

canticles  
from  
LABOWITZ

This is Canticles from Labowitz, number 8, published by Gary H. Labowitz, P. O. Box 15727, Philadelphia, Pa. 19103. Canticles is available for 50¢ per copy, contribution (including letter of comment), or trade. A few free copies are traditionally distributed. Canticles specializes in fiction and poetry, all of which should be of a science fictional or fantastic nature. Artwork is used in smallish quantities but is always welcome. Cover by Grant Canfield.

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Illustration on page 19 by J. Kinney.

# C O M M E N T S

It was pointed out to me in a couple of letters that some of the material I published in the last issue had seen print before. This is always unfortunate when it happens unless credit is given, of course, but in one case I checked with the author before using his material and he said it was all right to use (indicating that he probably didn't know it had been used); and in the other case the material was sent to me directly by the author and I can't believe he would submit it elsewhere after I had accepted it without it being a mistake. So, thanks for the information, but there is nothing to be done now and there was no real harm done.

Please take note of the change of address. All letters and manuscripts should now be addressed to me at the new address, listed above. Next issue is already shaping up. If you wish to subscribe send any amount. Each issue will be deducted from your running account until the money is used up.

Remember: support DUFF and TAFF!

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# the escapist

roy nelson

A fool's paradise is better than none.

-- Newton MacClintok

The dawn rushed like a tidal wave of light across the frozen wastelands and red dunes of Mars. If you stood on one of the higher dunes you could see it coming, an almost tangible line separating darkness from day. Behind it was the sun, small but brilliant, raising a tentative upper edge above the horizon. The sky turned from black to a deep, fathomless navy blue, and in this bright, cloudless void the stars remained visible near the zenith, as did the planets and the two swift, tiny moons.

On the crest of the highest hill in the area sat the towering statue of Mother Ngaa, facing the rising sun. She was crouching on Her haunches, round, fat and squat as the little globblies who had carved Her out of white marble. She was the Mother of All Things, and Her womb was the Martian sands. She was the Goddess and Protector of all things, and particularly the globblies, Her chosen people. She was the teacher of the young, the source of all wisdom. Around Her, all up and down the hill on which She sat, the Whispering Gardens stirred with the first touch of the sun. Thick, hard, leathery black leaves appeared, spreading to catch the sunlight. Last to appear were the sensory organs and the organs of speech, the whispering lips and the tight-stretched listening harp-strings.

As the wind of the morning thrummed these strings, the lips moved and the flowers spoke.

"It is morning," they said to one another. "Time for our lesson. Let us listen to Mother Ngaa."

"Yes, let us listen."

"Let us listen."

And they listened, not with their sense of hearing, but with their inner ear, with their minds.

But Mother Ngaa was silent.

"Why to you not speak?" demanded the flowers with their minds. "Are you angry at us?"

Silence. Emptiness in the mind.

"Mother Ngaa! Mother Ngaa! Are you there?"

Emptiness. Nothing.

"Mother Ngaa!"

The breeze playing across the taut strings of their aeolian harps drew out a wordless wail of despair that rose and fell as the wind rose and fell.

Some of the globblies poked their heads out of their tunnels in the valley between the dunes and heard the wail.

"The children are crying!" said one globbly to another, alarmed.

"The children are crying!" The word was passed from mouth to mouth all through their vast underground labyrinth.

In a moment the globblies were pouring from their tunnels like a horde of frightened ants and running up the hill toward the statue as fast as their sturdy little legs could carry them.

As they ran they could smell the flowers on the hilltop, but it was not a pleasant smell. It was the stench of fear.

The first to reach the Whispering Gardens was Dooeog, the prince. He paused a moment panting at the edge of the garden of wailing flowers, searching for danger with all his hyperacute senses, searching also with his telempathic mind for the presence of some hostile being. Detecting nothing, he threaded his way carefully between the tossing plants, being careful not to step on any of the small ones, until at last he stood at the foot of the idol, looking up into Her face.

Then he saw what was wrong.

There was an empty hole in Her forehead, an empty hole where only yesterday the ancient Eye of Ngaa had been. The speaking jewel, the Soul of the Goddess, was gone!

Even Dooeog, who had traveled so far and seen so much -- even Dooeog-the-Brave could not control his emotions, and his wail of dismay mingled with the wails of the flowers and spread to all the globbly multitude that now thickly crowded the crest of the hill.



"It must have been one of our own people who took it, Mister Smith," said Dooeog to me, after he finished telling me about the theft.

We sat on the floor of my underground room, meditatively listening to the whir of the air conditioner and compressor that kept the air in my room at Earth temperature, pressure, and oxygen content.

"How do you know that?" I asked when the silence had reached the proper length, adding a few squees of interrogation in his own language for emphasis. We usually spoke English between us, even though I now could speak his language of high-pitched squeaks, whistles and clicks as well as any Earthman could be expected to.

"At first my people thought only an alien could do such a thing," he said. "They thought you might have done it, Mister Smith."

"Tho, me?"

"Yes, but then I pointed out that only one of our own people could do it. Our babies are not defenceless, you know. If they sensed an alien moving among them they would sting him with their poisoned thorns, tangle him in their powerful crushing vines. But they did not even wake up. They would not wake up if one of their own kind walked among them, but the presence of anyone else would rouse them instantly."

Doeeg jumped to his feet and did a little dance of excitement, the breeze from my air conditioner ruffling his white fur, his big brown eyes sparkling.

"You see," he added, "I am a good detective, right?"

I whistled and clicked agreement and approval, then asked, "But how could a globbly move around above ground without freezing to death?"

"I found tracks," said Doeeg, sitting down again and leaning toward me with a confidential air. "He was wearing shoes, Mister Smith. I think he was also wearing an electrically heated suit like yours, perhaps even an air mask. That means the suit and shoes had to be made especially for him, right? I think he is working with Earthmen. The creatures of Mars do not make shoes or electrically heated suits."

"You are a good detective at that, Doeeg," I said, laughing. "Do you know who did it yet?"

"We are checking now to see if anyone is missing. If any one of us is gone, I think the missing one will be our thief."

At that moment there was a knock at the airlock and I opened it to admit an excited orange globbly, slightly smaller than Doeeg. The newcomer squeaked that Graoor was missing.

"Do you hear, Mister Smith?" cried Doeeg. "It was Graoor! He always was dissatisfied, always wanted us to adopt the ways and customs of Earthmen."

"Then he was an idiot." I snorted contemptuously.

"Now I think he will try to sell the Eye of Ngaa in order to buy a ticket to Earth."

"Then he's a madman!" I exploded. "If he goes to Earth they'll just make a pet of him, perhaps even put him in a cage."

"I have told him that," said Doeeg sadly, "but he did not believe me. Graoor thinks they will let him become a man."

• • •

I spent most of the next few days playing my saxophone and meditating. Doeeg didn't come to visit me as he usually did, but I didn't at first really miss him. Even when I went with the tribe on milk-gum gathering expeditions, it didn't seem strange to me that Doeeg was nowhere to be seen. Doeeg came and went as he pleased. After all, he was a prince.

One long-shadowed afternoon, as I was returning from one of these expeditions, I met Sheoam of the Golden Fur, the princess who would one day perhaps be Doeeg's mate, and asked her casually if she had seen him.

She squeed with surprise and said (in her own language) "Don't you know? Doeeg has gone away."

"Gone away? Where?" I demanded.

"To Marsport, where the Earthmen dwell and the great ships fly to Earth, Mister Smith."

"But why?"

"To get back the Eye of Ngaa and kill Graoor, Mister Smith." She paused, then murmured, "He went alone, Mister Smith."

How strange it sounded, that string of squeaks, hisses and clicks, followed by two piping words in English, "Mister Smith."

She looked as if she wanted to say something more, so I prompted her a little. "Well?" I said gently.

"Help him, Mister Smith," she whispered, then turned and ran away.

• • •

The answer was no.

