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For Carol, as always
And for the 100+ members
of the Resnick List,
without whom this book would be
both unconceived and unwritten

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Introduction

I have something called a Listserv, run by a fan named John Teehan, the same fellow who runs my web page. It's a group of fans from all over the world, plus a few writers and editors, who have a common interest in me and my work, and hundreds of e-mails are exchanged each week. It works like an apa (Amateur Press Association), which is to say that any member can post an e-mail and it will instantly be delivered to every other member of the List.

(You can join it, if you're so inclined, through my web page, which can currently be found at www.MikeResnick.com, and also at www.fortunecity.com/tattooine/farmer/2—and doubtless subject to change.)

Anyway, at one point in the autumn of 1999, one of the members was asking me how difficult it was to write for the movies compared to writing books and short stories, and I replied that it was a totally different discipline and that I had a horrible time with it when my producers kept sending me the shooting scripts of *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Chinatown* to study.

So how did I finally learn? I convinced them that I couldn't learn from these screenplays any more than someone could learn to write novels by studying Nabakov and Kazantzakis and Heller. What I needed, I explained, was a series of drafts of the same script, so that I could see what changes were made and why.

The other way I learned was from sitting down with a couple of journeyman screenwriters and asking them a zillion questions about the choices they made in the process of writing a saleable script.

Gee, said the List member, if only someone could do that for prose writers ... especially hopeful science fiction writers.

Didn't seem likely. Since the advent of the computer, most writers don't keep early drafts of their stories and novels. You tend to edit right on the copy, so there is only one draft—or else you keep the old drafts until you come up with a better one and then dump them.

But I happened to have my first two drafts of "The Land of Nod", a Hugo-nominated novelette. I kept them for only one reason: to remind me that good writing takes *work* , and that even after thirty years as a writer with dozens of awards and a few bestsellers, I was still capable of turning out not one but two totally unsaleable versions of a story.

I assume that you can see where this is leading. I hope you can, and I hope you'll find it useful, because I am not especially keen on public humiliation—but I happen to believe that you'll learn more by seeing how I improved those two early drafts than by simply reading the very polished final version.

As I was kicking this around with the List, I sold "The Elephants on Neptune" to *Asimov's* —and because I kinda sorta knew I was going to bite the bullet and expose Resnick at his worst, I hadn't yet erased the first draft.

Problem was, I had no other first drafts, and what I had wasn't enough for a book, even a thin one.

Then List member Adrienne Gormley reminded me that, a few years back, a number of hopeful writers on the CompuServe network had asked me endless questions about my Hugo-nominated short story, "Mwalimu in the Squared Circle".

I searched my hard disk, found the discussion hiding in a corner, and added it plus "Mwalimu" to the other two stories—and *still* didn't have enough for a book.

That's when the List members came to my rescue. Having come up with the notion of the book and convinced me to do it, they weren't going to let it die for lack of another 15,000 words. They could, they assured me, ask as many intelligent questions as the CompuServe group did, probably more. All they needed was a story.

I left it to them to choose the story we would discuss in minute detail, and they opted for my most recent Hugo winner, "The 43 Antarean Dynasties".

*Now*we had enough for a book ... and then I decided to add one more story, “The Kemosabee", because I felt that the Q and A about a funny story would differ considerably from the kind of discussion the other four stories engendered.

So here it is—a book that couldn't have existed without the members of the Resnick List. And a book with enough bad versions of ultimately decent stories for convention toastmasters to tease me about for the next couple of decades.

I hope someone out there thinks it was worth it, he grumped.

THE ELEPHANTS ON NEPTUNE —1st draft
by Mike Resnick

When men finally landed on Neptune in 2473 A.D., the very first thing they found were the elephants.

You can't imagine how distressing this was to both parties. Or maybe you can. A lot of it depends on whether or not you're an elephant.

“We thought you were extinct,” said the men accusingly. “You *are* elephants, aren't you?”

“Of course we are,” said the elephants, trying not to look too insulted.

That being settled, most of the men wanted to continue calling them elephants—but the scientists, who vigorously protected their prerogatives and were bitchy sorts anyway, insisted on dubbing them *loxidonta neptunus* . It didn't really matter, though, because they all answered to “Jumbo".

“That sure is an impressive-looking ship,” said the elephants nervously when the formalities of greeting were over. “You aren't carrying any weapons in it, are you?”

“Why?”

“Well, in times past you have been known to—”

“Forget all that,” interrupted the men impatiently. “We have more important things to talk about. For example: this world hasn't got much atmosphere, and what it does have is poison. So tell us: how do you breathe?”

“Through our noses,” said the elephants.

“That's not much of an answer,” said the men after some consideration, “but at least you seem like friendly sorts.”

“Well, we go back a long way, elephants and men,” said the elephants.

Which was true. It was also true than an elephant never forgets, no matter how hard he tries.

* * * *

One of the first things they didn't forget was the Battle of the Jhelum River. That was where Alexander the Great fought Porus, King of the Punjab of India.

Almost nobody remembers Porus today (except for the elephants, of course), but he had quite an army back in 326 B.C.—and, even more impressive, he had 200 elephants, the first that were ever used in war.

Alexander wasn't called the Great for nothing. He had his men sneak up on King Porus' elephants at night and, at a signal from him, they fired thousands of arrows into extremely sensitive trunks and hurled hundreds of spears into equally sensitive legs and bellies. The elephants went crazy with pain and began killing the nearest men they could find, which happened to be their keepers and handlers—and when the dust had cleared and the blood had stopped spurting, Alexander had won the Battle of the Jhelum River without losing a single man. Now I ask you: How's *that* for Great?

He promptly rewarded his commanders with a bunch of promotions. The reward for the elephants who had actually won the battle for Alexander was a little more problematical. Since they were understandably tired after a hard night of bloodletting, and since the few survivors looked exactly like giant pincushions, they hardly protested at all when Alexander conferred upon them the high honor of providing his troops with some necessary protein during the next few days by slaughtering them in the morning.

That was when elephants realized there was more to both war *and* men than they had imagined.

* * * *

“That was a long time ago,” said the men, without actually apologizing. “We haven't done anything like that lately.”

“You haven't seen an elephant in three hundred years,” replied the elephants.

“Details, details,” muttered the men, shrugging in unison.

* * * *

It was Ptolemy IV who first created prejudice in elephants. His battalions rode their African elephants into battle against the Indian elephants of Syria's Antiochus the Great in 217 B.C.

Ptolemy won the war, but all the survivors on both sides agreed that Antiochus' elephants performed better. The Indian elephants didn't let Ptolemy's elephants forget about it, either. They giggled and teased and razzed them without mercy.

There are lots of reasons scientists give for the fact that African and Indian elephants never interbreed, but if you ask the elephants on Neptune, it all goes back to Ptolemy.

* * * *

Now, while Ptolemy was doing terrible things to Syria and even worse things to his elephants' self-esteem, Hannibal gathered 15,000 men and 37 elephants in 219 B.C., marched them over the Alps, arrived at Carthage seventeen years later, and won a major battle.

“Well, he never told us he was in a hurry,” said the elephants on Neptune, refusing to meet their visitors' gaze.

* * * *

“By the way, how are we communicating?” asked the men.

“Not very well,” said the elephants. “We thought you'd be friendlier and more articulate.”

"What we meant was, what is the mechanism by which we are communicating? You don't wear radio transmitters, and because of our helmets we can't hear any sounds that aren't on our radio bands."

"Besides," added the scientists, who had to get in their two cents' worth, "there are hardly enough air molecules to carry any sound."

"But that doesn't matter," said the men irritably, "because even if there was, we'd have to take off our helmets to hear it, and then we'd freeze to death."

"You'd inhale poisonous fumes and die before you could freeze," said the scientists, who could never let anyone else have the last word.

"If you interrupt us once more," said the men, "we're going to take your helmets off and see which of us is right."

Which shut the scientists up, at least for the moment.

"Thanks for hanging around," the men said to the elephants. "We apologize for these guys, but you know what scientists are like—from earliest childhood they spend all their time with vectors and angles and formulae. They never quite get around to studying manners." The men shook their heads sadly. "So can you answer the question now?"

"Sure," said the elephants. "We communicate through a psychic bond."

"Not a telepathic one?"

"Absolutely not, though it comes to the same thing in the end," answered the elephants. "We're sure we sound like we're speaking English to you, except for the guy on the left there who thinks we're speaking Hebrew. On the other hand, you sound exactly as if you're making gentle rumbling sounds in your stomachs and your bowels."

"That's amazing!" said the men. "Disgusting, but amazing."

"You know what's *really* amazing?" responded the elephants. "The fact that you've got a Jew with you."

"What's surprising about that?"

"We always felt we were in a race with the Jews to see which of us would be exterminated first," said the elephants. "We used to call ourselves the Jews of the animal kingdom." They turned and faced the Jewish spaceman. "Did you guys think of yourselves as the elephants of the human kingdom?"

"Not until you just mentioned it," said the Jewish spaceman, who suddenly found himself agreeing with them.

* * * *

The Romans decided to set up a no-lose situation in the theater at Alexandria. They led a bunch of Jewish prisoners into the arena, and then turned a herd of fear-crazed elephants loose on them.

The Jews stood perfectly still, probably because they were too weak from hunger and repeated beatings to run, and the spectators began jumping up and down and screaming for blood—and, being contrarians,

the elephants attacked the spectators and left the Jews alone, proving once and for all that you can't trust a pachyderm.

That was the day the Jews knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were God's chosen people.

They weren't the Romans' chosen people, though. After the Roman soldiers killed all the elephants, they put all the Jews to the sword, too.

* * * *

"But that was all before Christ," said the men. "It doesn't really count."

"We never thought Jesus was all that fond of elephants," said the elephants.

"He loved all living things," said the men with absolute certainty.

"Well, now, we don't know about that," said the elephants. "He put devils into the Gadarene swine and made them run down the hill and into the sea. So he certainly didn't love pigs, did he?"

"Well ... um ... er ... well..." said the men.

"And if he loved elephants, he'd never have let you kill the last mammoth on those islands off Canada."

"That was ten thousand years before he was born!" protested the men.

"No, it was 400 years after he died," said the elephants.

"403 years, 8 months, and 3 weeks," corrected the scientists. "Pacific Daylight Time."

"But they were mammoths and you're elephants," said the men. "It's not the same thing."

"Don't be so hasty," said the scientists. " *Mammoth*is just a corruption of *behemoth* , and surely *loxidonta neptunus* is a behemoth."

"You keep out of this!" said the men angrily.

"Even if your argument was right, Jesus didn't do much for us *loxidonts* ," said the elephants. "Men started hunting us for our tusks, and by 700 A.D., not a single elephant remained in North Africa."

"Look at the bright side," said the men. "At least you weren't involved in any more wars. That's *some* thing to be grateful about."

"It's harder than you think to feel grateful for genocide," answered the elephants of Neptune.

* * * *

Actually (they could have added), there was one last battle to be fought. Tamerlane the Great—("And have you noticed," the elephants asked each other, "just what all these guys do to us the second someone calls them Great?")—went to war against Sultan Mahmoud, whose army rode to battle atop hundreds of elephants.

Tamerlane defeated Mahmoud by tying branches to buffalos' horns, setting fire to them, and then stampeding the buffalo herd into the elephants, thereby proving something or other.

That effectively ended the elephant as a war machine—and it didn't do much good for the buffalos' morale, either. All the remaining domesticated elephants were then trained for elephant fighting, which was just like cock-fighting only one helluva lot louder. It remained a wildly popular sport for thirty or forty years until they ran out of participants.

* * * *

"But we *loved* elephants!" protested the men. "The Indians even worshipped Ganesh, an elephant-headed God."

"That's funny," said the elephants. " *We*never worshipped a human-headed god."

"Well, there you have it," said the men, while the elephants wondered just what it was they had. "Not only did we worship you, we even named a country after you—the Ivory Coast."

"You named it after our teeth. That's not the same thing."

"Your tusks were your symbols."

"During the last half of the 19th Century, the Ivory Coast alone shipped out five of our symbols for every man, woman and child who lived there, every single year."

"Really?" said the men, surprised.

"Absolutely," said the elephants. "Did you know," they continued, "that the first alien visitors to Earth landed in Africa in 1883?"

"What did they look like?"

"They had ivory exoskeletons," answered the elephants. "They took one look at the carnage and left."

"Are you sure you're not making this all up?" asked the men.

"Why would we lie to you at this late date?"

"Maybe its your nature," suggested the men.

"Oh, no," said the elephants. "Our nature is that we always tell the truth. Our tragedy is that we always remember it."

The men decided that it was time to break for dinner, answer calls of nature, and check in with Mission Control to report what they'd found.

"Will you still be here in the morning?" asked the men.

"Where would we go?" asked the elephants.

"How should we know? We didn't know where you went the last time."

Most of the men went back to the ship, but one stayed behind. All of the elephants left too, except for one.

"I sense that you have a question to ask," said the elephant.

"Yes," said the man. "You have such an acute sense of smell, how did anyone ever sneak up on you during the hunt?"

"You mean before high-powered rifles and telescopic sights made it easy to kill us from 500 yards away?" asked the elephant.

"Yeah," said the man, annoyed that the elephant needed such qualifiers. "How could somebody sneak up undetected?"

"The greatest of the elephant hunters were the Wanderobo of Kenya and Uganda. They would rub our dung all over their bodies to hide their own scent, and would then silently approach us."

"Ah," said the man. "It makes sense."

"Perhaps," conceded the elephant. "But if the tables were turned, I would sooner die than cover myself with your shit."

He turned away and set off to rejoin his comrades.

* * * *

The elephants were waiting when the men emerged from their ship in the morning and strode across Neptune's surface to meet them.

"How did things go?" asked the elephants.

"Mission control told us to use our own judgment," said the men.

"Damn!" said the elephants. "You're going to shoot us, aren't you?"

"Why should you think so?" asked the men.

"It's what men do."

"Not all men," they protested. "We've produced some great individuals over the years."

The elephants winced when they heard the word *great* . "Name ten," they said.

"Easily done," said the men. "Moses. Augustus Caesar. Queen Elizabeth I. Sir Thomas More. Isaac Newton. Thomas Jefferson. Teddy Roosevelt. Grandma Moses. Elvis Presley. Stephen Hawking."

One of the men leaned over and whispered to the leader.

"Okay," said the leader. "Scratch Hawking and add Michael Jordan."

"Teddy Roosevelt killed eight elephants on his African safari, and his son killed three more," said the elephants. " *We*never killed any Roosevelts."

"But he hunted for a noble purpose—so that Carl Akeley could preserve the carcasses for future

generations to see and admire at the American Museum and the Smithsonian."

"But they were just as dead as if they'd been poached for their ivory," noted the elephants.

"Bah!" said the men. "You have no sense of historical perspective."

"Sure we do," said the elephants. "We'll prove it to you: you gave us ten great men, we'll give you ten great elephants."

"We didn't know you had any," said the men.

"The limitations of a public school education," said the elephants knowingly.

"All right. Who are they?"

The elephants rattled off the roll of honor: "The Kilimanjaro Elephant. Selemundi. Mohammed of Marsabit. And the Magnificent Seven of Krueger Park: Mafunyane, Shingwedzi, Kambaki, Joao, Dzombo, Ndlulamithi, and Phelwane. The ten greatest specimens in history."

"Are they here on Neptune?" asked the men.

"No," said the elephants. "Men killed all ten of them."

"We must have had a reason."

"They were there," said the elephants.

"See?" said the men. "We *knew* we had a reason." They paused. "Besides, sometimes it's the most humane thing to do."

"Or the most human," replied the elephants bitterly.

"We're serious," said the men. "Robert Ruark wrote a beautiful story about how he found an old tusker in the desert and put him out of his misery."

"Did you know," asked the elephants, "that Ruark, the great womanizer, developed testicular cancer and had his balls cut off? We notice that no one put *him* out of his misery."

"Apples and oranges," said the men.

"Men and elephants," contradicted the elephants. "You know how many men we killed in the 20th Century?"

"Lots."

"2,436," said the elephants. "Do you know how many of us you killed?"

"No."

"Eighteen million."

"It does seem a little disproportionate," admitted the men. "Still, we did your species a lot of good, too. We made an international superstar out of the original Jumbo. After he became foul-tempered and intractable in London, P. T. Barnum brought him to the U.S.A. and treated him like a king until he accidentally ran him down with a locomotive."

"We don't want to appear cynical," said the elephants, "but how do you *accidentally* run over a seven-ton animal?"

"Well, we wouldn't want to appear too smug," answered the men, "but you do it by inventing the locomotive in the first place. You have to admit we're a race of magnificent accomplishments: the internal combustion engine, splitting the atom, reaching the planets, curing cancer, and creating the childproof pill bottle." They smirked triumphantly at the elephants. "What have you got to equal that?

"We live our lives without sin," responded the elephants. "We have never hunted our fellow beings. The herd moves at a speed that accommodates the slowest and weakest member. We never abandon our aged or our infirm. And we have never made war on other elephants."

"Well, we suppose that's admirable," said the men, obviously unimpressed.

"If these were not exemplary traits," continued the elephants, "why would Tarzan be so devoted to Tantor?"

"Oh, please," said the men, wrinkling their noses. "Tarzan was one of those titled Brits who rips his clothes off and runs around naked the second he hits a tropical climate. Vertical rays of the sun, you know. He really should have worn a hat."

"We agree he wasn't your typical transplanted Brit," said the elephants.

"We're glad you agree," said the men.

"We do. We think your typical Brits were built more along the lines of Karamojo Bell, Pondoro Taylor, Deaf Banks, James Sutherland, John Alfred Jordan, Arthur Neumann, William Buckley, and Captain C. H. Stigand."

"We've heard of Karamojo Bell," said the men. "Who are the others?"

"Sportsmen, just like Bell."

"Did they have anything else in common?"

"Yes," answered the elephants. "They each killed more than 2,000 elephants."

"Okay, we'll grant that was a tad excessive," said the men defensively. "But you have to admit that we learned from our mistakes. Didn't we set up game parks and protect you?"

"Yes," replied the elephants. "But in the process you took away ninety percent of our habitat, so you began culling us to make sure that we couldn't exhaust the park's food supply. You became so efficient that an American, Peter Hathaway Capstick, was able to cull 2,000 of us in just eighteen months, whereas it took Karamojo Bell almost thirty years to reach that total." They paused. "That was when we received our second alien visitation. They examined the theory of preserving by culling, decided that Earth was an insane asylum, and began making arrangements to drop all their incurables off in the future."

"The aliens looked like Arabs, right?" suggested the Jewish spaceman.

"No, blacks," said another.

"Slavs," suggested a third.

Pretty soon all the men were offering their opinions as to which other men were really insane aliens. The elephants listened patiently while the men narrowed the aliens down to either brown-eyed Swedes or eighth-generation Reagan Democrats.

"We seem to have strayed afield here," said the men apologetically. "What were we talking about?"

"Unique approaches to saving elephants."

"We didn't put all our eggs in one basket," offered the men. "We bred you in zoos, too."

"That is true," answered the elephant. "By 2050 A.D., American zoos had produced 1,129 elephant births."

"So there you are," said the men triumphantly. "How many of you did we return to the wild?"

"None."

The men frowned. "Not even one?"

"Not even one."

"I wonder why not?" mused the men.

"There wasn't any wild to return us to."

"Ate yourself out of your environment, eh?" said the men.

"You have two guesses left," replied the elephants.

"Well, what's past is past," said the men. "We don't even remember what happened to the last elephant on Earth."

"Pretty much the same thing that happened to all the rest of them," said the elephants.

"Is he stuffed and mounted somewhere?"

"Not somewhere—everywhere," answered the elephants. "His right ear, which resembles the outline of the continent of Africa, has a map painted on it and is in the President's Mansion in Kenya. They turned his left ear over—and you'd be surprised how many left ears were thrown away over the centuries before some man somewhere thought of turning them over—and another map was painted, and it now hangs in a museum in Bombay. His feet were turned into a matched set of barstools, and currently grace the Aces High Lounge in Dallas, Texas. His scrotum serves as a tobacco pouch for an elderly Scottish politician. One tusk is on display at the British Museum. The other bears a scrimshaw and is in a store window in Beijing. His tail has been turned into a fly swatter, and is currently in the possession of a *vaquero* in

Argentina.”

“Well, even *you* will have to admit that we didn't waste anything,” said the men.

“There are those who would say you wasted a very valuable living entity,” said the elephants.

“Probably some beggars who wanted the meat for free,” said the men, obviously unimpressed. “So that was the last elephant before you guys?”

“The last on Earth,” the elephants corrected them. “You shipped one to the Moon for the purposes of scientific study.”

“We don't remember anything about that. What happened?”

“You studied him while he sickened and died because of the gravity and the food.”

“Well, that's the way you find these things out,” said the men with a massive group shrug. “He was the last, huh?”

“Almost. After you terraformed Ganymede, you made twenty clones of the great Ahmed of Marsabit, the only elephant ever to be protected by Presidential Decree. When the scientists were finally through studying them, you recouped your costs by letting twenty sportsmen each buy a five million dollar license to hunt one down and shoot it.”

“Well, that makes sense,” said the men approvingly. “Science has got to start paying for itself.”

The scientists uttered a mighty *"Hmmph!"* at that, turned on their heels, and returned to the ship.

“So they killed all twenty?” continued the men, trying to ignore the scientists.

“Yes,” replied the elephants. “The very last words of the very last elephant, who understood that men could not help being men, were ‘I forgive you'. He was promptly transported to a sphere higher than any man can ever aspire to.”

The men looked up to the sky. “Can we see it from here?” they asked.

“Of course not.”

“Well, when we take off again, maybe we'll have our ship's sensors look for it.”

“You do that,” said the elephants, sounding sardonic as only Neptunian elephants can.

“So anyway, that brings us up to date,” said the men. “What have you been doing here while we were conquering the solar system and curing the common cold?”

“We discovered the Unified Field Theory,” answered the elephants, “but we realized that it wasn't important in the true scheme of things. We have developed an almost perfect ethical system which is based on selflessness, forgiveness, and family values. We have taken the rudimentary work of Kant, Descartes, Spinoza, Thomas Aquinas and Bishop Barkley and amalgamated it into something far more sophisticated and logical, while never forgetting to incorporate emotional and aesthetic values at each stage.”

"You don't say!" said the men enthusiastically. "It sounds fascinating!"

"Thank you," said the elephants.

"We wonder, though," continued the men, "if you've come up with anything *useful* ?"

"We can show you the most efficient means of terraforming a planet. We have developed advanced agricultural methods that will triple your productivity at one-tenth of your current cost. We can even show you the secret of faster-than-light spaceflight."

"What about cold fusion?" asked the men.

"We're working on it," said the elephants.

"Well, now, like we said, that's fascinating stuff," said the men, staring at the elephants. "And while we're thinking of it, what happened to your trunks?"

"We've reached the state where we can evolve physically by the sheer force of will alone," said the elephants. "We thought you'd feel less threatened if we became smaller and less intimidating."

"That was very thoughtful of you," said the men, "and we deeply appreciate it." They paused. "We're going to return to the ship for lunch now, but we'll be back in a couple of hours to continue this discourse."

"Fine," said the elephants. "We feel that this represents the first step of a wonderful new understanding between humans and pachyderms."

The men returned to the ship, and all agreed that the elephants were truly remarkable beings.

This conclusion was reinforced when they emerged after lunch, and found that the elephants had, in less than two hours, eliminated every physical feature for which they had ever been hunted. Tusks, ears, feet, even scrotums, all had undergone enormous change. In fact, the elephants looked just like human beings, right down to their three-piece business suits, alligator shoes, and matching briefcases.

The men concluded that it was the most impressive display of evolution they had ever seen.

They shot them all anyway—some habits are more deeply ingrained than others—but they spent the whole trip back to Earth talking about how truly interesting elephants had become.

Discussion of the first draft of "The Elephants on Neptune".

It's a strange story, and you're allowed some leeway with strange stories, but there are some pretty obvious blunders here:

1. As Carol (my wife and frequent uncredited collaborator) pointed out, by the time you're 500 words into it, you know the ending. There's no misdirection, no red herrings, no nothing to divert you from watching it play out to an inevitable (which is okay) and obvious (which isn't) conclusion.

2. Everyone speaks with pretty much the same charming voice. There's not much in the way of characterization here, and that's precisely when the voices have to be different.

3. Beginner's mistake: just because I found it when researching doesn't mean I had to put it in the story. Most obvious example: what the hell does Robert Ruark's testicular cancer have to do with elephants on Neptune, Earth, or anywhere else?
4. OK, I think scientists can be a pain in the ass when they're being territorial about prerogatives, but there are better venues in which to make that argument. They had no business whatsoever being in this story.
5. I knew when I sat down to write the first draft that the men would kill the elephants. I knew it when I sat down to write the second draft.

But in between, I took to heart Carol's suggestion that it was too predictable. I don't think anyone, halfway through the final draft of the story, can see the change coming. And since this is a fable, I think the moral has more of a bite: no matter how you start out in life, once you become a man, killing becomes an instinctive habit.

Once I knew I was going to do that, I got rid of what had always been deadwood, but was now obvious even to me. There was some cute stuff—the list of the 10 greatest men, for example—that had to go, because it simply didn't serve the needs of the story.

When I reconceived the plot, I thought it might work to open by showing the elephants leading exactly the idyllic life they lead in African game parks—and then to hit the audience with two surprises: first, the line—quite portentous in this context—about how they never forget no matter how hard they try, and then, less than 100 words later, to have them speak to the spacemen. If I hadn't transferred their life to the opening page, had started the story after that space seven paragraphs into it, those two things would have seemed silly rather than funny/charming.

*A final comment: the first draft was probably good enough to sell to a minor market. One of the biggest challenges to an established writer who can sell almost anything he writes is never to*settle *—not for saleable, not for minor markets, not for anything but his best ... because if you settle enough times, you will no longer be an established writer who can sell almost anything he writes.*

THE ELEPHANTS ON NEPTUNE

by Mike Resnick

The elephants on Neptune led an idyllic life.

None ever went hungry or were sick. They had no predators. They never fought a war. There was no prejudice. Their birth rate exactly equalled their death rate. Their skins and bowels were free of parasites.

The herd traveled at a speed that accommodated the youngest and weakest members. No sick or infirm elephant was ever left behind.

They were a remarkable race, the elephants on Neptune. They lived out their lives in peace and tranquility, they never argued among themselves, the old were always gentle with the young. When one was born, the entire herd gathered to celebrate. When one died, the entire herd mourned its passing. There were no animosities, no petty jealousies, no unresolved quarrels.

Only one thing stopped it from being Utopia, and that was the fact that an elephant never forgets.

Not ever.

No matter how hard he tries.

* * * *

When men finally landed on Neptune in 2473 A.D., the elephants were very apprehensive. Still, they approached the spaceship in a spirit of fellowship and goodwill.

The men were a little apprehensive themselves. Every survey of Neptune told them it was a gas giant, and yet they had landed on solid ground. And if their surveys were wrong, who knew what else might be wrong as well?

A tall man stepped out onto the frozen surface. Then another. Then a third. By the time they had all emerged, there were almost as many men as elephants.

“Well, I'll be damned!” said the leader of the men. “You're elephants!”

“And you're men,” said the elephants nervously.

“That's right,” said the men. “We claim this planet in the name of the United Federation of Earth.”

“You're united now?” asked the elephants, feeling much relieved.

“Well, the survivors are,” said the men.

“Those are ominous-looking weapons you're carrying,” said the elephants, shifting their feet uncomfortably.

“They go with the uniforms,” said the men. “Not to worry. Why would we want to harm you? There's always been a deep bond between men and elephants.”

That wasn't exactly the way the elephants remembered it.

* * * *

326 B.C. Alexander the Great met Porus, King of the Punjab of India, in the Battle of the Jhelum River. Porus had the first military elephants Alexander had ever seen. He studied the situation, then sent his men out at night to fire thousands of arrows into extremely sensitive trunks and underbellies. The elephants went mad with pain and began killing the nearest men they could find, which happened to be their keepers and handlers. After his great victory, Alexander slaughtered the surviving elephants so that he would never have to face them in battle.

* * * *

217 B.C. The first clash between the two species of elephants. Ptolemy IV took his African elephants against Antiochus the Great's Indian elephants. The elephants on Neptune weren't sure who won the war, but they knew who lost. Not a single elephant on either side survived.

* * * *

Later that same 217 B.C. While Ptolemy was battling in Syria, Hannibal took 37 elephants over the Alps to fight the Romans. 14 of them froze to death, but the rest lived just long enough to absorb the enemy's spear thrusts while Hannibal was winning the Battle of Cannae.

* * * *

“We have important things to talk about,” said the men. “For example, Neptune's atmosphere is

singularly lacking in oxygen. How do you breathe?"

"Through our noses," said the elephants.

"That was a serious question," said the men, fingering their weapons ominously.

"We are incapable of being anything *but* serious," explained the elephants. "Humor requires that someone be the butt of the joke, and we find that too cruel to contemplate."

"All right," said the men, who were vaguely dissatisfied with the answer, perhaps because they didn't understand it. "Let's try another question. What is the mechanism by which we are communicating? You don't wear radio transmitters, and because of our helmets we can't hear any sounds that aren't on our radio bands."

"We communicate through a psychic bond," explained the elephants.

"That's not very scientific," said the men disapprovingly. "Are you sure you don't mean a telepathic bond?"

"No, though it comes to the same thing in the end," answered the elephants. "We know that we sound like we're speaking English to you, except for the man on the left who thinks we're speaking Hebrew."

"And what do we sound like to you?" demanded the men.

"You sound exactly as if you're making gentle rumbling sounds in your stomachs and your bowels."

"That's fascinating," said the men, who privately thought it was a lot more disgusting than fascinating.

"Do you know what's *really* fascinating?" responded the elephants. "The fact that you've got a Jew with you." They saw that the men didn't comprehend, so they continued: "We always felt we were in a race with the Jews to see which of us would be exterminated first. We used to call ourselves the Jews of the animal kingdom." They turned and faced the Jewish spaceman. "Did the Jews think of themselves as the elephants of the human kingdom?"

"Not until you just mentioned it," said the Jewish spaceman, who suddenly found himself agreeing with them.

* * * *

42 B.C. The Romans gathered their Jewish prisoners in the arena at Alexandria, then turned fear-crazed elephants loose on them. The spectators began jumping up and down and screaming for blood—and, being contrarians, the elephants attacked the spectators instead of the Jews, proving once and for all that you can't trust a pachyderm. (When the dust had cleared, the Jews felt the events of the day had reaffirmed their claim to be God's chosen people. They weren't the Romans' chosen people, though. After the soldiers killed the elephants, they put all the Jews to the sword, too.)

* * * *

"It's not his fault he's a Jew any more than it's your fault that you're elephants," said the rest of the men. "We don't hold it against either of you."

"We find that difficult to believe," said the elephants.

"You do?" said the men. "Then consider this: the Indians—that's the good Indians, the ones from India, not the bad Indians from America—worshipped Ganesh, an elephant-headed god."

"We didn't know that," admitted the elephants, who were more impressed than they let on. "Do the Indians still worship Ganesh?"

