

Entire and Perfect Chrysolite

by R. A. Lafferty

Having achieved perfection, we feel a slight unease. From our height we feel impelled to look down. We make our own place and there is nothing below us; but in our imagination there are depths and animals below us. To look down breeds cultishness.

There are the cults of the further lands and the further people. The Irish and Americans and Africans are respectable philosophical and industrial parties, but the cultishness is something beyond. Any addition to the world would mar the perfect world which is the perfect thought of the Maker. Were there an Africa indeed, were there an Ireland, were there an America or an Atlantis, were there Indies, then we would be other than we are. The tripartite unity that is the ecumene would be broken; the habitable world-island, the single eye in the head that is the world-globe would be voided.

There are those who say that our rational and perfect world should steep itself in this great unconscious geography of the under-mind, in the outré fauna and the incredible continents of the tortured imagination and of black legends. They pretend that this would give us depth.

We do not want depth. We want height. Let us seal off the under things of the under-mind, and exalt ourselves! And our unease will pass.

—Audifax O’Hanlon, *Exaltation Philosophy*

The *True Believer* was sailing offshore in an easterly direction in the latitude of fifteen degrees north and the longitude of twenty-four degrees east. To the north of the coasting ship was the beautiful Cinnamon Coast of Libya with its wonderful beaches and remarkable hotels tawny in the distance. To the east and south and west were the white-topped waves that went on forever and ever. The *True Believer* sailed along the southernmost edge of the ecumene, the habitable and inhabited world.

August Shackleton was drinking Roman Bomb out of a pot-bellied bottle and yelping happily as he handled the “wheel” of the *True Believer*.

“It’s a kids’ thing to do,” he yipped, “but there were never such beautiful waters to do it in. We try to call in outer spirits. We try to call up inner spirits and lands. It’s a children’s antic. Why do we do it, Boyle, other than for the fun of it?”

“Should there be another reason, Shackleton? Well, there is, but we go about it awkwardly

and without knowing what we're doing. The thing about humans (which nobody apparently wishes to notice) is that we're a species which has never had an adult culture. We feel that lack more and more as we become truly adult in other ways. It grows tedious to stretch out a childhood forever. The easy enjoyments, the easy rationality, the easy governments and sciences are really childish things. We master them while we are yet children, and we look beyond. There isn't anything beyond the childishness, Shackleton. We must find a deeper view somehow. We are looking for that something deeper here."

"What? By going on a lark that is childish even to children, Boyle? I was ashamed before my sons when I confessed on what sort of diversion I was going. First there were the séances that we indulged in. If we raised any spirits there, they were certainly childish ones. And now we're on this voyage on the *True Believer*. We're looking for the geographical home of certain collective unconscious images! Why shouldn't the children hoot at us? Ah well, let us not be too ashamed. It's colorful and stimulating fun, but it isn't adult."

The other four members of the party, Sebastian Linter and the three wives, Justina Shackleton, Luna Boyle, and Mintgreen Linter, were swimming in the blue ocean. The *True Believer* was coasting very slowly and the four swimmers were clipped to outrigger towlines.

"There's something wrong with the water!" Justina Shackleton suddenly called up to her husband. "There's weeds in it, and there shouldn't be. There's reeds in it, and swamp grasses. There's mud. And there's green slime!"

"You're out of your lovely head, lovely," Shackleton called back. "It's all clear blue water off a sand coast. I can see fish twenty meters down. It's clear."

"I tell you it's full of green slime!" Justina called back. "It's so thick and heavy that it almost tears me away from the line. And the insects are so fierce that I have to stay submerged."

But they were off the Cinnamon Coast of Libya. They could smell the warm sand and the watered gardens ashore. There was no mud, there was no slime, there were no insects off the Cinnamon Coast ever. It was all clear and bright as living, moving glass.

Sebastian Linter had been swimming on the seaward side of the ship. Now he came up ropes to the open deck of the ship, and he was bleeding.

"It *is* thick, Shackleton," he panted. "It's full of snags and it's dangerous. And that fanged hog could have killed me. Get the rest of them out of the water!"

"Linter, you can see for yourself that it is clear everywhere. Clear, and of sufficient depth, and serene."

"Sure, I see that it is, Shackleton. Only it isn't. What we are looking for has already begun. The illusion has already happened to all senses except sight. Stuff it, Shackleton! Get them out of the water! The snakes or the crocs will get them; the animals thrashing around in the mud will get them; and if they try to climb up onto the shore, the beasts there will break them up

and tear them to pieces.”

