

Lemuria Will Rise! by Kage Baker

Somewhere God has a celestial Polaroid of me, standing there in the Dunes with a painted clamshell in one hand and a sprig of *Oenothera hookeri* ssp. *sclatera* in the other, staring heavenward with a look of stupefied amazement. When He needs a mood lightener, He takes a look at that picture and laughs like hell.

It was 1860 and the Company had sent me to Pismo Beach. The place was not yet the vacation destination of Warner Brothers toons; the little town of cottages and motels wouldn't exist for another generation or two; but it did feature all the clams one could eat, and all the sand too.

I wasn't there for the clams, though.

If you stand on the beach at Pismo and look south, you can see twenty-odd miles of shore stretching away to Point Sal, endless lines of breakers foreshortened into little white scallops on blue water. The waves roll in on a wide pale beach toward a green line of cypress forest, rising on low sandhills to your left. Beyond them, and further south, rise the Dunes.

You never saw anything so pure of line and color in your life, though the lines shift constantly and the color is an indefinable shade between ivory and pink, or possibly gold. Even on a grey day they glow with their own light, pulsing as cloud shadows flow across them.

Beautiful, though I couldn't see how anything could be growing out there; and yet this was where I was supposed to find a rare variant of Evening Primrose.

Everywhere else in California, *Oenothera hookerii* is a lemon-yellow flower. In 1859, however, a salmon-pink subspecies was reported, growing only in a certain place in these very Dunes, and a single sample collected and preserved. Now, Evening Primrose Oil from the yellow flower has a number of recognized medical uses, such as being the only substance known to help sufferers of Laurent's Syndrome, that terriblecrippler of the 21st century. Thanks to a unique and complex protein, it helps retard the decay of those oh-so-important genito-urinary nerve sheaths afflicted by Laurent's. Analysis of the only surviving sample of the pink variety showed it to have had an even *more* unique and complex protein, which would probably *stop* the decay of the nerve sheaths entirely, bringing bliss and continence to those suffering from the Syndrome.

Unfortunately for them, it will be extinct by their time, long since destroyed by the ravages of the offroad vehicles of the 20th century. Interestingly enough, Laurent's Syndrome and its attendant neurovascular damage occurs most frequently in people who spend a lot of time with their reproductive organs suspended over internal combustion engines — such as the ones that power dune bikes. Mother Nature giving a rousing one-fingered salute to offroad enthusiasts, I suppose.

Not my job to judge — I was only there to gather samples, test them for the suspected properties, and (if they tested positive) secure live plants for the greenhouses of my Company, Dr. Zeus Inc. Dr. Zeus operates out of the 24th century and makes a pretty penny, let me tell you, out of miracle medical cures obtained by time travel.

So I shouldered my pack, settled my hat more firmly on my head and set off down the beach, keeping to the hard-packed sand and splashing through the surf occasionally. There were clams just below the surface of the sand, massed thick as cobblestones. They were big, too, and beautifully danger-free: no sewers yet dumping *E. Coli*, no cracked pipes leaking petroleum surfactant, no nuclear power plants cooking the seawater. In fact there weren't even any railroads through here, this early, and precious few

people.

My spirits rose as I strode on, past future real estate fantasies with quaint Yankee names like Grover City, Oceano, La Grande: mile after mile of perfect beach and not a mortal soul in sight. I'd build a driftwood fire, that was what I'd do, and have a private clambake. I had a flask of tequila in my pack, too. Why couldn't all my jobs be like this? No tiresome mortals to negotiate with, no dismal muddy cities, no noise, no trouble.

I turned inland at the designated coordinates and walked back into the Dunes. Squinting against the golden glow, I almost reached for my green spectacles; then paused, grinning to myself. Nobody here to see, was there? No mortals to be terrified by my appearance if I simply let the polarized lenses on my eyes darken. Whistling, I trudged onward, a cyborg with a sun hat and camping gear.

I found, as I moved further in, that this was no desert at all. There were islands in this maze of glowing sand, cool green coves of willow and beach myrtle and wild blackberry. There were a few little freshwater lakes sparkling, green reeds waving, ducks paddling around; there were abundant wildflowers too, especially rangy stands of yellow Evening Primrose. Somewhere hereabouts must be my quarry.

Climbing to the top of a dune I spotted it, on visual alone, a mere thirty meters south-southwest: a thicket of willow on three sides around a lawn of coarse dune grass, and all along the edge the tall woody stems bearing trumpet flowers of flaming pink! Could my work get any easier? I was actually singing as I plowed on down the side of the dune, an old old song from a long way away.

