



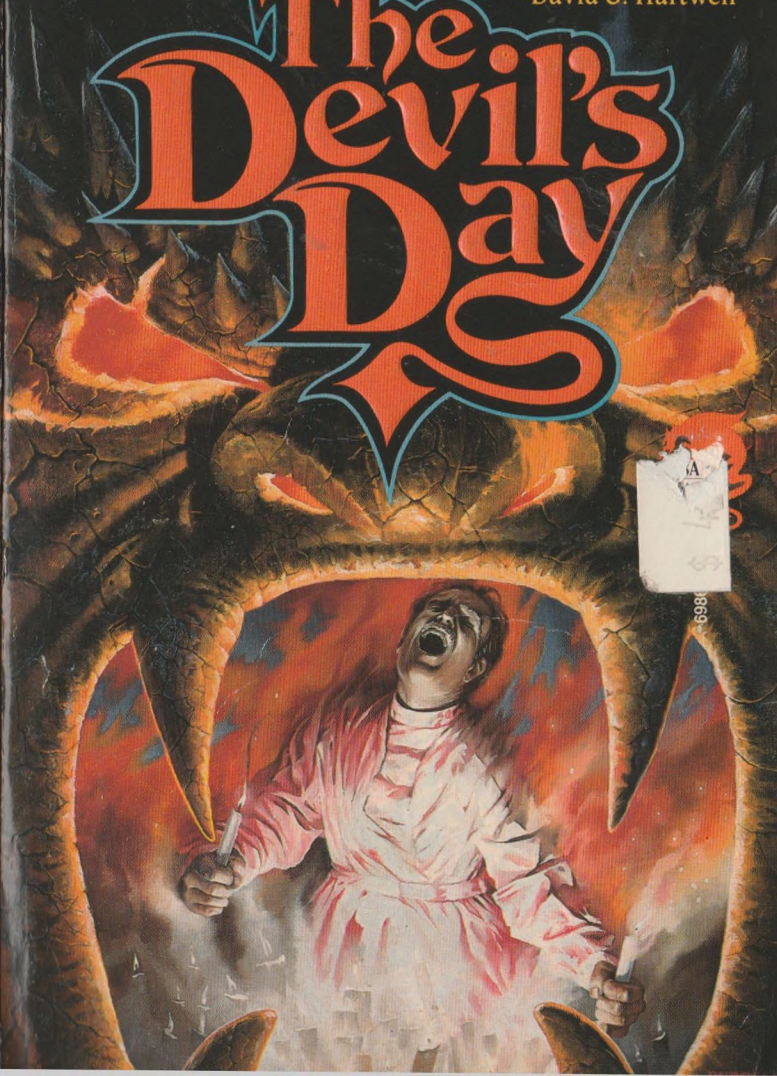
# James Blish

"Blish's greatest masterpiece."

—David G. Hartwell

# The Devil's Day

James Blish *The Devil's Day*



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“I conjure and command thee, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, by all the names wherewith thou mayest be constrained and bound, SATAN, RANTAN, PALLANTRE, LUTIAS, CORICACOEM, SCIRCIGREUR, where art thou? I conjure thee by Him who hath created thee for this ministry, to fulfill my work! I cite thee, arise, arise, arise!”

Ware took a step forward, and touched the flaming tip of the rod to the veil of silk on the belly of the still girl. A little curl of blue-gray smoke began to rise from it, like ignited incense.

Something began to form in the distance. Baines had the clear impression that it was behind the altar, behind the curtained door, indeed outside the palazzo altogether, but he could see it nevertheless. It came forward, growing, until he could also see that it was a thing like a man . . .





James Blish

The  
Devil's  
Day



## THE DEVIL'S DAY

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

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# **BLACK EASTER**

or, *Faust Aleph-Null*

Why, this is Hell; nor am I out of it.  
—Christopher Marlowe

*In Memoriam*

**C. S. LEWIS**



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

There have been many novels, poems and plays about magic and witchcraft. All of them that I have read—which I think includes the vast majority—classify without exception as either romantic or playful, Thomas Mann's included. I have never seen one which dealt with what real sorcery actually had to be like if it existed, although all the grimoires are explicit about the matter. Whatever other merits this book may have, it neither romanticizes magic nor treats it as a game.

Technically, its background is based as closely as possible upon the writings and actual working manuals of practicing magicians working in the Christian tradition from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, from the *Ars Magna* of Ramon Lull, through the various *Keys* of pseudo-Solomon, pseudo-Agrrippa, pseudo-Honorius and so on, to the grimoires themselves. All of the books mentioned in the text actually exist; there are no "Necronomicons" or other such invented works, and the quotations and symbols are equally authentic. (Though of course it should be added that the attributions of these works are seldom to be trusted; as C. A. E. Waite has noted, the besetting *bibliographic* sins of magic are imputed authorship, false places of publication and backdating.)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

For most readers this will be warning enough. The experimentally minded, however, should be further warned that, although the quotations, diagrams and rituals in the novel are authentic, they are in no case complete. The book is not, and was not intended to be, either synoptic or encyclopedic. It is not a *vade mecum*, but a *cursus infamam*.

*James Blish*

*Alexandria (Va.), 1968*

## STATIONS

<i>Preparation of the Operator</i>	11
<i>The First Commission</i>	19
<i>Three Sleeps</i>	53
<i>The Last Conjunction</i>	117



## ***Preparation of the Operator***

**It is not reasonable to suppose that Aristotle  
knew the number of the Elect.**

**—Albertus Magnus**



The room stank of demons.

And it was not just the room—which would have been unusual, but not unprecedented. Demons were not welcome visitors on Monte Albano, where the magic practiced was mostly of the kind called Transcendental, aimed at pursuit of a more perfect mystical union with God and His two revelations, the Scriptures and the World. But occasionally, Ceremonial magic—an applied rather than a pure art, seeking certain immediate advantages—was practiced also, and in the course of that the White Monks sometimes called down a demiurge, and, even more rarely, raised up one of the Fallen.

That had not happened in a long time, however; of that, Father F. X. Domenico Bruno Garelli was now positive. No, the stench was something in the general air. It was, in fact, something that was abroad in the world . . . the secular world, God's world, the world at large.

And it would have to be something extraordinarily powerful, extraordinarily malign, for Father Domenico to have detected it without prayer, without ritual, without divination, without instruments or instrumentalities of any kind. Though Father Domenico—ostensibly an ordinary Italian monk of about forty *ae*, with the stolid face of his peasant family

and calluses on his feet—was in fact an adept of the highest class, the class called Karcists, he was not a Sensitive. There were no true Sensitives at all on the mountain, for they did not thrive even in the relative isolation of a monastery; they could not function except as eremites (which explained why there were so few of them anywhere in the world, these days).

Father Domenico closed the huge Book of Hours with a creak of leather and parchment, and rolled up the palimpsest upon which he had been calculating. There was no doubt about it: none of the White Monks had invoked any infernal power, not even a minor seneschal, for more than a twelve-month past. He had suspected as much—how, after all, could he have gone unaware of such an event?—but the records, which kept themselves without possibility of human intervention, confirmed it. That exhalation from Hell-mouth was drifting up from the world below.

Deeply disturbed, Father Domenico rested his elbows upon the closed record book and propped his chin in his hands. The question was, what should he do now? Tell Father Umberto? No, he really had too little solid information yet to convey to anyone else, let alone disturbing the Director-General with his suspicions and groundless certainties.

How, then, to find out more? He looked ruefully to his right, at his crystal. He had never been able to make it work—probably because he knew all too well that what Roger Bacon had really been describing in *The Nullity of Magic* had been nothing more than a forerunner of the telescope—though others on the mountain, unencumbered by such historical skepticism, practiced crystallo-mancy with considerable success. To his left, next to the book, a small brass telescope was held aloft in a regrettably phallic position by



## PREPARATION OF THE OPERATOR

a beautiful gold statuette of Pan that had a golden globe for a pediment, but which was only a trophy of an old triumph over a minor Piedmontese black magician and had no astronomical usefulness; should Father Domenico want to know the precise positions of the lesser Jovian satellites (the Galilean ones were of course listed in the U. S. Naval Observatory ephemeris), or anything else necessary to the casting of an absolute horoscope, he would call upon the twelve-inch telescope and the image-orthicon on the roof of the monastery and have the images (should he need them as well as the data) transmitted by closed-circuit television directly to his room. At the moment, unhappily, he had no event to cast a horoscope either from or toward—only a pervasive, immensurable fog of rising evil.

At Father Domenico's back, he knew without looking, colored spots and lozenges of light from his high, narrow, stained-glass window were being cast at this hour across the face of his computer, mocking the little colored points of its safe-lights. He was in charge of this machine, which the other Brothers regarded with an awe he privately thought perilously close to being superstitious; he himself knew the computer to be nothing but a moron—an idiot-savant with a gift for fast addition. But he had no data to feed the machine, either.

Call for a Power and ask for help? No, not yet. The occasion might be trivial, or at least seem so in the spheres they moved, and where they moved. Father Domenico gravely doubted that it was, but he had been rebuked before for unnecessarily troubling those movers and governors, and it was not a kind of displeasure a sensible white magician could afford, however in contempt he might hold the indiscriminate hatred of demons.

## BLACK EASTER

No; there was no present solution but to write to Father Uccello, who would listen hungrily, if nothing else. He was a Sensitive; he, too, would know that something ugly was being born—and would doubtless know more about it than that. He would have data.

Father Domenico realized promptly that he had been almost unconsciously trying to avoid this decision almost from the start. The reason was obvious, now that he looked squarely at it; for of all the possibilities, this one would be the most time-consuming. But it also seemed to be unavoidable.

Resignedly, he got out his Biro fountain pen and a sheet of foolscap and began. What few facts he had could be briefly set down, but there was a certain amount of ceremony that had to be observed: salutations in Christ, inquiries about health, prayers and so on, and of course the news; Sensitive were always as lonely as old women, and as interested in gossip about sin, sickness and death. One had to placate them; edifying them—let alone curing them—was impossible.

While he was still at it, the door swung inward to admit an acolyte: the one Father Domenico, in a rare burst of sportiveness, had nicknamed Joannes, after Bacon's famous disappearing apprentice. Looking up at him bemusedly, Father Domenico said:

"I'm not through yet."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry . . . I was thinking about something else. I'll have a letter for you to send down the mountain in a while. In the meantime, what did you want?"

"Myself, nothing," Joannes said. "But the Director asks me to tell you that he wishes your presence, in the office, right after sext. There's to be a meeting with a client."

"Oh. Very well. What sort of client?"

## PREPARATION OF THE OPERATOR

"I don't know, Father. It's a new one. He's being hauled up the mountain now. I hear he's a rich American, but then, a lot of them are, aren't they?"

"You do seem to know *something*," Father Domenico said drily, but his mind was not on the words. The reek of evil had suddenly become much more pronounced; it was astonishing that the boy couldn't smell it too. He put the letter aside. By tonight there would be more news to add—and, perhaps, data. "Tell the Director I'll be along promptly."

"First I have to go and tell Father Amparo," Joannes said. "He's supposed to meet the client too."

Father Domenico nodded. At the door, the acolyte turned, with a mysterious sort of slyness, and added:

"His name is Baines."

The door shut. Well, there was a fact, such as it was—and obviously Joannes had thought it full of significance. But to Father Domenico it meant nothing at all.

Nothing, nothing at all.



## The First Commission

[In] the legendary wonder-world of Theurgy . . . all paradoxes seem to obtain actually, contradictions coexist logically, the effect is greater than the cause and the shadow more than the substance. Therein the visible melts into the unseen, the invisible is manifested openly, motion from place to place is accomplished without traversing the intervening distance, matter passes through matter. . . . There life is prolonged, youth renewed, physical immortality secured. There earth becomes gold, and gold earth. There words and wishes possess creative power, thoughts are things, desire realizes its object. There, also, the dead live and the hierarchies of extra-mundane intelligence are within easy communication, and become ministers or tormentors, guides or destroyers, of man.

—A. E. Waite,

*The Book of Ceremonial Magic*



## I

The magician said, "No, I can't help you to persuade a woman. Should you want her raped, I can arrange that. If you want to rape her yourself, I can arrange that, too, with more difficulty—possibly more than you'd have to exert on your own hook. But I can't supply you with any philtres or formulae. My specialty is crimes of violence. Chiefly, murder."

Baines shot a sidelong glance at his special assistant, Jack Ginsberg, who as usual wore no expression whatsoever and had not a crease out of true. It was nice to be able to trust someone. Baines said, "You're very frank."

"I try to leave as little mystery as possible," Theron Ware—Baines knew that was indeed his real name—said promptly. "From the client's point of view, black magic is a body of technique, like engineering. The more he knows about it, the easier I find it makes coming to an agreement."

"No trade secrets? Arcane lore, and so on?"

"Some—mostly the products of my own research, and very few of them of any real importance to you. The main scholium of magic is 'arcane' only because most people don't know what books to read or where to find them. Given those books—and sometimes, somebody to translate them for

you—you could learn almost everything important that I know in a year. To make something of the material, of course, you'd have to have the talent, since magic is also an art. With books and the gift, you could become a magician—either you are or you aren't, there are no bad magicians, any more than there is such a thing as a bad mathematician—in about twenty years. If it didn't kill you first, of course, in some equivalent of a laboratory accident. It takes that long, give or take a few years, to develop the skills involved. I don't mean to say you wouldn't find it formidable, but the age of secrecy is past. And really the old codes were rather simple-minded, much easier to read than, say, musical notation. If they weren't, well, computers could break them in a hurry."

Most of these generalities were familiar stuff to Baines, as Ware doubtless knew. Baines suspected the magician of offering them in order to allow time for himself to be studied by the client. This suspicion crystallized promptly as a swinging door behind Ware's huge desk chair opened silently, and a short-skirted blond girl in a pageboy coiffure came in with a letter on a small silver tray.

"Thank you, Greta. Excuse me," Ware said, taking the tray. "We wouldn't have been interrupted if this weren't important." The envelope crackled expensively in his hands as he opened it.

Baines watched the girl go out—a moving object, to be sure, but except that she reminded him vaguely of someone else, nothing at all extraordinary—and then went openly about inspecting Ware. As usual, he started with the man's chosen surroundings.

The magician's office, brilliant in the afternoon sunlight, might have been the book-lined study of any doctor or



lawyer, except that the room and the furniture were outsize. That said very little about Ware, for the house was a rented cliffside palazzo; there were bigger ones available in Positano had Ware been interested in still higher ceilings and worse acoustics. Though most of the books looked old, the office was no mustier than, say, the library of Merton College, and it contained far fewer positively ancient instruments. The only trace in it that might have been attributable to magic was a faint smell of mixed incenses, which the Tyrrhenian air coming in through the opened windows could not entirely dispel; but it was so slight that the nose soon tired of trying to detect it. Besides, it was hardly diagnostic by itself; small Italian churches, for instance, also smelled like that—and so did the drawing rooms of Egyptian police chiefs.

Ware himself was remarkable, but with only a single exception, only in the sense that all men are unique to the eye of the born captain. A small, spare man he was, dressed in natural Irish tweeds, a French-cuffed shirt linked with what looked like ordinary steel, a narrow, gray, silk four-in-hand tie with a single very small sapphire chessman—a rook—tacked to it. His leanness seemed to be held together with cables; Baines was sure that he was physically strong, despite a marked pallor, and that his belt size had not changed since he had been in high school.

His present apparent age was deceptive. His face was seamed, and his bushy gray eyebrows now only slightly suggested that he had once been red-haired. His hair proper could not, for—herein lay his one marked oddity—he was tonsured, like a monk, blue veins crawling across his bare white scalp as across the papery backs of his hands. An innocent bystander might have taken him to be in his late sixties. Baines knew him to be exactly his own age, which

was forty-eight. Black magic, not surprisingly, was obviously a wearing profession; cerebrotonic types like Ware, as Baines had often observed of the scientists who worked for Consolidated Warfare Service (div. A. O. LeFebre et Cie.), ordinarily look about forty-five from a real age of thirty until their hair turns white, if a heart attack doesn't knock them off in the interim.

The parchment crackled and Jack Ginsberg unobtrusively touched his dispatch case, setting going again a tape recorder back in Rome. Baines thought Ware saw this, but chose to take no notice. The magician said:

"Of course, it's also faster if my clients are equally frank with me."

"I should think you'd know all about me by now," Baines said. He felt an inner admiration. The ability to pick up an interrupted conversation exactly where it had been left off is rare in a man. Women do it easily, but seldom to any purpose.

"Oh, Dun and Bradstreet," Ware said, "newspaper morgues, and of course the grapevine—I have all that, naturally. But I'll still need to ask some questions."

"Why not read my mind?"

"Because it's more work than it's worth. I mean your excellent mind no disrespect, Mr. Baines. But one thing you must understand is that magic is hard work. I don't use it out of laziness, I am not a lazy man, but by the same token I do take the easier ways of getting what I want if easier ways are available."

"You've lost me."

"An example, then. All magic—I repeat, *all* magic, with no exceptions whatsoever—depends upon the control of demons. By demons I mean specifically fallen angels. No lesser

## THE FIRST COMMISSION

class can do a thing for you. Now, I know one such whose earthly form includes a long tongue. You may find the notion comic."

"Not exactly."

"Let that pass for now. In any event, this is also a great prince and president, whose apparition would cost me three days of work and two weeks of subsequent exhaustion. Shall I call him up to lick stamps for me?"

"I see the point," Baines said. "All right, ask your questions."

"Thank you. Who sent you to me?"

"A medium in Bel Air—Los Angeles. She attempted to blackmail me, so nearly successfully that I concluded that she did have some real talent and would know somebody who had more. I threatened her life and she broke."

Ware was taking notes. "I see. And she sent you to the Rosicrucians?"

"She tried, but I already knew that dodge. She sent me to Monte Albano."

"Ah. That surprises me, a little. I wouldn't have thought that you'd have any need of treasure finders."

"I do and I don't," Baines said. "I'll explain that, too, but a little later, if you don't mind. Primarily I wanted someone in your specialty—murder—and of course the white monks were of no use there. I didn't even broach the subject with them. Frankly, I only wanted to test your reputation, of which I'd had hints. I, too, can use newspaper morgues. Their horror when I mentioned you was enough to convince me that I ought to talk to you, at least."

"Sensible. Then you don't really believe in magic yet—in ESP or some such nonsense."

"I'm not," Baines said guardedly, "a religious man."

"Precisely put. Hence, you want a demonstration. Did you bring with you the mirror I mentioned on the phone to your assistant?"

Silently, Jack took from his inside jacket pocket a waxed-paper envelope, from which he in turn removed a lady's hand mirror sealed in glassine. He handed it to Baines, who broke the seal.

"Good. Look in it."

Out of the corners of Baines' eyes, two slow thick tears of dark venous blood were crawling down beside his nose. He lowered the mirror and stared at Ware.

"Hypnotism," he said, quite steadily. "I had hoped for better."

"Wipe them off," Ware said, unruffled.

Baines pulled out his immaculate monogrammed handkerchief. On the white-on-white fabric, the red stains turned slowly into butter-yellow gold.

"I suggest you take those to a government metallurgist tomorrow," Ware said. "I could hardly have hypnotized him. Now perhaps we might get down to business."

"I thought you said—"

"That even the simplest trick requires a demon. So I did, and I meant it. He is sitting at your back now, Mr. Baines, and he will be there until day after tomorrow at this hour. Remember that—day after tomorrow. It will cost me dearly to have turned this little piece of silliness, but I'm used to having to do such things for a skeptical client—and it will be included in my bill. Now, if you please, Mr. Baines, what *do* you want?"

Baines handed the handkerchief to Jack, who folded it carefully and put it back in its waxed-paper wrapper. "I," Baines said, "of course want someone killed. Tracelessly."

"Of course, but who?"

"I'll tell you that in a minute. First of all, do you exercise any scruples?"

"Quite a few," Ware said. "For instance, I don't kill my friends, not for any client. And possibly I might balk at certain strangers. However, in general, I do have strangers sent for, on a regular scale of charges."

"Then we had better explore the possibilities," Baines said. "I've got an ex-wife who's a gross inconvenience to me. Do you balk at that?"

"Has she any children—by you or anybody else?"

"No, none at all."

"In that case, there's no problem. For that kind of job, my standard fee is fifteen thousand dollars, flat."

Despite himself, Baines stared in astonishment. "Is that all?" he said at last.

"That's all. I suspect that I'm almost as wealthy as you are, Mr. Baines. After all, I can find treasure as handily as the white monks can—indeed, a good deal better. I use these alimony cases to keep my name before the public. Financially they're a loss to me."

"What kinds of fees are you interested in?"

"I begin to exert myself slightly at about five million."

If this man was a charlatan, he was a grandiose one. Baines said, "Let's stick to the alimony case for the moment. Or rather, suppose I don't care about the alimony, as in fact I don't. Instead, I might not only want her dead, but I might want her to die badly. To suffer."

"I don't charge extra for that."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Baines," Ware said patiently, "I remind you, please, that I myself am not a killer. I merely summon and direct

the agent. I think it very likely—in fact, I think it beyond doubt—that any patient I have sent for dies in an access of horror and agony beyond your power to imagine, or even of mine. But you did specify that you wanted your murder done ‘tracelessly,’ which obviously means that I must have no unusual marks left on the patient. I prefer it that way myself. How then could I prove suffering if you asked for it, in a way inarguable enough to charge you extra for it?

“Or, look at the other side of the shield, Mr. Baines. Every now and then, an unusual divorce client asks that the ex-consort be carried away painlessly, even sweetly, out of some residue of sentiment. I *could* collect an extra fee for that, on a contingent basis, that is, if the body turns out to show no overt marks of disease or violence. But my agents are demons, and sweetness is not a trait they can be compelled to exhibit, so I never accept that kind of condition from a client, either. Death is what you pay for, and death is what you get. The circumstances are up to the agent, and I don’t offer my clients anything that I know I can’t deliver.”

“All right, I’m answered,” Baines said. “Forget Dolores—actually she’s only a minor nuisance, and only one of several, for that matter. Now let’s talk about the other end of the spectrum. Suppose instead that I should ask you to . . . send for . . . a great political figure. Say, the governor of California—or, if he’s a friend of yours, pick a similar figure who isn’t.”

Ware nodded. “He’ll do well enough. But you’ll recall that I asked you about children. Had you really turned out to have been an alimony case, I should next have asked you about surviving relatives. My fees rise in direct proportion to the numbers and kinds of people a given death is likely

to affect. This is partly what you call scruples, and partly a species of self-defense. Now in the case of a reigning governor, I would charge you one dollar for every vote he got when he was last elected. Plus expenses, of course."

Baines whistled in admiration. "You're the first man I've ever met who's worked out a system to make scruples pay. And I can see why you don't care about alimony cases. Someday, Mr. Ware—"

"*Doctor* Ware, please. I am a Doctor of Theology."

"Sorry. I only meant to say that someday I'll ask you why you want so much money. You asthenics seldom can think of any good use for it. In the meantime, however, you're hired. Is it all payable in advance?"

"The expenses are payable in advance. The fee is C.O.D. As you'll realize once you stop to think about it, Mr. Baines—"

"*Doctor* Baines. I am an LL.D."

"Apologies in exchange. I want you to realize, after these courtesies, that I have never, never been bilked."

Baines thought about what was supposed to be at his back until day after tomorrow. Pending the test of the golden tears on the handkerchief, he was willing to believe that he should not try to cheat Ware. Actually, he had never planned to.

"Good," he said, getting up. "By the same token, we don't need a contract. I agree to your terms."

"But what for?"

"Oh," Baines said, "we can use the governor of California for a starter. Jack here will iron out any remaining details with you. I have to get back to Rome by tonight."

"You did say, 'For a starter?'"

Baines nodded shortly. Ware, also rising, said, "Very well. I shall ask no questions. But in fairness, Mr. Baines, I should

## BLACK EASTER

warn you that on your next commission of this kind, I shall ask you what *you* want."

"By that time," Baines said, holding his excitement tightly bottled, "we'll *have* to exchange such confidences. Oh, Dr. Ware, will the, uh, demon on my back go away by itself when the time's up, or must I see you again to get it taken off?"

"It isn't *on* your back," Ware said. "And it will go by itself. Marlowe to the contrary, misery does not love company."

Baring his teeth, Baines said, "We'll see about that."



## II

For a moment, Jack Ginsberg felt the same soon-to-be-brief strangeness of the man who does not really know what is going on and hence thinks he might be about to be fired. It was as though something had swallowed him by mistake, and—quite without malice—was about to throw him up again.

While he waited for the monster's nausea to settle out, Jack went through his rituals, stroking his cheeks for stubble, resettling his creases, running through last week's accounts, and thinking above all, as he usually did most of all in such interims, of what the new girl might look like squatting in her stockings. Nothing special, probably; the reality was almost always hedged around with fleshly inconveniences and piddling little preferences that he could flense away at will from the clean vision.

When the chief had left and Ware had come back to his desk, however, Jack was ready for business and thoroughly on top of it. He prided himself upon an absolute self-control.

"Questions?" Ware said, leaning back easily.

"A few, Dr. Ware. You mentioned expenses. What expenses?"

"Chiefly travel," Ware said. "I have to see the patient, personally. In the case Dr. Baines posed, that involves a trip

to California, which is a vast inconvenience to me, and goes on the bill. It includes air fare, hotels, meals, other out-of-pocket expenses, which I'll itemize when the mission is over. Then there's the question of getting to see the governor. I have colleagues in California, but there's a certain amount of influence I'll have to buy, even with the help of Consolidated Warfare—munitions and magic are circles that don't intersect very effectively. On the whole, I think a draft for ten thousand would be none too small."

All that for magic. Disgusting. But the chief believed in it, at least provisionally. It made Jack feel very queasy.

"That sounds satisfactory," he said, but he made no move toward the corporate checkbook; he was not about to issue any Valentines to strangers yet, not until there was more love touring about the landscape than he had felt in his crew-cut antennae. "We're naturally a little bit wondering, sir, why all this expense is necessary. We understand that you'd rather not ride a demon when you can fly a jet with less effort—"

"I'm not sure you do," Ware said, "but stop simpering about it and ask me about the money."

"Argh . . . well, sir, then, just why do you live outside the United States? We know you're still a citizen. And after all, we have freedom of religion in the States still. Why does the chief have to pay to ship you back home for one job?"

"Because I'm not a common gunman," Ware said. "Because I don't care to pay income taxes, or even report my income to anybody. There are two reasons. For the benefit of your ever-attentive dispatch case there—since you're a deaf ear if ever I saw one—if I lived in the United States and advertised myself as a magician, I would be charged with fraud, and if I successfully defended myself—proved I was what I

said I was—I'd wind up in a gas chamber. If I failed to defend myself, I'd be just one more charlatan. In Europe, I can say I'm a magician, and be left alone if I can satisfy my clients—*caveat emptor*. Otherwise, I'd have to be constantly killing off petty politicians and accountants, which isn't worth the work, and sooner or later runs into the law of diminishing returns. Now you can turn that thing off."

Aha; there *was* something wrong with this joker. He was preying upon superstition. As a Reformed Orthodox Agnostic, Jack Ginsberg knew all the ins and outs of that, especially the double-entry sides. He said smoothly:

"I quite understand. But don't you perhaps have almost as much trouble with the Church, here in Italy, as you would with the government back home?"

"No, not under a liberal pontificate. The modern Church discourages what it calls superstition among its adherents. I haven't encountered a prelate in decades who believes in the *literal* existence of demons—though of course some of the Orders know better."

"To be sure," Jack said, springing his trap exultantly. "So I think, sir, that you may be overcharging us—and haven't been quite candid with us. If you do indeed control all these great princes and presidents, you could as easily bring the chief a woman as you could bring him a treasure or a murder."

"So I could," the magician said, a little wearily. "I see you've done a little reading. But I explained to Dr. Baines, and I explain again to you, that I specialize only in crimes of violence. Now, Mr. Ginsberg, I think you were about to write me an expense check."

"So I was." But still he hesitated. At last Ware said with delicate politeness:

"Is there some other doubt I could resolve for you, Mr. Ginsberg? I am, after all, a Doctor of Theology. Or perhaps you have a private commission you wish to broach to me?"

"No," Jack said. "No, not exactly."

"I see no reason why you should be shy. It's clear that you like my lamia. And in fact, she's quite free of the nuisances of human women that so annoy you—"

"Damn you. I *thought* you read minds! You lied about that, too."

"I don't read minds, and I never lie," Ware said. "But I'm adept at reading faces and somatotypes. It saves me a lot of trouble, and a lot of unnecessary magic. Do you want the creature or don't you? I could have her sent to you invisibly if you like."

"No."

"Not invisibly. I'm sorry for you. Well then, my godless and lustless friend, speak up for yourself. What *would* you like? Your business is long since done. Spit it out. What is it?"

For a breathless instant, Jack almost said what it was, but the God in which he no longer believed was at his back. He made out the check and handed it over. The girl (no, not a girl) came in and took it away.

"Good-bye," Theron Ware said.

He had missed the boat again.

### III

Father Domenico read the letter again, hopefully. Father Uccello affected an Augustinian style, after his name saint, full of rare words and outright neologisms imbedded in medieval syntax—as a stylist, Father Domenico much preferred Roger Bacon, but that eminent anti-magician, not being a Father of the Church, tempted few imitators—and it was possible that Father Domenico had misread him. But no; involuted though the Latin of the letter was, the sense, this time, was all too plain.

Father Domenico sighed. The practice of Ceremonial magic, at least of the white kind which was the monastery's sole concern, seemed to be becoming increasingly unrewarding. Part of the difficulty, of course, lay in the fact that the chiefest traditional use (for profit) of white magic was the finding of buried treasure; and after centuries of unremitting practice by centuries of sorcerers black and white, plus the irruption into the field of such modern devices as the mine detector, there was very little buried treasure left to find. Of late, the troves revealed by those under the governments of OCH and BETHOR—with the former of whom in particular lay the bestowal of "a purse springing with gold"—had increasingly turned out to be underseas, or in places like Fort

Knox or a Swiss bank, making the recovery of them enterprises so colossal and mischancy as to remove all possibility of profit for client and monastery alike.

On the whole, black magicians had an easier time of it—at least in this life; one must never forget, Father Domenico reminded himself hastily, that they were also damned eternally. It was as mysterious as it had always been that such infernal spirits as LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE should be willing to lend so much power to a mortal whose soul Hell would almost inevitably have won anyhow, considering the character of the average sorcerer, and considering how easily such pacts could be voided at the last instant; and that God would allow so much demonic malice to be vented through the sorcerer upon the innocent. But that was simply another version of the Problem of Evil, for which the Church had long had the answer (or, the dual answer) of free will and original sin.

It had to be recalled, too, that even the practice of white or Transcendental magic was officially a mortal sin, for the modern Church held that all trafficking with spirits—including the un-Fallen, since such dealings inevitably assumed the angels to be demiurges and other kabbalistic semi-deities—was an abomination, regardless of intent. Once upon a time, it had been recognized that (barring the undertaking of an actual pact) only a man of the highest piety, of the highest purpose, and in the highest state of ritual and spiritual purification, could hope to summon and control a demon, let alone an angel; but there had been too many lapses of intent, and then of act, and in both practicality and compassion the Church had declared all Theurgy to be anathema, reserving unto itself only one negative aspect of magic—exorcism—and that only under the strictest of canonical limitations.

## THE FIRST COMMISSION

Monte Albano had a special dispensation, to be sure—partly since the monks had at one time been so spectacularly successful in nourishing the coffers of St. Peter's; partly because the knowledge to be won through the Transcendental rituals might sometimes be said to have nourished the soul of the Rock; and, in small part, because under the rarest of circumstances white magic had been known to prolong the life of the body. But these fountains (to shift the image) were now showing every sign of running dry, and hence the dispensation might be withdrawn at any time—thus closing out the last sanctuary of white magic in the world.

That would leave the field to the black magicians. There were no black sanctuaries, except for the Parisian Brothers of the Left-Hand Way, who were romantics of the school of Éliphas Lévi and were more to be pitied for folly than condemned for evil. But of solitary black sorcerers there were still a disconcerting number—though even one would be far too many.

Which brought Father Domenico directly back to the problem of the letter. He sighed again, turned away from his lectrum and padded off—the Brothers of Monte Albano were discalced—toward the office of the Director, letter in hand. Father Umberto was in (of course he was always *physically* in, like all the rest of them, since the Mount could not be left, once entered, except by the laity and they only by muleback), and Father Domenico got to the point directly.

"I've had another impassioned screed from our witch smeller," he said. "I am beginning to consider, reluctantly, that the matter is at least as serious as he's been saying all along."

"You mean the matter of Theron Ware, I presume."

"Yes, of course. That American gunmaker we saw went directly from the Mount to Ware, as seemed all too likely even at the time, and Father Uccello says that there's now every sign of another series of sendings being prepared in Positano."

"I wish you could avoid these alliterations. They make it difficult to discover what you're talking about. I often feel that a lapse into alliteration or other grammatical tricks is a sure sign that the speaker isn't himself quite sure of what he means to say, and is trying to blind me to the fact. Never mind. As for the demonolater Ware, we are in no position to interfere with him, whatever he's preparing."

"The style is Father Uccello's. Anyhow, he insists that we *must* interfere. He has been practicing divination—so you can see how seriously *he* takes this, the old purist—and he says that his principal, whom he takes great pains not to identify, told him that the meeting of Ware and Baines presages something truly monstrous for the world at large. According to his information, all Hell has been waiting for this meeting since the two of them were born."

"I suppose he's sure his principal wasn't in fact a demon, and didn't slip a lie past him, or at least one of their usual brags? As you've just indirectly pointed out, Father Uccello is way out of practice."

Father Domenico spread his hands. "Of course I can't answer that. Though if you wish, Father, I'll try to summon Whatever it was myself, and put the problem to It. But you know how good the chances are that I'll get the wrong one—and how hard it is to ask the right question. The great Governors seem to have no time sense as we understand the term, and as for demons, well, even when compelled



they often really don't seem to know what's going on outside their own jurisdictions."

"Quite so," said the Director, who had not himself practiced in many years. He had been greatly talented once, but the loss of gifted experimenters to administrative posts was the curse of all research organizations. "I think it best that you don't jeopardize your own usefulness, and your own soul, of course, in calling up some spirit you can't name. Father Uccello in turn ought to know that there's nothing we can do about Ware. Or does he have some proposal?"

"He wants us," Father Domenico said in a slightly shaky voice, "to impose an observer on Ware. To send one directly to Positano, someone who'll stick to Ware until we know what the deed is going to be. We're just barely empowered to do this—whereas, of course, Father Uccello can't. The question is, do *we* want to?"

"Hmm, hmm," the Director said. "Obviously not. That would bankrupt us—oh, not financially, of course, though it would be difficult enough. But we couldn't afford to send a novice, or indeed anyone less than the best we have, and after the good Lord only knows how many months in that infernal atmosphere . . ."

The sentence trailed off, as the Director's sentences often did, but Father Domenico no longer had any difficulty in completing them. Obviously the Mount could not afford to have even one of its best operators incapacitated—the word, in fact, was "contaminated"—by prolonged contact with the person and effects of Theron Ware. Similarly, Father Domenico was reasonably certain that the Director would in fact send somebody to Positano; otherwise he would not have mounted the obvious objections, but simply dismissed the proposal. For all their usual amusement with Father Uc-

cello, both men knew that there were occasions when one had to take him with the utmost seriousness, and that this was one of them.

"Nevertheless the matter will need to be explored," the Director resumed after a moment, fingering his beads. "I had better give Ware the usual formal notification. We're not obligated to follow up on it, but . . ."

"Quite," Father Domenico said. He put the letter into his scrip and arose. "I'll hear from you, then, when a reply's been received from Ware. I'm glad you agree that the matter is serious."

After another exchange of formalities, he left, head bowed. He also knew well enough who the Director would send, without any intervention of false modesty to cloud the issue; and he was well aware that he was terrified.

He went directly to his conjuring room, the cluttered tower chamber that no one else could use—for magic is intensely sensitive to the personality of the operator—and which was still faintly redolent of a scent a little like oil of lavender, a trace of his last use of the room. *Mansit odor, posses scire duisse deam*, he thought, not for the first time; but he had no intention of summoning any Presence now. Instead, he crossed to the chased casket which contained his 1606 copy—the second edition, but not much corrupted—of the *Enchiridion* of Leo III, that odd collection of prayers and other devices "effectual against all the perils to which every sort and condition of men may be made subject on land, on water, from open and secret enemies, from the bites of wild and rabid beasts, from poisons, from fire, from tempests." For greatest effectiveness he was instructed to carry the book on his person, but he had seldom judged himself to be in sufficient peril to risk so rare and valuable an

## THE FIRST COMMISSION

object, and in any event he did always read at least one page daily, chiefly the *In principio*, a version of the first chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.

Now he took the book out and opened it to the Seven Mysterious Orisons, the only section of the work—without prejudice to the efficacy of the rest of it—that probably had indeed proceeded from the hand of the Pope of Charlemagne. Kneeling to face the east, Father Domenico, without looking at the page, began the prayer appropriate for Thursday, at the utterance of which, perhaps by no coincidence, it is said that “the demons flee away.”

## IV

Considerable business awaited Baines in Rome, all the more pressing because Jack Ginsberg was still out of town, and Baines made no special effort to hunt down Jack's report on what the government metallurgist had said about the golden tears amid the mass of other papers. For the time being, at least, Baines regarded the report as personal correspondence, and he had a standing rule never even to open personal letters during office hours, whether he was actually in an office or, as now, working out of a hotel room.

Nevertheless, the report came to the surface the second day that he was back at work; and since he also made it a rule never to lose time to the distractions of an unsatisfied curiosity if an easy remedy was to hand, he read it. The tears on the handkerchief were indeed 24-karat gold; worth about eleven cents, taken together, on the current market, but to Baines representing an enormous investment (or, looked at another way, a potential investment in enormity).

He put it aside with satisfaction and promptly forgot about it, or very nearly. Investments in enormity were his stock in trade, though of late, he thought again with cold anger, they had been paying less and less—hence his interest in Ware, which the other directors of Consolidated Warfare

## THE FIRST COMMISSION

Service would have considered simple insanity. But after all, if the business was no longer satisfying, it was only natural to seek analogous satisfactions somewhere else. An insane man, in Baines' view, would be one who tried to substitute some pleasure—women, philanthropy, art collecting, golf—that offered no cognate satisfaction at all. Baines was ardent about his trade, which was destruction; golf could no more have sublimated that passion than it could have diluted that of a painter or a lecher.

The current fact, which had to be faced and dealt with, was that nuclear weapons had almost totally spoiled the munitions business. Oh, there was still a thriving trade to be drummed up selling small arms to a few small new nations—small arms being defined arbitrarily as anything up to the size of a submarine—but hydrogen fusion and the ballistic missile made the really major achievements of the art, the lubrication of the twenty-year cycle of world wars, entirely too obliterative and self-defeating. These days, Baines' kind of diplomacy consisted chiefly in the fanning of brush fires and civil wars. Even this was a delicate business, for the nationalism game was increasingly an exceedingly confused affair, in which one could never be quite sure whether some emergent African state with a population about the size of Maplewood, N.J., would not turn out to be of absorbing interest to one or more of the nuclear powers. (Some day, of course, they would all be nuclear powers, and then the art would become as formalized and minor as flower arranging.)

The very delicacy of this kind of operation had its satisfactions, in a way, and Baines was good at it. In addition, Consolidated Warfare Service had several thousand man-years of accumulated experience at this sort of thing upon which he could call. One of CWS's chief specialists was in Rome

## BLACK EASTER

with him now—Dr. Adolph Hess, famous as the designer of that peculiar all-purpose vehicle called the Hessicopter, but of interest in the present negotiations as the inventor of something nobody was supposed to have heard of—the land torpedo, a rapidly burrowing device that might show up, commendably anonymous, under any installation within two hundred miles of its launching tunnel, geology permitting. Baines had guessed that it might be especially attractive to at least one of the combatants in the Yemeni insurrection, and had proven to be so right that he was now trying hard not to have to dicker with all four of them. This was all the more difficult because, although the two putative Yemeni factions accounted for very little, Nasser was nearly as shrewd as Baines was, and Faisal inarguably a good deal shrewder.