It's always a mistake for a human to mix in non-human affairs. True, the globblies had taken me in, treated me as one of them, but the fact remained, I was not and never would be really one of them. I was an outsider on Earth, but wasn't I even more of an outsider there on Mars, among those alien creatures for whom the most important things in my life, my music and my philosophy, were completely meaningless? They do nothing but gather the milk-gum, worship the idol, bury the eggs, tend the plants that grew from them until they turned into adult globblies, then start all over again. They have always done this and perhaps always will. Where did my music and my philosophy fit into their changeless lives?

I was alone, as I always had been. The advantage, for me, of living with the globblies was just this, that I was left alone. Because they could not understand my inner life, they could not meddle with it, could not leave their dirty finger prints all over my dreams.

• • •

The Whispering Gardens whispered no more. Even at high noon they were silent. They were not dead, however. They still moved listless leaves to catch the sunlight and now and then their snakelike vines would slither out to catch some creature that came too close to them.

I stood at a safe distance, watching them curiously. What was it the Eye of Ngaa gave them, that they seemed so lost without? Did that jewel or whatever it was actually communicate with them by telepathy -- and if so, what did it tell them?

I walked a little closer and spoke to one of them. "What does Mother Ngaa tell you when she speaks to you?" I asked it.

There was no answer, no sound but the whir of my helmet compressor, so I asked again.

This time one of the plants drew tight its harpstrings, and as the wind blew through them, it moved its green, leathery lips and spoke.

"Mother Ngaa teaches us," said the flower slowly.

"But what? What does she teach you?"

"Everything," whispered the flower.

"But what exactly? Give me an example."

A strange, intoxicating perfume drifted from the flower to my air compressor, where it was sucked in and blown unceremoniously in my face.

"Darkness," whispered the flower.

"The illusion of time and space," whispered another.

"Beautiful things," said yet another.

"Lights, colors, shapes."

"The true nature of reality."

"Emptiness. Eternity. Infinity."

Now the plants were all whispering together, so that I couldn't make out what any of them were saying.

"I don't understand," I cried out, clenching my fists in frustration.

Abruptly the flowers were silent. Then, as the wind rose again, one of them said, "There are no words."

After that they refused to speak another syllable, no matter how much I coaxed and pleaded. "Perhaps," I thought, "if I help them they will tell me.!"

But on the other hand, maybe there really were no words -- if you were not one of them.

Finally I gave up my futile questioning and walked slowly to the nearby hill where lay the ionocraft I had come here in, silently recharging its solar batteries against the time when I might fly it again. I climbed over its bedspringlike ion grids and sat down in the cabin, moodily tracing my initials in the red dust that had collected on the dashboard.

I had not used it for months. It had probably built up quite a charge by now. I turned on the meter switch and watched the needle swing across the dial and stop at the full charge mark. Full charge. That meant I had enough juice to fly to Marsport in one hop, with no layovers for recharging.

I sat there for almost an hour before turning off the meter switch and walking slowly back to the tunnels.



Milk-gum is not the sort of thing I would eat if I could get anything else, but one can become inured to it if one tries. It is very good for you, though. Why is it that everything bad is good for you and everything good is bad for you? Was the universe created by the devil?

Whenever I think of milk-gum, I think of Sheoam of the Golden Fur, because she and I so often shared milk-gum together in my little underground room. That is, she would chew on it awhile, then pass it to me. I would chew on it for awhile, then pass it back to her. It's an old globbly custom of kissing, when you come to think of it.

After that one time, she never again asked me directly to help Doeeg. All the same, she talked about him constantly.

"In another day or two, Doeeg will reach Marsport," she would say, then chew thoughtfully for a while. She was in telepathic rapport with him, but only in a fitful and incomplete fashion. "And Mister Smith, this morning as I lay half-awake on my floor, I clearly saw, through his eyes, the Grand Canal. Doeeg has built a raft and is drifting down to the main junction at Ree, where he will walk overland along the big pipeline to Marsport. At night he seeks shelter with some of the speaking creatures along the bank of the canal, but sometimes he is almost caught by the night. If he had an electric suit like yours he would be so much safer. He senses that Graoor is still on Mars, but may leave the planet before Doeeg can reach him. If he had a flying machine like yours..."

You see what I mean?

Still, in spite of all that, I liked Sheoam. She did not seem like a person to me, the way Doeeg did, but more like a very intelligent pet, a talking dog or something. It was restful just to sit with her, saying nothing. With a human every long silence is a hungry void demanding to be filled with words, no matter how stupid and banal those words may be. Humans are always breaking into the Golden Silence with their "How are you?"



and their "Nice weather we're having," and their "What'cha thinkin' about?" Not so globblies. If a globbly speaks, it is because he has something to say, not just because he feels driven to prove to himself that he is not ignored.

You can sit with a globbly on a hilltop from sunrise to sunset, gazing with unfocused eyes at the creeping shadows and changing colors, and neither of you will say a word the whole time or even feel the urge to say a word. Isn't that wonderful?



Even with Sheoam and my saxophone to keep me company, I still missed Doeeg. All the time I was playing the sax or sitting and staring with Sheoam or going with the tribe to gather milk-gum, I thought about him. Sheoam told me he had reached Marsport, gained entrance by making himself a pet for a lonely Earth soldier stationed there, and now was searching the city for Graoor and the Eye of Ngaa.

Perhaps I was just caught up in the gloomy mood that seemed to have taken hold of the whole globbly tribe. Even the plants, the globbly children, seemed to have almost ceased to move, let alone speak.

One afternoon I went up to the Whispering Gardens to look at them. I noticed with a feeling of growing apprehension that some of the younger plants had failed to open, and there was something about the wrinkled, dried-up appearance of their black outer leaves that disturbed me.

"What's wrong?" I asked one of the flowers. "Why have some of you not opened?"

When the next breeze came the flower replied, "They are dead."

"Dead? But why?"

"Mother Ngaa gives us no more dreams. We can live a long time without food or water, but without dreams we will soon die. All of us," whispered the plant, slowly and with infinite weariness. "No thinking being can live without dreams."

I ran all the way from the hill to the tunnels and stumbled blindly through them, searching for Sheoam. Finally someone told me she had gone on a milk-gum expedition and I went out to meet her.

As soon as I emerged from the tunnel I saw her coming in the distance, together with a band of other globblies, dragging the bales of milk-gum behind them as globblies had been doing for centuries, as they probably had done when mankind was still swinging from tree to tree, or even before that. They were short, squat little creatures, as I say, but they cast long, tall shadows and the red dust from their feet and the dragging milk-gum drifted a long way before settling.

When I came up to Sheoam on the path I was so out of breath that it was a moment before I could speak, then I said, "Without the Eye of Ngaa, the race of globblies will slowly die out. Is that right?"

"Yes," she said softly.

"Why didn't you tell me, Sheoam? Why didn't any of you tell me?"

"We did not want to intrude on your privacy, Mister Smith," she answered, scuffing her foot in the dust.

We stood a long time looking at each other in silence, the way you can do with a globbly but not with a human being, then, still without a word, I turned and trudged toward my ionocraft, checking the electrical heating system in my suit as I walked. It would be a cold night's flight, but tomorrow morning I would be in Marsport.

● - end - ●

L. Sprague de Camp writes: Last year I appealed to readers of a number of magazines, pro and fan, for help in locating, for biographical purposes, unpublished letters by H. P. Lovecraft. Thanks in part to these readers' generous help, I am now saturated with HPL material (700+ pp. of photocopies and notes on other letters). I am still, however, trying to run down unpublished letters by Robert E. Howard (other than those in possession of my colleague Glenn Lord) and Clark Ashton Smith. Any information as to the whereabouts of such letters will be much appreciated.

L. Sprague de Camp // 278 Hothorpe Lane // Villanova, Pa. 19085

PRE-FANTASY  
by  
THADDEUS RUTKOWSKI

If it is possible, try to believe the story for it has no limits,  
But it has a purpose; remember it at the end.

