Games From Folktales

A free podcast for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

April - July 2022

Games From Folktales is a labour of love for me,
but it is covering all of its hosting bills thanks to
the Patreonage of the following people:

Antonio G.
Steve Parenteau
Imreai
Dalton Parker
Kyle Fischer
Raúl Trullenque Viudas
Eric H.
John Robotcop
Benjamin Gratch
The Ranting Savant
Thomas Stewart
Ben McFarland
Anonymous
Jason Tondro
Daniel Jensen
Dan Cassar
Sharao
Pantelis Polakis

To join them, please visit https://www.patreon.com/TimothyFerguson

Original images sourced from CC0 sites

The theme music for the podcast comes from Free Music Archive's public domain collection.
It is "The Fall of the Village of the Infinitesimal Forest at the Hands of the Royal Aggressor :
An Epic in Seven Parts" by Room 34.

Librivox is an online community group that records books
published before 1925 into the public domain.
Thanks to the readers, producers and editors.

The City of Dreadful Night James "B.V." Thomson

I'd prepped most of this for my "Stories I've tried to write week" and then a plot idea emerged. I was discussing things with Andrew, over on a Shewstone planning list, and while we were discussing something else entirely he gave me the key to moving this post to a workable series of scenarios for Ars Magica. It might also work for Magonomia, but I'd need to think about it rather harder. I'm already working on a shadow-city for Ars Magica, and a Shadow London seems a bite too many.

There's a lengthy poem by James Thomson called "The City of Dreadful Night" where he lays the nihilism on so thick that people at the time of publication were impressed by how unremittingly bleak it is. He never lets a crack of hope get in, other than the contemplation that at least death is the end of all this pain and bother. This may, of course, seem a bit obvious and played out to modern readers, because agnostic materialism is popular now, but at the time he was considered a bizarre bird. He didn't go in for Decadence, which was the popular line for nihilists at the time. Later in the year I'll share his version of Swinburne's three ladies, and you'll see that his approach is not opium and debauchery in the face of inevitable death. He'd just like to pick the death that is most pleasant, and ask her to get on with it. His angels of insomnia are awesome too, and they'll also be by later.

My initial plan was to use a section of the poem each post for "Every Day In May", but I don't want to snow my distribution channels with nihilism. My current plan is to take this poem and break it into four sections, describing the plot hooks in each. Unlike other long poems, which I've played and then commented on, for this one it'll be comments, then the poem as demonstration.

The City of Dreadful Night is a regio that seeks out sleepers and takes their dreaming selves. It is a nightmare, yes, but worse, it also seems to claim people after death. Having dreamt of the City, you are more likely to dream again of the City. The City is filled with vignettes of hopelessness. I thought it was useless as a play setting, because the vignettes are too static.

Then I remembered the Hounds of God. In Ars Magica there's an order of werewolves who annually storm Hell and break the place up, stealing the fertility of the Earth back from Satan. Why not just let the players loose on the vignettes, to break the place up and wreck it for whatever is making this place so terrible?

Certainly, this is a betrayal of Thompson's intention: you are not, as reader meant, to imagine yourself tracing a sleeper back to the earth and giving him a dose of Creo Mentem spells. You are not meant to imagine a magician putting a net under the bridge over the River of Suicides It might not be entirely in the spirit of the thing to fling Pila of Fire at the infernal toll collectors at Hell's Gate. Then again, Thomson is dead and expected very little of posterity, so I feel that by disappointing him, I'd give him a grim satisfaction.

To skip to the end, to give some structure, there is one creature that may act as a lynchpin for the regio, either a saviour for the people, or their oppressor. It is mentioned in the last chapter, so I wanted to give her now, as context. A statue of the Goddess of Melecolia lies outside the city, on the bare northern plateau, so that it is visible much of the time. The narrator seems to find some peace in knowing that others are suffering much as he is. The goddess is based on a print by Durer, Melencholia I. Yes, the spelling is irregular – there's some debate as to if he meant Melancholia or something more obscure. There's a plethora of discussion of this engraving and I'd suggest you look it up. Much like Durer's figure, the goddess of the city of night is surrounded by magical and geometrical instruments. She may be a spirit of alchemy, and she has the first magic square seen in European print. Also, what the "I" stands for is unclear: she may be a guide to the first stage of alchemy (black stone, disintegration) or it may be a reference to Durer, or there may be three lost prints for the other Temperaments based on bodily humours. A very high quality scan is available from Wikipedia which describes the objects in the image.

The City of Dreadful Night was recorded for Librivox by MoonLylith. Thanks to the reader and their production team.

The proem describes why he wrote the book. If you say "Hey, everything is terrible and pointless." you need to explain why to put your pen to paper. In Ars Magica terms, it lets you get back a Confidence point, because it gives you the solace of knowing you are not alone. It also seems likely that if you have some of the positive emotional or spiritual Virtues, you simply cannot read this text. You need to be a melancholy sort. My question is, if you are a melancholy sort and read this book in the real world, does it make the regio come for you? Is this, in essence, a seed or doorway for the Infernal?

PROEM

Lo, thus, as prostrate, “In the dust I write
My heart’s deep languor and my soul’s sad tears.”
Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
To blot the sunshine of exultant years?
Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life’s discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless innocence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe’er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try;
So may they flourish in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.
If any cares for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hopes are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight;
“I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.”

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore?
Nay, be assured; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before:
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

There is some note of a mystery lore here: an Area Lore for the city perhaps? Characters who want to destroy the city may find a certain satisfaction in learning its Lore, and sealing its mysteries.

Chapter one lays out the mood and nature of the city. The city is only manifest by night, but characters who visit it do not regain Fatigue. The city is a lot like London, but might be anywhere. Its streetlamps beam, but the houses are rarely lit. The houses have people in them, perhaps, asleep or dead, but they may have fled. If they are there, asleep, is it wrong to wake them, or is it better to put others to sleep? Note that the Vine of Death may be taken, literally, as a vis source.

I

The City is of Night; perchance of Death
But certainly of Night; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air:
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity
The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
Though present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day.
But when a dream night after night is brought
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
The while all change and many vanish quite,
In their recurrence with recurrent changes
A certain seeming order; where this ranges
We count things real; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth;
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon
For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges;
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains;
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

The city is not ruinous, although
Great ruins of an unremembered past,
With others of a few short years ago
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.
The street-lamps always burn; but scarce a casement
In house or palace front from roof to basement
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amid the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of ranged mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense
Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping:
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence!

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there: worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,
A woman rarely, now and then a child:
A child! If here the heart turns sick with ruth
To see a little one from birth defiled,
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with anguish
To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak
To one another seldom, for their woe
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak
Itself abroad; and if at whiles it grow
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,
To rave in turn, who lends attentive show.

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

They leave all hope behind who enter there:
One certitude while sane they cannot leave,
One anodyne for torture and despair;
The certitude of Death, which no reprieve
Can put off long; and which, divinely tender,
But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render
That draught whose slumber nothing can bereave (1).

Footnote:

(1) Though the Garden of thy Life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit-trees barren, over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will.

In the next section the narrator follows a man, because the man seems to be walking somewhere with purpose. He discovers that the man is actually walking a ceaseless triangle between three ruins, where he lost three of his virtues. That's not anything a player can, superficially do anything about. Arguably he can't even kill the man because it the city the living and the dead are difficult to tell apart, although the city does seem to allow suicide. He's very like a ghost, in Ars Magica, circling a final business monomaniacally.

The thing the player can do is destroy the triangle. Love is hard to meddle with in, but they might rekindle his failed Hope using scraps and clues in his former lodging. They might rekindle his Faith at the broken church. At minimum, they could destroy the three sites, and block the streets to them, so that he cannot make his ceaseless, pointless perambulation. They can force the cogs of the clock to stop.

II

Because he seemed to walk with an intent
I followed him; who, shadowlike and frail,
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,
Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil:
Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused: a black mass in the gloom,
A tower that merged into the heavy sky;
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb:
Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty:
He murmured to himself with dull despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more
And travelled weary roads without suspense;
And reached at last a low wall's open door,
Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense:
He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,
And travelled street and lanes with wondrous strength,
Until on stooping through a narrow arch
We stood before a squalid house at length:
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard
In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines:
Where Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
The works proceed until run down; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

Then turning to the right paced on again,
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose glooms
Seemed more and more familiar to my ken;
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs;
And paused to murmur with the old despair,
Hear Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife:
He circled thus forever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of Life;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.

In Ars Magica, many regiones have "tempers", which are inclinations toward emotional states or desired actions. The temper of the City, as given in the next section, is "Living death". It tries to sap away all ability to change or hope. It sucks vitality almost like a dark faerie.

IIII

Although lamps burn along the silent streets,
Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats;
But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns:
The night remains for it as dark and dense,
Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns
As in the daylight with its natural sense;
Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,
Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep
Becomes familiar though unreconciled;
Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,
And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision;
but all more dubious than the things of vision,
So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,
But wonder ceases soon; the weirdest thing
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law
Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king;
Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,
Dazed with mysteries of woe and error,
The soul is too outworn for wondering.

In this next section we see that the city obeys Ars Magica's triparate division of the self, but in a terrible way. The self is divided into the body, the soul, and the spirit. The body is the mortal part, the soul the eternal, and the spirit the part that allows the soul's will to drive the meat, and becomes a ghost if one arises. Animals have spirits, but no souls.

Here, a prophet lost in the wilderness outside the city is saved by a dreadful vision. His soul is saved, and his body drawn away. What rest, then, for what remains of him, his haunting spirit? The player characters could perhaps lay him to rest.

IV

He stood alone within the spacious square
Declaiming from the central grassy mound,
With head uncovered and with streaming hair,
As if large multitudes were gathered round:
A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,
The glances burning with unnatural light:—

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: All was black,
In heaven no single star, on earth no track;
A brooding hush without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat;
And thus for hours; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings:
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Eyes of fire
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire;
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death;
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold:
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Lo you, there,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare;
Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro;
A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell
For Devil's roll-call and some fete of Hell:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Meteors ran
And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span;
The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame;
The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Air once more,
And I was close upon a wild sea-shore;
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,
The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand;
White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept and flew;
The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: On the left
The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft;
There stopped and burned out black, except a rim,
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim;
Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: From the right
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light;
A woman with a red lamp in her hand,
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand;
O desolation moving with such grace!
O anguish with such beauty in thy face!
I fell as on my bier,
Hope travailed with such fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon and her;
And she came on, and never turned aside,
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide:
And as she came more near
My soul grew mad with fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Hell is mild
And piteous matched with that accursed wild;
A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,
A broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud;
That lamp she held was her own burning heart,
Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart:
The mystery was clear;
Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: By the sea
She knelt and bent above that senseless me;
Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair;
She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
She heeded not the level rushing flow:
And mad with rage and fear,
I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: When the tide
Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne
Away, and this vile me was left forlorn;
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart:
They love; their doom is drear,
Yet they nor hope nor fear;
But I, what do I here?

In this next section we see a person awaken from the regio. The key point is that it's not an escape: this break comes only about a quarter the way through the poem. The players could use this time to find a cure: to break the regio's tether.

V

How he arrives there none can clearly know;
Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,
Or down the river's boiling cataracts:
To reach it is as dying fever-stricken
To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken;
And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

But being there one feels a citizen;
Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn:
Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again?
And yet release does come; there comes a morn
When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly
That all the world is changed for him completely,
And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,
He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst;
Never again will he approach the range
Infected by that evil spell now burst:
Poor wretch! who once hath paced that dolent city
Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,
With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,
A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,
And love them more than death or happy life,
They shall avail not; he must dree his weird;
Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared.

VI

I sat forlornly by the river-side,
And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden stars
Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier bars;
And heard the heave and plashing of the flow
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk;
And under one, a few steps from my seat,
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,
Although I had not heard approaching feet:
These bodiless voices in my waking dream
Flowed dark words blending with sombre stream:—

And you have after all come back; come back.
I was about to follow on your track.
And you have failed: our spark of hope is black.

That I have failed is proved by my return:
The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn,
But listen; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,
"Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here:"

And would have passed in, gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast;
First leave your hopes behind!—But years have passed
Since I left all behind me, to the last:

You cannot count for hope, with all your wit,
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit:
How could I seek to enter void of it?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole
Without the payment of the settled toll?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest:
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest;
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box; whose lid shall shut,
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it; but
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate;
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,
Squares back his shoulders, breathes will all his might,
And briskly paces forward strong and light:

But these, as if they took some burden, bowed;
The whole frame sank; however strong and proud
Before, they crept in quite infirm and cowed.

And as they passed me, earnestly from each
A morsel of his hope I did beseech,
To pay my entrance; but all mocked my speech.

No one would cede a little of his store,
Though knowing that in instants three or four
He must resign the whole for evermore.

So I returned. Our destiny is fell;
For in this Limbo we must ever dwell,
Shut out alike from heaven and Earth and Hell.

The other sighed back, Yea; but if we grope
With care through all this Limbo's dreary scope,
We yet may pick up some minute lost hope;

And sharing it between us, entrance win,
In spite of fiends so jealous for gross sin:
Let us without delay our search begin.

The odd thing in the preceding section is that the spirit the narrator is talking to already has hope. He feels they might find a grain of hope, but that feeling would, itself, suffice to allow him to pass into Hell. He's kept in this almost-Limbo by a misunderstanding or a lie.

The box into which the spirits fling their hope is the box of Pandora, from which hope originally came. If you were to find enough hope to fill the box, the hellgate would close. Can the player characters find a spirit of hope and put it in the box?

VII

Some say that phantoms haunt those shadowy streets,
And mingle freely there with sparse mankind;
And tell of ancient woes and black defeats,
And murmur mysteries in the grave enshrined:
But others think them visions of illusion,
Or even men gone far in self-confusion;
No man there being wholly sane in mind.

And yet a man who raves, however mad,
Who bares his heart and tells of his own fall,
Reserves some inmost secret good or bad:
The phantoms have no reticence at all:
The nudity of flesh will blush though tameless
The extreme nudity of bone grins shameless,
The unsexed skeleton mocks shroud and pall.

I have seen phantoms there that were as men
And men that were as phantoms flit and roam;
Marked shapes that were not living to my ken,
Caught breathings acrid as with Dead Sea foam:

The City rests for man so weird and awful,
That his intrusion there might seem unlawful,
And phantoms there may have their proper home.

Phantoms can be destroyed with Lay To Rest the Haunting Spirit.

VIII

In this next section we see the sin of denying the spirit, which is a mortal sin.

While I still lingered on that river-walk,
And watched the tide as black as our black doom,
I heard another couple join in talk,
And saw them to the left hand in the gloom
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

"I never knew another man on earth
But had some joy and solace in his life,
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife:
My doom has been unmitigated dearth."

"We gaze upon the river, and we note
The various vessels large and small that float,
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat."

"And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth;
But homely love with common food and health,
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil."

"This all-too-humble soul would arrogate
Unto itself some signalising hate
From the supreme indifference of Fate!"

"Who is most wretched in this dolorous place?
I think myself; yet I would rather be
My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

"The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord!
Creator of all woe and sin! abhorred
Malignant and implacable! I vow

"That not for all Thy power furled and unfurled,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world."

"As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain!

"The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

“While air of Space and Time’s full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so:
It may be wearing out, but who can know?

“Man might know one thing were his sight less dim;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

“Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.”

IX

There are ships in the river, and drays in the streets. There must be manufacturing of something occurring here. The player characters could trace and destroy that industry.

It is full strange to him who hears and feels,
When wandering there in some deserted street,
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet:
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth?
Who in this city of the stars abideth
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet?

The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky
As it comes on; the horses snort and strain,
The harness jingles, as it passes by;
The hugeness of an overburthened wain:
A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges:
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise? whence, whither, and for whom?
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,
Bearing away to some mysterious tomb
Or Limbo of the scornful universe
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions
Of all things good which should have been our portions,
But have been strangled by that City’s curse.

X

Here, the City perverts the True Love Virtue, which so often defies the Infernal, by twisting it into idolatry. The players can end it by breaking the tableau somehow.

The mansion stood apart in its own ground;
In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,
High trees about it, and the whole walled round:
The massy iron gates were both withdrawn;
And every window of its front shed light,
Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still
As all the countless bulks of solid gloom;
Perchance a congregation to fulfil
Solemnities of silence in this doom,
Mysterious rites of dolour and despair
Permitting not a breath or chant of prayer?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad
Whereon lay still light from the open door;
The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,
Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor;
And ample stairways rose to left and right
Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,
Nor any life throughout the maze discerned;
But each was hung with its funereal pall,
And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,
With picture or with statue or with bust,
all copied from the same fair form of dust:

A woman very young and very fair;
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth:
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,
these shapes lit up that mausolean night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,
And reached an open oratory hung
With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse;
Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung;
And one lay there upon a low white bed,
With tapers burning at the foot and head:

The Lady of the images, supine,
Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay:
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine
A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray:
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white
Surmounted the large altar left in night:—

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,
With eyes forever fixed upon that face,
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there;
As patient as a statue carved in stone,
Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move;
And something tells me thou wilt never wake,
And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,
Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,
Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death,
For either shall be ever at thy side,
And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.—

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,
Intent upon that uncorrupted face,
Entranced except his moving lips alone:
I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.
This was the festival that filled with light
That palace in the City of the Night.

Episode Two

For this episode we return to the City of Dreadful Night. Rather than popping in so regularly after each section, I'll give brief comments here. Much of the section is centred on a cathedral where a group of parishioners enter after they give a password, in which they discard their mortal circumstances. The preacher is a mouthpiece for the author, giving a sermon on nihilism. In Ars Magica this might be the central villain. It could be a False God designed using the rules in Realms of Power : The Infernal or the preacher for such an infernal presence, so that the characters need to track him back to his master.

The narrator does see one change: a statue of an angel attacks the statue of a sphinx and loses first its divine nature, then its weapon, then its semblance of life. Clearly there's something there fighting the nature of the place, however ineffectively.

The ending is the mysterious Melencoly I, discussed last week. Over again to our reader, MoonLylith.

XI

What men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,
And fill their living mouths with dust of death,
And make their habitations in the tombs,
And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,
And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error
To reach that void of darkness and old terror
Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith?

They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,
They have much goodness yet they do not well,
(The fools we know have their own paradise,
The wicked also have their proper Hell);
They have much strength but still their doom is stronger,
Much patience but their time endureth longer,
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane:
And outward madness not to be controlled;
A perfect reason in the central brain,
Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,
And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly
The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly
To cheat itself refusing to behold.

And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
And some renowned for genius and for worth;
And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth
Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life: yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.

XII

Our isolated units could be brought
To act together for some common end?
For one by one, each silent with his thought,
I marked a long loose line approach and wend
Athwart the great cathedral's cloistered square,
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow in among the last:
And in the porch a shrouded figure stood,
Who challenged each one pausing ere he passed,
With deep eyes burning through a blank white hood:
Whence come you in the world of life and light
To this our City of Tremendous Night?—

From pleading in a senate of rich lords
For some scant justice to our countless hordes
Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee
By my transcendent feats of mimicry,
And humour wanton as an elvish sprite:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable
Of love and adoration and delight:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne
A nation which beneath my rule has grown
Year after year in wealth and arts and might:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,
Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-white:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From drinking fiery poison in a den
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace
First Eden and the parents of our race,
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan
To justify the ways of God to man,
And show how ill must fade and perish quite:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From desperate fighting with a little band
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,
To free our brethren in their own despite:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,
Each one responded with his countersign,
Then entered the cathedral; and in turn
I entered also, having given mine;
But lingered near until I heard no more,
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII

Of all things human which are strange and wild
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,
And showeth man most utterly beguiled,
To those who haunt that sunless City's range;
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating
How Time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days;
The burden of the months he scarce can bear;
And often in his secret soul he prays
To sleep through barren periods unaware,
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure;
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make
Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us;
This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,
Wounded and slow and very venomous;
Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and ocean,
Distilling poison at each painful motion,
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright
The little time here given him in trust,
But wasteth it in weary undelight
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust,
He naturally claimeth to inherit
The everlasting Future, that his merit
May have full scope; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,
O nights that are as aeons of slow pain,
O Time, too ample for our vital powers,
O Life, whose woeful vanities remain
Immutable for all of all our legions
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,
Not of your speed and variance WE complain.

WE do not ask a longer term of strife,
Weakness and weariness and nameless woes;
We do not claim renewed and endless life
When this which is our torment here shall close,
An everlasting conscious inanition!
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

XIV

Large glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there;
And all was hush: no swelling organ-strain,
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer;
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls
Leaned men and shadows; others seemed to brood
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.
Perchance they were not a great multitude
Save in that city of so lonely streets
Where one may count up every face he meets.

All patiently awaited the event
Without a stir or sound, as if no less
Self-occupied, doomstricken while attent.
And then we heard a voice of solemn stress
From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet:

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes
Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow;
The head behind it of enormous size.
And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed:—

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark!
O battling in black floods without an ark!
O spectral wanderers of unholy Night!
My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears:
Oh dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light!

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale;
Your woe hath been my anguish; yea, I quail
And perish in your perishing unblest.
And I have searched the highths and depths, the scope
Of all our universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:
There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life;
Whom we must curse because the life he gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
Could not be killed by poison or the knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
To other beings with their own time-doom:
Infinite aeons ere our kind began;
Infinite aeons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.

We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate:
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of Fate?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit:
If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;
I find alone Necessity Supreme;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

O Brothers of sad lives! they are so brief;
A few short years must bring us all relief:
Can we not bear these years of laboring breath?
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.—

The organ-like vibrations of his voice
Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away;
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice
Was sad and tender as a requiem lay:
Our shadowy congregation rested still
As brooding on that "End it when you will."

XV

Wherever men are gathered, all the air
Is charged with human feeling, human thought;
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and prayer,
Are into its vibrations surely wrought;
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,
Are breathed into it with our respiration
It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,
As if alone on mountains or wide seas;
But nourishes warm life or hastens death
With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbors;
He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,
Although not many exiles wander there,
With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air;
Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.

]XVI

Our shadowy congregation rested still,
As musing on that message we had heard
And brooding on that "End it when you will;"
Perchance awaiting yet some other word;
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry:—

The man speaks sooth, alas! the man speaks sooth:
We have no personal life beyond the grave;
There is no God; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth:
Can I find here the comfort which I crave?

In all eternity I had one chance,
One few years' term of gracious human life:
The splendours of the intellect's advance,
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife;

The social pleasures with their genial wit:
The fascination of the worlds of art,
The glories of the worlds of nature, lit
By large imagination's glowing heart;

The rapture of mere being, full of health;
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,
The reverend age serene with life's long truth:

All the sublime prerogatives of Man;
The storied memories of the times of old,
The patient tracking of the world's great plan
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before;
For me this infinite Past is blank and dumb:
This chance recurreth never, nevermore;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion; and my breath
Of noble human life upon this earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,
I worse than lose the years which are my all:
What can console me for the loss supreme?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all: can words make foul things fair?
Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss:
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.—

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close;
And none gave answer for a certain while,
For words must shrink from these most wordless woes;
At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head:—

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
But ends soon and nevermore can be;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth:
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII

How the moon triumphs through the endless nights!
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
Around the blue vault obdurate as steel!
And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream
Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream;
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals; cornice dome and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn;
Like faery lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays:
Fond man! they are not haughty, are not tender;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own
Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss:
They wax and wane through fusion and confusion;
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,
The empyrean is a void abyss.

XVIII

I wandered in a suburb of the north,
And reached a spot whence three close lanes led down,
Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth
Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and lown:
The air above was wan with misty light,
The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand path and slowly trod
Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went
The humid leafage; and my feet were shod
With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,
With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,
So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware
Of something crawling in the lane below;
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
To drag; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned
That it had been a man; for at my tread
It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
An infamy for manhood to behold.
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my prize?
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold
And all that men go mad upon, since you
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue?

You think that I am weak and must submit
Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,
And you are dead as if I clove with it
That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed! betrayed!
I fling this phial if you seek to pass,
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.

And then with sudden change, Take thought! take thought!
Have pity on me! it is mine alone.
If you could find, it would avail you naught;
Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own:
For who of mortal or immortal race
The lifetrack of another can retrace?

Did you but know my agony and toil!
Two lanes diverge up yonder from this lane;
My thin blood marks the long length of their soil;
Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain:
My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone;
I cannot move but with continual moan.

But I am in the very way at last
To find the long-lost broken golden thread
Which unites my present with my past,
If you but go your own way. And I said,
I will retire as soon as you have told
Whereunto leadeth this lost thread of gold.

And so you know it not! he hissed with scorn;
I feared you, imbecile! It leads me back
From this accursed night without a morn,
And through the deserts which have else no track,
And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime:

And I become a nursling soft and pure,
An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
Without a past, love-cherished and secure;
Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast,
And scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest.

He turned to grope; and I retiring brushed
Thin shreds of gossamer from off my face,
And mused, His life would grow, the germ uncrushed;
He should to antenatal night retrace,
And hide his elements in that large womb
Beyond the reach of man-evolving Doom.

And even thus, what weary way were planned,
To seek oblivion through the far-off gate
Of birth, when that of death is close at hand!
For this is law, if law there be in Fate:
What never has been, yet may have its when;
The thing which has been, never is again.

XIX

The mighty river flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides;
For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,
As if by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled;
Another wades in slow with purpose set
Until the waters are above him furled;
Another in a boat with dreamlike motion
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,
To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,
For none beholding them attempts to save,
The while thinks how soon, solicitous,
He may seek refuge in the self-same wave;
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance
Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,
Why actors and spectators do we stay?—
To fill our so-short roles out right or wrong;
To see what shifts are yet in the dull play
For our illusion; to refrain from grieving
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving:
But those asleep at home, how blest are they!

Yet it is but for one night after all:
What matters one brief night of dreary pain?
When after it the weary eyelids fall
Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain;
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,
That one best sleep which never wakes again.

XX

I sat me weary on a pillar's base,
And leaned against the shaft; for broad moonlight
O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
A shore of shadow slanting from the right:
The great cathedral's western front stood there,
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,
Two figures faced each other, large, austere;
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast
An angel standing in the moonlight clear;
So mighty by magnificence of form,
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.

Upon the cross-hilt of the naked sword
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held;
His vigilant intense regard was poured
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
Whose front was set at level gaze which took
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposed shapes
My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon
Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes
The outworn to worse weariness. But soon
A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,
And from the evil lethargy I woke.

The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered; hence the sudden sound:
A warrior leaning on his sword alone
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound;
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,
Again a clashing noise my slumber rent;
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet:
An unarmed man with raised hands impotent
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept
Such mien as if open eyes it slept.

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown;
A louder crash upstartled me in dread:
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,
And made the temple-front a mystic dream,
And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,
The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme:
I pondered long that cold majestic face
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

XXI

Anear the centre of that northern crest
Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,
From which the city east and south and west
Sinks gently in long waves; and throned there
An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
The bronze colossus of a winged Woman,
Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,
With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's might
Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee;
Across a clasped book in her lap the right
Upholds a pair of compasses; she gazes
With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her; but all men know
That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
Three centuries and threescore years ago,
With phantasies of his peculiar thought:
The instruments of carpentry and science
Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught;

Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above;
The grave and solid infant perched beside,
With open winglets that might bear a dove,
Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed;
Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,
But all too impotent to lift the regal
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride;

And with those wings, and that light wreath which seems
To mock her grand head and the knotted frown
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and dreams,
The household bunch of keys, the housewife's gown
Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid
As if a shell of burnished metal frigid,
The feet thick-shod to tread all weakness down;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,
The massy rainbow curved in front of it
Beyond the village with the masts and trees;
The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,
Bearing upon its batlike leathern pinions
Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,
The "MELENCOLIA" that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus
Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous;
Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime.

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,
Sustained by her indomitable will:
The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore,
And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,
With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,
A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,
More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
More fatal than the adamantine Never
Encompassing her passionate endeavour,
Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard:

To sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
Over her Capital of teen and threne,
Over the river with its isles and bridges,
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-bridges,
Confronting them with a coeval mien.

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.

Magonomia: Do you know John Stow?

A quick note this week for a Magonomia magician every player character should seek out: John Stow.

Stow is an occultist and geographer, whose magical practice is tied to the road network of the capital. He's famous for his book collection, his urbanity, and his willingness to lend material to other magicians. The call his library the Stow's "storehouse". Stow's availability can be invoked with a Contacts roll, but sending him a message and getting a reply takes a day. The storehouse is less well stocked than Dee's library at Mortlake, but Stow is the sort of guy who will gladly invite you in for dinner, lend you a book, and listen to stories of your adventures. Dee, on the other hand, is busy clawing for supernatural and political power, so tracking him down is tough, and getting him to help you is difficult.

Stow not only wrote the book about all why all the streets of London have weird names, he know where everything you want to find is. You need someone to sell you eight pounds of peacock fat? He knows a guy. You want to know where someone could get an odd dye on their clothes? He knows the place. He literally wrote the book on London's streets.

You need a magician to help you with something? He's the guy who knows the guy who knows your guy. Stow, as lending librarian to the antiquarians of London, knows what they are reading, what books they are looking for, and what they specialise in. The odd thing is, he won't even charge you to hook you up. Stow's from a merchant tailor family and has no formal education. He's just happy to be part of a society of lettered men who collaborate with each other.

Stow's reputation is as a man who is cheerful, diligent as a researcher and has a perfect memory. He does bear grudges, but not on professional matters. He hates his younger brother because of a dispute over their mother's will, for example, and keeps that going for years.

If something untoward happens to Stow, then a ton of trouble is going to come down on whoever was responsible. Magicians you have not even heard of, with spells you have not ever imagined, are going helping player characters investigate and make an example. Blood may, literally, paint the streets, in some final, significant working for the magician who is a friend to everyone.

Beth Gêlert, or the Grave of the Greyhound

by William Robert Spencer

This week we return to Faeries Second Edition in a to look at Saint Guinefort. Guniefort tis a folk saint – a sainted greyhound – and it doesn't turn up much in the later Ars Magica books because we tried not to have things that people who currently follow one of the religions described in the book would consider heresy as a basic tenet of their religion. If you are a Catholic for example, animal saints are heterodox.

People believe that they can pray to Gunefort for intercession much in the same way that you can work your way around Jesus by asking for favors from his Mum. There's also a ritual of the cultists of Guinefort which was used to return changelings: that you could leave a changeling on his grave and walk away. When you walk back your own child would be returned. We have moved away from that in some of the more recent material because that's literally child abuse, usually targeted towards autistic kiddies.

What we have here in Beth Gelert is the same folktale without the sainthood. The same origin story showing up in Wales. Now when a story shows up twice like this, and if it is divorced from the Divine, that would indicate that Gelert is a fairy. Now I make pretty much everything fairies, but here I think I have an excellent argument. We have greyhounds with the same name showing up doing similar things and being killed in similar ways far apart from each other both in time and space.

The recording which follows is by Peter Yearsley who is a recorder through Librivox. He's one of my favourites. Thank to Peter and his production team. I believe this was a Poem of the Week on Librivox some years ago so there are about 15 versions of this wandering around in Librivox's database, if you want a voice that sounds a different way for your particular campaign. For example you want to play this as a prop and you'd prefer someone with a French or Italian accent have a poke around in Librivox.

THE SPEARMEN heard the bugle sound,
And cheerly smiled the morn;
And many a brach and many a hound
Obeyed Llewelyn's horn.

And still he blew a louder blast,
And gave a lustier cheer:
"Come, Gêlert, come, wert never last
Llewelyn's horn to hear.

"O, where doth faithful Gêlert roam,
The flower of all his race,
So true, so brave,—a lamb at home,
A lion in the chase?"

'T was only at Llewelyn's board
The faithful Gêlert fed;
He watched, he served, he cheered his lord,
And sentineled his bed.

In sooth he was a peerless hound,
The gift of royal John;
But now no Gêlert could be found,
And all the chase rode on.

And now, as o'er the rocks and dells
The gallant chidings rise,
All Snowdon's craggy chaos yells
The many-mingled cries!

That day Llewelyn little loved
The chase of hart and hare;
And scant and small the booty proved,
For Gêlert was not there.

Unpleased Llewelyn homeward hied,
When, near the portal seat,
His truant Gêlert he espied,
Bounding his lord to greet.

But, when he gained his castle door,
Aghast the chieftain stood;
The hound all o'er was smeared with gore,
His lips, his fangs, ran blood.

Llewelyn gazed with fierce surprise;
Unused such looks to meet,
His favorite checked his joyful guise,
And crouched and licked his feet.

Onward, in haste, Llewelyn passed,
And on went Gêlert too;
And still, where'er his eyes he cast,
Fresh blood-gouts shocked his view.

O'erturned his infant's bed he found,
With blood-stained covert rent;
And all around the walls and ground
With recent blood besprent.

He called his child,—no voice replied,—
He searched with terror wild;
Blood, blood, he found on every side,
But nowhere found his child.

"Hell-hound! my child 's by thee devoured,"
The frantic father cried;
And to the hilt his vengeful sword
He plunged in Gêlert's side.

His suppliant looks, as prone he fell,
No pity could impart;
But still his Gêlert's dying yell
Passed heavy o'er his heart.

Aroused by Gêlert's dying yell,
Some slumberer wakened nigh:
What words the parent's joy could tell
To hear his infant's cry!

Concealed beneath a tumbled heap
His hurried search had missed,
All glowing from his rosy sleep,
The cherub boy he kissed.

Nor scath had he, nor harm, nor dread,
But, the same couch beneath,
Lay a gaunt wolf, all torn and dead,
Tremendous still in death.

Ah, what was then Llewelyn's pain!
For now the truth was clear;
His gallant hound the wolf had slain
To save Llewelyn's heir:

Vain, vain was all Llewelyn's woe;
"Best of thy kind, adieu!
The frantic blow which laid thee low
This heart shall ever rue."

And now a gallant tomb they raise,
With costly sculpture decked;
And marbles storied with his praise
Poor Gêlert's bones protect.

There never could the spearman pass,
Or forester, unmoved;
There oft the tear-besprinkled grass
Llewelyn's sorrow proved.

And there he hung his horn and spear,
And there, as evening fell,
In fancy's ear he oft would hear
Poor Gêlert's dying yell.

And, till great Snowdon's rocks grow old,
And cease the storm to brave,
The consecrated spot shall hold
The name of "Gêlert's Grave."

Magonomia : Roger Bacon on longevity potions

Roger Bacon was a writer in the late 13th Century, slightly after the Ars Magica period, and well known in the Magonomia period. It's important not to confuse him with Sir Francis Bacon, who was an early scientist in Elizabeth I's reign. Each had useful ideas about alchemy.

Roger Bacon explains, in his great book (called the "Major Opus") that extremely efficient longevity medicine is possible in a purely mechanical sense. In Ars Magica terms, he explains why longevity rituals don't breach the Law of Essential Nature. He also gives a recipe, whose ingredients could grant original research experience for player characters.

The "Opus Majus" of Roger Bacon: Experimental Science – Example II

Another example can be given in the field of medicine in regard to the prolongation of human life, for which the medical art has nothing to offer except the regimen of health. But a far longer extension of life is possible. At the beginning of the world there was a great prolongation of life, but now it has been shortened unduly. Many have thought that the reason for this prolongation and shortening of life is found in the influence of the heavens. For they considered that the arrangement of the heavens was best at the beginning, and that as the world grows old all things decay. They think that the stars were created in more advantageous positions, in which stars have their dignities, which are called house, exaltation, triplicity, face, and boundary ; and in a better relationship of these to one another in accordance with the diversity of aspects or the invisible projection of rays. They also think that they have gradually receded from this position, and that in accordance with this recession they impose a shortened span of life up to some fixed boundary, at which there will be a state of rest. But this idea has many contradictions and difficulties, of which I must now speak.

Whether this shall prove to be true or not, another reason must be given, which is ready at hand for us and is plain, which cannot be contradicted, and which we know by experience. Therefore in regard to this we must strive, that the wonderful and ineffable utility and splendour of experimental science may appear and the pathway may be opened to the greatest secret of secrets, which Aristotle has hidden in his book on the Regimen of Life. For although the regimen of health should be observed in food and drink, in sleep and in wakefulness, in motion and in rest, in evacuation and retention, in the nature of the air and in the passions of the mind, so that these matters should be properly cared for from infancy, no one wishes to take thought in regard to them, not even physicians, since we see that scarcely one physician in a thousand will give this matter even slight attention. Very rarely does it happen that anyone pays sufficient heed to the rules of health. No one does so in his youth, but sometimes one in three thousand thinks of these matters when he is old and approaching death, for at that time he fears for himself and thinks of his health. But he cannot then apply a remedy because of his weakened powers and senses and his lack of experience. Therefore fathers are weakened and beget weak sons with a liability to premature death. Then by neglect of the rules of health the sons weaken themselves, and thus the son's son has a doubly weakened constitution, and in his turn weakens himself by a disregard of these rules. Thus a weakened constitution passes from father to sons, until a final shortening of life has been reached, as is the case in these days.

Not only is there this accidental cause, but there is also another, consisting in the disregard of morals. For sins weaken the powers of the soul, so that it is incompetent for the natural control of the body ; and therefore the powers of the body are weakened and life is shortened. This weakening passes from father to son, and so on. Therefore owing to these two natural causes the longevity of man of necessity has not retained its natural course from the beginning but for these two reasons the longevity of man has been shortened contrary to nature. Moreover, it has been proved that this excessive shortening of the span of life has been retarded in many cases, and longevity prolonged for many years by secret experiments. Many authors write on this topic. Wherefore this excessive shortening of life must be accidental with a possible remedy.

Since I have shown that the cause of a shortening of life of this kind is accidental, and therefore that a remedy is possible, I now return to this example which I have decided to give in the field of medicine, in which the power of medical art fails. But the experimental art supplies the defect of medicine in this particular. For the art of medicine can give only the proper rules of health for all ages. For although noted authors have spoken inadequately concerning the proper regimen of the aged, it has been possible, however, for medicine to give such a regimen. This regimen consists in the proper use of food and drink, of motion and rest, of sleep and wakefulness, of elimination and retention, of the air, and in the control of the passions of the mind. But if from birth a man followed a proper regimen to the end of his life, he would reach the limit of life set by God and nature, in accordance with the possibility of a proper regimen. But since it is impossible for this regimen to be followed by any one, and since few, nay, scarcely any one at all, from youth pay any heed to this regimen, and very few old people observe it as it is possible, therefore the accidents of old age of necessity come before old age and senility, namely, in the period of the prime of life, which is the age of human beauty and strength. In these times this period of life does not continue beyond forty-five or fifty years.

All these accidents of old age and senility are white hair, pallor, wrinkling of the skin, excess of mucus, foul phlegm, inflammation of the eyes, and general injury to the organs of sense, diminution of blood and of the spirits, weakness in motion and breathing and in the whole body, failure in both the animal and natural powers of the soul, sleeplessness, anger and disquietude of mind, and forgetfulness, of which the royal Hali says that old age is the home of forgetfulness ; and Plato that it is the mother of lethargy. Because of the lack of a proper regimen of health all these accidents and many more come to men in the prime of life, that is, either in greater or lesser degree, in accordance with the better or worse control they have exercised over themselves in the matter of their health, and in accordance with a better and stronger constitution and a better or worse control exercised over their morals. But the medical art does not furnish remedies against this corruption that comes from lack of control and failure in regimen, just as all physicians expert in their own art know, although medical authors confess that remedies are possible, but they do not teach them. For these remedies have always been hidden not only from physicians, but from the whole rank and file of scientists, andhave been revealed only to the most noted, whom Aristotle mentions in the first book of the Topics in the division of the probable. Not only are remedies possible against the conditions of old age coming at the time of one's prime and before the time of old age, but also if the regimen of old age should be completed, the conditions of old age and senility can still be retarded, so that they do not arrive at their ordinary time, and when they do come they can be mitigated and moderated, so that both by retarding and mitigating them life may be prolonged beyond the limit, which according to the full regimen of health depends on the six articles mentioned. And there is another farther limit, which has been set by God and nature, in accordance with the property of the remedies retarding the accidents of old age and senility and mitigating their evil. The first limit can be passed but the second cannot be.

Because of these two limits the Scripture says more than once, "Thou hast set its bounds which cannot be passed" ; for it is impossible for the ultimate limit to be passed, but the first limit can be passed, although it is rarely passed ; but the second limit cannot be passed. The proper regimen of health, therefore, as far as a man can possess it, would prolong life beyond its common accidental limit, which man because of his folly does not protect for his own interest ; and thus some have lived for many years beyond the common limit of life. But a special regimen by means of remedies retarding the common limit mentioned, which the art of directing the health does not exceed, can prolong life much further. What is possible is shown by Dioscorides, who says that there may be some medicine to protect man from the swiftness of old age and from cold and from the drying up of his members, so that by its means the life of man may be prolonged. In the Tegni near the end Hali maintains this. Again he says, "Those who have lived a long time have used medicines by which their life has been prolonged." Avicenna, moreover, speaks in regard to such matters as follows in the second book of the Canon, "There is a medicine that settles and divides every constitution as it should be." But medical authorities have not given those medicines, nor have they been stated in their books, since these writers pay attention only to the art of caring for the health, and that, too, insufficiently as regards the elderly and the aged, as has been stated. But learned men devoted to experimental science have given thought to these matters, influenced thereto not only by their utility but by the action of animals which in many ways avoid a premature death, as, for example, the stag, the eagle, the snake, and many other animals that prolong their life by natural action, as authors state and experience has shown. Influenced by these examples they believed that God himself granted this power to brutes for the instruction of mortal man. Therefore they lay in wait for animals, in order that they might learn the powers of herbs, stones, metals, and other things, with which they improved their bodies in many apparently miraculous ways, just as we gather with the utmost certainty from the books of Pliny, Solinus, Avicenna on Animals, Tullius on the Divine Nature, from the philosophy of Artephius, and fromother books and various authors, and many people have had experience in this matter. For in Paris lately there was a scientist who sought for snakes and took one and cut it into small portions, except that the skin of the belly on which it crept remained intact. This snake crept as it was able to a certain herb by the touch of which it was immediately cured. The experimenter collected the herb of wondrous virtue. Since human reason is superior to all the wisdom of animals, scientists thus encouraged by the examples of animals have thought out better and greater means.

And especially was this wisdom granted to the world through the first men, namely, through Adam and his sons, who received from God himself special knowledge on this subject, in order that they might prolong their life. We can learn the same through Aristotle in the book of Secrets, where he says that God most high and glorious has prepared a means and a remedy for tempering the humors and preserving health, and for acquiring many things with which to combat the ills of old age and to retard them, and to mitigate such evils; and has revealed these things to his saints and prophets and to certain others, as the patriarchs, whom he chose and enlightened with the spirit of divine wisdom, etc. And below he says that there is a medicine called the ineffable glory and treasure of philosophers, which completely rectifies the whole human body. This medicine is said to have been discovered by Adam or by Enoch and secured through a vision, as he himself states, although it has not been fully attested which of these first produced this medicine. But these matters and the most secret of secrets of this kind have always been hidden from the rank and file of philosophers, and particularly so after men began to abuse science, turning to evil what God granted in full measure for the safety and advantage of men.

Many examples, moreover, of these facts are written. Artephius, who traveled over all the regions of the East in his search for knowledge, found Tantalus, teacher of the king of India, seated on a golden throne and discoursing on nature and on the motions of the heavens. This same Tantalus humbled himself and became a pupil of Artephius, who is said in the book of his Opus Majus own philosophy to have lived actually for many centuries by means of secret experiments. Pliny, moreover, in the twenty second book of the Natural History states that a man stood in the presence of Augustus, who had prolonged his life beyond a hundred years. To the astonishment of the bystanders he was strong, robust, and active to such a degree that the emperor in wonder asked him what he did so as to live in this way. The man replied in a riddle, as Pliny says, that he had applied oil on the outside and mead on the inside. Moreover, as stated in the book on the Accidents of Old Age, in the time of King William of Sicily a man was found who renewed the period of his youth in strength and sense and sagacity beyond all human calculation for about sixty years, and from a rustic ploughman became a messenger of the king. While ploughing he found a golden vessel in the fields hidden in the earth, which contained an excellent liquor. Thinking the liquor was dew from the sky he drank it and washed his face, and was renewed in mind and body beyond measure. And in the book just mentioned it is recorded that a man anointed with an excellent unguent the whole surface of his body with the exception of the soles of his feet, and lived for several centuries without decay except in his soles, which he had neglected to anoint, and for this reason he nearly always rode. Moreover, the author of this book bore witness that he had seen a man, and had talked with him, who had lived for several centuries, because he took a medicine prepared by scientists for a great king, who lost hope for himself and wished the medicine to be tried on an ignorant person. Thus the man's life was prolonged, and he had official letters from the Pope of that time and from others in regard to this fact.