So I made a little paradise of a base camp on the lawn, with a tent for my field lab and a sleeping bivvy, and got a specimen straight into solution for analysis. But even as I bustled happily about, I was becoming aware of Something that pulled at one of my lower levels of perception. You wouldn't have heard the subsonic tone, or noticed the faint flash of a color best described as blue; you *might* just possibly have felt the faint tingling sensation, but only if you were a very unusual mortal indeed. Reluctantly I crawled out of the lab and stood, turning my head from side to side, scanning.

Anomaly, five kilometers due north, electromagnetic. And ... Crome's Radiation. And ... a mortal human being. So much for my splendid isolation. How very tedious; now I'd have to investigate the damned thing. Sighing, I pulled out my green glasses and put them on.

I slogged up one dune and down another, following the signals through a landscape where one expected Rudolph Valentino to ride into view at any moment, burnoose flapping. God knows he would have looked commonplace enough, compared with what met my eyes when I got to the top of the last high dune, staggering slightly.

In the valley below me was another green cove, with its own dense willow thicket and its own green lawn. But rising from the thicket on four cottonwood poles was a thing like a big beehive or an Irish monk's cell, woven of peeled willow wands. On its domed top it wore a sort of cap of tight-braided eelgrass; a mat of the same flapped before a hole near its base. A path had been worn across the lawn, neatly outlined with clam shells arranged in a pattern. Real beehives were ranged in a tidy row there, woven skeps like miniatures of the house. All along the perimeter of the lawn, and poking up here and there out of the willows, were fantastical figures carved of driftwood, elaborately decorated with mussel shells and feathers. I saw Celtic crosses and sun wheels, I saw leaping horses, I saw stiff and stylized warriors with shields, I saw grass-skirted women of remarkable attributes.

Strange, but not so strange as the mottoes and exhortations spelled out in clam shells on the face of every surrounding dune. The nearest one said *GOD IS LOVE. DO NO HARM, REMEMBER, NOT ALONE, COME TOGETHER* and *LEMURIA HERE* shouted from dunes in the nearer distance. Further off still

rose the white shell domes of prehistoric middens.

Staring down, I collapsed into a sitting position on the sand. Borne faintly up on the wind and the blue streaming spirals of Crome's Radiation were the plaintive scrapings of a fiddle.

Well, what do you know? A holy hermit, apparently; judging from the Crome Effect, one of those poor mortals who would one day be classed as "psychic". The radiation from this one was so intense his abilities had probably driven him crazy, so he must have fled human society and somehow wound up here in the Dunes. Mystery explained. I allowed myself a smile.

The electromagnetic anomaly was still unaccounted for, however ... I scowled and turned my head, scanning. Now it seemed unclear, diffuse, further away. Now it faded out. Strange.

The fiddle music stopped. The Crome waves intensified a moment, and then the beehive shook slightly as the center mat was pushed aside. A snow-white beard flowed out, followed by the wrinkled and bespectacled face to which it was attached. The hermit turned to look straight at me, though I had been sitting perfectly motionless out of his line of sight.

"Did yez wish a word with me, then?" asked the hermit.

I blinked. Foolish to be surprised, though, with all the other weirdness here. "I was only admiring your, uh, art," I replied. "It wasn't my intention to disturb you."

We regarded each other for a moment. He wrinkled his brow.

"Have They sent yez to console me fleshly lusts?" he inquired.

Gosh, how sweet. "No," I answered.

"Dat's good, then." He relaxed. "They're always parading them foreign beauties before my eyes and that last one was more than a man of my years can do justice to, to tell yez the truth of it. Yez'll excuse me a moment, pray."

He vanished back into the beehive, and it shook and creaked with his rustling around in there. I wondered if I should disappear and decided against doing so; he might go looking for me, and I'd just as soon he didn't find my camp. Besides, I was curious. What was a Celtic anchorite doing in California, let alone in the vicinity of Pismo Beach?

So I waited, and after a moment he emerged from the beehive and dropped into the willows below, and came across his lawn toward me. I got up and descended the side of the dune to meet him, scanning him as I went. When we got within four meters of one another we both stopped abruptly. *He* was scanning *me*, albeit in a very unfocussed and inefficient way.

I don't know what he perceived, but I saw a tiny elderly mortal whose body glowed and flashed with a surrounding halo of blue radiation. He wore a sealskin loincloth and a kind of tabard of woven eelgrass to which had been sewn thousands of seagull feathers, tiny white ones. His ancient spectacles were tied on with string. Apart from advanced age he was in excellent health, without so much as an infected tooth.

He peered at me suspiciously, cocking his head.

