

VOLUME THREE:
ARGO

"Sine Patre, neque Finem,
Tu Melchisedech ordinum,
Panem proferens et Vinum."

[Bascom Bagby. Letters After I Am Dead.]

He, whoever he was, stirred out of a sick sleep into a frozen and fitful fear of falling. He supposed that he was a man of the human sort, as he usually was when he woke up in such a turmon. It seemed as if he had always had these horrifying awakenings, and now as usual there was a horrifying reason for it.

His stirring had caused him to sup another notch and to dislodge something else of whatever was holding him up. And what had woke him up was the sound of substance falling, through the frozen air, to a very great distance down. He felt insecure, and he realized that most of what he had been lying on had now vanished into space.

He was in a shallow notch of the very high reaches of an ice-coated cliff. And that cliff was slick. There was an icy gale blowing, and ice was falling in glops of many tons, falling and falling for a mile or more. He seemed to be in a sleeping bag that threatened to spill him out upside down. An ice support was eroding and breaking away under him, and the bottom of the cliff was out of sight in the darkness. Whenever he shifted to get into a more safe position, he dislodged more of his support.

"Kaloosh!" came the sound when the first and largest portion of the dislodged snow-ice finally hit far below. He had changed position three times while it fell. It was a thousand meters or more straight down. His head was out over the abyss and he gawked down into the white darkness.

White darkness? Yes, such frosty surroundings do provide a white darkness at night.

"If I am a man, I can reason," he said, and his voice dislodged still more of his support. His voice had been doing something else, and his out-loud comment had provided a jarring conflict. Now he seemed to be tilting downward on the disappearing icy ledge at an angle of more than sixty degrees. "If I am a man, I can reason," he said soundlessly this time, being careful to set up no disturbance with the vibration of his voice. "If I can reason, I need not be afraid. If I am afraid of such a little thing as death by falling, then it will not matter whether I fall. What falls will be worthless. (Who is singing that damned song?) If I were afraid, it would not be my own heroic self that fell. If it is not my own heroic self, it will not matter whether it dies. There is a person who is trying to remind the me-in-another-place to awaken to further life and to further inventions. He reminds me that I can say to bodily death 'I will go with you, only not yet'. Man, are you ever caught in a 'continued in next chapter' hiatus! The suspense, the suspense! What will we do about the suspense!"

And somebody was still singing that damned song:

"I'm stuck in peril most extreme,

Hi, Ho!

On morning danger is the theme!

Hi, Ho!

My enemies will soon prevail.
Oh where's a bailiff for my bail?
The wind is blowing quite a gale.
My fall will leave me plain un-hale.
I'll bust my head and bust my tail.
Hi, Ho! the gollie wol."

Aw, it was himself singing that stuff. It was the galey wind that gave it its strident tone. So he went with another bit.

"It's great to be young and in danger,
Hi, Ho!

It's great to be young and in danger."

Then he saw that he was not in a sleeping bag at all, but was wrapped only in half a dozen very long and very warm threads. He recognized them as a few combings from the Original Great Fleece of Colchis. So then, wrapped in no matter how few threads of the great fleece, he could not freeze and he could not fall and he could not die. Aye, he had been hung on the cliff in an impossible position by an almost fatal fall. And he had been left there until the next section of the adventure should begin. This was sky-high adventure serial drama he was in, and it was also real as Ragnarok.

He slipped completely then, as he shifted once more, and slid clear off of the precarious ledge or notch. But then he was dangling by one single golden thread out over the abyss and he knew that he was perfectly safe. He turned a fragment of the fleece outward to show its glint, and this quickly brought an answering glint from the still unrisen sun. The fleece and the sun were brothers. The sun now arose, a little bit early, being wakened by the greeting.

Then the man saw his ship very far below, possibly half a mile. It was frozen solid in blue ice, and three monkey-like figures were romping on the tall and ice-sheeted rigging and rejoicing in the dawn. The man saw the entire earth covered with ice, and he marveled at the solidly-frozen birds hanging motionless in the high air, spread-winged and asleep. It was so cold that all physical forces were frozen up and inoperative.

The man flung gold threads of the great fleece upward and climbed up them towards the top of the ice cliffs. He had spent one day climbing up to his ice station, and now he would move more rapidly. There had been nothing wrong at all. It was just that Argonauts, from the hectic life that they lead, do often wake up scrambled and with lost bearings. The man whistled sharply, and the three monkey-like figures came off the tall rigging of the ice-covered ship and boned up the slick and frozen cliffs like inverted cascades. They were wraiths, or at least of a lighter flesh, and they could climb like ascending lightning. They brought ice axes with them, and they were cheerful and ready for any assignment.

Reaching the top of the ice cliff, the man took a work order from the breast of his chlamys and read it. He looked around for what should be there. The three monkey-like seamen had already discovered it and were attacking it with their ice axes. It was a woman frozen in a solid block of ice.

"No job too big, no job too small," the man said in his laughing voice. "Sometimes a dozen jobs a day, from saving a lost cat to saving a lost soul. Oh, this is in the nature of a vacation really, to have been allowed to spend a night on the high cliffs that I love and to carry over the rescue into the bright morning. We appreciate these little leisures when

they come to us. And there is probably a reason for drawing her out of the ice."

The woman was ivory-fair, and her veins as shown through her flesh and the ice were sky blue. The lids of her closed eyes were also of this gentle and ghostly blue, as was the web-like flesh between her toes. The man attacked the encasing pillar of ice as the monkey creatures also were doing. They hacked and split great hunks out of the pillar and quickly sculptured it down almost to the woman.

The woman woke up, and her blue eyes darted here and yon, following the bladed axes. She grinned with her eyes at the magus (the man had already remembered that he was a magus and he was quite close to remembering his own name; morning forgetfulness were only temporary things to one piloting the Ship Itself). The woman grinned with her eyes at the monkey-like creatures also, and they echoed grins back at her. Her people and theirs had once been in close league. There would be complete accord throughout this whole company. The woman seemed to be as near akin to the scampering simians as she was to the magus himself.

The woman cringed with mock horror whenever the axes came too near to her, and she grimaced broadly when, now and then, an axe came absolutely too close and bit her flesh to send out little red gushets on the inside of the ice. These things do happen, however canny is the wielder of the axe. The woman was probably beautiful, and she was wrapped in the blond skin of a female cave-bear. There were primordial and archaic aspects to her appearance, but both the man and the monkey creatures smiled to show that they liked her and the way she looked.

"How did you know where I was?" she talked out of the ice when a crack in the pillar of it allowed her to move her chinless jaw. She spoke with human sound but not with usual words. It was the vocalized thought-speaking that primordial persons use so easily and understand so universally. Later in the morning she would be using usual words, all of the early people being fast learners. She had a swept-back face that was a bit fish-like, and a bit Texas-like, and a bit troll-like. Nice looking, but behind that face she was toothed more massively than are most of the people you know.

"I had a work order to come and get you and wake you up," the man stid, "What a way to run a hotel! Someone leaves an order with the desk clerk to be wakened in forty thousand years and it might not even be the desk clerk on duty when that time comes around. And it was a hard cold journey to come for you. Why couldn't you have used an alarm clock like anyone else?"

"Oh poor you," the woman said, and a lot of her was already out of the ice. She used words at random, but the expressions and messages were clear enough. "I almost feel sorry for you," she was saying, "but I know that you can't really be cold with those golden combings on you. We had heard about them, but we could never find them. Oh poor monkey faces too! But you don't resent having to come and get me, not when we are such good friends as we really are."

"When I'm running The Argo (that's the name of the Ship frozen in the ice below us there), I have quite a few of these work orders to fill," the magus said. "I never know where they come from or why, and some of them do not seem to have much reason. This is the ship that can go where no other ship would ever reach, the ship that can find places that would otherwise be lost forever. But I like to understand my missions as well as I may. Who are

you?"

"Ewaglouwshkoul, of course," said the fair woman with that pleasant big-mouthedness that so many of the older families have. "Who did you think I was?"

"Oh, Little Eva, yes, of course. There's one in every era."

"The Neanderthal Eve, I suppose they would call me, using your own words," she said, beginning herself to use a few real words mixed in with her thought-speaking. "It would be a sort of nickname. But I'm not the first woman of my tribe. I'm the last, I guess. There was only myself, and I underaged, and thirteen of our fellows left, and things were going badly with us. Every day we went out to fight and every day we got whipped. Then our ghostly mentor suggested that some of us should go into cold storage for a very long time, and we would be awakened when things looked more peaceful. I decided that I would go into freeze, and the thirteen fellows all took different courses of action. One or two of them went into freeze also, I think. And some others of them may have survived somewhere. If not, it's a real loss. We have so much to give. I'm sure that there are a lot of my half-blood kindred around, but we'd like to preserve the real thing if we could. Pride in stock, and all of that. I was about to say that everybody knows me, but the everybodies who knew me are mostly dead by now. Since I am returned and refreshed and awake, I will immediately set about the business of having children. They are needed."

"Don't look at me," the man said. "I'm a holy magus. I can't get involved in such things, certainly not with a client on whom I have a work order."

"Oh no, I didn't mean you. It will have to be one of the real ones if possible. But how will I go about it? I'm of an unfallen nature, and besides I'm pretty naive. I was only a child, really, when I had them freeze me in this ice clock. I should have a designated mate, but any of the thirteen would do if one of them were still alive. And there may have been other bands of us who survived somewhere. I don't know whether there is any chance of that or not."

"Were people of other bands also frozen in ice blocks?"

"No. Not all of them anyhow. The report was that most of them said they would tough it out. But I guess that most of them are gone after these forty thousand years. Do you know where there are any more of my kind?"

"No, not exactly," the magus said. "But I believe I do know where there are several half-bloods. And I know where there are a few Groll's Trolls, and they are pretty nearly the same thing. I'm all for the revival of the more talented of the old races. Things were getting a little bit bland without you."

"Does your work order say what you're supposed to do with me, holy magus?"

"It just says to release you from the ice and wake you up, and to take you to any sea port in the world that you designate."

"Do you have very many other work orders today?"

"No. Just a few. I am to pick up a man who has been waiting thirty years for this ship to come. We make a lot of mistakes, but he's a patient man and I believe that he's been enjoying himself. Besides, he's one of our group. He is a Master of the Ship himself. I will just pick him up in a sea port a third of the way around the world, and then he will travel with me on a tour of duty. He is an accomplished seaman, as I am."

"Which sea port is it, magus?"

"Biloxi. It's in Mississippi."

"Those are names that sound a little bit like our kind of talk.

Take me there too then. I don't know much about the different ports you have now. Some of the ports we had would be underwater now, and some of them would be on the mountain tops. If Biloxi is a cosmopolitan place, then there will be seamen of every sort who will come there. I will pick me out one who is the closest to my blood. Soon or late some such will turn up. I'll get me a saloon or a hotel where everybody passes, and finally one of them will come. Papa ran a waterfront place named 'The Old Stone Ship'. We invented ships and seamen, you know. I will find some of my folks somewhere, no matter where I start. And I will save you a trip if you let me off at a port where you are already going."

They all went down the great ice cliff. They blasted the ship out of the ice, and they blasted a passage for it. They opened up a fresh water stream with their explosives, and they filled their water casks from the stream. They gathered dead fish from their blasting and filled their stores. They killed blond cave bears to get bear grease to soften and make supple their frozen lines, and to give a new bear cloak to Eva. The old one was shedding after forty thousand years in the ice. They weighed anchor, and they sailed.

"This ship sails against the wind, doesn't it?" Eva asked as they were high-sea-ing it along. "Do you want it that way, or do you just not know any better?"

"This is the best way, for The Argo," said the magus-man. "It's just like a kite that will rise best against the wind. It goes against the wind and against the waves, and did you ever see a ship move so smoothly and rapidly?"

"Oh often, magus, often," Eva said. "We had such ships, surely, but I was not expecting to see the more degenerate people having them. You've come a long way while I was asleep. It must be a very interesting sort of life, filling every different kind of work order."

"It's quite interesting, Eva. I foresee that I will die while filling one over-interesting order soon, but that is to be expected. But it's a pleasant life, and I do meet interesting people. And now I begin to remember most of it about myself. But sometimes, is one becomes younger, it takes longer to recollect oneself in the morning. But now it all comes to me."

They sailed against the winds and currents to Biloxi.

2

"I will no more believe that there is a do-good ship sailing under the flag of the Kingdom of Colchis, under patent of Divine Intervention, crewed by ancient remnants of the Argonauts and by black giants, sailing cavalierly through time and space and tampering with the future than I will believe in Divine Intervention Itself. Both the Ship and the Divine Interventions are conceits of Melchisedech Duffey the mountebank. But belief in the Ship Argo seems to have become cult belief of the month."

[Elwin K. Elkheart, Secretary-General of WSMA (affiliate of WSMAASRTFM).]

The magus had now attained such clarity that he remembered his own name. He was Melchisedech Himself, the King of Salem, the ship pilot

extraordinary, art dealer and life expert and sometime lover, adventurer into futures, and righter of wrongs. In latter-day contexts, he was sometimes named Melchisedech Duffey. He considered about the three monkey-like or wraithlike seamen who served him; and they were persons that, to some extent, he had made himself. And there were many more than three of them. There were others in the galley, and off-duty here and there. They were good seamen, when actual seamen were not always to be had. Then Duffey considered the ship that he was sailing, the ship that had several times borne the name of The Argo.

Melchisedech had never completely understood this ship, though it was flesh of his flesh and ghost of his ghost. For all of the dozens of different times that he had sailed on her, he could still get lost on her. He could not even be sure how many masts she had: she had as many as were needed for any voyage, and funnels too sometimes. And, also, she had engines, whether or not it was proper that she should have them. There were unfamiliar apartments and mansions on the ship. Sometimes there were cavernous holds with stanchions and stalls for the many nameless animals quartered in them. There were doors to which Melchisedech had no key, and he was not even able to count the number of decks on her. And yet, from a slight distance, she seemed trim and complete and almost small.

Melchisedech would sometimes come into fascinating and memorable rooms and ward rooms and halls on The Argo, and he would not be able to find those same places again. He would come to rooms where large numbers of persons were talking and discussing gravely; he would find places where groups of families, all unknown to him, were living. And there were booths and shops and stores on the ship and even cottage industries were carried on. Nobody really had any good idea of the size of the ship. The Bible gives dimensions of one sort in the Vulgate and of another sort in the Septuagint, and perhaps a third sort in the Hebrew. And there are any number of different cubits, from nine inches to thirty-nine: and who can say which cubit is intended? At berthing, The Argo would go into very small slips designed for boats and not ships. And yet she would sometimes stand up as tall and long as any craft on the ocean.

There was an intimate room, 'The Bread and Wine Room' on The Argo. Very meaningful gatherings were sometimes held there. But, as to the present Argo, she was surely much smaller than once she had been. There was even the opinion that the present Argo was only the ship's boat or the pinnacle of the Great Ship Itself. And yet it carried all the relics and identifications of the great ship: the wheel itself with the piece of the 'talking oak' set into it, the molar of Noah buried in a ship's plank where he had bit down and broken it off in exasperation at the irritations of the voyage, the cote of the Special Dove (it isn't always remembered that this was a prodigious dove with a wing span of more than ten feet), the grist mills and the grain grinders that had been on the big ship for the feeding of all aboard. And the name, and the log book itself, were preserved there. So was the original lantern, the lantern that was so constructed that it would shine around headlands and promontories and corners and show what was beyond them, this while the ship was still a good distance from them.

It was the piece of talking oak in the ship's wheel that would give the history of the ship when it was questioned. The ship, after it had been The Argo or variants of the name those first few times, had been the Navicula Petri or Peter Ship, and it served both as a fishing skiff and as a salvation ship. It had been the Anthony Ship at Actium and had been shamed

there. It had been the flag ship of the great Abd-Aliah of the Sea, and the famous daughter of Abd-Aliah had ridden on her. (Who does not love the description of Abd-Aliah's beautiful daughter. "She had a face round like the moon, and long hair and heavy hips, and black-edged eyes and a slender waist, but she had a tail"?). Abd-Aliah of the Sea sold the Ship to Sindbad of El-Basrah.

There was still a stunning Sindbad Lounge or drinking bar on The Argo, to be in which was like being down underneath sun-drenched water with the air filled with fishes, and with sands like gold. And yet these decorations and appointments were much later than Sindbad's own ownership. The magnificent and oceanic paintings in the lounge were, in fact, painted by Count Finnegan in his youth. That was at a time when the Ship was named the Brunhilde and was owned by evil men. The Holy Argo had the strumpet habit of coming into the ownership of infidels.

The Argo, at different times in its sun-drenched and sea-drenched history, had carried such diverse notables as St. Paul, and the Crusader Godfrey of the Gate, and Mark Twain.

The ship had been named 'Land of Behest'. When St. Brandon sailed her from Ireland to America that first time, when he had encountered the great fish Jascoyne in her, when he had carried the traitor Judas in her (and Judas was not the most hellish passenger ever to travel on the ship).

The Argo had once been a Saracen Ship, but she had been recaptured from the Saracens by King Richard of England. She was named Salle du Roi when Robert of Namur sailed her for another King of England. She was named the Flying Serpent when Willy Jones sailed her in the Moluccas, and the Catherine when Dana Coscuin took her around the Horn. This is only part of the history of the ship that was given by the piece of talking oak to anyone who asked. And there were also whole rooms full of old log books of old voyages, some of which lasted for centuries.

Melchisedech had the opportunity all that morning of reviewing the history of his great ship, there being no one with him on this gusty trip a third of the way around the world except the effigy seamen of his own shaping and the beautiful woman whom he had taken out of the pillar of ice that morning. And this woman was of an unfallen nature and was naive besides, and beside she was too young for him, even in his new green and youthful cycle. And yet there were many people on The Argo unbeknownst to Melchisedech, and some of these made themselves manifest during the morning.

The unaccountable people seemed to be attracted to Eva and her luxury bear skin wrapper and her fair ways. She was very popular, even though she had been out of things for quite a few years. And so had some of the mysterious passengers been out of things for a long time. Everyone who had ever traveled on The Argo had left enough of his essence on her to be able to make a wraithy return to her at any time. Some of these passengers were curiously dated, but others were as current as the day.

Melchisedech was one of the very special persons who sometimes served as pilot of The Argo. There are certain persons, and Melchisedech was one of them, who live extraordinarily long lives. And they must pay for their length of days with extraordinary service. The purpose of The Argo was to sail anywhere in the world and to haul passengers and cargo that would be too dangerous for other ships to handle; to open up dark lands and ports; and to break up secret plots and conspiracies. It was also intended to bring joy and grace to dark places, and to provide entertainment. It was, in the

primary sense, a show boat. And she was also the 'Hope Ship' for unfortunates. "The Argo will come" was a promise among the promises.

There had never been another ship that knew all the seas and islands and mains and promontories (each one with its own goat) of the world, and all the salty sea port towns and raffish ports of call. The Argo also knew all the migrating islands, and all the (still more rare) migrating seas that travel yearly from north to south with all their birds and fish.