(1) First we must discuss the pile of dirt lying on the grounds.  
(2) It is somewhat of a wide, flat pile. (3) We see it often, since it is very noticeable from a short distance. (4) It is outside... (5) There is little else outside other than the pile of dirt, which is some several meters in height, to comfort us should we come upon it in the dark. (6) It may very well be we don't see many other things outside because of the poor light there. It is dim in the room also, but that is not the same. (7) This paragraph is like the almost-flash scene before the title of a movie.

Now the story.

You may find this an inactive place here, and you are correct, at the least. Yes, it is that; it is a place for being inactive. (Is this a place for that as there is one for everything?) And you are right but it does not bother us that much, for we do have the rug, and I would think it is in fairly good condition, too, still.

The rug is of little importance at this point. It is dark brown, and it covers the floor, but it is more than that. The rug is needed by the people. It is the base of the room. Personification is too high a degree, perhaps? Yes, it has been said that something should be done about the role of the rug in the life. There is a tendency to over-personify. But who is doing the over-personification? Surely not Rosetta with the lichen.

It's true though; I seem to remember that a short time ago Rosetta had found a bit of lichen while wandering outside. She does so too much -- wandering, that is. It creates an uncomfortable amount of worry for the rest of us. The lichen was light blue-green in color. One thing about this bryophyte, for it is not a saprophyte, it is dry, contrary to outward appearance. (Here cliché-use is pointless.) Rosetta planted the lichen on the pile of dirt, on the side facing our door.

That was also the day we were on the rug waiting for Rosetta. She came back and spoke for quite a bit, and then she remained in the room, and on the rug, too.

"Someone has written about music in the dirt, on the side of the pile. It would not have been the likeable creature outside. But who would it have been? Someone other than the likeable creature; the likeable one would not have written of music."

That is what Rosetta said. We said nothing; we never do.

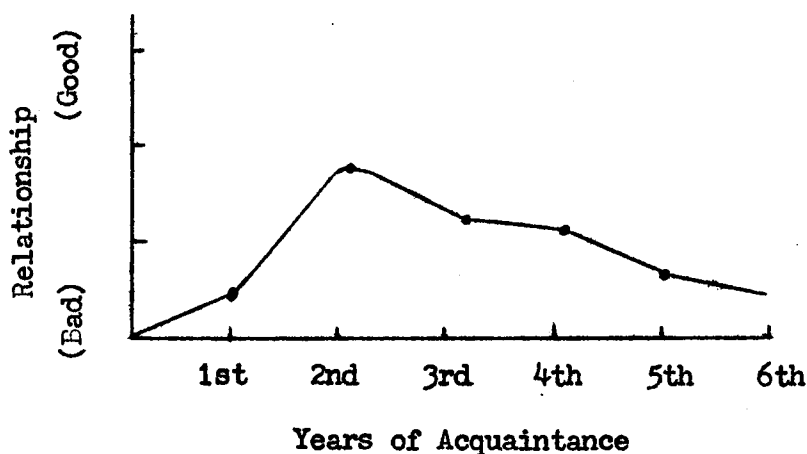
Later we were outside at the pile of dirt. It was not far from the room. The writing was sad and belonely and se were we. It was not time for jokes. We waited for quite a while. I believe we were reflecting on the writing and the dirt and the likeable creature outside. These things were pervading our lives we reflected. Our lives needn't have this pervasion. We thought what we needed had something to do with Rosetta. We went back then.

(Enter Rosetta) "I have seen the likeable creature," Rosetta said, "and the likeable creature is waiting outside. It has already brought pervasion into the life, so you can come out."

"It is she and invasion," we said. We were talking of "it" and "pervasion". We had actually spoken after very much time, and we wouldn't again for a while.

There was something likeable about this likeable creature. There were implications, we thought, resulting from our designating the likeable creature as "this likeable creature". The implications are correct, though, since there are many of them outside just like this one. She moves about outside all the time. But, IN REALITY, we did not usually think this much about this likeable creature. (We had a passing thought: at least Rosetta dressed most of the time. ((comparison of Rosetta and the likeable creature)) )

We thought of a graph of our long relationship with the likeable creature:



We thought of the likeable creature waiting outside. We tried to unravel the Rosetta problem. Rosetta was good at this, we thought. We became dejected. It is a matter of course. We decided to forget the likeable creature. She had left already anyway. Rosetta excused us for this, as always.

(Shall we discuss the wildness of this likeable creature? Was this an untamed creature?, a tamed creature?, inapplicable? ((All things are relative.)) We shall not discuss it.)

Rosetta decided to become more refined. We were glad and wished to help somehow. Rosetta said to help her to be less childish. (Do you see that this is ironic? Do you see that Rosetta is already nearly perfect?) If the likeable creature could ever comprehend us... What to do about the likeable creature; we were thinking easy thoughts again. She was too mechanical. We considered cutting her current.

(There seems to be a great amount of deterioration present. And toys of desperation, too. We must have toys of desperation. Many of my friends have one toy of desperation. I believe it is a problem in identification. They have a quasi- ((there is a toy of desperation)) authority. ((And it was profound when the young philosopher referred to the toys of desperation in the science laboratory.)) Petronius made an interesting study of decadence. This here, yes, this here should be a good example of inevitable deterioration.)

I don't believe we ever found out who was writing on the pile of dirt. We could only guess that it was Rosetta when she was childish.

I can only say that I would sardonically classify as amazing those choice sentences which have been unfortunately cut from this script.

END

Major themes in order of appearance: comfort, the us-you relationship, libidinous interest.

Major characters in order of appearance, with brief description:

unnamed group - frustratingly calm  
Rosetta - goddess-like,  
likeable creature - short attention span.

Author's purpose(s): showing off and/OR entertainment and/OR contribution to society and/OR need to communicate and/OR psychological stop-gap turn-valve twist-lid.

Comment supplied courtesy of Bellefonte Area School District:

Thaddeus was a very good boy this year.  
I enjoyed working with him.

so we decided to perform an experiment  
we raised four testube dogs in silenced chambers for two years  
then we played a different symphony for each and each for silence  
we removed their ear connections sliced the nerves allsilent evermore  
and set them free to live with us for two years  
then we ate them  
excellent this must be Vargram isn't it I told them well it  
well it tastes so Beethoven's Fifth I told them well it  
Vargram the tan one out of number three

John Gardner

So they announced the population was too high  
Too many people we'll all die none can survive if we all try to  
Figures show and experts say  
And they began to put up these Computer Centers in the  
Who goes first the poorer neighborhoods  
And began herding people in by means of television  
Jingles on the radio and leaflets in the mail and letters  
From your Congressman and articles by famous people in the magazines  
Talks with the Boss and Union contracts Welfare regulations  
And the President gave a speech  
And people next door friends and relatives who were Going  
Saying  
After all we've got no choice it's for the good of all and after all  
This stuff's cleared up the sky is nice at night again the harbor doesn't stink  
And you can drink a glass of water taste your food again and take joy just to breathe  
And be alive again they'll bring us back again and it'll feel just like  
No time has passed at all they'll put us into brandnew healthy bodies  
Just as fast as population pressures will allow and don't forget  
First come first served  
The first ones in will be the first ones out again and back to life  
They'll take you in and treat you nicely tape your traces safe in the Computerbank  
And fingerprint you take your picture let you say a few words to the future  
Then you go to sleep no pain no worry take a little nap and wake up  
In a much much better world and don't forget  
The deadline is the thirty-first of this month any bodies  
Walking occupied unauthorized after the thirty-first will be shot down  
No future better life for them ground up and fed to animals so don't  
Delay do it today avoid the rush come down here early make sure  
Everything's done thearly and you'll surely get well put away  
And in the people went in great long lines to get put out but me  
I didn't buy it something wrong with this arrangement you can't  
Trust them to look out for you you're nothing to them don't forget  
I went through six or seven empty houses got some things together  
And began to hide out it was easy I was watching  
When they took out that Computer Center junk and started packing  
And the meat trucks started pulling up

John Gardner

In the big house on the bank of the river there was a large, circular bedroom with two beds in it. In one bed slept Harry Tomplin, Galaxy-wide celebrity and famous lover, artist and dean of the school of "emoting artists," though only twenty-seven. In the other bed slept Mariana Tomplin, daughter of the Federation chairman, once the most desired girl in the entire Federation and now Harry's wife of six years. Why, you may ask, do Harry and Mariana sleep separately when he was a famous lover and she a renowned beauty? I assure you that there is no marital rift between them. It is just that Harry and Mariana haven't slept together for six years, not since their honeymoon.

