notice, he has not the full stench."

"It's full enough for me," Garamask gawked out of his sore throat "I'll have him."

Garamask rushed the animal. It reared up roaring, half again the man's height. It batted big paws around in the air and opened a big mouth. Garamask went in low, knifing the back legs of the animal with toes and knees knives, ripping its belly with his skull saber, delivering terrible blows on its loins with his hand claws. The animal toppled over backward, rolled, scrambled up, and ran away howling. And Garamask shambled after it, not at all able to catch it unless it should slow.

"It is no good that you chase it, Papa Garamask," Chavo called. "That is not Big Riksino. It is only a pup that runs away like a pup. Do not waste the day chasing a callow pup."

"I seem to spend several days climbing the mountains with one," Garamask panted. He was tired, and he had been a fool. The real stench, the king stench was still high above him, and he had only blooded a whimpering whelp. He climbed, he climbed. Then the stench stood and prevailed. The riksino person was waiting, quite near.

"We are almost to the top of Giri Mountain" said Garamask, "and his

den cannot be any higher. We will reach that ridge, and we will follow it to the left till we are above him. It's all clear rock above. His den will have to be in that jumble somewhere just below the ridge."

They were onto a fearful and crumbling ledge, crawling along it, Garamask in the lead. It is an awkward sort of crawl with toe and knee sabers in place. Garamask began to sight in on the very large animal. He could hear it panting and gnashing now, and he smelled it overpoweringly. He could hear it scratching big claws on the rocks; he could even hear the blood pounding in it, the strong pulse. But when he first saw it, paralyzingly close, it was the inside of it that he saw.

He was looking into the open mouth of it, a meter across, two meters below him. Then, in a flick, half of Garamask's nose was gone as he peered, fascinated, too close. The animal was in a strain with its forepaws extended as high as he could reach; and one of its high traveling claws had caught the leaning-over Garamask in the face.

Garamask had claws of his own. Angrily he raked the backs of Riksino's paws with his own hand talons when the big bear was extended on the rock as high as he could reach. Using his own bloody face for bait, Garamask counter-clawed every time the bear struck up at him. He found the animal slow and witless. The animal closed its gaping mouth once, drew back its great front limbs, and licked its bleeding paws. Garamask let himself half over the ledge and raked the animal's muzzle terribly with his heel saber. He half-blinded it with the slash, either cutting one of its eyes out or filling it so full of blood that the animal could not use it. And Garamask was back on the ledge before Riksino could slash out at him again.

The riksino bear crouched low on four feet, gathered himself, and leaped up toward the ledge. He got his great forepaws over it and hung on. Garamask slashed the big paws pulpy with his foot sabers, and then gashed the animal full in the face again and again and again as it hung there. The paws slipped off, and the animal slipped back to the lower level. And yet it was of such great, size, had so much blood and meat in it, that this little whittling that Garamask had done could have very little effect on it.

"Bear, you're a stumble-bum, but a big stumble-bum," Garamask talked. "What? What? You're turning something else on? Have you more exudations than your stench? What do you do, bear?"

The riksino bear had reared up again and opened its great mouth. And now it reeked with an influence on another level from its stench.

"Papa Garamask, do not fall!" Chavo called. "Do not fall into the open mouth of the Riksino."

"You fool! Why should I fall into the bear's mouth?" Garamask asked in amazement. "Bear, bear, you turn it on, do you? What are you, an amateur hypnotist? It might get you the birds and the small game, not a man. Turn it on, bear, turn it on as strong as you can! The Garamask will never be so fascinated as to fall into a bear's mouth."

And Garamask fell head-first into the mouth of the riksino bear.

From above there was another roaring, terrified and hysterical, and a third weight came down heavily. From the bowels of the riksino came an agonizing groan; and Garamask was being crushed to death, but not instantly. His skull spike aided him. His elbow sabers, for he was in to the maw of the animal beyond them, did slashing service. Then he was crushed in together in spite of them and his head began to split open. And then he was crushed no more, as his enveloping cosmos went limp.

And after a while lie was climbing again, up to the top of Giri Mountain. He was alive, more or less, and he was dazed and gagging. Had it all been a bloody dream, the fight with Riksino? Chavo was booming as offensively as ever, but the thing had not been a dream.