What other ship had sailed all the seas: the Timor Sea and the Savu Sea and the Arafura Sea? She had even, according to one old log on her, sailed the Mare Nectaris, and that is on the moon. What other ship had prowled the Molucca Sea and the Ceram Sea and the Banda Sea? What ship had sailed the Java and the Flores and the Bali, the South China and the Andaman and the Coral, the Solomon and the Tisman and the Philippine, the Mindanao and the Visayan and the Sibuyan, the Japan Sea and the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea, the Okhotsk and the Bering and the Kara, the Arabian and the Malabar and the Oman, the Ionian and the Aegean and the Marmora? What memories did these not bring back to Melchisedech, for he had sailed on every one of those. And those were only drops of water in the ocean of all the seas that had been sailed by The Argo.

What other ship had visited all the shores of that most mysterious of all seas, the Sea of the Seven Lost Years?

But do not ask too closely about that Sea of the Lost Years. There were a lot of things about that most strange of all seas that neither Melchisedech nor any of the other Pilots or Captains of The Argo understood. It was not always a contiguous sea. In many ways, it was like the migrating seas. Channels of it ran in the midst of other waters, and some of its shores seemed to be very far inland. They seemed to be river shores and even lake shores at times, rather than sea shores.

There had been one very early morning in Melchisedech's youth, in his fifth or sixth youth, really, when Melchisedech had walked out onto the river shore in St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and had walked right on to a low-lying boat. And it had been the The Argo in disguise. Melchisedech had then traveled on that ship for seven years, but not all of it consecutively with much time out for land adventures (the land adventures do not count in the Seven Lost Years, and neither are they deducted from the years of life).

Melchisedech still encountered many stray days out of the Seven Lost Years, and today may have been one of them. Some of those days were separated from others by very wide spaces in between. And there is another body of water (or anyhow of fluid), the Sea of Amnesia, that is connected with the Seven Lost Years by a hidden strait.

No, no, there was nothing at all notable going on aboard The Argo this morning, except a lot of loud hornpipe music and some carousing and singing and laughing, with Eva and some other girls discovered somewhere on the ship having a lot of fun with fellows of uncertain origin. Back to the memories, Melchisedech. Nothing at all is going on here.

Sea Islands, Mains, Promontories or Capes, Waterfronts. There have been some great waterfront places. Remember the Fanged Fish at Ogopo and the Benevolent Shark at Maule? Or the Drowned Whale, or Costerman's Whalers' Inn or Octopus Joe's, or Salty Dog's Shack-Up House, or the Rusty Harpoon, or O'Brien's Polynesian Palace, Ching Ling Charley's Doss House, the Barbary Ape, the Sulu Ritz, Harold's Blow Fish Ball Room, the Sand Flea, Bidy's Barracuda Bar, the Beacon Club, Kate's Neanderthal Bar, the...

"I wonder if Kate's Neanderthal Bar in Biloxi is for sale?" Eva asked Melchisedech about the time he came to that place in his catalog of memories. It was almost as if she had been reading his mind. She was flushed a bit, from the rapid dancing and carrying on, but always she had her mind open for business. "One of the seamen says that there's always a few of my kind of people around Kate's Neanderthal. That's the kind of place I will have to have. If any of my kind of people are around, then they will come in there sooner or later."

Eva was speaking pretty well now and was using regular words. The Neanderthals (and the Neo-Neanderthals, of whom Eva was one), on account of their funny shaped heads, have an odd word emphasis in the brain, and considerable verbal dexterity. They speak all languages easily, or they seem to. And they read words out of minds as easily as anyone else would read any other thing off of a printed page.

"We will see whether it is for sale," Melchisedech said. "I believe that Kate's Neanderthal Bar is almost always for sale. But what would you do with it?"

"I'd name it Eva's Neanderthal Bar, and I'd run it. It would be a neat place. We ran the first waterfront places, you know."

"I dispute you," Melchisedech said, "but they are in the origins of all of us. When the first people came up out of the first ocean to try to live on land, they sat on the shore to rest and to think about the momentous thing they were doing. And, as they sat there, somebody (probably he was half person and half octopus) brought them a platter of stewed oysters and a bottle of 'Sulu Sea Five Star Whisky'. Then the people, their tongues loosened and their gills flopping and themselves a little bit light in the head from breathing air, began to tell lies, or sea stories as they are sometimes called. These salt water lies formed an essential station in the peoples' coming out of the sea and onto land, in their becoming separate persons instead of the person-in-pieces colony that drifts through all the seas. The story is essential to personhood. Everyone in the world has been told about in story before he comes to live in the non-oceanic flesh. And every story in the world was first told in one of those waterfront places. Except, that is, and of course, those stories that were first told on the Holy Argo Herself."

"On magus man, you are a talker," Eva said, "but the first of the people places were run by my own people. All the better ones were, at least. On every waterfront, there was always an inferior place next door and it was run by a Groll's Troll, and then there was the superior place run by our folks. We always served better stuff and had better music and told better stories than the Groll's Trolls did. They are only a short cut above you folks. But we should all love each other since we are all cousins."

"I will have to get a consignment of tall talk ready for my taking over that place. Nothing interesting ever happens to me, me being in the frost chest for so long, and all that. But I will make up tall stories and say that they happened to me. I will do that if I run the Neanderthal. Come and see me there. Where can I get some business cards printed?"

"There is a little print shop on the Argo somewhere. I forget just where it is, but you might find it."

"Oh, I think I know where it is. And I can find anything," Eva said.

The Argo, still sailing resolutely against the waves and the winds,

came to dock in Biloxi Mississippi about noon on that blessed day. The sandpipers of Horn Island and the Gulls of Ship Island had made a glad noise about it as The Argo went in to dock. And there was news about an event arriving on that Ship.

Every sea-fooder in Biloxi put on another hundred dozen oysters. Every barbecue in town threw another hog in the pit. It would be a lively night that night, with rejoicing, and the reason for it would be more felt than known.

When the hundredth sheep which has been lost is found, there is gala. But when the hundred and first sheep that has been both lost and forgotten appears again, then there is a little special feel about the things. One of the older families was, possibly, going to be reestablished. That was cause enough for celebration.

Besides that, two Argo Masters who had not seen each other for a long time were going to be reunited.

3

Melchisedech Duffey sat and talked with Biloxi Brannagan in Brannagan's private beer garden that afternoon. Biloxi's wife Gertrude kept the pitchers filled and the various plates heaped up to show that she cared.

"Biloxi has been sitting in that same chair, waiting for the Ship to come, for thirty years," Gertrude Brannagan said. "He says that after you are three thousand years old, thirty years is hardly any time at all. The only time he ever gets up is to go to the bathroom. He doesn't even come in the house when it rains. He says it won't rain on him, and it doesn't. He has the rain here under interdict. It's afraid of him. I've often told him that I thought he had missed the Ship, that it must have been in and out of the port while he was sleeping. But he says that he never sleeps, and I don't believe that he does. Oh well, he's never what you'd call very wide awake either. I told him that perhaps he had not left a call for the Ship, or that it had been forgotten. But he insisted that he had left a call, and that calls for that Ship are never forgotten."

"Aye, he left a call," Duffey said, "but it was marked 'No Hurry'."

"And thirty years is certainly no hurry," Gertrude agreed. "Well, I've enjoyed having him all these years, sort of, though there have been a few things lacking. I don't know a more pleasant man anywhere than Biloxi Brannagan."

Brannagan had sandy hair with only a token touch of patriarchal gray mixed in. He could have passed for thirty years old, so 'waiting for The Argo' is not a very aging experience. He had the powerful forearms and clear eyes of an old-style seaman. There was much that was lion-like about both his forearms and his eyes. He would look any man in the world straight in the eye. And he would wither any jackal with a look out of the corner of his eye. He was a cobbler, a digger, a man from Australia. Duffey, in years gone by, had given a talisman to this Brannagan, and this talisman had had its part in the birth of Marie Monahan who was sister's child to Brannagan.

And, as to Gertrude Brannagan, there is an old document that describes her:

"Gertrude was herself a fortress. She was a gulf state lady of forty-five years old, give or take fifteen years either way. She was full-built and pretty, dark and a little bit Frenchy, curly of hair and

smile, voluted and parapeted." She was one of those friendly and smoochy lidics, and she kissed both Biloxi and Melchisedech every time she brought something else to the table.

"Wherever did you get that pretty Neanderthal girl, Duffey?" she asked. "I never saw so fine a complexion. I wonder where she get it?"

"From the ice," said Duffey. "The ice gives that ivory-like complexion with those ghostly touches of blue."

"Does she use ice packs for her skin? I thought that ice packs were outish lately."

"No. She used an ice pillar. She was frozen in a pillar of ice. She had been there quite a few ages. We chipped her out of the ice this morning, but she didn't have to thaw. She is one of those, naturally warm persons. She says that she doesn't feel the cold at all."

"What are the theological implications?" Gertrude asked, "with her being of an unfallen race and all? If they increase again, will that not make the rest of us look pretty sorry?"

"I'm sure that this been worked out," Duffey said. "Several of them seem to have been put into cold storage, and every few centuries another one is cracked out to make a contribution to the gene pool. It will not be a disturbing thing till they reach a level of about one in ten thousand. But they bring a nice touch into the mixture, an aroma that we nearly forget sometimes. But it's only a popular legend (which they themselves believe) that they are an unfallen people."

"Mr. Duffey, I think that that is interesting," Gertrude said, "and you told me that nothing interesting had happened to you all day. Finding a girl who has been frozen in a pillar of ice for thousands of years is very interesting."

"Which voyage is this that we go on now, Duffey?" Brannagan asked. "I lose count."

"On, it's the fourteenth voyage of The Argo," Melchiscdech said. "Argo Fourteen."

"That sounds like one of those cosmic clock dating methods," Gertrude said, "like Carnon Fourteen and such."

"And The Argo is a dating clock, among very many other things," Duffey told her. "Anything within the last nine thousand years, or the next sixty-seven years, is all written down pretty clearly in The Argo's log. It's all there, but sometimes one must be sharp about reading it. Part of the interpretation depends on Interior Illumination."

"You've got a lot of that, have you, Duffey?" Gertrude joshed him. "I have a lot of Interior Illumination myself. But why does the log go only sixty-seven years into the future."

"Most logs do not go into the future at all, so this is in The Argo's favor, however far it goes. But in this case, I think that -- ah -- I get the impression that that's all the farther the future goes. Or else the future moves into some other context about then. There is a note in the log that certain futures or parts of futures, after a jog or a dislocation, are to be found written in a different log book, though pretty much in the same hands. Now I have seen this different ledger or log book, and I have held it in my hands, but I cannot always find it just when I want to. There's an instruction in the chart room of The Argo telling how to find this other log book, but I cannot always find this instruction, and I cannot always, to be honest with you, even find the chart room.

"But there are several other ways in which The Argo acts as a dating

clock. If one brings any artifact at all on board and touches it to the piece of talking oak that is built into the ship's wheel, that talking oak will call out the year of origin of the piece in whatever aeon or era it belongs, and in whatever annals of the era. But sometimes the talking wood becomes confused. It may call out bearings instead of times, degrees and minutes and seconds of latitude and longitude which do not always have anything to do with the artifact brought to it.

"But the future, or a future, does go beyond the sixty-seven years, Gertrude, and I have been beyond that point into the future. It becomes different beyond that point, though, quite different."

"Then this is the thirteenth voyage of The Argo that you came in on today, Duffey, and you will take Brannagan on the fourteenth voyage tonight?"

"No, Gertrude, no. These individual trips aren't voyages, even if we may carelessly call them so. Each voyage is a cycle of trips or adventures, a dynasty of adventures. And a voyage is halted only by hiatus or mutation, or by one of the 'deaths' of the Ship. The Ship may be lost and found again several times on one of the voyages. The Argo was lost completely before my last several trips. I found her again by accident and intuition. I walked down to visit a sly hull dealer in New Orleans and he said that he had something to show me. I had put out the word that I wanted to see something in old hulls, hulks, or even complete ships. This hull was afloat and light in the water, and my heart leapt up to see it. But it didn't look anything like The Argo.

"The hull is of oak," the dealer told me. "It's unusual for there to be an oaken hull this old. Oak is the noble wood of legend, but in practice it is usually too crooked and cranky for ship building: and too hard, and with no real spring to it. It will break before it will bend, and that's intolerable in ships' timbers. But this old hull seems to have plenty of spring in her. She is very, very old, but she is worm-free." "I know," I said, and I told the dealer a bit about her: "Her keel was laid at Ragusa on the Adriatic, and she is built of oak from the Dinaric Alps. If she had been laid in a Black Sea port, she would have been, at that distant time, built of cedar. But she's oak. She even has built into her several pieces of the talking oak named -- no, I'll not name that special oak. But she talks, man." "She talks, yes," the sly hull dealer slid, "I've heard her. Shall I have her fitted for you, and how will it be financed?" "She'll fit herself," I said, "She has but to remember all her fittings and she'll have them again." And so it was. The above, though not an accurate account by common standards, is accurate symbolically.

"Could I ride on her?" Gertrude asked. "I'm oak myself. Live-oak."

"Any time, before late this night," Melchisedech told her. "There are seamen on her who are like monkey-shaped wraiths, but if they like you --"

"They will like me," Gertrude said. "All wraithy things like me."

"Oh then, they'll take you on a crisp and fast trip around all the little islands. She's in singing shape, The Argo. This is a sort of climax voyage we're on, the Fourteenth."

"Brannagan says that you tamper with history and with events on the voyages," Gertrude said. "He says that things would be in bad shape if you didn't interfere so judiciously. I say that things are in judiciously bad shape now. What do you do, sail backwards in time and destroy the seeds of dire events before they can grow?"

"Backwards in time!" Brannagan gasped. "Have I an insane wife, and have I only discovered it on my last day with her? You shame my bald hairs, woman."

"Backwards in time!" Duffey gasped. "That is the most brainless thing I've ever heard of. It sounds like a science fiction idea or a blatt-brained notion. How would anyone ever voyage backwards in time?"

"Well then, you little nimble hogging, where do you voyage to?" Gertrude asked.

"Forward into time or sideways in time," Brannagan said. "Into the future or into the present. We are already going forward in time, and we have only to accelerate a thousand-fold (that's critical speed for a time trip to the future to do it). But there is no way that one could go back in time."

"And there is no way that we could change things if we did go backwards," Duffey said. "We cannot change the past that has already happened. But we can change the present in the process of happening, by being a part of that happening. And often we can change the future which has not already happened. But not all our piety or wit will blot out any line of the past. Besides, we have already lived through the past, or died from it. Let us go on to other things."

"But changing the future won't help the present," Gertrude objected.

"It's the best that can be done," Duffey told her. "Every attempt to get the people to change the present to improve the future has been a dismal failure, though it would be the best way if it worked. But there is a very great amount of spilled-back from the future into the present. Almost all of the worst effects of the present come from the future, and the future is continually turning into the present, The future is trial balloon country. Some of the balloons are miglity evil, and if they are not shot down at once they will drift into reality. Prescient types see some of the things that are trying to become, and we do what we can about them. We are constantly moving out in front and making changes in things before they happen. Brandon, the time before last when I sailed with you, were you not St. Brandon of Ireland?"

"Certainly, I was and I am St. Brandon of Ireland. To be St. Brandon once is to be St. Brandon forever."

"But so is it also that to be a priest once is to be a priest forever. 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.' Myself, I belong to an obscure oriental rite where marriage has always been permitted. But with the Irish priests it was not so. So how do you square all that with your life with Gertrude here?"

"Gertrude is a holy woman and a merry one," Biloxi Brannagan said, "and we get along high and fine. She has been set to minister to me in this little beer garden which is like a piece of paradise."

"Well, I'm glad to know that it wasn't me," Gertrude said. "Thirty years I've been worried about the affair and wondering where I've failed. But if there has been this impediment all the time, why that explains it."

Biloxi and Gertrude had a better home life than do many of the patriarchs and Argo Masters. Usually they do not remember their sailing on The Argo at all during the times when they are on shore. They do not remember it, but it overshadows their daily life. It makes that daily life seem a little bit trivial, and they do not give it the attention that it observes. The Argo Master will sometimes be listless in his months and years

on shore, and then people will say 'He is waiting for his ship to come in. He is no good for anything while he waits.'

Along about then, Eva, the beautiful and archaic young Neo-Neanderthal lady came to them with a lopsided proposition.

"Does either of you gentlemen have fourteen thousand dollars that you don't need right now," she asked. "I can make a solid down on the Neanderthal Bar for fourteen thousand dollars cash on the barrelhead. I can buy Kate's Neanderthal Bar just the way it is, and I'm sure I can make a go of it. And if I get a mate out of it, we'll settle here and give Biloxi a more old fashioned flavor than it's ever had before. Consider it as a civic investment and as a broadening of the base of things."

Melchisedech Duffey robbed his two hands together, and two hundred and eighty of the old fifty dollar gold pieces cascaded onto the table with fine old music.

"There is something so boyish about all you sorcerers," Gertrude commented.

"I'll say so," Eva agreed. "But it's going to look fishy, my bringing in two hundred and eighty of these fifty dollar goldies. People will think I've robbed a Swiss bank. And I don't think there were any such things as fifty dollar gold pieces in the years shown on these, though they are real gold. When I was a kid, there was a lot of gold around on the ground that hadn't been washed down by the streams yet. Don't you have any green stuff?"

Biloxi Brannagan rubbed his hands together, and one hundred and forty of good one hundred dollar bills thumped onto the table in a bundle banded together with rubber bands. Eva undid the bundle and examined the bills with her sparkling fingers and her sparkling blue eyes. "These are good," she said after a moment, "but people will challenge them as fakes if I push this many of them all at one time, They all have the same serial number. Can you make them with a hundred and forty different serial numbers?"

"It's a hundred and forty times as hard that way, Eva," Brannagan said, "and when we manufacture something by mind-power alone, well, there's a limit to mind power. It would take me about a week to do it that way, Eva. I'd have to rest in between times."

"Well, what will I do?" Eva asked. "What if Kate sells the Neanderthal to some simpleton while we're fooling around here? I need the Neanderthal. It's the best place ever for meeting some of my own kind and getting things going again."

"Don't fret, Eva, Gertrude said. "We just have to work around these damned sorcerers if we're going to get anything done. We'll take care of it ourselves. Wait till I go in the house and get my checkbook."

4

About those crewmen on The Argo, why they were there to work as crewmen, of course. Sure, they were as robotic as the zombie devil himself, only not cute. They were not really wraiths or effigies. They were place tokens.

They were notices which said in effect, 'This is my place, until I come once more to fill it. Respect my place as you would respect me.' The ghostly mechanical 'crewmen' were the residues of persons who had sailed on The Argo, who would sail on her again, and who would always have the right

to sail on her. There were quite a few of these token residues on the ship, and the ship couldn't have operated without them, seamen's wages being what they are.

Indeed, when Melchisedech Duffey and Biloxi Brannagan were not on The Argo themselves, their animate memories or notices or residues were there. And these memory residues were materialized and programmed to do a little happy work. So these monkey-like things were the old crewmen themselves, as much of them as could be left behind for identification and service. And one could discern, or at least guess with reasonable probability, what great Argo Master was represented by each of them.

Melchisedech and Biloxi had been going into the future to root out things that might spill back into the present, and to have some of those evils already cleared out of the way when that future might have become the present.

