

THE ANGRY LAND

Where animal's don't care

A modern fable

By

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For Andrea

Chapters.

1. Here, one can neither stand nor lie nor sit.
2. These are the days that heaven is falling...
3. They sang, but had not human tune nor words.
4. I know a hall whose door faces north...
5. At every door before you enter...
6. It is with great cunning that we...
7. Easy to hate, hard to love.
8. Did this shining woman live to be...
9. Talwade burns in a camp of rage ...
10. Not even God can change the past.
11. Never Stoop to Conquer.
12. History what's that?
13. Does the Eagle know what is in the pit...
14. The in conclusion of all that is conclusion.

Camera Eye.

Deep in the ocean a large blue whale lumbers through it's depths. This whale is old, it's eyes tell us it is wise. Bellowing and bemoaning, descending into the dark wasteland it calls out:

'Where, where are my fishes of the deep?'

The call is not left unanswered, soon it is joined by other blue whales and massive silver metallic fish that rise from the valleys of the ocean. These fish are huge with silver-plated bodies, razor fins and teeth that can open battleships. Great malice is in all their roving eyes. Closing on nuclear submarines running silently through the darkness the Leviathans beat the subs hulls with such force that soon they are smashed and dented junk that sink into the depths of the ocean. These great Leviathans rise to join Mannan'an who continues his lamentation as the massive silver fish join in to make a great chorus that shakes the waters. Through the darkness this great multitude moves steadily upward toward the sun to break the waters so fast and with such momentum that a great tidal wave emanates from them, so much so that the US Sixth fleet of aircraft carriers and battleships sailing in its path are tossed about with such violence that some capsize and sink. Several aircraft carriers are large enough to withstand the wave but are soon swept under as the great fishes of the deep smash into them and their hulls are consigned to the deep forever. The shoal moves off; presumably to find another intruder of the oceans. With a bellow of victory, the blue whale Mannan'an and his cohorts dive back into the depths, leaving the ocean calm.

Across the cloud-laden horizon of the American west the sun is setting in a brilliant spectacle of color. It dips into the horizon as ten heavily armed F18 interceptor jets in V formation scream through the peaceful scene disappearing into cumulus clouds. Below them, the Grand Canyon, the clouds briefly give way to sunshine, a vast shadow darkens the interceptors and heavens with a pelting sound of small crushed and bruised feathered bodies. The pilots, struggle to fly their jets as more pelted bodies smash into them, turning their aircraft red with their blood. The jets peel away in distress, losing power & altitude.

Deafening frenetic chirps, the beating of a millions wings drown out the noise of the jet engines, blood and bird matter fly into the jet engines, as the interceptors plunge earthward to their destruction, small bird bodies seal the sunlight from one pilot, leaving him in a partially darkened bloodied world. A million bird bodies are sucked, hurled, squeezed through the engines'. The kamikaze birds break away, the commander on the radio calls, 'Mayday...' One jet explodes in mid-air, one, two, three, safely eject as the interceptors plunge into the earth and explode into balls of flame. The birds now regroup for another attack on the men as they drift helplessly to earth, below them the narrow canyon opens up into a flat expanse of scrubland where thousands of animals are moving up the valley toward more of their own kind of everything wild that can run, crawl or fly. As the pilots land in the canyon biting animals swarm over them, birds peck at their eyes. The pilots, desperately attempt to pull revolvers from holsters as a wolverine jumps from a rock at the throat of one pilot and is shot dead. A mountain lion quickly seals the fate of another pilot. We pass over the dying pilots, leaving them to their certain fate. Further up and further into the canyon, the floor is filled by the largest group of animals ever seen in the history of the world all gathered at the river's edge, surrounding a white buffalo who is quietly drinking.

Here, one can neither stand nor lie nor sit.

King Vortigern.

Beside the Columbia River stands the great White boanthrop Buffalo drinking the waters. He is torn, bloodied, tired and sleepless. Behind the white bull stand a mass of animals waiting for him. They are made up of every kind of furry, scaled and feathered beast of the wild side. To the right and left are buffalo, not white ones, next to them large lions, zoo escapees, fiercely guarding him. Several large golden eagle perch on bodies or rocks; surrounding them are armed Apes, with guns, radios, computers and television sets. Bigger than the rest, Sinir the ape, surrounded by his allies, test lab gorillas and chimpanzees. The apes look manic and definitely psychotic, holding hand grenades, military paraphernalia adorn these angry primates. Down by the water's edge, the large brown, strabismus pickled onion eyes of the white bull reflect mystically in the river. He drinks his fill, behind him, through his legs, smaller ferret and murines stare in silent eager anticipation for who knows what! Only the sound of the wind in the canyon & the sucking of water can be heard. The white bull stops drinking, turns his nates away from the mass of animals, looks up at them as water sloshes from the his fourteen inch lips dropping into the maws of the pelted warriors as he bellows his message balefully across the canyon to the Animal Army of Talwadc.

'It's not what we want to do', it's not what we want at all' Drozzers implores the masses of animals again, now raising his milky white eyes to the greater multitude of animals sedulously gathered around him in their millions. 'I wish the Song that is me, the eternal never-ending Song of Glashiel had not called to Talwadc the Rager so that now the N'ihdoggs' end draws near. We've gone out of our way for a long time to make room for the N'ihdoggs, as they kept taking more and more of the stomping grounds.' Drozzler is telling this multitude of leporine and murines to commit murder, as he mindlessly scumbers into the river, screwing up his face, exhaling the thin night air in a halo of

steaming accusations like the cacadoxical nupson he is. He only follows the declaration of the righting of the wrongings, the official mandate of Talwadc the Rager, given unto Drozzler the white Bull of America.

'For once, not so long ago we always ran from the N'ihdogg'. The Droz has more objections.

'N'ihdoggs push us from our beloved stomping grounds, not leaving us our wildest and most desolate places, making them their playgrounds, never content with their cities and factories. Their great road tracks cut across the wild side like a butcher's knife, fill the sky with beaks of hollow bone that bleach the air around it, how many birds know this is true. How many more know that every stomping ground has been taken from us'.

No one here as their faces are all a blank cos they all only woke up to all this about three weeks ago. Is there more? Yes indeed.

'Now the wild side must follow Talwadc the Rager, who has come into all of us, has come to save us. Now we realize no wild side places are left; now we realize we shall be doomed to that place 'extinction' unless we resist the N'ihdoggs.'

When Drozzler said 'extinction', all the smaller murine rodents and leporine MUCSPAT's (mammal upper canine special attack teams) let out ten million squeaks, culminating into a fremitus collective howl. The killers' tails sticking out real straight like a broom handle, every hair bristling in static rage, ears down flat against their bonces in a full-blown piked-out kill position, like the Cheetah on the hunt. Before my own eyes the dumber multitudes of rats and larger ferret corpse-swallowers go real ultra pike, as they spronk about in more Talwadian rage, biting, nibbling, scratching and micturating in rasorial spurges at everything that won't nibble or scratch back. We have a temporary moratorium on that, a war measures act. This is the bit I don't like, the fur stands up on my back like a coconut mat, and I tingle with these manic sensations running through me in maddening waves, compelling me to rabid gnawing obsessions. I hang on quaking and drooling with intermittent simpering cooing. Is that smoke I see coming from my ears? Must I watch in utter dumfusion the piligerous phatry running rampant in their millions committing utter destruction of the canyon and soon the N'ihdogg world? The rabble settles

down, Drozzler urges them to commit more destruction.

'Before none of us are left all the wild side have risen to take back Glashiel.'

All are petrous amid the dust and debris as they stop to only listen to Drozzers. In their rotating stunned eyes, I see only death as Drozzler's banter gets louder.

'That day of battle is coming with the rising Sun'.

He looks up to the horizon as the dying sun empties into the sky, leaving the heinous phatry in the partial darkness of the canyon and no doubt in total darkness, of what he's telling them. More from the white bull.

'Talwadc rises on other lands where our armies began the battle against the N'ihdoggs. Commit yourselves to Talwadc as your broszers far away have done, as they now fight against the N'ihdogg and his dread place... extinction'.

The dust flies up into the sunlight, more rasorial scratching, micturating, nibbling corybantic raptures ensue as the entire Talwadian phatry commit more heinous acts, swearing and cursing the thing they hate: *The Nihdogg'sssssssssssshs*.

More tingling madness runs over the end of my head, ears and nose with a mild anesthetizing effect, leaving me a semi-carused, frenzied, nibbling obsessionalist. I resist, barely able to refrain from what is within or before me, as I reach inside my bag for a walnut placebo to manically pulverize with my nibblers. Drozzler drones on. I hear him through my delirium as I hang on to you O solloqual one. This time he's going for the juggler.

'So have the Brotuladae, the Great Midgard Fishes from the valleys of the sea, risen against the N'ihdogg in the struggle to claim back their stomping grounds'. Partially recovered from their scattered senses, the Talwadian-consumed mobsters suddenly stop their ghost dance, their hopelessly vacant murine squinnies look up at Drozzler's, to realize very few terrestrials have seen that place, '*The Sea*', they're '*Great waters*', like a big pond-lake, that is all we know, yet in that frozen moment of dumfusion, Droz the Taurus feces artist moves in for the jugular, now he has their minuscule attention.

'And all the birds of the air', he raises his squinnies to the dimming heavens. The phatry of leporine pelted snouts, hooter's and stunned ocellations follow the white bovine bonce

to gaze at the evening sky by the light of dumfusion as more
amphiclexic sapprophillia pours from the dripping maw of
Drozzler.

'They have risen and taken back all the skies.'

A great rushing sound fills the air as millions of the swarmer
kamikaze sparrows and finches and all the birds of the air rush
into the sky darker than the pursuing night, smothering the last
rays of the fading sun like a black comet of death, filling the air
with a fritenating chirp - their call to murder. The leporine
groundsters get the point. Rabid and stunned in admiration, they
watch as the black hand of wings swoop real low over them.
Watch out, 'cos suddenly the murines and meat eaters have to
get into an all fours flat ducking, half piked stance, avoiding
collision as their noggins disappear down their scapulas!
Acrobatic swanks those birds, they're all going to die. Drozzler
is talking his party banter as usual.

'By the end of the next Sun we alone of Glashiel shall
have dominion over all the places of this earth, declared our
place in creation, defeated the terrible N'ihdogg, returned to our
stomping grounds'. He pauses to watch the phatry pull their
bonces out from their shoulder blades, as they wait again for him
to give them another shot of Talwadc the rabid Rager.

'Or we shall all go into that place known as...', pausing
one beat. Please don't say it Drozzers. He does.

'Extinction'. Here we go again, hang on as more rasorial
biting and nibbling, micturating, scumbering and
scratching bursts forth from the mobsters. Busy everywhere, the
demented leporines leap somersaults into the dusty air in
camerine camaraderie. The multitude of birds fly overhead in
their Talwadian rage in great clouds of dark death, so that the
earth and air teem with their frantic rage. All nature shrunk
down to madness. It's all I can do than to resist this urge called
Talwadc, as it sends more tingling madness through me. I
casually hang onto a rock and pose an appearance of mild
sensations, for the benefit of the other ferret meat eaters of the war
council busily kicking up their own dust storm. I hope they can't
see me resisting. Drozzler, miraculously unaffected, turns his
nates to the mob, corpulently flatulates in bellowed warbles,
drinks a little more, and the rabble in the front row settles down.
The albino ungulate turns to them with more sapprophillia on his

other end.

'If we should fail, then and only then shall the N'ihdogg live, alone with the insects? They, who would not join us in this struggle'. Solemnly, Drozzers tells us the worst case scenario, the bit I really don't like.

'Should the N'ihdoggs' purpose be greater than ours, then, we can only desist in death, for that is the law of the great Glashiel the Indifferent. Yet in destroying us they will have begun the way to their own doom, they cannot survive without the, 'wild side', for we too make perpetual war under Glashiel against the wrigglers and wrogglers O' the six legs'.

Speaking of which, amid the dust storm of the corybantic leporines, several large blow flies disturbed by the strepitous phatry landed on Drozzler's hooter for a free feed, begin sucking up the myxoid dribble hanging in great slimy streaks on his ham of a hooter. Quickly in mid sentence, Drozzler's strabismic malevolent squinnies fell upon the offending turd swallows sending his ham of a tongue lunging out of his hay hole, giving his snotty drenched hooter a quick tersive slap, almost devastating that festering fly hamlet. Whilst the black buzzers regroup for another feed the Droz has more sapprophillia to distract him.

'The machine that they build will never save them, so great are our designs, so great is our purpose. Even now we are smashing them under the power of Talwadc. Tell each other among the clans, your tales, tell each other the things the N'ihdogg has done to you and of the others who are gone forever, so all may know',

' And fight harder little one'.

'They shall not take us down with them anymore, we shall no longer submit to their dread place, 'Extinction'. Again that amphiexic speech sends the madness of Talwadc to possess the pelted warriors, who with pavlovian clockwork run about sniffing, scratching, squittering and nibbling in their camerine frampold raving. That rasorial rabid rabble! Drozzler looks on admiringly at the pelted frenzied leaping leporines dancing the dance, the dance down to the end of the world. I'm resisting as much as I can the madness of this urge Talwadc, only relenting occasionally by chewing anxiously rabid on another handy walnut, getting a mild tingling at the end of my paw-pads, nose and ears. I admit I have occasionally

experienced the hair on my back stand out as the rhetoric hits a new high point, that's rare. I have never gone down among them, for the rasorial that is. I have secret resistance.

'It's your pride little one'.

Our Bovine Buffalo bore continues, now they've settled down a bit.

'Some would say to kill in the name of Violentur is a crime against the laws of Glashiel'.

Just vacant eyeballs rotating in ecstatic dumfusion.

I say that the greatest crime against us is the N'ihdogg. That has given us the power to strike back with Talwadc... tomorrow we shall'.

Well done Drozzler, high priest of party babble, no one knows or understands really what he's saying, except for party buzz words like, 'extinction'. It doesn't matter- all eyes stare dumbfounded at the white buffalo as they wait for the right word to send them into more rabid raptures. Under his cacadoxy he's got them all transfixed, no one can stop him, he's getting ready with more logorrhea. Will he never shut up?

'The N'ihdoggs, all in the name of free do, destroying what they can never understand, since breaking from the wild side, the Law of Glashiel'.

Drozzer's drones on incessantly into the dying day. Inside my own darkness I hear among the twittering that whispering rat voice in my noodle again, telling me.

'And fight harder little one. It's your pride little one'.

Hark ! It is the voice of Glashiel the Indifferent who has come to taunt me to abandon myself into the euphoria of battle.

'Do you not believe in me little one'?

There it is again, I am silent' 'cept to mine own self. Outside my own bonce, in the world of the striven, more salutations from the leporine maddened micturaters as they yell out their allegiance to Glashiel. 'Glashiel, Glashiel, Glashiel', across the canyon.

'I'm very flattered little one'.

'What, by this lot? Listen imposter O' the noodle, listen, there is more from the white Bull'.

'You're not listening little one. I thought you weren't speaking to me today.'

'Instead of I speaking to you it is Drozzers the

indefatigable, the unquenchable.

'Of course , he can run for days and days and never tire'.

Don't I know it, we came here at break neck speed, 'neath the thunder of his hoofs'.

Drozzers has more and more and more banter for the itinerants of Talwadc.

'Now we have broken from our bonds of Glashiel and have come to the greatness of Talwadc, we the multitudinous have evolved to speak!' The fremitus roars of adulations changes midstream from 'Glashiel', to 'I kill, he kill, we kill'.

The racket grows louder, so does Drozzler until he is bellowing,

'Now we have faced things with the true knowledge of death, now driven by Talwadc to make war against the bringer of these terrible things. I am dead anyway, it matters not, it is Talwadc the Rager, you the dead I salute you as I move now to 'extinction'. More expressions of stunned dumfution from the phatry, before they recover their scattered senses, submit to the tingling madness, go frantic and frenetic in their corybantic sequaciousness, predictably resulting in more rasorial rage as the dust of the desert rises into the glow of the fading day. Beneath me the epiphany of Talwadc. I see their maddened squinnies rotating in ecstatic delirium as I swim in my own gelid frenzied carus. Such downright simple mindedness, simplicity itself, all going to such noble self obliteration!

' Is not their cause justified little one by the right of Violentur'?

'Sacrilegious outrage? Maybe O Glashiel, 'justification' is surely chosen, I didn't choose to be a part of this sacrilegious rage'.

'Neither did they. It is the Rager Talwadc that has brought them to Violentur and the numbers of the beasts'.

Always got to have the last word. The truth is no one dares turn away from the cause for fear of death by their companions, a tyranny of the majority. The way I see it Glashiel is us animals, they are now Talwadc, ipso facto Glashiel and Talwadc must be one and the same thing.

'But you really don't know'

'You're in it together, aren't you?'

There's no reply. The silence from the eavesdropper is broken; I am carried away, my ears full with the roars from the sea of various leporine physiognomies'. Those snouted beaks in pelted, feathered, scaled, piligerous colored blobs of brown or grey according to behavior, nibbling away frenetically, with this Talwadc on their side, raging the chants of war. This rabid rage is not the way I want to be- I don't want at all to fight with Drozzler and the striven. I must strive for other things. I'm getting the voice of Glashiel the Indifferent again. I must listen to the lodger eavesdropper, ignoring it is useless, better get it over with and answer its questions, lest it shall speak to the war council of my pending defection.

'How come the N'ihdogg have ruined a pristine world with their greedy dirty ways little one'?

I don't know O Glashiel, but they must pay'!

I got this brain lodger since being conscripted by Talwadc - I just woke up on the third day and there it was readying itself at me with questions that have no answers. That's all it does in its own self-pious righteousness and condescension. I must speak to you colloquial self. I must implore myself to you who have always been there, before I came into this living nightmare. You remember like I remember. Once we lived, not so long ago, in Blazing Norton with the One and Perfect Master, who taught me many things. Once, I had broken free from the tyranny of Glashiel the Indifferent, that is all secret, no one among the warriors of Talwadc know I have lied about my past. Living and learning with the One and Perfect Master means I'm a domesticated and that's not on with this lot. So I have a great deal to hide.

'Now I know little one, stop speaking to yourself'.

'Yes so you say, but tomorrow I shall not submit'.

'When the time comes you will be there killing

N'ihdoggs'. What's a N'ihdogg, O colloquial self? Referring to the war manual of Talwadc, definition # one, means, 'Striker that Destroys', simply stated it's the Hominid Sapiens coded war name. Now, not unlike us, since we are preying on N'ihdoggs. Looking around me at this stomping ground, we've become no better than them. Our mission? Kill all the N'ihdoggs, rid the planet of them forever stop their ugly ways. Get back the old ways of the ritual call Glashiel before the age of the N'ihdogg!

What is Glashiel or rather who is Glashiel, you may ask.

According to Drozzler:

'The ancient ways of animals, from the age Sileria. From the great void Gunnigap of the six wrogglers, from the great seas of the Midgard Serpent that is us all, blah blah'. I had suspected mostly grand myth. On the day- to-day level it's recently this voice in my bonce, something I must guard against. On the very ancient level it's the stupid feuds us animals have to live by, going back into the murky Midgard past. 'The Hunter and the Hunted', 'Thou Shalt' etc, 'doings' is all us animals know, I call it the 'Meat Game', been happening for literally ages.

'This has never been a game little one'.

'Perhaps, the end is the same O Glashiel the Indifferent who has no blood, gut's, nerve and sinew to get smashed up in pain'.

'I am all things'.

'So that is who you are! Wow - that really helps me.'

'I am also known only to you, I am the spirit of the

Ratatosks of Glashiel- only you will know me'.

A revelation at last: by this ubiquitous self-made auto biographer.

'What does all this really mean O Glashiel?'

Silence. Most inner solloqial self help me to stay away from that great brooding day of death and the phantom in my noggin. Who am I? Remember, we are the family Ratatosk having a long feud with the Tree Martens, 'Ferio Tergum et Edo', 'Strike back and eat' is their motto, edacious corpse-swallowing meat eaters, very dangerous to my kind. Now nothing is the same, lots of strangers and former enemies roam abroad arm in arm; prey and predator all very chummy, all born again into Talwadc the Rager, expecting, when this is over, to go back to the hunting and raiding rituals of Glashiel like nothing happened. Fat chance of that! An epic event driven by Talwadc; the dispossessed. That's what I'm reluctantly made to pursue, but how can there ever be any going back?

'Back to where? You have come from nothing 'cept mine own indifference little one and you shall return to it'.

'Can I get back to where I am not stung with this urge to kill and nibble, so that I must rattle on like this, perpetually muttering to myself, or is it you Glashiel who will send me

nutting over the hill into the multitudes O phatry & fray of thine own indifference - and I shall be no more'?

As usual no answer; there never is, it doesn't know.

'Or isn't saying little one, why don't you talk some more to yourself about your reluctance to fight'?

'You should have made me a large dog if you wish me to kill'.

After what I've seen over the several suns and moons: Day attacks, night attacks by the nocturne legions, blood and guts and all kinds of mean and ugly stuff preying on the N'ihdogg, I don't want to know. Once the Master spoke of an Earth where it was possible to watch the process of existence unfold.

'Existence..., that is unfolding right now little one'.

Were you there solloquial self, did you hear what he told me?

Do you still know of that place like I know? Do I still know the Dharma of the middle ground now I have acted with the killers?"

'Feeling something again; what are these `feelings` little one'?

Until now I have only limited myself to murder less secret skirmishes into N'ihdogg populations, watching the others destroying and killing anything in their path, making sure all traces of blood and meat were cleaned up. War of Talwadc rule # seven, 'leave no evidence', rule # eight, 'retreat incognito'. No one among the N'ihdogg believing it could be us animals who are responsible for the missing N'ihdoggs, the sentimental sympathy vote is just too big! Forget it! When the sun rises we shall have the real battle. It's going to be hard to avoid it all, I will do my best...

'Your `best`, is not enough little one O' the Nibblers'.

'I was going to supplement my original remark with, to survive'!

'If you know this, why are you telling yourself'?

Wait a moment... Drozzlers finished supping... he's going to speak again.

"The very last of the wild side... this band of fearless fraternity... you who are here, survived the greatest infamy... you have felt the power of Talwadc... you feel it like I do, the power to destroy, like the N'ihdoggs. So we have become like them so we may destroy them'.

I just said that.

'Abandoning our wild side and stomping grounds, our breeding, and the life that is Glashiel, it shall be once again as forever. Drozzler drozzles on. I've heard it all before, I just thought he might say something like: 'It's alright, it's not on anymore. The N'ihdoggs are moving over, you can all go home', that would be dreaming!

'That would be a game little one'.

Who's talking to you? The Sun is going down in this dry hot place called Grand Canyon, known by us as GUNNIGAP, the hot summer evening falls across the canyon, filled to the brim with a million mephitic kinabra. Drozzler is wetting his parched gullet in the river again before looking up as more cascades of salivated water slench over the rodentia divisions. Standing silently vacant observing this army of revenge, his great jawbone hanging down, finally empty of party speak, dripping like a great lanterned latch at the door of despondency. I'd be despondent too if I had to rule over this lot. I don't, thank the glory of the hazelnut.

'Thank you for not trying'.

What do I know anyway, besides who am I? I asked the One and Perfect Master many suns ago, since I knew nothing of myself before he found me. He told me; since I lacked a name...

'Among other things'.

I am to be known as Gallad from the family of Ratatosk. Tree Squirrel messenger service, now become, Tree rat-on-you spy, Ratatosk the Red, Ratatosk the hot head, Gnaw tooth the Red, occasionally Ratatosk the Rabid, now currently Ratatosk the Reluctant. My kind are known by many names for we are in the Hominid myths, according to the Master.

'Ratatosk the Reprobate, more grand myth little one'?

Family motto: 'Injuriae Quis Dideras Contumallium'. 'Add not insult to injury'. In other words, if caught, eat us, don't play with us, like the vicious Lynx. We are all lovers of trees, nuts, berries and sleep- ardent defenders of privacy, reluctant sharers of woodlands, haters of open spaces and rain.

'Don't forget, always chattering to yourself little one, you already know all this. Oh, and don't forget harbinger of the Black Death, you've been giving it to the N'ihdoggs for centuries, kind of moonlighting terrorist. Serve them right!'

'How can I forget anything with you in my noodle to always remind me. Lest I should forget, I have bitten nobody so far Glashiel'?

'Your fleas have.'

It matters not I have no fleas, I am, for reasons pertaining to registration into the army of Talwadc, currently non personae, though upon consideration I should have lied about my false name, if I ever knew my real one! I fell from my parents' dray; all I remember before taking the plunge down to earth was one of my brothers chattering some expletive like 'Gurgllurk!'

'Putzzzzzzzzzey.'

I never saw my brothers and sisters again, not even among this lot. On consideration I should have used 'Gurgllurk' as my pseudonym for this army. My parents never bothered to look for me as I lay helpless on the forest floor of Blazing Norton.

'Because of Glashiel little one, it is the only law'.

'Laws shouldn't be indifferent O Glashiel'.

Well, the One and Perfect Master found me and took me home, or I would have died under the law of Glashiel the Indifferent.

'So you really belong to me, I will let you live, so you can fight'

I even lied about my age. I am much older, since I lived many winters with the Master who taught me everything.

'You had better be careful then little one'.

The Thraesvelg corpse swallowing leviners, they'd eat their mother, scrutinize me a lot about my name, saying it 'Doesn't sound 'given' under the laws of Talwadc. 'Gallad', too many A's for a Ratatosk'. Glashiel has told them all about me as it spies about on everyone.

'That's right little one believe in your sophistry, what is the right question that you will not ask'?

'What am I doing here with you in my head?'

'Stupid Ratatosk O the empty noodle'.

It's not that empty. We don't like each other. Why don't you just disappear like the Dog boys with their stupid names like, Drystwyrps, Gnydpdr, Znkdryts'.

'That cannot be me you're referring to'?

Which reminds me, speaking of, 'not very nice'. I have also to contend with Bloggdrott, my life's bane, member of the war council, from the armadillo family of Dasypodidae. His name is

really Bldrtrt, pronounced 'blug drut'. He got the 'O's because he is on the war council. Sneirtsnerz is his doppelganger. His real name is Sntsntzzz, so I call him Snerter's. He's another one who got vowels because of party rank. They're the police of Glashiel, always ready to follow the book. To me they're all only lowly dirt rumblers and my kind doesn't normally operate around them, so getting along is difficult, to say the least, sometimes resulting with getting into hot scolding's and even threats of violent proportions. From the scratching rabid dirt rumblers with few exceptions, this piligerous phatry barely grumble understandable utterances at each other. In barking bleating they complain when they see me coming for the head count as I must for the war council. Tonight it's going to swell to millions. They manage to blurt out their diatribe to tell each other the simple-minded necessities. Soon, I must do the head count for the war council, bear the phatry parading in front of me, mockingly, saying in their barking ruffian gravy-voiced manner, 'Stepssss dysh wayzzz O Gaaaaallaaaadssss', or `afters yousczzzz O Gaaaalaaadssssh'. How can they have any sense when they're like that? Or catching them trying to get high on Talwadc using the forbidden word 'EXTINCTION'. Only the Droz can use it and besides it only works when he does. Some are placed on jankers and they hate me for that. How can I tell Droz and the war council no one is attempting self-inspiration? They would never believe me!

Did I mention I am also the reluctant leader of the 'lower' M.U.C.S.P.A.T, mammal 'upper' canine special attack team?

'Yes you have once or twice', let me think it was some where near Pittsburgh after the dogs trial'.

We're not good enough due to our size to be 'upper', only 'lower', so really the acronym would be M.L.S.P.A.T, 'mulspat'. Sounds deficient.

'It is deficient, deficient in its leader little one'.

Ironically, the more ubiquitous and small size the species, the lower the rating, that's probably why the six leggers wouldn't fight. My rating isn't too high, collectively or singular.

'What's size got to do with anything if we're all equal?' I asked the war council when they found it necessary to allocate titelage.

'It has a lot to do with this war, just like it has in

Glashiel the Indifferent. It is the only way to get everyone into the correct legions and utilize them for the war.'

So said Snerters 'high priest of party babble', a 'know-all' from the war council intelligence brigade.

'I thought that was you little one'.

Got a sense of humor; this eavesdropper. Bloggdrott, added boastfully, cozens me with his self-righteousness,

'We are not all the same nor ever can be, so the war armaments on size rules apply'.

I foolishly pressed myself upon them.

'Surely, now we are under the power of Talwadc, we all fight the same fight to get back the same thing, therefore we must be equal'?

The intellectual Bankers of Talwadc had a malapert like me sewn up, later I found myself mysteriously alone with some of them, increasing the power of their argument by surrounding me with a wall of fubsey scaly flesh, grinning at me like a bat sucking crotels through a cheese-grater, eyeing me up for a quick spadgering. Snerters successfully concluded, speaking for his more violent partners.

'Must...! Must we? That is not known to anyone, how do you know such insolences? Glashiel must be returned, where size is everything among the sacred rituals of hunting'. I hailed a grimace hoping to persuade him from pursuing the matter, too many nerves on that topic.

'I meant it as a question', I said, slipping into my unself.

'Bloggers eat little spadgers like you because you're no good to the cause', said Bloggdrott the bandicoot. I recede to a ball of fur on the ground showing myself as truly intimidated. It worked, as the walls of intimidating flesh belligerently retreated and Bloggdrott resumed his monomaniac party-babble for my benefit, placing his gelid trotter around my shoulder.

'You're still not listening little one'.

'Tomorrow, we will all have to fight together in the end, big or small. We must do what is best for everyone, not worry with titelage and function or who is better than whom!

After all, the Armadillo contingency are grossly underrated and can do far more than the estimations of the war council, we don't say anything'. I am silent, giving Bloggers only a gecko nod of approval, an affirmative multi nod, my thoughts are mine, well

almost. Rubbish! The Armadillos are useless, only good for whiffing out, nothing more! Armadillos have to be spattled onto their backs to get eaten, if you would ever want to, closer to the Midgard Snake, supposed to live at the bottom of the world, is the Armadillo. Been around a long time, it shows. The nit-witted fubsys retreated, leaving me once more alone to consider their words.

'Did you consider their words little one?'

They can say what they like; I have my plan and my personal motto for this war, 'Don't fight, run away, live to build another dray', no heroics for me! Surrounded by this sea of raving, foaming eye-beacons of death, believe me it's best to divagate from this madness called Talwadc. Those hopeful expectant eyes, savage eyes, eyes that could cut you up, eyes that have already been cut up, that have no feeling, eyes that flashed indifference at death, eyes attached to teeth, claw, beak and bone, assembled here in their millions and still a million more eyes pouring into this canyon of death. Believe me it's best I have enough sense to want out O' here. Wait though, yes, more sequacious sapprophillia from Drozzler.

'But you're not listening are you little one'.

I've listened to every word O Glashiel, for the last six nights, what do you expect of me? Don't answer. 'What I don't want any more rasorial madness of his Talwadian banter in my noodle'.

'You must be ready'.

Exactly! I still don't understand why the voice Glashiel doesn't or hasn't told the war council about my defections. It's gnawing at me like a beaver on a chainmail fence. More from the Droz.

'Tomorrow Sun-up the main attack will begin in the great east beyond the sky that even I cannot see over, the Battle of Talwadc shall follow the labors of the Sun to its end. So be ready for the big push lads! The pelted maddened mobsters shout out, 'Ready we are, ready we are'. Big push, more like big kill, as happiness at the sound of the dinner gong lights up the faces of the larger meat eaters, their imaginations drenched in puddles of blood like a butcher's window. I'm no meat eater, disgusting habit! I think it was what started all this in the first place. Sorry, I interrupted the Droz,

'By the end of the war, no N'ihdogg shall remain alive and we shall have dominion over the world.' War of Talwadc rule # one, 'If we fail, leave no survivors' outside Ragnarok'. More roars from the mobsters, 'Ragnarok, Ragnarok'. That's the other sound bite the meat eaters like, lots of ideologues that ensure the fresh meat supply keeps coming. Thraesvelg meat dream dog teams in their millions, 'They who sit at the end of the sky', what Glashiel the Indifferent appointed to them, covering the earth till the end of the horizon, and then some! More grand myth! I call them corpse-swallowing, salivating, edacious idiots, supposed to be 'higher' in Glashiel, purifiers of the earth, more grand myth. They were bad enough before this rebellion, now they have turned into sycophantic snarlers with Talwadc in their noodles. Reiterating words like, 'Ragnarok' as though they completely understand it and have compelled some thought to the matter. Very few know what it means, they just shout it as a 'hurrah' word, a word that, like magic, for some brings meat.

'What does it mean then little one'.

'I don't know O Glashiel, I don't use it! Do you know?' Only silence from that interfering imposter. It doesn't know, or isn't saying. It's just another hand-me-down 'hurrah word', direct from lob logic central. I asked Drozzers what it means, he said it wasn't for anyone to know, secret war measures act. He doesn't know or not saying. The Bovine Buffalo bore speaks before the expectant eyes of Talwadc the crazed.

'After the labor of the sun ceases, this next rising from the place that none but the birds can see, the Battle of Talwadc will be over, we shall return to our own stomping grounds of Glashiel.' Drozzers pauses in the silence of the canyon as the wind came up hard, blowing the pelts of the creatures into tufts as dust in spinning funnels race through the crowd of creatures.

'If we should falter and the Battle of Talwadc fail, then it is because Glashiel will not be driven mercilessly to the place called extinction'.

More rasorial micturating, nibbling and scratching. Caught unawares I hang on, moderately drooling, yet possessed, my noodle goes, 'sproynge' as the monophonic ampiclexic mongering of Drozzler is playing muse to me.

Let Talwadc enter our voices, since we are now the,

'Striker that destroys', Now we destroy the N'ihdogg, now we destroy the N'ihdogg, now we destroy the N'ihdogg...

The crowd roars out, 'N'ihdogg, N'ihdogg, N'ihdogg'. That's the war anthem, become very popular, simplicity itself. Drozzler casts more of his cantrip into my noodle as I swim in the delirium of Talwadc.

'Now we know of 'Death', without a true future of the days of Glashiel, it is better that we of the wild side are not daunted, so we may go from this world forever in the glory of our creation. Talwadc has given us the N'ihdogg art of speech and thought and with this great power, take back the worlds taken from us, so the greatness of the wild side will reign supreme across the world of the wild side'.

Wonderful stuff, really moving, the legions of pelts to go to destruction by it all, scuffling, sniffing, scumbering, micturating in their camerine mania. Not much noodle power out there tonight. Besides: what is he really saying? Memory and thought: not as sharp as it could be, speech of tongues neither is that, ancient drivel that sends you nuts or nutting listening to it, slow too! Look at the moon stop thinking of the middle ground, it is not hear yet.

You should see the pelters when the moons out, they really howl. Like tonight the moon burnt bright for these four nights, now it wanes.

'Like you little one, you wax eloquent to wane away from here'.

"Tell me Glashiel, can they now defy your indifference?"

Only more indifferent silence. Drozzers raises his head to the sky to acknowledge his dominion over them, bellowing out like the sacred crazed bovine pontiff he really is.

'In the name of Talwadc': repeating the line one, two, three times. Another great roar of cries fly up into the air as those tooth-eyed beacons howled, growled, and hailed that bloody name throughout the valley, filling me with certain dread. Birds of every kind psittaceously pass up the salutation among the backseat mobsters at the other end of the canyon. 'Talwadyaa, awk, talwadyaa', they screech, as they wing their way among the distant assembly, announcing repetitiously the calling to death and destruction. 'Cos Droz can't use the

loudhailer, so Sinir the Ape holds one up to his hooter so he can join in the thronging cacophony. Below them the scratching, nibbling, pooping, micturating pelted murine mobsters drive themselves into camerine frenzy. I hang on dribbling and quaking, their roars fill the canyon, my gaze holds strange - shapes of omen as they dance in the fading dusty sunbeams, with this terrible rage of this mighty Talwadc on their side. 'In the name of Talwadc, in the name of...' It's filling me with dread and apprehension, my heart beating fast in its cage, lowering my ears to the full 'non pike out ' and then some, blocking out that clamorous racket. Burzelsmertz, another Armadillo twin to Snerters, looking like a fubsey nubbins concertina, he has an eating disorder, secondary chief of mammal reptile armaments division, also representative to the war council, distinguished at the battle of: 'Little happy Town Texas', looked at me grinning and grimacing. I have my ears closed. Ear closure is seen as 'none piking out', refusal to accept the Mighty Talwadc must be a defective itinerant and desertion. He's trying to line me up for a spadger comestible, nothing more. They're not messing around, some defector ground hogs, wishing to go home and defy Talwadc, were taken out this morning and summarily stripped to the bone. I stare back at Berzelsmertz in myself made silence, riding out those accusatorial squinnies that flashed like red orbs in the decline of the day. I can't help it, I have sensitive ears and the bellowing of several million animals can be a deafening din.

'My poor little pig'!

I would have to do more than a modest ear lowering to justify my defection and consequent disposal to the corpse swallows. I am not indispensable, no one is, 'cept Drozzler, and Mannan'an the: 'Pope of the Oceans'. Whomever that may be I've never met him.

'You can't because he lives in the Seas'. I'm on the war council, considered important enough for strategic development, but I don't push it!

'Only because you can count little one'.

Now the campaign is on, the blood will really began to be spilt; with a twenty four hour world siege and according to the Droz it's already began in the 'far east'. Now in the near west I'm very certain about my fighting role in the entire operation, I only

have the body weight of a bee's wing,
'And a faint heart eh little one'?
 'Relatively speaking Glashiel, it's not as though I could
 throw my weight about, so I'm not fighting'.
'Join the masses if you want to survive'.
 Unlike many campaigners who have the right equipment to
 deliver death and survive, the most I could do is inflict severe
 lacerations, really, and I don't like the taste of blood.
'There are some who are smaller than you'.
 'Yes, they like it, they like the taste of blood, and want
 to fight!'

'Because they are filled with nobleness'.
 'Tomorrow they will be filled with noble death'
 I'm different from the rest, I don't have brown eyes like most
 squirrels, mine are blue.
*'You are different from the rest little one, you will not
 fight, blue eyes mean nothing to me'.*
'I mean something to me O Glashiel'.
 Here, among my kind I stand out like a boil on a badger's bum,
 unable to escape notice, too many witnesses to my every deed.
 Apart from this I'm ahead of this lot, in as much as I keep quiet
 and hold on to my plan to leave them to their folly... when the
 right time comes.
'It comes soon little one?'
 'Yeah, please don't tell the war council about it...
 please... Glashiel?'
 No reply. I hate the power of Talwadc. It has stupefied everyone
 with its cacadoxy, guiding them to these meeting grounds,
 chewing everything to shreds, making creatures hopping mad
 with revenge; creatures that once were not at all manic now kill
 in its name and like wreaking destruction and death.
'Yes you did my little fantod'.
 After Drozzler had finished his boring monologue, the roars
 went up from the mob. They scurried about ripping, nibbling,
 biting the bushes and trees, devastating the canyon, digging and
 scratching, generally acting out its madness and sharpening their
 hatchets. Is that any way to behave? Law of Talwadc # three,
 'never forget where you buried the hatchet'. They don't have real
 hatchets, like the Apes. It's a war armaments motto for
 whatever Glashiel gave you at birth, claws, teeth, beak. All very

potent propaganda and blood curdling stuff, as the mobsters tell each other,

'Not forget hatchet bury'.

Can anything be of worth, when such mindlessness covers the face of the earth? I ask you, I asked the One Perfect Master who taught me everything except where I shall find the body of the Dharma of the middle ground.

'There', he said 'You shall be a happy Ratatosk'. In the evenings, at Blazing Norton he told me stories. I tell you, solloqial self, that place was calm and full of hope.

'For it is with great cunning that we assume the name of the world', the O.P.M told me. The mobsters will all die as a consequence of such an assumption of this mad dream. I keep saying, 'No this cannot be, I shall not assume this name called Talwadc in the name of the new world', as I open my eyes I realize I am standing on the very edge of an Apocalypse, the voice of Glashiel whispering in my noodle,

'Yes, yes, yes it is, it is, it is...'

Thanks to the glory of the hazelnut, I learnt Sapient Arts from my One Perfect Master.

'So you keep telling me little one. I would love to speak to him and tell him what you are planning, would he be proud of your opting out of the fight'?

'You shall never know him, he is contrary to you'.

'Are you so sure'?

As I move through these populous of mutual admirers I get to know what they really want; what most soldiers want, survive the war, end it quickly in their favor and get on with the old ways of Glashiel. Back to the old ways of more endless bum sniffing and corpse swallowing, to others, more evolutionary antics in the hope of not going into extinction, like the Midgard Lizards the N'ihdogg calls Dinosaurs. How can we hope to become evolved when we are perpetually driven by evolution, evolution for what, evolution to what? Evolution from what? Evolution to this law of extinction has been around forever, there are no guarantees to assure survival in the evolutionary meat game. Did I mention, O solloqial self, speaking of evolution the Apes have devolved now they have guns, knives, grenades, incendiaries to do their butchery; also radios, television sets, computers to watch, wait, listen and prey on the

hated N'ihdogg world. Stranger stuff there cannot be, since the beginning of the world and the unleashing of Talwadc.

'Why don't you change the subject? This is all quite disturbing this monologue o the monotonous, evolution: it just is, that is the way it is - or nothing!'

Tonight: I go among them for the noggin count, to listen to what they are braying, hissing, bleating and growling - much bellyaching I can tell you. Like, 'did he the killing of the N'ihdoggs, or, 'no, it he who did the killing o the N'ihdogg', or, 'I who did the killing o the N'ihdogg'. If an argument breaks out big eagle or one of his cohorts gives them a quick aerial excursion, a 'fear stunt' it's called. Trouble is Drozzler doesn't realize the speech of the Talwadians cannot conjugate their verbs - he's too busy with the applause of his frenzied co-horts to know his army sounds like a bunch of nupsons. Primitive behavior equals primitive speech. That's my rule of Talwadc, unnumbered.

'Yes, but they're perfect for what you call murder.'

Foolishly, when I first came among them I questioned the war council,

'Why should the N'ihdogg be any different from any other influences we are made to endure? If that is the way for things to be, who are we to rebel against the ways of Glashiel. are they not animals too?' Not a good way to get brownie points, they flew at me with vicious ripostes, telling me,

'It is not the way to be, for all to be sent into Guggunnigggap together.' Silence fell upon me in the staring accusatorial squinnies of the phatry, I felt the need to drop the entire affair: my arguments 'Were no longer required', Drozzler told me. I don't care - they can go over Birkerot.

'What do you think little one?'

'What do you care, Glashiel the Indifferent?'

'I wish you to survive little one, I don't want you to come to me, but remember I am indifferent.'

'Thanks a lot, that's why us animals cannot cry, we are likened to you after all your indifference!'

'Finally, you're learning.'

'Not from you.'

So far during the campaign, I have managed to get away with no killing and limited destruction. This was forbidden by the

Master, where the middle ground cannot wander. Much to the displeasure of the dogs, and constant badgering by the Badgers, who bombard me with questions, it cannot last.

'I told you that'.

One female badger called Mlnnny constantly wants to know when I will, 'Into the fray come O friend?' I tell her, 'Soon I will the N'ihdogg kill', she adding as is her way, 'You the know what must you do?' She can say that again, of course I don't. I return the camaraderie telling her. 'Not the know what I do the must, O Sisdrosz, but of the know what you do the must'. She leaves me irritated, shaking her nubbins of a tail.

Drozzler listens to me but most think I'm wrong for the job. Only by going on these raids, and much to my displeasure, making success after success, becoming Tree Rat spy the Infamous of countless conquests; have I managed to survive. I get to do this 'cos I'm the only one that can count and write. Mostly it has allowed me to follow the Master's wish. Really my sorties are concerned with my opportunities for escape, otherwise I'd have to be out there with the rest of them covered in blood and shame!

'What a thin thread you hang by O little one'?

'Yes I know, most hang by no thread at all'.

There is no reply from this eavesdropper, the silence nibbling away at me. I know it wants me to capitulate to the cause. Right now with the big day coming, I will be expected to give it my 'all', no more 'dossing about', as Bloggdrott puts it.

'No more posing the killer as I put it'.

'Thank you so much Glashiel, who kills all the time'. Therefore my only wish is to run, something I'm very good at,

'You the know what must you do little one'.

'Yes I do, escape intact, find the peaceful place called, 'the Dharma of the middle ground'. I have searched for it, I have never found it'.

Most of the Grand Canyon is a stinking kinabra of animals, so I know it's not here, though every day I search for it. Soon I will continue my search'.

'You speak too much to yourself little one'.

'I'm not speaking to you Glasheil, for sure!'.

Right now I must do my duties and appear, 'cause driven and chauvinistic' to the war council, so I stare expectantly ready to

kill, into the mephitic mobsters' eyes, it is a lie. Only through this voice do I stay myself.

'And who might that be little one'

'It is who I am not'.

Ignore the sarcasm, listen there is more out there tonight. Terrible things are roaming abroad, nature forbidden, wickedness, cunning, death and destruction, worlds in collision, animals free from the confines of nature. Chained and still chained by human greed, relentless destruction, that shall garbage the world. I should change the subject.

'Yes, do that why don't you'.

'Do you smell something?'

'I smell only you little one'.

Large numbers of animals scumbering their crotels, friants, sparaints, wederrobes, waggyings, and fumets everywhere have brought terrible sanitary problems to the canyon, making my eyes fair water when I am in the middle of this mephitic camaraderie of turds. Ask some simple questions, hold your breath and nose, and count, though some don't like my disdain, either for them or for the mess they have to endure, calling me out and ridiculing me as a 'softie'. Fortunately I have a vehicular scouter to carry me through this paggle of anima-demos mobilus madness. An old female kangaroo, zoo escapee, carries me in her pouch when I count the multitudes, so it's not me who is turd strewn. Nevertheless the squelching through the animals turds makes me queasy. Not forgetting that bouncing up and down, trying to get a fix on a million bodies, surrounded by countless nates and kakopyges all shapes and sizes, while splattered and splashed, sometimes downright micturated or scumbered on by the larger ungulate bovine relatives of Drozzler, isn't easy. I'm getting quicker at inspecting the mobsters, getting a body count from the habitat estrangement deaths, get this, going into the caves to count bats, requesting the lower murine MUCSPATS to break their ground cover for a quick count, I do it by the square meter, trying to get the meat eaters to listen up. This isn't an envious job.

'Saving your neck little one'!

'I was getting to that' I'm saving my neck nothing more! Does that make you feel better Glashiel?

Too bad you're not more indifferent, then I could have some

peace! ´

*'There can be no peace now Violentur has been
proclaimed, besides I thought you weren't speaking to me'?*

Drozzler, on the other hand, hadn't been reluctant to take on his role of leading the animals, no doubt because of all those perks he gets 'cos he's a God. He also stays to the high ground and up wind as much as possible, he's a turd hater.

'Just like you eh, eh, little one'?

Apparently he's real important and totally indispensable. One like him hasn't been born for some time.

*'One like him has not been born since the creamo's
came to America little one'.*

Another great myth no doubt, he's the White Bull of Calypso, worshiped before and by some N'ihdogg called Moses, though the creamo N'ihdoggs deny it. I remember when Drozzler was born; he was on all the TV's throughout America, real popular with the Indians. He's been famous ever since he was a nipper has Drozzers. Being white made him the big long-awaited Tatonka, not for sacrifice. The N'ihdoggs God had sickened of burnt offerings; unless the world is now it's altar. Drozzler's different, before he went banshee the N'ihdogg Lakota used him, reading his turds, invoking their stories of the old stomping grounds, they didn't see this Talwadc coming, 'cos it was all quite literally bullshit.

'Tut, tut, tut little one what will the Master say'?

The Master told me the N'ihdoggs had left the age of religion and myth and entered the age of the machine, like the Male N'ihdogg succeeded the Female N'ihdogg in religious supremacy. He told me: 'Belief, they believe in anything at all, know nothing', we know nothing, before wisdom shall begin´.

*'I know, I saw you sitting there in Blazing Norton,
nodding away while the old fool ranted. How you wander away
into your half crazed world of neither animal or N'ihdogg.
Ratatosk, will you never know what you are?'´*

I shall never know because you have made it so, O' Glashiel. In the future; if we win, I shall speak no more of the Master if I am to have a new Master, the miraculous Bull-Footed God Drozzler who has come from his promised 'birth' to triumph over Extinction´.

His fame is from the western earth leader of Talwadc America a

large stampeder, the right man for the job, his color, white a powerful color, pure, and politically-correct medicine. So he only comes to announce the possible end of the world. A kind of nostrabovus. The Red man of this land is not spared, one way or the other they would have killed all the animals, it was only a matter of more of them before all Drozzers and the rest of us would be eaten. Talwadc doesn't care if they understand the law of the wild side. Last night some Red men and women tried to calm Drozzler and the mobsters, standing before the head of the column, uttering something about, 'understanding', were ripped to death and consumed by the dogs. Right now Droz is enjoying a unique privilege, due to his whiteness, which, under Glashiel is only attributed to Big Eagle or others of noble Raptor sentience, like 'Arkiopetrocks', the Golden Eagle, top of the war council Air Armaments, big swank. Five vowels in the name, that's tops; more vowels than in any other of the names out there, even Drozzler.

'His name isn't really Drozzler, its Atabiriuae, is that enough vowels'.

'Wow! seven, that's put him really up there eh Glashiel, one for every day of the week?

'Not really, if he had an 'o' he'd be up there with the N'ihdogg God of the week.'

Drozzler has been, 'expected'. He was waiting somewhere in Glashiel to be born for this day, so he's real important. Drozzler is a Born-again God, so he gets it all. Like I said.

'Yes you have mentioned it once or twice'.

Some animals out there are so rare they tell me they were worth more than a N'ihdogg by other N'ihdoggs. These decimated few had suffered most in the last two hundred years, reducing Drozzler's kind to a mere several thousand genetic doomy remnant. That, no doubt, gives them this superiority and their tragic personalities. Speaking of which, Drozzler worries about the fact he was born for Talwadc, that he's white, the western division leader and a worrier is Drozzers, though no one sees him bled in fear, as he is constantly reminding himself of the outcome of the war.

'What makes you so sure'?

'Unless you tell him: O Glashiel the sublime'.

'Me, tell him, I speak only to you, I am indifferent'.

'Sure you are, and I'm a Hedgehog!'

I watch Drozzer's face, when he isn't talking to the Pope of the Oceans, cetaceous Mannan'an. It is impaled anxiety and anticipation full of gloom and doom. All the genetic doomers are like Droz - a gloomy lot. I don't know why! The animals declared the Droz 'Emperor God' tonight. Emperor for a night and day, such a high title. I don't know how I can stand him,

'Survival, little one'?

