



Whatsit 21



The body lay on the floor in a horrid heap, its head, the size of an apple, rested on the rough wooden table. Outside the hut Ompa and Fanna were wiping their swords on the cloaks of the men they had just slain. "It seems we are too late comrade" said Fanna, indicating the bodies of the five men they'd fought, "someone seems to have been waiting for the messenger". They entered the hut, Ompa quickly took in the scene. "Well" he said, pointing to the shrunken head, we know now who we are up against". "The dreaded GAFIA" agreed Fanna grimly.

A week previously all had been well with the Ompalings, Fanlings and the Burplings. Everyone lived in, for those time, happy accord and, as their villages were only a days ride apart the members of different tribes were seen every day in each others village. Then, people noticed that there were no Burplings around. In a day or two they noticed that tribesmen who went to visit the Burplings had not returned. Fanna and Ompa had consulted the elders and sending this messenger ahead of them had summoned the warriors to go and investigate the mystery.

An hour later, after looking round the village, Ompa, Fanna and the warriors met in front of the chiefs hut. "There seems to have been no struggle" commented Ompa, "Aye, belike the Gafians cast a spell on them, or put something in their ale" replied Fanna. "Its a pity its been raining this last week, there are no clear tracks" mused Zine, an old and wise warrior of the Fannings. "Thats true, Proe," said Fanna, and they all fell to thinking again. After a few minutes Ompa roused himself. "This is no good" he declared, "we just can't stand around doing nothing. Obviously we must set off after the Gaflings. If there are no tracks to follow we must seek the aid of someone who does not need tracks" the others nodded wisely. "Ah" said Proe-zines eldest son, Fanna Zine, "the weird wizard of the woods, that scorceous scer of the south, that clever clair, er, cler, well, Gerbish!" "Exactly" exclaimed his brother Gen.

Instructing the remainder of the warriors to return to their homes, to defend them against any other attack of the Gaflings, Ompa and Fanna picked out fifty warriors to ride with them on their quest and set out to the north and the magic mountain.

A half days ride from their destination, it being near dark, they came to a village. Instead of a suspicious welcome, as would have been normal in that unsettled time, they found themselves made welcome and the guests at a feast. "I see you are suspicious and puzzled" said the grey old gheif cherrilly, "but don't fret yourselves" he winked, "the wizard sent us word you were coming". The tribe and the warriors got on very well, not a voice was raised in anger and all the villagers were very jolly. "You seem to be a very contented people" remarked Ompa, "I've not heard a hard word since I've been here." "And the womed" added Fanna, "were the quietest spoken and most polite I've ever met". "Thats something we can thank the wizard of the Wrekin for!" replied the cheif. "Look, do you see that tree" he pointed to a great tree, rather like a jew tree, covered with purple berries which dominated the square across from the cheis hut. "Thats a Hecto tree, the only one, says the wizard, outside of the Bleesed Isles to grow in middle earth. Its property is to bring to the fore all of mans, and womans, best nature. It grows here only by the arts of the blessed Gerbish. The berries" he added "we call Shrews berries, as they sweeten a womans nature so!" "ah," sighed Pore Zine, "I could do with some of those

to use on my wiser Publisher and Ompa". "I'm afraid I can't help you, friend" said the old chief sadly, "the sorcerer has to be eaten within an hour of being plucked or they lose their virtue".

The next day the company set off bright and early and arrived at the foot of the Wrekin before noon. They were met by a weird figure in a shapeless brown sock-like had. His hair and beard stuck out in all directions and around his neck, reaching to the floor he wore a singular piece of fabric covered with cabalistic signs and ornaments. As he capered around his russet cloak swirled away to reveal naked feet painted a deep shade of purple. "The Gerbish" muttered Ompa to Fanna behind his hand.

