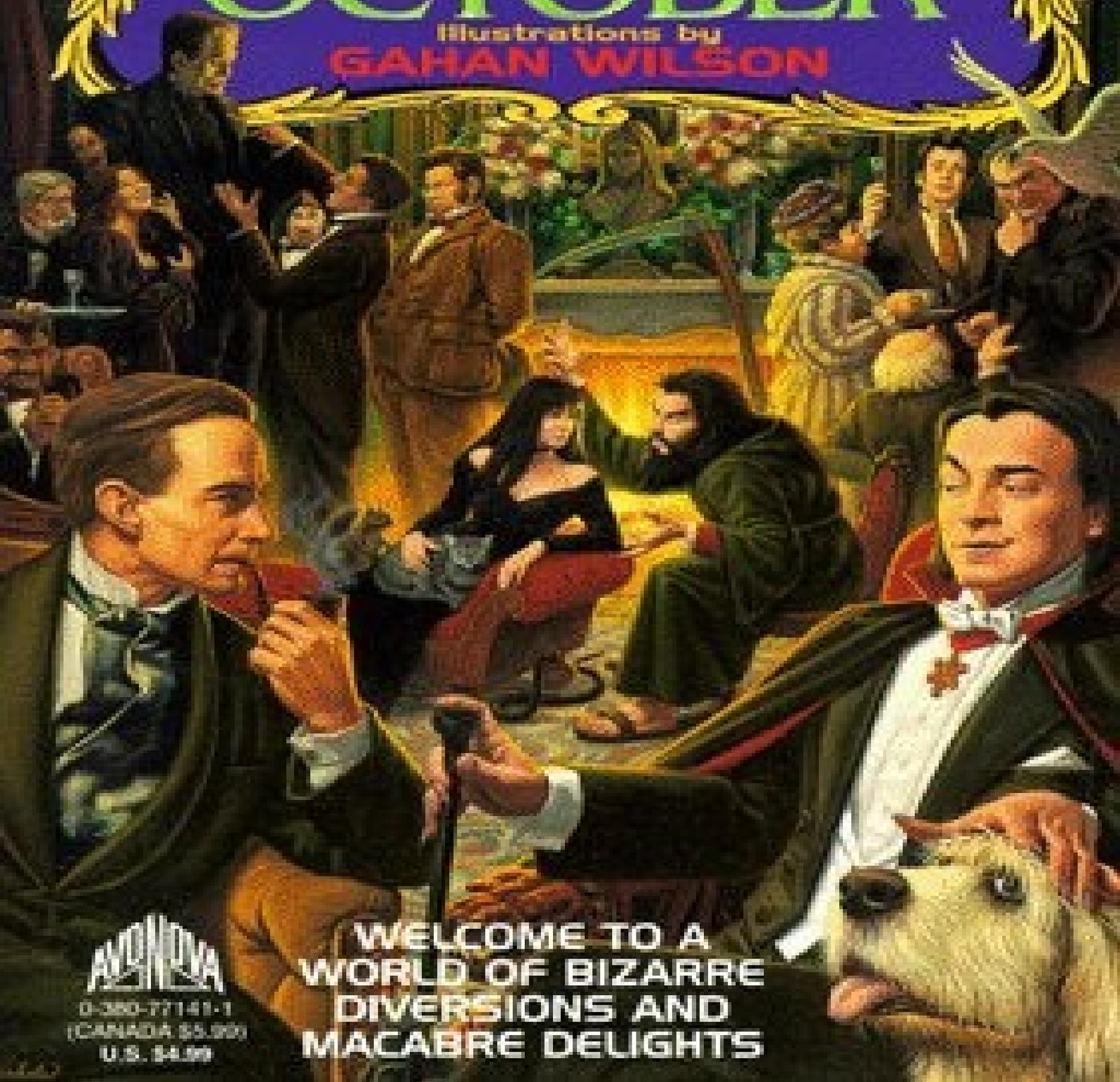


"BEWITCHING... A SUPERNATURAL ROMP"
Philadelphia News

Hugo and Nebula Award-winner
ROGER ZELAZNY

A Night In The
**LONESOME
OCTOBER**

Illustrations by
GAHAN WILSON



WELCOME TO A
WORLD OF BIZARRE
DIVERSIONS AND
MACABRE DELIGHTS



1-800-771-41-1
(CANADA \$5.99)
U.S. \$4.99

**A Night in the
Lonesome October**

**by Roger Zelazny
(1993)**

**Illustrations by
Gahan Wilson**

Prologue



I am a watchdog. My name is Snuff. I live with my master Jack outside of London now. I like Soho very much at night with its smelly fogs and dark streets. It is silent then and we go for long walks. Jack is under a curse from long ago and must do much of his work at night to keep worse things from happening. I keep watch while he is about it. If someone comes, I howl.

We are the keepers of several curses and our work is very important. I have to keep watch on the Thing in the Circle, the Thing in the Wardrobe, and the Thing in the Steamer Trunk—not to mention the Things in the Mirror. When they try to get out I raise particular hell with them. They are afraid of me. I do not know what I would do if they all tried to get out at the same time. It is good exercise, though, and I snarl a lot.

I fetch things for Jack on occasion—his wand, his big knife with the old writing on the sides. I always know just when he needs them because it is my job to watch and to know. I like being a watchdog better than what I was before he summoned me and gave me this job.

