

MORE STORIES BY R.A. LAFFERTY

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THE MAN UNDERNEATH

Charles Chartel was not the most pleasant man in the world, and as the Great Zambesi he was not the greatest magician. But he was a smart man and a good magician. He had the magnetism of a faith healer, the spirit and appearance of a rooster and a deadly seriousness. He had the patter and the poise and he had learned all that was learnable.

Nor was he a mere pigeon-passer and card-caller. He had inherited, built up, bought and assembled as full a repertoire as any Magic Man in the business.

And, as each must have, he had his specialty: a simple and sound disappearing act. It was nothing really startling; he seemed to underplay it. But it was puzzling and it remained a puzzle even to those in the trade. This one prime trick equated him with the Real Masters who in general technique were a little out of his class. Actually, in the ultimate variation of it, it was the greatest trick.

He put Veronica into a box. And when he opened the box again she was gone. That is all there was to it. The same thing had been performed by dozens of others in many variations.

But Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel did not use any of those variations; not, certainly, the trap door-for he had once performed the trick in a wire mesh twenty feet in the air. Besides, he was a cut above the trap-door men.

After showing the empty box he would always take it apart board by board, and pass the boards around for all to handle. He would then assemble it once more into a box, clamp down the cover, unclamp it again, open it, and Veronica would get out of the box.

The Great Boffo swore that the girl never stepped into the box at all.

The Great Boffo, however, could not duplicate the trick. Nor could the Great Thaumaturgos, nor the Great Zebdo.

All of them could make girls disappear from boxes, of course, and could do it in more showy fashion. But, though it was the same thing to the audiences, it was not the same thing to themselves. Their tricks were known to each other and were obvious to any magic man. The special trick of Zambesi-Chartel was not understood and this gave him stature. The only men in the world who do not secretly believe in magic are the magicians, but there was something about the doings of the Great Zambesi that sowed doubt in them. The Great Vespo, indeed, claimed that he knew how it was done. But Vespo,

though brilliant, was an old man and was given to extravagant claims.

The explanation that Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel gave to his audiences will not be given here. Should we repeat it, we would not be believed; we would be laughed at -- and we are sensitive. We have not the magnetism of Zambesi to carry off such an outlandish claim as his even though it should be true -- and it was. (Actually he said that he sent Veronica down into the Ocean and that he called her back again from that Ocean.)

However, this isn't about the disappearance of Veronica; it is about a matter quite the opposite. And the opposite of the disappearance of Veronica was the appearance of someone who differed from her as much as possible.

This came about at the Tri-State Fair when the New Arena was quite new. The crowd was spirited and the Great Zambesi was in full form. The lighting was perfect and Veronica shone like a jewel set in gold as she stepped into the box that was set up on blocks, clear of the stage. Zambesi closed the box and the crowd had the true feeling of magic about to happen.

And then, with perfect timing, Zambesi-Chartel threw back the front cover as to reveal the box -- empty.

We will be hornswoggled if that box was empty!

But what rolled out of the box was not Veronica. It was the most woebegone scarecrow of a clown ever seen, the saddest looking man who ever stumbled over his own two feet.

"Holy hamadryads, cramoise, where did you come from?" Zambesi-Chartel breathed without understanding his own words.

The man out of the box was a hobo from a hundred years ago. He wept and wiped his nose with his hand. He had trouble with falling pants and broken shoes and a coat whose sleeve avoided arm. The little clown was good and there was real pathos in his silent humor.

"You've got to get out of here, cnaufer," Chartel hissed at the little man again and again. "Who are you and how did you get here? Off with you now, cathexis, you're fouling up the act." But the little man avoided Chartel who would have killed him in all sincerity.

Finally Chartel in his despair closed the box loudly, then opened it again and brought Veronica out of it. But that didn't get and of the little tramp. He was still cavorting about the stage and he was good. Listen, he was dressed in old black pants and a torn undershirt and one suspender and he walked about the stage.

Then he had on a red sweater and a burglar's cap and black glasses. He still walked about the stage and suddenly he was splendid in evening clothes and monocle. Nobody had done that before.

He became Joe College; he became the man in the charcoal-tan suit; he became an old rowdy-dow on the loose with pearl-gray vest and yellow gloves. Then he became a hobo again-but of a different and worse vesture than before.

"Go away, cistugurium," Veronica whispered angrily, "please g~ away. You're not supposed to be in the act. Who are you anyhow?"

Nobody else had ever completely changed his garb six times in a minute and a half while hobbling about the stage with his hands in his pockets. Nobody else transmuted his shoes from brown to black as he walked in them. The expression of the little man was pathetic and many eyes misted as they watched him.

Then, before the act had begun to drag, the little man wobbled over and fell flat on his face in the box. Zambesi-Chartel closed it and stood poised over it in an intensity of fear and hope. Then he opened the box again. The little man was gone.

Zambesi-Chartel took the box apart board by board and he left it apart. Well, it had been a good act, with an added element. But Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel didn't know how he had done it this time -- or if he was the one who did it. The trick had always been to make Veronica disappear and appear; there sure hadn't been any little clown in the act before.

"Damn that cressanges anyhow," Chartel grumbled. He was puzzled. He knew

that little man -- and yet he didn't.

Later that night at the Pepperpot some of the people ate and talked. There were Chartel himself and Veronica; there was Captain Carter who had the trained bears; there were the three Lemon sisters, Dolly, Molly, and Polly. Then another one was with them--for the little man was sitting there and sniffing. He hadn't been there before and he hadn't come in.

"Shall I order for you, claud?" Molly Lemon asked solicitously. But a filled plate was already there and the little man began to eat. He grinned and he grimaced. He was wearing horn-rim glasses and then he was wearing pince-nez. He had a grin that came shyly as though he were trying it out for the first time.

"Clarence is so cute," said Dolly Lemon. "We will adopt him into our act if Chartel doesn't want him."

There was an empty five-cigar carton on the table. The little man picked it up and it was full. Well, Chartel could duplicate that probably you could yourself, but it would take prop and preparation. The little man pulled a stogie from the carton, puffed on it and it was lit. This also could be done; there are few tricks that cannot be duplicated.

If you are joining the act, cletus, and it seems as though you are," said Chartel wondering, "you will have to clean up a little."

Must I really?" asked curt but he obliged at once. He had become as immaculate a dandy as anyone ever saw. "Captain Carter," he said, "I see from your pocket bulge that you are a drinking man. I ask you to share it with us."

"It's empty an hour since," Captain Carter muttered sadly.

"It wasn't always empty," said cylix, the little man. "Let me see if I can restore it."

"The last time a magician filled an empty whisky bottle for me -- and it was none other than old Zambesi-Chartel here -- the stuff was not potable. It was the most horrendous rock dew ever distilled."

"This will be potable," said celiter -- and the bottle filled.

Its content was gloriously potable. It put new life into the party and all of them, except Chartel-Zambesi, had a wonderful time. And if you don't think you can have fun with a reanimated bottle of whisky and Veronica and the three Lemon sisters you must have a different and more staid definition of fun.

"But all good things must end," said Captain Carter when the small hours were half grown.

"All good things do not have to end," said cajetan, the little man, who had been enjoying himself on Polly Lemon's lap. "The world shriveled when your thought was first put into words. Good things can go on forever, except that -- now and then -- they must be temporarily adjourned. As long as we understand that partings are only temporary."

"Oh, we understand that, cuiller," said the three Lemon sisters. So they temporarily adjourned the party.

But later -- and this was after the sun itself was up -- Chartel and cyprian were finally alone.

"We will have to have an explanation," said Chartel. "Who are you?"

"You have no idea, Charles? Did you not take me out of the box? I thought you would know. Did you not call me up?"

"I doubt I did. Do not try to hoax an old hoaxter. Where did you come from that first time? The stage was not trapped and you were not intruded with my knowledge."

"Was I not? You told the audience how it was done. You said you called me up out of the Ocean."

"That is my patter -- but it doesn't apply to you. Dammit, ching-hi, where'd you get the Chinese robes and grow that little heard so fast? And how do you make them both change colors so neat? No, chawan, I never called any

such fish as you out of the Ocean."

"In that case I will leave, since I am here through a misunderstanding."

"Stay a bit, cyfaill. In my patter that is the way I make the girl disappear. How could it make you appear?"

"Charles, I've heard you explain the principle dozens of times. I was not in the box. But in a little while I would be in the box. So we adjust the box to a near moment in the future and I am in the box."

"There's a lacuna in your logic, clunis," Chartel said. "Hey, how can you turn into a Hottentot so easily? And not into a real Hottentot either, coya -- but into what I would call an old idea of a Hottentot."

"You did have a good imagination, Charles," said chabiari. He took up an empty glass, shook it, and it was filled again.

"You're my master there, cosmos," said Chartel. "I couldn't duplicate that without props and you've done it three times. How?"

"By our own theory that we worked out so long ago, Charles. I shift it only a little in time and it is done. Anything that has once been full can be filled again by taking it back to the time of its plenitude."

"Chester, you have a patter that won't quit. But, if it worked -- the idea would be a good one."

"It does work, Charles. I thought we knew that. We have used it so long."

"You talk and talk, collard," said Chartel. "But I still do not know how you can change your whole appearance so easily and often."

"Why, Charles, we are protean," said coilon. "That is the sort of man we are."

It was later the same day that Finnerty, the manager of the show, spoke to Chartel about the little man.

"Your brother from the old country has put new life into the act," he said. "Keep him in it. We haven't mentioned money - and I am seldom the one to bring up the subject -- but we can settle on a figure. Will it be payable to him or to you?"

"It will be payable to me," said Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel. Confused he was, but he always knew the top and bottom side of a dollar. Finnerty and Chartel settled on a figure.

"You have been taken for my brother from the old country," Chartel told cohn a bit later, "and I can see why. I wondered whom you reminded me of. Oh, stop turning into a rooster. If you were shaved and comleed -- say, that was quick, contumacel the resemblance would be, is, even closer. You do look like me; you are an extremely handsome man. But I did not know that I had a brother, compuesto, and I do not know what country the old country is -- since I was born on Elm Street in St. Louis."

"Perhaps 'country' is a euphemism for something even closer, Charles; and the 'old country' may have a special meaning for us. Is it not the name for what is on the other side of your 'Ocean'?"

"Columkill, you are as phony as -- well, metaphor fails me -- you are as phony as myself," said Charles Chartel.

Sometimes the little man was frightening in his wild actions. There wasn't a mean bone in him, and he was almost universally LIKED. But he did act on impulse.

For him, to think was to act. It was good that everybody liked hadn't they'd have hanged him high.

And always he would multiply things. Chartel begged for his secret.

"We could be rich, cogsworth, really rich," Chartel would plead.

"But we are already rich, Charles. Nobody has ever had such a rich and perfected personality as we have. You still do not appreciate the greatness of our trick, Charles, though we thought about it for years before we were able to do it. It's the noblest illusion of them all. Now we are citizens of an

abounding world and everything in it is ours. That is to be rich."

"Consuelo, you are a bleeding doctrinaire. I did not ask for a lecture. I only ask that you show me how to make a hundred dollars grow where one grew before. I say that is to be rich."

"I've shown you a hundred times, Charles, and you look for more than is in it. You take a thin old wallet that once knew fatness. You restore it to its old state, empty it and restore it again, and so you accumulate. But why do you want money?"

"It is just that I have a passion for collecting it, courlis."

Collecting we can understand, but the true collector will have no desire for duplicates. Understandably we might want a bill of each size -- a one, a five, a ten, a fifty -- but we avoid that which once we prized -- the ten-thousand dollar bill. The avid people have spoiled it for us. But you have not the true collectors' spirit, Charles."

"I have the true money-collectors' spirit, clendon. Why cannot I duplicate your feats in this?"

"The only reason I can figure, Charles, is that you're just too duck-knuckled duml~and it hurts me to say that about one of ourselves."

But Zambesi-Chartel got a new set of ideas when he saw the trick that cormorant did with an old hat. It was at a rummage sale at which charleroi looked in out of curiosity-he was curious about everything.

"What a pixie must have worn this!" he exclaimed. "What a pixie!"

C held the hat in his hands. And then he held the head in his hands. It was something like a pixie head and it was attached to the body of a young lady. Cisailles kissed the young lady uncommonly about the temporal regions and pressed her to his sternum -- for to him impulse was the same as action. And she squealed.

"Not that I mind-but you did startle me," she chimed. "Who are you? Who, may I ask, am I? And how in pigeon-toed perdition did I get here?"

"You are a pixie, young lady," said dough, "and as such you are likely to turn up anywhere. I had your hat, so what more natural than that I should call you up to fill it."

"I am only a part-time pixie, cartier, but I am a full-time housewife. Supper will burn. How do I get back?"

The Man Underneath

"You already are," said callimachus. And she was. Or at least she was no longer there.

And that was the beginning of the trouble; not for c, not for the young pixie lady, but it was the beginning of the trouble for Charles (Great Zambesi) Chartel.

Charles knew how it was done now. One cannot continue doing a basic trick in the presence of such a sharpy as Charles Chartel without his learning it. And once he had learned how it was done there was no stopping him.

Charles Chartel was not a bad man underneath, but on the surface he was a rotter. The natural complement of healthy greed that is in every man began to burgeon unnaturally in him. The hard core of meanness spread through his whole being. The arrogance of the rooster became that of the tyrant and envy and revenge burned in him with sulphurous fire.

Chartel now had the key to total wealth, a key that would not only unlock all doors for him, but lock them against others. He set out to get control of the show. To do this he had to break Finnerty, the owner-manager, and buy him out after breaking him.

Business had been good and every night Finnerty had a full cash box. But before a thing is full, it is half full. And before that, it is a quarter full. Every night, just as Finnerty went to count the take, Zambesi-Chartel would play a trick on that box. And it would be only a quarter full. That was not enough to cover expenses.

Finnerty had never been a saving man. He had always trod the narrow green edge between solvency and disaster. And in two weeks he was broke.

Finnerty sold the show and the bookings to Chartel for ten thousand dollars. It made a nice wad in his pocket when he walked away from the show that was no longer his.

But the meanness was running like a tide in Chartel and he wouldn't let it go at that. He emptied the wallet of Finnerty again, taking it back ten minutes in time. Finnerty felt a certain lightness, and he knew what it was. But he kept on walking.

"It's lucky he left me with my pants," said Finn, "if he has. I'm afraid to look down."

A cloud came over the happy little family that was the show. Veronica felt herself abused and it wasn't imagination. The three Lemon sisters shivered to the chill of a harsh master. So did Carucehi the singer, and Captain Carter and his bears. And c, the little man who was the unwitting cause of it all, took to staying out of the way of the rampaging Chartel.

For Zambesi-Chartel was now avid for praise, for money, for all manner of meanness. He accumulated coin by every variation of the new trick he had learned. He robbed by it, he burgled the easy way. It is an awful and sickening thing to see a good man grow rich and respected.

"But underneath he isn't a bad man at all," Veronica moaned. "Really he isn't."

"No, underneath he is a fine man," said c, the little man of impulse. "Who should know better than I?"

"Why, what do you mean, Chadwick dear?" Veronica asked him.

"The same as you. Charles is only bad on the surface. Underneath he's a fine fellow."

Well, that may have been. But on the surface, Zambesi-Chartel sure did get rough. He demeaned the dignity of his fellow humans and made them eat dirt by the ton. He went on adrenalin drunks and thrived on the hatred in his own bloodstream. He became a martinet, a propagandist for the Hoop act. He registered Democrat. He switched from perfectos to panatelas and from honest whisky sours to perfidious martinis. He developed a snigger and horselaugh that wilted pigweeds.

"Oll, chiot," said Veronica, "we must do something to save him from himself. We are all involved with him."

"Who should know better than I?" conehyllatus asked sadly.

Chartel began to drink tea. He started to call a napkin a serviette and to omit every single syllable in "extraordinary." He switched allegiance from the noble National League to the sniveling American. He defrauded his laborers of their wages, he used scent, he ate vegetarian lunches, he read Walter Lippmann posthumously, he switched from Gumbo Hair Oil to Brilliantine. Once a character begins to deteriorate it goes all the way and in every detail.

Chartel had the Green Sickness, the inordinate love of money.

He obtained the stuff, first by all means fair and foul, then by foul means only. But obtain it he did and it made a sniveling devil out of him.

But the man underneath isn't bad at all," Veronica insisted.

Who should know better than I?" caoine said.

The Grand Canyon began with a prairie dog burrow and once it was started there was no stopping it. The downfall of Zambesi. Chartel began over a nickel and then the whole apparatus came down: his wealth, real and phantom -- his reputation -- the whole blamed complex of the man.

It started with a fist fight he had with a blind newsdealer over a nickel. It ended with Chartel in jail, indicted, despised, shamed, despondent.

Moreover, public feeling was strongly against him.

Chartel was up on more than twenty counts of theft and pilfering and the nickel stolen from the blind man was by no means the least of them. He was up on a dozen counts of wage fraud. He was charged with multiplex pickpocketing "by device not understood." They had him on faked bill of sale, dishonest conveyance, simple and compounded larceny, possession of stolen goods,

barratry.

"Looks like we have you on everything but chicken-stealing," the judge said at the hearing.

"We have him on that, too," said the bailiff. "Five counts of it."

"You would gag a gannet and make a buzzard belch," said the judge. "I'd crop your ears if that law still obtained. And if we can find a capital offense in all this offensiveness I'll have your head. It is hard to believe that you were once human."

Chartel was shamed and sick of heart and felt himself friendless. That night he attempted to hang himself in his cell. The attempt failed for reasons that are not clear but not for any lack of effort on his part. It is worthy of note that the only persons who ever attempt to take their own lives are rather serious persons.

"We will have to go to him at once, cristophe," said Veronica. "We must show him that we still love him. He'd sicken a jackal the way he's behaving, but he isn't really like that. The man underneath --"

"Hush, Veronica, you embarrass me when you talk like that," said ciahhach. "I know what a prince is the man underneath."

Little C went to visit the Great Zambesi-Chartel in his cell.

"It is time we had a talk," he said.

"No, no, it's too late for talk," said Charles Chartel.

"You have disgraced us both, Charles," said celach. "It goes very deeply when it touches me."

"I never even knew who you were, little c. You are protean and you are not at all plausible."

"You called me up and you still don't know who I am, Charles? But this was our finest trick, our greatest illusion on which we worked subconsciously for years. We are our own masterpiece, Charles. And you didn't recognize it when it happened. You are the Magic Man but I am the Magic Man run wild. Aye, Charles, he's best when he runs wild."

"Tell me, cicerone, who are you? Who am I?" Chartel begged.

"What is my difficulty?"

"Our difficulty, Charles, is that one of us became too serious,"

Camefice tried to explain. "To be serious is the only capital crime. For that, one of us will have to die -- but it isn't as though it were a serious matter. Every man is at least two men, but ordinarily the two are not at the same time bodied arid apparent. Now you have marred our greatest trick -- but it was fun while it lasted."

He signaled to Veronica and she came down the corridor with a bunch of boards under her arm. She was admitted to the cell by the puzzled jailor.

"One of us will have to leave forever," coquelicot told Charles Chartel. "It isn't right for both of us to be around."

"Ah, I will be sorry to see you go, chandos," said Chartel. "But who are you? I never could remember your name properly and there is something weird about that. You change forever in appearance and name. Who are you, little c?"

"Only that. Just little c. Or shall we say sube? But we are too clever to be hounded into a hole like this, Charles. Remember! We were our own greatest trick, even if it failed."

"What must we do now?" Chartel asked dully.

"A simple transference," cogne said. He was building the box board by board.

"I'm not a bad man underneath," Chartel sniveled. "I'm misunderstood."

"No, we're a fine man underneath, Charles. I am the man underneath," said dud. "Get in the box."

"I get in? I am Charles (the Great Zamheei) Chartel. You are only little c, sube, an aspect of myself. I will not get into the box!"

"Get in, Charles," said cistercium. "It was a mix-up from the beginning. You were never meant to see the light of day. The wrong one of us has been running loose."

"I'll light, I'll claw, I'll rant!"

"That's what a healthy subconscious is supposed to do," cludok said.

"Get in!"

"It's murder! I won't got It's oblivion!"

"No such thing, Charles. It isn't as though we weren't the same person.

I'll still be here."

Then little c and Veronica shoved the Great Zambesi Charles Chartel down into the box and closed the lid. In doing so, little c became himself the Great Zambesi. For, when he opened the box again, it was empty. And he took it apart board by board. The jailor said that he had to have his prisoner and Veronica gave him the boards.

"There, there, doll," she said. "Make one out of them. Try real hard."

And Veronica and the Great Zambesi left that place.

We won't say that Zambesi wasn't the greatest magician in the world. He may have become the greatest, after he began to treat it lightly. People, he was good! There was never any act with such variety and fun in it. After his strange mid-life hiatus he achieved new heights.

"And I'm certainly glad you overcame your personality difficulties," the loving Veronica told him later. "For a while there -- whoof! But I always knew you were a fine man underneath."

INCASED IN ANCIENT RIND

1

The eye is robbed of impetus  
By Fogs that stand and shout:  
And swiftness all goes out from us  
And all the stars go out.

Lost Skies -- O'Hanlon

"Wear a mask or die," the alarmists had been saying louder and louder; and now they were saying "Wear a mask and die anyhow." And why do we so often hold the alarmists in contempt? It isn't always a false alarm they sound, and this one wasn't. The pollution of air and water and land had nearly brought the world to a death halt, and crisis was at hand as the stifling poison neared critical mass.

"Aw, dog dirt, not another air pollution piece," you say.

Oh, come off of it. You know us better than that. This is not such an account as you might suppose. It will not be stereotype, though it may be stereopticon.

"The lights are burning very brightly," said Harry Baldachin, "this club room is sealed off as tightly as science can seal it, the air conditioning labors faithfully, the filters are the latest perfection, this is the clearest day in a week (likely a clearer day than any that will ever follow), yet we have great difficulty in seeing each other's face across the table. And we are in Mountain Top Club out in the high windy country beyond the cities. It is quite bad in the towns, they say. Suffocation victims are still lying unburied in heaps."

"There's a curious thing about that though," Clement Flood said. "The people are making much progress on the unburied heaps. People aren't dying as fast as they were even a month ago. Why aren't they?"

"Don't be so truculent about it, Clement," Harry said. "The people will die soon enough. All the weaker ones have already died, I believe, and the strong ones linger awhile; but I don't see how any of us can have lungs left. There'll be another wave of deaths, and then another and another. And all of



us will go with it."

"I won't," said Sally Strumpet. "I will live forever. It doesn't bother me very much at all. just makes my nose and eyes itch a little bit. What worries me, though, is that I don't test fertile yet. Do you suppose that the pollution has anything to do with my not being fertile?"

"What are you chattering about, little girl?" Charles Broadman asked. "Well, it is something to think about. Gathering disasters usually increase fertility, as did the pollution disaster at first. It has always been as though some cosmic wisdom was saying 'Fast and heavy fruit now for the fruitless days ahead.' But now it seems as if the cosmic wisdom is saying 'Forget it, this is too overmuch.' But fertility now is not so much inhibited as delayed," Broadman continued almost as if he knew what he was talking about.

Sally Strumpet was a bright-eyed (presently red-eyed) seventeen-year-old actress, and that was her stage name only. Her real name was Joan Struthio, and she was met for club dinner with Harry Baldachin, Clement Flood, and Charles Broadman, all outstanding in the mentality set, because she had a publicity man who arranged such things. Sally herself belonged to the mentality set by natural right, but not many suspected this fact: only Charles Broadman of those present, only one in a hundred of those who were entranced by Sally's rather lively simpering, hardly any of the mucous-lunged people.

"This may be the last of our weekly dinners that I am able to attend," Harry Baldachin coughed. "I'd have taken to my bed long ago except that I can't breathe at all lying down any more. I'm a dying man now, as are all of us."

"I'm not, neither the one nor the other," Sally said. "Neither is Harry," Charles Broadman smiled snakishly, "not the first, surely, and popular doubt has been cast on the second. You're not dying, Harry. You'll live till you're sick of it."

"I'm sick of it now. By my voice you know that I'm dying."

"By your voice I know that there's a thickening of the pharynx," Charles said. "By your swollen hands I know that there is already a thickening of the metacarpals and phalanges, not to mention the carpals themselves. Your eyes seem unnaturally deep-set now as though they had decided to withdraw into some interior cave. But I believe that it is the thickening of your brow ridges that makes them seem so, and the new bulbosity of your nose. You've been gaining weight, have you not?"

"I have, yes, Broadman. Every pound of poison that I take in adds a pound to my weight. I'm dying, and we're all dying."

"Why Harry, you're coming along amazingly well. I thought I would be the first of us to show the new signs, and instead it is yourself. No, you will be a very, very long time dying."

"The whole face of the earth is dying," Harry Baldachin maintained.

"Not dying. Thickening and changing," said Charles Broadman.

"There's a mortal poison on everything," Clement Flood moaned. "When last was a lake fish seen not floating belly upward? The cattle are poisoned and all the plants, all dying."

"Not dying. Growing larger and weirder," said Broadman.

"I am like a dish that is broken," said the Psalmist, my strength has failed through affliction, and my bones are consumed. I am forgotten like the unremembered dead."

"Your dish is made thicker and grosser, but it is not broken," Broadman insisted. "Your bones are not consumed but altered. And you are forgotten only if you forget."

"Poor Psalmist," said Sally. This was startling, for the Psalmist had always been a private joke of Charles Broadman, but now Sally was aware of him also. "Why, your strength hasn't failed at all," she said. "You come on pretty strong to me. But my own nose is always itching, that's the only bad part of it. I feel as though I were growing a new nose. When can I come to another club supper with you gentlemen?"

"There will be no more," Harry Baldachin hacked through his thickened pharynx; "We'll all likely be dead by next week. This is the last of our meetings."

"Yes, we had better call our dinners off," Clement Flood choked. "We surely can't hold them every week now."

"Not every week," said Charles Broadman, "but we will still hold them. This all happened before, you know."

"I want to come however often they are," Sally insisted

"How often will we hold them, dreamer, and we all near dead?" Harry asked. "You say that this has happened before, Broadman? Well then, didn't we all die with it before?"

"No. We lived an immeasurably long time with it before," Charles Broadman stated. "What, can you not read the signs in the soot yet, Harry?"

"Just how often would you suggest that we meet then, Charles?" Clement Flood asked with weary sarcasm.

"Oh, how about once every hundred years, gentlemen and Sally. Would that be too often?"

"Fool," Harry Baldachin wheezed and peered out from under his thickening orbital ridges.

"Idiot," Clement Flood growled from his thickening throat.

"Why, I think a hundred years from today would be perfect," Sally cried. "That will be a wednesday, will it not?"

"That was fast," Broadman admired. "Yes, it will be a wednesday, Sally. Do be here, Sally, and we will talk some more of these matters. Interesting things will have happened in the meanwhile. And you two gentlemen will be here?"

"No, don't refuse," Sally cut in. "You are so unimaginative about all this. Mr. Baldachin, say that you will dine with us here one hundred years from today if you are alive and well."

"By the emphyseman God that afflicts us, and me dying and gone, yes, I will be here one hundred years from today if I am alive and well," Harry Baldachin said angrily. "But I will not be alive this time next week."

"And you say it also, Mr. Flood," Sally insisted.

"Oh, stop putting fools' words in peoples' mouths, little girl. Let me die in my own phlegm."

"Say it, Mr. Flood," Sally insisted again, "say that you will dine with us all here one hundred years from this evening if you are alive and well."

"Oh, all right," Clement Flood mumbled as he bled from his rheumy eyes. "Under those improbable conditions I will be here."

But only Sally and Charles Broadman had the quick wisdom to understand that the thing was possible.

Fog, smog, and grog, and the people perished. And the more stubborn ones took a longer time about perishing than the others. But a lethal mantle wrapped the whole globe now. It was poison utterly compounded, and no life could stand against it. There was no possibility of improvement, there was no hope of anything. It could only get worse. Something drastic had to happen.

And of course it got worse. And of course something drastic happened. The carbon pollution on earth reached trigger mass. But it didn't work out quite as some had supposed that it might.

2

We shamble thorough our longish terms  
Of Levallosian mind  
Till we be ponderous Pachyderms  
Incased in ancient rind.

Lost Skies -- O'Hanlon

Oh, for one thing, no rain, or almost no rain fell on the earth for that next hundred years. It was not missed. Moisture was the one thing that was in abounding plenty.

"But a mist rose from the earth and watered all the surface of the ground."

Rainless rain forests grew and grew. Ten million cubic miles of seawater rose to the new forming canopy and hung there in a covering world-cloud no more than twenty miles up. Naturally the sun and moon and stars were seen no more on the earth for that hundred years; and the light that did come down through the canopy seemed unnatural. But plants turned into giant plants and spread over the whole earth, gobbling the carbon dioxide with an almost audible gnashing.

So there was more land, now, and wetter land. There was a near equipoise of temperature everywhere under the canopy. The winds were all gathered up again into that old leather bag and they blew no more on the earth. Beneath the canopy it was warm and humid and stifling from pole to pole and to the utmost reaches of the earth.

It was a great change and everything felt it. Foot-long saurians slid out of their rocks that were warm and moist again: and gobbled and grew, and gobbled and grew, and gobbled and grew. Old buried fossil suns had been intruded into the earth air for a long time, and now the effect of their carbon and heat was made manifest. Six-foot-diameter turtles, having been ready to die, now postponed that event: and in another hundred years, in two hundred, they would be ten-foot-diameter turtles, thirteen-foot-diameter turtles.

The canopy, the new lowering copper-colored sky, shut out the direct sun and the remembered blue sky, and it shut out other things that had formerly trickled down: hard radiation, excessive ultraviolet rays and all the actinic rays, and triatomic oxygen. These things had been the carriers of the short and happy life, or the quick and early death; and these things were no longer carried down.

There was a thickening of bone and plate on all boned creatures everywhere, as growth continued for added years. There were new inhibitors and new stimulants; new bodies for old -- no, no -- older bodies for old. Certain teeth in certain beasts had always grown for all the beast life. Now the beast life was longer, and the saber-teeth appeared again.

It was murky under the new canopy, though. It took a long time to get used to it--and a long time was provided. It was a world filled with fogs, and foggy phrases.

'A very ancient and fish-like smell.'

'Just to keep her from the foggy foggy dew.'

'There were giants on the earth in those days.'

'When Enos was ninety years old, he became the father of Cainan. Enos lived eight hundred and fifteen years after the birth of Cainan, and had other sons and daughters.'

'Behold now Behemoth, which I have made with thee.'

'And beauty and length of days.'

'There Leviathan... stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims.'

'I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.'

"A land where the light is as darkness," said Job.

"Poor Job," said Sally Strumpet.

"This is my sorrow, that the right hand of the Most High is changed," said the Psalmist.

"Poor Psalmist," said Sally Strumpet.

The world that was under the canopy of the lowering sky was very like a world that was under water. Everything was incomparably aged and giantized and slow. Bears grew great. Lizards lengthened. Human people broadened and grew in their bones, and lengthened in their years.

"I suppose that we are luckier than those who come before or after," Harry Baldachin said. "We had our youths, we had much of our proper lives, and then we had this."

This was a hundred years to a day (a wednesday, was it not?) since that last club dinner, and the four of them, Harry Baldachin, Clement Flood, Charles Broad-man, and Sally Strumpet were met once more in the Mountain Top Club. Two of them, it will be remembered, hadn't expected to be there.

"What I miss most in these last nine or ten decades is colors," Clement Flood mused. "Really, we haven't colors, not colors as we had when I was young. Too much of the sun is intercepted now. Such aviators as still go up (the blue-sky hobbyists and such) say that there are still true colors above the canopy, that very ordinary objects may be taken up there and examined, and that they will be in full color as in ancient times. I believe that the loss of full color was understood by earlier psychologists and myth makers. In my youth, in my pre-canopy youth, I made some studies of very ancient photography. It was in black and white and gray only, just as most dreams were then in black and white and gray only. It is strange that these two things nearly anticipated the present world: we are so poor in color that we nearly fall back to the old predictions. No person under a hundred years old, unless he has flown above the canopy, has ever seen real color. But I will remember it."

"I remember wind and storm," said Harry Baldachin, "and these cannot now be found in their real old form even by going above the canopy. I remember frost and snow, and these are very rare everywhere on earth now. I remember rain, that most inefficient thing ever -- but it's pleasant in memory."

"I remember lightning," said Charles Broadman, "and thunder. Ah, thunder."

"Well, it's more than made up for in amplitude," Clement smiled. "There is so much more of the earth that is land now, and all the land is gray and growing -- I had almost used the old phrase 'green and growing,' but the color green can be seen now only by those who ascend above the canopy. But the world is warm and moist from pole to pole now, and filled with giant plants and giant animals and giant food. The canopy above, and the greenhouse diffusion effect below, it makes all the world akin. And the oceans are so much more fertile now -- one can almost walk on the backs of the fish. There is such a lot more carbon in the carbon cycle than there used to be, such a lot more life on the earth. And more and more carbon is being put into the cycle every year."

"That's true," said Harry Baldachin. "That's about the only industrialism that is still being carried out, the only industrialism that is still needed: burning coal and petroleum to add carbon to the cycle, burning it by the tens of thousands of cubic miles. Certain catastrophes of the past had buried great amounts of this carbon, had taken it out of the cycle, and the world was so much poorer for it. It was as if the fruit of whole suns had been buried uselessly in the earth. Now, in the hundred years since the forming or the reforming of the canopy, and to a lesser extent during the two hundred years before its forming, these buried suns have been dug up and put to use again."

"The digging up of buried suns has caused all manner of mischief," Charles Broadman said.

"You are an old foggy, Charles," Clement Flood told him. "A hundred years of amplitude have made no change at all in you."

The hundred years had really made substantial changes in all of them. They hadn't aged exactly, not in the old way of aging. They had gone on growing in a new, or a very old way. They had thickened in face and body. They had become more sturdy, more solid, more everlasting. Triatomic oxygen, that old killer, was dense in the world canopy, shutting out the other killers; but it was very rare at ground level, a perfect arrangement. There was no wind under the canopy, and things held their levels well. How long persons might live now could only be guessed. It might be up to a thousand years.

"And how is the -- ah -- younger generation?" Harry Baldachin asked. "How are you, Sally? We have not seen you for a good round century."

"I am wonderful, and I thought you'd never ask. People take so much longer to get to the point now, you know. The most wonderful news is that I now test fertile. When I was seventeen I worried that I didn't test out. The new times had already affected me, I believe. But now my term has come around, and about time I'd say. I'm a hundred and seventeen and there are cases of girls no more than a hundred who are ready. I will marry this very week and will have sons and daughters. I will marry one of the last of the aviators who goes above the canopy. I myself have gone above the canopy and seen true colors and felt the thin wind."

"It's not a very wise thing to do," said Harry. "They are going to put a stop to flights above the canopy, I understand. They serve no purpose; and they are unsettling."

"Oh, but I want to be unsettled," Sally cried.

"You should be old enough not to want any such thing, Sally," Clement Flood advised. "We are given length of days now, and with them wisdom should come to us."

"Well, has wisdom come?" Charles Broadman asked reasonably. "No, not really. Only slowness has come to us."

"Yes, wisdom, we have it now," Harry Baldachin insisted. "We enter the age of true wisdom. Long wisdom. Slow wisdom."

"You are wrong, and unwise," Charles Broadman said out of his thickened and almost everlasting face. "There is not, there has never been any such name or thing as unqualified Wisdom. And there surely are not such things as Long Wisdom or Slow Wisdom."

"But there is a thing named Swift Wisdom," Sally stated with great eagerness.

"There was once, there is not now, we lost it," Charles Broadman said sadly.

"We almost come to disagreement," Baldachin protested, "and that is not seemly for persons of the ample age. Ah well, we have lingered five hours over the walnuts and the wine, and perhaps it were the part of wisdom that we leave each other now. Shall we make these dinners a regular affair?"

"I want to," Sally said.

"Yes, I'd rather like to continue the meetings at regular intervals," Clement Flood agreed.

"Fine, fine," Charles Broadman murmured. "We will meet here again one hundred years from this evening."

3

And some forget to leave or let  
And some forget to die:  
But may my right hand wither yet  
If I forget the sky.

Lost Skies -- O'Hanlon

We are not so simple as to say that the Baluchitherium returned. The Baluchitherium was of an earlier age of the earth and flourished under an earlier canopy. Something that looked very like the Baluchitherium did appear, however. It was not even of the rhinoceros family. It was a horse grown giant and gangly. Horses of course, being artificial animals like dogs, are quite plastic and adaptable. A certain upper-lippiness quickly appeared when this new giant animal had turned into a giant leaf eater and sedge eater ("true" grass had about disappeared: how could it compete with the richer and fuller plants that flourished under the canopy?); a certain spreading of the hoofs, a dividedness more of appearance than of fact, was apparent after this animal had become a swamp romper. Well, it was a giant horse and a mighty succulent

horse, but it looked like the Baluchitherium of old.

We are not so naive as to accept that the brontosaurus came back. No. But there was a small flatfooted lizard that quickly became a large flatfooted lizard and came to look more and more like the brontosaurus. It came to look like this without changing anything except its size and its general attitude towards the world. Put a canopy over any creature and it will look different without much intrinsic change.

We surely are not gullible enough to believe that the crinoid plants returned to the ponds and the slack water pools. Well, but certain conventional long-stemmed water plants had come to look and behave very like the crinoids.

All creatures and plants had made their peace with the canopy, or they had perished. The canopy, in its two hundredth year, was a going thing; and the blue-sky days had ended forever.

There was still vestigial organic nostalgia for the blue-sky days, however. Most land animals still possessed eyes that would have been able to see full colors if there were such colors to be seen; man himself still possessed such eyes. Most food browsers still possessed enough crown to their teeth to have grazed grass if such an inefficient thing as grass had remained. Many human minds would still have been able to master the mathematics of stellar movements and positions, if ease and the disappearance of the stellar content had not robbed them of the inclination and opportunity for such things.

(There was, up to about two hundred years ago, a rather cranky pseudo-science named astronomy.)

There were other vestiges that hung like words in the fog and rank dew of the world.

'And the name of the star is called Wormwood.'

'In the brightness of the saints, before the day-star.'

'It was the star-eater who came, and then the sky-eater.'

"And the stars are not clear in his sight," said Job.

"Poor Job," said Sally.

The second hundred years had gone by, and the diners had met at Mountain Top Club again. And an extra diner was with them.

"Poor Sally," said Harry Baldachin. "You are still a giddy child, and you have already had sons and daughters. But you should not have brought your husband to this dinner without making arrangements. You could have proposed it this time, and had him here the next time. After all, it would only be a hundred years."

We are not so soft-headed as to say that the Neanderthal Men had returned. But the diners at Mountain Top Club, with that thickening of their faces and bones and bodies that only age will bring, had come to look very like Neanderthals -- even Sally a little.

"But I wanted him here this time," Sally said. "Who knows what may happen in a hundred years?"

"How could anything happen in a hundred years?" Harry Baldachin asked.

"Besides, your husband is in ill repute," Clement Flood said with some irritation. "He's said to be an outlaw flyer. I believe that a pickup order for his arrest was put out some six years ago, so he may be picked up at any time. In the blue-sky days he would have been picked up within twenty-four hours, but we move more graciously and slowly under the canopy.

"It's true that there's a pickup order out for me," said the husband. "It's true that I still fly above the canopy, which is now illegal. I doubt if I'll be able to do it much longer. I might be able to get my old craft up one more time, but I don't believe I would be able to get it down. I'll leave if you want me to."

"You will stay," Charles Broadman said. "You are a member of the banquet now, and you and I and Sally have them outnumbered."

The husband of Sally was a slim man. He did not seem to be properly

thickened to joint and bone. It was difficult to see how he could live a thousand years with so slight a body. Even now he showed a certain nervousness and anxiety, and that did not bode a long life.

"Why should anyone want to go above the canopy?" Harry Baldachin asked crossly. "Or rather, why should anyone want to claim to do it, since it is now assumed that the canopy is endless and no one could go above it?"

"But we do go above it," Sally stated. "We go for the sun and the stars; for the thin wind there which is a type of the old wind; for the rain even -- do you know that there is sometimes rain passing between one part of the canopy and another? -- for the rainbow -- do you know that we have actually seen a rainbow?"

"I know that the rainbow is a sour myth," Baldachin said.

"No, no, it's real," Sally swore. "Do you recall the lines of the old Vachel Lindsay: 'When my hands and my hair and my feet you kissed When you cried with your love's new pain I What was my name in the dragon mist In the rings of rainbowed rain?' Is that not wonderful?"

Harry Baldachin pondered it a moment.

"I give it up, Sally," he said then. "I can't deduce it. Well, what's the answer to the old riddle? What is the cryptic name that we are supposed to guess?"

"Forgive him," Charles Broadman murmured to the husband and to Sally. "We have all of us been fog-bound for too long a time below the canopy."

"It is now believed that the canopy has always been there," Baldachin said stiffly.

"Almost always, Harry, but not always," Charles Broadman answered him. "It was first put there very early, on the second day, as a matter of fact. You likely do not remember that the second day is the one that God did not call good. It was surely a transient and temporary backdrop that was put there to be pierced at the proper times by early death and by grace. One of the instants it was pierced was just before this present time. It had been breached here and there for short ages. Then came the clear instant, which has been called glaciation or flood or catastrophe, when it was shattered completely and the blue sky was seen supreme. It was quite a short instant, some say it was not more than ten thousand years, some say it was double that. It happened, and now it is gone. But are we expected to forget that bright instant?"

"The law expects you to forget that instant, Broadman, since it never happened, and it is forbidden to say that it happened," Baldachin stated stubbornly. "And you, man, the outlaw flyer, it is rumored that you have your craft hidden somewhere on this very mountain. Ah, I must leave you all for a moment."

They sat for some five hours over the walnuts and wine. It is the custom to sit for a long time after eating the heavy steaks of any of the neo-saurians. Baldachin returned and left several times, as did Flood. They seemed to have something going between them. They might even have been in a hurry about it if hurry were possible to them. But mostly the five persons spent the after-dinner hours in near congenial talk.

"The short and happy life, that is the forgotten thing," the husband of Sally was saying. "The blue-sky interval -- do you know what that was? It was the bright death sword coming down in a beam of light. Do you know that in the blue-sky days hardly one man in ten lived to be even a hundred years old? But do you know that in the blue-sky days it wasn't sealed off? The sword stroke was a cutting of the bonds. It was a release and an invitation to higher travel. Are you not tired of living in this prison for even two hundred years or three hundred?"

"You are mad," Harry Baldachin said.

Well of course the young man was mad. Broadman looked into the young man's eyes (this man was probably no older than Sally, he likely was no more than two hundred and twenty) and was startled by the secret he discovered

there. The color could not be seen under the canopy, of course; the eyes were gray to the canopy world. But if he were above the canopy, Broadman knew, in the blue-sky region where the full colors could be seen, the young man's eyes would have been sky-blue.

"For the short and happy life again, and for the infinite release," Sally's husband was saying. "For those under the canopy there is no release. The short and happy life and scorching heat and paralyzing cold. Hunger and disease and fever and poverty, all the wonderful things! How have we lost them? These are not idle dreams. We have them by the promise -- the Bow in the Clouds and the Promise that we be no more destroyed. But you destroy yourselves under the canopy."

"Mad, mad. Oh, but they are idle dreams, young man, and now they are over." Harry Baldachin smiled an old saurian smile. And the room was full of ponderous guards.

"Take the two young ones," Clement Flood said to the thickened guards.

But the laughter of Sally Strumpet shk'ered their ears and got under their thick skins.

"Take us?" she hooted. "How would they ever take us?"

"Girl, there are twenty of them, they will take you easily," Baldachin said slowly. But the husband of Sally was also laughing.

"Will twenty creeping turtles be able to catch two soaring birds on the high wing?" he laughed. "Would two hundred of them be able to? But your rumor is right, Baldachin, I do have my craft hidden somewhere on this very mountain. Ah, I believe I will be able to get the old thing up one more time."

"But we'll never be able to get it down again," Sally whooped. "Coming, Charles?"

"Yes," Charles Broadman cried eagerly. And he meant it, he meant it.

Those guards were powerful and ponderous, but they were just too slow. Twenty creeping turtles were no way able to catch those two soaring birds in their high flight. Crashing through windows with a swift tinkle of glass, then through the uncolored dark of the canopy world, to the rickety craft named Swift Wisdom that would go up one more time but would never be able to come down again, the last two flyers escaped through the pachydermous canopy.

"Mad," said Harry Baldachin.

"Insane," said Clement Flood.

"No," Charles Broadman said sadly. "No." And he sank back into his chair once more. He had wanted to go with them and he couldn't. The spirit was willing but the flesh was thickened and ponderous.

Two tears ran down his heavy cheeks but they ran very slowly, hardly an inch a minute. How should things move faster on the world under the canopy?

#### BOOMER FLATS

"In the tracks of our spiritual father Ivan Sanderson we may now have trailed a clutch of ABSMs to their lair," the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan was saying in his rattling voice. "And that lair may not be a mountain thicket or rain forest or swamp, but these scrimpy red clay flats. I would almost give my life for the success of this quest, but it seems that it should have a more magnificent setting."

"It looks like a wild goose chase," the eminent scientist Willy McGilly commented. But no, Willy was not down-grading their quest. He was referring to the wild geese that rose about them from the edges of the flats with clatter and whistle and honk. This was a flight-way, a chase of theirs. There were hundreds of them if one had the fine eyes to pick them out from the background. "Mud geese," Willy said. "We don't see as many of them as when I was a boy."

"I do not, and I am afraid that I will not, believe in the ABSMs," said the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk, stroking his - (no he didn't, he didn't have one) -- stroking his jaw, and yet this is the thing that I also have most desired, to find this missing link finally, and to refute all



believers in the other thing."

We can't see the chain for the links," said Willy McGilly. I never believed that any of them was missing. "There's always been too many of them for the length of the chain: that's the trouble." "I've traveled a million miles in search of them," said Arpad. "I've pretty well probed all the meager ribs of the world in that travel. My fear has always been that I'd miss them by a trick, even that in some unaccountable way I wouldn't know them when I found them. It would be ironic if we did find them in such a place as this: not a wild place, only a shady and overlooked place."

"My own fear has been that when I finally gazed on one I would wake with a start and find that I had been looking in a mirror," said Velikof. "There must be some symbolism here that I don't understand. What is your own anticipation of them, Willy?"

"Oh, coming back to people I've always liked. There used to be a bunch of them on the edge of my hometown," Willy McGilly said. "Come to think of it, there used to be a bunch of them on the edge of every hometown. Now they're more likely to be found right in the middle of every town. They're the scrubs, you know, for the bottoming of the breed."

"What are you talking about, Willy?" Arpad asked sharply. What they were all talking about was ABSMs.

Every town in the south part of that county has a shadow or secondary. There is Meehan, and Meehan Corners; Perkins, and Perkins Corner; Boomer, and Boomer Flats. The three eminent scientists were driving the three miles from Boomer to Boomer Flats looking for the bones, and hopefully even the living flesh, of a legend. It was that of the missing link, of the Abominable Snowman, the ABSM. It wasn't snowy country there, but the so-called Snowmen have been reported in every sort of climate and countryside.

The local legend, recently uncovered by Arpad, was that there was a non-African non-Indian "people of color" living in the neighborhood of Boomer Flats, "between the sand-bush thickets and the river." It was said that they lived on the very red mud banks of the river, and that they lived a little in the river itself.

Then Dr. Velikof Vonk had come onto a tape in a bunch of anthropological tapes, and the tape contained sequences like this:

"What do they do when the river floods?"

"Ah, they close their noses and mouths and ears with mud, and they lie down with big rocks on their breasts and stay there till the flood has passed."

"Can they be taught?"

"Some of the children go to school, and they learn. But when they are older then they stay at home, and they forget."

"What sort of language do they talk?"

"Ah, they don't seem to talk very much. They keep to themselves. Sometimes when they talk it is just plain Cimarron Valley English."

"What do they eat?"

"They boil river water in mud clay pots. They put in wild onions and greenery. The pottage thickens then, I don't know how. It gets lumps of meat or clay in it, and they eat that too. They eat frogs and fish and owls and thicket filaments. But mostly they don't eat very much of anything."

"It is said that they aren't all of the same appearance. It is even said that they are born, ah, shapeless, and that -- ah -- could you tell me anything about that?"

"Yeah. They're born without much shape. Most of them never do get much shape. When they have any, well actually their mothers lick them into shape, give them their appearance."

"It's an old folk tale that bears do that."

"Maybe they learned it from the bears then, young fellow. There's quite a bit of bear mixture in them, but the bears themselves have nearly gone from the flats and thickets now. More than likely the bears learned it from them."

Sometimes the mothers lick the cubs into the shape of regular people for a joke."

"That is the legend?"

"You keep saying legend. I don't know anything about legend. I just tell you what you ask me. I'll tell you a funny one, though. One of the mothers who was getting ready to bear happened to get ahold of an old movie magazine that some fishers from Boomer had left on the river edge. There was a picture in it of the prettiest girl that anyone ever saw, and it was a picture of all of that girl. This mother was tickled by that picture. She bore a daughter then, and she licked her into the shape and appearance of the girl in the movie magazine. And the girl grew up looking like that and she still looks like that, pretty as a picture. I don't believe the girl appreciates the joke. She is the prettiest of all the people, though. Her name is Crayola Catfish."

"Are you having me, old fellow? Have those creatures any humor?"

"Some of them tell old jokes. John Salt tells old jokes. The Licorice Man tells really old jokes. And man, does the Comet ever tell old jokes!"

"Are the creatures long-lived?"

"Long-lived as we want to be. The elixir comes from these flats, you know. Some of us use it, some of us don't."

"Are you one of the creatures?"

"Sure, I'm one of them. I like to get out from it sometimes though. I follow the harvests."

This tape (recorded by an anthropology student at State University who, by the way, has since busted out of anthropology and is now taking hotel and restaurant management) had greatly excited the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk when he had played it, along with several hundred other tapes that had come in that week from the anthropology circuit. He scratched his -- (no he didn't, he didn't have one) -- he scratched his jowl and he phoned up the eminent scientists Arpad Arkabaranan and Willy McGilly.

"I'll go, I'll go, of course I'll go," Arpad had cried. "I've traveled a million miles in search of it, and should I refuse to go sixty? This won't be it, this can't be it, but I'll never give up. Yes, we'll go tomorrow."

"Sure, I'll go," Willy McGilly said. "I've been there before, I kind of like those folks on the flats. I don't know about the biggest catfish in the world, but the biggest catfish stories in the world have been pulled out of the Cimarron River right about at Boomer Flats. Sure, we'll go tomorrow." "This may be it," Velikof had said. "How can we miss it? I can almost reach out and scratch it on the nose from here."

"You'll find yourself scratching your own nose, that's how you miss it. But it's there and it's real."

"I believe, Willy, that there is a sort of amnesia that has prevented us finding them or remembering them accurately."

"Not that, Velikof. It's just that they're always too close to see."

So the next day the three eminent scientists drove over from T-Town to come to Boomer Flats. Willy McGilly knew where the place was, but his pointing out of the way seemed improbable: Velikof was more inclined to trust the information of people in Boomer. And there was a difficulty there.

People kept saying "This is Boomer. There isn't exactly any place called Boomer Flats." Boomer Flats wasn't on any map. It was too small even to have a post office. And the Boomer people were exasperating in not knowing about it or knowing the way to it.

"Three miles from here, and you don't know where it is?" Velikof asked one of them angrily.

"I don't even know that it is," the Boomer man had said in his own near anger. "I don't believe that there is such a place."

Finally, however, other men told the eminent scientists that there sort of was such a place, sort of a place. Sort of a road going to it too. They pointed out the same improbable way that Willy McGilly had pointed out.

The three eminents took the road. The flats hadn't flooded lately. The road was sand, but it could be negotiated. They came to the town, to the sort of town, in the ragged river flats. There was such a place. They went to the Cimarron Hotel which was like any hotel anywhere, only older. They went into the dining room for it was noon.

It had tables, but it was more than a dining room. It was a common room. It even had intimations of old elegance in blued pier mirrors. There was a dingy bar there. There was a pool table there, and a hairy man was playing rotation with the Comet on it. The Comet was a long gray-bearded man (in fact, comet means a star with a beard) and small pieces were always falling on him. Clay-colored men with their hats on were playing dominos at several of the tables, and there were half a dozen dogs in the room. Something a little queer and primordial about those dogs! Something a little queer and primordial about the whole place!

But, as if set to serve as distraction, there was a remarkably pretty girl there, and she might have been a waitress. She seemed to be waiting, either listlessly or profoundly, for something.

Dr. Velikof Vonk twinkled his deep eyes in their orbital caves: perhaps he cogitated his massive brain behind his massive orbital ridges: and he arrived, by sheer mentality, at the next step.

"Have you a menu, young lady?" he asked.

"No," she answered simply, but it wasn't simple at all. Her voice didn't go with her prettiness. It was much more intricate than her appearance, even in that one syllable. It was powerful, not really harsh, deep and resonant as caverns, full and timeless. The girl was big-boned beneath her prettiness, with heavy brindled hair and complex eyes.

"We would like something to eat," Arpad Arkabaranan ventured. "What do you have?"

"They're fixing it for you now," the girl said. "I'll bring it after a while."

There was a rich river smell about the whole place, and the room was badly lit.

"Her voice is an odd one," Arpad whispered in curious admiration. "Like rocks rolled around by water, but it also has a touch of springtime in it, springtime of a very peculiar duality."

"Not just a springtime; it's an interstadial time," Willy McGilly stated accurately. "I've noticed that about them in other places. It's old green season in their voices, green season between the ice."

The room was lit only by hanging lamps. They had a flicker to them. They were not electric.

"There's a lot of the gas-light era in this place," Arpad gave the opinion, "But the lights aren't gas lights either."

"No, they're hanging oil lamps," Velikof said. "An amusing fancy just went through my head that they might be old whale-oil lamps."

"Girl, what do you burn in the hanging lamps?" Willy McGilly asked her.

"Catfish oil," she said in the resonant voice that had a touch of the green interstadial time in it. And catfish oil burns with a clay-colored flame.

"Can you bring us drinks while we wait?" Velikof of the massive head asked.

"They're fixing them for you now," the girl said. "I'll bring them after a while."

Meanwhile on the old pool table the Comet was beating the hairy man at rotation. Nobody could beat the Comet at rotation.

"We came here looking for strange creatures," Arpad said in the direction of the girl. "Do you know anything about strange creatures or people, or where they can be found?"

"You are the only strange people who have come here lately," she told them. Then she brought their drinks to them, three great sloshing clay cups or bulbous stems that smelled strongly of river, perhaps of interstadial river.

She set them in front of the eminents with something like a twinkle in her eyes; something like, but much more. It was laughing lightning flashing from under the ridges of that pretty head. She was waiting their reaction.

Velikof cocked a big deep eye at his drink. This itself was a feat. Other men hadn't such eyes, or such brows above them, as had Velikof Vonk. They took a bit of cocking, and it wasn't done lightly. And Velikof grinned out of deep folk memory as he began to drink. Velikof was always strong on the folk memory hit.

Arpad Arkabaranan screamed, rose backwards, toppled his chair, and stood aghast while pointing a shaking finger at his splashing clay cup. Arpad was disturbed.

Willy McGilly drank deeply from his own stirring vessel "Why, it's Green Snake Snorter!" he cried in amazement and delight. "Oh drink of drinks, thou're a pleasure beyond expectation! They used to serve it to us back home, but I never even hoped to find it here. What great thing have we done to deserve this?"

He drank again of the wonderful splashing liquor while the spray of it filled the air. And Velikof also drank with noisy pleasure. The girl righted Arpad's chair, put Arpad into it again with strong hands, and addressed him powerfully to his cresting breaker. But Arpad was scared of his lively drink. "It's alive, it's alive," was all that he could jabber. Arpad Arkabaranan specialized in primitives, and primitives by definition are prime stuff. But there wasn't, now in his moment of weakness, enough prime stuff in Arpad himself to face so pleasant and primitive a drink as this.

The liquid was sparkling with bright action, was adequately alcoholic, something like choc beer, and there was a green snake in each cup. (Velikof in his notebook states that they were green worms of the species *vermis ebrius viridis*, but that is only a quibble. They were snake-like worms and of the size of small snakes, and we will call them snakes.)

"Do get with it, Arpad," Willy McGilly cried. "The trick is to drink it up before the snake drinks it. I tell you though that the snakes can discern when a man is afraid of them. They'll fang the face off a man who's afraid of them."

"Ah, I don't believe that I want the drink," Arpad declared with sickish grace. "I'm not much of a drinking man."

So Arpad's green snake drank up his Green Snake Snorter, noisily and greedily. Then it expired -- it breathed out its life and evaporated. That green snake was gone.

"Where did he go?" Arpad asked nervously. He was still uneasy about the business.

"Back to the catfish," the girl said. "All the snakes are spirits of catfish just out for a little ramble."

"Interesting," Velikof said, and he noted in his pocket notebook that the *vermis ebrius viridis* is not a discrete species of worm or snake, but is rather spirit of catfish. It is out of such careful notation that science is built up.

"Is there anything noteworthy about Boomer Flats?" Velikof asked the girl then. "Has it any unique claim to fame?"

"Yes," the girl said. "This is the place that the comets come hack to."

"Ah, but the moths have eaten the comets," Willy McGilly quoted from the old epic.

The girl brought them three big clay bowls heaped with fish eggs, and these they were to eat with three clay spoons. Willy McGilly and Dr. Velikof Vonk addressed themselves to the rich meal with pleasure, but Arpad Arkabaranan refused.

"Why, it's all mixed with mud and sand and trash," he objected.

"Certainly, certainly, wonderful, wonderful," Willy McGilly slushed out the happy words with a mouth full of delicious gioop. "I always thought that something went out of the world when they cleaned up the old shanty town dish of shad roe. In some places they cleaned it up; not everywhere. I maintain

that roe at its best must always have at least a slight tang of river sewage."

But Arpad broke his clay spoon in disgust. And he would not eat. Arpad had traveled a million miles in search of it but he didn't know it when he found it; he hadn't any of it inside him so he missed it.

One of the domino players at a near table (the three eminent had noticed this some time before but had not fully realized it) was a bear. The bear was dressed as a shabby man, he wore a big black hat on his head; he played dominos well he was winning.

"How is it that the bear plays so well?" Velikof asked.

"He doesn't play at all well," Willy McGilly protested. "I could heat him. I could beat any of them."

"He isn't really a bear," the girl said. "He is my cousin. Our mothers, who were sisters, were clownish. His mother licked him into the shape of a bear for fun. But that is nothing to what my mother did to me. She licked me into pretty face and pretty figure for a joke, and now I am stuck with it. I think it is too much of a joke. I'm not really like this, but I guess I may as well laugh at me just as everybody else does."

"What is your name?" Arpad asked her without real interest.

"Crayola Catfish."

But Arpad Arkabaranan didn't hear or recognize the name, though it had been on a tape that Dr. Velikof Vonk had played for them, the same tape that had really brought them to Boomer Flats. Arpad had now closed his eyes and ears and heart to all of it.

The hairy man and the Comet were still shooting pool, but pieces were still falling off the Comet.

"He's diminishing, he's breaking up," Velikof observed. "He won't last another hundred years at that rate."

Then the eminent left board and room and the Cimarron Hotel to go looking for ABSMs who were rumored to live in that area.

ABSM is the code name for the Abominable Snowman, for the Hairy Woodman, for the Wild Man of Borneo, for the Sasquatch, for the Booger-Man, for the Ape-Man, for the Bear-Man, for the Missing Link, for the nine-foot-tall Giant things, for the living Neanderthals. It is believed by some that all of these beings are the same. It is believed by most that these things are no thing at all, no where, not in any form.

And it seemed as if the most were right, for the three eminent could not find hide nor hair (rough hide and copious hair were supposed to be marks by which the ABSMs might be known) of the queer folks anywhere along the red bank of the Cimarron River. Such creatures as they did encounter were very like the shabby and untalkative creatures they had already encountered in Boomer Flats. They weren't an ugly people: they were pleasantly mud-homely. They were civil and most often they were silent. They dressed something as people had dressed seventy-five years before that time -- as the poor working people had dressed then. Maybe they were poor maybe not. They didn't seem to work very much. Sometimes a man or a woman seemed to be doing a little bit of work, very casually.

It may be that the red-mud river was full of fish. Something was splashing and jumping there. Big turtles waddled up out of the water, caked with mud even around their eyes. The shores and flats were treacherous, and sometimes an eminent would sink into the sand-mud up to the hips But the broad-footed people of the area didn't seem to sink in.

There was plenty of greenery (or brownery, for it had been the dusty weeks) along the shores. There were muskrats, there were even beavers, there were skunks and possums and badgers. There were wolf dens and coyote dens dug into the banks, and they had their particular smells about them. There were dog dens. There were coon trees. There were even hear dens or caves. But no, that was not a bear smell either. What smell was it?

"What lives in these clay caves?" Velikof asked a woman who was digging river clams there.

"The Giants live in them," she said. Well, they were tall enough to be

giants' caves. A nine-footer need hardly stoop to enter one.

"We have missed it," Arpad said. "There is nothing at all to be found here. I will travel farther, and I will find it in other places."

"Oh, I believe we are right in the middle of it," Velikof gave the opinion.

"It is all around us, Arpad, everything you wanted," Willy McGilly insisted.

But Arpad Arkabaranan would have none of the muddy water, none of the red sand or the red sand caves, nothing of anything here. The interest had all gone out of him. The three of them went back to the Cimarron Hotel without, apparently, finding primitive creature or missing link at all.

They entered the common room of the hotel again. Dominos were set before them. They played draw listlessly.

"You are sure that there are no odd creatures around this place?" Arpad again asked the girl Crayola Catfish.