"I save your life, Papa Garamask," Chavo boomed. "Am I not wonderful? I kill the Big Riksino in the throat while he is straining there to crush you in his gullet. The Big Riksino can think of only one thing at a

time, and the Big Chavo can knife through even the thickest strained sinews very rapidly when he is given a free way to it. There is no other way that Riksino can be killed but by two hunters similarly; but the bait-hunter in the mouth almost always dies."

"You tried to kill me after Sinek had fallen off the mountain to his death, Chavo," Garamask panted. "Why did you not let the Riksino kill me, since you want nie dead?"

"The way the Riksino kills, you would be of no use to us dead," said Chavo. "He devours too rapidly."

"And otherwise I would be of some use to you dead, Chavo?"

"Dead, very freshly dead, or still dying, you would be of greatest use to us," Chavo said blandly. "Dying or new dead, you will represent our ultimate hope."

Just at last sun they came to the top of Giri Mountain, the second mountain of Three-Mountain. They ate bitter mountain rations, and Chavo dabbled medicaments on Garamask's wounds.

"Were you to survive the mountain hunt (and you will not) you could get a new nose made and be beautiful again," said Chavo. "Now, I suppose, you must live noseless until your death the tomorrow sun-fall. Or shall I attempt to make you a surrogate nose from the wood of this thorn-bush here?"

"Don't bother, Chavo. I'm going to sleep."

But Garamask was not going to sleep. Chavo took his stringed hitfur from his pack and played his damnable music and sang.

"Chavo!" Garamask spoke sharply. "Do you know why Spain on World fell from the highest nation in Europe to the lowest within one generation?"

"Perhaps they offended the frog-god."

"No. No, we have no frog-gods on World."

"What? What? Are you sure? No frog-gods on World? You dash me down."

"A devilish Arab, angered by the expulsion of the Arabs from Spain, brought a guitar into that unfortunate country. It was adopted. So that unfortunate country fell, its once noble soul shriveled into a miserable whiney-ness."

"I understand, Papa Garamask," said Chavo, still strumming. "They fell, as though the noble Rogha should fall to become ourselves Oganta."

"A good parallel, Chavo. And once in the Pacific Ocean on World, there was a noble kingdom of Hawaii. A sea-faring man introduced the guitar there, and the noble kingdom soon begged to be accepted into servitude by a land-nation."

"Yes, of course that would be the effect, Papa Garamask. We Oganta would accept such servitude gladly, but there is no longer anyone to accept us into it."

"My own land, the Conglomerate States, fell similarly," said Garamask sadly. "And once it had been a noble land."

"The noble Rogha, of course, despise the instrument," Chavo mourned. "But to us it is the Shetra, the holy instrument. It is our religion. It is our love."

"It is the noise of accepted inferiority in all things."

"Of course it is, Papa Garamask. And who are more or than ourselves, the Oganta? But we will give it up, we promise this, if we are ever able to give up being Oganta."

"Oh, go to sleep, Chavo!"

"But you say that you have no frog-gods on your world, and yet you have frogs? And we have our frog-gods, and, have no frogs except those introduced from World. And these are small frogs that have been imported. The largest of them can be held in the two hands. I dream about the frogs of World. How big are they, Papa Garamask? As big as the King Riksino?"

"Oh no. You've a completely mistaken idea, Chavo. The frogs on World are the same as the frogs imported here from World. The most of them you could hold in one hand."

"Are you sure? They are not as big as myself? They are not even as

big as yourself?"

"No, no, Chavo. They are quite small. I've often wondered about the frog-cult on Paravath. What is the meaning of it?"

"You dash me d6wn again, Papa Garamask. There should be frogs of great size. Why, the frog is the most wondeuful of all creatures! It is the only one that is able to make the frog-leap easily. Oh, may that thing come back to us!"

"Go to sleep, you damnable oaf."

Chavo sighed deeply. "I dream about frogs," he murmured. Then he did seem to go to sleep.

Allyn came then, but he was a thinner and more vapory Allyn than in his previous appearances to Garamask.

"The Shasos, the eagle-condor, isn't very hard to kill," said Allyn. "He will attack you when you are roping up the cliff face, of course; for there is no other time he will fight. If you can belay yourself on the rope, and if you are not overpowered with fear, you have a chance. Wring his neck like a chicken if you can, for he is a chicken.

"But he will rip you apart to get to your kidneys and spleen if he can. Prevent him in this! He will gobble your eyes out of your head. Let him not do this! Let him not do it with both of them, at least, or you are at a disadvantage."