The strange creature led them up the hill until they were within a long arrowshot of the top. Here a natural cave had its opening, large enough to admit two mounted men abreast. Once inside the warriors, though fearful suffered their horses to be led off by a horde of little beings scarcely waist high, who capered about squeaking, "DNO, loc, goshwow" and other outlandish things. Motioning the others to sit down the wizard said, "leave your warriors here chiefs, except the Zine family, they will be fed and looked after by my neos" with that he beckoned them on into a passage leading to an inner chamber. In the wizard's quarters he became quite sober, and indeed impressive. "pull up a neo and sit down" he said. Startled the heroes noticed the seats, stools in the form of crouched little people. "Er..er.." stammered Phroe. "Its all right," said Gerbish, "they can't feel a thing. And anyway, that'll larn 'em not to write such lousey loos". Uneasily the quintet took their seats. Neos scrambled in with meat and drink and when all was cleared away again the wizard set himself on fire. Up leapt the startled warriors. "Oh, for ghu' sake sit down", chuckled the Gerbish, "I'm not on fire, merely drinking in smoke".

"I know why you're here, the Gaflings carrying off the Burplings, but I don't think you realise just how serious the situation is". "Well, I don't see how things can get much more serious" said Ompa, "the Burplings will either be sold as slaves or tortured to death". "Now that's where you're wrong" returned the Gerbish, "this is no ordinary Gafling raid. They have a new leader now, an evil wizard from the far west, and his plans are most diabolical! he paused, impressively. "he intends to change by his evil arts the Burplings into Gaflings". There was a stunned silence. "By the holy purple beard of Ghu". breathed Fanna Zine.

"Hmmm" muttered Ompa, "wizardry eh?. I don't like the sound of that one little bit". "Well, we can't just leave them to such a fearful fate", said Fanna fiercely, "We've got to get to them before this wizard bloke does his dirty tricks", turning to Gerbish, "what do you advise O Gerbish?". "I advise that you take me with you", replied the Gerbish smiling.

The next morning they prepared to depart. "Have you still got the ring the druid Penge gave you", enquired Gerbish of Ompa. Which surprised Ompa because only Fanna knew how he'd come by the Midguard ring. "Yes" he said, "why?". "Giss us here a minute", replied Gerbish and, a little reluctantly Ompa did. Gerbish popped it into a little black box, closed the lid and then cranked the handle, muttering things like "Beard of Ghu, Pen of Willis, Eye of Foo Foo, bottle of guinness..." and other mysterious incantations. In a few minutes he finished and fished out the ring. "Here Ompa, put that on", and Ompa put it on. "Do you feel anything" queried the Gerbish?. "Er, no, what should I feel?". "Oh, its all right, if you feel nothing then that means that Nasti O'tule isn't within a mile of you. However," he added, "if he does come you'll get a tic in your finger, stronger in the direction of the enemy.". "This Nasti O'tule, is that the evil wizard you mentioned" asked

Fanna. "Aye, thats him, the leek chewing fiend", agreed Gerbish. Besides him self Gerbish took along a couple of pack animals loaded with heavilly shrouded bundles. "tools of the trade" he commented to the watching Zine's. and a dozen neos to tend to his simple wants.

Climbing into the saddle they set off north, as had been agreed in the discussion the previous night the Gaflings would probably cross the mountain s under cover of the rain that customarily covered all that region. "Besides I think we might consult the gnomes of Salt Ford, if anyone has news of the Gaflings it will be they." said the Gerbish. "Ho," said Fanna, "I've heard of them, little rain shrunkn creatures, not quite men, yet not quite anything else either. But do you think they'll help us?". "Oh, yes, I know them all quite well, and their Shaman, Normshork and Edjons hate the Gaflings as much as I do, having been caught once or twice by them in the past". "Caught by the Gaflings, and escaped!?" exclaimed Gen Zine, who was riding close by, "why, no-one has ever escaped the Gaflings, once taken". there was an uncomfortable silence. They were thinking of the captured Burplings. "Yes, its true. They suffered a great deal, but they escaped" confirmed Gerbish. "But its a different case with the Burplings. I'm sure that Nasti O'tule will have given orders that they be taken good care of, because of course if he succeeds in his evil designs they will be Gaflings too".

They journeyed on and two days later arrived at Salt Ford. Here they were welcomed by Nad, the cheif and his inner council, Chuck the master of disguise, the potion brewer Shork, Antdward, Bilbu, Dabrit, and Edjons. "Ye great boots of Ghu," cried Nad, I'm glad to see you Gerbish, and you too, noble Ompa, Fanna, and so on. You'll never guess," he said, turning to Gerbish again "but just a week ago we had a big fight....with a band of Gaflings!" The travellers muttered in surprise. "What happened" asked Fanna anxiously. "Did you see any captives?" enquired Ompa.

