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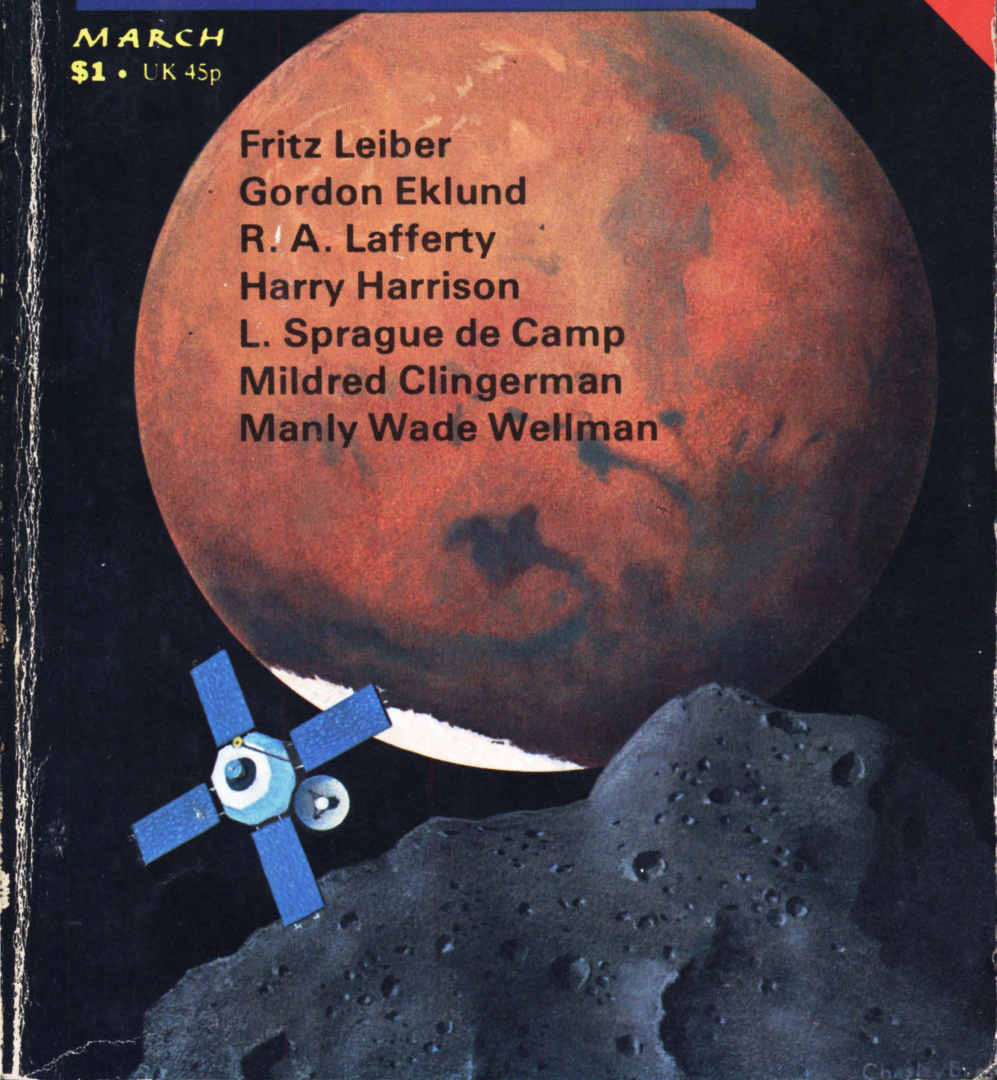

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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DEPARTMENTS

Cover by Chesley Bonestell (see page 79)

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Here's a thoughtful and action-filled story about a party of humans and one "native" who are hunting a 100-foot, 12-ton snake on a planet called Nogaria.

Sandsnake Hunter

by GORDON EKLUND

The third time I returned to camp from laying poor Lee in his grave, nobody told me to go away. Just as well for them, too, because I was determined by that time not to be forced back onto those barren, empty wastes. The first time, Warren had told me the grave was too shallow. The second time (again without looking,) Warren had said the grave was okay, but what about a marker, a shrine? The third time, this time, Warren wasn't anywhere around.

In fact, of them all, only Donna acted as if she noticed I was back. She turned from her place beside the blazing red bars of the fire and said, "All set, David?"

"He's buried," I said, dropping deliberately down several paces behind the rest of them. What was the use of a fire smack in the middle of the biggest desert ever known by man?

"Warren may want to look when he gets back."

"What happened to him?" I asked, glancing around as if just noticing his absence.

"He went to recruit a replacement. For Lee."

"Oh," I said.

She immediately broke what might have been an embarrased silence. "But you must be starved. Marea! Marea!" She shouted into the big sandbuggy parked behind the fire. "Bring out a plate for David!"

I wasn't hungry. Not in the least. Hauling a dead body around on your shoulders all afternoon and evening is a great appetite cure. But I didn't say anything.

"Right here, Donna." That was Marea's singsong voice as he stepped from the rear compartment of the buggy. I looked quickly away, pretending to study the stars. I had always known such people as Marea existed, but that

didn't mean I had expected to meet one of them out here. I had expected to find real men — or at least real women — not freakish fusions of the two.

It had all started less than a week before. I was sitting upstairs in our big house on the Northern Continent, and downstairs I could hear mother screaming. There was nothing unusual in that, but something in her tone — almost panic — finally pricked my curiosity. So I closed my book and went down to see.

Warren was there, a huge monster of a man, looming way over my ranting mother. I hadn't known him at first, but as soon as I saw the snakeskin dartsheath dangling from his belt, I knew what he was, if not who.

"Do you remember me?" he asked, turning from mother and facing me directly, his hands open in front of his chest as if asking a favor.

I shook my head.

"Fifteen years ago I found you on the wastes beside your father's body. I stayed with him until he was dead, and then I took you and brought you here. Now do you remember?"

I shook my head.

"Then you don't remember what he said? Just before he died? Lying there in the sand, his body crushed flat from the neck down and not much left of it above that either? You don't recall?"

I shook my head.

So did he — slowly, sadly. "Well, it doesn't matter. It's why I'm here. He asked me to do two things with you, and I gave my word. The first was to bring you here to your mother, and I did that. The second was, when you were old enough and I had a place available, to come and ask if you wanted a place in my company. I'm Warren, a snake hunter, and that's why I'm here."

I said, "Yes."

"But —"

I had surprised him. But mom, hearing my answer, understanding even faster than Warren, jumped in the air and started screaming and wailing in a voice so loud and shrill she drowned poor Warren out in a flash.

Luckily, the butler whizzed in at that moment and glided over to her and rammed a long tranquilizing needle into her bottom.

It was a couple more moments before she fell silently over. The butler scooped her off the rug and whizzed away as quickly as he had come.

Warren was staring at the disappearing robot as if he had never seen such a sight in his life.

"She's nuts," I said, in explanation.

"She's your mother."

"So what? It wasn't my idea for him to marry her."

"Now look," he said, recovering from the shock of the moment. "I really don't think you understand what you're doing. This isn't a game. This is for real out there. You could be killed. No, no, let me put that more bluntly. It isn't that you could be killed, it's that you *will* be killed. Sooner or later and most likely sooner, because a sandsnake is a beast bigger than this room, tougher than this house, ten times as sly. I've been hunting snakes twenty years and no man has ever —"

"I thought you made my dad a promise."

"I did — I said I did."

"And you're not going to back off?"

"No." He shook his head forcefully. "I never do that."

"Then when do we go?" I asked.

But that was then. And now — unfortunately — was now. "Thank you," I said, accepting my dinner from Marea. It was a stew made from snakemeat, utterly dreadful. I pretended to eat, watching the others. Marea and Donna went away into the buggy. I waited until I was sure they weren't coming right back, then, leaving my meal behind, stood up and went over to the fire.

I sat down, warming my hands against the bright, gleaming bars. The other two looked up at my approach and smiled.

Nikki said nothing, but Brother Justine, as usual, felt he had to talk.

"I can't get over how closely you resemble that man. Your father. I not only knew that man but I worshiped the ground at his feet. The handicaps he was willing to endure, living among those monsters as if they were human, treating them in a like fashion. I'm telling you, son, it was something to behold."

I nodded. He had told me the same thing a dozen times already. I looked at Nikki instead. Of the company, I so far liked her easily the best. She was nearly my own age — no more than a year or two older — and very beautiful. Her father had been a hunter — it was his position I had assumed — and, like Marea, she had been transformed. But the operation, in her case, had not been so crazy. A pair of delicate, pale-pink butterfly wings had been grafted to her shoulders — they only matched the fragility of her personality. I could have sat all night just staring at her — especially considering the alternatives available.

"Eighteen years ago," Justine was saying. "That long ago when I first came across your father in one of their ruined cities. I had

come to Nogaria only shortly before, determined at that time to spread the sacred gospel of my faith among the barren souls of the infidel sandsnake hunters." He laughed loudly, as he always did at this point. "But what happened? Instead of them joining me, I ended up joining them; and instead of saving their souls from mortal ruin, I surrendered my own to Satan's pitiless grasp. But I will tell you this, David, in all frankness: there has not been a moment of it I have not enjoyed. And even if I have willingly foresaken my own salvation, I will still proclaim that —"

But Donna interrupted him. With Marea bustling tight on her heels, she came dashing out of the back of the buggy. "Listen!" she cried. "Everybody shut up and listen! I thought I heard —!"

We listened — and heard it too. Far across the dark, invisible sands: a distant rumbling roar.

"That is him," Donna said. "Now, damn it, what went wrong? I'd know that buggy anywhere, but he couldn't have got halfway to the settlement. But that's him — that's Warren. He's coming back."

A few moments later a small sandbuggy entered the circle of light created by our fire and slid to a noisy halt. Warren jumped out of the driver's seat, smiled, waved, started off toward the fire.

But Donna jumped in front of him. "Hold it — wait. What went wrong?"

"Not a thing," Warren said. Out here, smack in the center of his own domain, he was a different man from the one I had known in the North. "I got him."

"But you couldn't have. You didn't go to the settlement."

"No," he said, "I didn't." Slipping past Donna, he reached the fire. "Marea — Marea! Bring me something to eat! I'm starved, damn it!"

"Right, Warren."

Then he refused to say another word until after his plate was clean and wiped and he had burnt half a cigarette.

At last he got back to his feet, stretched, then looked at the rest of us one-by-one and smiled. "Well," he said. "I guess it's time. Come on over and meet your new companion."

In mass we all followed Warren over to the little buggy. He unlocked the rear door, took the handle in his hand, and drew it slowly open. Everybody hopped up and down, trying to get a look. But there wasn't a thing to see. It was blacker then a moonless night in there.

Warren spoke into the darkness: "Hey, it's all right. They won't harm you. Come on out."

At first there was no response. Then, suddenly, catching everyone by surprise, a foot appeared in the open doorway. Justine, seeing something the rest of us missed, swore in surprise. Then a second foot. An arm. Two arms. Donna groaned as if in pain. Then part of a bare chest. The chin. The face. That was when Marea cried out in disbelief. Nikki cried, too — a delicate yelp.

A moment later all of him was standing in the sand, and the wound and everything was clearly visible.

I can't speak for the rest of them, but I thought I was going to be sick. The wound itself was bad enough, but combined with the Nogarian stink — an awful odor that seems to lodge in your throat and refuse to go away — the situation was damn near unbearable.

I tried to breathe with my mouth, but somehow I couldn't look away. I saw a wrinkled, prune - shaped, dung - colored, scabby, sexless, half-human monster. He was small and couldn't have been even as old as me. I thought he might be trying to smile.

Warren stood beside his charge, saying not a word.

Brother Justine was the first of us to recover. "Warren, I don't know what you're trying to prove with this. But there's one thing you ought to know: this isn't funny."

"It's not intended to be. This is Olgul — he's going to be our seventh."

"Have you gone out of your mind?" Donna asked.

"Could be," Warren said. "But, if so, it's nothing recent. For as many years as I've been on the wastes, I've wanted a Nogarian in my company. I've asked them before and been refused. But I met Olgul on my way to the settlement, stopped, picked him up, talked to him, asked him, and he said yes."

"Well, I say no," Donna said.

"That is your right," Warren said. "But how about the rest of you? I'm not revoking your voting privileges. What about you, Justine?"

"Is it really necessary for me to tell you?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then let me say if you think I'm going to stand here and let you try to infiltrate this foul-smelling, ignorant, immoral, loathsome beast into my bedtent, then you must think my brains were swept away in the last sandwind, because I'm —"

"You're voting no?"

Justine nodded decisively. "I am indeed."

"And you Marea?"

"I'm sorry, Warren, but I don't think it's a good idea."

"Nikki?"

I thought she might vote yes out of her respect for Warren. But: "I can't," she said, very softly.

"And you, David?"

"Me?" I said. "But I can't —"

"Yes, you can. You're not a companion now but you will be soon enough. I want every available opinion."

I briefly considered the possibility of scoring some cheap points with Warren, but I didn't think he could be fooled that easily. "No," I said.

Then Warren raised his right hand and spread the fingers. "What I've got here," he said, "is one ... two ... three ... four ... five ... that's five votes against. And there's one vote — that's me — who says yes."

"At least you've still got sense enough to count," Donna said.

"So what that means," Warren said, beaming, turning on a heel and facing the Nogarian, "is that I ought to congratulate you, Olgul. You're in."

Everybody was howling now — even me — but the Nogarian could have been deaf. He accepted Warren's hand, shook it, bowed slightly, and murmured a few words.

But none of us could hear him through the cacophony.

We were seven now.

My father was an anthropologist who came to Nogaria with his wife and infant son to study the indigenous native species. He lived among the people for several years, recorded his findings, and died in the process. Even though for much of that time I was with him, I have never been able to remember any of it except the actual moment of his death when the sandsnake ran over him.

Because of that, and also because I spent the rest of my life on the Northern Continent, I had seen very little of the Nogarians. My attitude toward them was the same as that of almost all other human beings:

I hated and loathed the very sight of them.

The few actual facts I knew about them did nothing to change this attitude. I knew that the Nogarians were one of the few intelligent species yet discovered in the galaxy. Far and away, they were the oldest and, next to man himself, also the most advanced. In the distant past — estimates ranged all the way up to a million years — the Nogarians had been even more advanced. Their relics had been uncovered on a dozen different worlds — one a full hundred light-years from their home planet. But they had fallen. On Nogaria, they had reverted into barbarism and then passed beyond

that. I remember one of my teachers — a man who did not stay long on Nogaria — saying that the reason humans hated the Nogarians was not because of what they were or what they once had been. Rather, it was fear. We were afraid, he had said, because we could glimpse within the Nogarians a hint of our own possible fate.

All I knew was that I hated them. They rolled in their own shit, had ugly scabs, stunk, and wounded themselves horribly for no apparent purpose at all.

There were no more than ten or fifteen thousand of them left, nearly all scattered about the wastes of the Southern Continent. Most people thought they'd all be gone within a generation or two — especially considering the wounds.

At the moment I couldn't have cared less about that. This one here — Olgul — was alive and thriving. And I was alone with him.

The others, still arguing, had disappeared into their bedtents. As an apprentice companion, I was not allowed in there and would not be until I had accomplished my first kill.

And the same was true of Olgul.

"Now look here," I said, turning to face him. "I'm going to go to sleep up here and I don't want to see or hear you all night. Do you understand? I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"Of course, David," he said, his voice easily reaching me from where he stood beside the fire.

I knelt upon the peak of a high, distant dune. "And don't call me by my name, either. Just leave me alone. All right?"

"Of course," he said, as calmly as ever.

I had trouble getting to sleep at first. I couldn't see or hear the Nogarian, but I sure could smell him. I stuck my face down into the warm clean sand, but even that hardly helped.

And, every time I shut my eyes, I kept seeing Lee's poor dead face.

I had killed him the day before. It was the company's first ambush after my joining them. Warren had assigned me a point beside the far right flank, which was where Lee was. The snake had come right for me. I had done everything right. I had drawn my dartgun, sighted, aimed, and waited.

But the snake kept getting closer and closer, rushing across the sand at a speed in excess of eighty miles per hour. I didn't do a thing.

I couldn't. I was frozen stiff with fear.

At the last moment Lee had reached me. He grabbed me and tried to haul me away. The snake was so close I felt I could have reached out and caressed its two

massive, gleaming white fangs.

When I finally snapped awake, it was too late. Lee and I both jumped at the same moment. The horrible sandwind the snake carries in its wake caught us both. We were knocked through the air as if we were feathers.

I had never been so lucky in my whole life. I landed with barely a scratch to show for my experience.

Lee got all of the bad luck. He landed with a broken neck — dead.

The others didn't say a word to me, not even Warren. But I knew what they had to be thinking.

That was why I had been assigned to bury Lee.

When I awoke, it was still night and I was screaming.

Something had a hold of my arm. I screamed louder and tried to squirm away. It was the snake — it had to be the snake.

"Let go! Let go of me! I'm not afraid — I'm not —!"

He let go. It was the Nogarian — Olgul. I smelled him almost at once.

"I hear your dream and come to help," he said. "Was this wrong of me?"

I was still shaking, shivering — from the dream, the snake. "No," I said. "It wasn't wrong."

"You were very anxious," he said. "But I think your dreams are better now — right?" He was trying to smile — a horrible, twisted grin.

I don't know why, but I told him about my dream — and about Lee.

"But the dream is just a dirty lie," he said. "All dreams are that."

"Not this one. It happened."

"But it will go away real soon and then you will know better."

"This one won't go away."

"What about when you kill the big snake?"

"If I ever do, it'll help. I guess."

"Then you must kill that old one out there." He waved one of his skeleton hands expansively at the dark horizon.

I squinted in the direction he was pointing but couldn't see anything. "What are you talking about? You can't see in the dark, can you?"

He tapped his forehead and winked. "Can see an old snake anytime."

There was something in his attitude that halfway convinced me he was doing more than talking. "Should I go tell Warren?"

"You tell him we better get to running."

I stood up, brushing the wet sand from my clothes. "Yes," I said, starting off. "I'll go tell him right now."

"Tell him also that the chase

will be a long one," he called after me.

"I will."

"And tell him you will be the one to enact the kill."

"Sure."

But that was the one thing — of all things — I had no intention of telling Warren.

Or anyone.

I found Warren in Marea's bedtent and softly called him awake. When I told him what Olgul had said, he didn't argue a bit. Instead, as soon as I finished, he jumped to his feet, threw on his clothes, and dashed outside. In a moment, his fist rattling the tents, he had risen the multitude and was racing about, shouting instructions and orders.

Within ten minutes, the camp was down and both sandbuggies were packed and ready to go. I started to follow the others into the big buggy, but Warren shook his head and said, "I want you to ride with me, David."

I had almost forgotten all about Olgul, but when Warren and I climbed into the little buggy, he was already there ahead of us, curled up in the middle of the front seat, looking tired and drawn and spent.

We didn't wait another momemt. Warren slammed down the throttle, and the little buggy leaped straight ahead, tearing a neat path through the nearby sand.

The moment we were under way, Olgul sat up and began calling out directions.

Warren obediently followed every word he said.

When you're chasing a sandsnake, how you do it is you try to run your buggies at a speed fast and consistent enough to permit you to pass the eighty-mile-per-hour beast, then head him off. But that's not half so easy as it sounds, for the snakes are born out there on the wastes, and the buggies and their passengers are not. Speed is only part of the whole situation. You also have to keep track of the snake and watch out you don't get trapped in the sandwind and a million and one other things.

And even if you manage to do everything right — if you beat the snake and reach your ambush point and get your formation strung out in place — then it's still not exactly easy street because what you've still got to do — seven puny human beings — is slay a one - hundred - foot, twelve - ton snake, who is meanwhile proceeding toward you at a speed in excess of eighty miles per hour. I remember what Warren once told me, that a good, experienced company will usually bring down one snake out of every five it

ambushes. (And it usually takes five futile chases before finding that one good ambush.) And that figure is for a good, experienced company, which ours at the time was not.

But we went on anyway. Roaring and bumping across that godforsaken landscape. The sun popped high in the sky, and all three of us sweated such gobs that nobody could very well complain about Olgul's stench any more. Around noon we stopped, and I took over the driving while Warren crawled into the back and went to sleep. Behind us in the big buggy the others were doing likewise.

We swallowed nourishment tablets and gulped water indiscriminately. All of us, that is, except Olgul.

He merely sat where he was, barely moving, sweating buckets, telling us (whichever was driving) exactly where to go.

We had been chasing the snake for nearly sixteen hours and never once caught sight of it.

"Aren't they getting worried?" I asked Warren at one point — early in the chase because he was still driving. We had just made a forty-five degree turn.

"What for?"

"Well, turning and maneuvering, and yet they can't see anything and neither can we. Don't they wonder why we're doing it?"

"They know enough not to wonder," Warren said. "Because they know it's me. And that's what counts, David. If I decided to go that way, they'd follow me all the way down into hell and back."

As the sun began to set, I stopped and woke Warren and he took over the driving again. Around midnight we exchanged places once more.

I had just started out — hearing already Warren's loud snores from the back — when Olgul reached over and touched my arm. I looked at him and saw that he was smiling. Very softly, barely audibly, he whispered, "Tomorrow, David, I think you will sleep much better."

I looked away. "I slept just fine."

"But tomorrow your dreams will be gone."

"I didn't have any dreams."

"After you slay the big snake, you will be free and have nothing to fear."

"I'm not afraid of anything now," I said.

After that neither of us said a thing. I kept the buggy pointed straight ahead, and Olgul said nothing about changing course. Much sooner than I ever would have thought, a bright red line appeared against the approaching horizon. That was dawn coming.

"Will we catch the snake

today?" I asked Olgul, suddenly breaking the silence.

"We passed him last night while you slept, David. Today we will kill him."

Shortly after that, Warren awoke. Olgul turned and asked if we could stop for a moment. The landscape around us was uneven and hilly and no good place for an ambush.

"What for?" Warren asked.

"I have a need for solitude."

"How great a need?"

"Only for a brief moment."

"Then I suppose so. We should be far enough ahead to spare a moment. David, stop the buggy."

I did so. A few yards behind us the big buggy also slammed to a halt. Olgul hopped out the side door and hurried away, disappearing over the summit of a lofty dune.

"What's that all about?" I asked Warren.

He shrugged. "Who knows? They're aliens and none of us is ever going to understand how they think. Your father tried, but even he couldn't do that."

"But I don't mind Olgul," I said. "Once you're around him awhile, he isn't half so bad. If it wasn't for that — that ...." I found it hard even to mention the topic.

"You mean his wound," Warren said.

Once the subject was in the open it was easier to talk. "Yes — that. I guess it's because there's just no way — like you said — no way for any of us to understand."

"Oh, the wound is easy enough to understand. It's strictly for our benefit. They know it disgusts us more than almost anything else would, and so they display it proudly, and we keep our distance from them. And that's what they want."

"You mean they didn't do it before?"

"Not until the first ship landed."

"But why should they be afraid of us?"

"Why not?"

"But they're killing themselves."

He smiled and shook his head. "That's also something they want us to believe. But they don't do it — no male is ever wounded — not until he's way past the age of greatest virility. Their birthrate is low — they may well be dying off — but the wound is not a cause. It may be an effect, though. The loss is less painful — less vital — to them."

"But Olgul isn't —"

"Yes, he's an exception. Olgul can't be much older than you."

"Then why ....?"

He shrugged. "You'll have to ask him. I can only guess.

Because, for some reason, they don't want him to reproduce. Because, for some reason, he is being punished. Or a combination of both. And there's also the fact that they do not allow their males to associate with humans until they are wounded."

"But Olgul came of his own accord. I mean, you met him by accident."

"Did I?"

"You think he's here for some reason?"

"I try not to think at all," Warren said. "I intend to wait and see if I can find out. I imagine it won't be too long before we know."

"When?" I asked.

"When it's time to kill the snake. But here — that's him coming back. Start the buggy now. I don't want to lose any more time."

A moment later, Olgul hopped back into the buggy beside me. We took off, roaring and dashing once more. Ten minutes later, we left the hilly region and emerged onto a long flat stretch of pure sand.

In the middle of it, Warren told me to stop the buggy for the last time.

Olgul pointed over to our left. "One hundred seventeen yards that way," he said.

"Okay," said Warren.

All seven of us poured out of the two buggies in unison. Warren passed out the shovels, one to each of us, then paced off the distance.

After one hundred seventeen yards, he stopped and said, "Donna — right here."

He went fifty yards farther, then pointed again. "Nikki — here."

I was assigned the next point. I activated my shovel, watched it dig, then turned out of curiosity to see who had been given the point beside me.

It was Olgul.

Warren himself came next. Then Brother Justine. Finally, on the farthest flank, Marea.

Our formation was set. The next step was up to the sandsnake.

My shovel finished constructing its pit. I went over and shut it off. After that, there was nothing to do but wait. The pit is used only as a sanctuary for protection from the sandwind when the snake is actually passing. No one is expected to take cover until the very last moment. The task is to kill the snake, not to hide from him.

Therefore, I moved far away from the pit before settling myself down to wait.

Because we had gotten such a good jump on the snake, he was rather long in coming. I inspected my dart a dozen times at least. I twiddled my thumbs, shuffled my

feet, hummed, sang, whistled, danced — did a little bit of everything in fact except think; that was the one thing I was deathly afraid of doing.

At last, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Nikki remove her dartgun from its sheath. A moment later, turning my head, I saw Olgul doing the same. They knew — both of them. The horizon was still bare but I had sufficient faith.

I drew my dartgun, too, then stared ahead.

I saw it a second later. Floating just above the horizon. Barely visible. A tiny gray puff of a cloud. It might have been smoke. It wasn't.

It was the snake.

Stretching my ears, I heard the distant whistling of the wind. That was the snake, too. Yes — there could be no doubt now. It was coming. Our snake. Straight ahead. Coming for us.

But where was it coming? Which point would it choose to strike? This early there was no certain way of telling. Slowly, gradually, the cloud grew larger. The whistling stung my ears. At my feet (I was standing now) the sand began to vibrate. Who would be chosen this time? Me again? Or Olgul? Nikki? Warren or Marea or Justine or Donna? Or none of us? Would the snake simply streak past, missing the formation entirely, avoiding the darts even of the flank pointers?

But I didn't think that was going to be it. The longer I watched that growing cloud of dust, the more positive I became. Olgul had been right all along. This snake was mine. It was coming for me. I could not doubt. Watching, I thought I saw within the cloud the black-and-white squares of the snake's wide snout. I could see the teeth, the eyes, the flicking tongue. I could hear the pounding of the hundred feet as they tore at the soft sand, driving the great snake body inexorably forward. My hands were cold. I laid a finger around the trigger of the dartgun, then raised the weapon carefully to my cheek. My mouth had gone dry. I could barely breathe. I wanted to scream — but couldn't.

The snake was coming — yes, I knew it was — coming for me.

Suddenly, Olgul was moving too. He jumped to his feet, clutching his dartgun, and sprinted in my direction, running with tremendous speed. A moment later, Nikki came at me too. I peered through the telescopic sights of my weapon, trying to guage the snake's trajectory. I crouched on one knee. In the scope, the snake was huge, gigantic, awesome. He seemed to be rushing right on top of me.

I touched the trigger. I told myself, "No, not yet — not yet. He's too far away — not yet."

I kept saying that over and over again. Then, suddenly, I realized it was time. The snake was close enough. I had to fire.

But I couldn't.

My hands, my feet, everything. I was frozen as stiff as a statue. I could not move.

The snake kept coming. I watched through my scope, not afraid, not a coward, just frozen. Tears crept into my eyes. My knees shook.

But I could not stand.

Then, suddenly, the gun spun out of my hands. I blinked, turned my head, looked up, saw Olgul standing above me. He waved both his hands. He shouted, "Run — that way!"

"What way?" I cried, standing at last. The whistling of the wind was so powerful I could barely hear my own voice.

"That way!" He spun me around and then pushed. "The pit — get in the pit!"

"But the snake!" I cried.

"Forget the snake!" He pushed me again. "Run, David, run!"

I ran.

Ahead of me I saw Nikki crouched in the sand, her wings wrapped tightly around her shoulders. She raised her dartgun, pressed the trigger, fired — *twang* — then stood up and also ran.

I followed right on her heels.

We both reached my pit at the same time. We jumped, landing in a tangled mass. We started to struggle but then it was too late.

The snake was passing.

What happened then? As many times as it has happened to me, I find it close to impossible to describe. I remember that time the ground quivered, the land trembled, the world shook. The walls of the pit collapsed inward, burying us beneath the hot sand. A horrible odor — acrid, sharp, nauseous — penetrated even there. The snake! I heard a high, mournful wailing sound, like an animal in mortal pain. The whistling wind screamed in my ears. Darkness hung all around. For a moment I feared I had been struck blind.

Then the whole world sprang up. I was tossed into the air. Every past sensation — darkness, heat, stench, whistling, wailing — merged into a massive, dreadful, unbearable whole.

I was screaming. Nikki was screaming. The whole world was screaming.

And then it was over.

The snake was gone.

Silence reigned. Quiet. Peace.

There was nothing left to do. Cautiously, I found my feet and managed to stand. Sudden light

burned my eyes. I stumbled and fell to my knees.

Blinking, I looked up. Nikki loomed over me, panting and shivering too.

The thick odor of the snake hung powerfully in the air. Not more than a dozen yards away I could see the wide, torn path the beast had taken.

Then I began to remember.

I grabbed Nikki's leg. She looked down at me, puzzled and confused.

I pointed out at the wastes. "He — Olgul — he's still out there. He didn't run. That thing — the snake — it must have got him."

"No, look there," she said flatly.

I tried to look. I saw ... yes, it was him. Olgul. He came toward us. Unharmed.

He was smiling.

"And look there, too," Nikki said.

I turned again. This time it was the snake. Not more than twenty yards behind us, it lay upon the flat surface of the sand. Still. Unmoving. Dead.

"He must have got it through the eye," Nikki said. "There's no other way to stop a snake so fast. The poison takes twenty minutes to work at least. You have to get them right through the brain."

"No, not him," I said. "It was you."

"No." She shook her head. "I fired but I missed."

Warren and the others were approaching now. They came after Olgul, shouting, crying out, cheering.

"I missed, too," I said.

"We know," Nikki said. "We saw you."

No, it certainly wasn't a very rational thing to do. No, but I've never claimed it made the least bit of sense. Yes, of course I know it was stupid, childish, foolish, immature and cowardly.

But I did it anyway.

In order to understand, you would have to have been inside my mind at the very moment. I had come with Warren to join his company of hunters with one intention in mind: to kill snakes.

My motives, not all of them conscious, were mixed. I wanted to avenge my father's death. I wanted to teach my mother that my life belonged to me and not to her. I wanted to prove myself to myself. And, most of all, I wanted glory, adventure, excitement, and success.

And now I had failed. Not just once — but twice.

I was a coward.

And now, since Olgul had a kill to his credit, I would also be alone.

I took all the shame I felt and laid it upon the others' shoulders.

I cursed Warren, Olgul, Lee, my father — all of them.

I waited for night to fall, then crept silently away from the camp, avoiding the place where the dead body of the snake still lay. In my pockets, I was carrying a compass and enough nourishment pills for a twenty-mile trip. I had a water bag strapped to my waist.

It was everything I've already said it was, but I was going to do it: I was going to go home.

And nobody or nothing was going to stop me.

But nobody or nothing tried: I was soon on my way.

At first I was just glad to be rid of my troubles and on my own again. But I soon got bored. Walking is bad enough, and walking on the wastes is even worse, but walking on the wastes at night has got to be the worst of all. There was nothing for me to do but think. And that was still the one thing I didn't ever want to have to do.

I had gone barely a quarter of a mile when my belly started complaining because it hadn't been fed. Then, in spite of the night, I started sweating and I drank too much water to make up for it. My feet hurt and my ankles ached. And, worse than anything else, the horrible thinking kept going on.

If there had been an easy way, I would have ripped out my humming brain by the roots and thrown it as far away from me as it was possible to manage.

I kept checking my odometer and watch. The settlement was twenty miles away, and I estimated the trip at six hours at the most. An hour passed. I had gone a mile and a half. Two hours. Two miles. Eighteen more to go. I kept drinking more and more water. The bag was already half gone.

I was four miles out with three hours gone when I passed over the top of a higher-than-usual dune and ran smack into the biggest set of Nogarian ruins I had ever seen.

As usual, nothing remained of the city beyond the bare, stripped skeletons of the highest steel towers. Everything else had long since been buried beneath the shifting sands. But this city — even the tiny, ruined segment that remained — was still an amazing sight. The bare steel frames stretched a good quarter-mile across the landscape, and the highest towers rose as much as two and three hundred feet into the air. Pausing there, I stared, realizing what this must once have been. All three moons were in the sky, and so nothing was hidden from my eyes. But when I shut my eyes, I could see even better — even more.

I saw the city as it must have been ten thousand — a hundred thousand — years ago. Alive and

thriving. And I saw the citizens of the city, too, and they were not the pale, doomed, wounded Nogarians of our day, but another people entirely, one who looked and moved and spoke and acted just like human beings. No, more than human beings. Greater and grander than mere men.

It was a vision the like of which I had never known. My knees weakened; I staggered, nearly falling. Opening my eyes, I gazed upon the great ruined city; and although the vision had vanished, leaving only reality in its wake, I remained rooted as I was, simply staring.

Then I became aware that I wasn't alone any more. I turned slowly around and found him there behind me.

We stood facing each other. Olgul and I.

"What do you want?" I asked coldly.

"I have come to bring you back, David."

I tried to laugh. "You'll have to pick me up and carry me."

Olgul shook his head and laid a hand upon my arm. "David," he said, "there is much to be done. We must go now."

"No." I tried to shake his hand away, but the grip was firm. "I failed. Not once but twice now. They don't want me and I don't want them. So leave me — alone."

"No," he said. "Come with me." He clamped down his fingers and drew me forward.

"Let me go," I said, fighting back. But his fingers were enormously powerful. I could have been held in a great vise. Reaching up with both hands, I tried to draw his wrists away. But his forearms were as hard and unyielding as iron bars.

"Let go of me." I squirmed in his grasp. "Let go or I swear I'll kill you." I swung out with a fist. But he ducked. His head was just a blur. My hand shot fruitlessly out into empty air.

"Now come," he said as calmly as ever. "The worst is past now."

"I can't."

"David, you are not a coward." I had ceased resisting and, sensing this, he let me go. We faced each other there on the sands, the ruined city a mournful backdrop to our private drama.

"But I am."

"You will succeed the next time. I am sure."

"I'm not. And I don't care. Why should you?"

"I have sacrificed too much not to care."

"But I don't."

"You don't?" he asked, as if hearing me for the first time.

"No," I said.

He looked at me then with an expression of total and utmost

disgust. It's a look I'll never forget, for I have never seen its like — human or Nogarian — before or since.

Without another word, he turned on a heel and walked away.

I went after him, calling, "Olgul — wait! Please! I'm sorry! That was a lie — I —!"

He stopped and waited for me to catch up with him. When I did, he turned back, and then, for a brief flash, I saw another expression cross his face: he smiled — in triumph, and relief.

Then he hit me. And — like they always say — the whole universe turned black.

When light returned to my world once more, the campfire was providing it. I blinked, squinted, looked up, focused, and saw Warren looming over me. My jaw ached like a rock had cracked the bone, and my rear end was sore, too. Warren dropped something on the sand beside me. I performed another series of squints and blinks.

But it was only a toolkit.

"Get to work," he said.

"But —"

"You're our low man now. It's your job to extract the fangs."

"But I can't —"

"It's late." He shrugged and turned away. "You better hurry."

He disappeared inside his bedtent. I could see quite clearly now, but there was nothing much around to look at. I was sitting near the campfire. I was alone.

With a sigh, I stood up, wobbling. I felt hungry, thirsty, hot, sore, and tired.

But Warren had said to get to work.

All the moons had set except Dalkas — little brighter than the nearest planets — but I hardly needed a lantern to find the snake's carcass. If nothing else, the odor alone would have led me to the right spot. The smell of rotting flesh hung thickly in the night air. As I proceeded forward, I clutched my rumbling stomach, trying to soothe it back into a more peaceful state.

The head of the dead snake lay flat upon its chin. The jaw had been propped open with a steel pole. With only minor hesitation, I got myself to crawl inside, edging carefully past the sharp upper fangs, and went clear to the back of the mouth, where I placed my lantern beside the swollen stem of the narrow pink tongue. Then, squatting down, I opened the toolkit and removed the saw. I inserted a slender, sharp blade, then moved back forward.

Holding the saw above my head, I stood and began to cut.

The gum surrounding the fangs proved to be extremely tough. As I

carved — flesh, gum, blood raining down upon me, painting my hands, face, and clothes various shades of red and pink — I struggled to keep the blade pointed in a steady upward course. I knew a deep incision was necessary to ensure not chipping the deep roots of the teeth.

Upon delivery at the settlement, each of the two big sandsnake fangs would bring a price sufficient to feed and keep our company for a full month. On the open market, their value was probably ten times that much. Were they worth it? I really didn't want to say. The fangs were used in purely ornamental ways — in making carvings, statuettes, trinkets, jewelry — a sort of galactic version of elephant ivory tusks, a not wholly inappropriate comparison, as sandsnakes are actually mammals and their fangs very much like tusks. The rest of the snake — all one hundred feet and twelve tons — would be left to rot under the sun.