Doesn't he know that the war will end tomorrow? If we win, for those left alive are supposed to go back to Glashiel, and under Glashiel we don't have Emperors, right? If we are going to die tomorrow as I suspect, except me, why do they need a dead Emperor, where in death there are none? Is that not so my indifferent ratty voice?

'My indifference say's it must be so'.

There you go, either way, there's no point of being Emperor, besides it's getting too close to the N'ihdogg. Didn't matter: the war council was telling the mass of leporine snouts how Drozzler's credentials were perfect for the running of the western operation. He had the terrestrial knowledge of the area, was large, held a great death potential, especially with the newly added zeal of Talwadc, and though he might lack the strategic experience to deploy the division effectively, he has herd management, putting him over the top. Not forgetting the whitey factor, the whitey part was really everything. Why is it such important decisions are always established upon such arbitrary principles? For me, Drozzler possesses the most important factor of all...

'Çomo'?

He can talk to Talwadc Central main control of the battle brain Mannan'an. I watch him as the voice he gets in his Bovine brain makes him drift off from the rest of us,

'It's a very powerful form of you, is it not O Glashiel?'

'Hmmmm, did you say something little one'?

Ah well, it matters not. Drozzer's face gets screwed up like a nupson, his eyes roll back like fresh peeled onions into his noggin' as he twiddles away somewhere in gloomyville and I know he's telestically communicating to Mannan'an, a.k.a. Pope of the Oceans. I stay close to him when this happens.

'You know too much little clever one, that noodle will land you in it, just see'!

I can't be in it any more than I am Glashers'.

Amazingly this war began when Mannan'an the Blue whale, 'Pope 'O' the Oceans of Cetaceous', Drozzler calls him, genus Balaenoptera Physalus I know him as. It was he who first called the song of Talwadc to our attention. We knew the time was up for us to live any more with the N'ihdoggs, due to our cramped living conditions and personal sacrifices. It was getting harder and harder to find a tree to build drays, find food, so he got all this going. Talwadc, it's nothing but a great rumbling belly for the homeless. Anyway, when it happened some of us were real glad! Get this, Mannan'an's bellowing from the depths of the oceans connected every living wild thing together to make all this possible, he is no doubt responsible for this voice in my noodle. Only the wild sided heard this deep murmur of the fishes, no domestic pet ponces of the N'ihdogg heard it, not even the domestic animals they swallow as comestibles. When the, 'calling' happened to me, I first heard five scream's. This mysterious scream called out so piteously for the last time to be saved and my body ran in quivering waves of frozen fear. I recognized it instantly, the ancient family death scream of the Ratatosks, every animal has one. Other animals in my neighborhood recognized their own ancient death scream, so that soon among the growing groups of Talwadian draftees it became known as, 'The Scream of the fishes and no loaves'. I was on one of my twigs in Blazing Norton stashing something away at the time - my nature forbids me telling you what it was, or where I stashed it.

'It matters not silly Ratatosk'

It caught me off guard completely, making me almost fall from my branch. That very same day, animal neighbor enemies all born this year suddenly became friendly, gave up their usual habits of strike, kill, eat, sleep & scumber. Instead they took on born-again attitudes and generally acted real nice to each other, communicating in this new way. It was all new and strange to me, after a period of self-imposed silence since leaving the Master,

'Not him again''

I was confronted suddenly with speech from my neighbors' kids

telling me to join up. My days were upset to say the least, I had to think fast.

'You had to get younger'. Exactly, I had to become one of the newborn, and I had to speak broken verbiage from my silence to them,

'Cos you can't keep your nuthole shut'?

I had to offer my services to the war council, or else I would quickly die.

'You had to eat nuts and climb trees at the same time'.

'Exactly, O Glashiel'.

'Hmm, umm please continue'.

All my neighbors thought it wasn't possible; what we were hearing could not be true. Stories of the past were never mentioned, before they lived only in the action of Glashiel.

'That is correct'.

Afterward, the new Gospel, according to the Pope of the Ocean was declared true, this universal divagation for revenge began and here we all are in the funnel of Talwadc! Where was I? Ah yes, back to Drozzler.

'Being a God means you have to die, so you can become a hero', I told him once, when he confided in me and I in him.

'Cept you told him nothing'!

'It's Mannan'an's big idea to have this war. There must be other ways, we don't have to fight'!

Before this uprising, only the Elephants and the apes knew of death in Glashiel. Now we all know, and there is some genuine fear in the animals regarding the big event tomorrow.

'You're no different'

'I am completely different'.

'You're just as scared as the rest of them; besides who's to know some don't plan the same thing'?

'You should know, you're the one who can take up residence in others' noodles. Are there others who wish to leave O Glashiel?' Silence again. In the faces of the multitudes I see the fear of the bloodletting, when they are not intoxicated by the rasorial urges and rages of Talwadc. I am sure in the fever pitch of the big battle they're not loathing, Talwadc the all-consuming will transform them into its raging bliss of mindless scrappiness. Earlier a scrutinizing on my daily report about war statistics was

leveled at me by the war council. It left Drozzler not entirely trusting in me, wanting to know how I learnt sapient arts, like counting. I wimble out of it telling him how it must be the power of Talwadc,

'Perhaps every division has someone like me to count and write things down.' I dare not tell him the truth. Drozzler said he was going to ask the Mannan'an if there are others like me. I have lied to the war council, meaning death and the tooth of the dog leviners are waiting.

'For theirs is the kingdom to come, little one'.

The next to last dusk patrol recently returned from a killing expedition, desolating a local town of life, emptying it of comestibles. Finding their helpless victims sitting down to the evening meal it's easy to kill them. War of Talwadc rule # twelve: 'N'ihdoggs easier to kill sitting, than standing'. I take credit for that, it pleased the war council and I was forgiven for a minor infraction.

'So you offer up ideas for killing instead'?

Rule # thirteen is: 'ripping them to shreds'. Ronkers, my sergeant, briefed me when they came back from the skirmish tonight. No N'ihdogg got out alive, casualties low, too bad. Soon I must escape.

These are the days that heaven is falling
The hour when Earth's foundation fled
Followed their military calling
Took their wages and are dead.

Catullus.

Tired out by all the party invectives and rituals, I go out among the phatry once more, ordered by the war council to have a count, have a squelch about, not that sixty eight hundred billion means anything to them.

'You made the suggestion little one!'

'I know, I have good reason for these absurdities'
So instead of counting I pretend, then take a guess. Announcing the new figure to the murines cheers them up, especially the more militant of us, like the experimental animals, escapees from the N'ihdogg test labs. Really a savage lot, they really enjoy it all, the blood, the screams, the horror and the carnal savaging. Ironically when they come back from the battles, they seem forlorn, just like the genetic doomers. It's up to me to give them commendations for savagery and generally bloat their heroic endeavors. Big talks from the war council to the multitudes don't happen every day. Like tonight - it's all in preparation for tomorrow. The escapee chimpanzees have taken to using guns seem the worst off from the N'ihdogg killing fields. Murder has changed them. I hate guns, so seeing them turn their revolvers and ouzzies on the N'ihdoggs is not only life gone mad, as they wave them madly around, hitting anything, killing everything. It's all wrong. The eyes of the N'ihdoggs staring wild in bewildered astonishment when we burst in on them, opening fire in a blaze of horror. They have qualities of the N'ihdoggs, have the Apes, and they're teaching other potentially manual dexterous animals the same techniques in the use of guns, knives, and grenades. This dangerous booty, attached to the bodies of the animals, renders them living bombs. The pull cords on the grenades hang down ready, available to the itinerant's mouth upon contact with the enemy! Thousands of Grenade Carrier Tortoise left this morning to be in position for tomorrow's fight, something for the fanatical among

us. The birds as well, have given new meaning to flight with their grenade bombs, though they're not going to blow themselves to smithereens! They just let go at a hundred feet or so and kaboom! Still all this is not without fatalities and mortalities, ground mistakes happen, explosions occur, bodyparts, chunky red jellied mattoid matter wobbles by air, with the corpse swallows in a frantic scrum, eyes ahoy to catch pieces of the dead and dying, like quarterback's chasing the ball, hoping for a chow down. The Apes have been busy all day, and no doubt all night, so now hundreds of campaigners are wearing hand grenades and mortar shells. Discharged from such acts of bravery, due to my size, I avoid them as much as I can.

'That's why you're called 'lower' mucspater'.

'Thank you for that clarification O Glashiel.'

A fact regarding these loyal campaigners: they have shown new life in the face of certain death, calling death, 'a greatly underestimated fate'. That's straight from the war manual of Talwadc # twenty six. One escapee experimental group told me how they were used by the N'ihdoggs to determine the ill effect of cosmetics, soap, and toothpaste so as not to contaminate the precious N'ihdoggs. Cruel tests without care for them, leaving the dying lonely and bloodied in filthy cages, or abandoned only to die. Just so some N'ihdogg woman wouldn't break out in spots or severe acne!

'What's the wrong with spots?' said a young, M.U.C.S.P.A.T lad with a streak of sycotic encrustations breaking out all over his face and bum. I can't blame them, I tell myself, though I don't like what I witness. Examine the facts for yourself, for ages us animals have been mistreated by the N'ihdoggs, crowded into conservation territories, then evicted and moved somewhere else, only to die of stress and disease. Smaller terrestrials like me have always moved over, gone to a new tree-wood, but for the Drozzlers of the world it hasn't been that easy.

'So you think it's worth fighting after all ? '

'No O Glashiel, I'm merely considering the facts, not justifying them'.

'They need not justice, 'cept Violentur'.

'It has no place, it is Talion and death'.

Now the sun has left the sky. The mulspat boys have disappeared in their millions, burying themselves into the desert sand so as not to get picked off by the meat eaters. Now the nocturnal lads take over, as life-threatening soudine squeaks and last gasp noises do happen in the dead of night. The night can hide a thousand crimes. I hear them, tomorrow there will be missing campaigners, mainly door knob mice. On the open sand in the dark, well it's asking to get yourself eaten if you're a marmot, gopher or ground squirrel. They're day lads; don't mess with them when they're filled with Talwadc, because when they swarm over their victim, nibbling and biting away, they're comparable to a land-based piranha! So this meeting in the Valley of the Dead is not a great mutual admiration society. On the contrary a lot of opportunists are taking advantage of an easy meal. It made some disheartened and they had shown disloyalty and couldn't be trusted, like I mentioned. Yet all had come because of Talwadc, only to be delivered to some hungry jaws. So patrolling security parties for the slumbering itinerants have become a priority. Upon consideration, I am sure not all come freely.

'Think again little one'.

Most perfect Master where are you, now that I really need you as I walk through this tenebrous landscape of death? Why did you send me back to the woods to find the middle ground? Why couldn't I live with you? I have looked everywhere for it, I have have nothing left but to survive to discover the meaning of the middle ground. Why did I have to fall from such a place to be changed forever? Now not even the body of the Dharma exists, only the emaciated body of the Gallad, and the millions of strange bodies of this malison of angry campaigners! What will happen to us all? Bitterly, I turn my transporter kangaroo around a bluff of rocks at one corner of the canyon. Some new creatures arriving; I have never seen anything like it before. Terribly large with strange shapes, coming from places far away heading to this calling ground. On the Apes' radios and TVs other N'ihdogg stomping grounds called London, Paris, Rome, Athens are inundated by millions of Talwadc, wreaking destruction and death - all falling to fire and destruction, falling, falling, unreal, unimaginable. Drozzler told me reports from Talwadc central. He'd been in telastica to the Pope O' the

Oceans – apparently whole N'ihdogg communications networks chewed to ribbons, making N'ihdogg life on the information highway impossible. Hundreds of forgotten ex-pet alligators have started to move up from the sewers of major cities here in America, devouring and killing. Drozzers said a secret letter to the war council was simply, 'V'. Everyone nodded knowingly when they heard this, accompanied with an 'Oooooo'. So their wild side never left them, as the N'ihdogg alligators were closer to the Serpent Ophion, was the party line of the War Council. The local wild horses came in again from far and wide, giving us instructions for food and water, outlining the area of N'ihdogg grounds, even going on death operations tonight. This year they will avoid the N'ihdoggs roundup, and being shipped away for Dom pet food. The Uniramia divisions of seabirds join us in their millions, the moon flickering in the night sky with the shadow of their malison. Areas laid out around the Canyon have become stuffed full with them, since they have waited at sea for this occasion. The gulls were brought under command, finally obeying the war council since they had been piecemeal about efforts. Too many garbage dumps for them to get a free feed. Like the Kamikaze boys, look at the Sun for the last time and away you go in the name of Talwadc to die. Millions upon millions of Gulls, Boobies, Albatross, Petrel, Shanks are out there tonight, filling this Canyon. A flock of Albatross were laughing openly, fiddling with each other's beaks like they do, talking about an ariel bombardment they had made on a large group of hunters in some part of the outback near North Carolina, apparently lapidating several hundred weight of large stones on their heads killing all, stone dead so to speak. Deadly stuff when you're not expecting it. In fact the crowd had looked up in sentimental adulations to see them, before the wall of rock rained down. I love the self-justified arguments that they propound to each other through Talwadc's influence, as they wag their heads and clap beaks. I stopped to share the ipsidixitist's party rhetoric.

'Exhausted from the endless harassment of extinction, we, birds of the oceans, will attack the N'ihdoggs in our millions'. There is more beak-clapping and self - adulation.

'Think about it, after coming through trial of evolution to be snubbed out without regard through N'ihdogg stupidity and

greed. What is left for us when we have to live like this? What are months of rebellion, death, hunger? For us who only know the wild side'.

Just the kind of stuff that fills Drozzler and the war council with fresh zeal and relish. There was something more than the wild side in the eyes that I saw out there tonight. Resolved in their cause, death held no shadow of fear for the Birds. They had gone over from such things, loss of fear came with loss of habitat to the N'ihdoggs, since they had come to Talwadc from the time of the Dinosaurs. They are closer to the sky and therefore nearer to Glashiel. Who's going to argue with that, I wasn't! Talwadc had a lot of influence on the Uniramia, of course they had already taken the skies back from the N'ihdogg, so pomposity wasn't absent, especially from the mythic majestic Albatross.

'We birds of the air and the great blue skies knew there was nowhere to roam free, except barren desolate places where no one can live. We knew there were little comestibles in the sea. We were first to hear the great calling of Mannan'an as we flew over the sea, so dutifully we came. He told us that after three and a half billion years the wild side would disappear forever, unless we fight back'.

Modest, are our feathered friends, very loyal, very proud, unlike the ground lot, running around in their mess, steaming up hill and dale. Instead, the Uniramia boys just float about up there without a care in the world. If there was only one who felt like me and would fly me out of here! It sickens me to listen as I pose for them in admiring stances, pretending to feel the worth of their rhetoric and rubbishy righteousness, and worse, ducking their fishy breath in this whitewashed viscid place. The Albatross of the sea told me this, no doubt still looking for revenge on that ancient Mariner.

'The N'ihdoggs rituals have no connection to the real world, though they think so, in our behavior we're driven by the seasons, instinct, hunger, procreation, and our behavior was simple for these necessary actions, we live in all things mutually because we are in the circle of Glashiel and now the song of Talwadc. I know - I have flown around and listened to the N'ihdogg'.

'The N'ihdogg works for money, to have power over

other N'ihdoggs, making them greedy and destructive'. A youthful Great Orc of the sea came aggressively forward leaning his rudder of a beak in my face to tell me,

'Whereas the N'ihdoggs have made a real mess of it and have taken away all our fishes so that we don't have anything to eat, so they must die!' So sayeth Yrgrths the Orc.

Adulations of beaks saber rattling applause, not for long as a black headed booby clamored to the forefront to get his party invectives away to the multitudes, but mostly the night air. Fill your boots O winged one.

'Yes...., Glashiel cannot be ignored and we all abide in that'. To the rear of the feathered phatry, more applause from the Boobies and Shanks,

'In their 'freedom', the N'ihdoggs have denied all others theirs; in their rights they have denied themselves any future in Glashiel, never to be broken. I have flown across this land called America; it's all they talk about. Do you know of their beliefs O Gallad? '

It was up to me to respond to this youthful itinerant of Talwadc, I had to think fast. I was in a doze state when the fatal interruption arrived. I blurted out.

'Yes O brusx drux O the skies. As a member of the small nibbler rodentia species I want to know if any of the N'ihdoggs were asked if they want to join this Glashiel, which they call Democracy. This club that is in so much favor, for it was all I ever heard when I lived in my wood at Blazing Norton'. Fooling them, I continued the fabrication.

'It could kill you if you're not careful little one!'

'No interruptions right now, I'm talking to Yrgrths'. Yrgrths is still with me so I tell him more.

'I think they all went to it at birth, but if it is truly democracy, they should be asked first, for it is the first idea of its meaning O brother of Uniramia. They don't, because it is all tricks, lies and deceit for the thing they love the most'. Everyone's face went blank at this remark. I added, 'money - that is all'. That ought to get me of the hook, they seem satisfied. No one asked if Glashiel had asked them to join up and never Talwadc! The rhetoric continued, Yrgrths pompously flapped his way back into the fray of the word bondage.

'There is such human mistakes in this place they call

Democracy, empty ideas with little substance, unlike Glashiel, that is the one and perfect way. The N'ihdoggs do much thrashing about, going nowhere fast, and how pompous they are about themselves, yet they make movement so clumsy, so dirty'. Look who's talking! Talk about self-righteous pomposity, you should see this white viscid landscape I stand in. Ygrths hadn't stopped talking to me.

'Tell O little learned one, what do you know of the N'ihdogg for we know that you are the war council's wise one'. That took me back, Bloggdrott was hovering nearby with his ears twitching, so I had to make it good, otherwise I would surely end up under the scrutiny of the Thraesvelg boys again. 'Look at Sinir the Great Ape, he's only one point six percent different from the N'ihdoggs. How hypocritical and murdering the N'ihdoggs are to each other. The N'ihdoggs hate the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Dachau, but they built them for Sinir and others. Was it right to incarcerate and experiment upon their closest living relatives? How could they ever know the wild side, those who would shake in fear if it ever revealed itself to them? Did the N'ihdogg consider Sinir the Great Ape for heaven?' No one knew what 'heaven' was,

'Neither do you little one'.

I had to tell them. Bloggdrott hovered nearer listening, wanting me to reveal something I am sure, I only told them it was the place for the wretched N'ihdogg, we know as Glashiel.

'The Butchawild and the Dackabut what is that?' asked the young booby, living up to his namesake. Bloggdrott stopped again to listen, his ears fanning the air, twitching like he was expecting an email. I said,

'It was where the N'ihdogg had kept other lesser N'ihdogg' in Zoo's for being less than N'ihdoggs and had decided they should be sent into extinction'. There was a rabble of wings and beak-clapping when I said that, the landscape grew more viscid. Bloggdrott looked at me accusingly stupid. I must be more careful with my blather skate mouth; otherwise I will surely deliver myself to my enemies. The Booby wanted to know why one N'ihdogg could be lesser than another N'ihdogg, I told him to ask Bloggdrott.

After the evening's resting the crowds have gathered in the moonlight to listen for the last time to the war council's rhetoric.

The Apes, persuaded to turn off the radios, reluctantly came forward among the leporine mucspats for the first time. Large massive hands falling around its knees like a bunch of bananas, very stern, very proud, looked very angry. As it got closer I felt intimidated slightly because of my size, but the ranks didn't move around me so I just dug in and waited. Sinir the great ape stepped up and spoke proudly, to the multitudes.

'We were the next in line to evolution under Glashiel the indifferent. No one among you is higher than I, once the ancient N'ihdoggs from their places Greece and Egypt led us around behind them to remind them of their own past, but now these fools of the modern age have forgotten everything us animals taught them and they must die! Not even the great cat of Affric, for it knows that I would rip him apart if he should take my family for his food, is higher than I. Now no one shall ever know which sphere my kind shall evolve. We are agreed in the wild side, because of Glashiel. It seems it is us who will finally show the N'ihdoggs death from the wild side. We must not entreat ourselves with softness when revenge is ours!' The piligerous phatry beneath him let out an erumpent scream as they all flew horizontal into the air amidst a mild fit of nibbling and scratching. The Great ape continued.

'Circuses, zoos, experimental laboratories, anywhere the wild ones get captured, our emissaries have been sent out to free them so they can join us in the fight'.

'We have lost the nature that held the mystery of Glashiel, for surely us animals do not kill unless there is a reason, albeit another beast or the fish of the seas. For every thing there must be a limit to the scope of appetite, not this feast lacking no end. So that it will eat what I eat, take everything that is around me and my habitants of the forest. There are no eyes in this valley of dying stars, this broken jaw of our lost kingdoms that does not know these things of which I speak. This will be the last of meeting. No more words can conclude these hatreds that I hold within me'. There were more furibund roars from the crowd. Bloggdrott raised his gelid trotter affectedly up to them as though we might rouse the sleeping N'ihdoggs. Sinir the gorbelly, continued his goetic hortative speech under that full moonlight. This mad dream is coming true.

'Taken from our homes to live in Zoos, some of us escaped, some left the forest and the trees to be with you, (more hurrahs). I am myself true Affric, we came here at the command of the Song. I hid away with my family in a ship to come to America, before the Brottage sunk them all, so I too may fight in the greatest fight of all. This will shame the N'ihdoggs when they see me with my Affric ear tag'. He held up a flat yellow bar with a number on it #13-95-42 from its dangling position on his ear; as everyone let out a cry of, 'shame'.

'Those that would call me wild, put this in my ear, what do they know of the wild side?' From the multitudes the roar of, 'nothing, nothing, nothing', echoed throughout the place. Again Bloggdrott the Affected raises his trotter to silence them. I could see that Sinir was to continue in his rebel rousing rhetoric, standing there with the yellow tag hanging from him, bereft of freedom that is so rightly his.

'When the N'ihdoggs first came, though we didn't know them, we accepted them. Some of your ancestors sat on their shoulders, some of you came to the edge of the clearings in the evening to see their campfires, to listen to their messages to each other. We felt no threat'.

'Then they came with guns to kill my family and turn us into garbage like everything they make out of the wasteland. They cut off our hands and heads'.

More pullulating cries of: ' we do, we do, we do', interspersed with the rabid nibbling and again Bloggdrott rose to adjudicate the crowds with his gelid trotter. In their stampeding, frenzied foaming of the effects of Sinir and Talwadc, no one paid attention.

'A long time ago, when millions of our beloved leader's ancestors roamed these Great Plains forever, they were Gods, the white Bison is surely a sign of the coming armies of Talwadc'.

Drozzler lowered his great Bison head when he heard Sinir, his eyes were full of the wild torments that raged through his broken spirit. In his own way I knew he saw in the inspiration of Glashiel the vision of his great ancestors hurtling to the dusty earth in their millions. Filling him with incredulity, like something had terribly gone wrong, something inexplicable had shaped their end, but he could not understand.

'So you do have a little allegiance after all' .

We were in for another dreary depressing monologue again, I knew it. He felt compelled to speak. Who could stop him? Certainly not me! The pelted mobsters squelching below loved it, as they readied for another manic thrash around that did not come. Instead they settled down for a bedtime story from the Droz.

'Once, it is true we were many. We roamed from east to west across this great continent, singing the song of Glashiel within the circle of life. Noble and proud beasts who rejoiced at the sight of the sun and the great sky, from every blade of grass and bubbling stream, to all things under Glashiel, even the smallest of us. The great thunder clouds rolled, booming over us, feeding our spirit, so that we are exalted by life and wish for nothing more. Our spirit in death through the rituals of life to be reborn again in our mothers. In a world where you cannot roam wild, who would want to live? That is life to us animals, that is the spirit taken up into rapture, unfettered by bridle or chain, neck collar and other appendages of bondage and ...'. Don't say it again Drozzler please I beseech you, don't say that word again, I've heard it too often tonight.

'Now we are just the few left alive, gathered here, like you, to avenge for the past. Tomorrow when the call goes out for the last time throughout the animal kingdom, to rise up and slay the N'ihdogg be prepared. If we may perish and the N'ihdoggs triumph, then let the planet be totally N'ihdogg, so that we deny them the rest of ourselves forever, and this place shall be their place and they shall perish alone! Only the N'ihdoggs and their dominoes shall remain with the insects who would not join us, because they may be destined to rule in the end if we fail, then everything shall go into extinction'. He said it again! I had sat back half snoozing, now jolted by this surge of Talwadc into my noodle and nothing handy to nibble on. Beneath me the rabble were eating dirt at this point and generally going into the nibbling, micturating rasorial twitch of Talwadc. I think some have a serious problem there, they can't get off it! Quickly I grasp the rock, as I open my eyes to see in the moonlight the eyes of the Talwadc war council upon me. I mimic a twitch and a frothing at the whiskers a bit, they seem

satisfied. I wish he would shut up and let us go to sleep. I had heard these tales in some shape or form from him before. The mass of eyes of the phatry beneath me never seeming to tire of this grandstanding stuff!

'Don't you like it anymore'

` I don't like certain words, the banter of sequaciousness and rabid madness'. Drozzler stopped his address to the multitudes.

Sinir picked up the long tale of old when the ground subsided from the thrashing roust-abouters. I could tell he liked the oratorical fervor that could be whipped up in them. I hung on to my rock expecting more rabidness.

'For extinction is correct according to the Song of Glashiel, when each has had the duration of existence and had failed, not all at once like now, like the N'ihdogg prepares for us!'

The frampold phatry run scared when Sinir said this, this is pure terror what he speaks, and they all feel it! He resumes the sapprophillia.

'My ancestors should have killed them there and then. Now in the name of the past and the present shall we go forward, we who have no fear of anything anymore since the life of Talwadc is in us. Tomorrow we shall win the day and take back this place. So rest dear comrades and prepare for that time of freedom and remember nothing will prevent us from taking the world back for ourselves so we may live again in the peace of the great Glashiel and never again speak of that called 'extinction'. Around him the great multitude of animals shouted in an unearthly harmony their agreement, 'Talwadc, Talwadc, Talwadc', lethiferously spread hectare upon hectare. On this hot moonlit night there is nothing grand at seeing the last of the creatures of Earth dancing this mad dance. Some animals had already suffered terribly because of habitat estrangement; some are not even going to see out the dawn. My smaller Rodentia class nibblers had scurried ahead of the main party and had inexhaustibly mined the main thoroughfare of the canyon with endless hollows, up to twenty feet deep. This unique plan left some animals more courageous, for surely as some were fearless, some younger creatures feared giving up the gift called life and the song called Glashiel.

'When the N'ihdoggs come they will be swallowed by the earth, for even the earth cannot abide them any more', said Ronkers my chief rat. Indeed they would be swallowed, for the ground was ready, waiting to collapse if the heavy equipment of the N'ihdoggs moved in. Now the war-drunk rabble has settled down for rest and the Canyon falls quiet to the cool of the evening. I can think at last without too many interruptions, clean myself up get back myself, what's left of it. Where was I colloquial self? Ah yes, the wild side rabble's. We have nothing among us not wild sided, as I have just experienced with the tallis of the war chant. On the other side there are the dominoes, or the 'domestics', they are the people pets and comestibles, they don't know about the 'wild side' or freedom. They have forgotten: some get fed, while others get eaten. The ones they keep together in large groups seem to know when it is the end and it's time to go into the N'ihdogg factories. The ones that live with the N'ihdoggs are the most hated; they're considered Pet Ponces - that's what I partially am. There was an abattoir just up the lane at Blazing Norton. Most of the day their terrifying screams could be heard echoing across the valley. Terrified Porkers in their thousands, dispatched into the N'ihdogg factory never to walk out alive. Often I would be startled back from the depths of a summers day by the sounds that emanated from that wretched place. It became a place that I had learnt to fear. Dominoes have provided much needed rations to the meat eaters, while the herbivores like me have been attacking other food supplies, granaries, package food warehouses and other storehouses of comestibles. The meat eaters have been getting extravagant tastes since this all began, especially when we destroyed a bacon factory. Some dogs, I believe, temporarily suffused with greed, forgot what they were there for, eating the bacon was only a part of it. The Pooch legions forgot to overpower the N'ihdoggs. They nearly escaped in their automobiles. A good American ending: only finally eaten, instead of shot to death. Really fanatical they are, who wants to argue with them? not I, got a real chip on their shoulder as well. These M.U.C.S.P.A.T lads from the really butcherous N'ihdogg test labs, another case altogether. What's left of some of them doesn't bear thinking about. Part brains cases, parts parts cases, they are really mad, even worse than the

apes! They had to learn new things, and they learnt new things. Not bad when you've only had these mutilated comrades to work with. I have thought about it now that the rabble rousing has died down and sleep is falling across the camp. What about the N'ihdoggs? They're just as bad - it's not so much, 'in their nature', but in their self-serving language that enslaves them and shapes everything for them, especially in the running of their world. Take the word, 'Sapien' for instance, meaning, 'to possess wisdom', there's a pat on the back for you. What about 'Sapiently', for those requiring humor, but 'Sapiential', says it all: 'Containing, exhibiting, or affording wisdom'. Could have fooled me! At the beginning of the campaign I thought it seemed possible to win a small concession from the N'ihdoggs, sure there was enough sympathy-driven N'ihdoggs. People from the S.A.G (save animal grounds), brigade, had shown sympathy, some had gone to prison on our behalf. The 'roamers' of us had gone a bit too berserk and didn't show even their sympathizers any sympathy. Well you would have to have gone around during a raid consisting of thousands of rampaging animals with a sign that said something like, 'I'm a s.a.g'ers', or, 'I love animals don't kill me'. The MUCSPAT's didn't care, too much intoxication from Talwadc. Then there was the security problem. We wouldn't leave the entire campaign to trust in the very thing we wished to eradicate, and there was always the problem with lying to save your skin. I mean how would we know who was who? Whereas it was simpler our way. Besides, some animals resented the adolescent sentimentality shown them by the s.a.g'ers. Early in the campaign we started a few wash ups of dolphins, a stranding here and there of old whales ready to make the sacrifice. The message wasn't getting through, instead the N'ihdoggs attempted to push them back into the polluted oceans, or revive them - talk about unable to read the writing on the wall. Ok, I admit we became too diligent in the Californian hill- top residential areas using our smaller rodent class attack units, hoping to induce a thought in the N'ihdogg like, 'gee I guess the animals don't have anywhere to live or anything to eat, I guess we're doing wrong by living here. Let's move out and leave the animals in peace, they need somewhere to live as well'. Something like Drozzler said earlier. That didn't work either. Others heard Talwadc

joined in the campaign, some had stayed out like the six leggers and exoskeletonoids who didn't want to know. The semi wild ones were turning away from Talwadc, because they managed to get a scavenger's living from the waste sites of the N'ihdoggs didn't seem to want to listen to the song. They were doing all right, didn't want to rock the boat. I won't go into who it was, suffice to say the Common Gull was one, the Raccoon another.

All other animals hearing what they said became very angry. The birds of prey put a moratorium on all the skies, telling the Gulls they should listen up to the song and get with it, or they would have no other recourse than to declare war on them. This was not outside the war council's power, naming it 'Big Eagle Wars Measures Act'. As for the cunning raccoon, they didn't resist much, seemed more enthusiastic; knew the spoils of the war would be coming their way, relished the idea their diets would be changed for the better and it was going to be easier to get a living. New news is coming in from our emissaries, apparently we are destroying more communication networks, hacking down phone lines, or the underground Gopher drill teams are attacking fibre optic communications lines. Smart lads, quick too. Standard orders issued to the raiding party, no one was listening. Avoid leaving survivors, eat everything, leave it clean, no escapees, and full operation security. Unfortunately the marauding club of meat eaters hadn't been too well organized in their 'spring attack' as they liked to call it. A large pack of hyenas, dogs, the Tree Martens and even the rattlesnakes, went along; sick of the decades of indiscriminate shootings against them since the local Rednecks had taken over the territory back in the early eighteen- hundreds. Well they looked like a real rabble when they left and as things turned out, acted like one. In short they screwed up, descending upon the enclave of N'ihdoggs in a disorganized pattern, ignoring my well thought - out, war council - approved plan. Anyway: they didn't pull off such a good job after all, and a young N'ihdogg Man boy had managed to run as fast as he could into the relative safety of the dessert. Grytryr the coyote hadn't seen him while he was savaging a local store owner with a few of his close pals. Chase was given, to no avail, apparently the little N'ihdogg could run fast! When the dogs came home to roost that evening it was the

old saddleback rattler Lynglod, sibilantly told Drozzler and the war council about the mishap regarding the breach of security. Grytryr, the wild dog was responsible for the right flank security breach, proffered lame excuses about several others not having the instincts given them by Glashiel.

'Did someone mention my name'?

He would have none of it, being fit to have a fork stuck in him, 'cos he was done! They left the council to capture the Man boy, laughing at the idea of a military court martial or any other official position by the war council.

'He may desert like you little one, you should ask him'.

I'm not going anywhere with a corpse-swallower Glashiel'. Telling us, 'It was enough that I'm prepared to die for the cause. That was a lot more than some are willing or capable of doing', taking a surreptitious glance in my general direction, letting his squinnies draw me into his diatribe. Why does everyone look at me so accusingly? A party of Armadillos and wolves went out on another killing expedition to scout for the Man boy; with the hope of delivering him to the provisioneers. The Armadillos have better scenting techniques than the M.U.C.S.P.A.T.'s, like I mentioned that's all their good for! Several hyenas had gone along to cut up of his corpse, should they find him, to drag it back to camp to feed their hungry comrades and the ariel backup of owls also went along. Disconsolate and anxious about the big battle, I go up to the high ridge to get away from that stinking hole, reflect about the state of things, work out a plan for my escape. I was on a small ridge near devils bluff, a good place if one decided it wasn't worth going on - it was getting that way for me. It falls some thousand feet to the nearest rocks, enough to dash the brains from a small mammal, enough to look down and see the shadowy legions of Talwadc beneath that full Moon of death. I'm justifiably concerned about Berzelsmertz, considering what he said about my N'ihdogg art and how he looked at me as though he knew everything I must keep secret. I know he wants to get inside my survival bag and take a good look, the least excuse to dispatch me into the Thraesvelg meat eaters. Drozzler hadn't said anything about me to Mannan'an, had he? I reshuffled my belongings I keep in my survival bag, hiding the mandala the One and Perfect gave me as a token of our

friendship. I fear that alone will send me to my death should it be discovered. Scared and apprehensive I sense someone hiding nearby. I did not see him shuddering in the crack of the rocks. As the cold desert air was getting its way with that young Man boy, his chattering teeth, noisily rattling through that dark night. Again, fear gripped me, I turn to see him through the dark, still fearful the scenting party of Armadillos and Hyenas were coming back. Not being nocturnal I strained into the dark crevasse from where the noise came. Terrified, he stayed motionless hoping to conceal his presence. My first instinct was to run, I didn't, instead I waited to see if he would attack me, he didn't. Initially I thought, 'Gerotzers! the escaped Man boy: quick call the hunting party'. He meant absolutely nothing to me at all. Clear and in a flash; he was like me, escaping the madness of Talwadc. So we stare at each other. I: motionless, twitching, sniffing the air, catching his scent. Him: fear, rage, resentment of the hunt, all mixed up, I could smell it like a weasel's armpit.

'You haven't whiffed weasels armpits have you little one'.

More silence pervading through the night air, as we stared longer into each others' eyes. Dim as it was, I knew he looked hard at me, he was waiting, we both waited. Surprised he was hiding close to me and I hadn't sensed his presence, in dread I thought of the search party, making my heart beat in fear, that moment seemed to last forever. A failure to communicate with him would undoubtedly bring some panicked response. I thought he would reveal himself and bring on the scenting party or arouse other animals, perhaps the night Owl scouts. I could be implicated; they would expect me to alert them, it could be seen as failure to do so. Thoughts ran through my rat-brain noodle. I was in it up to my whiskers. Anyway a loose Man boy wouldn't make any difference, it could dig me in deeper. I knew he wouldn't speak first, that was more than his scope could encompass. N'ihdoggs have given up talking to animals a long time ago, the Master told me that. Neither could I speak, it had been so long since I was with the Master or spoken to anyone from the Sapiens. More manic moments flashed by. Suddenly driven out of our panicked thoughts, came the sound of the scenting party closely approaching the ridge as we both

full of fear in anticipation of being discovered together. A panicked fantod grabbed me. He also saw the rabble shuffling up to our place of retreat; in his young eyes I saw the terror burn brighter. It was then I felt strange; unusual things began to change me, as I became possessed by regard for his safety. It was too late to shout out to hide; the armadillos were almost upon me and I was certainly in their hearing and whiffing distance. Quickly I pointed to him to lie low in another smaller opening in the rocks that led back into a recess that would conceal him more. He looked to see what I was showing him efficiently sliding into the opening and out of sight. It was none too soon. When the Armadillos came sniffing and shuffling along. I am sure he had peed his pants out of fear; they would invariably catch a whiff of him. I mustered up a good bladder-full of my poison and scattered it around the entrance of the colluvia in front of the cave. No sooner had I stopped micturating than the hunting party rounded the bluff, full of surprise to see me sitting, looking eternally thoughtful at the camp of animals below. The party of killers stopped dead in its track, calling from the bluff.

'Evening Bruszdruzszzssssssssss,' condescending as though I shouldn't be there they called to me, quickly resumed their sniffing and rasorial scratching routine, shuffling around me as I sat frozen in fear. My eyes would have alerted them if they looked into them, because they must have been wild, spinning kaleidoscopically in my rat brain. Animals know about eyeball contact even in the dark, so I casually averted them. The corpse swallower boys gave little attention to me as usual; instead they just stood around waiting for the potential slaughter at the discovery of food, watching, mindlessly scratching their arses as the busybody Armadillos sniffed around, swinging in a pattern around the cave entrance where I had just peed, sniffing volumes of the liquid, telling their nose holes and eyeballs something didn't add up. I attempted a distraction by directing my comments to the general party asking if they, 'had any idea where he was', and, 'got him yet, if you haven't, why not?' Being a member of the war council gave me such rights, I didn't want to push it! The broszery sniffed closer and closer to the edge of the cave where the Man boy hid. I began to think about the precipitous cliff as my only exit, wishing I had the faculty of

my flying cousins, seeing myself abandoning into the deathless sky to safety as the Armadillo lads moved their ears back and forth, flicking and twitching intermittently as though someone was trying to send them an email.

'They're listening to a heart beating fast in its cage little one'.

Again I proffered another question, as I skipped from rock to rock asking where they had been, what was their surveillance pattern? I said anything I could spout to them, so that they wouldn't smell my fear or hear the Man boys' heart. I don't know why, I had done nothing,

'You didn't cry out little one, complicity against Talwadc is a war crime, didn't you know?'

So said Glashiel the snitch, I didn't say anything, either to the eavesdropper or my hosts. One Hyena Drystwyrps, said he, 'trace N'ihdogg scent here, then dry up.' He asked me, 'Had the Broz the pee-pee in the area?', grinning like a weasel sucking blood through a mouse hole. Naturally I replied that I had, in fact several times, chattering on stupidly telling him how I had taken large drafts of water to abate the heat of the day. The weather was always good to get things off the subject.

'With the cold of the night, I had a sudden attack of the whizzers'. The Armadillos looked disappointed at each other, like I had overlooked something and they were there to set me right. My plan wasn't working. Grytryr, one of the halitotic Hyena sentries, stood at the edge of the bluff, blocking any escape. He asked me at close quarters, leaning into my face, if I had seen the Man boy. I went on the offensive mocking, a small laughing chatter that sounded more nervous than real, using the opportunity to tell him, 'You stupid thing! If I had, then I would have told you by now! ' I protested there wasn't much I could have done by myself anyway. They replied, something about my virtual uselessness and why had Mannan'an bothered calling species like me up in the first place. 'Good question', I thought, 'why had he?' I was going to remind Grytryr of his earlier blunder, I didn't want to get his instincts up into a kill mode for fear that any extra sense may allow him to sense the Man boy like I had. Besides: the danger was still pressing despite the idle banter with the fubsey nupsons.

' Why put yourself to risk over a silly boy'.

That voice told me indifferently. I could fake a surprise find.

'That would be the way out if your nerve fails.'

Unmoved by the fantod specter consuming me, I stood firm. I had already lost myself once that night and the strangeness for the Man boy kept stirring the image of his terrified face, so I didn't relent. The Armadillos, annoyed because I had spoiled their sniffing area with my micturating, strongly suggested they may report me for violating the war council's edict regarding pooping and peeing on operational territory. I responded angrily, hoping to distract them away from the cave, telling them the entire dessert couldn't be their operational platform, besides I had to go somewhere. Trying to put me right again, they confidently offered the advice, how I should have waited until I went down to the valley, I should watch out what I was saying - it could land me in trouble again. Elaborating with relish, as the Thraesvelg corpse swallows looked on, telling me there was reason to believe that I had broken the chain of command and could pay for it. Seeing I was at risk, I humbled myself, drawing their attention away from the cave entrance again with my apologies and idly skipping away toward another rock, interjecting the word 'comrades', and other party speak. They swallowed it, seeing this form of self debasement as 'proper and right' from us smaller terrestrials - it sufficed its purpose.

'You're learning little one'.

'Yes, if it's going to keep me alive'.

Finally unable to distinguish the scent of the Man boy in the vicinity, but obviously not satisfied, one of the other hyenas came up to my face real close, blowing the hot blood gravy-breath like a stinking mephitic meat sewer, asking,

'Why you not like other lower mucspats?'

I told him I was the same. Then as he stared close into my eyes, the foul stench of his hot halitosid blood gravy-brained breath in my face again, he said,

'Oh no, why you blue eyes have, not brown? '.

I moved back from the stench, adding,

'Because Glashiel see's that it is so, like it sees Drozzler to be the only white buffalo, it gives him great power, which was more than you have'.

'So you are like him?'

He asked pathetically, grumbling something more about the

other M.U.C.S.P.A.T's' eyes being brown. I added that the rats have different colored eyes, especially the albino kamikazes, they're pink! Going on the offensive I told him I had more authority than him! I hated to compare myself to the rats, really I was one, only I didn't live in the sewers. He retreated, mumbling foul,

'I be keeping eyes on you in future'.

'Don't lose any more eyesight on me, rather devote it to catching the Man boy escapee or the war council won't even leave an eye for you to look with'.

'Boldness makes you quite senseless little one'.

They guarded up into their search pattern and left, suggesting I didn't hang around much longer as there was still a dangerous N'ihdogg loose. I bid them tidings and wished the best of Glashiel in their search. Then, relieved at their disappearance, I pretended to resume my cosmoptic meditations. When they had gone, I checked the edge of the bluff to ensure so, and went to the opening of the cave and stared into the darkness, not wishing to call out for fear that the hunting party would hear me, they have sharp hearing Armadillos! I was pleasantly surprised that the rat brain Glashiel didn't or couldn't snitch.

'I only know myself; I'm getting to know you little one'.

I had still not gained sufficient courage to say anything to him who lay hiding, nor had I determined what I was to do with him, or what he intended, for I knew that the N'ihdoggs could inflict abuse, especially upon someone like myself, who really couldn't offer any real resistance. Suddenly the Man boy spoke out of the darkness of the night, stammering out his queue of questions.

'Why can you animals speak, why are you killing people, why did you save me, why aren't you like the rest, what are you going to do with me'?

He paused for his breathe.

'What's a N'ihdogg'?

That just about summed up the curiosity one needed for the situation - he was intelligent, I lowered my guard. On hearing me talk to the hunting party, he had learned a great deal more than what he saw this afternoon. The archaic speech of the animals must have been hard to comprehend, especially for a young, too young N'ihdogg Man boy. Nevertheless I gleaned immediately that he had understood everything.

'You're not slow are you little one'?

'Sometime's Glashiel.'

Slowly I approached him into that darkness with only the rays of the waning Moon by which to see him. Finally I could see him more complete for the first time. An Asian Man boy, probably in his seventh year, big round eyes, slender lean arms, not much on him provisionally. Featous, strong prominent features suggesting a masculinity that could one day be envied, if he lived that long. Nervously, I meekly whispered to him the answers that he so desperately sought from me. Why did we call him a N'ihdogg? I told him distractedly the party rhetoric, 'N'ihdogg is gnawing from below the mighty Yggdrasil tree of Glashiel'. I was still trying to work out a way to conceal the boy, though I knew it may prove helpless to save him. I was going to answer his other questions but he interrupted me.

'What is the mighty Yggdrasil Tree? Is that why the animals are killing us?'

I stopped, the rat brained voice was singing in my ear,

'I know an Ash tree known as Yggdrasil, besprent in white clay by Urd's spring'.

In my mind's-eye noodle I saw the spring like the one in Blazing Norton - the pool of water had a white lamina skin over its surface.

'So you're killing us 'cos of a tree?' he asked, dumfounded. What am I to do with him, now I have secured his life? That was all I could think. Pretty prose from you Glashiel is not required, got any answers? Again that stanza echoed through my noggin noodle.

'I know an Ash tree known as Yggdrasil, besprent in white clay by Urd's spring'.

I went closer to him in that dark cave. I feared the scenting party, for the Owls were above us everywhere. He didn't shirk from me as I whispered in his ears the story of the animals, the song of Glashiel, the coming Battle of Talwadc, the fate that awaits the N'ihdoggs. He made small murmurs at all the bad parts, his eyes bigger than that full Moon, he was listening and believing. After my story of woe, he only had one question.

'What is to be my fate?'

With great difficulty I told him that in all likelihood he will perish when they find him, unless they stop looking for him.

The animals are sworn to kill all N'ihdoggs and will not stop the search. I strongly suggested that he stay in his hiding, since they had covered this area, to rest in the safety that I had secured for him and to wait until morning, when I would return with news of his future. If he should resist my suggestions, to look outside the cave to the millions of creatures below him. No doubt they would find him and kill him if he should move, because he was a threat to the secrecy of Talwadc and this could not be. Confused myself, to say the least at what I was doing, I left that hill with its dread secret and returned to camp. Stumbling across some late night raiders on the hunt for lower MUCSPATS, hunger gripping them as it does in the night, I passed unnoticed, otherwise I would be comestibalized by now. I went to my place of rest, uncomfortable at what I had discovered, even more uncomfortable at what I should do with him than with myself. I was disturbed by the strange feelings when I had found him; never knowing before, it cut into myself preservation, that I could lay down my life for something or someone and could not resist, brought upon myself a terrible responsibility of minding for this Man boy, my sworn enemy, and the cloak of fear that surrounded my safety burdened me.

'But you have no enemies little one'.

'You Glashiel, you're my enemy, my enemy from within'. For in as much as I was alone in these thoughts, I couldn't help the suspicious feeling that some animals, especially the dogs who I fear the most, had sniffed up something more about me. I went to my little rock and placed my tail around me, so that I to may hide from life and the day that is coming with its burden of new thoughts and death. There I dreamt a terrible dream. I saw myself nailed on a wall, surrounded by other faces, Badger, Deer, Wolf- the trophies of death. It was as though I was part of something that I could not extricate myself from.

'That's for sure'.

Surrounding my head that stuck through its was the surface of a large flat wall over which I couldn't see the edges. For I, frozen static, unable to move and around me the chorus of a million N'ihdoggs were staring at me, singing my name in a million tones.

'That's what happens when you stick your neck out!'

Bad dreams'.

Not a pretty thing, I woke in terror and fear, a fantod, twitching and clammy, full of the sense that I would have a lot more to awaken to before this battle was over. Once more, before falling into sketchy sleep, the rat brained voice of Glashiel whispered to me in that early eoan of light.

'I know an Ash tree known as Yggdrasil, besprent in white clay by Urd's spring'.

`Glashers... go to sleep eh'.

They sang, but had not human tune nor words.

W.B. Yeats.

' With the Sun full up and the path clear, what the heck are we doing here'? So pervervidly sang all the animals on this cheery morn of battle and death. Already, 'Good Morning America' was broadcasting live from the apes' TV's and laptops, regarding Talwadc worldwide, the exploits, or as the animals call it, 'relieve from extinction'. Hang on, I have to scratch myself. The Apes sat about waiting and watching their TV's and listening to their radios. It was not very pretty what I saw. Preparations to move out of this place have finally begun as they assemble in great swelling ranks to join the howling hero's, as the viewing breakfasteers reluctantly move away from their morning brief. I shudder at the thought of this rabble of animals that are to take the war of Talwadc to the N'ihdoggs, I have seen the fires and death on the Apes' television. It is time for me to make my move to get out of here as the rabble move toward that consummate hour. Yet I have no ideas, barren are my wits by which I now live; even for the Man boy, who could carry me from this place, I have no ideas how to make this escape and to remind me of my own fate, should I pose my death, the feeble ailing livid bodies of some campaigners who had not made it through the night, were already being consumed by the lambent leviners.

'You're raving again little one, please shut up!'

I looked around for my transporter Kangaroo, to tell her where to wait for me, I had other business first, but she didn't show. She was another victim to old age or the merciless cold and heat of this place. I was right! Further up the ridge, above the main division of animals I saw her crouched in a recess, so I went to her, tramping through the blood-raved phatry as most of the other animals were preparing their evacuation from the canyon, grouping in their divisions in a gallimaufry, the main spearhead of the larger animals center, the two flanks, to the forward of them the Lower M.U.C.S.P.A.T's, no brains there so I passed unnoticed.

The birds in their millions were flying into great black

dense formations filling the blue sky, blocking out the sun, circling ominously, loaded with their death booty.

'So this is it', I thought, 'the day of death it comes.'
'For some, little one'.

As I moved toward the recess that held the corpse O' kanga, dead thoughts fell through me with the horror of it all, on the day of death.

'Waste not want not, Brosz-drosz', said one scavenger of the Vulture Air Division, as it dined on dead comrades for breakfast, ripping the pelts to the pinguid meat and the bones. I passed them in disgust, chewing on a walnut, learning not to look or listen. Up ahead it wasn't possible to ignore the well- and truly-badgered non nocturnal corpse swallows from last evening's raid. Caught by the night patrol were the Badgers for stealing live comestibles, raiding doorknob mice packs and smaller MUCSPATS. Now in the light of day they have to face the music. As I passed I was met with screams of resistance from the biting and scratching itinerants, cajoled by their jailers with a great deal of snappiness from the large leviners. Herded into a frantic group they were summarily squittered by the skunks using their powerful aromatic ouzzies. Their stench was unbearable, so much that some itinerants fell over in a dead swoon, as those still barely conscious dripped with that virulent potion. Drozzler and the war council, looking on to see that all was to be performed with military correctness, stood upwind. Now the graevolent stinking itinerant's were identified and known. There would be no more nighttime disappearances. In the future, if there is to be one, other creatures could smell them coming and sound the alarm. Those still standing on all fours were ushered by their frampold escorts to the spearhead of the columns of the attack, probably to die for their misdemeanors. Resisting more comraderies and bravado from the meat eaters, I attempted to infiltrate the main path to take me out of that valley, toward my dead transporter and the secret Man boy. I dispatched their coprolalia with indifference, avoiding the latrines, already busy with the scumbereers in their early morning cloacinal mungdungus. Upon consideration, everyone seemed somewhat normal, nothing had gone bang in the night, no alarms and death threats, no Man boy carnage. After several attempts to get away from the morning exchanges and friendly

cajoling, I slipped away unnoticed. Near a colluvia, away from the stench and madness, I found the corpse of my dead transporter Kangaroo withdrawn into a crevasse in the hillside to die in peace. Kangaroos are kind of like squirrels, because they don't just drop off their branch in front of you, they prefer to die somewhere quietly. I knew she wasn't going to make it, she had been a friend nevertheless, eating meals with her, helping me find water, she had helped me many times over the campaign had been the only company to enjoy. I stopped briefly to acknowledge her death.