"There were a couple of hundred of them, plus a great many captives, their camp was well guarded so we couldn't do a great deal. But Normshork here brewed a potent stink brew and we gave them not rest all the time they were in our territory, but tossed them stinkbrews night and day from ambush!" "Yes, but then what happened" asked Fanna Zine.. "Well, those that were overcome enough we cut their throats, maybe a score, and" he said with some pride and excitement, "we managed to free some of the prisoners!". "Excellent, excellent!" chuckled Gerbish, "and where are these captives now"? .."Oh, in the village. You see, they were a bit overcome by the stinkbrews too". He led the leaders to the reviving captives while the warriors were led off to be feasted.

Eighteen people had been rescued from the Gaflings, mostly the younger ones, who had been able to run into the forest while their captors had been busy warding off the Madlings attacks. (they later decided to stay with the Madlings and join their tribe). J'rols, the captive who had recovered best, explained how the Gaflings, cleverly disguised as a band of strolling Welsh pastry cooks, had laid on a feast for the unsuspecting Burpling, and had drugged every item on the menu so thoroughly that they had rendered all the Burplings unconscious for four days... "Ah," said Ompa, "that explains why some of them were still there when our messenger got there. They can only have had a day or so's start on us". J'rols further explained that, listening to his captors talk he had discovered that they were bound for the other side of the mountains, to the sinister fortress of Arrow Gait itself. There was a drawing in of breath. "The place of Evil Water" quoth the Gerbish.

The next day it rained and they set off. It rained the next day, and the next, and the next. They were tired, hungry, sodden. But still they struggled on. Shortly after crossing the ford on the Brad river they came to a village

surrounded by soggy fields. The people made them welcome, but were all cast down in a soggy misery. "Never seen owt like it" said cheif Rikharv to the travellers, "I know its a bit damp round here, but we've had rain now for ten full days. Sometimes," he added dolefully, "I think we'll never see the sun again."

Gerbish became thoughtful. "You'd say that this rain was unseasonable"? he asked the cheif. "Unseasonable! its unreasonable, impossible, black magic, its..its.." the cheif looked thoughtful too. "I think you're right chief", said Gerbish, "I should have though of that myself". he then explained the quest to the chief. "Hmm, most like you are right" opinioned Ompa when the Gerbish and chief Rikharv explained to him, "It probably is Nasti O'tule's doing. But what can we do about it", he looked expectantly at the Gerbish. "Why," said the Gerbish, "there's nothing for it but to have a Sun Dance".

The preparations would take a couple of days and Ompa and Fanna fretted as the time went by. "But Gerbish", said Ompa exasperatedly, "every hour is precious. Nasti O'tule may at this very moment casting his evil spells over the hapless Burplings". "I'd thought of that" returned the great Gerbish, "but I believe that the rain is part of Nasti's build up, and if we stop the rain he'll have to start again". "Well, its beyond me, but I take your word for it" replied Ompa.

A chariot was brought out, and painted red all over, "the sun's red see" said Gerbish. Then it was solemnly decked with flowers and annointed with oils. The rain abated not a whit. The villagers and warriors gathered together a great heap of wood for the ceremony, the various principals rehearsed their parts, and at last all was ready.

The Fanlings, Ompalings and the Harvings stood in a circle in the pouring rain. It was no more than a good stones throw from side to side and the heat of the fire made garments steam. Ompa and Fanna saw that the flames kept up.

Gerbish stood in the car, chariot, which had no horses to pull it but instead it was crewed by Rikharv, his wife, and their three daughters. As the wood crackled up on the fire, the rainsudden sky flushed greyly with the dawning. "Now!" cried Gerbish, and as the chariot surged forward, to be dragooned round and round the fire, the crowd solemnly chanted the hymn to the god of light and fertility... "Harrisson, Oh, Harrisson. Harrisson, Ohh Harrisson.." .. their rough voices swelled into a mighty churos; warriors beat their weapons on their sheilds, and the women their spoons on their pots. It was very noisy.