As I was turning the blade to begin cutting under the roots — grinding noisely through hard jawbone — a voice, very close, said, "I hope I did not cause you any physical pain."

I didn't need to look to know it was him. But I ignored his opening remark, having no desire to relive those moments. "I never said anything before," I said, shouting to be heard above the noise of the saw, "but you did save my life. I want you to know I appreciate that."

"And killed the snake," he said, in a tone I could not quite understand.

"Yes," I said. "That, too."

"But it does not matter. We both performed bravely today. That should be enough."

"Both?" I started to laugh.

"I refer to your courage in attempting to renunciate your past role."

"I wasn't renunciating anything. I was running away."

"But you are reconciled now?"

I wasn't sure how to answer, but what I said appeared to be extremely important to him. So I told the truth as I then knew it: "If you mean, do I intend to stay here, the answer is yes."

"Because I stopped you."

"No."

"And you wish to kill the snake?"

"I want to try."

"Then you will succeed."

"You told me that the last time." I turned, trying to find him, but he had moved and was now crouched far in the back of the snake's mouth, down beside the lantern, his knees drawn up so that they nearly touched his chin. He seemed so incredibly small and fragile, so vulnerable, cowering

there, that only the constant soreness in my jaw reminded me that Olgul was much more than appearances might indicate.

"I made an error the last time."

"You lied?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"That does not matter. But this time I am telling the truth."

"We'll see," I said.

"But it is important to you?" he asked, his tone switching from careful diffidence to controlled passion.

"It does," I said.

"But why?"

"You wouldn't answer me when I asked you that same question. But I'll tell you. Because this is the one thing, the only thing I have ever tried to do on my own."

"I see."

"You do?"

"Yes. It's because of your mother."

"And my father," I added. "And almost everyone I've ever known."

He didn't reply. I tried to return to my work, but my brain was too full of thoughts to lapse back into tedious labor. "Look," I said, turning to face him, shutting down the saw so that talk was no longer a war of noise. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you a long time. It's about —"

"Your father," he said.

"Yes. Did you — did you know him?"

"No."

"Never?"

"He lived among my people."

"Do you mean your people as a whole, or just your village, your tribe, whatever it is?"

"My mother knew your father."

"Did she ever talk about him? That's what I want to know. What kind of person was he? I mean, you can understand why I'd like to know."

"He was a fine man."

I waited for him to continue and, when he didn't, asked impatiently, "Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Are you hiding something from me?"

"Oh, no. Not from you, David."

I could see it was useless to go on. What he had already said was all he intended to say. I turned on the saw. "Here — give me a hand."

He came forward.

"Hold the tooth steady."

He looked down at his hands as though they belonged to someone else. "Hold it?"

"Yes, so that it won't wobble. I don't want to chip off the enamel by mistake."

Reaching up high, he tried to grab hold of the tooth, but his hands were trembling so much that

he hindered rather than helped me.

Yet, when I asked him what was wrong, he said he was just cold.

"Then why aren't you asleep?" I asked, continuing to cut, turning the saw in a downward direction now.

"I am rarely tired."

"But you should be in your bedtent anyway."

"The others do not truly care to have me there."

"Even though you killed the snake?"

"They admire me for that, but it has not changed what I am."

"And Warren?"

"He is different — as are you, David. If all your people were the same, my people would be different, too."

I felt a touch of pleasure — and pride — at his including me with Warren. "But they are," I said. "All the same."

"Oh, no. Not even the others here are the same."

"You have to give them time."

"There is not enough in the universe for that."

"Well, you know what the reason is — so stop."

He laughed bitterly. "Impossible."

"But Warren said —"

He snapped at me. "Warren knows nothing of us."

"Oh," I said. Just then, the tooth came loose, making an ugly sucking sound. Both Olgul and I tumbled back, falling over each other's feet. The fang dropped out onto the sand with a noisy thud.

"That did it," I said.

But Olgul was on his feet. Standing on the tips of his toes, he stared up into the jagged recession torn through the gum by the deep roots of the fang. He shook his head — a gesture which for him seemed to mean something quite different than it meant to men — then turned back to me.

"Now you want the other?" he asked.

"Yes, we need it."

"Then I will help."

Later that same night I was drawn suddenly and without warning out of the warm embrace of a sound sleep. Sitting up, fully alert, I heard — emanating from the surrounding darkness — a strange and at first unidentifiable sound. It was a mournful and inhuman wailing that sent shivers racing up and down my spine.

Then I remembered where I had heard it before. The day before. In the pit. With Nikki. When the sandsnake passed.

Cautiously, I gained my feet. Above, both smaller moons were out and their light was sufficient to guide me across the dunes. I tried

to follow the direction of the wailing, but the noise seemed more to be coming from all directions at once. So I was left with only my instincts to carry me forward, and they said — loudly and firmly in unison — to go to the snake's dead carcass. So I did, and the closer I came the more certain I was that my instincts had not failed me.

The wailing was indeed coming from there.

When the snake's carcass was a firm, opaque shadow filling the gray darkness with its sleek bulk, I stopped and knelt down. At first, even squinting, I could see nothing beyond the great dead beast himself; then slowly — by stages — I began to make out the presence of a second, smaller shape standing beside the snake.

It was Olgul.

The wailing definitely was coming from him.

He stood beside the snake, maybe halfway down its length. His feet were buried deep in the sand and his forehead rested against the snake's thick hide. As he spoke — wailing — he lifted his arms into the air, holding them up, letting them flutter like the wings of a silent bird, before lowering them slowly to his sides.

Then the process was repeated once more.

For a long time — of course I had no way of estimating exactly how long — I remained crouching on the sand, unable to draw away from the sight. Within the awful wailing I heard, I soon began to sense the presence of something more definite — even of actual and distinct words. The wailing was more than simple sound, but rather a song or chant, possessed both of form and meaning, but what the sense of it might be — beyond an almost unendurable sadness — I could not really begin to tell.

But I could guess.

And somehow — though I was far from certain — I had a feeling the chant was concerned with me, that it was a direct result of the conversation Olgul and I had had in the snake's mouth.

But what? And why? And how?

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the wailing stopped. Olgul raised his head and hands at the same moment and stared at the stars above. I held my breath, genuinely shaken by the sight. I felt real tears in my eyes.

Then Olgul turned around and started to walk away.

Standing, I called out, "Olgul!"

He did not appear to hear. He continued walking forward, as if following a straight but invisible line.

I stepped into his path and lifted a hand. "Wait, Olgul, I want to—"

But he brushed right past me. I might as well not have been there, some vague figment of the night.

I stared after him, shaking my head in confused wonderment.

Then once again that same night I was suddenly awakened from a sound and dreamless sleep, this time by the frantic noise of bodies moving through the night. I turned over on the sand and looked off toward the camp. The light of a dozen lanterns burned down there. I saw the company busily engaged in breaking camp. Needless to say, this brought me straight to my feet. I plunged downhill, waving my arms furiously, and caught Justine as he tried to speed past me, his arms filled with a pair of medium-sized tent poles.

"Hey," I said. "What goes on? Are you trying —?"

"Not trying anything." He nodded back toward the broken tents. "Pitch in and lend a hand."

"But why—?"

He jerked away from me, impatiently scurrying away, but did call back, "Snake. Olgul says a fat one. Better hurry."

At that same moment Donna went past in the opposite direction, and she said, "Come on, David — pitch in."

So I did.

But most of the work was already done. At the end of my second trip between the tents and buggies, the whole group — exclusive of Warren and Olgul — was waiting for me.

"I'll go with Warren," Justine told us. "The rest of you follow."

"Fine," said Donna. She waved an authoritative hand at the rest of us. "Shall we fly?"

Then she and Marea got into the front of the big buggy. I crawled into the back with Nikki.

A second later, Warren took off.

Four seconds after that, we went too.

I felt uncomfortable being with them, unsure of how they regarded me. Because of that, I was also the first to speak as we dashed through the silent, encircling night:

"What about this snake? Is it far? Will we catch it soon?"

The moment the words left my lips, I regretted them. Innocuous as they were intended, in my own mind they sounded like certain evidence of anxiety, even fear, cowardice.

But Donna just laughed. "Too damned far. But Olgul says it's there and this time I'm believing him."

"It's too far to be seen," Nikki added, at my side.

"Even if it were day," Marea said.

"But how does he do it?" Nikki said.

"He reads their minds," Marea said.

"But he can't do that. They're just animals."

"How do we know? Maybe it's easier with animals."

"And maybe he can read our minds, too."

Donna cut them off. "Who cares?" she said. "I just know I'm glad. Olgul is going to help us a lot. We'll soon be rich, who knows? Warren knew what he was doing."

"But we didn't," Marea said.

"No, we didn't. Except for David."

"Wait," I said, as if protesting a false accusation. "Not me. I voted no — the same as you."

"You voted that way but you didn't act that way. That was the difference. You gave him a chance."

"He saved my life. I couldn't very well ignore him after that."

"But I meant before that. He had to be given a reason for saving you. You don't think his people go around saving every human being they see, do you?"

"All I ever did was —"

"— treat him like a human being. Like an intelligent, rational, thinking, feeling creature deserves to be treated. And that was plenty — more than the rest of us did."

I didn't know. Maybe she was right. In any event, after that we all fell silent for a time, but, in our present mood, that couldn't last for long. The excitement of the chase had all of us going. A few minutes later Donna broke into a song — some crazy ditty about a space sailor painting the big moon bright silver so that it'll reflect better on his lovewoman's face. The rest of us joined in. Me, too — though I didn't know a word of that particular song and couldn't carry the tune of any. At some point during the songfest, Marea drew a smoke out of his pocket and passed the weed around. Only Donna, driving, said no. The rest of us knew it was going to be hours and hours before we needed to be sharp.

Meanwhile, down below us, acres and acres of dead barren sand swept uncaringly past our wheels.

We drove through that night and the whole of the following day, then the next night too.

The next morning, as dawn crept over us for the second time, Warren relayed the word. We were ahead of the snake. It was time to stop. The land nearby was flat. Perfect ground for an ambush.

I was afraid.

We stopped. Grabbed the shovels. Then ran.

The land was as dead, vast, empty, and lifeless as any other stretch of the great wastes.

But it was here we had chosen to make our stand.

Warren lined up a formation: Justine, Nikki, Donna, Olgul, me, himself, finally Marea. I set my shovel to work, leaning back, watching the gaping pit as it formed and grew, fingering the cold steel hilt of my dartgun poised in its sheath.

I felt I had to know: which was it to be? Success or failure? Defeat or victory? Fear or courage? I said I had to know — and maybe I did — but deep down I knew already that that was something which wasn't going to be. I wouldn't know — not until the moment itself arrived — and then, when I looked up and saw the snake's blazing eyes bearing down upon me and knew it was time either to fire or flee, win or lose, live or die, that was when I would receive my answer.

And not a second before.

From the point to my left, Olgul called over encouragingly, his voice easily carrying the distance: "This snake is yours to kill, David. Now at last your dreams will be pure."

I couldn't answer him. Not yet. Not only was the distance too far, but I had nothing to say, nothing to do, in fact, except to wait.

I did. Time seemed to crawl past, and I had no means for filling it. In desperation, I even tried praying — an act I had not committed for five years at least — asking, as selfishly as possible, that the snake be allowed to appear at once. My lips — and thoughts — refused to proceed farther. I didn't ask for the power to kill the snake; I didn't even want the beast to be sent my way. I wanted it to come — yes — so that the most dreadful part of all, the waiting, would be over. Other than that, I was prepared to permit fate to take its preordained course.

I don't know what effect my prayers might have had, but not much after I finished I heard a harsh unified clang and glanced over and saw, down the line, that the others had drawn their dartguns. Warren waved at me impatiently and I hastily followed their example.

But that was the easy part.

Then, a moment later, at the very edge of the horizon, a faint, puffy cloud materialized. I heard the whistling of the rushing wind.

It was coming.

I knelt down, raised my dartgun. I sought to make my mind an utter blank. What point was there otherwise? Thoughts were no longer worth thinking, or prayers uttering, or miracles delivering. I was alone now — and not waiting either.

For the great snake was coming.

At first I was certain of only one fact: unless something truly extraordinary occurred, I would be spared this time. The more I stared the more certain I became that the snake was headed in a path destined to carry him far past our leftward flank. Turning that way, I saw that Brother Justine had recognized this too and already deserted his pit. He ran frantically to the left, trying to get close enough to the snake's path so as to fire a wild dart or two when the beast rushed past.

As for myself, I didn't know if I was glad or sad, disappointed or pleased. By this time, even without the aid of my scope, I could clearly discern the black - and - white, fingertip-sized point of the snake's skull gliding through the furious sandwind.

Then I heard Olgul. Puzzled, I glanced over at his point. He was standing with his hands thrown high over his head and his face turned toward the sky. He was willing — chanting — using what sounded like the same words I had heard the other night beside the snake's carcass. But, no — the longer I listened the more convinced I became that this time was different. There was no grief in his tone this time. But rather a pleading note, as if he was praying.

The chant lasted only a brief time. I doubt that anyone noticed except me.

No, I shouldn't say that. None of the company heard — no — but someone else did. The snake heard. The moment Olgul finished — or so it seemed — the snake turned, changed direction. Within a few more moments, as the great magnificent beast soared across the sands, the truth became apparent. The snake was no longer headed anywhere near the left flank.

It was headed straight for me.

Olgul had said this snake would be mine to kill. And he was right.

Vaguely, I heard Warren shout, "Goddamn!" and out of the corner of an eye saw him jump up and rush desperately toward my point. From the opposite side, Olgul was also running, and he had a good moment's headstart over Warren.

There was no need, however, for me to gauge their paths against the snake's. The beast came straight and true and would easily reach the cleanest firing range before either Olgul or Warren arrived to help.

So it was strictly up to me to win.

Below my knees, the sand trembled. The earth vibrated and shook.

I laid my eye against the scope and saw the snake's vast mouth, the twin twisting white fangs.

The whistling of the wind deafened my ears.

An odor burned in my nostrils — sharp, acrid, nauseous. My eyes watered.

I saw black. White. Black. The eyes. Fangs. Black. White. The snake, the snake, the snake....

I whispered nothing to myself. Too late, too soon, I kept my mind a deliberate blank. I was frozen. I couldn't move my feet or hands. The snake came onward. I couldn't breathe. The gun was an impossible weight upon my shoulder. My finger rested upon the trigger, stiff and unmovable.

I saw the eyes. Then just the right eye. Dimly, I heard loud footsteps approaching. The snake veered slightly — to the right. I moved my gun in response — briefly unfrozen. I heard Olgul. Wailing. Chanting.

Then all at once I was free to move and I did, if only briefly.

I sighted, aimed, squeezed. I fired my dart.

Then I froze again.

But I could see. The dart soared high, piercing the calm sky, painting a bright arc, then down, down, down ....

The dart struck home. A perfect hit. Cutting deep into the snake's spine. Behind the head. In front of the high sail.

A clean score.

Later — when the poison reached the tiny brain — the snake would be dead.

Raising my right hand, I drew a wide circle through the air. A signal to the others: clean hit.

The next imperative was for me to get moving and save my own hide.

For it was worth something now: I was a sandsnake hunter.

I jumped to my feet. A few yards away, Warren stood, waving an arm, shouting.

I ran toward him and then, together, raced toward the pit.

But then, with safety only a short distance away, for reasons I have never quite been able to discover,. I stopped dead in my tracks and looked back.

I saw Olgul. His hands were raised high over his head. His mouth was moving. And he ran. Straight ahead. With purpose, dignity, and restraint.

But he was running straight toward the path of the oncoming snake.

He was racing to his death.

"No!" I cried, and ran toward him. "Olgul — don't! You don't have to! I got him — I killed him!"

Warren tackled me from behind. I slide across the sand on the side of my face. I scrambled to my knees. Warren, running over,

stopped and kicked me in the jaw. I didn't lose consciousness. He picked me up in his arms. He ran back. I could see. Olgul was running too. I heard his chant, the words as clear as a wilderness brook. The snake soared. Eyes, fangs, black and white — a hundred thunderous feet. Olgul leaped. I flew up. A great blast of wind struck my face. And sand. Olgul. I screamed. I fell. The stench swept over me. Olgul. I choked, gagged. Couldn't see. Olgul. The snake passed. Olgul. Passed, passed ....

Down in the pit — safe and secure — Warren poised beside me — well, I'll tell you I was crying.

Damn it, he was dead!

It wasn't much of a shrine, nowhere near as fine as the one I had erected for Lee. Olgul hadn't owned anything that could be added to the pile, and I had already given my belt buckle to Lee. From the wastes, I had managed to gather a few dull rocks and broken sticks and, of all things, a wilted desert flower.

But it was ugly, and there was nothing else to give.

Warren came running toward me, his hands flaying the air. Stopping at my side, out of breath, he looked down at the shrine.

"Come on," he said, when he could. "We've spotted a snake."

"No, wait," I said, resisting him. "There's something I want to tell you first. I think I've figured it out."

He shook his head impatiently but made no further move to draw me away.

I pointed down at the shrine and grave. "I know why he came here. What he wanted. It was me."

"No," Warren said, "that's not true."

"He came here to see me because I was someone important in his life even though he had never met me before. He used to talk about my father, but he said he never knew him. I think he did in one way. He almost told me as much one time. I think my father was also Olgul's father and he was my brother."

"That's ridiculous, David. They're another race — another species."

"Are they? How different? Who can tell unless they try, and I think my father did. And Olgul's wound — you told me that was wrong — but what if it was inflicted for the most obvious reason of all? To prevent him from fathering children?"

"Why would anyone want to do that?"

"Because they thought he was inferior. Or superior. Or different. They thought what he was was

wrong and my father, too. I think they must have killed my father."

"But I was there when your father died. A snake killed him."

"And they made the snake do that."

Warren laughed. "How? Did they whisper in its ear?"

"They can do it and I know they can. I saw it. Olgul. I saw him talk to the snake. He made it come to me. You saw it, too. That snake was going way over to the side, and then Olgul called to it, and it changed course and came to me. And that other time, too — the first time. He called it then, but when I got afraid, he had to kill it himself. I think that —"

"David," he said, almost tenderly. He laid a hand on my shoulder and shook his head sadly. "David, forget all this."

"Why should I?"

"Because you're wrong."

"Don't lie to me, Warren, I can stand the truth."

"Then I'll tell you the truth: Olgul was a friend. He loved you."

I shook my head. "That doesn't explain anything. It doesn't answer why he killed himself."

Warren smiled grimly. "Yes, it does. Think about it a minute, David. What was Olgul? Human? Nogarian? Neither or either or both? He was suspended between species, hated and distrusted by both. This is granting that your theory is correct, and I'm not saying that it is."

"And that's why he did what he did?"

"No, I told you why he did that."

"But what you said didn't make sense."

"It did, if you know one other fact: Nogarians do not kill. Not a thing. Nothing. Having nearly wiped out their entire species through mass murder, some sort of reaction must have set in ages ago. But they do not kill each other. They certainly do not kill the sandsnakes, which they appear to worship almost as gods — as creatures, at least, who managed to survive."

"But Olgul did kill a snake."

"To save your life."

"And that's why he killed himself?"

"It's my best guess. I do know his people would never have taken him back, not after what he did. I told you for years I've tried to get a Nogarian to join my company. I failed. When I asked them, I don't care how close to starvation one was or what I offered him, I was refused. But Olgul stopped my buggy in the desert and asked me to take him on. He knew what he was getting into."

"But why?" I asked, feeling as if each question that was answered only succeeded in producing yet

another question. "How did he know about me and what I wanted?"

Warren shrugged. "Who knows? How do they talk to the snakes? How can they see them in the dark? Don't ask me such things. Olgul was an alien and he did what made sense to him. There is no law stating it must also make sense to us. He gave his life willingly for yours, David. I would say that's all you need to remember."

"But I can't —"

"You have to."

I nodded slowly, knowing he was right. For a long, silent moment, we both gazed steadily at the grave of our fallen companion. At last, I was the first one to look up.

"Hadn't we better go?"

"You're ready?"

I nodded. "Yes."

"Good." Turning, he set off across the wastes. With only a single brief backward glance, I followed.

But I did not forget.

"Our people have many sayings on the vanity of haste, effendi . . ."

A short tale with a surprising windup, about one man's sacrifice in the cause of energy conservation.

Speed of the Cheetah, Roar of the Lion

by HARRY HARRISON

"Here he comes, Dad," Billy shouted, waving the field glasses. "He just turned the corner from Lilac."

Henry Brogan grunted a bit as he squeezed behind the wheel of his twenty-two-foot-long, eight-foot-wide, three hundred and sixty-horsepower, four-door, power-everything and air-conditioning, definitely not compact, luxury car. There was plenty of room between the large steering wheel and the back of the leather-covered seat, but there was plenty of Henry as well, particularly around the middle. He grunted again as he leaned over to turn the ignition switch. The thunderous roar of unleashed horsepower filled the garage, and he smiled with pleasure as he plucked out the glowing lighter and pressed it to the end of his long cigar.

Billy squatted behind the hedge, peering through it, and when he called out again, his voice squeaked with excitement.

"A block away and slowing down!"

"Here we go!" his father called out gaily, pressing down on the accelerator. The roar of the exhaust was like thunder, and the open garage doors vibrated with the sound while every empty can bounced upon the shelves. Out of the garage the great machine charged, down the drive and into the street with the grace and majesty of an unleashed 747. Roaring with the voice of freedom, it surged majestically past the one-cylinder, plastic and plywood, one hundred and thirty-two miles to the gallon, single-seater Austerity Beetle that Simon Pismire was driving. Simon was just turning into his own driveway when the behemoth of the highways hurtled by and set his tiny conveyance rocking in the slipstream. Simon, face red with fury, popped up through the open top like a gopher from his hole and shook his fist after the car with impotent rage, his

words lost in the roar of the eight gigantic cylinders. Henry Brogan admired this in his mirror, laughed with glee and shook a bit of cigar ash into his wake.

It was indeed a majestic sight, a whale among the shoals of minnows. The tiny vehicles that cluttered the street parted before him, their drivers watching his passage with bulging eyes. The pedestrians and bicyclists, on the newly poured sidewalks and bicycle paths, were no less attentive or impressed. The passage of a king in his chariot, or an All-American on the shoulders of his teammates, would have aroused no less interest. Henry was indeed King of the Road and he gloated with pleasure.

Yet he did not go far; that would be rubbing their noses in it. His machine waited, rumbling with restrained impatience at the light, then turned into Hollywood Boulevard, where he stopped before the Thrifty drugstore. He left the engine running, muttering happily to itself, when he got out, and pretended not to notice the stares of everyone who passed.

"Never looked better," Doc Kline said. The druggist met him at the door and handed him his four-page copy of the weekly *Los Angeles Times*. "Sure in fine shape."

"Thanks, Doc. A good car should have good care taken of it." They talked a minute about the usual things: the blackouts on the East Coast, schools closed by the power shortage, the new emergency message from the President, whether Mitchell and Stans would get the parole they had been promised; then Henry strolled back and threw the paper in onto the seat. He was just opening the door when Simon Pismire came popping slowly up in his Austerity Beetle.

"Get good mileage on that thing, Simon?" Henry asked innocently.

"Listen to me, dammit! You come charging out in that tank, almost run me down, I'll have the law on you —"

"Now, Simon, I did nothing of the sort. Never came near you. And I looked around *careful* like because that little thing of yours is hard to see at times."

Simon's face was flushed with rage and he danced little angry steps upon the sidewalk. "Don't talk to me like that! I'll have the law on you with that truck, burning our priceless oil preserves —"

"Watch the temper, Simon. The old ticker can go poof if you let yourself get excited. You're in the coronary belt now, you know. And you also know the law's been around my place often. The price and rationing people, IRS, police, everyone. They did admire my car, and all of them shook hands like

gentlemen when they left. The law *likes* my car, Simon. Isn't that right, Officer?"

O'Reilly, the beat cop, was leaning his bike against the wall, and he waved and hurried on, not wanting to get involved. "Fine by me, Mr. Brogan," he called back over his shoulder as he entered the store.

"There, Simon, you see?" Henry slipped behind the wheel and tapped the gas pedal; the exhuast roared and people stepped quickly back onto the curb. Simon pushed his head in the window and shouted.

"You're just driving this car to bug me, that's all you're doing!" His face was, possibly, redder now and sweat beaded his forehead. Henry smiled sweetly and dragged deeply on the cigar before answering.

"Now that's not a nice thing to say. We've been neighbors for years, you know. Remember when I bought a Chevvy how the very next week you had a two-door Buick? I got a nice buy on a secondhand four-door Buick, but you had a new Tornado the same day. Just by coincidence, I guess. Like when I built a twenty-foot swimming pool, you, just by chance, I'm sure, had a thirty-foot one dug that was even a foot deeper than mine. These things never bothered me —"

"The hell you say!"

"Well, maybe they did. But they don't bother me any more, Simon, not any more."

He stepped lightly on the accelerator, and the juggernaut of the road surged away and around the corner and was gone. As he drove, Henry could not remember a day when the sun had shone more

clearly from a smogless sky, nor when the air had smelled fresher. It was a beautiful day indeed.

Billy was waiting by the garage when he came back, closing and locking the door when the last high, gleaming fender had rolled by. He laughed out loud when his father told him what had happened, and before the story was done, they were both weak with laughter.

"I wish I could have seen his face, Dad, I really do. I tell you what for tomorrow, why don't I turn up the volume on the exhaust a bit. We got almost two hundred watts of output from the amplifier, and that is a twelve-inch speaker down there between the rear wheels. What do you say?"

"Maybe, just a little bit, a little bit more each day maybe. Let's look at the clock." He squinted at the instrument panel, and the smile drained from his face. "Christ, I had eleven minutes of driving time. I didn't know it was that long."

"Eleven minutes...that will be about two hours."

"I know it, damn it. But spell me a bit, will you, or I'll be too tired to eat dinner."

Billy took the big crank out of the tool box and opened the cover of the gas cap and fitted the socket end of the crank over the hex stud inside. Henry spat on his hands and seized the two-foot-long handle and began cranking industriously.

"I don't care if it takes two hours to wind up the spring," he panted. "It's damn well worth it."

In the words of Noel Coward, Aldiss Is At It Again, frolicking with Time, merrily imitating other people's writing styles, and naturally bewildering the poor critic of *Locus*, who cannot peg a late 18th-century novel written in modern English (and impossible American), a hero who's supposed to be Everyman but is really Nobody, and the out-and-out treachery of any novel (except *Dracula*) which begins with a letter to "My dearest Mina" —! Aldiss's description of Mary Shelley's book in his critical work, *Billion Year Spree*, fits his own novel perfectly:

> a quilt of varied colors ... and occasional 'strong' scenes. Contrast is what she is after ... the preoccupation with plot had not yet arrived. (p. 22)

While Percy Shelley was writing *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary Shelley (at eighteen) was writing *Frankenstein: A Modern Prometheus* — two opposing views of the consequences of modern industrialization. Hence Aldiss's title and his fascination with "this first great myth of the industrial age".* The structure of *Unbound* is not the usual cause-and-effect dramatic narrative, but a hyperbolic curve: from a deliberately flattened, neutral, conventional,

**Billion Year Spree, Brian Aldiss, Doubleday, N.Y., 1973, p. 23*

JOANNA RUSS

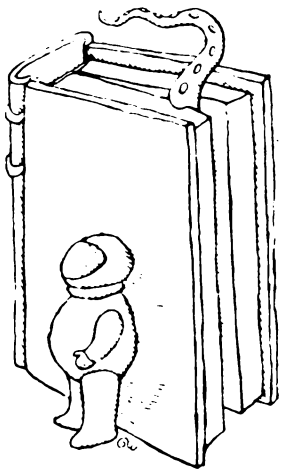
Books

Frankenstein Unbound, Brian Aldiss, Random House, $5.95

The Dispossessed, Ursula K. Le Guin, Harper & Row, $7.95

Joy In Our Cause, Carol Emshwiller, Harper & Row, $6.95

Stellar 1, ed. Judy Lynn del Rey, Ballantine, $1.25



s.f. 21st-century to the clumsy world of Mary Shelley's clumsy novel, to the historical milieu of its author (the portrayal of the literary circle of Percy, Lord Byron, and Mary at the Villa Diodati is particularly good) back to a sophisticated, "Opened-up" version of Mary Shelley's novel, and from there to a spendid far-future world (with odd echoes of Hodgson's *The Night Land*). The aesthetic spiral from the flat, twenty-first century of the beginning to the marvelous far-future world of the end are part of what the novel is about; so is the "unfolding" of Mary Shelley's book *in* Brian Aldiss's book — *Spree* calls the original *Frankenstein* "an exhausting journey without maps."* So is *Unbound.*

There is no question, I think, about the last quarter of the novel, where Aldiss breaks free of history, as it were, and writes his own version of the myth, but Joe Bodenland (New-Texan and former Presidential advisor) is such a clunkhead that it may not be possible to use him as a first-person narrator. Sometimes the results are extremely funny, as in his letter to Mary Shelley complaining that two of her characters, Clerval and Elizabeth, have been treating him very badly, and that she doesn't really understand Elizabeth's personality at all. But parts sag — for example, Joe's trudging ruminations on the book's theme, handled so much better by Percy and Byron at the Villa Diodati; there Aldiss knows exactly when to interrupt a didactic passage, but Joe (alas) is unstoppable and far too dense to realize (another example) that his "timeslips" are merely novelistic time. When it occurs to him, at the end of the book, that he may be a character in a novel by Brian Aldiss, he comes out with it in a painfully flat-footed way.

Somewhere James Blish says, apropos of the anti-novel, *Report on Probability A,* that even Aldiss's failures are definitive. This is waffling, but it does describe the effect of *Unbound.* The book is complex, cool, unemotional (except at the end), and very distanced. It is sometimes boring and large parts of it require Brian Aldiss to pretend to be a bad writer. Yet the novel sticks in one's mind with extraordinary force. Even the fact that Part One is epistolary (a technique not used seriously in literature for more than a century) evokes a kind of senseless pleasure. *Unbound,* a book very much about time, flowers in one's memory just as its impressive ending grows out of its

*[ibid., p. 23

superficially bad beginning, just as Bodenland* is the necessary cipher in the story, like the zero: a living place-mark. A definitive failure? A definition of failure? Something like that. And at times very beautiful. (But read *Frankenstein* first.)

Robert Edmond Jones, the Great American stage designer, once said that a theatrical mise-escene is not a picture, but an image. Similarly, no Utopia can provide a genuine blueprint for social change, only a poetic image of what we need or want, and can thus (like a good Dystopia) illuminate the questions we need to ask. For all its beauty, *The Dispossessed* wrecks itself on just this issue, and since Ursula Le Guin is neither hack nor craftswoman, but an artist, the inauthenticities show.

The rift between authentic and inauthentic runs through the whole book. Anarres, the novel's Utopia is bleak, beautiful, and brilliantly realized, but Urras is a stand-in for Earth, and once you spot the models (Ben-bili is the Third World, Thu the Soviet Union, A-Io the Western Democracies) Urras becomes redundant; why should we be interested in a fancy way of disguising what we already know? *Dispossessed* is not satire, which would thrive on such one-to-one correspondence. In fact, A-Io is not even American; it's literary-European (a copy of a copy) which leads the author to some awful inconsistencies; a capitalism that neither expands uncontrollably nor experiences drastic depressions, women with the social position of the 1840s but with contraception and a stable population (hence few children), ultra-modern technology plus an Edwardian (at the latest) social structure. Even the scenery evaporates — it's all *kleggitch* (the Annaresti word for drudgery as opposed to meaningful play/work) technically polished but unreal. One has only to compare the mass protest in A-Io with a similar scene in *When the Sleeper Wakes* to see that Le Guin does not know slums, the poor, mass strikes, police riots, politics, economics, revolutionary undergrounds, society ladies, or aristocrats. Few writers do. The oddity is that she conscientiously insists on writing about them anyway. (One extraordinary goof is that women's fashions haven't changed in a century and a half — haven't the Ioti capitalists invented planned obsolescence?)

There are rifts even in Anarres, generally between what we are shown and what we are told. The

**The name obviously bodes something, but I can't catch the reference.*

anarchism/syndicalism of the society is all there, right down to its roots, like the climate, but (for example) we are *told* that Anarresti children copulate with each other bisexually, breaking no taboos, yet we *see* adolescent boys clubbing together to avoid girls and the disturbing advent of sex. We are *told* that much of the adult population remains promiscuous throughout life, but the only such person we *see* is prying, nasty, meddling, and comical. We are told that one (male) character is homosexual; yet he acts asexual* and has no love affairs (except once, with the hero, but the hero only does it out of friendship because the hero is heterosexual). We *see* no other homosexual men, and never even hear of homosexual women (this is not explained). We are *told*, near the *end* of the book, that it is common for a child's father to be the nurturing parent; yet Shevek, the hero, suffers from his mother's absence (*early* in the book), and she herself seems to feel guilty about it. In all the partnerships we *see*, it is assumed that children stay with the mother. Furthermore, although we are *told* that children are raised communally after the age of about three, the only children besides Shevek that we *see* at close range have (by some fluke) been raised privately. (We never find out what happens to the children of unpartnered people. Even the theatre, which we are *told* is the most important Anarresti art form, and which causes the downfall of the one artist in the book (he is a playwright) is invisible. Instead we have many fine descriptions of — music! Anarres is without artificial gender-roles (a point Shevek makes explicitly in conversation on Urras) but except for female administrators (for whom Le Guin seems to have a penchant: diplomats, work bosses, and such) what we see does not quite match what we are told. For example women are physicists, et cetera, but most conversations on Urras are between men, and the one female physicist in the book is senile; we are *told* that she *has done* fine work, but she never does it on stage, while Shevek's intellectual life is absolutely and authentically concrete. (I might add that the constant use of "brother" as a form of address is enough to make your head spin, especially when used for women — and yet the Anarresti have an invented word, *ammar*, which could easily be made genderless, if

**A mistake made in* And Chaos Died *by Ross — um — Roos? Rouse? Somehow I forget.*

Le Guin wanted it to be.) The author's artistic and intellectual impulses seem to be traveling subtly, but persistently, in different directions, and the (unintentional) result is a romantic radicalism, a radicalism without teeth.

Something has gone wrong; what, I can only guess at. I suspect that Le Guin, who is relatively young as an artist, is still in the process of finding her own voice, a process partly hidden (as in Virginia Woolf's early work) by her extraordinary talent. *Dispossessed* makes uncomfortable forays (mostly on Urras) into Big, Public Subjects when the author's real talent lies elsewhere; Big Subjects begin to glow in her books only when they are exotic or magical (as in *The Left Hand of Darkness* or the children's books) or have happened long ago or will happen in some indefinite future. In fact, Le Guin's talent is not (strictly speaking) dramatic at all, but lyrical, and such talent can't deal conventionally with conventional Big Happenings, nor should it. What works (and magnificently) in *Dispossessed* is indeed what the hero, at one point, calls, "a time outside time ... unreal, enduring, enchanted." The novel's Utopia rejects the categories of higher/lower in favor of central/peripheral (the material on this is fascinating) but the author seems caught in a conventional hierarchy of what makes subject-matter important. One thing she might try is abandoning male protagonists, with the burden of tour-de-force characterization they inevitably impose on a female writer. (And the third-person point of view, which often produces the same kind of strain — in fact, *Dispossessed* is author-omniscient!) Another is to develop the artistic "irresponsibility" (actually the highest form of responsibility) to simply *leave out* what doesn't interest her; when intellect and emotion part company, it's intellect that ought to be abandoned (after a struggle, true, but abandoned).

Needless to say, I carp because the book has earned the right to be judged by the very highest standards. That it fails as an organic whole by these standards is both a criticism and a tribute. (The author is, in addition, exploring new territory; Aldiss's *Unbound*, both a more successful and a lesser book, employs territory Aldiss mapped out long ago.) Anyone who can write that description of the rocket port on Anarres (the first few paragraphs of the book) with its thrilling and intensely meaningful figure-ground reversal is potentially a writer of masterpieces. There are parts of a masterpiece in *Dispossessed* (though the title's echo of

Dostoevsky is too easy) and while carping, I will also wait. As George Bernard Shaw (also a late starter) once said, the strength of a work of art lies in its strongest, not its weakest link, and where *The Dispossessed* is strong, it's strong indeed.

Nothing can justly describe Carol Emshwiller's collection of short stories, *Joy in Our Cause.* It is a terrifying, inexplicable, totally authentic world in which even the commas are eloquent. People either drop from the sky, are brought in forcibly from the woods, walk in from the desert or otherwise appear inexplicably out of place (What am I doing *here?*) or "I" is squushed under desks, into kitchen corners, or the eaves of attics (What am I *doing* here?) The publisher has packaged the book as feminist, but it isn't; it's only absolutely faithful to the center, "little bits of fun or little bits of reality" as the author says ("Stories! I don't believe in them any more than I believe in pictures on the walls") sometimes excruciatingly funny, sometimes just excruciating, the insupportable taken cheerily for granted, Hell loyally lived in ("As a mother I have served longer than I expected"), Heaven profoundly melancholy with intimations of death (as in "The Childhood of the Human Hero", a painfully loving portrait of a son).* There are sentences that follow the wrinkles of thought in one, secure, impeccable line, gallows humor so fresh and innocent that you swallow it sentimentally before you realize what it is, trivia that can kill — remember the fencer who didn't know he'd been cut in half until he tried to walk? — in short, feathers made of neutronium because there are no big subjects or little subjects, only life.