This day, they had a work order to prevent a rumored evil or distaste of an extreme sort. It was really a little bit funny to consider just what it was, but hell was roofed and timbered by such prevertedly funny things. It was something so vile that it was hard to see how humans could possibly tolerate it, and yet samplings from the future showed humans not only accepting it but reveling in its gustatory depravity. Comics of the past and present had already brought it into their swampy humor, and they were grooming the future to accept it. Some of these were good but randy people, and they did not realize what they were doing.

Henry Salvatore, a fat Frenchman of the Louisiana swamps, a man known to both Melchisedech and Biloxi Brannagan, had used to tell stagnant swamp stories. And the most distasteful thing in any of his stories was the damnable Puff Fish. Henry told about people who ate the things. There was no way that anybody was ever going to get all the swamp country humor out of Henry. Other people have also referred to this coming abomination in a spirit of misguided humor. Swamp stories will always refer either to things of the past or present or future, and there were no Puff Fish in the past or the present. The very idea of them was rancid. The possibility of people really eating them was horrifying. They were in every water, so the story went, and they were only waiting till somebody would find the bait they would bite on. On what bait would be horrible enough for the horrible Puff Fish?

The future that they might be in was getting closer, so there was nothing to do except to go forward into the future and root them out and save the world from that shameful era.

It was on the futuristic trail of the Puff Fish that The Argo, on a sunshiny day, was apparently sailing through a sea of grass in waterlogged rural Louisiana. The Argo was really sailing down one of those weed and reed grown canals. The Masters of the Ship brought The Argo to a little landing in the swamp, and they tied up there. They were met by three brakish water gentleme, Leonard Archive, Oliver Greenflag, and Harry A. (Honeybucket) Kincaid, three pleasant and hospitable persons.

"We have everything here that you salty travelers might need or name," Leonard Archive said. "Name it."

"It's to destroy the naming or needing of one foul thing that we are here," Biloxi Brannagan said. "But, as to your hospitable invitation, bring me a nine pound gar. Then flense about three pounds off the tender flanks of it and grill it."

"I'll have about a fourteen pound Blooper Fish," Melchisedech Duffey

said. "You should be able to get about fourteen pounds of good head steak from a fellow that size."

Honeybucket Kincaid set certain dials for voltage and frequency, and threw the power. He also made slight adjustments to the underwater electrodes, but that was just because he loved to fiddle with them. For small jobs, it didn't matter how deep in the water the electrodes were.

The green of the channels was literally galvanized into life. The water meadows, thick with both rooted and free-floating flora, showed white wakes. Shadows of gar were sliding in at every level, but they were very selective shadows. Allowing for perspective and distance, all those gar were the same size. All the nine pound gar for about a mile around had quickly arrived. Out of perhaps three thousand of them, Honeybucket selected three and lifted them out of the water. Of these, he further selected just one, for its fine color and proportion, and he threw the other two back. He put the one superb alligator gar into the eviscerator. He adjusted dials, and the perhaps three thousand other alligator gar scooted out of there.

Honeybucket let the boiling water set for ten seconds. One does not mix fish-ways too closely. Then he set the dials anew. There was quickly a new turmoil and arriving, of a different speed and movement, of differently sluped shadows, of different foaming and wake. There was another large and rapid assembly, and it was made up of fourteen pound Blooper Fish. Honeybucket selected the best of them, and he dismissed the others. He put this finest Blooper Fish into the eviscerator, and at the same time he took out three pounds of tender flank meat of the Gar. He put the Gar in a high frequency oven.

"For salad, I'll have globigerina glace," Duffey said. "For fruit you might make me a chlamydomonas with kelp syrup. I'll have pond scum bread, and sea lice soup. And a Hashed-Ectocarpus Collins for cocktail."

"I'll have a desmid salad with ulothrix," said Biloxi Brannagan. "For fruit you might fix me a volvox colonial. Spirogyra bread, I suppose, and hydrodictyon soup. And a Foraminifera Julip for drink."

Honeybucket made the drinks first. Volvoxa and ectocarpus can be brought to congregate in waters by frequencies in the same part of the scale. They can, in fact, be brought in by common carrier and then unscrambled. And alcohol is one of the things (sugar and petroleum are others) that could be gathered as rapidly as might be wished from any water. Honeybucket had the drinks quickly, and he had the dinner ready in not much longer time.

"We have it all here," Leonard Archive told those travelers Duffey and Brannagan. "We've got it made. We could vegetate here now, except that we don't even let the vegetables vegetate. We insist that the vegetables supply us with electrical power. We have plenty of it from the sun, of course, and from the water flow, and from the wind. But a canny man will always have at least four strings to his bow. The breathing of the plants exhibits a voltage differential, as does the polarity between the brown and the green plants. We draw on the bountiful sea, and on the bountiful blending of the sea and land here. Fishermen have always known that a couple of electrodes in the water and a little voltage applied to them will attract fish. We found that by using a variety of voltages and a variety of frequencies, and sometimes many pairs of electrodes, we could attract every sort and sub-sort of fish or crustacea or animals or plants or chemicals or minerals or salts or alcohols or petroleum or sugars. We found that there were minute quantities of everything in saltwater and in brackish water and

in fresh water. And we found out that these minute quantities of everything will count up, in a very little while, to mountaneous quantities. We learned selective polarization of every medium. We learned that wherever there are differences of potential there is power a-plenty, and that there are differences of potential everywhere. We learned a lot of things because we were too lazy to work for a living. And we have given all these techniques to the world."

"How about Puff Fish?" Melchisedech Duffey asked.

"It's a moral problem, of course, and a problem of individual vileness," Oliver Greenflag said. "If people want Puff Fish, who are we to prevent? I do not believe there is any way of blocking them anyhow. Now that the principles of frequency modulation and of frequency braiding also are understood, Puff Fish can be attracted in unlimited quantities just as anything can be. Puff Fish bait is a frequency. Frequency itself would have to be tampered with to make Puff Fish unavailable again."

"Let us talk about something less depraved than eating Puff Fish though," Leonard Archive said. "We can attract everything by frequency modulation and broadcasting, you know, feelings of pleasure and of displeasure, weather of every sort, notions of every sort, ideas, emotions, even people. We can attract any sort of people, of any age or station. They come readily to the particular frequencies that they cannot resist. Honeybucket, surprise us with a visit of interesting people."

"All right," Honeybucket said, and he began to do things with dials and to set the special frequencies into effect.

"Gentlemen, there is always a sufficiency of everything near at hand," Greenflag said. "The problem his always been in finding the dippers to dip the different things up. The frequency signals are such dippers. They will dip anything out of water or land or sky. What kind of folks are you bringing to visit us, Honeybucket?" "Twenty-one year old girls," Honeybucket Kincaid said. "I've always liked them at about that age. Ah, another thousand cycles here, and a few more pairs of electrodes there. Young people come to high frequency signals more readily than old people do."

Three twenty-one year old girls were seen coming down a waterway in a rowboat. It had taken only two and a half minutes from the frequency activation until their appearances. They paddled to the dock, and they tied up the rowboat there.

"I never saw such a tide as is running along here," said one of the girls who was named Janeway Celeste Lynne. "It just seemed to catch up our boat and propel it right along."

"But the occantide is pulling in the other direction, through all the salt water meadows now," Melchisedech Duffey pointed out. "You came here against a strong tide. It was the frequency modulation that caught you up and propelled you right along. Ah, that was a fine demonstration that you gave, Honeybucket."

"I'm Janeway," said Janeway. "These are my cousins, Candy Sue Pirogue and Etta Mae Mansion."

"Would you young ladies want anything," Leonard Archive asked, "outside of the pleasure of our company?"

"Puff Fish," said Candy Sue. "We hate them, but we love them even more, and we never know how to catch them. OOooo, they are so dreamy and vile! Can you bring them in here with your frequency modulation?"

"Nothing easier," said Honeybucket. "If you can conquer your

disgust..."

"Oh, we call, we can!" Etta Mae cried. "All the people are conquering their disgust now and eating all the Puff Fish they can get. Puff Fish are in. If only there were a way to get enough of them..."

"There is a way," said Honeybucket, and he began to adjust the dials. But Melchisedech Duffey went head-first into the Main Frequency Modulator (as the first one in the world, it was tied in with all the other frequency modulators and would affect them all); and Biloxi Brannagan was preventing anyone else from interfering with Duffey, by use of a hasty swivel gun. He came by the swivel gun by rubbing his hands together. He didn't know much about frequency modulation, but he knew about other things.

Then there was a bit of high frequency lightning in that Main Frequency Modulator, and there was a slight stench. Melchisedech Duffey came out of that modulator with all of his clothes burned off, and all the hair of his head and body burned off also. But he was smiling happily.

"Got it," he said. "Got it. That is one frequency that will never re-occur again. There will be no more Puff Fish -- ah, there will be no more of what they want, not ever again. The bait bucket for them is destroyed, and there'll be no baiting them in again."

"Oh, we could repair the frequency modulators," Honeybucket said.

"It isn't broken," Melchisedech said. "Can you repair something that is working perfectly?"

"If it is working perfectly, then what is to prevent me imposing on it the frequency of... I forget just what frequency I am thinking about at the moment, but what is to prevent my imposing it again?"

"There is no longer any such frequency," Melchisedech said. "And there wasn't any such frequency before this either. When we do away with a thing, we do away with it in past, present and future." "There is a frequency to attract everything whatsoever," Honeybucket insisted, "and the different frequencies are easily found. I have only to activate the searcher device to locate the abominable... I forget just what the name of the abominable thing is at the moment... to obtain the corresponding frequency and to impose that frequency."

"The abominable thing doesn't exist any longer," Duffey said, "and it never existed before either. And there isn't any frequency to correspond to something that doesn't exist."

"You mean that we can no longer eat those vile -- I forget their names?" Candy Sue demanded. "They sure were terrible, but if everybody wanted them --"

"Those terrible things do not exist," Melchisedech said, "and everybody is not eating those foul non-name things, nor will they ever. Come along, Biloxi. What's the next work order we have?"

So Duffey and Brannagan traveled into the future and rooted out many abominable things to the point where they did not and had not ever existed. And thus the people were thwarted in perversion after perversion. It was no hardship really. They already had plenty of perversions.

No more would there ever be swamp stories about -- whatever its name hadn't been. Such beneficent extirpations every day count up. Ten thousand such adventures they had, and mostly it is only those that failed or partly failed that are remembered. For when a future evil is rooted out and completely removed, then there is nothing of it that can be remembered in

any tense. But if any motlet of it is left, then it grows (though weakened) in both directions and sometimes it will be remembered a little bit as a grotesqueness. The great triumphs of the Argonauts, by their very nature, must be unknown. Bless all such work and adventure of the Holy Argo and her crew!

5

The Argo was, beyond everything else, a Quest Ship. There was much emphasis in the Ship's Logs on the quest and finding of the Golden Fleece of Colchis, and indeed this was one of the brightest of the early triumphs of the ship. But there were several more important findings than that of the Fleece, and dozens that were equally important. The Argo and the Argo Masters had recovered the Holy Cross exactly one hundred years after Salaadin had rode away into the desert dragging it at his horse's tail. There was the recovery of the Lord's Table which had been in the Cenaculum in Jerusalem, and was now in the Bread and Wine Room on The Argo. There was the recovery of the Sancgreal, the Holy Grail that had been stolen from Glastonbury. There were the findings of the Holy Shroud of Turin, the Ring of the Nebelunggs, the Philosopher's Stone. Ah, the discoveries, the discoveries!

There was the finding of the tomb of St. Jude, the Northwest Passage (it is still serviceable with a good nineteen foot deep channel), of Ronald's Horn, of Alarac's Sword, of Aaron's Rod, of the Seamless Garment of Christ, of the Baptist's Heaa (it is still in good flesh, and the growing hair and beard have not been cut; they are each now more than one hundred feet long), the Sword and Scabbard of Saint Secaire, the Magic Flute, the Great Mogul Diamond, the Iron Crown of Charlemagne, the Lost Dutchman Mine. And many others, some of them too holy to mention.

The latest and most contrary of the findings was that of the Sword and Scabbard of Sain Secaire. And this is the exceptional one of the prizes, for it was not found by the Argo Masters, and they didn't want it to be found. They wanted it to be lost and to remain lost. It was the anti-prize, a peril to the world.

In times past, the Argo Misters had lost the Sword and Scabbard three times. At its last losing, they had filled the space between the sword and the scabbard with iron, lead, brimstone, and babbet metal, all boiling hot, and this had welded the sword to the scabbard as the filler solidified and made it impossible for anyone to draw the sword out easily or accidentally.

Then they lost it in a place in the ocean named 'Nine Mile Depth'. In the floor of the depth, they had lost it a hundred meters deep in mud and lime ooze; and they had memorialized the ocean and its creatures around and about that the sword and scabbard must stay lost. And so it did stay lost for four hundred years.

Then some frenchmen, the brothers Cyril and Cyrus Dumbeau, went down into the 'Nine Mile Depth' in a bathysphere. They took core specimens for a hundred meters deep in that sea floor then, and they struck something harder than mud and lime ooze. So they brought it into their bathysphere with grapples, and then they brought it up to the surface of the ocean and set it on the platform of their attending boat. It was the sword and scabbard of Saint Secaire. This was on the early morning when Duffey and Brannagan had taken to sea together on journey as Argo Masters. And of course the Argo

Masters came to that mid-Pacific place immediately. They scotched their Argo immediately along side, and they boiled onto the platform of the attending boat.

"What two extinct sea creatures are these?" Cyril Dimbeau asked.

"Sure, I think they are already rotting as they stand there, they are so old and extinct. We'll just have all the blood out of them they have and pump them full of preservatives. They'll do to show for novelties when we get home with them."

"Do not on any account draw that sword from that scabbard," Melchisedech Duffey said.

"And what happens if we do?" Cyrus Dimbeau asked.

"If you draw it but an inch, two thirds of the people in the world will fall into a deep sleep. And they will die of it if they are not rescued quickly. The only means of saving them is to put the sword back full into the scabbard."

"Fair enough," said Cyril Dimbeau. "We'll make try of the affair." There was one other scientist there with the two brothers, and there were ten strong workmen and laboratory assistants there. These ten strong assistants grabbed Duffey and Brannagan and put them under tight restraint. And the three scientists were melting the flux out from between the sword and its sheath.

"It will move now", Cyrus Dimbeau said. "I believe that it will move just about an inch." And the man drew the sword one inch out of its scabbard. The ten assistants fell down in deep sleep and rolled around on the platform.

"You were right. It worked," Cyril Dimbeau said. "The ten assistants have fallen into deep sleep. And the other five of us, we three scientists and you two sea spooks, are still awake. That is two thirds of us in this miniature world who are so stricken, and I assume that it applies to the maxi-world also. And if I pull the sword out the rest of the way?"

"The world will come to an end," Melchisedech said.

"Fair enough," said Cyril Dimbeau. "I always wanted to be there when the world ended, but I didn't know how to manage it. Pull the sword out, brother."

But when the ten assistants had fallen down in deep sleep, they had released Duffey and Brannagan from their tight grip by necessity. And while Duffey had been parlaying with the scientists, Brannagan had retrieved the still melted flux that had been poured out from between the sword and scabbard. Now he poured it back in, and it sized the sword and scabbard together again so that they would not separate easily.

"How clumsy of me," Brannagan said. "I stumbled with the bucket of flux, and I spilled it. Now you will have that little melting tisk to do all over again."

"Damned oafs!" Cyrus Dimbeau hissed. "Get back into the ocean whence you came."

"Let me have it," Duffey said. "I know a way to melt the flux out of it again in in instant. Then you can go ahead and pull the wword all the way out and destroy the world if you're so minded."

"Well, hyrry it up," Cyril Dinbeau barked.

Duffey took the sword and scabbard, now tigitly welded together again. But with in incredible clumsiness, he dropped the thing off the platform, and it went down, down, down, nine miles deep into the ocean, and then it begin to bore its way one hundred meters deep into the mud and lime

ooze to find its old place again. "Oops, oops, oops, I dropped it! Fellows, I wouldn't have that happen for anything," Duffey apologized.

"Oafs, oafs, oafs," Cyrus Dimbeau cried. "Now we'll have to go all the way down again and get it."

"Get what?" Brannagan asked them. Brannagan had cannily spread the Forgetfulness Mesh over them and they couldn't remember the episode at all. The ten assistants, now rescued from their deep sleep, stood waiting orders, but no orders came.

"Well, it's been a pleasant visit," Cyril Dimbeau finally said. "Glad you couldn't stay longer."

Duffey and Brannagan sailed away and left the bathysphere people there, taking samples of ocean fleas at the middle depths. But they would not remember at all about the sword and the scabbard.

"We are going to have to find a way to lose that thing a little more securely," Duffey said. "In four hundred more years somebody is likely to stumble on it again."

It is always good to have a suspense-and-fun adventure early in the morning.

A bit later in the morning, at Gdansk on the Baltic, near the mouth of the Vistula, a stranger came to The Argo, he having the air of being no stranger at all. Now it was a plain case that any Argo Man should always recognize any other Argo Man anywhere, at any time. The only slight exception is that a man fallen from grace may not be completely recognized at once.

Well, neither Brannagan nor Duffey recognized this man immediately. They should have seen through every disguise, but it may be that they saw through one disguise too many to that basic 'Something a Little Bit Wrong'. The land they were in had been in the hands of the New Infidels for some years, and it may have been that caution was called for. It was really not caution that stood all the way here though. It was just fundamental failure to recognize.

"You bring the Brotherhood itself into danger if you fail to recognize me," this stranger said. "It is by this one thing only that the Brotherhood may be broken. Do not do it! Know me now!"

Well, this stranger was a mixture of disguises. He had a black hat on his head, and ear locks, like an old Jew. But he had a wide and treeless face like a Polish landscape, for the faces of Poles are always like the constantly changing and always lopsided map of Poland. But this man also had the blue eyes of Scandinavia, and the square hands of Holland.

"The Ship will know me," the man said. "The piece of talking oak in the ship's wheel will know me and speak." And the piece of talking oak in the Ship's wheel did speak, and it said "I know him". But Duffey and Brannagan still looked at each other and at the man.

"We will all lay identifications out here," Duffey said. "We will see who are the men of The Argo." Duffey rubbed his hands together and produced a large gold coin with the king Crown of Salem on one side and with the Bread and Wine on the other. It bore as superscript the magic name 'Melchisedech' and as subscript the words 'Thou Art Forever'. Melchisedech set the big coin on the steersman's sideboard there in the cabin. He had identified himself, though he had not been questioned. Biloxi Brannagan rubbed his hands together and produced an even larger coin made of the red-gold of Ireland. It had the Celtic Cross of Christ on one side of it,

and a Coracle Boat on the other. It bore the holy name 'Naomh Brandon' on it. Brannagan set it there on the steersman's sideboard beside the Melchisedech coin. Brannagan had also identified himself, though this swift lion of the sea had not been questioned either.

The stranger then rubbed his own two hands together. This set off a shower of sparks from which was formed a large and living two-headed eagle, but no coin or medallion. The stranger had a lot of style in these things, however, and Duffey and Brannagan began to recognize him by this florid style. The man grinned and grimaced in a stagey manner. Yes, he was a real magician. All the real ones have this showiness about them. From his own mouth he took one thin half of a coin, and from one mouth of the two-headed eagle, he took another thin half of a coin. He put the two halves together, and there was a small clap of thunder. That was good show. On one side of the thus produced coin was the same two-headed eagle of Poland. On the other side of the coin was an ornate Crock or Pot or Niglit Charley. But there was no name on the coin yet.