'You never asked her name did you little one'.

True, but names don't mean much do they now the day is here?

'Yours does'.

'What was her name, do you know Glashiel'?

'It was Koosh'.

'Not bad, two O's; consecutive as well, must have had some high connections, but death levels all things'.

As I stood before the dead Koosh, Glashiel was telling me,

'Listen little one - there is more today for you and I than all this and I will only speak the truth to save you from yourself in all this folly. I know an Ash tree known as Yggdrasil, besprent in white clay by Urd's spring'.

Again I saw in my noodle the Yggdrasil tree by the spring and the lamina skin of white clay covering the surface of the pool. Outside in the real world, there before me was my dead Kangaroo friend and comrade. Inside I'm confused; outside there's the dead and more death waiting in the corridors of this world. I covered the corpse respectfully, according to the manner the Master had shown me, with wild acacia branches. Before returning to the path leading out of the canyon, doubling back occasionally to ensure none of the hunting party had followed me to the ridge where I pursued the track toward the Man boy; going higher into the hills. Below, I looked out to see the great battle machine of Talwadc readying itself for destruction. Above: the sky darkened by the billion birds. Taking to the shrubbery to avoid detection, and reaching my destination, I snuck lickety-split into the crevasse, peering into the darkness, perhaps hoping the responsibility of finding the Man boy was no longer there he had left. First I could not see anything, soon through the darkness his feateous form appeared

sitting exactly as I had left him. He was cold, hungry and terrified, I could offer him nothing. Rising up slowly from his lying position at my appearance in the cave entrance, glad to see me 'cos he smiled. I did not respond likewise, my noodle only swam in fear and apprehension of what to do with him.

'You can't smile anyway little one'.

Things had begun to get a move on with the morning's roustabout. The call from Mannan'an battle-brain central was expecting some results, and even more pressing, the war council would find my absence unreasonable. Originally I was going to leave him where he was, knowing we were pulling out down the valley in the morning and he would probably make it through the night, somehow, until I realized I had discovered my one way out o there.

'How so very thoughtful of you little one: I'm sure'.

'Well Glashiel I couldn't leave him. There were other animal divisions coming up as a rear-guard and they would find him faster than 'a ferret up a drain pipe'. Then the voice of Glashiel again, full of poetry and stuff! I saw the white lamina skin at Urd's spring, and the dead kangaroo, and the corpse swallows, ripping of the pelts of the dead, yuk! In a moment of sheer inspiration I saw what to do. We would have to stick together - it was as simple as that. First part: simple? Second part, how? Third part, a case of camouflage, crytochromism, the animals last defense. It was the only way. He would become one of us, take an animal form, travel with us until ...,

'Until...

'Until: I could persuade him to cross the desert'.

I must have partially decided this on the way up the ridge, after I saw the pelt pieces left over from some breakfasters. That must have given me the idea!

'Not the poetry, little one'?

'Not the poetry'.

When I told Man boy my plan, he wasn't overly enthusiastic. Wearing smelly rotting pieces of skin wasn't one of life's great pleasures, then neither is dying. After telling him the news about the war, strongly implying he lacked choice, he relented. I sweetened it for him by suggesting we should become allies, swear a pact, there wasn't any blood required. Since neither of us are sure of the outcome of the battle. I added more for him, telling

him,

"The N'ihdoggs are smart, but downright wrong; the animals are not so bright, but right. Right doesn't always mean you're going to win! Who cares who will win as long as you survive! Life right now is just a little bit more interesting than death. This way if things look good for the N'ihdoggs, you can save me, like I am doing for you! After all, the N'ihdoggs are not going to be too friendly if they get the upper hand, even to a Squirrel!"

'Yes, yes, do you have to go on about your deceptive collusion? It won't make you feel any better'.

So sayeth Glashiel who lives inside others, who lacks a body to break in pain upon the world.

'I am the body of the living all, little one, did you not know'?

Sure, and I'm Bloggdrott's mother once- removed.

Why don't you get a life!

' I am your colloquial self little one'.

'No you're not; 'it' doesn't speak back like you. Now hit the trail! I've got real problems and you're not helping'. I had surmised they wouldn't leave a single animal alive if they began to win. A simple arrangement, between new friends; problem was how to make it work, like the problem of how to get to the dead Kangaroo incognito. Did he have a knife, anything useful to aid our plan? Not a thing! I suggested he look around and see if he could knap a stone to make a sharp edge for skinning Koosh. Something disheartening occurred to him. He screwed his face up at his realization exclaiming,

'I'll have to hop all day imitating a Kangaroo surrounded by animals'. He didn't know if he could. He wasn't too happy at the prospect, more down heartedness until I said I would try to arrange it so he could be my vehicular scout for the war party; that way he would be patrolling outback areas with me most of the time and he would only have to hop in and out of camp. The war was only on for a day. The prospect of the animals winning and him having to remain a Kangaroo all his life, brought on more crinkled faces from the Man boy. He suggested he could be something else, if that were the circumstance after the war.

'Like what I asked', he said,
'A wolf or dog!'.
'

I told him that would be even harder walking on all fours, and having to eat corpses. He hadn't thought of that. The hard part was to get the war council to let him act as my vehicular scout. If they thought he was fit for active duty he'd be conscripted as a M.U.S.P.A.T. I was doubtful it could work, and there was the danger the War Council would suggest I use one of the dogs instead. This life is all risks.

'Glad to hear it after all little one.'

'Yes, but not for you though, eh Glashiel?'

After telling him where the kanga – corpse lay, drawing several diagrams in the sand. I told him I would return to the area to meet later, leaving him to the task of evaginating Koosh. On my return to the valley I checked out the Kanga-corpse. Luckily it hadn't been found and consumed. With burning feet the scouting parties met me at the edge of the ridge, returned to the main party and took up our position, split into smaller units and dispersed into the dessert. Drozzler had addressed the assembly in his usual droll style, confirming the target area for the big attack, a place called Angerboda. It lay some miles, 'south west', the attack, set for, 'sun at zenith'. As usual, and lucky for him, scouting the territory was needed. Droz had me at it right away, sending me into the hinterland, he offered a corpse swallower. I had to take it along but chose an older and smaller transporter who I knew would have to die at the hands of the Man boy. When everyone was out of sight I quickly headed toward the ridge where the man boy lay, though I was not sure he would still be there.

'Because you need transportation and wish to cover your arse little one.'

'Oh yes, that's right Glashiel know-all, reminded me again of what a selfish Ratatosk I am, what would you be doing right about now? I just wasn't thinking of myself'.

'Sure you aren't little one'

I managed to find again the place where Koosh's Kanga-corpse was. Man boy was not glad to see me with the meat eater who quickly went to attack him with vicious speed, but he met his match as the Man boy thrust the knife into it's throat with one slash, it was dead. Never knew it's name, didn't matter it was

over! He had successfully made a good looking stone edge, and found it useful before I had to explain to him how I was unable to leave camp alone and how I needed him to help me escape. When he saw my burnt feet, he relented to my plausible argument. Arriving at the body of my dead friend, I suggested a two piece outfit would work nicely for his disguise. A quick slash around the neck and a pull upwards, so that the skin slides up and over the head, not forgetting the ears, there, that was the head piece - didn't look half bad! Now the hard part, pulling mightily the neck skin down over the body, yuk! He was strong and determined to get the entire skin in one piece and soon the evaginated body of Koosh lay red and bloodied on the sand. Now for the fit, first we dragged the two piece down to the river to wash it and remove any blood, otherwise the dogs would be sniffing him all day and they may suspect something. After the pelt washing, he slipped between the soggy skins and placed the headpiece on. It was difficult since he only had the pool of water in which to get any bearing on his appearance and as the ripples subsided, there in the reflection of the pool was the revenant Koosh, well almost! I suggested some alterations to the face, since the nose was not prominent, but saggy, it didn't look real; same with the back of the legs, they needed stuffing as well. The back of the, 'two piece' had a slit down the rear of it, so that he could crawl inside, and now it needed stitching up. I ran a cactus needle through the skin, and threaded some dried grass through the holes, pulling the whole bundle as tight as I could. I tied it off. There! Not too bad on a running horse. If, upon close inspection you looked at the Kangaroo, perhaps it was obvious there was a rapparee hiding beneath the surface. It seemed real, then again, perhaps not. These vacillating impressions heightened our awareness of being caught, yet the more we looked, the more the camouflage seemed insufficient. I guess it is good only while it works. One aspect of the disguise, like I mentioned, are the eyes - very important to animals. It's the way they can tell what's going on inside your noodle. I took a long hard stare into his, it wasn't any good, they seemed too unreal, so I said so. The Man boy was unhappy at my opinion. On second thought I should have let things go, I didn't want a savaging on my hands if the animals discovered him, and they would also discover me!

Think again! Things got worse when he pulled out a pair of spectacles. Stunned by the surprise, I could only drown in my dumfussion. How were we going to hide that? I twitched nervously, this was getting too complex, originally began with a simple impersonation, now it was beginning to take on farcical proportions. After all, I had asked him if he possessed anything when this plot first hatched itself! Why didn't he mention it earlier? I could have thought of something.

'Yes, 'the situation is hopeless you're on your own'.

'Not so Glashiel, I have imagination, thanks to the Master'. There wasn't time, so I had him remove the headpiece, and placing the spectacles on, helped guide the head piece back over his head. The frame covered by the skinned rim of the eyes hid the bulbous eye pieces. Well, almost! Upon close inspection he looked more like a Terrapin than a Kangaroo. The binocular thickness of the glasses didn't make the illusion too complete either, we would have to take our chances. It was time we were moving on. I was getting twitchy again, so quickly I urged him to confricate the pelt with various unction's of poop and pee and original animal musk's, to enhance or hide his N'ihdogg smell. He could do this in the canyon of the previous night's haunt, the scumbereers had left plenty. Like I said ,there weren't any shortages to be found and eventually he didn't smell of anything else except the temulent poop and pee of that cloacinal place. This impression of mephitic odors I knew, I didn't require a free whiff when he asked me. I didn't want to loose my very last walnut breakfast. With that done, we left for the army of Talwadc, telling him, when we arrive among them, to let me do all the speaking parts, and not to forget to start hopping once we had become apparent to them, and under no circumstance, fart, once we were in whiffing distance of the animals. N'ihdogg odiferations, well known in the animal kingdom, jeopardize our secret and greatly increase getting caught when floating about the mobsters. With that, he practiced a few hops about the place, making sure everything was secure, picked me up in his pouch and began to walk in the direction that I pointed. Almost immediately there were some problems with the tail, since it sticks out some four feet on this particular model, swinging around his feet almost knocking him down, so I tied it up to his shoulders, leaving him looking like a doughnut.

The sun rose and the heat of the day intensified, costume shrinkage became a problem, and as the day went on he said there were overwhelming strangling sensations in all areas. In that heat, well, he began to become overwhelmed in the sudoriferous potions. I wondered how he bore it. Funny thing, so did he. It wasn't very funny, yet we couldn't help a chortle over it, as some stuffing had to be removed. All in all, as it shrank and minor adjustments were made, it became more convincing. Returning to the army of Talwadc I asked him who he was and what was he doing there on that bluff. So he told me.

'Two years ago I became an orphan at the age of six, after my parents were killed by Government troops. The elders and priests said I was the one who would be found before the falls of Malat like their stories tell - the holy men respected me especially since I was alone in the world like all the hero's in the myths. So hidden in a basket they sent me down river to escape the soldiers purging sympathy for the rebels with infanticide. After sixteen days alone I was found by the American Red Cross. I came to America by way an aid group. They were very kind to me; you know not all are bad. I hope they're not killed!

'Indeed', I told him, I wished for no killing, for it had all gone too far! Concerned that he should not take it upon himself to seek revenge for his dead friends by deciding to go down fighting the animals, I told him.

'Under no circumstances consider revenge for your dead friends'. He eyed me suspiciously, realizing I may have discovered what he was planning. It wasn't very long before we could see the groups of my Rodentia legion up ahead. Quite a sight to see several millions animals rumbling along a dusty trail; surreal, almost illusionistic in their proreptic rumbles. From the ridge, large groups of animal divisions were sliddering and snooving, along the desert sands in a sea of fur, with Ronkers at the head of his division,

'Head sticking out Ronkers', I called to him, pointing at the tantivity of Ronkers and co's leporine bonces of the lower M.U.S.P.A.T divisions. Rodent nibbler class units at the front, large to the rear - dust hazard regulation - war of Talwadc rule number twenty one. Strangely enough, I found myself feeling proud at the sight of those valorous brigands,

then surprised at myself that I was. It must have been all the action. The Man boy fell motionless when he came up over the ridge. He was anhelating badly since he had begun to hop like a kangaroo because the air divisions were sauntering suspiciously overhead. Below him, my rodentia class nibblers traversing the carpet of sand. To the distant horizon the other larger divisions of Badger, Wolf, Coyote, Mountain lions, Bear. All moving upon their prey in tessellating unison, the wild Horses to their left and right, the reptile armaments division covering the flanks, Bloggdrott and Co. Whiffer division lagging behind as their little trotters were pacing faster and faster forward in their struggle to stay with the main group.

'I bet you wish they would fall behind and get swallowed by the sands, eh little one?'

'It's not very hard for you to read my mind is it, O Glashiel?' All round this great body of life the lower M.U.C.S.P.A.T.'s, ran, hopped, and jumped in frenzied pervidity like a bunch of hoplites, searching out anything that may have gone to ground. It was, if I may say so...

'You may say 'a magnificent sight'.

Man boy was horrified and excited all in the same moment. I could tell since I felt his heart beat increase and he etiolated slightly into a fantod. I reminded him, saying,

'Suffice unto the day and so forth'.

At which point he took strength and began to move forward again. Above us the vast swarm of the heavy bomber legion of birds: Vultures, Big Eagle, Condors, and Hawks clutching their bombs, the deadly arsenal intended for the inhabitants of Angerboda.

'For upon this day even rats shall fall from the sky.'

Even higher, the massive swarms of finches, sparrows, chickadee, blackbird, thrush, crow, raven, and all the birds of the ocean making the sun, and no doubt the moon, go down to darkness, their great shadow falling over the army of Talwadc. All kamikaze-trained against N'ihdogg aircraft, their strategy worked real simple, straight up the turbine engine they go, straight down goes the plane. Simple strategy, very effective. The N'ihdoggs tried to block the engine nacelles by fencing them off, but our boys could still sneak through. When the planes got hit by the swarmers it was all over anyway, making

the skies our own. the skies were empty. Soon, Big Eagle bomber divisions swooped in to greet us. I told him to wave and keep hopping and hoping: they had good eye sight, we didn't want to arouse any suspicion, did we? Petrous where I sat in that stinking pouch, nothing in the world could have jogged me from that vision before me. My pride had melted, and I beheld a terrible thing, the world became lost to me, as though delivered up to the destruction of the wasteland.

'You have little one'.

My peanut heart pounded hard, I 'm a fantod,

'That's your usual state'.

As the visions of its outcome beat a terrible place through me, I looked to see the energies of Talwadc. It was only when he spoke to me I startled myself out of my daydream.

'Here goes, this is it', broke into my world, in a bouncing rhythm as I was once more mobilized over the ridge. It was a reasonably smooth ride considering he hadn't been a kangaroo for very long. The distance he covered by each spronk wasn't nearly as impressive as the previous owner. Constantly I called out to him to remember what I told him, as we bounced closer and closer to the surging animals, some turning to see us, but no one breaking from their steady pace or ranks. Ronkers the Rat was the first to offer salutations to me, looking, as I thought, strangely at my vehicular companion. I had forgotten to invent an animal name for him. I lacked any idea what Australian names existed for Kangaroos, probably neither did Ronkers. That didn't seem to matter at the time, so I just raised my hand up to the hopping Man boy and blurted out 'Fundin', 'found one', why not? Fundin the Kangaroo, we're making history here! It mattered not what I called him as far as Ronkers and the rest of them as they squinnied hard at the anhelating Man boy. His looks were suggesting something wasn't quite right about the Kangaroo, but he couldn't put his finger on it, asking me.

'Why not he jump good as Koosh?' dismally, like he was off to see a dentist. I didn't follow the leading question, instead I offered a response, saying, while pointing to the imposter, 'Fundin, better, needs training'. Ronkers looked brightened up when I said this, taking it as though I had entrusted him for the job. We carried on moving down the rodentia division, 'Fundin jumping better'. As I called out his

name, they obediently acknowledged him, before turning their heads again toward the open plain. Of course that wasn't the Man boy's real name, his real name was Peko. We had lots of field mice called Pko, thousands of them! So it is perhaps best that he took to that name that I gave him from the moment I uttered it.

'So you're making him like you?'

'Yes that's right, why stop at just a disguise, make it complete' So the disguises had worked so far, touch a weasel's bum and run, and will continue to do so as long as Glashiel doesn't snitch on us. He had settled in to my legion without so much as a murmur of suspicion, now all he had to do was to pass the scrutiny of the war council, worse, the armadillos and dogs! When the main spearhead of the colony intercepted us, Drozzler and the war council stopped to have a pow-wow, gathering to see if I had anything good to tell them regarding the terrain ahead. I didn't. I merely offered some febrile summation about what may be waiting for us, but we all knew the N'ihdoggs would be on the lookout. After the usual salutations from the divisions: shouting, 'hail Talwadc', and other sequacious nonsense, we got down to the business of the war, calling in the Apes' radios. A squadron of F 18 jet fighters had gone down earlier in the morning near Flagstaff, and Virginia, just inside the Grand Canyon park boundaries. The war was looking good for the animals, bad for the N'ihdoggs. After all there had been another definite victory for the swarmer Kamikaze boys. Though we had taken considerable losses, there were no noticeable holes in that dark sky. Drozzler said losses are justified: the N'ihdoggs had suspended all aircraft flights worldwide, so there was no chance of any bombing, but he seemed his usual gloomy self. Other aircraft that had been flying on route were summarily knocked out of the air almost instantaneously. So our part of the uprising had really begun, confirmed by the war councils' communications man, Sneirtznerts, as, 'Sunup, Japanese time'. N'ihdoggs have to go to the cities for military protection, evacuating the suburbs. The animals were devastating everything in fierce retaliations, killing thousands. Millions of people too frightened to sleep, since we used the cover of darkness in the Far East, now swarmed into the cities for the protection offered them. Fatalities were high

on both sides; we had lost many larger predators like the mountain lion, and bear, in the inner city areas of the east coast. Other animals, Caribou, Elk, Moose, Mountain goat, were taking the brunt of the attack, I wasn't sure they would make it when this war began, most have come through. I had told Drozzler earlier how they would be better employed as, excuse the term because of its political incorrectness, 'beasts of burden'. When I mentioned it, a wail went up in the War Council, so I dropped the idea like a dog turd. Smaller animals like the rat and skunk, burrowing mammals, like Sneirtsnertz, Bloggdrott the Armadillo and Ronkers the Rat were doing better. They had overwhelmed cities in the east to such an extent that N'ihdogg teams were no longer risking the underground sewers to infiltrate their hideouts. But with the natural ability of camouflage, and knowledge of the territory, the smaller animals had proven elusive, though the N'ihdogg dogs had taken some of us. More reports had come in on the radio about our air power, how it had proved effective; it seemed that it was no good just shooting at the sky. The birds were too many. You could shoot them, but the effectiveness was slight compared to the actual amount of fire power required to eradicate them. Only the bomber squadrons ran the risk of getting shot down. They were re-designated to the upper skies, out of range of the big guns' flak and the average crackpot crack shot. When thousands of large birds like the Albatross populations let go of large rocks, some up to ten or fifteen pounds, from a height of six or eight thousand feet, watch out! It's not just one wave of them, it's a constant bombardment and not just rocks but bombs and grenades used with deadly effect to find their targets, added to the destruction. I have inspected drop sights from our practices - the ground is pretty shook up, think what that does to craniums, bodies and buildings? When the terrestrial M.U.C.S.P.A.T's lads swarm, cos. numbers are the name of the game, nothing can survive the attacks from thousands of those biting nibblers, not even the fiercest dogs. Our spies are everywhere, and we're undetectable.

'Just like you, my tree rat spy Ratatosk'.

The element of surprise was proving effective, though I was sure that the next objective assigned to us would find the N'ihdoggs waiting, for now they knew the answer to a week-long mystery.

I didn't expect the war to be easy, but the War Council did. They're convinced the power of Glashiel and Talwadc will save them. Like I said, I found myself not in the middle ground, but in the middle of an apocalypse, sinking with extremism and fanatical ideologues on all sides, even conducting the most important details of military strategy.

'That being, no doubt, determines your future'

'Exactly Glashiel. You're beginnings to understand'. I was right, our destination attack point had come in from Talwadc Central. Drozzler said it was, 'just down the valley, can't miss it, code name Angerboda'. He wanted me to go ahead to ascertain the stomping ground. That's what I thought, send me in first, if I got killed, the bird messengers will report my obituary, but the war will go on! The meat eaters of the War Council eyed the Man boy suspiciously while we talked,. Berzeldrerts and Snerterers, especially interested, were eyeing him up as though they were considering a quick mating. The omnifutuant armadillos were sniffing the air and rotating their ears in an all -bulletin way like someone was sending them a satellite signal. I asked if everything was all right, telling them,

'My old transporter died, wasn't it lucky I found the new young relief just up the valley?' Snerterers said I was always lucky, more than most; did blue eyes have anything to do with it? I told him that under Glashiel some are more fortunate than others, but luck, that's more to the point of the hunt than a simple finding of a Kanga'. Co-incidences do happen. Look at his kind, everyone like Snerterers are identical. It's only their squinnies that enable me to tell who's who. Why were they always like that when a stranger came into camp? So the introduction didn't go quite as smoothly as I expected when I looked into those thestral squinnies, wondering what was going on.

'Only I shall ever know little one'.

'And you're not saying, eh Glashiel?

'Correct'.

Sinir especially, really went over him with a fine tooth comb, wondering why his eyes were dry and swollen? Fundin gave the negative gecko multi-nod, Sinir couldn't distinguish the pawkery that hid a hot and sweating N'ihdogg Man boy.

'Jolly good job for both of you'.

I thought his smell was going to give him away, keeping the ever whiffing Sneirtsnertz away, trying to busy him with flattering questions that he loves to answer. 'Find any towns on the way?' Yes they had hit Pokey - Ville, didn't I see it?

'Did you hit it'? I asked avoiding his question. Snerter's replied pompously saying, 'history'. That was that! The Thraesvelg sniffers too, though gratefully, they don't, unless requested, sniff Kanga's mesopygion regions, gave me tense moments when I really thought it was going to be over as they whiffed him with every available sense. Which wasn't very much thank little green acorns. Drozzler asked lots of questions.

'Was he a foreigner or did he escape from the zoo, had he seen the rearguard that was behind us, if so where did he see them'? Fundin remembered to speak in broken speech.

'Not see divisions other or anywhere see do I'.

Not bad for a beginner, naturally I interjected, 'he had a bad case of rasp throat, and couldn't speak much due to the weather, how I met him on my southern reconnoiter, while I was scouting N'ihdogg habitats possibly lying in that direction'. My report was sketchy, there was a beat of pregnant silence, the war council eyed Fundin up and down, I anxiously awaited, before Sinir greeted Fundin the Rapparee. Then they all relinquished all suspicion when they bought the biggest con of my life to fruition, wimbling around him cordially with greetings and Fundin: accepted into the frampold fold, fell in. Only after he launched into a grandiose series of falsehoods; about how he had escaped from the Denver Zoo, how he had been born there, was the son of Katie and Ken, how he never had a wild side name, until I named him. He told the War Council many lies, how he wished to serve Talwadc to avenge the incarceration of his parents by the N'ihdoggs, wishing to offer himself as my vehicular scout transporter. I proffered the words of a paraclete to them, 'he was young', could cover a great deal of ground with him, smarter than the other mobile I had been using, waste no time on the longest day eh Drozzler's? Pleased I had trained a new recruit, even congratulating me on his name he agreed. Fundin was good, very good, he almost had me convinced, but mostly he was in. Though I don't know if I can ever believe him again, after the good rattling he gave them about himself. Snerter's still looked at him suspiciously, saying something

about how he looked like someone else, 'Koosh', he said stupidly, but I bluffed the stupid Armadillo, telling him that all Kanga's looked the same, just like Armadillo's, that, 'Koosh' had already made the supreme sacrifice this morning at breakfast. The rest, amused at my remarks to Sneirtsnetz, didn't seem to mind at all, wondered what all the fuss was about. They wanted us to head the main colony and report the situation at Angerboda right away. This was fine by me 'cos my bike was on fire so to speak, we would all rendezvous in the large valley, lying west of the city according to Sinir's map and to await my report. If I failed to return before the sun was at its zenith, they would come on without me. They would have to do just that, 'cos we wasn't going back.

'Then why are you nodding your head with an affirmative multi nod?'

'Get inside if you can', said Berzeldrerts, see what they have ready for us'.

'I'll just hang about on the out skirts of the battle'.

'Well you're deserting after all tree spy Ratatosk'.

'Take some air message carrier units with you', said

Sinir. I went to desist for good reason, but looking at Sinir's serious face I only said, 'When do we leave?' 'Hell, right away, since I didn't wish to expose Fundin to the dogs more than necessary, who would give him a good whiffing over, when they got the chance and challenge him with their coprolalia. So we remained detached from the main units for the duration of the intern at war council headquarters. The Sun climbed into the morning sky- we ate, Fundin didn't particularly like the mixture of berries, fruit seeds and cactus offered him. I said that was too bad, just be grateful. I hadn't eaten since my very early breakfast, as Snerter's came round telling me to, 'eat fast the morning was growing late', so we began to ready ourselves before they are discovered.

'Don't be so sure little one, it's not over till it's over.'

'Glashiel, it's over, say goodbye to Bloggers.'

Without so much as by your leave, we dutifully left the main column and headed into the desert. Our three messenger ravens, swooping and swiffing about the air following us closely, ready with any arial report of danger. It was too bad we had to take them along because that meant Fundin had to spronk rather than

follow his natural call of running; very tiring and a real jogger for me! We dare not speak, instead spronked along in a dread silence as those black crows glided over head. I had fooled the war council again, stupid lot of nupsons really, perhaps they deserve to die.

'Now that's not very nice'.

'Nice, what do you think they would have done to us if they had discovered Fundin?' Glashiel the Indifferent didn't answer as usual. I was glad. Who cares what Glashiel thought, sure I'm crafty, I don't go around inhabiting someone else.

'Is this what this place is?'

I had dreaded this day since the campaign began, only now it may be easier to escape. I could do it with Fundin, I hadn't really relished the idea of traveling alone, especially across the dessert. My pads wouldn't hold up to the burning sand. One thing had me worried, the war was going well for us rather than the N'ihdoggs. Large cities were being destroyed by fire and general mayhem everywhere. Deaths high on both sides, mostly N'ihdogg. Large movements of bird, and animals had regrouped after surviving the attacks and were heading toward new destinations that still had pockets of resistance.

We had conquered the sea and the air, the land war was proving to be harder. Quickly I thought what I should do if the animals won. What I could tell them; what they would believe about my excursions. Perhaps I could be held prisoner by the N'ihdoggs or knocked unconscious, temporarily killed only to be later resurrected. It wouldn't come to that. Once the animals won, they would all go back to Glashiel and forget all about me and Fundin. I would just be another squirrel, and he would be another whatever he wanted to be.

'More wishful thinking little one'.

That voice in my noodle will follow me to the end of the earth. It will never let me get away and it will never let me forget I am an animal of Talwadc. Now the future, was looking like Fundin may have to be an animal all his life, although he was happy to be on the, 'animals side' as he put it. 'Wild side' is how I put it, but I wanted him to put it on my side. He didn't like it when I told him how Talwadc makes you go rabid and micturate everywhere! He was glad the wild side spared him that. I was glad Drozzler hadn't made another amphiexic speech

otherwise he would have been the odd man out. I didn't explain that one to him at the time. Despite these gloomy insights, when the birds were out of earshot I tried to propel his thoughts to more impartiality, suggesting he may have to change sides quickly, not get entrenched in loyalty, if things started to go wrong we would have to switch.

'My my little one; what a web we weave'.

'Well difficult times require difficult solutions, free flowing, go with the flow and all that'. Even going as far to tell Fundin of my plan to make for the safety of the desert. Suggesting very strongly that we should desert the war, the Man boy wasn't listening, so I told him again,

'We shall leave when the battle begins O Fundin', I reiterated, he didn't listen. Worried that my plan wasn't going to work, we traversed across the open plain toward Angerboda-Giant land, I sank my ideas further into his noodle, worried he had other ideas. Perhaps he was going to desert me!

'So you've met your match at last little one'.

As we moved with every spronk toward that place, new and frightening thoughts filled me with fear and dread. We could be heading into the very center of the battle, and it may not be possible to retreat. I felt pavid, didn't want to go to Angerboda, as the familiar discomfort of my fantod surrounded me in a delirium.

'Be not fearful little one, these are great things in Glashiel'

Trouble is who gives a damn! Just give me a quiet peaceful place to live! Fundin was tiring, and I wish to dispatch our messengers swift of wing with some latest headlines. The N'ihdoggs are packing up and leaving the planet'. Too late for anything like that now, the campaign was well underway. I was brought out of my thoughts when Fundin stopped dead in his tracks. Something was happening, on the ridge of rock. We watched a group of vehicles laden with N'ihdoggs heading up along the main highway, traveling north, armed with guns and grenade launchers, tanks and heavy armaments, straight into the main division of Talwadc West. I instructed two of the carrier air mail boys to leave right away and report, then the third to go forward and scout out Angerboda. Hugin and Munin left immediately. As they flew high over the main road, crossing

the N'ihdoggs path, I could hear someone firing off their weapons into the sky blue yonder. 'Fat chance', I thought 'of hitting those boys'. It occurred to my peanut noodle how crude the N'ihdoggs were in comparison to our highly-evolved personal technology. Take me for example, you ought to see me wiz about on a tree, absolutely staggering acrobatics you know! No man made machine allows them to do that, and by themselves, most of them are quite putsey. It was time to talk Fundin into desertion, after all it was a given we should carry on south straight into the Madres. I didn't see why a Man boy rescue should change my plan. Avoiding the direct question and inevitable confrontation, I made my diplomatic suggestions, allowing him to make the choice to join me.

'How thoughtful of you little one'.

'Why stop?' I told him sincerely, 'for either beast or man'. He asked like a nupson what I meant I attempted to secure his help out of the battle, telling him, 'I hadn't rescued you to ally yourself with those who are going to eat you or put you in a Dachau camp for orphans, if they survived'. Fundin was silent, except for his anhelating lungs gasping for more spronking potential. I waited for his reply.

'You're not considering his inability to run and talk at the same time are you little one?'

'Yes I am Glashiel, he has you.'

In the silence we were getting closer to Angerboda. I need to trust, trust in his loyalty to my sensible plan.

'Is that possible little one, trust in yourself, can you do that?'

So sayeth the rat-brain noodle mockingly,

'It's really nibbling away at the edges of my nerves, feeling the sedation from its hundred needle pricks, not relenting, to its calming sensations, too pervasive like the rabid Talwadc. You should know Glashiel, can't you feel it?'

'You mean your trust in the Man boy... me?, I feel nothing, I am...'

I know, 'Glashiel: indifferent', what does indifference feel like?'

'I cannot know this 'feeling', or even care to care'.

'Thanks a lot!'

I began to swim in a pond of doubt and to speculate my fate. I hadn't trusted any Sapiens, 'cept the O.P.M and he had warned me about others.

'You trusted the Man boy, you were overwhelmed with this, 'feeling''

'That's quite right O righteous one, not with my life'.

When Fundin got close to the N'ihdoggs' stronghold he wouldn't need me anymore. I had another plan that would not require him. It was quite simple, make a single dash for it without him, after I made soon boots! With the N'ihdoggs on the lookout, we couldn't get in real close to investigate anything of any worth. It was all too late.

'So what do you think we're doing'? I asked him regenerating enthusiasm for my question. Fundin panted out something about; 'doing our part, pant, puff, wheeze'. He spluttered out,

'We never know when we're needed'. I said I needed him right now to get us on the safe path to the Madres. Fundin steadied his pace. We were closing in on the Giant land Angerboda. He wanted to know about something that was in Angerboda. He had understood something terrible was there, something he wanted to know, something that was on the news the day before something about fire. This brought me to another realization, was it worth getting the Fundin to change his mind and desert? After the last remark, burning with youthful ardor, perhaps it was best that I left alone; a burnt paw, even a temporary crippling from sunburn would be better than soliciting something lethal in Angerboda's dark halls. I had avoided such things all my life, there was no reason to change now. Another question, would he desert, as if he needed to, to what did he belong? He returns to a N'ihdogg again, so that he could infiltrate them? Have the best of both worlds, why not?

'As long as we are going into Angerboda we should use the disguise to our mutual advantage'. He could easily conceal me but I couldn't stand the close quarter confrontation. So he could hide me and would come back. I said I'd wait for him in the Madres, 'don't take too long'. He thought it out first, I waited a reply, thoughtful is this Man boy.

'If I will stay with you, we may survive; if I go back to

the people, I may survive. So perhaps the animals may not succeed, but perhaps you will; perhaps there will be no winners from this affair and we will have only our friendship. Since we have agreed upon a bargain, let that stand as our reason for you did save my life! A life for a life, and besides now we that are friends we may have need of each other again. 'Indeed we were friends, and I was glad to hear that fact of friendly affection.

"So we bypass Angerboda?" I asked, unmoved by his generous perustrations.

'We must go together, I may need you', he told me unconvincingly.

'We must leave together. This is no place to be', I said.

'Trust me, like I have trusted you, so I may pay back the life that I owe you'.

'You don't owe me anything 'cept some help to live and make a home again. Don't you want a home again'?

'Not really', he replied, 'I never had a real home after my parents died. I never really belonged anywhere, no one cared for me until I met you. I was born in the middle of a war so perhaps it should be that I should die in one!'

'Why you should think that I'm only loyal to my own? You're not!'

'Now that's telling you Ratatosk!'

'Besides they call me 'paki' or 'chinky', I don't fit in to this America, I have nothing and nowhere, 'cept for you'.

I felt a cheery glow come swimming across my breast momentarily when he smiled down at me. I knew our friendship hung by a thin thread.

'I said something like that to you little one'.

Fundin was trying to understand, trying to see what was happening.

'The N'ihdoggs?' he asked rhetorically, I nodded to confirm him.

'They have done some terrible things to the wildlife and forests, oceans and rivers on Earth. Now I believe like your comrades believe, that you have to make a stand somewhere and this is mine. Besides I care for the animals, don't you? I will die for the cause!'

I told him that wasn't necessary, I wouldn't. As for caring for the animals, well maybe some of them, most can go over

Birkerot! His youthful enthusiasm and ardor burnt brighter when I said this, sickening me to shame. When he asked

'What are you doing in the fight? Aren't you prepared to die for it? don't you think the animals are justified'?

Sadly I told him I was only ready to desert for it, I had other business! Disheartened, knowing I wasn't a real chauvinist for the cause, he lowered his eyes to not to look at me. I offered him my solicitudes, telling him how I had sworn never to kill, and avoid party babble or invective, instead find the middle ground as required of me from the O.P.M. Fundin looked confused in his simple way. I am sure he knew nothing about what I said. He murmured something incomplete about the place called the middle ground, asking, 'are people and animals happier there than here?' I saw my chance to convince him, since I firmly held that the right place was this middle ground. If he could see it like me we would be off the hook to Angerboda.

'Yes O friend, it is it is a wonderful place full of serenity and happiness, where the balance of life is respected and all things in it have a place'. I waited expectantly, we had still not stopped moving and were heading into Angerboda. 'But if this place exists then has it also fallen into the wasteland of the war of Talwadc. What I mean is that all these roads are surely the place that you seek, it is right here and now surely'.

'I understand what you mean', I added hastily irucund and abject. He had defeated my reasoning, indeed I never thought that asking that one would have brought such an answer. I babbled on,

'True, though according to battle-brain Mannan'an nothing escapes the wrath of Talwadc except the middle ground, so let us go find it'. Fundin argued the right of the animals to rebel against the N'ihdoggs and to open up the middle ground, saying, there had been far too much mediocrity in regard to such important issues. Since coming to America he had spent many hours watching TV documentaries about animal species getting entirely wiped out, so the middle ground was all-round me and I never knew it. In his country he watched as the trees of the ancient forest, cut down to make chop sticks, left the land bleak and dead. He said it was funny that the N'ihdoggs

was destroying the very place that they all had come from.

'So how can you think that this war's not justified? It's only a matter of time before everything, other than human, is to fall.' Fundin told me dangerously, passionately. He hadn't finished,

'Populations of the animals keep moving over, to make room for the people. Somehow it can't go on'! He was beginning to sound like Drozzler.

'Precisely' I said, 'survive. Surely survival is the all-important thing; what happens through it all is the little bit dished out to you or I. Like our paths meeting like this, and what waits for us in the future only we must determine, because I am not going to get killed in this war, so let's leave. It's just interesting enough to be better than death. Justification has nothing to do with it. I just want to live'.

Passionately I asked him again.

'So what about the desertion, are you in'?

Fundin didn't know; he didn't know how to decide. I urged him further into my corner, telling him, how it wasn't our fight. If it was, then we would be looking at each other from opposite direction. We are friends, didn't that tell him something? We can be free from all the carnage, we don't have to get involved. I thought I had him convinced.

'Perhaps if I fight for the animals they will recognize my efforts and let me live, we could look for the middle ground together afterwards'. He was getting way out of the real picture for me.

'Forget the middle ground let's just leave for the desert and stop moving closer to those halls of the Iron wood. If the animals find you they will kill you, have no doubt about that.'

We were still edging with every spronk toward that dread place on the horizon. My time was running out for us to run.

'It's time for you to run alone'.

'What does Talwadc mean'? Fundin asked, innocent and fresh, no doubt trying to lead me away from my ruse.

Lacking patience I told him,

'It means war and strife if we head toward that place; more blood and guts and death, every unhealthy thing that life cannot be made of'.

As the city of Angerboda became visible on the horizon, I tried

to cozen him again with my plea.

'If you want to stay alive better still stick to Gallad, even better, let's turn around and head for those hills.' Fundin told me it didn't mean that. I told him it doesn't matter anymore what Talwadc meant - who really gave a hoot!

'Death surely awaits us ahead, and at our rear that same fate seemed equally real, now please Fundin.' The fear grew in me as the city became more visible on the horizon with every spronk from that eager self-righteous compatriot. My brain raced thinking how could I stop him. Should I jump out and head off, were we to proceed into Angerboda's great halls O Fundin? Angerboda, bigger than life, full of angry N'ihdoggs, I shuddered at its immensity. It was just my luck that of all the people in this world to have as an ally I had to get Fundin who, although he possessed exceptional devotion to the very animals that would kill him in a twinkle of a badgers sphincter, wouldn't be easily persuaded from it! I just knew it! He told me how he only wanted to see what the N'ihdogg was doing with the fire they had told everyone they had and we had to find it, we wouldn't have any risks, we had the perfect cover! Hero of the day wanted to do more, promised to do more, promised to look after me, wanted to get inside the place and look around. Didn't think it was right to leave right then. Inexplicably Gallad the Gullible agreed.

'Now why would you do something like that'?

Fundin the Fallible promised to get out real quick once we had a good scan about. Get supplies, we would need them, then we could make away as I had planned. Stuck, I really needed him, on my own the desert would burn me up like a rabbit rammed up an exhaust pipe.

'Now I understand, you're only thinking of yourself again.'

' I knew I was losing control of my fate, just like an N'ihdogg to take over! As we began to approach the suburbs O' Angerboda I quickly realized that nothing around me was alive or moving; everything exhibited an unearthly disquieting solitude. No people in sight, no traffic, nothing to listen to, nothing of any interest to report, let's go to the desert. Everything was deserted. I really didn't care, we were out of the main war party's range, but they could always send 'Big Eagle'

to get us and give us a good pelting with rocks and grenades. Fat chance of that, we were alone, so why continue into danger?, Fundin stopped in the suburbs to slowly pant air back into his hot and thirsty body. As the silence of those deserted streets became apparent, it was very clear we were a target for a sniper's bullet.

'Yes, he's a little larger than you.'

A random solitary sniper; you never know Glashiel, could fire at any moment. It's easy for you to speak you obviously are not corporeal. Fundin took me down back alleys, passing the rows of garages that most American suburbs are teeming with. I suggested that we immediately put our switch I.D. plan into operation since we were in the N'ihdogg territory. 'Should we proceed'? I asked him,

'Let's get out of here Fundin', I called out passionately pleading for my freedom. He only ignored me telling me how, 'A Squirrel is easier to hide than a Fundin'. Slipping inside a shed and placing me down, he began removing the two piece costume while I waited for an answer. Soon the evagenerated remains of Kush lay empty and deflated on the garage floor like a shriveled prune.

'She is now deep inside of me.'

'Where, where is she, tell me Glashiel the omniscient?'

It is silent 'cos it doesn't know. Fundin doused himself with water, taking a swig and rearranged his shorts, tucking his shirt inside them. I could tell he almost felt N'ihdogg again especially when he placed his spectacles back on his face and his world came back into focus as mine went out into another fantod of fear and suspicion. I knew we had gone further than I had wanted. In a split moment I could see that something had come into focus, taking me far away from my plan as he smiled happily for the first time - like he could see the prospects of his own future, yet not mine. He smiled, not for me though, that smile had nothing to do with me. I was standing on the seat of a bicycle and it was only common sense to him that it would convey us to Angerboda. He looked at it scrupulously. The tires were a bit flat, so he pumped in some air, 'Brakes were ok', he told me. I gave a standard Gecko nod of approval, as I silently watched him spring into action. Soon enough the bicycle was ready. He stowed the 'two-piece' in a cupboard ,

then waited, for me, me! 'What can I do'? I asked. Fundin pointed to my little bag that I always carry. He was right, I couldn't go into N'ihdogg territory with that around my shoulders, I wasn't going into Angerboda, I resolutely told him. Fundin sibilantly pressured me with words of persuasion, saying how it wasn't for very long. Like you said, just get some supplies and a quick scan around, then we would leave. He promised me, the war wasn't for either of us.

'So leave the bag Gallad', he told me. I argued no one was going to see me, and the bag contained all that I owned in the world.

'You must trust- to find the middle ground little one'.

'You can get it later, when we come back this way'. Trusting him, I reluctantly slipped the bag into the cupboard with his stinking 'two-piece'. I climbed up onto the handle bars loosing no time; wanting to get this excursion over with. We began to go into Angerboda. We had to go right away cos, 'our bike was on fire. Well, mine was!

'You mean your bike was on fire little one'.

'That's what I said Glashiel the now not-so-bold'. We passed row upon row of desolate streets, gliding along somewhat carefree, 'cept for the thought that a sniper's bullet would lay us both stone dead any moment. On the bright side, at least as a target moving with great speed, since I had urged Fundin to pedal like merry billy-o, we would have some chance of escaping those imaginary bullets. Occasionally a stray pet would run out at the sight of us and pursue the bike as though it had found it's owners. I didn't think much about them since I knew I was safe, but reminded of several traumatic experiences when I had to dodge such foes in Blazing Norton, I felt nothing in the way of saving them from the army of Talwadc. Fundin did, telling them to run away, else they would get scooped! They couldn't understand, stupid as they are. Once they discovered us it seemed we had permanently collected them, following behind us in a yip-yipping rabble. Fundin shouted at them, jeering and angry, at the next intersection, they came back. No N'ihdoggs sniper bullets had skimmed us with its death like glance. Several more stretches of suburban back roads were covered in break neck speed as soon it became clear which road to take. Suddenly we rounded a corner, and there in front of us was the

main highway leading into the city that shone like a great clock on the desert skyline. A massive sign telling us, 'PHOENIX CITY CENTER'. So we went that way, toward the massive pinnacles of Hag of the Ironwood looming high above my head. Like a great hall with the sky as its roof, and six hundred doors leading into that interminable labyrinth of Angerboda. Ahead, the road was blocked high with wrecks, stretching like an antiquated dragonate straight across our path. I was sure I saw soldiers flanking us. I turned to the peddler, shouting to hide me, I could already pick up on N'ihdogg whiffs. Taking his hands from the handle bars, he proceeded to pull his shirt over his head, making my panic reach a fearful shrill pitched scream! We were without steering and now blind, if only temporarily, as he tugged the shirt from his back and wrapped it around me and the handle bars. I couldn't believe we were still traveling upright. I was cleverly concealed, with only a slit through the fabric to look from, as we sped on into the N'ihdogg malabolge. We started down an in-road, but then I had second thoughts about going on. I shouted for him to stop, he carried on. I had decided it wasn't necessary to go into that great thestral labyrinth of six hundred doors where the floors covered in snakes await you. The mirror buildings led in every direction, even into the sky. These monstrous edifices, these deserted avenues, these Woods or Iron. Fundin only said nonchalantly, 'it would be ok, we would get out safely, no one knew we were coming.' I did. Several well-armed soldiers drove up in front of us. I knew we had reached the point of no return. I had safely made a dive into Fundin's shirt, and from my slit I saw one N'ihdogg raise his pistol, pointing it directly at Fundin, violently shouting,

'Are you crazy being out here alone on a bike, kid? You haven't heard of the animal attacks?' Fundin had heard about the animals, he hadn't seen anything on his journey down from Flagstaff after the attack on the town. Next thing, to my horror, the N'ihdogg soldiers ordered Fundin inside the barricade and before I realized it we were inside the labyrinth. So much for remaining incognito as Fundin pushed the bike into a doorway, into the darkness of Angerboda that grew darker around me. I knew he had left me, his voice getting fainter and tinnier. One soldier asked him, 'hey kid, d'ya

want your shirt?' I froze, readying a set of knashers for the obtrusive hand, it never came. Fundin asked him, 'Did everyone move into the city?' The soldier told him: 'the only safe places were the large skyscrapers made of concrete and glass. Wood didn't stand up to the millions of animals, then some swearing about rodents. I wasn't feeling comfortable. More details on Fundin's escape. He's a good little fibber, I will say that for him, if that's anything to say about anyone,; not a bad spy either. Things were not too good all round for the N'ihdoggs; it was getting worse for me. The animals were taking over, that's for sure, as everyone is driven inside their stinking labyrinths by wild animals, then more swearing. One soldier went into great detail about the emergency, telling Fundin how the White House had ordered a full sweep across the entire country to find animals, any animals, and kill them. Had he seen any? Fundin hadn't, he could be relied upon to let them know right away if he did.

'Mobilization of the entire country's Army - the Navy and Air force were out of the fight, shipping sunk, including the Sixth Fleet, overnight by massive fish no one had ever seen before', said the soldier bitterly. No time to launch depth charges they had come and gone so 'quickly. Submarines as well disappeared into the deep. Planes unable to hold altitude due the billions of tiny birds, it's suicide to go up there'. he said with remugience pointing skyward.

Fundin asked if he could go. I waited - I felt the bounty weighing heavily on my neck. Next thing, the soldiers telling him they were to taking him to an emergency shelter since he couldn't look after himself. Fundin said he'd wanted to bring his bike, but the soldiers said there wasn't room in the jeep. Slowly the voices grew quieter and quieter until I couldn't hear them anymore, leaving me alone in that place of Angerboda and the great tall stone at the entrance. I was all alone in dangerous territory waiting for the return of Fundin, my worst fear had come true. Everything I had not wished to have done, I had done; every place I had not wished to go to, I had gone. How stupid of me! Was I loosing my sense. Again in fear I spoke to the O.P.M, asking for clear thoughts to guide me from that place. Time passed, noises emanated from various directions; far away I thought I heard screams and explosions

then more silence and running feet, then again screaming and gunshots. When the bike began to move I realized Fundin had returned, I peeped furtively from my covers. First thing I realized, before I spoke, was the hands I saw were not boy-like at all, in fact they were large and strigulous.

'Beware of the hands of a stranger little one'.

'Beware of the voice of a stranger O Glashiel'.

I was gripped in fantod fear, wheeled away to some strange destination, without knowing where Fundin was, or he knowing where I would be. Things were not working out very well as usual, it has been like that for a few days. I thought it best if I could wait my moment and escape, perhaps jump from the bike, so that I could wait up a wall till Fundin came back. The sunlight faded as we entered a darker labyrinth where everything has an echo. The journey across no-man's land, filled with buckets of blood and bone, where the nerve ends snap and the brain aches of being found out, impaled in agony, or killed. No opportunities to make a dash for it. I was beginning to hallucinate in fear. Little old me chased across Angerboda with guns going off in all directions, swinging by my neck, hung out like washing for the dogs to chew and micturate over. Attempting, and failing an escape, found out and caught, rearing up, removing large chunks of N'ihdogg flesh with my one inch incisors.

'Don't boast so little one, besides you dislike blood'!

Always alert to the possibility that any moment that rough hewn hand could reach into the shirt that hid me. It would all be a matter of instinct, usually a quick bite to the offending appendage, and a quick mid-air dash. I lay like a coiled spring, fangs to the ready, hoping it wouldn't be necessary to slash into the stranger. I resisted a panicked exit and hung on in the hope that Fundin would return and pay me back the rescue. Nothing happened and soon the stranger's hands had gone with their owner, leaving me and the bike parked up against a warehouse wall. I waited and waited in that shirt, Fundin didn't come back. Everything was passing before my eyes, a hundred thoughts, a second. Riddled with doubt and fear, I peeked out again, squinting into the darkness. I wasn't very sensible just then; instinctual power possessed me more than my wits. High above me, the ceiling was swimming with large glowing lights. All-

round me large metal containers with 'Surt-Napalm', written in bold red letters and a skull and crossbones from those pirate books at the O.P.M's, then some hundred lettered word I couldn't read. The smell of N'ihdogg meat, sweat, hamburger and dry cheese mixed with underarm deodorant, halitosis, flatulence, urine, tobacco smoke around me. Exhaust fumes mixed in a malodorous pong of last year's eggs beaten up in diarrhea. Suddenly I caught the worst whiff of whiffs - the mephitic stench of gravy and urine, dogs! I froze in terror as I felt my vulnerability. I was sitting like a tasty spadger, it would only take one dog to whiff me and send me to Glashiel. Away across the floor I could hear a toilet flush and then footsteps on the concrete, as a soldier emerged from the washroom tying up his gunnies. More voices, further away down that long dark hall of doom. I was a sitting duck. Would Fundin hand me over to the N'ihdoggs?