"Yez ain't from Them," he stated.

"No," I admitted. "Who are They?"

"Why, the Ascended Masters," he answered, as though I were crazy to ask. "Them fellows up on Mount Shasta, ye know. The Inheritors of Lemuria."

O-kay. "No, I haven't heard of them, Señor, I'm only from Monterey," I replied cautiously. "My name is Dolores Concepcion Mendoza, and I have come here on holiday to sketch wildflowers."

"O, I don't know about that." He looked me up and down. "Yez got a look about yez of the Deathless Ones."

Whoops. So much for keeping a cover identity around a psychic. I thought fast, which is to say I accessed Smith's *History of Mystical Esoteric Cults*, Volumes 1-10; blinked, smiled and said: "The White Fraternity does not reveal itself to all men. You are to be commended on your sharp sight, Brother. But I have come here, as I said, for the wild flowers that grow here in these Dunes, to collect them for their rare properties. Look into my heart and you will see that I speak the truth."

He scanned me a moment and nodded. "So, dat's all right. Yez ain't of any Order I ever seen though. What Discipline do yez follow?"

"The Mystical Sisterhood of Orion," I improvised. "We, uh, live in caves in the Pyrenees and observe absolute chastity. We also preserve the healing arts of the exiled Moors. A traveler brought us word of the rare flowers here, and I have been sent to collect them for our studies."

"Well!" The anchorite's thin chest swelled with pride. "Yez couldn't have come to a more salubrious place for medicines. These Dunes is the best place for the corporeal body yez ever saw. How long d'yez think I've lived here, without ever a day of sickness or care? Forty years, I tell yez, forty years since the *Lima* run aground out there and I come ashore. And in all that time, not one pain nor pang. It's the superior vibrations, ye know."

"I don't doubt it," I affirmed solemnly.

"The most powerful vibrations in the world, right here in these Dunes, and I have that straight from the Ascended Masters Themselves. Why, They come here all the time to enjoy the beneficial vibrational effects." He nodded with certainty.

"Really?" I wondered when he was going to ask if I had a piece of cheese about me. "They come here often, do They?"

"Indeed They do. I'll introduce yez, maybe."

"That would be charming, though I'm sure They're quite busy. Still, I hope you'll give Them my best regards." I made to withdraw. "And now, Señor, I must set about my appointed task. Good day." Poor old lunatic.

He bid me an effusive farewell and I climbed away across the sand, giggling to myself. Well, this was one for the cultural anthropologists: a classic California crackpot, years and years before the breed was supposed to be common here. Worth an amusing sidebar on my official report, perhaps.

I put him out of my mind and went back to my field lab, where I had a good afternoon's work undisturbed by weird lights or electromagnetic pulses. Not that there weren't plenty of both, but now that I knew their origin I could afford to ignore them, couldn't I? And ignore them I did, though blue lightning came down and danced at the water's edge as I dug clams for my supper, and blue aurorae shimmered over my driftwood fire as I sipped tequila. When the level in the flask grew low enough I took to singing old Gypsy songs at them. I thought I sounded like a wounded coyote, but the blue lights seemed to like

it. They followed me back to my bivvy and flitted off politely when I crawled in to sleep.

"I thought I'd bring yez a few clams for breakfast, there," sounded a voice close to my ear, as a net bag clattered down before my face. I managed to avoid erupting through the roof of my bivvy and scrambled out on knees and elbows instead. The hermit was inspecting my field lab with great interest.

"Ain't dat fascinatin', now?" He held a glass slide up to the light and peered through it. "The Sisterhood's got all the latest appurtenances, I can see dat."

"Yes." I got hastily to my feet. "And thank you so very much for the clams, Senor, how gracious of you, may I offer you a cup of coffee?" Not much danger in a security breach where a looney was involved, but he might break something.

"Coffee." With a wistful smile he handed me back my slide. "My, I ain't had coffee since the *Lima*. 'Course it's bad for yez, ye know, or so They tell me. All them alkaloids."

How'd he know that? Maybe he'd been a chemist before he'd gone to sea. "Er — we of the Sisterhood can neutralize all toxins before they harm our, uh, atomic structures," I told him. Well, it wasn't exactly a lie.

He looked impressed. "Dat's a fine trick, to be sure. The Ascended Masters can do that one, but I can't, ye know, not till I've made me transition to the next Astral Plane. Got any tea?"

With a growing sense of unreality I set up my camp stove and prepared his tea and my badly needed coffee. He watched alertly, commenting with little enthusiastic cries and noddings of his head on all the advanced technological marvels I employed.