“Linter, we’re two thousand meters offshore and everything is clear. But you are disturbed. So am I. The ship just grounded, and it’s fifty meters deep here. All right, everyone! I order everybody except my wife to come out of the water! I request that she come out. I am unable to order her to do anything.”

The other two women, Luna Boyle and Mintgreen Linter, came out of the water. And Justina Shackleton did not.

“In a while, August, in a while I’ll come,” Justina called up to the ship. “I’m in the middle of a puzzle here and I want to study it some more. August, can a hallucination snap you in two? He sure is making the motions.”

“I don’t know, lovely,” August Shackleton called back to her doubtfully.

Luna Boyle and Mintgreen Linter had come out of the ocean up the ropes. Luna was covered with green slime and was bleeding variously. Mintgreen was covered with weeds and mud, and her feet and hands were torn. And she hobbled with pain.

“Is your foot broken, darling?” Sebastian Linter asked her with almost concern. “But of course it is all illusion.”

“I have the illusion that my foot is broken,” Mintgreen sniffled, “and I have the illusion that I am in very great pain. Bleeding blubberfish, I wish it were real! It couldn’t really hurt this much.”

“Oh elephant hokey!” Boyle stormed. “These illusions are nonsense. There can’t be such an ambient creeping around us. We’re not experiencing anything.”

“Yes, we are, Boyle,” Shackleton said nervously. “And your expression is an odd one at this moment. For the elephant was historical in the India that is, was fantastic in the further India that is fantastic, and is still more fanciful in its African contingency. In a moment we will try to conjure up the African elephant which is twice the mass of the historical Indian elephant. The ship is dragging badly now and might even break up if this continues, but the faro shows no physical contact. All right, the five of us on deck will put our heads together for this. You lend us a head too, Justina!”

“Take it, take my head. I’m about to let that jawful snapper have my body anyhow. August, this stuff is real! Don’t tell me I imagine that smell.”

“We will all try to imagine that smell, and other things,” August Shackleton stated as he uncorked another bottle of Roman Bomb. In the visible world there was still the Cinnamon Coast of Libya, and the blue oceans going on forever. But in another visible world, completely unrelated to the first and occupying absolutely different space (but both occupying total space), were the green swamps of Africa, the sedgy shores going sometimes back into rain forests and sometimes into savannas, the moon mountains rising behind them, the air

sometimes heavy with mist and sometimes clear with scalding light, the fifty levels of noises, the hundred levels of colors.

"The ambient is forming nicely even before we start," Shackleton purred. Some of them drank Roman Bomb and some of them Green Canary as they readied themselves for the psychic adventure.

"We begin the conjure," Shackleton said, "and the conjure begins with words. Our little group has been involved with several sorts of investigations, foolish ones perhaps, to discover whether there are (or more importantly, to be sure that there are not) physical areas and creatures beyond those of the closed ecumene. We have gone on knobknockers, we have held séances. The séances in particular were grotesque, and I believe we were all uneasy and guilty about them. Our Faith forbids us to evoke spirits. But where does it forbid us to evoke geographies?"

"Ease up a little on the evoking!" Justina shrilled up to them. "The snapper just took me off at the left ankle. I pray he doesn't like my taste."

"It has been a mystery for centuries," said August (somewhat disturbed by his wife's vulgar outburst from the ocean), "that out of the folk unconscious there should well ideas of continents that are not in the world, continents with a highly imaginary flora and fauna, continents with highly imaginary people. It is a further mystery that these psychic continents and islands should be given bearings, and that apparently sane persons have claimed to visit them. The deepest mystery of all is Africa. Africa, in Roman days, was a subdivision of Mauritania, which was a subdivision of Libya, one of the three parts of the world. And yet the entire coast of Libya has been mapped correctly for three thousand years, and there is no Africa beyond, either appended or separate. We prove the nonsense of it by sailing in clear ocean through the middle of that pretended continent."

"We prove the nonsense further by getting our ship mired in a swamp in the middle of that imaginary continent and seeing that continent begin to form about it," said Boyle. And his Green Canary tasted funny to him. There was a squalling pungency in the air and something hair-raisingly foreign in the taste of the drink.

"This is all like something out of Carlo Forte," Linter laughed unsteadily.

"The continental ambient forms about us," said Shackleton. "Now we will evoke the creatures. First let us conjure the great animals, the rhinoceros, the lion, the leopard, the elephant, which all have Asian counterparts; but these of the contingent Africa are to be half again or twice the size, and incomparably fierce."

"We conjure them, we conjure them," they all chanted, and the conjured creatures appeared mistily.

"We conjure the hippopotamus, the water behemoth, with its great comical bulk, its muzzle like a scoop-shovel, and its eyes standing up like big balls—"

"Stop it, August!" Justina Shackleton shrieked from the water. "I don't know whether hippo is playful or not, but he's going to crush me in a minute."