A sample (from "I Love You"):

The person you care about the most has just told you you're no good.

It rings true, but there's an element of surprise in it.

He has wonderful hands and always gives free advice even if he is, basically, a nonverbal person.

(These tears are just from yawning.).

Or (in a story indescribably mixed up with Johann Sebastian Bach):

BACH'S SEX LIFE

Orthodox Lutheran.

(This is followed by a list of his twenty children, only nine of whom lived to adulthood, one of them feeble-minded and the words, both funny and horrible:)

Is this any way to write a Saint Matthew passion! Or;

I have one more thing to tell them before the trap door is opened or the

**Heaven and Hell exist simultaneously in the same activities, of course.*

sergeant of the firing squad says, "Fire." In fact, I'm sure of it. "Wait," I'll say.

The last story in the book should not be "Maybe Another Long March Across China 80,000 Strong," a very funny story about the women's movement (she's game but has her doubts; the baby girl she carries turns out to be a boy; her best friends are two transvestites in miniskirts; and after clonking one man on the head with a rubber dildo she jumps into the arms of another whom — she brags — is "noted for his leadership qualities"). It should be "Peninsula" (John Donne?) in which "I," driven into the attic by obscene telephone calls, imagines beautiful acrobats on the telephone wires ("the boys wear tights and colored vests and the girls have short skirts and flowery hats") who go South for "Carnival" like migratory birds. The story ends as "I" (who used to be ornamental but is now alone) steps out — to freedom or death? — on the wire.

Oh, those untold stories! ... If mine could only ring in your ears like that!

And they do, They do.

As Baird Searles once said, the golden age of s.f. is twelve, and *Stellar 1*'s efforts to pursue the bubble Entertainment ev'n in the plethora's mouth (the introduction is full of vague, sinister assertions about "second-rate academics" who are taking the fun out of s.f. and grumblements about significance and other dangers, as if science fiction hadn't been born didactic) only lead to a host of newly-made antiques, a good Lafferty ("Mr. Hamadryad"), a pleasant Clement ("The Logical Life") and Robert Silverberg's "Schwartz Between the Galaxies" in which Silverberg becomes an artist for the second time in his life; the story is worth the rest of the book put together. I will delicately omit the other participants except for Milt Rothman's "Fusion," a 30-page essay on hydrogen fusion interrupted by names who drink coffee — this is the editor's mistake; Rothman is a fusion technologist himself and only wants to burble. Actually, *Stellar 1* may not be the editor's fault alone; a well-meaning steam dynamo named Roger Elwood has been diluting the anthology market to death lately, innocently unaware that an increase in titles published may not mean reaching a new audience, but only overloading the existing one, and that good fiction can't be cranked out like haggis; there aren't enough good stories written in one year to fill fifty extra anthologies. Let us tiptoe past *Stellar 1* and wish *Stellar 2* a wider selection to choose from.

Mr. Wellman's latest concerns some witch business in the Carolina mountains. The book that figures in the story, *Albertus Magnus*, is real enough, says Mr. Wellman: "It just so happens I have a copy, picked up long ago in a creepy bookstore on the edge of Greenwich Village. I haven't tried to burn it or bury it, and I won't give it away. It's too much a help in stories like this ..."

The Ghastly Priest Doth Reign

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The jury found Jack Bowdry not guilty of murder. All anybody could testify was that he'd cursed and damned Kib Wordin for a witch-man and gave him twenty-four hours to leave the Sawback Mountain country, and twenty-five hours later Kib Wordin lay dead under the creepy tree in his cabin yard with a homemade silver bullet in his head. Come to think, a witch-man had died at that red-painted cabin thirty years back, and another witch-man years before that.

Anyway, Jack's neighbors helped him fetch his stuff from the county jail and rejoiced him up Walnut Creek to his home place next to Hosea's Hollow. They'd shucked his corn for him, handed and hung his tobacco in the curing barn. All vowed he'd done a good thing about Kib Wordin, whatever the jury couldn't decide, and at sundown that pretty fall day they good-byed him at his door.

Tolly Paradine, the schoolmaster's daughter, waited with him, making him feel almighty big because she was so little, with her pale-gold hair and rosy-gold cheeks. He stood a foot over her and near about a foot broader, with his brickbat jaw and big hands dangling from his blue shirtsleeves, with gray-threaded black hair, with thirty-four years to Tolly's twenty.

"I redded your place up for you," she said. "Jack, I'm proud you'll neighbor us again. And glad Kib Wordin won't pester me no more to come live with him."

He stared up slope to the ridge. "Better haste to catch up you daddy yonder," he said. "I'll come visit tomorrow if you say I can."

"Well you know you can, Jack." She upped to kiss his rough cheek, then ran after her folks. Jack looked again at what he'd seen to make him hurry her off from there.

Against the soft evening sky at ridge top stood a squatty man, with a long, ashy-pale coat down to his ankles. As Jack looked, the fellow slid away into some brushy trees.

"Huh," said Jack Bowdry, deep in his deep chest, and faced toward his notch-logged cabin with its lime-painted clay chinking. He pushed the door open and set foot on the sill. Then he scowled down at what he'd near about stepped on. A gold coin, big as a half dollar, a double eagle such as was still round when Roosevelt started being President. It looked put there for him to pick up.

He glowered back to where that long-coated somebody had been. Then he toed the coin down into the yard and kicked it away in a twinkle of light into the bushes and went inside.

His cabin was just the one long room. The plank floor was swept. On the fireplace crane hung a kettle of stewed chicken, dumplings, carrots, the things Tolly knew he relished most. Jack built a fire under the kettle and put the match to the wick of his lamp. It let him see his bed at the far end, made up with a brown blanket and a white pillow, more of Tolly's doing. A smile creased the corners of Jack's wide mouth as he set the lamp on the fireboard, under his rifle and shotgun on the deer horns up there, and next to the row of books he'd read over and over.

Grandma Cutshaw's Bible; *Amateur Builder's Handbook;* Macaulay's poems that Jack almost knew by heart; *Guide to Rocks and Minerals; Jack Ranger's School Days; Robinson Crusoe;* Hill's *Manual of Social and Business Forms,* how to make a will, figure interest, all like that; and —

But he had only seven books. What was this one with the white paper cover at the end of the row?

He took it down. *Albertus Magnus, or White and Black Magic for Man and Beast.* Jack had heard tell of it, that you couldn't throw or give it away or burn it, you must bury it and say a funeral over it like for a dead man. Tolly had never left that here for him, nor either that gold eagle on the door log. The book flopped open in his hand:

> ...in the red forest there is a red church, and in the red church stands a red altar, and upon the red altar there lies a red knife; take the red knife and cut red bread.

Jack slammed it shut and put it back on the shelf. Tomorrow he'd show it to Tolly's educated father. He took down the Macaulay and opened it to wash away the taste of the other book. Here was *The Battle of Lake Regillus:*

> Those trees in whose dim shadow

The ghastly priest doth reign,
The priest who slew the slayer,
And shall himself be slain.

Now, what in hell might that mean? He shoved the Macaulay back, too, and spooned out a plateful of chicken stew and carried it to his table. Tasty, the stew was. He was glad to find himself enjoying to eat, proving to himself that he wasn't pestered by all these funny happenings. Even after two big helps, enough was left in the kettle to hot up for noon dinner tomorrow. Jack lighted his corncob pipe and went yet again for a book. Better be the Bible this time. He carried it and the lamp to the table.

Grandma used to cast signs, open the Bible anywhere and put a finger on whatever text is there. Do that three times and figure out the meaning. Jack opened the Bible midway and stabbed down his big finger.

...preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies.

The Twenty-third Psalm. Tolly had prepared Jack a mighty good table. But the presence of enemies, now. He opened farther along, pointed again.

...cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Book of Acts that time, and Saint Paul getting hollered at, scolded. One more time, the very last page, a verse at the end of Revelation.

...Without are dogs, and sorcerers...

Just then, a scrabbling at the door.

Jack sailed out of his chair, dropping the Bible and snatching his double-bitted ax from beside the fireplace. He ran and grabbed the latch string and yanked the door inward. "What's going out here?" he roared.

A half-cowering shape backed off down the path toward the road.

"Where did you come from?" Jack yelled at it.

It stood up then, in a drench of moonlight, in its long pale coat, lifting its hands toward him. Not a dog, after all. Jack charged, ax lifted, and the shape scuttled away among the trees. Jack stood alone in the moon-bright road. Something else hurried at him from down slope. Again he whirled up the ax.

"Jack!" cried Tolly Paradine's voice.

He caught her wrist. "I thought you were that other one yonder."

"No, I came to tell you—"

"Inside, quick." He whirled her along the path and into the cabin and slammed the door behind them. Tolly looked at him with big scared eyes, and her golden skin was as pale as her hair.

"How come you to be out?" Jack demanded.

"Daddy was reading in a book

he's got," she quavered. "It's *The Golden Bough,* somebody named Frazer wrote it."

"Ain't never heard tell of it." He cracked the door open, peered out, then shut them in again. "What's a book got to do with it?"

"Daddy says there's some kind of old worship." She dropped into his chair. "Long time ago, over the sea, somewhere near Rome. But longer ago than Rome." She trembled her lips. "Folks worshiped Diana."

"Just so happens I was reading in the Bible about Diana," Jack told her. "Wasn't she the hunting goddess, goddess of the moon? I recollect that from a book in school."

"Daddy says she was all kinds of goddess. They worshiped her with fire; sometimes they killed people for a sacrifice. Why, Daddy says some scholars think the whole witch business comes down from old worship of Diana. Like Kib Wordin's witch stuff."

"There's another tale about Diana," remembered Jack, leaning against the fireboard. "A man was out hunting and he seen her in swimming, naked as a jaybird. It was just a happen-so, but she flung water on him and turned him into a buck deer for his own dogs to pull down and kill. Ain't what sounds like a good goddess to worship."

"In those old days, the chief priest lived under a sacred tree," Tolly pattered on. "And when somebody killed him, that fellow got to be the priest, till another killed *him,* and —"

She fell quiet. Jack frowned.

"What sort of tree is it got to be?" he asked her.

"Daddy never said that." Her eyes got wider. "You're thinking on that tree at Kib Wordin's place. Maybe one like that. No telling what a tree can get to be, over thousands of years, no more than what worship can get to be."

"And before Kib Wordin, a witch-man died up there," Jack reminded. "And before him, another one."

"And now —" she began, but again she stopped.

"And now, you aim to say, it's me," he finished for her. He shook his head, and his black hair stirred. "All right, what if old Jack Bowdry just ain't accepting the nomination? What if I just ain't having it, no way?"

"Daddy explained me about it," she stammered. "A branch from that old witch tree could be planted and grow to a witch tree itself, and be their worship place." She looked near about ready to cry. "You don't believe it's so," she half accused.

"Yes, I do. Stuff tonight makes me to believe."

He told her about the man in

the long gray coat, the gold coin, the messages from the books.

"What man was it?" asked Tolly. "I don't call to mind anybody with a coat like that."

"I doubt if he wore it to be known," said Jack. "Anyway, it's like he was here to threaten me, and the money to buy me, and this here book to teach me."

He took down *Albertus Magnus*. "No, Tolly, don't touch it. Anyway, I've seen that tree at Wordin's place, far off. Maybe it's what's grown up to cause this witch business."

"Kib Wordin read to me out of that book one time," she said. "Told me he'd put a spell on me so I couldn't refuse him."

"But you refused him."

"It was just about then when you —" She broke off. "You know."

"Sure enough I know. I put that silver bullet right back of his ear."

"You killed the priest, and that makes you the new one," said Tolly. "It's in Daddy's books. If you say no, they'll kill you, whoever they are."

"Ain't I a sitting duck to be killed?" he cried out. "Whoever wants that priest job next, won't he kill me if he can?"

"But when you see what's happening —"

"Stop rooting against me, Tolly!" he yelled, and she shrank down in the chair. "Whatever happens, I still ain't their man."

He glared at the book in his hand and walked to the door.

"What are you going to do?" Tolly squeaked behind him.

"A couple things needing to be done. The first of them won't take but two-three minutes."

He dragged the door open and stepped out into the night. Scraps of moonlight flitted among the trees as he walked to the road. He knelt and groped with his free hand until he found soft earth. Powerfully he scooped out great clods. He pushed *Albertus Magnus* into the hole, dragged the loosened earth back over it and rammed it down hard.

Still kneeling, he tried to think of the burial service. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," he said aloud, and the night around him was as still as stone. "Until the day break and the shadows flee away," he recollected a few more words to say. Then he got up. There was Tolly, standing beside him.

"Get back inside," he grumbled.

"Not with you out here."

He took her arm and pulled her to the door and inside. "Sit," he ordered her, pointing to the chair. "Don't you leave out of here till I get back."

"What you aiming to do, Jack?"

"I've kindly got it in mind that that witch tree up yonder's been growing long enough."

"If you don't come back —"

"Just start pestering about that when I don't."

He rolled his shirt sleeves back from his corded arms and took the double-bitted ax again. Out he tramped, slamming the door behind him.

Out to the road, past the grave where he'd buried *Albertus Magnus,* up slope. He moved between bunches of big trees he'd once reckoned he knew as friends, oaks and walnuts and tall watching pines, with sooty shadows amongst them. They stared at him from both sides; they seemed to hold their breath. He heard only his own dull footsteps until, before he knew it, he was where the path turned off to the red-painted cabin where once he'd sneaked up on Kib Wordin.

There was light through the trees there; not the moon glow on the road, but a dull red light. Jack stole along the path. Now he saw the slumpy-roofed cabin where three witch-men had lived and died, with its sneaky look like a hungry beast waiting, waiting. The red light soaked out through curtains at the windows. Who was inside there now? Doing what?

He decided not to knock and find out. He took careful steps into the yard, and he was right under the tree he'd come to find.

Never had he relished the look of that tree, even from far off, and he didn't relish its look now. It seemed to move or shiver in the dull red light. Its coaly black trunk might could be a foot and a half thick above roots that clutched deep down among rocks. Just above Jack's head the branches kinked this way and that way, like nothing so much as snakes. They wiggled, or maybe it was just the stir of lean, ugly leaves.

He walked all the way round, bending his head under the snaky branches, studying the trunk. Finally he set his booted feet just so on the damp-feeling earth. He shifted his grip on the ax helve and hiked it high. If whoever or whatever was in yonder with the red light heard him chop and came out, he'd be ready, ax in hand. Hard and deep he drove down the blade just above the roots.

Sound rose round him, soft to hear but scary to feel. It was like an echoed cry of pain, as if the wood he chopped was living flesh. He ripped the ax loose and raised it, and knew without looking up that those branches sure enough squirmed. A whisper sneaked in the air, like an angry voice. Again he swung the ax. A big chip sailed loose, showing white wood that glowed with its own pale, sick light.

Jack recollected the old

Cherokee who'd said that trees felt when they were chopped, and it hadn't made him like to cut timber any right much. But this tree was different, it was an enemy tree. He looked toward the cabin. Not a stir from there. He slashed and slashed at the blackness of the trunk, every blow flinging white chips away. Sweat popped out on him. The murmur kept murmuring, but it didn't slow him up a hooter. Another six or seven chops at the right place, and that tree would fall. It would slap down right on the pulpy shingles of that red-lighted cabin. Once more he heaved up his ax.

And something grabbed onto it and held it on high.

At once he was fighting to get the ax back, but he couldn't. They crawled and struggled above him, those snaky branches, winding the ax helve, sliding twigs round his right arm like a basket weaving itself there. He let go the ax to fight that grip on him. His feet came clear of the ground with the effort, and the branches bent with his weight. Powerfully he fought his way round the trunk, the twigs still netting his arm. His hand and wrist tingled as if they were being bitten, sucked.

His free left hand hustled his great big clasp knife out of his pants pocket. He yanked the longest blade open with his teeth and slashed at those snaring twigs.

They parted under the edge that was as sharp as a whetrock could make it. As his right hand came free, more twigs scrambled down to spiral his left arm. His whipped the knife over to his right hand to hack and chop those new tethers. Free for a second, he tried to flounder away, but he slipped on soggy earth and fell to his knees. The branches grabbed and tied him again.

He started to curse, but saved his breath. He slashed with the knife, passing it from hand to hand. He cleared the twigs from wrists and arms, but a thicker branch wound him, tying his right arm to his side. It squeezed tighter than the strongest wrestler he'd ever tried holds with; he sawed at it, and it was hard to cut through. He got it whittled free of him, just as a bigger branch snapped a loop on his ankle and flung him full length.

"If I knew where your heart was," he panted as if the tree could hear, and maybe it did. Twenty twigs scraped and felt for new holds on him, wove and twisted round him, made it harder for him to cut at them. The cut ends kept crawling back, thicker, harder to slice away. He wished he had his ax, flung down yonder out of reach.

He turned himself over, and over again, He was as strong as any man in the Sawback Mountain country, and the surge of his

turning broke some twigs, not all of them. Hacking at the ones still at him, he saw the cabin door open and somebody stepping out in the red light.

Hunched, wearing a long pale coat, it must be the one who'd spied at his homecoming. Close it came. A hand lifted a dark-shining blade, a big corn knife, just over him.

"Stay right there," said the quiet, cold voice of Tolly, from just beyond them.

The fellow froze, the corn knife drooped.

"Put that thing to Jack and I'll shoot you," Tolly said, as quiet as if she was saying the time of day. "I've got Jack's shotgun here, and a bunch of silver dimes wadded down both barrels on top of the buckshot."

The corn knife sank and pointed to the ground.

"You want to kill Jack and be the priest," Tolly said. "Then what if I killed you and got to be priestess? What if I used that witch book to witch your soul right down to the floor of hell?"

The fellow spun round and scurried off. Jack heard the long coat whip, heard a crash among dark trees. Tolly ran close.

"Look out," Jack wheezed.

But she stood right over him, laid the shotgun muzzles to that pallid wound he'd cut in the trunk, and slammed loose with both barrels. Flame flashed, the two shots howled like two claps of thunder, and something screamed a death scream. All those holds on Jack turned weak and fell away. With one floundering, scrambling try he ripped free of them and came to his feet beside Tolly.

The tree blazed up like fat meat where the blasts had driven into it. Jack pulled Tolly clear as the whole thing fell away from them, fell right on the roof of the cabin. The flames ran up into the branches and caught the shingles, burning blood red and sick white. Still holding to Tolly, Jack started her away at a run to the road and down the mountain.

Once they looked back. Flames jumped high and bright into the high darkness against the stars, gobbling that tree and that cabin, putting an end to both of them.

Tolly and Jack got married Thanksgiving week. Before that, the neighbor folks built a bedroom to Jack's cabin at the left, a lean-to kitchen at the right. Before that, too, half a dozen sorry men and women left out of the Sawback Mountain country. Nobody knew where they went, or even for dead sure which was the one who wore the long coat. All anybody was certain sure of was that you could live another sight better there without that half dozen people and whatever they'd been up to.

Jonathan Swift Somers III is, of course, the favorite science fiction author of Simon Wagstaff, the hero of Kilgore Trout's *Venus On The Half-Shell* (Dec.-Jan.). This story features Somers' most popular character, Ralph Von Wau Wau, a private detective with an IQ of 200. Ralph is a German Shepherd.

A Scarletin Study

by JONATHAN SWIFT SOMERS III

BEING A REPRINT FROM THE REMINISCENCES OF JOHANN H. WEISSTEIN, DR. MED., LATE OF THE AUTOBAHN PATROL MEDICAL DEPARTMENT.

Foreword

Ralph von Wau Wau's first case as a private investigator is not his most complicated or curious. It does, however, illustrate remarkably well my colleague's peculiar talents. And it is, after all, his first case, and one should proceed chronologically in these chronicles. It is also the only case I know of in which not the painting but the painter was stolen. And it is, to me, most memorable because through it I met the woman who will always be for me *the woman.*

Consider this scene. Von Wau Wau, his enemy, Dectective-Lieutenant Strasse, myself, and the lovely Lisa Scarletin, all standing before a large painting in a room in a Hamburg police station. Von Wau Wau studies the painting while we wonder if he's right in his contention that it is not only a work of art but a map. Its canvas bears, among other things, the images of Sherlock Holmes in lederhosen, Sir Francis Bacon, a green horse, a mirror, Christ coming from the tomb, Tarzan, a waistcoat, the Wizard of Oz in a balloon, an ancient king of Babylon with a dietary problem, and a banana tree.

But let me begin at the beginning.

Chapter I

HERR RALPH VON WAU WAU

In the year 1978 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of Cologne and proceeded to Hamburg to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the Autobahn Patrol. Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth North-Rhine Westphalia Anti-Oiljackers as assistant surgeon. The campaign against the notorious Rottenfranzer Gang brought honors and promotions to many, but for me it was nothing but misfortune and disaster. At the fatal battle of the Emmerich Off-Ramp, I was struck on the shoulder by a missile which shattered the bone. I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Rottenfranzer himself but for the devotion and courage shown by Morgen, my paramedic aide, who threw me across a Volkswagen and succeeded in driving safely across the Patrol lines.

At the base hospital at Hamburg (and it really is base), I seemed on the road to recovery when I was struck down with an extremely rare malady. At least, I have read of only one case similar to mine. This was, peculiarly, the affliction of another doctor, though he was an Englishman and suffered his wounds a hundred years before on another continent. My case was written up in medical journals and then in general periodicals all over the world. The affliction itself became known popularly as "the peregrinating pain," though the scientific name, which I prefer for understandable reasons, was "Weisstein's Syndrome." The popular name arose from the fact that the occasional suffering it caused me did not remain at the site of the original wound. At times, the pain traveled downward and lodged in my leg. This was a cause celebre, scientifically speaking, nor was the mystery solved until some years later. (In *The Wonder of the Wandering Wound,* not yet published.)

However, I rallied and had improved enough to be able to walk or limp about the wards, and even to bask a little on the veranda when smog or fog permitted, when I was struck down by *Weltschmerz,* that curse of Central Europe. For months my mind was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself, six months had passed. With my health perhaps not irretrievably ruined, but all ability to wield the knife as a surgeon vanished, I was discharged by a paternal government with permission to spend the rest of my life improving it. (The health, not the life, I mean.) I had

neither kith nor kin nor kinder and was therefore as free as the air, which, given my small social security and disability pension, seemed to be what I was expected to eat. Within a few months the state of my finances had become so alarming that I was forced to completely alter my life style. I decided to look around for some considerably less pretentious and expensive domicile than the Hamburg Hilton.

On the very day I'd come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Kennzeichen Bar when someone tapped me on the shoulder. Wincing (it was the wounded shoulder), I turned around. I recognized young blonde Stampfert, who had been an anesthetist under me at the Neustadt Hospital. (I've had a broad experience of women in many nations and on three continents, so much so in fact that I'd considered entering gynecology.) Stampfert had a beautiful body but a drab personality. I was lonely, however, and I hailed her enthusiastically. She, in turn, seemed glad to see me, I suppose because she wanted to flaunt her newly acquired engagement ring. The first thing I knew, I had invited her to lunch. We took the bus to the Neu Bornholt, and on the way I outlined my adventures of the past year.

"Poor devil!" she said. "So what's happening now?"

"Looking for a cheap apartment," I said. "But I doubt that it's possible to get a decent place at a reasonable rate. The housing shortage and its partner, inflation, will be with us for a long time."

"That's a funny thing," Stampfert said. "You're the second ... person ... today who has said almost those exact words."

"And who was the first?"

"Someone who's just started a new professional career," Stampfert said. "He's having a hard go of it just now. He's looking for a roommate to share not only expenses but a partnership. Someone who's experienced in police work. You seem to fit the bill. The only thing is ..."

She hesitated, and I said, "If he's easy to get along with, I'd be delighted to share the expenses with him. And work is something I need badly."

"Well, there's more to it than that, though he is easy to get along with. Lovable, in fact."

She hesitated, then said, "Are you allergic to animals?"

I stared at her and said, "Not at all. Why, does this man have pets?"

"Not exactly," Stampfert said, looking rather strange.

"Well, then, what is it?"

"There is a dog," she said. "A highly intelligent ... police dog."

"Don't tell me this fellow is blind?" I said. "Not that it will matter, of course."

"Just color-blind," she said. "His name is Ralph."

"Yes, go on," I said. "What about Herr Ralph?"

"That's his first name," Stampfert said. "His full name is Ralph von Wau Wau."

"What?" I said, and then I guffawed. "A man whose last name is a dog's bark?" (In Germany "wau wau" — pronounced vau vau — corresponds to the English "bow wow.")

Suddenly, I said, "Ach!" I had just remembered where I had heard, or rather read, of von Wau Wau.

"What you're saying," I said slowly, "is that the dog is also the fellow who wants to share the apartment and is looking for a partner?"

Stampfert nodded.

Chapter II

THE SCIENCE OF ODOROLOGY

And so, fifteen minutes later, we entered the apartment building at 12 Bellener Street and took the elevator to the second story. Stampfert rang the bell at 2K, and a moment later the door swung in. This operation had been effected by an electrical motor controlled by an on-off button on a control panel set on the floor in a corner. This, it was obvious, had been pressed by the paw of the dog now trotting toward us. He was the largest police dog I've ever seen, weighing approximately one hundred and sixty pounds He had keen eyes which were the deep lucid brown of a bottle of maple syrup at times and at other times the opaque rich brown of a frankfurter. His face was black, and his back bore a black saddlemark.

"Herr Doktor Weisstein, Herr Ralph von Wau Wau," said Stampfert.

He grinned, or at least opened his jaws, to reveal some very long and sharp teeth.

"Come in, please, and make yourself at home," he said.

Though I'd been warned, I was startled. His mouth did not move while the words came from his throat. The words were excellent standard High German. But the voice was that of a long-dead American movie actor.

Humphrey Bogart's, to be exact.

I would have picked Basil Rathbone's, but *de qustibus non disputandum.* Especially someone with teeth like Ralph's. There was no mystery or magic about the voice, though the effect, even to the prepared, was weird. The voice, like his high intelligence, was a triumph of German science. A dog

(or any animal) lacks the mouth structure and vocal chords to reproduce human sounds intelligibly. This deficiency had been overcome by implanting a small nuclear-powered voder in Ralph's throat. This was connected by an artificial-protein neural complex to the speech center of the dog's brain. Before he could activate the voder, Ralph had to think of three code words. This was necessary, since otherwise he would be speaking whenever he thought in verbal terms. Inflection of the spoken words was automatic, responding to the emotional tone of Ralph's thoughts.

"What about pouring us a drink, sweetheart?" he said to Stampfert. "Park it there, buddy," he said to me, indicating with a paw a large and comfortable easy chair. I did so, unsure whether or not I should resent his familiarity. I decided not to do so. After all, what could, or should, one expect from a dog who has by his own admission seen *The Maltese Falcon* forty-nine times? Of course, I found this out later, just as I discovered later that his manner of address varied bewilderingly, often in the middle of a sentence.

Stampfert prepared the drinks at a well-stocked bar in the corner of the rather large living room. She made herself a tequila with lemon and salt, gave me the requested double Duggan's Dew o' Kirkintilloch on the rocks, and poured out three shots of King's Ransom Scotch in a rock-crystal saucer on the floor. The dog began lapping it; then seeing me raise my eyebrows, he said, "I'm a private eye, Doc. It's in the best tradition that P.I.'s drink. I always try to follow human traditions — when it pleases me. And if my drinking from a saucer offends you, I *can* hold a glass between my paws. But why the hell should I?"

"No reason at all," I said hastily.

He ceased drinking and jumped up onto a sofa, where he sat down facing us. "You two have been drinking at the Kennzeichen," he said. "You are old customers there. And then, later, you had lunch at the Neu Bornholt. Doctor Stampfert said you were coming in the taxi, but you changed your mind and took the bus."

There was a silence which lasted until I understood that I was supposed to comment on this. I could only say, "Well?"

"The babe didn't tell me any of this," Ralph said somewhat testily. "I was just demonstrating something that a mere human being could not have known."

"Mere?" I said just as testily.

Ralph shrugged, which was quite an accomplishment when one

considers that dogs don't really have shoulders.

"Sorry, Doc. Don't get your bowels in an uprorar. No offense."

"Very well," I said. "How did you know all this?"

And now that I came to think about it, I did wonder how he knew.

"The Kennzeichen is the only restaurant in town which gives a stein of Lowenbrau to each habitue as he enters the bar," von Wau Wau said. "You two obviously prefer other drinks, but you could not turn down the free drink. If you had not been at the Kennzeichen, I would not have smelled Lowenbrau on your breath. You then went to the Neu Bornholt for lunch. It serves a salad with its house dressing, the peculiar ingredients of which I detected with my sense of smell. This, as you know, is a million times keener than a human's. If you had come in a taxi, as the dame said you meant to do, you would be stinking much more strongly of kerosene. Your clothes and hair have absorbed a certain amount of that from being on the streets, of course, along with the high-sulfur coal now burned in many automobiles. But I deduce — olfactorily — that you took instead one of the electrically operated, fuel-celled, relatively odorless buses. Am I correct?"

"I would have said that it was amazing, but of course your nose makes it easy for you," I said.

"An extremely distinguished colleague of mine," Ralph said, "undoubtedly the most distinguished, once said that it is the first quality of a criminal investigator to see through a disguise. I would modify that to the *second* quality. The first is that he should smell through a disguise."

Though he seemed somewhat nettled, he became more genial after a few more laps from the saucer. So did I after a few more sips from my glass. He even gave me permission to smoke, provided that I did it under a special vent placed over my easy chair.

"Cuban make," he said, sniffing after I had lit up. *"La Roja Paloma de la Revolucion."*

"Now that is astounding!" I said. I was also astounded to find Stampfert on my lap.

"It's nothing," he said. "I started to write a trifling little monograph on the subtle distinctions among cigar odors, but I realized that it would make a massive textbook before I was finished. And who could use it?"

"What are you doing here?" I said to Stampfert. "This is business. I don't want to give Herr von Wau Wau the wrong impression."

"You didn't used to mind," she

said, giggling. "But I'm here because I want to smoke, too, and this is the only vent he has, and he told me not to smoke unless I sat under it."

Under the circumstances, it was not easy to carry on a coherent conversation with the dog, but we managed. I told him that I had read something of his life. I knew that his parents had been the property of the Hamburg Police Department. He was one of a litter of eight, all mutated to some degree since they and their parents had been subjected to scientific experiments. These had been conducted by the biologists of *das Institut und die Tankstelle fur Gehirntaschenspielerei.* But his high intelligence was the result of biosurgery. Although his brain was no larger than it should have been for a dog his size, its complexity was comparable to that of a human's. The scientists had used artificial protein to make billions of new nerve circuits in his cerebrum. This had been done, however, at the expense of his cerebellum or hindbrain. As a result, he had very little subconscious and hence could not dream.

As everybody now knows, failure to dream results in a progressive psychosis and eventual mental breakdown. To rectify this, Ralph created dreams during the day, recorded them audiovisually, and fed them into his brain at night. I don't have space to go into this in detail in this narrative, but a full description will be found in *The Case of the Stolen Dreams.* (Not yet published.)

When Ralph was still a young pup, an explosion had wrecked the Institute and killed his siblings and the scientists responsible for his sapiency. Ralph was taken over again by the Police Department and sent to school. He attended obedience school and the other courses requisite for a trained *Schutzhund* canine. But he was the only pup who also attended classes in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Ralph was now twenty-eight years old but looked five. Some attributed this anomaly to the mutation experiments. Others claimed that the scientists had perfected an age-delaying elixir which had been administered to Ralph and his siblings. If the explosion had not destroyed the records, the world might now have the elixir at its disposal. (More of this in *A Short Case of Longevity,* n.y.p.)

Ralph's existence had been hidden for many years from all except a few policemen and officials sworn to silence. It was believed that publicity would reduce his effectiveness in his detective work. But recently the case had come to the attention of

the public because of Ralph's own doing. Fed up with being a mere police dog, proud and ambitious, he had resigned to become a private investigator. His application for a license had, of course, resulted in an uproar. Mass mediapersons had descended on Hamburg in droves, herds, coveys, and gaggles. There was in fact litigation against him in the courts, but pending the result of this, Ralph von Wau Wau was proceeding as if he were a free agent. (For the conclusion of this famous case, see *The Caper of Kupper, the Copper's Keeper*, n.y.p.)

But whether or not he was the property of the police department, he was still very dependent upon human beings. Hence, his search for a roommate and a partner.

I told him something about myself. He listened quietly and then said, "I like your odor, buddy. It's an honest one and uncondescending. I'd like you to come in with me."

"I'd be delighted," I said. "But there is only one bedroom ..."

"All yours," he said. "My tastes are Spartan. Or perhaps I should say canine. The other bedroom has been converted to a laboratory, as you have observed. But I sleep in it on a pile of blankets under a table. You may have all the privacy you need, bring all the women you want, as long as you're not noisy about it. I think we should get one thing straight though. I'm the senior partner here. If that offends your human chauvinism, then we'll call it quits before we start, amigo."

"I foresee no cause for friction," I replied, and I stood up to walk over to Ralph to shake hands. Unfortunately, I had forgotten that Stampfert was still on my lap. She thumped into the floor on her buttocks and yelled with pain and indignation. It was, I admit, stupid — well, at least an unwise, action. Stampfert, cursing, headed toward the door. Ralph looked at my outstretched hand and said, "Get this straight, mac. I never shake hands or sit up and beg."

I dropped my hand and said, "Of course."

The door opened. I turned to see Stampfert, still rubbing her fanny, going out the door.

"*Auf Wiedersehen,*" I said.

"Not if I can help it, you jerk," she said.

"She always did take offense too easily," I said to Ralph.

I left a few minutes later to pick up my belongings from the hotel. When I re-entered his door with my suitcases in hand, I suddenly stopped. Ralph was sitting on the sofa, his eyes bright, his huge red tongue hanging out, and his breath

coming in deep happy pants. Across from him sat one of the loveliest women I have ever seen. Evidently she had done something to change his mood because his manner of address was now quite different.

"Come in, my dear Weisstein," he said. "Your first case as my colleague is about to begin."

Chapter III

THE STATEMENT OF THE CASE

An optimist is one who ignores, or forgets, experience. I am an optimist. Which is another way of saying that I fell in love with Lisa Scarletin at once. As I stared at this striking yet petite woman with the curly chestnut hair and great lustrous brown eyes, I completely forgot that I was still holding the two heavy suitcases. Not until after we had been introduced, and she looked down amusedly, did I realize what a foolish figure I made. Red-faced, I eased them down and took her dainty hand in mine. As I kissed it, I smelled the subtle fragrance of a particularly delightful — and, I must confess, aphrodisiacal — perfume.

"No doubt you have read, or seen on TV, reports of Mrs. Scarletin's missing husband?" my partner said. "Even if you do not know of his disappearance, you surely have heard of such a famous artist?"

"My knowledge of art is not nil," I said coldly. The tone of my voice reflected my inward coldness, the dying glow of delight on first seeing her. So, she was married! I should have known on seeing her ring. But I had been too overcome for it to make an immediate impression.

Alfred Scarletin, as my reader must surely know, was a wealthy painter who had become very famous in the past decade. Personally, I consider the works of the so-called Fauve Mauve school to be outrageous nonsense, a thumbing of the nose at common-sense. I would sooner have the originals of the *Katzenjammer Kids* comic strip hung up in the museum than any of the maniac creations of Scarletin and his kind. But, whatever his failure of artistic taste, he certainly possessed a true eye for women. He had married the beautiful Lisa Maria Mohrstein only three years ago. And now there was speculation that she might be a widow.

At which thought, the warm glow returned.

A. Scarletin, as I remembered, had gone for a walk on a May evening two months ago and had failed to return home. At first, it was feared that he had been kidnaped. But, when no ransom

was demanded, that theory was discarded.

When I had told Ralph what I knew of the case, he nodded.

"As of last night there has been a new development in the case," he said. "And Mrs. Scarletin has come to me because she is extremely dissatisfied with the progress — lack of it, rather — that the police have made. Mrs. Scarletin, please tell Doctor Weisstein what you have told me."

She fixed her bright but deep brown eyes upon me and in a voice as lovely as her eyes — not to mention her figure — sketched in the events of yesterday. Ralph, I noticed, sat with his head cocked and his ears pricked up. I did not know it then, but he had asked her to repeat the story because he wanted to listen to her inflections again. He could detect subtle tones that would escape the less sensitive ears of humans. As he was often to say, "I cannot only *smell* hidden emotions, my dear Weisstein, I can also *hear* them."

"At about seven last evening, as I was getting ready to go out ..." she said.

With whom? I thought, feeling jealousy burn through my chest but knowing that I had no right to feel such.

"... Lieutenant Strasse of the Hamburg Metropolitan Police phoned me. He said that he had something important to show me and asked if I would come down to headquarters. I agreed, of course, and took a taxi down. There the sergeant took me into a room and showed me a painting. I was astounded. I had never seen it before, but I knew at once that it was my husband's work. I did not need his signature — in its usual place in the upper right-hand corner — to know that. I told the sergeant that and then I said, 'This must mean that Alfred is still alive! But where in the world did you get it?'