"Allyn, I will go as far as you went," said Garamask. "I'm as good a man as you ever were. Tell me now, what is the mystery at the end of it that you didn't find out till you died? What is peculiar about the final prey, the Bater-Jeno? What were you on to, Allyn?"

But wraiths are notoriously hard of hearing.

"You will do well to weaken the bridge after you have crossed over it, and to keep your gaze always fixed on the back of your head," the dead-man Allyn said. Then he became thinner, and he was gone.

Garamask again woke eagerly and easily at first gray light. His face and his throat were not as sore as they had been. Though bereaved in ear and nose, he was happy. He lifted up his heart to the morning. Enjoyably, he kicked Chavo the Oganta awake, for the Oganta are not morning types.

They ate bitter mountain rations, donned sabers and claws and spikes and armor, and began to climb Bior Mountain, the third and highest mountain of Three-Mountain. Here it was steep and sheer, Bior a saber mountain rising out of its sheath which was Giri Mountain. It was a different sort of hunt now, and a climb in a different element.

There were the slanting slick shields of rock, and the slanting slick grass and cobble-moss. There were the rodents and poke-snakes that ate the grass and the moss and slithered over the rocks. There were the great birds that stood in from the tall skies and ate the rodents and poke-snakes. The greatest of these birds was the Shasos, the eagle-condor.

"Is it with Shasos as it was with the first two prey: that there are many of them, and that there is one special one?" Garamask asked Chavo.

"Yes, it is Shasos himself who will attack, and the others will not. It is the big Shasos himself whom we have to fear, he who nests on the third moon."

"Moon-brained muggledoon! Where do the other Shasos nest, Chavo?"

"On the second moon. The less noble of the large birds nest on first moon, and small birds nest on Paravath itself. I am told that you do not have such large birds as Shasos on World."

"There are no birds on World so large as those three swooping there now, Chavo. Are they Shasos?"

"No, Papa Garamask, they are of the less noble of the big birds, Cejer-Birds. When we are a little higher in the sky we will come to the hunting cliffs of Shasos. Now I will climb up here dangerously, and then I will run a line down. We will be running many of these lines."

The oafish Chavo could climb. He oozed up the overhanging rock like

slightly viscous oil. He climbed with all his armor, and he seemed sure of his grip on these rocks that were slick with cobble-moss.

From forty meters above he let down a line, and Garamask climbed it -- very tiring work.

"What was to keep you from letting me fall with the line?" Garamask asked Chavo when they were up to that next hint of a ledge in the rocks.

"Would an Oganta violate the sanctity of the line?" Chavo asked him.

It was a very long hard day. Garamask went up long lines a dozen times, terrifying overhangs out over nothingness. Slate-gray clouds were below them, and Paravath could no longer be seen below. The grass and cobble-moss became stronger, shattering the rocks with their growth and making them all very soft and dangerous. The rodents and poke-snakes became larger; and there were larger birds that stood in from the stark sky to prey on them. This was fearful exaltation here, stunning height without support. First moon, cragged and misshapen in the day-sky, seemed nearer than the glimpses of Paravath below. Indeed, the little first moon was only eight times the distance from Mountain-Foot.

"There is shasos, and there, and there," said Chavo as they were resting on an imaginary ledge, actually only a band of discoloration on the rock. "But it is not yet Shasos himself. Quite soon he, though."

Garamask followed Chavo up several quite difficult stretches, refusing to let a line be strung. And, then there loomed above them a very long and very difficult overhang that Garamask knew he would never be able to climb.

"It is the line again here, Chavo," he said, "and I hate to be dependent on you. Can even you climb this?"

"I can climb this, and it is the hardest of the climbs. But first I will tell you something here. It is at this place, on the line that I will drop, that you will have your encounter with Shasos. He is out there now, the black dot in the sky, sleeping on furled wings, motionless. But he sleeps with one eye open, and watches. He will attack you midway in your climb up the line. He will rip you apart to get to your kidneys and spleen. He will gobble the eyes out of your head."

"So I've been told by another, Chavo. Yes, I remember birds in legend eating the spleen and liver of a certain one forever."

"I suppose that World-birds and World-gods eat the spleen, Papa Garamask, to bring them through their time of change. Here we require a different food."

Chavo the amazing Oganta climber went up the longest and most dangerous climb, flowing like oil up the cliff. He disappeared and reappeared to Garamask four different times, following the contours of the cliffs, and then he seemed to achieve a real base. Soon the very thin line, one hundred meters of it, came down; and Garamask began the very tiring climb up it.