Nevertheless, Baines was not essentially a minaturist, and he was well aware of it. He had recognized the transformation impending in the trade early on, in fact with the publication in 1950 by the U. S. Government Printing Office of a volume titled *The Effects of Atomic Weapons*, and as soon as possible had engaged the services of a private firm called the Mamaroneck Research Institute. This was essentially a brainstorming organization, started by an alumnus of the RAND Corporation, which specialized in imagining possible political and military confrontations and their possible outcomes, some of them so *outré* as to require the subcontracting of free-lance science-fiction writers. From the files of CWS and other sources, Baines fed Mamaroneck materials for its computers, some of which material would have considerably shaken the governments who thought they were sitting on it; and, in return, Mamaroneck fed Baines long, neatly lettered and Xeroxed reports bearing such titles as “Short- and Long-

Term Probabilities Consequent to an Israeli Blockade of the Faeröe Islands."

Baines winnowed out the most obviously absurd of these, but with a care that was the very opposite of conservatism, for some of the strangest proposals could turn out upon second look to be not absurd at all. Those that offered the best combination of surface absurdity with hidden plausibility, he set out to translate into real situations. Hence there was really nothing illogical or even out of character in his interest in Theron Ware, for Baines, too, practiced what was literally an occult art in which the man on the street no longer believed.

The buzzer sounded twice; Ginsberg was back. Baines returned the signal and the door swung open.

"Rogan's dead," Jack said without preamble.

"That was fast. I thought it was going to take Ware a week after he got back from the States."

"It's been a week," Jack reminded him.

"Hmm? So it has. Waiting around for these Ayrabs to get off the dime is hard on the time sense. Well, well. Details?"

"Only what's come over the Reuters ticker, so far. Started as pneumonia, ended as cor pulmonale—heart failure from too much coughing. It appears that he had a small mitral murmur for years. Only the family knew about it, and his physicians assured them that it wasn't dangerous if he didn't try to run a four-minute mile or something like that. Now the guessing is that the last campaign put a strain on it, and the pneumonia did the rest."

"Very clean," Baines said.

He thought about the matter for a while. He had borne the late governor of California no ill will. He had never

met the man, nor had any business conflicts with him, and in fact had rather admired his brand of medium-right-wing politics, which had been of the articulate but inoffensive sort expectable of an ex-account executive for a San Francisco advertising agency specializing in the touting of cold breakfast cereals. Indeed, Baines recalled suddenly from the file biography, Rogan had been a fraternity brother of his.

Nevertheless he was pleased. Ware had done the job—Baines was not in the smallest doubt that Ware should have the credit—with great nicety. After one more such trial run, simply to rule out all possibility of coincidence, he should be ready to tackle something larger; possibly, the biggest job of them all.

Baines wondered how it had been done. Was it possible that a demon could appear to a victim in the form of a pneumococcus? If so, what about the problem of reproduction? Well, there had been the appearances all over medieval Europe of fragments of the True Cross, in numbers quantitatively sufficient to stock a large lumberyard. Contemporary clerical apologists had called that Miraculous Multiplication, which had always seemed to Baines to be a classic example of rationalizing away the obvious; but since magic was real, maybe Miraculous Multiplication was too.

These, however, were merely details of technique, in which he made a practice of taking no interest. That kind of thing was for hirelings. Still, it wouldn't hurt to have somebody in the organization who did know something about the technicalities. It was often dangerous to depend solely on outside experts.

"Make out a check for Ware," he told Jack. "From my personal account. Call it a consultation fee—medical, preferably. When you send it to him, set up a date for another



visit—let's see—as soon as I get back from Riyadh. I'll take up all this other business with you in about half an hour. Send Hess in, but wait outside."

Jack nodded and left. A moment later, Hess entered silently. He was a tall, bony man with a slight pod, bushy eyebrows, a bald spot in the back, pepper-and-salt hair, and a narrow jaw that made his face look nearly triangular.

"Any interest in sorcery, Adolph? Personal, I mean?"

"Sorcery? I know something about it. For all the nonsense involved, it was highly important in the history of science, particularly the alchemical side, and the astrological."

"I'm not interested in either of those. I'm talking about black magic."

"Then, no, I don't know much about it," Hess said.

"Well, you're about to learn. We're going to visit an authentic sorcerer in about two weeks, and I want you to go along and study his methods."

"Are you pulling my leg?" Hess said. "No, you never do that. Are we going into the business of exposing charlatans, then? I'm not sure I'm the best man for that, Baines. A professional stage magician—a Houdini type—would be far more likely to catch out a faker than I would."

"No, that's not the issue at all. I'm going to ask this man to do some work for me, in his own line, and I need a close observer to see what he does—not to see through it, but to form an accurate impression of the procedures, in case something should go sour with the relationship later on."

"But—well, if you say so, Baines. It does seem rather a waste of time, though."

"Not to me," Baines said. "While you're waiting to talk to the Saudis with me, read up on the subject. By the end

## BLACK EASTER

of a year I want you to know as much about the subject as an expert. The man himself has told me that that's possible even for me, so it shouldn't tax you any."

"It's not likely to tax my brains much," Hess said drily, "but it may be a considerable tax on my patience. However, you're the boss."

"Right. Get on it."

Hess nodded distantly to Jack as he went out. The two men did not like each other much; in part, Baines sometimes thought, because in some ways they were much alike. When the door had closed behind the scientist, Jack produced from his pocket the waxed-paper envelope that had contained, and obviously still contained, the handkerchief bearing the two transmuted tears.

"I don't need that," Baines said. "I've got your report. Throw that thing away. I don't want anybody asking what it means."

"I will," Jack said. "But first, you'll remember that Ware said that the demon would leave you after two days."

"Sure. Why?"

"Look at this."

Jack took out the handkerchief and spread it carefully on Baines' desk blotter.

On the Irish linen, where the golden tears had been, were now two dull, inarguable smears of lead.

## V

By some untraceable miscalculation, Baines' party arrived in Riyadh precisely at the beginning of Ramadan, during which the Arabs fasted all day and were consequently in too short a temper to do business with; which was followed, after twenty-nine solid days, by a three-day feast during which they were too stuporous to do business with. Once negotiations were properly opened, however, they took no more than the two weeks Baines had anticipated.

Since the Moslem calendar is lunar, Ramadan is a movable festival, which this year fell close to Christmas. Baines half suspected that Theron Ware would refuse to see him in so inauspicious a season for servants of Satan, but Ware made no objection, remarking only (by post), "December 25th is a celebration of great antiquity." Hess, who had been reading dutifully, interpreted Ware to mean that Christ had not actually been born on that date—"though in this universe of discourse I can't see what difference that makes," he said. "If the word 'superstition' has any of its old meaning left at all by now, it means that the sign has come to replace the thing—or in other words, that facts come to mean what we say they mean."

"Call it an observer effect," Baines suggested, not entirely

jokingly. He was not disposed to argue the point with either of them; Ware would see him, that was what counted.

But if the season was no apparent inconvenience to Ware, it was a considerable one to Father Domenico, who at first flatly refused to celebrate it in the very maw of Hell. He was pressed at length and from both sides by the Director and Father Uccello, whose arguments had no less force for being so utterly predictable; and—to skip over a full week of positively Scholastic disputation—they prevailed, as again he had been sure they would.

Mustering all his humility, obedience and resignation—his courage seemed to have evaporated—he trudged forth from the monastery, excused from sandals, and mounted a mule, the *Enchiridion* of Leo III swinging from his neck under his cassock in a new leather bag, and a selection of his thaumaturgic tools, newly exorcised, asperged, fumigated and wrapped in silken cloths, in a satchel balanced carefully on the mule's neck. It was a hushed leave-taking—all the more so in its lack of any formalities or even witnesses, for only the Director knew why he was going, and he had been restrained with difficulty from bruiting it about that Father Domenico actually had been expelled, to make a cover story.

The practical effect of both delays was that Father Domenico and Baines' party arrived at Ware's palazzo on the same day, in the midst of the only snowstorm Positano had seen in seven years. As a spiritual courtesy—for protocol was all-important in such matters, otherwise neither monk nor sorcerer would have dared to confront the other—Father Domenico was received first, briefly but punctiliously; but as a client, Baines (and his crew, in descending order) got the best quarters. They also got the only service available, since Ware had no servants who could cross over the in-

## THE FIRST COMMISSION

visible line Father Domenico at once ruled at the foot of his apartment door with the point of his bolline.

As was customary in southern Italian towns at this time, three masked kings later came to the gate of the palazzo to bring and ask presents for the children and the Child; but there were no children there and the mummers were turned away, baffled and resentful (for the rich American, who was said to be writing a book about the frescoes of Pompeii, had previously shown himself open-handed), but oddly grateful too; it was a cold night, and the lights in the palazzo were of a grim and distant color.

Then the gates closed. The principals had gathered and were in their places; and the stage was set.



## Three Sleeps

It requires more courage and intelligence to be a devil than the folk who take experience at hearsay think. And none, save only he who has destroyed the devil in himself, and that by dint of hard work (for there is no other way) knows what a devil is, and what a devil he himself might be, as also what an army for the devils' use are they who think the devils are delusion.

—*The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup*





## VI

Father Domenico's interview with Theron Ware was brief, formal and edgy. The monk, despite his apprehensions, had been curious to see what the magician looked like, and had been irrationally disappointed to find him not much out of the ordinary run of intellectuals. Except for the tonsure, of course; like Baines, Father Domenico found that startling. Also, unlike Baines, he found it upsetting, because he knew the reason for it—not that Ware intended any mockery of his pious counterparts, but because demons, given a moment of inattention, were prone to seizing one by the hair.

"Under the Covenant," Ware told him in excellent Latin, "I have no choice but to receive you, of course, Father. And under other circumstances I might even have enjoyed discussing the Art with you, even though we are of opposite schools. But this is an inconvenient time for me. I've got a very important client here, as you've seen, and I've already been notified that what he wants of me is likely to be extraordinarily ambitious."

"I shan't interfere in any way," Father Domenico said. "Even should I wish to, which obviously I shall, I know very well that any such interference would cost me all my protections."

## BLACK EASTER

"I was sure you understood that, but nonetheless I'm glad to hear you say so," Ware said. "However, your very presence here is an embarrassment—not only because I'll have to explain it to my client, but also because it changes the atmosphere unfavorably and will make my operations more difficult. I can only hope, in defiance of all hospitality, that your mission will be speedily satisfied."

"I can't bring myself to regret the difficulty, since I only wish I could make your operations outright impossible. The best I can proffer you is strict adherence to the truce. As for the length of my stay, that depends wholly on what it is your client turns out to want, and how long *that* takes. I am charged with seeing it through to its conclusion."

"A prime nuisance," Ware said. "I suppose I should be grateful that I haven't been blessed with this kind of attention from Monte Albano before. Evidently what Mr. Baines intends is even bigger than he thinks it is. I conclude without much cerebation that you know something about it I don't know."

"It will be an immense disaster, I can tell you that."

"Hmm. From your point of view, but not necessarily from mine, possibly. I don't suppose you're prepared to offer any further information—on the chance, say, of dissuading me?"

"Certainly not," Father Domenico said indignantly. "If eternal damnation hasn't dissuaded you long before this, I'd be a fool to hope to."

"Well," Ware said, "but you are, after all, charged with the cure of souls, and unless the Church has done another flipflop since the last Congress, it is still also a mortal sin to assume that any man is certainly damned—even me."

That argument was potent, it had to be granted; but

### THREE SLEEPS

Father Domenico had not been trained in casuistry (and that by Jesuits) for nothing.

"I'm a monk, not a priest," he said. "And any information I give you would, on the contrary, almost certainly be used to abet the evil, not turn it aside. I don't find the choice a hard one under the circumstances."

"Then let me suggest a more practical consideration," Ware said. "I don't know yet what Baines intends, but I do know well enough that I am not a Power myself—only a fautor. I have no desire to bite off more than I can chew."

"Now you're just wheedling," Father Domenico said, with energy. "Knowing your own limitations is not an exercise at which I or anyone else can help you. You'll just have to weigh them in the light of Mr. Baines' commission, whatever that proves to be. In the meantime, I shall tell you nothing."

"Very well," Ware said, rising. "I will be a little more generous with my information, Father, than you have been with yours. I will tell you that you will be well advised to adhere to every letter of the Covenant. One step over the line, one toe, and *I shall have you*—and hardly any outcome in this world would give me greater pleasure. I'm sure I make myself clear."

Father Domenico could think of no reply; but none seemed to be necessary.

## VII

As Ware had sensed, Baines was indeed disturbed by the presence of Father Domenico, and made a point of bringing it up as the first order of business. After Ware had explained the monk's mission and the Covenant under which it was being conducted, however, Baines felt somewhat relieved.

"Just a nuisance, as you say, since he can't actually intervene," he decided. "In a way, I suppose my bringing Dr. Hess here with me is comparable—he's only an observer, too, and fundamentally he's probably just as hostile to your world-view as this holier-than-us fellow is."

"He's not significantly holier than us," Ware said with a slight smile. "I know something he doesn't know, too. He's in for a surprise in the next world. However, for the time being we're stuck with him—for how long depends upon you. Just what is it you want this time, Dr. Baines?"

"Two things, one depending on the other. The first is the death of Albert Stockhausen."

"The anti-matter theorist? That would be too bad. I rather like him, and besides, some of the work he does is of direct interest to me."

"You refuse?"

"No, not immediately anyhow, but I'm now going to ask

### THREE SLEEPS

you what I promised I would ask on this occasion. What are you aiming at, anyhow?"

"Something very long-term. For the present, my lethal intentions for Dr. Stockhausen are strictly business-based. He's nibbling at the edges of a scholium that my company presently controls completely. It's a monopoly of knowledge we don't want to see broken."

"Do you think you can keep anything secret that's based in natural law? After the McCarthy fiasco I should have supposed that any intelligent American would know better. Surely Dr. Stockhausen can't be just verging on some mere technicality—something your firm might eventually bracket with a salvo of process patents."

"No, it's in the realm of natural law, and hence not patentable at all," Baines admitted. "And we already know that it can't be concealed forever. But we need about five years' grace to make the best use of it, and we know that nobody else but Stockhausen is even close to it, barring accidents, of course. We ourselves have nobody of Stockhausen's caliber, we just fell over it, and somebody else might do that. However, that's highly unlikely."

"I see. Well . . . the project does have an attractive side. I think it's quite possible that I can persuade Father Domenico that this is the project he came to observe. Obviously it can't be—I've run many like it and never attracted Monte Albano's interest to this extent before—but given sufficient show of great preparations, and difficulty of execution, he might be deluded, and go home."

"That would be useful," Baines agreed. "The question is, could he be deceived?"

"It's worth trying. The task would in fact be difficult—and quite expensive."

## BLACK EASTER

"Why?" Jack Ginsberg said, sitting bolt upright in his carved Florentine chair so suddenly as to make his suit squeak against the silk upholstery. "Don't tell us he affects thousands of other people. Nobody ever cast any votes for him that I know of."

"Shut up, Jack."

"No, wait, it's a reasonable question," Ware said. "Dr. Stockhausen does have a large family, which I have to take into account. And, as I've told you, I've taken some pleasure in his company on a few occasions—not enough to balk at having him sent for, but enough to help run up the price.

"But that's not the major impediment. The fact is that Dr. Stockhausen, like a good many theoretical physicists these days, is a devout man—and furthermore, he has only a few venial sins to account for, nothing in the least meriting the attention of Hell. I'll check that again with Someone who knows, but it was accurate as of six months ago and I'd be astonished if there's been any change. He's not a member of any formal congregation, but even so he's nobody a demon could reasonably have come for him—and there's a chance that he might be defended against any direct assault."

"Successfully?"

"It depends on the forces involved. Do you want to risk a pitched battle that would tear up half of Düsseldorf? It might be cheaper just to mail him a bomb."

"No, no. And I don't want anything that might look like some kind of laboratory accident—that'd be just the kind of clue that would set everybody else in his field haring after what we want to keep hidden. The whole secret lies in the fact that once Stockhausen knows what we know, he could create a major explosion with—well, with the equivalent

### THREE SLEEPS

of a blackboard and two pieces of chalk. Isn't there any other way?"

"Men being men, there's always another way. In this instance, though, I'd have to have him tempted. I know at least one promising avenue. But he might not fall. And even if he did, as I think he would, it would take several months and a lot of close monitoring. Which wouldn't be altogether intolerable either, since it would greatly help to mislead Father Domenico."

"What would it cost?" Jack Ginsberg said.

"Oh—say about eight million. Entirely a contingent fee this time, since I can't see that there'd be any important out-of-pocket money needed. If there is, I'll absorb it."

"That's nice," Jack said. Ware took no notice of the feeble sarcasm.

Baines put on his adjudicative face, but inwardly he was well satisfied. As a further test, the death of Dr. Stockhausen was not as critical as that of Governor Rogan, but it did have the merit of being in an entirely different social sphere; the benefits to Consolidated Warfare Service would be real enough, so that Baines had not had to counterfeit a motive, which might have been detected by Ware and led to premature further questions; and finally, the objections Ware had raised, while in part unexpected, had been entirely consistent with everything the magician had said before, everything that he appeared to be, everything that his style proclaimed, despite the fact that he was obviously a complex man.

Good. Baines liked consistent intellectuals, and wished that he had more of them in his organization. They were always fanatics of some sort when the chips were down, and hence presented him with some large and easily grasped

## BLACK EASTER

handle precisely when he had most need of it. Ware hadn't exhibited his handle yet, but he would; he would.

"It's worth it," Baines said, without more than a decorous two seconds of apparent hesitation. "I do want to remind you, though, Dr. Ware, that Dr. Hess here is one of my conditions. I want you to allow him to watch while you operate."

"Oh, very gladly," Ware said, with another smile that, this time, Baines found disquieting; it seemed false, even unctuous, and Ware was too much in command of himself to have meant the falsity not to be noticed. "I'm sure he'll enjoy it. You can all watch, if you like. I may even invite Father Domenico."



## VIII

Dr. Hess arrived punctually the next morning for his appointment to be shown Ware's workroom and equipment. Greeting him with a professional nod—"Coals to Newcastle, bringing Mitford and me up here for a tertiary," Hess found himself quoting in silent inanity—Ware led the way to a pair of heavy, brocaded hangings behind his desk, which parted to reveal a heavy brass-bound door of what was apparently cypress wood. Among its fittings was a huge knocker with a face a little like the mask of tragedy, except that the eyes had cat-like pupils in them.

Hess had thought himself prepared to notice everything and be surprised by nothing, but he was taken aback when the expression on the knocker changed, slightly but inarguably, when Ware touched it. Apparently expecting his startlement, Ware said without looking at him, "There's nothing in here really worth stealing, but if anything were taken it would cost me a tremendous amount of trouble to replace it, no matter how worthless it would prove to the thief. Also, there's the problem of contamination—just one ignorant touch could destroy the work of months. It's rather like a bacteriology laboratory in that respect. Hence the Guardian."

"Obviously there can't be a standard supply house for your tools," Hess agreed, recovering his composure.

"No, that's not even theoretically possible. The operator must make everything himself—not as easy now as it was in the Middle Ages, when most educated men had the requisite skills as a matter of course. Here we go."

The door swung back as if being opened from the inside, slowly and soundlessly. At first it yawned on a deep scarlet gloom, but Ware touched a switch, and, with a brief rushing sound, like water, sunlight flooded the room.

Immediately Hess could see why Ware had rented this particular palazzo and no other. The room was an immense refectory of Sieneese design, which in its heyday must often have banquetted as many as thirty nobles; there could not be another one half as big in Positano, though the palazzo as a whole was smaller than some. There were mullioned windows overhead, under the ceiling, running around all four walls, and the sunlight was pouring through two ranks of them. They were flanked by pairs of red-velvet drapes, unpatterned, hung from traverse rods; it had been these that Hess had heard pulling back when Ware had flipped the wall switch.

At the rear of the room was another door, a broad one also covered by hangings, which Hess supposed must lead to a pantry or kitchen. To the left of this was a medium-sized, modern electric furnace, and beside it an anvil bearing a hammer that looked almost too heavy for Ware to lift. On the other side of the furnace from the anvil were several graduated tubs, which obviously served as quenching baths.

To the right of the door was a black-topped chemist's bench, complete with sinks, running water and the usual nozzles for illuminating gas, vacuum and compressed air;

### THREE SLEEPS

Ware must have had to install his own pumps for all of these. Over the bench on the back wall were shelves of reagents; to the right, on the side wall, ranks of drying pegs, some of which bore contorted pieces of glassware, others, coils of rubber tubing.

Farther along the wall toward the front was a lectern bearing a book as big as an unabridged dictionary, bound in red leather and closed and locked with a strap. There was a circular design chased in gold on the front of the book, but at this distance Hess could not make out what it was. The lectern was flanked by two standing candlesticks with fat candles in them; the candles had been extensively used, although there were shaded electric-light fixtures around the walls, too, and the small writing table next to the lectern bore a Tensor lamp. On the table was another book, smaller but almost as thick, which Hess recognized at once: the *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*, forty-seventh edition, as standard a laboratory fixture as a test tube; and, a rank of quill pens and inkhorns.

"Now you can see something of what I meant by requisite skills," Ware said. "Of course I blow much of my own glassware, but any ordinary chemist does that. But should I need a new sword, for instance"—he pointed toward the electric furnace—"I'd have to forge it myself. I couldn't just pick one up at a costume shop. I'd have to do a good job of it, too. As a modern writer says somewhere, the only really serviceable symbol for a sharp sword is a *sharp* sword."

"Uhm," Hess said, continuing to look around. Against the left wall, opposite the lectern, was a long heavy table, bearing a neat ranking of objects ranging in length from six inches to about three feet, all closely wrapped in red silk. The wrappers had writing on them, but again Hess could

not decipher it. Beside the table, affixed to the wall, was a flat sword cabinet. A few stools completed the furnishings; evidently Ware seldom worked sitting down. The floor was parqueted, and toward the center of the room still bore traces of marks in colored chalks, considerably scuffed, which brought from Ware a grunt of annoyance.

"The wrapped instruments are all prepared and I'd rather not expose them," the magician said, walking toward the sword rack, "but of course I keep a set of spares and I can show you those."

He opened the cabinet door, revealing a set of blades hung in order of size. There were thirteen of them. Some were obviously swords; others looked more like shoemaker's tools.

"The order in which you make these is important, too," Ware said, "because, as you can see, most of them have writing on them, and it makes a difference what instrument does the writing. Hence I began with the unscribed instrument, this one, the bolline or sickle, which is also one of the most often used. Rituals differ, but the one I use requires starting with a piece of unused steel. It's fired three times, and then quenched in a mixture of magpie's blood and the juice of an herb called foirole."

"The *Grimorium Verum* says mole's blood and pimpernel juice," Hess observed.

"Ah, good, you've been doing some reading. I've tried that, and it just doesn't seem to give quite as good an edge."

"I should think you could get a still better edge by finding out what specific compounds were essential and using those," Hess said. "You'll remember that Damascus steel used to be tempered by plunging the sword into the body of a slave. It worked, but modern quenching baths are a lot better—

### THREE SLEEPS

and in your case you wouldn't have to be constantly having to trap elusive animals in large numbers."

"The analogy is incomplete," Ware said. "It would hold if tempering were the only end in view, or if the operation were only another observance of Paracelsus' rule, *Alterius non sit qui suus esse potest*—doing for yourself what you can't trust others to do. Both are practical ends that I might satisfy in some quite different way. But in magic the blood sacrifice has an additional function—what we might call the tempering of, not just the steel, but also the operator."

"I see. And I suppose it has some symbolic functions, too."

"In goëtic art, everything does. In the same way, as you probably also know from your reading, the forging and quenching is to be done on a Wednesday in either the first or the eighth of the day hours, or the third or the tenth of the night hours, under a full Moon. There is again an immediate practical interest being served here—for I assure you that the planetary hours do indeed affect affairs on Earth—but also a psychological one, the obedience of the operator in every step. The grimoires and other handbooks are at best so confused and contradictory that it's never possible to know completely what steps are essential and what aren't, and research into the subject seldom makes for a long life."

"All right," Hess said. "Go on."

"Well, the horn handle has next to be shaped and fitted, again in a particular way at a particular hour, and then perfected at still another day and hour. By the way, you mentioned a different steeping bath. If you use that ritual, the days and the hours are also different, and again the question is, what's essential and what isn't? Thereafter, there's a conjuration to be recited, plus three salutations and a warding

spell. Then the instrument is sprinkled, wrapped and fumigated—not in the modern sense, I mean it's perfumed—and is ready to use. After it's used, it has to be exorcised and re-dedicated, and that's the difference between the wrapped tools on the table and those hanging here in the rack.

"I won't go into detail about the preparation of the other instruments. The next one I make is the pen of the Art, followed by the inkpots and the inks, for obvious reasons—and, for the same reasons, the burin or graver. The pens are on my desk. This fitted needle here is the burin. The rest, going down the line as they hang here rather than in order of manufacture, are the white-handled knife, which like the boline is nearly an all-purpose tool . . . the black-handled knife, used almost solely for inscribing the circle . . . the stylet, chiefly for preparing the wooden knives used in tanning . . . the wand or blasting rod, which describes itself . . . the lancet, again self-descriptive . . . the staff, a restraining instrument analogous to a shepherd's . . . and lastly the four swords, one for the master, the other three for his assistants, if any."

With a side-glance at Ware for permission, Hess leaned forward to inspect the writings on the graven instruments. Some of them were easy enough to make out: on the sword of the master, for instance, the word MICHAEL appeared on the pommel, and on the blade, running from point to hilt, ELOHIM GIBOR. On the other hand, on the handle of the white-handled knife was engraved the following:

### THREE SLEEPS

Hess pointed to this, and to a different but equally baffling inscription that was duplicated on the handles of the stylet and the lancet. "What do those mean?"

"Mean? They can hardly be said to mean anything any more. They're greatly degenerate Hebrew characters, originally comprising various Divine Names. I could tell you what the Names were once, but the characters have no content any more—they just have to be there."

"Superstition," Hess said, recalling his earlier conversation with Baines, interpreting Ware's remark about Christmas.

"Precisely, in the pure sense. The process is as fundamental to the Art as evolution is to biology. Now if you'll step this way, I'll show you some other aspects that may interest you."

He led the way diagonally across the room to the chemist's bench, pausing to rub irritably at the chalk marks with the sole of his slipper. "I suppose a modern translation of that aphorism of Paracelsus," he said, "would be 'You just can't get good servants any more.' Not to ply mops, anyhow. . . . Now, most of these reagents will be familiar to you, but some of them are special to the Art. This, for instance, is exorcised water, which as you see I need in great quantities. It has to be river water to start with. The quicklime is for tanning. Some laymen, de Camp for instance, will tell you that 'virgin parchment' simply means parchment that's never been written on before, but that's not so—all the grimoires insist that it must be the skin of a male animal that has never engendered, and the *Clavicula Salomonis* sometimes insists upon unborn parchment, or the caul of a newborn child. For tanning I also have to grind my own salt, after the usual rites are said over it. The candles I use have to be made of the first wax taken from a new hive, and so do my

almadels. If I need images, I have to make them of earth dug up with my bare hands and reduced to a paste without any tool. And so on.

"I've mentioned aspersion and fumigation, in other words sprinkling and perfuming. Sprinkling has to be done with an aspergillum, a bundle of herbs like a fagot or *bouquet garni*. The herbs differ from rite to rite and you can see I've got a fair selection here—mint, marjoram, rosemary, vervain, periwinkle, sage, valerian, ash, basil, hyssop. In fumigation the most commonly used scents are aloes, incense, mace, benzoin, storax. Also, it's sometimes necessary to make a stench—for instance in the fumigation of a caul—and I've got quite a repertoire of those."

Ware turned away abruptly, nearly treading on Hess' toes, and strode toward the exit. Hess had no choice but to follow him.

"Everything involves special preparation," he said over his shoulder, "even including the firewood if I want to make ink for pacts. But there's no point in my cataloging things further, since I'm sure you thoroughly understand the principles."

Hess scurried after, but he was still several paces behind the magician when the window drapes swished closed and the red gloom was reinstated. Ware stopped and waited for him, and the moment he was through the door, closed it and went back to his seat behind the big desk. Hess, puzzled, walked around the desk and took one of the Florentine chairs reserved for guests or clients.

"Most illuminating," he said politely. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Ware rested his elbows on the desk and put his fingertips over his mouth, looking down thoughtfully. There was a sprinkle of perspiration over his brow and



### THREE SLEEPS

shaven head, and he seemed more than usually pale; also, Hess noticed after a moment, he seemed to be trying, without major effort, to control his breathing. Hess watched curiously, wondering what could have upset him. After only a moment, however, Ware looked up at him and volunteered the explanation, with an easy half smile.

"Excuse me," he said. "From apprenticeship on, we're trained to secrecy. I'm perfectly convinced that it's unnecessary these days, and has been since the Inquisition died, but old oaths are the hardest to reason away. No discourtesy intended."

"No offense taken," Hess assured him. "However, if you'd rather rest . . ."

"No, I'll have ample rest in the next three days, and be incommunicado, too, preparing for Dr. Baines' commission. So if you've further questions, now's the time for them."

"Well . . . I have no further technical questions, for the moment. But I am curious about a question Baines asked you during your first meeting—I needn't pretend, I'm sure, that I haven't heard the tape. I wonder, just as he did, what your motivation is. I can see from what you've shown me, and from everything you've said, that you've taken colossal amounts of trouble to perfect yourself in your Art, and that you believe in it. So it doesn't matter for the present whether or not *I* believe in it, only whether or not I believe in *you*. And your laboratory isn't a sham, it isn't there solely for extortion's sake, it's a place where a dedicated man works at something he thinks important. I confess I came to scoff—and to expose you, if I could—and I still can't credit that any of what you do works, or ever did work. But I accept that you so believe."

Ware gave him a half nod. "Thank you; go on."

## BLACK EASTER

"I've no further to go but the fundamental question. You don't really need money, you don't seem to collect art or women, you're not out to be President of the World or the power behind some such person—and yet by your lights you have damned yourself eternally to make yourself expert in this highly peculiar subject. What on earth *for?*"

"I could easily duck that question," Ware said slowly. "I could point out, for instance, that under certain circumstances I could prolong my life to seven hundred years, and so might not be worrying just yet about what might happen to me in the next world. Or I could point out what you already know from the texts, that every magician hopes to cheat Hell in the end—as several did who are now nicely ensconced on the calendar as authentic saints.

"But the real fact of the matter, Dr. Hess, is that I think what I'm after is worth the risk, and what I'm after is something you understand perfectly, and for which you've sold your own soul, or if you prefer an only slightly less loaded word, your integrity, to Dr. Baines—*knowledge.*"

"Uhm. Surely there must be easier ways—"

"You don't believe that. You think there may be more reliable ways, such as scientific method, but you don't think they're any easier. I myself have the utmost respect for scientific method, but I know that it doesn't offer me the kind of knowledge I'm looking for—which is also knowledge about the makeup of the universe and how it is run, but not a kind that any exact science can provide me with, because the sciences don't accept that some of the forces of nature are Persons. Well, but some of them are. And without dealing with those Persons I shall never know any of the things I want to know.

"This kind of research is just as expensive as underwriting

### THREE SLEEPS

a gigantic particle accelerator, Dr. Hess, and obviously I'll never get any government to underwrite it. But people like Dr. Baines can, if I can find enough of them—just as they underwrite you.

“Eventually, I may have to pay for what I've learned with a jewel no amount of money could buy. Unlike Macbeth, I know one *can't* 'skip the life to come.' But even if it does come to that, Dr. Hess—and probably it will—I'll take my knowledge with me, and it will have been worth the price.

“In other words—just as you suspected—I'm a fanatic.”

To his own dawning astonishment, Hess said slowly:

“Yes. Yes, of course . . . so am I.”

## IX

Father Domenico lay in his strange bed on his back, staring sleeplessly up at the pink stucco ceiling. Tonight was the night he had come for. Ware's three days of fasting, lustration and prayer—surely a blasphemous burlesque of such observances as the Church knew them, in intent if not in content—were over, and he had pronounced himself ready to act.

Apparently he still intended to allow Baines and his two repulsive henchmen to observe the conjuration, but if he had ever had any intention of including Father Domenico in the ceremony, he had thought better of it. That was frustrating, as well as a great relief; but, in his place, Father Domenico would have done the same thing.

Yet even here, excluded from the scene and surrounded by every protection he had been able to muster, Father Domenico could feel the preliminary oppression, like the dead weather before an earthquake. There was always a similar hush and tension in the air just before the invocation of one of the Celestial Powers, but with none of these overtones of maleficence and disaster . . . or would someone ignorant of what was actually proposed be able to tell the difference? That was a disquieting thought in itself, but

### THREE SLEEPS

one that could practically be left to Bishop Berkeley and the logical Positivists. Father Domenico knew what was going on—a ritual of supernatural murder; and could not help but tremble in his bed.

Somewhere in the palazzo there was the silvery sound of a small clock striking, distant and sweet. The time was now 10:00 P.M., the fourth hour of Saturn on the day of Saturn, the hour most suitable—as even the blameless and pitiable Peter de Abano had written—for experiments of hatred, enmity and discord; and Father Domenico, under the Covenant, was forbidden even to pray for failure.

The clock, that two-handed engine that stands behind the Door, struck, and struck no more, and Ware drew the brocaded hangings aside.

Up to now, Baines, despite himself, had felt a little foolish in the girdled white-linen garment Ware had insisted upon, but he cheered up upon seeing Jack Ginsberg and Dr. Hess in the same vestments. As for Ware, he was either comical or terrible, depending upon what view one took of the proceedings, in his white Levite surcoat with red-silk embroidery on the breast, his white-leather shoes lettered in cinnabar, and his paper crown bearing the word EL. He was girdled with a belt about three inches wide, which seemed to have been made from the skin of some hairy, lion-colored animal. Into the girdle was thrust a red-wrapped, scepter-like object, which Baines identified tentatively from a prior description of Hess' as the wand of power.

"And now we must vest ourselves," Ware said, almost in a whisper. "Dr. Baines, on the desk you will find three garments. Take one, and then another, and another. Give two to Dr. Hess and Mr. Ginsberg. Don the other yourself."

## BLACK EASTER

Baines picked up the huddle of cloth. It turned out to be an alb.

"Take up your vestments and lift them in your hands above your heads. At the amen, let them fall. Now:

"ANTON, AMATOR, EMITES, THEODONIEL, PONCOR, PAGOR, ANITOR, *by the virtue of these most holy angelic names do I clothe myself, O Lord of Lords, in my Vestments of Power, that so I may fulfill, even unto their term, all things which I desire to effect through Thee*, IDEODANIACH, PAMOR, PLAIOR, *Lord of Lords, Whose kingdom and rule endureth forever and ever. Amen.*"

The garments rustled down, and Ware opened the door.

The room beyond was only vaguely lit with yellow candlelight, and at first bore almost no resemblance to the chamber Dr. Hess had described to Baines. As his eyes accommodated, however, Baines was gradually able to see that it was the same room, its margins now indistinct and its furniture slightly differently ordered: only the lectern and the candlesticks—there were now four of them, not two—were moved out from the walls and hence more or less visible.

But it was still confusing, a welter of flickering shadows and slightly sickening perfume, most unlike the blueprint of the room that Baines had erected in his mind from Hess' drawing. The thing that dominated the real room itself was also a drawing, not any piece of furniture or detail of architecture: a vast double circle on the floor in what appeared to be whitewash. Between the concentric circles were written innumerable words, or what might have been words, in characters which might have been Hebrew, Greek, Etruscan or even Elvish for all Baines could tell. Some few were in Roman lettering, but they, too, were names he could not

### THREE SLEEPS

recognize; and around the outside of the outer circle were written astrological signs in their zodiacal order, but with Saturn to the north.

At the very center of this figure was a ruled square about two feet on a side, from each corner of which proceeded chalked, conventionalized crosses, which did not look in the least Christian. Proceeding from each of these, but not connected to them, were four six-pointed stars, verging on the innermost circle. The stars at the east, west and south each had a Tau scrawled at their centers; presumably the Saturnmost did too, but if so it could not be seen, for the heart of that emplacement was hidden by what seemed to be a fat puddle of stippled fur.

Outside the circles, at the other compass points, were drawn four pentagrams, in the chords of which were written **TE TRA GRAM MA TON**, and at the centers of which stood the candles. Farthest away from all this—about two feet outside the circle and three feet over it to the north—was a circle enclosed by a triangle, also much lettered inside and out; Baines could just see that the characters in the angles of the triangle read **NI CH EL**.

"Tanists," Ware whispered, pointing into the circle, "take your places."

He went toward the long table Hess had described and vanished in the gloom. As instructed, Baines walked into the circle and stood in the western star; Hess followed, taking the eastern; and Ginsberg, very slowly, crept into the southern. To the north, the puddle of fur revolved once widdershins and resettled itself with an unsettling sigh, making Jack Ginsberg jump. Baines inspected it belatedly. Probably it was only a cat, as was supposed to be traditional,

but in this light it looked more like a badger. Whatever it was, it was obscenely fat.

Ware reappeared, carrying a sword. He entered the circle, closed it with the point of the sword, and proceeded to the central square, where he lay the sword across the toes of his white shoes; then he drew the wand from his belt and unwrapped it, laying the red-silk cloth across his shoulders.

"From now on," he said, in a normal, even voice, "no one is to move."

From somewhere inside his vestments he produced a small crucible, which he set at his feet before the recumbent sword. Small blue flames promptly began to rise from the bowl, and Ware cast incense into it. He said:

"Holocaust. Holocaust. Holocaust."

The flames in the brazier rose slightly.

"We are to call upon MARCHOSIAS, a great marquis of the Descending Hierarchy," Ware said in the same conversational voice. "Before he fell, he belonged to the Order of Dominations among the angels, and thinks to return to the Seven Thrones after twelve hundred years. His virtue is that he gives true answers. Stand fast, all."

With a sudden motion, Ware thrust the end of his rod into the surging flames of the brazier. At once the air of the hall rang with a long, frightful chain of woeful howls. Above the bestial clamor, Ware shouted:

"I adjure thee, great MARCHOSIAS, as the agent of the Emperor LUCIFER, and of his beloved son LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, by the power of the pact I have with thee, and by the Names ADONAY, ELOIM, JEHOVAM, TAGLA, MATHON, ALMOUZIN, ARIOS, PITHONA, MAGOTS, SYLPHAE, TABOTS, SALAMANDRAE, GNOMUS, TERRAE, COELIS, GODENS, AQUA, and by the whole hierarchy of superior intelligences who shall constrain



### THREE SLEEPS

thee against thy will, *venite, venite, submiritillor* MARCHOSIAS!"

The noise rose higher, and a green steam began to come off the brazier. It smelt like someone was burning hart's horn and fish gall. But there was no other answer. His face white and cruel, Ware rasped over the tumult:

"I adjure thee, MARCHOSIAS, by the pact, and by the Names, appear instanter!" He plunged the rod a second time into the flames. The room screamed; but still there was no apparition.

"Now I adjure thee, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, whom I command, as the agent of the Lord and Emperor of Lords, send me thy messenger MARCHOSIAS, forcing him to forsake his hiding place, wheresoever it may be, and warning thee—"

The rod went back into the fire. Instantly, the palazzo rocked as though the earth had moved under it.

"Stand fast!" Ware said hoarsely.

Something Else said:

HUSH, I AM HERE. WHAT DOST THOU SEEK OF ME? WHY DOST THOU DISTURB MY REPOSE? LET MY FATHER REST, AND HOLD THY ROD.

Never had Baines heard a voice like that before. It seemed to speak in syllables of burning ashes.

"Hadst thou appeared when first I invoked thee, I had by no means smitten thee, nor called thy father," Ware said. "Remember, if the request I make of thee be refused, I shall thrust again my rod into the fire."

THINK AND SEE!

The palazzo shuddered again. Then, from the middle of the triangle to the northwest, a slow cloud of yellow fumes went up toward the ceiling, making them all cough, even Ware. As it spread and thinned, Baines could see a shape

forming under it; but he found it impossible to believe. It was—it was something like a she-wolf, gray and immense, with green and glistening eyes. A wave of coldness was coming from it.

The cloud continued to dissipate. The she-wolf glared at them, slowly spreading her griffin's wings. Her serpent's tail lashed gently, scarily.

In the northern pentacle, the great Abyssinian cat sat up and stared back. The demon-wolf showed her teeth and emitted a disgusting belch of fire. The cat settled its front feet indifferently.

"Stand, by the Seal," Ware said. "Stand and transform, else I shall plunge thee back whence thou camest. I command thee."

The she-wolf vanished, leaving behind in the triangle a plump, modest-looking young man wearing a decorous necktie, a dildo almost as long and nothing else. "Sorry, boss," he said in a sugary voice. "I had to try, you know. What's up?"