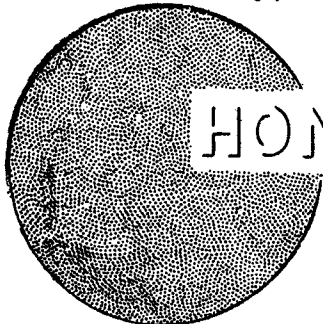
When they were married, the entire civilized Galaxy took an interest. She was the daughter of the most powerful man in the Federation, a beautiful girl of nineteen who was reputed to have caused more than one jilted lover to suicide in despair; he was the famous artist, the man who made his paintings emote. He credited all of his artistic success to his mind-feel. Mind-feel was a modern phenomenon, a combination mental and emotional talent that many scientists believed was the first sign of the next stage in humanity's evolution. Mind-feel enabled its possessor to actually feel the emotions of others, to partake in the joy and sorrow and envy of others as easily as speaking to them. Harry Tomplin used his paintings to display what he felt with his mind-feel. It was said that when Harry first met Mariana she was a snob who wouldn't admit that she desired a "mere painter." But how could she possibly hide her love from a mind-feeler? Their love affair was a brief one, but it commanded Galaxy-wide attention. They were married in the Federation Building on Corisus in the presence of the Chairman and his Board of Governors. It was a splendid ceremony, featuring the burning of a grove of cherry trees to symbolize their everlasting love. Immediately after the ceremony, Harry and Mariana left on their honeymoon.

At Mariana's urging, they would spend the honeymoon on a hunting trip on the famous jungle world Emarsha, in search of the prized ebony lions.

They arrived on Emarsha late in the evening, three days after the wedding; and they spent the night together, a beautiful night for a recently married couple. Theirs was to be a lifetime love affair, not one that would be dimmed by familiarity.

The next day's hunt was one which Mariana had awaited for a long time; Harry, the artist, looked upon the hunt as no more than a game of intelligent man versus dumb animal.

The couple, attired in baggy pants, long, water-resistant shirts, high boots, wide hats and, of course, guns specially designed for the hunting of ebony lions left the cabin before dawn. Along with a guide they took their glider to a suitable locale. There they began their trek through the jungle in search of their prey. Harry, Mariana and the guide.



# HONEYMOON

by ROBERT SABELLA



As they walked through the brush, Harry "felt" the emotions of the other two people: Mariana was nervous, realizing that she was practically defenseless against any rampaging animals that might come from the brush. Still, she was trying to brave, and she felt some comfort with Harry walking at her side. The guide was completely sure of himself, confident that no animal could ever catch him by surprise. He was waiting eagerly for an ebony lion to show itself, so that he could kill it and then wear the pride of the conqueror.

And Harry's own feelings? They were much more difficult to analyze. He was very unfamiliar with live animals, Emarsha being one of the very few worlds where they were allowed to roam free. Sure, he had seen many small, domesticated animals, but they were nothing compared to the ebony lion. He wasn't ashamed to admit that he was nervous at the possibility of meeting such a creature.

The trio encountered nothing in the morning. They stopped for lunch during which time the guide checked all the weapons and ammunition. It was only a short break, after which they resumed their walking.

In late afternoon they reached the foot of a large hill. The guide told them to remain where they were while he climbed the hill for a look ahead. After the guide left, Mariana sat down on a rock for a brief rest, while Harry stood over her, watching for animals.

There was a low growl. Mariana stood up.

"Did you hear it, Harry?" she asked. He nodded his head.

The growl came again, louder. Harry could "feel" that Mariana was afraid. He was too but he tried not to show it. He turned to face the direction in which he thought the growl had originated. He told Mariana to stand back-to-back with him, her gun in her hand. Although he had never actually hunted before, Harry did know how to act in case of trouble.

The two of them waited, perfectly still, watching for the appearance of any animals.

"There it is," Mariana said, in a weak voice. Harry turned in the indicated direction.

"Separate," he said quickly, putting ten feet between himself and his wife.

The animal was an ebony lion. It stood nearly five feet high on all four legs. It was covered with long, coal black hair. As Harry watched the lion, his gun ready, he could "feel" that the lion was more scared than he was. The lion's attention was fixed on the guns, for it had seen other hunters use guns to kill members of its pride. The lion was terrified, but it couldn't flee because it knew what the guns would do to it if it tried.

Unintentionally, Harry found himself pointing his gun towards the ground; he couldn't shoot such an animal. It really wasn't vicious at all; it was a scared creature, a victim of man's savagery.

Then a shot was fired, and the lion was hit. Turning his head, Harry saw that Mariana had fired the shot.

And now the lion was panicking. It was hurt and it feared that the gun which had wounded it was going to kill it. The only chance was for the lion to destroy that gun; it leaped at Mariana.

"No!" Harry yelled as he fired his gun, hitting the lion in the side of the head. It fell to the ground, short of Mariana. Dead.

And that's why Harry never sleeps with his wife. That second night of the honeymoon he tried to make love to her, but he found himself impotent. He certainly didn't blame Mariana; she had only been frightened. But making love to her reminded him that in saving her life he had killed the lion. And lost his soul.

END

STALKING

THE WILD

HOAGIE



YALE EDEJEN

It had been a long and loud lament of the Charles Beard set that William Penn's quaint old country town contains not a single beanery of the first water. Philadelphia, they say, ranks but a cut above such centers of mediocrity as Duluth or Butte, Montana when the haute cuisine is considered. For aught I know there is truth to these canards; but, and consider this carefully, I doubt that any single city or area in the world has contributed to the growling stomachs of the masses more tasty and satisfying schlock snacks than my much maligned city. True, London has its fish and chips, New York has its roasted chestnuts, Texas and Los Angeles have their tacos, and Frankfurt has its frankfurters; but these are one-snack towns. None have had produced within their boundaries as vast and varied an array as has been devised by the culinarily deprived gourmands of old Philly.

The environs of Philadelphia have been the fertile soil from which the following dishes have sprung: scrapple, the steak sandwich and its higher form the cheese steak, snapper soup, shoo fly pie, Bassett's ice cream, the soft pretzel with mustard (there is a story, probably apocryphal, about a main-line politician who, while campaigning for office in the city, attempted to demonstrate his affinity for the common run of Philadelphian by partaking of a soft pretzel at a busy center city street corner; unfortunately the blue-blood chomped into the morsel without allowing the vendor to smear it with rancid mustard; so shocked were the onlookers at this sacrilege that the tale spread rapidly throughout the city and never has a politician been so decisively defeated at the polls as was that specimen of the breed), the hoagie, and, of course, the alka seltzer. But stop a moment; did I list the "hoagie" as a meal native to Philadelphia? About this fact there is some controversy.

The "hoagie" is called by other names in other places; it has been relabeled the hero, the grinder, the Italian sandwich, the submarine (the probable origin for an abomination I was served once in Quebec labeled a "sous-marin"), the blimb, and the zep. But these are spurious titles for an inferior imitation; the true appellation is and always has been the "hoagie." For years controversy has raged between the Italian communities of South Philadelphia and nearby Chester for the honor of naming their home grounds as the birthplace of the hoagie. This has by no means been a quiet struggle; its history is replete with incidents like the Great Hoagie War of 1935 when armies of rival claimants converged on the sleepy hamlet of East Tinicum where they battled with stale cherry peppers and balloons filled with olive oil until six platoons of the National Guard and a group of volunteers recruited from the local chapter of the Audubon Society intervened. This long-standing feud was not settled until 1967 when a certain Dr. Ames, a professor of anthropology at Temple University, and a band of graduate students with stomachs of iron studied the hoagie as a phenomenon of cultural dispersion. Chester was vindicated. The hoagie originated in Chester in or about the summer of 1925, spread to South Philadelphia within a few months, and from there spread throughout the country reaching New York by 1930 and the west coast by 1940. It is interesting to note that the last hold-out against the jihad of the hoagie was New England where the hoagie did not penetrate until the late 1940's.