Halfway up he was arm and leg weary and sick, and he heard the sky-whistle. It was the wings of big Shasos powering toward him. Garamask wrapped his legs in the line, having achieved at that point a slope that supported him slightly, and waited the attack with fist, elbow, and skull knives flashing.

"Like Prometheus bound to the rock for the attack of the great birds!" he said. "And why did I never realize that it had to be a high rock in the sky he was bound to?"

Shasos had a wingspan of perhaps twenty meters, and a great head with sickle jaws. In actual body the bird was about the same size as Garamask.

Shasos was in fast, slashed Garamask deeply over the groin, and Garamask jagged the bird still more deeply in the back of the head. The line twisted with Garamask. On the second swoop Shasos got Garamask in the small of the back, and Garamask countered effectively again into the bird-head. Again, and Shasos gaped open Garamask's lower side, held there, had him now

ripped open fore and aft; and perhaps he did eat somewhat of the spleen. But Garamask smote half through the head of the creature, and Shasos staggered in the air.

"I have you now," Garamask reveled. "You die a-winging. But now you come the last time, and you come for the eyes. You'll gobble them out of my head, will you? 'Do not let him do it to both of them or you will be at a disadvantage,' the dead man Allyn told me. Have at me, chicken! It's the end of you."

Shasos did slash Garamask over his eye, and something was hanging down the man's cheek. Whether it was a fold of flesh or the eye itself Garamask did not know. He had fist claws into the throat of Shasos, into the long stringy neck that was sinewed like a cable. He strained, and the sinews gave a little. Then they gave up completely. He wrung Shasos' neck like a chick for he was a chicken. And the big broken bird fell a leaf toward the slate-gray clouds below.

"I'm ripped up pretty gapingly," Garamask said, "but nothing is looping out of me. I was always a sound man in my entrails. It's up the weary climb again, and to find the fourth prey that is the mystery to me and was the death of Allyn."

So Garamask completed the very tiring climb up the line. He was met by the oafish grinning face of Chavo. They were on top of Bior Mountain, the third mountain of Three-Mountain.

"I have a nice surprise for you," Chavo boomed. "I will ready it for you while you rest."

"I have two surprises for you," said Garamask, "and I will have them ready in due time."

You will do well to weaken the bridge after you have crossed it, and to keep your gaze fixed on the back of your head, the dead man Allyn had said. Chavo was busy with his surprise. Garamask weakened the bridge he had just crossed, the line he had climbed, gashing it with heel saber. He didn't cut it through. It would still, he believed, support his weight going down, if he had guessed wrong, and if he would not have to seek another way down. But the line would not now support a weight several times greater than Garamask's.

"I am soldering a device to a deep boulder," Chavo said. "You from World do not understand rock-soldering, but you will not be able to get this device loose to fling it off the mountain; and you will not be able to silence it."

"And I am doing a thing of my own," said Garamask, and he had cut a small teleor tree with his heel saber and was trimming it with his fist claws. "We are on top of Bior Mountain, Chavo, and it is a small flat top; and there is nobody here but ourselves. Where is the fourth prey, the Bater-Jeno, called either the crag-ape or the frog-man?"

"Bater-Jeno is here," said Chavo. "He sets his signature, as surely as Riksino set his own below."

Garamask had hurriedly sliced a length of line from Chavo's pack as the sound began, a stronger thing than even the stench of Risino. With the line, Garamask lashed the teleor pole to one of his elbow sabers that he had removed. Then it was over him like putrid waves, the gagging cacophony of hittur music and Oganta singing. It was a recorder that Chavo had soldered to the rock, but Garamask had a good long spear now.

"You will not be able to silence the playing, Papa Garamask," Chavo chortled. "It will drive you bugs in your last moments. And Bater-Jeno is here. He is myself. Or he is yourself. Come and face me and we will find out which."

Garamask knocked Chavo down with the butt-end of the teleor-tree spear. Chavo had not even noticed it. Then Garamask put the blade to the Oganta's chest, just below the throat armor.

"You have violated the weapon code," Chavo complained.

"Not really, Chavo. I'll give up my edge and fight the fourth prey

even, after we have talked. If I do go to my death now, I do not want to go fuzzy in my facts as Allyn did. Quick now, Chavo. Talk! Where is the person Ocras who killed Allyn? Is he really dead?"

