

ART SOUL AND THE MULTIVERSE

When he located the new grave, approximately where he'd guessed that it would be, he was surprised to find a black granite headstone already set in place, instead of a temporary marker painted with the. The second and third rooms proved to be deserted, as well, and as muffled as the cushioned spaces of a funeral home, but an office was tucked discreetly at the back of the final chamber. As Junior crossed the third room, apparently monitored by closed-circuit security cameras, a man glided out of the office to greet him. "Did he say I'd met him?" Jacob asked, squinting past Edom toward the bright sunlight at the open door. In a stolen black Dodge Charger 440 Magnum, Junior Cain shot out of Spruce Hills on as straight a trajectory to Eugene as the winding roads of southern Oregon would allow, staying off Interstate 5, where the policing was more aggressive. OF THE SEVEN NEWBORNS, none was fussing, too fresh to the world to realize how much was here to fear. "Peach, raisin, walnut pies," Agnes said, "with regular bottom crust and a chocolate-crackle top crust." Wednesday morning, January 10, he wired one and a half million dollars from the Gammoner account to Pinchbeck in Switzerland. Then he closed out the account in the Grand Cayman bank. This wasn't a new sensation. He had experienced it before. In the night just passed, when he awakened from an unremembered dream and saw the bright quarter dancing across Vanadium's knuckles. Junior was pleasantly surprised by his flexibility and by his audacity. He was, indeed, a new man, a daring adventurer, and by the day he grew more formidable. "Because He didn't want you to be a dog." She finished tying a bow in the drawstrings. "There. You look just like an M&M." a time, from the carafe on the nightstand. She spooned the ice into Junior's mouth not with the businesslike. Though they had expected the cause of the explosion, both Paul and Harrison were halted by shock at the sight of all this ruination. They had expected to find the car jammed into the wall of the house, never this far inside. The speed required to penetrate this distance into the structure beggared Paul's skills of calculation and made him wonder if even recklessness and alcohol were sufficient to produce, such a catastrophe. Aside from purchasing the T S. Eliot book, which he hadn't found time to read, Junior was only peripherally aware of current events, because they were, after all, current, while he tried always to focus on the future. The news of the day was but a faint background music to him, like a song on a radio in another apartment. Her brothers' solemnity irritated Agnes. They appeared to be taking this reading seriously, as though it were far more than just a little after-dinner entertainment. The two men detached and rolled up the pleated green skirt that hung from the rectangular frame of the graveyard winch on which the casket was suspended. Green, rather than black, because Naomi loved nature: Junior had been thoughtful about the details of the service. "No, the more I think about it, the more it feels like this is just kids. Some kids goofing around, that's all. I- guess Vanadium got deeper under my skin than I realized, so when this came up, I couldn't think straight about it." Junior glimpsed Vanadium first in profile-and then, as the cop rode down and away, only the back of his head. He hadn't seen this man in almost three years, yet he was instantly certain that this was no coincidental look-alike. Here went the filthy-scabby-monkey spirit itself. A table candle glowed in an amber glass. To Nolly, in this glimmering light, Kathleen's face was more radiant than the flame. He briefly considered playing dumb, but he knew she was too smart for that. "Gunsmoke, you mean. Listen, I know you'll do whatever's necessary to keep Angel safe, because you love her so much. Love will give. From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases. In Junior's estimation, this was not the way that a normal person lived. This was the home of a deranged loner, a dangerously obsessive man. "You're better at concentrative meditation without seed than anyone I've ever known, better than me. That's why you, especially, should never undertake a long session unsupervised," Chicane scolded. "At the very least, the very least, you should use your electronic meditation timer. I don't see it here, do I?" As it turned out, Seraphim was a virgin. This thrilled Junior. He was inflamed also by the thought of ravishing her in her parents' house ... an by the kinky fact that their house was a parsonage. Leaning across the front seat, he lowered the passenger's window six inches. Then he lowered the driver's-side window an equal distance. of fists, hard blows, and his father's heavy breathing as he deals out the punishment. Edom himself lies face down in. "When the Iroquois Theater in Chicago burned on December 30, 1903" he said aloud, testing his memory, "during a matinee of Mr Blue Beard, six hundred two people perished, mostly women and children." Only now, as the tide of adrenaline began to ebb, Paul wondered who could possibly have wanted to kill a man of peace and God, a man as good as Harrison White. Calcimine moonlight cast an arctic illusion over the boneyard. The grass was as eerily silver as snow at night, and gravestones tilted like pressure ridges of ice in a fractured wasteland. This seemed to be a statement of great mystery and beauty, and Agnes was still contemplating it when the last of the ice melted on her tongue. Instead of more ice, sleep was spooned into her, as dark and rich as baker's chocolate. Speaking of bosoms, everywhere in the loft were braless girls in sweaters and miniskirts, braless girls in T-shirts and miniskirts, braless girls in silk-lined rawhide vests and jeans, braless girls in tie-dyed sash tops, with bared midriffs, and calypso pants. Lots of guys moved through the crowd, too, but Junior barely noticed them. For half an hour he studied Barty's eyes with various devices and instruments. Thereafter, he arranged an immediate appointment with an oncologist, as Joshua Nunn had predicted. One apartment to the right, one to the left. Junior went to the right, to Apartment 1, where he'd seen the lights come on behind the curtained windows. Perhaps this particular worry was not ordinary maternal concern. If a sixth sense is at work in all of us, then perhaps subconsciously Apes was aware of the tragedy to come: the tumors, the surgery, the blindness. Had Junior been chest-deep in wet concrete, he would have been more mobile than he was now. He had no feeling in his legs. As Barty stepped across the threshold into the upstairs hall, Miss Pixie Lee said, "You're sweet, Barty. Matching his mother's whisper, taking obvious delight in their conspiracy, he said, "Our own secret society." His words