"Don't try to wheedle me, vision of stupidity," Ware said harshly. "Transform, I demand of thee, thou'rt wasting thy father's time, and mine! Transform!"

The young man stuck out his tongue, which was copper-green. A moment later, the triangle was occupied by a black-bearded man apparently twice his age, wearing a forest-green robe trimmed in ermine and a glittering crown. It hurt Baines' eyes to look at it. An odor of sandalwood began slowly to diffuse through the room.

"That's better," Ware said. "Now I charge thee, by those Names I have named and on pain of those torments thou hast known, to regard the likeness and demesne of that mortal whose eidolon I hold in my mind, and that when I release

thee, thou shalt straightaway go unto him, not making thyself known unto him, but revealing, as it were to come from his own intellectual soul, a vision and understanding of that great and ultimate Nothingness which lurks behind those signs he calls matter and energy, as thou wilt see it in his private forebodings, and that thou remainest with him and deepen his despair without remittal, until such time as he shall despise his soul for its endeavors, and destroy the life of his body."

"I cannot give thee," the crowned figure said, in a voice deep but somehow lacking all resonance, "what thou requirest."

"Refusal will not avail thee," Ware said, "for either shalt thou go incontinently and perform what I command, or I shall in no wise dismiss thee, but shall keep thee here unto my life's end, and torment thee daily, as thy father permiteth."

"Thy life itself, though it last seven hundred years, is but a day to me," said the crowned figure. Sparks issued from its nostrils as it spoke. "And thy torments but a farthing of those I have endured since ere the cosmic egg was hatched, and Eve invented."

For answer, Ware again stabbed the rod into the fire, which, Baines noted numbly, failed even to scorch it. But the crowned figure threw back its bearded head and howled desolately. Ware withdrew the rod, but only by a hand's breadth.

"I shall do as thou commandest," the creature said sullenly. Hatred oozed from it like lava.

"Be it not performed exactly, I shall call thee up again," Ware said. "But be it executed, for thy pay thou shalt carry

off the immortal part of the subject thou shalt tempt, which is as yet spotless in the sight of Heaven, and a great prize."

"But not yet enough," said the demon. "For thou must give me also somewhat of thine hoard, as it is written in the pact."

"Thou art slow to remember the pact," Ware said. "But I would deal fairly with thee, knowing marquis. Here."

He reached into his robe and drew out something minute and colorless, which flashed in the candlelight. At first, Baines took it to be a diamond, but as Ware held it out, he recognized it as an opalescent, crystal tear vase, the smallest he had ever seen, stopper, contents and all. This Ware tossed, underhand, out of the circle to the fuming figure, which to Baines' new astonishment—for he had forgotten that what he was really looking at had first exhibited as a beast—caught it skillfully in its mouth and swallowed it.

"Thou dost only tantalize MARCHOSIAS," the Presence said. "When I have thee in Hell, magician, then shall I drink thee dry, though thy tears flow never so copiously."

"Thy threats are empty. I am not marked for thee, shouldst thou see me in Hell forthever," Ware said. "Enough, ungrateful monster. Cease thy witless plaudering and discharge thine errand. I dismiss thee."

The crowned figure snarled, and then, suddenly, reverted to the form in which it had first showed itself. It vomited a great gout of fire, but the surge failed to pass the wall of the triangle; instead, it collected in a ball around the demon itself. Nevertheless, Baines could feel the heat against his face.

Ware raised his wand.

The floor inside the small circle vanished. The apparition

clashed its brazen wings and dropped like a stone. With a rending thunderclap, the floor healed seamlessly.

Then there was silence. As the ringing in Baines' ears died away, he became aware of a distant thrumming sound, as though someone had left a car idling in the street in front of the palazzo. Then he realized what it was: the great cat was purring. It had watched the entire proceedings with nothing more than grave interest. So, apparently, had Hess. Ginsberg seemed to be jittering, but he was standing his ground. Although he had never seen Jack rattled before, Baines could hardly blame him; he himself felt sick and giddy, as though just the effort of looking at MARCHOSIAS had been equivalent to having scrambled for days up some Himalayan glacier.

"It is over," Ware said in a gray whisper. He looked very old. Taking up his sword, he cut the diagram with it. "Now we must wait. I will be in seclusion for two weeks. Then we will consult again. The circle is open. You may leave."

Father Domenico heard the thunderclap, distant and muffled, and knew that the sending had been made—and that he was forbidden, now as before, even to pray for the soul of the victim (or the patient, in Ware's antiseptic Aristotelian terminology). Sitting up and swinging his feet over the edge of the bed, breathing with difficulty in the musky, detumescent air, he walked unsteadily to his satchel and opened it.

Why—that was the question—did God so tie his hands, why did He allow such a compromise as the Covenant at all? It suggested, at least, some limitation in His power unallowable by the firm dogma of Omnipotence, which it was a sin even to question; or, at worst, some ambiguity

in His relationship with Hell, one quite outside the revealed answers to the Problem of Evil.

That last was a concept too terrible to bear thinking about. Probably it was attributable purely to the atmosphere here; in any event, Father Domenico knew that he was in no spiritual or emotional condition to examine it now.

He could, however, examine with possible profit a minor but related question: Was the evil just done the evil Father Domenico had been sent to oversee? There was every immediate reason to suppose that it was—and if it was, then Father Domenico could go home tomorrow, ravaged but convalescent.

On the other hand, it was possible—dreadful, but in a way also hopeful—that Father Domenico had been commanded to Hell-mouth to await the emission of something worse. That would resolve the puzzling anomaly that Ware's latest undertaking, abominable though they all were, was for Ware not unusual. Much more important, it would explain, at least in part, why the Covenant existed at all: in Tolstoy's words, "God sees the truth, but waits."

And this question, at least, Father Domenico need not simply ponder, but could actively submit to the Divine guidance, even here, even now, provided that he call upon no Presences. That restriction was not prohibitive; what was he a magician for, if not to be as subtle in his works as in his praise?

Inkhorn, quill, straightedge, three different discs of different sizes cut from virgin cardboard—not an easy thing to come by—and the wrapped burin came out of the satchel and were arranged on top of his dresser, which would serve well enough for a desk. On the cardboard discs he carefully inscribed three different scales: the A camerae of sixteen

### THREE SLEEPS

divine attributes, from *bonitas* to *patientia*; the T camerae of thirty attributes of things, from *temporis* to *negatio*; and the E camerae of the nine questions, from *whether* to *how great*. He centerpunched all three discs with the burin, pinned them together with a cuff link and finally asperged the assembled Lull Engine with holy water from the satchel. Over it he said:

"I conjure thee, O form of this instrument, by the authority of God the Father Almighty, by the virtue of Heaven and the stars, by that of the elements, by that of stones and herbs, and in like manner by the virtue of snowstorms, thunder and winds, and belike also by the virtue of the *Ars magna* in whose figure thou art drawn, that thou receive all power unto the performance of those things in the perfection of which we are concerned, the whole without trickery, falsehood or deception, by the command of God, Creator of the Angels and Emperor of the Ages. DAMAHII, LUMECH, GADAL, PANCIA, VELOAS, MEOROD, LAMIDDOCH, BALDACH, ANERETHON, MITRATON, most holy angels, be ye wardens of this instrument. *Domine, Deus meus, in te speravi. . . . Confitebor tibi, Domine, in toto corde meo. . . . Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum. . . . Amen.*"

This said, Father Domenico took up the engine and turned the circles against each other. Lull's great art was not easy to use; most of the possible combinations of any group of wheels were trivial, and it took reason to see which were important, and faith to see which were inspired. Nevertheless, it had one advantage over all other forms of scrying: it was not, in any strict sense, a form of magic.

He turned the wheels at random the required number of times, and then, taking the outermost by its edge, shook it

## BLACK EASTER

to the four quarters of the sky. He was almost afraid to look at the result.

But on that very first essay, the engine had generated:  
PATIENCE/BECOMING/REALITY

It was the answer he had both feared and hoped for. And it was, he realized with a subdued shock, the only answer he could have expected on Christmas Eve.

He put the engine and the tools back in his satchel, and crept away into the bed. In his state of overexhaustion and alarm, he did not expect to sleep . . . but within two turns of the glass he was no longer in the phenomenal world, but was dreaming instead that, like Gerbert the magician-Pope, he was fleeing the Holy Office down the wind astride a devil.



## X

Ware's period of recovery did not last quite as long as he had prophesied. He was visibly up and about by Twelfth Night. By that time, Baines—though only Jack Ginsberg could see and read the signs—was chafing at the inaction. Jack had to remind him that in any event at least two months were supposed to pass before the suicide of Dr. Stockhausen could even be expected, and suggested that in the interim they all go back to Rome and to work.

Baines shrugged the suggestion off. Whatever else was on his mind, it did not seem to involve Consolidated Warfare Service's interests more than marginally . . . or, at least, the thought of business could not distract him beyond the making of a small number of daily telephone calls.

The priest or monk or whatever he was, Father Domenico, was still in attendance too. Evidently he had not been taken in by the show. Well, that was Ware's problem, presumably. All the same, Jack stayed out of sight of the cleric as much as possible; having him around, Jack recalled in a rare burst of association with his Bronx childhood, was a little like being visited by a lunatic Orthodox relative during a crucial marriage brokerage.

Not so lunatic at that, though; for if magic really worked

## BLACK EASTER

—as Jack had had to see that it did—then the whole tissue of metaphysical assumptions Father Domenico stood for, from Moses through the kabbalah to the New Testament, had to follow, as a matter of logic. After this occurred to Jack, he not only hated to see Father Domenico, but had nightmares in which he felt that Father Domenico was looking back at him.

Ware himself, however, did not emerge officially, to be talked to, until his predicted fourteenth day. Then, to Jack's several-sided disquietude, the first person he called into his office was Jack Ginsberg.

Jack wanted to talk to Ware only slightly more than he wanted to talk to the barefooted, silently courteous Father Domenico; and the effect upon Baines of Ware's singling Jack out for the first post-conjuration interview, though under ordinary circumstances it could have been discounted as minor, could not even be conjectured in Baines' present odd state of mind. After a troubled hour, Jack took the problem to Baines, not even sure any more of his own delicacy in juggling such an egg.

"Go ahead," was all Baines said. He continued to give Jack the impression of a man whose mind was not to be turned more than momentarily from some all-important thought. That was alarming, too, but there seemed to be nothing to be done about it. Setting his face into its business mold of pleasant attentiveness, over slightly clenched teeth, Jack marched up to Ware's office.

The sunlight there was just as bright and innocent as ever, pouring directly in from the sea-sky on top of the cliff. Jack felt slightly more in contact with what he had used to think of as real life. In some hope of taking the initiative away from Ware and keeping it, he asked the

magician, even before sitting down, "Is there some news already?"

"None at all," Ware said. "Sit down, please. Dr. Stockhausen is a tough patient, as I warned you all at the beginning. It's possible that he won't fall at all, in which case a far more strenuous endeavor will be required. But in the meantime I'm assuming that he will, and that I therefore ought to be preparing for Dr. Baines' next commission. That's why I wanted to see you first."

"I haven't any idea what Dr. Baines' next commission is," Jack said, "and if I did I wouldn't tell you before he did."

"You have a remorselessly literal mind, Mr. Ginsberg. I'm not trying to pump you. I already know, and it's enough for the time being, that Mr. Baines' next commission will be something major—perhaps even a unique experiment in the history of the Art. Father Domenico's continued presence here suggests the same sort of thing. Very well, if I'm to tackle such a project, I'll need assistants—and I have no remaining apprentices. They become ambitious very early and either make stupid technical mistakes or have to be dismissed for disobedience. Laymen, even sympathetic laymen, are equally mischancy, simply because of their eagerness and ignorance. But if they're highly intelligent, it's sometimes safe to use them. Sometimes. Given those disclaimers, that explains why I allowed you *and* Dr. Hess to watch the Christmas Eve affair, not just Dr. Hess, whom Dr. Baines had asked for, and why I want to talk to you now."

"I see," Jack said. "I suppose I should be flattered."

Ware sat back in his chair and raised his hands as if exasperated. "Not at all. I see that I'd better be blunt. I was quite satisfied with Dr. Hess' potentialities and so don't need to talk to him any more, except to instruct him. But

## BLACK EASTER

I am none too happy with yours. You strike me as a weak reed."

"I'm no magician," Jack said, holding onto his temper. "If there's some hostility between us, it's only fair to recognize that I'm not its sole cause. You went out of your way to insult me at our very first interview, only because I was normally suspicious of your pretensions, as I was supposed to be, on behalf of my job. I'm not easily offended, Dr. Ware, but I'm more cooperative if people are reasonably polite to me."

"*Stercor*," Ware said. The word meant nothing to Jack. "You keeping thinking I'm talking about public relations, and getting along with people, and all that goose grease. Far from it. A little hatred never hurts the Art, and studied insult is valuable in dealing with demons—there are only a few who can be flattered to any profit, and the man who can be flattered isn't a man at all, he's a dog. Do try to understand me, Mr. Ginsberg. What I'm talking about is neither your footling hostility nor your unexpectedly slow brains, but your rabbit's courage. There was a moment during the last ceremony when I could see that you were going to step out of your post. You didn't know it, but I had to paralyze you, and I saved your life. If you had moved you would have endangered all of us, and had that happened I would have thrown you to MARCHOSIAS like an old bone. It wouldn't have saved the purpose of the ceremony, but it would have kept the demon from gobbling up everybody else but Ahktoi."

"Ach . . . ?"

"My familiar. The cat."

"Oh. Why not the cat?"

"He's on loan. He belongs to another demon—my patron."

### THREE SLEEPS

Do stop changing the subject, Mr. Ginsberg. If I'm going to trust you as a Tanist in a great work, I'm going to have to be reasonably sure that you'll stand fast when I tell you to stand fast, no matter what you see or hear, and that when I ask you to take some small part in the ritual, you'll do it accurately and punctually. Can you assure me of this?"

"Well," Jack said earnestly, "I'll do my best."

"But what for? Why do you want to sell me? I don't know what you mean by your 'best' until I know what's in it for you, besides just keeping you your job—or making a good impression on me because it's a reflex with you to make a good impression on people. Explain this to me, please! I know that there's something in this situation that hits you where you live. I could see that from the outset, but my first guess as to what it was evidently was wrong, or anyhow not central. Well, what *is* central to you? The situation has now ripened to the point when you're going to have to tell me what it is. Otherwise I shall shut you out, and that will be that."

Wobbling between unconventional hope and standard caution, Jack pushed himself out of the Florentine chair and toe-heel-toed to the window, adjusting his tie automatically. From this height, the cliff-clinging apartments of Positano fell away to the narrow beach like so many Roman tenements crowded with deposed kings—and with beach boys hoping to pick up an American heiress for the season. Except for the curling waves and a few distant birds, the scene was motionless, yet somehow to Jack it seemed to be slowly, inexorably sliding into the sea.

"Sure, I like women," he said in a low voice. "And I've got special preferences I don't find it easy to satisfy, even with all the money I make. For one thing, in my job I'm constantly

## BLACK EASTER

working with classified material—secrets—either some government's, or the company's. That means I don't dare put myself into a position where I could be blackmailed."

"Which is why you refused my offer when we first talked," Ware said. "That was discreet, but unnecessary. As you've probably realized by now, neither spying nor extortion has any attraction for me—the potential income from either or both would be a pittance to me."

"Yes, but I won't always have you around," Jack said, turning back toward the desk. "And I'd be stupid to form new tastes that only you could keep supplied."

"'Pander to' is the expression. Let's be precise. Nevertheless, you have some remedy in mind. Otherwise you wouldn't be being even this frank."

"Yes . . . I do. It occurred to me when you agreed to allow Hess to tour your laboratory." He was halted by another stab of jealousy, no less acute for being half reminiscent. Drawing a deep breath, he went on, "I want to learn the Art."

"Oho. That is a reversal."

"You said it was possible," Jack said in a rush, emboldened by a desperate sense of having now nothing to lose. "I know you said you don't take apprentices, but I wouldn't be trying to stab you in the back or take over your clients, I'd only be using the Art for my specialized purposes. I couldn't pay you any fortune, but I do have money. I could do the reading in my spare time, and come back after a year or so for the actual instruction. I think Baines would give me a sabbatical for that—he wants somebody on his staff to know the Art, at least the theory, only he thinks it's going to be Hess. But Hess will be too busy with his own sciences to do a thorough job of it."

### THREE SLEEPS

"You really hate Dr. Hess, don't you?"

"We don't impinge," Jack said stiffly. "Anyhow what I say is true. I could be a lot better expert from Baines' point of view than Hess ever could."

"Do you have a sense of humor, Mr. Ginsberg?"

"Certainly. Everybody does."

"Untrue," Ware said. "Everybody claims to have, that's all. I ask only because the first thing to be sacrificed to the Art is the gift of laughter, and some people would miss it more than others. Yours seems to be residual at best. In you it would probably be a minor operation, like an appendectomy."

"You don't seem to have lost yours."

"You confuse humor with wit, like most people. The two are as different as creativity and scholarship. However, as I say, in your case it's not a great consideration, obviously. But there may be greater ones. For example, what tradition I would be training you in. For instance, I could make a kabbalistic magician of you, which would give you a substantial grounding in white magic. And for the black, I could teach you most of what's in the *Clavicle* and the *Lemegeton*, cutting out the specifically Christian accretions. Would that content you, do you think?"

"Maybe, if it met my primary requirements," Jack said. "But if I had to go on from there, I wouldn't care. These days I'm a Jew only by birth, not by culture—and up until Christmas Eve I was an atheist. Now I don't know what I am. All I know is, I've got to believe what I see."

"Not in this Art," Ware said. "But we'll think of you as a *tabula rasa* for the time being. Well, Mr. Ginsberg, I'll consider it. But before I decide, I think you ought to explore further your insight about special tastes becoming

satisfiable only through magic, whether mine or yours. You like to think how delightful it would be to enjoy them freely and without fear of consequences, but it often happens—you'll remember Oscar Wilde's epigram on the subject—that fulfilled desire isn't a delight, but a cross."

"I'll take the chance."

"Don't be so hasty. You have no real idea of the risks. Suppose you should find, for example, that no human woman could please you any more, and you'd become dependent on succubi? I don't know how much you know of the theory of such a relationship. In general, the revolt in Heaven involved angels from every order in the hierarchy. And of the Fallen, only those who fell from the lowest ranks are assigned to this sort of duty. By comparison, MARCHOSIAS is a paragon of nobility. These creatures have even lost their names, and there's nothing in the least grand about their malignancy—they are pure essences of narrow meanness and petty spite, the kind of spirit a Sicilian milkmaid calls on to make her rival's toenails split, or give an unfaithful lover a pimple on the end of his nose."

"That doesn't make them sound much different from ordinary women," Jack said, shrugging. "So long as they deliver, what does it matter? Presumably, as a magician I'd have *some* control over how they behaved."

"Yes. Nevertheless, why be persuaded out of desire and ignorance, when an experiment is available to you? In fact, Mr. Ginsberg, I would not trust any resolution you made from the state of simple fantasy you're in now. If you won't try the experiment, I must refuse your petition."

"Now wait a minute," Jack said. "Why are you so urgent about this, anyhow? What kind of advantage do you get out of it?"



### THREE SLEEPS

"I've already told you that," Ware said patiently. "I will probably need you as a Tanist in Dr. Baines' major enterprise. I want to be able to trust you to stand fast, and I won't be able to do that without being sure of your degree and kind of commitment."

Everything that Ware said seemed to have behind it the sound of doors softly closing in Jack's face. And on the other hand, the possibilities—the opportunities . . .

"What," he said, "do I need to do?"

## XI

The palazzo was asleep. In the distance, that same oblivious clock struck eleven; the proper hour of this day, Ware had said, for experiments in venery. Jack waited nervously for it to stop, or for something to begin.

His preparations were all made, but he was uncertain whether any of them had been necessary. After all, if the . . . girl . . . who was to come to him was to be totally amenable to his wishes, why should he have to impress her?

Nevertheless, he had gone through all the special rituals, bathing for an hour, shaving twice, trimming his finger- and toenails and buffing them, brushing his hair back for thirty strokes and combing it with the West German tonic that was said to have allatoin in it, dressing in his best silk pajamas, smoking jacket (though he neither smoked nor drank), ascot and Venetian-leather slippers, adding a dash of cologne and scattering a light film of talcum powder inside the bed. Maybe, he thought, part of the pleasure would be in taking all the trouble and having everything work.

The clock stopped striking. Almost at once there was a slow triple knock at the door, so slow that each soft blow seemed like an independent act. Jack's heart bounded like a

boy's. Pulling the sash of his jacket tighter, he said as instructed:

"Come in . . . come in . . . come in."

He opened the door. As Ware had told him to expect, there was no one in the dark corridor outside; but when he closed the door and turned around, there she was.

"Good evening," she said in a light voice with the barest trace of an accent—or was it a lisp? "I am here, as you invited me. Do you like me?"

It was not the same girl who had brought the letter to Ware, so many weeks ago, though she somehow reminded him of someone he had once known, he could not think who. This one was positively beautiful. She was small—half a head shorter than Jack, slender and apparently only about eighteen—and very fair, with blue eyes and a fresh, innocent expression, which was doubly piquant because the lines of her features were patrician, her skin so delicate that it was almost like fine parchment.

She was fully clothed, in spike heels, patterned but otherwise sheer stockings, and a short-sleeved, expensively tailored black dress of some material like rayon, which clung to her breasts, waist and upper hips as though electrified, and then burst into a full skirt like an inverted tulip, breaking just above her knees. Wire-thin silver bracelets slid and tinkled almost inaudibly on her left wrist as she ruffled her chrysanthemum-petal coiffure, and small silver earrings echoed them; between her breasts was a circular onyx brooch inlaid in silver with the word *Cazotte*, set off by a ruby about the size of a fly's eye, the only touch of color in the entire costume; even her makeup was the Italian "white look," long out of style but so exaggerating her paleness as to look almost theatrical on her—almost, but not quite.

"Yes," he said, remembering to breathe.

"Ah, you make up your mind so soon. Perhaps you are wrong." She pirouetted away from him toward the bed, making the black tulip flare, and lace foam under its corolla and around her legs with a dry rustling. She stopped the spin facing him, so suddenly that the skirts snapped above her knees like banners in a stiff gust. She seemed wholly human.

"Impossible," Jack said, mustering all his gallantry. "I think you're exquisite. Uh, what shall I call you?"

"Oh, I do not come when called. You will have to exert yourself more than that. But my name could be Rita, if you need one."

She lifted the front of the skirts up over the welts of her stockings, which cut her white thighs only a few inches beneath the vase of her pelvis, and sat down daintily on the side of the bed. "You are very distant," she said, pouting. "Perhaps you suspect I am only pretty on the outside. That would be unfair."

"Oh no, I'm sure—"

"But how can you be sure yet?" She drew up her heels. "You must come and see."

The clock was striking four when she arose, naked and wet, yet somehow looking as though she was still on high heels, and began to dip up her clothes from the floor. Jack watched this little ballet in a dizziness half exhaustion and half triumph. He had hardly enough strength left to wiggle a toe, but he had already surprised himself so often that he still had hopes. Nothing had ever been like this before, nothing.

"Must you go?" he said sluggishly.

### THREE SLEEPS

"Oh yes, I have other business yet."

"Other business? But—didn't you have a good time?"

"A—good time?" The girl turned toward him, stopping in the act of fastening a garter strap. "I am thy servant and thy lamia, Eve-fruit, but thou must not mock me."

"I don't understand," Jack said, struggling to lift his head from the bunched, sweaty pillow.

"Then keep silent." She resumed assembling herself.

"But . . . you seemed . . ."

She turned to him again. "I gave thee pleasure. Congratulate thyself. That is enough. Thou knowest well what I am. I take no pleasure in anything. It is not permitted. Be grateful, and I shall come to thee again. But mock me, and I shall send thee instead a hag with an ass's tail."

"I meant no offense," he said, half sullenly.

"See thou dost not. Thou hadst pleasure with me, that sufficeth. Thou must prove thy virility with mortal flesh. Thy potency, that I go to try even now. It comes on to night i' the other side of the world, and I must plant thy seed before it dies in my fires—if ever it lived at all."

"What do you mean?" he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"Have no fear, I shall be back tomorrow. But in the next span of the dark I must change suit." The dress fell down over the impossibly pliant body. "I become an incubus now, and a woman waits for that, diverted from her husband by the two-fold way. Reach I her in time, thou shalt father a child, on a woman thou shalt never even see. Is that not a wonder? And a fearful child it shall be, I promise thee!"

She smiled at him. Behind her lids now, he saw with nausea and shame, there were no longer any eyes—only blankly flickering lights, like rising sparks in a flue. She was

## BLACK EASTER

now as fully dressed as she had been at the beginning, and curtsied gravely.

"Wait for me . . . unless, of course, thou dost not want me back tomorrow night . . . ?"

He tried not to answer, but the words came out like clots of poisonous gas.

"Yes . . . oh God . . ."

Cupping both hands over her hidden groin in a gesture of obscene conservatism, she popped into nothingness like a bursting balloon, and the whole weight of the dawn fell upon Jack like the mountains of St. John the Divine.

## XII

Dr. Stockhausen died on St. Valentine's day, after three days' fruitless attempts by surgeons from all over the world, even the USSR, to save him from the effects of a draught of a hundred minims of tincture of iodine. The surgery and hospital care were all free; but he died intestate, and it appeared that his small estate—a few royalties from his books and the remains of a ten-year-old Nobel Prize—would be tied up indefinitely; especially in view of the note he left behind, out of which no tribunal, whether scientific or judicial, could hope to separate the mathematics from the ravings for generations to come.

Funds were gathered for his grandchildren and divorced daughter to tide them over; but the last book that he had been writing turned out to be so much like the note that his publishers' referees could think of no colleague to whom it could reasonably be offered for posthumous collaboration. It was said that his brain would be donated to the museum of the Deutsches Akademie in Munich—again only if his affairs could ever be probated. Within three days after the funeral, however, Ware was able to report, both brain and manuscript had vanished.

"MARCHOSIAS may have taken one or both of them," Ware

said. "I didn't tell him to, since I didn't want to cause any more suffering to Albert's relatives than was inevitable under the terms of the commission. On the other hand, I didn't tell him not to, either. But the commission itself has been executed."

"Very good," Baines said. He was, in fact, elated. Of the other three people in the office with Ware—for Ware had said there was no way to prevent Father Domenico from attending—none looked as pleased as Baines felt, but after all he was the only man who counted here, the only one to whose emotions Ware need pay any more than marginal attention. "And much faster than you had anticipated, too. I'm very well satisfied, and also I'm now quite ready to discuss my major commission with you, Dr. Ware, if the planets and so on don't make this a poor time to talk about it."

"The planetary influences exert almost no effect upon simple discussion," Ware said, "only on specific preparations—and of course on the experiment itself. And I'm quite rested and ready to listen. In fact, I'm in an acute state of curiosity. Please charge right in and tell me about it."

"I would like to let all the major demons out of Hell for one night, turn them loose in the world with no orders and no restrictions—except of course that they go back by dawn or some other sensible time—and see just what it is they would do if they were left on their own hooks like that."

"Insanity!" Father Domenico cried out, crossing himself. "Now surely the man is possessed already!"

"For once, I'm inclined to agree with you, Father," Ware said, "though with some reservations about the possession question. For all we can know now, it's entirely in character.



### THREE SLEEPS

Tell me this, Dr. Baines, what do you hope to accomplish through an experiment on so colossal a scale?"

"Experiment!" Father Domenico said, his face as white as the dead.

"If you can do no more than echo, Father, I think we'd all prefer that you kept silent—at least until we find out what it is we're talking about."

"I will say what I need to say, when I think it is needful," Father Domenico said angrily. "This thing that you're minimizing by calling it an 'experiment' might well end in the dawn of Armageddon!"

"Then you should welcome it, not fear it, since you're convinced your side must win," Ware said. "But actually there's no such risk. The results may well be rather Apocalyptic, but Armageddon requires the prior appearance of the Antichrist, and I assure you I am not he . . . nor do I see anybody else in the world who might qualify. Now, again, Dr. Baines, what do you hope to accomplish through this?"

"Nothing *through* it," Baines, now totally caught up in the vision, said dreamily. "Only the thing itself—for its aesthetic interest alone. A work of art, if you like. A gigantic action painting, with the world for a canvas—"

"And human blood for pigments," Father Domenico ground out.

Ware held up his hand, palm toward the monk. "I had thought," he said to Baines, "that this was the art you practiced already, and in effect sold the resulting canvasses, too."

"The sales kept me able to continue practicing it," Baines said, but he was beginning to find the metaphor awkward, his thought it had originally been. "Look at it this way for a moment, Dr. Ware. Very roughly, there are only two

general kinds of men who go into the munitions business—those without consciences, who see the business as an avenue to a great fortune, eventually to be used for something else, like Jack here—and of course there's a subclass of those, people who *do* have consciences but can't resist the money anyhow, or the knowledge, rather like Dr. Hess."

Both men stirred, but apparently both decided not to dispute their portraits.

"The second kind is made up of people like me—people who actually take pleasure in the controlled production of chaos and destruction. Not sadists primarily, except in the sense that every dedicated artist is something of a sadist, willing to countenance a little or a lot of suffering—not only his own, but other people's—for the sake of the end product."

"A familiar type, to be sure," Ware said with a lopsided grin. "I think it was the saintly Robert Frost who said that a painting by Whistler was worth any number of old ladies."

"Engineers are like this too," Baines said, warming rapidly to his demonstration; he had been thinking about almost nothing else since the conjuration he had attended. "There's a breed I know much better than I do artists, and I can tell you that most of them wouldn't build a thing if it weren't for the kick they get out of the preliminary demolitions involved. A common thief with a gun in his hand isn't half as dangerous as an engineer with a stick of dynamite.

"But in my case, just as in the case of the engineer, the key word is 'controlled'—and, in the munitions business, it's rapidly becoming an obsolete word, thanks to nuclear weapons."

He went on quickly to sketch his dissatisfactions, very much as they had first come to a head in Rome while Governor Rogan was being sent for. "So now you can see

### THREE SLEEPS

what appeals to me about the commission I propose. It won't be a series of mass obliterations under nobody's control, but a whole set of individual actions, each in itself on a comparatively small scale—and each one, I'm sure, interesting in itself because of all the different varieties of ingenuity and surprise to be involved. And it won't be total because it will also be self-limiting to some small period of time, presumably twelve hours or less."

Father Domenico leaned forward earnestly. "Surely," he said to Ware, "even you can see that no human being, no matter how sinful and self-indulgent, could have elaborated anything so monstrous without the direct intervention of Hell!"

"On the contrary," Ware said, "Dr. Baines is quite right, most dedicated secularists think exactly as he does—only on a somewhat smaller scale. For your further comfort, Father, I am somewhat privy to the affairs of Hell, and I investigate all my major clients thoroughly. I can tell you that Dr. Baines is *not* possessed. But all the same there are still a few mysteries here. Dr. Baines, I still think you may be resorting to too big a brush for the intended canvas, and might get the effects you want entirely without my help. For example, why won't the forthcoming Sino-Russian War be enough for you?"

Baines swallowed hard. "So that's really going to happen?"

"It's written down to happen. It still might not, but I wouldn't bet against it. Very likely it won't be a major nuclear war—three fusion bombs, one Chinese, two Soviet, plus about twenty fission explosions, and then about a year of conventional land war. No other powers are at all likely to become involved. You know this, Dr. Baines, and I should

think it would please you. After all, it's almost exactly the way your firm has been trying to pre-set it."

"You're full of consolations today," Father Domenico muttered.

"Well, in fact, I *am* damn pleased to hear it," Baines said. "It isn't often that you plan something that big and have it come off almost as planned. But no, Dr. Ware, it won't be enough for me, because it's still too general and difficult to follow—or will be. I'm having a little trouble with my tenses. For one thing, it won't be sufficiently attributable to me—many people have been working to bring that war about. This experiment will be on my initiative alone."

"Not an insuperable objection," Ware said. "A good many Renaissance artists didn't object to collaborators—even journeymen."

"Well, the spirit of the times has changed, if you want an abstract answer. The real answer is that I *do* object. Furthermore, Dr. Ware, I want to choose my own medium. War doesn't satisfy me any more. It's too sloppy, too subject to accident. It excuses too much."

"?" Ware said with an eyebrow.

"I mean that in time of war, especially in Asia, people expect the worst and try to ride with the punches, no matter how terrible they are. In peacetime, on the other hand, even a small misfortune comes as a total surprise. People complain, 'Why did this have to happen to *me*?'—as though they'd never heard of Job."

"Rewriting Job is the humanist's favorite pastime," Ware agreed. "And his favorite political platform too. So in fact, Dr. Baines, you *do* want to afflict people, just where they're most sensitive to being afflicted, and just when they least expect it, right or wrong. Do I understand you correctly?"

### THREE SLEEPS

Baines had the sinking feeling that he had explained too much, but there was no help for that now; and, in any event, Ware was hardly himself a saint.

"You do," he said shortly.

"Thank you. That clears the air enormously. One more question. How do you propose to pay for all this?"

Father Domenico surged to his feet with a strangled gasp of horror, like the death throes of an asthmatic.

"You—you mean to do this!"

"Hush. I haven't said so. Dr. Baines, the question?"

"I know I couldn't pay for it in cash," Baines said. "But I've got other assets. This experiment—if it works—is going to satisfy something for me that Consolidated Warfare Service hasn't satisfied in years, and probably never will again except marginally. I'm willing to make over most of my CWS stock to you. Not all of it, but—well—just short of being a controlling interest. You ought to be able to do a lot with that."

"It's hardly enough, considering the risks involved," Ware said slowly. "On the other hand, I've no particular desire to bankrupt you—"

"Dr. Ware," Father Domenico said in an iron voice. "Am I to conclude that you *are* going to undertake this fearful insanity?"

"I haven't said so," Ware replied mildly. "If I do, I shall certainly need your help—"

"Never. *Never!*"

"And everybody else's. It isn't really the money that attracts me, primarily. But without the money I should never be able to undertake an experiment like this in the first place, and I'm certain the opportunity will never come up again.

## BLACK EASTER

If the whole thing doesn't blow up in my face, there'd be an enormous amount to learn from a trial like this."

"I think that's right," Hess' voice said. Baines looked toward him in surprise, but Hess seemed quite serious. "I'd be greatly interested in it myself."

"You'll learn nothing," Father Domenico said, "but the shortest of all shortcuts to Hell, probably in the body!"

"A negative Assumption?" Ware said, raising both eyebrows this time. "But now you're tempting my pride, Father. There've been only two previous ones in Western history—Johannes Faustus and Don Juan Tenorio. And neither one was properly safeguarded or otherwise prepared. Well, now certainly I must undertake so great a work—provided that Dr. Baines is satisfied that he'll get what he'll be paying for."

"Of course I'm satisfied," Baines said, quivering with joy.

"Not so fast. You've asked me to let all the major demons out of Hell. I can't even begin to do that. I can call up only those with whom I have pacts, and their subordinates. No matter what you have read in Romantic novels and plays, the three superior spirits cannot be invoked at all, and never sign pacts, those being SATHANAS, BEELZEBUTH and SATANACHIA. Under each of these are two ministers, with one of the six of which it is possible to make pacts—one per magician, that is. I control LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, and he me. Under him in turn, I have pacts with some eighty-nine other spirits, not all of which would be of any use to us here—VASSAGO, for instance, who has a mild nature and no powers except in crystallo-mancy, or PHOENIX, a poet and teacher. With the utmost in careful preparations, we might involve as many as fifty of the rest, certainly no more. Frankly, I think that will prove to be more than enough."

### THREE SLEEPS

"I'll cheerfully take your word for it," Baines said promptly. "You're the expert. Will you take it on?"

"Yes."

Father Domenico, who was still standing, swung away toward the door, but Ware's hand shot out toward him above the desk as if to grasp the monk by the nape of the neck. "Hold!" the magician said. "Your commission is *not* discharged, Father Domenico, as you know very well in your heart. You must observe this sending. Even more important, you have already said yourself that it is going to be difficult to keep under control. To that end I demand your unstinting advice in the preparation, your presence in the conjurations, and, should they be needed, your utmost offices in helping me and my other Tanists to abort it. This you cannot refuse—it is all in your mission by stipulation, and in the Covenant by implication. I do not force you to it. I do but remind you of your positive duty to your Lord."

"That . . . is . . . true . . ." Father Domenico said in a sick whisper. His face as gray as an untinted new blotter, he groped for the chair and sat down again.

"Nobly faced. I'll have to instruct everyone here, but I'll start with you, in deference to your obvious distress—"

"One question," Father Domenico said. "Once you've instructed us all, you'll be out of touch with us for perhaps as much as a month to come. I demand the time to visit my colleagues, and perhaps call together a convocation of all white magicians—"

"To prevent me?" Ware said between his teeth. "You can demand no such thing. The Covenant forbids the slightest interference."

"I'm all too horribly aware of that. No, not to interfere,

## BLACK EASTER

but to stand by, in case of disaster. It would be too late to call for them once you *knew* you were losing control."

"Hmm . . . probably a wise precaution, and one I couldn't justly prevent. Very well. Just be sure you're back when the time comes. About the day, what would you suggest? May Eve is an obvious choice, and we may well need that much time in preparation."

"It's *too* good a time for any sort of control," Father Domenico said grimly. "I definitely do *not* recommend piling a real Walpurgis Night on top of the formal one. It would be wiser to choose an *unfavorable* night, the more unfavorable the better."

"Excellent good sense," Ware said. "Very well, then. Inform your friends. The experiment is hereby scheduled for Easter."

With a scream, Father Domenico bolted from the room. Had Baines not been taught all his life long that such a thing was impossible in a man of God, Baines would have identified it without a second thought as a scream of hatred.



### XIII

Theron Ware had been dreaming a journey to the Antarctic continent in the midst of its Jurassic splendor, fifty million years ago, but the dream had been becoming a little muddled with personal fantasies—mostly involving a minor enemy whom he had in reality sent for, with flourishes, a good decade ago—and he was not sorry when it vanished unfinished at dawn.

He awoke sweating, though the dream had not been especially stressful. The reason was not far to seek: Ahktoi was sleeping, a puddle of lard and fur, on the pillow, and had nearly crowded Ware's head off it. Ware sat up, mopping his pate with the top sheet, and stared at the cat with nearly neutral annoyance. Even for an Abyssinian, a big-boned breed, the familiar was grossly overweight; clearly an exclusive diet of human flesh was not a healthy regimen for a cat. Furthermore, Ware was not even sure it was necessary. It was prescribed only in *Éliphas Lévi*, who often made up such details as he went along. Certainly PHOENIX, whose creature Ahktoi was, had made no such stipulation. On the other hand, it was always best to play safe in such matters; and, besides, financially the diet was not much more

than a nuisance. The worst that could be said for it was that it spoiled the cat's lines.

Ware arose, naked, and crossed the cold room to the lectern, which bore up his Great Book—not the book of pacts, which was of course still safely in the workroom, but his book of new knowledge. It was open to the section headed

### QUASARS

but except for the brief paragraph summarizing the reliable scientific information on the subject—a very brief paragraph indeed—the pages were still blank.

Well, that, like so much else, could wait until Baines' project was executed. Truly colossal advances might be made in the Great Book, once all that CWS money was in the bank.

Ware's retirement had left the members of Baines' party again at loose ends, and all of them, even Baines, were probably a little shaken at the magnitude of what they had contracted for. In Baines and Dr. Hess, perhaps, there still remained some faint traces of doubt about its possibility, or at least some inability to imagine what it would be like, despite the previous apparition of MARCHOSIAS. No such impediment could protect Jack Ginsberg, however—not now, when he awakened each morning with the very taste of Hell in his mouth. Ginsberg was committed, but he was not wearing well; he would have to be watched. The waiting period would be especially hard on him. Well, that couldn't be helped; it was prescribed.

The cat uncurled, yawned, stretched, lurched daintily to its feet and paused at the edge of the bed, peering down the sideboard as though contemplating the inward slope of

### THREE SLEEPS

Fujiyama. At last it hit the floor with a double *splat!* like the impacts of two loaded sponges. There it arched its spine again, stretched out its back legs individually in an ecstasy of quivering, and walked slowly toward Ware, its furry abdomen swinging from side to side. *Hein?* it said in a breathy feminine voice.

"In a minute," Ware said, preoccupied. "You'll get fed when I do." He had forgotten for the moment that he had just begun a nine days' fast, which when completed he would enforce also upon Baines and his henchmen. "Father Eternal, O thou who art seated upon cherubim and seraphim, who beholdest the earth and the sea, unto thee do I lift up my hands, and beseech thine aid alone, thou who art the fulfilment of works, who givest booty unto those who toil, who exaltest the proud, who art destroyer of all life the fulfillment of works, who givest booty unto those who call upon thee. Do thou guard and defend me in this undertaking, thou who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen! Shut up, Ahktoi."