"Dead? No, Papa Garamask, he is translated. Ocras (the hunger) has become Treorai, a noble Rogha. You have talked to this Treorai. It was he who ate the backbrains of your friend Allyn, and so was transformed."

"Chavo, that hellish music and wailing will burst my brains! What wildness are you saying? The Oganta become Rogha? You are the same species?"

"Pop your head like a pippin, Papa Garamask, drive you bugs. We are the same species, the noble Rogha and the un noble us. We turn into the Rogha, but now we can no longer turn into them. We have lost the ability to make the frog-leap, except under special stimulus."

"Seventh Hell! It's the same noise they have down there. May I never fall so low. What is the frog-mystic, oaf? Talk."

"The frog-leap, it is our transformation from Oganta to Rogha. What other creature, except the holy frog, changes from a form so unbelievable so suddenly? Strangers believe that we are two different species, as they would believe the tadpole and the frog were two different species. We worship the frog as the high sign of ourselves."

"What went wrong, oaf? What happened to the transformations? What is the difficulty now? Fill it all in. Nice spear, isn't it?"

"Nice spear, Papa Garamask, but I cry foul. The difficulty -- perhaps a cosmic difficulty. For one hundred equivalent years no Oganta has turned into a Rogha without special stimulus. We generate as Oganta, and we live out our lives as Oganta, and we are not able to maintain the high civilization of the Rogha. We have lost our adult form, and we try to regain it."

"How, Chavo? What does the murder of Allyn have to do with this? How did the Oganta Ocras become the Rogha Treorai? What was his special stimulus?"

"To eat the back-brains of a Rogha will transform an Oganta into a Rogha, if both are strong and capable. We calculate that there is enough there to transform four Oganta. We have also discovered (Ocras discovered it in becoming Treorai) that eating the back-brains of certain fully-charged World-men will bring on this transformation in us -- those of such World-men who might be able to stay with a mountain-hunt till the fourth prey."

"Lie still, oaf. I'll spear you through. What now will happen to Treorai who was Ocras the murderer of Allyn?"

"What will happen to Chavo, the sun-fall murderer of Papa Garamask? Treorai's time is up, as mine will be after a like period. Treorai has had two equivalent years to grow in wisdom as a Rogha. This very week (he will not know the time) he will be set on and killed, and his back-brains eaten."

"'And to keep your gaze fixed on the back of your head,' the dead-man Allyn told me," Garamask mused. But the Ocras-Treorai will not die so. I will finish the business up here, and then I will go down and arrest the fellow regularly for the murder."

"And in place of one Rogha there will be four," Chavo continued as though he had not heard Garamask. "In this way we will reestablish the Rogha and shorten our time of waiting. When there are again enough Rogha, they in their wisdom will be able to find what went wrong with the transformations; and they will find a less grotesque way to bring them about"

"And you yourself, Papa Garamask, do a good deed in your death this sun-fall. From your death there will spring four new Rogha."

"You violate a code yourself, Chavo. Dying, or freshly dead, I would be good for you. And for four of you? I hear your three companions coming up the line now, so you think you have me fresh? Will the line hold, do you think, Chavo?"

"It will hold. Papa Garamask, you have not violated the code of the line also?"

"Lie still, oaf. Call it what you will. Oh, it will be close, and I

will not slash it again. I stand by my bet. It frays, Chavo, it gives a little, and the highest one of them is so near the top! It gives more! It parts! It breaks! They have fallen, Chavo!"

The Oganta was sobbing and crying noisily on the ground for the death of his friends, and the deathly ineptitude of the recording seemed to give a fitting dirge. Garamask laughed with black amusement, withdrew the spear, unslashed the elbow saber from it and put it on himself again. He looked at the Oganta.

"Get up, Chavo. What is the name of the fourth prey again?"

"It is you, the crag-ape, Papa Garamask, for World-men do look funny to us, and we call you so. Or it is myself, the frog-man, if I can kill you here and now and eat and make the frog-leap. We fight, Papa Garamask, and I eat your back-brains! Hear my battle-cry on the recorder that you cannot turn off! Does it not twang beautiully?"

"Damnable eternal teenagers!" Garamask howled as they closed in bloody battle. "There is enmity between us from the beginning of the worlds! I'll break you down! I'll choke you to death with the strings of your own hittur."

"Papa Garamask, you lie about frogs' size. I be a very big frog here very soon."

They fought in the late day on the top of the needle in the sky, gnashing and knifing in their eschatological fury. And one of them would be dead by sun-fall.