So we walk, Jack and I, and other dogs are often afraid of me. Sometimes I like to talk and compare notes on watchdogging and masters, but I do tend to intimidate them.

One night when we were in a graveyard recently an old watchdog came by, though, and we talked for a time.

“Hi. I’m a watchdog.”

“Me, too.”

“I’ve been watching you.”

“And I’ve been watching you.”

“Why is your person digging a big hole?”

“There are some things down there that he needs.”

“Oh. I don’t think he’s supposed to be doing that.”

“May I see your teeth?”

“Yes. Here. May I see yours?”

“Of course.”

“Perhaps it’s all right. Do you think you might leave a large bone somewhere nearby?”

“I believe that could be arranged.”

“Are you the ones who were by here last month?”

“No, that was the competition. We were shopping elsewhere.”

“They didn’t have a watchdog.”

“Bad planning. What did you do?”

“Barked a lot. They got nervous and left.”

“Good. Then we’re still probably ahead.”

“Been with your person long?”

“Ages. How long’ve you been a graveyard dog?”

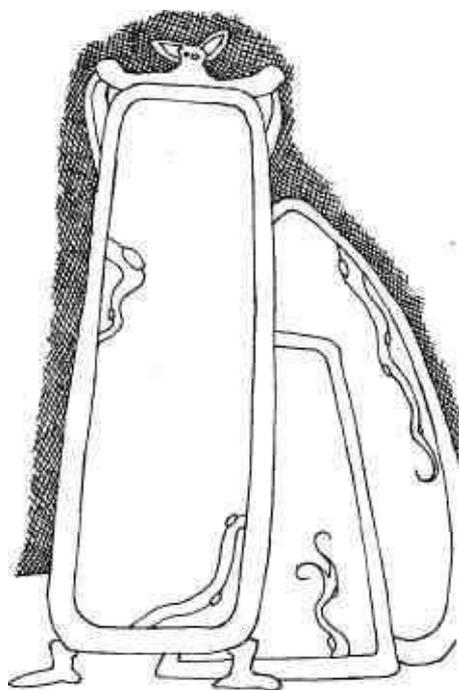
“All my life.”

“Like it?”

“It’s a living,” he said.

Jack needed lots of ingredients for his work, as there was a big bit of business due soon. Perhaps it were best to take it day by day.

October 1



Made the circuits. The Thing in the Circle changed shapes, finally making itself look like a lady dog of attractive person and very friendly disposition. But I was not fooled into breaking the Circle. It didn't have the smell part down yet.

"Nice try," I told it.

"You'll get yours, mutt," it said.