The man then pulled the name 'Kasmir Gorshok' from the other mouth of the two-headed eagle, and he fastened it onto the coin. He set the coin beside the other two on the steersman's sideboard, and the other two did not reject it. This man was Kasmir Gorshok, the Casey of the Crock of the low middle ages, Casey Szymanski of Chicago, and Casey of the Zodiac. And he was a true Argo Master.

Kasimir waved the two-headed eagle to fly, and it flew away into the interior of the country. "That will bring their numbers up to nine," he said. The two-headed eagles of Poland had been an endangered species for a long while, and whenever their numbers fell below nine, it was feared that their extermination was near.

So Melchisedech Duffey and Biloxi Brannagan sailed with this stranger-no-more, an old companion in magic and grace, on further adventures of the Fourteenth Voyage of The Argo. But it was very mysterious that they had not recognized him at once. How had he changed?

"But there is something gone wrong about things," Melchisedech said that same day as they wrangled around in shallow seas and treacherous estuaries. "There is a treason smell about Our Holy Ship. It's as if Judas himself were aboard."

"As you know, we transport Judas only one night every year," Casey explained to Melchisedech as to a child. "And then we carry him across one narrow strait only, and we are done with him in an hour. Then we use the herb Rosemary to remove the treason smell. So there can be none now. And this is not even that day or night of the year."

"There's a saying that one other Masters of the Holy Argo Herself will turn traitor," Melchisedech said dirkiy.

"And the second part of that saying declares that it will be an affair between that Argo Master and God Himself," Kasmir said. "What is it to thee?"

At Karl Marx Stadt, near the upper waters of the Mulde, the Argo Masters destroyed a new incursion into logic that carried the tentative title 'I wake up forgetting'. Possible effects of this queer logic had been spilling out of the future into the various presents, and they were not good.

There was hardly enough water to float The Argo at Karl Marx Stadt, and there was scarce enough draught-way for that incursion into logic

either. But the logic piece was baneful even as it attempted to launch itself off the sand bars and to float free,

Duffey and Brannagan and Gorshok burst in on a young man shivering in his underwear and sobbing with excitement as he scribbled furiously on little pieces of paper. The young man was named Ralph Rolfe and he was English on his father's side.

"Oh bother me not, ghosts, burglars, police spies, followers of static philosophy," Ralph sobbed as they came into his room this morning. "I must get it all down on paper before I forget it. Paper, paper, are there no more little pieces of you here? For the love of Logica Perversa herself, give me paper to write upon."

Casey Gorshok gave little pieces of paper to the young man, and he gathered them in from the young man again when they were full written with the wakening residue. And pretty soon, the young man ceased his frantic writing and half collapsed upon himself. Then Casey gathered in the last thing that the youngling had written.

"That isn't all. That isn't nearly all of it," the young man jittered, "but it is the vital keys to it. It is all gone out of my mind completely now, but there should be enough mind jogs and memory hooks down on the little pieces of paper for me to recreate the great and crooked system by. And this I will do when I am more clear in my mind. Have I pants somewhere? Do I not ordinarily wear pants? Have I coffee here? Do I not ordinarily drink coffee?"

Brannagan found the pants for the excited young man, and Duffey made coffee for him. By and by he was more composed.

"It is a completely new system of Perverse Logic that I have discovered," the young man said, "or that has discovered me and employed me as a medium. It will drive out all the other systems of logic as a shrew drives out mice. It has come to me in my sleep a dozen times, and I have always forgotten it as I awakened. I have known that if I could get certain key words and symbols down, I would be able to put it all together from them when I was in a clarified wakened state. For a long time I have slept with a candle lit and with writing materials beside me to jot down the key words as I wakened, and for a long time something has gone wrong every morning. This morning, after I had received the great and crooked message once more, I was told in a sad voice, 'This is the last time that it will be given to you. Get it down this morning or lose it forever.' Well, I would get it down then, for there was not anything else that could have gone wrong with my precautions and procedures that had not previously gone and now been allowed for.

"I was mistaken in this supposition. There was one other thing that could go wrong, and it did. While I slept, mice came in and ate much of the writing paper that I had by my bedside, and they left only small pieces that they had bitten around. But I had to get the great system written down. I filled up even the smallest piece of paper that the mice had left. Oh, you do have them safely, sir, do you not? And you have them in the order that I wrote them?"

"I have them in the order that you wrote them, yes," Casey said.

"And they will be destroyed in the same order that you wrote them, in the same order that he has them," Melchisedech said. "Destroyed they must be."

"No, no, no!" the young man jittered. "I have the system in my mind no longer. I spilled all of the treacherous things down on the little pieces

of paper. It is an entirely new tiling. It will turn the world awry and set it by the ears."

"New and awry things usually do set the world by the ears," Melchisedech said. "But the world can hardly stand another entirely new and entirely harmful system of logic at this time. Believe me, we are not narrow-minded or arbitrary about this. It's a bad and slippery thing that you have almost introduced. It has come close to being born many times. Again and again and again it has come close. But now we are luckily rid of it this time also."

"Give me those little pieces of paper or I will shoot you all," the young man cried. "Have I a gun to shoot you with? Do I not usually have a gun here?"

Brannagan found the gun and gave it to the young man. Duffey found the bullets for it and gave them to him. The young man put the gun to the right temple of Casey Gorshok and fired it with a loud explosion. But Duffey and Brannagan and Casey had already retreated from there, out of that time and out of that place. Their exquisite sense of timing was the one thing that never left them.

The 'Sudden Withdrawal' was a device that they often used. They had carried out their mission and prevented a tricky thing from being born. It wasn't an ordinary tricky thing, or it wouldn't have been assigned to The Argo. There was something absolutely new in trickery and devilishness in it.

But, if their mission in this had been carried out perfectly and completely, the adventure could not even have been told about. The adventure would have been wiped out with the thing itself. And the adventure is told about. It is only the loose end adventures that have enough of them to be remembered and told.

"I shudder to think what might have happened if it had taken effect," Duffey speculated. "The last such thing that took effect put mankind into a twist for four hundred years, and this one could have been much twistier. Gorshok, just to add double surety to this matter, I did not hear the sound of the small pieces of paper being destroyed. Let us hear that sound now."

"Ah, I just thought that I might read a little bit of them now, Duff," Kasmir the sorcerer mumbled.

"No, no, destroy them at once," Brannagan insisted. "No one of even ourselves would be immune to their effects. You especially would not be immune. Destroy the little pieces of the logic system, Casey, and let there not be division between us."

Casey destroyed some little pieces of paper.

"Is that all of them, Casey?" Duffey insisted.

"All of them but three," Casey said. "Shoal water ahead! Watch the steering!"

"I see no shoal water ahead," Brannagan said. "Destroy them, Casey, all of them."

Casey destroyed three of them, but did he destroy all of them? Did he lie when he said that there were only three of them left?

"Do you not still have one of them, Casey?" Duffey asked. "Even one piece of paper will have evoking words or parts of words on it. From them, an evil person might be able to reconstruct the whole system. Destroy that last one!"

"I destroyed all three of them. Reefs ahead!" Casey bawled. "Shorten

sail. Beat to the wind. Do various nautical things. All hands aloft. Awk, one last little piece of paper fluttered over the side undestroyed. I must have miscounted them. On well, no harm done."

"What if a devil-fish find it and save it?" Duffey asked. "Our mission is not perfect until that one piece is destroyed with the others. Do you not have a particular devil-fish who is mascot to you, Gorshok? You used to have one. Have I not noticed him following us in these very waters? What if he should..."

"I cannot hear you, Duffey, with this violent wind blowing," Casey said.

"There is no wind," Melchisedech spoke. "But here it is that we enter new waters. Destroy that paper when the devil-fish brings it to thee, Casey. I will not remember to remind you of this again. Sometimes the amnesia works for us and sometimes against us. Now the forgetting message works its forgetting on me also."

At Weinsburg on the Nechar River, the Argo Masters cured a young man of stuttering. This was a brilliant young man with a mind like a burning sphere and a will to move worlds. And there was a red fury about everything that he did, and this caused him to be a great overturner. He had all excellent qualities and talents, and the stuttering had been the only defeating and frustrating ailing that he had.

The Argo Masters broke in on this brilliant man suddenly.

"How how how how d-d-did y-y-you g--" the young man began to question their intrusion.

"Ephphatha," said Melchisedech Duffey. "Be thou opened." The young man's lips and tongue were loosened, and he stuttered no more. The young man looked it them in that burnished way that all very brilliant people have, and he seemed a little bit disturbed.

"Had I asked to be cured?" he challenged them then.

"In a way you did ask to be cured of your stuttering," Melchisedech said. "You have complained angrily of your affliction to High Heaven. You have said that no man was ever so unfortunate as yourself. You have sworn that the clear river of your thoughts was roiled by the stuttering obstruction of your lips and tongue. You have sworn that you could move worlds, if only you were free of this misfortune."

"You did not pay attention to my question," the brilliant man said. "Of course I complained. This complaint was a part of my stock in trade. It was a means I used to work myself into a wrath. Of course I was furious against my affliction. It was a stepping stone to my being furious against other things. And how else could I have been furious so constantly and so easily? No, I did not ask to be cured. Afflict me again and restore me as I was."

"This I will not do," Melchiscdech said. "I have said 'Be Thou Opened', and you are opened. One would have to be perverse to object to being cured."

"Of course I'm perverse," the man said. "That's the whole idea. I can move worlds whether I am bound or loosened, but I can move them in a crooked way only when I am bound. I want to be furious and frustrated! That is part of my mission. If I have not this goad of fury, I will be a cheerful man. And if I am a cheerful man, the destruction that I have sworn to do will not seem important."

"Be cheerful. Be opened. Stutter no more," Melchisedech said. "And

destroy no more. This turns you from an evil genius into a good genius, or at least a complacent genius. Out of here, companions, out of here."

Duffey and Brannagan were out of there, out of that time and out of that town. They were already reading the work order for their next mission. And Casey Gorshok Szymansky, where was he? Oh, he would be along in a minute. Sometimes he loitered a bit as he dawdles over the curiosities of the world. Sometimes he seemed completely unable to keep his hands off of this thing or some other. But he would be along in a minute.

It was a good thing they had removed the stuttering impediment from the young man and unfrustrated him. Frustrated persons sometimes do very great harm, and the future must be cleansed of frustrations as much as possible. Likely enough, if some Argo Master gave him his stuttering back, he would be frustrated all over again, and his powerful mind would be to evil and awry things. But why should anyone give him his stuttering back again?

And why did Cisey Gorshok the sorcerer lag so far behind the other two that day?

At Wien, on the Donau River, they had an encounter with an old problem of either ethics or philosophy. Whether it was better to do the right thing for the wrong reason, or to do the wrong thing for the right reason.

"There is a mixed group in this very city having a go at this very problem right now," Melchisedech said, "and it behooves us to interfere. These people are in grave danger of following wrong reason in a particular action. What shall we do about this?"

Trick them," said Brannagan, "or anyhow trick somebody. There is no thing like Holy Trickery for jobs of a certain sort. Great Thomas writes that this is the one case in which trickery is licit: that one may trick a tricker, or he may trick a tricker's tricker's tricker. You trick the odds and the evens off on your fingers when you are involved in such high speculation as this, and it is not difficult to keep things straight. We cannot have wrong committed for any reason."

"But we can," said Melchisedech. "We can have it committed for a right reason."

"But that would be wrong," Brannagan insisted. "'I mean, it would not be right."

"Ah, but it would be," Melchisedech said. "It would be right for the wrong reasons, which would make it right."

"No, it'd be wrong," Brannagan still argued, "and rightly so. Why are we having trouble with a little schoolboy argument like this? Right and wrong are as differentiated as are beacons in the opposite ends of the sky. Who could possibly mistake them?"

"It's cloudy today," Casey slid, "and the beacons don't shine as well as they might. There are some things that can better be solved by two heads than by three. If the first head is wrong, then the second head will contradict it and make it right. But the third head contradicts them; then it will make it all wrong again. Therefore, I will remove this my third head from the company for a little while."

Casey Gorshok strode off among the fountains and government buildings and pastry shops and left the other two to settle it. And Brannagan and Duffey joined the company of a philosophical activist group that was then in discussion. It was for the pleasure and the influencing of

this group that they had come to Wien.

When Argonauts interfere in three or more futuristic affairs within a couple of hours, they may very well go a little wrong. Not very wrong, of course, for their being Argonauts will not allow them to go too far astray. There was the further case that, in mixed company and in Wien, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish right from wrong, a difficulty that does not occur anywhere else in the world. Besides, it was a pleasant company, and a pleasant time of the afternoon.

This mixed group of people (you may not believe this about them) was of great influence on the world. What they thought here today would be thought tomorrow in the provincial capitals of Paris and Moscow and New York. And even Argonauts enjoy sharpening their wits on strange home stories. But such arguments must come to an end when there are other adventures to have before sundown. And the mixed people were discussing more than one hundred variations of their original right-wrong argument.

Melchisedech Duffey slipped off and bought the cafe where the arguments were going on. Then he hired four fast-action carpenters with swift saws and unobtrusive ways. Each time a new variation of the argument was introduced, the four carpenters came swiftly and each of them cut one inch off the bottom of one of the table legs where the arguments were being held. They always did this so quickly and neatly that nobody noticed what was going on. "Now we are really getting to the gist of things," some of the arguers said. "Oh, this is the low-down of it. This is the low-down."

But, as the table got lower inch by inch, the arguers began to have third thoughts about the whole business. And when the table top was flat on the floor, Duffey and Brannagan, in their roles as magicians and certified Argonauts, moved in deftly and demolished the disputes.

"Your arguments haven't a leg to stand on," Duffey told one party of them.

"Your whole thesis lacks depth," Brannagan told the opposite party of them. "Your arguments have been reduced to the lowest common denominators. Leave them, and have peace in these things. Besides, your chairs are standing above you and calling you back to true reason."

So Duffey and Brannagan finally set the company right. Or they set it wrong. But they forced them to quit their silly quibbling, and they went away from there with the feeling of a job well done.

But someone else came and joined the company as soon as they left, someone else with all interest in continuing the confusion. And this someone else induced all that intelligent company to come to one of the other tables that was still intact, and to continue the nonsense there.

Who could that person have been?

At the Ship Argo, as usual, Duffey and Brannagan had to wait for Casey who had been taking his pleasure in the town. When Casey did join them, he had a new, sly look about him. Take that not to heart. Casey always had a new, sly look about him. But one Argonaut surely will not slip back and undo the work of two fellow Argonauts. He would not set things right if they had set them wrong, and he would not set them wrong if they had set them right. For, if an Argonaut did do wrong, he would always do it for the right reasons.

Unless, of course, he was Casey Gorshok Szymansky. And in his case

At Milano, on the Po (or nearly so), they took Mr. X. on board The Argo. This X. was not a true Mister of The Argo, however much he wished that he were. He was not one of the long-lived persons, and his present manifestation was likely to be the only one he would have. He was not a sorcerer, but he swore that he could reproduce any trick of any sorcerer if he saw it twice. He was acquainted with all three masters who were presently on The Argo. He was good and amusing company. There was no reason why he should not have ridden on the Ship. But easily tendered accommodations are not appreciated as much as those that are more hardly given.

"I do not know you, man," Kasmir Szymansky said when X. came to them there.

"I do not know you, man," Melchisedech Duffey said. There was always fun to be had with X.

"I do not know you, man," Biloxi Brannagan said, "and our sublime destination can hardly be yours. Nor are you able to riddle our riddles."

"The Ship will know me," said X. "We have sailed together before. I am even a sort of half member of this corporation. Ask the talking oak that has a piece of itself in the Ship's wheel."

"I do not know you, man," said the piece of talking oak. "I believe that it is the nature of X. to be unknown. Are you in Scripture, or are you in Inscription? Nobody comes onto The Argo who is not to be found in one place or the other."

"I am surely in Inscription," X. maintained. "In the Attic ephebic inscriptions, X. equals 'Xenoi'. No, I am not otherwise in Scripture or in Inscription, but I ask you to take me into your company. All of you do know me.

"'Xenoi' means 'Strangers'," the piece of talking oak said. And then it fell silent, for that was much more than it usually talked.

"Oh, I suppose that we halfway know you, X.," Brannagan said, for he had a kind heart under his ruddy hide, "and you have always been good on the conversation and news. Set your golden medallion there on the steersman's sideboard and we will accept it as your identity."

X. rubbed his hands together in the professional manner. He had seen real sorcerers do this trick more than twice, so he could do it also. And he did produce a big gold coin, according to first appearance. It had his coat of arms on it. It had half of all the fancy things that he wished to put on it.

"There it is," he said. "Was there ever such a medallion coin as that?"

"But, X., it is only a one-sided coin," Casey chided him. "That makes it a very one-sided identification. Are we not to be allowed to hear the contra against you, the reverse of your own coin?"

X. turned the coin over, and it disappeared. He had made the coin to be two-sided, but something had happened to it. He tried it again and again. He turned it and it was there, a good coin. He turned it over and it disappeared. There wasn't any reverse to it. X. had crossed magic with real magicians. In particular he had crossed magic with Casey Gorshok the necromancer and Gorshok had won. The coin is still there, on the steersman's sideboard in the cabin of The Argo. It's a curiosity the way it will appear and disappear when it's turned.

"Yes, X., you may sail with us," Melchisedech said. "But you sail as a servitor only and not as a Master Argonaut. You are talented, sure. And

you are all over the place. But, with you, it is a question of not being able to see the water for the fish. You are to receive half shares of whatever booty we win. Many servitors receive only quarter shares."

"That is all right," X. said, "and you do need me. Some of your latest exploits have been worse than just bad show. Gentlemen, they have been bush. Was there not something said about 'Reducing a problem to its lowest level'? Was there not a business of four quick carpenters and four quick saws?"

"You hear only about our busts and half busts," Melchisedech said. "The hundreds of consummate successes are closed off forever in that forgetfulness 'where the only sound is Lethe, and where the ovations sound now', as the poet says. Our really good work remains under the seal and the silence."

"That's what they all say."

So X. sailed with them. And, really, they were glad to have him.

At Our'yev, at the East Mouth of the River Uril in Tartary, Melchisedech Duffey lost his life. Oh, there was no question about it. He was killed dead: deader than a mackerel. Dead, and quickly stripped of the flesh off his bones, and that flesh cremated to ashes. A man will not walk away fromn such a thing as that.

6

The Gold Ship or the King's Ship or the Shimmering Ship is an almost universal boys' dream. And all of the almost universal dreams have strong basis in fact. The almost universal dreams (but not ordinary dreams) are really sub-surface or simultaneous happenings which parallel the surface happenings and are often the stronger and more valid. Almost all boys realize that they have this valid dimension of other happenings and other life. But many of them, not being intelligent enough to keep up, forget it as they grow older.

The other world of oceans and ships and adventures is really there. It is the other side of the coin. It is often the clearest and most decorative side of that coin.

The Argo is not the only one of the preternatural Gold Ships or King's Ships or Shimmering Ships. There are a dozen or so of them. But The Argo is one of the most noble of them, and also it is one of those with the raciest adventures.