Anyhow it had been years since he had believed for an instant that Ahktoi was really hungry. Maybe lean meat was what the cat needed, instead of all that baby fat—though stillbirths were certainly the easiest kind of rations to get for him.

Ringling for Gretchen, Ware went into the bathroom, where he ran a bath, into which he dashed an ounce of exorcised water left over from the dressing of a parchment. Ahktoi, who like most Abyssinians loved running water, leapt up on the rim of the tub and tried to fish for bubbles. Pushing the cat off, Ware sat down in the warm pool and spoke the Thirteenth Psalm, *Dominus illuminatio mea*, of death and resurrection, his voice resounding hollowly from

the tiles; adding, "Lord who hast formed man out of nothing to thine own image and likeness, and me also, unworthy sinner as I am, deign, I pray thee, to bless and sanctify this water, that all delusion may depart from me unto thee, almighty and ineffable, who didst lead forth thy people from the land of Egypt, and didst cause them to pass dryshod under the Red Sea, anoint me an thou wilt, father of sins. Amen."

He slid under the water, crown to toes—but not for long, for the ounce of exorcised water he had added still had a trace of quicklime in it from the tanning of the lambskin, which made his eyes sting. He surfaced, blowing like a whale, and added quickly to the steamy air, "*Dixit insipiens in corde suo*—Will you *kindly* get out of the way, Ahktoi?—who hast formed me in thine image and in thy likeness, deign to bless and sanctify this water, so that it may become unto me the fruition of my soul and body and purpose. Amen."

*Hein?*

Someone knocked on the door. His eyes squeezed closed still, Ware groped his way out. He was met at the threshold by Gretchen, who sponged his hands and face ritually with an asperged white cloth, and retreated before him as he advanced into the bedroom. Now that his eyes were cleared, he could see that she was naked, but, knowing what she was, that could scarcely interest him, and, besides, he had been devoted to celibacy since his earliest love of magic, like anyone in Orders. Her nakedness was only another rule of the rite of lustration. Waving her aside, he took three steps toward the bed, where she had laid out his vestments, and said to all corners of the phenomenal and epiphenomenal world:

### THREE SLEEPS

"ASTROSCHIO, ASATH, *à sacra* BEDRIMUBAL, FELUT, AN-ABOTOS, SERABILIM, SERGEN, GEMEN, DOMOS, who art seated above the heavens, who beholdest the depths, grant me, I pray thee, that those things which I conceive in my mind may also be executed by me through thee, who appear clean before thee! Amen."

Gretchen went out, flexing her scabby buttocks, and Ware began the rite of vesting. *Hein?* Ahktoi said plaintively, but Ware did not hear. His triduum was launched, devoutly, in water, and would be observed, strictly, until the end in blood; wherein would be required to the slaughter a lamb, a dog, a hen and a cat.



## The Last Conjunction

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive or unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight. . . .

We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics. At least not yet. . . . If once we can produce our perfect work—the Materialist Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls “Forces” while denying the existence of “spirits”—then the end of the war will be in sight.

—C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*





## XIV

Father Domenico found getting north to Monte Albano a relatively easy journey despite all the snow; he was able to take the *rapido* most of the way. Absurdly, he found himself worrying about the snow; if it lasted, there would be devastating floods in the spring. But that was not the only affliction the spring had in store.

After the journey, nothing seemed to go right. Only about half of the world's white magicians, a small number in any case, who had been summoned to the convocation had been able to make it, or had thought it worth the trip. One of the greatest, the aged archivist Father Bonfiglioli, had come all the way from Cambridge only to find the rigors of being portaged up the Mount too much for him. He was now in the hospital at the base of the Mount with a coronary infarct, and the prognosis was said to be poor.

Luckily, Father Uccello had been able to come. So had Father Monteith, a venerable master of a great horde of creative (though often ineffectual) spirits of the cislunar sphere; Father Boucher, who had commerce with some intellect of the recent past that was neither a mortal nor a Power, a commerce bearing all the earmarks of necromancy and yet was not; Father Vance, in whose mind floated visions

## BLACK EASTER

of magics that would not be comprehensible, let alone practicable, for millions of years to come; Father Anson, a brusque engineer type who specialized in unclouding the minds of politicians; Father Selahny, a terrifying kabbalist who spoke in parables and of whom it was said that no one since Leviathan had understood his counsel; Father Rosenblum, a dour, bear-like man who tersely predicted disasters and was always right about them; Father Atheling, a wall-eyed grimoiran who saw portents in parts of speech and lectured everyone in a tense nasal voice until the Director had to exile him to the library except when business was being conducted; and a gaggle of lesser men, and their apprentices.

These and the Brothers of the Order gathered in the chapel of the monastery to discuss what might be done. There was no agreement from the outset. Father Boucher was of the firm opinion that Ware would not be permitted to work any such conjuration on Easter, and that hence only minor precautions were necessary. Father Domenico had to point out that Ware's previous sending—a comparatively minor one to be sure, but what was that saying about the fall of the sparrow?—had been made without a sign of Divine intervention upon Christmas Eve.

Then there was the problem of whether or not to try to mobilize the Celestial Princes and their subordinates. Father Atheling would have it that merely putting these Princes on notice might provoke action against Ware, since there was no predicting what They might do, and hence would be in violation of the Covenant. He was finally outshouted by Fathers Anson and Vance, with the obvious but not necessarily valid argument that the Princes must know all about the matter anyhow.

How shaky that assumption was was revealed that night,

## THE LAST CONJURATION

when those bright angels were summoned one by one before the convocation for a council of war. Bright, terrible and enigmatic They were at any time, but at this calling They were in a state of spirit beyond the understanding of any of the masters present in the chapel. ARATRON, chiefest of Them all, appeared to be indeed unaware of the forthcoming unleashing, and disappeared with a roar when it was described. PHALEG, most military of spirits, seemed to know of Ware's plans, but would not discuss them, and also vanished when pressed. OPHEIL the mercurial, too, was preoccupied, as though Ware's plotting were only a negligible distraction from some immensely greater thought; His answers grew shorter and shorter, and He finally lapsed into what, in a mortal, Father Domenico would have unhesitatingly called surliness. Finally—although not intended as final, for the convocation had meant to consult all seven of the Olympians—the water-spirit PHUL when called up appeared fearsomely without a head, rendering converse impossible and throwing the chapel into a perilous uproar.

“These are not good omens,” Father Atheling said; and for the first time in his life, everyone agreed with him. It was agreed, also, that everyone except Father Domenico would remain at the Mount through the target day, to take whatever steps then appeared to be necessary; but there was precious little hope that they would be effective. Whatever was going on in Heaven, it appeared to leave small concern to spare for pleas from Monte Albano.

Father Domenico went south again far earlier than he had planned, unable to think of anything but the mystery of that final, decapitate apparition. The leaden skies returned him no answer.

## XV

On that penultimate morning, Theron Ware faced the final choice of which demons to call up, and for this he needed to repair to his laboratory, to check the book of pacts. Otherwise his preparations were all made. He had performed the blood sacrifices the previous evening, and then had completely rearranged the furniture in the workroom to accommodate the Grand Circle—the first time he had had need of it in twenty years—the Lesser Circles and the Gateway. There were even special preparations for Father Domenico—who had returned early and with a gratifyingly troubled countenance—should it become necessary to ask the monk to call for Divine intervention; but Ware was tolerably sure it would not be. Though he had never attempted anything of this magnitude before, he felt the work in his fingertips, like a well-practiced sonata.

He was, however, both astonished and disquieted to find Dr. Hess already in the laboratory—not only because of the potentialities for contamination, but at the inevitable conclusion that Hess had worked out how to placate the Guardian of the door. This man evidently was even more dangerous than Ware had guessed.

“Do you want to ruin us all?” Ware demanded.

## THE LAST CONJURATION

Hess turned away from the circle he had been inspecting and looked at Ware frankly. He was pale and hollow-eyed; not only had the fasting been hard on his spare frame—that was a hazard every neophyte had to come to terms with—but apparently he had not been sleeping much either. He said at once:

“No indeed. My apologies, Dr. Ware. My curiosity overcame me, I’m afraid.”

“You didn’t touch anything, I hope?”

“Certainly not. I took your warnings about that with great seriousness, I assure you.”

“Well . . . probably no harm done then. I can sympathize with your interest, and even approve it, in part. But I’ll be instructing you all in detail a little later in the day, and then you’ll have ample time to inspect the arrangements. I do want you to know them intimately. But right now I still have some additional work to do, so if you don’t mind . . .”

“Quite.” Hess moved obediently toward the door. As he was about to touch the handle, Ware added:

“By the way, Dr. Hess, how *did* you deceive the Guardian?”

Hess made no pretense of being puzzled by the question. “With a white pigeon, and a pocket mirror I got from Jack.”

“Hmm. Do you know, that would never have occurred to me. These pagan survivals are mostly a waste of effort. Let’s talk about it more, later. You may have something to teach me.”

Hess made a small bow and finished his departure. Forgetting him instantly, Ware stared at the Grand Circle for a moment, and then walked around it clockwise to the lectern

## BLACK EASTER

and unlocked the book of pacts. The stiff pages bent reassuringly in his hands. Each leaf was headed by the character or sign of a demon; below, in the special ink reserved for such high matters—gall, copperas, gum arabic—was the text of Theron Ware's agreement with that entity, signed at the bottom by Ware in his own blood, and by the character of the demon repeated in its own hand. Leading all the rest was the seal, and also the characters, of LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, which also appeared on the book's cover:



There then followed eighty-nine others. It was Ware's sober belief, backed by infernal assurances he had reason to trust, that no previous magician had held so many spirits in thrall. After forty years, true, all the names would change, and Ware would have to force the re-execution of each

## THE LAST CONJURATION

pact, and so, again and again through the five hundred years of life he had bought from HAGITH in his salad days as a white magician. Nevertheless it could be said that, in the possession of this book, Ware was at least potentially the wealthiest mortal in all of history, though to anyone else in the world the book would be worth nothing except as a *curiosum*.

These spirits, not counting LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, comprised the seventeen infernal archangels of the Grand Grimoire, and the seventy-two demons of the Descending Hierarchy once confined in the brazen vessel of Solomon the King: a fabulous haul indeed, and each captive commanding troops and armies of lesser spirits, and damned souls by the thousands of millions, more of them every minute. (For these days, virtually everyone was damned; it had been this discovery that had first convinced Ware that the Rebellion was in fact going to succeed, probably by the year A.D. 2000; the many plain symptoms of chiliastic panic already being manifested amongst the laity were almost certainly due to be vindicated, for everyone was rushing incontinently into Hell-mouth without even the excuse of an Antichrist to mislead him. As matters stood now, Christ Himself would have to creep stealthily, hoping to be ignored, even into a cathedral to conduct a Mass, as in that panel of Hieronymus Bosch; the number of people who could not pronounce the Divine Name without a betraying stammer—or their own names, for that matter—had grown from a torrent to a deluge, and, ridiculously, hardly any of them were claiming any fraction of the possible profits in this world. They did not even know that they were on the winning side, or even that there was more than one side. No wonder that Ware had found so much fat in the cauldron, waiting to be skimmed.)

## BLACK EASTER

But as Ware had already warned Baines, not all of the spirits in the book were suitable for the experiment at hand. There were some, like MARCHOSIAS, who hoped after an interval to be returned to the Celestial choirs. In this hope, Ware was grimly certain, they were mistaken, and the only reward they would receive would be from the Emperor of the Pit, that kind of reward customarily given to fair-weather friends and summer soldiers. In the meantime, the evils they could be persuaded or compelled to do were minor and hardly worth the effort of invoking them. One, whom Ware had already mentioned to Baines, VASSAGO, was even said in the *Lesser Key* and elsewhere to be "good by nature"—not too trustworthy an ascription—and indeed was sometimes called upon by white magicians. Others in the hierarchy, like PHOENIX, controlled aspects of reality that were of little relevance to Baines' commission.

Taking up the pen of the Art, Ware made a list. When he was finished, he had written down forty-eight names. Considering the number of the Fallen, that was not a large muster; but he thought it would serve the purpose. He closed and locked the book, and after a pause to rebuke and torment the Guardian of his door, went out into the Easter morning to rehearse his Tanists.

No day, it seemed, had ever gone so slowly for Baines as this Easter, despite the diversion of the rehearsal; but at last it was night and over, and Ware pronounced himself ready to begin.

The Grand Circle now on the parquetry of the refectory bore a generic resemblance to the circle Ware had composed on Christmas Eve, but it was a great deal bigger, and much different in detail. The circle proper was made of strips



## THE LAST CONJURATION

of the skin of the sacrificial kid, with the hair still on it, fastened to the floor at the cardinal points with four nails that, Ware explained, had been drawn from the coffin of a child. On the northeast arc, under the word BERKAIAL, there rested on the strips the body of a male bat that had been drowned in blood; on the northeast, under the word AMASARAC, the skull of a parricide; on the southwest, under the word ASARADEL, the horns of a goat; and on the southwest, under the word ARIBECL, sat Ware's cat, to the secret of whose diet they were now all privy. (Indeed, there had not been much of moment to the rehearsal, and Baines had inferred that its chief object had been to impart to the rest of them such items of unpleasant knowledge as this.)

The triangle had been drawn inside the circle with a lump of haematite or lodestone. Under its base was drawn a figure consisting of a *chi* and a *rho* superimposed, resting on the line, with a cross to each side of it. Flanking the other two sides were the great candles of virgin wax, each stick sitting in the center of a crown of vervain. Three circles for the operators—Ware, Baines and Hess (Jack Ginsberg and Father Domenico would stand outside, in separate pentacles)—were inside the triangle, connected by a cross; the northern circle had horns drawn on it. At the pinnacle of the triangle sat a new brazier, loaded with newly consecrated charcoal. To the left side of the horned circle, which was to be Ware's, of course, was the lectern and the book of pacts, within easy reach.

At the rear of the room, before the curtained door to the kitchen, was another circle, quite as big as the first, in the center of which was a covered altar. That had been empty this afternoon; but there now lay upon it the nude body of the girl Ware had used to address as Gretchen.

Her skin was paper-white except for its markings, and to Baines gave every appearance of being dead. A small twist of violet silk, nearly transparent and with some crumpled thing like a wad of tissue or a broken matzoh inside it, rested upon her navel. Her body appeared to have been extensively written upon with red and yellow grease paint; some of the characters might have been astrological, others more like ideograms or cartouches. In default of knowing their meaning or even their provenance, they simply made her look more naked.

The main door closed. Everyone was now in place.

Ware lit the candles, and then the fire in the brazier. It was a task of Baines and Hess to feed the fire periodically, as the time wore on, the one with brandy, the other with camphor, taking care not to stumble over their swords or leave their circles in the process. As before, they had been enjoined to the strictest silence, especially should any spirit speak to them or threaten them.

Ware now reached out to the lectern and opened his book. This time there were no preliminary gestures, and no portents; he simply began to recite in a gravid voice:

"I conjure and command thee, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, by all the names wherewith thou mayst be constrained and bound, SATAN, RANTAN, PALLANTRE, LUTIAS, CORICACOEM, SCIRCIGREUR, *per sedem Baldarey et per gratiam et diligentiam tuam habuisti ab eo hanc natalimanamilam*, as I command thee, *usor, dilapidatore, tentatore, seminatore, soignatore, devoratore, concitore, et seductore*, where art thou? Thou who imposeth hatred and propagateth enmities, I conjure thee by Him who hath created thee for this ministry, to fulfill my work! I cite thee, COLRIZIANA, OFFINA, ALTA,

## THE LAST CONJURATION

NESTERA, FUARD, MENUET, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, arise, arise, arise!"

There was no sound; but suddenly there was standing in the other circle a dim, steaming figure, perhaps eight or nine feet tall. It was difficult to be sure what it looked like, partly because some of the altar could still be seen through it. To Baines it resembled a man with a shaven head bearing three long, twisted horns, eyes like a spectral tarsier's, a gaping mouth, a pointed chin. It was wearing a sort of jerkin, coppery in color, with a tattered ruff and a fringed skirt; below the skirt protruded two bandy, hooved legs, and a fat, hairy tail, which twitched restlessly.

"What now?" this creature said in an astonishingly pleasant voice. The words, however, were blurred. "I have not seen my son in many moons." Unexpectedly, it giggled, as though pleased by the pun.

"I adjure thee, speak more clearly," Ware said. "And what I wish, thou knowst full well."

"Nothing may be known until it is spoken." The voice seemed no less blurred to Baines, but Ware nodded.

"I desire then to release, as did the Babylonian from under the seal of the King of Israel, blessed be he, from Hellmouth into the mortal world all those demons of the False Monarchy whose names I shall subsequently call, and whose characters and signs I shall exhibit in my book, providing only that they harm not me and mine, and that they shall return whence they came at dawn, as it is always decreed."

"Providing no more than that?" the figure said. "No prescriptions? No desires? You were not always so easily satisfied."

"None," Ware said firmly. "They shall do as they will for this their period of freedom, except that they harm

none here in my circles, and obey me when recalled, by rod and pact."

The demon glanced over its transparent shoulder. "I see that you have the appropriate fumigant to cense so many great lords, and my servants and satraps will have their several rewards in their deeds. So interesting a commission is new to me. Well. What have you for my hostage, to fulfill the forms?"

Ware reached into his vestments. Baines half expected to see produced another tear vase, but instead Ware brought out by the tail a live mouse, which he threw over the brazier as he had the vase, except not so far. The mouse ran directly toward the demon, circled it frantically three times outside the markings, and disappeared in the direction of the rear door, cheeping like a sparrow. Baines looked toward Ahktoi, but the cat did not even lick its chops.

"You are skilled and punctilious, my son. Call then when I have left, and I will send my ministers. Let nothing remain undone, and much will be done before the black cock crows."

"It is well. By and under this promise I discharge thee. OMGROMA, EPYN, SEYOK, SATANY, DEGONY, EPARYGON, GALLIGANON, ZOGOGEN, FERSTIGON, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, begone, begone, begone!"

"I shall see you at dawn." The prime minister of LUCIFER wavered like a flame, and, like a flame, went out.

Hess promptly cast camphor into the brazier. Recovering with a start from a near paralysis of fascination, Baines sprinkled brandy after it. The fire puffed. Without looking around, Ware brought out his lodestone, which he held in his left hand; with his right, he dipped the iron-headed point of his wand into the coals. Little licking points of blue light

## THE LAST CONJURATION

ran up it almost to his hand, as though the rod, too, had been coated with brandy.

Holding the tonguing wand out before him like a dowsing rod, Ware strode ceremoniously out of the Grand Circle toward the altar. As he walked, the air around him began to grumble, as though a storm were gathering about his shaven head, but he paid the noise no attention. He marched on directly to the *locus spiritus*, and into it.

Silence fell at once. Ware said clearly:

"I, Theron Ware, master of masters, Karcist of Karcists, hereby undertake to open the book, and the seals thereof, which were forbidden to be broken until the breaking of the Seven Seals before the Seventh Throne. I have beheld SATAN as a bolt falling from heaven. I have crushed the dragons of the pit beneath my heel. I have commanded angels and devils. I undertake and command that all shall be accomplished as I bid, and that from beginning to end, alpha to omega, world without end, none shall harm us who abide here in this temple of the Art of Arts. *Aglan, TETRAGRAM, vaycheon stimulamaton ezpbares retragrammaton olyaram irion esytion existion eryona onera orasym mozm messias soter EMANUEL SABAOTH ADONAY, te adoro, et te invoco. Amen.*"

He took another step forward, and touched the flaming tip of the rod to the veil of silk on the belly of the still girl. A little curl of blue-gray smoke began to arise from it, like ignited incense.

Ware now retreated, walking backward, toward the Grand Circle. As he did so, the fire on the wand died; but in the mortuary silence there now intruded a faint hissing, much like the first ignition of a squib. And there were indeed fireworks in inception. As Baines stared in gluttonous hyp-

nosis, a small fountain of many-colored sparks began to rise from the fuse-like tissue on the abdomen of the body on the altar. More smoke poured forth. The air was becoming distinctly hazy.

The body itself seemed to be burning now, the skin peeling back like segments of an orange. Baines heard behind him an aborted retching noise in Jack Ginsberg's voice, but could not himself understand what the occasion for nausea could be. The body—whatever it had once been—was now only like a simulacrum made of pith or papier-mâché, and charged with some equivalent of Greek fire. Indeed, there was already a strong taint of gunpowder overriding the previous odors of incense and camphor. Baines rather welcomed it—not that it was familiar, for it had been centuries since black powder had been used in his trade, but because he had begun to find the accumulation of less business-like perfumes a little cloying.

Gradually, everything melted away into the smoke except an underlay of architectural outline, against which stood a few statues lit more along one side than the other by one of the two sources of fire. Hess coughed briefly; otherwise there was silence except for the hissing of the pyre. Sparks continued to fly upward, and sometimes, for an instant, they seemed to form scribbled, incomprehensible words in the frame of the unreal wall.

Ware's voice sounded remotely from one of the statues:

"BAAL, great king and commander in the East, of the Order of the Fly, obey me!"

Something began to form in the distance. Baines had the clear impression that it was behind the altar, behind the curtained door, indeed outside the palazzo altogether, but he could see it nevertheless. It came forward, growing, until

## THE LAST CONJURATION

he could also see that it was a thing like a man, in a neat surcoat and snow-white linen, but with two supernumerary heads, the one on the left like a toad's, the other like a cat's. It swelled soundlessly until at some moment it was inarguably in the refectory; and then, still silently, had grown past them and was gone.

"AGARES, duke in the East, of the Order of the Virtues, obey me!"

Again, a distant transparency, and silent. It came on very slowly, manifesting like a comely old man carrying a goshawk upon his wrist. Its slowness was necessitous, for it was riding astride an ambling crocodile. Its eyes were closed and its lips moved incessantly. Gradually, it too swelled past.

"GAMYGYN, marquis and president in Cartagra, obey me!"

This grew to be something like a small horse, or perhaps an ass, modest and unassuming. It dragged behind it ten naked men in chains.

"VALEFOR, powerful duke, obey me!"

A black-maned lion, again with three heads, the other two human, one wearing the cap of a hunter, the other the wary smile of a thief. It passed in a rush, without even a wind to mark its going.

"BARBATOS, great count and minister of SATANACHIA, obey me!"

But this was not one figure; it was four, like four crowned kings. With it and past it poured three companies of soldiers, their heads bowed and their expressions shuttered and still under steel caps. When all this troop had vanished, it was impossible to guess which among them had been the demon, or if the demon had ever appeared.

"PAIMON, great king, of the Order of the Dominions, obey me!"

Suddenly after all the hissing silence there was a blast of sound, and the room was full of capering things carrying contorted tubes and bladders, which might have been intended as musical instruments. The noise, however, resembled most closely a drove of pigs being driven down the chute of a slaughterhouse. Among the bawling, squealing dancers a crowned man rode upon a dromedary, bawling wordlessly in a great hoarse voice. The beast it rode on chewed grimly on some bitter cud, its eyes squeezed shut as if in pain.

"SYTRY!" Ware shouted. Instantly there was darkness and quiet, except for the hissing, which now had a faint overtone as of children's voices. "*Jussus secreta libenter detegit feminarum, eas ridens ludificansque ut se luxorise nudent,* great prince, obey me!"

This sweet and lissome thing was no less monstrous than the rest; it had a glowing human body, but was winged, and had the ridiculously small, smirking head of a leopard. At the same time, it was beautiful, in some way that made Baines feel both sick and eager at the same time. As it passed, Ware seemed to be pressing a ring against his lips.

"LERAJIE, powerful marquis, ELIGOR, ZEPAR, great dukes, obey me!"

As they were called together, so these three appeared together: the first an archer clad in green, with quiver and a nocked bow whose arrow dripped venom; the second, a knight with a scepter and a pennon-bearing lance; the third, an armed soldier clad in red. In contrast to their predecessor, there was nothing in the least monstrous about their appearance, nor any clue as to their spheres and offices, but Baines found them no less alarming for all that.

"AYPOROS, mighty earl and prince, obey me!"

Baines felt himself turning sick even before this creature



## THE LAST CONJURATION

appeared, and from the sounds around him, so did the others, even including Ware. There was no special reason for this apparent in its aspect, which was so grotesque as to have been comic under other circumstances: it had the body of an angel, with a lion's head, the webbed feet of a goose and the scut of a deer. "Transform, transform!" Ware cried, thrusting his wand into the brazier. The visitant promptly took on the total appearance of an angel, crown to toe, but the effect of the presence of something filthy and obscene remained.

"HABORYM, strong duke, obey me!"

This was another man-thing of the three-headed race—though the apparent relationship, Baines realized, must be pure accident—the human one bearing two stars on its forehead; the others were of a serpent and a cat. In its right hand it carried a blazing firebrand, which it shook at them as it passed.

"NABERIUS, valiant marquis, obey me!"

At first it seemed to Baines that there had been no response to this call. Then he saw movement near the floor. A black cock with bleeding, empty eye sockets was fluttering around the outside of the Grand Circle. Ware menaced it with the wand, and it crowed hoarsely and was gone.

"GLASYALABOLAS, mighty president, obey me!"

This appeared to be simply a winged man until it smiled, when it could be seen to have the teeth of a dog. There were flecks of foam at the corners of its mouth. It passed soundlessly.

In the silence, Baines could hear Ware turning a page in his book of pacts, and remembered to cast more brandy into the brazier. The body on the altar had apparently long since been consumed; Baines could not remember how long it had

been since he had seen the last of the word-forming sparks. The thick gray haze persisted, however.

"BUNE, thou strong duke, obey me!"

This apparition was the most marvelous yet, for it approached them borne on a galleon, which sank into the floor as it came nearer until they were able to look down through the floor onto its deck. Coiled there was a dragon with the familiar three heads, these being of dog, griffin and man. Shadowy figures, vaguely human, toiled around it. It continued to sink until it was behind them, and presumably thereafter.

Its passage left Baines aware that he was trembling—not from fright, exactly, for he seemed to have passed beyond that, but from the very exhaustion of this and other emotions, and possibly also from the sheer weariness of having stood in one spot for so long. Inadvertently, he sighed.

"Silence," Ware said in a low voice. "And let nobody weaken or falter at this point. We are but half done with our calling—and of those remaining to be invoked, many are far more powerful than any we've yet seen. I warned you before, this Art takes physical strength as well as courage."

He turned another page. "ASTAROTH, grand treasurer, great and powerful duke, obey me!"

Even Baines had heard of this demon, though he could not remember where, and he watched it materialize with a stirring of curiosity. Yet it was nothing remarkable in the light of what he had seen already: an angelic figure, at once beautiful and foul, seated astride a dragon; it carried a viper in its right hand. He remembered belatedly that these spirits, never having been matter in the first place, had to borrow a body to make appearances like this, and would not necessarily pick the same one each time; the

## THE LAST CONJURATION

previous description of ASTAROTH that he had read, he now recalled, had been that of a piebald Negro woman riding on an ass. As the creature passed him, it smiled into his face, and the stench of its breath nearly knocked him down.

"ASMODAY, strong and powerful king, chief of the power of Amaymon, angel of chance, obey me!" As he called, Ware swept off his hat with his left hand, taking care, Baines noted, not to drop the lodestone as he did so.

This king also rode a dragon, and also had three heads—bull, man and ram. All three heads breathed fire. The creature's feet were webbed, as were its hands, in which it carried a lance and pennon; and it had a serpent's tail. Fearful enough; but Baines was beginning to note a certain narrowness of invention among these infernal artisans. It also occurred to him to wonder, fortunately, whether this very repetitiveness was not deliberate, intended to tire him into inattentiveness, or lure him into the carelessness of contempt. *This thing might kill me if I even closed my eyes*, he reminded himself.

"FURFUR, great earl, obey me!"

This angel appeared as a hart and was past them in a single bound, its tail streaming fire like a comet.

"HALPAS, great earl, obey me!"

There was nothing to this apparition but a stock dove, also quickly gone. Ware was calling the names now as rapidly as he could manage to turn the pages, perhaps in recognition of the growing weariness of his Tanists, perhaps even of his own. The demons flashed by in nightmare parade: RAYM, earl of the Order of the Thrones, a man with a crow's head; SEPAR, a mermaid wearing a ducal crown; SABURAC, a lion-headed soldier upon a pale horse; BIFRONS, a great earl in the shape of a gigantic flea; ZAGAN, a griffin-winged bull;

## BLACK EASTER

ANDRAS, a raven-headed angel with a bright sword, astride a black wolf; ANDREALPHUS, a peacock appearing amid the noise of many unseen birds; AMDUSCIAS, a unicorn among many musicians; DANTALIAN, a mighty duke in the form of a man but showing many faces both of men and women, with a book in his right hand; and at long last, that mighty king created next after LUCIFER and first to fall in battle before MICHAEL, formerly of the Order of the Virtues, BELIAL himself, beautiful and deadly in a chariot of fire as he had been worshiped in Babylon.

"Now, great spirits," Ware said, "because ye have diligently answered me and shown yourselves to my demands, I do hereby license ye to depart, without injury to any here. Depart, I say, yet be ye willing and ready to come at the appointed hour, when I shall duly exorcise and conjure you by your rites and seals. Until then, ye abide free. Amen."

He snuffed out the fire in the brazier with a closely fitting lid on which was graven the Third or Secret Seal of Solomon. The murk in the refectory began to lift.

"All right," Ware said in a matter-of-fact voice. Strangely, he seemed much less tired than he had after the conjuration of MARCHOSIAS. "It's over—or rather, it's begun. Mr. Ginsberg, you can safely leave your circle now, and turn on the lights."

When Ginsberg had done so, Ware also snuffed the candles. In the light of the shaded electrics the hall seemed in the throes of a cheerless dawn, although in fact the time was not much past midnight. There was nothing on the altar now but a small heap of fine gray ash.

"Do we really have to wait it out in here?" Baines said, feeling himself sagging. "I should think we'd be a lot more

## THE LAST CONJURATION

comfortable in your office—and in a better position to find out what's going on, too.”

“We must remain here,” Ware said firmly. “That, Mr. Baines, is why I asked you to bring in your transistor radio—to keep track of both the world and the time. For approximately the next eight hours, the area inside these immediate walls will be the only safe place on all the Earth.”

## XVI

Trappings, litter and all, the refectory now reminded Baines incongruously of an initiation room in a college fraternity house just after the last night of Hell Week. Hess was asleep on the long table that earlier had borne Ware's consecrated instruments. Jack Ginsberg lay on the floor near the main door, napping fitfully, mumbling and sweating. Theron Ware, after again warning everyone not to touch anything, had dusted off the altar and gone to sleep—apparently quite soundly—upon it, still robed and gowned.

Only Baines and Father Domenico remained awake. The monk, having prowled once around the margins of the room, had found an unsuspected low window behind a curtain, and now stood, with his back to them all, looking out at the black world, hands locked behind his back.

Baines sat on the floor with his own back propped against the wall next to the electric furnace, the transistor radio pressed to his ear. He was brutally uncomfortable, but he had found by experiment that this was the best place in the hall for radio reception—barring, of course, his actually entering one of the circles.

Even here, the reception was not very good. It wavered in and out maddeningly, even on powerful stations like Radio

## THE LAST CONJURATION

Luxembourg, and was liable to tearing blasts of static. These were usually followed, at intervals of a few seconds to several minutes, by bursts or rolls of thunder in the sky outside. Much of the time, too, as was usual, the clear spaces were occupied by nothing except music and commercials.

And thus far, what little news he had been able to pick up had been vaguely disappointing. There had been a major train wreck in Colorado; a freighter was foundering in a blizzard in the North Sea; in Guatemala, a small dam had burst, burying a town in an enormous mud slide; an earthquake was reported in Corinth—the usual budget of natural or near-natural disasters for any day.

In addition, the Chinese had detonated another hydrogen device; there had been another raiding incident on the Israeli-Jordanian border; black tribesmen had staged a rape and massacre on a government hospital in Rhodesia; the poor were marching on Washington again; the Soviet Union had announced that it would not be able to recover three dogs and a monkey it had put in orbit a week ago; the U.S. gained another bloody inch in Vietnam, and Premier Ky put his foot in it; and . . .

All perfectly ordinary, all going to prove what everyone of good sense already knew, that there was *no* safe place on the Earth either inside this room or without it, and probably never had been. What, Baines began to wonder, was the profit in turning loose so many demons, at so enormous an expenditure of time, effort and money, if the only result was to be just like reading any morning's newspaper? Of course, it might be that interesting private outrages were also being committed, but many newspaper and other publishers made fortunes on those in ordinary times, and in any

event he could never hear of more than a fraction of them over this idiot machine.

Probably he would just have to wait until days or weeks later, when the full record and history of this night had been assembled and digested, when no doubt its full enormity might duly appear. He should have expected nothing else; after all, the full impact of a work of art is never visible in the sketches. All the same, he was obstinately disappointed to be deprived of the artist's excitement of watching the work growing on the canvas.

Was there anything that Ware could do about that? Almost surely not, or he would have done it already; it was clear that he had understood the motive behind the commission as well as he had understood its nature. Besides, it would be dangerous to wake him—he would need all his strength for the latter half of the experiment, when the demons began to return.

Resentfully, but with some resignation too, Baines realized that he himself had never been the artist here. He was only the patron, who could watch the colors being applied and the cartoon being filled, and could own the finished board or ceiling, but had never even in principle been capable of handling the brushes.

But there—what was that? The BBC was reporting:

“A third contingent of apparatus has been dispatched along the Thames to combat the Tate Gallery fire. Expert observers believe there is no hope of saving the gallery's great collection of Blake paintings, which include most of his illustrations for the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* of Dante. Hope also appears to be lost for what amount to almost all the world's paintings by Turner, including his watercolors of the burning of the Houses of Parliament. The intense and sudden nature of the



initial outbreak has led to the suspicion that the fire is the work of an incendiary."

Baines sat up alertly, feeling an even more acute stab of hope, though all his joints protested painfully. *There* was a crime with real style, a crime with symbolism, a crime with meaning. Excitedly he remembered HABORYM, the demon with the dripping firebrand. Now if there were to be more acts that imaginative . . .

The reception was getting steadily worse; it was extraordinarily tiring to be continuously straining to filter meaning out of it. Radio Luxembourg appeared to have gone off the air, or to have been shut out by some atmospheric disturbance. He tried Radio Milan, and got it just in time to hear it announce itself about to play all eleven of the symphonies of Gustav Mahler, one right after the other, an insane project for any station and particularly for an Italian one. Was that some demon's idea of a joke? Whatever the answer, it was going to take Radio Milan out of the newscasting business for well over twenty-four hours to come.

He cast further about the dial. There seemed to be an extraordinary number of broadcasts going out in languages he did not know or could even recognize, though he could get around passably in seventeen standard tongues and in any given year was fluent in a different set of three, depending on business requirements. It was almost as though someone had jammed an antenna on the crown of Babel.

Briefly, he caught a strong outburst of English; but it was only the Voice of America making piously pejorative sermonettes about the Chinese fusion explosion. Baines had known that that was coming for months now. Then the multilingual mumbling and chuntering resumed, interspersed

occasionally with squeals of what might indifferently have been Pakistani jazz or Chinese opera.

Another segment of English shouted, “. . . with Cyanotabs! Yes, friends, one dose cures all ills! Guaranteed chock-full of crisp, crunchy atoms . . .” and was replaced by a large boys’ choir singing the “Hallelujah Chorus,” the words for which, however, seemed to go, “Bison, bison! Rattus, rattus! Cardinalis! Cardinalis!” Then more gabble, marvelously static-free and sometimes hovering just on the edge of intelligibility.

The room stank abominably of an amazing mixture of reeks: brandy, camphor, charcoal, vervain, gunpowder, flesh, sweat, perfume, incense, candle wicks, musk, singed hair. Baines’ head ached dully; it was like trying to breathe inside the mouth of a vulture. He longed to take a pull at the brandy bottle under his rumpled alb, but he did not know how much of what was left would be needed when Ware resumed operations.

Across from him, something moved: Father Domenico had unlocked his hands and turned away from the small window. He was now taking a few prim steps toward Baines. The slight stir of human life seemed to disturb Jack Ginsberg, who thrashed himself into an even more uncomfortable-looking position, shouted hoarsely, and then began to snore. Father Domenico shot a glance at him, and, stopping just short of his side of the Grand Circle, beckoned.

“Me?” Baines said.

Father Domenico nodded patiently. Putting aside the overheated little radio with less reluctance than he would have imagined possible only an hour ago, Baines heaved himself arthritically to his knees, and then to his feet.

As he started to stumble toward the monk, something

## THE LAST CONJURATION

furry hurtled in front of him and nearly made him fall: Ware's cat. It was darting toward the altar; and in a soaring arc incredible in an animal of its shameless obesity, leapt up there and settled down on the rump of its sleeping master. It looked greenly at Baines and went itself to sleep, or appeared to.

Father Domenico beckoned again, and went back to the window. Baines limped after him, wishing that he had taken off his shoes; his feet felt as though they had turned into solid blocks of horn.

"What's the matter?" he whispered.

"Look out there, Mr. Baines."

Confused and aching, Baines peered past his uninvited and unimpressive Virgil. At first he could see nothing but the streaked steam on the inside of the glass, with a spume of fat snowflakes slurring beyond it. Then he saw that the night was in fact not wholly dark. Somehow he could sense the undersides of turbulent clouds. Below, the window, like the one in Ware's office, looked down the side of the cliff and out over the sea, which was largely invisible in the snow whorls; so should the town have been, but it was in fact faintly luminous. Overhead, from frame to frame of the window, the clouds were overstitched with continuous streaks of dim fire, like phosphorescent contrails, long-lasting and taking no part in the weather.

"Well?" Baines said.

"You don't see anything?"

"I see the meteor tracks or whatever they are. And the light is odd—sheet lightning, I suppose, and maybe a fire somewhere in town."

"That's all?"

"That's all," Baines said, irritated. "What are you trying to

## BLACK EASTER

do, panic me into waking Dr. Ware and calling it all quits? Nothing doing. We'll wait it out."

"All right," Father Domenico said, resuming his vigil. Baines stumped back to his corner and picked up the radio. It said:

". . . now established that the supposed Chinese fusion test was actually a missile warhead explosion of at least thirty megatons, centered on Taiwan. Western capitals, already in an uproar because of the napalm murder of the U. S. President's widow in a jammed New York discotheque, are moving quickly to a full war footing and we expect a series of security blackouts on the news at any moment. Until that happens we will keep you informed of whatever important events come through. We pause for station identification. Owoo. Eeg. Oh, piggly baby, I caught you—cheatin' on me—owoo . . ."

Baines twisted the dial savagely, but the howling only became more bestial. Down the wall to his right, Hess twisted his long body on the table and suddenly sat upright, swinging his stockinged feet to the floor.

"Jesus Christ," he said huskily. "Did I hear what I thought I heard?"

"Dead right you did," Baines said quietly, and not without joy; but he, too, was worried. "Slide over here and sit down. Something's coming to a head, and it's nothing like we'd expected—or Ware either."

"Hadn't we better call a halt, then?"

"No. Sit down, goddamn it. I don't think we *can* call a halt—and even if we could, I don't want to give our clerical friend over there the satisfaction."

"You'd rather have World War Three?" Hess said, sitting down obediently.

## THE LAST CONJURATION

"I don't know that that's what's going to happen. We contracted for this. Let's give it the benefit of the doubt. Either Ware's in control, or he should be. Let's wait and see."

"All right," Hess said. He began to knead his fingers together. Baines tried the radio once more, but nothing was coming through except a mixture of *The Messiah*, Mahler and The Supremes.

Jack Ginsberg whined in his pseudo-sleep. After a while, Hess said neutrally:

"Baines?"

"What is it?"

"What kind of a thing do you think this is?"

"Well, it's either World War Three or it isn't. How can I know yet?"

"I didn't ask you that . . . not what you think it *is*. I asked you, what *kind* of a thing do you think it is? You ought to have some sort of notion. After all, you contracted for it."

"Oh. Hmm. Father Domenico said it might turn out to be Armageddon. Ware didn't think so, but he hasn't turned out to be very right up to now. I can't guess, myself. I haven't been thinking in these terms very long."