"John Salt is an odd creature and he comes from this place," Crayola told them. "The Licorice Man is an odd creature, I suppose. So is Ape Woodman: he used to be a big-time football player. All three of them had regular-people blood in them; I suppose that's what made them odd. They were almost as odd as you three creatures. And the Comet playing pool there is an odd one. I don't know what kind of blood he has in him to make him odd."

"How long has he been around here?" Velikof asked.

"He returns every eighty-seven years. He stays here about three years, and he's already been here two of them. Then he goes off on another circuit. He goes out past the planets and among the stars."

"Oh? And how does he travel out there?" Velikof asked with cocked tongue and eye.

"With horse and buggy, of course."

"Oh there, Comet," Willy McGilly called. "Is it true that you travel out among the stars with horse and buggy?"

"Aye, that I do," the long gray-bearded man named Comet called back, "with a horse named Pee-gosh and a buggy named Harma. It's a flop-eared horse and a broken buggy, but they take me there."

"Touch clay," said Crayola Catfish, "for the lightning."

They touched clay. Everything was of baked clay anyhow, even the dominos. And there had been lightning, fantastic lightning dashing itself through every crack and cranny of the flimsy hotel. It was a lightning brighter than all the catfish-oil lamps in the world put together. And it continued. There was clattering sequence thunder, and there was a roaring booming sound that came from a few miles west of the thunder.

The Giants came in and stood around the edges of the room. They were all very much alike, like brothers. They were tall and somber, shabby, black-bearded to the eyes, and with black hats on their heads. Unkempt. All were about nine feet tall.

"Shall I sound like a simpleton if I ask if they are really giants?" Velikof questioned.

"As your eyes tell you, they are the giants," Crayola said. "They stay here in the out-of-the-way places even more than the rest of us. Sometimes regular people see them and do not understand that they are regular people too. For that there is scandal. It was the scent of such a scandal, I believe, that brought the three of you here. But they are not apes or bears or monsters. They are people too."

"They are of your own same kindred?" Velikof asked.

"Oh yes. They are the uncles, the old bachelors. That's why they grow tall and silent. That's why they stand around the edges of the room. And that is why they dig themselves caves into the banks and bluffs instead of living in huts. The roofs of huts are too low for them."

"It would be possible to build taller huts," Willy McGilly suggested.

"It would be possible for you, yes," Crayola said. "It would not be possible for them. They are set in their ways. They develop a stoop and a gait

because they feel themselves so tall. They let their hair grow and overflow, all over their faces and around their eyes, and all over their bodies also. They are the steers of the species. Having no children or furniture, what can they do but grow tall and ungainly like that? This happens also to the steers of cattle and bears and apes, that they grow tall and gangling. They become bashful, you see, so sometimes it is mistakenly believed that they are fierce."

The roaring and booming from west of the thunder was becoming louder and nearer. The river was coming dangerously alive. All of the people in the room knew that it was now dark outside, and it was not yet time to be night.

The Comet gave his pool cue to one of the bashful giants and came and sat with the eminent.

"You are Magi?" he asked.

"I am a magus, yes," Willy McGilly said. "We are called eminent scientists now-a-days. Velikof here also remains a magus, but Arpad has lost it all this day."

"You are not the same three I first believed," the old Comet said. "Those three passed me several of my cycles back. They had had word of an Event, and they had come from a great distance as soon as they heard it. But it took them near two thousand years to make the trip and they were worried that myth had them as already arriving long ago. They were worried that false Magi had anticipated them and set up a preventing myth. And I believe that is what did happen."

"And your own myths, old fellow, have they preceded you, or have you really been here before?" Willy McGilly asked. "I see that you have a twisty tongue that turns out some really winding myths."

"Thank you, for that is ever my intent. Myths are not merely things that were made in times past: myths are among the things that maintain the present in being. I wish most strongly that the present should be maintained: I often live in it."

Tell us, old man, why Boomer Flats is a place that the comets come back to?" Willy said.

"Oh, it's just one of the post stations where we change horses when we make our orbits. A lot of the comets come to the Flats: Booger, Donati, Eneke, 1914c, and Halley."

But why to Boomer Flats on the little Cimarron River?" Willy inquired.

Things are often more than they seem. The Cimarron isn't really so little a river as you would imagine. Actually it is the river named Ocean that runs around all the worlds."

"Old Comet, old man with the pieces falling off of you," Dr. Velikof Vonk asked out of that big head of his, "can you tell us just who are the under-people that we have tracked all around the world and have probably found here no more than seventy miles from our own illustrious T-Town?"

"A phyz like you have on you, and you have to ask!" the old Comet twinkled at Velikof (a man who twinkled like that had indeed been among the stars; he had their dust on him). "You're one of them, you know."

"I've suspected that for a long time," Velikof admitted. "But who are they? And who am I?"

"Wise Willy here said it correctly to you last night; that they were the scrubs who bottom the breed. But do not demean the scrubs: they are the foundation. They are human as all of us are human. They are a race that underlies the other several races of man. When the bones and blood of the more manifest races grow too thin, then they sustain you with the mixture of their strong kingship: the mixing always goes on, but in special eras it is more widespread. They are the link that is never really missing, the link between the clay and the blood."

"Why are they, and me if I were not well-kempt and eminent, sometimes taken to be animals?" Velikof asked. "Why do they always live in such outlandish places?"

"They don't always. Sometimes they live in very inlandish places. Even

wise Willy understands that. But it is their function to stand apart and grow in strength. Look at the strong bone structure of that girl there! It is their function to invent forms -- look at the form her mother invented for her. They have a depth of mind, and they have it particularly in those ghostly areas where the other races lack it. And they share and mingle it in those sudden motley ages of great achievement and vigor. Consider the great ages of Athens, of Florence, of Los Angeles. And afterwards, this people will withdraw again to gather new strength and bottom."

"And why are they centered here in a tumble-down hotel that is like a series of old daguerreotypes?" Willy McGilly asked. "Will you tell us that there is something cosmic about this little old hotel, as there is about this little old river?"

"Aye, of course there is, Willy. This is the hotel named Xenodocheion. This is the special center of these Xenoi, these strangers, and of all strangers everywhere. It isn't small; it is merely that you can see but a portion of it at one time. And then they center here to keep out of the way. Sometimes they live in areas and neighborhoods that regularized humanity has abandoned (whether in inner-city or boondock). Sometimes they live in eras and decades that regularized humanity has abandoned: for their profundity of mind in the more ghostly areas, they have come to have a cavalier way with time. What is wrong with that? If regular people are finished with those days and times, why may not others use them?"

The roaring and booming to the west of the thunder had become very loud and very near now, and in the immediate outdoors there was heavy rain.

It is the time," the girl Crayola Catfish cried out in her powerful and intricate voice. "The flash flood is upon us and it will smash everything. We will all go and lie down in the river.

They all began to follow her out, the Boomer Flats people, and the Giants among them; the eminents, everybody.

"Will you also lie down in the river, Comet?" Willy McGilly asked. "Somehow I don't believe it of you."

"No, I will not. That isn't my way. I will take my horse and buggy and ascend above it."

"Ah, but Comet, will it look like a horse and buggy to us?"

"No, it will look quite other, if you do chance to see it."

"And what are you really, Comet?" Velikof asked him as they left him. "What species do you belong to?"

"To the human species, of course, Velikof. I belong to still another race of it; another race that mixes sometimes, and then withdraws again to gather more strength and depth. Some individuals of us withdraw for quite long times. There are a number of races of us in the wide cousinship, you see and it is a necessity that we be strangers to each other for a good part of the time."

"Are you a saucerian?"

"Oh saucerian be damned, Velikof! Harma means chariot or it means buggy; it does not mean saucer. We are the comets. And our own mingling with the commonalty of people has also had quite a bit to do with those sudden incandescent eras. Say, I'd like to talk with you fellows again some time. I'll be by this way again in about eighty-seven years.

"Maybe so," said Dr. Velikof Vonk.

"Maybe so," said Willy McGilly.

The eminents followed the Boomer Flats people to the river. And the Comet, we suppose, took his horse and buggy and ascended out of it. Odd old fellow he was; pieces falling off him; he'd hardly last another hundred years.

The red and black river was in surging flood with a blood-colored crest bearing down. And the flats -- they were just too flat. The flood would be a mile wide here in one minute and everywhere in that width it would be deep enough and swift enough to drown a man. It was near dark: it was near the limit of roaring sound. But there was a pile of large rocks there in the



deepening shallows: plenty of rocks: at least one big heavy rock for every person.

The Boomer Flats people understood what the rocks were for, and the Giants among them understood. Two of the eminents understood; and one of them, Arpad, apparently did not. Arpad was carrying on in great fear about the dangers of death by drowning.

Quickly then, to cram mud into the eyes and ears and noses and mouths. There is plenty of mud and all of it is good. Spirits of Catfish protect us now! -- it will be only for a few hours, for two or three days at the most.

Arpad alone panicked. He broke and ran when Crayola Catfish tried to put mud in his mouth and nose to save him. He ran and stumbled in the rising waters to his death.

But all the others understood. They lay down in the red roaring river, and one of the giants set a heavy rock on the breast of every person of them to hold them down. The last of the giants then rolled the biggest of the rocks onto his own breast.

So all were safe on the bottom of the surging torrent, safe in the old mud-clay cradle. Nobody can stand against a surging flood like that: the only way is to lie down on the bottom and wait it out. And it was a refreshing, a deepening, a renewing experience. There are persons, both inside and outside the orders, who make religious retreats of three days every year for their renewal. This was very like such a retreat.

When the flood had subsided (this was three days later), they all rose again, rolling the big rocks off their breasts; they cleared their eyes and ears and mouths of the preserving mud, and they resumed their ways and days.

For Velikof Vonk and for Willy McGilly it had been an enriching experience. They had found the link that was not really lost, leaving the other ninety-nine meanwhile. They had grown in cousinship and wisdom. They said they would return to the flats every year at mud-duck season and turtle-egg season. They went back to T-Town enlarged and happy.

There is, however, a gap in the Magi set, due to the foolish dying of Arpad Arkabaranan. It is not of Scripture that a set of Magi should consist of only three. There have been sets of seven and nine and eleven. It is almost of Scripture, though, that a set should not consist of less than three. In the Masulla Apocalypse it seems to be said that a set must contain at the least a Comet, a Commoner, and a Catfish. The meaning of this is pretty muddy, and it may be a mistranslation.

There is Dr. Velikof Vonk with his huge head, with his heavy orbital ridges, with the protruding near-muzzle on him that makes the chin unnecessary and impossible, with the great hack-brain and the great good humor. He is (and you had already guessed it of him) an ABSM, a neo-Neanderthal, an unmissing link, one of that branch of the human race that lives closest to the clay and the catfish.

There is Willy McGilly who belongs (and he himself has come to the realization of this quite lately) to that race of mankind called the Comets. He is quite bright, and he has his periods. He himself is a short orbit comet, but for all that he has been among the stars. Pieces fall off of him; he leaves a wake; but he'll last a while yet.

One more is needed so that this set of Magi may be formed again. The other two aspects being already covered, the third member could well be a regularized person. It could be an older person of ability, an eminent. It would be a younger person of ability, a pre-eminent.

This person may be you. Put your hand to it if you have the surety about you, if you are not afraid of green snakes in the cup (they'll fang the face off you if you're afraid of them), or of clay-mud, or of comet dust, or of the rollicking world between.

How many habitable worlds there are depends on the meaning given to 'habitable' and to 'world.' Habitable without special equipment and conditioning is the usual restriction on the first. 'Of no mean size' and 'of no no extreme distance' are two common conditions of the second. Thus Roulettenwelt and Kentron-Kosmon are really asteroids, too small to be worlds. But how about Hokey Planet and such? And how about the distant traveler's-tale worlds?

Butler lists only seventeen habitable worlds, limiting them to the fair-sized and generally hospitable worlds of Sol and of the Centauri Suns. So all these were closely grouped. The early notion that double or triple suns would not have planets because of their irregularity had been an erroneous estimate, fortunately.

Thus, revolving around Sol there is only Gaea (Earth). Around the Sun Proxima (the Grian Sun) are Kentauron-Mikron, Camiroi, Astrobe, and Dahae. Around the Sun Alpha are Skandia, Pudibundia, Analos, and the equivalently-named twins with such different superior fauna, Proavitus and Paravata; and Skokumchuck (the Shelni Planet). Around the sun Beta are the three trader planets, Emporion, Apateon, and Klepsis; tricky places, it is said. But if you think the Traders are tricky, how about the other three Beta Planets? There are Aphthonia (also called World Abounding), Bellota (Butler lists this as a Planet, though there are larger bodies listed as asteroids: he says, however, that Bellota in its present creation is much larger than its size of record, a puzzling statement), and Aranea (or the Spider Planet).

These latter three are habitable by all definition, but they are generally uninhabited, each for its own unclear reason. It was to clear up the reason and impediment concerning Aphthonia or World Abounding that a party was now in descending hover.

"We are on this mission because of one phrase, repeated by leaders of five different parties, and maintained in the face of vigorous courts martial," Fairbridge Exendine, the singling leader, said with a sort of hooked wonder. "I have never been able to get that phrase out of my mind. 'You'd never believe it' was the phrase, and the men of the five parties, of the more than twenty parties in fact, would not elaborate on it much."

"I hardly believe it either," Judy Brindlesby said, and I haven't been there yet. It almost jumps at you. There is certainly no other world that presents so pleasant an appearance from medium hover. The continent named Aegea and the howling beauty of those oceans and seas that invade it so deeply! The river named Festinatio, the largest clear river on any world! The volcano named Misericors! Why should a river be named 'I hurry' and a volcano be named the 'merciful'?"

"It was John Chancel who named them," Rushmore Planda said with that curious reverence which all use in speaking of the great explorer. "And it was he who first said that this was the finest world ever, and that it should be left alone to be just that."

World Abounding has been visited by the great John Chancel just fifty years before. He had been the first Gaea man on very many of the worlds. It was John Chancel who said that only men should go to work on World Abounding, that it was no place to raise a family.

Later he repented even of this and said that nobody at all should go there.

Chancel had stated that World Abounding was the most generous and fertile world ever, and that its very generosity would blow one's mind. It was his opinion that this was the Hasty Planet of the earliest travelers' tales, and that there was something very much too hasty about it. And he said that the most famous product of World Abounding should never be used at more than one-thousandth strength.

Gorgos, the magic animal and plant hormone (it wasn't that, but such was the popular explanation of it), came from World Abounding. Cut it a thousand times and it still was the magic growth-trigger. Ah, why cut it at all though? Why not take it at the full where it abounded in its fullness? To be spooked

off by too much of a good thing was childish. "Let us examine it as scientists and adults," Fairbridge said as they came into lower hover, "as balanced persons who know what we are about."

The seven balanced persons who knew what they were about were Fairbridge Exendine, the canny commander; the Brindlesbys, Judy and Hilary; the Plandas, Erma and Rushmore; the Kerwins, Lisetta and Blase. They were three couples and one remarkable singling, a superior microcosm.

They came down easily and safely from low hover as twenty-two parties had come down before (twenty-three if one counts the solo voyage of John Chancel). They were pleasantly staggered by the sudden green power of that place. There was no need of any caution: Nobody of any party had ever suffered even slight injury or sickness on World Abounding. They found such generosity as would gladden any mind and body. It would be difficult, initially, to be scientists and adult about World Abounding.

Well, revel in the joy then. Afterwards, analyze it all minutely, but without losing any of that joyousness. Do not complain too strenuously about a stacked deck if it is all stacked in your favor.

They were on the Terraces -- "which aren't mentioned by John Chancel at all," Erma Planda said with a toss of her whole golden body, "and it is only gradually that members of the other parties begin to mention them. Could the Terraces have grown up in fifty standard years?"

The Terraces formed a great elongated, stepped plateau, overcome with its own lushness. From the great green broad height of the hover-craft landing, the Terraces tumbled down seventy meters in more than twenty giant steps to the plain. This was all between the volcano and the river, and the Terraces had shoved out into the river to produce gracious rapids with their musical foam.

"Yes, the Terraces have apparently grown in fifty years, or have been spewed out by the volcano named Merciful," Fairbridge said. "Chancel described the plain between the volcano and the river and he didn't mention the Terraces at all. He set up a spire for monument in the middle of the plain, and where is it now? I believe that it is engulfed in the Terraces, and I intend to find it. I also intend to find why some of the latter parties refer to the Terraces as the Graves. No member of any party died here. All returned. I have a sudden exuberance come over me and I'll start my digging now."

And Fairbridge Exendine had already set the earth-augers to cutting down into the Terraces.

"I have my own new exuberance," Judy Brindlesby shouted like a whole covey of trumpets. "Hilary, my clay-headed hero, we will make luscious life together all day and all night."

Judy was large, but surpassingly shapely and graceful, like a hover-craft. Her brindled black-red hair was so weighty and enveloping that a lesser woman could hardly have carried it; and it seemed to be growing by the minute, like the grass there. One couldn't actually quite see the World Abounding grass grow, but one could hear it; it made a pleasant squeaking sound. And there was a hint of quick music about Judy's heavy hair that indicated that it was growing and growing.

"Yes, it is volcanic ash," Rushmore Planda was saying as he joined Fairbridge at the earth-augers. "It is quite airy ash." The volcanic ash was chalky white to pearl gray. Then it had a streak of green in it, and another.

"You are through the first stratum, Fairbridge," Rushmore said, "and into a layer of compressed vegetation that hasn't even rotted yet. This is the vegetation that was recently the top of the second stratum; very recently, I believe. This is a curious pile of Terraces."

"Oh, it's a holy pyramid," Erma Planda told them all, "and the Volcano built it especially for the holy people, ourselves. John Chancel said that he always felt himself to be a holy man when he first set foot on a good new world. I feel myself to be a holy woman now."

"Do not stuff yourself, holy woman," her man Rushmore told her. "Chancel

preached temperance in all things. Do you have to eat everything you see? Do you have to eat all of everything you see?"

"Yes, I have to, I have to! And was it not the great John Chancel, he who first warned against this place, who said that there was no possibility of poisoning on World Abounding? Oh, and he said that there was no possibility of over-indulgence here either. He stated that the essence Gorgos has no limits, but that it pretends that it has. Everything that can be chewed or swallowed here is safe to eat or drink. There is no insect or animal that bites, nor worm that gnaws, nor moth that harms. There'll be no extreme heat or cold. The nineteen-day polar tumble combined with the diurnal rotation keeps the air breezy and invigorating. Invigorating, yes, yes, extremely so. More than invigorating. It's a pretty horny world, actually. Rather a rambunctious feeling it gives one. More than that, it --"

"What has happened to all you girl-folk?" the leader Fairbridge asked, rather puzzled and almost alarmed. "I have never seen you so wild-eyed and charged."

"Poor Fairbridge," Judy Brindlesby needled him. "Never mind, Fairbridge, I'll get you a girl. I'll get you one within a standard month. I promise you."

"Impossible, sweet Judy, unless you slay your own mate. We're to be here for a long year, or until we solve the problem, and nobody else will touch down. Where would you get me a girl?"

"That I don't know. But the very rocks are singing to me, 'You'll get a girl, Judy, you'll get a girl for old Fairbridge within a month.'"

"Gorgos is not merely a magic animal-and-plant hormone," Rushmore Planda was speaking with a suddenly improved, new and magnificent voice. "It's a way of life, I see that now. It will impose its own shape on my wife, however much she stuffs herself. It will impose its shape on everything. It is a new pace and a new sort of life."

"It may be that its pace is too fast," Fairbridge warned.

"Makes no difference. There can't be any other pace here. Get the song of those romping birds there! It's the same beat that Gaea lunatics, treated with Gorgos, begin to sing with as soon as their sure cure begins. Get the whole stimulating, pleasant, almost drunken smell of this planet! Here is not so much the uncanny feel of things seen before, but of things smelled before. All great smells (Can one speak of great smells? Yes, one can.) have a reminiscent element, but with this it is reminiscent of a future. There is a pleasurable mustiness here, that's sure, but it isn't of past time: it's of future time, long waiting, and now beginning to unfold suddenly."

"You men are drunk on only the expectation of wine," Lisetta Kerwin said. "But the one thing I remember from the journal of the great John Chancel was the recipe for making morning wine in nine minutes on World Abounding. And I've already started it. Time's arunning."

Lisetta was crushing purple fruit into a hugh calathus or basket made by pulling the inner corolla out of a giant flower bloom.

"It would be chemically possible to make a potable fruit alcohol in nine minutes," Blase Kerwin said, "but it wouldn't be wine. It wouldn't have the bouquet. It wouldn't have the -- but it has it. I smell that it has already, and it grows. Here, here, let me swig that --"

"No, no, it isn't ready," Lisetta protested. "It still moves itself, it lends its color to the cup, it bites like a serpent."

"Look out, serpent and wife, I'll bite back. Have at you.'" And Blase Kerwin took a huge draught from the green cup. He turned a bit green himself, but cheerfully so. He lost his voice, and he did a little dance on one foot while he grasped his throat with both hands, but he was quite pleased about it all. There are some things too good to wait for.

"A little patience," Lisetta said. "Four minutes yet."

Blase still hadn't his speech back but he could howl his high pleasure over the breathtaking encounter. And soon, quite soon, they were all lushy over the singing, heady stuff. It was very difficult to be scientific and adult about World Abounding.

So they probed the world very unscientifically and kiddishly, except Fairbridge and Rushmore, who still probed the levels of the Terraces. The three ladies especially were happy maniacs and they were all over that abundant land. They caught and rode huge gangling animals. After all, on the word of Chancel and others, everything was harmless. They wrestled with big starfish in the river named Festinatio. They ate the snap-off tails of huge lizards and sent them away bawling and running on their two hind legs. Never mind; the big lizards could regrow their snap-off tails.

"Those five party leaders who wrote 'You'd never believe it,' do you think they were laughing when they wrote it?" Judy Brindlesby exploded the question when she clambered once again back up to the diggings.

"One of them, I believe, wrote in laughter, Judy," Fairbridge said. "And one of them, I know for certain, wrote in absolute horror. I don't know about the other three."

"Fairbridge, I suggest that we clear out a square about five meters on a side and excavate the whole top level of it," Rushmore Planda said. "I believe that there is more mystery buried here than we have met in all our lives."

"All right, we will do that," Fairbridge agreed. "The least we can do is see what is right under our feet."

"But not there!" Judy trumpeted at them. "Dig here where the people are."

"What people, Judy?" Fairbridge asked her patiently. "All the people who have ever been on this world have been accounted for."

"Not till we account for them they haven't been. How do I know what people they are till you dig them up? Dig carefully, though. They are real people here. You call yourselves diggers and you don't even know where the people are buried."

"We dig where you say, Judy. You are a people-witcher in your several ways."

"But don't dig all the time. You're missing it. Life is being lived today and tonight." And she was off again, leaping down the three-meter steps of the Terraces.

"I don't know what she means," Fairbridge said as he set the excavators to work and then adjusted them to 'Slow and Careful.' "I hardly ever know what she means."

"I believe that I know what she means, Fairbridge," Rushmore said in an eerie voice with a scarce human chuckle in it.

So the excavators excavated, moving the light volcanic ash that was below the vegetation. There was real mystery in the ash that was turned up. That stuff was not completely dead.

"One thing I like about it here is the size of the party," Fairbridge mumbled as he sensed something near and put the excavators on 'Very Slow.' "Seven. That's right, that's just right. That's just how many persons should be on a world. More than that is a crowd. But a man cannot live pleasantly alone. What do you think about that, Rushmore? Isn't seven about right? Rushmore?"

"He's gone. The party isn't seven now. It's one, me. I'm alone. I suspect that they have chosen the better part, though. Yes, I know what Judy meant, and it does come in very strongly here. But it isn't just with them; it's coming up from the very ground here. I'll dig on."

Fairbridge dug down till he came to the people.

It was night. Ancilla, the smaller moon, was overhead; Matrona, the larger moon, had just arisen. Fairbridge went to find the three couples of the party.

"They all have the new exuberance on them and they make luscious life together all day and all night. But I have to tell them what I have found."

It would be easiest to find Judy Brindlesby, the liveliest of them all. Wherever she was, any man would know it by special sensing. Fairbridge's special sensing led him to a river meadow and into a high brake of reeds that

still squeaked from sudden new growth. Judy lay there with her clay-headed hero and husband Hilary.

It was magnificent Judy stretched on her back in giggling slumber. Hilary, chuckling with pleasure, lay atop her and was cutting her hair with great shears: cutting her incredible hair, cutting her superabundant hair, cutting the mountains of her hair. He had sheared off great heaps of it, possibly twenty kilograms of it, and she still had more than she'd had that afternoon.

"You are almost completely hidden in the reeds, Hilary," Fairbridge said then. "I'd never have found you, except that any man can sense Judy's presence."

"Hullo, Fairbridge," Hilary grunted pleasantly. "The reeds weren't here when we lay down. They've grown up since. Everything that touche~ her grows, and she is enlivened wherever she touches this ground. Look at her hair, Fairbridge. She's in accord with it here. Gorgos or whatever the growth element is, she's with it. So am I."

"I dug down to people in the Terraces, Hilary."

"Yes. Judy said there would be people there."

Fairbridge and Hilary went and took Rushmore from the sleeping arms of Erma in the blue-stem hills. And they met Lisetta and Blase Kerwin coming out of the orchards.

"Lisetta says that you have dug down to people," Blase cried vividly. "Oh, for the love of abundant Aphthonia, let's go see what this is about!"

"I've dug down to people, yes," Fairbridge said, "but how could Lisetta know it?"

They climbed up the tall Terraces and came to the open shaft.

"We will remove the rest of the volcanic dust and crust from about them," Fairbridge said. "And when old Beta Sun comes up, we can get a good look at them."

"Oh, this is fine enough light for it," Lisetta said. "Aren't they nice people, though. So friendly. We will get acquainted with them before the brighter light is on them. It's best to become acquainted with good people in dim light first, especially when they've been through an odd experience. Then they'll brighten up with the light."

There were twelve of the people there, twelve adults. They were seated, apparently, on stone benches around a stone table. The details would be known when the rest of the volcanic dust had been cleared away and when Beta sun was risen. The twelve were got up in a gala and festive way. They had sat eating and drinking when it came over them, but they had not been taken by surprise. It was a selective volcanic thrust that had covered them. It came only onto the Terraces that had become a shoulder of the volcano. The people needn't have been there; and they needn't have sat and waited while it covered them. The surrounding plains hadn't been covered by the volcanic thrust.

"Why, they're pleasantly dead, and not at all decayed," Lisetta cried. "They are really such nice people. Don't they seem so to the rest of you? There is something almost familiar about a few of them - as if I had met them before."

"How long?" Fairbridge asked Hilary Brindlesby.

"Two years, maybe. They haven't been dead longer than that."

"You're crazy, Hilary. You are the tissue man of this party. Take tissue samples."

"I will, of course. But they've been dead for about two years."

"Then they were alive here when the Whiteoak party was here."

"Likely."

"They why didn't Commander Harry Whiteoak mention them?"

"Whiteoak was one of those, Fairbridge, who used the phrase 'You'd never believe it,'" Rushmore Planda cut in. "Maybe he figured that covered it all."

"But who are they?" Fairbridge persisted. "Every person of every expedition has been accounted for. These are our own sort of people, but they

aren't people of the Whiteoak party. I've met all the Whiteoaks, and all came back."

"Aren't they of the Whiteoak party, Fairbridge?" Blase asked with an air of discovery. "You'd better pray that the light doesn't get any better, man. You're near spooked now. There's a couple of ghosts there: an ear, a brow, a jaw slope. And that lady there, isn't she a little like another lady we met, enough like her to be a sister or daughter? I tell you that there are strong resemblances to several of the Whiteoak people here."

"You're crazy. The Whiteoaks were here for only six standard months. If they met these mysterious people, why didn't they give an account of it?"

They didn't do much more with it till daylight. They moved some of the volcanic filler and uncovered to a little more depth.

"Can you prop under this level and leave these people here, and then excavate the layer under them?" Lisetta Kerwin asked.

"We can, but why?" Fairbridge inquired. Fairbridge was jumpy. He didn't seem to appreciate how nice it was to come onto such a nice group of people.

"Oh, I think that these people picked a spot that had been picked time and time again before them."

Along about daylight, Judy Brindlesby and Erma Planda, with a variety of noises, came up to the other on the Terraces.

"Folks, are we ever sick!" Judy sounded out. "I'm sicker than Erma, though. I go further into things than she does. Don't you wish you were sick the way we are, Lisetta?"

"But I am, I am," Lisetta said, "and it didn't take me all night to find it out. It's fun, isn't it?"

"Sure it is. I never had so much fun being sick in my life." And Judy retched funfully.

It was a little unusual that all three ladies should show the first signs of pregnancy at the same time. It was odd that they should all have morning sickness. Oddest of all was their being so delighted with their sickness. There was something about World Abounding that seemed to make all experience, even nausea, a happy experience.

And the dead people in the Terraces -- "They are the happiest-looking dead people I ever did see," Erma Planda declared. "I will have to know what they are so happy about. They would tell me if I had the proper ears to listen. It's hard to hear when it comes to you that way. What, dear? What are you saying?"

"I wasn't saying anything, Erma," Rushmore told her.

"Wasn't talking to you, Rushmore," Erma said with a flick of her golden body. "What, dear? I can't quite make it out." And Erma Planda thumped her body as if to get better reception.

"Your ears aren't in your belly, Erma," Rushmore reminded her.

"Oh well, maybe some of them are. No, I just get it a little at a time what they are so happy about."

The happy dead people had been preserved by the volcanic fill, and perhaps by the essence Gorgos or some other substance of World Abounding. They didn't feel dead. They were rather waxy to the touch; they were about as warm as the air, and they hadn't any clamminess; there was even a slight resiliency to them which is usually a property of live flesh and not of dead flesh. They were clad in the light native garments of World Abounding. They were, in some manner hard to reconcile, kindred to the members of the Whiteoak expedition. They were beautiful and mysterious people, but they didn't mean to be mysterious. They'd have told you anything you wanted to know if only proper accord might be established between dead tongue and live ear.

But was there not something a little bit too glib about the impressions that all these new explorers received from the dead folks? Yes, a little too glib here and there, but how could anyone be blamed for that?

"Just a minute? nevertheless," Lisetta Kerwin was saying both to the dead people and to the live. "We all say, or we all think, that you, our good friends here, are clad in the light native garments of World Abounding. Our good commander, Fairbridge, in fact, has just scribbled those very words in his notebook. But how did we know what the light native garments of World Abounding should look like since we never saw any of them before? And since there has never been, for the record, any human native on World Abounding, never been any human being born here, hasn't this all a fishy smell? Or has it? For I recall now that the fish of World Abounding have a pleasant fruity smell. Well, take your time, folks. Being dead, you are in no hurry, and I am not; but tell us about it when you get to it."

They sank a second shaft beside the first. They ran reinforcing timbers under the place of the pleasant dead people so that they would not be disturbed or collapsed. Then they dug the second shaft down through the volcanic fill to the next level of vegetation. There was an unexpected thing: it had been dug before. They were excavating an old excavation.

They cleared the space below the dead people (and it showed every sign of having been cleared before); they came, as they had weirdly known that they must come to such, to another clutch of dead people. They had been expecting just that, but they were stunned by it even more than by the first discovery or first report.

"How many times, do you think?" Fairbridge asked them all in real wonder.

"I guess twenty-two times," Hilary squinted. "There are, in all, twenty-two levels to the Terraces."

"Would a colossal joker, a demonical joker, a supernal joker, a godly joker, even an ungodly joker pull the same joke twenty-two times in a row? Wouldn't it begin to pall even on him after twenty-two times of it?"

"Not a bit of it," Erma said. "Whoever he is, he still thinks thunder is funny, and he's pulled the thunder joke billions and billions of times. And he laughs every time. Listen for the giggle sometimes; it comes around the edge of every thunder."

Slight differences only this time. The dead people of the second level numbered eleven adults. They had been dead a little longer than the first, but they hadn't been dead for more than four or five years. They were as well-preserved and as happy-seeming as the upper gentry. They added a bit to the mystery.

Fairbridge and his folks and his excavators continued to excavate, about one level a day. All the shafts that they dug now had already been dug out several times before. At the fifth level down they came to the tip of the spire or steeple that John Chancel had built as monument on the plain between the volcano and the river. They knew that it was older than the Terraces, that it went all the way down to the flat land; they also knew that it was only fifty years old.

There were sixteen of the gracious and pleasantly dead people on this level. They had made a circular stone table around the tip of the spire where it came through the lower Terrace. They had wine and dined themselves there while they waited for the volcano named Merciful to cover them up. But who were these people, so beautiful and so pleasant and so dead, arranged on levels several years apart?

"The mystery gets deeper all the time," Fairbridge said weightily.

"Yes, it gets about three meters deeper every day," Hilary grinned. "Anybody got any strange stories to add to this?"

"Yes, I've a strange one," Judy told them. "I know that it seems pretty short notice, and I had no idea that it could be so far along, and I'm sure that it's completely impossible, but my time is upon me right now."

They all gaped at her.

"I said Right Now, Hilary," Judy told her husband in an almost tight voice, "and I mean right now."



Well, Judy was large (though shapely and graceful as a hover-craft), and the issue would apparently be quite small. But all of them had scientific eyes, trained to notice things large and small, and none of them had noticed that it would be so soon with Judy.

There was no trouble, of course. Hilary himself was a doctor. So was Blase. So, come to think of it, was Lisetta Kerwin. But Lisetta herself was feeling a bit imminent.

No trouble, though. On World Abounding everything happens easily and pleasantly and naturally. Judy Brindlesby, easily and pleasantly, gave birth to a very small girl.

Well, it was less ugly than most babies, less a red lump and more of a formed thing. And quite small. There was a spate of words from all of them, but no words could convey the unusual formliness of the very little girl.

"She is really pretty, and I never thought I'd say that about a baby, even my own," Hilary bleated proudly. "She is so small and so perfect. She is the least lass I ever saw."

"She is wonderful, she is beautiful, there has never been anyone like her," Judy was chanting in ecstasy, "She is perfect, she shines like a star, she sparkles like an ocean, she is the most enchanting ever, she is --"

"Oh, cool it, mother, cool it," the Least Lass said.

2

Fairbridge Exendine reacted in absolute horror to this, and he remained in a state of horrified rejection. The others, however, accepted it pretty gracefully. Explanations were called for, of course. Well then, let us seek the explanations.

"There has to be an answer to the Case of the Precocious Little Girl," Rushmore said. "Does anyone have an answer?"

"She's yours, Judy," Erma said. "You tell us if we heard what we thought we heard."

"Oh, I thought she talked quite plain enough, and I'm sure you heard what she said. But why should you ask me about it when she is right here? How did you learn to talk, dear?" Judy asked her little daughter, the Least Lass.

"Five days in the belly of a chatterbox and I shouldn't have learned talk?" the Least Lass asked with fine irony for one so young. So the explanation was simple enough: the little girl had learned to talk from her mother.

But Fairbridge Exendine was still gray-faced with horror. And she didn't belong to that singling at all. Why should he be so affected by this?

"Do you know that you are the first human child ever born on World Abounding?" Judy asked her child a little later.

"Oh, mother, I'm sure you're mistaken," Least Lass said. "I was under the impression that I was the two hundred and first."

"Can you walk?" Blase Kerwin asked the little girl a little later yet.

"Oh, I doubt it very much," she said. "It will be a standard hour before I even attempt it. It may be a standard day before I do it perfectly."

But Fairbridge Exendine had gone back to his digging now. He was in new horror of the mystery of the excavations, but he was still more in horror of the little girl.

Yet she was the prettiest child that anyone had ever seen -- so far.

"Anything that we do is always anticlimactic to whatever Judy does," Erma Planda said with mock complaint. Erma, with her golden body and her greater beauty, wasn't really jealous of Judy Brindlesby. Neither was Lisetta Kerwin, with her finer features and her quicker intelligence. Both knew that Judy would always anticipate them in everything. She had certainly done it in this, though by no more than a couple of hours.

"Well, it's surely a puzzle," Rushmore Planda was talking pleasantly

that day or the next. "We are all human persons. And the gestation period for humans is more than five days."

"Don't -- don't talk about it," Fairbridge stuttered. "Dig -- dig, man."

"Of course it's possible that the three conceptions took place nine months ago. That's the logical thing to believe, but a little illogic bug keeps croaking to me 'You know better than that.' And all three of the children say that they were in the bellies for only five days. There was certainly an extraordinary enlivening in all of us that first night here, except in you, Fairbridge."

"Don't -- damn -- talk about it. Dig -- damn -- dig."

"This is a miracle world, of course, and it is full of miracle substances. Nevertheless, I believe that the Miracle Master is a little grotesque in this trick. I love my own small son beyond telling, yet I feel that there is something in him that is not of myself and is not of Erma. Part of his parentage is World Abounding."

"Don't -- don't talk crazy. None -- none of this has happened. Dig -- dig, man."

There was never a more frightened, more nervous man than Fairbridge. He buried himself in the digging work to get away from it; he'd buried himself nearly forty-five meters deep in the excavating work by this time. Oh, that man was edgy!

"I imagine that the same thing happens on Gaea," Rushmore was rambling on. "We were, for most of the centuries, so close to it that we couldn't see that the planet was the third parent in every conception. We saw it only a little when we came to Camiroi and Dahae and Analos: a twenty-day shorter gestation period in the one case, a twelve-day longer one in another. We were a long time guessing that there is no such thing as biology without environment. But who could have guessed that World Abounding would be so extreme?"

"Don't -- don't talk about it," Fairbridge begged. "Thirty days, dam -- dammit, and four -- fourteen of them gone already. Dig, dig."

"What thirty days, Fairbridge? Is there a thirty-day period mentioned of our expedition? I don't know of it. Fairbridge, man, you only dig because you're afraid to wonder. Whoever saw children grow so much in nine days? But then there are trees here that grow twenty meters high in one day. And look at the way the hair grows on Judy Brindlesby, and she a human! Not that the children aren't human, not that they aren't even two-thirds earth-human."

"Fairbridge, those are the three smartest children that anybody ever saw. When I was their age (oh, damn, I don't mean nine days old, I mean their apparent age of nine or ten years old), when I was their age I wasn't anything like as sharp as they are, and I was rated smart. And who ever saw such handsome people anywhere? They're on a par with the dead people here in the Terraces. Do you believe that they're of the same genesis?"

"D-dig, man, or drop dead, but don't -- don't talk about it. It isn't there. It hasn't happened."

"Erma thinks that the children have rapport with the dead people here in the Terraces. After all, they are one-third blood kindred. They all have one common parent, World Abounding. Erma also thinks that all three children are coming to their puberty period now. She believes that the pubescent manifestations here will be much stronger, much more purposive, much more communal than anything on Gaea or Camiroi or Dahae. The useless and vestigial poltergeistic manifestations of Gaea-Earth will not compare with them at all, she believes. Was there ever such frustrating failure in communicating as the whole poltergeist business?"

"Erma believes that the manifestations here will go even beyond the three-angel paradoxes of the pubescents on Kentauron-Mikron. And why should these things not go beyond? We had premonitions of such wonderful weirdnesses even on our own world. My mate Erma believes that these puberty insights (the volcano is a part and person of these insights) will begin very soon. Two more days; three at the most."

"D-dig, man. Don't -- don't think."

Coming of age on World Abounding is a closed subject. It is not closed in the sense of being all secret or restricted, but in being a thing closed upon itself. From its very beginning it is conscious of its resolution.

Least Lass Brindlesby, Heros Planda, and Kora Kerwin were paradoxical children. It seems foolish to speak of relaxed intensity, of foolish sagacity, of placid hysteria, of happy morbidity, of lively death-desire. The children had all these qualities and others just as contradictory. They were at all times in close wordless communication with their parents and with all other persons present, and they were at the same time total aliens. The children were puzzling, but they themselves certainly weren't puzzled: they were always quite clear as to their own aims and activities. They had no more doubt of their direction than the arc of a circle has.

Lisetta Kerwin worried a little that she might have a retarded daughter. It was not that the girl was slow about things, just that she was different about things. Should a nineteen-day-old girl be called retarded because she dislikes reading? Kora could read, most of the time. Whenever her intuitions cocked their ears with a little interest she could go right to the heart of any text. But mostly all three of the children disliked the reading business.

Hilary Brindlesby scolded the children because they showed no sign of the scientific approach or method. But the scientific approach with its systematic study would not have brought them along nearly as fast as they did go. They all had the intuitive approach and it brought them rapidly to a great body of knowledge.

The children were well acquainted with the dead people in the Terraces (Fairbridge, in his horror-filled distracting work, had excavated almost all the Terrace levels now). The children named the names of all the dead people and told of their intricate relationships. Lisetta Kerwin recorded all this from the children. It tied in remarkably with the surnames of the people of the various expeditions.

"You can't really communicate with the dead people of the Terraces," Blase Kerwin told his daughter Kora. "It is just a bit of flamboyant imagination that you all seem to have."

"Oh, they say pretty much the same thing about you and us, father," Kora said. "They tell us that we can't really communicate with such stuffy folks as you who weren't even born on World Abounding. We do communicate with you, though; a little bit, sometimes."

And then one evening, Heros Planda and Kora Kerwin said that they were married.

"Isn't twenty-two days old a little young to marry?" Rushmore Planda asked his son.

"No, I don't believe so, father," Heros said. "It is the regular age on World Abounding."

"Who married you?" Lisetta Kerwin asked. After all, it had to be somebody who had done it, and there were no human persons on the world except those of the party.

"We don't know his name," Kora said. "We call him Marrying Sam in fun, but lots of the Terrace people have called him that too. We might suppose that that is his name now."

"He isn't a human person? Then what species does he belong to?"

"He doesn't belong to any species, mother, since he is the only one of his kind. The Volcano says that Marrying Sam is his -- the Volcano's -- dog. He doesn't look like a dog, as I intuit dogs, though. He can't very well look like anything else, since he is the only one of his kind."

"I see," Lisetta Kerwin said, but she saw it a little cockeyed. She was vaguely disappointed. She had always wanted a grand wedding for her daughter, if she had ever had a daughter. And now the daughter and the wedding had come so close together that something seemed lacking. She didn't know that it had been a very grand wedding, with elementals such as a Volcano and an Ocean

participating; she didn't even know that she had participated, along with everything else on World Abounding.

"I thought you would be pleased, mother, that we had married and regularized our relationship," Kora suggested hopefully.

"Of course I'm pleased. It's just that you seem so young."

Actually, the wedding celebration was not yet completed. Part of it was tangled with an event that involved almost all of them that night. It was similar to the mysterious carnal happenings of the first night of the party on World Abounding.

It was another of those extraordinary enlivening events. It got them. It got Erma Planda of the golden body, and Judy Brindlesby of the sometime incredible hair. It got Lisetta Kerwin of the now shattered serenity; it got Rushmore and Hilary and Blase.

Perhaps it had been thought that connubial passion happened without regard to place or planet. Such is not the case. And the case on World Abounding was very different from the case on Gaea or Camiroi or Dahae. There was a pleasantness at all times on World Abounding, there was a constant passion of a sort, an almost pantheistic communion of all things together. But there was something else that came on much stronger at special times, that was triggered by special events without an exact time arriving, that was wild and rampant and blood- and seed-pungent.

It was the rutting reason.

Ah, we deck it out better than that. It was a night, or a day and a night, of powerful interior poetry and music, of personal affirmation, of physical and moral and psychic overflowing, of aesthetic burgeoning. It was clear crystal passion.

But let us not deck it out so nice that we won't know it. It was the horniest business ever, and it went on all night and all day and all night.

Hilary and Judy Brindlesby: he had the length and the strength; she had the fullness and the abundance. They made such laughing love that it sounded like chuckling thunder in the reed-brakes. Even the birds and the coney took up the cadence of it.

Rushmore and Erma Planda: he of the buffalo bulk and the impression of swooping Moses-horns on his head; she of the golden body and the emerald eyes. "They should take the two of us for models," Erma had said on that memorable time twenty-seven nights before. "Nobody has ever done it as we have. We should give lessons."

And then Blase and Lisetta Kerwin -- no one will ever know just how it was with them. They had a thing that was too good to share (except in the planet-sharing aspect of it), that was too good to tell about, that was too good even to hint at. But, after such pleasures, they seemed the most pleased of all the couples.

But Kora and Heros were at home in this. World Abounding was really a third flesh of their union in a way that it couldn't be for the others. They held their own pleasures atop the volcanic Terraces, not in the reeds or the blue-stem hills or the orchards as the World-Gaea couples did.

World Abounding is the most passionate of worlds, with the possible exception of Kleptis of the Trader Planets where the rapacity in all things is so towering. The Miracle-Maker of legend and fact on World Abounding was always shocked and bewildered by such coming together as that of Heros and Kora, even though it was a licit relationship and done in the licit manner. It was the depth and violence of it that was beyond law, that almost made the Miracle-Maker doubt that he had made such an indomitable thing as this.

Really, it was the Abounding Time, the name-thing of the world.

The only discordant (ill-fitting, but not completely unpleasant) elements in the thunderous season-time of World Abounding were Fairbridge Exendine and Least Lass Brindlesby.

"Now I am an old maid out of joint with the time," Least Lass said as

she wandered on the hills of her home. Both the smaller moon Ancilla and the larger moon Matrona were a-shine. "My proper mate is unready and unbelieving. My third parent, World Abounding, who is also the third lover of our love, is not sufficiently penetrating. Father of Planets, help us! You gave us here the special instruction 'What you do, do quickly,' yet it isn't with us as with other places. Answer me, answer me right now!"

Least Lass threw angry rocks at the sky when she was not answered right now. But there is no time for slow answers on World Abounding.

And Fairbridge (still in the horror that would never leave him, but now touched by something both brighter and deeper) could only bark harshly to himself, "I am a human man. These things cannot be, have not been, must not be allowed to be. They are all hallucination, and this is an hallucinatory world. The monster-child remains monstrous, breathtakingly monstrous. It would be the only love I had ever had, if it could have been, if the cause of it were real. How could a human man mate with an imagination, how with a monster, be she a demon or an angel?"

It did not come to these two incongruities, in proper season, as it came to the other persons there.

By second morning, the partaking couples were in a state of dazzling exhaustion. But they knew that they were well fruited, fruited forever. Then there came the several days of golden desuetude. Even the letdowns on World Abounding were wonderful.

All the folks sympathized, of course, with the passion-impounded Fairbridge and with the lost-in-a-maze Least Lass. The case of Fairbridge and Least Lass was comical with the sort of cloud-high comedy that is found on World Abounding. There was everything ludicrous about it. There was a poignancy and a real agony about it also, but the betting was that these qualities would give way. You drive the sharp poignancy staff into the ground of World Abounding and it will grow green leaves on it before you can blink; yes, and grotesque blooms like monkey faces. But it won't lose any of its sharpness when it blooms.

Fairbridge Exendine was a rough-featured man, in no way handsome. He missed being clumsy only by the overriding power of his movements. He had always been a singling. He could hardly be called a woman-hater, since he was infinitely courteous and respecting to women, but he must be set down as a woman-avoider. Either he had been burned badly once, or the singling nature was in his roots and bones.

He was an abrupt man with a harsh sound to him. There was seldom in itself anything harsh about his acts or his words; the harshness was in the shell of him, in the rind that wrapped him up.

And Least Lass Brindlesby-Fairbridge believed that she wasn't real; and she was. She had been the most beautiful child that anyone had ever seen for no more than an hour or two; until the birth of the children Kora and Heros those twenty-four days ago. She was still of almost perfect beauty; she could only be faulted for a certain heartiness bursting out, too big to be contained in the beauty. She wasn't really the Least Lass anymore; she was as large as her mother; she was bigger than either Kora or Heros. She had a shapeliness and grace superior even to that of her mother, for she was born on World Abounding.

But she looked like Fairbridge Exendine, for all her elegant beauty and for all his craggy ugliness. She looked like him as a daughter will look like a father, as a wife may sometimes come to look like a husband. She had 'grown towards him' in the World Abounding phrase, and all such growths here had to be very swift.

She had a great deal of humor, this girl Least Lass, and she needed it. She was not of flimsy growth: none of the children (children no longer) were. On some worlds and quasi-worlds of rapid growth, there is a defect of quality. The quick-grown tree-sized things will really be no more than giant weeds; the quick-grown creatures will not have much to them. On World Abounding that

wasn't so. The quick-grown plants and creatures here were fine-grained and intricate and complete. The persons were so, and especially Least Lass.

She was no weed. Weeds have no humor (except the Aphthonia Sneezeweed, of course). But Least Lass sometimes pursued Fairbridge with humor that would make one shiver.

"My good man holds me in horror," she'd say. "He likes me really, but he believes that I am unnatural, and he has a real horror for the unnatural. Oh, I will turn him ash-gray and I will turn him fruit-purple! I will turn him swollen blood-black. I'll give him all the seven horrors, and I love him. Fairbridge, Fairbridge, even the rocks are laughing at your horror and your plight, and mine is the rockiest laugh of them all."

Ah, the rocks laughed like clattering hyenas at the poor distraught man.

Sometimes, Least Lass cried a little, though. There is a quick gushiness about tears on World Abounding, a voluminousness that would drown the world if continued more than a short instant. She cried a cupful there one day, actually filled a big blue crystal cup with her tears. Then, in a swift change of mood, she set it at Fairbridge's place at the dinner. And when he, puzzled, tasted it and sputtered, the composite laughter of all assembled nearby shattered his spirit. (Tears on World Abundant are quite pungent, more than just salty.)

Fairbridge Exendine then did a strange thing. He covered the cup with a nap, then wrapped it in a towel and carried it away to his singling quarters to preserve it just as it was.

Then Least Lass cried at least another cupful on the ground. But that was only a matter of seconds. She was always the sunniest girl ever, immediately after tears.

Things wound themselves up in the thirty-first day of the expedition on World Abounding. It was a clear and exuberant day. Both the Grian sun and the Alpha sun could be seen like bright stars in the daylight sky. This is always a good sign. And the Beta sun itself was pleasantly scorching. A good strong day.

We cannot know just how it happened. The fields themselves announced that there was a special and privileged rutting time, not for all, only for a select two. The sand squeaked oestrius sounds. Kora had talked to the Volcano and to the one-of-a-kind subcreature called Marrying Sam, and had learned that the ceremony itself had been a rather stilted one. There was something of very deep emotion cloaked over with layers of rock hard reserve, world deep passion covered with a careful crust. The volcano was familiar with such things in his own person, and explained that such surface covering is often necessary to very deep people.

Then, somewhere on World Abounding, Fairbridge and Least Lass and the Planet itself had their private experience (an orgy, actually, but their privacy extends even to the selection of the word); they had their time of it, and it may have been a high old time. The others could admire from a distance, and from secondary evidence; but they had no direct evidence, only the planetary resonances and the ghostly reports.

When it was over with, the day and the night of it, when the whole double Nation of those folks was together again, Fairbridge still had that look of horror (it would never leave him). But now it was only one element of many. It was one part of a look or a play more properly named The Comedy of Horror; and this was but a portion of a whole assembly of deep comedies: The Comedy of Soul Agony, the Comedy of Quick Growth (one new furrow in the Fairbridge face represented the almost pun that 'quick' here means 'alive,' means it specially on World Abounding), the Comedies of World Ending, of Love Transcending, or Death and Deep Burial.

Fairbridge hadn't been loosed of any of his own agonies, but at least he had learned that they were funny.

And Least Lass had a look of almost total happiness, it being understood that almost-total happiness is often a shaggy clown-looking thing, with at

least a slight touch of insanity, and a more than slight touch of death's-head. Quite a gay girl she was and would always be: she had been born knowing that death is open at both ends.

The end of the world, the end of a discrete culture comes quickly. Lisetta Kerwin worried about a certain impossibility here.

(Four children had been born on the same day; then, two days later, a fifth. That made eight persons of the half nation, the World Abounding Nation; and, of course, there were still the seven persons of the World-Gaea Nation.)

"We have been here for just thirty-six days," Lisetta worried, "and we have more than doubled our population. What if there should be (What is the phrase they used back in the Era of Wonderful Nonsense?) a People Explosion?"

"You know that is impossible, mother," Kora said. "World Abounding sets its own lines, as is the habit of worlds."

"Yes, it is quite impossible, grandmother," Chara Kerwin, the newborn daughter of Kora, said. "This is all there will be for this particular world. I myself, and those of my generation, will not experience it all directly. We will experience part of it by sharing. Our present numbers are our final numbers. It is less than some worlds have, I know, so we must make up for it by being as vital as we can be."

"But, in another twenty days or so," Lisetta protested, "there will be another passion period, and then --"

"No, there will not be," Kora tried to explain. "To do a thing more than once, to do a thing more than twice (twice is sometimes necessary when there is an intersection of two worlds), that is to become repetitious, and to be repetitious is the unforgivable sin. Touch stone, mother, kick sand, knock wood (as you report is said on Gaea), and pray that it may never happen to any of us."

"But of course it will happen, children, and it will become an increasingly compounded happening. Consider how many there will be in even one year --"

"A year!" Chara shrilled from the arms of Kora her mother. "Has anyone ever lived for a year?"

"I don't know," Kora puzzled. "Has anyone? Have you, mother?"

"Yes, I'm afraid that I have," Lisetta admitted. But why should she be apologetic at having lived more than one year?"

"I had no idea, mother," Kora mumbled in half-embarrassment. "I guess this is the reason for the gaps in our communication, however hard we try to close them."

Then, for a long while (by local standards), it was all an easygoing time on World Abounding. It was a period of action packed leisure (though not all will be able to understand this); it was crammed full of events, the outcomings and incomings of a new maturing fruitful culture. There was not room in the concentrated leisured hours of any of them to experience it all directly; each one must simultaneously live in the mind and body of everyone to be able to contain it all. There was the unhurried rapidity of thought and act and enjoyment. There was little difference in the day and night hours: sleep and wakefulness were merged; dreaming and experience were intermingled. The fulfilled persons would sometimes sleep while walking or even running, especially those of the full World Abounding generations.

"Are we awake or sleeping?" Least Lass asked her lover one day, or night.

"That I do not know," Fairbridge said, or thought, in whatever state he was in. "But we are together. May the Planet Plucker grant that we be always together."

"We are together," Least Lass agreed, "and yet I am climbing and leaping on the north ridges of the Volcano Misericors, and I am sound asleep. And you are swimming in the estuary of the River Festinatio, very deep below the surface where it is ocean water below the running water, and you also are

asleep. Give me your hand. There! On a false level of reality it might seem that my hand was closed on the meaty bloom of a rock crocus, but that rock crocus is a part of yourself. It might seem, to an observer of no understanding, that your own hand has closed on an Aphthonia Blue-Fish (the Blue-Fish himself is such an observer and he believes this), but that Blue-Fish is really myself with the scales still on his eyes and on his whole fishness. But the scales have fallen from our own eyes a little bit so that we may see reality. Grip my hand very hard."

They gripped hands very hard. They were together.

Ceramic flutes! The flutes were one signature of the present World Abounding culture. They have a tone of their own that cannot be touched by either wooden or brass horns. This light, hard, airy ceramic is made from the deposits of windblown loess from the ocher hills, from the limey mud of the splashes of the River Festinatio, from the ash and the pumice of the Volcano Misericors. This makes a ceramic like no other; there will always be old tunes nesting in every horn and pipe of it.

There were also green-wood clarinets with tendrils still growing on them; aeolian stringed boxes that played themselves in harmonic to whistling; snakeskin drums; hammered electrum trumpets (what a rich sound they had!); and honey-wood violins.

Such orchestration as was employed was of a natural sort. Usually it was the whistling coney (who are very early risers) who would set the aeolian strings to going: then the several nations of birds would begin to intone; the people, whether waking or sleeping, would soon come in with their composite solos. Or sometimes it was one of the persons who began a music.

"Think a tune, father," Heros Planda might call. And his father Rushmore, afternoon dreaming somewhere in the blue-stem hills, would think of one. Heros would begin to blow a few notes of it, though he might be several kilometers distant from his father. It might be taken up then by boom-birds or by surfacing riverfish with their quick sounding that was between a whistle and a bark. There was a lot of music in this World Abounding culture, but it was never formal and never forced.

There was a sculpture culture, though Fairbridge warned that it was a dangerous thing. World Abounding was so plastic a place, he said, that one might create more than he had intended by the most simple shaping or free-cutting. "Half the things alive here have no business being alive," he said. "One is not to trust the stones, especially not trust any stones of the Volcano."

Nevertheless, the sculpture culture, done in high and low relief, or in the free or the round, was mostly on the south face of that trustless volcano. Whenever the Volcano exuded a new flow-wall during the night, all the people would be at the bright and soft surface in the morning, before it had cooled. These flow-walls were of mingled colors, of bright jagged colors sometimes, or soft colors at other times, then again of shouting colors: it was a very varied and chemical Volcano and it bled like rock rainbows.

Usually the Volcano himself set the motif for a sculpture-mass. He could do good and powerful work in the rough. He could form out large intimations of creatures and people and events. But he was like a geniused artist who had only stubs, no hands. It was the human persons who had to do all the fine and finishing work of the almost living murals.

The performed dramas of this culture fell into a half-dozen cycles. They were mostly variations or continuations of things done by groups of the dead Terrace peoples, or by primordials before them. They were always part of an endless continuity. Here they might be in scene five of act four hundred of one of the Volcano cycles. Earlier acts had been performed by earlier peoples, by the primordials, by Aphthonian bears, by characters or manifestations which had had no life of their own outside of the dramas.

Poetry wasn't a separate act here. The people of World Abundant were poetry, they lived poetry, they ate poetry, they drank it out of cups. All the



persons were in rime with each other, so they had no need of the sound of it.

Eating was an art. No two meals on World Abounding had ever been the same. Every one of them was a banquet, beyond duplication, beyond imitation.

So it went on for a long while (by local standards); it went along for near three standard months. All the persons of the native World Abounding generations now appeared to be about the same age, this in spite of the fact that some of them were parents of others of them.

3

"We have done absolutely everything," Chara Kerwin said one day. "Some of us, or other of us, or all of us have done everything. Now we will wind it up wonderfully. Is it not a stunning thing to have done everything?"

"But you haven't done everything, you bumptious child," Lisetta told her. "You haven't borne children, as your mother has, as myself your grandmother has."

"But I have. I have borne myself, I have borne my mother Kora, I have borne you, my grandmother Lisetta, I have borne every person ever birthed on World Abounding or elsewhere. What we do not do as individuals, we do in common. All of our nation has now done everything, as I have. So we will wind it up."

All eight of the gilded youths of the World Abounding nation came at the same time to the realization that they had done everything. They called it back and forth, they echoed the information from the blue-stem hills to the orchards to the mountains. They all came together full of the information. They assembled on the top of the Terraces. They sat down at table there, and demanded that the elder World-Gaea nation should serve them.

"Out-do yourselves!" Least Lass Exendine called to all those elders. "Give us a banquet better than any you ever invented before. But you may not share it with us. It is for ourselves only. Serve us. And eat ashes yourselves."

So the oldsters, those who had not been born on World Abounding, served the assembled younglings, and did it with delight. There seemed to be a wonderful windup fermenting for all of them.

The Comedy of Horror, perhaps, showed a little stronger than it had recently on the face and form of Fairbridge, but it was still only one of that complex of deep comedies. Fairbridge had a very stark and terrible intuition now. He had a horrifying premonition of the real substance of those twin Comedies of World Ending and of Love Transcending. But even horror is a subject of comedy of World Abounding, and it is supposed to have that jagged edge to it.

"Bring all our things, bring all our artifacts," Chara ordered when they were still deep in the wining and dining. "Bring all our instruments and robes and plaques and free sculptures. Pile up enough food for a dozen banquets. Bring our green shroud-robes."

"It may be that you have not really done everything," Fairbridge said once in white agony while all the things were being piled up. "Let us think if there is not something left that you haven't done."

"No, no, good father, good husband, good lover, good ancestor, good descendant, good Fairbridge mine," Least Lass was saying, "we have done everything. We have done everything that could be in your mind, for plumbing the Fairbridge mind to its total depth is one of the many things we have done. And if there is some thing that we really have not done, then we will do it after we are dead. We do all sorts of communicating things in our sleep. Well, we will also do them in our deaths, as do the other dead people living in the Terraces. Fairbridge, my passion, my patsy, my toy, my love, go tell the Volcano that it is time."

"How should I talk to a Volcano?" Fairbridge asked.

"Why, you will speak to it directly, Fairbridge. Is it not a Gaea

proverb that a man may talk to a volcano just as a beggar may talk to a horse or a cat to a king?"

"And I should say what to the Volcano?"

"Simply tell him that it is time."

Fairbridge Exendine climbed up from the Terraces onto the steep eastern slope of the Volcano Misericors. He climbed clear to the cone. The cone was a ragged laughing mouth; the whole face was a distorted laugh. One eye of that face was far down the north slope, and the other eye was over in the blue-stem hills. The ears were sundered off somewhere; the brow was exploded; the jaw was shattered all over the scree slopes. It was a fine merry face that the Volcano had, even though it was a little disjointed and disparate.

Something overly glandular about this Volcano, though. Ah, it was great-glanded. The Gorgos gland that supplied all of World Abounding was a part of this Volcano.

"Are you sure that it is as funny as all that?" Fair-bridge gruffed at this open-mawed mountain. "It strains my idea of the comic a little. It could stand some revision."

They both were silent for a little while.

"Ah, the young persons told me to tell you that it is time," Fairbridge said glumly. The Volcano belched a bit of fire. There was something of cruel laugh in that sound: a snort, really. Fairbridge suspected that the Volcano was more animal than man.

Then the Volcano became somewhat raucous, foulmouthed ("that quip is my own, my last," Fairbridge said in his throat), rumbling and roaring, smoky and sulphurous, scorching, sooty. Fairbridge left it in his own passion.

He came down towards the shouldering Terraces again. All the World-Gaea people were calling him to come to the plain below where the hover-craft was at the ready. He ignored them. He continued to the high Terraces and to the native generations of World Abounding. It was like hot snakes hissing at his heels as he went, pouring streams of lava. The air had become like a furnace, like a forge with bellows puffing.