These Shimmering Ships, with their ever-young crewmen of very great age, have all the excitement and blood and thunder of Pirate Ships or Devil Ships, but they have the advantage of being on the side of light and glory.

But every boy reveling in their companionship by day and by night knows that their victories are not either easy or inevitable, that some of the greatest contests will be lost, that some of the great Ship Masters will be slain and skinned by their adversaries, that the adversaries are very strong.

These adversariaea are people of stunning impact, of massive mystery, of overpowering personality, of unmatched courage. Give them all of that. So it is in the group understanding, and so it is in reality.

Among the most shatteriiig of the Adversaries is that group known is The Evil prince, the Purple Prince, the Mocking Prince, the Laughing Prince. The most powerful and trickiest of all these adversaries may well be the Laughing Prince of Tartary.

Except for a very short interlude in Wien, all the Argonauts had always been able to tell right from wrong very clearly, and they had always supported the right. They were Commando Experts of a sort, in a battle against evil things, and all of them served tours of duty at this heroic labor. They ransacked minds and seas and realms in their efforts, and they brought strength of character and lively imagination to bear.

The Argo did, very often, sail clear outside of the cosmos, and it did also sail on the insides of minds and persons and it learned of the dangerous reefs and promontories that are within. If the Argonauts ever became confused as to 'where' or 'on which side', there was an Instruction in the chart room of The Argo to set them right. Even when, several times, The Argo had been in evil hands and ownership, the chart room and its instruction were not disturbed.

There were, of course, gray areas that they traveled on their tours, but always they could be classified as good gray or bad gray, or they could be changed by astute battle from one to another. All of the worlds were sites of the long-drawn and never-finished battle between good and evil, and there was no one anywhere who could really stand aside from it.

Except the Laughing Prince of Tartary.

There had been bothersome reports of this Laughing Prince for the late while, that he was the Prince of the Third Way. He was not claimed by either God nor the Devil, and he claimed not either. He was neither hot nor cold, so he had been vomited out of the mouths.

"But he will rue the day when he vomited me out of his mouth," the Laughing Prince had said, and he was not laughing when he said it. "He is the enemy of my enemy, but He is my enemy also. And the enemy vomited me out of his mouth also, and he likewise will rue the day. I am not so 'neither-nor' as all that. I am hot as fire and cold as ice, and they were wrong to eject me. I hold this third place, and I will not successfully be invaded here. My land is a scorcher when I want it to scorch, and mine is the only cooling spring in the country. Whoever comes to my land will have to come down to my spring to drink. My way is sweet and my burden light, and my spring is poisoned."

It was reported that the Prince was really the vile creature out of the 'dialectic pit'. It was also reported that he was not so no-sided as he pretended, that he really did adhere to one side, and that the truth was not in him. The Laughing Prince always wore large, black lens, eyeglasses, and no one had ever seen his eyes. It was reported that he was a totally amoral person, which of course was impossible. It was reported that his laugh was really a bit of something else.

So the Ship Argo had a work order to check out the reports on this Laughing Prince. It was hardly known of what land he was the Prince. Tartary, like so many of the other realms, had been under the dominion of the New Infidels for several generations. Tartary was not even an official name any more.

The Argo went there by rapid but difficult voyage. Even getting a ship the size of The Argo onto an inland sea the size of the Caspian was tricky. The Argo Masters came to Tartary, and nobody there had ever heard of the Laughing Prince. They had, they said, no prince except the First Secretary of the Oblast. There were some slight indications of superimposed ambients in Tartary, but mostly the country was as it should be. So each of the Masters, and the Half-Master, searched as best they could.

Mr. X. did the things he could do best. He talked to important people, or to people whom he fictionalized as being somehow important. He obtained from them bits and snippets of information that he thought might be important. He dug up strong hints of things as they should not be. If it hadn't been for the peculiar information that he uncovered, he wouldn't have been able to identify Duffey's ashes and bones later.

And Kasmir Gorshok, the Casey of the Zodiac and the Casey of Chicago, did the things he could do best. He sorcered up a pavillion that was like a pleasure palace. He sorcered aides into being. He gave lavish entertainments to such local officials who might be of value. He gathered all such intelligence as could be gathered by sorcery. He met the Laughing Prince in seances, and he was told by the prince that one of the coffins on The Argo would soon have its designated bones in it. There were always a few unoccupied (and some occupied) coffins on The Argo to take care of all eventualities. But Casey was not able to persuade the Laughing Prince to mend his evil or ambivalent ways, or even to admit that his ways were evil or ambivalent. "No, no, fuzz-face, my ways are beyond good and evil," the prince told Kasmir. Kasmir wasn't able to come to the Prince in the flesh. He was told that the story that the Prince had no eyes behind those black lens glasses was false. The mystery of the black lens glasses was something other than that.

Biloxi Brannagan did the things that he did best. He took The Argo, and he ransacked all the shores of that Sea to make them give up their answers. It was a mocking bunch of answers that they gave him, and yet not false. Brannagan was the finest seaman of all the fine seamen who had sailed on The Argo. There was nobody like him for ransacking a shore.

Melchisedech Duffey went upland a little bit into the boondock interior, but the interiors were never well done in treacherous Tartary. (Is Tartary ultimately the same as Tartarus?) There was an emptiness and incompleteness about the interiors. It was for this reason that they were so susceptible to having other ambients superimposed on them. Upcountry, the superimposed ambients were much more noticeable than on the coast, and things were somewhat more strongly 'as they should not be'.

The Industrial-Agricultural country had a desert superimposed upon it sometimes, a desert that in reality had been driven away by the big dams and deep wells long ago. Melchisedech knew something about Asian deserts from his earlier eras, and he recognized that there were many things in this desert that did not fit. There were many skeletons of people lying around on the rocks and sand, but few of animals. There were conspicuous skulls of them here and there, but not skeletons. "And skeletons are harder to do," said Duffey, "unless you've studied them a bit." The rocks were not right and the plants were not. Even the blasting heat of the desert was wrong. It tore at one like the wind from a furnace, but it did not stir the plants or the sand. There was intense thirst in that desert, and rather stylized hallucinations. And yet, it seemed a skimpy net in which to allow yourself to be entangled.

Melchisedech was several times able to break out of this desert framework and back into the basic world. Now he entered a middle-sized town that was full of trucks and bustle. He ate a good meal at a restaurant 'Rose Ivanova's Kofeinik, You Know It's the Best, All the Truck Drivers Stop Here', of hearty food. And he drank eleven glasses of water. That's right, eleven glasses. His subliminal thirst, induced by the desert scenes, was very great. But ordinary water might not slake it.

Nobody in that place had ever heard of the Laughing Prince who was the enemy of both God and the Devil, and who was partisan of neither good nor evil, having a third thing going. "Such lowering amorality must have left its mark somewhere," Melchisedech said. "There is one place in every town where they will know something about every phenomenon, even if they have it all wrong.

Melchisedech went out of the restaurant and started for the newspaper building two blocks up the street where he would --

-- but he was back in the desert again, and the town was gone. The middle-sized town, with its bustle and business, had turned into desert dust that hung faintly in the air, but the desert burning through it was much stronger. Melchisedech was tortured once more by the instant thirst. There were shocking hallucinations of the Laughing Prince. There were -- no, these things could not be -- hallucinations of hallucinations out of one of Melchisedech's childhoods. There were the three crooked persons with the slanted faces. They had pursued Duffey in his boyhood and tried to kill him. Later they had become cartoon characters and stereotypes and comic book persons. They were the SFM, the Slant Faced Men, of the Fantasy Rags. But now they were in the desert scene as bully boys for the Laughing Prince.

"You have to come down to my spring to drink," the Prince was saying like an old record on a record player. And Duffey knew that he must indeed drink of that spring even if it should be the death of him. Duffey knew that in reality he had drunk eleven glasses of water in the last half hour. But he also knew that in unreality he was dying of thirst and would have to drink at a spring that he had heard gurgling on the edge of the town. He rushed to it. He found it. It was upwelling in sparkling splendor.

"Don't drink! it's poisoned!" millions of boys were trying to warn him out of their deep participation in the events. "It's poison! It's poison!"

Melchisedech had always been in close rapport with the millions of boys. But now, though he heard them and their warning voices, he could not understand their words.

He drank of the poisoned spring of the Laughing Prince. And he was slain and seduced and defeated just as easy as that.

He could see everything with great clarity after he had drunk from the poisoned spring, but it was all wrong stuff that he saw so clearly. The unreality had defeated him. This unreality is the greatest of enemies.

The spring was a gusher that was in defiance of all hydraulic laws. Duffey had drunk greedily from it, and then he had known that it was all over with him. He waited to die. The haughty prince was there to relish his death scene, but he seemed to be watching it not directly, but through some medium at second hand. The three slant faced killer slunk up. They were badly dated. They were caricatures. But now they were murder itself.

"They simply won't do, Prince," Duffey said. "They are American cartoon type, and they actually date before the year 1910. They grew up after that, year by year as I grew up, but they are still dated back in their beginnings. Those slant faces! Those knives! Really, Prince, you can do better than that."

"If you laugh at them, you laugh at me also," the Prince giggled furiously. Duffey knew then that the Prince had misnamed himself. He was the Giggling Prince and not the Laughing Prince. He could giggle as well when furious as when happy, and he was furious now.

"Their knives are thirsty," the Prince giggle angrily, "and I will let them have you now before the un-pain of death saves you from them. Suffer, Melchisedech, suffer!"

Melchisedech was paralyzed from the water of the poisoned spring, but his awareness of pain was still intact when the three slant-faced killers slithered in and began to murder him alive with their knives. It was a real death even though it was set in an unreal scene.

Melchisedech had that clarity and perception of special information that a dying body will sometimes feed back into whatever it is separating itself from. He now knew how the Prince could be so amoral. The Prince was very young, and he was retarded in his intelligence. Not in his mentality, which was immense, but in his intelligence he was retarded. What surface glibness he had was from the televisions and the hallucinators that he watched. The mystery of the black lensed glasses, in fact, was that the two black lenses were the backs of two small television sets set close to the Princely eyes, and that these, and his own interior hallucinations, were all that the Prince could ever view. The Prince has a large but irrational brain, and great and unhinged psychic power. It was out of this that the first case ever of massive total amorality had been compounded.

The three slant-faced killers cut all the flesh off of Duffey's bones, and that is what killed him, beating the poison to it. But his spirit still lingered with his remains, as that of a new dead person will often do. Besides, he had received no further instructions. The slant faces had done their work and they went away, one of them eating the kidneys. They were followed by three slack-faced men (in archetypal literature, they are sometimes confused with the three slant faces who go before them, but the Prince did not confuse them; he kept a trio of each) who built a furnace fire. The slack faces burned all the sinew and viscera and flesh of Melchisedech until they were nothing except hot ashes (they would always be hot and ready to burst into flames). They put these ashes, still smoking, into a cigar canister that had once belonged to the King of Spain.

The amoral desert and the amoral figures faded away. There was a slight jerk or jar then as when these things shift to a different context. The mortal remains of Melchisedech Duffey were in the middle of an unbusy street in Gur'yev, a town at the East Mouth of the Ural River in Tartary. The bones lay lankly there in the street, and the smoking ashes were in a little canister beside them. Both X. and Kasmir Gorshok, gathering their information in their different ways, had coincided in their results. They came to the place in that street where Melchisedech's death and remains had impinged into the world of Reality. And they were able, by methods that were themselves very near to sorcery, to identify Melchisedech positively in both bones and ashes.

A minor official who was there was glad enough to be rid of the whole business. "I just don't know how I would have written up a report like this," he said. "People keep arriving out of that 'nowhere desert', dead and disfigured and our superiors always believe that we have been drinking when we report such things. Take them and say no more about them, and I will not."

"I will be the custodian of the ashes," X. said. "I have a premonition that I will meet Melchisedech alive again, and then I will give them back to him. Few men have such keepsakes of themselves."

X. kept the ashes in their canister. X. and Casey Gorshok carried the bones down to dockside, keeping to the side streets from some kind of

embarrassment. And Biloxi Brannagan was just bringing The Argo back into port, knowing that the search for the Laughing Prince had ended in disaster.

They put the bones of Melchisedech Duffey into one of the caskets of The Argo. Brannagan, in his person of St. Brandon, said the 'Mass of the Holy Precursor Melchisedech' for him. (It was the Mass of April 31 when the old calendar prevailed.) And Brannagan and Gorshok and X. half believed that they had done all that they could do for Melchisedech.

And Melchisedech lay in that coffin, and he lay there and lay there.

"I thought there would be more to it than this," Melchisedech said.

The Argo Masters, Brannagan and Casey Gorshok, and the Half-Master X., went on to further adventures and rectifications, but it just wasn't the same thing without Duffey booming in the midst of them. The bones of their companion Melchisedech, just lying there, spooked them and gave an incomplete air to all their doings.

And so it went, for about three days. Then God Himself came onto The Argo in the uncounted hour.

"Have you been relieved of your duties as a Master of The Argo?" God asked those bones, and they leapt with joy at the sound of His voice.

"No, I have not," the bones of Melchisedech spoke boldly, "but I am dead and stripped of my flesh. I waited here in my coffin where I knew You would find me. I did not have any further instructions. I did not know whether I was wanted as Pilot and Master any longer."

"The articles of the voyage do not require that you be a fleshed Pilot and Master," God said. "And you are always wanted. You, and you others, see to the details among you."

Well, it would be awkward, but it could be done. There would be a sort of joyful awkwardness in finding ways to go about it. Melchisedech still had all his faculties, his movements, his merriments. His old seaman's clothes still fit him, though a little bit scarecrowishly. Casey Gorshok made for Melchisedech a golden mask to go over his bony skull, a golden scarf to go around his neck, and golden gauntlets for his hands and wrists. These golden fabrics came from combings of the Great Golden Fleece of Colchis itself. Melchisedech could have made these things himself, but Casey wanted to make them for him as a sign of their friendship, which was indeed in need of repair. Melchisedech could no longer speak properly, because of his fleshless throat condition. But he could communicate, and one did not always notice that his communication was not speech of the ordinary sort.

And so it was that, with the bones of a merry dead man at the helm, The Argo sailed on some of her highest adventures. She became the talk of the seas.

But it wasn't as easy as you might suppose. The golden mask didn't have the eye slits quite in the right place. Melchisedech no longer had eyes, but he still had something there, and the mask often impaired his sensing. And those golden gauntlets on his hands and wrists, sometimes it seemed as though they coarsened the steersman's fine touch on the wheel. Even the gold scarf around the throat may have choked down a few noble impulses. But, if it were all made out of the Fleece Itself, and shaped by an Argo Master, where could the fault be?

After this very real death, Melchisedech Duffey could still come and go in time and in space, but he could go on living only a very few years into the futures: and some of the incursions of The Argo were beyond those few years. As a stubbornly dead and resolutely bony man, he accomplished things that another man could hardly do. There was an ambivalence about him (he said that he had a tibia in each of the worlds), but there was an awkwardness and unaccountability also. The future is wraithy in any case, and one may excuse a certain wraithiness there. But as to present time, however constrained that present scene might be, what was the case of Melchisedech in it?

If an Argo adventure was more nearly in the present time, if it impinged less far into the future than did the Adventure of the Laughing Prince, then Melchisedech became as a normal man again, with flesh on his bones, and a voice back in his voice box. In that case, he used the same bones that he had been using, and he used the same flesh that he used to use. But were not the ashes in the canister a residue of that old flesh? The ashes did not disappear at such times, though they smoked uncommonly and seemed a bit more hot. But Melchisedech walked in his flesh, and his flesh was at the same time ashes in the can. This was the Ambiguity of the Flesh of Melchisedech Duffey, the 'Ambiguity of the Flesh' that would be with him for many many years, all through his married life, all through the New Orleans days and nights, all through his less spectra adventures. But his flesh would be no less valid from suffering this ambiguity.

Henceforth (and preforth) Melchisedech always had the feeling that the 'Present Time' was really a sort of living in the 'Past'. Melchisedech had been quite a young man when he first (and last, and always) set his person onto that circumstance named 'The Sea of the Seven Lost Years', the sea and years in which all of The Argo adventures were enacted. And that not always contingent sea could be re-entered at any of its shores. It could be entered from a shore where Melchisedech was nineteen or sixty-nine years old, from a shore where he was twenty-four or eighty-four years old, but he would always be a young man again when he had stepped from the shore.

"And I must remind you that you can leave The Argo again at any of the shores, at that of age twenty-four or at that of eighty-four," X. told Duffey. "And if you leave it at the shore of an early age, then you leave it before your death and confusion, and you will have your long life ahead of you yet."

"What are you saying, X?" Melchisedech asked him. "Your mouth moves but I cannot understand your words.

"Leave The Argo? Why should I want to leave The Argo?" Melchisedech asked.

Duffey, however, seemed (to himself, and even to those who knew him best) a not quite-real person on his every return to 'present' It seemed to Duffey himself that whole hunks of his life, living them for the first and only time as he was, were being lived in the past.

The Chicago years, from this unmoored viewpoint, would have a strong tone of living in the past to them. By that, Melchisedech never knew his wife Letitia except by incursions into the past, since the earliest shore of the Seven Lost Years went back before he had known her. The New Orleans years were always a sort of living in the past too. There was nothing wrong

with this. It gave depth to those time and experiences. But Duffey really would be a bundle of anomalies in the deaces when would run the Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans, when he would keep his own ashes in a cigar cannister on the table there, when he would parade such incredible knowledge, and sometimes such incredible ignorance and simplicity. The unreality of Duffey would be to everybody the most striking thing about him. It wasn't that he was destined to die in the near future. Everybody does that. It was that he had already died in the near future. And it wasn't so much that he made untimely forays into the future beyond the point of his own death. "For all the lives he has lived. he hasn't died nearly enough deaths," Absalom Stein would say of Melchisedech. And that would tell a lot about him.

Duffey's relationship to Stein, and to others of the 'Animated Marvels' was a mixed up business. Duffey really did 'create', to some extent and in some aspects, that bunch of animated mavel. And yet most of the Marvels were themselves Masters of The Argo, and were probably as old as Melchisedech, within a few centuries. They all belonged to one living corporation. The Argo Masters were an interdependent society, and each member played some very special role in every other one of them. But what role, for instance, did Kasmir-Casimir-Casey play to all the others? What role did Count Finnegan play? Or Stein? Or Teresa Stranahan (probably hers was an animating role just as Melchisedech's was a creative role; they are not quite the same). What role did Biloxi Brannagan play? Or Henry Salvatore? There aren't a large number of absolutely vital roles, or there would have been a large number of Argonauts to play them to the oteh. And there weren't.

But whenever The Argo would come to land to refit or to take on water or provisions or sea stores, she was likely to come to one of those chancey places or times in a present day context. And her few hours or days in such a port could be years or decades according to the flowing and present time. And some of the sea stores and ship stores that The Argo took on wer, though absolutely necessary, intangible.

The Argo took on electric life from Teresa Stranahan and Margaret Stone and Henri Salvatore in their world militant or 'present' lives. She took on sea biscuit from Hans and Marie Schultz, and Jew bread from Absalom Stein, and Purgatorial Loaf from Bascom Bagby. She took On sea stores from Marie Monahan also, and from Finnegan. She took on ship's timbers and even masts from Zabotski.