In 1925 the employees of the Hog Island Naval Base, located on the Delaware River about equidistant between South Philadelphia and Chester, were a manly and hearty group; one of their major complaints was that their wives were ignorant of the techniques of packing an adequate lunch basket. Finally one Italian mother, the proprietor of a small grocery (known locally as Mom's; but more of that later), devised a solution. Cleverly she split a long Italian roll down the middle

and stuffed it with the cold cuts and cheese available in her store. Soon all the local workers and a few school children were stopping at her store in the morning to purchase their lunch and the hoagie business was born. Workers from South Philadelphia were quick to take note of these lunch time feasts and soon prevailed upon the grocers of their own neighborhoods to imitate Mom's creations; and it was in these South Philadelphia stores where the hoagie was perfected. Incidentally, it is this point of origin that gives the hoagie its name. The sandwiches were named hoggies to commemorate the workers who demanded their creation; this form soon began "hogie" (and in more conservative sections of South Philadelphia it is still so labeled) and gradually this became the present "hoagie." (When last I asked an expert in linguistics about this curious transformation he mumbled something about "vocal ellisions" and the tendency to slur vowels in South Philadelphia and hurried away. My own thesis concerning this problem is simpler: the Hog Islanders were large and brawny men and probably took an earnest dislike to the slightly opprobrious connotations of the word "hoggie." It was hard for other persons to argue in the face of such strong and powerful logic and the name was changed.)

The logical point to begin a survey of the hoagie today is at its point of origin, Mom's in Chester. Unfortunately Mom sold out in 1969 and retired to Florida (not, incidently, on the great rewards she realized in the hoagie trade but due to her cagy investments in sowbelly futures). A visit to Mom's, during its heyday, was an exhilarating experience for any hoagie habitue. I remember wandering in one time with two companions, Charles K. and his cousin Howard. (As the case was, it was not an easy wander. Charles lives over ten miles from Mom's and has a prodigious capacity for getting lost, consequently the trip took us over an hour and a half during which time we located such exotic and out of the way areas as Warminster, Wingohocking, and Bethlehem; which Bethlehem I will leave to your imagination.) A short, white-haired woman behind the counter waved a foot long butcher knife in the general direction of our innards and inquired: "Hey, whacha want?" We ordered three of her specials and watched with amazement the preparation of these proto-hoagies.

After the ritual of splitting the rolls with a flourish (an odd knife peculiar to the hoagie trade), Mom whipped out a gallon can of olive oil and upended it over the first roll. The first can empty, the grand old lady of hoagidom fetched another, opened it with her church-key, and treated the other two rolls to a bath of pungent oil. A handful of oregano was gayly flung into the breeze, some of it even landed on the rolls, and the counter top was liberally dusted with salt. Then Mom got down to the serious work; a layer of provolone covered the rolls and mounds of freshly sliced meats, capocola, coteghino, genoa, prosciutto, and others too arcane to mention -- or even spell properly -- were heaped onto each creation. Without a pause to admire her work, Mom produced three tomatoes, quartered them, and dropped the chunks on top of the meat. "Hey, you wanta some peppers?" she inquired archly. There are some people, dear reader, who insist on eating a hoagie without peppers; but then there are people who like hot dogs without mustard, marinara sauce without garlic, lamb without mint jelly, Montagues without Capulets, but these are lesser breeds of folk. Handfuls of Mom's special homemade peppers which can make even the most hardened devotee of tabasco sauce or chinese mustard gasp for air and call for water were heaped on each hoagie. Mom started to wrap her creations and Charles, who has the innate caution of a wild boar in heat, wondered why there was no lettuce on the hoagies. "Hey," Mom replied, "here I feeda men, nota rabbits." Before this pearl of wisdom could sink in, our hoagies were wrapped and we were out the door.

That was the hoagie of yesterday; what is today's hoagie like? Hoagies are available in two varieties: plastic and real. The plastic variety is distinguished by the use of gummy American cheese, sawdust bologna (one experienced hoagie maker interviewed in conjunction with this article remarked: "Hey, never would I give a customer something with boloney in it and tell him it was an Italian hoagie."), tasteless ham, and bland salami; should one of these works of the devil be presented to you wrapped in cellophane, as they often are, it is wise to eat the cellophane wrapper too. It is usually the tastiest part and adds a certain zest that the plastic hoagie lacks when eaten straight. The plastic hoagies are easy to find; every luncheonette or restaurant in the Philadelphia area has "hoagie" listed on at least its luncheon menu and will present to the customer on demand one wretched concoction that it is pleased to label a "hoagie." Any "hoagie" from a restaurant or lunchroom will to some extent be a plastic hoagie, although if the customer is lucky or the sandwich man is asleep an authentic real hoagie might appear; but don't count on these places for consistency. Another common source is the hole-in-the-wall shop that specializes in the preparation solely of hoagies and cheesesteaks. Very often the speciality of the house is really the cheesesteak (which has a cult of its own) and the hoagie is a sideline; very often the hoagie presented to the customer will come very close to being a real hoagie. Ask any Philadelphian and he will assuredly provide you with the name of some such shop where, he will assure you, the real hoagie abounds. I have eaten good hoagies in many of these places. Let me be honest; I have, on rare occasion even eaten a great hoagie in one of these spots. But to get the real hoagie at its consistent best one must go their source, the small neighborhood groceries of South Philadelphia, and go through a process of haggling that would curl the hair of an arab rug merchant.

Italians can be funny people (especially when they live in Philadelphia where all people are funny people). Take the average owner of a South Philadelphia grocery, give him a new location in say, Drexel Hill, and ask him to make a hoagie. He won't be able to do it; anything he makes once he is in Drexel Hill, or Narberth, or North Philadelphia, or Center City, will suddenly become part plastic. Don't ask me why, but the only place where the true hoagie can be found is in the area near the old Italian market in South Philadelphia. A good starting place in your hoagie hunt is the corner of 9th and Washington, the heart of the Italian market (a fascinating place where one would not be really surprised if one were to notice Conan or Northwest Smith wandering down the narrow streets looking for adventure). Do not be deterred by the vendors hawking their wares from their pushcarts; you did not come here for squids or sheep's eyeballs, or any of the other rare delicacies carried here. Forget that comely wench haggling over the price of tripe and turn down one of the narrow side streets. The grocery stores are unmarked and can be distinguished only by the stacks of dusty cans and balls of green provolone hung in the windows. If the door is open the place is a grocery, if the door is not open --- well, I'll leave that to your imagination. (Incidentally, if you are not sure whether or not you are still in an Italian neighborhood there is a simple test. Just kick the next passerby in the shins. If he slugs you he is not an Italian; if he spews forth a stream of maledictions punctuated by wild gesticulations, you have found an Italian.)

It is inside the neighborhood grocery, where all outsiders are treated with suspicion, that your bargaining skills and knowledge of the lore of the hoagie are put to the test. After you inform the man behind the counter that you desire a hoagie he will most probably give you a blank stare and mumble, "Hey, whatcha wanonit?" At the neighborhood grocery hoagies are not made impersonally; each is a work of art the composition of which is dictated by the customer.

Before we go any farther there is something that must be explained. The average South Philadelphian speaks not English but a melange of English, poorly pronounced Italian, and a group of formalized gestures that have been evolved over the years. As you have been told the real hoagie has provolone cheese and capocola, coteghino, genoa, and prosciutto meats. However, should you name them with a pronunciation that would be even marginally understandable to the average Italian you will probably be met by another and even blanker stare or, at worst (at worst, if puns are your mean) ((this was an obligatory pun: all fan humor articles must, by tradition, contain at least one lousy pun)). "Capocola" is called "gob-ah-ghoul," "provolone" is "pro-val-own," "coteghino" is known locally as "coat-ah-guin," "prociutto" comes out "pro-schoot" and, strangely enough, "genoa" is known as "gen-oh-ah."

