

Well, did you ever watch the way the future comes out of its jug? The jug is of smokey glass or rock crystal. Shapes and forms and movements can be seen in there, and some of the details of it call be guessed. But it is all distorted and deformed. It is the curvature of the smokey glass that deforms the images. No future is ever seen undeformed.

But the globs of the future trying to get out will push each other back, and there will be clotting at the mouth of the jug. Only thin juice will roll out for a while. Then it will break loose and big hunk will come out. But they are never quite as you imagined them to be when you peered through the smokey glass.

Can one cheat to catch an earlier look at what is coming out? One can try. There is a thin leading edge between the devouring present and the waiting future. What happens if one is too eager and crosses this leading edge? The world ends, for that person, for that while.

If this thin line is crossed, then one is out in the narrow interval of unreality. It's a chancey though flexible place there.

Melchisedech Duffey and his history had come up to the absolute present time, and then had gone a thumb's width beyond that, Duffey and his nimbus had gone into the future then? No, they had gone into the shattering state of contingency. It was a fracturing of reality. And it was a fracturing of Melchisedech Duffey.

There has always been a quantity of unreality leaking out of the future into the present. Then the unreality has to be negated, and the reality revived. The reconstructing of reality is what is being talked about when we talk about reconstructing the world.

Duffey had been into the future before, spottily, off and on, for seven years once. And he had returned several times to those same seven years. And yet it was not strictly speaking into the future. It was a mixture of future and past and present. It was an interval or series of intervals removed out of time and held apart. The intervals of Seven Years did not necessarily count in regular time, which is why they could sometimes be revisited. They did not fracture reality. They stood on the far side of reality.

Melchisedech had been on the fourteenth voyage of the Ship Argo, and this fourteenth voyage was technically in the future. And his own ashes had been brought back to him from that future land. Anything brought back from the future has unreality as a major component. Anyone who ever looked at or handled Duffey's ashes with seeing eyes and sensing fingers knows something about their index of unreality. Teresa the Showboat knew about their unreality, but she believed that she was blowing them into real fire.

In a misbehaven case like this, when a complex over-runs itself, it is shattered into a number of apocalypses or possible manifesting futures. A number seven is often mentioned of these futures. Really, there is no limit to the number of contingencies: but seven of them, like eager olives of different sizes, seemed to be disputing the mouth of the jug. And the seven most jostling ones were these:

"One". This is called, from a remnait of it that has been found 'The Great Day Contingency'. It is characterized by a bewildering unstructuring or unstructuring of all things. It is further characterized by the obliterating of boundaries, which results in the obliteration of persons also. The irony is that Duffey was the one who had first thought of this, and that as a joke. It would take a lot of misplaced faith on the part of a faithless world to bring it off, but misplaced faith is the easiest sort to come by. If on go imagining a trap like that one, you had better imagine yourself leaping out of its jaws pretty nimbly. Duffey hidn't done this, and he had been caught.

(This sounds a little bit familiar. Yes, the pretty girls who were putting on the play, and one of them was a prophesing pythoiness who hit some

of this imagery pretty close.)

'This is the clock that stopped at twelf.

This is the snake that swallowed itself.'

That was the theme of the Great Day Contingency. Wouldn't it be an absurd ending? Or even an absurd future segment? But one does not say 'Absurd' to a thing that swallows one up.

"Two." This is the Goat Contingence. (Whence do I have this partial understanding of the alternatives,' Duffey asked himself, 'my understanding of these alternatives offered to me and to the world? Oh, I simply have them in my prophetic function. Even the little verse-writing prophetess at the academy had pieces of this understanding.) This contingency was that of the Promontory Goats or the Scapegoats as passionate motivators of the world and as receivers of the world and as receivers of the world's bankruptcy. This contingency involved one of the Prodigious Persons or Splendid Animations, Casey Szymanski, as cosmos scapegoat and bad-trader of worlds. Nobody could ever make a bad trade like Cascv. Compassionate goats keep picking up the tab for the defeciting world. Casey had tried to trade souls with the Devil to spare that person punishment. Whether that trade was ever consummated, or whether it was still in the process of being consummated, is not know. Casey did trade souls (or perhaps it was just one of his old souls that he had lying around, as Absalom said) with Absalom Stein. Casey and his sort will trade off everything till there is nothing left to trade. And, when the debts of all the world fall due and must be collected, they must be collected from them the scapegoats. They will pay forever in a lower and more painful hell than the one commonly known, the fearful hell that is under the name-board "The End of Compassion'. This is a very doubtful contingency, but it does answer the question 'Who is going to pay for it all?' Like all the contingencies, it involved the entire world.

"Three". This is the eschatological resolution presented in the form of the Petrine Spy Story. In plainer words -- no, there are no plainer words to lend it. This is about a very special selection and fingering of a man for a great station. Spy stories are in, especially those on whose outcome the fate of the world hinges. Count Finnegan is the main person in this alternate. Finnega's death on the Marianao Coast of Cuba near Havana was a trick (Oh, certainly he died there), a cover drama to spring him loose for a great masquerade. His appearance, whether in effigy or in body, was exactly the same as that of Peter the Second, banana nose and all. When forces move to kill peter, there will be some very intricate movement and counter-movement. Dotty Yekouris (dead-undead on the Marianao Coast also) has an incredible role in this. God knows what!

Someone will be dead on the Petrine throne, and yet someone will still reign over that diminished and tottering and holy kingdom. The only thing preventing this chase-farce-tragic-drama from moving out of contingency and into certainty is that Finnegan cannot be found, dead or alive, to play his role. Or he is already playing that role, And this version of the world is already happening. Once more, the whole world is involved in this alternative. But it's a pretty chancey thing to try to save the world on such a shoestringy thing as this is.

"Four". This is the Fourteenth Voyage of the Ship Argo, and the Reduction of Melchisedech Duffey. It must happen (this is the only one of the contingencies that is sure to happen) but it will not preclude other alternatives from happening. This is in the preter-natural circumstances of the Seven Lost Years (they are called the Seven Golden Years in their own context). This is concerned with ongoing beatitudes, and the strong promise of Final Beatitude. It is concerned with Shipboard Romance in a wider sense than it is usually understood. It is the 'Quest Accomplished' motif (and what will you do for an encore now?) The fleece has been found, and the big moment of that finding abides forever.

All of the Splendid Animations have sailed on The Argo, are sailing on it now even though they believe that they are doing other things in the

flatland that is taken for the ordinary world, and they will still sail on it on the high seas after every shore has stink.

The splintering contingencies are not, in all cases, exclusive things.

The last death of Melchisedech Duffey has to occur on this Fourteenth Voyage of The Argo, or his ashes could not be brought back from it.

We will return to this case again with more massive information.

"Five". This is called the Thunder Colt Complex, or the Decatur Street Opera House Presentation of the World. Duffey had once been frightened to learn that the Decatur Street Opera House had moved into the realm of the possible to the extent of advertising in the Bark. The Presentation is an Ending and a Beginning, except that it is some other species and not ourselves that begins when we end. Were we members of this gloriotis new species, we would applaud. Being of the old and unregenerate species, it will stick in our throats.

To this case also we will return with much more massive information.

"Six". This is the confrontation of Melchisedech with the Loosed Devil in a closed place. There are instructions given before the confrontation. 'You stand for Mankind in this meeting,' someone tells Melchisedech as he goes to the doom place. 'I will just be damned if I stand for Mankind, here or anywhere,' Melchisedech swore. He never knew whether these unbodeed voices were those of friend or enemy.

This was a duel that shook the whole spider web in which the suns are caught, the web that is called the cosmos. Or else it was not that at all. It was a fancy that Melchisedech might or might not accept in its possibilities.

A covenant is offered there, but there are holes in that covenant. But what if Melchisedech accepts the covenant, and then lies and tells Mankind that he did not do it?

"Seven". This is a wordless repartee between Melchisedech Duffey and the invisable God in a garden in the afternoon. Everything is promised, and a solution to all problems. The only thing that could go wrong is so minor a thing that it would have to be sought out in stubbornness and confusion. And even if found and effected, the thing that could go wrong would not mean final disaster; not to everyone, maybe only to the one at whose hand it should go wrong would it mean disaster. But that person was Melchisedech Duffey. At the very least it would mean a reversion to a beginning for that misbehaving person. This seventh contingency would nullify some, but maybe not all of the others.

It wasn't clear whether Melchisedech had any power to choose between these cases. Anyhow, there wasn't any hurry about making the choices. Outside of Time, there can be anxiousness, and anxiety, and even hysteria, but there cannot be hurry for that is tied to time. Melchisedech, hardly noticing it, had moved out of time and into moment. He had done this when he had come onto the sign that the girls had printed to advertise their play. And who else of the Duffey circle was it who was living in moment?

Yes, Duffey still got a weekly letter from his brother Bascom Bagby. He didn't, in his fractured state, receive clear communciations from anyone else. But the Bagby correspondence was longstanding; it was outside of time; it was allowed.

"My dear brother," Bagby wrote. "Do not be alarmed over your present situation. You were in a somewhat similar situation during your 'Seven Lost Years'. You aren't dead. The people around you do not even notice your acting much different from your usual. You are skitting. You are in an adolescence. For some reason, you skipped adolescence in all your previous courses, going from long childhood to early manhood. Yes, there are often awkward and spooky accompaniments to an adolescence. There is psychic

dislocation, and there is the familiarity of neutral creatures ('neutral spirit' we call them here; that's a sort of purgatorial joke). As a prodigious and special person, you attract them massively.

"Seven maids willing to marry you? The most I ever had at one time was five, but I was a slob. It shows that you are in a greening cycle, old patriarch.

"You are a fetish mark, like a crack in the sidewalk or a post by the road. This is a fetish that the fates and principalities step on or do not step on, touch or do not touch; since they set great store in this, and perhaps they determine a course by whether they have touched you or not. There is nothing lowly about being such a fetish. Even the grand ones cannot ignore you."

There was more. There was always more to Bagby's letters. And Dyffey would have been lost without them.

Melchisedech met the Loosed Devil in a closed place. This, then, was at least the ante-room of the Sixth Contingency of the World that Melchisedech had entered. Would it prevent him from entering some of the other contingencies. No it wouldn't, not unless Melchisedech Duffey entered into covenant with this person.

"There are certain things that my client is always in need of," the Devil said. "He must always have a Magus or so on hand. At the moment he is very low on them. The last several of them were vaporized, soul and body. There was overreaction somewhere. I have heard that you are not the nervous type, and that you are a top Magus."

"I didn't know that we were rated, Cloutie," Melchisedech said.

"Yes, I am Magus. I do magic. Having known several who worked for you, I can say that I am better at the trade than they are. But no two of us plow the same field, and no one can say who is top."

"Come work for my client, and you can wear diamonds," the Devil said in the corniest of the very old lines.

"I already wear diamonds," Melchisedech said, "Finnegan diamonds. Finnegan, wherever he is, is still in the diamond distributing business with the Haussa boy named Joseph. All Finnegan's friends wear diamonds? Do all of yours?"

"This Finnegan has reaped where he has not sown," the Devil said. "He is in deep debt to my client, and he will not come out of that house till all is paid. My client needs a Magus for certain creative work. It isn't that my client cannot himself create, but --" "It is that you yourself cannot create, Cloutie," Melchisedech said. "You can poison the springs and roil the land, but you cannot create."

"The creative fecundity is always at hand," this Devil said. "It didn't originate with my client, and it didn't originate with any magus. But sometimes, to awaken a thing to a desired shape or inclination, we must bring to bear an influence or a secondary intervention."

"Nah, Cloutie, nah, that's not the way I do it," Melchisedech said. "A cheap-stiot magus may work by secondary intervention, but I do not. I actually create."

The Devil's eyes brightened when he heard this, and he rubbed his hands together. "That is what we want," he said. "We've always been hampered in the field of primary creation. Now you will work for me with your full magus powers. I said that you will work for me. I tell you: I do not ask you. You have no idea what mortgage I hold on you. I'm a canny fellow in all this, and I hold iron-studded mortgages on you, soul and body. And I'll not remit anything to you for coming over to me. I have it on your own word that you are a primary creator, so you will create for me. I compel you to --"

"Nah, Cloutie, nah," said Melchisedech. "You'll not compel me." Melchisedech had scored a few shots. As to the question whether this was a minor devil of the Devil himself His Majesty, the fellow was using a tactic of speaking of his 'client' as if he himself were a mere agent or underling

working for another. But then he would (Duffey could see it coming, what ham!) reveal that he himself was the client, the high Majesty. He would do this by a great pyrotechnic display that would be overpowering even if not convincing. But Duffey, by calling the fellow 'Clootie' (one might call a minor devil that, but not Himself His Majesty) had kept him a little off balance.

It wasn't settled. It's still going on. These out-of-time confrontations still continue while other things are going on also.

"But the devil or Devil is way ahead on points," Melchisedech deplored it in his own place while he was being outhandled by the devil on the devil's home field. "Why am I responsible? Oh, I suppose that I'm 'charge of quarters' for the world this city, and the highest ranking non-com about. It might be that we could reverse the trend oil the devils, if only --

"-- if only I could shape up another dozen of -- and, with both the world and myself in a fractured state, it might be possible -- well, since I have over-run the cutting edge and stand out of context, maybe I could --- the old bunch does all it can -- but there should be more for me to do than to wait for plaudits.

"If I could locate a fecund working area, and not be distracted by either threats or pleasures, I might be able to make --"

"To what extent are a potters' dozen of us the Marvelous Animations of Melchisedech Duffey?"

"To no extent at all. It is more likely that Duffey is an animation of ours. His undistinguished clay hulk was first known to Caisey Szymanski and Hugo Stone (who was possibly myself) in Chicago, and to Mary Catherine Carruthers and to Margaret Stone in Chicago also. And before that, the clay hulk was known to those magicians Sebastian Hilton and Lily Koch. We all worked on Duffey, to see whether we could not shape him into something worthwhile. It was a sort of a game. So also did Giulio Solli, the Monster Forgotten, the Father of Finnegan, work on the Duffey. So did Finnegan himself, and Henri and Vincent, when they joined our acquaintance during the war. So did Mary Virginia Schaeffer and Dotty Yekouris and Showboat Piccojie, though some of them had not yet seen Melchisedech Duffey. We made him what he is today, a moth-eaten magus who believes that he made us, and whom we love, for all his unlovely qualities.

"Such is my belief today, that he proceeds from us and not we from him. But there are other days when I believe irrationally that this Melchisedech was our maker, that he evoked our clay and awoke us to live, or to new life."

[Absalom Stein. Notes in a Motley Notebook.]

"Where are you going, dear?" Mary Virginia Schaeffer asked Duffey in a worried voice one day. "You are so nutty lately that I wonder if you should be wandering around without a keeper."

"I'm just going for one of my afternoon walks," Melchisedech said.

"Bit for you, they are doomsday wilks, Duffey," she said. "From one of them you won't come back."

"In that case, have a double care of things, Mary Virginia. Brood the world like the wonderful hen you are."

"That man really is a magus," Mary Virginia said wonderingly when he had left, as if she had just realized it for the first time.

"The Duff, he is a magus strange.

Hi! Ho!

The Duff he is a magus strange,

A holy magus with the mange!

Hi! Ho! The gollie wol!" That was Margaret Stone who sang that. They should not teach the Gadarene Swine Song to irresponsible persons.

It was not on thit afternoon walk though that Duffey walked over the edge. It was in a walk the next morning that Duffey stepped into a pothole and nearly fell, and then found himself in a somewhat changed world.

Book Seven

"You, Melchisedech the brambled,
Deeply weathered, widely rambled,
Find the World Completely scrambled."
[Margaret Stone- Tablets of Stone.)

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"In our own Philosophical language we may put the question thus: How did the real become phenomenal, and how can the phenomenal become real again... Or, to put it in more familiar language, how was this world created, and how can it be uncreated again?!

[P.D. Ouspensky. Tertium Organus.]

So Clio scribes in manner blurred,
To sound of crackish gong:
She writes it down in every word,
And every word is wrong."
[Finnegan. Road Songs.]

What was different about the City all of the sudden?

The city had been, for some time now, different from any other place in the world. It was different for its hanging onto a certain stubborn and malodorous remnant. And the most stubborn and most malodorous part of that remnant was Zabotski.

Zabotski had once been a chemist, a smelly man in a smelly trade. He had retired from being a regular chemist now, and he had retired from a dozen trades, but he remained a smelly man. And there was something peculiar about this. He wasn't smelly to the nose. He was smelly to the eye.

Zabotski was probably rich. He owned a lot of property around town. He wasn't an unreasonable landlord. He carried more people than did those who bad-mouthed him. But he had an abrasive tongue, and he could shout even Melchisedech Duffey in a shouting match. And he was in no way elegant. Likely the only one who loved him, beyond the Christian requirement, was the Widow Waldo. Or was she Wife Waldo by now?

On this particular morning he was mumbling to himself, but when Zabotski mumbled he could be heard for half a block:

"There's a peculiar little episode hanging over our town. It's like a misshapen cloud, and it's been raining improper stuff on us for the last several hours of the night. It's hovering like a big buzzard, like a fancy-Dan buzzard with three peacock tail feathers tied on it. I think this dirty-bird episode will be a puzzler, and I may add to the puzzle. I'm going to claim that have a main hand in it, just out of orneriness."

Zabotski sometimes waited around and offered his arm and his protection to Margaret Stone when she had finished her nightly giving of testimony in the Quarter. He liked to walk her back to the Pelican Press Building with a flourish.

Protection for Margaret Stone! Aw, come down from that perch! It was rather the town and the world that needed protection from Margaret.

"He's about the last of them," the people would sometimes say about Zabotski, and they'd shake their heads. The last of what? Ah, to answer that we must go on a spree of destruction that changed the face of the town and the country and disturbed some of the underpinning of the world itself.

So, this morning, Margaret Stone came in from her night in the Quarter wearing a gaudy button that read: 'Royal Pop History. Come and Make History With Us. Are You Splendid Enough?'

"Wherever did you get that, you splendid person, you?" Mary Virginia Schaeffer asked her.

"I made it," Margaret said. "A man was wearing the big button part of it for his convention name button. I took his name out and put the message in. A bunch called 'The Society for Creative History', or else the 'Royal Pop Historians' is going to hold a meeting in town. It starts today. They say that their job is to get rid of a lot of unhistorical remnants in this town, just as they have gotten rid of them in the rest of the world. I better go to their thing. They may try to get rid of something that I want to keep. I suspect that they'll need me."

"I used to create quite a bit of history myself," Mary Virginia bragged, "but I don't do nearly as much of it nowadays."

"I don't think that's quite what the 'Society for Creative History' means," Margaret rattled in her dubious voice, "but maybe it is. They have topics listed like 'Get rid of that Stuff', 'History made while you wait', 'It doesn't matter -- they're only human', 'Louts, Liars, and the Uses of Historical Evidence', 'The Holy Barnacle and the Pearl Beyond Price', 'Wax-Work History and the Ironic Flame', 'The Evidential World', 'Mountain-Building for Fun and Profit', 'History, Hypnotis and Group Amnesia', 'Whoever Were Those People Who Lived Next Door to You Yesterday?', 'We said to Get Rid of that Stuff!', others that I forget. They're interesting topics. Oh, by the way, the Black Sea has disappeared and millions of people have been destroyed. It's all utterly obliterated, now and forever. The Royal Pop People say that it puts an end to the old geography."

"How could a sea be obliterated?" Mary Virginia asked. "Where did you read the announcement of such an historical meeting, Margaret? They sound like things that you made up."

"Read them? Whenever did I ever read anything. I'm not even sure that I know how to read. I don't remember ever doing it. No, this is just something that I know. Or it's something that I heard."

"Please don't go through all that recital again, Margaret, but can't you just tell me in two words what you're talking about," Mary Virginia requested. "Absalom says that everything in the world can be described in two words."

"I know his two words. But what I'm talking about is Pop History. People of the Old Kind won't understand it very well, so the Royal Pop Historians say. The meeting starts today. I don't know where it is, but somebody said that Duffey might know."

"I didn't know that you were interested in history, Margaret. It sure was noisy in town last night. What was happening?"

"Sure I'm interested in history, Mary V. Papa used to have a book 'History of Cook County in the Early Days'. I'm from Chicago, you know."

"I know, Margaret. Did you read the book about the history of Cook County?"

"No. I never read it, but we had it. Papa bought things like that because he was trying to get used to being an American. Anyhow, I'm real noetic so I'll be a natural at something like history. What was so noisy last night was that funny wind blowing down the facades of the buildings and breaking up the old people and the old animals. It left a lot of trash in the streets. Not only that, but there's so many parks and courtyards and places this morning that weren't there yesterday that it causes one to wonder. They sure are gracious places."

"What old people and old animals are you talking about, Margaret? What funny wind? What fronts of buildings being blown down? How did they break up?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Mary V., I think that some of that stuff was

from old Mardi Gras floats, or they were planning to be floats next season. The new people and the new winds were breaking up everything that wasn't splendid enough. There's one dragon that's big enough to load three floats pretty heavy. It's still alive a little bit."

"Are you talking about live people and live animals, Margaret? And what are these new parks and courtyards and places that you're jabbering about?"

"Oh, the broken people and animals are mostly papier mache or rubber or styrofoam or plastic. After they break up and die that's all that's left of them. But some of them were pretty lively before the end. There was one fire-drake (or he was half man and half fire-drake) who bit a lady in the leg and got blood all over the street. Some people took her to Doctor Doyle with it. 'That's a terrible bite,' he said. 'I think it give you infections draconitis. You have to show me what bit you.' He went out with the people to look at it. When he found out that it was just a fire-drake made out of rubber, and that it was fabulous besides, he didn't know what to think. But a laboratory has checked what the lady has, and it's infectious draconitis all right. They think she'll die."

"Margaret, what sort of convention was going on in town last night?"

"Oh, just three or four very ordinary ones. No, this is the straight dope, Mary V. I wasn't cordial on the stuff last night. And the courtyards and parks and nooks aren't new, except for not being there before. They're quite old and weathered, and they're full of almost the biggest trees in town. They're very ingrown and curious. New things aren't usually that ingrown and pleasant. And the thing that chokes me is that nobody remembers what was in those place yesterday. 'I live there,' one man said (you know him, he's that Russian Sarkis Popotov), 'and now there's a place next door to me named Artaguette Park. It looks unfamiliar to me, but some of those horsey tourists who are in town say that it'll look familiar by tomorrow. I've lived there for forty years, and I know that there were some kind of buildings next to me, but I sure can't remember what they were.' That's what old Sarkis said. And there are other places like that. The town's full of them this morning."

"What were the people in the Quarter drinking last night, Margaret?"

"Green Ladies mostly," Margaret Stone said. "You know, like Peppermint Schnapps, except with absinthe instead of the schnapps. That's what everybody has been drinking all week. Why don't you go with the to the Pop Histoy meetings today, Mary Virginia?"

'Margaret was small and intense, with a large voice that was saved from stridence only by a certain music in it. But it broke at least once a week, and it wasn't nearly as large. She was Italian and Jew, with possibly a little bit of the Greek and the Pre-Adamite in her. She would have been beautiful in repose, but no one had ever seen her so.' So, at least, an old describer has described her. But he didn't mention the terrible tragedy and passion that was sometimes in her face. It was because people so seldom listened to what her musical voice said that there were such stark things in her face. The passion and tragedy in her face had increased lately. So had a certain threat that refused to give its name.

And Mary Virginia, her associate at the Pelican, had everything. Her kindness was extreme, but lately it had acquired a vacant quality, as though she could no longer remember just whom or what to be kind to. Her beauty alone would knock you off your stool forever. That had happened to a number of fellows. It wasn't true that her beauty had begun to fail in the last several decades. It had become deeper and fuller.

"As you know, I seldom get out of this place, Margaret," Mary V. said. "And the Pop Historians don't sound all as attractive as that. There are very many things going on this week, if I should go out. Horny Henderson is on the Trumpet at the Imperial John. They have a new singer at Red

Neck's. Justin says that the Jazz Museum has so much new stuff over there that it'd take a week to see and hear it all. The Presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House this week will transcend everything. We have to go there tonight. There's a big bunch of new painters in the galleries and around Pirates' Alley, and Duffey says that one of the new ones could almost be the ghost of Finnegan, the way he uses his oranges. There's a couple of Dominicans giving a mission at Ste. Katherines. It's full of hell-fire, just like when we were kids. They say that our world will end, right here this week. The 'Nostaigia Club' should get hold of them. 'As American as hell-fire and apple-pie, is Mencken used to write. And you want me to go to a Pop History Banger? And you don't even know where they're having it?"

The scene changes to just around the corner, over on Chartres Street or whatever street it was that Duffey now had his establishment on. Yes, there had been a new breeze blowing during the night. Well, it was a retrospective breeze. You remembered it now, hearing it, but you didn't notice it at the time when it had been happening. But now it was blowing for real, blowing down the facades, and some of the whole buildings, with a rattling and crashing. Duffey had been out very early, and had turned his ankle in a pot hole. Then wild things began to happen, and they began to have happened for quite a few hours before. You wouldn't think that stepping into a pot hole would make that much difference.

The scenery, the facades, the false fronts (but they hadn't been false till right at the time of their destruction) were toppling and breaking up in the streets outside, and there was the sound of tearing canvas and scorching rubber and stuttering styrofoam. It wasn't a joke. It was all straight impression. There really was something noisy and airish going on outside in the streets. It was like a strong experience of anthropomorphic colts, a great clatter of them.

"A Strong Experience of Anthropomorphic Clots!" Duffey howled at his own half-conscious word train that had been going through his head. "I've roused up with a mouthful of pretty crocky phrases before, but these anthropomorphic colts outrace them all."

Duffey never locked his doors, but sometimes (late at night) he did close them. He had inventories worth many thousands of dollars. These solid money items formed the heart of Melchiscdech Duffcy's Walk-In Art Bijou. And the bijou, the pawn shop, the various other enterprises, his living quarters, his very body were all members of this one establishment. He would not lock up any of them.

Yes, the door was still wide open, as he had left it when he hobbled in with his slightly twisted ankle. And he had heard a slight noise at that door, that came to him over the thumping and clattering noises in the streets. The door opened inward, as did Duffey himself. And there was a notice nailed to it that hadn't been there when he had re-entered an hour before. It was on some sort of old, yellowed poster cardboard, and it was nailed to the door with a long and ancient nail.

Duffey read the notice or message. It was in the new style of writing, so it was a non verbatim message. The words 'Pop History' left out at him. Then other and more fearsome words came and are up those first words, and established themselves with an easy arrogance. Slogans like 'We said to get rid of that stuff', and 'It doesn't matter -- they're only human' took their places on the scroll, and then other phrases came forward and these withdrew to less emphatic levels. The whole thing was a proclamation, but it was a very tricky one.