Therefore the excellent experimenter in the book on the Regimen of the Aged says that if what is tempered in the fourth degree, and what swims in the sea, and what grows in the air, and what is cast up by the sea, and a plant of India, and what is found in the vitals of a long-lived animal, and the two snakes which are the food of Tyrians and Aethiopians, be prepared and used in the proper way, and the mineral of the noble animal be present, the life of man could be greatly prolonged and the conditions of old age and senility could be retarded and mitigated. But that which is tempered in the fourth degree is gold, as stated in the book on Spirits and Bodies, which among all things is most friendly to nature. And if by a certain experiment gold should be made the best possible, or at any rate far better than nature and the art of alchemy can make it, as was the vessel found by the rustic, and it should be dissolved in such water as the ploughman drank, it would then produce a wonderful action on the body of man. And if there is added that which swimsin the sea, namely, the pearl, which is a thing most efficacious for preserving life, and there is added also the thing that grows in the air. This last is an anthos [flower] and is the flower of seadew, which possesses an ineffable virtue against the condition of old age. But the dianthos that is put in an electuary is not a flower, but is a mixture of leaves and fragments of wood and a small portion of flower. For the pure flower should be gathered in its proper season, and in many ways it is used in foods and drinks and electuaries. To these must be added what is cast up by the sea. This last is ambergris, which is spermaceti, a thing of wondrous virtue in this matter. The plant of India is similar to these, and is the excellent wood of the aloe, fresh and not seasoned. To these ingredients there is added that which is in the heart of a long-lived animal, namely, the stag. This is a bone growing in the stag's heart, which possesses great power against premature old age. The snake which is the food of the Tyrians is the Tynan snake from which Tyriaca is made, and whose flesh is properly prepared and eaten with spices. This is an excellent remedy for the condition of old age and for all the corruptions of the constitution, if it is taken with things suitable to one's constitution and condition, as we are taught in the book on the Regimen of the Aged. Aristotle, moreover, in the book of Secrets recommends strongly the flesh of the Tyrian snake for our ills. The snake that is the food of the Aethiopians is the dragon, as David says in the psalm, 'Thou hast given it as food to the tribes of the Aethiopians." For it is certain that wise men of Aethiopia have come to Italy, Spain, France, England, and those lands of the Christians in which there are good flying dragons, and by the secret art they possess lure the dragons from their caverns. They have saddles. and bridles in readiness, and they ride on these dragons and drive them in the air at high speed, so that the rigidity of their flesh may be overcome and its hardness tempered, just as in the case of boars and bears and bulls that are driven about by dogs and beaten in various ways before they are killed for food. After they have domesticated them in this way they have the art of preparing their flesh, similar to the art of preparing the flesh of the Tyrian snake, and they use the flesh against the accidents of old age, and they prolong life and sharpen their intellect beyond all conception. For no instruction that can be given by man can produce such wisdom as the eating of this flesh, as we have learned through men of proved reliability on whose word no doubt can be cast.

If the elements should be prepared and purified in some mixture, so that there would be no action of one element on another, but so that they would be reduced to pure simplicity, the wisest have judged that they would have the most perfect medicine. For in this way the elements would be equal. Averroes, moreover, asserts in opposition to Galienus in the tenth book of the Metaphysics that if the mixture was made with an equality of the miscibles, the elements would not act or be acted on, nor would they be corrupted, Aristotle also maintains this view in the fifth book of the Metaphysics, where he has stated definitely that no corruption occurs when the active potencies are equal ; and this is an assured fact.

For this condition will exist in our bodies after the resurrection. For an equality of elements in those bodies excludes corruption for ever. For this equality is the ultimate end of the natural matter in mixed bodies, because it is the noblest state, and therefore in it the appetite of matter would cease, and would desire nothing beyond. The body of Adam did not possess elements in full equality, and therefore the contrary elements in him acted and were acted on, and consequently there was waste, and he required nourishment. For this reason he was commanded not to eat of the fruit of life. But since the elements in him approached equality, there was very little waste in him; and hence he was fit for immortality, which he could have secured if he had eaten always of the fruit of the tree of life. For this fruit is thought to have elements approaching equality ; and therefore it was able to continue incorruption in Adam, which would have happened if he had not sinned. Scientists, therefore, have striven to reduce the elements in some form of food or drink to an equality or nearly so, and have taught the means to this end. But owing to the difficulty of this very great experiment, and because few take an interest in experiments, since the labor involved is complicated and the expense very great, and because men pay no heed to the secrets of nature and the possibilities of art, it happens that very few have labored on this very great secret of science, and still fewer have reached a laudable end.

Those men, however, of whom mention has been made, who prolonged their life for centuries, had a medicine of this kind prepared with more or less skill. For Artephius, who, it is stated, lived a thousand and twenty-five years, had a better medicine than the aged ploughman, in whom his youth was renewed for sixty years. That liquor which the rustic drank is thought to have approached an equality of elements far beyond ordinary foods and drinks ; but yet it was far from possessing full equality. For there are many degrees in the approach to final equality, which the medicine of Artephius failed to secure, as well as that which caused the man to live for five hundred years who had the papal letter in attestation of so great a miracle, of whom mention was made above. Nor is it strange if Aristotle did not live so long, nor Plato, nor many other famous philosophers; since in the Categories Aristotle says he was ignorant of the quadrature of the circle, which bears no comparison to a secret of this kind. Avicenna, moreover, says in the third book of the Physics that he did not yet know the category of habit; and now I judge that this is easily learned, and we wonder that these men were ignorant of matters so evident. For all wisdom is from the Lord God ; and therefore sometimes to the simple are granted things that the most learned arid famous cannot know. But medicine cannot give us these things nor does it mention them but the greatness of the secret belonging to an experimental science of this kind has proved them. What, then, the remedies are and what things they contain, are discovered especially in the book of ‘the Secrets of Aristotle and in the philosophy of Artephius, and in the book on the Conditions of Old Age, and in the treatise on the men of the Elderly and the Aged, and in the books of Pliny, and elsewhere in many ways.

Magonomia: King Henry’s Walking Stick

There’s one device that seems like spy gear that I’ve not been able to include in Magonomia, and that’s King Henry VIII’s walking stick. True walking sticks don’t develop as a British fashion accessory until the reign of one of the later Edwards, where their function is basically to hit muggers. This differentiations them from the accessibility devices that have existed as long as humans have had sticks. Henry’s walking stick was nothing like those.

Imagine a piece of dowel about four feet long. Jacket it in metal. Attach big flanges, or spikes, to it. Top it with a two foot long spike. Now, run four musket barrels up the middle, and have them all come to a reservoir of powder in the handle that you can light with slowmatch to a touchhole covered by a button or slide. That’s Henry VIII’s walking stick. It’s in the Tower of London now.

The musket barrels, which in the podcast I called “rifle” barrels, but which are not rifled, cannot be fired independently. They all go off at once. I’m also not sure if the spike on the top comes off, cleverly anchors around the barrels, or is just blown clear by the shot coming from behind it.

The story that Henry used this when he went anonymously into town is possible, but suspect. The story that he was arrested and jailed by one of his wardens, when they caught him carrying this object near the King’s residence, is likely untrue. Still it’s a good story hook for a player character: if Henry did pour wealth on the honest warder, he might have used it to have his child educated.

True Story by Lucian of Samosata

This being the week that the podcast celebrates its sixth anniversary I am allowing myself the luxury of two, long, perhaps pointless, episodes. I started playing Ars Magica decades ago and the second thing I tried to rework as source material was Lucian's "True Story". It doesn't work because its fantasy level is far too high. It might be easier now, because the current edition has a less realistic tone.

It also doesn't work because it satirises sources we have treated as true in other works. For example, in Lands of the Nile we have the odd humanoids of Herodotus. Lucain's core point is that people like Herodotus are lying, and that their readers know they are just making details up. Lucian, in short, says they are fiction, and known to be fiction. Lucian does not know why he should not also write a book where he lies, and lies, and lies, because people seem to like that sort of thing.

That beings said, faerie stories don't need to be true, they only need to evoke emotions. You might well get a sort of anti-faerie that people know does not exist, but which is active because of their attachment to its story.

Our reader is Terry Kroenung from Librivox: thanks to Terry and his production team. Trigger warning, child abuse.

Even as champions and wrestlers and such as practise the strength and agility of body are not only careful to retain a sound constitution of health, and to hold on their ordinary course of exercise, but sometimes also to recreate themselves with seasonable intermission, and esteem it as a main point of their practice; so I think it necessary for scholars and such as addict themselves to the study of learning, after they have travelled long in the perusal of serious authors, to relax a little the intention of their thoughts, that they may be more apt and able to endure a continued course of study.

And this kind of repose will be the more conformable, and fit their purpose better, if it be employed in the reading of such works as shall not only yield a bare content by the pleasing and comely composure of them, but shall also give occasion of some learned speculation to the mind, which I suppose I have effected in these books of mine: wherein not only the novelty of the subject, nor the pleasingness of the project, may tickle the reader with delight, nor to hear so many notorious lies delivered persuasively and in the way of truth, but because everything here by me set down doth in a comical fashion glance at some or other of the old poets, historiographers, and philosophers, which in their writings have recorded many monstrous and intolerable untruths, whose names I would have quoted down, but that I knew the reading would bewray them to you.

Ctesias, the son of Ctesiochus, the Cnidian, wrote of the region of the Indians and the state of those countries, matters which he neither saw himself, nor ever heard come from the mouth of any man. Iambulus also wrote many strange miracles of the great sea, which all men knew to be lies and fictions, yet so composed that they want not their delight: and many others have made choice of the like argument, of which some have published their own travels and peregrinations, wherein they have described the greatness of beasts, the fierce condition of men, with their strange and uncouth manner of life: but the first father and founder of all this foolery was Homer's Ulysses, who tells a long tale to Alcinous of the servitude of the winds, and of wild men with one eye in their foreheads that fed upon raw flesh, of beasts with many heads, and the transformation of his friends by enchanted potions, all which he made the silly Phæakes believe for great sooth.

This coming to my perusal, I could not condemn ordinary men for lying, when I saw it in request amongst them that would be counted philosophical persons: yet could not but wonder at them, that, writing so manifest lies, they should not think to be taken with the manner; and this made me also ambitious to leave some monument of myself behind me, that I might not be the only man exempted from this liberty of lying: and because I had no matter of verity to employ my pen in (for nothing hath befallen me worth the writing), I turned my style to publish untruths, but with an honester mind than others have done: for this one thing I confidently pronounce for a truth, that I lie: and this, I hope, may be an excuse for all the rest, when I confess what I am faulty in: for I write of matters which I neither saw nor suffered, nor heard by report from others, which are in no being, nor possible ever to have a beginning. Let no man therefore in any case give any credit to them.

Disanchoring on a time from the pillars of Hercules, the wind fitting me well for my purpose, I thrust into the West Ocean. The occasion that moved me to take such a voyage in hand was only a curiosity of mind, a desire of novelties, and a longing to learn out the bounds of the ocean, and what people inhabit the farther shore: for which purpose I made plentiful provision of victuals and fresh water, got fifty companions of the same humour to associate me in my travels, furnished myself with store of munition, gave a round sum of money to an expert pilot that could direct us in our course, and new rigged and repaired a tall ship strongly to hold a tedious and difficult journey.

***

Thus sailed we forward a day and a night with a prosperous wind, and as long as we had any sight of land, made no great haste on our way; but the next

morrow about sun rising the wind blew high and the waves began to swell and a darkness fell upon us, so that we could not see to strike our sails, but gave our ship over to the wind and weather; thus were we tossed in this tempest the space of threescore and nineteen days together. On the fourscorth day the sun upon a sudden brake out, and we descried not far off us an island full of mountains and woods, about the which the seas did not rage so boisterously, for the storm was now reasonably well calmed: there we thrust in and went on shore and cast ourselves upon the ground, and so lay a long time, as utterly tired with our misery at sea: in the end we arose up and divided ourselves: thirty we left to guard our ship: myself and twenty more went to discover the island, and had not gone above three furlongs from the sea through a wood, but we saw a brazen pillar erected, whereupon Greek letters were engraven, though now much worn and hard to be discerned, importing, “Thus far travelled Hercules and Bacchus.”

***

There were also near unto the place two portraitures cut out in a rock, the one of the quantity of an acre of ground, the other less, which made me imagine the lesser to be Bacchus and the other Hercules: and giving them due adoration, we proceeded on our journey, and far we had not gone but we came to a river, the stream whereof seemed to run with as rich wine as any is made in Chios, and of a great breadth, in some places able to bear a ship, which made me to give the more credit to the inscription upon the pillar, when I saw such apparent signs of Bacchus’s peregrination. We then resolved to travel up the stream to find whence the river had his original, and when we were come to the head, no spring at all appeared, but mighty great vine-trees of infinite number, which from their roots distilled pure wine which made the river run so abundantly: the stream was also well stored with fish, of which we took a few, in taste and colour much resembling wine, but as many as ate of them fell drunk upon it; for when they were opened and cut up, we found them to be full of lees: afterwards we mixed some fresh water fish with them, which allayed the strong taste of the wine.

We then crossed the stream where we found it passable, and came among a world of vines of incredible number, which towards the earth had firm stocks and of a good growth; but the tops of them were women, from the hip upwards, having all their proportion perfect and complete; as painters picture out Daphne, who was turned into a tree when she was overtaken by Apollo; at their fingers’ ends sprung out branches full of grapes, and the hair of their heads was nothing else but winding wires and leaves, and clusters of grapes. When we were come to them, they saluted us and joined hands with us, and spake unto us some in the Lydian and some in the Indian language, but most of them in Greek: they also kissed us with their mouths, but he that was so kissed fell drunk, and was not his own man a good while after: they could not abide to have any fruit pulled from them, but would roar and cry out pitifully if any man offered it. Some of them desired to have canal mixture with us, and two of our company were so bold as to entertain their offer, and could never afterwards be loosed from them, but were knit fast together at their nether parts, from whence they grew together and took root together, and their fingers began to spring out with branches and crooked wires as if they were ready to bring out fruit: whereupon we forsook them and fled to our ships, and told the company at our coming what had betide unto us, how our fellows were entangled, and of their copulation with the vines. Then we took certain of our vessels and filled them, some with water and some with wine out of the river, and lodged for that night near the shore.

***

On the morrow we put to sea again, the wind serving us weakly, but about noon, when we had lost sight of the island, upon a sudden a whirlwind caught us, which turned our ship round about, and lifted us up some three thousand furlongs into the air, and suffered us not to settle again into the sea, but we hung above ground, and were carried aloft with a mighty wind which filled our sails strongly. Thus for seven days’ space and so many nights were we driven along in that manner, and on the eighth day we came in view of a great country in the air, like to a shining island, of a round proportion, gloriously glittering with light, and approaching to it, we there arrived, and took land, and surveying the country, we found it to be both inhabited and husbanded: and as long as the day lasted we could see nothing there, but when night was come many other islands appeared unto us, some greater and some less, all of the colour of fire, and another kind of earth underneath, in which were cities and seas and rivers and woods and mountains, which we conjectured to be the earth by us inhabited: and going further into the land, we were met withal and taken by those kind of people which they call Hippogypians.

These Hippogypians are men riding upon monstrous vultures, which they use instead of horses: for the vultures there are exceeding great, every one with three heads apiece: you may imagine their greatness by this, for every feather in their wings was bigger and longer than the mast of a tall ship: their charge was to fly about the country, and all the strangers they found to bring them to the king: and their fortune was then to seize upon us, and by them we were presented to him.

As soon as he saw us, he conjectured by our habit what countrymen we were, and said, Are not you, strangers, Grecians? which when we affirmed, And how could you make way, said he, through so much air as to get hither?

Then we delivered the whole discourse of our fortunes to him; whereupon he began to tell us likewise of his own adventures, how that he also was a man, by name Endymion, and rapt up long since from the earth as he was asleep, and brought hither, where he was made king of the country, and said it was that region which to us

below seemed to be the moon; but he bade us be of good cheer and fear no danger, for we should want nothing we stood in need of: and if the war he was now in hand withal against the sun succeeded fortunately, we should live with him in the highest degree of happiness.

Then we asked of him what enemies he had, and the cause of the quarrel: and he answered, Phaethon, the king of the inhabitants of the sun (for that is also peopled as well as the moon), hath made war against us a long time upon this occasion: I once assembled all the poor people and needy persons within my dominions, purposing to send a colony to inhabit the Morning Star, because the country was desert and had nobody dwelling in it. This Phaethon envying, crossed me in my design, and sent his Hippomyrmicks to meet with us in the midway, by whom we were surprised at that time, being not prepared for an encounter, and were forced to retire: now therefore my purpose is once again to denounce war and publish a plantation of people there: if therefore you will participate with us in our expedition, I will furnish you every one with a prime vulture and all armour answerable for service, for to-morrow we must set forwards.

With all our hearts, said I, if it please you. Then were we feasted and abode with him, and in the morning arose to set ourselves in-order of battle, for our scouts had given us knowledge that the enemy was at hand.

Our forces in number amounted to an hundred thousand, besides such as bare burthens and engineers, and the foot forces and the strange aids: of these, fourscore thousand were Hippogypians, and twenty thousand that rode upon Lachanopters, which is a mighty great fowl, and instead of feathers covered thick over with wort leaves; but their wing feathers were much like the leaves of lettuces: after them were placed the Cenchrobolians and the Scorodomachians: there came also to aid us from the Bear Star thirty thousand Psyllotoxotans, and fifty thousand Anemodromians: these Psyllotoxotans ride upon great fleas, of which they have their denomination, for every flea among them is as big as a dozen elephants: the Anemodromians are footmen, yet flew in the air without feathers in this manner: every man had a large mantle reaching down to his foot, which the wind blowing against, filled it like a sail, and they were carried along as if they had been boats: the most part of these in fight were targeteers. It was said also that there were expected from the stars over Cappadocia threescore and ten thousand Struthobalanians and five thousand Hippogeranians, but I had no sight of them, for they were not yet come, and therefore I durst write nothing, though wonderful and incredible reports were given out of them.

This was the number of Endymion's army; the furniture was all alike; their helmets of bean hulls, which are great with them and very strong; their breastplates all of lupins cut into scales, for they take the shells of lupins, and fastening them together, make breastplates of them which are impenetrable and as hard as any horn: their shields and swords like to ours in Greece: and when the time of battle was come, they were ordered in this manner.

The right wing was supplied by the Hippogypians, where the king himself was in person with the choicest soldiers in the army, among whom we also were ranged: the Lachanopters made the left wing, and the aids were placed in the main battle as every man's fortune fell: the foot, which in number were about six thousand myriads, were disposed of in this manner: there are many spiders in those parts of mighty bigness, every one in quantity exceeding one of the Islands Cyclades: these were appointed to spin a web in the air between the Moon and the Morning Star, which was done in an instant, and made a plain champaign upon which the foot forces were planted, who had for their leader Nycterion, the son of Eudianax, and two other associates.

***

But of the enemy's side the left wing consisted of the Hippomyrmicks, and among them Phaethon himself: these are beasts of huge bigness and winged, carrying the resemblance of our emmets, but for their greatness: for those of the largest size were of the quantity of two acres, and not only the riders supplied the place of soldiers, but they also did much mischief with their horns: they were in number fifty thousand. In the right wing were ranged the Aeroconopes, of which there were also about fifty thousand, all archers riding upon great gnats: then followed the Aerocardakes, who were light armed and footmen, but good soldiers, casting out of slings afar off huge great turnips, and whosoever was hit with them lived not long after, but died with the stink that proceeded from their wounds: it is said they use to anoint their bullets with the poison of mallows. After them were placed the Caulomycetes, men-at-arms and good at hand strokes, in number about fifty thousand: they are called Caulomycetes because their shields were made of mushrooms and their spears of the stalks of the herb asparagus: near unto them were placed the Cynobalanians, that were sent from the Dogstar to aid him: these were men with dogs' faces, riding upon winged acorns: but the slingers that should have come out of Via Lactea, and the Nephelocentaurs came too short of these aids, for the battle was done before their arrival, so that they did them no good: and indeed the slingers came not at all, wherefore they say Phaethon in displeasure over-ran their country.

These were the forces that Phaethon brought into the field: and when they were joined in battle, after the signal was given, and when the asses on either side had brayed (for these are to them instead of trumpets), the fight began, and the left wing of the Heliotans, or Sun soldiers, fled presently and would not abide to receive the charge of the Hippogypians, but turned their backs immediately,

and many were put to the sword: but the right wing of theirs were too hard for our left wing, and drove them back till they came to our footmen, who joining with them, made the enemies there also turn their backs and fly, especially when they found their own left wing to be overthrown. Thus were they wholly discomfited on all hands; many were taken prisoners, and many slain; much blood was spilt; some fell upon the clouds, which made them look of a red colour, as sometimes they appear to us about sun-setting; some dropped down upon the earth, which made me suppose it was upon some such occasion that Homer thought Jupiter rained blood for the death of his son Sarpedon.

Returning from the pursuit, we erected two trophies: one for the fight on foot, which we placed upon the spiders' web: the other for the fight in the air, which we set up upon the clouds. As soon as this was done, news came to us by our scouts that the Nephelocentaurs were coming on, which indeed should have come to Phaethon before the fight. And when they drew so near unto us that we could take full view of them, it was a strange sight to behold such monsters, composed of flying horses and men: that part which resembled mankind, which was from the waist upwards, did equal in greatness the Rhodian Colossus, and that which was like a horse was as big as a great ship of burden: and of such multitude that I was fearful to set down their number lest it might be taken for a lie: and for their leader they had the Sagittarius out of the Zodiac.

When they heard that their friends were foiled, they sent a messenger to Phaethon to renew the fight: whereupon they set themselves in array, and fell upon the Selenitans or the Moon soldiers that were troubled, and disordered in following the chase, and scattered in gathering the spoils, and put them all to flight, and pursued the king into his city, and killed the greatest part of his birds, overturned the trophies he had set up, and overcame the whole country that was spun by the spiders. Myself and two of my companions were taken alive. When Phaethon himself was come they set up other trophies in token of victory, and on the morrow we were carried prisoners into the Sun, our arms bound behind us with a piece of the cobweb: yet would they by no means lay any siege to the city, but returned and built up a wall in the midst of the air to keep the light of the Sun from falling upon the Moon, and they made it a double wall, wholly compact of clouds, so that a manifest eclipse of the Moon ensued, and all things detained in perpetual night: wherewith Endymion was so much oppressed that he sent ambassadors to entreat the demolishing of the building, and beseech him that he would not damn them to live in darkness, promising to pay him tribute, to be his friend and associate, and never after to stir against him. Phaethon's council twice assembled to consider upon this offer, and in their first meeting would remit nothing of their conceived displeasure, but on the morrow they altered their minds to these terms.

***

"The Heliotans and their colleagues have made a peace with the Selenitans and their associates upon these conditions, that the Heliotans shall cast down the wall, and deliver the prisoners that they have taken upon a ratable ransom: and that the Selenitans should leave the other stars at liberty, and raise no war against the Heliotans, but aid and assist one another if either of them should be invaded: that the king of the Selenitans should yearly pay to the king of the Heliotans in way of tribute ten thousand vessels of dew, and deliver ten thousand of their people to be pledges for their fidelity: that the colony to be sent to the Morning Star should be jointly supplied by them both, and liberty given to any else that would to be sharers in it: that these articles of peace should be engraven in a pillar of amber, to be erected in the midst of the air upon the confines of their country: for the performance whereof were sworn of the Heliotans, Pyronides and Therites and Phlogius: and of the Selenitans, Nyctor and Menius and Polylampes."

Thus was the peace concluded, the wall immediately demolished, and we that were prisoners delivered. Being returned into the Moon, they came forth to meet us, Endymion himself and all his friends, who embraced us with tears, and desired us to make our abode with him, and to be partners in the colony, promising to give me his own son in marriage (for there are no women amongst them), which I by no means would yield unto, but desired of all loves to be dismissed again into the sea, and he finding it impossible to persuade us to his purpose, after seven days' feasting, gave us leave to depart.

Now, what strange novelties worthy of note I observed during the time of my abode there, I will relate unto you. The first is, that they are not begotten of women, but of mankind: for they have no other marriage but of males: the name of women is utterly unknown among them: until they accomplish the age of five and twenty years, they are given in marriage to others: from that time forwards they take others in marriage to themselves: for as soon as the infant is conceived the leg begins to swell, and afterwards when the time of birth is come, they give it a lance and take it out dead: then they lay it abroad with open mouth towards the wind, and so it takes life: and I think thereof the Grecians call it the belly of the leg, because therein they bear their children instead of a belly. I will tell you now of a thing more strange than this. There are a kind of men among them called Dendritans, which are begotten in this manner: they cut out the right stone out of a man's cod, and set it in their ground, from which springeth up a great tree of flesh, with branches and leaves, bearing a kind of fruit much like to an acorn, but of a cubit in length, which they gather when they are ripe, and cut men out of them: their privy members are to be set on and taken off as they have occasion: rich men have them made of ivory, poor men of wood, wherewith they perform the act of generation and accompany their spouses.

When a man is come to his full age he dieth not, but is dissolved like smoke and is turned into air. One kind of food is common to them all, for they kindle a fire and broil frogs upon the coals, which are with them in infinite numbers flying in the air, and whilst they are broiling, they sit round about them as it were about a table, and lap up the smoke that riseth from them, and feast themselves therewith, and this is all their feeding.

For their drink they have air beaten in a mortar, which yieldeth a kind of moisture much like unto dew. They have no avoidance of excrements, either of urine or dung, neither have they any issue for that purpose like unto us.

Their boys admit copulation, not like unto ours, but in their hams, a little above the calf of the leg, for there they are open. They hold it a great ornament to be bald, for hairy persons are abhorred with them, and yet among the stars that are comets it is thought commendable, as some that have travelled those coasts reported unto us. Such beards as they have are growing a little above their knees. They have no nails on their feet, for their whole foot is all but one toe. Every one of them at the point of his rump hath a long colewort growing out instead of a tail, always green and flourishing, which though a man fall upon his back, cannot be broken. The dropping of their noses is more sweet than honey. When they labour or exercise themselves, they anoint their body with milk, wherein to if a little of that honey chance to drop, it will be turned into cheese.

They make very fat oil of their beans, and of as delicate a savour as any sweet ointment. They have many vines in those parts, which yield them but water: for the grapes that hang upon the clusters are like our hailstones: and I verily think that when the vines there are shaken with a strong wind, there falls a storm of hail amongst us by the breaking down of those kind of berries.

Their bellies stand them instead of satchels to put in their necessaries, which they may open and shut at their pleasure, for they have neither liver nor any kind of entrails, only they are rough and hairy within, so that when their young children are cold, they may be enclosed therein to keep them warm.

The rich men have garments of glass, very soft and delicate: the poorer sort of brass woven, whereof they have great plenty, which they enseam with water to make it fit for the workman, as we do our wool.

If I should write what manner of eyes they have, I doubt I should be taken for a liar in publishing a matter so incredible: yet I cannot choose but tell it: for they have eyes to take in and out as please themselves: and when a man is so disposed, he may take them out and lay them by till he have occasion to use them, and then put them in and see again: many when they have lost their own eyes, borrow of others, for the rich have many lying by them. Their ears are all made of the leaves of plane-trees, excepting those that come of acorns, for they only have them made of wood.

I saw also another strange thing in the same court: a mighty great glass lying upon the top of a pit of no great depth, whereinto, if any man descend, he shall hear everything that is spoken upon the earth: if he but look into the glass, he shall see all cities and all nations as well as if he were among them. There had I the sight of all my friends and the whole country about: whether they saw me or not I cannot tell: but if they believe it not to be so, let them take the pains to go thither themselves and they shall find my words true.

Then we took our leaves of the king and such as were near him, and took shipping and departed: at which time Endymion bestowed upon me two mantles made of their glass, and five of brass, with a complete armour of those shells of lupins, all which I left behind me in the whale: and sent with us a thousand of his Hippogypians to conduct us five hundred furlongs on our way. In our course we coasted many other countries, and lastly arrived at the Morning Star now newly inhabited, where we landed and took in fresh water: from thence we entered the Zodiac, passing by the Sun, and, leaving it on our right hand, took our course near unto the shore, but landed not in the country, though our company did much desire it, for the wind would not give us leave: but we saw it was a flourishing region, fat and well watered, abounding with all delights: but the Nephelocentaurs espying us, who were mercenary soldiers to Phaethon, made to our ship as fast as they could, and finding us to be friends, said no more unto us, for our Hippogypians were departed before.

Then we made forwards all the next night and day, and about evening-tide following we came to a city called Lychnopolis, still holding on our course downwards. This city is seated in the air between the Pleiades and the Hyades, somewhat lower than the Zodiac, and arriving there, not a man was to be seen, but lights in great numbers running to and fro, which were employed, some in the market place, and some about the haven, of which many were little, and as a man may say, but poor things; some again were great and mighty, exceeding glorious and resplendent, and there were places of receipt for them all; every one had his name as well as men; and we did hear them speak. These did us no harm, but invited us to feast with them, yet we were so fearful, that we durst neither eat nor sleep as long as we were there.

Their court of justice standeth in the midst of the city, where the governor sitteth all the night long calling every one by name, and he that answereth not is adjudged to

die, as if he had forsaken his ranks. Their death is to be quenched. We also standing amongst them saw what was done, and heard what answers the lights made for themselves, and the reasons they alleged for tarrying so long: there we also knew our own light, and spake unto it, and questioned it of our affairs at home, and how all did there, which related everything unto us.

That night we made our abode there, and on the next morrow returned to our ship, and sailing near unto the clouds had a sight of the city Nephelococcygia, which we beheld with great wonder, but entered not into it, for the wind was against us. The king thereof was Coronus, the son of Cottyphion: and I could not choose but think upon the poet Aristophanes, how wise a man he was, and how true a reporter, and how little cause there is to question his fidelity for what he hath written.

The third after, the ocean appeared plainly unto us, though we could see no land but what was in the air, and those countries also seemed to be fiery and of a glittering colour.

The fourth day about noon, the wind gently forbearing, settled us fair and leisurely into the sea; and as soon as we found ourselves upon water, we were surprised with incredible gladness, and our joy was unexpressible; we feasted and made merry with such provision as we had; we cast ourselves into the sea, and swam up and down for our disport, for it was a calm. But oftentimes it falleth out that the change to the better is the beginning of greater evils: for when we had made only two days' sail in the water, as soon as the third day appeared, about sun-rising, upon a sudden we saw many monstrous fishes and whales: but one above the rest, containing in greatness fifteen hundred furlongs, which came gaping upon us and troubled the sea round about him, so that he was compassed on every side with froth and foam, showing his teeth afar off, which were longer than any beech trees are with us, all as sharp as needles, and as white as ivory: then we took, as we thought, our last leaves one of another, and embracing together, expected our ending day.

The monster was presently with us, and swallowed us up ship and all; but by chance he caught us not between his chops, for the ship slipped through the void passages down into his entrails. When we were thus got within him we continued a good while in darkness, and could see nothing till he began to gape, and then we perceived it to be a monstrous whale of a huge breadth and height, big enough to contain a city that would hold ten thousand men: and within we found small fishes and many other creatures chopped in pieces, and the masts of ships and anchors and bones of men and luggage. In the midst of him was earth and hills, which were raised, as I conjectured, by the settling of the mud which came down his throat, for woods grew upon them and trees of all sorts and all manner of herbs, and it looked as if it had been husbanded. The compass of the land was two hundred and forty furlongs: there were also to be seen all kind of sea fowl, as gulls, halcyons and others that had made their nests upon the trees. Then we fell to weeping abundantly, but at the last I roused up my company, and propped up our ship and struck fire. Then we made ready supper of such as we had, for abundance of all sort of fish lay ready by us, and we had yet water enough left which we brought out of the Morning Star.

The next morrow we rose to watch when the whale should gape: and then looking out, we could sometimes see mountains, sometimes only the skies, and many times islands, for we found that the fish carried himself with great swiftness to every part of the sea. When we grew weary of this, I took seven of my company, and went into the wood to see what I could find there, and we had not gone above five furlongs but we light upon a temple erected to Neptune, as by the title appeared, and not far off we espied many sepulchres and pillars placed upon them, with a fountain of clear water close unto it: we also heard the barking of a dog, and saw smoke rise afar off, so that we judged there was some dwelling thereabout. Wherefore making the more haste, we lighted upon an old man and a youth, who were very busy in making a garden and in conveying water by a channel from the fountain into it: whereupon we were surprised both with joy and fear: and they also were brought into the same taking, and for a long time remained mute.

But after some pause, the old man said, What are ye, you strangers? any of the sea spirits? or miserable men like unto us? for we that are men by nature, born and bred in the earth, are now sea-dwellers, and swim up and down within the Continent of this whale, and know not certainly what to think of ourselves: we are like to men that be dead, and yet believe ourselves to be alive.

Whereunto I answered, For our parts, father, we are men also, newly come hither, and swallowed up ship and all but yesterday: and now come purposely within this wood which is so large and thick: some good angel, I think, did guide us hither to have the sight of you, and to make us know that we are not the only men confined within this monster: tell us therefore your fortunes, we beseech you, what you are, and how you came into this place.

But he answered, You shall not hear a word from me, nor ask any more questions until you have taken part of such viands as we are able to afford you. So he took us and brought us into his house, which was sufficient to serve his turn: his pallets were prepared, and all things else made ready. Then he set before us herbs and nuts and fish, and filled out of his own wine unto us: and when we were sufficiently satisfied, he then demanded of us what fortunes we had endured, and I related all things to him in order that had betide unto us, the tempest, the passages

in the island, our navigation in the air, our war, and all the rest, even till our diving into the whale.

Whereat he wondered exceedingly, and began to deliver also what had befallen to him, and said, By lineage, O ye strangers, I am of the isle Cyprus, and travelling from mine own country as a merchant, with this my son you see here, and many other friends with me, made a voyage for Italy in a great ship full fraught with merchandise, which perhaps you have seen broken in pieces in the mouth of the whale. We sailed with fair weather till we were as far as Sicily, but there we were overtaken with such a boisterous storm that the third day we were driven into the ocean, where it was our fortune to meet with this whale which swallowed us all up, and only we two escaped with our lives; all the rest perished, whom we have here buried and built a temple to Neptune. Ever since we have continued this course of life, planting herbs and feeding upon fish and nuts: here is wood enough, you see, and plenty of vines which yield most delicate wine: we have also a well of excellent cool water, which it may be you have seen: we make our beds of the leaves of trees, and burn as much wood as we will: we chase after the birds that fly about us, and go out upon the gills of the monster to catch after live fishes: here we bathe ourselves when we are disposed, for we have a lake of salt water not far off, about some twenty furlongs in compass, full of sundry sorts of fish, in which we swim and sail upon it in a little boat of mine own making. This is the seven-and-twentieth year of our drowning, and with all this we might be well enough contented if our neighbours and borderers about us were not perverse and troublesome, altogether insociable and of stern condition.

Is it so, indeed, said I, that there should be any within the whale but yourselves?

Many, said he, and such as are unreconcilable towards strangers, and of monstrous and deformed proportions. The western countries and the tail-part of the wood are inhabited by the Tarychanians that look like eels, with faces like a lobster: these are warlike, fierce, and feed upon raw flesh: they that dwell towards the right side are called Tritonomendetans, which have their upper parts like unto men, their lower parts like cats, and are less offensive than the rest. On the left side inhabit the Carcinochirians and the Thinnocephalians, which are in league one with another: the middle region is possessed by the Paguridians, and the Psettopodians, a warlike nation and swift of foot: eastwards towards the mouth is for the most part desert, as overwashed by the sea: yet am I fain to take that for my dwelling, paying yearly to the Psettopodians in way of tribute five hundred oysters.

Of so many nations doth this country consist. We must therefore devise among ourselves either how to be able to fight with them, or how to live among them. What number may they all amount unto? said I.

More than a thousand, said he.

And what armour have they?

None at all, said he, but the bones of fishes.

Then were it our best course, said I, to encounter them, being provided as we are, and they without weapons, for if we prove too hard for them we shall afterward live out of fear. This we concluded upon, and went to our ship to furnish ourselves with arms.

The occasion of war we gave by non-payment of tribute, which then was due, for they sent their messengers to demand it, to whom he gave a harsh and scornful answer, and sent them packing with their arrant. But the Psettopodians and Paguridians, taking it ill at the hands of Scintharus, for so was the man named, came against us with great tumult: and we, suspecting what they would do, stood upon our guard to wait for them, and laid five-and-twenty of our men in ambush, commanding them as soon as the enemy was passed by to set upon them, who did so, and arose out of their ambush, and fell upon the rear. We also being five-and-twenty in number (for Scintharus and his son were marshalled among us) advanced to meet with them, and encountered them with great courage and strength: but in the end we put them to flight and pursued them to their very dens. Of the enemies were slain an hundred threescore and ten, and but one of us besides Trigles, our pilot, who was thrust through the back with a fish's rib. All that day following and the night after we lodged in our trenches, and set on end a dry backbone of a dolphin instead of a trophy.

The next morrow the rest of the country people, perceiving what had happened, came to assault us. The Tarychanians were ranged in the right wing, with Pelamus their captain: the Thinnocephalians were placed in the left wing: the Carcinochirians made up the main battle: for the Tritonomendetans stirred not, neither would they join with either part. About the temple of Neptune we met with them, and joined fight with a great cry, which was answered with an echo out of the whale as if it had been out of a cave: but we soon put them to flight, being naked people, and chased them into the wood, making ourselves masters of the country. Soon after they sent ambassadors to us to crave the bodies of the dead and to treat upon conditions of peace; but we had no purpose to hold friendship with them, but set upon them the next day and put them all to the sword except the Tritonomendetans, who, seeing how it fared with the rest of their fellows, fled away through the gills of the fish, and cast themselves into the sea.

Then we travelled all the country over, which now was desert, and dwelt there afterwards without fear of

enemies, spending the time in exercise of the body and in hunting, in planting vineyards and gathering fruit of the trees, like such men as live delicately and have the world at will, in a spacious and unavoidable prison.

This kind of life led we for a year and eight months, but when the fifth day of the ninth month was come, about the time of the second opening of his mouth (for so the whale did once every hour, whereby we conjectured how the hours went away), I say about the second opening, upon a sudden we heard a great cry and a mighty noise like the calls of mariners and the stirring of oars, which troubled us not a little. Wherefore we crept up to the very mouth of the fish, and standing within his teeth, saw the strangest sight that ever eye beheld—men of monstrous greatness, half a furlong in stature, sailing upon mighty great islands as if they were upon shipboard.

I know you will think this smells like a lie, but yet you shall have it. The islands were of a good length indeed, but not very high, containing about an hundred furlongs in compass; every one of these carried of those kind of men eight-and-twenty, of which some sat on either side of the island and rowed in their course with great cypress trees, branches, leaves and all, instead of oars. On the stern or hinder part, as I take it, stood the governor, upon a high hill, with a brazen rudder of a furlong in length in his hand: on the fore-part stood forty such fellows as those, armed for the fight, resembling men in all points but in their hair, which was all fire and burnt clearly, so that they needed no helmets.

Instead of sails the wood growing in the island did serve their turns, for the wind blowing against it drave forward the island like a ship, and carried it which way the governor would have it, for they had pilots to direct them, and were as nimble to be stirred with oars as any long-boat. At the first we had the sight but of two or three of them: afterwards appeared no less than six hundred, which, dividing themselves in two parts, prepared for encounter, in which many of them by meeting with their barks together were broken in pieces, many were turned over and drowned: they that closed, fought lustily and would not easily be parted, for the soldiers in the front showed a great deal of valour, entering one upon another, and killed all they could, for none were taken prisoners. Instead of iron grapples they had mighty great polypodes fast tied, which they cast at the other, and if they once laid hold on the wood they made the isle sure enough for stirring.

They darted and wounded one another with oysters that would fill a wain, and sponges as big as an acre. The leader on the one side was Æolocentaurus, and of the other Thalassopotes. The quarrel, as it seems, grew about taking a booty: for they said that Thalassopotes drave away many flocks of dolphins that belonged to Æolocentaurus, as we heard by their clamours one to another, and calling upon the names of their kings: but Æolocentaurus had the better of the day and sunk one hundred and fifty of the enemy's islands, and three they took with the men and all. The rest withdrew themselves and fled, whom the other pursued, but not far, because it grew towards evening, but returned to those that were wrecked and broken, which they also recovered for the most part, and took their own away with them: for on their part there were no less than fourscore islands drowned. Then they erected a trophy for a monument of this island fight, and fastened one of the enemy's islands with a stake upon the head of the whale.

That night they lodged close by the beast, casting their cables about him, and anchored near unto him: their anchors are huge and great, made of glass, but of a wonderful strength. The morrow after, when they had sacrificed upon the top of the whale, and there buried their dead, they sailed away, with great triumph and songs of victory. And this was the manner of the islands' fight.

Part Two

Upon this we began to be weary of our abode in the whale, and our tarriance there did much trouble us. We therefore set all our wits a-work to find out some means or other to clear us from our captivity. First, we thought it would do well to dig a hole through his right side and make our escape that way forth, which we began to labour at lustily; but after we had pierced him five furlongs deep and found it was to no purpose, we gave it over. Then we devised to set the wood on fire, for that would certainly kill him without all question, and being once dead, our issue would be easy enough. This we also put in practice, and began our project at the tail end, which burnt seven days and as many nights before he had any feeling of our fireworks: upon the eighth and ninth days we perceived he began to grow sickly: for he gaped more dully than he was wont to do, and sooner closed his mouth again: the tenth and eleventh he was thoroughly mortified and began to stink: upon the twelfth day we bethought ourselves, though almost too late, that unless we underpropped his chops when he gaped next to keep them from closing, we should be in danger of perpetual imprisonment within his dead carcase and there miserably perish.

We therefore pitched long beams of timber upright within his mouth to keep it from shutting, and then made our ship in a readiness, and provided ourselves with store of fresh water, and all other things necessary for our use, Scintharus taking upon him to be our pilot, and the next morrow the whale died. Then we hauled our ship through the void passages, and fastening cables about his teeth, by little and little settled it into the sea, and mounting the back of the whale, sacrificed to Neptune, and for three days together took up our lodging hard by the trophy, for we were becalmed. The fourth day we put to sea, and

met with many dead corpses that perished in the late sea-fight, which our ship hit against, whose bodies we took measure of with great admiration, and sailed for a few days in very temperate weather. But after that the north wind blew so bitterly that a great frost ensued, wherewith the whole sea was all frozen up, not only superficially upon the upper part, but in depth also the depth of four hundred fathoms, so that we were fain to forsake our ship and run upon the ice. The wind sitting long in this corner, and we not able to endure it, put this device in practice, which was the invention of Scintharus:—with mattocks and other instruments we made a mighty cave in the water, wherein we sheltered ourselves forty days together: in it we kindled fire, and fed upon fish, of which we found great plenty in our digging. At the last, our provision falling short, we returned to our frozen ship, which we set upright, and spreading her sails, went forward as well as if we had been upon water, leisurely and gently sliding upon the ice; but on the fifth day the weather grew warm, and the frost brake, and all was turned to water again. We had not sailed three hundred furlongs forwards but we came to a little island that was desert, where we only took in fresh water (which now began to fail us), and with our shot killed two wild bulls, and so departed. These bulls have their horns growing not upon their heads but under their eyes, as Momus thought it better. Then we entered into a sea, not of water but of milk, in which appeared a white island full of vines. This island was only a great cheese well pressed (as we afterwards found when we fed upon it), about some five-and-twenty furlongs in bigness: the vines were full of clusters of grapes, out of which we could crush no wine, but only milk: in the midst of the island there was a temple built dedicated to Galatea, one of the daughters of Nereus, as by the inscription appeared. As long as we remained there the soil yielded us food and victuals, and our drink was the milk that came out of the grapes: in these, as they said, reigneth Tyro, the daughter of Salmoneus, who, after her departure, received this guerdon at the hands of Neptune.