'Change your locale, get a new perspective, gather some real intelligence, get high, climb high.'

For once I was glad of the advice of Glashiel the not so indifferent after all. Sliding from my covers I ran pell mell straight up one of the supporting pillars without a single branch to grab, when full of fear we can defy gravity, thanks to Glashiel.

'Why thank you little one.'

I was soon up in the rafters, springing along the iron threads, watching the armed N'ihdoggs below, the enemy, talking, cursing, smoking, the fan blowing a supply of fresh air over them, as I ran into the corner of the wall to hide my anhelating self of a fantod. Along a bit farther, was a set of offices situated on a mezzanine so I slid up to the concrete pillars, to listen to find out what? I had no idea what I was doing or what I would be doing next. In front of me directly at eye level, more soldiers sat, talking and smoking cigarettes. The door was open, I could hear their conversation about the attacks of the warriors of Talwadc. From the radio came more spluttered news of the day.

'Now you're the Ratatosk the Tree spy little one, how does it feel?'

'Please Glashiel not now, your voice I feel can be heard all over this place.'

I knew most of the things the soldiers were talking about: more death and bloodshed, more planes knocked out of the air, failed plans to capture the birds using helicopters. It was everything I wanted to know.

'As long as they controlled the skies, we're not capable of launching successful attacks against them!'

We had captured the skies and the entire oceans of the world. The only territory left to the N'ihdoggs was the land masses, and they were falling also into our incapable hands. The animals were winning, it was time for me to leave. The radio had given up, one of the soldiers tapped it violently, complaining. The radio stations are out, another victory for us. Outside under the early morning daylight come screams and explosions, gunfire. Air Division skirmishes blackening the skies were already killing and destroying, whole city blocks with powerful walls of bombs. The soldiers were busy trying to get another radio station on the walkie-talkie, swearing among themselves like the leviners of Talwadc with their coprolalia. The callous thought came to me again, had Fundin deceived me, and told the N'ihdoggs, or deserted me?

'You were going to, little one.'

'I thought you had decided to miss this part of my life O Glashiel'?

'How can he find you?'

'He probably doesn't wish to, O Glashiel,'

I told it, irucund. Wishful thinking mixed in with feelings of getting dumped by the Fundin, was getting to me. I hate betrayal, if it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have come this far into N'ihdogg territory risking my neck. Get out of here, keep looking, keep listening, that was all I could think, as I skipped across the gable ends of the dark labyrinth.

'Forget Fundin', up onto a window for another view of another street. Same as the last one, the blue sky dotted out by cloud after cloud of black air divisions of Talwadc bombing again. Below me in the street, small fires were raging out of control amidst chaos and confusion. Really, we had done all this? Now the rage of Talwadc was rising to a fevered pitch, I began to feel twitchy when my rat voice Glashiel said those words. I shuddered in dread apprehension of their meaning. I felt Glashiel seemed to like it all. Used to going through life

without ever making any impression on anything, without making such a fuss over a few stomping grounds, surprised, feeling awkward at the power that came from such impudent success.

'Except the surface of a nut'.

'That's right Glashiel, sometimes you can't believe what's happening to you.'

'Believe it little one'.

Searching the crowds of people and soldiers brought no sign of Fundin, I grew into a fantod as the hand of death spread broad and plain before me. Below me the long faces of the N'ihdoggs, outside the birds of death, there was nowhere I could go. There must be! Move on, keep looking about, stay busy, keep your eyes out,

'For Fundin little one'.

'For a way out of here.'

'Wait till dark and slip out. So you really have decided to take the way out of here? Perhaps you should cancel those plan.'
I had to get out of here this morning.

'Now listen little one, you're panicking, slow down, sit tight, wait, have trust in your friend.'

To cozen myself I was beginning to think how the N'ihdogg world wasn't so bad; they were really no different from us, except they had forgotten and become more like helpless machines than creatures of terrestrial origins. I might even find the O.P.M. and he would help me. Think about it, there is nothing to think about except the tonitruating of my beating heart, mixed crazy with my fear of what may come now that death walks abroad with solemn smiles this day. Days' dream thoughts passed through me. When he picked me up after I had fallen from my perch because he feared for me, so I would not die, instead returned to me that which I had almost lost, then added some of him. Oh Master, why did you go, why did you leave me here? Where now the horizons cannot touch the sky, instead it retreats in wails of windy mystery and pain of death. Unreal is this fog upon which I stumble, this ancient splendor reduced to ashes in eyes of despairing, and these endless counterfeiting circumstances,

'There' I said, 'go you or I'.

'No it's only you alone this time.'

I thought alone.

'All thought is alone little one'.

'How can that be when I have to contend with you'?

My counter-heirs and long lost friendship never to be renewed, now only endless days of death. Master, you are right, they use words, in language each to each, but cannot reveal their hearts when conditioned by their speech. Those who have lost life in their living resolved in this. Trying to reconcile my powers, concoct a theorem of embrace, perhaps not to kill the N'ihdogg, but instead inspire in them an art. What would or should it be? All the animals and N'ihdoggs lying dead, and priests who shouted to the earth that, 'he' would live for man instead and I, in broken images, retreated to a world and hid waiting for that which was already dead and could not be made again. I swung away again in fantod dread, where I heard these words, and then I came too half-dead. I had not slept in many suns or moons, instead I was reaching for things so long ago. Now, stirred by dull ideas that rose up in me, they had their own life and speech.

'What is the secret of Glashiel? Who does it serve, what are the secrets of the animals? Why are the Labors of the Sun in dismal array? What is the meaning of Talwadc?' I did not know I never would. How could I know these great secrets? It sounded like the Man boy, a zealous inquisition. I cannot walk away. My eyes and ears are bound, so too my lips.

'That's a change.'

Only the silent prison of my brain and heart went on and my fantod grew a specter in the world. Around me the noises of the N'ihdoggs, cursing foul beneath their breath, a withered deadly speech that told me of its owner's health. Sickened by it all, I wished to leave, yet the vision persisted and I remained transfixed. My fantod took me like never before, out from that foul-smelling labyrinth into the labors of the Sun I run, seeking my friend here and there where once I had begun.

'Let's face it little one, you lost it'

I know a hall whose door faces north
On corpse strands far from the sun
Poison drips from lights in the roof
That building is woven
On the backs of snakes.

Sibyl's Vision

From the dark labyrinth of the N'ihdoggs Hag of the Iron Wood, a panicked, pavid, fantod into that splendid Sun I spin, everything was before me, like a world-size sketch straight from the Sunday comics, emerging from the dark building - struck by the intense light of day. Remembering the enchantment, through which cozened by Glashiel, succumbed, I came too on the roof of that dark hall, feeling betrayed, exposed to a world in which I did not belong, feeling the eyes of someone upon me, were everyone's eyes falling upon me? Overhead the black swarms of Talwadian death squads were dropping more destruction from the skies, below me terror and fear milled in the bloodied streets of Angerboda. Again my fantod gripped me, I felt the need to escape, possessed by a great instinctual terror, the fiercest terror of all. Above me, a wall of rock and bombs hailed down from the feet of the Talwadc Air divisions that smashed into the ground, buildings and people. I called out to Big Eagle, high on the wing, to come for me, no one heard my soudine shouts among that confusion. I panicked, started running away, which way? I slipped off that building, across a roof top, down to another lower building where there were shadows in which to hide, nothing else to keep me high off the ground except a dash along the gutters - 'not to touch the earth, not to see the Sun', I thought, 'unless it's absolutely necessary'. It was necessary, the wall had run out of bricks. No sooner had I

dropped to the earth, than people in the street saw me, and then came the awful cry.

'The animals', see they come', shouted a mob of pointing panicked fingers. I stopped, frozen in my tracks. Realizing my fatal mistake, I turned to look around, hoping I was not alone, that my legions was here to help. They were far away and the cry from the N'ihdogg was for me! I ran up what seemed like the alley of the dead, growing darker and darker toward the end, hemmed in on both sides by those tall dark walls reaching up to the sky. A crowd of N'ihdoggs in hot pursuit, cursing foul beneath their breath, their weapons firing close behind me. Bullets skimming, ricocheting zings off walls, nearly hitting me. I ran faster and faster, behind me the mob closing, wishing my death. Terrified I ran here there and everywhere, jumping in a nervous twitch. I lost it.

'I just said you had.'

The muse of Glashiel rattled inside my noodle, that voice telling me instantly where to go, when to jump, how much spring in the legs, the real wild side. Suddenly I sprang up real smart as a dog's mouth went go get itself around me, terrier, I think, as it made a salivating lunge for me.

'Never eat anything bigger than your head'

'Especially me. Thank you Glashiel for that war rule of Talwadc # eighteen. Just keep up the good work, guide my feet please'. I was a goner, who ever would have known? Then in a twinkle of a Badger's sphincter, I found myself propelled up toward the sky and away from those rows of snappy knashers. I thought 'big eagle has come', it wasn't Big Eagle, it was a N'ihdogg hand through which I briefly passed. Next: I found myself falling through a bifurcation of material, black leather patent, into a smaller dark confine. Next I saw briefly, lipstick tubes, 'No experimental animals have been tested...' in bold black letters, small jars, Kleenex, tampons, US currency... nothing else, cos. the place went dark, then a 'clunk' overhead. Adding everything up from what I had seen before darkness came, I would say I was in a woman's handbag! I could hear the mob pass, then fade away into the distance to disappear. I was perhaps no safer than before, at least I wasn't dead. What ending could come to me at the hands of a N'ihdogg woman?

'Who said anything about a woman?'

`Since when do N'ihdogg men use lipstick? Glashiel isn't that smart about the N'ihdogg Female!

'Smart enough to save your neck and make your legs move with my silver haste. Some men wear lipstick.'

The fact I had been saved by a woman cheered me a little, they are after all, are they not, the gentler of the sexes?

'Not right now, they're not.'

'Of course, silly me, I forgot we were trying to kill them.'

'They don't know that.'

My heart sank even lower at the thought of the war again.

'How could you forget it?'

Dread, fear of my future rushed over me, seizing me in its fantod again. I tried biting through the fabric of my prison, spitting out threads of material, mouthfuls of rayon lining, biting down furiously, I was almost out. Day light was only threads away, bite more away from the sides, nearly through, as I push my face up to the last obstacle of fabric. Eyes closed, my self sharpening teeth gnashing away full bore.

'You were getting a bit long in the tooth Ratatosk.'

Freedom was building until I hit a high fashion metal fence of chain mail.

'What were you saying earlier about your cousin the beavers?'

I was doomed, but doomed in daylight. A female N'ihdogg voice said, 'It's ruining your bag Condomour'.

I imagined the worst, more torments, if not the rack then perhaps a mild keebabing for ruining personal chattels. We were still in motion, walking along the cratered pavement, below me, a turn to the right, up some outside stairs, then more stairs, we were on a metal gantry, were getting higher and higher until I saw the city skyline. I shifted to the side, ripping more pieces of fabric to get a better view while a young woman was shouting more commentary regarding my vandalism. It was a young mysterious female, owner of high fashion chainmail handbag. So I was right, it was female.

'Ok for once you're right.'

More frozen moments, more thought intractable and nonsensical, worlds in collision and getting higher I can see more of the Angerboda skyline. I looked ahead as I swung

along that stairwell, then looked up, long slender hand, slightly dirty, grasping the handbag. Look ahead, a set of steel doors. We went in, stopped moving, my captor placing me down. More N'ihdogg junk clattering around my ears. We arrived, where? There was sunlight at the end of the room, a clock on the wall, never learnt how to use them. I spun around looking the opposite way, three people, real close, six eyes, big and fisheye.

'Only I know what the fishes see little one, who has been foolish and got caught?'

Terrified, I rattled the bars of my cage, biting furiously at the cheap metal alloy fence, not cheap enough. One of them spoke, the same voice, wondering if I would run away,

'It'd get killed for sure', said the windy hollow voice of a male N'ihdogg. Obviously he cared for my health. Then I knew why they hadn't just killed me? I flashed my eyes around the dirty room, littered with junk food wrappers and old dirty cups half full and there on the walls, a poster of a N'ihdogg saying: Jimi Hendrix, a photograph of presumably Mannan'an, from what I could glean from the sea birds of his general cetaceous description, saying absently 'save the whales'. What about the rest of us?

'Don't worry about him, he's doing just fine!'

Another poster of more genetic doomers, the latest series of species who were about to perish; captured in full color for the N'ihdoggs sentimental adulations. Then another young female N'ihdogg kaleidogyn telling her companions,

'He's not scared now, see how he seems to look around?' Another female voice, telling all present the quick IQ rating of the animal world and my place in it. It was a lot of old rubbish! Everyone is a monomaniac obeying the heteronomic Talwadc. Six eyeballs stared through that ragged slit into my cage for what seemed like eternity, four female eyes tried to speak Glashielese, you know, when people utter Eulalie to animals and babies, like the ravings of the Pentecostals. They were coo eying and woo eying around me, as I tried to look my cutest, lying on my back, legs spread like lamb chops, arms lifted ready for a tickling, eyes batting flattery at the fools. I was hoping to procure my release.

'It's not that easy to escape, I tried to tell you.'

No doubt I would have to ask for that, not right then, I was hoping they would do it on their own. The other two eyes that didn't coo and woo, knew other things, violent things, I could tell by the way the lirophalmonic leer etched me out against my prison walls. I should keep my mouth shut, and I did.

'That's a change.'

'Why Glashiel - I'll talk to you; you're always so chatty when you're up to your neck in alligators and you're trying to drain the swamp. Shaddup will ya' Not wishing to reveal my N'ihdogg arts, fearing they may become unhinged at the idea of an animal possessing such faculties and kill me outright, best to wait and hope, gain as much information as I could, before making a move. Mostly stay calm. If I could escape with my new sharpened fangs I'd rip them from ear to ear to get out of 'ere!

'Remember your vision of the dead.'

Quickly I realized, surrounded by two animal rights sympathizers, maybe three, only the male was quiet. No life stuff there, only life saving stuff in these females; possible members of SAG: Save Animals' Grounds, bringing me freedom and possible safety.

'How can you be so sure?'

I'd be dead by now for sure, smart aleck!

Here they were, real and big, trying to decide what to do with me, 'keep me here or take me out of the city at nightfall'. Yes please, but no killing, which is good. I shut my eyes, hearing someone cooing again. 'Cute' was working, the 'open sezz-a-me' psychology of human sentimentality is a definite life skill in the animal world.

'When you're stuffed in a handbag like a mome'.

'Glashiel you don't even have a body; no body, no pain, no death. What do you know?'

'Enough to keep you alive.' 's aid Glashiel the jilted.

'They did save you'.

It was true, they had saved me, probably for something and at Great risk to themselves. I pondered, should I just come right out and speak to them?

'You look a right twerp lying there; please don't open your nuthole.'

In my state I considered again the outcome: one -they

would all probably start climbing the walls in fear, two - they wouldn't understand that, or three - they could simply accept what was happening and kill me! It was up to me to risk it, after all they weren't mainstream, they obviously didn't fit in with the rest of the N'ihdoggs or I would have been dead by now. I listened and soon found out how they were putting the pieces of the mystery of Talwadc together, as one of the females said,

'Predator and prey all hand in hand, as though they had a unified purpose, Condumour. Birds dropping large rocks and grenades, animals swarming into cities all organized, yet this one here alone! '

'Aossin, perhaps it lost its way, poor thing, others have,. They were gassing them last night. I tried protesting, but it was no good, the crowds were too powerful, the army had no chance of saving them even if they wanted to', said the other kaleidogyn At least I knew their names, Aossin and Condumour. What was the other one called? Come to think about it, what was all this about 'gassing'. We had a lot of that back in camp, but it was different . To my horror I soon realized that the N'ihdoggs had captured some late campaigners who had wandered into Angerboda by mistake. My heart began to syncope, dread pictures of a public tree rat gassing possessed me. It wasn't all panic, otherwise I would have been rattling the bars of my cage instead of lying quietly, listening and waiting for my chance to make a run for it. So I knew these N'ihdoggs weren't stunned by ignorance, like the soldier N'ihdoggs guarding the labyrinth of Angerboda. Now all they had to do was to let me go and it wasn't going to be that easy. I wanted out of there real bad, my extremities were going numb. I stank of female N'ihdogg. More conversation about me again. What were they going to do with me, was I reasonably tame? Did my presence give them anything they could learn from, how did the animals know how to get together to fight this war? ' After all' said the other kaleidogyn Aossin, 'they are very well-organized, they must have some kind of communication, but what?' Lots of questions, no one asked me. I would have loved to have obliged them, like I had done for Fundin. The poster of Mannan'an on the wall caught my eye and I considered more the idea that they're a bunch of animal righter's. It made me feel better if it was so. I was ready to blab anything, feeling some degree of

ease and seeing that no one had performed any ill deed upon me. I wondered if they would know of the One and Perfect Master. Perhaps I should ask them, maybe they would understand if I told them how I had saved the Man boy Fundin. That must be worth something surely? Instead, not having the courage to pipe up, I waited, considered, listened, trying to gain that courage to speak. I opened my eyes, the kaleidogyn were still surrounding the cage with their faces close, too close. I remained curled and cute.

'Come on, get on with it.'

Gradually I spoke out in a ruckled hollow feeble voice, cracking up mid sentence, getting stronger in the middle, finishing clear and strong,

'Get me out of here, I can't stand it anymore!'

I stammered, then fluttered my eyes. Will that work? Did they hear me as I hoped, and will they understand the demand and act?

'So you do have hope after all!'

Strained by the sheer fantasticness of the event, my voice sounded a strange celestomy even to me. Making things more difficult, the young male N'ihdogg hadn't been listening or looking. Can't blame him, I mean who in the N'ihdogg world would be expecting a Ratatosk to talk? Like an accomplished inquisitor he challenged the two kaleidogyn, wanting to know where the funny shrill shout came from. Asked the others if they had said something, Condumour and Aossin calmly told him it must be me. The boy was irucund and irritated by their unusual assertions, accusing them, like someone confronted by the preposterous.

'They have little one, well he has.'

They unanimously insisted it was I who had shouted, which of course I had! Now they surrounded the handbag, with scrutiny in their eyes.

'I was sure it spoke. I saw the mouth move', said Condumour. The other kaleidogyn Aossin confirmed my outburst. Suddenly I felt my worst fear had come true. One pair of angry eyes would crush me where I lay it's smell changed to aggressive fear. If I speak again, I thought, he will kill me, yet I had to speak again if I was to gain their attention, and if I was to be free. So when I knew they were all eyes and ears in my

direction, I mustered up courage again,

'Please get me out a here, I'm going numb.'

The female's eyes were large enough to live in, floating in their sockets like hens' eggs in silent sauces. I spoke again,

'I can't breathe let me out, I shan't try to escape or hurt you'. Now the eyeballs nearly popped out of their sockets!

Condumour proudly re-established her original claim, telling the lirophalmonic slit-eyed male, how it was true, I had spoken.

Aossin didn't doubt what she heard, galvanized to my cause now, silently transfixed on my questioning face, she

understood. The male's face went pavid and etiolated like a

saucer of milk. No adulations of surprise coming from him!

Time passed slowly cramped up inside that handbag; the clock moved its hands from 9:18 to 9:19.

'Gallad in a chain-mail handbag, Good job the Thraesvelgers can't see you, they'd laugh you into Ragnarok'. said Glashiel the indifferent fool. Its hide wasn't in this handbag.

'I walk now in a room no bigger than yours, around and around'.

'Is there someone trying to kill you, if they can?' Only

Aossin knew what she had experienced, trusting her

senses, excited, much to the other male N'ihdoggs displeasure.

'We have a talking squirrel.' She fell about the floor in

shrieks of joy, as Condumour argued with 'slit-eye'.

'Stop wasting time on him Condumour and get me out of here. The other animals will be coming soon!' I shouted

shrilly. She turned around and plangently told me,

'Be quiet! You have made your point'. It was as

though she had always known me and had always been the best of friends, a definite case of familiarity breeding contempt.

'That's telling you now little on.'

I lowered my ears to my bonce, tucking in all extremities, going into a haughty full pike position, and considered stuffing a tampon in each ear, but at last, a partial victory! Aossin was still wild and silly, rolling on the floor, speaking in a foreign language I had never heard before. My expletive not intended to create the turbidity it had. It wasn't meant to have that effect, but since she was happy, ecstatically happy, I felt I was in. Funny thing about it all, Condumour not surprised in the least,

merely continued arguing for my release. I knew she was an ally if I chose. I was going to need someone to get me from this place, now the traitor Fundin had left me. Little did I know then what I had just got myself into, by mostly wishing to get myself out of her hand bag.

'And into her.'

My outburst wasn't misunderstood after all and my new-felt attention had brought unexpected popularity among the kaleidogyns. Unfortunately trouble was brewing between Condumour and the Sliteye. They were arguing about me, so I just shut my ears like I was at a war council meeting and hoped I would come through. I was beginning to understand and experience why the animals called all the N'ihdogg cities 'Angerboda'. Suddenly Sliteye reared up from his seat and smashed his arm across the handbag knocking it to the ground. I fell against the chain mail fence onto the concrete as lipstick containers opened up daubing me across the face, powder bursting open everywhere covering me in stinking sauces. Sliteye didn't like the idea that I could speak. On reflection it was probably because I disturbed his youthful picture of the universe. He corroborated this for me.

'Animals can't talk cos. their vocal chords aren't geared up for it'!

'Wanna bet.'

The boy spluttered dogmatically.

'Are you all losing your marbles or what? Their voice boxes can't make labial fricatives, plosives, syllables or diphthongs'.

'I can, I can!' I thought.

Condumour was on him in N'ihdogg Angerboda, telling him how his mind was riddled with, 'Too many drugs Spence, I heard the damn squirrel speak'. So that's what his name is; I liked 'Sliteye', it suited him better. Sliteye with those dark thoughts from his dead world, listening attentively fearing danger or worse... death. I felt trouble and crouched scared at what would follow.

'Try the tampons in each ear, if you don't like what your about to hear little one'.

'No thanks Glashiel, I'd still have to listen to you!' Condumour rushed over and picked up the handbag, holding on,

with both arms firmly, asking if I was all right? I told her to, 'let me out of here please'. She was angry, so angry the bag was shaking, from her rage. I still had to sit in that stinking cramped place, while what followed was a political rebuttal of my assailant's ethics, a review of their political, moral mandate as an organization, small as it was. Sliteye was out of S.A.G. He started to the main door, and we followed, Condomour telling him vehemently how he had broken the most fundamental principle of their beliefs.

'How hypocritical, how cruel, how stupid, how arrogant' she bleated at him. I looked up to see her eyes flashing, her long red hair flying, believe me watch out for this Morgan-le Fay! Her voice exacting her heart and mind with fierce indignation, only stopping short of hatred. 'Slit-eye' looking like one of the ferrets, worse, a tree Marten after a good hiding from the leviners, broke the silence, his lips hissing spittle, telling Condomour, while pointing at everyone accusingly, advocating certain death for them and me, calling Condomour and Aossin a pair of bitches. Nice guy! Sliteye Spence left, thank little cracked acorns, slamming the door hard and violently behind him. Condomour opened it shouting out through the darkness.

'You better not tell anyone Spence or we'll get you.'

Condomour stopped her raging, as Aossin stopped giggling, singing in swooning acrobatics around the room. My heart stopped in that silence. He, who hadn't succumb to the idea of an animal with the gift of speech and thought, of narrow mind and ideas would not; as the day wore on, if he lived long enough, be back with more N'ihdoggs and no doubt death. Trouble was I didn't want to make any enemies, I had enough of those with the meat eaters of Talwadc,

'You're not going back to Talwadc.'

True enough, but a cunning N'ihdogg like Sliteye Spence didn't make me feel too safe. It's incredible how one set of enemies can quickly become a completely different set. When the door closed, Condomour snapped open the handbag and I ran out cramped and aching, covered in female N'ihdogg cosmetics. Gratefully I stretched my aching limbs as I turned to see Condomour who has the longest sun shot red golden hair I have ever seen on an N'ihdogg. Her eyes too, shone into that

darkened room, ancient beauty coming from the age of Glashiel.

'Thank you little one, so you do know of me'?

'You have nothing to do with this!'

Aossin's hair, long and jet black, had stopped flying around the room like reels of airborne thread. She stopped her fatidic rumblings on the floor calming her ancient beauty into the serene, inquisitive charm of ageless grace; her eyes darting blue as the sky, her long hair sun shot through with blue light, skin as white as snow, lips of Rowan berry red.

'Like your eyes.'

I must admit I found my capture-savior's young beauty enchanting, though not for long, my freedom was more attractive than two kaleidogyns. I was like a mink's armpit, as I squatted on that table after being ejected from my confinement, covered in white powder and lipstick smears. Quickly raising myself I brushed out the offending substances, and tackled myself with a quick lick, sneaking rat glances at Condumour and Aossin, the witch sisters, who gazed in wild amazement. I heard Aossin say surreptitiously,

'Perhaps we can get our message through it?'

It was time to get your obedient messenger Ratatosk out of there. It wouldn't take them long to discover my use throughout antiquity. Sliteye would be back looking for me with soldiers and death, even more deadly they had dangerous plans for me. In my noodle I saw my bike burst into flames, catch fire, disappearing over the horizon as my rat-brain quickly took in my new surroundings and began aching for freedom. However, with the mob anxious to see my blood I had no choice but to find help from these females, after losing the help of the traitor Fundin. I rethought my plan of defenestrating through the window. That was no good, I may have to face the mob again, very ugly! Surely I would stand a much better chance to get out of Angerboda with them than without them, then perhaps alone I could easily escape and hide.

'Like the last time?'

I really wanted to say, 'thanks', and then leave, hoping to find Fundin the traitor, on my way out of town give him a piece of my noodle. I had seen enough, of the N'ihdogg for one day, thank you very much, it was time I was going.

'It's not going to be easy.'

‘Nothing is, O Glashiel.’

Aossin was reciting some cantrip. Around her on the floor was a circle with pictures of animals going around her in a carousel, as she danced within its entanglement. Strange stuff I had never seen: there was Drozzler the bull; a drawing of Gurtlurge, the mountain ram; some scombroids, and there in the middle of it, Aossin: spinning some enchantment that will not work. She splashed water onto them with a bunch of leafy twigs. In the center of that circle a dummy mouse you can buy at a three and five store for cat ponces. She was trying to make it come to life, spinning her hypnopsias into this petrous murine golem. That was not the right way, to give a mouse life, you have to be mice and go and sit under the harvest moon if you want more mice. Glashiel you should know that!

‘How do you know she is trying to make more mice?’

‘That’s my business.’

I wanted out of there, something was making my hair stand on edge and my fingers tingle with gelid sensations running up and down my spine, like Talwadc.

‘Leave this place, leave right away O little one.’

‘That is not so easy O Glashiel I have no escape to make’. Captivated I watch Aossin swirl around, yet that rubber mouse didn’t move, and the voice of Glashiel urging me to leave. Glashiel speaking ten to the dozen in my ear hole.

‘Get out a there little one now! Get out, get out’

More incantations from Aossin, more numbness in the extremities I was, ‘getting cold’, she briskly rubbed me, filling me with more tingling sensations as I lit up with small lightning bolts and pieces of lint flew out of the air and stuck to me. Condomour scooping me up, Aossin had finished dancing around the rubber mouse, it was time to leave.

‘So you’re staying with them after all?’

‘Only until I find Fundin or get out of Angerboda.’ Outside, the sun was climbing to its midday zenith. Hot fire mixed with more blood and sweat would be pouring from under its eye before this day was over. I was getting the ultimate spies- eye view of the city as we passed mile upon mile of electric fencing, fortified entrances, avoiding border patrols. N’ihdogg artillery batteries were in a lull from Big Eagle bomber divisions. Everything was calm for a change, soon we were

descending into a small entranceway of those six hundred doors, into an ill-lit, dirty tunnel. Descending into the forbidden earth, Ferret territory. I'm of the air and sky, Tree land, skipping happily from bough to bough collecting nuts and the fruits of the earth, nothing troglodytic about me. Whereas here in the chthonic world, every dark corner ferociously whispers, 'gotya', as the face of the Ferret meat eaters jump out at me, making my blood run cold. My kind do not appreciate the Tannhaurisms of others.

Finally, after many turns and tunnels, I was led into a small circular shaped room, safe from Sliteye Spence. Inside that candlelit dank hole I was given the inquisition. I told them all, almost all. Condomour wanted to know how many animals were coming, where, what time, how we communicated. I told her. She asked if the war could be stopped.

'Certainly not by me', I told her defiantly, 'anything like that was very unlikely'. Both kaleidogyns looked disappointed. 'Do the animals think they can win, would they allow sympathizers to survive, if they did, could we contact my legion and find out?' Lot's of ideas. I told her what little I knew of the outcome, future plans, animal resistance, reasons for the world siege, avoiding any personal justification of the entire event. The kaleidogyns listened as I told them who I was, who the O.P.M was, how I had saved Fundin the traitor, how we had come to Angerboda.

'Why had you come?' asked Condomour.

'I don't know, it wasn't my idea! I would have been happy to have gone into the desert. It's not my fight'. Aossin asked,

'Do you have a name? I told her my name, she wrote it down.

'Are all the animals like you?' asked Condomour the uncertain.

'No I am different, I have qualities they don't'.

"See - he has Blue eyes, not brown, Condomour", said Aossin, more marveled by my presence than her companion. We went on like that until they knew nearly everything about me. By the end of the questioning they had a pretty good idea of the situation.

'I just wished you would think of some plan to stop the

animals, other than just wanting to run off into the desert and start your sterile seed metamorphoses', said Condomour as she scrambled through lots of plans and maps and stuff, shoving it all into her bag. I could feel another journey in the drainpipe. I said that I had been among the animals and I had seen how the struggle was futile, my escape was the only thing left to me that made sense.

I was curious, asking them.

'Sterile seed' -what may that be?'

Busy stuffing her bag, Condomour absently told me,

'Acarpousness, someone sterile, fruitless titubation, franion, preterite. Life is not just the garnering of the seed from the chaff, but also the assurance that the seed can grow again. So life's soul is not to be made sterile by the darkness of the night of Brahma and can be reborn into the day of Brahma'.

I didn't get it!

'Stick around little one, you may learn yet.'

'You must know, this is the only opportunity you're going to get', said Aossin pleading for some unknown quality. I told her she was right, it was the only chance I had to get out of this place, 'so when can I leave? 'I was becoming more and more phobic, swimming in darkness among all the implications. The inquisition was not over, I had to tell them more about Talwadc the mad, the, 'Pope of the Ocean' sending Aossin into a trance, trying to make a rhyming chant from what I told her. They didn't seem to understand Glashiel - they weren't the only ones! Condomour seemed to think she understood, calling it a, 'great biological key system of energy, genetically controlling the animals on the planet'.

'How should I understand that little one?'

'Anyway you like'.

Aossin tried to grasp the meaning of Talwadc. I told her that one was a tricky subject, it didn't bear any great analysis, it didn't have one, I knew many more who had tried and failed. Condomour hummed at that one, though Aossin was already busy trying to compute anagrams, aphorisms, acrostics acronyms, all from its name. Not that I could blame her, I'd have liked to know. I was sure that its deciphering could possibly stop the war or help get us out alive, as for once we all agreed. There were endless questions about the name N'ihdogg.

I told them of the ways of the animals and the names and rules they must obey. Ragnarok was of keen interest to the poetesses as they sat listening.

'The animals chant it's name, when they realize they will all die. The chant calms them and makes them more willing to fight for Talwadc. Aossin was scribbling down every word I said, until she came to Talwadc asking me to spell it for her. Spelling it out wasn't easy, so we phonetically tried to describe the stupid name of Talwadc the mad malefic. 'Talwaddock, Taalwhadick, Tahlwyduck', I was beginning to sound like a parrot. 'You work it out' I told her. Condomour piped up. She knew what Ragnarok meant, the...

'Twilight of the Gods: the end of days and the end of the world.' I shuddered when she said this, my little courage melting like winter frost in sight of spring sun. I told them how the animals chant the word like a war mantra - it leads them on to death or glory.

'That would explain it,' said Aossin. Condomour hummed in agreement. Condomour stopped to speak. 'They see the uprising as a divine mission, driven by Talwadc the mad, as much as anything, not merely territorial, really revengeful. Boy, are they mad or what?'

'Like justice gone mad', said Aossin.

'Perhaps', I said despondently, not really knowing what to believe, 'if war and death is justice, then I suppose the answer is yes.'

'Only if the purpose is just', said Aossin,

'War can never have anything good about it. Love is the key to all, only 'love' is the only miracle', so sayeth Condomour.

'As far as the animals were concerned they're hopping mad and don't really care if the cause is just or justified, love or no love whatever that may be? They just want to win and go home to their stomping grounds'. I told them .

'They're all pining for the lost lands and animals who have gone into extinction. They're terrified of extinction, without the strength of Talwadc they would cower at the sight of the N'ihdogg, like they have in the past.'

I told her about the animal's hatred of the place, extinction. I had never known people I didn't entirely trust before. Their

were ideas so grand I could never aspire to know them, and what is this thing called love? Who really cares about divine aspects of the world, or that other thing called 'love', what is it?

'This Love couldn't stop the last battle of the World, could it?' I asked like a hopeful twerp. Condumour told me that it may if we all tried.

'Love is but a miracle of life. For 'love' has wondrous power, it shows hope to the lost and despairing. That never can happen. Right now, it may still yet be possible.'

Big ideas from the kaleidogyns, really scary, do they really know what they're talking about?

'Unfortunately it's easier to hate than to love', said Aossin indifferently.

'Especially if you're making lots of money and don't have to give a damn about anything, even going so far that you buy sentimentality in a nice package, that's the problem with the moderns', said Condumour the polemicist.

'Oh yes ' I said, droning indifferently to Aossin, It's a bit late for anything, didn't she think?

I didn't know, something better, perhaps stronger and more efficacious at dispelling the Talwadc/N'ihdogg curse.

Condumour thought it could work if I could help her get to the secret hiding place of the animals to tell them of her love. I thought it was too late for the N'ihdoggs, love had always failed on them, why should it work on the animals?

'Get to the animals: that's the bit I don't like. If you want to get yourselves killed go on alone, go! I'm only interested in saving myself right now'. I spoke to them of the danger, telling them the Talwadc pelted mobsters we're going to be here real soon and more real than anything imaginable from her future. Condumour ignored me, instead returning to the sterile seed, calling me an idler unwilling to do its bit, even with the aid of her love.

'Must I return with you to the secret place of the animals to stop them, if I don't wish to become the sterile seed, and I won't be given another chance to get killed in the next... whatever it is, right'? I asked streperously.

'Taking this message of peace or love to Talwadc is more than anyone can do and hope to survive. They will not listen, I know'. I stammered out, feeling the urgency of the

kaleidogyns' unreasonable demands and their threat of my barren future somewhere in the day of Brahma.

'Who cares about the future?'

'Avoiding the issue little one?'

'When the present is not certain, bang goes your chance for becoming something, either in this world or the next one', said Aossin.

'It doesn't worry me in the least about the 'next world', this one is more than enough! ' I told her, dropping the carrot. As for this world I wanted very little from it. I was playing for time, hoping something could ensure my release and let me evade these do-gooders. I wanted to do the only good left, secure my escape! They didn't seem to think so, there was only the way of the sterile seed's vicious neutralizing and this promise of nothing! Condomour mused on the visionary aspect of death.

'I can see further than you, there can be no future in this world, if you run from this dilemma'.

'Only if you run', said Aossin assuringly.

'What do you need with me?' I asked.

'To help us find the answers to the day and prevent the battle of Talwadc', said Condomour, assertively confident. I let out a mild chattering laugh at her words as the witches looked at me disapprovingly.

' I've tried to tell you we'll all get killed. Besides it's already started, we can't stop it'. I asked if the sun was at its zenith yet. No one cared, right about then.

'True freedom, on the other hand', said Aossin, 'not the small gift of terrestrial freedom that we have given you, means you may have to take great risks. Sometimes dare what no one else will dare, so that the rewards are greater to those who act! Time and circumstance now require that you do not go, as you plan too with this 'Fundin Man boy'; whoever that may be, into the desert. Work with us together and make plans to stop the murdering of the innocent, That is the meaning of the day'. The voice of Glashiel spoke inside my rat brain,

'I told you there was no such thing as abstinence from life little one, did I not?'

'The sterile seed will not grow again', said Condomour, 'if it's not pollinated with the experience that awaits it'.

I told her that the desert awaits me and that is the way I intended to get 'pollinated'. My mocking angered her as she grew huge about me, a red rage glowing in her face. 'You can't go away when there's a war going on', she said irucund. I told her I had my own quest to find the middle ground. She was jibing me by reiterating the words 'middle ground'. I did not know that those words could be said in so many different ways as I listened to those charmers tell me the one million ways it can be spoken. Lulled into a false sense of security they brought me out of the séance and Condumour ran her red hot-headed face into mine again and defiantly told me, 'Doesn't exist and never will, you have other things to do'. Just like the badgers, she too set off on her, 'of what I must the do-idea, don't run away, fight-the-day stuff'.

I'm no one, nothing really. What can I do against the N'ihdoggs?' I bleated at the fierce female N'ihdogg.

'This is your chance to redeem yourself from the prison of the sterile seed, where you will surely wither if you go into the desert'. All I could do was to ask in a stupefied manner, 'how'. I did not know if this sterile seed stuff was true. How could I know it wasn't more grand mything to make me decide. Aossin put me right on that one.

'If you do not do well in this life, how can you hope to become again on the path of enlightenment in the light of the day of Brahma?'

'Who said I wanted to?' I protested, 'maybe I want to fall into sterility forever, in a world like this, who doesn't'? Who was she? This inscrutable Aossin; other than animal sampler and poetess. How could I trust her, how could I know she wanted to help me?

'She has saved you.'

'Hope can be a dangerous thing Glasheil.'

I could see their faces, the pleading looks, saying, 'you have a point there, but why waste eternity?'

'All are candidates, some never get the chance. You just have to get on with it. The animals of Talwadc know. That's why they sing of Ragnarok: a meaningful death is a meaning that goes a long way later, you little wretched franion', said Condumour.

'So they too can become again in the time of the great

enlightenment.'

I said I could ask someone if that were true, so I called upon Glashiel with my question.

'Is it true the animals know of this night moving into day and the immortal principle of rebirth? Tell me.'

'If you believe it to be true, then it must be so, surely I am here, am I not?'

That wasn't really any clarification. Who is this voice I call Glashiel? I had never heard it before the battle of Talwadc. How do I know you are not some caliginous revenant? There was more gentle cozening from Aossin.

'So who knows what may await you into the new becoming?'

'Such as?' I said truculently.

'Such as something that is greater than what you are now, something that is perhaps more sublime than anyone can understand', said Condumour fiercely convincing me in my muddle as I staggered under her trance.

'Right now you're nothing but a titubating freak, a small one at that! What you need is to get in at the top of things, face the music, unless you want to get caught in the dead end of avoidance, 'cos that's where you seem headed', she bellowed at me in that great cavern. I disagreed, telling her I'm not interested in anything as great as all that. I preferred to find Fundin and leave. Who cares about the sterile seed and the day of Brahma, more grand myth, all fallacies. I was surrounded by sycophantic demagogues, and she was sounding like the animals.

'Do not speak again of the sterile seed.' It made my flesh crawl at the sound of it as Condumour looked at me with the same relish of the meat eaters, ready to consume me.

'That's because you know it's true, it makes you shiver like someone has just walked on your grave.'

I told her,

'I don't have a grave, remember, in my life you're lucky if you die of old age; usually you're scoffed up by Big Eagle or the wretched Tree Marten'.

'With the One and Perfect Master', I was taught only to seek the middle ground, not some great spell of everlastingness, or another place of fantastic promise. I am still searching for it.

I know it's not back there with the rabble of the animals'. I saw them grasping at my idea incomplete, asked if they had found the middle ground, if they knew, tell me and I'd be on my way. All looked amazed. Despite my cleverness, I was naïve. They fell about laughing. I came back to them saying, 'no seriously...!'

What the fuss and laughter was about, for I know that my Master wouldn't lie to me; that the middle ground is out there I am sure. Aossin made me more rufescent than my fur as she told me:

'Silly Ratatosk, it's not a real place. Besides, why do you believe in the Master? But not us, in the idea of the sterile seed, is it because it isn't as attractive as the 'middle ground, that doesn't need action'?

I told her that I believed the Master because he was all I ever knew.

'The power of love', said Condumour, 'you have felt the power of love, you have given love, in the saving of this Man boy as you call him, and again like the Master did when he found you. We shall give love to the animals and save them.' I was learning fast, now I knew what love was. Lighter moments in a time of great dark events. Condumour came right back, sitting up straight as a polecats' tail, asking me sternly.

'Now can you be sure that this 'middle ground' isn't real, because you have been looking in the wrong place. Tell you what, why believe in anything at all my dear Ratatosk, why not just go back to your million-year picnic as you wish? '

'I have promised the Master I will try to find the body of the Dharma. That is my solemn oath, mine alone, that I must find it, in so doing I will understand who I am.' I was unsure of myself under the pressure of these inscrutable witches.

'Stop calling him 'your Master', you sound like a dog. Aren't you struggling to have no masters, isn't that the reason for wishing to go into the desert for the middle ground, isn't that the freedom you seek, so why are you so accepting of this Master?'

'He is a great Master over the ways of this world and deserves the title as a sign of my respect, for he taught me many things that have kept me alive over the seven years I lived with him. I promised I would find the body of the Dharma of the

middle ground.'

'Then why do you avoid that which is before you, humble one, what are you doing here talking to me?', said Aossin, 'Are not these plans we prepare for you to take you to the middle ground?' Condumour moved in to do some more noodle scrubbing,

'Let's just say that you have found the 'middle ground', it's on the way to Gotterdammerung or Ragnarok. There are lots of names for the same thing and that maybe just a bit further along than here, if we don't stop, we can see through the illusion of here for we are never there. Yet 'here' is where we have been brought together for some reason surely. Otherwise we'd be talking about something else, or may never have met. Now we have just a bit further to go and we will know the answers to those questions and desires by the results of trying hard for the right thing. After all, we are not just thrown together because of no good reason... there's something we can all do, isn't there?' I didn't know, was there? Does there have to be some meaning to circumstance, chance meeting, isn't some delusional process at work in that fable of purpose. After all, just because the battle of Talwadc had begun, is there something more important to be realized other than survival? Naturally the witches thought so.

'By virtue of the situation alone, we have something to do here; do we have some reason to know of each other'? So said Condumour, for once the uncertain, scouring her noodle for some grand idea.

'Why delusional, surely are we are beyond all those things now?'

'We... maybe you are Glashiel, I'm trying all I can to see what's really going on out there! It seems it's delusion, I suggested; to anyone who would listen. The purpose of me being there was to lead them away from the battle to safety. My plan was just as valid surely? I looked up expectantly, hoping it would convince, mostly convincing.

'No, it wasn't that at all, that's not facing the challenge. In fact it wasn't facing anything', said Aossin, seeing my reluctance. I said,

'I cannot change the story of old. It has always been like this. How may I change the fate of the dispossessed?'

There are more litanies regarding other N'ihdoggs

kicked off their stomping grounds, came from the blessed sisters, no doubt in the hope of my compliance to their plan. Condomour told me the animals were not the first. How she was from the New World generation of Irish descendance, her great grandparents forced out from the Irish land evictions.

'Driven from the lands like the animals, fought before losing out.' Condomour continued,

'Fiercely militant, resistant to eviction in the old European world, they came to America to resist all. The N'ihdogg are all the same and had always disinherited other N'ihdoggs, and their religion merely justified them. Take anywhere in the world, you'll find that to be the case. Even my family when they came to America threw the Red man from his land. Like self-declared aristocrats, they still wished to be like those they despised. It was merely relocation, their natures were still with them and it's human nature that can never change.' Finally after long and loxodromic diversions Condomour told me the worst. She had a sympathetic tolerance for the animals' cause, thought the N'ihdoggs had gone too far, taken too much. On hearing this sequacious banter again I just uttered,

'Oh yes, another one like Fundin. What has this to do with me?'

She told me more, irucund and heated,

'History is a story of the dispossessed, the disinheritance by the Father - all the great old stories say so. The world has lost its reason for life, we have forgotten the ways of the wood and the stream, the marvel of creation, now instead, greed rules the world. Perhaps it is our chance to stop the endless cycle of which I speak.'

I did not say or think so. Like the sterile seed or the Day of Brahma, it wasn't my fight or my cause or my future. I was a mere Ratatosk, with no real purpose other than to find the body of the Dharma and the nibbling of nuts. What hopes are there for me to gain such knowledge of a better life or a rebirth as someone else or something else? Ultimately I was only maggot food in the end! If anything was true about what they had told me, I only wished not to come back to this madness again. If I did, then hopefully I wouldn't come back as an Armadillo or a wretched Thraesvelg meat eater. How could I stop this wheel turning? There was nothing else for me in these myths and

fables, only the One and Perfect Master knew the path, all else was delusion. Still I sensed there was another reason for them to want me to believe, a reason rooted in the secrets of those two female N'ihdoggs. Condumour told me about the ancient people who knew the true life of themselves and the animals, those that worships the three aspects of the Yggdrasil Tree. More drivel about Yggdrasil Tree, too much wood vegetable drivel for one day. It just made me hungry; she sounded like the animals. Yet from this came new ideas that began to flow from this messenger that I had heard so little of before.

'It is the best tree of all, the branches are spread out over the entire sky, the trunk held in place by three roots that spread out across the world. The first among us now in the knowledge of the Aesir, the second, cover the void of space and the drop of doom, of all cold things, and under the third is the spring of wisdom and understanding the spring of Urd'. I thought of my voice from Glashiel?

'I am many things little one if you would listen.'

'Beneath this spring a hall that three maidens come from and they are past, present and future. Men and woman have wished to drink from that spring called M'inir, only one who lost an eye did so. Each day: Yggdrasil is attacked by the N'ihdogg in Niflheim'.

'I too know why the animals call us N'ihdoggs. I too know of the wisdom of the ancient ways, the power of the animals. In the beginning, we all came from the tree Yggdrasil and His name is Ask and Her name is Embla. In Yggdrasil's branches sits an Eagle and between its eyes sits a hawk called Vedrfolnir, 'the bleached one', and between them is the Squirrel Ratatosk, who conveys abuse between the Eagle and the N'ihdoggs'.

'Why that's you after all little one!'

'Four Harts leap around the tree nibbling at it, some say they may destroy it. It will be the N'ihdogg and the Midgard Serpent, the Greek Okeanos, the serpent Ophion, who shall do that in the twilight of the Gods called Ragnarok. In the battle of mutual annihilation, it shall kill and be killed by Thor. It has happened before in the time of Tish. This time to Ragnarok/Jormungandr shall be four hundred and thirty two thousand years, until the end of the night of Brahma, where we

are now. Until the day of M'odi and Magni shall begin in the wood of Hoddminir, where V'idar and V'ali, shall conceal Lif and Lifthrasir until the fire of Surt shall cease its destruction of the world. That the souls of the true seed shall again come again into the day of Brahma: toward enlightenment, when they shall be reborn. Who shall that chosen one be? To walk through the new day, to be that one true enlightened one. The truth is that no one knows who it could be; that is the truth of it all.

'Perhaps it could be you', said Aossin.

'It could be no one...' I stammered,

'How could I become anything like you have spoken of?' I asked, surprised and pavid as she held the carrot of immortality before me once more.

'On the wheel of life anything is possible, it may come to pass that you are to be born a man.'

'If', said Condumour, 'you don't run and fall to the sterile seed, you can count yourself in. In the day of Brahma a great leader will come, that could be you'.

'So animals can become men?' I asked naively.

'It is believed to be so, yes, it is so in the day of days.'

'I did not wish to become a N'ihdogg, like I did not wish to believe in Talwadc'. I told them.

'Is it not so that you believe in the Master who told you to seek the middle ground, that this is all one and the same idea requiring certainty, leading to the same path that is forking eternally'. Like a mind reader Aossin had sprung the trap around me.

'Now do you believe that you may have something else other than running into the desert? We watched you come and saw you in the fork of time'. She nonchalantly laid cards with figures upon the open floor again, as though she wasn't that interested in saving my seed from sterility. Condumour readied for another Drozzleresque monologue for the conversion of Gallad.

'It is also written, that in the hall of Othin there are five hundred and forty doors, through which go eight hundred warriors to give battle to the forces of the Antigods in war of mutual annihilation five hundred and forty times. Eight hundred times five hundred and forty is four hundred and thirty two thousand, which is the daily heart beat of Sapiens. Adding to

eighty six thousand four hundred beats a day. Together there are eighty six thousand four hundred years which is the duration of the night of Brahma. So we are in miniature a night and day of Brahma.'

She might be, according to my heart beat I was doing a day and one night of Brahma in about one third of that! My life will be over before hers had even begun. How could this ancient knowledge apply to such lowly things as me? Condumour watched me as she spoke, her eyes growing kinder as her memory returned that ancient script back to life.

'The Sacred groves where our ancestors would gather and swear protection to all life, until the coming of Ragnarok, so that all could be reborn into the Day of Brahma. They knew how to escape the N'ihdogg as you correctly call them. For the N'ihdogg is the Sapiens wishing to fall into destructive ways. They who have forgotten the world and its splendor and the life of the Yggdrasil Tree: the life to worship lowly things, even Ratatosks, even a tree, anything of this world that would stop the monumental destruction of the real and the beautiful life-giving planet. Now nothing is sacred!'

So end the analects of Condumour. It wasn't for me to speak, I lacked questions, but Aossin, who, looking up from her scribbles, told us,

'When Jesus was asked by the disciples, when shall the kingdom come? He answered,

'It will not come by expectation, 'see here, see there'; the Kingdom of the Father is spread upon the Earth and men do not see it. Yet there is no God, if there was he would want us to love each other'. With that interspersed in her litany she went back to deciphering the meaning of Talwadc. Thank you Aossin for that clarification.

'Ironically', said Condumour, 'now that the beginning of the end has begun, men look out to realize that the animals are smarter than what they thought and are an important part of this vast tapestry of life on planet Earth, for without them we shall fall into Ragnarok, we shall be sterile, unable to become reborn. Join us in our struggle. This time we shall not escape, unless we can show our only truth which is love'.