Round and round the chariot was towed and pushed, amid slithering feet and sliding wheels; Gerbish trying to stand up straight and shouting encouraging words to his team. As they came round for the third time the chariot slowed, as the Harvs panted for breath. Uttering one last piercing invocation "Southgate in '58" Gerbish lept from the chariot and lent his strength. As they passed in front of the fire Ompa took from his bosom the rune inscribed parchment, "HYFHEN" it said, whatever than meant, and threw it on the fire as Gerbish had instructed him.

A thousand thunders threashed through the lowering sky; a fearful orange glow, torn by a gask of molted gold red filled the dome of heaven. The rain ceased. The clouds and mist vanished. A golden orb rode in the azure sky. "What is it, what is it" whispered the Harvings fearfully. "Fear not" cried Gerbish, "tis the Sun". "the sun, the sun" muttered the light starved inhabitants, for of course even without Nasti O'tules spells it was rare that all the mist dispersed. "Yes, and if you enact a modified version of this ritual, you may see the sun each year" cried Gerbish.

4

And lo, tis even as Gerbish said, for the mystic rites of the Bradford Sun Dance are practised to this day; in the little known hamlet of Idle, under the direction of the descendants of the chief, even in this year of Our Lord 1970. (scribe).

To continue....Much encouraged our band of hero's set off for Arrow Gait. They had not gone far when they saw the first sign of the Gaflings, "Look" cried young Gen Zine, "a rabbit, cut completely in two!". "No," said Ompa, "its a hare. We are getting into Gafia country now, they always kill hares that way, by splitting them."

Next they came to a forest of wilting trees. "see," said Gerbish, the sunlight has done that. This is the dread forest of Diversions and Lame Excuses; it can't stand the sunlight". "Ah, I've heard of it" commented Fanna, "its lucky you did do the Sun Dance, I can't believe we would have gotten through in the darkness and rain".

Through the forest they went, and stood at last on the edge of a vast area of lake and swamp. "This is the Lake of False Horizons, surrounded by the Swamp of Apathy; there, do you see that shadow" They looked in the direction Gerbish pointd. "There lies Arrow Gait, the city of Foul Waters, and the stronghold of the Gaflings".

That evening they stopped within a short ride of the walls of Arrow Gait.; according to plan. While some warriors busied themselves lighting cooking fires; more than they needed and not near the real camp; others helped the Gerbish to set up his occult equipment. "I want it set up here, in the trees, with the swamp in front like that; and your men to be distributed as I've indicated", said Gerbish. "Hmm," replied Ompa, "I hope this works." "Oh, its bound to. Nasti is sure to know that there are only fifty of us, and the Gaflings could never resist a night attack, as darkness is their element". "Well, what about these things" said Ompa, indicating a box of what looked like fairy horse shoes". "Ah, those are staples from ten consecutive issues of Ape, strew them in the swampp just at the edge of the thepath. They'll cripple and Gafling who treads on them".

At last all was ready. The warriors, their trusty blades dipped in corflu, lay just inside the forest. To their left the campfires, to their right Arrow Gait.

Midnight ghosted up on misty swamp sodden wings, and a soft squelching was heard by Ompa, who was the man nearest to Arrow Gait. Quiet figures, row after row, shuffled almost silently along, between the swamp and the forest. He tugged at his length of string three times, it jerked the next warriors big toe, the agreed signal! The end man on the left was Fanna. As the leading Gaflings came into sound, fifty feet down the path he sent them signal to Gerbish.

The night lit up with a daylightbeam and a roar. The Fanlings and Ompalings came to their feet and charged at the enemy. Behind them, leaping among the trees, lit with the weird light a vast host of warriors milled and growled and poured towards the Gaflings. Who stood. For a moment. In astonishment, rooted, pale, aghast. Then as the swords of the warriors started to fall amongst them they, with a concerted moad of terror, fled. Into the swamp, where they were decimated by the staples. Where they stumbled and rose no more. Where they fled and fled, away from the Ompalings, away from the Fanlings, away from Arrow Gait. And away from Gerbish and his magic lantern.

"On, on to Arrow Gait" cried Ompa, "We'll get through the gates before they realise that we are not their own returning men". And off they trooped. Up the track, singing and shouting, calling out cheerfully to the watch; and they were let in. Cries of "Treachery!" rang through the damp night air.