"Well, we're sure they would if we hadn't killed them all while we were defending the Raj," said the men. "Elephants were no longer in the military by then," they added. "That's something to be grateful for."

* * * *

Their very last battle came when Tamerlane the Great went to war against Sultan Mahmoud. Tamerlane won by tying branches to buffalos' horns, setting fire to them, and then stampeding the buffalo herd into Mahmoud's elephants, which effectively ended the elephant as a war machine, buffalo being much less expensive to acquire and feed. All the remaining domesticated elephants were then trained for elephant fighting, which was exactly like cock-fighting, only on a larger scale. Much larger. It became a wildly popular sport for thirty or forty years until they ran out of participants.

* * * *

"Not only did we worship you," continued the men, "but we actually named a country after you—the Ivory Coast. *That* should prove our good intentions."

"You didn't name it after *us* ," said the elephants. "You named it after the parts of our bodies that you kept killing us for."

"You're being too critical," said the men. "We could have named it after some local politician with no vowels in his name."

"Speaking of the Ivory Coast," said the elephants, "did you know that the first alien visitors to Earth landed there in 1883?"

"What did they look like?"

"They had ivory exoskeletons," answered the elephants. "They took one look at the carnage and left."

"Are you sure you're not making this all up?" asked the men.

"Why would we lie to you at this late date?"

"Maybe its your nature," suggested the men.

"Oh, no," said the elephants. "Our nature is that we always tell the truth. Our tragedy is that we always remember it."

The men decided that it was time to break for dinner, answer calls of nature, and check in with Mission Control to report what they'd found. They all walked back to the ship, except for one man, who lingered behind.

All of the elephants left too, except for one lone bull. "I intuit that you have a question to ask," he said.

“Yes,” replied the man. “You have such an acute sense of smell, how did anyone ever sneak up on you during the hunt?”

“The greatest elephant hunters were the Wanderobo of Kenya and Uganda. They would rub our dung all over their bodies to hide their own scent, and would then silently approach us.”

“Ah,” said the man, nodding his head. “It makes sense.”

“Perhaps,” conceded the elephant. Then he added, with all the dignity he could muster, “But if the tables were turned, I would sooner die that cover myself with *your* shit.”

He turned away and set off to rejoin his comrades.

* * * *

Neptune is unique among all the worlds in the galaxy. It alone recognizes the truism that change is inevitable, and acts upon it in ways that seem very little removed from magic.

For reasons the elephants couldn't fathom or explain, Neptune encourages metamorphosis. Not merely adaption, although no one could deny that they adapted to the atmosphere and the climate and the fluctuating surface of the planet and the lack of acacia trees—but *metamorphosis* . The elephants understood at a gut level that Neptune had somehow imparted to them the ability to evolve at will, though they had been careful never to abuse this gift.

And since they were elephants, and hence incapable of carrying a grudge, they thought it was a pity that the men couldn't evolve to the point where they could leave their bulky spacesuits and awkward helmets behind, and walk free and unencumbered across this most perfect of planets.

* * * *

The elephants were waiting when the men emerged from their ship and strode across Neptune's surface to meet them.

“This is very curious,” said the leader.

“What is?” asked the elephants.

The leader stared at them, frowning. “You seem smaller.”

“We were just going to say that you seemed larger,” replied the elephants.

“This is almost as silly as the conversation I just had with Mission Control,” said the leader. “They say there aren't any elephants on Neptune.”

“What do they think we are?” asked the elephants.

“Hallucinations or space monsters,” answered the leader. “If you're hallucinations, we're supposed to ignore you.”

He seemed to be waiting for the elephants to ask what the men were supposed to do if they were space monsters, but elephants can be as stubborn as men when they want to be, and that was a question they had no intention of asking.

The men stared at the elephants in silence for almost five minutes. The elephants stared back.

Finally the leader spoke again.

“Would you excuse me for a moment?” he said. “I suddenly have an urge to eat some greens.”

He turned and marched back to the ship without another word.

The rest of the men shuffled their feet uncomfortably for another few seconds.

“Is something wrong?” asked the elephants.

“Are we getting bigger or are you getting smaller?” replied the men.

“Yes,” answered the elephants.

* * * *

“I feel much better now,” said the leader, rejoining his men and facing the elephants.

“You look better,” agreed the elephants. “More handsome, somehow.”

“Do you really think so?” asked the leader, obviously flattered.

“You are the finest specimen of your race we've ever seen,” said the elephants truthfully. “We especially like your ears.”

“You do?” he asked, flapping them slightly. “No one's ever mentioned them before.”

“Doubtless an oversight,” said the elephants.

“Speaking of ears,” said the leader, “are you African elephants or Indian? I thought this morning you were African—they're the ones with the bigger ears, right? —but now I'm not sure.”

“We're Neptunian elephants,” they answered.

“Oh.”

They exchanged pleasantries for another hour, and then the men looked up at the sky.

“Where did the sun go?” they asked.

“It's night,” explained the elephants. “Our day is only fourteen hours long. We get seven hours of sunlight and seven of darkness.”

“The sun wasn't all that bright anyway,” said one of the men with a shrug that set his ears flapping wildly.

“We have very poor eyesight, so we hardly notice,” said the elephants. “We depend on our senses of smell and hearing.”

The men seemed very uneasy. Finally they turned to their leader.

“May we be excused for a few moments, sir?” they asked.

“Why?”

“Suddenly we're starving,” said the men.

“And I gotta use the john,” said one of them.

“So do I,” said a second one.

“Me too,” echoed another.

“Do you men feel all right?” asked the leader, his enormous nose wrinkled in concern.

“I feel great!” said the nearest man. “I could eat a horse!”

The other men all made faces.

“Well, a small forest, anyway,” he amended.

“Permission granted,” said the leader. The men began walking rapidly back to the ship. “And bring me a couple of heads of lettuce, and maybe an apple or two,” he called after them.

“You can join them if you wish,” said the elephants, who were coming to the conclusion that eating a horse wasn't half as disgusting a notion as they had thought it would be.

“No, my job is to make contact with aliens,” explained the leader. “Although when you get right down to it, you're not as alien as we'd expected.”

“You're every bit as human as *we* expected,” replied the elephants.

“I'll take that as a great compliment,” said the leader. “But then, I would expect nothing less from traditional friends such as yourselves.”

“Traditional friends?” repeated the elephants, who had thought nothing a man said could still surprise them.

“Certainly. Even after you stopped being our partners in war, we've always had a special relationship with you.”

“You have?”

“Sure. Look how P.T. Barnum made an international superstar out of the original Jumbo. That animal lived like a king—or at least he did until he was accidentally run over by a locomotive.”

“We don't want to appear cynical,” said the elephants, “but how do you *accidentally* run over a seven-ton animal?”

“You do it,” said the leader, his face glowing with pride, “by inventing the locomotive in the first place. Whatever else we may be, you must admit we're a race that can boast of magnificent accomplishments: the internal combustion engine, splitting the atom, reaching the planets, curing cancer.” He paused. “I

don't mean to denigrate you, but truly, what have you got to equal that?”

“We live our lives free of sin,” responded the elephants simply. “We respect each other's beliefs, we don't harm our environment, and we have never made war on other elephants.”

“And you'd put that up against the heart transplant, the silicon chip, and the three-dimensional television screen?” asked the leader just a touch of condescension.

“Our aspirations are different from yours,” said the elephants. “But we are as proud of our heroes as you are of yours.”

“You have heroes?” said the leader, unable to hide his surprise.

“Certainly.” The elephants rattled off their roll of honor: “The Kilimanjaro Elephant. Selemundi. Mohammed of Marsabit. And the Magnificent Seven of Krueger Park: Mafunyane, Shingwedzi, Kambaki, Joao, Dzombo, Ndlulamithi, and Phelwane.”

“Are they here on Neptune?” asked the leader as his men began returning from the ship.

“No,” said the elephants. “You killed them all.”

“We must have had a reason,” insisted the men.

“They were there,” said the elephants. “And they carried magnificent ivory.”

“See?” said the men. “We *knew* we had a reason.”

The elephants didn't like that answer much, but they were too polite to say so, and the two species exchanged views and white lies all through the brief Neptunian night. When the sun rose again, the men voiced their surprise.

“Look at you!” they said. “What's happening?”

“We got tired of walking on all fours,” said the elephants. “We decided it's more comfortable to stand upright.”

“And where are your trunks?” demanded the men.

“They got in the way.”

“Well, if that isn't the damnedest thing!” said the men. Then they looked at each other. “On second thought, *this* is the damnedest thing! We're bursting out of our helmets!”

“And our ears are flapping,” said the leader.

“And our noses are getting longer,” said another man.

“This is most disconcerting,” said the leader. He paused. “On the other hand, I don't feel nearly as much animosity toward you as I did yesterday. I wonder why?”

“Beats us,” said the elephants, who were becoming annoyed with the whining quality of his voice.

"It's true, though," continued the leader. "Today I feel like every elephant in the universe is my friend."

"Too bad you didn't feel that way when it would have made a difference," said the elephants irritably. "Did you know you killed sixteen million of us in the 20th Century alone?"

"But we made amends," noted the men. "We set up game parks to preserve you."

"True," acknowledged the elephants. "But in the process you took away most of our habitat. Then you decided to cull us so we wouldn't exhaust the park's food supply." They paused dramatically. "That was when Earth received its second alien visitation. The aliens examined the theory of preserving by culling, decided that Earth was an insane asylum, and made arrangements to drop all their incurables off in the future."

Tears rolled down the men's bulky cheeks. "We feel just terrible about that," they wept. A few of them dabbed at their eyes with short, stubby fingers that seemed to be growing together.

"Maybe we should go back to the ship and consider all this," said the men's leader, looking around futilely for something large enough in which to blow his nose. "Besides, I have to use the facilities."

"Sounds good to me," said one of the men. "I got dibs on the cabbage."

"Guys?" said another. "I know it sounds silly, but it's much more comfortable to walk on all fours."

The elephants waited until the men were all on the ship, and then went about their business, which struck them as odd, because before the men came they didn't *have* any business.

"You know," said one of the elephants. "I've got a sudden taste for a hamburger."

"I want a beer," said a second. Then: "I wonder if there's a football game on the subspace radio?"

"It's really curious," remarked a third. "I have this urge to cheat on my wife—and I'm not even married."

Vaguely disturbed without knowing why, they soon fell into a restless, dreamless sleep.

* * * *

Sherlock Holmes once said that after you eliminate the impossible, what remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Joseph Conrad said that truth is a flower in whose neighborhood others must wither. Walt Whitman suggested that whatever satisfied the soul was truth. Neptune would have driven all three of them berserk.

* * * *

"Truth is a dream, unless my dream is true," said George Santayana. He was just crazy enough to have made it on Neptune.

* * * *

"We've been wondering," said the men when the two groups met in the morning. "Whatever happened to Earth's last elephant?"

"His name was Jamal," answered the elephants. "Someone shot him."

"Is he on display somewhere?"

"His right ear, which resembles the outline of the continent of Africa, has a map painted on it and is in the Presidential Mansion in Kenya. They turned his left ear over—and you'd be surprised how many left ears were thrown away over the centuries before someone somewhere thought of turning them over—and another map was painted, which now hangs in a museum in Bombay. His feet were turned into a matched set of barstools, and currently grace the Aces High Show Lounge in Dallas, Texas. His scrotum serves as a tobacco pouch for an elderly Scottish politician. One tusk is on display at the British Museum. The other bears a scrimshaw and resides in a store window in Beijing. His tail has been turned into a fly swatter, and is the proud possession of one of the last *vaqueros* in Argentina."

"We had no idea," said the men, honestly appalled.

"Jamal's very last words before he died were, 'I forgive you'," continued the elephants. "He was promptly transported to a sphere higher than any man can ever aspire to."

The men looked up and scanned the sky. "Can we see it from here?" they asked.

"We doubt it."

The men looked back at the elephants—except that they had evolved yet again. In fact, they had eliminated every physical feature for which they had ever been hunted. Tusks, ears, feet, tails, even scrotums, all had undergone enormous change. The elephants looked exactly like human beings, right down to their spacesuits and helmets.

The men, on the other hand, had burst out of their spacesuits (which had fallen away in shreds and tatters), sprouted tusks, and found themselves conversing by making rumbling noises in their bellies.

"This is very annoying," said the men who were no longer men. "Now that we seem to have become elephants," they continued, "perhaps you can tell us what elephants *do* ?"

"Well," said the elephants who were no longer elephants, "in our spare time, we create new ethical systems based on selflessness, forgiveness, and family values. And we try to synthesize the work of Kant, Descartes, Spinoza, Thomas Aquinas and Bishop Barkley into something far more sophisticated and logical, while never forgetting to incorporate emotional and aesthetic values at each stage."

"Well, we suppose that's pretty interesting," said the new elephants without much enthusiasm. "Can we do anything else?"

"Oh, yes," the new spacemen assured them, pulling out their .550 Nitro Expresses and .475 Holland & Holland Magnums and taking aim. "You can die."

"This can't be happening! You yourselves were elephants yesterday!"

"True. But we're men now."

"But why kill us?" demanded the elephants.

"Force of habit," said the men as they pulled their triggers.

Then, with nothing left to kill, the men who used to be elephants boarded their ship and went out into

space, boldly searching for new life forms.

* * * *

Neptune has seen many species come and go. Microbes have been spontaneously generated nine times over the eons. It has been visited by aliens 37 different times. It has seen 43 wars, five of them atomic, and the creation of 1,026 religions, none of which possessed any universal truths. More of the vast tapestry of galactic history has been played out on Neptune's foreboding surface than any other world in Sol's system.

Planets cannot offer opinions, of course, but if they could, Neptune would almost certainly say that the most interesting creatures it ever hosted were the elephants, whose gentle ways and unique perspectives remain fresh and clear in its memory. It mourns the fact that they became extinct by their own hand. Kind of.

A problem would arise when you asked whether Neptune was referring to the old-new elephants who began life as killers, or the new-old ones who ended life as killers.

Neptune just hates questions like that.

MWALIMU IN THE SQUARED CIRCLE
by Mike Resnick

While this effort was being made, Amin postured: "I challenge President Nyerere in the boxing ring to fight it out there rather than that soldiers lose their lives on the field of battle ... Mohammed Ali would be an ideal referee for the bout."
—George Ivan Smith
GHOSTS OF KAMPALA (1980) *As the Tanzanians began to counterattack, Amin suggested a crazy solution to the dispute. He declared that the matter should be settled in the boxing ring. "I am keeping fit so that I can challenge President Nyerere in the boxing ring and fight it out there, rather than having the soldiers lose their lives on the field of battle." Amin added that Mohammed Ali would be an ideal referee for the bout, and that he, Amin, as the former Uganda heavyweight champ, would give the small, white-haired Nyerere a sporting chance by fighting with one arm tied behind his back, and his legs shackled with weights.*
—Dan Wooding and Ray Barnett
UGANDA HOLOCAUST (1980)

* * * *

Nyerere looks up through the haze of blood masking his vision and sees the huge man standing over him, laughing. He looks into the man's eyes and seems to see the dark heart of Africa, savage and untamed.

He cannot remember quite what he is doing here. Nothing hurts, but as he tries to move, nothing works, either. A black man in a white shirt, a man with a familiar face, seems to be pushing the huge man away, maneuvering him into a corner. Chuckling and posturing to people that Nyerere cannot see, the huge man backs away, and now the man in the white shirt returns and begins shouting.

"Four!"

Nyerere blinks and tries to clear his mind. Who is he, and why is he on his back, half-naked, and who are these other two men?

"Five!"

“Stay down, Mwalimu!” yells a voice from behind him, and now it begins to come back to him. *He* is Mwalimu.

"Six!"

He blinks again and sees the huge electronic clock above him. It is one minute and 58 seconds into the first round. He is Mwalimu, and if he doesn't get up, his bankrupt country has lost the war.

"Seven!"

He cannot recall the last minute and 58 seconds. In fact, he cannot recall anything since he entered the ring. He can taste his blood, can feel it running down over his eyes and cheeks, but he cannot remember how he came to be bleeding, or laying on his back. It is a mystery.

"Eight!"

Finally his legs are working again, and he gathers them beneath him. He does not know if they will bear his weight, but they must be doing so, for Mohammed Ali—that is his name! Ali—is cleaning his gloves off and staring into his eyes.

“You should have stayed down,” whispers Ali.

Nyerere grunts an answer. He is glad that the mouthpiece is impeding his speech, for he has no idea what he is trying to say.

“I can stop it if you want,” says Ali.

Nyerere grunts again, and Ali shrugs and stands aside as the huge man shuffles across the ring toward him, still chuckling.

* * * *

It began as a joke. Nobody ever took anything Amin said seriously, except for his victims.

He had launched a surprise bombing raid in the north of Tanzania. No one knew why, for despite what they did in their own countries, despite what genocide they might commit, the one thing all African leaders had adhered to since Independence was the sanctity of national borders.

So Julius Nyerere, the Mwalimu, the Teacher, the President of Tanzania, had mobilized his forces and pushed Amin's army back into Uganda. Not a single African nation had offered military assistance; not a single Western nation had offered to underwrite so much as the cost of a bullet. Amin had expediently converted to Islam, and now Libya's crazed but opportunistic Quaddafi was pouring money and weapons into Uganda.

Still, Nyerere's soldiers, with their tattered uniforms and ancient rifles, were marching toward Kampala, and it seemed only a matter of time before Amin was overthrown and the war would be ended, and Milton Obote would be restored to the Presidency of Uganda. It was a moral crusade, and Nyerere was convinced that Amin's soldiers were throwing down their weapons and fleeing because they, too, know that Right was on Tanzania's side.

But while Right may have favored Nyerere, Time did not. He knew what the Western press and even the Tanzanian army did not know: that within three weeks, not only could his bankrupt nation no longer supply its men with weapons, it could not even afford to bring them back out of Uganda.

* * * *

“I challenge President Nyerere in the boxing ring to fight it out there rather than that soldiers lose their lives on the field of battle...”

The challenge made every newspaper in the western world, as columnist after columnist laughed over the image of the 330-pound Amin, former heavyweight champion of the Kenyan army, stepping into the ring to duke it out with the five-foot one-inch, 112-pound, 57-year-old Nyerere.

Only one man did not laugh: Mwalimu.

* * * *

“You're crazy, you know that?”

Nyerere stares calmly at the tall, well-built man standing before his desk. It is a hot, humid day, typical of Dar es Salaam, and the man is already sweating profusely.

“I did not ask you here to judge my sanity,” answers Nyerere. “But to tell me how to defeat him.”

“It can't be done. You're spotting him two hundred pounds and twenty years. My job as referee is to keep him from out-and-out killing you.”

“You frequently defeated men who were bigger and stronger than you,” notes Nyerere gently. “And, in the latter portion of your career, younger than you as well.”

“You float like a butterfly and sting like a bee,” answers Ali. “But 57-year-old presidents don't float, and little bitty guys don't sting. I've been a boxer all my life. Have you ever fought anyone?”

“When I was younger,” says Nyerere.

“How much younger?”

Nyerere thinks back to the sunlit day, some 48 years ago, when he pummeled his brother, though he can no longer remember the reason for it. In his mind's eye, both of them are small and thin and ill-nourished, and the beating amounted to two punches, delivered with barely enough force to stun a fly. The next week he acquired the gift of literacy, and he has never raised a hand in anger again. Words are far more powerful.

Nyerere sighs. “ *Much*younger,” he admits.

“Ain't no way,” says Ali, and then repeats, “Ain't no way. This guy is not just a boxer, he's crazy, and crazy people don't feel no pain.”

“How would *you* fight him?” asks Nyerere.

“Me?” says Ali. He starts jabbing the air with his left fist. “Stick and run, stick and run. Take him dancing til he drops. Man's got a lot of blubber on that frame.” He holds his arms up before his face. “He catches up with me, I go into the rope-a-dope. I lean back, I take his punches on my forearms, I let him wear

himself out." Suddenly he straightens up and turns back to Nyerere. "But it won't work for you. He'll break your arms if you try to protect yourself with them."

"He'll only have one arm free," Nyerere points out.

"That's all he'll need," answers Ali. "Your only shot is to keep moving, to tire him out." He frowns. "But..."

"But?"

"But I ain't never seen a 57-year-old man that could tire out a man in his thirties."

"Well," says Nyerere with an unhappy shrug, "I'll have to think of something."

"Think of letting your soldiers beat the shit out of *his* soldiers," says Ali.

"That is impossible."

"I thought they were winning," said Ali.

"In fourteen days they will be out of ammunition and gasoline," answers Nyerere. "They will be unable to defend themselves and unable to retreat."

"Then give them what they need."

Nyerere shakes his head. "You do not understand. My nation is bankrupt. There is no money to pay for ammunition."

"Hell, I'll loan it to you myself," says Ali. "This Amin is a crazy man. He's giving blacks all over the world a bad name."

"That is out of the question," says Nyerere.

"You think I ain't got it?" says Ali pugnaciously.

"I am sure you are a very wealthy man, and that your offer is sincere," answers Nyerere. "But even if you gave us the money, by the time we converted it and purchased what we needed it would be too late. This is the only way to save my army."

"By letting a crazy man tear you apart?"

"By defeating him in the ring before he realizes that he can defeat my men in the field."

"I've seen a lot of things go down in the squared circle," says Ali, shaking his head in disbelief, "but this is the strangest."

* * * *

"You cannot do this," says Maria when she finally finds out.

"It is done," answers Nyerere.

They are in their bedroom, and he is staring out at the reflection of the moon on the Indian Ocean. As the light dances on the water, he tries to forget the darkness to the west.

"You are not a prizefighter," she says. "You are Mwalimu. No one expects you to meet this madman. The press treats it as a joke."

"I would be happy to exchange doctoral theses with him, but he insists on exchanging blows," says Nyerere wryly.

"He is illiterate," said Maria. "And the people will not allow it. You are the man who brought us independence and who has led us ever since. The people look to you for wisdom, not pugilism."

"I have never sought to live any life but that of the intellect," he admits. "And what has it brought us? While Kenyatta and Mobutu and even Kaunda have stolen hundreds of millions of dollars, we are as poor now as the day we were wed." He shakes his head sadly. "I stand up to oppose Amin, and only Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana, secure in his British knighthood, stands with me." He pauses again, trying to sort it out. "Perhaps the old *mzee* of Kenya was right. Grab what you can while you can. Could our army be any more ill-equipped if I had funneled aid into a Swiss account? Could I be any worse off than now, as I prepare to face this madman in"—he cannot hide his distaste—"a boxing ring?"

"You must *not* face him," insists Maria.

"I must, or the army will perish."

"Do you think he will let the army live after he has beaten you?" she asks.

Nyerere has not thought that far ahead, and now a troubled frown crosses his face.

* * * *

He had come to the office with such high hopes, such dreams and ambitions. Let Kenyatta play lackey to the capitalist West. Let Machal sell his country to the Russians. Tanzania would be different, a proving ground for African socialism.

It was a dry, barren country without much to offer. There were the great game parks, the Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater in the north, but four-fifths of the land was infested with the tsetse fly, there were no minerals beneath the surface, Nairobi was already the capital city of East Africa and no amount of modernization to Dar es Salaam could make it competitive. There was precious little grazing land and even less water. None of this fazed Nyerere; they were just more challenges to overcome, and he had no doubt that he could shape them to his vision.

But before industrialization, before prosperity, before anything else, came education. He had gone from the bush to the presidency in a single lifetime, had translated the entire body of Shakespeare's work into Swahili, had given form and structure to his country's constitution, and he knew that before everything came literacy. While his people lived in grass huts, other men had harnessed the atom, had reached the Moon, had obliterated hundreds of diseases, all because of the written word. And so while Kenyatta became the *Mzee* , the Wise Old Man, he himself became *Mwalimu* . Not the President, not the Leader, not the Chief of Chiefs, but the Teacher.

He would teach them to turn away from the dark heart and reach for the sunlight. He created the *ujamaa* villages, based on the Israeli *kibbutzim* , and issued the Arusha Declaration, and channeled more than half his country's aid money into the schools. His people's bellies might not be filled, their

bodies might not be covered, but they could read, and everything would follow from that.

But what followed was drought, and famine, and disease, and more drought, and more famine, and more disease. He went abroad and described his vision and pleaded for money; what he got were ten thousand students who arrived overflowing with idealism but devoid of funds. They meant well and they worked hard, but they had to be fed, and housed, and medicated, and when they could not mold the country into his utopia in the space of a year or two, they departed.

And then came the madman, the final nail in Tanzania's financial coffin. Nyerere labeled him for what he was, and found himself conspicuously alone on the continent. African leaders simply didn't criticize one another, and suddenly it was the Mwalimu who was the pariah, not the bloodthirsty butcher of Uganda. The East African Union, a fragile thing at best, fell apart, and while Nyerere was trying to save it, Kenyatta, the true capitalist, appropriated all three countries' funds and began printing his own money. Tanzania, already near bankruptcy, was left with money that was not honored anywhere beyond its borders.

Still, he struggled to meet the challenge. If that was the way the *Mzee* wanted to play the game, that was fine with him. He closed the border to Kenya. If tourists wanted to see his game parks, they would have to stay in *his* country; there would be no more round trips from Nairobi. If Amin wanted to slaughter his people, so be it; he would cut off all diplomatic relations, and to hell with what his neighbors thought. Perhaps it was better this way; now, with no outside influences, he could concentrate entirely on creating his utopia. It would be a little more difficult, it would take a little longer, but in the end, the accomplishment would be that much more satisfying.

And then Amin's air force dropped its bombs on Tanzania.

* * * *

The insanity of it.

Nyerere ducks a roundhouse right, Amin guffaws and winks to the crowd, Ali stands back and wishes he were somewhere else.

Nyerere's vision has cleared, but blood keeps running into his left eye. The fight is barely two minutes old, and already he is gasping for breath. He can feel every beat of his heart, as if a tiny man with a hammer and chisel is imprisoned inside his chest, trying to get out.

The weights attached to Amin's ankles should be slowing him down, but somehow Nyerere finds that he is cornered against the ropes. Amin fakes a punch, Nyerere ducks, then straightens up just in time to feel the full power of the madman's fist as it smashes into his face.

He is down on one knee again, 57 years old and gasping for breath. Suddenly he realizes that no air is coming in, that he is suffocating, and he thinks his heart has stopped ... but no, he can feel it, still pounding. Then he understands: his nose is broken, and he is trying to breathe through his mouth and the mouthpiece is preventing it. He spits the mouthpiece out, and is mildly surprised to see that it is not covered with blood.

"Three!"

Amin, who has been standing at the far side of the ring, approaches, laughing uproariously, and Ali stops the count and slowly escorts him back to the neutral corner.

*The pen is mightier than the sword.*The words come, unbidden, into Nyerere's mind, and he wants to laugh. A horrible, retching sound escapes his lips, a sound so alien that he cannot believe it came from him.

Ali slowly returns to him and resumes the count.

*"Four!"*Stay down, you old fool, Ali's eyes seem to say.

Nyerere grabs a rope and tries to pull himself up.

*"Five!"*I bought you all the time I could, say the eyes, but I can't protect you if you get up again.

Nyerere gathers himself for the most difficult physical effort of his life.

*"Six!"*You're as crazy as *he* is.

Nyerere stands up. He hopes Maria will be proud of him, but somehow he knows that she won't.

Amin, mugging to the crowd in a grotesque imitation of Ali, moves in the for kill.

* * * *

When he was a young man, the president of his class at Uganda's Makerere University, already tabbed as a future leader by his teachers and his classmates, his fraternity entered a track meet, and he was chosen to run the 400-meter race.

I am no athlete, he said; I am a student. I have exams to worry about, a scholarship to obtain. I have no time for such foolishness. But they entered his name anyway, and the race was the final event of the day, and just before it began his brothers came up to him and told him that if he did not beat at least one of his five rivals, his fraternity, which held a narrow lead after all the other events, would lose.

Then you will lose, said Nyerere with a shrug.

If we do, it will be your fault, they told him.

It is just a race, he said.

But it is important to *us* , they said.

So he allowed himself to be led to the starting line, and the pistol was fired, and all six young men began running, and he found himself trailing the field, and he remained in last place all the way around the track, and when he crossed the finish wire, he found that his brothers had turned away from him.

But it was only a game, he protested later. What difference does it make who is the faster? We are here to study laws and vectors and constitutions, not to run in circles.

It is not that you came in last, answered one of them, but that you represented us and you did not try.

It was many days before they spoke to him again. He took to running a mile every morning and every evening, and when the next track meet took place, he volunteered for the 400-meter race again. He was beaten by almost 30 meters, but he came in fourth, and collapsed of exhaustion ten meters past the finish line, and the following morning he was re-elected president of his fraternity by acclamation.

* * * *

There are 43 seconds left in the first round, and his arms are too heavy to lift. Amin swings a roundhouse that he ducks, but it catches him on the shoulder and knocks him halfway across the ring. The shoulder goes numb, but it has bought him another ten seconds, for the madman cannot move fast with the weights on his ankles, probably could not move fast even without them. Besides, he is enjoying himself, joking with the crowd, talking to Ali, mugging for all the cameras at ringside.

Ali finds himself between the two men, takes an extra few seconds awkwardly extricating himself—Ali, who has never taken a false or awkward step in his life—and buys Nyerere almost five more seconds. Nyerere looks up at the clock and sees there is just under half a minute remaining.

Amin bellows and swings a blow that will crush his skull if it lands, but it doesn't; the huge Ugandan cannot balance properly with one hand tied behind his back, and he misses and almost falls through the ropes.

"Hit him now!" come the yells from Nyerere's corner.

"Kill him, Mwalimu!"

But Nyerere can barely catch his breath, can no longer lift his arms. He blinks to clear the blood from his eyes, then staggers to the far side of the ring. Maybe it will take Amin 12 or 13 seconds to get up, spot him, reach him. If he goes down again then, he can be saved by the bell. He will have survived the round. He will have run the race.

* * * *

Vectors. Angles. The square of the hypotenuse. It's all very intriguing, but it won't help him become a leader. He opts for law, for history, for philosophy.

How was he to know that in the long run they were the same?

* * * *

He sits in his corner, his nostrils propped open, his cut man working on his eye. Ali comes over and peers intently at him.

"He knocks you down once more, I gotta stop it," he says.

Nyerere tries to answer through battered lips. It is unintelligible. Just as well; for all he knows, he was trying to say, "Please do."

Ali leans closer and lowers his voice.

"It's not just a sport, you know. It's a science, too."

Nyerere utters a questioning croak.

"You run, he's gonna catch you," continues Ali. "A ring ain't a big enough place to hide in."

Nyerere stares at him dully. What is the man trying to say?

"You gotta close with him, grab him. Don't give him room to swing. You do that, maybe I won't have to

go to your funeral tomorrow."

Vectors, angles, philosophy, all the same when you're the Mwalimu and you're fighting for your life.

* * * *

The lion, some 400 pounds of tawny fury, pulls down the one-ton buffalo.

The 100-pound hyena runs him off his kill.

The 20-pound jackal winds up eating it.