The river Festinatio had become quite excited. It palpitated in running shivers of waves. It was a-leap with all its fishy fauna, with all its bold turtles and squids. The Volcano always invaded the river at the climax of its eruptions: each successive Terrace ran further into the River. Nobody should have been surprised at the excitement of the River, nobody who had watched or taken part in the dramas of the Volcano cycles.

Fairbridge came down to the death-edge young people on the Terraces.

"You must not be here with us," Heros told him. "There is no way that you can earn that right. We are completed, but you are not."

Fairbridge threw himself down on the Terraces, however, and the ground of the Terraces had already begun to smoke.

"You cannot stay here, my other love, my other life," Least Lass told him. But he lay at her feet. He embraced her ankles.

"Shall we allow them to stay on the Terraces and be burned to death and buried with ashes?" Judy Brindlesby asked uneasily on the land below.

"Yes. We must allow it," Hilary said.

"But there is a whole world that will not be covered. Only the Terraces will be covered and burned."

"Yes."

"They sit there eating and drinking, and already we can smell the scorched flesh of their feet. They are all so young, and they could live so long and so happy anywhere else on this world."

"We don't know that they could live any longer. We don't understand it."

"But they are our children."

"Yes."

"Shall I feed you scraps from the table as though you were a dog at my feet?" Least Lass asked Fairbridge. "Go at once now. You have no business dying here. Go with them. They come in great danger and pain to themselves to

get you."

Rushmore Planda and Blase Kerwin came and dragged Fairbridge off the top of the smoking Terraces and down the slopes where lava and ash flow ran like lizards. All were burned, and Fairbridge was dangerously burned.

They went into the hover-craft, the seven persons who had not been born on World Abounding. They rose into the smoky volcanic air, and they hovered.

The young people, the World Abounding people, still sat and wined and dined themselves on the scorched Terraces. The hot ash and the fiery liquid shoved in upon them and rose to engulf them. They were encapsuled and preserved in the caking hot ash. Least Lass, at the rivermost edge of the Terraces, was the last of them to be completely covered. She made a happy signal to them in the hover-craft, and her mother Judy signaled back.

Hot ash filled the banquet plate of Least Lass by then, and hot lava filled her cup. Smiling and easy, she ate and drank the living coals to her pleasant death. Then she had disappeared completely under the flow of it, as the rest of them had done.

The Volcano covered them with another two meters of fill. Then he pushed on to have his will with the river.

"It did not happen, it could not have happened, it must not be allowed to have happened," Fairbridge Exendine was mumbling inanely, but Fairbridge was mind out of body now. His mind was at the feet of Least Lass in the merciful ashes of the new topmost Terrace.

"The report will be a difficult one," Hilary hazarded. "Just how are we to explain that a normal human settlement is impossible here? How explain that it will always end in such swift short generations? How explain that every World Abounding culture is, by its nature, a terminal culture?" "Why bother?" asked Erma Planda of the still golden body and emerald eyes. "We will make the entry that several of the other expeditions have made. Yes, and we will be classed as such disgraceful failures as they have been. What else to do?"

She wrote the damning entry quickly.

"We were warned that there would be some necks wrung if that phrase was used in our report," Rushmore said sourly.

"Wring my neck who can," Erma challenged. "There. It's done. And they really wouldn't have believed it, you know."

#### GROANING HINGES OF THE WORLD

Eginhard wrote that the Hinges of the World are, the one of them in the Carnic Alps north of the Isarko and quite near High Clockner, and the other one in the Wangeroog in the Frisian islands off the Weser mouth and under the water of this shelf; and that these hinges are made of iron. It is the Germanies, the whole great country between these hinges that turns over, he wrote, after either a long generation or a short generation.

The only indication of the turning over is a groaning of the World Hinges too brief to terrify. That which rises out of the Earth has the same appearance in mountains and rivers and towns and people as the land that it replaces. The land and the people do not know that they have turned over, but their neighbors may come to know it. A man looking at the new, after the land had turned over, would not see it different from the old: and yet it would be different. But the places and the persons would have the same names and appearances as those they replaced.

Strabo, however, eight hundred years earlier, wrote that the Hinges of the World are in high Armenia, the one of them on the Albanian extension into the Caspian Sea, the other at Mount Ararat itself (known from the earliest time as the hinge of the world). Strabo wrote that it is the whole Caucasus Mountains that turn over, with all the people and goats: and the hinges on which the region turns are bronze.

But Elpidius claimed that the Hinges of the World are, the one of them at Aneto in Andorra (anciano Gozne del Mundo), and the other at Hendaye on

the Biscay coast. He stated that it is the Pyrenees that turn over, that their turning is always for a very long generation, and that the Basques who obtain in that region are people from under the earth and are much more Basque-like than those they replace. He wrote that the Hinges of the World are here of rock-crystal.

All three of the writers give the name Revolution to this turning over of a region, but lesser authorities have later given that name to less literal turnings. There is something very consistent about the reports of these three men, and there are aspects of their accounts almost too strange not to be true.

But they all lie. How would any of these regions turn over on hinges? And if they have the same appearance in land and people after they have turned over, who would know that they had turned? It would seem that if a man have the same name and appearance after he has turned over, then he is still the same man.

As to the deep groaning of the World Hinges which all three authorities state is heard at the time of turnover, why, one hears groanings all the time.

The only region of the world that does in fact turn over is far around the world from all of these. It is in the western Moluccas. One hinge is just north of Berebere on Morotai Island and the other is at Ganedidalem on Jilolo or Halmahera Island. These are the true Hinges of the World and they are made of hard kapok-wood well oiled.

All the peoples of this region were peaceful with themselves and their neighbors almost all the time. The people under the world were no more than people in stories to them. There was fire under the islands, of course, and volcanos on them; and the people under the earth were said to be themselves brands of fire. Well, let them stay under the world then. Let the hinges not turn again!

But one day a fisherman from Obi Island was out in his boat right on the edge of the region that was said to have turned over in the old times. He had pulled in only a few fish in his nets and he had about decided to sail to Jilolo and steal enough fish from the timid people there to fill his boat.

Then he heard a short, deep groaning. He felt a shock, and a shock-wave. But who pays attention to things like that around the volcano islands? He was uneasy, of course, but a man is supposed to be uneasy several times a day.

He pulled in his net. Then he felt a further shock. This net had been torn in one place and he had tied it together. He had tied it, as he always did, with a pendek knot. But now he saw that it was tied with a panjang knot which he had never tied in his life. He noticed also that the fish in his net were of a little bit darker color than usual. He wouldn't have noticed this if he hadn't noticed the knot first. In great fear he set his short sail, and he also drove his oar as hard as he could to take the boat toward his own Obi Island.

The only region where the panjang knot is commonly tied is the region under the world. This region had turned up in the age of the fisherman's ancestors, to the death and destruction of many of them, and now it may have turned up once more. A part of the fisherman's net must have been in the region that turned over, he was that close to the fringe of it. The fisherman knew that the upheaval people would have the same names and appearances as people he knew; he knew also that the whole business might be a high storm.

Fast canoes out of Jilolo overtook the fisherman before he was home. He was frightened at first, but when they came closer to overhaul him, he saw that the men in them were friends of his, Jilolo people, the most gentle people in the world. You could push the Jilolos, you could steal their fish, you could steal their fruits, you could even steal their boats, and they would only smile sadly. The fisherman forgot all about the turnover when the gentle Jilolos overtook him.

"Hello, Jilolo men, give me fish, give me fruits," the fisherman said, "or I will run down your canoes and push you into the water. Give me fish. My

boat is not near full of fish."

"Hello, our friend," the Jilolo men said to the fisherman. Then they came on board his boat and cut off his head. They were men of the same names and appearances as those he had known, and yet they were different.

The Jilolos tied the fisherman's head onto the prow of the foremost and biggest canoe. "Guide us into the best landing of Obi Island," they told the head. So the head guided them in, telling them whether to veer a little to the east or the west, telling them about the cross-wave and the shoal, telling them how to go right to the landing. (The shy Jilolos had formerly used a poorer landing when they came to Obi Island.)

"Shout a greeting," the men told the head when they were very near the land. "They will know your voice on shore. Tell them to bring out all their spears and fish-spears, and the Dutch gun, and stack them all by the landing. Tell them we are their good friends come to play a game with them." So the head shouted it all out.

The Obi men came out and stacked all their spears and the fish-spears and the Dutch gun by the landing, chuckling over whatever new game it should be. Weapons had not been used for anything but games for many years.

The Jilolo men came onto shore. They took the spears and the Dutch gun. One of them understood the gun. He shot it three times and killed three of the Obi men with it. Other Jilolo men killed other Obi men with spears and with clubs they brought with them.

"This is the game we play with you," the Jilolos said. They caught twenty of the Obi girls and young women and took them with them. They gave instructions as to what tribute must be brought to them weekly by the Obis. They killed two more Obi men to make sure that their message was understood. Then they went away in their canoes.

And it was all confusion that they left behind them.

One of the Obi men, however, in spite of the killing and confusion, had untied the fisherman's head from the prow of the biggest canoe. Now some of the frightened Obi men took the head with them into the long hut and questioned it as to what this should mean.

"The region has turned over on its hinges," the fisherman's head said, "just as it sometimes turned over and over again in the days of our distant grandfathers. I was out in my boat fishing. I heard the short, deep groaning; I felt the shock, and the shockwave. But who pays attention to things like these around the volcano islands? Then I pulled in my net with the few fish in it.

"This net had been torn in one place, and I had tied it together with a pendek knot. Now I saw that it was tied with a panjang knot, which I never tied in my life, but which the people under the earth tie. I noticed also that the fish in my net were a little darker color than is common. This means that I was on the edge of the region and the region has turned over.

"Oh my family and my people, it is all misery and death for us now! The Jilolo men will have the same names and appearances as those they have displaced, but you see already that they are not the same. No more will we be able to push the Jilolos down and take their fish and fruits and boats. We will not be able to push them into the water or have fun with them. They have taken the bodies of some of our men with them; they have taken some of our girls and young women with them; and they will be having fun with both tonight. We used to make jokes with each other about the stories that we used to eat each other. It has come back to us now. That whole part of the world has turned over on its hinges. We die in our woe."

The fisherman's head was in great pain. One of the men gave it a stick to bite on. And in a little while it died.

And there followed one of the most horrifying ages ever in those lilac waters. The turned-up Jilolos were the demons, the old slavers come back. They were like the tearing, meat-eating birds swooping in. They were like bloody dragons. They came one day and took an Obi man away from his brother. The next day they came again and said, "Your brother wants to talk to you."

They had a drumhead covered with the brother's skin. They beat on it till it sounded like the brother's voice booming. That is what they meant that his brother wanted to talk to him.

These Jilolos gnawed roast meat from men's ribs as they strode about for mockery. They burned down the huts and the long huts of the Obi. They did the same thing to the people of Batjan and Misool and Mangole and Sanana. All the leading men of those places were hiding in the hills.

The Jilolos said that they would kill nine men for every leading man who was hiding. Many of the leading men, hearing of this, came out of their hiding and let themselves be killed to save the lives of many more. Soon there were only a few leading men left. The Jilolos cut out the eyes and tongues and gonads of people and left the people blind and mutilated and dying. They roasted some of the people alive. People are best that way, they said. "How is it that in the old days we ate only fish and pig and fruit?" the Jilolos asked. "How have we missed this fine thing so long?"

The Jilolos set fires in the coconut groves and spice bushes and kapok forests of the five islands. Fires rose over these islands day and night, brighter even than the volcano fires of Jilolo itself. Anyone who tried to put out the fire would be burned up in the fire, they said.

They tied sacks over the heads of men before they killed them. This was to trap their souls and kill them too. They were merciless. They violated and killed little children. They skinned some people before they killed them. They killed so many people that they took only their eyes and hearts to eat. Carrion birds gobbled down from the high air, and sharks jostled into the waters drawn by more blood than had been known for many ages.

So it went for a year and a day. Whole islands moaned and bled with the abomination of it, and the oceans were black with reeking blood.

There was one old Dutchman who still lived on Obi Island. After the Dutch days, he had gone home to Dutchland. He had missed the really busy seas and ports with the tang of trade to them, and the ordered rich land in all its bright neatness. He had been homesick for many years, so he went home.

But he found that the home seas were cluttered with belching ships that fouled the air (he had forgotten that part); he found the land was overcrowded with Dutchmen all busy and benign (he had forgotten that part too); and the roads and lanes were full of bicycles and motor ears. He found that it was cold and gusty and demanding, and the bright neat colors were not nearly so bright as those of the islands. He discovered that neatness and the appearance of respectability were required of him, and he had long since turned into a loose old rounder. He became homesick for the second time, and he returned to the islands and Obi island. He had found that he could not Dutch it over the Dutch themselves, but he could still Dutch it over the Obis.

Now the Jilolos demanded that the Obis give up their Dutchman to them, or they would kill one hundred Obis. They wanted to have fun with the Dutchman and then kill him in an unusual way. They wanted to see if Dutch flesh was really prime stuff. So the Obis came sadly to their duty.

"We will have to give you up," they told the Dutchman when they had come to his house in the hills. "We like you, but we don't like you as well as one hundred of ourselves. Come along now. There is no way out of it."

"This Dutchman, about to be given up, will think of a way out of it," the Dutchman said. "A thing that is done can be undone. Can there be found twelve leading men left alive here, and twelve in the peninsula north of Berebere?"

"There are barely that many of us. We are they," the men said. "We believe that there are barely that many leading men left north of Berebere."

"Inform yourselves, and inform them," the Dutchman said. "Each party will go out in twelve fishing boats that have windlass winches for the nets. It will take the power of all the windlasses together to turn the things, and even then it may not work. And both parties will have to do it at exactly the same time."

"How will we know it is the same time, with the distance between the two groups?" the men asked.

"I don't know," the Dutchman said.

But one of the men there had affinity with two large birds of the kind called radjatuult, who were larger than others of their species and special in several ways. They preyed over the ocean as well as over the land (they were, in fact, sea-eagles), they talked more canny than parrots, and they were more intelligent than the Tekderek, the crane. The man went out of the Dutchman's house and whistled loudly. The two big birds appeared as two dots in the sky, they came on very rapidly, and then they were there with the men.

"Oh yes, I've heard of you two fellows," the Dutchman said to the birds. "If one of you were flying high over Ganedidalem and the other over Berebere, could you still see each other at that distance?"

"Yes, if we were high enough, we could still see each other," one of the birds said.

"And would you be too high to see our ready-signal from the shores then?"

"No, we could see that too," the other bird said. "Tell us what you want us to do."

The Dutchman carefully told them about the affair. Then he said, "The one of you fly now to Berebere and find the men there. Tell them how it is, Tell them that we start now and will be at our place in the early morning. Let them be at their place then too. And caution them to be clear of the Hinges when they do it, on the outside of them, or they may find themselves turned over when it happens. In the morning you two birds will give the signal to each other and to us so we can do it together."

The one bird flew off to Berebere. The twelve leading men, each one taking three lesser men with him, east off in twelve fishing boats. They set sail on the evening wind; and with the wind and the oars going all night, they were off Ganedidalem in the early morning.

They found the great Hinge in an inlet, just where legend had always said it should be. They took the twelve windlass winches off the twelve fishing boats, and the Dutchman rigged them to the kapok-wood axle of the World Hinge. There would be no trouble about the same thing up at Berebere. The men at Berebere are handier and more mechanical than the men of Obi.

Then four men stood at each windlass to throw their weight to the thing. The Dutchman gave the ready signal to the bird in the sky. Then they waited.

One minute later, the bird flared his great wings and began to dive straight down for signal. Long leagues to the north, off Berebere, the other bird did the same thing.

"Heave!" cried the Dutchman. "All heave! For our lives, it is now or it is nevermore with us!" And all heaved at the windlass winches, turning the cranks while the ropes sounded and moaned.

Then the groaning of the World Hinges, more horrible than could be believed! The Earth shook, and the Island smoked and bawled. This was unnatural, it was a violation. Always before, the hinges had turned from natural forces in the earth that had come to their term and time.

Groaning yet more horrible! The ropes cried like infants from the strain on them, the cranks whined with the sound of hard wood about to shatter. The Hinge groaned a final terrible time. There was the shock! And the shockwave.

Then they were done with it, or they were undone forever.

"Let us go back to Obi Island and wait," the Dutchman said. "I believe that it turned over when the Hinge groaned last and loudest. If the raiding stops, then we have done it. If it has not stopped, then we are dead forever."

"Let us go to Jilolo Island and not wait," the Obi men said. "We will have bloody death there, or we will have us a lot of fun."

The Obis with the Dutchman rowed and sailed for Jilolo all day, and came there in the evening. They found Jilolo men. They pushed them down, they stole their fish and fruits and boats, they pushed them in the water and laughed at them. This was the fun they hadn't had for a long time.

These were Jilolos of the same names and appearances as the horrible killers of the last time, but they were different. You could push them down and take advantage of them; you didn't have to be afraid of them. For they were also the men of the same names and appearances of the time before last, and they only smiled sadly when they were robbed and pushed down.

The Obi men called the girls and young women who had been stolen from them, and took them in the boats with them and went home. So peace returned, and it was all as it had been before with them.

Only not quite.

These girls and young women, robbed from the Obi and now taken back by them, had been on Jilolo when it turned back. It was in reverse with them. With the turning back, they became their own counterparts from under the world, the meanest, most troublesome women ever found anywhere, yet of the same names and appearances as the girls and young women before. They raised hell from one end of Obi to the other when they got home, and they kept it up all their lives.

So it was a troubled peace that came to Obi. Even so, many said it was better than to be killed by the Jilolo. Others said it was about the same thing.

That is the only place, there in the western Moluccas, where the World Hinges do really turn and a whole region may experience this revolution. The other places are almost surely fable.

A man just back from high Armenia says he examined the hinges there and they are bronze turned green with great age. They apparently have not turned since the drying of the flood. And if Armenia would turn over, who would know it? You can turn an Armenian upside-down and hardly tell it. Those fellows look about the same on both ends.

As to the Germanies, those hinges in the Camic Alps and in the Wangeroog are of badly rusted iron. Nobody can tell when they turned last, but should they turn now (the shape they are in) it would make a groaning heard around the world. Besides, if this country had turned in modern centuries, there would have to be some indication of it; some stark frightful thing would have happened there comparable to the revolution of the Jilolos. The people and places, keeping the same names and appearances, would have become immeasurably different in not too subtle ways, would have become violent and appalling. Is there any report of such a thing happening in our own days or those of our fathers?

And in the Pyrenees, is there any indication that they have turned, lately or ever? Rock-crystal does not rust, but it does acquire a patina of unuse. Yet one has said of the Canigou, which I take to apply to all the Pyrenees and all the people in them, that it is unchanging forever, but that it is created anew every morning. The Hinges at Aneto and Hendaye either do not turn at all or they turn every night.

#### ISHMAEL INTO THE BARRENS

Sometimes, however, a group of animals about to become extinct undergoes considerable change of a pathological nature before it disappears from the scene.

Douglas Dewar

It was early in the morning, which was illegal. Which is to say that it was illegal for persons to be about in the early morning. And yet there were a few people, some alive and some dead, scattered about in the morning hours. Most of these were yellow-card people doing necessary work in those hours; another few were authorized nothoi-hunters; the rest were outlaws. All of the dead people lying in the streets were outlaws; but some of the live people also were outlaws unknown.

Really, there was no need for anyone to be about at this time; and if the world were ordered in a perfectly legal manner there would have been none.



But the world was not perfectly ordered. There was outlawry and the breaking of the hours rules.

There were the working hours for those of the age when work was still required, and concurrent with these were the basic-enjoyment hours for those beyond that age. Then there were the swinging hours for all (compulsory). And finally there were the morning hours, the forbidden hours -- the hours for sleep, for rest, for completing a trip: these were from the fifth hour of the day till the thirteenth. Timers were adjusted so that the sunrise was always in the forbidden hours; and indeed no really good person had ever seen the sun rise, except certain very old ones who had seen it in their uninstructed youths. "No good person was ever the better for seeing the sun rise," it is written in the Analects.

It was an old and dirty city in the glare of the early illegal sun, but the yellow-card street-sweepers would soon clear away the worst of the debris. The swinging hours always left their clutter, as was their right. Here were yesterday's cut flowers in heaps, many thousands of broken balloons, posters torn and shredded, remnants of food and drink and vein-main, papers covered with scatter-print, discarded litter and clothing.

Here also, right on the edge of a pile of broken guitars, a woman was lying twisted and grubby. She was very young and very dead. She was not, however, a casualty of the swinging hours, but of the early morning hours. And there was another one some distance from the first, blowsier and bloodier. They were not rare in the morning hours in the city. Very soon the sweepers would cart them away. By the thirteenth hour all would be clean again, and the Gentle World would begin another day.

But here is the heroine, a live one, perhaps a lively one. Should she not be a platinum woman, scatter-ornamented and beautiful, according to the norms? Or a shiiiiing ebony or a creamy chocolate? Should she not be adjusted and legal? Flowery and scatter-eyed? Should she not be of the multiplexity, nonlineate, a Scan, an Agape Apple, a Neutrino, a Pop Poppy? A Poster Coaster at the very least? Should she not be a Happy Medium, a Plateau Potato, a Twanger, a Mime, a Dreamer, and Enhincer-Dincer? Are these not the aspects of a heroine?

Nah, she wisn't like that at all. She was a Morning-Glory, which is illegal. She was a Gown-Clown, which is also illegal. She was not flowery, not scatter-eyed. She wasn't even quite beautiful though she rather wished that she were, And yet perhaps she was, in another way, in an old and almost private way.

She had form. But was it not now bad form to have form? She had grace and face. She had a forky tongue and a willful way. She even had a measure of gaiety. She was tall and full. Her hair was midnight-black with green starlights in it (really). Her eyes were even blacker with deeper lights. She had a strong element of stubbornness in her, which is illegal. She was a flower-tender, and she was not enchanted with the job. (Something had gone out of the flowers, something had gone out of them.) Her name was Janine Pervicacia. To the people she was Jane the Crane, but she wasn't so leggy as all that.

The flowers, especially those that were to be cut this day, needed care in the morning hours, and for that reason this yellow-card girl was tending them. But she tended them lineately, which was illegal.

Here is the hero. Should he not be a Swing, a Slant, a Cut, according to the norms? A Spade, a Btick, a Whanger? Should he not be a Head, a Flash, an Etch, a Neutrino yet, a Burn, a Vein, a Flower? Yeah, but he wasn't like that. He wasn't that kind of hero at all. He was a Dawner, he was a doggedly pleasant man, he was even a sort of battler ("He saith among the trumpets, Hal ha; and he sinclielli the battle afar off" -- Job), he was friendly; he was even intelligent on some subjects and murderous on others. He was big enough and thick enough; his hair was brambled but short. The people said that he

would be the father of Ishmael. He didn't know what they meant; either did the people. He was a moving man with cat-springs in him. He was a yellow-card steet-sweeper, and his name was Morgan Saunders.

He was making his rounds, cleaning up after the swingers. He growled when he came to the twisted and grubby woman who was very young and very dead.

"Secret hid in the bottom of a well, May the nothoi-hunters all go to hell," he chanted, which is illegal (the nothoi-hunters are authorized). He had a very hassle of a time bending the dead woman in the middle (he saw now that she was only a girl) and stuffing her into his wheeled canister. He quickly covered her with shards of broken guitars so she would be hidden from his eyes.

Then he saw Jane the Crane tending flowers. He did not know her. This was her first morning back on the job after a term in a disorderly house. She was tending the flowers as if they were in straight lines, as if they were in rows, going down one file of them and back another. But only in tier mind were they in rows.

"That is not the allowed way to tend flowers, girl," Morgan spoke to her very low. "You must not consider them as growing in rows, even in your thought. Consider them as random scatter-clusters, or there will be a black mark on your record. Consider them as a revolving nexus of patternless broken volutes. They grow random in nature, you know, and the Gentle World is all for the random. I am only trying to help you."

"I know you are. The things I have been put through by people trying to help me! I tell you, though, that nothing grows random in nature. Everything falls into patterns. And flowers very often do grow in terraced tiers and in tufted rows. I've seen them."

"That is very dangerous talk," said Morgan Saunders, "and I believe that the nothoi-htinters are eyeing us even now. Is it possible that I will see you here again tomorrow? Do you know the doubled-up girl in my canister?"

"I know her. Her name is Agar. Yes, it is possible that you will see me here again tomorrow. It is possible that I will be the doubled-up dead girl in your canister tomorrow."

Then Morgan Saunders went on his way, picking up old flowers and broken balloons and guitars and dead women. He went on past the Pop Palace with its high sign in psychedelic dancing dots: "THE GOLDEN DWARF, MAN, MAN, THAT'S MAN!"

And Janine Pervicacia continued to tend the flowers (those that would die today), moving her hands as if the Flowers were in rows; and they weren't.

This is a love and hate story (both were illegal) from the False Terminal Days that were the middle or the twenty-first century. It is very difficult to decode the story and lay it out for the reason that (even in its illegal form) it was printed in scatter-print. No other sort of print was available. Every printing machine, even the small household ones used by private individuals, was both a scatter-printer and a randoming machine. Each letter could have many different shapes and colors, and these were so blended that no two colors or shape-styles might come together, or that nothing might range itself into lines even accidentally.

Scatter-print was the flowering of 150 years of pop-posters. It shouted a complex nonlinear message, or else it did not: but it shouted. There was difficulty that about a third of the signs were not letters at all, had no meaning or sound value to them: and their blending in made the words difficult to read -- if one were still a reader and not a depth comprehender. There was also a difficulty in that it wis illegal to number pages; ever; in anything, long or short. Pages must be fed in unnumbered, and they were then randomized. And they are very difficult to unrandom.

For this reason there will be anomalies and inconsistencies in this story, for all that we try to untangle it and set it in line. It was (in its

first form) an illegal private record by a grieving friend, but we cannot be sure of the order it should fall into. We do not know for sure whether Jane the Crane was the doubled-up dead girl in the canister on the first morning or on the one-thousandth. We do not know when the destruction of Morgan Saunders took place, whether before the birth of Ishmael or after, but we have set it before. And we do not know whether the interlude of the odd man and the Odd God is truly a part of this account or whether it should be interluded at the point we give it or at another. We can but guess how long Jane the Crane was in a disorderly house, and we cannot always tell flashback from future glimpse. We try.

The next morning (we cannot be sure that it was the next morning, but it was a different morning) Morgan Saunders slowed his cleaning and sweeping as he came near where Janine Pervicacia was tending flowers. It was summer now (flowers, of course, must be grown in all seasons) and perhaps it hadn't been the other time. Janine (Jane the Crane) was revealed as a gown-clown in an old unrevealing dress. There was scarcely a square foot of her body exposed. She worked now with a carefulness and neatness that were unusual. This girl might be beyond help.

"There are dangerous and divergent things in your manner," Morgan said in a low voice. "If you are not more careless you may be sent to a disorderly house. I am only trying to help you."

"I've already been in the disorderly house," Janine said cheerlessly. "I was discharged as incurable and always to be watched."

"How was it there?" Morgan asked. "I have always been afraid of it, for myself. I have been threatened with it, and I am always careful to assume the careless manner."

"It was horrible and depressing. I was put in with very small children, five and six years old. We were taught artless art. 'Form is only the pedestal. Deformity is the statue,' one of the instructors said that first day. 'The trick is to smash the pedestal completely and yet leave something of the statue, Deformity is beauty, always remember that. Form, which is pattern, is always ugly.' That's what he told us. We had classes in pop-posters, which are hand-done scatter-print. We had classes in Lump the Lump, which is plastic modeling. We had classes in finger painting, and paintings by chimpanzees were used as models and suggestions. I noticed of the children that though many of them were handsome and even-featured when they first came to the disorderly house, their features soon altered. One eye would become larger than the other. The two sides of their faces would no longer match. One side of their mouths would be pulled down and the other pulled up. They would come to look as crooked as most people do look. The instructors could tell at a glance which children were being inculcated with the proper sense of deformity: those who themselves became deformed. We talk too long. I am sure we will be watched."

"Wait. We have so much of dinger to spend anyhow. Let us spend a little of it now." And Morgan himself was doing a dangerous thing. He was smoking a short fag, but it was not what you think: not potty, not dotty, not snow, not glow, none of the approved high things. It was old, forbidden, non-mind-enhancing tobacco. "What else did they try to teach you in the disorderly house?"

"Guitar," said Jane the Crane. "That remains the worst of all experiences, the hell-thing that certain humans can never accept. I still wake up screaming at night (working in the mornings, I sometimes sleep illegally during the swing hours of night) at the oppressiveness, the whining meanness of it. It is the only instrument that is always random, that does not have to be randomized. Oh, the twang, twang, twang, the eternal flatness of it! 'After all, is not the purpose of life on earth to accustom the people to life in hell?' one of the instructors asked. This is one of the permanent quips of the disorderly houses, of course, but the way the instructor said it in a deformed voice out of a deformed face shook me. It is true, Morgan, it is true. Or is

it?"

"It is not everywhere true, Janine. It is not my purpose, but it is theirs. What else did they teach the children and fail to teach you?"

"Crudity, nudity; presbys and lesbos; monophony, cacophony; profanity, urbanity; muggery and buggery. Narcosis. Doggery. Flesh-mesh. Much else. Does that stuff not curdle the convoluted ears of you? It should."

"Do they not have a course to teach ducks to swim? But it seems that a little bit of this would be beyond the scope of five- and six-year-olds, Janine, especially beyond those who had to be sent back for corrections."

"Never mind, they would remember it and they would be ready for it when their time came to appreciate it. Go now. We have spent too much danger and we are watched."

"Will I see you here again tomorrow, Janine?"

"Tomorrow or next season, or someday, or never."

"Will you think of me?"

"I will think of you as if this were another world, towering where it was meant to be high, ordered where it should be ordered, free in the great central things, and free from the dwarfed and compulsory freedoms. I will think of you, Morgan, in ways that are presently unthinkable."

Janine (Jane the Crane) turned back to caring for her flowers, which she liked but was not impassioned over. And Morgan Saunders went on about his sweeping and cleaning, past the Pop Palace, past the Dog Temple, past Levelers' Loggia, past the Pseudo-Parthenon, past Humanity Hall with its great poster in electric scatter-print raising its headless torso into the sky: "MAN, THIS GELDED GLORY OF THE LEVEL WAY."

In the False Terminal Days that were the middle of the twenty-first century the population plateau had been reached. It had not been reached in perfect peace. In an odd piece entitled The Analects of Issac we encounter the phrase "the conflicts created in a society which sees in population stability the only hope of the human race." There were conflicts.

There had been hard feelings. Blood had run in the rivers in some localities. But every casualty of this conflict had become part of the feedback of the population-stability calculators. It was settled now. it was enforced. But the confingt continued, and it must still continue till the total death of one or both of the antagonists. It had become one-sided. It looked like the conflict between an elephant and a day fly. But there were irreconcilables. There were die-hards among those midges. And there were also hard-abornings, illegitimate and double-damned and defiant. The plateau had been reached, but there were bumps on the plateau.

Stable population. And the second step (very nearly achieved already) was population homogeneity. For fifty years the restrictions had been most selective. By now those of extreme colors were about of equal number, and the great central blending out-numbered them both. Hereafter, only progeny-crosses between the two extremes or out of the central blending could be permitted; none at all among either extreme.

In any case, with the stack-up (old never die; they don't even fade away) a kid-card now cost a quarter of a million dollars. That was very high, and perhaps it would go even higher.

In any case, again, as either both-white or both-black, there would be an impediment between Janine Pervicicia and Morgan Saunders. (They hadn't talked about a union at all, but they had begun to think about it.) This impediment is mentioned in the old scatter-print record written by the grieving friend. But this record does not indicate which was the color of their impediment, and we do not know it either.

A flower-care inspector had been plaguing Janine Pervicacia. He could not fault her that the flowers in her care were insufficient in numbers and vitality. It was something else. The flowers from her care were reported to be out of sympathy with the flower people. They had not the right attitude to all

this. They had developed sympathies of their own, or of Janine's; and the flower people could feel the alienation, and they complained. There is a fine line here. There really is sympathy and antipathy even in cut flowers, but it is liable to exaggeration and subjectivity by the flower people.

"You will have to conform," the flower-care inspector told Janine. "There is complaint."

"Conform to what?" she asked. "Form is damnable to you."

"You will please to cease using words as having direction, Jnne the Crane flower-carer Fifth-class," he said sharply. "Words are like confetti, like stars, like snowflakes, like -- there simply are not words for words! You must conform to nonconformity, of course. Your lineate overview will minimize you in the simultaneous multidepth mosaic appraisal."

"Oh, that! I have already been weighed and found wanting. Do what you will with me, but do not stand and goggle it me."

"We could have a meeting during the swinging hours and come to a certain understanding with each other."

"I'll see you in the Barrens first!"

"Then, if you will not be affectionate or gentle or human, you must improve on your work. Your flowers must show more feeling at once."

"They will show more feeling!" Jane of the forky tongue cried. "They'll bark it you! They'll snap at you with their severed heads!"

Jane the Crane was getting many marks against her record.

And an Official Instigator had been plaguing Morgan Saunders. Oh, must talk to in Official Instigator. They are privileged. They have rights of entry into property and dwellings, and into minds. But they are not direct. They nibble at you; they potshot; they speak in randomized riddles.

This was a very old Instigator; of the very first generation of them. He wore a pop button ("Never trust anyone under ninety"); he wore a pop beard which was perhaps infested; he wore a loincloth, he wore shamble-sandles; he wore flowers and sashes and ribbons and jewelry, but no real garment. He rated as old even in a world made up mostly of old people. He was an Ancient Hippie indeed.

"You find me objectionable, Morgan in my hands," he sniped, "and that is a most dangerous finding of yours. You are an alien to the Gentle World, Morgan, and you are known as the philosopher of the street-sweepers. But the world doesn't need a philosophy -- not a rigid street-sweeper philosophy, at any rate. We will snip those rigid corners off you, or we will snip that rigid head off you. Whence are you named? Yours isn't a name from the randoming machines. Therefore it is an illegal name. In one old context Morgan meant 'from over the sea'; in another it meant 'morning', which is very significant in your case."

"In still another case it meant a pony, old man," Morgan said. "A very stylish pony."

"Can a Morgan pony sire a wild ass?" (Somehow the old Instigator already knew about the wild-ass boy Ishmael, who was not even conceived yet, much less born.) "But run, Morgan, run," the old Instigator went on. "We will catch you with our gentle pursuit. Why do you resist us who are kind to every living creature?"

"Kind to every living creature, old man? But you murder the nothoi."

"Are the nothoi living creatures, Morgan? Not in law, not in fact. Who will admit ever seeing such creatures? Who will admit that there are such things living anywhere? They are fables, Morgan, fables from the Barrens. They are less substantial even than ghosts. Prove that they are not. Take me and show me a nothos."

"That would be the death of both myself and the small thing." "If they cause deaths, then they are demons. Who could find fault with the ritual laying of such ghosts and demons?"

This Official Instigator was one of the authentic Ancient Hippies, those in the hundred-years-and-over class. They had station and rights. They had

final honor.

"We are the open world," said this Ancient Hippie. "We open, and you will not come in to us."

"You are not open, old man," Morgan insisted. "You close the great way itself. You open only mole runs, and you go blind in their windings, proclaiming them to be the great way. We stubborn ones are for the open world that is gone."

"It is you who withdraw, Morgan. You withdraw from the Gentle World."

"You withdraw from life, old man, and the withdrawal syndromes are weird and twitchy."

"Be careful, Morgan. I and mine are main things in the withdrawal syndromes, and we will not be spoken of slightingly. Can you not see that you are wrong? You do not see how curiously you withdraw from life in opposing me here? Do you not know that you have just passed death sentence on yourself?"

"Certainly I know it," Morgan said.

It was true, Everything spoken to an Instigator was recorded, and the records were fed to appraisal machines. But how many seals does it take on a death sentence? Morgan Saunders knew that there were very many on his already.

But he walked out on the Instigator, which was illegal. He went on about his work, on past the Hippie Hippodrome, with its high sign of writhing splatter-paint: "MAN, OUR STUNTED PURPOSE AND OUR GREATEST STUNT."

The nothoi-hunters plagued both Janine Pervicacia and Morgan Saunders, following them, leveling guns at them, mocking them, hungering for them. The nothoi-hunters had the sense of prey; they had sophisticated equipment. They killed a lot. They were authorized to kill a lot. But they did not want to hunt out their field. Here it wis a special prey that they waited for and counted on, that they counted on even before it came into being, that they everlastingly hoped for. The hunters asked both Janine and Morgan when Ishmael would be along, this even before the time when Janine and Morgan had met. But now Morgan and Janine had met, and they talked about Ishmael, not realizing it, never having heard the name, not realizing that they were talking about a coming person.

"Expectation of anything is out of order, of course," Morgan said to Janine, "and is not much hope in hope. Nevertheless, I got a distant tang of something that may not be all wrong. Are you with me in it, Janine, if we discover some good way (even if it is a short way) away from this?"

"I am with you in anything you want to do, O Morgan with the short bramble hair, but it is all at an end. Everything goes down, and we go down with it."

"We will not go down, Janine. This is not the end yet, even for such as we are."

"Yes, the ending, Morgan, the evening of the seventh day."

"Janine, the seventh day had no evening. For better or worse, for many thousands of years we have lived in the afternoon of the seventh day, maybe even in the morning of it. And we live in it yet. Will I see you here tomorrow?"

"No. Not for several days, or weeks, or months. I will do a thing, and I will not tell you what it is till it's done. Goodbye, then, for some days or weeks or months, or forever."

2

What things a man or a world believes or disbelieves will permeate every corner and shadow and detail of life and style, will give a shape to every person and personifact and plant of that world. They will form or they will disorder, they will open or close. A world that believes in open things is at least fertile to every sort of adventure or disaster. A world that believes in a closed way will shrivel and raven and sputter out in frosty cruelty.

Audifax O'Hanlon

When Morgan saw Janine no more in the mornings the world became a deprived place. He was still plagued by the nothoi-hunters, who mocked him, and by the official instigators, who conversed with him. One afternoon, after he had put away his brooms and rakes and shovels and was on his rest period, he walked out into the Barrens, which was illegal. He found no nothoi there at all nor any trace of them. He did find cattle that had gone feral, wild swine, and rabbits and deer. He found streams that were full of fish and frogs; he found berries and fruits and hazelnuts. He found patches of wild wheat and rye, and sweet corn and melons.

"What is the reason I could not live here?" he asked himself out loud. "I could come here with Janine and we could live and flourish, away from the clang of industry and the clatter of the guitar-makers' factories. What is the reason I could not live here?"

But his left ear left his head at that moment, and immediately afterward he heard (with his right ear) the sound of the shot. Angry and scared, he clawed and crawled and rolled and made his way out of the Barrens and back to the fringes of the city.

"The reason I cannot live in the Barrens is that the nothoi-hunters will kill me as a nothos if they see me there," he said quietly. "They all kill any illegal person they find in the Barrens. And it was no mistake they made. They could see plainly that I was a grown man and not a nothos. Here I am now, one-eared and sad-hearted and -- oh, oh, oh -- here is an even sadder thing come to worry me!"

It was an Official Instigator wishing to talk to him. Morgan could not be sure whether it was the same Instigator who had talked to him several times before. Those Instigators who belong to the Ancient Hippie aristocracy (the one-hundred-years-and-older class) all look pretty much alike.

"We get you piece by piece, Morgan afraid to wander." the Instigator said. "Today an ear, tomorrow another thing, and very soon we will get you all and entire. If you would not listen to reason with two ears, how can you listen with one? There was a question that arose many years before you were born, so it does not really concern you at all. The question arose, and the answer was given. The question was simply, 'What will we do when there are too many people in the world?' And the answer given was, 'We will pass edict so that there never will be allowed too many people in the world.' Why do you not accept the gentle and wise answer?"

"The answer was out of order. Your whole complex is out of order in several senses of the term. That is why you will not accept order in any of the central things. That is why you must substitute deformity for form. I do not accept your answer because it is the wrong answer."

"How is it wrong, one-eared Morgan? What could possibly be wrong with it?"

"It is the static answer to a dynamic question and therefore the wrong answer."

"Could you have given a righter answer?"

"Of course not. But I could have contributed to it, and you could have also. The answer would have to grow like an organism. And it would have grown."

"There was no time to permit an organism to grow. It was a matter of great hurry."

"No, there was no great hurry, and the answer was already growing apace until it was hacked to death. There had been some signs or a full blooming springtime for mankind, and this frightened the The Population Blessing was a challenge, as all large and fine things are. There was only one question: whether we were a good enough people to accept the greatest gift ever offered. And the answer given was, No, we are not."

"But we splendid ones in our youth gave another answer, little die-hard Morgan," the Instigator said. "We will not abide a clutter of people, we said. Chop them off; there are enough and too many, we said. Really, it was a splendid answer, and I tell you that we were a splendid people."

"'Evil always wins through the strength of its Splendid Dupes', as a wise man said, and yet I doubt that you were ever splendid. You aren't now."

"But we are, little Morgan the philosopher of the street-sweepers, we are splendid and talented, gentle and random, creative and inventive."

"No, old man, you know that creativity and invention have disappeared completely. Why should they not? Residue technique will suffice to maintain a plateau. It is only for mountain-building that creativity and invention are required. You were the loss-of-nerve people. And it is hard for a small remnant to restore that nerve when every thing has flowed the other way for near a hundred years."

"Morgan of the remnant, your pieces are so little that they cannot even find each other. You lost everything completely before you were born. Listen to me: I am a wise and long-lived man. The old sophistry that there are two sides to every question has long passed away. Instead of that, there are mutual exclusions that cannot live in the same world with each other. The great consensus and the small remnant can no longer live in the same world. What odds could you post, little Morgan, on our going and your remaining?"

"Very weak odds, but I am more and more inclined to play them out."

"We have recorded almost enough on you to terminate you right now. Is it not curious that a man shot in the ear will bleed out of the mouth -- in words? The nothoi-hunters are better shots than that, you know. They but practice of you till we give them the final word on you. We have checked your own ancestry. You yourself are a nothos, for all that we can find to the contrary. No kin-card was ever issued for you. We could classify you for extinction at any time, but we will wait a little while and have spectacle out of you."

The nothoi-hunters in fact were very good shots. They had prediction scopes on their rifles. These small directors had the evasion patterns of many small aillinials and of the small nothoi worked out: the rush, the scurry, the broken pace, the double, the zigzag. With the pattern of those built into a scope the hunters could hardly miss.

The nothoi-hunters themselves were square pegs who happened to fit into certain square holes of the Gentle World. They were not gentle (not every one can be gentle even on that low plateau); they were naturally troublesome and warlike. Now their proclivities were channeled to a special job. They exterminated certain unlawful things. They did it thoroughly and well. And they made high sport out of it.

And there were other summary things in the system of the Gentle World. This very afternoon, right at the beginning of the swing hours, there were several executions under the recusancy laws. Many persons refused to take part in the swing hours. This was the same as refusal to be happy. To the offenders, first there was warning, then there was mutilation, then there was death. A half dozen of such public hangings would usually minimize the absences from swing time for a while.

There was a stubborn girl ready to be hanged, and at first Morgan thought that she was Janine. She was much the same type. She refused to recant; she refused to take her dutiful place in the Gentle World. She had refused three times to join the swing fun. Likely she was mad, but her madness might be dangerous and contagious.

"You refuse to have fun with the funsters?" an Ancient Instigator asked her almost tearfully.

"I always have fun," the girl said loudly. "It's more fun to be me dead than you alive. And I will not endure anything as stifling as the swing times. Drop dead, old man!"

"You might at least respect my position is Ancient Instigator." "I'd see the last Instigator strangled with the strings of the last guitar!"



So the girl was hanged, drawn, and quartered. Morgan, though he had often seen these little dramas, was deeply shocked: not so much by the girl's bad-mannered defiance as by the punishment itself. She looked so like Janine and talked so like her that it was frightening.

Then Janine came back and was busy with her flowers again one morning. The flowers remembered her (it had not really been such a long time), and they came alive to her. Janine was not impassioned with the flowers (as many in the Gentle World had the pose of being), but they were impassioned with her. They always had been.

"Where have you been this while?" Morgan asked her. "At the end of every morning I examined all the bodies gathered up by all the sweepers, and yours was never among them."

"I And awhile. And I had an illegal operation performed on myself."

"Which?" Morgan asked. "What did it do to you?"

"It undid," Janine said. "It undid the earlier operation. Now I am open to life once more."

"And under the automatic sentence of death you are! And I am if I say the word. I say the word. I am."

"I know a Papster priest," said Janine.

"And I know one," said Morgan. "We will go to mine."

"No, we will go to mine," she insisted. But they couldn't have quarreled over that or over anything. There wasn't room for that in the narrow margin of life left to them. Besides, it happened that it was the same Papster priest they both knew. There weren't more than two or three of those hidden ones in that city of a million.

They went to the Papster priest and were inarried, which was illegal.

The Papster must have been lonesome for the central things, so he brought out his eloquence, which had grown rusty, and gave a doctrine to their act.

"What you do is right," he said, "no matter how illegal it is. This world had become a stunted plant, and it was not meant to be. Deformity can never be the norm. The basic and evil theory was: that (by restriction) fewer people could live better and more justified. But they did not. Fewer people live, an() they live as dwarfs. Not even China in the thousand years it was frozen (it also muclily in an opium dream) was as deprived and listless as this world. The Cities of the Plateau may be destroyed as were the Cities of the Plain, I do not know. We live in that which calls itself a biological world, but no one seems to understand the one central fact of biology, of the life complex.

"This is the one biological fact that all present biologists ignore to their own incompetence: that every life is called into being by God and maintained in being by God at every instant of that life; that an without God there is no bios, no life, and certainly no biology. There can never be an unwanted life or an unwanted person, ever, anywhere. If a person were not wanted by God, God would not call him into being, There can never be too many persons, because it is God who counts and records and decides how many there should be. There can never be a person unprovided for, because it is God who provides. Whoever does not believe in this Providence does not believe in God. Once there was some nonsense on this subject. Now it is pretty well dispelled, and the pretense of believing in one and not the other has about vanished."

The priest wrinkled his nose for the sweat running down it. It was a hot underground hole that they came to for the secret marriage.

"But they bug me, the biologists and their dwarfed biota," the priest went on "If they cannot see the central fact of their own science, if they cannot see this fact in the knotted tangle of chromosomes and in the ladders of the double helices, then they have eyes in vain. Ah -- I talk too much, and perhaps you do not understand me."

"We understand you," Morgan and Jane said together.

"May the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, ah -- the God of Ishmael --

the God of Jacob be with you, and may He fulfill in you His blessings," the Papster said; then he said other things, and they married each other before him.

The background didn't mean much immediately after that. It could have been still on the plateau; it could have been on a mountain or in a deep ravine or over the sea. What happened was gaiety. Morgan and Janine cut up in their lives. No, no, not the dwarfed singing and jittery whining of the Gentle World grown old so gracelessly. This was the song-central thing. They joked, they carried on, they startled, they set fires in what had been too dry, too lacking in substance, even to burn. Like magic they came to know other couples of their same state, ten of them, twenty of them, all in subservient positions and none of them servile. All of them hidden, all of them dangerously open. They were a new thing in the air. The Official Instigators flared their nostrils at the new scent; and the nothoi-hunters caught wind of a now strong prey and shook in their hate and anticipation.

Morgan and Jane the Crane even joked about which of them would run out his string first. "It will be you, Janine," Morgan jibed. "I will sweep you up one morning. 'Is it Agar?' I will ask, 'or is it the Crane?' And I will say, 'Oh, she bends hard in the middle!' And I will stuff you into my canister. And then there will be another girl selling Flowers, and I will begin to carry on with her."

"Be in not so much hurry to sweep me up," Janine said, "or you will have to bear Ishmael yourself. It will be hard on you, Morgan, you so narrow in the pelvic girdle, you lacking in so many ways. When you come to give birth to him, you will wish that I were back to do it."

"Oh, we will keep you alive a little while then," Morgan said, "and I will try to stay alive myself. A doubly posthumous child always has a hard time of it. At least one of its should be around. Ah, the hunters shoot me through with their eyes a dozen times a day, and the Instigators are fashioning the last seal for my certificate. What is taking Ishmael so long anyhow? Mayhap he'll be a monster. They have longer gestation periods. Better a monster than the sort of dwarfs that abound now."

"He will be a wild ass or,, man, and that is surely monster enough," Janine said. "Get gone. The flower-care inspector has been plaguing me, and he is coming now. I love you more than the sky itself. Not much more, but a little. Get gone."

The flower-care inspector was always in a great fury with Janine now.

"Do you not know that the flower-care girl over on Western Avenue had her tongue cut out for talking overly much with a sweeper?" she asked.

"Yellow-card morning people have not the right to talk freely. And why are you so clothed? Why are you so overclothed? There is scarcely a square foot of flesh showing on you. What do your silly affectations work toward anyhow?"

"The world clothed and in its right mind," said Janine Pericicacia.

"Clothes sometimes hide things!" the flower-care inspector shrilled.

"Oh, they do!" Janine beamed. "They do."

Those were the days. When you rise above the plateau you rise above it in all ways. There was hope everywhere; and there was no single detail that could give any possible hope. There was a man from over the sea (as was Morgan of that name) who said that things were much the same elsewhere, congealed, dwarfed, and vapid. Yet he was full of sunny strength and quick laughs. There was a man there from over the prairies. He said that the prairies were disaster areas now for all free and illegal people. They were hunted down and killed from the air by fog poisons that had first been tried out on coyotes. There was a man there from the north woods. He said that the nothoi-hunters up there were real hunters, and there was no bag limit. They didn't seem to care if they did hunt out the game. It would be replenished, they said, or they would hunt elsewhere when they had done with it. There was a man there from that ghetto that is under the ghetto, from the sewers that are under the

sewers. He said that the very small pockets of free and illegal people underground were being systematically killed by spray poisons that had first been tried out on rats.

But still there was high hope: not for long life, of course, but for bright and embattled life, fine for issue. But the way was getting mighty narrow.

"All joking aside," Morgan told Janine one morning, "you win our little bet and game. This is the last morning of my life. They get me today."

"Take some of them with you, man!" Janine spat with her forky tongue.

"No. We won't go to the same place; but I may send some of them another way."

"Break for the Barrens, man!" Janine sounded. "In short months I and the boy will come to you there."

"Oh, I break to them now," Morgan said, "but I must pass through an Instigator and a circle of hunters first. This world, my love, is only temporary, of time. We have another one. But we are appointed to this world first. It is of ourselves, part of our bodies. It is mean, and are we not also? It is not better, because we did not make it any better, this withered world is both our ancestry and our issue, however deformed it may be. Remember, Janine (and this is important) never hate this world; but it will be hateful. Remember also we always loved the early mornings."

"I will remember,, Morgan. Go happy with it now. See how joyful I say it! Your dead ears may hear me shrilling like a demented woman fifteen minutes from now; do not believe them. Remember that I said, 'Go happy with it.'"

Morgan Saunders slid through the early morning streets toward the edge of the city in the direction of the Barrens. He was a moving man with cat-springs in him. It was his last morning by all the odds, but he would give them a run or a fight for it. Then his own particular Official Instigator loomed up in front of him, the Ancient Hippie of the more-than-a-hundred-years class, the nemesis who had already obtained the warrant for Morgan's death and who would turn the hunters loose on him whenever he wanted to.

"Get out of my way, old hip," Morgan warned. "I'm in a hurry." "Oh, do not be in a hurry, man," the old Instigator protested. "Talk to me. It is you who are going to die today. It is you of the illegitimate life that we have enough to kill a dozen times. If I were you I would say, 'Let them be impatient; let them wait a little.' They cannot kill you till I give the word. Talk to me, man."

"Talking won't change a thing, oldster. And I go to a better thing than this, whether I get to the Barrens or to my death. Why shouldn't I be in a hurry for a better thing?"

"Talking did change everything once, Morgan-Sorgen. We whipped you once by talk alone, not even very good talk. We won the world to our way by our talk. And now you are nothing at all but a remnant and a sport. You are less than the tenth of one percent. If I were of the tenth of one percent I would be silent. And we can extinguish even that minuscule of you whenever we wish."

"But we reappear. You will not be rid of us. We grow back. Why are you ifrand to let the tenth of one percent speak? You shake, you fume, you slander, you vilify."

"You are our prey and you have no right to opinion or voice. We keep a very few of you for the hunting only. You will not grow back if we wish to end the game. Why have you never accepted our consensus? It is really rather interesting, rather arty, rather gentle, rather novel."

Several sets of nothoi-hunters were waiting in the near distance. There was in particular the set of Peeler and Slickstock and Quickcoiner; these had claim on Morgan Saunders as their special game.

"The same novelties for a hundred years are no longer novel, old man," Morgan shot, shifting nervously but having to endure the talk. "And divergent

art is of some interest for a while, as long as there is a main thing for it to diverge from. Yes, you even had a touch of humor and a touch of kindness once. But now you are cut flowers, no more than that; worse, you are artificial cut flowers. It is your loss of nerve, it is your regression, it is your dwarfing yourselves and creeping into strange wombs for shelter. You lost your courage first of all, then your honesty and your common sense. As falsehood and ugliness are equated, you set out to create a world of unsurpassed ugliness. Painting and sculpture were perverted first. Then music withered and whimpered into stringed idiocy. Then all the arts went and all the life ambients. You claimed that it was an opening up, a meaningful development. It wasn't. It was an end, and there is no meaning or development in a dead end. These are the Terminal Days that you have brought about." "You are jealous of our success, little Morgan from over the sea. Judge us by our beautiful divergence that works. Recognize us by our results."

"Aye, by your fruits we may know you," Morgan said. It was an unkind jibe, and it got under the Instigator's skin. That Ancient Hippie piled in anger.

"We are irreconcilables!" he howled. "You are impossible, not to be reformed, not to be converted. You are impossible unto death."

The Ancient Hippie made a downward sign with his arm, and there was a clatter of armament coming alive from every direction. Morgan smashed the Ancient Hippie in the face (an unkind and illegal thing); he fainted and ran like a bolt of rabbits in three directions at once.

"He is a deformity," Morgan spoke in his churning head about the Ancient Hippie, who still lingered in his mind. "He is perfect in his logic to the system with the central thing left out. There is no meeting ground at all in this life. Impossible, irreconcilable!"

A street-sweeper knows the streets. A moving cat-spring man can get the jump on food-hungry nothoi-hunters. Bullets banged and clattered into wells of buildings, but Morgan had movements that the prediction scopes of the nothoi-hunters' rifles could not predict. And the hunters really weren't very good at movement shot, no matter how fancy the wrappings of their colt. Mostly they had hunted down and killed very small children and heavy and distraught women. It was higher sport to bring down a prime man, but they were less practiced at it.

Morgan was away from the first circle of them, going like ragged lightning, striking and vanishing. He sent several of the hunters on their dead way. He seemed always to go toward the inner city, and yet he retreated two steps toward the fringe and the Barrens for every conspicuous step that he took toward the center.

But they were all out after him now. Jazzbo horns sounded to call all hunters. Dogs of the two-legged variety took up the bay after him to trap him or tree him or sound him for the hunters. This was no illegitimate child to be hunted down. It was an illegitimate man, grown and known, illegal and illicit in his tongue and his life. They would have him in their dully murderous way. There was novelty (almost the only remaining one) and diversion in a nothoi-hunt; but there was no heroism, not in the hunters, not even in the prey.

For Morgan Saunders certainly had nothing heroic in him now. He ran sick and scared; he had believed it would be otherwise. He was a man of no special ability or intelligence. He had come to the old central way of things quite late, and by accident or intuition. He had no magic; he had no plan or program now but to run and evade. He had the unworldly hope and peace, but he hadn't them immediately or vividly as he came to the end; only as buried certainties. He ran himself to weariness. The cat-springs and the movement died in him, and when he could no longer evade and elude, the nothoi-hunters had him and killed him on the edge of the city within sight of the miserable Barrens.

Jane the Crane found him a little later, still in the early morning. She picked him up in sudden strong arms. She walked and keened, carrying the dead

Morgan in her arms and the live Ishmael under her belly, wilkeul back into the city and among her flowers, trampling them (which was illegal), shrilling and wailing, a walking forky-tongeed aand agonizing pieta.

Morning crows gathered about her and followed here; and even some of the folks from the regular swing-hours world were up and blinking at the spooky sunlight and the keening woman. They jeered and defamed her, and she came back with her forky tongue and harangued them all.

"Bedammed with you all and the fouled nest of you!" she cried. "You are vermin, you are no longer people. And the Instigators are lice on the body of the world."

And already the Instigators were holding council about her.

"Why not now?" some asked. "She is certainly illegitimate in her conduct, and she carries one illegitimate burden in her arms and one in her belly. Why not now?"

"The hunting has come to be too slim," others of them said. "The nothoi-hunters insist that a small bit of it must be reserved. Here is an additional quarry for them, in two years from now, or at most three. There is prescience about the unborn one. It is sworn that he will be prime game. And the hunters must retain a small reserve."

Another yellow-card street-sweeper, a man very like Morgan Saunders and a friend of his, came by with his working things. With great compassion he took Morgan from Janine's arms, bent him difficultly in the middle, and stuffed him into his wheeled He also spoke some words to Janine in a low voice. We do not know what words they were, but they were like a flame. And now Janine became a new sort of flame.

She brightened, she burned, she erupted with laughter.

What? What? With laughter?

Yes, with laughter and with a quick spate of gay words:

"But why am I mourning like one who doesn't believe?" she sparked. "It's the dawn of the world to me! I am a berthing woman, and I will give merriment with my milk. I take the old motto 'This is the first day of the rest of my life.' It's a new dawn, and I have loved the dawns. To be otherwise would be to miss the main things as they have missed them. Hurry, Ishmael, you leaping lump in my belly! We have to get you born and agile before they come to eat us up. But by tomorrow's morning we will see each other's faces. God knows the wonder of it, to send births in the early mornings."

She went to her hidden shanty-room in the ghetto under the ghetto, singing and whistling. Really, she was an odd one in those fl@it False Terminal Days of the world.

(A question, perhaps out of context: Why were those False Terminal Days not truly terminal to the race and the world? O, there were other movements and powers that had not been taken into account. And the plateau, as a matter of fact, that low, level, artificial construction, that been built atop an area of old volcanic and earthquake movement. There was a great underlying fault, and it would erupt there. But this is not an account of termination of the Terminal Stasis.)

3

I'll climb Sinai's rocks to the thunder-clad crest  
And learn all that Moses forgot,  
And see if the Bush is at Hebron or Fiest  
And if it is burning or not.

Archipelago

Here are some pages which possibly do not belong here at all. If that is so, then it is the fault of the randoming machines. This illegal private account of Janine Pervicacia and Morgan Saunders and their illegal issue

Ishmael was first composed by a grieving friend and was printed (as everything was printed then) in scatter-print. The unnumbered pages, even of a private journal, had to go through a randomizing machine and be randomized; the print machine would not function otherwise. Now, in sorting them out as best we can (for we are reader and not depth-comprehender), a certain section falls together that is not directly a part of the account of Janine and Morgan. Yet this section was mixed up with their account, whether or not it was also written by the hand of the grieving friend, and it will be given here. We do not know whether this intrusive section is comic or ironic or straight. There is even a chance that it may be a sample of a rare and secret form of the period, a satire upon a satire: an ironic counterpoise of a stereotyped satire form. We nominate this misfit section, "The Interlude of the the Odd Man and the Odd God," and it is as follows:

"In the early springtime of the year 2040 of the common era, the original sparse population having been removed from the area, three hundred persons of a troubling sort were sealed into the Vale of Pailliun, which is in the Knockmealdown Mountains of the Disunited Commonwealth of Ireland. These three hundred persons included certain fossils, diehards, and "yesterday's leaders" of all irreformable religious and ethic sort, among them the last "Pope" who strangely insisted that he was not the last of them. These three hundred persons, families and singletons, were allowed the sheep and kine of the valley and such primitive tools as they chose to bring in. Seals were set for one thousand years (we do have the historical sense) on both the upper and lower entrances of the valley. All communications with the persons of the vale are evermore prohibited under pain of death. Nothing may go into the vale by earth or by air, and nothing may come out. If there is increase in the valley, then let that increase choke on itself."

-- Joint statement of the United Nations Obsolescence and Terminating Board and of the One Ecumenical Liberal and Secular Church, May 1, 2040.

Matteo Matuitine (Matthew Morning -- what kind of a name is that!) who was Pope Paul XIII, had said mass before dawn for the twelve who still adhered to him out of this remnant; they had assisted standing with tapers and rushlights. Then he had brought one flock of sheep (150 of them) up to the high pasture just a little before sunrise. He was a rugged old man and barefoot (for the ground of the vale was holy ground), though it was sharp November. The high grass of this pasture had browned and cured itself where it steel], making winter hay, and the sheep would be kept on such pastures till May when the close-grazed river meadow turned green again. Paul XIII had a hammer, a pestle, and a mattock sort of tool, which the Italians call zappa. He was mending a little stone sheep-bridge over the stream there.

What? Is it odd that a shepherd should herd sheep and that a pontiff should maintain bridges?