Then Duffey again read what he could of it, with unbelief and near alarm. There was a difficulty about the words. Duffey still had some trouble with the new style of writing, even though words were one of his trades. But there didn't seem to be much doubt about the first meaning. Duffey was sociable: he was hospitable: but the message mentioned numbers that were overwhelming. It stated that he was favored and selected to lodge two

hundred or more royal persons at his establishment. It stated that these were serious persons of a scientific sort, persons of blazing beauty and towering mentality and perfumed perversion and breath-catching art: all this in the intensity and scope of the thunder dimension. That sounded like pretty vaunting stuff. It stated that such splendid persons were used to the best in accommodations. And it said that Duffey was selected for this honor because of his great age and erudition. It gave the name of the convening society. But something was missing from the name and message, something that can only be called verbatimness. There were very tricky things about the words of the message refusing to stand fast and be accounted for.

This Duffey has been called 'a patriarch without seed, a prophet without lionor, and a high-sounding brawler'. He was a man of uncertain age (this fact about him had assumed importance lately): and he was a willful man who was held on peculiar checkrein by forces unknown. But he was a spacious man and he could be forgiven many inconsistencies.

Duffey rocked on his feet and lowered at the writing and thought about it in an effort to make up his mind. It was a ritual sort of thing that was nailed to his door, and it deserved a ritual answer. Duffey got a pen and bowl, and he wrote an answer in his hieratic hand at the bottom of the scroll. It was not old poster cardboard that the scroll was made out of. It was now seen to be old parchment. Duffey wrote:

"Royal Pop People, I am honored. And you are welcome. But my facilities are quite limited, as is my credit. I will be host to as many of you as I can be. No man can do more. Somehow you will all be taken care of. Signed, Melchisedech Duffey."

He paused for a while, and he stirred the ink in the bowl. Then he wrote a bit more: "if this is a hoax, then it's a howling hoax."

Out of affectation, Duffey wrote all official things with this squid ink that he kept in a bowl. This was the finest ink ever. It will not coagulate. Write anything at all in squid ink. Then write something else beside it in ordinary ink. Come back in three thousand years, or even in ten years, and notice the difference. The squid ink will have remained true and unfaded; the other will have paled. But squid ink had gone out of fashion. The prime message on the parchment, however, was also written in squid ink, and there weren't many people who used it these last few centuries. Duffey examined the parchment, and later he would examine it again and again. "We will come back to you, skin of a horny goat," he said. "Oh, how we will come back to you!" He turned his attention then to the nail that held it. It was large, and it appeared very sharp. It was not, as Duffey had at first thought, either brass or bronze. It was a copper-iron nail, and it was of old Macedonian workmanship. Old, but not very.

For there were in that city many members of the "Society of Creative Anachronisms", a social and historical and dramatic society. These people were all friendly to Duffey, and Duffey suspected them of a hoax. They put great effort in some of their hoaxes.

Duffey, a widow-man of loose and informal establishment, now made himself ready for the day and its apparent adventure. He caught again the whiff of the new breeze blowing, and part of that whiff was made up of putridity, that emanation of changes working. He dressed, daubed whiting on his beard and hair (they had both been turning disquietingly black lately), and went out into the streets to find comradeship and adventure and breakfast. Yes, there was indeed a new breeze blowing. It wasn't a great air-mover of a breeze; but it brought a rumbling freshness, a bracing and reminiscent aroma, a rakish sense of rot, and an altogether vivid accord with things as they are and as they were becoming.

And it brought a sudden and happy discord with things as they had not been before. Certainly there had always been several buildings right next to Duffey's place, on the left when one comes out. And just as certainly those structures of whatever kind were not standing there now.

Just what was there was a little harder to say. One couldn't get a clear view of the area, or one wouldn't have believed his eyes if he had gotten a clearer view. The powers shouldn't spring these things on a man so early in the morning. Something was in the act of being born in that area. There were bales of greenery. There were bales of shadow. There were other bright things already there, or arriving. But this pleasant confusion hadn't quite put itself together yet.

The streets were trashy, though trash trucks were everywhere working on the clean-up. Here and there, the sidewalks were slippery with blood, but it was blood of no great validity. There was a lot of synthetic fiber lying around, and very little of authentic flesh.

And there were a few newly homeless cur dogs, and vacant oddity people, and evil spirits skulking about the sites. They had been dislocated from their places and from their forms. And their new and unpleasant confusion was another thing that hadn't been able to put itself together yet.

"It is you who gave destroyed my house and my body," one of the uncreations hissed at Duffey. Duffey could not determine whether it was a cur dog or a snake or a spirit or a person. "It is you who have done it with that rectitude of yours," the thing said. Duffey did have his rectitude, but these uncreations did not seem to have much of anything.

"I cannot any way remember who lived next door to me here," Duffey mumbled into his beard, not to the uncreations but to himself, "or who it was who transacted business in this place so near to my own. This is a puzzle. And yet I've lived and worked here for several decades, and various persons have lived here beside me... I now suspect that they were nothing-people all this time, and that they have descended to their perdition or oblivion." Duffey walked a block and noticed a handful of other disappearances and changes, as well as several pleasant new arrivals. Some of the broken-up puppets or dummies in the streets reminded him of persons whom he had known. Some of them opened effigy mouths and croaked at him in voices that he had known. The discarded little abominations were almost in bad taste.

But not everything nice changed. Duffey entered one of the old old and gracious places that had remained (considerably changed, though, it seemed, from the day before), and he sat down with a happy sigh. And a friend of his was sitting with him instantly. In that place, that always happens.

"I hear that you are playing host to some sort of historical group, Duffey," Absalom Stein was saying as they sat together and planned a breakfast at Girardeau's Irish Restaurant. Absalom was an Israelite in whom there was much guile, but he averaged out to a good man, and sometimes he wrote for the Investigator (that was Duffey's newest journal) as well as for the Bark. "How long is this convention going to last, Duffey?"

"I don't know at all," Duffey said. "All I remember are the words 'Pop History'. Then other words came out and gobbled them up and began to make demands for two hundred or more people. You seem to know something about it, so I suspect that you're in on the hoax."

"No I'm not, Duff, but I may get in on it. Why shouldn't I know about it? We have all become intuitive since (Oh, I guess it's just this morning), since we began to realize that we belonged to the new pleasant people. But there's a lot of loose stuff floating around town this morning, and I suspect that your 'Royal Pop History' bunch may be the handle to take hold of it by. I'm afraid that they're going to make us give up a lot of our old items as not being splendid enough to keep."

"No, this man is not in on it," the young lady said to Duffey, "though I now invite him to join us. Oh, we never know how long these things will last. We will be in session until we get certain points settled and certain remnants rooted out. Your friend here, the Stein, is worried because a few people have gone away and he can't remember who they were. I say that

if one can't remember them, then it's a good thing that they're gone. If they were superb and splendid enough, then they would be remembered. Let them pass out of all memory and be no more."

This young lady, she had 'Royal Pop People' written all over her. She was excessively one of them. She was 'The Countess', a teenage archetype among the Splendid People.

"But I have a peculiar affection and passion for unmemorable persons," Absalom Stein said carefully. "I feel that I'm responsible for some few of them that nobody else would bestow a thought on. I suspect that it's just that they are swallowed by oblivion if nobody remembers them at all, and then it would become the case that they had never existed at all. I can feel a dozen or so of them now, hanging on by the very nails of their fingers on the rim of oblivion, bawling against extinction, but almost certainly doomed to that pit or cauldron and be extinguished. So it will be with them if someone will not give them a thought. I come closest to remembering them of all the people left in the world; I know that. But I cannot come close enough. I could bring them back from nothingness if I could form their faces in my mind. I can't. But I'll still try it."

"You are playing with very sticky fire, Oh Absalom," the young countess said. "It may be that you will go with them to the nothingness where they have gone if you show such an unhealthy interest in them."

"What is it that you call your society, lady?" Duffey asked. Duffey couldn't remember just when this young lady had sat down at the table with them. He couldn't remember whether he knew who she really was. He seemed very slow at catching onto things this morning.

"Sometimes we call Ourselves the Thunder Harps," the countess lady said, "and sometimes we cill ourselves other things. How is it that you have to ask me the nature of our group? You are a man of very great age and honor, and you are an affiliate of ours."

"What? Am I i Thunder Harp?" Duffey cried with breakfast heartiness. He was dislocated and confused by this new air of change or mutation, but he would never admit his confusion to the world.

"Oh, of course," the young lady said. "You've been one of us almost forever. You're one of the perennial bushes. I suspect that you're thousands of years old. You have those little green moss marks at the corners of your eyes, and there are many other signs. Why does it scare you, Duffey, when people spot you is one of the very old ones? Don't you want to be old and honored? And why ever should it startle you when you feel the green seasons returning to you and you know that you'll be appearing younger and younger for a few decades? You've surely been through these happenings often enough. How old are you anyhow?"

A waitress was pouring coffee powder into the urn. The name of the coffee was 'New Splendor'. Duffey had honestly never heard of the brand before, and he wasn't sure that he liked it, if that was what he had been drinking. Oh, it had a lot of new tastes in it, and many of them were pleasant. And what about the eggs he was eating? What about the sausage? Did that come from a pleasant hog? But this was one of the new 'with-it' places, though barely. There was still some of the old showing through, in spite of signs that read 'Be Splendid', 'Are You Splendid Enough?', 'Be Splendid, or Perish', 'Be Splendid, and If You Can, Be Noetic'.

"How old am I?" Duffey mumbled. This young lady had asked the unsettling question that Duffey had never been able to answer. Well, how old did that lady think that she was? She looked to be about seventeen years old. She wore the scent named 'Timeless', but who sould be sure of her? She was just one of the 'New Royal Pop People' who had taken over the directorship of everything. And how did she happen to be eating breakfast with them?

"Duffey, you've been using waiting on your beard and hair again," Stein accused. "Why do you do it? Why not let them turn black again if you're on that cycle? If you're supposed to be young for a few decades, then

be young. Really, you'd look better young, and I can't think of anyone else of whom that's the case. You were always very boyish. But just what is this 'green seasons' affair that the lady is talking about? And, yes, just how old are you anyhow, Duffey?"

Stein had always been splendid. And he had always been noetic. He had sure in his youth it least, been a 'Royal Pop Person', in that he had even been a little bit before his time. But would even he be at his total ease in this new ambient?

"I don't know what the young lady is talking about?" Duffey said. "But I'd wondered for a long time why all of you in our bunch noticed that I've been growing younger."

"What is to notice?" Stein asked. "When I was a boy in Chicago, You were an old man. Quite old, Duffey. When I met you this last timee, thirty or more years ago, you still seemed several decades older than the rest of us, but not nearly so old as you had been earlier. Now you seem several decades younger than the rest of us. That's all there is to it. It's sort of a silly way you have of getting attention, Duffey, turning younger. And to notice it would only be to humor you."

"It isn't as though this hadn't happened to you before, Melchisedch", the young pop lady said. This lady had an impudent and archaic grin. She was bright and fundamental, as though several of the duller outer layers had been lifted off of her. Duffey had terra cotta figurines in his bijou that were of the same period as this young lady and that very much resembled her and her grin. Some of them were ancestral to the Etruscan, and some of them were splendid fakes. The terra cotta process and its finish are easily faked. The archaic grin is more difficult. But who was to say that this mysterious young lady was not a fake? She seemed disquietingly genuine though, on the new terms. Duffey had felt a real chill at the mention of the anomaly of his own unaging. It had never been mentioned out loud before. And the new breeze blowing today was not really new. It was an old, old breeze with its green seasons returning. But was there not (Duffey was trying to remember how it had been on this point, and he was not remembering well), was there not something illicit and tainted about that old cyclic thing?

"What had barnacle-removing to do with history?" Absalom Stein suddenly asked the young pop lady. He must have seen the prospectus of the subjects of discussion at the historical meeting: 'The Holy Barnacle, and the Pearl Beyond Price,' and he must have sensed the irony of calling the barnacle holy. Duffey recalled that the non-verbatim notice that had been nailed to his door had mentioned barnacles or barnacle-removing somewhere.

The young pop countess did not answer. She had the air or supposing that it would be a little bit infra for her to answer so obvious a question as Stein had posed.

"Duffey, you'd better get back to your place," Mary Virginia Schaeffer said as she came into Girardeau's Irish Restaurant. "Oh, you do have it splendid here, Girardeau! How could you have changed it so much since yesterday? Maybe your place won't have to be destroyed at all. Duffey, those people are crowding around your place, and they look like the lively that doesn't like being crowded or kept waiting either. If any of us can help you out, just let us know. What was going on in town during the night anyhow? Margaret Stone is being very noetic about something, and the town does have a different look to it this morning. I mean it's so splendid! Besides the trash, that is. I just don't know what to make of some of that trash. It wrings my heart the way some of it looks like old friends with forgotten names, and they try to speak to me. It's as though blinders had been put on my eyes and on my mind as regards some of those smashed things. People say that everything that isn't really splendid has got to go. Why does it have to go? Why?"

"Do not be asking such unsplendid questions, the young pop countess said. "That is dangerous for you. It may be that you will be found

unsplendid and will be trashed also."

Mary Virginia bought a sack of Girardeau's special greaseless doughnuts (They aren't doughnuts: they are 'Pop Tortuses' now," Girardeau told her), and some tabouli wheat. Then she went out again. She had a scattering of gray hairs in that witching halo that framed her face. Duffey hadn't known that about her before, and he'd known her for more than thirty years. Perhaps she was acquiring the gray that he was losing. And it was natural that she should turn from a beautiful young lady to a beautiful middle-aged lady with the attrition of the years. Those things happen to everybody.

To everybody except Duffey. Duffey would need a change of blood if he kept getting those chilling thoughts. He knew now that he was very old, and that this business of him getting younger for a few decades was a very old business indeed.

"Yes, I'd better get back to my place," he said. "I hadn't expected guests to arrive so early in the morning. I wonder why they chose me."

"There is no need for you to hurry, Duffey," the pop countess said. "We are all perfectly able to make ourselves at home anywhere. I'm sure that my associates have already taken possession of your things and put them to use. We aren't it all backward about affairs like that. And we chose you because we like you, because you were a 'pop person' anciently, because you are already one of us, and because you are the oldest and most honored person in this town."

"Ah, just how many of you pop people are there in town?" Duffey asked. "I forget."

"And what did you say was the name of your society and principality?" Stein asked. "I also forget."

"Legion," the Pop Countess said. "That is the answer to both of your questions."

"I am going down to check some courthouse records and tax rolls," Stein said as they were out in the street again. "These disappearing and unremembered buildings and properties must have left records behind them. And I will check old city directories also. These disappeared people must have left records also. I will worry until I find the answers."

"Oh ancient Stein (hey, that's the same is saying 'Oh, old pot!'), you'll not find them that way," the Countess chided him. "Those were nothing buildings and no-count properties, and they were inhibited by nothing-people. Get that into your whopper-sized head, or you may be reclassified as a nothing-person yourself. And, no, they will not have left any traces or records. You are wasting your time, and that is an illicit luxury now."

"I must find out," Stein said. "What, am I an ancient one too?"

"Yes, ancient, archeo, time-soaked, and you were one of the cremen on the ship which now must become splendid or be scuttled," the young countess said out of her archaic grin. "Old, old, but not so old as the Melchisedech here."

Stein went off to check courthouse records and tax rolls and old directories. He returned and went again several times. He was nervous to get to the bottom of the business.

"Be alogn and get your own piece of this neighborhood straightened out," Zabotski called to Duffey a little later as Duffey was hurrying home. "Your place is clear out of order, Duff. Straighten it out, or I'll have the pack of you assailed for Unlawful Assembly or with Unseemly Crowding in Counterintervention of the Fire Laws. Man, what is it over at your place anyhow, a mob scene from Hades? First, they overflowed your place, and now they're impinging on mine. I have the feeling that these are the latter days of the world, for me maybe, not necessarily for everybody. Say, they keep askign for a shanty ship that they think I have here. 'Where have you hidden it?' one of them asks. 'It's too big for him to have hidden,' another says.

'Maybe he hasn't built it yet.' Do you know what they're talking about, Duffey?"

"Yes, I think I do. I remember it a little bit."

"Wife Waldo thinks that she remembers it a little bit too, but I sure don't. Whatever it is, they'll destroy it if they find it. Say, Duffey, didn't I used to own some buildings that were just next door to you on the right as I go in? It seems like I did, but I forget."

"So do I forget it, Zabotski," Duffey said sadly. "But the things that are disappeared and forgotten were probably owned by some such an easily forgotten person as yourself."

"Will yo forget me, Duffey, if I perish this night?" crude Zabotski asked.

"Aye, I'll forget you," Duffey said. "It would be easy to say that I'll remember you, but I'll not recall the least lump of you."

"Duffey, thou cladhaire, I'll split the head!" Zabotsky sputtered in stylized fury.

"Have a care, Eabhraioch," Duffey bantered him. "Your tongut will turn black and fall out if you misuse the holy language so. Quiet, Zabotski, quiet!"

"That tongue is not holy," a pop person said sharply. "It is not splendid."

And Duffey hurried along home. It was just around the corner from where they talked. But the irritation drained away from him as he neared his home and got a look at that throng that had taken it over. A mob? Yes. Unseemly crowding? Perhaps. Unlawful assembly? Oh no, you can't cite folks of such high quality for unlawful assembly. The mob, oh the essential thing about this mob was that it was a mob with class. Even the mobish sound of it was a vivid orchestration. It was a finely done instrumentaiton of happy thuneder and mountain echoes, with a strong underlay of 'roaring river' timbre. Evey mob has its own tone. Well, this mob had a pleasant though challenging tone to it, and it rang like thousands of large gold coins.

And look at the confabulating people who made up that noisy bunch! Duffey was reminded of a phrase used by the Lord himself for an earlier mob, "In the brightness of the saints." He was reminded of the phrase 'The Splendid People' that these pops used for themselves. And Duffey was delighted with them even though it was his own place that they were near to bursting the walls out of it.

There is much to be said for elegant shooting and brimming banter when it is used by such really classy folks with their silver tongues and their bronze lungs. There were something like the sort of people that Melchisedech had attempted in his own 'Splendid Animations', though he did not go quite so far in one or two treacherous directions. These were people with a stunning style and with a rippling and dazzling color and costume. But how could there be so many of them here? The very presence of such folks had effected a growth and change in Duffey's buildings. This was a new sort of calculation that was called 'The Geometry of Shining Space.'

Duffey's house was now very much larger than he himself remembered it. He went through the back rooms of it, and through those rooms that were still farther behind them. There were constructions in Duffey's own intrepid and inexact carpentry everywhere. As a carpenter, Duffey, was one of the great originals. He himself had built all the rooms of these buildings except for the front two tiers which had already been there when he came. But had he built as many rooms as these? He was like a man encountering strange things in his own handwriting. "It's my own writing, but when did I write such things," he might say. "It's my own carpentry, but whenever did I carpenter such rooms as these," he did say. Many of the back rooms had to intrude onto a piece of property that belonged to Zabotski. There was no calculation whatever that would allow them to be on Duffey's own land.

"Ah, I can't think of any overbearing neighbor that I'd rather intrude on," Duffey thought with laughter. But the building couldn't have

extended so deeply before today, or Zabotski would have made the howling trespasss known to the whole town.

Duffey explored through the bright crowds in his own art bijou, through those in his own book store, through those in his pawn shop, through those in his auditorium, through his soup kitchen, and through those in his flop house. Never had the places been so full except for the few times when he had staged those

'Original-Masterpiece-For-Eighty-Five-Cents-Frame-And-All' Saturday sales.. But these crowds today were made out of extraordinary people, exuberant as colts, touchy as velours, bright as primary-color-baked terra cotta, superior in their soundelry and their saintliness, big-bellied with fresh life and invention, incredibly urbane and sophisticated, adolescent and arty and archaic all at the same time.

Oh, Duffey knew some of them, of course. There was the 'Child-Hero', there was the 'Hoyden', there was the 'Countess' (how had she got there before him when he had started soonest?), there was the 'Sanctimonious Sam'. But are these not types? No, they are people. They are the everlasting and omnipresent people. And, though it seemed as if there were more, there was only one of each sort of them. Who would ever turn these great originals into types?

But beyond these pop oeples who seemed to have come to town from everywhere, there were the more local and less typical folks. There was Danny Degas who was history professor at Lsuno College there in town, Hugh de Turenne who was deep in the humanities at Xavier, Sister Mary Susanna of Ursuline Academy, Robert Darnley who was historical in residence at Dillard. And there was the dozen of those tome-toting eccentrics from the deep Quarter who had each been working for thirty years on a thirty volume history of the world.

And there were the fine experts in the special fields of history: Berny Cacciatore who was the finest historian in the world on boxing and other sports; Bulo Belonki who was the non-pareil historian of jazz. There were high historians from all over the world, some known to Duffey, some known only to God. There were the flash-wits who were not thought of as orthodox historians.

These were all nimble people. History had just made a fundamental change in itself, with the defeat and obliteration of its old subject matter and the triumph of the new. Similarly, the art of geometry and the art of words had just made deep changes in themselves to accommodate the new conditions.

There were also present many eminent persons in the field of hard science. There were physicists and exophysicists, chemists, and nuclear nabobs. There were biologists and brainstylers and mathematicians. And there were also the psychologists and the cultural gestalters and the transcendental philosophers.

There were music folks, artist folks, and both grid and linear narrators. Since history included everything, Duffey supposed that all these folks belonged to the conclave. And he had found that there were many other conclaves of other sorts going on all over town. After all, there are such things as pop biology and pop veterinary medicine and pop theology and pop open heart surgery. There was pop astronomy and pop aerodynamics. They all of them had to be nimble folks who were involved, since all of their sciences were now of the new and fearlessly nimble sort. Everyone here was clearly highly qualified, of the veriest elite. But even that many highly qualified persons will take up a lot of room. There must have been a thousand unassorted persons crowded into Duffey's buildings, and there was not a doused light or an empty head among them.

A ram's horn blew a lowering blast. And it was time for the first sessions to begin. The first speaker had a smiliiig and unhurried incandescence about him, and he spoke in a high and singing voice that can only be described as brindled thunder laughing down the valleys that weren't

there yesterday, and as hooves pounding through flame-green grass. But why put it so fancy? He spoke like a thunder colt. "We are all pleased to see each other," he began. "We return to our continuing and never really interrupted sessions now. We ask again (it should be the oldest one of us present who asks it, but Duffey's tongue hasn't been taught nimbleness yet) the ritual question: 'What is History?' And the answer comes: 'History is everything that has happened up till now'. And then we ask (it should be the youngest one of us here present who asks it, but the 'Child Hero' has let his attention travel elsewhere): 'What is now?' And so we move into our pleasant discussions and difficulties. Now is the all-embracing moment, so our composite answer really is 'History is everything in the Now. Or it should simply be: 'History is everything.'

"Our fun and our fascination will always be to track the cubs of the wild history cat to their lair. It is to winnow the golden dust that we call historical evidence and to discover that it is really the green dust of life. And we can track the cubs. We can winnow the dusts to a final arrival and solution every time. There is nothing that can hide from history, or from ourselves who are the shapers and pruners of history. Where would anything hide? Everything is in the momentour now, and we are the lords of this now."

The speaker wore a rakish and gaudy turban, and a gaudy and exuberant gem or eye sparkled and winked from the middle of it. This give the impression that the real face was up inside the turban, and that it was a false face that the speaker was talking from. He went on.

"We now have techniques of research and reconstruction that allow us to answer any historical question. More, they allow us to sly 'We were there'. A primitive deity once asked a number of questions of a man who was not able to answer them. We pose is challenge here and now. Ask those questions of us! Here are some of them, and our answers.

'Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place?'

"Yes we have. We did it this morning, only two hours ago. And the local scene is still a little bit upset about it."

'Have you entered into the sources of the sea, or walked about in the depths of the abyss?'

"Sure we have. Depth Oceanography his made these things commonplace."

'Have you entered into the storehouse of the snow, and seen the treasury of the hail?'

"Sure we have. Every weather reconaissance pilot has done it."

'Is it by your discernment that the hawk soars, that he spreads his wings towards the South? Does the eagle fly up at your command to pass the night at his lofty nest?'

"Yes, and again yes. We are doing considerable ornithological engineering now, and wre implanting completely new patterns in many of the birds."

'Have you fitted a curb to the Pleides, or loosened the bond of Orion?'

"No, we haven't, primitive deity, and we don't believe that you have done it either. But we are working on it. We will bet that we do it before you do."

"There are not ghosts of the past that we track down and set right. Really, there are no ghosts. There are only some persons or things that are wasted more than others. And there is no 'past'. There are certain times and incidents that have been misplaced. But we can find them, all of them, buried in barrows or trapped under the cement of barnacles, and we can free them from their incrustations. But even we adepts are in danger of thinking in terms of inimical incrustations and surrogates, in treating some events as though they were not still happening. What? If a thing is not still happening, then how will it be revised? It is for the ordering and revision

and clarification that we come together for these continuing meetings. That, and to reassure ourselves, and to enjoy each other's company.

"When we as a people arrive at our full splendor, then we create a sparkling history for ourselves, and we devise noetic and sophisticated and splendid techniques. Ah, the tracking down, the digging up, the freeing, with the finest weapons and tools ever, that's where the fun is. It is the rich ritual of historical evidence, the formula in our own hands of what was and is and what shall be. We will keep it all in our hands. A line by an always contemporary poet reads, 'Here lies one whose name was writ on water', as though that name might become difficult to read after the water had grown old and forgetful. But this is not the case. The reading would never be difficult, not to initiate like ourselves. Even the writing of it on rapidly running water would make the reading of it just about difficult enough to be interesting. It's always easy to develop transparencies from living water.

"I have heard it said by an erudite man that it would be wonderful to have placed recording microphones at various spots in the time and place of history. Oh, but it has been done! We have the recordings of billions of such microphones, we have the recordings of billions of cameras. We use such microphones all the time! I have never found a dingle or dell on this earth in which there were not many such microphones. Stories are the most common recorders. Everywhere, to a person with informed eyes and ears, these stories shine and shout their presence. It is in their thin (but not so thin as a non-historian might imagine) patinas that we can read complete histories.