And Nyerere clinches with the madman, hangs on for dear life, feels the heavy blows raining down on his back and shoulders, grabs tighter. Ali separates them, positions himself near Amin's right hand so that he can't release the roundhouse, and Nyerere grabs the giant again.

* * * *

His head is finally clear. The fourth round is coming up, and he hasn't been down since the first. He still can't catch his breath, his legs will barely carry him to the center of the ring, and the blood is once again trickling into his eye. He looks at the madman, who is screaming imprecations to his seconds, his chest and belly rising and falling.

Is Amin tiring? Does it matter? Nyerere still hasn't landed a single blow. Could even a hundred blows bring the Ugandan to his knees? He doubts it.

Perhaps he should have bet on the fight. The odds were thousands to one that he wouldn't make it this far. He could have supplied his army with the winnings, and died honorably.

* * * *

It is not the same, he decides, as they rub his shoulders, grease his cheeks, apply ice to the swelling beneath his eye. He has survived the fourth round, has done his best, but it is not the same. He could finish fourth out of six in a foot race and be re-elected, but if he finishes second tonight, he will not have a country left to re-elect him. This is the real world, and surviving, it seems, is not as important as winning.

Ali tells him to hold on, his corner tells him to retreat, the cut man tells him to protect his eye, but no one tells him how to *win* , and he realizes that he will have to find out on his own.

Goliath fell to a child. Even Achilles had his weakness. What must he do to bring the madman down?

* * * *

He is crazy, this Amin. He revels in torture. He murders his wives. Rumor has it that he has even killed and eaten his infant son. How do you find weakness in a barbarian like that?

And suddenly, Nyerere understands, you do it by realizing that he *is* a barbarian—ignorant, illiterate, superstitious.

There is no time now, but he will hold that thought, he will survive one more round of clinching and grabbing, of stifling closeness to the giant whose very presence he finds degrading.

Three more minutes of the sword, and then he will apply the pen.

* * * *

He almost doesn't make it. Halfway through the round Amin shakes him off like a fly, then lands a right to the head as he tries to clinch again.

Consciousness begins to ebb from him, but by sheer force of will he refuses to relinquish it. He shakes his head, spits blood on the floor of the ring, and stands up once more. Amin lunges at him, and once again he wraps his small, spindly arms around the giant.

* * * *

“A snake,” he mumbles, barely able to make himself understood.

“A snake?” asks the cornerman.

“Draw it on my glove,” he says, forcing the words out with an excruciating effort.

“Now?”

“Now,” mutters Nyerere.

* * * *

He comes out for the seventh round, his face a mask of raw, bleeding tissue. As Amin approaches him, he spits out his mouthpiece.

“As I strike, so strikes this snake,” he whispers. “Protect your heart, madman.” He repeats it in his native Zanake dialect, which the giant thinks is a curse.

Amin's eyes go wide with terror, and he hits the giant on the left breast.

It is the first punch he has thrown in the entire fight, and Amin drops to his knees, screaming.

"One!"

Amin looks down at his unblemished chest and pendulous belly, and seems surprised to find himself still alive and breathing.

"Two!"

Amin blinks once, then chuckles.

"Three!"

The giant gets to his feet, and approaches Nyerere.

“Try again,” he says, loud enough for ringside to hear. “Your snake has no fangs.”

He puts his hand on his hips, braces his legs, and waits.

Nyerere stares at him for an instant. So the pen is *not* mightier than the sword. Shakespeare might have told him so.

“I'm waiting!” bellows the giant, mugging once more for the crowd.

Nyerere realizes that it is over, that he will die in the ring this night, that he can no more save his army with his fists than with his depleted treasury. He has fought the good fight, has fought it longer than anyone thought he could. At least, before it is over, he will have one small satisfaction. He feints with his left shoulder, then puts all of his strength into one final effort, and delivers a right to the madman's groin.

The air rushes out of Amin's mouth with a *woosh!* and he doubles over, then drops to his knees.

Ali pushes Nyerere into a neutral corner, then instructs the judges to take away a point from him on their scorecards.

They can take away a point, Nyerere thinks, but they can't take away the fact that I met him on the field of battle, that I lasted more than six rounds, that the giant went down twice. Once before the pen, once before the sword.

And both were ineffective.

Even a Mwalimu can learn one last lesson, he decides, and it is that sometimes even vectors and philosophy aren't enough. We must find another way to conquer Africa's dark heart, the madness that pervades this troubled land. I have shown those who will follow me the first step; I have stood up to it, faced it without flinching. It will be up to someone else, a wiser Mwalimu than myself, to learn how to overcome it. I have done my best, I have given my all, I have made the first dent in its armor. Rationality cannot always triumph over madness, but it must stand up and be counted, as I have stood up. They cannot ask any more of me.

Finally at peace with himself, he prepares for the giant's final assault.

Discussion of “Mwalimu in the Squared Circle"

*Rather than show you yet another first draft (and, in all honesty, I don't have the first draft for “Mwalimu in the Squared Circle"), I thought we'd use a different approach. A number of hopeful and beginning pro writers on the CompuServe network decided they wanted to discuss the writing of the story in depth. I would think*your *questions would be very similar to theirs, so I decided to show you a thorough question-and-answer session here.*

It actually took the better part of a week, and I've eliminated all the redundant questions and answers.

* * * *

CompuServe Member #1: What kind of choices did you have to make while writing this story?

*Mike:*Well, I can discuss some of the easier choices now, and wait for you to ask about the more esoteric ones.

I chose to begin with the quotes. The purpose was to put it in its historical context, since I expected 98% of the readership not to know who Nyerere is; and the reason I used two quotes was to show that Amin's challenge really did exist historically. (Which is to say, if I'd been making it all up, one quote would have sufficed; by quoting two different books, I was telling the readers that yes, he really did challenge Nyerere to a prizefight, that that much was true.)

I chose to start the action in the ring. After all, the title and opening quotes promised you a prizefight; you'd have been (theoretically) disappointed if you had to wait 4,000 words for it.

Present tense gives the reader a sense of immediacy. It's a criminally-overused technique, but it seemed to fit this particular approach.

Since I was doing a realistic approach, of course a 57-year-old 112-pound man would not be able to defend himself against the former heavyweight champion of the Kenyan army. From the first line to the last, Nyerere never has a chance. What he, the Mwalimu, the scholar, must do is stand up to the dark heart of Africa, as symbolized by Amin (note the nouns used to identify him: “the giant", “the madman", etc.); it's too early in his/Africa's history to be able to destroy it.

The flashbacks: it would be meaningless to describe the fight if the reader didn't understand the history behind it, and comprehend what's at stake. The general flashbacks—basically about his education and presidency—are true; the specific ones—the track meet, the leadership of his fraternity, the conversation with his wife, the fight with his brother—are fiction, woven into what is known of his life for the purposes of making the story's point.

As for Ali—Amin asked for him, so I wrote him into the story. Having done so, I had to give him a conversation with Nyerere, to explain what the old man was up against, and to show where Ali's sympathies lay ... but after that, I used him as little as possible. Reason: he and Amin are both primary people; Nyerere is a pastel. Since Nyerere is the viewpoint character and the story is about him, he can't be overshadowed by either of the other two men in the ring. Therefore Amin became a symbol, rarely referred to by name until the very end, when Nyerere makes his futile effort to cut him down to size; and since nothing Ali symbolizes was important to the story—he was the most recognizable man in the world, circa 1979, and I'm writing about two men who are the yin and yang of a relatively unknown continent—I thought it best, after the one obligatory scene where he speaks with Nyerere, to keep him in the background. After all, when you go to a fight, you don't watch the referee.

The ending: Nyerere has to realize that both the pen (i.e., literacy, as symbolized by the drawing on his glove) and the sword (i.e., military power, as symbolized by the low blow that knocks Amin off his feet) are equally useless against the darker forces of Africa. Nyerere's not the Messiah, but the Forerunner; the best, the most meaningful thing he can accomplish, is to stare evil in the eye and stand up to it; the man who can defeat it hasn't yet come to power, may not even have been born yet.

The changing of tenses: since the fight is described in the present tense to further a sense of immediacy, it stands to reason that the flashbacks cannot be told the same way, or the reader would become confused. Hence the past tense for the scenes leading up to the fight.

Third person: it's a foregone conclusion that Nyerere is going to get his brains scrambled. Therefore it can't be told in the first person; he may never be in good enough condition to relate his experiences once the fight is over.

Why the true flashbacks? Because Nyerere is a real person, and the trajectory of his life is vital to an understanding of him and the story.

Then why the fictional flashbacks? Because this is a work of fiction, and they help emphasize the points the author is making.

CompuServe Member #1: You said “he and Amin are both primary people; Nyerere is a pastel.”

I've not come across the concept of color coding character types. What does it mean?

Mike: To me, as a writer, “primary” people are charismatic; they're painted in bold, primary colors. “Pastel” people tend to blend in with the wallpaper if you don't make a real effort to bring them to the front of the stage and work with them. I think my wife and I created the expression originally when we were breeding and exhibiting collies: the primary ones required only that you hold the other end of the leash in the ring; the pastel ones required all your efforts to help them catch the judge's eye.

CompuServe Member #2: If those are the *easy* choices, what constitutes the hard ones?

Mike: The more difficult ones, of course, concern exactly how you push a noun up against a verb: i.e., the actual writing. I'll give one example here, and then wait for someone to ask about any others that may interest or puzzle you.

Someone uptopic objected to “seems to see the dark heart of Africa, savage and untamed", and suggested the alternative “sees the dark heart of Africa etc.” They both say approximately the same thing, so why choose one rather than the other?

The answer is simple. You choose words to say *exactly* what you want, not approximately. (Alfie Bester once remarked that the word “synonym” is not in the serious writer's lexicon.) The latter example says pretty much the same thing, but it says it with a sledgehammer. By the use of the word “seems", which was not chosen at random or to earn an extra 8 cents, there is an implication of ambiguity, a certain subtlety. Things are not all black and white, even in fiction, and every word you use either adds or takes away resonances from the story you are trying to tell. There is a difference between telling a simple story, and telling it simplistically.

CompuServe Member #3: I understand why the fight is in present tense, but I'm not clear as to why the scene with Mwalimu and Ali, and Mwalimu and his wife are also present tense. Why did you decide to do these two scenes present tense instead of past tense like the rest of the memories?

I read through the conversation between Ali and Mwalimu several times before I found the one word that focused it for me. Early on, you use: “notes Nyerere gently". That “gently” set the tone of the conversation for me. I could hear Nyerere as a soft-spoken, gentle man throughout the rest of the conversation. Was this done purposefully, or did it just work out that way?

In the memory section about the 400-meter race, there is dialogue, but it isn't enclosed in quotes. Was this done to create distance?

Why a snake? Aren't there more powerful demons in African folklore?

This one is a question that the story raised. If Mwalimu—Nyerere—is the teacher, shouldn't the one to follow be something else? The explorer, the liberator, the innovator?

Mike: Good questions. The scenes with Ali and with Maria are present tense, because they relate directly to the prizefight. None of the others do.

“...notes Nyerere gently...” was of course purposeful; it shows the response of a gentle, thoughtful man; the attitude is integral to his character.

The lack of quote marks in the dialog concerning his college race is a distancing mechanism. Perhaps he said that; perhaps he said something similar. Put it in quotes and you then have to put the responses of his teammates in quotes, and then you have to create names and identities for a bunch of literary spear-carriers who served no purpose in the story. Had I done that, it would have felt to you as if the

author was padding, even if you couldn't quite put your finger on exactly *how* it was being padded.

As for the snake, I wish I had a truly insightful answer for you, but it's simply a matter of expediency—not for the author, but for the characters. Let me put it in simpler terms: I challenge you to draw something more complex than a snake on a trembling boxing glove in less than 30 seconds.

Your last question is excellent, because there are clearly a number of ways to go, and none of them are wrong. I chose to believe that *this* Mwalimu taught his people to stand up to Africa's darker side, and that a better future Mwalimu will teach them how to not only stand up to it but defeat it.

It belatedly occurs to me that I answered the “gently” part of “notes Nyerere gently” and didn't address the first word, which was also a matter of choices. Why not “says” or “points out” or “replies"?

Well, “says” and “replies” are perfectly acceptable words, but they don't *do* anything. “Points out” is more forceful than “notes", and Nyerere, the intellectual caught up in a macho contest, is not a forceful man. Hence “notes".

Also, consider what it's in response to. Ali has just explained that he can't win, that Amin is much stronger. He gently notes that Ali fought many men who were stronger. He doesn't argue it, because he knows it's a ridiculous argument; he merely notes it, as a teacher, a mwalimu, would. It's tactically wrong if Ali were saying it to a young prizefighter, but it's merely academically wrong in this context.

CompuServe Member #1: I've given the story a good re-read in the light of your previous comments and still have a few questions.

The first thing that comes to mind is: why would Nyerere do it? If he didn't accept in real life then I would have expected more of an explanation built into the story. On the Nyerere vs. Amin level it's crazy. On the Mwalimu vs the Dark Heart level I can understand why he may believe he can win. One consideration must have been thought about so I assume its exclusion is deliberate. Why doesn't Nyerere attempt to come to terms with Amin at the beginning? After all, he's winning the war and Amin thinks he's about to fall so it's logical on that level. As this is the antithesis of the end position of the story I would have thought you could have used it to reinforce the theme.

You have set up the main theme in the first paragraph with your mention of the dark heart. What considerations had to be made in balancing the levels within the story? Do you use any specific techniques to pull the reader's mind one way or another?

Toward the end of the first fight sequence is the phrase: “for he has no idea what he is trying to say.” This is the type of key phrase that English teachers at school would jump on and come up with several underlying messages that the author was really saying about the character (and potentially, in this case, the author.) I always found this pretty spurious. Are you saying anything other than the man is befuddled? Do you ever use this type of portentous key phrase deliberately—and if so, when?

Sorry to go back to the question of tenses. The small section beginning “Vectors. Angles. The square of the hypotenuse” is couched in the present tense, but it seems to logically follow from the race section which is couched in the past tense. Before you leave that section I am curious why you used full stops after each mathematical term and not a lighter punctuation mark.

I assume all the general historical background was true. Would you bend it if that improved the story or would you worry about blurring the lines?

Another key phrase: in the section “You're crazy, you know that", you write “Words are far more powerful". Why? It just seems a little odd considering that he is setting up a prizefight. Why not something like “Words have been far more powerful” or even “Words have seemed..."?

You refer to Machal. This stopped me dead on the second reading for a good five seconds. The BBC pronounced his name M'shell and so I didn't recognize it; I was trying to say in my head Machal with a hard ch, or even Makal. Do you have problems translating African names into the Latin alphabet? After all, it appears that Gaddafi has more spellings than a MacDonald's chef has zits.

Which I guess leads me to the more general question of non-Africans being brought up short by African names and concepts. Has this proved a problem or does it not matter if the flow of the story is broken?

A bit further on in the section “His head is finally clear.” Nyerere wishes he had bet on the outcome of the fight thinking he could have supplied his army with the winnings. I don't understand. You have already made it plain in the conversation with Ali that this would not be possible. You have also stated that his head is clear. Er ... so what am I supposed to make of this?

Why did you split the sections “It is not the same” and “He is crazy"? The second section seems to follow on directly from the first in both time and thought process.

In the final section you say “Shakespeare might have told him so". This seems ambiguous. It could be a criticism of Shakespeare by Nyerere or of Nyerere by the author. “Told him so” may even be taken as a “told you so” taunt. Was the ambiguity deliberate?

Again in the final section you say “a wiser Mwalimu". The previous time you mentioned “wise” it was in reference to Mzee, so that was who my mind went to. Was this deliberate on your part?

Mike: Why would Nyerere do it? Well, of course, he wouldn't and didn't. So I fictionalized the state of his country's economy and its effect upon the war. It is true that Tanzania was virtually bankrupt in 1979; it is *not* true that they couldn't pursue the war; in point of fact, they did pursue it and they won. But if Nyerere felt his army would be stranded without gas and without weapons in an enemy nation, I think he would have done anything to get them out, including agreeing to the fight. Given the fictional context of the story, he had a one-in-a-million chance of winning the fight, whereas he had *no* chance of otherwise saving his army. And you don't come to terms with a madman like Amin; people had been trying for 8 years.

Of course you try to pull the reader in the direction you want him to go. Hence, Nyerere is a gentle, thoughtful man; his virtues are extolled, and his faults—and he had his share—are never mentioned. Amin is made to seem a mindless, primal force, both in the descriptions of him and in his actions in the ring. The symbolism is not quite as subtle or felicitous as a butterfly's wing, but it's there.

“Are you saying anything other than that the man is befuddled?” No. “Do you ever use this type of portentous key phrase deliberately, and if so when?” Rarely. I prefer scalpels to sledgehammers.

“Vectors. Angles.” Why the full stops? For emphasis, as if in his mind he is rattling off a list of what he felt was or was not important. They appear again, a few sentences later, separated by commas rather than periods, for in retrospect they are all the same, rather than differentiated approaches.

The general historical data *is* true. Certain specifics are not. Such as: his inability to withdraw his army; his conversation with Maria; his college track team; his fistfight with his brother 48 years ago. They all *might* have been true, given his character, but they were created by the author.

Another deliberate falsehood: Nyerere is actually only one year older than Amin—but having a 57-year-old fight a 56-year-old, even one as strong and brutal as Amin (he really was the former heavyweight champion of the Kenyan army), didn't imply the kind of one-sided contest the story required. So I took two decades off Amin's age.

"Words are far more powerful." Why not "Words have seemed..."? Because at this early point of the story, he truly believes words are more powerful. He is somewhat bemused that, despite a life devoted to the intellect, he has somehow been drawn into this prizefight. He knows that in general terms the result will be meaningless (though in specific terms it will decide the war's outcome.)

Machal is the way it is spelled in every African book I have seen. Qaddafi has a plethora of spellings, but I have never seen more than one standard spelling used for every sub-Saharan leader.

Has use of African names proved a problem? Well, if it has, no one has ever told me so. I've done 6 books and perhaps 25 stories set in Africa or with African themes, and that is one complaint I've yet to receive, knock wood.

Nyerere's fleeting thought that he could have bailed out his army by betting on the fight is *sardonic* . It is a fleeting, self-deprecatory reflection, not a meaningful regret.

Why did I split the sections "It is not the same" and "He is crazy"? Good question. Originally they were not split. When I read it over in galleys, I decided to put a space between them. The reason is not as clear-cut as most of those I have given you, but I think it is valid. It is when Nyerere realizes that Amin is a crazed, illiterate, superstitious barbarian that he thinks he sees a way to defeat him. That is the observation that leads to his (erroneous) conclusion, so I wanted to separate it from the prior paragraph. I would do it again, but I'm not so tied to it that if the typesetter missed it I'd write him to complain about it.

"Shakespeare might have told him so." This is neither a criticism of Shakespeare by Nyerere (or the author), nor a taunt by Shakespeare. It is Nyerere's rueful realization, after a life devoted to the principle that the pen is mightier than the sword, that, at least in this situation, the principle was wrong. If I were inclined to use sledgehammers, I might have stated it a bit differently, something to the effect that it was one of the more convincing lies that Nyerere had subscribed to.

"Wise" was used much earlier in regard to Kenyatta, because his title was Mzee, which in Swahili means "wise old man". Nyerere's final thought, that it will take a wiser Mwalimu than he, simply implies that he had the wisdom to know that he must stand up to the evil Amin symbolizes, but he does not have the wisdom to defeat it, and that hopefully someone who follows him *will* possess it.

CompuServe Member #4: I don't think you're addressing the meat of the problem, which is that you're trying to have it both ways: if "Mwalimu" is a morality play, then historical context is irrelevant, and the quotes at the beginning are unnecessary; if it's "alternative history," then the quotes don't do enough to establish the context.

CompuServe Member #2: Irrelevant? What makes you think that?

Mike: I'll tell you who *doesn't* think that: the Hugo voters. Check out the finalists from the last few years:

1993: "The Winterberry" by Nick DiChario (an 83-year-old vegetative JFK); "In the Stone House" by Barry Malzberg (Joe Kennedy, Jr.); "Danny Goes to Mars" by Pam Sargent (Dan Quayle).

1992: “Dispatches from the Revolution” by Pat Cadigan (LBJ and other Democrats); “The Gallery of His Dreams” by Kris Rusch (Matthew Brady); “Winter Solstice” by Mike Resnick (Arthur and Lancelot).

1991: “Bully!” by Mike Resnick (Teddy Roosevelt and John Boyes); “The Hemingway Hoax” by Joe Haldeman (Ernest Hemingway).

1990: “Dori Bangs” by Bruce Sterling (Lester Bangs and Dori Seda); “The Return of William Proxmire” by Larry Niven (Proxmire and Heinlein); “Enter a Soldier; Later, Enter Another” by Robert Silverberg (Pizzaro and Socrates).

Even back at the first Worldcon I ever attended in 1963, the winner for Best Novel was Phil Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* , about an America that had lost World War II and was divided between its Japanese and German conquerors.

I think it's clear that most of the readers have come to the conclusion—one that I obviously share—that you can say something relevant in an alternate history story.

THE LAND OF NOD—1st draft
by Mike Resnick

Once, many years ago, there was a Kikuyu warrior who left his village and wandered off in search of adventure. Armed only with a spear, he slew the mighty lion and the cunning leopard. Then one day he came upon an elephant. He realized that his spear was useless against such a beast, but before he could back away or find cover, the elephant charged.

His only hope was divine intervention, and he begged Ngai, who rules the universe from His throne atop Kirinyaga, the holy mountain that men now call Mount Kenya, to find him and pluck him from the path of the elephant.

But Ngai did not respond, and the elephant picked the warrior up with its trunk and hurled him high into the air, and he landed in a distant thorn tree. His skin was badly torn by the thorns, but at least he was safe, since he was on a branch some twenty feet above the ground.

After he was sure the elephant had left the area, the warrior climbed down. Then he returned home and ascended the holy mountain to confront Ngai.

“What is it that you want of me?” asked Ngai, when the warrior had reached the summit.

“I want to know why you did not come,” said the warrior angrily. “All my life I have worshiped you and paid tribute to you. Did you not hear me beg you to help me?”

“I heard you,” answered Ngai.

“Then why did you not come to my aid?” demanded the warrior. “Are you so lacking in godly powers that you could not find me?”

“After all these years you still do not understand,” said Ngai sternly. “It is *you* who must search for *me* .”

* * * *

My son Edward picked me up at the police station on Biashara Street and drove me back to his house in the Ngong Hills.

"This is becoming tedious," he said, trying to hide his exasperation.

"You would think they would tire of it," I agreed.

"We must have a long, serious talk, my father," he said as the gate to his property identified our vehicle and vanished to allow us to pass through. "You have been back only nine days, and this is the fourth time I have had to bail you out of jail."

"I have broken no Kikuyu laws," I said calmly.

"You have broken the laws of Kenya," he said. "And like it or not, that it where you live now." He paused, struggling with his temper. "Look at you! I have offered to buy you a new wardrobe. Why must you wear this ugly old *kikoi* ? It smells even worse than it looks."

"Is there now a law against dressing like a Kikuyu?" I asked him.

"No. But there *is* a law against creating a disturbance in a restaurant."

"I paid for my meal," I noted. "In Kenya shillings."

"That does not give you the right to hurl your food against the wall, simply because it is not cooked to your taste."

"It was impala," I said. "The Kikuyu do not eat game animals."

"It was *not* impala," he said. "The last impala died in a German zoo a year after you left for Kirinyaga. It was a modified soybean product, genetically enhanced to *taste* like impala." He paused, then sighed deeply. "If you thought it was impala, why did you order it?"

"The menu said steak. I assumed it meant the meat of a cow or an ox."

"And yesterday you showed my nephew how to apply the *githani* test for truthfulness, and he practically burned his brother's tongue off."

"His brother was lying," I said calmly. "He who lies faces the red-hot blade with a dry mouth, whereas he who has nothing to fear has enough moisture on his tongue so that he cannot be burned."

"Try telling a seven-year-old boy who is being approached by a sadistic older brother brandishing a red-hot knife that he has nothing to fear!" snapped my son. He got out of the vehicle and approached his rectangular brick house as I followed suit. He made a physical effort to restrain his anger. "This cannot go on, my father! I agreed to let you live with us, because you are an old man who was thrown off his world—"

"That is not true!" I said. "I left Kirinyaga of my own volition!"

"It makes no difference why or how you left," said my son wearily. "What matters is that you are *here* now. You are a very old man. It has been many years since you have lived on Earth. All of your friends

are dead. My mother is dead. If you did not live with me, you would have nowhere to stay, no one to care for you. I am your son, and I will accept my responsibilities, but you must meet me halfway."

"I am trying to," I said.

"I doubt it."

"I am," I repeated. "You own son understands that."

"My own son has had quite enough to cope with since my divorce. The last thing he needs is a grandfather filling his head with wild tales of some Kikuyu Utopia."

"It is a failed Utopia," I corrected him. "They would not listen to me, and so they are doomed to become another Kenya."

"What is so wrong with that?" demanded my son. "Kenya is my home, and I am proud of it." He paused. "And now it is your home again. You should speak of it with more respect."

"I lived here for many years," I said. "I can live here again. It is unchanged."

"That is not so," said my son. "We have built a transport system beneath Nairobi, and there is now a spaceport at Watamu, just south of Malindi. We have closed down the nuclear plants; our power is now entirely thermal, drawn from beneath the floor of the Rift Valley."

"You misunderstood me, my son," I replied. "Kenya remains unchanged in that it continues to ape the Europeans rather than remain true to our traditions."

The security system identified us and opened his house to us, and we walked through the foyer to the living room, which looked out over his small walled yard. Even this domicile had been plundered from the Europeans, for it consisted of many rectangular rooms, and all Kikuyu knew—or should have known—that demons dwell in corners and the only proper shape for a home is circular.

Edward activated his computer and read his messages, then turned to me.

"There is another message from the government," he said with a sigh. "They want you to meet with them next Tuesday at noon."

"I have already told them I will not accept their money," I said. "I have performed them no service."

"I know. But we are no longer a poor country. We pride ourselves that none of our infirm or elderly goes hungry."

"I will not go hungry, if the restaurants will stop trying to feed me unclean animals."

"The government is just making sure that you do not become a financial burden to me," said Edward, refusing to let me change the subject.

"You are my son," I said. "I raised you and fed you and protected you when you were young. Now I am old and you will do the same for me. That is our tradition."

"Well, it is *our* tradition to provide a financial safety net to families who are supporting elderly

members," he said, and I could tell that the last trace of Kikuyu within him had vanished, that he was entirely a Kenyan.

"You are a successful businessman," I pointed out. "You do not need their money."

"I pay my taxes," he said, suddenly defensive. "It would be foolish not to accept the benefits that accrue to us. You may live a very long time. We have every right to that money."

"It is dishonorable to accept what you do not need," I replied. "Tell them to leave you alone."

"Even if I *were* to tell them, they would not do so, my father."

"They must be Wakamba or Maasai," I said, making no effort to hide my contempt.

"They are Kenyans," he answered. "Just as you and I are."

"Yes," I said wearily. "Yes, I must work very hard at remembering that."

"You will save us both a lot of trouble if you can," said my son.

I nodded and went off to my room. He had supplied me with a bed and mattress, but after so many years of living in my hut on Kirinyaga, I found the bed uncomfortable, so every night I removed the blanket and placed it on the floor, then lay down and slept on it.

But tonight sleep would not come, for I kept reliving the past nine days in my mind. Everything I saw, everything I heard, made me remember why I had left Kenya in the first place, why I had fought so long and so hard to obtain Kirinyaga's charter.

I rolled onto my side, propped my head on my hand, and looked out the window. Hundreds of stars were twinkling brightly in the clear, cloudless sky. I tried to imagine which of them was Kirinyaga, and then attempted, for the thousandth time, to understand what had gone wrong.

We had emigrated there, we who still were Kikuyu rather than Kenyan, and had tried to established a Kikuyu Utopia on that lovely, verdant world. I was the *mundumugu* —the witch doctor—and it is the *mundumugu* who is entrusted with keeping the customs and traditions of his people.

Things had gone well at first. Not that there hadn't been problems, but they had all been capable of solution. But as time went by, it was almost as if some inexorable force was at work, as if Charles Darwin had only scratched at the surface of things, and that Kirinyaga existed to demonstrate that not only do animals and people evolve, but that societies evolve as well.

"I served you more selflessly than any other," I whispered, staring at a flickering, verdant star. "I gave you everything I owned, everything I was—and you betrayed me. Worse, you have betrayed Ngai. Neither He nor I shall ever try to find you again."

I lay my head back down, turned away from the window, and closed my eyes, determined to look into the skies no more.

* * * *

In the morning I went to Kirinyaga—not the terraformed world, but the *real* Kirinyaga, which is now called Mount Kenya. It was here that Ngai gave the digging-stick to Gikuyu, the first man, and told him

to work the earth. It was here that Gikuyu's nine daughters became the mothers of the nine tribes of the Kikuyu, here that the sacred fig tree blossomed. It was here, millennia later, that Jomo Kenyatta, the great Burning Spear of the Kikuyu, would invoke Ngai's power and send the Mau Mau out to drive the white man back to Europe.

And it was here that a steel-and-glass city of five million inhabitants sprawled up the side of the holy mountain. Vehicles spewed pollution into the atmosphere, and the noise of the city at work was deafening. I walked to the spot where the fig tree had once stood; it was now covered by a lead foundry. The slopes where the bongo and the rhinoceros once lived were hidden beneath the housing projects. The winding mountain streams had all been diverted and redirected. The tree beneath which Deedan Kimathi had been killed by the British was only a memory, its place taken by a school for handicapped children.

I walked further up the holy mountain. Not a single tree remained, not a flowering shrub, not an animal larger than a mole rat. The summit was usually hidden beneath a layer of clouds, but today the clouds were elsewhere, and I could see that the city reached all the way to the top of the mountain, covering the eternal snow on its peak from view.

And now I realized why Kenya had become intolerable. Ngai no longer ruled the world from His throne atop the mountain, for there was no longer any room for Him there. Like the leopard and the golden sunbird, like I myself many years ago, He too had fled before this onslaught of black Europeans.

* * * *

“Good morning, Grandfather,” said my grandson, as he sat down at the breakfast table.

“ *Jambo*, Joshua,” I replied.

“I hear you got into trouble again yesterday,” he said.

"Joshua!" said my son harshly.

“It is all right,” I said. “I am not ashamed, and I have nothing to hide.”

“You must have been something as a young man,” said my grandson in amusement. “I'll bet everyone was terrified of you.”

“I have no evidence to the contrary,” interjected my son bitterly.

“Perhaps we should clone you and sic you on the government whenever it gets too smug or complacent,” said my grandson, still smiling.

“Are they cloning men these days?” I asked disapprovingly.

He shook his head. “No,” he replied, “but I don't think we're too far from it.”

“When I left for Kirinyaga,” I said, “science had managed to clone nothing larger than a housecat. Surely cloning a man is centuries away.”

“We've made enormous strides in the last decade,” said my grandson.

“ *'We'?*” I repeated distastefully. “And do you work on this cloning yourself?”