And Paul XIII talked with the Odd God there in the high pasture, as he talked with Him every morning:

"When we first came into this valley (our desert, our prison; our delight if You say it is our delight), we found certain beings here who were more ghost than flesh, who were not on the manifest of the proper fauna of this valley. I had seen such strange half-creatures (neither proper flesh nor yet honest brimstone) in the high mountain valleys of Italy, We always believed them to be the shades of the old supplanted Italic gods and their devotees. But what are we to think when we find them here in Ireland? They are awkward and ungainly and not all there, either in mind or body. You must know of them, for You made them, though they deny it. They are not quite like men, not quite like devils; still less are they like angels. Yet they have some knowledge of the old established things. "A great shapeless bulk of one such spook ran to me on my first morning in this vale. I could see the dew on the grass sparkling through him; and yet he had substance, for lie kicked the

rocks about with his big splay feet. He was in torment then, but was not I also in torment? 'Has Rome fallen?' he cried out to me in anguish. 'Is it true that Rome has fallen? Are all the golden walls and towers nung down?' 'Yes, fallen,' I said sadly. 'Rome had fallen before, but now she falls again in a special way.' At hearing that it was as if his outsized pumpkin-shaped head broke. His lumpish face cracked and he cried. He went back up into his rocks with a roaring and sobbing like dragons wailing their dead. And some of the stones in this valley also cried out at the news that Rome had fallen.

"What I would like to know, though, is whether we now become as they are. Do we (our remnant here) become like them: not quite like men, not quite like devils, even less like angels? Do we become here no more than ancient haunts, devotees of vanished gods, spooks of the waste places? Assure me that we are more than just one more layer of the stratified fossil formation. Assure me that we will be something more than this, even in our exile."

The Odd God spoke and assured Paul that they were something more than that. He spoke by a still-green thorn-bush bursting into flame.

Paul XIII spoke again, for only this one Person really listened to him:

"I have a little theory," said Paul XIII. "The first offense was the taking of the forbidden fruit. The second offense (which I believe is more grievous than the first) is the refusing of the bidden fruit. It is even the hacking down of the tree of the fruit. I believe that all the noisome oddities of the present world are entwined with this refusal and hacking. They kill an entire ecology when they hack down the growth tree. The people starve now in every aspect and do not even know that the name of their unease is starvation, that their pale fever is the starvation fever. Because they have food and ease they do not realize that they starve.

"Did You know that there is no landscape any more in the world? That there are no longer any real rocks or towns out there? Instead there are only weak splotchy pictures of them. A countryside vanishes, and in its place is a poster dizzy with scatter-print that says, 'This represents a countryside.' A town goes down, and in its place is a psychedelic blob proclaiming, 'This stands for a town.' People are terminated, and in their place are walking spooks with signs around their necks: 'We are we instead of people.' In place of life there is narcosis. Hack back the growth enough, and the thing dies. Cut a foot length from the top of a child, and it goes badly with that child. 'Oh, but the child would grow till he overflowed the world and broke the sky,' is what they said. 'How else to regularize the child and the world than to cut off their heads?' This I believe, is the wrong way.

"But will You not bid the fruit again to us? Offer it. Offer it again and again! In some way that only You understand it will be accepted. Will You not still bid the fruit to fruit?"

A fruity breath; a clear glitter of green leaves; a flash of blossoms that hung and then fell like snow; and a runty dead tree was red with apples. Remember that this was sharp November and the tree had not previously leaved that year.

"You remember the child who found a root and said he would pull it out?" Paul XIII continued. "But when he tried to pull it out, distant people and buildings shriveled and collapsed and were pulled down to nothing and died. The child pulled down the whole world but couldn't pull out that root. It was a special root; it was the root of everything. And for seven decades now, men have tried to pull out that same root; and instead they have pulled down that same world.

"They did if all to us with catchwords," Paul continued his morning conversation. "'We accept it all,' they said, 'except the flesh and blood of if. We are for all these things. We are only against the structure and body of them.' I had a little joke for the critics who said they loved the Church Itself but hated the Institutional Church. 'What was the verb that God did about the Church?' I would ask in my guileless way. 'He instituted the Church, and therefore it is Institutional.' But perhaps I cheated a little in my jibe. For the verb that in the Vulgate is instituo is actually in the Greek -- but I

always forget, You know more Greek than I do. Is it true that there is one construction in the Greek historical optative that is now understood only by the Devil and Yourself? But tell me, are we now in an historical optative time? And what are the options? Will Thou not reveal them to me?"

There were other early and devout men about in the vale. A kaftaned Jew had a stone shed there in the upper pasture where he prepared parchments from sheepskins, and he had set to work now with a low merry chanting. A Hard-Shell from the southern United States was there looking for a lost calf, having left the ninety-nine to find the one (having left them, however, in the careful care of another Hard-Shell). A Mosulman came down from the height of the sealed upper entrance of the valley where he had just performed his morning rites.

The several men looked till and about with a slight impatience. It was time.

"Must You always be reminded?" asked the Hard-Shell.

"We do not even ask the manna which You gave the Fathers," the kaftaned Jew said.

"Only the plain morning fare of this country," said Paul XIII. Quick fire came down on a smoothed stone. And the browned oaten pancakes were there, rampant with ewe butter and honey and aroma. The several men began to eat them.

"I have to laugh at the late line of us from that Paul to this," Paul XIII reminisced. "I swear that we infuriated the world eleven times in these seven and a half decades. We were all known for our proclivities toward the accommodating secularism, we were all devoted to the soft surrogate thing, we were all intending to voice the easy agreement and be done with it, we were all elected to do so. And then You touched each of our tongues in turn with a burning coal. You think our actions bewildered and angered the world? I tell you that they bewildered ourselves a thousand times over. How does the speaking horn know what words will be spoken through him? Oh, well, I suppose You have Your reasons, but it has been a little hard on each of us, each being the only transcendent man living in the world in his time."

Paul XIII ran on with other talk because he was old and garrulous. It was sunlight on the high pastures now and soon the sun would reach down to the depths of the valley. Tinkle bells on the animals filled the air. Kids of sheep and goats and human were everywhere. Women were at work stone-grinding oats and barley. A smith was hammering copper and tin together into orange-colored tools and ornaments. Clipping men were long-clipping sheep. It was sharp November, and the sheep would not be short-clipped again till late spring. The sealed vale in the Knockmealdown Mountains was a busy and burgeoning place.

"I believe that we should have a little of the special this morning," Paul XIII wheedled. "We can make it ourselves, of course," he flattered, "but we cannot make it nearly as good as You can. And I have forgotten. I have not so much as brought a pot for it this morning. We can make pots ourselves of course but we cannot make them anywhere as good as You can."

There was a sigh in the wind over the vale, almost a sigh of exasperation, if He were capable of exasperation. But of a sudden a three-measure stone crusca-jar stood there, full of the, most extraordinary Wine Ordinary, the blood that ever bled from the earth. And several of them drank of it.

"Leave it off for a while, Paul the Thirteenth," the Hard-Shell growled. The Hard-Shell only half approved of the extraordinary Wine Ordinary, and he seldom took more than a sip of it. He was stricter than the Odd God but only by a little.

"He has talked to you as to a child, Paul," the Hard-Shell said, "and it wearies Him after a while, if He could be wearied. It is my turn now. This morning He may talk to me as to a man."

"I am a child," said Paul XIII. "I even flatter myself that I am a child



of grace"

Then Paul returned to mending the stone slileep-bridge, and the Hard-Shell talked to the Odd God in his own way. And later the kaftaned Jew came and talked to Him, deeply like low music, shivering with fear and quaking with merriment at the same time. Old Jews are said to have several private jokes between themselves and the Odd God.

And again later the Mosulman came and talked to Him in the desert manner which He especially understands.

They were in odd clutch in that valley of the Knockmealdown Mountains, and it was an Odd God who provided for them.

4

Lo, blessed are our ears for they have heard;  
Yes, blessed are our eyes for they have seen:  
Let thunder break on man and beast and bird  
And the lightning. It is something to have been.

G. K. Chesterton

Jane the Crane had the boy Ishmael born and agile in less time than might be believed. There was a very great hurry now. A baby is vulnerable: not Ishmael, perhaps, but most babies. But he was not born ignorant or uninstructed. For the many months of Janine's carrying him (well, it had been long; he was part monster, surely, and their period is a longer one), she had instructed him all the hours of the day and night, when she was working over her flowers, when gawking about in the street, when abiding in her hidden shanty-room. Especially in the afternoons (these were her nights, when she slept) she instructed him, for they shared the same dreams just as they shared the same blood.

"I tell you, I don't know whether I can hide you better inside or out, she would say to him. "I leave it to you now. Come out when you're ready. You are already bigger than I am. I tell you to get smart fast, to get fast fast. Are you listening to me? You must learn to hide and to disguise. You must learn to look like this one and that one. You will live in the sewers and on the roofs and in the trees. Let me tell you one thing: it is better even to have lived in the dankest agony and fear than never to have lived at all. It is better to be a vermin than never to be anything. It is better to be weird and deformed (I do not mean deformed as the world is deformed now) than to be empty and without form. It is better to be conscious in horror and delirium than to miss consciousness. If you have a nomination and a soul, then nothing else matters greatly, This I believe. If you can hear and understand me, whistle."

And the boy Ishmael always whistled from out of her belly. He always heard and he always understood. Then, when they both realized that it was no longer possible to hide him within, he was born. When they both realized immediately that it would not do to have him newborn and helpless, he became agile. The open eyes of Ishmael were clouded for only short instants after birth. Then they cleared; he understood; he knew. Nobody ever heard him cry like a human child. He had more sense than that. Sometimes he chirped and whistled like a chimney bird, sometimes he whined like a dog pup. (Dogs, as surrogate to human persons and human affections, were everywhere privileged.) Sometimes Ishmael gurgled like sewer water; but he was always able to communicate -- even to communicate without sound.

But where could Ishmael hide? Illegal stories attached to his mother, Jane the Crane. She was watched and followed and checked. All the shanty rooms of the city were searched from time to time by the "rat catchers" who anticipated the nothoi-hunters with the not yet mobile illegals.

Ishmael lived in the sewers and on the roofs and in the trees. But mostly he lived under the floors and in the walls. All the shanties were fifty

to eighty years old. Nothing was ever built now, only obbled up a little just before it tumbled clown. Inside the walls was the best place. A young boy not yet able to walk could still climb about inside the walls. And not even the dogs of of the rat-catchers would snuffle him out from them. Ishmael could whine and rattle and yap in the dogs' own talk. He could pass for a dog in the dark corners, under the floors, inside the walls. When Ishmael seemed like this one or that one, he seemed so to every sense.

But how did Jane the Crane feed him? However did other illegitimate mothers feed their offspring? Oh, there had never been any shortage of food. The swing-time people wasted far more food than they ate. The illegitimate mothers, mostly servile workers to the swingers or morning yellow-card workers, had only to carry leavings home "for the clogs." It wasn't starvation that killed the illegal children; it was the "scatter eyes" and the rat-catchers prowling to find and kill them, doing the work voluntarily mostly, from some inner need of theirs.

Ishmael, however, passed all the other illegal children in earliness and agility. He was one of the few authentic geniuses born in the first half of the twenty-first century: thinking like a pot-a-boil before he could talk; reading minds before he could read the simplest scatter-print; imitating animals by sound and scent and movement; imitating legal children by face before he ever saw the reflection of his own face. He was a wild colt of a boy destined, should he live, to be a wild ass of a man. And he had fame. He was known everywhere before he was seen. Fame is a weed that grows up overnight and can be rooted in anything or nothing.

Some of the nothoi-hunters already talked about the agile Ishmael, possibly before he was ever out of the womb, certainly soon afterward. There was Peeler, a big man among the hunters. There was Slickstock. There was Quickcoiner, a tipster gentleman such as was always a part of a hunter team. These three were now dining together on the popular Chinese dish, egg gone wrong.

"There's a new one, I tell you!" Peeler gloated and rubbed his long hand together. "I can feel him like a new wind ruffling my hackles. He's the dog that barks different, he's the bird that whistles different, he's the sewer rat that squeaks different. He's the one of the kind we always hoped for. It will make our season whenever we kill him. The next best thing to killing that seven-year-old male would be to kill this new one."

"He's under the streets, he's in the trees," said Slickstock, "and I tell you he's mine! His father killed a teammate of mine at his own hunting-down. How had we missed his father all his years? Where did he come from?"

"This new one is out of Jane the Crane, the forky-tongued flower woman," Quickcoiner said. "Is she not game yet, now that he is born? Is she not game? Why must we hold off? He is named Ishmael."

It was known, even before his father came to this city, that there would be a boy named Ishmael.

"But nobody has ever seen this Ishmael," Peeler said. "We hear him, we sense him, but we do not see him. We know that he is the wild ass of a creature who climbed in the trees and crawled under the streets before he could walk. We know that he dog-sounded and bird-whistled in code before he could talk. We know also that he imitated the talk of our own children before he could talk himself. We do not know his age, though he must be about two years old. But we know that he will be the wildest of them all, even wilder than the seven-year-old male that we have never been able to kill."

"And we have not been able to got Jane the Crane declared open game," Slickstock complained. "Tire Instigators claim that there is no evidence of a child. No evidence! Have they no senses except the regular ones?"

When he was three years old, Ishmael slipped off during the swing-hours and got clear to the Barrens where he met the eight-year-old male that the nothoi-hunters had never been able to kill.

So it was all over then, the little drama? The boy had got free and gained his own hunted kind. And whatever happened to the wild children in the Barrens, how they were hunted down and almost extinguished again and again, is surely of another account. Then we are finished with the wild boy Ishmael?

No. He didn't stay in the Barrens. He came back to Janine's slanty room in the ghetto under the ghetto, back to the sewers and the spaces in the walls and under the floors and streets, back to the trees.

Three swing-periods later, Ishmael got clear to the Barrens again, taking another small boy with him. It was harder with another boy (though Ishmael had instructed him well) and they made it barely. They ran atangle of a set of nothoi-hunters (not the Peeler set, however), not a quick-sensing set that know there was an Ishmael. But the wild-ass boy had a shot lodged behind his ear just where his wiry mane rose highest. He left it there for memento though it festered him. He received this shot in memory of his father, who hadn't been able to leave him anything tangible.

Three swing periods later, Ishmael got clear to the Barrens again, taking three small boys with him. This incursion was without incident. He repeated the feat after the same interval. Then he repeated it again. It took him about three days to instruct and train the children properly. Many two- and three- and four-year-old children are slow learners and inattentive, though Ishmael selected only the most promising of them to smuggle to the Barrens.

Then they had their first fatalities. During one of their swing-period journeys they ran atangle of a set of nothoi-hunters, and this was the Peeler set; this was the quick-sensing set that knew there was an Ishmael. Four of the six boys that Ishmael was leading were killed, and both of the girls. Ishmael cursed Peeler and his cronies.

Ishmael had taken a hundred children into the Barrens, and the rampant eight-year-old male who ruled the region now had real material for his talents. Then Peeler led an incursion into the Barrens that killed fifty young nothoi. It was announced (as it had been announced many times before) that the young nothoi in the Barrens had now been extinguished. But they hadn't been.

Ishmael led another hundred children into the Barrens over a period of some weeks. But seven incursions, the last one led by the notorious Peeler again, killed seventy of the Barrens nothoi. Ishmael was not four years old. Is not a wild ass full grown at three? He had cursed Peeler before, and the cursing hadn't been effective. "I will do something else. I will get him where it hurts him," Ishmael said.

Peeler had a little boy, older than Ishmael but about the same size. Ishmael knew this. Ishmael knew everything.

Ishmael found the little boy, Onlyborn Peeler, struck him down wildly, and stripped him naked. Then he changed clothes with him. Thereupon, he made himself to look exactly like that little Peeler boy. How could he have done it, with the wild-ass crine standing up on his head and neck like that? With the wild eyes rolling around in his head the way they did? With the hands and feet that were too big for him, with the ass-sprits (which were like the cat-springs of his father) in his steps, with the sloping shoulders and haunches on him that the little Peeler boy didn't have? Well hokey, he wasn't even the same color as the Peeler boy!

Well, he did it. Ishmael was hypnotic. He drew eyes to him or away from him as he wished. He made those hypnotized eyes see what he wanted them to see. He could make his face look like anything he decided. "Why, I almost peeled you for a potato!" Jane the Crane had said to him once. "Why are you looking like a potato?" He had the face of the little Peeler boy now and the Peeler boy's clothes. He went and found Peeler himself, sitting with Slickstock and Quickcoiner.

"Hey, Pop, get on the op!" he spoke boldly to Peeler, using the voice of the Peeler boy and the kind of talk that legal kids talked. He put his eye to the barrel of Peeler's gun and looked down it.

"What is the matter with you, Onlyborn? Why do you look so funny? What

are you doing here? Why aren't you in kindergarten?" Peeler asked Ishmael with rising anger.

"Peeler, I never realized that your kid looked so funny," said Quickcoiner, "and looking From him to you, I never realized that you looked so funny either."

"Got him easy, got him hard, got him dead in our own backyard," Ishmael chanted in the little Peeler boy voice.

"Talk sense, or got out of here and back to school," Peeler ordered.

"Peeler!" Slickstock roared, rising, "Let's go see! If somebody's dead, we want to know why we didn't get to kill him. Maybe somebody else has been potting our game."

Ishmael was running toward the Peeler house, and the three big nothoi-hunters were clattering after him to see who was dead.

"Who is it, Onlyborn, who is dead?" Peeler was calling after Ishmael, still thinking he was his own son.

"On the op, Pop, see the fish," Ishmael chanted as he ran, "all laid out and his name is Ish."

"Ishmael!" Peeler roared like a wounded boar. "Somebody has stolen Ishmael from us."

"Ishmael!" Slickstock shouted. "We've been robbed. He was our assigned kill."

"Ishmael!" Quickcoiner shrieked. "I'll have coin back from the tipsters. They assured me he could never be caught in the city."

Ishmael pointed when they came to the body. Then he faded back through the big nothoi-hunters and was into the trees. He was in the near trees for a moment, till he should see how the hunters carried on, but ready to be into the far trees as soon as these big men realized what had happened.

"Ishmael!" Peeler agonized as he bent over the little body where Ishmael had struck it down. "Wait, men, wait!" he said then. "Why, this can't be Ishmael at all! This is my little boy Onlyborn who is dead here. This is the funniest thing I ever heard of. What do you make of it, fellows?" )Peeler didn't particulary car for his small son. The kid-card and the kid [for prestige] had put him into hock for years>)

"But since this is little Onlyborn" -- Quickcoiner hesitated -- "then who was --?"

"Ishmael!" Slickstock roared. "It was himself! He tricked us! He bearded the lions in our own jaws. We'll have him, we'll have him! He's our kill!"

"Coin out of my hand," Quickcoiner cried. "I'll overdraw. I'll get every tipster in town on this. We're tricked. We'll get him, we'll get him fast."

"I'll kill him, I'll kill him," Peeler jabbered. "Made fools of us! Looked right down my giin. Insulted us. Something else. Yeah, he killed my boy. I'll kill him, I'll kill him."

It hadn't quite fallen is Ishmael (now in the far trees) had figured. He hadn't gotten Peeler where it hurt him in killing his son, Onlyborn, and this puzzled Ishmael. But he had got him where it hurt him in tricking him, in making a fool out of him. It had been to the death between them before. Now it was triply so.

Quickcoiner poured out money to the tipsters, and they began to hem Ishmael in, so they thought. Peeler and Ishmael declared the special game of his set.

But there was enough hunting for all the nothoi-hunter sets now. A dozen other wild-ass kids were working in the city, instructed by Ishmael himself and by the intrepid nine-year-old male that the nothoi-hunters had never been able to kill. And new Barrens-like places were already being used: a skimpy little region called the Potato Hills, a swampy stretch called the Deadwood Bottoms. And the wild-ass kids were breaking out all over the world; wilder than they had been before, clonkey-smart now, long-eared for rumor and news, mule-strong, jenny-fleet, hoof-liard, rebels, misbegottens, Issachars, asses indeed. They even used the sinister-barred bray for signal now and for mockery. The left-handed brotherhood had rampaged before, and it refused to

believe now that it was extinguished.

But the nothoi-hunters also came on stronger now, more professional, better provided, better intelingenced, more adaptably armed. Every new evasion tactic that the nothoi kids discovered was soon the property of the prediction scopes of the hunters' rifles.

Ishmael had run other branches of illegitimate kids into the Barrens and the Bottoms and the Potato Hills. Then it came to his another, (who had powers) that he had run his way; to whichever end, she did not know.

"You have run to the end of the line in this," she said. "You are already too big to crawl in many of the walls and under many of the floors and streets. The crawl spaces are only suited for very small children. You are too big to be passed over by the sharp eyes, you are too big to vanish absolutely. You will die on your next incursion; or you will get through to the wilds a last time and remain there to be a male in the Barrens or the Bottoms. There is no plan, there has never been any plan except to live: that everybody be allowed to live once -- a little while at least. To have been is to be forever. But never to have been is to be nothing."

"Oh, we make plans, the nine-year-old male and I. But they close in on us more and kill more of us every time. And we run out of tricks and dodges and evasions. The prediction scopes on their guns know them all. They know when we will break pace, when we will cut back, even before we know it."

"There is one trick that they don't know, Ishmael of the high crine and the wobbly eyes," Jane the Crane said. "If you are trapped for the last time, run straight. The scopes will not understand it, and the hunter-men will not understand it. Run a straight line that last time. The very idea of a straight line has vanished from this world."

Quickcoiner had poured more money to the tipsters. Slickstock had organized beaters. Peeler had led incursions into the Barrens and Bottoms and Hills that had left those refuges torn to pieces.

Ishmael could tell by the tint of the streams in the mornings how many had died in the Barrens the night before.

"It is the last day," Jane the Crane told Ishmael now. "Not the last day for you, maybe. Not the last day for me, maybe. But the last day for us. I knew which was the last day I would have with your father. I know this is the last day I will have you. Whatever I have done I have done. Now it is time that I do it again."

After that, Ishmael went on incursion and got through with a good pack of kids. He got back just in the closing hours of swing-time and found that every entrance to every burrow was spotted and guarded and closed to him. He could smell the hunters smell ing him. He could sense their sensors.

He heard also that his mother Jane the Crane had now been declared open game. He was trapped and angry. He was an animal-smart six-year-old boy of the species that had once been human, that might again be human after its freakish interlude. He was a towering and intelingent example of that species which was being hewn to death in its best, in its left-handed blood.

He was blocked in, he was sighted, he took to the trees. This city (thanks for all green and growing favors) had preserved its trees. But the trees did not reach all the way to the Barrens. They did not, but they reached to --

Too late! He sniciled the trip wire, of course, but he could not avoid tripping it, not at the speed he was going. And he hadn't expected a sky trap, a treetop trap. He had never encountered such before. But the tipsters had gathered information on Ishmael's every route, even his routes through the high trees.

There was a searing and acrid explosion. There was a ballooning wave of green fragments and gray-brown bark branches, and there was a sudden gap in the sky where there had been foliage. Ishmael, broken and burned considerably, fell to the street out of that sudden gap in the sky. Communication crackled, and three sets of nothoi-hunters converged on the boy. Peeler was barking that it was his kill and the other sets should desist.

Ishmael, dazed and bloodied, rose out of the green trash that covered him and began to run in the direction of the Barrens. He ran in a straight line. The short-range rifles began to cough at him; they were mostly from Peeler's set. One set of hunters did desist. Another set was firing crazily. It almost seemed as if men were firing at Peeler and Slickstock and Quickcoiner. There were confused and angry cries and the barking of weapons, but Ishmael ran on, straight as a lance and untouched; ran on under the last of these trees, under the open sky, toward distant trees again, on and on.

The prediction scopes of the hunters' rifles simply could not handle a straight-line trail. Nothing in their data or in their world gave information on this ultimate evasion tactic. The scope on Peeler's own gun failed in frustration and smoke, and the other scopes glowed red in malfunction and failure.

It seemed that Ishmael might make it through clear again, to trees, to escape, to the Barrens. He didn't. A ricochet shot killed him there, no more than a dozen bounds from the skirting woods. He bunched and fell; he looked half animal, half child, as he curled into a small ball and died quickly.

There was Peeler's barking laugh of triumph; then a quick flash out of those skirting trees sawed it in half. Something had dived down from those trees, too swift for free fall. The something had hit, rolled, scurried, run, and swooped to the curled-up ball that was the dead boy Ishmael. The something had Ishmael (knowing that he was dead), bounded with him while the fury howl and fast clatter of bullets came from at least two sets of hunters, reached the skirting trees with the burden, and bounded up a trunk like a giant squirrel. Perhaps the apparition got away clear, perhaps not. The trees were almost bowed over with the blow of automatic nearer weapons.

It had been the ten-year-old male from the Barrens who had come and snatched the body of Ishmael from under the noses of the the guns. For what? He himself knew that Ishmael was already dead. He himself had taught Ishmael never to waste time on a dead one. For what then?

For heroism. He did not know that heroism was already dead. He believed that he could establish a mystique and a tomb.

Half a dozen sets of hunters were now after the young male and his dead burden. Not the set of Peeler, however. Peeler's set had got its kill, though by accident. It wanted more of the same blood, and it had one more prey assigned to it as open game.

"Where's the mother?" Peeler howled. "We may as well have double party today," Slickstock exulted. "Tipsters, tipsters, where is the leggy one?" Quickcoiner screeched.

But Jane the Crane had already rushed out, wailing and keening:

"Oh my son, Oh my son!" she cried. "Oh my son, come back to me!"

Somehow that didn't sound like Jane the Crane's way of carrying on.

But shots sang out. Janine went rigid in spread agony; she fell at full length; she spilled out gore, quivered, and was quiet.

The shots had not come from the unready guns of Peeler's set.

They had come, apparently, from another set of hunters down a side street. There was an afterbirth of firing from there also; again it almost seemed as if someone was shooting it Peeler's set. Peeler and his associates took cover, confused by the dangerous random firing, happy that Ishmael and his mother had been killed, somewhat morbid that they themselves had not done all the killing.

(Check it, sensors, check it. Is there something tricky about all this? -- No. It appears quite authentic.)

Janine Pervicaia lay in her gore in the open street, and a yellow-card street-sweeper came dutifully to dispose of her. Slain illegal women were common enough, of course; but Janine was uncommonly comely and loggy, and many eyes were on her. This had to be done carefully, and she herself was not very careful now. But what would it matter, when she was already slain?

Slain? She was not slain. She wasn't touched. She hadn't lived with

Morgan that long, she hadn't lived with Ishmael that long, to be killed in the open street, and for nothing. But it is good to have "Dead" written on your record and have it closed when it has gotten out of hand. Perhaps one can become another person with another records or with none.

The yellow-card street-sweeper (who looked very like Morgan Saunders and had been friend of him) did indeed gather Janine up as if she were dead, bending her difficultly in the middle and stuffing her into his wheeled canister. Quite a bit of her still stuck out; she was pretty leggy. But there had been signal between Jane the Crane and the sweeper, and perhaps illegal communication had also been held with others.

The gore that had spilled out in the street was not Jane's own. Many of the illegal birthing women now carried gore with them for just such eventualities as this. (And there were more and more of them now in the ghetto that is under the ghetto; there were more and more of their issue getting through to the various Barrens to set up kids' kingdoms. For already the Plateau had begun to tremble with its great underlying fault. Earthquake and Volcano and Upheaval!)

"Is it Agar again, or is it the Jane?" the trundling sweeper asked softly to the inside of his canister. "No, no, do not sing and whistle, or softly if you do. That's enough to make any canister suspect."

Jane the Crane had lost her man, the dashing street-sweeper from over the sea. She had lost her son Ishmael, the incandescent wild colt of a boy. But she sang and whistled (doubled up as she was in the canister) gaily but so low that only her new sweeper-man could hear her.

She'd do it again -- and again. She would be a birthing woman once more. And once more she would give merriment with her milk.

#### NOR LIMESTONE ISLANDS

A lapidary is one who cuts, polishes, engraves, and sets small stones. He is also a scrivener with a choppy style who sets in little stones or pieces here and there and attempts to make a mosaic out of them.

But what do you call one who cuts and sets very large stones?

Take a small lapillus or stone for instance:

The origin of painting as an art in Greece is connected with definite historical personages; but that of sculpture is lost in the mists of legend. Its authentic history does not begin until about the year B.C. 600. It was regarded as an art imparted to men by the gods; for such is the thought expressed in the assertion that the earliest statues fell from heaven.

-- "Statuana Ars; Sculpture," -- Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities.

We set that little stone in one corner, even though it at, contains a misunderstanding of what fell from heaven: it wasn't finished statues.

Then we set another small stone:

(We haven't the exact citation of this. It's from Charles Fort or from one of his imitators.) It's of a scientist who refused to believe that several pieces of limestone had fallen from the sky, even though two farmers had seen them fall. They could not have fallen from the sky, the scientist said, because there is no limestone in the sky. (What would that scientist have done if he had been confronted with the question of Whales in the Sky?)

We set that little stone of wisdom into one corner. And we look around for other stones to set.

The limestone salesman was making his pitch to the city commissioners. He had been making a poor pitch and he was a poor salesman. All he had was price (much less than one tenth that of the other bidders) and superior quality. But the limestone salesman did not make a good appearance. He was bare-chested (and colossally deep-chested). He had only a little shoulder jacket above, and a folded drape below. On his feet he had the crepida or Hermes-sandals, made of buckskin apparently: a silly affectation. He was

darkly burnt in skin and hair, but the roots of his hair and of his skin indicated that he was blond in both. He was golden-bearded, but the beard (and in fact the whole man) was covered with chalk-dust or rock-dust. The man was sweaty, and he smelled. His was a composite smell of limestone and edged bronze and goats and clover and honey and ozone and lentils and sour milk and dung and strong cheese.

"No, I don't believe that we want to deal with you at all," the mayor of the city was saying. "The other firms are all reputable and long established."

"Our firm is long established," the limestone salesman said.

"It has been doing business from the same - ah -- cart for nine thousand years."

"Balderdash," the streets and sewers commissioner swore. "You won't even give us the address of your firm, and you haven't put in a formal bid."

"The address is Stutzamutza," the limestone salesman said. "That's all the address I can give you. There isn't any other address. And I will put in a formal bid if you will show me how to do it. I offer you three hundred tons of the finest marble-limestone, cut exactly to specification, and set in place, guaranteed to take care of your project, guaranteed to be without flaw, in either pure white or variegated; I offer this delivered and set within one hour, all for the price of three hundred dollars or three hundred bushels of cracked corn."

"Oh take it, take it!" a Miss Phosphor McCabe cried out. "We elect you gentlemen to do our business for us at bargain prices. Do not pass up this fine bargain, I beg you." Phosphor McCabe was a lady photographer who had nine fingers in every pie.

"You be quiet, young lady, or we will have you put out of the hearing room," said the parks and playgrounds commissioner. "You will wait your turn, and you will not interfere in other cases. I shudder to think what your own petition will be today. Was ever a group so put upon by cranks as ourselves?"

"You have a very bad reputation, man," the finance commissioner said to the limestone salesman, "insofar as anyone has heard of you before. There is some mumble that your limestone or marble is not substantial, that it will melt away like hailstones. There is even a rumor that you had something to do with the terrible hailstorm of the night before last."

"Ah, we just had a little party at our place that night," the limestone salesman said. "We had a few dozen bottles of Tontitown wine from some stone that we set over in Arkansas, and we drank it up. We didn't hurt anybody or anything with those hailstones. Hey, some of them were as big as basketballs, weren't they! But we were careful where we let them fall. How often do you see a hailstorm as wild as that that doesn't do any damage at all to anything?"

"We can't afford to look silly," the schools and activities commissioner said. "We have been made to look silly in quite a few cases lately, not all of them our own fault. We can't afford to buy limestone for a project like this from someone like you."

"I wonder if you could get me about a hundred and twenty tons of good quality pink granite?" asked a smiling pinkish man in the hearing room.

"No, that's another island entirely," the limestone salesman said. "I'll tell them if I see them."

"Mr. Chalupa, I don't know what your business is here today," the mayor said severely to the smiling pinkish man, "but you will wait your turn, and you will not mix into this case. Lately it seems that our open hearings are just one nut after another."

"How can you lose?" the limestone salesman asked the commissioners. "I will supply and cut and set the stones. If you are not satisfied, I will leave the stones at no cost, or I will remove them again. And not until you are completely satisfied do you pay me the three hundred dollars or the three hundred bushels of cracked corn."

"I want to go to your country with you," Miss Phosphor McCabe burst out. "I am fascinated by what I have heard of it. I want to do a photographic article about it for the Heritage Geographical Magazine. How far away is your



country now?"

"All right," the limestone salesman said. "I'll wait for you. We'll go just as soon as I have transacted my business and you have transacted yours. We like everybody and we want everybody to come and visit us, but hardly anybody wants to. Right now, my country is about three miles from here. Last chance, gentlemen: I offer you the best bargain in quality marble-limestone that you'll ever find if you live two hundred years. And I hope you do all live to be two hundred. We like everybody and we'd like to see everybody live two hundred years at least."

"Absolutely not," said the mayor of the city. "We'd be the laughing-stock of the whole state if we did business with someone like you. What kind of a country of yours are you talking about that's only three miles from here? Absolutely not. You are wasting your time and ours, man."

"No, no, it just couldn't be," said the streets and sewers commissioner. "What would the papers print if they heard that we had bought limestone from somebody nearly as disreputable as a saucerian?"

"Rejected, rejected," said the parks and playgrounds commissioner. "We were elected to transact the city's business with economy and dignity."

"Ah well, all right," the limestone salesman said. "You can't sell a stylobate every time you try. Good day, commissioners. No hurry, lady. I'll wait for you." And the limestone salesman went out, leaving, as it seemed, a cloud of rock-dust in his wake.

"What a day!" the schools and activities commissioner moaned. "What a procession of jokers we have had! Anyhow, that one can't be topped."

"I'm not so sure," the mayor grumbled. "Miss Phosphor McCabe is next."

"Oh, I'll be brief," Phosphor said brightly. "All I want is a permit to build a pagoda on that thirty-acre hill that my grandfather left me. It won't interfere with anything. There won't be any utilities to run to it. And it will be pretty."

"Ah, why do you want to build a pagoda?" the streets and sewers commissioner asked.

"So I can take pictures of it. And just because I want to build a pagoda."

"What kind of a pagoda will it be?" the parks and playgrounds commissioner asked.

"A pink pagoda."

"How big will it be?" the schools and activities commissioner asked.

"Thirty acres big. And four hundred feet high. It will be high and it won't bother anything."

"Why do you want it so big?" the mayor asked.

"So it will be ten times as big as the Black Pagoda in India. It'll be real pretty and an attraction to the area."

"Do you have the money to build this with?" the streets and sewers commissioner asked.

"No, I don't have hardly any money. If I sell my photographic article "With Camera and Canoe on Sky-High Stutzamutza" to the Heritage Geographical Magazine. I will get some money for it. And I have been snapping unrehearsed camera portraits of all you gentlemen for the last few minutes, and I may be able to sell them to Comic Weekly if I can think of cute headings for them. As to the money to build the Pink Pagoda, oh, I'll think of something."

"Miss McCabe, your request is remanded or remaindered or whatever, which is the same thing as being tabled," the mayor said.

"What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure. The legal commissioner is absent today, but he always says something like that when we want to pass the buck for a little while."

"It means come back in one week, Miss McCabe," the streets and sewers commissioner said.

"All right," Miss Phosphor McCabe agreed. "I couldn't possibly start on the Pink Pagoda before a week anyhow."

And now we set this odd-shaped stone over in the other corner:

The seventeenth century discovery of the Polynesian Islands by common seamen was one of the ancient paradise promises fulfilled. The green islands, the blue sea, the golden beaches and the golden sunlight, the dusky girls! Fruit incomparable, fish incomparable, roast pig and baked bird beyond believing, breadfruit and volcano, absolute and continuing perfection of weather, brown-skin paradise maidens such as are promised in alcoran, song and string-music and surf-music! This was the Promised Paradise of the Islands, and it came true.

But even this was a weak thing beside the less known, the earlier and continuing discovery of the Floating Islands (or the Travertine Islands) by more intrepid farers. The girls of the Floating Islands are lighter (except for the cool blacks on the Greenstone Dolomites) than the Polynesian maidens; they are more intelligent and much more full of fun; are more handsome and fuller-bodied; are of an artier and more vital culture. They are livelier. Oh how they are livelier! And the regions themselves defy description. For color and zest, there is nothing in Polynesia or Aegea or Antilla to compare at all. And all the Travertine people are so friendly! Perhaps it is well that they are little known and little visited. We may be too weak for their experience.

Facts of the Paradise Legend by Harold Bluewater.

Look closely at that little stone ere we leave it. Are you sure that you have correctly noted the shape of it?

Then a still smaller stone to be set in, here where there seems too empty a little gap. It's a mere quotation:

"In Lapidary Inscription a Man is not upon Oath."

-- Doctor Johnson.

Miss Phosphor McCabe did visit the limestone salesman 5 country, and she did do the photographic article "With Camera and Canoe in Sky-High Stutzamutza." The stunning, eye-blowing, heart-swelling, joy-filled color photography cannot be given here, but these are a few extracts from the sustaining text:

"Stutzamutza is a limestone land of such unbelievable whiteness as to make the eyes ache with delight. It is this super-whiteness as a basis that makes all the other colors stand out with such clarity. There cannot be anywhere a bluer sky than, for most of the hours and days, surrounds Stutzamutza (see plates I and II). There cannot be greener fields, where there are fields, nor more silvery water (plates IV and V). The waterfalls are absolute rainbows, especially Final Falls, when it flows clear off the high land (plate VI). There cannot be more variegated cliffs, blue, black, pink, ochre, red, green, but always with that more-white-than-white basic (plate VII). There cannot be such a sun anywhere else. It shines here as it shines nowhere on the world.

"Due to the high average elevation of Stutzamutza (there will be some boggled eyes when I reveal just what I do mean by the average elevation of this place), the people are all wonderfully deep-chested or deep-breasted. They are like something out of fable. The few visitors who come here from lower, from more mundane elevations, are uniform in their disbelief. 'Oh, oh,' they will say. 'There can't be girls like that.' There are, however (see plate VIII). 'How long has this been going on?' these occasional visitors ask. It has been going on for the nine thousand years of recorded Stutzamutza history; and, beyond that, it has been going on as long as the world has been going on.

"Perhaps due to their deep-breastedness the Stutzamutza people are superb in their singing. They are lusty, they are loud, they are beautiful and enchanting in this. Their instruments, besides the conventional flutes and bagpipes (with their great lung-power, these people do wonderful things with the bagpipes) and lyric harps and tabors, are the thunder-drum (plate IX) and the thirteen-foot-long trumpets (plates X and XI). It is doubted whether any other people anywhere would be able to blow these roaring trumpets.

"Perhaps it is due also to their deep-breastedness that the Stutzamutza people are all so lustily affectionate. There is something both breath-taking and breath-giving in their Olympian carnality. They have a robustness and

glory in their man and woman interfluents that leave this underdeveloped little girl more than amazed (plates X to XIX). Moreover, these people are witty and wise, and always pleasant.

"It is said that originally there was not any soil at all on Stutzamutza. The people would trade finest quality limestone, marble, and dolomite for equal amounts of soil, be it the poorest clay or sand. They filled certain crevices with this soil and got vegetation to begin. And, in a few thousand years, they built countless verdant terraces, knolls and valleys. Grapes, olives and clover are now grown in profusion. Wine and oil and honey gladden the deep hearts of the people. The wonderful blue-green clover (see plate XX) is grazed by the bees and the goats. There are two separate species of goat, the meadow and pasture goat kept for its milk and cheese and mohair, and the larger and wilder mountain goat hunted on the white crags and eaten for its flavorsome, randy meat. Woven mohair and dressed buckskin are used for the Stutzamutza clothing. The people are not voluminously clothed, in spite of the fact that it becomes quite chilly on the days when the elevation suddenly increases.

"There is very little grain grown on Stutzamutza. Mostly, quarried stones are bartered for grain. Quarrying stone is the main industry, it is really the only one on Stutzamutza. The great quarries in their cutaways sometimes reveal amazing fossil deposits. There is a complete fossilized body of a whale (it is an extinct Zeuglodon or Eocene Whale) (see plate XXI). "If this is whale indeed, then this all must have been under ocean once," I said to one of my deep-chested friends. "Oh certainly," he said, "nowhere else is limestone formed than in ocean." "Then how has it risen so far above it?" I asked. "That is something for the Geologists and the Hyphologists to figure out," my friend said.

"The fascinating aspect of the water on Stutzamutza is its changeableness. A lake is sometimes formed in a single day, and it may be emptied out in one day again by mere tipping. The rain is prodigious sometimes, when it is decided to come into that aspect. To shoot the rapids on the sudden swollen rivers is a delight. Sometimes ice will form all over Stutzamutza in a very few minutes. The people delight in this sudden ice, all except the little under-equipped guest. The beauty of it is stupendous; so is its cold. They shear the ice off in great sheets and masses and blocks, and let it fall for fun.

"But all lesser views are forgotten when one sees the waterfalls tumbling in the sunlight. And the most wonderful of all of them is Final Falls. Oh to watch it fall clear off Stutzamutza (see plate XXII), to see it fall into practically endless space, thirty thousand feet, sixty thousand feet, turning into mist, into sleet or snow or rain or hail depending on the sort of day it is, to see the miles-long rainbow of it extending to the vanishing point so far below your feet!

"There is a particularly striking pink marble cliff toward the north end of the land (the temporary north end of the land). 'You like it? You can have it,' my friends say. That is what I had been fishing for them to say.

Yes, Miss Phosphor McCabe did the really stunning photographic article for Heritage Geographical Magazine. Heritage Geographical did not accept it, however. Miss Phosphor McCabe had arrived at some unacceptable conclusions, the editor said.

"What really happened is that I arrived at an unacceptable place," Miss Phosphor said. "I remained there for six days. I photographed it and I narrated it."

"Ah, we'd never get by with that," the editor said. Part of the trouble was Miss Phosphor McCabe's explanations of just what she did mean by the average elevation of Stutzamutza (it was quite high), and by "days of increasing elevation."

Now here is another stone of silly shape. At first glimpse, it will not seem possible to fit it into the intended gap. But the eye is deceived: this

shape will fit into the gap nicely. It is a recollection in age of a thing observed during a long lifetime by a fine weather eye.

Already as a small boy I was interested in clouds. I believed that certain clouds preserve their identities and appear again and again; and that some clouds are more solid than others.

Later, when I took meteorology and weather courses at the university, I had a classmate who held a series of seemingly insane beliefs. At the heart of these was the theory that certain apparent clouds are not vapor masses at all but are floating stone islands in the sky. He believed that there were some thirty of these islands, most of them composed of limestone, but some of them of basalt or sandstone, even of shale. He said that one, at least, of them was composed of pot-stone or soap-stone.

This classmate said that these floating islands were sometimes large, one of them being at least five miles long: that they were intelligently navigated to follow the best camouflage, the limestone islands usually traveling with masses of white fleecy clouds, the basalt islands traveling with dark thunder-heads, and so on. He believed that these islands sometimes came to rest on earth, that each of them had its own several nests in unfrequented regions. And he believed that the floating islands were peopled.

We had considerable fun with Mad Anthony Tummley, our eccentric classmate. His ideas, we told each other, were quite insane. And, indeed, Anthony himself was finally institutionalized. It was a sad case, but one that could hardly be discussed without laughter.

But later, after more than fifty years in the weather profession, I have come to the conclusion that Anthony Tummley was right in every respect. Several of us veteran weathermen share this knowledge now, but we have developed a sort of code for the thing, not daring to admit it openly, even to ourselves. 'Whales in the Sky' is the code-name for this study, and we pretend to keep it on a humorous basis.

Some thirty of these floating stone islands are continuously over our own country (there may be more than a hundred of them in the world). They are tracked on radar; they are sighted again and again in their slightly changed forms (some of them, now and then, seem to slough off small masses of stone and deposit it somehow on earth); they are known, they are named.

They are even visited by some persons of odd character: always a peculiar combination of simplicity, acceptance, intelligence and strange rapport. There are persons and families in rural situations who employ these peopled islands to carry messages and goods for them. In rural and swampland Louisiana, there was once some wonder that the people did not more avail themselves of the Intercoastal Canal barges to carry their supplies, and their products to market. 'How are the barges better than the stone islands that we have always used?' these people ask. 'They aren't on a much more regular schedule, they aren't much faster, and they won't give you anything like the same amount of service in exchange for a hundredweight of rice. Besides that, the stone-island people are our friends, and some of them have intermarried with us Gajuns.' There are other regions where the same easy cooperation obtains.

Many of the stone-island people are well known along certain almost regular routes. These people are all of a powerful and rather coarse beauty. They are good-natured and hearty. They actually traffic in stone, trading amazing tonnages of top grade building stone for grain and other simple provisions.

There is no scientific explanation at all of how these things can be, how the stone islands are able to float in the sky. But that they do so is the open secret of perhaps a million persons.

Really, I am now too wealthy to be put in a mad-house (though I made my money in a rather mad traffic which would not be generally believed). I am too old to be laughed at openly: I will merely be smiled at as an eccentric. I have now retired from that weather profession which served me as a front for many years (which profession, however, I loved and still love).

I know what I know. There are more things in the zone fifteen miles above the earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio.

-- Memories of 52 Years as a Weather Observer by Hank Fairday (Privately printed 1970).

Miss Phosphor McCabe did another really stunning photo-graphic article for the Heritage Geographical Magazine. It had a catchy title: "All Right, Then You Tell Me How I Did It, or The Building of the Pink Pagoda."

"The Pink Pagoda is complete, except for such additions as shall have made whenever the notion strikes me, and whenever my high-flying friends are in the neighborhood. It is by far the largest structure in the world and also, in my n opinion, the most beautiful. But it is not massive in appearance: it is light and airy. Come see it in the stone, all of you! Come see it in the color photography (plates I to CXXIX) if you are not able to come yourself. This wonderful structure gives the answers to hundreds of questions, if you will just en your eyes and your ears.

"Of ancient megalithic structures it has sometimes been asked how a hundred or more of one hundred ton blocks of stone could have been piled up, and fitted so carefully that even a knife-blade could not be inserted between the blocks. It's easy. You usually don't set a hundred one hundred ton blocks, unless for a certain ornamentation. You set one ten thousand ton block, and the joinings are merely simulated. In the Pink Pagoda I have had set blocks as heavy as three hundred thousand tons of pink limestone (see plate XXI).

"They bring the whole island down in place. They split off what block is wanted at that location (and, believe me, they are some splitters); then they withdraw the island a little bit and leave the block in place.

"Well, how else was it done? How did I get the one hundred and fifty thousand ton main capstone in place four hundred and fifty feet in the air? With ramps? Oh stop it, you'll scare the cuckoos. The stone pillars and turrets all around and below it are like three-dimensional lace-work, and that main capstone had to go on last. It wasn't done by rocking it up on ramps, even if there had been a place for the ramps. It was all done on one Saturday afternoon, and here are the sequence pictures showing just how it was done. It was done by using a floating island, and by detaching pieces of that island as it was floated into place. I tell you that there is no other way that a one hundred and five pound girl can assemble a thirty million ton Pink Pagoda in six hours. She has got to have a floating island, with a north cliff of pink limestone, and she has got to be very good friends with the people on that island.

"Please come and see my Pink Pagoda. All the people and all the officials avert their eyes from it. They say that it is impossible that such a thing could be there, and therefore it cannot be there. But it is there. See it yourself (or see plates IV, IX, XXXIII, LXX especially). And it is pretty (see plates XIX, XXIV, V, LIV). But best, come see it as it really is."

Miss Phosphor McCabe did that rather astonishing photographic article for the Heritage Geographical Magazine. Heritage Geographical refused to publish it, though, stating that such things were impossible. And they refused to come and see the Pink Pagoda itself, which is a pity, since it is the largest and most beautiful structure on earth.

It stands there yet, on that thirty acre hill right on the north edge of town. And you have not heard the last stone of it yet. The latest, a bad-natured little addition, will not be the last: Miss Phosphor swears that it will not be.

There was a flimsy-winged enemy flew down, shortly after the first completion of the pagoda, and set the latest very small stone (it is called the egg-of-doubt stone) on top of the main capstone. 'Twas a crabbed written little stone, and it read:

"I will not trow two-headed calves,"  
Say never-seens, and also haves.  
"I'll not believe a hollow earth,"

Say seepicals of doubtful birth.  
"I'll not concede Atlantis you,  
"Nor yet Lemuria or Mu,  
"Nor woodsmen in northwestern lands,  
"Nor bandy-legg'd saucerians,  
"Nor ancient technologic myth,  
"Nor charm of timeless megalith.  
"I will not credit Whales that fly,  
"Nor Limestone Islands in the Sky."  
Unfolk Ballad

That crabby little ballad-stone on the top almost spoils the Pink Pagoda for me. But it will be removed, Miss Phosphor McCabe says, just as soon as her traveling friends are back in this neighborhood and she can get up there. That is all that we have to say on the subject of stone setting.

Does anyone else have something further to add?

#### SKY

The Sky-Seller was Mr. Furtive himself, fox-muzzled, ferret-eyed, slithering along like a snake, and living under the Rocks. The Rocks had not been a grand place for a long time. It had been built in the grand style on a mephitic plot of earth (to transform it), but the mephitic earth had won out. The apartments of the Rocks had lost their sparkle as they had been divided again and again, and now they were shoddy. The Rocks had weathered. its once pastel hues were now dull grays and browns.

The five underground levels had been parking places for motor vehicles when those were still common, but now these depths were turned into warrens and hovels. The Sky-Seller lurked and lived in the lowest and smallest and meanest of them all.

He came out only at night. Daylight would have killed him; he knew that. He sold out of the darkest shadows of the night. He had only a few (though oddly select) chents, and nobody knew who his supplier was. He said that he had no suppher, that he gathered and made the stuff himself.

Welkin Alauda, a full-bodied but light-moving girl (it was said that her bones were hollow and filled with air), came to the Sky-Seller just before first light, just when he had become highly nervous but had not yet bolted to his underground.

"A sack of Sky from the nervous mouse. jump, or the sun will gobble your house!" Welkin sang-song, and she was already higher than most skies.

"Hurry, hurry!" the Sky-Seller begged, thrusting the sack to her while his black eyes trembled and glittered (if real light should ever reflect into them he'd go blind).

Welkin took the sack of Sky, and scrambled money notes into his hands which had furred palms. (Really? Yes, really.)

"World be flat and the Air be round, wherever the Sky grows underground," Welkin intoned, taking the sack of Sky and soaring along with a light scamper of feet (she hadn't much weight, her bones were hollow). And the Sky-Seller darted head-first down a black well-shaft thing to his depths.

Four of them went Sky-Diving that morning, Welkin herself, Karl Vlieger, Icarus Riley, Joseph Alzarsi; and the pilot was -- (no, not who you think, he had already threatened to turn them all in; they'd use that pilot no more) -- the pilot was Ronald Kolibri in his little crop-dusting plane.

But a crop-duster will not go up to the frosty heights they liked to take off from. Yes it will -- if everybody is on Sky. But it isn't pressurized, and it doesn't carry oxygen. That doesn't matter, not if everybody is on Sky, not if the plane is on Sky too. Welkin took Sky with Mountain Whizz, a carbonated drink. Karl stuffed it into his lip like snuff.

Icarus Riley rolled it and smoked it. Joseph Alzarsi needled it, mixed with drinking alcohol, into his main vein. The pilot, Ronny, tongued and chewed it like sugar dust. The plane named Shrike took it through the manifold.

Fifty thousand feet -- you can't go that high in a crop-duster. Thirty below zero -- Ah, that isn't cold! Air too thin to breathe at all -- with Sky, who needs such included things as air?

Welkin stepped out, and went up, not down. It was a trick she often pulled. She hadn't much weight; she could always get higher than the rest of them. She went up and up until she disappeared. Then she drifted down again, completely enclosed in a sphere of ice crystal, sparkling inside it and making monkey faces at them.

The wind yelled and barked, and the divers took off. They all went down, soaring and gliding and tumbling; standing still sometimes, it seemed; even rising again a little. They went down to clouds and spread out on them; dark-white clouds with the sun inside them and suffusing them both from above and below. They cracked Welkin's ice-crystal sphere and she stepped out of it. They ate the thin pieces of it, very cold and brittle and with a tang of ozone. Alzarsi took off his shirt and sunned himself on a cloud.

"You will burn," Welkin told him. "Nobody burns so as when sunning himself on a cloud." That was true.

They sank through the black-whiteness of these clouds and came into the limitless blue concourse with clouds above and below them. It was in this same concourse that Hippodameia used to race her horses, there not being room for such coursers to run on earth. The clouds below folded up and the clouds above folded down, forming a discrete space.

"We have our own rotundity and sphere here," said Icarus Riley (these are their Sky-Diver names, not their legal names), "and it is apart from all worlds and bodies. The worlds and bodies do not exist for as long a time as we say that they do not exist. The axis of our present space is its own concord. Therefore, it being in perfect concord, Time stops."

All their watches had stopped, at least.

"But there is a world below," said Karl. "It is an abject world, and we can keep it abject forever if we wish. But it has at least a shadowy existence, and later we will let it fill out again in our compassion for lowly things. It is flat, though, and we must insist that it remain flat."

"This is important," Joseph said with the deep importance of one on Sky. "So long as our own space is bowed and globed, the world must remain flat or depressed. But the world must not be allowed to bow its back again. We are in danger if it ever does. So long as it is truly Flat and abject it cannot crash ourselves to it."

"How long could we fall," Welkin asked, "if we had not stopped time, if we let it flow at its own pace, or at ours? How long could we fall?"

"Hephaestus once tumbled through space all day long," Icarus Riley said, "and the days were longer then."

Karl Vliieger had gone wall-eyed from an interior-turned sexual passion that he often experienced in diving. Icarus Riley seemed to be on laughing gas suddenly; this is a sign that Sky is not having perfect effect. Joseph Alzarsi felt a cold wind down his spine and a series of jerky little premonitions.

"We are not perfect," Joseph said. "Tomorrow or the next day we may be, for we do approach perfection. We win a round. And we win another. Let us not throw away our victory today through carelessness. The earth has bowed his old back a little bit, and we make ready for him! Now, guys, now!"

Four of them (or maybe only three of them) pulled the rings. The chutes unpeeled, flowered, and jerked. They had been together like a sheaf in close conversation. But suddenly, on coming to earth, they were spread out over five hundred yards.

They assembled. They packed their chutes. That would be all the diving for that day.

"Welkin, how did you pack your chute so quickly?" Icarus asked her suspiciously.

"I don't know."

"You are always the slowest one of us, and the sloppiest. Someone always has to re-roll your chute for you before it is used again. And you were the last one to land just now. How were you the first one to be packed? How did you roll it so well? It has the earmarks of my own rolling, just as I rolled it for you before we took off this morning."

"I don't know, Icarus. Oh, I think I'll go up again, straight up."

"No, you've sailed and dived enough for one morning. Welkin, (lid you even open your chute?"

"I don't know."

High on Sky, they went up again the next morning. The little plane named Shrike flew up as no plane had ever flown before, up through Storm. The storm-shrouded earth shrank to the size of a pea-doogie.

"We will play a trick on it," said Welkin. "When you're on Sky you can play a trick on anything and make it abide by it. I will say that the pea-doogie that was the world is nothing. See, it is gone. Then I will select another pea-doogie, that one there, and I will call it the world. And that is the world that we will come down to in a little while. I've switched worlds on the world, and it doesn't know what happened to it."

"It's uneasy, though," Joseph Alzarsi spoke through flared nostrils. "You shook it. No wonder the world has its moments of self-doubt."

They were one million feet high. The altimeter didn't go that high, but Ronald Kolibri, the pilot, wrote out the extended figure in chalk to make it correct. Welkin stepped out. Karl and Icarus and Joseph stepped out. Ronald Kolibri stepped out, but only for a while. Then he remembered that he was the pilot and got back in the plane. They were so high that the air was black and star-filled instead of blue. It was so cold that the empty space was full of cracks and potholes. They dived half a million feet in no time at all. They pulled up laughing.

It was invigorating, it was vivifying. They stamped on the clouds, and the clouds rang like frosty ground. This was the ancestral country of all hoarfrost, of all grained-snow and glare-ice. Here was weather-maker, here was wind-son. They came into caves of ice mixed with moraine; they found antler hatchets and Hemicyon bones; they found coals still glowing. The winds bayed and hunted in packs through the chasms. These were the cold Fortean clouds, and their location is commonly quite high.

They came down below Storm, finding new sun and new air. it as pumpkin-summer, it was deep autumn in the sky.

They dropped again, miles and millennia, to full Sky-summer: the air so blue that it grew a violet patina on it to save the surface. Their own space formed about them again, as it did every day, and time stopped.

But not motion! Motion never stopped with them. Do you realize that nothingness in a void can still be in motion? And how much more they of the great centrality! There was Dynamic; there was sustaining vortex; there was the high serenity of fevered motion.

But is not motion merely a relationship of space to time? No. That is an idea that is common to people who live on worlds, but it is a subjective idea. Here, beyond the possible influence of any worlds, there was living motion without reference.

"Welkin, you look quite different today," Joseph Alzarsi spoke in wonder. "What is it?"

"I don't know. It's wonderful to be different and I'm wonderful."

"It is something missing from you," said Icarus. "I believe it is a defect missing."

"But I hadn't any, Icarus."

They were in central and eternal moment, and it did not end, it could not end, it goes on yet. Whatever else seems to happen, it is merely in parentheses to that moment.

"It is time to consider again," Icarus mused after a while. There is no



time or while in the Moment, but there is in the parentheses. "I hope it is the last time we will ever have to consider. We, of course, are in our own space and beyond time or tangent. But the earth, Such as it is, is approaching with great presumption and speed."

"But it's nothing to us!" Karl Vlieger suddenly raged out in a chthonic and phallic passion. "We can shatter it! We can shoot it to pieces like a clay pigeon! It cannot rush onto us like a slashing dog. Get down, world! Heel, you curl Heel, I say!"

"We say to one world 'rise' and it rises, and to another one 'heel' and it heels," Icarus Sky-spoke in his dynamic serenity.

"Not yet," Joseph Alzarsi warned. "Tomorrow we will be total. Today we are not yet. Possibly we could shatter the world like a clay pigeon if we wished, but we would not be lords of it if we had to shatter it."

"We could always make another world," said Welkin reasonably.

"Certainly, but this one is our testing. We will go to it when it is crouched down. We cannot allow it to come ravening to us. Hold! Hold there, we order you!"

And the uprushing world halted, cowed.

"We go down," said Joseph. "We will let it come tip only when it is properly broken."

("And they inclined the heavens and came down.")

Once more, three of them pulled the rings. And the chutes unpeeled, flowered, and jerked. They had been like a sheaf together in their moment; but now, coming to earth, they were suddenly scattered out over five hundred yards.

"Welkin, you didn't have your chute at all today!" Icarus gaped with some awe when they had assembled again. "That is what was different about you."

"No, I guess I didn't have it. There was no reason to have it if I didn't need it. Really, there was never any reason for me to have used one at all, ever."

"Ah, we were total today and didn't know it," Joseph ventured. "Tomorrow none of us will wear chutes. This is easier than I had believed."

Welkin went to the Sky-Seller to buy new Sky that night. Not finding him in the nearer shadows of the Rocks, she went down and down, drawn by the fungoid odor and the echoing dampness of the underground. She went through passages that were man-made, through passages that were natural, through passages that were unnatural. Some of these corridors, it is true, had once been built by men, but now they had reverted and became most unnatural deep-earth caverns. Welkin went down into the total blackness where there were certain small things that still mumbled out a faint white color; but it was the wrong color white, and the things were all of a wrong shape.

There was the dead white shape of Mycelium masses, the grotesqueness of Agaricus, the deformity of Deadly Amanita and of Morel. The gray-milky Lactarius glowed like lightless lanterns in the dark; there was the blue-white of the Deceiving Clitocybe and the yellow-white of the Caesar Agaric. There was the insane ghost-white of the deadhest and queerest of them all, the Fly Amanita, and a mole was gathering this.

"Mole, bring Sky for the Thing Serene, for the Minions tall and the Airy Queen," Welkin jangled. She was still high on Sky, but it had begun to leave her a little and she had the veriest touch of the desolate sickness.

"Sky for the Queen of the buzzing drones, with her hollow heart and her hollow bones," the Sky-Seller intoned hollowly.

"And fresh, Oh I want it fresh, fresh Sky!" Welkin cried.

"With these creatures there is no such thing as fresh," the Sky-Seller told her. "You want it stale, Oh so stale! Ingrown and aged and with its own mold grown moldy."

"Which is it?" Welkin demanded. "What is the name of the one you gather

it from?"

"The Fly Amanita."

"But isn't that simply a poisonous mushroom?"

"It has passed beyond that. It has sublimated. Its simple poison has had its second fermenting into narcotic."

"But it sounds so cheap that it be merely narcotic."

"Not merely narcotic. It is something very special in narcotic."

"No, no, not narcotic at all!" Welkin protested. "It is liberating, it is world-shattering. It is Height Absolute. It is motion and detachment itself. It is the ultimate. It is mastery."

"Why, then it is mastery, lady. It is the highest and lowest of all created things."

"No, no," Welkin protested again, "not created. It is not born, it is not made. I couldn't stand that. It is the highest of all uncreated things."

"Take it, take it," the Sky-Seller growled, "and be gone. Something begins to curl up inside me."

"I go!" Welkin said, "and I will be back many times for more."

"No, you will not be. Nobody ever comes back many times for Sky. You will be back never. Or one time. I think that you will be back one time."

They went up again the next morning, the last morning. But why should we say that it was the last morning? Because there would no longer be divisions or days for them. It would be one last eternal day for them now, and nothing could break it.

They went up in the plane that had once been named Shrike and was now named Eternal Eagle. The plane had repainted itself during the night with new name and new symbols, some of them not immediately understandable. The plane snuffled Sky into its manifold, and grinned and roared. And the plane went up!

Oh! Jerusalem in the Sky! How it went up!

They were all certainly perfect now and would never need Sky again. They were Sky.

"How little the world is!" Welkin rang out. "The towns are like fly-specks and the cities are like flies."

"It is wrong that so ignoble a creature as the Fly should have the exalted name," Icarus complained.

"I'll fix that," Welkin sang. "I give edict: That all the flies on earth be dead!" And all the flies on earth died in that instant.