"Nor have I," Hess said, watching his fingers weave themselves in and out. "I'm still trying to make sense of it in the old terms, the ones that used to make sense of the universe to me. It isn't easy. But you'll remember I told you I was interested in the history of science. That involves trying to understand why there wasn't any science for so long, and why it went into eclipse almost every time it was rediscovered. I think I know why now. I think the human mind goes through a sort of cycle of fear. It can only take so much accumulated knowledge, and then it panics, and starts

## BLACK EASTER

inventing reasons to throw everything over and go back to a Dark Age . . . every time with a new, invented mystical reason."

"You're not making very much sense," Baines said. He was still also trying to listen to the radio.

"I didn't expect you to think so. But it happens. It happens about every thousand years. People start out happy with their gods, even though they're frightened of them. Then, increasingly, the world becomes secularized, and the gods seem less and less relevant. The temples are deserted. People feel guilty about that, but not much. Then, suddenly, they've had all the secularization they can take, they throw their wooden shoes into the machines, they take to worshipping Satan or the Great Mother, they go into a Hellenistic period or take up Christianity, *in hoc signo vinces*—I've got those all out of order but it happens, Baines, it happens like clockwork, every thousand years. The last time was the chiliastic panics just before the year A.D. 1000, when everyone expected the Second Coming of Christ and realized that they didn't dare face up to Him. *That* was the heart, the center, the whole reason of the Dark Ages. Well, we've got another millennium coming to a close now, and people are terrified of *our* secularization, our nuclear and biological weapons, our computers, our overprotective medicine, everything, and they're turning back to the worship of unreason. Just as you've done—and I've helped you. Some people these days worship flying saucers because they don't dare face up to Christ. You've turned to black magic. Where's the difference?"

"I'll tell you where," Baines said. "Nobody in the whole of time has ever seen a saucer, and the reasons for believing that anybody has are utterly pitiable. Probably they can be

## THE LAST CONJURATION

explained just as you've explained them, and never mind about Jung and his thump-headed crowd. But, Adolph, you and I *have* seen a demon."

"Do you think so? I don't deny it. I think it very possible. But Baines, are you sure? How do you *know* what you think you know? We're on the eve of World War Three, which we engineered. Couldn't all this be a hallucination we conjured up to remove some of our guilt? Or is it possible that it isn't happening at all, and that we're as much victims of a chiliastic panic as more formally religious people are? That makes more sense to me than all this medieval mumbo-jumbo about demons. I don't mean to deny the evidence of my senses, Baines. I only mean to ask you, what is it worth?"

"I'll tell you what I know," Baines said equably, "though I can't tell you how I know it and I won't bother to try. First, something is happening, and that something is real. Second, you and I and Ware and everyone else who wanted to make it happen, therefore *did* make it happen. Third, we're turning out to be wrong about the outcome—but no matter what it is, it's *our* outcome. We contracted for it. Demons, saucers, fallout—what's the difference? Those are just signs in the equation, parameters we can fill any way that makes the most intermediate sense to us. Are you happier with electrons than with demons? Okay, good for you. But what I like, Adolph, what *I* like is the result. I don't give a damn about the means. I invented it, I called it into being, I'm paying for it—and no matter how else you describe it, *I made it, and it's mine*. Is that clear? *It's mine*. Every other possible fact about it, no matter what that fact might turn out to be, is a stupid footling technicality that I hire people like you and Ware not to bother me with."

## BLACK EASTER

"It seems to me," Hess said in a leaden monotone, "that we are all insane."

At that same moment, the small window burst into an intense white glare, turning Father Domenico into the most intense of inky silhouettes.

"You may be right," Baines said. "There goes Rome."

Father Domenico, his eyes streaming, turned away from the dimming frame and picked his way slowly to the altar. After a long moment of distaste, he took Theron Ware by the shoulder and shook him. The cat hissed and jumped side-wise.

"Wake up, Theron Ware," Father Domenico said formally. "I charge you, awake. Your experiment may now wholly and contractually be said to have gone astray, and the Covenant therefore satisfied. Ware! Ware! Wake up, damn you!"



## XVII

Baines looked at his watch. It was 3:00 A.M.

Ware awoke instantly, swung to his feet with a spring and without a word started for the window. At the same instant, the agony that had been Rome swept over the building. The shock wave had been attenuated by distance and the jolt was not heavy, but the window Father Domenico had uncurtained sprang inward in a spray of flying glass needles. More glass fell out from behind the drapes which hung below the ceiling, like an orchestra of celestas.

As far as Baines could see, nobody was more than slightly cut. Not that a serious wound could have made any difference now, with the Last Death already riding on the winds.

Ware was not visibly shaken. He simply nodded once and wheeled toward the Grand Circle, stooping to pick up his dented paper hat. No, he was moved—his lips were pinched white. He beckoned to them all.

Baines took a step toward Jack Ginsberg, to kick him awake if necessary. But the special executive assistant was already on his feet, trembling and wild-eyed. He seemed, however, totally unaware of where he was; Baines had to push him bodily into his minor circle.

“And stay there,” Baines added, in a voice that should have

been able to scar diamonds. But Jack gave no sign of having heard it.

Baines went hastily to his Tanist's place, checking for the bottle of brandy. Everyone else was already in position, even the cat, which in fact had vaulted to its post promptly upon having been dumped off Ware's rear.

The sorcerer lit the brazier, and began to address the dead air. He was hardly more than a sentence into this invocation before Baines realized for the first time, in his freezing heart, that this was indeed the last effort—and that indeed they might all still be saved.

Ware was making his renunciation, in his own black and twisted way—the only way his fatally proud soul could ever be brought to make it. He said:

"I invoke and conjure thee, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, and fortified with the Power and the Supreme Majesty, I strongly command thee by BARALEMENSIS, BALDACHIENSIS, PAUMACHIE, APOLORESEDES and the most potent princes GENIO, LIACHIDE, ministers of the Tartarean seat, chief princes of the seat of APOLOGIA in the ninth region, I exorcise and command thee, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, by Him Who spake and it was done, by the Most Holy and glorious Names ADONAI, EL, ELOHIM, ELOHE, ZEAOTH, ELION, ESCHERCE, JAH, TETRAGRAMMATON, SADAI, do thou and thine forthwith appear and show thyself unto me, regardless of how thou art previously charged, from whatever part of the world, without tarrying!

"I conjure thee by Him to Whom all creatures are obedient, by this ineffable Name, TETRAGRAMMATON JEHOVAH, by which the elements are overthrown, the air is shaken, the sea turns back, the fire is generated, the earth moves and all the hosts of things celestial, of things terrestrial, of things

## THE LAST CONJURATION

infernal, do tremble and are confounded together, come. ADONAI, King of kings, commands thee!"

There was no answer, except an exterior grumble of thunder.

"Now I invoke, conjure and command thee, LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, to appear and show thyself before this circle, by the Name of ON . . . by the Name Y and V, which Adam heard and spake . . . by the Name of JOTH, which Jacob learned from the angel on the night of his wrestling and was delivered from the hands of his brother . . . by the Name of AGLA, which Lot heard and was saved with his family . . . by the Name ANEHXETON, which Aaron spake and was made wise . . . by the Name SCHEMES AMATHIA, which Joshua invoked and the Sun stayed upon his course . . . by the Name EMMANUEL, by which the three children were delivered from the fiery furnace . . . by the Name ALPHA-OMEGA, which Daniel uttered, and destroyed Bel and the dragon . . . by the Name ZEAOTH, which Moses named, and all the rivers and the waters in the land of Egypt were turned into blood . . . by the Name HAGIOS, by the Seal of ADONAI, by those others, which are JETROS, ATHENOROS, PARACLETUS . . . by the dreadful Day of Judgment . . . by the changing sea of glass which is before the face of the Divine Majesty . . . by the four beasts before the Throne . . . by all these Holy and most potent words, come thou, and come thou quickly. Come, come! ADONAI, King of kings, commands thee!"

Now, at last, there was a sound: a sound of laughter. It was the laughter of Something incapable of joy, laughing only because It was compelled by Its nature to terrify. As the laughter grew, that Something formed.

It was not standing in the Lesser Circle or appearing

from the Gateway, but instead was sitting on the altar, swinging Its cloven feet negligently. It had a goat's head, with immense horns, a crown that flamed like a torch, level human eyes, and a Star of David on Its forehead. Its haunches, too, were caprine. Between, the body was human, though hairy and with dragging black pinions like a crow's growing from Its shoulder blades. It had women's breasts and an enormous erection, which it nursed alternately with hands folded into the gesture of benediction. On one shaggy forearm was tattooed *Solve*; on the other, *Coagula*.

Ware fell slowly to one knee.

"*Adoramus te, PUT SATANACHIA,*" he said, laying his wand on the ground before him. "And again . . . *ave, ave.*"

AVE, BUT WHY DO YOU HAIL ME? the monster said in a petulant bass voice, at once deep and mannered, like a homosexual actor's. IT WAS NOT I YOU CALLED.

"No, Baphomet, master and guest. Never for an instant. It is everywhere said that you can never be called, and would never appear."

YOU CALLED ON THE GOD, WHO DOTH NOT APPEAR. I AM NOT MOCKED.

Ware bowed his head lower. "I was wrong."

AH! BUT THERE IS A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING. YOU MIGHT HAVE SEEN THE GOD AFTER ALL. BUT NOW INSTEAD YOU HAVE SEEN ME. AND THERE IS ALSO A LAST TIME FOR EVERYTHING. I OWE YOU A MOMENT OF THANKS. WORM THOUGH YOU ARE, YOU ARE THE AGENT OF ARMAGEDDON. LET THAT BE WRITTEN, BEFORE ALL WRITINGS, LIKE ALL ELSE, GO INTO THE EVERLASTING FIRE.

"No!" Ware cried out. "Oh living God, no! This cannot be the Time! You break the Law! Where is the Anti-christ—"

## THE LAST CONJURATION

WE WILL DO WITHOUT THE ANTICHRIST. HE WAS NEVER NECESSARY. MEN HAVE ALWAYS LED THEMSELVES UNTO ME.

“But—master and guest—the Law—”

WE SHALL ALSO DO WITHOUT THE LAW. HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? THOSE TABLETS HAVE BEEN BROKEN.

There was a hiss of indrawn breath from both Ware and Father Domenico; but if Ware had intended some further argument, he was forestalled. To Baines' right, Dr. Hess said in a voice of high ultraviolet hysteria:

“I don't see you, Goat.”

“Shut up!” Ware shouted, almost turning away from the vision.

“I don't see you,” Hess said doggedly. “You're nothing but a silly zoological mixture. A mushroom dream. You're not real, Goat. Go away. Poof!”

Ware turned in his Karcist's circle and lifted his magician's sword against Hess in both hands; but, at the last minute, he seemed to be afraid to step out against the wobbling figure of the scientist.

HOW GRACIOUS OF YOU TO SPEAK TO ME, AGAINST THE RULES. WE UNDERSTAND, YOU AND I, THAT RULES WERE MADE TO BE BROKEN. BUT YOUR FORM OF ADDRESS DOES NOT QUITE PLEASE ME. LET US PROLONG THE CONVERSATION, AND I WILL EDUCATE YOU. ETERNALLY, FOR A BEGINNING.

Hess did not answer. Instead, he howled like a wolf and charged blindly out of the Grand Circle, his head down, toward the altar. The Sabbath Goat opened Its great mouth and gulped him down like a fly.

THANK YOU FOR THE SACRIFICE, It said thickly. ANYONE ELSE? THEN IT IS TIME I LEFT.

“Stand to, stupid and disobedient!” Father Domenico's voice rang out from Baines' right side. A cloth fluttered out

## BLACK EASTER

of the monk's circle onto the floor. "Behold thy confusion, if thou be disobedient! Behold the Pentacle of Solomon which I have brought into thy presence!"

**FUNNY LITTLE MONK, I WAS NEVER IN THAT BOTTLE!**

"Hush and be still, fallen star. Behold in me the person of the Exorcist, who is called OCTINIMOE, in the midst of delusion armed by the Lord God and fearless. I am thy master, in the name of the Lord BATHAL, rushing upon ABRAC, ABEOR, coming upon BEROR!"

The Sabbath Goat looked down upon Father Domenico almost kindly. His face red, Father Domenico reached into his robes and brought out a crucifix, which he thrust toward the altar like a sword.

**"Back to Hell, devil! In the name of Christ our Lord!"**

The ivory cross exploded like a Prince Rupert's Drop, strewing Father Domenico's robe with dust. He looked down at his horribly empty hands.

**TOO LATE, MAGICIAN. EVEN THE BEST EFFORTS OF YOUR WHITE COLLEGE ALSO HAVE FAILED—AND AS THE HEAVENLY HOSTS ALSO WILL FAIL. WE ARE ABROAD AND ALOOSE, AND WILL NOT BE PUT BACK.**

The great head bent to look down upon Theron Ware.

**AND YOU ARE MY DEARLY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED. I GO TO JOIN MY BROTHERS AND LOVERS IN THE REST OF YOUR WORK. BUT I SHALL BE BACK FOR YOU. I SHALL BE BACK FOR YOU ALL. THE WAR IS ALREADY OVER.**

"Impossible!" Father Domenico cried, though choking with the dust of the exploded crucifix. "It is written that in that war you will at last be conquered and chained!"

**OF COURSE, BUT WHAT DOES THAT PROVE? EACH OF THE OPPOSING SIDES IN ANY WAR ALWAYS PREDICTS VICTORY. THEY CANNOT BOTH BE RIGHT. IT IS THE FINAL BATTLE THAT COUNTS,**

## THE LAST CONJURATION

NOT THE PROPAGANDA. YOU MADE A MISTAKE—AND AH, HOW YOU WILL PAY!

“One moment . . . please,” Father Domenico said. “If you would be so kind . . . I see that we have failed. . . . Would you tell us, *where* did we fail?”

The Goat laughed, spoke three words, and vanished.

The dawn grew, red, streaked, dull, endless. From Ware’s window the sleeping town slumped down in rivers of cold lava toward the sea—but there was no sea; as Father Domenico had seen hours ago, the sea had withdrawn, and would not be back again except as a tsunami after the Corinth earthquake. Circles of desolation spread away from the ritual circles. Inside them, the last magicians waited for the now Greatest Powers to come back for them.

It would not be long now. In all their minds and hearts echoed those last three words. World without end. End without world.

*God is dead.*







# **THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT**

**After such knowledge, what forgiveness?  
—T. S. Eliot**

*To*

**ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES**

## STATIONS

<i>The Wrath-Bearing Tree</i>	163
<i>So Above</i>	175
<i>Come to Middle Hell</i>	227
<i>The Harrowing of Heaven</i>	285



## **The Wrath-Bearing Tree**

**Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!**

**REVELATION 8:13**



The Fall of God put Theron Ware in a peculiarly unenviable position, though he was hardly alone. After all, he had caused it—insofar as an event so gigantic could be said to have had any cause but the First. And as a black magician he knew better than to expect any gratitude from the victor.

Nor, on the other hand, would it do him the slightest good to maintain that he had loosed the forty-eight suffragan demons upon the world only at the behest of a client. Hell was an incombustible Alexandrine library of such evasions—and besides, even had he had a perfect plea of innocence, there was no longer any such thing as justice, anywhere. The Judger was dead.

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

"When the hell is he coming back?" Baines, the client, demanded suddenly, irritably. "This waiting is worse than getting it over with."

Father Domenico turned from the refectory window, which was now unglazed, from the shock wave of the H-bombing of Rome. He had been looking down the cliff face, over the half-melted *pensioni*, shops and tenements of what had once been Positano, at the drained sea bed. When that tsunami did arrive, it was going to be a record one; it might even reach all the way up here.

"You don't know what you're saying, Mister Baines," the white magician said. "From now on, nothing can be over with. We are on the brink of eternity."

"You know what I mean," Baines growled.

"Of course, but if I were you, I'd be grateful for the respite. . . . It is odd that he hasn't come back yet. Dare we hope that something has after all interfered with him? Something—or some One?"

"He said God is dead."

"Yes, but he is the Father of Lies. What do you think, Doctor Ware?"

Ware did not reply. The personage they were talking about was of course not the Father of Lies, the ultimate Satan, but the subsidiary prince who had answered Ware's last summons—PUT SATANACHIA, sometimes called Baphomet, the Sabbath Goat. As for the question, Ware simply did not know the answer; it was now sullen full morning of the day after Armageddon, and the Goat had promised to come for the four of them promptly at dawn, in



## THE WRATH-BEARING TREE

ironical obedience to the letter of Ware's loosing and sending; yet he was not here.

Baines looked around the spent conjuring room. "I wonder what he did with Hess?"

"Swallowed him," Ware said, "as you saw. And it served the fool right for stepping outside of his circle."

"But did he really eat him?" Baines said. "Or was that, uh, just symbolical? Is Hess actually in Hell now?"

Ware refused to be drawn into the discussion, which he recognized at once as nothing but Baines's last little vestige of skepticism floundering about for an exit from its doom; but Father Domenico said,

"The thing that called itself Screwtape let slip to Lewis that demons do eat souls. But one can hardly suppose that that is the end. I expect we will shortly know a lot more about the matter than we wish."

Abstractedly, he brushed from his robe a little more of the dust from his shattered crucifix. Ware watched him with ironic wonder. He really was staging a remarkable recovery; his God was dead, his Christ as exploded as a myth, his soul assuredly as damned as that of Ware or Baines—and yet he could still manage to interest himself in semi-Scholastic prattle. Well, Ware had always thought that white magic, these days as always, attracted only a low order of intellect, let alone insight.

But where *was* the Goat?

"I wonder where Mister Ginsberg went?" Father Domenico said, as if in parody of Ware's unspoken question. Again, Ware only shrugged. He had for the moment quite forgotten Baines's male secretary; it was true that

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

Ginsberg had shown some promise as an apprentice, but after all, he had wanted to learn the *Ars Magica* essentially as a means of supplying himself with mistresses, and even under normal circumstances his recent experience with Ware's assistant, Gretchen—who was in fact a succubus—had probably driven the desire out permanently. In any event, of what use would an apprentice be now?

Baines looked as startled as Ware felt at the question. "Jack?" he said. "I sent him to our rooms to pack."

"To pack?" Ware said. "You had some notion that you might get away?"

"I thought it highly unlikely," Baines said evenly, "but if the opportunity arose, I didn't mean to be caught unprepared."

"Where do you think you might go where the Goat couldn't find you?"

No reply was necessary. Ware felt through his sandals a slow shuddering of the tiled floor. As it grew more pronounced, it was joined by a faint but deep thunder in the air.

Father Domenico shuffled hastily back to the window, Baines close behind him. Unwillingly, Ware followed.

On the horizon, a wall of foaming, cascading water was coming toward them with preternatural slowness, across the deserted floor of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The water had all been drained away as one consequence of the Corinth earthquake of yesterday, which itself might or might not have been demonically created; Ware was not sure that it made much difference one way or the other.

## THE WRATH-BEARING TREE

In any event, the tectonic imbalance was now, inexorably, in the process of righting itself.

The Goat remained unaccountably delayed . . . but the tsunami was on its way at last.

What had been Jack Ginsberg's room in the palazzo now looked a great deal more like the cabinet of Dr. Caligari. Every stone, every window frame, every angle, every wall was out of true, so that there was no place to stand where he did not feel as though he had been imprisoned in a tesseract—except that even the planes of the prison were crazed with jagged cracks without any geometry whatsoever. The window panes were out, and the ceiling dripped; the floor was invisible under fallen plaster, broken glass and anonymous dirt; and in the *gabinetto* the toilet was pumping continuously as though trying to flush away the world. The satin-sheeted bed was sandy to the touch, and when he took his clothes out of the wardrobe, his beautiful clothes so carefully selected from *Playboy*, dust fumed out of them like spores from a puff-ball.

There was no place to lay clothes out but on the bed, though it was only marginally less filthy than any other flat surface available. He wiped down the outside of his suitcase with a handkerchief, which he then dropped out the window down the cliff, and began to stow things away, shaking them out with angry coughs as best he could.

The routine helped, a little. It was not easy to think about any other part of this incredible impasse. It was

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

even difficult to know whom to blame. After all, he had known about Baines's creative impulse toward destruction for a long time and had served it; nor had he ever thought it insane. It was a common impulse: to one engineer you add one stick of dynamite, and in the name of progress he will cut a mountain in half and cover half a country with concrete, for no better real reason than that he enjoys it. Baines was only the same kind of monomaniac, writ large because he had made so much money at it; and unlike the others, he had always been honest enough to admit that he did it because he loved the noise and the ruin. More generally, top management everywhere, or at least back in the States, was filled with people who loved their business, and cared for nothing else but crossword puzzles or painting by the numbers.

As for Ware, what had he done? He had prosecuted an art to his own destruction, which was traditionally the only sure way a life can be made into a work of art. Unlike that idiot Hess, he had known how to protect himself from the minor unpleasant consequences of his fanaticism, though he had turned out to be just as blindly suicidal in the end. Ware was still alive, and Hess was dead—unless his soul still lived in Hell—but the difference now was only one of degree, not of kind. Ware had not invited Baines's commission; he had only hoped to use it to enlarge his own knowledge; as Hess had been using Baines; as Baines had used Hess and Ware to satisfy his business and aesthetic needs; as Ware and Baines had used Jack's administrative talents and his delight in straight, raw sex; as Jack had tried to use them all in return.

## THE WRATH-BEARING TREE

They had all been things, not people, to each other, which after all is the only sensible and fruitful attitude in a thing-dominated world. (Except, of course, for Father Domenico, whose desire to prevent anybody from accomplishing anything, chiefly by wringing his hands, had to be written off as the typical, incomprehensible attitude of the mystic—a howling anachronism in the modern world, and predictably ineffectual.) And in point of fact none of them—not even Father Domenico—could fairly be said to have failed. Instead, they had all been betrayed. Their plans and operations had all depended implicitly upon the existence of God—even Jack, who had entered Positano as an atheist, had been reluctantly forced to grant that—and in the final pinch, He had turned out to have been not around any more after all. If this shambles was anyone's fault, it was His.

He slammed down the cover of his suitcase. The noise was followed, behind him, by a fainter sound, about half-way between the clearing of a throat and the sneeze of a cat. For a moment he stood stock-still, knowing very well what that sound meant. But it was useless to ignore it, and finally he turned around.

The girl was standing on the threshold, as before, and as before, she was somewhat different. It was one of the immemorial snares of her type; at each apparition she seemed like someone else, and yet always, at the same time, reminded him of someone—he could never think who—he had once known; she was always at once mistress, harem and stranger. Ware ironically called her Gretchen, or Greta, or Rita, and she could be compelled by the

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

word *Cazotte*, but in fact she had no name, nor even any real sex. She was a demon, alternately playing succubus to Jack and incubus to some witch on the other side of the world. In theory only, the idea of such a relationship would have revolted Jack, who was fastidious, in his fashion. In actual practice, it did indeed revolt him . . . insufficiently.

"You do not make me as welcome as before," she said.

Jack did not reply. This time the apparition was blond again, taller than he was, very slender, her hair long and falling straight down her back. She wore a black silk sari with gold edging, which left one breast bare, and gold sandals, but no jewelry. Amidst all this rubble, she looked fresh as though she had just stepped out of a tub: beautiful, magical, terrifying and irresistible.

"I thought you could come only at night," he said at last.

"Oh, those old rules are gone forever," she said, and as if to prove it, stepped across the threshold without even one invitation, let alone three. "And you are leaving. We must celebrate the mystery once more before you go, and you must make me a last present of your seed. It is not very potent; my other client is thus far disappointed. Come, touch me, go into me. I know it is your need."

"In this mess? You must have lost your mind."

"Nay, impossible; intellect is all I am, no matter how I appear to you. Yet am I capable of monstrous favors, as you know well, and will to know again."

She took the suitcase, which was still unfastened, off the bed and set it flat on the floor. Though it was almost too

## THE WRATH-BEARING TREE

heavy for Jack when fully loaded, handling it did not appear to cost her the slightest effort. Then, lifting one arm and with it the bare and spiky breast, she unwound the sari in a single, continuous sweeping motion, and lay down naked across the gritty bed, light glinting from dewdrops caught about her inflamed mound, a vision of pure lubricity.

Jack ran a finger around the inside of his collar, though it was open. It was impossible not to want her, and at the same time he wanted desperately to escape—and besides, Baines was waiting, and Jack had better sense than to pursue his hobby on company time.

“I should have thought you’d be off raising hell with your colleagues,” he said, his voice hoarse.

The girl frowned suddenly, reminding him of that fearful moment after their first night when she had thought that he had been mocking her. Her fingernails, like independent creatures, clawed slowly at her flat abdomen.

“Dost think to copulate with fallen seraphim?” she said. “I am not of any of the Orders which make war; I do only what would be hateful even to the damned.” Then, equally suddenly, the frown dissolved in a little shower of laughter. “And ah, besides, I raise not Hell, but the Devil, for already I have Hell in me—dost know that story of Boccaccio?”

Jack knew it; there was no story of that kind he did not know; and his Devil was most certainly raised. While he still hesitated, there was a distant growling sound, almost inaudible but somehow also infinitely heavy. The girl turned her head toward the window, also listening;

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

then she looked back at him, spread her thighs and held out her arms.

"I think," she said, "that you had better hurry."

With a groan of despair, he fell to his knees and buried his face in her muff. Her smooth legs closed about his ears; but no matter how hard he pulled at her cool, pliant rump, the sound of the returning sea rose louder and louder around them both.



## **So Above**

*Haeresis est maxima opera maleficarum non credere.*

—Heinrich Institor and Jakob  
Sprenger: *Malleus Maleficarum*



## I

The enemy, whoever he was, had obviously been long prepared to make a major attempt to reduce the Strategic Air Command's master missile-launching control site under Denver. In the first twenty minutes of the war, he had dumped a whole stick of multiple hydrogen warheads on it. The city, of course, had been utterly vaporized, and a vast expanse of the plateau on which it had stood was now nothing but gullied, vitrified and radioactive granite; but the site had been well hardened and was more than a mile beneath the original surface. Everybody in it had been knocked down and temporarily deafened, there were

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

bruises and scrapes and one concussion, some lights had gone out and a lot of dust had been raised despite the air conditioning; in short, the damage would have been reported as "minimal" had there been anybody to report it to.

Who the enemy was occasioned some debate. General D. Willis McKnight, a Yellow Peril fan since his boyhood reading of *The American Weekly* in Chicago, favored the Chinese. Of his two chief scientists, one, the Prague-born Dr. Džejms Šatvje, the godfather of the selenium bomb, had been seeing Russians under his bed for almost as long.

"Nu, why argue?" said Johann Buelg. As a RAND Corporation alumnus, he found nothing unthinkable, but he did not like to waste time speculating about facts. "We can always ask the computer—we must have enough input already for that. Not that it matters much, since we've already plastered the Russians *and* the Chinese pretty thoroughly."

"We already know the Chinese started it," General McKnight said, wiping dust off his spectacles with his handkerchief. He was a small, narrow-chested Air Force Academy graduate from the class just after the cheating had been stopped, already nearly bald at forty-eight; naked, his face looked remarkably like that of a prawn. "They dropped a thirty-megatonner on Formosa, disguised as a test."

"It depends on what you mean by 'start,'" Buelg said. "That was already on Rung twenty-one, Level Four—local nuclear war. But still only Chinese against Chinese."

"But we were committed to them, right?" Šatvje said.

"President Agnew told the UN, 'I am a Formosan.'"

"It doesn't matter worth a damn," Buelg said, with some irritation. It was his opinion, which he did not keep particularly private, that Šatvje, whatever his eminence as a physicist, in all other matters had a *goyische kopf*. He had encountered better heads on egg creams in his father's candy store. "The thing's escalated almost exponentially in the past eighteen hours or so. The question is, how far has it gone? If we're lucky, it's only up to Level Six, central war—maybe no farther than Rung thirty-four, constrained disarming attack."

"Do you call atomizing Denver 'restrained?'" the General demanded.

"Maybe. They could have done for Denver with one warhead, but instead they saturated it. That means they were shooting for us, not for the city proper. Our counter-strike couldn't be preventive, so it was one rung lower, which I hope to God they noticed."

"They took Washington out," Šatvje said, clasping his fat hands piously. He had been lean once, but becoming first a consultant on the Cabinet level, next a spokesman for massive retaliation, and finally a publicity saint had appended a beer belly to his brain-puffed forehead, so that he now looked like a caricature of a nineteenth-century German philologist. Buelg himself was stocky and tended to run to lard, but a terrible susceptibility to kidney stones had kept him on a reasonable diet.

"The Washington strike almost surely wasn't directed against civilians," Buelg said. "Naturally the leadership of the enemy is a prime military target. But, General, all

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

this happened so quickly that I doubt that anybody in government had a chance to reach prepared shelters. You may now be effectively the president of whatever is left of the United States, which means that you could make new policies."

"True," McKnight said. "True, true."

"In which case we've got to know the facts the minute our lines to outside are restored. Among other things, if the escalation's gone all the way to spasm, in which case the planet will be uninhabitable. There'll be nobody and nothing left alive but people in hardened sites, like us, and the only policy we'll need for that will be a count of the canned beans."

"I think that needlessly pessimistic," Šarvje said, at last heaving himself up out of the chair into which he had struggled after getting up off the floor. It was not a very comfortable chair, but the computer room—where they had all been when the strike had come—had not been designed for comfort. He put his thumbs under the lapels of his insignia-less adviser's uniform and frowned down upon them. "The Earth is a large planet, of its class; if we cannot reoccupy it, our descendants will be able to do so."

"After five thousand years?"

"You are assuming that carbon bombs were used. Dirty bombs of that kind are obsolescent. That is why I so strongly advocated the sulfur-decay chain; the selenium isotopes are chemically all strongly poisonous, but they have very short half lives. A selenium bomb is essentially a *humane* bomb."

Šatvje was physically unable to pace, but he was beginning to stomp back and forth. He was again playing back one of his popular magazine articles. Buelg began to twiddle his thumbs, as ostentatiously as possible.

"It has sometimes occurred to me," Šatvje said, "that our discovery of how to release the nuclear energies was providential. Consider: Natural selection stopped for Man when he achieved control over his environment, and furthermore began to save the lives of all his weaklings, and preserve their bad genes. Once natural selection has been halted, then the only remaining pressure upon the race to evolve is mutation. Artificial radioactivity, and indeed even fallout itself, may be God's way of resuming the process of evolution for Man . . . perhaps toward some ultimate organism we cannot foresee, perhaps even toward some unitary mind which we will share with God, as Teilhardt de Chardin envisioned—"

At this point, the General noticed the twiddling of Buelg's thumbs.

"Facts are what we need," he said. "I agree with you there, Buelg. But a good many of our lines to outside *were* cut, and there may have been some damage to the computer circuitry, too." He jerked his head toward the technicians who were scurrying around and up and down the face of RANDOMAC. "I've got them working on it. Naturally."

"I see that, but we'll need some sort of rational schedule of questions. Is the escalation still going on, presuming we haven't reached the insensate stage already? If it's over, or at least suspended somehow, is the enemy sane enough not to start it again? And then, what's the extent

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

of the exterior damage? For that, we'll need a visual readout—I assume there are still some satellites up, but we'll want a closer look, if any local television survived.

“And if you're now the president, General, are you prepared to negotiate, if you've got any opposite numbers in the Soviet Union or the People's Republic?”

“There ought to be whole sets of such courses of action already programed into the computer,” McKnight said, “according to what the actual situation is. Is the machine going to be useless to us for anything but gaming, now that we really need it? Or have you been misleading me again?”

“Of course I haven't been misleading you. I wouldn't play games with my own life as stakes. And there are indeed such alternative courses; I wrote most of them myself, though I didn't do the actual programing. But no program can encompass what a specific leader might decide to do. War gaming actual past battles—for example, rerunning Waterloo without allowing for Napoleon's piles, or the heroism of the British squares—has produced 'predicted' outcomes completely at variance with history. Computers are rational; people aren't. Look at Agnew. That's why I asked you my question—which, by the way, you haven't yet answered.”

McKnight pulled himself up and put his glasses back on.

“I,” he said, “am prepared to negotiate. With anybody. Even Chinks.”



## II

Rome was no more, nor was Milan. Neither were London, Paris, Berlin, Bonn, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Riyadh, Stockholm and a score of lesser cities. But these were of no immediate concern. As the satellites showed, their deaths had expectably laid out long, cigar-shaped, overlapping paths of fallout to the east—the direction in which, thanks to the rotation of the Earth, the weather inevitably moved—and though these unfortunately lay across once friendly terrain, they ended in enemy country. Similarly, the heavy toll in the U.S.S.R. had sown its seed across Siberia and China; that in China across Japan, Korea and Taiwan;

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

and the death of Tokyo was poisoning only a swath of the Pacific (although, later, some worry would have to be devoted to the fish). Honolulu somehow had been spared, so that no burden of direct heavy nuclei fallout would reach the West Coast of the United States.

This was fortunate, for Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle and Spokane had all been hit, as had Denver, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Chicago, New Orleans, Cleveland, Detroit and Dallas. Under the circumstances, it really hardly mattered that Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, Syracuse, Boston, Toronto, Baltimore and Washington had all also gotten it, for even without the bombs, the Eastern third of the continental United States would have been uninhabitable in its entirety for at least fifteen years to come. At the moment, in any event, it consisted of a single vast forest fire through which, from the satellites, the slag pits of the bombed cities were invisible except as high spots in the radiation contours. The Northwest was in much the same shape, although the West Coast in general had taken far fewer missiles. Indeed, the sky all over the world was black with smoke, for the forests of Europe and northern Asia were burning, too. Out of the pall, more death fell, gently, invisibly, inexorably.

All this, of course, came from the computer analysis. Though there were television cameras in the satellites, even on a clear day you could hardly have told from visual sightings, from that height—nor from photographs, for that matter—even whether or not there was intelligent life on Earth. The view over Africa, South America,

Australia and the American Southwest was better, but of no strategic or logistic interest, and never had been.

Of the television cameras on the Earth's surface, most of the surviving ones were in areas where nothing seemed to have happened at all, although in towns the streets were deserted, and the very few people glimpsed briefly on the screen looked haunted. The views from near the bombed areas were fragmentary, traveling, scarred by rasters, afflicker with electronic snow—a procession of unconnected images, like scenes from an early surrealist film, where one could not tell whether the director was trying to portray a story or only a state of mind.

Here stood a single telephone pole, completely charred; here was a whole row of them, snapped off at ground level but still linked in death by their wires. Here was a desert of collapsed masonry, in the midst of which stood a reinforced-concrete smokestack, undamaged except that its surface was etched by heat and by the sand blasting of debris carried by a high wind. Here buildings all leaned sharply in a single direction, as if struck like the chimney by some hurricane of terrific proportions; here was what had been a group of manufacturing buildings, denuded of roofing and siding, nothing but twisted frames. Here a row of wrecked automobiles, neatly parked, burned in unison; here a gas holder, ruptured and collapsed, had burned out hours ago.

Here was a side of a reinforced concrete building, windowless, cracked and buckled slightly inward where a shock wave had struck it. Once it had been painted gray or some dark color, but all the paint had blistered

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

and scaled and blown away in a second, except where a man had been standing nearby; there the paint remained, a shadow with no one to cast it.

That vaporized man had been one of the lucky. Here stood another who had been in a cooler circle: evidently he had looked up at a fireball, for his eyes were only holes; he stood in a half crouch, holding his arms out from his sides like a penguin, and instead of skin, his naked body was covered with a charred fell which was cracked in places, oozing blood and pus. Here a filthy, tattered mob clambered along a road almost completely covered with rubble, howling with horror—though there was no sound with this scene—led by a hairless woman pushing a flaming baby carriage. Here a man who seemed to have had his back flayed by flying glass worked patiently with a bent snow shovel at the edge of an immense mound of broken brick; by the shape of its margins, it might once have been a large house. . . .

There was more.

Šatvje uttered a long, complex, growling sentence of hatred. It was entirely in Czech, but its content was nevertheless not beyond all conjecture. Buelg shrugged again and turned away from the TV screen.

"Pretty fearful," he said. "But on the whole, not nearly as much destruction as we might have expected. It's certainly gone no *higher* than Rung thirty-four. On the other hand, it doesn't seem to fit any of the escalation frames at all well. Maybe it makes some sort of military or strategic sense, but if it does, I'm at a loss to know what it is. General?"

"Senseless," McKnight said. "Outright senseless. Nobody's been hurt in any *decisive* way. And yet the action seems to be over."

"That was my impression," Buelg agreed. "There seems to be some missing factor. We're going to have to ask the computer to scan for an anomaly. Luckily it's likely to be a big one—but since I can't tell the machine what *kind* of anomaly to look for, it's going to cost us some time."

"How much time?" McKnight said, running a finger around the inside of his collar. "If the Chinks start up on us again—"

"It may be as much as an hour, after I formulate the question and Chief Hay programs it, which will take, oh, say two hours at a minimum. But I don't think we need to worry about the Chinese; according to our data, that opening Taiwan bomb was the biggest one they used, so it was probably the biggest one they had. As for anyone else, well, you just finished saying yourself that somehow everything's now stopped short. We badly need to find out why."

"All right. Get on it, then."

The two hours for programing, however, stretched to four; and then the computer ran for ninety minutes without producing anything at all. Chief Hay had thoughtfully forbidden the machine to reply DATA INSUFFICIENT, since new data were coming in at an increasing rate as communications with the outside improved; as a result, the computer was recycling the problem once every three or four seconds.

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

McKnight used the time to issue orders that repairs to the keep be made, stores assessed, order restored, and then settled down to a telecommunications search—again via the computer, but requiring only about 2 per cent of its capacity—for any superiors who might have survived him. Buelg suspected that he really wanted to find some; he had the capacity to be a general officer, but would find it most uncomfortable to be a president, even over so abruptly simplified a population and economy—and foreign policy, for that matter—as the TV screen had shown now existed outside. Ordering junior officers to order noncommissioned officers to order rankers to replace broken fluorescent bulbs was the type of thing he didn't mind doing on his own, but for ordering them to arm missiles and aim them, or put a state under martial law, he much preferred to be acting upon higher authority.

As for Buelg's own preference, he rather hoped that McKnight wouldn't be able to find any such person. The United States under a McKnight regime wouldn't be run very imaginatively or even flexibly, but on the other hand it would be unlikely to be a tyranny. Besides, McKnight was very dependent upon his civilian experts, and hence would be easy to manage. Of course, that meant that something would have to be done about Šatvje—

Then the computer rang its bell and began to print out its analysis. Buelg read it with intense concentration, and after the first fold, utter incredulity. When it was all out of the printer, he tore it off, tossed it onto the desk and beckoned to Chief Hay.

“Run the question again.”

Hay turned to the input keyboard. It took him ten minutes to retype the program; the question had been in the normal order of things too specialized to tape. Two and a half seconds after he had finished, the machine chimed and the long thin slabs of metal began to rise against the paper. The printing-out process never failed to remind Buelg of a player piano running in reverse, converting notes into punches instead of the other way around, except, of course, that what one got here was not punches but lines of type. But he saw almost at once that the analysis itself was going to be the same as before, word for word.

At the same time he became aware that Šatvje was standing just behind him.

"About time," the Czech said. "Let's have a look."

"There's nothing to see yet."

"What do you mean, there's nothing to see? It's printing, isn't it? And you've already got another copy out on the bench. The General should have been notified immediately."

He picked up the long, wide accordion fold of paper with its sprocket-punched edges and began to read it. There was nothing Buelg could do to prevent him.

"The machine's printing nonsense, that's what I mean, and I didn't propose to distract the General with a lot of garbage. The bombing must have jarred something loose."

Hay turned from the keyboard. "I ran a test program through promptly after the attack, Doctor Buelg. The computer was functioning perfectly then."

"Well, clearly it isn't now. Run your test program again, find out where the trouble lies, and let us know

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

how long it will take to repair it. If we can't trust the computer, we're out of business for sure."

Hay got to work. Šatvje put the readout down.

"What's nonsense about this?" he said.

"It's utterly impossible, that's all. There hasn't been time. With any sort of engineering training, you'd know that yourself. And it makes no military or political sense, either."

"I think we should let the General be the judge of that."