"No," he answered. "I'm just in pre-med. But I have a friend who works at the cloning lab. You wouldn't believe what they've done."

"Doubtless you are correct," I said, hoping to end the subject, for I had no desire to hear about further changes that were to be wrought in Kenya or upon the Earth.

"Though perhaps I could sneak you in for a peek," he offered.

"It is not necessary."

He looked disappointed. "You've told so many fables about elephants, I thought you might be interested in seeing one."

"An elephant?" I said, surprised. "But the last one died more than a century ago!"

"That's the beauty of cloning," he said. "Nothing's ever truly extinct."

"Amazing," I said. "An elephant!"

He nodded. "And not just *any* elephant. This is the most famous elephant in Kenya's history—the only elephant ever to be protected day and night by Presidential Decree."

I stared at him, wide-eyed. "You have cloned Ahmed of Marsabit!"

"Well, *I* haven't," protested my grandson. "But my friend's team has."

"How?"

"His skeleton had been preserved at the Nairobi Museum. They took some scrapings from his bones and the insides of those enormous tusks of his, reconstructed the DNA pattern, did whatever they do once they get that far, and presto—instant Ahmed. Though 'instant' is hardly the word; they've been working on this for almost twenty years. My friend's actually a latecomer to the project."

"How interesting," I said. "Yes, Joshua, if it is possible, I would very much like to see him."

My grandson's face lit up. "I'll arrange it immediately, Grandfather."

He raced off for the vidphone, and his father turned to me.

"You look very excited," he said, a worried expression on his face. "You *will* behave yourself, won't you?"

"Certainly, my son," I assured him.

* * * *

Nairobi had become a city of eighteen million, all brick and concrete and steel. It stunk of gasoline, and there was no place to get away from the constant noise and the press of people.

Our vehicle went through the terrifying heart of the city, then came out on Langata Road, near what had once been Nairobi's very own game sanctuary and was now an enormous housing development. We

approached a large, windowless building that had posted several PRIVATE and KEEP OUT signs.

"We have arrived," said my grandson, stepping out of the vehicle and inviting me to do the same.

I followed him to the front door, where he sent a message to his friend, and a moment later we were passed through and joined by a young man wearing a laboratory smock.

"Steven," said my grandson, "this is my grandfather, Koriba Kimante. Grandfather, this is my friend, Steven Kamau."

Steven Kamau extended a hand to me.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Kimante," he said. "I see you still wear the *kikoi* of our people."

"Is there some restriction against wearing it here?" I asked.

"Certainly not," he said with a smile. "Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated with your world of Kirinyaga." He paused, suddenly uncomfortable. "I am sorry that things did not work out better for you."

"I am sorry they did not work out better for Kirinyaga," I replied.

"You were the *mundumugu* , were you not?"

I nodded. "Yes, I was."

"My understanding is that traditional *mundumugus* frequently used parables to make their points," he continued. "It is entirely possible that you used Ahmed at one time or another."

"If I did not use him, at least I used his species," I replied as we traversed a sterile white corridor.

"He's quite a specimen," said Steven Kamau. "We're very proud of him."

Suddenly I heard what could only be the ear-shattering trumpet of an elephant.

"That's him," said my grandson excitedly.

We turned into another corridor, walked a few yards, and stopped before a huge door. A security beam recorded Steven's retinagram and thumbprint, and the door slid open.

We found ourselves in a large chamber, perhaps fifty meters on a side, and there, penned in the corner in a much smaller area, was Ahmed himself.

His huge tusks touched the ground, as legend had said they did. But it was his eyes that commanded my attention: they were wild and filled with panic. He was the greatest creature Ngai had ever placed down in Kenya, and yet he did not belong here, in this alien century, in this polluted city, and he seemed to know it. There was fear in his eyes, the fear of a creature that cannot understand or adapt to its circumstances.

"What do you think of him?" asked Steven.

"He is magnificent," I said.

"That he is," agreed my grandson, staring at Ahmed in awe.

"And frightened," I added.

"That, too," said Steven. "He was never meant to be confined in a pen in the middle of a city." He sighed. "Still, the lab is here. This is his birthplace." He shrugged. "For all I know, the first Ahmed was born here too. After all, Nairobi was an uninhabited swamp in 1900."

I stepped closer to Ahmed. He stared at me, breathing heavily. I wanted to stroke his rough skin, to tell him that I understood, that we were *both* anachronisms in this enormous village of steel and brick and strange angles that had been built over the swamp. I wanted him to know that I, too, knew what it felt like to have outlived my time, to be the last of my race, and have nowhere to go, no friend to speak with, no sanctuary in which to hide from a world that was no longer comprehensible.

"Careful!" said Steven, grabbing my arm, just as Ahmed trumpeted again and swiftly reached out for me with his trunk. "He has become more dangerous almost by the day."

"Of course he has," I said, staring at the huge animal with a strange feeling of kinship. "He does not belong here, and he knows it. He is not Ahmed of Nairobi, but Ahmed of Marsabit."

"Actually, we're moving him to Marsabit tomorrow," said Steven with a sigh of relief. "The mountain will be surrounded by an electric fence, and armed guards will be posted at the base to make sure he is not molested."

"And then?" I asked.

"And then, if he survives for a given period—five years, ten years, we haven't yet decided how long—the experiment will be considered a success, after which ... who knows? We may well clone an entire herd of elephants to release on Mount Marsabit." He paused. "I just hope he can adapt."

I continued staring at my soulmate. "He will," I said with certainty.

* * * *

"You have been silent all day, Grandfather."

"I have been thinking," I replied.

"About Ahmed?" asked my grandson.

"About Ahmed, and other things."

"He is a fabulous animal," said my grandson, "surely the greatest and most powerful that has ever strode across the face of Kenya. And yet when I see him, the last of his kind, trying to grasp what has happened to him, my awe is replaced by pity."

"Keep your pity to yourself," I said. "It demeans him."

"But he cannot cope."

"He cannot cope in *your* world," I replied. "In a little more than a day he will be in *his* world, where he

belongs."

Joshua was silent for a very long moment. Finally he looked up at me. "Grandfather," he began.

"Yes."

"I mean no offense, but when I look at *you...* " His voice trailed off.

"I know," I said.

" *Is* there a place for you, now that you have left Kirinyaga?" he asked.

"There might be," I replied. "I have been giving the matter much thought."

My grandson met my gaze with level eyes.

"It will be *his* mountain," said Joshua slowly. "He might kill you the moment he sees you."

"It is a big mountain," I said. "Certainly big enough to hold two beings who belong nowhere else."

"You are a very old man," he said. "Can you live on a mountain, all by yourself?"

"I hope so," I said. "For I can live nowhere else."

"Perhaps you should not give up on Nairobi just yet," suggested my grandson without much conviction. "I know that it is difficult for you to adjust, but to those of us who live here, it is Eden reborn."

"Then I shall dwell in the land of Nod," I answered.

He smiled. "Nod lay to the east of Eden," he said. "Marsabit is three hundred miles north."

"It is Nod all the same," I said, "and it will suffice."

"I will have to bribe one of the guards to let you onto the mountain," he said.

"I have no money to give you."

"That is all right," he said. "I have money of my own. This will be my final gift to you."

"Then I must give you something in exchange," I replied. "I own nothing but this old *kikoi* , and surely you do not wish to own it." I paused, and suddenly it came to me. "A long time ago, when your father was born, I gave him the Kikuyu name of Koriba. He chose to use his European name, and so when I left for Kirinyaga I took it back. I have done the best I can with it, and I hope I have not disgraced it. I now give it to you, as a remembrance not only of me, but of who and what you are."

"Thank you, Grandfather," he said seriously. "I shall cherish it always. From this day forth, I am Joshua Koriba Kimante."

Suddenly I felt very old and very tired, and I went off to my room to spend my last night in civilization.

* * * *

We rode three hundred miles before daylight, and the guard nodded to Joshua as we approached him.

"You're going to be mighty chilly in that *kikoi* , old man," he said.

"I have been chilly before," I replied.

"If anyone finds out you're up there, this could cost me my job," he continued. "And I need this job." He stared at me. "You go up the mountain this morning, old man—and you *stay* up there. If you come down again, in a day or a month or a year, I'll shoot you and swear you were an intruder."

I stared back at him, but made no reply.

"Do you understand?" he said.

"I understand."

"Then start climbing."

I turned to my grandson. "Thank you for all you have done."

"Have you any message for my father?"

I shook my head. "It is best to let him think I have simply moved out into the city. If he knew where I was, he would come looking for me."

He nodded in agreement, then looked into my eyes. *"Kwaheri, Mzee,"* he said. *Good-bye, Wise Old Man.*

" *Kwaheri*, Koriba," I replied.

Then I turned and began walking up the gentle slopes of Mount Marsabit.

* * * *

I climbed for almost three hours before I was too exhausted to continue, and then I sat down to rest in the shade of an acacia tree. Somewhere up above me, probably a two- or three-day march, was Lake Paradise, where I would find ample water for all my needs, and enough firewood so that I would be able to cope with the frigid night air.

Suddenly I heard the sound of trumpeting, not frightened or confused this time, but triumphant and exhilarated, and I knew that Ahmed had been set loose at the base of his mountain. Over the next few minutes I heard the crashing of trees as he made his way upward. From now on it would be just the two of us, both alive and both extinct, and we would both live out what remained of our lives on mighty Marsabit.

It was where we belonged. I had searched for Ngai too high up and too far away, and had finally come to understand that He was on neither Kirinyaga. I realized the moment I saw the sprawling city covering on the sides and peak of the holy mountain that He could no longer function there, just as I had so painfully learned that He no longer directed the fortunes of the world I had spent so many years trying to mold into a Utopia.

I had looked for Ngai in the wrong place, on the wrong mountain. Men of lesser faith might have thought

Him dead, yet I knew that if Ahmed could be reborn after all others of his kind were long dead, then Ngai must surely be nearby, overseeing the miracle. I would spend the rest of the day regaining my strength, and then, in the morning, I would begin searching for Him again on this new mountain.

And this time, I was sure I would find Him.

Discussion of the first draft of "The Land of Nod"

I was dissatisfied with this the entire time I was writing it. The opening was fine. The end was what I wanted—Koriba and Ahmed, each an anachronism, living out their lives on Mount Marsabit.

Everything in between is pretty poor.

This was the culmination of the Kirinyaga stories, already the most-awarded story cycle in science fiction history. Every one of those stories carried an emotional punch that was lacking here.

Why?

I wasn't comfortable making the entire story a series of dialogues between Koriba and his son (and I was right) ... but I made some mistakes in opening it out.

First, I added a grandson. What we don't need in the final story of a saga that's been going on for ten years in the magazines is a new family member with views that differ from both his father and Koriba. Big mistake.

Second, the story was too short to gather any emotional momentum. Koriba narrates each of the Kirinyaga stories, and they have a pace to them, a pace that is fitting for an old man who finds his body betraying him more and more often. He just can't get through a story fast enough to give it the emotional punch it needs in 5,000 words.

Third, the elephant and its keeper were introduced clumsily. They have no personality, no emotional power—and it becomes obvious that the grandson was just a gimmick for getting Koriba to "meet" Ahmed.

I knew I liked the beginning, the little Kikuyu fable (and all the Kirinyaga stories begin with one), and I knew that I wanted it to end with Koriba and Ahmed on the mountain. And I knew there had to be some conflict with the son. But it was handled very poorly, and I decided to take another run at it.

THE LAND OF NOD—2nd draft
by Mike Resnick

Once, many years ago, there was a Kikuyu warrior who left his village and wandered off in search of adventure. Armed only with a spear, he slew the mighty lion and the cunning leopard. Then one day he came upon an elephant. He realized that his spear was useless against such a beast, but before he could back away or find cover, the elephant charged.

His only hope was divine intervention, and he begged Ngai, who rules the universe from His throne atop

Kirinyaga, the holy mountain that men now call Mount Kenya, to find him and pluck him from the path of the elephant.

But Ngai did not respond, and the elephant picked the warrior up with its trunk and hurled him high into the air, and he landed in a distant thorn tree. His skin was badly torn by the thorns, but at least he was safe, since he was on a branch some twenty feet above the ground.

After he was sure the elephant had left the area, the warrior climbed down. Then he returned home and ascended the holy mountain to confront Ngai.

"What is it that you want of me?" asked Ngai, when the warrior had reached the summit.

"I want to know why you did not come," said the warrior angrily. "All my life I have worshiped you and paid tribute to you. Did you not hear me ask for your help?"

"I heard you," answered Ngai.

"Then why did you not come to my aid?" demanded the warrior. "Are you so lacking in godly powers that you could not find me?"

"After all these years you still do not understand," said Ngai sternly. "It is *you* who must search for *me* ."

* * * *

I arrived at the huge titanium-and-glass laboratory complex just before midnight. The night had turned cool, and a breeze was blowing gently from the south. The moon had passed behind a cloud, and it was difficult to find the side gate in the darkness. Eventually I did find it, though, and Kamau was waiting for me. He deactivated a small section of the electronic barrier long enough for me to step through.

"Jambo, mzee," he said. *Hello, wise old man.*

"Jambo, mzee," I replied, for he was almost as old as I myself was. "I have come to see with my own eyes if you were telling the truth."

He nodded and turned, and I followed him between the tall, angular buildings that hovered over us, casting eerie shadows along the narrow walkways and channeling all the noises of the city in our direction. Our path was lined with Whistling Thorn and Yellow Fever trees, cloned from the few remaining specimens, rather than the usual introduced European shrubbery. Here and there were ornamental displays of grasses from the vanished savannahs.

"It is strange to see so much true African vegetation here in Kenya," I remarked. "Since I have returned from Kirinyaga, my eyes have hungered for it."

"You have seen a whole world of it," he replied with unconcealed envy.

"There is more to a world than greenery," I said. "When all is said and done, there is little difference between Kirinyaga and Kenya. Both have turned their back on Ngai."

Kamau came to a halt, and gestured around him at the looming metal and glass and concrete buildings that totally covered the cool swamps from which Nairobi took its name. "I do not know how you can prefer *this* to Kirinyaga."

"I did not say I preferred it," I replied, suddenly aware that the ever-present noises of the city had been overshadowed by the droning hum of machines.

"Then you *do* miss Kirinyaga."

"I miss what Kirinyaga might have been. I only wish I knew why the people fought my attempts to mold it into the Utopia we had all envisioned. As for these," I said, indicating the immense structures, "they are just buildings."

"They are European buildings," he said bitterly. "They were built by men who are no longer Kikuyu or Kamba or Embu, but merely Kenyans. They have corners, and you and I know that our huts were always circular because demons dwell in corners." He paused, and I thought, approvingly, *How much you sound like me! No wonder you sought me out when I returned to Kenya.* "Nairobi is home to eight million people," he continued. "It stinks of sewage. The air is so polluted that you can actually see it. The people wear European clothes and worship the Europeans' god. How could you turn your back on Utopia for this?"

I held up my hands. "I have only ten fingers."

He frowned. "I do not understand."

"Do you remember the story of the little Dutch boy who put his finger in the dike?"

Kamau shook his head and spat contemptuously on the ground. "I do not listen to European stories."

"Perhaps you are wise not to," I acknowledged. "At any rate, the dike of tradition with which I had surrounded Kirinyaga began to spring leaks. They were few and easily plugged at first, but as the society kept evolving and growing they became many, and soon I did not have enough fingers to plug them all." I shrugged. "So I left before I was washed away."

"Have they another *mundumugu* to replace you?" he asked.

"I am told that they have a doctor to cure the sick, and a Christian minister to tell them how to worship the god of the Europeans, and a computer to tell them how to react to any situation that might arise," I said. "They no longer need a witch doctor."

"Then Ngai has forsaken them," he stated.

"No," I corrected him. " *They*have forsaken Ngai."

"I apologize, *mundumugu* ," he said with deference. "You are right, of course."

He began walking again, and soon a strong, pungent odor came to my nostrils, a scent I had never encountered before, but which stirred some memory deep within my soul.

"We are almost there," said Kamau.

I heard a low rumbling sound, not like a predator growling, but rather like a vast machine purring with power.

"He is very nervous," continued Kamau, speaking in a soft monotone. "Make no sudden movements.

He has already tried to kill two of his daytime attendants."

And then we were there, just as the moon emerged from its cover and shone down on the awesome creature that stood facing us.

"He is magnificent!" I whispered.

"A perfect replication," agreed Kamau. "Height, ten feet eight inches at the shoulder, weight seven tons—and each tusk is exactly 148 pounds."

The huge animal stared at me through the flickering force field that surrounded it and tested the cool night breeze, striving to pick up my scent.

"Remarkable!" I said.

"You understand the cloning process, do you not?" asked Kamau.

"I understand what cloning *is* ," I answered. "I know nothing of the exact process."

"In this case, they took some cells from his tusks, which have been on display in the museum for more than two centuries, created the proper nutrient solution, and this is the result: Ahmed of Marsabit, the only elephant ever protected by Presidential Decree, lives again."

"I read that he was always accompanied by two guards no matter where he roamed on Mount Marsabit," I said. "Have they also ignored tradition? I see no one but you. Where is the other guard?"

"There are no guards. The entire complex is protected by a sophisticated electronic security system."

"Are you not a guard?" I asked.

He kept the shame from his voice, but he could not banish it from his face: even in the moonlight I could see it. "I am a paid companion."

"Of the elephant?"

"Of Ahmed."

"I am sorry," I said.

"We cannot all be *mundumugus* ," he answered. "When you are my age, in a culture that worships youth, you take what is offered to you."

"True," I said. I looked back at the elephant. "I wonder if he has any memories of his former life? Of the days when he was the greatest of all living creatures, and Mount Marsabit was his kingdom."

"He knows nothing of Marsabit," answered Kamau. "But he knows something is wrong. He knows he was not born to spend his life in a tiny yard, surrounded by a glowing force field." He paused. "Sometimes, late at night, he faces the north and lifts his trunk and cries out his loneliness and misery. To the technicians it is just an annoyance. Usually they tell me to feed him, as if food will assuage his sorrow. It is not even *real* food, but something they have concocted in their laboratories."

"He does not belong here," I agreed.

"I know," said Kamau. "But then, neither do you, *mzee* . You should be back on Kirinyaga, living as the Kikuyu were meant to live."

I frowned. "No one on Kirinyaga is living as the Kikuyu were meant to live. I tried to show them the way, but I failed." I sighed deeply. "I think perhaps the time for *mundumugus* is past."

"This cannot be true," he protested. "Who else can be the repository of our traditions, the interpreter of our laws?"

"Our traditions are as dead as *his* ," I said, gesturing toward Ahmed. Then I turned back to Kamau. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Certainly not, *mundumugu* ."

"I am glad you sought me out, and I have enjoyed our conversations since I returned to Kenya," I told him. "But something puzzles me: since you feel so strongly about the Kikuyu, why did I not know you during our struggle to find a homeland? Why did you remain behind when we emigrated to Kirinyaga?"

I could see him wrestling with himself to produce an answer. Finally the battle was over, and the old man seemed to shrink an inch or two.

"I was terrified," he admitted.

"Of the spaceship?" I asked.

"No."

"Then what frightened you?"

Another internal struggle, and then an answer: " *You*did, *mzee* ."

"Me?" I repeated, surprised.

"You were always so sure of yourself," he said. "Always such a perfect Kikuyu. You made me afraid that I wasn't good enough."

"That was ridiculous," I said firmly.

"Was it?" he countered. "My wife was a Catholic. My son and daughter bore Christian names. And I myself had grown used to European clothes and European conveniences." He paused. "I was afraid if I went with you—and I wanted to; I have been cursing myself for my cowardice ever since—that soon I would complain about missing the technology and comfort I had left behind, and that you would banish me." He would not meet my gaze, but stared at the ground. "I did not wish to become an outcast on the world that was the last hope of my people."

You are wiser than I suspected, I thought. Aloud I uttered a compassionate lie: "You would not have been an outcast."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure," I said, laying a comforting hand on his bony shoulder. "In fact, I wish you had been there to support me when the end came."

"What good would the support of an old man have been?"

"You are not just *any* old man," I answered. "The word of a descendant of Johnstone Kamau would have carried much weight among the Council of Elders."

"That was another reason I was afraid to come," he replied, the words flowing a little more easily this time. "How could I live up to my name—for everyone knows that Johnstone Kamau became Jomo Kenyatta, the great Burning Spear of the Kikuyu. How could I possibly compare to such a man as that?"

"You compare more favorably than you think," I said reassuringly. "I could have used the passion of your belief."

"Surely you had support from the people," he said.

I shook my head. "Even my own apprentice, who I was preparing to succeed me, abandoned me; in fact, I believe he is at the university just down the road even as we speak. In the end, the people rejected the discipline of our traditions and the teachings of Ngai for the miracles and comforts of the Europeans. I suppose I should not be surprised, considering how many times it has happened here in Africa." I looked thoughtfully at the elephant. "I am as much an anachronism as Ahmed. Time has forgotten us both."

"But Ngai has not."

"Ngai, too, my friend," I said. "Our day has passed. There is no place left for us, not in Kenya, not on Kirinyaga, not anywhere."

Perhaps it was something in the tone of my voice, or perhaps in some mystic way Ahmed understood what I was saying. Whatever the reason, the elephant stepped forward to the edge of the force field and stared directly at me.

"It is lucky we have the field for protection," remarked Kamau.

"He would not hurt me," I said confidently.

"He has hurt men whom he had less reason to attack."

"But not me," I said. "Lower the field to a height of five feet."

"But..."

"Do as I say," I ordered him.

"Yes, *mundumugu* ," he replied unhappily, going to a small control box and punching in a code.

Suddenly the mild visual distortion vanished at eye level. I reached out a reassuring hand, and a moment later Ahmed ran the tip of his trunk gently across my face and body, then sighed deeply and stood there, swaying gently as he transferred his weight from one foot to the other.

"I would not have believed it if I had not seen it!" said Kamau almost reverently.

"Are we not all Ngai's creations?" I said.

"Even Ahmed?" asked Kamau.

"Who do *you* think created him?"

He shrugged again, and did not answer.

I remained for a few more minutes, watching the magnificent creature, while Kamau returned the force field to its former position. Then, as the night air became uncomfortably cold, as so often happened at this altitude, I turned to Kamau.

"I must leave now," I said. "I thank you for inviting me here. I would not have believed this miracle had I not seen it with my own eyes."

"The scientists think it is *their* miracle," he said.

"You and I know better," I replied.

He frowned. "But why do you think Ngai has allowed Ahmed to live again, at this time and in this place?"

I paused for a long moment, trying to formulate an answer, and found that I couldn't.

"There was a time when I knew with absolute certainty why Ngai did what He did," I said at last. "Now I am not so sure."

"What kind of talk is that from a *mundumugu* ?" demanded Kamau.

"It was not long ago that I would wake up to the song of birds," I said as we left Ahmed's enclosure and walked to the side gate through which I had entered. "And I would look across the river that wound by my village on Kirinyaga and see impala and zebra grazing on the savannah. Now I wake up to the sound and smell of modern Nairobi and then I look out and see a featureless grey wall." I paused. "I think this must be my punishment for failing to bring Ngai's word to my people."

"Will I see you again?" he asked as we reached the gate and he deactivated a small section long enough for me to pass through.

"If it will not be an imposition," I said.

"The great Koriba an imposition?" he said with a smile.

"My son finds me so," I replied. "He gives me a room in his house, but I can tell he would prefer I lived elsewhere. And his wife is ashamed of my bare feet and my *kikoi* ; she is constantly buying me European shoes and clothing to wear."

" *My*son works inside the laboratory," said Kamau, pointing to his son's third-floor office with some pride. "He has seventeen men working for him. Seventeen!"

I must not have looked impressed, for he continued, less enthusiastically, “It is he who got me this job, so that I *wouldn't* have to live with him.”

“The job of paid companion,” I said.

A bittersweet expression crossed his face. “I love my son, Koriba, and I know that he loves me—but I think that he is also a little bit ashamed of me.”

“There is a thin line between shame and embarrassment,” I said. “My son glides from the one to the other like the pendulum of a clock.”

Kamau seemed grateful to hear that his situation was not unique. “You are welcome to live with me, *mundumugu* ,” he said, and I could tell that it was an earnest offer, not just a polite lie that he hoped I would reject. “We would have much to talk about.”

“That is very considerate of you,” I said. “But it will be enough if I may visit you from time to time, on those days when I find Kenyans unbearable and must speak to another Kikuyu.”

“As often as you wish,” he said. *"Kwaheri, mzee."*

*"Kwaheri,"*I responded. *Farewell.*

I took the slidewalk down the noisy, crowded streets and boulevards that had once been the sprawling Athi Plains, an area that had swarmed with a different kind of life, and got off when I came to the airbus platform. An airbus glided up a few minutes later, almost empty at this late hour, and began going north, floating perhaps ten inches above the ground.

The trees that lined the migration route had been replaced by a dense angular forest of steel and glass and tightly-bonded alloys. As I peered through a window into the night, it seemed for a few moments that I was also peering into the past. Here, where the titanium-and-glass courthouse stood, was the very spot where the Burning Spear had first been arrested for having the temerity to suggest that his country did not belong to the British. Over there, by the new eight-story post office building, was where the last lion had died. Over there, by the water recycling plant, my people had vanquished the Wakamba in glorious and bloody battle some 300 years ago.

Off in the distance was the original Kirinyaga, Mount Kenya, from which Ngai was said to rule the universe. When I had returned to Earth, I had thought to live there, but a sprawling city of two million people snaked up the slopes of the holy mountain, covering the sacred soil with asphalt and cement, replacing the tall trees with taller buildings. I decided that if I was to live amid the corruption and contamination of a debased society, it would out of respect *not* be on Ngai's mountain.

“We have arrived, *mzee* ,” said the driver, and the bus hovered a few inches above the ground while I made my way to the door. “Aren't you chilly, dressed in just a blanket like that?”

I did not deign to answer him, but stepped out to the sidewalk, which did not move here in the suburbs as did the slidewalks of the city. I preferred it, for man was meant to walk, not be transported effortlessly by miles-long beltways.

And as I walked, I tried to look across the centuries once more, to see the mud-and-grass huts, the *bomas* and *shambas* of my people, but the vision was blotted out by the row upon row of mock-Tudor and mock-Victorian and mock-Colonial and mock-contemporary houses, intermixed with needle-like

apartment buildings that reached up to stab the clouds. For a moment I was disoriented, but then I remembered which house belonged to my son, and I walked slowly to it.

I had no desire to speak to him or my daughter-in-law, for they would question me endlessly about where I had been, and my son would once again warn me about the thieves and muggers who prey on old men after sunset in Nairobi, and my daughter-in-law would try to subtly suggest that I would be warmer in a coat and pants. So I walked past my son's house, and walked around the block five times, until all the lights in the house had gone out. Then I walked once more around the block, to make sure they had time to fall asleep, and finally I entered through the back door, and softly made my way to my room.

Usually I dreamed of Kirinyaga, but this night the image of Ahmed haunted my dreams. Ahmed, eternally confined by a force field; Ahmed, trying to imagine what lay beyond his tiny enclosure; Ahmed, who would live and die without ever seeing another of his own kind.

And gradually, my dream shifted to myself: to Koriba, attached by invisible chains to a Nairobi he could no longer recognize; Koriba, trying futilely to mold Kirinyaga into what it might have been; Koriba, who once led a brave exodus of the Kikuyu until one day he looked around and found that he was the only Kikuyu remaining.

I awoke with the sun, as always; and I remained in my bed, pretending to sleep, as always, until my son and his wife had left the house and gone off to their jobs. Then I arose, went to the kitchen, ordered breakfast from the computer, and sat at the table, staring out at the blank grey wall that separated my son's house from his neighbor's.

After I finished eating I walked through the house. My son's wife had left the holo set on for me, as she did every morning; I deactivated it, as *I* did every morning. Of all the European gifts we had not asked for, I think I hated that one the most.

I walked out the door and wandered over to the park. Once lions had stalked this land. Leopards had clung to overhanging limbs, waiting for the opportunity to pounce upon their prey. Wildebeest and zebra and gazelles had rubbed shoulders, grazing on the tall grasses. Giraffes had nibbled the tops of acacia trees, while warthogs rooted in the earth for tubers. Rhinos had nibbled on thornbushes, and charged furiously at any sound or sight they could not immediately identify.

Then the Kikuyu had come and cleared the land, bringing with them their cattle and their oxen and their goats. They had dwelt in huts of mud and grass, and lived the life that we had tried to emulate on Kirinyaga.

But all that was in the past. Today the park contained nothing but a few squirrels racing across the imported Kentucky Blue Grass and a pair of hornbills that had nested in the one of the transplanted European trees. Old Kikuyu men, dressed in shoes and pants and jackets, sat on the benches that ran along the perimeter. One man was tossing crumbs to an exceptionally bold starling, but most of them simply sat and stared aimlessly.

I found an empty bench, but decided not to sit on it. I didn't want to be like these men, who saw nothing but the squirrels and the birds, when I could see the lions and the impala, the war-painted Kikuyu and the red-clad Maasai, who had once stalked across this same land.

I continued walking, suddenly restless, and despite the heat of the day and the frailty of my ancient body, I walked until twilight. I decided I could not endure dinner with my son and his wife, their talk of work,

their veiled suggestions about a nearby Kikuyu retirement home, their inability to comprehend either why I went to Kirinyaga or why I returned, so instead of going home I began walking aimlessly through the crowded city.

Finally I looked up at the sky, at the myriad of stars that were just beginning to appear, and wondered which one was Kirinyaga.

Ngai, I said silently, *I still do not understand. I was a good mundumugu. I obeyed Your law. I honored Your rituals. There must have come a day, a moment, a second, when together we could have saved Kirinyaga if You had just manifested Yourself. Why did You abandon it when it needed You so desperately?*

I spoke to Ngai for minutes that turned into hours, but He did not answer, and finally I turned my attention to other matters. When it was ten o'clock, I decided it was time to start making my way to the laboratory complex, for it would take me more than an hour to get there, and Kamau began working at eleven.

As before, he deactivated the electric barrier to let me in, then escorted me to the small grassy area where Ahmed was kept.

"I did not expect to see you back so soon, *mzee* ," he said.

"I have no place else to go," I answered, and he nodded, as if this made perfect sense to him.

Ahmed seemed nervous until the breeze brought my scent to him. Then he turned to face the north, extending his trunk every few moments.

"It is as if he seeks some sign from Mount Marsabit," I remarked, for the great creature's former home was hundreds of miles north of Nairobi, a solitary green mountain rising out of the blazing desert.

"He would not be pleased with what he found," said Kamau.

"Why do you say that?" I asked, for no animal in our history was ever more identified with a location than the mighty Ahmed with Marsabit.

"Do you not read the papers, or watch the news on the holo?"

I shook my head. "What happens to black Europeans is of no concern to me."

"The government has evacuated the town of Marsabit, which sits next to the mountain. They have closed the Singing Wells, and have ordered everyone to leave the area."

"Leave Marsabit? Why?"

"They have been burying nuclear waste at the base of the mountain for many years," he said. "It was just revealed that some of the cannisters broke open almost six years ago. The government hid the fact from the people, and then failed to properly clean up the leak."