'Love' though, what is that when it comes down to the Animals'? I asked her, perplexed. She told me,

'It was love that my One and Perfect Master had shown you when he gave you an abode to live in, warmth and protection, kindness and consideration, more importantly 'compassion', the highest of all Sapient arts. It is love that makes the fertile earth; it teaches us to accept death, accept and know of the day of Brahma, the extensibility of worlds beyond our thoughts and ideas, in the worship of lowly things and the grace of humility. It will move the sky to reveal to us truths we could never before understand '.

I could not say anything, I knew too much. I know that this love is a great thing, for without it I would surely have perished. But can it save us from Ragnarok?

'Love the greatest feeling, the miracle of life, the only one that really works', said Aossin, looking up from her jottings,

'We need not fear Ragnarok, or Armageddon.'

'Would the animals understand it?' I asked emphatically expectant. I told them how I thought the animals have never known the N'ihdoggs' love, only their mothers' love, kicked out after rearing to find our own stomping grounds.

'Animals could not know of this love till now!'

I told her how the Drozzler had shown them the way, they could not come back from that brink of intoxication to know 'love'. They believe all N'ihdoggs are selfish and unstoppable, they don't know of this 'love'. Condomour confidently said she would stop them and the N'ihdoggs in the name of love, the only miracle, and they would understand. I asked Condomour; since she was real up on ancient N'ihdogg stories, 'Where it's written that the war of Talwadc would come in the days of Ragnarok?' She thought it was a very old story that goes back to the time of Meroe and Tish, hastily adding,

'It is Ragnarok and Talwadc one and the same result; it is coming unless stopped by... She paused briefly...' love, yes love will keep us'. Though all present were touched by this love, I still thought they should listen up to what I told them previously. Get as much comestibles and stuff as they would need and sit this attack out in this bunker, nothing was going to stop the event called Ragnarok/Talwadc. Whoever comes out alive in the end, if there is someone, well, they could then take these ideas of peace and love to the survivors, who will probably be needing them by then! As for introducing them at this

juncture, I could only call sheer folly. Condumour wasn't going to be done out of her life's long meaning, I could tell, because she hadn't listened to my reasonable suggestions. Instead she ignored it, telling me,

"There can be no survivors from Ragnarok. Neither can we hide from it, so we should get in there and give it a good going over. Nor can we stop it without love, we are the ones to stop it, the only ones to stop it, we had a duty to prevent it, did I realize that?" Not really, all I knew was that the situation was growing worse, reaching unpredictable limits, that I had not taken my plan to fruition, due to love and compassion, and that Fundin had deserted me on this futile road. Did she see that? I would only know more useless myth of my family tree, going back to Ratatosk; that we were once famous, conveying messages to the Aesir, is this to be my lot, a snitch, is this crusade to be my life, this tale to be myself founding? I had conveyed knowledge of the animals to the N'ihdoggs.

'Reluctantly little one'.

'You're back again Glashiel, reluctantly?'

'You only survived 'reluctantly' no doubt, little one?'

The animals are far from an Aesir. They only guessed they knew something about the old world; it was mouthed ignorantly in the name of revenge. I told Condumour that I understood, finally. She poured out her heart of love to me right there and then and I felt the world of my Master in her charms, just as I felt when I had saved the Man boy. Condumour concocted something of a powerful charm, this thing of love - I had felt it, how could it stop Ragnarok?

"The animals chant it, possessed in its rage", I told her repeatedly.

"You must trust us little Ratatosk: this is a terrible love of strange darkened regions that shall never see itself gain over. By then it will change into a new and different permanence that will prevail. It shall gain over the fires and the wasteland beyond the purple church of frocked priests and Mullahs. Love, the miracle, to stay with us forever."

Condumour came back into the relative here and now place. She had been away, no doubt in the Day of Brahma. I knew what she was leading me to.

'We shall need of your wisdom as well.'

'Flattery will get you everywhere with the little one, Condumour', said the voice of Glasheil, who had mercifully been silent for a change.

'He will stay and learn to save and love me'.

'Only when you're out of my noodle, will that day come', I told the rat brained voice. To the world, I told those witches how they had better hurry because the great event of the millennium of Ragnarok was on its way here in the form of millions of pelted', biting mobsters coming when the Sun hits its zenith. They didn't listen; the female Sapien noodle can be quite an exclusive thing, ignoring everything that intercepts it. This I knew, they were downright fool -hardy, going right into the fight, certain death. What I wanted to know was, how do they find their new strength in this dark and terrible love? After all, surrounded by the mobs who also knew they had the same certainty of success, someone must be wrong, two rights don't make a world right.

'Which one do you wish to hedge upon little one?'

It was true. I had to decide, it was only ideas for now, it would keep this future they speak of, so I agreed.

'It's alright by me this plan you wish for',

I said humbly to the two kaleidogyns,

'If you help me find Fundin, he must have a place in the scheme of things, since he brought me here'.

I knew the kaleidogyns were hooked when I said this; really I wanted to move out into the open and start looking for Fundin and escape!

'O little one, you are such a wretch!'

'He's probably gone by now', said Aossin idly. I told them about our shield of mutual protection, we're sworn to it, how he felt he owed me a life. Knowing him as I thought I did, I felt he would be more worried, like me, about saving his neck in these times.

'Don't judge others by your own standards little one, it is a mistake!'

Condumour was glad I would go with her, but disappointed that I still planned a future with the Fundin. She angrily whimpered,

'Oh you still make plans with him after all we have told you'? I was hoping you would be only my messenger of Love!'

I wasn't getting closer to my trail, my confidence vacillated toward her. Confused about which way to go, I was being too specific, too trusting; I didn't expect the next question. 'This Fundin, he thinks the animals will win. Where shall there be a place for him when they do?' Good question! I answered by saying that I didn't think, or I wasn't sure who would win, either way we would come out of it ok. Fundin, if I found him, would stay with me if their plan failed. Condomour laughed abruptly surprising me; a full brilliant peal shook me. 'That's absurd', it's great for you either way, if you win, Fundin must go around out of sight or disguised as an animal all his life', she laughed sarcastically.

'And what happens when you move back to the laws of Glasheil? Fundin's live longer than Squirrels.' She was right, as usual. I hadn't thought about that, I didn't know at the time. I thought we could live somewhere away from everything incognito, futures were not too bright when we made the deal, it keeps changing. I proffered to the wind, wriggling out of my predicament.

'More like wriggling out of history.'

I told her that we all may be dead anyway if her plan fails. Even closer, if Sliteye Spence gets us. Condomour said rebarbatively that her plan cannot fail, how everything we were arguing was nothing more than conjecture, nothing more than finding out about me.

'Actum non Verba', said Aossin, looking like she was getting ready to leave.

'Are you the messenger for love or not?' asked Condomour. This was my only chance to see daylight again, I was sure. If love alone wasn't going to stop animals from killing the N'ihdoggs, then perhaps it was going to save this Ratatosk. Without knowing how love could defeat Talwadc, and as the certain brilliant hope happily hung from my two companions' pink faces, I told them,

'Yes, as long as I find the Man boy, that the future and the sterile seed, the day and night of whatever name it is, wasn't going to give me the life that I wished for. I will take up this cause for peace and love and try.'

'President Clinschor and his wife want to save the animals. They will come out on our side when they hear your

message. That's what has been all the trouble, up till now we haven't had any communications before and now you can offer that,' Condomour hastily told me.

'What message?' I asked accusingly.

'This message you will give to the world', she said, pointing to a piece of paper beneath the hand of Aossin,

'This is the first to the N'ihdogg and the second will be the one you will deliver to the Animals.' I didn't think so; nothing would persuade me, especially the message to the animals, they would kill me as a traitor. The girls insisted that I was only to show them where they were! The idea that I would have to tell the six billion N'ihdoggs the plan was probably bye-bye either way. Unless the animals stopped, I wasn't exactly filled with enthusiasm for the plan prepared for me by those strange females. On second thought I should have asked first, I kept silent. Quickly my mind raced into the future, and I saw my concluding address to the N'ihdoggs.

'Either way N'ihdoggs you're doomed if you don't accept the peace plan, if the animals win they will kill you, and if you win then the insects will probably kill you, kind of Hobson's choice.' Glasheil the all-truthful gave me a more accurate assessment of my chances for survival.

'Either way Gallad you're doomed, if the animals win they will kill you for hiding Fundin and making your conspiracy for peace, and if the N'ihdoggs, win then they will probably kill you as well just because they won't want anything around to remind them of Talwadc, kind of another Hobson's choice.'

Great: now I have enemies from within and without, that's all I needed. Condomour looked at her watch. The numbers ten: twelve, changed to ten: thirteen.

'Love- it's the only way ', said Aossin who had just come back from finishing her jottings, no light yet on the meaning of Talwadc.

'Fear not little one, this has not come out this way in vain. I will protect you with my charm, so will the love of Condomour, on this road to rebirth and freedom from the sterile seed.' Very reassuring, I believed her, it was so kindly put, so well meant, so heartfelt. If I were to go along with the plan, it would be for reasons far more real, more concerned with this life than the next one; these clever sorceresses didn't have to go to

all that trouble on my account.

‘What pray may do such a thing little one?’

‘Because I had my hide saved by them, because Condumour puts the fear of Talwadc in me, because Fundin has given me his word. He had such big ideas for us. Glashiel who isn't listening.’ So we left, the sorceresses had everything prepared, or so they told me. I was grateful seeing again the Sun, out from that badger’s burrow of corpse swallows and fetid odors of death. Emerging into the streets of breaking glass, rocks and bombs exploding into the N'ihdoggs’ lives, overhead flew the divisions of Talwadc announcing the war.

At every door before you enter
Look around with care
You never know what enemies
Are waiting for you there.

Gangleri.

'Droppers?' asked Aossin despondently, as the sky blackened with thousands of birds carrying a stone or bomb or two, dropping them in a wall of pounding destruction ahead of us. Dodging the missiles of Talwadc I told them...

'They will be bringing M.U.C.S.P.A.T's in their claws, carrying grenades, a rain of self detonated rats dropping from the sky, scratching, biting, exploding!' Both Kaleidogyns, horrified, their eyes looking at the black sky in diastatic fear. We waited for a break between first wave of heavy bombers and the next. The skies cleared and we started out for where Fundin the traitor had left me. As we came close to our destination more Big Eagles approached, I called out to the skied wingsters to come and get me, they couldn't hear someone so small among the rabble and racket so flew over me. Condumour, disheartened and angry with my feeble attempt to dissent, looked angrily down at me. If looks could kill I was a dead Ratatosk. When I saw Fundin the traitor he was standing hiding in the doorway of a book shop near where he had left me in that deep dark hall of six hundred doors, and my heart rose in happiness. I pointed to the recreant for Condumour & Aossin, who, dodging and ducking the rocky hail from the skies, ran over to him. At first he didn't notice the Kaleidogyns standing next to him, he was too busy watching the soldiers herding everyone off the streets, hoping they wouldn't see him. When he realized he wasn't alone, he looked furtively at them, like he was going to make some remark about the weather.

'Literally it's going to be raining cats and dogs and rats and...'

'Yes we get the point Glasheil' I said aloud, irritated by the nag I had to endure. It was then that Fundin heard my voice and turned to see me looking up toward him from my cramped spot in the coat of Condumour. Happily surprised at seeing me,

he beamed a smile as broad, but not so dark as the sky, saying.

'I'm Fundin not Glasheil, whoever that may be. Why did you leave, why didn't you wait for my return?' I was pleased he hadn't deserted me, despite my doubts. I went in search of the one and only perfect friend. Affectionately he touched the top of my bonce.

'I had not wished to leave you, I lacked choice. I had to run away to come looking for you. The soldiers put me away, they will be looking for me now.' He looked at Condomour and Aossin, then down in my direction, literally in the non-bosom of my protector. He seemed full of dread and worry, something else was hard at work upon him. I told him who my accomplices were and as they went to greet each other a bomb exploded nearby sending flames through the street. Fundin broke open the door of the bookshop and we slipped inside for its protection, babbling news, bad news, plans as well, everyone had a plan, we were all full of plans. He looked at me distressed, whispering in my ear.

'Do they know of our plans? There is no one you could trust.' I told him the two kaleidogyns knew almost as much as both of us combined and then some. We were all in it together. Then the Fundin told us the news, bad news, something about, 'fire throwing'. Condomour and Aossin knew what a: 'flame thrower' was. I didn't. Condomour said,

'They've been moving heavy units all day, that's what they're for'. Flame thrower, I didn't know it was possible to throw fire since I never had much to do with the stuff!

'So what?' I said looking at the worried face of Fundin. Not that anything wouldn't be, as he gave the description of the Surt Napalm: it wasn't very nice, burnt bodies and more of that kind of thing. Fundin said his parents knew people from his real country who had been killed by it. It was powerful stuff. 'Surt Napalm, there's a whole hall of it where you left me,' I told them, 'stacked to the ceiling in that place that drips with the poison of snakes.' Having no real military experience I could not tell them if this napalm would be effective. Fundin worried more about the flame throwers pulling out an industrial label.

'This is what they're loaded with', shoving it under my nose before handing it to Condomour. It read,

OXYBUTOLPHYNELTRIPHORICMETHOLSTRISURTICAZ
EPOPTRIN. Was I any wiser?

'Could that ever become a possibility little one?

Not really.

Only Condomour seemed to feel master over the situation, as she abandoned her laptop, stopping at some books on the shelf, ran her hand down through the titles under self help, 'The Philistine Prophecy', by Jimmy Redden, she passed that one, 'The bedroom Fairy, an unexpurgated code of male sexuality', no not that one either, 'Meat dream from Planet X', she was getting closer. After exhaustive searches she finally came to the 'Encyclopedia of Chemistries for very modern Warfare', pulling the book from the shelf. Hey presto, she knew what it was. She told us that according to the International Encyclopedia of Chemistries for Very Modern Warfare, the napalm will not only burn, but dissolve the enemy into a blob of putrescence and even worse it contained nuclear fuel that destroys life around it for years to come. Stunned by it all my fear intensified with knowledge of Surt Napalm's efficaciousness. Condomour had all that information on hand, I was impressed, when she saw what the Fundin saw. She drew an imaginary scenario for me, as if I needed the details of this day.

'A wall of flame ten feet high and as broad as the rotation of an N'ihdogg, in an even circle. Nothing can get through, or survive, if they're hit by the stuff which can dissolve the flesh leaving the bones white and stark. Even worse, Surt is the name that will finish the work of Ragnarok destroying the world in fire.' I knew what she was up to, reiterating to me the problem, emphasizing more graphically the effect, describing, the burnt out wreckage of my 'animal friends', as she referred to them. She was inspiring me to make my debut before the N'ihdoggs, working on her peace plan, trying to get me to go along with it.

'It cannot stop the animals, there're too many of them', said

Fundin, loyal to the pelted mobsters. Condomour thought it could begin to turn the tides of the war but it may not be required if her plan was to be implemented immediately.

'What plan is that', asked the Fundin hopefully.

Condomour told him. Whatever is going to end the war, whatever its outcome,. She seemed lost in terrible fear, I

could tell because her smell changed dramatically, like being cornered by a Badger. In that moment I think she saw the end of the animals and her lost cause of love. I knew, her eyes told me everything. Ragnarok listens not to love, does it Condomour? We heard guns going off on the horizon, another legion of heavy bird bombers flying in with more destruction and death darkened the sky. I could tell this was going to be one of the real big attacks, the rising sun and sky went down to darkness, like a great storm was preparing to lash the earth, and of course it was. Amidst this Fundin was still insisting we get a copy of the flame thrower out of the city to show the animals, suggesting a demonstration to them would be in order so that they would not perish in Ragnarok and come to the Day of Brahma or survive.

'Right now' I said, amidst the explosions and screams, 'we had another mission called: 'Operation get out of there'. As we ducked inside a doorway, bombs went cracking like thunder around us. I was in control, we had the facts, I knew the way out of there, let's go! Fundin insisted,

'We have to go where they are stored, and swipe one', his face showing despair, 'Perhaps a demonstration to the animals could stop them.'

He wasn't listening to me as usual, just like the N'ihdoggs never listen `till it was too late. Condomour told us it was probably going to change everything,

'By showing the animals perhaps they might...'. There we go again, off on the peace love plan idea again. I reiterated the song of Talwadc's meaning for the benefit of the deaf. In the face of such youthful optimism and inexperience the words were merely patronizing. Nothing can be so driven that it cannot see its own destruction.

'If I could tell them little one, they would see the history of every person on the earth, to answer such folly shall be scorn itself.'

` I think there are already too many people involved don't you Glasheil?' It never answered as usual. Ironically Fundin was depressed about the animals dying,

'They won't stop at the sign in the road.' he said despairingly.

'That's right.' I told him. 'They won't stop until they're all gone,' as another wave of stones and bombs plummeted to

earth amid grinding screams.

'Except for you,' said Condomour, 'you're planning on sticking it out, waiting for your chance to get out of here.'

'That's right.' I replied promptly.

'The N'ihdogg will incinerate you the first chance they get,' she told me, cheering me up no end. Seems I was right about the keebabing, except the chef called for well done.

'How would you like your fricasseed squirrel sir, rare or completely burnt to a cinder?' said Glashiel.

Aossin the silent, said it would be best to go to the authorities as they had planned, looking over at her sister. Condomour urged her plan, telling Fundin everything,

'Instead of running away and probably just getting killed by one side or the other, we could all do something that would stop this bloodshed. There is no reason to die unless it's for the right reason.' Her reason was the idea of some other world's great promise of rebirth, that wasn't really enough for this world was it?

I added in. 'Fight now hope later', I was too late. Fundin, saw the salvation of the animals in the peace plan and took out adoptive designs toward Condomour, I could tell. I couldn't comply in favor of the general principle of the plan. They berated me as a franion and a recreant to my own kind. As for dying uselessly, I told them all, hoping to traduce their idea,

'Think of yourself if you can, everyone else does!'

'And you do that quite a lot little Ratatosk!'

All I was saying was that we could all go to the desert instead of to our death - it seemed a much better idea. If we were going to die, then I preferred to do so in more peaceful circumstances. Aossin muttered more about the sterile seed and the death in life already setting in, if I ran away. If I'm caught it would be a useless death, hardly worth pronouncing on me. That was the way I felt about the entire affair, so we had reached an impasse.

'Her peace initiative had better work,' said Fundin, 'or we're not going to have animals anymore.'

'Who cares, I thought, they're a dirty-ikey-pikey lot. I mean I'm one and it's not such a great thing.'

'I am the light of this dirty-ikey lot and where would you be if I am no more?'

'Would you like some suggestions, O Glasheil? I am

not convinced of you or your forms of the thousand myriad creatures of death. Speak to Fundin if you can, he's the one who needs lobotomizing, all he thinks about is the death of the animals. He had some great, dare I say it, love, for the wretched lot, try telling them that if you get the chance. You should have told them when you were in the cave with me when Bloggdrott came through! Come to think about it, maybe you should call off this Talwadc and save us all the trouble.' Glasheil knew I lacked stomach for the self-righteous indignation of the dispossessed animals of Talwadc. Unlike Aossin and Condumour, I had nothing to die for and wished it to stay like that for a very long time. The numbers on Condumour portcompcom clock moved from ten forty to ten forty one. Condumour understood Fundin's urgency to get a 'flame thrower' from the N'ihdogg. Naturally, it fitted in with her plans, as she told me that the flame thrower would make it easier to convince the animals, so who was I to resist now insanity was gaining popularity.

'First we have to get one', Fundin told me, sounding strained and intemperate, losing patience, 'We need to show the animals, it may turn things around.' The only thing I wanted was to turn round our nates and leave town for the peace of the desert. That was not to be. Condumour said :

'Before we go to the animals, we must go to Army Headquarters; tell them of our plan. After all it is hopeless if the authorities don't agree!' It was hopeless anyway and getting downright dangerous for me again, did they see that? More rocks rained down from the sky. Condumour wasn't in the listening mode, like Glasheil she had switched to 'auto-moron do- gooder', reminding me how I had agreed, and then changed my mind, once I had found Fundin. They needed me to prove the validity of an opposition with which to negotiate. I remarked how ludicrous it was she thought the animals were 'cognizant'. They were, only for killing.' I told her for the very last time, asking Fundin to back me up. He squeaked out something about them, 'being a bit justifiably hostile.'

'A bit hostile! Just look about you everyone, it's raining stones and bombs, soon it will rain down biting vermin. The Army won't listen, they'll only hold me as a prisoner of war, the animals are unstoppable!' I started to leave but stopped by

Fundin. ,

'Stop, things will work out.'

'Yes like before.' I said, 'let's just leave and cancel our attendance at Ragnarok ok?' Condumour, Aossin and Fundin needed me, they said so, they begged me. Again, I was called upon, over and beyond the call of reason, so I submitted to the stupid ideologues. I must be a real sucker for that stuff, helpless as I was, helpless in a helpless world of ideas, my only hope was to start believing in the peace plan. Perhaps, and it was a big one, it was the only thing that might save us all, the N'ihdoggs and the Animals.

'When the Army sees and listens to Gallad, they'll know the animals are to be reasoned with', said Aossin confidently. I waited for the voice of Glasheil to drop its acerbic commentary: it was silent, gone off to do its indifferent business no doubt. Quietly, calmly Aossin suggested we don't waste time and simply start talking with the Army, definitely get the President in on it.

'After all; there is no reason for anyone to die. When we have an agreement from the President, we take the flame thrower to demonstrate its effect, dispel the animals' warlike ardor and bring them to negotiate a peace.' So said Aossin. 'Only if the work of love cannot be accepted', said Condumour matter-of-factly, accepting her sister's advice, taking back control of all operations. I had to point out, surt napalm would only get the animals more desperate, not liking to respond to more threats.

'Besides', I asked desperately, 'You said nothing can stop this power called love, so why do we require the flame thrower?' Condumour explained,

'The flame thrower is our way of telling them we can save them, if they don't go ahead with our peace plan.'

'Don't be surprised if the animals shred you into comestibles the moment they see you. They will also do the same to me when they see I have N'ihdoggs with me..., for breaking with Talwadc.'

No one was listening, they were busy ducking stones and trying to imagine a world where N'ihdoggs and animals could speak to each other.

'Oh little brother, are you in it or what', said the

nagging voice of Glashiel. Desperately I broke down under the strain of war.

'You poor thing little one, take a break from life'

'I'll wait here for Ragnarok to come, you said there's no way of stopping it! Make a great bonfire, maybe even roast marshmallows, in the great American tradition? Forget me, none of this is going to work.' Condomour thought I was giving up, 'You're right, I told her angrily, 'there isn't anything to give up!' It was all lost anyway, couldn't she see that?

'Try again my little defeatist.'

'Be quiet', I told my rat brained voice. I was getting it from all sides, as everyone looked at me, wondering who I was talking to. I wanted to run out into the desert with the Fundin and find someplace where all the fanatical idealist warlike religious zealot maniac peace planners wouldn't harm us. Besides, I told Condomour, the pelted mobsters of Talwadc would want more than just promises and treaties; they knew of the Redman's betrayal by the N'ihdogg New Worlders' treachery. They'll want real treaties over stomping grounds, maybe walls. Again I tried to persuade Fundin to take me to the desert, he shook his head in a silence that told me nothing! Stopping a war doesn't happen on street corners. Aossin said,

'That would be where you would come in, because no one would believe her.' No kidding, even I didn't, no one would. I told her

'Only Drozzler had contact with Talwadc and the, 'Pope of the Oceans', only he could stop the global war, not that he would, it's too late. No one could stop Ragnarok, right Condomour? 'She wasn't happy: telling me, 'I should have left you to the mob, if that was the way of the world, now how do you feel?' I said it was only, 'putting off the inevitable'. She urged me to decide,

'It couldn't work without me.'

'Ah!' I said, 'it couldn't work with me either.'

Aossin tried a more sympathetic approach,

'If we're already dead, then it can't make any difference. We should act in the right way, if there really is a chance to stop the war. We should try or face the worst. To know and not act is wretchedness itself.' Aossin lightening up the darkness of our debate.

‘We have to make the effort, we must offer ourselves for peace.’

Seeing an armed personnel carrier swerving in our general direction, while the rock pelters of the air were giving a break in the weather, all three ran out and hailed it. Condomour needed to see someone who could make decisions, she had something very important to say, something to stop the war. Of course the soldiers wouldn't go along just like that, so she shed some information on the matter telling the soldiers how we are sought by army intelligence, how we had information about the animals.

‘We wish to turn ourselves in, the General wants us for a good reason’, Aossin told the army lads. She didn't quite hit the mark to convince the squadies.

‘Sure little girl’, said one of the soldiers condescending, jumping down from the jeep, ‘ave ya seen a small animal on the loose?’

‘That's why we need to see the General’, said Condomour.

‘Maybe the General doesn't want or need to see you,’ said the soldier.

‘You have to get off the streets; there's an air raid, if you didn't know it.’ Condomour was desperate,

‘We have the animal, the one you're looking for.’ That was different, the soldiers came to attention.

‘Then you should hand it over’, said the soldier authoritatively. I was readying to make a leap from Condomour's coat, but the pressure from her hands made it impossible for me to escape, as she held me in her vice-like grip.

‘It can speak’, said Aossin.

‘It's got information, it wants to help. The soldier's faces cracked their strigulous surface into broad smiles of derision.

‘Sure it can , like ducks don't fart in shallow water’, said the soldier prophetically.

‘It's true’, said Condomour desperately, ‘It can make the animals stop their killing, that's why it's here.’

‘Yes’, said Aossin, ‘it has come to negotiate for peace with the General and America.’

The soldiers grinned derisively; they were familiar with

crackpots and the girls were just two more.

'Yeh, then why are they still trying to kill us?'

Condumour the Certain knew why, she told them.

'Because they haven't heard from it yet, it's delayed, you're delaying us. Please we're wasting time, what is the time?'

'Ten fifty or so,' said one soldier squinking at his chronometer.

'Well soon there will be millions of animals here, just like you've heard about,' said Aossin authoritatively.

'You say it can speak?' asked an unshaved face of a soldier.

'You bet,' said Aossin enthusiastically, 'and it has plans, peace plans. Now take us to the General right away please!' The soldiers reluctantly agreed only after I made a brief appearance, head sticking out from Fundin's shirt, telling them to their astonished ears and eyes.

'It's true, now quit wasting time and let's meet with the General.' One of the soldiers thought Fundin was doing it with ventriloquism. Most reluctantly; after a lot of chiding, I hopped onto the hood of the jeep doing a full summersault, and told them the same over again. Only then did they realize I was no hoax.

'Just a franion and a..., what was it? Ah yes, a titubater, isn't that so, according to Condumour?'

'I'll ignore that Glasheil. Using someone else's ideas makes you a sequacious lob logical brain squatter.'

We were loaded into the jeep to drive to headquarters, but nothing is that simple.

'I told you that little one.'

We were about to depart when the raving madman Slit face Spence, with him several armed soldiers firing their guns madly at the bird bombers, ran up hurling abuse at Condumour calling her, 'Protectress of the enemy'. The soldiers weren't keen on following Sliteyes' orders as he yelled at them to search Condumour. Of course no one was going to do a strip search, especially on a female. Condumour looked indignantly at her betrayer. I peeked out from Fundin's shirt just as she smashed into Sliteyes' head with every muscle her little body could manage. Ouch, I almost felt the plang of pain around his face, as the soldiers wrestled her from him. Tough cookie,

Condumour. Bleeding Sliteye hollered more abuse, pointing to her bosom with one hand, while holding his face with the other. The soldiers eyed her suspiciously. Sliteye told the soldiers where I might hide.

'Aossin', he said, 'or that one! '

My nibblers poised, I was ready to move out hacking and slashing at my foe. Condumour sighed, saying something about Sliteye being an idiot,

'There is no animal in my shirt', she gasped, opening her shirt right there in front of everyone, revealing those pink papillary's to the soldiers, their faces turning rubescent amid their strigulous surface, saying in dumfusion,

'That's all right little girl, we don't care who has the god dam critter, we're going to see the General.' Quickly the soldiers conferred, everything was under control, get rid of the nerd, Sliteye. Last thing I heard was the soldiers telling him to go find his mum. I returned my nibblers to my nuthole.

'See', said Condumour, absently addressing everyone, 'that wasn't as hard as we thought was it? '

'Yes', I thought, 'wait 'till it comes to Talwadc.

It is with great cunning that we
assume the name of the world.

Sir Francis Bacon.

'Calm yourself', I told myself as I set out for the dangerous N'ihdoggs' war council bunkers. 'Badly' was all my faint heart told me, racing, faster and faster than the night and day of Brahma. At this rate I would be a fortnight ahead of everyone else in Ragnarok. The jeep, accelerated faster toward that underestimated fate I was sure was waiting for me, unless I could escape.

'You still wish to run little one?'

It's easy for Glasheil the rat-brain to say stay and fight. Be brave, don't run. It probably lives in some real nice place like a bank of clouds and rainbows, no war going on up there from the sound of its smooth -talking confident voice. No dying either. This time I would have to make an appearance in front of the real enemy, my neck was really in the sling this time.

'Don't forget your comrades in arms little one.'

The rat-brained Glasheil was being charitable with my life as usual. I hadn't forgotten the pelted mobsters; I was going to be there for their benefit.

'Reluctantly: mostly yours as well'.

'No', I said to Rat-brain One, emphatically, 'not mine'.

Why was I there?

'Because you just are'.

'Just like you Glasheil'.

Hollow sounds of feet reboantly filling the dread place of the N'ihdoggs war chamber. A slamming of doors, Condomour the Certain seemed to be talking to the right people, the next thing she had the attention of a certain General Thripster. I heard her telling of her plan, then I heard Thripster laughing heartily, filling me with dread again. I readied my nibblers, other N'ihdoggs joined in, laughter abruptly ending, no doubt by the General's disregard for amusement: he could laugh, but no one else. Irucund, he told Condomour if she wanted him to take her seriously, she should produce the critter pronto! Condomour wanted the Generals 'personnel to leave, telling him of my

reluctance to be there, and also my shyness.

*'That's a joke little one, next thing you'll be saying
you're mysterious as well!'*

'You have the floor on that one O Rat-brain'.

After a little military persuasion from the General to strip search everyone if I didn't, 'pop up pronto', we would all be incarcerated. Finally, after all the deliberations and procrastinations, it was my turn to make an appearance.

Condumour called me out in woosified phrases. That was all I needed, I mean, she could have announced me instead of talking to me like I was a lapdog. Humiliated and terrified I reluctantly scrambled up the belly of Fundin, climbed out of the darkness, stuck out my head.

'What not your neck as usual?'

'No I'm trying not to give that up.'

Get a look around first, take in the unfamiliar surroundings. I noticed a large glass mono-eye whirring away in our direction, it made me feel even more rouncey, the General directly before me, a dead ringer for the Kaiser, aglastic, irucund, fubsey- faced, lots of scrambled egg all over his epaulets and baseball cap, real full-sized male N'ihdogg bellowing demands. Worse still, behind him on the wall unimaginable horror faced me. Several decapitated brothers and sisters had fallen victim to his venery and the art of the taxidermist, staggered along the wall amid that fetid air of smoke and urine. The squinnied eyes of per lustration fell upon me in that perilous place. My fantod reappeared, as I looked to my paracletes for support. They seemed struck in silent fear by the General's presence. I was virtually alone and it wasn't going to be easy selling Condumour's peace plan to this N'ihdogg who enjoys killing for sport. Nothing could move me from my gaze upon those effigies on the wall that once possessed the life of Glasheil.

The clock on the wall went from ten thirty two to ten thirty three. I stared, twitching, going into auto out a 'ere, noticing a window was open to my immediate right through which I would willingly go through. After all, I was the only one there who wasn't a N'ihdogg, counting the living!

'So this baggage of death -spitting fur is what all the trouble is about?' said the General, obviously disappointed. Of course I knew he was referring to the mad mob of N'ihdoggs,

who had tried to end my life, but 'death spitting fur?' I was not aware of any infamous notoriety regarding myself. Apparently, I was, as an aide to the General informed him with eager vellication.

'A great deal of fear was initiated due to this sighting, several people had gone to hospital suffering from tramlings set off by their panic, caused quite a commotion sir!'

Probably my only real war effort, so the General's generality was not altogether incorrect. In a panicked fantod I fell back inside the jacket of the Fundin, seeing myself imminently pinned bodiless on the wall next to my dreaded enemy the tree Marten and to my left the American Armadillo. So that's to be the ending for Gallad, head sticking out for posterity between the stupid and the vicious. I tell you that open window with a blue rectangle of sky was looking good, and the peace plan already began to look bad. I was waiting for the right cue from my hosts, it didn't come. I looked up to catch Fundin's glance down to me, we knew what to do in the event of imminent arrest. Condumour took the floor in my silence, telling Thripster about how important it was to show the animals the peace plan using me as its diplomat. As she told him,

'It would be a beginning of the end, not to try.'

Exonerating me for saving Fundin, she explained she had saved a valuable asset to world peace,

'That's you little one'.

The General in his silence still didn't seem impressed, taking another peek at me, like he was sizing up the mounting board for me to join his wall furniture of ventry. I gauged the right time to sneak through the window, when I saw his face grow into a crater, like an earthquake. I still hadn't said a word, or really shown myself in any way! The amazing Technicolor story that Condumour had painted for him of our mutual heroism, wasn't effective. General Thripster wasn't in the same space as Condumour, so you couldn't blame him from thinking he was in a sycophantic Walt Disney cartoon. Condumour's endearing soliloquy ended. I thought everyone's ears were going to shrivel up and fall off, like they were exposed to a severe frosting, and there would be a general 'plink' as their ears hit the floor. The General didn't seem amused in the least, instead

realizing the key of the idea lay in me. He told Condumour and the Fundin.,

'So let's hear what this goddamn murdering squirrel has to say eh!' That was a good beginning. I had realized earlier this man was uncouth and mostly terrified like everyone else.

'How right little one', said the rat sized brain voice, as I asked it nicely to shut its nuthole during the inquisition. The General added,

'What makes you think these goddamn animals are going to stop all their murdering just because of your peace plan with the critter?'

Condumour told him we should always negotiate for peace first of course, for the threat of the flame thrower wasn't real to them, just a saving deterrent. I still hadn't spoke, the General needed to know it wasn't some freak of nature he was dealing with, he hadn't wished for her to speak.

'Shut up and let me speak!' I thought, more brave in my mind than in that room. Yet it was the General who said what I could not.

'Look here Condumour, Shaddup, let the rodent speak will ya?' More importantly his furrowed brow described the biggest question of all, namely,

'What in the god dam hell is going on?'

The floor was mine, dazzled and dazed by it all I wasn't sure I had it right. Squirrels pride themselves on memory, usually, it was one reason I was chosen for the war council. Squirrels are different, how else can we remember where we stashed our nuts? I think it was the spotlight occasion that placed me into the temporary cosmopsis. I told the aglast sports killer it wasn't going to be easy stopping the billions of animals waiting for the N'ihdoggs because of Talwadc the mad, maybe we could try. He was dumfounded hearing me talk.

'Because of what', he spluttered, 'Talwaddy?'

The General shouted out into the room, startling me.

'And what or who is these god dam Niggerdoggs?'

I tried to explain, his patience was thin, I knew he wouldn't understand, saying he didn't want me calling him and his men Niggerdoggs.

'Just call us Human,' he said threateningly pointing his stinking bonfire of a cigar at me. Next he asked me to jump

away from Fundin, to make sure, as he put it, 'There are no wires up ya arse', he laughed insidiously, menacingly, though this time alone. He told us that since the flame throwers were strategically used, the animals were already loosing, what did he need this peace plan for? Condomour told him about the Hobson's choice: the ecology of the planet, how we needed the animals. He wasn't listening; he couldn't see far down the road, nor the idea of Talwadc attacking him in the form of a rabble of confounded animals.

'It doesn't make any difference what I or the war is called, the animals are not going to stop the war, due to the power of Talwadc. It was in the name of Talwadc that the war would proceed.' How could I make him understand?

'So it's only in the name of Talwaddyya, is it? It's still killing innocent bystanders, people and children and now this Ragnarocks is about to happen?'

'That is most regrettable,' I told him with my very best tact,

'The world has reached a terrible threshold, it's no longer possible to have such things as innocent bystanders any more, everyone is responsible for the plight of the animals.' I was jolted back into my shell of fear when I said this as the General went into a fit of rage,

'What do you mean there's no such thing as an innocent bystander?'

'In this war everyone is responsible and everyone has to take their place in the scheme of things; is that no so?' I continued.

'The animals', I ventured forth, 'are bent on revenge. It matters not regarding the outcome, or who is in their way, they are all ready to die.' He didn't understand.

'Then let them die! They may have had victories elsewhere in the world, this time they are up against Uncle Sam. They should goddamn well wise up; this time we're going to incinerate the lot of the little bastards!'

The horror of it all raced through my noodle. Such willingness to kill, thoughtless actions in a ruined world, how can they be sustained, how can they hope to live when they are despairing in madness? Couldn't he see my point, did I have one? Defending

something I felt absolutely nothing for, neither caring nor uncaring, the day growing hotter and the local weather seeming to burst my peanut noodle with pressure, pressure calling me with questions, 'what do you think of this, what should we do with that?' It was wearing me out, this struggling to stay alive, this conviction created by others to listen and understand . Why do I bother?

'Perhaps you should go back and fight, take up your side, it would be easier to die that way, little one, for the noble cause of Talwadc.'

'I was wondering more O Glasheil, how to get out of here.' If I could see the sky again, perhaps I wouldn't feel the oppression of everything, the real peril I was in, realizing the hopelessness of my case. I decided to change my point of view, hoping I would elicit my release, telling the General how the animals would stop the moment the peace plan failed , the flame thrower would stop Talwadc dead in its tracks, the animals would see into the peace idea as having merit, especially now they were losing. The General saw what he wanted to see, the innate fear of fire in the animals. The great fighting man sat back agape when I told him such stuff.

'So why will they stop when you show it to them - because you say so?'

'Perhaps', said Aossin the silent one, 'Condumour will deal with the animals without the flame thrower.'

'Then the animals are not bent to destruction like this rodent says. If you can stop them, perhaps I should give it a try.' Condumour, seeing her opportunity and the clock on the wall, raced on.

'You have to take every opportunity to save those innocent people in your protection, this is the real opportunity,' reminding him of the imminent death that he had accused me of being responsible for. He wanted to take me out and shoot me for spying, asking me if I thought the animals were right in moving out into human populations, killing and destroying. My reply could have been disastrous if I had told him that the N'ihdoggs had done just that to the animals, so I told him how I lacked any real idea in the ways or means to answer the question, neither had the animals. I had been honest, the General seemed to understand briefly, some things cannot have

negative or positive conclusions, they just are, like this wretched war. I wished for a peaceful solution to the entire affair and had come to see him personally to begin such a conclusion. When I mentioned the flame thrower, how it might stop the murder of more innocents, though it was a slim chance, the General eyed me suspiciously.

'How do you know about the flame throwers anyway?' he burst out in guarded anger. Fundin said he had seen the flame thrower, it had been a mistake to see what it was, how he had found them by mistake. The General seemed to be coming around. The clock ticked away my freedom. Condomour knew this more than anyone, she was getting angry with the General I could tell.

'So how about it then', said Condomour, trying to take the General's attention away from me, telling N'ihdogg Thripster, some Mother Earth apple seed rhetoric about, 'I alone could persuade the animals to negotiate, save thousands of lives. How it could be world-wide if we succeed, we couldn't walk away from a plan like this; at least save those living.' Very sure of herself, she was; me as well.

'We should move fast', said Condomour matter-of-factly, as the Sun began to enter closer to its zenith,

'The animals are coming at the zenith of the sun', I told them resolutely. That got the General interested; times and dates are very important to people like him, probably collected train schedules as a kid. He paused for a few moments while he gave thought to what I told him. He looked at the clock on the wall, knowing he had only a slim slice of the future to save his own neck. He wanted assurances I wouldn't return to the animals bearing information, wanted to know if the rest of us would remain safe. Condomour added her ten cents worth in the storyboard with Aossin. The General thought his peace plan was usable.

'Stay in touch eh, keep an eye on him', he added in a fatherly way, pointing to me. I should really be taken out and shot. Happily: Condomour tucked me into her coat, tucking in the suggestion that the success of the plan was in his making the right decision, and with the success of the plan, so to would come the glory. Calling his staff ; telling them to get a mobile flame thrower, and ordered a vehicle to escort us to the

perimeter of the city. The N'ihdogg Thripster pointed to the shining eye, telling us what a laugh it's going to be when he shows it to the top brass, laughing loudly. I didn't seem to care, he had agreed to our plan, and I was leaving alive. My debut was coming to the television world, and a déjà vu suddenly overwhelmed me, for I realized that last night's dream had come true. I had dreamt that the wall I was nailed to, was the wall in the background of that running camera with the heads of the dead creatures of taxidermical fates. I could not see over that wall because my body was buried in a TV set, with my head sticking out through the shiny surface of the screen, spread in acres all 'round me. I was lost in my thoughts when Condomour the PR girl suggested the General show it soon,

'Most important General', added Condomour, 'show it to President Clinschur.'

I saw the General's face crack wide open when she said this. Showing any President original footage of a talking squirrel didn't sit too good in his head.

'It was a beginning eh, Condomour?' said the General, who's fifteen watt light bulb personality came on, dimming at the edge.

'I should speak to the President about you lot anyway.' picking up his telephone, telling his aide to get the President. Silence pervades. We waited for the line to connect to the big man, a small delay to freedom. I turned to look up at Condomour and my other two companions. No one spoke as the silence grew heavy, more depression filled our hearts. Thripster and the President were speaking, another shiny eye flashed on and we had a Ratatosk-to-President connection. Suddenly the conversation was disturbed by some commotion outside the room from which the President was speaking, sounds of breaking glass, sirens and screams emanating from outside. The battle was underway and I thought I could see the muffled faces of the mobsters of Talwadc pressing their faces against the plate glass windows. Then one pane broke as the thousand swarming mobsters streamed through every available hole, only to be incinerated by flames. Quickly, everyone ushered the President away to safety toward two steel doors. The light came on again and the shaken President Clinschur spoke to us.

'I presume this is important.'

Thripster cleared his throat,

'Indeed Sir it is, I have some, e-hum, some people here who say they can stop the animals.'

'How do you mean General... er?' An aide in his ear, 'Thripster?'

The General went on to speak of the impossible peace plan.

'And this sir is Gallad, one of the animals. I know this sounds absurd, he is the main one who can talk to the animals sir, see for yourself...'

The General ushered me to speak to the camera vis-a-vi the President of the United States of America. My big moment had finally come, I stepped forward to speak. Suffice to say that I was brief, hopefully succinct, as I proceeded to tell him of the virtue of the peace plan and the method of its execution. I didn't expound its possible failure, such a thing I believed would have only led to my incarceration should the President give it the thumbs down. Remember I wanted out of there and this was the only sure way. Give the story real good press, talk it up to the main man and hope. Gratefully Condomour said nothing; she had a stunned look, like she had been smacked by a baseball bat. After I told all, the Prez went silent, ponderous moments, nail-nibbling anxieties passed through me as I waited and wondered. The Prez whispered into the hundred ears surrounding him, before finally looking up in our direction again.

'What do you require for the mission?' he wisely asked. I unwisely told him. 'Can it succeed?' he wanted to know. I turned to Condomour. She told the Prez how it could, she knew the odds and had planned for such contingencies adding respectfully at the end, 'it cannot fail Sir, we have nothing to loose trying'. Only our lives. The Prez, concerned children would be risking life and limb for national security, seemed reluctant initially. Condomour read his mind, saying:

'It is of no consequence, everyone has taken that into account and we're duty bound to try to save America. She added something about the pictures earlier of the rampaging cohorts of Talwadc moving closer and closer,

'It would be impossible to stop them without reconciliation to renew stomping grounds worldwide, should I promise them that?' she asked.

The Prez looked grave at the reminder of the fate of the world outside his bunker. He seemed hopefully optimistic enough like Condumour, to issue orders for our release. Moments of silent anticipation as the clock behind the Prez said ten and ten again. 'Give them the right equipment to get this plan to the animals, and tell the animals I guarantee their domiciles.' said the Prez gloomily,

 'Tell the animals to stop the aerial bombardments of the cities immediately, it's got to stop nation-wide, then we can peacefully work this out. People or animals don't have to die.'

 'God bless you and God bless America.' as more pelted mobsters clamored over the battlements of the White House. The picture flashed snow and crackled hisses before going blank. Escorted from the building and given the Thiokol flame thrower in a readied jeep, and we were out of there. At the garage Fundin found his old 'two piece' and I found my little bag still intact just like he had said. Condumour and Aossin were falling about laughing at the sight the Fundin made up in his two piece suit. They soon fell silent when I told them that in the event she and Aossin didn't possess such a camouflage that they were exposed to great danger from the animals. Condumour regrouped with a sneer, telling me she and Aossin didn't wish to camouflage, they had things to stop animal attacks. Aossin held up some yellow feathers. It was Fundin's turn to laugh.

Easy to hate, hard to love.

Aossin

A shadow passed over us all, throwing us into a darkened vortex as another flock of birds were heading to Angerboda, so we ducked into cover. The sun broke through their eclipse, I realized it had almost reached its zenith. We were running hard to get to the main division with the message. Would there be enough of that sun left before its zenith comes and the war will begin?

'Something that suits you real fine eh little one?'

Perhaps a terrible tragedy would intercede on my behalf, maiming my two witches, or the animals would find them and kill them before they had a chance to speak.

'That's nice of you to say after all they have done for you!'

As the moments passed I realized we were closing toward that place of rendezvous and nothing had so far intervened. The only hope I had, was that perhaps we wouldn't get to the animals in time.

'Then you're off the hook, right little one?'

'Yes that's right O Glasheil, perhaps today I may get to be free of your nagging voice.' After much debate and consultation, Condumour and Aossin agreed to go into the hills, to await my command. I was getting edgy, the Eagles were scouting around, looking for movements of N'ihdogg resistance. Luckily the girls hadn't been spotted by the war party, since no one had come out from the main division as a spearhead yet. Suddenly overhead, in swooped the reconnaissance Big Eagle boys, dipping and diving, calling out, telling us they would report our return to the war council. Fundin wasn't too happy, he had to begin hopping into camp again.

Further along the trail we passed the burnt out fuselage wreckage of jet aircraft, bodies and arsenals of war smashed and covered in blood, the small but lethal corpses of the kamikaze boys, perished, lost forever in this life. No doubt alive and well in Glasheil by now. I'm sure!

'Glad to hear at last little one, surely you jest?'

'What do you think Rat-brain One?' No answer as usual. Even further along were the shattered ragged remains of some pilots, their bodies gnawed and broken by the ravages of the MUCSPAT boys. Fundin was his usual stoical self, with nothing to say, though I knew he was exhausted from the hopping and skipping. I took the opportunity to ask him if he still wanted to make a run for it, before we looked like those pilots. Fundin was very conciliatory,

'We have the flame thrower if things go wrong', he told me and though reluctantly, he would torch those who dared to harm me! Dismal at the thought of meeting the animals again, we trudged-hopped forward, but when Fundin checked the fuel level of the flame thrower, we realized the army boys hadn't filled it to the top and that we would have only a few bursts if we needed to escape. So much for 'military intelligence'! More ensuing depression, it was just another sign the noose was tightening around its victims, namely us! When Condumour and Aossin came out of the shadows of the canyon we didn't recognize them as they turned the cliff face looking like two ostrich birds from the Uniramia land legion had found us. Fundin rose into a sprung, 'kill' position, readying to pounce with the flame thrower juice. Aossin called it a 'tuion' or cape and described how it would protect them. It almost worked, if you had never seen their eyes or their normal selves before, I already thought they were pushing their credibility with the animals.

'One thing', I told them, 'the animals appreciate honesty. In the animal world they don't like posers or impostors, in this case, provocateurs.'

Aossin said she didn't care. Fundin had a costume to hide behind, why shouldn't they? I thought they were running scared after all, but she believed the animals would accept the idea of them being in their midst if they were more like them. I wasn't banking on that, besides their smell was wrong. The animals would kill them just for that reason alone. I suggested they find some turds and give themselves a good rub down with it and perhaps I could micturate and provide some musky odiferations to help them blend in. The faces and the diastatic blue eyes told me I had gone over the boundaries of feminine acceptability, I was serious. Both told me in banter of confused expletives that

they would

'In no way roll about in Buffalo, or any scumbles or use the urine of a Squirrel!'

'Please yourself', I added, 'except don't expect them just to eyeball you, the Thraesvelg dog boys do a lot of whiffing. Check for cuts and blood, cos that will definitely give you away'. Aossin confidently told me she was prepared for the worst anyway. I thanked her for her vote of confidence, because I sure wasn't. How can you be prepared for something like a mob of raving killers or a good ripping to shreds? Quickly I told my plan.

'Fundin and I will go in alone to approach the War Council, since you haven't taken the correct odiferations to conceal yourselves.'

'You must remain in hiding, the warriors are too dangerous for direct confrontations, anything sets them into the kill mode, if they're not already there, as you well know.'

'Don't assume anything here, because they really don't know yet!' I thought they were re-considering the rollicking and scumbering, as their faces went into petrous disappointment and hostile rejection of my plan. I don't know how I convinced them to stay in hiding until I had broken the ground with Drozzler. Distrusting me, Condumour and Aossin agreed. The best thing would be for them to come in after I had some agreement, assuming the War Council was receptive to the idea. Then Condumour could be called in and happily fill in all the details. It would be sometime before we knew, as I was sure Drozzler would have to get on the blower and speak to the 'Pope of the Oceans', before anything of such importance could be accepted. If by some extraordinary sense of redemption the animals may have, I would send Fundin to fetch them. I made it clear again, they must not come into camp unannounced; such folly or youthful optimism would undoubtedly throw the animals into a Talwadc' fit of raving madness, resulting in a massacre. They promised to wait for my signal. I didn't know how long it would be, they could rest assured I wouldn't have the ok for a while. I didn't even know if I would have the OK at all!

'What happens if you don't get a general consensus?' asked Aossin. I told her it was simple, we'll start running and

she can start heading for the hills to hide! As usual Condomour the Certain didn't think it would be required to retreat. I even suggested we alone possessed enough sense to forget the meeting and the plan, in fact, forget everything.