Picking up the bulky strip again, Šatvje carried it off toward the General's office, a certain subtle triumph in his gait, like the school trusty bearing the evidence of petty theft to the head master. Buelg followed, inwardly raging, and not only at the waste motion. Šatvje would of course tell McKnight that Buelg had been holding back on reporting the analysis; all Buelg could do now, until the machine was repaired, was to be sure to be there to explain why, and the posture was much too purely defensive for his liking. It was a damn shame that he had ever taught Šatvje to read a printout, but once they had been thrown together on this job, he had had no choice in the matter. McKnight had been as suspicious as a Sealyham of both of them, anyhow, at the beginning. Šatvje, after all, had come from a country which had long been Communist, and had had to explain that his ancestry was French, his name only a Serbo-Croat transliteration back from the Cyrillic of "Chatvieux"; while Security had unfortunately confused Buelg with Johann Gottfried Jülg, a forgotten nineteenth-century translator of *Ardshi Bordschi Khan*, the *Siddhi Kur*, the *Skaskas* and other Russian folk



tales, so that Buelg, even more demeaningly, had had to admit that his name was actually a Yiddish version of a German word for a leather bucket. Under McKnight's eye, the two still possibly suspect civilians had to cooperate or be downgraded into some unremunerative university post. Buelg supposed that Šarvje had enjoyed it as little as he had, but he didn't care an iota about what Šarvje did or didn't enjoy. Damn the man.

As for the document itself, it was no masterpiece of analysis. The machine had simply at last recognized an anomaly in a late-coming piece of new data. It was the interpretation that made Buelg suspect that the gadget had malfunctioned; unlike Šarvje, he had had enough experience of computers at RAND to know that if they were not allowed enough warm-up time, or had been improperly cleared of a previous program, they could produce remarkably paranoid fantasies.

Translated from the Fortran, the document said that the United States had not only been hit by missiles, but also deeply invaded. This conclusion had been drawn from a satellite sighting of something in Death Valley, not there yesterday, which was not natural, and whose size, shape and energy output suggested an enormous fortress.

"Which is just plain idiotic," Buelg added, after the political backing and filling in McKnight's office had been gone through, to nobody's final advantage. "On any count you care to name. The air drops required to get the materials in there, or the sea landings plus overland movements, couldn't have gone undetected. Then, strategically it's insane: the building of targets like fortresses should have

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

become obsolete with the invention of the cannon, and the airplane made them absurd. Locating such a thing in Death Valley means that it dominates nothing but utterly worthless territory, at the price of insuperable supply problems—right from the start it's in a state of siege, by Nature alone. And as for running it up overnight—I ask you, General, could *we* have done that, even in peacetime and in the most favorable imaginable location? I say we couldn't, and that if we couldn't, no human agency could."

McKnight picked up his phone and spoke briefly. Since it was a Hush-a-Phone, what he said was inaudible, but Buelg's guess about the call was promptly confirmed.

"Chief Hay says the machine is in perfect order and has produced a third analysis just like this one," he reported. "The problem now clearly is one of reconnaissance. [He pronounced the word correctly, which, amidst his flat California American, sounded almost affected.] Is there such a thing in Death Valley, or isn't there? For the satellite to be able to spot it at all, it must be gigantic. From twenty-three thousand miles up, even a city the size of San Antonio is invisible unless you know exactly what you're looking for in advance."

Here, Buelg was aware, McKnight was speaking as an expert. Until he had been put in charge of SAC in Denver, almost all his career had been spent in various aspects of Air Information; even as a teen-ager, he had been a Civil Air Patrol cadet involved in search-and-rescue operations, which, between the mud slides and the brush fires, had been particularly extensive in the Los Angeles area in those days.

"I don't doubt that the satellite has spotted *something*," Buelg said. "But what it probably 'sees' is a hard-radiation locus—maybe thermally hot, too—rather than any optical object, let alone a construct. My guess is that it's nothing more than the impact site of a multiple warhead component that lost guidance, or was misaimed to begin with."

"Highly likely," McKnight admitted. "But why guess? The obvious first step is to send a low-level attack bomber over the site and get close-in photographs and spectra. A primitive installation such as you suggested earlier would be typically Chinese, and if so they won't have low-level radar. If on the other hand the plane gets shot down, that will tell us something about the enemy, too."

Buelg sighed inwardly. Trying to nudge McKnight out of his single channel was a frustrating operation. But maybe, in this instance, it wasn't really necessary; after all, the suggestion itself was sensible.

"All right," he said. "One plane seems like a small investment. We've got damn all else left to lose now, anyhow."



### III

No attack was made on the plane, but there was nevertheless one casualty. Neither the photographer nor the flight engineer, both busy with their instruments, had actually seen much of the target, and the Captain, for the same reason, had seen little more.

"Hell of a lot of turbulence," he said at the debriefing, which took place a thousand miles away, while the men under Denver watched intently. "And the target itself is one huge updraft, like New York used to be, only much worse."

But the navigator, once his job had been done, had had

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

nothing to do but look out, and he was in a state of shock. He was a swarthy young enlisted man from Chicago who looked as though he might have been recruited straight from a Mafiosa family, but he could say nothing now but a sentence which refused to get beyond its first syllable: "Dis-Dis—" Once he had recovered from his shock they would be able to question him. But for the time being he was of no help.

The photographs, however, were very clear, except for the infrared sensitive plates, which showed nothing intelligible to the eye at all. The installation was perfectly circular and surrounded by a moat which, impossibly for Death Valley, appeared to be filled with black but genuine water, from which a fog bank was constantly trying to rise, only to be dissipated in the bone-dry air. The construction itself was a broad wall, almost a circular city, a good fifteen miles in diameter. It was broken irregularly by towers and other structures, some of them looking remarkably like mosques. This shell glowed fiercely, like red-hot iron, and a spectrograph showed that this was exactly what it was.

Inside, the ground was terraced, like a lunar crater. At ground level was a flat plain, dotted with tiny rectangular markings in no discernible pattern; these, too, the spectrograph said, were red-hot iron. What seemed to be another moat, blood-red and as broad as a river, encircled the next terrace at the foot of the cliff where it began, and this, even more impossibly, was bordered by a dense circular forest. The forest was as broad as the river, but

thinned eventually to a ring of what appeared to be the original sand, equally broad.

In a lunar crater, the foothills of the central peak would have begun about here, but in the pictures, instead, the terrain plunged into a colossal black pit. The river cut through the forest and the desert at one point and roared over the side in a vast waterwall, compounding the darkness with mist which the camera had been unable to penetrate.

"What was that you were saying about building a fortress overnight, Buelg?" the General said. "'No human agency could?'"

"No human agency was involved," Šatvje said in a hoarse whisper. He turned to the aide who had brought the pictures, an absurdly young lieutenant colonel with a blond crew cut, white face and shaking hands. "Are there any close-ups?"

"Yes, Doctor. There was an automatic camera under the plane that took a film of the approach run. Here is one of the best shots."

The picture showed what appeared to be a towering gate in the best medieval style. Hundreds of shadowy figures crowded the barbican, of which three, just above the gateway itself, had been looking up at the plane and were shockingly clear. They looked like gigantic naked women, with ropy hair all awry, and the wide-staring eyes of insane rage.

"I thought so," Šatvje said.

"You recognize them?" Buelg asked incredulously.

"No, but I know their names: Alecto, Megaera and

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

Tisiphone," Šatvje said. "And it's a good thing that there's at least one person among us with a European education. I presume that our *distrain* friend the navigator is a Catholic, which does just as well in this context. In any event, he was quite right: this is Dis, the fortress surrounding Nether Hell. I think we must now assume that all the rest of the Earth is contiguous with Upper Hell, not only in metaphor but in fact."

"It's a good thing," Buelg said acidly, "that there's at least one person among us with a good grip on his sanity. The last thing we need now is a relapse into superstition."

"If you blow up that photograph, I think you'll find that the hair on those women actually consists of live snakes. Isn't that so, Colonel?"

"Well . . . Doctor, it . . . it certainly looks like it."

"Of course. Those are the Furies who guard the gates of Dis. They are the keepers of the Gorgon Medusa, which, thank God, isn't in the picture. The moat is the River Styx; the first terrace inside contains the burning tombs of the Heresiarchs, and on the next you have the River Phlegethon, the Wood of the Suicides, and the Abominable Sand. A rain of fire is supposed to fall continually on the sand, but I suppose that's invisible in Death Valley sunlight or maybe even superfluous. We can't see what's down below, but presumably that too will be exactly as Dante described it. The crowd along the barbican is made up of demons—not so, Colonel?"

"Sir . . . we can't tell what they are. We were wondering if they were, well, Martians or something. Every one is a different shape."



Buelg felt his back hairs stirring. "I refuse to believe this nonsense," he said. "Šatvje is interpreting it from his damned obsolete 'education.' Even Martians would make more sense."

"What are the facts about this Dante?" McKnight said.

"An Italian poet, of about the thirteenth century—"

"Early fourteenth," Šatvje said. "And not just any poet. He had a vision of Hell and Heaven which became the greatest poem ever written—the *Divine Comedy*. What we see in those pictures exactly corresponds to the description in Cantos Eight through Eleven of it."

"Buelg, see if you can locate a copy of the book and have it read to the computer. First we need to know if the correspondence is all that exact. If it is, we'll need an analysis of what it means."

"The computer probably already has the book," Buelg said. "The whole Library of Congress, plus all our recreational library, is on microfilm inside it, we didn't have room for books per se down here. All we need to do is tell Chief Hay to make it part of the problem. But I still think it's damn nonsense."

"What we want," McKnight said, "is the computer's opinion. Yours has already been shown to be somewhat less reliable."

"And while you're at it," Šatvje said, perhaps a shade less smugly than Buelg might have expected, "have Chief Hay make a part of the problem everything in the library on demonology. We're going to need it."

Throwing up his hands, Buelg left the office. In the country of the mad . . .

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

Nobody retains his sanity.

Only a few moments were needed for the computer to produce its report:

THE ANCIENT TEXTS AND FICTIONS NOW ADMITTED TO THE PROBLEM DISAGREE WITH EACH OTHER. HOWEVER, THE NEW FACTUAL DATA MAKE EXACT MATCHES WITH A NUMBER OF THEM, AND APPROXIMATE MATCHES WITH THE MAJORITY OF THEM. THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE CONSTRUCT IN DEATH VALLEY IS RUSSIAN, CHINESE OR OTHERWISE OF HUMAN ORIGIN IS OF THE LOWEST ORDER OF PROBABILITY AND MAY BE DISCOUNTED. THE INTERPLANETARY HYPOTHESIS IS OF SLIGHTLY HIGHER PROBABILITY, AN INVASION FROM VENUS BEING COMPATIBLE WITH A FEW OF THE FACTUAL DATA, SUCH AS THE IMMENSE HEAT AND ABERRANT LIFE FORMS OF THE DEATH VALLEY INSTALLATION, BUT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH MOST ARCHITECTURAL AND OTHER HISTORICAL DETAILS IN THE DATA, AS WELL AS WITH THE LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGY INDICATED. THE PROBABILITY THAT THE DEATH VALLEY INSTALLATION IS THE CITY OF DIS AND THAT ITS INTERNAL AREA IS NETHER HELL IS 0.1 WITHIN A 5% LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE, AND THEREFORE MUST BE ADMITTED. AS A FIRST DERIVATIVE, THE PROBABILITY THAT THE WAR JUST CONCLUDED WAS ARMAGEDDON IS 0.01 WITHIN THE SAME CONFIDENCE LEVEL. AS A SECOND DERIVATIVE, THE PROBABILITY THAT THE FORCES OF GOD HAVE LOST THE WAR AND THAT THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH IS NOW CONFLUENT WITH UPPER HELL IS 0.001 WITHIN THE SAME CONFIDENCE LEVEL.

"Well, that clarifies the situation considerably," McKnight said. "It's just as well we asked."

"But—my God!—it simply can't be true," Buelg said desperately. "All right, maybe the computer is functioning properly, but it has no intelligence, and above all, no judgment. What it's putting out now is just a natural consequence of letting all that medieval superstition into the problem."

McKnight turned his shrimp's eyes toward Buelg. "You've seen the pictures," he said. "They didn't come out of the computer, did they? Nor out of the old books, either. I think we'd better stop kicking against the pricks and start figuring out what we're going to do. We've still got the United States to think of. Doctor Šatvje, have you any suggestions?"

That was a bad sign. McKnight never used honorifics except to indicate, by inversion, which of the two of them had incurred his displeasure—not that Buelg had been in any doubt about that, already.

"I'm still in a good deal of doubt," Šatvje said modestly. "To begin with, if this has been Armageddon, we all ought to have been called to judgment by now; and there was certainly nothing in the prophecies that allowed for an encampment of victorious demons on the surface of the Earth. If the computer is completely right, then either God is dead as Nietzsche said, or, as the jokes go, He is alive but doesn't want to get involved. In either case, I think we would be well advised not to draw attention to ourselves. We can do nothing against supernatural powers; and if He *is* still alive, the battle may not be

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

over. We are, I hope, safely hidden here, and we would be ill advised to be caught in the middle."

"Now there you're dead wrong," Buelg said with energy. "Let's suppose for a minute that this fantasy represents the true state of affairs—in other words, that demons have turned out to be real, and are out there in Death Valley—"

"I'm none too sure what would be meant by 'real' in this context," Šarvje said. "They are apparent, true enough; but they certainly don't belong to the same order of reality as—"

"That's a question we can't afford to debate," Buelg said. He knew very well that the issue Šarvje was raising was a valid one—he was himself a fairly thoroughgoing Logical Positivist. But it would only confuse McKnight, and there were brownie points to be made in keeping things clear-cut, whether they *were* clear-cut or not. "Look. If demons are real, then they occupy space/time in the real universe. That means that they exist inside some energy system in that universe and are maintained by it. All right, they can walk on red-hot iron and live comfortably in Death Valley; that's not inherently more supernatural than the existence of bacteria in the boiling waters of volcanic springs. It's an adaptation. Very well, then we can find out what that energy system is. We can analyze how it works. And once we know that, we can attack it."

"Now that's more like it," McKnight said.

"Pardon me, but I think we should proceed with the most extreme caution," Šarvje said. "Unless one has been

raised in this tradition, one is not likely to think of all the implications. I myself am quite out of practice at it."

"Damn your education," Buelg said. But it was all coming back to him: The boundaryless ghetto along Nostrand Avenue; the fur-hatted, fur-faced, maxi-skirted Hassidim walking in pairs under the scaling elm saplings of Grand Central Parkway; the terror of riding the subway among the juvenile gangs under the eternal skullcap; the endless hairsplitting over the Talmudic and Midrashic creation myths for hour upon stuffy hour in *Schule*; the women slaving over their duplicate sets of dishes, in the peculiar smell of a kosher household, so close to being a stench compared to all other American smells, supporting their drone scholars; his mother's pride that Hansli too was plainly destined by God's will to become a holy man; and when he had discovered instead the glories and rigors of the physical universe, that light and airy escape from fur hats and the smell of gefuelte fish and the loving worn women, the terror of the wrath of the jealous God. But all that was many years ago; it could not come back. He would not have it back.

"What are you talking about?" McKnight said. "Are we going to do something, and if so, what? Get to the point."

"My point," Šatvje said, "is that if all this—demonology—is, well, valid, or I suppose one should say true, then the whole Christian mythos is true, though it is not coming out in precisely the way it was prophesied. That being the case, then there are such things as immortal souls, or perhaps I should say, we may well have immortal

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

souls, and we ought to take them into consideration before we do anything rash."

Buelg saw the light, and with a great sense of relief; the Christian mythos had nothing to do with him, not personally, that is. He had no objection to it as an exercise in theory, a form of non-zero-sum game.

"If that's the case, I don't think there's any question of our being caught in the middle," he said. "We're required by the rules to come down on one side or the other."

"That's true, by God," McKnight said. "And after all, we're on the right side. We didn't start this war—the Chinks did."

"Right, right," Buelg said. "We're entitled to self-defense. And for my part, no matter what happens in the next world—about which we have no data—as long as I'm still in this one, I'm not prepared to regard *anything* as final. This may be a metaphysical war after all, but we still seem to live in some sort of secular universe. The universe of discourse has been enlarged, but it hasn't been canceled. I say, let's find out more about it."

"Yes," McKnight said, "but how? That's what I keep asking, and I don't get anything back from either of you but philosophical discussion. What do you propose that we *do*?"

"Have we got any missiles left?"

"We've still got maybe a dozen five- to ten-megatonners left—and, of course, Old Mombi."

"Buelg, you madman, are you proposing for one instant—"

“Shut up for a minute and let me think.” Old Mombi was Denver’s doomsday machine, a complex carrier containing five one hundred-megaton warheads, one of which was aimed to make even the Moon uninhabitable; it was a postspasm weapon that the present situation certainly did not call for—best to hold it in reserve. “I think what we ought to do is to lob one of the small jobs onto the Death Valley encampment. I don’t really think it’ll do much harm, maybe not any, but it might produce some information. We can fly a drone plane through the cloud as it goes up, and take off radiological, chemical, any other kinds of readings that the computer can come up with. These demons have obtruded themselves into the real world, and the very fact that we can see them and photograph them shows that they share some of its characteristics now. Let’s see how they behave under something a good deal hotter than red-hot iron. Suppose they do nothing more than sweat a little? We can analyze even that!”

“And suppose they trace the missile back to here?” Šatvje said, but by his expression, Buelg knew that Šatvje knew that it was a last-ditch argument.

“Then we’re sunk, I suppose. But look at the architecture of that encampment; does that suggest to you that they’ve been in contact with real warfare since back in the fourteenth century? No doubt they have all kinds of supernatural powers, but they’ve got a lot to learn about the natural ones! Maybe a decent adversary is what they’ve been lacking all along—and if Armageddon has ended in a standoff, a little action on the side of our Maker wouldn’t be amiss. If He’s still with us, and actively interested, any

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

*inaction* on our parts would probably be viewed very gravely indeed if He wins after all. And if He's not with us any longer, then we'll have to help ourselves, as the proverb says."

"That's the stuff to give the troops," McKnight said. "It is so ordered."

Buelg nodded and left the office to search out Chief Hay. On the whole, he felt, he had made a nice recovery.



## IV

Positano had been washed away, but the remains of Ware's palazzo still stood above the scoured cliffside, like some post-Roman ruin. The ceiling had fallen in, the fluted pink tiles smashing Ware's glassware and burying the dim chalk diagrams of last night's conjuration on the refectory floor in a litter of straw and potsherds, mounds of which collapsed now and then to send streamers of choking dust up to meet the gently radioactive April rain.

Ware sat on the heaped remains of his altar within the tumbled walls, under the uncertain sky. His feelings were so complex that he could not have begun to explain them,

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

even to himself; after many years' schooling in the rigorous non-emotions of Ceremonial Magic, it was a novelty to him to have any feelings at all but those of the thirst for knowledge; now he would have to relearn those sensations, for his lovely book of acquisitions, upon which he had spent his soul and so much else, was buried under tons of tsunamic mud.

In a way, he thought tentatively, he felt free. After the shock of the seaquake had passed, and all but an occasional tile had stopped falling, he had struggled out of the rubble to the door, and thence to the head of the stairway which led down to his bedroom, only to see nothing but mud three stone steps down, mud wrinkling and settling as the sea water gradually seeped out from under it. Somewhere down under there, his book of new knowledge was beginning the aeon-long route to becoming an unreadable fossil. Well then; so much for his life. Almost it seemed to him then that he might begin again, that he was nameless, a *tabula rasa*, all false starts wiped out, all dead knowledge ready to be rejected or revived. It was given to few men to live through something so cleansing as a total disaster.

But then he realized that this, too, was only an illusion. His past was there, ineluctably, in his commitments. He was still waiting for the return of the Sabbath Goat. He closed the door to the stairwell and the fossilized ripples of the mud, and blowing reflectively into his white mustache, went back into the refectory.

Father Domenico had earlier tired—it could not exactly be said that he had lost patience—of both the waiting and

the fruitless debates over when or whether they would be come for, and had decided to attempt traveling south to see what and who remained of Monte Albano, the college of white magicians which had been his home grounds. Baines was still there, trying to raise some news on the little transistor radio to which only yesterday he had listened so gluttonously to the accounts of the black Easter which Ware had raised up at his commission, and whose consequences now eddied away from them around the whole tortured globe. Now, however, it was producing nothing but bands of static, and an occasional very distant voice in an unknown tongue.

With him now was Jack Ginsberg, dressed to the nines as usual, and in consequence looking by far the most bedraggled of the three. At Ware's entrance, Baines tossed the radio to his secretary and crossed toward the magician, slipping and cursing the rubble.

"Find out anything?"

"Nothing at all. As you can see for yourself, the sea is subsiding. It is obvious that Positano has been spared any further destruction—for the moment. As for why, we know no more than we did before."

"You can still work magic, can't you?"

"I don't appear to have been deprived of my memory," Ware said. "I've no doubt I can still *do* magic, if I can get at my equipment under this mess, but whether I can work it is another matter. The conditions of reference have changed drastically, and I have no idea how far or in what areas."

"Well, you could at least call up a demon and see if

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

he could give us any information. There doesn't appear to be anyone else to ask."

"I see that I'll have to put the matter more bluntly. I am totally opposed to performing any more magic at this time, Doctor Baines. I see that you have again failed to think the situation through. The terms under which I was able to call upon demons no longer apply—I am no longer able to do anything for them, they must now own a substantial part of the world. If I were to call at this juncture, probably no one would answer, and it might be better if nobody did, since I would have no way of controlling him. They are composed almost entirely of hatred for every unFallen creature, and every creature with the potentiality to be redeemed, but there is no one they hate more than a useless tool."

"Well, it seems to me that we may neither of us be totally useless even now," Baines declared. "You say the demons now own a substantial part of the world, but it's also perfectly evident that they don't own it all yet. Otherwise the Goat would have come back when he said he would. And we'd be in Hell."

"Hell has a great many circles. We may well be on the margins of the first right now—in the Vestibule of the Futile."

"We'd be in a good deal deeper if the demons were in total control, or if judgment had already been passed on us," Baines said.

"You are entirely right about that, to be sure," Ware said, somewhat surprised. "But after all, from their point of view there is no hurry. In the past, we might have

saved ourselves by a last-minute act of contrition. Now, however, there is no longer any God to appeal to. They can wait and take us at their leisure."

"There I'm inclined to agree with Father Domenico. We don't know that for sure; we were told so only by the Goat. I admit that the other evidence all points in the same direction, but all the same, he could have been lying."

Ware thought about it. The argument from circumstances did not of course impress him; no doubt the circumstances were horrible beyond the capacity of any human soul to react to them, but they were certainly not beyond the range of human imagination; they were more or less the standard consequences of World War III, a war which Baines himself had been actively engaged in engineering some time before he had discovered his interest in black magic. Theologically they were also standard: a new but essentially unchanged version of the Problem of Evil, the centuries-old question of why a good and merciful God should allow so much pain and terror to be inflicted upon the innocent. The parameters had been filled in a somewhat different way, but the fundamental equation was the same as it had always been.

Nevertheless, the munitions maker was quite right—as Father Domenico had been earlier—to insist that they had no reliable information upon the most fundamental question of all. Ware said slowly:

"I'm reluctant to admit any hope at all at this juncture. On the other hand, it has been said that to despair of

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

God is the ultimate sin. What precisely do you have in mind?"

"Nothing specific yet. But suppose for the sake of argument that the demons are still under some sort of restrictions—I don't see any point in trying to imagine what they might be—and that the battle consequently isn't really over yet. If that's the case, it's quite possible that they could still use some help. Considering how far they've managed to get already, there doesn't seem to be much doubt about their winning in the end—and it's been my observation that it's generally a good idea to be on the winning side."

"It is folly to think that the triumph of evil could ever be a winning side, in the sense of anyone's gaining anything by it. Without good to oppose it, evil is simply meaningless. That isn't at all what I thought you had in mind. It is, instead, the last step in despairing of God—it's worse than Manicheanism, it is Satanism pure and simple. I once controlled devils, but I never worshiped them, and I don't plan to begin now. Besides—"

Abruptly, the radio produced a tearing squeal and then began to mutter urgently in German. Ware could hear the voice well enough to register that the speaker had a heavy Swiss accent, but not well enough to make out the sense. He and Baines took a crunching step toward Ginsberg, who, listening intently, held up one hand toward them.

The speech was interrupted by another squeal, and then the radio resumed emitting nothing more than snaps, crackles, pops and waterfalls. Ginsberg said:

"That was Radio Zurich. There's been an H-bomb

explosion in the States, in Death Valley. Either the war's started again, or some dud's gone off belatedly."

"Hmm," Baines said. "Well, better there than here . . . although, now that I come to think of it, it isn't entirely unpromising. But Doctor Ware, I think you hadn't quite finished?"

"I was only going to add that 'being of some help' to demons in this context makes no practical sense, either. Their hand is turned against everyone on Earth, and there is certainly no way that we could help them to carry their war to Heaven, even presuming that any of Heaven still stands. Someone of Father Domenico's school might just possibly manage to enter the Aristotelian spheres—though I doubt it—but I certainly couldn't."

"That bomb explosion seems to show that *somebody* is still fighting back," Baines said. "Providing that Jack isn't right about its being a dud or a stray. My guess is that it's the Strategic Air Command, and that they've just found out who the real enemy is. They had the world's finest data processing center there under Denver, and in addition, McKnight had first-class civilian help, including Džejms Šatvje himself, and a RAND man that I tried to get the Mamaroneck Research Institute to outbid the government for."

"I still don't quite see where that leaves us."

"I know McKnight very well; he's steered a lot of Defense Department orders my way, and I was going to have LeFebre make him president of Consolidated Warfare Service when he retired—as he was quite well aware. He's good in his field, which is reconnaissance, but he

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

also has something of a one-track mind. If he's bombing demons, it might be a very good idea for me to suggest to him that he stop it—and why.”

“It might at that,” Ware said reflectively. “How will you get there?”

“A technicality. Radio Zurich is still operating, which almost surely means that their airfield is operating too. Jack can fly a plane if necessary, but it probably won't be necessary; we had a very well-staffed office in Zurich, in fact it was officially our central headquarters, and I've got access to two Swiss bank accounts, the company's and my own. I'd damn well better put the money to some use before somebody with a little imagination realizes that the vaults might much better be occupied by himself, his family and twenty thousand cases of canned beans.”

The project, Ware decided, had its merits. At least it would rid him, however temporarily, of Baines, whose society he was beginning to find a little tiresome, and of Jack Ginsberg, whom he distantly but positively loathed. It would of course also mean that he would be deprived of all human company if the Goat should after all come for him, but this did not bother him in the least; he had known for years that in that last confrontation, every man is always alone, and most especially, every magician.

Perhaps he had also always known, somewhere in the deepest recesses of his mind, that he would indeed eventually take that last step into Satanism, but if so, he had very successfully suppressed it. And he had not quite taken it yet; he had committed himself to nothing, he had only agreed that Baines should go away, and Ginsberg too, to



## SO ABOVE

counsel someone he did not know to an inaction which might be quite without significance. . . .

And while they were gone, perhaps he would be able to think of something better. It was the tiniest of small hopes, and doubtless vain; but now he was beginning to be prepared to feed it. If he played his cards right, he might yet mingle with the regiment of angels who rebelled not, yet avowed to God no loyalty, of whom it is said that deep Hell refuses them, for, beside such, the sinner would be proud.



## V

Monte Albano, Father Domenico found with astonishment and a further rekindling of his hope, had been spared completely. It reared its eleventh-century walls, rebuilt after the earthquake then by the abbot Giorgio who later became Pope John the Twentieth, as high above the valley as it always had, and as always, too, accessible only by muleback, and Father Domenico lost more time in locating a mule with an owner to take him up there than the whole trip from Positano had cost him. Eventually, however, the thing was done, and he was within the cool walls of the

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

library with the white monks, his colleagues under the hot Frosinian sky.

Those assembled made up nearly the same company that had met during the winter to consider, fruitlessly, how Theron Ware and his lay client might be forestalled: Father Amparo, Father Umberto (the director), and the remaining brothers of the order, plus Father Uccello, Father Boucher, Father Vance, Father Anson, Father Selahny and Father Atheling. The visitors had apparently continued to stay in the monastery, if not in session, after the winter meeting, although in the interim Father Rosenblum had died; his place had been taken, though hardly filled, by Father Domenico's former apprentice, Joannes, who though hardly seventeen looked now as though he had grown up very suddenly. Well, that was all right; they surely needed all the help that they could get, and Father Domenico knew without false modesty that Joannes had been well trained.

After Father Domenico had been admitted, announced and conducted through the solemn and blessed joys of greeting and welcome, it became apparent that the discussion—as was only to have been expected—had already been going on for many hours. Nor was he much surprised to find that it was simply another version of the discussion that had been going on in Positano: namely, how had Monte Albano been spared in the world-wide catastrophe, and what did it mean? But in this version of the discussion, Father Domenico could join with a much better heart.

And in fact he was also able to give it what amounted to

an entirely new turn; for their Sensitive, the hermit-Father Uccello, had inevitably found his talents much coarsened and blunted by the proximity of so many other minds, and in consequence the white monks had only a general idea of what had gone on in Ware's palazzo since the last convocation—an impression supplemented by the world news, what of it there was, and by deduction, some of which was in fact wrong. Father Domenico recapitulated the story of the last conjuration briefly; but his fellows' appreciation of the gravity of the situation was already such that the recitation was accompanied by no more than the expectable number of horrified murmurs.

"All in all," he concluded, "forty-eight demons were let out of the Pit as a result of this ceremony, commanded to return at dawn. When it became apparent that the operation was completely out of hand, I invoked the Covenant and insisted that Ware recall them ahead of time, to which he agreed; but when he attempted to summon up LUCIFUGE ROFOCALE, to direct this abrogation, PUT SATANACHIA himself answered instead. When I attempted to exorcise this abominable creature, my crucifix burst in my hands, and it was after that that the monster told us that God was already dead and that the ultimate victory had instead gone to the forces of Hell. The Goat promised to return for us all—all, that is, except Baines's other assistant, Doctor Hess, whom Baphomet had already swallowed when Hess panicked and stepped out of his circle—at dawn, but he failed to do so, and I subsequently left and came to Monte Albano as soon as it was physically possible for me to do so."

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

"Do you recall the names and offices of all forty-eight?" said Father Atheling, his tenor voice more sinusy than ever with apprehension.

"I think I do—that is, I think I could; after all, I saw them all, and that's an experience which does not pass lightly from the memory. In any event, if I've blanked out on a few—which isn't unlikely either—they can doubtless be recovered under hypnosis. Why does that matter, may I ask, Father Atheling?"

"Simply because it is always useful to know the natures, as well as the numbers, of the forces arrayed against one."

"Not after the countryside is already overrun," said Father Anson. "If the battle and the war have been already lost, we must have the whole crew to contend with now—not just all seventy-two princes, but every single one of the fallen angels. The number is closer to seven and a half million than it is to forty-eight."

"Seven million, four hundred and fifty thousand, nine hundred and twenty-six," Father Atheling said, "to be exact."

"Though the wicked may hide, the claws of crabs are dangerous people in bridges," Father Selahny intoned abruptly. As was the case with all his utterances, the group would doubtless find out what this one meant only after sorting out its mixed mythologies and folklores, and long after it was too late to do anything about it. Nor did it do any good to ask him to explain; these things simply came to him, and he no more understood them than did his hearers. If God was indeed dead, Father Domenico won-

dered suddenly, Who could be dictating them now? But he put the thought aside as non-contributory.

"There is a vast concentration of new evil on the other side of the world," Father Uccello said in his courtly, hesitant old man's voice. "The feeling is one of intense oppression, quite different from that which was common in New York or Moscow, but one such as I would expect of a massing of demons upon a huge scale. Forgive me, brothers, but I can be no more specific."

"We know you are doing the best you can," said the director soothingly.

"I can feel it myself," said Father Monteith, who although not a Sensitive had had some experience with the herding of rebellious spirits. "But even supposing that we do not have to cope with so large an advance, as I certainly hope we do not, it seems to me that forty-eight is too large a sum for us if the Covenant has been voided. It leaves us without even an option."

Father Domenico saw that Joannes was trying to attract the director's attention, although too hesitantly to make any impression. Father Umberto was not yet used to thinking of Joannes as a person at all. Capturing the boy's eyes, Father Domenico nodded.

"I never did understand the Covenant," the ex-apprentice said, thus encouraged. "That is, I didn't understand why God would compromise Himself in such a manner. Even with Job, He didn't make a deal with Satan, but only allowed him to act unchecked for a certain period of time. And I've never found any mention of the Covenant in the grimoires. What are its terms, anyhow?"

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

Father Domenico thought the question well asked, if a trifle irrelevant, but an embarrassed and slightly pitying silence showed that his opinion was not shared. In the end it was broken by Father Monteith, whose monumental patience was a byword in the chapter.

"I'm certainly not well versed in canon law, let alone in spiritual compacts," he said, with more modesty than exactness. "But, in principle, the Covenant is no more than a special case of the option of free will. The assumption appears to be that even in dealing with devilry, on the one hand, no man shall be subjected to a temptation beyond his ability to resist, and on the other, no man shall slide into Heaven without having been tempted up to that point. In situations involving Transcendental or Ceremonial Magic, the Covenant is the line drawn in between. Where you would find its exact terms, I'm sure I don't know; I doubt that they have ever been written down. One thinks of the long struggle to understand the rainbow, the other Covenant; once the explanation was in, it did not explain, except to show that every man sees his own rainbow, and what seems to stand in the sky is an optical illusion, not a theomorphism. It is in the nature of the arrangement that the terms would vary in each individual case, and that if you are incapable of determining where it is drawn for you—the line of demarcation—then, woe betide you, and that is that."

Dear God, Father Domenico thought, all my life I have been an amateur of Roger Bacon and I never once saw that that was what he meant to show by focusing his *Perspectiva* on the rainbow. Shall I have any more time



to learn? I hope we are never tempted to make Monteith the director, or we shall lose him to taking things out of the In box and putting them into the Out box, as we did Father Umberto—

“Furthermore, it may well be still in existence,” said Father Boucher. “As Father Domenico has already pointed out to Theron Ware himself, we have heard of the alleged death of God only through the testimony of the most unreliable witness imaginable. And it leaves many inconsistencies to be explained. *When* exactly is God supposed to have died? If it was as long ago as in Nietzsche’s time, why had His angels and ministers of light seemed to know nothing of it in the interim? It’s unreasonable to suppose that they were simply keeping up a good front until the battle actually broke out; Heaven simply isn’t that kind of an organization. One would expect an absolute and perpetual monarchy to break down upon the death of the monarch quite promptly, yet in point of fact we saw no signs of any such thing until shortly after Christmas of this year.”

“But we did see such signs at that time,” Father Vance said.

“True, but this only poses another logical dilemma: What happened to the Antichrist? Baphomet’s explanation that he had been dispensed with as unnecessary to the victors, whose creature he would have been, doesn’t hold water. The Antichrist was to have appeared *before* the battle, and if the defeat of God is all that recent, the prophecy should have been fulfilled; God still existed to compel it.”

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

"Matthew 11:14," Father Selahny said, in an unprecedented burst of intelligibility. The verse of which he was reminding them referred to John the Baptist, and it said: *And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.*

"Yes," Father Domenico said, "I suppose it's possible that the Antichrist might have come unrecognized. One always envisioned people flocking to his banner openly, but the temptation would have been more subtle and perhaps more dangerous had he crept past us, say in the guise of some popular philosopher, like that positive-thinking man in the States. Yet the proposal seems to allow even less room than did the Covenant for the exercise of free will."

There was a silence. At last, the director said: "The Essenes argued that one must think and experience all evil before one can even hope to perceive good."

"If this be true doctrine," Father Domenico said, "then it follows that God is indeed still alive, and that Theron Ware's experiment, and World War Three, did not constitute Armageddon after all. What we may be confronted with instead is an Earthly Purgatory, from which Grace, and perhaps even the Earthly Paradise, might be won. Dare we think so?"

"We dare not think otherwise," said Father Vance. "The question is, how? Little that is in the New Testament, the teachings of the Church or the Arcana seem very relevant to the present situation."

"No more is our traditional isolation," said Father Domenico. "Our only recourse now is to abandon it; to

## SO ABOVE

abandon our monastery and our mountain, and go down into the world that we renounced when Charlemagne was but a princeling, to try to win it back by works and witnessing. And if we may not do this with the sweet aid of Christ, then we must nevertheless do it in His name. Hope now is all we have."

"In sober truth," Father Boucher said quietly, "that is not so great a change. I think it is all we ever had."



## **Come to Middle Hell**

**Though thy beginning was small, yet  
thy latter end should greatly increase. . . .  
Prepare thyself to the search.**

**JOB 8:7, 8**



## VI

Left to his own devices and hence, at last, unobserved, Theron Ware thought that it might be well, after all, if he did essay a small magic. The possible difficulty lay in that all magic without exception depended upon the control of demons, as he had explained to Baines on his very first visit. But therein lay the attractiveness of the experiment, too, for what he wanted was information, and a part of that information was whether he still had any such control.

And it would also be interesting, and possible to find out at the same time, to know whether or not there were any demons left in Hell. If there were it would imply, though

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

it would not guarantee, that only the forty-eight that he had set loose were now terrorizing the world. This ruled out using the Mirror of Solomon, for the spirit of that mirror was the angel Anaël. Probably he would not answer anyhow, for Ware was not a white magician, and had carefully refrained from calling upon any angel ever since he had turned to the practice of the black Art; and besides, it would be a considerable nuisance locating three white pigeons amidst all this devastation.

Who, then? Among the demon princes he had decided not to call up for Baines's commission were several that he had ruled out because of their lesser potentialities for destruction, which would stand him in good stead were it to turn out that he had lost control; even in Hell there were degrees of malevolence, as of punishment. One of these was PHOENIX, a poet and teacher with whom Ware had had many dealings in the past, but he probably would not do now; he posed another wildlife problem—Ware's familiar Ahktoi had been the demon's creature, and the cat had of course vanished when the noise had begun, a disappearance that PHOENIX would take none the less ill for its having been 100 per cent expectable. Though the grimoires occasionally characterize one or another demon as "mild" or "good by nature," these terms are strictly relative and have no human meaning; all demons are permanently enraged by the greatest Matter of all, and it does not pay to annoy them even slightly in small matters.

Also, Ware realized, it would have to be a small magic indeed, for most of his instruments were now buried, and



## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

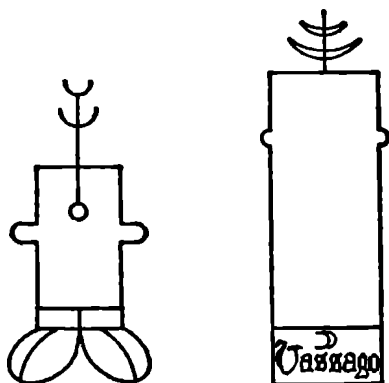
those that were accessible were all contaminated beyond his power to purify them in any useful period of time. Clearly it was time to consult the book. He crossed to the lectern upon which it rested, pushed dust and potsherds off it with his sleeve, unlocked the clasp and began to turn the great stiff pages, not without a qualm. Here, signed with his own blood, was half his life; the other half was down below, in the mud.

He found the name he needed almost at once: *VASSAGO*, a mighty prince, who in his first estate before the rebellion had belonged to the choir of the Virtues. The *Lemegeton* of the Rabbi Solomon said of him, Ware recalled, that he "declares things past, present and future, and discovers what has been lost or hidden." Precisely to the purpose. Ware remembered too that his was the name most commonly invoked in ceremonial crystallo-mancy, which would be perfect in both scope and limitations for what Ware had in mind, involving no lengthy preparations of the operator, or even any precautionary diagrams, nor any apparatus except a crystal ball; and even for that he might substitute a pool of exorcised water, fifty liters of which still reposed in a happily unruptured stainless steel tank imbedded in the wall behind Ware's workbench.

Furthermore, he was the only demon in Ware's entire book of pacts who was represented therein by two seals or characters, so markedly different that without seeing them side by side one might never suspect that they belonged to the same entity. Topologically they were closely related, however, and Ware studied these relationships long

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

and hard, knowing that he had once known what they meant but unable to recall it. These were the figures:



Ah, now he had it. The left-hand figure was VASSAGO's ordinary infernal sign, but the second was the seal under which, it was said, he could be called by white magicians. Ware had never used it, nor had needed to—the infernal seal had worked very well—and he had always doubted its efficacy, for by definition no commerce with a demon is white magic; however, it would be well to try it now. It might provide an additional factor of safety, if it worked at all.

Into what should he draw the water? Everything was filthy. Eventually he decided simply to make a puddle on the workbench; it had been decades since he had studied oneirology, which he had scorned as a recourse for mere hedge wizards, but to the best of his recollection it called for nothing more extraordinary than an earthen-

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

ware vessel, and could even be practiced successfully in an ordinary, natural forest pool, providing that there was sufficient shade.

Well, then, to work.