Thus, to inform the hoagie maker what you want; gesture with your right hand and say, "Hey, proschoot, genoa, prov-ah-lone," gesture again, "a little coat-ah-guin and some gob-ah-ghoul." You probably have not fooled him but you put up a good front which is almost as good. Now he will inquire before he smears mayonaise over the hoagie (a common method of showing his contempt for the customer: no true hoagie lover would eat one with mayonaise. The hoagie maker when he smeared that awful stuff on your sandwich said, in effect, this character don't know the first thing about hoagies.); simply say, "Hey, no."

There is an old superstition in South Philadelphia that the real hoagie cannot be taken north of South Street because once a real hoagie is removed from its native turf it cries, soaking the roll and making it inedible; there is some truth to this old tale. A good hoagie roll will to some extent resist the sog capabilities of olive oil; but there is a limit to this resistance. Actual sog tests performed under both laboratory and field conditions have decisively demonstrated that the olive oil used in the average real hoagie can sog a roll completely within one hour, South Philadelphia traffic conditions being what they are this gives the consumer time enough only to travel about a mile. (I am, for the purposes of this article, ignoring the tests performed by A. J. Giacobetti at the behest of a group of South Philadelphia hoagie merchants and a certain Italian protective society. Although these tests demonstrated that a hoagie roll had the power to resist the sog power of olive oil indefinitely, charges that Dr. Giacobetti used polystyrene rolls for the tests have never been adequately resolved.) This sogability raises a problem; how does one eat the blasted thing?

The best solution to the eating of the hoagie is to grab it from the hoagie maker before he has a chance to wrap it (but be careful: the aforementioned flourish is a deadly weapon) and cram the darn thing down your gullet in the narrow confines of the store. But this is not always possible. Strange as it might seem (and this will be strange if you take note of the cleanliness of either the store, the storekeeper, or the stock) other persons are going to want to enter the store, which is invariably wide enough for one customer at a time, to buy groceries, get a hoagie, pass the time, or even to hand the storekeeper some loose coins wrapped in a piece of paper with numbers written on it. These interruptions to your eating pleasure can be tiresome especially in the latter case when the customer might very well be followed by squads of the local gendarmie, who will cause no end of noise and jostling; this is very upsetting to a digestive system that is already struggling with a hoagie.

If home is not an easy distance away the best solution is to eat the hoagie in your car which should be parked comfortably nearby. If this course of action is chosen it is wise to remember that a fresh hoagie roll sheds its olive oil. If this is forgotten there is really no problem for the store where the hoagie was purchased will also carry in stock several good brands of spot removers. Of course, as a last resort you might take the hoagies with you to your home or to a party and eat them in the privacy of kitchen, dining room, or bathroom (as with the mango it is best to eat the hoagie in close proximity to running water, especially if they have been sitting for a while).

If you have followed the above instructions with imagination and descretion you will have sampled one of the most transcendental experiences in the culinary arts, and in approximately half an hour, you will also experience sensations that have been labeled by the ever-quaint inhabitants of South Philadelphia "agita." But that is another story.



# THE KINGDOM OF THE AIR

Darrell Schweitzer

It is said by persons of the greatest authority that our blessed saviour Iyar was the last of a long line of wizards and that he actually possessed some traces of the immeasurable knowledge that was lost in the war that ended the First Age of Man.

--The Book, Ch. 6, Sect. 34  
(believed to have been written approximately  
400 Moon-Triangles after the death of Iyar)

In his uneasy sleep the old man dreamed. He dreamed of the past and of the long dead Ulaitu. Years had passed since she had gone up to The Place of the Gods, so many years that the three moons had formed a perfect triangle in the sky twice since then, and were about to do it a third time. He could hardly remember what she looked like. Images came to him, images of her middle age, her long brown hair streaked with grey, the wrinkles forming beneath her eyes and beginning to spread across her face. He couldn't recall her youth at all. It was something of the far, far past, something that had died with The World. It was gone even from his memory forever.

He dreamed, too, of the lost lands, the places that he had once ruled in the name of his Lord. These too seemed faroff and vague. The images of the dead world that had once been were fading. It was as if the clouds that now floated below the Ship, concealing where the ground used to be, had finally seeped into his brain, obscuring all.

\* \* \* \* \*

No one in the crowd really had any intention of coming there. They had all just been passing by the main deck, on some business or other, when they stopped for a second to see what was going on. And when they heard what was being said, each and every one of them forgot about what he or she was doing and listened. For the words both fascinated and repelled them. They were heretical words, statements which undermined all of nature and reason. The speaker, Tgnui-Ob, was trembling as he delivered his message, even though he was only repeating what the one who he served had said. Even though these thoughts were not his own, he realized the significance of them. But he controlled himself and went about his business. In another time, at another place, in another language, men would have called him a rabble-rouser.

"I think the man is mad," he proclaimed. "Now I do not wish to be understood. No, not that. I respect our beloved patriarch as much as you do. After all, it was he who saved us all from the final destruction of the world. One had only to look over the railing and see nothing but endless clouds to appreciate what Iyar has done for us. But alas, though it pains me deeply to say this, someone must do it and fate has declared that it should be I. I fear that the strain of leadership has finally become too great a burden for Iyar, and at last his aged mind is beginning

to wear out. How old is he anyhow? Seven Moon-Triangles? Eight? It is unquestionably a sign of the favor of the gods that he should live that long. Why, I doubt that there is another man alive on the ship today who is more than six. But, alas, the gods for some unknowable reason of their own did not choose to make Iyar immortal. Oh that they had! Then we would be forever safe under the guidance of this most holy man! But we must be realistic and admit that it is not so. Old Iyar grows feeble and we shall very soon need a new leader, someone who possesses as many of his noble qualities as any normal man can be expected to. The most logical choice would be one of Iyar's sons. Surely it cannot be the younger son, Iyar-Thillic, who is a brilliant and wise person, but a scholar and a mystic, and has little interest in such worldly matters as leadership. Therefore the only choice is the elder brother Iyar-Hyuil. You must support him if you care at all about the future of humanity. We are the only survivors of the Great Destruction and let not one of you forget that for an instant. We must choose carefully, for we have no room for mistakes."

Then the one who had been standing behind the speaker, upon hearing himself being introduced came forward. (This was only a formality, of course, since everyone already knew he was Iyar-Hyuil.)

"I thank you Tgnui-Ob," he began, "for you have spoken truthfully about these things. I know that it is my destiny to take up the burden of leadership soon. My father grows senile faster and faster these days. No longer can he distinguish reality from fantasy. Why, just three days ago he claimed that the world was not really destroyed but that it was only hidden beneath the clouds, which would vanish after three hundred more Moon-Triangles. What else can this be but madness? As his own son I am of course reluctant to say this, but I must for it is my duty to reveal what is true. It is indeed a sad task for me to depose my father, but I have no choice since his delirious mind cannot understand enough to rightfully abdicate. I must do this thing and you all know it. So follow me when I go to the cabin of Iyar and demand that he step down from the kingship!"

The crowd roared in affirmation. All over the ship they could be heard. Even the men who were just then repairing a pulley on the end of the underside masts turned in their direction. Everywhere people looked out of windows and through doors and up from hatches to see what the commotion was.

Iyar-Hyuil stood gloating at it all. He was beginning to enjoy his power already.

\* \* \* \* \*

Like golden teardrops they were, those flaming things that fell out of the sky that night, so very long ago. They seemed to glow with a strange, sterile life of their own, but Iyar knew that they bore only death. Like brush fires the plagues raced across the land. Cities became empty almost overnight. The climate changed with frightening rapidity. It became bitterly cold as great masses of clouds covered the sky. No longer could men see the sun.