Scattering handfuls of the deadly-to-Gafians staples as they fought and ran the warrior band, headed by Ompa, Fanna and the Gerbish, struggled towards the Crystal Palace, releasing by lucky chance, the Burpling prisoners and many more as they proceeded. (these releasees armed themselves and were soon wreaking vengeance).

Nasti O'tule had barricaded himself in the Pump Room, that place of evil and unspeakable horror, where hapless prisoners were forced to drink pot upon pot of the stomach wrenching Spa Water. (so called from the sound made after drinking it...sppaaarrrrrrhrrr !!!)

Too late the heroes cut their way through the last of the elite guards, the Foul Fighting Fuggheads. There, in the middle of the Pump Room, stood Nasti O'tule, in a strange ceramic and metal device. "Curse you, curse you all" he screamed peevishly. "I shall yet wreak my vengeance. Beware Ompa of the sly Laotivity, who will creep upon thee in the night; and Fanna shall not escape the clammy clutches of the Hecto Hexer. And as for you," his voice rose even higher, "the Gerbish, may you be afflicted with the curse of Short Time and Too Much Work, may spiders drop in your ale...." He ceased as the trio advanced menacingly upon him. His lips curled in a sneer. "Farewell, we shall meet again" he cried, and pulled upon a laughing chain. There was a gurgle and a rush of many waters, and the old Nast? Vanished into the depths of his ceramic machine.

"Ah, too late, too late" lamented the Gerbish. "I should have known that he would wriggle out of our trap somehow. He has a knack for it you know", he observed.

A week later the Omplings, Fanlings and some other set off to return to their tribes. But Gerbish and most of the Burplings remained in Arrow Gait. "It may be that I can discover some of Nasti's evil secrets" explained the Gerbish, "for I've no doubt that we shall be hearing of him again; and from the Gafplings". The Burplings decided that, cleared of Nasti O'tule and the Gafplings, Arrow Gait was quite a nice piece of real estate, good strong walls, solid houses, and a good lot of fertile land once they'd drained the swamp. (their descendants....oh, you knew?, live there to this day.....)

They made their way, not leisurely but not tarrying either, back to wards their own country. Eventually, one bright morning, they saw the smoke of home. As they rode nearer a peculiar expression passed, and fixed itself, on Ompa's face. He waved his right hand about. Then reined in his horse.

"What's the matter Ompa", asked Fanna, concernedly. Ompa looked worried and grim. "You remember Gerbish worked some spell on my Midguard ring, so that I could detect Nasti O'tule?" he said. "Why, yes, is something wrong then?" responded Fanna. "Something is very definitely wrong" said Ompa grimly. "I've been getting twitches in my finger ever since we sighted the village!" "You think we're being followed" queried Fanna looking round. "No," replied Ompa, "the signals are getting stronger and are coming straight from there". He pointed directly at the sleepy, peaceful village of the Fanling which lay ahead.

-----might be continued some time....

kmpe.

WHATSIT 21 for October 1971. Ken Cheslin, 36 Chapel Street, Worsley, Stourbridge, Worcestershire, England.

ompa63ompa63ompa63whatsit21whatsit21whatsit21ompa63ompa63ompa63whatsit21ompa63

....due to circumstances previously related about the year 3,000, Christian Era, after the discovery of a FTL drive and the exploration and colonisation of a few hundred star systems, humanity, and its friends-and-d-allies picked up in the last 1,000 years meet a threat of extinction by scattering all sorts of ships, loaded with all sorts of people, to all the (poetically speaking) corners of the galaxy, and nearby ones.

One ship, after 2,000 years or so, arrives in another galaxy, finds another star system, and a suitable planet. All this by the ship's own brain while the passengers Deep Sleep. The ship unloads at 9 different points, (after a 200 year seeding-exploring wait) but before it has started to do more than unload the passengers, it is disabled and, together with its ferries, soft-crashes on one of the two moons.

The previous story recounted how, when it was obvious that something had gone wrong with the ship, one landing group, drawn mostly from the Scandinavian-Polyresian planet of Ottoheim, split up. Some stayed hopefully waiting, some drifted off; one party elected leaders and made a planned secession.