"We commonly live or peel off transparencies at six-second intervals. Each such transparency will give a detailed and accurate analysis of the air for its period, the temperature, direction of wind, light intensity (whether in shade or sunlight or dark night or bright night; even, from the angle of the shine, the hour of the day and the day of the year), sulphur content of the air, significant pollen, aroma, and quality generally. Do you realize that it would take fewer than three hundred billion such six second intervals, less than three hundred billion such transparencies to carry us back through the last fifty thousand years of history, the period in which we are most interested, the period since our own first appearance. We can go deeper, of course, but frankly we have not yet the technique to go more than ten times deeper, or to about half a million years. Beyond that, we lose accuracy. But why should we go deeper than our own period? In those murky depths we find only animals and uncouth creatures and peoples who are not ourselves.

"But we can slice the transparencies much thinner than six seconds. We can slice them down to a hundredth of a second for any period we wish to focus upon. Six second interval is merely cruising speed or hunting speed. The patinas deposited on good rock surfaces can be lifted down to the thickness of a single molecule.

"Complete visual pictures, from any aspect or direction, can be reconstructed of anything whose light or shadow fell even indirectly on one of our stones. We can get detailed pictures of animals, of plants, or people as they lived and moved thousands of years ago. We can reconstruct color pictures of the clouds moving overhead, and we can read the spectra of those clouds for trace materials trapped in them. We can reconstruct anything that was ever visible, that was ever to be discerned by any of the senses, that was ever subject to any sort of analysis. Give us a dozen tuned stones (they resonate to each other, and those of the same locale will always know each other) and we can reconstruct a complete countryside for any period we wish. We can zero in on an individual grasshopper in that countryside. We can zero in on a virus infecting that grasshopper, and we can analyse it. We can prescribe for that virus, but we are not yet able to send medication back to that ancient grasshopper. If it were important, we would find a way to do even that. Nor would the various upheavals that might seem to scramble the

rocks and their records make as much difference as you might suppose.

"We can trap sounds and play them back with perfect fidelity. We can play the song of the ancestral cicada that had two more chromosomes than its present descendants have. The old cicada (it is only coincidence) had two more notes in its song. We can say what the two disappeared chromosomes were. We can even, by very advanced techniques, duplicate those chromosomes.

"And smells! Of course they are even more simple than sounds to life in the transparencies. We can go back and pick up nearly every scene complete for the last fifty thousand years. We can do it at ten times that depth, if there were anything interesting happening there. The patinas and deposits on stones and other things are only one of the dozens of tools that we have for such historical reconstruction."

"If I had a rock in this room, could it tell me the hanky panky that my husband does when I'm gone?" a woman asked. She was a walk-in from the street. She wasn't an associate of the pop historians. "If it takes a special rock, where could I get one?" she asked.

"Oh, it takes at least a dozen seasons to set patina layers so that they can be removed as transparencies," the speaker said. "I don't know why this is so, but it does protect and make privileged all current information from the hot eyes and gawky ears of suspicious persons. You wouldn't be interested in hanky panks that are more than a dozen years old, would you?"

"I sure would," the woman said. "I want to find out about them as far back or as close up as I can go. Where can I find one of these rocks?"

"Oh, any rock in the vicinity will do. But just any technician will not do," the speaker said. "We exercise a certain discretion as to just what patinas should divulge their information to whom. But many things other than rocks have secrets."

"Aye, goat skins have secrets too," Duffey told his beard. He had been thinking about the parchment that he had found nailed to his door that morning. Now he was inspired to use his own technique to lift transparencies and tracings from it. The parchment was still on the door. Duffey realized that it was a proclamation and that it was intended to remain there for the stay of the Royal Pop Historians.

He rolled a violet light thing through the throng and to the door. Several of the people, the child hero, the hoyden, the countess and others, were very interested in his doings. They followed him about as he made his hook-up.

"Why do you use that obsolete apparatus?" the child hero asked him. "There is nothing intuitive about it at all, nothing dumbfounding, nothing splendid. I wouldn't be caught dead with an apparatus that wasn't in some way dumbfounding." Duffey's violet light wasn't obsolete. He had bought it that very year. His older violet light had been obsolete but still workable. But neither of them had very intuitive or dumbfounding in their operation.

"What is it with you, children?" Duffey demanded. "This does not make great speeches, but it works. Well, what is the latest thing that you Pop Historians would use to define the depth and past history of this goat skin?"

"For such primary work as that, where the levels are the doings and undoings of people (some of them probably human), and with so few such recordings a peach branch would probably be the newest and most sophisticated device," the child hero said. "It must be a forked branch, and it must be cut like --"

"Like a dowser's forked stick," Duffey finished. "Yes, I have one of them somewhere. I often use it. And also I often use my violet light here." In his business of art dealer and pawn broker, Duffey often examined things by his violet light. It would bring out underlays of paintings. It would bring out filed-off serial numbers of pawned equipment. And also he often used his dowser's forked stick which was from a red peach tree. It would tell whether blood had been shed in the history of an article or artifact.

It would tell particularly whether there was a murder in the history of ownership of an item (only the forked sticks told all those things scientifically and not intuitively).

For this particular job, the violet light was best. The parchment was a pallimpsest, written over many times and scraped imperfectly. The latest underlay of it was quickly made manifest under the violet light. It consisted of some unfamiliar verses of Boethius, but it was in his overly familiar style.

"I never cared for his doggerel," Duffey said. "It would be valuable in a money way, I suppose, but essentially his stuff is completely worthless. May the weedeater take him!"

"He was never really one of our group," the child hero said. "There was just too much of the human element in him."

The next underlay was a first century copy (or perhaps it was the original) of the Fourth Gospel. It had marginal notations in the pagona shorthand that had been secret for so many centuries, and indeed had been cracked only two centuries before this time. The document had the sweep of understanding and authority both in its lettering, and in the hen script of its shorthand.

"A fine hand," Duffey said. "I wonder if it was his own."

"Oh, it was, it was," said the hoyden. "If we had realized that it was on this piece, perhaps we would have used another piece of parchment and given this one special care. Did you ever know him, Duffey? He was one of our group. And he was so patient and thoughtful. He once put up more than two hundred of us in a small-sheep shed. I don't know how he did it, but he made us feel at home. That was one of the better segments of our always-continuing meeting. Yes, this is the original. But of course the thing can be found in print now, so there's no need to save even good hand. And there is only about a thousand word segment on this."

The next latest underlay was a spate of priceless drivel of the classical Greek era. Well, what more can one say about it. It was priceless. And it was drivel.

"It's fake, of course," the child hero said. "All of the classical period was a fake. There wasn't any classical period in reality. You'll hear more of that. It's a favorite colt-to-ride of Cyrus Roundhead who will be speaking by and by."

Then, a bit deeper on the goat skin, there was a highly polished passage of epic from one of the pre-pre-Homerics.

"No need to flash that into the light of day," Duffey said. "It's good and it's important, but it would only excite the scholars."

"He belonged to us once," the child-hero said, "but then the weed chopper cut him down. There were a lot of defections among the pre-pre's."

A bit earlier then, there was all imposing, closely written, clearly alphabetical screed from the pre-alphabetical time. It might easily establish itself as the earliest alphabetical writing known. And below this there were many depths of writings and scrippings. But Duffey, not wishing to tip his hand, went no deeper at this time.

"Times are hard," he whispered hoarsely in his shyster voice, for he had come under the influence of a part of himself that he could never control, "and I don't know where the devil I'd ever find a buyer for the thing. But I feel generous today, and I cannot resist the plea in your entreating eyes. I'll go nine dollars for this worthless old piece of goat skin."

There were peals of laughter from the countess and several others of the people there. The child hero was too choked up with merriment to laugh out loud. But for the kindness of it, the laughter would have shriveled Duffey irreparably. The laughter meant that the parchment was not for sale. It meant that not nine dollars, or even nine million dollars would touch it. It meant that Duffey was a perfect clown in this: so he accepted the role. But he would dearly have loved to have that parchment for nine dollars or

even nine thousand. He put his violet light away. The parchment would never lodge permanently in Melchisedec's Walk-In Art Bijou.

Back in the auditorium, the main and largest room of the Duffey buildings, the opening speaker was still holding forth on stones and their patinas.

"We forget that our time scale is purely conventional," he was saying, "and that all events are pretty much simultaneous. Take the case of God, and the person who presently holds most persuasive claim to that position. There was a sort of vacancy several months ago, and the question was which strong man would seize the opportunity. There was one man (who almost certainly had suffered a human interval), who had mutated quite recently (though some maintain that it was his second mutation), and who learned the total trick of time-dealing while doing so. Then he intruded himself back into time, into history and history's records, into the oceanic unconscious mind that is shared by both creatures and uncreatures: and so he became God. Certainly he is all-powerful and all-knowing and all-present now... Part of his peculiar mutation was his mastering of the tricks of power and knowledge and location. And certainly he created the worlds. Or at least he created the historical evidence that he created the worlds. That's almost the same thing."

"How long has he been established in this position?" Duffey asked from the floor. "I try to keep up with such things."

"About three weeks," the easy speaker said. "We'll give him another couple of months and then assay him a little more completely."

"I'd certainly challenge one who went back no further than that in his power," Duffey maintained stubbornly, "even if his power includes the mastery of historical evidence and of simultaneousness."

"Oh, he is being actively challenged," the speaker said. "There are at least three main challengers. Back to our subject then, for simultaneity and backward intrusions remain deep mysteries that are beyond many of us. Stones of the countryside are not our most important records, as there isn't very much going on in the country. Transparencies and live tracings may also be lifted from city stones, whether they are natural or artificial. Several of our members are at this very moment busy at lifting transparencies from certain strategic stones that are built into the Decatur Street Opera House of this very city. Sometimes one hears the expression 'if these stones could only talk!' People, we initiatees know that these stones can talk."

"There are several special stones in and around the old opera house which is our demonstration for today. Know you all that there is a private corner in every inspired builder, that this private corner of the person knows about special stones. It may know about them only while the man is asleep but it knows. And the man, while the construction of the building was going on, will convey the command (he may convey it without knowing that he does so, or he may know that he does it and still wonder at himself), will convey the command that several special stones are to be built into the building and around the building. And the building will then become memorable. It will become resonant and in accord with its town and its times. It will accumulate living legends, and memories and ghosts. The old opera house in this city is such a building."

"Two dozen cheap gem stones or gim cracks on the inside of that building do hold the total record of the short but tumultuous two-hundred-year history of the building. They not only have the all-sense record of every performance that has been played on those boards, but they have the record of every person who has attended each performance. They have the record of every gesture of every person. They have the record of every accent and sigh and word and whisper of every person. And also, by highly scientific extrapolation of every contingent datum, they have the probable content of the most improbable thoughts of every person who has ever been there. Minor miracles of intrapolating gestures and expressions into thought have been wrought. Major miracles in extracting fine transparencies from

stoney patinas have been achieved.

"The gim crack stones will have the glow of every wax candle or rush light that ever lighted the performing house. They have the hot wax smell, and the rush-fat smell, even the evocative native rig-wick stench. They have the glittering and guttering of the bear oil that was burned in the earlier days, of the whale oil, of the pig lard lamps. They have the whispering sound and flicker of old illuminating gas flames, the garishness of the limelights and the carbide lights, the later and stronger shine of the electrical chandeliers and of the mercury spotlights. Oh, do any of you remember the unearthly whiteness of the old sodium lights? The stones will remember it."

The speaker had a stone that was apparently set into his turban, but closer examination would show that it was set into his head. The speaker was a highbrow in the literal sense. The stone was one of the best, and it had recorded many scenes in many years. "And there are some quaint stones set in the outside of the building, and all in the surface of Decatur Street itself," the speaker went on. "There is one old dalle or flagstone that would be recognized as distinguished by any investigators. It was set in the midst of the random rocks when the road was first laid out. This stone developed a will of its own, and it has survived a dozen changes. By accident (but there are no accidents), it was not discarded when the first random stones were thrown out and the slates and the mud shales were brought in to give the street a better finish. And the special flagstone survived when these old slates and mud shales were replaced by ironstone cobbles. It maintained its place even when the cobbles were replaced by bricks. It prevailed again when it was buried clear up to its eyes in asphalt. What things it could tell if it had tongue."

Duffey, like the good host he was, had rolled in several barrels of hard cider and had brought out his collection of three hundred cider mugs and put them to service. The Royal Pop People and walk-ins who had joined them appreciated it. It was good cider from Arkansas apples.

"Well, we will give that stone a tongue now," the speaker said in cider-smacking accept. "That stone remembers the underbellies of thousands of horses and carriages that stomped and rushed over it. Ah, what great horse vehicles those were! Who now living, except possibly our host Duffey, remembers them all? The Acme Top and the Acme Open, the Southern Beauty, the Fulton Road Cart, the Livery Special, the Farmers' Canopy-Top Surrey, the Johnson's Jump-Seat Buggy, the Imperial Carriage, Dempster's Three-Spring Handy Wagon (it was a 'wagon' that even swells and dudes drove to the Opera in), Drexel's Eight-Horse, Dray, Pontiac's Special Milk Wagon, Hallock's Grocery Cart, the Sears Famous, the Road Runner. Ah, I see brimming eyes at the memory of these things. The fragrance of old road apples will always be a primary part of nostalgia."

"What is the purpose of these rhapsodies, Countess?" Duffey asked the girl.

"Actually, we're so new that we don't have much detailed history of our own," she said, "and we sure don't want to borrow any history from the second-rate humans. But we can steal some of their memories and things, and we can claim them for our own. And there was at least a handful of pop people around here during the old horse carriage days. I'm on a nostalgia kick myself. Ah, the fragrance of road apples! I wonder what they were like?"

"That stone on Decatur Street remembers the quickening snap and bang of whips," the speaker said, "and their airy swishing. Ah, the Cowles Buggy Whip, we shan't see its like again! The Jacksonville Drover, the S.R. and Co's Australian, the Western Mule Skinner, the Milford Quirt, Hodson's Superior Horse Whip, the San Antonio, the Fancy, the Never-Break Dog Whip, the Elko. What days do these not bring back! The cursing of wagoneers, the rattling of whipple trees, the jangle of even chains! Some of these things still live in the blessed place, and others of them have been cut down by

the weed hacker."

The speaker had a new mellowness in his voice that only a couple of mugs of good Arkansas cider will give.

"That stone remembers the undersides of old street cars," the speaker said. "It even remembers the round punchings of old street car transfers wafting down on the easy breeze, blessed confetti! And the odor of trolley ozone! It remembers the underside of every automobile that ever went down Decatur Street, and I dare not roll their names off my tongue lest nostalgic riots might ensue."

What, if the Royal Pop People had a weakness for nostalgia, Duffey saw a good thing for himself. In the back rooms of his Walk-In Art Bijou, he had tons and tons of forgotten nostalgic items.

"Te stone recalls faithfully every two-legged and four-legged walker of the street," the turbaned speaker said. "And it remembers, from the underside also, the jeweled sky of eighty thousand nights. It's a very talkative old stone, and it is talking to our experts and their instruments at this instant."

The speaker had two large and complex shining blue eyes. They may have had special, small, remembering stones set into their irises. Many of the Royal Pop people had this double-irised look to their eyes. "What about the stones that look in the other direction?" asked a person who was not a full member of the Royal Pop Historians and Flesh Weederers. "Are there any stones whose patinas have recorded future events?"

"There are stones whose living surfaces and depths reveal events in every direction," the speaker said. "There are not any 'future' events. 'Future' is only the name of a putative direction so designated by those who have lost their directions. Oh certainly, it is quite easy to lift transparencies and tracings and reproductions of what are commonly called future events. All common stones will serve for all purposes, but exceptional stones are needed to give fine and minute service. Those that record the best from all directions are the half gem or gim crack stones, the spars, the garnets, the imperfect crystals. But those that focus more aptly on the direction misnamed 'future' are the hard prismatic crystals, The small and resonant crystals of the early-day radio had part of this directional secret. The quartzes and natural rock crystals, the sphere-formed crystals, all real crystals can see quite clearly into the future direction. These sphere-formed rock crystals that are tuned to the historical future direction are known commercially as 'crystal balls'."

"Can patinas be peeled from anything except stones?" a non-Pop asked.

"Yes, certainly," the speaker said. "Wood, is a short term storehouse of historical treasures (for no more than four or five centuries), is often superior to stone. Finished and furnished woods in particular will project these recalls at unexpected moments. These are the ghosts of the last seven centuries, the ghosts of old houses. And the term 'table talk' sometimes has the special meaning of talking tables. Planchette and ouija are dull forgeries of such talking tables, but they are made out of genuine remembering and projecting wood. And old tables become accepted members of old families. What child, playing under an old wooden table, has not heard old family secrets whispered by the familiar (which is to say 'long in the family') wood?"

"But still better, and more recording, than either stone or wood, for very short periods (a couple of decades), is undisturbed leaf mold."

"Hey, Duff, let's slip off for a while," a small group of young and talented members of the Royal Pop People propositioned Melchisedech Duffey. "They'll not miss you for the host for a while, and they'll not miss us either."

"The most dedicated rationalist, if he is honest, must admit that there are intervals that go against the grain, that go against reason. There are happenings, usually of quite short duration, that simply are not acceptable in the rationalist framework. I myself have experienced several such unaccountable if unbelievable intervals. Two were of such very short duration that they did not take up any discernable time; they were like flashes. Of the longer states, one was of three minutes, and one was of five minutes.

"And the Most Puzzling of them was for twenty-four hours."
[Absalom Stein. Notes on the Argo Cycle.]

"Quick thunder wounds the fatted town
That Copiously bleeds:
And fruitless growths come tumbling down
And even human weeds."
[Finnegan. Road Songs.]

"Done", said Duffey to the Younger Pop People. "I always said that if I could find a better place than mine or better company than my own, I would join it for as long as I was accepted. You look just like the young people who could show me wonders in my own town."

They were out of the buildings and into the streets. And right next to Duffey's establishments was Bayougoula Park, and it hadn't been there yesterday. Hell, it hadn't been there an hour ago. There had previously been some buildings there, but they wouldn't now be called to mind. Zabotski half believed that the missing buildings had belonged to him, but he couldn't say for sure. Well, there was a new park there now. It was like a blessing.

"But it isn't a new park, Duffey," said Absalom Stein who had been pacing there in edgy thought. "I've just been checking the records, and it's been here for more than a hundred years. That's what the people at the park department tell me. There's something nervous about those people. They act like zombies, and they say things as though somebody were making them say them. And there's something contrived about the park itself."

"Don't look a gift colt in the mouth, Absalom," the hoyden told him.

"Or it'll crop you like a weed," the child hero said. "The thunder colts can crop the weeds that are too tough for the weed hackers to cut. Are you a tough one, Duffey?"

There couldn't ever have been more than two or three narrow buildings in that place, but the park was not narrow in any sense. It remembered all the things that a park should remember and it made room for them.

There were graceful benches made out of redwood, or perhaps out of red plum wood. There were tables and standing sideboards, and little barbecue ovens for the people to use. There were the big trees, liveoaks, gum tupelos, royal walnuts, red cedar, pop elm trees. There were several dead and dying animals there, their flesh turning into rubber or plastic or styrofoam as they expired. There were several dead and dying people there also, but they lacked conviction and reality.

"Duffey, Duffey, help me," one of the dying people said. "I'm Moriarty. Help me."

"You look a bit like the Moriarty I knew," Duffey admitted, "but you look more like a bad joke than like a person. Young people, are the broken-up animals and the broken-up people on the same order?"

"Oh yes. The broken-up people often collapse into their own interiors when they die," the child-hero said. "But often they collapse into their animal totem forms first. So when one of the animals, or one of the persons, tells you that he is someone you used to know, he is probably telling you right. But you will notice that none of them has real flesh, except for a hunk here and there. Most such people were never real, not

authentic or meaningful. They are the first ones that the weed choppers chop down. We wonder that your city has kept so many of them so long. Every place else in the world has gotten rid of all of theirs several weeks ago."

There was a tumbling and noisy fountain in the middle of the park. It was full of green turtles and bull frogs, whistling blue fish, and carp. There were conches and oysters. There were alligators that would snap up alive any child or dog that came too near and had reactions too slow. The park policed its own. There were horned cattle there. And there were some of the crazy and splendid thunder colts.

But natural beauties are not enough for a park. It must have the amenities also. Some of the new pop persons had the amenities, but most of the old people were frightened and skittish and had no amenities at all. But then there came three old (and ever-new) people who were the amenities themselves: Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Margaret Stone and Salvation Sally. They came to see what was all this talk about there being a new park right around the corner from them. These were the ladies from the Pelican Press.

Also in the park, there were the inanimate or only partly animate amenities. There were arcades there, gazebos and kiboshes and kiosks, taverns and tabernacles and all other sorts of tents and pavillions. There were shops there, news stands and confectioners stands, open-air cafes, a little bandstand where some fellows drummed and tootied and tinkled.

"There is a sort of show being staged here," Mary Virginia said. This is 'Act Two, Scene 1', a Park. People coming and going. Remnants of people and animals dying. A fountain playing in the sun, laughter and pleasure everywhere. It is all contrived and set up. I like it, of course. I like almost all theatrical scenes. It has a bright and flashy face. I don't understand it, but I know that it isn't quite real."

"Yes, it is real," the child hero insisted. Really, it was time for the child hero to leave off being a child. He was old enough to be a man. "But many things that you thought were real, Mary Virginia, they aren't," he said. "You're wide open yourself, and it isn't so easy to change your apperceptions. And your town, here in its old and historic part, was never quite real. Haven't you ever seen the gaps in its reality?"

"Not very many gaps, not very big ones," Mary Virginia said. "It's all real except for these new morning parks, and you new morning people. Are you real, or will you melt away like the dew in another hour of sunlight?"

"We are real," the hoyden said. "it is the old people who are melting away in the sun. You can see remnants of them scattered around. We are real. You're still on trial."

"What do you think of these new-old parks and people, Duffey?" Mary Virginia asked.

"Oh, they represent the bright and shining obverse side of the Fortean coin or the Fortean universe," he said. "I've always known that the coin had two sides. The reverse, the best known side of the Fortean medallion, was always dingy and dim, poltergeistic and irregular, cheesy, aye, and stupid. But this new side of it is fine and excitiiig. If things must be Fortean, let them be bright and shining Fortean. The parks are misplaced, of course. They do not belong here at all, But let us enjoy them."

"Forget about the morning parks," the child hero said. "We've told you that they're real. Think about this art of your town that is several hundred years old. Is it real, or his it always been a fraud? Will it stand the test of historical evidence? Have you ever wondered where the people got all that iron for the wrought iron work here? They were very prodigal with it. But this was a pretty primitive Louisiana it the time ascribed for the constructions... And the workmanship of the old iron balconies is no way primitive. It's decadent rather. But there was no iron available here. Hardly any stone; nothing except wood. It isn't real iron." "Oh bedamned with this jabber!" Mary Virginia exploded. "It's real enough."

"Have you ever wondered where they got all the stones for the stone

buildings?" the Countess asked. That countess was pert with many generations of pertness in her. She was quite young. Likely she was still a teenager. She had the easy cruelty of a member of a very old and very civilized family. "Really, there was never any stone on these mud flats, and there was not a quarry within sixteen hundred miles. The stones of these old buildings around here, they aren't real stones."

Mary Virginia and the others had to laugh at this line of nonsense that these Royal Pop People were pushing on them. All of them were drinking Shining Mountain Beer now. The brewery was right across the street from the park, but it hadn't been there yesterday. Or, if it had been, it had been passing itself off as some other kind of building.

"They've kept the taste," Margaret Stone said. "I recognize the taste. But maybe they've changed the name of it. Does anybody remember what the name of it was yesterday? Not Shining Mountain, no."

"There are two further proofs that your town is mostly unreal," the hoyden was saying. Zabotski joined them about then. He had a puzzled look, but he still felt that he was supposed to own the land that Bayougoula Park was reposing on. "Have you heard about the Black Sea Disasters?" he asked. He was wearing one of those new badges 'It's a question of your survival: are you splendid enough?'

"It has no mountains, and it almost hasn't any thunder," the hoyden was continuing despite the Zabotski interruption, "and these are two of the things by which the validity of a locale and a history can be checked. A place must have mountains and it must have thunder, or it isn't real."

"Certain tropic lands have no thunder at all," said the learned Stein who had arrived to the park and the party of them.

"Those same tropic lands have no history at all either," the hoyden said.

"Who is that very young man who looks so much like Finnegan?" Salvation Sally asked them as she pointed to a bugle-nosed young man who was coming dangerously close to the alligators in the fountain. "I'm spooked, I tell you. I thought that he was Finnegan indeed. I think it is his ghost."

"It does look like Finnegan, when he was a very young man," Duffey said. "He is the young painter who paints very like Finnegan in his orange period. Yes, he could almost be a younger ghost or fetch of Finnegan."

"Finnegan always did have a lot of fetches," Margaret Stone remembered.

"Mountains and thunder, they are the test," the hoyden was insisting. "Oh, the newness of mountains! Mountains are the most astonishing happenings in recent history. There weren't any mountains at all until quite recently. And we hadn't full dimensions on this world until they were raised up."

"What are you New Young Royal Pop girls talking about?" Melchisedech Duffey demanded. "There were always mountains. How would there not be mountains?"

"Duffey, you are so old that you have to remember when there weren't any mountains," the hoyden challenged. "Or maybe there was just one. But it wasn't a very high mountain, whatever you may have heard to the contrary. That's why there wasn't really very much water required for the water epic. It was all a flatlander world then." "Are not all of you young people, the hoyden, the countess, are you not all in the big Horse Opera at the Street Opera House tonight?" Mary Virginia said. "The play bills have been up for a month, but I just recognized you as the people shown on them now."

"Why, of course," the young countess said. "We are the splendor and the interest of the horse opera. We are spectacular in it right up till the slaughter starts. Then we let other people be spectacular for a while."

"And this mountains and thunder nonsense that you're talking, that's part of the presentation, isn't it? This is just advertising talk, yes?"

"Come to the show, lady, come to the show," the child hero said. "The Horse Opera celebrates the wiping out of a last stronghold of the old

and human way. It represents it, and it is it. But we will not tell it now. Come to the show. We give away lots of free things here, but we don't give away everything."

Black people of the town strode by wearing the new badges 'Are You Splendid Enough?' They looked more splendid than they usually did, but they also looked doubtful. Intercoastal Canal People were also wearing the badges, and splendid people they are not. There were other people of unspecified sorts, all trying to get behind the badges before it was too late.

The dying people and the dying animals were about gone. As the life left their members, their flesh turned into plastic or plywood or papier mache, and then they might be regarded as no more than leftover carnival debris.

"How does it happen?" Margaret Stone asked.

"They lost faith in themselves and in their flesh," the countess said. "That dragon there had the most faith. It was a human, and then it collapsed into the dragon totem as it died. Most of its flesh is turned now, but not all."