Having received his tea, the hermit leaned back comfortably into a hill of sand and regarded me over the steaming cup.

"Now I wonder," he said, "whether the Sisterhood is up on interpreting the Ancient Prophecies, too?"

"No, actually, Senor." I sipped coffee very carefully. I have some circuitry close to my eustachian tubes that registers intense pain if exposed to too-hot liquids. "We concentrate on the healing arts."

"The reason I was asking being," he continued, as though I hadn't spoken, "dat I need to get a fix on how much time I've got before Lemuria rises again."

Lemuria? I did a fast access. "Ah. You mean the legendary drowned continent, the Atlantis of the Pacific," I said.

"*Older* than Atlantis," he said firmly. "Them Atlanteans was no more than colonists of Lemuria, if yez want the truth of it. It was the cook on board the *Northerly Isles* first told me about Lemuria; he was a man with an education, ye know, before them unfortunate circumstances what sent him to sea. I'm telling you, the Lemurians had it over Atlantis in every way. Their high priests knew more arcane lore, their temples and palaces was bigger, and they sunk first."

"Really."

"They did. And see, the Atlanteans (who had got degenerate to start with, which was why they sunk) spread out all over everywhere and forgot their ancient wisdom, but not the Lemurians. They founded a fine city up on Mount Shasta, and from there They've kept Their gold and silver vessels together and Their ancient libraries and all."

"You don't say."

"I do. And I wager the reason They've been so careful to keep to Themselves *is*," he leaned forward for emphasis, "dat They know Lemuria's going to rise again, any day now, and They want to be able to move back in without the place getting crowded. Just a select company, ye know. They ain't said it in so many words — They're shy that way — but I can tell, all right."

"Mm-hm." I tasted my coffee. "And you need to know exactly when Lemuria will rise? Why don't you ask Them, Senor?"

"O, I have." He wrooched uneasily in the sand, causing little avalanches around himself. "But They don't care to talk about Lemuria much, which is a prudent thing to do, right enough, I can see dat; but, see, I've got this School to found, and if I know the vast submerged peaks ain't going to lift clear of the waves for another year or so, why then I've got time to get everything ready. On the other hand, if it's the day after tomorrow-like dat the ancient palaces is rising into view again, I'm in a sad fix."

"You're founding a school?" Who did he think was going to attend, clams? "What kind of school, Senor?"

"The School of Lemurian Knowledge." He put his finger to the side of his nose. "Now, it was foretold in me natal horoscope dat I was to found a great institution of learning. And, me being wrecked here, yez wouldn't think dat would come to pass, would yez, now? But Destiny's a mighty thing. It was here I met Them, and They saw at once I was spiritually evolved enough to keep company with the likes of Them. Mind you, it was a while before They'd admit to being the Ascended Masters — made on at first like what They didn't understand me — but at last They saw I was clever enough to have found out Their game. They put me through a lot of tests to see if I'm worthy, and They has prepared me ever since to be one of the Elect what'll get to live in Lemuria once it's up again. Why, They've had me to visit up there, ye know, I've walked in Their golden tunnels on Mount Shasta!

"But, after all, I pity me fellow creatures dat'll have to stay here and ain't had the benefit of Their company. So what I been doing is, I been copying down all I seen when I visits Them on sacred tablets, which is to form the library of me school. As soon as I've got all the collected wisdom down, pupils will flock to the Dunes from all over the world. So, see, even if I ascend to Lemuria, or row out to it or something, I can still pass on Their knowledge to mankind."

"So you see yourself as a sort of Promethean benefactor, then," I said straight-faced, taking a cautious drink from my cup. He drank too and then looked up as the classical allusion sank in.

"Mind yez, I ain't stealing any sacred fire from Heaven!" he protested. "They're good fellows, Them Ascended Masters, and I'm sure They wouldn't mind about me copying things I've seen on sacred tablets, if I'd got around to mentioning 'em to Them. But I've been so busy, what with Them always testing me worthiness and all..."

"No, no, of course." I looked around at the shifting sand. "But, tell me, what do you do for your tablets? There is no stone here."

"Clam shells," he told me. "I paint on the insides, see."

I looked at the net bag, lying where he'd dropped it. I wasn't quite up to breakfast yet. "Can you get a lot of sacred wisdom in a clamshell?"

"Yez can if yez paint small; but then dat's another way these Dunes has it over other places, for there's much bigger clams here. If I had to use them little rubbishy eastern clams I'd have no end of labor." He

shook his head.