"He replied that it had come to the attention of the police only that morning. A wealthy merchant, Herr Lausitz, had died a week before. The lawyer supervising the inventory of his estate found this painting in a locked room in Lausitz's mansion. It was only one of many valuable objects d'art which had been stolen. Lausitz was not suspected of being a thief except in the sense that he had undoubtedly purchased stolen goods or commissioned the thefts. The collection was valued at many millions of marks. The lawyer had notified the police, who identified the painting as my husband's because of the signature."

"You may be sure that Strasse would never have been able to identify a Scarletin by its style alone," Ralph said sarcastically.

Her delicate eyebrows arched. "Ach! So that's the way it is! The lieutenant did not take it kindly when I told him that I was thinking of consulting you. But that was later.

"Anyway, I told Strasse that this was evidence that Alfred was still alive. Or at least had been until very recently. I know that it would take my husband at least a month and a half to have painted it — if he were under pressure. Strasse said that it could be: one, a forgery; or, two, Alfred might have painted it before he disappeared. I told him that it was no forgery; I could tell at a glance. And what did he mean, it was painted some time ago? I knew exactly — from day to day — what my husband worked on."

She stopped, looked at me, and reddened slightly.

"That isn't true. My husband visited his mistress at least three times a week. I did not know about her until after he disappeared, when the police reported to me that he had been seeing her ... Hilda Speck ... for about two years. However, according to the police, Alfred had not been doing any painting in her apartment. Of course, she could have removed all evidence, though Strasse tells me that she would have been unable to get rid of all traces of pigments and hairs from brushes."

What a beast that Scarletin was! I thought, how could anybody married to this glorious woman pay any attention to another woman?

"I have made some inquiries about Hilda Speck," Ralph said. "First, she has an excellent alibi, what the English call ironclad. She was visiting friends in Bremen two days before Scarletin disappeared. She did not return to Hamburg until two days afterward. As for her background, she worked as a typist-clerk for an export firm until two years ago when Scarletin began supporting her. She has no criminal record, but her brother has been arrested several times for extortion and assault. He escaped conviction each time. He is a huge obese man, as ugly as his sister is beautiful. He is nicknamed, appropriately enough, *Flusspferd.* (Hippopotamus. Literally, river-horse.) His whereabouts have been unknown for about four months."

He sat silent for a moment, then he went to the telephone. This lay on the floor; beside it was a curious instrument. I saw its function the moment Ralph put one paw on its long thin but blunt end and slipped the other paw snugly into a funnel-shaped cup at the opposite end. With the thin end he punched the buttons on the telephone.

A police officer answered over

the loudspeaker. Ralph asked for Lt. Strasse. The officer said that he was not in the station. Ralph left a message, but when he turned off the phone, he said, "Strasse won't answer for a while, but eventually his curiosity will get the better of him."

It is difficult to tell when a dog is smiling, but I will swear that Ralph was doing more than just exposing his teeth. And his eyes seemed to twinkle.

Suddenly, he raised a paw and said, quietly, "No sound, please."

We stared at him. None of us heard anything, but it was evident he did. He jumped to the control panel on the floor and pushed the on button. Then he dashed toward the door, which swung inward. A man wearing a stethoscope stood looking stupidly at us. Seeing Ralph bounding at him, he yelled and turned to run. Ralph struck him on the back and sent him crashing against the opposite wall of the hallway. I ran to aid him, but to my surprise Ralph trotted back into the room. It was then that I saw the little device attached to the door. The man rose glaring and unsteadily to his feet. He was just above minimum height for a policeman and looked as if he were thirty-five years old. He had a narrow face with a long nose and small close-set black eyes.

"Doctor Weisstein," Ralph said. "Lieutenant Strasse."

Strasse did not acknowledge me. Instead, he tore off the device and put it with the stethoscope in his jacket pocket. Some of his paleness disappeared.

"That eavesdropper device is illegal in America and should be here," Ralph said.

"So should talking dogs," Strasse said. He bowed to Mrs. Scarletin and clicked his heels.

Ralph gave several short barks, which I found out later was his equivalent of laughter. He said, "No need to ask you why you were spying on us. You're stuck in this case, and you hoped to overhear me say something that would give you a clue. Really, my dear Lieutenant!"

Strasse turned red, but he spoke up bravely enough.

"Mrs. Scarletin, you can hire this ... this ... hairy four-footed Holmes ..."

"I take that as a compliment," Ralph murmured.

"... if you wish, but you cannot discharge the police. Moreover, there is grave doubt about the legality of his private investigator's license, and you might get into trouble if you persist in hiring him."

"Mrs. Scarletin is well aware of the legal ramifications," my dear Strasse," Ralph said coolly. "She is also confident that I will win my

case. Meantime, the authorities have permitted me to practice. If you dispute this, you may phone the mayor himself."

"You ... you!" Strasse sputtered. "Just because you once saved His Honor's child!"

"Let's drop all this time-wasting nonsense," Ralph said. "I would like to examine the painting myself. I believe that it may contain the key to Scarletin's whereabouts."

"That is police property," Strasse said. "As long as I have anything to say about it, you won't put your long nose into a police building. Not unless you do so as a prisoner."

I was astonished at the hatred that leaped and crackled between these two like discharges in a Van de Graaff generator. I did not learn until later that Strasse was the man to whom Ralph had been assigned when he started police work. At first they got along well, but as it became evident that Ralph was much the more intelligent, Strasse became jealous. He did not, however, ask for another dog. He was taking most of the credit for the cases cracked by Ralph, and he was rising rapidly in rank because of Ralph. By the time the dog resigned from the force, Strasse had become a lieutenant. Since then he had bungled two cases, and the person responsible for Strasse's rapid rise was now obvious to all.

"Pardon me," Ralph said. "The police may be holding the painting as evidence, but it is clearly Mrs. Scarletin's property. However, I think I'll cut through the red tape. I'll just make a complaint to His Honor."

"Very well," Strasse said, turning pale again. "But I'll go with you to make sure that you don't tamper with the evidence."

"And to learn all you can," Ralph said, barking laughter. "Weisstein, would you bring along that little kit there? It contains the tools of my trade."

Chapter IV

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS, COURTESY OF VON WAU WAU

On the way to the station in the taxi (Strasse having refused us use of a police vehicle), Ralph told me a little more of Alfred Scarletin.

"He is the son of an American teacher who became a German citizen and of a Hamburg woman. Naturally, he speaks English like a native of California. He became interested in painting at a very early age and since his early adolescence has tramped through Germany painting both urban and rural scenes. He is extremely handsome, hence, attracts women, has a photographic memory, and is

an excellent draftsman. His paintings were quite conventional until the past ten years when he founded the Fauve Mauve school. He is learned in both German and English literature and has a fondness for the works of Frank Baum and Lewis Carroll. He often uses characters from them in his paintings. Both writers, by the way, were fond of puns."

"I am well aware of that," I said stiffly. After all, one does not like to be considered ignorant by a dog. "And all this means?"

"It may mean all or nothing."

About ten minutes later, we were in a large room in which many articles, the jetsam and flotsam of crime, were displayed. Mrs. Scarletin led us to the painting (though we needed no leading), and we stood before it. Strasse, off to one side, regarded us suspiciously. I could make no sense out of the painting and said so even though I did not want to offend Mrs. Scarletin. She, however, laughed and said my reaction was that of many people.

Ralph studied it for a long time and then said, "It may be that my suspicions are correct. We shall see."

"About what?" Strasse said, coming closer and leaning forward to peer at the many figures on the canvas.

"We can presume that Mrs. Scarletin knows all her husband's works — until the time he disappeared. This appeared afterward, and so we can presume that he painted it within the last two months. It's evident that he was kidnaped not for ransom but for the money to be made from the sale of new paintings by Scarletin. They must have threatened him with death if he did not paint new works for them. He has done at least one for them and probably has done, or is doing, more for them.

"They can't sell Scarletins on the open market. But there are enough fanatical and unscrupulous collectors to pay very large sums for their private collections. Lausitz was one such. Scarletin is held prisoner and, we suppose, would like to escape. He can't do so, but he is an intelligent man, and he thinks of a way to get a message out. He knows his paintings are being sold, even if he isn't told so. Ergo, why not put a message in his painting?"

"How wonderful!" Mrs. Scarletin said and she patted Ralph's head. Ralph wagged his tail, and I felt a thrust of jealousy.

"Nonsense!" Strasse growled. "He must have known that the painting would go to a private collector who could not reveal that Scarletin was a prisoner. One, he'd be put in jail himself for having taken part in an illegal transaction.

Two, why would he suspect that the painting contained a message? Three, I don't believe there is any message there!"

"Scarletin would be desperate and so willing to take a long chance," Ralph said. "At least, it'd be better than doing nothing. He could hope that the collector might get an attack of conscience and tell the police. This is not very likely, I'll admit. He could hope that the collector would be unable to keep from showing the work off to a few close friends. Perhaps one of these might tell the police, and so the painting would come into the hands of the police. Among them might be an intelligent and well-educated person who would preceive the meaning of the painting. I'll admit, however, that neither of these theories is likely."

Strasse snorted.

"And then there was the very slight chance — which nevertheless occurred — that the collector would die. And so the legal inventory of his estate would turn up a Scarletin. And some person just might be able to read the meaning in this — if there is any."

"Just what I was going to say," Strasse said.

"Even if what you say happened did happen," he continued, "his kidnapers wouldn't pass on the painting without examining it. The first thing they'd suspect would be a hidden message. It's so obvious."

"You didn't think so a moment ago," Ralph said. "But you are right ... in agreeing with me. Now, let us hypothesize. Scarletin, a work of art, but he wishes to embody in it a message. Probably a map of sorts which will lead the police — or someone else looking for him — directly to the place where he is kept prisoner.

"How is he to do this without detection by the kidnapers? He has to be subtle enough to escape their inspection. *How* subtle depends, I would imagine, on their education and perceptivity. But too subtle a message will go over everybody's head. And he is limited in his choice of symbols by the situation, by the names or professions of his kidnapers — if he knows them — and by the particular location of his prison — if he knows that."

"If, if, if?" Strasse said, throwing his hands up in the air.

"If me no ifs," Ralph said. "But first let us consider that Scarletin is equally at home in German or English. He loves the pun-loving Carroll and Baum. So, perhaps, due to the contingencies of the situation, he is forced to pun in both languages."

"It would be like him," Mrs. Scarletin said. "But is it likely that he would use this method when he would know that very few people

would be capable of understanding him?"

"As I said, it was a long shot, madame. But better than nothing."

"Now, Weisstein, whatever else I am, I am a dog. Hence, I am color blind. (But not throughout his career. See *The Adventure of the Tired Color Man*, to be published.) Please describe the colors of each object on this canvas."

Strasse sniggered, but we ignored him. When I had finished, Ralph said, "Thank you, my dear Weisstein. Now, let us separate the significant from the insignificant. Though, as a matter of fact, in this case even the insignificant is significant. Notice the two painted walls which divide the painting into three parts — like Gaul. One starts from the middle of the lefthand side and curves up to the middle of the upper edge. The other starts in the middle of the right-hand side and curves down to the middle of the lower side. All three parts are filled with strange and seemingly unrelated — and often seemingly unintelligible — objects. The Fauve Mauve apologists, however, maintain that their creations come from the collective unconscious, not the individual or personal, and so are intelligible to everybody."

"Damned nonsense!" I said, forgetting Lisa in my indignation.

"Not in this case, I suspect," Ralph said. "Now, notice that the two walls, which look much like the Great Wall of China, bear many zeros on their tops. And that within the area these walls enclose, other zeros are scattered. Does this mean nothing to you?"

"Zero equals nothing," I said.

"A rudimentary observation, Doctor, but valid," Ralph said. "I would say that Scarletin is telling us that the objects within the walls mean nothing. It is the central portion that bears the message. There are no zeros there."

"Prove it," Strasse said.

"The first step first — if one can find it. Observe in the upper right-hand corner the strange figure of a man. The upper half is, obviously, Sherlock Holmes, with his deerstalker hat, cloak, pipe — though whether his meditative brierroot or disputatious clay can't be determined — and his magnifying glass in hand. The lower half, with the lederhosen and so on, obviously indicates a Bavarian in particular and a German in general. The demi-figure of Holmes means two things to the earnest seeker after the truth. One, that we are to use detective methods on this painting. Two, that half of the puzzle is in English. The lower half means that half of the puzzle is in German. Which I anticipated."

"Preposterous!" Strasse said. "And just what does that next figure, the one in sixteenth-century costume, mean?"

"Ah, yes, the torso of a bald and bearded gentleman with an Elizabethan ruff around his neck. He is writing with a pen on a sheet of paper. There is a title on the upper part of the paper. Doctor, please look at it through the magnifying glass which you'll find in my kit."

Chapter V

MORE DAWNING LIGHT

I did so, and I said, "I can barely make it out. Scarletin must have used a glass to do it. It says *New Atlantis.*"

"Does that suggest anything to anybody?" Ralph said.

Obviously it did to him, but he was enjoying the sensation of being more intelligent than the humans around him. I resented his attitude somewhat, and yet I could understand it. He had been patronized by too many humans for too long a time.

"The great scholar and statesman Francis Bacon wrote the *New Atlantis,*" I said suddenly. Ralph winked at me, and I cried, "Bacon! Scarletin's mistress is Hilda Speck!"

(*Speck* in German, means *bacon.*)

"You have put one foot forward, my dear Weisstein," Ralph said. "Now let us see you bring up the other."

"The Bacon, with the next two figures, comprise a group separate from the others," I said. "Obviously, they are to be considered as closely related. But I confess that I cannot make much sense out of Bacon, a green horse, and a house with an attic window from which a woman with an owl on her shoulder leans. Nor do I know the significance of the tendril which connects all of them."

"Stuck in the mud, eh, kid?" Ralph said, startling me. But I was to get used to his swift transitions from the persona of Holmes to Spade and others and back again.

"Tell me, Doc, is the green of the oats-burner of any particular shade?"

"Hmm," I said.

"It's Nile green," Lisa said.

"You're certainly a model client, sweetheart," Ralph said. "Very well, my dear sawbones, does this mean nothing to you? Yes? What about you, Strasse?"

Strasse muttered something.

Lisa said, "*Nilpferd!*"

"Yes," Ralph said. "*Nilpferd.* (Nile-horse.) Another word for hippopotamus. And Hilda Speck's brother is nicknamed *Hippopotamus.* Now for the next figure, the house with the woman looking out

the attic and bearing an owl on her shoulder. Tell me, Strasse, does the Hippo have any special pals? One who is perhaps, Greek? From the city of Athens?"

Strasse sputtered and said, "Somebody in the department has been feeding you information. I'll ..."

"Not at all," Ralph said. "Obviously, the attic and the woman with the owl are the significant parts of the image. *Dachstube* (attic) conveys no meaning in German, but if we use the English translation, we are on the way to light. The word has two meanings in English. If capitalized, Attic, it refers to the ancient Athenian language or culture and, in a broader sense, to Greece as a whole. Note that the German adjective *attisch* is similar to the English *Attic*. To clinch this, Scarletin painted a woman with an owl on her shoulder. Who else could this be but the goddess of wisdom, patron deity of Athens? Scarletin was taking a chance on using her, since his kidnapers, even if they did not get beyond high school, might have encountered Athena. But they might not remember her, and, anyway, Scarletin had to use some redundancy to make sure his message got across. I would not be surprised if we do not run across considerable redundancy here."

"And the tendrils?" I said.

"A pun in German, my dear Doctor. *Ranke* (tendril) is similar to *Ranke* (intrigues). The three figures are bound together by the tendril of intrigue."

Strasse coughed and said, "And the mirror beneath the house with the attic?"

"Observe that the yellow brick road starts from the mirror and curves to the left or westward. I suggest that Scarletin means here that the road actually goes to the right or eastward. Mirror images are in reverse, of course."

"What road?" Strasse said.

Ralph rolled his eyes and shook his head.

"Surely the kidnapers made my husband explain the symbolism?" Lisa said. "They would be very suspicious that he might do exactly what he did do."

"There would be nothing to keep him from a false explanation," Ralph said. "So far, it is obvious that Scarletin has named the criminals. How he was able to identify them or to locate his place of imprisonment, I don't know. Time and deduction — with a little luck — will reveal all. Could we have a road map of Germany, please?"

"I'm no dog to fetch and carry," Strasse grumbled, but he obtained a map nevertheless. This was the large Mair's, scale of

1:750,000, used primarily to indicate the autobahn system. Strasse unfolded it and pinned it to the wall with the upper part of Germany showing.

"If Scarletin had put, say, an American hamburger at the beginning of the brick road, its meaning would have been obvious even to the *dummkopf* kidnapers," Ralph said. "He credited his searchers — if any — with intelligence. They would realize the road has to start where the crime started — in Hamburg."

He was silent while comparing the map and the painting. After a while the fidgeting Strasse said, "Come, man! I mean, dog! You..."

"You mean Herr von Wau Wau, yes?" Ralph said.

Strasse became red-faced again, but after a struggle he said, "Of course. Herr von Wau Wau. How do you interpret this, this mess of a mystery?"

"You'll note that there are many figures along the yellow brick road until one gets to the large moon rising behind the castle. All these figures have halos over their heads. This puzzled me until I understood that the halos are also zeros. We are to pay no attention to the figures beneath them.

"But the moon behind the castle? Look at the map. Two of the roads running southeast out of Hamburg meet just above the city of Luneburg. A *burg* is a castle, but the *Lune* doesn't mean anything in German in this context. It is, however, similar to the English *lunar*, hence the moon. And the yellow brick road goes south from there.

"I must confess that I am now at a loss. So, we get in a car and travel to Luneburg and south of it while I study the map and the painting."

"We can't take the painting with us; it's too big!" Strasse said.

"I have it all in here," Ralph said, tapping his head with his paw. "But I suggest we take a color Polaroid shot of the painting for you who have weak memories," and he grinned at Strasse.

Chapter VI

FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Strasse did not like it, but he could not proceed without Ralph, and Ralph insisted that Mrs. Scarletin and I be brought along. First, he sent two men to watch Hilda Speck and to make sure she did not try to leave town — as the Americans say. He had no evidence to arrest her as yet, nor did he really think — I believe — that he was going to have any.

The dog, Lisa, and I got into the rear of a large police limousine, steam-driven, of course. Strasse

sat in the front with the driver. Another car, which kept in radio contact with us, was to follow us at a distance of a kilometer.

An hour later, we were just north of Luneburg. A half hour later, still going south, we were just north of the town of Uelzen. It was still daylight, and so I could easily see the photo of the painting which I held. The yellow road on it ran south of the moon rising behind the castle (Luneburg) and extended a little south of a group of three strange figures. These were a hornless sheep (probably a female), a section of an overhead railway, and an archer with a medieval Japanese coiffure and medieval clothes.

Below this group the road split. Two roads wound toward the walls in the upper and lower parts of the picture and eventually went through them. The other curved almost due south to the left and then went through or by some more puzzling figures.

The first was a representation of a man (he looked like the risen Jesus) coming from a tomb set in the middle of some trees. To its right and a little lower was a waistcoat. Next was what looked like William Penn, the Quaker. Following it was a man in a leopard loincloth with two large apes at his heels.

Next was a man dressed in clothes such as the ancient Mesopotamian people wore. He was down on all fours, his head bent close to the grass. Beside him was a banana tree.

Across the road was a large hot-air balloon with a bald-headed man in the wicker basket. On the side of the bag in large letters were: O.Z.

Across the road from it were what looked like two large Vikings wading through a sea. Behind them was the outline of a fleet of dragon-prowed longships and the silhouette of a horde of horn-helmeted bearded men. The two leaders were approaching a body of naked warriors, colored blue, standing in horse-drawn chariots.

South of these was a woman dressed in mid-Victorian clothes, hoopskirts and all, and behind her a mansion typical of the pre-Civil War American south. By it was a tavern, if the drunks lying outside it and the board hanging over the doorway meant anything. The sign was too small to contain even letters written under a magnifying glass.

A little to the left, the road terminated in a pair of hands tearing a package from another pair of hands.

Just before we got to Uelzen, Strasse said, "How do you know that we're on the right road?"

"Consider the sheep, the raised

section of railway, and the Japanese archer," Ralph said. "In English, *U* is pronounced exactly like the word for the female sheep — *ewe*. An elevated railway is colloquially an *el*. The Japanese archer could be a Samurai, but I do not think so. He is a *Zen* archer. Thus, *U*, *el*, and *zen* or the German city of Uelzen."

"All of this seems so easy, so apparent, now that you've pointed it out," I said.

"Hindsight has 20/20 vision," he said somewhat bitterly.

"And the rest?" I said.

"The town of Esterholz is not so difficult. Would you care to try?"

"Another English-German hybrid pun," I said, with more confidence than I felt. "*Ester* sounds much like *Easter*, hence the risen Christ. And the wood is the *holz*, of course. *Holt*, archaic English for a small wood or copse, by the way, comes from the same Germanic root as *holz*."

"And the Weste (waistcoat)?" Ralph said.

"I would guess that that means to take the road west of Esterholz," I said somewhat more confidently.

"Excellent, Doctor," he said. "And the Quaker?"

"I really don't know," I said, chagrined because Lisa had been looking admiringly at me.

He gave his short barking laughter and said, "And neither do I, my dear fellow! I am sure that some of these symbols, perhaps most, have a meaning which will not be apparent until we have studied the neighborhood."

Seven kilometers southeast of Uelzen, we turned into the village of Esterholz and then west onto the road to Wrestede. Looking at the hands tearing loose the package from the other pair, I suddenly cried out, "Of course! Wrestede! Suggesting the English, *wrested!* The hands are *wresting* the package away! Then that means that Scarletin is a prisoner somewhere between Esterholz and Wrestede!"

"Give that man the big stuffed teddy bear," Ralph said. "OK, toots, so where is Scarletin?"

I fell silent. The others said nothing, but the increasing tension was making us sweat. We all looked waxy and pale in the light of the sinking sun. In half an hour, night would be on us.

"Slow down so I can read the names on the gateways of the farms," Ralph said. The driver obeyed, and presently Ralph said, "Ach!"

I could see nothing which reminded me of a Quaker.

"The owner of that farm is named Fuchs (fox)," I said.

"Yes, and the founder of the

Society of Friends, or The Quakers, was George Fox," he said.

He added a moment later, "As I remember it, it was in this area that some particularly bestial — or should I say human? — murders occurred in 1845. A man named Wilhelm Graustock was finally caught and convicted."

I had never heard of this case, but, as I was to find out, Ralph had an immense knowledge of sensational literature. He seemed to know the details of every horror committed in the last two centuries.

"What is the connection between Herr Graustock and this figure which is obviously Tarzan?" I said.

"Graustock is remarkably similar in sound to Greystoke," he said. "As you may or may not know, the lord of the jungle was also Lord Greystoke of the British peerage. As a fact, Graustock and Greystoke both mean exactly the same thing, a gray stick or pole. They have common Germanic roots. Ach, there it is! The descendants of the infamous butcher still hold his property, but are, I believe, singularly peaceful farmers."

"And the man on all fours by a banana tree?" Strasse growled. It hurt him to ask, but he could not push back his curiosity.

Ralph burst out laughing again. "Another example of redundancy, I believe. And the most difficult to figure out. A tough one, sweetheart. Want to put in your two pfennigs' worth?"

"Aw, go find a fireplug," Strasse said, at which Ralph laughed even more loudly.

"Unless I'm mistaken," Ralph said, "the next two images stand for a word, not a thing. They symbolize *nebanan* (next door). The question is, next door to what? The Graustock farm or the places indicated by the balloon and the battle tableau and the antebellum scene? I see nothing as yet which indicates that we are on or about to hit the bull's-eye. Continue at the same speed, driver."

There was silence for a minute. I refused to speak because of my pride. Finally, Lisa said, "For heaven's sake, Herr von Wau Wau, I'm dying of curiosity! How did you ever get *nebanan?*"

"The man on all fours with his head close to the ground looks to me like ancient Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who went mad and ate grass. By him is the banana (Banane) tree. Collapse those two words into one, a la Lewis Carroll and his portmanteau words, and you have *nebanan* (next to)."

"This Scarletin is crazy," Strasse said.

"If he is, he has a utilitarian madness," Ralph said.

"You're out of your mind, too!" Strasse said triumphantly. "Look!" And he pointed at a name painted on the wall. Neb Bannons.

Ralph was silent for a few seconds while Strasse laughed, and then he said, quietly, "Well, I was wrong in the particular but right in the principle. Ach! Here we are! Maintain the same speed driver! The rest of you, look straight ahead, don't gawk! Someone may be watching from the house, but they won't think it suspicious if they see a dog looking out of the window!"

I did as he said, but I strained out of the corners of my eyes to see both sides of the road. On my right were some fields of barley. On my left I caught a glimpse of a gateway with a name over it in large white-painted letters: Schindeler. We went past that and by a field on my left in which two stallions stood by the fence looking at us. On my right was a sign against a stone wall which said: Bergmann.

Ralph said delightedly, "That's it!"

I felt even more stupid.

"Don't stop until we get around the curve ahead and out of sight of the Schindeler house," Ralph said.

A moment later, we were parked beyond the curve and pointed west. The car which had been trailing us by several kilometers reported by radio that it had stopped near the Graustock farm.

"All right!" Strasse said fiercely. "Things seem to have worked out! But before I move in, I want to make sure I'm not arresting the wrong people. Just how did you figure this one out?"

"Button your lip and flap your ears, sweetheart," Ralph said. "Take the balloon with O.Z. on it. That continues the yellow brick road motif. You noticed the name Bergmann (miner)? A Bergmann is a man who digs, right? Well, for those of you who may have forgotten, the natal or Nebraskan name of the Wizard of Oz was Diggs."

Strasse looked as if he were going to have an apoplectic fit. "And what about those ancient Teutonic warriors and those naked blue men in chariots across the road from the balloon?" he shouted.

"Those Teutonic warriors were Anglo-Saxons, and they were invading ancient Britain. The Britons were tattooed blue and often went into battle naked. As all educated persons know," he added, grinning. "As for the two leaders of the Anglo-Saxons, traditionally they were named Hengist and Horsa. Both names meant *horse*. In fact, as you know,

Henqst is a German word for stallion, and *Ross* also means horse. Ross is cognate with the Old English *hrossa*, meaning horse."

"God preserve me from any case like this one in the future!" Strasse said. "Very well, we won't pause in this madness! What does this pre-Civil War house with the Southern belle before it and the tavern by it mean? How do you know that it means that Scarletin is prisoner there?"

"The tableau suggests, among other things, the book and the movie *Gone With the Wind*," Ralph said. "You probably haven't read the book, Strasse, but you surely must have seen the movie. The heroine's name is Scarlett O'Hara, right, pal? And a *tavern*, in English, is also an *inn*. Scarlett-inn, get it?"

A few minutes later, Ralph said, "If you don't control yourself, my dear Strasse, your men will have to put you in a strait jacket."

The policeman ceased his bellowing but not his trembling, took a few deep breaths, followed by a deep draught from a bottle in the glove compartment, breathed schnapps all over us, and said, "So! Life is not easy! And duty calls! Let us proceed to make the raid upon the farmhouse as agreed upon!"

Chapter VII

NO EMERALD CITY FOR ME

An hour after dusk, policemen burst into the front and rear doors of the Schindeler house. By then it had been ascertained that the house had been rented by a man giving the name of Albert Habicht. This was Hilda Speck's brother, Albert Speck, the Hippopotamus. His companion was a Wilhelm Erlesohn, a tall skinny man nicknamed *die Giraffe*. A fine zoological pair, both now behind bars.

Hilda Speck was also convicted but managed to escape a year later. But we were to cross her path again. (*The Case of the Seeing Eye Man.*)

Alfred Scarletin was painting another canvas with the same message but different symbols when we collared his kidnapers. He threw down his brush and took his lovely wife into his arms, and my heart went into a decaying orbit around my hopes. Apparently, despite his infidelity, she still loved him.

Most of this case was explained, but there was still an important question to be answered. How had Scarletin known where he was?

"The kidnaping took place in daylight in the midst of a large crowd," Scarletin said. "Erlesohn

jammed a gun which he had in his coat pocket against my back. I did as he said and got into the back of a delivery van double-parked nearby. Erlesohn then rendered me unconscious with a drug injected by a hypodermic syringe. When I woke up, I was in this house. I have been confined to this room ever since, which, as you see, is large and has a southern exposure and a heavily barred skylight and large heavily barred windows. I was told that I would be held until I had painted twelve paintings. These would be sufficient for the two men to become quite wealthy through sales to rich but unscrupulous collectors. Then I would be released.

"I did not believe them of course. After the twelve paintings were done, they would kill me and bury me somewhere in the woods. I listened often at the door late at night and overheard the two men, who drank much, talking loudly. That is how I found out their names. I also discovered that Hilda was in on the plot, though I'd suspected that all along. You see, I had quit her only a few days before I was kidnaped, and she was desperate because she no longer had an income.

"As for how I knew where I was, that is not so remarkable. I have a photographic memory, and I have tramped up and down Germany painting in my youth and early middle age. I have been along this road a number of times on foot when I was a teen-ager. In fact, I once painted the Graustock farmhouse. It is true that I had forgotten this, but after a while the memory came back. After all, I looked out the window every day and saw the Graustock farm.

"And now, tell me, who is the man responsible for reading my message? He must be an extraordinary man."

"No man," I said, feeling like Ulysses in Polyphemus' cave.

"Ach, then, it was you, Lisa?" he cried.

"It's yours truly, sweetheart," the voice of Humphrey Bogart said.

Scarletin is a very composed man, but he has fainted at least once in his life.

Chapter VIII

THE CONCLUSION

It was deep in winter with the fuel shortage most critical. We were sitting in our apartment trying to keep warm by the radiations from the TV set. The Scotch helped, and I was trying to forget our discomfort by glancing over my notes and listening to the records of our cases since the Scarletin case. Had Ralph and I, in that relatively short span of time,

really experienced the affair of the aluminum creche, the adventures of the human camel and the Old-School Thai, and the distressing business with the terrible Venetian, Granelli? The latter, by the way, is being written up under the title: *The Doge Whose Barque Was Worse Than His Bight.*

At last, I put the notes and records to one side and picked up a book. Too many memories were making me uncomfortable. A long silence followed, broken when Ralph said, "You may not have lost her after all, my dear Weisstein."

I started, and I said, "How did you know I was thinking of *her?*"

Ralph grinned (at least, I think he was grinning). He said, "Even the lead-brained Strasse would know that you cannot forget her big brown eyes, her smiles, her deep rich tones, her figure, and her etcetera. What else these many months would evoke those sighs, those moping stares, those frequent attacks of insomnia and absent-mindedness? It is evident at this moment that you are not at all as deep in one of C. S. Forester's fine sea stories as you pretend.

"But cheer up! The fair Lisa may yet have good cause to divorce her artistic but philandering spouse. Or she may become a widow."

"What makes you say that?" I cried.

"I've been thinking that it might not be just a coincidence that old Lausitz died after he purchased Scarletin's painting. I've been sniffing around the painting — literally and figuratively — and I think there's one Hamburger that's gone rotten."

"You suspect Scarletin of murder!" I said. "But how could he have killed Lausitz?"

"I don't know yet, pal," he said. "But I will. You can bet your booties I will. Old murders are like old bones — I dig them up."

And he was right, but that adventure was not to happen for another six months.

ABOUT THE COVER

Chesley Bonestell's new painting depicts the Viking Orbiter passing Phobus on its approach to Mars — scheduled for 1976.

Here is the first new story in more than ten years from Mildred Clingerman, who contributed regularly to F&SF during the '50's. From Mrs. Clingerman: "I'm still married to the same man I married at nineteen and still marvelling that my choice was so right. From our two children there are four grandchildren, all brilliant and beautiful. I write fantasy probably because I have never outgrown the fearful fun of telling myself scary tales, so long as it's broad daylight and there's a beloved grown-up close by to run to."

The Time Before

by MILDRED CLINGERMAN

The mocking birds were singing that morning, and the dandelions danced and nodded along the lane. Pa was off plowing in the far field with his lunch all ready in a tin bucket, and so I was free till suppertime. Poor ma was lying deep and still in the old cemetery, since a year last Christmas. There wasn't a soul to keep me from doing anything I wanted to do.

I stood in the clean-swept yard looking back at our house. The smoke from the kitchen chimney rose up as wavering and meaningful as a signal. The sky was that empty blue that makes you want to throw something at it — yourself, for instance, if there was only some way to do it. I was seventeen years old. I was wearing a pink gingham dress just fresh ironed, and I was so clean I squeaked all over. I'd scrubbed myself in a washtub by the cookstove till I was almost as pink as the dress, and then washed my hair. I was standing in the yard shaking it out, drying it, and watching the sunlight glinting through its blackness when all at once I took a notion to visit Deep Pool.

Something in me told me that maybe I shouldn't, but I didn't heed it. I streaked off down the sandy lane with my hair flying behind me and my bare feet fairly skimming that lane as if it were one of those waxed floors I'd heard pa tell about.

"Feet, feet," I laughed at them. "Can't you tarry along?" But they couldn't. They didn't even slow down at the cemetery where the nettles crowded thick against the old stone-covered Indian graves. Only ma's grave was as clean and

pious as she had been, outlined with the rows of daffodils ma loved. Ma always said they smelled like soap and goodness, with no stain of sin. I liked them well enough, but I could never love them the way ma did. Something in me answered to the smell of the four o'clocks — their sauciness, their spice, and the something else in them that's heavy and secret and warm.

I turned aside from the lane and struck off down the wooded hill that slants steeply to Deep Pool. The walnut trees stood thickly around it, and inside their ring were great blackberry bushes shrouded in late summer by tangly vines. I crawled carefully through the space I'd kept cleared from childhood, and there I was in the thin new grass, lying with my head hanging over the bank of the pool. The sunlight slanted through the trees, and my reflection smiled back at me.

"I've got a good notion to join you," I told the me-girl in the pool.

"Oh, do!" She nodded her head, and my long hair streamed around me.

"But my hair is just newly dried." She primmed her mouth at me. "But I'll dance for you," I told her. "Like I did when we were little."

"Dare you?"

I did dare. I shucked out of that pink gingham and the other things and kicked them in a tumbled heap. The air was satin against my nakedness. All the bits and pieces of that late springtime came thronging into my body, urging my feet to dance. The mockingbird trilled; the blue sky loomed empty and waiting; the daffodils bowed stately and clean, and far away men plowed in fields. The smoke from far-off chimneys rose like signals. Signals for what? A lover? Pooh ... Not Thomas Cluny, for certain sure, with his raw red hands and carrot hair. Who else, then, who else? Oh, I thought, for someone not even known. So I turned my whole body into a signal, dancing, dancing on the very edge of the dark, deep pool. Then I closed my eyes and stilled my feet, and I waited for an answer.

Silence can be as heavy as a stone, or feather-light. Now there moved behind me a kind of silence I'd never known or weighed. I knew if I opened my eyes I might see it reflected in the pool. I couldn't bear that thought. If I must see silence, I didn't mean to look on it secondhand. I whirled and opened my eyes.

He was ... a darling boy. Tall and fair with little sparkles of light laughing in his blue eyes. Hot, exciting eyes. I began to retreat in the direction of my clothes, but he

reached out for me firmly. I struggled, but not much. His mouth moved on mine as gently as spring warmth. At first. His hands were white and slender and strong. While he held me as close as skin, he whistled soft at my ear the twelve tunes, he said, of the twelve little winds.

Afterwards, the pool received our nakedness as warmly as if it were full summer. As we splashed about, his laughing voice seemed deeper and warmer than the pool.

The shadows lay thick with evening when I smoothed out the crumpled pink gingham. He watched me dress and smiled at me, but I shivered in the sudden chilliness of the air.

"I don't even know your name." I felt like it was the wrong thing to say, but I couldn't stop myself. "Shall I ... shall I see you again?" The chill in the air seemed to sharpen.

He smiled, but his eyes didn't. They looked as cold as a winter sky.

"Who are you, anyway?" I asked. "Do you live around here, or are you just passing through? Sometimes we get pedlars this time of year .... Do you have something to sell?"

"So many questions!" he said. He had finished dressing, but he bent to adjust his boots and to pick up his walking stick. It was a strange kind of staff, I saw, with twisty snakes carved around it. He began to move away from me.

"No! Don't go yet," I begged, and I clutched at him. I was strong, and I held him for a moment, but he threw me down as casually and easily as I might shoo off a fly. I fell at his feet, and it was then I noticed the little white wings he'd fastened to his boots. Something about the fanciness of those boots angered me. They were the prettiest things I'd ever seen — so soft and supple and winged. Nobody who wore boots like that would ever pledge himself to a girl with only one pair of shoes, and those saved for Sunday. For spite, I wrapped my arms around his ankles, and as he kicked at me, I pulled viciously till I grasped one silvery feather.

"Bitch!" he spat out the word.

"I don't care!" I said. I just lay there at his feet looking up at him, twirling the feather. "I've got this much, anyway. Don't you see?" I began to cry. "I must have something ...."