"I wasn't sure you could do that," said Joseph Alzarsi. "The wrong is righted. Now we ourselves assume the noble name of Flies. There are no Flies but us!"

The five of them, including the pilot, Ronald Kolibri, stepped chuteless out of the Eternal Eagle.

"Will you be all right?" Ronald asked the rollicking plane.

"Certainly," the plane said. "I believe I know where there are other Eternal Eagles. I will mate."

It was cloudless, or else they had developed the facility of seeing through clouds. Or perhaps it was that, the earth having become as small as a marble, the clouds around it were insignificant. Pure light that had an everywhere source! (The sun also had become insignificant and didn't contribute much to the light.) Pure and intense motion that had no location reference. They weren't going anywhere with their intense motion (they already were everywhere, or at the super-charged center of everything).

Pure cold fever. Pure serenity. Impure hyper-space passion of Karl Vliieger, and then of all of them; but it was purely rampant at least. Stunning beauty in all things along with a towering cragginess that was just ugly enough to create an ecstasy.

Welkin Alauda was mythic with nenuphars in her hair. And it shall not be told what Joseph Alzarsi wore in his own hair. An always-instant, a million or

a billion years!

Not monotony, no! Presentation! Living sets! Scenery! The scenes were formed for the splinter of a moment; or they were formed forever. Whole worlds formed in a pregnant void: not spherical worlds merely, but dodeka-spherical, and those much more intricate than that. Not merely seven colors to play with, but seven to the seventh and to the seventh again.

Stars vivid in the bright light. You who have seen stars only in darkness be silent! Asteroids that they ate like peanuts, for now they were all metamorphic giants. Galaxies like herds of rampaging elephants. Bridges so long that both ends of them receded over the light-speed edges. Waterfalls, of a finer water, that bounced off galaxy clusters as if they were boulders.

Through a certain ineptitude of handling, Welkin extinguished the old sun with one such leaping torrent.

"It does not matter," Icarus told her. "Either a million or a billion years had passed according to the time-scale of the bodies, and surely the sun had already come onto dim days. You can always make other suns."

Karl Vlieger was casting lightning bolts millions of parsecs long and making looping contact with clustered galaxies with them.

"Are you sure that we are not using up any time?" Welkin asked them with some apprehension.

"Oh, time still uses itself tip, but we are safely out of the reach of it all," Joseph explained. "Time is only one very inefficient method of counting numbers. It is inefficient because it is limited in its numbers, and because the counter by such a system must die when he has come to the end of his series. That alone should weigh against it as a mathematical system; it really shouldn't be taught."

"Then nothing can hurt us ever?" Welkin wanted to be reassured.

"No, nothing can come at us except inside time and we are outside it. Nothing can collide with us except in space and we disdain space. Stop it, Karl! As you do it that's buggery."

"I have a worm in my own tract and it gnaws at me a little," the pilot Ronald Kolibri said. "It's in my internal space and it's crunching along at a pretty good rate."

"No, no, that's impossible. Nothing can reach or hurt us," Joseph insisted.

"I have a worm of my own in a still more interior tract," said Icarus, "the tract that they never quite located in the head or the heart or the bowels. Maybe this tract always was outside space. Oh, my worm doesn't gnaw, but it stirs. Maybe I'm tired of being out of reach of everything."

"Where do these doubts rise from?" Joseph sounded querulous. "You hadn't them an instant ago, you hadn't them as recently as ten million years ago. How can you have them now when there isn't any now?"

"Well, as to that --" Icarus began -- (and a million years went by) -- "as to that I have a sort of cosmic curiosity about an object in my own past" -- (another million years went by) -- "an object called world."

"Well, satisfy your curiosity then," Karl Vlieger snapped. "Don't you even know how to make a world?"

"Certainly I know how, but will it be the same?"

"Yes, if you're good enough. It will be the same if you make it the same."

Icarus Riley made a world. He wasn't very good at it and it wasn't quite the same, but it did resemble the old world a little.

"I want to see if some things are still there," Welkin clamored. "Bring it closer."

"It's unlikely your things are still there," Joseph said, "Remember that billions of years may have passed."

"The things will be there if I put them there," Icarus insisted.

"And you cannot bring it closer since all distance is now infinite," Karl maintained.

"At least I can focus it better," Icarus insisted, and he did. The world

appeared quite near.

"It remembers us like a puppy would," Welkin said. "See, it jumps up at us."

"It's more like a lion leaping for a treed hunter just out of reach," Icarus grtided. "But we are not treed."

"It can't ever reach us, and it wants to," Welkin piqued. "Let's reach down to it."

("And they inclined the heavens and went down.")

A most peculiar thing happened to Ronald Kolibri as he touched earth. He seemed to have a seizure. He went slack-faced, almost horror-faced, and he would not answer the others.

"What is it, Ronald?" Welkin begged in kindred anguish. "Oh, what is it? Somebody help him!"

Then Ronald Kolibri did an even more peculiar thing. He began to fold up and break up from the bottom. Bones slowly splintered and pierced out of him and his entrails gushed out. He compressed. He shattered. He splashed. Can a man splash?

The same sort of seizure overtook Karl Vlieger: the identical slack-face horror-face, the same folding up and breaking up from the bottom, the same hideous sequence.

And Joseph Alzarsi went into the same sundering state, baffled and breaking up.

"Icarus, what's happened to them?" Welkin screamed. "What is the slow loud booming?"

"They're dead. How could that be?" Icarus puzzled trembling. "Death is in time, and we are not."

Icarus himself passed through time as he crashed earth, breaking up, spilling out more odiously than any of them.

And Welkin touched earth, crashed, then what? She heard her own slow loud booming as she hit.

(Another million years went by, or some weeks.)

A shaky old woman on crutches was going down the middle-of- the-night passages that are under the Rocks. She was too old a woman to be Welkin Alauda, but not too old for a Welkin who had lived millions of years outside of time.

She had not died. She was lighter than the others, and besides she had done it twice before unscathed. But that was before she had known fear.

Naturally they had told her that she would never walk again; and now most unnaturally she was walking with crutches. Drawn by the fungoid odor and the echoing dampness she went down in the total dark to where small things were growing with the wrong color white and were all of the wrong shape. She wanted one thing only, and she would die without it.

"Sky for salving the broken Crone! Sky for the weal of my hollow bone!" she crackled in an old-woman voice. But it was only her own voice that echoed back to her.

Should a Sky-Seller live forever?

#### ONCE ON ARANEA

One fine spider silk, no more than 1"80,000 of an inch thick, could this bind and kill a man? He would soon know. It would be a curious death, to be done in by fine spider silk.

"-- but then mine has been a curious life," Scarble muttered from a tight throat, "and it might as well have an ironic end to it. I wonder if you know, you motherloving spiders," he called out with difficulty, "that every death is ironic. The arachnidian irony has a pretty fine edge, though."

It had begun on Aranea a week earlier. In their surveying of the

planet-sized asteroids of the Cercyon Belt, their practice was (after the team had completed the Initial Base Survey) to leave a lone man on the asteroid for a short period.

The theory was that any malevolent force, which might not move against a group, could come into the open against a lone man. In practice it had given various results.

Donners said that nothing at all happened on his world when he was there alone, and that nothing had happened to him. But Donners had developed a grotesque facial tic and an oddity of speech and manner. Something had happened to him which he had not realized.

Procop had simply disappeared from his world, completely and with no residue. He couldn't have traveled a hundred kilometers on foot in the time he had, and there was no reason for him to travel even ten. He should have left traces -- of the calcium which was hardly on that world at all, of cellular decomposition, of amino acids. If a gram of him had been left on that world in any form, the scanners would have found it, and they hadn't. But exploratory parties grow used to such puzzles.

Bernbeim said that he had gone to pieces when left alone. He did not know whether there had been strange happenings on his world or in his head. He had straightened up only with a great effort when he saw them come back for him, he said. Bernheim had always been a man of compulsive honesty.

Mann said that it hadn't been a picnic when he was left alone, but that nothing had happened there that he wouldn't be able to find an answer to if he could devote a thousand years to it. He said it was more a test of a man than of a world. But it was the test that the Party was to use for the livableness of a world.

On Aranea it was Scarbie who would remain alone and make the test. On Aranea, the Spider Asteroid, there were two sorts of creatures -- at first believed to be three. But two of these first apparent forms were different stages of the same species.

There were the small four-legged scutters. There were the two-legged, two-armed, upright straddling fingerlings. Finally there were the "Spiders" -- actually dodecapods, the largest of them as big as a teacup. The two-legged fingerlings were the spiders, after their metamorphosis.

Bernbeim was reading his report, the final bit for the Initial Base Survey:

"The basic emotion of the small quadrupeds, Scutterae Bernheimiensis, is subservience. They register that they are owned by the spider complex, and that they must serve it."

"So, there are two species, one slave to the other," said Mario. "It's a common pattern."

"The biped fingerlings, Larva Arachnida Marin, do not realize their relationship to the 'Spiders,'" Bernbeim continued. "When forced into the metamorphosis, their reaction is stark consternation."

"So would mine be," said Scarble. "And what's the basic emotion of the adult spiders, the Arachne Dodecapode Scarble?"

"It is mother-love, lately reoriented by an intrusion and intensified many-fold."

"By what intrusion? And how intensified?" Mann asked.

"We are the intrusion. We are the intensification," Bernheim explained. "They are intensely excited only since our arrival. That murmuring and chirping of millions of them is all for us. This is maternal affection gone hysterical -- for us!"

They exploded in the first real laughter ever heard on Aranea, and even the spiders giggled in million-voiced accord.

"Oh, those mother-loving spiders!" became their byword for their stay there, and it had to go into the report.

So it was with rare good humor that three of them (Bernbeim, Mann, Donners) took off and left Scarble alone on the Spider World, himself

chortling every time he thought of the maternal spiders. For companion, Scarble had only a dog named Dog, which is to say Cyon; it was a classical dog.

This would be easy. Scarble liked spiders and even looked like one -- a spindly, wiry man covered with black hair almost everywhere except on the top of his head; a man who ran much to long legs and arms and had not a great amount of body to him. When he waved his arms, as he did when he talked, he gave the impression of having more than two of them. Even his humor was spiderlike.

And what was there to scare any man in the golden daylight of Aranea? Scarble had the name of not being afraid of anything; he had been diligent to give himself that name. And courage is the normal complement of the male animal everywhere. Individual exceptions are common in every species, but they are abnormal. Scarble was normal.

And, should normal courage fail, they had left him a supply of Dutch Courage, and French, Scotch, Canadian, and Kentucky; as well as a distilled-on-the-wing drink known as Rocket Red. They always left a man with a good bottled stock.

It was on this prime stock that the shadow of the coming thing first fell -- and Scarble didn't recognize it. He was delighted when he woke from his first sleep on Aranea and saw the stuff as covered with cobwebs as though it had been a hundred years in a cellar. He sampled it with exceptional pleasure. Mellow! Even the Rocket Red had acquired age and potent dignity.

Then he walked all over Aranea with the dog Cyon. That whole world was covered with golden cobwebs; and it brought out the song in Scarble. Man afoot! Here was a whole echoing world to sing in! The full voice is also the normal complement of the male animal, and Scarble had a voice (a bad one) that would fill a world.

"The Spaceman frolicked with his girl  
Though all his friends could not abide her.  
She was a pippin and a pearl,  
She was a comely twelve-legged spider."

Scarble added dozens of verses, most of them obscene, while the spider audience in its millions chirped and murmured appreciation. He sang them to the tune of 'Ganymede Saturday Night.' He sang all his ballads to that tune. It was the only tune he knew.

Mann had been wrong; it was a picnic after all. Scarble sat on the edge of one of the silken ringed spider ponds and communed with the mother-loving spiders. The cycle of them, he knew, was this:

The little biped fingerlings were born in a sort of caul. Most often the caul is only wrapped about them, and the young ones fight their way out of it and become aware. Sometimes they look as if they arrived wearing space helmets. Often the young are truly live-born, with only scraps on them of the egg they should have arrived in. The spiders had been surprised in their era of transition.

The newborn bipeds refuse the care of the adult spiders, and run wild at this stage of their being. They destroy everything of the spider nettings and handicrafts that they are able to, and the adult spiders regard them patiently with that abiding mother-love.

And sometime later, when it is time for the change, the adults drug these young, bind them, weave a silk shell around them, and then put a cap on it. Into the cap (it is the hood of the cocoon) is placed one of the small four-legged scutters, freshly killed and made putrescent in some manner. This is the whole purpose in life of the scutters, to feed the pupa form of the spiders.

The pupa spider is somnolent for a long time. Then it begins to eat of the putrescence in the hood, and to change. Four little notches grow out of each of its sides. With these it saws away the cocoon and emerges as a new

being. Soon the notches wilt grow to full members, and the creature then takes its place as a full adult of the Nation of Spiders.

The Spiders were master engineers, and the pattern of the spider ponds built by them covered the whole world of Aranea. They controlled the waters of that world with their silken dams, weirs, levees, and hurdles. The spiders were littoral creatures and had to maintain a controllable water level.

The lakes and ponds were divided by silken barriers into small plots, some of them so completely covered by blue-green vegetation as to have the appearance of lush meadows, others adjacent to them being clear of all growth. The spiders seeded and they harvested. At some of their major dams there were anchoring cables as much as an inch in diameter. Scarble estimated that there might be as many as seven billion individual spider silks making up such a cable.

Scarble sat on the silken edge of one of the pools while the spiders in their myriads twittered about him. Then an expert crew of them performed certain rites at that pool, sweeping it, making it clearer, inviting him to drink.

"Thank you," said Scarble. He leaned into it and drank deeply. Then he stretched out to rest on the silken shore. He went to sleep.

He dreamed that it was snowing, but in a new and pleasant manner. It was not like Earth snow, and not at all like the biting snow of Priestly Planet or the blue horror that is the lethal snow on Arestor: This was warm snow, light and full of sun, snowflakes with beards on them like mote-sized comets. Scarble was being covered over by a warm snow that was half sunshine.

He awoke lazily and discovered that it was true. The spiders had been covering him with gossamer and silk, as children on a beach will cover one another with sand. They shot the silks out over him like millions of stream-ers of serpentine. It was a party, a ball given for him; and the spider song had now reached a point of excitement and jubilation.

Scarble tried to raise his head and found that he could not. He gave it up and lay back, deliciously lazy. This was something new in ease. Whether he was sleeping or waking it was all the same. A picnic after all, to be so pleasantly drugged --

To be what? An ugly thought came into Scarble's mind and he chased it away. It came again and sat like a little black animal on the edge of his golden dream.

Why hadn't he been able to raise his head?

He cleared his mind of the beginnings of panic.

"Here, here!" he called out. "You're covering me too deep with that damned sand. Fun's fun, but that's enough."

But it was more cohesive than sand. This might be only a noonday dream that would slide away. Well, it wasn't. It was stark afternoon reality. The spiders had him pegged down to the ground with their billion-stranded silk bonds and he could hardly move a muscle.

And the mother-loving little abominations had drugged him by whatever they had put into the inviting drinking pool. The taste in his mouth reminded him of the knock-out drops they used to pass out free as water on New Shanghai.

The spider song became more complex. There were elements of great change in it, the motifs of one world falling away and another one being born. The golden daylight of Aranea was coming to an end. Scarble had enjoyed his luxurious drugged Sleep for more hours than he had believed. Completely weary of his struggle with his bonds, he dropped to sleep again; and the spiders continued to work through the night.

The first thing that Scarble saw in the morning-out of the corner of one eye fixed in his unmoving head--was the spiders maneuvering a large golden ball towards him. They tipped it with lines from the tops of gin poles. They rolled it over and over, reset their rigging, and rolled it again.

It was the dog Cyon, dead, and cocooned in a sack of silk. The stench of

it was unbearable. The dog was not only dead but decayed, almost liquid in its putrefaction, and with the high hair still on it.

Scarble was sickened by this, but he understood the nature of the happening. He was a naturalist, and he knew that anger was an unnaturalist response, and that murder and putrefaction are natural workings. But Cyon wasn't merely a dog. He was also a personal friend of Scarble.

Scarble could not turn to see what was behind his own head, but he knew that spiders had been working on something there all night. He realized now what it was: a snood, a capuchin like a friar's, the hood to be his own cocoon. He knew with horror what thing they were rolling into that hood now, and how the hood would be joined onto his own cocoon. It happened quickly.

Scarbie's screams were drowned in the near liquid mass; they had a drumlike sound even to his own ears as though they were coming from under water. They merged easily with the spider music which had just the place for that screaming motif.

Then overpowering sickness sent Scarble into merciful unconsciousness after the dead and rotting dog was rolled into his face and closed in with him as their cocoons became one.

How long does it take a man to die in such circumstances? Scarble set his mind to do it as quickly as possible, but he was too tough for his own good. By second night he still could not arrive at death, but he welcomed the dark. The dog's carcass had become higher and more pungent, and the agony of Scarble took on new refinements. He was thirsty to the point of madness, and so hungry that he could eat anything -- almost anything.

It frightened him that he could now understand the spider mind so clearly. The spiders worked by analogy. They believed Scarbie to be an unfinished two-legged strider, come to them with his quadruped that was born for one purpose -- to feed him when he went into pupa form before being metamorphosed into a giant Emperor Spider. Aye, they believed Scarble to be the Emperor Spider promised to them from the beginning of time.

The spider song was a dirge now, the passing of the old life, the death and decay fugue. But in the complex of the dirge there were introductory passages of something much higher: the Anastasis, the Resurrection Song.

"You mother-loving spiders!" Scarble called out in fury. "You think I'm going to eat Cyon and then turn into a spider. You're wrong, I tell you! The biology of the thing is impossible, but how do you explain biology to spiders?"

To be dying of thirst and there no liquid to mouth except that! To be starving and there no food available but this soft putridity pressed into his face!

There was a change in the tempo of the spider song. It rose in the crescendo of transition and made Scarble angry.

"You presumptive little twelve-legged crawlers, you're getting ahead of me! Don't tell me what to do! Don't act as though I had already done it."

But the hours had taken their price, and Scarble had already passed through madness and into the world on the other side. He didn't know when it began, but the spiders knew of the change about third dawn. The spiders' soaring incantation rose to new heights, and Scarble was able to follow it. He was hearing tones above the range of the human ear.

Scarble began to eat of the putrefied mass -- and to change. The Hallelujah Chorus of the Spider Song rose in a vast symphony.

In the Spaceman's Survival Handbook there is one instruction which some have believed to be written in humor: 'Never die till you have considered every alternative to a situation.'

Well, how does a man get out of a situation like this?

He doesn't.

Well then, how does a spider get out of a situation like this?

He grows eight more short little notches of legs, and he shuffles and saws his way out of the cocoon with them.



"It's worth a try," Scarble said. "I'll see if I've turned into a spider."

He had. He did it. It worked.

They disabled Scarble from the active service. He could give no intelligent account of his lone stay on Aranea. He gave out with nothing but sick quips like:

"Cyon was a good dog, but only after he had become very bad," and "The Spiders tied me up and made me eat the dog, and then they turned me into a spider."

Scarble was plainly insane, but pleasantly so. And there was nothing left of the dog except curiously softened bones.

They sent Scarbie back to Earth and kept him under observation. Such men were handled with sympathy. They called him the Spider Man around the wards. But after a while that sympathy ran a little thin. Earth was having her own troubles with spiders.

"I've never seen anything like them," an earthside doctor told Scarble in examining him one day, as he brushed some of that floating stuff out of his eyes. "The growths are not malignant, but they will be mighty unhandy. Since they are not malignant, I cannot remove them without your permission, Scarble. They're getting larger, you know."

"Certainly they're getting larger," Scarbie maintained. "I'm quite pleased with the way they're coming along. They get to be as big as the spiders' other legs. And don't remove them! I'd as soon lose one of my other limbs as one of them. They saved my life. I couldn't have gotten out of my cocoon without them."

"You're going to have to get off this spider jag, Scarble. Have you been reading the crank reports about the spiders and have they upset you?"

"Why should they upset me, Doctor? Everything is going as smooth as - ah -- spidersilk. Naturally I have my own intelligence setup on these matters. And the fact that you refer to them as 'crank reports' likewise pleases me. I'm on the top of the heap, Doctor. Who else has a hundred billion soldiers ready to strike? We live in exciting times, do we not?"

"As to that sickness of yours, Scarble, I'll gladly leave it to your other doctor, your psycho doctor; and now it is time for you to go and see him. But I wish you'd let me remove those growths before they become larger. They're almost like other limbs."

"Quite like," said Scarble. He left the room majestically in the flowing robes which he now affected and went down the corridor to see his other doctor. The robes served a purpose. They did cover Scarble's afflictions, the four strange growths on each side of his body. And also:

"An Emperor always wears flowing robes," Scarble said. "You can't expect him to go dressed like a commoner."

Doctor Mosca, Scarble's other doctor, was a quiet and patient man. He was also a dull fellow who had to have simple things explained to him over and over again.

"What are you today, Scarble?" Doctor Mosca asked again as he brushed some of the floating stuff away.

"Why, I'm the Emperor of the Dodecapod Spiders of Aranea," Scarble said pleasantly. "I explain that to you every day, doctor, but you don't seem to remember. I am also Prefect Extraordinary to the Aranea Spiders of the Dispersal. And I am Proconsul to the Spiders of Earth."

"Scarbie, I'll be plain with you. Your planet probe experience (whatever it was) has unhitched your mind. And you have somehow connected whatever happened on Aranea to the recent spider incidents on Earth. I will admit that some of these incidents are peculiar and almost insane --"

"No, no, Doctor, not insane. They are absolutely reasonable -- according to the Higher Reason. They are organized and directed and strictly on schedule.

To call the incidents insane would be almost like calling me insane.

"Mr. Scarble, we don't keep you here for your poolshooting ability, though you're good at that. We keep you here because you're very sick -- mentally. Now listen to me carefully: You are a man, and not a spider."

"I'm glad you think so, doctor. Our high council decided that it would be better if I retained the basic man-appearance until our present military operation is completed. It should be completed today."

"Scarbie, you've got to get hold of yourself!" Doctor Mosca insisted. He brushed heaps of the accumulated silkstuff off his desk. "You are a man, and an intelligent man. We have to get you off this insane spider jag of yours. And it's not my department, but somebody had better get the world off its jag, too. Every year has its own peculiar sort of nuttiness, but the Spider Incidents have become downright silly. Do you know that, with the recent astronomical increases of the spiders --"

"That may be an unconscious pun," Scarble interrupted.

"-- that it is estimated there are now a hundred billion spiders in this country alone."

"Multiply that figure by a thousand if you wish," Scarble said. "Last night was the Night of the Great Hatching, and the young ones grow to effective size in hours, all stages of them quickly now. The time is at hand. I give the word now!"

"Great thumping thunder!" Doctor Mosca howled. "I'm bitten badly! Another spider bite."

"Not just another bite," Scarble said. "That was the critical bite. I'm sincerely sorry for the pain: but, with so many people to impregnate, I could not equip all my creatures with painless probes. It eases off now, though, doesn't it? The injection contains a narcotic and a soporific."

It did. Doctor Mosca drowsed. He half-dreamed that it was snowing, but in a new and pleasant manner. It was warm snow, light and full of sun, flakes with beards on them like mote-sized comets.

The suddenly appearing spiders were covering Doctor Mosca with gossamer and silk, as children will cover each other with sand on a beach. And they were covering many millions of others, all stung and sunk into pleasant lethargy and drowsiness, with billions of streamers of serpentine silk.

It was deliciously lazy for Doctor Mosca to lie back in the chair and hear that demented Scarble drone on that he was no longer a man -- (Doctor Mosca found that he could no longer move his head: there was something odd about that) -- that Scarble was no longer a man, whatever his appearance, that he was really the Emperor of the Dodecapod Spiders of Aranea, and of all Spiders everywhere.

#### EUREMA'S DAM

He was about the last of them.

What? The last of the great individualists? The last of the true creative geniuses of the century? The last of the sheer precursors?

No. No. He was the last of the dolts.

Kids were being born smarter all the time when he came along, and they would be so forever more. He was about the last dumb kid ever born.

Even his mother had to admit that Albert was a slow child. What else can you call a boy who doesn't begin to talk till he is four years old, who won't learn to handle a spoon till he is six, who cin't operate a doorknob till he is eight? What else can you say about one who put his shoes on the wrong feet and walked in pain? And who had to be told to close his mouth after yawning.

Some things would always be beyond him -- like whether it was the big hand or the little hand of the clock that told the hours. But this wasn't something serious. He never did care what time it was.

When, about the middle of his ninth year, Albert made a breakthrough at telling his right hand from his left he did it by the most ridiculous set of mnemonics ever put together. It had to do with the way dogs turn around before lying down, the direction of whirlpools and whirlwinds, the side a cow is milked from and a horse is mounted from, the direction of twist of oak and sycamore leaves, the maze patterns of rock moss and tree moss, the cleavage of limestone, the direction of a hawk's wheeling, a shrike's hunting, and a snake's coiling (remembering that the Mountain Boomer is an exception), the lay of cedar fronds and balsam fronds, the twist of a hole dug by a skunk and by a badger (remembering pungently that skunks sometimes use old badger holes). Well, Albert finally learned to remember which was right and which was left, but an observant boy would have learned his right hand from his left without all that nonsense.

Albert never learned to write a readable hand. To get by in school he cheated. From a bicycle speedometer, a midget motor, tiny eccentric cams, and batteries stolen from his grandfather's hearing aid Albert made a machine to write for him. It was small as a doodlebug and fitted onto pen or pencil so that Albert could conceal it with his fingers. It formed the letters beautifully as Albert set the cams to follow a copybook model. He triggered the different letters with keys no bigger than whiskers. Sure it was crooked, but what else can you do when you're too dumb to learn how to write passably?

Albert couldn't figure at all. He had to make another machine to figure for him. It was a palm-of-the-hand thing that would add and subtract and multiply and divider he next year when he was in the ninth grade they gave him algebra, and he had to devise a flipper to go on the end of his gadget to work quadratic and simultaneous equations. If it weren't for such cheating Albert wouldn't have gotten any marks at all in school.

He had another difficulty when he came to his fifteenth year. People, that is an understatement. There should be a stronger word than "difficulty" for it. He was afraid of girls.

What to do?

"I will build me a machine that is not afraid of girls," Albert said. He set to work on it. He had it nearly finished when a thought came to him: "But no machine is afraid of girls. How will this help me?"

His logic was at fault and analogy broke clown. He did what he always did. He cheated.

He took the programming rollers from an old player piano in the attic, found a gear case that would serve, used magnetized sheets instead of perforated music rolls, read a copy of Wormwood's Logic into the matrix, and he had a logic machine that would answer questions.

"What's the matter with me that I'm afraid of girls?" Albert asked his logic machine.

"Nothing the matter with you," the logic machine told him. "It's logical to be afraid of girls. They seem pretty spooky to me too."

"But what can I do about it?"

"Wait for time and circumstances. They sure are slow. Unless you want to cheat --"

"Yes, yes, what then?"

"Build a machine that looks just like you, Albert, and talks just like you. Only make it smarter than you are, and not bashful. And, ah, Albert, there's a special thing you'd better put into it in case things go wrong. I'll whisper it to you. It's dangerous."

So Albert made Little Danny, a dummy who looked like him and talked like him, only he was smarter and not bashful. He filled Little Danny with quips from Mad magazine and from Quip, and then they were set.

Albert and Little Danny went to call on Alice.

"Why, he's wonderful!" Alice said. "Why can't you be like that, Albert? Aren't you wonderful, Little Danny? Why do you have to be so stupid, Albert, when Little Danny is so wonderful?"

"I, uh, uh, I don't know," Albert said, "uh, uh, uh."

"He sounds like a fish with the hiccups," Little Danny said.

"You do, Albert, really you do!" Alice screamed. "Why can't you say smart things like Little Danny does, Albert? Why are you so stupid?"

This wasn't working out very well, but Albert kept with it. He programmed Little Danny to play the ukelele and to sing. He wished that he could program himself to do it. Alice loved everything about Little Danny, but she paid no attention to Albert. And one day Albert had had enough.

"Wha -- wha -- what do we need with this dummy?" Albert asked. "I just made him to am -- to amu -- to make you laugh. Let's go off and leave him."

"Go off with you, Albert?" Alice asked. "But you're so stupid. I tell you what. Let's you and me go off and leave Albert, Little Danny. We can have more fun without him."

"Who needs him?" Little Danny asked. "Get lost, Buster."

Albert walked away from them. He was glad that he'd taken his logic machine's advice as to the special thing to be built into Little Danny. He walked fifty steps. A hundred. "Far enough," Albert said, and he pushed a button in his pocket.

Nobody but Albert and his logic machine ever did know what that explosion was. Tiny wheels out of Little Danny and small pieces of Alice rained down a little later, but there weren't enough fragments for anyone to identify.

Albert had learned one lesson from his logic machine: never make anything that you can't unmake.

Well, Albert finally grew to be a man, in years at least. He would always have something about him of a very awkward teenager. And yet he fought his own war against those who were teenagers in years, and defeated them completely. There was enmity between them forever. He hadn't been a very well-adjusted adolescent, and he hated the memory of it. And nobody ever mistook him for an adjusted man.

Albert was too awkward to earn a living at an honest trade. He was reduced to peddling his little tricks and contrivances to shysters and promoters. But he did back into a sort of fame, and he did become burdened with wealth.

He was too stupid to handle his own monetary affairs, but he built an actuary machine to do his investing and became rich by accident; he built the damned thing too good and he regretted it.

Albert became one of that furtive group that has saddled us with all the mean things in our history. There was that Punic who couldn't learn the rich variety of hieroglyphic characters and who (revised the crippled short alphabet for wan-wits. There was the nameless Arab who couldn't count beyond ten and who set up the ten-number system for babies and idiots. There was the double-Dutchman with his movable type who drove fine copy out of the world. Albert was of their miserable company.

Albert himself wasn't much good at anything. But he had in himself a low knack for making machines that were good at everything.

His machines did a few things. You remember that anciently there was smog in the cities. Oh, it could have been drawn out of the air easily enough. All it took was a tickler. Albert made a tickler machine. He would set it fresh every morning. It would clear the air in a three hundred yards around his hovel and gather a little over a ton of residue every twenty-four Hours. This residue was rich in large polysyllabic molecules which one of his chemical machines could use.

"Why can't you clear all the air?" the people asked him.

"This is as much of the stuff as Clarence Deoxyribonucleiconibus needs every day," Albert said. That was the name of this particular machine.

"But we die from the smog," the people told him. "Have mercy on us."

"Oh, all right," Albert said. He turned it over to one of his

reduplicating machines to make as many copies as were necessary.

You remember that once there was a teen-ager problem? You remember when those little buggers used to be mean? Albert got enough of them. There was something ungainly about them that reminded him too much of himself. He made a teen-ager of his own. It was rough. To the others it looked like one of themselves, the ring in the left ear, the dangling side-locks, the brass knucks and the long knife, the guitar pluck to jab in the eye. But it was incomparably rougher than the human teenagers. It terrorized all in the neighborhood and made them behave, and dress like real people. There was one thing about the teen-age machine that Albert made. It was made of such polarized metal and glass that it was invisible except to teenager eyes.

"Why is your neighborhood different?" the people asked him. "Why are there such good and polite teenagers in your neighborhood and such mean ones everywhere else? It's as though something had spooked all those right around here."

"Oh, I thought I was the only one who didn't like the regular kind," Albert said.

"Oh no, no," the people said. "If there is anything at all you can do about it--"

So Albert turned his mostly invisible teen-ager machine over to one of his reduplicating machines to make as many copies as were necessary, and set up one in every neighborhood. From that day to this the Teenagers have all been good and polite and a little bit frightened. But there is no evidence of what keeps them that way except an occasional eye dangling from the jab of an invisible guitar pluck.

So the two most pressing problems of the latter part of the twentieth century were solved, but accidentally and to the credit of no one.

As the years went by, Albert felt his inferiority most when in the presence of his own machines, particularly those in the form of men. Albert just hadn't their urbanity or sparkle or wit. He was a clod beside them, and they made him feel it.

Why not? One of Albert's devices sat in the President's Cabinet. One of them was on the High Council of World-Watchers that kept peace everywhere. One of them presided at Riches Unlimited, that private-public-international instrument that guaranteed reason and riches to everyone in the world. One of them was the guiding hand in the Health and Longevity foundation that provided those things to everyone. Why should not such splendid machines look down on their shabby uncle who had made them?

"I'm rich by a curious twist," Albert said to himself one day, "and honored through a mistake, of circumstance. But there isn't a man or machine in the world who is really my friend. A book here tells how to make friends, but I can't do it that way. I'll make one my own way."

So Albert set out to make a friend.

He made Poor Charles, a machine as stupid and awkward and inept as himself. "Now I will have a companion," Albert said, but it didn't work. Add two zeros together and you still have zero. Poor Charles was too much like Albert to be good for anything. Poor Charles! Unable to think, he made a -- (but wait a moleskin-gloved minute here, Colonel, this isn't going to work out at all) -- he made a machine -- (but isn't this the same blamed thing all over again?) -- he made a machine to think for him and to --

Hold it, hold it! That's enough. Poor Charles was the only machine that Albert ever made that was dumb enough to do a thing like that.

Well, whatever it was, the machine that Poor Charles made was in control of the situation and of Poor Charles when Albert came onto them accidentally. The machine's machine, the device that Poor Charles had constructed to think for him, was lecturing Poor Charles in a humiliating way.

"Only the inept and the deficient will invent," that damned machine's machine was droning. "The Greeks in their high period did not invent. They

used neither adjunct power nor instrumentation. They used, as intelligent men or machines will always use, slaves. They did not descend to gadgets. They, who did the difficult with ease, did not seek the easier way.

"But the incompetent will invent. The insufficient will invent. The depraved will invent. And knaves will invent."

Albert, in a seldom fit of anger, killed them both. But he knew the machine of his machine had spoken the truth.

Albert was very much cast down. A more intelligent man would have had a hunch as to what was wrong. Albert had only a hunch that he was not very good at hunches and would never be. Seeing no way out, he fabricated a machine and named it Hunchy.

In most ways this was the worst machine he ever made. In building it he tried to express something of his unease for the future. It was an awkward thing in mind and mechanism, a misfit.

His more intelligent machines gathered around and hooted at him while he put it together.

"Boy! Are you lost!" they taunted. "That thing is a primitive! To draw its power from the ambient! We talked you into throwing that away twenty years ago and setting up coded power for all of us."

"Uh -- someday there may be social disturbances and all centers of power and apparatuses seized," Albert stammered. "But Hunchy would be able to operate if the whole world were wiped smooth."

"It isn't even tuned to our information matrix," they jibed. "It's worse than Poor Charles. That stupid thing practically starts from scratch."

"Maybe there'll be a new kind of itch for it," said Albert.

"It's not even housebroken!" the urbane machines shouted their indignation. "Look at that! Some sort of primitive lubrication all over the floor."

"Remembering my childhood, I sympathize," Albert said.

"What's if good for?" they demanded.

"Ah -- it gets hunches," Albert mumbled.

"Duplication!" they shouted. "That's all you're good for yourself, and not very good at that. We suggest an election to replace you as -- pardon our laughter -- head of these enterprises."

"Boss, I got a hunch how we can block them there," the unfinished Hunchy whispered.

"They're bluffing," Albert whispered back. "My first logic machine taught me never to make anything I can't unmake. I've got them there, and they know it. I wish I could think up things like that myself."

"Maybe there will come an awkward time and I will be good for something," Hunchy said.

Only once, and that rather late in life, did a sort of honesty flare up in Albert. He did one thing (and it was a dismal failure) on his own. That was the night in the year of the double millennium when Albert was presented with the Finnerty-Hochmann Trophy, the highest award that the intellectual world could give. Albert was certainly an odd choice for it, but it had been noticed that almost every basic invention for thirty years could be traced back to him or to the devices with which he had surrounded himself.

You know the trophy. Atop it was Eurema, the synthetic Greek goddess of invention, with arms spread as though she would take flight. Below this was a stylized brain cut away to show the convoluted cortex. And below this was the coat of arms of the Academicians: Ancient Scholar rampant (argent); the Anderson Analyzer sinister (gules); the Mondeman Space-Drive dexter (vair). It was a very fine work by Groben, his ninth period.

Albert had the speech composed for him by his speech-writing machine, but for some reason he did not use it. He went on his own, and that was disaster. He got to his feet when he was introduced, and he stuttered and spoke nonsense:

"Ah -- only the sick oyster produces nacre," he said, and they all gaped

at him. What sort of beginning for a speech was that? "Or do I have the wrong creature?" Albert asked weakly.

"Eurema does not look like that!" Albert gawked out and pointed suddenly at the trophy. "No, no, that isn't her at all. Eurema walks backward and is blind. And her another is a brainless hulk."

Everybody was watching him with pained expression. "Nothing rises without a leaven," Albert tried to explain, "but the yeast is itself a fungus and a disease. You be regularizers all, splendid and supreme. But you cannot live without the irregulars. You will die, and who will tell you that you are dead? When there are no longer any deprived or insufficient, who will invent? What will you do when there are none of us defectives left? Who will leaven your lump then?"

"Are you unwell?" the master of ceremonies asked him quietly. "Should you not make an end of it? People will understand."

"Of course I'm unwell. Always have been," Albert said. "What good would I be otherwise? You set the ideal that all should be healthy and well adjusted. No! No! Were we all well adjusted, we would ossify and die. The world is kept healthy only by some of the unhealthy minds lurking in it. The first implement made by man was not a scraper or celt or stone knife. It was a crutch, and it wasn't devised by a hale man."

"Perhaps you should rest," a functionary said in a low voice, for his sort of rambling nonsense talk had never been heard at an t awards dinner before.

"Know you," said Albert, "that it is not the fine bulls and wonderful cattle who make the new paths. Only a crippled calf makes a new path. In everything that survives there must be an element of he incongruous. Hey, you know the woman who said, 'My husband is incongruous, but I never liked Washington in the summertime.'"

Everybody gazed at him in stupor.

"That's the first joke I ever made," Albert said lamely. "My joke-making machine makes them lots better than I do." He paused and gaped, and gulped a big breath. "Dolts!" He croaked out fiercely then. "What will you do for dolts when the last of us is gone? How will you survive without us?"

Albert had finished. He gaped and forgot to close his mouth. They led him back to his seat. His publicity machine explained that Albert was tired from overwork, and then the thing passed around copies of the speech that Albert was supposed to have given.

It had been an unfortunate episode. How noisome it is that the innovators are never great men. And the great men are never good for anything but just being great men.

In that year a decree went forth from Caesar that a census of the whole country should be taken. The decree was from Caesar Panebianco, the President of the country; it was the decimal year proper for the census, and there was nothing unusual about the decree. Certain provisions, however, were made for taking a census of the drifters and decrepits who were usually missed, to examine them and to see why they were so. It was in the course of this that Albert was picked up. If any man ever looked like a drifter and a decrepit, it was Albert.

Albert was herded in with other derelicts, sat down at a table, and asked tortuous questions. As:

"What is your name?"

He almost muffed that one, but he rallied and answered, "Albert."

"What time is it by that clock?"

They had him there in his old weak spot. Which hand was which? He gaped and didn't answer.

"Can you read?"

"Not without my --" Albert began. "I don't have with me my -- No, I can't read very well by myself."

"Try."

They gave him a paper to mark up with true and false questions. Albert marked them all true, believing that he would have half of them right. But they were all false. The regularized people are partial to falsehood. When they gave him a supply-the-word test on proverbs.

"\_\_\_\_\_ is the best policy" didn't mean a thing to him. He couldn't remember the names of the companies that he had his own policies with.

"A \_\_\_\_\_ in time saves nine" contained more mathematics than Albert could handle. "There appear to be six unknowns," he told himself, "and only one positive value, nine. The equating verb 'saves' is a vague one. I cannot solve this equation. I am not even sure it is in equation. If only I bid with me my --"

But he hadn't any of his gadgets or machines with him. He was on his own. He left half a dozen more proverb fill-ins blank. Then he saw the chance to recoup. Nobody is so dumb as not to know one answer if enough questions are asked.

"\_\_\_\_\_ is the mother of invention," it said.

"Stupidity," Albert wrote in his weird ragged hand. Then he sat back in triumph. "I know that Eureka and her mother," he snickered. "Man, how I do know them!"

But they marked him wrong on that one too. He had missed every answer to every test. They began to fix him a ticket to a progressive booby hatch where he might learn to do something with his hands, his head being hopeless.

A couple of Albert's urbane machines came down and got him out of it. They explained that, while he was a drifter and a derelict, yet he was a rich drifter and derelict and that he was even a man of some note.

"He doesn't look it, but he really is -- pardon our laughter -- a man of some importance," one of the fine machines explained. "He has to be told to close his mouth after he has yawned, but for all that he is the winner of the Finnerty-Hochmann Award. We will be responsible for him."

Albert was miserable as his fine machines took him out, especially when they asked that he walk three or four steps behind them and not seem to be with them. They gave him some pretty rough banter and turned him into a squirming worm of a man. Albert left them and went to a little hide-out he kept.

"I'll blow my crawfishing brains out," he swore. "The humiliation is more than I can bear. Can't do it myself I though. I'll have to have it done."

He set to work building a device in his hide-out.

"What you doing, boss?" Hunchy asked him. "I had a hunch you'd come here and start building something."

"Building a machine to blow my pumpkin-picking brains out," Albert shouted. "I'm too yellow to do it myself."

"Boss, I got a hunch there's something better to do. Let's have some fun."

"Don't believe I know how to," Albert said thoughtfully. "I built a fun machine once to do it for me. He had a real revel till he flew apart, but he never seemed to do anything for me."

"This fun will be for you and me. Consider the world spread out. What is it?"

"It's a world too fine for me to live in any longer," Albert said. "Everything and all the people are perfect, and all alike. They're at the top of the heap. They've won it all and arranged it all neatly. There's no place for a clutter-up like me in the world. So I get out."

"Boss, I've got a hiingh that you're seeing it wrong. You've got better eyes than that. Look again, real canny, at it. Now what do you see?"

"Hunchy, Hunchy, is that possible? Is that really what it is? I wonder why I never noticed it before. That's the way of it, though, now that I look closer.

"Six billion patsies waiting to be took! Six bil ion patsies without a



defense of any kind! A couple of guys out for some fun, man, they could mow them down like fields of Albert-Improved Concho Wheat!"

"Boss, I've got a hunch this is what I was made for. The world sure has been getting stuffy. Let's tie into it and eat off the top layer. Man, we can cut a swath!"

"We'll inaugurate a new era!" Albert gloated. "We'll call it the Turning of the Worm. We'll have fun, Hunchy. We'll gobble them up like goobers. How come I never saw it like that before? Six billion patsies!"

The twenty-first century began on this rather odd note.

DORG

The Problem: Straighted Ecology (not enough to eat).

Projected Answer: Turnip and Tetrapod.

Projected Method: Find them, find them.

Methodologist: A Crash-Oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology.

Spin-Offs: An Amalgamated Youth, a Trilobal Psychologist, a Mad Cartoonist.

Recycled Method: "On your feet, Dordogne, do it one more time."

"It beats me how you will find the answer to world hanger in a mad cartoonist and a half-mad psychologist," the pleasantly ponderous Annalouise Krug railed angrily. (Annalouise was a member of Amalgamated Youth.) "This is the sort of unimaginative drivel we have always had from the aged," she ran on. (Whenever three or more persons were gathered together anywhere in the world to discuss actions, a member of Amalgamated Youth must be present; this was the law.) "What we need is fresh insights, youthful impetus: not the woeful stutterings of aged minds," she stated.

"You are the oldest person present, Annalouise," Adrian Durchbruch the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology bounded back at her.

"The oldest only in years, and then only if you unjuggle the record," Annalouise maintained. "I have had my age officially set back eleven years. In Amalgamated Youth we have that privilege. Besides, you have no idea how difficult it is to recruit chronological youths into Amalgamated Youth. Further besides, Adrian, you are a crook-tailed boor to mention my age, considering all the years I have given to Youth. "

"And you are a slashing female shrew, Annalouise, to refer to Dordogne and Riddle as respectively mad and half-mad while they are present," Adrian D. volleyed the words back off Annalouise.

Jame Riddle had fixed Annalouise with a pleasant scowl when she called him half-mad. J. P. Dordogne had sketched on a square of paper, then balled it up thrown it to her. She smoothed it out and looked at it.

"They are no less mad for being present," she said with some reason. "Let's start it again, old men. How are you going to solve the problem of world hunger with a mad cartoonist and a half-mad psychologist? Neither one of them knows anything about ecology. Neither one knows anything about anything. And as to food, why I could eat them both up within a week myself and be hungry again."

Annalouise Krug, though she was both the largest and oldest person present, was also the prettiest. And she was not really so old: she was not yet thirty. None of the four persons present was of really advanced years or stiffened mind. This Annalouise was of the swift and powerful loveliness and full figure that is sometimes caned Junoesque, but we will not call her so. She was suddenly in the fashion, though. There is something interesting about full-bodied women in those times when the edge is on the hunger just a bit. Besides which she held her age better than did most members of Amalgamated Youth.

The mad cartoonist was J.P. (Jasper Pendragon) Dordogne. He used to sign his strips "Dorg," and some of his friends called him Mad Dorg. He was a small, sandy young fellow, all bland and grinning except for his mad black

eyes which he said he had inked in himself. While Annalouise was tonguelashing them, Dordogne had sat silently drawing lampoons of her, balling them up, and throwing them to her, and she caught them and smoothed them out with beautiful anger.

"Tje dorg has actually been seen, Annalouise," Adrian Durchbruch lobbed the words in as he bounced around. "It has been seen by at least a dozen persos." Adrian was not referring to the cartoonist "Dorg" Dordogne, but to the fabled annual named dorg that sometimes appeared in Dordogne's comic strip. And now there had been a whole spate of clownish reports that the burlesque animal had actually been seen out in the boondocks, alive and all.

Adrian bounced around constantly as though he had springs in the balls of his deet. He expediated, he organized, he said things like "Let's have a brain-crash" when he meant "Let's discuss this for a moment." He was the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology. He had held the job for only a week, and he wouldn't last another week if he didn't come with with something good. There was a rapid turnover of chiefs in the Department of Remedial Ecology. That showed constant effort and reassessment, even if there were no results in the department.

"I don't believe it," Annalouise claimed and resonated. A skinny girl simply will not leave that full resonance. "If ever I see it I'll go get my eyes fixed. I will not believe it, not when the witless Dordogne invented it in his comic strip; not when the half-witless Jimmy Riddle declared that it was a creative act and that the animal was bound to appear soon afterward. There cannot be such an animal."

"It's that or turnips," the psychologist said, "and they've already got whole shoals of psychologists studying the creative act in neo-turnips." James Riddle was the trilobal psychologist. He really had a third lobe or cerebral hemisphere to his brain, this on the actual testimony of proper doctors, but it didn't seem to do much for him. He was boyish and dreamy and horn-rimmed. His theories were astonishing, but he wasn't.

"Since this is our study and our problem, we may as well go and see if we can catch a glimpse of the dorg," Riddle chattered.

"What worries me," Adrian Durchbruch said, "is that there seems to be only one dorg, a male."

"But that part is almost too good to be true," Riddle exulted. "It's in total concord with my theory. You knew it would be that way, didn't you, Dordogne?"

"Yes, but I've been afraid to finish drawing it that way," the mad cartoonist mumbled.

"Where has the dorg been sighted, Adian?" Riddle asked him.

"Down in the Winding Stair Mountains of -- ah -- Oklahoma," Durchbruch chirped, and bounced around in eagerness to be at it.

"Then let's fly down there right now," Riddle offered. "I used to own an airplane. I wonder if I still have it."

"Yes, you still have it," Annalouise told him.

"Good, let's go." All of them, Dordogne the mad cartoonist, Hames Riddle the trilobal psychologist, Adrian Durchbruch the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology, and Annalouise Krug the Amalgamated Youth went out to Riddle's place and got in the plane.

"Which way is Oklahoma?" Riddle asked when they were airborne. "Listen to the sound of that engine, people, to the sound of any engine anywhere. Do yen kwow that functionally the engine sounds have no purpose? The various engines produce their monotonous noises solely to hynotize human persons. Then the engines are able to --" But Riddle's warning words were suddenly blocked out by the engine's sudenly increased noise volume. Engines will do that every time the stibject is about to be discussed.

The world was in pretty short supply as to food. The miracle of the barley loaves and the fishes had fed the multitudes for a long time. Barley had been developed that would yield five hundred bushels an acre, and billions

and billions of fishes had been noodled out of the oceans. The oceans, however, are mostly desert, so have they always been; and the oases and streams and continental shelves of them had been harvested to their limits of both fish and plankton. And on land all the worthy areas were producing to their utmost, and still it was not enough.

The solution: Turnip or Tetrapod. A plant was needed that would grow more lush than barley, more lush than grass, that would be fully edible for humans in both top and bottom of it, that would grow on even the worst land. And such a plant was being searched for carefully. More than that, it was being invented every day, everywhere, anyhow. But the new plants were not really good enough.

And a four-footed annual (they are the best kind) was being searched out. It would have to be a fine fleshed and multiple-bearing annual, with as many litters as possible a year; one that would grow quickly to great size and succulence; one that could eat and thrive on anything, anything, even -- one that could eat --

About that time, the mad cartoonist J.P. Dordogne invented just such an annual in his comic strip. It was a big, comical, rock-eating animal. It struck the popular fancy and humor at once, though it did not at once put anything into the popular stomach. It was a shambling hulk of an animal, good-natured and weird. It ate earth and rocks and anything at all. It didn't even need vegetation, or water. It grew peculiarly fat on such feeding.

And the dorg had a fine slow wit as shown in the comic strip dialogue balloons. The people liked the dorg and especially liked the idea that the animal could grow so large and toothsome on nothing but rocks and earth. The animal was not loved the less because there was something unreal and mad about it, even beyond the unreality of all things in that medium. Something else: the dorg in the comic strip was always feeling bad: there was an air of something momentous about to happen to him.

The dorg filled an inner need, of emotion if not of stomach yet. It became the hopeful totem of the people on the bitig edge of hunger. And the dorg was unmistakable; that was what gave the news reports their sharp interest. There was recognition and recollection of the dorg as matching a buried interior image. It could not be mistaken for something else. The sighters had sighted the dorg, or they had suffered hallucination. But they had not mistaken some other object or creature for the dorg. And Dordogne the cartoonist, a bland little man except for the mad black eyes, was scared stupid by reports that the cartoon animal had actually been seen, alive and all.

It was then that there appeared, in Primitive Arts Quarterly, an off piece by the trilobal psychologist James Riddle. The piece was titled "Lascaux, Dordogne, and the Naming of the Animals." The essay contained this strange thesis:

"What happened in the cave art days of Lascaux was the 'Naming' of the Animals. The paintings were the namings, or at least they were an aspect of the namings. It must be understood that this was concurrent with the creative act. The depicted animals were absolutely new then. if the paleozoologists say otherwise, then the paleozoologists are wrong. The men also were absolutely new then.

"Some, perhaps all, of these cave paintings were anticipatory: the paintings appeared a slight time before the animals themselves appeared. My evidence for this is subjective, and yet I am as sure of this as I am of anything in the world. In several cases, the animals, when they appeared, did not quite conform to their depiction. In several other cases, owing I supposed to a geodetic accident, the corresponding animals failed to appear at all.

"It is certain that this art was anticipatory and prophetic, heralding the appearance of new species over the life horizon. It was precursor art, harbinger art. It is certain also that this art contained elements of

effective magic; it is most certain that the species were of sudden appearance. The only thing not certain is just to what extent the paintings were creative of the animals. There is still fluid mystery about the mechanism of the sudden appearance of species. The paleontologists cannot throw any light on this mystery at all, and the biologists cannot. But the artist can throw light on it, and the psychologist can. It is clear that a new species appears, suddenly and completely developed, exactly when it is needed.

"And a new species is needed exactly now.

"It is for this reason that there is peculiar interest in a recent creation of the cartoonist Jasper Pendragon Dordogne. He has depicted a new species of animal. I do not believe that Dordogne realizes what he is doing. He isn't an intelligent man. I do not believe that the Lascaux cave painters realized what they were doing. But the art of J.P. Dordogne, like that of the old cave painters, is anticipatory, it is prophetic, it is precursor art, harbinger art. The new species of animal will appear almost immediately, if it has not already appeared. The exact effect that the cartoonist will have on the appearing species we do not know. The effect that we may be able to have on the cartoonist will not be exact, but it can be decisive.

"Above all, let us see it happen, if this is at all possible. Let us witness the appearance of a new species for once. It should answer very many questions. It should give the final answer to that dreary and tedious remnant of evolutionists that still lingers in benighted areas. Let our hope and our effort be toward this being a permanent appearance. Very many of them have not been permanent."

Adrian Durchbruch, the newly appointed Chief of Remedial Ecology, had read the James Riddle article in Primitive Arts Quarterly on his first day on the job. He immediately requisitioned the mad-eyed cartoonist J.P. Dordogne and the trilobal psychologist for his program. They were both referring to the animal that the world and the project were looking for. However the two men might have their information confused, they did seem to have information of a sort.

When Durchbruch incorporated himself and these other two men into his project, he also had to include a member of Amalgamated Youth to keep it legal. He accepted Annalouise Krug gladly. You should see what most members of Amalgamated Youth are like.

The reports of the actual sightings of the animal had come in immediately. And the four persons flew down to the area immediately.

Riddle landed the plane in tall grass near Talihina, Oklahoma, and the four dorg-seekers got out.

"We will immediately contact the local -authorities," Adrian Durchbruch began as he bounded around on his feet on the springy ground, "and we will find whether --"

"On, shut up, Adrian," Riddle said pleasantly. "This lady here knows where it can be found. If that were not so, I would have landed in some other place where a lady would know all about it. Time spent checking with authorities is always time lost. Where is the dorg, lady?"

"It went up in the high pasture this morning," said the lady that was there. "It has been feeling so bad that we were worried about it. And you are the only one that knows what's the matter with it. You, mad-eyes, I'm talking to you. You know what is bothering it, don't you?"

"Gosh, I'm afraid I do," the cartoonist Dordogne grumbled sadly. "I've been afraid to say it or draw it, though. If it is true, then it will push me clear over the edge, and everyone says I haven't far to go. Don't let it happen! I don't want to be that crazy."

"My husband followed him up there a while ago," the lady said, "and he took his big Jim Bowie knife with him, in case we guessed right about it. They can't hardly do it by themselves, you know. They're not built for it. Oh, here they come now, and the little one is with them."

The man, and the big dorg (moving painfully), and the little dorg were coming down the slope.

"But the big dorg is male!" Annalouise Krug cried out in disbelief.

"Yes, they have such a hard time of it," the lady said. "There isn't any other way to get anything staricd, though."

The man and the big male dorg and the little female dorg came down to them.

"It wasn't much trouble," the man said. "He went to sleep."

"The Tardemah, the deep sleep," Riddle said reverently. "I should have guessed it."

"Then I cut him open and took her out of his side," the man said. "They will both be all right now."

"Bu Caesarean section," Annalouise mumbled. "Why didn't we all guess it?" There was a loud snapping noise. "What was that?" Adrian demanded, bouncing around.

"My mind just snapped," Dordogne said woozily. "I won't bother to keep up appearances any longer. Now I will be crazy with a clear conscience."

The little dorg was near grown within one month and was impregnated. In another mornh she produced a litter of ten. In another five weeks another, and in another five weeks still another. And the young ones produced at two months, and again in five weeks, and again in another five weeks. Quite soon there were a million of them, and then one hundred million, shipped all over the world wow. These were big cow-sized animals of excellent meat, and they ate only the rocks and waste hills where nothing had ever grown, turning it into fertile soil incidentally.

Soon there were a billion dorgs in the world ready for butchering, and the numbers of them could be tapered off as soon as it seemed wise, and there was enough meat for everyone in the world.

"I have only one worry," the trilobal psychologist James Riddle said as he met with Adrian Dirchbruch and Annalouise Krug in a self-congratulatory session. J.P. Dordogne the mad cartoonist was in a sanitarium now and was really mad. "I keep remembering a part of those cave paintings at Lascaux."

"What were they, James?" Annalouise Krug asked. Annalouise was not so much in the fashion as she had once been. Well-fed nations somehow set their ideals on more svelte types.

"They were the crossed-out animals, the chiseled-over animals, the funny-looking animals. They are funny-looking to us only because we have never seen them in the flesh. They are the animals that did not survive. We don't know why they did not. They were drawn originally with the same boldness as the rest of them."

"We don't know what the odds are," Adrian said worriedly, forgetting to bounce. "We have no way at all to calculate them. It is so hard to take a census of things that aren't. We will keep our fingers crossed and all fetishes working full time. Without primordial fetish there wouldn't have been ally animals or people at all."

It went on smoothly for a year and a day after the dorgs had struck their proper world balance. There was plenty of meat for everyone in the world, there were plenty of dorgs, and they had to be segregated to prevent their being too many.

Then the index of dorg fertility fell. The numbers of them were raised up past the safe level again only by unsegregating all flocks. The index fell again and continued to fall. It disappeared.

The last dorgs were born. There was breathless waiting to see if some of them might not be fertile. They weren't. It was all over with, and the world wailing raised higher it had ever been.

"What we need is fresh insights, youthful impetus, not the woeful stutterings of aged minds," Annalouise Krug was saying. "Aren't there any

other animals that can live on rocks?"

"No," Adrian Durchbruch said sadly.

"Where does the species male come from in the first place?" she asked.

"It appears for the first time on a Monday morning in a comic strip or on a cave mural," James Riddle said. "I believe it is something about the syndication that new formats in cartoons always appear on Monday mornings."

"Before that, I mean. Where does the male come from?" Annalouise said.

"I don't know," Riddle grouched.

"Well, somebody had better remember something right now," Annalouise stated with a curious menace. "Riddle, what good does an extra lobe do you if you can't remember something special? Come up with something, I say."

"I can't. There is nothing else to come up with," Riddle said. But Annalouise picked the psychologist up and shook him till he near fell apart.

"Now remember something else," she ordered.

"I can't, Annalouise, there is nothing else to remember."

"You have no idea how hard I will shake you if you don't come up with something." She gave him an idea of just how hard she could shake him.

"Now!" she ordered.

"On, yes, since my life is on the line, I will remember something else," Riddle moaned, with not much wind left in him. "There are others of those cave paintings that are most curious. Some of them are printed and carved over and over and over again, always in the same region. Most of them are of the common animals of today. Did it come that close, do you think, with even the common ones of them? One at least (and this gives me some hope) was a common animal of today that had been crossed out as having failed. But someone was not content to let it remain crossed out. It was redrawn with great emphasis. And then redrawn and expanded again and again, always in the same region."

"Let's go to Dordogne right now with plenty of drawing materials," Adrian snapped.

"But Dordogne is crazy," Annalouise cried. "Always in what same region, Adrian?"

"We're crazy, too, to think of it," Adrian hooted, "but let's go to him right now."

"What region, James?" Annalouise insisted. "Always drawn over and over again in what same region?"

"The belly. Let's go to Dordogne."

They had Dordogne on his feet and drawing dogs so pregnant that their bellies dug the ground. He was dazed, though, and sniffing.

"When you've drawn one pregnant dog you've drawn them all," he whimpered.

But they kept him at it. He collapsed, but they jerked him back to the task again. Who knows which may be the quickening stroke? "On your feet, Dordogne," they yelled, "Do it one more time!"

#### AND NOW WALK GENTLY THROUGH THE FIRE

"The Ichtyans or Queer Fish are the oddest species to be found in any of the worlds. They are pseudo-human, perhaps, but not android. The sign of the fish is not easily seen on them, and they pass as human whenever they wish: a peculiarity of them is that they often do not wish to pass as human even when their lives depend on it. They have blood in their veins, but an additional serum also. It's only when the organizational sickness is upon them (for these organizing and building proclivities they are sometimes known as the Queer Builders or the Ants of God), that they can really be told from humans. There is also the fact that most of them are very young, or at least of a youthful appearance. Their threat to us is more real than apparent and we tend to minimize it. This we must not do. In our unstructured, destructed, destroyed society, they must be counted as the enemies to be exterminated. It's a double danger they offer us: to fight them on their own grounds, or to neglect to

fight them. They'd almost trick us into organizing to hunt down their organization.

"Oh, they can live near as loosely as ourselves in their deception. These builders can abandon buildings in their trickery. They'll live in tents, they'll live in huts, they'll live under the open sky as easily as do ourselves, the regular people. But observe (they trick us there again: observation is a quality of theirs, not of ours), notice that everything they do is structured. There is always something structured about their very tents; there is something peculiarly structured about their butts; they even maintain that there is something structured about the open sky. They are the Institutional People.

"The Queer Fish claim that Gaea (Earth) is the most anciently peopled of the worlds and that they themselves are the most ancient people. But they set their own first appearance in quite late times, and they contradict the true ancientness of humans and proto-humans.

"The Queer Fish have been bloody and warlike in their times. They have been Oceanic as well as Sky-Faring, in some cases beyond ourselves in that phase. They have even been, in several peculiar contexts, creative. They are not now creative in the arts (they do not even recognize the same arts as we do). They are certainly not creative in the one remaining genuine art, that of unstructured music. They are something much worse than creative now: they are procreative in the flesh. Their fishy flesh would have already become dominant if they hadn't been ordered hinted to extinction. Even in this they force us to come out of ourselves, to use one of their own words.

"They force us to play their game. We have to set up certain structures ourselves to effect their destruction. We even need to institute certain movements and establishments to combat their Institutionalism and Establishmentism. They are, let us put it plainly, the plague-carriers. Shall we, the Proud Champions of the Destroyed Worlds, have to abandon a part of our thesis to bring about their unstructuring, their real destruction? Must we take unseemly means to balk their fishy plague? We must."

"Problem of the Queer Fish."