I walked past the various mirrors. The Things locked in them gibbered and writhed. I showed them my teeth and they writhed away.

The Thing in the Steamer Trunk pounded on the sides and hissed and sputtered when it became aware of my sniffing about. I snarled. It hissed again. I growled. It shut up.

I made my way to the attic then and checked out the Thing in the Wardrobe. It was scratching on the sides when I entered but grew still as I approached.

"How's everything inside?" I asked.

"Be a lot better if someone could be persuaded to turn the key with his paws."

"Better for you maybe."

"I could find you lots of great bones—big ones, fresh, juicy, lots of meat on them."

"I just ate, thanks."

"What *do* you want?"

“Nothing special just now.”

“Well, I want out. Figure what it’s worth to you and let’s talk.”

“You’ll get your chance, by and by.”

“I don’t like waiting.”

“Tough.”

“Up yours, hound.”

“Tsk, tsk,” I replied, and I went away when it began using more abusive language.

I went back downstairs, then passed through the library, smelling its musty volumes and incense, spices, herbs, and other interesting matters, on my way to the parlor, whence I stared out the window at the day. Watching, of course. That is my job.

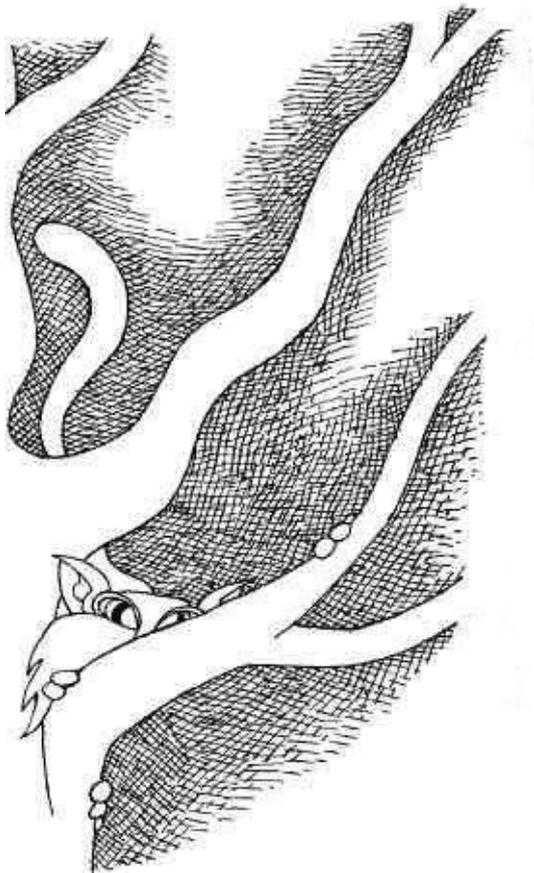
October 2

We took a walk last night, acquiring mandrake root in a field far from here at the place of a killing by somebody else. The master wrapped it in silk and took it to his work space direct. I could hear him engage in good-natured banter with the Thing in the Circle. Jack has a long list of ingredients, and things must be done properly on schedule.

The cat Graymalk came slinking about, pussyfoot, peering in our windows. Ordinarily, I have little against cats. I can take them or leave them, I mean. But Graymalk belongs to Crazy Jill who lives over the hill, in towards town, and Graymalk was spying for her mistress, of course. I growled to let her know she had been spotted.

“About your watching early, faithful Snuff,” she hissed.

“About your spying early,” I responded, “Gray.”



“We have our tasks.”

“We do.”

“And so it has begun.”

“It has.”

“Goes it well?”

“So far. And you?”

“The same. I suppose it is easiest simply to ask this way, for now.”

“. . . But cats are sneaky,” I added.

She tossed her head, raised a paw and studied it.

“There are certain pleasures to be had in lurking.”

“For cats,” I said.

“. . . And certain knowledges gained.”

“Such as . . . ?”

“I am not the first come calling here today. My predecessor left traces. Are you aware of this, faithful watcher?”

“No,” I replied. “Who was it?”