There was a ships' chandler in New Orleans who had nether millstones that were harder than any others. There was a boats' supplier in St. Louis who had boat hitches so that no barge or tow need ever be lost from a hitch. Those things are important.

The Argo had always to come back to its sea wrack roots, or to its land roots in a 'present time'. There was sound sustenance in the 'present times', but in the 'futures' the sustenance was often food too small, or too large, or too strange. It was of those weirdly verdant futures that Blessed Austin, an old Argo Master he, wrote, "And these were the dishes wherein to me, hunger starven for thee, they served the sun and moon". Don't knock it who have never been served the sun and the moon in a dish, but both these are weak candles before the Source itself.

It was of a future that had to be forced to disgorge a past and a present that Blessed Ezekial spoke "Oh my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and I will bring you back to your land." Ezekial was a very early Argo Master.

It was of a present, ever-cutting into the future, that Blessed Margaret Stone spoke, "I can procure it that no one I, have ever known will be lost. I have this as a promise, and no one else in the world has been given this same promise. But what of those whom I have never known? What promise will save some of them?"

"Margaret, Margaret," Melchisedech would say when he would hear her expound this, "You went to see and to heckle the Devil himself when he once spoke in this city. And later you drank coffee with him and talked with him privately. So you do know him. Is he then covered by the promise to you that he will not be lost?"

"He is covered by the promise, and he will not be lost," Margaret said. "Even now, he may already have broken with that thing. But he is a devil only. He is not the Great Devil Himself. Him I have not known."

"Yes, he was the Great Devil Himself," Melchisedech would say at that time, "or that is the prevailing opinion."

"Listen, you masters of the several worlds, how do you know that your salt hasn't lost its savor," Margaret would challenge them. "How are you sure?"

"You and yours make me sure," Melchisedech would say. "If our salt has lost its flavor, well then we will get more savor from some of you here. See to the stowing of a few hundred weights of savory salt, favorite urchin. We sail again within the year, and we will fly a new pennant 'This Ship is Salted by Blessed Margaret Herself.'"

Duffey had once said "Every attempt to get the people to change the present to improve the future has been a dismal failure." But Duff&y had been wrong. People like Henry Salvatore and Margaret Stone and Teresa Stranahan and Mary Virginia Schaeffer, and even Absalom Stein, and even quarded Zabotski, would be changing the present to improve the future. They would be doing it massively.

Margaret would always be "The Fire that sayeth not 'It is enough'." The shape of the world would have been different, and more ungainly Without her. They were a bunch.

From the earliest sail ship days, there have been good islands, recuperative islands, where ships might be watered, provisioned, stored, every one careened and overhauled. Such an island would have to be a copious and accessibly place with a fine flow of fresh water, good game for hunting, or good cattle or ant turtles for meat supply, fruit or coconut, pleasant climate for recovering from sickness, sea stores, turpentine, tar, jute fiber, cloth or vegetable matting that could be used for cloth, timbers. And native workmen and native friendships were advantages also.

The Argo had quite a few such islands, whether they were completely surrounded by water or not. The Land of the Animated Marvels was such a recuperative island for the Ship. This was also called 'The Archipelago' or 'The Greater Archipelago'. This was a scattered island with its population in various places, but mostly in Chicago and St. Louis and New Orleans. It had old liaison with The Argo. Many of its members were themselves Argo Masters though they might not always remember having followed that trade, until some of them were called back to it. They offered sweet water and provisions and healings and virtues. But the interrelationship of The Argo to this Island or Archipelago of Animation, in terms of time and place, is not at all well worked out. It is supposed that it is all down in the log

books of The Argo, but these lack indexing and correlation.

Melchisedech Duffey sometimes sailed a hundred different adventures on The Argo in the interval of no more than a single day that he was absent from his establishment in Chicago or his Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans. And Biloxi Brannagan lived ashore for thirty years with his wife Gertrude in Biloxi Mississippi, not turning a lick, and this thirty years was all during a quite short leave of absence from The Argo.

The Argo people cruised various presents and futures. But could one always tell when he was in a future?

An Argo Master could almost always tell, by the wavy billowy glints and sharps of light and shadow, like sunlight under water.

But others than Argo Masters cannot always tell, in as much as it might be present and not future time for those others when it is future for the Argo Masters.

8

There were events and rumors of events, but the end was not yet, not quite yet.

The effigies had always been on The Argo, for this voyage and for every one of them. Each person who came onto The Argo as Master donned his effigy, which then became part of him, and he wore it. And this released another Master to go and leave his effigy behind. A Master and his effigy did not seem to be present separately at the same time. The effigies were of no real importance, except that they were good working seamen.

But each Argonaut, coming onto The Argo for another tour as Master, would do creative things to all the effigies of absent Argonauts, for that is one of the ways that personalities are built up. But now, standing against this, there were destructive rather than creative things done to three of the effigies. These three effigies were violated and marred by none other than Casey Gorshok. This was after he had been on The Argo for some time, and it was done in a fit of pique. One of the effigies that he violated was that of an Argo Master, and the other two had been companions or companions to be of the Master. Yes, there were effigies of respected companions on board. There could be more effigies than there were Masters, just as there were more coffins on board The Argo than were needed to contain the remains of all Masters everywhere.

The effigy of the Master was clearly that of Count Finnegan. Well, Count Finnegan was an accredited Astronaut, a High Master. His effigy could licitly be there, and it could have two companions if it washed. But who were the two companions?

All three of them had been smeared by a marring hatred, by a creative urge gone awry. It was Casey Gorshok's hatred, which was hard to understand. Gorshok was always a gentle and compassionate man.

One of the companion effigies looked like a Hercules Monkey, but it also looked like a man. The other one of them looked a little bit like a Mottled Skin Gilbert Hyena, an unkind appearance to give anyone.

Now a brief world history for the last two millennia:

There had been, since the time of Restored Salvation, one central institution in the world. This central institution of the world was now, in

these latter years, being systematically destroyed. It was known that the world itself could not survive the destruction of its central institution.

"We know that," the systemic destroyers said. "We know how closely the world and the thing are linked together. Why do you think we're doing it? We want the world destroyed."

But the bells for the 'Last Rally' had been set to ringing by a few persons who opposed the destruction.

Conclusion of the brief world history of two millennia.

It was in the 'Third Year of the Bells' that Count Finnegan did come on board with two companions, all of them in such sort of disguises as any sharp-eyed mariner could see through. They slipped into and absorbed their marred effigies. The point about these three men, Count Finnegan Himself, and Gilberto Levine and O'Brien, and Herman Hercules, is that they were acting as doubles or stalking horses for three Princes of the Ekkiesia (that central institution on earth than which none can be higher). Or else they themselves were the three Princes disguised as their own doubles.

The assignment of Count Finnegan and his companions had been to get themselves killed in place of the three Princes, or at least draw the murder fire away from the Princes. And they had failed in their assignment. The three Princes had all been murdered. And these their three doubles still lived and traveled the lands and seas.

There was one music sound that became noticeable shortly after the coming on board of these three doubles. It may have been going on ever since their coming on board, but it only gradually rose to full audibility. This music sound was produced by certain Coryphaena Fish rising with their heads above the waves and blowing horns (shell horns, but with bright brass stops and frets), blowing them now loudly and clearly.

This always happened whenever a present or future Pope was riding on The Argo. It had happened a dozen times in The Argo's history, and it was a fact beyond question that this music of such unusual origin served as a continuing salute to the personage.

One other person had come onto The Argo at the same moment as Finnegan and Gilberto and Herman Hercules. This other person did not come onto The Argo openly. He came over the poop, and he hid, except from Melchisedech that is. No one could hide from Melchisedech when he was in his state of fleshlessness. The person who was acting so peculiar, not so peculiar for him though, was X.

But was not X. already on The Argo? No, he had left The Argo openly three ports back, for service of another sort, as he said, and now he returned secretly. Secretly, but brightly, for now he was in red robes and red-piped cape. And he was Monsignor X.

He brought with him a sly-wrapped package. He always brought something such whenever he came. He showed it to Melchisedech in one of those unaccountable hours of the night. It was the oddly-marked, flayed skin of one Cardinal Artemis.

"Yes, this is the holy, flayed skin itself," Monsignor X. told Melchisedech, "and it is marked in a very peculiar manner. And so is the skin of one of the men who now sleeping in a berth on The Argo here, one of the men who came on board with Count Finnegan. The Cardinal's flayed skin here, and the living skin of that sleeping man, have almost identical markings. This man was supposed to be double of the Cardinal, but how can we

tell which is which for certain now?"

"Ah, flay the sleeping man, I suppose, X.," Melchisedech said, "and run both the skins through our computer. That should tell us which is the false skin and which is the true, which is the double and which is the man. But only Count Finnegan and Gilberto the man know of the marks."

Duffey at first thought that a most peculiar fog was rising in the night. Then he saw that it was the special shimmering. That meant that the events happening now and henceforth, though of high probability, were not absolutely happening. It was really a sort of relief.

"But the flayed skin that I hold in my hands, to what man does it belong? The skin of the dead Cardinal Artemis was marked and mottled naturally. The skin of Gilberto who would play his double was marked by Gilberto himself with a tattoo needle, and it had all the marks of the Cardinal's skin. But Gilberto put on certain of his own characteristic marks also, 'So that I will know my own skin if I ever see it again,' as he said. But which skin is it now? Are there too many marks on it, or too few? Of which man is this the skin? And which man is sleeping on this ship right now?"

"I don't know, Monsignor X.," said Melchisedech of the bones only.

"I find it significant that you, a certified sorcerer and magus, do not know such a simple thing," Monsignor X. said.

Yes, it was possible that Casey Gorshok Szymansky, of the Zodiac and of Chicago, was somewhat chilly to Count Finnegan and his companions when those three came onto The Argo during the 'Third Year of the Bells'. But both of them were Argonauts and Masters, so a chilliness between them would not have been becoming. There had to be some explanation of the apparent frostiness of Casey, since it could not be real.

Then there was an event of great importance in the history of art. Count Finnegan, in that short time he was on The Argo at that time, painted thirteen really stunning pictures. This was the "Deaths of the Cardinals" series. They are beyond all price. They are also beyond almost all access, for they are painted on the very bulkheads of the 'Bread and Wine Room' of The Argo, and The Argo does not come to the call of random persons.

Could there be any doubt that Count Finnegan himself painted them? Cardinal Hedayat, that great Prince of the Church and look alike double of Finnevan, had been an accomplished amateur painter. But had he such power as this? Was there on all the Earth, now that Adam Scanlon was dead, any painter other than Finnegan who was capable of such work? This was consummate power in portraiture.

The series showed the thirteen executions or murders of the thirteen very great men. All of them were wonderful in their power and majesty, but the 'Hanging of Cardinal Gabrailovitch', the 'Beheading of Cardinal Ti', the 'Flaying of Cardinal Artemis', the 'Impaling Upside Down of Cardinal Hedayat', these were surpassing.

The thirteen great paintings, representing the Cardinals Ti, Brokebolt, Merry de Val, Leviathon, Artemis, Lloyd-Spencer, Salvatore, Gregorio, Runosake, Doki, Gabrailovitch, Erculo, and Hedayat, showed thirteen very great men, some of them saints, one of them Salvatore an Argo Master.

"My God, what passion!" Biloxi Brannagan had cried out when he saw those beautiful and torturous burstings of color. These were life and death portrayed.

"Biloxi, you have known myself and you have known Melchisedech and

others of us," Count Finnegan chided him, "and you still use words wrongly, as a land-bound mortal would. 'Passion' is but the weak opposite of 'Action' as to be passive is the opposite of to be active. You should look at these and strike your forehead with your hand and cry 'My God, what action!' Action does not require such incidentals as exterior motion. Action is..."

"Be off with thee, thou impelled genius, thou glorious counterfeit, thou delicious fraud," Biloxi Brannagan cried at him.

"We go to the 'Belling Shoals', to the 'Ringing Rocks', to the hewn cave in the heart of the 'Mooring Stone'", Count Finnegan said to them all. "Ours is a very short trip with you this time. And I may never again set foot on The Argo till I sail on her on the Four Waters of Paradise. We are going to the Haven in the Shoals because that is the last refuge on Earth for us. We are assembling there now, by various conveyance, thirteen shadow men, thirteen doubles of dead princes, because we will play a trick on the Judas World by going there. Of the thirteen of us, one of us will not be a shadow man. One of us will not be the double of a dead holy man. One of us will be, pardon me, a dead holy man who is still alive. And by that we will effect it that the line is not broken. We will assure it that the world will not be lost before the last battle begins at least. You will know that we have not let the line be broken by the fact that on your very next adventure you will have the transporting of the Antichrist. Were we extinguished now, his evil would already have been done and there would be no need for him to appear in the world in person. But our line will still be unbroken when Armageddon Morning dawns red. One of us will be reigning when this very ship, the Holy Argo, carries Antichrist to the Plains of Megiddo."

"The Antichrist will never travel on The Argo," said Biloxi Brannagan.

"He has done so," said Gilberto Levine and O'Brien, the double of Holy Artemis.

"He is doing so," said Herman Hercules, the double of Holy Erculo.

"He will do so," said Count Finnegan the double of Holy Hedayat.

When Count Finnegan and his companions left The Argo, the Coryphaena Fish with their brass-fretted shell horns stayed by that shore of the 'Ringing Rocks' where the three landed, and they did not follow The Argo further.

9

Melchisedech Duffey and Biloxi Brannagan and Kasmir Gorshok, the three Masters then a-sail on The Argo, declared themselves in perpetual session to guard against the coming of the Antichrist onto The Argo.

"Prophecies are made for man and not man for prophecies," Melchisedech swore. "If a prophecy is bad hap for man, or if it signifies the end of man, then we will contravene it. Myself, I cannot even recall the prophecy that Antichrist will sail on the Argo to Megiddo."

"I believe that it is somehow combined with the Judas Prophecy," Casey said.

"And it is necessary that it should happen," said Biloxi Brannagan. "It is needful that this evil person of Mystery does go to Megiddo. Scripture tells us that this, along with other related things, must happen."

"It is necessary that it happens, but woe to him by whom it

happens,' is what God in Sripture says," Melchisedech said. "My own prayer is 'Let this misfortune happen if it must, only not yet!' Let this woe, which will be eternal, not fall on us. Not on myself, not on thee Biloxi, not on thee Kasmir, not on Holy Argo Herself. Somewhere there are experts at detection and scrutiny who could set up conditions so that this 'Person of Mystery' could in no way come onto The Argo. Who are these experts? Where will we find them?"

Finnegan and his companions had left the Ship by then, and The Argo was on further adventures.

"Oh the highest experts will be found in their graves," Kasmir said, "or we'll find them still struggling in the World Militant, or we'll find them still unborn. Or in fiction. Damn this flitting fog!"

"The flitting fog, the shimmering, is to be blessed and not damned," Melchisedech said. "It means that some of the most direful things are not of absolute finality at this time, We will find the experts at once, wherever they are, and we will procure their services. See to it, Gorshok! See to it, Brannagan! See to it, myself!"

Well, they got such as they could of the experts in scrutiny and detection. Some of these were indeed fictitious, and they were routed out of their fictional graves. Some of them were authentic persons behind fictional disguises, and these were plucked either out of life or out of death. All the better ones insisted on anonymity before they would give advice: so these will appear under code names. So it happens that they will all be called by the names of famous detectives, whether these are their code names or their real names. They are here called Philo Vance, Father Brown, Doctor Thorndyke, Max Carrados, and Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen. And thus they advised how to keep a person from entering:

"Fireplaces are often the keys to situations like this," Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, also known as 'The Thinking Machine' said. "I always regretted that I could not use a fireplace in my famous 'The Problem of Cell 13', but fireplaces are so seldom found in standard jail cells. When one considers a room or a building or a ship, one says 'This is still a cube, however much it is distorted. We still have the problem of entering or leaving a cube. And a cube is made up of four sides, distorted maybe, and a top and a bottom; or four bulkheads and an overhead and a deck if it is a ship. Something coming into this cube must come in through one of the sides, or through the top or the bottom'. Aha, yes, that is the classic statement. But now comes the classic exception that is so often forgotten: 'Have you remembered the fireplace?' More people have gone wrong by not remembering fireplaces than by any other thing. A fireplace is not really a wall, and it is not really a ceiling, but what is it? Are there any fireplaces on The Argo?"

"There are a few," Kasmir Gorshok said. "I suspect that most of them are subjective or state of mind fireplaces. Every study, every den, every wardroom, on ship or off, has to have a fireplace. There is no satisfaction in such a place without one. But a fireplace need not have an exit to the outside world. A sorcerer in particular has to have a fireplace. He uses the shapes that appear in it for the assembly and selecting of his thoughts and figures. He will also use it as a Sorcerer's Furnace or as an Alchemist's Retort. He will use it for conjuring, or just because a sorcerer would be lost without a fire and a fireplace. There are a number of sorcerers affiliated with The Argo, so there are a number of fireplaces on her. But as

I say, they need not have outlets to the exterior world. They may be subjective fireplaces, blind fireplaces."

"Blind spirits may enter by blind fireplaces," the Professor said, "and I believe that we are dealing with such here. And once they are inside, they can turn themselves into almost anything. A fireplace is neither a wall nor a ceiling, but it is a forgotten entry place between the two. Do you sorcerers or masters have access to or command of any firedrakes?"

"Oh certainly," Kasmir said. "We can command all the firedrakes we wish, and they will come."

"Then set a firedrake to guard each fireplace," the Professor said. "Take ordinary precautions about all the other entrances. Make sure that he who would come aboard does not have an ally on ship already. Watch all these things, and the code-named 'Man of Mystery' will not be able to come onto The Argo."

"The thing to keep track of is who goes out and who comes in," said the person using the name of 'Max Carrados the Blind Detective'. "Do not trust anyone. If more persons come in than go out, then there are additions to the people here. Sound every alarm then, for you have an illegal entry. Break down the security into sections. Make it check for every person, even for yourself, most especially for yourself. And the person who has more entries than exits is himself the guilty one. If you yourself come in more times than you go out, then you may be the culprit, you may be the invader, you may be the 'Man of Mystery'. Watch particularly whether you do not sometimes use a disguise when you come in. Sawed-off shotguns, strategically placed, are a good solution to this problem. They will blast and kill anyone who has an entry that is not balanced by a previous exit."

"Always notice the frame of a picture or of a problem closely," said the person using the code name of Doctor Thorndyke. "Always distrust a person who says that an answer must be either inside or outside of the framework of a problem or a question. Perhaps the answer is neither inside nor outside the framework. Perhaps there are two different meanings to being 'inside' a frame. A thing may be in or inside a frame, and yet not be in the space enclosed by the frame. Especially if the frame is made out of five eighth inch hardwood moulding, the answer may be hidden within the frame itself. You will have to take the ship apart and examine it plank by plank and stick by stick and nail by nail. Examine them all minutely and individually. The ship is its own framework. You recall that in my 'The Case of Oscar Brodski' that I said '...the danger of delay; the vital importance of instant action before that frail and fleeting thing that we call a clue has time to evaporate'. I suggest that you apprehend the 'Man of Mystery' first of all."