"Oh, of course. To remember me by." He spoke sweetly and raised me to my feet and held me as tenderly as before. He smoothed the tangled hair away from my face and kissed me just at the hairline. "Now go," he said.

"Can't you stay?"

"No."

"Will you come back? I'll wait for you."

"Yes. You'll wait for me ... and I'll return someday. I promise."

"When?"

"Just at the end."

"What do you mean? Tell me! At least you could tell me your name."

"I have a dozen names, but I'll give you one I've always fancied. It's Quicksilver," he said, and he was gone. From beyond the ring of berry bushes he called back, "*Mister* Quicksilver!" and I heard his laughter float back faintly.

What happened after he was gone was just what happens to any woman in like circumstances. I went home and cooked pa's supper and brooded. By high summertime I was married to Thomas with his red hands and carrot hair. We rocked along fairly well together. I slept beside him winter nights almost content. But on spring nights when there was moonlight enough, I held myself quiet till he slept, then slipped away to pace the fields and woods. I was waiting and hoping, I suppose. I waited a lifetime.

All the while, I tended my children, nursing them in fret and sickness, and crooning to them at bedtime. I fed them and washed them, and I tried to fill them with the little more that all mothers have for the children of a man not truly loved. I never danced again. The days passed under my hands, half felt, half seen, and I grew old. I missed so much, just waiting. Finally I knew I'd missed out on this life, the way you do if you're not miser-careful about it. I could have gleaned a better harvest. Cluny was a good man in his way. I might have stored up flowers and color and rich days and love. I might have been all-the-way alive, but I wasn't. I didn't even have the silver feather for a keepsake. The boy had stolen it back before he slipped away, and all I had left was the silver feather in my own black hair.

But he did come back. I was old and bent and dying, and he stood at my bedside.

"I know you now," I told him. "I finally hunted out all your names and ways. I know you're one of the gods in old learned books, and I've read the tales they tell of you. All your thieving tricks. I wish I'd never seen you. And now you've come to conduct my soul to hell."

"The old books lie. And you're not really sorry you met me. Why, you'd do it all again in a minute if you had the chance, wouldn't you?" His voice was as persuasive as before, and he was young and beautiful. That kind doesn't grow old.

"I'll be fair," he said. "You may choose again. Come."

I went along with him. Why not?

So now he has brought me here. What is this place? Who am I? In the springtime you ask yourself things like that.

It's a beautiful morning. The mockingbirds are singing, and along the lane the daffodils dance and nod. Pa has gone off to plow the far field. I'll go to the Deep Pool. Why do I hesitate? Feet, feet, run, run. Smell the daffodils. But four o'clocks! Something heavy and secret and warm.

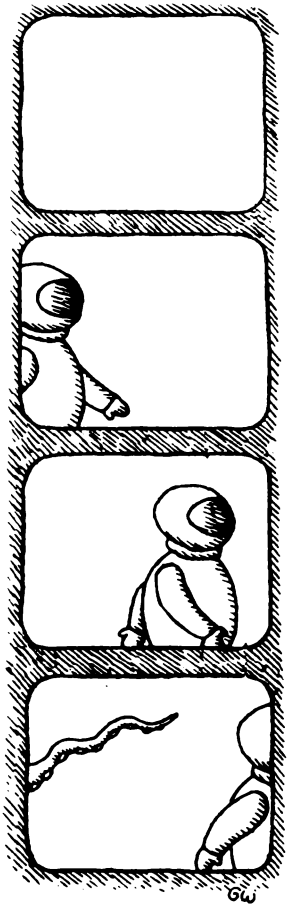
A FUNKY, FAUSTIAN, FILMORIAN FANTOM

I'm a sucker for updated legends. Show me the Iliad set in the Old West and I eat it up (there is such a thing, "The Stars in Their Courses" by Harry Brown). But since the cultural revolution there have been so many so badly done that I'm getting jaundiced about the whole idea (best example — "Jesus Christ: Superstar" — even though I liked a lot of the film). So if I had been around when producer-writer Brian de Palma had seen the traditional light bulb over his head and said "Gee whiz! Let's do a new version of "The Phantom of the Opera" with rock 'n roll and some Faust mixed in!" I'd have probably yawned and said something unkind. Luckily my presence was not to hand to discourage this idea, because *Phantom of the Paradise* did not turn out badly at all.

I feel singularly qualified to judge because not only have I seen the Chaney-Raines-Lom film versions of "Phantom," I've also actually read the novel (by one Gaston Leroux — would you believe — published in 1911 and a real gas). Also I have been associated by emotional relationship (as one would earlier say by

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



marriage) with the upper echelons of the rock field and thereby grew to know and loathe it. That field is brutal and vicious even by the worst standards of show biz (and science fiction, might I add, is a veritable bed of sweetness and light in comparison). So a rock adaptation of The Phantom of... and Faust works singularly well, since half the fun of this sort of thing is how many analogs can be found between the old and the new material.

Swan is a dominant producer-writer of rock records (the label is Death Records — the logo a dead bird, feet uppermost). Winslow Leach is a naive — and rather hyper — composer who has been working on an epic rock cantata based on Faust. Swan is about to open the greatest-ever rock palace, the Paradise, and decides he wants Leach's music but not Leach for the opening. Leach innocently gives the music to Swan; he is ignored, beaten by Swan's goons, and eventually jailed on a phoney drug rap when he tries to get it back. He escapes, and in the process of insanely ransacking Swan's record factory is brutally maimed in a record pressing machine. He decamps to the Paradise, takes refuge in the costume room and with the help of a cape and a wonderfully designed metallic mask (with an avian look) becomes the phantom of the Paradise.

This is just the beginning, though. It seems that Swan has long ago signed a contract to stay ever young (only the video tape image will age — a thrown away allusion which could have been a whole *other* film). In a face-to-face confrontation, he diabolically persuades Leach to sign such a contract (a marvelously incomprehensible one with such phrases as "All clauses which are excluded will be deemed included" which Swan airily explains "...is just for *your* protection"), the bargain being that Leach will finish the cantata if Swan will hire Phoenix to sing it, Phoenix being the beautiful girl singer whom Leach not only loves but is convinced is the only singer who can handle his music.

Now things really get complicated. Swan tries to double cross Leach by substituting Beef, a new glitter rock star, for Phoenix, but Leach kills Beef in mid-performance with a well-thrown prop neon lightning bolt (live). Swan puts Phoenix back in, but seduces her and gets her to sign a contract. There is a final fatal confrontation for the two onstage during Phoenix' debut show, as the musicians continue to play and the audience applauds in a frenzy. All that's missing, I regret to say, is the falling chandelier.

Most of this is done with a large

amount of style and wit. The sets are fine — Swan's huge desk made like a golden record with him in the middle; the surrealist Caligariesque corridors of Swan's office; the electronic nightmares of the recording studios. There's good use made of the split scene — one very nice moment where you are seeing a performance from audience point of view on one side, the exact same thing from the wings on the other. Avian symbols abound — Swan, Phoenix, the dead bird logo, Leach's mask with the one good eye peering out with the maniacal, fixed gaze that birds tend to have.

The film falls down, oddly enough, in the stage numbers, which tend to look more like Las Vegas or the Dean Martin Show rather than the particular improvised neo-theatricalism of a David Bowie or Alice Cooper concert. Sometimes the satirical element is too broad; the androgynous glitter-rock scene take-off would have been funnier if it had been subtler. And the film shows evidence of having been overedited (probably for a shorter length) since some key points seem to be missing. But it's good to see a horror film with style, which — with a few exceptions — has been missing since the days of the '30s "Frankenstein" and "Dracula."

Totally style-less was something that hit ABC's late-night Wide World Mystery recently — a cheapie made-for-TVer called *The Cloning of Clifford Swimmer.* An experimental psychiatrist clones a patient (a maladjusted TV exec, of all things) so that he can go off to the Caribbean with his mistress and the clone can stay at home with wife and job. It's really a cool, superficially convincing update of mad scientist and monster (except that the clone is the nice guy), produced with those qualities that distinguish these tooled-for-the-tube movies: acting of the I've-read-the-script-once improvisational variety and sets (what few there are) which seemed to be left over from old I Love Lucy shows. The only interesting point to be made about this one is that a sophisticated concept such as cloning has made it to the lowest stage of TV drama without having gone through any levels that even attempted quality or intelligence.

One of science fiction's most colorful and distinctive writers treats a classic fantasy theme; the result is both gripping and unusual. R. A. Lafferty's most recent book is a collection of short stories about "secret places and mean men" published by Scribners under the title *Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?*

Three Shadows of the Wolf

by R. A. LAFFERTY

There was a sheep-killing wolf about, and that redneck sheriff Otis Pidgeon would have to do something about it. It was a big wolf (everybody seemed to have seen it except the sheriff) and stories were clustering about it. The folks swore that it was a big gray wolf, not a red wolf, and that was impossible. One would have to go north a thousand miles to find a gray wolf. So the people were mistaken. But it wasn't like them to be mistaken about a country thing like a wolf.

The people also said that the big wolf might have a pack, that he might have three shadowy followers. But, if so, the three were really shadow wolves; they didn't leave tracks.

It was a gray wolf with a white slash at the crown of his head. Ribaul said that the wolf would weigh two hundred and fifty pounds. Ribaul was a Frenchman, and so the sheriff automatically divided his figure by two. That would still be a very large wolf. It loomed up gray, and it disappeared like a ghost. It killed and carried off sheep.

Royal Parish was almost the only sheep-raising parish around there, and even in Royal the sheep were raised in only a small district around Yellow Knife. And that was where Sheriff Pidgeon was raised too.

Pidgeon was a tall and gaunt young man with bulging blue eyes. He was a man who went ash-white when he was angry or terrified or embarrassed; it might be said that he blushed white. He was the most suspicious man in Royal Parish. For this reason he had never married, never courted a woman, nor formed any close friendship, nor deposited money in a bank, nor loaned or borrowed, nor trusted weather or fate. He was the right

sheriff for Royal Parish, but likely not for any other place. The people in Royal had very dirty quicksilver in them and only a suspicious man could keep up with them. But what Pidgeon was suspicious of now was the strange wolf.

Ragley said that the wolf stood as tall as a shetland pony, but the lies of Ragley had always stood as tall as a jack pine in a brush thicket. Kenrad said that the wolf had ears like a panther, jaws with the snap of a gator, the muzzle of a moose, and a gait like a high-shouldered ox. Pidgeon was smart enough to know that no wolf looked like that. He was even sharp enough to understand that Kenrad had unwittingly described himself.

It was Ragley with the monstrously mobile features and the equally mobile heart who came through strongest on the wolf. Ragley was a widower with a thirteen-year-old daughter Clela. He was a liar by profession, and he farmed a little on the side.

But Ribaul was the only one who described the wolf as if he even knew what a wolf looked like. Ribaul had been a roustabout and an animal tamer. He described the wolf as impossibly large, but he described it as a man would who knows just how a wolf is put together.

"I will tell you this, Pidgeon," storekeeper Scroggins said. "You had better get that sheep-killing wolf before there is a man killed. This same thing happened a few miles south and it ended in a man being killed."

"Anything can end in a man being killed," Pidgeon said, "but it's usually another man and not a wolf that kills him."

"If you know where to draw the line between them, Sheriff," Scroggins said. "Did you hear me, Sheriff? I said 'if you know where to draw the line between them.' I'd get to the bottom of this if I were sheriff for fifteen minutes."

Pidgeon was suspicious of all of them there in the store: Scroggins, Ragley, Kenrad, Tadler, Corbey, Boston, Danby. "All right, Scroggins," Pidgeon told him. "You *are* sheriff for fifteen minutes. Let's see you handle it."

"Just pin a badge on me and I'll get to the bottom of it." That got a sore spot.

"You know the parish voted against an appropriation for a badge," Pidgeon said. "Nobody remembers the last sheriff to have a badge."

"Sheep disappeared from three more flocks last night, Pidgeon," Danby said.

"Scroggins here will have it solved in fifteen minutes."

"Not without a badge I won't. But there's some queer stories about that wolf."

"Who's starting them, Scroggins?" Pidgeon asked.

"Why, Pidgeon, I would say that the wolf is starting them," Tadler broke in. "I would say that there's a wolf hair behind every one of those wolf stories. They say that the wolf might not be exactly a wolf all the time. He disappears from a place and he travels mighty fast."

"Yes, he's in three different places too fast for any wolf," Pidgeon said.

"Maybe he rides a motorcycle, Sheriff," Ragley jibed.

Pidgeon went angrily out of Scroggins' store and applied himself to looking for the wolf. Well, there was this about him: he left big and obvious wolf tracks at the site of every killing and theft. He always left at least one slashed sheep. But the tracks couldn't be followed from one raid to another. They just died away.

Pidgeon drove his pickup truck up a back road to the site of the Tadler raid, and he pulled off the road. Tadler's place was full of outcroppings. The sheriff had been told where the raid had been, and moreover a dog was waiting to take him to it.

"Ah, you're nipped a bit, Little Harry," Pidgeon said to the dog, "but not as much as if you'd made a real fight out of it. There's a saying that a good sheep dog will stand to any wolf, but neither of us believes it. A dog smart enough to be a good sheep dog will know when he's outpowered. You have any opinions about that, Little Harry?"

Little Harry the sheep dog was abashed, though he and Pidgeon were friends. But he did lead the sheriff to a killed sheep, and to live sheep reposing around it. They ignore one of their dead fellows after he's cold.

"Killed in neat wolf style, isn't he, Little Harry? And not too much of him eaten. And there is no sign at all of the four missing sheep. Dammit, Little Harry, you should find some way of telling me what happened here." There were plenty of tracks of a very large wolf, but they didn't lead anywhere.

"All right, Little Harry, which way did he go?" Pidgeon asked. Little Harry showed him, leading him across the rock croppings that held no prints. Then there were prints in the mud, and the wolf went onto the road itself. "He doesn't leave tracks on the road," Pidgeon said. "All right, which way did he go?"

Little Harry lay down in the road with the air of having done all that was asked of him. He could not be urged to go further. Pidgeon left the dog, got in his pickup, and drove to the site of the Boston raid. It was six miles there. Boston had

suffered thirteen sheep disappeared, and one killed and partly eaten by a wolf. This site also was near the road and did not require much walking in the rough country. It had been a considerate wolf in this. There were marks of several trucks here, Boston's, Tadler's, Danby's, Corbey's; they had come to investigate when the news had got around. There was one other heavy truck that may have been there first.

Pidgeon knew Boston's sheep, and he knew that the thirteen missing ones were the best ones. Pidgeon found and pocketed two small pieces of brass. He could have found more of them if he had looked long enough. Well, they were at least a small part of the explanation.

Pidgeon went to the site of the Danby raid, glad again that the wolf was so considerate as to raid close to the road. It was about eight miles from Boston's place. They had all been here before him, all the trucks of the gathering angry men. Had the unidentified heavy truck been here also? Couldn't be sure.

One sheep was killed and partly eaten, and nine sheep reported disappeared. And here was a dead dog. He, at least, had stood to the wolf, but he hadn't had much luck with it. Dandy George had been a fine large animal; he'd been killed by something larger.

Pidgeon didn't find any brass here, and he didn't intend a long search for it. There were no wolf tracks except around the dead sheep (very plain, as though left there on purpose), and around the dead dog (barely discernible on the rocks there, as though the site was not of the wolf's choosing). Pidgeon found more tracks. The wolf had gone up onto the road.

"One of the fellows said maybe the wolf used a motorcycle," Pidgeon mumbled. "He didn't, but maybe he used a truck. That wolf had a lot of man in him."

There are very few wolves who will go down and slay one sheep, and then stand off and kill a number of them with a rifle. And then pick them off cleanly, carrying, not dragging.

Pidgeon went to get Ribaul, the French bum and his part-time helper.

Their connection had begun several months earlier when Pidgeon had locked Ribaul up in their little jail for cause. Ribaul had been living in a shack on rough land that belonged to a French farmer. Soon after the arrest, Pidgeon gave Ribaul part-time employment and the run of the place. Ribaul was a handy man, a big oaf with a head like a giant potato. He was strong as a mule, and like a mule he would

refuse when he felt himself overworked. But Ribaul could track.

"Hopping Hailstones!" Sheriff Pidgeon swore. "You fat-faced fool!"

The French bum Ribaul had nudged Pidgeon's arm and made him miss a shot. It was too late to shoot again. The wolf was gone, and so was a night's work.

"You splay-footed French fool, you'd better have a good reason for that."

"No, no reason, Mr. Pidgeon, just a notion," big Ribaul said in a little voice.

"I had a perfect shot. Why am I afflicted by a fool?"

It was just before dawn, about eighteen hours after Pidgeon had got Ribaul to help him track the wolf. They had stayed with it all that time. Ribaul could track, but there was a lot of hocus in his methods. They had driven the back roads along the west end of the parish. The wind had been strong from the east, and Ribaul swore that he could catch a whiff of a wolf when within a mile of him.

"That's the way they work the bloods, Mr. Pidgeon," he said. "Track and backtrack till you pick up the scent. Then close in on it. Pass it by to the other side till you lose it again. Then box it in."

"You aren't a bloodhound, Ribaul, though about the eyes and dewlap —"

"I can't pick up a scent as quick as a good dog, but I know better how to close in when I have it. I'm smarter than a lot of dogs."

Well, maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. They had the wolf boxed in several hours before sundown. They could drive no closer to it, and their box was a double section of land, a wild thousand acres, very rough.

"Sometimes the wolf has followers," Ribaul said, "three other wolves who trail him, but sometimes they are only shadows. And there is a man who sometimes has three followers. They will be men for a while, and then they will be only shadows."

"Rot, Ribaul," Pidgeon said. They walked and cross-walked, always to the windward of the wolf. Ribaul had a high loping walk and Pidgeon had trouble staying up with him.

"We're crossing the same country a lot, Ribaul. You're sure you're onto him?"

"The wolf moves too. He is a smart one. He began to move a couple of hours ago."

They were going along a clear hogback ridge when Ribaul stopped.

"The wolf scent is completely gone, Mr. Pidgeon," he said.

"How could that happen, Ribaul?"

"I'm afraid to ask myself how it could happen. Now I get a scent. Ah, I don't know how to say this. What I get now is a man scent instead of a wolf scent."

"Well hickory-handled hell, Ribaul! Let's go after the man then!" They went after him. But a man is harder to follow than a wolf is. He hasn't the same pungency to him. Pidgeon and Ribaul separated at a rock cone with jack pines growing out of it; it was a place where crows roosted. Ribaul went around it to the north, and Pidgeon to the south. Pidgeon heard Ribaul whistling and he called to him to be quiet. Then he heard him no more.

Pidgeon was coming into the throat of a draw a quarter mile beyond there when he picked up a scent. It wasn't a man's scent. It was a wolf's. Strong!

"Ribaul, this way!" Pidgeon called. There was something in the brush, large and low, heavy gray and flash-white. "Ribaul, this way!" Pidgeon called again.

It wasn't possible for a shot yet. The thing moved just often enough and far enough to prevent that. And it couldn't be seen clearly. "Ribaul, you fool, down this way!"

Ribaul came from the north out of a tangle of rocks and brush.

"He's in the brush just beyond us, Ribaul," Pidgeon said. "Even I can get the wolf scent here."

"Yes, he's changed again. He's wolf now. I've been watching him a long time. He's a wolf now, but for a while he seemed to be something else."

"What are you talking about, Frenchy?"

"It's hard to get the outline of a thing in the brush."

They went after the animal then, never losing him again, never quite getting in a position for a shot at the canny beast. It was a ten-hour, frustrating, foot-smashing, weary chase. But the wolf wasn't hard to follow even in the dark. It was a gray wolf that sometimes flashed white in the clear night. A dozen times they were near to having shots, but every time the animal melted away and had to be picked up again.

It didn't really move fast, but it was tireless, and it kept them at a dogged run most of the night. Several times, as if by mutual agreement, both parties stopped and rested. The wolf with the white slash on the top of his head was always to be seen, and the men never took their eyes off it in the pulsating dark. Pidgeon got a close look at it only once, and the wolf seemed to look at him with a man's eyes.

"He's an odd one, Ribaul," Pidgeon said. "A wolf that sometimes travels in a truck and hunts with a rifle, he isn't the kind of wolf you meet every day."

"Only a special kind of wolf can do that. And I won't say what it's called."

"If you don't want to look down the wrong end of a rifle barrel at a cross-eyed sheriff, you'd better say what it's called. What kind of wolf might do that?"

"Loup-garou?"

"What's its name in English?"

"I don't know. I never heard it in English."

They went after the wolf again for what was left of the night. Pidgeon, using Ribaul as his left hand, working with definite aim, pinned the wolf against the very wide, clear slope he couldn't have missed. It was then that Ribaul, who should have been a hundred yards away, nudged Pidgeon's arm. The shot went high, and the wolf was away.

"Ribaul, you open-ended idiot! If you've only a notion, it better be a good one."

"Mr. Pidgeon, I'm ashamed to say what it was."

"You made me miss the wolf! Why? Why?"

"I had a sudden notion that he wasn't a wolf at all. I looked at his eyes, and at the blaze on his head, and I wasn't sure whether he was a wolf or a man. If you'd have killed a man, there'd have been trouble."

"Ribaul, *couldn't you see what he was?*"

"I could see every hair on him. I could even see the pulse move at his throat. But he looked like a man that I know. He is a man sometimes. He is *loup-garou.*"

"Tell me what that is, Ribaul, or, trouble or not, I'll kill me a man right here."

"Oh, he's a wolf part of the time. And sometime's he's a man. If I am wrong, then I have caused you to miss a wolf. If I am right, then I have saved you from killing a man."

"Let it go. Since it spent the night mostly on its own terms, it may have brought us near where it dens."

"A male will hardly den this time of year. Just lay up somewhere in cool rocks."

"Let's find out where. I'll take the draw. You take the thicket. I'll show you that I'm not such a bad tracker myself."

And Pidgeon wasn't a bad tracker. He picked up deep and firm wolf tracks almost at once. The hair was prickling on his neck with the feeling that the wolf *intended* to leave tracks that could be followed. There was a big old truck half-hidden in some shrub in the rocky meadow just above the draw. "Ah, the wolf's own transport," Pidgeon grinned the words to himself.

It was moist in the draw, and the wolf, from his tracks, was very

heavy. It would have gone far over a hundred and fifty pounds, and whoever heard of a wolf that big? The draw narrowed sharply, and the wolf kept to it. The soft, white lime sand on its floor left very clear tracks, *show tracks*, the biggest wolf tracks ever seen, and the clearest.

The wolf at a slouch-walk leaves the hind foot ahead of the front-foot track. It is a five-toed track of the front foot, and a four-toed track of the hind foot (one of the back toes is small and rudimentary, and it does not track). The front paw is always the broader of the two. This wolf had very heavy front paws, almost as broad as those of a mountain lion.

It was the coolest hour out of the twenty-four, and almost daylight.

Front foot, back foot left; front foot, back foot right, Pidgeon found himself chanting it. Front foot, back foot left; front foot, back — and that is where the sequence stopped —

Stopped completely. Pidgeon stood erect and closed his eyes for a moment. Nothing that he'd ever known had prepared him for this.

"The light is still pretty dim, and besides I'm tired," he told himself, but he lied when he told it. He reasoned with himself a moment, and then he picked up the trail again.

Well, it *was* a back foot, in a manner of speaking. In other circumstances there wouldn't be anything frightening about such a well-known sort of print. But the print wsn't that of a wolf's back foot. Nor was the next one, nor the next. The wolf tracks had turned into man tracks. Well, the world has to have its back broken somewhere.

Pidgeon followed the tracks of the man till the draw ended in a rock spread and no more tracking was possible. Pidgeon called to Ribaul. After a while the Frenchman came to him from an upper thicket. Ribaul took it all in with quick eyes, and he rubbed his head.

"Was Jules Lamotte here with you?" he asked Pidgeon. "Why didn't I see him if he was here?"

"I haven't seen Lamotte for several weeks," Pidgeon said with difficulty. "I haven't seen him a dozen times in my life. I hardly know him. Are those his tracks? They may be old tracks. I believe that he lives near here. He may have made those tracks yesterday on his normal business."

"He does live near here," Ribaul said. "And his tracks were *not* made yesterday. They were made short minutes ago."

"I didn't see him, Ribaul. What kind of man is he really?"

"He has a laugh with hair on it."

"That's no crime, though perhaps it should be. And what else?"

"He's a man who has mutton, and does not keep sheep. And this is his place we come to."

Jules Lamotte was a big, sharp-muzzled man, with a sudden slash of white in his mouse-gray hair. He met Pidgeon and Ribaul in his kitchen doorway.

"You are halfway welcome," he said. "Did you kill the wolf?"

"No, the wolf still escapes us," Pidgeon said. "Didn't you see us, and the wolf? We found your tracks, just where we lost those of the wolf, fresh tracks."

"I have not been out of my house last night or this morning,"

"Then someone else has been wearing your feet," Ribaul challenged.

"What? Both of them?" Lamotte asked with a touch of harsh humor.

"Yes. Or all four," Ribaul said.

"Can you explain what he means, Mr. Sheriff?" Lamotte asked.

"Ribaul believes that the wolf is *loup-garou*. I understand that it's French."

"It's a child's story, and not necessarily French," Lamotte said. "Madelon, make breakfast for two new-come ones! Madelon! Do you hear?"

"I hear," she called from within, and she came to the kitchen. "Oh, for them," she said. "All right."

Pidgeon had never seen Lamotte's wife before. She was a good-looking woman. She made a heavy country breakfast for them and they were soon sat down to it.

"How is it that you have mutton, Lamotte?" Pidgeon asked him. "I did not know that you had sheep,"

"I do not. How is it that I have coffee? I have no plantation."

"Who are the three men in the picture there on the wall?" Pidgeon asked.

Lamotte looked at it puzzled.

"Oh, my brothers, I suppose," he said. "I don't remember ever seeing that picture before." Why should a man say "my brothers, I suppose"? They were three bristly men in the picture, and they looked enough like Jules Lamotte to be his brothers.

"They say you left your old place because of some kind of trouble," Pidgeon said.

"They don't even know where my old place was," Lamotte answered. "Yet they're partly right. A settled man doesn't change his abode in midlife if everything is peaceful."

"Yours is one of the places that the wolf hasn't bothered, Lamotte."

"What could he bother here? I

raise grain and cattle, not sheep."

"Did you hear anything, Lamotte, during the night and dawn?"

"You two men clattering around the rocks out there, trying to clatter quietly."

They ate pancakes and drank a little morning whisky and were not really unfriendly.

"Is that your big truck in the rock pasture?" Pidgeon asked.

"Yes, I seldom use it though."

"Does anyone use it?"

"Why would anyone use that big old truck?"

"Have you an enemy, Lamotte?"

"I think so, yes. Or a friend who intends to kill me."

"Will you tell me who it is?"

"No. It's a private matter. You are welcome to stay. I must go check on a calf." Lamotte went out of the house, walking stiffly as though he had perpetually sore ankles.

"He lied to you, my husband," Madelon Lamotte told them some time after Jules had gone. "He said that he had not been out of the house the night past. Yet he did leave yesterday, and he was gone the whole of last night. He arrived back in a daze, but only just before you two came. I feel that he isn't well, even he isn't sane. It's though he had two different natures."

"Which two different natures, Mrs. Lamotte?" Pidgeon asked.

But Jules Lamotte came back in then, and Madelon did not tell what she meant.

Later that day, after he had slept for a few hours, Pidgeon got certain equipment and then drove and walked to the last draw in which he had tracked the night before. He had to know whether those tracks would appear different by daylight.

They didn't. The only things that struck Pidgeon in a different light were his own tracks of the night before. How he had skittered about when he came to the spot where the tracks changed! What a wild little dance he had done!

But all else was as he had remembered it. There were the wolf tracks; and then there were the man tracks. There was no other ending to the wolf tracks and no other beginning to the man tracks. If one set didn't turn into the other in full stride, then evidence was meaningless. Pidgeon took pictures of them from different angles, thinking that the various shadings might tell something. He also went and got pictures and tire tracks of Jules Lamotte's heavy truck. Then he drove to Yellow Knife and went to the store.

All of them were there, Scroggins the storekeeper, Kenrad, Ragley, Tadler, Corbey, Boston,

Danby. The store was the club, the place where they talked and played dominoes and checkers.

"I've been out with the French tracker after the wolf," Pidgeon said.

"We will help you skin him," Tadler grunted. "Let's see how big he really is."

"We can't skin it till we kill it. I had one shot. Ribaul made me miss."

"Why'd he do that?" storekeeper Scroggins asked.

"He said that it was *loug-garou* and that if I shot it I'd be shooting a man."

"I say shoot it anyhow," Tadler harangued. "Get rid of the wolf no matter what he turns into. I say shoot every man that even looks a little bit like a wolf."

"Then I'd have to shoot several of you here present," Pidgeon said.

"It's mostly the French that turn into wolves," Ragley told them. "The French are superstitious; they believe in that stuff. Down in Beauregard Parish one time there was a big wolf came into the country with a funny look in his eyes and a white blaze on his head."

Pidgeon was startled. Had Ragley known that the present wolf had a funny look in his eyes and a white blaze on his head? Another man had come into the store quietly.

Pidgeon didn't look around, but he knew that it was the man with the funny look in his eyes and the white blaze on his head. There was also the impression of several other men now standing outside the store.

"The hardest thing, when a man turns into a wolf, is right at the ankle bone," Corbey said. Corbey was a crafty old swindler and he was about to wrap his tongue around something rich. "It hurts there at the ankle. You see, what appears to be a wolf's knee has its bend opposite to a man's, but that is really the same as a man's ankle bone, not his knee bone. The wolf's real knee is hidden up in the haunch. When a man turns into a wolf his ankle bone has to expand about eight inches. You find a man who turns a lot and you'll find a fellow who always has sore ankles.

"The rest is easy. Watch one change sometime and see how slick he does it. He kind of softens his skull, and part of it flows forward and part of it flows back. Then he lets his eyes roll around to the sides of his head. He sharpens his muzzle and does all the other little things. Then he goes down on all fours just like he was unhinging himself. He begins to shiver: that's the way he brings the hair out of his hide. After that he lacks just one thing for him to be a total wolf."

Well, someone had to ask it.

"What's the one thing he needs to make himself into a total wolf," Pidgeon asked, "after he has gone down on all fours and shivered his hair to the outside of his hide?"

"The tail," said Corbey, and licked his lips. "It sounds like a cork popping when he brings it out. The tail's the last thing to go back in too. And after he changes quite a few times, man to wolf and wolf to man, why his tail gets where it won't go all the ways back in anymore. I maintain, Sheriff, that there's a way to put this knowledge to test."

What was Corbey getting at? There was dark lightning bouncing around that store. There was musky excitement beginning to rise, and the feeling got riper by the minute. Something was brewing, and it was these fellows' kind of thing.

"Men, this becomes a community effort," Corbey was crowing. "Sheriff, we got to get every man-jack in the neighborhood together and make them strip. Sheriff, *one of those men is going to have a tail!*"

Coruscating coon dogs! Was Corbey kidding? Dammit, would the laughter never come? What was holding off the howling glee? One or two of them may have quaked a bit, but they would not be caught in open laughter. They were all long-faced and serious.

"Sheriff, I believe that it's your duty to set the example," Ragley gruffed.

"Drop your pants, Sheriff!" Boston barked. "We'll have first look at you."

Were these men serious? They looked murderous in their intensity

"I'll not be first," Pidgeon said. "I stand on privilege. I'll be last."

"Nobody leaves alive till he's been examined and certified," storekeeper Scroggins stated harshly, and he produced a long gun from behind his counter. "Who'll be number one, do the manly thing, and prove he's not the wolf?"

"By damn I will!" Ragley swore. Ragley was never a backward man. He dropped his pants. The examination was thorough and minute. Clothed or stripped, Ragley was curiously shaped, awkwardly articulated, sometimes coming to points or knobs. But he didn't have a tail.

"You, boy," Scroggins called to an eleven-year-old who looked in. "This is a man's meeting for men only. Boy, go out and round up every man in the neighborhood. Tell them to come to the store and be examined right now."

"Whaffor?"

"Tell them that we're going to nail down the wolf. Tell them, boy, that we're going to find out which one of them wears the tail." The boy left running."

Boston dropped his pants. No tail. Then it was like a dam bursting the way the pants and overalls came down in a sudden flood. The new men were already coming in. There must have been thirty of the finest men in Royal Parish who dropped their pants within thirty seconds. Tadler, one of the prime inspectors, was near-sighted and he had to get very close to the work. But he was conscientious and he never left a man till he was sure. No tail in the lot. Ribaul came in.

"Ribaul, have you a tail?" Scroggins thundered at him, gun in hands.

"No. I never learned how to grow one." But Ribaul submitted when it was explained to him. He didn't have a tail either.

"And now you, Sheriff Pidgeon," Scroggins said in his gun-barrel voice.

"This isn't happening. This can't be happening," Pidgeon moaned.

But Pidgeon submitted, in that most shameful moment of his life. And, to the disappointment of many, he didn't have a tail either. He'd made all the fuss over nothing.

"And what are you waiting for?" Ragley asked the big Frenchman who was standing there. It was the man with the funny eyes and the white blaze on his head, the man Jules Lamotte.

"For tobacco, salt, coffee, rubbing alcohol, nails, several things," big Lamotte said. "I've no more time. Your games should be finished by now."

"How about some mutton, Frenchy?" storekeeper Scroggins asked.

"No. I have plenty of mutton," Lamotte said. Scroggins, the gun under his arms, filled the Frenchman's order from a written list.

"Why don't you drop your pants like an honest man, Frenchy?" Ragley asked. "Don't you get the idea? Didn't you hear us and see us?"

It was like an explosion the way Lamotte laughed, like a wolf laugh, a laugh with hair on it. There were three big men waiting in the doorway for Lamotte. Pidgeon believed that they were the three men in the picture in Lamotte's kitchen. Lamotte got his things.

"What's the rubbing alcohol for?" Ragley asked him.

"I have sore ankles," Jules Lamotte said quietly, "always sore ankles." Lamotte left them there, going out with his high-gaited walk. And if he had a tail, it was still in his pants when he left.

"He's your man, Sheriff," Kenrad said. "He's your wolf."

Pidgeon looked after Lamotte. Then he was startled. Lamotte was walking alone. The three men were

not with him, and there was nowhere they could have gone.

Pidgeon walked out. A ways further on, he met and spoke briefly with Clela Ragley, the young daughter of rough Ragley himself. She had an idea about using a wolf bait. Pidgeon went on about other things. He would solve this yet. After you've been a fool a couple of times, it gets easier. So he made a fool of himself again after dark.

Pidgeon met Clela Ragley by the road in the dark that night. She went into that rough double section of land that seemed to be the hold of the wolf. And Pidgeon followed her at about fifty yards.

And the wolf was there. Turpentined tomcats, how he was there! The whole air was full of the wolf. Pidgeon was downwind of it, and now he moved to full windward of the wolf. It was very near, and Clela was upwind of it. She waited in the clear, and Pidgeon watched what would happen. He had a rifle cradled in his elbow, and he wondered what he would do if it was a man and not a wolf that they flushed. Pidgeon again had the feeling that the setting was contrived, that the wolf was announcing his presence as powerfully as possible. Whom was baiting whom here?

The wolf came out of the rocks and moved towards Clela. There was confusion as the animal seemed to have three shadows following it. Pidgeon could see its shagginess before he could make out its form. There was the feel of menace, of murder in the making. Pidgeon caught the white blaze on the head of it before he could make out much else. It erected itself curiously, and so did its three shadows.

And Pidgeon was quite surprised to see that it was now a man on two legs, though losing none of its fierceness or shagginess. It was the wolfish Jules Lamotte with a rifle on his arm. Oh, and that white blaze on his head!

Pidgeon slipped his own rifle onto ready as he heard the sudden rough voice of Jules. He watched Clela put her hand to her mouth and totter, trembling like a staked-out lamb. He'd kill Lamotte if he touched the girl. Man or wolf, he'd kill him!

Lamotte came within a foot of the girl, and Pidgeon could see Clela's eyes widen to great balls of white. Then suddenly the fire was banked and the storm died.

"This is a very rough place to be at night, young lady," Lamotte said in a tight voice. "Your father wouldn't care if you were abroad here, but you should care. I all but shot you. I might not have made sure. Walk on down the road,

young girl, and then follow it to your home. I'll keep watch on you as you go. Ah, but I see that I'm not needed in this. Is it not the sheriff who slips up so clumsy and heavy-footed behind me?"

"I'm the sheriff, Lamotte," Pidgeon said. "And what are you doing here?"

"Walking on my own land. That's all you need to know. Why are you here?" Lamotte seemed to have invisible or shadowy supporters with him. Not to be seen now, though, and not certainly to be smelled either as men or wolves. Present to extra senses or to imaginations.

"I'm hunting a wolf-man," Pidgeon said. "I came near to killing you for him. It mightn't have been a mistake if I'd done it."

"And I also lacked only a little of killing," Lamotte said, "and you interrupted me. Yes, you were very close to the wolf-man, Sheriff. So was I. But this time it was you and the girl who nudged my elbow and prevented my shooting. Why do you hunt with an *agneau?*"

"With what?"

"With a little lamb staked out. Is that how you hunt a wolf-man?"