"Good point." There was sand in the bottom of my cup. I tilted it and dumped the last few drops out. "Well, Señor — I wish I could be of some assistance to you in your generous efforts to spread enlightenment. Though I must say most arcane texts I've read hold the opinion that Lemuria won't rise before the end of this century, so I think you have plenty of time."

"Do yez tell me so?" He knit his white brows uncertainly. "All the omens I been seeing predict a great change dat's coming."

Well, there was the Civil War of the Yankees about to kick off, not that he'd be likely to hear much about it out here. I looked thoughtful and said, "I too have heard of a great disturbance in the affairs of men soon, but most prophets agree it will not last long. Surely, then, they don't mean the rise of Lemuria?"

"O, no, I suppose not," he agreed, draining his teacup. "For when Lemuria escapes Ocean's mighty bosom, its next great cycle will last seventeen million years, ye know."

It took nearly that long to get him to leave, with gentle hints and tactful shoves; but at last he vanished over the top of a dune, waving cheerfully, and I was able to relax in blessed silence.

And without mortal distractions I got so much work done that day, hangover notwithstanding, that by nightfall I was able to transmit preliminary results on my field credenza to the relay station on the nearby mesa. Things were looking good for Laurent's sufferers everywhere. With the cellular map and the holoes I included the following smirky communication:

SPECIAL NOTE: AUTHENTIC HOLY MAN LIVING IN DUNE REGION! ELDERLY MALE CAUCASIAN EUROPEAN ORIGIN, SPONTANEOUS CROME GENERATOR ESTIMATE FORCE 10. CLAIMS TO HAVE BEEN CONTACTED BY ANCIENT LEMURIAN MASTERS AND IS CONFIDENTLY WAITING FOR SUBMERGED CONTINENT TO RISE. IS COMPILING LIBRARY OF TEACHINGS OF ASCENDED MASTERS! GREAT SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY TO OPEN HERE ANY DAY NOW!

I signed off, crawled out of the tent and stood stretching, looking up at the stars. All the black heaven sparkled and shone, and the Milky Way streamed out to sea like smoke from a ship's funnel. Too nice a night to waste on sleep. I strolled off across the sand, following the sound of the night ocean.

Cresting the top of a dune unmarked by any print, I looked down on the white circle of a shell midden. It gleamed under the starlight, perfect in its circumference. How many generations of Chumash had picnicked here, before the Europeans came? The thing must be fifteen meters across.

"But it wasn't the Indians put it there, ye know," observed a voice at my elbow.

I screamed, leaped into thin air and reappeared on the other side of the midden. Heart pounding, I stared across at the hermit, who was standing where I had been a second before. He waved pleasantly, apparently quite unsurprised by my teleportation.

"It was Them," he called to me.

"What?" I gasped. *What was wrong with my Approach Warning Sensors?* I ran a hasty self-diagnostic.

"They put it there, as a marker for when They come sailing down from Mount Shasta to visit. Helps 'em navigate in," he explained. He strode down the dune across the sand to me, sturdy knees and elbows

pumping. I watched him in disbelief.

"Out for a breath of fresh air, are yez?" he inquired. "I come out meself, on fine nights. These Dunes is also the best place to watch the celestial movements, ye know."

"No city lights to dim the stars," I found myself remarking.

"There are not," he agreed, looking heavenward. A green fire Drake crackled down the southern horizon. "Almost a pity that Lemuria's coming up so close by. They had towers in Their grand cities for the spreading of light focused through jewels. All them emeralds and rubies and sapphires winkin' away must have been a rare sight, and lit up the streets a deal better than lanterns, wouldn't ye think? But very bright."

"I suppose it would have been. Look, you don't think Lemuria's going to rise with the buildings all intact and everything in working order, do you? I mean, how long has it been at the bottom of the sea, for heaven's sake?" I cried in exasperation.

"Twelve million years," he informed me imperturbably.

"Well, there, how could there even be any ruins left after all this time?" I drew a deep breath, attempting to get a grip. The electromagnetic weirdness must be affecting me somehow. "It'll just be one big muddy unimproved ... landmass."

"So was San Francisco," he pointed out. "Nothing to speak of when the *Lima* put in there, and look what the Americans has built there now. I hear it's fit to rival Paris or London, though of course it's nothing so grand as what *They'll* build once They've got Their own back. Think of all them water frontage lots! And building's no trouble at all for Them, ye know, because They've got the secret of countermanding the forces of gravity."

"They have?"

"They have that. They've got a device uses cosmic rays to move great blocks of stone. Just floats 'em in as though they weighed nothing at all, at all. I daresay Their builders taught the Egyptians everything they knew. Why, the Pyramids ain't nothing to what you'll see being put up once Lemuria rises." He nodded in the direction of the sea as though he could glimpse it there already. My eyes followed his gaze involuntarily. I shook my head, as if to clear away the fog of mystical nonsense surrounding me.