Margaret Stone bought a box of crackers at one of the kiboshes. She fed the crackers to the dying dragon. Most of the body of this biodegradable dragon had already been transmuted into papier mache. But some flesh remained.

"That one low mountain that they had at first was the Mountain of the Commandments," the hoyden said. "Notice the number ten in all of the versions. That meant that this god had ten fingers and ten toes. He was an anthropomorphic god. Had he been a god in the image of the splendid people, he would have given twelve commands for his twelve fingers. Had he been an abstract or transcendent god, then he would have given an abstract or transcendent number of commands.

"It was the same little mountain that they used in Greece both earlier and later. They played King-of-the-Mountain on it. They played Titans and Thunderguns. They played Giants and Jovians. They had small caliber thunder then, but none of the big stuff.

"Very often the people put rollers under the mountain and rolled it around to the different countries, since there was only the one little mountain in the world. The name of that first mountain was Ziggurat. It was a prefiguration of Ararat. Now there are more and more mountains. There's supposed to be a new one appearing this morning."

"What's the real story, guys?" Salvation Sally asked.

"Oh these Morning People, these Royal Pop People (we're all turning into them, you know, and I hate it) were around for a long time," Stein said, "and they were a nuisance. A demiurge put them all to sleep on a mountainside and told them that they must sleep till he called them with thunder of a certain tone. Then, a few millennia later, the demiurge forgot about that and used that tone of thunder for something else. The Royal Pop People woke up at the tone of the thunder (it was only the other day) and the first thing that they saw was the mountain they were on. They thought that the mountain was their mother and that they were thunder dimension people. That's all there was to it."

"Is it possible that you speak truth when you intend to joke?" the child hero cried. "We are the thunder dimension people. The Mountain is our mother. It was only the other day that we woke up. We aren't fully awake yet, but we're in a fever to resolve it all. We're in a hurry to get rid of the flesh weeds and the remnants and see who are the thunder people and who are not."

An alligator was eating a little boy who had come too near to the fountain. The sight of this nauseated Mary Virginia, and indeed it wasn't a pleasant thing to watch.

"I know that it isn't real," she slid, "but who is the illusion master who puts these things on? Is it possible that there is some meaning

to it? Or is it just a piece of unfortunate clownishness?"

"Oh, the alligator eating the little boy is real enough," the child hero said. "And the little boy was real once. But then he failed it. That's the thing that will happen to at least half of you here present. You'll be found short, and you'll be destroyed. It's best for all. Some simple persons who have lost their shine will be eaten by the alligators here, and by other creatures in other parks. Other people, a bit larger and older, will be destroyed by the fire drakes when the people prove to be inferior. And then there are certain bright and strong, but crookedly talented weeds. Even the flesh weed eater will not be able to do away with some of them. They must be destroyed by the thunder colts. Two will be working side by side at the harvest. And one will be taken and one will be left.

"But the little boy will be gone for good, just as soon as the -- Yes, there goes the last bit of him down the gullet. And his puzzled parents will not even remember his name. Look at his mother there. She knows that she brought something or someone to the park with her, but she can't remember what or who it was."

"Come along Stein," Duffey said. "We're too close to it. Let's stand off from it a little ways where the dazzle won't be in our eyes. We can solve these puzzles. It comes to my mind that both of us are good at puzzles, and Zabotski here also. There's a group of master illusionists in town."

"I believe that they are a group of master disillusionists," Stein said. "They destroy the sustaining illusions of the people, and then they move in and take them over or demolish them. Yes, let us withdraw from their influence and take a good look at things."

"Goodbye, you men," Margaret Stone wished them on their way. "Be splendid!"

Duffey and Stein and Zabotski all went over to Stein's apartment. There was always a lot of high-class sanity at Stein's. The three men looked at each other. They laughed. They set themselves down to solve some doubtful happenings that had made a shambles of the morning and of the city.

"We all know that building after building after cluster of buildings cannot disappear overnight and be replaced by pleasant parks that are curiously stylized," Stein said. "We must now bring reason to bear. There is an illusion working in all of this, and we must see through it. They are all dislocated scenes that we have watched this morning. But they may be only halves of a binocular vision, and they may come into clear focus if we are able to find the other halves. These things are something like the aberration that I describe in my paper on..."

3

The revolt of the failing-apart people began about eleven o'clock in the morning. It hadn't a very strong basis as to tactics and strategy, but it had a lot of burning resentment banked up.

But the non-splendid people, the unrevolutionary old-line humans, had no good starting place. They were being assaulted from the inside and from the outside, and they could not come at their opponents at all. Most of the old-liners had awoken that morning feeling that they were afflicted with terminal diseases, diseases that would finish them off within short hours, that would rot them inside and turn them into trash.

Some leaders tried to come forward and tried to lead them, solid people with names like Callagy and Fitzherbert and Chastellain and Faucher and Panebianco and Cassady and Loubet. These were leaders who swore that they would not change and would not give up while they had a quart of blood or a pound of styrofoam left in them. But these leaders failed the old people in two ways.

Some of them did change greatly, in spite of their swearing that they would not. They changed greatly and suddenly, they ate fine bread and

went over to the fine people, they became splendid and they joined the Splendid Royal Pop People. And may the green grass never grow on their fine graves!

And others of the leaders died the most withering deaths imaginable, and their dying came within minutes of their taking leadership. The trash death came so weirdly that it was as if the victim was shot in the paunch with an exploding shell. It seemed that this shell laid them open (they were quickly laid open, that's sure) and filled them with expanding trash that absorbed their entrails and turned them all into plastic and styrene and papier mache and pieces of all-purpose willy board. And so in their deaths they were derided by those they had tried to lead, since it was revealed that they were full of trash and had likely been full of trash all along. It was ridiculous that they should die of such ludicrous wounds (whether of internal or external origin); it was ridiculous that they should turn into trash. But how is such a thing to be battled?

Many of the stubborn old humans gathered together and holed up together in certain strong buildings, swearing that they would defend themselves and each other from all assaults, human, anti-human, pop-royal, bodily, phenomenal, mental, psycho, ghostly, Fortean, hellish, inexplicable, unholy.

They dug themselves in and formed strong pockets of people. They united their minds and resolves, so that the assaulting influences could not overpower them individually. So the pop people would hunt them out and break up their gatherings.

The hunting out of the holed-up old humans became good sport of the royal-pops and their recent recruits. Mtry Virginia Schaeffer, Salvauon Sally, and Margaret Stone joined in these exterminauing hunts, though we'd have bet that they wouldn't. It came about this way:

These three persons of the female persuasion had gone around the park to Duffey's bijou, and through it to his auditorium. They believed this place of Duffey's to be one of the sources of confusion in the City. The Pop-Historical sessions were going great. The speaker now was Hugh de Turenne of Xavier College there in the City. Hugh seemed to be a genuine member of the Inner Royal Pop Historians. And he was speaking thus: "Yes, the Black Sea had been obliterated this morning, with all waters and shores of it, with all people and setungs of it, and soon with all memories of it. After today we will never mention it again except to say 'What Black Sea?' if someone is so gauche as to mention it. Himself wanted it destroyed, and Himself wanted it to be completely forgotten. That this is done is a measure of the power of Himself. He wanted it obliterated because he had been imprisoned on its shores, and he washed that distasteful episode to be expunged completely. And he wanted it obliterated because Colchis was on the Black Sea shore and had always been a bastion of strength of the Argo Forces. It was believed that some of the strength of The Argo, and of The Fleece, would go out of them if their geological base were destroyed.

"It now becomes the case that the Black Sea never existed, just as it becomes the else that several cities of renowned names -- Athens, Jerusalem, Rome -- never existed either."

"Be noetic," said one person who claimed the floor to speak for a moment, "but are you sure that those cities never existed?"

"Of course I'm sure of it," Hugh de T. said. "These were names in legend, and now they don't serve any further purpose so we won't use them. Oh, we are not fetish-ridden. The names may still be used in some connections. Black Sea Sturgeon may still be spoken of, though most of those sturgeon come from the Muk Muk Sea in Turkestan. 'Black Sea' brand is a little bit like 'Golden Mountain' brand, or some such. Persons do put what they consider to be catchy names on commercial products. Perhaps Cyrus Roundhead here, who is art expert on those old blinking-out legends, would like to say a few words on the disappearances."

"Ah yes," Cyrus Roundhead agreed, clicking a second and third lens

into his monocle to give him enough distance vision to see across the room. "Be noetic, everybody! Ah yes, the Saga of the Sea that never was, the legend that took on a life of its own. Isostatic analysis had determined long ago that there had to be a fairly high land there, rather than a low sea. The world would have known the difference otherwise, by the difference of sectional weight, if there really had been a sea there. And people thought that they saw the sea, that they lived upon it and fished in it, that they sailed on it and had habitations and industries on its shore. But they were wrong. Now it is gone, and with its going, we are also rid of the legends of that great Prison and its great prisoner, and also of Colchis and of the influential Golden Fleece which was supposed to be there."

"Oh plague, take the Black Sea and all its caviar!" shouted a non-pop man who wore a badge that read 'Ride it out: they've got to keep some of us'. "You are saying that Rome and Athens and Jerusalem do not exist? I'm aghast."

"It served the mordant humor of the Etruscans (who were a pop people) to bandy the name 'Roman' about," Cyrus said. "It referred to a desolate neighborhood of hillbillies who scratched out (literally) an existence in the hounddog hills above the Tiber swamps. But there was nothing there large enough to be called a town."

"But what of the famous name Roman emperors?" a man with a nose on him like the knobbiest Roman of them all asked. "They must have existed." They were too well-known to be made-up."

"Some of them were the names of music halls and Vaudeville performers," Cyrus Roundhead said. "Some of them were the names of mascots of the army regiments. Some of them were nothing at all."

"What about Athens?" John the Greek shouted. He was the owner and operator of 'John the Greek's Famous French Restaurant'. "I come from there. I lived there till I was thirteen years old."

"Ancient Greece was made up of a blasted inner core named 'Hellas' and five concentric rings about it named Aetolia, Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace. The only part of it of any importance was Macedonia which was made up of strong and warlike men who, in consequence of their being strong and warlike, also became rich. Then, being not quite complete in their capabilities, they took one step backwards and became nouveau riche. So they decided to give themselves a culture, a portfolio of the growth arts, and a history. They had to make a past for themselves, and they had nothing but imagination to make it out of. So these prideful Macedonians created the legend of an old and heroic Greece. And they invented a fantasy city, Athens (the name is Atlantean originally), and they developed a fiction form of Athenian Romances and Athenian Novels. But there was never any Athens in Greece."

"How about Jerusalem then?" an unsatisfied person asked Roundhead.

"The name dates only to the first part of the present century or the last part of the previous one," Roundhead said. "The name was used in a promotional real estate venture by the Turks, but it never caught on except in fantasy. It was to be built near various ruined cities: the Jewish city Jebus, the Greek city Solyma, the Idumaeen city Hiero-Solyma or Holy Solyma, the Roman city Aelia Capitolina, the Syrian city Uris Lem, the Arabian city El Quds. But there was never any city named Jerusalem, except in the imagination. Bonds were sold to begin construction, but the builders went bankrupt before ever beginning it."

"But where were the Jews?" the now doubly unsatisfied person roared out.

"Oh, most of the Jews were in Babylon. They still are. Even today, you can dig down in the ruins of old Babylon and you will find the ruins of old Jews. But we will speak no more about the three imaginary cities. We will speak no more at all for right now. One hour of talking and then one hour of action is a good rule. Let us go out and see about the slaughter of non-splendid remnants. Weapons are available. Take what you wish."

So Mary Virginia, Salvation Sally, and Margaret Stone took weapons and went out into the city with splendid and semi-splendid persons. They took to the roofs and balconies and the iron ladders of the town. The young royal pop people were very agile, and the new pops from the city there kept up with them. All the newly splendid townspeople found a sudden competence and strength and speed in themselves. They found the thunder axe an easy weapon to master. They quickly learned the trick of hacking fraudulent persons and structures to death.

"This is illusion," Mary Virginia said to Margaret Stone and to Salvation Sally. "Just keep saying to yourself 'This is illusion'." If it hasn't been illusion, none of them would have been able to climb so wildly.

"Ah, we've finished with clearing out this building of its nothing people, have we not?" Cyrus Roundhead asked as they made their rounds.

"Child hero and myself cleared out the third floor," Salvation Sally announced. "The other floors should already have been taken care of."

"Then we remove the structure by deflation," Roundhead said. "We let the air out of the building, and we deflate it down to nothing. Do not be surprised, you who are on your first safari of this sort. There wasn't really any building here; there was only the illusion of one. There wasn't any iron. There wasn't any stone." The building was quickly deflated down to absolute trash, old cardboards and old papers. The wind blew the papers away, and with them it blew away all memories of the building. By and by, in a couple of hours, a park would begin to grow there.

Breaking up the faces and bodies of the pseudo-persons in the buildings was a queasy business. A little blood usually came out of them, but always more trash and fragments of plaster than blood. Some of the quasi-persons were even wearing those new 'Are You Splendid Enough?' badges, but the answer for them was 'No!' No, they weren't. They were not splendid enough, or they wouldn't have been fingered for obliteration.

"Some of them don't want to go," Mary Virginia cried from a crumbling building where she was deflating false people. "Some of them protest and they fight. Yes, and they bite like hell. If they never existed at all, where do they get the will to protest so violently when we put an end to their fictions?"

"You must insist that they go," said Roundhead, "or we will insist that you go in their places. It's fair that the persons having the least reality should go."

Yes, some few of the persons and creatures and effects that were being obliterated by the thunder axes and other weapons did not accept their obliteration willingly. They fought, though they had little to fight with. They hissed their hatred. From looking like people they came to look like cur dogs and sick spirits. They were being dislocated from their pieces and forms. "It's you who are destroying our houses and our bodies," some of these un-creatures spit at Mary Virginia, and she could not tell whether they were cur dogs or snakes or persons.

"Why are we destroying these persons and things whose only fault is that they are unimportant?" Mary Virginia asked as she destroyed a half-grown lout or boy of the pseudo-people, the un-splendids.

"Why? Oh, because we are important and we must be intolerant of anything that is not," Roundhead said. "We destroy them because they seem to exist, and so seeming they dilute the whole worth of the world."

"Come, quickly, quickly!" the Countess was crying as she swooped down on them from an iron ladder out of the sky. "There are great numbers of pseudo-people, of human remnants, or morphic dragons, of papier mache fire lizards who have barricaded themselves in that building there. They say that they will resist forever. I never heard people make such a fuss about dying. Bring thunder axes, bring lightning rams. We'll route them out!"

Many meeungs and conventions do not provide such interesting safaris for their folks as do the Royal Pop Historians.

Meanwhile, back in Stein's apartment:

"Whatever we do most accord with scientific methods and processes," Stein said.

"Always some of us (you and I, Stein, for example) have known that we were of the elite," Melchisedech Duffey was saying, "that we were special, that we were -- well -- splendid. And always others of us (Zabotski here, for instance) have known that they were not these things. But now it is presented to us, both inwardly and outwardly, that we have become two different species. Almost none of this presentation has been on a conscious level, but now it comes to a point where we must face it consciously."

"I don't understand you, Duffey. I said scientific methods and processes," Stein protested, "But not scientific-accepted content. That would be to bow too deeply to science. Much has been made about scientific content of subject matter, but it's all nonsense. 'Scientific' means simply 'knowing'. And one must knowingly handle the unknown as well as the known. We go into the unknown, which is to say, the unscientific, waters now."

"What you're saying, Absalom, is that you don't know what to think about these tacky things any more than anyone else does," Zabotski interrupted.

"No. I, we, don't know what to think about them, not yet. But perhaps we can know how to think about them. Let it see if we can make a working sketch of that 'how'."

"Balderdash!" Zabotski shouted. "I could set you straight, but I won't."

"It's true that we've changed," Duffey was saying. "We are not the same sort of people that our fathers (of which I had none) were. But have we changed so completely as to become a new species? Or were some of us always of a separate species? Yes, let us investigate this in the tradition of the great, freewheeling, nontraditional scientists, from the viewpoint of an O'Connell or a Field or a Watson or a Spraggett."

"We have first to state our problem," Stein said. "What is our problem or question?"

"Our question, our eternal question," said Duffey, "is 'how does the world get along so well with so many things always going wrong with it?' A puzzler."

"You think that the world goes well?" Zabotski asked with a hang-jawed expression.

"It goes beautifully, man, beautifully!" Duffey beamed. "It somehow avoids being choked in its own trash and fatuity. Let us consider whether the strange things that have been happening in town today are part of what keeps the world running so well. Or does it run so amazingly well because there are so many of us amazing people in it? Let us ask this fairly, as great scientists like Churchward and Pauwels and Senday and Allegro would ask it."

"Why not ask whether the strange happenings are happening at all," Zabotski asked. "Why not ask whether you are amazing at all, or whether you are overtaken by an attack of bilious euphoria. I could probably tell the answer if someone would ask me the question."

"Zabotski is right," Stein asserted. "Let's find out whether these things are really happening. I don't believe that they are. They're not plausible. How's about a large dragon turning into papier mache as he dies, and still able to eat crackers with his dying head? That's what the kid said was happening, the kid that just ducked in here for a minute the kid that looks like Finnegan. These happenings are in the balance, but they're not fixed yet."

"I believe that all historical happenings must be chemically fixed like memory fixes. If they are not, then they haven't happened. Encountered phenomena are first recorded as electrical impulses in the brain. Then,

after a few seconds or even minutes, they receive a chemical fix and they become permanently accessible memories. But if the recording does not receive the chemical fix, then it is forgotten. It will not be subject to any kind of recall at all. In such cases, it is more than metaphor to say that the event did not happen.

"So it may be with certain events that have been 'happening' in our city today. So it is with contingent events in every place every day. If the events turn out to be transitory, then they will escape instrumental notice as well as mental recording. There have been, for me, some very hazy unhappenings today. They fade, they weaken, they unhappen. Soon, possibly, they will be gone."

"They will not be gone before tonight's presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House," Zabotski stated. "Let them count the dead after that is over with. Then we may be able to say whether the things happened or not."

"It's like the poltergeist stuff, like the saucer-riding stuff, like the hairy-giant stuff," Duffey said. "A dozen times as many of such things are first observed as will go into permanent report or permanent memory. With many of them, it is the case that while they are happening it one end they are unhappening at the other. And if they finally come unhappened, then they become unremembered also. They are like daytime dreams, like skylarks, like walkabouts. It is only by accident that a person remembers one out of many such dreams when he is jarred back into awareness. But with the walking and talking daytime dreams, our imaginations are outside of our heads; just as they are all inside of our heads with the nighttime dream. If by accident we happen to remember one of our daytime dreams after we are jarred back to comparative awareness, then that thing will really have happened. And here is the point: it will have happened for everyone as well as for ourself."

"But if we do not remember it, then it did not happen, not for ourself, not for anybody. What then is the result when one person remembers it clearly, and all others forget it completely? Or when one person forgets it clearly and all other persons remember it completely?"

"The result is group paranoia," Stein said. "It's common. And such splitting may be a common cause of it."

"But I will remember these things just out of orneriness," Zabotski said. "No one can persuade me to forget any part of them. I will drive the whole town bugs either way. If other people remember them, then the things have to have happened: and they will be enough to drive anybody bugs. If the other people do not remember them, I still will remember. This brings on the paranoia, and that is another name for bugs. I have you all either way. I do this because I am an ornery man."

"I wonder how many of these potential happenings are weighed in the happening balance every day?" Stein asked. "There may be dozens."

"There may be millions," Duffey said. "Any daytime dream of any person could become real and of actual occurrence, if it were sufficiently insisted upon. I believe that there are unbodied syndromes of possible events roaming the world like packs of dogs, looking for places to feed and live. And I believe that a particularly grotesque nexus of such unhappenings is trying to take up residence in our city today. Ah, how would all those great and swinging scientists think about this thing? How would Braden? How would Cayce? How would Velikovsky? How would Otto?"

"The syndrome has survived for some hours already. People at this moment are murdering other people by the hundreds in our town, and it is only because those other people are not splendid enough. It's like an euphoric dream in which one says 'I'm dreaming, it doesn't count, they're not real bodies, it isn't real blood'. But what if it is real? The new species, if we have become a new species in significant numbers, is essentially euphoric. I know that I've become euphoric beyond all reason. But is this horrifying stuff that is lurking behind the euphoric veil really happening? No, not yet. But, at this very moment, it's in the balance whether it will have happened or not." "Easy, Duffey, easy!" Stein said.

"You'll not give in, Zabotski?"

"I'll not give in. I'll remember it and I'll make it happen. I'll teach them to push things like that. And I'll be killed for it, and all of my sort will be killed. That's all right. What effect will it have on you when we are gone? A cramping knot in the middle of you that you can't untie, that's what will happen. Oh, you'll remember us all right. I always wanted to drive a whole town and a whole world bugs."

"Zabotski, if what we're thinking is correct, then some one person in this town, some deformed dreamer, did happen to have this obstreperous dream first. And he also had the obstreperous desire to make this dream come true, out of, out of plain --"

"Out of plain orneriness, Absalom, that's the word," Zabotski said.

"Zabotski couldn't have done it," Duffey insisted. "He hasn't enough imagination. He's a wan-wit. He's an old-remnant human."

"Zabotski could have done it!" Zabotski swore.

"Was that one person you?" Stein asked with spitting harshness. "Are you the deformed dreamer?"

"I'm the one," Zabotski maintained, "or I'm one of them. I have fun with it. The world-changers have been gnawing on the edges of the world like rats. I am helping to set out in bright daylight what has been lurking in their heads and intents. I kill a couple thousand people I don't like maybe. But no, the ones who will get killed are the ones I do like. No matter. It has to be done. The business has to be clarified. I draw a picture of the world and I ask 'Is this the way you want it? All right, I'll fight against the vile thing, and I won't let it go and hide.'"

"There's a man up on Common Street who claims that he started it all," Finnegan said.

"Oh then, I suppose he did," Zabotski admitted. "But I got onto the idea pretty quick, and I joined it with quite a few others who wanted to see it dragged out into the open."

So that was that.

"I wonder why such a thing never happened before," Stein muttered.

"Take a look back through history," Melchisedech Duffey said.

"Consider the hundreds and hundreds of things that couldn't possibly have happened, and yet they did happen. Even after the history has been edited and cleaned up and most carefully phrased, it remains that many of the unlikely things did happen. There have been deformed dreamers all over the place. Oh, how would all those tall and talented scientists think their way out of this one? How would Ouspensky think? How would Patten? I low would Van Daniker or Ostrander? How would great Fort think about all of this?"

"Duffey, now that we are on strangge things, just how old are you?" Stein asked. (The question has come up several times lately.) The Thunder Colts recognize you as somebody very old. What is the answer? Is Zabotski here part of the answer?"

5

'...It is more of a hope than a promise. For four hundred years we have gone to the theatre in the hope of a worthy play, and it has not appeared: and we have gone without even an authoritative promise that it will come, as we have promises for the larger things like redemption and salvation. And yet no person cut watch a curtain rise without the hope of great things. There is no art from which so much is expected after so many disappointments.'

[Patrick Stranahan. Archipelago.]

'And that twenty-four hour long, not-rationally-acceptable presentation comprised the last twenty-four hours that I spent in the old human context. How quickly we have forgotten that context! How quickly we have forgotten those who refused to forget it!'

[Absalom Stein. Notes on the Argo Legend.]

It's woe to tender fishes all
Who cannot stand the gaff,
And helpless folks who fail and fall,
Not splendid by a half.
[Finnegan. Road Songs.]

Mary Virginia Schaeffer was caught up in a horror and revulsion. She had killed a medium-sized child during the skylarking safari. Then came the abysmal doubt: 'What if this child was real?' It looked real. It bled scarlet stuff with the smell of blood. It did not turn into a poltergeist or an animal or a puppet as it died. It did not break down into piles of ashes or trish-barrel trash that would indicate (to a euphoric observer or effector) that it had been worthless or invalid from the beginning. The child still had warmth to it, and then it turned cold under her hand.

"It's as though one should play a hand of 'Lizzie Borden' with the playing cards," she allocated, "and then go home and find one's parents killed with in axe. It's is though I should jump rope to a child's chant: 'Boil my mother in a pot!

Turn the fire up, hot, hot, hot!'

and then go home and find that my mother was indeed boiled to death. What devil's cards do I play with? Whose rope do I jump to anyhow?"

She carried the bloody child in her bosom as if it were it doll. She cried runny tears. But they were archaic tears from the old time when both the occan and the human lacrimae were only half is salty as they later became. But had a newer and more saltless time come over the world quite recently?

"Whatever was the name of that hilarious delusion that we were just now caught up in so delightfully?" She asked blindly.

"The name of it was Hell," said somebody who was passing by. Why should she be shocked on hearing that? It was one of the older sort of people who said that, and they are likely to say anything.

"Stein, I have no idea how old I am," Duffey said. "And I don't see how Zabotski can be part of the answer. He belongs to some other groups. I used to know how old I was, on two different counts. I used to be well ordered in my sequences and my lives. That's all gone now. I used to remember my childhood and my early manhood clearly. Now once again, as it used to happen in my uncertain moments, I remember half a dozen childhoods for myself, and they all have the marks of my own fictions all over them. Now I remember half a dozen different young manhoods for myself. Am I really named 'Melchisedech, without father, wwithout mother, having neither beginning of days nor end of life', as Paul writes about me in Hebrews? My name used to be Michael, once, in one of my versions. What is the advantage of being Melchisedech?"

"To be Melchisedech is to be a king," Stein said. "I don't know about your childhood, Duffey, but when I was a young boy, you were a grown man, and I considered you to be old. That was in Chicago, and it's likely the valid version. You remember me there. You remember others there."

"Yes, but Hans remembers me in the Northland in the same years," Duffey said, "and I remember him there. Vincent and Teresa remember me in St. Louis in those years, though it took a while for their memories to work. And I remember them. Henry and I mutually remember scenes in rural Louisiana, he a fat young boy, I a fat man. You eat the fat way in that Cajun Country. Mary Virginia Schaeffer remembers the in Galveston. And I remember her and her parents."

"I remember Duffey here in New Orleans," Finnegan said. "Dotty remembers him here too." There was something peculiar about Finnegan being there with them it this time.

"These are things that the different persons told me separately without telling the others," Duffey said, "and my own recollections come separately and disturbingly. Could I have lived so many lives at the same time?"

"Well, where do you remember Duffey from, Zabotski?" Stein sensed a rat.

"Whenever I want to remember him at, that's where I make him to have been," Zabotski said.