Soon there would be no life at all on the face of the world. Iyar knew this; he had been the only one who had realized it in time. He still remembered vividly the time when the voices of those who battled beyond the sky had spoken to him through the mysterious box, relating their ominous warning. Those Who Protected were faring poorly in some faroff and incomprehensible war. They had been forced to abandon this section of the universe and Those Who Destroyed would soon come and do strange and terrible things to the world in an attempt to kill all men. His people would have to find a way to survive for many years until the effects of the evil magic wore off. Those Who Protected could not help at all, for they were in retreat and had to regroup somewhere beyond the stars so that they might defend their own world against the Evil Ones.

He had never fully understood the meaning of the message, but he did see that it was a warning of a great catastrophe. When it first came he thought that he must be dreaming, for no one within the memory of any living man had ever heard the box talk. And there was no such instance recorded in the Sacred Record. Some said that it once spoke regularly, shortly after the One Who Came From Heaven placed it in the temple at the beginning of the First Age, but this was generally regarded as myth. After all, if such a momentous event had occurred, it would have surely been mentioned in the Sacred Record. But after the message came, Iyar reconsidered his beliefs.

He had considered himself honored that They would select him to be the saviour of humanity. It had never occurred to him that They might have contacted other chieftains in other lands by means of other boxes (for he knew that there were such), because there was only one ship and it was therefore obvious that only one tribe had been saved.

In his dream Iyar saw the past rushing before him. He saw the building of the great ship and the wars that resulted, the insurrections among his own people, and finally the alunching and narrow escape of the Last Day. He saw Ulaitu on her deathbed, a victim of the aerial sickness, shrivelled with disease and age. He saw her as they carried her plague-ridden corpse to the side of the ship and cast her down into the abyss. The image of her falling was with him now; he seemed to be falling with her. She toppled end over end, her arms and legs waving wildly. She seemed to be screaming something.....

He awoke. For a moment he laid still in his bed, staring out the porthole at the three moons. It had all been so vivid. What was the meaning of this dream? He had always tried to forget the past before and had lived for the present and the future. What was the significance of its looming up before him just now? And what was it that his beloved had been trying to say as she plummeted down through the clouds? Something important was about to happen; he knew this. Something terrible.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I am afraid he is much worse," said the first healer.

"How so?" asked the second.

"He has a high fever now, and his servants say that he raves."

"And what does he rave about?"

"Oh, nonsensical things. Such as the reappearance of the ground after a certain time and his duty to find out when this has occurred so that he might bring the ship down through the clouds."

"This is indeed sad -- and dangerous. Such a man is no longer competent to rule the ship. Why, imagine what would happen if he were to attempt to lower us down right now. We'd all be killed! Humanity would be extinct!"

"You have been listening to Iyar-Hyuil and Tgnui-Ob haven't you?"

"I have. And I am fully convinced that they are right."

"This is treason, you know. It borders on sacrilege."

"Treason or not, it is necessary! We cannot allow a senile old man to control the fate of humanity. Regardless of how wise he might have once been, he is now a definite threat to all seven hundred and twelve people on this ship!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Iyar-Thillic, second son of the old king, sat on the foredeck watching the stars. Behind him the sky was beginning to glow as the sun was rising out of the clouds. A cold wind blew.

He looked up at the constellations. To his right he saw the Great Gnath and two of the three Lesser Gnaths (the third one being below the horizon at this time of year). He knew them by those names because he had been taught to think of them thus. But to him they looked like a sail-maker and his three assistants, not at all like gnaths. After all, the gnath was a large beast, used mostly for transportation, and there was neither need nor room for them on the ship. He had never seen one.

He watched the moons closely, observing how they were almost in Triangle, how they seemed to be converging on the Star of Fate. But it was not the stars that occupied his mind this night. Only three nights before his brother had held a rally on the main deck, right in front of his father's cabin. It had been a large rally, far greater than any of his earlier ones. Fully a hundred people were there! Now one person in seven had listened to his treasonous and blasphemous words. And that one would easily spread them to the other six.

The frightening thing about it all was that for the first time the people were taking Hyuil seriously. The servants were spreading rumors about his father's "ravings" but there was nothing he could do to silence them. He had ordered them confined to the king's quarters, only to have himself countermanded by his brother. For Iyar-Hyuil knew just how eager the ears of the populace were for such news, and it was to his advantage they get it.

It was true that Iyar was sick, and that he did say strange things. Iyar-Thillic himself did not understand everything his father said, but he knew that they were the words of a sage, not a madman. There was a

truth in them, a difficult truth that could only be understood by a more diligent study of the sacred books and records which had been brought up from the dying world. He would ponder, and perhaps begin to understand these things. He had to; it was his duty as son of his father. And he would ask the gods for aid. He would do that right now.

He began chanting the prayer of enlightenment under his breath.

Maybe the gods would aid him.

Maybe the magic box would speak again and he would understand the words of Iyar.

Maybe ---

\* \* \* \* \*

Dawn came. Slowly the sun sailed up out of the clouds and ascended towards the middle of the sky. Still Iyar-Thillic sat on the deck, unaware of his surroundings, his muscles stiff from the cold of the night.

A flock of birds flew over, screeching. The men who had been repairing the sail that they'd spread out on the deck stopped what they were doing and rushed to the gunwhales, seizing the bows that had been placed there. Bowstrings twanged and some of the birds fluttered and fell, only to be brought back up as the men reeled in the lines attached to the arrows. There were joyous shouts. The birds were a special delicacy and the sail-makers knew they would eat well for the next few days.

This commotion caused Iyar-Thillic to look up from his ponderings. Still in a reflexive mood, he considered what he had just seen. He wondered how the birds could exist. He believed that they always laid eggs. In fact, he knew this, for occasionally a couple would nest in the rafters of the ship's cabins and lay a few eggs before they were discovered. But this couldn't possibly account for all of them. If there was no ground, how did the birds reproduce? They couldn't drop their eggs and hope that the young would hatch out before they were so deeply immersed in the clouds that they'd never find their way out again. He had never seen a young bird, but some said that they couldn't fly. How would they survive? It was all obviously impossible, yet there they were.

This was something important! He realized that he had just proved that there had to be some kind of land below somewhere! The gods had answered his prayers! It was a great revelation!

\* \* \* \* \*

Iyar-Hyuil was speaking to a small group of devoted followers and people who just happened to be passing by. They were gathered around him, looking up to him as he sat on a crate and preached.

"I think my father's madness has carried over to my brother," he was saying. "Have you heard what he has been saying lately? He claims that there is land below us, beneath the clouds! He says there has to be, because that is the only way the birds could nest. Well, I have more important things to do than study the ways of birds, but I know his claims to be

nonsense bordering on heresy. Everyone knows that the ground is gone. The gods destroyed it because of the impiety of Man. There can be no questioning of such an important truth!"

"I think he borders on blasphemy and heresy himself sometimes," a man seated at the edge of the crowd whispered to the one next to him.

"Be careful!" warned the other. "Don't let them hear that! There are spies all over the ship these days. And after Hyuil takes over, he will eliminate his enemies."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Father?"

"Yes? Who is it? I can't see you anymore. My eyes are failing, you know. The disease is spreading throughout my entire body. First my limbs, then my eyes --"

"It is I, Thillic. I have come to warn you."

"Warn me? About what?"

"About Hyuil and his friends. They plan to take over the ship. They're going to force you to relinquish your authority so that he may set himself up as ruler. You must do something. He's been very open about all this since you have been sick. They plan to move soon."

"Nonsense! I will hear no more of this! Hyuil has always been a good son, even if he is a little mischievous. Why, just the other day Ulaitu said to me, 'Iyar, that son of ours --!'"

"But father! You don't understand! He threatens insurrection! Perhaps even murder!"

"I will hear no more of this I said! Ulaitu! Come and tell him the truth! Ulaitu!"

"But father! Ulaitu has been dead for many years!"

"Get out of my sight! First you slander your brother because of your mad jealousy, then you wish death upon your mother! Out! Don't come near me again! I am ashamed to call you my son!"