On the next day there came new evidence against Jules Lamotte. Ribaul brought Madelon Lamotte to Sheriff Pidgeon. "Mr. Pidgeon, Mr. Pidgeon!" Ribaul called from outside. Ribaul never knocked. He followed the country custom of standing in front of a house and calling out. Pidgeon opened the door to them. "I'm here. Come in," he said.

"I will leave her with you," Ribaul said, and he left.

"It is only to talk to you a little," Madelon spoke when she was inside. She was very fair for a country woman, and her hair was the color of polished walnut.

"I hope that you can tell me something to clear things up," Pidgeon said.

"No. What I tell will clear nothing up. It will tie it all in knots like snakes. It is possible that I am mad, Sheriff. If that is so, then lock me up at once. Better to be locked up than torn to pieces. Better to be a mad woman than a dead one. But I am selfish: it is of my husband that I must think. For myself I no longer care if I am mad, or even if I am dead. It is the wolf in everything. Everything that I eat or drink has the wolf in it. I see it everywhere, I see it in our yard and house. But wait! Before I speak more, promise that you will not kill him."

"Not kill the wolf?"

"Not kill my husband Jules. Promise that you will not kill him."

"I promsie nothing. Tell me what you came to tell."

"I see the wolf in our yard. I

scream for my husband. When he comes, the wolf is gone, and he says that I only imagine it. Then I see it again and I say 'Look, Jules, look!" But then my husband is gone."

"They are never both there at once?"

"Never. And Jules says that he does not see the wolf at all, but I see it a dozen times. Jules goes out at night. Oh, if I only know where he goes! Then I begin to smell the wolf, strongly and all the time. And in my own house! Yesterday I come on the wolf face to face in my own house, in the room that we call the cool pantry. I screamed, I ran to my own room, I blocked the door with a trunk. I lay on the bed in terror. I am a country woman. I have seen wolves. Another wolf I would chase like a big dog. This is not like another wolf. I hear it pant at my door. I hear its feet go back and forth. Its teeth scrape the balks of the door and they seem to splinter and tear. Then I feel a change as if it is two things at once.

"Then it opened the door as if the trunk against it was a toy. It opened the door and came in. It stood at my bed, and I am too frightened even to open my eyes. 'My poor Madelon,' said my husband Jules, for he was the one standing there. 'What has frightened you? Have you dreamed of the wolf again?'

"He is there, my husband, and there is no wolf. 'I have seen him, Jules, in this very house,' I say. 'You know that is impossible,' Jules tells me, and he comforts me. But as I looked I saw something, and I froze. His left hand was only becoming a hand again. The claws were going back in and the fingers were coming out. The heaviest part of the hair was disappearing. It had not been a hand a moment before. Is that possible?

"No. That is not possible," Pidgeon said. But what was possible? "Mrs. Lamotte, are you afraid of your husband?"

"Not when he is my husband. Only when he is the wolf."

"Go back and stay with him today and tonight. Tell him not to leave his house at all for any reason. If the wolf shows in the open tonight, we will kill it. And if the cornered wolf turns into a man, we will still kill it."

She left then. She still had her bearing and her beauty, for all her distraught state. Pidgeon had wanted to ask her one more thing.

But how do you go about asking a woman whether her husband has a tail?

A little later in the day, Clela Ragley came to the sheriff.

"I have proof now for sure," she said. "Jules Lamotte is the wolf."

"Have you really anything to go on? Anything tangible?"

"I think he got pretty tangible

with me. I dreamed of the wolf and the man just before dawn this morning. It was a real liver-twister of a dream. He was Jules the man and he came at me. Then he was Jules the wolf as he closed in. He fastened on my shoulder with those terrible teeth, and I only awakened in time or I would have been done to death by him."

"Clela, you half-pint witch! Won't you ever grow up! I want tangible evidence."

"Is this what you call tangible?" she asked. She showed it to him with a sudden motion, and it set him to shaking. He wasn't sure whether it was Clela herself who had this effect on him, or the horrible wounds. She'd been bitten and mauled pretty badly where she dropped her sack dress off her shoulders. They were deep, tearing bites that had gone livid, two of one sort and one of another. They could be deadly.

"Clela, where did you get those?" Pidgeon asked in amazement.

"I told you," she said. Pidgeon wouldn't accept it. He'd close his ears and not hear such stuff. Clela was talking some more, but he only heard the end of it.

"After you kill him, Sheriff," she said, "then cut off his head and bring it here and see if it doesn't match the bites. That way we can be sure."

The wolf had struck again the night before and many sheep were missing. So it had to be the wolf hunt all the way now.

"Why do you cut those funny notches into the lead part of your bullets?" Ribaul asked Pidgeon before they started out.

"So I'll know which shots I shot," Pidgeon said. "I want to be clear on that."

They went after the wolf as night came on, four of them in one bunch, Ribaul, Ragley, Pidgeon and Kenrad. These four men could track. They knew the country, and they knew animals.

"I hear, Ribaul, that you were once with a carnival," Ragley said as they went along in loose skirmish. "I hear that they paid to see you and thought you were a new kind of animal."

"Were you with a carnival, Ribaul?" Pidgeon asked. "How did Ragley know?"

"I was with a carnival. I was not on exhibit. I worked. I cared for animals. I had a tame bobcat and a tame coon and a tame bear."

"Did you have a tame wolf?" Ragley asked.

"No. There is no such thing as a tame wolf."

"Why are you carrying the stake and the maul, Ribaul?" Kenrad asked. "Are they your idea, or the sheriff's?"

"What matter? He says it

doesn't hurt to have them, so long as I'm the one to carry them."

"You'll have to catch the wolf, Ribaul, before you can kill him with those."

"They are not to kill the wolf with. They are to make him stay dead."

The wolf was there all right, in a general area. For a long time it did not seem to move at all. It waited for them to come. Then, as though by sudden decision, it began to move. So did the men, with absolute sureness now.

They hunted without dogs, and they were quickly onto the wolf much closer than they could have got with dogs. They had the wolf boxed into the same rough double section of land where Pidgeon and Ribaul had hunted him before. They had him in the poke, and there was nothing left but to pull the drawstring.

It was clear moonlight, and they had him. If he had broke to the open, he would have to display himself for an easy shot against the clear hillside. If he stayed in the thicket, they would beat him out. If he holed in anywhere, they would burn him over and dig him out. He was big and dangerous, but they had him tight.

The wolf broke to the open hill, and he turned as if at bay. And it was as if three shadows of him turned also. He was as big as a grown puma. He'd go more than two hundred pounds. He actually sparked fire off his raised hackles, as a lynx at bay is said to do. He had his high white blaze and his eyes of a man, and he looked at them with fevered hate.

Ribaul and Ragley must have hated to let it go to another. But it was the sheriff's case, and so it was his shot. Sheriff Pidgeon shot the wolf clearly, right at the edge of that white blaze on the head. And one shot did it.

"Now he turn to a man," Ribaul said. "Watch him turn as he dies. See how he begin to shiver and turn. This will show that he is *loup-garou.*"

But he didn't turn. He'd been a wolf, and he stayed a wolf.

"He's dead," said Pidgeon. "That lays one ghost, for me at least."

"Here is the maul, here is the stake," Ribaul said. "Use them, Sheriff."

"You really believe in that, do you, Ribaul?" Pidgeon asked.

"That if you drive the stake through the wolf's heart he'll stay dead? I believe it."

"Somebody find where that hellish noise is coming from," Pidgeon sputtered, "and put a stop to it." There had been an awful wailing going on since the wolf was shot.

Pidgeon drove the stake of bois

d'arc wood in through the chest of the wolf at the line just behind and under the front shoulder, so as to go through the heart, or at least to make the fiction of going through the heart. It was a very tough wolf and it took some driving. But the stake had been sharpened as only tough bois d'arc wood can be. Staking the wolf became like an orgasm to all the men.

"He'll stay dead now," said Ragley.

"Then why doesn't that damned noise stop if the wolf is dead?" Pidgeon asked. The noise was coming from the farmhouse of Jules Lamotte. Pidgeon's feet recognized the approach before his eyes did. They had been less than two hundred yards from the house when Pidgeon had killed the wolf. They went to it.

The kitchen door was open and there was a light inside. It was Madelon Lamotte standing in the doorway with her hair streaming. The hellish noise was her screaming. It went on and on to chill your blood.

Pidgeon got there first, white-faced and with a crazy clatter as he caromed off objects in the dark kitchen yard.

"Mrs. Lamotte! For the love of God what is wrong? Mrs. —"

But Sheriff Pidgeon never finished, nor did he get all the way through the kitchen door. He staggered back with crimsoned vision. He went down crazily and hard.

"Killer!" screamed Madelon Lamotte. "Murder my husband! I'll —"

Pidgeon had risen dazed and made for the door again, there to be met by a second impact of sound and another shredding blow. It was Madelon who clawed him like a lioness and left a bloody swath as she swung. She had felled him twice. She had nearly taken his head off, and a great part of his face was surely left beneath her fingernails.

Ragley and Kenrad had her restrained in some fashion after a while. The screaming fell to a series of splitting sobs.

"Now what is this?" Pidgeon demanded. "Hold her, dammit!" He wasn't sure how badly he was injured. He could barely see.

"You lick-spit sheriff, you kill my husband!" Madelon howled. "Kill me then, men, but give me two seconds with that white-faced fool first. We see who kill who —"

Ragley had her pinned down then, and Kenrad went deeper into the house to see what had happened. He didn't have to go very deep.

"In here, Sheriff," he called then. "In the little room off the kitchen here. It's worse than you think."

Pidgeon followed in. Jules Lamotte lay dead in that little earth-floored room off the kitchen that is called the cool pantry. He had been shot in the head, right at the edge of that white blaze that so resembled that of the wolf.

What was even more weirdly wrong was that Jules Lamotte had a stake of bois d'arc driven through his chest and into the dirt floor of the little pantry. And Madelon was still spitting fury in the kitchen. It seemed wild to try to reason with her in her state, but it must be attempted.

"Tell me who did this thing, Mrs. Lamotte," Sheriff Pidgeon begged.

"You vile pig, you did it! Spitting hypocrite, you killed my husband! Right in that room. Just minutes ago. You shot him, and you drove a stake through his heart. Let me at that sheriff, man!"

"I couldn't have," Pidgeon said weakly. "Ragley, hold her! Where is Ribaul all this time?"

"But I am right here all this time," Ribaul banged out the words. "Here, let me hold her. I have a way with wild animals. She'll not get loose from me."

Back in the cool pantry Pidgeon swooped down on dead Jules Lamotte and began to do a thing that was illegal, outrageous, really mad. Kenrad and Ragley tried to stop him, but he was not to be stopped. Working feverishly he began to cut into the starred head of Lamotte with a jackknife. He went in after the shot that had killed the man. He grasped a meat cleaver from the pantry wall and used it as a pry and wedge. The shot had spent itself in smashing through the bone at an angle and was barely inside the brain case. Pidgeon brought it out and held it in his hand.

"It's my shot," Pidgeon said. "I marked my shots before starting out tonight. I wanted to be certain of what ones I shot."

"Well, then, it's certain that you shot this one," Ragley said. "It's certain that you killed Jules Lamotte."

Pidgeon left the Lamotte farmhouse and took Ragley and Kenrad back to the wolf-kill site. Pidgeon wandered back and forth, and the other two looked at him puzzled.

"What are we looking for?" Ragley asked.

"For the spot where the wolf was killed!" Pidgeon said wildly.

"We're standing on the spot, Sheriff. Those are the scuff marks. There's the hole where your stake went through the wolf and into the ground. Wipe the blood out of your eyes, Sheriff. She near took your eyes out with her claws."

"But where's the wolf?" Pid-

geon asked in a daze.

"Sheriff, are you crazy?" Ragley asked. "You saw Lamotte dead. How could the wolf be here and he there? Lamotte *was* the wolf. Lamotte is the dead wolf now."

"No. A wolf is a wolf and a man is a man," Pidgeon insisted. "There has to be a dead wolf around here somewhere."

"You can find out tomorrow, Sheriff," Ragley said. "It's going to be another hot one tomorrow. Give that sun seven or eight hours on this rock pasture, and you can find the wolf if he is here. The buzzards will be turning in the air over him and shuttling down on him. A dead wolf would get real ripe in the sun if he was here. But he isn't. We all know who killed the wolf and the man with the same shot. Let's call it a night."

Well, a man had been shot to death, and Pidgeon himself was Pidgeon's only suspect. But why, leaving the unnatural stories out of it, should anyone want to kill Jules Lamotte?

Possibly for his gold coins. Likely Lamotte hadn't any gold coins, but one of the stories was that he had piles of them somewhere. Or possibly for his more-than-handsome wife. Since he'd seen her in a fury, Pidgeon had known that Madelon might have enough fire in her to draw a man to murder.

Or Lamotte could have been killed because he was really stealing the farmers' sheep. But there were wild elements left over from all these motives. Why couldn't Lamotte have been killed in a rational manner?

"Where is the wolf?" Pidgeon quizzed himself. "Where is my maul that drove the stake or stakes. Why was only one of my marked bullets shot? Oh, I remember the maul now."

They had told Pidgeon that his maul, overlooked at first, had been found on the earth floor of the cool pantry in Lamotte's farmhouse, right beside dead Lamotte.

In the hot afternoon of the new day Pidgeon went to check on the buzzards. The sun should have done its work. The wolf, if he still lay in the rocky pasture, would be ripe. There were a couple of buzzards wheeling near where it should be. Not quite near enough though. They seemed rather to be above the Lamotte farmstead.

There were two of the buzzards in the air and two of them down on the eaves of a low shed not ten feet off the Lamotte kitchen. They were gazing with mournful intensity at that near part of the house called the cool pantry where Jules Lamotte (not yet removed, for the wheels turn slowly there) lay dead.

There was a strong wolf scent and man scent mixed. Ragley had said "Lamotte is the dead wolf now." Was Lamotte right?

Ragley, Scroggins, and several other men came out of the Lamotte house. Pidgeon knew that Scroggins was acting in his office of coroner, and that the others had been acting as sworn witnesses.

"Pidgeon, I'm glad you're here," Scroggins cried. "We've decided that it would be best if you arrested yourself for the murder of Jules Lamotte and then appointed an interim sheriff to handle things."

"No. I won't do it," Pidgeon said.

"We decided that it would be next best if we sent for the nearest other sheriff to come and arrest you. Who would he be?"

"Sheriff Bartholdy across the river in Calvados Parish. I think I will go and have a talk with him right now."

Pidgeon went across the river to Calvados Parish. He went to the house of Bartholdy, walked in, and found the man. Sheriff Bartholdy gestured a welcome. Then he left the room. He came back with two bottles of white wine, a can of worms, a pail of minnows, and two fishing poles. He carried them all out to Pidgeon's pickup. The two men loaded in, and Pidgeon drove to a good spot on the red banks of the Red River. They fished there.

"I don't know whether you have heard of it, but there is a puzzling little murder up in my district," Pidgeon said finally.

"Take your line out of the water," Sheriff Bartholdy said. "No man can pay attention to two things at once. Have a drink of the white wine. It loosens the wits. Tell me about it. Who was murdered?"

Pidgeon told about Jules Lamotte being murdered. Bartholdy knew Lamotte from of old. Pidgeon told about the nightmarish coincidences, *loup-garou* stories, wolf tracks, sheep kills, tail hunts, young wife tales, marked bullets, a rifle shot and a stake through a wolf, a shot man and a stake through the man, various things.

"It that all?" Bartholdy asked then. "What is the puzzling aspect that you mentioned? Why do you not simply arrest the two murderers?"

"But *everything* is puzzling about it, Bartholdy!" Pidgeon screeched. "There's the dead man that I couldn't have shot. The stake through his heart that I couldn't have driven. My own marked bullet in his head. Being French, you would be superstitious. So I thought that you might understand about the unearthly aspects of the case. The werewolf stuff, I mean, and all that, and the wolf turning into a man."

"Are you out of your mind, Pidgeon? I never heard such nonsense."

"I tell you that there was a wolf. And there was the man."

"I don't mean that. You said 'Being French, you would be superstitious.' You'd have to be out of your mind to say a thing like that. There can no more be a superstitious Frenchman than there can be dry water or green horses. Think about the implications of that for a long time. Then your little problems will have solved itself."

Pidgeon thought about the implications for quite a while.

"Not a bit superstitious, Bartholdy?" he asked once. "Not a bit?"

"Not a bit," said Bartholdy. "There can be stupid Frenchmen. There can be Frenchmen who rustle sheep. There can be Frenchmen who love other men's wives. There can be evil Frenchmen. But there cannot be superstitious Frenchmen."

"If that's so, then I don't live in the same sort of world as I'd supposed."

"No, not quite the same sort, Pidgeon."

Pidgeon thought about the implications some more. Then he rose with a sigh.

"I never like these things," he said, "but I guess I'd better go make the arrests."

So sheriff Otis Pidgeon drove back to Royal Parish and arrested Ribaul and Madelon Lamotte for the murder of Jules Lamotte.

"How'd you figure it out, Pidgeon?" Ragley asked as Pidgeon and Ragley and Clela Ragley walked over the rock pasture of the events area. "Checked perfect, did it?"

"All but the three shadows," said Pidgeon. "There were always three shadows of the wolf, and of Lamotte. I don't understand them. As to the rest, well here's how I did it. There were a pair of those folks who thought we were easily foxed up here. And because they thought so, they will hang for it. Who was it, I asked, who was clear enough of superstition to use superstition on us? It had to be French folks. You see, Ragley, the French aren't superstitious. But we are."

"Sure we are. How's a redneck going to get any savor in his life if he doesn't spice it up with superstition? The French now, they use garlic instead. Yeah, I can see how they don't have to be superstitious."

"So, Ragley, when everything points to something happening that simply could not happen, then I ask 'Who's trying to make it seem like it happened?' So I pick out stories that will make a lot of things come

clear if the stories are lies."

"Whose stories are that?" Ragley asked.

"Those of Madelon Lamotte. And those of Ribaul."

"She tell you some rousers, Sheriff?"

"She told me a couple of rousers, so convincingly that —"

"I always said it was a mistake for a young man to be sheriff," thirteen-year-old Clela said. "They're too easy taken in by fancy women."

"So I go back a little, Ragley; I asked myself who it was that started all those werewolf stories in the first place? Ribaul, that's who. And Madelon fed kindling to the fire. I myself saw wolf prints turn into man prints, but who was it made me see them?"

"How did Ribaul do the tracks, Pidgeon? That's a stumbler."

"I don't know. He just grins (with his neck in a noose he grins) and says 'A trick, Mr. Pidgeon, a trick.' But with a tame wolf under his control, and husky as he is, he could have leaped down into the draw and had it jump onto his shoulder, or some such. Those tracks were made earlier, when it was still wetter in the draw; it was Ribaul who made me believe that they were more recent or immediate. And Ribaul's old shack was on Lamotte's rough land right near. He kept the wolf there. No wonder that wolf smell always came on so strong when we were near it. It was Ribaul all the way, that old carnival faker who tamed animals. He said that a wolf couldn't be tamed, but he lied."

"But Sheriff, Ribaul isn't smart enough to put all that together."

"He isn't. Madelon is. Ribaul had a tame wolf, but Ribaul *was* the tame wolf of Madelon Lamotte. He followed Madelon and Jules up from south of the river last year and conspired with Madelon to kill Jules. Madelon wanted the younger Ribaul, and Ribaul wanted the farm and money and Madelon. Ribaul was doing a pretty good business in shot sheep while he set the trap for Jules and for the town of Yellow Knife. To rub it in, he hauled the shot sheep in Lamotte's old truck, and all the suspicion fell on Jules. He gave Madelon at least two shot sheep, and she wouldn't tell Jules where she got them. But that was when Jules started to go man-hunting at night. The wolf took out the throat of at least one sheep at every place, and ate a little sheep shoulder."

"When did Ribaul shoot Jules?"

"It was Madelon who shot her husband, in bed. Then she dressed him and carried him to the cool pantry."

"How was it done with your

marked bullet?"

"Ribaul was my helper and had access to my things. He saw me marking the lead shots. He marked one as close to mine as he could, and he substituted it for one of mine. I can tell now, though barely, the one that has his notch instead of mine on it."

"How about the stake?"

"Ribaul cut two bois d'arc stakes as near as possible alike. He gave one to Madelon when he gave her the marked bullet to use. The maul marks don't mean anything. Some one made me see maul marks clearer than they were. Bois d'arc splinters a little bit, but it doesn't take a good mark. The blaze on the wolf's head was a fake. Ribaul had to put it on fresh every time he let the wolf out, but he had sure made it look like Lamotte's blaze. And every wolf looks at you with man's eyes. Notice it next time you trap a wolf. It startles us every time we see it, and then we forget. I had already told Ribaul that I intended to shoot the wolf right on the edge of the blaze, and he knows I'm a good shot. Madelon didn't have to be a very good shot to shoot Jules in the same place at very short range. Madelon was listening for my shot, and she set up that screaming to draw us to the house and away from the wolf, so Ribaul could get it out of the way."

"When did you find out that the wolf was in that shed not ten feet from dead Jules?"

"Damn, I keep seeing three shadows following us even now. It can't be all imagination. Oh, I found that out quite late. I should have known it this noon when I saw the buzzards perched on the eaves. There was the smell of ripe man and ripe wolf together, but I thought it was werewolf."

"Sheriff, why did Lamotte really use so much rubbing alcohol?"

"Like he said, he had sore ankles. But not from turning into a wolf. I believe that Corbey's account of how a man turns into a wolf was borrowed from a Ribaul account. And Ribaul already knew that Jules had sore ankles."

"Then that's all of it, except for the three shadows."

"Yes. But I can't solve the shadows of the wolf, or the shadows of Jules Lamotte. Madelon says that Jules didn't have any brothers or kindred, that there were no such three men visiting him or in the neighborhood at all. She says there was no such picture on their kitchen wall. Well, it isn't there now, and I can't find it. But there's one other loose end, and either you or your daughter here knows the answer. Clela, where did you get those horrible fang marks?"

"I told you once. Say, why don't you cut off Jules' head and bring it

to me? Then we'll see whether the teeth match the teeth marks. Cut off the wolf's head and bring it too. I like to have a lot of heads rolling around."

"Oh, that, Sheriff. Well, Clela here is a violent young girl and she is sometimes plagued by a personal sort of spooks," Ragley said. "Most such spooks just pinch kids and leave them black and blue, but Clela is more violent and she has more violent spooks. The particular devils that haunt her slash her up pretty bad sometimes. It happens to all the women of our family. She'll outgrow it in a year or two. They all do."

"Ragley, you are a prize liar, but sometimes —"

"But sometimes you can't be sure that I'm lying? And you never can be sure when Clela is. Let's leave it like that."

"Oh, it's real," Clela said. "Like your three shadows. They're real too."

Ragley and Clela, both laughing, left the sheriff then and turned towards their own place. And Sheriff Pidgeon walked alone — for a very little while. Then there were three bristly men walking with him. Pidgeon was nervous at the sight of them.

"What are you three men doing here?" Pidgeon asked them. "When did you come back?"

"We came for the burial of our brother Jules," one of the men said.

"But you weren't at the service. And you weren't at the graveside."

"Yes. We were both places."

"Madelon says that there are not any three such men as you," Pidgeon said, trying to make them not be.

"Madelon is only at this minute dead in your jail," said the spokesman of the three, "with man bites and with wolf bites in her throat. She dies for that lie, and for other things. We will not be disowned."

One of the men unhinged himself and went down. He turned rapidly. Yes, the account was true. The tail came last of all, and it popped like a cork when it came out. Pidgeon continued to feel very nervous as he walked with two strange men and one strange wolf in the shaggy daylight of Jules Lamotte's rock meadow.

"You are the pieces left over," Pidgeon said. "Ribaul explained most of the details, but he didn't explain you. He said he didn't believe in your sort of shadows."

"Ribaul is at this minute dead in your jail also, man-bit and wolf-bit. He dies for his unbelief, and for other things."

"For what other things?" Pidgeon asked with a little bit of boldness.

"For knowing too much, and for not knowing enough," the

spokesman said. Another man unhinged himself and went down. He turned quickly. Yes, there was a terrible stretching of the ankle bones. Yes, he shivered his wolf's hair to the outside of his hide with convulsive movements. Yes, the tail came out last of all. Pidgeon was shaking like a quicken tree as he walked with one strange man and two strange wolves.

"Ah, I turn off here," Pidgeon said. "I have some business in this other direction."

"Turn off as much as you will," the man said, "but your feet will continue on course with us." And Pidgeon's feet did continue on the course with the man and the wolves. Then he knew that it was all over with him.

"Why?" he asked. "Why me?"

"As with Ribaul, you know too much and not enough. And we like to work by threes."

"Well, then, how will you do it, as man or as wolf?" Pidgeon demanded shaking. And his feet wouldn't run.

"Ah, they'll find two gashes of one sort and one of another on you," the man said, and he fastened into Pidgeon's throat with long and tearing teeth.

Pidgeon was down on the ground then, and the two wolves had moved onto him to consummate the work. The last bristly man, streaming with Pidgeon's blood, unhinged himself and went down. And turned, Pidgeon watched the turning listlessly as his death closed in on him.

The terrible lengthening of the ankle bones, the softening of the skull with one part of it flowing forward and another part of it flowing backward, the eyes rolling around to the sides of the head, the shivering that brings the wolf hair to the outside, everything that marks the transition from man to beast!

And then there was only one thing needed for that third of the shadow-persons to turn himself into a total wolf. But Pidgeon's vision and life were interfered with, and he never did get to see the tail appear.

NEW SINGLE COPY PRICE

Due to the fact that our distributors were not set up to handle the 95¢ cover price, F&SF's newsstand price had to be set five cents higher than announced in last month's issue. We hope to make up for this difference by offering several special items, such as the new Robert Silverberg novel announced on page 160.

Fritz Leiber is back, with a strange and unsettling story about the flickerings of alternate worlds during a visit to the Empire State Building . . .

Catch That Zeppelin!

by FRITZ LEIBER

This year on a trip to New York City to visit my son, who is a social historian at a leading municipal university there, I had a very unsettling experience. At black moments, of which at my age I have quite a few, it still makes me distrust profoundly those absolute boundaries in Space and Time which are our sole protection against Chaos, and fear that my mind — no, my entire individual existence — may at any moment at all and without any warning whatsoever be blown by a sudden gust of Cosmic Wind to an entirely different spot in a Universe of Infinite Possibilities. Or, rather, into another Universe altogether. And that my mind and individuality will be changed to fit.

But at other moments, which are still in the majority, I believe that my unsettling experience was only one of those remarkably vivid waking dreams to which old people become increasingly susceptible, generally waking dreams about the past, and especially waking dreams about a past in which at some crucial point one made an entirely different and braver choice than one actually did, or in which the whole world made such a decision, with a completely different future resulting. Golden glowing might-have-beens nag increasingly at the minds of some older people.

In line with this interpretation I must admit that my whole unsettling experience was structured very much like a dream. It began with startling flashes of a changed world. It continued into a longer period when I completely accepted the changed world and delighted in it and, despite fleeting quivers of uneasiness, wished I could bask in its glow forever. And it ended in horrors, or nightmares, which I hate to mention, let alone discuss, until I must.

Opposing this dream notion, there are times when I am completely convinced that what happened to me in Manhattan and in a certain famous building there was no dream at all, but absolutely real, and that I did indeed visit another Time Stream.

Finally, I must point out that what I am about to tell you I am necessarily describing in retrospect, highly aware of several transitions involved and, whether I want to or not, commenting on them and making deductions that never once occurred to me at the time.

No, at the time it happened to me — and now at this moment of writing I am convinced that it did happen and was absolutely real — one instant simply succeeded another in the most natural way possible. I questioned nothing.

As to why it all happened to me, and what particular mechanism was involved, well, I am convinced that every man or woman has rare brief moments of extreme sensitivity, or rather vulnerability, when his mind and entire being may be blown by the Change Winds to Somewhere Else. And then, by what I call the Law of the Conservation of Reality, blown back again.

I was walking down Broadway somewhere near 34th Street. It was a chilly day, sunny despite the smog — a bracing day — and I suddenly began to stride along more briskly than is my cautious habit, throwing my feet ahead of me with a faint suggestion of the goose step. I also threw back my shoulders and took deep breaths, ignoring the fumes which tickled my nostrils. Beside me, traffic growled and snarled, rising at times to a machine-gun rata-tat-tat. While pedestrians were scuttling about with that desperate ratlike urgency characteristic of all big American cities, but which reaches its ultimate in New York. I cheerfully ignored that too. I even smiled at the sight of a ragged bum and a fur-coated gray-haired society lady both independently dodging across the street through the hurtling traffic with a cool practiced skill one sees only in America's biggest metropolis.

Just then I noticed a dark, wide shadow athwart the street ahead of me. It could not be that of a cloud, for it did not move. I craned my neck sharply and looked straight up like the veriest yokel, a regular *Hans-Kopf-in-die-Luft* (Hans-Head-in-the-Air, a German figure of comedy).

My gaze had to climb up the giddy 102 stories of the tallest building in the world, the Empire State. My gaze was strangely accompanied by the vision of a gigantic, long-fanged ape making

the same ascent with a beautiful girl in one paw — oh, yes, I was recollecting the charming American fantasy-film *King Kong,* or as they name it in Sweden, *Kong King.*

And then my gaze clambered higher still, up the 222-foot sturdy tower, to the top of which was moored the nose of the vast, breath-takingly beautiful, streamlined, silvery shape which was making the shadow.

Now here is a most important point. I was not at the time in the least startled by what I saw. I knew at once that it was simply the bow section of the German Zeppelin *Ostwald,* named for the great German pioneer of physical chemistry and electrochemistry, and queen of the mighty passenger and light-freight fleet of luxury airliners working out of Berlin, Baden-Baden, and Bremerhaven. That matchless Armada of Peace, each titanic airship named for a world-famous German scientist — the *Mach,* the *Nernst,* the *Humboldt,* the *Fritz Haber,* the French-named *Antoine Henri Becquerel,* the American-named *Edison,* the Polish-named *Sklodowska,* the American-Polish *T. Sklodowska Edison,* and even the Jewish-named *Einstein!* The great humanitarian navy in which I held a not unimportant position as international sales consultant and *Fachman* — I mean expert. My chest swelled with justified pride at this *edel* — noble — achievement of *der Vaterland.*

I knew also without any mind-searching or surprise that the length of the *Ostwald* was more than one half the 1,472-foot height of the Empire State Building plus its mooring tower, thick enough to hold an elevator. And my heart swelled again with the thought that the Berlin *Zeppelinturm* (dirigible tower) was only a few meters less high. Germany, I told myself, need not strain for mere numerical records — her sweeping scientific and technical achievements speak for themselves to the entire planet.

All this literally took little more than a second, and I never broke my snappy stride. As my gaze descended, I cheerfully hummed under my breath *Deutschland, Deutschland uber Alles.*

The Broadway I saw was utterly transformed, though at the time this seemed every bit as natural as the serene presence of the *Ostwald* high overhead, vast ellipsoid held aloft by helium. Silvery electric trucks and buses and private cars innumerable purred along far more evenly and quietly, and almost as swiftly, as had the noisy, stenchful, jerky gasoline-powered vehicles only moments before, though to me now the latter were completely forgotten. About two blocks ahead,

an occasional gleaming electric car smoothly swung into the wide silver arch of a quick-battery-change station, while others emerged from under the arch to rejoin the almost dreamlike stream of traffic.

The air I gratefully inhaled was fresh and clean, without trace of smog.

The somewhat fewer pedestrians around me still moved quite swiftly, but with a dignity and courtesy largely absent before, with the numerous blackamoors among them quite as well dressed and exuding the same quiet confidence as the Caucasians.

The only slightly jarring note was struck by a tall, pale, rather emaciated man in black dress and with unmistakably Hebraic features. His somber clothing was somewhat shabby, though well kept, and his thin shoulders were hunched. I got the impression he had been looking closely at me, and then instantly glancing away as my eyes sought his. For some reason I recalled what my son had told me about the City College of New York — CCNY — being referred to surreptitiously and jokingly as Christian College Now Yiddish. I couldn't help chuckling a bit at that witticism, though I am glad to say it was a genial little guffaw rather than a malicious snicker. Germany in her well-known tolerance and noble-mindedness has completely outgrown her old, disfiguring anti-Semitism — after all, we must admit in all fairness that perhaps a third of our great men are Jews or carry Jewish genes, Haber and Einstein among them — despite what dark and, yes, wicked memories may lurk in the subconscious minds of oldsters like myself and occasionally briefly surface into awareness like submarines bent on ship murder.

My happily self-satisfied mood immediately reasserted itself, and with a smart, almost military gesture I brushed to either side with a thumbnail the short, horizontal black mustache which decorates my upper lip, and I automatically swept back into place the thick comma of black hair (I confess I dye it) which tends to fall down across my forehead.

I stole another glance up at the *Ostwald*, which made me think of the matchless amenities of that wondrous deluxe airliner: the softly purring motors that powered its propellers — electric motors, naturally, energized by banks of lightweight TSE batteries and as safe as its helium; the Grand Corridor running the length of the passenger deck from the Bow Observatory to the stern's like-windowed Games Room, which becomes the Grand Ballroom at night; the other peerless rooms letting off that corridor — the

Gesellschaftsraum der Kapitan (Captain's Lounge) with its dark woodwork, manly cigar smoke and *Damentische* (Tables for Ladies), the Premier Dining Room with its linen napery and silver-plated aluminum dining service, the Ladies' Retiring Room always set out profusely with fresh flowers, the Schwartzwald bar, the gambling casino with its roulette, baccarat, chemmy, blackjack (*vingt-et-un*), its tables for skat and bridge and dominoes and sixty-six, its chess tables presided over by the delightfully eccentric world's champion Nimzowitch, who would defeat you blindfold, but always brilliantly, simultaneously or one at a time, in charmingly baroque brief games for only two gold pieces per person per game (one gold piece to nutsy Nimzy, one to the DLG), and the supremely luxurious staterooms with costly veneers of mahogany over balsa; the hosts of attentive stewards, either as short and skinny as jockeys or else actual dwarfs, both types chosen to save weight; and the titanium elevator rising through the countless bags of helium to the two-decked Zenith Observatory, the sun deck windscreened but roofless to let in the ever-changing clouds, the mysterious fog, the rays of the stars and good old Sol, and all the heavens. Ah, where else on land or sea could you buy such high living?

I called to mind in detail the single cabin which was always mine when I sailed on the *Ostwald — meine Stammkabine.* I visualized the Grand Corridor thronged with wealthy passengers in evening dress, the handsome officers, the unobtrusive ever-attentive stewards, the gleam of white shirt fronts, the glow of bare shoulders, the muted dazzle of jewels, the music of conversations like string quartets, the lilting low laughter that traveled along.

Exactly on time I did a neat *"Links, marschieren!"* ("To the left, march!") and passed through the impressive portals of the Empire State and across its towering lobby to the mutedly silver-glowing date: 6 May 1937 and the time of day: 1:07 P.M. Good! — since the *Ostwald* did not cast off until the tick of three P.M., I would be left plenty of time for a leisurely lunch and good talk with my son, if he had remembered to meet me — and there was actually no doubt of that, since he is the most considerate and orderly minded of sons, a real German mentality, though I say it myself.

I headed for the express bank, enjoying my passage through the clusters of high-class people who thronged the lobby without any unseemly crowding, and placed myself before the doors designated "Dirigible Departure Lounge" and

in briefer German "*Zum Zeppelin.*"

The elevator hostess was an attractive Japanese girl in skirt of dull silver with the DLG, Double Eagle and Dirigible insignia of the German Airship Union emblazoned in small on the left breast of her mutedly silver jacket. I noted with unvoiced approval that she appeared to have an excellent command of both German and English and was uniformly courteous to the passengers in her smiling but unemotional Nipponese fashion, which is so like our German scientific precision of speech, though without the latter's warm underlying passion. How good that our two federations, at opposite sides of the globe, have strong commercial and behavioral ties!

My fellow passengers in the lift, chiefly Americans and Germans, were of the finest type, very well dressed — except that just as the doors were about to close, there pressed in my doleful Jew in black. He seemed ill at ease, perhaps because of his shabby clothing. I was surprised, but made a point of being particularly polite towards him, giving him a slight bow and brief but friendly smile, while flashing my eyes. Jews have as much right to the acme of luxury travel as any other people on the planet, if they have the money — and most of them do.

During our uninterrupted and infinitely smooth passage upward, I touched my outside left breast pocket to reassure myself that my ticket — first class on the *Ostwald!* — and my papers were there. But actually I got far more reassurance and even secret joy from the feel and thought of the documents in my tightly zippered inside left breast pocket: the signed preliminary agreements that would launch America herself into the manufacture of passenger zeppelins. Modern Germany is always generous in sharing her great technical achievements with responsible sister nations, supremely confident that the genius of her scientists and engineers will continue to keep her well ahead of all other lands; and after all, the genius of two Americans, father and son, had made vital though indirect contributions to the development of safe airship travel (and not forgetting the part played by the Polish-born wife of the one and mother of the other).

The obtaining of those documents had been the chief and official reason for my trip to New York City, though I had been able to combine it most pleasurably with a long overdue visit with my son, the social historian, and with his charming wife.