“The owl, Nightwind, consort of Morris and MacCab. I saw him flee at dawn, found a feather out back. The feather is tainted with mummy dust, to do you ill.”

“Why do you tell me this?”

“Perhaps because I am a cat and it amuses me to be arbitrary and do you a good turn. I shall take the feather away with me and leave it at their window, concealed amid shrubs.”

“I prowled last night after my walk,” I said. “I was near your house beyond the hill. I saw Quicklime, the black snake who lives in the belly of the mad monk, Rastov. He rubbed against your doorpost, shedding scales.”

“Ah! And why do you tell me this?”

“I pay my debts.”

“There should not be debts between our folk.”

“This is between us.”

“You are a strange hound, Snuff.”

“You are a strange cat, Graymalk.”

“As it should be, I daresay.”

And she was gone amid shadows. As it should be.

October 3

We walked again last night, and the master was hunting. He had donned his cloak and said to me, “Snuff, fetch!” And from the way he said it, I knew that it was the blade he required. I took it to him and we went out. Our luck was varied. That is, he obtained the ingredients he was after, but only with considerable turmoil and an inordinate passage of time. We were discovered near the end. I gave warning, and we had to flee. It was a long chase, till finally I hung back and nipped the other on the leg. We made good our escape, with the ingredients. As he was washing up later, Jack told me I was an excellent watchdog. I was very proud.

Later, he let me out to prowl. I checked Rastov’s place, which was dark. Out and about business, I supposed. Lying behind a bush near Crazy Jill’s, I could hear her chuckling within and talking to Graymalk.

They had already been out. The broom beside the rear entrance was still warm.

I was especially careful at Morris and MacCab’s. Nightwind can be very potent after dark and could be anywhere.



I heard a small tittering from the nearly bare branches of a cherry tree. I sniffed the air, but Nightwind’s gritty signature was not on it. There was something else, though.

The small laughter—so high-pitched a human might not hear it—came again.

“Who’s there?” I asked.

A cluster of leaves unrolled itself from the tree and darted down, stitching the air at blinding speeds about my head.

“Another who watches,” came its tiny voice.

“The neighborhood is getting crowded,” I said. “You may call me Snuff. What may I call you?”

“Needle,” it replied. “Whom do you serve?”

“Jack,” I answered. “And yourself?”

“The Count,” it said.

“Do you know whether Morris and MacCab found their ingredients?”

“Yes,” it replied. “Do you know whether the crazy woman found hers?”

“I’m pretty sure she did.”

“So she is abreast of us. Still, it is early. . . .”

“When did the Count join the Game?”

“Two nights ago,” it said.

“How many players are there?”

“I don’t know,” it answered. Then it soared high and was gone.

Life was suddenly even more complicated, and I’d no way of knowing whether they were openers or closers.

As I made my way back I felt that I was being watched. But whoever it was, was very, very good. I could not spot him, so I took a long, long way about. He left me later to follow another. I hurried home to report.

October 4

Rainy day. Windy, too. I made my rounds.

“Up yours, cur.”

“Same to you.”

“Hi, things.”

Slither, slither.

“How’s about letting me out?”

“Nope.”

“My day will come.”

“It’s not today.”

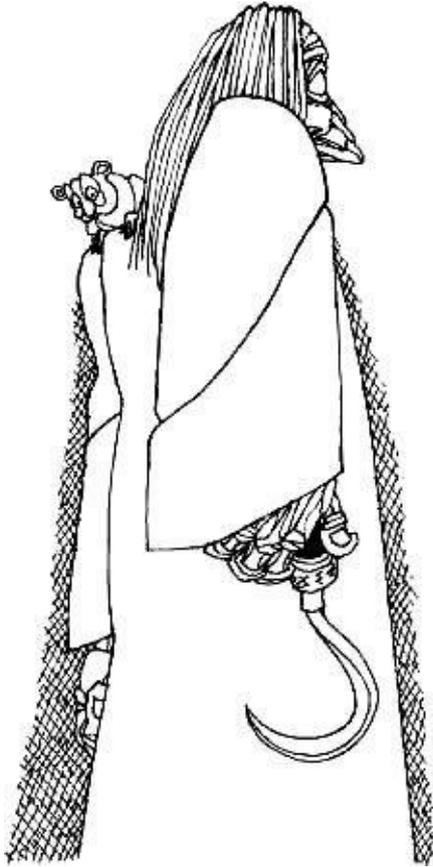
The usual. Everything seemed in order.