"Come out of the water, Justina!" August ordered sternly.

"I will not. There isn't any ship left to come out to. You're all sitting on a big slippery broken tree out over the water, and the snappers and boas are coming very near your legs and necks."

"Yes, I suppose so, one way of looking at it," August said. "Now everybody conjure the animals that are compounded out of grisly humor—the giraffe with a neck alone that is longer than a horse, and the zebra which is a horse in a clown suit."

"We conjure them, we conjure them," they all chanted. "The zebra isn't as funny as I thought it would be," Boyle complained. "Nothing is as funny as I thought it would be."

"Conjure the great snake that is a thousand times heavier than other snakes, that can swallow a wild ass," Shackleton gave them the lead.

"We conjure it, we conjure it," they all chanted.

"August, it's over your head, reaching down out of the giant mimosa tree," Justina screamed warning from the swamp. "There's ten meters of it reaching down for you."

"Conjure the crocodile," Shackleton intoned. "Not the little crocodile of the River of Egypt, but the big crocodile of deeper Africa that is able to swallow a cow."

"We conjure it, we imagine it, we evoke it, and the swamps and estuaries in which it lives," they all chanted.

"Easy on that one," Justina shrilled. "He's been taking me by little pieces. Now he's taking me by big pieces."

"Conjure the ostrich," Shackleton intoned, "the bird that is a thousand times as heavy as other birds, that stands a meter taller than man, that kicks like a mule, the bird that is too heavy to fly. I wonder what delirium first invented such a wildlife as Africa's anyhow?"

"We conjure it, we conjure it," they chanted.

"Conjure the great walking monkey that is three times as heavy as a man," August intoned.

"Conjure a somewhat smaller one, two thirds the size of man, that grins and gibbers and understands speech, that could speak if he wished."

"We conjure them, we conjure them."

"Conjure the third of the large monkeys that is dog-faced and purple of arse."

"We conjure it, we conjure it, but it belongs in a comic strip."

“Conjure the gentle monster, the okapi, that is made out of pieces of the antelope and camel and contingent giraffe and which likewise wears a striped clown suit.”

“We conjure it, we conjure it.”

“Conjure the multitudinous antelopes, koodoo, nyala, hartebeest, oryx, bongo, klipspringer, gemsbok, all so out of keeping with a warm country, all such grotesque takeoffs of the little alpine antelope.”

“We conjure them, we conjure them.”

“Conjure the buffalo that is greater than all other buffalo or cattle, that has horns as wide as a shield. Conjure the quagga. I forget its pretended appearance, but it cannot be ordinary.”

“We conjure them, we conjure them.”

“We come to the top of it all! Conjure the most anthropomorphic group in the entire unconscious: men indeed, who are black as midnight in a hazel grove, who are long of ankle and metatarsus and lower limb so they can run and leap uncommonly, who have crumpled hair and are massive of feature. Conjure another variety that are only half as tall as men. Conjure a third sort that are short of stature and prodigious of hips.”

“We conjure them, we conjure them,” they all chanted. “They are the caricatures from the beginning.”

“But can all these animals appear at one time?” Boyle protested. “Even on a contingent continent dredged out of the folk unconscious there would be varieties of climates and land-forms. All would not be together.”

“This is rhapsody, this is panorama, this is Africa,” said Luna Boyle.

And they were all totally in the middle of Africa, on a slippery bole of a broken tree that teetered over a green swamp. And the animals were around them in the rain forests and the savannas, on the shore, and in the green swamp. And a man black as midnight was there, his face broken with emotion.

Justina Shackleton screamed horribly as the crocodile sliced her in two. She still screamed from inside the gulping beast as one might scream underwater.

The ecumene, the world island, has the shape of an egg 110° from East to West and 45° from North to South. It is scored into three parts, Europa, Asia, and Libya. It is scored by the incursing sea, Europa from Asia by the Pontus and the Hyrcanum Seas, Asia from Libya by the Persian Sea, and Libya from Europa by the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas (the Mediterranean Complex). The most westerly place in the world is Coruna in Iberia or Spain, the most northerly is Kharkovsk in Scythia or Russia, the most easterly is Sining in Han or China, and the most

southerly is the Cinnamon Coast of Libya.

The first chart of the world, that of Eratosthenes, was thus, and it was perfect. Whether he had it from primitive revelation or from early exploration, it was correct except in minor detail.

Though Britain seems to have been charted as an island rather than a peninsula, this may be the error of an early copyist. A Britain unjoined to the Main would shrivel, as a branch hewed from a tree will shrivel and die. There are no viable islands.