"What a fascinating thought," I said, summoning every ounce of courtesy. "I have no doubt I shall dream about Lemuria's jewel-studded towers as I sleep. To which end, Senor, I must wish you Good Evening."

"And a fine Good Evening to yez as well. I think I'll just wait around and see if They drop by tonight. Yez'll be welcome to stay to meet Them, ye know." He raised his eyebrows alluringly.

"Thank you, Senor, but I am weary and fear I would not be at my social best. Give Them my regards, though, won't you?" I requested, and made my escape under the grinning stars.

When I returned to my camp there was a faint blue light blinking in my field lab. I actually grabbed up my frying pan and started for it, blood in my eye; but it was only the credenza indicator light, telling me that a transmission had come in while I was out.

I leaned down to peer at the tiny glowing screen.

PRIORITY DIRECTIVE GREEN 07011860 2300 RE: CROME GENERATOR. INVESTIGATE FURTHER. OBTAIN DNA SAMPLE AND FORWARD TO RELAY STATION.

There was some ugly language used in the field lab, and a frying pan sailed out under the stars as though propelled by cosmic anti-gravity rays.

So, how do you get a DNA sample from a psychic?

A real two-fisted operative would move in silently, plant some expensive neuronutralizing device (which field botanists are never given enough budget for, by the way) and get a pint of blood and maybe a finger or two from the unconscious subject.

I opted to sneak into the hermit's house while he wasn't there and collect shed hair and skin cells, but even that presented its own problems. When did he leave his wicker beehive? For how long? Did he ever go far enough away for all his blue lights to follow him and leave me the hell alone? If he did, and they did, maybe he'd be unable to perceive my rifling his belongings.

Dawn of the next day found me crouching in a willow thicket one kilometer south of the hermit's cove, scanning intently. He was home, I could tell, awake already and moving around within a tiny zone of activity; must be still within the beehive. Abruptly his signal dropped in location and its zone widened: he'd climbed out and was moving around on his lawn. Then his signal moved away due west, receding and receding. He must be going down to dig clams. That should take him a while.

I emerged from my thicket and ran like a rabbit over the dunes. In no time I went tumbling down the sand-wall into his cove and sprinted across his lawn. Well, he wouldn't need any sixth sense to know I'd been here; I could always tell him I'd just stopped by to borrow a cup of sugar or something. No blue radiation at the moment, at least.

I pushed my way into the willows about the base of his beehive and looked around.

He'd cleared a space under the bushes around the four supporting poles. It was cool and shady in there, and clearly he used it as additional living room. Over to one side was a shallow well and the banked embers of a cooking fire; over to the other side must be his library, to judge from the baskets and baskets of clamshells. There must have been hundreds of them, each one painted with knotted and interlacing patterns of dizzying Celtic complexity. Some had text, beautiful tiny lettering massed between spirals and vine leaves, but many appeared to be abstract images. There was something vaguely familiar about them, but I couldn't spare the time to look further. I scrambled up his ladder and crawled into the beehive.

Right at the doorway was his scriptorium: a chunk of redwood log two feet across, adzed flat for a work surface, with clamshells holding various inks and paints. I supposed he made them from berry juice and powdered earths. A grooved tray held little brushes made from reed cane and hair; an old graniteware cup held water. The present tome in progress was balanced on a ring of woven grass.

I didn't look at it particularly closely, or at the fiddle hanging on the wall. I made straight for the rumpled mass of sealskins that formed the old man's bed.

I swept a few long white hairs into my collector and groped around with a scraper for skin cells. Oh, great: the ancient hide was coming off too. Now the Company would think he had seal DNA.

It would have to do. Tucking the samples away, I turned to exit on my hands and knees. My gaze fell on the half-painted clamshell.

The pattern was drawn in a faint silver line, done with a knife point or an old nail maybe, and blocked in carefully in ocher and olive green. Ribbons and dots? No. A twisting ladder? No ... a DNA spiral.

A DNA spiral.

I stared at it fixedly for a long moment and then jumped down the ladder into the area below, where I grabbed up a clamshell from the nearest basket.

On its inner surface was an accurate depiction of the solar system, including Pluto and all the moons of Jupiter. And here was another one showing the coastline of Antarctica, and I couldn't identify this one but it certainly looked like circuitry designs. And what were these? Lenticular cumuli? *Where had he seen all this?*

He hadn't gotten it from any bloody Lemurians, that much I was sure of. In this time period, surely only one of Us could have painted these pictures, unless there was a serious security breach somewhere. I'd have to inform the Company.