These happy reflections were cut short by the jarless arrival of

our elevator at its lofty terminus on the 100th floor. The journey old love-smitten King Kong had made only after exhausting exertion we had accomplished effortlessly. The silvery doors spread wide. My fellow passengers hung back for a moment in awe and perhaps a little trepidation at the thought of the awesome journey ahead of them, and I — seasoned airship traveler that I am — was the first to step out, favoring with a smile and nod of approval my pert yet cool Japanese fellow employee of the lower echelons.

Hardly sparing a glance toward the great, fleckless window confronting the doors and showing a matchless view of Manhattan from an elevation of 1,250 feet minus two stories, I briskly turned, not right to the portals of the Departure Lounge and tower elevator, but left to those of the superb German restaurant *Krahenest* (Crow's Nest).

I passed between the flanking three-foot-high bronze statuettes of Thomas Edison and Marie Sklodowska Edison niched in one wall and those of Count von Zeppelin and Thomas Sklodowska Edison facing them from the other, and entered the select precincts of the finest German dining place outside the Fatherland. I paused while my eyes traveled searchingly around the room with its restful, dark wood paneling deeply carved with beautiful representations of the Black Forest and its grotesque supernatural denizens — kobolds, elves, gnomes, dryads (tastefully sexy) and the like. They interested me since I am what Americans call a Sunday painter, though almost my sole subject matter is zeppelins seen against blue sky and airy, soaring clouds.

The *Oberkellner* came hurrying toward me with menu tucked under his left elbow and saying, *"Mein Herr!* Charmed to see you once more! I have a perfect table-for-one with porthole looking out across the Hudson."

But just then a youthful figure rose springily from behind a table set against the far wall, and a dear and familiar voice rang out to me with *"Hier, Papa!"*

"Nein, Herr Ober," I smilingly told the head waiter as I walked past him, *"heute hab ich ein Gesellschafter. Mein Sohn."*

I confidently made my way between tables occupied by well-dressed folk, both white and black.

My son wrung my hand with fierce family affection, though we had last parted only that morning. He insisted that I take the wide, dark, leather-upholstered seat against the wall, which gave me a fine view of the entire restaurant, while he took the facing chair.

"Because during this meal I wish to look only on you, Papa," he

assured me with manly tenderness. "And we have at least an hour and a half together, Papa — I have checked your luggage through, and it is likely already aboard the *Ostwald.*" Thoughtful, dependable boy!

"And now, Papa, what shall it be?" he continued after we had settled ourselves. I see that today's special is *Sauerbraten mit Spatzel* and sweet-sour red cabbage. But there is also *Paprikahuhn* and—"

"Leave the chicken to flaunt her paprika in lonely red splendor today," I interrupted him. "*Sauerbraten* sounds fine."

Ordered by my Herr Ober, the aged wine waiter had already approached our table. I was about to give him directions when my son took upon himself that task with an authority and a hostfulness that warmed my heart. He scanned the wine menu rapidly but thoroughly.

"The Zinfandel 1933," he ordered with decision, though glancing my way to see if I concurred with his judgment. I smiled and nodded.

"And perhaps *ein Tropfchen Schnapps*" to begin with?" He suggested.

"A brandy? — yes!" I replied. "And not just a drop, either. Make it a double. It is not every day I lunch with that distinguished scholar, my son."

"Oh, Papa," he protested, dropping his eyes and almost blushing. Then firmly to the bent-backed, white-haired wine waiter, *"Schnapps also. Doppel."* The old waiter nodded his approval and hurried off.

We gazed fondly at each other for a few blissful seconds. Then I said, "Now tell me more fully about your achievements as a social historian on an exchange professorship in the New World. I know we have spoken about this several times, but only rather briefly and generally when various of your friends were present, or at least your lovely wife. Now I would like a more leisurely man-to-man account of your great work. Incidentally, do you find the scholarly apparatus — books, *und so weiter* (et cetera) — of the Municipal Universities of New York City adequate to your needs after having enjoyed those of Baden-Baden University and the institutions of high learning in the German Federation?"

"In some respects they are lacking," he admitted. "However, for my purposes they have proved completely adequate." Then once more he dropped his eyes and almost blushed. "But, Papa, you praise my small efforts far too highly." He lowered his voice. They do not compare with the victory for international industrial relations you yourself have won in a fortnight."

"All in a day's work for the DLG," I said self-deprecatingly, though once again lightly touching my left chest to establish contact with those most important documents safely stowed in my inside left breast pocket. "But now, no more polite fencing!" I went on briskly. "Tell me all about those 'small efforts,' as you modestly refer to them."

His eyes met mine. "Well, Papa," he began in suddenly matter-of-fact fashion, "all my work these last two years has been increasingly dominated by a firm awareness of the fragility of the underpinnings of the good world-society we enjoy today. If certain historically minute key-events, or cusps, in only the past one hundred years had been decided differently — if another course had been chosen than the one that was — then the whole world might now be plunged in wars and worse horrors then we ever dream of. It is a chilling insight, but it bulks continually larger in my entire work, my every paper."

I felt the thrilling touch of inspiration. At that moment the wine waiter arrived with our double brandies in small goblets of cut glass. I wove the interruption into the fabric of my inspiration. "Let us drink then to what you name your chilling insight," I said. *"Prosit!"*

The bite and spreading warmth of the excellent *schnapps* quickened my inspiration further. "I believe I understand exactly what you're getting at..." I told my son. I set down my half-emptied goblet and pointed at something over my son's shoulder.

He turned his head around, and after one glance back at my pointing finger, which intentionally waggled a tiny bit from side to side, he realized that I was not indicating the entry of the *Krahenest,* but the four sizable bronze statuettes flanking it.

"For instance," I said, "if Thomas Edison and Marie Sklodowska had not married, and especially if they had not had their supergenius son, then Edison's knowledge of electricity and hers of radium and other radioactives might never have been joined. There might never have been developed the fabulous T.S. Edison battery, which is the prime mover of all today's surface and air traffic. Those pioneering electric trucks introduced by the *Saturday Evening Post* in Philadelphia might have remained an expensive freak. And the gas helium might never have been produced industrially to supplement earth's meager subterranean supply."

My son's eyes brightened with the flame of pure scholarship. "Papa," he said eagerly, "you are a

genius youself! You have precisely hit on what is perhaps the most important of those cusp-events I referred to. I am at this moment finishing the necessary research for a long paper on it. Do you know, Papa, that I have firmly established by researching Parisian records that there was in 1894 a close personal relationship between Marie Sklodowska and her fellow radium researcher Pierre Curie, and that she might well have become Madame Curie — or perhaps Madame Becquerel, for he too was in that work — if the dashing and brilliant Edison had not most opportunely arrived in Paris in December 1894 to sweep her off her feet and carry her off to the New World to even greater achievements?

"And just think, Papa," he went on, his eyes aflame, "what might have happened if their son's battery had not been invented — the most difficult technical achievement, hedged by all sorts of seeming scientific impossibilities, in the entire millennium-long history of industry. Why, Henry Ford might have manufactured automobiles powered by steam or by exploding natural gas or conceivably even vaporized liquid gasoline, rather than the mass-produced electric cars which have been such a boon to mankind everywhere — not our smokeless cars, but cars spouting all sorts of noxious fumes to pollute the environment."

Cars powered by the danger-fraught combustion of vaporized liquid gasoline! — it almost made me shudder and certainly it was a fantastic thought, yet not altogether beyond the bounds of possibility, I had to admit.

Just then I noticed my gloomy, black-clad Jew sitting only two tables away from us, though how he had got himself into the exclusive *Krahenest* was a wonder. Strange that I had missed his entry — probably immediately after my own, while I had eyes only for my son. His presence somehow threw a dark though only momentary shadow over my bright mood. Let him get some good German food inside him and some fine German wine, I thought generously — it will fill that empty belly of his and even put a bit of a good German smile into those sunken Yiddish cheeks! I combed my little mustache with my thumbnail and swept the errant lock of hair off my forehead.

Meanwhile my son was saying, "Also, Father, if electric transport had not been developed, and if during the last decade relations between Germany and the United States had not been so good, then we might never have gotten from the wells in Texas the supply of natural helium our Zeppelins

desperately needed during the brief but vital period before we had put the artificial creation of helium onto an industrial footing. My researchers at Washington have revealed that there was a strong movement in the U.S. military to ban the sale of helium to any other nation, Germany in particular. Only the powerful influence of Edison, Ford, and a few other key Americans, instantly brought to bear, prevented that stupid injunction. Yet if it had gone through, Germany might have been forced to use hydrogen instead of helium to float her passenger dirigbles. That was another crucial cusp."

"A hydrogen-supported Zeppelin! — ridiculous! Such an airship would be a floating bomb, ready to be touched off by the slightest spark," I protested.

"Not ridiculous, Father," my son calmly contradicted me, shaking his head. "Pardon me for trespassing in your field, but there is an inescapable imperative about certain industrial developments. If there is not a safe road of advance, then a dangerous one will invariably be taken. You must admit, Father, that the development of commercial airships was in its early stages a most perilous venture. During the 1920's there were the dreadful wrecks of the American dirigibles *Roma, Shenandoah,* which broke in two, *Akron,* and *Macon,* the British *R-38,* which also broke apart in the air, and *R-101,* the French *Dixmude,* which disappeared in the Mediterranean, Mussolini's *Italia,* which crashed trying to reach the North Pole, and the Russian *Maxim Gorky,* struck down by a plane, with a total loss of no fewer than 340 crew members for the nine accidents. If that had been followed by the explosions of two or three hydrogen Zeppelins, world industry might well have abandoned forever the attempt to create passenger airships and turned instead to the development of large propeller-driven, heavier-than-air craft."

Monster airplanes, in danger every moment of crash from engine failure, competing with good old unsinkable Zeppelins? — impossible, at least at first thought. I shook my head, but not with as much conviction as I might have wished. My son's suggestion was really a valid one.

Besides, he had all his facts at his fingertips and was complete master of his subject, as I also had to allow. Those nine fearful airship disasters he mentioned had indeed occurred, as I knew well, and might have tipped the scale in favor of long-distance passenger and troop-carrying airplanes, had it not been for helium, the T.S. Edison battery, and German genius.

Fortunately I was able to dump from my mind these uncomfortable speculations and immerse myself in admiration of my son's multisided scholarship. That boy was a wonder! — a real chip off the old block, and, yes, a bit more.

"And now, Dolfy," he went on, using my nickname (I did not mind), "may I turn to an entirely different topic? Or rather to a very different example of my hypothesis of historical cusps?"

I nodded mutely. My mouth was busily full with fine *Sauerbraten* and those lovely, tiny German dumplings, while my nostrils enjoyed the unique aroma of sweet-sour red cabbage. I had been so engrossed in my son's revelations that I had not consciously noted our luncheon being served. I swallowed, took a slug of the good, red Zinfandel, and said, "Please go on."

"It's about the consequences of the American Civil War, Father," he said surprisingly. "Did you know that in the decade after that bloody conflict, there was a very real danger that the whole cause of Negro freedom and rights — for which the war was fought, whatever they say — might well have been completely smashed? The fine work of Abraham Lincoln, Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the Union League Clubs put to naught? And even the Ku Klux Klan underground allowed free reign rather than being sternly repressed? Yes, Father, my thoroughgoing researchings have convinced me such things might easily have happened, resulting in some sort of re-enslavement of the Blacks, with the whole war to be refought at an indefinite future date, or at any rate Reconstruction brought to a dead halt for many decades — with what disastrous effects on the American character, turning its deep simple faith in freedom to hypocrisy, it is impossible to exaggerate. I have published a sizable paper on this subject in the *Journal of Civil War Studies.*"

I nodded somberly. Quite a bit of this new subject matter of his was *terra incognita* to me; yet I knew enough of American history to realize he had made a cogent point. More than ever before, I was impressed by his multifaceted learning — he was indubitably a figure in the great tradition of German scholarship, a profound thinker, broad and deep. How fortunate to be his father. Not for the first time, but perhaps with the greatest sincerity yet, I thanked God and the Laws of Nature that I had early moved my family from Braunau, Austria, where I had been born in 1899, to Baden-Baden, where he had grown up in the ambience of the great new

university on the edge of the Black Forest and only 150 kilometers from Count Zeppelin's dirigible factory in Wurttemberg, at Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance.

I raised my glass of *Kirschwasser* to him in a solemn, silent toast — we had somehow got to that stage in our meal — and downed a sip of the potent, fiery, white, cherry brandy.

He leaned toward me and said, "I might as well tell you, Dolf, that my big book, at once popular and scholarly, my *Meisterwerk,* to be titled *If Things Had Gone Wrong,* or perhaps *If Things Had Turned for the Worse,* will deal solely — though illuminated by dozens of diverse examples — with my theory of historical cusps, a highly speculative concept but firmly footed in fact." He glanced at his wristwatch, muttered, "Yes, there's still time for it. So now —" His face grew grave, his voice clear though small — "I will venture to tell you about one more cusp, the most disputable and yet most crucial of them all." He paused. "I warn you, dear Dolf, that this cusp may cause you pain."

"I doubt that," I told him indulgently. "Anyhow, go ahead."

"Very well. In November of 1918, when the British had broken the Hindenburg Line and the weary German army was defiantly dug in along the Rhine, and just before the Allies, under Marshal Foch, launched the final crushing drive which would cut a bloody swath across the heartland to Berlin —"

I understood his warning at once. Memories flamed in my mind like the sudden blinding flares of the battlefield with their deafening thunder. The company I had commanded had been among the most desperately defiant of those he mentioned, heroically nerved for a last-ditch resistance. And then Foch had delivered that last vast blow, and we had fallen back and back and back before the overwhelming numbers of our enemies with their field guns and tanks and armored cars innumerable and above all their huge aerial armadas of De Haviland and Handley-Page and other big bombers escorted by insect-buzzing fleets of Spads and other fighters shooting to bits our last Fokkers and Pfalzes and visiting on Germany a destruction greater far than our Zeps had worked on England. Back, back, back, endlessly reeling and regrouping, across the devastated German countryside, a dozen times decimated yet still defiant until the end came at last amid the ruins of Berlin, and the most bold among us had to admit we were beaten and we surrendered unconditionally—

These vivid, fiery recollections came to me almost instantaneously.

I heard my son continuing, "At that cusp moment in November, 1918, Dolf, there existed a very strong possibility — I have established this beyond question — that an immediate armistice would be offered and signed, and the war ended inconclusively. President Wilson was wavering, the French were very tired, and so on.

"And if that had happened in actuality — harken closely to me now, Dolf — then the German temper entering the decade of the 1920's would have been entirely different. She would have felt she had not been really licked, and there would inevitably have been a secret recrudescence of pan-German militarism. German scientific humanism would not have won its total victory over the Germany of the — yes! — Huns.

"As for the Allies, self-tricked out of the complete victory which lay within their grasp, they would in the long run have treated Germany far less generously than they did after their lust for revenge had been sated by that last drive to Berlin. The League of Nations would not have become the strong instrument for world peace that it is today; it might well have been repudiated by America and certainly secretly detested by Germany. Old wounds would not have healed because, paradoxically, they would not have been deep enough.

"There, I've said my say. I hope it hasn't bothered you too badly, Dolf."

I let out a gusty sigh. Then my wincing frown was replaced by a brow serene. I said very deliberately, "Not one bit, my son, though you have certainly touched my own old wounds to the quick. Yet I feel in my bones that your interpretation is completely valid. Rumors of an armistice were indeed running like wildfire through our troops in that black autumn of 1918. And I know only too well that if there had been an armistice at that time, then officers like myself would have believed that the German soldier had never really been defeated, only betrayed by his leaders and by red incendiaries, and we would have begun to conspire endlessly for a resumption of the war under happier circumstances. My son, let us drink to your amazing cusps."

Our tiny glasses touched with a delicate ting, and the last drops went down of biting, faintly bitter *Kirschwasser.* I buttered a thin slice of pumpernickel and nibbled it — always good to finish off a meal with bread. I was suddenly filled with an immeasurable content. It was a golden moment, which I would have been happy to have go on forever, while I listened to my son's wise words and fed my satisfaction in him. Yes, indeed, it was a golden nugget of pause in the

terrible rush of time — the enriching conversation, the peerless food and drink, the darkly pleasant surroundings —

At that moment I chanced to look at my discordant Jew two tables away. For some weird reason he was glaring at me with naked hate, though he instantly dropped his gaze —

But even that strange and disquieting event did not disrupt my mood of golden tranquillity, which I sought to prolong by saying in summation, "My dear son, this has been the most exciting though eerie lunch I have ever enjoyed. Your remarkable cusps have opened to me a fabulous world in which I can nevertheless utterly believe. A horridly fascinating world of sizzling hydrogen Zeppelins, of countless evil-smelling gasoline cars built by Ford instead of his electrics, of re-enslaved American blackamoors, of Madame Becquerels or Curies, a world without the T.S. Edison battery and even T.S. himself, a world in which German scientists are sinister pariahs instead of tolerant, humanitarian, great-souled leaders of world thought, a world in which a mateless old Edison tinkers forever at a powerful storage battery he cannot perfect, a world in which Woodrow Wilson doesn't insist on Germany being admitted at once to the League of Nations, a world of festering hatreds reeling toward a second and worse world war. Oh, altogether an incredible world, yet one in which you have momentarily made me believe, to the extent that I do actually have the fear that time will suddenly shift gears and we will be plunged into that bad dream world, and our real world will become a dream —" .

I suddenly chanced to see the face of my watch —

At the same time my son looked at his own left wrist —

"Dolf," he said, springing up in agitation, "I do hope that with my stupid chatter I haven't made you miss —"

I had sprung up too —

"No, no, my son," I heard myself say in a fluttering voice, "but it's true I have little time in which to catch the *Ostwald. Auf Wiedersehn, mein Sohn, auf Wiedersehn!*"

And with that I was hastening, indeed almost running, or else sweeping through the air like a ghost — leaving him behind to settle our reckoning — across a room that seemed to waver with my feverish agitation, alternately darkening and brightening like an electric bulb with its fine tungsten filament about to fly to powder and wink out forever —

Inside my head a voice was saying in calm yet death-knell tones, "The lights of Europe are

going out. I do not think they will be rekindled in my generation—"

Suddenly the only important thing in the world for me was to catch the *Ostwald,* get aboard her before she unmoored. That and only that would reassure me that I was in my rightful world. I would touch and feel the *Ostwald,* not just talk about her —

As I dashed between the four bronze figures, they seemed to hunch down and become deformed, while their faces became those of grotesque, aged witches — four evil kobolds leering up at me with a horrid knowledge bright in their eyes—

While behind me I glimpsed in pursuit a tall, black, white-faced figure, skeletally lean—

The strangely short corridor ahead of me had a blank end — the Departure Lounge wasn't there—

I instantly jerked open the narrow door to the stairs and darted nimbly up them as if I were a young man again and not 48 years old—.

On the third sharp turn I risked a glance behind and down—

Hardly a flight behind me, taking great pursuing leaps, was my dreadful Jew—

I tore open the door to the 102nd floor. There at last, only a few feet away, was the silver door I sought of the final elevator and softly glowing above it the words, *"Zum Zeppelin."* At last I would be shot aloft to the *Ostwald* and reality.

But the sign began to blink as the *Krahenest* had, while across the door was pasted askew a white cardboard sign which read "Out of Order."

I threw myself at the door and scrabbled at it, squeezing my eyes several times to make my vision come clear. When I finally fully opened them, the cardboard sign was gone.

But the silver door was gone too, and the words above it forever. I was scrabbling at seamless pale plaster.

There was a touch on my elbow. I spun around.

"Excuse me, sir, but you seem troubled," my Jew said solicitously. "Is there anything I can do?"

I shook my head, but whether in negation or rejection or to clear it, I don't know. "I'm looking for the *Ostwald,*" I gasped, only now realizing I'd winded myself on the stairs. "For the zeppelin," I explained when he looked puzzled.

I may be wrong, but it seemed to me that a look of secret glee flashed deep in his eyes, though his general sympathetic expression remained unchanged.

"Oh, the zeppelin," he said in a voice that seemed to me to have become sugary in its solicitude. "You must mean the *Hindenburg.*"

Hindenburg? — I asked myself. There was no zeppelin named *Hindenburg*. Or was there? Could it be that I was mistaken about such a simple and, one would think, immutable matter? My mind had been getting very foggy the last minute or two. Desperately I tried to assure myself that I was indeed myself and in my right world. My lips worked and I muttered to myself, *Bin Adolf Hitler, Zeppelin Fachman...*

"But the *Hindenburg* doesn't land here, in any case," my Jew was telling me, "though I think some vague intention once was voiced about topping the Empire State with a mooring mast for dirigibles. Perhaps you saw some news story and assumed —"

His face fell, or he made it seem to fall. The sugary solicitude in his voice became unendurable as he told me, "But apparently you can't have heard today's tragic news. Oh, I do hope you weren't seeking the *Hindenburg* so as to meet some beloved family member or close friend. Brace yourself, sir. Only hours ago, coming in for her landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey, the *Hindenburg* caught fire and burned up entire in a matter of seconds. Thirty or forty at least of her passengers and crew were burned alive. Oh, steady yourself, sir."

"But the *Hindenburg* — I mean the *Ostwald!* — couldn't burn like that," I protested. "She's a helium zeppelin."

He shook his head. "Oh, no. I'm no scientist, but I know the *Hindenburg* was filled with hydrogen — a wholly typical bit of reckless German risk-running. At least we've never sold helium to the Nazis, thank God."

I stared at him, wavering my face from side to side in feeble denial.

While he stared back at me with obviously a new thought in mind.

"Excuse me once again," he said, "but I believe I heard you start to say something about Adolf Hitler. I suppose you know that you bear a certain resemblance to that execrable dictator. If I were you, sir, I'd shave my mustache."

I felt a wave of fury at this inexplicable remark with all its baffling references, yet withal a remark delivered in the unmistakable tones of an insult. And then all my surroundings momentarily reddened and flickered, and I felt a tremendous wrench in the inmost core of my being, the sort of wrench one might experience in transiting timelessly from one universe into another parallel to it. Briefly I became a man still named Adolf Hitler, same as the Nazi dictator and almost the same age, a German-American born in Chicago, who had never visited Germany or

spoke German, whose friends teased him about his chance resemblance to the other Hitler, and who used stubbornly to say, "No, I won't change my name! Let that *Fuehrer* bastard across the Atlantic change his! Ever hear about the British Winston Churchill writing the American Winston Churchill, who wrote *The Crisis* and other novels, and suggesting he change his name to avoid confusion, since the Englishman had done some writing too? The American wrote back it was a good idea, but since he was three years older, he was senior and so the Britisher should change *his* name. That's exactly how I feel about that son of a bitch Hitler."

The Jew still stared at me sneeringly. I started to tell him off, but then I was lost in a second weird, wrenching transition. The first had been directly from one parallel universe to another. The second was also in time — I aged 14 or 15 years in a single infinite instant while transiting from 1937 (where I had been born in 1889 and was 48) to 1973 (where I had been born in 1910 and and was 63). My name changed back to my truly own (but what is that?), and I no longer looked one bit like Adolf Hitler the Nazi dictator (or dirigible expert?), and I had a married son who was a sort of social historian in a New York City municipal university, and he had many brilliant theories, but none of historical cusps.

And the Jew — I mean the tall, thin man in black with possibly Semitic features — was gone. I looked around and around but there was no one there.

I touched my outside left breast pocket, then my hand darted tremblingly underneath. There was no zipper on the pocket inside and no precious documents, only a couple of grimy envelopes with notes I'd scribbled on them in pencil.

I don't know how I got out of the Empire State Building. Presumably by elevator. Though all my memory holds for that period is a persistent image of King Kong tumbling down from its top like a ridiculous yet poignantly pitiable giant teddy bear.

I do recollect walking in a sort of trance for what seemed hours through a Manhattan stinking with monoxide and carcinogens innumerable, half waking from time to time (usually while crossing streets that snarled, not purred) and then relapsing into trance. There were big dogs.

When I at last fully came to myself, I was walking down a twilit Hudson Street at the north end of Greenwich Village. My gaze was fixed on a distant and unremarkable pale-gray square of building

top. I guessed it must be that of the World Trade Center, 1,350 feet tall.

And then it was blotted out by the grinning face of my son, the professor.

"Justin!" I said.

"Fritz!" he said. "We'd begun to worry a bit. Where did you get off to, anyhow? Not that it's a damn bit of my business. If you had an assignation with a go-go girl, you needn't tell me."

"Thanks," I said, "I do feel tired, I must admit, and somewhat cold. But no, I was just looking at some of my old stamping grounds," I told him, "and taking longer than I realized. Manhattan's changed during my years on the West Coast, but not all that much."

"It's getting chilly," he said. "Let's stop in at that place ahead with the black front. It's the White Horse. Dylan Thomas used to drink there. He's supposed to have scribbled a poem on the wall of the can, only they painted it over. But it has the authentic sawdust."

"Good," I said, "only we'll make mine coffee, not ale. Or if I can't get coffee, then cola."

I am not really a *Prosit!*-type person.

THE BRIDGE OF THE GODS

On June 6, 1974, my wife and I were in the Forest of Dean in southwestern England near the Welsh border. It was a day of showers interspersed with sunshine, and in the late afternoon, Janet and I took a walk among the immemorial beeches.

A sprinkle of rain sent us under one of those beeches, but the Sun was out and a rainbow appeared in the sky. Not one rainbow, either, but *two*. For the only time in my life I saw both the primary and secondary bows, separated, as they should be by about twenty times the diameter of the full Moon. Between them, the sky was distinctly dark, so that, in effect, we saw a broad band of darkness crossing the eastern sky in a perfect circular arc, bounded on either side by a rainbow, with the red end of each bordering the darkness and the violet end fading into the blue.

It lasted several minutes and we watched in perfect silence. I am not a visual person, but that penetrated — and deeply.

Nine days later, on June 15, 1974, I visited Westminster Abbey in London and stood beside Isaac Newton's grave (I refused to step

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

on it). From where I stood, I could also see the graves of Michael Faraday, Ernest Rutherford, James Clerk-Maxwell and Charles Darwin; all told, five of the ten men whom I once listed (in *The Isaac Winners*, F&SF, July, 1963) as the greatest scientists of all time. It penetrated as deeply as the double-rainbow.

I couldn't help thinking of the connection between the rainbow and Newton and decided at once to do an article on the subject when the occasion lent itself to the task — and here it is.

Suppose we begin with light itself. In ancient times, those we know of who speculated on the matter thought of light as pre-eminently the property of the heavenly bodies and, in particular, of the Sun. This heavenly light was not to be confused with earthly imitations such as the fire of burning wood or of a burning candle. Earthly light was imperfect. It flickered and died or it could be fed and renewed. The heavenly light of the Sun was eternal and steady.

In Milton's "Paradise Lost" one gets the definite impression that the Sun is simply a container into which God has placed light. The light contained in the Sun is forever undiminished, and by the light of that light (if you see what I mean) we can see. From that point of view, there is no puzzle in the fact that God created light on the first day and the Sun, Moon and stars on the fourth. Light is the thing itself, the heavenly bodies merely the containers.

Since Sunlight was heaven-born it would naturally have to be divinely pure, and its purity was best exemplified in the fact that it was perfectly white. Earthly "light," imperfect as it was, could have color. The flames of Earthly fires were distinctly yellowish, sometimes reddish. Where certain chemicals were added, they could be any color.

Color, in fact, was an attribute, it seemed, of Earthly materials only, and when it intruded into light it seemed invariably a sign of impurity. Light reflected from an opaque colored object, or transmitted through a transparent colored object, took on the color and imperfection of matter, just as clear water coursing over loose silt would grow muddy.

There was only one aspect of color which, to the eyes of the ancients, did not seem to involve the kind of matter they were familiar with, and that was the rainbow. It appeared in the sky as a luminous arc of different colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet, in that order, with the red on the outer curve of the arc and the violet on the inner

curve.*

The rainbow, high in the sky, insubstantial, evanescent, divorced from any obvious connection with matter, seemed as much an example of divine light as that of the Sun — and yet it was colored. There was no good explanation for that except to suppose that it was another creation of God or of the gods, produced in color for some definite purpose.

In the Bible, for instance, the rainbow was created after the Flood. God explained its purpose to Noah: "And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." (Genesis 9:14-15).

Presumably, though the Bible doesn't say so, the rainbow is colored so that it can the more easily be seen against the sky, and serve as a clearer reassurance to men trembling before the wrath of God.

The Greeks took a less dramatic view of the rainbow. Since it reached high in the sky and yet seemed to approach the Earth at either end, it seemed to be a connecting link between Heaven and Earth. It was the bridge of the gods (colored, perhaps, because it was a material object, even though of divine origin) whereby they could come down to Earth and return to Heaven.

In Homer's "Iliad," the goddess Iris is the messenger of the gods and comes down from Olympus now and then to run some errand or other. But "iris" is the Greek word for "rainbow" (and because that portion of the eye immediately about the pupil comes in different colors, it, too, is called the iris). The genitive form of the word is "iridis," and when there is a colored, rainbow-like shimmering on matter, as on a soap-bubble, it is said to be "iridescent." And because the compounds of a certain new element showed a surprising range of color, the element was named "iridium."

In the Norse myths, the rainbow was "Bifrost," and it was the bridge over which the gods could travel to Earth. Before the last battle, Ragnarok, it was one of the signs of the coming universal destruction that

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**A seventh color is often added, "indigo." To my eyes, indigo is only a bluish-violet and does not deserve the dignity of a separate color of the rainbow. The presence of an indigo-colored component of the light emitted by a certain ore heated to incandescence revealed a new element, however, which was consequently named "indium."*

under the weight of the heroes charging from Valhalla, the rainbow bridge broke.

But what about rational explanations? Steps were made toward that, too. In ancient times, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, about 350 B.C., noted a rainbow effect seen through a spray of water — the same colors in the same arrangement and just as insubstantial. Perhaps the rainbow itself, appearing after rain, was produced in similar fashion by water-droplets high in the air.

Nor was water the only transparent substance associated with the rainbow. About 10 A.D. or so, the Roman philosopher, Seneca, wrote of the rainbow-like effect of colors that showed on the broken edge of a piece of glass.

But what is there about light and transparent substances that can produce a rainbow? It is quite obvious that light passing through such substances in ordinary fashion produces no colors. There is, however, a certain peculiarity in the way light behaves when it crosses from one type of transparent substance to another; from air to water, for instance; that might offer a clue.

This peculiar behavior first entered the history of science when Aristotle pointed out what innumerable people must have casually noticed: that a stick placed into a bowl of water, seems to be bent sharply at the water surface, almost as though it were broken back into an angle at that point. Aristotle attributed this to the bending of light as it passed from air into water, or from water into air. After all, the stick itself was not really bent since it could be withdrawn from the water and shown to be as straight as ever — or felt while it was still in the water and experienced as still straight. The bending of light in passing from one medium to another is called "refraction" (from Latin words meaning "breaking back").

Could it be that the rather unusual event of color-formation by water or glass could involve the rather unusual fact of the changing of direction of a beam of light?

The first person actually to suggest this was a Polish monk named Erazm Ciolek, in a book on optics, which he wrote in 1269 under the partially Latinized name Erasmus Vitellio.

Merely to say that refraction was responsible for the rainbow is easy. To work out exactly how refraction could result in an arc of the precise curvature and in the precise position in the sky is an altogether more

difficult thing to do, and it took three and a half centuries after the refraction suggestion was made for someone to work it out mathematically.

In 1611, Marco Antonio de Dominis, Archbishop of Spalato (who was imprisoned by the Inquisition toward the end of his life because he was a convert to Anglicanism and argued against Papal supremacy) was the first to try, but he managed only a very imperfect job. Unfortunately, ever since Greek times, people had an inaccurate idea as to the precise manner in which light was refracted — and so did the Archbishop.

It was not until 1621 that refraction was finally understood. In that year, a Dutch mathematician, Willebrord Snell, studied the angle which a beam of light made with the perpendicular to the water surface it was entering, and the different angle it made with the perpendicular once it was within the water. It had been thought for many centuries that as one angle changed, the other angle changed in proportion. Snell showed that it was the sines* of the angles that always bore the same ratio, and this constant ratio is called "the index of refraction."

Once the notion of an index of refraction was known, scientists could trace the path of light through spherical water-droplets, allowing for both reflection and refraction, with considerable precision.

This was done by the French philosopher, Rene Descartes, in 1637. He used Snell's Law to work out the precise position and curvature of the rainbow. However, he did not give the proper credit to Snell for the law, but tried to leave the impression, without actually saying so, that he had worked it out himself.

Snell's Law, however, did not, in itself, properly explain the *colors* of the rainbow.

There seemed only two alternatives. First, it was possible that the color arose, somehow, out of the colorless water (or glass) through which the light passed. Second, it was possible that the color arose, somehow, out of the colorless light as it passed through the water (or glass).

Both alternatives seemed very unlikely, since, in either case, color had to derive from colorlessness; but there was a tendency to choose the first

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**In these articles I try to explain every concept I use as I come to it but a line has to be drawn. Sines, and trigonometric functions generally, deserve an entire article to themselves and some day I'll write one. Meanwhile, if you don't know what sines are, it doesn't matter. It plays no further part in the present argument.*

alternative, since it was better to tamper with water and glass than with the holy light of the Sun.

The Sun and its light had so often been touted as a symbol of Deity (not only in Christian times, but in pre-Christian times dating back to the Egyptian Pharaoh, Ikhnaton, in 1360 B.C., and who knows how much farther back to what dim speculations of prehistoric time) that it had come to seem, rather foolishly, that to impute imperfection to Sun and Sunlight was to deny the perfection of God.

Consider what happened to Galileo, for instance. There were a number of reasons why he got into trouble with the Inquisition, the chief of them being that he could never conceal his contempt for those less intelligent than himself even when they were in a position to do him great harm. But it helped that he gave them weapons with which to attack him, and perhaps the foremost of these was his discovery of dark spots on the Sun.

He had noted Sunspots first toward the end of 1610 but made his official announcement in 1612 and presented a copy of his book on the subject to Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, who was then a friend of his, but who from that time (for various reasons) slowly began to cool toward him. The Cardinal had become Pope Urban VIII and an outright enemy when, twenty years later, Galileo's troubles with the Inquisition reached their climax.

The finding of Sunspots (and the reality of that finding was irrelevant) offended those mystics who found the Sun to be a type of God, and some began to preach against him.

One of them was a Dominican friar who made use, very tellingly, of an amazingly apt quotation from the Bible. At the beginning of "The Acts of the Apostles" the resurrected Jesus finally ascends to heaven and his Galilean apostles stare steadfastly upward at the point where he disappeared until two angels recall them to their Earthly duties with a reproof that begins with "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

In Latin, the first two words of the quotation are "Viri Galilaei" and Galileo's family name is "Galilei." In 1613 when the Dominican thundered out that phrase and used it as a Biblical denunciation of Galileo's attempts to penetrate the mysteries of the heavens, many must have shuddered away from the angel-reproved astronomer. In 1615, Galileo's case was in the hands of the Inquisition and his long ordeal began.

Yet Sunspots can be explained away. Their presence need not be accepted as a final disruption of Heaven's perfection. If the Sun is only the container of light, it might be imperfect and smudged. The thing contained, however, the heavenly light itself, the first creation of God on the First Day, was another matter altogether. Who would dare deny *its* perfection?

That blasphemy came about in England in 1666, a place and time much safer for the purpose than the Italy of 1612. And the man who carried through the blasphemy was a quite pious 24-year-old named Isaac Newton.

The young Newton was interested in the rainbow-effect not for its own sake but in connection with a more practical problem which concerned him but does not, at the moment, concern us.

Newton might have begun by arguing that if a rainbow is formed by the refraction of light by water-drops, then it should also be formed in the laboratory, if refraction were carried through properly. Refraction takes place when light passes from air into glass at an oblique angle, but if the glass surface is bounded by two parallel planes (as ordinary window-glass is, for instance) then, on emerging from the other surface, the same refraction takes place in reverse. The two refractions cancel and the ray of light passes through unrefracted.

One must therefore use a glass object with surfaces that are not parallel and that refract the light entering the glass, and the light leaving the glass, in the same direction, so that the two effects add on instead of cancelling.

For the purpose, Newton used a triangular prism of glass which he knew, by Snell's law, would refract light in the same direction, on entering and on leaving, as he wanted it to do. He then darkened a room by covering the windows with shutters and made one little opening in one shutter to allow a single circular beam of light to enter and fall on the white wall opposite. A brilliant circle of white light appeared on the wall, of course.

Newton then placed the prism in the path of the light and the beam was refracted sharply. Its path was bent and the circle of white light was no longer where it had been but now struck the wall in a markedly different position.

What's more, it was no longer a circle but an oblong some five times longer than it was wide. Still more, colors had appeared, the same colors as in the rainbow and in the same order.

Was it possible that this rainbow was just a lucky freak resulting from the size of the hole or the position of the prism? He tried holes of different sizes and found that the artificial rainbow might get brighter or dimmer but the colors remained, and in the same order. They also remained if he had the light pass through the thicker or thinner part of the prism. He even tried the prism outside the window so that the Sunlight went through it *before* it went through the hole in the shutter — and the rainbow still appeared.