In this island we rested ourselves five days, and on the sixth put to sea again, a gentle gale attending us, and the seas all still and quiet. The eighth day, as we sailed onward, not in milk any longer, but in salt and azure water, we saw many men running upon the sea, like unto us every way forth, both in shape and stature, but only for their feet, which were of cork, whereupon, I suppose, they had the name of Phellopodes.

We marvelled much when we saw they did not sink, but keep above water, and travel upon it so boldly. These came unto us, and saluted us in the Grecian language, and said they were bound towards Phello, their own country, and for a while ran along by us, but at last turned their own way and left us, wishing us a happy and prosperous voyage. Within a while after many islands appeared, and near unto them, upon our left hand, stood Phello, the place whereunto they were travelling, which was a city seated upon a mighty great and round cork. Further off, and more towards the right hand, we saw five other islands, large and mountainous, in which much fire was burning; but directly before us was a spacious flat island, distant from us not above five hundred furlongs: and approaching somewhat near unto it, a wonderful fragrant air breathed upon us, of a most sweet and delicate smell, such as Herodotus, the story-writer, saith ariseth out of Arabia the happy, consisting of a mixture of roses, daffodils, gillyflowers, lilies, violets, myrtles, bays, and blossoms of vines: such a dainty odoriferous savour was conveyed unto us.

Being delighted with this smell, and hoping for better fortunes after our long labours, we got within a little of the isle, in which we found many havens on every side, not subject to overflowing, and yet of great capacity, and rivers of clear water emptying themselves easily into the sea, with meadows and herbs and musical birds, some singing upon the shore, and many upon the branches of trees, a still and gentle air compassing the whole country. When pleasant blasts gently stirred the woods the motion of the branches made a continual delightsome melody, like the sound of wind instruments in a solitary place: a kind of clamour also was heard mixed with it, yet not tumultuous nor offensive, but like the noise of a banquet, when some do play on wind instruments, some commend the music, and some with their hands applaud the pipe, or the harp. All which yielded us so great content that we boldly entered the haven, made fast our ship and landed, leaving in her only Scintharus and two more of our companions behind us. Passing along through a sweet meadow we met with the guards that used to sail about the island, who took us and bound us with garlands of roses (which are the strictest bands they have), to be carried to their governor: from them we heard, as we were upon the way, that it was the island of those that are called blessed, and that Rhadamanthus was governor there, to whom we were brought and placed the fourth in order of them that were to be judged.

The first trial was about Ajax, the son of Telamon, whether he were a meet man to be admitted into the society of the Heroes or not: the objections against him were his madness and the killing of himself: and after long pleading to and fro, Rhadamanthus gave this sentence, that for the present he should be put to Hippocrates, the physician of Cos, to be purged with helleborus, and upon the recovery of his wits to have admittance.

The second was a controversy of love, Theseus and Menelaus contending which had the better right to Helen; but Rhadamanthus gave judgment on Menelaus' side, in respect of the manifold labours and perils he had incurred for that marriage' sake, whereas Theseus had wives enough beside to live withal—as the Amazon, and the daughters of Minos. The third was a question of precedency between Alexander, the son of Philip, and

Hannibal, the Carthaginian, in which Alexander was preferred, and his throne placed next to the elder Cyrus the Persian.

In the fourth place we appeared, and he demanded of us what reason we had, being living men, to take land in that sacred country, and we told him all our adventures in order as they befell us: then he commanded us to stand aside, and considering upon it a great while, in the end proposed it to the benchers, which were many, and among them Aristides the Athenian, surnamed the Just: and when he was provided what sentence to deliver, he said that for our busy curiosity and needless travels we should be accountable after our death; but for the present we should have a time limited for our abode, during which we should feast with the Heroes and then depart, prefixing us seven months' liberty to conclude our tarriance, and no more. Then our garlands fell off from us of themselves, and we were set loose and led into the city to feast with the blessed.

The city was all of gold, compassed with a wall made of the precious stone smaragdus, which had seven gates, every one cut out of a whole piece of timber of cinnamon-tree: the pavement of the city and all the ground within the walls was ivory: the temples of all the gods are built of beryl, with large altars made all of one whole amethyst, upon which they offer their sacrifices: about the city runneth a river of most excellent sweet ointment, in breadth an hundred cubits of the larger measure, and so deep that a man may swim in it with ease. For their baths they have great houses of glass, which they warm with cinnamon: and their bathing-tubs are filled with warm dew instead of water. Their only garments are cobwebs of purple colour; neither have they any bodies, but are intactile and without flesh, a mere shape and presentation only: and being thus bodiless, they yet stand, and are moved, are intelligent, and can speak: and their naked soul seemeth to wander up and down in a corporal likeness: for if a man touch them not he cannot say otherwise, but that they have bodies, altogether like shadows standing upright, and not, as they are, of a dark colour. No man waxeth any older there than he was before, but of what age he comes thither, so he continues. Neither is there any night with them, nor indeed clear day: but like the twilight towards morning before the sun be up, such a kind of light do they live in. They know but one season of the year which is the spring, and feel no other wind but Zephyrus. The region flourisheth with all sorts of flowers, and with all pleasing plants fit for shade: their vines bear fruit twelve times a year, every month once: their pomegranate-trees, their apple-trees, and their other fruit, they say, bear thirteen times in the year, for in the month called Minous they bear twice. Instead of wheat their ears bear them loaves of bread ready baked, like unto mushrooms. About the city are three hundred three-score and five wells of water, and as many of honey, and five hundred of sweet ointment, for they are less than the other. They have seven rivers of milk and eight of wine.

They keep their feast without the city in a field called Elysium, which is a most pleasant meadow, environed with woods of all sorts, so thick that they serve for a shade to all that are invited, who sit upon beds of flowers, and are waited upon, and have everything brought unto them by the winds, unless it be to have the wine filled: and that there is no need of: for about the banqueting place are mighty great trees growing of clear and pure glass, and the fruit of those trees are drinking-cups and other kind of vessels of what fashion or greatness you will: and every man that comes to the feast gathers one or two of those cups, and sets them before him, which will be full of wine presently, and then they drink. Instead of garlands the nightingales and other musical birds gather flowers with their beaks out of the meadows adjoining, and flying over their heads with chirping notes scatter them among them.

They are anointed with sweet ointment in this manner: sundry clouds draw that unguent out of the fountains and the rivers, which settling over the heads of them that are at the banquet, the least blast of wind makes a small rain fall upon them like unto a dew. After supper they spend the time in music and singing: their ditties that are in most request they take out of Homer's verses, who is there present himself and feasteth among them, sitting next above Ulysses: their choirs consist of boys and virgins, which were directed and assisted by Eunomus the Locrian, and Arion the Lesbian, and Anacreon, and Stesichorus, who hath had a place there ever since his reconcilement with Helena. As soon as these have done there enter a second choir of swans, swallows, and nightingales; and when they have ended, the whole woods ring like wind-instruments by the stirring of the air.

But that which maketh most for their mirth are two wells adjoining to the banqueting place, the one of laughter, the other of pleasure: of these every man drinks to begin the feast withal, which makes them spend the whole time in mirth and laughter.

I will also relate unto you what famous men I saw in that association. There were all the demigods, and all that fought against Troy, excepting Ajax the Locrian: he only, they told me, was tormented in the region of the unrighteous. Of barbarians there was the elder and the younger Cyrus, and Anacharsis the Scythian, Zamolxis the Thracian, and Numa the Italian. There was also Lycurgus the Lacedæmonian, and Phocion and Tellus the Athenians, and all the Wise Men, unless it were Periander.

I also saw Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus, prattling with Nestor and Palamedes, and close by him stood Hyacinthus the Lacedæmonian, and the gallant Narcissus and Hylas, and other beautiful and lovely youths, and for aught I could gather by him he was far in love with Hyacinthus, for he discoursed with him more than all the rest: for which cause, they said,

Rhadamanthus was offended at him, and often threatened to thrust him out of the island if he continued to play the fool in that fashion, and not give over his idle manner of jesting, when he was at their banquet. Only Plato was not present, for they said he dwelled in a city framed by himself, observing the same rule of government and laws as he had prescribed for them to live under.

Aristippus and Epicurus are prime men amongst them, because they are the most jovial good fellows and the best companions. Diogenes the Sinopean was so far altered from the man he was before that he married with Lais the harlot, and was many times so drunk that he would rise and dance about the room as a man out of his senses. Æsop the Phrygian served them for a jester. There was not one Stoic in company but were still busied in ascending the height of virtue's hill: and of Chrysippus we heard that it was not lawful for him by any means to touch upon the island until he have the fourth time purged himself with helleborus. The Academics, they say, were willing enough to come, but that they yet are doubtful and in suspense, and cannot comprehend how there should be any such island; but indeed, I think, they were fearful to come to be judged by Rhadamanthus, because themselves have abolished all kind of judgment: yet many of them, they say, had a desire, and would follow after those that were coming hither, but were so slothful as to give it over because they were not comprehensive, and therefore turned back in the midst of their way.

These were all the men of note that I saw there; and amongst them all Achilles was held to be the best man, and next to him Theseus. For their manner of venery and copulation thus it is: they couple openly in the eyes of all men, both with females and male kind, and no man holds it for any dishonesty. Only Socrates would swear deeply that he accompanied young men in a cleanly fashion, and therefore every man condemned him for a perjured fellow: and Hyacinthus and Narcissus both confessed otherwise for all his denial.

The women there are all in common, and no man takes exception at it, in which respect they are absolutely the best Platonists in the world: and so do the boys yield themselves to any man's pleasure without contradiction.

After I had spent two or three days in this manner, I went to talk with Homer the poet, our leisure serving us both well, and to know of him what countryman he was, a question with us hard to be resolved, and he said he could not certainly tell himself, because some said he was of Chios, some of Smyrna, and many to be of Colophon; but he said indeed he was a Babylonian, and among his own countrymen not called Homer but Tigranes, and afterwards living as an hostage among the Grecians, he had therefore that name put upon him. Then I questioned him about those verses in his books that are disallowed as not of his making, whether they were written by him or not, and he told me they were all his own, much condemning Zenodotus and Aristarchus, the grammarians, for their weakness in judgment.

When he had satisfied me in this, I asked him again why he began the first verse of his poem with anger: and he told me it fell out so by chance, not upon any premeditation. I also desired to know of him whether he wrote his Odysseys before his Iliads, as many men do hold: but he said it was not so. As for his blindness which is charged upon him, I soon found it was far otherwise, and perceived it so plainly that I needed not to question him about it.

Thus was I used to do many days when I found him idle, and would go to him and ask him many questions, which he would give me answer to very freely: especially when we talked of a trial he had in the court of justice, wherein he got the better: for Thersites had preferred a bill of complaint against him for abusing him and scoffing at him in his Poem, in which action Homer was acquitted, having Ulysses for his advocate.

About the same time came to us Pythagoras the Samian, who had changed his shape now seven times, and lived in as many lives, and accomplished the periods of his soul. The right half of his body was wholly of gold; and they all agreed that he should have place amongst them, but were doubtful what to call him, Pythagoras or Euphorbus. Empedocles also came to the place, scorched quite over, as if his body had been broiled upon the embers; but could not be admitted for all his great entreaty.

The time passing thus along, the day of prizes for masteries of activity now approached, which they call Thanatusia. The setters of them forth were Achilles the fifth time, and Theseus the seventh time. To relate the whole circumstance would require a long discourse, but the principal points I will deliver. At wrestling Carus, one of the lineage of Hercules, had the best, and wan the garland from Ulysses. The fight with fists was equal between Arius the Ægyptian, who was buried at Corinth, and Epius, that combated for it. There was no prize appointed for the Pancratian fight: neither do I remember who got the best in running: but for poetry, though Homer without question were too good for them all, yet the best was given to Hesiodus. The prizes were all alike, garlands plotted of peacocks' feathers.

As soon as the games were ended, news came to us that the damned crew in the habitation of the wicked had broken their bounds, escaped the gaolers, and were coming to assail the island, led by Phalaris the Agrigentine, Busyris the Ægyptian, Diomedes the Thracian, Sciron, Pituocamptes, and others: which Rhadamanthus hearing, he ranged the Heroes in battle array upon the sea-shore, under the leading of Theseus and Achilles and Ajax Telamonius, who had now

recovered his senses, where they joined fight; but the Heroes had the day, Achilles carrying himself very nobly. Socrates also, who was placed in the right wing, was noted for a brave soldier, much better than he was in his lifetime, in the battle at Delium: for when the enemy charged him, he neither fled nor changed countenance: wherefore afterwards, in reward of his valour, he had a prize set out for him on purpose, which was a beautiful and spacious garden, planted in the suburbs of the city, whereunto he invited many, and disputed with them there, giving it the name of Necracademia.

Then we took the vanquished prisoners, and bound them, and sent them back to be punished with greater torments.

This fight was also penned by Homer, who, at my departure, gave me the book to show my friends, which I afterwards lost and many things else beside: but the first verse of the poem I remember was this: “Tell me now, Muse, how the dead Heroes fought.”

When they overcome in fight, they have a custom to make a feast with sodden beans, wherewith they banquet together for joy of their victory: only Pythagoras had no part with them, but sat aloof off, and lost his dinner because he could not away with beans.

Six months were now passed over, and the seventh halfway onwards, when a new business was begot amongst us. For Cinyras the son of Scintharus, a proper tall young man, had long been in love with Helena, and it might plainly be perceived that she as fondly doted upon him, for they would still be winking and drinking one to another whilst they were a-feasting, and rise alone together, and wander up and down in the wood. This humour increasing, and knowing not what course to take, Cinyras’ device was to steal away Helena, whom he found as pliable to run away with him, to some of the islands adjoining, either to Phello, or Tyroessa, having before combined with three of the boldest fellows in my company to join with them in their conspiracy; but never acquainted his father with it, knowing that he would surely punish him for it.

Being resolved upon this, they watched their time to put it in practice: for when night was come, and I absent (for I was fallen asleep at the feast), they gave a slip to all the rest, and went away with Helena to shipboard as fast as they could. Menelaus waking about midnight, and finding his bed empty, and his wife gone, made an outcry, and calling up his brother, went to the court of Rhadamanthus.

As soon as the day appeared, the scouts told them they had descried a ship, which by that time was got far off into the sea. Then Rhadamanthus set out a vessel made of one whole piece of timber of asphodelus wood, manned with fifty of the Heroes to pursue after them, which were so willing on their way, that by noon they had overtaken them newly entered into the milky ocean, not far from Tyroessa, so near were they got to make an escape. Then took we their ship and hauled it after us with a chain of roses and brought it back again.

Rhadamanthus first examined Cinyras and his companions whether they had any other partners in this plot, and they confessing none, were adjudged to be tied fast by the privy members and sent into the place of the wicked, there to be tormented, after they had been scourged with rods made of mallows. Helena, all blubbered with tears, was so ashamed of herself that she would not show her face. They also decreed to send us packing out of the country, our prefixed time being come, and that we should stay there no longer than the next morrow: wherewith I was much aggrieved and wept bitterly to leave so good a place and turn wanderer again I knew not whither: but they comforted me much in telling me that before many years were past I should be with them again, and showed me a chair and a bed prepared for me against the time to come near unto persons of the best quality.

Then went I to Rhadamanthus, humbly beseeching him to tell me my future fortunes, and to direct me in my course; and he told me that after many travels and dangers, I should at last recover my country, but would not tell me the certain time of my return: and showing me the islands adjoining, which were five in number, and a sixth a little further off, he said, Those nearest are the islands of the ungodly, which you see burning all in a light fire, but the other sixth is the island of dreams, and beyond that is the island of Calypso, which you cannot see from hence. When you are past these, you shall come into the great continent, over against your own country, where you shall suffer many afflictions, and pass through many nations, and meet with men of inhuman conditions, and at length attain to the other continent.

When he had told me this, he plucked a root of mallows out of the ground, and reached it to me, commanding me in my greatest perils to make my prayers to that: advising me further neither to rake in the fire with my knife, nor to feed upon lupins, nor to come near a boy when he is past eighteen years of age: if I were mindful of this, the hopes would be great that I should come to the island again.

Then we prepared for our passage, and feasted with them at the usual hour, and next morrow I went to Homer, entreating him to do so much as make an epigram of two verses for me, which he did: and I erected a pillar of berylstone near unto the haven, and engraved them upon it. The epigram was this:

Lucian, the gods’ belov’d, did once attain
To see all this, and then go home again.

After that day's tarrying, we put to sea, brought onward on our way by the Heroes, where Ulysses closely coming to me that Penelope might not see him, conveyed a letter into my hand to deliver to Calypso in the isle of Ogygia. Rhadamanthus also sent Nauplius, the ferryman, along with us, that if it were our fortune to put into those islands, no man should lay hands upon us, because we were bent upon other employments.

No sooner had we passed beyond the smell of that sweet odour but we felt a horrible filthy stink, like pitch and brimstone burning, carrying an intolerable scent with it as if men were broiling upon burning coals: the air was dark and muddy, from which distilled a pitchy kind of dew. We heard also the lash of the whips, and the roarings of the tormented: yet went we not to visit all the islands, but that wherein we landed was of this form: it was wholly compassed about with steep, sharp, and craggy rocks, without either wood or water: yet we made a shift to scramble up among the cliffs, and so went forwards in a way quite overgrown with briars and thorns through a most villainous ghastly country, and coming at last to the prison and place of torment we wondered to see the nature and quality of the soil, which brought forth no other flowers but swords and daggers, and round about it ran certain rivers, the first of dirt, the second of blood, and the innermost of burning fire, which was very broad and unpassable, floating like water, and working like the waves of the sea, full of sundry fishes, some as big as firebrands, others of a less size like coals of fire, and these they call Lychniscies.

There was but one narrow entrance into it, and Timon of Athens appointed to keep the door, yet we got in by the help of Nauplius, and saw them that were tormented, both kings and private persons very many, of which there were some that I knew, for there I saw Cinyras tied by private members, and hanging up in the smoke. But the greatest torments of all are inflicted upon them that told any lies in their lifetime, and wrote untruly, as Ctesias the Cnidian, Herodotus, and many other, which I beholding, was put in great hopes that I should never have anything to do there, for I do not know that ever I spake any untruth in my life. We therefore returned speedily to our ship (for we could endure the sight no longer), and taking our leaves of Nauplius, sent him back again.

A little after appeared the Isle of Dreams near unto us, an obscure country and unperspicuous to the eye, endued with the same quality as dreams themselves are: for as we drew, it still gave back and fled from us, that it seemed to be farther off than at the first, but in the end we attained it and entered the haven called Hypnus, and adjoined to the gate of ivory, where the temple of Alectryon stands, and took land somewhat late in the evening.

Entering the gate we saw many dreams of sundry fashions; but I will first tell you somewhat of the city, because no man else hath written any description of it: only Homer hath touched it a little, but to small purpose.

It is round about environed with a wood, the trees whereof are exceeding high poppies and mandragoras, in which an infinite number of owls do nestle, and no other birds to be seen in the island: near unto it is a river running, called by them Nyctiporus, and at the gates are two wells, the one named Negretus, the other Pannychia. The wall of the city is high and of a changeable colour, like unto the rainbow, in which are four gates, though Homer speak but of two: for there are two which look toward the fields of sloth, the one made of iron, the other of potter's clay, through which those dreams have passage that represent fearful, bloody, and cruel matters: the other two behold the haven and the sea, of which the one is made of horn, the other of ivory, which we went in at.

As we entered the city, on the right hand stands the temple of the Night, whom, with Alectryon, they reverence above all the gods: for he hath also a temple built for him near unto the haven. On the left hand stands the palace of sleep, for he is the sovereign king over them all, and hath deputed two great princes to govern under him, namely, Taraxion, the son of Matogenes, and Plutocles, the son of Phantasion.

In the middest of the market-place is a well, by them called Careotis, and two temples adjoining, the one of falsehood, the other of truth, which have either of them a private cell peculiar to the priests, and an oracle, in which the chief prophet is Antiphon, the interpreter of dreams, who was preferred by Sleep to that place of dignity.

These dreams are not all alike either in nature or shape, for some of them are long, beautiful, and pleasing: others again are as short and deformed. Some make show to be of gold, and others to be as base and beggarly. Some of them had wings, and were of monstrous forms: others set out in pomp, as it were in a triumph, representing the appearances of kings, gods, and other persons.

Many of them were of our acquaintance, for they had been seen of us before, which came unto us and saluted us as their old friends, and took us and lulled us asleep, and feasted us nobly and courteously, promising beside all other entertainment which was sumptuous and costly, to make us kings and princes. Some of them brought us home to our own country to show us our friends there, and come back with us the next morrow.

Thus we spent thirty days and as many nights among them, sleeping and feasting all the while, until a sudden clap of thunder awakened us all, and we starting up, provided ourselves of victuals, and took sea again, and

on the third day landed in Ogygia. But upon the way I opened the letter I was to deliver, and read the contents, which were these:

“Ulysses to Calypso sendeth greeting. This is to give you to understand that after my departure from you in the vessel I made in haste for myself, I suffered shipwreck, and hardly escaped by the help of Leucothea into the country of the Phæacks, who sent me to mine own home, where I found many that were wooers to my wife, and riotously consumed my means; but I slew them all, and was afterwards killed myself by my son Telegonus, whom I begat of Circe, and am now in the island of the blessed, where I daily repent myself for refusing to live with you, and forsaking the immortality proffered me by you; but if I can spy a convenient time, I will give them all the slip and come to you.”

This was the effect of the letter, with some addition concerning us, that we should have entertainment: and far had I not gone from the sea but I found such a cave as Homer speaks of, and she herself working busily at her wool. When she had received the letter, and brought us in, she began to weep and take on grievously, but afterwards she called us to meat, and made us very good cheer, asking us many questions concerning Ulysses and Penelope, whether she was so beautiful and modest as Ulysses had often before bragged of her.

And we made her such answer as we thought would give her best content: and departing to our ship, reposed ourselves near unto the shore, and in the morning put to sea, where we were taken with a violent storm, which tossed us two days together, and on the third we fell among the Colocynthopiratans. These are a wild kind of men, that issue out of the islands adjoining, and prey upon passengers, and for their shipping have mighty great gourds six cubits in length, which they make hollow when they are ripe, and cleanse out all that is within them, and use the rinds for ships, making their masts of reeds, and their sails of the gourd leaves.

These set upon us with two ships furnished and fought with us, and wounded many, casting at us instead of stones the seeds of those gourds. The fight was continued with equal fortune until about noon, at which time, behind the Colocynthopiratans, we espied the Caryonautans coming on, who, as it appeared, were enemies to the other, for when they saw them approach, they forsook us and turned about to fight with them; and in the mean space we hoist sail and away, leaving them together by the ears, and no doubt but the Caryonautans had the better of the day, for they exceeded in number, having five ships well furnished, and their vessels of greater strength, for they are made of nutshells cloven in the midst and cleansed, of which every half is fifteen fathom in length.

When we were got out of sight we were careful for the curing of our hurt men, and from that time forwards went no more unarmed, fearing continually to be assaulted on the sudden: and good cause we had: for before sun-setting some twenty men or thereabouts, which also were pirates, made towards us, riding upon monstrous great dolphins, which carried them surely: and when their riders gat upon their backs, would neigh like horses. When they were come near us, they divided themselves, some on the one side, and some on the other, and flung at us with dried cuttle-fishes and the eyes of sea-crabs: but when we shot at them again and hurt them, they would not abide it, but fled to the island, the most of them wounded.

About midnight, the sea being calm, we fell before we were aware upon a mighty great halcyon’s nest, in compass no less than threescore furlongs, in which the halcyon herself sailed, as she was hatching her eggs, in quantity almost equalling the nest, for when she took her wings, the blast of her feathers had like to have overturned our ship, making a lamentable noise as she flew along.

As soon as it was day, we got upon it, and found it to be a nest, fashioned like a great lighter, with trees plaited and wound one within another, in which were five hundred eggs, every one bigger than a tun of Chios measure, and so near their time of hatching that the young chickens might be seen and began to cry. Then with an axe we hewed one of the eggs in pieces, and cut out a young one that had no feathers, which yet was bigger than twenty of our vultures.

When we had gone some two hundred furlongs from this nest, fearful prodigies and strange tokens appeared unto us, for the carved goose, that stood for an ornament on the stern of our ship, suddenly flushed out with feathers and began to cry. Scintharus, our pilot, that was a bald man, in an instant was covered with hair: and which was more strange than all the rest, the mast of our ship began to bud out with branches and to bear fruit at the top, both of figs and great clusters of grapes, but not yet ripe. Upon the sight of this we had great cause to be troubled in mind, and therefore besought the gods to avert from us the evil that by these tokens was portended.

And we had not passed full out five hundred furlongs, but we came in view of a mighty wood of pine-trees and cypress, which made us think it had been land, when it was indeed a sea of infinite depth, planted with trees that had no roots, but floated firm and upright, standing upon the water. When we came to it and found how the case stood with us, we knew not what to do with ourselves. To go forwards through the trees was altogether impossible: they were so thick and grew so close together: and to turn again with safety was as much unlikely.

I therefore got me up to the top of the highest tree to discover, if I could, what was beyond; and I found the breadth of the wood to be fifty furlongs or thereabout, and then appeared another ocean to receive us. Wherefore we thought it best to assay to lift up our ship upon the leaves of the trees which were thick grown, and by that means pass over, if it were possible, to the other ocean: and so we did: for fastening a strong cable to our ship, we wound it about the tops of the trees, and with much ado poised it up to the height, and placing it upon the branches, spread our sails, and were carried as it were upon the sea, dragging our ship after us by the help of the wind which set it forwards. At which time a verse of the poet Antimachus came to my remembrance, wherein he speaks of sailing over tops of trees.

When we had passed over the wood, and were come to the sea again, we let down our ship in the same manner as we took it up. Then sailed we forwards in a pure and clear stream, until we came to an exceeding great gulf or trench in the sea, made by the division of the waters as many times is upon land, where we see great clefts made in the ground by earthquakes and other means. Whereupon we struck sail and our ship stayed upon a sudden when it was at the pit's brim ready to tumble in: and we stooping down to look into it, thought it could be no less than a thousand furlongs deep, most fearful and monstrous to behold, for the water stood as it were divided into two parts, but looking on our right hand afar off, we perceived a bridge of water, which to our seeming, did join the two seas together and crossed over from the one to the other. Wherefore we laboured with oars to get unto it, and over it we went and with much ado got to the further side beyond all our expectation.

Then a calm sea received us, and in it we found an island, not very great, but inhabited with unsociable people, for in it were dwelling wild men named Bucephalians, that had horns on their heads like the picture of Minotaurus, where we went ashore to look for fresh water and victuals, for ours was all spent: and there we found water enough, but nothing else appeared; only we heard a great bellowing and roaring a little way off, which we thought to have been some herd of cattle, and going forwards, fell upon those men, who espying us, chased us back again, and took three of our company: the rest fled towards the sea.

Then we all armed ourselves, not meaning to leave our friends unrevenged, and set upon the Bucephalians as they were dividing the flesh of them that were slain, and put them all to flight, and pursued after them, of whom we killed fifty, and two we took alive, and so returned with our prisoners; but food we could find none.

Then the company were all earnest with me to kill those whom we had taken; but I did not like so well of that, thinking it better to keep them in bonds until ambassadors should come from the Bucephalians to ransom them that were taken, and indeed they did: and I well understood by the nodding of their heads, and their lamentable lowing, like petitioners, what their business was.

So we agreed upon a ransom of sundry cheeses and dried fish and onions and four deer with three legs apiece, two behind and one before. Upon these conditions we delivered those whom we had taken, and tarrying there but one day, departed.

Then the fishes began to show themselves in the sea, and the birds flew over our heads, and all other tokens of our approach to land appeared unto us. Within a while after we saw men travelling the seas, and a new found manner of navigation, themselves supplying the office both for ship and sailor, and I will tell you how. As they lie upon their backs in the water and their privy members standing upright, which are of a large size and fit for such a purpose, they fasten thereto a sail, and holding their cords in their hands, when the wind hath taken it, are carried up and down as please themselves.

After these followed others riding upon cork, for they yoke two dolphins together, and drive them on (performing themselves the place of a coachman), which draw the cork along after them. These never offered us any violence, nor once shunned our sight; but passed along in our company without fear, in a peaceable manner, wondering at the greatness of our ship, and beholding it on every side.

At evening we arrived upon a small island, inhabited, as it seemed, only by women, which could speak the Greek language; for they came unto us, gave us their hands, and saluted us, all attired like wantons, beautiful and young, wearing long mantles down to the foot: the island was called Cabbalusa and the city Hydramardia. So the women received us, and every one of them took aside one of us for herself, and made him her guest. But I pausing a little upon it (for my heart misgave me), looked narrowly round about, and saw the bones of many men, and the skulls lying together in a corner; yet I thought not good to make any stir, or to call my company about me, or to put on arms; but taking the mallow into my hand, made my earnest prayers thereto that I might escape out of those present perils.

Within a while after, when the strange female came to wait upon me, I perceived she had not the legs of a woman, but the hoofs of an ass. Whereupon I drew my sword, and taking fast hold of her, bound her, and examined her upon the point: and she, though unwillingly, confessed that they were sea-women, called

Onosceleans, and they fed upon strangers that travelled that way. For, said she, when we have made them drunk, we go to bed to them, and in their sleep, make a hand of them.

I hearing this, left her bound in the place where she was, and went up to the roof of the house, where I made an outcry, and called my company to me, and when they were come together, acquainted them with all that I had heard, and showed them the bones, and brought them into her that was bound, who suddenly was turned into water, and could not be seen. Notwithstanding, I thrust my sword into the water to see what would come of it, and it was changed into blood.

Then we made all the haste we could to our ship, and got us away, and as soon as it was clear day, we had sight of the mainland, which we judged to be the country opposite to our continent. Whereupon we worshipped, and made our prayers, and took council what was now to be done. Some thought it best only to go a-land and so return back again: others thought it better to leave our ship there and march into the mid-land to try what the inhabitants would do: but whilst we were upon this consultation a violent storm fell upon us, which drave our ship against the shore, and burst it all in pieces, and with much ado we all swam to land with our arms, every man catching what he could lay hands on.

These are all the occurrences I can acquaint you withal, till the time of our landing, both in the sea, and in our course to the islands, and in the air, and after that in the whale; and when we came out again what betid unto us among the Heroes and among the dreams, and lastly among the Bucephalians and the Onosceleans. What passed upon land the next books shall deliver.

***

Lucian was lying about sequels, by the way.

Averted Malefice
by Clark Ashton Smith

This Samhain night, a little poem. You may be thinking “Timothy, it is April.” but I remind you, dear listener, that I am in the Southern Hemisphere. Thanks to Roslyn Carlisle for her recording which was released via Librivox.

Where mandrakes, crying from the moonless fen,
Told how a witch, with eyes of owl or bat,
Found, and each root maleficently fat
Pulled for her waiting cauldron, on my ken
Upstole, escaping to the world of men,
A vapor as of some infernal vat;
Across the stars it clomb, and caught thereat
As if their bright regard to veil again.

Despite the web, methought they knew, appalled,
The stealthier weft in which all sound was still. . . .
Then sprang, as if the night found breath anew
A wind whereby the stars were disenthralled. . . .
Far off, I heard the cry of frustrate ill,
A witch that wailed above her curdled brew.

The Vampire Maid by Hume Nisbet

Time for our monster of the month. Hume Nisbet was an English writer who lived for a while in Australia, and it affected much of his fiction. This story, though, when I think of it, seems better suited to England, with its gloomier light and shingle roofs. The recording was released by TypicalJax through Librivox. Thanks to the production team.

***

It was the exact kind of abode that I had been looking after for weeks, for I was in that condition of mind when absolute renunciation of society was a necessity. I had become diffident of myself, and wearied of my kind. A strange unrest was in my blood; a barren dearth in my brains. Familiar objects and faces had grown distasteful to me. I wanted to be alone.

This is the mood which comes upon every sensitive and artistic mind when the possessor has been overworked or living too long in one groove. It is Nature's hint for him to seek pastures new; the sign that a retreat has become needful.

If he does not yield, he breaks down and becomes whimsical and hypochondriacal, as well as hypercritical. It is always a bad sign when a man becomes over-critical and censorious about his own or other people's work, for it means that he is losing the vital portions of work, freshness and enthusiasm.

Before I arrived at the dismal stage of criticism I hastily packed up my knapsack, and taking the train to Westmorland, I began my tramp in search of solitude, bracing air and romantic surroundings.

Many places I came upon during that early summer wandering that appeared to have almost the required conditions, yet some petty drawback prevented me from deciding. Sometimes it was the scenery that I did not take kindly to. At other places I took sudden antipathies to the landlady or landlord, and felt I would abhor them before a week was spent under their charge. Other places which might have suited me I could not have, as they did not want a lodger. Fate was driving me to this Cottage on the Moor, and no one can resist destiny.

One day I found myself on a wide and pathless moor near the sea. I had slept the night before at a small hamlet, but that was already eight miles in my rear, and since I had turned my back upon it I had not seen any signs of humanity; I was alone with a fair sky above me, a balmy ozone-filled wind blowing over the stony and heather-clad mounds, and nothing to disturb my meditations.

How far the moor stretched I had no knowledge; I only knew that by keeping in a straight line I would come to the ocean cliffs, then perhaps after a time arrive at some fishing village.

I had provisions in my knapsack, and being young did not fear a night under the stars. I was inhaling the delicious summer air and once more getting back the vigour and happiness I had lost; my city-dried brains were again becoming juicy.

Thus hour after hour slid past me, with the paces, until I had covered about fifteen miles since morning, when I saw before me in the distance a solitary stone-built cottage with roughly slated roof. 'I'll camp there if possible,' I said to myself as I quickened my steps towards it.

To one in search of a quiet, free life, nothing could have possibly been more suitable than this cottage. It stood on the edge of lofty cliffs, with its front door facing the moor and the back-yard wall overlooking the ocean. The sound of the dancing waves struck upon my ears like a lullaby as I drew near; how they would thunder when the autumn gales came on and the seabirds fled shrieking to the shelter of the sedges.

A small garden spread in front, surrounded by a dry-stone wall just high enough for one to lean lazily upon when inclined. This garden was a flame of colour, scarlet predominating, with those other soft shades that cultivated poppies take on in their blooming, for this was all that the garden grew.

As I approached, taking notice of this singular assortment of poppies, and the orderly cleanness of the windows, the front door opened and a woman appeared who impressed me at once favourably as she leisurely came along the pathway to the gate, and drew it back as if to welcome me.

She was of middle age, and when young must have been remarkably good-looking. She was tall and still shapely, with smooth clear skin, regular features and a calm expression that at once gave me a sensation of rest.

To my inquiries she said that she could give me both a sitting and bedroom, and invited me inside to see them. As I looked at her smooth black hair, and cool brown eyes, I felt that I would not be too particular about the accommodation. With such a landlady, I was sure to find what I was after here.

The rooms surpassed my expectation, dainty white curtains and bedding with the perfume of lavender about them, a sitting-room homely yet cosy without being crowded. With a sigh of infinite relief I flung down my knapsack and clinched the bargain.

She was a widow with one daughter, whom I did not see the first day, as she was unwell and confined to her own room, but on the next day she was somewhat better, and then we met.

The fare was simple, yet it suited me exactly for the time, delicious milk and butter with home-made scones, fresh eggs and bacon; after a hearty tea I went early to bed in a condition of perfect content with my quarters.

Yet happy and tired out as I was I had by no means a comfortable night. This I put down to the strange bed. I slept certainly, but my sleep was filled with dreams so that I woke late and unrefreshed; a good walk on the moor, however, restored me, and I returned with a fine appetite for breakfast.

Certain conditions of mind, with aggravating circumstances, are required before even a young man can fall in love at first sight, as Shakespeare has shown in his Romeo and Juliet. In the city, where many fair faces passed me every hour, I had remained like a stoic, yet no sooner did I enter the cottage after that morning walk than I succumbed instantly before the weird charms of my landlady's daughter, Ariadne Brunnell.

She was somewhat better this morning and able to meet me at breakfast, for we had our meals together while I was their lodger. Ariadne was not beautiful in the strictly classical sense, her complexion being too lividly white and her expression too set to be quite pleasant at first sight; yet, as her mother had informed me, she had been ill for some time, which accounted for that defect. Her features were not regular, her hair and eyes seemed too black with that strangely white skin, and her lips too red for any except the decadent harmonies of an Aubrey Beardsley.

Yet my fantastic dreams of the preceding night, with my morning walk, had prepared me to be enthralled by this modern poster-like invalid.

The loneliness of the moor, with the singing of the ocean, had gripped my heart with a wistful longing. The incongruity of those flaunting and evanescent poppy flowers, dashing the giddy tints in the face of that sober heath, touched me with a shiver as I approached the cottage, and lastly that weird embodiment of startling contrasts completed my subjugation.

She rose from her chair as her mother introduced her, and smiled while she held out her hand. I clasped that soft snowflake, and as I did so a faint thrill tingled over me and rested on my heart, stopping for the moment its beating.

This contact seemed also to have affected her as it did me; a clear flush, like a white flame, lighted up her face, so that it glowed as if an alabaster lamp had been lit; her black eyes became softer and more humid as our glances crossed, and her scarlet lips grew moist. She was a living woman now, while before she had seemed half a corpse.

She permitted her white slender hand to remain in mine longer than most people do at an introduction, and then she slowly withdrew it, still regarding me with steadfast eyes for a second or two afterwards.

Fathomless velvety eyes these were, yet before they were shifted from mine they appeared to have absorbed all my willpower and made me her abject slave. They looked like deep dark pools of clear water, yet they filled me with fire and deprived me of strength. I sank into my chair almost as languidly as I had risen from my bed that morning.

Yet I made a good breakfast, and although she hardly tasted anything, this strange girl rose much refreshed and with a slight glow of colour on her cheeks, which improved her so greatly that she appeared younger and almost beautiful.

I had come here seeking solitude, but since I had seen Ariadne it seemed as if I had come for her only. She was not very lively; indeed, thinking back, I cannot recall any spontaneous remark of hers; she answered my questions by monosyllables and left me to lead in words; yet she was insinuating and appeared to lead my thoughts in her direction and speak to me with her eyes. I cannot describe her minutely, I only know that from the first glance and touch she gave me I was bewitched and could think of nothing else.

It was a rapid, distracting, and devouring infatuation that possessed me; all day long I followed her about like a dog, every night I dreamed of that white glowing face, those steadfast black eyes, those moist scarlet lips, and each morning I rose more languid than I had been the day before. Sometimes I dreamt that she was kissing me with those red lips, while I shivered at the contact of her silky black tresses as they covered my throat; sometimes that we were floating in the air, her arms about me and her long hair enveloping us both like an inky cloud, while I lay supine and helpless.

She went with me after breakfast on that first day to the moor, and before we came back I had spoken my love and received her assent. I held her in my arms and had taken her kisses in answer to mine, nor did I think it strange that all this had happened so quickly. She was mine, or rather I was hers, without a pause. I told her it was fate that had sent me to her, for I had no doubts about my love, and she replied that I had restored her to life.

Acting upon Ariadne's advice, and also from a natural shyness, I did not inform her mother how quickly matters had progressed between us, yet although we both acted as circumspectly as possible, I had no doubt Mrs Brunnell could see how engrossed we were in each other. Lovers are not unlike ostriches in their modes of concealment. I was not afraid of asking Mrs Brunnell for her daughter, for she already showed her partiality towards me, and had bestowed upon me some confidences regarding her own position in life, and I therefore knew that, so far as social position was concerned, there could be no real objection to our marriage. They lived in this lonely spot for the sake of their health, and kept no servant because they could not get any to take service so far away from other humanity. My coming had been opportune and welcome to both mother and daughter.

For the sake of decorum, however, I resolved to delay my confession for a week or two and trust to some favourable opportunity of doing it discreetly.

Meantime Ariadne and I passed our time in a thoroughly idle and lotus-eating style. Each night I retired to bed meditating starting work next day, each morning I rose languid from those disturbing dreams with no thought for anything outside my love. She grew stronger every day, while I appeared to be taking her place as the invalid, yet I was more frantically in love than ever, and only happy when with her. She was my lone-star, my only joy–my life.

We did not go great distances, for I liked best to lie on the dry heath and watch her glowing face and intense eyes while I listened to the surging of the distant waves. It was love made me lazy, I thought, for unless a man has all he longs for beside him, he is apt to copy the domestic cat and bask in the sunshine.

I had been enchanted quickly. My disenchantment came as rapidly, although it was long before the poison left my blood.

One night, about a couple of weeks after my coming to the cottage, I had returned after a delicious moonlight walk with Ariadne. The night was warm and the moon at the full, therefore I left my bedroom window open to let in what little air there was.

I was more than usually fagged out, so that I had only strength enough to remove my boots and coat before I flung myself wearily on the coverlet and fell almost instantly asleep without tasting the nightcap draught that was constantly placed on the table, and which I had always drained thirstily.

I had a ghastly dream this night. I thought I saw a monster bat, with the face and tresses of Ariadne, fly into the open window and fasten its white teeth and scarlet lips on my arm. I tried to beat the horror away, but could not, for I seemed chained down and thralled also with drowsy delight as the beast sucked my blood with a gruesome rapture.

I looked out dreamily and saw a line of dead bodies of young men lying on the floor, each with a red mark on their arms, on the same part where the vampire was then sucking me, and I remembered having seen and wondered at such a mark on my own arm for the past fortnight. In a flash I understood the reason for my strange weakness, and at the same moment a sudden prick of pain roused me from my dreamy pleasure.

The vampire in her eagerness had bitten a little too deeply that night, unaware that I had not tasted the drugged draught. As I woke I saw her fully revealed by the midnight moon, with her black tresses flowing loosely, and with her red lips glued to my arm. With a shriek of horror I dashed her backwards, getting one last glimpse of her savage eyes, glowing white face and blood-stained red lips; then I rushed out to the night, moved on by my fear and hatred, nor did I pause in my mad flight until I had left miles between me and that accursed Cottage on the Moor.

Venice : A patron saint of roistery

The last time we visited Mythic Venice we found a representative of the Infernal, so perhaps its fitting that this time we add a saint. He's not one of the great saints, like Mark, or a locally potent but slightly pagan-seeming saint like Giustiana. He seems to be a folk saint, supported by a bishop. at the insistence of his living sister.

This is not how sainthood works: you really can't just claim it for a person by force or finance. The current method of checking miracles is not in place in period, but still, you need a local cultus and a tradition of miracles to be recognised by the Church. That being said, the Church itself says there are a heap of saints it does not know about: they are the saints which are venerated on All Hallows. Possibly this young man's suffering expiated his sins sufficiently for him to find exceptional grace.

Time to hand over to a younger version of me, reading from the Lives of the Dogaressas by Edgecume Staley. This is from a section late in the Sixteenth century, but I'd include it, because we need more interesting NPCs. The Doge at the time was Antonio Venier.

"There was however a thorn, and a very sharp one too, in Antonio Venier's career ; it was one which sprang out of his own branch of the family tree.

Alvise, or Luigi, his eldest son, was if not a ne'er-do-well, a very wild sort of lad. Probably the serenity of the life at the Ducal Palace palled upon the youth, who sought relief in romantic attachments. Among his escapades was one, in company with his friend, Marco Loredan, which compromised the fair fame of Madonna Felicita, the wife of Messir Giovanni dalle Boccole—a rosebud and a thorn!

Messir dalle Boccole discovered the intrigue and watched his opportunity for chastisement, but the gay Lotharios anticipated his purpose and in a moment of peculiar sportiveness,—it was at midnight, iith June 1388,—they stuck up, over Messir dalle Boccole's front door a Phallic symbol, and scribbled upon the lintel some opprobrious words. Such an insult was intolerable, and, as the culprits did nothing to conceal their identity, nor make amends, dalle Boccole complained of their conduct to their respective fathers.