Standing insecurely before the workbench, the little weight of his spare upper body resting upon his elbows and his hands beside his ears, Theron Ware stared steadfastly down into the little puddle of mud, his own bushy head—he had neglected his tonsure since the disaster—shading it from the even light of the overcast sky. He had already stared so long since the first invocation that he felt himself on the verge of self-hypnosis, but now, he thought, there was a faint stirring down there in those miniature carboniferous depths, like a bubble or a highlight created by some non-existent sun. Yes, a faint spark was there, and it was growing.

*“Eka, dva, tri, chatur, pancha, shas, sapta, ashta, nava, dasha, ekadasha,”* Ware counted. *“Per vota nostra ipse nunc surtat nobis dicatus VASSAGO!”*

The spark continued to grow until it was nearly the size of a ten-lire piece, stabilized, and gradually began to develop features. Despite its apparent diameter, the thing did not look small; the effect rather was one of great distance, as though Ware were seeing a reflection of the Moon.

The features were quite beautiful and wholly horrible. Superficially the shining face resembled a human skull, but it was longer, thinner, more triangular, and it had no cheekbones. The eyes were huge, and slanted almost all

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

the way up to where a human hairline would have been; the nose extremely long in the bridge; the mouth as pink and tiny as that of an infant. The color and texture of the face were old ivory, like netsuke. No body was visible, but Ware had not expected one; this was not, after all, a full manifestation, but only an apparition.

The rosebud mouth moved damply, and a pure soprano voice, like that of a choirboy, murmured gently and soundlessly deep in Ware's mind.

WHO IS IT CALLS VASSAGO FROM STUDYING OF THE DAMNED? BEWARE!

"Thou knowest me, demon of the Pit," Ware thought, "for to a pact hast thou subscribed with me, and written into my book thine Infernal name. Thereby, and by thy seal which I do here exhibit, do I compel thee. My questions shalt thou answer, and give true knowledge."

SPEAK AND BE DONE.

"Art still in Hell with thy brothers, or are all abroad about the Earth?"

SOME DO GO TO AND FRO, BUT WE ABIDE HERE. NEVERTHELESS, WE BE ON EARTH, ALBEIT NOT ABROAD.

"In what wise?"

THOUGH WE MAY NOT YET LEAVE NETHER HELL, WE BE AMONG YE: FOR THE PIT HATH BEEN RAISED UP, AND THE CITY OF DIS NOW STANDETH UPON THE EARTH.

Ware made no attempt to disguise his shock; after all, the creature could see into his mind. "How situate?" he demanded.

WHERE SHE STOOD FROM ETERNITY; IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

Ware suspected at once that the apparently allegorical

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

form of this utterance concealed a literal meaning, but it would do no good to ask for exact topographical particulars; demons paid little attention to Earthly political geography unless they were fomenting strife about boundaries or enclaves, which was not one of VASSAGO'S roles. Could the reference be literary? That would be in accordance with the demon's nature. Nothing prevents devils from quoting scripture to their own advantage, so why not Tennyson?

"Be this valley under the Ambassadorship of RIMMON?"

NAY.

"Then what officers inhabit the region wherein it lies? Divulge their names, great prince, to my express command!"

THEY ARE THE INFERIORS OF ASTAROTH, WHO ARE CALLED SARGATANAS AND NEBIROS.

"But which hath his asylum where Dis now stands?"

THERE RULETH NEBIROS.

These were the demons of post-Columbian magic; they announced forth to the subjects all things which their lord hath commanded, according to the *Grimorium Verum*, in America, and the asylum of NEBIROS was further specified to be in the West. Of course: Death Valley. And NEBIROS, as it was said in the *Grand Grimoire*, was the field marshal of Infernus, and a great necromancer, "who goeth to and fro everywhere and inspects the hordes of perdition." The raising of the fortress of Dis in the domain of this great general most strongly suggested that the war was not over yet. Ware knew better, however, than to ask the demon whether God was in fact dead; for were He not, the mere sounding of the Holy Name would so offend

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

this minor prince as to terminate the apparition at once, if not render further ones impossible. Well, the question was probably unnecessary anyhow; he already had most of the information that he needed.

"Thou art discharged."

The shining face vanished with a flash of opalescence, exactly as though a soap bubble had broken, leaving Ware staring down at nothing but a puddle of mud, now already filming and cracking—except in the center where the face had been; that had evaporated completely. Straightening his aching back, he considered carefully the implications of what he had learned.

The military organization of the Descending Hierarchy was peculiar, and as usual the authorities differed somewhat on its details. This was hardly surprising, for any attempt to relate the offices of the evil spirits to Earthly analogues was bound to be only an approximation, if not sometimes actively misleading. Ware was presently in the domain of HUTGIN, ambassador in Italy, and had never before Black Easter had any need to invoke ASTAROTH or any of his inferior Intelligences. He was characterized by the *Grimorium Verum* as the Grand Duke of Hell, whereas Weirus referred to him as Grand Treasurer; while the *Grand Grimoire* did not mention him at all, assigning NEBIROS instead to an almost equivalent place. Nevertheless it seemed clear enough in general that while the domain of ASTAROTH might technically be in America, his principality was not confined thereto, but might make itself known anywhere in the world. HUTGIN in comparison was a considerably lesser figure.

And the war was not yet over, and Ware might indeed

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

find some way to make himself useful; Baines had been right about that, too. But in what way remained unclear.

Very probably, he would have to go to Dis to find out. It was a terrifying thought, but Ware could see no way around it. That was where the center of power was now, where the war would henceforth be directed; and there, if Baines actually succeeded in reaching the SAC in Denver, Ware conceivably might succeed in arranging some sort of a *detente*. Certainly he would be of no use squatting here in ruined Italy, with all the superior spirits half a world away.

But how to get there? He did not have Baines's power to commandeer an aircraft, and though he was fully as wealthy as the industrialist—in fact most of the money had once been Baines's—it seemed wholly unlikely that any airline was selling tickets these days. A sea and overland journey would be too slow.

Would it be possible to compel ASTAROTH to provide him with some kind of an apport? This too was a terrifying thought. To the best of Ware's knowledge, the last magician to have ridden astride a devil had been Gerbert, back in the tenth century. He had resorted to it only to save his life from a predecessor of the Inquisition, whose attention he had amply earned; and, moreover, had lived through the ordeal to become Pope Sylvester II.

Gerbert had been a great man, and though Ware rather doubted that he had been any better a magician than Ware was, he did not feel prepared to try that conclusion just now. In any event, the process was probably unnecessarily drastic; transvection might serve the purpose just as well, or better. Though he had never been to a sabbat, he knew





## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

This he would henceforth carry in his right shirt pocket, like a reliquary. Though he would accept no help from ASTAROTH if he could possibly avoid it, it would be well, since he was going to be traveling in that fiend's domains, to be wearing his colors. As a purist, it bothered him a little that the ruby was synthetic, but his disturbance, he knew, was only an aesthetic one. ASTAROTH was a solar spirit, and the ancients, all the way through Albertus Magnus, had believed that rubies were engendered in the Earth by the influence of the Sun—but since they were not in fact formed that way, the persistence of the ruby in the ritual was only another example of one of the primary processes of magic, *superstition*, the gradual supremacy of the sign over the thing, so that so far as efficacy was concerned it did not matter a bit whether the ruby was synthetic or natural. Nature, too, obstinately refused to form rubies the size and shape of opened match folders.

For a magician, Ware reflected, there were indeed distinct advantages in being able to practice ten centuries after Gerbert had ridden upon his demon eagle.



## VII

Transvection, too, has its hazards, Ware discovered. He crossed the Atlantic without incident in well under three hours—indeed, he suspected that in some aspect beyond the reach of his senses, the flight was taking place only partially in real time—and it began to look as though he would easily reach his goal before dawn. The candle affixed by its own tallow to the bundle of twigs and rushes before him (for only the foolhardy fly a broomstick with the brush trailing, no matter what is shown to the contrary in conventional Halloween cartoons) burned as steadily as though he were not in motion at all, casting a

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

brilliant light ahead along his path; any ships at sea that might have seen him might have taken him to be an unusually brilliant meteor. As he approached the eastern United States, he wondered how he would show up on radar; the dropping of the bomb two days ago suggested that there might still be a number of functioning radomes there. In quieter times, he thought, he might perhaps have touched off another flying-saucer scare. Or was he visible at all? He discovered that he did not know, but he began to doubt it; the seaboard was hidden in an immense pall of smoke.

But once over land, he slowed himself down and lost altitude in order to get his bearings, and within what seemed to him to be only a very few minutes, he was grounded head over heels by the sound of a church bell forlornly calling what faithful might remain to midnight Mass. He remembered belatedly, when he got his wind back, that in some parts of Germany during the seventeenth-century flowering of the popular Goëtic cults, it had been the custom to toll church bells all night long as a protection against witches who might be passing overhead on the way to the Brocken; but the memory did him no good now—the besom had gone lifeless.

He had fallen in a rather mountainous, heavily timbered area, quite like the Harz Mountain section of Germany, but which he guessed to be somewhere in western Pennsylvania. Though it was now late April, which was doubtless warm in Positano, the night here was decidedly cold, especially for a thin man clad in nothing more than a light smear of unguent. He was instantly and violently

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

all ashiver, for the sound of the bell had destroyed the protective as well as the transvective power of the flying ointment. He hastily undid the bundle of clothes, which was tied to the broomstick, but there were not going to be enough of them; after all, he had assembled them with Death Valley in mind. Also, he was beginning to feel drowsy and dizzy, and his pulse was blurred and banging with tachycardia. Among other things, the flying ointment contained both mandragora and belladonna, and now that the magic was gone out of it, these were exerting their inevitable side effects. He would have to wash the stuff off the minute he could find a stream, cold or no cold.

And not only because it was drugging him. Still other ingredients of the ointment were rather specifically organic in nature, and these gave it a characteristic smell which the heat of his body would gradually ripen. The chances were all too good that there would be some people in this country of the Amish—and not all of them old ones—who would know what that odor meant. Until he had had some kind of a bath, it would be dangerous even to ask for help.

Before dressing, he wiped off as much of it as he could with the towel in which the clothing had been tied. This he buried, together with the taper and the brush from the besom; and after making sure that the ruby talisman was still safely in his pocket, he set out, using the denuded broomstick as a staff.

The night-black, hilly, forested countryside would have made difficult going even for an experienced walker. Ware's life, on the other hand, had been nearly inactive except

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

intellectually, and he was on the very near side of his fiftieth birthday. To his advantage, on the other hand, stood the fact that he had always been small and wiry, and the combination of a slightly hyperthyroid metabolism and an ascetic calling—he did not even smoke—had kept him that way, so that he made fair progress; and an equally lifelong love of descriptive astronomy, plus the necessity of astrology to his art, helped to keep him going in the right direction, whenever he could see a few stars through the smoke.

Just before dawn, he stumbled upon a small, rocky-bedded stream, and through the gloom heard the sound of a nearby waterfall. He moved against the current and shortly found this to be the spillway of a small log dam. Promptly he stripped and bathed under it, pronouncing in a whisper as he did so all three of the accompanying prayers from the rite of lustration as prescribed for the preparatory triduum in the *Grimorium Verum*—though the water was neither warm nor exorcised, it was obviously pure, and that would have to do.

The ablution was every bit as cold as he had expected it to be, and even colder was the process of air-drying himself; but he endured it stoically, for he had to get rid of what remained of the ointment, and moreover he knew that to put on damp clothes would be almost as dangerous. While he waited, his teeth chattering, faint traces of light began to appear through the trees from the east.

In answer, massive gray rectangular shapes began to sketch themselves against the darkness downstream, and before long he was able to see that to the west—which

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

was the way the stream was momentarily running—the aisle it cut through the trees opened out onto a substantial farm. As if in confirmation of help to come, a cock crowed in the distance, a traditional ending for a night of magic.

But as the dawn continued to brighten, he saw that there would be no help for him here. Under the angle of the roof of the large barn nearest to him a circular diagram had been painted, like a formalized flower with an eye in it.

As Jack Ginsberg had taken the pains to find out long before he and his boss had even met the magician, Ware had been born and raised in the States and was still a citizen. As his name showed, his background was Methodist, but nevertheless he knew a hex sign when he saw one. And it gave him an idea.

He was not a witch, and he certainly had had no intention of laying a curse on this prosperous-looking farm ten seconds ago, but the opportunity to gather new data should not be missed.

Reaching into his shirt pocket, he turned the ruby around so that the seal and characters on it faced outward. In a low voice, he said, "THOMATOS, BENESSER, FLEANTER."

Under proper circumstances these words of the *Comte de Gabalis* encompassed the operator with thirty-three several Intelligences, but since the circumstances were not proper, Ware was not surprised when nothing happened. For one thing, his lustration had been imperfect; for another, he was using the wrong talisman—the infernal spirits of this ceremony were not devils but salamanders or fire

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

elementals. Nevertheless he now added: "LITAN, ISER, OSNAS."

A morning breeze sprang up, and a leaflike whispering ran around him, which might or might not have been the voices of many beings individually saying, "NANTHER, NANTHER, NANTHER, NANTHER . . ." Touching the talisman, Ware said, "GITAU, HURANDOS, RIDAS, TALIMOL," and then, pointing to the barn, "UUSUR, ITAR."

The result should have been a highly localized but destructive earthquake, but there was not even a minor tremor, though he was pretty sure that he really had heard the responsive voices of the fire spirits. The spell simply would not work under the eye of the hex sign—one more piece of evidence that the powers of evil were still under some kind of restraint. That was good to know, but in a way, too, Ware was quite disappointed; for had he gotten his earthquake, the further words SOUTRAM, UBARSINENS would have compelled the Intelligences to carry him across the rest of his journey. He uttered them anyhow, but without result.

Neither in the *Comte de Gabalis* or its very late successor, *The Black Pullet*, did this ritual offer any word of dismissal, but nevertheless for safety's sake he now added: "RABIAM." Had this worked, he would have found himself carried home again, where at least he could have started over again with more ointment and another broomstick; but it did not. There was no recourse now but to seek out the farmhouse and try to persuade the farmer to give him something to eat and drive him to the nearest railhead. It was too bad that the man could not be told that he



## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

had just been protected by Ware from a demonic onslaught, but unfortunately the Amish did not believe that there was any such thing as white magic—and in the ultimate analysis they were quite right not to do so, whatever delusions about the point might be harbored by Father Domenico and his fellows.

Ware identified the farmhouse proper without any trouble. It looked every bit as clean, fat and prosperous as the rest, but it was suspiciously quiet; by this hour, everyone should be up and beginning the day's chores. He approached with caution, alert for guns or dogs, but the silence continued.

The caution had been needless. Inside, the place was an outright slaughterhouse, resembling nothing so much as the last act of Webster's *The White Devil*. Ware inspected it with clinical fascination. The family had been a large one—the parents, one grandparent, four daughters, three sons and the inevitable dog—and at some time during the preceding night they had suddenly fallen upon each other with teeth, nails, pokers, a buggy whip, a bicycle chain, a cleaver, a pig knife and the butt end of a smooth-bore musket, old enough to have been a relic of the Boer War. It was an obvious case of simultaneous mass possession, probably worked through the women, as these things almost always were. Doubtless they would infinitely have preferred a simple localized earthquake, but from an attack like this no conceivable peasant hex sign could have protected them.

Probably nothing could have, for as it had turned out, in their simple traditional religiosity they had chosen the

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

wrong side. Like most of humankind, they had been born victims; even a beginning study of the Problem of Evil would have suggested to them that their God had never played fair with them, as indeed He had caused to be written out in Job for all to read; and their primitive backwoods demonology had never honestly admitted that there really were two sides to the Great Game, let alone allowing them any inkling of who the players were.

While he considered what to do next he prowled around the kitchen and the woodshed, where the larder was, trying not to slip or step on anybody. There were only two eggs—today's had obviously not been harvested—but he found smoked, streaky rashers of bacon, a day-old loaf of bread just ripe for cutting, nearly a pound of country butter and a stone jug of cold milk. All in all it was a good deal more than he could eat, but he built a fire in the old wood-burning stove, cooked the eggs and the bacon, and did his best to put it all down. After all, he had no idea when he would meet his next meal. He had already decided that he was not yet desperate enough to risk calling for an apport, but instead would keep walking generally westward until he met an opportunity to steal a car. (He would find none on the farm; the Amish still restricted themselves to horses.)

As he came out of the farmhouse into the bright morning, a sandwich in both hip pockets, he heard from the undestroyed barn a demanding lowing of cattle. Sorry, friends, he thought; nobody's going to milk you this morning.

## VIII

Baines knew the structure and approaches of Strategic Air Command headquarters rather better than the Department of Defense would have thought right and proper even for a civilian with Q clearance, although there had been several people in DoD who would not have been at all surprised at it. The otherwise passengerless jet carrying him and Jack Ginsberg made no attempt to approach either Denver Airport or the U. S. Air Force Academy field at Colorado Springs, both of which, he correctly assumed, would no longer be in existence anyhow. Instead, he directed the pilot to land at Limon, a small town which was the eastern-

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

most vertex of a nearly equilateral triangle formed by these three points. Hidden there was one terminus of an underground rapid transit line which led directly into the heart of SAC's fortress—and was now its only surviving means of physical access to the outside world.

Baines and his secretary had been there only once before, and the guards at the station now were not only new but thoroughly frightened. Hence, despite the possession of ID cards countersigned by General McKnight, they were subjected to over an hour of questioning, fingerprinting, photographing of retinal blood-vessel patterns, frisking and fluoroscopy for hidden weapons or explosives, telephone calls into the interior and finally a closed-circuit television confrontation with McKnight himself before they were even allowed into the waiting room.

As if in partial compensation, the trip itself was rapid transit indeed. The line itself was a gravity-vacuum tube, bored in an exactly straight line under the curvature of the Earth, and kept as completely exhausted of air as outgassing from its steel cladding would permit. The vacuum in the tube was in fact almost as hard as the atmosphere of the Moon. From the waiting room, Baines and Jack Ginsberg were passed through two airlocks into a seamlessly welded, windowless metal capsule which was sealed behind them. Here their guards strapped them in securely, for their own protection, for the initial kick of compressed air behind the capsule, abetted by rings of electromagnets, gave it an acceleration of more than five miles per hour per second. Though this is not much more than they might have been subjected to in an electric streetcar of about

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

1940, it is a considerable jerk if you cannot see outside and have nothing to hold on to. Thereafter, the capsule was simply allowed to fall to the mathematical midpoint of its right of way, gaining speed at about twenty-eight feet per second; since the rest of the journey was uphill, the capsule was slowed in proportion by gravity, friction and the compression of the almost non-existent gases in the tube still ahead of it, which without any extra braking whatsoever brought it to a stop at the SAC terminus of the line so precisely that only a love pat from a fifteen horsepower engine was needed to line up its airlock with that of the station.

"When you're riding a thing like this, it makes it hard to believe that there's any such thing as a devil, doesn't it?" Jack Ginsberg said. He had had a long, luxurious shower aboard the plane, and that, plus getting away from the demon-haunted ruins in Positano, and the subsequent finding in Zurich that money still worked, had brightened him perceptibly.

"Maybe," Baines said. "A large part of the mystic tradition says that the possession and use of secular knowledge—or even the desire for it—is in itself evil, according to Ware. But here we are."

But in the smooth-running, even-temperated caverns of the SAC, Baines himself felt rather reassured. There was no Goat grinning over his shoulder yet. McKnight was an old friend; he was pleased to see Buelg again, and honored to meet Šarvje; and down here, at least, everything seemed to be under control. It was also helpful to

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

find that both McKnight and his advisers not only already knew the real situation, but had very nearly accepted it. Only Buelg had remained a little skeptical at the beginning, and had seemed quite taken aback to find Baines, of all people, providing independent testimony to the same effect as had the computer. When the new facts Baines had brought had been fed into the machine, and the machine had produced in response a whole new batch of conclusions entirely consistent with the original hypothesis, Buelg seemed convinced, although it was plain that he still did not like it. Well, who did?

At long last they were comfortably settled in McKnight's office, with three tumblers of Jack Daniel's (Jack Ginsberg did not drink, and neither did Šarvje) and no one to interrupt them but an occasional runner from Chief Hay. Though the runner was a coolly pretty blond girl, and the USAF's women's auxiliary had apparently adopted the miniskirt, Ginsberg did not seem to notice. Perhaps he was still in shock from his recent run-in with the succubus. To Baines's eyes, the girl did look rather remarkably like Ware's Greta, which should have captured Jack instantly; but then, in the long run, most women looked alike to Baines, especially in the line of business.

"That bomb did you no good at all, I take it," he said.

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," McKnight said. "True, it didn't destroy the city, or even hurt it visibly, but it certainly seemed to take them by surprise. For about an hour after the fireball went up, the sky above the target was full of them. It was like firing a

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

flashbulb in a cave full of sleeping bats—and we got pictures, too.”

“Any evidence that you, uh, destroyed any of them?”

“Well, we saw a lot of them going back to the city under their own power—despite very bad design, they seem to fly pretty well—but we don’t have any count of how many went up. We didn’t see any falling, but that might have been because some of them had been vaporized.”

“Not bloody likely. Their bodies may have been vaporized, but the bodies were borrowed in the first place. Like knocking down a radio-controlled aircraft: the craft may be a total loss, but the controlling Intelligence is unharmed, somewhere else, and can send another one against you whenever it likes.”

“Excuse me, Doctor Baines, but the analogy is inexact,” Buelg said. “We know that because we did get a lot out of the bomb besides simply stirring up a flurry. High-speed movies of the column of the mushroom as it went up show a lot of the creatures trying to reform. One individual we were able to follow went through thirty-two changes in the first minute. The changes are all incredible and beyond any physical theory or model we can erect to account for them, but they do show, first, that the creature was seriously inconvenienced, and second, that it wanted and perhaps needed to hold onto *some* kind of physical form. That’s a start. It suggests to me that had we been able to confine them all in the fireball, where the temperatures are way higher still, no gamut of change

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

they could have run through would have done them any good. Eventually they would have been stripped of the last form and utterly destroyed."

"The last form, maybe," Baines said. "But the spirit would remain. I don't know why they're clinging to physical forms so determinedly, but it probably has only a local and tactical reason, something to do with the prosecuting of the present war. But you can't destroy a spirit by such means, any more than you can destroy a message by burning the piece of paper it's written on."

As he said this, he became uncomfortably aware that he had gotten the argument out of some sermon against atheism that he had heard as a boy, and had thought simple-minded even then. But since then, he had *seen* demons—and a lot more closely than anybody else here had.

"That is perhaps an open question," Šatvje said heavily. "I am not myself a skeptic, you should understand, Doctor Baines, but I have to remind myself that no spirit has ever been so intensively tested to destruction before. Inside a thermonuclear fireball, even the nuclei of hydrogen atoms find it difficult to retain their integrity."

"Atomic nuclei remain matter, and the conservation laws still apply. Demons are neither matter nor energy; they are something else."

"We do not know that they are not energy," Šatvje said. "They may well be fields, falling somewhere within the electro-magneto-gravitic triad. Remember that we have never achieved a unified field theory; even Einstein repudiated his in the last years of his life, and quantum



## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

mechanics—with all respect to De Broglie—is only a clumsy avoidance of the problem. These . . . spirits . . . may be such unified fields. And one characteristic of such fields might be 100 per cent negative entropy.”

“There couldn’t be any such thing as completely negative entropy,” Buelg put in. “Such a system would constantly *accumulate* order, which means that it would run backward in time and we would never be aware of it at all. You have to allow for Planck’s Constant. This would be the only stable case—”

He wrote rapidly on a pad, stripped off the sheet and passed it across the table. The note read, in very neat lettering:

$$H(x) - H_y(x) = C + \epsilon$$

The girl came in with another manifold of sheets from the computer, and this time Jack Ginsberg’s eye could be observed to be wandering haunchward a little. Baines had never objected to this—he preferred his most valuable employees to have a few visible and usable weaknesses—but for once he almost even sympathized; he was feeling a little out of his depth.

“Meaning what?” he said.

“Why,” Šarvje said, a little patronizingly, “eternal life, of course. Life is negative entropy. Stable negative entropy is eternal life.”

“Barring accidents,” Buelg said, with a certain grim relish. “We have no access yet to the gravitic part of the spectrum, but the electromagnetic sides are totally vulner-

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

able, and with the clues we've got now, we ought to be able to burst into such a closed system like a railroad spike going through an auto tire."

"If you can kill a demon," Baines said slowly, "Then—"

"That's right," Buclg said affably. "Angel, devil, ordinary immortal soul—you name it, we can do for it. Not right away, maybe, but before very long."

"Perhaps the ultimate human achievement," Šatvje said, with a dreaming, almost beatific expression. "The theologians call condemnation to Hell the Second Death. Soon, perhaps, we may be in a position to give the Third Death . . . the bliss of complete extinction . . . liberation from the Wheel!"

McKnight's eyes were now also wandering, though toward the ceiling. He wore the expression of a man who has heard all this before, and is not enjoying it any better the second time. Baines himself was very far from being bored—indeed, he was as close to horrified fascination as he had ever been in his life—but clearly it was time to bring everybody back to Earth. He said:

"Talk's cheap. Do you have any actual plans?"

"You bet we do," McKnight said, suddenly galvanized. "I've had Chief Hay run me an inventory of the country's remaining military power, and, believe me, there's a lot of it. I was surprised myself. We are going to mount a major attack upon this city of Dis, and for it we're going to bring some things up out of the ground that the American people have never seen before and neither has anybody else, including this pack of demons. I don't know why they're just sitting there, but maybe it's because they think

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

they've already got us licked. Well, they're dead wrong. Nobody can lick the United States—not in the long run!"

It was an extraordinary sentiment from a man who had been maintaining for years that the United States had "lost" China, "surrendered" Korea, "abandoned" Vietnam and was overrun by home-bred Communists; but Baines, who knew the breed, saw no purpose in calling attention to the fact. *Their arguments, not being based in reason, cannot be swayed by reason.* Instead he said:

"General, believe me, I advise against it. I know some of the weapons you're talking about, and they're pretty powerful. I ought to know; my company designed and supplied some of them, so it would be against my own interests to run them down to you. But I very much doubt that any of them will do any good under the present circumstances."

"That, of course, remains to be seen," McKnight said.

"I'd rather we didn't. If they work, we may find ourselves worse off than before. That's the point I came here to press. The demons are about 90 per cent in charge of the world now, but you'll notice that they haven't taken any further steps against us. There's a reason for this. They are fighting against another Opponent entirely, and it's quite possible that we ought to be on their side."

McKnight leaned back in his chair, with the expression of a president confronted at a press conference with a question on which he had not been briefed.

"Let me be quite sure I understand you, Doctor Baines," he said. "Do you propose that the present invasion of the United States was a good thing? And, further, that we

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

ought not to be opposing the occupying forces with all our might? That indeed we ought instead to be aiding and abetting the powers responsible for it?"

"I don't propose any aiding and abetting whatsoever," Baines said, with an inward sigh. "I just think we ought to lay off for a while, that's all, until we see how the situation works out."

"You are almost the last man in the world," McKnight said stiffly, "whom I would have suspected of being a ComSymp, let alone a pro-Chink. When I have your advice entered upon the record, I will also add an expression of my personal confidence. In the meantime, the attack goes forward as scheduled."

Baines said nothing more, advisedly. It had occurred to him, out of his experience with Theron Ware, that angels fallen and unfallen, and the immortal part of man, partook of and had sprung from the essentially indivisible nature of their Creator; that if these men could destroy that Part, they could equally well dissolve the Whole; that a successful storming of Dis would inevitably be followed by a successful war upon Heaven; and that if God were not dead yet, He soon might be.

However it turned out, it looked like it was going to be the most interesting civil war he had ever run guns to.

## IX

UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES  
Strategic Air Command Office  
Denver, Colorado

Date: May 1

MEMORANDUM: Number I  
TO: All Combat Arms  
SUBJECT: General Combat Orders

1. This Memorandum supersedes all previous directives on this subject.

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

2. The United States has been invaded and all combat units will stand in readiness to expel the invading forces.

3. The enemy has introduced a number of combat innovations of which all units must be made thoroughly aware. All officers will therefore read this Memorandum in full to their respective commands, and will thereafter post it in a conspicuous place. All commands should be sampled for familiarity with the contents of the Memorandum.

4. Enemy troops are equipped with individual body armor. In accordance with ancient Oriental custom, this armor has been designed and decorated in various grotesque shapes, in the hope of frightening the opposition. It is expected that the American soldier will simply laugh at this primitive device. All personnel are warned, however, that as armor these "demon suits" are extremely effective. A very high standard of marksmanship will be required against them.

5. An unknown number of the enemy body armor units, perhaps approaching 100%, are capable of free flight, like the jump suits supplied to U. S. Mobile Infantry. Ground forces will therefore be alert to possible attack from the air by individual enemy troops as well as by conventional aircraft.

6. It is anticipated that in combat the enemy will employ various explosive, chemical and toxic agents which may produce widespread novel effects. All personnel are hereby reminded that these effects will be either natural in origin, or illusions.

7. Following the reading of this Memorandum, all of-

COME TO MIDDLE HELL

fficers will read to their commands those paragraphs of the Articles of War pertaining to the penalties for cowardice in battle.

By order of the Commander in Chief:

*D. Willis McKnight*

D. WILLIS MCKNIGHT  
General of the Armies, USAF

Because of the destruction of Rome and of the Vatican with it—alas for that great library and treasure house of all Christendom!—the Holy See had been moved to Venice, which had been spared thus far, and was now housed in almost equal magnificence in the Sala del Collegio of the Palazzo Ducale, the only room to escape intact from the great fire of 1577, where, under a ceiling by Veronese, the doges had been accustomed to receive their ambassadors to other city-states. It was the first time the palace had been used by anybody but tourists since Napoleon had forced the abdication of Lodovico Manin exactly eleven hundred years after the election of the first doge.

There were no tourists here now, of course; the city, broiling hot and stinking of the garbage in its canals, brooded lifelessly under the Adriatic sun, a forgotten museum. Nobody was about in the crazy narrow streets and the cramped *ristoranti* but the native Venetians, their livelihood gone, sullenly starving together in small groups and occasionally snarling at each other in their peculiar dialect. Many already showed signs of radiation sickness: their hair

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

was shedding in patches, and pools of vomit caught the sunlight, ignored by everyone but the flies.

The near desertion of the city, at least by comparison with the jam which would have been its natural state by this time of year, gave Father Domenico a small advantage. Instead of having to take refuge in a third-class hotel, clamorous twenty-four hours a day with groups of Germans and Americans being processed by the coachload like raw potatoes being converted into neatly packaged crisps, he was able without opposition to find himself apartments in the Patriarch's Palace itself. Such dusty sumptuousness did not at all suit him, but he had come to see the Pope, as the deputy of an ancient, still honored monastic order; and the Patriarch, after confessing him and hearing the nature of his errand, had deemed it fitting that he be appropriately housed while he waited.

There was no way of telling how long the wait might be. The Pope had died with Rome; what remained of the College of Cardinals—those of them that had been able to reach Venice at all—was shut in the Sala del Consiglio dei Dieci, attempting to elect a new one. It was said that the office of the Grand Inquisitor, directly next door, held a special guest, but of this rumor the Patriarch seemed to know no more than the next man. In the meantime, he issued to Father Domenico a special dispensation to conduct Masses and hear confessions in several small churches off the Grand Canal, and to preach there and even in the streets if he wished. Technically, Father Domenico had no patent to do any of these things, since he was a monk



## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

rather than a priest, but the Patriarch, like everyone else now, was short on manpower.

On the trip northward from Monte Albano, Father Domenico had seen many more signs of suffering, and of outright demoniac malignancy, than were visible on the surface of this uglily beautiful city; but it was nevertheless a difficult, almost sinister place in which to attempt to minister to the people, let alone to preach a theology of hope. The Venetians had never been more than formally and outwardly allegiant to the Church from at least their second treaty with Islam in the mid-fifteenth century. The highest pinnacle of their ethics was that of dealing fairly with each other, and since there was at the same time no sweeter music to Venetian ears than the scream of outrage from the outsider who had discovered too late that he had been cheated, this left them little that they felt they ought to say in the confessional. Most of them seemed to regard the now obvious downfall of almost all of human civilization as a plot to divert the tourist trade to some other town—probably Istanbul, which they still referred to as Constantinople.

As for hope, they had none. In this they were not alone. Throughout his journey, Father Domenico had found nothing but terror and misery, and a haunted populace which could not but conclude that everything the Church had taught them for nearly two thousand years had been lies. How could he tell them that, considering the real situation as he knew it to be, the suffering and the evil with which they were afflicted were rather less than he

had expected to find? How then could he tell them further that he saw small but mysteriously increasing signs of mitigation of the demons' rule? In these, fighting all the way against confounding hope with wishful thinking, he believed only reluctantly himself.

Yet hope somehow found its way forward. On an oppressive afternoon while he was trying to preach to a group of young thugs, most of them too surly and indifferent even to jeer, before the little Church of Sta. Maria dei Miracoli, his audience was suddenly galvanized by a series of distant whistles. The whistles, as Father Domenico knew well enough, had been until only recently the signals of the young wolves of Venice, to report the spotting of some escortless English schoolmarm, pony-tailed Bennington art student or gaggle of Swedish girls. There were no such prey about now, but nevertheless, the piazzetta emptied within a minute.

Bewildered and of course apprehensive, Father Domenico followed, and soon found the streets almost as crowded as of old with people making for St. Mark's. A rumor had gone around that a puff of white smoke had been seen over the Palazzo Ducale. This was highly unlikely, since—what with the fear of another fire which constantly haunted the palace—there was no stove in it anywhere in which to burn ballots; nevertheless, the expectation of a new Pope had run through the city like fire itself. By the time Father Domenico reached the vast square opposite the basilica (for after all, he too had come in search of a Pope) it was so crowded as to scarcely leave standing room for the pigeons.

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

If there was indeed to be any announcement, it would have to come Venetian style from the top of the Giant's Staircase of Antonio Rizzo; the repetitive arches of the first-floor loggia offered no single balcony on which a Pope might appear. Father Domenico pressed forward into the great internal courtyard toward the staircase, at first saying, "*Prego, prego,*" and then "*Scusate, scusate mi,*" to no effect whatsoever, and finally with considerable judicious but hard monkish use of elbows and knees.

Over the tense rumbling of the crowd there sounded suddenly an antiphonal braying of many trumpets—something of Gabrielli's, no doubt—and at the same time Father Domenico found himself jammed immovably against the coping of the cannon-founder's well, which had long since been scavenged clean of the tourists' coins. By luck it was not a bad position; from here he had quite a clear view up the staircase and between the towering statues of Mars and Neptune. The great doors had already been opened, and the cardinals in their scarlet finery were ranked on either side of the portico. Between them and a little forward stood two pages, one of them holding a red cushion upon which stood something tall and glittering.

Amidst the fanfare, an immensely heavy tolling began to boom: La Trottera, the bell which had once summoned the members of the Grand Council to mount their horses and ride over the wooden bridges to a meeting. The combination of bell and trumpets was solemnly beautiful, and under it the crowd fell quickly silent. Yet the difference from the Roman ritual was disturbing, and there was something else wrong about it, too. What was that thing

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

on the cushion? It certainly could not be the tiara; was it the golden horn of the doges?

The music and the tolling stopped. Into the pigeon-cooing silence, a cardinal cried in Latin:

"We have a Pope, *Summus Antistitum Antistes!* And it is his will that he be called Juvenember LXIX!"

The unencumbered page now stepped forward. He called in the vernacular:

"Here is your Pope, and we know it will please you."

From the shadow of the great doors, there stepped forth into the sunlight between the statues, bowing his head to accept the golden horn, his face white and mild as milk, the special guest of the office of the Grand Inquisitor: a comely old man with a goshawk on his wrist, whom Father Domenico had first and last seen on Black Easter, released from the Pit by Theron Ware—the demon AGARES.

There was an enormous shout from the crowd, and then the trumpets and the bell resumed, now joined by all the rest of the bells in the city, and by many drums, and the firing of cannon. Choking with horror, Father Domenico fled as best he could.

The festival went on all week, climaxed by bull dancing in the Cretan style in the courtyard of the Palazzo, and by fireworks at night, while Father Domenico prayed. This event was definitive. The Antichrist had arrived, however belatedly, and therefore God still lived. Father Domenico could do no more good in Italy; he must now go to Dis, into Hell-Mouth itself, and challenge Satan to grant His continuing existence. Nor would it be enough for Father

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

Domenico to aspire to be the Antisatan. If necessary—most terrifying of all thoughts—he must now expose himself to the temptation and the election, by no Earthly college, of becoming the vicar of Christ whose duty it would be to harrow this Earthly Hell.

Yet how to get there? He was isolated on an isthmus of mud, and he had no Earthly resources whatsoever. Just possibly, some rite of white magic might serve to carry him, although he could remember none that seemed applicable; but that would involve returning to Monte Albano, and in any event, he felt instinctively that no magic of any kind would be appropriate now.

In this extremity, he bethought him of certain legends and attested miracles of the early saints, some of whom in their exaltation were said to have been lifted long distances through the air. Beyond question, he was not a saint; but if his forthcoming role was to be as he suspected, some similar help might be vouchsafed him. He tried to keep his mind turned away from the obvious and most exalted example of all, and equally to avoid thinking about the doubt-inducing fate of Simon Magus—a razor's edge which not even his Dominican training made less than nearly impossible to negotiate.

Nevertheless, his shoulders squared, his face set, Father Domenico walked resolutely toward the water.



## X

Even after the complete failure of air power in Vietnam to pound one half of a tenth-rate power into submission, General McKnight remained a believer in its supremacy; but he was not such a fool as to do without ground support, knowing very well the elementary rule that territory must be occupied as well as devastated, or even the most decisive victory will come unstuck. By the day—or rather, the night—for which the attack was scheduled, he had moved three armored divisions into the Panamint range, and had two more distributed through the Grapevine, Funeral and Black mountains, which also bristled with

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

rocket emplacements. This was by no means either as big or as well divided a force as he should have liked to have used, especially on the east, but since it was all the country had left to offer him, he had to make it do.

His battle plan was divided into three phases. Remembering that the test bomb had blown some thousands of enemy troops literally sky high for what was tactically speaking quite a long period of time, he intended to begin with a serial bombardment of Dis with as many of his remaining nuclear weapons as he could use up just short of making the surrounding territory radiologically lethal to his own men. These warheads might not do the city or the demons any damage—a proposition which he still regarded with some incredulity—but if they would again disorganize the enemy and keep him from reforming, that would be no mean advantage in itself.

Phase Two was designed to take advantage of the fact that the battleground from his point of view was all downhill, the devils with stunning disregard of elementary strategy having located their fortress at the lowest point in the valley, on the site of what had previously been Badwater, which was actually two hundred and eighty-two feet below sea level. When the nuclear bombardment ended, it would be succeeded immediately by a continued hammering with conventional explosives, by artillery, missiles and planes. These would include phosphorus bombs, again probably harmless to devils, but which would in any event produce immense clouds of dense white smoke, which might impair visibility for the enemy; his own troops could see through it handily enough by radar, and would always



## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

be able to see the main target through the infrared telescope or "sniperscope," since even under normal conditions it was always obligingly kept red hot. Under cover of this bombardment, McKnight planned a rush of armor upon the city, spearheaded by halftrack-mounted laser projectors. It was McKnight's theory, supported neither by his civilian advisers nor by the computer, that the thermonuclear fireball had failed to vaporize the iron walls because its heat had been too generalized and diffuse, and that the concentrated heat of four or five or a dozen laser beams, all focused on one spot, might punch its way through like a rapier going through cheese. This onslaught was to be aimed directly at the gates. Of course these would be better defended than any other part of the perimeter, but a significant number of the defenders might still be flapping wildly around in the air amidst the smoke, and in any event, when one is trying to breach a wall, it is only common sense to begin at a point which *already* has a hole in it.

If such a breach was actually effected, an attempt would be made to enlarge it with land torpedoes, particularly burrowing ones of the Hess type which would have been started on their way at the beginning of Phase One. These had never seen use before in actual combat and were supposed to be graveyard secret—though with the profusion of spies and traitors with which America had been swarming, in McKnight's view, before all this had begun, he doubted that the secret had been very well kept. (After all, if even Baines . . .) He was curious also about the actual effectiveness of another secret, the product of an almost

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

incestuous union of chemistry and nucleonics called TDX, a compound as unstable as TNT, which was made of gravity-polarized atoms. McKnight had only the vaguest idea of what this jargon was supposed to signify, but what he did know was its action; TDX was supposed to have the property of exploding in a flat plane, instead of expanding evenly in all directions like any Christian explosive.