Analects. - The Putty Dwarf

Judy Thatcher was moving upcountry in a cover of cattle. The millions of feral cattle were on all the plains. Most of these cattle were wobble-eyed and unordered. But an ordered person, such as Judy, would have ordered cattle; she could draw them about her like with a sense of structure a cloak, whole droves of them. A person could manipulate whole valleys of these cattle, could turn them (the smaller units turning the larger), could head them any way required, could use them for concealment or protection, could employ their great horned phalanxes as a threat. Judy Thatcher had some hundreds of her own ordered bulls. Being magic (she was one of the Twelve) she could manipulate almost anything whatsoever.

But most of the cattle of the plains were not quite cattle, were not ordered cattle. Most of the horses were not quite horses, nor the dogs dogs. Most of the people were no longer quite people (this from the viewpoint of the Queer Fish; Judy was a Queer Fish).

Judy was a young and handsome woman of rowdy intellect. She had, by special arrangement, two eyes outside of her head, and these now traveled on the two horizons. These eyes were her daughter, traveling now about two miles to the East and right of her on a ridge, and her son moving on another ridge three miles to her left and West. She was a plague carrier, she and hers. All three of them were Queer Fish.

The son, on her West and left, worked along a North-running ridge in those high plains and he could scan the filled plain still farther to the West. He could mark every disordered creature on that plain, and he had also been marking for some time one creature that was wrongly ordered but moving toward him with a purpose.

This son, Gregory, was twelve years old. Being of that age, he knew it was time for a certain encounter. He knew that the creature, wrongly ordered and moving towards him with a purpose, would be a party to that encounter. This always happens to boys of that age, when they are of the ripe time for the Confirmation or the Initiation of whatever sort. Many boys, unstructured boys, amazed boys of the regular species, boys of the Queer Fish even, are not conscious of the encounter when it comes. It may come to them so casually that they miss its import. It may come as wobble-eyed as themselves and they accept it without question. It may even come to them in dream state (whether in waking or walking dream, or in night dream), and then it sinks down, yeasting and festering a little bit but not really remembered, into their dream underlay. But many boys, particularly those of the Queer Fish species, know it consciously when it comes, and they negotiate with it.

(As to the ritual temptation of girls, that is of another matter, and perhaps it is of earlier or later years. Any information must come from a girl, or from a woman who remembers when she was a girl. Many do not seem to remember it at all. Most will deny it. Some will talk around it, but they do not talk of it directly. You may find an exceptional one who will. You may be an exceptional one who knows about it. But it isn't in the records.)

Gregory Thatcher, being twelve years old and in his wits, was tempted by a devil on a high spot on that ridge. There had been a cow, a white-eyed or glare-eyed cow, coming blindly towards him. The cow had no order or purpose, but someone in the cow came on purpose. Then the cow was standing, stock-still, blind-still, too stupid to graze, too balkish to collapse, less animate than a stone cow. Whoever had been in her had come out of her now. Where was he?

There was a little flicker of black lightning, a slight snigger, and he was there.

"Command that these stones be made bread," he said (his heart not quite in it). He was a minor devil; his name was Azazel. He wasn't the great one of that name, but one of the numerous nephews. There is an economy of names among the devils.

"Does it always have to start with those same words?" Gregory asked him.

"That's the way the rubric runs, boy," Azazel jibed. "You Fish are strong on rubric yourselves, you're full of it. Play the game."

"We are the rubric," Gregory said easily, "in the first meaning, the red meaning. We're the red ocher, the red earth."

"A smart Fish I have, have I? You heard the words 'Command that these stones be made bread.' Do it, or confess that you are unable to do it. You Fish claim powers."

"It is easy enough to make bread with these stones," said Gregory. "Even you can see that they are all roughly quern stones, grinding stones. They are all flat or dished limestones and almost any two will fit together. And the wild wheat stands plentiful and in full head. It's easy enough to thresh it out by rubbing the ears in my hands, to grind it to meal or to flour between your stones, to mix with water from my flask and salt from my pack, to build a fire of cow chips and make bread cakes on one of the flat rocks put to cap the fire. I've dined on this twice today. I'd dine with you on it now if fraternizing were allowed."

"It isn't, Greg. You twist the words. They are 'Command that these stories be made bread,' not 'Command that these stones make bread.' You fail it."

"I fail nothing, Azazel." (The two of them seemed about the same age, but that was not possible.) "You'll not command me to command. On with it, though."

"Cast thyself down from this height," Azazel ordered. "If you are one of the elect you'll not be dashed to pieces by it."

"I'll not be dashed to pieces yet. It's high but not really steep. Not a good selection, Azazel."



"We work with what we are given. The final one then -- the world and all that is in it --." Here Azazel went into a dazzle. He was real enough, but now he went into contrived form and became the Argyros Daimon, the Silver Demon who was himself a literary device and diversion. He waved a shimmering silvery band. "The world and all that is in it, all this I will give you, if --." Then they both had to laugh.

"It isn't much of a world you have to offer," Greg Thatcher grinned. "Really, where is the temptation?"

"It doesn't look like much," Azazel grinned. "Oh the temptation is quite real, but it's subtle and long-term. It's quite likely that you'll be had by it, Greg. Almost all are had by it along the way. You can see it as wheat-colored, or as green-grass colored, or as limestone and dust, or as shimmering. It isn't a simple world, and you haven't seen it all. Already you love it, and you believe you have it. You haven't it yet, not till I give it to you. You're a stranger on it. And you're blind to its main characteristic."

"What characteristic am I blind to?"

"The surface name of it is freedom."

"I have the ordered sort of freedom now," Gregory said rather stiffly. The Odd Fish have always had this somewhat stiff and pompous and superior way of setting forth their views. Whether it is a strength or a weakness is disputed but it is essential to them. They'd not be the Odd Fish without it. "Have you Freedom in Hell?" he groi asked Azazel. "Have you Order there?"

"Would we offer you something we don't have ourselves?" Azazel asked with his own pomposity. (The Devils and the Odd Fish both have this stilted way of talking, and they have other similarities, but in most ways they are quite different.) "Certainly we have Freedom, with the same Freedom that all others have on Earth, the Freedom that an you Queer Fish deny yourselves. And Order, here you touch us in a sore spot, Greg. It is here that we offer you a little more than we do have ourselves, for we offer you freedom from order. Aye, regrettably we suffer order of a sort, but you needn't. There's a line in one of the old poets of your own Queer Fish species: 'They order things bel so damnably in Hell.' He's right, in his way. There is a damnable order still surviving there.

"Let me explain something to you though, Greg. Let me ask you a favor. I'll even appeal to the 'good side' of you. You Queer Fish make much of that 'good side' business. If I am able to disorder you, by that same measure I am allowed to escape into disorder myself. I've made good progress in my time. I've disordered very many. Look not at me like that! You are almost critical of me. I want you. You're to a great prize." (The Queer Fish are almost as susceptible to flattery as are the Dcvils themselves, and Gregory had flushed slightly from thi pleasure.)

"But I have it all, the world and its fruits," he explained to Azazel.

"And I have things that are beyond the world. I walk in light."

"Here's a pair of blued sunglasses you can use then, Greg. The light is always over-bright. You haven't it all. You're afraid of so much of it. I'll take away your fear. All flesh is grass, it is said by some old authority, I forget whether by one of yours or ours. Why do you refuse the more spirited grasses and bemps then? Even the cattle know enough to enjoy them."

"The wobble-eyed cattle and the wobble-eyed people are on the loco. I'll not be on it."

"Come along with our thing, Greg, and we'll help both ourselves into Freedom and Disorder. You can have it the other way also: All grass is flesh. What flesh!"

The things that Azazel demonstrated were fleshy in the extreme. They were like old pictures, but they came on multidimensional and musky and writing. Wherever the creatures came from white-eyed cows that were not quite cows or out of the ground that was not quite ground Greg did not know. Perhaps they were nop more than surrogate projections. What then of those whose lives were no more than surrogate projections, they of the great disordered

majority?

"They have so much, Greg," Azazel said, "and you miss it all."

Gregory Thatcher broke the whole complex of devices to peices with a shattering laugh. It was a nervous laugh though. Gregory had an advantage. He was yougn, he was only twelve, and he was not precocious. (But from this day on it couldn't be said that he was not precocious. In that complex instant he was older by a year; he was as old as Azazel now.)

"I'll not say 'Get thee behind me, Satan' for I wouldn't trust you behind me for one stride," Gregory laughed. "I will say 'Get they back into thy cow and be off' for I now perceive that the white-eyed cow there is no cow at all but only a device and vehicle of yourse. Into it and be gone, Azazel."

"Greg, boy, think about these things," Azazel spoke as a knowing young fellow to one even younger and not quite so knowing. "You will think about them in any case. I've been talking to you on various levels, and not all my speech has been in words and not all meant to enter by the ears. Parts of it have gone into you by other orifices and they will work in you in your lower parts. Ah, some of those things of mine were quite good. I regret that you refuse the savor of them in your proper consciousness and senses, but they'll be with you forever. We've won it all, Greg. Join it. You don't want to be with the losers."

"You worry and fret as though you'd not quite one it, Azazel," Gregory mocked. "Into your vehicle and be off now. The show watn's really as well done as I expected."

"The show isn't over with, boy," Azazel said.

There had been a white-eyed cow standing, stock-still, blind-still, too stupid to graze, less animate than a stone cow, an empty cow skin standing uncollapsed.

There had been a teen-aged devil named Azazel, sometimes in a silver dazzle, sometimes in a blue funk, who had talked in words for the ears and in non-words for other entry.

Then there was only one of them. With a laugh, the devil disappeared into the white-eyed cow and she became quite animate. She whistled, she did a little cross-legged dance, she skittered off, blind and bounding. She was full of loco weed as were almost all the creatures of these plains. Aye, and she was full of the devil, too.

And how was one to distinguish an artificial and vehicular cow from a real one? All the cows now looked artificial. They had become like great spotted buffalo in their going feral. They were humpbacked now and huge, wild and wooly, except that they were mostly somnambulistic and stumbling, with an inner pleasure, perhaps, or an inner vacuity.

And the horses of the plains also. What was the tired weirdness about the horses?

And the dogs. However had the dogs become undogged? How is a dog disarticulated?

And the people. They were unpersoned and perverse now. They all shared a secret, and the secret was that they were a shared species with few individuals among them.

Cows, horses, dogs, people, the four artificial species. Now strange contrivances had spouted out of them all and recombined in them. They were all wobble-eyed, white-eyed, vacant-eyed, and freakish. Except the Queer Fish. The Queer Fish Gregory Thatcher whistled, and the birds whistled and called back to him. How had the birds been spared? Meadow Larks, Scissor Tails, Mockingbirds, they all still used structured music.

The Queer Fish Gregory had been noticing movement in the center plains where his mother Judy had been traveling. The movement did not seem to constitute a threat. Some dozen of the ordered bulls of Judy Thatcher had surrounded a creature. They escorted him down into the center of the valley; they escorted him with a benign throating and bellowing. So it was a visitor to them, and not a hostile visitor. It was possibly one of the Seventy-Two, or one of the looser penumbra. Gregory stood and waited a moment for the signal.

It came. The two eyes that Judy Thatcher had outside of her head she called in to her now. Gregory went down into the valley from its west slope. His sister was descending from the opposite rampart.

2

"We owe so much to one phrase that we can hardly express it. Without it, we'd have had to invent a phrase, we'd have put a modicum of meaning into it (overestimating the intelligence of the people as we have done so many times), and we'd have failed and failed and failed again. One smiles to recall that phrase that our fathers accidentally stumbled on and which later came back to us a hundredfold like bread cast upon the waters: 'I am all for relevant religion that is free and alive and where the action is, but institutional religion turns me off.' Incredible? Yes. A hog, if he could speak, wouldn't make so silly a statement: a blind mole wouldn't. And yet this statement was spoken many millions of times by young human persons of all ages. How lucky that it had been contrived, how mind boggling that it was accepted. It gave us victory without battle and success beyond our dreams.

"It was like saying 'I love animals, all animals, every part of them: it is only their flesh and their bones that I object to; it is only their living substance that turns me off.' For it is essential that religion (that old abomination) if it is to be religion at all (the total psychic experience) must be institutionalized and articulated in organization and service and liturgy and art. That is what religion is. And everything of a structured world, housing and furniture and art and production and transportation and organization and communication and continuity and mutuality is the institutional part of religion. That is what culture is. There can no more be noninstitutional religion than there can be a bodiless body. We abjure the whole business. We're well quit of the old nightmare.

"What was, or rather what would have been, the human species? It was, would have been, the establishment of a certain two-legged animal. This had never been done of any species, and by a very narrow margin it was not done in this case. It would have been Structuring and Organization and Institution erected where such things had never been done before. It would have been the realization of worlds where worlds had not been before. It would have been the building of the 'Sky Bucket' for containing and shaping humanity. And if that 'Sky Bucket' should actually have been build and filled to the brim, the human race would have appeared; and it would have been transcendent. The first requirement of the 'Human' is that it should be more than human. Again, we abjure the whole business. We'd rather remain unstructured monkeys.

"Fortunately we have halted it, before critical mass could have been achieved, before even the bottom of the 'Sky Bucket' was covered with the transcendent flowing that might have become human. We have succeeded in unmaking the species before it well appeared. And a thing unmade once is unmade forever, both as to its future and its past. There never was a 'Sky Bucket;' there never was a transcendent flowing; there never was a structured human race or even the real threat of one.

"Our surviving enemies are slight ones, the plague-carrying Queer Fish and others of their bias. We'll have them down also, and then it will be the case that they never were up, that they never were at all. We have already disjointed the majority of them and separated them from their basis. And when they have become disjointed and destructed and disestablished, they become like ourselves in their coprophility and in their eruption against order.

"We have won it. We have unmade the species. We have created the case that it has never been. We have carried out our plan to the end that there never need be any sort of plan again. We have followed our logic to its conclusion. The logical conclusion of the destructing process 's illogic. So we had intended it to be. So we have now achieved it."

The Unmaking of the Species. Analities. -- The Coprophilous Monkey

The visitor was a long, lean, young man who had been put through the torture. He was close cropped and bare faced and he wore only that day's dirt and dust. He was washing now in the shallow stream. Gregory gave him soap made of bull fat and potash, and he took the visitor's clothes from him for strongest washing.

The visitor had made his request from Judy Thatcher before Gregory's arrival. She had felt a sudden fear at it, but she put it away from her. Now Judy, the mother and magic person, was writing a letter. She wrote on a great flat stone that providentially would serve her for table and desk and for a third function. Why should the stone not serve her providentially? Judy was a child of Providence.

Trumpet Thatcher, the daughter of Judy, the sister of Gregory, had called a horse. This was an ordered horse (there were still a few such), and not one of the wobble eyed not-quite-horses of the plains. Being an ordered animal, of its nature it obeyed her orders, and she rode it freely across the valley.

"He has not been followed, not closely at least," Judy Thatcher called to her daughter, looking up from her writing. "The danger is not now. The danger is tomorrow, after he has left us for a while, when he may fall in with the destructed ones who have followed him (but not closely), when he might bring them, if he is of the treason."

"Nevertheless, I will ride and look," the girl named Trumpet called. And she rode and looked.

The long, lean, young man seemed uneasy at the speculation that he might belong to the treason. He was tired eyed, but he was not yet truly wobble eyed. He was wordless and not quite open, but he seemed to have a sanity about him. That he was of the torture meant nothing; he might still be of the treason.

He had been lashed and gashed and burned and broken, that was true. It had been done to him in other years, and it had also been done to him recently, within a week. But had he been burned and gashed and broken for the Faith?

Many of the unstructured persons now tortured themselves or had themselves tortured, sometimes to try to stir their tired sensations, sometimes out of mere boredom. It was a last sensation of those who had sensationalized everything. But the threshold of pain of those tired ones who had almost disappeared; the most severe pain would hardly stir them from their drowse. It wasn't the same with them as if an alive and responding person were tortured.

The tired-eyed young man said that he was named Brother Ampirropos. He had come to Judy Thatcher, one of the Twelve, and asked for a Letter. This she could not refuse, even if the giving of it meant her life. She gave the letter now, and perhaps her life, with great sweeps of writing in a rowdy hand out of a rowdy mind. She was a special figure. Two thousand years ago she'd have been a male figure and yet that is not quite correct. The Twelve, in their office, had always been hermaphrodites for God. SO was Judy in her special moments.

Yet she wrote with difficulty, for all the free-handed sweep of her writing. There are things hard to write, there are things impossible. She dipped her calaniary pen in lampblack and in grace and wrote to somebody or something that might no longer be in existence.

Gregory had cleaned up the visitor and his clothes. The visitor rested on cool stones by the stream. He was wordless, he was almost cyeless, fie gave out no confidence at all. It would lia vc been so easy to slay him and bury him there under the cottonwoods and then be off a few quick miles before dark. He had no papers, he had no recommendations. He knew the Sign of the Fish, but there had been something unaccustomed and awkward about his way of giving it.

Gregory had gathered a quantity of wild wheat. He threshed it between the palms of his hands, kcep'ng the good grains, blowing the awns and gluines of chaff away. He threshed a good quantity of it. He ground it between quern

stones which were naturally about on the plain, ground it fine to flour for the small bread, and coarse to meal for the large bread. He built a fire of cow chips, put a flat capstone or oven stone over the fire on which to bake the two breads. The small bread (which, however, is larger than the world) he mixed with water only and put it, unsalted and without leaven, on the oven stone. The large, or meal bread, was salted and leavened and kneaded with cow milk, and was then let to rise before it was set on the stone to bake.

Trumpet Thatcher, fine eyed and proud, returned from her circuit ride. Her good eyes had missed nothing, neither flight of birds nor cloud of dust nor unusual drifting of cattle as far as any of the distant horizon that could be seen from the highest ridges. There was no enemy within three hours' ride of them, none within seven hours' walk, and the stranger, Brother Amphirropos, had come on foot. Or had he come on foot? Trumpet Thatcher, a strong and freckled girl, was now freckled with blood and it was not her own. She took a packet to the stranger.

"It is yours," she said. "You will need it when you leave." It was a small, heavy saddlebag, but she handled it as if it were light. And the stranger went white faced and kept silent.

Trumpet set to work to dig a pit. She was a strong girl, two years older than Gregory, and she dug easily. Also she dug with a queer humor. The pit should have been nearly square but she made it long and narrow. Sometimes she looked at the Stranger-Brother Amphirropos as though measuring him with her eyes, and he became very nervous.

"It is long enough and deep enough," she said after a while. Indeed it was long enough and deep enough to serve as grave for this stranger if it were intended for such. Trumpet put cow chips in the bottom of the pit and set fire to them. Then she put in wood from felled cottonwood and sycamores that lined the stream. It gradually grew to a rousing hot fire.

Judy Thatcher looked up and grinned at the shape of the pit her daughter had made, at the joke she had been playing. And Judy became a little more serious when she observed the shaken appearance of Brother Amphirropos.

"It is time," Judy Thatcher said then. She set her writing to one side of the providential flat rock, that rowdy looping screed on which she had been laboring so seriously. She brought the small bread to the providential rock. She also set out water and wild wine from gone-feral grapes.

"Brother Amphirropos, is there something you should say to me or I to thee, either apart, or before my two?" she asked clearly.

"No," the Stranger-Brother said shortly.

"We begin it then," Judy declared. Her two children and the Stranger-Brother gathered around her. She said ordered words. She did ordered things. She structured, she instituted, she transformed. She and they (including the strange Brother Amphirropos) consumed and consummated. The small bread and the small wine were finished. Judy washed her hands with the small water and then poured it into the porous earth. She returned then, smiling and powerful, to her writing.

Trumpet Thatcher put the large bread on to bake.

Gregory ordered a young bull of six months to come. It came, it nuzzled him, it was an ordered young bull and a friend. It went down before him, on foreknees first as though kneeling to him, but that is the way cattle go down. Then down with its high haunches also and on the ground before him. It rolled its head far back into the bulging of its hump. Gregory and the young bull looked eye to eye. Then Gregory cut its throat with a whetted knife.

They strung the young bull up on a tripod of cottonwood poles. Trumpet understood how to aid in this. Brother Amphirropos didn't quite. He was clumsy and unaccustomed to such labor, but they managed. They skinned the animal down. They cut and separated. They set portions of fat aside. They put large parts of ribs and rump into the burning pit to be seared and roasted.

Trumpet made a frame of poles meanwhile. She cut a great quantity of bull meat into long narrow strips and put them on the pole frame to dry in the wind and the smoke. She did other things with other parts of the animal, set

aside in crocks blood that she had drawn and further fat. The great intestine and the stomach she had out and everted. She washed them seven times in the stream, using lime, ochre mixed with bone ash (from the bull's own bone), gypsum, soap, soda, natron, and salt in the water for the seven washings.

The large bread was finished. Trumpet Thatcher brought it to the broad providential stone. They had butter and honey with it. Gregory brought aromatic roasts from the burning pit. They cut and broke and feasted, the four of them. They had cider and small wine. They had milk and cheese. They had blackberries and sand plums and feral grapes. They had sour cider for sauce. They feasted for quite a while.

Two coyotes came and begged and were fed. They could have all the small meat they wanted on the plains, but they loved the big meat that had been roasted.

"Will you be staying the night?" Trumpet Thatcher asked the Stranger-Brother Amphirropos.

"No he will not," Judy the mother answered for the stranger. "He must be gone very soon, as soon as we have finished, and I have finished."

"I'll make him a sling of provender then," Trumpet said. She cut a length of the bull's intestine and knotted it. She took strips of the beef that had been wind-drying and smoke-drying and sizzled them in the fire of the pit. She stuffed the length of intestine with them. She melted fat and poured it in with the meat, added honey and berries and grapes, scaled it with more fat, and knotted it finally with the second knot. It was a twenty pound length.

"Take it with you," Trumpet told him.

"I'll have no need for a great thing like that," the Stranger-Brother protested.

"You may have need," Gregory growled. "The treason cuts both ways. You may have to ride hard and fast when it is accomplished, or when it has failed. You can live on that for a very long time. I doubt if your days, will near come to the end of it. Mother, are you not finished yet?"

"Yes, I am finished. It's a short and inept thing, but it may carry its own grace."

This was the letter (it was titled Epistle to the Church of Omaha in Dispersal):

"To you who are scattered and broken, gather again and mend. Rebuild always, and again I say rebuild. Renew the face of the earth. It is a loved face, but now it is covered with the webs of tired spiders.

"We are in a post-catastrophe world, and yet the catastrophes did not happen. There are worse things than catastrophes. There is the surrender of the will before even the catastrophes come. There are worse things than war. There are worse things even than unjust war: unjust peace or crooked peace is worse. To leave life by withdrawal is worse than to leave life by murder. To be bored of the world is worse than to shed all the blood in the world. There are worse things than final Armageddon. Being too tired and wobble eyed for final combat is worse. There are things worse than lust -- the sick surrogates of lust are worse. There are things worse than revolution -- the half-revolution, the mere turning away, is worse. "Know that religion is a repetitious act or it is nothing. The 're' is the holy prefix, since nothing is successful the first time. It must be forever the 're,' the returning, the restructuring, the re-lexion, the reconstitution, the building back from defeat. We will rebuild in the dark and in the light; we will work without ceasing.

"Even our mysterious Maker was the Re-deemer, the re-doomer who wrangles for us a second and better doom, the ransomer, the re-buyer, the re-demptor. We are sold and we are ransomed, we are lost and we are found. We are dead and we are resurrected, which is to say 'Surged up again.'

"You ask me about the Parousia, the second coming. This has been asked from the beginning. There was urgent expectation of it in the beginning. Then,

in the lifetimes of those first ones, there came a curious satisfaction, as though the coming had been experienced anew, as though it were a constant and almost continuing thing. Perhaps there has been a second coming, and a third, and a three hundredth. Perhaps, as the legend has it, it comes every sabbatical, every seventh year. I do not know. I was not of the chosen at the time of the last sabbatical. We are in the days of a new one, but I know now I will not be alive for the day of it.

"Be steadfast. Rebuild, restructure, reinstitute, renew."

'X-Dmo. Judy Thatcher (one of the Twelve).

Judy had read the epistle aloud in a clear voice. Now she folded it, scaled it, and gave it to the Stranger-Brother Amphirropos.

"What thou doest do quickly," she said.

"Here is horse," Gregory said, "for your horse that my sister Trumpet killed. It was deception for you to leave your horse a distance apart and come to us on foot. No, worry not. You'll not need saddle or bridle. He is an ordered horse, and we order him to take you where you will. Take up your saddlebag and your bull-gut sling with you and be gone."

The Strange-Brother mounted horse, took the bag and the sling, looked at them with agonized eyes, almost made as if to speak. But whatever words he had he swallowed in his throat. He turned horse and rode away from them. He carried the letter with him.

3

"It worries us a little that our victories were too easy, that the world fell down before it had hardly been pushed. We have our results and we should rejoice, but we have them so easily that the salt and the sulphur are missing from our rejoicing. There is a lack of elegance in all that we have accomplished. Elegance, of course, was the first thing of which we deprived the humans, but we rather liked it in the small group that was ourselves. It's gone now. It was only a little extra thing in any case, and our own thesis is that there must be none of these little extra things.

"We intended to have our way in the post-cataclysmic world. We do have our way now and the world has all the predicted marks of the post-cataclysmic world, but the cataclysm did not happen. Since our whole objective was for flatness in all things, perhaps we were wrong to expect grandeur in the execution. Ah, but all the fabled mountains of the world were deflated so easily as to leave us unsatisfied. They were made of empty air, and the air has gone out of them.

"The Queer Fish have the saying that the Mysterious Master and Maker of the Worlds came and walked upon this world in historical time; that he will come again; that, perhaps, he has already come again and again.

"Let us set up the counter saying: that the Mysterious Masters and Unmakers of the Worlds (Ourselves) walk upon this world now; that we diminish it as we walk upon it; that we will not leave a stone upon a stone remaining of it.

"How is a person or a world unmade or unformed? First by being deformed. And following the deforming is the collapsing. The tenuous balance is broken. Insanity is introduced easily under the name of the higher sanity. Then the little candle that is in each head is blown out on the pretext that the great cosmic light can be seen better without it. Then we introduce what we used to call, in our then elegant style, Lady Narkos, Lady Porno, Lady Krotos, Lady Ephialtes, and Lady Hypnos; or Dope, Perversion, Discordant Noise, Nightmare or Bad Trip, and Contrived Listlessness or Sleep. We didn't expect it to work so easily, but it had been ripening for a long while.

"The persons and the worlds were never highly stable. A cross member is removed here on the pretext of added freedom. Foundation blocks are taken away on the pretext of change. Supporting studs are pulled down on the pretext of new experience. And none of the entities had ever been

supported more strongly than was necessary. What happens then? A man collapses, a town, a city, a nation, a world. And it is hardly noticed.

"The cataclysm has been and gone. The cataclysm was the mere gnawing away of critical girders and rafters by those old rodents, ourselves. And who are we? The Queer Fish say that we are unclean spirits. We aren't; perhaps we are unclean materialities. We do not know or care what we are. We are the Unmakers, and we have unmade our own memories with the rest of it. We forget and we are forgotten.

"There was no holocaust, there was no war, there was no predicted overcrowding or nature fouling. The nature fouling came later, from undercrowding. Parts of the cities still stand. Certain diminished black tribes are said still to inhabit their jungles. But, though it has been only thirty years, nobody remembers what the cities really were or who built them.

"We discovered that most persons were automatic, that they operated, as it were, by little winders. One had only to wind them up and they'd say 'That's where the action is, that's where the action is,' and then they'd befoul themselves. And to these little people winders there was always a mechanism release. When tired of playing with the mechanical people, we pushed the release. And the people were then rundown, inoperative, finished."

#### The Destroying of the World. Aphorisms -- The Jester King

It was late in the day after the Stranger-Brother left them.

"Let us flame the fire high," Gregory said, "that they may think we are still here. Then, when full dark comes, let us take horse and ride South to reverse our direction: or better, go West where there has been no show of action."

"I have not been told to go anywhere beyond this place," Judy said doubtfully. "Besides, we do not know for sure that it is the treason."

"Of course it is the treason!" Trumpet Thatcher affirmed. "But I do hope he gets clear of them after he has betrayed you and us. I've never liked their treason that cuts both ways. Why must they always kill the traitor as well as the betrayed? From his eyes, though, I don't believe that he wants to get clear of them."

"What are you waiting for, mother?" Gregory asked.

"For Levi, I think," Judy said doubtfully, dreamily.

"And who is Levi?"

"I really don't know. I believe he is just Levi from over the sea."

"Is there to be a meeting?" Gregory asked. "Are you to be a part of it?"

"There is to be a meeting, I think. I do not believe now that I will be a part of it. I will be dead."

"Well, have you any instructions at all for Trumpet and for myself," Gregory asked, "what we should do?"

"None at all," Judy admitted. "It goes blank. I am out of it soon."

"Should we not at least flame the fires and then move maybe two miles North under the dark?" Gregory asked. "We should not be completely sitting prey."

"All right," Judy said. "We'll go a ways, but not far yet." But she seemed listless as though it had indeed ended with her.

They flamed their fires to mark their old position. They packed meat into slings to carry with them. They burned the remnants of the young bull in the flaming pit then. They moved maybe two miles North. Judy gave instructions to a dozen of the big, horned, ordered bulls. Then Judy and Trumpet bedded down for the night.

Gregory took horse and rode in the night, anywhere, everywhere. As a Queer Fish, Gregory had now come of age on the plains, but he was still a twelve-year-old boy whose personal memory did not go back to any of the great events.

The Day of the Great Copout had been thirty years before. Even Gregory's



mother Judy had nothing but scant childhood memories of the days before the Copout. The legends and the facts of that event had now parted company considerably, but it had always been more legend than fact to it. The only fact was that the human race had one day slipped a cog; that it had fallen down from the slight last push, though it had withstood much more severe buffeting. The fact was that the race now built no more and sustained no more, that it had let the whole complexity run down and then looked uncomprehending at the stalled remnant of it.

The legend was that the Day of Freedom arrived for everyone, and that thereafter nobody would ever work at all. The people were very heroic in their refusal to work, and many of them starved for it. Their numbers fought in the cities (always under the now universal peace symbol) for what food and goods could be found there. Their greatly diminished numbers then moved into the countrysides which had for a long time been choked with their sad abundance. Every grain elevator was full to bursting, every feed lot and pasture had its animals to excess. Every haybarn and corncrib was full.

Before the Day of the Great Copout the population had already greatly diminished. In the Americas it was less than a third of what it had been a century before. In other lands it was down variously. The world had already begun to fall apart a bit (being so alike everywhere there was not much use in keeping up communication between the like parts) and to diminish in quality (why run if no one is chasing you?).

But the Day of the Great Copout was worldwide. As though at a given signal (but there had been no signal) people in every city and town and village and countryside of earth dropped their tools and implements and swore that they would work no more. Officials, and paper shufflers ceased to officiate and to shuffle paper. Retailers closed up and retailed no more. Distributors no longer distributed. Producers produced nothing. The clock of the people stopped although some had believed that the hour was still early.

The Last Day had been, according to some.

"The Last Day has not been," said a prophet. "They will know it when it has been."

There was a little confusion at first. Though distributors no longer distributed nor retailers retailed, still they objected to their stores and stocks being looted. There was bad feeling and bloodshed over this, and the matter was never settled at all.

The law people had all resigned from the law; and every congress and assembly in the world stood adjourned indefinitely or forever. There were, for a while, new assemblies and gatherings, freely chosen and freely serving, but these quickly fell apart and left nothing in their places but random gangs.

Minorities of odd people resisted the disintegration for a while, becoming more odd and more minor in their exceptions. The Crescent Riders kept up a little order for some years in the older parts of the world, not really laboring, looting just enough that the art be not forgotten; still keeping leaders who looked a little like leaders. The Ruddy Raiders maintained that there was nothing wrong with rape and arson so long as it was done as fun and not labor. The Redwinged Blackbirds and the Mandarins held together here and there.

And among certain groups that had always been considered peculiar, The Witnesses, the Maccabees, the Queer Fish, the Copout had not been complete. Certain numbers of these folks, somewhere between five and ten percent of them, resisted the Freakout, the Copout, the Freedom Day. These minorities of minorities had the compulsion to continue with their building, their ordering, their planting, creating, procreating.

This caused a disturbance in the New Free World. Groups should not be free to reject Free Think. So these remnants were hunted down. Even though it was against the new ways of the Free World, a certain organization was necessary for the hunts.

Most of that had passed now. Most of everything had passed. After thirty years had rolled by, the Free People of the world had become pretty old,

pretty old and pretty crabby. Though most of the males among them still wore the beards of their boyhood and youth, yet they had aged in every way. They hadn't been reproducing themselves to any great extent; and the most of them hadn't really been so very young when the Great Day had come and gone. The cult of youth had become a bit senile.

There were still some populations in the cities. The cities have always been built on the best lands of the country and have always occupied the best river bottoms and river junctions. There was good fishing, there was good grazing on the new grass that shattered the pavements and sidewalks, on the open places which became still more open, there was good fuel of several sorts, there were buildings remaining that were still tight enough to give year-round protection.

But most of the folks were in the countryside now. The special grasses and hems and poppies necessary to the Free Culture had long been established and abundant; they were in the cities and the countryside and the fringe areas. In the country were millions upon millions of now feral-cattle to be had for easy killing. Wheat and corn still grew of themselves, rougher and more ragged every year, but still more than sufficient. The scattered crops would apparently outlast the diminished people, the disappearing human race.

What children and young people there were now belonged, much beyond their expected percentages, to the peculiar groups. Children also showed some tendency to join these peculiar of the regular people groups. It was almost the case that any young person was now suspect. It was quite rare that any young one should really adhere to the Free People. There had even come the anomalous situation (to one who remembered the earlier days and the earlier slogans) that beards were now more typical of old men than of boys.

Such was the world. So had it been for thirty years, for the Freedom Era.

"But there is always hope," Judy Thatcher (and John Thatcher before her) used to preach. "Never has there been so much room for hope, never so great a vacuum waiting to be filled by it. Hope is a substance that will fill a vessel of any shape, even the convoluted emptiness that is the present shape of the world."

"And now in the sabbatical year" (this was Judy Thatcher alone preaching now, for John Thatcher was dead before sabbatical year rolled around) "there is more room for hope than ever before. There are still the Twelve (we have the Word that we will not diminish below that); there are still the further seventy-two traveling and laboring and building somewhere; and there are still the scattered hundreds who will not let it die. Oh, there will be a great new blooming! It begins! It begins!"

"Where? Where does it begin?" Gregory and Trumpet used to ask this rowdy-minded mother of theirs with laughing irony. "Where does it begin at all?"

"With the two of you," Judy would say. "With the dozens, with the hundreds, with the thousands of others."

Knock off the last zero, mother," Trumpet would always laugh. "There are a few hundreds, perhaps, very widely scattered. But you know there are not thousands."

"There have been thousands and millions," Judy always insisted. "And there will be thousands and millions again."

The Thatchers had been moving for all these years North and South in the marginal land that is a little to the West of the land of really adequate rain. There was plenty here for small bands. The Thatchers and their friends knew all the streams and pools and dry runs where one could dig to water. They had their own grain that seemed to follow their paths and seasons with its own rough sowing. They had their own cattle that were devoted to them in a strangely developed way.

Gregory Thatcher, as the summer starred night was rolling overhead (they

were quite a ways North), was remembering the murder of his own father, John Thatcher, two years before. It had been a nervous night like this one, following a daytime visit of a man with not-quite-right eyes, a man with the slight tang of treason on him.

But the man had asked for a letter to take to one of the churches in dispersal. This was given; it could not be refused. And it was given under John Thatcher's own name. The man had also asked for the sacrament; that could never be refused. And the man had been allowed to depart in peace and on foot as he had come. On foot-but a thousand yards away and he was on horse and gone in the afternoon's dust to meet a scheming group.

The group had come just at next dawn, after such a nervous night as this one; had come from an unexpected direction and killed John Thatcher in one swoop. They then were all away except the several who were tossed and killed on the horns of the ordered bulls.

And the stunned reaction had found voice and words only in Judy's puzzled lament:

"It is broken now. There are no longer the full twelve. It was never supposed to be broken."

"Bend down, woman," dead Thatcher said. "I am not quite dead. I lay my hands on you." John Thatcher laid his hands on his wife Judy and made her one of the Twelve. Then he died (for the second time, Gregory believed. Gregory was sure his father had been killed by first assault, and had come alive for a moment to accomplish what he had forgotten).

"It is all right then," Judy Thatcher had said. "We are still the Twelve. I make the twelfth. I was wrong ever to doubt of that; I was wrong ever to doubt of anything."

So they had buried John Thatcher, the father and still a young man, and rejoiced that the Twelve still survived. That had been two years ago.

Gregory rode his circuit all night. It was his to do. It was not for his mother Judy or for his sister Trumpet. They had other roles. This was Gregory's night. It had a name which he did not know. It was the Watch Night, the night of squires on the eve of their knighting, of princes on the nocturne of their crowning, of apostles on the vigil of their appointing.

There was a nervousness among the cattle here, and again there. There might be several strange bands in motion. The Thatchers had no firearms, no weapons at all that could not be excused or justified as being tools. A few of the roving gangs still had rifles, but these were sorry things near as dangerous to rascal as to victim. All such things were thirty or more years old, and none had been well cared for. But the raiders always had bludgeons and knives.

Gregory fell asleep on horseback just before dawn. This was not a violation of the Watch Night for him. It was the one thing for which he never felt guilt. Actually he was cast into deep sleep; it was done to him; it was not of his own doing or failing at all. His horse also was cast into deep sleep, standing, with head bowed down and muzzle into the stiff grass. They both slept like wind-ruffled statues.

Then there was movement, double movement, intruded into that sleep. There was the stirring and arraying of the ordered bulls. There was the false attack; and the bulls went for the false attack, being faithful beasts only.

Then there was the death attack, coming apparently from the West. Gregory himself was struck from his horse. One of the raiders had counted coup on him, but not death coup. He was on the ground begrimed with his own blood and his horse was dead.

Then he heard the clear ringing voice from which his sister had her name. It rose to a happy battle cry and was cut off in quick death. The last note of the Trumpet was a gay one, though. This had been a big happy girl, as rowdy in mien and mind as her mother.

Trumpet Thatcher was dead on the ground: and the mother Judy Thatcher was dead beyond all doubt. There was confusion all around, but there was no

confusion about this fact.

The ordered horned bulls had wheeled now on the real attackers. They wrecked them. They tossed them, men and horses, into the air, and ripped and burst them before they came to ground. And the only words that Gregory could find were the same words that his mother Judy had found two years before.

"It is broken now. They are no longer the full Twelve. It was never supposed to be broken."

His mother was quite dead and she would not come alive even for a moment to accomplish what she had forgotten. This dead Thatcher was not able to say, "Bend down, boy. I am not quite dead." She was quite dead. She would speak no more, her broken mouth would be reconstituted no more, till resurrection morning.

"Are there no hands?" Gregory cried out, dry-eyed and wretched. "Are there no hands that might be laid upon me?"

"Aye, boy, mine are the hands," came a voice. A man of mature years was walking through the arrayed bulls. And they, who had been killing strange men in the air and on the ground, opened their array and let this still stranger man come through. They bowed liortis down to the turf to this man.

"You are Levi," Gregory said.

"I am Levi," the man answered softly. He laid hands on Gregory. "Now you are one of the Twelve," he said.

4

"There has been a long series of 'Arrow Men' or 'Beshot Men' who have been called (or who have called themselves) Sons of God. These Comet-like Men have all been exceptional in their brief periods. The Queer Fish, however, insist that their own particular Mentor 'The Mysterious Master and Maker of the Worlds' was unique and apart and beyond the other Arrow Men or Comet Men who have been called Sons of God. They state that he is more than Son of God: that He is God the Son.

"We do not acknowledge this uniqueness, but we do acknowledge the splendor and destroying brilliance of all these Arrow Men. To us, there is nothing wrong with the term Son of God. There is not even anything wrong with the term God, so long as it is understood to be meaningless, so long as we take him to be an unstructured God. Our own splendor would have been less if there had not been sonic huge thing there which we unstructured. This unstructuring of God, which we have accomplished, was the greatest masterwork of man.

"The second greatest masterwork of man was the unstructuring of man himself, the ceasing to be man, the going into the hole and pulling the hole in after him; and the unstructuring, the destroying of the very hole then.

"We were, perhaps, the discredited cousins of man. We are not sure now what we were or are. We who were made of fire were asked to serve and salute those who were made of clay. We had been Arrow Men ourselves. Our flight was long flaming and downward, and now it has come to an end. We destroy ourselves also. We'll be no more. It is the Being that we have always objected to.

"The collapsing of the human species was a puzzle for the anthropologists and the biologists, but both are gone now. They said though, before their going, that it is a common thing for a new species to collapse and disappear; that the collapse, in these common cases, is always sudden and complete; they said that it was an uncommon case for any species to endure. They said also that there was never anything unusual in the human species.

"They were almost wrong in this evaluation. There was, or there very nearly was, something unusual about the human species. It was necessary that we alter and tilt things a bit to remove that unusualness. We have done that. We've blown it all for them and for ourselves.

"Fly-blown brains and fly-flown flesh! What, have you not lusted for rotted mind and for rotted meat? Here are aphrodisiacs to aid you. Have you not lusted for unconsciousness and oblivion? You can have them both, so long

as you accept them as rotted, which is the same as disordered, or unstructured, or uninstituted. This is the peaceful end of it all: the disordering, the disintegrating, the unstructuring, the rotting, the dry rot which is without issue, the nightmare which is the name of sleep without structure. Lust and lust again for this end! We offer you, while it is necessary, the means and the aids to it."

Mind-Blowing and World-Blowing. Aphrodisiacs. -- Argyros Daimon.

(No, really we don't know why these Unstructured Scriveners chose such oddities for calamary names.)

Levi and Gregory were walking northward at a great easy ambic. "It is no use to be bothered with horses and so be slowed," Levi said. They moved without hurry but at unusual speed. It was a good trick. Gregory would not have been able to do it of himself, but with Levi he could do it. Levi had a magic way of delving in the earth, as for the two burials. He had this magic way of moving over the earth.

"You are Levi from over the sea," Gregory said once as they moved along over the stiff grass pastures, "but how have you come? There are no longer any planes. There are no longer any ships. Nobody comes or goes. How have you done it?"

"Why Gregory, the world has not slumbered as deeply as you had believed. Things have not ceased completely to be done. Anything can be builded again, or builded a first time. And there are no limits to what a body can do when infused with spirit. Perhaps I walked on the water. Perhaps I traveled for three days in the belly of a whale and he brought me all this way and vomited me up on these high plains. Or perhaps I came by a different vehicle entirely. Oh, is it not a wonderful world that we walk this morning, Gregory!" They were in the dusty Dakota country, coming into that painted and barren region that is called the Bad Lands. Well, it was wonderful to the eye, perhaps, but it was dry and sterile.

"My father and my mother, both gone in blood now, have said that the world has gone to wrack and ruin," Gregory was speaking with some difficulty, "and that there is nothing left but to trust in God."

"Aye, and I say that we can build wonderful things out of that wrack and ruin, Gregory. Do you not know that all the pieces of the world are still here and that many of them are still useable? Know that the world has been not dead but sleeping. 'Twas a foolish little nodding off, but we come awake again now. And this Trust is a reciprocal thing. We must trust in Cod, yes. And He must trust in us a little. We are the Twelve. He puzzles a bit now I think. 'How are they going to get out of this one?' He wonders. Yes boy, I jest, but so does the Lord sometimes. He jests, He jokes, and we be the point of His most pointed jokes. An old sage once said that there were only twelve jokes in the world. What if we be those twelve? The possible humor and richness of this idea will grow in you, Greg, when you meet the others of the Twelve. There are some sly jokes among the pack of us, I assure you of that."

"When will we meet others?" Gregory asked.

"Oh, almost immediately now. It is a new day and a new year and a new rebuilding We'll set about it almost at once, Greg."

"The regular people have hunted us down like the lowest animals," Gregory vented some of his old feelings. "They say that we are the plague carriers."

"It is life that you carry, Greg, and life is the plague to their wobble-eyed view. But they are no great thing, boy. They are only the Manichees returned to the world for a while, those people who were born old and tired. They are the ungenerating generation and their thing always passes."

"In my life it has shown no sign of passing."

"Your life has been a short one, boy Greg. But I shouldn't call you 'boy'; you are one of the Twelve now. Ah, those sterile parasites have always

had a good press though, as the phrase used to be -- the Manichees, the Albigenses, the Cathari, the Troubadors (they of the unstructured noise who couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, they in particular have had a good press), the Bogomils, parasites all, and parasites upon parasites. But the great rooted plant survives, and the parasites begin to die now."

"They have spirits also who work for them, Levi," Gregory said. "They have the Putty Dwarf, the Jester King, the Silvery Demon, others."

"Those are parasites also, Gregory. They are mean and noisome parasites on real Devildom, just as their counterparts are parasites on humanity. Listen now to the ordered birds, Gregory, and remember that each of us is worth many birds. It bothered the disordered brotherhoods more than anything that the birds still used structured music. It bothered them in Languedoc, and in Bosnia, and in the Persia of Shapur. It bothered them in Africa, and on these very plains, and it bothers them in hell. Let them be bothered then! They are the tares in the wheat, the anti-lifers."

Gregory Thatcher and Levi Cain had been going along at a great easy ramble, moving without hurry but at unusual speed. But a third man was with them now, and Gregory could not say how long he had been with them.

"You are Jim Alpha," Gregory said (he began to have the magic or insight that his mother had had, that his father had had before her), "and you also come from overseas from over a slightly different sea than that of Levi."

"I am Jim Alpha, yes, and I have crossed a slightly different sea. We gather now, Gregory. There will be the full set of us, and the secondary set, and also the hundreds. And besides ourselves there will be the Other Sheep. Do not be startled by their presence. They also are under the blessing."

"There are bees in the air. Many thousands of bees," Gregory was saying. "I have never seen so many."

"They are bringing the wax," Jim Alpha was saying, "and a little honey also. No, I don't believe I've ever seen so many of them, not even in sabbatical year. Perhaps this is jubilee also. The bees are the most building and structuring of all creatures, and they have one primacy. They were the first creatures to adore; this was on the day before man was made. It won't be forgotten of them."

Other things and persons were gathering now, thousands of things, hundreds of persons. There was a remembered quality to many of them. "The remembered quality, the sense of something seen before, is only rightness recognized, Gregory," Tom Culpa was saying in answer to Gregory's thought. Tom Culpa must be rightness recognized then, since he was a remembered quality to Gregory Thatcher, he was someone appearing as seen and known before though the thing was impossible. How did Gregory even know his name without being told? Or the names of the others?

There was something coming on that would climax quickly. It was evening, but it was white evening: it would be white night, and then it would be morning. And the inner gathering seemed almost complete.

To Levi and Gregory and Jim Alpha had now gathered Matty Miracle (he was a fat old man; it was a miracle that he could be moving along with them so easily, matching their rapid amble), and Simon Canon, Melchisedech Rioga (what an all-hued man he was! -- what was he, Gael, Galla, Galatian, Galilean?), Tom Culpa whose name meant Tom Twin, Philip Marcach, Joanie Cromova (Daughter of Thunder her name meant: Judy Thatcher hadn't been the only woman among the Twelve), James Mollnir, Andy Johnson, and his younger brother Peter Johnson.

"It counts to twelve of us now," Gregory Thatcher said very sagely, "and that means --"

"-- that we have arrived to where we were going," Peter Johnson laughed. This Peter Johnson was very young. "Most of the seventytwo are here also," he continued. "Yes, now I see that they are all here. And many of the hundreds. We can never say whether all the hundreds are here."

"Peter," Gregory tried to phrase something a little less than a warning. "There are others here whom we know in a way but do not know by name, who are not of the Twelve nor of the Seventy-Two nor of the Hundreds."

"Oh, many of the Other Sheep are here," Peter Johnson said. "You remember that He said He had Other Sheep?"

"Yes," Gregory answered. He remembered it now. The puzzle was that this Peter Johnson was a boy no older than Gregory. There were many older men there, Levi, Jim Alpha, Matty Miracle, Simon Canon. How was it that Peter Johnson, that other twelve-year-old boy, was accepted as the Prince of them all?

The candle molders were busy. Candle molders? Yes, ten at least of them were working away there, or ten thousand. And full ten thousand bees brought wax to each of them. There would be very many candles burning through the white evening and the white night and on into the white dawn. Then these weren't ordinary candle molders or ordinary bees? No, no, they were the extraordinary of both; they had reality clinging to them in globs of light. Events gathered into constellations.

One using words wrongly or in their usual way might say that everything had taken on a dreamlike quality. No, but it had all lost its old nightmarish quality. It had all taken on, not a dreamlike quality, but the quality of reality.

There was, of course, the acre of fire, the field of fire. This acre was large enough to contain all that needed to be contained: it is always there, wherever reality is. There are tides that come and go; but even the lowest ebbing may not mean the end of the world. And then there are the times and tides of clarity, the jubilees, the sabbaticals. There is reassurance given. The world turns in its sleep, and parts of the world have moments of wakefulness.

Ten million bees had not brought all the wax for that acre of fire, and yet it was a very carefully structured fire in every tongue and flame of it. It was the benevolent illumination and fire of reality. It was all very clear, for being in the middle of a mystery. White night turned into white dawn; and the people all moved easily into the fire, their pomposities forgiven, their eyes open.

The Mysterious Master and Maker of the Worlds came again and walked upon this world in that Moment. He often does so. The Moment is recurring but undivided.

No, we do not say that it was Final Morning. We are not out of it so easily as that. But the moment is all one. Pleasantly into the fire that is the reality then! It will sustain through all the lean times of flimsiness before and after.

#### PARTHEN

Never had the springtime been so wonderful. Never had business been so good. Never was the World Outlook so bright. And never had the girls been so pretty.

It is true that it was the chilliest spring in decades -- sharp, bitter, and eternally foggy -- and that the sinuses of Roy Ronsard were in open revolt. It is admitted that bankruptcies were setting records, those of individuals and firms as well as those of nations. It is a fact that the aliens had landed (though their group was not identified) and had published their Declaration that one half of mankind was hereby obsoleted and the other half would be retained as servants. The omens and portents were black, but the spirits of men were the brightest and happiest ever.

To repeat, never had the girls been so pretty! There was no one who could take exception to that.

Roy Ronsard himself faced bankruptcy and the loss of everything that he had built up. But he faced it in a most happy frame of mind. A Higher Set of Values will do wonders toward erasing such mundane everyday irritations.

There is much to be said in favor of cold, vicious springtimes. They represent weather at its most vital. There is something to be said for

exploding sinuses. They indicate, at least, that a man has something in his head. And, if a man is going to be a bankrupt, then let him be a happy bankrupt.

When the girls are as pretty as all that, the rest does not matter.

Let us make you understand just how pretty Eva was! She was a golden girl with hair like honey. Her eyes were blue - or they were green - or they were violet or gold and they held a twinkle that melted a man. The legs of the creature were like Greek poetry and the motion of her hips was something that went out of the world with the old sail ships. Her breastwork had a Gothic upsweep - her neck was passion incarnate and her shoulders were of a glory past describing. In her whole person she was a study of celestial curvatures.

Should you never have heard her voice, the meaning of music has been denied you. Have you not enjoyed her laughter? Then your life remains unrealized.

It is possible that exaggeration has crept into this account? No. That is not possible. All this fits in with the cold appraisal of men like Sam Pinta, Cyril Colbert, Willy Whitecastle, George Goshen, Roy Ronsard himself - and that of a hundred men who had gazed on her in amazement and delight since she came to town. All these men are of sound judgment in this field. And actually she was prettier than they admitted.

Too, Eva Ellery was but one of many. There was Jeannie who brought a sort of pleasant insanity to all who met her. Roberta who was a scarlet dream. Helen - high-voltage sunshine. Margaret - the divine clown. And it was high adventure just to meet Hildegarde. A man could go blind from looking at her.

"I can't understand how there can be so many beautiful young women in town this year," said Roy. "It makes the whole world worthwhile. Can you let me have fifty dollars, Willy? I'm going to see Eva Ellery. When I first met her I thought that she was a hallucination. She's real enough, though. Do you know her?"

"Yes. A most remarkable young woman. She has a small daughter named Angela who really stops the clock. Roy, I have just twenty dollars left in the world and I'll split it with you. As you know, I'm going under, too. I don't know what I'll do after they take my business away from me. It's great to be alive, Roy."

"Wonderful. I hate not having money to spend on Eva, but she's never demanding in that. In fact she's lent me money to smooth out things pertinent to the termination of my business. She's one of the most astute businesswomen I ever knew and has been able to persuade my creditors to go a little easy on me. I won't get out with my shirt. But, as she says, I may get out with my skin."

There was a beautiful, cold, mean fog, and one remembered that there was a glorious sun (not seen for many days now) somewhere behind it. The world rang with cracked melody and everybody was in love with life.

Everybody except Peggy Ronsard and wives like her who did not understand the higher things. Peggy had now become like a fog with no sun anywhere behind it. Roy realized, as he came home to her for a moment, that she was very drab.

"Well?" Peggy asked with undertones in her voice. Her voice did not have overtones like that of Eva. Only undertones.

"Well what? My - uh - love?" Roy asked.

"The business - what's the latest on it today? What have you come up with?"

"Oh, the business. I didn't bother to go by today. I guess it's lost."

"You are going to lose it without a fight? You used not to be like that. Two weeks ago your auditing firm said that you had all sorts of unrealized assets and that you'd come out of this easily." "And two weeks later my auditing firm is also taking bankruptcy. Everybody's doing it now."

"There wasn't anything wrong with that auditing firm till that Roberta



woman joined it. And there wasn't anything wrong with your company till you started to listen to that Eva creature."

"Is she not beautiful, Peggy?"

Peggy made a noise Roy understood as assent, but he had not been understanding his wife well lately.

"And there's another thing," said Peggy dangerously. "You used to have a lot of the old goat in you and that's gone. A wife misses things like that. And your wolfish friends have all changed. Sam Pinta used to climb all over me like I was a trellis -and I couldn't sit down without Willy Whitecastle being on my lap. And Judy Pinta says that Sam has changed so much at home that life just isn't worth living anymore. You all used to be such loving man. What's happened to you?"

"Ah - I believe that our minds are now on a higher plane."

"You didn't go for that higher plane jazz till that Eva woman came along. And that double-damned Roberta! But she does have two lovely little girls, I'll admit. And that Margaret, she's the one that's got Cyril Colbert and George Goshen where they're pushovers for anything now. She does have a beautiful daughter, though."

"Have you noticed bow many really beautiful women there are in town lately, Peggy?"

"Roy, I hope those aliens get every damned cucumber out of that patch! The monsters are bound to grab all the pretty women first. I hope they're a bunch of sadist alligators and do everything that the law disallows to those doll babies."

"Peggy, I believe that the aliens (and we are told that they are already among us) will be a little more sophisticated than popular ideas anticipate."

"I hope they're a bunch of Jack the Rippers. I believe I could go for Jack today. He'd certainly be a healthy contrast to what presently obtains."

Peggy had put her tongue on the crux. For the beautiful young women, who seemed to be abundant in town that springtime, had an odd effect on the men who came under their influence. The goats among the men had become lambs and the wolves had turned into puppies.

Jeannie was of such a striking appearance as to make a man almost cry out. But the turmoil that she raised in her gentlemen friends was of a cold sort, for all that the white flames seemed to leap up. She was Artemis herself and the men worshipped her on the higher plane. She was wonderful to look at and to talk to. But who would be so boorish as to touch?

The effect of Eva was similar - and of Roberta and of Helen who had three little daughters as like her as three golden apples) and of Margaret and of Hildegarde. How could a man not ascend to the higher plane when such wonderful and awesome creatures as these abounded?

But the damage was done when the men carried this higher plane business home to their comparatively colorless wives. The men were no longer the ever-loving husbands that they should have been. The most intimate relations ceased to take place. If continued long this could have an effect on the statistics.

But daily affairs sometimes crept into the conversations of even those men who had ascended to the higher plane.

"I was wondering," Roy asked George Goshen, "when our businesses are all gone - who do they go to?"

"Many of us have wondered that," George told him. "They all seem to devolve upon anonymous recipients or upon corporations without apparent personnel. But somebody is gathering in the companies. One theory is that the aliens are doing it."

"The aliens are among us, the authorities say, but nobody has seen them. They publish their program and their progress through intermediaries who honestly do not know the original effecters. The aliens still say that they will make obsolete one half of mankind and make servants of the other half."

"Jeannie says - did you ever see her pretty little daughters? - that we see the aliens every day and do not recognize them for what they are. She says

that likely the invasion of the aliens will have obtained its objective before we realize what that is. What's the news from the rest of the country and the world?"

"The same. All business is going to pot and everybody is happy. On paper, things were never more healthy. There's a lot of new backing from somewhere and all the businesses thrive as soon as they have shuffled off their old owners. The new owners - and nobody can find out who or what they are - must be happy with the way things are going. Still, I do not believe that anybody could be happier or more contented than I am. Can you let me have fifty cents, George? I just remembered that I haven't eaten today. Peggy has gone to work for what used to be my company, but she's a little slow to give me proper spending money. Come to think of it, Peggy has been acting peculiar lately."

"I have only forty cents left in the world, Roy. Take the quarter. My wife has gone to work also, but I guess there will never be any work for us. Did you think we'd ever live to see the NO MALES WANTED signs on every hiring establishment in the country? Oh, well - if you're happy nothing else matters."

"George, there's a humorous note that creeps into much of the world news lately. It seems that ours is not the only city with an unusual number of pretty young ladies this season. They've been reported in Teheran and Lvov, in Madras and Lima and Boston. Everywhere."

"No! Pretty girls in Boston? You're kidding. This has certainly been an upside-down year when things like that can happen. But did you ever see a more beautiful summertime, Roy?"

"On my life I never did."

The summer had been murky and the sun had not been seen for many months. But it was a beautiful murk. And when one is attuned to inner beauty the outer aspect of things does not matter. The main thing was that everyone was happy.

Oh, there were small misunderstandings. There was a wife - this was reported as happening in Cincinnati, but it may have happened in other places also - who one evening reached out and touched her husband's hand in a form of outmoded affection. Naturally the man withdrew his hand rudely, for it was clear that the wife had not yet ascended to his higher plane. In the morning he went away and did not return.

Many men were drifting away from their homes in those days. Most men, actually. However that old cohabitational arrangement had grown into being, it no longer had anything to recommend it. When one has consorted with the light itself, what can he find in a tallow candle?

Most of the men became destitute wanderers and loafers. They were happy with their inner illumination. Every morning the dead ones would be shoveled up by the women on the disposal trucks and carted away. And every one of those men died happy. That's what made it so nice. To anyone who had entered higher understanding death was only an interlude.

It was a beautiful autumn day. Roy Ronsard and Sam Pinta had just completed their fruitless rounds of what used to be called garbage cans but now had more elegant names. They were still hungry, but happily so for it was truly a beautiful autumn.

The snow had come early, it is true, and great numbers of men had perished from it. But if one had a happy life, it was not a requisite for it to be a long life. Men lived little in the world now, dwelling mostly in thought. But sometimes they still talked to each other.

"It says here" - Roy Ronsard began to read a piece of old newspaper that had been used for wrapping bones - "that Professor Eimer, just before he died of malnutrition, gave as his opinion that the aliens among us cannot stand sunlight. He believed it was for this reason that they altered our atmosphere and made ours a gloomy world. Do you believe that, Sam?"

"Hardly. How could anybody call ours a gloomy world? I believe that we are well rid of that damned sun."

"And it says that he believed that one of the weapons of the aliens was

their intruding into men a general feeling of euphor -the rest of the paper is torn off."

"Roy, I saw Margaret today. From a distance, of course. Naturally I could not approach such an incandescent creature in my present condition of poverty. But, Roy, do you realize bow much we owe to those pretty girls? I really believe that we would have known nothing of the higher plane or the inner light if it had not been for them. How could they have been so pretty?"

"Sam, there is one thing about them that always puzzled me."

"Everything about them puzzled me. What do you mean?"

"All of them have daughters, Sam. And none of them have husbands. Why did none of them have husbands? Or sons?"

"Never thought of it. It's been a glorious year, Roy. My only regret is that I will not live to see the winter that will surely be the climax to this radiant autumn. We have had so much - we cannot expect to have everything. Do you not just love deep snow over you?"

"It's like the blanket of heaven, Sam. When the last of us is gone - and it won't be too long now - do you think the girls will remember how much light they brought into our lives?"

#### SEVEN STORY DREAM

Gadberry had a contempt for dawns badly done. He knew how blatant and stylized the outdoor world can be in its pristine moments: the contrived shagginess of grass, the stupidity of trees, the falsity of flowers, the oafishness of the birds and their inept melody. These scratched the smooth surface of his soul. "Bad work, very bad work," Cadbeny would opine, for he was an artist.

Yet there were times when these sorry units arranged themselves with striking effect. On this very early dawn they made an almost perfect harmony, and Gadberry gracefully acknowledged it. There it was: the old oaks, and the new firs and hedges:, the ragged Bermuda on the vacant lot in the new sun, the thin rye grass that held to the shade of the building, the corpse on the lawn, the row of hollyhocks and the lone aster in the middle of them, the drooping mimosa full of driveling birds, the even rank of garbage cans standing chalky in the aluminum dawn, and that damned dew over everything.

In spite of the elements that went into the composition the effect was near perfect -- and yet there was one clashing entity in that aubade scene. Gadberry reviewed it in his mind, for the artist is satisfied with nothing but perfection.

The firs, the hedges, the corpse, the mimosa, the garbage cans, the lawn, the hollyhocks with their lone aster -- something was in that peaceful morning scene that simply did not belong there.

Gadberry strode over and savagely struck down the aster with its white flower. The harmony of the scene was now perfect. He walked away, his artist's soul satisfied.