How Marco's father acted we know not, but Doge Venier visited his son's offence with the severity of a Brutus. The lad was put on his trial before the Signori delle Noitiy—the Police Court of Venice,—a fine was imposed of one hundred lire, and two months' imprisonment in the Pozzi, —where only political prisoners were confined. " Horrible, dark, damp cells, that would make the saddest life in the free light and air seem bright and desirable," so wrote George Eliot in 1860.

In this terrible place of confinement, with a steady depth of two feet of stagnant putrid water, the only dry rest his hard bench, which did duty for table and for bed, poor young Alvise lost heart and health. He pleaded desperately with his father to release him from his terrors and his infirmities, but the Doge gave no reply and made no sign. He was, he plumed himself the impersonation of all that was just, honourable, and unimpeachable in Venice, and, not for his own offspring, could he suffer any relaxation of the sentence. His son had transgressed the law, he must abide the consequences, so he ruled. And the consequences, in spite of his mother, the Dogaressa Agnese's impassioned intercessions, were that the young man, left to his fate, died miserably in the filthy Gehenna, in the springtide of 1388.

This was the parental justice of the urbane and gracious Antonio Venier, but the " thorn " pierced his own hand and heart, and after two years of useless remorse and self-accusation, the unnatural if judicial Doge passed away in mental anguish in the Palazzo Venier ai Gesiusti near the Ponte dell'Acqua-vita. There is quite a touching little story which concerns the burial of poor young Alvise Venier. The sister who loved him best, Antonia, was so greatly distressed by her father's attitude that she professed herself a Canoness of San Zaccaria, and, when her brother's dead body was refused decent burial by the Doge, she obtained possession of it and carried it away from the foul Casa degli Spiriti, —where all the dead rest before their final course to San Michele,—the common cemetery,—and placed it reverently in an unoccupied piece of land of the fondamento of Cannaregio, the most distant sestiere from the Ducal Palace.

Directly the Doge was dead she put into effect a resolution she had made, — after earnest prayer to St Mary, St Giustina, and the good Bishop Lodovico, her patron,—to build a church and a Canonica, and dedicate them in the name of her brother as Sant' Alvise. In the crypt she buried him and, by her will, directed that her own dead body should be laid beside his. Alas the Orto Botanico, where,—when not beset by picnic parties of bird – lovers at the neighbouring aviaries of St Giobbe, — devout Antonia Venier meditated and prayed, and whence she watched her church arise, has lost all traces of its original condition, it is now a torpedo factory!"

I must say I disagree with Staley. I think that the sacred site of the Patron of the Shockingly Unexpected Phallic Object being turned into a torpedo factory is oddly fitting, but your saga may vary.

Cellini shoots the Prince of Orange in the face

A quick return to Cellini, where he almost changes the course of Magonomia history.

I SHALL skip over some intervening circumstances, and tell how Pope Clement, wishing to save the tiaras and the whole collection of the great jewels of the Apostolic Camera, had me called, and shut himself up together with me and the Cavalierino in a room alone. This cavalierino had been a groom in the stable of Filippo Strozzi; he was French, and a person of the lowest birth; but being a most faithful servant, the Pope had made him very rich, and confided in him like himself. So the Pope, the Cavaliere, and I, being shut up together, they laid before me the tiaras and jewels of the regalia; and his Holiness ordered me to take all the gems out of their gold settings. This I accordingly did; afterwards I wrapt them separately up in bits of paper and we sewed them into the linings of the Pope's and the Cavaliere's clothes. Then they gave me all the gold, which weighed about two hundred pounds, and bade me melt it down as secretly as I was able. I went up to the Angel, where I had my lodging, and could lock the door so as to be free from interruption. There I built a little draught-furnace of bricks, with a largish pot, shaped like an open dish, at the bottom of it; and throwing the gold upon the coals, it gradually sank through and dropped into the pan.

While the furnace was working I never left off watching how to annoy our enemies; and as their trenches were less than a stone's-throw right below us, I was able to inflict considerable damage on them with some useless missiles, of which there were several piles, forming the old munition of the castle. I chose a swivel and a falconet, which were both a little damaged in the muzzle, and filled them with the projectiles I have mentioned. When I fired my guns, they hurtled down like mad, occasioning all sorts of unexpected mischief in the trenches. Accordingly I kept these pieces always going at the same time that the gold was being melted down; and a little before vespers I noticed some one coming along the margin of the trench on muleback. The mule was trotting very quickly, and the man was talking to the soldiers in the trenches. I took the precaution of discharging my artillery just before he came immediately opposite; and so, making a good calculation, I hit my mark. One of the fragments struck him in the face; the rest were scattered on the mule, which fell dead. A tremendous uproar rose up from the trench; I opened fire with my other piece, doing them great hurt. The man turned out to be the Prince of Orange, who was carried through the trenches to a certain tavern in the neighbourhood, whither in a short while all the chief folk of the army came together.

When Pope Clement heard what I had done, he sent at once to call for me, and inquired into the circumstance. I related the whole, and added that the man must have been of the greatest consequence, because the inn to which they carried him had been immediately filled by all the chiefs of the army, so far at least as I could judge. The Pope, with a shrewd instinct, sent for Messer Antonio Santacroce, the nobleman who, as I have said, was chief and commander of the gunners. He bade him order all us bombardiers to point our pieces, which were very numerous, in one mass upon the house, and to discharge them all together upon the signal of an arquebuse being fired. He judged that if we killed the generals, the army, which was already almost on the point of breaking up, would take flight. God perhaps had heard the prayers they kept continually making, and meant to rid them in this manner of those impious scoundrels.

We put our cannon in order at the command of Santacroce, and waited for the signal. But when Cardinal Orsini became aware of what was going forward, he began to expostulate with the Pope, protesting that the thing by no means ought to happen, seeing they were on the point of concluding an accommodation, and that if the generals were killed, the rabble of the troops without a leader would storm the castle and complete their utter ruin. Consequently they could by no means allow the Pope's plan to be carried out. The poor Pope, in despair, seeing himself assassinated both inside the castle and without, said that he left them to arrange it. On this, our orders were countermanded; but I, who chafed against the leash, when I knew that they were coming round to bid me stop from firing, let blaze one of my demi-cannons, and struck a pillar in the courtyard of the house, around which I saw a crowd of people clustering. This shot did such damage to the enemy that it was like to have made them evacuate the house. Cardinal Orsini was absolutely for having me hanged or put to death; but the Pope took up my cause with spirit. The high words that passed between them, though I well know what they were, I will not here relate, because I make no profession of writing history. It is enough for me to occupy myself with my own affairs.

The Venus Trap by E. E. Smith

When I first read this story, I thought: “That’s an odd one from you, Doc.” E. E. “Doc” Smith was a popular early science fiction author. He wrote the Lensman series, which predates and is very reminiscent of Star Wars. The thing I didn’t know is that there were two writers going by E. E. Smith in period.

Evelyn E Smith seems to often write stories about intelligent plants. There’s a wonderful, ambulatory vine in one of her other stories I’d like to eventually write up. Here, we see her colonisation of a distant planet and what we'd call a magical tree.

One thing Man never counted on to take along into space with him was the Eternal Triangle—especially a true-blue triangle like this!

“What’s the matter, darling?” James asked anxiously. “Don’t you like the planet?”

“Oh, I love the planet,” Phyllis said. “It’s beautiful.”

It was. The blue—really blue—grass, blue-violet shrubbery and, loveliest of all, the great golden tree with sapphire leaves and pale pink blossoms, instead of looking alien, resembled nothing so much as a fairy-tale version of Earth.

Even the fragrance that filled the atmosphere was completely delightful to Terrestrial nostrils—which was unusual, for most other planets, no matter how well adapted for colonization otherwise, tended, from the human viewpoint, anyway, to stink. Not that they were not colonized nevertheless, for the population of Earth was expanding at too great a rate to permit merely olfactory considerations to rule out an otherwise suitable planet. This particular group of settlers had been lucky, indeed, to have drawn a planet as pleasing to the nose as to the eye—and, moreover, free from hostile aborigines.

As a matter of fact, the only apparent evidence of animate life were the small, bright-hued creatures winging back and forth through the clear air, and which resembled Terrestrial birds so closely that there had seemed no point to giving them any other name. There were insects, too, although not immediately perceptible—but the ones like bees were devoid of stings and the butterflies never had to pass through the grub stage but were born in the fullness of their beauty.

However, fairest of all the creatures on the planet to James Haut—just then, anyhow—was his wife, and the expression on her face was not a lovely one.

“You do feel all right, don’t you?” he asked. “The light gravity gets some people at first.”

“Yes, I guess I’m all right. I’m still a little shaken, though, and you know it’s not the gravity.”

***

He would have liked to take her in his arms and say something comforting, reassuring, but the constraint between them had not yet been worn off. Although he had sent her an ethergram nearly every day of the voyage, the necessarily public nature of the messages had kept them from achieving communication in the deeper sense of the word.

“Well, I suppose you did have a bit of a shock,” he said lamely. “Somehow, I thought I had told you in my ‘grams.”

“You told me plenty in the ‘grams, but not quite enough, it seems.”

Her words didn’t seem to make sense; the strain had evidently been a little too much. “Maybe you ought to go inside and lie down for a while.”

“I will, just as soon as I feel less wobbly.” She brushed back the long, light brown hair which had got tumbled when she fainted. He remembered a golden rather than a reddish tinge in it, but that had been under the yellow sun of Earth; under the scarlet sun of this planet, it took on a different beauty.

“How come the preliminary team didn’t include—it in their report?” she asked, avoiding his appreciative eye.

“They didn’t know. We didn’t find out ourselves until we’d sent that first message to Earth. I suppose by the time we did relay the news, you were on your way.”

“Yes, that must have been it.”

The preliminary exploration team had established the fact that the planet was more or less Earth-type, that its air was breathable, its temperature agreeably springlike, its mineral composition very similar to Earth’s, with only slight traces of unknown elements, that there was plenty of drinkable water and no threatening life-forms. Human beings could, therefore, live on it.

It remained for the scout team[Pg 81] to determine whether human beings would want to live on it—whether, in fact, they themselves would want to, because, if so, they had the option of becoming the first settlers. That was the way the system worked and, in the main, it worked well enough.

After less than two weeks, this scout team had beamed back to Earth the message that the planet was suitable

for colonization, so suitable that they would like to give it the name of Elysium, if there was no objection.

There would be none, Earth had replied, so long as the pioneers bore in mind the fact that six other planets had previously been given that name, and a human colony currently existed on only one of those. No need to worry about a conflict of nomenclature, however, because the name of that other planet Elysium had subsequently been changed by unanimous vote of settlers to Hades.

***

After this somewhat sinister piece of information, Earth had added the more cheerful news that the wives and families of the scouts would soon be on their way, bringing with them the tools and implements necessary to transform the wilderness of the frontier into another Earth. In the meantime, the men were to set up the packaged buildings with which all scout ships were equipped, so that when the women came, homes would be ready for them.

The men set to work and, before the month was out, they discovered that Elysium was neither a wilderness nor a frontier. It was populated by an intelligent race which had developed its culture to the limit of its physical abilities—actually well beyond the limit of what the astounded Terrestrials could have conceived its physical abilities to be—then, owing to unavoidable disaster, had started to die out.

The remaining natives were perspicacious enough to see in the Terrestrials' coming not a threat but a last hope of revivifying their own moribund species. Accordingly, the Earthmen were encouraged to go ahead building on the sites originally selected, the only ban being on the type of construction materials used—and a perfectly reasonable one under the circumstances.

James had built his cottage near the largest, handsomest tree in the area allotted to him; since there were no hostile life-forms, there was no need for a closely knit community. Everyone who had seen it agreed that his house was the most attractive one of all, for, although it was only a standard prefab, he had used taste and ingenuity to make it a[Pg 82] little different from the other unimaginative homes.

And now Phyllis, for whom he had performed all this labor of love, for whom he had waited five long months—the tedium of which had been broken only by the intellectual pleasure of teaching English to a sympathetic native neighbor—Phyllis seemed unappreciative. She had hardly looked at the inside of the cottage, when he had shown her through, and now was staring at the outside in a blank sort of way.

The indoctrination courses had not, he reflected, reconciled her to the frontiersman's necessarily simple mode of living—which was ironic, considering that one of her original attractions for him had been her apparent suitability for the pioneer life. She was a big girl, radiantly healthy, even though a little green at the moment.

***

He just managed to keep his voice steady. "You don't like the house—is that it?

"But I do like it. Honestly I do." She touched his arm diffidently. "Everything would be perfect if only—"

"If only what? Is it the curtains? I'm sorry if you don't like them. I brought them all the way from Earth in case the planet turned out to be habitable. I thought blue was your favorite color."

"Oh, it is, it is! I'm mad about the curtains."

Perhaps it wasn't the house that disappointed her; perhaps it was he himself who hadn't lived up to dim memory and ardent expectation.

"If you want to know what is bothering me—" she glanced up apprehensively, lowering her voice as she did—"it's that tree. It's stuck on you; I just know it is."

He laughed. "Now where did you get a preposterous idea like that, Phyl? You've been on the planet exactly twenty-four hours and—"

"—and I have, in my luggage, one hundred and thirty-two ethergrams talking about practically nothing but Magnolia this, Magnolia that. Oh, I had my suspicions even before I landed, James. The only thing I didn't suspect was that she was a tree!"

"What are you talking about, honey? Magnolia and I—we're just friends."

"Purely a platonic relationship, I assure you," the tree herself agreed. It would have been silly for her to pretend not to have overheard, since the two were still standing almost directly underneath her. "Purely platonic."

"She's more like a sister to me," James tried to explain.

Phyllis stiffened. "Frankly, if I had imagined I was going to have a tree for a sister-in-law, I would have thought before I married you, James." Bursting into tears, she ran inside the cottage.

"Sorry," he said miserably to Magnolia. "It's a long trip out from Earth and an uncomfortable one. I don't suppose the other women were especially nice to her, either.

Faculty wives mostly and you know how they are…. No, I don't suppose you would. But she shouldn't have acted that way toward you."

"Not your fault," Magnolia told him, sighing with such intensity that he could feel the humidity rise. "I know how you've been looking forward to her arrival. Rather a letdown, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm sure it'll be all right." He tried to sound confident. "And I know you'll like Phyllis when you get to know her."

"Possibly, but so far I'm afraid I must admit—since there never has been any pretense between us—that she is a bit of a disappointment. I—and my sisters also—had expected your females, when they came, to be as upright and true blue as you. Instead, what are they? Shrubs."

The door to the cottage flew open. "A shrub, am I!" Phyllis brandished an axe which, James winced to recall, was an item of the equipment he had ordered from Earth before the scout team had learned that the trees were intelligent. "I'll shrub you!"

"Phyllis!" He wrested the axe from her grip. "That would be murder!"

"'Woodman,' as the Terrestrial poem goes," the tree remarked, "'spare that tree! Touch not a single bough! In youth it sheltered me and I'll protect it now!'"

Good of her to take the whole thing so calmly—rather, to pretend to take it so calmly, for he knew how sensitive Magnolia really was—but he was afraid this show of moral courage would not diminish Phyllis's dislike for her; those without self-control seldom appreciate those who have it.

"If you'll excuse us," he said, putting his arm around his wife's heaving shoulders, "I'd better see to Phyllis; she's a little upset. Holdover from spacesickness, I expect. Poor girl, she's a long way from home and frightened."

"I understand, Jim," Magnolia told him, "and, remember, whatever happens, you can always count on me."

"I must say you're not a very admirable representative of Terrestrial womanhood!" James snapped, as soon as the door had slammed behind him and his wife, leaving them alone together in[Pg 84] the principal room of the cottage. "Insulting the very first native you meet!"

"I did not either insult her. All I said was, 'What beautiful flowers—do you suppose the fruit is edible?' How was I to know it—she could understand? Naturally I wouldn't dream of eating her fruit now. It would probably taste nasty anyway. And how do you think I felt when a tree answered me back? You don't care that I fainted dead away, and I've never fainted before in my life. All you care about is that old vegetable's feelings! It was bad enough, feeling for five months that someone had come between us, but to find out it wasn't someone but something—!"

"Phyllis," he said coldly, "I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

Dropping into the overstuffed chair, his wife dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. "She wasn't so very polite to me!"

"Look, Phyllis—" he strove to make his voice calm, adult, reasonable—"you happened to have hit on rather a touchy point with her. Those trees are dioecious, you know, like us, and she isn't mated. And, well, she has rather a lot of xylem zones—rings, you know."

"Are you trying to tell me she's old?"

"Well, she's no sapling any more. And, consideration aside, you know it's government's policy for us to establish good relations with any intelligent life-form we have to share a planet with. You weren't in there trying."

Phyllis put away her handkerchief with what he hoped would be a final sniff. "I suppose I shouldn't have acted that way," she conceded.

"Now you're talking like my own dear Phyllis," James said tenderly, though, as a matter of fact, he had a very remote idea of what his own dear Phyllis was like. He had met her only a couple of months before the scout mission was scheduled, and so their courtship had been brief, and the actual weeks of marriage even briefer. He had remembered Phyllis as beautiful—and she was beautiful. He had not, however, remembered her as pig-headed—and pig-headed she was, too.

"How come she hasn't a mate? I didn't think trees were choosy."

***

He wouldn't take exception to that statement, uncharitable though it was; after all, someone whose only acquaintance with trees had been with the Terrestrial variety would naturally be incapable of appreciating the total tree at its highest development.

"It's a great tragedy," he told her in a hushed tone. "There was a blight some years back and most of the male trees died off, except for a few on the other side of the planet—well out of bee-shot, even if the females there would let the females here have any pollen, which they absolutely won't."

"I don't blame them," Phyllis said coldly. Of course she would identify at once with the trees whose domestic lives seemed to be threatened.

It's not that so much. It's that the male trees produce so little pollen."

"This would be a good place for people with hay fever then, wouldn't it?"

"And even when there is fruit, so much of it tends to be parthenocarpous—no seeds." He sighed. "The entire race is dying out."

"How is it you know so much about botany?" she asked suspiciously. "It's not your field."

"I don't know so very much, really," he smiled. "I had to learn a little, if I wanted to work the land, so I borrowed an elementary text from Cutler." Had he been a trifle idealistic in quitting his snug, if uninspiring, job on the faculty to join in this Utopian venture? So many of the other men at the university had enrolled, it had seemed a splendid idea until Phyllis's arrival.

"Daddy never had any trouble working his land and he doesn't know a thing about botany. You've been boning up on it just to please her!"

"Phyllis! How can you jump to conclusions without a shred of evidence?" Not that she wouldn't be able to collect such evidence later, because the allegation happened to be correct. If, instead of coming to Elysium, I had merely gone to China, would she have thought it so odd that I studied Chinese? Then why, where the natives are trees, shouldn't I study botany? The woman is unreasonable.

***

"And will her—people let you farm?"

Now he could show her how cogently and comprehensively he could answer a logical question. "That aspect of the situation will be all right, dear, because only the trees are an intelligent species and, even of them, some aren't so bright. They won't have any more objection to our eating the other fruit and vegetables than we would have to an extraterrestrials eating our eggs and chickens, for example. We're going to try to introduce some Earth plants here, though, as the higher forms of vegetation are dying out and we're afraid the lower might follow. Pity it's too late for a sound conservation program."

***

Phyllis said grimly, "She doesn't think it's too late for a sound conservation program. She still has hopes—far-fetched, maybe, and I'm not so sure they are. Mark my words, James, she's got designs on you."

"Don't be idiotic," he protested. "That would be—" he attempted to introduce a light note—"it would be miscegenation."

"These foreigners can't be expected to have our standards." And she burst into tears again. "A fine thing to go through that miserable five-month trip only to find out a tree has alienated my husband's affections."

"Oh, come on, Phyl!" He still was trying for a smile. "What would a tree see in me?"

"I'm beginning to wonder what I saw in you. You never loved me; you just wanted a wife to come out and colonize with you and b-b-breed."

What could he say? It was almost true. Phyllis was a beautiful girl and he loved her, but, if he had planned to remain as an instructor with the Romance Languages Department instead of joining the scout mission, he knew he would never have asked her to be his wife … for her sake, of course, as well as his own. He should say something to reassure her, but the words wouldn't come.

"I don't like it here," Phyllis sobbed. "I don't like blue leaves. I don't like blue grass. I like them green, the way they're supposed to be. I hate this nasty planet. It's all wrong. I want to go home."

She was very young—less than eight years younger than he, true, but he was mature for his age. They didn't know each other very well. And, finally, there were more men than women on the planet and he had noticed that the bachelors had seemed readily disposed, upon her arrival the day before, to overlook the fact that she had no college degree. So he must be patient with her.

"There's nothing wrong about it, dear. The plants here synthesize cyanophyll instead of chlorophyll; that's why the leaves are blue instead of green. And, of course, there are different mineral constituents of the soil—more aluminum and copper, for instance, than on Earth, and some elements we haven't quite isolated yet. So, you see, they're bound to be a little different from Terrestrial trees."

"A little different I wouldn't mind," she said sulkily, "but they're a lot different without being nearly alien enough."

"Look, Phyllis—dear—those trees have been very hospitable, very kind. We owe them a lot. They themselves suggested that we come here and live with them in, so to speak, symbiosis."

"That's a fine idea!"

***

He beamed. "I knew you'd understand after I had explained it to you."

"We provide the brains and they provide the furniture."

"Phyllis! What a thing to say!"

“I’ve heard of man-eating trees before. I suppose there could be man-loving ones, too.”

“Phyllis, these trees are as gentle and sweet as—as—” He didn’t know how he could explain it to her. No one who had never been friends with a tree could appreciate the true beauty of the xylemic character. “Why, we even offered to go over to the other side of the planet and fetch some pollen for them, but they wouldn’t hear of it. Unfortunately, they’d rather die than be mated to anyone they had never met.”

“What a perfectly disgusting idea!”

“I don’t think so. Trees can be idealistic—”

“You fetching pollen for her, I mean. Naturally she wouldn’t want pollen from a tree on the other side of the planet. She wants you!”

“Don’t be silly. Incompatibility usually exists between the pollen of one species and the stigmata of another. Besides,” he added patiently, “I haven’t got pollen.”

“You’d better not, or it won’t be her who’ll have the stigmata.”

“Phyllis—” he sat down on the arm of her chair and tried to embrace her—”you know that you’re the only life-form I love.”

“Please, James.” She pushed him away. “I guess I love you, too, in spite of everything … but I don’t want to make a public spectacle of myself.”

“What do you mean now?”

“That tree would know everything that goes on. She’s telepathic.”

“Where did you get a ridiculous idea like that? What kind of rubbish have you been reading?”

“All right, tell me: how else did she learn to speak such good English?”

“It’s because she’s of a very high order of intelligence. And I suppose—” he laughed modestly—”because I’m such a good teacher.”

“I don’t care how good a teacher you are—a tree couldn’t learn to speak a language so well in five months. She must be telepathic. It’s the only explanation.”

***

“Give her time,” the tree advised later, as James came out on the lawn to talk to his only friend on the planet.

He hadn’t seen much of the other scouts since the house-building frenzy had started, and visits among the men had decreased. The base camp, where the bachelors and the older married couples lived, was located a good distance away from his land, for he had raised his honeymoon cottage far from the rest; he had wanted to have his Phyllis all to himself. In the idyll he had visualized for the two of them, she would need no company but his. Little had he imagined that, within twenty-four hours of her arrival, he would be looking for company himself.

“I suppose so,” he said, kicking at a root. “Oh, I’m sorry, Maggie; I didn’t think.”

“That’s all right,” Magnolia said bravely. “It didn’t really hurt. That female has got you all upset, you poor boy.”

James muttered a feeble defense of his wife.

“Jim, forgive me if I speak frankly,” the tree went on in a low rustle, “but do you think she’s really worthy of you?”

“Of course she is!”

“Surely on your planet you could have found a mate more admirable, high-minded, exemplary—more, in short, like yourself. Or are all the human females inferior specimens like Phyllis?”

“They’re—she suits me,” James said doggedly.

“Of course, of course. It’s very noble of you to defend her; you would have disappointed me if you had said anything else, and I honor you for it, James.”

He kicked at one of the pebbles. The tree meant well, he knew, yet, like so many well-meaning friends, she succeeded only in dispiriting him. It was almost like being back at the faculty club.

“I don’t suppose a clod like her would have brought any more books along,” the tree changed the subject. James’s own library had been insufficient to slake the tree’s intellectual thirst, so he had gone all over the planet to borrow books for Magnolia. Dr. Lakin, at Base, who had formerly taught English literature, possessed a fine collection which he had been reluctant to lend until he had learned that they were not for James but for a tree. At that, he had fetched the books himself, since he was anxious to meet her.

“A lot of the trees here have learned the English language,” he had told James, “but none seems to have developed a taste for its literature. Your Magnolia is undoubtedly a superior specimen. Excellent natural taste, too—perhaps a little unformed when it comes to poetry and the more sophisticated aspects of life, but she’ll learn, she’ll learn.”

***

Unfortunately, the same, James knew, could hardly be said of his wife. “Phyllis did bring some books,” he told Magnolia.

“For you, no doubt. That was kind of her. I’m sure she has many good qualities which will unfold one by one, as her meristems start differentiating. I hope you don’t feel I’ve been too—well, personal, Jim. I was only trying to help. If I’ve gone too far….”

“Of course not, Maggie. After all—” he laughed bitterly—”I do know you better than I know her.”

“We have been good friends, haven’t we, Jim? It was rather nice—these five months we spent alone together. For the first time in my life, I have never regretted being so far from my sisters. ‘And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.'”

Her blue leaves shone violet in the scarlet rays of the setting sun; the gold of her trunk was lit with red radiance. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen … but she was a tree, not a woman.

“I’m sure she’ll fit in after a while,” Magnolia continued. “Perhaps she isn’t well. She seems to guttate an awful lot. Do you suppose she’s been overwatered?”

“That wasn’t guttation,” James said heavily. “It was tears. It means she’s unhappy.”

“Unhappy? Perhaps she won’t fit in on this planet, in which case she should by all means go back to Earth. It’s cruel and unfair to keep an intelligent—loosely speaking—life-form anywhere against her will, don’t you think?”

“She’ll be happy here,” James vowed. “I’ll make her happy.”

“Well, I certainly hope you can manage it! By the way, do you suppose you’ll have a chance to read me the books she brought, or will she be keeping you too busy?”

“I’ll never be too busy to read to you, Magnolia.”

“That’s very nitrogenous of you, Jim. Our—intellectual communions have meant a lot to me. I’d hate to have to give them up.”

“So would I,” he said. “But there won’t be any need to. Phyllis will understand.”

“I certainly hope so. I so admire your English literature. It’s so deeply cognizant of the really meaningful things in life. And if your coming to this planet has served only to add poetry to our cultural heritage, it would be reason enough to welcome you with open limbs. For it was a truly perceptive versifier who wrote the immortally simple lines: ‘Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.’

“And such a charming tune to go with it, too,” Magnolia went on. “We have always sung the music that the wind and the rain have taught us, but, until you came, we never thought of putting words and melody together to form one glorious whole. ‘A tree that may in summer wear,'” she caroled in a pleasing contralto, “‘a nest of robins in her hair.’ By the way, Jim, ever since reading that poem, I’ve been meaning to ask you precisely what are robins and do you think they’d look well in my hair, by which, I suppose the bard refers, in a somewhat pedestrian flight of fancy, to leaves?

“They’re a kind of bird,” he said drearily.

“Birds—nesting in my hair! I wouldn’t think of allowing it. But then I suppose Terrestrial birds are quite different from ours? More housebroken, shall we say?”

“Everything’s different,” James said and, for an irrational moment, he hated everything that was blue that should have been green, everything sweet that should have been vicious, everything intelligent that should have been mindless.

***

Since matters could not grow much worse, they improved to a degree. After a day or two had passed, Phyllis, being a conscientious girl, came to realize how wrong it had been for her as a Terrestrial immigrant to show overt hostility toward a native of the planet that had welcomed her.

“But how can she be a—a person?” Phyllis wanted to know, when they were inside the cottage, for she had learned to hold her tongue when they were near Magnolia or any of her sisters, who, though they could not speak the language as fluently as she, understood it very well and eavesdropped at every possible opportunity in order, they said, to improve their accents. “She’s a tree. A plant. And plants are just vegetables.” She stabbed her needle energetically through the tablecloth she was embroidering.

“You mustn’t project Terrestrial attitudes upon Elysian ones,” James said, patiently looking up from his book. “And don’t underestimate Magnolia’s capabilities. She has sense organs, and motor organs, too. She can’t move from where she is, because she’s rooted to the ground, but she’s capable of turgor movements, like certain Terrestrial forms of vegetation—for example, the sensitive plant or blue grass.”

“Blue grass,” Phyllis exclaimed. “I’m sick of blue grass. I want green grass.”

“However, these trees have conscious control of their pulvini, whereas the Earth’s plants don’t, and so they can do a lot of things that Earth plants can’t.”

“It sounds like a dirty word to me.”

“Pulvini merely means motor organs.”

“Oh.”

***

He closed his book, which was a more advanced botany text, covered with the jacket of a French novel in order to spare Phyllis’s feelings. “Darling, can’t you get it through your pretty head that they’re intelligent life-forms? If it’ll make it easier for you to think of them as human beings who happen to look like trees, then do that.”

“That’s exactly what I am doing. And I’m quite sure she thinks of you as a tree who happens to look like a human being.”

“Phyllis, sometimes I think you’re being deliberately difficult. Do you know one of the reasons why I took such pains to teach Magnolia English? It was that I hoped she would be a companion for you, that you could talk to each other when I had to be away from home.”

“Why do you call her Magnolia? She isn’t a lot like one.”

“Isn’t she? I thought she was. You see, I don’t know so much botany, after all.” Actually, he had picked that name for the tree because it expressed both the arboreal and the feminine at the same time—and also because it was one of the loveliest names he knew. But he couldn’t tell Phyllis that; there would be further misunderstanding. “Of course she has a name in her own language, but I can’t pronounce it.”

“They do have a language of their own then?”

“Naturally, though they don’t get much chance to speak it, since they’ve grown so few and far apart that verbal communication has become difficult. They communicate by a network of roots that they’ve developed.”

“I don’t think that’s so clever.”

“I merely said … oh, what’s the use of trying to explain everything to you? You just don’t want to understand.”

***

Phyllis put down her needlework and closed her eyes. “James,” she said, opening them again, “it’s no use pretending. I’ve been trying to be sympathetic and understanding, but I can’t do it. That tree—I’ve forced myself to be nice to her, but the more I see of her, the more convinced I am that she’s trying to steal you from me.”

Phyllis was beginning to poison his mind, he thought, because it had seemed to him also, in his last conversation with Magnolia, that he had discerned more than ordinary warmth in her attitude toward him … and perhaps a trace of spite toward his wife?

Preposterous! The tree had only been trying to cheer him up as any friend might reasonably do. After all, a tree and a man…. Nonsense! One had an anabolic metabolism, one a catabolic.

But this was a different kind of tree. She spoke, she read, she was capable of conscious turgor movements. And he, he had often thought secretly, was a different kind of man. Whereas Phyllis….

But that was disloyalty—to the type as well as the individual. The tree could be a companion to him, but she could not give him sons to work his land; she could not give him daughters to populate his planet; moreover, she did not, could not possibly know what human love meant, while Phyllis could at least learn.

“Look, dear,” he said, sitting down beside his wife on the couch and taking her hand in his. She didn’t draw away this time. “Suppose that what you say is true—not that it is, of course. Just because the tree has a crush on me doesn’t mean I necessarily have a crush on her, does it?”

His wife looked up at him, her rose-red lips parted, her moss-gray eyes shining. “Oh, if only I could believe that, James!”

“Anyhow, she doesn’t know what the whole thing’s about, poor kid!”

“Poor kid!”

“Phyllis, you know you’re prettier than any tree.” That was not literally true, but reason was useless; he had to make his point in terms she could understand. “And, remember, she’s got a lot of rings—she must be centuries old—while you are only nineteen.”

“Twenty,” Phyllis corrected. “I had a birthday on the ship.”

“Well, you certainly must allow me to wish you a happy birthday, darling.”

She was in his arms at last; he was about to kiss her, and the tree seemed very remote, when she drew back. “But are you sure she doesn’t—she isn’t—she can’t be watching us?”

“Darling, I swear it!” “Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear, that tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops“…. But he had sense enough not to say it, and Elysium had not one blessed moon, but three, and everything was all right.

For a while anyway.

***

“I see your wife is developing a corm,” the tree remarked, as James paused for a chat. He hadn’t much time to be sociable those days, for there was such a lot of work to be done, so many preparations to be made, so many things to be requisitioned from Earth. The supply ships were beginning to come now, bringing necessities and an occasional luxury for those who could afford it.

“She’s pregnant,” James explained. “Happened before I left Earth.”

“How do you mean?”

“She’s about to fruit. Didn’t I read that zoology book to you?”

“Yes, but—oh, James, it all seems so vulgar! To fruit without ever having bloomed—how squalid!”

“It all depends on how you look at it,” he said. “I—that is, we had hoped that when the baby came, you would be godmother to it. You know what that is, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. You read Cinderella to me. I know it’s a great honor. But I’m afraid I must decline.”

“Why? I thought you were my—our friend.”

“Jim, there is something I must confess: my feelings toward you are not merely those of a friend. Although Phyllis doesn’t have too many rings of intellect, she is a female, so she knew all along.” Magnolia’s leaves rustled diffidently. “I feel toward you the way I never felt toward any intelligent life-form, but only toward the sun, the soil, the rain. I sense a tropism that seems to incline me toward you. In fact, I’m afraid, Jim, in your own terms, I love you.”

“But you’re a tree! You can’t love me in my own terms, because trees can’t love in the way people can, and, of course, people can’t love like trees. We belong to two entirely different species, Maggie. You can’t have listened to that zoology book very attentively.”

“Our race is a singularly adaptable one or we wouldn’t have survived so long, Jim, or gone so far in our particular direction. It’s lack of fertility, not lack of enterprise, that’s responsible for our decline. And I think your species must be an adaptable one, too; you just haven’t really tried. Oh, James, let us reverse the classical roles—let me be the Apollo to your Daphne! Don’t let Phyllis stand in our way. The Greek gods never let a little thing like marriage interfere with their plans.”

***

“But I love Phyllis,” he said in confusion. “I love you, too,” he added, “but in a different way.”

“Yes, I know. More like a sister. However, I have plenty of sisters and I don’t need a brother.”

“We’re starting a conservation program,” he tried to comfort her. “We have every hope of getting some pollen from the other side of the planet once we have explained to the trees there how far we can make a little go, and you’ve got to accept it; you mustn’t be silly about it.”

“It isn’t the same thing, Jim, and you know it. One of the penalties of intelligence is a diffusiveness of the natural instincts. I would rather not fruit at all than—”

“Magnolia, you just don’t understand. No matter how much you—well, pursue me, I can never turn into a laurel tree.”

“I didn’t—”

“Or any kind of tree! Look, some more books were just sent over from Base.”

Magnolia gave a rueful rustle. “Just were sent? Didn’t they come over a month ago?”

James flushed. “I know I haven’t had a chance to do much reading to you in the last few weeks, Maggie—or any at all, in fact—but I’ve been so busy. After the baby’s born, things will be much less hectic and we’ll be able to catch up.”

“Of course, James. I understand. Naturally your family comes first.”

“One of the books that came was an advanced zoology text that might make things a little clearer.”

“I should very much like to hear it. When you have the time to spare, that is.”

“Tell you what,” he said. “I’ll get the book and read you the chapter on the reproductive system in mammals. Won’t take more than an hour or so.”

“If you’re in a hurry, it can wait.”

“No,” he told her. “This will make me feel a little less guilty about having neglected you.”

***

“Whereupon the umbilical cord is severed,” he concluded, “and the human infant is ready to take its place in the world as a separate entity. Now do you understand, Magnolia?”

“No,” she said. “Where do the bees come in?”

“I thought you were in such a hurry to get to Base, James,” Phyllis remarked sweetly from the doorway, wiping her reddening hands on a dish towel.

“I am, dear.” He slipped the book behind his back; it was possible that, in her present state of mind—induced, of course, by her delicate condition—Phyllis might misunderstand his motive in reading that particular chapter of that particular book to that particular tree. “I just stopped for a chat with Magnolia. She’s agreed to be godmother to the baby.”

“How very nice of her. Earth Government will be so pleased at such a fine example of rapport with the natives. You might even get a medal. Wouldn’t that be nice?… James,” she hurried on, before he could speak, “you still haven’t found any green-leafed plants on the planet, have you? Have you looked everywhere? Have you looked hard?”

“Haven’t I told you time and time again, Mrs. Haut,” the tree said, “that there aren’t any—that there can’t be any? It’s impossible to synthesize chlorophyll from the light rays given off by our sun—only cyanophyll. What do you want with a green-leafed plant, anyway?”

Phyllis’s voice broke. “I think I’d lose my mind if I was convinced that I’d never see a green leaf again. All this awful blue, blue, blue, all the time, and the leaves never fall, or, if they do, there are new ones right away to take their place. They’re always there—always blue.”

“We’re everblue,” Magnolia explained. “Sorry, but that’s the way it is.”

“Jim, I hate to hurt your feelings, but I just have to take down those curtains. The colors—I can’t stand it!”

***

“Pregnant women sometimes get fanciful notions,” James said to the tree. “It’s part of the pregnancy syndrome. Try not to pay any attention.”

“Kindly don’t explain me to a tree!” Phyllis cried. “I have a right to prefer green, don’t I?”

“There is, as your proverb says, no accounting for strange tastes,” the tree murmured. “However—”

“We’re going to have a formal christening,” James interrupted, for the sake of the peace. “We thought we should, since ours will be the first baby born on the planet. Everybody on Elysium will come—that is, all the human beings. Only because they can come, you know; we’d love to have the trees if they were capable of locomotor movement. You’ll get to widen your social contacts, Maggie. Dr. Lakin and Dr. Cutler will probably be here; I know you’ll be glad to see Dr. Lakin again, and you’ve been anxious to meet Dr. Cutler. They’ve been asking after you, too. I think Dr. Lakin is planning to write a monograph on you for the Journal of the American Association of Professors of English Literature—with your permission, of course.”

Christening—that’s one of your native festivals, isn’t it? It should be most interesting.”

“That’s right,” Phyllis murmured. “It will be Christmas soon. I’d almost forgotten. It’ll be the first Christmas I’ve ever spent away from home. And there won’t be any snow or—or anything.” She started to guttate—to cry again.

“Cheer up, honey,” Jim said. “It won’t be as bad as you think, because I didn’t forget Christmas was coming. There’s something specially nice for you on its way from Earth; I only hope it gets here on time.” Phyllis sniffled. “Maybe we’ll have a Christmas party, too. Would you like that?”[Pg 97] But she remained unresponsive.

He turned to the tree. “Christening’s entirely different, though,” he explained. “It’s—I guess naming the fruit would be the best way to describe it.”

“Is that so?” Magnolia said. “What kind of fruit do you expect to have, Mrs. Haut? Oranges? Bananas? As your good St. Luke says, the tree is known by its fruit. You look as if yours might be a watermelon.”

“Why, the—idea!” Phyllis choked. “Are you going to stand there, James, and let that vegetable insult me?”

“I’m sure she didn’t mean to,” he protested. “She got confused by—that zoology book I read her.”

The door slammed behind his weeping wife.

“I don’t think you quite understand, Maggie,” he said. “In fact, sometimes I almost think you, too, don’t want to understand.”

“I know what kind of fruit it’s going to be,” the tree concluded triumphantly. “Sour apples.”

***

“Ouch,” exclaimed Magnolia, “that tickles! There’s more to acting as a Christmas tree than I had anticipated from your glowing descriptions, Jim.”

“Here, dear,” Phyllis said, “maybe you’d better let me put the decorations on her.”

“You can’t get on the ladder in your condition,” he said, apprehensive not only for her welfare but for the tree’s. Phyllis had not taken kindly to the idea of having Magnolia as official Christmas tree, suggesting that, if she must participate in the ceremonies, it might be better in the capacity of Yule log. However, Jim knew Magnolia would be offended if any other tree were chosen to be decorated.

“I’ll manage all right,” he assured his wife. “If you want to be useful, you might put on some coffee and make sandwiches or something. The bachelors are coming

over from Base with that equipment that arrived yesterday, and they'll probably be glad of a snack before turning in."

"The coffee's already on and the canapes made," Phyllis smiled. "And I've baked cookies, too, and whipped up a batch of penuche. What kind of a Christmas party do you think it would be without refreshments?"

"Very efficient, isn't she?" Magnolia remarked, as the battery-powered lights that James had affixed to her began to wink on, for the deep red-violet dusk had already fallen and the first moon was rising. "Have you thought, Mrs. Haut, that if you fruit today, it will save the expense of another festival?"

"I don't expect to fruit for another two months," Phyllis said coldly, "and why shouldn't we have another festival? We can afford it and I like parties. I haven't been to one since the day I landed."

"Is the life out here getting a little quiet for you, petiole?" the tree asked solicitously. "It must be hard when one has no intellectual resources upon which to draw."

***

Phyllis held her peace for ten seconds; then, "I wonder where those boys can be," she said. "I hope they bring some pickles along. I asked to have some sent, but I'm accustomed to having no attention paid to what I want."

"There's a surprise coming for you, Phyllis," James could not help telling her again, hoping to arouse some semblance of interest. "Something I know you'll love…. And for you, too," he said courteously to Magnolia.

"You mean the same surprise for both, or a surprise apiece?" the tree asked.

"Oh, one for each, of course."

"I see the lights of the 'copter now!" Phyllis cried and, running out into the middle of the lawn, began waving her handkerchief. He hadn't seen her so pleasantly excited for a long time.

"I don't suppose I'll need to turn on the landing lights," he said to Magnolia. "You should do the trick."

"Am I all finished?" she rustled anxiously. "I do wish I could see myself. How do I look?"

"Splendid. I've never had as beautiful a Christmas tree as you, Maggie," he told her with complete honesty. "Not even on Earth."

"I'm glad, Jim, but I still wish I could be more to you than just a Christmas tree."

"Shh. The others might hear."

For the helicopter had landed and the visitors were pouring out, with shouts of admiration. Not only the bachelors had come—and in full force—but some of the older men from Base, who apparently felt they could manage to do without their wives for twelve hours, even if those hours included Christmas Eve. He wondered where he and Phyllis could put them all, but some could sleep outside, if need be, for it was never cold on Elysium. The winds were gentle and the rains light and fragrant.

***

While the visitors were crowding around Phyllis and the tree, James rooted eagerly through the packages they had brought, until he found what he wanted. Then he rushed over to the group. "I know I should wait until tomorrow, but I want to give the girls their presents now." The other men smiled sympathetically, almost as joyful as he. "Merry Christmas, Magnolia!" He hoped Phyllis would understand that it was etiquette which dictated that the alien life-form should get her gift first.

"Thank you," the tree said. "I am deeply touched. I don't believe anyone ever gave me a present before. What is it?"

"Liquid plant food—vitamins and minerals, you know. For you to drink."

"What fun!" she exclaimed in pretty excitement. "Pour some over me right now!"

"Not so fast, Jim, boy!" Dr. Cutler, the biologist, snatched the jug from James' hand. "First you-all better let me take a sample of this here stuff back to Base to test on a lower life-form, so's I can make sure it won't do anything bad to Miss Magnolia. Might have iron in it and I have a theory that iron may not be beneficial for the local vegetation."

"Oh, thank you!" the tree rustled. "It's so very thoughtful of you, Doctor, but I'm sure Jim would never give me anything that would injure me."

"I'm sure he isn't fixing to do a thing like that, ma'am, but he's no botanist."

"And for you, Phyllis…." James handed his wife the awkward bundle to unwrap for herself.

She tore the papers off slowly. "Oh, Jim, darling, it's—it's—"

"You wanted a bit of green, so I ordered a plant from Earth. You like it? I hope you do."

"Oh, Jim!" She embraced him and the pot simultaneously. "More than anything!"

"It won't stay green," Magnolia observed. "Either it'll turn blue or it'll die. Puny-looking specimen, isn't it?"

“Well,” said James, “it’s only a youngster. I guess this Christmas is too early, but next Christmas there ought to be berries. It’s a holly plant, Phyl.”

“Holly,” she repeated, her voice shaking a little. “Holly.” She and Dr. Cutler exchanged glances.