"But we still don't know who he is, that is to say, we don't know who he will be," Melchisedech said.

"In that case, find out who he is first of all," said the doctor, "and then apprehend him second of all."

"One of the answers is to be found in the eighth movement of Andreyev's Zauberkonzert," said the expert who was codenamed Philo Vance. "Or, really, the answer may be found in the eighth movement of anything at all, but not so clearly. If you have any feeling for African Violets, you will clearly understand the answer. I would recommend, however, that African

Violets be felt for themselves alone. See my celebrated monogram 'The Unutility of African Violets'. A consummate cribbage boardman will know the answer instantly, as will a master of the Round-The-Mountain manoeuvre at American checkers."

"I dispute you there, Mr. Vance," said Melchisedech Duffey. "I am the master of the Round-The-Mountain trick at checkers, but I do not know the answer to the problem of keeping the person codenamed 'The Man of Mystery' off of The Argo. Myself, when I really know the answer to a thing, I can usually state it in three words."

"Oh certainly, I could do that also," Philo Vance said.

"Well, what are your three words, Philo?" Duffey asked him.

"Get a dog," said the master of detection.

"The hardest man to throw out of a place is the man who is already outside," said codenamed Father Brown, "and the hardest man to prevent entering a place is the man who is already inside. Well, it's been a pleasure, gentlemen. And since Philo and the others have already solved the problem for you, I will bid you all good day. Remind me not to walk directly off the ship until a plank or ladder or device of some sort is provided. I am absent-minded about such things, and sometimes I get a good drenching that way. You know that the original meaning of 'drench' in Old English is to drown, but I don't want to apply this meaning to myself."

"But has the problem been solved?" Brannagan asked. "Do we know how to deal with the 'Man of Mystery' and how to keep him off our Ship? What, after all, has Philo Vance told us?"

"Perhaps an English Bulldog would be the best sort of dog in this case," Father Brown said. "If you know one you can trust, get him. The English Bulldog will most quickly realize it when something familiar begins to turn into something strange and wrong. Deal with it quickly when that moment arrives."

"I'll do it," Melchisedech said. "I'll get an English Bulldog. I know one I can trust." The Argo Masters sent the codenamed detectives and scrutinizers back to their stations, whether in life or out of it.

"Not Gunboat Smith," Kasmir Gorshok said with a touch of worry after the detectives had gone.

"Yes, Gunboat Smith," Melchisedech insisted. "That is one English Bulldog that I trust all the way."

"But Gunboat never liked me," Kasmir said. "We just don't get along well enough together to be on the same ship."

"Gunboat Smith it will be," Melchisedech said with heavy finality. And it was but a short adventure to pick up Gunboat Smith where he was Bulldog-in-Residence at the Old Wooden Ship Tavern in Galveston, Texas.

There was a lot of growling on The Argo for the next several days. Gunboat Smith growled at Kasmir Gorshok, and Kasmir Gorshok growled at Gunboat Smith. But other wise the Ship was in good shape. Closed circuit burglar alarms were installed at every passageway and rat line of The Argo, and the firedrakes were on constant patrol. It would seem that no person could enter The Argo uninvited, either by air or by land or sea, or from under the sea.

But phenomena of every sort were surrounding and infiltrating the ship in their multitudes. Something from their still poorly-defined aggregation was trying to board The Argo, or was already paying homage to

somebody on The Argo. There was the beginning of something familiar turning strange and wrong. Gunboat Smith let them know about it as well as he could, but they all felt it.

"Has he come already?" Biloxi asked, "and has he been given authority over the world?"

The Argo was picking up an entourage of ships and boats, large and small, and some of them of unrecognizable flag and registry. There were musical sounds from the sea, but these were of a greatly different music from that which had accompanied The Argo when it was carrying Count Finnegan and Gilberto and Herman Hercules. The sea itself was something that was turning wrong and strange. There was a new magnetic wind blowing. Strangeness isn't to be classified too quickly.

The musical sound that accompanied them now (or was it an anti-musical sound?) was possessed of a different magnetism. It was as if consensus and polarity had been abrogated. The ears of Duffey and Brannagan and Gunboat Smith bled a bit in those hours. New and dazzling things were happening to smell and vision, and even to tactile feelin@. There was a pleasant clamminess in the air. Can there be a pleasant clamminess? Something new in excitement and fascination was creating itself.

The Ship Argo was following a course of her own selection, or perhaps she had been instructed by persons unknown to follow this course. She was moving eastward at a fair speed, but not at full Argo speed. She was not (as she usually was) moving against the winds and waves. Now she was carried along by the winds and waves (winds and waves that had obviously been tampered with). And those winds and waves were paying open homage to The Argo or to someone on board of her.

"Morning sickness? Me? Morning sickness!" Melchisedech moaned one morning, and he was sicklied all over with a new dullness.

"I've got it too, Duffey," Brannagan said. "I'm just like a landsman on his first rough sea. Have you noticed the sea though? It's different. It's of a different texture and aim and intent. Duff, it's paying homage to a different thing. I had a discussion with some fellows once. What, we considered, if the materialists and secularists are right, and there are no things beyond? What if there be no aim or intent? What if there be a different aim or intent to it all? What would the sea be like then? Those were all fellows who knew the many faces of the sea well.

"The sea would be glassy, they argued. It would swell and it would trough, but it would still be of a dull and opaque glass. It would heave, perhaps, but it would not crest. They had all seen such seas for very brief moments. But the sea, by ordinary, pays true homage, pays brilliant homage, and it is not of that opaque glassiness. We see the wrong ocean now."

"And I will heave, perhaps in a moment," Duffey said, "but I will not crest. Yes, what homage the sea is paying this morning is to a different thing. What homage my own stomach is paying is different and wrong, but I may get to like it a little. I know too what the world would look like, if it were secular. I've seen snatches and pieces of such a world: places where, in the autumn, the leaves turn from green to dull brown with no brilliant interval; tropical trashlands where it does not lighten or thunder at all; steppe lands where it goes to deep snow and deep freeze with neither rime frost nor hoar frost coming first; swamps too dismal to have swamp lights or fox fire or St. Elmo's fire. Ah, I do feel queasy this morning, Brannagan, and I do think queasy. In my black little heart, it

seems as if I would welcome all the brilliant things going out, and the new brotherhood and new regularity coming in."

"I'm sick too, Duffey," said Brannagan, "and it bothers me that it doesn't -- ah -- bother me a lot more. Ulp! Such pleasant retching I've never known before. I can see why the thing's attractive to most. It's a new form of expression. I'm less a man than I was yesterday, and it doesn't bug me out. Have you heard what rot that piece of talking oak in the Ship's wheel has been talking lately? It's all other seas and other plaudits now, Duffey. Why does it bother us so little?"

"That piece of talking oak in the Ship's wheel, it says that it has been baptised in the spirit and is speaking in tongues now. There's more than a thousand crift following us and Surrounding us, Brannigiin. What is the big attraction? Above all the other atmospheric changes, it is becoming more shimmery now, which means th@At we are even further and more uncertainly into the future. It may break at any time and send us back into one of the presents, or cast us up on one of the shores of the 'Lost Years Sea'. If it is going to happen, I hope that it happens before The Argo and ourselves disgrace ourselves. Do you believe that the things may, by their numbers and their confusions around us, succeed in getting the codenamed 'Man of Mystery' onto The Argo? And why does the general stickiness become less and less sticky until it is nearly tolerable?"

Aye, maybe you'd get to like that regularized sea and that regularized din also. You'd get to like the false regularization and acceptance that had been done to the people.

"Is it going to be a slow and Uneventful event, this taking us over?" Brannagan asked? What do you think, Duffey? What do you think Gunboat?"

No, it wasn't completely uneventful. Just after sundown that night, events began to happen. One of the effigy seamen came and said that the compass in the binnacle was awry. The needle deformed itself and kept pointing at something on the Ship itself, something below decks.

"It is the magnetism," the effigy seaman said. "It is a personal magnetism that deforms needles."

"We feel it," said Melchisedech.

There was a series of sharp explosions on The Argo. Exploration revealed that every mirror on the Ship was shattered, but not a piece of glass had fallen from any of them. One looked in the glass now, and saw himself in a thousand aspects, a different reflection in each shattered segment. This was cubism come into the world as actuality. Then, when one looked away from the mirror, one saw the whole world as shattered and cubistic.

"It's the only way to see the world," another effigy seaman said.

"This is the new depth and dimension, the freedom from integrity. Praise it, praise it!"

"Oh shut up!" Melchisedech said.

Very many people were on The Argo. Gunboat Smith had near bitten the legs off of many of them, and still they came. They were coming over the sides of the ship. They were coming up from the depths of it. There would be no way to keep out the 'Man of Mystery' with so many unidentified people coming in. But Brannagan and Duffey now knew that the 'Man of Mystery' had been on The Argo for quite some time.

People cried out in tongues, and talking dogs interpreted what they

said. Gunboat Smith was not able to come to any of the talking dogs, though he railed furiously against them. The world had changed, or it had somehow been given over to a queer power.

And there was a real attraction to the power. The Argo was going at a still greater rate towards the East, though there was no longer any way of verifying directions; and the smell of hot and rocky land was near. This was the abomination of desolation that was spoken of in the prophets; and it was entirely too attractive an abomination.

A crooked peace had settled over everything. All breathing stopped. Then the Great One appeared, out of the bowels of The Argo.

Breathing began once more, but at a different pace. The world still moved, but not as it had moved before. The Great One appeared in colors that had been long outlawed, and the noise that greeted his appearance ruptured ears and sent double red streams down every head on all the ships and boats of the retinue.

"It's getting more and more shimmery," Brannagan said, "and this is not all the effect of the 'great' event that seems to be happening. We've just gone a little further into the future than we should. But how do we go back?"

"I think we can go back simply by refusing it," Duffey guessed, "but all these poor people cannot go. They live in this time and they are deluded in this time. And the Holy Argo cannot go back until she brings her mysterious passenger to land."

The Apparition, the Man of Mystery, the Mystery of Evil, the Master of the World for That Time, the 'He Who Must Come First', stood there in glory, but the glory was made out of tampered-with light. And yet that's the only kind of light there was left.

He was Peleus, he was Kasmir Gorshok, he was Prince Casimir, he was Casey Szymansky of Chicago and of the Zodiac, and he was the Antichristus. And this was his world. There were paeans heaped up on mountainous sound. There was worldwide adoration on the spherical screen of the apparitionsphere.

The Argo landed at Habonim where the hilly 'Plains of Megiddo' began, and from there this Prince Kasimir who was the Antichristus would rule the world for his period. Then he would destroy the world in the last big battle. It became more and more shimmery.

But Duffey was solidly back into his own flesh. No bones -- only man was he now. There was a returning to basics for him.

There must have been a million people waiting on that shore, and most of them were the high notables of the world. There were very few of the five billion people of the world who didn't accept it. Every compass needle of the world pointed to the Plains of Megiddo now. It was the new center of the new earth, and the Antichrist was king of the earth. And what sort of elect was it that remained undeceived, though powerfully influenced?

Only three of them there that we know of, and some would find them a little bit shabby.

"I wonder why Casey didn't sweep us in too," Brannagan said. "I never knew that he had such power. We're lucky to have escaped him here, and to be able to escape out of here."

"A false prophet is not without honor, save on his own ship," Melchisedech said.

"Thank God for the shimmering," Gunboat Smith growled. "We're fading

out of it and leaving it to itself. What, The Argo had disappeared while we gaze here with the noddies on the shore. She'll be the object of our new search for a while."

"Aye, but I seem to see myself rediscovering her, in disguise and in the hands of a sly hull dealer in New Orleans many years from now," Melchisedech said. "There, or somewhere else we'll find her. Till then, my friends!"

"We go back," Gunboat growled. "We couldn't stop that kinky future this time. Maybe we will stop it the next time, if we're capable of learning anything."

"Gunboat, Gunboat," Brannagan chided him. "From the unholy talking dogs who had caught the false spirit, you have picked up the unholy habit of talking. Give the evil and unseemly thing over. Yes, we have failed to stop it this time. Possibly we have failed to stop it many times, and we are not even sure there is another chance. Well, we go back, one way or the other, and we fade out --"

?

Biloxi Brannagan faded out first. Gunboat Smith, after a deep and comprehending growl to indicate that he would never again indulge in unholy dog talk, faded out next. The entire Surroundings and ambient were gone --

And Duffey himself was fading out of there, and fading in somewhere else, in another time and place. Duffey was swimming in doubtful water, and perhaps he was drowning in it, Then the ocean became a little more cheerful, a Fittle more self assured as it were. "If I'm drowning I may as well drown cheerfully," Duffey said in an aside to himself. N@, the whole of his life did not flash before his eyes in those fragments or seconds, but significant pieces of his early life did flash before him.

There were the times when he had been the Boy King of Salem and had done magic. And he'd had black giants to serve him. He had made birds out of clay and flung them into the air and they flew.

A couple of millennia later in his boyhood, in Iowa and in other places, he had been the Boy King in disguise. There also he had had black giants to command, but they were invisible to all except himself. There were early years where he was shuffled from one set of false kindred to other sets of false kindred. There was the forever blessed boarding school where a few persons (Sebastian Hilton, John Rattigan, Lily Koch), understood that he really was a king in disguise. There was Charley Murray who did magic tricks while Duffey did real magic. But Charley, his best friend, had a better line of patter, and was more applauded than was Melchisedech.

The sky and the water had become younger now, and it was foolish to fear that one might die by drowning. There was the exuberance of youth on everything.

There had been the meteoric gold-touched business venture in St. Louis. There was the foster brother Bagby. There was the Rounder's Club, as fine a club as any in the world. There was Sister Mary Louise. There was Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders, Helen Platner of the Bavarian Club, Papa Piccone of the Star and Garter Club, Beth Keegan who was an ivory statuette.

And following that, Melchisedech, then probably being in his seventeenth year, in a very early morning, had walked out on the river shore in St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and he had walked right onto a

low-lying boat that had been The Argo in disguise. Oh happy water, he was very near that place again.

"I had forgotten how wonderful it was to be not quite seventeen," he chuckled to himself. Then he quoted "I shall arrive. What time, what circuit first, I ask not." What a time to be quoting Browning. A new joy, even a glee, had taken over everything. It was a young ocean now and a young sky over it. There were youthful sea creatures and river creatures, possibly not entirely authentic, Favoring around him with happy noises. They looked a little bit like creatures in certain comic paintings that Finnegan had done long ago. Long ago from when? Just how old was Finnegan now?

It was the year 1923 and Duffey was quite a young man. Finnegan (John Solli) had been born June 1, 1919 so he was about four years old and hadn't done any significant painting yet. Now it was the year 1923 and Melchisedech Duffey swam at the same time out of the 'Sea of Lost Years' and out of the young and joyously muddy Mississippi River. He climbed onto the shore just below the Eads Bridge in St. Louis, Mo. He has never been so happy in any of his lives. He was twenty-three years old and no age is happier than that.

"Oh, I see by your face how young and handsome I am," he cried in joy to Pseudo-Melchisedech who was standing before him there looking very young-mannish and very sad. "it isn't permitted to be sad, not when you're so happy," Melchisedech told the creature.

"You have now lived through the lost years of your life seven times," the young and sad creature told Melchisedech, "and you've died seven deaths. These lives and these deaths have been widely different. You know that, don't you?"

"Not consciously, but, yes; I've known it," said Happy Duffey. "You've known that each set of your lost years were pretty sketchy, haven't you? That you've lived only selections of those world years?"

"Absolutely no!" Duffey declared. "What I have lived, I've lived fully, There's been nothing sketchy about it."

"Have you any idea why this has happened to you?"

"Because I am a Magician, a Magus," Melchisedech spoke out of his youthful joy. "And also because (I hate to say this about so great an entity) because God doesn't quite know how to end the World Affair. He's started many things, but he's never ended anything yet. And the endings are the hardest. I think he's using myself and various other of his Magicians to explore various endings."

"Do you really think so? Oh, no, no, you laughing Judas! That wouldn't be possible. You do know that after three of your deaths you were damned to hell."

"And after the other four of them I wasn't," Melchisedech spoke happily. "So I'm ahead of the game. And I know that the rehearsals are over with, or that they were an illusion. Now I must play my happy role in the last five or six decades of the world. And this time we will do it without the instructions that were given us during the rehearsals. I do not understand it at all, and I'm happy that I don't. Some of those who have other roles may understand it. But I'm twenty-three years old, probably for the last time, and the world is my oyster."

"Do you know what I am?" the strange and boyish double of Melchisedech Duffey asked him.

"I know that you are an Angel," Melchisedech said. "But there are

two sorts of them. Are you an Angel of God or of the Devil?"

"Of God," said the creature. "Yes, I'm quite certain of that."

"Look, pale reflection of myself," Melchisedech crowed, "I've just had a seven part daydream or hallucination. And whether each part of it lasted one minute or seventy years is no matter. It seems now that the whole thing was no more than one minute."

"The world is a kaleidoscope, ever-changing, ever-enchanting, did you know that, My Reflection? And one best strides happily laughing and singing through it. And the fact that one is striding through the hot ashes of Hell every step of the way is no reason to be less merry. If one looks down and sees that he is no more than ankle-deep in Hell, let him continue with a happy heart. But if he sees that he is more than knee-deep in Hell, then hemust, then he must, what must he do then, pale reflection of me?"

"I don't know," said the creature with its paler face of Duffey.

"Maybe that's when he should leave the land for a while and walk on the water," Melchisedech declared. "Remember, Reflection, that man in his original nature was able to walk on water. He is still able to do it, but sometimes he forgets that he is." Then Melchisedech Duffey turned and ran to the city singing happily.

"I lied to him and I lied to myself," said the unhappy Angel who wore Duffey's face. "No, no, I'm not certain at all which one of them I serve. I'm afraid to be certain or even to think about it. Is it God or the Devil that I serve in my confusion and darkness?"

But Melchisedech Duffey, singing happily, was into the city in the bright morning. And he didn't hear the creature at all.

* * *

And so ends R.A.Lafferty's masterful conclusion to MORE THAN MELCHISEDECH.

Or does it?

We shall quote from that ruddy-faced, near-genius, Enniscorthy Sweeny on the matter.

"An event is like a box or other geometrical object," Ennis would say, "and it should be pretty much the same no matter which side it is viewed from. Let us say that we look at it from the south side (that is the past), or from the east side (that is the present), or from the west side (that is an alternative (!!!-ed.) present), or from the north side (that is the future). The event will look a little bit different from these various viewpoints, but not much. You must not reject one view of it when you come to another view. They are all equally parts of it."

Let us turn our faces to the west then -- to that alternate reality which "should not be rejected".

Direction! Direction! Should we run rampant over all the 45 degrees of the thing?

No. No, of course not. We shall plot a course for south south-west to begin and let the sun in its course draw us where it will.

Turn back now. Turn back the pages until you find this sign:

?

And then, after re-acquainting yourself with the compass points, read on!

Biloxi Brannagan faded out first. Gunboat Smith, after a feed and comprehending growl to signify that he would never again indulge in unholy dog-talk, faded entire surroundings and ambient were gone -- the congress of ships and boats and the land itself.

So, for the moment, or for the regression of the moment, there faded out the whole coming of the Antichrist who had possibly deceived all but three people in the world, and one of them a dog.

