



## The Sculptor

a short story by Garry Kilworth

Niccolò reached the pale of the Great Desert at noon on the third day. He dismounted and led his horse and seventeen pack camels towards the last water he would see for six weeks. There at the river's edge they drank. Some would have said that so many camels was an expensive luxury, but Niccolò knew the value of too many over too few. Only eight of them were carrying the statuettes. Of the remaining camels, two were loaded with his and his mount's personal supplies, three were carrying water, and three were loaded with fodder to feed the other camels. The last camel was packing fodder for the fodder-carriers but not for itself. It was possible that this camel, or one of the others, would die of starvation before he reached the Tower.

Niccolò had had to call a halt at seventeen. When he had consulted the sage, Cicaro, the old man had recommended that to ensure survival he take an endless string of camels with him. Distance, food-chains, energy levels, temperatures, humidities, moisture loss - when all the relevant information had been given to Cicaro, and the calculations made, the result was camels stretching into infinity. Impossibilities were not the concern of the sage. He merely applied his mathematics to the problem and gave you the answer.

At least they were flesh and blood. Towards the end of the journey Niccolò could begin eating them, if it became necessary. At that moment he found the thought distasteful, though he was no sentimentalist, and had refrained from even naming his horse. Niccolò knew, however, that when it came to the choice between starvation or butchering one of the beasts, whatever he promised himself now, he would use the knife without hesitation. He had eaten worms, even filled his stomach with *dirt*, when he had been without food. Man is a wretched creature when brought to the level of death. When he has shed his scruples he will eat his own brother, let alone a horse or a camel.

Yet there was a mystery there. Man also perplexes himself, Niccolò thought, as he filled his canteens from the river. When he and Arturo had almost run out of water in this very desert, they had fought like dogs for the last few mouthfuls, would have killed each other for them. Then rescue had come, at the last moment, preventing murder.

Yet, not two months afterwards, Arturo ironically committed suicide, hung himself in the back room of a way station, for love of a whore.

Why does a man fight tooth and nail to live one day, and kill himself the next? It was as if life was both precious and useless, not at the same time, but in different contexts. Life changed its values according to emotional colours. In the desert, dying of thirst, Arturo had only one thought in mind - to *live*. It had been a desperate, savage thought, instinctive.

Yet that instinct had vanished when Arturo had climbed on that ale barrel and tied a window sash around his neck. Why hadn't it sprung out from that place in which it was lurking, waiting to perform, to kill

Let us know what you think of **infinity plus** - e-mail us at:  
[sf@infinityplus.co.uk](mailto:sf@infinityplus.co.uk)

**support this site - buy books through these links:**  
[A+ Books: an insider's view of sf, fantasy and horror  
amazon.com \(US\)](#) | [Internet Bookshop \(UK\)](#)

[top of page](#)  
[ [home page](#) | [fiction](#) | [non-fiction](#) | [other stuff](#) | [A to Z](#) ]  
[ [infinity plus bookshop](#) | [search infinity plus](#) ]