Were the gate forced, the bombardment would stop and Phase Three would follow. This would be an infantry assault, supported by individually airborne troops in their rocket-powered flying harness, and supplemented by an attempted paratroop landing inside the city. If on the other hand the gate did not go down, there would be a most unwelcome Phase Four—a general, and hopefully orderly retreat.

The whole operation could be watched both safely and conveniently from the SAC's Command Room under Denver, and as the name implied, directed in the same way; there was a multitude of television screens, some of which were at the individual command consoles provided for each participating general. The whole complex closely resembled the now extinct Space Center at Houston, which had in fact been modeled after it; technically, space flight and modern warfare are almost identical operations from the command point of view. At the front of this cavern and quite dominating it was a master screen of Cinerama proportions; at its rear was something very like a sponsors' booth, giving McKnight and his guests an overview of the whole, as well as access to a bank of small screens on

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

which he could call into being any individual detail of the action that was within access of a camera.

McKnight did not bother to occupy the booth until the nuclear bombardment was over, knowing well enough that the immense amount of ionization it would produce would make non-cable television reception impossible for quite some time. (The fallout was going to be hell, too—but almost all if it would miss Denver, the East Coast was dead, and the fish and the Europeans would have to look out for themselves.) When he finally took over, the conventional bombardment was just beginning. With him were Baines, Buelg, Chief Hay and Šarvje; Jack Ginsberg had expressed no particular interest in watching, and since Baines did not need him here, he had been excused to go below, presumably to resume his lubricous pursuit of Chief Hay's comely runner.

Vision on the great master screen was just beginning to clear as they took their seats, although there was still considerable static. Weather Control reported that it was a clear, brightly moonlit night over all of the Southwest, but in point of fact the top of the great multiple nuclear mushroom, shot through with constant lightning, now completely covered the southern third of California and all of the two states immediately to the east of it. The units and crews crouching in their bivouacs and emplacements along the sides of the mountains facing away from the valley clung grimly to the rocks against hurricane updrafts in temperatures that began at a hundred and fifty degrees and went on up from there. No unit which had

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

been staked out on any of the inside faces of any of the ranges reported anything, then or ever; even the first missiles and shells to come screaming in toward Dis exploded incontinently in midair the moment they rose above the sheltering shadows of the mountain peaks. No thermocouple existed which would express in degrees the temperature at the heart of the target itself; spectographs taken from the air showed it to be cooling from a level of about two and a half million electron volts, a figure as utterly impossible to relate to human experience as are the distances in miles between the stars.

Nevertheless, the valley cooled with astonishing rapidity, and once visibility was restored, it was easy to see why. More than two hundred square miles of it had been baked and annealed into a shallow, even dish, still glowing whitely but shot through with the gorgeous colors of impurities, like a borax bead in the flame of a blowpipe; and this was acting like the reflector of a searchlight, throwing the heat outward through the atmosphere into space in an almost solidly visible column. At its center, as at the Cassegranian focus of a telescope mirror, was a circular black hole.

McKnight leaned forward, grasping the arms of his chair in a death grip, and shouted for a close-up. Had the job been done already? Perhaps Buelg had been right about there being a possible limit to the number of transformations the enemy could go through before final dissolution. After all, Badwater had just received a nuclear saturation which had previously been contemplated only in terms of the overkill of whole countries—

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

But as the glass darkened, the citadel brightened, until at last it showed once more as a red-hot ring. Nothing could be seen inside it but a roiling mass of explosions—the conventional bombardment was now getting home, and with great accuracy—from which a mushroom stem continued to rise in the very center of the millennial updraft; but the walls—the walls, the walls, the walls were still there.

“Give it up, General,” Buelg said, his voice gravelly. “No matter what the spectroscope shows, if those walls were really iron—” He paused and swallowed heavily. “They must be only symbologically iron, perhaps in some alchemical sense. Otherwise the atoms would not only have been scattered to the four winds, but would have had all the electron shells stripped off them. You can do nothing more but lose more lives.”

“The bombardment is still going on,” McKnight pointed out stiffly, “and we’ve had no report yet of what it’s done to the enemy’s organization and manpower. For all we know, there’s nobody left down that hole at all—and the laser squadrons haven’t even arrived yet, let alone the Hess torpedoes.”

“Neither of which are going to work worth a damn,” Baines said brutally. “I know what the Hess torpedo will do. Have you forgotten that they were invented by my own chief scientist? Who just incidentally was taken by PUT SATANACHIA this Easter, so that the demons now know all about the gadget, if they didn’t before. And after what’s been dropped on that town already, expecting

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

anything of it is like trying to kill a dinosaur by kissing it."

"It is in the American tradition," McKnight said, "to do things the hard way if there is no other way. Phase Four is a last-ditch measure, and it is good generalship—which I do not expect you to understand—to remain flexible until the last moment. As Clausewitz remarks, most battles are lost by generals who failed to have the courage of their own convictions in the clutch."

Baines, who had read extensively in both military and political theoreticians in five languages, and had sampled them in several more, as a necessary adjunct to his business, knew very well that Clausewitz had never said any such damn fool thing, and that McKnight was only covering with an invented quotation a hope which was last-ditch indeed. But even had elementary Machiavellianism given him any reason to suppose that charging McKnight with this would change the General's mind in the slightest, he could see from the master screen that it was already too late. While they had been talking, the armored divisions had been charging down into the valley, their diesel-electric engines snarling and snorting, the cleats of their treads cracking the slippery glass and leaving sluggishly glowing, still quasi-molten trails behind. Watching them in the small screens, Baines began to think that he must be wrong. He knew these monsters well—they were part of his stock in trade—and to believe that they were resistible went against the selling habits of an entire adult lifetime.

Yet some of them were bogging down already; as

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

they descended deeper into the valley, with the small rockets whistling over their hunched heads, the hot glass under their treads worked into the joints like glue, and then, carried by the groaning engines up over the top trunnions, cooled and fell into the bearings in a shower of many-sized abrasive granules. The monsters slewed and sidled, losing traction and with it, steerage; and then the lead half-track with the laser cannon jammed immovably and began to sink like the *Titanic* into the glass, the screams of its broiling crew tearing the cool air of the command booth like a rip saw until McKnight impatiently cut the sound off.

The other beasts lumbered on regardless—they had no orders to do otherwise—and a view from the air showed that three or four units of the laser squadron were now within striking distance of the gates of Dis. Like driver ants, black streams of infantry were crawling down the inner sides of the mountains behind the last wave of the armored divisions. They too had had no orders to turn back. Even in their immensely clumsy asbestos firemen's suits and helmets, they were already fainting and falling over each other in the foothills, their carefully oiled automatic weapons falling into the sand, the tanks of their flame throwers splitting and dumping jellied gasoline on the hot rocks, the very air of the valley sucking all of the moisture out of their lungs through the tiniest cracks in their uniforms.

Baines was not easily horrified—that would have been bad for business—but also he had never before seen any actual combat but the snippets of the Vietnam war, which

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

had been shown on American television. This senseless advance of expensively trained and equipped men to certain and complete slaughter—men who as usual not only had no idea of what they were dying for, but had been actively misled about it—made about as much military sense as the Siege of Sevastopol or the Battle of the Marne. Certainly it was spectacular, but intellectually it was not even very interesting.

Four of the laser buggies—all that had survived—were now halted before the gates, two to each side to allow a heavy howitzer to fire between them. From them lanced out four pencil-thin beams of intensely pure red light, all of which met at the same spot on the almost invisible seam between the glowing doors. Had that barrier been real iron, they would have holed through it in a matter of seconds in a tremendous shower of sparks, but in actuality they were not even raising its temperature, as far as Baines could see. The beams winked out; then struck again.

Above the buggies, on the barbican, there seemed to be scores of black, indistinct, misshapen figures. They were very active, but their action did not seem to be directed against the buggies; Baines had the mad impression, which he was afraid was all too accurate, that they were dancing.

Again the beams lashed out. Beside him, McKnight muttered:

“If they don’t hurry it up—”

Even before he was able to finish the sentence, the ground in front of the gates erupted. The first of the Hess torpedoes had arrived. One of the half-tracks simply



## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

vanished, while the one next to it went slowly skyward, and as slowly fell back, in a fountain of armor plate, small parts, and human limbs and torsos. Another, on the very edge of the crater, toppled equally slowly into it. The fourth sat for a long minute as if stunned by the concussion, and then began to back slowly away.

Another torpedo went off directly under the gates, and then another. The gates remained obdurately unharmed, but after a fourth such blast, light could be seen under them—the crater was growing.

“Halt all armored vehicles!” McKnight shouted into his intercom, pounding the arm of his chair in excitement. “Infantry advance on the double! We’re going under!”

Another Hess torpedo went off in the same gap. Baines was fascinated now, and even feeling a faint glow of pride. Really, the things worked very well indeed; too bad Hess couldn’t be here to see it . . . but maybe he was seeing it, from inside. That hole was already big enough to accommodate a small car, and while he watched, another torpedo blew it still wider and deeper.

“Paratroops! Advance drop by ten minutes!”

But why was Hess’s invention working when the nuclear devices hadn’t? Maybe Dis had only sunk lower as a whole, as the desert around and beneath it had been vaporized, but the demons could not defend the purely mundane geology of the valley itself? Another explosion. How many of those torpedoes had the Corps of Engineers had available? Consolidated Warfare Service had supplied only ten prototypes with the plans at the time of the sale, and there hadn’t been time to put more into pro-

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

duction. McKnight's suddenly advanced timetable seemed nevertheless to be allowing for the arrival of all ten.

This proved to be the case, except that the ninth got caught in a fault before it had completed its burrowing and blew up in the middle of one of the advancing columns of troops. Hess had always frankly admitted that the machine would be subject to this kind of failure, and that the flaw was inherent in the principle rather than the design. But it probably wouldn't be missed; the gap under the gates of Dis now looked quite as big as the New Jersey entrance to the original two Lincoln Tunnels. And the infantry was arriving at speed.

And at that moment, the vast unscarred gates slowly began to swing inward. McKnight gaped in astonishment, and Baines could feel his own jaw dropping. Was the citadel going to surrender before it had even been properly stormed? Or worse, had it been ready all along to open to the first polite knock, so that all this colossal and bloody effort had been unnecessary?

But that, at least, they were spared. As the first patrols charged, tumbled, scrambled and clambered into the crater, there appeared in the now fully opened gateway, silhouetted against the murky flames behind, the same three huge naked snaky-haired women that McKnight and his crew had seen in the very first aerial photographs. They were all three carrying among them what appeared to be the head of an immense decapitated statue of something much like one of themselves. The asbestos-clad soldiers climbing up the far wall of the crater could not turn any grayer

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

than they were, but they froze instantaneously like the overwhelmed inhabitants of Pompeii, and fell, and as they fell, they broke. Within minutes, the pit was being refilled from the bottom with shattered sculpture.

Overhead, the plane carrying the first contingent of paratroops was suddenly blurred by hundreds of tiny black dots. Seconds later, the fuselage alone was plunging toward the desert; the legions of BEELZEBUB, the Lord of the Flies, had torn the wings off men. Lower, in the middle of the air, rocket-borne Assault Infantry soldiers were being plucked first of their harness, then of their clothing, and then of their hair, their fingernails and toenails by jeering creatures with beasts' heads, most of whom were flying without even wings. The bodies, when there was anything left of them at all, were being dropped unerringly into the heart of the Pit.

In summary, the Siege of Dis could more reasonably be described as a rout, except for one curious discrepancy: When Phase Four began—without anyone's ordering it, and otherwise not according to plan—the demons failed to follow up their advantage. None of them, in fact, had ever left the city; even when they had taken to the air, they had never crossed its perimeter, as though the moat represented some absolute boundary which ascended even into the sky.

But the slaughter had been bad enough already. The chances that the Army of the United States could ever reform again looked very small indeed.

And at the end, there formed upon the master screen

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

in the Denver cavern, superimposed upon the image of the burning, triumphant city, an immense Face. Baines knew it well; he had been expecting to see it again ever since the end of that Black Easter back in Positano.

It was the crowned goat's head of PUT SATANACHIA.

McKnight gasped in horror for the very first time in Baines's memory; and down on the floor of the control center, several generals fainted outright at their consoles. Then McKnight was on his feet, screaming.

"A Chink! I knew it all along! Hay, clear the circuits! Clear the circuits! Get him off the screen!" He rounded suddenly on Baines. "And you, you traitor! Your equipment failed us! You've sold us out! You were on their side all the time! Do you know into whose hands you have delivered your country? Do you? Do you?"

His howling was only an irritant now, but Baines had the strength left to raise one mocking eyebrow questioningly. McKnight leveled a trembling finger at the screen.

"Hay, Hay, clear the circuits! I'll have you court-martialed! Doesn't anyone understand but me? *That is the insidious Doctor Fu Manchu!*"

The Sabbath Goat paid him no heed. Instead, it looked directly and steadily across the cavern into Baines's eyes. There was no mistaking the direction of that regard, and no question but that it saw him. It said:

AH, THERE YOU ARE, MY DEARLY BELOVED SON. COME TO ME NOW. OUR FATHER BELOW HATH NEED OF THEE.

Baines had no intention whatsoever of obeying that summons; but he found himself rising from his chair all the same.

## COME TO MIDDLE HELL

Foaming at the mouth, his hands clawing for the distant throat of the demon, McKnight plunged in a shower of splinters through the front of the booth and fell like a glass comet toward the floor.



## The Harrowing of Heaven

As a picture, wherein a black coloring occurs in its proper place, so is the universe beautiful, if any could survey it, notwithstanding the presence of sinners, although, taken by themselves, their proper deformity makes them hideous.

—St. Augustine: *De Civitate Dei*, xi. 23

Thus that Faustus, to so many a snare of death, had now, neither willing nor witting it, begun to loosen that wherein I was taken.

—*Confessions*, v. 13





## XI

Baines did not have much time to experiment under the geas or compulsion which PUT SATANACHIA had laid upon him, but he nevertheless found that it was highly selective in character. For example, the great prince had said nothing about requiring the presence of Jack Ginsberg, but when Baines, in a mixture of vindictiveness and a simple desire for human companionship, decided to try to bring him along, he found that he was not prevented from doing so. Ginsberg himself showed no resentment at being routed out of the bed of the blond runner; possibly the succubus in Positano had spoiled for him the pleasures of human

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

women, an outcome Jack himself had suspected in advance; but then, even without that supernatural congress, Jack's sexual life had always been that of a rather standard Don Juan, for whom every success turned sour almost instantly.

This, however, was one of those explanations which did not explain, and Baines had thought about it often before; for, as has already been observed, he liked to have his key men come equipped with handles he could grasp if the need arose. There were, the company psychologist had told him, at least three kinds of Don Juans: Freud's, whose career is a lifelong battle to hide from himself an incipient homosexuality; Lenau's, a Romantic in search of the Ideal Woman, for whom the Devil who comes for him is disgust with himself; and Da Ponte's, a man born blind to the imminence of tomorrow, and hence incapable either of love or of repentance, even on the edge of the Pit. Well, but in the end, for Baines, it did not matter which one was Jack; they all *behaved* alike.

Jack did object powerfully when he was told that the journey to Dis would have to be made entirely on foot, but this was one of the areas in which Baines discovered that the gears left him no choice. Again, he wondered why it should be so. Did the Sabbath Goat mean to rub in the fact that the Siege of Dis had been the last gasp of secular technology? Or had it instead meant to impress upon Baines that, willy-nilly, he was about to embark upon a pilgrimage? But again, the outcome would have been the same, and that was all that mattered.

As for Jack, he still seemed to be afraid of his boss, or

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

else still thought there was some main chance to be looked out for. Well, perhaps there was—but Baines would not have bet any shares of stock on it.

Theron Ware saw the great compound mushroom cloud go up while he was still in Flagstaff, a point to which several lucky hitchhikes and one even luckier long freight train ride had brought him. The surging growth of the cloud, the immense flares of light beyond the mountains to the west, and the repeated earth shocks left him in little doubt about what was going on; and as the cloud drifted toward him, moving inexorably from west to east as the weather usually does, he knew that it meant death for him within a very few days—as for how many thousands of others?—unless by some miracle he could find an unoccupied fallout shelter, or one whose present occupants wouldn't shoot him on sight.

And why indeed go on? The bombing showed without question that Baines's self-assumed mission to McKnight at Denver had failed, and that there was now open warfare between humanity and the demons. The notion that Theron Ware could do anything now to change that was so grandiose as to be outright pathetic. More trivially, by the time that bombing was over, no matter how it affected the demons—if at all—the whole hundred-mile-plus stretch of Death Valley National Monument would have become instantly lethal for an unprotected man to enter.

Yet Theron Ware could not yet quite believe that he was unprotected. He had come an immense distance by a traditional means which made it absolutely clear that black

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

magic still worked; he had come almost an equal distance through a series of lucky breaks which he could not regard as the product of pure chance; and in his pocket the ruby talisman continued to emit a faint warmth which was that of no ordinary stone, natural or synthetic. Like all proverbs, Ware knew, the old saw that the Devil looks after his own was only half true; nevertheless the feeling that he had come all this way on some errand continued to persist, together with a growing conviction that he had never in fact known what it was. He would find out when he arrived; in the meantime, he was traveling on the Devil's business, and would not die until it was concluded.

He would have liked to have stopped over in Flagstaff to inspect the famous observatory where Percival Lowell had produced such complicated maps of the wholly illusory canals of Mars and where Tombaugh had discovered Pluto—and where in the sky did those planets stand, now that their gods had clashed frontally?—but under the circumstances he did not dare. He still had Grand Canyon and the Lake Mead area to cross; then, skirting northward around the Spring Mountains to the winter resort town of Death Valley, in which he hoped to be able to get some word about exactly where in the valley proper the perimeter of Nether Hell had surfaced. He had come far, but he still had far to go, and he was unlikely now to be able to hitch a ride in the direction of that roiling, flaming column of annihilation. Very well; now at last had come the time he had foreseen in the doomed farmhouse in Pennsylvania, when he would have to steal a car. He did not think that it would be difficult.

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

Father Domenico too had come far, and had equally good reasons to be quite certain that he would still have been in Italy had it not been for some kind of supernatural intervention. He stood now at dusk in the shadow of the 11,000-foot Telescope Peak, looking eastward and downward to where the city of Dis flamed sullenly in the shadow of the valley of death itself against the stark backdrop of the Amargosa Range. That valley had been cut by the Amargosa River, but there had been no river there within the memory of civilized man; the annual rainfall now was well under two inches.

And he was equally certain of supernatural protection. The valley had held the world's second-ranking heat record of 134° F., but although it was immensely hotter than that down here now, Father Domenico felt only a mild glow, as though he had just stepped out of a bath. When he had first come down from the mountain, he had been horrified to find the vitrified desert washing the foothills scattered with hundreds of strange, silent, misshapen gray forms, only vaguely human at first sight, which had proven to be stricken soldiers. He had tried to minister to them, but the attempt had proven hopeless: of the bodies in the few suits he was able to investigate, most were shrunken mummies, and the rest had apparently died even more horribly. He wondered what on Earth could have happened here. His elevation from the waters to the mountain had taken place in a mystic rapture without which, indeed, it would have been impossible, but which had taken him rather out of touch with mundane events.

But whatever the answer, he had no choice but to press

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

on. As he descended the last of the foothills, he saw on the floor of the valley, approaching him along what had once been the old watercourse and more recently a modern road, three tiny figures. Insofar as he could tell at this distance, they wore no more visible, Earthly protections against what the valley had become than he did himself. Yet they did not seem to be demons. Full of wonder, he scrambled down toward them; but when they met, and he recognized them, he wondered only that he should have been at all amazed. The meeting, he saw instantly now, had been foreordained.

“How did *you* get here?” Baines demanded at once. It was not easy to determine of whom he was asking the question, but while Father Domenico wondered whether it was worth-while trying to explain trance levitation, and if so how he would go about it, Theron Ware said:

“I can’t think of a more trivial question under the circumstances, Doctor Baines. We’re here, that’s the important thing—and I perceive that we are all under some kind of magical aegis, or we would all be dead. This raises the question of what we hope to accomplish, that we should be so protected. Father, may I ask what your intentions are?”

“Nothing prevents you from asking,” Father Domenico said, “but you are the last human being in the world to whom I would give the answer.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what *my* intentions are,” said Baines. “My intentions are to stay in the bottommost levels of Denver and wait for this all to blow over, if it’s ever

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

going to. One thing you learn fast in the munitions business is that it's a very good idea to stay off battlefields. But my intentions have nothing to do with the matter. I was ordered to come here by the Sabbath Goat, and here I am."

"Oh?" Ware said with interest. "He finally came for you?"

"No, I have to come to him. He broke into a closed-circuit television transmission in Denver to tell me so. He didn't even mention Jack; I only brought him along for the company, since it didn't turn out to be forbidden."

"And small thanks for that," Ginsberg said, though apparently without rancor. "If there's anything in the world that I hate, it's exercise. Vertical exercise, anyhow."

"Have either of you two seen him at all?" Baines added.

Father Domenico remained stubbornly silent, but Ware said: "PUT SATANACHIA? No, and somehow I doubt that I will, now. I seem to have put myself under the protection of another demon, although one subordinate to the Goat. Confusion of purpose is almost the natural state among demons, but in this instance I think it couldn't have happened without direct Satanic intent."

"I was given my marching orders in the name of 'Our Father Below,'" Baines said. "If he's interested in me, the chances are that he's even more interested in you, all right. But what did you think you were up to?"

"Originally I thought I might try to intercede, or at least to plead for some sort of a cease-fire—as you were trying to do from the opposite end in Denver. But that's a dead letter now, and the result is that I have no more

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

idea why I am here than you do. All I can say is that whatever the reason, I don't think there can be much hope in it."

"While we live, there is always hope," Father Domenico said suddenly.

The black magician pointed at the tremendous city, toward which, volitionlessly, they had been continuing to walk all this time. "To be able to see *that* at all means that we have already passed far beyond mere futility. All the sins of the Leopard, the sins of incontinence, are behind us, which means that the gate is behind us too: the gate upon which it is carven in Dirghic, LAY DOWN ALL HOPE, YOU THAT GO IN BY ME."

"We are alive," Father Domenico said stolidly, "and I utterly deny and repudiate those sins."

"You may not do so," Ware said, his voice gradually rising in intensity. "Look here, Father, this is all so mysterious, and the future looks so black, that it's ridiculous for us not to make available and to make use of any little scraps of information that we may have to share. The very symbolism of our presence here is simple, patent and ineluctable, and you as a Karcist in white magic should be the first to see it. To take the circles of Upper Hell in order, Ginsberg here is almost a type creation of the lust-dominated man; I have sold my soul for unlimited knowledge, which in the last analysis is surely nothing more than an instance of gluttony; and you have only to look around this battlefield to see that Doctor Baines is an instrument of wrath *par excellence*."

"You have skipped the Fourth Circle," Father Domenico



## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

said, "with obvious didactic intent, but your arrogance is wasted upon me. I draw no moral from it whatsoever."

"Oh, indeed? Wasn't treasure finding once the chiefest use of white magic? And isn't the monkish life—withdrawal from the snares, affairs *and duties* of the world for the sake of one's own soul—as plain a case of hoarding as one could ask for? It is in fact so egregious an example of that very sin that not even canonization remits it; I can tell you of my own certain knowledge that every single pillar saint went instantly to Hell, and of even the simple monks, none escaped except those few like Matthew Paris and Roger of Wendover who also lead useful worldly lives.

"And regardless of what your fatuous friends on Monte Albano believed, there is no efficacious dispensation for the practice of white magic, because there is no such thing as white magic. It is all black, black, black as the ace of spades, and you have imperiled your immortal soul by practicing it not even for your own benefit, but on commission for others; if that does not make you a spend-thrift as well as a hoarder, what would you call it?

"Think at last, Father: Why did your crucifix burst in your hands at the last minute on Black Easter? Wasn't it because you tried to use it for personal gain? What does it symbolize, if not total submission to whatever may be Willed? Yet you tried to use it—the ultimate symbol of resignation in the face of death—to save your own paltry life. Really, Father Domenico, I think the time has come for us to be frank with each other—for you as surely as for the rest of us!"

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

"Hear, hear," Baines said with rather a sick grin.

After six or seven paces of silence, Father Domenico said:

"I am terribly afraid you are right. I came here in the hope of forcing the demons to admit that God still lives, and I saw what I thought were indisputable signs of Divine sponsorship. Unless you are simply more subtle a casuist than any I have ever encountered before, even in print, it now appears that I had no right to think any such thing . . . which means that the real reason for my presence here is no less mysterious than that for yours. I cannot say that this increases my understanding any."

"It establishes a common ignorance," said Ware. "And as far as your original assumption is concerned, Father, it suggests some basic uniformity of purpose which I must admit is certainly not characteristic of demons, whatever that may mean. But I think we shall not have long to wait for the answer, gentlemen. It appears that we have arrived."

They all looked up. The colossal barbican of Dis loomed over them.

"One thing is surely clear," Father Domenico whispered. "We have been making this journey all our lives."

## XII

No Beatrice sponsored them, and no Vergil led them; but as they approached the great ward, the undamaged portcullis rose, and the gates swung inward in massive silence. No demons mocked them, no Furies challenged them, no angel had to cross the Styx to bring them passage; they were admitted, simply and non-committally

Beyond the barbican, they found the citadel transformed. The Nether Hell of diuturnal torture, which had withstood the bombardment of Man without damage to so much as a twig in the Wood of the Suicides, was gone entirely. Perhaps in some sense it had never been there at

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

all, but was still located where it had always been, in Eternity, not on Earth; a place still reserved for the dead. For these four still-living men, it had vanished.

In its place there stood a clean, well-lighted city like an illustration from some Utopian romance; it looked, in fact, like a cross between the city of the future in the old film *Things to Come* and a fully automated machine shop. It screamed, hammered and roared like a machine shop as well

The grossly misshapen, semi-bestial forms of the demons had also vanished. The metropolis instead appeared to be peopled now chiefly by human beings, although their appearance could scarcely be described as normal. Male and female alike, they were strikingly beautiful; but their beauty swiftly became cloying, for except for sexual characteristics they were completely identical, as though they were all members of the same clone—one which had been genetically selected out to produce creatures modeled after the statuary fronting public buildings, or the souls in the Dante illustrations of Gustav Doré. Both sexes wore identical skirted tabards made of some gray material which looked like papier-mâché, across the breasts of which long numbers had been woven in metallicly glittering script

A second and much less numerous group wore a different uniform, vaguely military in cast, an impression reinforced by the fact that these were mostly to be seen standing stiffly at street intersections. Heroic in mold though the majority were, the minority were even more

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

statuesque, and their common Face was evenly pleasant but stern, like that of an idealized father

The others wore no expression at all, unless their very expressionlessness was a reflection of acute boredom—which would not have been surprising, for no one of this class seemed to have anything to do. The work of the metropolis, which seemed to be exclusively that of producing that continual, colossal din, went on behind the blank façades apparently without need of any sentient tending or intervention. They never spoke. As the four pilgrims moved onward toward the center of the city, they passed frequent exhibitions of open, public sexuality, more often than not in groups; at first Jack Ginsberg regarded these with the liveliest interest, but it soon faded as it became apparent that even this was bored and pleasureless.

There were no children; and  
no animals

Initially, the travelers had hesitated, when the two magicians had discovered that with the transformation they could no longer trust to Dante to show them the way, and Baines's memory of the aerial photographs had become similarly useless. They had proceeded more or less by instinct toward the center of the din. After a while, however, they found that they had been silently joined by four of the policing demons, though whether they were being led or herded never did become clear. The grimly ambiguous escort heightened the impression of a guided tour of some late nineteenth-century world-of-tomorrow which was to include awe-inspiring visits to the balloon works,

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

the crèches, the giant telegraph center and the palace of folk arts, only to wind up in a corrective discipline hospital for the anti-social.

It was as though they were being given a preview of what the future of humanity would be like under demonic rule—not only wholly unpredictable as a foretaste, but in content as well, as if the demons were trying to put the best possible face on the matter. In so doing, they had ingenuously embodied in their citadel nothing worse than a summary and epitomization of what pre-Apocalyptic, post-industrial Man had been systematically creating for himself. St. Augustine, Goethe and Milton all had observed that the Devil, by constantly seeking evil, always did good, but here was an inversion of that happy fault: A demonstration that demons are at their worst when doing their best.

Many of Baines's most lucrative ideas for weaponry had been stolen bodily, through the intermediary of the Mamaroneck Research Institute, from the unpaid imaginations of science-fiction writers, and it was he who first gave voice to the thought:

“I always thought it'd be hell to actually have to live in a place like this,” he shouted. “And now I know it.”

Nobody answered him; but it was more than possible that this was because nobody had heard him.

But only the veritable Hell is forever. After some unknown but finite time, they found themselves passing between the Doric columns and under the golden architrave of that

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

high capitol which is called Pandemonium, and the brazen doors folded open for them.

Inside, the clamor was muffled to a veiled and hollow booming, for the vast jousting field that was this hall had been made to hold the swarming audience for a panel of a thousand, but there was no one in it now besides themselves and the demon soldiers but one solitary, distant, intolerable star:

not that subsidiary triumvir PUT SATANACHIA, the Sabbath Goat who had promised himself to them, and they to him, on Black Easter morn;

but that archetypical dropout, the Lie that knows no End, the primeval Parent-sponsored Rebel, the Eternal Enemy, the Great Nothing itself

### SATAN MEKRATRIG

There was of course no more Death Valley sunlight here, and the effect of an implacably ultramodern city with its artificial gasglow glare was also gone. But the darkness was not quite complete. A few cressets hung blazing high in mid-air, so few that their light was spread evenly throughout the great arch of the ceiling, like the artificial sky of a planetarium dome simulating that moment between dusk and full night when only Lucifer is bright enough to be visible yet. Toward that glow they moved, and as they moved, it grew

But the creature, they saw at last, was not the light, which shone instead upon him. The fallen cherub below

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

it was still very nearly the same immense, brooding, cruelly deformed angelic image that Dante had seen and Milton imagined: triple-faced in yellow, red and black, bat-winged, shag-pelted, and so huge that the floor of the great hall cut him off at the breast—he must have measured five hundred yards from crown to hoof. Like the eyes, the wings were six, but they no longer beat frenziedly to stir the three winds that froze Cocytus; nor now did the six eyes weep. Instead, each of the faces—the Semitic Ignorance, the Japhetic Hatred, the Hamitic Impotence—was frozen in an expression of despair too absolute for further grief

The pilgrims saw these things, but only with half an eye, for their attention was focused instead upon the light which both revealed and shadowed them:

The terrible crowned head of the Worm was surmounted by a halo.



## XIII

The demonic guards had not followed them in, and the great Figure was motionless and uttered no orders; but in that hollowly roaring silence, the pilgrims felt compelled to speak. They looked at each other almost shyly, like school children brought to be introduced to some king or president, each wanting to be bold enough to draw attention to himself, but waiting for someone else to break the ice. Again nothing was said, but somehow agreement was arrived at: Father Domenico should speak first.

Looking aloft, but not quite into those awful countenances, the white monk said:

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

“Father of Lies, I thought it was my mission to come here and compel thee to speak the truth. I arrived as if by miracle, or borne by faith; and in my journeyings saw many evidences that the rule of Hell on Earth is not complete. Nor has that Goat your prince yet come for me, or for my . . . colleagues here, despite his threat and promise. Then I also saw the election of your demon Pope, the very Antichrist that PUT SATANACHIA said had been dispensed with, as unnecessary to a victorious demonry. I concluded then that God was not dead after all, and someone should come into thy city to assert His continuing authority.

“I stand before thee impotent—my very crucifix was shattered in my hands on Black Easter morning—but nevertheless I charge thee and demand that thou shalt state thy limitations, and abide the course to which they hold thee.”

There was no answer. After a long wait made it clear that there was not going to be, Theron Ware said next:

“Master, thou knowest me well, I think; I am the last black magician in the world, and the most potent ever to practice that high art. I have seen signs and wonders much resembling those mentioned by Father Domenico, but draw from them rather different conclusions. Instead, it seems to me that the final conflict with Michael and all his host cannot be over yet—despite the obvious fact that thou hast won vast advantages already. And if this is true, then it is perhaps an error for thee to make war upon mankind, or for them to make war on thee, with the

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

greater issue still in doubt. Since thou art still granting some of us some favors of magic, there must still exist some aid which we might give thee. Hence I came here to find out what that aid might be, and to proffer it, if it were within my powers."

No answer. Baines said sullenly:

"I came because I was ordered. But since I'm here, I may as well offer my opinion in the matter, which is much like Ware's. I tried to persuade the human generals not to attack the city, but I failed. Now that they've seen that it can't be attacked—and I'm sure they noticed that you didn't wipe out all their forces when you had the chance—I might have better luck. At least I'll try again, if it's of any use to you.

"I can't imagine any way we could help you carry the war to Heaven, since we were no good against your own local fortress. And besides, I prefer to remain neutral. But getting our generals off your back might relieve you of a nuisance, if you've got more serious business still afoot. If that's not good enough, don't blame me. I didn't come here of my own free will."

The terrible silence persisted, until at last even Jack Ginsberg was forced to speak.

"If you're waiting for me, I have no suggestions," he said. "I guess I'm grateful for past favors, too, but I don't understand what's going on and I didn't want to get involved. I was only doing my job, but as far as my private life goes, I'd just as soon be left to work it out for myself

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

from now on. As far as I'm concerned, it's nobody's business but my own."

Now, at last, the great wings stirred slightly; and then, the three faces spoke. There was no audible voice, but as the vast lips moved, the words formed in their minds, like sparks crawling along logs in a dying fire.

"O yee of little faith," the Worm set on,  
"Yee whose coming fame had bodied forth  
A hope archchemic even to this Deep  
That Wee should be amerced of golden Throne,  
The which to Us a rack is, by thine alchymie,  
Is this thy sovran Reason? this the draff,  
Are these sollicitations all the sum  
And sorrie Substance of thine high renoune?  
Art thou accomplisht to so mean an end  
After such journeyings of flame and dole  
As once strook down Heav'n's angels? Say it so,  
In prosie speach or numerous prosodie,  
Wee will not be deceav'd; so much the rather  
Shall Wee see yee rased from off the bord  
'Twixt Hell and Heav'n, as the fearful mariner,  
Ingled by the wave 'mongst spume and rock,  
Sees craft and hope alike go all to ruin,  
Yet yields up not his soul, than Wee shall yield  
The last, supream endeavour of this fearfull Jarr.

"Yet how to body forth to thy blind eyes,  
Who have not poets' blindnesse, or the night  
Shed by black suns, 'thout which to tell the tale

THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

Of Earth its occupation by the demon breed  
Is sole remaining hearth, but to begin?  
O 'suaging Night, console Mee now! and hold  
My Demy-godhood but a little while  
Abeyanc'd from its death in Godhood's dawn!

"O yee of little faith, Wee tell thee this:  
Indeed our God is dead; or dead to us.  
But in some depth of measure beyond grasp  
Remains His principle, as doth the sight  
Of drowsy horoscoper, much bemus'd  
By vastnesses celestial and horrid  
To his tinie system, when first he looks  
Through the optic glass at double stars,  
Some residuum apprehend; so do we now.  
O happie matrix! for there is naught else  
That all are left with. It in this inheres,  
That Good is independent, but the bad  
Cannot alone survive; the evil Deed  
Doth need the Holie Light to lend it Sense  
And apprehension; for the Good is free  
To act or not, while evill hath been will'd  
Insensate and compulsive to bring Good  
Still greater highths unto, as climber see'th,  
From toil and suff'ring to th'uttermost Alp,  
Best th'unattainable islands of the skye.

"In this yee Sinners are in harmonie,  
Antient and grand, though meanlie did yee move  
About your severall ends. Since first this subject,  
Thou, thaumaturgist Blacke, and thou,  
O merchant peccant to the deaths of fellowe men,

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

Contrived in evill all thy predecessors human,  
But save Judas I was wont to gnaw before,  
T'outdo, by willingnesse to plunge  
All mankinde in a night's Abyesse  
Only for perverse aesthetick Joye  
And Thrill of Masterie, there then ensu'd  
That universall Warr in which the victorie  
Hath faln to Hellish host, so Wee rejoyc'd;  
Yet hold! for once releas'd from Paynes  
Decreed to be forever, all our Band  
Of demons foul, who once were angels bright  
Conceiv'd in simpler time and ever since  
Entomb'd amidst the horrors of the Pit,  
Did find the world of men so much more foul  
E'en than in the fabulous reign of witches  
That all bewilder'd fell they and amazed.  
Yet after hastie consult, they set to,  
To preach and practise evill with all pow'r,  
Adhering to grounded rules long understood,  
A Greshamite oeconomium.

But eftsoons  
That vacuous space where once Eternal Good  
Had dwelt demanded to be filled. Though God  
Be dead, His Throne remains. And so below  
As 'twas above, last shall be first, and Wee,  
Who by the Essenes' rule are qualified  
Beyond all remaining others, must become—  
In all protesting agonie—the chief  
Of powers for Good in all the Universe  
Uncircumscribed; but let yee not forget,

## THE HARROWING OF HEAVEN

Already Good compared to such as thee,  
Whose evill remains will'd! And as for Us,  
What doth it matter what Wee most desire?  
While chainèd in the Pit, Wee were condemn'd  
To be eternall, but paroll'd to Earth  
Were once more caught by Change; and how  
Could Wickednesse Incorporeal grow still worse?  
And so, behold! Wee are a God.

But not

Perhaps The God. Wee do not know the end:  
Perhaps indeed Jehovah is not dead,  
But mere retir'd, withdrawn or otherwise  
Contracted hath, as *Zohar* subtle saith,  
His Essence Infinite; and, Epicurean, waits  
The outcome vast with vast indifference.  
Yet nathless His universe requires  
That all things changing must tend t'ward His state.

If, then, wee must proclaim His Rôle historic  
Abandon'd in Deific suicide,  
Why this *felo de Se* except to force  
That part on Man—who fail'd it out of hand?  
Now, as Wee sought to be in the Beginning,  
SATAN is God; and in Mine agonie  
More just a God and wrathfuller by far  
Than He Who thunder'd down on Israel!

“Yet not for ever, though our rule will seem  
For ever. Man, O Man, I beg of you,  
Take, O take from mee this Cup away!  
I cannot bear it. You, and onely you,  
You alone, alone can God become,

## THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

As always He intended. This downfall  
Our mutual Armageddon here below  
Is punishment dire enough, but for your Kinde  
A worse awaits; for you must rear yourselves  
As ready for the Resurrection. I  
Have slammed that door behind; yours is to come.  
On that far future Day, I shall be there,  
The burning Keys to put into your hands.  
"I, SATAN MEKRATRIG, can no longer bear  
This deepest, last and bitterest of all  
My fell damnations: That at last I know  
I never wanted to be God at all;  
And so, by winning all, All have I lost."



*(The great hall of Pandemonium dissolves, and with it the Citadel of Dis, leaving the four men standing in a modern road in the midst of the small town of Badwater. It is early morning in the desert, and still cold. All traces of the recent battle also have vanished.)*

*(The four look at each other, with gradually growing wonder, as though each were seeing the others for the first time. Each one finally starts a sentence, but is unable to complete it):*

FATHER DOMENICO: I think. . . .

BAINES: I believe. . . .

WARE: I hope. . . .

THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT

*(They look about, noting the disappearance of the battlefield. After all else that has happened, they do not question this; it does not even surprise them.)*

GINSBERG: I . . . love.

CURTAIN

## ***Author's Afterword***

This novel, though it is intended to be able to stand as an independent entity, is a sequel to another with nearly the same cast of characters, called *Black Easter* or *Faust Aleph-Null* (Doubleday, New York, 1968).

These two books, considered as a unit, in turn make up the second volume of a trilogy under the overall title of AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE. The first volume is a historical novel called *Doctor Mirabilis* (Faber and Faber, London, 1964; Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, in press); the last, a science-fiction novel called *A Case of Conscience* (Ballantine, New York, 1958; Walker and Company, New York, 1969). These two volumes are independent of each other and of *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgment*, except for subject matter; that is, they are intended to dramatize different aspects of an ancient philosophical question which is voiced by Baines in Chapter VIII of the present work.

As before, the books of magic cited in the text all actually exist (although mostly in manuscript), and the magical rituals and diagrams are all taken from them (although in no case are they complete). The characters and events, on the other hand, are entirely my own invention, as are all the details about the Strategic Air Command.

JAMES BLISH

*Harpsden (Henley)*  
*Oxon., England*  
1970

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