“How’s about a collie? You like redheads?”

“You still haven’t got it right. S’long.”

“Son of a bitch!”

I checked all the windows and doors from the inside, then let myself out the back through my private hatch, master Jack sleeping or resting in his darkened room. I checked everything again from the outside. I could discover no surprises of the sort I had discussed with Graymalk the other day. But I did find something else: There was a single paw-print, larger than my own, in the shelter of a tree to the side of the house. The accompanying scent and any adjacent prints had been washed away by the rain. I circled far afield, seeking more evidence of the intruder, but there was nothing else. The old man who lives up the road was in his yard, harvesting mistletoe from a tree, using a small, shining sickle. A squirrel sat upon his shoulder. This was a new development.



I addressed the squirrel through a hedge:

“Are you in the Game?”

It scurried to the man’s nearer shoulder and peered.

“Who asks?” it chattered.

“Call me Snuff,” I answered.

“Call me Cheeter,” it replied. “Yes, I suppose we are. Last minute thing—rush, rush.”

“Opener or closer?”

“Impolite! Impolite to ask! You know that!”

“Just thought I’d try. You could be novices.”

“Not new enough to be giving anything away. Leave it at that.”

“I will.”

“Stay. Is there a black snake in it?”

“You ask me to give something away. But yes, there is: Quicklime. Beware. His master is mad.”

“Aren’t they all?”

We chuckled and I faded away.

That evening we went out again. We crossed the bridge and walked for a long, long while. The dour detective and his rotund companion were about, the latter limping from his adventure of the other night. We passed them twice in the fog. But it was the wand Jack bore this night, to stand at the city’s center with it and trap a certain beam of starlight in a crystal vial while the clocks chimed twelve. Immediately, the liquid in the container began to glow with a reddish light; and somewhere in the distance a howling rose up. No one I knew. I wasn’t even sure it was a dog. It said a

single word in the language of my kind, a long, drawn-out “Lost!” My hackles rose at the sound of it.

“Why are you growling, friend?” Jack asked.

I shook my head. I was not sure.

October 5

I breakfasted in the dark and made my rounds of the house. Everything was in good order. The master was asleep so I let myself out and prowled the vicinity. The day would not begin for some time yet.

I walked beyond the hill, to Crazy Jill's place. The house was dark and quiet. Then I turned to head for Rastov's ramshackle abode. I caught a scent as I did, and I sought its source. A small form lay unmoving atop the garden wall.

"Graymalk," I said. "Sleeping?"

"Never wholly," came the reply. "Catnappery is useful. What are you after, Snuff?"

"Checking an idea I had. It doesn't really involve you or your lady—directly. I'll be walking to Rastov's place now."

Suddenly, she was gone from the wall. A moment later she was near. I glimpsed a glint of yellow light from her eyes.

"I'll walk with you, if it's not secret work."

"Come, then."

We walked, and after a time I asked, "Everything quiet?"

"At our place, yes," she replied. "But I heard there was a killing in town earlier. Your work?"

"No. We were in town, but it was a different sort of work we were about. Where did you hear of it?"

"Nightwind was by. We talked a little. He'd been across the river into town. A man was torn apart, as by a particularly vicious dog. I thought of you."

"Not me, not me," I said.

"There must be more of these, of course, as the others seek their ingredients. This will make the people wary, the streets better patrolled between now and the big event."

"I suppose so. Pity."

We reached Rastov's place. A small light burned within.

"He works late."

"Or very early."

"Yes."