"How many pots do you have fingers in, Zabotski?" Stein asked.

"Yah. I low many fingers do I got?" Zabotski held up his two big, Polish hands. But he dazzled his fingers, so there was no way that anyone could count them.

"Zabotski could have nothing to do with my simultaneous lives," Duffey said. "He is nothing. He is just a poor old-human person, non-noetic, non-splendid."

There were many gruesome happenings into the afternoon and through the day. There were battles and massacres. But it always ended up with more disintegrating trash in the streets and lots and shops. Then it was evening. It was near time to dress for dinner and for the presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House. That would be quite special. Of course they would have to go formal. It was that kind of thing. These men didn't go formal more than once a year. But what was going to be shown happened only once a world.

Duffey, of course, had every sort of evening clothes for rent over at his establishments. His 'Imperial Tuxedo Rentals and Gentlemanly Appointments' had always been a money maker. But the Royal Pop Historians ("Is there really such a group as the Royal Pop Historians?" Duffey had asked awhile before, "and of what are they royal?") were still holding forth there, and Duffey didn't want, just now, to run athwart them.

Finnegan said that he would go and get the evening clothes for Duffey and Zabotski and himself (Stein, of course, had his own at hand), and he left to get them.

He was gone. Then the others looked at each other with clammy unease. They discovered that they couldn't remember how long Finnegan had been with them in Stein's apartment. And they didn't know why they hadn't remembered, until just now when he had walked out of the apartment, that Finnegan was supposed to be dead. So that couldn't have been Finnegan, however much like him he seemed.

"Zabotski!" Stein cried with a real threat in his voice. What could Zab have to do with this?

"Yes, I always liked Finnegan more than I liked you others," Zabotski said. "I keep dreaming all today that it will be good to have his company back. Then he is with us and I hardly notice that there's something oblique about it. I dream a lot of real stubborn dreams today."

When the man returned with the clothes, however, it was clear that he wasn't Finnegan. He was the young man whom Stein had dubbed 'Deutero-Finnegan'. He was the young painter around town, the young painter who sometimes left paintings on consignment at Duffey's place to see if they might not be sold. He was the young man who resembled Finnegan slightly, and whose best paintings were more than a little bit like Finnegan paintings from his orange period.

But he had spoken somehow as if he were Finnegan. And he had mentioned Dotty. Dotty had disappeared some years before this young man had been around there. There was surely something of Finnegan clinging to him. Finnegan haunted many people with his pervading presence. Could this be Finnegan's son? No. Finnegan had no sons in the flesh.

"We will have dinner before the opera," Duffey said. "Some of us

won't be alive afterwards. The Presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House is billed as an eschatological dram. It will be the end of an affair, probably the end of the affair.

"Have we any friends to go with us to a fine dinner at Girardeau's Irish Restaurant? Nobody does tracings so fine as does Girardeau lately, though he didn't used to be so grand. Have you noticed how grand all of us have become since, well, just these last few hours. Except Zabotski, of course. I mean it. Never have there been so many really grand people in the world, or in our city, before."

They walked in their grand get-ups through the streets. Trash men were loading their scoop trucks again and again with the debris. It was mostly broken effigies of people and animals that was being loaded into the trucks: polyvinyl bits, styrofoam bits, clay bits, plastic bits, paperboard bits, even fleshy and bloody bits. These latter showed signs of twitchy life. 'Duffey, Duffey, it's me. Alexi Ravel. Help me, help me,' one of the bloody bits said. Things like that were weird. And sometimes there were severed fleshy pieces mixed with the general trash -- a leg, a head, a dripping loin that seemed to be of real flesh and vein and blood. The animal pieces also came from the destroyed people, it was said. Many of these disappearing people pass through the animal form on their way back to clay and trash.

Duffey, Zabotski, Finnegan-not-Finnegan (the young painter, his real name was Jacob Sothe), Mary Virginia, Margaret Stone, the Child Hero, Salvation Sally, the Urchin, the Countess, Absalom Stein, the Royal Pop Historian named Cyrus Roundhead, maybe some others. They were all together at that big, plush, oaken table at Girardeau's. This was the number one table in the front window. They were all splendid and supreme and superb. They were escharotic and noetic. They were mutated and metamorphosed and specified (is 'specify' not the word that means to change into a new species?): they were euphoric and willful and wonderful and transcendent.

"Only not all."

There was somebody who said "Only not all", and this indicated that at least one of them would fail of splendor and would betray all the new and splendid things and fall back to the old dullness. Well, whoever it was, he would be done away with this night. "Just what is it that you Royal Pop Historians are doing to our town, Roundhead?" Stein asked him. "Mostly I like the effect, but I do have reservations." Things and attitudes were beginning to clarify themselves.

"Oh, we're making selective recordings of the last remnants of mankind, at the same time that we terminate those remnants," Roundhead told them. "The last pocket of humanity is here in your city. I say 'selective recordings' for this is very tricky. The records may not be as things originally were. They will be as we say that things were. Objectivity in these things is fine, when it is properly directed by ourselves."

Mary Virginia still had the broken body of the child with her, the last child that she had killed on safari. She wasn't making quite such a big thing of it now, but she wasn't quite ready to throw it away either.

"It's one of the old kind, Mary Virginia," the countess told her. "It isn't good for anything. Wouldn't be good for anything even if it were alive. You know what it is, don't you?"

"I know that it's human," Mary Virginia said. After a while, one of the waitresses took it from her to throw it on a trash truck. "It's not nice to have something like that at table," the waitress said. No, that's not accurate. Mary Virginia refused to give it to the waitress. Margaret Stone took it from her and said that she would have it thrown away.

But Margirct lied. She gave it to somebody to bury it.

"I just remembered that there isn't any Decatur Street Opera House in this city," Duffey slid with a puzzled grin. "How do I know where it is then." But you're not supposed to puzzle too much when you're possessed by

Euphoria.

"I just remembered that there isn't even any Decatur Street in this town," Mary Virginia Schaeffer said. But they were both wrong. "Are we being elegant enough?" Margaret Stone asked. She asked it with a certain duplicity or irony or bitterness, some such things as the humans used to have in their speech, things that would soon be gone out of all speech forever. Duplicity and irony and bitterness are things that simply have no place in splendid speech.

"Oh yes. You're in the clear. You're splendid and elegant enough, Margaret. You'll pass easily," the hoyden said.

Horse carriages were waiting in the streets outside. They had really elegant horses on some of those carriages. They were thunder colts who are part artifice, part legend, and part horse.

But inside, Girardeau's Irish Restaurant had become a work of living art. Transcendent persons are themselves works of art, and their transcendence flows from themselves to their groups, and from both to the surroundings. Any resulting arrangement must of necessity be perfect. Every person in this great dining hall was so seated as to contribute to the most striking composition of appearance and voice and aura. Every order that was served became a part of an olfactory and gustatory orchestration. Each gesture and nuance of the thousand diners (Girardeau's didn't used to be so large: only yesterday it could seat only forty-eight persons) was part of a living panorama and pandemonium. There was nothing accidental about the deeply textured and strong, musky scene. There would never be anything 'accidental' again. It was all a perfectly-fitted and balanced contrivance, ruthlessly beautiful... or horrible, depending on the sensibilities. The only ineptly clashing notes to be met there were provided by the several persons present who were lacking in the finer sensibilities. There were Zabotski and a few others. Bloody death be upon them!

But even the human remnants and preservations might be arranged and toyed with and enjoyed. They were interesting bric-a-brac in the now all-ways interesting world. But the human remnants could be much more handily arranged and enjoyed after they were dead.

"We are unable to account for the human interval," the man named Roundhead was saying. "It's like one of those flimsy visions that sometimes come to one in the moment of waking up, and that then vanish, with full wakefulness. I do not believe that any of us splendid people were ever human, and yet our bodies appear very similar to the human. But the body is related to the person and to the species only as the brain is related to the mind: it is a temporary place for it to live, that is all. It may be that both humans and ourselves moved into bodies that had been developed by a still more primitive species. Myself, I can live in a house of almost any shape. The body isn't important to me. The body and the brain cannot live without their visitors, the person and the mind. But the converse may not be true. I believe that a species may travel, like father through many bodies of various sorts: through that of the totem animal, through that of the contrived effigy, even through that burlesque thing that is called human."

"What is wrong with the human thing?" Zabotski flared up.

"Human mental processes are subject to error, and they are almost wholly lacking in true kinetic intuition," Roundhead explained. "Humans have the sickness of introspection and guilt. They have the sickness of depth, but sanity is always a surface phenomenon. They have the sickness of awkwardness, and that is the most incurable sickness of them all. Thunder is the specific against most of these sicknesses, but who is it who prescribed it for us? Humans are crude and tedious and full of malodorous trash. Humans, Zabotski, are like you."

"What is special about Duffey here?" Stein asked. "I keep feeling that he had a foot in both of the worlds."

"So he did. So have you. There is no salvation for those who haven't it. But there's not much special about him," Roundhead said, "except that he

is the oldest of us bright ones who are here present." "You speak sometimes, Roundhead, as if you were all very old yourselves, and yet you speak as if you awoke very recently."

"Aye, so we did, but from an ancient sleep," Roundhead said. "And we found that, as in the case of bears, many of us cubs were born during that sleep. I don't know whether I'm new born or new awakened."

"And what is, all, unspecial, about Zabotski here?" Stein asked.

"Oddly enough, Zabotski has been invaluable to us since we have been in this city," Roundhead said. "He's so damned human! He spots the old humans for us, dozens and dozens of them. He leads us right to them. Ah, as soon as we clear out this city, then the old humans will be gone forever, except for the very few who escape us for a while. But we will track them all down and sink them. The human ship will be the one that left no wake."

"Nothing at all to be left?" Stein asked. "Not even the echo of an empty vain?"

"Nothing it all left?" Margaret asked. "Not even the perfume of an empty vase?"

"Nothing it all left?" Deutero-Finnegan asked. "Not even the guffaw of an empty gag?"

Margaret herself, who seldom wore such deceptions, was wearing the perfume named 'The Last Night of Her Life'. She also wore a sullenness that was unusual for her. "No wake, no remnant, no impact, no influence, we will have none of these from the human thing," Roundhead stated resolutely. "We eradicate the thing completely."

"How chorasmian of us!" the Countess exclaimed.

"I think there will be a legacy," Zabotski said sullenly. "I think that I will be a part of it."

"So will I be," slid Deutero-Finnegan, the young painter who had some of the memories and aspects of Finnegan clinging to him.

"Was humanity really a species apart from us?" Roundhead talked to the tableful and to himself. "Or was it a disease that afflicted the world for a little while? Possibly it was both, a double, donkey-headed monstrosity. But now it will not be either. When we arrange the human things, in their histories, even in their possible influence on ourselves, we will arrange them in our own ways. We will arrange that they drop into the bottomless void from whence there is no echo."

Time was running apace. The people begin to enter their horse carriages to travel to the opera.

6

There was a Decatur Street in that city, though there hadn't been before. It had used to be called Magazine Street, or perhaps Peters Street. It was fed into by the Grand Concourse through which a thousand horse carriages came without crowding. There was a Decatur Street Opera House in that city, one of the memorable opera houses of the world, though the people there who had been living in New Orleans didn't remember it being there before. It had a great facade of laughing stone. The special stones set in that facade recorded the flood tide of arrivals at the Opera. Everything was of a stylized splendor under the jeweled night sky, and the splendid people dismounted and went grandly in.

"Only not all."

Somebody said "Only not all" because their were tests that would winnow out a few of those who sought entrance. There were tests to discern the stubborn old humanness of people going in. Perhaps a dozen out of every thousand seeking entrance were flagged out by the Kinetic Intuition Indicators. These flagged-out persons were made to wash their hands in ashes. If they were persons they would be washing their hands in flame. And several persons came there of their own will without being compelled by the Kinetic Intention Indicator.

Of those first ones who took the test, they failed it every one of them. They failed it in dirty flames and curling smoke.

Zabotski, of course! It didn't take the Indicators to spot him. He was flagged out by everybody's intuition. He was unregenerate, old-line human, and this was apparent to everybody. He was stubborn and unchanging, devoid of easy euphoria, devoid of intuition, empty of transcendence, and of cloggy depths.

The ashes of the tests were in large, bronze basins. They were recent human ashes, of that very day. They were the strong-smell ashes of newly burned and very stubborn flesh, of flesh that refused to break down into trash and trifles as it died. These test ashes were really a little bit special, if anything of the relieved human can be called special.

Zabotski rolled his hands in the dead ashes. And the ashes burst into stifling and reeking flames. Old human flesh recognized other old human flesh. Zabotski, from the pain of the flame, gave out with a horrible, wrenching sound that was both a moan and a laugh.

There was a blood roar against this Zabotski from all the bright people entering the Opera. It had been known that Zabotski was unrepentantly human, but the pleasure of catching him was not dulled by its being expected. Zabotski was big and wild and loud and silly, and there was a lot of blood and fun to be got out of him. Powerful men put a halter over his head, a bit in his mouth, and a rope around his neck. They began to lead him off, into the Opera House by the animal entrance.

"I'll leave me a wake behind me!" Zabotski roared (it was a deformed half animal roar, for the month bit had a tongue spike in it). "I will strew me a path in this world and out of the door of this world! I will make me be remembered!" He did strew a pretty wide path made out of half a dozen felled strong men. But he was only back into his youth for one furious moment there. He was too old and too fat, and he was overpowered again and dragged away. But he left a stenchy wake from the smell of his burnt and broke-open hands, human stenchy.

Well, what was there in human ashes that would still kindle fire at the touch of kindred flesh? There was something in the ashes that remembered.

Then, a short moment after Zabotski had been dragged along, there was an out-of-order incident, a happening that was not anticipated at all. A person came out of the crowd to the total consternation of all the initiative people. This was a slight, quick, powerful young man, with a big nose and with sudden moves. He was certified splendid and noetic. He was an intuitive, with-it person. This young man had been a puzzle around town to various sorts of people. He had been a puzzle even around the Walk-In Art Bijou and the Pelican Press. Stein had called him Deutero-Finnegan because of his supposed resemblance to dead Finnegan and because of the real resemblance of his paintings to those of Finnegan. This man was not compelled either by the intuitions of the crowd or by those of the Instruments to declare himself. But he did. He left the concourse of the people entering the Opera House, and he went to one of the large, bronze basins that held cold human ashes.

"This is a mistake," one of the Marshals of the Opera said to him. "You are not suspect. You have not been questioned at all."

"This is no mistake," the Deutero-Finnegan said. Then he declared himself by putting his hands deep into the ashes. They flamed to his touch. But it was not the black-red, reeking flame that had been the case with Zabotski. It was a paler flame, yellow at first, then deepening a bit and shifting to orange color.

"You can withdraw from this," the marshal of the opera said. "This is some sort of a technical error. We all know that you're not human, that you are one of us. We know that you're new and splendid and sane. Why do you young men like to be eccentrics? You are causing a false flame for an antic. It isn't even the right color of flame. Why do you love the extravagant

gestures?"

"I won't withdraw," the young fellow, the Finnegan Image said. Then his face crumbled and broke with the realization of the flame of his burning hands. "I am human if I die to be human," he shuddered the words out. "Where I am it human, it is not in your direction." He staggered, and he watched the flames on his hands.

"No, it's not quite the right color," he said. The color deepened a bit when the flesh begin to support the flame. "Still not quite the right color," the young man croaked as he watched the flame turning to a richer orange. "I'll have to work on that color." Strong men put a rope about the young painter's neck, and they led him into the opera house by the animal entrance. But they didn't inflict the bridle or bit on him.

Seconds later, there was another out-of-order incident, one still less anticipated than the episode of the Double Finnegan. But who was the person who broke out of the concourse and ran towards one of the oracular ash pots?

"Come along inside," Duffey was insisting to his party with curious haste. "Come, Sally. Come, Mary Virginia. The show is inside, not here."

"Wait, I want to see who it is," Salvation Sally protested being hurried.

"Inside, inside," Stein was insisting with false heartiness. "We are supposed to have some excellent prelude music tonight. We don't want to miss it."

"I'll not be rushed," Mary Virginia objected strongly. "Where's Margaret?"

But the small party was swept inside by the concourse of people.

Of course the prelude music was excellent. There was the Painted Thunder Suite by Kandarsky. The Countess and the Child Hero left the party. "We're in the bullfight sequence, you know," they said.

There was the Shining Mountain Fugue by Palfrey. The Hoyden left the party. "I'm in the Thunder Cold Games, you know," she said.

"Where is Margaret Stone?" Mary Virginia asked again.

"She must have gotten lost in the crowd," Salvation Sally said.

"Nobody could lose Margaret, not anywhere, not ever," Mary Virginia objected.

One does not come to the Opera House to hear excellent prelude music, nor to wait overlong for the curtain to rise. It is all right to wait just long enough for anticipation to peak, yes, but then...

...but then the curtain didn't rise at all in the Decatur Street Opera House that night. Instead of rising...

But Margaret Stone hadn't entered the Opera building with her party. She hadn't gone in with the press of people. Instead of that, she became the least expected episode of the evening. She was the second of the out-of-order persons who went to the oracular ash pot. She put her hands deeply into the human ashes, but these ashes were cold and grainy and dead and remained so. So then, of course, Margaret was not old and unregenerate human. She belonged with the splendids and noetics. But wait!

She flicked her tongue. She often did this before making a sparky statement. She flicked her tongue again, and there was genuine holy ghost fire flying about it. She scooped up the ashes in her tangled and tense and electric fingers, and put them into her mouth. They flamed.

Then she cascaded handfuls of flame over her head and face and arms, and she seemed unburnt by them. They were garish, tumbling, orange flames.

"Oh, that is the right color!" the Deutero-Finnegan said as he watched from the animal entrance of the opera house. "Perfect, perfect."

"You can withdraw from this childish prank," the marshal of the opera told Margaret. "You are not human. You have not been charged with any offense. We know that you are splendid, that you are noetic, that you are intuitive. This is false fire you have made here for a joke. Why do so many

of the genuine people insist on flamboyant gestures? Withdraw from this insane thing! Be splendid!" "I will not withdraw from it," Margaret said. "I will be human in death at least. It is not false flame. It is true flame. Sure I'm splendid. I will be splendid in flame."

They put a rope around her neck to lead her away. But she turned it into a rope of fire and drove all her oppressors back. Then she moved of herself, with that quick dancing step that she used, into the animal entrance of the building.

Instead of going up, the Opera House curtain was sundered to nothing. It was struck by lightning. It was burst and rent by a simultaneous thunder stroke. It was in flames, and then it was gone. The Decatur Street Opera House was the only place in town that employed this effect.

The scene was a blood-and-sand arena. The act was a bullfight. It wasn't a Spanish thing, It was the earlier Cretan Bull Drama. The music was the heavy Bull Waltz. The Countess, the Child Hero, and nine other young persons leapt over the bulls, vaulted on their horns, curvetted clear over them, escaping the horns, escaping the hooves. This was all a beautiful action. The young people had their waists drawn very small by bronze cinctures.

Each of the young persons would defy a bull and do a flying hand stand on its horns. Then there would be an interval when the bull was given a human person to mangle and maul to death. The humans were sliced and gored by the curving, whetted horns, and they were trampled and torn open by the thunder hooves. They were broken to pieces by the violent bull impact. In their being broken open, the humans spewed out some blood, much entrail, and still more trash.

"it is because we who order their deaths are so intuitive that we force them to reveal their inner essence," said Cyrus Roundhead who was in the loge with the Duffey party, "and the inner essence of humans is always trash. Ourselves, who have no inner essence and who are entirely and splendidly on the surface, contain no trash at all."

Zabotski was one of the humans to be killed by the bulls. He made a good show. He gave the bull back bellow for bellow. He pawed the sand in mimicry of the bull. He put down his own head to meet the impact He was dislocated and smashed and broken open, and he died in his own blood and serum and trash. He did, however, give one more defiant bellow after he was dead, a thing that startled the spectators. He got what is called 'The Ugly Ovation', that given to things that the splendid people hate but also admire.

"What we must do is create a cycle of heroic memories of ourselves as a species," Cyrtis Roundhead was saying. "Likely we must borrow or adapt such material. But wherever will be discover any heroic material to adapt? If only we could acquire it by legacy from some other species. Does any of you know of a heroic species?"

After some minutes, the arena scene was that of bears and retiarii or net wielders. The little young people in this act tangled the rushing and maddened bears in their flung nets, took them off their feet with the force of their own rushes, rolled them like huge and angry balls, scorched and burned them with white-hot prods. Then they had mad bears indeed.

"Is not the music exquisite?" Roundhead asked proudly, for he was himself one of the marshalls of the opera. "It's the Bear Ballet by Brhzhlozh."

"Brhzhlozh is only a machine," Mary Virginia said sourly.

"Certainly," Roundhead answered. "He is an intuitive, music-writing machine. There wis once some slight talk of keeping a few unmutated humans to compose our music for us, but the best opinion was to extirpate every human vestige and to make no exceptions. We ourselves are not humans by chromosomic count or by blood type or brainwave pattern. We are not humans by passion or estrogen or adrenalin (for we have none of these things in its

at all). We are not humans by mental process or by esthesia. We are forever rid of the human connection. And so are you our recruits, though you may once have believed yourselves to be human. We are the splendid persons, the final persons."

"We sit at Opera, and Opera was a human thing," Stein said.

"Not such blood opera, no," Roundhead contradicted. "It is all our own, both in its new form and in its ancient antecedents."

The maddened bears were slashed out of their entangling nets by the young and splendid net people. They escaped the on-rushes of the released beasts. Then human persons were thrown into the arena in the way of the bears. And these humans were broken up and killed in a series of noisy crunchings.

Then there was the Fire-Drake Frolic in which a few more stubborn humans were slain. Fritz's Fandango in Three Flames was the accompanying music.

The Interlude came then. There was interlude music by Mrzorca, and Shining Mountain Bubbly was served to all the loge patrons.

"Opera used to be better," Mary Virginia said. "Operas were more fun a few years ago, when we were still human."

"None of us was ever a human," Cyrus Roundhead corrected. "Some of us may have thought that we were. Some of us may have been raised by humans, just as humans had the tradition of human children sometimes raised by animals."

Time flowed by on its smooth and easy surface. Time stood still in its depth. But the new simultaneity had no depth. Then the gracious and rather stylized interlude scenery was cleared away. The presentation of the climax piece of the night would now begin. It was the Thunder Colt Game. It was orchestrated to the Thunder Torus music. The live and pantomimic game unfolded.

"When we persons of the thunder dimension attained consciousness, it was a sudden event that instantly overtook every person of us," Roundhead of the splendid mouth was saying. "The world was already in the middle of its baroque phase when we woke to consciousness. The humans have claimed a sort of consciousness, but they cannot mean the same thing by it. I believe that our own wakening to full consciousness is quite recent. Watch now! The awakening of life of our own totem animal, the Thunder Colt, is the symbol of our awakening. Notice that it devours compulsively on awakening. So do we."

There was a large thunder colt egg in the arena. The Hoyden and other young people broke a window into the egg. They took a human person, alive and blaring, and thrust him through the window hole into the egg. Then there was a mindless gnashing and crunching as the still-unconscious thunder colt inside the egg began to devour the human. With the nourishment, there came a fulgence from within the egg. It was not yet consciousness. It was only inquiry.

Lightning answered the inquiry, struck the egg, and shattered it open. The thunder colt stood up on uncertain and stilted legs. That was the awakening to consciousness.

Simultaneous thunder struck and suffused the colt. That was the awakening to the thunder dimensions. Then the splendid thunder colt, some pieces of the eaten human still protruding from its mouth, lept clear of its birthing debris and ran riot. The stark music of the Thunder Torus picked up the tempo as the game evolved. There were only two human persons remaining

in the arena. These two were known to be noetic and splendid. They were humans only in their coming deaths and in their depths as persons.

The thunder colt knocked the Deutero-Finnegan down with its first assault. It tore off his lower jaw, split his chest, and seemed to lay open

layer after layer of person in turbulent and confused depth.

"We have the thunder dimensions," the talkative Cyrus Roundhead was saying, in the loge, "but I am jealous that there may be other dimensions that we lack. Do we really miss anything by living so entirely on the surface? What we need to find for ourselves is a dimension of depth. It would be fine if some older and kinder race would give such a dimension to us, but we look in vain for a source of such an inheritance."

The joyous, newly-awakened, totem thunder colt killed the Finnegan effigy on the second press, splitting him open in an incredibly rich and mingled juiciness. There was spilled out shouting scarlet blood, crimson blood, high saturation sulphur-colored blood, saffron-colored blood, flame blood, ichor and serum mezzcolanza. The color was more orange than red and thick now. That color... it was the life garish orange color of all strange artists in their orange period.

"Why, he had the right color in him after all," Margaret Stone laughed. It was almost her last joke.

"As a species, we should try to create a signature color for ourselves," Roundhead was saying in the loge, "as well as a depth and an intensity. Can we remain splendid forever if we do not add to our repertoire? We'll pick garbage out of the wake of any great people who'd gone before us, but where shall we find traces of a great people? We search vainly for a legacy of glory."

The thunder colt wheeled back and killed Margaret Stone at a single pass. It tore off half of her head with its totemic teeth. It tore out her throat. But it couldn't go deeply enough to get the laugh in her throat. That's all she had to leave.

The Thunder Torus music crashed to an end. Outside the Opera House, the new and unlegacied breeze was blowing under the gimcrack, jeweled sky.
Book Eight

"You, Metchisedech pathetic,
Not descending, not beget-ic,
Duff, you'd better be noetic.
[Crissie Cristofero.]

1

"How chorasmian of us!" Becky Stein cried, and she grinned at Duffey.

"What, Countess?" Duffey asked her.

"How noetic of us!" Cleo Mahoney cried, and she smiled proudly.

"What, Hoyden?" Duffey asked. "What are you children going on about?"

"We have strengthened the 'Fifth Road' part in the play," Cleo Mahoney said. "You know, that's the one where Crissie had the introductory verse:

'A shattered world, and an end to fuss.

A new folk comes. And it isn't us.'

We have made the 'Fifth Alternative' rather more important and more powerful, and we will give you your new lines that you say in it. But you have already called us 'Countess' and 'Hoyden', and those are the roles that the two of us play in the 'Fifth Road' part of the play. You're amazing. How do you do it? Here is the script with your new lines. Here, read them. I hope you learn them as wonderfully fast as you learned the others."

"All right," Duffey said, "I'll read them. But didn't we already put the play on the night before last?"

"No, no, of course not," Becky said. "You are exasperating. Sometimes you catch onto things so quickly that it amazes me. And sometimes

you are so slow and confused. That was the rehearsal, but you didn't even come to it, and I had to read your lines. The play is tomorrow night. There's been no change in the date of it."