Trekking across the steppe-pampas-veld north-east towards their objective, they are in a grove of trees round a water hole when the horizon is suddenly filled with running animals. A migration or stampede.

Ivan MacNally, sometime geologist-in-training, married a mere 2,000 years ago, a month before the Trip, felt a surge of panic. But he stopped to look round for Irene. The party was fairly tightly grouped. "Hold still" commanded Brian O'Dowd. "We have nearly two minutes before they get here. Quickly, pick up your breakables and pair up. Two to a tree. They have stood here for a good many years by the look of them, they'll not fall in the face of this." Seeing Irene teamed up Ivan joined the nearest person Gerald Twell, and between them they climbed 20 or 30 feet up a strongish tree. Brian O'Dowd was still on the ground, less than a minute had passed. Confirming by shouts that everyone was treed Brian hoisted himself off the ground too. The thunder of hooves and the clunk clunk of horns, rather like the loud spitting of a fire if green branches, the bellowing, and the dust made it impossible to hear. The herd seemed to consist of some sort of wild cattle, longhorned and humpbacked. From his tree Ivan could see no prairie, but only dust, horns and humping backs of the cattle, from horizon to horizon. The herd went on, the noise went on. Throats got dryer and ropes were used to tie weary bodies to the safety of bough. Several animals hit a tree every minute, but although the humans were sometimes shaken, the trees did not seem to receive severe damage. The sun was considerably lower in the sky when the herd started thinning out. Slow animals, limping animals, cows with young calves, and animals more severely wounded came along, and with them, tearing at the dead and injured came the predators. Large cougar-like animals were rare, then there were some gigantic wolf-like creatures, in packs of six or seven, and then many bands of smaller, wolfish predators, and then a hodgepodge of smaller scavengers. "The velt country contains more life than one would think" said Twell thoughtfully. "Those are nasty-looking brutes" replied Ivan, indicating the Feris-wolves especially. "It's not long now until sunset, I don't fancy bedding down with those things around" said Twell. "It's lucky we haven't run into them before" rejoined Ivan, "and, my skin creeps when I think what would have happened if we'd been caught in the open by that stampede".

The leaders called the group down from their trees at that juncture, to gather wood for fires and as a defence; and to salvage equipment left on the ground, and to cut meat for the evening meal from the carcasses in the vicinity. Thrór K'ney instructed; "what we can eat and keep for a day of so, bring in. The rest drag away from the trees, we don't want to attract more of those wolf things than necessary".

The next day they started a little late, having first of all paused to check for losses. Due to good luck, good habits, and Brian O'dowds ordered retreat up the trees, nothing more than a few garments had been lost. It was also decided that, not knowing the frequency of the migrations, or what ever it was, it would be safest if they proceeded from cover to cover, instead of directly across the open. This was not too difficult as the occasional clump of trees was eked out by groups of thorn trees, or outcrops of rock.

The next ten days were without great incident. There were scares and accidents, but nothing to slow them down. By this time, the twelfth since they had left the landing site, the mountains were visible to the north-east.

Ivan, a lad of fifteen named Kristan and a woman of fifteen named Y'lia were scouting ahead that day. They were sitting on an outcrop of rock, at noon, waiting for the main party to draw a little nearer before going further on.

"Over the mountains. That's not very far now. They are not much more than another couple of days away now" rambled Ivan. "How high are they, will we have trouble crossing them" asked Kristan, "and what's it like on the other side" put in Y'lia. They were not so much asking, as talking to themselves, wondering about the future as sentient beings will.

They roused themselves as the main group got nearer. They waved and indicated the carcass of the deer they were leaving, then set out on the next lap. "That broken ground with the clump of thorn bushes is the best cover in the line we're going" said Ivan. "Creep up quietly when we get near, there may be water and game".

As they passed the rocky place they came to a clearing. There were rocks this side of it, thorns the other three sides, and a spring trickling down the middle. There was also some "game". They stopped, a massive head, muzzle dripping water, looked up. It was something like a triceratops, but the size of an Earth rhinoceros. His eyes were bigger; and perhaps his temper shorter. The beast turned round and charged straight for them. They turned and ran for the rocks. Y'lia stumbled, got up, and was caught. She flew through the air, blood streaming from her side; and landed on a rock, too high to be finished off by the beast shorting running up and down below. Ivan and Kristan made it to two other rocks. The "rhino" patrolling swiftly and angrily between them. Ivan still had a javelin, they had no other weapon.