I reflected on the possibilities as I sped back to my camp. He'd seen my field lab, of course, but I'd only been here a couple of days! He was a psychic, and a powerful one. Had he somehow been picking up transmissions from the station on the mesa nearby? If they'd been careless with their shielding, he might. Anyway it couldn't be my fault.

I rushed right into the tent and sent a breathless communication outlining what I'd found. As the last green letter flitted away into the ether, I sat back and frowned. Having been put into words, the story sounded even crazier than it was. The crew at the relay station might think I had a screw missing. Maybe I should go back and take some holoes of the clamshells to back up my story. There was still the DNA sample to send, too.

But even as I was preparing it for transmission, the credenza beeped and another message came in. I leaned over to peer at it.

PRIORITY DIRECTIVE GREEN 070218601100 RE: CROME GENERATOR. OBTAIN LIBRARY.

My jaw dropped. Hesitantly I transmitted: *CLARIFY? SPECIFY? HOW MANY?*

ENTIRE LIBRARY. OBTAIN. PRIORITY.

A long moment later I transmitted ACKNOWLEDGED.

Well, this was just great. What was I supposed to do now? Carry basket after basket of clamshells up to the relay station on the mesa?

Yes, that was exactly what I was supposed to do, and that was the easy part. How was I to obtain the old man's library in the first place? I'd like to see anybody just sort of slip four hundred pounds of clamshells into her pocket without being noticed, and I was dealing with a psychic at that.

I crawled out of the tent and stood, gloomily staring at the thickets of *Oenothera*. It wasn't as though I didn't have work of my own to do, after all. Look at all these endangered plants. And such specimens of *Lupinus chamissonis*, *Fragaria chiloensis*, *Calystegia soldanella* ! Why couldn't the Company send a Security operative to deal with this? I reached out and broke off a sprig of primrose, examining closely the pattern of viral striping in a deeper pink than the salmon color of the petals...

The petals turned blue. Everything turned blue: my hand, my sleeve, the dune before me. I raised a startled face just in time to see a dark-blue blur cross the sky above me, as the electromagnetic anomaly pulsed and roared like a monster leaping out of the sand at my feet. I tried to yell, but couldn't remember how; and I fell down a tiny blue tunnel where there was nothing to see but a line of tiny letters and

punctuation marks, tangling themselves together in a vain attempt to produce something other than gibberish.

After a long while they did manage to spell out a word, however, and it blinked on and off steadily. RESET. Oh. I knew what that meant. I was supposed to do something now, wasn't I? I breathed, blinked and tried to look around but found I could only move my eyes.

I lay where I had toppled backward, frozen in my last conscious attitude, arm still out, hand still clutching a sprig of *Oenothera*. A little sand had drifted into my open mouth. It was quiet and peaceful here now, and no longer blue; but the air stung with ozone and some sort of electromagnetic commotion was going on to the north of me.

To hell with it. I closed my eyes, but to my dismay saw red letters flashing behind my eyelids. PRIORITY! OBTAIN LIBRARY! My body jerked as some fried circuit repaired itself and my legs flexed, attempting to pull me up into a standing position. After several tries, during which the rigid upper half of my body jolted to and fro and got me another faceful of sand, my legs righted themselves and set off northward, staggering through the dunes. The rest of me rode along above them like an unwilling maharani atop a drunken elephant. At least some of the sand spilled out of my mouth.

As I lurched nearer I could feel the anomaly throbbing away up ahead, and a fan of blue rays spread themselves like a peacock's tail above the hermit's cove. Every instinct I had left was screaming at me to get out of there, but my lower torso blundered along like a goddam Frankenstein's Monster, stumbling occasionally and pitching me face-forward into the sand again. Frantically I went into my self-repair program and tried to get control, but it was committed to fixing my arms and would not allow override. The best I was able to do was close my mouth.

By the time I came thrashing over the top of the last dune, I had sensation again in my right arm; but what I beheld in the cove below me nearly brought on another fit of electronic apoplexy. Somebody else was stealing the library!

Two small figures were struggling up the face of the opposite dune, carrying each a basket of piled shells. From the prints in the sand ahead of them, I could see that this was not their first trip, and their destination was an indistinct domed something that lay in a shimmer of blue just over the top of the dune.

My jaw worked, I spat out sand and shouted, "Hey!" They turned around and I had the impression that they were a pair of English children in white hooded snowsuits, their facial features tiny and perfect, their skin ashy pale. They wore enormous black goggles. When they saw me they squeaked in horror and ran, plowing up the dune face in their efforts to get away from me and not drop the heavy baskets.