And Duffey himself was fading out of there and fading in somewhere else, in another time and place. Duffey was swimming in --

Hold everything right there! The hour grows early again, and there will never be a better place for some short notes on the nature of time and related things. The things related to time are aeon and eternity.

Time is the measure of the duration of material creatures and substances. It is the numbering of the successiveness of material change. Things that do not change do not have a beginning and end, and do not display successiveness. An instant of time is imperfect, and anything that is imperfect may be added to. Suppose that one lives only every odd millisecond of an instant, or every third millisecond of it? He would still be living with successiveness and would still be living through imperfect instants. Then those instants could, in another successiveness, be added to. This would not be living that instant twice, though it would resemble it very closely. But all of this is sophistry.

There is only one time.

Aeon is the measure of the duration of non-material creatures or substances, as time is that of material creatures or substances. Thomas writes "Although the aeon is instantaneously whole, it differs from eternity in being able to exist with before and after." There is one aeon for every immaterial individual and for every immaterial relationship. Some aeons apply only to the non-material aspects of individuals and relationships. A person who is partly material and partly immaterial will be sometimes in time and sometimes in aeon.

There are more aeons than one.

Eternity lacks both beginning and end. It exists as a single instant lacking successiveness but having immeasurable depth. Eternity is perfect, and anything that is perfect cannot be added to.

There is only one eternity.

Boethius says: "The flowing instant produces time and the abiding instant eternity."

Augustine says: "Eddying thoughts have no part in the saints' vision of the world."

Thomas says: "Time and eternity clearly differ. But certain people make the difference consist of time having a beginning and an end whilst eternity has neither. Now this is an accidental and not an intrinsic difference... eternity is an instantaneous whole, whilst time is not; eternity measuring abiding existence and time measuring change."

There is an old school-boy argument that states that, since eternity does not have a beginning, then obviously it has not begun; and that the abiding existence is not yet.

There is only one Lord of Time and of Eternity.

This is the end of the short notes on time and related things.

Melchisedech Duffey was swimming in wrong water that was like opaque glass. And quite possibly he was drowning in it. No, the whole of his life did not flash before his eyes in those fragments of seconds, but significant pieces of his life and lives did flash to him.

There were the times when he had been the Boy King of Salem and had done magic. He had had black giants to serve him. He had made birds out of clay, and flung them in the air. And they flew.

There were the times when, in Iowa and other places, he had been the Boy King in Disguise. Then he had black giants to command also, but they were invisible. There were the early years when he was shuffled from false kindred to other false kindred. There were the blessed boarding schools where a few persons, Sebastian Hilton, John Rattigan, Lily Koch, understood that he was really a King in Disguise. There was Charley Murray who did magic tricks while Duffey did real magic.

There was the meteoric gold-touched business venture in St. Louis. There was the foster-brother Bagby. There was the great Rounder's Club, as fine a club as was to be found in the world. There was the sister Mary Louise. There was boxing and promotion. There was the string band. There was Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders, Helen Platner of the Bavarian Club, Papa Piccone of the Star and Garter, Beth Keegan who was an ivory statuette.

There was the flaming love for objects of art. There was St. Malachy's. There were the talismans by which persons would be created or at least awakened. There was a hearty but unexpected leave-taking.

And following that, Melchisedech then being probably in his seventeenth year, in a very early morning, had walked out on a river shore in East St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and had walked right on to a low-lying boat that had been the Argo in disguise.

There had been adventures on the Argo, and now the adventures were finished for a while. That had been the life of Melchisedech Duffey thus far.

Duffey still heard the words of the vanished Brannagan: "I'm not even sure that it has to happen, with as many shimmer lines as there are in the air now. If we three withdraw from it, we make it a little less likely to happen. We help to break the consensus."

Then Duffey was swimming in right water again.

"I shall arrive. What time, what circuit first, I ask not," he was saying. What a time to be quoting Browning. Duffey was swimming in the Sea of the Seven Lost Years, and one can never be sure onto what shore he will come out of that sea.

It was the year 1923, and Duffey was quite a young man. He swam ashore from the muddy river. He had eddying thoughts and he had come on an eddying way, so perhaps he wasn't a saint all the time. But he was still a Holy Magus in patent and title.

Melchisedech was swimming and drifting easily. It was the same river and the same town where he always came out of the sea of the Seven Lost Years. He touched the shore just below the Eads Bridge. It was the river town St. Louis. But just below the high bridge there was a little bob-tailed fishing pier that he had never noticed before. A young boy was sitting on the end of the pier and dangling a line in the water.

"Holy cow!" the boy whooped. "How far did you swim?"

"Oh, about eight thousand miles," Duffey called easily, "but the

current was in my favor."

"Funny man, you remind me of something funny. I think that Manatee is the name for it."

"And you remind me of something funny, young fellow," Melchisedech panted as he lunged onto the shore. "I think that Stranahan is its name."

"My name is Stranahan," the boy gaped, "but how did you know?" "You have the Stranahan sound. There were four sons in a family I knew, Phiup, Hugh, Timothy, and Vincent, going from the oldest to the youngest. Which one are you and how old are you?"

"I'm Philip. I'm ten."

"Ah yes. I knew Vincent best, in his later years."

"But there weren't any later years for Vincent. He died when he was five days old. He was born on April 5, 1921 and he died on April 10, 1921. Is it right with you, old man. You made a funny noise."

"Oh, Vincent, Vincent, sure it's all right now. You were always so droll a kidder. I didn't know you till you winked."

"I can't help it when I wink like that. But I'm not Vincent."

"You winked with Vincent's eyes."

"When Vincent was born his eyes were wide open and everybody called out 'Oh look, he has Philip's eyes; and in the five days before he died I'd sit by his bed and we'd look at each other and understand each other. I believe he could have talked to me, but he seemed to think better of it."

"Well then, Philip with Vincent's eyes, I suppose that everything is still all right. Everything except everything. Where do I start to pick up the pieces? Did you ever know a girl named Teresa Piccone?"

"Yes, she's in the first grade at school. FUnny old man, you look at me with somebody else's eyes too. And I'm in the fifth grade at school. She's a comical little Italian girl who carries live pet mice in her pockets."

"That's her. Do they call Your house the Cat Castle?"

"Yes. What's your name, funny old man?"

"Melchisedech."

"Nobody is named Melchisedech. Why don't you go out to our house and see our folks? Maybe they can find out what's wrong with you. Do you know where our house is?"

"I do. I'll go there at once. I will see you later, Phiup."

Melchisedech went by the Old Stranahan house, the Cat Castle. He recognized the place, almost, but it just wasn't the same. It was like a burlesque of the old house that held visited in other years and in other contexts. He didn't make himself known there.

After that, Melchisedech was sitting in a sort of tavern only two blocks from the Cat Castle. It was in the unhappy years when the blight of prohibition was already on the land, and the only bottles on the shelves were bevo and near-beer. But the people there were drinking real beer; for in St. Louis the people knew all the tricks. Well, everybody except Melchisedech was drinking, but he was not waited on. He shouted and he grew angry, but he soon realized that the people could not see him or hear him.

"So, it's come to that, has it?" he asked somebody, God, or his Angel, or his own inner self. "I ask a sign that there really is such a person as myself. I've come to doubt it and it shatters me. A sign, a sign, for the love of God, give me a sign! Oh, there's the sign. She isn't very big though. Little girl, how old are you?"

"I'm five and a little bit more. I'm in the first grade at school. I

saw you looking at the Stranahan house, and then I saw you walk away from it. I was pretty sure who you were, and I saw what kind of trouble you were in. The reason that people can't see you is that you're a ghost, either one who hasn't been born yet or one that has died. The reason that I can see you is that I can see ghosts."

"Are you Teresa Piccone?"

"Of course I am, and you're King Melchisedech. It has to be that I'd meet you sometime even if it was after you were dead. Oh, this is a delight, the way you take off your beard and hang it on your ear. Live people can't do that."

"Maybe some of them can. Can you see other ghosts, Teresa?" "You mean Vincent, don't you? He died before I was born and it's only this last year that I'm able to talk to him. He says that his seeming to be born was all an illusion, that he was sent to the Stranahans as a good omen. Soon he will really be born, in another part of the country, to another family of very good people. And when that happens, the Stranahans will forget even the illusion of him, but the good omen will be part of them forever. If I were God, I'd make somebody remember Vincent, just for the fun of it."

"I believe that God has done that, Teresa, just for the fun of it. He's made somebody remember Vincent. You."

"Oh yes. Of course I will. I always forget about me. But if the Vincent Stranahan that you remember so well over so many years didn't really live those years, then it casts a big doubt on you, doesn't it?"

"It sure does, little Teresa. It makes it seem that maybe none of my lives happened."

"Maybe with all your ancient memories you forgot to be born? If that's the case, then I think I can fix it up for you. I'll have you be born to me in twenty years or so. I'll just have you, old King Melchisedech, be born to me. Then one at least of your lives will be real. And I believe that if one of them is proved real, all the rest of them will be real too. And in the meantime we'll stay in touch, we can you know, even if it's only playing ghost. And in twenty years or so, I'll have the oldest king in the world as my baby."

"You do give me some slight hope, Teresa."

"And in the meantime, why don't you have some fun? You don't have to be an old ghost. Why don't you be a young ghost? You can be, you know."

"Oh, Oh, Oh, I'll try it, Teresa."

Melchisedech Duffey walked down by the Eads bridge, and he looked at Philip Stranahan sitting on the little bob-tailed fishing pier and dangling a line in the water.

"Which of us is the ghost, Philip?" he called up to the boy.

"You know my name. Hey, did your grandfather find you a while ago? He seemed to be looking for somebody and I believe it must have been you. You look just like him only about fifty years younger. Did he find you?"

"I and the grandfather are one," Melchisedech said.

What? What? Yes, it was the year 1923 again, and Melchisedech was twenty-three years old, one of his favorite ages.

"And if Teresa, in twenty years or so, gives me a valid life, then all of my lives will have been valid. But what will that do to Philip sitting there? Philip shows a touch of the hazy unreality. Better he than me." Then Melchisedech began to sing.

"Oh, it's great to be young-and in danger,

Hi Ho!

It's great to be young in the morning!"

"But it's afternoon, man," Philip Stranahan protested. "I fish here in the early morning and in the late afternoon too."

"I am twenty-three years old, Philip, and I can be twenty-three years old again and again and again. And how many times can you be ten years old? My ghost is more solid than your ghost. In this new life, in this ever-flowing multiplicity of new lives, it shall officially be 'In The Morning' for all twenty-four hours of every day. I'll settle for nothing less."

APPARENT END

AN ESSAY EXPLAINING; THE ALTERNATE ENDINGS OF THE BOOK ARGO

In the Course of Which I'm Obligated to Explain The Detailed Workings of The World Itself

The editor-publisher of these books has asked me to "compose the finishing essay for the final book ARGO, explaining the alternate endings."

"Yes, sure," I told myself, and I started to sketch the outline for a two or three page essay on the subject. "This will be easy," I said. And in a minute I added "This will be harder than I thought."

Then something took possession of my hand and wrote words that were not my words at all.

"The book ARGO seems to have alternate endings because everything and everybody in the World seems to have alternate endings. That's the way all the Worlds and all the people in them are made. That is the Detailed Working of the World Itself. But the endings do not really end."

The business of somebody or something else writing with my hand scared me. It plunged me into darkness and despondency. I sat down then and wrote a letter to the Editor-Publisher. "I don't know how to write this essay. It's impossible." But I didn't mail that letter. I kept it three days and then I tore it up.

I said to myself "I'll do the impossible for him. If people didn't do the impossible now and then, things would never be done. And if it is required that somebody should explain the detailed workings of the world, that somebody might as well be me."

I began with my own writings and with ARGO as the latest. It seemed, until I thought of it a bit, that I had written quite a few novels, and many shorter works, and also verses and scraps. Now I understood by some sort of intuition that what I had been writing was a never-ending story and that the name of it was 'A GHOST STORY'. The name comes from the only thing that I have learned about all people, that they are ghostly and that they are sometimes split-off. But no one can ever know for sure which part of the split is himself. "Is this myself, right here and now, or is this the ghost?" is a question that most people, from some shyness, do not ask themselves nearly often enough.

"But what about the people who aren't novelists?" someone asks. "Your sketch applies to only a very small minority of people."

Wrong. The more numerous and vital people live their novels (their lives). The less vital and less direct and less effective persons write

theirs. But there is not too much difference. Every writer realizes pretty soon that his writings are peopled by real people. Of course they are. Real people are the only kind of people there are.

There was a man named Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) an essayist, editor, physician, psychologist, and publisher of the 'Mermaid Series of Old Dramatists', designed to bring the 17th century dramas to a wider public. This drama revival was one of the great loves of his life: but he had very many great loves in his life. One of them was his fixed idea that there are no common people, that all of us are geniuses, that all of us are absolutely wonderful. He encapsulated this idea in a writing called 'THE LAW OF INTELLECTUAL CONSTANCY'.

The thesis of Havelock was that all persons with brains and bodies not seriously damaged are of about equal power and ability, that a guy who scratches out a slim living on two and a half acres in shantytown is as intelligent and capable in all ways as are John D. Rockefeller, or Thomas Alva Edison, or Wilhelm Wagner, or George Bernard Shaw (G.B. Shaw and Havelock Ellis were very close personal friends), or Victor Hugo, or the President of the United States or of U.S. Steel, or of Alexander Graham Bell, or Henrik Ibsen.

It was simply that peoples' fancies turned to different ways of fulfilling themselves. Ellis, in his work as physician, psychologist, and as forerunner of the psychoanalysts, was thunderstruck by the creative richness of some of the totally unimpressive lower-class people that he turned up. And he remained thunderstruck by such things for ten years or so. People selected the enjoyments that appealed to them and followed them out in lifetimes of high pleasure. And Havelock's 'Mermaid Series of Old Dramatists' found echoes here. Some of the common-uncommon, lowly-but-not-really-so-lowly people were recreating the wonders of the THREE PENNY OPERA or the BEGGARS OPERA in their lives. Some of them exulted in the wonderful world and racy challenges of extreme poverty. It takes as much brains and ability for the very poor to make it as it does for the very rich. Some of the people played with Hell Fire itself and its unholy excitement.

Havelock Ellis was a little bit before his time with his LAW OF INTELLECTUAL CONSTANCY. The people who were manufacturing the current thinking of the world considered themselves very superior people, and they would not easily admit that they were barely equal to the lowest of the lowest. Yet, in less than a decade they adjusted to it. They admitted that there was such a thing as 'occult compensation' which compensated the underlings for being underlings, but it wasn't really a threat so long as it remained sufficiently 'occult'. And a little bit later, though buried under a mountain of words, it was admitted that the LAW OF INTELLECTUAL CONSTANCY was true, but not really very important on a working level. And such is still the case with it today. But it is important as a cornerstone to the explanation of the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

It is established that the human race is made up entirely of glowing geniuses. That's something. And it's pretty well established that the begeniused human race is totally ghostly in all the meanings of the word, that it is overflowing so that very often persons cannot be contained in a single body, that it runs pretty much on multiple and parallel tracks. It's agreed that every human person is really two or three different persons when in an overflowing mood. ("As many as Nine different persons," an Irish hero hollers from several hundred years in the past.)

The psychoanalyst C.G. Jung (mostly in the essay 'Aion') argued that the human person was made up of the Ego, the Self, the Shadow, and those opposing twins the Anima and the Animus. That's five persons in us and he hints at quite a few more.

But can these different persons in the PERSON be physically separate and visible? They can be, but not as a usual thing. But in certain hysterias and raptures and hilarities and exuberances and plain High Spirits (when the Ghost hangs high) the various persons of an individual may be seen, and have been seen, with various degrees of clarity. In all really meaningful moments a human may be seen in his multiplicity. This is another item of the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

But it makes most persons nervous to see even a single ghost, and to see a group of them makes most persons very nervous. Nevertheless, almost everybody in his lifetime will see some person in his duality or his multiplicity. And this 'almost everybody' will mumble "I must be seeing things", and he will try mightily to put the 'seeing' out of his mind and out of his memory.

The Irish hero-giant Fingal was commonly attended by nine fetches or doubles of himself. He himself would be clad in a mantle of white sheep wool and the nine fetches would be clad in mantles of black sheep wool. But Fingal was known as a trickster almost as much as as a hero-giant. The people would laugh and say "Show how you are really doing that." And Fingal would say "I am showing you how I'm really doing this."

Nevertheless, every recorded visibility of a person as a multiplicity is testimony to the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

Charles the First, King of Great Britain, was sometimes accompanied by a beheaded ghost of himself, as an omen of what death Charles himself should die. This beheaded ghost spoke with a heavy voice out of its severed throat. It is said that it sometimes spoke stunning things of prophecy and wisdom. But other members of the Court insisted that the beheaded ghost spoke nothing but absolute silliness. Nevertheless, this is a piece of evidence that really unusual things have sometimes happened.

Melchisedech Duffey once signed a letter to Absalom Stein as "Melchisedech, King of Salem, 59th King of the Dynasty." And when he was later asked about this by Stein he said "Oh, I don't know why I wrote that, but I'm sure that it's correct. It's always been deep in my mind that I've had fifty-eight predecessors."

After that, Absalom wrote in his notebook "I wonder what my own dynastic number is in my own dynasty? I'm sure that all of us Argonauts can remember our own dynastic numbers if there is reason for us to do so. Oh, one of us dies. And then his dynastic successor is born. And the successor will sometimes (as often is necessary) have rapport with some or many of the previous dynastic rulers. Or, and this is an equal possibility, he will have rapport with some of the future dynastic rulers. God is tricky, God is remarkably good-natured, God is highly inventive. I believe that many of the wonderful people that he has made often run on multiple tracks, both in time and space. And I believe that all of the people he has made are wonderful."

"Once we were indeed Lords of the World. We still are.

"Once time stood still when we ordered it to do so. it still does.

"Once we had the transmuting touch. We have it yet.

"Once we could walk through walls or walk on water. We still can.

"Once we could move mountains. Haven't you heard the good news? We can still move them.

"We can still do all these good things. But sometimes we half-forget that we are able to do them."

-- RIDDLE WRITERS OF THE ISTHMUS. Auctore.

These thunderous powers, whether we use them or whether we forget to use them, stand up like giants among the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

Now all I have to do to answer the questions is answer them.

Why are there alternate endings to the book ARGO?

There aren't. There aren't any endings at all. A cross-cut of the multiplicities may seem like a bunch of endings, but that is only a seeming. It is a forward surge on multiple tracks of multiple powers, and it still goes on. It does not end. Because that is the way the world works. That is the simple explanation of the detailed workings of the world itself.

The people of the world are none of them common, are all of them geniuses, are all of them wonderful. So the power is always there, and the great overspilling of the multiplicity and the power. All the people are ghostly, and all of them are split or exploding people. They have rapport with all their fellows in time and in space, with all of them now in the world, with all of them who have been or will be in the world.

I have answered the Impossible questions which proved easy. Still impossible, but easy. Why were there alternate endings? There weren't. It only seemed so, but there was never any hint of anything ending.

I am also happy that I was able to explain the detailed workings of the World Itself.

THANK YOU ALL

-- R.A.Lafferty

Tulsa, Ok.