On his way to find an early eating place, he met a policeman named Embree and told him that Minnie Jo Merry was lying dead on that little lawn behind the apartment where she lived, and perhaps it should be looked into.

Captains Keil and Gold were there quickly and in charge. Minnie Jo was bruised about the throat and dried blood framed her mouth, but her death may have been caused by a violent concussion. Keil and Gold left her to Dr. Sanderson and their men. There was no crowd. This was very early on a Saturday morning, the apartment was on a quiet street, and the small rear lawn was secluded.

Orders were given for all the residents of the apartment building to remain in the building, and Captain Keil sent for Gillord Gadberry, the only one who had left. Gadberry told the patrolman who came for him that he would come as soon as he had finished his breakfast, and not a moment before. He finished it leisurely, drinking coffee and sketching while the policeman

fumed. He was sketching a fuming policeman.

"Mrs. Raffel," Captain Keil said, "you are the owner and operator of this apartment. I assume that you know something of your renters. Who lives here?"

"Minnie Jo lived here, and how will I get her rent now? She used to say, 'You worry too much about my rent. I'm not much further back than some of the others. You should know that I'm good for it. As long as I live I will always be good for what I owe.' But now who will be good for what she owes?"

"Your problem, Mrs. Raffel. Who else lived -- lives here?"

"Dillahunty, Gadberry, Handle, Izzard, Lamprey, Nazworthy, all in a permanent or temporary state of singleness."

"Six living and one dead tenant. Is that all?"

"It's a small place, but I do have two other empty units--three it will be now. I doubt if this will help me rent them."

"It may not make a difference. The girl was murdered in her own room, we believe, and she seems to have made no outcry. She was either taken very suddenly, or she knew the intruder well."

"Not necessarily, Captain. Minnie Jo was a very open person. If Jack the Ripper himself had come in, red from his trade, she'd have said, 'Hi, honey, sit down and talk to me.' But it was probably someone she knew."

"What are your feelings on hearing of the death of Miss Merry?"

"Satisfaction -- though I'll miss her -- and relief and thankfulness that it has finally turned out all right."

"Turned out all right? Do you call it turning out all right that she was murdered?" he asked her.

"Oh yes. There were many worse things that could have happened to her. How lucky that Minnie Jo was killed before they happened!"

"You will have to explain that. Did you hate her?"

"No, I loved her -- and I will explain. Minnie Jo was quite a good girl, but she was on the edge of becoming quite a bad girl. I have seen it happen to so many of the young ones who are loose in the world. Every time I know one, and notice her nearing the change, I pray that something will intervene and prevent it. This is the first time my prayers have been answered, and I'm thankful."

"Could you yourself have done anything to bring about this, ah, intervention, this preventative death?"

"I have just told you: I prayed. I didn't know it would be death, but that's as good a solution as any."

Then they questioned her a little about other things.

Gadberry, now back from his breakfast, was questioned by Captain Gold.

"Gadberry, do you often get up so early?"

"Never. But I often stay up this late. I work at night and sleep in the daytime."

"Why?" Captain Gold inquired.

"It was originally a pose. Then I became used to it."

"You seemed extraordinarily cool on discovering Miss Merry dead. You did not make an outcry, or hurry to report it."

"I reported it to the first person I met, a policeman. This seemed the logical person, and the logical thing to do."

"Almost too logical. What was your opinion of Miss Merry?"

"Alive, or dead? The girl was somehow completed in death. It improves many people. So often we see only the outside of people, but to look at her smeared with her own blood gives an added dimension, a more total view."

"Ah, what was your opinion of her alive?"

"Her hands and ankles were rather good; between, she was conventional. She hadn't eyes, no eyes at all. It isn't usual for a girl her age to have eyes. A child will sometimes have eyes, a woman after thirty may have them again, or a man after forty. I never saw her hair, which is to say that it was doctored. I sketched her ears sometimes, and her throat. I was not satisfied

with either of them, but then it isn't twice a year that I come on either that is really good. Are you interested in these things?"

"We are somewhat interested in the throat of this girl, and other matters. Since you work at night, you must have been awake. Did you hear any outcry or evidence of a struggle?"

"No. I could be throttled myself and not notice it. When I work I am taken by the Holy Spirit of art. I am probably unable to help you on the more mundane details you are seeking."

"What is your opinion of the tenant George Handle? It is reported that you sponge on him considerably."

"The artist is worthy of his hire. George is an oaf, a fool; but do not believe that a fool and his money are easily parted. I have to work for every dollar I twist out of him. George has caught the sickness of self-improvement. He learns at night. He has one of those sets with an earphone for under the pillow. He's put quite a bit of money into the recordings, money much better given to me. He has his own recorder, reads into it things he wishes to learn, then has them played back while he sleeps. Whatever he learns while asleep, he is still a fool when awake."

"You haven't any use for fools?"

"But I have! I often make use of fools."

They questioned him a little more, then went on to Izzard.

"Mr. Izzard, what were your relations with Miss Merry?" Keil asked.

"Avuncular -- of the Dutch-uncle sort. Low Dutch, really, but she hadn't come to realize that yet. I lavished gifts on her, and she was friendly. I believe I would ultimately have been successful. There was a change beginning in her,"

"Yes. Others have noticed the change. Were these expensive gifts?"

"Not to me. The price tags don't matter. I run the A to Izzard Variety Store. She was without discernment, and I have access to bargains."

"You wouldn't have been rebuffed by her, and been angry enough to do her in?"

"I was rebuffed by her constantly, but she did it in a graceful way -- never so as to stop the flow of gifts. My timetable for her was a long one and I am sorry to see it interrupted. No, I never laid a hand on her, except sometimes in attempted affection."

They questioned him a little about the others, a little more about himself, and left him.

Next, they questioned Nazworthy, a large, sullen-appearing man. He said that any of them might have done it: Handle, Izzard, Lamprey, Gadberry, Dillahunty. "They are a bad bunch. All of them always looking at the young girl. Any of them do it. Yes, I am awake when it happen. I hear the shots ring out. I say, 'Oh somebody have killed that pretty Miss Merry.' Whichever one you decide on, I will positively identify him as the killer."

"You are sure that you heard shots? She was not shot."

"It was the knife I hear, then. I hear it go in loud. I say, 'Somebody have killed that pretty Miss Merry.'"

"She was not knifed."

"How was it, then? What is the loud noise I heard? How did he kill her?"

"We believe that she was strangled, and then thrown or pushed from her window."

"My very thought. That is what I heard. The strangle noises and the thrown-out-of-the-window noises. I hear everything. I know everything. I will give testimony."

There was the look of arrogant laughter behind the hard eyes of Nazworthy. He was talking nonsense, either seriously or speciously. They would get nothing out of him.

Mr. Dillahunty told Keil and Gold, "My opinion of the lodgers I cannot give as I would like, being opposed to profanity. You may have to discount my opinion of them, however. I always have a low opinion of those with whom I live; but when I have moved on to other lodgings I remember them with

affection. No, I heard nothing in the night. I hear little without my aid, and I do not sleep with it. My acquaintance with the aforesaid Minnie Jo was sketchy. She would smile, and I would smile, but I am thrice her age and a crippled man. Having second sight, I knew that this would happen... No, I haven't second sight to that extent; I don't know who did it. You are sure it was one of the lodgers?"

"No. But she was apparently in her own room and in bed when accosted. She seems to have been strangled there and thrown out her own window. It was quite late, after the dew, and no feet left the building after the dew and before her discovery -- except those of Gadberry, who reported her. At the moment we have no leads to anyone except those who lived in this building. Tell us, what about Mrs. Raffel?"

"A religious fanatic but a good woman. It is believed by the others that I pay the regular rates here, but that is not so. I live here partly on the charity of Mrs. Raffel."

"And Gadberry, the artist?"

"In one word, selfish."

"George Handle? He has been called a fool."

"Only a half-fool. But easily led."

"Izzard?"

"A merchant. He never spent a penny without a return."

"Nazworthy? Is he as crazy as he sounds?"

"No, he isn't. He's a sardonic kidder, with a dislike for all authority. I can imagine a little the line he would take with the police. The cat, the only other animal that indulges in straight-faced sardonic humor, betrays itself by a flick of the tail. Nazworthy has the same motion, but without the tail."

"Could he kill?"

"I doubt he could kill Minnie Jo Merry. He hates only pretentious people, and she wasn't. He could kill a policeman -- or her killer. If another is killed, then you will know."

"We'll watch for that. Lamprey?"

"Nothing there. A nothing man. Did you notice the girl well? A beautiful thing and finely made, but there was plenty of strength to her. That nothing man couldn't have strangled her. She'd have strangled him and thrown him out the window. You'll have to look to one of the others, not to him."

Dillahunty was right. Lamprey was a nothing man, and he was terrified of the police. "I didn't kill her. I didn't know her. I didn't know anybody. I wash dishes at Webbers. I don't know nobody. I'm in my room all night."

"Well did you hear noises in the night?"

"Noises I always hear, and some of them never happen. I'm a nervous man, but I kill nobody, I hurt nobody. It is more I am always afraid someone would kill me."

Lamprey was a small man with small hands, a frightened man on the edge of incompetency. They questioned him a little more and left him.

"What do we have?" Captain Keil asked. "A heavy old woman who is a religious fanatic and also a good woman, and is glad that the girl was killed before something had happened to her. An artist who is selfish. A sardonic kidder who is not as stupid as he acts. A half-fool who is easily led. A nothing man. A merchant who does not spend without a return. An old Irishman who is thrice her age, but can we be sure that all the sap is dead in him? Seven, and one of them is crazy, but which? Let's go talk to the half-fool."

"Handle," Captain Gold said, "did you sleep well last night?"

"No. I have never slept well any night of my life. I dream a lot and worry a lot. I'm totally alive when I sleep."

"Was it because of your restlessness at night that you decided to try the learn-while-you-sleep systems?"

"Yes. I want to know things, so I decided to tap my nocturnal energy, as the advertisement said."

"What is your relationship with Gilford Gadberry?"

"Oh, he takes me for quite a bit, but he knows all the things I want to know. He can talk about music and funny paintings and the new dirty novels and psychology and things like that. Sometimes I turn him on when he talks, and play him back at night. Sometimes when I lend him money he'll make recordings for me -- Gaelic furniture design, and things like that. He arranges the things I'll hear at night so I'll get a well-rounded liberal education."

"I see. Did you hear any noises last night?"

"I hear noises every night, though I sleep with the earphones on, and all outside noise is supposed to be cut out. It must be that I dream the noises."

"Did you dream last night? Did you dream anything about a murder or a dead person?" Gold asked.

"Yes. About seven dreams like that."

"Tell us one of them."

"Which one?"

"Hell, I don't know. We're shooting blind. Tell us one."

"Well, this one, it's kind of silly. This was a long time ago, or anyhow it took place in a cabin and by candlelight. We sat wake over a corpse. We cracked and ate walnuts, but someone objected when we threw the shells in with the corpse, though that was a good place to throw them. Then someone else."

"Oh Judas!" said Captain Keil.

"I believe that is enough of that one," Captain Gold said. "Were all of the seven dreams like that?"

"All of them about murder or corpses, yes. All of them kind of silly."

"Seven story dreams we have yet," Keil said. "We're getting nowhere."

"Then we'll get somewhere," Gold said. "Handle, have you any idea who killed Minnie Jo Merry?"

"I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie Jo Merry."

"What?"

"I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie --"

"You are talking for the record?"

"Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed --"

So they took him downtown, but first they gave orders for a new lock to be put on George Handle's door and they left a guard at the apartment building.

Naturally they didn't leave it at that. The confession of the half-fool was complete enough. There were odd elements in it, but he was an odd man. He said that he had killed the girl in a dream; that he had risen and gone to her room and strangled her and thrown her out of the open window because he was jealous. Then he had gone back to his bed, to other dreams.

Yet there were points about that murder that hadn't been given out, that only the killer could have known; George Handle knew them

Nevertheless, the two captains continued to check during that morning. They found that Minnie Jo was an inefficient but promising worker for a stationery company. Her particular girlfriend believed that Minnie Jo ran around only with the men where she lived. They checked the places she frequented, and she had been seen with all the men.

She had been out with Gadherry and with Handle often, and with Izzard nearly as often. She had even been seen dining with the sardonic Nazworthy at a sardonic place run by two Bulgarian brothers. She often went to Webbers, and sometimes drank coffee in the kitchen with the dishwasher Lamprey. It was believed by them at Webbers, though, that this was mere kindness on her part.

Minnie Jo had even been seen drinking Irish coffee with Dillahunty in the after-midnight hours at Maddigan's. Nor was she the only girl a third his age that he brought in. The sap was not all dead in him yet.

They found that Dillahunty was well liked, Handle was liked, and even poor Lamprey was liked.

Izzard was not liked, Gadherry was not liked, Nazworthy was not liked.

"We can tell nothing by that," Keil said. "Handle has confessed, and it makes no difference that the people who know him like him. There is nothing to tie onto the others, even if Gadberry is selfish, Izzard is demanding, and Nazworthy is sardonic. We still have the fact that Handle has confessed."

"Yes. Repetitiously. But to be sure, let's go hear him again. Again, George Handle told them, "I killed Minnie Jo Merry. Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed Minnie --"

"He sounds like --"

"Yes, doesn't he?" Keil interrupted Gold. "Let's go look for it."

"Has anybody been trying to get into Handle's room?" they asked the guard at the apartment.

"Gadberry has. Says Handle owes him money. Says he was to go in and get it. Says he wears Handle's shirts, and this locking out puts him to grave inconvenience. Handle never locked his door, according to him. Gadberry was disappointed to find the new lock on it. He seems pretty nervous now." They found Gadberry.

"Come on with us. We'll go to his room and get it."

"What? Get what?"

"What you were trying to get. What is making you nervous that you couldn't get? It will be here, somewhere with the bunch of them. Quite a few of them here, aren't there, Gadberry?"

They were in Handle's room now.

"I don't know what you mean," Gadberry protested.

"The tapes, the wires, the records. How long would it take to play them all?"

"I don't know."

"You know pretty well. It would take about forty hours or more, wouldn't it? Will you find it for us, or must we play them all? And you will listen."

"I won't listen to forty hours of that drivel. I'll find it for you. I'd have said that nothing could break me down, but that surely could."

"Why did you kill the girl, Gadberry?"

"Jealousy, frustration, curiosity..."

"I can understand the jealousy. She was an attractive girl. What was the frustration?"

"She was almost perfect, but not quite, and it is that which is just short of a masterpiece that infuriates. It is so near -- yet it misses. I'm always in anger to destroy a near-masterpiece."

"So you destroyed her. And the third element was your curiosity, like when you said 'The girl was somehow completed in death.' You had to see how she would look dead."

"Yes. That knowledge was necessary to my work." Gadberry had located the tape for them, and Captain Keil was threading it into the machine.

"I suspect that you weren't accurate in your appraisal to us of Miss Merry, Gadberry. You said that she hadn't eyes, and other things."

"I lied. She had eyes, and she wasn't conventional. She was near perfect; gentlemen. So near."

"And in preparation for the murder it was only necessary for you to condition the easily led George Handle to a confession?"

"Astute of me, was it not, Captains?"

The machine played now in the compelling voice of Gilford Gadberry, as it had night after night played to George Handle, in his sleep, till he had learned to answer on cue; and the cue, of course, was the question: "Who killed Minnie Jo Merry?"

"Pretty uninspired," Gadberry had to admit, "but I had to assume uninspired questioners, to whom the cliché would come naturally."

The machine went on to recount certain abominations that only the killer knew he would commit, but the voice of that most polished adman returned again and again to the command:

"Say, 'I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie Jo Merry. Strangled



her and threw her out the window. I killed --'"

#### THE WORLD AS WILL AND WALLPAPER

A template, a stencil, a plan.  
Corniest, orniest damsel and man,  
Orderly, emptily passion and pity,  
All-the-World, All-the-World, All-the-World City.  
13th Street Ballad

There is an old dictionary-encyclopedia that defines a City as "...a concentration of persons that is not economically self-contained." The dictionary-encyclopedia being an old one, however (and there is no other kind), is mistaken. The World City is economically self-contained.

It was William Morris who read this definition in the old book. William was a bookie, or readie, and he had read parts of several books. But now he had a thought: If all the books are old, then things may no longer be as the books indicate. I will go out and see what things are like today in the City. I will traverse as much of the City as my life allows me. I may even come to the Wood Beyond the World that my name-game ancestor described.

William went to the Permit Office of the City. Since there was only one City, there might be only one Permit Office, though it was not large.

"I want a permit to traverse as much of the City as my life allows me," William told the permit man. "I even want a permit to go to the Wood Beyond the World. Is that possible?"

The permit man did a little skittish dance around William, "like a one-eyed gander around a rattlesnake." The metaphor was an old and honored one, one of the fifty-four common metaphors. They both understood it: it didn't have to be voiced. William was the first customer the permit man had had in many days, though, so the visit startled him.

"Since everything is permitted, you will need no permit," the permit man said. "Go, man, go."

"Why are you here then?" William asked him. "If there are no permits, why is there a Permit Office?"

"This is my niche and my notch," the permit man said. "Do away with me and my office and you begin to do away with the City itself. It is the custom to take a companion when you traverse the City."

Outside, William found a companion named Kandy Kalosh and they began to traverse the City that was the World. They began (it was no more than coincidence) at a marker set in stone that bore the words "Beginning of Stencil 35,352." The City tipped and tilted a bit, and they were on their way. Now this is what the City was like:

It was named Will of the World City, for it had been constructed by a great and world-wide surge of creative will. Afterward, something had happened to that surge, but it did not matter; the City was already created then.

The City was varied, it was joyful, it was free and it covered the entire world. The mountains and heights had all been removed, and the City, with its various strips of earth and sweet water and salt water, floated on the ocean on its interlocking floaters. As to money values, everything was free; and everything was free as to personal movement and personal choice. It was not really crowded except in the places where the people wanted it crowded, for people do love to congregate. It was sufficient as to foodstuff and shelter and entertainment. These things have always been free, really; it was their packaging and traffic that cost, and now the packaging and traffic were virtually eliminated.

"Work is joy" flashed the subliminal signs. Of course it is. It is a joy to stop and turn into an area and work for an hour, even an hour and a half, at some occupation never or seldom attempted before. William and Kandy entered an area where persons made cloth out of clamshells, softening them in one solution, then drawing them out to filaments on a machine, then forming (not

weaving) them into cloth on still another machine. The cloth was not needed for clothing or for curtains, though sometimes it was used for one or the other. It was for ornamentation. Temperature did not require cloth (the temperature was everywhere equitable) and modesty did not require it, but there was something that still required a little cloth as ornament.

William and Kandy worked for nearly an hour with other happy people on the project. It is true that their own production was all stamped "Rejected" when they were finished, but that did not mean that it went all the way back to the clamshells, only back to the filament stage.

"Honest labor is never lost," William said as solemnly as a one-horned owl with the pip.

"I knew you were a readie, but I didn't know you were a talkie," Kandy said. People didn't talk much then. Happy people have no need to talk. And of course honest labor is never lost, and small bits of it are pleasurable.

This portion of the City (perhaps all portions of the City) floated on an old ocean itself. It had, therefore, a slight heave to it all the time. "The City is a tidy place" was an old and honored saying. It referred to the fact that the City moved a little with the tides. It was a sort of joke.

The two young persons came ten blocks; they came a dozen. For much of this traverse the City had been familiar to William but not to Kandy. They had been going west, and William had always been a westing lad. Kandy, however, had always wandered east from her homes, and she was the farthest west that she had ever been when she met William.

They came to the 14th Street Water Ballet and watched the swimmers. These swimmers were very good, and great numbers of curiously shaped fish frolicked with them in the green salt-fresh pools. Anyone who wished to could, of course, swim in the Water Ballet, but most of the swimmers seemed to be regulars. They were part of the landscape, of the waterscape.

William and Kandy stopped to eat at an algae-and-plankton quick-lunch place on ~5th Street. Indeed, Kandy worked there for half an hour, pressing the plankton and adding squirts of special protein as the people ordered it. Kandy had worked in quick-lunch places before.

The two of them stopped at the Will of the World Exhibit Hall on ~6th Street. They wrote their names with a stylus in wax when they went in, or rather William wrote the names of both of them for Kandy could not write. And because he bore the mystic name of William, he received a card out of the slot with a genuine Will of the World verse on it:

This City of the World is wills  
Of Willful folk, and nothing daunts it.  
With daring hearts we hewed the hills  
To make the World as Willy wants it.

Really, had it taken such great will and heart to build the City of the World? It must have or there would not have been a Will of the World Exhibit Hall to commend it. There were some folks, however, who said that the building of the World City had been an automatic response.

Kandy, being illiterate (as the slot knew), received a picture card.

They stopped at the Cliff-Dweller Complex on ~7th Street. This part of the City was new to William as well as to Kandy.

The cliffs and caves were fabricated and not natural cliff dwellings, but they looked very much as old cliff dwellings must have looked. There were little ladders going up from one level to the next. There were people sitting on the little terraces with the small-windowed apartments behind them. Due to the circular arrangement of the cliff dwellings, very many of the people were always visible to one another. The central courtyard was like an amphitheater. Young people played stickball and Indian ball in this area. They made music on drums and whistles. There were artificial rattlesnakes in coils, artificial rib-skinny dogs, artificial coyotes, artificial women in the act of grinding corn with hand querns. And also, in little shelters or pavilions, there were

real people grinding simulacrum corn on apparatus.

Kandv Kalosh went into one of the pavilions and ground corn for fifteen minutes. She had a healthy love for work. William Morris made corn-dogs out of simulacrum corn and seaweeds. It was pleasant there. Sometimes the people sang simulacrum Indian songs. There were patterned blankets, brightly collared, and woven out of bindweed. There were buffoons in masks and buffoon suits who enacted in-jokes and in-situations that were understood by the cliff-dwelling people only, but they could be enjoyed by everyone.

"All different, all different, every block different," William murmured in rapture. It had come on evening, but evening is a vague thing. It was never very bright in the daytime or very dark at night. The World City hadn't a clear sky but it had always a sort of diffused light. William and Kandy traveled still farther west.

"It is wonderful to be a world traveler and to go on forever, William exulted. "The City is so huge that we cannot see it all in our whole lives and every bit of it is different."

"A talkie you are," Kandy said. "However did I get a talkie? If I were a talkie too I could tell you something about that every-part-of-it-is-different bit."

"This is the greatest thing about the whole World City," William sang, "to travel the City itself for all our lives, and the climax of it will be to see the Wood Beyond the World. But what happens then, Kandy? The City goes on forever, covering the whole sphere. It cannot be bounded. What is beyond the Wood Beyond the World?"

"If I were a talkie I could tell you," Kandy said.

But the urge to talk was on William Morris. He saw an older and somehow more erect man who wore an arm band with the lettering "Monitor" or it. Of course only a readie, or bookie, like William would have been able to read the word.

"My name-game ancestor had to do with the naming as well as the designing of the Wood Beyond the World," William told the erect and smiling man, "for I also am a William Morris. I am avid to see this ultimate wood. It is as though I have lived for the moment."

"If you will it strongly enough, then you may see it, Willy," the man said.

"But I am puzzled," William worried out the words, and his brow was furrowed. "What is beyond the Wood Beyond the World?"

"A riddle, but an easy one." The man smiled. "How is it that you are a readie and do not know such simple things?"

"Cannot you give me a clue to the easy riddle?" William begged.

"Yes," the man said. "Your name-game ancestor had to do with the designing of one other particular thing besides the Wood Beyond the World."

"Come along, readie, come along," Kandy said.

They went to the West Side Show Square on 18th Street. Neither of them had ever been to such a place, but they had heard rumors of it for there is nothing at all like the West Side Show Square on 18th Street.

There were the great amplifiers with plug-ins everywhere. Not only were the instruments plugged in, but most of the people were themselves plugged in. And ah! The wonderful setting was like the backside of old tenements all together in a rough circuit. There were period fire escapes that may even have been accurate. They looked as though persons might actually climb up and down on them. Indeed, light persons had actually done this in the past, but it was forbidden now as some of the folks had fallen to death or maiming. But the atmosphere was valid.

Listen, there was period washing on period clotheslines! It was flapped by little wind machines lust as though there were a real wind blowing. No wonder they called this the show square. It was a glum-slum, a jetto-ghetto, authentic past time.

The performing people (and all the people on that part of 18th Street seemed to be performing people) were dressed in tight jeans and scalloped or

ragged shirts, and even in broken shoes full of holes. It must have been very hot for them, but art is worth it. It was a memento of the time when the weather was not everywhere equitable.

There were in-dramas and in-jokes and in-situations acted out. The essence of the little dramas was very intense hatred for a group or class not clearly defined. There were many of those old-period enemy groups in the various drama locations of the City.

The lights were without pattern but they were bright. The music was without tune or melody or song or chord but it was very loud and very passionate. The shouting that took the place of singing was absolutely livid. So me of the performers fell to the ground and writhed there and foamed at their mouths.

It was a thing to be seen and heard -- once. William and Kandy finally took their leave with bleeding ears and matter-encrusted eyes. They went along to 19th Street where there was a Mingle-Mangle.

It was now as dark as it ever got in the City but the Mangle was well lighted. Certain persons at the Mangle laughingly took hold of William and Kandy and married them to each other. They had bride and groom crowns made of paper and they put them on their heads.

Then they wined and dined them, an old phrase. Really, they were given fine cognac made of fish serum and braised meat made of algae but also mixed with the real chopped flesh of ancients.

Then William and Kandy padded down in the great Pad Palace that was next to the Mangle. Every night there were great numbers of people along that part of 19th Street, at the Mingle-Mangle and at the Pad Palace, and most of these folks were friendly, with their glazed eyes and their dampish grins.

2

Pleasant most special to folks of the club!  
Pleasant for manifold minions and hinds of it!  
Stuff them with plankton and choppings and chub!  
Simple the City and simple the minds of it.  
20th Street Ballad

The world's resources are consumed disproportionately by the intelligent classes. Therefore we will keep our own numbers drastically reduced. The wan-wits have not strong reproductive or consuming urge so long as they are kept in reasonable comfort and sustenance. They are happy, they are entertained; and when they are convinced that there is no more for them to see, they become the ancients and go willingly to the choppers. But the 2 per cent or so of us superior ones are necessary to run the world.

Why then do we keep the others, the simple-minded billions? We keep them for the same reason that our ancestors kept blooms or lands or animals or great houses or trees or artifacts. We keep them because we want to, and because there is no effort involved.

But a great effort was made once. There was an incredible surge of will. Mountains were moved and leveled. The sky itself was pulled down, as it were. The Will of the World was made manifest. It was a new act of creation. And what is the step following creation when it is discovered that the Commonality is not worthy of the City created? When it is discovered also that they are the logical cattle to fill such great pens? The next step is hierarchies. The Angels themselves have hierarchies, and we are not less. It is those who are intelligent but not quite intelligent enough to join the Club who are imperiled and destroyed as a necessity to the operation of the City. At the Summit is always the Club. It is the Club in the sense of a bludgeon and also of an organization.

Will of the World Annals -- Classified Abstract

In the morning, Kandy Kalosh wanted to return to her home even though it

was nearly twenty blocks to the eastward. William watched her go without sorrow. He would get a westering girl to go with him on the lifelong exploration of the endlessly varied City. He might get a girl who was a talkie or even a readie, or bookie.

And he did. She was named Fairhair Farquhar, though she was actually dark of hair and of surface patina. But they started out in the early morning to attain (whether in a day or a lifetime) the Wood Beyond the World.

"But it is not far at all," Fairhair said (she was a talkie). "We can reach it this very evening. We can sleep in the Wood in the very night shadow of the famous Muggers. Oh, is the morning not wonderful! A blue patch was seen only last week, a real hole in the sky. Maybe we can see another."

They did not see another. It is very seldom that a blue (or even a starry) hole can be seen in the greenhouse glass-gray color that is the sky. The Will of the World had provided sustenance for everyone, but it was a muggy and sticky World City that provided almost equally warm from pole to pole, cloyingly fertile in both the land strips and the water strips, and now just a little but queasy.

"Run, William, run in the morning!" Fairhair cried, and she ran while he shuffled after her. Fairhair did not suffer morning sickness but most of the world did: it had not yet been bred out of the races. After all, it was a very tidy world.

There was a great membrane or firmament built somewhere below, and old ocean was prisoned between this firmament and the fundamental rock of Gehenna-earth. But the ocean-monster tossed and pitched and was not entirely tamed: he was still old Leviathan.

Along and behind all the streets of the World City were the narrow (their width not five times the length of a man) strips, strips of very nervous and incredibly fertile land, of salt water jumping with fish and eels and dark with tortoise and so thick with blue-green plankton that one could almost walk on it, of fresh water teeming with other fish and loggy with snapping turtles and snakes, of other fresh water almost solid with nourishing algae, of mixed water filled with purged shrimp and all old estuary life; land strips again, and strips of rich chemical water where people voided themselves and their used things and from which so many valuable essences could be extracted; other strips, and then the houses and buildings of another block, for the blocks were not long. Kaleidoscope of nervous water and land, everywhere basic and everywhere different, boated with boats on the strange overpass canals, crossed by an infinity of bridges.

"And no two alike!" William sang, his morning sickness having left him. "Every one different, everything different in a world that cannot be traversed in a lifetime. We'll not run out of wonders!"

"William, William, there is something I have been meaning to tell you," Fairhair tried to interpose.

"Tell me, Fairhair, what is beyond the Wood Beyond the World, since the world is a globe without bounds?"

"The World Beyond the Wood is beyond the Wood Beyond the World," Fairhair said simply. "If you want the Wood, you will come to it, but do not be cast down if it falls short for you."

"How could it fall short for me? I am a William Morris. My name-game ancestor had to do with the naming as well as the designing of the Wood."

"Your name-game ancestor had to do with the designing of another things also," Fairhair said. Why, that was almost the same thing as the monitor man had said the day before. What did they mean by it?

William and Fairhair came to the great Chopper House at 20th Street. The two of them went in and worked for an hour in the Chopper House.

"You do not understand this, do you, little William?" Fairhair asked.

"Oh, I understand enough for me. I understand that it is everywhere different."

"Yes, I suppose you understand enough for you," Fairhair said with a touch of near sadness. (What they chopped up in the Chopper House was the

ancients.) They went on and on along the strips and streets of the ever-changing city. They came to 21st Street and 22nd and 23rd. Even a writie could not write down all the marvels that were to be found at every street. It is sheer wonder to be a world traveler.

There was a carnival at 23rd Street. There were barkies, sharkies, sparkies, darkies, parkies, and markies; the visitors were the markies, but it was not really bad for them. There was the very loud music even though it was supposed to be period tingle-tangle or rinky-dink. There was a steam calliope with real live steam. There were the hamburger stands with the wonderful smell of a touch of garlic in the open air, no matter that it was ancient chopper meat and crinoid-root bun from which the burgers were made. There were games of chance, smooch houses and cooch houses, whirly rides and turning wheels, wino and steino bars and bordellos, and Monster and Misbegotten displays in clamshell-cloth tents.

Really, is anyone too old to enjoy a carnival? Then let that one declare himself an ancient and turn himself in to a Chopper House.

But on and on; one does not tarry when there is the whole World City to see and it not be covered in one lifetime. On 24th (or was it 25th?) Street were the Flesh Pots; and a little beyond them was the Cat Center. One ate and drank beyond reason in the Flesh Pots region and also became enmeshed in the Flesh Mesh booths. And one catted beyond reason in the honeycomblike cubicles of the Cat Center. Fairhair went and worked for an hour at the Cat Center; she seemed to be known and popular there.

But on and on! Everywhere it is different and everywhere it is better.

Along about 27th and 28th Streets were the Top of the Town and Night-Life Knoll, those great cabaret concentrations. It was gin-dizzy here; it was yesterday and tomorrow entangled with its great expectations and its overpowering nostalgia; it was loud as the West Side Show Square; it was as direct as the Mingle-Mangle or the Pad Palace. It was as fleshy as the Flesh Pots and more catty than the Cat-Center. Oh, it was the jumpingest bunch of places that William had yet seen in the City.

Something a little sad there, though; something of passion and pity that was to" empty and too pat. It was as though this were the climax of it all, and one didn't want it to be the climax yet. It was as if the Top of the Town and Night-Life Knoll (and not the Wood Beyond the World) were the central things of the World City.

Perhaps William slept there awhile in the sadness that follows the surfeit of flesh and appetite. There were other doings and sayings about him, but mostly his eyes were closed and his head was heavy.

But then Fairhair had him up again and rushing toward the Wood in the still early night.

"It is only a block, William, it is only a block," she sang, "and it is the place you have wanted more than any other." (The Wood began at 29th Street and went on, it was said, for the space of two full blocks.) But William ran badly and he even walked badly. He was woozy and confused, not happy, not sad, just full of the great bulk of life in the City. He'd hardly have made it to his high goal that night except for the help of Fairhair. But she dragged and lifted and carried him along in her fine arms and on her dusky back and shoulders. He toppled off sometimes and cracked his crown, but there was never real damage done. One sometimes enters the Wood Beyond in a sort of rhythmic dream, grotesque and comic and jolting with the sway of a strong friend and of the tidy world itself. And William came in with his arms around the neck and shoulders of the girl named Fairhair, with his face buried in her hair itself, with his feet touching no ground.

But he knew it as soon as they were in the Wood. He was afoot again and strong again in the middle of the fabled place itself. He was sober? No, there can be no sobriety in the Wood; it has its own intoxication.

But it had real grass and weeds, real trees (though most of them were bushes), real beasts as well as artificial, real spruce cones on the turf, real birds (no matter that they were clattering crows) coming in to roost.

There was the carven oak figure of old Robin Hood and the tall spar-wood form of the giant lumberjack Paul Bunyan. There was the Red Indian named White Deer who was carved from cedarwood. There was maple syrup dripping from the trees (is that the way they used to get it?), and there was the aroma of slippery elm with the night dampness on it.

There were the famous Muggers from the mugger decades. They were of papier-mache, it is true, and yet they were the most fearsome. There were other dangerous beasts in the Wood, but none like the Muggers. And William and Fairhair lay down and wept in the very night shadow of the famous Muggers for the remainder of the enchanted night.

3

"Wonder-bird, wander-bird, where do you fly?"  
"All over the City, all under the sky."  
"Wandr'ing through wonders of strippies and streets,  
Changing and challenging, bitters and sweets."  
"Wander-bird, squander-bird, should not have budged:  
City is sicko and sky is a smudge."  
1st Street Ballad

"Run, William, run in the morning!" Fairhair cried, and she ran while William (confused from the night) shuffled after her.

"We must leave the Wood?" he asked.

"Of course you must leave the Wood. You want to see the whole world, so you cannot stay in one place. You go on, I go back. No, no, don't you look back or you'll be turned into a salt-wood tree."

"Stay with me, Fairhair."

"No, no, you want variety. I have been with you long enough. I have been guide and companion and pony to you. Now we part."

Fairhair went back. William was afraid to look after he. He was in the world beyond the Wood Beyond the World. He noticed though that the street was 1st Street and not 31st Street as he had expected.

It was still wonderful to be a world traveler, of course, but not quite as wonderful as it had been one other time. The number of the street shouldn't have mattered to him. William had not been on any 1st Street before. Or 2nd.

But he had been on a 3rd Street before on his farthest trip east.

Should he reach it again on his farthest trip west? The world, he knew (being a readie who had read parts of several books), was larger than that. He could not have gone around it in thirty blocks. Still, he came to 3rd Street in great trepidation.

Ah, it was not the same 3rd Street he had once visited before; almost the same but not exactly. An ounce of reassurance was intruded into the tons of alarm in his heavy head. But he was alive, he was well, he was still traveling west in the boundless City that is everywhere different.

"The City is varied and joyful and free," William Morris said boldly, "and it is everywhere different." The he saw Kandy Kalosh and he literally staggered with the shock. Only it did not quite seem to be she.

"Is your name Kandy Kalosh?" he asked as quakingly as a one-legged kangaroo with the willies.

"The last thing I needed was a talkie," she said. "Of course it isn't. My name, which I have from my name-game ancestor, is Candy Calabash, not at all the same."

Of course it wasn't the same. Then why had he been so alarmed and disappointed?

"Will you travel westward with me, Candy?" he asked.

"I suppose so, a little way, if we don't have to talk," she said.

So William Morris and Candy Calabash began to traverse the City that was the world. They began (it was no more than coincidence) at a market set in stone that bore the words "Beginning of Stencil 35,353," and thereat William

went into a sort of panic. By why should he? It was not the same stencil number at all. The World City might still be everywhere different.

But William began to run erratically. Candy stayed with him. She was not a readie or a talkie, but she was faithful to a companion for many blocks. The two young persons came ten blocks; they came a dozen.

They arrived at the 14th Street Water Ballet and watched the swimmers. It was almost, but not quite, the same as another 14th Street Water Ballet that William had seen once. They came to the algae-and-plankton quick-lunch place on 15th Street and to the Will of the World Exhibit Hall on 16th Street. Ah, a hopeful eye could still pick out little differences in the huge sameness. The World City had to be everywhere different.

They stopped at the Cliff-Dweller Complex on 17th Street. There was an artificial antelope there now. William didn't remember it from the other time. There was hope, there was hope.

And soon William saw an older and somehow more erect man who wore an arm band with the word "Monitor" on it. He was not the same man, but he had to be a close brother of another man that William had seen two days before.

"Does it all repeat itself again and again and again?" William asked this man in great anguish. "Are the sections of it the same over and over again?"

"Not quite," the man said. "The grease marks on it are sometimes a little different."

"My name is William Morris," William began once more bravely.

"Oh, sure. A William Morris is the easiest type of all to spot," the man said.

"You said -- No, another man said that my name-game ancestor had to do with designing of another thing besides the Wood Beyond the World," William stammered. "What was it?"

"Wallpaper," the man said. And William fell down in a frothy faint.

Oh, Candy didn't leave him there. She was faithful. She took him up on her shoulders and plodded along with him, on past the West Side Show Square on 18th Street, past the Mingle-Mangle and the Pad Palace, where she (no, another girl very like her) had turned back before, on and on.

"It's the same thing over and over and over again," William whimpered as she toted him along.

"Be quiet talkie," she said, but she said it with some affection.

They came to the great Chopper House on 20th Street. Candy carried William in and dumped him on a block there.

"He's become ancient," Candy told an attendant. "Boy, how he's become ancient!" It was more than she usually talked.

Then, as she was a fair-minded girl and as she had not worked any stint that day, she turned to and worked an hour in the Chopper House. (What they chopped up in the Chopper House was the ancients.) Why, there was William's head coming down the line! Candy smiled at it. She chopped it up with loving care, much more care than she usually took.

She'd have said something memorable and kind if she'd been a talkie.

#### BY THE SEASHORE

The most important event in the life of Oliver Murex was his finding of a seashell when he was four years old. It was a bright and shining shell that the dull little boy found. It was bigger than his own head (and little Oliver had an unusually large head), and had two eyes peering out of its mantle cavity that were brighter and more intelligent-seeming than Oliver's own. Both Oliver and the shell had these deep, black, shiny eyes that were either mockingly lively or completely dead -- with such shiny, black things it was hard to say which.

That big shell was surely the brightest thing on that sunny morning beach and no one could have missed it. But George, Hector, August, Mary,



Catherine and Helen had all of them missed it and they were older and sharper-eyed than was Oliver. They had been looking for bright shells, going in a close skirmish line over that sand and little Oliver had been trailing them with absent mind and absent eyes. "Why do you pick up all the dumb little ones and leave the good big one?" he yiped from their rear. They turned and saw the shell and they were stunned. It actually was stunning in appearance - why hadn't they seen it? (It had first to be seen by one in total sympathy with it. Then it could be seen by any superior person.)

"I wouldn't have seen it either if it hadn't whistled at me," Oliver said. "It's a Hebrew Volute," George cried out, "and they're not even found in this part of the world."

"It isn't. It's a Music Volute," Mary contradicted,

"I think it's a Neptune Volute," Hector hazarded.

I wish I could say it's a Helen Volute," Helen said, "but it isn't. It's not a Volute at all. It's a Cone, an Alphabet Cone."

Now these were the shelliest kids along the seashore that summer and they should all have known a Volute from a Cone, all except little Oliver. How could there be such wide differences among them?

"Helen is right about its being a Cone," August said. "But it isn't an Alphabet Cone. It's a Barthelemy Cone, a big one."

"It's a Prince Cone," Catherine said simply. But they were all wrong. It was a deadly Geography Cone, even though it was three times too big to be one. How could such sharp-eyed children not recognize such an almost legendary prize?

Oliver kept this cone shell with him all the years of his growing up. He listened often to the distant sounding in it, as people have always listened to seashells. No cone, however, is a real ocean-roarer of a shell. They haven't the far crash; they haven't the boom. They just are not shaped for it, not like a Conch, not like a Vase Shell, not like a Scallop, not even like the common Cowries or Clam Shells or Helmet Shells. Cones make rather intermittent, sharp sounds, not really distant. They tick rather than roar.

"Other shells roar their messages from way off," Helen said once. "Cones telegraph theirs." And the clicking, ticking of Cones does sound somewhat like the chatter of a telegraph.

Some small boys have toy pandas or bears. But Oliver Murex had this big seashell for his friend and toy and security. He slept with it -- he carried it with him always. He depended on it. If he was asked a question he would first hold the big cone shell to his ear and listen -- then he would answer the question intelligently. But if for any reason he did not have his shell near at hand he seemed incapable of an intelligent answer on any subject.

There would sometimes be a splatter of small blotches or dusty motes on the floor or table near the shell.

"Oh, let me clean those whatever-they-ares away," mother Murex said once when she was nozzling around with the cleaner.

"No, no -- leave them alone -- they'll go back in," Oliver protested. "They just came out to get a little sunlight." And the little blotches, dust motes, fuzz, stains, whatever retreated into the shell of the big cone.

"Why, they're alive!" the mother exclaimed.

"Isn't everybody?" Oliver asked.

"It is an Alphabet Cone just as I always said it was," Helen declared. "And those little skittering things are the letters of the different alphabets that fall off the outside of the shell. The cone has to swallow them again each time, and then it has digested them they will come through to the outside again where they can be seen in their patterns."

Helen still believed this was an Alphabet Cone. It wasn't. It was a deadly Geography Cone. The little blotches that seemed to fall off it or to come out of it and run around -- and that then had to be swallowed again -- may have been little continents or seas coming from the Geography Cone; they may have been quite a number of different things. But if they were alphabets (well, they were those, among other things), then they were more highly

complex alphabets than Helen suspected.

It isn't necessary that all children in a family be smart. Six smart ones out of seven isn't bad. The family could afford big-headed, queer-eyed Oliver, even if he seemed a bit retarded. He could get by most of the time. If he had his shell with him, he could get by all the time. One year in grade school, though, they forbade him the company of his shell. And he failed every course abysmally. "I see Oliver's problem as a lack of intelligence," his teacher told father Murex. "And lack of intelligence is usually found in the mind."

"I didn't expect it to be found in his feet," Oliver's father said. But he did get a psychologist in to go over his slow son from head to foot.

"He's a bit different from a schizo," the psychologist said when he had finished the examination. "What he has is two concentric personalities. We call them the core personality and the mantle personality -- and there is a separation between them. The mantle or outer personality is dull in Oliver's case. The core personality is bright enough, but it is able to contact the outer world only by means of some separate object. I believe that the unconscious of Oliver is now located in this object and his intelligence is tied to it. That seashell there, now, is quite well balanced mentally. It's too bad that it isn't a boy. Do you have any idea what object it is that Oliver is so attached to?"

"It's that seashell there. He's had it quite a while. Should I get rid of it?"

"That's up to you. Many fathers would say yes in such a case; almost as many would say no. If you get rid of the shell the boy will die. But then the problem will be solved - you'll no longer have a problem child."

Mr. Murex sighed, and he thought about it. He had decisions to make all day long and he disliked having to make them in the evening, too.

"I guess the answer is no," he finally said. "I'll keep the seashell and I'll also keep the boy. They're both good conversation pieces. Nobody else has anything that looks like either of them."

Really they had come to look alike, Oliver and his shell, both big-headed and bug-eyed and both of them had a quiet and listening air about them.

Oliver did quite well in school after they let him have the big seashell with him in class again.

A man was visiting the Murex house one evening. This man was by hobby a conchologist or student of seashells. He talked about shd Is. He set out some little shells that he had carried wrapped in his pocket and explained them. Then he noticed Oliver's big seashell and he almost ruptured a posterior adductor muscle.

"It's a Geography Cone!" he shrieked. "A giant one! And it's alive!" "I think it's an Alphabet Cone," Helen said.

"I think it's a Prince Cone," Catherine said.

"No, no, it's a Geography Cone and it's alive!"

"Oh, I've suspected for a long time that it was alive," Papa Murex said.

"But don't you understand? It's a giant specimen of the deadly Geography Cone."

"Yes, I think so. Nobody else has one," father Murex said.

"What do you keep it in?" the conchologist chattered. "What do you feed it?"

"Oh, it has total freedom here, but it doesn't move around very much. We don't feed it anything at all. It belongs to my son Oliver. He puts it to his ear and listens to it often."

"Great galloping gastropods, man! It's likely to take an ear clear off the boy."

"It never has."

"But it's deadly poisonous. People have died of its sting."

"I don't believe any of our family ever has. I'll ask my wife. Oh, no, I needn't. I'm sure none of my family has ever died of its sting. I just

remembered that none of them has ever died at all."

The man with the hobby of conchology didn't visit the Murex house very much after that. He was afraid of that big seashell.

One day the school dentist have a curious report of things going on in Oliver's mouth.

"Little crabs are eating the boy's teeth -- little microscopic crabs," the dentist (he was a nervous man) told Mr. Murex.

"I never heard of microscopic crabs," Mr. Murex said. "Have you seen them, really, or examined them at all?"

"Oh no, I haven't seen them. How would I see them? But his teeth just look as if microscopic crabs had been eating them. Ah, I'm due for a vacation. I was going to leave next week."

"Are his teeth deteriorating fast?" Mr. Murex asked the dentist.

"No, that's what puzzles me," the dentist said. "They're not deteriorating. The enamel is disappearing, eaten by small crabs, I'm sure of that; but it's being replaced by something else, by some shell-like material."

"Oh, it's all right then," Mr. Murex said.

"I was going to leave on vacation next week. I'll call someone and tell them that I'm leaving right now," the dentist said.

The dentist left, and he never did return to his job or to his home. It was later heard of him that he had first abandoned dentistry and then life.

But little Oliver grew up, or anyhow he grew out. He seemed to be mostly head, and his dwarfish body was not much more than an appendage. He and the great seashell came to look more and more like each other by the day.

"I swear, sometimes I can't tell which of you is Oliver," Helen Murex said one day. She was more fond of Oliver and his shell than were any of their brothers or sisters. "Which of you is?" she asked.

"I am."

Oliver Geography Cone grinned.

"I am."

Oliver Murex grinned.

Oliver Murex was finally out of school and had taken his place in the family business. The Murex family was big in communications, the biggest in the world, really. Oliver had an office just off the office of his father. Not much was expected of him. He seemed still to be a dull boy, but very often he gave almost instant answers to questions that no one else could answer in less than a week or more. Well, it was either Oliver or his shell who have the almost instant answers. They had come to resemble each other in voice almost as much as in appearance and the father really didn't care which of them answered -- as long as the answers were quick and correct. And they were both.

"Oliver has a girl friend," Helen teased one day. "She says she's going to marry him."

"However would he get a girl friend?" brother Hector asked, puzzled.

"Yes. How is it possible?" Mr. Murex wanted to know.

"After all, we are very rich," Helen reminded them.

"Oh, I didn't know that the younger generation had any interest in money," Mr. Murex said.

"And, after all, she is Brenda Frances," Helen said.

"Oh, yes I've noticed that she does have an interest in money," Mr. Murex said. "Odd that such a recessive trait should crop out in a young lady of today."

Brenda Frances worked for the Murex firm.

Brenda Frances wanted round-headed Oliver for the money that might attach to him, but she didn't want a lot of gaff that seemed also to attach to the young fellow. But now Oliver became really awake for the first time in his life, stimulated by Brenda Frances' apparent interest. He even waxed a little bit arty and poetic when he talked to her, mostly about his big seashell.

"Do you know that he wasn't native to the sea or shore where we found," Oliver said. "He tells me that he comes from the very far north, from the Sea

of Moyle."

"Damn that bug-eyed seashell!" Brenda Frances complained. "He almost looks alive. I don't mind being leered at by men, but I dislike being leered at by a seashell. I don't believe that there is any such thing as the Sea of Moyle. I never heard of it. There isn't any sea in the very far north except the Arctic Ocean."

"Oh, but he says that this is very far north," Oliver said with his ear to the shell (When you two put your heads together like that I don't know whose ear is listening to whose shell, Helen had said once), "very, very far north and perhaps very again. It's far, far beyond the Arctic Ocean."

"You can't get any farther north than the Arctic," Brenda Frances insisted. "It's as far north as there is any north."

"No. He says that the Sea of Moyle is much farther," Oliver repeated the whispers and ticklings of the shell. "I think probably the Sea of Moyle is clear off-world."

"Oh great glabrous Glabula!" Brenda Frances swore. Things weren't going well here. There was so much nonsense about Oliver as nearly to nullify the pleasant prospect of money.

"Did you know he has attendants?" Oliver asked. "Very small attendants."

"Like fleas?"

"Like crabs. They really are crabs, almost invisible, almost microscopic fiddler crabs. They are named Gelasimus Notarii or Annotating Crabs - I don't know why. They live in his mouth and stomach most of the time, but they come out when they're off duty. They do a lot of work for him. They do all his paper work and they are very handy. I've been practicing with them for a long time, too, but I haven't learned to employ them at all well yet."

"Oh great whelping whelks!" Brenda Frances sputtered.

"Did you know that the old Greeks shipped wine in cone shells?" Oliver asked. "They did it because cone shells are so much bigger on the inside than on the outside. They would put a half a dozen cone shells into an amphora of wine to temper them for it. Then they would take them out and pour one, two, or three amphoras of wine into each cone shell. The cones have so many internal passages that there is no limit to their capacity. The Greeks would load ships with the wine-filled cones and ship them all over the world. By using cones, they could ship three times as much wine as otherwise in the same ship."

"Wino seashells, that's what we really need," Brenda Frances mumbled insincerely.

"I'll ask him," Oliver said. They put their two heads together, Oliver and the cone shell. "He says that cones hardly ever become winos," Oliver announced then. "He says that they can take it or leave it alone."

"After we are married you will have to stop this silly talk," Brenda Frances said. "Where do you get it anyhow?"

"From Shell. I'll tell you something else. The Greek friezes and low reliefs that some student of shells study -- they are natural and not carved. And they aren't really Greek things. They're pictures of some off-world things that look kind of Greek. They're not even pictures of people. They're pictures of some kind of seaweed that looks like Earth people. I hope that clears up that mystery."

"Oliver, I have plans for us," Brenda Frances said firmly, "and the plans seem very hard to put across to you in words. I have always believed that a half-hour's intimacy is worth more than forever's talk. Come along now. We're alone except for old sea-slob there."

"I'd better ask my mother first," Oliver said. "It seems that there is some question about this intimacy bit, a question that they all believed would never arise in my case. I'd better ask her."

"Your mother is visiting her sister at Peach Beach," Brenda Frances said. "Your father is fishing at Cat Island. George and Hector and August are all off on sales trips. Mary and Catherine and Helen are all making political appearances somewhere. This is the first time they've all been out of town at once. I came to you so you wouldn't be lonesome."

"I'm never lonesome with Shell. You think the intimacy thing will be all right, then?"

"I sure do doubt it, but it's worth a try," Brenda Frances said. "For me, you're the likeliest jackpot in town. Where else would I find such a soft head with so much money attached?"

"We read a seduction scene in a book once," Oliver said. "It was kind of funny and kind of fun."

"Who's we?"

"Shell and myself."

"After we're married, we're sure going to change that 'we' stuff," Brenda Frances said. "But how does Shell read?"

"With his eyes like everyone else. And the annotating crabs correlate the reading for him. He says that seduction scenes are more fun where he comes from. All the seductors gather at the first high tide after the big moon is full. The fellows are on one side of the tidal basin -- and then their leader whistles and they put their milt in the tidewater. And the she seashells (Earth usage -- they don't call themselves that there), who are on the other side of the tidal basin, put their roe into the water. Then the she seashell leader whistles an answer and that is the seduction. It's better when both moons are still in the sky. At the Sea of Moyle they have two moons."

"Come along, Oliver," Brenda Frances said, "and you can whistle if you want to, but that seawash talk has got to stop." She took big-headed, short-legged Oliver under her arm and went with him to the chamber she had selected as the seduction room. And Shell followed along.

"How does it walk without any legs?" Brenda Frances asked.

"He doesn't walk. He just moves. I'm getting so that I can move that way too."

"It's not going to get into bed with us, Oliver?"

"Yes, but he says he'll just watch the first time. You don't send him at all."

"Oh, all right. But I tell you, there's going to be some changes around here after we're married."

She turned out the lights when she was ready. But they hadn't been in the dark for five seconds when Brenda Frances began to complain.

"Why is the bed so slimy all at once?"

"Shell likes it that way. It reminds him more of the ocean."

"Ouch! Great crawling crawdads -- something is biting me! Are they bugs?"

"No, no -- they're the little crabs," Oliver told her. "But Shell says that they only bite people they don't like."

"Wow, let me sweep them out of this bed."

"You can't. They're almost too little to see and they hang on. Besides, they have to be here."

"Why?"

"They're annotating crabs. They take notes."

Brenda Frances left the bed and the house in a baffled fury. "Best jackpot in town, hell!" she said. "There are other towns. Somewhere there's another half-brained patsy in a monied family -- one that won't bring the whole damned ocean to bed with him."

It was later learned the Brenda Frances left town in the same fury.

"That was an even less satisfying seduction scene than in that book," Shell and his crabby minions conveyed. "We do these things so much better on the Sea of Moyle."

So Oliver preserved his virtue. After all, he was meant for other things.

An off-world person of another great and rich family in the communications field came to call on Mr. Murex at his home.

"We weren't expecting your arrival in quite such manner," Mr. Murex said. He had no idea of how the other had arrived -- he simply was there.

"Oh, I didn't want to wait for a vehicle. They're too slow. I conveyed

myself," the visitor said. They met as tycoon to tycoon. Mr. Murex was very anxious that he and his family should make a good impression on their distinguished visitor. He even thought about concealing Oliver, but that would have been a mistake.

"This is a fine specimen," the visiting person said. "Fine. He could almost be from back home."

"He is my son Oliver," said Mr. Murex, quite pleased.

"And his friend there," the visitor continued, "I swear that he is from back home."

"There's a misunderstanding," Mr. Murex said. "The other one there is a seashell."

"What is a seashell?" the visitor asked. "Are Earth seas hatched out of shells? How odd. But you are mistaken, person Murex. That is a specimen from back home. Do you have the papers on him?"

"I don't know of any papers. What would such papers indicate?"

"Oh, that you have given fair exchange for the specimen. We wouldn't want an interworld conflict over such a small matter, would we?"

"If you will let me know what this 'fair exchange' is," Mr. Murex tried to comply.

"Oh, I'll let you know at the time of my leaving," the visiting tycoon said. "We'll settle on something." This person was very much up on communications. He engaged Mr. Murex and George, Mary, Hector, Catherine, August, Helen, yes, and Oliver, all in simultaneous conversations on the same subject. And he made simultaneous deals so rapid-fire as to astound all of them. He controlled even more patents than did the Murex family, some of them overlapping. The two tycoons were making nonconflict territory agreements and the visitor was out-shuffling the whole Murex clan by a little bit in these complex arrangements.

"Oh, just let me clean them off there!" Mrs. Murex said once where she saw a splatter of small blotches and dust motes on the table that served both for conference and dinner table -- the splatter of little things was mostly about the visitor.

"No, no, leave them," that person said. "I enjoy their conversation. Really, they could almost be Notarii from my own world." Things began then to go well in these transactions even for the Murex family, just when they had seemed to be going poorly.

The visitor was handsome in an off-worldly way. He was toothless, but his boney upper and lower beak cut through everything, through prime steak that seemed too tough to the Murex clan, through the bones, through the plates. "Glazed, baked, clay, we use it too. It spices a meal," the visitor said of the plates as he munched them. "And you have designs and colors on the pieces. We do that sometimes with cookies."

"They are priceless chinaware," Mrs. Murex said in a voice that was almost a complaint.

"Yes, priceless, delicious, exquisite," the visitor said. "Now shall we finalize the contracts and agreements?"

Several waiting stenographers came n with their machines. Brenda Frances was not among them -- she had left the Murex firm and left town. The stenographers began to take down the contracts and agreements on their dactyl-tactiles.

"And I'll just save time and translation by giving the whole business in my own language to this stenographer from my own world," the visiting tycoon said.

"Ah, that isn't a stenographer there, however much it may remind you of the stenographers where you come from," Mr. Murex tried to set a matter straight again. "That is what we call a seashell."

But the visiting tycoon spoke in his own language to Shell. And Shell whistled. Then whole blotches and clouds of the almost invisible annotating crabs rushed into Shell, ready to work. The visiting tycoon spoke rapidly in off-worldly language, his beak almost touching Shell.

"Ah, the Geography Cone shell -- that's what the thing is -- is said to be absolutely deadly," Mr. Murex tried to warn the visitor.

"They only kill people they don't like," the visitor said and he went on with his business.

The annotating crabs did the paper work well. Completed contracts and agreements began to roll out of the mantle cavity of Shell. And all the business was finished in one happy glow.

"That is it," the visiting tycoon said with complete satisfaction after all the papers were mutually signed. With his beak he bit a very small ritual wedge from the cheek of his hostess, Mr. Murex. That was a parting custom where he came from.

"And now 'fair exchange' for the specimen from back home," he said. "I always find these exchanges satisfying and fruitful."

He had a sack. And he put the short-legged, big-headed Oliver into that sack.

"Oh, that's not fair exchange," Mr. Murex protested, "I know he looks a little unusual, but that is my son Oliver."

"He's fair enough exchange," the visitor said. He didn't wait for a vehicle. They were too slow. He conveyed himself. And he and Oliver were gone.

So all that the Murex family had to remind them of their vanished son and brother was that big seashell, the Geography Cone. Was it really from the world of the visitor? Who knows the true geography of the Geography Cone?

Oliver sat on the shore of the Sea of Moyle in the far, far north. This was not in the cold, far north. It was on a warm and sunny beach in the off-world far north. And Oliver sat there as if he belonged.

There hadn't been any sudden space-change in Oliver. There had been only the slow change through all the years of his life and that was never a great alteration -- a great difference hadn't been needed in him.

Oliver was bright and shining, the brightest thing on that sunny morning beach. He had his big head and his little body. He had two shiny black eyes peering out of his mantle cavity. Oliver was very much a sea shell now, a special and prized shell. (They didn't use that term there, though. Seashell? Was the Sea of Moyle hatched out of a shell?) Six sharp-eyed children of the dominant local species were going in close skirmish right over that sunny sand and a smaller seventh child trailed them with absent mind and absent eyes. The big moon had already gone down; the little moon still hung low in the sky like a silver coin. And the sun was an overpowering gold.

The sharp-eyed children were looking for bright shore specimens and they were finding them, too. And right ahead of them was that almost legendary prize, a rare Oliver Cone.

## In Outraged Stone

The look of indignation on the face of that artifact was matched only by the total outrage of her whole figure. Oh, she was a mad one! She was the comic masterpiece of the Oganta Collection. If stone could speak she would be shrilling. She was a newly catalogued item among the grotesque alien stonery called the Paravata Oneirougma.

You'd almost believe that she was alive!" was the laughing comment of many who watched her there in the display. "Oh, it's that she was alive once, and now she is furious at finding herself frozen in stone."

But that was the whole missed point of her outrage. She wasn't alive; and she never had been.

It was the cultural discovery time of the Oganta of Paravata. The Oganta had become things both in and interesting. Earth people had taken a seasonable delight in their rough culture, in their hominess, in their froggishness. Many Earth people from the scientific simmer were now visiting them and studying them. In particular were those of the psychologic phratry involved in this. A quick trip to Paravata would yield such theses as enhance reputations and make

names. There the mysterious human undermind and underbody was atop and open to explore. There was no way that one could miss if he had the energy for the encounter. The energy for it, though; that was the thing that separated the bulls from the steers and the homed heifers from the freemartins.

"Paravata has half again Earth's gravity, so it calls out our strength. It has an atmosphere that keeps one on an oxygen binge, so it gives that strength something to draw on," so had Garamask, that most vigorous Earthman, said of the planet.

Many Earth people wilted on Paravata. They couldn't stand the weight (there was something wrong about the weight) and the weirdness; they hadn't the strength for it. But others (and not always the ones you would guess) found a new strength and excitement there. It was bigger than life and rougher. It was vulgar and misshapen. It was a grinning challenge and it would smash anyone who wasn't up to it.

But if you could make it there you could make it big. The loins bulged with new energy for these fortunates, and the adrenaline ran in rivers. It was a common and shouting and delirious world for those who could match it, and it was not only the body juices that were called into fresh spate. The mind juices sang their new tunes also, and the ideas came in tumbling torrents. They were pretty shaggy, some of those ideas, but there was nothing tired about them. Mind and body appetites grew steeply, almost exploded. There was an absolute horniness that came onto such visitors as had the capacity to take it. And a froggishness. What is the mystique about frogs?

The horned frog of Earth is a miserable sleepy little antediluvian and has nothing to do with these vigorous whorls. Let us take the name away from it and give it to another. Somewhere, on some world, there is a real horned frog, rampant with green comedy, outrageous in its assumptions, able to get away with worse than murder. The Oganta of Paravata were really such horned frogs, except that they hadn't actual visible horns, except that they were frogs only in a manner of speakign.