All islands fade and drift and disappear. Sometimes they reappear briefly, but there is no life in them. The juice of life flows through the continent only. It is the ONE LAND, THE LIVING AND HOLY LAND, THE ENTIRE AND PERFECT JEWEL.

Thus, Ireland is seen sometimes, or Hy-Brasil, or the American rock-lands; but they are not always seen in the same places, and they do not always have the same appearances. They have not life nor reality.

The secret geographies and histories of the American Society and the Atlantis Society and such are esoteric lodge-group things, symbolic and murky, forms for the initiated; they contain analogs, and not realities.

The ecumene must grow, of course, but it grows inwardly in intensity and meaning; its form cannot change. The form is determined from the beginning, just as the form of a man is determined before he is born. A man does not grow by adding more limbs or heads. That the ecumene should grow appendages would be as grotesque as a man growing a tail.

—Diogenes Pontifex, *World as Perfection*

August Shackleton guffawed nervously when his wife was sliced in two, and the half of her swallowed by the crocodile; and his hand that held the Roman Bomb trembled. Indeed, there was something unnerving about the whole thing. That cut-off screaming of Justina Shackleton had something shocking and unpleasant about it.

Justina had once gone hysterical at a séance when the ghosts and appearances had been more or less conventional, but August was never sure just how sincere her hysteria was. Another time she had disappeared for several days after a séance, from a locked room, and had come back with a roguish story about being in spiritland. She was a high-strung clown with a sense of the outrageous, and this present business of being chomped in two was typical of her creations.

And suddenly they were all explosively creative, each one's subjective patterns intermingling with those of the others to produce howling chaos. What had been the ship the *True Believer*, what had been the slippery overhanging bole, had now come dangerously down into the swamp. They all wanted a closer look.

There was screaming and trumpeting, there was color and surge and threshing mass. The crocodile bellowed as a bull might, not at all as Shackleton believed that a croc should sound. But someone there had the idea that a crocodile should bellow like that, and that someone had imposed his ideate on the others. Unhorselike creatures whinnied, and vivid animals sobbed and gurgled.

“Go back up, go back up!” the black man was bleating. “You will all be killed here.” His face was a true Mummings Night black-man mask; one of the party was imagining strongly in that stereotyped form. But the incongruous thing about the black man was that he was gibbering at them in French, in bad French as though it were his weak second language. Which one of them was linguist enough to invent such a black French on the edge of the moment? Luna Boyle, of course, but why had she put grotesque French into the mouth of a black man in contingent Africa?

“Go back up, go back up,” the black man cried. He had an old rifle from the last century and he was shooting the crocodile with it.

“Hey, he’s shooting Justina too,” Mintgreen giggled too gaily. “Half of her is in the dragon thing. Oh, she will have some stories about this! She has the best imagination of all of us.”

“Let’s get her out and together again,” Linter suggested. They were all shouting too loudly and too nervously. “She’s missing the best part of it.”

“Here, here, black man,” Shackleton called. “Can you get the half of my wife out of that thing and put her together again!”

“Oh, white people, white people, this is real and this is death,” the black man moaned in agony. “This is a closed wild area. You should not be here at all. However you have come here, whatever is the real form of that balk or tree on which you stand so dangerously, be gone from here if you can do it. You do not know how to live in this. White people, be gone! It is your lives!”

“One can command a fantasy,” said August Shackleton. “Black man fantasy, I command you to get the half of my wife out of that dying creature and put her together again.”

“Oh, white people on dope, I cannot do this,” the black man moaned. “She is dead, and you joke and drink Green Bird and Bomb and hoot like demented children in a dream.”

“We *are* in a dream, and you are *of* the dream,” Shackleton said easily. “And we may experiment with our dream creatures. That is our purpose here. Here, catch a bottle of Roman Bomb!” and he threw it to the black man who caught it. “Drink it. I am interested in seeing whether a dream figure can make incursion on physical substance.”

“Oh, white people on dope,” the black man moaned. “The watering place is no place for you to be. You excite the animals and then they kill. When they are excited it is danger to me also who usually moves among them easily. I have had to kill the crocodile who is my friend. I do not want to kill others. I do not want more of you to be killed.”

The black man was booted and jacketed quite in the manner of a hunting store outfitting, this possibly by the careful imagining of Boyle who loved hunting rig. The black Mummies Night mask was contorted in agony and apprehension, but the black man did drink the Roman Bomb nervously the while he begged them to be gone from that place.