"Oh, that's... well, that's reassuring, I guess," Duffey said. he looked at the script with the revised more important and more powerful 'Fifth Alternative' part. And he tried to orient himself at the same time.

Duffey had been in a place and with people who were too fast for him. Things had been happening there that were beyond all reason, and he had been accepting them as though he were hypnotised. With the 'too fast' people, Duffey had sinned in pride and superbity, and he had leagued himself with those people who were, for all he knew, no more than splendid devils.

Then he had attempted to withdraw from the situation to clarify his mind. He had called on all his magic and trickery. He had reminded himself that he had a qualified lordship over time and place. When younger, he had had the power of moving back and forth through time easily, the power of backing out of a time that had gone wrong and taking another alternative forward then. As he got older it became a little harder for him to do this, but it should still be possible in an extremity. He attempted it; he challenged it. And it began to movr. But now he had to tear across acres and acres of fabric to back out of the situation, and there were living people imbedded in that fabric.

Duffey, having just come out of a shocking and splendid Opera House, trembling yet at the magnitude and splendor and outrage of what he has seen and heard, had been standing under a gimcrack, jeweled, night-time sky in a splendid devildom. But the devildom was wearing the false face of his own city New Orleans. He had marshalled all his power to break out of it. Then he lost his bearings and his consciousness.

Then, after a while, or before a while, he had come to himself in a pleasant plce, and there were several teenage girls with him, girls whose names he would remember after a bit.

"A totem animal plays a bit part in that 'Fifth Road Alternative'," Cleo Mahoney was saying. "We have given it the tentative name of the 'Clattering Pony'."

"The Thunder Colt," Duffey said.

"Oh, that's better," Becky Stein cricd. "You've hit it right, Duff. The Thunder Colt it will be."

This pleasant place, in fact, was a teenage milk bar and ice cream restaurant, and Duffey was attacking a Golden Gate Sundae. He suspected that Becky Stein, who was chubby, had suggested it to him.

So Duffey was back out of the bright devildom (otherwise known as the 'Fifth Contingency' or the 'Fifth Road'), but had he brought anything back with him? He hadn't liked that sound and feel of tearing fabric as he had returned. He had done violence to time and to the people living in it. How badly had he torn the fabric of the two worlds? Had he injured people, or even killed them?

"They say that you can do magic tricks, Mr. Duffey," Crissie Cristofero said. "Would you do some of them during the intermission? That would be better than your playing your banjo, I believe, or even playing your recorder flute. A touch of magic is what our play needs, at the intermission, right before the sequence where there has got to be a belief in magic."

"I don't do magic tricks," Duffey said. "But I do magic. It's nearly as effective."

"If it weren't for working on the play now, I think I'd go crazy," Becky Stein was siying. "Aunt Margaret's sudden death tore me up so much! She's the only one of you Romans I ever loved, except you now, Duff. And to be killed by a rabid horse! Whoever heard of a rabid horse before?"

Duffey was sick. Margaret Stone (for Margaret was a sort of aunt of Rebeka Stein) had been killed by a horse. Duffey had brought at least part of the Fifth Alternative back with him.

"And the funeral mass, Duffey, what have they done to it?" Becky moaned. "They've ruined it. I made a Crissie verse about it:

'Ain't we glad that she is dead!

All be happy! Don't be sad!'

All I can say is that the new funeral mass sure is in bad taste at a funeral. It cloy, it cloy! What's the matter with you Romans anyhow? I wish Aunt Margaret were back so she could make a Gadarene S@vine verse about her own funeral. You people don't believe that mass is inspired, do you?"

"The Holy Ghost has bad days, even as I and thou, Becky," Duffey said miserably, "I tell you now though that there are dangerous things in that 'Road Five' of the play."

"Are there ever!" Cleo Mahoney cried in shocked delight. "It is all so horrible and so murderous and so splendid. I pray that it may never happen in the real world. And, as a codicil to my prayer, I pray that if it does happen, I want to have a front place where I can see and take part in everything. I wouldn't miss it for the world! But it is the world, and which way it will roll, that's the subject matter of that 'Fifth Contingency'."

"What are you going to do with the Jacob Soule pictures now that he is dead, Mr. Duffey?" Crissie Cristoforo asked him. "There's one of his that you have over at your Walk-In Art Bijou that I just love. I'd give anything I have in the world for it, but everything I have in the world is just a little over nineteen dollars."

"I don't know what I'll do with them, Crissie," Duffey said. "There will probably be an administrator appointed for his estate. I never knew many details about him, whether he has any kindred or not. He comes and goes, just like Finnegan did, ah -- just like another painter did."

Duffey was trembling. Margaret Stone killed by a rapid horse and already buried! Jacob Soule, the Deutero-Finnegan also dead! The ripped fabric of Duffey's coming back from the splendid Devildom had displaced events and people, in time and in space. And Duffey had brought at least two deaths back with him.

How about Zabotski! Zab had also been killed in the Devildom.

"Have any of you -- I'm almost afraid to ask this -- seen Zabotski lately?" Duff asked the young girls. "I -- ah -- wonder if he is all right."

"I haven't seen him," Becky said, "and the others wouldn't know him. Duffey, I'm worried about my father. He's grown grand and splendid lately, and he's using it for all it's worth. He's signed to do a series of reviews for 'Gentleman Rounder', and that's the magazine with the built-in sneer for the common people. 'Abba Absalom really believes that he's become superior to the common crowd. 'Reilly, those of us who are truly aware, we form a species quite apart from the commoners,' he said. 'It's no use pretending that we don't.' Really, he's impossible."

"It is a phase that a middle-aged man sometimes pass through," Duffey said. "I hope that it will pass." So Stein was back from the Devildom, but he had brought some of its baggage with him. What, Absalom grand and splendid! Well perhaps he had always been, but he should not be aware of it in himself.

Duffey took the script for the play with him and left the girls and went over to Zabotski's old place. This was the first look he had had of his city since his return from his 'Fifth Road' excursion. When he had returned to awareness he had already been in conversation with the girls. The city looked pretty much as it always had, and yet Duffey looked at it with a jaundiced eye. The jaundiced eye was one of the things he had brought back from his mingling with the splendid people.

At least the Bayougoula Park was no longer there, as it had been there in the Fifth Contingency. And some of Zabotski's buildings were back there again, as they had not been there in the Contingency.

"Is Zabotski around the place?" Duffey asked a fellow who rented from Zab in one of the apartment buildings. "I'm almost afraid to ask."

"He just left," said the renter (his name was Alexi Ravel). "He just came by to collect the rents. That's all he comes by for now. He spends all his time on the lake in that big, freakish boat with Wife Waldo and all the kids and animals. He says that when catastrophe strikes, they'll have a better chance than most of riding it out."

"Ah, does Zab seem to be all right?"

"All right? No, of course not, Duffey. When was he ever all right? He's as nutty as Pecan Prairie. By the way, I'm more than a bit angry with you, Duff. I had a dream that I was dying and that you passed me by and let me die. I wouldn't have done that to you. I'd have tried to save you."

"But Alexi, if it was only a dream --" Duffey tried to defend himself with hand-flopping gestures. But he did remember the incident. That bit of trash that had seemed to call to him, it had been Alexi Revel in mortal agony. Duffey hadn't stopped because it would be an unsplendid thing to notice a pile of trash. But now he was ashamed.

"No, it was only only a dream, Duffey," Ravel said bitingly. "I don't know what it was, but you knew it was me in it. You left me there to die, and I wouldn't have done that to a dog."

Alexi Ravel turned away from Duffey, spat on the sidewalk in disgust, and went into the Zabotski-owned apartment building where he lived.

Well anyhow, Zabotski was back in the well-a-day world, in as much as he had ever been in it. And his watertight contraption, the large boat or barge, was apparently back also. In the world of the splendid Devildom, Zabotski hadn't seemed to remember anything about building the boat.

Duffey went into his own place that was quite near (Bayougoula Park was no longer between his place and Zabotski's buildings). He saw by his automatic clock that it was Monday, a Monday that he had lived once before. The Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday of that week he had already lived once, before he found himself in the situation of the Fifth Case.

It being Monday, there was a letter from his quasi-brother Bagby. It was not, however, the same Bagby letter that had been there the previous time that Duffey had lived this Monday.

"My dear brother and most egregious ass," the letter began. "It is with disgust verging on loathing that I view some of your recent conduct. An ordinary person, not very smart, might have been taken in by some of the pretensions of the Royal Pop People, for a very little while. But you, who are supposed to be an extraordinary person, were taken in by them all one day and far into the hellish night. You are supposed to be better than that. You have proved yourself, in this, to be a cad and a coward and a crawler, a total goof, and not at all manly. But you could just as well have been a good man in the episode. You have the equipment to be so.

"For a little pride, you denied your people, and you went with the Royal Freaks. And now you have withdrawn from it, though not till the twenty-third hour. That much is good. But you have not withdrawn from it in all ways clean.

"Now you must go into the wilderness and gather your strength. If you cannot gather it now, under disadvantaged conditions and beset with obstacles, then you will never be able to gither it at all. Wherevcr you go, whatever you do, for a while, it will be a wilderness where you are. You will make your own wilderness. And you will be an old bear in the woods of it.

"Ah well, we bet on you here. We bet clay coins that we make ourselves, for we use no other money here. Because of your peculiar attributes and circumstances, many persons are watching how it will go with you, and I am watching also. 'He cannot die,' some people say 'or at least he cannot have an end.' So, what will happen to you? There are several theories about this, and we bet on them."

"But I have died," Duffey told himself and Bagby if he could hear him, "and I have my ashes somewhere to prove it. Do not say that I can't

die. I will have no end, it says? It seems, at the moment, that I will have no end in the sense that I will have no purpose. I hope that is not the true case of it."

"My brother, be a little more steadfast in your unique career. It is absolutely necessary that you should be. It only begins to get rough for you so far."

Oh, it was nice to have one faithful correspondent like this stepbrother Bagby.

Duffey was walking through that part of his wilderness that is called Dumaine Street. That sign "The Future Begins Right Here" was still standing in the pedestrian way. It must have been some time since Crissie Cristofero had first painted it. It's paint must long since be dry. The message of it was really directed to Duffey personally, which may have been the reason that he seemed to be the only one who noticed it.

The sign stood in the pedestrian way, but it wasn't an obstacle to the people. They didn't walk around it. They walked through it. Duffey also attempted to walk through it, but he stumbled into it violently, for it was solid and substantial to him. He tangled himself up, and he fell backwards with a resounding clatter. It was an obstacle to him, if not to others.

"What's with you, man?" a young fellow asked sharply. "You were walking along in the clear when all at once you started to fall all over yourself. Then you stumbled backwards and fell flat." The young fellow helped Duffey to his feet. "Are you all right?" he asked. "You are the clumsiest old bear I ever saw in my life."

Yes, there are pitfalls and obstacles in the wilderness, and a man falls several times a day.

"I know it's rough a second or two beyond that sign, or a day or two beyond it," Duffey said. "But maybe that is only the breakers breaking on the rocks. Will there not be clear water a little bit beyond them? How will it be a year beyond the barrier? I will see?"

"I and my giants will crash through! Power, power, lend me power! I have the modified lordship of time is a promise. I must make use of that now. I go through. Why is it so much harder than it used to be?"

Melchisedech went through the barrier and through the breakers that are just beyond it. And he found clear and nearly smooth water.

2

There should not be any awkward confrontations. Melchisedech had jumped one year into the future, but so had the world. To be sure that there would be no clashing of irreconcilables, Melchisedech walked to the Pelican Press which was the least awkward place that he knew. The memories of the jumped year should accrue to him flow and supply him with all the background he needed. After all, this was himself, and these would be his memories. He was jumping that year completely, and he should have arrived with every impression of that year complete within him.

But they were a very clotted bunch of impressions, very many for some months, hardly any for others. They would take some sorting out, and his own memories should be in him naturally.

He swung open the ornate door, bronzed by Finnegan, with the Holy Pelican so vivid on it, so alive that you wanted to throw it a fish. He entered, and he found Mary Virginia Schaeffer inside.

Few people have ever realized how complex a person was the open and intelligent and always kind Mary Virginia. And Duffey had not really realized it until he saw the look on her face now. Complex! Oh complex! She kept a gently burning look on him for a long time. She ran her hand over his face. "Ugh, my dear, ugh," she said. "That is my word on the subject. "If I did not love you I could not stand you so at all. How have you come to

this?"

That look of hers would have melted tin or brass. Well, Duffey was a tin horn sport loaded with brass, and it melted him completely.

"Oh Melchisedech, whatever will I do with you?" she said then. "You are the most exasperating person that I have ever known." But Duffey, for the life of him, couldn't think of anything exasperating he had done lately. His memories of the 'lately' were completely blank.

"What have I done wrong, Mary V.?" he asked. "You almost sound as if you weren't glad to see me this day. Fake it, sis, fake it. Pretend that you're glad to see me."

"I love you, Duff, but you shouldn't be here. Have any of the others seen you? They'll be frightened if they do see you."

"Why should anyone ever be frightened of me? Have I given you my review column for this week's Bark yet? Somehow I don't remember whether I have or not. If I haven't, I'll sit right down and do it now."

"Go ahead," Mary Virginia said. "No, you haven't done one for this week yet. Do it now if you wish, yes. It will certainly be a 'First'."

Duffey sat down at the little desk there and began to type quite rapidly. He wrote a very long and absolutely excellent review column, about three thousand words in a little more than an hour. His fingers and his mind had wings on them. It was an outstanding piece, loaded with insights and breakthrough stuff. Good! It was thumping good. Nobody around there, not even Stein, had ever marshalled such an array of crashing and illuminating ideas before. Salvation Sally started into the room. She looked at Duffey rattling away at the typewriter. Then she gave an odd 'squawk' and bolted out of the room again. And Mary Virginia went out after her. Odd!

But it was not nearly so odd as the super-odd things that were flooding through Duffey and being transformed into thoughty words by his magic fingers. How they did rattle out of that hardline! "It's as though I had acquired bi-mentality and bi-local vision," he told himself. "Never have I been able to see things from so many sides." Mary Virginia came back into the room after a while. She was smiling in seven-level arrangement and compression. And Duffey continued with his excellent piece.

Then the splendid and noetic Absalom Stein strode into the room. Yes, he was superb and splendid, and yes he knew it all. His daughter Becky was correct that he now suffered with overweening superbity. What, did he still have it? He had been suffering from it for more than a year then.

Stein looked at Melchisedech in an obscure way, not startled really, but not absolutely unstartled either. He shook his head that seemed to be even bigger than it used to be. He grinned a grin that was even wider than his previous record.

"I'll not believe it," he cried. "Whoop, I'll not believe it!" he howled. His rising howl broke into a roaring laugh, a grandfather guffaw, and he reeled out of the room overcome by something that went beyond merriment. And he could be heard with his echoing laughter filling all the streets outside.

"That man sure can laugh long," Melchisedech said. "I wonder why? What was so funny? They should barrel up laughter like that in casks and seal it. That was extraordinary."

And Duffey rattled along and finished his astonishing review article.

"Here it is, Mary Virginia," he said, "and it's good."

"I'm sure it is, I'm sure it is," she said. "We permit nothing that isn't good here. And now hadn't you better go?"

"What for? I like it here. It's my favorite place, after my own, of course. And besides, I am one-third owner of this place and its publications. Why are you angry with me? Or disappointed? Why are you whatever it is?"

"Have you done something bad, Melchisedech?" she asked. "Worse than usual, I mean."

"I don't think so. Not worse than usual, no."

"Then why are you wandering? Wily haven't you found peace?"

"I'm not wandering, Mary Virginia. I'm not even in the mood to wander."

"And I am looking for peace, and for pattern and for purpose, and all such things. Why is there a misunderstanding between us today?"

"Well, why are you so ambiguous then?"

"Ambiguous? I? Never."

"Yes, ambiguous. Ghosts are always ambiguous. That's all that they are. They are the essence of ambiguity. What? Don't you really understand what it is, dear? You're dead all these months. You're a ghost. And properly disposed persons have no need to wander as ghosts. At least I don't believe that they do."

"Ah, you fade out! Good, good. Then you're not really wandering lost. Then I only saw you because I was tired, and your specter was part of my tiredness. But how did Salvation Sally and Absalom Stein see you then?"

"Whatever it is, bless you, my friend."

Yes, Duffey faded out of there. But he didn't go away from there, only from them. So he would die within the year, the year less 'all these months'. Was that the death breathing its cold breath down his neck even now? But his death was already ordained in another place and time. Was there not a canonical impediment against dying twice?

Duffey withdrew from that crash year, and in doing so, he set it into the future once more. And then he was once again (it should be 'and then he was once before', but may grammar not perturb us) sitting in the all-things room at the Pelican press and trying to write a review column for the Bark.

"You've been fiddling away a lot of your time with that play that the Ursuline Academy girls are putting on," Mary Virginia was saying to him, "and then yesterday you were no good at all. It's as though you were in a daze all day long. Now you just finish that piece up! I need it this afteriloon absolutely."

So Duffey worked away at the review column with sincere application. But it didn't come so easy, nor was it nearly so excellent, as the review that he had just done, a year ahead of now, as a ghost.

Absalom Stein came in with his excellent and splendid stride. Superbity, Superbity, thy name is Stein.

"What was so damned funny, Stein?" Duffey asked in a rasping voice. And Stein was a little taken aback.

Then Duffey howled. His rising howl broke into a roaring laugh, a primordial guffaw. This laughing filled the whole room. It was horse laugh, it was hoodoo hootiig, it was gelasmus.

"Ah, the bubbly water people ought to bottle that stuff and sell it," Stein said. "It's good." Nobocly could laugh so outlandishly as Duffey, unless it was Stein himself.

Duffey went out to the unsinkable boat-castle to have dinner with Zabotski and Wife Waldo. They had been asking him for years, it seemed, and he had been promising to come for years. Duffey went out there in a taxi, but the taxi cab stopped three hundred yards from Zabotski Flats where the big castle-boat rode at kedge anchor. Zabotski Flats was about two hundred acres on Lake Borgne that Zabotski had bought. About two thirds of it was sweet, and one third of it salt meadows. All of it was incomparably lush, though the flats on each side of it were sparse of growth and worthless. So had Zabotski Flats been worthless when Zabotski had bought the spread at a low price. But then God and his sun has shined down on it, and God and his water had watered it and blessed it (such was Zabotski's explanation of the rich verdure of the place), all because Zabotski was a just man and selected for a special role.

You wouldn't believe the things that were grazing in the tall greenery of Zabotski Flats. You wouldn't believe that the lions and leopards had abjured flesh and were eating grass there, would you? Well, it wasn't grass they were eating, but it was vegetation. It was the Nimrod Flesh Plant, which is very rare in most parts of the earth but which was growing abundantly in the Flats.

Hippopotami and leviathan were grazing in the salt water meadows, belly-deep in the reed grass and the water, and happy with rumbling stomach song. Whales came up to the deeper part of the meadows and visited and joined their wisdom. Water buffaloes grazed in both the salt and the sweet portions. Zebras with all asses and cattle and sheep and goats, grazed in the sweet water parts of the fruits, with all rabbits and coney and small game animals also.

There was a little skiff there on the mixed water and grass shore. Duffey stood in it and pushed his way out to the big contraption boat castle barge by using its single steering car. And there on the big floating craft it was all domestic festivity and family revel. Wife Waldo had a pot as big as Duffey's own slungullion pot (indeed the pots were twins) which she kept at an eternal simmer or low boil.

"You come without wife or without hopes of offspring, Melchisedech," Zabotski said. "What is there about you that is worth serving then? We take no sterile thing with us when we go on our grand float." Zabotski talked funny today.

"I come here to dinner by invitation," Duffey said. "I do not come here to be saved. Nevertheless, it is always a welcome side benefit when salvation falls to one. And you will not be going on your grand float today."

"Aye, today it will be," Zabotski swore in his sore-tongued voice.

"Every day, for nine years now, Zab has sworn 'Aye, today it will be,'" Wife Waldo put in her tupelo-wood car. "But we still drift here on the light anchor. Zab had his tongue butchered by the lynchcrs, and I tell that now he should talk a little bit less for a while and let me talk a little bit more. But there's no way that Zab could talk less."

They were seated at a very long table now, and several of the salt water oriented children were saying grace: "We thank thee for the hippopotamus steak and the rhinoceros steak and the behemoth steak and the leviathan steak and the alligator steak and the buffalo steak and the elephant steak and the green turtle steak. Amen."

"We eat a lot of steak here," Wife Waldo said. "We pan fry it in those deep pans over there." The deep pans were as big as airplane wheels.

"Aye, it was down by the Opera House last night that the low lynchcrs took me and tried to dishonor me and to kill me," Zabotski said. "Was that only last night? It seems longer. They put a halter over my head, a bit in my mouth, and a rope around my neck. They began to hang me. I roared for help, but the mouth bit had a tongue spike in it and I could not roar properly. Nevertheless, certain poor people of the neighborhood came to my aid, and I myself erupted like a volcano with hiorns and hoofs on it. The poor people saved me, and I saved myself. We scattered those lynchcrs like chaff. But my tongue is mangled and so is my disposition. I tell you, Duffey, it isn't safe to be around that Opera House after dark."

There is nothing so homey as an ark. There was music and conversation, and all of it was home made. There were flutes there (the first ones made by Zabotski, the others by the various children) for every child and ape and seal in the establishment, and there was no prohibition against playing at table. This made for a musical meal. All houseboats are homey, but none so homey as this ark. You do not get such numbers of animals on most houseboats, nor such numbers of children.

"There are fifty-two kids," Zabotski said, "all of them unrelated, and all of them of superior quality. This gives a strong genetic base. We will get our first crop from the kids this year. Wife Waldo says that we

have been here for nine years (it doesn't seem like that long to me) so the oldest of the children will be fruiting this year.

"Melchisedech, these are smart kids. They know all the sciences and all the technologies. They even top me in a few fields. They are pious and imaginative and good-natured and loaded with understanding and scope. They take smart pills which they have invented themselves. They are splendid, but I told them this morning not to use the word 'splendid' any more. It's picked up distasteful connotations for me since last night. These kids do new things, with music (especially on the alligator skin drums). They do new things with mathematics. They do new things with metamorphics. They build the finest instruments in the world, and they build them for fun. They extract all one hundred and twenty elements out of the water of this open-mouthed salt lake, and then they change them from one to another. With such improvising kids, we need never run short of anything. They're the best kids that I ever saw."

There were many practical little tricks used there on the ark. Every person had a little hatchet with the other table implements beside his plate. Some of those rhinoceros and behemoth steaks are tough, but a good hacker can hack them into pieces, and the plates were of unbreakable Zabotski metal.

And each person had a small bow with arrows beside his place. This was to combine the sports of hunting and fishing with the sport of eating. Some of these those bowls of slungullian were pretty lively, you see. A variety of small creatures had mutated there, under the guidance of some of the biologically minded kids, and now they were able to live and thrive in boiling water and boiling slum. There were small, fierce, fanged sea creatures among them who disputed the contents of the bowls with the people. Oh, they struck like lightning when they struck, up out of the depths of the bowls of slum. But they could be shot with arrows just before they lept.

"But it was loaded in our favor to begin with," one of the kids said. "It isn't really fair. We could kill them with arrows. But all they could do to us was snap off a lip or a nose sometimes. So I have been redressing the balance."

"How have you been doing that?" Duffey asked warily. Zabotski was a joker, and even Wife Wildo was something of a joker. How would children raised by them not be jokers?

"I've taught two dozen of the midget octopoes to shoot little bows and arrows," the child said. (This was a female kid, and tricky.) "And I've made midget bows and arrows for them. I've also installed the shoot-to-kill instinct in them. The poison sepia concoctions for tipping the arrows was their own intention. A person shot by one of those poison tipped arrows will turn black and die within thirty seconds."

"Ah, and where are they now?" Duffey asked. "What did you do with the little biglbers after you'd educated them and armed them?" "I put them in the big pot," the child said. "And they had already settled on the go-for-the-open-spiggot, go-for-the-bowls strategy'. I imagine that they are in the bowls now, the very bowls we are starting in on. I think it's better sport when things are more evenly matched, don't you? How are your own reactions, Mr. Duffey? Are your arrows handy enough for quick notching and your bow handy enough for quick drawing? Will you be able to spot an overt move in your slungullion quickly enough? Remember, you have to shoot first, or you will die."

"I will shoot first," Duffey said.

"But if you should miss with your shot --"

"I won't miss," Duffey said.

That was one of the best and most homey and most wholesome dinners and visits that Duffey had ever experienced. If the world were destroyed and only this bright establishment saved, that would be better than if this bright establishment were destroyed and only the world saved. This group surviving would have to be entered on the gain side.

Duffey taught the children to make banjos that afternoon. They were good workers in all the materials, as their foster father was. And this would give a new note to the lively orchestration of the place. There would be some blessed plunking added to all the other blessings of the place.

If Duffey hadn't had an important appointment in town that evening, he might not have been able to tear himself away from the ark and its animals and people at all.

And the next evening, or maybe it was the evening after that, there was presented the play 'Seven Roads' in the Ursuline Academy's auditorium. Melchisedech Duffey acted his own role excellently. And in the intermission he performed magic. Not magic acts, but real magic. And he also played on his banjo and on his recorder flute. The presentation was an overwhelming success.

3

In his finite wisdom, Melchisedech knew that whatever time he would take for visiting and private communications would be time he would have to steal. The night of the little play, and it was late that night after the play had been given, seemed to be the last normal night of his life. The recent, last time that this night had been lived through, it had been followed by a weird morning when the whole town was turned awry and a new people had come in and taken control. This same morning would hardly follow again, but there might be a morning equally spooky. In any case, Duffey might not have full freedom of action on the morrow.

And Duffey had decided on a series of visits, that he wished to make. And as soon as he had decided on them, the fulfilling of them seemed imperative.

Duffey, retreating and retracing and using the same days and weeks and months several times over, made visits to most of his 'animations'. He feared this would be the last time he would ever see them in the normal flesh.

To a person who was not Duffey, it seemed as if there were lively doings in Duffey's diggings that night. Duffey went and returned close to a dozen times that night. He left in a hurry every time, and he returned in a hurry only minutes or hours later. And yet he might have spent a week or a month on several of his journeys of that night. He was playing fast and loose with time and space, before his powers in those directions should be taken away from him.

Duffey had decided to go to Havana Cuba on his first journey. Then he would go to the Marianao Coast a few miles from Havana to search for the place where Finnegan was said to have been killed. The death of Finnegan was supposed to have been many years before this. But Duffey was not at all sure that Finnegan was dead. He intended to find out about it.