“I told you, Miz Phyllis, ma’am—he may know the first thing about botany, but he doesn’t know anything after that.”

“Jim,” Phyllis said, linking her free arm through his, “I misjudged you. Dr. Cutler is right. You don’t know so very much about botany, after all.”

***

He looked at her blankly. Her voice was trembling, and not with tears this time. “I love this little plant; it’s just what I wanted … but there aren’t ever going to be any berries, because, to have berries, you have to have two plants. And the right two. Holly’s di—dio—it’s just like us.”

“Oh,” James said, feeling thoroughly inadequate. “I’m sorry.”

“But you mustn’t be sorry. I’m going to plant it here on Elysium, and I hope it will stay green in spite of what she says, and it’ll have blossoms anyway … and it was very, very sweet of you, dear.”

She kissed his cheek.

“Is this one a boy or a girl?” Magnolia asked.

“You-all can’t tell till it blooms, Miss Magnolia, ma’am,” Dr. Cutler informed her.

“Maybe I can. Hand it up here, please.”

Phyllis paused for an irresolute moment, then, smiling nervously at her guests, obliged.

“It’s a boy,” Magnolia announced, after a minute. “A boy.” She gave back the pot reluctantly. “Phyllis,” she said, “you and I have never been friends and I admit that it’s been my fault just as much as yours.”

“As much as mine?” Phyllis echoed. “I like that—” and was going to go on when she obviously recollected that they had company, and stopped.

“So I know it’s presumptuous of me to ask you a favor.”

“Yes, Magnolia?” Phyllis said, her fine cornsilk eyebrows arched a trifle. “What is this favor?”

“When you plant the little fellow—you said you were going to, anyhow—would you plant him near me?”

Phyllis looked down at the plant she held cradled in her arms and then up at the tree. “Of course, Magnolia,” she said, frowning slightly. “I didn’t realize….” Her voice began to tremble. “I have been pretty rotten, haven’t I?” She looked toward James, but he turned his glance away.

“Just because you were a plant,” Phyllis continued, “didn’t mean I had to be a b-b-beast. It must have been awful for you, seeing me like this, practically crowing over you, and knowing that you yourself would never have the chance to be a m-m-m-mother.”

“‘Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,’” Magnolia said sadly, “‘and waste its sweetness on the desert air.’”

***

Phyllis was crying unashamedly now. “I’ll plant him right next to you—Maggie. I want you to have him. He can be your baby.”

“Thank you, Phyl,” Maggie said softly. “That’s very … blue of you.”

“Although I think that’s a jim-dandy idea,” the biologist said, “and I sure wouldn’t want to do anything to discourage it, being real interested in the results of an experiment like that my own self, I don’t think you ought to feel so mean about it, Miz Phyllis. If all she wanted—begging your pardon, Miss Magnolia, ma’am—was a baby, why didn’t she take an interest in the holly until she found out it was a male? Why wouldn’t a little old girl holly have done as well?”

“Why—why, you scheming vegetable!” Phyllis exploded at Magnolia, clutching the holly plant to her protective bosom. “He’s much too young for you, and I’m going to plant him far away, where he can’t possibly fall into your clutches.”

“Now, Miss Phyllis, we-all mustn’t look at things out of their proper perspective.”

“Then why did you take your hat off when you were introduced to Miss Magnolia, Cutler?” Dr. Lakin asked interestedly.

“Sir, where I come from, we respect femininity, whether it be animal, vegetable or mineral. Nonetheless, we-all got to remember, though Miss Magnolia is unquestionably a lady, she is not a woman.”

Phyllis began to laugh hysterically. “You’re right!” she gasped. “I had almost forgotten she was only a tree. And that it is only a little Christmas holly plant that’s probably going to die, anyway—they almost always do.”

“That’s cruel, Phyllis,” James said, “and you know it is.”

“Do you really think I’m cruel? Are you going to tell the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Vegetables on me? But why am I cruel? I’m giving her the holly. That’s what she wants, isn’t it? Do you hear that, Miss Magnolia, ma’am? He‘s all yours. We’ll plant him next to you—right away. And I hope he doesn’t die. I hope he grows up to make you a good husband.”

***

“She’s really quite remarkable,” Dr. Lakin said to James later that same evening, after the planting ceremonies were over and the rest of the party had gone into the cottage for fresh coffee and more sandwiches and cookies and penuche. “Quite remarkable. You’re a lucky man, Haut.”

“Thank you, sir,” James replied abstractedly. “I’m sure Phyllis will be pleased to—”

“Phyllis! Oh, Mrs. Haut is a very remarkable woman, of course. A handsome, strong girl; she’ll make a splendid mother, I’m sure. But I was referring to Miss Magnolia. She’s a credit to you, my boy. If for no other reason, your name will go down in the history of our colony as that of the guide and mentor of Miss Magnolia. That’s quite a tree you have there.”

James looked at the dark form of the tree—for the lights had been turned out—silhouetted against the three pale moons and the violet night. “Yes, she is,” he said.

“You’re fortunate to be her neighbor … and her friend.”

“Yes, I am.”

“Well, I expect I’d better join the rest. Are you coming on in, Jim?”

“In a little while, sir. I thought I’d—I wanted to have a word with Magnolia. I won’t be long.”

“Of course, of course. I’m delighted to see that there is such an excellent relationship between you…. Good night, Miss Magnolia!” he called.

“Good night, Dr. Lakin,” the tree replied, politely enough, but it was obvious that she was preoccupied with her new charge, who stood as close to her as it was possible to plant him and yet allow room for him to grow.

***

The door closed. James walked across the lawn until he was quite near Magnolia. “Maggie,” he whispered, reaching out to touch her trunk—smooth it was, and hard, but he could feel the vibrant life pulsing inside it. Certainly she was not a plant, not just a plant, even though she was a tree. She was a native of Elysium, neither animal nor vegetable, unique unto the planet, unique unto herself. “Maggie.”

“Yes, Jim. Don’t you think his silhouette is so graceful there in the moonlight? He isn’t really puny—just frail.”

“Maggie, you’re not serious about this holly?”

“What do you mean?” And still he didn’t have her full attention. Would he ever have it again?

“Serious about raising him to be your—your—”

“Why not, Jim?”

“It’s impossible.”

“Is it? It certainly is far more possible with him, isn’t it? That much I understood from your zoology books.”

“I suppose so.”

“Besides, I have nothing to lose, have I?”

“But even if it were possible, wouldn’t it be humiliating for you? The creature’s mindless!”

Magnolia’s leaves rustled in the darkness. She was laughing—a little bitterly. “Your Phyllis isn’t your intellectual equal, Jim, and yet you say you love her and I suppose you do. Am I not entitled to my follies also?”

But she couldn’t compare Phyllis to a holly plant! It was unreasonable.

“He may die, of course,” Magnolia said. “I’ve got to be prepared for that. The soil is different, the air is different, the sun is different. But the chances are, if he survives, he’ll turn blue. And if he turns blue, who knows what other changes might be brought about? Maybe the plants on your Earth aren’t inherently mindless, Jim. Maybe they just didn’t have a chance. ‘Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime…?’ That land isn’t Earth, Jim, so it might just possibly be Elysium.”

***

Again he didn’t say anything. What he wanted to say, he had no right to say, so he kept silent.

“It’ll be a chance for me, too, Jim. At least we’re both plants, he and I. That gives us a headstart.”

“Yes, I suppose it does.”

“Intellect doesn’t count for much in the propagation of the species. Life goes on without regard for reason, and that’s mainly what we’re here for, to make sure that life goes on—if we’re here for anything at all. Thanks to your kind, Jim, life will continue on this planet; it will certainly be your kind of life—and I hope it can be ours as well.”

“Yes,” he said. “I hope so, too.”

And he did, but he wished it didn’t have to continue in quite that way. Perhaps it was a trick of the three moons, but the holly plant’s leaves seemed to have changed color.. They were no longer green, but almost blue—powder blue.

“You’d best be getting on to your party, Jim,” Magnolia said. “You wouldn’t want to be remiss in your duties as host. And please close the door gently when you go inside. The little holly plant’s asleep.”

As he closed the door carefully behind him, he heard a burst of laughter coming from the kitchen, where the guests apparently had assembled—raucous animal laughter—and, rising shrill and noisy above it, Phyllis’s company laugh.

Stewed Eels by Thomas Holding

Over to Dale Grothman for the preparation of stewed eels. Thanks to Dale and Librivox.

In camp Stewed Eels are rather a luxury, not only because they need a little cooking but they need a little catching. The difficulty with an eel is that it is rather a disagreeable thing to handle, though to those who like eels this is a trifle. There are two things which have to be done. The first is to skin the eel, and the second is to carefully cleanse it. Note the words italicised. When Camping near a river recently, a man who was to have saved me a quart of milk, sold it, and in a spirit of contrition presented me with a fine fat eel, 2-ft. 9-ins. long. I was delighted, as it was my first eel. I consulted many people as to how to remove the skin. No one could tell me, and no one could do it. Now I know that it is imperative to take the skin off the eel, because that skin contains that which is not good for human creatures to eat. The correct way to remove the skin is to nick it under the ear each side till you gi^i two small corners that you can take hold of. Pull these ” tales ” back a good bit. Be careful and take time at the beginning. Hang the head fast to a nail, or get the ” other person ” to hold the eel by the head. Then having properly started, the skinning is a mere matter of a moment or two. The belly must be ripped, and the interior most carefully washed and scrubbed, and exam- ined, so there is not the slightest suggestion of anything other than the clean flesh of the eel. Do not let the head and tail go into the pan. Stew until it is cooked enough. Then add your parsley butter, the mixture for which is flour, water, parsley, salt, and pepper. Pour it into the pan, and continue stewing until it thickens and the parsley is cooked.

As a caution, however, I think it best to mention that after the eating of three sections of my long eel, it was my misfortune to be very seriously affected, and for a matter of 24 hours I suffered sickness and all the evidence of ptomaine poisoning. Such a case is not infrequent with those who eat eels caught in English rivers. Eels from Ireland are different, because they come chiefly off the limestone and sandy bottom of the lakes, and not from the bottoms of muddy, sluggish streams or pools.

Excerpt from “The Sorcerer” by W.S. Gilbert

Let me take you to the Victorian musical hall, gentle reader. Let us look upon the work of W.S Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. I’ve been trying to show how stage magic might work in Magonomia for some time, and so here is a look at how it was satirized in a later period.

The two characters we initially meet are Aline and Alexius. They have just been married. Alexius believes the best thing he can do for his village is to ensure that everyone, regardless of their station is in love. He procures a philtre from a sorcerer, and puts in it a pot of tea during a country fete. Aline thinks this is a monstrous idea, but he succeeds. Everyone has tea, and everyone falls in love, provided they are not already married. This is presumably because of the True Love Virtue or magic resistance granted by the sacrament.

Note the demons here are essentially slaves. This is not how sorcery works in Magonomia, because we didn’t want slave ownership to be a foundational characters experience.

Thanks to Librivox, and all the participants. This is a parlour reading, rather than a musical, because the music has a separate and sometimes obscure copyright.

AIL Oh, Alexis, those are noble principles

Alex. Yes, Aline, and I am going to take a desperate step in support of them. Have you ever heard of the firm of J. W.Wells and Co., the old-established family sorcerers, in St. Mary Axe?

AIL I have seen their advertisement.

Alex. They have invented a philtre, which, if report may be believed, is simply infallible. I intend to distribute it through the village, and within half an hour of my doing so, there will not be an adult in the place who will not have learnt the secret of pure and lasting happiness. What do you say to that?

AIL Well, dear, of course a filter is a very useful thing in a house ; quite indispensable in the present state of Thames water ; but still I don’t quite see that it is the sort of thing that places its possessor on the very pinnacle of earthly joy. Alex. Aline, you misunderstand me. I didn’t say a filter— said philtre.

Ali. So did I, dear. I said a filter.

Alex. No, dear, you said a filter. I don’t mean a filter—I mean a philtre,—ph, you know.

AIL (alarmed). You don’t mean a love-potion ?

Alex. On the contrary—I do mean a love-potion.

AIL Oh, Alexis, I don’t think it would be right. I don’t indeed. And then—a real magician ! Oh, it would be downright wicked.

Alex, Aline, is it, or is it not, a laudable object to steep thewhole village up to its lips in love, and to couple them in matri-mony, without distinction of age, rank, or fortune ?

AIL Unquestionably, but

Alex, Then, unpleasant as it must be to have recourse tosupernatural aid, I must nevertheless pocket my aversion, indeference to the great and good end I have in view. {Calling.)Hercules Enter a Page from tent.

Page, Yes, sir.

Alex, Is Mr. Wells there ?

Page, He’s in the tent, sir—refreshing.

Alex. Ask him to be so good as to step this way.

Page. Yes, sir. [Exit Page.]

AIL Oh, but, Alexis! A real sorcerer! Oh, I shall befrightened to death

Alex, I trust my Aline will not yield to fear while the strong, right arm of her Alexis is here to protect her.

AIL It’s nonsense, dear, to talk of your protecting me with your strong right arm, in face of the fact that this Family Sorcerer could change me into a guinea-pig before you could turn round.

Alex, He could change you into a guinea-pig, no doubt, but it is most unlikely that he would take such liberty. It’s a most respectable firm, and I am sure he would never be guilty of so untradesmanlike an act.

Enter Mr. Wellsfrom

Mr, W, Good day, sir.

[Aline much terrified.]

Alex. Good day. I believe you are a sorcerer.

Mr, W, Yes, sir, we practise necromancy in all its branches.We’ve a choice assortment of wishing-caps, divining-rods, amulets, charms, and counter-charms. We can cast you a nativity at a low figure, and we have a

horoscope at three and six that we can guarantee. Our Abudah chests, each containing a patent hag who comes out and prophesies disasters, with spring complete, are strongly recommended. Our Aladdin lamps are very chaste, and our prophetic tablets, foretelling everything—from a change of ministry down to a rise in Turkish stock—are much inquired for. Our penny curse—one of the cheapest things in the trade—is considered infallible. We have some very superior blessings, too, but they're very little asked for. "We've only sold one since Christmas—to a gentleman who bought it to send to his mother-in-law—but it turned out that he was afflicted in the head, and it's been returned on our hands. But our sale of penny curses, especially on Saturday nights, is tremendous. We can't turn 'em out fast enough.

Song.—Mr. Wells.

Oh ! my name is John Wellington Wells.
I'm a dealer in magic and spells,
In blessings and curses, And ever-filled purses,
In prophecies, witches, and knells.
If you want a proud foe to " make tracks"—
If you'd melt a rich uncle in wax
You've but to look in
On our resident Djinn,
Number seventy, Simmery Axe.
We've a first-class assortment of magic
And for raising a posthumous shade
With effects that are comic or tragic,
There's no cheaper house in the trade.
Love-philtre—we've quantities of it
And for knowledge if any one burns,
We keep an extremely small prophet
Who brings us unbounded returns
Oh ! he can prophesy
With a wink of his eye,
Peep with security Into futurity,
Sum up your history,
Clear up a mystery,
Humour proclivity
For a nativity—for a nativity
Mirrors so magical,
Tetrapods tragical,
Bogies spectacular,
Answers oracular,
Facts astronomical,
Solemn or comical,
And, if you want it, he
Makes a reduction on
taking a quantity \ Oh!
If any one anything lacks,
He'll find it all ready in stacks
If he'll only look in
On the resident Djinn,
Number seventy,
Simmery Axe
He can raise you hosts Of ghosts,
And that without reflectors ;
And creepy things With wings,
And gaunt and grisly spectres.
He can fill you crowds Of shrouds,
And horrify you vastly ;
He can rack your brains With chains,
And gibberings grim and ghastly
Then, if you plan it, he Changes organity,
With an urbanity
Full of Satanity,
Vexes humanity
With an inanity
Fatal to vanity

Driving your foes to the verge of insanity!
Barring tautology, In demonology,
'Lectro-biology, Mystic nosology,
Spirit philology, High-class astrology,
Such is his knowledge, he
Isn't the man to require an apology

Oh! My name is John Wellington Wells.
I'm a dealer in magic and spells,
In blessings and curses,
And ever-filled purses,
In prophecies, witches, and knells.
If any one anything lacks,
He'll find it all ready in stacks,
If he'll only look in
On the resident Djinn,
Number seventy,
Simmery Axe

Alex. I have sent for you to consult you on a very important matter. I believe you advertise a Patent Oxy-Hydrogen Love at-first-sight Philtre?

Mr. W. Sir, it is our leading article.

Alex, Now, I want to know if you can confidently guarantee it as possessing all the qualities you claim for it in your advertisement ?

Mr. W. Sir, we are not in the habit of puffing our goods. Ours is an old-established house with a large family connection, and every assurance held out in the advertisement is fully
realized. {Hurt.)

Ali. (aside). Oh, Alexis, don't offend him ! He'll change us into something dreadful—I know he will

Alex. I am anxious from purely philanthropical motives to distribute this philtre, secretly, among the inhabitants of this village. I shall of course require a quantity. How do you sell it ?

Mr. W. In buying a quantity, sir, we should strongly advise your taking it in the wood, and drawing it off as you happen to want it. We have it in four and a half and nine gallon casks—
also in pipes and hogsheads for laying down, and we deduct 10 per cent, for prompt cash.

Ali Oh, Alexis, surely you don't want to lay any down!

Alex. Aline, the villagers will assemble to carouse in a few minutes. Go and fetch the teapot.

Ali. But, Alexis

Alex. My dear, you must obey me, if you please. Go and fetch the teapot.

Ali. (going). I'm sure Dr. Daly would disapprove it. [Exit Aline]

Alex. And how soon does it take effect ?

Mr. W. In half an hour. Whoever drinks of it falls in love, as a matter of course, with the first lady he meets who has also tasted it, and his affection is at once returned. One trial will prove the fact.

Vanished Castles
by F. R Buckley

This brief article was released in *Adventure* magiazine back in the 1920s. The reader is Dale Grothman. Thanks to him, and his production team at Librivox.

***

A general rule, oppression in the Middle Ages was strictly a one-way affair; the lords oppressed the people, and that was all there was about it. But there were exceptions to this general rule; for example, the feudal law seemed to run rather sluggishly in the neighbourhood of Liege.

In the fifteenth century, at the time when feudalism was at the apogee preceding its decline, this manufacturing city, under its ruling Bishop, had an extremely short way of dealing with intrusive nobles. The city is surrounded by heights which, commanding it, offered most eligible sites for feudal castles, since one of the feudal jests with the commonalty was the stopping of provisions until a ransom should be paid. But according to Michelet

"Some morning, the mountain would hear no sounds from the city, and would see neither fire nor smoke. The people had struck work. Presently from twenty to thirty thousand workmen would defile through the gates, march on such or such a castle, dismantle and lay it level with the ground. They would indemnify the baron with lands in the plain — where, to interpolate a remark, he could not watch them—"and a good house in Liege—" where they could keep an eye upon him. The archives of the city, quoted by the same historian, relates that one of the barons in question, Sir Radus, returned from a journey he had taken in company with the Bishop of Liege, to find the spot on which his castle had stood entirely bare.

"By my fay, Sir Bishop," his astonished voice comes to us down the ages, "I know not whether I am dreaming or awake; but I was accustomed to see my house, Sylvestre, here, and now I do not perceive it."

"Be not angry, my good Radus," replied the Bishop gently. "You shall not be a loser by it." One imagines the gentle churchman looking slightly embarrassed. "But," he adds diffidently, "I have had a monastery built out of the stones of your castle."

The Perfectionists by Arnold Castle

I like this story as a basis for an odd Ars Magica faerie species that workshops its role on isolated humans before encountering society. In Magonomia, I like the idea that they grab shipwrecked people and use them as audience. Escaping the island would be a way for characters who lose a sea fight to continue on.

FRANK PEMBROKE sat behind the desk of his shabby little office over Lemark's Liquors in downtown Los Angeles and waited for his first customer. He had been in business for a week and as yet had had no callers. Therefore, it was with a mingled sense of excitement and satisfaction that he greeted the tall, dark, smooth-faced figure that came up the stairs and into the office shortly before noon.

"Good day, sir," said Pembroke with an amiable smile. "I see my advertisement has interested you. Please stand in that corner for just a moment."

Opening the desk drawer, which was almost empty, Pembroke removed an automatic pistol fitted with a silencer. Pointing it at the amazed customer, he fired four .22 caliber longs into the narrow chest. Then he made a telephone call and sat down to wait. He wondered how long it would be before his next client would arrive.

The series of events leading up to Pembroke's present occupation had commenced on a dismal, overcast evening in the South Pacific a year earlier. Bound for Sydney, two days out of Valparaiso, the Colombian tramp steamer Elena Mia had encountered a dense greenish fog which seemed vaguely redolent of citrus trees. Standing on the forward deck, Pembroke was one of the first to perceive the peculiar odor and to spot the immense gray hulk wallowing in the murky distance.

Then the explosion had come, from far below the waterline, and the decks were awash with frantic crewmen, officers, and the handful of passengers. Only two lifeboats were launched before the Elena Mia went down. Pembroke was in the second. The roar of the sinking ship was the last thing he heard for some time.

Pembroke came as close to being a professional adventurer as one can in these days of regimented travel, organized peril, and political restriction. He had made for himself a substantial fortune through speculation in a great variety of properties, real and otherwise. Life had given him much and demanded little, which was perhaps the reason for his restiveness.

Loyalty to person or to people was a trait Pembroke had never recognized in himself, nor had it ever been expected of him. And yet he greatly envied those staunch patriots and lovers who could find it in themselves to elevate the glory and safety of others above that of themselves.

Lacking such loyalties, Pembroke adapted quickly to the situation in which he found himself when he regained consciousness. He awoke in a small room in what appeared to be a typical modern American hotel. The wallet in his pocket contained exactly what it should, approximately three hundred dollars. His next thought was of food. He left the room and descended via the elevator to the restaurant. Here he observed that it was early afternoon. Ordering a full dinner, for he was unusually hungry, he began to study the others in the restaurant.

Many of the faces seemed familiar; the crew of the ship, probably. He also recognized several of the passengers. However, he made no attempt to speak to them. After his meal, he bought a good corona and went for a walk. His situation could have been any small western American seacoast city. He heard the hiss of the ocean in the direction the afternoon sun was taking. In his full-gaited walk, he was soon approaching the beach.

On the sand he saw a number of sun bathers. One in particular, an attractive woman of about thirty, tossed back her long, chestnut locks and gazed up intently at Pembroke as he passed. Seldom had he enjoyed so ingenuous an invitation. He halted and stared down at her for a few moments.

"You are looking for someone?" she inquired.

"Much of the time," said the man.

"Could it be me?"

"It could be."

"Yet you seem unsure," she said.

Pembroke smiled, uneasily. There was something not entirely normal about her conversation. Though the rest of her compensated for that.

"Tell me what's wrong with me," she went on urgently. "I'm not good enough, am I? I mean, there's something wrong with the way I look or act. Isn't there? Please help me, please!"

"You're not casual enough, for one thing," said Pembroke, deciding to play along with her for the moment. "You're too tense. Also you're a bit knock-kneed, not that it matters. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

“Yes, yes—I mean, I suppose so. I can try to be more casual. But I don’t know what to do about my knees,” she said wistfully, staring across at the smooth, tan limbs. “Do you think I’m okay otherwise? I mean, as a whole I’m not so bad, am I? Oh, please tell me.”

“How about talking it over at supper tonight?” Pembroke proposed. “Maybe with less distraction I’ll have a better picture of you—as a whole.”

“Oh, that’s very generous of you,” the woman told him. She scribbled a name and an address on a small piece of paper and handed it to him. “Any time after six,” she said.

Pembroke left the beach and walked through several small specialty shops. He tried to get the woman off his mind, but the oddness of her conversation continued to bother him. She was right about being different, but it was her concern about being different that made her so. How to explain that to her?

Then he saw the weird little glass statuette among the usual bric-a-brac. It rather resembled a ground hog, had seven fingers on each of its six limbs, and smiled up at him as he stared.

“Can I help you, sir?” a middle-aged saleswoman inquired. “Oh, good heavens, whatever is that thing doing here?”

Pembroke watched with lifted eyebrows as the clerk whisked the bizarre statuette underneath the counter.

“What the hell was that?” Pembroke demanded.

“Oh, you know—or don’t you? Oh, my,” she concluded, “are you one of the—strangers?”

“And if I were?”

“Well, I’d certainly appreciate it if you’d tell me how I walk.”

She came around in front of the counter and strutted back and forth a few times.

“They tell me I lean too far forward,” she confided. “But I should think you’d fall down if you didn’t.”

“Don’t try to go so fast and you won’t fall down,” suggested Pembroke. “You’re in too much of a hurry. Also those fake flowers on your blouse make you look frumpy.”

“Well, I’m supposed to look frumpy,” the woman retorted. “That’s the type of person I am. But you can look frumpy and still walk natural, can’t you? Everyone says you can.”

“Well, they’ve got a point,” said Pembroke. “Incidentally, just where are we, anyway? What city is this?”

“Puerto Pacifico,” she told him. “Isn’t that a lovely name? It means peaceful port. In Spanish.”

That was fine. At least he now knew where he was. But as he left the shop he began checking off every west coast state, city, town, and inlet. None, to the best of his knowledge, was called Puerto Pacifico.

He headed for the nearest service station and asked for a map. The attendant gave him one which showed the city, but nothing beyond.

“Which way is it to San Francisco?” asked Pembroke.

“That all depends on where you are,” the boy returned.

“Okay, then where am I?”

“Pardon me, there’s a customer,” the boy said. “This is Puerto Pacifico.”

Pembroke watched him hurry off to service a car with a sense of having been given the runaround. To his surprise, the boy came back a few minutes later after servicing the automobile.

“Say, I’ve just figured out who you are,” the youngster told him. “I’d sure appreciate it if you’d give me a little help on my lingo. Also, you gas up the car first, then try to sell ’em the oil—right?”

“Right,” said Pembroke wearily. “What’s wrong with your lingo? Other than the fact that it’s not colloquial enough.”

“Not enough slang, huh? Well, I guess I’ll have to concentrate on that. How about the smile?”

“Perfect,” Pembroke told him.

“Yeah?” said the boy delightedly. “Say, come back again, huh? I sure appreciate the help. Keep the map.”

“Thanks. One more thing,” Pembroke said. “What’s over that way—outside the city?”

“Sand.”

“How about that way?” he asked, pointing north. “And that way?” pointing south.

“More of the same.”

“Any railroads?”

“That we ain’t got.”

“Buses? Airlines?”

The kid shook his head.

“Some city.”

“Yeah, it’s kinda isolated. A lot of ships dock here, though.”

“All cargo ships, I’ll bet. No passengers,” said Pembroke.

“Right,” said the attendant, giving with his perfect smile.

“No getting out of here, is there?”

“That’s for sure,” the boy said, walking away to wait on another customer. “If you don’t like the place, you’ve had it.”

Pembroke returned to the hotel. Going to the bar, he recognized one of the Elena Mia’s paying passengers. He was a short, rectangular little man in his fifties named Spencer. He sat in a booth with three young women, all lovely, all effusive. The topic of the conversation turned out to be precisely what Pembroke had predicted.

“Well, Louisa, I’d say your only fault is the way you keep wigglin’ your shoulders up ‘n’ down. Why’n’sha try holdin’ ’em straight?”

“I thought it made me look sexy,” the redhead said petulantly.

“Just be yourself, gal,” Spencer drawled, jabbing her intimately with a fat elbow, “and you’ll qualify.”

“Me, me,” the blonde with a feather cut was insisting. “What is wrong with me?”

“You’re perfect, sweetheart,” he told her, taking her hand.

“Ah, come on,” she pleaded. “Everyone tells me I chew gum with my mouth open. Don’t you hate that?”

“Naw, that’s part of your charm,” Spencer assured her.

“How ’bout me, sugar,” asked the girl with the coal black hair.

“Ah, you’re perfect, too. You are all perfect. I’ve never seen such a collection of dolls as parade around this here city. C’mon, kids—how ’bout another round?”

But the dolls had apparently lost interest in him. They got up one by one and walked out of the bar. Pembroke took his rum and tonic and moved over to Spencer’s booth.

“Okay if I join you?”

“Sure,” said the fat man. “Wonder what the hell got into those babes?”

“You said they were perfect. They know they’re not. You’ve got to be rough with them in this town,” said Pembroke. “That’s all they want from us.”

“Mister, you’ve been doing some thinkin’, I can see,” said Spencer, peering at him suspiciously. “Maybe you’ve figured out where we are.”

“Your bet’s as good as mine,” said Pembroke. “It’s not Wellington, and it’s not Brisbane, and it’s not Long Beach, and it’s not Tahiti. There are a lot of places it’s not. But where the hell it is, you tell me.

“And, by the way,” he added, “I hope you like it in Puerto Pacifico. Because there isn’t any place to go from here and there isn’t any way to get there if there were.”

“Pardon me, gentlemen, but I’m Joe Valencia, manager of the hotel. I would be very grateful if you would give me a few minutes of honest criticism.”

“Ah, no, not you, too,” groaned Spencer. “Look, Joe, what’s the gag?”

“You are newcomers, Mr. Spencer,” Valencia explained. “You are therefore in an excellent position to point out our faults as you see them.”

“Well, so what?” demanded Spencer. “I’ve got more important things to do than to worry about your troubles. You look okay to me.”

“Mr. Valencia,” said Pembroke. “I’ve noticed that you walk with a very slight limp. If you have a bad leg, I should think you would do better to develop a more pronounced limp. Otherwise, you may appear to be self-conscious about it.”

Spencer opened his mouth to protest, but saw with amazement that it was exactly this that Valencia was seeking. Pembroke was amused at his companion’s reaction but observed that Spencer still failed to see the point.

“Also, there is a certain effeminateness in the way in which you speak,” said Pembroke. “Try to be a little more direct, a little more brusque. Speak in a monotone. It will make you more acceptable.”

“Thank you so much,” said the manager. “There is much food for thought in what you have said, Mr. Pembroke. However, Mr. Spencer, your value has failed to prove itself. You have only yourself to blame. Cooperation is all we require of you.”

Valencia left. Spencer ordered another martini. Neither he nor Pembroke spoke for several minutes.

“Somebody’s crazy around here,” the fat man muttered after a few moments. “Is it me, Frank?”

“No. You just don’t belong here, in this particular place,” said Pembroke thoughtfully. “You’re the wrong type. But they couldn’t know that ahead of time. The way they operate it’s a pretty hit-or-miss operation. But they don’t care one bit about us, Spencer. Consider the men who went down with the ship. That was just part of the game.”

“What the hell are you sayin’?” asked Spencer in disbelief. “You figure they sunk the ship? Valencia and the waitress and the three babes? Ah, come on.”

“It’s what you think that will determine what you do, Spencer. I suggest you change your attitude; play along with them for a few days till the picture becomes a little clearer to you. We’ll talk about it again then.”

Pembroke rose and started out of the bar. A policeman entered and walked directly to Spencer’s table. Loitering at the juke box, Pembroke overheard the conversation.

“You Spencer?”

“That’s right,” said the fat man sullenly.

“What don’t you like about me? The truth, buddy.”

“Ah, hell! Nothin’ wrong with you at all, and nothin’ll make me say there is,” said Spencer.

“You’re the guy, all right. Too bad, Mac,” said the cop.

Pembroke heard the shots as he strolled casually out into the brightness of the hotel lobby. While he waited for the elevator, he saw them carrying the body into the street. How many others, he wondered, had gone out on their backs during their first day in Puerto Pacifico?

Pembroke shaved, showered, and put on the new suit and shirt he had bought. Then he took Mary Ann, the woman he had met on the beach, out to dinner. She would look magnificent even when fully clothed, he decided, and the pale chartreuse gown she wore hardly placed her in that category. Her conversation seemed considerably more normal after the other denizens of Puerto Pacifico Pembroke had listened to that afternoon.

After eating they danced for an hour, had a few more drinks, then went to Pembroke’s room. He still knew nothing about her and had almost exhausted his critical capabilities, but not once had she become annoyed with him. She seemed to devour every factual point of imperfection about herself that Pembroke brought to her attention. And, fantastically enough, she actually appeared to have overcome every little imperfection he had been able to communicate to her.

It was in the privacy of his room that Pembroke became aware of just how perfect, physically, Mary Ann was. Too perfect. No freckles or moles anywhere on the visible surface of her brown skin, which was more than a mere sampling. Furthermore, her face and body were meticulously symmetrical. And she seemed to be wholly ambidextrous.

“With so many beautiful women in Puerto Pacifico,” said Pembroke probingly, “I find it hard to understand why there are so few children.”

“Yes, children are decorative, aren’t they,” said Mary Ann. “I do wish there were more of them.”

“Why not have a couple of your own?” he asked.

“Oh, they’re only given to maternal types. I’d never get one. Anyway, I won’t ever marry,” she said. “I’m the paramour type.”

It was obvious that the liquor had been having some effect. Either that, or she had a basic flaw of loquacity that no one else had discovered. Pembroke decided he would have to cover his tracks carefully.

“What type am I?” he asked.

“Silly, you’re real. You’re not a type at all.”

“Mary Ann, I love you very much,” Pembroke murmured, gambling everything on this one throw. “When you go to Earth I’ll miss you terribly.”

“Oh, but you’ll be dead by then,” she pouted. “So I mustn’t fall in love with you. I don’t want to be miserable.”

“If I pretended I was one of you, if I left on the boat with you, they’d let me go to Earth with you. Wouldn’t they?”

“Oh, yes, I’m sure they would.”

“Mary Ann, you have two other flaws I feel I should mention.”

“Yes? Please tell me.”

“In the first place,” said Pembroke, “you should be willing to fall in love with me even if it will eventually make you unhappy. How can you be the paramour type if you refuse to fall in love foolishly? And when you have fallen in love, you should be very loyal.”

“I’ll try,” she said unsurely. “What else?”

“The other thing is that, as my mistress, you must never mention me to anyone. It would place me in great danger.”

“I’ll never tell anyone anything about you,” she promised.

“Now try to love me,” Pembroke said, drawing her into his arms and kissing with little pleasure the smooth, warm

perfection of her tanned cheeks. “Love me my sweet, beautiful, affectionate Mary Ann. My paramour.”

Making love to Mary Ann was something short of ecstasy. Not for any obvious reason, but because of subtle little factors that make a woman a woman. Mary Ann had no pulse. Mary Ann did not perspire. Mary Ann did not fatigue gradually but all at once. Mary Ann breathed regularly under all circumstances. Mary Ann talked and talked and talked. But then, Mary Ann was not a human being.

When she left the hotel at midnight, Pembroke was quite sure that she understood his plan and that she was irrevocably in love with him. Tomorrow might bring his death, but it might also ensure his escape. After forty-two years of searching for a passion, for a cause, for a loyalty, Frank Pembroke had at last found his. Earth and the human race that peopled it. And Mary Ann would help him to save it.

The next morning Pembroke talked to Valencia about hunting. He said that he planned to go shooting out on the desert which surrounded the city. Valencia told him that there were no living creatures anywhere but in the city. Pembroke said he was going out anyway.

He picked up Mary Ann at her apartment and together they went to a sporting goods store. As he guessed there was a goodly selection of firearms, despite the fact that there was nothing to hunt and only a single target range within the city. Everything, of course, had to be just like Earth. That, after all, was the purpose of Puerto Pacifico.

By noon they had rented a jeep and were well away from the city. Pembroke and Mary Ann took turns firing at the paper targets they had purchased. At twilight they headed back to the city. On the outskirts, where the sand and soil were mixed and no footprints would be left, Pembroke hopped off. Mary Ann would go straight to the police and report that Pembroke had attacked her and that she had shot him. If necessary, she would conduct the authorities to the place where they had been target shooting, but would be unable to locate the spot where she had buried the body. Why had she buried it? Because at first she was not going to report the incident. She was frightened. It was not airtight, but there would probably be no further investigation. And they certainly would not prosecute Mary Ann for killing an Earthman.

Now Pembroke had himself to worry about. The first step was to enter smoothly into the new life he had planned. It wouldn’t be so comfortable as the previous one, but should be considerably safer. He headed slowly for the “old” part of town, aging his clothes against buildings and fences as he walked. He had already torn the collar of the shirt and discarded his belt. By morning his beard would grow to blacken his face. And he would look weary and hungry and aimless. Only the last would be a deception.

Two weeks later Pembroke phoned Mary Ann. The police had accepted her story without even checking. And when, when would she be seeing him again? He had aroused her passion and no amount of long-distance love could requite it. Soon, he assured her, soon.

“Because, after all, you do owe me something,” she added.

And that was bad because it sounded as if she had been giving some womanly thought to the situation. A little more of that and she might go to the police again, this time for vengeance.

Twice during his wanderings Pembroke had seen the corpses of Earthmen being carted out of buildings. They had to be Earthmen because they bled. Mary Ann had admitted that she did not. There would be very few Earthmen left in Puerto Pacifico, and it would be simple enough to locate him if he were reported as being on the loose. There was no out but to do away with Mary Ann.

Pembroke headed for the beach. He knew she invariably went there in the afternoon. He loitered around the stalls where hot dogs and soft drinks were sold, leaning against a post in the hot sun, hat pulled down over his forehead. Then he noticed that people all about him were talking excitedly. They were discussing a ship. It was leaving that afternoon. Anyone who could pass the interview would be sent to Earth.

Pembroke had visited the docks every day, without being able to learn when the great exodus would take place. Yet he was certain the first lap would be by water rather than by spaceship, since no one he had talked to in the city had ever heard of spaceships. In fact, they knew very little about their masters.

Now the ship had arrived and was to leave shortly. If there was any but the most superficial examination, Pembroke would no doubt be discovered and exterminated. But since no one seemed concerned about anything but his own speech and behavior, he assumed that they had all qualified in every other respect. The reason for transporting Earth People to this planet was, of course, to apply a corrective to any of the Pacificos’ aberrant mannerisms or articulation. This was the polishing up phase.

Pembroke began hobbling toward the docks. Almost at once he found himself face to face with Mary Ann. She smiled happily when she recognized him. That was a good thing.

“It is a sign of poor breeding to smile at tramps,” Pembroke admonished her in a whisper. “Walk on ahead.”

She obeyed. He followed. The crowd grew thicker. They neared the docks and Pembroke saw that there were now set up on the roped-off wharves small interviewing booths. When it was their turn, he and Mary Ann each went into separate ones. Pembroke found himself alone in the little room.

Then he saw that there was another entity in his presence confined beneath a glass dome. It looked rather like a groundhog and had seven fingers on each of its six limbs. But it was larger and hairier than the glass one he had seen at the gift store. With four of its limbs it tapped on an intricate keyboard in front of it.

“What is your name?” queried a metallic voice from a speaker on the wall.

“I’m Jerry Newton. Got no middle initial,” Pembroke said in a surly voice.

“Occupation?”

“I work a lot o’ trades. Fisherman, fruit picker, fightin’ range fires, vineyards, car washer. Anything. You name it. Been out of work for a long time now, though. Goin’ on five months. These here are hard times, no matter what they say.”

“What do you think of the Chinese situation?” the voice inquired.

“Which situation’s ‘at?”

“Where’s Seattle?”

“Seattle? State o’ Washington.”

And so it went for about five minutes. Then he was told he had qualified as a satisfactory surrogate for a mid-twentieth century American male, itinerant type.

“You understand your mission, Newton?” the voice asked. “You are to establish yourself on Earth. In time you will receive instructions. Then you will attack. You will not see us, your masters, again until the atmosphere has been sufficiently chlorinated. In the meantime, serve us well.”

He stumbled out toward the docks, then looked about for Mary Ann. He saw her at last behind the ropes, her lovely face in tears.

Then she saw him. Waving frantically, she called his name several times. Pembroke mingled with the crowd moving toward the ship, ignoring her. But still the woman persisted in her shouting.

Sidling up to a well-dressed man-about-town type, Pembroke winked at him and snickered.

“You Frank?” he asked.

“Hell, no. But some poor punk’s sure red in the face, I’ll bet,” the man-about-town said with a chuckle. “Those high-strung paramour types always raising a ruckus. They never do pass the interview. Don’t know why they even make ’em.”

Suddenly Mary Ann was quiet.

“Ambulance squad,” Pembroke’s companion explained. “They’ll take her off to the buggy house for a few days and bring her out fresh and ignorant as the day she was assembled. Don’t know why they keep making ’em, as I say. But I guess there’s a call for that type up there on Earth.”

“Yeah, I reckon there is at that,” said Pembroke, snickering again as he moved away from the other. “And why not? Hey? Why not?”

Pembroke went right on hating himself, however, till the night he was deposited in a field outside of Ensenada, broke but happy, with two other itinerant types. They separated in San Diego, and it was not long before Pembroke was explaining to the police how he had drifted far from the scene of the sinking of the Elena Mia on a piece of wreckage, and had been picked up by a Chilean trawler. How he had then made his way, with much suffering, up the coast to California. Two days later, his identity established and his circumstances again solvent, he was headed for Los Angeles to begin his save-Earth campaign.

Now, seated at his battered desk in the shabby rented office over Lemark’s Liquors, Pembroke gazed without emotion at the two demolished Pacificos that lay sprawled one atop the other in the corner. His watch said one-fifteen. The man from the FBI should arrive soon.

There were footsteps on the stairs for the third time that day. Not the brisk, efficient steps of a federal official, but the hesitant, self-conscious steps of a junior clerk type.

Pembroke rose as the young man appeared at the door. His face was smooth, unpimpled, clean-shaven, without sweat on a warm summer afternoon.

“Are you Dr. Von Schubert?” the newcomer asked, peering into the room. “You see, I’ve got a problem—”

The four shots from Pembroke’s pistol solved his problem effectively. Pembroke tossed his third victim onto the pile, then opened a can of lager, quaffing it appreciatively. Seating himself once more, he leaned back in the chair, both feet upon the desk.

He would be out of business soon, once the FBI agent had got there. Pembroke was only in it to get the proof he

would need to convince people of the truth of his tale. But in the meantime he allowed himself to admire the clipping of the newspaper ad he had run in all the Los Angeles papers for the past week. The little ad that had saved mankind from God-knew-what insidious menace.
It read

ARE YOU IMPERFECT?

LET DR. VON SCHUBERT POINT OUT YOUR FLAWS

IT IS HIS GOAL TO MAKE YOU THE AVERAGE FOR YOUR TYPE

FEE—$3.75

MONEY BACK IF NOT SATISFIED!

A Demon of Grief

The first of two short episodes for the week. This is a statue found in Venice that I'll be redesigning as a demon. Stats eventually. The description comes from William Dean Howell's "Venetian Life".

***

There would be nothing to say, after Mr. Ruskin, in praise or blame of the great monuments in San Giovanni e Paolo, even if I cared to discuss them; I only wonder that, in speaking of the bad art which produced the tomb of the Venieri, he failed to mention the successful approach to its depraved feeling, made by the single figure sitting on the case of a slender shaft, at the side of the first altar on the right of the main entrance. I suppose this figure typifies Grief, but it really represents a drunken woman, whose drapery has fallen, as if in some vile debauch, to her waist, and who broods, with a horrible, heavy stupor and chopfallen vacancy, on something which she supports with her left hand upon her knee. It is a round of marble, and if you have the daring to peer under the arm of the debauchee, and look at it as she does, you find that it contains the bass-relief of a skull in bronze. Nothing more ghastly and abominable than the whole thing can be conceived, and it seemed to me the fit type of the abandoned Venice which produced it; for one even less Ruskinian than I might have fancied that in the sculptured countenance could be seen the dismay of the pleasure-wasted harlot of the sea when, from time to time, death confronted her amid her revels.

Cats of Venice

There's no real reason for this episode other than my love of cats. In Ars Magica, these are likely a tradition as per Realms of Power : Magic. In Magonomia they are likely malkins, as per the Bestiary.