"Looks as if we're here until it decides to go home" called Kristan, who was looking pale and sick and trying not to look at Y'lia. Ivan looked out, back the way they had come. The first figures were on the last outcrop. Soon they would be crossing the open velt towards them. Kristan followed his gaze. "Ho. what happens when rover-boy here sees that lot" he said. They both stood up and waved and yelled. Those that saw waved cheerfully back. "Goddamn! Goddamn! god-bloody-damn!" swore Ivan. "Look Kristan, we can't let the beast catch them out in the open, we'll have to lure him out of the rocks where they can see him, so they can get back to the rocks!" They made a dangerous way over the rock, the beast getting more furious, until they could go no further. There they waved and shouted again. The beast, because of the lie of the ground, could not be seen from the main party. They waved and shouted. "Look" cried Kristan, "thank god" said Ivan. The group had stopped and were retreating to the rocks. Then, "Oh no". a small group had detached itself and was coming towards them.

The party consisted of Olaf Ragnarsson and four others, Olaf carried one of the great axes, the others javelins and bows.

They had looked across and seen waving. Thrór thought that it would be best if the main party waited. "Y'lia is missing, perhaps she has been hurt and they are calling for help. But the motions they are making are not much like beckoning. Olaf, will you take a party and go see what has happened?", and they were on their way.

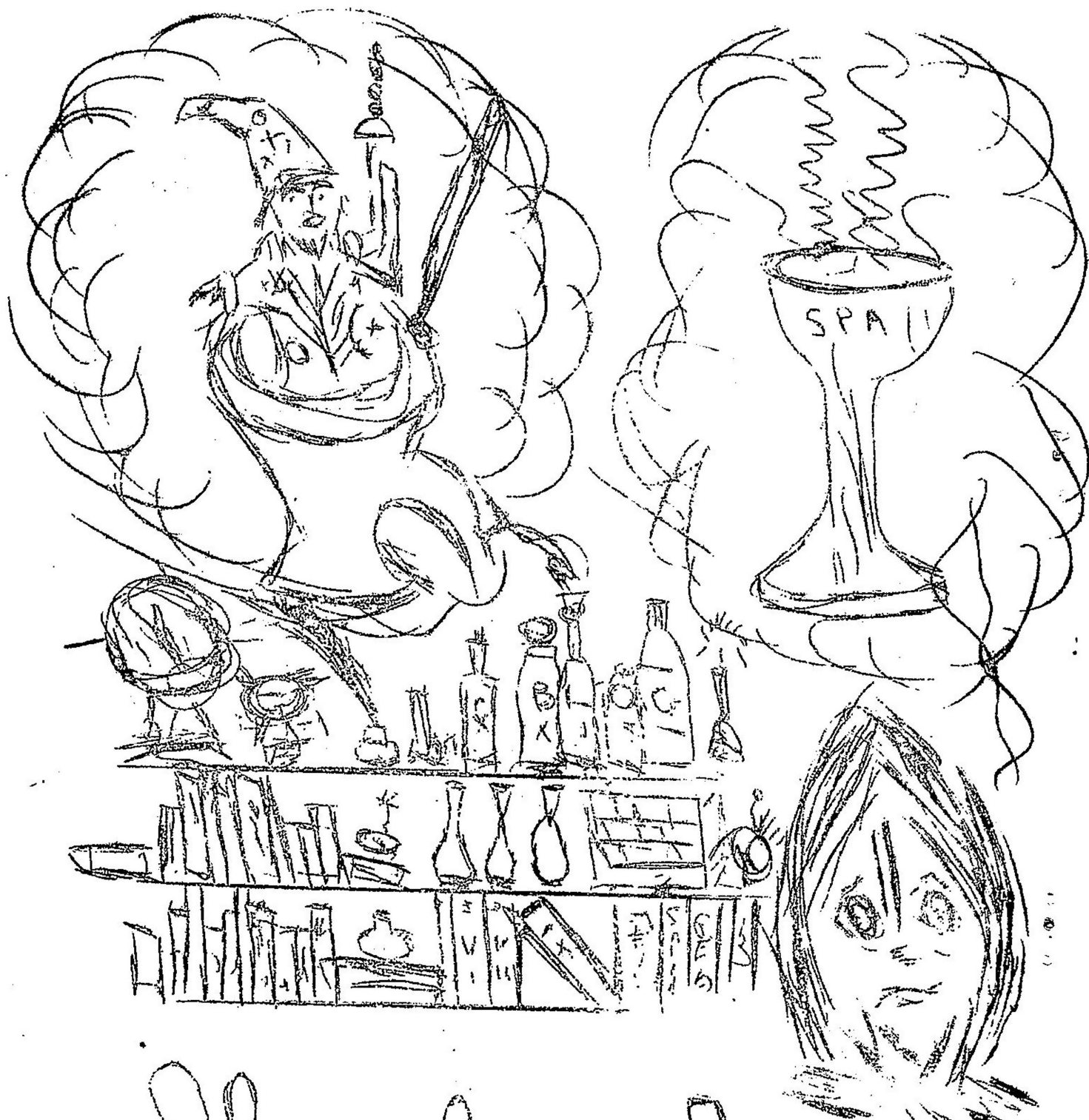
The beast scented, or heard the shout of, the others before they were near enough to understand what Ivan was shouting. There was a snort and a beat of hoofs; and the rhino appeared before the "relief" party. It flashed nearer as they strove to get moving. "To the rocks, the rocks" yelled Ivan and Kristan together. The group broke and ran. One down and torn and trampled, the others near the rocks and a steamroller and rip saw catches another. Safe the survivors and Ivan and Kristan look down at the circling, bloody, bloodthirsty beast.