"I mean to talk to Finnegan," Duffey said. "Be he alive or be he dead, I intend to talk to him and to have answers to my questions. I don't believe that Finnegan ever meant to be mysterious or to leave a mystery behind him. It was quite by accident that it fell out so. His body was not found there. But no further traces of him were ever found either. He will be glad to see me. Dead or alive, he will always be glad to see me. We were close, though our actual time together did not number very many days. I have a great affection for him, and I have never gotten over the shock of his possible death. He was the most masterly of my 'Animations'."

Duffey had a few clues. He had one always startling clue, the picture of Finnegan's grave. And this most mysterious picture had most likely been painted by Finnegan himself.

That painting hung in Duffey's Walk-in Art Bijou in New Orleans. It had been hanging there for more than thirty years. The name of it was 'The Resurrection of Count Finnegan'.

"Of what was Count Finnegan a Count?" asked Carmelo Mondoza, the

private detective who would accompany Duffey on the Cuban investigation.

"Possibly he was Count of nothing," Duffey said. "But he has titled this picture in his own hand, and he would not claim a title for himself that he didn't possess. One not-to-be-depended on source says that Fiiiiiegiii was a Papal Count, that he was an In Petto Papal Count, so named by a Pope now dead."

"If he were named In Petto, In Secret, then we could hardly know about it," Carmelo said. "Who is this not-to-be-depended on source?"

"He calls himself Mr. X."

"Oh him. I know him. And are not some of your other clues from this Mr. X. also?"

"They are, yes," Duffey said. "Oh, X., be there something in your information this time!"

Duffey and the detective Carmelo Mendoza studied the picture again. Their luggage had already gone to the dock, and they would go there in a moment. And the detective had already taken photographs of the picture and extracted much information from it. But, ah, the picture itself!

"The painting was twelve feet by eight feet, and Count Finnegan... [was] shown as life-sized. The painting was really two paintings separated by a schizo-gash. In the larger portion, the burial crypt seemed to be an ocean cave under a rock shelf; but now there was a fissure in the rock roof of the cave, and air and sunshine were pouring in. The half-risen Count Finnegan was partly in the dark-green water and partly in the bright-green air. There was a stark and horrible riseness about him. There were places on him where the flesh had fallen away from his bones as will sometimes happen when a person in either death or time-stasis is subject to an abrasion; and the under-the-rock-shelf water had apparently been abrasive. Count Finnegan was setting back into place one long strip of flesh that had fallen away from it's bone, and he showed sure intent of repairing other flesh damage and decay. He was identified by a latin scroll there, as the Papal Count Finnegan. Finnegan-Solli had always been good at reproducing Latin scrolls.

"The Count Finnegan in the picture seemed about thirty years older than the John Solli Finnegan would have been at the time of his reported death, which had been between two and three years before the time of the arrival of the painting at Melchesedech Duffey's New Orleans place. So it was a self-painting of Finnegan as it would appear twenty-five to thirty-five years in the future...

"Solli-Finnegan's big banana nose had acquired nobility and distinction on the Count in the picture. The flesh-mending hands of the pictured Count were even more intricate and talented than Finnegan's recent artist's hands which would be remembered by all who had ever known him. There was still the outrageous humor mixed with the warping pain and torture in the eyes. There was still the loose strength and speed of a yearling bullock... on the Count in the picture. There was still the mouth in motion, and one had the feeling of soon being able to hear the multi-dialected words and spatting phrases from the painted Count. But there was an added texturing of the whole person that appears mostly in those who have risen from the dead. The flesh had suffered simultaneous transfiguration and corruption and was now in a state of violent incompleteness. There was a locality about the flesh change; partly it was the sea change of un-coffined dead... Count Finnegan was in the rags and tatters of what may have been a winding sheet. But there were solid but old clothes there for him to put on, travellers clothes.

[How Many Miles To Babylon.]

'How Many Miles To Babylon' was a fictional piece written by a member of the old Finnegan outer circle. But it described the painting well, and so it is given here. It is one of the clues that Duffey turned over to the detective Carmelo Mendoza. But Mondoza had now absorbed the painting

itself, and he would never forget it. Mendoza stowed the other clues, in his mind or in his cases and folders, and they went down to the docks to take the Cuban boat.

This man Carmelo Mendoza, he was a happy-looking and wistful-looking clown. He was a small and lively man, but he seemed about as old as Duffey. He rolled his r's in the Austrian manner, and he had the palest eyes and hair that anyone ever saw. He seemed to know everything instantly, and he came well recommended by many people.

By whom? By what people? Well, by Teresa Showboat Piccone Stranahan of St. Louis. And by anyone else? Oh, by no one else. No one else was needed. Teresa herself was many people, and her recommendations were tops.

"Duff, this Carmelo is right all the way," Teresa wrote. "Since you are now starting out on a series of very tricky trips that will scrape both sides of the tunnel, I believe you should have Carmelo with you. He understands high trickery. He is only a so-so private detective, but he is a superb companion and friend.

"My love to the diminishing 'All of You'."

Oh, Teresa was all-understanding, that's why she knew that Melchisedech was starting out on a series of trips that would scrape both sides of the tunnel. One side of the tunnel was 'world' and the other side of it was 'time'. She knew that Melchisedech would have to leave and return to both of these on his journeys and do it again and again.

It would have been quicker to fly to Cuba, but perhaps they wouldn't have been allowed to disembark there. There was still a prevailing fussiness against Americans there.

Carmelo had provided seaman's pipers for both himself and Duffey, and they traveled as working seamen. Duffey's name was 'Mike Duffey' on the papers, and he was given as a citizen of the Irish Free State. ("You should be able to remember 'Mike'," Carmelo said, "and you sure should be able to remember 'Duffey'.") And Carmelo Mendoza himself was Karl Metz, and he was given as a West German. But who was he really? Duffey quickly understood that Carmelo was in love with disguises and with plots.

So they sailed for six sunny days and starry nights. Both of them were competent seamen and had clearly sailed as seamen many times before. Well then, they were nearly sure to meet someone that they had sailed with before.

"What is your real life history behind your surface life history?" Carmelo asked him one day. "If I am to serve and lead you through your puzzles, I think I should know this. It is clear that this lifetime is only an episode in your existence, but how did you come into it? How did your present phase of existence come to be?"

"Ah yes, I had been on the Holy Ship," Melchisedech said in a dreamy voice. "I had been doing high gestures that I am not allowed to remember in normal circumstance. Then I left the ship and came ashore. Well, I was given a short shore leave on the shore of my choice. That is what my present lifetime is. I came ashore swimming and then wading through turbulent water. It was early morning. The shore was muddy, with engendering mud, and full of promise. It was the year 1923, and I was a young man of no more than a quarter of a century of physical years. I went up that muddy shore and entered into the green and burgeoning years of a life.

"I tell you, there is no pleasure like starting a new life at age of less than twenty-five years. And I seem to remember that I had a choice of shores, and of green and burgeoning years. And I remember that I will always have that choice, again and again and again. I will have it if I only remember that I have it. That's the trick to it, if I only remember that I have it."

"Oh, I'll remind you," Carmelo said. "I'll make it a point of being there in your extremity, and reminding you that you have choices left."

But how odd it was that Duffey should tell such things to a

comparative stranger like Carmelo.

As it happened, Duffey did meet a seaman he knew. This was about mid morning of their first day at sea. It was a gnarled and cheerful oldster named Horace Pie, a Scotchman. He had sailed with Duffey once in years gone by, on quite a long voyage, and he had met Duffey on several shores since then. And he had known Finnegan. "You are going to find what you can of his death and entombment, Duffey? I will be ashore in Havana for three days. I'll go with you. I'm curious about the thing myself. I've heard stories about him. He's one of the legends now. I don't know where he's entombed, but there are people who do know. I say entombed, not buried. There's a difference. And entombment isn't such a tight fit.

"They call Finnegan 'The Sleeping Man'. Did you know that? So there are others who don't believe that he's dead for sure. You're traveling with Eggs, heh?"

"With eggs, Horace?"

"Ya, Mr. Eggs. And now he calls himself Metz. He is all right. Harmless. And he does tell some tall ones."

"Oh," said Duffey. "Oh, and again Oh. How unperceptive of me! But he always did love disguises. Yes, I've known him before also, so it's odd that I didn't know him this time."

"Can you still rub your hands and make gold coins, Duffey?" Horace Pie asked him.

"Yes, yes, I suppose that I can still do it."

"That talent will come in handy when you try to get information about Finnegan in Cuba. In Cuba, they don't say 'What's that?' when they see a bit of gold. They circulate a lot of it and it will buy a lot there."

"Then I will circulate a lot of it, if it will buy information about Finnegan."

"Did you know, Duffey," Pie said, "that several men once plotted to chop off your hands. They believed that the coining power was in your hands and not in yourself. They believed that they could keep your severed hands and rub them together whenever they wanted, and set up a rain of gold coins. But you were too canny for us. We never had the chance to lop your hands. I was one of the men who plotted against your hands. I was younger then. They grew us pretty green in the green hills of Scotland."

"I have information already," X. said to Duffey on the second day. "There are about a hundred of those tide-water caves that are two thirds under water and have their entrances under water; these are in about a seven mile stretch along the Marinanao Coast. All we have to do is find the right one. How are you at under water swimming?"

"Good enough, Mr. Eggs," Duffey said. "But it will be very choppy water along a shelf like that. Nobody will be very good at it. I could go down. I could enter half a dozen of the caves. But I could never enter a hundred."

"When did you tumble that I was Mr. X., Mr. Duffey," X. asked, for he was Carmelo Mondoza and he was also Karl Metz. X., the old friend and dealer of doubtful information.

"You think I would not always know my own handiwork, X.? I made you, or at least I evoked your clay."

"Then Signora Stranahan in St. Louis won her bet," X. said. "She bet that you would know me in whatever disguise I used. But I bet not one person in a million would have known me. Have you still your facility for coining gold, Mr. Duffey?"

"I hope that I have it yet."

"It will go well in Cuba. Golden tips get information."

There was still the testiness about Americans in Cuba, but Duffey and X. got in all right. An Irishman like Duffey can always pass for all Irishmen. And X. was one quarter German and had but to speak in the way that

his maternal grandfather had spoken.

Then Duffey and X. and Horace Pie were down along the coast, telling people that they were looking for the sea level tomb of the 'Sleeping Man' and that they would give one gold coin or even two for real information.

"He is not here," said a man full of ancient integrity. "He was there for thirty years, and no one came to see what his problem was. And just yesterday he went away. And today you come. Bad luck that."

"How did he go away?" Duffey asked.

"I don't know how," the man said, "but I'm sure that he went away. More than thirty years ago, the woman said that he was sleeping and not dead. She had him put in a tomb cave with a sea door to it. "Let him not be disturbed," she said. "Let him be forgot. In his own time he will wake up." And so it was. The woman, La Dorotea, she was here for about three weeks after that. Then she died. She had been wounded by gunshot and her strength never came back to her. She is buried in the San Francisco cemetery on the other side of the city. She is buried there because she had a medallion showing that she belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis. But the sleeping man his waked and gone yesterday."

"No, he is not gone. He is still there," several young boys said. "Give us gold coins, and then give us hanf an hour, and we will take you to the 'Sleeping Man' in his hole under the sea shelf."

"Are you sure that he is the same 'Sleeping Man'?" Horace Pie asked suspiciously.

"Oh sure. There is only one of them," the ringleader of the boys slid. "We call him the Long-Sleep Man and we even make a song about him." The boy sang a little snatch of song that had words such as 'hombre' and 'durmiendo' in it. "Hell, it even has an English chorus to it," he said then.

Long-Sleep MAN, in sweet repose.

Long-Sleep MANNNN, with banana nose!"

"Yes, that's Finnegan," Duffey said. He rubbed his hands together and brought forth three gold pieces and gave one to each boy.

"We need two more of them," the ringleader boy said. "He won't do it for less than two gold pieces. I don't think he will."

"Who won't do what?" Duffey asked.

"Ah, a confederate of ours. He can find the cave better than we can. But he has to have two gold pieces."

Duffey rubbed his hands together and produced two more gold pieces. The ringleader boy took them and ran off, apparently to find the confederate.

Duffey struck another gold piece and gave it to the man full of ancient integrity who still insisted that the Sleeping Man had left the burial cave the day before. And Duffey had a suspicion that he was right.

Then the three men, Duffey and X and Horace Pie, went with the two remaining boys and entered three of the caves with underwater entracnes. None of them was the right one, and the underwater swims were rathe strenuous.

After that, the ringleader boy returend. He led them into another cave by another submarine 'set door'. They came up into a space that was slightly above the water and that had sunlight seeping down through the cracks in its rocky beech roof.

And there was a sleeping man there. He was a portly Cuban man, lying nude on a rock shelf. And his workman's clothes were piled beside him. But he wasn't Finnegan and he hadn't been there for thirty years, nor even for thirty minutes. The sleeping opened one eye and looked at them.

"O...?" he asked.

"O.K. I supposed," Duffey said, "but you're not the man we're looking for."

"The other, original 'Sleeping Man' really did go away yesterday," the ringleader boy said. "But we will not give you back your gold. We've

hidden it."

"All right," Duffey said, "But take us to the cave of the real 'Sleeping Man'."

"We take you there, but he himself is gone," the ringleader boy said.

They came to it, out of the dripping sea and into its half darkness touched with sunlight. Yes, it was Finnegan's tomb. He was not there, but things that had touched him were still there. Fragments of his aura still hung there, discernible. And there were a few carvings in low round on the walls that had unmistakably been done by Finnegan. Like a hibernating bear, he had brief moments of wakefulness during his long sleep.

And this was clearly the cave that had been shown in that painting 'The Resurrection of Count Finnegan'. But Finnegan was not there.

"The old man spoke true," Horace Pie commented. "Finnegan was here yesterday and he has left."

"If he was here yesterday, then I will go to yesterday and see him before he leaves," Melchisedech said. Pie and X laughed, but Duffey cast a deep sleep on them, cutting across their laughter.

It was yesterday in the burial cave then. Pie and X were not there, but Finnegan and Melchisedech were there. And a murderous white sturgeon was there also, full in the sea door or underwater entrance to the cave, avid to prevent anyone leaving alive. The white shark intended to kill the awakened Count Finnegan should he attempt to leave by sea.

And there was an unfriendly man standing on the flat shore over their heads, intending to kill Count Finnegan if he should find a way up through the fissured roof of the cave to come out to full day. The word of the Resurrection had reached the Enemies, and they would prevent it by every way possible. Count Finnegan knew that the man was there, and Melchisedech knew that he was.

Count Finnegan seemed to have passed through extreme agony only the moment before, but now he was alive and awake and intense. He had been speaking when Duffey broke into his yesterday, and he continued to speak, or to pray.

"My rock, be not deaf to me," Finnegan said, but not exactly to Melchisedech, though he saw him.

"Lest if thou hear me not, I become like unto them who go down into the pit," Melchisedech spoke in the same psalm prayer.

Finnegan: "Though war should rise against me, even then will I trust."

Melchisedech: "One thing I ask. This do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."

Finnegan: "He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sharon like a young buffalo."

Melchisedech: "The Lord shakes the desert of Cadiz."

Finnegan: "He rises in the darkness, as a light to the upright."

Melchisedech: "He shall not fear bad news."

Finnegan: "I am shut in and cannot go out."

Melchisedech: "They surround me like water all day long."

Finnegan: "I lie down among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave."

Melchisedech: "Your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Finnegan: "He has shaken the earth, he has torn it apart."

Melchisedech: "Heal its branches, for it quakes."

Finnegan: "They howl like dogs and prowl about the city."

Melchisedech: "Rise up."

Finnegan: "My tears were kept in thy water skin."

Melchisedech: "Are they not recorded in thy book?"

Finnegan: "Therefore we do not fear, though the earth be overthrown."

Melchisedech: "And the mountains crash into the midst of the sea."

Finnegan: "I lay down and slept."

Melchisedech: "You arose."

Finnegan: "He waits in ambush near the villages. He lurks in secret places like a lion in his lair. There are traps for my feet. I must find my way among them."

Melchisedech: "There will be light for your feet. He has called you to rise from the sea."

Finnegan: "Have I found out the secret of the darkness? Have I found the kindling of the light?"

Melchisedech: "He has saved you for this latter time." Finnegan: "Here are my hands, if it should pass into them. What if I should hold the crown and raise it above the teeth of the dogs?"

Melchisedech: "Ascend into the city. There are doings that only you can do."

Finnegan: "The lines have failed for me in pleasant places. I am greatly pleased with my inheritance."

Melchisedech: "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. And now that we have prayed together, Finn of my heart, tell me what mission you go on. It's a violent one, I know, to call you out of death sleep for it."

Finnegan: "It's a violent one, yes. It will be a sort of spy thriller, Duffey, if you must know the category of it. And, like all good spy thrillers, the fate of the world will depend on its resolution. You cast two friends of mine into a deep sleep about this time tomorrow, did you not?"

Melchisedech: "Yes, Finnegan, I did. And now if you will let me... or tell me what your great mission is... or at least let me see whether you escape the man and the shark. Let me see how you do it, or if you do."

Finnegan: "It sure will be tricky, Duffey. But I haven't been in abeyance for thirty years to blink out now. You put my friends to sleep tomorrow. I put you to sleep now."

Melchisedech: "Wait, Finnegan, wait --"

But Duffey was into deep sleep. And woke up when X and Pie woke up. It was the day that it should have been. And Finnegan had risen the day before and gone on his journey.

"That white shark, thirty yards off the breakers there," Duffey said after they had surfaced outside of the cave, and then they were getting onto the high shore fast. "That white shark, does he look fed?"

"He does not," Horace Pie said. "He is hungry. And he is frustrated and furious. I do not want any congress with that embittered shark."

4

Duffey and X. went to Chicago. X. was complaining of time lag which is of much more effect than jet lag caused by having one's time of day disrupted by fast travel. Duffey had gone several weeks into the past, and he had taken X. with him. X. did not look well, but he looked more himself. He had not yet lightened his hair nor (by special process known only to himself) lightened his eyes to give himself a disguise.

"This is awkward. It is even outrageous," X. fumed. "Why is it necessary that we traverse time contrary-wise?"

"To avoid my own death," Duffey said. "My death would impose a special set of conditions on my travel. I have it pretty well narrowed down when I will die, on a certain night or on the night after that, and we were coming too close to them. I like a very short leeway. I believe that it deepens my piety to know that I am always within two weeks of my death."

"Your set is already ordained, man," X. said. "You know in what future it will be. I brought your ashes back from that time. You will not die within two weeks."

"There are paradoxes about me that you know not of," Duffey said. "I will go when I will go, but first I want to see all of my nation once more in the normal flesh."

"But is Casey in the normal flesh now?" X. asked. "There is some doubt about that, Casey has become -- ah --"

"Casey has become a cult figure," Mary Catherine Carutners told them fifteen minutes later when they had gone to see her. "And as such he makes more than thirty thousand dollars a week. There is big money in being a cult figure. I don't know whether you'll be able to see him or not. Hardly anybody gets to see him now. And when you do see him, you haven't seen much. He's clear off the world, in another world of his own. There is even good physical evidence that he is clear off the world when he is in one of his raptures.

"'That fish, Prince Casimir!' is what Bascom Bagby always called him. Well, but Casey says that he is one of the two Zodiacal Fish. Christ is the other one. Cult leaders aren't known for their modesty. I have always wondered how Casey hooked people, but he has always had me hooked worse than any of them. Take me out on the town tonight, fellows! I don't go out nearly enough. The Casey sickness is pretty awkward, and I can't shake it. He really is a total phoney, granted. Well then, that means, that one of the two Zodiacal Fish is a total phoney, for Casey is indeed in the Zodiac. He has painted a remarkable painting of the curile chair on which he sits in the Zodiac. It's loaded with living and crawling symbolism. Casey is nearly, for very short spurts, as good a painter as Fiiinegan was, is. Sometimes Casey says that he's the Antichrist. I don't know whether he believes it or not, but countless of his followers say it and believe it. 'It is the highest status ever attained by any human,' they say. 'It should be a matter of pride to every human that one of us has risen to give the highest challenge.' His followers, ugh! But I am generally accounted as one of his leading followers, and those who so account me are the ones who say 'That Carruthers woman, ugh!' No. I'm sure he won't see you. But Hilary Hilton has just come in and he will be overjoyed to see you."

Mary Catherine Carruthers worked for Hilary Hilton, that dynamically lazy young tycoon who liked to gather in money and power.

"The enormously spoiled brat, Rolo Danovitz, the Antichrist of a current cycle of quasi-fiction, is Casey exactly," Hilary Hilton was saying two minutes later. Hilary was nephew to Duffey's dead best friend Sebastian Hilton, and Hilton and Duffey had become very good friends in the middle and later years. "Casey is the spoiled brat who squawled for the stars so loudly and stridently that they had to be given to him. The dark stars, that is: ah, the dark stars belong to Casey now, and they're at least half the stars. Does Casey really believe that he's Antichrist? That's a question that's often asked. Why shouldn't he believe it? That's who he is, Certainly I mean it. I spent several million dollars establishing his identity, and it has been established. Not one of the top five minds in the world doubts the identity now. But I've known who it is since we were both small boys.

"Casey makes much ado about his sacrificing himself for humanity, and for the 'larger humanity', and especially for those most unfortunate and most abused creatures in all creation, the demons. But Casey misleads here. He never sacrificed in his life. He's incapable of sacrifice. But he demands sacrifice to himself by all. He gets it most of the time too. He's insatiable in his demands.

"No, Duffey, I don't believe he's into the cultishness for the money. He's low, but he isn't that low. And I don't believe that being even a top cult figure pays all that well. Oh, maybe he clears forty or fifty thousand dollars a week. I make more money than that myself, and Casey's at least as smart as I am. He could be making more than that in some honest line of business. He would have done better to marry Mary Catherine here and prosper legitimately. So would I have done better to marry Mary Catherine here. But my wife Mary Jean preempted both Casey and myself. No, I don't

think that Casey will see you. He believes that he can out-measure you, Duffey, but not without a bruising psychic battle, and he wants to avoid that. The only two persons he does not believe that he can out-measure are Finnegan and Bishop Salvatore. He's afraid to go to the test with either of them. Casey has always insisted that Finnegan is still alive. And now my own very high priced investigators have told me that Finnegan is indeed alive, that he is waking from his deathlike sleep right now, and that he will leave his tomb within the next ten or twelve days. He is destined for some tricky doings. Finnegan has come to look exactly like Josef Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch. Cardinal Joseph is the other person, separated off by the schizogash from Count Finnegan, in that remarkable painting 'The Resurrection of Count Finnegan' which painting belongs to me and is kept by you in your Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans. You must know that Cardinal Josef is the best bet to be next Pope. But some of those who see into the future, imperfectly and in rough hunks though they see, say that by a contrived mix-up Count Finnegan will be the one who actually assumes the Crown, though he will be known as Josef Cardinal Hedayat until he is known as Peter the Second."

"That is a large order, Hilary," Duffey said.

"True, but I have the most penetrating investigators in the world, and many of them move easily beyond the world to gather their data. One of the (not the best of them) most outre of them is X. here."

"You blow my cover!" X. said with open exasperation.

"Duffey, I know that Casey will refuse to see you," Hilary said.

"But he can be manipulated. We will make him want to come to you. How about my getting a hundred or so of your best remaining friends together for a little intimate party tonight? I will bet you that Casey crashes it. He hates to be left out. 'Highest status ever attained by a human or not'. Casey doesn't like to be passed over. He will come, if he knows that I am throwing the party, and that I refused to invite him."

"All right," Duffey said.

"This Casey has never impressed me a lot," said that mendacious midget Charlotte Garfield. "Yes, I know who he is. He really is the Antichrist. But that's only a high-sounding title. It carries very little prestige with the real inner circle people.

"As a confidence man, he breaks the basic code. He does prey on widows and orphans, on the helpclass, and on the inept. His whole fellowship is among such. He seldom pitches to persons of intelligence and canniness, unless they have an extreme tilt that makes them vulnerable. He is not an honest hunter. He has no conception of conmanship as high hunting of tough and resourceful game.

"Oh, he has learned a big hatful of tricks, patiently and thoroughly. But he uses them mostly on gravid females and on children of all ages. Yes, he does have a foot in each world, or in each of several worlds. So have I, so have you Duffey, so have you X.; that isn't a great thing. He is a cheap shotter to his heart.

"As to the eschatological aspects of his activities, those are the last things I want to think about."

"Hilary Hilton is giving a small and intimate party for myself and a hundred or so of my old friends tonight, Charlotte," Duffey said.

"Yes, he's called me. I'll be there," the damnable midget agreed.

But in the early evening, in hour or so before the small gathering of the hundred or so ultimate friends, Duffey called Casey. He did not call on phone or on Intimo. He knew that he wouldn't get through to him if Casey was on the high hobby. But he called him in a direct and undeviced way.

And Casey talked to Duffey in saying that he would not talk to him. This was one of the direct conversations that did not come over any of the approved channels.

"I will not see you," Casey said, "and I will not permit you to see me. On no account will we meet again. Be gone, clown."

"You will see me, if I have to have your head brought here and set before me, with your eyes sewn open, youi will see me," Duffey swore. "And you will see me in the seeing of many millions of people. On early prime time television we will have you, Casey."

"I know power, Duffey, and I know that you have not the power to compel me to any such silliness," Casey said. "Oh, I swore that I would not talk to you, and I will not. Nor see you. Nor hear you."

Casey scrambled the very air and aether, and Duffey could not reach to him again. But Duffey believed that he could project him.

This trick of protecting persons and situations and pitches on television was one of Casey's own strong tricks, though he always denied any complicity or intent in it. But Ciscy had projected his idealized face and his eerie-toned voice in superposition on hundreds of programs. That is really how he became so well known as the Anti-Christus. This projection too difficult for one who is a genius at electronics and a giant in psyche.

The intimate part was at Randal's. Duffey told them there that an interesting over-picture would appear that evening on the channels, one worth minute study. So a three-meter set was brought into the Cenacle or supper room.

And the over-picture came while that supertime family comedy, Goldfarb's Alley, was on the tube.

Violence was only used for clownish effect on Goldfarb's Alley; so when the horrible screaming begin, many of the watchers thought that it was supposed to be funny. Others knew at once that something was very very wrong, that the sceaming didn't belong there at all. Some thousands recognized that beloved voice, and knew that the person was in agony. They begin to pour out into the streets within seconds. They would kill for their cult hero. They would tear the town apart to extricate him from danger. All they needed was direction.