'Why not just slide away into the desert anyway?' 'I suggested furtively to them for the last time. Sanctimonious self-righteous heroics prevailed in those witches, so it didn't matter if we left them in that dark valley. Quicker than a ferret up a drain pipe, we were in the midst of the pelted multitudinous mobsters of Talwadc. As they roared out their cacophonic greetings to us like hero's returning, all I felt again was dread and murine madness rush over me when I saw the millions upon millions of animals of the western divisions, poised in readiness for the charge into the city of Angerboda. Drozzler, Sinir, Berzerlsmertz, Berzeldreerts, Sneirtsnerets, Bloggdrott, Ronkers, all diligently standing at the head of their legions, greeted us as we hopped into camp. I hadn't missed them. I thought we could lose them somehow, just slide by, keep moving on as we passed them with a quick, 'hello' and a quicker, 'goodbye - we have to go now, our bikes are on fire.' We could wind up missing the confrontation of peace and love suggestions and the like. That was the last time I suggested it to Man boy - to save ourselves the misery, hoping the thrall of animals may discourage him. I was wrong. Gathered there before me were the expectant endless faces of feather, fur, bone, and skin, all wanting to know what I had discovered on my journey. Finally putting all doubt and fear behind me, we made a step toward that place of confrontation, the grim and grinning faces of the War Council. I simply knew from the grim faces they wouldn't like the peace-love initiative and I would undoubtedly be the one to die, if anyone died that day.

You know something, I was correct, they didn't. No sooner had we entered camp and I had briefed Drozzler and the War Council about the Surt Napalm, Peace and Love plan of the N'ihdogg, than all eyes turned lirophalmically savage with strained incredulity and I was seized upon, dragged from the pocket of the Fundin and surrounded by the Thraesvelg corpse swallowers! No one liked the plan in the least. As it spread quickly around the pelted groups of whispering lunatics; loud cries went out for my blood. I thought about making a run for

it. Surrounded by those salivating jaws, who could blame me? It would have ended quickly if I had, for I could not possibly get away though such a sea of piligerous faces. Fundin moved close to me, for they did not suspect him yet, but his muffled mug held all the consternation of a typhoon. I looked back to his eyes saying all with mine,

'See foolish Man boy, now it is all too late.'

Drozzler, in his minuscule mercy calmed the frothing masses, canceling my immediate dispatch into that future called Ragnarok. All was lost as I saw the astonished pelted faces turn angry again at the very mention of my reasoning. They started doing a Talwadc fit of rasorial thrashing about and nibbling, peeing on the legs of Fundin's 'two piece', while the murine rodents from my division were jumping clear into the air screaming, 'him kill, kill, kill.' I think Drozzler and the War Council seemed to enjoy the fact I had finally screwed up, and had implicated myself in the treachery they always suspected of me. Now they could enjoy those brief few moments seeing me squirm for my life. Berzeldrerts and the hallowed Bloggdrott were both grinning like a fox sucking blood through a cheese grater, full of schadenfreud at my blunder. To add some all-too-late dissuasion to my immanent destruction, I desperately mentioned the fortification of the city, the deserted suburbs.

'The flame thrower', I told them, 'was formidable,' pointing to the clobber on Fundin's back,

'There is no way you can prevent its deadly results.' I said I had counted them, the flame machines are as common as rodentia nibblers. The lower MUCSPAT lads let out a howl when I called them 'common', and moved closer to the fray.

'Better keep your mouth washed out with sacred Glasheil if you want to survive little one', said the noodle voice. For once I listened. Then some of the dogs accused me of being too sympathetic to the N'ihdoggs, that I really didn't believe in Talwadc, and the N'ihdoggs wouldn't be able to stop them once they got going, flame thrower or no flame thrower. When I told them they hadn't even seen one in practice, they lied as was their nature, telling me they had, nonchalantly micturating against some rocks. Lying makes you pee. When I suggested Fundin demonstrate the flame thrower, everyone became more suspicious, suggesting we'd better not try and use it against

them and escape! More arguing ensued about, 'how come a Kangaroo can use such a machine', as the Thraesvelgers eyed him. He pushed them away to make room for himself, telling them how he had at least seen the thing work which was more than they had. It didn't matter to the dogs - they were going to have no retreats. Now blood was on the menu they wanted some of it. Sinir, loaded to the ears with his arsenal, told them all to shut up, or he was going to do a bit of blood wringing himself.

The dogs lay in abeyance, and I was glad to see that I had a protector, ever so briefly, and a reasonable audience. Some moment of truth had arrived as Sinir motioned to Fundin to prove the flame throwers power. Fundin told the MUCSPAT lads how this was finally going to, 'shut them up once and for all.' They saw these foolish words as an attack and reared up. I told Fundin to cut the crap, just get on with it as Sinir calmed the piligerous mobsters once more with a shaddupppp... Fundin lit the fuse of the flame thrower. More roars from the assembly; no doubt because we had fire. He blew the hot fiery liquid over several expired corpses as the stunned audience watched in horror, letting out reboant triskeles that filled the canyon. I thought I had made my point, for within seconds the corpses had melted into a burning bubbling sludgy plumbaceous porridge, leaving only the bleached bones stark and whitened against the desert sands. I could tell from their faces, that no one liked the sludge bit as they reared back howling and running about in another rasorial fit. Death was death - this was horrific and down- right mean.

'You wouldn't have to go this way,' I told them, 'the N'ihdoggs finally want to listen, believe me, just meet with them.' The animals didn't care ,they wanted the fight more. Now their invincibility was challenged, they let us know in more screaming torpid tortuosity how the,

'N'ihdoggs deserve it, besides what do you mean, 'go this way?'

'No one deserves to die. A fight now will make you no better than the N'ihdoggs, especially now they offer peace. If we act only in anger in the face of such opportunities for reconciliation, they have won the fight! '

I had lost mine. Drozzler and others were unimpressed by the

flame throwers effective ability to stop them. Mistakenly I thought Sinir was impressed, so I directed everything I said to him, trying to get him to exert his authority over the animals, I was wrong. He was sickened by it all, the sight of the sludged bodies oozing into the sand. Fundin was standing there like he was saying defiantly, 'see I told you so' and I was quaking in expectation for my life.

The divisions of Sinir had come through several small towns on the way here, wreaking more havoc. His mate, who had journeyed with him over such a great distance, was severally wounded during the sorties, had just recently expired. Fundin had reduced her to sludge, much to everyone's horror. I thought Sinir was going to kill him as he stared at him, he didn't. Ah well, I guess he could have got anyone to have done his dirty work just about then! I tried for the last time, seeing my ultimate chance to convince them to stop the assault on Angerboda, get Drozzler to tell the Pope of the Oceans, to stop just for one hour, one hour, listen to the N'ihdoggs, they were real sorry, really, really sorry. Please Drozzler, Sinir? The Sun climbing to the mark in a sky that was bluer and clearer than ever as my world was running down to that last opportunity. The mobsters dissatisfied; their eyes stared hard, marbles of hatred pouring out of them, seeking revenge as a little picture of me reflecting in every one of them connected in their noodles to the Rabid Talwadc. I knew that Talwadc was rising in their gorges with the rising Sun, as everyone looked on, grinning like a tiger sucking blood through the barrel of a gun. Berzeldrefts wasn't the least impressed telling us, 'We have conquered the sea and the air, the land war would soon be over, why should we fall to the cunning plans of the N'ihdoggs? There were no guarantees, there never are.' Then a devastating monologue with more concerns about getting the N'ihdoggs to live up to their word on animal rights or lands! The N'ihdoggs would never submit to the sublime insolences of Talwadc! 'Their track record is a bit shabby,' said Berzelsmertz his brother-in-league, 'so now that we have them fearful of us, let's get on with it and kill them all. After our glorious victory think of the lands we will have.' He screamed out,

'The sun is high upon us, we are late but we are ready.'

Drozzler agreed, he had no powers to oppose Talwadc, or the

Pope of the Oceans. The supreme influence had told them what to do, they trusted in it, it would win through, Talwadc was on their side. Ronkers the Rat had brought my legion from out of the ground for the court martial, since the word was out I was a traitor. He figured Talwadc would have none of it, the N'ihdoggs were trying 'it on again.' The dogs saw the end of it for me, they were already getting fangs ready after the declaration of my guilt and the chase to the death routine. I could tell as they stretched their readied limbs and yawned nuthole of sharp teeth. Again reiterating my defense, for I had nothing to lose, I told them how the news reports on the radio were true, how the N'ihdoggs are taking things back with the flame thrower Surt. How the President Clinschor, the main man of America, wanted me to tell them all how he was ready to make real concessions if we stopped the war. How he had told me personally. That was the last straw as the roars went skyward in their rage and madness for my blood.

'They're all lies, Clinschor rules a desolate Kingdom'.¹ cried Bloggdrott vituperatively, 'It's on to victory and freedom rather than 'peace' or that other deception called 'love', more words for extinction.'² he told the ranks. As it was passed up by manic mobs their micturating and rasorial nibbling resumed. That was it, I had lost my case, the moment to succeed had gone, along with the peace plan. My death followed by mass destruction would prevail, I would not be there to see it. Everyone wanted to die, except us. Fundin wanted the animals to stop racing about, he blew more flames against the rocks. They came to in stunned positions, eyes wild and rotating , roaring,

'It's going not to work, go you to your deaths, you who do not see, you who care not for the life of Glasheil!' 'Glasheil', I thought, 'where are you now, why do you not speak?' For once I wished it to fill my head with words like it had on the roof tops of Angerboda. It was Fundin who was more to the point, it was a bit late for the charade now the animals knew who we were. I definitely saw our end coming in the shape of several large corpse swallows moving in for the spoils of the chase, as Drozzler announced my guilt and my punishment: we were to be handed over for comestibles. Since I had broken with Talwadc, it was the War Council's

responsibility to dispatch me to Ragnarok, they said so. The War Council checked the position of the Sun: a quick execution was still possible, real quick though, Sneirtsnertz officiously estimated. The Council asked me how I pleaded as the sea of piligerous bonces shouted out, 'guilty!' Last words, before dispatch via Talwadc to Ragnarok. I pleaded with them.

'I have merely worked for the best thing possible.'

'That's a fib little one.'

I initiated a passionate burst of salivating and rasorial nibbling, and running about snapping at broken twigs.

'Enough of this rascal, into Ragnarok with him.'

The crowd joined each other in their roars for my death, rose to a full battle pitch of revenge. I even tried to tell them again about the miracle of 'love', that wasn't any good either.

'Because you don't believe or know what it is.'

Berzeldrerts derided the notion of 'love' as he poked around Fundin. Sneaking round his back, he told everyone hortatively how, 'love' was just another four letter word of the N'ihdoggs like, 'scum'! They didn't understand what either meant. How could he, always busy trying to screw everyone? It didn't matter anyway, Berzeldrerts had discovered the real Fundin, screaming to the mob .

'The lost Man boy, see he has been hiding with the traitor!'

That was really it, there was now absolutely no way out.

Berzeldrerts told me how he had suspected me the night they looked for this N'ihdogg. Of course he was just fibbing again, no one cared, they wanted our hides! More pullulating bodies and roars of 'blood' sang out through the Canyon.

'Quick Fundin, let's try to get out of here!' I shouted desperately

as my armed escort raised their paws to salute the hail of revengeful roars, I hopped back into the relative safety of Fundin's pocket. Fundin spread a ring of fire around us, none could enter, though some tried. Temulent in the rage that consumed them, they retreated howling with their pelts on fire, a not so mild keebabing, the stink of singed horrent hides filling the canyon. We were safe temporarily, what do we do when the fuel runs out? Several more bursts of flame around us as a hole in the crowd appeared and teeth loaded faces came snarling toward us. Berzeldrerts called for guns to be brought, as the Apes started to load them. Someone lobbed in a hand grenade,

and Fundin quickly lobbed it back out, immediately blowing up a group of MUCSAPT's, blood and guts flying into our faces. They didn't do that again. Instead, risking the torments of the flames again, they threw themselves into the fray as Fundin spread another burst, leaving them all retreating once more with their hides ablaze. In the brief relapse of aggression we waited for the guns to start going off. Sinir, who could have shot us right there where we stood, looked at us, neutral and ineffectual. I appealed to him and Drozzler through the flames,

'You're right, let's just get on with the war, it would be ok, no one really meant it, I haven't betrayed the cause, I only tried to win my way'. Drozzler didn't think so, they would purge Talwadc of its traitors, insisting that Sinir should shoot us. He desisted; only standing despondent like a nupson. We were finished anyway, 'Prepare to die.' Drozzler told me, as I saw others returning bearing weapons. 'Enforce Talwadc!' they screamed, brayed, and howled across that chasm of flame. Fundin fired another shot of flame juice around us, keeping the persistent killers at bay, the dial on the side of the tank reading 'low'. The apes loaded the gun clips and raised them toward us. The mob of singed hides, loaded with knashers, dispersed when they saw this, since aim wasn't perfected, someone could undoubtedly cop a stray bullet or two. Fundin and I stood alone in that circle of flame and dying alone took on a new meaning as I closed my eyes to the cruel world and waited for Ragnarok.

Did this shining woman live to be
at death the food of worms?

Book of Thel: William Blake.

It was not to be that I should die. In the darkness of my noodle I heard strange words call out across the canyon. Opening one eye to sneak a view of where the voices came from, to see Condumour and Aossin standing out against the skyline in their feathered outfits, arms raised above the multitudes, a bag of yellow feathers in handfals, thrown up into the wind as they shouted: 'Artha na bhFranach'. Those witches called out again, 'Artha na bhFranach'. I thought, all we needed was a soliloquy for our death, as I saw the apes, stunned by the performance, resume loading their guns. A drove of upper MUCSPATS, also stunned by the surprise appearance of the witches, immediately passed us, making a theroid dash up the ridge to savage the feathered kaleidogyns. The chant continued, 'Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach' they shouted again and again, holding forth their arms to the pelted killers, pointing to them in defiance. I thought, 'this is it, we shall all die together'. I was wrong, as the raving marauders approached they must have felt the powerful effects of the amphiexis, 'cos suddenly they stopped absolutely dead in their tracks, frozen petrous like chocolate bunnies, their mouths frothing and salivating, their rotating eyeballs full with the rage of impotence.

Quickly, more words from the mouths of Condumour and Aossin, 'Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach'. Guns went off, bullets ricocheting off the rocks behind us, mercifully missing, no doubt due to the immediacy of the anchylosis, for soon they all stood quaking and paralyzed. More animals in their ten thousands rose up from the rear ranks prepared for the attack, the anchylosis persisted into petrescence as the rat charm increased intensity, leveling them in its hypnapiasis, desisting their death revelries. The entire army of Talwadc groaned spasmodically together in one great reboant eructation of frozen bodies. Those witches uttered on and on into that wind of petrescence so that the canyon was filling with

flying yellow feathers. Even the birds came out of the skies and landed in their millions into that state of temulent petrification as Condumour and Aossin issued forth their mafficking words. Big Eagle and his brosz, who had flown to Angerboda came home to roost, as the yellow feathers carried the message far away upon the wind, its very utterance stunning the living of the sky -born wild side. All we could do was stand in that ring of lambent fire now abating, inextricably surrounded in a sea of frozen aggressors as the fatidic diviners repeated their rat charm. We watched in dumfusion the maffick mediators. 'Artha na bhFranach', Artha na bhFranach'. I was freezing up as well, a partial paralysis of the feet, rising up my body, tingling the end of my paws, a numb feeling, hair horribly standing out on the back of my neck giving me goose bumps, and a real cold feeling, leaving me with no bodily movement at all! In gelid fear I watched as the wild horses from the ruminant division, unaffected by the rat charm, broke loose from their ranks and charged forth in a paggle of destruction to stamp the kaleidogyn witches into the dust, before the davening Aossin shouted a magic message charm potion, 'Do Chonaciad ag Rith le Scandradh, Fe' chabhaite na Gcloch!' Repeatedly she shouted throughout that petrous valley. The wild horses whinnied, rose into the air screaming, before they too were standing petrous, inches before those davening maffickers. Condumour told us, 'I saw them flee in terror under the overhang of stones'. Was that all? What did the first rat charm mean? Basically: 'Get yourselves into stone and quick about it'. Well, something was correct, they were under a overhang of rock, even more incredible the 'rat charm' had worked and had saved us all. Silenced by the sounds of the feathered poetesses, that rabble of death stood as stiff as the rocky valley in which we had gathered. Could it last? Since Aossin and Condumour kept repeating the words I feared it wasn't a one shot affair, certain that if they stopped we would be back to where we started, looking into the face of the deadly Talwadc. It was long enough to let us out of there, as Fundin, carrying me like a frozen pole stepped through those lambent flames, passing Drozzler and the War Council, staring at me with strabismic onion eyeballs rotating in their craniums of solid fierce anger. I couldn't move a muscle, if I could I would have offered a final audacious

salutation. Silently through those ranks of petrified animals we moved in trepidation, passing a troggole of snakes twisting and writhing before stiffening. All around us the eyes of the leviners, we were expecting them to turn and attack us, instead only their squinnies followed us through that noonday heat of the dark summer day in that valley of rotating eyeballs.

Soon enough we had reached the ridge where our saviors were busy dispensing their fatidic charm. Relieved to have survived, I had finally unburdened myself of my secret, the peace plan, and all links to those killers of Talwadc.

'At last they know of you little one.'

'Glasheil: why do you always go silent in the face of death?' No reply as usual, can't answer, doesn't know.

'Fundin you don't owe me that life,' I blurted out in incomprehensible numbness amid Aossin and Condumour busy filling the air, repeating the rat charm, so that between them they sounded:

More crazy than cruel
As the mobsters of Talwadc
Are held fast by their rule.
Words planted by power
Where fear must comply
More certain of creation lest it shall all die.

'So you are a poet after all little one, not a very good one, but going in the right direction eh?'

Condumour, disappointed in the failure of the love plan, feared to stop uttering the fatidic charm. All of Talwadc was frangible and could descend upon us.

'Let us leave this place, all is lost!'

Fundin shouted at her. 'Get out of here, find refuge to hide.'

'If we stop,' said Condumour the Confricator, ignoring Fundin's plea for sanity,

'I am sure they will break out'. 'I looked on in my gelid stance and listened to Aossin still waving feathers into the growing blore, still offering the fatidic utterance. Condumour took her sister by the arm as she was about to release another handful of feathers and she stopped those mafficking words.

My heart syncope back into the night and day of Brahma.

Down in the valley of frozen death some animals moved spasmodically, twitching in convulsive tremors and strepitous

groaning. My fantod rushed into me again, I was helpless, expecting the theroid phatry to charge up that ridge. They were held by the strange banusical skill of those kaleidogyns, strong magic, magic more powerful than Glasheil. Satisfied she had control. However when the piligerous phatry moved too much, it was Aossin, not trusting the absolute power of the charm, returned to repeating those powerful words. I was grateful to see those feathers dispersing into the wind once more.

Condumour still had a mission to accomplish: she wanted to go to the mobsters, she still wanted to go back to her plan to save the animals. More foolishness, Aossin was game. So I just kept silent, grateful for my rescue. This time I noticed Fundin didn't burn quite so brightly when it came to going among the animals again.

'That's the second time she saved you little one.'

Oh! the voice of Glasheil is alive and well, its voice sounded like mine, as though we had our nut holes stuffed full of pebbles.

'Why don't you convince the animals to give it up?' I asked. Glasheil never replied. Leaving Fundin and I on the relative safety of the ridge, Aossin and Condumour, uttering the rat charm, walked down through the ranks of those petrified bonces, all insolently looking at her in a frozen rage, lots of drooling, inane cooing, slobbering, wailing, hissing and blabbering in a fremitus clamor of frustrated repressed anger. It was a strange and unreal sightseeing all Talwadc in such a state of impotence and Condumour and Aossin slowly walking among them, throwing bundles of feathers into the air, as all those white eyes turned to follow them wherever they went. Amid that blowing windy blore they went right up to the stunned War Council assembled for the first time in total silence. That was a record for that lot. Condumour approached Drozzler, Berzelsmertz, Berzeldrefts, Ronkers, Sinir, Snerter's' straight-lipped, tight-limbed, silenced for a change, moving through that sea of eyes until they came before them. She told Drozzler to listen up. He twitched and twiddled his eyes, now in a strabismic eclipse. Nothing else moved on that ventripotent boanthrop. More fatidic charms from the peregrinating Aossin as Condumour addressed the War Council.

I will save you all from yourselves and save the N'ihdoggs, with Love, for we cannot live without each other, so

let love form our mutual bond. That I will show unto you, for I am here in the name of Love... Love!' All eyes of the War Council spun in raging impotence. They were spitting teeth out from their nut holes, no doubt from biting in rabid anger, saliva dribbled down their chins, still they cannot move. Condomour the Continuer goes on to commit more heresies.

'Talwadc is madness, like the madness of the N'ihdoggs, so desist. Yet I am not of their kind. Now you will obey this rule of the spell and give up that which cannot be won. For all you do is fatally flawed and portends doom.' The sound of the word *Talwadc* in the mouth of Condomour the N'ihdogg made the sea of frozen mobsters tremble and groan with more rage. Spasmodically, the animals shook and groaned under the aggravation of her words. After their tremulations, something else seemed to be coming through the groaning, seething, hissing and farting sounds of the pelted mobsters. Sure I felt something distant come rumbling under those sands. The earth began to tremble, so did I, as my fear of the unexpected returned me. Condomour and Aossin looked up and around them sniffing the new winds like Thraesvelgers. Condomour of Love would not desist amidst that blore.

'So call Talwadc, Glasheil, or whatever it is, tell it the war is over, tell it no one can win. We have the power to stop the disinheritance of the animals of the earth and guarantee your place in creation. I have the word from President Clinschur.' More muffled murine triskeles ran through those frozen faces as Condomour continued.

'Now I possess the power to make this sorcery, now I command you in the name of love.' Aossin added her bit to their already strained presence.

'Know too, I am the pure of heart, I call upon the power of that purity to help you. You all know we to are like you and have the secrets of the past and that truth that is us. So fear us not, the N'ihdogg cannot betray us anymore and we are with you in your struggle. Now call to the 'Pope of the Oceans', tell him who has been found, and what is our power and our purpose... eh lads?

Oh boy, the earth continued to rumble as more groans and twitches. The wind rose to a pitch, when she spoke those words, 'Pope of the Oceans', that's just plain desipience Aossin, a

definite no-no, like a great treachery. Why didn't she say, 'extinction' and be done with it and us? The blore came up even stronger, Talwadc really didn't like us. The earth rumbled more deeply as though it was about to deracinate itself from the sky. Condumour the Conveyor waited, Aossin the Affable spun her charm, Fundin the Fool stared silently in full stun at the apparition beneath him and I Gallad the Gullible, testing limbs, getting ready to run.

'Do you agree to this? Waste no more these things given to you in the name of love, speak now to the 'Pope of the Oceans', said Condumour, 'of my love and my sister's purity. Speak now, for I know those who are not with us in this bond.' Drozzler remained static, stunned and silent, gave the vacant moment its most poignant expression in that silence. It wasn't going to be that simple, to suddenly 'jaunt off with the message and tell Battle Brain Mannan'an it was all over, quit, give it up. These two fatidic kaleidogyns have telestically turned us all into nupsons and there is nothing I can do about it. That's all, and the animals of the world will stop their killing and vengeance and begin negotiations with the N'ihdoggs. I had warned her! It didn't seem to make any difference; it seemed Droz didn't have to go to anywhere, Talwadc was coming to us! The rumbling was getting louder, the wind was getting fair breezy as everyone waited. I swear I hear the heart beat of everything in that place going babum, babum, babum. More insolent silence from Drozzler. Aossin shouted

'Speak clearer than a yellow bird, speak clearer than Elthorin's Spring, what's up with you?' She threw yellow feathers into that wind that temporarily calmed. Her question wasn't so easy to answer right about then. More quaking among the frozen pelted throng as the splashing of various body fluids squeezed from millions of quaking, salivating, frothing mobsters. They started flying in every direction in that hurricane, soaking all thoroughly in a stinking halo of myxoid mung dungus. Drozzler was listening I am sure. That was all, he was possessed like me, how could he say anything? Just for once I wanted him to break with the hesychastics, he didn't. I waited for that face of dumfusion he made when communicating with Battle Brain Mannan'an, his face nothing but a gallimaufry of confusion. More silence, more waiting,

my heart doing the day and night of Brahma five hundred meter marathon! The raging noise of the storm, the pounding noise in the ground closing in, getting louder, closer, more threatening, dissilient, something booming, coming from the earth, as the animals began to shake. Condomour pressed home the lethal charm with Aossin again, `Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach.' More tingling up my back and bum, Drozzler hung down his head and I thought he would speak, it wasn't anything like,

'Ok, hang on, I'll just give the main man a dingle and we'll get this sorted out.' Instead he just hung there like a stunned nupson, surrounded by the millions of trembling, frothing, loathing, salivating twitching cohorts of Talwadc. I could see the girls were getting a bit twitchy themselves and they weren't the only ones. Condomour told him, 'Come speak to Mannan'an, or this spell shall spread with the moving Sun if you will not stop, and with it, all this, each and everyone, shall disappear into Hilokk. If we cannot stop you, then all is lost.' Aossin looked troubled as the noise grew and she rumbled through her pandect looking for more fatidic recipes. The sun was passed by large clouds, its fierce radiance ceased, throwing us into a darkened, getting noisier, future. Aossin searching for prose, coming to a certain page of that manual for modern rat charming. She spoke more words, now a mere soudine noise amid the raging blore. Laying her hand on the white head of Drozzler, she laid on her autoptics as more yellow feathers blew across the valley of the great blore.

'Nuiar a chualadar mise ag labhairt leo, An damhsa gur stop'. (When they heard me speak their dancing stopped) Rat charm number three, or was it four, had been uttered. More trembling twitches, more shuddering down through those multitudes of marauders, more rumbling was coming, getting stronger, getting deeper, getting dangerous. I was sure some mobsters were micturating and scumbering in their quaking dribbling spasms, as I caught a drifting whiff of the mephitic air again, like battery acid and dead wasps. It was Talwadc the terrible that stank of the extinct. Condomour looked doubtful to hold this rabble for much longer, quickly telling the statuesque Drozzler,

'Now all the animals of the earth are petrified by the

pure power of Gwinion, the war has ended all across the planet, so tell Talwadc it has failed and must obey Randgrid, destroyer of shields.'

So sayeth Condumour. Several more moments passed by like eternity. Was Drozzler dialing up Talwadc, or was it Mannan'an, shall we ever know? I recognized the stuporific face the Droz made when he tried to speak to battle brain Mannan'an, he was going to get through. He didn't need to, something happened that I cannot say what or why, I saw one in the crowd of petrified, move. It was Sinir. He slowly reached into his ammunition bag, he was going to shoot the Kaleidogyns! Greatly pained; I tried to warn them but I could not move, I waited for the guns to go off. Sinir, only capable of throwing a handful of beans into the air. Suddenly I could really feel the earth rumble beneath Fundin's feet, as every one of those Talwadians let out their own distinct fart, filling the valley with a loud babble of flatulent warbles according to bum size and species. Soon the odiferousness wafted down toward us making our eyes fair water. I prayed no one would light a match just then. More cracking and quaking, like a great tree was being broken across the back of the world, Craaaacckkkkkkaaaaa! Talwades' reply? Or was it the beans, or the animals farting? I saw Condumour and Aossin's faces blake into crimson grey fear as they saw the beans leave Sinir's hand and go pell mell into the blore. Frantically the fatidic rat charm was uttered again and again, 'Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach, Artha na bhFranach'. Page full's of this charm came from their lips, yet they had not human voice or song to stop this mighty force. As they fell into a trancing davening fit, they spoke what I thought must have been the ultimate rat charm, dancing and waving arms in davening corybantic utterances, sounding more guttural at every word, looking more pavid in fear at every booming clamor issuing from the earth. If that wasn't going to work then watch out! Then all the animals began to shake with the earth. I was sure I could hear the voice of the 'Pope of the Oceans' bellowing throughout the Earth for the first time. I thought I was in Glasheil again, as Glasheil, Talwadc, Mannan'an, wrestled with the rat charm of Condumour and Aossin, resisting those potent portents to obey in the name

of Love those witches of the N'ihdoggs, as all and sundry quaked and quivered in the throes of the rat charms and the rage of Talwadc. Except for Fundin, who just stood there on that blore- blown ridge stunned by the cunning of it all. How does he do it? The ground rumbled more, another Craaaackkkkaaakkkaaa, across the face of the earth. I was expecting the sun and moon to go down as the noise from the two parties grew into a great din. Like a liturgical chant of a million voices, bewailing the death of the stars, getting stranger and more stranger, like a million violin and drums were being played backward: 'bum ba, zzzzzss, bum ba, zzzss'. It grew louder, adding to those secret words amid the triumphal blasts of Talwadc coming! The pressure in my head was growing greater and greater, my eyes bulging like a bulldog's balls. I thought my noodle was going to be ketchup all over the nearby rocks. Painfully, I tried looking up at Fundin, trying to tell him to make an exit as fast as he could, and since he held me in his pouch, to take me with him. I could only move my eyes, I couldn't get his attention, he was fixated on the davening group in the valley. He wasn't going anywhere either, stunned by the most dangerous ruse of all, fascination. The poetry and rat chanting rumbling grew louder and louder, things started to fly around in the air. As we all ducked the sage brush and other votive offerings, including some of my fur, the wind started blowing about in fury, but nothing else moved in that petrified valley. In that holocaust of flying debris the noise running through the earth grew to a great boom, followed by the 'swarmer' air unit birds suddenly breaking free of the rat charm to burst into the dazzling sky in their millions, instantly darkening the sun, their wings sounding like a hundred babies' bottoms being spanked, their voices a thrall, fritanatic deafening din. Now we were really in the dark. The witches looked up in horror, more rumbling, more word cursing. Then what seemed like all the bats of the world rushed out of the caves of that valley, filling the air, as more babies' bottoms were quickly spanked breaking another spell of the rat charm. Big eagle and all rose up into the sky, though they didn't know so much as what to do, seeming half crazed, swooping and banking in and out of the other eagles and hawks that joined in the confusion of the mighty blore of fatidic charms. Condumour and Aossin looked at each other in

dread apprehension. More looks from the valley of rotating eyeballs getting ready to move, to kill! Snakes wriggled, writhed in their thousand millions, like they had been stomped on by the Moon; more twitching, writhing, and frothing from the MUCSPAT boys, in a nervous fit of convulsions. We were losing the fight to save the animals from the will of Talwadc. We were losing the fight to save our own necks! The animals can go over Birkerot! I wanted to get out of there, so I mustered up enough muscle to give Fundin a bite on the leg. He hollered at me. I inclined my head in the general direction to go. He looked at me, we're not going anywhere. Drozzler and the War Council begun trembling more, this time looking like they were verging on mobility. It was time for us to get out, and this time, never come back. Aossin threw more yellow feathers into the gusting wind that only abated the killers. No poetess or two could hold this rabble back once it became dissilient, that which must be set free must be unbound, but not right now! It was getting hot around there. Blasted by its power, my toes must have been sizzling and I was sure that smoke was coming from my ears as the charm of love and purity met the rage of Talwadc blowing through every living thing in the valley. Condomour and Aossin's faces getting redder and redder like a punnet of strawberries. Their hair blowing wildly in that wind, more blood rushing to everyone's head as the winds rose now, fierce, and the trembling moans reached an all time high. I saw Condomour, lost in the eyes of Drozzler unable to draw her attention away in a stunned state of hypnotic fascination. Only Aossin held back that fearful rage as she tugged at her sister desperately in that squall of sorcery, shouting at her to escape to the ridge. Suddenly Condomour the Stunned came to in that storm of wills as that brave Aossin reiterated more of those charms, jolting her back into the picture of horrors.

'Run Condomour', shouted Aossin and Condomour the Confused did run, leaving her sister inside that circle of piligerous madness to hold the rabble inside her charm, as she remugiently called clear across that whole domain of death. 'Nuiar a chualadar mise ag labhairt leo, An damhsa gur stop.' Again she said it, 'Nuiar a chualadar mise ag labhairt leo, An damhsa gur stop.' More feathers into the blasting blore, animals abated from movement again as they all jerked into

motion then petrous, then motion. Condumour came to us shaken and exhausted, began shouting to Aossin to run for it. Fundin too called loud and clear in death's dark valley, by now the outside ranks of the animals had begun to move with death-like proreption toward Aossin; fixated by the eyes of Drozzler, or perhaps she could not hear us, for the raging winds and the thunderous rage of Talwadc was all-round us. The theroid horror began as we saw the davening Aossin loose the power of her rat charm over the animals, uttering more and more of those fatidic words, stamping the earth with her feet, throwing more feathers into the blore, more davening and swaying, arms in circular encompassment, sometimes abating Talwadc, but with every moment passing she was losing the struggle.

'Run now dear sister,' Condumour shouted, calling out the rat charm again and again over that deafening wind. It was all in vain, Talwadc the dissilient ripped the power from her, smashing the rat charm as more and more of the mob closed in on their prey in a proreptic fury of anger and rage. The Talion of Talwadc turned on the body of Aossin to commit their vaticidal act. Uttering the rat charm for the last time, 'Artha na bhFranach', Artha na bh...', her last murmur for life, overcome by those pelted piligerous maniacs, Aossin fell, and summarily ripped to death. Yet in that storm of death these words came back to me, I had heard it somewhere before, I had heard it from the very lips of the slain.

'She did not falter, nor turn or try to run, brave, kind, pure loving Aossin, who's life had just begun. Look now upon her sacrifice. Her acts are writ in her blood. Can you do something as you should'?

Condumour desperately called out her sister's name, for we could not see, only hear her in the theroid death ripping carnage of the mobsters that overwhelmed her. Throughout that valley Condumour's belated triskeles went up into that dying heaven, as an even greater blore now came up, throwing the sands of the dessert into the air. Small trees were ripped out of the earth, were sent hurtling toward those piligerous mobsters. Condumour's voice rose to meet her sister's dying screams. So powerful her voice turned rocks to dust. All-round a swirling mass of debris strewn around, came together in her portent of angry might to be hurled onto those savages of the fair Aossin.

Even her breath flew from her lips, reached out across that canyon and struck some mobsters stone dead in their rush to join the carnival of carnage. Some, caught by the power of her furibundous rage, were carried away from the falling Aossin, Condomour screamed, 'Rats have sharp snouts yet are poor fighters', and at least a thousand murine mobsters dropped dead. Condomour screamed blue murder to the heavens, I am sure the surfaces of distant stars cracked, but nothing would save her sister as the Talion of animals kept coming and she could not be saved. Aossin's blood was shed upon those ancient sands and Condomour, fiercer than frightened, spoke no more of peace and love, instead turned away from that cruel sight of death to look no more with love upon the animals of Talwadc.

'Odi atque amo' to love is to hate'.

'Love so pure is a sword, a double-edged sword.' Said Fundin gloomily. The winds suddenly died down as quickly as they had sprung up. So too the clouds rolled away, revealing the blue-shot sky. The Sun's Talion of blindness descended upon us, the animals proreptically moving forward. The Sun seemed to stop to call those over whom it had dominion. It reached its zenith like a silent bell announcing for the last time the passing of life, when peace can be no more. The earth was still partially ringing with that great chthonic booming swell, as animals suddenly stopped dead in their tracks to obey the heteronomic Talwadc, looked up in their millions to its call for destruction, stopped, turned away from us and took off toward Angerboda's dark halls of Iron Wood to slay N'ihdoggs. I too, free from the fatidic charm of the kaleidogyns, mindlessly walked down into the maddened piligerous throng to join in the destruction so strong was the malefic will possessing me by that midday sun. Only by Fundin's care, took me up, confricating me back from my numbed senses.

'Surely that cannot be you little one?'

'It was me, did you not say when the time comes I shall be there?'

Condomour would look no more upon that hallowed place, where only the blood-stained ground spoke of her departed sister, where once she had stood pure and shining. As we stumbled out of that place, some Talwadians continued their

killing hunt, making us hasten away. Condumour called out for the last time her sister's name, in a galled wail of lamentation, resounding through that canyon

‘Now all Love is broken to the day burning wild
Now they have taken my sister child,
Now all Heaven shall break and be dispelled
Now come the hounds of Hel
Run through this hollow vale.’

Now we were on the run, almost from the moment we had gathered our breath to see that fearful savaging of dear Aossin. Fundin threw down a wall of fire, preventing the Talion of raging mobsters from pursuing us through the narrow canyon walls. It wasn't long before they resumed their pursuit through the lambent flames, following close behind us. Now overhead, the air legions following our tracks, screamed out where we had gone. Saved only by that burning Sun, sensing to move toward Angerboda, did the party of the pelted infandum's break off the chase to join the main party, leaving only a small group in pursuit of revenge, Bloggdrott & Broz, backed up by some Thraesvelgers, now hunted us to the death. The revengeful Talwadc poured and peered into every part of that canyon looking for our blood. Around a bluff a few small kamikaze boys quickly dove down upon us, to drive home their sharp flinted beak spears. Luckily Fundin de-commissioned them from flight with the flame thrower, leaving them apterous in a confused naked scrawl on the ground. Pity really, the lovely song gone forever from them in a fit of the singed pain of death, for Fundin loved them all, every one of them, even the sparrows. Following Condumour as usual, we headed deep into ferret territory as we left the light of the world and passed into an underground cave. Nowhere could we escape, as bats came to bite and hinder us where we hid. Condumour led us through that place she called the Cauldron as we sank deeper and deeper into the earth. Condumour knew this place; another of her abditories as she began tugging at a flat stone on the cave floor. Fundin assisted, and I, in a desperate fit of fantod fear, helped tug that great thing away, slowly revealing a narrow descending passage falling even deeper into the bowels of the Earth. As we heard the mobsters' febrile shuffling coming through the dark, we fought frantically to pull the stone back across that

infundibulum. It was close, as the rabid infandum's came soon behind us, scratching, sniffing, screaming, they could not move that rock. If they wanted us dead they would have to send for the great apes, which would not be likely, since there was not a noodle among them for such things. Instead; with that great stone blocking my enemies, all I heard was their screaming furious rage of impotence. Down, down, down, almost vertically down, and down some more into the caliginous bowels of the earth.

'Just a bit further down,' said Condumour, her voice a celestomy of its former self. I was getting sick from it all, a long tunnel, then another longer tunnel and another, getting wider into a winze. It was hard to know where we were; we moved in our Tannhaurisms of absolute darkness.

'You were in complete agreement about death all right, you wish to avoid it.' Glasheil stuck his noodle in once more.

'It seems you have finally won the day little one, after all you have managed to escape intact for more reckless titubation.'

To titubate is to survive, I had seen the others. I was not unduly concerned by those remarks, instead every sense I possessed switched to max. I was seeing in that dark more than what is possible. Ferret eyes darted in and out, hiding, coming and going, razor-edged knashers doing the cut and slash routine, the savage lunge and play of the tree marten's flash and grinning grab. I wished I was titubating since I wouldn't be going into another fantod-phobic stress as we seemed to turn and go upwards into another round bend in the rock face, toward another troglodytic nightmare. Coming onto an opening, a cliff cave ledge before us, there was a great sense of black empty space stretched into infinite darkness.

'The Cauldron of Cariddwen,' said Condumour pointing into the darkness for our blank-faced edification:.

'We have been re-illuminated... before you the Cauldron of Midgard, the belly of the world.'

All I could see was black all-round me. I thought, 'so, out of the jaws of Talwadc into the Cauldron of Midgard.' Condumour said the end of the spout of the Cauldron was,

'Right where we are standing, in the entrance and that space we feel is the pot, the Cauldron itself.' More blackness in

the caverns of echoing voices .

'Over there sits the rock 'drop till destruction' and the entrance to the hall Eljudnir and its Queen Hel. We must be quiet and speak only in whispers'.´ she sibilantly hissed at us, 'Then we can pass through the ring of the Cauldron on the other side and not even disturb it.´

'It?' I asked with deference.

'Yes, it, the Serpent Midgard. It will awaken if we are not silent, and 'it' doesn't like us...´

So sayeth Condumour with ease as we began to circle the depths of the Midgard malabolge.

'What about Talwadc? It's bound to wake it, it knows we are here surely?' I hadn't even finished speaking, when from inside the caliginous encirclement of thestral mystery and myth came a slithering sound, like great plates of rock were scraping together in a clamorous racket of threatening presences.

Through that imperceptible darkness we peered breathless.

'Gallad has awakened the Serpent Midgard.´ said Fundin with vellication.

'It is blind, it cannot see us, we may still yet pass.´ said Condumour, and with that said and done Condumour also bade us to shut up. Proreptically in terrified silence, we moved toward the Rock, 'drop till destruction' as that great malefic edacious hulk slithered up and up the belly of the Cauldron in a strepitous roar of scraping and groaning, as we fumbled and fell in a confused rabble over rocks and each other. Ophion, Midgard, Erichthonious, shuffled up that great bung hole, slowly lighting the cavern with its thestral glow. It would be remarkable if it could even hear us through all that noise. Through the dark void, rising out of its abditory, came mucilaginous Midgard the taliped, beaming in on us. I thought, 'it must be using Glasheil as counter intelligence, I am my own enemy'. Glasheil's´ reply wasn't too long coming forth.

'Me? I am not your keeper or betrayer, I am your friend.´

'Perhaps even you cannot know all things Glasheil the Indifferent, perhaps it knows you like Talwadc knows you're not like each other, you're all in this together.´

I told it angrily as Condumour bade me to silence.

'I cannot know the Serpent Midgard, we look into each

other and see not thingness, and so we pass.'

More loxodromía via the rat-noodle Glasheil, it had been around Condomour to long! I wish it would pass by us right now, 'cos. below me the fuliginous Cauldron was filling with the great beaming bonce of glavigerous Midgard, now glowing murky lurid pale yellow-green as someone lit ignited the stage with a: 'voovuumb', as spoiler-of-twigs rosy glow in the pit around Midgard lit the horrific spectacle. Closer now, monstrous in size, murgeoning its bulbous blind bonce up that tenebrous abditory, Orphion, Midgard closed to consume us. Condomour and Fundin moved faster and faster in that circular hell hole, toward that great Rock at the entrance to Hel. All I could think was, 'we're losing ground', as the Serpent rose closer and upwards to block our path, lighting the chamber in those lambent flames that green glow of death. We staggered, tripped, fell over each other, picked ourselves up, keeping one eye on the salamadrine sausage, the other on the door to Eljudinor, coming into full view was Midgard rising, towering above us, getting higher and higher into that foul fuliginous malabolge. Flames flared up more as if someone threw another log on its fire, making the view look like a spectacular barbecue as it hissed and bellowed at us. It knew exactly where we were, which was more than I did! Being blind it had been sensing us: 'motility' is the word that comes to mind, so silence was not going to work anymore, it never did. Screaming to Condomour to whip up a quick diablufuge from her pandect of never - endings to rid us of this evil maggot. This time she lacked faistry, no pawkery, she had run out of tricks, 'cos she just kept running toward the rock of destruction.

I turned back to look, see if there was something that would make it vulnerable, something we could get it with, good! There was nothing.

'Take a look little one, take a good look, it is where all creation begins.'

'And ends, O Glashiel!'

Pavid perlustrations: I did get a good look, its head like a dog, maybe a catty maggot, no eyes, just ocellations through which you could stare into its lethiferous black emptiness. The great maw jaws opened in orexis, revealing rotting teeth, bad halitosid miasmic breath filled the malabolge, created by its last victim's

rotting corpse impaled on its snarling chops, emitting its putrid stench. Malefic Midgard then began to succusively spit odious mephitic poison in foul ponging gobs at us, wringing its body in clonic muscular contortions as those gobbets of death splashed everywhere. We dodged, ducked the stinking sludge that murlled the rocks like the Surt-napalm, turning our surroundings into porridge only to find ourselves hiding at the entrance to Hel, before the face of the Rock, DTD hanging like a great hammer of the world. Serpent Midgard rising from the murk o' mire of its calcinating fire and fuliginous choking smoke, hailed us with more of its ponging poisonous potions.

'What do we do now Condomour?' I asked dodging another mephitic missile.

'Niflheim!' said Condomour loxodromically for our edification, looking up to the salamadrine Midgard maggot readying us for Ragnarok via a quick bath in special unction's and a good fricasseeing, and she says something like that!

'Who cares where we are or what it's called, let's kill it!' I told her. Condomour told us, as though she was ready to lay down her life for dinner.

'Only Thor could kill the Serpent Midgard.' I looked around in diastatic dismay. We were short one Thor, only Fundin above me, no one else, so I said,

'Thor isn't here.'

Condomour told us only the hammer Mjollner could kill Midgard. That wasn't here either, perhaps we could just maim it and run ! More mephitic ponging missiles, this time landing in great sizzling hissing gobbets, murling the rock we were standing upon. We moved closer to the door of Hel.

'Ragnarok!' I shouted in a fantod panicked state, readying for the fire- swallowing act to come and get us,

'Can't we do something?'

Fundin had an idea, Condomour had met her match this time and stood in dumbfounded paresis.

'I had better begin doing something.' He said, astutely looking at Condomour's horizontal shake of the head.

'It is my fight, to avenge the death of Aossin', she murmured gratefully, Fundin would face it placing me down, readying to repay the debt of a life to me, I said it was alright, he didn't need to, we will all die together, we had a good run.

Condumour tried to stop him, saying she would avenge her sister, she alone would face this thing, though only Thor would suffice.

'No' Fundin said, 'I must fight. I can rise to destroy this thing, though not with Thor's hammer, I know a better way.' Condumour t looked in her bag of never-endings and gave him a holly leaf and a red berry, saying, 'Take this for it is the club of Hercules,' pressing it into his palm, making the needles break his skin so that blood ran down his wrist.

'He only slayed the day and half the year', said Fundin, silently resolved, and left us for Midgards' doom, entering its thestral glow. I called to him, 'The day, the longest day will be enough killing for now', as I watched my friend cross toward the great rock of Drop 'till Destruction, taking the side of the rock face in his hands, climbing in the lurid glow of Midgard davening salamadrine fire. Below him was the great hole through which murky Midgard dissiliently pursued us, stuffed full by that mucilaginous maggot and all its dead. Above him rising into darkness, the rock Drop 'till Destruction hanging by the walls of the Cauldron. There he hung, climbing higher and higher in full view of the Midgard Serpent. Quietly Condumour offered vigilance for Fundin's safe return as the edacious Midgard, sensing his presence, readied to reeve him. Over the power of the word she began speaking of trees, though first she pressed some holly leaves into her hand like before, making the blood run down her wrist.

' By the power of the battle of the trees kill this serpentum draconia.' Always seems to work well under pressure does Condumour, 'cos. the mephitic squittering of Midgard briefly ceased, as though to say, 'huh'? 'What's she up to?' Quickly resuming its trajectories, it wasn't listening to her charm! If you did not come too close...

'Which you're not likely to little one, are you'?

'Be quiet Glasheil the Useless, 'If you did not come too close, you can see Fundin singing and dancing along that ridge of rock in a thestral glow of incantation. One on one in the art of dragonmachy in necessary conjunction, holding each other by whatever moves could make one a winner, as the davening

Midgard maggot rose to consume him.' A squittering ricocheting gobbet of mephitic filth splatted at Fundin's feet as he, mockingly skipping and dancing away, sang another song of his ancient-into past as the rock murlled beneath him.

'Dance, dance, dance little man, dance 'till the world spins to a stop.' said the triskelating larynx of Condomour, intoning it into her tree charm. He did dance. Another sizzling squelch shot at him across that venomous void hitting more rock. Fundin danced, cart wheeled, dam right showing off, and shouted real loud upon the rock of doom, 'Midgard you're a maggot, a maggot with a Doggett's head,' More squittering of Midgard juices, that got it real mad, as it quivered and quaked, bellowing deafening roars filling that glowing malabolge. More seething clonic muscular contortions, more squittering, more sizzling rock melting murlled by mephitic myxoids. Mine eyes were fair watering from the malodorous fumes, Condomour too! Fundin stopped right in front of the nubbin of granite that clung to the opposing rock face like an ancient finger holding the world in bated breath. Midgard reared its ugly head to fire another drowning dose of doom at him. It fired, missed, I reflexively ducked as a wall of poison shot toward Fundin like the sheet of filth that it was. He danced, skipped away, like the little girls playing in Blazing Norton, toward that nubbin, as the great ponging poisonous potion flew all-round him, splattering the rocks in sizzling, liquefying destruction. Through the screaming bellowing confusion of it all, I looked up to see the nubbin of rock, sizzling away, until it finally crumbled, murlled into porridge I waited for it to fall. Groaning and creaking emanated from its moorings, everything stopped. Midgard seemed briefly to look up before getting down to its business again. The great rock fell away from where it had laid for countless aeons. I called out to Fundin to get out of the way, for he seemed not to notice, he was busy avoiding Midgard and it was loading up for another squitter as it opened its nuthole. He didn't hear me because he began slipping toward the Midgard along with the rock to which he clung precariously Condomour called, 'Jump, jump Fundin!' Midgard fired more ponging potion at him, hitting the rock around his bare feet in a splattering gobbet of green. Suddenly

he launched himself into a great leap, jumping free from the great rock before it fell terribly from its perch, down and down through that malabolgic void smashing into the head of the Serpent Midgard, dropping into its meat hole. Midgard tried to swallow or dislodge it, as it writhed, wriggled, wrove - too big, stuck fast in its gullet as Serpentina, Draconus, Ophion Erichonius, Midgard', maggot of the malabolge staggered davening under the rock's great weight. First: there was a faint flickering in its bio-luminosity department before dimming, dimmer, dim as it flickered and wilted under that colossal weight. Next thing it wobbled left', then right, then left again, crumpling, crumpled, crumps, then down, down, down into that place of thestral darkness, back down the great plughole 'O' the world. The last thing I saw of it was a circular sphincter all aglow getting smaller and smaller and then it was mercifully gone! In the silence I happily sat listening to the plummet of Midgard as Condumour thanked the power of the trees. Then what sounded like a soft, 'cluck' emanated from the bottom of the plughole like something had been stoppered in that darkness forever. Condumour spoke, 'Now Ragnarok shall start, all Hel breaks loose'. As we hid she was right, what came to pass, the door of Hel blew of its hinges to defy description. The entire wild and sinister minions of the underworld and its Queen called Hel, flew through that door, following Midgard down into the bottom of the world, as all Hel, quite literally, broke loose.