My legs took me down the sand like a juggernaut. I picked up speed across the lawn and started up after them, gaining back more and more of my coordination as I went. They were nearly to the top of the dune now and I could see there was something not quite human in their proportions. Head circumference too big, tubby little bodies, spindly arms and legs. What the Hell? I searched my index for information on related subjects and was rewarded with a host of terribly earnest UFO titles from the late 20th century, all illustrated with drawings of these same spindly little people. *Aliens*? From outer space? Were *these* the Ascended Masters from whom the Hermit had been stealing his sacred fire, his memorized scraps of improbable knowledge? As I gained on them they began crying openmouthed in their terror, desperately trying to clamber over the top of the dune.

One of them made it but the other stumbled, dropping his basket, and a single clamshell bounced out and went skating down the sand wall toward me. My right hand shot out and closed on it like a trap, in as fine an example of bonehead priority programming as I've ever seen, because if I'd been able to ignore it and

keep going past I'd have caught the little so-and-so. As it was, in my wasted second he managed to grab up his basket again and hands-and-knees drag it over the top, where his friend had hung back long enough to help him to his feet. They scampered away down the other side just seconds before I was able to pull myself up off the slope.

I looked down into a wide valley of sand, featureless but for the great white circle of a shell midden. There was an airship parked on it.

Now this was 1860, mind you, and here was this thing that looked like an Easter egg designed by Jules Verne sitting on a prehistoric shell midden. It was all of some purply-silver metal and it had portholes, and riveted plates, and scrollwork and curlicues that made no kind of aerodynamic sense. It wasn't one of our ships, certainly. It bore no resemblance to a silver saucer; but then, this was 1860, wasn't it? Nearly a hundred years before anything crashed in a place called Roswell.

The little figures ran for it, sobbing in alarm to the others who stood around the ship. They all turned to stare at me, except for one who was crouched over, trying to pull a snowsuit on up around himself. As all the others screamed at the sight of me, he straightened up and looked. It was the hermit.

"O, not to worry," he told them. "I know her." He put his hands up to form a trumpet around his mouth and shouted, "I regret I was not at home when yez come to call! It seems They've decided to take me to Mount Shasta to live with Them permanent-like! Ain't dat a grand thing, now?"

"Your Library!" I croaked. The little creatures were frantically tossing basket after basket of shells in through the open door of the airship, and two of them grabbed the hermit's arms to try to hurry him the rest of the way into his suit. He gave me a slightly shamefaced shrug.

"Well, They found me out about that, and They're confiscating it ; but They're good fellows, like I told yez, and They say I can open a school in Lemuria when she comes up. They say They'll have to test me worthiness some more, but dat's all right." One of them zipped up the front of his suit and pressed a pair of goggles into his hands, signing several times that he should put them on at once. The others were vanishing inside the ship as fast as they could get through the door.

But I wasn't about to follow them now, priority or no priority, not after the brain-scrambling I'd got when they'd overflowed me. My self-preservation program was finally working again, and I stood rooted in place watching the hermit fit the goggles on over his spectacles while the one remaining creature gibbered and tugged on his arm.

"Half a minute, there, I can't see through this — there now. Why, it's all funny-looking. Say," he called across to me, "Yez might see if the Sisterhood's interested in coming out here to the Dunes. I still think it's a capital place for a great center of learning." The ship began to tremble and hum, and the creature turned to dart through the door, pulling the hermit after him. I recoiled from the waves of radiation that flooded outward. The hermit paused in the doorway, looking back to me, and went on shouting:

"Because, ye know, the vibrations hereabouts is so powerful yez can almost — " the door slid shut with a dull bang, trapping a lock of his beard as the ship began its ascent into the sky. The ascent paused, the door slid open a half-inch and the beard vanished inside; the door slammed again and the ship zoomed upward a few hundred meters, until without turning it sped off at an angle and vanished from sight.

I stood staring for a long moment. Aware that I was still clutching the one clamshell I had managed to grab, I raised my hand painfully and examined it. I nearly screamed.

It was a nice little study of ducks paddling happily on a lake. And look: here were some children on the shore of the lake, feeding the ducks. At least, they might have been children. Oh, who was I kidding?

They weren't children, they were Visitors from Somewhere who had found a unique life form in these Dunes. Like me, they had tested a sample; like me, they were transplanting it.

I let my arm drop to my side. Now that the ship had gone I could see across the midden to the high dune beyond, where clamshell letters ten feet high shouted silently:

NOT ALONE.