In my mind, I traced a path back to my own home. Then I turned and headed across fields to the old farmhouse where Morris and MacCab resided. Graymalk continued with me. A piece of the moon began to rise. Clouds slid quickly across the sky, their bellies tickled by the light. Graymalk's eyes flashed.

When we reached the place I stood among long grasses. There were lights within.

"More work," she said.

"Who?" came Nightwind's voice from atop the barn.

"Shall we answer?"

"Why not?" I said.



She offered her name. I growled my own. Nightwind departed his perch to circle us, finally alighting nearby.

“You know each other,” he remarked.

“We are acquainted.”

“What do you want here?”

“I wanted to ask you about that killing in town,” I said. “You saw it?”

“Only after it had occurred and been discovered.”

“So you did not see which of us was about it?”

“No. If indeed it were one of us.”

“How many of us are there, Nightwind? Can you tell me that?”

“I don’t know that such knowledge should be dispensed. It may come under my prohibitions.”

“A trade then? We list the ones we know. If there is one among them you do not know, you furnish us with another we do not know—if you can.”

He swiveled his head around backwards to think, then said, “That sounds fair. It would save us all time. Very well. You know of my masters, and I know both of yours. That’s four.”

“Then there is Rastov, with Quicklime,” Graymalk offered. “Five.”

“I know of them,” he responded.

“The old man who lives up the road from me seems of druidical persuasion,” I said. “I saw him harvesting mistletoe the old way, and he has a friend—a squirrel called Cheeter.”

“Oh?” Nightwind remarked. “I was unaware of this.”

“The man’s name is Owen,” Graymalk stated. “I’ve been watching them. And that’s six.”

Nightwind said, “For three nights now a small, hunched man has been raiding graveyards. I saw him on my patrols. Two nights back I followed him by the full of the moon. He bore his gleanings to a large farmhouse to the south of here—a place with many lightning rods, above which a perpetual storm rages. Then he delivered them to a tall, straight man he addressed as the ‘Good Doctor.’ It may be they are seven, or perhaps eight.”

“Would you show us this place?” I asked.

“Follow me.”

We did, and after a long trek we came to the farmhouse. There were lights in its basement but the windows were curtained and we could not see what the Good Doctor was about. There were many odors of death in the air, however.

“Thank you, Nightwind,” I said. “Have you any others?”

“No. Have you?”

“No.”

“Then I would say that we are even.”

He took wing and hurried off through the night.

As I crouched sniffing near a window I traced trails from Morris and MacCab’s place to this one, from this one to Crazy Jill’s, to my own, to Owen’s, from Owen’s to the others’ It was hard keeping all of the trails in mind at once.

I leaped at the bright flash and the crackling sound from behind the window. The smell of ozone reached me moments later, and the sound of wild laughter.

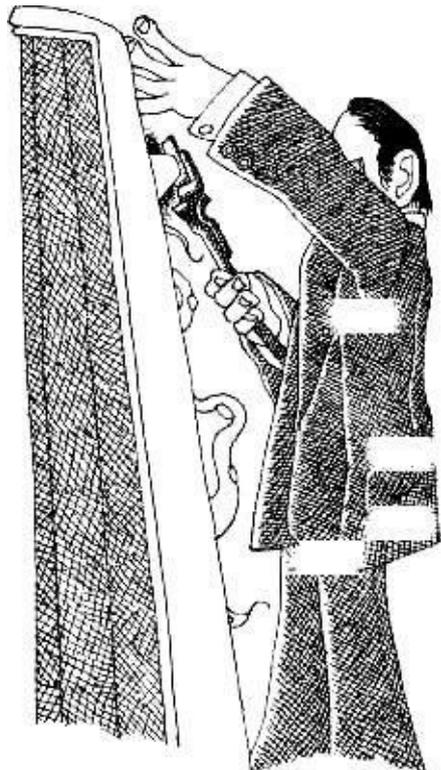
“Yes, this place will bear watching,” Graymalk observed, from her sudden perch high in a nearby tree. “Shall we go now?”

“Yes.”