'No doubt they go dissiliently shrieking and screaming, arguing out of the world that made them.' said Condumour, telling me who they all were. 'There go The Twelve disciples arguing in a comet's spin, writing lies about Jesus; followed by Nostradamus reading his Veborum et Fraudo; Dante making a map; Beelzebub, playing an out of tune violin; Ashtoreth surrounded by kaleidogyns...' Condumour placed her hand over my eyes, so I couldn't see what he was doing. 'John the Baptist carrying his head.' she told me before removing the offending nubbins, 'King Solomon covered in gold; Xanthippe scolding Socrates; Aristophanes laughing at Cleon; Praxiteles sketching beautiful kaleidogyns; Salome in her rags; Anaximander looking for the stars; Pericles looking into a mirror; followed by Perander, Solon, Theseus, Aristides, Alcibiades, Nicias, Cimon, Themistocles, Lysander, all in heated peripatetic debate over the

fate of Athens, all too late; followed by: Mad Meg and her gixies; Pudicitia, Lysistrata, Clymenestra, Cotytto, Canidia and all the million Knights of the round mattress; John of Patnos and the laughing foolish Domitianos alias Nero. Then more and million more tourbillion throngs burst through that broken door. Coming up the rear Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe, Skelton, Tommy Hobbes, Frank Bacon, all roaring drunk; Elizabeth the first, quiddling, her hand down her dress; Adam, Eve and her quinces, Newton taking the apple from her hand; Johnny Milton and Satan arm in arm. Billy Blake closes on their heels, forehead reared against the world. Schopenhauer, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Husserl, Brentano, arguing with Hume, Locke Berkley, Descartes, over being late and never on time; Darwin, Desmond Morris, Malcolm Muggeridge, discussing the difference between a cup of cold tea and a cup of hot tea; and on & on ad nauseam, till all of history's greats and smalls and every Joe Soap and Mary Contradiction went down that plug hole after Midgard into who knows where. Or who cares where. Strange as it was, we did not see the fair Aossin, though Condumour had looked like a hawk amid the throttled mob. So we hid in that rocky crag by the door for what seemed like eternity as all Hel slipped down that thestral plughole, until with certain relief the tourbillion of crowds dispersed and we heard the Fundin quite unconcerned come limping alone through the darkness. All had not gone so well for him, he was squittered with poison and begun to go lame in the affected heel. Condumour only said, 'Shut it up inside that place: 'drop till destruction' for a very long time, maybe forever, if the day of Brahma is coming. Now Ragnarok will begin... it shall never return.' That filled me with dread, hearing from Condumour the Certain the coming of the big 'R' was on its way. Fundin told us what he had seen from where he stood as the Midgard had fallen, how it changed into a dog, fierce and vicious, and finally before its lights went out, a great black cat, 'It's eyes only confounded on that boulder of doom in dumsfusion.' he told us laughing in pain. 'You look like you've been through Hel!' he said like a malapert over-achiever. He seemed to blake briefly and I knew he was in great danger. Condumour was going loxodromic, eulogizing about his bravery, Fundin had too much pain,. She took a bottle of unction from her purse of never-endings to soothe the injury, droning on

about the death of Midgard, cleaned the burning wound, soothing Fundin the Buckler. What was she telling us ? No one was listening, we were both just glad Midgard had gone.

We climbed out of that dark malabolge, staggering helpless and silent onto the rocky caldera that rose to meet the dark sky, to look down, down, down across the desert to Angerboda. There on that distant horizon the fierce battle of Talwadc raged amid the fires of Surt. A darkening world gone mad as the sun hit the horizon, disintegrating into the dust O the day. The sounds of war encompassed both earth and sky, as the calcinating fire of Surt rose into its fury to consume the world and all our hope. Birds darkened the sky in their millions amidst the fuliginous smoke drifting across the plain into our whiffers. Great lightning bolts dissiliently cracking on the thunderheads rolling in, announcing Death was abroad to dance the dance of the great phantasmagoria of Ragnarok down to the end of the burnt-out cinder Suns of the stars.

Talwadc burns in a camp of rage
Against the dying Sun
Let 's warlike creatures rise up from silent age
When murder shall be done.
Against the ancient spell they go
Destroying all that could not be won
Come from thy camp Talwadc, let love instead be done.
Conдумour

In the late of the day a great sanguineous sun was falling across the silent world to the bell and the day. The thunderstorm passed, the world of war ceased to silence. There were only columns of stinking death smoke drifting across the desert skyline, lit up by the fire of Surt like a finger of light across the horizon, roaring out of control into the night. Our hearts sank with that sun into silent darkness as we sat on that table of rock and looked out to the terrible day. There was no sign of a ragtaggle mass of animals coming toward us on the horizon, like a victorious army returning from battle. Nor were there any N'ihdoggs resistant, scouting out around the perimeter of Angerboda. As we looked down from that broad plateau, our faces ran blood red from the fiery glow of Surt's destructive fires, yet it was our fears for the day's terrible conclusion burning out of control.

'Worse than the vision of Hel; the vision of Surt, destroyer of twigs and then some! That no one could imagine.' said Conдумour to the silence of the day. Her eyes full of torment, her past full of wistful regret, she broke down, weeping pitifully, quaking and, stammering, telling me the terrible vision revealed by Talwadc when she was drawn into the eyes of Drozzler. I said, 'surely not', for it was well known among the animals that no one had seen Talwadc, not even Mannan'an the battle brain. Talwadc would never reveal itself to a N'ihdogg. She was insistent, invoking the terrible vision for us,

I beheld a changing terrible form rising in and out of the millions of animals surrounding me, like a veil of blood drawn out from each animal, and wrapped into the center of the world and the stars, into the center of me and I was its white bride to which it would wed its sorrow. Blood, so much blood,

poured out from the black void of the stars, filling an incomprehensible red ocean. Great streaking veined comets of blood crossing all the earth, filling the void to the edge of the black sky and beyond, in that sea of blood, floated the parts of animals' guts, claws, bones, beaks and teeth and eyes; there were eyes, the eyes,' she stammered, 'millions of animal eyes, eyes that accused and asked, 'cannot we, the creatures of Glasheil, cannot we live?' Eyes that spoke gentle knowing of sentience, 'I have known these things also, the shining sun, the blue of the sky, the gold morning meadow, I have known these things.' Eyes that asked questions that had no answer, 'Why do you kill me when I am sent to be your companion in this place of earth? I have no need to know of these things.' Eyes that flashed in the light of the stars, 'I was to be something more in the provenance of space, now sent to extinction I can never evolve and follow the course of my White Mother, I have known of these things.' These questioning eyes, staring at me from that ocean of cold blood, and in that ocean floated more and more piece's of flesh, hair and bone, claw, feather, beak, scale and skin, white craniums and bones of animals and birds. Each skull with a deathly eye in it's socket looking all about it, looked at me! Filling that ocean of bubbling, surging bloody worlds to the sky so that I could not see over that great flat red ocean of whispering death. Rising from the center of that ocean of blood and animal viscera came the great unfathomable eye of Talwadc, and within its encompassment I saw how it looked to seek out the rest of life and kill it all, destroying, tearing and ripping at the heart of the world. It could continue for eternity, vengeful, Violentur with no purpose, only destruction and death. Such justifiable rage did fill that eye and I shrank in fear, as I fell into the eye of Talwadc. T here I was, alone in the center of the eye of Talwadc. The eye smiled, cracked, shattered as a tourbillion animals danced away, revealing to me a terrible vision of the Crucified - Hanging God, Q're I.A.H.U and his Angels, written into a bleeding wall of the stars, swinging in the tempestuous blore of terror from the great tree Tinne, its roots reaching beyond the depths of the world, its tops reaching over space and the stars themselves. There at the center was Q're' dying creation, as the animals of non-existence and extinction danced around him in widdershins to the end of the world and all the

dust of the stars. Above, Suns planets, comets, meteors were exploding into nothingness, as the black smoldering cindered suns of the universe lay dead and falling into dust. The earth itself cracked wide open, the sun and moon went down into it. Leonids, flyagaric Uniramia and all the infusoria of the earth filled that empty place as the sky began to rain blood onto the white wings of doves, bringing more growling thunder, lightning, laughter, weeping whispers, 'Ragnarok, Ragnarok, Ragnarok, and Gotterdammerung, Gotterdammerung, Gotterdammerung, or Megiddo, Megiddo, Megiddo' together in a clamorous hortative cacophony, ringing throughout the corridors of space, as the Hanged God swung terrible in that awful vision and around his blood-soaked crown flew black doves. Deep inside the eye, in that veined varicose bloody red eye, in the black of the pupil of Talwadc was fire filling the space of the stars, skeletons of animals rose up from that blackness to walk abroad, to be annihilated into dust of the purifying, calcinating flames of Surt that rose to burn the world and that alone was its only purity, its only sacred self .

So everything within that fearful vision was consumed by fire and darkness, and the Hanged God, Q're and his Angels were no more. I knew no prayer or human chant that could appease or forgive what we had done to creation. My terror and shame rose up within me, a miserable hatred for my existence, that was and still is, self loathing like I have never known before. I could not imagine myself to live with this shame, so I readied myself to abandonment into the eye of Talwadc. Then through this raging noise of horror, I heard the voice of Aossin call out for me to flee! I did not know so many had been undone', she said, as more tears, a well of tears, flowed from her heart.'

Poor Condumour, alone in that terrible place, I am concerned for her, she has withdrawn into herself and only babbles of her dead sisters' fate. Condumour had seen the future, turning to look out across the plain to the city of Angerboda, covering her ears to block out the background, her mind filled with the vision of Talwadc and the death of Aossin, hid her face in shame and horror. Talwadc was a cunning enemy, all the cunning of the animals in one; it could create such phantoms, better if she forgot it all, otherwise she would be destroyed.

Fundin slept little this evening, he rests, broken by terrible visions. He woke, wailing or crying, his eyes dimmed from their fierce brilliance by Condumour's tale of the vision of the Hanged God. I felt we were losing him to death, he passed out frothing at the mouth. For him I felt like I may have tears, tears of remorse, tears of sadness and endless tears for that which cannot be changed, for the pity of it all, for the pity of the world. Lost, utterly lost, standing on the very edge of the world's apocalypse, within its brief foreboding future', we knew no longer what to do. I could not cry, alone, bereft of all comfort or cares, even the voice of Glasheil was not saying anything, though I tried to call, it was not there, it had deserted me. We did not rise; only watch the fires raging across the horizon, the fiery glow growing stronger in the fading day. Only the wind moved, making lonely and desperate sounds through the rocks, catching no speech of thought. In the inoperancy of spirit, all action is lost in the aching feeling of everything, of what seemed like a dead planet, stretching on forever and forever into the next and next empty moment, it stayed like that for a very long time.

'Move on' I said, urging my friends, sick at looking at the fires of Surt. 'Let's find shelter from the night,' as the late rains of the season had begun to wash the sands of the desert, to wash the stains of the blood from the dead and the dying. We moved in a dull patrol, silently crossing that place I called, 'nowhere', covering the ground almost without sense of movement, as though our feet did not touch those muddy places that lacked sense of familiarity. Feeling returned to my extremities, the tingling sensations of the rat charm ceased, I was alive! More than I wished to be, only longing for a carus sleep to alleviate that clear sense of fate and fear, perhaps to find in dreams that which is called 'love.' I knew it was a great thing, yet I couldn't ask Condumour for love, she was completely bereft of it. How were these things possible? How was it that we had come out of the jaws of death, only to discover we had been left in a world infandum's so terrifying no one would wish to live in? Listen, nothing had its usual characteristic self, nothing was as before, if it ever was, or now ever could be! Strange shapes came out of the landscape to haunt us, Condumour seeing Aossin three times against a rocky slope, beckoning to her. Once as she was in life, the young

maid, the other as a bride dressed in white with a garland of flowers around her head, the third time as a golden-haired hag covered with rags. On that occasion she nearly fell to her death in pursuing the ancient vision. Or I, yes even I, saw from far away the Lotus position of the One and Perfect Master sitting supreme on the open dessert. I was sure it was him as I ran toward him, but it wasn't, only the distant shape of solitary rocks. Fundin too, though ailing badly, began to point to that horizon that can never be, saying he saw the tessera of the triumphant mob of animals crossing the sandy plain, shouted out to us to see, his glee throwing me into a fantod fit of fear and panic as I nearly believed him. Gratefully his vision faded as the rains came harder, washing it clear away. Relieved that it was the tricks of the dessert, we continued on our course. I for one didn't wish to see those pelted maniacs again.

If perceptions are the thing that shapes worlds, it is certainly what destroys them; our perceptions that day were shaped by fear and loneliness of our thoughts and of what the future held. Something rooted deep and inaccessible gnawed at us until we were mere shells of our former selves. I felt we had all seen the same, knew the same and felt the same, like perhaps lovers do. Why do we cross that place, why move at all, why remain when all else seemed so dead?

‘If there is no water then let there be only dry rocks, like the dry thoughts and abjectness of myself, who am nothing but a sterile seed. This water from the thunder head cannot make you live again, so be forgotten. The rains come, we cross from the high land to the valley floor, it washes our faces fresh and clear, so that a little happiness returns; though the water did not penetrate us enough to make us live, only giving us the mild sensation of another life as we descended back into the world of death. We, who are among the dry rocks of the desert, must return to the dry land of the 'sterile seed', for like the desert, we gave up the water's refreshing sensation too easily, forgot too quickly and saw so very little to become the 'sterile seed' in a sterile world so that we can never grow again. Do we wish to live in this place of fire and death? Let the rains restore us, as is its nature, back into the beauty of the earth. Let it ring back to the past and restore that which has been smashed’, shouted Condumour to the pelting storm. The wind

whipped her face, fresh and wet, she cried tears of bitterness, remorse as we staggered along with our dying friend. If we saw nothing on our endless trails of water and rock, it was because we wished not to see or to look. Instead, we were blinded from life, throwing our dead world into our darkened spirits. or us who had survived there shall be no living like before, no life, no shadows, no light, nothing except grey falling on grey in the open burning dessert and everywhere the specter of death hung terrible in the night air'.

'The end of the million year picnic,' said Condomour despondently, amid the splashing streams of waterfalls and verdant moss of a coulee.

'After all of creation, that we arrive at this juncture to perish in ignominy.'

`At least the animals died fighting instead of being dispatched to extinction,' said Fundin the self -justified, slayer of Midgard,

'The mindless trickle of their extinction. It is better we all go to death.'

'That is the poison of the Midgard talking to you.' said Condomour.

` You should resist it Fundin, if you wish to live.'

'Who wants to live in a barren desolate world alone, void of creatures? Anyway, the fires now come', pointing to the glowing red horizon lit from east to west, 'what will be left for us?'

Fundin moved silently, in gloom along that muddy trail. Soon he would go no further. So we took him to a cave where Condomour made spoiler of twigs to warm us. Inside that ancient place Fundin's fever increased as the moments passed, sending him into a babbling vision. He called out,

'A silver island floating before me, its bastions huge, revolving and revolving, all white, all-round me a vast sea, rolling over into itself, oh, oh, oh, such a sea and such a fortress, people are waving to me, calling me, telling me to come to them I see the King, the King...' Fundin violently vomited.

Condomour however, knew more as usual. I looked at her with a gallimaufry expression of dumfusion as she took hold of Fundin's afflicted heel and held it up, telling me.

'I know of this pain that ails him now, for it has come

many times before. 'Condumour went her passionate loxodromic way with davening arms animating what she said, 'Witness once the heel of Achilles pierced by Paris' arrow, the heel of Talus pierced by Medea's pin, the heel of Diarmuid pierced by the bristle of the Benn Gulban Boar, the heel of Harpocrates stung by the scorpion; the heel of Balder pierced by mistletoe; well in the Danish version, by the God Hoder; the heel of Ra by the snake sent by Isis, Mopsus the Lapith stung by the black snake of Libya and the heel of the lord Jesus nailed upon that cross of the quick beam, all had the same dream of the Kingdom and its domed silver halls, all fell to the Serpent at the end of their time.'

'Now the heel of Fundin, besmirched by the Serpent Midgard in the Malabolge of Cariddwen.' I added, laboring the obvious.

'Exactly.' said Condumour dyspneally.

'What saved them or did they die?' I asked, passionately concerned for my friend's life.

'All died, none lived.' Condumour told me abjectedly, as though she had been there throughout history. Moments later she left me, going into the hills, saying she would return, she had something to save Fundin, to ease his pain and restore his life, but she first must find it. By late night of the waxing Moon, now silver - horned, she returned bearing red toadstools covered in white spots and small blue flowers.

'Amanita Muscaria', the sacred mushroom, ambrosia of the ancients, Mysterion,' she told me, 'and these', holding tiny blue flowers, 'These are the flowers of death, the periwinkle.' I knew what the toadstools were, I knew not to eat such things, leave them to the wasps and the bugs, for Amanita is deadly poisonous. Why would she bring these flowers and toadstools of death ? Fundin had already taken in lethal potion to bring on that dread thing, he needed something to cure him, not kill him! Was that not so, Condumour? She dried the toadstools by the fire. Later: waking Fundin, she told him to eat that foul ambrosia of the ancients, saying,

'This will make you sleep, or you will die Fundin the Buckler, for I fear that the poison of the Midgard is lethal.' I tried to protest, but Condumour resisted me. Soon Fundin slept, falling away from this wretched world.

'It works in illness to take away the bile and the evil of the world. That is, if it's used sparingly and with respect,' she told me with authority, preparing that potion of periwinkles, to lay on Fundin's foot.

'You probably would have gorged yourselves on the toadstools if you ate them,' she said with sardony, though I knew she only joked. I told her it is forbidden to touch Amanita under Glasheil. With new hope for Fundin's life we lay down to wait, to let the toadstool do its work. If Fundin was on his way to a cure I wondered if Condumour might have something for me. Recently I had begun to incur an unusual molt, making my hair fall out in paw full's, worrying me somewhat. As the night came on and the air chilled I began to feel the cold, I was filled with vain thoughts of going bald. Pelt loss was now my new condition and ailment. Condumour, somewhat resolved to our plight, began to give her love and care so briefly as she soothed me by those glowing embers, stroking me gently, telling me.

'It's either a reaction to the dessert my dear Ratatosk, or you have taken on a nervous response, no doubt from the recent scares you've experienced.' Nor did she have any unction to stop it, though it's possible to re-attach it somehow,' she told me unconvincingly. I told her I was sure the winds and the Sun of the longest day of Talwadc didn't help. That great blore alone blew most of it away. I saw it, leaving my body in great tufts, flying away across that goetic malefic valley of death!

'Seeds don't have hair, their bald like me. Sterile seeds don't grow, like my pelt.' I told her.

'Is this what it means to be a forgotten, a preterite, a titubating franion, is this what it means to be dead in the face of life?'

Condumour could offer me no solace, though she said,

'You must do better; though you have done well in the fight of the name of peace and love, and yet in this journey we still have far to go. Remember we who have slipped away into laughter, into that future, shall all be together with Aossin. Then we shall laugh at this world.'

'Yes,' I said, 'with Aossin and Fundin? I shall be bald, stripped naked, or died of cold before I can even get to the sacred spring of Erd? If I must drink, I know not why.'

'So you may be in that which is to come; you must

drink of Erd or Lethe, be free from the circle of returning.'

Condumour said to me in earnest.

'I alone must come again into this world as a man, so I may be consumed by Surt down in the valley at Angerboda?' I asked.

'It shall not be like that again, nothing will be repeated in this cosmos, everything will be different. You are to be there to see these words of mine ring true, you shall know of this and make the night turn to day.'

'And if I do not drink of Lethe, Erd, Persephone, whatever it may be called, what shall happen to me? '

'Then you shall simply die of thirst and sterility' said Condumour.

' Death is death, I had seen lots of it, what difference is there, so I shall, I shall rest?' I told her.

'No, before you die you will search in vain and never rest and the world is more empty than ever and you are never fulfilled'.

'Why is it that you are free?'

'I shall not return because I have made my life such, I have chosen to believe something in this world, whereas you are neither alive nor are you dead; it is as though you are neither, yet you are both, life and death of a nether world, so you will return.'

'Then I shall drink of this water of Erd, though I do not know where it shall be, as I do not know why it must be.'

Condumour looked up at me in avulsion , as I seemed to tear her apart from her thoughts, for I knew her mind dwelt again on her absent sister. She told me passionately,

'It shall be when you have lost the past, the present and the future, then you can drink and know the life that is beyond. I too shall come again, though not to this place.'

With her Love, could Condumour do all this? I saw her hurl those pelted maniacs off Aossin, smash rocks to dust with her triskeled voice, raising the earth and skies to confusion. Her Love had such power. I saw her aura shining bright; I saw her vision of the new day through all that destruction and death, and I was changed forever, I saw myself walk through that place of the Iron hag, and I was not consumed.

Not even God can change the past.

Agathon.

We hid resting in that cave, in what seemed like the first empty night of the World. Darkness fell as the huge bronzed cinder glows of a thousand fuliginous fires glowed across the desert horizon, coming from those tombed halls of Angerboda, Hag of the Iron wood, lighting up the sky in crimson terror. Yet it was the silence that fell upon everything, that brought the sense of death and murder through that smoky death-stenched air, where the middle ground cannot wander, falling upon all our fears, making us insignificant, minuscule entities in a death-domineered world. Condumour repeatedly burst into tears, cried out lamentations for Aossin and for the struggle of animal and N'ihdogg for life. Screams of anger and rage, explosions echoing into the valley, added to our fears. We knew the day was lost. I tried to comfort Condumour, but little good did I do, for we were both so sick of the whole affair. We lay down amid noise and smoke from the raging battle of Talwadc, I wishing so very hard it was not so! Alone, I sat to listen only to my own thoughts and to know I had no one to speak to 'cept you, my own solloqial self'. Why had so many come together in such a great conflagration to do so much harm to each other? 'The consequences of history', I could say, the Master had told to me of N'ihdogg history, was it all because the land was taken forever, something smashed a long time ago, when men forgot the seasons and the animals of the earth, for the machine? When they stood too proud in the name of their God, Q're, abandoning the songs of their ancestors, forgetting the land, the animals and the trees, destroying the places that are sacred? Was that the reason for this end of life, so no one shall inherit the kingdom save for Ophion of Midgards' rising? So that everyone becomes the dispossessed at that still point of desolation?' No answers. Not even the tinny voice of Glashiel broke through that dark death night of silences. I am alone as the storm of Surt rages outside. The O.P.M told me, I remember,

'Religion is no longer a choice according to free will,

now it is a dogma that predicts the end of days and the coming of Jesus. The Rapturists will proclaim their self-fulfilling prophesy when they see this world end. For the clergy have the ancient books wrong, dead wrong. They're already dead by the death wish of the end of days. He shall not come again, this dead King Jesus, he is gone, he shall not return!'

The voice of the Master was gone and I came too into the light of the fire as the day of death still whirled around my head.

Condumour lay embracing the carus Fundin with her terrible dark thoughts brooding of death's wrong answers. I knew the heroic mobsters of Talwadc had not seen the light of that Sun in its truth, instead gone into the fight for revenge, ignorant of the consequences. Condumour says strange things.

'Perhaps this may have been possible, or possibly that may have worked, maybe if I could have gone down to her, or, then if I could only...' That's the trouble with the future, no one could ever know how dark and foreboding it could become; they were always too concerned by its brilliance to see the dark, simply not apprehensive enough like me. What could I have done anyway? Who would have listened to Ratatosk the messenger? Condumour didn't. I would not say I felt nothing for these things, what was the understandings I have had from the Master? I am no longer sure. Condumour was regressing, going into the hopeless despair that the Sapiens called 'regret.' She was metamorphosing into someone I didn't know; trouble was, who? I kept seeing flashes of an older Condumour, hag like. My friend fell, deeper and deeper, so it became impossible to see anything of reality, abandoning all hope for herself. I was sure she was close to throwing herself over the cliff. Davening back and forth in front of the fire; singing ancient songs, invoking her sister in life and death in colorful love. She took a lock of Aossin's hair from her bag of never-endings, that lock invoking the person called Aossin, making her live again, as ever so briefly as she sang,

Aossin I call to you in Death's dark moor
Little bird of purity.
Who walked so strong so bold,
Of that dread door.
The stallion's trade you did belong
Elothin's Spring where you abide

These words I sing shall ring new life
Across that vast and endless tide.
If by chance we meet again upon an
Open plain called Thrudvangar
Before I begin my search
Sing clear under Yggdrasil
In star-filled evening light
So I too may know
That place sought by the few
In that bright lee of fire
None shall ever be like you.'

The song of Condumour rang through that cave, catching the flames of the fire, rising up into the air, filling that place with the strange presence of her sister and all that had lived in our pasts. The faces of enmity, the faces of pallid anger and hope, fear and presumption, arrogance and pride, rose up into that place from the first day of the world. Where we sat as the sole survivors of possibly the end of days we had all known, we harkened back to ourselves in solemn quietude. Where had they come from, these girls of secrets? What twisted in the fate of the streets of the N'ihdoggs and the rage called Talwadc? Could they, in 'love & purity', have hoped and dared to strike a bargain for peace against such foes? Should I have known better than to go back to the animals, so Aossin should not have to die? Could I have done more to convince the mobs of Talwadc? Should I have given myself, along with my friend, the Fundin? Glasheil, are you there? Can you tell me what I must do? Now I can listen to you. I had only wished us all to leave the field of battle, for I alone saw both sides.

'If you stand in the middle of the road, you always get knocked over from both directions little one. Even now I am dying.' Glasheil was back, but dying? For once I wish that it would stay. Where does it go? Why does it go?

'Why to that place where Aossin is now, deep in the belly of the sea Thallassa, deep in the great Stella Maris, to wait for Ragnarok and the day of light that is to come. I fade away, such waste, for I was always there for you little one. Soon I too shall sing my song at the tables of Mannan'an, little one, I have tried, farewell.'

I called out to Glasheil,

'Wait, please don't go, I am in need of you.'

Glasheil, the unseen, sang before me and filled my little scantily pelted body and noodle with itself singing the song of the world of the wild side, that is, Glashiel the glorious, the indifferent.

'In the thousand myriad variations of the birds of the sky, great fishes of the mountains, of the sea and all the animals that rove the wild side of earth, I was all. Yet nothingness throve in me and all of them, I lived in you all, yet you did not hear me. Here's to my thousand upon millionth creatures that ran and hunted through glade and glen, valley and mountain, air, sea and sky. Now all gone into Ragnarok, the sublime darkness, before eternal forms roamed in their tourbillion, among the trees, the rock and river plain, as all now wait in bladed jaws of futurity. I am beheld as a crystal ship rising upon a crystal sea of stars upon the infinite darkness, the first that was ever made by all who knew me. All my seas teemed with the thousand billionth fishes, singing always to me in that great blue place and my palaces were full with the song of the sun, the air and the land. They saw nothing but me, they heard only my song, for we were each in each. Give me my wild snowy leopard of mountain high, give me my Jaguar of evergreen, saber tooth champions and consumers of Death. Give me my eagle high who soars above the land and cleans the sacred soil. Give me all that is wild, that is mine and mine alone. All that has crawled upon the land and every place that had habitation knew of my song in their ways of ancient old, it is mine alone, the 'I' that is me, Glasheil the Indifferent, happy in the glorious forms of life, ever repeating in oblivion and consequence.

Give me also my pretty wild Birds of air and sea, for my lightness is in their breasts and in their darting eyes, tourbillion colors of the Serpent's spirit where it can never dwell were they. Give me also my great lizard king, wild reptile of the Midgard, as night spoke to the cloud, to measure it's depth that is still unfathomable, for I am without depth surrounding that serpent. I am the Glain, never before would pass away, that had turned and turned the tables of plenty. Take the N'ihdogg from my wild places, coming in their wretched haste and wasteful ways, and tables spent. These beasts have eaten, now kick the Morphic egg, made desolation of all and sent all to

extinction. Then from Talwadc came the code of war, dispatched to my ten thousand myriad tribes the clarion call of the fishes of the sea to save the egg morphic that is the eternal female, for the Male N'ihdogg came to slay her with the madness of the Sun God. Then alone I saw my fading image dim, as sun and moon descend the spiral castle stairs, as vast I was, my nature shrunk. So Midgard Serpent spoke into all Talwadc's ear, to smell the fuming smoke, the ashes that are Surt of Violentur, to make Great War. Then rose up a sea of blood, did come the eyes of all my dead. Behold Talwadc to destroy the Striker that destroy, for I was bankrupt to extinction. Now Surt shall rule this barren plain to purify with that dread flame from Helions' fiery orb. Eons shall pass till tourbillion days have cleansed the Earth. Then higher in the heavens a comet shall weep again into the breast of the Flood, where I shall wait till the passing of Surt from Ragnarok to come again into the brilliant light of this new day. Till then I shall become a phantom ghost of spirit only, deep in the great fish's brain where my memory alone shall dwell. Farewell little one, farewell. Drink in the vale where in time you shall know me again, and all will be renewed and a mystery once more shall prevail'.

Glasheil was gone? I listened as the chorus of that ancient voice sang out of sight and I came to with only the sound of spoiler of twigs. It was then I knew I was alone, as Condumour had said, as the sterile seed, my life bereft of everything! I was a Ratatosk without a real past or a future as I opened my eyes to see the sterilizing flames of that campfire, as the ashes of that bone-wood flaked away from branch and twig and fell helpless into the desert sand. My eyes were opened, yet I lacked someone to tell, no one of my own to speak to of this vision of the dead Glasheil. How could I tell my companions of such things, would they understand the secret death of such great nature? Only the pictures of the night, ancient-colored in that bleak dead place came to wrest me from my despair, came through my newly-opened eyes to see landscapes of primordial beauty before the N'ihdoggs came. Dancing upon that cave wall and through those lambent flames, were red -ochre forms of ancient peoples, kept alive by the light of spoiler of twigs. As one life passed into ashes another briefly lived again. The association of

Sapiens and Creature, each in each, in necessary conjunction, dancing macabre in some lost incantation of Glasheil, another past dream world now gone forever, a vast tapestry of light and color, danced into life. Drozzler's ancestors: fierce, noble and strong, submitting to the flint lance of the hunter. Linty the Roebuck, Wolf dog Finir, and Lapwing Deidre, weaving their eternal riddle into the future that is me, running between sage brush on the sodden floor of ancient mysteries. Fishes leaping, birds swooping, and the Hominids fulfilling the ancient song of life in death and death in life, each in each in the movement of all seasons, as man was born to be, to live among the animals, and we to live with him. As the flames flickered in that ancient cave, those forms danced, danced, my whole world danced on and on into the patterns of life and the eternal future of the stars, and the eternal death in the dance of Glasheil. Lives, long gone into pasts, living in me upon that eternal cave wall, eternal reminder of what had happened, what they had all come from, perhaps where they now may all be, swam into life's tourbillion streams. My rat brained voice of Glasheil, though feeble, I thought, returned to me briefly,

'Too smudged for you to see who is there, little one, you are there to see who is not there.' telling me its riddle as it tittered, laughing into its fading self.

'Glasheil where do you go, will you ever come back? Don't leave me, for now I too love you, I have seen the beauty of yourself.' At that moment, I saw myself flying through a window into a cloud-laden yonder. I heard Aossin's voice singing sweetly, softly, as her song came clear as a bell to me.

'Battle of the Trees' she said sweetly,
 The tops of the beech tree
 Have sprouted of late
 Are changed and renewed
 From their withering state.
 When the beech prosper
 Through spells and the litanies
 The oak top entangles
 There is hope for the trees.

I saw in that fire's light shed upon that ancient rock face, four hunting, dancing figures from death's dream world. All became encircled by an alphabet: B, L, N, F, S, H, D, T, C, M, G, P, R.

Where each symbol shimmered amber crimson upon that cave floor, a tree grew. Aossin spoke,

'Beth, tree of inception and of woman's cycle of moon.'

A shimmering silver birch tree, radiant in the spring light, its leaves fluttering in a breeze sprang from the floor. Around its base, white-capped red buttons of the toadstool Amanita rose up from the earth.

'Luis the flame and delight to the eye.' Another tree rose out from the letter 'L' as Aossin spoke.

'The Rowan Ash, laden with its lip-red berries, its golden blazon leaves of amber red and yellow.' Ancient fires burnt Rowan wood and priests uttered incantations between two great armies ready to battle. Aossin spoke again, 'Nion, Yggdrasil tree of Odin, sacred to Poseidon, tree of Turtu and Dath, sacred tree of Creevna. Six six five the date of the death of these trees, when the Christians came to slay the sacred groves.' Five green Ash tree rose up before me, gnarled and old, their roots reaching deep into the earth where the N'ihdogg lives. Above, branches reaching high into the clouds and beyond, where the God Aesirs live. I saw myself running between them as eternal messenger service. I saw those sacred groves go down before the axe of the N'ihdogg, toppling down in great crashes of splintering wood.

'Fearn.' said Aossin, and an alder tree rose up, covered as it is in the early part of the year with white flowers, turning to clusters of the purple berry, 'Food of Bran and Saturn and Cronos.' said Aossin, as it was consumed in flames, but rose again and again through its cycle of resurrection. An alder-girt island floated before my eyes .

'Saille.' A willow tree sprang gently lithe from the letter 'S' as it uncurled like a snake, the face of the full moon behind it. The triple-headed Goddesses roved the cloudless night as Aossin spoke,

'Hecate, Circe, Hera, this is thy tree, sacred only to you; all witches and Hags winnow their riddles through you.'

'Uath, Hawthorn, she of the white track, tree of the Goddess Cardea, who casts her spell with five of its flowering branches, unlucky to lovers.' Sharp thorns sprung upon this tree before me, a tangled labyrinth of beauty as white flowers grew, their perfumed odor in profusion, until its deep brown branches

were hid in flower.

'Duir, the Oak, Oracle of Dodona, tree of the Dagda, Lord of all Ireland, sacred to Zeus, Jupiter, Hercules, Thor, and Jehovah. Also of Hermes, who sits with the double-headed face.'

Then a great Oak rose before me, its outer branches touching the ground, above the sodden floor its acorns eaten by Blue jay, Magpie and Jackdaw, all squabbling in its glorious bowers. The sound of thunder and forked lightening as its center, turned into a door on golden hinges swung open, from which I saw the black dove of Zeus fly out. That door swung with the seasons and the ever constant motions of the sun. Aossin solemnly said,

'Merddin did prophesize to King Vortigern, the God Llyr shall languish at the forgotten castle Arianrhod. After this, Janus shall never have priests again, his door will be shut and remain concealed in Ariadne's crannies.'

That tree withered and was no more.

'Tinne, Men shall weep and bewail their lot, curse Cadmus for placing Tau into this alphabet, upon which men shall be crucified. Stauros derives its foul name from him'. 'I saw the bitter Holly tree with its hard green leaves, its white flowers turning into clusters of red berries, changing into the oak called Kerm, and Jesus stood before it, wearing the scarlet sacred cloak, a sword clenched in each hand.

'Coll, the Hazel, Bile Ratha, the tree of the triple squared muse, Aes Sidhe lives there, this is your tree of wisdom little one, you have eaten of it.' I saw nine hazel trees rise up from that symbol that changed into a well, and nuts plopping into the water and the Salmon therein eating that fruit, with every nut they ate, red amber spots appeared upon their skins.

'Muin: the vine sacred to Dionysus, fruit of the Faeries.' I saw the vine creep steadily from that letter 'M' of the alder tree, mixed with bramble berries dripping bloody juice upon the ground and Aossin told me.

'This is the thorn of crowns and the blood of the dead King Jesus, he shall be called no more. Late in the season of the year the son of the morning shall also come to take his share, as the rightful twin to King Jesus, it is also his, second most beautiful of creation's forms.'

'Gort, the ivy sacred also to Dionysus, home of the

golden crested wren, flower of the Mysterion and the toad.'. I saw the proreptic ivy vine entwine around the holly tree and two faces came from those two plants, one Holly Boy and Ivy Girl. They smiled before they slayed the year in winter's pestilential blight.

'Peith, the guelder rose, and water elder Ngetal the canna reed.' The P rose from the river bed of rock, pouring out arrows of reed in every direction from its center. Jesus adorned in scarlet ropes held this royal reed and sweetly smiled.

'Ruis, The cursed elder and the fatal yew, with witch rowan and nightshade in their shadow grew.'
The waterside Elder rose from that letter 'R' and hanging from it was the face of one, 'called Judas', said Aossin.
'Further in its deathly bowers hung Dysmas, Jesus and Gestas. The season of the dead King has come for the last time.' said Aossin plainly. 'It shall come no more, no more shall Wren and Robin fight in the seasons of the Battle of the Trees, now Ragnarok shall rage in Surt until the end.' All thirteen trees marched in ancient ways before me, as they motioned their purposes in the endless secret ritual of season, the eternal dancing ways of life. Within that alphabet five more letters A, O.U, E, I, grew inside that circle of trees and the voice of Aossin sang,

'Ailm, Onn, Ur, Eadha, Idho.'

Upon the 'A' a young and beautiful kaleidogyn, Goddess of the Moon, reclined upon the isle of Ogygia with the Elm and sacred Silver Fir, screened in Alder thickets. Elm trees held vine, my Elysian field of trees,
'Artemis Caryatis.' said Aossin's voice, 'Never let the Goddess know you wish to live in her garden where the hazel nuts grow.'

White Oxen ranged through those thickets of the Moon Goddess, was that Drozzer's I saw? The face of the Moon changed from scythe to round white belly, turning into the face of the Hag of Ironwood. I looked away as the bitter flames drove hard into the dead bones of the wood. This Goddess was changing, I saw the maiden and the bride, and the golden Hag of the triple squared muse slay the boy king who knelt upon the letter 'O'. On that 'O', I saw ancient fires burning the ill - behaved yellow furze thicket, then it burst into tender green

shoots, then yellow flower. Greedy sheep picked clear those tender sprouts, as they stood on the verdant grass below spring sun and rain. From every shoot a boy eternal sprang upwards to meet the bladed futurity of three woman's heads, Maid, Bride and Hag, as the sheeps' nibblers rove in and out of each others' eternal contradiction. Upon the letter 'T', I beheld pale Aossin laying in Yew tree glade, Yew's roots grew from her mouth, her face pale as the moon, her hair white threads filling the somber sky. A Unicorn, wise and pure, lay down beside her.

'Fir, womb of sliver pain, Yew, tomb of leaden grief, Viragoes of one vein alike in leaf, with arms uplifted, taunt us in the same tongue: Here Jove's own coffin cradle swings.' The vision faded as spoiler of twigs crackled hard through the dead wood's bones in that ancient cave; those flames dancing time's immemorial pattern to Surt's countenance, turning wood to ash and dust. Now three images of lives past came alive and danced through their last spark to destruction. In the light of that lee of fire I thought I saw three Sapient children, two girls and a boy and another smudge, rubbed out and indistinct, perhaps a fourth Sapient upon that ancient painted wall. The smudged one at the entrance to the cave did not move. I saw the letter 'U' and blazoned purple burning amber gold ran through that figure. I saw the mountain tops covered in this colored bush as bees swarmed round them, till honey dripped from Linden trees, and Aossin's voice said,

'The child is sacrificed to Isis and Osiris, Venus Erycina, the sweetness still to come. Uroica is her name. She sets up her chair in the womb of the hills at the season of the heather and then expires. Ura reeve unto us the year of thy sweetness.'

'Who is that', I asked, pointing to the woman of alabaster gold, and Aossin said,

'Why it is my sister and my mother?' Round and round the fire leaping through the light of flames the red, black and white colors amid the amber of the sparking fire of cadmium, radiated this world before me as I wandered in and out of those visions. Had some ancient known the future path that led us here? Knew we would be coming here? They, from so very long ago? For the uncanniness of it is, that red ochre smudges at the edge of the painting, closest to the entrance, its

back to the world, beyond the cave's mouth like the last one to enter, could it be the shape of a Ratatosk? The tail riding majestically around its ears, sitting up doing the 'beg' position, just petrous, watching the three figures of the circle dance round that enchanted place of eternal acts. The Goddess of the Moon held up a flat stone with an eye of amber gold and lapis blue. Burning inside, I saw in blazon gold the shores of some foreign land. Golden cliffs buried in the evening sun across the great white-capped blue waters, while two of the figures dance their ritual in their contradiction, slaying the boy king, and his eternal resurrection on those hills of golden furze. The smudge at the edge of this world just sat there in the polecat stun and looked. The 'I' was me, I was the blur on the edge of the world's wall, quickly becoming indistinct, heading toward extinction. Was I not what I was if only for then? How could I say with certainty what I saw, now in that place of memory where things are not distinct? How could I be so sure to waste myself in such illusion, such beautiful illusion, until the blurred figure took from the ground where a hole had been drawn as only a circle of lapis blue, a vessel and I was seeming to drink, and I felt the freshness of that cool liquid run into me. Even more, the face after drinking looked up through its own reflection and smiled at me knowingly, like the portrait of Jesus, knowing who I was, that I am sure. The leporine face had my blue eyes like that blue pool and my golden amber coat, though there were no pink skin revealing emaciation, but clear and distinct as it should be, untouched and unchanged by the world. It was me, it was me, I am sure. I wrestled from the vision that faded with the dying fire, I felt I was not alone in what I saw. Condomour seemed drawn into my vision, she always knew everything about what happens, turned like a nupson to see. To watch those dancing figures made to live again, according to some old decree, to know that we had lived again before, perhaps served this purpose once before. Those flames went down with the ancient lives that had briefly lived again, retold for us in death and dreams, to realize I was seeing beyond my life in those figures on that cave wall, perhaps seeing the past now caught up in the future of countless generations, like the great army of N'ihdoggs and Talwadians marching into the future, marching who could know where? Toward the path of evolutionary enlightenment,

toward the battle of Talwadc, to Ragnarok and beyond, to that place of neither light nor dark. 'That's us.' I said to Condumour, pointing to the edge of the painting, now dimming its brilliance to its original three, possibly four, figures,

'And that's Aossin, see she holds the stone with the eye of the slayed serpent, and you Condumour, slaying Fundin, see he is still alive. Aossin told me of the battle of the trees, and the seasons' last dance. I saw it this night, this night she lives on the island of the moon, Ogygia!'

Condumour looked vaguely at me, aglask and unenlightened, too dim in brain, her personality now a fifteen watt light bulb as she murmured...

'How do you know that isn't me with the stone? I saw the eye of Talwadc, no one else. It's ridiculous anyway what you're saying. Aossin is dead in this place, don't try to make her live just to please me!' Ka-pow! This sorceress exploded at my suggestions and I thought I saw the sands of the cave floor crawl away from her anger like the tide was going out. I tried to explain in the light of my experience, everything I had seen. She wished to confute and ridicule me, it was useless for me to try to share with her my new found hope.

'It's your stories about the past, present and future that you keep telling me about. I only wish to understand : now I do, from that painting on the wall.'

'How do you know that it is any of us?' said Condumour bitterly.

'Me?' I said, surprised that she should use this momentous occasion for questioning me, 'Question the experience or yourself, why me?' I had left out the voice of Glasheil, she would never know that, how could she? I tried again.

'Me, see there at the edge of the cave; Fundin or you, Condumour, holding the stone of the eye, and Aossin.'

Condumour wasn't convinced; she disliked coincidences.

'Only three, and you're a Ratatosk so it's no coincidence.' After such a day I found it hard she should be like that. I asked her about the rat charm, wasn't that something magical like I had just seen?

'That was not 'magic', it almost worked, it was the work of Aossin so let us not mock the efforts of the dead. Besides, if

it is true what you say, that it's us up there, then why are you always on the edges?' she asked, reminding me of my acarpous titubation.

'What makes you think you're in it at all?' she added vituperatively. I told her I was merely having a vision for hope, can't one do that now? She was persistent and irucund, telling me the past is the past and the future awaits new things. 'besides' she added, 'hope is hope of the wrong thing.' I couldn't be privileged to see or to know until I had drunk from Lethe's spring. I almost told her I had I had felt cool liquid rush into me, the future that had been revealed to me through Glasheil, yet I resisted, I didn't wish the argument. Condumour did, 'It's got nothing to do with us, nothing at all!' she said, more irucund and resolute but mostly contrary to her earlier self. So I asked her what she saw, for I had assumed, no doubt incorrectly, that we had experienced roughly the same thing.

'I saw the dancing figures, the slaying of the boy King by the triple headed Goddess, all the trees of an ancient alphabet, the animals, and the hunter, the cycles of the seasons, I didn't think I was in the picture, or you, especially you. Why would they paint a Ratatosk in their pictures, a sterile one at that? Doesn't make any sense at all, my dear Ratatosk, to think you could be in a vision.'

'Did you not see and hear Aossin sing those incantations of the deity?' She had not. In fact she only saw a small part of what was revealed to me, or my vision, becoming irate when I mentioned Aossin when she appeared in the Battle of the Trees, as though that was exclusively her domain alone and no one else could speak of such things. I was deflated. How could Condumour have such cruelty in such hard times? She was right, I was the sterile seed, is it too late to be changed? Among that jumble of creatures on the cave wall I could be anywhere, or not anywhere! I had seen the last of the dance of the trees, never again to come into this world. She didn't care. There and then I learned from Condumour the Cruel that you don't get into a picture unless you paint yourself into it, apparently I had not yet done so. Have I ?

Never stoop to Conquer.

Fundin.

Contrary to me, Condomour the Hag still thought to rescue the remains of the longest day, starting at the first Sun up on the dead world, urging me to find out, go with her to Angerboda.

'Something still moves out there, not all is yet lost,' she told me, enthusiastically twiddling the dial on the ipod as it spewed out its zithering meows, barren of any N'ihdogg voices. I chose to confute her, to tell her it was only the insects and the lambent flames of Surt that lived. Condomour's exclusive right to know the future.

'Surely the slaying of the Midgard Serpent has brought Ragnarok, you said it yourself.' Condomour would have none of it, she thought the myth was wrong. I tried to tell her what I knew of Glasheils' death,

'If Glasheil is gone forever, so must be the animals, for it lived in every one them, I am sure.'

It made no difference to Condomour, she would have none of it. Instead she contradicted everything as she turned from me,

'This Glasheil has given up on you Ratatosk. It ceases to live in you, the loss of your Glashiel is only your living death. She could not understand or wished not to believe me. 'The slaying of Midgard, you said it yourself, would bring on Ragnarok and the still burning flames of Surt. Does not all life end there?' Condomour had fallen into sleep, there was no answer to my question. I only hoped she would wake up better. After my deflating brush with my companion, I still believed I was in the picture, something had spoken to me, perhaps I had drunk of the truth of that world, the same truth that had shown itself to me in Glasheil.

Sleep quietly now in the comfort of that ancient cave under the stars of Ragnarok, spoil more twigs and watch the dance again that never came. Fall into sleep, sleep that we had not had in nearly one full rotation of the Sun; sleep full of nervous exhaustion in the stars of Ragnarok. I found it hard to close my eyes from fear of something coming through the night with terrible clashing teeth to rip us all to shreds. Perhaps

Glasheil had slipped up and there were a few piligerous mobsters on the roam. So I napped, as my companions slept, dragging twigs onto the fire to make the dance come again so I could be sure, yet it never moved again. Watching, thinking, hoping, perhaps we had all slept too long to shake ourselves from that dream, why should the dreamers wake from ancient beauty long ago into a world of pain? So I lay watching the Sun rise over the eastern horizon, sleepless from terror and uncharmed thoughts about what we would find this day, when we venture into Angerboda.

Condumour awoke in a better mood as she went to the carus Fundin, he still lives or did he sleep in that other place where death cannot roam? We left him in the cave, Condumour leaving him a message in sand on the cave's floor to: 'stay put'. I took one more glance at the images from the last night, in daylight it was different, only the four hunters and the animals, no alphabet. I saw the image of myself in memory mix inextricably into that blurred effigy as past and present and perhaps future. Like the river that runs through the rock, I ran through life's little desperate hopes that it was true. We struck out together for the burning city, Angerboda, Hag of the Iron wood', said Condumour, pointing to the burning city on the edge of the sky.

'We have come to see the vision of the future.'

The sky blue was black and thick with smoke and ash, foul with the contamination of the stench of burning flesh. No sign of bird flocks in the sky, or darting creatures retreating from the battle's wane, just a splashing waterfall or a rustle from a tree's leaves where ghosts are known to wait. Down one track leading into a rough-hewn gorge of rocks and beyond we reach the suburbs of that burning death palace of Angerboda, still desolate. Nothing had turned up on her radio as Condumour twiddled with it once more; no human or animal sound stirred. We passed avenue upon avenue, no sign of life, no bodies, nothing. Not till we had come full circle onto the main road into the city center did the horror begin. First we found a N'ihdogg corpse here, another there, some piled high with the pelted bodies of the mucspat swarmers, lying expired by the gnawed remains. All lay where they fell, overwhelmed or asphyxiated by that smothering, biting, rabid death machine. Crashed flame

thrower vehicles spun out against pollards, bodies half chewed, tanks destroyed and littered with dead warriors. Further in and further up, bodies of the dead became thick and messy; rivers of blood, dried and congealed, monumental piles of bodies floating in the offal of their own carnage. It was like a page from the vision of Talwadc that Condumour had seen; the future in the eye of Talwadc that attests to what I saw in the Iron wood of flame. I was not there, I merely floated high above that incomprehensible ocean of blood and death. Bones bleached white by Surt, like sterile pods. Though we turned through those corpses to see if anything lived, we found nothing, search though we did. It was futile. Condumour full of tears and dread, roamed that place, would not listen to anything that I said, took out her book of poetry and buried with words the helpless dead. In broken images of life we press on through that hideous maze, go from here to there dispatching odes of love to the dead. Further up through the barricades of electric fences, we stopped, before us, rising meters into the air the electrified bodies of the thousand million animals fallen with the N'ihdoggs in their last final pitched battle.

As the flames began rising higher, the fierce heat pushing us away, those bodies consumed in the calcinating flames of Surt, Angerboda burnt on. Choking on the smoke, we saw the evidence of life in death. So many undone that day; so many had fallen, their bodies piled in mounds along the straggled lines of defense as horror after horror came before me. More shattered bodies lay piled high farther up, charred, bloodied and broken, their remains speared in the eyes by the large beaks of Albatross, Crane, and Stork, so that the dead birds of the air covered the corpses like mythical feathered beings. I could not apprehend so many infandum's of death's face. All morning long we search in vain, hoping, looking for the living, yet nothing lived. The wrecked barracks and the remains of the General, his body viciously gnawed, his head decapitated and roughly stuck up on a pole like his trophies. Death was triumphant.

At 'Widgets Warehouse Direct' television cameras were still running unmanned, bearing witness to the global horror. A psycho electric-colored nightmare showed us the outcome. Death littered the streets of America, Russia, Europe, India, China, Africa, Australia, South America - all beamed the same

vision of hell into the heavens and back to earth, broadcasting to the ghosts of the dead. It was by those flickering images all life had failed in this penultimate struggle and we were totally alone. Farther up we came upon Drozzler's scorched remains, his blaked face recognizable, his tuft of white hair, sticking curled between his ears, his earmark, his strabismic eyes staring at his enemy beneath his great bulk. Around him the vain glorious bodies of Bloggdrott, Sneirtsnertz, Berzelsmertz, Berzeldrerts, even the tiny corpses of Ronkers, Drerts, Pestus, and Porkas, the mighty Sinir, and so many more whose countless names I would never know, their bloody burnt bodies piled upon their enemies or each other. So, everything made for joyful life, now gone, lay in dismal stead. As hard I might I could not turn, nor reconcile my terror of this strife. Do I live now in death's other kingdom, where worlds collide? Where everything was nothing?