I have sometimes been puzzled in Venice to know why churches should keep cats, church-mice being proverbially so poor, and so little capable of sustaining a cat in good condition; yet I have repeatedly found sleek and portly cats in the churches, where they seem to be on terms of perfect understanding with the priests, and to have no quarrel even with the little boys who assist at mass. There is, for instance, a cat in the sacristy of the Frari, which I have often seen in familiar association with the ecclesiastics there, when they came into his room to robe or disrobe, or warm their hands, numb with supplication, at the great brazier in the middle of the floor. I do not think this cat has the slightest interest in the lovely Madonna of Bellini which hangs in the sacristy; but I suspect him of dreadful knowledge concerning the tombs in the church. I have no doubt he has passed through the open door of Canova's monument, and that he sees some coherence and meaning in Titian's; he has been all over the great mausoleum of the Doge Pesaro, and he knows whether the griffins descend from their perches at the midnight hour to bite the naked knees of the ragged black caryatides. This profound and awful animal I take to be a blood relation of the cat in the church of San Giovanni e Paolo, who sleeps like a Christian during divine service, and loves a certain glorious bed on the top of a bench, where the sun strikes upon him through the great painted window, and dapples his tawny coat with lovely purples and crimsons.

The church cats are apparently the friends of the sacristans, with whom their amity is maintained probably by entire cession of the spoils of visitors. In these, therefore, they seldom take any interest, merely opening a lazy eye now and then to wink at the sacristans as they drag the deluded strangers from altar to altar, with intense enjoyment of the absurdity, and a wicked satisfaction in the incredible stories rehearsed. I fancy, being Italian cats, they feel something like a national antipathy toward those troops of German tourists, who always seek the Sehenswürdigkeiten in companies of ten or twenty,—the men wearing their beards, and the women their hoops and hats, to look as much like English people as possible; while their valet marshals them forward with a stream of guttural information, unbroken by a single punctuation point. These wise cats know the real English by their "Murrays;" and I think they make a shrewd guess at the nationality of us Americans by the speed with which we pass from one thing to another, and by our national ignorance of all languages but English. They must also hear us vaunt the superiority of our own land in unpleasant comparisons, and I do not think they believe us, or like us, for our boastings. I am sure they would say to us, if they could, "Quando finirà mai quella guerra? Che sangue! che orrore!" [Footnote: "When will this war ever be ended? what blood! what horror!" I have often heard the question and the comment from many Italians who were not cats.] The French tourist they distinguish by his evident skepticism concerning his own wisdom in quitting Paris for the present purpose; and the traveling Italian, by his attention to his badly dressed, handsome wife, with whom he is now making his wedding trip.

Fayliss, from “The Troubadour” by Peter Michael Sherman

It’s our monster of the month! Demon or dark faerie?

The following recording was released through LibriVox by Dale Grothmann.

***

SO FAR as parties go, Jocelyn’s were no duller than any others. I went to this one mainly to listen to Paul Kutrov and Frank Alva bait each other, which is usually more entertaining than most double features. Kutrov adheres to the “onward and upward” school of linear progress, while Alva is more or less of a Spenglerian. More when he goes along by himself; less when you try to pin him down to it. And since the subject of tonight’s revelations would be the pre-Mohammed Arabian Culture, I’d find Alva inclined toward my side of the debate, which is strictly morphological and without any pious theories of “progress”.

I’d completely forgotten that Jocelyn had mentioned something about having a special attraction: a “Mr. Fayliss”, who, she insisted, was a troubadour. I didn’t comment, not wanting to spend a day with Jocelyn on the phone, exploring the Provence.

The night wasn’t too warm for August, and there were occasional gusts of air seeping through the layers of tobacco smoke that hovered over the assemblage. As usual, it was a heterogeneous crowd, which rapidly formed numerous islands of discourse. The trade winds carried salient gems of intelligence throughout the entire archipelago at times, and Jocelyn walked upon the water, scurrying from one body to another, sopping up the overflow of “culture”. She visited our atoll, where Kutrov’s passionate exposition had already raised the mean temperature some degrees, but didn’t stay long. Such debates didn’t suggest any course of social or political action, and couldn’t be trued in to any of her causes.

My attention was wandering from the Kutrov-Alva variations, for Bill had only been speaking for ten minutes, and could not be expected to arrive at any point whatsoever for at least another fifteen. From the east of us came apocalyptic figures of nuclear physics; from the west, I heard the strains of Mondrian interwoven with Picasso; south of us, a post mortem on the latest “betrayal” of this or that aspiration of “the people”, and to the north, we heard the mysteries of atonality. It was while I was looking around, and letting these things roll over me, that I saw the stranger enter. Jocelyn immediately bounced up from a couch, leaving the crucial problem of atmosphere-poisoning via fission and/or fusion bombs suspended, and made effusive noises.

This, then, was the “troubadour”—Mr. Fayliss. The Main Attraction was decidedly prepossessing. Tall, peculiarly graceful both in appearance and manner, dressed with an immaculateness that seemed excessive in this post-Bohemian circle. There was a decided musical quality to his speech, as he made polite comments upon being introduced to each of us, and an exactness in sentence-structure, word-choices and enunciation that bespoke the foreigner. Jocelyn took him around with the air of conducting a quick tour through a museum, then settled him momentarily with the music group, now in darkest Schoenberg, only partially illuminated by “Wozzek”. I watched Fayliss long enough to solidify an impression that he was at ease here—but not merely in this particular discussion. It was a case of his being simply at ease, period.

Kutrov was watching him, too, and I saw now that there would be a most-likely permanent digression. Too bad—I’d had a feeling that when he came to his point, it would have been a strong one. “Hungarian, do you suppose?” he asked.

Alva examined the evidence. Fayliss had high cheekbones, longish eyes, with large pupils. He was lean, without giving an impression of thinness. He had not taken off his gloves, and I wondered if he would come forth with a monocle; if he had, it would not have seemed an affectation.

“I wouldn’t say Slavic,” Alva said. He started off on ethnology, and we toured the Near East again. I jumped into the break when Kutrov was swallowing beer and Alva lighting a cigaret to observe that Fayliss reminded me of some Egyptian portraits—although I couldn’t set the period. “If those eyes of his don’t shine in the dark,” I added, “they ought to.”

***

A BRIEF pause for appreciation, then Jocelyn was calling for all men’s attention. She managed to get it in reasonably short order, took a deep breath, then dived into announcing that our “special guest, Mr. Fayliss” was going to deliver a song-cycle.

Fayliss arose, bowed slightly, then nodded to Mark Loring, who brought forth his oboe. “These songs were not conceived or composed in the form I am presenting them,” he said. “But I believe that the arrangement I use is an effective one.

“I call this, ‘Song of the Last Men’.” He nodded again to Loring, and the performance began. His voice was affecting, and his artistry unmistakable. And there were overtones in his voice that gave an added eeriness to the weird music itself.

The songs told of the feelings, the memories, and despair of a nearly-extinct people—one which had achieved a great culture and a world-wide civilization. The singer knows that the civilization has been destroyed; that the people created by this culture and civilization are gone, the few survivors being pitiful fellaheen, unable to rebuild or bring forth a culture of their own. There is despair at the loss of the comforts the civilization they knew brought them, sorrow at their inability to share in its greatness—even in memory; and a resigned certainty that they are the last of the race—they will soon be gone, and no others shall arise after them.

There was silence when Fayliss finished, then discreet but firm applause, as if the audience felt that giving full reign to their approval would make an impious racket. Fayliss seemed to sense this feeling, and smiled as he bowed.

“These are not songs of your people, are they?” asked Jocelyn.

Fayliss shook his head. “Oh no—they are far removed from us. I am merely an explorer of past cultures and civilizations, and I enjoy adapting such masterpieces of the past as I can find. This arrangement was made for you; I shall make a different one for my own people, so that the sonic values of the music and the words agree with each other.”

Kutrov blinked, then asked him—”Well, can you tell us something more about the people who created this cycle? It has a familiar ring to it, yet I cannot tie it in with any past culture I have heard of.”

Jocelyn cut in with the regretful announcement that Mr. Fayliss had another appointment, and called for a note of thanks to him for coming. More applause—this time unrestrained. Fayliss smiled again and swept his eyes around us, as if filled with some amusing secret. Then he said to Kutrov, “You would find them quite understandable.”

I wandered over to the window, in search of air, and noted that someone had indiscreetly left a comfortable chair vacant. I was near the door, so that I could hear Jocelyn say to Fayliss: “It was—very moving. Why, I could almost feel that you were singing about us.”

Fayliss smiled again. “That is as it should be.”

“Of course,” chimed in Loring, who’d come up to ask Fayliss if he could have a copy of the score, “that’s the test of expert performance.”

The lights were dimmed again by the fog of tobacco smoke, and I could see the street quite clearly by moonlight. I decided I would watch Fayliss, and see if his eyes did glow in the dark. I saw him go down the sidewalk, with that graceful stride of his, his hands in his pockets. But I couldn’t see his eyes at all.

Then a gust of wind tugged his hat, and, for an instant I thought he’d have to go scrambling after it. But, quick as a rapier thrust, a tail darted out from beneath his dress coat, caught the hat, and set it back upon his head.

Venice : The Order of the Trousers and the Law Against Tall Shoes

A not-very secret society serving the Doge and Dogaressa directly, that overseas festivals, Originally they were called the Order of the Beret because of their cool hats. Later they changed the name to the Society of the Sock, or perhaps Hose. Edgecum Staley says there were 40 societies, but they were likely contemperaneous. A handful may have existed at any timer, and each replaced as it dissolved with a replacement, totalling about forty eventually.

The company was reconstituted in the 1980s and overseas the modern Venetian Carnevale.

***

An obvious and visible token of the opulent greatness of the new century was the foundation of the famous ” Compagnia delta Calza,” directly under the auspices of the stylish Doge and fashionable Dogaressa, old folks as they really were.

This remarkable Society took its rise at the period of the pageants held during the first year of Doge Steno’s rule. The designation ” Calza” was quite an arbitrary choice for the purview of the Compagnia had regard to all and every detail of dress and manner. It was first entitled ” della Berretta,”— “Company of the Cap,” but the woven silken or worsted grarment which clung- to and exhibited the whole figure, was the emphatic feature of the sumptuary modes—hence came ” Calza,”—”Company of the Tights.”

The society or union consisted of a number of clubs of young men—gay, rich and physically fit.
The officers of the Compagnia consisted of a Prior or chief,—who went about in a gorgeous costume of cloth of gold,—two Councillors, treasurer, chaplain, painter, sculptor, architect, poet, annalist, and a notary. The Compagnia consisted of clubs, and each club bore a distinguishing name. Immortali, Realty, Perpeiui, Semprevivi, Pavoni, Ortolani, etc., etc.,—there were forty of them. Every member wore striped silk tights, embroidered in gold and coloured silks with pearls and gems : each club had its special arrangement of stripes. Their doublets of silk velvet embroidered with gold, fitted close to the body, and bore the badge of the particular club. They had slashed sleeves through which puffings of fine white linen shirts were pulled. Upon their shoulders they wore short cloaks of cloth of gold or crimson damask velvet, lined with choice fur. Their flowing locks of hair were restrained under jaunty little caps of red or black silk or cloth, with a handsome jewel at the side and a heron’s feather. Their pointed shoes were of fine red leather pierced at the toes and adorned with gold and pearls. Waist – belts of leather, jewelled and embroidered, with beautiful scarcelle, or pouches, at the side, a golden chain bearing a jewelled pendant, and rings on the fingers completed the superb costumes.

Women associates were freely admitted, upon the hems of whose tight fitting silken petticoats, was embroidered in gold, the word ” Calza ” ; foreigners also were admitted to honorary membership. The gentildonne wore long sleeves, —lined with fur, and beautifully worked cinctures of gold and embroidery : their hair was arranged in plaits and rolled under golden nets, and their feet were shod in jewelled golden shoes. Their fine gold chains of interlaced and jewelled rings encircled throats and breasts.

The purpose of the ” Conipagnia della Calza” was however not merely the wearing of fine clothes, but the direction of State pageants, the reception of foreign princes and ambassadors, the performance of spectacular games and plays, and attendance at solemn Ecclesiastical functions. They also assisted at weddings, birthdays, baptisms, and funerals, and acted as elegant and audacious State masters of ceremonies in general.

With enthusiasm, each Maundy-Thursday, the gay young fellows entered the annual Caccia del Tori, which had originated after the first defeat of Friuli in 1 164. Three other dates were added,—Santa Marta’s day, the first Monday in September, and the first in October, and the “rings” were on the Lido and in the Piazza. Later on every campi had its Caccia, and, degenerating as such festivals usually do, the places of the gentildonne were taken by courtesans dressed, masked, and mannered.

The love of sumptuous dress gave a grand impetus to Venetian trade, but it led of course to many corruptions and exaggerations,—one of these was the wearing of enormously high pattens. The condition of the calle unfortunately required some such protection from mud and dirt, but women went about on shoe-stilts of poplar wood and leather which effectively dwarfed the slim tall figures of the men. At last an edict was issued which forbade this absurd fashion, especially in the case of pregnant women :

This fashion, by the way, led to many ludicrous situations, for many a gallant admirer of a calle beauty, tall, commanding and superfine, — discovered her in her boudoir reduced to natural if disappointing dimensions, and forthwith declined her charms, and made a not too dignified exit !

Alchemy in Chaucer

One of the most popular books in Elizabethan England is The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer. It's essentially a 14th Century anthology with a frame narrative, where a group of pilgrims amuse each other by telling stories. Late in the series we get the tale we will examine today, where a priest's servant (a canon's yeoman) explains how he and his master attempt to create gold alchemically, how the science of alchemy is addictive, and how they are driven to poverty and fraud to pursue it. He also gives the story of a more successful confidence trick by someone in the same profession, but that will wait for next month's episode

By the 16th Century, people interested in the subtle science had become convinced that Chaucer was one of its masters. What he writes in this story is enough to demonstrate that he knows some of the basic processes, and that he has been trained in the obfuscating language used by alchemists to describe the Great Work. He is also known to have written a partial treatise on the construction and use of an astrolabe. It was written for a child, so it is in plain, contemporary English. His role of comptroller of the port of London gave him all kinds of opportunities to hide the wealth created by the art, and to arrange the importation of needed tools and reagents.

His family is, from an English perspective, effectively extinct. His daughter married into the de la Pole family, and his grandsons were some of the final claimants of the Yorkist line of Plantagenets. He has a few descendants whose ancestors escaped to France during the Tudor ascension, and married well there. There is not, however, any known practitioner who carries on his magical work in the Reign.

There was no trace of a laboratory in his London residences, but a cache of his materials may exist somewhere. Biographical research indicates that he became a deputy forester for the king toward the end of his life, and had a remote hunting lodge under his care. This might have proven a suitable site for a laboratory.

Our reader is Joshua Young from Librivox, but the version he's recorded removes the yeoman's prologue. Essentially, the dialogue is as follows. When the prilgrims take to the road after staying at an inn for the night, two more people hurry up, and ask to join their company. The host, the leader of the pilgrims, asks who they are, and the yeoman says his master is a wonderfully wise man. The host says he's welcome if he can tell a merry tale or two. The yeoman answers that his lord has done many interesting things, and so will have tales to tell. The host then asks if he is a clerk, and the yeoman says he's better than that: he's a canon and that he's so clever he could pave the road to Canterbury with silver and gold.

The host asks why, if that's true, he's dressed so shabbily. The yeoman says that when men are too wise, they lose their wits because their researches become vices, and his master is troubled by just such an ailment. The host asks where they live, and the yeoman confirms it is in alleyways. The host asks why the yeoman is so discoloured (later said to look leaden), and he says it is from his work at the fires. He then says he and his lord chiefly live by getting people to give them gold, under the fancy they can multiply it alchemically, but although they sincerely try, they always fail. The Canon rides up and quarrels with his servant for talking too much, and spurs away in embarrassment. The yeoman, suddenly free of his employer, sees no reason not to tell all of his secrets, and how his own addiction to the Art has ruined him.

And now over to the reading, with interjections for me. Note that we won't make it as far as the actual tale this episode, as the yeoman's introductory remarks about his art are lengthy and interesting to us.

With this Canon I dwelt have seven year,
And of his science am I ne'er the near
All that I had I have lost thereby,
And, God wot, so have many more than I.
Where I was wont to be right fresh and gay
Of clothing, and of other good array
Now may I wear an hose upon mine head;

(To explain that, his cap is made of an old stocking.)

And where my colour was both fresh and red,
Now is it wan, and of a leaden hue
(Whoso it useth, sore shall he it rue);
And of my swink yet bleared is mine eye;
Lo what advantage is to multiply!

(Multiplying is the alchemical making of gold, in this context.)

That sliding science hath me made so bare,
That I have no good,* where that ever I fare;

("Good" here means property. By "sliding science" he means it is slippery and deceitful).

And yet I am indebted so thereby
Of gold, that I have borrow'd truely,
That, while I live, I shall it quite never;
Let every man beware by me for ever.
What manner man that casteth him thereto,
If he continue, I hold his thrift y-do;

(Quite here means "complete" or "be clear of" or "quit". y-do means "ended."]

So help me God, thereby shall he not win,
But empty his purse, and make his wittes thin.
And when he, through his madness and folly,
Hath lost his owen good through jupartie,

[Jupartie is a card game of even odds.)

Then he exciteth other men thereto,
To lose their good as he himself hath do'.
For unto shrewes joy it is and ease
To have their fellows in pain and disease.
Thus was I ones learned of a clerk;
Of that no charge; I will speak of our work.

(Shews here means wicked, vicious people. Disease means suffering, lack of ease, rather than sickness.)

When we be there as we shall exercise
Our elvish craft, we seeme wonder wise,
Our termes be so clergial and quaint.

[Right, these are odd. When he says the craft is elvish he means it's weird and magical, not literally taught by elves. Clergical means "learned" in this case. Quaint means old and unusual, not having the sort of nostalgic goodness we give it today.)

I blow the fire till that mine hearte faint.
Why should I tellen each proportion
Of thinges, whiche that we work upon,
As on five or six ounces, may well be,
Of silver, or some other quantity?
And busy me to telle you the names,
As orpiment, burnt bones, iron squames,

[Orpiment is yellow arsenic sulphide. Squames are scales: hence Lovecraft's love of the word "squamous".]

That into powder grounden be full small?
And in an earthen pot how put is all,
And, salt y-put in, and also peppere,
Before these powders that I speak of here,
And well y-cover'd with a lamp of glass?

["Lamp" here is a mistake. Walter Skeat's edition says it should say "lamm", which means "plate".]

And of much other thing which that there was?
And of the pots and glasses engluting,

[Engluting is "sealing" with clay. Well, mud, arguably.]

That of the air might passen out no thing?
And of the easy fire, and smart also,

[Easy and smart are antonyms here. One means slow, the other rapid.]

Which that was made? and of the care and woe
That we had in our matters subliming,
And in amalgaming, and calcining
Of quicksilver, called mercury crude?

[Subliming here is turning something into a vapour. Amalgamating is mixing. Calcinating is heating without melting to create a change by oxidization.]

For all our sleightes we can not conclude.
Our orpiment, and sublim'd mercury,
Our ground litharge eke on the porphyry,

[Litharge is white lead, which was a lot commoner in Elizabethan England than in earlier times, as it was used in cosmetics. Porphyry is a purple stone prized in the ancient world as being suitable for Emperors, due to its colour.]

Of each of these of ounces a certain,
Not helpeth us, our labour is in vain.
Nor neither our spirits' ascensioun,
Nor our matters that lie all fix'd adown,
May in our working nothing us avail;
For lost is all our labour and travail,
And all the cost, a twenty devil way,
Is lost also, which we upon it lay.

There is also full many another thing
That is unto our craft appertaining,
Though I by order them not rehearse can,
Because that I am a lewed man;
Yet will I tell them as they come to mind,

[Lewd here means "unlearned", not sexually lewd.]

Although I cannot set them in their kind,
As sal-armoniac, verdigris, borace;
And sundry vessels made of earth and glass;

Sal armoniac is ammonium chloride. It was used to clear the dross out of metals being refined. It is also edible, but ammonium carbonate has taken its place in baking. Verdigris is the blue-green rust that forms on copper alloys. It used to be made by putting sheets of copper over boiling vats of vinegar, but in England I think they just sealed the whole lot in pots and put them in dungheaps, because they were fascinating to alchemists and produced their own heat. French alchemists used the vinegar from wine production for the same process. I know it's a fungicide and a pigment, and I want to say it is used to make a particularly potent acid, but the details escape me. I've made a heap of it when showing children how to light LEDs with penny batteries. Borace is borax.

Our urinales, and our descensories,

Urine, because it is golden, got a lot of interest from alchemists and, hateful as it may sound, one of them really did strike the jackpot here. The first new, cool, element discovered by these people was phosphorous, which glows on its own (spooky!) and it was found in urine allowed to rot down and concentrate). A descensioary is a retort that distils via descent.

Phials, and croslets, and sublimatories,
Cucurbites, and alembikes eke,
And other suche, dear enough a leek,

A croslet is a crucible. It's what you'd also call a creuset if you like French cookware. A sublimatory is used to sublimate, which is to say, vaporise. An alembic is a still, of which the curcurbit is the part that contains the materials to be heated. Yes, the name does mean "cucumber". Modern ambelics work a bit differently to the ones with the curcurbit. Basically, in a modern still, you heat a flask and the stuff to be distilled hits the lid and runs off down a cooling pipe or tube to be collected in an unlidded collection vessel. In a curcurbit alembic, the end of the tube from the curcurbit pokes into the lidded collection vessel. "Dear enough a leek" means "cheaper that a long Welsh onion".]

It needeth not for to rehearse them all.
Waters rubifying, and bulles' gall,
Arsenic, sal-armoniac, and brimstone,

[Now, here is where we see why people thought Chaucer knew his stuff. Rubyfied water was water that had been infused with elemental fire as part of the process of combining the five essences. This is aqua spiritualis rubea, which is quite important, hence the fancy name which means "red spirit water". Sal ammoniac I discussed before, but forgot to mention that's a place name and it will come up again in another bit of alchemy in the line. Brimstone is sulphur and has Infernal associations. Also its yellow and its a rock that burns, so clearly its got something to do with cooking stuff to make gold.]

And herbes could I tell eke many a one,
As egremoine, valerian, and lunary,

[That first one is agrimony. The last one we now call "moon wort". Basically, in folklore, its good for pretty much everything, everything but gathering it has to be done ritually by the full moon.]

And other such, if that me list to tarry;
Our lampes burning bothe night and day,
To bring about our craft if that we may;
Our furnace eke of calcination,
And of waters albification,
Unslaked lime, chalk, and glair of an ey,
Powders diverse, ashes, dung, piss, and clay,
Seared pokettes, saltpetre, and vitriol;

[Let's go through these. Calcination is heating stuff to make it change. Albification means to make something white and the things he uses later are used for that whitening, but I'm not sure what the point of that is. "Glair" is bookbinding glue made from egg whites. Well, I'm a librarian, presumably it has some other use. I know you can crack eggs into coffee to take out the grinds, so something similar but mystical and subtle? Saltpetre is nitre and I've covered it in an earlier episode. Vitriol is sulphuric acid. Seared pokettes are, sadly, not modern pockets. There's some argument here, but Walter Skeat's edition suggest it's a diminutive of "poke" which means a sack or bag, and "seared" means coated in wax (cera, in Latin). So, basically little bags for alchemist stuff. We will be pinching these for Magonomia, clearly.]

And divers fires made of wood and coal;
Sal-tartar, alkali, salt preparate,

Salt of tartar is potash, and I'm most familiar with it from baking and glasswork. It forms naturally in wine barrels, and that was considered interesting by alchemists (is it a mineral or a vegetable?) Alkali is also potash, although it was originally made by burning shrubs, so clearly I'm missing something (the K in al-Kali is where potassium gets its chemical symbol from). I have no idea what salt preparate is. It may just be refined, common salt. Sal tartar, or spirits of wine as it was also called, works as a flux. That is, if you add it to metals it makes them more malleable. The ancient alchemists though this was a great thing.

And combust matters, and coagulate;
Clay made with horse and manne's hair, and oil
Of tartar, alum, glass, barm, wort, argoil,
Rosalgar,* and other matters imbibing;

Let's work through these. Clay made with horse and man's hair. Oil of tartar is salt of tartar that's been left in a cellar for a while. It was used to treat facial blemishes and warts. Alum here is potassium alum, which is to say, it's a different type of potash. Barm is yeast froth from the top of alcoholic fermentation. Wort is the stuff that gets mashed out of grain before fermenting begins. Argoil is potter's clay. Rosalgar is a red arsenic sulphide that was used for white in fireworks before aluminium became available. It's used as a rat poison in the Reign and is called sandarac, locally.

And eke of our matters encorporing,
And of our silver citrination,
Our cementing, and fermentation,
Our ingots, tests, and many thinges mo'

Citirination is when you make a metal more yellow, so it is closer to gold. Ingots here mean "moulds" not the bars that come out of moulds.

I will you tell, as was me taught also,
The foure spirits, and the bodies seven,
By order, as oft I heard my lord them neven.
The first spirit Quicksilver called is;
The second Orpiment; the third, y-wis,
Sal-Armoniac, and the fourth Brimstone.
The bodies sev'n eke, lo them here anon.
Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe
Mars iron, Mercury quicksilver we clepe;
Saturnus lead, and Jupiter is tin,
And Venus copper, by my father's kin.

[So, he's given some of the alchemical code words away here.]

This cursed craft whoso will exercise,
He shall no good have that him may suffice;
For all the good he spendeth thereabout,
He lose shall, thereof have I no doubt.
Whoso that list to utter his folly,
Let him come forth and learn to multiply:
And every man that hath aught in his coffer,
Let him appear, and wax a philosopher;
Ascaunce that craft is so light to lear.
Nay, nay, God wot, all be he monk or frere,
Priest or canon, or any other wight;

[Wight just means "body" here.]

Though he sit at his book both day and night;
In learning of this elvish nice lore,

[Nice used to be a negative word. It means "stupid" in this case.]

All is in vain; and pardie muche more,
Is to learn a lew'd man this subtlety;
Fie! speak not thereof, for it will not be.
And conne he letterure, or conne he none,
As in effect, he shall it find all one;
For bothe two, by my salvation,
Concluden in multiplication
Alike well, when they have all y-do;
This is to say, they faile bothe two.
Yet forgot I to make rehearsale
Of waters corrosive, and of limaile,
And of bodies' mollification,
And also of their induration,

[Limaile are metal shavings Mollifcation means softening and induration means hardening.]

Oiles, ablutions, metal fusible,
To tellen all, would passen any Bible

[Bible here just means "book" I believe.]

That owhere is; wherefore, as for the best,
Of all these names now will I me rest,
For, as I trow, I have you told enough
To raise a fiend, all look he ne'er so rough.

Ah! nay, let be; the philosopher's stone,
Elixir call'd, we seeke fast each one;

[Literally, he means that "elixir" is the name of the philosopher's stone. It's not a more general term to him for all of the things he makes.]

For had we him, then were we sicker enow;
But unto God of heaven I make avow,
For all our craft, when we have all y-do,
And all our sleight, he will not come us to.
He hath y-made us spende muche good,
For sorrow of which almost we waxed wood,

[Getting "wood" in this period meant to be mad.]

But that good hope creeped in our heart,
Supposing ever, though we sore smart,
To be relieved by him afterward.
Such supposing and hope is sharp and hard.
I warn you well it is to seeken ever.
That future temps hath made men dissever,
In trust thereof, from all that ever they had,
Yet of that art they cannot waxe sad,
For unto them it is a bitter sweet;
So seemeth it; for had they but a sheet
Which that they mighte wrap them in at night,
And a bratt to walk in by dayelight,
They would them sell, and spend it on this craft;
They cannot stint, until no thing be laft.

[A bratt is a cloak. They can't stop until they have nothing.]

And evermore, wherever that they gon,
Men may them knowe by smell of brimstone;
For all the world they stinken as a goat;
Their savour is so rammish and so hot,
That though a man a mile from them be,
The savour will infect him, truste me.
Lo, thus by smelling and threadbare array,
If that men list, this folk they knowe may.
And if a man will ask them privily,
Why they be clothed so unthriftily,
They right anon will rownen in his ear,
And sayen, if that they espied were,
Men would them slay, because of their science:
Lo, thus these folk betrayen innocence!

[This is complicated, but basically they look and smell like they perform dark magic.]

Pass over this; I go my tale unto.
Ere that the pot be on the fire y-do
Of metals, with a certain quantity
My lord them tempers, and no man but he

(Now he is gone, I dare say boldely);
For as men say, he can do craftily,
Algate I wot well he hath such a name,
And yet full oft he runneth into blame;
And know ye how? full oft it happ'neth so,
The pot to-breaks, and farewell! all is go'.
These metals be of so great violence,
Our walles may not make them resistence,
But if they were wrought of lime and stone;

["But if" here means "unless". Unless the walls of the vessels are made of lime and stone they break.]

They pierce so, that through the wall they gon;
And some of them sink down into the ground
(Thus have we lost by times many a pound),
And some are scatter'd all the floor about;
Some leap into the roof withoute doubt.
Though that the fiend not in our sight him show,
I trowe that he be with us, that shrew;
In helle, where that he is lord and sire,
Is there no more woe, rancour, nor ire.
When that our pot is broke, as I have said,
Every man chides, and holds him evil apaid.
Some said it was long on the fire-making;
Some saide nay, it was on the blowing
(Then was I fear'd, for that was mine office);
"Straw!" quoth the third, "ye be lewed and nice,
It was not temper'd as it ought to be."
"Nay," quoth the fourthe, "stint and hearken me;
Because our fire was not y-made of beech,

[This is the tree.]

That is the cause, and other none, so the'ch.
I cannot tell whereon it was along,
But well I wot great strife is us among."
"What?" quoth my lord, "there is no more to do'n,
Of these perils I will beware eftsoon.
I am right sicker that the pot was crazed.

[Crazed means "cracked".]

Be as be may, be ye no thing amazed.
As usage is, let sweep the floor as swithe;
Pluck up your heartes and be glad and blithe."

The mullok on a heap y-sweeped was,

Mullok is rubbish. Oddly in Australia, mining waste used to be called mullock, so I thought it was more specific than general waste, but it's not: it's just a coincidence they are going through it for gold.

And on the floor y-cast a canevas,
And all this mullok in a sieve y-throw,
And sifted, and y-picked many a throw.
"Pardie," quoth one, "somewhat of our metal
Yet is there here, though that we have not all.
And though this thing mishapped hath as now,
Another time it may be well enow. at present
We muste put our good in adventure;

[Adventure here means "risk". He keeps using "pardie". That's pardue, "by God" in French.]

A merchant, pardie, may not aye endure,
Truste me well, in his prosperity:
Sometimes his good is drenched in the sea,
And sometimes comes it safe unto the land."
"Peace," quoth my lord; "the next time I will fand
To bring our craft all in another plight,

[Fand means "try". Plight here means means "condition" but not necessarily a bad ending.]

And but I do, Sirs, let me have the wite;
There was default in somewhat, well I wot."
Another said, the fire was over hot.
But be it hot or cold, I dare say this,
That we concluden evermore amiss;
We fail alway of that which we would have;
And in our madness evermore we rave.
And when we be together every one,
Every man seemeth a Solomon.
But all thing, which that shineth as the gold,
It is not gold, as I have heard it told;

[Chaucer getting in his aphorism. Shakespeare pinches it.]

Nor every apple that is fair at eye,
It is not good, what so men clap or cry.
Right so, lo, fareth it amonges us.
He that the wisest seemeth, by Jesus,
Is most fool, when it cometh to the prefe;
And he that seemeth truest, is a thief.
That shall ye know, ere that I from you wend;
By that I of my tale have made an end.

Next time, we get into a classic story of alchemical con artistry.

Episode Two

In this excerpt from Chaucer the main characters area simple priest and a skilled con artist, who is a canon. I've cut out a lot of the setup. The two men have met, the conman has engaged his mark in conversation, and they have travelled to the priest's home.

"Sir," quoth he to the priest, "let your man go
For quicksilver, that we it had anon;
And let him bringen ounces two or three;
And when he comes, as faste shall ye see
A wondrous thing, which ye saw ne'er ere this."

Sir," quoth the priest, "it shall be done, y-wis."
He bade his servant fetche him this thing,
And he all ready was at his bidding,
And went him forth, and came anon again
With this quicksilver, shortly for to sayn;
And took these ounces three to the canon;
And he them laide well and fair adown,
And bade the servant coals for to bring,
That he anon might go to his working.
The coales right anon weren y-fet,
And this canon y-took a crosselet
Out of his bosom, and shew'd to the priest.

[A reminder, a crosslet is what we would now call a crucible.]

"This instrument," quoth he, "which that thou seest,
Take in thine hand, and put thyself therein
Of this quicksilver an ounce, and here begin,
In the name of Christ, to wax a philosopher.
There be full few, which that I would proffer
To shewe them thus much of my science;
For here shall ye see by experience
That this quicksilver I will mortify,
Right in your sight anon withoute lie,
And make it as good silver, and as fine,
As there is any in your purse, or mine,
Or elleswhere; and make it malleable,
And elles holde me false and unable
Amonge folk for ever to appear.

["Mortifying" quicksilver is adding acid to it. Oddly enough the usual product of adding nitric acid to quicksilver is mercury fulminate, which is an explosive.]

I have a powder here that cost me dear,
Shall make all good, for it is cause of all
My conning, which that I you shewe shall.
Voide your man, and let him be thereout;
And shut the door, while we be about
Our privity, that no man us espy,
While that we work in this philosophy."
All, as he bade, fulfilled was in deed.
This ilke servant right anon out yede,
And his master y-shut the door anon,
And to their labour speedily they gon.

This priest, at this cursed canon's bidding,
Upon the fire anon he set this thing,
And blew the fire, and busied him full fast.
And this canon into the croslet cast
A powder, I know not whereof it was
Y-made, either of chalk, either of glass,
Or somewhat ellse, was not worth a fly,
To blinden with this priest; and bade him hiee
The coals for to couchen all above lay in order
The croslet; "for, in token I thee love,"
Quoth this canon, "thine owen handes two
Shall work all thing that here shall be do'."

[This is a basic principle of close magic for con artistry. The mark picks the card, or choses which cup the ball's under. The trick has already happened by the time they are allowed to touch the materials, so it only aids the verisimilitude.]

"Grand mercy," quoth the priest, and was full glad,
And couch'd the coales as the canon bade.
And while he busy was, this fiendly wretch,
This false canon (the foule fiend him fetch),
Out of his bosom took a beechen coal,
In which full subtifly was made a hole,
And therein put was of silver limaile.

[Limaile is shavings.]

An ounce, and stopped was withoute fail
The hole with wax, to keep the limaile in.
And understande, that this false gin
Was not made there, but it was made before;
And other thinges I shall tell you more,

[Gin here means "device", like a cotton gin, not the drink.]

[…]

But take heed, Sirs, now for Godde's love.
He took his coal, of which I spake above,
And in his hand he bare it privily,
And while the prieste couched busily
The coales, as I tolde you ere this,
This canon saide, "Friend, ye do amiss;
This is not couched as it ought to be,
But soon I shall amenden it," quoth he.
"Now let me meddle therewith but a while,
For of you have I pity, by Saint Gile.
Ye be right hot, I see well how ye sweat;
Have here a cloth, and wipe away the wet."

[And that's the misdirection.]

And while that the prieste wip'd his face,
This canon took his coal, — with sorry grace, —
And layed it above on the midward attend him!
Of the croslet, and blew well afterward,
Till that the coals beganne fast to brenn.
"Now give us drinke," quoth this canon then,
"And swithe all shall be well, I undertake.
Sitte we down, and let us merry make."
And whenne that this canon's beechen coal
Was burnt, all the limaile out of the hole
Into the crosselet anon fell down;
And so it muste needes, by reasoun,
Since it above so even couched was;
But thereof wist the priest no thing, alas!
He deemed all the coals alike good,
For of the sleight he nothing understood.

And when this alchemister saw his time,
“Rise up, Sir Priest,” quoth he, “and stand by me;
And, for I wot well ingot have ye none;
Go, walke forth, and bring me a chalk stone;
For I will make it of the same shape
That is an ingot, if I may have hap.
Bring eke with you a bowl, or else a pan,
Full of water, and ye shall well see than
How that our business shall hap and preve
And yet, for ye shall have no misbelieve
Nor wrong conceit of me, in your absence,
I wille not be out of your presence,
But go with you, and come with you again.”

[So, the ingot here is the mould, not the bar of metal we draw from the mould. Note that the trick being done, the magician can say “To prove I’m not doing anything untoward I will be with you the whole time.”

The chamber-doore, shortly for to sayn,
They opened and shut, and went their way,
And forth with them they carried the key;

[So, the trick is locked in a box, the key of which is held by the mark.]

And came again without any delay.
Why should I tarry all the long day?
He took the chalk, and shap’d it in the wise
Of an ingot, as I shall you devise;
I say, he took out of his owen sleeve
A teine of silver (evil may he cheve!)

[Here we see a fault in the magician’s form. The trick’s done. There is silver in the quicksilver. There’s no need to do any of this secondary business. A teine is a small piece. “Cheve” is an outcome, like an achievement.]

Which that ne was but a just ounce of weight.
And take heed now of his cursed sleight;
He shap’d his ingot, in length and in brede
Of this teine, withouten any drede,
So slily, that the priest it not espied;
And in his sleeve again he gan it hide;

[So, he pops an ingot out of his sleeve, uses it to shape the mould, then drops it back. He doesn’t need to do any of that, and the manipulation to carve out a chalk stone to make a mould isn’t worth it. He could just as well give the man a lump of silver from the pot, or melt it into an ingot before him. In the next few lines, remember that when he puts the “matter in the ingot”, the matter is the melted metal and the ingot’s the mould, not the piece of silver in his sleeve, which Chaucer calls a tiene. That being said, the water bath in which the chalk is cooled is discoloured by the process, so the man needs to “grope” in it for the silver. If the magician wanted to, he could just have dropped the silver from his sleeve into the water vessel, as he does later.

And from the fire he took up his mattere,
And in th’ ingot put it with merry cheer;
And in the water-vessel he it cast,
When that him list, and bade the priest as fast
Look what there is; “Put in thine hand and grope;
There shalt thou finde silver, as I hope.”
What, devil of helle! should it elles be?
Shaving of silver, silver is, pardie.
He put his hand in, and took up a teine
Of silver fine; and glad in every vein
Was this priest, when he saw that it was so.
“God’s blessing, and his mother’s also,
And alle hallows, have ye, Sir Canon!”
Saide this priest, “and I their malison
But, an’ ye vouchesafe to teache me
This noble craft and this subtility,
I will be yours in all that ever I may.”

[All Hallows means “by all the saints”, and Hallowe’en is called All Hallows Eve because its the night before the feast of the saints who do not have their own individual days in the church’s calendar. A malison is a spoken curse, literally the same as a slightly later word, “malediction”.]

Quoth the canon, “Yet will I make assay
The second time, that ye may take heed,
And be expert of this, and, in your need,
Another day assay in mine absence
This discipline, and this crafty science.
Let take another ounce,” quoth he tho,
“Of quicksilver, withoute wordes mo’,
And do therewith as ye have done ere this
With that other, which that now silver is. “

The priest him busied, all that e’er he can,
To do as this canon, this cursed man,
Commanded him, and fast he blew the fire
For to come to th’ effect of his desire.
And this canon right in the meanewhile
All ready was this priest eft to beguile,
and, for a countenance, in his hande bare
An hollow sticke (take keep and beware);
Of silver limaile put was, as before
Was in his coal, and stopped with wax well
For to keep in his limaile every deal.
And while this priest was in his business,
This canon with his sticke gan him dress
To him anon, and his powder cast in,
As he did erst (the devil out of his skin
Him turn, I pray to God, for his falsehead,
For he was ever false in thought and deed),
And with his stick, above the crosselet,
That was ordained with that false get,
He stirr’d the coales, till relente gan
The wax against the fire, as every man,
But he a fool be, knows well it must need.
And all that in the sticke was out yede,
And in the croslet hastily it fell.

Now, goode Sirs, what will ye bet than well?
When that this priest was thus beguil'd again,

[To us, this seems like he's doing the trick the same way twice, but not to the audience. Remember that for the canon, the first coal that hid the silver was, as far as he knew, his own coal. In this case, the priest is saying "I am using this perfectly normal stick." but if the canon were to trace his memory afterward, the assumption that the technique was the same both times would hide the stick's participation. "I am using this perfectly normal stick." is subverted in modern magic, because the wand is assumed to be part of the trick. Actually it's often the misdirection – it really is a perfectly normal stick.

This is the version of the con I first heard of, and it differed slightly. The equipment here has coals above and metal melting out below: the version I'd seen was for gold in a more conventional cauldron. It involved the magician stirring his material with an iron spoon that had a hollow stem, again filled with gold and stoppered with wax that melted out. This is perhaps a better method, as the canon, here, needs to make sure the priest is not looking when his vessel disintegrates and drains. In the cauldron and spoon method, the matter in the cauldron being opaque, that part of the trick is hidden from the audience.]

Supposing naught but truthe, sooth to sayn,
He was so glad, that I can not express
In no mannere his mirth and his gladness;
And to the canon he proffer'd eftsoon
Body and good. "Yea," quoth the canon soon,
"Though poor I be, crafty thou shalt me find;
I warn thee well, yet is there more behind.
Is any copper here within?" said he.
"Yea, Sir," the prieste said, "I trow there be."
"Elles go buy us some, and that as swithe.
Now, goode Sir, go forth thy way and hie thee."
He went his way, and with the copper came,
And this canon it in his handes name,
And of that copper weighed out an ounce.
Too simple is my tongue to pronounce,
As minister of my wit, the doubleness
Of this canon, root of all cursedness.
He friendly seem'd to them that knew him not;
But he was fiendly, both in work and thought.
It wearieth me to tell of his falseness;
And natheless yet will I it express,
To that intent men may beware thereby,
And for none other cause truely.
He put this copper in the crosselet,
And on the fire as swithe he hath it set,
And cast in powder, and made the priest to blow,
And in his working for to stoope low,
As he did erst, and all was but a jape;
Right as him list the priest he made his ape.
And afterward in the ingot he it cast,
And in the pan he put it at the last
Of water, and in he put his own hand;
And in his sleeve, as ye beforehand
Hearde me tell, he had a silver teine;
He silly took it out, this cursed heine
(Unweeting this priest of his false craft),
And in the panne's bottom he it laft
And in the water rumbleth to and fro,
And wondrous privily took up also
The copper teine (not knowing thilke priest),
And hid it, and him hente by the breast,

[So, the priest seems determined to do the trick three times and in different ways. There's a bit of art to this: it makes it harder to work out how the trick was done afterward, because the mark tends to assume the same method was used in each iteration.]

And to him spake, and thus said in his game;
"Stoop now adown; by God, ye be to blame;
Helpe me now, as I did you whilere;
Put in your hand, and looke what is there."

This priest took up this silver teine anon;
And thenne said the canon, "Let us gon,
With these three teines which that we have wrought,
To some goldsmith, and weet if they be aught:
For, by my faith, I would not for my hood worth anything
But if they were silver fine and good,
And that as swithe well proved shall it be."
Unto the goldsmith with these teines three
They went anon, and put them in assay
To fire and hammer; might no man say nay,
But that they weren as they ought to be.

This sotted priest, who gladder was than he?
Was never bird gladder against the day;
Nor nightingale in the season of May
Was never none, that better list to sing;
Nor lady lustier in carolling,
Or for to speak of love and womanhead;
Nor knight in arms to do a hardy deed,
To standen in grace of his lady dear,
Than had this priest this crafte for to lear;
And to the canon thus he spake and said;
"For love of God, that for us alle died,
And as I may deserve it unto you,
What shall this receipt coste? tell me now."
"By our Lady," quoth this canon, "it is dear.
I warn you well, that, save I and a frere,
In Engleland there can no man it make."
"No force," quoth he; "now, Sir, for Godde's sake,
What shall I pay? telle me, I you pray."
"Y-wis," quoth he, "it is full dear, I say.
Sir, at one word, if that you list it have,
Ye shall pay forty pound, so God me save;
And n'ere the friendship that ye did ere this
To me, ye shoulde paye more, y-wis."
This priest the sum of forty pound anon
Of nobles fet, and took them every one

To this canon, for this ilke receipt.
All his working was but fraud and deceit.

[A noble was a gold coin from the time of Edward the Third. It was 80 pence, or a third of a pound.]