We headed back and I left her at Jill’s—dropping the adjective out of politeness in her presence—and I left her to catnappery on her wall. When I returned home I found another paw-print.

October 6

Excitement. I heard the mirror crack this morning, and I ran and raised holy hell before it, keeping the slitherers inside. Jack heard the fuss and fetched his mundane wand and transferred them all to another mirror, just like the Yellow Emperor. This one was much smaller, which may teach them a lesson, but probably not. We're not sure how they did it. Continued pressure on some flaw, most likely. Good thing they're afraid of me.



Jack retired and I went outside. The sun was shining through gray and white clouds and only the crisp scents of autumn rode the breezes. I had been drawing lines in my head during the night. What I'd tried to do would have been much easier for Nightwind, Needle, or even Cheeter. It is hard for an earthbound creature to visualize the terrain in the manner I'd attempted. But I'd drawn lines from each of our houses to each of the others. The result was an elaborate diagram with an outer boundary and intersecting rays within. And once I have such a figure I can do things with it that the others cannot. It was necessarily incomplete because I did not know the whereabouts of the Count—or of any other players who might not yet have come to my attention.

Nevertheless, it was enough to play around with, was sufficient for seeking some approximation.

I began walking.

My way took me through yard and field to a lane which I followed for a time. When I reached what I deemed to be the proper spot I halted. There were several large old trees off to my left, another across the way to the right. The spot which I had so carefully derived by means of my mental mapmaking was situated, unfortunately, in

the middle of the road. And it hadn't even the good grace to be a crossroad.

The nearest house was to my right and back several hundred yards along the way I had come. It was inhabited, I knew, by an elderly couple who fed birds, worked in their garden, and argued every Saturday night when the old man staggered in from the pub. In my earlier investigations of the area I had seen no signs that they might be involved in the Game.

I decided to sniff about, anyway. As I sought along the roadsides I heard a familiar voice:

"Snuff!"

"Nightwind! Where are you?"

"Overhead. There's a hollow place in this tree. Stayed out too long. Came in here to get away from the light. We think a bit alike, don't we?"

"Looks like we draw the same lines."

"This can't be the place, though."

"No. It's the center of the pattern we have, but it's not a likely spot."

"Therefore the pattern is incomplete. But we knew that. We don't know where the Count is."

"If he's the only other. It must take place at the center of the pattern we form."

"Yes. What should we do?"

"Could you follow Needle back to the Count's place?"

"Bats are damnably erratic."

"I couldn't do it. And I don't think Graymalk could."

"No. Never trust a cat, anyway. All they're good for is stringing tennis racquets."

"Will you try following Needle?"

"First I have to find the little bastard. But yes, I'll watch for him tonight."

"Let me know what you find?"

"I'll think about it."

"It might be to your advantage, if you ever need an errand run by day."

"That's true. All right. Why do the players always form themselves into a pattern around the center of things, anyway?"

"Beats me," I said.

I returned home, growling at the Things in the Mirror—propped in the front hallway now—as I passed, just to let them know I was on the job. The Thing in the Steamer Trunk was still. I told the Thing in the Wardrobe to shut up. Its pounding was shaking the place. I had to bark several times to get it to be quiet.

Down in the cellar the Thing in the Circle had become a Pekingese.

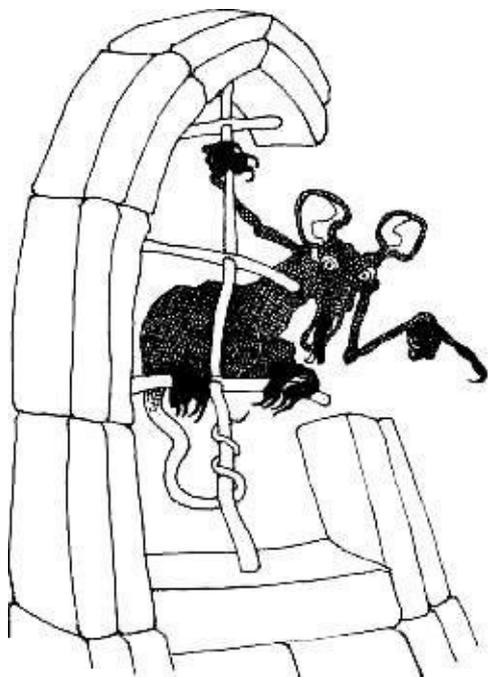
"You like little ladies?" it asked. "Come and get it, big fella."