They retained some weapons. "Try your bow of him Alf", called Olaf, and Alf tried, the arrows bounced. The javelins, one from Ivan and one from P'ketetaranguragong, (Pongo) fared better. Pongo lost his down the beast throat, drawing blood, while Ivan's wounded an eye. None of this seriously discommoded the beast. The sat. They thought. They looked all about them and discussed it. Time passed, the beast still patrolled. "It's no good," said Olaf, "if we hang on too long one of us will fall off a rock, and in any case, even if it wanders off he might hang around, and attack again, or he might attack the others, unsuspecting". "So, what do you propose" asked Alf. "I'll get a bit lower down and tempt him within axe range. These plasteel axes are unstoppable, I'll try to knock him off with it". no-one elaborated on the dangers of slipping, misjudging the reach of the beast, the possibility of missing; and so on. Olaf carefully lowered himself down until he was only a foot higher than the beast's horn, and then began to yell to get its attention. It worked. The beast thundered up, paused, and reared up to get higher than the rock, making a lightning sideways sweep as it did so. It nearly got Olaf, but, leaping swiftly back, then forward, he brought the axe down where the neck joined the massive jaw. There was a raw and a wild scrabble, the creature, enraged and pained charred again, axe still embedded, and lept onto the ledge Olaf had just managed to scramble back from. It scrabbled and fumbled and bled copiously for ten minutes. Then its snorts got more bubbly, and it panted froth, and it wheezed. Finally, half an hour later, it fell on its side and expired.

.....

The dead were buried, Y'lia though in a bad way lived. They stayed there that night. "We know in a general way what to expect in the way of animal life" remarked Olaf to Thrór, but we don't really realise yet that the rhino or beastie we read about in the book is a very different kettle of fish when you meet it in real life.". "What was that thing?" asked Kanaka. "I'd guess that it was one of the native animals; though we can't discount the possibility that it might have been seeded by the ship; being a native of one of the other Earth-type planets". "How about mutation, or selection" "What, in two hundred years?.. no far too soon".

Grima spoke up. "Well, we'll be out of this velt in a day or so. How much farther do you reckon Pele?". "As close as I can tell we have hit the mountains a little south of the ismuth. We will have to get to the other side, say three or four days, depending on the weather, the mountains and so on, hmm, and then north along the coast. Of course, how far we go after that is up to all of us to decide". "So, another week" mused Brian.



Whatvit 21