"You will notice that the skull form is quite human and the bearing completely erect," Linter said. "You will notice also that he is less hairy than we are and is thick of lip, while the great ape to the left is more hairy and thin of lip. I had imagined them to be the same creature differently interpreted."

"No, you imagine them to be as they appear," Shackleton said. "It is your imagining of these two creatures that we are all watching."

"But notice the configuration of the tempora and the mandible," Linter protested. "Not what I expected."

"You are the only one of us who knows about tempora and mandible shape," said Shackleton. "I tell you that it is your own imagery. He is structured by you, given the conventional Mummies Night black mask by all of us, clothed by Boyle, and speeched by Luna Boyle. His production is our joint effort. Watch it, everyone! It becomes dangerous now, even explosive! Man, I'm getting as hysterical as my wife! The dream is so vivid that it has its hooks in me. Ah, it's a great investigative experience, but I doubt if I'll want to return to this particular experience again. Green perdition! But it does become dangerous! Watch out, everyone!"

Ah, it *had* become wild: a hooting and screaming and bawling wild Africa bedlam, a green and tawny dazzle of fast-moving color, pungent animal stench of fear and murder, acrid smell of human fear.

A lion defiled the watering place, striking down a horned buck in the muddy shallows and going muzzle-deep into the hot-colored gore. A hippo erupted out of the water, a behemoth from the depths. Giraffes erected like crazily articulated derricks and galloped ungainly through the boscaje.

"Enough of this!" Mintgreen Linter, frightened, took the lead out of it, incanting: "That the noon-time nightmare pass! The crocodile-dragon and the behemoth."

"We abjure them, we abjure them," they all chanted in various voices.

"That the black man and the black ape pass, and all black things of the black-green land."

"We abjure them, we abjure them," they chanted. But the black man was already down under the feet and horns of a buffalo creature, dead, and his last rifle shot still echoing; he had tried to prevent the buffalo from upsetting the teetering bole and dumping all the white people into the murder swamp. The great ape was also gone, terrified, back to his high-grass savanna. Many of the other creatures had disappeared or become faint, and there was again the tang of salt water and of distant hot-sand beaches in the air.

“That the lion be gone who roars by day,” Luna Boyle took up the incantation, “and the leopard who is Panther, the all-animal of grisly mythology. That the crushing snakes be gone, and the giant ostrich, and the horse in the clown suit.”

“We abjure them all, we abjure them all,” everyone chanted.

“That the *True Believer* form again beneath our feet in the structure we can see and know,” August Shackleton incanted.

“We conjure it up, we conjure it up,” they chanted, and the *True Believer* rose again barely above the threshold of the senses.

“That the illicit continents fade, and all the baleful islands of our writhing under-minds!” Boyle blurted in some trepidation.

“We abjure them, we abjure them,” they all chanted contritely. And the illicit Africa had now become quite fragile, while the Cinnamon Coast of South Libya began to form as behind green glass.

“Let us finish it! It lingers unhealthily!” Shackleton spoke loudly with resolve. “Let us drop our reservations! That we dabble no more in this particular illicitness! That we go no more hungering after strange geographies that are not of proper world! That we seal off the unsettling things inside us!”

“We seal them off, we seal them off,” they chanted.

And it was finished.

They were on the *True Believer* sailing in an easterly direction off the Cinnamon Coast of Libya. To the north was that lovely coast with its wonderful beaches and remarkable hotels; to the south and east and west were the white-topped waves that went on forever and ever.

It was over with, but the incantation had shaken them all with the sheer psychic power of it.

“Justina isn’t with us,” Luna Boyle said nervously. “She isn’t on the *True Believer* anywhere. Do you think something has happened to her? Will she come back?”

“Of course she’ll come back,” August Shackleton purred. “She was truant from a séance for two days once. Oh, she’ll have some good ones when she does come back, and I’ll rather enjoy the vacation from her. I love her, but a man married to an outré wife needs a rest from it sometimes.”

“But look, look!” Luna Boyle cried. “Oh, she’s impossible! She always did carry an antic too far. That’s in bad taste.”

The severed lower half of Justina Shackleton floated in the clear blue water beside the *True Believer*. It was bloodied and gruesome and was being attacked by slashing fishes.

“Oh, stop it, Justina!” August Shackleton called angrily. “What a woman! Ah, I see it now! We turn to land.”

It was the opening to the Yacht Basin, the channel through the beach shallows to the fine harbor behind. They tacked, they turned, they nosed in toward the Cinnamon Coast of Libya.

The world was intact again, one whole and perfect jewel, lying wonderful to the north of them. And south was only great ocean and great equator and empty places of the under-mind. The *True Believer* came to port passage with the perfect bright noon-time on all things.