“Sir Priest,” he said, “I keep to have no los
Of my craft, for I would it were kept close;
And as ye love me, keep it secre:
For if men knewen all my subtlety,
By God, they woulde have so great envy
To me, because of my philosophy,
I should be dead, there were no other way.”
“God it forbid,” quoth the priest, “what ye say.
Yet had I lever spenden all the good
Which that I have (and elles were I wood),
Than that ye shoulde fall in such mischief.”
“For your good will, Sir, have ye right good prefe,”
Quoth the canon; “and farewell, grand mercy.”
He went his way, and never the priest him sey
After that day; and when that this priest should
Maken assay, at such time as he would,
Of this receipt, farewell! it would not be.
Lo, thus bejaped and beguil’d was he;
Thus made he his introduction
To bringe folk to their destruction.

[Let’s skip down to the bit where Chaucer drops some names.]

Lo, thus saith Arnold of the newe town,
As his Rosary maketh mentioun,
He saith right thus, withouten any lie;
“There may no man mercury mortify,
But it be with his brother’s knowledging.”

[This is a reference to the Rosarium Philosophorum of Arnaldus Villanovanus, a French alchemist.]

Lo, how that he, which firste said this thing,
Of philosophers father was, Hermes;

[This is not the god, it’s Hermes Trismegistus. At this stage he was though to be the counsellor of Osiris and the inventor of writing, so he’s basically Thoth, which gets him back to godhood. He was believed to have written a book on the philosopher’s stone.]

He saith, how that the dragon doubteless
He dieth not, but if that he be slain
With his brother. And this is for to sayn,
By the dragon, Mercury, and none other,
He understood, and Brimstone by his brother,
That out of Sol and Luna were y-draw.
“And therefore,” said he, “take heed to my saw.

[A “saw” is a saying]

Let no man busy him this art to seech,
But if that he th’intention and speech
Of philosophers understande can;
And if he do, he is a lewed man.
For this science and this conning,” quoth he,
“Is of the secret of secrets pardie.”

“The Secret of Secrets” is another book of alchemical knowledge. Folklorisitcally, it’s a letter from Aristotle to his student, Alexander the Great. Oddly, it’s the only one of the books listed here I’ve actually read. It was some years ago, but I couldn’t find anything immediately useful as a podcast topic.

Also there was a disciple of Plato,
That on a time said his master to,
As his book, Senior, will bear witness,
And this was his demand in soothfastness:
“Tell me the name of thilke privy stone.”
And Plato answer’d unto him anon;
“Take the stone that Titanos men name.”
“Which is that?” quoth he. “Magnesia is the same,”

[So, “thilke privy” means the “stone that is secret”. Magnesia was an area that interested Plato a lot: he suggested his perfect republic would be founded there. The weird stone from there produces what we now call magnesium. It also produces manganese. These two were both called magnesium in period, one “white” and one “black” magnesium, and they were believed to be the male and female variants of the same rock. The same area also produces magnetite, by the way, so some of the stones in the area were magnets, which alchemists though were incredibly neat. It’s not what the yeoman means here, by the way.]

Saide Plato. “Yea, Sir, and is it thus?
This is ignotum per ignotius.
What is Magnesia, good Sir, I pray?”
“It is a water that is made, I say,
Of th’ elementes foure,” quoth Plato.
“Tell me the roote, good Sir,” quoth he tho,
“Of that water, if that it be your will.”

[The Latin bit there, “ignotium per ignotius” means to answer an unknown with another unknown. “What’s the stone?” “Magnesia!” “What’s Magnesia?” “A name I made up for a thing I made.” Plato says it’s a water of the four elements. This is one of the ways of getting the quintessence, the elixir, the fifth element. Another way is to be a meat popiscle that drives a cab in the 23rd Century, but Plato was not a fan of French cinema.]

“Nay, nay,” quoth Plato, “certain that I n’ill.
The philosophers sworn were every one,
That they should not discover it to none,
Nor in no book it write in no mannere;
For unto God it is so lefe and dear,
That he will not that it discover’d be,
But where it liketh to his deity

Man for to inspire, and eke for to defend’
Whom that he liketh; lo, this is the end.”

Then thus conclude I, since that God of heaven
Will not that these philosophers neven
How that a man shall come unto this stone,
I rede as for the best to let it gon.
For whoso maketh God his adversary,
As for to work any thing in contrary
Of his will, certes never shall he thrive,
Though that he multiply term of his live.
And there a point; for ended is my tale.
God send ev’ry good man boot of his bale.

[So, God doesn’t want humans to have the secret of the elixir. It’s rather like the Peaches of Immortality in that respect. It’s there, but it’s not for you, you rising ape. The last line means “may everyone find a cure for his misfortunes.”

Swiatek the beggar by Seabury Quinn

I have COVID. The way my podcast plan is set out, however, I have to do some recording today. I’m recording a couple of episodes which will go live in August. By the time you hear this hopefully I’ve been well for a month. Today I bring you one of the earliest werewolf stories, even though to me arguably it doesn’t contain a werewolf. The version that Seabury Quinn gives here has some of the features of the werewolf version. I originally read the werewolf version of the Swiatek the Beggar story in “The Book of Werewolves” by Sabine Baring-Gould. There it is surrounded by werewolf stories which accents some of his behaviors as similar to those of people who actually transform. As a trigger warning there is, in some versions of this story, graphic violence directed towards small children.

Seabury Quinn wrote nine articles – I believe – for Weird Tales magazine. He was the most prolific Weird Tales author. The nine weird crimes articles are different from his other work in that they claim to be non-fictional. This may be why his version, even though historically it comes after Baring-Gould’s, seems a little less supernatural.

I’m going to be giving one of Quinn’s other stories in about two weeks time. That’s the Magic Mirror Murders. It's about a serial killer in the Elizabethan period. I think has just done the perfect thing to annoy one of the monsters in the Bestiary, so look out for that.

Over to Ben Tucker. Ben’s recorded all of these for Librivox. Thanks to Ben and his production team.

I’m unable to transcribe this text. Please instead accept copies of the original publication.

A Series of Startling Articles

WEIRD CRIMES

No. 4. Swiatek, the Beggar

By SEABURY QUINN

THE landlord of the Silver Axe was on the verge of nervous prostration. Half an hour before a messenger had brought tidings of a great English milord whose coach had broken down a scant ten miles from the hamlet of Polomyja—even now the wealthy foreigner (were not all the English fabulously rich?) and his servants were making their way as best they could along the forest road, and the Silver Axe was the first inn they would pass on their journey to the town of Dubkow.

The winter of 1845 had been cruel to the inhabitants of the lordship of Parkost, in Austrian Galicia. The peasants, who got their meager living by hewing down the tall fir trees and floating them down the Vistula to market, had been sorely plagued by deep snows and frozen streams. Disease and lack of fodder had depleted their small supply of livestock, and the taxes of the landed proprietors of whom they held their hovels and little garden patches had been heavier than usual.

In these circumstances, there had been few coppers to buy beer and fewer silver pieces to buy wine at the tap room of the Silver Axe, and the landlord's purse had suffered in consequence. Now, when May had come to drive away the lingering frosts of winter, and the menfolk had gone to their summer work of resin collecting, came word of the wealthy *Englander*, dropped into the landlord's inn like the purses of the good Saint Nicholas into the laps of the dowerless maidens — and there was naught with which to prepare a feast for the unexpected guest.

Chickens had perished on their roosts in the biting winter frosts, one of the pigs had died of the cholera and the other had been taken by the Imperial tax collector in lieu of unforthcoming coin, only the ducks remained.

The ducks! That was the solution of the problem. The landlord would regale the Englishman with roast duck. "Come, come," he called to his bustling *housfrau*, "make haste, kill me our three ducks. We must have them roasted to a turn, with pickled fish and watercress and the best of our wine for the rich *Englander*. Ah, 'twill be a meal fit for the table of a duke! Doubtless our guest will reward us with a gold piece, mayhap two!"

Followed such an agonized squawking as never before was heard in all duckdom, as the landlady and her assistants ran a dignified and much scandalized drake to his doom. But of the slaughtered drake's harem no sign was to be found. Search high, search low, no frightened "quark!" gave testimony of a cowering duck hiding from the axe. Time pressed, the Englishman drew nearer with every passing minute, and only one duck lay waiting to grace the table for the famished foreigner and his hungry servants.

A trembling stable boy ran to tell the landlord. The landlord tore at his hair and beard, calling freely and impartially on all the red-and-black letter saints in the calendar to witness his misfortune. He also cursed the stable boy who brought him the evil tidings. But most of all, most horribly, most blasphemously, he cursed the unknown miscreant who had robbed him of his ducks and of the profit he would have made from the Englishman.

"What misbegotten descendant of an unvirtuous wild pig would do this thing to me?" the landlord questioned of the unanswering forest wind. "Who would steal from me? Do I not attend regularly at holy mass and give liberally to the poor? Do I ever turn beggars from my fire—

"Ah—!" The landlord ceased his curses and put on his hat. The rehearsal of his charities had turned his thoughts upon beggars in general, and from mendicants in general his thoughts had turned upon the neighborhood beggar in particular.

Scarcely a stone's throw from the Silver Axe stood the hut of Swiatek, the beggar of Polomyja. Summer and winter this old man was to be seen squatting at the church door, his long, white beard falling to his knees, as he held forth his wooden basin and whined, "Alms, an alms, an alms for the love o' Christ, kind friends. Give to the needy, and the Lord will reward you. Alms, alms for the love o' God!"

The landlord cherished no love for Swiatek. On more than one occasion he had caught him in the act of pilfering from the Silver Axe's none too plentifully stocked pantry, and on more occasions than one he had proof he had suspected him of thievery.

To be sure! Who would have been more likely to make away with the so precious ducks than this whining mendicant who, though strong and hardy as any man his age in the forest-bound circle of Tarnow, preferred to eke out an existence on what he could beguile from the pockets of honest laboring men.

The landlord picked up a stout cudgel and set off for Swiatek's hut. "Has the rogue stolen my ducks" he muttered, "I'll write the Eighth Commandment on his thievish hide with this." He brandished his club menacingly as he neared the beggar's door.

The strong and savory odor of roasting flesh greeted his nostrils as he crept nearer. Swiatek, the beggar, the man who lived without work, was preparing a meal of meat, while the great English milord must go hungry and the worthy landlord of the Silver Axe unrewarded!

"Villain!" the landlord shouted, bursting through the door. "I have caught thee red-handed. I will teach thee to steal ducks from honest men while their guests cool their heels in hunger!"

Swiatek stepped back quickly from the fireplace over which he had been bending, at the same time stuffing some object about the size of a duck out of sight beneath his peasant's blouse.

In a trice the furious landlord had him by his venerable white beard, shaking

hen as a terrier does a rat. Back and forth the inn-keeper shook the beggar, berating him as only a man whose good fortune has been suddenly snatched away can.

The half-roasted piece of meat which Swiatek had all this time clutched to his bosom beneath his loose blouse slipped from his grasp and fell rolling and bumping to the floor.

It was the severed head of a fourteen-year-old girl.

HORROR-PARALYZED, the inn-keeper stared at the grisly thing. Catching his breath in short, panting sobs, Swiatek slunk into a corner of the hut. Next instant, with an inarticulate cry of mingled rage and fear, he made at the landlord, a butcher knife brandished in his skinny hand.

The knife flashed forward for a stroke, but the swish of the inn-keeper's oaken cudgel was followed by a heavy thud. Swiatek, the beggar, sank to the hut's earthen floor without a cry.

As fast as terror-spurred messengers could summon them, gendarmes from Dubkow came to Polomyja and hustled their prisoner to jail.

All along the route Swiatek cried out like a trapped forest-wolf, flinging himself repeatedly to the earth and attempting suicide by trying to swallow clods of road-clay and stones. His captors choked these from his throat with no very gentle hands. Austrian gendarmes were never noted for tenderness toward their prisoners, and the already-proven crime of this felon was not the sort to inspire these with an extra amount of courtesy.

The prisoner was taken at once before the Protokol (committing magistrate's court) and remanded to prison pending an investigation. Gendarmes were sent to search his dwelling, while others scoured the forest-country for witnesses.

In Austria, as in Germany, courts and prosecutors were not hampered by refinements of evidence such as those in vogue in Common Law countries. Everything which had a bearing on the case in hand was eagerly sought and brought out at the trial, regardless of whether it was hearsay or not. Even rumor was listened to on the odd chance it would throw light on the case, the judges deciding what should receive consideration in influencing their decision.

For this reason, the agents of justice brought into court a considerable number of witnesses, whose stories, while inadmissible under British or American law, were, nevertheless, of great interest.

The residents of the lordship of Parkost in the vicinity of Polomyja were, for the most part, wretchedly poor. They were woodcutters who tilled small garden patches in the intervals between their logging work. Each held his house and farmlet by a sort of villein tenure—that is, he paid no money rental, but was bound to work a fixed number of days each year for his landlord. This scheme of payment by labor, while it might at first glance seem the fairest treatment of people whose stock of cash was always scanty, was really one of the contributing causes of the peasants' poverty, since the landlords invariably exacted labor from their tenants at times when the tenants' own crops were ripe for harvesting, or when the cutting of timber would prove most remunerative.

Nevertheless, in spite of their poverty, the villagers had always a ready hand for those who besought their charity, and witnesses who had transacted business with Swiatek, always to the latter's advantage, were numerous.

One of the first to testify at the hearing was a peasant woman who, some two years before, had taken compassion on the old beggar as he crouched at the church door and bidden him come to her cottage for food. He had at first appeared reluctant, asking her if she could not give him a copper instead, but when she charitably insisted on his sharing the Sunday meal with her and her good man, he assented.

They pressed such food as they had upon him, but he seemed strangely lacking in appetite. While he ate a little bread, he turned from the meat pie they offered with what seemed to her like repugnance.

After dinner, when the master of the house presented the beggar with a pipe of tobacco, he became more genial, recounting stories of his adventures upon the road and amusing the children with a few tricks of simple legerdemain.

One child, a chubby little girl of nine or ten, attracted the old man's attention particularly. Swiatek felt in his pocket and produced a ring consisting of a piece of colored glass set in lead foil. This he presented to the child, who ran off delighted to show her companions.

"Is that little maid your daughter?" he asked the housewife.

"Na," she answered, "she is an orphan. There was a widow in this place who died leaving the child, and I have taken her into my family. One mouth more will not matter much, and the good God will bless us for our charity."

"Aye, aye," agreed Swiatek. "The orphans and fatherless are ever under His peculiar care."

"She is a good little thing, and gives us no trouble," the woman resumed. "You go back to Polomyja tonight?"

"I do," the beggar answered. Then, as the little orphan ran up to him, "Ah, you like the ring, little one? It is a beautiful thing, is it not? I found it under a big tree to the left of the churchyard—who knows, there may be dozens more in the same spot!

"You must go there after dark has fallen and turn round three times. Then say '*Zabos.*' Look among the tree roots, and you will surely find more rings."

"Come!" screamed the delighted child to her playmates. "Let us go to look for rings."

"Nay, nay," Swiatek cautioned. "You must seek singly—one at a time—or the charm will not work."

The children scampered off to the wood, and Swiatek flung his cloak about his stooping shoulders.

"You may thank me for ridding you of the children's noise for a time, at least," he coughed as he opened the door to leave.

HE left the cottage, walking rapidly, not going down the road, but among the somber evergreens which reached nearly to the front door.

An hour later the woodcutter's children returned, out of breath with running. The little orphan girl was not with them.

Vaguely, incoherently, as terrified children will, they told how the bravest of the rest, had gone alone beneath the shadow of the fir tree where rings were to be found; how she called out the word "*Zabos*" lustily, then how a startled scream had suddenly checked, like the ceasing of a night bird's cry when the bullet strikes its mark. They told, too, of a monstrous form, like that of a cloaked and bearded man, half distinguished through the gloom, and of hurrying footsteps sounding fainter and still more faintly through the underbrush.

"It was a wolf," the woman said, crossing herself piously. The talk of the cloaked and bearded man she set down to childish imagination.

Several school boys told how one of their companions, a boy named Peter, had loitered behind his fellows one day after school. They saw him leave the path; they thought they saw him talking with a man wearing a long cloak and having a white beard, though they could not be certain of this. One thing was sure. Peter was never seen again.

**See article III of this series, The Magic Mirror Murders.*

A wealthy Russian Jew told of the loss of his servant maid, a girl of thirteen. One night she left his house on an errand. When she failed to return he became uneasy and set out to look for her with a lantern. Her footprints were plainly marked in the light snow; it could be seen where she left the road, wandering into a copse of fir trees. Here other footprints — much larger and heavier — joined hers. For a time the two trails went on together, then, at a spot where the trees were so thick no snow had drifted down upon the brown carpet of pine-needles, all trace of the girl and her companion was lost. At any rate, the girl was never seen again.

The gendarmes sent to search Swiatek's cottage returned with staring eyes and bated breath. In a closet, neatly trussed up, like a fowl ready for the spit, they had found the legs and thighs of a half grown girl—the child whose head Swiatek had attempted to hide when discovered by the landlord of the Silver Axe. Beneath the earthen floor of the hut they had found caps and parts of clothing sufficient to account for thirteen children and a young woman.

The witnesses disposed of, Swiatek was summoned before the magistrate. For a time he stood dumb before the court, not touched with remorse for his hideous crimes but paralyzed with fear for himself.

With the notes of the testimony before him, the magistrate commenced interrogating the prisoner, but wordless moans were the only replies his questions evoked. At last, by accident, the beggar's lips were opened.

"You must have been insane to commit these acts," the judge remarked.

A crafty look, a gleam of hope came into the prisoner's little eyes for, ignorant though he was, he knew the law forebore to punish those whose misdeeds were committed while insane.

"Your Excellency has said no more than the truth," he replied. "I was, indeed a lunatic when I transgressed so terribly. But now, your Excellency, I am restored. I pray you, let me depart hence. My reason is returned, and I will sin no more."

"Tell us first how you came to do such savage and unchristian acts," prompted the judge. "It is necessary that our records be complete before we dispose of the case."

"Disposing of the case" was a phrase capable of more than one interpretation, but dread of punishment and overwhelming hope of freedom led Swiatek to place the most favorable construction on the words. Smiling amiably at the magistrate, stroking his patriarchal beard as he talked, he related one of the most amazing criminal histories ever heard in a court of law.

Three years before, during the bitter winter of 1846, he had been hastening through the forest to his cottage in Polomyja, just as the sun was setting. The frosts which set in early in autumn had held steadily, and the countryside had suffered greatly. Responses to his whine for alms had been few and small, and he was near to perishing with cold and hunger. As he neared the village he came upon the still-glowing embers of a small Jewish tavern which had burned down that morning, and paused to warm himself beside the smoldering ruins. Creeping nearer for extra warmth, he noticed the charred remains of the tavern's keeper, who had perished in the flames.

The scent and sight of the roasted flesh so worked upon his hunger that he was unable to resist tearing off a bit of flesh and tasting it.

As the horrid morsel passed his lips he became, to quote his own words, "as it were, a ravening wolf."

Rending, tearing, even growling in his throat like a brute beast, he satisfied his hunger, then stuffed his beggar's pouch with material for another horrible repast.

Suddenly, the enormity of his act struck him. Flinging the pouch with its grisly load from him, he ran pellmell down the road until exhaustion compelled him to stop.

As he sat upon a wayside stone regaining his breath, the desire for another meal like the revolting one he had just completed began to steal over him. Like a drunkard's craving for drink. Battling with his conscience, yet yielding, he retraced his steps, recovered his pouch and hastened home.

From that night he had never eaten any other meat. Bread and vegetables he had accepted from kindly disposed peasants who pitied him, but their offers of meat filled him with an almost uncontrollable revulsion.

The little orphan girl whose disappearance had been testified to by her foster parents was his first victim. He had killed and eaten her as unconcernedly as another peasant would have butchered a calf or pig.

Freely, as the magistrate questioned him, he admitted murder after cold blooded murder and case after case of cannibalism. With a complacency which brought a shudder of horror to all who watched, he rolled back his sleeves and loosened the collar of his blouse that the court might see how sleek and fat he had grown upon his frightful meals.

"And now," he concluded, looking expectantly at the magistrate, "I have told you all, your Excellency. Surely you will let me go!"

"Inhuman monster," the judge replied, "out of your own mouth you have condemned yourself. No madman could have told his tale so reasonably. If there be any justice in the Empire of Austria, you shall die upon the scaffold, and the public executioner will hang his head in shame that his duties force him to lay hands on so vile a wretch as you."

Screaming with terror, Swiatek was dragged back to his cell, for his terror-palsied legs refused to bear his weight.

Next morning when the turnkey of the jail made his tour of inspection, he found that justice had been cheated.

Swiatek, the beggar, had hanged himself to the bars of his prison window.

This is the fourth article of a series that Anthony Quinn is writing for Weird Tales. *The fifth will appear in an early issue.*

THE HOUND

(Continued from page 68)

of green jade, I merely screamed and ran away lifelessly, my screams soon dissolving into peals of hysterical laughter.

Madness rides the star-wind . . . claws and teeth sharpened on carcasses of corpses dripping death untold . . . burrowings of bats from night-black ruins of buried temples of Belial. . . . Now, on the haying of that dead, feathless monstrosity grows louder and louder, and the stealthy whirring and flopping of those accursed web-wings circles closer and closer. I shall seek with my revolver the oblivion which is my only refuge from the unnamed and unnamable.

Another Uncanny Story by H. P. Lovecraft Will Appear in an Early Issue of Weird Tales.

THE HATER

(Continued from page 70)

With a sob Ivan went out into the snow. For days he walked the frozen tundra—alone. Only at night did he come to the village for food.

Those who saw him shook their heads. "He is coming back," they said sorrowfully. "He is forgetting the little flower girl."

Then one morning Ivan staggered into the town, gaunt and haggard.

"Call the people together," he said hollowly and the soldiers noted the glint in his eye.

He picked one of the men from the mass—old Zenovief the cobbler it was—had him stripped and tied to the whipping post.

"Twenty blows," he commanded the soldiers hoarsely, but the sight of blood sickened him.

"No! No!" he cried after a few blows, "I can't."

He gave the suffering man a piece of gold, and went to his empty cottage. There he sat in a stupor. He knew now that no more could he enjoy the sufferings of others. Maria had killed that—forever.

"Ah, Ivan," he muttered over and over to himself "what a fool you are!"

Then, finally, with something like a smile: "Ah, Ivan how I hate you—how I hate you!"

Suddenly a light broke over his face.

"It's Ivan" he exulted wildly, "you can kill—kill the one you hate!" The glint in his eye sparkled and danced.

The next morning the peasants found him hanging from a beam of his cottage. His arms were spread wide and on his face was that pleased satisfied smile; in his eyes a cold, baleful glint—fixed there forever.

Cellini - jail and a guardian angel

This is the original material which was used to produce the episodes about Cellini shooting at a Cardinal and the episode where he is tended by an angelic host. I have COVID and can't manage a better transcript this week. Sorry gang.

CXII

SO the Governor came to see me. Two days before he had been made Bishop of Jesi; [1] and when he entered he said: "Friend Benvenuto, although my office is wont to frighten men, I come to set your mind at rest, and to do this I have full authority from his holiness' own lips, who told me how he also escaped from Sant' Angelo, but had many aids and much company, else he would not have been able to accomplish it. I swear by the sacraments which I carry on my person (for I was consecrated Bishop two days since) that the Pope has set you free and pardoned you, and is very sorry for your accident. Attend to your health, and take all things for the best; for your imprisonment, which you certainly underwent without a shadow of guilt, will have been for your perpetual welfare. Henceforward you will tread down poverty, and will have to go back to France, wearing out your life in this place and in that. Tell me then frankly how the matter went, and who rendered you assistance; afterwards take comfort, repose, and recover." I began at the beginning, and related the whole story exactly as it had happened, giving him the most minute countersigns, down to the water-carrier who bore me on his back. When the Governor had heard the whole, he said: "Of a surety these are too great exploits for one man alone; no one but you could have performed them." So he made me reach my hand forth, and said: "Be of good courage and comfort your heart, for by this hand which I am holding you are free, and if you live, shall live in happiness." While thus conversing with me, he had kept a whole heap of great lords and noblemen waiting, who were come to visit me, saying one to the other: "Let us go to see this man who works miracles." So, when he departed, they stayed by me, and one made me offers of kindness, and another made me presents.

While I was being entertained in this way, the Governor returned to the Pope, and reported all that I had said. As chance would have it, Signor Pier Luigi, the Pope's son, happened to be present, and all the company gave signs of great astonishment. His Holiness remarked: "Of a truth this is a marvellous exploit." Then Pier Luigi began to speak as follows: "Most blessed Father, if you set that man free, he will do something still more marvellous, because he has by far too bold a spirit. I will tell you another story about him which you do not know. That Benvenuto of yours, before he was imprisoned, came to words with a gentleman of Cardinal Santa Fiore, [2] about some trifle which the latter had said to him. Now Benvenuto's retort was so swaggeringly insolent that it amounted to throwing down a cartel. The gentleman referred the matter to the Cardinal, who said that if he once laid hands on Benvenuto he would soon clear his head of such folly. When the fellow heard this, he got a little fowling-piece of his ready, with which he is accustomed to hit a penny in the middle; accordingly, one day when the Cardinal was looking out of a window, Benvenuto's shop being under the palace of the Cardinal, he took his gun and pointed it upon the Cardinal. The Cardinal, however, had been warned, and presently withdrew. Benvenuto, in order that his intention might escape notice, aimed at a pigeon which was brooding high up in a hole of the palace, and hit it exactly in the head-a feat one would have thought incredible. Now let your Holiness do what you think best about him; I have discharged my duty by saying what I have. It might even come into his head, imagining that he had been wrongly imprisoned, to fire upon your Holiness. Indeed he is too truculent, by far too confident in his own powers. When he killed Pompeo, he gave him two stabs with a poniard in the throat, in the midst of ten men who were guarding him; then he escaped, to their great shame, and yet they were no inconsiderable persons."

Note 1. Cellini confuses Jesi with Forlimpopoli. See above, p. 203, note.

Note 2. Ascanio Sforza, son of Bosio, Count of Santa Fiore, and grandson of Paul III. He got the hat in 1534, at the age of sixteen.

CXIII

WHILE these words were being spoken, the gentleman of Santa Fiore with whom I had that quarrel was present, and confirmed to the Pope what had been spoken by his son. The Pope swelled with rage, but said nothing. I shall now proceed to give my own version of the affair, truly and honestly.

This gentleman came to me one day, and showed me a little gold ring which had been discoloured by quicksilver, saying at the same time: "Polish up this ring for me, and be quick about it." I was engaged at the moment upon jewel-work of gold and gems of great importance: besides, I did not care to be ordered about so haughtily by a man I had never seen or spoken to; so I replied that I did not happen to have by me the proper tool for cleaning up his ring, [1] and that he had better go to another goldsmith. Without further provocation he retorted that I was a donkey; whereupon I said that he was not speaking the truth; that I was a better man than he in every respect, but that if he kept on irritating me I would give him harder kicks than any donkey could. He related the matter to the Cardinal, and painted me as black as the devil in hell. Two days afterwards I shot a

wild pigeon in a cleft high up behind the palace. The bird was brooding in that cleft, and I had often seen a goldsmith named Giovan Francesco della Tacca, from Milan, fire at it; but he never hit it. On the day when I shot it, the pigeon scarcely showed its head, being suspicious because it had been so often fired at. Now this Giovan Francesco and I were rivals in shooting wildfowl; and some gentlemen of my acquaintance, who happened to be at my shop, called my attention, saying: “Up there is Giovan Francesco della Tacca’s pigeon, at which he has so often fired; look now, the poor creature is so frightened that it hardly ventures to put its head out.” I raised my eyes, and said: “That morsel of its head is quite enough for me to shoot it by, if it only stays till I can point my gun.” The gentlemen protested that even the man who invented firearms could not hit it. I replied: “I bet a bottle of that excellent Greek wine Palombo the host keeps, that if it keeps quiet long enough for me to point my good Broccardo (so I used to call my gun), I will hit it in that portion of its head which it is showing.” So I aimed my gun, elevating my arms, and using no other rest, and did what I had promised, without thinking of the Cardinal or any other person; on the contrary, I held the Cardinal for my very good patron. Let the world, then, take notice, when Fortune has the will to ruin a man, how many divers ways she takes! The Pope, swelling with rage and grumbling, remained revolving what his son had told him.

Note 1. Cellini calls it ‘isvivatoio.’ It is properly ‘avvivatoio,’ a sort of brass rod with a wooden handle.

CXV

AFTER my conversation with the Greek, the whole day wore away, and at night there came abundant provisions from the kitchen of the Pope; the Cardinal Cornaro also sent good store of viands from his kitchen; and some friends of mine being present when they arrived, I made them stay to supper, and enjoyed their society, keeping my leg in splints beneath the bed-clothes. An hour after nightfall they left me; and two of my servants, having made me comfortable for the night, went to sleep in the antechamber. I had a dog, black as a mulberry, one of those hairy ones, who followed me admirably when I went out shooting, and never left my side. During the night he lay beneath my bed, and I had to call out at least three times to my servant to turn him out, because he howled so fearfully. When the servants entered, the dog flew at them and tried to bite them. They were frightened, and thought he must be mad, because he went on howling. In this way we passed the first four hours of the night. At the stroke of four the Bargello came into my room with a band of constables. Then the dog sprang forth and flew at them with such fury, tearing their capes and hose, that in their fright they fancied he was mad. But the Bargello, like an experienced person, told them: “It is the nature of good dogs to divine and foretell the mischance coming on their masters. Two of you take sticks and beat the dog off; while the others strap Benvenuto on this chair; then carry him to the place you wot of.” It was, as I have said, the night after Corpus Domini, and about four o’clock.

The officers carried me, well shut up and covered, and four of them went in front, making the few passengers who were still abroad get out of the way. So they bore me to Torre di Nona, such is the name of the place, and put me in the condemned cell. I was left upon a wretched mattress under the care of a guard, who kept all night mourning over my bad luck, and saying to me: “Alas! poor Benvenuto, what have you done to those great folk?” I could now form a very good opinion of what was going to happen to me, partly by the place in which I found myself, and also by what the man had told me. [1] During a portion of that night I kept racking my brains what the cause could be why God thought fit to try me so, and not being able to discover it, I was violently agitated in my soul. The guard did the best he could to comfort me; but I begged him for the love of God to stop talking, seeing I should be better able to compose myself alone in quiet. He promised to do as I asked; and then I turned my whole heart to God, devoutly entreating Him to deign to take me into His kingdom. I had, it is true, murmured against my lot, because it seemed to me that, so far as human laws go, my departure from the world in this way would be too unjust; it is true also that I had committed homicides, but His Vicar had called me from my native city and pardoned me by the authority he had from Him and from the laws; and what I had done had all been done in defence of the body which His Majesty had lent me; so I could not admit that I deserved death according to the dispensation under which man dwells here; but it seemed that what was happening to me was the same as what happens to unlucky people in the street, when a stone falls from some great height upon their head and kills them; this we see clearly to be the influence of the stars; not indeed that the stars conspire to do us good or evil, but the effect results from their conjunctions, to which we are subordinated. At the same time I know that I am possessed of free-will, and if I could exert the faith of a saint, I am sure that the angels of heaven would bear me from this dungeon and relieve me of all my afflictions, yet inasmuch as God has not deemed me worthy of such miracles, I conclude that those celestial influences must be wreaking their malignity upon me. In this long struggle of the soul I spent some time; then I found comfort, and fell presently asleep.

Note 1. Cellini thought he was going to have his throat cut. And indeed the Torre di Nona was a suspicious place, it being one of the worst criminal prisons in Rome.

CXVI

WHEN the day dawned, the guard woke me up and said: “Oh, unfortunate but worthy man, you have no more time to go on sleeping, for one is waiting here to give you evil news.” I answered: “The sooner I escape from this earthly prison, the happier shall I be; especially as I am sure my

soul is saved, and that I am going to an undeserved death. Christ, the glorious and divine, elects me to the company of His disciples and friends, who, like Himself, were condemned to die unjustly. I too am sentenced to an unjust death, and I thank God with humility for this sign of grace. Why does not the man come forward who has to pronounce my doom?" The guard replied: "He is too grieved for you, and sheds tears." Then I called him by his name of Messer Benedetto da Cagli, [1] and cried: "Come forward, Messer Benedetto, my friend, for now, I am resolved and in good frame of mind; far greater glory is it for me to die unjustly than if I had deserved this fate. Come forward, I beg, and let me have a priest, in order that I may speak a couple of words with him. I do not indeed stand in need of this, for I have already made my heart's confession to my Lord God; yet I should like to observe the ordinances of our Holy Mother Church; for though she has done me this abominable wrong, I pardon her with all my soul. So come, friend Messer Benedetto, and despatch my business before I lose control over my better instincts."

After I had uttered these words, the worthy man told the guard to lock the door, because nothing could be done without his presence. He then repaired to the house of Signor Pier Luigi's wife, who happened to be in company with the Duchess of whom I spoke above. [2] Presenting himself before them both, he spoke as follows: "My most illustrious mistress, I entreat you for the love of God to tell the Pope, that he must send some one else to pronounce sentence upon Benvenuto and perform my office; I renounce the task, and am quite decided not to carry it through." Then, sighing, he departed with the strongest signs of inward sorrow. The Duchess, who was present, frowned and said: "So this is the fine justice dealt out here in Rome by God's Vicar! The Duke, my late husband, particularly esteemed this man for his good qualities and eminent abilities; he was unwilling to let him return to Rome, and would gladly have kept him close to his own person." Upon this she retired, muttering words of indignation and displeasure. Signor Pier Luigi's wife, who was called Signora Jerolima, betook herself to the Pope, and threw herself upon her knees before him in the presence of several cardinals. She pleaded my cause so warmly that she woke the Pope to shame; whereupon he said: "For your sake we will leave him quiet; yet you must know that we had no ill-will against him." These words he spoke because of the cardinals who were around him, and had listened to the eloquence of that brave-spirited lady.

Meanwhile I abode in extreme discomfort, and my heart kept thumping against my ribs. Not less was the discomfort of the men appointed to discharge the evil business of my execution; but when the hour for dinner was already past, they betook themselves to their several affairs, and my meal was also served me. This filled me with a glad astonishment, and I exclaimed: "For once truth has been stronger than the malice of the stars! I pray God, therefore, that, if it be His pleasure, He will save me from this fearful peril. Then I fell to eating with the same stout heart for my salvation as I had previously prepared for my perdition. I dined well, and afterwards remained without seeing or hearing any one until an hour after nightfall. At that time the Bargello arrived with a large part of his guard, and had me replaced in the chair which brought me on the previous evening to the prison. He spoke very kindly to me, bidding me be under no apprehension; and bade his constables take good care not to strike against my broken leg, but to treat me as though I were the apple of their eye. The men obeyed, and brought me to the castle whence I had escaped; then, when we had mounted to the keep, they left me shut up in a dungeon opening upon a little court there is there.

Note 1. It will be remembered that Benedetto da Cagli was one of Cellini's three examiners during his first imprisonment in S. Angelo.
Note 2. The wife of Pier Luigi Farnese was Jeronima, daughter of Luigi Orsini, Count of Pitigliano.

CXVII

THE CASTELLAN, meanwhile, ill and afflicted as he was, had himself transported to my prison, and exclaimed: "You see that I have recaptured you!" "Yes," said I, "but you see that I escaped, as I told you I would. And if I had not been sold by a Venetian Cardinal, under Papal guarantee, for the price of a bishopric, the Pope a Roman and a Farnese (and both of them have scratched with impious hands the face of the most sacred laws), you would not have recovered me. But now that they have opened this vile way of dealing, do you the worst you can in your turn; I care for nothing in the world." The wretched man began shouting at the top of his voice: "Ah, woe is me! woe is me! It is all the same to this fellow whether he lives or dies, and behold, he is more fiery than when he was in health. Put him down there below the garden, and do not speak to me of him again, for he is the destined cause of my death."

So I was taken into a gloomy dungeon below the level of a garden, which swam with water, and was full of big spiders and many venomous worms. They flung me a wretched mattress of course hemp, gave me no supper, and locked four doors upon me. In that condition I abode until the nineteenth hour of the following day. Then I received food, and I requested my jailers to give me some of my books to read. None of them spoke a word, but they referred my prayer to the unfortunate castellan, who had made inquiries concerning what I said. Next morning they brought me an Italian Bible which belonged to me, and a copy of the Chronicles of Giovanni Villani.

[1] When I asked for certain other of my books, I was told that I could have no more, and that I had got too many already.

Thus, then, I continued to exist in misery upon that rotten mattress, which in three days soaked up water like a sponge. I could hardly stir because of my broken leg; and when I had to get out of bed to obey a call of nature, I crawled on all fours with extreme distress, in order not to foul the place I slept in. For one hour and a half each day I got a little glimmering of light, which penetrated that unhappy cavern through a very narrow aperture. Only for so short a space of time could I read; the rest of the day and night I abode in darkness, enduring my lot, nor ever without meditations upon God and on our human frailty. I thought it certain that a few more days would put an end of my unlucky life in that sad place and in that miserable manner. Nevertheless, as well as I was able, I comforted my soul by calling to mind how much more painful it would have been, on passing from this life, to have suffered that unimaginable horror of the hangman's knife. Now, being as I was, I should depart with the anodyne of sleepiness, which robbed death of half its former terrors. Little by little I felt my vital forces waning, until at last my vigorous temperament had become adapted to that purgatory. When I felt it quite acclimatised, I resolved to put up with all those indescribable discomforts so long as it held out.

CXVIII

I BEGAN the Bible from the commencement, reading and reflecting on it so devoutly, and finding in it such deep treasures of delight, that, if I had been able, I should have done naught else but study it. However, light was wanting; and the thought of all my troubles kept recurring and gnawing at me in the darkness, until I often made my mind up to put an end somehow to my own life. They did not allow me a knife, however, and so it was no easy matter to commit suicide. Once, notwithstanding, I took and propped a wooden pole I found there, in position like a trap. I meant to make it topple over on my head, and it would certainly have dashed my brains out; but when I had arranged the whole machine, and was approaching to put it in motion, just at the moment of my setting my hand to it, I was seized by an invisible power and flung four cubits from the spot, in such a terror that I lay half dead. Like that I remained from dawn until the nineteenth hour, when they brought my food. The jailers must have visited my cell several times without my taking notice of them; for when at last I heard them, Captain Sandrino Monaldi [1] had entered, and I heard him saying: "Ah, unhappy man! behold the end to which so rare a genius has come!" Roused by these words, I opened my eyes, and caught sight of priests with long gowns on their backs, who were saying: "Oh, you told us he was dead!" Bozza replied: "Dead I found him, and therefore I told you so." Then they lifted me from where I lay, and after shaking up the mattress, which was now as soppy as a dish of maccaroni, they flung it outside the dungeon. The castellan, when these things were reported to him, sent me another mattress. Thereafter, when I searched my memory to find what could have diverted me from that design of suicide, I came to the conclusion that it must have been some power divine and my good guardian angel.

CXIX

DURING the following night there appeared to me in dreams a marvellous being in the form of a most lovely youth, who cried, as though he wanted to reprove me: "Knowest thou who lent thee that body, which thou wouldst have spoiled before its time?" I seemed to answer that I recognized all things pertaining to me as gifts from the God of nature. "So, then," he said, "thou hast contempt for His handiwork, through this thy will to spoil it? Commit thyself unto His guidance, and lose not hope in His great goodness!" Much more he added, in words of marvellous efficacy, the thousandth part of which I cannot now remember.

I began to consider that the angel of my vision spoke the truth. So I cast my eyes around the prison, and saw some scraps of rotten brick, with the fragments of which, rubbing one against the other, I composed a paste. Then, creeping on all fours, as I was compelled to go, I crawled up to an angle of my dungeon door, and gnawed a splinter from it with my teeth. Having achieved this feat, I waited till the light came on my prison; that was from the hour of twenty and a half to twenty-one and a half. When it arrived, I began to write, the best I could, on some blank pages in my Bible, and rebuked the regents of my intellectual self for being too impatient to endure this life; they replied to my body with excuses drawn from all that they had suffered; and the body gave them hope of better fortune. To this effect, then, by way of dialogue, I wrote as follows:-

'Benvenuto in the body.

'Afflicted regents of my soul!
Ah, cruel ye! have ye such hate of life?

'The Spirits of his soul.

'If Heaven against you roll,
Who stands for us? who saves us in the strife?
Let us, O let us go toward better life!

'Benvenuto.

'Nay, go not yet awhile!
Ye shall be happier and lighter far-
Heaven gives this hope-than ye were ever yet!

'The Spirits.

'We will remain some little while,
If only by great God you promised are
Such grace that no worse woes on us be set.

After this I recovered strength; and when I had heartened up myself, I continued reading in the Bible, and my eyes became so used to that darkness that I could now read for three hours instead of the bare hour and a half I was able to employ before.

With profound astonishment I dwelt upon the force of God's Spirit in those men of great simplicity, who believed so fervently that He would bring all their heart's desire to pass. I then proceeded to reckon in my own case too on God's assistance, both because of His divine power and mercy, and also because of my own innocence; and at all hours, sometimes in prayer and sometimes in communion with God, I abode in those high thoughts of Him. There flowed into my soul so powerful a delight from these reflections upon God, that I took no further thought for all the anguish I had suffered, but rather spent the day in singing psalms and divers other compositions on the theme of His divinity.

I was greatly troubled, however, by one particular annoyance: my nails had grown so long that I could not touch my body without wounding it; I could not dress myself but what they turned inside or out, to my great torment. Moreover, my teeth began to perish in my mouth. I became aware of this because the dead teeth being pushed out by the living ones, my gums were gradually perforated, and the points of the roots pierced through the tops of their cases. When I was aware of this, I used to pull one out, as though it were a weapon from a scabbard, without any pain or loss of blood. Very many of them did I lose in this way. Nevertheless, I accommodated myself to these new troubles also; at times I sang, at times I prayed, and at times I wrote by means of the paste of brick-dust I have described above. At this time I began composing a Capitolo in praise of my prison, relating in it all the accidents which had befallen me. [1] This poem I mean to insert in its proper place.

Note 1. Capitolo is the technical name for a copy of verses in 'terza rima' on a chosen theme. Poems of this kind, mostly burlesque or satirical, were very popular in Cellini's age. They used to be written on trifling or obscene subjects in a mock-heroic style. Berni stamped the character of high art upon the species, which had long been in use among the unlettered vulgar. See for further particulars Symonds' 'Renaissance in Italy,' vol. v. chap. xiv.

CXX

THE GOOD castellan used frequently to send messengers to find out secretly what I was doing. So it happened on the last day of July that I was rejoicing greatly by myself alone while I bethought me of the festival they keep in Rome upon the 1st of August; and I was saying to myself: "In former years I kept the feast among the pleasures and the frailties of the world; this year I shall keep it in communion with God. Oh, how far more happy am I thus than I was then!" The persons who heard me speak these words reported them to the castellan. He was greatly annoyed, and exclaimed: "Ah, God! that fellow lives and triumphs in his infinite distress, while I lack all things in the midst of comfort, and am dying only on account of him! Go quickly, and fling him into that deepest of the subterranean dungeons where the preacher Foiano was starved to death. [1] Perhaps when he finds himself in such ill plight he will begin to droop his crest."

Captain Sandrino Monaldi came at once into my prison with about twenty of the castellan's servants. They found me on my knees; and I did not turn at their approach, but went on paying my orisons before a God the Father, surrounded with angels, and a Christ arising victorious from the grave, which I had sketched upon the wall with a little piece of charcoal I had found covered up with earth. This was after I had lain four months upon my back in bed with my leg broken, and had so often dreamed that angels came and ministered to me, that at the end of those four months the limb became as sound as though it never had been fractured. So then these fellows entered, all in armour, as fearful of me as though I were a poison-breathing dragon. The captain spoke as follows: "You must be aware that there are many of us here, and our entrance has made a tumult in this place, yet you do not turn round." When I heard these words, I was well able to conceive what greater harm might happen to me, but being used and hardened to misfortune, I said to them: "Unto this God who supports me, to Him in heaven I have turned my soul, my contemplation, and all my vital spirits; to you I have turned precisely what belongs to you. What there is of good in me, you are not worthy to behold, nor can you touch it. Do then to that which is under your control all the evil you are able." The captain, in some alarm, and not knowing what I might be on the point of doing, said to four of his tallest fellows: "Put all your arms aside." When they had done so, he added: "Now upon the instant leap on him, and secure him well. Do you think he is the devil, that so many of us should be afraid of him? Hold him tight now, that he may not escape you." Seized by them with force and roughly handled, and anticipating something far worse than what afterwards happened, I lifted my eyes to Christ and said: "Oh, just God, Thou paidest all our debts upon that high-raised cross of Thine; wherefore then must my innocence be made to pay the debts of whom I do not even know? Nevertheless, Thy will be done." Meanwhile the men were carrying me away with a great lighted torch; and I thought that they were about to throw me down the oubliette of Sammabo. This was the name given to a fearful place which had swallowed many men alive; for when they are cast into it, the fall to the bottom of a deep pit in the foundation of the castle. This did not, however, happen to me; wherefore I thought that I had made a very good bargain when they placed me in that hideous dungeon I have spoken of, where Fra Foiano died of hunger, and left me there without doing me further injury.