The darkness soon to come, the rolling clouds thundered, and the earth is bankrupt, utterly bereft. Drowning fear and terror, we searched the radio wave-lengths once more, nothing came from that machine.

'Move on do not stop here, where there is only the dead.' I called to Condumour breaking our long silence.

'You cannot bury them, there are too many,' as she heaped rubble into cairns over the corpses, animal and Sapien, in a common grave. Amidst this stinking bloody carnage piled high at Angerboda, the swarming flies and insects, were moving in on their hosts not yet consumed by the rising flames. The air now only buzzing with the infusoria of insects of the air, the ground: singing with the chorus of six leggers swarming in for the banquet on the dead, rustling in their fervor to eat. Fearing for ourselves, spirits came through those flames, to haunt and terrify. So I urge my companion to leave, I need not have bothered. There were explosions in Ironwood Angerboda; the fires rise up from the earth to consume the remains of the dispossessed in that open cemetery.

Leaving there, I could not forget the reason for such a conflagration: the endless systematic slaughter of the animals, the invasion of their territories. Were the animals right, did they have a choice against the song of Talwadc, was it a just cause, even though I may call it mad? Among that carnage it was hard

to say 'yes'. If so, did the justness of Violentur matter any more in the face of such a spectacle? Can anything so destructive be justified in this world? Simply stated it didn't matter anymore. I had survived only to die ten trillion deaths, could I have wished for life on Earth to return on that sunny day? Now darkened by death's mask I could not. What shame and ignominy for the life so much I wished to weep, I could not, so my heart beat a faint pattern of despair, to ache in bitterness and remorse for everything. What is there left to hope for? The long lost happiness of summer days, birds singing through the green boughs of trees, fresh big hazel nuts awaiting my collection, the chestnut blossom perfume filling valleys of sun shine. Perhaps a new dray, or noticing new tree's grew down the valley. Even a new neighbor or winter coming on, though we had a hard time coming through it, spring would warm us and renew us with fresh energy for our labors to come, the season at hand, in the endless eternal cycle of Glasheil. There is its own kindness and reward. So that the passing over to death was not sudden, but kinder and with the sense of fulfillment reflected in the Sun songs of the animals and the time of the seasons. 'No more,' I thought, 'can this be true, no more shall Earth have such a song, no more the dance of life shall sing the end of days, sky-blazoned evening hearts be warmed on that happy shore.' Now the song of Talwadc was sung into the glories of death's past down to the end of life; all reasons for this bloody end's regret lie buried with their masters, now all so insignificant. I made a pact with my companion that I would seek out this Talwadc and it's meaning and send it into the black hole of the stars forever. So stricken by our mutual loss, so sickened by it all, Condumour, broken and smashed in spirit, screamed blue ominous curses at the sky. In her cursing, her love had begun to purge the stars, even those barren plains. The sky swallowing us in it's enormity cracked open it's eternal emptiness. Do words fill that void? Utterances have no sense, in a world that no longer had proportion?

History, what's that?

SnerTERS.

I had seen the consequences of history for those who had tried in their 'understandings' only a short distance from here; understanding lay in absolute ruin. Perhaps, 'understanding' was its own subtle trap, more urgent the need to understand, than the ability to achieve it! I have begun to suspect the N'ihdogg art of the understandings, and perhaps the knowledge of the One and Perfect Master, returning instead to my instincts of the lost world of Glasheil. Now I hide away, drive out desperate thoughts concerning what I may become or why I have survived. Today is so much older than yesterday; it left us defeated and helpless, full of resentment, and now our world is chaos. Will our roots hold fast, where once we could flourish, in this place of stony junk land? The desert hills and canyons have a new complexity of color and form, more vibrant, more alive, dazzling us with their splendid colors. Unreal this place, so resplendent, now we look around us; its hard edges full under this azure sky, the wind in the trees or the waterfall. At the cave Fundin slept into the afternoon, still breathing and happy in that dream world near death's door, for he smiled through it all.

'Metempsychosis, the sky sighs its deepest blue, and the stories about the fairies can finally come true.' Condumour told me. She's gone into her own world; taken to imitating fanciful personalities, acting like the last woman on Earth, sure that she is who she says she is. She is the persona, more than the actor. I watch and listen as her davening moves her through sometimes terrible, magnificent or perhaps pathetic cruel acts. Condumour is changing, changing I am sure. I am sure too all her powers are failing her. Earlier she began to lay out stones on the sand, telling each one how they would spring to life at her command and become animals of her choice,

'You will be like Sinir, you like Berzelsmertz,' and so on. When she couldn't spring life into them, she would crawl away whimpering into a crevasse, forlorn and bewildered. I am still somewhat Gallad the Grateful, not because those stones

didn't turn into those Thraesvelg corpse swallows from Talwadc, but because I am still my own companion. Now I think, I have felt a side of this world that is more death than dead, perhaps the death of death. I tell myself I am no longer afraid. Miserable and desolate I sit here on this rock. 'As we walk upon this world, going backward and forward upon it.' I heard the voice of the O.P.M, and longed to be there in that place with him. Solloqial self, do you remember, you who were the Master of the perfect way? Fundin slept on, shall he ever wake or is he gone into that impossible body? Shall I now be alone with Condumour, mad hag of the dead world? What future can there be, where shall we go? That is the problem, lead us where? We have no direction, only playful fancies, and they cannot last forever, we cannot sit here and wait for death. I ask Condumour for some sign of what to do. She had no direction, everything she does and says are in confused widdershins and wishes. I suggested we look for my Master, for I had some questions for him. Perhaps he would still live and have conquered this deluge of death.

I said 'we should go east, back to Blazing Norton.'
'Go east!' she said with vellication, 'It's a long way', is 'east' and there's nothing there, like there is nothing here. Here, there, it matters not and I don't care.' Then she burst out of her mad rhyming into a chattering hysterical laugh, echoing over the empty mesa as she draws more circles in the sand, concocts tricks of pawkery and magic potions, hopefully to inveigh the dead with life, but nothing works, she's lost her power. Taking the lock of Aossin's hair from her pouch, waived it into the winds to bring her back, the dead can never come back in to this world of the night of Brahmin. Isn't that so Condumour?

'Perhaps the resurrection of animals isn't possible', said Condumour. She could say that again!

'Perhaps', I told her, hoping skepticism might prevail, 'if the path towards the future in the day of Brahma is complete. Why do I need to resist it with life?'

'Because: the meaning of this life will be shadowed in the next one.'

'Perhaps something to tell us what to do next, some sign, some path to follow, I am so deflated, after all we have done these last sun and moon. Do you have any answers, any

more rat charms?'

'That would take some thinking on,' she said, 'but remember we can live again'. Silently we wait for Fundin's return from the hills and vales of sleep, since Condumour is sure he will live. So he sleeps on and on. I saw in the fading sinister Sun clock of war, that burnished effigy at the mouth of the cave at the entrance to both worlds. It shall always be like that, it shall wait. It must stand like that, an effigy between light and dark until forever ends and I, straggled between them, waiting to bring them to resolution. This morning we were greeted by a much revived Fundin. He hobbled out of the cave into the Sun as I sat quietly with Condumour, rubbing his eyes and pouring out his experience of the long sleep: a dream so bright, the voice of Glasheil speaking into his mind, clear as water from a secret spring before the beginning of the world. Such freshness, such life that flowed from his eyes and continued to do so even though we told him of the death of the world. His eyes still glowed not happily, but radiantly. Though saddened by the death of life he shone, pouring forth his dreamy vision. His wound was clean, he was lamed. Condumour didn't look at the sore leg, she just said nonchalantly, 'of course'. He lives, thanks be to the glory of the hazelnut tree. Even more fantastic, Glashiel lives too. How can he know, how can he tell me such things against my own experience? Before I could question him, before I could ask him to take me to see Glashiel, he headed out across that dessert, shouting to us,

'I must speak to the fishes, they wait for me. I shall return.' Stopping to have a quick chat with a termite nest, he left us. While we wait again for him, I am left alone with Condumour. Today she is more Hag like, her face darkening into some great certainty, wanting answers from me of the unimaginable. We went into the cave to see the drawing again. The drawing was different. Though still four distinct shapes, it no longer held those luminous images under the light of day. Did it really have any significance? Condumour told me it was nothing, the image incomplete, almost obliterated, how could it be a sign?

The number, four figures', I told her.' She pointed to four rocks piled together, saying,

'We could conject those rocks symbolized the four of

us, but it would be improbable, still bound by the law of chance from which you concoct these ideas.'

'We had better get along soon or the fires will be upon us, where could Fundin be?' I said, changing the subject.

'He will come back soon', said Condumour, handing me a walnut and a thimble of water. The afternoon droned on under the buzzing skies of the insects. More fire burning, always burning on the horizon from every direction, closing the circle between us and destruction. I was worried we would become trapped waiting for Fundin; it wasn't such a good thing to wait while he pursues some fancy. I was wanting nothing more in the world than to see his return so we could get out of there. We had to wait until the Sun went down and Condumour to make spoiler of twigs, before he emerged from the canyon into the light of that glowing cave where I quietly waited for those images to dance again. Fundin: jubilantly trod in, eyes bright, brighter than usual, hair all ablaze like a badger's bum.

'I had a vision', he told us excitedly, 'in a pool of water up the canyon. I was looking with the Fishes', he said bubbling this news, talkative and enthusiastic, like there were ants in his trousers for he couldn't stand still for the first time since I knew him.

'I didn't think anything like fishes were left alive,' I said.

'They are, they are, I saw them I spoke with them, they told me...'

'Calm down', said Condumour, 'tell us slowly.'

Fundin couldn't calm down as he ran on excitedly like he had been vaccinated with a gramophone needle.

'Not only that, I have news about Mannan'an.

Mannan'an wants to meet us, he will be waiting for us at west Finistere, Chesapeake Bay, which was according to the fish, east of here some great distance.'

Well, I was right about going east, but surprised Mannan'an the blubbing bungler was still living. Naturally we wanted to know how he had found out. Fundin had from the fishes all the information we required.

'Sure', I said, 'I had a vision of Glasheil but no one believed me. What makes you think it can do the same thing for you?' Condumour brightened up from her Hagness; she was

ready to listen to anything.

I threw myself into a pool of water and held my breath for what seemed like an eternity, after time passed, I found myself swimming with spotted fishes. They brightened me with their colors and song. Soon I was talking with the Pope of the Ocean. Mannan'an wasn't very happy that I had slayed the Midgard Serpent. He thought that was the reason they had lost the Battle of Talwadc. I asked Fundin why the Blubereer wants to see us. He told me,

'Mannan'an has some explaining to do.'

He could say that again ! After instigating the bloodbath of the century, he had 'some explaining to do. The gall of it all, Mannan'an wanted to meet us for a chat! Mannan'an told Fundin where to meet us, a place called no man's land of sea and shore, where one world meets another. I need not doubt Fundin: it was Mannan'an I feared, giving orders as usual. Fundin confirmed our worst fear,

'All terrestrial life is dead, only the oceans of the big fishes from the valleys of the seas live. We are left. My first question,

'What is Mannan'an going to do once we were all gathered together, kill us?'

Fundin said he didn't know, he didn't ask and Mannan'an didn't say.

'Great', I said, 'we go there only to get murdered by Mannan'an and his boys.' Fundin said he didn't think so, the message was peaceful. I told him that once upon a time so was ours and look what happened to us!

'How can messages be peaceful in this world, they always start out like that and end differently?' I had a message for Mannan'an, 'Go over Birkerot!' Mannan'an said that last time and looked what happened', I told my companions desperately, although that wasn't exactly true. It didn't matter anyway, I wasn't going! Something was afoot and I didn't see why we had to go to see Mannan'an, what do we need him for anyway? Just so he can explain away the death of the planet's inhabitants? Condomour wanted to meet him, she didn't think he could kill us,

'We have more. Remember your wish little one, you have wished, so not even Mannan'an can harm us.' Naively, she

continued,

'Besides he lives in the Sea and we are on the land, what can he do?'

'What can he do? That's rich', I told her.

'It would be just like Mannan'an to get someone else to do his dirty work. What about Talwadc? That maniac must still be abroad.'

Fundin said Talwadc is dead in the land,

'It has failed, now only the sea has life and will restore Glasheil in time.'

Condumour looked at me as though to say, 'satisfied? Very nice, I just hate happy endings, especially when others have paid such a high price. There was absolutely no reason to go, was there? Fundin said he promised Mannan'an we would go. He was insistent on the matter and begging the importance of the visit. I didn't really know what Mannan'an wanted, probably revenge on me for desertion to Talwadc.

'So we're going to the 'Sinister Finistere', exclaimed Fundin. Upon closer interrogation I discovered that the Sinister Finistere was the sea and I was more reluctant than before.

'We have to cross that first ', said Condumour pointing to the desert and pulling out a map of America, eagerly expecting another mission, sensing another mystery and the opportunity to stick her nose in the bad business of meeting with the 'Pope of the Oceans'. She had been apathetic, so it was no surprise that suddenly she was keen for another ridiculous mystery. As they paged over the maps of America, I hung back, sitting on a rock, preparing to go it alone into the desert to die. I wished not to go with these two children anymore or see the ridiculous face of Mannan'an explain away mass murder.

Acres of America spread out in front of us in the map, a world shrunk down for examination. Cross the Madres into Texas, due east to Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, nearly there, north to Richmond Virginia, Washington, Chesapeake Bay, western Sinister Finistere. On second thoughts, I liked the fact that we would be entering my old turf again, find the One and Perfect Master and then I could leave these two fig declarers. I was sure I had seen my own future and had nothing to fear from the sterile seed. So I just went along this time, saying to everyone's surprise, 'Ok let's go!'

We left right there and then. Coming out over the mountain range and descending into the river valleys of Texas, over the next couple of suns and moons was hard for my two companions, I could take a ride on them and rest, for them it was a trek through brush and hills that seemed never to end. The heat of the day, the fires of Surt burning night and day began to play itself out on them. Sweating in the heat and stench, rubbed sore from scratches and insect bites, they faded fast, so that we may not make it after all. The insects: busy populating the Earth; the air buzzing with mosquitoes, mayfly, thunder bugs, and all kinds of creatures of the summer night, biting and digging into our flesh. We were forced into the open spaces to escape from the fires, where those six leggers concentrated into a veritable stew of stinging pain. After several hundred kilometers, besieged by a great swarm of biters, we got to the Staked Plain almost intact. Later, it didn't seem possible to go another mile as Fundin and Condomour were almost eaten alive. We decided at the first available opportunity we would find an abandoned vehicle. That afternoon we crossed the Peco River heading still north east, hoping to get to Big Spring by evening and mobilized. The river had swollen for the time of year and proved difficult to cross, making us walk several miles south to find a bridge. We crossed, relieved to find several abandoned pickups. Once the pickup burst into life, Condomour set off, heading in a north easterly direction, crossing the Red River by nightfall. More dead on the road, mile after mile of death and rotting, stinking carnage everywhere, the endless bleached white bones of the dead, sterile seeds stretching ever on before us, amidst the burning fires of Surt. Foul winds of pestilential agony blew across the open plane, carrying the stench of death into our whiffers. None would eat a thing, just water. Empty cars and vehicles lay strewn everywhere, abandoned and savaged by the marauding animals. Small towns, usually busy this time of the year, only exhibiting the silent deathly emptiness, the ripened fields of wheat left for hungry Surt. We crossed the Mississippi river into Tennessee, heading due east toward the Appalachians. Not much further to go: Macon, Augusta; Columbia went by, the usual nightmares. I would be glad when we got further north into the colder weather to escape from southern nights of insects, but I am sure we are only all to die at

the flippers of Mannan'an and his cohorts. We passed Mt. Mitchell, its snowy cap reminding us of cooler climes, for the days were very hot under the labors of the Sun, and the insects were gaining more strength in numbers, pursued us in their rounds, biting until they had made my companions sore and bleeding. As we came through the Blue Ridge into Virginia, I reminded myself of the home I once had before embarking on this madness called Talwadc. I asked if I could visit the wood of my birth. Condumour resisted.

'Besides', she added, like the Hag she was becoming, 'You never knew your home, you were raised by the One and Perfect Master, he alone knew where you came from.' At the James River, Washington, we made a stop to visit the Lincoln Memorial at Condumour's insistence. Climbing the stairs toward that stone edifice, constantly savaged by flies and mosquitoes disturbed from their feeding on corpses. My companions, hard pressed to avoid the white bones of the dead that lay scattered everywhere, clattering and falling when they accidentally stumbled into them, pressed through that terrible place. Ahead: the top of the monument were the watchful eyes of Lincoln staring down through that granite rock face of austerity, asking everyone in his silence.

'Well and how is my nation, what is the answer to the meaning of the land called America?'

'We no longer know, America is no longer, Mr. President, the nation is no more', said Condumour to silent edifice. 'We have failed you, Mr. Lincoln, we have forgotten the land and have perished. Your children grew greedy and hostile to each other, murdering senselessly, forgot the credo of our forefathers, became vulgar and lacked all generosity to become the new aristocrats of the dispossessed.'

Condumour addressed again the face of Lincoln, telling him. 'Let these bones that are spread before you atone for their forgetfulness of what you told us to live by, now they are in the single party of death. In this dead valley of ideas and dead hopes we cannot bury these thoughts. Father of our nation: why are so many undone so many have been disinherited to be thrown into the wasteland? These bones are the chaff of their soul seeds, these are the sterile seeds, the seeds that will never come again, will be forgotten. In the sound and the fury of the

thunder we will hide in fear that we too are of the sterile seed and when the rains pour down in your garden, we, like they, cannot be renewed and grow again. Such was their lives, they cannot come again into creation.'

Fundin spoke.

'I believed in the people who had lost their inheritance, and that inheritance was the land and the animals, some rose up powerful and mighty against the rest and threw them out of this place into dispossession. Think of us here who are before you today, who stand before the bones of your nation. Show us what to do, for we, the lost children, the frightened children, who have seen and lived through the greatest war of history, the war of the dispossessed, know not what to do.'

Fundin was in tears. Condumour embraced him before that silent monument, these lost children of America.

'Speak to your only children Mr. Lincoln. Write once more that which is the truth of your lost nation in us,' said Condumour. Then a breeze came up, mercifully cooling us, the sound of it blowing in a mild rage across the great green empty lawns like a lost holiday, trees' leaves rustling like the spirits of my companions. They alone knew his meaning; they, the disinherited children of the wasteland, sent into oblivion. Despite the biting insects, Fundin and Condumour stood in silence for several long tormented minutes sobbing lamentably before the great granite Lincoln. Condumour pulled a candle from her bag, placing it before the great man of stone, turned to catch Fundin and myself up in her supreme love. As I turned to see the face of Lincoln, the candle never seemed to burn so bright as it did in that moment. I thought he smiled on his children. We left through the white beached bones as the sky grew dark, thunder clouds rolled in and began to pour with rain, soaking those dry white bones. In the thunderclap of death we turned to see a creaking Lincoln rise up, stride across those bone-strewn lawns toward the Potomac River, at the river's edge, he turned to stare at us, and in one final goetic lunge, threw himself into the river, sinking out of sight. There was no prayer to Lincoln or human pleas to make him return to his children of America, America; like Lincoln was gone forever. Despondently: we looked up to the place where Lincoln lived, only to see the empty throne that was once America.

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or love in a golden bowl?

The Book of Thel.
W Blake.

Afternoon light fell as we wound our way through that place called Washington. Soon we would be nearing the place appointed as the meeting ground with Mannan'an, where two worlds meet on the sea shore of the Mysterious Sinister Finistere. What was the Sinister Finistere, the great pond lake that Drozzler had mentioned? Was it so big that you couldn't see across it, or so deep that you couldn't see to its bottom? I was on the verge of running out through the side window, when the truck turned the corner and there in the picture postcard windshield lay the rolling waves of the Sinister Finistere. Dawn pointing across its great flat waves, the sun barely reddening the horizon, the surging noise rushing in and out on the gravel shore, as the line of waves changed from one place to another. Fundin and Condumour scanned the horizon looking for Mannan'an while I readied a hiding place and then searched for all possible exits on the beach. No sign of the cetacean delegation, as the sun began to light the sea with its cherry red hue, announcing another day. I almost imagined I heard the familiar call of seagulls. It wasn't that, it was something different, something I had never heard before. It was a more sharp peeling sound way out on the high end that N'ihdoggs can't hear; it was so shrill that it almost made me block my ears. 'This is it', I thought, 'first they're going to deafen you and then, when your staggering deafened in pain down the beach head, snap you up real quick'. The sound was getting deeper, as slowly the great forms of Mannan'an and his entourage of every kind, on the incoming tide fill the Chesapeake Bay, rose out of sinister Finistere. I knew it was Mannan'an, he was at the center of them all, his blue corpus shone in the brilliant light. Not wanting to go down to the water's edge where the great massive monsters; I

had heard about, the five headed fish with lights on their faces, their great round fishy eyes, their luminescent plates of armor, bobbing up and down. With a quick back flip out over Fundin and heading for the hills! First mistake. Fundin's primitive responses had become sharpened since being with me; as he caught me mid air. I nearly bit him, stopping my incisors a hair away from the offending appendage, angrily telling him,

'It's your idea, you die if you want to, I won't be around to save you...' What could I have done anyway? He relaxed his hand and I climbed out and sat on the open window staring at him. Fundin just looked at me as though to say,

'Fine, leave, I don't care now.'

Calmly he climbed out of the truck, stepping onto the soggy carpet of sand, moving toward that Finistere. As the whales came closer, I sat still, very still, swinging on the open door of the truck, hoping I wasn't seen by that great Blubberer. When Condumour saw Fundin leave, she too stepped out to join him. I watch the nupsons go down to their deaths. Mannan'an was swimming in approaching them, neither nupson stopped, holding up their arms in salutation. Everyone got closer, closer and closer, and stopped at the water's edge in a brief moment of silence. No savage lunges at my companions, just motionless assemblages of Fishes and N'ihdogg. Moments zoomed past before Fundin walked into the ocean and Condumour followed him. A terrifying momentous occasion suddenly seemed not so terrifying; they were touching the blubberous beached Mannan'an. That didn't get me off the hook, Mannan'an would still want me to report. I will, first I needed to know what they were saying to each other. My gunshot trained ears pierced through the sloshing of the monotone waves. I could hear someone speaking in simpering tones, the state of the war, how things had gone badly all over, how everything had failed across the planet, leaving it desolate. Just as I had suspected, the call for the war of Talwadc, the intervention of Condumour and Aossin's peace initiative had all been too late! The war had begun with the song of Talwadc and was unstoppable; neither the rat charm nor Mannan'an, could have stopped extinction. Can't fault him there, my experience had been the same. Neither could he stop the N'ihdogg.

'The body called life was tampered with and wronged,

so Talwadc must prevail under the Labors of the Sun.' He bellowed.

'Now Mannan'an's table of endless feasts are empty, the fish in the oceans gone. Now let the Great Deluge of Surt rage hard like the wind that shall bring Baldr from Hel. The Hanged God, Hangagud, shall pass at Ragnarok beyond the long day. Nothing can stop the voice of Violentur once called from the deep', said Mannan'an. A bellowing chorus came forth through the water with an introduction by Condumour, 'Baldr's Song', as we all went to the opera by the sea,

'There where Baldr has built his dwelling they call it Breidablik; in that land I know there are fewest evil things.' They sung this over a few times, then sang another song, the song of Talwadc the Rager. It was from the head of Condumour that it came, she had sung it before.

Talwadc burns in a camp of rage
Against the midday Sun
Let's warlike creatures rise up from silent age
When murder shall be done.
Against the ancient spell they go
Destroying all that could not be won.

Very nice Condumour. Mannan'an thought so as well. He rolled over on his side like a beached nupson as Condumour lay close to him in the water, singing the last line of Talwadc into his ear, for no one knew the last line only Condumour and I.

'Come from thy rage Talwadc and let love instead be done.' I said it; Condumour whispered it through song. Mannan'an bellowed in cetaceous illumination, passing it on to his blubbered buddies like it was a prayer for redemption, as his eyes rolled round and brightened. The Great Bantering Blubberer saddened as he told them how their ancient song of the deep was changed, how the oceans were dead and now nothing only what they saw in the bay lived. Though the bay was full of the fishes they were all that were left and they too would pass to Ragnarok. Condumour looked up from the great body O the Blubberer when he said this, looking in my direction. I felt the pain of shame fall over me again for my acarpous titubating. We were all in it together if I liked it or not. 'Perhaps some did more than others, so the fishes of the deep must return to their world and wait for the night to be

changed into day .’

‘And the meaning of Talwadc?’ asked Condumour.

‘A mystery in ‘Glasheil,’ was all he could say, ‘and it’s dead.’

‘And the Squirrel?’ asked Mannan’an expertly as the blubberous

cacophony died down, lamenting Glashiel’s recent departure. My heart immediately started doing the day and night of Brahma real quick, day night, day night, day night.

‘He’s in the truck probably listening to everything’.

That sneak Fundin, told the fishes about me, a security breach of friendship, a traitor in disgust. He had me fooled with that entire loyalty blood bond, life for a life, expert lie rubbish! He had really brought me here to face the blubberous pugilist. Suddenly I was the sole attention of the crowd at the waters’ edge. All stared in my general direction, it was time to report.

Condumour put a thought in my head when she said.

‘He’s probably heading into the hills by now.’

The Great Blubberer filled my ears with such happy relief when he said.

‘Well he’s free till Ragnarok.’ I was overjoyed when I realized the war was finally over and they weren’t going to kill me. So I canceled my retreat.

‘Thanks are to Condumour.’ was all I could say as she called me to come to the shore line where the two worlds meet.

Reluctantly I slithered down the beach with my scant tail between my legs, walking stiff, ducking the tidal waves until I could hop the height onto Fundin.

‘Greetings O great Mannan’an, I said in my best manner, realizing I was within squashing or throttling distance, yet so far, nothing violent.

‘Why do you cover yourself so?’ Mannan’an asked me.

‘Because of the wind of Talwadc has scorched me in its midday sun and made me naked and cold.’ I

So I asked him.

‘What of Glasheil?’

Mannan’an said,

‘It is diminished and now lives in the eternal form.’

‘Could I speak or hear Glashiel one last time?’ I asked the baleful Blubereer. Mannan’an told me balefully,

‘Glashiel is gone. You shall never hear its voice again

Ratatosk, you must go it alone from here.'

'What of my dead sister Aossin?' Condumour asked.

'Did she have to die? How can I find her, where shall she be until Ragnarok?' Mannan'an was saddened at the name of the Death of pure Aossin.

'Aossin will wait in the chambers of the sea with us.'

'It's only a matter of time before the six leggers' come,' I said.

'They will all fail in the flames of Surt. Glasheil is weak. The chain link descending link by link through the song is weak. Look, see the fires of Surt rage harder and closer than before. We, have no fear of what is to come,' said Mannan'an

'Yes we know', I said, not turning round, as Mannan'an held up his flipper toward the burning land. They will fail.' Ignoring me briefly, my companions turned to see what Mannan'an had pointed to. The fires of Surt, closer than before, were covering the horizon of America. Lava of the molten rock pouring over the cliff into the hissing Finistere! I knew I didn't need a view. Even worse, the ground exploding, hurling ash and debris into the insect-laden air.

'Where were we to go, do we give up, must we die?' I asked the Blubereer. Mannan'an looked glumly at me. Guess what, Condumour had an idea. She wanted to go to an Isle somewhere across the Finistere, enthusiastically telling us, her face briefly brimming with fresh hope and zeal, pointing across the expanse of water.

'Somewhere at the center of the world there shall be peace.'

Mannan'an said he had heard of an isle where all those things were true. Condumour had forgotten the name of the place; she asked if anyone knew what it was called or where it may lie. Although Mannan'an had heard of it, he couldn't name it and consequently couldn't tell us where it was,

'Somewhere across the Finistere.' vague enough for all present. Fundin interrupted, said the isle is called 'Utopia.' Condumour said it wasn't that, 'Utopia' really meant 'no place'. I said that's where we are. Mannan'an knew the Oceans and every island of Finistere by name.

'Was it in the north Finistere?' asked Mannan'an.

'Was it?' Condumour asked aloud, thinking hard.

So Mannan'an began to list the islands of the world to us in the hope one of them would hit the right sound and jog her memory. He began with the A's,

‘Andlang, Avalon, Anglesey.’

‘No, apple land wasn't it, but close’ said Condumour.

Mannan'an went on though a veritable catalogue of strange sounding names until he came to I, he spoke the name of...

‘Iona, bless each eye that beholds it.’

‘That was it’ exclaimed Condumour, excitedly hag like.

‘The name of the blessed isle ,Iona’. She said it over and over again so as not to forget. It making her jump with happiness and call, ‘Iona, Iona, Iona’, as she waved her triple thrysus bug swatter into the air.

‘Does it exist?’ I asked Mannan'an. He told us there are two of the same name; both were real places, one green and covered in beautiful trees and the other, its sister, barren and covered in rocks with no trees.

‘What about the large plants and nuts version?’ I asked, getting moderately enthusiastic.

‘The one in the north is better than the one in the south,’ said Mannan'an.

‘Iona was a pure place for the few who would know when the time of Ragnarok was coming. It would be a good place to try or perhaps die.’ said Condumour. Fundin said.

‘It's a good idea, we need to be safe from the insects. We lack choice’. He asked Mannan'an to take us.

‘Across the ocean on the back of a whale’, I said. ‘It will probably kill us!’

‘Why not’, said Fundin, as Condumour smiled at the idea. Another river of molten rock lunged down the cliff before us, hissing like Midgard as it fell into the sea.

‘If we are going to survive, Mannan'an would see to it. Besides we could have a few days peace at least, on the open sea where the buggies do not go.’ Point taken, Mannan'an agreed, seeing the fires edging closer and the rocky red lava pouring from the land. Quickly Fundin grabbed rope from the pickup, before we climbed on board the great broad back of Mannan'an, strapped ourselves off to his barnacled bonce and left the shore of America forever. Our last view was the already heat-frenzied day shift of the insects, already in their corpse

marauding parties along the shore. Soon they would be driven from the land forever by Surt, spoiler of twigs, and then some!

'Good bye America my home, I shall never see you again.' said Fundin,

'Amen', added Condumour, gravely looking the hag she was becoming. Saddened at leaving my home, sadder because I had failed to find my One and Perfect Master alive or the middle ground of America, I waved at the lambent flames of Surt.

As we sped out of the bay, Surt raged hard across the horizon, leaving behind us America burning. As we sped away, I could only see the smoke coming over that pelagic border as the smoke-choked air cleared to let the midday sun poke through onto the still waters of the bay glaring like a sheet of burning glass. Solemnly slicing through that mysterious deep blue-black place, surrounded by a field of Blubberers, we could have played a symphony, played baseball, if there had been enough of us. 'Blubereer of dreams', I thought. Beyond them the great flotilla of the fishes Brotuladae, like the islands of the Moon Goddess, their spiny fins like ancient sails, gills with horny plates, rising and sinking through the foamy waters. Their armor, flashing luminescent colors in silver sheens, eyes bulging round and ominous. Great and scary of the deep, Finistere began to swell as winds came up and sea spray lashed us through to our gullivers. I was completely drenched by the first wave, taking on a mouthful of that brine in a hurried panicked gulp putting out my flame of enthusiasm. I didn't like the sea, especially the mouthful inside me. Why do we listen to Condumour? Asleep at night I dreamt of endless soakings, in different situations resulting in near drowning, going over huge cavernous waterfalls. Again and again. thrown into a surging, gurgling endless tide of deep water, getting caught up in whirlpools the size of Texas, as Condumour; the wind and rain-lashed hag, laughed through her pawkery and spells the rage of the Finistere upon me. I was whipped by a million winds that blew the rest of my fur away, leaving me almost naked and pink, re-emerging to begin all over as that Hag laughed and laughed at my demise, shivering and soaked, my remaining fur sticking out in spikes, my eyes bulging from my head, wishing the roaring Finistere would end, and there at my side was the bracelet of the double-headed serpent of Condumour to which I

anchor myself. All around us the luminescent lights of the fishes of the deep kept blinking on and off as they crashed into the depths of the Finistere, through the storm and the night. Before that trial by water was over, we had a hard three days, coming up over mid Finistere; to make things worse, reminding me of the sterile seed, we entered a thunderstorm, lashing us with stinging rain and the great Dhar-Dhar Dharummm of its voice, lightening cracking like the back of the world was being snapped!.

After the storm went, the sea calmed, yet the worst had not come, I awoke to find myself completely alone on the back of Mannan'an. My friends gone, gone, left to drown in the Finistere! Why hadn't Mannan'an known? Why hadn't he stopped and rescued them? No answers, no chance of getting them from Mannan'an, as he ploughed through that briny Finistere. Full of questions and concerns, I raced about on his back shouting, 'Where are my companions?' Terribly saddened, I turned against the wind and fell to sleep going on through the deep dark Finistere.

The in conclusion of all that is conclusion.

Gallad.

Dead on, Condomour the Certain was right again, even in death. Iona lay like a jewel in the sea and Mannan'an was closing fast on that blessed Isle. The sun sinking in yellow and magenta hues over the eoan. The blue waters, the labyrinth of green lush forests covered in sea mists were becoming visible with every stroke of the fin. Soon we had come to the shoreline and Mannan'an silently beached himself; allowing me a quick hop onto the shore. I turned to say 'farewell', as Mannan'an, in a single flip o' the flipper, fell in the Finistere. I scrambled hastily up the shore, escaping the incoming tidal wave from the great Blubberers' pelagic sweep. Not a word about my two drowned companions from Mannan'an, he just rose slowly out of the water and blew his water spout. That was it after all that! 'Goodbye Mannan'an,' I sadly called, seeing him go, Sad at being completely alone, he plunged back into that briny vermicular Finistere, leaving me dripping wet and naked on the shoreline where the two worlds meet. I knew I would never see him again. As I turned to walk away, rising from that pelagia to meet Mannan'an came one of the great Fishes from the valleys of the sea, and within a twitch of a whisker, that great fish swallowed Mannan'an whole! Surprised but not shocked, I had learnt well that this world can afford waste.

Sea of the dead was not for me,

Not a bit, for the mew of its waves

Its watery graves, drowns, not saves.

I turned away from that place forever, toward the ancient cliff with its Cathedral, and from inside came the sorrowful wailing of a woman. Now, only to those in death who cannot enter, it is merely an edifice, and for those who live, shelter against the wind, refuge from the world. It was where I could escape from the wind that was driving down hard upon me as I made my way to its shelter. I was almost totally shed of my pelt and my skin had taken on a pink color. I looked up toward the cliffs, there sat a mysterious figure at the entrance of the cathedral, covered in a black cape, its face enclosed within that dark shroud

blocking the doorway; it does not beckon me, it does not move, nor call out. It is dead. I move toward the figure, my seasick legs light and airy, springing me along, carrying me, shivering and cold I crouch before the dark silent form. I go to climb over it to enter the cathedral. I try to it to confirm to myself it is dead, calling out,

'Do you live'?

It rotates its torso in my direction; it lived alright, whatever it was, looking up I still could not see the face beneath that hood. I crouched in dread apprehension . Only by my name did I know who it was, for beyond all my hopes I hear my name: 'Gallad ?' It was the One and Perfect Master who called to me, his rich voice eternally questioning. Overjoyed at seeing the OPM again, filling me with such happiness I had not known for so long, I flew into his arms, calling out,

'Master!' as I landed in his lap. He greeted me affectionately, patting me on my bonce and calling me, 'His little Ratatosk.' I looked into the eyes of the Master; they were his all right, as he said,

'Gallad, you have finally come alone, as is the way. You look like you've been through a war.'

'I have, Master, the War of Talwadc. I thought I was alone and you, well, I thought you were no longer in this world.'

'I am not in this world, this world has passed away.' He sat quietly in the lotus position, in the attitude of the limpid solitude as I had always known him, unmoved by my contrition and weariness, or my scanty pelt.

'You have seen the day in everything, you have survived?' I asked him,

'I have seen more things than this Earth ever knew: the end of the animals, the end of the trees, the slaying of the Midgard Serpent, a dream upon a wall where the past and the future are one, even seeing, bursting from hell's door, all that has ever been, and will ever be, of your world. I Drank from the Spring of Lethe.'

'You have drunk of the spring; you learned to forget so that you may proceed beyond Ragnarok into the day of Brahma where night will be over. Now in this life I am your friend, in

another I shall be your enemy; in another you shall save me, in another I shall save you, in another it will never happen that we shall not be born or meet, until all the possibilities are exhausted and the stars made ready, so that the dark may be light and the movement of the stars configured in the drift of endless possibility. This time has come round, the infinite forks split and fractures, all has ended its course until you cannot remember how often you have been down this road, how often you have witnessed the same.' I told him I had.

'I no longer sit inside that circle of confusion, no longer witness the pawkery, stunts and cantrips of the ridiculous nature of returning. Here I sit in the Pavilion of Limpid Solitudes at the still point of the turning world. What about you, have you found that place I told you to search out, what was it called...?'

My voice a celestomy, I told him how I had not found that middle ground, or the body of the Dharma. I had searched for it, I could not see it due to the fact I had been busy as an errand boy for all the minions of war. I had failed.

'Now it no longer exists', he told me. 'Now it lacks purpose for you, and may never beckon others again. That is good, you have not found that thing which you could not find, instead you have reached the place and have found it gone! Yet now it seems of little significance, since you are further along than that, where the paths meet and divide infinitely; you are at the garden of infinite forking paths, at the in conclusion of conclusion. The painting on the cave wall is only one of those forks, that you would come to Iona is another.'

He laughed, bellicose and wise, I had been, confused, confuted and condemned, I had been somewhere else. I asked the Master,

'How can you know of that cave of the painting?'

'I have been there, where the fork is narrow and so many wish to pass through.'

'Will you now kill me master?'

He laughed, bellicose again,

'No Gallad, revenge serves no honor it has destroyed a world, the philosophy of Talion. Why should I kill you, the King to come'. He looked at me, taking the tiny silver and gold bracelet I clasped in my paw. He placed it on my head. It sat there awkwardly as he smiled a broad beaming smile.

'So I will tell you again that all possibilities are laid before us to use well or poorly, we cannot drink from that spring when we fail in ourselves.' I confessed my shame, telling him what a franion I had been, he only remarked,

'This tale is not yet told, nothing has happened, nothing has transpired, instead everything drifts in the possibility of the infinite, where even old stories wait eternally to be retold, over and over again, and the future is pregnant with death and laughter.'

It was then I began to feel the company of my friends swarming around me, Condumour, Aossin, Fundin, even Drozzler and Ronkers, Bloggers, Dreerts, Sinir, even the ventry expert the General and President Clinschur, all those tourbillions unknown, invisible forms moving all 'round me, in me and ever present, everywhere and yet nowhere.

I was grateful to the Master, I had seen the path and the fork infinite, I felt the invisible forms of those presences permeating every fork in the swarming sense of the infinite path. I asked,

I came no further to uttering than from the walls of the Cathedral I heard the contrite wails again ,deathly, piercing through that clear air as we both sat upright. Then I felt the presence of someone else, someone who like me was full of regret and contrition, but lacked freedom, as the sound of weeping and wailing uttered from those barren walls. I asked,

'Who dwells in misery in this great place that only gives shelter from the wind? The Master turned to look at the granite grey wall of the Cathedral.

'Oh, in there - the Queen of this once great land.' Like the nupson I was, I asked

'What is she doing, why is she alone, why did she not perish in the war of Talwadc?'

'The great Queen sits alone. She sits in a well of tears, rejected by death because she let her Church dispossess all for that elusive Grail. Though they never found it, though it was all around them, she let them destroy the land and the animals, utterly smashing it. Hers is to cry lamentations till the end of the night of Brahma. Now the lady must recline in contemplation.'

'Then we should go and tell her of this great thing of the infinite path so she may understand'. I suggested. The Master declined, he did not move in that limpid pavilion of dark thestral cloth, telling me

'Those initiated of the seasons and the stars who seek the path of the infinite fork shall know where it converges, they have seen this. Those who know and do not act must recline in their wretchedness because they did not act. They must appease their loss in sterility. This time we shall not converge with the Lady; perhaps in another path she will hear us weeping and she will come to us. In another, I will go to her. In another, she will not be here. In another, she shall not forget, she cannot rule an empty kingdom. In this fork she greets no one, so let her lament her empty kingdom.'

'My companions, Condumour and Fundin, are they also in another fork of the infinite, now they have joined the rest of the dead?'

'They crossed over to the Pavilion of Limpid Solitudes, like you'.

'And they are in the painting on the wall?' I asked.

'Only there do we live,' said the One and Perfect Master, sure that I understood.

'Like where?' I asked.

'Like death's other dream world,' said the O.P.M.

'Did you fight well, Gallad, in the battle of Talwadc? ' I honestly told him,

'I did my best, I had my moments of titubating indifference and running chicken, for I wished to save the neck the world was all too ready to indifferently wring!' The Master laughed at me again as I hid in my naked shame, I knew I had failed, I had not done well.

'Why, when I have been such a franion and acarpously foolish, should I now have any right to be the only one to have survived? To sit here with you in this Limpid Palace in my nakedness, stripped of all desires?' I asked .

'That is not for us to know, there has been a great game of preparedness in the making and the destroying of worlds, animals, people, trees, rocks, rivers, Gods and demigods, wills and wishes and all manner of things. When you come to the

crossroad in a thunderstorm and listen to the crack of thunder, fear itself tells you have been there before. In the summer afternoon as you turn off that lane into the sultry heat, the lane beckons you down it's tribulations and digressions, think, remember, I had walked this road before when I was King at midnight to claim the kingdom! Now I come again and the day is no longer sultry with stormy skies, no winds blow, nor rains fall on sterile plains. All shall be calm the next time you see the people waving to you from the silver battlements. This time future of which I speak you shall know; this time will bring you to the place that is forever unchanging, that shall be the Aeon of which you have wished.'

So ended the Master's analects on some improbable place called, 'time future'. I cannot say where it was, if it was, or how it was, for that is to say it is absolute. He added for my edification,

'Good, then you're made ready from the sterile seed that you have feared because you have conquered it. Now you no longer need to fear the thunder. It is almost over and the path, I feel, shall fork toward another painting on a wall, another death, another life.'

'Have I broken from the sterile seed, shall I escape the endless ritual of Ragnarok?' I asked humbly. As the Master laughed, he told me,

'You have crossed the bardo of death. Like the wall painting, where we all live and died, in the infinite paths that have converged, there alone and nowhere else, and your path crossed there too! You must pass again through Ragnarok through the sterility of deaths kingdom. Another path of the infinite, endlessly converging happily forward', said the Master, laughing happily.

'In the endless rebirth of Ragnarok seek not to escape, for it brings the fresh rains to wash and cleanse the sky and earth. Most, it brings the boy King, the Song of the Trees once more.'

I had brought myself to this place where neither death nor life are rulers, where only the One and Only Perfect Master and I had formed the perfect Dharma.

'That which triumphs over all things is made in the nature of all things.' He happily told me, 'Did I not say go into

the forest and find the one true form of the Dharma?' He had.

'And now you will come into that form?'

I still didn't know. The Master laughed happily, amused at my doubts, adding confidently,

'You are the Dharma.' he said wisely.

'What is to come of the Midgard Serpent?' I asked, fearful. The Master thought a while before he answered.

'The Midgard Serpent shall always be and try to destroy; without it nothing can change, nothing can be brought forward again and again, nothing can be freed from Hel, no other purpose does it serve.' He laughed again.

'Now, tell me, what is the meaning of Talwadc?'

'I have not decided if it was, death and annihilation, or greed and intolerance.' I told him I remembered all the acrostics, cantrips and banusia, Condumour's riddles, yet nothing had come clear to me regarding its meaning. The Master merely shook his head, told me not to tarry,

'Talwadc shall always be, it is the voice of Violentur, and it is always there to be called upon when this world fails like it has done. For you it has already happened, for others it is over; next time it will be different, next time perhaps not at all, perhaps you shall die Gallad, perhaps you may fight hard.' I thought of Glasheil. Forgive me, great voice.

'Perhaps you shall triumph.'

'Shall I'll be a man in that time as Condumour had said?'

The Master thought long and hard at my question, before replying,

'In the long Day you shall be that one and more, much more; you will have many witness and many enemies, then you shall know of these things. See, are you not the King? When you embark upon a great desire, think that you have already achieved it, think that you have already passed to all of the consequences and they shall seem to be nothing at all.' The Master straightened Condumour's bracelet atop my bonce, now my toppled crown, and I saw the path of infinite forks converge toward my true self. If I could have told Condumour I would, for she had told me so and shown me so. I would thank her. Talwadc was the place where all those paths converged together

to make this so; after all, if we had known it was so simple, would we have understood? Yet simplicity that costs everything, had cost too much!

'The riddle of Talwadc was more than that, something we could gain over to stop the war, Aossin said so.' I bleated at the Master as he laughed again.

'Gallad, why should it be more complicated, why cannot something be simple? Simplicity fooled you all, like death surprised the earthly powers.' The Master told me more

'Now you have no witness. Soon you shall have many and you will triumph among them, so you can be with the few.' I told him that was roughly what had happened to me, coming right down to him.

'What does Talwadc tell you?' he asked.

I said,

'It is there always ready to strike at the greed of worlds.' The Master nodded assigning that I was right, then from the murky past, Fundin the Buckler, corpse pale from the chambers of the sea, came back to tell us the meaning of Talwadc.

'The Animals and the land are one and shall always be so.'

'Who does Glasheil serve?' asked the Master.

Condumour the Certain corpse came through that sea mist in death pale loveliness, no longer the Hag of Iron Wood, her golden tresses falling around her shoulders once more. Her youthful merciful beauty intensified her love in that pavilion as she came surrounded by the blossoms of May,

'Glasheil serves the animals in the well of infinite time; it is the guardian of that well in the balance of life; it is in the releasing of that life back into the infinite forking paths of Spirit, and its name is Love.' The Master gave a gecko nod of approval, 'cos. Condumour was right again.

'Where are the people and its Queen?'

Then Aossin too came through that mist to tell us,

'The people and the animals are together in the Spirit, and they are one in the land. The song of the seasons to be sung and the song is Truth, the only song, sacred in life springing from the forking path and no one can bemoan this truth. Till

then this queen... 'she pointed to the cathedral, 'this queen must bewail her lost kingdom and atone for the animals and the land. She is tied to those walls with the rags of her dead children.' Then all three of those surely missed friends told me sweetly, softly,

'When the N'ihdogg prevails then 'The Angry Land Where The Animals Don't Care', shall come for vengeance. The fork fractures, freeing Midgard, and all must go to Ragnarok, as is now, to wait till until the darkness of the light, the struggle to be born in the stars, this is the way, the way of time future rising from time past.'

The Master smiled beneficently at me, saying,

'There you are Gallad, got all that?

Overjoyed: to see that my friends had returned and found the answer to my questions. I went to rise to greet them, but I was stuck fast in that Limpid Pavilion of Solitudes, where the Master sat supreme. I beheld this vision not from the dead, but from the infinite path of those swarming feelings as I felt all those billions of life forms who had come and gone, greet me again. Arriving in this place, touching all of those who await to converge with me in the paths of infinite time future, were calling me from those silver battlements. So my friends converged into one, vanishing into the sea.

'Goodbye Condumour, I am sorry I didn't listen to your love. Goodbye Aossin, thank you for your purity and your supreme sacrifice. Goodbye Fundin the Buckler, thank you for slaying at Midgards' rise. Shall you be there to wait for me when I am ready to go Master?'

'No, you shall be alone as is the way. It's time to go now that you have said goodbye to all your pals, little one. Goodbye again my little Ratatosk, our paths shall converge again into the infinite. Now everything is read, adieu...'

I lacked time to say goodbye to the One and perfect Master, as he fell into a mere fold of black cloth that blew away into the blore, empty of its owner as it passed over that cliff by the sea, his laughter crying happily into those far-distant stars and behind me. The voice of the wind blew hard the lesson of time future,

'Do not forget this story of the father, it is the story of

the dispossessed, you are not to follow him when you are once free to wander the road of the infinite path of all possibilities to come, come, again and again and again...'

Everything drifted deathly pale around that place, sea mist came covering me, everything fell away into oblivion, sky, beach, cliffs, that cathedral and its Queen, all crumbled to dust. Even the Sun and Moon went down and the wind slowed, finally ceased. No comets, no wrecked stars, no cinder ash of smoldering burnt out cinder-suns filled that eternal void as I drifted endlessly on a sea of reckless dreams. Only the echoing of the Master's voice, 'Now everything has been made ready', reboantly filling the space. I had not flinched or reached for him, nor did I turn to see where the voice had gone as I fell into the darkness of the void. It was my time to enter Ragnarok, so I must pass away to the supreme lesson and wait 'till the boy King must come to the day of Brahma. I readied for that dismal web of thestral darkness to consume me, I did not flinch or struggle to escape my path. I was not alone, I still felt the swarming of those invisible presences. I heard death's drowning confused emptiness, I saw myself dim to a fifteen watt consciousness. I would succumb, yet even now, coming from that emptiness all-round me, the silence was broken by a strange cacophonic roar, Kakkkaaaa, kkkaaa, kkkaaa!.

'Master...' I called out, there was only that dread noise below me before I stumbled back into the world and found myself in my ragged dray at Blazing Norton where I had hibernated all winter long. I awoken from the infinite path. Outside my walls of twig and leaf, the zinzulating kaaa, kaaaaaaa, kaaaaaa, shaking everything about me, to look out through my peer - hole. The tree upon which I dwell was beginning to fall to the earth as N'ihdoggs were busy below with spoiler of twigs and bodies of dead and dying trees. N'ihdoggs are upon me, thunder and destruction ripping up Blazing Norton. I thought:

'Again, another place of the dispossessed.' I remembered the voice of the wind in my dream of winter's other kingdom as I look along the horizon to see Surt's' fires burning up the forest and N'ihdoggs everywhere preparing to war against me, like that great army I had seen in the alphabet. The battle of

Talwadc had not come, it still waits in the infinite path. As it did through death's long dream of winter's cold kingdom. I had no time as I saw my tree home swing to earth, the noise intensifying, the shouting of the N'ihdoggs, below me, the cracking of spoiler of twigs. Blazing Norton was burning down, burning down, trees falling, falling, unreal, unimaginable. This time the N'ihdoggs were real and they were upon my world like the Leviners going into the belly of a corpse. In the depths of the forest I was not alone amid the thousands of other animals escaping the dispossessors as all wild and wonder joined me in that cold bleak morning, we ran to where the stomping grounds were not violated. As I sprang through the boughs of Blazing Norton, one thought of the One and Perfect Master's question persisted: 'Did you fight well in the Battle of Talwadc, Gallad?' I knew the answer,

'No Master, Talwadc, when you come in time future I shall be ready.'

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