It still smelled of Thing rather than dog.

"You're not really very bright," I said.

The Peke gave me the paw as I departed, and it's hard to turn your leg that way.

October 7



We were out again last night in pursuit of more ingredients for the Great Work. It was very foggy, and there were many patrolmen about. This did not stop us, but it made things more difficult. The master's blade flashed, the woman screamed, and there was a rending of garments. We passed the Great Detective in our flight, and I inadvertently tripped his companion, whose limp had lessened his ability to avoid onrushing canines.

As we crossed the bridge Jack unrolled the strip of cloth and regarded it.

"Very good. It is green," he remarked.

Why his list of materials required the edge of a green cloak worn by a red-haired lady on this date at midnight and removed while still upon her person, I am uncertain. Magical rotas sometimes strike me as instructions for lunatic scavenger hunts. Nonetheless, Jack was happy so I was, too.

Much later, after an unsuccessful search for Nightwind, I returned home and was drowsing in the parlor when I heard a small scratching sound from the rear of the house. It did not come again. So I went into my stalking mode and investigated.

The kitchen was empty, the pantry was bare. I circulated.

At the entrance to the front hall I caught the scent. I halted, watched, listened. I became aware of a slight movement—low, and to my right—ahead.

It sat before the mirror watching the slitherers. I suspended breathing and edged forward. When I was near enough to catch it with a short lunge I said, "I trust you are

finding your last moments amusing.”

It leaped and I was upon it, catching it at the base of the neck—a large, black rat.

“Wait! I can explain!” it said. “Snuff! You’re Snuff! I came to see you!”

I waited, neither tightening nor loosening my hold. A toss of my head would snap its spine.

“Needle told me of you,” it went on. “Cheeter told me where to find you.”

I couldn’t say anything, my mouth being occupied. So I continued to wait.

“Cheeter said you seemed reasonable, and I wanted to talk. Nobody was around outside, so I let myself in through the little door in the back. Could you put me down, please?”

I carried the rat to a corner, deposited him there, seating myself directly before him.

“So you are in the Game,” I said.

“Yes.”

“Then you must know that entering another player’s home without invitation lays you open to immediate reprisal.”

“Yes, but it was the only way I knew to get in touch with you.”

“What is it you wanted to tell me?”

“I know Quicklime, and Quicklime knows Nightwind. . . .”

“Yes?”

“Quicklime says that Nightwind told him you know a lot about who the players are and what they’re about. And that you sometimes trade information. I’d like to trade some.”

“Why didn’t you trade directly with Nightwind?”

“I’ve never met Nightwind. Owls scare me. Besides, I heard he’s pretty closebeaked. Keeps everything close to his feathers, and keeps his pinions to himself.”

He chuckled at that. I did not.

“If you just wanted to talk, why were you snooping around?” I asked.

“I couldn’t help being curious when I saw the things in the mirror.”

“Is this the first time you’ve been by?”

“Yes!”

“Who’re you with?”

“The Good Doctor.”

“I’ve a friend named Graymalk who happens to be a cat. She comes around here a lot. If I think you’re planning to make mischief I’m going to let her start coming in regularly.”

“I’m not looking for trouble, damn it! Let’s keep the cat out of this!”

“Okay. What are you trading and what do you want?”

“I want you to tell me everybody you know who’s in the Game, and where they live.”

“What do I get?”

“I know where the Count takes his rest.”

“Nightwind was going to seek that information.”

“He’s not good enough to follow Needle through the woods. Owls can’t zigzag the way bats can.”

“You may be right. You will take me to the place?”