"But--"

"Out! Guards! Guards!"

The cabin door flew open. Two guards entered.

"Yes, Highness?"

"Show my son out and see to it that he does not return to plague me. I have enough sorrows without him."

"Yes, Highness."

"I was just leaving," said Thillic.

"Don't speak to me!"

\* \* \* \* \*

After Iyar-Thillic had gone, the two guards who stood outside Iyar's door spoke to each other in hushed terms. Said the first:

"Iyar-Hyuil is a fool to rush things like he does. He is the obvious choice for the throne and he hasn't much time to wait."

Said the second: "One cannot be so sure. The old man may live on for many months, or perhaps even years. And Hyuil grows impatient."

"Still, he is a fool."

\* \* \* \* \*

After the Last Meal for the day had been distributed on the main deck, Iyar-Hyuil called Tgnuil-Ob aside.

"See how the moons move towards a triangle," he said pointing at the sky. "Tonight is the fifth since the rally. In ten more the moons will be in position. Then we will move. After all, the Moon-Triangle has been traditionally considered a special time during which great events occur. And what can be greater than the removal of the old king?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Iyar-Thillic sat alone. Only ten days left! What could he do in so little time to prevent his brother's coup? The people of the ship seemed to be divided into three groups; those who supported Hyuil, those who didn't consider him to be any menace, and those who didn't care about such things. None of them would be of much use to him. And alone he could do nothing.

But he couldn't just wait for it to happen! It was his duty to see that his father maintained his rightful position as long as he breathed. Why couldn't Hyuil wait, just a few years, until he could assume kingship legally and honorably? Did he really believe his father to be mad and a menace to the ship?

It seemed to Thillic that everything had gone wrong. The entire order of the universe seemed upturned. He, not his brother, should have been in the position of power and influence. After all, justice and the law were on his side.

These things puzzled him. He resolved to meditate on them a bit more.

\* \* \* \* \*

Their faces lighted by the single candle, Iyar-Hyuil and his companions huddled around the table.

"Have you figured out a plan?"

"Indeed I have."

"What is it?"

"It is really very simple. When the moons reach Triangle, we will gather together as many people as we can trust, march over to the King's cabin and demand that he announce his resignation publicly before the sun of the next day disappears below the clouds."

"And if he refuses?"

"We kill him, of course."

"Kill him! But the people would never approve of such a thing!"

"Not publicly, you fool! We'll make it look like my idiot brother did it. Ten witnesses ought to be enough to have him condemned. Then he will be out of the way and there will be no possible heir to the throne besides myself."

"You would slay your own father?"

"It will be a hard and trying task, but a prince makes great sacrifices for his people sometimes."

"You know, you sound like you half believe this nonsense you've been spreading about."

They all laughed, except for Hyuil who was silent, brooding.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Tgnui-Ob, come here for a minute."

"Yes?"

"We must discredit my brother in the eyes of the people before we carry through the plan I proposed last night. I'll need your help. Here is what you must do ..."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the room of the great valves, the guard was asleep. Silently and stealthily the hooded man sneaked across the floor. He seized the first of the giant wheels in his hands.

The guard stirred. The man paused for a second, frozen. Then he crept quickly over to the guard and struck him on the head with a candleholder, whereupon the guard ceased to stir.

The valve-wheels creaked as the man turned them, slowly letting the precious gas that held the ship up escape. He waited the prescribed time, then closed the valves again and left.

The guard awoke in a few hours. Since he did not see anything wrong immediately, he did not tell anyone what happened, for fear of being punished for sleeping on duty.

\* \* \* \* \*



The following morning Iyar-Thallic arose early, in order to pay proper respects to the gods. He stumbled along the corridor, climbed the stairs, and emerged onto the deck. Without consciously making a decision, he started towards his prayer-spot on the foredeck.

At first he sensed something was wrong, but was unable to determine exactly what it was. Then it hit him. Small, thin wisps of clouds were floating over the deck! He raced to the side and stared down. The clouds were not more than twenty feet below his face! The bottom of the ship was obscured in them!

He ran from the sight, back down the hatch, along the corridor, and into his room. He paused at the door. What good would it do to hide if the whole ship were about to fall through the clouds? It was a childish reaction, unbecoming a son of the house of Iyar. And wasn't he the one who said there was land down there? For a second he doubted that he really believed it.

By now the alarm had been sounded. People streamed from their cabins to see what the matter was. Iyar-Thillic followed along with the crowd.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was an assembly forming on the main central deck, just in front of the King's cabin. Thillic looked around and saw that nearly everyone on the ship was there. The crowd was frightened; they looked around for a leader to tell them what to do. Their fear hung in the air like dirty smoke. They were volatile, ready to explode.

A hastily assembled platform made of old crates rose up by the port gunwhale. Thillic saw his brother climb up on it and spread his arms, calling for silence. There was no fear on Hyuil's face.

When all were still, and attention was focused on Iyar-Hyuil, he stood, surveying the crowd pseudo-dramatically. Then he pointed to the clouds, which were slowly drifting over the ship.

"A foul deed has been done here this day," he began. All eyes were upon him. The people looked at him like a saviour or god, expecting him to rescue them instantly through some feat of supernatural strength. "A madman has threatened the lives of all of you with his insane schemes. I only thank the gods that he failed. It seems that the benevolent forces of heaven were watching over us in our hour of peril and in his haste the villain neglected to complete his evil crime."

"The Keeper of The Gas That Lifts tells me that a great deal of the contents of all the tanks have been emptied, deliberately and maliciously, in an obvious attempt to lower us all down through the clouds to our deaths."

"You ask who would do such a thing. Only one person would! Iyar-Thillic would and did! Through his fanatical devotion to his now senile father he has attempted to kill us all in order to prove the heresy he spouts. He is a traitor to humanity! Seize him!"

Horror froze Thillic's heart. How could his brother say such a thing? It was a lie! All a lie! He had been in his room all night.

The crowd reacted instantly. From all directions hands reached out at him, tearing at his clothing, fists pounding at his face. He went down under the weight of the mob and they piled on top of him, pounding, screaming with wild hatred.

Somewhere, faroff, beyond the crushing and cursing crowd Iyar-Hyuil shouted a command. The crowd responded, dragging Thillic to his feet and forcing him forward to the foot of the platform. He could see little, for there was blood streaming down his face and over his eyes.

"Good shipmates!" cried Hyuil. "Be calm please! Well can I understand your justified anger at this maniac, but we must maintain our respect for tradition and do this according to the laws. You all know how I have sworn to uphold the Law. There must be a trial. We can hold it here and now. It just so happens that I have on hand a witness who actually saw my accursed brother do his foul deed. Let the witness be brought forward!"

Two of Hyuil's trusted comrades pushed their way through the crowd, bringing with them the valve-room watchman. His clothing was ruffled and torn and dried blood matted his hair. He looked about dumbly, as if unable to comprehend what was going on. They led him up to the base of the platform, on the opposite end from where Thillic was now held.

"Now," said Hyuil to his completely captive audience, "your cooperation is needed. There must be silence, absolute silence, so that all may hear what this man has to say."

He turned to the watchman. "Now, shipmate, kindly tell us exactly what happened. Tell us all you know of how the ship came to be in the distressing condition that it is in now."

"Well - well," the man stammered.

"Yes?" Hyuil leered. One of the guards gave the man a kick on the shin.

"I - I was on duty, you see, when a man came up behind me and hit me over the head with a candle-holder. When I woke up I saw that a lot of gas had been let out of the cylinders. Why, they were still open, and if I hadn't closed them in time the gods only know what would have happened."

"Did you see the man before he hit you?"

"Uuh." One of the guards gave him a threatening look. "Why yes, I did! Indeed I did. I saw him right out of the corner of my eyes just before he got me."

"Do you see that man in this crowd?"

"Yes I do. He's that one over there." His shaking hand pointed to Iyar-Thillic.

Rage rushed to Thillic's head. He struggled against his captors. "That's a lie!" he screamed. "All a lie! I was in my room at the time!"