"How could such a thing happen?" I asked, though of course I knew the answer. After all, how does *anything* happen in Kenya?

"Politics. Payoffs. Corruption."

"A third of Kenya is desert," I said. "Why did they not bury it there, where no one lives or even thinks to travel, so when this kind of disaster occurs, as it always does, no one is harmed?"

He shrugged. "Politics. Payoffs. Corruption," he repeated. "It is our way of life."

"Ah, well, it is nothing to me anyway," I said. "What happens to a mountain 500 kilometers away does not interest me, any more than I am interested in what happens to a world named after a different mountain."

"It interests *me* ," said Kamau. "Innocent people have been exposed to radiation."

"If they live near Marsabit, they are Pokot and Rendille," I pointed out. "What does that matter to the Kikuyu?"

"They are *people* , and my heart goes out to them," said Kamau.

"You are a good man," I said. "I knew that from the moment we first met." I pulled some peanuts from the pouch that hung around my neck, the same pouch in which I used to keep charms and magical tokens. "I bought these for Ahmed this afternoon," I said. "May I...?"

"Certainly," answered Kamau. "He has few enough pleasures. Even a peanut will be appreciated. Just toss them at his feet."

"No," I said, walking forward. "Lower the barrier."

He lowered the force field until Ahmed was able to reach his trunk out over the top. When I got close enough, the huge beast gently took the peanuts from my hand.

"I am amazed!" said Kamau when I had rejoined him.

"Oh?"

"Even I cannot approach Ahmed with impunity, yet you actually fed him by hand, as if he were a family pet."

"We are each the last of our kind, living on borrowed time," I said. "He senses a kinship."

I remained a few more minutes, then went home to another night of troubled sleep. I felt Ngai was trying to tell me something, trying to impart some message through my dreams, but though I had spent years interpreting the omens in other people's dreams, I was ignorant of my own.

My days faded one into another, the dullness and drudgery of them broken only by occasional nocturnal visits to the laboratory complex. Then one night, as I met Kamau at the gate, I could see that his entire demeanor had changed.

"Something is wrong," I said promptly. "Are you ill?"

"No, *mzee* , it is nothing like that."

“Then what is the matter?” I persisted.

“It is Ahmed,” said Kamau, unable to stop tears from rolling down his withered cheeks. “They have decided to put him to death the day after tomorrow.”

“Why?” I asked, surprised. “Has he attacked another keeper?”

“No,” said Kamau bitterly. “The experiment was a success. They know they can clone an elephant, so why continue to pay for his upkeep when they can line their pockets with the remaining funds of the grant?”

“Is there no one you can appeal to?” I demanded.

“Look at me,” said Kamau. “I am an 86-year-old man who was given his job as an act of charity. Who will listen to me?”

“We must do something,” I said.

He shook his head sadly. “They are *kehees* ,” he said. “Uncircumcised boys. They do not even know what a *mundumugu* is. Do not humiliate yourself by pleading with them.”

“If I did not plead with the Kikuyu on Kirinyaga,” I replied, “you may be sure I will not plead with the Kenyans in Nairobi.” I tried to ignore the ceaseless hummings of the laboratory machines as I considered my options. Finally I looked up at the night sky: the moon glowed a hazy orange through the pollution. “I will need your help,” I said at last.

“You can depend on me.”

“Good. I shall return tomorrow night.”

I turned on my heel and left, without even stopping at Ahmed's enclosure.

All that night I thought and planned. In the morning, I waited until my son and his wife had left the house, then called Kamau on the vidphone to tell him what I intended to do and how he could help. Next, I had the computer contact the bank and withdraw my money, for though I disdained shillings and refused to cash my government checks, my son, who was wealthy, had found it easier to shower me with money than respect.

I spent the rest of the morning shopping at vehicle rental agencies, until I found exactly what I wanted. I had the saleswoman show me how to manipulate it, practiced until nightfall, hovered opposite the laboratory until I saw Kamau enter the grounds, and then maneuvered up to the side gate.

*"Jambo, mundumugu!"*whispered Kamau as he deactivated enough of the electronic barrier to accommodate the vehicle, which he scrutinized carefully. I backed up to Ahmed's enclosure, then opened the back and ordered the ramp to descend. The elephant watched with an uneasy curiosity as Kamau deactivated a ten-foot section of the force field and allowed the bottom of the ramp through.

*"Njoo, Tembo,"*I said. *Come, elephant.*

He took a tentative step toward me, then another and another. When he reached the edge of his enclosure he stopped, for always he had received an electrical “correction” when he tried to move

beyond this point. It took almost twenty minutes of tempting him with peanuts before he finally crossed the barrier and then clambered awkwardly up the ramp, which slid in after him. I sealed him into the hovering vehicle, and he instantly trumpeted in panic.

"Keep him quiet until we get out of here," said a nervous Kamau as I joined him at the controls, "or he'll wake up the whole city."

I opened a panel to the back of the vehicle and spoke soothingly, and strangely enough the trumpeting ceased and the scuffling did stop. As I continued to calm the frightened beast, Kamau piloted the vehicle out of the laboratory complex. We passed through the Ngong Hills twenty minutes later, and circled around Thika in another hour. When we passed Kirinyaga—the true, snow-capped Kirinyaga, from which Ngai ruled the world—90 minutes after that, I did not give it so much as a glance.

We must have been quite a sight to anyone we passed: two seemingly crazy old men, racing through the night in an unmarked cargo vehicle carrying a six-ton monster that had been extinct for more than two centuries.

"Have you considered what effect the radiation will have on him?" asked Kamau as we passed through Isiolo and continued north.

"I questioned my son about it," I answered. "He is an important government official, and he says that the contamination is confined to the lower levels of the mountain." I paused. "He also tells me it will soon be cleaned up, but I do not think I believe him."

"But Ahmed must pass through the radiation zone to ascend the mountain," said Kamau.

I shrugged. "Then he will pass through it. Every day he lives is a day more than he would have lived in Nairobi. For as much time as Ngai sees fit to give him, he will be free to graze on the mountain's greenery and drink deep of its cool waters."

"I hope he lives many years," he said. "If I am to be jailed for breaking the law, I would at least like to know that some lasting good came of it."

"No one is going to jail you," I assured him. "All that will happen is that you will be fired from a job that no longer exists."

"That job paid my bills," he said unhappily.

The Burning Spear would have no use for you, I decided. *You bring no honor to his name. It is as I have always known: I am the last true Kikuyu.*

I pulled my remaining money out of my pouch and held it out to him. "Here," I said.

"But what about yourself, *mzee* ?" he said, forcing himself not to grab for it.

"Take it," I said. "I have no use for it."

"Asante sana, mzee," he said, finally taking it from my hand and stuffing it into a pocket.

We fell silent then, each occupied with our own thoughts. As Nairobi receded further and further behind us, I compared my feelings with those I had experienced when I had left Kenya behind for Kirinyaga. I

had been filled with optimism then, certain that we would create the Utopia I could envision so clearly in my mind.

The thing I had not realized is that a society can be a Utopia for only an instant—once it reaches a state of perfection it cannot change and still be a Utopia, and it is the nature of societies to grow and evolve. I do not know when Kirinyaga became a Utopia; the instant came and went without my noticing it.

Now I was seeking Utopia again, but this time of a more limited, more realizable nature: a Utopia for one man, a man who knew his own mind and would die before changing. I had been misled in the past, so I was not as elated as the day we had left for Kirinyaga; being older and wiser, I felt a calm, quiet certitude rather than more vivid emotions.

An hour after sunrise, we came to a huge, green, fog-enshrouded mountain, set in the middle of a bleached desert. A single swirling dust devil was visible against the horizon.

We stopped, then unsealed the elephant's compartment. We stood back as Ahmed stepped cautiously down the ramp, his every movement tense with apprehension. He took a few steps, as if to convince himself that he was truly on solid ground again, then raised his trunk to examine the scents of his new—and ancient—home.

Slowly the great beast turned toward Marsabit, and suddenly his whole demeanor changed. No longer cautious, no longer fearful, he spent almost a full minute eagerly examining the smells that wafted down to him. Then, without a backward look, he strode confidently to the foothills and vanished into the foliage. A moment later we heard him trumpet, and then he was climbing the mountain to claim his kingdom.

I turned to Kamau. “You had better take the vehicle back before they come looking for it.”

“Are you not coming with me?” he asked, surprised.

“No,” I replied. “Like Ahmed, I will live out my days on Marsabit.”

“But that means you, too, must pass through the radiation.”

“What of it?” I said with an unconcerned shrug. “I am an old man. How much time can I have left—weeks? Months? Surely not a year. Probably the burden of my years will kill me long before the radiation does.”

“I hope you are right,” said Kamau. “I should hate to think of you spending your final days in agony.”

“I have seen men who live in agony,” I told him. “They are the old *mzees* who gather in the park each morning, living lives devoid of purpose, waiting only for death to claim another of their number. I will not share their fate.”

A frown crossed his face like an early morning shadow, and I could see what he was thinking: he would have to take the vehicle back and face the consequences alone.

“I will remain here with you,” he said suddenly. “I cannot turn my back on Eden a second time.”

“It is not Eden,” I said. “It is only a mountain in the middle of a desert.”

“Nonetheless, I am staying. We will start a new Utopia. It will be Kirinyaga again, only done right this

time."

I have work to do, I thought. *Important work. And you would desert me in the end, as they have all deserted me. Better that you leave now.*

"You must not worry about the authorities," I said in the same reassuring tones with which I spoke to the elephant. "Return the vehicle to my son and he will take care of everything."

"Why should he?" asked Kamau suspiciously.

"Because I have always been an embarrassment to him, and if it were known that I stole Ahmed from a government laboratory, I would graduate from an embarrassment to a humiliation. Trust me: he will not allow this to happen."

Kamau's face became a battlefield, his terror of returning alone warring against his terror at spending the rest of his life on the mountain.

"It is true that my son would worry about me," he said hesitantly, as if expecting me to contradict him, perhaps even hoping that I would. "And I would never see my grandchildren again."

You are the last Kikuyu, indeed the last human being, that I shall ever see, I thought. *I will utter one last lie, disguised as a question, and if you do not see through it, then you will leave with a clear conscience and I will have performed a final act of compassion.*

"Go home, my friend," I said. "For what is more important than a grandchild?"

"Come with me, Koriba," he urged. "They will not punish you if you explain why you kidnapped him."

"I am not going back," I said firmly. "Not now, not ever. Ahmed and I are both anachronisms. It is best that we live out our lives here, away from a world we no longer recognize, a world that has no place for us."

"You and he are joined at the soul," said Kamau.

"Perhaps," I agreed. I laid my hand on his shoulder. " *Kwahari,* Kamau."

"Kwaheri, mzee," he replied unhappily. "Please ask Ngai to forgive me for my weakness."

It seemed to take him forever to activate the vehicle and turn it toward Nairobi, but finally he was out of sight, and I turned and began climbing mighty Marsabit.

It was easier to let Kamau believe that some mystic bond existed between Ahmed and myself than try to explain the real reason I chose to remain there. For the truth I had finally perceived was that I had searched for Ngai too high up and too far away. Indeed, I had looked for Him on the wrong mountain.

Men of lesser faith might believe Him dead or disinterested, but I knew that if Ahmed could be reborn after all others of his kind were long dead, then Ngai must surely be nearby, overseeing the miracle. I would spend the rest of the day regaining my strength, and then, in the morning, I would begin searching for Him again on this new mountain.

And this time, I knew I would find Him.

Discussion of the second draft of “The Land of Nod"

This time I concentrated on the keeper (Kamau) and the elephant. There was some good stuff, but it still lacked the resonance I wanted, because they had nothing to play off of—I was so interested in them that I forgot that Koriba's conflict was not with them, but with modern Kenya as personified by his son.

But I was getting close.

No, you can't tell it by reading the second draft. It's lopsided, out of whack, not unfocused but rather wrongly focused.

But all the elements were there now. The start was unchanged. He still ends up on the mountain with Ahmed. Kamau has character. I've fleshed out a couple of sections of Nairobi. And I knew that if I could just mesh that with Edward from the first draft, I might have something worthwhile...

THE LAND OF NOD
by Mike Resnick

Once, many years ago, there was a Kikuyu warrior who left his village and wandered off in search of adventure. Armed only with a spear, he slew the mighty lion and the cunning leopard. Then one day he came upon an elephant. He realized that his spear was useless against such a beast, but before he could back away or find cover, the elephant charged.

His only hope was divine intervention, and he begged Ngai, who rules the universe from His throne atop Kirinyaga, the holy mountain that men now call Mount Kenya, to find him and pluck him from the path of the elephant.

But Ngai did not respond, and the elephant picked the warrior up with its trunk and hurled him high into the air, and he landed in a distant thorn tree. His skin was badly torn by the thorns, but at least he was safe, since he was on a branch some twenty feet above the ground.

After he was sure the elephant had left the area, the warrior climbed down. Then he returned home and ascended the holy mountain to confront Ngai.

“What is it that you want of me?” asked Ngai, when the warrior had reached the summit.

“I want to know why you did not come,” said the warrior angrily. “All my life I have worshiped you and paid tribute to you. Did you not hear me ask for your help?”

“I heard you,” answered Ngai.

“Then why did you not come to my aid?” demanded the warrior. “Are you so lacking in godly powers that you could not find me?”

“After all these years you still do not understand,” said Ngai sternly. “It is *you* who must search for *me* .”

* * * *

My son Edward picked me up at the police station on Biashara Street just after midnight. The sleek British vehicle hovered a few inches above the ground while I got in, and then his chauffeur began taking us back to his house in the Ngong Hills.

"This is becoming tedious," he said, activating the shimmering privacy barrier so that we could not be overheard. He tried to present a judicial calm, but I knew he was furious.

"You would think they would tire of it," I agreed.

"We must have a serious talk," he said. "You have been back only two months, and this is the fourth time I have had to bail you out of jail."

"I have broken no Kikuyu laws," I said calmly, as we raced through the dark, ominous slums of Nairobi on our way to the affluent suburbs.

"You have broken the laws of Kenya," he said. "And like it or not, that is where you now live. I'm an official in the government, and I will not have you constantly embarrassing me!" He paused, struggling with his temper. "Look at you! I have offered to buy you a new wardrobe. Why must you wear that ugly old *kikoi* ? It smells even worse than it looks."

"Is there now a law against dressing like a Kikuyu?" I asked him.

"No," he said, as he commanded the miniature bar to appear from beneath the floor and poured himself a drink. "But there *is* a law against creating a disturbance in a restaurant."

"I paid for my meal," I noted, as we turned onto Langata Road and headed out for the suburbs. "In the Kenya shillings that you gave me."

"That does not give you the right to hurl your food against the wall, simply because it is not cooked to your taste." He glared at me, barely able to contain his anger. "You're getting worse with each offense. If I had been anyone else, you'd have spent the night in jail. As it is, I had to agree to pay for the damage you caused."

"It was eland," I explained. "The Kikuyu do not eat game animals."

"It was *not* eland," he said, setting his glass down and lighting a smokeless cigarette. "The last eland died in a German zoo a year after you left for Kirinyaga. It was a modified soybean product, genetically enhanced to *taste* like eland." He paused, then sighed deeply. "If you thought it was eland, why did you order it?"

"The server said it was steak. I assumed he meant the meat of a cow or an ox."

"This has got to stop," said Edward. "We are two grown men. Why can't we reach an accommodation?" He stared at me for a long time. "I can deal with rational men who disagree with me. I do it at Government House every day. But I cannot deal with a fanatic."

"I am a rational man," I said.

"Are you?" he demanded. "Yesterday you showed my wife's nephew how to apply the *githani* test for truthfulness, and he practically burned his brother's tongue off."

"His brother was lying," I said calmly. "He who lies faces the red-hot blade with a dry mouth, whereas he who has nothing to fear has enough moisture on his tongue so that he cannot be burned."

"Try telling a seven-year-old boy that he has nothing to fear when he's being approached by a sadistic older brother who is brandishing a red-hot knife!" snapped my son.

A uniformed watchman waved us through to the private road where my son lived, and when we reached our driveway the chauffeur pulled our British vehicle up to the edge of the force field. It identified us and vanished long enough for us to pass through, and soon we came to the front door.

Edward got out of the vehicle and approached his residence as I followed him. He clenched his fists in a physical effort to restrain his anger. "I agreed to let you live with us, because you are an old man who was thrown off his world—"

"I left Kirinyaga of my own volition," I interrupted calmly.

"It makes no difference why or how you left," said my son. "What matters is that you are *here* now. You are a very old man. It has been many years since you have lived on Earth. All of your friends are dead. My mother is dead. I am your son, and I will accept my responsibilities, but you *must* meet me halfway."

"I am trying to," I said.

"I doubt it."

"I am," I repeated. "Your own son understands that, even if you do not."

"My own son has had quite enough to cope with since my divorce and remarriage. The last thing he needs is a grandfather filling his head with wild tales of some Kikuyu Utopia."

"It is a failed Utopia," I corrected him. "They would not listen to me, and so they are doomed to become another Kenya."

"What is so wrong with that?" said Edward. "Kenya is my home, and I am proud of it." He paused and stared at me. "And now it is *your* home again. You must speak of it with more respect."

"I lived in Kenya for many years before I emigrated to Kirinyaga," I said. "I can live here again. Nothing has changed."

"That is not so," said my son. "We have built a transport system beneath Nairobi, and there is now a spaceport at Watamu on the coast. We have closed down the nuclear plants; our power is now entirely thermal, drawn from beneath the floor of the Rift Valley. In fact," he added with the pride that always accompanied the descriptions of his new wife's attainments, "Susan was instrumental in the changeover."

"You misunderstood me, Edward," I replied. "Kenya remains unchanged in that it continues to ape the Europeans rather than remain true to its own traditions."

The security system identified us and opened his house to us. We walked through the foyer, past the broad winding staircase the led to the bedroom wing. The servants were waiting for us, and the butler took Edward's coat from him. Then we passed the doorways the lounge and drawing room, both of which were filled with Roman statues and French paintings and rows of beautifully-bound British books.

Finally we came to Edward's study, where he turned and spoke in a low tone to the butler.

"We wish to be alone."

The servants vanished as if they had been nothing but holograms.

"Where is Susan?" I asked, for my daughter-in-law was nowhere to be seen.

"We were at a party at the Cameroon ambassador's new home when the call came through that you had been arrested again," he answered. "You broke up a very enjoyable bridge game. My guess is that she's in the tub or in bed, cursing your name."

I was about to mention that cursing my name to the god of the Europeans would not prove effective, but I decided that my son would not like to hear that at this moment, so I was silent. As I looked at my surroundings, I reflected that not only had all of Edward's belongings come from the Europeans, but that even his house had been taken from them, for it consisted of many rectangular rooms, and all Kikuyu knew—or should have known—that demons dwell in corners and the only proper shape for a home is round.

Edward walked briskly to his desk, activated his computer and read his messages, and then turned to me.

"There is another message from the government," he announced. "They want to see you next Tuesday at noon."

"I have already told them I will not accept their money," I said. "I have performed no service for them."

He put on his Lecture Face. "We are no longer a poor country," he said. "We pride ourselves that none of our infirm or elderly goes hungry."

"I will not go hungry, if the restaurants will stop trying to feed me unclean animals."

"The government is just making sure that you do not become a financial burden to me," said Edward, refusing to let me change the subject.

"You are my son," I said. "I raised you and fed you and protected you when you were young. Now I am old and you will do the same for me. That is our tradition."

"Well, it is our government's tradition to provide a financial safety net to families who are supporting elderly members," he said, and I could tell that the last trace of Kikuyu within him had vanished, that he was entirely a Kenyan.

"You are a wealthy man," I pointed out. "You do not need their money."

"I pay my taxes," he said, lighting another smokeless cigarette to hide his defensiveness. "It would be foolish not to accept the benefits that accrue to us. You may live a very long time. We have every right to that money."

"It is dishonorable to accept what you do not need," I replied. "Tell them to leave us alone."

He leaned back, half sitting on his desk. "They wouldn't, even if I asked them to."

“They must be Wakamba or Maasai,” I said, making no effort to hide my contempt.

“They are Kenyans,” he answered. “Just as you and I are.”

“Yes,” I said, suddenly feeling the weight of my years. “Yes, I must work very hard at remembering that.”

“You will save me more trips to the police station if you can,” said my son.

I nodded and went off to my room. He had supplied me with a bed and mattress, but after so many years of living in my hut on Kirinyaga, I found the bed uncomfortable, so every night I removed the blanket and placed it on the floor, then lay down and slept on it.

But tonight sleep would not come, for I kept reliving the past two months in my mind. Everything I saw, everything I heard, made me remember why I had left Kenya in the first place, why I had fought so long and so hard to obtain Kirinyaga's charter.

I rolled onto my side, propped my head on my hand, and looked out the window. Hundreds of stars were twinkling brightly in the clear, cloudless sky. I tried to imagine which of them was Kirinyaga. I had been the *mundumugu* —the witch doctor—who was charged with establishing our Kikuyu Utopia.

“I served you more selflessly than any other,” I whispered, staring at a flickering, verdant star, “and you betrayed me. Worse, you have betrayed Ngai. Neither He nor I shall ever seek you out again.”

I lay my head back down, turned away from the window, and closed my eyes, determined to look into the skies no more.

* * * *

In the morning, my son stopped by my room.

“You have slept on the floor again,” he noted.

“Have they passed a law against that now?” I demanded.

He sighed deeply. “Sleep any way you want.”

I stared at him. “You look very impressive...” I began.

“Thank you.”

“...in your European clothes,” I concluded.

“I have an important meeting with the Finance Minister today.” He looked at his timepiece. “In fact, I must leave now or I will be late.” He paused uneasily. “Have you considered what we spoke about yesterday?”

“We spoke of many things,” I said.

“I am referring to the Kikuyu retirement village.”

"I have lived in a village," I said. "And that is not one. It is a twenty-story tower of steel and glass, built to imprison the elderly."

"We have been through all this before," said my son. "It would be a place for you to make new friends."

"I have a new friend," I said. "I shall be visiting him this evening."

"Good!" he said. "Maybe he'll keep you out of trouble."

* * * *

I arrived at the huge titanium-and-glass laboratory complex just before midnight. The night had turned cool, and a breeze was blowing gently from the south. The moon had passed behind a cloud, and it was difficult to find the side gate in the darkness. Eventually I did find it, though, and Kamau was waiting for me. He deactivated a small section of the electronic barrier long enough for me to step through.

"*Jambo, mzee,*" he said. *Hello, wise old man.*

"*Jambo, mzee,*" I replied, for he was almost as old as I myself was. "I have come to see with my own eyes if you were telling the truth."

He nodded and turned, and I followed him between the tall, angular buildings that hovered over us, casting eerie shadows along the narrow walkways and channeling all the noises of the city in our direction. Our path was lined with Whistling Thorn and Yellow Fever trees, cloned from the few remaining specimens, rather than the usual introduced European shrubbery. Here and there were ornamental displays of grasses from the vanished savannahs.

"It is strange to see so much true African vegetation here in Kenya," I remarked. "Since I have returned from Kirinyaga, my eyes have hungered for it."

"You have seen a whole world of it," he replied with unconcealed envy.

"There is more to a world than greenery," I said. "When all is said and done, there is little difference between Kirinyaga and Kenya. Both have turned their backs on Ngai."

Kamau came to a halt, and gestured around him at the looming metal and glass and concrete buildings that totally covered the cool swamps from which Nairobi took its name. "I do not know how you can prefer *this* to Kirinyaga."

"I did not say I preferred it," I replied, suddenly aware that the ever-present noises of the city had been overshadowed by the droning hum of machines.

"Then you *do* miss Kirinyaga."

"I miss what Kirinyaga might have been. As for these," I said, indicating the immense structures, "they are just buildings."

"They are European buildings," he said bitterly. "They were built by men who are no longer Kikuyu or Luo or Embu, but merely Kenyans. They are filled with corners." He paused, and I thought, approvingly, *How much you sound like me! No wonder you sought me out when I returned to Kenya.* "Nairobi is home to eleven million people," he continued. "It stinks of sewage. The air is so polluted there are days when you can actually see it. The people wear European clothes and worship the Europeans' god. How

could you turn your back on Utopia for this?"

I held up my hands. "I have only ten fingers."

He frowned. "I do not understand."

"Do you remember the story of the little Dutch boy who put his finger in the dike?"

Kamau shook his head and spat contemptuously on the ground. "I do not listen to European stories."

"Perhaps you are wise not to," I acknowledged. "At any rate, the dike of tradition with which I had surrounded Kirinyaga began to spring leaks. They were few and easily plugged at first, but as the society kept evolving and growing they became many, and soon I did not have enough fingers to plug them all." I shrugged. "So I left before I was washed away."

"Have they another *mundumugu* to replace you?" he asked.

"I am told that they have a doctor to cure the sick, and a Christian minister to tell them how to worship the god of the Europeans, and a computer to tell them how to react to any situation that might arise," I said. "They no longer need a *mundumugu* ."

"Then Ngai has forsaken them," he stated.

"No," I corrected him. " *They*have forsaken Ngai."

"I apologize, *mundumugu* ," he said with deference. "You are right, of course."

He began walking again, and soon a strong, pungent odor came to my nostrils, a scent I had never encountered before, but which stirred some memory deep within my soul.

"We are almost there," said Kamau.

I heard a low rumbling sound, not like a predator growling, but rather like a vast machine purring with power.

"He is very nervous," continued Kamau, speaking in a soft monotone. "Make no sudden movements. He has already tried to kill two of his daytime attendants."

And then we were there, just as the moon emerged from its cloud cover and shone down on the awesome creature that stood facing us.

"He is magnificent!" I whispered.

"A perfect replication," agreed Kamau. "Height, ten feet eight inches at the shoulder, weight seven tons—and each tusk is exactly 148 pounds."

The huge animal stared at me through the flickering force field that surrounded it and tested the cool night breeze, striving to pick up my scent.

"Remarkable!" I said.

"You understand the cloning process, do you not?" asked Kamau.

"I understand what cloning *is* ," I answered. "I know nothing of the exact process."

"In this case, they took some cells from his tusks, which have been on display in the museum for more than two centuries, created the proper nutrient solution, and this is the result: Ahmed of Marsabit, the only elephant ever protected by Presidential Decree, lives again."

"I read that he was always accompanied by two guards no matter where he roamed on Mount Marsabit," I said. "Have they also ignored tradition? I see no one but you. Where is the other guard?"

"There are no guards. The entire complex is protected by a sophisticated electronic security system."

"Are you not a guard?" I asked.

He kept the shame from his voice, but he could not banish it from his face: even in the moonlight I could see it. "I am a paid companion."

"Of the elephant?"

"Of Ahmed."

"I am sorry," I said.

"We cannot all be *mundumugus* ," he answered. "When you are my age in a culture that worships youth, you take what is offered to you."

"True," I said. I looked back at the elephant. "I wonder if he has any memories of his former life? Of the days when he was the greatest of all living creatures, and Mount Marsabit was his kingdom."

"He knows nothing of Marsabit," answered Kamau. "But he knows something is wrong. He knows he was not born to spend his life in a tiny yard, surrounded by a glowing force field." He paused. "Sometimes, late at night, he faces the north and lifts his trunk and cries out his loneliness and misery. To the technicians it is just an annoyance. Usually they tell me to feed him, as if food will assuage his sorrow. It is not even *real* food, but something they have concocted in their laboratories."

"He does not belong here," I agreed.

"I know," said Kamau. "But then, neither do you, *mzee* . You should be back on Kirinyaga, living as the Kikuyu were meant to live."

I frowned. "No one on Kirinyaga is living as the Kikuyu were meant to live." I sighed deeply. "I think perhaps the time for *mundumugus* is past."

"This cannot be true," he protested. "Who else can be the repository of our traditions, the interpreter of our laws?"

"Our traditions are as dead as *his* ," I said, gesturing toward Ahmed. Then I turned back to Kamau. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Certainly not, *mundumugu* ."

"I am glad you sought me out, and I have enjoyed our conversations since I returned to Kenya," I told him. "But something puzzles me: since you feel so strongly about the Kikuyu, why did I not know you during our struggle to find a homeland? Why did you remain behind when we emigrated to Kirinyaga?"

I could see him wrestling with himself to produce an answer. Finally the battle was over, and the old man seemed to shrink an inch or two.

"I was terrified," he admitted.

"Of the spaceship?" I asked.

"No."

"Then what frightened you?"

Another internal struggle, and then an answer: " *You*did, *mzee* ."

"Me?" I repeated, surprised.

"You were always so sure of yourself," he said. "Always such a perfect Kikuyu. You made me afraid that I wasn't good enough."

"That was ridiculous," I said firmly.

"Was it?" he countered. "My wife was a Catholic. My son and daughter bore Christian names. And I myself had grown used to European clothes and European conveniences." He paused. "I was afraid if I went with you—and I wanted to; I have been cursing myself for my cowardice ever since—that soon I would complain about missing the technology and comfort I had left behind, and that you would banish me." He would not meet my gaze, but stared at the ground. "I did not wish to become an outcast on the world that was the last hope of my people."

*You are wiser than I suspected,*I thought. Aloud I uttered a compassionate lie: "You would not have been an outcast."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure," I said, laying a comforting hand on his bony shoulder. "In fact, I wish you had been there to support me when the end came."

"What good would the support of an old man have been?"

"You are not just *any* old man," I answered. "The word of a descendant of Johnstone Kamau would have carried much weight among the Council of Elders."

"That was another reason I was afraid to come," he replied, the words flowing a little more easily this time. "How could I live up to my name—for everyone knows that Johnstone Kamau became Jomo Kenyatta, the great Burning Spear of the Kikuyu. How could I possibly compare to such a man as that?"

"You compare more favorably than you think," I said reassuringly. "I could have used the passion of your belief."

"Surely you had support from the people," he said.

I shook my head. "Even my own apprentice, who I was preparing to succeed me, abandoned me; in fact, I believe he is at the university just down the road even as we speak. In the end, the people rejected the discipline of our traditions and the teachings of Ngai for the miracles and comforts of the Europeans. I suppose I should not be surprised, considering how many times it has happened here in Africa." I looked thoughtfully at the elephant. "I am as much an anachronism as Ahmed. Time has forgotten us both."

"But Ngai has not."

"Ngai, too, my friend," I said. "Our day has passed. There is no place left for us, not in Kenya, not on Kirinyaga, not anywhere."

Perhaps it was something in the tone of my voice, or perhaps in some mystic way Ahmed understood what I was saying. Whatever the reason, the elephant stepped forward to the edge of the force field and stared directly at me.

"It is lucky we have the field for protection," remarked Kamau.

"He would not hurt me," I said confidently.

"He has hurt men whom he had less reason to attack."

"But not me," I said. "Lower the field to a height of five feet."

"But..."

"Do as I say," I ordered him.

"Yes, *mundumugu* ," he replied unhappily, going to a small control box and punching in a code.

Suddenly the mild visual distortion vanished at eye level. I reached out a reassuring hand, and a moment later Ahmed ran the tip of his trunk gently across my face and body, then sighed deeply and stood there, swaying gently as he transferred his weight from one foot to the other.