So far, these experiments, though they had never been conducted with anything like such systematic care, did not introduce anything completely new. After all, rainbow effects had, for centuries, been observed and reported at oblique edges of glass which had been either broken or beveled, and that was essentially what Newton was now observing.

It had always been assumed before, though, that the effects were produced by the glass, and now Newton found himself wondering if that could possibly be so. The fact that changing the position of the glass or the thickness of the glass through which the light passed did not change the rainbow in any essential way made it seem the glass might not be involved; that it was the light itself that might be responsible.

It seemed to Newton that if he held the prism point down and then had the light that had passed through it pass throw a second prism oriented in the opposite direction, with the point up, one of two things ought to happen:

1) If it was the glass producing the colors as light was refracted through it, more color would be produced by the glass of the second prism and the colored oblong of light would be still more elongated, and still more deeply colored.

2) If it was refraction alone that produced the colors and if the glass had nothing to do with it, then the second refraction, being opposite in direction should cancel out the first so that the oblong would be a circle again with all the colors gone.

Newton tried the experiment and the second alternative seemed to be it. The light, passing through two prisms that were identical except for being oppositely oriented, struck the wall where it would have struck if there had been no prisms at all, and struck it as a brilliant circle of pure white light. (If Newton had placed a piece of white cardboard between the prisms he would have seen that the oblong of colors still existed there.)

Newton decided, therefore, that the glass had nothing to do with the color, but served only as a vehicle of refraction. The colors were produced out of the Sunlight itself.

Newton had, for the first time in man's history, clearly demonstrated the existence of color apart from matter. The colors he had produced with his prism were not colored this or colored that; they were not even colored air. They were *colored light,* as insubstantial and as immaterial as Sunlight itself. Compared to the gross and palpable colored matter with which people had been familiar till then, the colors Newton had produced were a kind of ghost of color. It's not surprising, then, that the word he introduced for the band of colors was the Latin word for ghost — "spectrum."*

Newton went on to allow his beam of refracted light to fall on a board with a hole in it so that only the single color of a small portion of the spectrum could pass through. This single-color portion of Sunlight he passed through a second prism and found that although it was broadened somewhat, no new colors appeared. He also measured the degree to which each individual color was refracted by the second prism, and found that red was always refracted less than orange, which was refracted less than yellow and so on.

His final conclusion, then, was that Sunlight (and white light generally) was not pure but was a mixture of colors, each of which was much more nearly pure than white light was. No one color by itself could appear white, but all of them together, properly mixed, would do so.

Newton further suggested that each different color had a different index of refraction in glass or in water. By passing through a glass prism or through water droplets, the differences in index of refraction caused the different colored components of white light to bend each by a different amount and emerge from glass or water separated.

This was the final blow to the ancient/medieval view of the perfection of the heavens. The rainbow, that reminder of God's mercy, that bridge of the gods, was reduced to a giant spectrum high in the air, produced by countless tiny prisms (in the form of water droplets) all combining their effect.

To those who value the vision of the human mind organizing observations into natural law and then using natural law to grasp the workings of what had until then been mysterious, the rainbow has gained

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**We still speak of "spectres" and "spectral appearances" but the new meaning of the word, signifying a whole stretch of different colors, has taken over and is now a common metaphor. We can speak of "the spectrum of political attitudes" for instance.*

added significance and beauty through Newton's discovery, because, to a far greater extent than before, it could be *understood* and truly appreciated. To those of more limited fancy, who prefer mindless staring to understanding, and simple-minded fairy-tales of gods crossing bridges to the dancing changes of direction of light in accordance with a system that can be written as an elegant mathematical expression, I suppose it is a loss.

Newton's announcement of his discoveries did not take the world by storm at once. It was so revolutionary, so opposed to what had been taken for granted for many centuries, that many hesitated.

For instance, there was the opposition of Robert Hooke, seven years Newton's senior, and with an important position at the Royal Society, which was the arbiter of science in those days. Hooke had been a sickly youngster. Smallpox had scarred his skin, but he had had to work his way through Oxford waiting on tables, and the scapegoatings and humiliations he had to endure at the hands of the young gentry who were infinitely his inferiors intellectually, left deeper marks on him than the smallpox did.

The world was his enemy after that. He was one of the most brilliant scientific thinkers of his time and might easily have ranked a clear second after Newton himself, if he had not put so much of his time into a delighted orgy of spiteful disputation.

In particular, he marked down Newton for his prey, out of sheer jealousy of the one man whose intellectual equal he could never be. Hooke used his position in the Royal Society to thwart Newton at every turn. He accused him of stealing his (Hooke's) ideas and nearly kept Newton's masterpiece, "Principia Mathematica," in which the laws of motion and of universal gravitation are expounded, from being published, through such an accusation. When the book was published at last, it was not under Royal Society auspices, but at the private expense of Newton's friend, Edmund Halley.

Newton, who was a moral coward, incapable of facing opposition openly (although willing to use his friends for the purpose) and who was given to sniveling self-pity, was cowed and tormented by the raging, spiteful Hooke. At times, Newton would vow he would engage in no more scientific research, and in the end, he was driven into a mental breakdown.

It wasn't till Hooke's death that Newton was willing to publish his book "Opticks" in which he finally organized all his optical findings.

This book, published in 1704, was in English, rather than in Latin as "Principia Mathematica" had been. Some have suggested that this was done deliberately in order to limit the extent to which it would be read outside England and therefore cut down on the controversies that would arise, since Newton, for various reasons, was not entirely a popular figure on the Continent.

Opposition to the notion of white light as a mixture of colors did not disappear altogether even after the appearance of "Opticks." As late as 1810 a German book entitled "Farbenlehre" ("Color-science") appeared, which argued the case for white light being pure and unmixed. Its author was none other than the greatest of all German poets, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who, as a matter of fact, had done respectable scientific work.

Goethe was wrong, however, and his book dropped into the oblivion it deserved. It is only remembered now as the last dying wail against Newton's optical revolution.

Yet there is this peculiar point to be made. Newton's optical experiments, as I said earlier, were not carried through solely for the purpose of explaining the rainbow. Newton was far more interested in seeing whether there was any way of correcting a basic defect in the telescopes that, ever since Galileo's time a half-century before, had been used to study the heavens.

Till then, all the telescopes had used lenses that refracted light and that produced images that were fringed with color. Newton's experiments seemed to him to prove that color was inevitably produced by the spectrum-forming process of refraction and that no "refracting telescope" could possibly avoid these colored fringes.

Newton therefore went on to devise a telescope that made use of mirrors and reflection, thus introducing the "reflecting telescope" that today dominates the field of optical astronomy.

Yet Newton was wrong when he decided that refracting telescopes could never avoid those colored fringes. You see, in his marvellous optical experiments, he had overlooked one small thing. — But that is another story.

A rare and most welcome short story from Sprague de Camp, who writes: "The basic idea of the lamp from Atlantis is one of those that H. P. Lovecraft toyed with in his depressed period in New York, in 1926, but never got around to writing. Naturally, my use of the idea is probably drastically different from anything HPL might have done with it, but I hope you like the result." We emphatically do and think you'll agree.

The Lamp

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

I stopped at Bill Bugby's Garage in Gahato and got young Bugby to drive me to the landing above the dam. There I found Mike Devlin waiting for me, in an aluminum row-canoe with an outboard motor. I said:

"Hello, Mike! I'm Wilson Newbury. Remember me?"

I dropped my gear into the boat, lowering the suitcase carefully lest I damage the box I was carrying in it.

"Hello, Mr. Newbury!" said Mike. "To be sure, I remember you." He looked much the same as before, save that the wrinkles on his brown face were a little deeper and his curly hair a little grayer. In old-fashioned lumberjack style, he wore a heavy flannel shirt, a sweater, an old jacket, and a hat, although the day was warm. "Have you got that thing with you?"

I sent the car back to Bugby's to keep until I needed it again and got into the boat. "The thing Mr. Ten Eyck wanted me to bring?" I said.

"I do mean that, sir." Mike started the motor, so that we had to shout.

"It's in the big bag," I said, "so don't run us on a stump. After fetching that thing all the way from Europe, and having nightmares the whole time, I don't want it to end up at the bottom of Lower Lake."

"I'll be careful, Mr. Newbury," said Mike, steering the boat up the winding course of the channel. "What is that thing, anyhow?"

"It's an antique lamp. He got me to pick it up in Paris from some character he'd been writing to."

"Ah, well, Mr. Ten Eyck is always buying funny things. After his troubles, that's about all he's interested in."

"What's this about Al's having been married?" I asked.

"Sure, and didn't you know?" Although born and reared in Canada, Mike still sounded more Irish than most native-born Irishmen. I suppose his little home town in Nova Scotia had been solidly Irish-Canadian. "He married the Camaret girl — the daughter of that big lumberjack." Mike chuckled, his faded blue eyes searching the channel ahead for snags. "You remember, when she was a little girl and the teacher in Gahato asked all the childer what they wanted to be when they grew up, she said: "I want to be a whore!' It broke up the class for fair, it did."

"Well, what happened? Whatever possessed Al —"

"I guess he wanted a husky, hard-working cook and housekeeper, and he figured she'd be so pleased to marry a gentleman that she'd do what he wanted. Trouble was Melusine Camaret is a pretty hot piece — always has been. When she found Mr. Ten Eyck couldn't put it to her night and morning regular, she up and ran off with young Larochelle. You know, Pringle's foreman's son."

A big blue heron, disturbed by the racket of the outboard, flapped away up the channel. Mike asked, "How was the Army, Mr. Newbury?"

I shrugged. "Just manning a desk. Nobody bothered to shoot at me. I sometimes feel I was lucky the war ended when it did, before they found what a nincompoop they'd put into an officer's uniform."

"Ah, sure, you was always the modest one."

The channel opened out into Lower Lake. The lake was surrounded by the granite ridges of the Adirondacks, thickly clad in hardwoods and evergreens — mostly maple and pine. Here and there, a gray hogback or scar showed through the forest. Most of the marketable timber had been cut out early in the century and its place taken by second growth. The postwar shortages, however, had made it profitable to cut stands that theretofore had stood too far back from transportation to be profitable. While much of the land thereabouts had gone into the Adirondack State Park and so was no longer cuttable, enough remained in private hands to keep the lumber trucks rolling and the saws of Dan Pringle's mill in Gahato screaming.

We cut across Lower Lake to Ten Eyck Island, which separated Lower Lake from Upper Lake. On the map, the two lakes made an hourglass shape, with the island partly plugging the neck between them.

Alfred Ten Eyck, in khaki shirt and pants, came to the dock with a

yell of "Willy!" He had a quick, nervous handshake, with a stronger grip than I expected.

We swapped the usual remarks about our not having changed a bit, although I could not say it sincerely of Alfred. While he had kept his slim, straight shape, he had pouches under his eyes. His sandy hair was graying; although, like me, he was still in his thirties.

"Have you got it?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. It's in that—"

He had already grabbed my big suitcase and started for the old camp. He went up the slope at a pace that I almost had to run to keep up with. When he saw me lagging, he stopped to wait. Being out of condition, I came up panting.

"Same old place," I said.

"It's run down a bit," he said, "since the days when my folks entertained relays of friends and relatives all summer. In those days, you could hire help to keep it up — not that Mike doesn't do two men's work."

The trail was somewhat overgrown, and I stumbled on a clump of weeds. Alfred gave me a wry grin.

"I have an understanding with Nature," he said. "I leave her alone, and she leaves me alone. Seriously, anytime you want to help us clear out the trails, I'll give you a corn hook and tell you to go to it. It's all you can do here to keep ahead of the natural forces of growth and decay."

Camp Ten Eyck was a big two-story house, made of huge handhewn logs, with fifteen or sixteen rooms. There was a tool kit beside the front door, with tools lying about. Mike and Alfred had evidently been replacing a couple of porch boards that had begun to rot.

Most Adirondack camps are of wood, because lumber is relatively cheap there. The Adirondack climate, however, sees to it that a wooden house starts to fall apart almost as soon as it is completed. Some of the big logs that made up the sides of Camp Ten Eyck had spots so soft that you could stick your thumb into them.

While I caught my breath, Alfred said, "Look, I'll show you your room, but first would you please get *it* out? I want to see it."

"Oh, all right," I said. I set the suitcase on one of those old-fashioned window seats, which filled the corners of the living room, and opened it. I handed Alfred the box.

"You'll notice it's properly packed," I said. "My sister once sent us a handsome antique luster vase from England, in just a flimsy carton, and it got smashed to pieces."

Alfred cut the cords with

shaking hands. He had to go out to get a chisel from his tool chest to pry up the wooden lid. Then he burrowed into the excelsior.

While he worked, I looked around. There were the same old deerskins on the couches and window seats, the same deer heads staring glassily from the walls, the same stuffed fox and owl, the same silver-birch banisters with the bark on, and the same lichens on whose white nether surfaces amateur artists had scratched sylvan scenes.

I was surprised to see that the big, glass-fronted gun case was empty. As I remembered it from the thirties, the case had held an impressive array of rifles, shotguns, and pistols, mostly inherited by Alfred from his father and grandfather.

"What happened to all your guns?" I said. "Did you sell them?"

"The hell I did!" he said, working away. "You know that no-good cousin of mine, George Vreeland? I rented the place to him one year, and when I got back I found that he had simply sold most of the guns to the *natives*." (Alfred always snarled a little when he said "natives," meaning the year-round residents of the country.)

"What did you do about it?"

"Nothing I could do. George was gone before I got back, and the last I heard he was in California. Then, when I was away last winter, one of our local night workers made off with the rest, including my sailing trophy. I know who did it, too."

"Well?"

"Well, what? No matter how good my proof was, do you suppose I could get the goddamn *natives* to convict him? After what happened to me with Camaret?"

"What about Camaret? I don't know this story."

"Well, you knew I'd been married?"

"Yes. Mike mentioned it."

Alfred Ten Eyck gave me a brief account of his short-lived union with Melusine Camaret. He said nothing about his own sexual inadequacy, for which I cannot blame him.

"The day after she flew the coop," he said, "I was walking along the street in Gahato, bothering absolutely nobody, when Big Jean comes up and says: 'Hey! What you do wit my leetla girl, *hein?*' And the first thing I know, he knocks me cold, right there in the street."

(That was not how the folk in Gahato remembered the event. They say that Alfred answered: "Now look, you dumb Canuck, I don't know what that floozie has been telling you, but —" and then Camaret hit him.)

"Well," Alfred went on, "when I came to, I swore out a warrant and had the trooper run Jean in. But the jury acquitted him, although half the village had seen him slug me. I heard they figured that if Big Jean wanted to belt his son-in-law, that was a family fight and none of their business."

(The villagers' version was that, since Jean Camaret was built like a truck and had a notoriously violent temper, anyone fool enough to pick a fight with him deserved what he got.)

Waving an arm to indicate the surrounding mountains, Alfred glowered at me. "They can't forget that, fifty years ago, everything you could see from here was Ten Eyck property, and they had to get a Ten Eyck's permission to so much as spit on it. Now the great Ten Eyck holdings are down to this one lousy little island, plus a few lots in Gahato; but they still hate my guts."

(In fact, several members of the Ten Eyck family still held parcels of land in Herkimer County, but that is a minor point. Alfred did not get on well with most of his kin.)

"I think you exaggerate," I said. "Anyway, why stay here if you don't feel comfortable?"

"Where should I go, and how should I earn a living? Jeepers! Here I at least have a roof over my head. By collecting a few rents on those shacks on Hemlock Street in Gahato — when the tenants don't talk me out of them with hard-luck stories — and now and then selling one of the remaining lots, I get by. Since I can't sell them fast enough to get ahead of my expenses and build up some investments, I'm whittling away at my capital; but I don't seem to have any choice. Ah, here we are!"

Alfred had unwrapped the page from *Le Figaro*, which enfolded the lamp. He held up his treasure.

It was one of those hollow, heart-shaped things, about the size of the palm of your hand, which they used for lamps in Greek and Roman times. It had a knob-shaped handle at the round end, a big hole in the center top for refilling, and a little hole for the wick at the pointed or spout end. You can buy any number of them in Europe and the Near East, since they are always digging up more.

Most such lamps are made of cheap pottery. This one looked at first like pottery, too. Actually, it was composed of some sort of metal but had a layer of dried mud all over it. This stuff had flaked off in places, allowing a dull gleam of metal to show through.

"What's it made of?" I asked. "Ionides didn't seem to know, when he gave me the thing in Paris."

"I don't know. Some sort of silver bronze or bell metal, I guess. We'll have to clean it to find out. But we've got to be careful with it. You can't just scrub an antique like this with steel wool, you know."

"I know. If it has a coating of oxide, you leave it in place. Then they can put it in an electrolytic tank and turn the oxide back into the original metal, I understand."

"Something like that," said Alfred.

"But what's so remarkable about this little widget? You're not an archaeologist —"

"No, no, that's not it. I got it for a reason. Did you have any funny dreams while you were bringing this over?"

"You bet I did! But how in hell would you know?"

"Ionides told me that might happen."

"Well, then, what's the gag? What's this all about?"

Alfred gave me another glare from his pale-gray eyes. "Just say I'm fed up with being a loser, that's all."

I knew what he meant. If the word "loser" applied to anybody, it was Alfred Ten Eyck. You know the term "Midas touch"? Alfred had the opposite, whatever that is. He could turn gold into dross by touching it.

Alfred's father died while Alfred was at Princeton, leaving him several thousand acres of Adirondack land but hardly any real money to live on. So Alfred had dropped out of college and come to Herkimer County to try to make a go of the country-squire business. Either he lacked the right touch, however, or he had the most extraordinary run of bad luck. He sold most of the land, but usually on unfavorable terms to some smarter speculator, who thereupon doubled or tripled his money.

Alfred also dabbled in business of various kinds in Gahato. For example, he went partners with a fellow who brought in a stable of riding horses for the summer-visitor trade. It turned out that the fellow really knew very little about horses and imported a troop of untrained crowbaits. One of his first customers got bucked off and broke her leg.

Then Alfred put up a bowling alley, the Iroquois Lanes, with all that machinery for setting up the pins after each strike. He did all right and sold out at a handsome profit to Morrie Kaplan. But Morrie was to pay in installments. He had not had it a mouth when it burned up; and Morrie, who was no better a businessman than Alfred, had let the insurance lapse. So Morrie was bankrupt, and Alfred was left holding the bag.

Then came the war. Full of patriotic fire, Alfred enlisted as a private. He promptly came down with tuberculosis in training camp. Since antibiotics had come in, they cured him; but that ended his military career. Maybe it was just as well, because Alfred was the kind of fellow who would shoot his own foot off at practice.

"Okay," said Alfred, "let me show you to your room. Mike and I just rattle around in this big old place."

When he had settled me in, he said, "Now what would you really like to do, Willy? Drink? Swim? Hike? Fish? Or just sit in the sun and talk?"

"What I'd really like would be to go for a row in one of those wonderful old guide boats. Remember when we used to frog around the swamps in them, scooping up muck so we could look at the little wigglers under the microscope?"

Alfred heaved a sigh. "I don't have any more of those boats."

"What happened to them? Sell them?"

"No. Remember when I was in the Army? I rented the island to a family named Strong, and they succeeded in smashing every last boat. Either the women got into them in high heels and punched through the hulls, or their kids ran them on rocks."

"You can't get boats like that any more, can you?" I said.

"Oh, there are still one or two old geezers who make them through the winter months. But each boat costs more than I could afford. Besides the outboard, I have only an old flatbottom. We can go out in that."

We spent a couple of very nice hours that afternoon, out in the flatbottom. It was one of those rare days, with the sky crystal-clear except for a few puffy little white cumulus clouds. The old rowboat tended to spin in circles instead of going where you wanted it to. When, not having rowed for years, I began to get blisters, I gave my place to Alfred, whose hands were horny from hard work.

We caught up on each other's history. I said, "Say, remember the time I pushed you off the dock?" and he said, "Whatever happened to your uncle — the one who had a camp on Raquette lake?" and I said, "How come you never married my cousin Agnes? You and she were pretty thick ...."

I told Alfred about my inglorious military career, my French fiancee, and my new job with the trust company. He looked sharply at me, saying:

"Willy, explain something to me."

"What?"

"When we took those tests in school, my IQ was every bit as high as yours."

"Yes, you always had more original ideas than I ever did. What about it?"

"Yet here you are, landing on your feet as usual. Me, I can't seem to do anything right. I just don't get the hang of it."

"Hang of what?"

"Of life."

"Maybe you should have gone into some line that didn't demand such practicality — so much realism and adaptability. Something more intellectual, like teaching or writing."

He shook his graying head. "I couldn't join the professorate, on account of I never finished college. I've tried writing stories, but nobody wants them. I've even written poems, but they tell me they're just bad imitations of Tennyson and Kipling, and nobody cares for that sort of thing nowadays."

"Have you tried a head-shrinker?" (The term had not yet been whittled down to "shrink.")

He shook his head. "I saw one in Utica, but I didn't like the guy. Besides, chasing down the line to Utica once or twice a week would have meant more time and expense than I could afford."

A little breeze sprang up, ruffling the glassy lake. "Oh, well," he said, "time we were getting back."

The island was quiet except for the chugging, from the boathouse, of the little Diesel that pumped our water and charged the batteries that gave us light and power. Over drinks before dinner, I asked:

"Now look, Al, you've kept me dangling long enough about that damned lamp. What *is* it? Why should I have nightmares while bringing the thing back from Europe?"

Alfred stared at his Scotch. He mostly drank a cheap rye, I learned, but had laid in Scotch for his old friend. At last he said:

"Can you remember those nightmares?"

"You bet I can! They scared the living Jesus out of me. Each time, I was standing in front of a kind of chair, or maybe a throne. Something was sitting on the throne, only I couldn't make out details. But when it reached out toward me, its arms were — well, kind of boneless, like tentacles. And I couldn't yell or run or anything. Each time, I woke up just as the thing got its snaky fingers on me. Over and over."

"Ayup, it figures," he said. "That would be old Yuskejek."

"That would be *what?*"

"Yuskejek. Willy, are you up on the mythology of the lost

continent of Atlantis?"

"Good lord, no! I've been too busy. As I remember, the occultists try to make out that there really was a sunken continent out in the Atlantic, while the scientists say that's tosh, that Plato really got his ideas from Crete or Egypt or some such place."

"Some favor Tartessos, near modern Cadiz," said Alfred. (This happened before those Greek professors came up with their theory about the eruption of the volcanic island of Thera, north of Crete.) "I don't suppose a hard-headed guy like you believes in anything supernatural, do you?"

"Me? Well, that depends. I believe what I see — at least most of the time, unless I have reason to suspect sleight-of-hand. I know that, just when you think you know it all and can see through any trick, that when they'll bamboozle you. After all, I was in Gahato when that part-time medium, Miss — what was her name? — Scott — Barbara Scott — had that trouble with a band of little bitty Indian spooks, who threw stones at people."

Alfred laughed. "Jeepers Cripus, I'd forgotten that! They never did explain it."

"So what about your goofy lamp?"

"Well, Ionides has good connections in esoteric circles, and he assures me that the lamp is a genuine relic of Atlantis."

"Excuse me if I reserve my opinion. So what's this Yuskejek? The demon-god of Atlantis?"

"Sort of."

"What kind of name is 'Yuskejek,' anyway? Eskimo?"

"Basque, I believe."

"Oh, well, I once read that the Devil had studied Basque for seven years and only learned two words. I can see it all — the sinister Atlantean high priest preparing to sacrifice the beautiful virgin princess of Ongabonga, so the devil-god can feast on her soul-substance —"

"Maybe so, maybe not. You've been reading too many pulps. Anyway, let's go eat before I get too drunk to cook."

"Doesn't Mike cook for you?"

"He's glad to, when I ask him; but then I have to eat the result. So most of the time I'd rather do it myself. Come along. *Mike!*" He roared. "Dinner in twenty minutes!"

By mutual unspoken consent, we stayed off Atlantis and its lamp during dinner. Instead, we incited Mike to tell us of the old lumbering days and of some of the odder lumberjacks he had known. There was one who swore he was being trailed, day and night, by a ghostly

cougar, or puma, although there hadn't been one of those animals in the Adirondacks since the last century ....

We let Mike wash the dishes while Alfred and I settled down in the living room with the lamp. Alfred said:

"I think our first step is to get this crud off. For that, suppose we try an ordinary washcloth and a little water?"

"It's your gimmick," I said, "but that sounds reasonable."

"We have to be oh-so-careful," he said, wetting his cloth and rubbing gently. "I wish we had a real archaeologist here."

"He'd probably denounce you for buying looted antiquities. Someday, they tell me, governments will clamp down on that sort of thing."

"Maybe so, but that time hasn't come yet. I hear our brave boys looted half the museums in Germany during the occupation. Ah, look here!"

Much of the mud had come off, exposing a white, toothlike projection. Alfred handed me the lamp. "What do you make of it?"

"I need a stronger light. Thanks. You know, Al, what this looks like? A barnacle."

"Let me see! Jeepers Cripus, you're right! That means the lamp must have been under water —"

"That doesn't prove anything about its — its provenience, I think they call it. It could have been a lamp of Greek or Roman times, dropped overboard anywhere in the Mediterranean."

"Oh," said Alfred, dampened. "Well, I wouldn't dare work on it longer this evening. We need full daylight." He put the thing away.

That night I had the same nightmare again. There was this throne, and this dim character — Yuskejek or whatever his name was — sitting on it. And then he stretched out those rubbery arms....

A knocking awoke me. It was Alfred. "Say, Willy, did you hear something?"

"No," I said. "I've been asleep. What is it?"

"I don't know. Sounds like someone — or something — tramping around on the porch."

"Mike?"

"He's been asleep, too. Better put on your bathrobe; it's cold out."

I knew how cold Adirondack nights could get, even in July. Muffled up, I followed Alfred downstairs. There we found Mike, in a long nightshirt of Victorian style, with a lantern, a flashlight the size of a small baseball bat, and an ax. Alfred disappeared and, after fumbling in one of the chests beneath the window seats,

reappeared with a .22 rifle.

"Only gun on the place," he said. "I keep it hidden in case the goddamn *natives* burgle me again."

We waited, breathing lightly and listening. Then came the sound: a bump — bump — bump — pause, and then bump — bump — bump — bump. It sounded as if someone were tramping on the old porch in heavy boots, the kind everyone used to wear in the woods before the summer people started running round in shorts and sneakers. (I still like such boots; at least, the deer flies can't bite through them.)

Perhaps the sound could have been made by a horse or a moose, although we haven't had moose in the region for nearly a century. Anyhow, I could not imagine what either beast would be doing, swimming to Ten Eyck Island.

The sound was not especially menacing in itself; but in that black night, on that lonely spot, it made my short hair rise. The eyes of Alfred and Mike looked twice their normal size in the lantern light. Alfred handed me the flashlight.

"You fling open the door with your free hand, Willy," he said, "and try to catch whatever-it-is in the beam. Then Mike and I will go after it."

We waited and waited, but the sound did not come again. At last we went out and toured the island with our lights. There was no moon, but the stars shone with that rare brilliance that you get only in clear weather in high country. We found nothing except a racoon, scuttling up a tree and turning to peer at us through his black bandit's mask, with eyes blazing in the flashlight beam.

"That's Robin Hood," said Alfred. "He's our personal garbage-disposal service. It sure wasn't him that made that racket. Well, we've been over every foot of the island without seeing anything, so I guess ...."

There were no more phenomena that night. The next day, we cleaned the lamp some more. It turned out quite a handsome little article, hardly corroded at all. The metal was pale, with a faint ruddy or yellowish tinge, like some grades of white gold.

I also took a swim, more to show that I was not yet middle-aged than for pleasure. I never cared much for swimming in ice water. That is what you get in the Adirondack lakes, even in the hottest weather, when you go down more than a foot or so.

That night, I had another dream. The thing on the throne was in it. This time, however, instead of standing in front of it, I

seemed to be off to one side, while Alfred stood in front of it. The two were conversing, but their speech was too muffled for me to make out the words.

At breakfast, while demolishing the huge stack of pancakes that Mike set before me, I asked Alfred about it.

"You're right," he said. "I did dream that I stood before His Tentacular Majesty."

"What happened?"

"Oh, it's Yuskejek, all right — unless we're both crazy. Maybe we are, but I'm assuming the contrary. Yuskejek says he'll make me a winner instead of a loser, only I have to offer him a sacrifice."

"Don't look at me that way!" I said. "I've got to get back to my job Monday —"

"Don't be silly, Willy! I'm not about to cut your throat, or Mike's either. I have few enough friends as it is. I explained to this spook that we have very serious laws against human sacrifice in this country."

"How did he take that?"

"He grumbled but allowed as how we had a right to our own laws and customs. So he'll be satisfied with an animal. It's got to be an animal of real size, though — no mouse or squirrel."

"What have you got? I haven't seen anything bigger than chipmunks, except that coon."

"Jeepers, I wouldn't kill Robin Hood! He's a friend. No, I'll take the outboard down to Gahato and buy a pig or something. You'd better come along to help me wrassle the critter."

"Now I know we're nuts," I said. "Did you find out where the real Atlantis was?"

"Nope, didn't think to ask. Maybe we'll come to that later. Let's shove off right after lunch."

"Why not now?"

"I promised to help Mike on some work this morning."

The work was cutting up a dead poplar trunk into firewood lengths. With a powered chain saw, they could have done the job in minutes; but Mike distrusted all newfangled machinery. So they heaved and grunted on an old two-man crosscut saw, one on each end. I spelled Alfred until my blisters from rowing began to hurt.

The weather had other ideas about our afternoon's trip to Gahato. It is a safe rule that, if it rains anywhere in New York State in summer, it also rains in the Adirondacks. I have known it to rain some every day for eight weeks running.

We had had two fine days, and this one started out clear and balmy. By ten, it had clouded over. By eleven, thunder was rumbling. By twelve, it was raining pitchforks with the handles up, interrupting

our woodcutting job on the poplar.

Looking out the windows, we could hardly see to the water's edge, save when a particularly lurid flash lit up the scene. The wind roared through the old pines and bent them until you thought that any minute they would be carried away. The thunder drowned half of what we said to one another. The rain sprayed against the windows, almost horizontally, like the blast from a fire hose.

"Yuskejek will have to wait, I guess," I said.

Alfred looked troubled. "He was kind of insistent. I told him there might be a hitch, and he mumbled something about 'Remember what happened last time!'"

The rain continued through the afternoon. The thunder and lightning and wind let up, so that it became just a steady Adirondack downpour. Alfred said:

"You know, Willy, I think we really ought to take the boat to Gahato —"

"You *are* nuts," I said. "With this typhoon, your boat would fill before you got there."

"No, it's an unsinkable, with buoyancy tanks, and you can bail while I steer."

"Oh, for God's sake! If you're so determined on this silly business, why don't you take Mike?"

"He can't swim. Not that we're likely to have to, but I don't want to take the chance."

We argued a little more, in desultory fashion. Needless to say, neither of us really wanted to go out in that cataract. Alfred, though, had become obsessed with his Atlantean lamp and its attendant spirit. Perhaps the god had been evoked by our rubbing the lamp, like the jinn in the *Arabian Nights*.

Then Alfred grabbed my arm and pointed. "Look at that!"

I jumped as if stuck; the spooky atmosphere had begun to get to me. It was a relief to see that Alfred was pointing, not at the materialized form of Yuskejek, but at an enormous snapping turtle, plodding across the clearing in front of the house.

"There's our sacrifice!" cried Alfred. "Let's get him! *Mike!*"

We tore out the front door and went, slipping and sliding in the wet, down the bank to Lower Lake in pursuit of this turtle. We ringed the beast before it reached the lake. Looking almost like a small dinosaur, it dodged this way and that, showing quite a turn of speed. When we got close, it shot out its head and snapped its jaws. The *glop* of the snap sounded over the noise of the rain.

The turtle was snapping at Mike when Alfred caught it by the

tail and hoisted it into the air. This took considerable strength, as it must have weighted at least twenty pounds. Alfred had to hold it almost at arm's length to keep from being bitten. The turtle kept darting that hooked beak in all directions, *glop, glop!* and flailing the air with its legs.

"Watch out!" I yelled. "That thing can castrate you if you're not careful!"

"Mike!" shouted Alfred. "Get the ax and the frog spear!"

We were all soaked. Alfred cried, "Hurry up! I can't hold this brute much longer!"

When the tools had been brought, Alfred said, "Now, Mike, you get him to snap at the end of the spear and catch the barbs in his beak. Willy, stand by with the ax. When Mike hauls the head as far out of the shell as it'll go, chop it off!"

I had no desire to behead this turtle, which had never done anything to me. But I was a guest, and it was just possible that the lamp and its nightmares were kosher after all.

"Don't you have to do some ritual?" I asked.

"No, that comes later. Yuskejek explained it to me, Ah, got him!"

The turtle had snapped on the frog spear. By twisting the little trident, Mike hauled the head out out of the shell. Then —

"Mother of God!" shouted Mike. "He's after biting off the shpear!"

It was true. The turtle had bitten through one of the tines of the trident — which may have been weakened by rust — and freed itself.

Instantly came a wild yell from Alfred. The turtle had fastened its beak on the flesh of his leg, just above the knee. In the excitement, Alfred had forgotten to hold the reptile out away from his body.

As the turtle bit into his leg through his trousers, Alfred danced about, tugging at the spiny tail. Then he and the turtle let go together. Alfred folded up on the ground, clutching his wounded leg, while the turtle scuttled down the slope and disappeared into the rain-beaten waters of Lower Lake.

Mike and I got Alfred back to Camp Ten Eyck, with a big red stain spreading down the front of his soaking pants leg. When we got the pants off, however, it did not look as if a trip to the doctor in Gahato would be needed. The turtle's jaws had broken the skin in four places, but the cuts were of the sort that a little disinfectant and some Band-Aids would take care of.

With all the excitement, we more or less forgot about Yuskejek and his sacrifice. Since Alfred was

limping, he let Mike get dinner. Afterwards we listened to the radio a bit, read a bit, talked a bit, and went to bed.

The rain was still drumming on the roof when, some hours later, Alfred woke me. "It's that stamping noise again," he said.

As we listened, the bump — bump — bump came again, louder than before. Again we jerked open the door and sprayed the light of the flash and the lantern about. All we saw was the curtain of rain.

When we closed the door, the sound came again, louder. Again we looked out in vain. When we closed the door again, the noise came louder yet: boom — boom — boom. The whole island seemed to shake.

"Hey!" said Alfred. "What the hell's happening? It feels like an earthquake."

"Never heard of an earthquake in this country," I said. "But —"

There came a terrific *boom*, like a near-miss of a lightning bolt. The house shook, and I could hear things falling off shelves.

Mike risked a quick look out and wailed, "Mr. Ten Eyck! The lake's coming up!"

The shaking had become so violent that we could hardly stand. We clutched at the house and at each other to keep our balance. It was like standing in a train going fast on a bad old roadbed. Alfred looked out.

"It *is!*" he shrieked. "Let's get the hell out of here!"

Out we rushed into the merciless rain, just as the water of Lower Lake came foaming up to the porch of Camp Ten Eyck. Actually, it was not the lake that was rising but the island that was sinking. I stumbled off the porch to find myself knee-deep in water. A wave knocked me over, but I somehow shed my bathrobe.

I am, luckily, a fairly good swimmer. Once I was afloat, I had no trouble in keeping on the surface. There were no small waves of the kind that slap you in the face, but big, long, slow surges, which bobbed me up and down.

There was, however, a vast amount of debris, which had floated off the island when it submerged. I kept bumping into crates, shingles, sticks of firewood, tree branches, and other truck. I heard Mike Devlin calling.

"Where are you, Mike?" I yelled.

By shouting back and forth, we found each other, and I swam to him. Remembering that Mike could not swim, I wished that I had had more lifesaving practice. Fortunately, I found Mike clutching a log — part of that poplar they had been sawing up — for a life

preserver. With some pushing on my part, we got to shore half an hour later. Mike was sobbing.

"Poor Mr. Ten Eyck!" he said. "Such a nice, kind gentleman, too. There must have been a curse on him."

Whether or not there was a curse on Alfred Ten Eyck, his corpse was recovered the next day. He was, as he had admitted, a loser.

The surges had done many thousands of dollars' damage to other people's docks, boats, and boathouses on Upper and Lower Lakes and the Channel. Because of the downpour, however, all the other camp owners had stayed in and so had not been hurt.

The state geologist said the earthquake was a geological impossibility. "I should have said, an anomaly," he corrected himself. "It was obviously possible, since it happened. We shall have to modify our theories to account for it."

I did not think it would do any good to tell him about Yuskejek. Besides, if the story got around, some camp owner might be screwy enough to sue me for damages to his boathouse. He would have a hell of a time proving anything, but who wants even the silliest lawsuit?

The Atlantean lamp is, I suppose, at the bottom of the lake and I hope that nobody dredges it up. When Yuskejek threatens to sink an island if disappointed of his sacrifice, he is not fooling. Perhaps he can no longer sink a place so large as the supposed Atlantis. A little islet like Ten Eyck is more his present-day speed.

I do not, however, care to needle that testy and sinister old deity to find out just what he can do. One such demonstration is enough. After all, Atlantis is supposed to have been a *continent.* If he got mad enough ...

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