When I was alone, I began to sing a 'De profundis clamavi,' a 'Miserere,' and 'In te Domine speravi.' During

the whole of that first day of August I kept festival with God, my heart rejoicing ever in the strength of hope and faith. On the second day they drew me from that hole, and took me back again to the prison where I had drawn those representations of God. On arriving there, the sight of them filled me with such sweetness and such gladness that I wept abundantly. On every day that followed, the castellan sent to know what I was doing and saying. The Pope, who had heard the whole history (and I must add that the doctors had already given the castellan over), spoke as follows: “Before my castellan dies I will let him put that Benvenuto to death in any way he likes, for he is the cause of his death, and so the good man shall not die unrevenged.” On hearing these words from the mouth of Duke Pier Luigi, the castellan replied: “So, then, the Pope has given me Benvenuto, and wishes me to take my vengeance on him? Dismiss the matter from your mind, and leave me to act.” If the heart of the Pope was ill-disposed against me, that of the castellan was now at the commencement savage and cruel in the extreme. At this juncture the invisible being who had diverted me from my intention of suicide, came to me, being still invisible, but with a clear voice, and shook me, and made me rise, and said to me: “Ah me! my Benvenuto, quick, quick, betake thyself to God with thy accustomed prayers, and cry out loudly, loudly!” In a sudden consternation I fell upon my knees, and recited several of my prayers in a loud voice; after this I said ‘Qui habitat in adjutorio;’ then I communed a space with God; and in an instant the same clear and open voice said to me: “Go to rest, and have no further fear!” The meaning of this was, that the castellan, after giving the most cruel orders for my death, suddenly countermanded them, and said: “Is not this Benvenuto the man whom I have so warmly defended, whom I know of a surety to be innocent, and who has been so greatly wronged? Oh, how will God have mercy on me and my sins if I do not pardon those who have done me the greatest injuries? Oh, why should I injure a man both worthy and innocent, who has only done me services and honour? Go to! instead of killing him, I give him life and liberty: and in my will I’ll have it written that none shall demand of him the heavy debt for his expenses here which he would elsewise have to pay.” This the Pope heard, and took it very ill indeed.

Note 1. Fra Benedetto da Foiano had incurred the wrath of Pope Clement VII. by preaching against the Medici in Florence. He was sent to Rome and imprisoned in a noisome dungeon of S. Angelo in the year 1530, where Clement made him perish miserably by diminishing his food and water daily till he died. See Varchi’s ‘Storia Fiorentina,’ lib. xii. chap. 4.

CXXI

I MEANWHILE continued to pray as usual, and to write my Capitolo, and every night I was visited with the gladdest and most pleasant dreams that could be possibly imagined. It seemed to me while dreaming that I was always in the visible company of that being whose voice and touch, while he was still invisible, I had so often felt. To him I made but one request, and this I urged most earnestly, namely, that he would bring me where I could behold the sun. I told him that this was the sole desire I had, and that if I could but see the sun once only, I should die contented. All the disagreeable circumstances of my prison had become, as it were, to me friendly and companionable; not one of them gave me annoyance. Nevertheless, I ought to say that the castellan’s parasites, who were waiting for him to hang me from the battlement whence I had made my escape, when they saw that he had changed his mind to the exact opposite of what he previously threatened, were unable to endure the disappointment. Accordingly, they kept continually trying to inspire me with the fear of imminent death by means of various terrifying hints. But, as I have already said, I had become so well acquainted with troubles of this sort that I was incapable of fear, and nothing any longer could disturb me; only I had that one great longing to behold the sphere of the sun, if only in a dream.

Thus then, while I spent many hours a day in prayer with deep emotion of the spirit toward Christ, I used always to say: “Ah, very Son of God! I pray Thee by Thy birth, by Thy death upon the cross, and by Thy glorious resurrection, that Thou wilt deign to let me see the sun, if not otherwise, at least in dreams. But if Thou wilt grant me to behold it with these mortal eyes of mine, I engage myself to come and visit Thee at Thy holy sepulchre.” This vow and these my greatest prayers to God I made upon the 2nd of October in the year 1539. Upon the following morning, which was the 3rd of October, I woke at daybreak, perhaps an hour before the rising of the sun. Dragging myself from the miserable lair in which I lay, I put some clothes on, for it had begun to be cold; then I prayed more devoutly than ever I had done in the past, fervently imploring Christ that He would at least grant me the favour of knowing by divine inspiration what sin I was so sorely expiating; and since His Divine Majesty had not deemed me worthy of beholding the sun even in a dream I besought Him to let me know the cause of my punishment.

CXXII

I HAD barely uttered these words, when that invisible being, like a whirlwind, caught me up and bore me away into a large room, where he made himself visible to my eyes in human form, appearing like a young man whose beard is just growing, with a face of indescribable beauty, but austere, not wanton. He bade me look around the room, and said: “The crowd of men thou seest in this place are all those who up to this day have been born and afterwards have died upon the earth.” Thereupon I asked him why he brought me hither, and he answered: “Come with me and thou shalt soon behold.” In my hand I had a poniard, and upon my back a coat of mail; and so he led me through that vast hall, pointing out the people who were walking by innumerable thousands up and

down, this way and that. He led me onward, and went forth in front of me through a little low door into a place which looked like a narrow street; and when he drew me after him into the street, at the moment of leaving the hall, behold I was disarmed and clothed in a white shirt, with nothing on my head, and I was walking on the right hand of my companion. Finding myself in this condition, I was seized with wonder, because I did not recognise the street; and when I lifted my eyes, I discerned that the splendour of the sun was striking on a wall, as it were a house-front, just above my head. Then I said: “Oh, my friend! what must I do in order to be able to ascend so high that I may gaze upon the sphere of the sun himself?” He pointed out some huge stairs which were on my right hand, and said to me: “Go up thither by thyself.” Quitting his side, I ascended the stairs backwards, and gradually began to come within the region of the sunlight. Then I hastened my steps, and went on, always walking backwards as I have described, until I discovered the whole sphere of the sun. The strength of his rays, as is their wont, first made me close my eyes; but becoming aware of my misdoing, I opened them wide, and gazing steadfastly at the sun, exclaimed: “Oh, my sun, for whom I have passionately yearned! Albeit your rays may blind me, I do not wish to look on anything again but this!” So I stayed awhile with my eyes fixed steadily on him; and after a brief space I beheld in one moment the whole might of those great burning rays fling themselves upon the left side of the sun; so that the orb remained quite clear without its rays, and I was able to contemplate it with vast delight. It seemed to me something marvellous that the rays should be removed in that manner. Then I reflected what divine grace it was which God had granted me that morning, and cried aloud: “Oh, wonderful Thy power! oh, glorious Thy virtue! How far greater is the grace which Thou art granting me than that which I expected!” The sun without his rays appeared to me to be a bath of the purest molten gold, neither more nor less. While I stood contemplating this wondrous thing, I noticed that the middle of the sphere began to swell, and the swollen surface grew, and suddenly a Christ upon the cross formed itself out of the same substance as the sun. He bore the aspect of divine benignity, with such fair grace that the mind of man could not conceive the thousandth part of it; and while I gazed in ecstasy, I shouted: “A miracle! a miracle! O God! O clemency Divine! O immeasurable Goodness! what is it Thou hast deigned this day to show me!” While I was gazing and exclaiming thus, the Christ moved toward that part where his rays were settled, and the middle of the sun once more bulged out as it had done before; the boss expanded, and suddenly transformed itself into the shape of a most beautiful Madonna, who appeared to be sitting enthroned on high, holding her child in her arms with an attitude of the greatest charm and a smile upon her face. On each side of her was an angel, whose beauty far surpasses man’s imagination. I also saw within the rondure of the sun, upon the right hand, a figure robed like a priest; this turned its back to me, and kept its face directed to the Madonna and the Christ. All these things I beheld, actual, clear, and vivid, and kept returning thanks to the glory of God as loud as I was able. The marvellous apparition remained before me little more than half a quarter of an hour: then it dissolved, and I was carried back to my dark lair.

I began at once to shout aloud: “The virtue of God hath deigned to show me all His glory, the which perchance no mortal eye hath ever seen before. Therefore I know surely that I am free and fortunate and in the grace of God; but you miscreants shall be miscreants still, accursed, and in the wrath of God. Mark this, for I am certain of it, that on the day of All Saints, the day upon which I was born in 1500, on the first of November, at four hours after nightfall, on that day which is coming you will be forced to lead me from this gloomy dungeon; less than this you will not be able to do, because I have seen it with these eyes of mine and in that throne of God. The priest who kept his face turned to God and his back to me, that priest was S. Peter, pleading my cause, for the shame he felt that such foul wrongs should be done to Christians in his own house. You may go and tell it to whom you like; for none on earth has the power to do me harm henceforward; and tell that lord who keeps me here, that if he will give me wax or paper and the means of portraying this glory of God which was revealed to me, most assuredly shall I convince him of that which now perhaps he holds in doubt.”

CXXIII

THE PHYSICIANS gave the castellan no hope of his recovery, yet he remained with a clear intellect, and the humours which used to afflict him every year had passed away. He devoted himself entirely to the care of his soul, and his conscience seemed to smite him, because he felt that I had suffered and was suffering a grievous wrong. The Pope received information from him of the extraordinary things which I related; in answer to which his Holiness sent word-as one who had no faith either in God or aught beside-that I was mad, and that he must do his best to mend his health. When the castellan received this message, he sent to cheer me up, and furnished me with writing materials and wax, and certain little wooden instruments employed in working wax, adding many words of courtesy, which were reported by one of his servants who bore me good-will. This man was totally the opposite of that rascally gang who had wished to see me hanged. I took the paper and the wax, and began to work; and while I was working I wrote the following sonnet addressed to the castellan:-

“If I, my lord, could show to you the truth,
Of that Eternal Light to me by Heaven
In this low life revealed, you sure had given
More heed to mine than to a monarch’s sooth.
Ah! could the Pastor of Christ’s flock in ruth
Believe how God this soul with sight hath shriven
Of glory unto which no wight hath striven

Ere he escaped earth's cave of care uncouth;
The gates of Justice, holy and austere,
Would roll asunder, and rude impious Rage
Fall chained with shrieks that should assail the skies.
Had I but light, ah me! my art should rear
A monument of Heaven's high equipage!
Nor should my misery bear so grim a guise."

CXXIV

ON the following day, when the servant of the castellan who was my friend brought me my food, I gave him this sonnet copied out in writing. Without informing the other ill-disposed servants who were my enemies, he handed it to the castellan. At that time this worthy man would gladly have granted me my liberty, because he fancied that the great wrong done to me was a main cause of his death. He took the sonnet, and having read it more than once, exclaimed: "These are neither the words nor the thoughts of a madman, but rather of a sound and worthy fellow." Without delay he ordered his secretary to take it to the Pope, and place it in his own hands, adding a request for my deliverance.

While the secretary was on his way with my sonnet to the Pope, the castellan sent me lights for day and night, together with all the conveniences one could wish for in that place. The result of this was that I began to recover from my physical depression, which had reached a very serious degree.

The Pope read the sonnet several times. Then he sent word to the castellan that he meant presently to do what would be pleasing to him. Certainly the Pope had no unwillingness to release me then; but Signor Pier Luigi, his son, as it were in the Pope's despite, kept me there by force.

The death of the castellan was drawing near; and while I was engaged in drawing and modelling that miracle which I had seen, upon the morning of All Saint's day he sent his nephew, Piero Ugolini, to show me certain jewels. No sooner had I set eyes on them than I exclaimed: "This is the countersign of my deliverance!" Then the young man, who was not a person of much intelligence, began to say: "Never think of that, Benvenuto!" I replied: "Take your gems away, for I am so treated here that I have no light to see by except what this murky cavern gives, and that is not enough to test the quality of precious stones. But, as regards my deliverance from this dungeon, the day will not end before you come to fetch me out. It shall and must be so, and you will not be able to prevent it." The man departed, and had me locked in; but after he had remained away two hours by the clock, he returned without armed men, bringing only a couple of lads to assist my movements; so after this fashion he conducted me to the spacious rooms which I had previously occupied (that is to say, in 1538), where I obtained all the conveniences I asked for.

Magonomia:
Do you know John Stow?

A quick note this week for a Magonomia magician every player character should seek out: John Stow.

Stow is an occultist and geographer, whose magical practice is tied to the road network of the capital. He's famous for his book collection, his urbanity, and his willingness to lend material to other magicians. The call his library the Stow's "storehouse". Stow's availability can be invoked with a Contacts roll, but sending him a message and getting a reply takes a day. The storehouse is less well stocked than Dee's library at Mortlake, but Stow is the sort of guy who will gladly invite you in for dinner, lend you a book, and listen to stories of your adventures. Dee, on the other hand, is busy clawing for supernatural and political power, so tracking him down is tough, and getting him to help you is difficult.

Stow not only wrote the book about all why all the streets of London have weird names, he know where everything you want to find is. You need someone to sell you eight pounds of peacock fat? He knows a guy. You want to know where someone could get an odd dye on their clothes? He knows the place. He literally wrote the book on London's streets.

You need a magician to help you with something? He's the guy who knows the guy who knows your guy. Stow, as lending librarian to the antiquarians of London, knows what they are reading, what books they are looking for, and what they specialise in. The odd thing is, he won't even charge you to hook you up. Stow's from a merchant tailor family and has no formal education. He's just happy to be part of a society of lettered men who collaborate with each other.

Stow's reputation is as a man who is cheerful, diligent as a researcher and has a perfect memory. He does bear grudges, but not on professional matters. He hates his younger brother because of a dispute over their mother's will, for example, and keeps that going for years.

If something untoward happens to Stow, then a ton of trouble is going to come down on whoever was responsible. Magicians you have not even heard of, with spells you have not ever imagined, are going helping player characters investigate and make an example. Blood may, literally, paint the streets, in some final, significant working for the magician who is a friend to everyone.

The Witch of Atlas by Percy Bysshe Shelley

The problem with Shelley is that he's a really annoying author. He can't leave well enough alone. In "Frankenstein", for example, you'll know there is a not particularly good frame narrative. He insisted it be shoved around it. Similarly the poem I'm about to give you starts with – I think it's five maybe six – verses, in which he tells Mary Shelley that she has no right to dislike what he's written, because she gave him a bad review. The bad review she gave him, and I agree with, is that the poem that follows has absolutely no plot. I'm going to cut that bit off.

The poem is, however, about a witch who has a cave full of the secrets of the gods and the ability to physically embody a servant spirit. The spirit is both male and female and has beautiful wings. The witch appears to be actively working towards a human utopia through trickery so all of these things make her perfect as an Ars Magica or Magonomia character. Sadly to get there we need to go through some Shelley.

My dislike of Shelley aside, thank you to Leonard Wilson and the Librivox production team. As a reminder I've trimmed off the first bit the Witch of Atlas.

1.
Before those cruel Twins, whom at one birth
Incestuous Change bore to her father Time,
Error and Truth, had hunted from the Earth
All those bright natures which adorned its prime,
And left us nothing to believe in, worth
The pains of putting into learned rhyme,
A lady-witch there lived on Atlas' mountain
Within a cavern, by a secret fountain.

2.
Her mother was one of the Atlantides:
The all-beholding Sun had ne'er beholden
In his wide voyage o'er continents and seas
So fair a creature, as she lay enfolden
In the warm shadow of her loveliness;—
He kissed her with his beams, and made all golden
The chamber of gray rock in which she lay—
She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away.

3.
'Tis said, she first was changed into a vapour,
And then into a cloud, such clouds as flit,
Like splendour-winged moths about a taper,
Round the red west when the sun dies in it:
And then into a meteor, such as caper
On hill-tops when the moon is in a fit:
Then, into one of those mysterious stars
Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

4.
Ten times the Mother of the Months had bent
Her bow beside the folding-star, and bidden
With that bright sign the billows to indent
The sea-deserted sand—like children chidden,
At her command they ever came and went—
Since in that cave a dewy splendour hidden
Took shape and motion: with the living form
Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm.

5.
A lovely lady garmented in light
From her own beauty—deep her eyes, as are
Two openings of unfathomable night
Seen through a Temple's cloven roof—her hair
Dark—the dim brain whirls dizzy with delight.
Picturing her form; her soft smiles shone afar,
And her low voice was heard like love, and drew
All living things towards this wonder new.

6.
And first the spotted cameleopard came,
And then the wise and fearless elephant;
Then the sly serpent, in the golden flame
Of his own volumes intervolved;—all gaunt
And sanguine beasts her gentle looks made tame.
They drank before her at her sacred fount;
And every beast of beating heart grew bold,
Such gentleness and power even to behold.

7.
The brinded lioness led forth her young,
That she might teach them how they should forego
Their inborn thirst of death; the pard unstrung
His sinews at her feet, and sought to know
With looks whose motions spoke without a tongue
How he might be as gentle as the doe.
The magic circle of her voice and eyes
All savage natures did imparadise.

8.
And old Silenus, shaking a green stick
Of lilies, and the wood-gods in a crew
Came, blithe, as in the olive copses thick
Cicadae are, drunk with the noonday dew:
And Dryope and Faunus followed quick,
Teasing the God to sing them something new;
Till in this cave they found the lady lone,
Sitting upon a seat of emerald stone.

9.
And universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,
And though none saw him,—through the adamant
Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air,
And through those living spirits, like a want,
He passed out of his everlasting lair
Where the quick heart of the great world doth pant,
And felt that wondrous lady all alone,—
And she felt him, upon her emerald throne.

10.
And every nymph of stream and spreading tree,
And every shepherdess of Ocean's flocks,
Who drives her white waves over the green sea,
And Ocean with the brine on his gray locks,
And quaint Priapus with his company,
All came, much wondering how the enwombed rocks
Could have brought forth so beautiful a birth;—
Her love subdued their wonder and their mirth.

11.
The herdsmen and the mountain maidens came,
And the rude kings of pastoral Garamant—
Their spirits shook within them, as a flame
Stirred by the air under a cavern gaunt:
Pigmies, and Polyphemes, by many a name,
Centaurs, and Satyrs, and such shapes as haunt
Wet clefts,—and lumps neither alive nor dead,
Dog-headed, bosom-eyed, and bird-footed.

12.
For she was beautiful—her beauty made
The bright world dim, and everything beside
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade:
No thought of living spirit could abide,
Which to her looks had ever been betrayed,
On any object in the world so wide,
On any hope within the circling skies,
But on her form, and in her inmost eyes.

13.
Which when the lady knew, she took her spindle
And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and three
Long lines of light, such as the dawn may kindle
The clouds and waves and mountains with; and she
As many star-beams, ere their lamps could dwindle
In the belated moon, wound skilfully;
And with these threads a subtle veil she wove—
A shadow for the splendour of her love.

14.
The deep recesses of her odorous dwelling
Were stored with magic treasures—sounds of air,
Which had the power all spirits of compelling,
Folded in cells of crystal silence there;
Such as we hear in youth, and think the feeling
Will never die—yet ere we are aware,
The feeling and the sound are fled and gone,
And the regret they leave remains alone.

15.
And there lay Visions swift, and sweet, and quaint,
Each in its thin sheath, like a chrysalis,
Some eager to burst forth, some weak and faint
With the soft burthen of intensest bliss.
It was its work to bear to many a saint
Whose heart adores the shrine which holiest is,
Even Love's:—and others white, green, gray, and black,
And of all shapes—and each was at her beck.

16.
And odours in a kind of aviary
Of ever-blooming Eden-trees she kept,
Clipped in a floating net, a love-sick Fairy
Had woven from dew-beams while the moon yet slept;
As bats at the wired window of a dairy,
They beat their vans; and each was an adept,
When loosed and missioned, making wings of winds,
To stir sweet thoughts or sad, in destined minds.

17.
And liquors clear and sweet, whose healthful might
Could medicine the sick soul to happy sleep,
And change eternal death into a night
Of glorious dreams—or if eyes needs must weep,
Could make their tears all wonder and delight,
She in her crystal vials did closely keep:
If men could drink of those clear vials, 'tis said
The living were not envied of the dead.

18.
Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device,
The works of some Saturnian Archimage,
Which taught the expiations at whose price
Men from the Gods might win that happy age
Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;
And which might quench the Earth-consuming rage
Of gold and blood—till men should live and move
Harmonious as the sacred stars above;

19.
And how all things that seem untameable,
Not to be checked and not to be confined,
Obey the spells of Wisdom's wizard skill;
Time, earth, and fire—the ocean and the wind,
And all their shapes—and man's imperial will;
And other scrolls whose writings did unbind
The inmost lore of Love—let the profane
Tremble to ask what secrets they contain.

20.
And wondrous works of substances unknown,
To which the enchantment of her father's power
Had changed those ragged blocks of savage stone,
Were heaped in the recesses of her bower;
Carved lamps and chalices, and vials which shone
In their own golden beams—each like a flower,
Out of whose depth a fire-fly shakes his light
Under a cypress in a starless night.

21.
At first she lived alone in this wild home,
And her own thoughts were each a minister,
Clothing themselves, or with the ocean foam,
Or with the wind, or with the speed of fire,
To work whatever purposes might come
Into her mind; such power her mighty Sire
Had girt them with, whether to fly or run,
Through all the regions which he shines upon.

22.
The Ocean-nymphs and Hamadryades,
Oreads and Naiads, with long weedy locks,
Offered to do her bidding through the seas,
Under the earth, and in the hollow rocks,
And far beneath the matted roots of trees,
And in the gnarled heart of stubborn oaks,
So they might live for ever in the light
Of her sweet presence—each a satellite.

23.
'This may not be,' the wizard maid replied;
'The fountains where the Naiades bedew
Their shining hair, at length are drained and dried;
The solid oaks forget their strength, and strew
Their latest leaf upon the mountains wide;
The boundless ocean like a drop of dew
Will be consumed—the stubborn centre must
Be scattered, like a cloud of summer dust.

24.
'And ye with them will perish, one by one;—
If I must sigh to think that this shall be,
If I must weep when the surviving Sun
Shall smile on your decay—oh, ask not me
To love you till your little race is run;
I cannot die as ye must—over me
Your leaves shall glance—the streams in which ye dwell
Shall be my paths henceforth, and so—farewell!'—

25.
She spoke and wept:—the dark and azure well
Sparkled beneath the shower of her bright tears,
And every little circlet where they fell
Flung to the cavern-roof inconstant spheres
And intertangled lines of light:—a knell
Of sobbing voices came upon her ears
From those departing Forms, o'er the serene
Of the white streams and of the forest green.

26.
All day the wizard lady sate aloof,
Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity,
Under the cavern's fountain-lighted roof;
Or broidering the pictured poesy
Of some high tale upon her growing woof,
Which the sweet splendour of her smiles could dye
In hues outshining heaven—and ever she
Added some grace to the wrought poesy.

27.
While on her hearth lay blazing many a piece
Of sandal wood, rare gums, and cinnamon;
Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is—
Each flame of it is as a precious stone
Dissolved in ever-moving light, and this
Belongs to each and all who gaze upon.
The Witch beheld it not, for in her hand
She held a woof that dimmed the burning brand.

28.
This lady never slept, but lay in trance
All night within the fountain—as in sleep.
Its emerald crags glowed in her beauty's glance;
Through the green splendour of the water deep
She saw the constellations reel and dance
Like fire-flies—and withal did ever keep
The tenour of her contemplations calm,
With open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm.

29.
And when the whirlwinds and the clouds descended
From the white pinnacles of that cold hill,
She passed at dewfall to a space extended,
Where in a lawn of flowering asphodel
Amid a wood of pines and cedars blended,
There yawned an inextinguishable well
Of crimson fire—full even to the brim,
And overflowing all the margin trim.

30.
Within the which she lay when the fierce war
Of wintry winds shook that innocuous liquor
In many a mimic moon and bearded star
O'er woods and lawns;—the serpent heard it flicker
In sleep, and dreaming still, he crept afar—
And when the windless snow descended thicker
Than autumn leaves, she watched it as it came
Melt on the surface of the level flame.

31.
She had a boat, which some say Vulcan wrought
For Venus, as the chariot of her star;
But it was found too feeble to be fraught
With all the ardours in that sphere which are,
And so she sold it, and Apollo bought
And gave it to this daughter: from a car
Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat
Which ever upon mortal stream did float.

32.
And others say, that, when but three hours old,
The first-born Love out of his cradle lept,
And clove dun Chaos with his wings of gold,
And like a horticultural adept,
Stole a strange seed, and wrapped it up in mould,
And sowed it in his mother's star, and kept
Watering it all the summer with sweet dew,
And with his wings fanning it as it grew.

33.
The plant grew strong and green, the snowy flower
Fell, and the long and gourd-like fruit began
To turn the light and dew by inward power
To its own substance; woven tracery ran
Of light firm texture, ribbed and branching, o'er
The solid rind, like a leaf's veined fan—
Of which Love scooped this boat—and with soft motion
Piloted it round the circumfluous ocean.

34.
This boat she moored upon her fount, and lit
A living spirit within all its frame,
Breathing the soul of swiftness into it.
Couched on the fountain like a panther tame,
One of the twain at Evan's feet that sit—
Or as on Vesta's sceptre a swift flame—
Or on blind Homer's heart a winged thought,—
In joyous expectation lay the boat.

35.
Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow
Together, tempering the repugnant mass
With liquid love—all things together grow
Through which the harmony of love can pass;
And a fair Shape out of her hands did flow—
A living Image, which did far surpass
In beauty that bright shape of vital stone
Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.

36.
A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
It seemed to have developed no defect
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both,—
In gentleness and strength its limbs were decked;
The bosom swelled lightly with its full youth,
The countenance was such as might select
Some artist that his skill should never die,
Imaging forth such perfect purity.

37.
From its smooth shoulders hung two rapid wings,
Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere,
Tipped with the speed of liquid lightenings,
Dyed in the ardours of the atmosphere:
She led her creature to the boiling springs
Where the light boat was moored, and said: 'Sit here!'
And pointed to the prow, and took her seat
Beside the rudder, with opposing feet.

38.
And down the streams which clove those mountains vast,
Around their inland islets, and amid
The panther-peopled forests whose shade cast
Darkness and odours, and a pleasure hid
In melancholy gloom, the pinnace passed;
By many a star-surrounded pyramid
Of icy crag cleaving the purple sky,
And caverns yawning round unfathomably.

39.
The silver noon into that winding dell,
With slanted gleam athwart the forest tops,
Tempered like golden evening, feebly fell;
A green and glowing light, like that which drops
From folded lilies in which glow-worms dwell,
When Earth over her face Night's mantle wraps;
Between the severed mountains lay on high,
Over the stream, a narrow rift of sky.

40.
And ever as she went, the Image lay
With folded wings and unawakened eyes;
And o'er its gentle countenance did play
The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies,
Chasing the rapid smiles that would not stay,
And drinking the warm tears, and the sweet sighs
Inhaling, which, with busy murmur vain,
They had aroused from that full heart and brain.

41.
And ever down the prone vale, like a cloud
Upon a stream of wind, the pinnace went:
Now lingering on the pools, in which abode
The calm and darkness of the deep content
In which they paused; now o'er the shallow road
Of white and dancing waters, all besprent
With sand and polished pebbles:—mortal boat
In such a shallow rapid could not float.

42.
And down the earthquaking cataracts which shiver
Their snow-like waters into golden air,
Or under chasms unfathomable ever
Sepulchre them, till in their rage they tear
A subterranean portal for the river,
It fled—the circling sunbows did upbear
Its fall down the hoar precipice of spray,
Lighting it far upon its lampless way.

43.
And when the wizard lady would ascend
The labyrinths of some many-winding vale,
Which to the inmost mountain upward tend—
She called 'Hermaphroditus!'—and the pale
And heavy hue which slumber could extend
Over its lips and eyes, as on the gale
A rapid shadow from a slope of grass,
Into the darkness of the stream did pass.

44.
And it unfurled its heaven-coloured pinions,
With stars of fire spotting the stream below;
And from above into the Sun's dominions
Flinging a glory, like the golden glow
In which Spring clothes her emerald-winged minions,
All interwoven with fine feathery snow
And moonlight splendour of intensest rime,
With which frost paints the pines in winter time.

45.
And then it winnowed the Elysian air
Which ever hung about that lady bright,
With its aethereal vans—and speeding there,
Like a star up the torrent of the night,
Or a swift eagle in the morning glare
Breasting the whirlwind with impetuous flight,
The pinnace, oared by those enchanted wings,
Clove the fierce streams towards their upper springs.

46.
The water flashed, like sunlight by the prow
Of a noon-wandering meteor flung to Heaven;
The still air seemed as if its waves did flow
In tempest down the mountains; loosely driven
The lady's radiant hair streamed to and fro:
Beneath, the billows having vainly striven
Indignant and impetuous, roared to feel
The swift and steady motion of the keel.

47.
Or, when the weary moon was in the wane,
Or in the noon of interlunar night,
The lady-witch in visions could not chain
Her spirit; but sailed forth under the light
Of shooting stars, and bade extend amain
Its storm-outspeeding wings, the Hermaphrodite;
She to the Austral waters took her way,
Beyond the fabulous Thamondocana,—

48.
Where, like a meadow which no scythe has shaven,
Which rain could never bend, or whirl-blast shake,
With the Antarctic constellations paven,
Canopus and his crew, lay the Austral lake—
There she would build herself a windless haven
Out of the clouds whose moving turrets make
The bastions of the storm, when through the sky
The spirits of the tempest thundered by:

49.
A haven beneath whose translucent floor
The tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably,
And around which the solid vapours hoar,
Based on the level waters, to the sky
Lifted their dreadful crags, and like a shore
Of wintry mountains, inaccessibly
Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray,
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay.

50.
And whilst the outer lake beneath the lash
Of the wind's scourge, foamed like a wounded thing,
And the incessant hail with stony clash
Ploughed up the waters, and the flagging wing
Of the roused cormorant in the lightning flash
Looked like the wreck of some wind-wandering
Fragment of inky thunder-smoke—this haven
Was as a gem to copy Heaven engraven,—

51.
On which that lady played her many pranks,
Circling the image of a shooting star,
Even as a tiger on Hydaspes' banks
Outspeeds the antelopes which speediest are,
In her light boat; and many quips and cranks
She played upon the water, till the car
Of the late moon, like a sick matron wan,
To journey from the misty east began.

52.
And then she called out of the hollow turrets
Of those high clouds, white, golden and vermilion,
The armies of her ministering spirits—
In mighty legions, million after million,
They came, each troop emblazoning its merits
On meteor flags; and many a proud pavilion
Of the intertexture of the atmosphere
They pitched upon the plain of the calm mere.

53.
They framed the imperial tent of their great Queen
Of woven exhalations, underlaid
With lambent lightning-fire, as may be seen
A dome of thin and open ivory inlaid
With crimson silk—cressets from the serene
Hung there, and on the water for her tread
A tapestry of fleece-like mist was strewn,
Dyed in the beams of the ascending moon.

54.
And on a throne o'erlaid with starlight, caught
Upon those wandering isles of aery dew,
Which highest shoals of mountain shipwreck not,
She sate, and heard all that had happened new
Between the earth and moon, since they had brought
The last intelligence—and now she grew
Pale as that moon, lost in the watery night—
And now she wept, and now she laughed outright.

55.
These were tame pleasures; she would often climb
The steepest ladder of the crudded rack
Up to some beaked cape of cloud sublime,
And like Arion on the dolphin's back
Ride singing through the shoreless air;—oft-time
Following the serpent lightning's winding track,
She ran upon the platforms of the wind,
And laughed to hear the fire-balls roar behind.

56.
And sometimes to those streams of upper air
Which whirl the earth in its diurnal round,
She would ascend, and win the spirits there
To let her join their chorus. Mortals found
That on those days the sky was calm and fair,
And mystic snatches of harmonious sound
Wandered upon the earth where'er she passed,
And happy thoughts of hope, too sweet to last.

57.
But her choice sport was, in the hours of sleep,
To glide adown old Nilus, where he threads
Egypt and Aethiopia, from the steep
Of utmost Axume, until he spreads,
Like a calm flock of silver-fleeced sheep,
His waters on the plain: and crested heads
Of cities and proud temples gleam amid,
And many a vapour-belted pyramid.

58.
By Moeris and the Mareotid lakes,
Strewn with faint blooms like bridal chamber floors,
Where naked boys bridling tame water-snakes,
Or charioteering ghastly alligators,
Had left on the sweet waters mighty wakes
Of those huge forms—within the brazen doors
Of the great Labyrinth slept both boy and beast,
Tired with the pomp of their Osirian feast.

59.
And where within the surface of the river
The shadows of the massy temples lie,
And never are erased—but tremble ever
Like things which every cloud can doom to die,
Through lotus-paven canals, and wheresoever
The works of man pierced that serenest sky
With tombs, and towers, and fanes, 'twas her delight
To wander in the shadow of the night.

60.
With motion like the spirit of that wind
Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet
Passed through the peopled haunts of humankind.
Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet,
Through fane, and palace-court, and labyrinth mined
With many a dark and subterranean street
Under the Nile, through chambers high and deep
She passed, observing mortals in their sleep.

61.
A pleasure sweet doubtless it was to see
Mortals subdued in all the shapes of sleep.
Here lay two sister twins in infancy;
There, a lone youth who in his dreams did weep;
Within, two lovers linked innocently
In their loose locks which over both did creep
Like ivy from one stem;—and there lay calm
Old age with snow-bright hair and folded palm.

62.
But other troubled forms of sleep she saw,
Not to be mirrored in a holy song—
Distortions foul of supernatural awe,
And pale imaginings of visioned wrong;
And all the code of Custom's lawless law
Written upon the brows of old and young:
'This,' said the wizard maiden, 'is the strife
Which stirs the liquid surface of man's life.'

63.
And little did the sight disturb her soul.—
We, the weak mariners of that wide lake
Where'er its shores extend or billows roll,
Our course unpiloted and starless make
O'er its wild surface to an unknown goal:—
But she in the calm depths her way could take,
Where in bright bowers immortal forms abide
Beneath the weltering of the restless tide.

64.
And she saw princes couched under the glow
Of sunlike gems; and round each temple-court
In dormitories ranged, row after row,
She saw the priests asleep—all of one sort—
For all were educated to be so.—
The peasants in their huts, and in the port
The sailors she saw cradled on the waves,
And the dead lulled within their dreamless graves.

65.
And all the forms in which those spirits lay
Were to her sight like the diaphanous
Veils, in which those sweet ladies oft array
Their delicate limbs, who would conceal from us
Only their scorn of all concealment: they
Move in the light of their own beauty thus.
But these and all now lay with sleep upon them,
And little thought a Witch was looking on them.

66.
She, all those human figures breathing there,
Beheld as living spirits—to her eyes
The naked beauty of the soul lay bare,
And often through a rude and worn disguise
She saw the inner form most bright and fair—
And then she had a charm of strange device,
Which, murmured on mute lips with tender tone,
Could make that spirit mingle with her own.

67.
Alas! Aurora, what wouldst thou have given
For such a charm when Tithon became gray?
Or how much, Venus, of thy silver heaven
Wouldst thou have yielded, ere Proserpina
Had half (oh! why not all?) the debt forgiven
Which dear Adonis had been doomed to pay,
To any witch who would have taught you it?
The Heliad doth not know its value yet.

68.
'Tis said in after times her spirit free
Knew what love was, and felt itself alone—
But holy Dian could not chaster be
Before she stooped to kiss Endymion,
Than now this lady—like a sexless bee
Tasting all blossoms, and confined to none,
Among those mortal forms, the wizard-maiden
Passed with an eye serene and heart unladen.

69.
To those she saw most beautiful, she gave
Strange panacea in a crystal bowl:—
They drank in their deep sleep of that sweet wave,
And lived thenceforward as if some control,
Mightier than life, were in them; and the grave
Of such, when death oppressed the weary soul,
Was as a green and overarching bower
Lit by the gems of many a starry flower.

70.
For on the night when they were buried, she
Restored the embalmers' ruining, and shook
The light out of the funeral lamps, to be
A mimic day within that deathy nook;
And she unwound the woven imagery
Of second childhood's swaddling bands, and took
The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche,
And threw it with contempt into a ditch.

71.
And there the body lay, age after age.
Mute, breathing, beating, warm, and undecaying,
Like one asleep in a green hermitage,
With gentle smiles about its eyelids playing,
And living in its dreams beyond the rage
Of death or life; while they were still arraying
In liveries ever new, the rapid, blind
And fleeting generations of mankind.

72.
And she would write strange dreams upon the brain
Of those who were less beautiful, and make
All harsh and crooked purposes more vain
Than in the desert is the serpent's wake
Which the sand covers—all his evil gain
The miser in such dreams would rise and shake
Into a beggar's lap;—the lying scribe
Would his own lies betray without a bribe.

73.
The priests would write an explanation full,
Translating hieroglyphics into Greek,
How the God Apis really was a bull,
And nothing more; and bid the herald stick
The same against the temple doors, and pull
The old cant down; they licensed all to speak
Whate'er they thought of hawks, and cats, and geese,
By pastoral letters to each diocese.

74.
The king would dress an ape up in his crown
And robes, and seat him on his glorious seat,
And on the right hand of the sunlike throne
Would place a gaudy mock-bird to repeat
The chatterings of the monkey.—Every one
Of the prone courtiers crawled to kiss the feet
Of their great Emperor, when the morning came,
And kissed—alas, how many kiss the same!

75.
The soldiers dreamed that they were blacksmiths, and
Walked out of quarters in somnambulism;
Round the red anvils you might see them stand
Like Cyclopses in Vulcan's sooty abysm,
Beating their swords to ploughshares;—in a band
The gaolers sent those of the liberal schism
Free through the streets of Memphis, much, I wis,
To the annoyance of king Amasis.

76.
And timid lovers who had been so coy,
They hardly knew whether they loved or not,
Would rise out of their rest, and take sweet joy,
To the fulfilment of their inmost thought;
And when next day the maiden and the boy
Met one another, both, like sinners caught,
Blushed at the thing which each believed was done
Only in fancy—till the tenth moon shone;

77.
And then the Witch would let them take no ill:
Of many thousand schemes which lovers find,
The Witch found one,—and so they took their fill
Of happiness in marriage warm and kind.
Friends who, by practice of some envious skill,
Were torn apart—a wide wound, mind from mind!—
She did unite again with visions clear
Of deep affection and of truth sincere.

80.
These were the pranks she played among the cities
Of mortal men, and what she did to Sprites
And Gods, entangling them in her sweet ditties
To do her will, and show their subtle sleights,
I will declare another time; for it is
A tale more fit for the weird winter nights
Than for these garish summer days, when we
Scarcely believe much more than we can see.

Sixth Annual Report

Last week was the sixth anniversary of the podcast, so it's time for the annual report. If you are new to the podcast, start anywhere else.

The Patreons are covering the hosting fees of the podcast, so it is financially stable. There has been a permanant price change in my podcast host, so now instead of getting 50MB a month, I get 162. This extra space has allowed me to do things like Fragment Week, but I can't promise to find enough material to fill that each month. Essentially each megabyte gets you a minute, and so we'd be going from roughly 14 minutes a week to roughly 40. That's harder than it sounds because between scripting, recording and editing episodes, a minute takes five minutes to produce, which means the podcast balloons out from just over an hour a week to three hours and I can't currently manage that. Librivox recordings let me cut that down substantially, although it does make the episode lengths waggle about.

There's always a temptation to push on and turn this hobby into a side hustle. I'm not going to do that because I think the added pressure would make the whole thing less enjoyable and burn me out. I have various medical things going on, chronically, so when I have some energy I line up a heap of episodes, and then when I need it I ignore the podcast for self-care. A professional podcast would mean I had to grind through promised projects, like the bestiary and Venice, rather than meandering about them and filling in bits when I can, following byways like the Pentamerone and Cellini.

I know this leads to a lumpy sort of episode length. Some weeks you get five minutes of new material from me, and the next you get an hour from a dead Greek chap with odd ideas about who lives on the Sun. A truly professional podcast would split into separate feeds, like The Great Library of Dreams does, but for now that's not necessary. If things eventually get to the stage where the Ars Magica people and Magonomia people are not liking each other's material, I'll look at it again. Similarly, a professional podcast would have its own Facebook, Twitter and Discord, but I don't see the point in fragmenting the communities further.

According to Libsyn, the podcast averages about 150 listens per week. According to WordPress, the transcripts get about 250 visits per week. That's amazing, really, which is why I don't trust it at all.

I don't pay extra to get detailed stats, but my feeling on it is that we have a lot of people dropping by for stuff that's not related to roleplaying. For example, the most popular post of all time on the blog is *The Pear Drum*, which is the story also known as *The New Mother*. I presume it is people who are Neil Gaiman fans looking up his inspiration for *Coraline*, and finding this site because it's easier here that finding it under the original title in the depths of Project Gutenberg. Similarly the most visited page this month has been *Earl Haldaran's Daughter*, and it seems like forty or fifty of the visitors have come from India. I'm not saying they are unwelcome, but I presume they are a class group who have been told to look at it, and have found it on my page because it's not buried under OCR on Internet Archive, rather than that there's a really big Ars group in India that's making Viking-themed fae.

During Fragment Week I had slightly north of 45 daily audio downloads, with a bit of a bounce on the weekend. I presume that's a solid number I can count as my listener base. 45 only sounds small if you are comparing to Joe Rogan – I'm happy to have a roomful of people listen each week.

The following episodes have already been recorded and are queued on timers on my podcast host. This part of the transcript has been updated to be correct as of 27 July 2020. Please be aware I had COVID in July, so there's a certain amount of emergency spackling in the podcast run order. These are the Seabury Quinn and Haunted Homes episodes.

August
18 Cellini is poisoned like a prince
25 The Magic Mirror Murders by Seabury Quinn

September
1 The White Witch
15 Two short Cellini episodes: Cellini angers the king's official mistress and Cellini swears his giant statue is not haunted.
22 Magonomia - Haunted Homes 1
29 Magonomia - Haunted Homes 2

October
6: Our Ladies of Death
13: Magonomia - Haunted Homes 3
20: Cellini in Paris
Various shorts for Hallowe'en week

November
3 Insomnia Angels
17 Cellini and the fiery birth of the Perseus

December
15: Cellini and Renaissance Medicine

There are also six episodes for some of the monsters I wrote for the Magonomia bestiary. These explore the folklore, and the material I couldn't include, about the creatures. The episodes will release during the campaign to give Shewstone some material to use for promotion, if they wish.

The creatures I've written up are:
The Laidly Toad
Grim King of the Ghosts
Malkins
The Viol of the Two Sisters
Kenidjack
Satyrs

I'm reading a lot of the poetry of Madison Cawein at the moment and he's given me a take on urban wisps that may be worth an episode. One of my co-authors had to step aside and I took up two of their monsters, so I might also do one of those. The basilisk is promising because it has a period source I can pick apart.

I started recording bits and pieces as bonuses for Halloween week. Three are in place
October
24 *The Dark Poo*l (a poem from "Weird Tales"
25 The Haunting of Jedburgh (Poe's biographer claims it was the source for *The Masque of the Red Death*)
26 *The Dance of Death* by Baudelaire

Next year's replacement of Cellini will be *The Discoverie of Witches,* which is an Elizabethan sceptic's guide to folk magic, but that's a long term goal.

Although *City of Dreadful Night 1* was posted in the waning days of June, I've kept it to accompany its sibling episode in this edition.