"I would not have believed it if I had not seen it!" said Kamau almost reverently.

"Are we not all Ngai's creations?" I said.

"Even Ahmed?" asked Kamau.

"Who do *you* think created him?"

He shrugged again, and did not answer.

I remained for a few more minutes, watching the magnificent creature, while Kamau returned the force field to its former position. Then the night air became uncomfortably cold, as so often happened at this altitude, and I turned to Kamau.

"I must leave now," I said. "I thank you for inviting me here. I would not have believed this miracle had I

not seen it with my own eyes."

"The scientists think it is *their* miracle," he said.

"You and I know better," I replied.

He frowned. "But why do you think Ngai has allowed Ahmed to live again, at this time and in this place?"

I paused for a long moment, trying to formulate an answer, and found that I couldn't.

"There was a time when I knew with absolute certainty why Ngai did what He did," I said at last. "Now I am not so sure."

"What kind of talk is that from a *mundumugu* ?" demanded Kamau.

"It was not long ago that I would wake up to the song of birds," I said as we left Ahmed's enclosure and walked to the side gate through which I had entered. "And I would look across the river that wound by my village on Kirinyaga and see impala and zebra grazing on the savannah. Now I wake up to the sound and smell of modern Nairobi and then I look out and see a featureless grey wall that separates my son's house from that of his neighbor." I paused. "I think this must be my punishment for failing to bring Ngai's word to my people."

"Will I see you again?" he asked as we reached the gate and he deactivated a small section long enough for me to pass through.

"If it will not be an imposition," I said.

"The great Koriba an imposition?" he said with a smile.

"My son finds me so," I replied. "He gives me a room in his house, but he would prefer I lived elsewhere. And his wife is ashamed of my bare feet and my *kikoi* ; she is constantly buying European shoes and clothing for me to wear."

" *My*son works inside the laboratory," said Kamau, pointing to his son's third-floor office with some pride. "He has seventeen men working for him. Seventeen!"

I must not have looked impressed, for he continued, less enthusiastically, "It is he who got me this job, so that I *wouldn't* have to live with him."

"The job of paid companion," I said.

A bittersweet expression crossed his face. "I love my son, Koriba, and I know that he loves me—but I think that he is also a little bit ashamed of me."

"There is a thin line between shame and embarrassment," I said. "My son glides between one and the other like the pendulum of a clock."

Kamau seemed grateful to hear that his situation was not unique. "You are welcome to live with me, *mundumugu* ," he said, and I could tell that it was an earnest offer, not just a polite lie that he hoped I would reject. "We would have much to talk about."

"That is very considerate of you," I said. "But it will be enough if I may visit you from time to time, on those days when I find Kenyans unbearable and must speak to another Kikuyu."

"As often as you wish," he said. *"Kwaheri, mzee."*

"Kwaheri," I responded. *Farewell.*

I took the slidewalk down the noisy, crowded streets and boulevards that had once been the sprawling Athi Plains, an area that had swarmed with a different kind of life, and got off when I came to the airbus platform. An airbus glided up a few minutes later, almost empty at this late hour, and began going north, floating perhaps ten inches above the ground.

The trees that lined the migration route had been replaced by a dense angular forest of steel and glass and tightly-bonded alloys. As I peered through a window into the night, it seemed for a few moments that I was also peering into the past. Here, where the titanium-and-glass courthouse stood, was the very spot where the Burning Spear had first been arrested for having the temerity to suggest that his country did not belong to the British. Over there, by the new eight-story post office building, was where the last lion had died. Over there, by the water recycling plant, my people had vanquished the Wakamba in glorious and bloody battle some 300 years ago.

"We have arrived, *mzee*," said the driver, and the bus hovered a few inches above the ground while I made my way to the door. "Aren't you chilly, dressed in just a blanket like that?"

I did not deign to answer him, but stepped out to the sidewalk, which did not move here in the suburbs as did the slidewalks of the city. I preferred it, for man was meant to walk, not be transported effortlessly by miles-long beltways.

I approached my son's enclave and greeted the guards, who all knew me, for I often wandered through the area at night. They passed me through with no difficulty, and as I walked I tried to look across the centuries once more, to see the mud-and-grass huts, the *bomas* and *shambas* of my people, but the vision was blotted out by enormous mock-Tudor and mock-Victorian and mock-Colonial and mock-contemporary houses, interspersed with needle-like apartment buildings that reached up to stab the clouds.

I had no desire to speak to Edward or Susan, for they would question me endlessly about where I had been. My son would once again warn me about the thieves and muggers who prey on old men after dark in Nairobi, and my daughter-in-law would try to subtly suggest that I would be warmer in a coat and pants. So I went past their house and walked aimlessly through the enclave until all the lights in the house had gone out. When I was sure they were asleep, I went to a side door and waited for the security system to identify my retina and skeletal structure, as it had on so many similar nights. Then I quietly made my way to my room.

Usually I dreamed of Kirinyaga, but this night the image of Ahmed haunted my dreams. Ahmed, eternally confined by a force field; Ahmed, trying to imagine what lay beyond his tiny enclosure; Ahmed, who would live and die without ever seeing another of his own kind.

And gradually, my dream shifted to myself: to Koriba, attached by invisible chains to a Nairobi he could no longer recognize; Koriba, trying futilely to mold Kirinyaga into what it might have been; Koriba, who once led a brave exodus of the Kikuyu until one day he looked around and found that he was the only Kikuyu remaining.

* * * *

In the morning I went to visit my daughter on Kirinyaga—not the terraformed world, but the *real* Kirinyaga, which is now called Mount Kenya. It was here that Ngai gave the digging-stick to Gikuyu, the first man, and told him to work the earth. It was here that Gikuyu's nine daughters became the mothers of the nine tribes of the Kikuyu, here that the sacred fig tree blossomed. It was here, millennia later, that Jomo Kenyatta, the great Burning Spear of the Kikuyu, would invoke Ngai's power and send the Mau Mau out to drive the white man back to Europe.

And it was here that a steel-and-glass city of five million inhabitants sprawled up the side of the holy mountain. Nairobi's overstrained water and sewer system simply could not accommodate any more people, so the government offered enormous tax incentives to any business that would move to Kirinyaga, in the hope that the people would follow them—and the people accommodated them.

Vehicles spewed pollution into the atmosphere, and the noise of the city at work was deafening. I walked to the spot where the fig tree had once stood; it was now covered by a lead foundry. The slopes where the bongo and the rhinoceros once lived were hidden beneath the housing projects. The winding mountain streams had all been diverted and redirected. The tree beneath which Deedan Kimathi had been killed by the British was only a memory, its place taken by a fast food restaurant. The summit had been turned into a park, with tram service leading to a score of souvenir shops.

And now I realized why Kenya had become intolerable. Ngai no longer ruled the world from His throne atop the mountain, for there was no longer any room for Him there. Like the leopard and the golden sunbird, like I myself many years ago, He too had fled before this onslaught of black Europeans.

Possibly my discovery influenced my mood, for the visit with my daughter did not go well. But then, they never did: she was too much like her mother.

* * * *

I entered my son's study late that same afternoon.

“One of the servants said you wished to see me,” I said.

“Yes, I do,” said my son as he looked up from his computer. Behind him were paintings of two great leaders, Martin Luther King and Julius Nyerere, black men both, but neither one a Kikuyu. “Please sit down.”

I did as he asked.

“On a chair, my father,” he said.

“The floor is satisfactory.”

He sighed heavily. “I am too tired to argue with you. I have been brushing up on my French.” He grimaced. “It is a difficult language.”

“Why are you studying French?” I asked.

“As you know, the ambassador from Cameroon has bought a house in the enclave. I thought it would be advantageous to be able to speak to him in his own tongue.”

"That would be Bamileke or Ewondo, not French," I noted.

"He does not speak either of those," answered Edward. "His family is ruling class. They only spoke French in his family compound, and he was educated in Paris."

"Since he is the ambassador to our country, why are you learning *his* language?" I asked. "Why does he not learn Swahili?"

"Swahili is a street language," said my son. "English and French are the languages of diplomacy and business. His English is poor, so I will speak to him in French instead." He smiled smugly. " *That*ought to impress him!"

"I see," I said.

"You look disapproving," he observed.

"I am not ashamed of being a Kikuyu," I said. "Why are you ashamed of being a Kenyan?"

"I am not ashamed of anything!" he snapped. "I am proud of being able to speak to him in his own tongue."

"More proud than he, a visitor to Kenya, is to speak to you in *your* tongue," I noted.

"You do not understand!" he said.

"Evidently," I agreed.

He stared at me silently for a moment, then sighed deeply. "You drive me crazy," he said. "I don't even know how we came to be discussing this. I wanted to see you for a different reason." He lit a smokeless cigarette, took one puff, and threw it into the atomizer. "I had a visit from Father Ngoma this morning."

"I do not know him."

"You know his parishioner, though," said my son. "A number of them have come to you for advice."

"That is possible," I admitted.

"Damn it!" said Edward. "I have to live in this neighborhood, and he is the parish priest. He resents you telling his flock how to live, especially since what you tell them is in contradiction to Catholic dogma."

"Am I to lie to them, then?" I asked.

"Can't you just refer them to Father Ngoma?"

"I am a *mundumugu* ," I said. "It is my duty to advise those who come to me for guidance."

"You have not been a *mundumugu* since they made you leave Kirinyaga!" he said irritably.

"I left of my own volition," I replied calmly.

"We are getting off the subject again," said Edward. "Look—if you want to stay in the *mundumugu*

business, I'll rent you an office, or"—he added contemptuously—"buy you a patch of dirt on which to sit and make pronouncements. But you cannot practice in my house."

"Father Ngoma's parishioners must not like what he has to say," I observed, "or they would not seek advice elsewhere."

"I do not want you speaking to them again. Is that clear?"

"Yes," I said. "It is clear that you do not want me to speak to them again."

"You know exactly what I mean!" he exploded. "No more verbal games! Maybe they worked on Kirinyaga, but they won't work here! I know you too well!"

He went back to staring at his computer.

"It is most interesting," I said.

"What is?" he asked suspiciously, glaring at me.

"Here you are, surrounded by English books, studying French, and arguing on behalf of the priest of an Italian religion. Not only are you not Kikuyu, I think perhaps you are no longer even Kenyan."

He glared at me across his desk. "You drive me crazy," he repeated.

* * * *

After I left my son's study I left the house and took an airbus to the park in Muthaiga, miles from my son and the neighbors who were interchangeable with him. Once lions had stalked this terrain. Leopards had clung to overhanging limbs, waiting for the opportunity to pounce upon their prey. Wildebeest and zebra and gazelles had rubbed shoulders, grazing on the tall grasses. Giraffes had nibbled the tops of acacia trees, while warthogs rooted in the earth for tubers. Rhinos had nibbled on thornbushes, and charged furiously at any sound or sight they could not immediately identify.

Then the Kikuyu had come and cleared the land, bringing with them their cattle and their oxen and their goats. They had dwelt in huts of mud and grass, and lived the life that we aspired to on Kirinyaga.

But all that was in the past. Today the park contained nothing but a few squirrels racing across the imported Kentucky Blue Grass and a pair of hornbills that had nested in the one of the transplanted European trees. Old Kikuyu men, dressed in shoes and pants and jackets, sat on the benches that ran along the perimeter. One man was tossing crumbs to an exceptionally bold starling, but most of them simply sat and stared aimlessly.

I found an empty bench, but decided not to sit on it. I didn't want to be like these men, who saw nothing but the squirrels and the birds, when I could see the lions and the impala, the war-painted Kikuyu and the red-clad Maasai, who had once stalked across this same land.

I continued walking, suddenly restless, and despite the heat of the day and the frailty of my ancient body, I walked until twilight. I decided I could not endure dinner with my son and his wife, their talk of their boring jobs, their continual veiled suggestions about the retirement home, their inability to comprehend either why I went to Kirinyaga or why I returned—so instead of going home I began walking aimlessly through the crowded city.

Finally I looked up at the sky. *Ngai* , I said silently, *I* still do not understand. I was a good mundumugu. I obeyed Your law. I honored Your rituals. There must have come a day, a moment, a second, when together we could have saved Kirinyaga if You had just manifested Yourself. Why did You abandon it when it needed You so desperately?

I spoke to Ngai for minutes that turned into hours, but He did not answer.

* * * *

When it was ten o'clock at night, I decided it was time to start making my way to the laboratory complex, for it would take me more than an hour to get there, and Kamau began working at eleven.

As before, he deactivated the electronic barrier to let me in, then escorted me to the small grassy area where Ahmed was kept.

“I did not expect to see you back so soon, *mzee* ,” he said.

“I have no place else to go,” I answered, and he nodded, as if this made perfect sense to him.

Ahmed seemed nervous until the breeze brought my scent to him. Then he turned to face the north, extending his trunk every few moments.

“It is as if he seeks some sign from Mount Marsabit,” I remarked, for the great creature's former home was hundreds of miles north of Nairobi, a solitary green mountain rising out of the blazing desert.

“He would not be pleased with what he found,” said Kamau.

“Why do you say that?” I asked, for no animal in our history was ever more identified with a location than the mighty Ahmed with Marsabit.

“Do you not read the papers, or watch the news on the holo?”

I shook my head. “What happens to black Europeans is of no concern to me.”

“The government has evacuated the town of Marsabit, which sits next to the mountain. They have closed the Singing Wells, and have ordered everyone to leave the area.”

“Leave Marsabit? Why?”

“They have been burying nuclear waste at the base of the mountain for many years,” he said. “It was just revealed that some of the containers broke open almost six years ago. The government hid the fact from the people, and then failed to properly clean up the leak.”

“How could such a thing happen?” I asked, though of course I knew the answer. After all, how does *anything* happen in Kenya?

“Politics. Payoffs. Corruption.”

“A third of Kenya is desert,” I said. “Why did they not bury it there, where no one lives or even thinks to travel, so when this kind of disaster occurs, as it always does, no one is harmed?”

He shrugged. “Politics. Payoffs. Corruption,” he repeated. “It is our way of life.”

"Ah, well, it is nothing to me anyway," I said. "What happens to a mountain 500 kilometers away does not interest me, any more than I am interested in what happens to a world named after a different mountain."

"It interests *me* ," said Kamau. "Innocent people have been exposed to radiation."

"If they live near Marsabit, they are Pokot and Rendille," I pointed out. "What does that matter to the Kikuyu?"

"They are *people* , and my heart goes out to them," said Kamau.

"You are a good man," I said. "I knew that from the moment we first met." I pulled some peanuts from the pouch that hung around my neck, the same pouch in which I used to keep charms and magical tokens. "I bought these for Ahmed this afternoon," I said. "May I...?"

"Certainly," answered Kamau. "He has few enough pleasures. Even a peanut will be appreciated. Just toss them at his feet."

"No," I said, walking forward. "Lower the barrier."

He lowered the force field until Ahmed was able to reach his trunk out over the top. When I got close enough, the huge beast gently took the peanuts from my hand.

"I am amazed!" said Kamau when I had rejoined him. "Even I cannot approach Ahmed with impunity, yet you actually fed him by hand, as if he were a family pet."

"We are each the last of our kind, living on borrowed time," I said. "He senses a kinship."

I remained a few more minutes, then went home to another night of troubled sleep. I felt Ngai was trying to tell me something, trying to impart some message through my dreams, but though I had spent years interpreting the omens in other people's dreams, I was ignorant of my own.

* * * *

Edward was standing on the beautifully rolled lawn, staring at the blackened embers of my fire.

"I have a beautiful fire pit on the terrace," he said, trying unsuccessfully to hide his anger. "Why on earth did you build a fire in the middle of the garden?"

"That is where a fire belongs," I answered.

"Not in *this* house, it doesn't!"

"I shall try to remember."

"Do you know what the landscaper will charge me to repair the damage you caused?" A look of concern suddenly crossed his face. "You haven't sacrificed any animals, have you?"

"No."

"You're sure none of the neighbors is missing a dog or a cat?" he persisted.

"I know the law," I said. And indeed, Kikuyu law required the sacrifice of goats and cattle, not dogs and cats. "I am trying to obey it."

"I find that difficult to believe."

"But *you* are not obeying it, Edward," I said.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

I looked at Susan, who was staring at us from a second-story window.

"You have two wives," I pointed out. "The younger one lives with you, but the older one lives many kilometers away, and sees you only when you take your children away from her on weekends. This is unnatural: a man's wives should all live together with him, sharing the household duties."

"Linda is no longer my wife," he said. "You know that. We were divorced many years ago."

"You can afford both," I said. "You should have kept both."

"In this society, a man may have only one wife," said Edward. "What kind of talk is this? You have lived in England and America. You know that."

"That is their law, not ours," I said. "This is Kenya."

"It is the same thing."

"The Moslems have more than one wife," I replied.

"I am not a Moslem," he said.

"A Kikuyu man may have as many wives as he can afford," I said. "It is obvious that you are also not a Kikuyu."

"I've had it with this smug superiority of yours!" he exploded. "You deserted my mother because she was not a true Kikuyu," he continued bitterly. "You turned your back on my sister because she was not a true Kikuyu. Since I was a child, every time you were displeased with me you have told me that I am not a true Kikuyu. Now you have even proclaimed that none of the thousands who followed you to Kirinyaga are true Kikuyus." He glared furiously at me. "Your standards are higher than Kirinyaga itself! Can there possibly be a true Kikuyu anywhere in the universe?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"Where can such a paragon be found?" he demanded.

"Right here," I said, tapping myself on the chest. "You are looking at him."

* * * *

My days faded one into another, the dullness and drudgery of them broken only by occasional nocturnal visits to the laboratory complex. Then one night, as I met Kamau at the gate, I could see that his entire demeanor had changed.

"Something is wrong," I said promptly. "Are you ill?"

"No, *mzee* , it is nothing like that."

"Then what is the matter?" I persisted.

"It is Ahmed," said Kamau, unable to stop tears from rolling down his withered cheeks. "They have decided to put him to death the day after tomorrow."

"Why?" I asked, surprised. "Has he attacked another keeper?"

"No," said Kamau bitterly. "The experiment was a success. They know they can clone an elephant, so why continue to pay for his upkeep when they can line their pockets with the remaining funds of the grant?"

"Is there no one you can appeal to?" I demanded.

"Look at me," said Kamau. "I am an 86-year-old man who was given his job as an act of charity. Who will listen to me?"

"We must do something," I said.

He shook his head sadly. "They are *kehees* ," he said. "Uncircumcised boys. They do not even know what a *mundumugu* is. Do not humiliate yourself by pleading with them."

"If I did not plead with the Kikuyu on Kirinyaga," I replied, "you may be sure I will not plead with the Kenyans in Nairobi." I tried to ignore the ceaseless hummings of the laboratory machines as I considered my options. Finally I looked up at the night sky: the moon glowed a hazy orange through the pollution. "I will need your help," I said at last.

"You can depend on me."

"Good. I shall return tomorrow night."

I turned on my heel and left, without even stopping at Ahmed's enclosure.

All that night I thought and planned. In the morning, I waited until my son and his wife had left the house, then called Kamau on the vidphone to tell him what I intended to do and how he could help. Next, I had the computer contact the bank and withdraw my money, for though I disdained shillings and refused to cash my government checks, my son had found it easier to shower me with money than respect.

I spent the rest of the morning shopping at vehicle rental agencies, until I found exactly what I wanted. I had the saleswoman show me how to manipulate it, practiced until nightfall, hovered opposite the laboratory until I saw Kamau enter the grounds, and then maneuvered up to the side gate.

*"Jambo, mundumugu!"*whispered Kamau as he deactivated enough of the electronic barrier to accommodate the vehicle, which he scrutinized carefully. I backed up to Ahmed's enclosure, then opened the back and ordered the ramp to descend. The elephant watched with an uneasy curiosity as Kamau deactivated a ten-foot section of the force field and allowed the bottom of the ramp through.

"Njoo, Tembo," I said. *Come, elephant.*

He took a tentative step toward me, then another and another. When he reached the edge of his enclosure he stopped, for always he had received an electrical "correction" when he tried to move beyond this point. It took almost twenty minutes of tempting him with peanuts before he finally crossed the barrier and then clambered awkwardly up the ramp, which slid in after him. I sealed him into the hovering vehicle, and he instantly trumpeted in panic.

"Keep him quiet until we get out of here," said a nervous Kamau as I joined him at the controls, "or he'll wake up the whole city."

I opened a panel to the back of the vehicle and spoke soothingly, and strangely enough the trumpeting ceased and the scuffling did stop. As I continued to calm the frightened beast, Kamau piloted the vehicle out of the laboratory complex. We passed through the Ngong Hills twenty minutes later, and circled around Thika in another hour. When we passed Kirinyaga—the true, snow-capped Kirinyaga, from which Ngai once ruled the world—90 minutes after that, I did not give it so much as a glance.

We must have been quite a sight to anyone we passed: two seemingly crazy old men, racing through the night in an unmarked cargo vehicle carrying a six-ton monster that had been extinct for more than two centuries.

"Have you considered what effect the radiation will have on him?" asked Kamau as we passed through Isiolo and continued north.

"I questioned my son about it," I answered. "He is aware of the incident, and says that the contamination is confined to the lower levels of the mountain." I paused. "He also tells me it will soon be cleaned up, but I do not think I believe him."

"But Ahmed must pass through the radiation zone to ascend the mountain," said Kamau.

I shrugged. "Then he will pass through it. Every day he lives is a day more than he would have lived in Nairobi. For as much time as Ngai sees fit to give him, he will be free to graze on the mountain's greenery and drink deep of its cool waters."

"I hope he lives many years," he said. "If I am to be jailed for breaking the law, I would at least like to know that some lasting good came of it."

"No one is going to jail you," I assured him. "All that will happen is that you will be fired from a job that no longer exists."

"That job supported me," he said unhappily.

The Burning Spear would have no use for you, I decided. *You bring no honor to his name. It is as I have always known: I am the last true Kikuyu.*

I pulled my remaining money out of my pouch and held it out to him. "Here," I said.

"But what about yourself, *mzee* ?" he said, forcing himself not to grab for it.

"Take it," I said. "I have no use for it."

"Asante sana, mzee," he said, taking it from my hand and stuffing it into a pocket. *Thank you, mzee.*

We fell silent then, each occupied with our own thoughts. As Nairobi receded further and further behind us, I compared my feelings with those I had experienced when I had left Kenya behind for Kirinyaga. I had been filled with optimism then, certain that we would create the Utopia I could envision so clearly in my mind.

The thing I had not realized is that a society can be a Utopia for only an instant—once it reaches a state of perfection it cannot change and still be a Utopia, and it is the nature of societies to grow and evolve. I do not know when Kirinyaga became a Utopia; the instant came and went without my noticing it.

Now I was seeking Utopia again, but this time of a more limited, more realizable nature: a Utopia for one man, a man who knew his own mind and would die before compromising. I had been misled in the past, so I was not as elated as the day we had left for Kirinyaga; being older and wiser, I felt a calm, quiet certitude rather than more vivid emotions.

An hour after sunrise, we came to a huge, green, fog-enshrouded mountain, set in the middle of a bleached desert. A single swirling dust devil was visible against the horizon.

We stopped, then unsealed the elephant's compartment. We stood back as Ahmed stepped cautiously down the ramp, his every movement tense with apprehension. He took a few steps, as if to convince himself that he was truly on solid ground again, then raised his trunk to examine the scents of his new—and ancient—home.

Slowly the great beast turned toward Marsabit, and suddenly his whole demeanor changed. No longer cautious, no longer fearful, he spent almost a full minute eagerly examining the smells that wafted down to him. Then, without a backward glance, he strode confidently to the foothills and vanished into the foliage. A moment later we heard him trumpet, and then he was climbing the mountain to claim his kingdom.

I turned to Kamau. "You had better take the vehicle back before they come looking for it."

"Are you not coming with me?" he asked, surprised.

"No," I replied. "Like Ahmed, I will live out my days on Marsabit."

"But that means you, too, must pass through the radiation."

"What of it?" I said with an unconcerned shrug. "I am an old man. How much time can I have left—weeks? Months? Surely not a year. Probably the burden of my years will kill me long before the radiation does."

"I hope you are right," said Kamau. "I should hate to think of you spending your final days in agony."

"I have seen men who live in agony," I told him. "They are the old *mzees* who gather in the park each morning, leading lives devoid of purpose, waiting only for death to claim another of their number. I will not share their fate."

A frown crossed his face like an early morning shadow, and I could see what he was thinking: he would have to take the vehicle back and face the consequences alone.

"I will remain here with you," he said suddenly. "I cannot turn my back on Eden a second time."

"It is not Eden," I said. "It is only a mountain in the middle of a desert."

"Nonetheless, I am staying. We will start a new Utopia. It will be Kirinyaga again, only done right this time."

I have work to do, I thought. *Important work. And you would desert me in the end, as they have all deserted me. Better that you leave now.*

"You must not worry about the authorities," I said in the same reassuring tones with which I spoke to the elephant. "Return the vehicle to my son and he will take care of everything."

"Why should he?" asked Kamau suspiciously.

"Because I have always been an embarrassment to him, and if it were known that I stole Ahmed from a government laboratory, I would graduate from an embarrassment to a humiliation. Trust me: he will not allow this to happen."

"If your son asks about you, what shall I tell him?"

"The truth," I answered. "He will not come looking for me."

"What will stop him?"

"The fear that he might find me and have to bring me back with him," I said.

Kamau's face reflected the battle that was going on inside him, his terror of returning alone pitted against his fear of the hardships of life on the mountain.

"It is true that my son would worry about me," he said hesitantly, as if expecting me to contradict him, perhaps even hoping that I would. "And I would never see my grandchildren again."

You are the last Kikuyu, indeed the last human being, that I shall ever see, I thought. *I will utter one last lie, disguised as a question, and if you do not see through it, then you will leave with a clear conscience and I will have performed a final act of compassion.*

"Go home, my friend," I said. "For what is more important than a grandchild?"

"Come with me, Koriba," he urged. "They will not punish you if you explain why you kidnapped him."

"I am not going back," I said firmly. "Not now, not ever. Ahmed and I are both anachronisms. It is best that we live out our lives here, away from a world we no longer recognize, a world that has no place for us."

Kamau looked at the mountain. "You and he are joined at the soul," he concluded.

"Perhaps," I agreed. I laid my hand on his shoulder. "*Kwaheri,* Kamau."

"Kwaheri, mzee," he replied unhappily. "Please ask Ngai to forgive me for my weakness."

It seemed to take him forever to activate the vehicle and turn it toward Nairobi, but finally he was out of

sight, and I turned and began ascending the foothills.

I had wasted many years seeking Ngai on the wrong mountain. Men of lesser faith might believe Him dead or disinterested, but I knew that if Ahmed could be reborn after all others of his kind were long dead, then Ngai must surely be nearby, overseeing the miracle. I would spend the rest of the day regaining my strength, and then, in the morning, I would begin searching for Him again on Marsabit.

And this time, I knew I would find Him.

THE 43 ANTAREAN DYNASTIES

by Mike Resnick

To thank the Maker Of All Things for the birth of his first male offspring, the Emperor Maloth IV ordered his architects to build a temple that would forever dwarf all other buildings on the planet. It was to be made entirely of crystal, and the spire-covered roof, which looked like a million glistening spear-points aimed at the sun, would be supported by 217 columns, to honor his 217 forebears. When struck, each column would sound a musical note that could be heard for kilometers, calling the faithful to prayer. The structure would be known as the Temple of the Honored Sun, for his heir had been born exactly at midday, when the sun was highest in the sky. The temple took 27 Standard years to complete, and although races from all across the galaxy would come to Antares III to marvel at it, Maloth further decreed that no aliens or non-believers would ever be allowed to enter it and desecrate its sacred corridors with their presence...

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A man, a woman, and a child emerge from the Temple of the Honored Sun. The woman holds a camera to her eye, capturing the same image from a dozen unimaginative angles. The child, his lip sparsely covered with hair that is supposed to imply maturity, never sees beyond the game he is playing on his pocket computer. The man looks around to make sure no one is watching him, grinds out a smokeless cigar beneath his heel, and then increases his pace until he joins them.

They approach me, and I will myself to become one with my surroundings, to insinuate myself into the marble walls and stone walkways before they can speak to me.

I am invisible. You cannot see me. You will pass me by.

“Hey, fella—we're looking for a guide,” says the man. “You interested?”

I stifle a sigh and bow deeply. “I am honored,” I say, glad that they do not understand the subtleties of Antarean inflection.

“Wow!” exclaims the woman, aiming her camera at me. “I never saw anything like that! It's almost as if you folded your torso in half! Can you do it again?”

I am reminded of an ancient legend, possibly apocryphal though I choose to believe it. An ambassador who was equally fascinated by the way the Antarean body is jointed, once asked Komarith I, the founder of the 38th Dynasty, to bow a second time. Komarith merely stared at him without moving until the embarrassed ambassador slunk away. He went on to rule for 29 years and was never known to bow again.

It has been a long time since Komarith, almost seven millennia now, and Antares and the universe have

changed. I bow for the woman while she snaps her holographs.

"What's your name?" asks the man.

"You could not pronounce it," I reply. "When I conduct members of your race, I choose the name Hermes."

"Herman, eh?"

"Hermes," I correct him.

"Right. Herman."

The boy finally looks up. "He said Hermes, Dad."

The man shrugs. "Whatever." He looks at his timepiece. "Well, let's get started."

"Yeah," chimes in the child. "They're piping in the game from Roosevelt III this afternoon. I've got to get back for it."

"You can watch sports anytime," says the woman. "This may be your only chance to see Antares."

"I should be so lucky," he mutters, returning his attention to his computer.

I recite my introductory speech almost by rote. "Allow me to welcome you to Antares III, and to its capital city of Kalimetra, known throughout the galaxy as the City of a Million Spires."

"I didn't see any million spires when we took the shuttle in from the spaceport," says the child, whom I could have sworn was not listening. "A thousand or two, maybe."

"There was a time when there were a million," I explain. "Today only 16,304 remain. Each is made of quartz or crystal. In late afternoon, when the sun sinks low in the sky, they act as a prism for its rays, creating a flood of exotic colors that stretches across the thoroughfares of the city. Races have come from halfway across the galaxy to experience the effect."

"Sixteen thousand," murmurs the woman. "I wonder what happened to the rest?"

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No one knew why Antareans found the spires so aesthetically pleasing. They towered above the cities, casting their shadows and their shifting colors across the landscape. Tall, delicate, exquisite, they reflected a unique grandness of vision and sensitivity of spirit. The rulers of Antares III spent almost 38,000 years constructing their million spires. During the Second Invasion, it took the Canphorite armada less than two weeks to destroy all but 16,304 of them...

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The woman is still admiring the spires that she can see in the distance. Finally she asks who built them, as if they are too beautiful to have been created by Antareans.

"The artisans and craftsmen of my race built everything you will see today," I answer.

"All by yourselves?"

"Is it so difficult for you to believe?" I ask gently.

"No," she says defensively. "Of course not. It's just that there's so *much...* "

"Kalimetra was not created in a day or a year, or even a millennium," I point out. "It is the cumulative achievement of 43 Antarean Dynasties."