Five young Earth psychologists (they all had the capacity and ruggedness for Paravata) were dining in one of those gape-walled inns on a ridge above the small town of Mountain Foot, on one of the stunning Paravata plateaus. Dining wasn't the proper word for it: they were gorging. They were gorging with Oganta friends (an Oganta had to be your friend or one of you would be dead quickly). And they didn't sit at table for their stupendous eating. This would be unthinkable to the Oganta, and it was immediately unthinkable to the Earth people. For such action, they stood, they strode, they rollicked; they Tromped about on the big tables from giant bowl to giant bowl, and they grabbed and ate commonly from these common caldrons. They dipped and slurped, they toothed great joints of flesh-meat, they went muzzle-deep into musky mixtures. They were as mannerless as the Oganta themselves. They were already full of the coarse Oganta spirit and had even taken on something of the Oganta appearance.

On Paravata, one never reclined when he could stand (the Oganta even took their carnal pleasure leaping and hopping); one never sauntered where he could stride, nor walked when he could run. Aimless it all might be, but there was a burning energy and action in the very aimlessness.

They wrestled, they rolled. they walked upon one another and sat upon one another. "Och, I could hardly eat another bellyful," Margaret Mondo groaned happily as she rolled on one of the big tables among the bowls. Then a huge male Oganta landed in the middle of her belly with both feet and bounced. Ah, he'd have gone three hundred pounds on Earth, and things were half again as heavy on Paravata. "Och, now I can eat again. How I can eat!" Margaret chortled. We knew that Margaret, the earthiest of them all, wouldn't really give out so quickly. The dining customs on Paravata are extreme. If you can't take them, don't go there.

It was just at frost-bite and there was a light snow sifting. The five youngish Earth-folk were dressed near as barely as the Oganta. It would be



many degrees colder than this before the walls of this mountain inn would be raised. The open air is always to be praised. On Paravata there were no heating fires ever, except the internal ones: and these burned hot.

"It's much more earthy than Earth," George Oneiron was saying. He was almost shouting. "It's everything, it's all through everything. The butterflies here are absolutely rampant, they're rutting, they're ravaging. We know that 'psyche' originally meant butterfly as well as soul. The psyche, the soul-mind-person, is our field of study, and here it is grossly material, fleshed and blooded. Even the Marsala Plasma of this place (there's no counterpart to it on Earth, there couldn't be), though it floats and drifts and jostles in the air. has a heaviness and materiality about it that startles one. Don't turn your back on one of those floating blobs or it'll crash down on you like nine tons of rock. We'll solve the mystery of these plasma balls, or we will not solve any other mystery here."

The Oganta themselves had this sometimes weightlessness and this sometimes great weight. It was a part of the jokes they played. And the Earth people discovered that now they had it too, sometimes, mostly when they were in contact with the oafish Oganta. You are light or heavy when you think light or heavy.

The floating globs, the air balls, had more mysteries than their weight. There was their sound, the most raucous dissonance ever, when one caught it only out of the corner of the ear. But turn full ear on one, and it was all innocence and quiet. Incredible scenes flashed and lounged inside the balls when taken at a careless glance, but they lurked over when looked at straight. The globs made lascivious gestures, but what was lascivious about them? They were only charged air drifting in uncharged air (if there was any uncharged air on Paravata), The lasciviousness must be in the eye of the beholder. But what were the globs anyhow? "Oh, they're persons, some of our own persons, persons that we're not using right now," one of the Oganta tried to explain it.

George Oneiron, still avid to solve the mystery, was trying to take one of these plasma balloons into his hands. It was a yellowish, greenish, translucent, transparent glob of crystal gas (crystal gas? yes, crystal gas) the size of his own head. It challenged him. It was as if it shook its horns at him. He had it, it escaped him, he had it again, he grunted and grappled with it, he seized it out of the shimmering air and he didn't seize it easily.

"It'll go heavy on you," one of the Oganta grinned. "It'll cut you to shreds. Its weight is polaroid, just as ours is, just as yours begins to be. If it's in alignment it hasn't any weight; if it isn't it's crushing. You match it or it breaks you down. You shape with it or one of you breaks to pieces."

George Oneiron was quite strong, and the thing, after all, was only a floating glob of gas. "I have you now!" he cried when he had it. "Why do you follow and cling to the Oganta while you evade ourselves? I have you, and you'll spill your secrets to me."

"Poor George is reduced to talking to globs of air," Helen Damalis jibed, but Helen was no great one at understanding deep things.

Actually, it was a giant wrestle, and it was close there for a moment. But it was the plasma ball, and not George, that broke to pieces. The Marsala Plasma shattered in George's hands, broke jaggedly into a hundred edged pieces, and clattered and crashed heavily on the stony ground. And George was cut badly on the hands and forearms and chest by the jagged slivers of it.

George cursed, he howled with quick pain, he laughed at the crashing puzzle of it: the floating balloon that turned into jagged rock. And he laughed at the half dozen Oganta of both sexes who came with hasty bowls and cries of "Here, here, to me, to mine."

George shook and dribbled his running blood into the Oganta's bowls. The big oafs loved the tang of blood, human blood or their own, in their strong stew. It was salt and condiment to them. And to George too. For he leapt barefooted onto the shoulders of the chuckling Oganta girls and trod them. It

was bloody revel.

"Here, here, to me, to mine," the Earth girls also cried, partly in comedy, partly in novel passion. George Oneiron dribbled his blood into the crocks of Helen Darnalis and Margaret Mondo and Bonta Chrysalis, and leapt onto their shoulders also. Then, borne there by Margaret he poured his blood into the common caldrons on the largest table.

George was bleeding a surprising quantity of blood from the cuts of the gas globule, that floating thing that had shattered so quickly into vitreous daggers that were heavier than stone or metal. The loss of blood made him light-headed and gave him the froggish passion. But he quickly received more blood. All the Oganta, then the other four of the Earth people, slashed themselves with the dagger-shards of the broken globule and gave him their blood to drink. Now they were of one blood forever.

All five of the Earth psychologists were quite young adults. This would give them closer and quicker understanding of the Oganta, who were such vivid and outgoing oafs that even their dreams were on the outside. There was no denying that there was an abnormality about the Oganta, even beyond the differences of worlds and the differences of species.

The Oganta were a neotenic species who had lost, or almost lost, their adult form. As well as it can be explained in Earth context, they were teenagers forever whatever their age: and they seemed to age not at all after they had attained their high oafishness. There is no thing to which they might be compared in this: but imagine, if you dare, teenager attitudes and activities continued by certain individuals to a far greater age, twenty-two years, twenty-three, twenty-four, even further. If such things happened on Earth where would Earth be? Imagine neotenic breeding, reproducing, and never attaining an adult form. That was the state on Paravata.

The Oganta of Paravata were large. They looked like a cross between humans and frogs. They themselves said that they were analogous to the tadpoles who had been unable to make the frog leap. But to human Earth eyes they looked like frogs and they leapt like frogs.

"But every frog is really a prince enchanted," Bonta Chrysalis said.

"I'd say that every prince is rather a frog in disguise," Philip Blax countered, "except that I'm sure it's been said before, and probably by me."

"Come here, Prince," Bonta Chrysalis cried suddenly, and one of the big Oganta leapt into her arms and wrapped long froggy legs around her till Bonta herself could hardly be seen. But she'd made her choice. She'd taken one of the grinning gape-faced Oganta for her subject (subject for her study, and willing subject to her real whims) and she would not fail in this.

The Oganta were intelligent: or perhaps they only pretended to be, for a joke. They imbibed Earth knowledge easily and literally, but they didn't take it too seriously. Their own culture was deliberately anti-intellectual, but they understood pretty well all that they rejected. They had an easy way with languages and lingos. They even had an easy way with the psychology texts that lay about there, fingering through them quickly, then burlesquing not only the words but also the ideas of them.

The Oganta also had (this is not fully understood, it is one of the mysteries that must be solved) that light way and that heavy way with weight.

The Oganta played one abominable instrument, the stringed hittur. Rut the five young Earthlings did not find it as offensive as older Earthlings would have. They knew that the whining tastelessness of it was an essential part of the Oganta. And they knew that even the vigorous Oganta could not be vigorous in everything. Even the hittur would be accepted, as one of the things that must be studied.

Helen Damalis had also acquired a boyfriend, an oaf friend, a leaping frog friend, from among the Oganta there in the mountain inn. She hadn't done it as deftly or as regally as Bonta had taken hers. Perhaps it was that Helen was acquired by the Oganta. Helen wasn't regal, she wasn't strong, she wasn't

much of anything at the moment. She looked like a very small sofa with a very large Oganta lounging on her.

The Oganta liked the Earth folks. They slavered over them, they kissed them with great slurping sounds, they frog-leapt upon them. They insisted that the Earth folks should play the leaping game also. This was the mystic game of leapfrog, the oldest game of the worlds. The leaping is always upon and not over, and the fun of the game is in going from weightlessness to staggering weight at just the wrong moment.

"We'll need neither notebooks nor recordings." Christopher Bullock was saying very solemnly (vet he was very unsolemnly a-romp and a-tromp on a playful and trollish female Oganta), "for the Marsala Plasmi will serve for both. They are the crystal balls, crystal even in their gaseous state, and they record everything of the particular Oganta they attach to. We'll have everything down in the most solid recordings ever, petrified dream and person blobs."

There were five of these young psychologists from Earth.

There was this Christopher Bullock: we will have to call him a young man of muscular mind; there's no other term that will serve. The playful and trollish female Oganta had now picked Christopher up and draped him about her neck like a scarf: like a light scarf at first, then like a staggeringly heavy scarf. Christopher himself was learning a little about the light way and the heavy way with weight. There has always been something doubled about that name of Christopher, especially when it doubles into the name of Cristobal. There was once a man named Cristobal Colon (an old necromancer of Earth who doubled the Earth), though his name was regularized to Christopher Columbus. Though Christopher means Christ-Bearer, yet Cristobal is the phonetic equivalent of Crystal Ball and it has unchristly connotations. Just what is the real meaning of the crystal ball, and why was Christopher Bullock so interested in it?

The second of the young psychologists from Earth was George Oneiron. George was a split person, and the two halves of him were stark idealism and total depravity. In each half George was a nice enough fellow, but the contrast within him was awkward. The halves of George were at the moment served by two female Oganta one of them as spiritual, one of them as carnal as it is possible for neotenic frog-humans to be.

The third of the young psychologs from Earth was Philip Blax. Philip had healed his own split and had become (in advance) a very little like one of the Oganta in appearance and attitude. Nothing special about Philip really.

But the fourth of the psychologs from Earth was Bonta Chrysalis and she was something special. She was everything. She was magnificent in mind and body, splendid, soaring, regal, almost a flame. She was beauty and grace combined with power. She had always known the light way and the heavy way with things. The Oganta frog, who might be the prince enchanted, had frog-leapt onto her shoulder and perched there, and he was the largest of them all. But what is weight to a flame? And that big one, if he wasn't enchanted before, he was now, completely enchanted by Bonta.

And from Bonta Chrysalis we go to Helen Damalis, who suffers by the comparison. Helen wasn't much. She had less substance than any of them, less even than Philip. Helen wasn't distinguished by the primary brain in her head or by the secondary spinal brain which all good psychologs must have. She hadn't beauty of face or grace of body, not by Earth standards, not even by Paravata-Oganta standards. She was plastic, perhaps, and she might take the impression of these things, but she hadn't them of herself. She was an empty receptacle, an inelegant piece of pottery; yet she had a sullen intensity and an eagerness to be filled. She had a real hunger for life. One thing more: the Marsala Plasma, those gaseous blobs that were really crystal balls that could shatter into heavy fragments, followed and clung to Helen, as they did to all the Oganta, as they did not to the Earth people. And Helen clung very closely to her Oganta boyfriend, oaf friend, frog friend.

The fifth of the psychologs from Earth was Margaret Mondo. She had an

earthiness beyond any of them This wasn't necessarily a roughness. Earth is more than that. It wasn't a lowness of any sort. Earth is much more than that. It was a primordial variety that she had, a many-rootedness. It was not true that Paravata was more earthy than Earth; you knew that was not true when you looked at Margaret who was Earth itself. She could contain them all, but nobody could contain her. So it wasn't an Oganta singling that she attracted, but a group, a trio of Oganta, two males and a female. She was too complex and vital to waste on a singling.

Ah, the young scientists had gathered up, or in some cases been gathered up by, their subjects. They went off with them now, riding them or ridden by them, in groups and tangles; off for study and for fun and for exploratory experience and for science.

The Oganta, so coarse and so open that they had their dreams on the outside.

And the five young mind-scientists from Earth.

Five? Not six? Christopher, George. Philip, Bonta, Helen, Margaret. Do they not come to six?

No. There are five of them. Count them again carefully. See, there are five of them.

The crystal ball, it is everywhere phony in its every form, and nowhere has it so many or such unusual forms as on Paravata. On Earth, as far back as one wants to go, to Babylon, to Chaldee, the crystal ball is in solid (though cloud-filled) form only, and it is the tool and scope of charlatans and oneiromancers. Even in those beginnings its users didn't understand its real form, and yet they preserved some slight pre-Earth memory of its various phases. On Paravata, by accident, it has its full phases. It may be in gas or liquid or plastic or solid form; it may go from one to the other in a twinkling (the phrase was coined for that change in that thing).

But what can really be seen in any crystal ball? Futures? Yes, futures, pasts, presents, scenes, dreams, images, dramas, primary persons, secondary persons. The ball may go tricky and freeze forever any of these fleeting things. Very often it will seize a secondary person and freeze this person forever. That person, then, will never have had any existence except in the ball, it will never have been anything except petrified.

To say that the crystal ball is everywhere phony is not to say that it is ineffectual. It is to say that it has misshapen or phony effect. But it does have effect. It works, it works.

From the Notebooks of Christopher Bullock Wasn't he the one who said they would need neither notebooks nor recordings?)

Bonta Chrysalis and Margaret Mondo perhaps had the most success with their projects. Bonta's, it would turn out, would be a badly twisted success. Helen Damalis surely had the least success, though she believed she was having the greatest. She was realizing herself at least, she claimed, in a limited way that was true. Christopher Bullock may have had the most fun, what with that playful and trollish female Oganta of his, but even this is to be doubted. There was something unexpected to be found even in the troll. All the projects suffered in having no aim other than the mere study of the Oganta.

Could they be studied apart from their planet of Paravata? Were the Oganta isolated and discrete individuals? Were they interlinked groups with the personality residing in the groups? Were they mere fauna of their planet, a mobile grass of their world, manifestations, fungi? That was the trouble with the Oganta: they changed under the different points of view. As drops of water they were one thing, as small seas they were something quite opposite; as planetary oceans they might have a third and vastly different substance.

Philip Blax said that the Oganta themselves had no problems, that they were completely uninhibited and uncomplicated, that they were interchangeable modules of an unstructured society that knew neither anxiety nor doubt. Bonta

said that in this Philip was wrong in a way unusual even for Philip. She said that the Oganta did have extreme anxieties, and that the better the intelligence and personality of the individual Oganta the greater was his anxiety. She said they had these anxieties because they had lost their adult form.

"It is well lost," Philip had said, "and I might wish that we could lose our own."

"You never had one and never will," Bonta told him. "I haven't my own completely yet, but I will have it. You are yourself like an Oganta, and it's yourself you see when you look at them. You're emptier than they are. You're not like the ones who are superior in intelligence and personality."

The plasma balls, the crystal balls, did make good notebooks and recorders; Christopher Bullock had been correct on that. The Oganta were such uninhibited (on the surface anyhow) and open creatures that they had their dreams on the outside of them: the psychologists from Earth had said that from the beginning but without really understanding what they meant.

"The plasma ball is a bucket," Margaret Mondo said now. "It can become a bucketful of dreams, and it becomes heavier as it becomes fuller."

No need for other apparatus to study Oganta dreams. Allow a new and fresh Marsala Plasma to hover over an Oganta as he slept, either in the daytime or at night, and watch the plasma globe. The parade of dreams would be shown and sensed in that globe, vividly and colorfully, pungently and resoundingly. The Oganta dreamed better than they knew. Their dreams were more finely structured than their lives and had a greater diversity. They were real pageants, full of symbols and outright creations, enormous, overwhelming, spooky, powerful. Each superseded dream of the parade gathered itself like broken smoke and retreated into the center of the plasma to make way for more current presentations on the spherical stage nearest the surface. But all the dreams were recorded for all the senses and not one of them was lost.

George Oneiron made first discovery of a method of reconstructing the dissolved Oganta dreams. He'd affront a plasma ball that had been beside one of his Oganta subjects during her sleep period; he'd affront it and make it go heavy. He'd affront it still more and make it shatter into pieces. And each jagged broken fragment of it would display one of those bright jagged dreams. Turn one of those jagged fragments to another angle, and there was the same dream in another aspect, one that might have been completely missed at first viewing. George himself was very strong in the dreams of his two Oganta subjects, in a distorted form always, or in his two distorted forms.

Margaret Mondo said that George was doing it all wrong. She quickly discovered that there was no reason to affront the globes, still less reason to shatter them. There was no need to make them go heavy permanently they received less well when they were always heavy. Let them go heavy and light, and heavy and light again. Margaret herself could resurrect out of the globes any dream or constellation of dreams by caressing them with her own magic hands. She could reconstruct them in sequence or out of sequence, any way she wished.

Having three Oganta subjects, Margaret sometimes used three globes. But she could make the three globes merge into one, and emerge out of it again. Sometimes there would then be four globes and not three: one composite globe, three discrete globes. Margaret was studying three individuals as well as one small nation.

After a while she maintained master globes. The individual globes, after each dream period, were merged with their master globes; and then they were emerged from them again, emptied and ready for reuse. There was no limit to the amount of data that a globe might hold.

Indexing and recovering the data were other matters. Margaret could effect these things with her magic hands. The others hadn't hands so magic as Margaret's, but they managed. Except Helen Damalis. She managed her material

not at all; it managed her.

The Oganta needn't be sleeping to project these dream sequences. They projected always, when leaping or shouting, when slaving or loving, when guzzling or gorging, while wrestling or rolling, while rattling the air with their whining unmusic, while burlesquing and buffooning, while unstructuring themselves and their minds. Even their waking dreams were better than their waking lives. Why did the Oganta put themselves down so?

There was a certain pathos in the pageanted dreams of Christopher Bullock's subject. the playful and trollish Oganta girl. Oh, she was playful enough, cloud-shatteringly playful! Sequences taken from her playful dreams and reveries (reverie is the wrong word, it implies quietness and musing; there should be a word to express the whooping happy calamities and catastrophes of this alien girl) would later be enjoyed by a certain clientele of Earth fellows in the manner of old stag movies. And she was trollish enough. She enjoyed her massive and misshapen burlesque of a body; it was the house she lived in. But there were other levels and aspects to the data that streamed and fountained up from this girl. There were odd caves and grottos in the mountain of her, some of them secluded and quite unexpected, rare ones, puzzling ones. It's a dull mountain that can labor (even trollishly) without bringing forth at least a small heap of gemstones.

There was nobility in the interaction of Bonta Chrysalis and her enchanted Oganta subject. There was something cracked or usurping about that nobility though.

"But they do put it on a little thick." George Oneiron said correctly of them.

"Blunt as I am, I was never that blunt, or that empty," Philip Blax attacked them, and with justice.

"Oh, climb down from it, Bonta," Christopher mocked. "You'll get too high for your own head."

Even the ever kind and ever magic Margaret Mondo wrung her hands and shook her head over the affair and said: "May never be so pretentious as that! May God Himself never be! There are limits to things, and they pass the limit."

Helen Damalis perhaps said the strangest thing of all about the affair: "If they can make a thing like that come alive, is it helpless for myself? Air lives and turns into talking and walking crystal. Stones live, and float like air in air. Frogs live. Imaginary princes live. All I ever wanted was to live. Is there magic enough for some of it to fall on me?"

Were they really so pretentious and outrageous, the things that Bonta and her charmed frog were attempting? This frog-Oganta had intimations and even expectations of adulthood now. Whether he had already had these intimations of himself or whether Bonta had given them to him is unknown, but he had them strongly.

There was now no more than one out of ten thousand Oganta who ever attained the old Rogha form the old adult form. And these few who attained it were isolated in it, without mate or breed, and usually very old. All the other Earth psychologs felt that this thing gone once should be gone forever. All the other Oganta felt that whatever state one should reach all should reach; that if they did break out of the top of themselves to a new state and development it should not now be that old and lost state. There must have been something wrong with that old advanced state or it would never have been lost. Perhaps it was too pretentious in itself, and too contemptuous of its underlay.

It was strange that Bonta Chrysalis, that everything Earthling girl, didn't understand this. Perhaps her own state was in her name and she was looking for a developed state for herself as well as for her subject. Perhaps, for all her easy attainments and brilliances, she herself was not adult and would not soon be.

It was strange that the enchanted Oganta himself, more intelligent and personable than the other Oganta, didn't realize that the old effective

advanced form was now impossible. If attained now it would be mere sterility. On the word of the other Oganta of the immediate group, this one was the most gifted of them all. Why had he a faulty gift of vision in this?

Helen Damalis had the rockiest time of them all. She seemed, though, to be the most avid for the experience, even the very rocky experience. She had become attached to her subject, not he to her. And he was cruel to her with that offhanded and amazing cruelty of which only the Oganta are capable. He was a complete egotist and most of his dream sequences were parades and pageants of himself only or himself against a dim background of other Oganta: other Oganta and a flurry of inferior creatures that were not easy to identify. "Like a cross between an Oganta and a chicken." Was that more offensive than the Earthlings' way of seeing the Oganta? "Like a cross between a human and a frog." It was Margaret who pointed out that this was the Oganta way (or this particular Oganta's way) of seeing the Earth-humans.

But there had come another person and appearance into the dream sequence of this cruel Oganta now, This was the appearance of Helen Damalis herself. Oh, he dreamed of her! That was something. It was as if it made her real. What matter that she was only the secondary element in a shaggy form that was somewhat hermaphroditic and miscegenated? She was there. That was something.

George Oneiron projected his own split person onto his two subjects. It was all very brilliant in the tensions that it set up. George was making parades of his double self through the Oganta mediums. These were sculpted and directed dreams of himself and he loved them. Later viewers would love them also. They were good. They were excellent. But they weren't pure Oganta.

Margaret Mondo was wielding a small notion. To her own trio, two males and a female, she now added the boisterous, playful, trollish female of Christopher Bullock. And to herself she added Christopher: she'd always intended to do that. It might be that the development of the Oganta (och, they did need development; it was catastrophe if they remained as they were for always;) would come through these small but accreting nations of them. There were nuclei being created, some by the Earthlings, some independent of them. The Oganta seemed the starkest individuals of any species anywhere, but it was only seeming. They began to accrete into these small nations now; and the personality was in the nations, not in the individuals. Happily this is not the case with many species: necessarily it was so with the Oganta. The small nation might be their new adult form.

The Oganta of Helen Damalis had broken all her bones and mangled her body almost beyond recognition. This pleased her: but it must not go as far as her extinction or all would be lost. She must hide, but she must maintain the relationship: so she must hide in the most obvious place of all. She attracted empty an Marsala Plasma and crept inside it. Then she merged it with the standing plasma globe, her Oganta's crystal ball of record. He would see her there mingled with himself; but he'd not know that this was her alive, so he'd not extinguish her to her death.

Bonta Chrysalis had just now (and most unfortunately) succeeded in her own experiment. She had disenchanting her frog. She had produced her prince. He stood now in his pride and royalty: he was an adult in the old line and form; he was a Rogha.

He was very proud. He was very old (the Oganta showed no aging, whatever their years, but all the considerable years of this one were apparent in his new Rogha form). He was a royal Rogha, one of the elites, of the excellent ones. He was imposing in a way that neither Oganta nor human could ever be. He was extraordinary, he was magnificent, he was proud with the pride of the older angels. He was isolated. He was finished.

He was ridiculous He was silly.

"I'm sorry'," Bonta Chrysalis said lamely. She was still in bondage to her own state and youth. Chrysalis-dreams never accord with reality, but how could she have been so very wrong in this?

"Sorry?" the Rogha asked in regal voice. "You should be happy, small creature, in your limited was. You've been the instrument. You have restored me. Something has restored me. Now I have inherited to my rightful station, that of a natural and destined prince. I look around. I find that I am more than that. I see that it is very late in the day. All the kings are dead. Now I am the king."

In poetic justice, the oafish and unsensing Oganta almost deserved such an adult form. But they had lost it. There is a Providence.

The times had come to their end. These seminar, these field trips, cannot last for ever. It was time for the five Earthlings to return to Earth.

The Oganta, the new, small but acereting nation of them, threw a bash for the five young psychologists from Earth. It was rowdy, of course. It was loud almost beyond bearing. It was vulgar, it was boisterous, it was cacophonous with the whanging and whining of the stringed hitturs. It was at a mountain inn, one of those gape-wall places. It was just at frost-bite, and a light snow was sifting. The five youngish Earth-folk were dressed near as barely as the Oganta.

Crudity, gluttony, guzzling and gorging. Tromping on tables and on torsos. Slurping and tooting from the common caldrons. The ancient and mystic game of leapfrog, and the wrestling and rolling of bodies.

But it was not quite the same sort of bash as the Oganta had thrown for them at their coming. Niceties had appeared. A new element was there, an element that you could hardly pin down with your two feet, but there was a difference. Come back in a thousand years and you'd be able to see the difference clearly.

The bash bashed on. Margaret and Christopher went to gather up the various records. The crystal balls (now solid and stony, yet with clouds still drifting in them) that held the dream pageants and complexes of the curious small Oganta nation, and of their own curious human selves as seen through Oganta eyes.

George and Philip and Bonta came to them late in the day, bebash and besotted, and the five Earth psychologists were near packed for their return to Earth.

"There is one missing," Margaret said. "I wonder if it is worth picking up? Oh, I'll do it. It'll be inferior, but it'll be different. Sometimes there are overlooked things to be found in artifacts that are inferior and different."

"Which?" Bonta asked.

"The crystal ball of record of the singling Oganta," Margaret said, "of the one unsociable Oganta who hated humans so much. But we persuaded him to let a recording ball accumulate on him. Oh, I bet it's full of hate! I'll get it."

Margaret Mondo got the crystal ball of record of the Oganta who hated humans. It was small, but heavy and weird. It wasn't entirely full of hate, not yet. There was one other slight element in it, not quite extinguished, outraged and terrified and squalling for attention.

"Margaret, get me out of here," the stone screeched. "I'm trapped in it, I tell you. I want to mend up my bones and go home to Earth."

"My, aren't you an odd one." Margaret exclaimed. "What a dirty little masterpiece! He made you out of scraps of Bonta and myself. So how could he have made you so ugly?"

"Margaret, it's I, Helen Damalis! Get me out of here!"

"Why, how psychological of him. All the Oganta have an easy way with the lingos. He really named you that, did he, little hell heifer? Ah, what a



shrilling little bad dream you are. One ugly clot of stone like this will show up the others, I in all their colorful beauty. Pack you away with the others, I will, and you'll be the comedy piece of the collection."

"Margaret, I'm Helen. Can't you understand? Run your magic hands over my globe and get me out of here. I'm Helen, the sixth one of the party."

"But we were always a party of five. Ah, the look on you, it changes, it lowers, it explodes. There are stinking flames reeking about you not dream clouds. More, dirty dream, more. Hate, hate, hate! Then I'll freeze you forever in the stone in your dull hatred. Oh, what a perfect little deformity you are!"

"Margaret, I hate you," the stone squalled, "I hate everybody. I'm alive, I tell you. I'm real See me, hear me, smell me, get me out of here! I'm alive, I'm alive!"

"Yes, you're a lively little abomination, but never really alive. The worlds couldn't stand it if you were. More, un-creature, more, more if that's possible. Burn, scream, hate! That's it."

Then Margaret Mondo packed the little misshapen nightmare stone away with all the intricate and interesting crystal balls.

Go see it in the Oganta Collection. Really, it's the liveliest item of them all. Look at it there, wobble-eyed with horror and hatred, shrilling silently, pungent as brimstone, squalling against extinction, hating, outraged, absolutely petrified.

#### DAYS OF GRASS, DAYS OF STRAW

Fog in the corner and fog in his head:  
Gray day broken and bleeding red.

-- Ballads, Henry Drumhead

Christopher Foxx was walking down a city street. No, it was a city road. It was really a city trail or path. He was walking in a fog, but the fog wasn't in the air or the ambient: it was in his head. Things were mighty odd here. There was just a little bit of something wrong about things.

Oceans of grass for one instance. Should a large and busy city (and this was clearly that) have blue-green grass belly-high in its main street? Things hardly remembered: echos and shadows, or were they the strong sounds and things themselves? Christopher felt as though his eyeballs had been cleaned with a magic cleaner, as though lie were blessed with new sensing in ears and nose, as though he went with a restored body and was breathing a new sort of air. It was very pleasant, but it was puzzling. How had the world been pumped full of new juice?

Christopher couldn't recall what day it was; he certainly didn't know what hour it was. it was a gray day, but there was no dullness in that gray. It was shimmering pearl-gray, of a color bounced back by shimmering water and shimmering air. It was a crimson-edged day, like a gray squirrel shot and bleeding redly from the inside and around the edges. Yes, there was the pleasant touch of death on things, gushing death and gushing life.

Christopher's own name didn't sound right to him. He didn't know what town he was in. Indeed he'd never before seen a town with all the storefronts flapping in the wind like that. Ah, they'd curl and bend, but they wouldn't break. A town made of painted buckskin, and yet it was more real than towns made of stone and concrete.

He saw persons he almost knew. He started to speak and only sputtered. Well, he'd get a newspaper then; they sometimes gave information. He reached in his pocket for a coin, and discovered that he didn't have regular pockets. He found a little leather pouch stuck in his belt. What's this? What else was stuck in his belt? It was a breechclout with the ends fore and aft passing

under his belt. Instead of pants he had a pair of leggings and a breechclout, three-piece pants. Oh, oh, what else?

Oh, he wore a shirt that seemed to be leather of some sort. He wore soft shoes that were softer than slippers. He was hatless, and his hair came forward over his shoulders in two tight long braids. He had dressed casually before, but he didn't remember ever dressing like this. How were the rest of the people dressed? No two alike, really, no two alike.

But he did bring a coin out of that leather pouch that was stuck in his belt. A strange coin. It wasn't metal: it was made of stone, and made roughly. On the face of it was the head and forequarters of a buffalo. On the reverse side was the rump of a buffalo. The words on the obverse of it read "worth one buffalo," and on the reverse they read "maybe a little bit less."

"And where do I put a coin in this contraption?" Christopher asked himself angrily and loudly. A hand extended itself, and Christopher put the coin in the hand. The hand belonged to an old wrinkled brown man, swathed in robes and folds of blackened leather, and sitting in the dust.

The old man gave Christopher a newspaper, or gave him something anyhow. It was on leather that was almost board-stiff. It was illustrated, it was printed in a variety of hands; and here and there it had a little hair growing out of it as though its leather were imperfectly scraped.

"Wait your change," the old brown man said. He gave Christopher seven small coins. These were neither metal nor stone: they were clay baked in the sun. The obverse of each was the head and fore of a badger, puffed and bristled and hissing in high defense. And the reverse was the reared rump of the same badger in embattled clawed stance.

"Price go down a little but not a whole badger," the old man said. "Take three puffs. It's close as I can get to even change." Wondering at himself, Christopher took three strong rich smokey puffs from the old pipe of the old man. He felt that he had received full value then. It was about all that he felt satisfied with. But is it wrong to feel unsatisfied, which is unsated? Christopher thought about it.

He went over and sat on a bale of rags outside the shop with the sign "Hot roast dog for sale or give." The bale of rags seemed somehow lively; it was as if there was no division between the animate and the inanimate this day. He tried to make something out of the strange newspaper or the strange day, or the newly strange man who was apparently himself.

Oh, the newspaper was interesting. It could be read one way or another: by picture, by stylized pictograph, by various writings and printings. Here were anecdotes; woolly, horny, bottomlessly funny anecdotes: and they were about people that Christopher knew, or almost knew. And all the people passing by (Christopher realized it with a chuckling gasp) were also people that he knew or almost knew. Well, what made them so different then? They looked like familiar people, they smelled like familiar people (which the familiar people erstwhile had not done), they had the familiar name that came almost to the edge of the tongue.

"But what town is this? What day is this? What is the context?" Christopher wailed out loud. "Why is everything so strange?"

"Kit-Fox, you call me?" Strange Buffalo boomed at him. Strange Buffalo was a big and boisterous man and he had always been a good friend of Christopher. He had? Then why did he look so different? And why was his real name, or his other name, now unremembered?

"Will the buffalo go to war, do you think, Kit-Fox?" Strange Buffalo asked him. "Do you believe that the two great herds of them will go to war? They come near to each other now and they swear that neither will give way."

"No, there will be only the pushing and goring of a few thousand bulls, not much else," Christopher said. "The buffalo simply haven't the basis for a real war." He was surprised at his own knowledge of the subject.

"But the buffalo have human advisers now," Strange Buffalo said. "It began with the betting, of course, but now we can see that there is real cause of conflict on both sides. I dabble in this myself and have some good ideas.

We are tying spear-shafts to the horns of some of the big bulls and teaching them to use them. And we're setting up big bows and teaching them to bend them with their great strength, but they haven't any accuracy at all."

"No, I don't believe they were meant to have a real war. It's a wonderful dust they raise, though, when they all come together. It makes you glad to be alive. And the thunder of their millions of hoofs!" (There was the distant sound of morning thunder.) "Or is that a thundering in the mountains?" Kit-Fox -- ah, Christopher was asking.

"Well, there is quite a clatter in the mountains this morning, Kit," Strange Buffalo was saying in happy admiration. "The deep days, the grass days like this one aren't come by easily. It's a wonder the mountains aren't knocked to pieces when the big prophets pray so noisily and wrestle so strong. But, as the good skin says, we must work out our salvation in fear and thundering."

"Is it not 'In fear and trembling'?" Christopher asked as he lounged on the lively bale of rags.

"No, Kit-Fox, no!" Strange Buffalo pealed at him. "That's the kind of thing they say during the straw days; not here, not now. In the Cahooche shadow-writing it says 'In fear and chuckling,' but the Cahooche words for thunder and chuckling are almost the same. On some of the Kiowa antelope-skin drawings, 'In scare-shaking and in laughter-shaking.' I like that. I wish I could pray and wrestle as woolly and horny as the big ones do. Then I'd get to be a prophet on the mountain also, and I'd bring in more days of grass. Yes, and days of mesquite also."

"The mountain is a funny one this morning, Strange Buffalo. It doesn't reach clear down to the ground," Christopher said. "There's a great space between, and there are eagles flying underneath it."

"Ah, it'll fall back after a while, Kit-Fox, when they have won or lost the wrestling for the day; after they have generated sufficient juice for this day, for I see that they have already won it and it will be a day of grass. Let's go have a rack of roast dog and a gourd of choc beer," Strange Buffalo proposed.

"In a minute, Strange Buffalo. I am in the middle of a puzzle and I have this fog in my head. What day is this?"

"It's one of the days of grass, Kit-Fox. I just told you that."

"But which one, Strange Buffalo? And what, really, are 'days of grass'?"

"I believe that it is the second monday of Indian Summer, Kit-Fox," Strange Buffalo was saying as he gave the matter his thought and attention. "Or it may be the first monday of Blue-Goose Autumn. We're not sure, though, that it is a monday. It sounds and tastes more like a thursday or an aleikaday."

"It sure does," Christopher -- ah, Kit-Fox agreed.

A laughing, dying man was carried past by four hale men. This fortunate one had been smashed by bear or rolled on by horse or gored by buffalo, and the big red blood in him was all running out. "It works," the happy dying man cried out. "It works. I got a little too close to him and he ripped me to pieces, but it works. We are really teaching those big bulls to use the spears lashed to their horns. Others will carry on the work and the fun. I bet that I've had it."

"A little blood to bless me!" Strange Buffalo cried out: and the dying man splashed him with the rich and rigorous blood.

"For me also," Kit-Fox begged: and the dying man smeared him with blood on the brow and breast and shoulders and loins. Two other friends, Conquering Sharp-Leaf and Adoration on the Mountain, came and were blessed with the blood. Then the man died and was dead.

"There is nothing like the fine rich blood to make a grass day sing in your head and in your body," Strange Buffalo exulted. "On the straw days they try to hide the blood or they bleed in a dark corner."

(What was all this about the grass days and the straw days? There was

now a sordid dull-dream quality, a day-of-straw quality that kept trying to push itself in. For a little while,' it begged, 'to reestablish rigor and rule and reason for just a little while.' 'Go away,' said the day-of-grass quality, 'The wrestle was won this morning, and this is a day out of the count.')

Kit-Fox and Strange Buffalo went in, past the booths and work areas of the coin makers, past the stands of the eagle-wingbone-whistle makers, and into the shop which had roast dog for sale or give. Strange Buffalo had a shoulder of dog and Kit-Fox had a rack of ribs. There was fried bread also, and hominy and pumpkin. There was choc beer dipped with gourd dippers out of a huge crock. Thousands of people were there. It was crowded and it was supposed to be. The man named Mountain twinkled in the air. Why had they not noticed that about him before?

Folks rolled up the walls and tied them. Now the strong smoke and savor could visit all the places, and the folks in every shop could see into every other shop. It was full morning and beginning to get warm.

"But I still want to know the date," Kit-Fox insisted, not quite converted to the day of grass, not quite clear of the head-fog that accompanies the sullen burning of the straw days. "What newspaper is this that doesn't have a date? I want a date!"

"Look at it. It tells," said Strange Buffalo.

"You want a date, honey?" the top of the newspaper writhed in sudden flickering of day-fire print. "Phone 582-8316 and I give you a real date." Then the day-fire print was gone.

"I hope I can remember that number," Kit-Fox said anxiously. "Strange Buffalo, where is there a telephone exchange?"

"They are the same and single and right outside past the booths," Strange Buffalo said. "You were sitting upon it when I came upon you. And you, you old straw-head, you thought it was a bale of rags."

Kit-Fox went outside, past the booths of the stone-buffalo-coin makers and the clay-badger-coin makers, past the tents of the porcupine-quill dealers, to what he had thought was a bale of rags, a lively bale of rags as he now remembered it. Well, it was an ample lady in her glad rags and she was the telephone exchange lying there in the grass.

"I want to call number 582-8316," Kit-Fox said uneasily.

"Here are a handful of dice," the glad-rags lady told him. "Arrange them here in the short grass and make any number you want."

"But proper once have numbers only to six," Kit-Fox protested, "and some of the numbers are higher."

"Those are improper dice, they are crooked dice," the lady said. "They have numbers more than six and numbers less than one. Number out your telephone number in the short grass with them."

"Are you sure this is the way to dial a number?" Kit-Fox asked.

"Sure am not sure," the lady said. "If you know a better way, do it that way. Worth a try kid, worth a try."

Kit-Fox numbered out his numbers in the short grass.

"Now what do I do?" he asked.

"Oh, talk into the telephone here."

"That buckskin bag is a telephone?"

"Try it, try it. Drop a badger coin in and try it."

Kit-Fox dropped the coin into the telephone. "Hello, hello," he said.

"Hello, hello," the lady answered. "That's my number you called. You want a date, I wait for you awhile. Believe me, I get pretty tired of waiting pretty soon."

"I don't think this is a telephone exchange at all," Kit-Fox grumbled.

"How else I can get guys so easy to drop badger-coins in a buckskin bag," the lady said. "Come along, lover man, we will have a grand time this day."

The lady was full-bodied and jolly. Kit-Fox remembered her from somewhere.

"Who are you?" he asked her.

"I'm your wife in the straw days," she said, "but this is a grass day. They're harder to find, but they're more fun when you find one. They have something to do with grandfather's brother and that wrestling of his."

"Days of grass, days of straw", Kit-Fox said as he embraced the lady passionately. "How about a hay day?"

"You mean a heyday? Those are special. We hope to make them more often, if only the wrestle is better. They're fuller of juice than the grass days even. We try to make one now."

They made a heyday together (together with a whole nation of people); and it went on and on. Day-Torch (that was the lady in the glad rags, the lady who was Kit-Fox's wife during the straw days) bought an eagle-wingbone whistle from a dealer, and she whistled happy haunting times on it. The people followed Kit-Fox and Day-Torch out of town, out to the oceans of buffalo grass and blue-stem grass. They torched everthing that was dry and set the blue-black smoke to rolling. But the fundamental earth was too green to burn.

All mounted horses and took lances. They went out after buffalo. Word was brought to them that some of the newly armed buffalo bulls wanted to schedule battle with them. And the battle was a good one, with gushing blood and broken-open bodies, and many on each side were killed.

Strange Buffalo was killed. That big boisterous man died with a happy whoop.

"Strange Buffalo, indeed," one of the buffalo bulls said. "He looks like a man to me." When the ground there had become too soggy and mired in blood, they adjourned the battle till the next clay of grass, or the one after that. Bloody battles are fine, but who wants to spend a whole day on one? There are other things. Kit-Fox and Day-Torch and a number of other folks went to higher ground.

There was a roaring river on the higher ground, the biggest river ever and the loudest.

"Oh be quiet," Day-Torch said. "You've got the tune wrong." The great river ceased to roar. Day-Torch whistled the right tune on the eagle-wingbone whistle. Then the river resumed its roiring, but in this right tune now. This mightiest of all rivers was named Cottonwood Creek.

Henry Drumhead added his beat to the tune. Then the folks had a rain dance till the sharp rain came down and drenched them through. They had a sun dance then, till the sun dried up the niud and began to burn the hides of the people. They had a cloud dance then. They had an antelope dance till enough antelope came to provide a slaughter and a feast. They had a pit dance, a fire dance, a snake dance, and an ashes dance: the ashes from pecan wood and a better condiment than salt to go with roast hickory wood and antelope. They had a feast dance. Then (after a while) a shakedown dance. They had a thunder clance and a mountain dance.

Say, it is spooky to come to the foot of the mountain itself and see the great gap between it and the ground! Rocks and boulders fell off of the bottom of the mountain and killed many of the people below. And, from the mountain itself, a broken, bloody, and headless torso fell down to the earth.

Helen Hightower -- ah, that is to say the glad-rag lady Day-Torch -- set up a rakish screaming, "The head, the head, somebody forgot the head!"

There was a thunderous grumbling, a mountain-shaking irritation, but the bloody head did come down and smash itself like a bursting pumpkin on the earth.

"A lot of times they forget to throw the head down if you don't remind them," Day-Torch said.

The meaning of the fallen torso and head was that there was now one less prophet or wrestler on the mountain; that there was now an opportunity for one more man to ascend to glory and death.

Several of the men attempted it by various devices, by piling cairns of stones to climb upon, by leaping into the air to try to grab one of the dangling roots of the mountain, by hurling lances with trailing lianas to fasten quivering in the bottom of the mountain. They played it out in the

garish day there where all the colors were so bright that they ached. Many of the men fell to their deaths, but one ascended. There is always one who is able to ascend to the great wrestle when there is an empty place to receive him.

And the one who ascended was -- no, no, you'll not have his name from us yet.

Something was mighty odd here. There was just a little bit of something right about things.

2

Draftsman, draftsman, what do you draw?  
Dog days, draggy days, days of straw.

-- Ballads, Henry Drumhead.

Indian Summer. A period of warm or mild weather late in autumn or in early winter.

So Webster's Collegiate defines it, but Webster's hasn't the humility ever to admit that it doesn't know the meaning of a word or phrase. And it doesn't know the meaning of this one.

There are intervals, days, hours, minutes that are not remembered directly by anyone. They do not count in the totality of passing time. It is only by the most sophisticated methods that even the existence of these intervals may be shown.

There are whole seasons, in addition to the four regular seasons that are supposed to constitute the year. Nobody knows where they fit in, there being no room for them anywhere in the year; nobody has direct memory of being in them or living in them. Yet, somehow, they have names that have escaped these obliterations. The name of one of the misfit seasons is Indian Summer.

("Why can't the Indians have their summer in the summertime like the rest of us?" comes a high voice with a trace of annoyance. Not a high-pitched voice: a high voice.)

But all that is neither here nor there. It is yonder, and we will come to it.

Christopher Foxx was walking down a city street. Things were mighty even here, mighty neat. There was just a little bit of something wrong about their rightness. The world was rubbed, scrubbed, and tubbed; it was shaved, paved and saved; it was neat, sweet, and effete. Ah, the latter was possibly what was wrong with it, if anything could be wrong with perfection. The colors were all flat (flat colors had been deemed best for nerves and such), and the sounds were all muted. Christopher, for a moment, wished for a color that shrieked and for a sound that blazed. He put the thought resolutely out of his head. After all, he had for wife Helen Hightower, and he suffered much criticism because of her gaudiness and exuberance.

Christopher took a paper from the slot on the corner, noted that it was a day in May (he had a queer feeling that he had been uneasy about the date, and yet all that registered with him was that it fell within a familiar month). He entered the North Paragon Breakfast Club. It was there that the Symposium would begin (it would last the whole day and into the night, and be held at various sites) on the multiplex subject "Spacial and Temporal Underlays to the Integrated World, with Insights as to Their Possible Reality and Their Relationship to the World Unconscious and to the Therapeutic Amnesia; with Consideration of the Necessity of Belief in Stratified Worlds, and Explorations of the Orological Motif in Connection with the Apparent Occurrence of Simultaneous Days." It would have been an exciting subject if Excitement had not become another of the muted things.

Buford Strange was already at the North Paragon, and with him were

Adrian Montaigne and Vincent Rue.

"I have already ordered for ourselves and for yourself, Christopher," Buford said. "It is Sheldrake, and I hope that you like it. They will not prepare it for fewer than four persons. 'We can't go around killing quarter ducks,' they say."

"That is all right," Christopher said meekly. He glanced at the others three nervously. There was surely something familiar about them all.

Great blue mountain thunder! Why shouldn't there be! He had worked with these men daily for several years. But, no, no, his edgy mind told him that they were familiar in some other and more subtle way. He glanced at the paper which he had taken from the corner slot outside. Something like quick flame ran across the top of it and was gone too quickly to verify. But was it possible that the flame had said "You want a date, honey? You phone --" Of course it was not possible. Clearly, at the top of the paper it was printed "A Day in May." Clearly? Was that clear enough for a date?

"What date is this?" Christopher asked the three of them.

"May the eighth, of course," Adrian answered him. "You've got today's Journal in your hand and still you ask?"

Well now it was printed clearly there "May 8" and there was no nonsense about "A Day in May"; still less was there anything like "You want a date, honey?"

Some wild-looking children burst into the North Paragon Breakfast Club.

"Straw-Men! Straw-Men!" they cried at the four gentlemen there.

"Straw-Men! Straw-Men!" The children buffeted the four men a bit, but other extravagant things that are since forgotten, and then they went out of the Breakfast Club again: or at least they disappeared; they were no longer there.

"Why should they have done that?" Adrian asked, puzzled. "Why should they have called us that, and done the other things?"

"Why should who have called us what?" Vincent asked, even more puzzled.

"I don't know," Adrian said dully. "It seemed that someone was here and said or did something."

"You're witless, Adrian," Vincent chided. "Nobody was here."

"Straw-Man," Christopher Foxx said softly. "I remember the word now and I couldn't remember it before. I woke up this morning trying to remember it. It seemed to be the key to a dream that was slipping away in spite of my trying to bang onto it. I have the key word now, but it fits nothing. The dream is gone forever."

"We will come back to this subject later in our discussions," Buford Strange said. "I believe that your word 'Straw-Man,' Christopher, is a part of the underlay, or perhaps of the overlay, that pertains to our world and our study. There is a good chance that certain children, or perhaps dwarfs or gnomes, entered here several moments ago. Did any of you notice them?"

"No," said Vincent Rue.

"No one entered," said Adrian Montaigne.

"No. I didn't see anyone," said Christopher Foxx.

"Yet I believe that a group did come in," Buford Strange continued suavely. "It was a group unusual enough to be notice. Then why didn't we notice it? Or why did we forget, within a short moment, that we had seen it at all? I believe it was because the group was in a different sort of day. I am near sure that it is a group that lives in either St. Martin's Summer or in the Kingfisher Days. Ah, here is the Sheldrake ready with all the trimmings! Drool and be happy. We shall never know such moment again."

It was a momentous fowl, no question of that. It was good, it was rich, it was overflowing with juice. It was peer of the fowl that are found in the land named St. Succulentus' Springtime. (What? What? There is a land named that?)

The four noble men (they were enobled by the circumstance) fell to eating with what, in days of another sort, might almost be called gusto. It was a royal bird and was basted with that concoction of burst fruits and

crushed nuts and peppers and ciders and holy oils and reindeer butter that is called -- (wait a bit) --

"Do you know that the Sheldrake is really a mysterious creature?" Buford Strange asked as he ate noisily (nobody eats such royal fare in quiet). Buford acted as if he knew a secret.

"It is not a mysterious creature at all," Adrian countered (he knew it was, though). "It is only the common European duck."

"It is not only the common European duck," Buford said strongly. "In other days it may be quite uncommon."

"What are you saying, Buford?" Vincent Rue asked him. "In what other days?"

"Oh, I believe, possibly, in what the Dutch call Kraanzorner (Crane-Summer). Are we agreed that the other days, the days out of count, are topic rather than temporal?"

"We are not even agreed that there are days out of count," Christopher objected.

"Drakes' teeth, by the way, while rare, are not unknown," Adrian Montaigne popped the statement out of his mouth as if in someone else's voice. He seemed startled at his own words.

"Drake is really the same word as drakos, a dragon," Christopher Foxx mumbled. "Ah, I was going to say something else but it is gone now."

"Waiter, what is the name of the excellent stuff with which the drake is basted and to which it is wedded?" Vincent Rue asked in happy wonder.

"Dragons' sauce," said the waiter.

"Well, just what is the mystery, the uncommonness of the Sheldrake, Buford?" Christopher asked him.

"I don't seem to remember," that man said. "Ah, let us start our discussion with my, our, failure to remember such things. Vincent, did you not have a short paper prepared on 'Amnesia, the Holes in the Pockets of the Seamless Garment'?"

"I forget. Did I have such a paper prepared? I will look in my own pockets."

Meanwhile, back on the mountain,

back on the thundering mountain there were certain daring and comic persons rushing in and out and counting coup on the Wrath of God. It is a dangerous game. These were the big prophets who prayed so violently and sweat so bloodily and wrestled so strongly, It was they who fought for the salving or the salvation of the days, in fear and in chuckling, in scare-shaking and in laughter-shaking.

The thundering mountain was a funny one this morning. It didn't reach clear to the ground. There was a great space between, and there were eagles flying under it. And the day, the day, was it really the first monday of Blue-Goose Autumn? Was it really a monday at all? Or was it a thursday or an aleikaday?

It was like another morning of not long before. The eagles remember it; the clouds remember it; the mountain wrestlers remember it dimly, though some of the memory has been taken away from them.

Remember how it is written on the holy skins: "If you have faith you shall say to the mountain 'Remove from here and cast thyself into the sea' and it will do it." Well, on that morning they had tried it. Several of the big prophets and wrestlers tried it, for they did have faith. They groaned with travail and joy, they strove mightily, and they did move the mountain and make it cast itself into the sea.

But the thunders made the waters back off. The waters refused to accept or to submerge the mountain. The prayer-men and wrestlers had sufficient faith, but the ocean did not. Whoever had the last laugh on that holy morning?

The strivers were timeless, of the prime age, but they were often called the 'grandfathers' brothers' by the people. They were up there now, the great



prophets and prayer-men and wrestlers. One of these intrepid men was an Indian and he was attempting to put the Indian Sign on God himself. God, however, was like a mist and would not be signed.

"We will wrestle," the Indian said to God in the mist, "we will wrestle to see which of us shall be Lord for this day. I tell you it is not thick enough if only the regular days flow. I hesitate to instruct you in your own business, and yet someone must instruct you. There must be overflowing and special days apart from the regular days. You have such days, I am sure of that, but you keep them prisoned in a bag. It is necessary now that I wrest one of them from you."

They wrestled, inasmuch as a man slick with his own sweat and blood may wrestle with a mist: and it seemed that the Indian won the lordship of a day from God. "It will be a day of grass," the Indian said. "It will be none of your dry and juiceless days." The Indian lay exhausted with his fingers entwined in the won day: and the strength came back to him. "You make a great thing about marking every sparrow's fall," the Indian said then. "See that you forget not to mark this day."

The thing that happened then was this: God marked the day for which they had wrestled, but he marked it on a different holy skin in a different place, not on the regular skin that lists the regular days. This act caused the wrested Day to be one of the Days out of Count.

Prophets, wrestlers, praying-men of other sorts were on the mountain also. There were black men who sometimes strove for kaffir-corn days or ivory-tree days. There were brown island men who wrestled for shellfish days or wild-pig days. There were pinkish north-wood men who walked on pine needles and balsam; there were gnarled men out of the swampy laids; there were town men from the great towns. All of these strove with the Lord in fear and in chuckling.

Some of these were beheaded and quartered, and the pieces of them were flung down violently to earth: it is believed that there were certain qualities lacking in these, or that their strength had finally come to an end. But the others, the most of them, won great days from the Lord, Heydays, Halcyon or Kingfisher Days, Maedchensommer Days, St. Garvais Days, Indian Summer Days. These were all rich days, full of joy and death, bubbling with ecstasy and blood. And yet all were marked on different of the holy skins and so they became the Days out of Count.

"Days out of the Count," Buford Stange was saying. "It's an entrancing idel, and we have almost proved it. Seasons out of the count! It's striking that the word for putting a condiment on should be the same word as a division of the year. Well, the seasons out of the count are all well seasoned and spiced. There are whole multiplex layered eras out of the count. The ice ages are such. I do not say 'were such'; I say 'are such.'"

"But the ice ages are real, real, real," Helen Hightower insisted. (Quite a few long hours had passed in the discussions, and now Helen Hightower, the wife of Christopher Foxx, was off her work at the telephone exchange and had put on her glad rags and joined the scholars.)

"Certainly they are real, Helen," Buford Strange said. "If only I were so real! I believe that you remember them, or know them, more than the most of us do. You have a dangerously incomplete amnesia on so many things that I wonder the thunder doesn't come and take you. But in the days and years and centuries and eras of the straight count there are no ice ages."

"Well then, how, for instance, would local dwellers account for terminal moraines and glacial till generally?" asked Conquering Sharp-Leaf, ah, Vincent Rue.

(They were at the university, in that cozy room in the psychology department where Buford Strange usually held forth, the room that was just below the special effects room of Prof. Timacheff.)

"How did they account for such before the time of modern geology?" Buford asked. "They didn't. There would be a new boulder one morning that had

not been there the day before. The sheep-herder of the place would say that the moon had drawn it out of the ground, or that it had fallen from the sky."

"You're crazy, Buford," Adrian Montaigne said with a certain affection. "Why the ice ages then? Why should they have happened, even in times out of count? Why should they have left their footprints in the times within the count?" Adrian had very huge and powerful hands. Why had they not noticed this before?

"I believe there was a dyanasty of great and muscular prophets and ghost-wrestiers who wanted to call out the terrible days of fimbul winter," Buford said in a hushed voice. "I don't know why they wanted such things, or why they sweated blood and wrestled prodigies to obtain them. They were men, but they are remembered as the frost giants."

"Oh my grand, grand trucks!" Day-Torch, Helen Hightower, rather, cried out. "Days of snow! Days of ice! Millions of them!"

"You aree saying that certain archetypes --" Kit-Fox began.

-- shook the pillars of Heaven till the snow and ice fell down for a million days, for a million days out of the count," Buford Strange finished.

"Strange Buffalo, ah, Buford, you are crazy," Christopher Foxx chided much as Adrian had. Christopher was talking, but the queerly smiling Adrian had now become the presence in the room. Adrian had the curious, under-rutile of the skin of one who has sweat blood in prayer and buffoonery and passion. Why had they not noticed that of him before?

"I could almost believe that you were one of the great challengers yourself, Strange," Christopher said to Buford, but he was looking at Adrian.

"You strike me as with a lance, Kit," Buford said sadly. "You uncover my mortification. For I failed. I don't know when it was. It was on a day out of the count. I failed a year ago or ten thousand years ago. I could not make it among the great ones. I was not cast out to my death: I was never in. There was room for me, and an opportunity for the ascent, but I failed in nerve. And one who has aspired to be a champion or prophet cannot fall back to be an ordinary man. So I am less than that: I am short of manhood. But, sadly, I do remember and live in other sorts of days."

"I believe that the aberrant days are simultaneous with the prosaic days," Adrian Montaigne mused. Adrian was quite a large man. Why had they not noticed that before?

"No, no, they are not simultaneous," Buford was correcting him. "There are the days out of the count and there are the days in the count. Those out of count are outside of time so they cannot be simultaneous with anything, You have to see it that way."

"You see it your way and I'll see it mine," Adrian was stubborn. "Consider some of the aberrant times or countries: St. Garvais' Springtime, St. Martin's Summer (the Saints in these names were mountain prophets and wrestlers, but some of them were not at all saintly in their violence), Midas March (the very rich need their special season also: it is said that, in their special month, they are superiorly endowed in all ways), Dog Days, Halcyon Days, Dragon Days, Harvest May (what in the world is harvested in May?), All-Hallow Summer, Days of Ivory, Days of Horn, Indian Summer, Wicklow Week, Apricot Autumn, Goose Summer, Giant-Stone Days, Day of the Crooked Mile, the season called Alcedonia by the Latins. I tell you that all these days are happening at the same time!" This man named Adoration on the Mountain, or rather Adrian Montaigne, had a reckless sort of transcendence about him now.

"No, they do not all happen at the same time," Striinge Buffalo was saying, "for the aberrant clays of them are not in time. They are places and not times."

"Are there no night-time hours in the times out of time?" Vincent Rue asked.

"No. Not in the same sense. They are in another province entirely," Buford said.

There was thunder in the special effects room of Professor Timacheff on the floor just above them, cheerful, almost vulgar thunder, Timacheff taught

some sensational (sense-response and also melodramatic ) courses up there. But how did he get such special effects anyhow?

"They do happen at the same time," Adrian Mountain insisted, and he was laughing like boulders coming together. Quite a few things seemed to be happening to Adrian all at the same time. "They are all happening right now. I am sitting with you here this minute, but I am also on the mountain this minute. The thunder in the room above, it is real thunder, you know. And there is a deeper, more distant, more raffish thunder behind it which primitives call God's-Laughter Thunder."

"This gets out of hand now," Vincent Rue protested. "It is supposed to be a serious symposium on spacial and temporal underlays. Several of you have turned it into a silly place and a silly time. You are taking too anthropomorphic a view of all these things, including God. One does not really wrestle with God in a bush or a mist, or ride wildly on a pony and count coup on God. Even as an atheist I find these ideas distasteful."

"But we are anthropoi, men," Adrian proclaimed. "What other view than an anthropomorphic view could we take? That we should play the God-game, that we should wrestle with a God-form and try to wrest lordship of days from him, that we should essay to count coup on God, I as a theist do not find at all distasteful."

"Why, One of them is failing now! It happens so seldom. I wonder if I have a chance."

"Adrian, what are you talking about?" Vincent demanded.

"How could you do it, Adrian, when I could not?" Buford Strange asked.

"Remember me when you come to your place, Adrian," Day-Torch cried.

"Send me a day. Oh, send me a day-fire day."

"And to me also, Adrian," Kit-Fox begged. "I would love to do it myself, but it isn't given to everyone."

There was a strong shouting in the room above. There was the concussion of bodies, and the roaring of mountain winds.

"What in all the crooked days is Professor Timacheff doing up there this evening?" Vincent Sharp-Leaf asked angrily. "And what things are you doing here, Adrian? You look like a man set afire."

"Make room for me! Oh, make room for me!" Adrian of the Mountain cried out in a voice that had its own crackling thunder. He was in the very transport of passion and he glistened red with his own in bloody sweat. "One is failing, one is falling, why doesn't he fall then?"

"Help with it, Kit-Fox! And I help also," Day-Torch yowled.

"I help!" Kit-Fox yelled. The room shuddered, the building shuddered, the whole afternoon shuddered. There was a rending of boulders, either on the prophet's mountain or in the special effects room of Professor Timacheff above them. There was a great breaking and entering, a place turning into a time.

There came a roaring like horses in the sky. Then was the multiplex crash (God save his soul, his body is done for) of bloody torso and severed limbs falling into the room from a great height, splintering the table at which the five of them sat, breaking the room, splattering them all with blood. But the ceiling above was unbreached and unharmed and there was no point of entry.

"I am not man enough even to watch it," Buford Strange gurgled, and he slumped sideways unconscious.

"Timacheff, you fool!" Vincent Rue bawled to the space above them.

"Watch your damned special effects! You're wrecking the place!"

Unquestionably that Timacheff was good. He used his special effects in classes on phenomenology that he taught up there.

"The head, the head! Don't let them forget the head!" Day-Torch cried in a flaming voice.

"I just remembered that Timacheff is out of town and is holding no classes today," Kit-Fox muttered in vulpine wonder.

"Make room for me! Oh, make room for me!" Adrian Mountain boomed. Then he was gone from the midst of them. He would be a factor, though, "in days to

come."

Christopher and Vincent tried to straighten up the unconscious Buford Strange. They shook him, but he came apart and one arm came off him. He was revealed as a Straw-man filled with bloody straw, and no more.

"Why, he's naught but a poorly made scarecrow," Christopher Foxx said in wonder. "He was right that one who falls back from it cannot become an ordinary man again. He will be less than man."

"That's funny. He always looked like a man to me," Vincent Rue said.

"The head, the head! You forget the head. Let the head fall down!" Day-Torch cried.

And the head fell down.

It smashed itself like a bursting pumpkin on the broken floor.

Under the town is a woollier town,

And the blood splashed up and the head fell down.

-- Ballads, Henry Drumhead