For others, the surface fun was quickly milked out of the comedy, and the sound became grizzly. And yet there might be a deeper and darker fun in it. The over-picture appeared to reinforce the sound. There were four black giants of demiurgic appearance. They were carrying a livid object by its hair.

The horrifying object was the head only of Kasimir Szmansky, Casey of the Zodiac, the fantastic cult figure. It was not shown as severed. It was shown as a head-only person, grimacing horribly, and cursing. It would shiver anybody just to watch it.

"Not bad, Duffey," Hilary Hilton said. "How do you do it?"

"I take it from a picture that Adam Scanlon once painted of Casey, unbeknownst to Casey himself. Scanlon had no use at all for Casey, though Scanlon was a close friend of Finnegan and Finnegan was of the inner world with Casey. The animation and presentation of it? Oh, that's a little harder. It's taking a lot out of me," Melchisedech Duffey said. "These things don't come as easy for me as they used to. The power is just not what it once was."

"I want the original of that Scanlon painting," Hilary said. "I lust for it."

"I'll send it to you," Duffey said.

"I will not see! I will not see!" the lolling mouth of the atrocious head was rattling out in jerky anger. "I will not see you at all, mangy magus."

But the eyes of the head were sewn open and there was no way that the livid head could close them. The head groaned and sweat profusely.

All of the people on the 'Goldfarb's Alley' Comedy Show had adandoned the screen to the grotesque head and the black giants that still held it. The alley people had fled away in terror. But they were just

pictures, and were not present on the individual screens in person. Maybe not, but still they fled away in terror. They did not want any part of that livid head. The apparition was building up to a point of vivid horror.

But then a tensely cool voice broke over the screen, broke over millions of screens on all channels, attempting to override the visibility and the strident sound.

"This presentation is a fraud!" the cool but tense voice announced. "It is projected by a fraud. I am Casey of the Zodiac, the Anti-Christus, and I say that this livid head is not mine. It is only a sick dream. I am not captured. I am not compelled to look at trash. I beg you, people who believe in me, do not riot in the streets. I am not captured. I am not harmed. I am not threatened. This picture is sheer fraud."

But the mouth and the voice of the living head cried out, "This is no fraud."

The head rolled its eyes inward till only the bloodshot whites of them could be seen, and they could not be compelled to see anything except the head's own interior darkness. "I will not meet this magus, I will not look upon him," the head said.

But one of the black giants made cuts at the corners of the head's eyes with a surgical instrument. Then he went deeper with another instrument, and snipped. He did this to the region behind each eye. He cut the optic nerves and muscles so that the eyes came to the front again and could not be rolled back into the head.

"I will not see this monster!" the head roared. And yet its eyes were sewn open and it had to see him. The eyes did see Melchisedech. In malevolence they saw him.

"There is rioting in the streets," an official of Randal's said as he came to them in the Cenacle Room. "It's broken out everywhere just in seconds. This Zodiac Person has millions of intense followers and defenders."

"Street riots in Chicago have always had an amateurish quality," Duffey said. "They don't do much real damage."

"These are doing real damage," the official said. "I believe the picture that has set them off is originating right here. I ask you to terminate it."

"Wait a minute," Duffey said. "He's caving in. I can feel him cave."

And Casey, watching the bloated caricature of his own head, hearing the croaking burlesque of his own voice in its agony-humor, did cave in. Casey was a bit fastidious. Stark things offended him. "You win, Melchisedech," the Casey voice came, cool and with a touch of venom, both on the big T.V. set and independent of it. "Turn it off. I'll be down to the party immediately. Such things as these pass for humor with the Duffeyites."

Casey arrived there in about seven minutes. He had climbed down from his Curile Chair in the Zodiac, and he showed quite a bit of the old Casey in him, only about half covered up by the cult figure. The old Casey had always been a fair sort of party man, sometimes setting aside his pride for hours on an end for enjoyment in the company of old acquaintances. For everyone here was an acquaintance of Casey as well as of Melchisedech Duffey.

It was a good party. It was five hours of the most urbane festivities ever. There have not been so many bright people in one room, actually four rooms of the suite that they overflowed, since Olympus was torn down to build a 'Look-Out Lodge and Leisure Hostel' up there.

Hilary Hilton and Mary Jean (she was the only one in the world who had ever really set Casey's heart to howling and baying), Demetrio Glauch, Clarence Schrade, Silas and Maude Whiterice, the Countess Margaret Hochfelsen (only next week you will be a Royal Pop Person, Countess, and much younger than you are now: do you know that?), Lily Koch (Oh Lily, Lily,

Lily!), Mary Frances Rattigan (Gompers), Mary Catherine Carruthers, Ethyl Ellenberger and her husband John Ryan, Nathan and Shirley Stone (Duffey was pretty sure that Nathan was a brother, and less abrasive person, than Absalom Stein), Elena O'Higgins, d'Alesandro, Charlotte Garfield and her son Michael, Enos Dorn, Angelo Cato, Ira and Rebecca Spain, Homer and Evangeline Durbin, Mike and Peggy Conner, Isaac and Mary Lightfoot, Judley and Pauline Peacock, Mary Carmel Hooligan, Mother Mary Aurora, Enniscorthy and Mary Margaret Sweeny, Tony and Evelyn Apostolo, Cletus Kenealy, Cassius and Mary Greatheart, Leo Ring, Martin and Katherine Redwine, Nemo Cobb, Fred and Helen Batavia, X., Melchisedech Dtiffey, many, many others were there. So many of the old friends were still there, and so many others were sleeping in the Lord. And Casey of the Zodiac, what could you make of him?

On this night, Melchisedech saw these good friends of his for the last time in the normal flesh. He reveled in the company of almost all of them, and in particular in that of one of his Splendid Animations, Mary Catherine Carruthers.

But he did not solve the riddle of the other one of his Splendid Animations here: Kasimir Szymansky, Casey of the Zodiac, the self-proclaimed Anti-Christus. Cisey was wrapped in several thicknesses of riddles, and he would not be penetrated in a day or a week now. But it was a good party, and one that would be remembered in this world and in the next.

5

'It's NOLA for all Quirks and Quips,
Havana for rum graves and rum,
Chicago for Companionships,
St. Louis for Symposium.

[Count Finnegan. Road Songs.]

Duffey and X went to St. Louis. There was a concentration of his Animated Marvels there, Hans Schultz and wife Marie Monahan, Vincent Stranahan and his wife Teressa Piccone. Four of them was almost critical mass. And a fifth one was there that Duffey didn't know was there. This was critical mass, considering that X. was also an Animated Marvel.

The one of them that DLiffey did not expect to find in St. Louis was Henri Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans.

"Whatever are you doing here in St. Louis, friend and elevated person," Duffey asked. "I waw saving you for the last. I intended to see you in New Orleans before my skein quite runs out."

"I came to St. Louis to see you," Cardinal Salvatore said. "You will not return to New Orleans. Your skein runs out here."

"You are sure of that, your tallness?"

"Was I ever sure of anything? I was just talking to Dame Bagby about the situation. She believes that you should be buried here. There is a lot for you in their plot. You can be beside your quasi-brother Bagby, and perhaps you will be with him in person also. He's presently residing on the north slope of Purgatory, if you need guidance to find him. And after a bit the Dame will join you there."

The Cardinal was referring to Duffey's sister as Dame Bagby, and indeed she had become something of it dame, weighty and ponderous, but merry yet.

"You have it all figured out," Duffey said. "Could you tell me what day my obsequies would be?"

"No point in telling you," the Cardinal said. "Figure you have it almost through this weekend. Then we can bury you Monday or Tuesday. Yes, neat, Melchiscdech. The world will be a bit lonesome without you."

They were in the old Stranahan residence, the Cat Castle. Patrick Stranahan was dead. Charley Murray was dead. Papa Piccone was dead. Father

McGuigan was dead. "I should have come two years ago," Melchiscdech said, "and seen them a last time in their worn-out mortal coils. Marry me, Monica. You should have come into a good inheritance."

"Oh, you would only give it away," Monica said. Duffey had given away his half-ownership in the 'Rounders' Club' just that day. Well, Charley Murray, in his will, had left his half interest in the club to his nephew Vincent Stranahan. So Duffey now deeded his half interest to Teresa Showboat Piccone Stranahan. Now those two were running it. It would continue to be a fine club in the old tradition.

"You haven't delayed your own death one moment by your scurrying around through time," the Cardinal Salvatore said. "This is the day it is supposed to be. You will die when you are supposed to die. And another good man will be gone to the greater thing."

"Yes, the calendar did jump ten days when I wasn't paying attention," Duffey said. "But I can always make it jump back again."

"No, you cannot," the Cardinal said. "Never again. The gears and the activating rods of that device have rusted fast now, and they'll never work for you again. It was only boyishness, and it's taken away from you now."

"There is always the Argo," X. said.

"What is the Argo?" Melchisedech Duffey asked him. Probably they were talking in the Bread and Wine Room at Rounders' Club now, or at Cabramatta Castle which was the home of Hans and Marie, or in the Burlesque Buffet Room in the house of Vincent and Teresa, or at Dame Bagby's Place. Probably those present were Dame Bagby, Hans and Marie and Cecelia Schultz (Cecilia was one of the daughters-in-law), Vincent and Teresa and their three younger children Chiara and Rafadio and Theresa Anna who were born so many years after their older children, Monica Murray Stranahan, Philip Stranahan the oldest brother of Vincent, Duffey, X., Henri Cardinal Salvatore. It was a pleasant continuing conversation or symposium that went on for several days, the last several days of Duffey's normal life.

"Do you not remember the Argo, Melchiscdech?" Teresa asked. "We are not supposed to remember that grand ship when we are not actually sailing on her. There is an amnestic mechanism that insures that we do not remember, but I myself cheat a little bit on it, and I believe that you others do also."

"The only Argo I have heard of is in Bulfinch's Mythology. What is this grand ship and what flag does she sail under?"

"That of the Kingdom of Colchis," Henri Cardinal Salvatore said.

"No, we do not ordinarily remember the Argo except when we are sailing on her. And if, during our land tenure, we do remember a little bit about it, we feel that it is more symbolic than real. And yet it's a grand thing to ship as an Angel before the Mast, as an Ancient Salt-Water Shepherd who smells strongly of sheep, as a person who may sail over the edge of the world again and again and again. I believe that I myself have been sailing on her quite recently. I feel the sustaining salt-wind of an Argo voyage sustaining me in all that I do. But the days and years spent on the Argo are not deducted from the days and years of life. They are outside of that. And of the mariners on the Argo, some are in the flesh and some are out of it, and sonic are of a fishy flesh. But one cannot play tricks with the Argo."

"I can," X said. "I do it constantly."

"Should Duffey, in the last minute of his life, decide to sail on the Argo, then very likely he would be able to do so. He might sail on her and perform gesses from her for what seems like three or five or seven years, which is those years according to the chronometer of the Argo. But they will not shorten the last minute of his life. They are not contained in that minutes though they may accompany that minute. The minute will still be gone in sixty seconds, and the earthly life will be gone with it. There is no way to play tricks with the Voyages."

"There is a way, right at the end of the voyage," X. said. "One has, if he remembers to have, a selection of shores on which to land from the

voyage. And one has, if he remembers to have, a selection of years in which to land."

"But he will not remember," the Cardinal said.

"If I remember to remind him, then he will," X. maintained.

"No, you will not remember to remind him, and he will not remember to remember," the Cardinal insisted. "It will end when it is supposed to end."

"I remember it now," Duffey said, "how I begin the present phase of my life. Ah yes, I had been on the Holy Ship and doing high gestures there. Then my tour of duty was ended there, and I remembered what I might do. I left the ship and cattle ashore. Well, I was given a short leave (sixty years it was, as it happened) on the shore of my choice. That is what my present lifetime is. It seems as if I have told this same thing in these same words to somebody very recently."

"Not to me," said the Cardinal Salvatore.

"I came ashore, swimming and wading through turbulent water. It was early morning. The shore was muddy, with engendering mud, and full of promise. It was the year 1923, and I was a young man of no more than a quarter of a century of physical years. I went up that muddy shore and entered into the green and burgeoning years of my life. If I remember to do it, I can come back to that same shore, and to that same year, and have another sixty green and burgeoning years to my life. If I remember, I can land on that shore again and once more be a young man of only a quarter of a century of physical years."

"Melchisedech, Melchisedech, if you keep coming back to the same shore, how will you ever reach the other shore where all blessing is?" Cardinal Henri asked. "But if you do relive the sixty green and burgeoning years again, it will still all be in that final minute of your life, and it will not shorten that minute by a second."

"It may be that I am not quite prepared to face that other shore just yet," Melchisedech said.

"I believe that I have been on the Argo quite recently," Hans said.

"I know that I have," Marie maintained. "That is why I always wake so refreshed lately."

"One of the latter-day prophetic books, referring to a conclave to be held in the middling near future, dismisses the me as being already dead," Cardinal Henri told them. "'Daniel Jean Boule who was the double of the dead Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans, was coming up from along the Mexican coast in a tramp steamer' it records briefly. That is the only time that I appear in this prophetic piece, and I thought I would play a large part in the conclave."

"For I do not intend to be dead. I intend to be my double's double. I will travel for a while as the double of the dead Dan Boule (he's my cousin, by the way). I will attend the conclave. And I will be a candidate."

"There's another passage in one of the latter-day prophetic books," Teresa said. "And it is (pay attention please, Melchisedech and all) this:

'He also predicted three cargoes that Melchisedech Duffey, in ghostly and bony form, and with a crew of wraiths, would transport on the last voyage of the ship Argo, which has had other names.

One of these cargoes would be Count Finnegan whom Melchisedech would transport to an obscure place in the Indies where he would be elected and crowned. One of these cargoes would be Prince Casimir whom Duffey would transport to the coast nearest the Vale of Armageddon where this Prince Casimir would reign for a while as Anti-Christ. And the third of the cargoes would be the Parousia Himself, Christ of the Second Coming.' Have you knowledge of these things that you will do, Melchisedech?"

"I have it not", Melchisedech Duffey said.

Everything was a bonus in those last days in St. Louis. It was

superfluous in the correct old sense of the word which is 'overflowing'. There were extra snails on the thorn, there were extra pigeons in the parks. The years that the cows had eaten were returned green and whole. There was gravy on the goose and huckleberries on the biscuits. Melchisedech had almost forgotten what good people were these several of his Blessed Animations, Teresa and Vincent, Hans and Marie, Henry: were there ever five such genuinely good persons in the world? Had they not rebuilt the world from its sorry state? Was it not better for their having been in it? Did the cranky details matter at all when these larger persons were --"

Oh, Duffey had a seizure then, on the third or fourth day of the St. Louis visitation. And he was into the last minute of his normal life. But he was happy to have such pleasant friends at his sudden leave-taking. They would bid him right.

"Remember to ask for the Argo again," X. said to him.

"On, don't bother his dying," Dame Bagby said. "We will see each other again in shorter time than it has been between our visits last years, Melky."

"It been fun with you," Teresa said, "and it will be even more fun the next time."

6

Melchisedech was strongly into the seventh contingency now. He had been almost here before, again and again. It had been a recurring dream and a recurring speculation of his. It had had the shape of the final expectation.

But it had always been "thus far and no farther". There had always been a wall between, or a mist is obscuring as a wall. Or it had always been a waking up, or a forgetting, or a complete destruction of mood with a plunging back into hopelessness. But now Melchisedech began at the high point of pleasure and excitement where before he had always broken off.

Melchisedech was walking with the Invisible God in a Garden in the afternoon. There was quite a few thousand other people also walking in that pleasant place, but there was no possibility of crowding, and there was no possibility of any one of them being supplanted or falling out of the Attention. Every one was in special favor here. It was a high fellowship of special favor.

There was total appeal to all fifty-and-five senses, so Melchisedech knew that the scene was genuine. And yet the old senses still held precedence over the new and unpracticed senses.

"You are a special person, Melchisedech," the Invisible God said, but not in words. "The Melchisedech Paradoxes are at least as wonderful as the Zeno Paradoxes. But every one of my persons is absolutely special and absolutely unique, and every one of them is wrapped in a cluster of wonderful paradoxes. There is no precedence as to particularity among my special persons."

No, this was not the finality. This was only the anteroom of it. That last second of life still had some while to go. This was dying vision, but not death yet. Here and there, one might see gaps in the green-mantled earth on which they walked, and there was open sky below them, through the gaps. But there was no uneasiness of footing nor fear of falling. Anyone who can walk on water can walk on either caving green earth or on sky with short practice. It was as easy to walk on the flowing sky as on the flowering earth.

Duffey had for mentor Patrick Plunket, that great Irish saint and magician and medical doctor.

"This is mostly Adam Scanlon sod that we are walking over now," Melchisedech told Plunket to show his erudition. "Nobody else could do the muscular greens of sedge grass and fern flower as well as Scanlon, not even

Finnegan. I didn't know that he had gone in for landscape animations. For a fact, I didn't know that there was such a field."

"No, Duffey, this is real," Plunket said.

"And I never saw such textured symbolism," Melchisedech Duffey mumbled happily. "There's a very old Arcadian motif here. Then there is glorious sixteenth century Spanish stuff, Teresa, and John of the Cross. And there is twentieth century Jungian influence, transfigured and outdoing itself. The audio components of this mystical symbolism are to be found in the music of --"

"Easy, easy. It's real, Duffey man, it's real," Plunket insisted. "You've a weakness to correct here. You're in love with the contrived. It is for that reason that you have animated various clays, that you have wakened certain quick-earths. You put a lot of symbolism in your marvels, and you're good at it. But in spite of yourself, they turned real on you. And that is over with for you now. Look up from it, man! You're in the Presence of the Real Thing."

"Yes, yes, I know, and it's hard for me to comprehend it all, Pat," Duffey said. "Now it's as though we were ascending a mountain, pleasantly and without great effort. But there is no particular elevation to be seen in this place. But I can feel the elevation, Patrick, and I can taste it."

"It's the invisible Mountain, Melky. It's the interior mountain. We ascend in intensity. We are in the Presence."

"I know we are in the Presence. I have walked in grace three days out of four of my life. Do you think me a stranger to the Presence? But this is a blooming richness that increases in every way. There's a hundred people here that I know and love. And then there are a hundred thousand of them with no lessening of the knowing and loving, and certainly no lessening of the personal acquaintance. How long can it grow better and better?"

"Forever, Duffey. It grows exponentially better forever."

"There's no danger of our losing it, or of it going wrong, is there, Pat?"

"So slight a danger, Duffey, that we will put it out of mind." "You don't know my mind. There are still uncleansed corners of it, and disoriented curiosities. Ah, here's a pitch of perfect clay, Plunket. I believe that I will just try to make a model of -- to try to catch a fraction of this dazzling animation -- to imprison a piece of this transitory loveliness in a more permanent..."

"Duffey, thou clod! This is the Permanence Itself that we walk with! There's no need to mould idols."

"You're right, Patrick, you're right. It's an old habit that I find hard to reak. A little while ago, I made a dozen splendid animations..."

"No, no, you wokr them up only, Duffey. You did not make them. There has been criticism of your attempts to make these things. You did good work, but you thought it other than it was. There is a place for persistent and unrepentant makers. It's a dankish and mud-colored place where the addicted persons form things, and form them, and form them again and again. It's about the shoddiest section of Purgatory."

"It doesn't sound bad to me at all, Pat. It is far from here? Could we go there now?" "Duffey, you're walking in the Delectable Place Itself, and our Delectation walks with us! The Potter's Place is on a low and broken way, and it's full of lamentations."

"I suppose so. That's the test of good work. I lament qyite a bit myself when I'm in the labor and passion of making. Ah, let's just cut through these thorn hedges!"

"The thorn hedges are out of the direct way, Duffey. They are an obstacle that has to be sought out. They are the only rough going here, and they make us go the long way around to go through them."

"Sometimes I like the rough going and the long way around, Patrick. Just solong as there's no danger of things going wrong, I love the wrong way. You said there was so slight a danger of things going wrong, Patrick,

that we could put it out of our minds, but I've not been able to do that. Just how great are the odds against things going wrong?"

"Not nearly as great as they were a while ago, Melchisedech. But come into the green way again, and the odds will increase once more."

"What a curious deformity that branch in the middle of the thorn thicket is! I must..."

"No, you must not, man! Leave it alone. It was put in the middle of the thorn thicket so that it would be left alone. There's a billion better and more firmly branches in the holy boscage around us. Oh why was I ever assigned to be mentor and guide to a snake-bit Irishman?"

"Look, Pat, it's a mechanical lever of some sort. And the handle of it..."

"No, Duffey, no! Don't touch it!"

"I'll touch what I please, good friend. It sets one a-tingle, it does, just to grip it like this. And now I look at it all, at the fine detail of it. It's seductive, it's beautiful, it's soul-satisfying, and it's symbolically enriching. But is it real?"

"It is Melchisedech, and it will continue to be. And you were real, till you touched that handle. Untouch it, man, and be real again."

"Ah, there's a curious deformity about the handle of this lever. However is that gnarled effect achieved? Fine carving that. It's made of fruit wood, you see. I wonder what the handle activates if I just..."

"Man, don't try to find out! There were a billion billion chances to one against anyone going through those tearing thorn hedges and discovering that handle, and you did it. Let it alone now."

"Well, I have to find out if all of this is real."

"Turn that handle, you lame-brained Irishman, and you'll find out all too late what's real."

"Too soon or too late, I want to find out. Can even the Presence itself be a form of temptation to trick me away from the wonderful hewing and moulding place. Tell me, Pat Plunkett, what does happen if I turn this handle?"

"The whole bottom falls out from under you!"

Melchisedech Duffey turned the handle, and the whole bottom fell out of things.

"Pat, I'm falling forever!" Melchisedech wailed, and he fell like a scorched rock through the afternoon sky.

"I'll miss you, Melky, but some like it one place and some like it another," Pat Plunkett said.

(No, the last moment of life wasn't over. The last moment of life was hardly begun, barely dented yet. There might have been as much as fifty seconds of it left.) Melchisedech Duffey was sitting in a dung heap, pretty deep in it. His legs and hips had been smashed by the fall, and likely many more bones had been broken. He was in a fetid and half liquid place of miasmas and mists, and storms were beginning to bumble out of the putrid sky above it. And Melchisedech found himself assaulted interiorly and exteriorly and medially (on and in the covering hide of him) by angry small creatures.

Blister beetles were afflicting him, and horse leeches, and latrine snakes. He was stung by scorpions and infested by midges and crab cooties. Moreover, he suffered from the body flux.

"It's a big change from the beautiful and green sky meadows," he said, "and the end of the fall was a real shocker. Well, well, let's see what can be done about it right now."

Melchisedech banged his hands together, and he groaned in pain. One of his hands was shattered worse than the other, but the best one was not good. A storm churned around him, and whirl winds were the inhabited fingers of that storm. The sky was garish, gaunt, gray-orange, Gothic.

"It's a Finnegan sky," Duffey said. "I always wondered where he'd gotten it. He's been here, that's what."

Duffey's skin was that of sick and leprous snakes. It wailed and

itched wretchedly, and burned like termite. "I will have to get out of this skin," he said. He took pieces of broken bottles, shards they were, and tore his skin and flesh to rake out the devouring and itching worms.

From far away, a voice was calling "The Argo. Remember The Argo. You can go to it if you remember that you can go."

"What is The Argo?" Melchisedech asked out loud. And then he called more loudly. "What? What? What is it that you're saying?"

Dung rats took savage slices from Duffey, and buzzards plundered him with their knifed beaks. Blood snakes came like arrows to the scent of his blood.

"I've always liked these little jogs to the ingenuity," Duffey said. "A man is hard put to do his best work without them." And the livid sky spun and spoke.

"Ah, the whirlwinds, the whirlwinds!" Duffey cried. "That' is my kind of talk. And the lightning!"

The whirlwinds were sky-high cyclones. And the lightning split the sky, relentlessly, shriekingly, destroyingly, totally. The thunder was sky-explosive, divinely clattering, rolling, rocking blasts of...

...laughter. No, not maniac laughter, total-sanity laughter.

"Why, I'm not out of favor at all," Duffey cried. "God in the whirlwind and tempest is not less present than God in the afternoon breeze. I am still in the Presence. I have the best of all worlds."

"The Argo, remember The Argo," the voice was crying. Not the great voice, a small and mortal voice. "You can go to it if you remember that you can go."

"Why? Will things be better if I go to this Argo?" Duffey cried the question.

The broken Melchisedech hands were moving and working now. "It reminds me a lot of that Finnegan picture 'Potting Shed in a Storm!'" the happy magician said.

(Those who believe that this is only adjunct to the seventh congruency and is not reality are the same people who believed that Melchisedech could not really create. Abjure them.)

"He remembered that I am a magus and that making is what I am best at," Melchisedech gloated. "Why, I have everything here that I need to work with. And worldly distractions are blotted out. Gloria in Tempestis Deo!"

There were pieces of broken bottles and jagged metal on this trashy dung heap. The most shapely of them would serve as talismans, and Duffey selected them with his creator's eye. These would work. And the lightning --

"Ah, a million volts should be about right for the infusing," Duffey cried in his joyful labor. "Here's the Muck of Animation. Here's good blood, my own. Here are shapes and forms of all of it dancing in the sky, if I should forget. Bless this lightning! Bless this dungheap! This is the world that I love."

Well, what do you think is maintainign the world on even its wobbly ways if it is not the extraordinary work and workmanship of such prodigious and special and creative people?

"Remember The Argo!" the voice was calling again. "You can go to it now. And you can leave it for any destination you prefer, if only you remember that you can leave it."

"Yes, I remember The Argo now," Melchisedech said. "I love it, and I love this work here also. Is there not some way I can have both?"

(No, the last minute of his life wasn't over. The last minute of his life had but a very small hunk taken out of it as yet. There might be as many as forty-nine seconds of it left.)

Melchisedech was reaching out and moulding the rich dung in which he was half-buried. He was moulding it into forms, into marvels (soon they would be Animated Marvels), with his own blood as integument, burning to make, and making -- "another dozen even better than the first..."

And the million-volted lightning came down like giant hands to help

in the happy making.

Yes, all this was happenign. And Melchisedech wouldn't have had it unhappen for anything. But what if he should go around to another thing and then come back to this.

"This happy work will still be here," he said, "and I suspect that it will be even happier and better when the irrittions are removed after I have been tested. This is here forever, but The Argo has only one more voyage. I can have both of my delight. I can sail. I can have my intervals of delight on sea and on shore. And I can return to this for my final delight.

"Lord, I am enraptured with this work. Lord I will do this work forever. But not yet."