"So we're in the 43rd Dynasty now?" she asks.

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It was Zelorean IX who officially declared Kalimetra to be the Eternal City. Neither war nor insurrection had ever threatened its stability, and even the towering temples of his forefathers gave every promise of lasting for all eternity. It was a Golden Age, and he could see no reason why it should not go on forever...

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"The last absolute ruler of the 43rd Dynasty has been dust for almost three thousand years," I explain. "Since then we have been governed by a series of conquerors, each alien race superseding the last."

"Thank goodness they didn't destroy your buildings," says the woman, turning to admire a water fountain, which for some reason appears to her to be a mystical alien artifact. She is about to take a holo when the child restrains her.

"It's just a goddamned water bubbler, Ma," he says.

"But it's fascinating," she says. "Imagine what kind of beings used it in ages past."

"Thirsty ones," says the bored child.

She ignores him and turns back to me. "As I was saying, it must be criminal to rob the galaxy of such treasures."

"Yeah, well *somebody* destroyed some buildings around here," interjects the child, who seems intent on proving someone wrong about something. "Remember the hole in the ground we saw over that way?" He points in the direction of the Footprint. "Looks like a bomb crater to me."

"You are mistaken," I explain, leading them over to it. "It has always been there."

"It's just a big sinkhole," says the man, totally unimpressed.

"It is worshipped by my people as the Footprint of God," I explain. "Once, many eons ago, Kalimetra was in the throes of a years-long drought. Finally Jorvash, our greatest priest, offered his own life if God would bring the rains. God replied that it would not rain until He wept again, and we had not yet suffered enough to bring forth His tears of compassion. But He promised that He would strike a bargain with Jorvash." I pause for effect, but the man is lighting another cigar and the child is concentrating on his pocket computer. "The next morning Jorvash was found dead inside his temple, while God had created this depression with His foot and filled it with water. It sustained us until He finally wept again."

The woman seems flustered. "Um ... I hate to ask," she finally says, "but could you repeat that story? My recorder wasn't on."

The man looks uncomfortable. “She's always forgetting to turn the damned thing on,” he explains, and flips me a coin. “For your trouble.”

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Lobilia was the greatest poet in the history of Antares III. Although he died during the 23rd Dynasty, most of his work survived him. But his masterpiece, “The Long Night of the Exile"—the epic of Bagata's Exile and his triumphant Return—was lost forever. Though he was his race's most famous bard, Lobilia himself was illiterate, unable even to write his own name. He created his poetry extemporaneously, embellishing upon it with each retelling. He recited his epic just once, and was so satisfied with its form that he refused to repeat it for the scribes who were waiting for a final version and hadn't written it down.

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“Thank you,” says the woman, deactivating the recorder after I finish. She pauses. “Can I buy a book with some more of your quaint folk legends?”

I decide not to explain the difference between a folk legend and an article of belief. “They are for sale in the gift shop of your hotel,” I reply.

“You don't have enough books?” mutters the man.

She glares at him, but says nothing, and I lead them to the Tomb, which always impresses visitors.

“This is the Tomb of Bedorian V, the greatest ruler of the 37th Dynasty,” I say. “Bedorian was a commoner, a simple farmer who deposed the notorious Maelastri XII, himself a mighty warrior who was the last ruler of the 36th Dynasty. It was Bedorian who decreed universal education for all Antareans.”

“What did you have before that?”

“Our females were not allowed the privilege of literacy until Bedorian's reign.”

“How did this guy finally die?” asks the man, who doesn't really care but is unwilling to let the woman ask all the questions.

“Bedorian was assassinated by one of his followers,” I reply.

“A male, no doubt,” says the woman wryly.

“Before he died,” I continue, “he united three warring states without fighting a single battle, decreed that all Antareans should use a common language, and outlawed the worship of *kreneks* .”

“What are *kreneks* ?”

“They are poisonous reptiles. They killed many worshippers in nameless, obscene ceremonies before Bedorian IV came to power.”

“Yeah?” says the child, alert again. “What were they like?”

“What is obscene to one being is simply boring to another,” I say. “Terrans find them dull.” Which is not true, but I have no desire to watch the child snicker as I describe the rituals.

“What a shame,” says the woman, though her voice sounds relieved. “Still, you certainly seem to know your history.”

I want to answer that I just make up the stories. But I am afraid if I say it, she will believe it.

“Where did you learn all this stuff?” she continues.

“To become a licensed guide,” I reply, “an Antarean must undergo fourteen years of study, and must also speak a minimum of four alien languages fluently. Terran is always one of the four.”

“That's some set of credentials,” comments the man. “I made it through one year of dental school and quit.”

And yet, it is you who are paying me.

“I'm surprised you don't work at one of the local universities,” he continues.

“I did once.”

Which is true. But I have my family to feed—and tourists’ tips, however small and grudgingly given, are still greater than my salary as a teacher.

A *rapu* —an Antarean child—insinuates his way between myself and my clients. Scarcely more than an infant, he is dressed in rags, and his face is smudged with dirt. There are open sores on the reticulated plates of his skin, and his golden eyes water constantly. He begs plaintively for credits in his native tongue. When there is no response, he extends his hand in what has become a universal gesture that says: *You are rich. I am poor and hungry. Give me money.*

“Yours?” asks the man, frowning, as his wife takes half a dozen holos in quick succession.

“No, he is not mine.”

“What is he doing here?”

“He lives in the street,” I answer, my compassion for the *rapu* alternating with my humiliation at having to explain his presence and situation. “He is asking for coins so that he and his mother will not go hungry tonight.”

I look at the *rapu* and think sadly: *Timing is everything. Once, long ago, we strode across our world like gods. You would not have gone hungry in any of the 43 Dynasties.*

The human child looks at his Antarean counterpart. I wonder if he realizes how fortunate he is. His face gives no reflection of his thoughts; perhaps he has none. Finally he picks his nose and goes back to manipulating his computer.

The man stares at the *rapu* for a moment, then flips him a two-credit coin. The *rapu* catches it, bows and blesses the man, and runs off. We watch him go. He raises the coin above his head, yelling happily—and a moment later, we are surrounded by twenty more street urchins, all filthy, all hungry, all begging for coins.

"Enough's enough!" says the man irritably. "Tell them to get the hell out of here and go home, Herman."

"They live here," I explain gently.

"Right here?" demands the man. He stomps the ground with his foot, and the nearest *rapus* jump back in fright. "On this spot? Okay, then tell them to stay here where they live and not follow us."

I explain to the *rapus* in our own tongue that these tourists will not give them coins.

"Then we will go to the ugly pink hotel where all the Men stay and rob their rooms."

"That is none of my concern," I say. "But if you are caught, it will go hard with you."

The oldest of the urchins smiles at my warning.

"If we are caught, they will lock us up, and because it is a jail they will have to feed us, and we will be protected from the rain and the cold—it is far better than being here."

I have no answer for *rapus* whose only ambition is to be warm and dry and well-fed, but merely shrug. They run off, laughing and singing, as if they are human children off to play some game.

"Damned aliens!" mutters the man.

"That is incorrect," I say.

"Oh?"

"A matter of semantics," I point out gently. " *They*are indigenous. *You* are the aliens."

"Well, they could do with some lessons in behavior from us aliens, then," he growls.

We walk up the long ramp to the Tomb and are about to enter it, when the woman stops.

"I'd like a holo of the three of you standing in the entrance," she announces. She smiles at me. "Just to prove to our friends we were here, and that we met a real Antarean."

The man walks over and stands on one side of me. The child reluctantly moves to my other side.

"Now put your arm around Herman," says the woman.

The child steps back, and I see a mixture of contempt and disgust on his face. "I'll pose with it, but I won't *touch* it!"

"You do what your mother says!" snaps the man.

"No way!" says the child, stalking sulkily back down the ramp. "You want to hug him, you go ahead!"

"You listen to me, young man!" says the man, but the child does not stop or give any indication that he has heard, and soon he disappears behind a temple.

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It was Tcharock, the founder of the 30th Dynasty, who decreed that the person of the Emperor was sacrosanct and could not be touched by any being other than his medics and his concubines, and then only with his consent.

His greatest advisor was Chaluba, who extended Tcharock's rule to more than 80% of the planet and halted the hyper-inflation that had been the 29th Dynasty's legacy to him.

One night, during a state function, Chaluba inadvertently brushed against Tcharock while introducing him to the Ambassador from far Domar.

The next morning Tcharock regretfully gave the signal to the executioner, and Chaluba was beheaded. Despite this unfortunate beginning, the 30th Dynasty survived for 1,062 Standard years.

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The woman, embarrassed, begins apologizing to me. But I notice that she, too, avoids touching me. The man goes off after the child, and a few moments later the two of them return—which is just as well, for the woman has begun repeating herself.

The man pushes the child toward me, and he sullenly utters an apology. The man takes an ominous step toward him, and he reluctantly reaches out his hand. I take it briefly—the contact is no more pleasant for me than for him—and then we enter the Tomb. Two other groups are there, but they are hundreds of meters away, and we cannot hear what their guides are saying.

“How high is the ceiling?” asks the woman, training her camera on the exquisite carvings overhead.

“38 meters,” I say. “The Tomb itself is 203 meters long and 67 meters wide. The body of Beldorian V is in a large vault beneath the floor.” I pause, thinking as always of past glories. “On the Day of Mourning, the day the Tomb was completed, a million Antareans stood patiently in line outside the Tomb to pay their last respects.”

“I don't mean to ask a silly question,” says the woman, “but why are all the buildings so *enormous* ?”

“Ego,” suggests the man, confident in his wisdom.

“The Maker Of All Things is huge,” I explain. “So my people felt that any monuments to Him should be as large as possible, so that He might be comfortable inside them.”

“You think your God can't find or fit into a small building?” asks the man with a condescending smile.

“He is everyone's God,” I answer. “And while He can of course find a small temple, why should we force Him to live in one?”

“Did Beldorian have a wife?” asks the woman, her mind back to smaller considerations.

“He had five of them,” I answer. “The tomb next to this one is known as The Place of Beldorian's Queens.”

“He was a polygamist?”

I shake my head. “No. Beldorian simply outlived his first four queens.”

"He must have died a very old man," says the woman.

"He did not," I answer. "There is a belief among my people that those who achieve public greatness are doomed to private misery. Such was Beldorian's fate." I turn to the child, who has been silent since returning, and ask him if he has any questions, but he merely glares at me without speaking.

"How long ago was this place built?" asks the man.

"Beldorian V died 6,302 Standard years ago. It took another 17 years to build and prepare the Tomb."

"6,302 years," he muses. "That's a long time."

"We are an ancient race," I reply proudly. "A human anthropologist has suggested that our 3rd Dynasty commenced before your ancestors crossed over the evolutionary barrier into sentience."

"Maybe we spent a long time living in the trees," says the man, clearly unimpressed and just a bit defensive. "But look how quickly we passed you once we climbed down."

"If you say so," I answer noncommittally.

"In fact, everybody passed you," he persists. "Look at the record: How many times has Antares been conquered?"

"I am not sure," I lie, for I find it humiliating to speak of it.

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When the Antareans learned that Man's Republic wish to annex their world, they gathered their army in Zanthu and then marched out onto the battlefield, 300,000 strong. They were the cream of the planet's young warriors, gold of eye, the reticulated plates of their skin glistening in the morning sun, prepared to defend their homeworld.

The Republic sent a single ship that flew high overhead and dropped a single bomb, and in less than a second there was no longer an Antarean army, or a city of Zanthu, or a Great Library of Cthstoka.

Over the millennia Antares was conquered four times by Man, twice by the Canphor Twins, and once each by Lodin XI, Emra, Ramor, and the Sett Empire. It was said that the parched ground had finally quenched its thirst by drinking a lake of Antarean blood.

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As we leave the Tomb, we come to a small, skinny *rapu* . He sits on a rock, staring at us with his large, golden eyes, his expression rapt in contemplation.

The human child pointedly ignores him and continues walking toward the next temple, but the adults stop.

"What a cute little thing!" enthuses the woman. "And he looks so hungry." She digs into her shoulder bag and withdraws a sweet that she has kept from breakfast. "Here," she says, holding it up. "Would you like it?"

The *rapu* never moves. This is unique not only in the woman's experience, but also in mine, for he is obviously undernourished.

“Maybe he can't metabolize it,” suggests the man. He pulls a coin out, steps over to the *rapu* , and extends his hand. “Here you go, kid.”

The *rapu* , his face frozen in contemplation, makes no attempt to grab the coin.

And suddenly I am thinking excitedly: *You disdain their food when you are hungry, and their money when you are poor. Could you possibly be the One we have awaited for so many millennia, the One who will give us back our former glory and initiate the 44th Dynasty?*

I study him intently, and my excitement fades just as quickly as it came upon me. The *rapu* does not disdain their food and their money. His golden eyes are clouded over. Life in the streets has so weakened him that he has become blind, and of course he does not understand what they are saying. His seeming arrogance comes not from pride or some inner light, but because he is not aware of their offerings.

“Please,” I say, gently taking the sweet from the woman without coming into actual contact with her fingers. I walk over and place it in the *rapu's* hand. He sniffs it, then gulps it down hungrily and extends his hand, blindly begging for more.

“It breaks your heart,” says the woman.

“Oh, it's no worse than what we saw on Bareimus V,” responds the man. “They were every bit as poor—and remember that awful skin disease that they all had?”

The woman considers, and her face reflects the unpleasantness of the memory. “I suppose you're right at that.” She shrugs, and I can tell that even though the child is still in front of us, hand outstretched, she has already put him from her mind.

I lead them through the Garden of the Vanished Princes, with its tormented history of sacrifice and intrigue, and suddenly the man stops.

“What happened here?” he asks, pointing to a number of empty pedestals.

“History happened,” I explain. “Or avarice, for sometimes they are the same thing.” He seems confused, so I continue: “If any of our conquerors could find a way to transport a treasure back to his home planet, he did. Anything small enough to be plundered *was* plundered.”

“And these statues that have been defaced?” he says, pointing to them. “Did you do it yourselves so they would be worthless to occupying armies?”

“No,” I answer.

“Well, whoever did *that* "—he points to a headless statue—"ought to be strung up and whipped.”

“What's the fuss?” asks the child in a bored voice. “They're just statues of aliens.”

“Actually, the human who did that was rewarded with the governorship of Antares III,” I inform them.

“What are you talking about?” says the man.

"The second human conquest of the Antares system was led by Commander Lois Kiboko," I begin. "She defaced or destroyed more than 3,000 statues. Many were physical representations of our deity, and since she and her crew were devout believers in one of your religions, she felt that these were false idols and must be destroyed."

"Well," the man replies with a shrug, "it's a small price to pay for her saving you from the Lodinites."

"Perhaps," I say. "The problem is that we had to pay a greater price for each successive savior."

He stares at me, and there is an awkward silence. Finally I suggest that we visit the Palace of the Supreme Tyrant.

"You seem such a docile race," she says awkwardly. "I mean, so civilized and unaggressive. How did your gene pool ever create a real, honest-to-goodness tyrant?"

The truth is that our gene pool was considerably more aggressive before a seemingly endless series of alien conquests decimated it. But I know that this answer would make them uncomfortable, and could affect the size of my tip, so I lie to them instead. (I am ashamed to admit that lying to aliens becomes easier with each passing day. Indeed, I am sometimes amazed at the facility with which I can create falsehoods.)

"Every now and then each race produces a genetic sport," I say, and I can see she believes it, "and we Antareans are so docile, to use your expression, that this particular one had no difficulty achieving power."

"What was his name?"

"I do not know."

"I thought you took fourteen years' worth of history courses," she says accusingly, and I can tell she thinks I am lying to her, whereas every time I have actually lied she has believed me.

"Our language has many dialects, and they have all evolved and changed over 36,000 years," I point out. "Some we have deciphered, but to this day many of them remain unsolved mysteries. In fact, right at this moment a team of human archaeologists is hard at work trying to uncover the Tyrant's name."

"If it's a dead language, how are they going to manage that?"

"In the days when your race was still planetbound, there was an artifact called the Rosetta Stone that helped you translate an ancient language. We have something similar—ours is known as the Bosperi Scroll—that comes from the Great Tyrant's era."

"Where is it?" asks the woman, looking around.

"I regret to inform you that both the archaeologists and the Bosperi Scroll are currently in a museum on Deluros VIII."

"Smart," says the man. "They can protect it better on Deluros."

"From who?" asks the woman.

“From anyone who wants to steal it, of course,” he says, as if explaining it to a child.

“But I mean, who would want to steal the key to a dead language?”

“Do you know what it would be worth to a collector?” answers the man. “Or a thief who wanted to ransom it?”

They discuss it further, but the simple truth is that it is on Deluros because it was small enough to carry, and for no other reason. When they are through arguing I tell her that it is because they have devices on Deluros that will bring back the faded script, and she nods her head thoughtfully.

We walk another 400 kilometers and come to the immense Palace of the Kings. It is made entirely of gold, and becomes so hot from the rays of the sun that one can touch the outer surface only at night. This was the building in which all the rulers of the 7th through the 12th Dynasties resided. It was from here that my race received the Nine Proclamations of Ascendency, and the Charter of Universal Rights, and our most revered document, the Mabelian Declaration.

It was a wondrous time to have lived, when we had never tasted defeat and all problems were capable of solution, when stately caravans plied their trade across secure boundaries and monarchs were just and wise, when each day brought new triumphs and the future held infinite promise.

I point to the broken and defaced stone chair. “Once there were 246 jewels and precious stones embedded in the throne.”

The child walks over to the throne, then looks at me accusingly. “Where are they?” he demands.

“They were all stolen over the millennia,” I reply.

“By conquerors, of course,” offers the woman with absolute certainty.

“Yes,” I say, but again I am lying. They were stolen by my own people, who traded them to various occupying armies for food or the release of captive loved ones.

We spend a few more minutes examining the vanished glory of the Palace of the Kings, then walk out the door and approach the next crumbling structure. It is the Hall of the Thinkers, revered to this day by all Antareans, but I know they will not understand why a race would create such an edifice to scholarship, and I haven't the energy to explain, so I tell them that it is the Palace of the Concubines, and of course they believe me. At one point the child, making no attempt to mask his disappointment, asks why there are no statues or carvings showing the concubines, and I think very quickly and explain that Lois Kiboko's religious beliefs were offended by the sexual frankness of the artifacts and she had them all destroyed.

I feel guilty about this lie, for it is against the Code of Just Behavior to suggest that a visitor's race may have offended in any way. Ironically, while the child voices his disappointment, I notice that none of the three seems to have a problem accepting that another human would destroy millennia-old artwork that upset his sensibilities. I decide that since they feel no guilt, this one time I shall feel none either. (But I still do. Tradition is a difficult thing to transcend.)

I see the man anxiously walking around, looking into corners and behind pedestals, and I ask him if something is wrong.

“Where's the can?” he says.

“I beg your pardon?”

“The can. The bathroom. The lavatory.” He frowns. “Didn't any of these goddamned concubines ever have to take a crap?”

I finally discern what he wants and direct him to a human facility that has been constructed just beyond the Western Door.

He returns a few minutes later, and I lead them all outside, past the towering Onyx Obelisk that marked the beginning of the almost-forgotten 4th Dynasty. We stop briefly at the Temple of the River of Light, which was constructed *over* the river, so that the sacred waters flow through the temple itself.

We leave and turn a corner, and suddenly a single structure completely dominates the landscape.

“What's *that* ?” asks the woman.

“That is the Spiral Ramp to Heaven,” I answer.

“What a fabulous name!” she enthuses. “I just know a fabulous story goes with it!” She turns to me expectantly.

“There was a time, before our scientists knew better, that people thought you could reach heaven if you simply built a tall enough ramp.”

The child guffaws.

“It is true,” I continue. “Construction was begun during the 2nd Dynasty, and continued for more than 700 years until midway through the 3rd. It looks as if you can see the top from here, but you actually are looking only at the bottom half of it. The rest is obscured by clouds.”

“How high does it go?” asked the woman.

“More than nine kilometers,” I say. “Three kilometers higher than our tallest mountain.”

“Amazing!” she exclaims.

“Perhaps you would like a closer look at it?” I suggest. “You might even wish to climb the first kilometer. It is a very gentle ascent until you reach the fifth kilometer.”

“Yes,” she replies happily. “I think I'd like that very much.”

“I'm not climbing anything,” says the man.

“Oh, come on,” she urges him. “It'll be fun!”

“The air's too thin and the gravity's too heavy and it's too damned much like work. One of these days *I'm* going to choose our itinerary, and I promise you it won't involve so goddamned much walking.”

"Can we go back and watch the game?" asks the child eagerly.

The man takes one more look at the Spiral Ramp to Heaven. "Yeah," he says. "I've seen enough. Let's go back."

"We really should finish the tour," says the woman. "We'll probably never be in this sector of the galaxy again."

"So what? It's just another backwater world," replies the man. "Don't tell your friends about the Stairway to the Stars or whatever the hell it's called and they'll never know you missed it."

Then the woman comes up with what she imagines will be the clinching argument. "But you've already agreed to pay for the tour."

"So we'll cut it short and pay him half as much," says the man. "Big deal."

The man pulls a wad of credits out of his pocket and peels off three ten-credits notes. Then he pauses, looks at me, pockets them, and presses a fifty-credit note into my hand instead.

"Ah, hell, you kept your end of the bargain, Herman," he says. Then he and the woman and child begin walking back to the hotel.

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The first aliens ever to visit Antares were rude and ill-mannered barbarians, but Perganian II, the greatest Emperor of the 31st Dynasty, decreed that they must be treated with the utmost courtesy. When the day of their departure finally arrived, the aliens exchanged farewells with Perganian, and one of them thrust a large, flawless blue diamond into the Emperor's hand in payment for his hospitality.

After the aliens left the courtyard, Perganian let the diamond drop to the ground, declaring that no Antarean could be purchased for any price.

The diamond lay where it had fallen for three generations, becoming a holy symbol of Antarean dignity and independence. It finally vanished during a dust storm and was never seen again.

Discussion of "The 43 Antarean Dynasties"

When I decided to do this book, I ran "The 43 Antarean Dynasties" on the Resnick Listserv and asked the members to come up with questions: technical, philosophical, commercial ... it didn't matter what kind, because we could edit out the dull or redundant ones.

The response was overwhelming. In fact, what you read here are those I selected from the first 24 hours after I put out the request. So many questions came in that I shut it down after one full day.

These are the best of them—which is to say, the ones I feel readers of the story and of this book are most likely to want answered.

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From: Bob Faw

Question: What inspired you to write it? In other words, what were you doing when the idea came into

your head?

Answer: Carol and I went to Egypt with my agent, my father, and some friends back in 1989. Our guide in Cairo was a fellow named Iman, a very mild-mannered but highly intelligent man. I got to speaking with him, and learned that he had a Ph.D. in Egyptian history, but that he made more money from tourists' tips than he made teaching at the University.

He explained what was involved in becoming a tour guide: a minimum of four years advanced study of Egyptian history, and the ability to speak four languages fluently, of which at least one must be English or French.

He seemed especially happy to be guiding us, and confessed that his last group was more interested in discussing the relative merits of the Raiders and the Steelers. They actually got mad at him when he interrupted them to point out the various sights he was being paid to show them.

I got to thinking about this exceptionally intelligent man, a member of a race that had once ruled the known world, that had built the pyramids when most of our ancestors were living in mud huts, and was now forced to work for tips from this era's uncultured conquerors ... and after it festered in my mind for eight years (not everything comes quickly or easily), I sat down and wrote it in one sitting.

Question: Did you stop what you were doing immediately and write it, or was it a longer, percolating process? If the latter, how long? Describe the process. What else were you working on at the time?

Answer: Like I say, it gestated for eight years. I was writing the second Widowmaker novel, *The Widowmaker Reborn* , when everything fell into place and I took a couple of nights off to write the story. Well, one night to write it, one night to polish it.

Question: Did you write it fairly much in its final form or did you have to make some major changes? If significant changes were made, what inspired them and why?

Answer: No, this was pretty much the way I wrote it. After your subconscious has worked on something for that long and tells you it's time for it to be born, your first draft is usually close to the final form.

Question: Did Carol contribute any major ideas to the work after you'd written the first draft?

Answer: Yes. She suggested the sightless alien child. And she made a number of improvements in the language. None of them would seem major if I named them, but as a whole they added levels and tiers of resonance and emotion to the story. *From: Robyn M. Herrington*

Question: Did you consider it a difficult or easy story to write, and why? Give examples of stories that gave problems, and be specific about the problems and how you overcame them.

Answer: It was exceptionally easy after eight years of thinking about it.

Difficult stories? "Mwalimu in the Squared Circle" was difficult to come up with. The first time through I made it a comedy, and then I realized that I could say something important with it, that Amin's challenge was farcical in itself, but there was nothing farcical about a man dying in the ring for his country and his beliefs.

"The Land of Nod" was difficult too. I knew the effect I wanted, but until I combined the rather mediocre first and second drafts, I wasn't able to come up with enough complexity or resonances.

My most famous story is probably “Kirinyaga". I knew I wanted the plot to turn on the strangling of a baby, but the first time I wrote it I did so in the first person of the baby's father—but he was just another member of the society, and not a very interesting one. It was Carol who discovered Koriba, the witch doctor (who appeared on just one page and didn't even have a name) and suggested that he was the only truly interesting member of the society—or at least the only interesting one who had a reason to be involved in this particular set of events. And of course, Koriba turned out to be the most famous character “I” ever invented.

The man shrugs. “Whatever.” He looks at his timepiece. “Well, let's get started."

Question: Why did you choose ‘timepiece’ instead of something like ‘watch'? After all, the woman is using something as mundane as a camera and bringing it up to her eye, no less.

Answer: I used it to imply that by that point in the far future, people will not have simple wristwatches any more. The other possible word was “chronometer", but that struck me as clumsy, more like something out of a 1930s pulp magazine.

It's true, the woman has a camera—but it's not a mundane camera. It takes holographs. And to be honest, if I had known a good future equivalent of “camera", I'd have used it.

"Thank you,” says the woman, deactivating the recorder after I finish. She pauses. “Can I buy a book with some more of your quaint folk legends?"

Question: Why “quaint", rather than something else? What does the word “quaint” imply to you, here?

Answer: I think “quaint” serves a double purpose here: it is incredibly condescending from the narrator's point of view, but I don't believe the woman, given her innate insensitivity, would agree with that, and would probably be both surprised and offended if you suggested it to her.

I have no answer for rapus whose only ambition is to be warm and dry and well-fed, but merely shrug. They run off, laughing and singing, as if they are human children off to play some game.

"Damned aliens!” mutters the man.

"That is incorrect,” I say.

"Oh?"

"A matter of semantics,” I point out gently.“They *are indigenous.* You *are the aliens."*

Question: You've mentioned this same sentiment in a few of your stories—most recently, I read it in *A Hunger in the Soul* . Why do you keep bringing it up?

Answer: I think it's very important to an understanding of the resentment felt by a colonized people. It is one thing to be militarily conquered; sooner or later that happens to just about every country. It's quite another to be colonized, and to be treated like second-class citizens—or intelligent apes—in your own homeland, by people who have no business being there.

The attitude doesn't die easy. Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have all been independent black-ruled countries for more than a third of a century, and yet we have met white ex-pats in all three nations who

still don't seem to understand who's running things.

"38 meters," I say. "The Tomb itself is 203 meters long and 67 meters wide.

Question: Why metric measurements?

Answer: I think it's the height of conceit and arrogance to assume that, in the far future, the 150+ nations that use the metric system will all have converted to yards/feet/inches just because America uses them ... and since they will be using the metric system, those are the terms Hermes will use to be understood. (It's doubtful that he would know what a foot or an inch *is* .)

When the Antareans learned that Man's Republic wished to annex their world, they gathered their army in Zanthu and then marched out onto the battlefield, 300,000 strong. They were the cream of the planet's young warriors, gold of eye, the reticulated plates of their skin glistening in the morning sun, prepared to defend their homeworld.

Question: Why did you wait until the arrival of the *rapu* to indicate what the Antareans look like?

Answer: I wanted them to represent *all* colonized and dispossessed people, and I felt that an early and thoroughgoing description of them could dilute that effect. If my description made them physically repulsive in some readers' eyes, there was a possibility that this would detract from the emotional bond I was trying to create between the reader and the Antareans.

Question: Then, as with here, you talk of reticulated plates and the eyes—why not their other physical features?

Answer: Same as above. It's a science fiction story, so at that point I had to describe a few alien features ... but the more I generalized by *not* describing them in details, the more they represent *every* colonized/dispossessed/Third World race, rather than just Antareans.

The truth is that our gene pool was considerably more aggressive before a seemingly endless series of alien conquests decimated it. But I know that this answer would make them uncomfortable, and could affect the size of my tip, so I lie to them instead. (I am ashamed to admit that lying to aliens becomes easier with each passing day. Indeed, I am sometimes amazed at the facility with which I can create falsehoods.)

Question: Why did you put the last sentence in (parentheses), rather than leaving it as just part of the text?

Answer: It is an aside, spoken directly to the reader. Hermes is breaking the flow of the story to comment on his ability to lie, and as such I felt it needed to be separated from the body of the paragraph. A dash wouldn't work, because that would make it part of the same sentence that *was* directly relating the story, so I chose parentheses. If I hadn't made so much other use of italics, that would have been the perfect solution—but since I was using italics to show prior eras and epochs, I thought it would be confusing if I used them here as well. *From: Issica Baron*

We walk another 400 kilometers and come to the immense Palace of the Kings.

Question: This is just the first thing that jumped out at me. Are you saying that they walked very far to the next place, or that humans have at the time in the story evolved enough that this kind of walking distance is realistic?

Answer: This is just the kind of thing for which you need copy editors. Of course I meant 400 *meters* . I missed it. Carol missed it. Gardner Dozois, my editor, missed it. Sheila Williams, Managing Editor of *Asimov's* , caught it two days before the magazine went to press and changed it. I decided to leave it in the story here, just so I could point out the value of good copy editors.

Question: Despite the whole them/us idea that is brought forth in the story, the narrator here says "we", which suggests to me that he must identify with the tourists at least a little bit. Wouldn't "the tourists and I" have showed a greater distinction between the two species? Was this done intentionally?

Answer: Damn! You're right—but not for the reason given. "We" doesn't imply any more familiarity than "the tourists and I", but the latter is more formal, more in keeping with someone for whom Terran (which is what he's speaking, though it reads exactly like late 20th Century English) is not a first language.

I might add that a couple of critics praised Mr. Ahasuerus, my blue-skinned being who appeared in *Sideshow* and its three sequels, for sounding so alien. The answer was simple: he went four books without ever once uttering a contraction. And that was the *only* difference between him and the other characters. Sometimes a tiny difference is enough. *From: Steven Gurr*

Question: Why did you choose to write the story in the present tense? Or rather, I suppose, why did you choose to write the majority of the story in the present tense?

Answer: Usually present tense implies a certain sense of urgency, but in this story it was done to juxtapose the present with the past. In some stories where I put past and present side by side, such as "Mwalimu in the Squared Circle", it was possible to retain the present tense in both cases, but here, when we're dealing with events that happened while Man was still living in caves, present tense would have been totally out of place.

Question: Why did you choose to intersperse selections of Antarean history as separate sections of the story rather than as part of the narrator's main story? Did you hit upon this structure early in the writing process, or was it added during later drafts?

Answer: I knew from the start that by juxtaposing the former glories with the present inglorious state of affairs, I was not going to have a straight-line narrative. To include the past sections as part of the present story would have confused the reader, whereas the breaks and the italics have allowed him to differentiate past from present.

Another consideration is that unlike Julius Nyerere, who was involved in all of "Mwalimu's" flashbacks, Hermes wasn't alive during the previous dynasties. He's narrating *this* story in the first person, but he couldn't possibly narrate what happened 10,000 years ago in the first person. Changing from first to third person without showing the break in the story where this occurs would have been too confusing for the reader.

The structure was there from the beginning. To simply describe a tour and some insensitive tourists wouldn't have allowed the resonances the story needs, the juxtapositions of a race that had limitless possibilities and an optimistic future to a race that has spent the past few millennia being conquered and occupied by one power after another.

Question: When you were writing this story, did you start with the story of the tour of the temple and allow the sections of Antarean history to evolve out of the events in that story, or did you start with the little Antarean histories and bend the main story to fit them?

Answer: I scribbled down about 30 juxtapositions of ancient and current events, events that played off one another, and then chose the ones that seemed most powerful to me.

Question: And finally, a manuscript question: I noticed that you inserted a "#" character between sections of the story where in the final, published version a blank line would go; is this standard practice for manuscripts you are going to submit to a publisher? What is the correct format to use when preparing a manuscript for submission.

Answer: The # character tells the printer that you want a space and no symbols. If you want to show the reader a symbol in that space, then type * * * and that's what you'll get.

Never add italics. Typesetters and printers look for underlines, and if they don't find them, you don't get italics in the printed version, even if they're in the manuscript.

Don't justify the right-hand margin. It screams "bush league" at the editor.

Give yourself an inch to an inch-and-a-half margin all the way around the page. Number every page. Put your name/slash/title on each page. *From: D. Rutsala*

Question: This story, like many of your others, deals with the subject of colonialism and post-colonialism. What is it about this subject which fascinates you so much?

Answer: I think everyone who reads science fiction or thinks seriously about the far future will agree to two things: first, if we can reach the stars we're going to colonize them; and second, if we colonize enough of them, we're eventually going to come into contact with a sentient race.

Africa offers 51 separate and distinct examples of the deleterious effects of colonization on the colonizers as well as the colonized, and I've used Africa (or, more often, analogs of Africa) in many of my stories, because I've yet to find anyone who thinks we *won't* be colonizing those worlds that can support us. I think it's been shown to be a harmful and foolish policy, and I also think that men are not very adept at learning from their prior mistakes.

When even a revered figure like Sir Winston Churchill can state that he has "no intention of presiding over the dissolution of His Majesty's Empire", as if England had every right to rule half a hundred other countries, I think there should be *more* stories about colonialism, not less. *From: Matt Edwards*

Question: You've mentioned in various articles how you've taken facets of different cultures and reworked them into your tales, I wondered if there was any culture/society that was the direct inspiration for the "Antarean Dynasties" or whether it was a combination of many?

Answer: Egypt. The pyramids, which are four thousand years old, dwarf every structure I've seen in America, England, France, and the rest of the so-called civilized world. I've been to Notre Dame in Paris, and believe me, you could fit 20 Notre Dames into the Temple at Karnak. And so forth. This was a society that expressed everything in huge terms—their history, their statues, their gods, their buildings—and today the average Egyptian earns about $300 a year, the Nile River is undrinkable, and the prime source of hard currency is tourism by this generation's world powers.

Sound a little like Antares? *From: Issica Baron*

When struck, each column would sound a musical note that could be heard for kilometers, calling

the faithful to prayer.

Question: This is completely out of the blue, but do you mean when the Temple is struck somewhere or one column is struck they'd all sound, or that each would sound on its own if stuck?

Answer: I just looked it again, and it seems clear to me: as each column is struck, it sounds a musical note. *Each* , not *they* or *all* . (Nonsequitur: I really like that image. It strikes me as exotic and totally alien.)

Maloth further decreed that no aliens or non-believers would ever be allowed to enter it and desecrate its sacred corridors with their presence...

Question: How did you decide what to focus on in this story? Why did you focus on those things and not, for example, the religion and the event of the aliens' first sacrilege of the Temple?

Answer: I tried to choose those events, however great or small, that would allow Hermes to see parallels in the behavior of the human family. He has no knowledge of their religion, and we have no reason to assume he knows anything about *any* human religion, so he can't juxtapose it to the Antarean religion. For the story to work, the author had to find/create events that would have a contrary modern application and resonance.

I am invisible. You cannot see me. You will pass me by.

Question: Why did you decide to use this kind of format for thoughts, as opposed to "and I thought, 'yadda yadda'"? Is it permanent part of your own 'style' of writing, or does it suit some literary purpose (sorry if this is a dumb question, I haven't got a chance to study English yet) beyond creating a closer connection with the inner dialogue of the narrator?

Answer: It has become a permanent part of my own style. I probably used it more in *A Miracle of Rare Design* than anywhere else ... but over the years I've found that the readers have no problems accepting it, and I hate sticking "I thought" or "he considered" on every unspoken thought.

I'll tell you something, though: If I could expunge one single sentence from the story, it would be the one you just quoted. Why? Because it appears in a science fiction magazine, less than 400 words into the story—and when Hermes says "I am invisible" in a *science fictional context* , the reader has every reason to take his word for it, rather than to realize that this is merely wishful thinking.

That's something a science fiction writer always has to be aware of. When you say "He turned into a room" in any other story, there's no question what it means—he turned out of a corridor and entered a room. But when you say it in science fiction—well, have you ever seen a quirky, delightful British movie called *The Bed-Sitting Room* , in which Sir Ralph Richardson quite literally turns into a room?

He went on to rule for 29 years and was never known to bow again.

Question: Was it apparent to you at the time you began writing the story that the histories would take the form of allegories?

Answer: Yes. I write a lot of allegories. More to the point, I did not know—and still don't know—any other way to make the story work *except* through allegory.

"Yeah," chimes in the child. "They're piping in the game from Roosevelt III this afternoon. I've

got to get back for it."...

"I should be so lucky," he mutters, returning his attention to his computer.

Question: How long ago did you write this piece? If you had known (did know) about wireless Internet connections, why doesn't the boy have stg. like that (or an 'ansible' connection) that would let him see the game wherever he was?

Answer: I wrote it in mid-1997. The reason the boy can't watch the game during the tour is that if he could, he'd serve no purpose in the story at all. This way he's discontented for a different reason than his father, and he has his own priorities: he wants to leave in time to see the game. Always remember: the characters are there to serve the purposes of the story, not the other way around.

Whatever the hell

"It's just a goddamned water bubbler, Ma," he says.

...and we had not yet suffered enough to bring forth His tears of compassion

"Our females were not allowed the privilege of literacy until Bedorian's reign."

Question: How do you decide how different things will be, and what will remain similar enough for readers to relate to directly (e.g. the above quotes)?

Answer: I made the humans as close to 20th Century humans as I could; after all, I'm writing about a 20th Century problem for a 20th Century audience—and as the late James Blish once pointed out, the future equivalent of "damn!", written for a contemporary audience, is "damn!"

As for the last two quotes, they're more exotic than alien. (I created a true alien race once. We all do—once. There just isn't a damned thing you can do with them. Mine was in *Birthright: The Book of Man* , and having proven I could do it, I've never felt a need to do it again.)

Anyway, there are still societies, today, here, on Earth, where women are second-class citizens, some where they are not allowed to read, some where wives are still bought and sold like chattel. As for the line about God's tears of compassion, I invented it for a Kirinyaga story that concerned a drought, and I liked it so much I used it here as well. So ... exotic, yes; alien, no. But if they *imply* a certain alienness without (pardon the expression) alienating the reader, then they've done what they were supposed to do.

"There was a time when there were a million," I explain. "Today only 16,304 remain. Each is made of quartz or crystal. In late afternoon, when the sun sinks low in the sky, they act as a prism for its rays, creating a flood of exotic colors that stretches across the thoroughfares of the city.

Question: Where/when did you come up with the idea of a city full of spires?

Answer: I wish I could take credit for this one, but Cairo is known as the "city of 10,000 minarets". I just made it bigger.

During the Second Invasion, it took the Canphorite armada less than two weeks to destroy all but 16,304 of them...

Question: Why don't we get to know why the 16,304 were allowed to remain standing?

Answer: Something is always left standing, even after the most brutal bombing. I think wiping out 983,696 spires is pretty devastating.

I look at the rapu and think sadly: Timing is everything. Once, long ago, we strode across our world like gods. You would not have gone hungry in any of the 43 Dynasties.

Question: Did you intend this story to be some sort of warning to people today? To cherish what we have while we still have it because it might be gone tomorrow? Or perhaps ‘don't destroy and conquer'? Was there some current event that provoked you into weaving this theme into the story?

Answer: It absolutely is a warning. It's the same warning my Egyptian guide might have given to his clients. In vulgar terms, it's “What goes around, comes around.” In religious terms, “Obey the golden rule.” In realistic terms, “Primacy is fleeting. Be careful how you treat those you have conquered, for someday they—or someone very like them—will conquer *you* .”

For what it's worth, you quoted Carol's favorite line/concept—that in historical terms “timing is everything".

*I have no answer for*rapus *whose only ambition is to be warm and dry and well-fed, but merely shrug. They run off, laughing and singing, as if they are human children off to play some game.*

Question: Why did you decide to make this analogy? Why are these *rapus* so happy despite their predicament? Is it an attempt to draw one's thought to the fact that they might be very similar to the tourists, who treat eons of history as nothing more than an afternoon outing?

Answer: I've never seen a Third World country (and I've been to a lot of them in Africa and the Caribbean) where there weren't street urchins everywhere you looked when you were in the cities. Because they are children, and have never known full bellies and warm clothes and uncrowded beds, they have no concept of what they are missing, and because children of any race or species are so resilient, they manage to enjoy themselves in circumstances that any reasonable Westernized adult would find appalling.

"When I conduct members of your race, I choose the name Hermes."

Question: The use of the word conduct makes me think of a guide in a museum ... it makes me wonder if none of these sacred and religious places (like the Spiral Ramp) are used by the Antareans any more, if that is yet another tradition they have been forced (in some way or another) to give up.

Answer: One never sees Africans enjoying their national parks, or Jamaicans day-tripping through their mountains. Once the tourists move in, the locals abandon the pasttime.

In mythology, Hermes is the guide to Hades (i.e., Hell), and Antares has become Hell to the narrator's race.

"There is a belief among my people that those who achieve public greatness are doomed to private misery."

Question: Was this comment intentionally spurred by current events (e.g. Lady Di, Clinton)? If so, any ones in particular, or just the faintly noticeable general trend?

Answer: No, it wasn't spurred by current events, but by history. It seems to me that most of those men and women who achieved enormous success in their fields usually paid for it with equally tragic failures in their personal lives.

Just look at this century: Teddy Roosevelt spent years convincing us to enter World War I, then lost his son in it. FDR served as president for 13 years, but he served from a wheelchair. Joe Kennedy, ambassador and multi-millionaire, groomed three sons for the White House; one was killed in World War II, one was killed in office, and one was killed while running for office. You can't count the number of brilliant artists who drank and drugged themselves to death—and half of the exceptional members of the Broadway community have died of AIDS.

And suddenly I am thinking excitedly: You disdain their food when you are hungry, and their money when you are poor. Could you possibly be the One we have awaited for so many millennia, the One who will give us back our former glory and initiate the 44th Dynasty?

Question: Overall I sort of felt there was a slow buildup throughout this story, and that there would be some explosive ending, and then when there wasn't it made me have to think back, what really happened? What did those tourists really learn from this?

Answer: I don't do explosive endings. That's for the sledgehammer boys, and I prefer a scalpel.

What really happened? The same thing that's happened to Hermes a thousand times in the past, and the same thing that will happen to him a thousand times in the future.

What did the tourists really learn from this? Not a damned thing. *From: D. A. Hussey*

Question: Why does Hermes believe they would not understand the Hall of Thinkers?

Answer: Their insensitivity convinces him that thinking is not very high on their list of priorities, and paying homage to thinkers would rank even lower.

Question: Had the Antareans themselves ever been conquerors? We do know from what Hermes said that they have warred against each other.

Answer: Probably. Most cultures that have been around any length of time have been both conquerors and conquered. But an author must pick and choose the facts he presents to the audience. Those facts must serve the story—and suggesting that the Antareans decimated six neighboring planets and exterminated seventeen sentient races definitely does not serve the needs of the story. In fact, it runs counter to them.

Question: What was so valuable about the planet that so many came in to take it over?

Answer: It was there. That may seem facetious—but why have men spent their blood and their resources to conquer Egypt, or Angola, or the Seychelles Islands, to choose three examples that wouldn't seem to have enough resources or treasure to be worth fighting for?

Question: Does Hermes really have a realistic view of the past?

Answer: Probably not. The past was probably better than the present, and not quite as wonderful as he imagines it. But again, his view must serve the story.

Question: Were the spires built with free or slave labor?? Hermes says they were built by the artisans and craftsmen.

Answer: Since this is an analog of Egypt, they were built by free labor. I know Hollywood is fond of showing slaves being whipped as they build the pyramids, but the truth of the matter is that they were built by volunteer labor.

Question: Does Hermes realize that he could refuse the coin, and that if he did so *he* could have been the hope?

Answer: Now, that's a fascinating notion. The best answer I can give is that if Hermes had said No to the coin, it would have been a petty act of rebellion, caused by his irritation with the tourists, and the only result would be that his family would go hungry that night. With the skinny, starving child, Hermes sees it as somehow a *pure* act, an unexpected and unusual act of innate character and nobility—until he realizes the child is blind. *From: John Teehan*

The human child looks at his Antarean counterpart. I wonder if he realizes how fortunate he is. His face gives no reflection of his thoughts; perhaps he has none. Finally he picks his nose and goes back to manipulating his computer.

Question: Picks his nose? The kid seems to at least acknowledge the guide as an intelligent and sentient being, reminding his father the name was Hermes, not Herman. He may not like touching him, but would he pick his nose so publicly? And what is he manipulating? A game? Sports news? Is it sufficiently interesting enough to walk along staring at the little screen and following the voice of his mother asking questions? It seems you're throwing the obnoxious human characters into exaggerated relief, but perhaps the painting of the boy is a little *too* obvious?

Answer: I have seen pro football players pick their noses in front of 80,000 fans while standing on the sidelines. I have seen major league baseball players stand in the batting box and scratch their genitals in front of TV audiences numbering in the tens of millions.

As for the computer game the boy is playing, haven't you seen thousands of kids wearing Walkmans, strolling down the street like zombies, totally oblivious to their surroundings—and these are kids who are just *listening* , not *watching* .

The next morning Tcharock regretfully gave the signal to the executioner, and Chaluba was beheaded. Despite this unfortunate beginning, the 30th Dynasty survived for 1,062 Standard years.

Question: I wonder why you chose something so insignificant as brushing Tcharock. Would it have been more effective if perhaps he tripped and the well-meaning but unlucky Chaluba reached forward to catch him? Or would that have been too cliche and obvious?

Answer: I wanted the action to be something trivial, to show how harsh the Law was—and how far the current Antareans had fallen from primacy. The point was to juxtapose the two events: the insignificant, totally minimal contact on that bygone day with the current situation, which is also shown in two ways, both distasteful—the man *making* contact with the Antarean, and the child *refusing* to.

I find that you don't have to climb on a soap box and lecture to a reader to get your point across. Give him two events to compare and contrast—and that's what this story does from start to finish—and he can usually draw the proper conclusion.

Question: Concerning the human rest rooms—why not one for the Antareans or a comment from our narrator? Be interesting if they did not dispose of waste in a manner similar to humans and the further indignation of having to put up with human waste matter, especially to accommodate visits to their holies of holies.

Answer: There are probably all kinds of fascinating things I could have said/created about the Antareans, but every single one of them must serve the needs of the story or be jettisoned. The particular problem you suggest comes too late in the story (and hence would slow it down) and would require a major "info dump" on the physiology of the Antareans.

THE KEMOSABEE

by Mike Resnick

So me and the Masked Man, we decide to hook up and bring evildoers to justice, which is a pretty full-time occupation considering just how many of these *momzers* there are wandering the West. Of course, I don't work on Saturdays, but this is never a problem, since he's usually sleeping off Friday night's binge and isn't ready to get back in the saddle until about half past Monday.

We get along pretty well, though we don't talk much to each other—my English is a little rusty, and his Yiddish is non-existent—but we share our food when times are tough, and we're always saving each other's life, just like it says in the dime novels.

Now, you'd think two guys who spend a whole year riding together wouldn't have any secrets from each other, but actually that's not the case. We respect each other's privacy, and it is almost twelve months to the day after we form a team that we find ourselves answering a call of Nature at the very same time, and I look over at him, and I am so surprised I could just *plotz* , you know what I mean?

It's then that I start calling him Kemosabee, and finally one day he asks me what it means, and I tell him that it means "uncircumcised goy", and he kind of frowns and tells me that he doesn't know what *either* word means, so I sit him down and explain that Indians are one of the lost Hebrew tribes, only we aren't as lost as we're supposed to be, because Custer and the rest of those *meshugginah* soldiers keeps finding us and blowing us to smithereens. And the Kemosabee, he asks if Hebrew is a suburb of Hebron, and right away I see we've got an enormous cultural gap to overcome.

But what the hell, we're pardners, and we're doing a pretty fair job of ridding the West of horse thieves and stage robbers and other varmints, so I say, "Look, Kemosabee, you're a *mensch* and I'm proud to ride with you, and if you wanna get drunk and *shtup* a bunch of *shikses* whenever we go into town, that's your business and who am I to tell you what to do? But Butch Cavendish and his gang are giving me enough *tsouris* this month, so if we stop off at any Indian villages, let's let this be our little secret, okay?"

And the Kemosabee, who is frankly a lot quicker with his guns than his brain, just kind of frowns and looks hazy and finally nods his head, though I'm sure he doesn't know what he's nodding about.

Well, we ride on for another day or two, and finally reach his secret silver mine, and he melts some of it down and shoves it into his shells, and like always I ride off and hunt up Reb Running Bear and have him say Kaddish over the bullets, and when I hunt up the Masked Man again I find he has had the *chutzpah* to take on the whole Cavendish gang single-handed, and since they know he never shoots to kill and they ain't got any such compunctions, they leave him lying there for dead with a couple of new *pupiks* in his

belly.

So I make a sled and hook it to the back of his horse, which he calls Silver but which he really ought to call White, or at least White With The Ugly Brown Blotch On His Belly, and I hop up my pony, and pretty soon we're in front of Reb Running Bear's tent, and he comes out and looks at the Masked Man lying there with his ten-gallon stetson for a long moment, and then he turns to me and says, "You know, that has got to be the ugliest *yarmulkah* I've ever seen."

"This is my pardner," I say. "Some goniffs drygulched him. You got to make him well."

Reb Running Bear frowns. "He doesn't look like one of the Chosen People to me. Where was he *bar mitzvahed* ?"

"He wasn't," I say. "But he's one of the Good Guys. He and I are cleaning up the West."

"Six years in Hebrew school and you settle for being a janitor?" he says.

"Don't give me a hard time," I said. "We got bad guys to shoot and wrongs to right. Just save the Kemosabee's life."

"The Kemosabee?" he repeats. "Would I be very far off the track if I surmised that he doesn't keep kosher?"

"Look," I say, deciding that it's time to play hardball, "I hadn't wanted to bring this up, but I know what you and Mrs. Screaming Hawk were doing last time I visited this place."

"Keep your voice down or that *yenta* I married will make my life hell!" he whispers, glancing back toward his teepee. Then he grimaces. "Mrs. Screaming Hawk. Serves me right for taking her to Echo Canyon. *Feh!* "

I stare at him. "So *nu* ?"

"All right, all right, Jehovah and I will nurse the Kemosabee back to health."

"Good," I say.

He glares at me. "But just this one time. Then I pass the word to all the other Rabbis: we don't cure no more *goys* . What have they ever done for us?"

Well, I am all prepared to argue the point, because I'm a pretty open-minded kind of guy, but just then the Kemosabee starts moaning and I realize that if I argue for more than a couple of minutes we could all be sitting *shivah* for him before dinnertime, so I wander off and pay a visit to Mrs. Rutting Elk to console her on the sudden passing of her husband and see if there is anything I can do to cheer her up, and Reb Running Bear gets to work, and lo and behold, in less than a week the Masked Man is up and around and getting impatient to go out after desperados, so we thank Reb Running Bear for his services, and he loads my pardner down with a few canteens of chicken soup, and we say a fond *shalom* to the village.

I am hoping we have a few weeks for the Kemosabee to regain his strength, of which I think he is still missing an awful lot, but as Fate would have it, we are riding for less than two hours when we come across the Cavendish gang's trail.

"Aha!" he says, studying the hoofprints. "All thirty of them! This is our chance for revenge!"

My first thought is to say something like, "What do you mean *we* , mackerel eater?"—but then I remember that Good Guys never back down from a challenge, so I simply say "Ugh!", which is my opinion of taking on thirty guys at once, but which he insists on interpreting as an affirmative.

We follow the trail all day, and when it's too dark to follow it any longer, we make camp on a small hill.

"We should catch up with them just after sunrise," says the Masked Man, and I can see that his trigger finger is getting itchy.

"Ugh," I say.

"We'll meet them on the open plain, where nobody can hide."

"Double ugh with cherries on it," I say.

"You look very grim, old friend," he says.

"Funny you should mention it," I say, but before I can suggest that we just forget the whole thing, he speaks again.

"You can have the other twenty-nine, but Cavendish is mine."

"You're all heart, Kemosabee," I say.

He stands up, stretches, and walks over to his bedroll. "Well, we've got a hard day's bloodletting ahead of us. We'd best get some sleep."

He lays down, and ten seconds later he's snoring like all get-out, and I sit there staring at him, and I just know he's not gonna come through this unscathed, and I remember Reb Running Bear's promise that no medicine man would ever again treat a goy.

And the more I think about it, the more I think that it's up to me, the loyal sidekick, to do something about it. And finally it occurs to me just what I have to do, because if I can't save him from the Cavendish gang, the least I can do is save him from himself.

So I go over to my bedroll, and pull out a bottle of Mogen David, and pour a little on my hunting knife, and try to remember the exact words the medicine man recites during the *bris* , and I know that someday, when he calms down, he'll thank me for this.

In the meantime, I'm gonna have to find a new nickname for my pardner.

Discussion of "The Kemosabee"

Okay, we've had four serious stories. A Hugo winner, a pair of Hugo nominees, and one that's too recent to have qualified for any awards. (Editor's note: "The Elephants on Neptune" has won the Asimov's Readers Poll and become a Hugo Nominee since this book first came out.)

Maybe it's time for a funny one. After all, science fiction is the just about the only remaining market for funny short stories, and humor is an entirely different animal. So I chose one of my

favorites and gave it to the List members to pick apart.

* * * *

From: Adrienne Gormley

Question: Why open with such an informal sentence, a sentence beginning with the word “So"?

Answer: It's going to be a funny, informal story, so it's best to immerse the reader instantly in that fact. How? By starting in the least grammatical yet comprehensible way. It's not just “So” that serves the purpose, but the next 5 words as well: “me and the Masked Man", *not* “the Masked Man and me” or “the Masked Man and I.” 6 words into the story I've broken two grammatical rules, and made it as conversational as I can, so it (hopefully) feels as if Tonto is addressing the reader directly.

And before the sentence is over, I've also introduced a slang Yiddish term, “momzers", which means “bastards". Now, I'd like to think most of my audience will know that, but even if they don't, the word alerts them to the fact that this isn't a typical Indian, because that's neither a typical Indian word nor an informal English word such as you find in the rest of the sentence.

And finally, since there's a reference to the West (capitalized, which means the American West), I think most readers—well over 90% of them—will know that the Masked Man is the Lone Ranger, and hence that the narrator is Tonto.

I submit that that's a lot for a single sentence to do—but the opening sentence is often the most important single thing you do in a short story.

Question: Why present tense?

Answer: Listen to any friend's informal recountings of his experiences, and you'll find that four times out of five it's told in the present tense. I think it fits with the opening few words, as described above.

Question: Why did you make the Indians the lost Hebrew tribes?

Answer: I don't think it's a funny story if it doesn't have an off-the-wall concept like that—or at least not *as* funny. I got the notion quite accidentally when watching *Cat Ballou* on television; there's a little 30-second bit about how her father thinks the Indians are one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and it struck me as such a ludicrous notion that I thought it would work as a very short story, using our best-known cowboy and Indian icons.

Question: I notice you use Reb instead of Rabbi when addressing the medicine man. What is the reason for this?

Answer: The actual form of address *is* “Reb". If the reader didn't know that the Indians were Jews and that Tonto was coming to Running Bear for a blessing, I'd certainly have signposted Running Bear's function in the story by using “Rabbi"...but since the reader *does* know that, this just lends a little verisimilitude to a concept that's so far out in left field that it can use all the verisimilitude it can get.

Question: How did you hit upon Tonto's dialect?

Answer: He's uneducated, as were most people in the mythical Wild West. And since I'm not writing for a Jewish audience, I threw in just enough Yiddish words to remind the readers from time to time that he's Jewish. (And since they're so infrequent, they should jar comically each time they appear.) Other than

that, semi-literate sentence construction was the order of the day ... and in this case, since I had a lot of plot to cover in just a handful of pages, I gave him a ton of run-on sentences, just like this one, since an uneducated man wouldn't know where to put his periods and semi-colons.

Question: If you're making fun of Silver's name, why not Scout's?

Answer: It seems to me that everybody knows the Lone Ranger's horse is Silver ... but you had to be a fan of the radio or TV show to know that Tonto's horse is Scout, so I made no mention of it. (By the same token, I never considered using the Lone Ranger's nephew, Dan Reed, and *his* horse, Victor, both of whom were limited to radio—which means you'd have to be on the distant side of 50 to remember them.)

*"What do you mean*we, *mackerel eater?* ”

Question: Is there something special about eating mackerel that you used this term in this passage?

Answer: “Mackerel eater” is a dated slang term for Catholic. It's not quite as offensive as “kike” or “nigger", and it's pretty much vanished from the lingo since Catholics are no longer restricted to eating fish on Friday. And the humor, of course, comes from the unexpected, in this case “mackerel eater” rather than the by-now-trite “What do you mean *we* , white man?” The reader, knowing this is a funny story, expects Tonto to back away from fighting for a non-Indian; theoretically the notion that Tonto would refuse to risk his life for a non-Jew rather than a non-Indian should surprise and delight the hell out of him.

In fact, I think a case can be made that humor is primarily composed of the logical or the expected, occurring at an illogical or unexpected point in the story. *From: John Teehan*

Question: I showed an office-mate this story who professes *no* knowledge of yiddish, even the parts in which it enters the American vernacular (*tush*and *schmuck* , for example) and she felt the Yiddish a bit distracting and confusing. She didn't have much knowledge of Judaism so I had to explain the whole foreskin/bris thing and even then the leap from being “snipped” to being able to be treated (and no longer a “goy")—she thought “goy” was another term for “gay"—for the inevitable wounds.

When you use a specialized vocabulary/language (for example, Yiddish, Japanese, Spanish) sprinkled in a story, do you limit your readership and can the story survive a publisher?

Can you rely on context? Granted, I certainly did not know all the Yiddish words presented, but I feel confident in the definition of “pupiks” taken from context.

Answer: If the only funny thing in the story is the corruption of Yiddish, then yes, you limit your audience and the story falls flat anywhere except Manhattan and Israel. That's why there are the non-Yiddish jokes (and there are a lot for such a brief story), such as the color of Silver, or the meaning of “Ugh", or the problems at Echo Canyon, or etc.

The more levels you can be funny on, the greater your chance for success. In my three *Lucifer Jones* books, for example, the plots are parodies—but the language is funny on its own, for those (and there must be a lot of them under the age of 30) who have no idea what is being parodied. *From: Robyn Herrington*

*So me and the Masked Man, we decide to hook up and bring evildoers to justice, which is a pretty full-time occupation considering just how many of these*momzers *there are wandering*

Question: Do editors ever suggest that you don't use a non-English word so soon in the text, or is it not really a problem because, even if you don't know what *momzers* are, in the context you can figure it out? Can you think of an example where non-english words were used and the story suffered for it?

Answer: Since science fiction uses so many made-up words, no editor is inclined to ask that you don't use non-English words early on—and I think *momzers* (bastards) is pretty clear from the context.

I can think of any number of science fiction stories that have been hurt, not by introducing French or Arabic or Yiddish words, but by introducing too damned many made-up alien words.

And the Kemosabee, who is frankly a lot quicker with his guns than his brain, just kind of frowns and looks hazy and finally nods his head, though I'm sure he doesn't know what he's nodding about.

Question: Has anyone ever taken offense that you're messing with a Cultural Icon? How do you handle people who accuse you of showing an American Hero in a less that bright light? (More generally, what advice would you give on how to handle critics in general?)

Answer: To the best of my knowledge, no one has taken offense. I asked one of SFWA's (the Science Fiction Writers of America) two Indians, Owl Goingback, if the story offended him in any way, and he told me he laughed his head off. And our other Indian, Will Sanders, became my friend because he stumbled over the story in an anthology in which he also appeared and called to tell me how much he liked it. So as long as the Indians aren't mad, I can live with any enraged Kemosabees.

As for critics, my first inclination is to ignore them—not because their advice is invalid (though it frequently is), but primarily because of lag times. I'm usually four novels and twelve short stories ahead of where they're criticizing, and since what they're discussing is ancient history to me and my career, it's usually pretty meaningless.

There are a few critics you can learn from, but not many. If you're a writer, most of them would trade places with you in two seconds if they had the talent and the discipline; it helps to remember that when they're ripping your masterpiece to shreds.

*...compunctions, they leave him lying there for dead with a couple of new*pupiks *in his belly.*

Question: What's a *pupik* ? I'm guessin' a hole, but I've never heard this Yiddish word before.

Answer: It's a navel—a belly-button.

*So I go over to my bedroll, and pull out a bottle of Mogen David, and pour a little on my hunting knife, and try to remember the exact words the medicine man recites during the*bris, *and I know that someday, when he calms down, he'll thank me for this.*

In the meantime, I'm gonna have to find a new nickname for my pardner.

Question: This ending reads like it could be the only one possible for this story. Have you ever finished a story, looked at the ending and decided it didn't work? If so, did you then go for an ending that put a different spin on the story, or the same spin, but written in a different way?

Answer: I always know when I sit down to write a story what the ending will be. On those occasions it

doesn't work, it's usually because I built up to it incorrectly, which means I have to go back and try again (as I did in the first two drafts of “The Land of Nod"). Once in a long while I lead up to it properly but write it badly, which is a much easier fix.

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