echoed back to her from July: My cold's just here, not every place I am..She leaned forward in her seat, and toward him, so he could see her more directly, and when she put one trembling hand against his cheek, his head dropped forward on neck muscles as limp as rags, his chin.If Vanadium was watching, however, he would interpret the pitch of the coin to mean that his unconventional strategy was working, that Junior's nerves were frayed to the breaking point. With an adversary as indefatigable as this cuckoo cop, you dared never show weakness..The musician had no talent for deception. His hopping-hen eyes pecked at the nearest painting, at other guests, down at the floor, everywhere but directly at Junior, and a nerve twitched in his left cheek. "Well, I'm very good, you know, at faces, they stick with me, I don't know why. Goodness knows, my memory is otherwise shot."The first was an ace of hearts. This, Maria said, was a very good card, indeed. It meant that Barty would be lucky in love..Edom felt uneasy in this kingdom of a strange god. The god that his brother feared was humanity, its dark compulsions, its arrogance. Edom, on the other hand, trembled before Nature, whose wrath was so great that one day she would destroy all things, when the universe collapsed into a super dense nugget of matter the size of a pea..In a swirl of London Fog and righteous indignation, Neddy turned his back on Junior and drifted away through the nibbling, nattering crowd..Agnes, who inherited the property, would have welcomed her brothers in the main house. Although both were willing to visit her for an occasional dinner or to sit in rocking chairs on the porch, on a summer night, neither could abide living in that ominous place.."Making too many wrong choices," Grace White said, "produces too many branches-a gnarled, twisted, ugly growth."Although Junior had not answered, Vanadium said, "Yes, I thought you heard it."The past three years had given Wally much to celebrate, as well. After selling his medical practice and taking an eight-month hiatus from the sixty-hour work weeks he had endured for so long, he'd been giving twenty-four hours of free service to a pediatric clinic each week, providing care to the disadvantaged. He'd worked hard all his life, and saved diligently, and now he was able to focus solely on those activities that gave him the greatest gratification..Summary: Explores further the magical world of Earthsea through five tales of events which occur before or after the time of the original novels, as well as an essay on the people, languages, history and magic of the place..ROCKING AS IF AFLOAT on troubled waters, abused by an unearthly and tormented sound, Junior Cain imagined a gondola on a black river, a carved dragon rising high at the bow as he had seen on a..Tom stared down into the oceanic depths of the city, through the reefs of buildings, to the lamp-fish cars schooling through the great trenches..During the past three years, he'd suffered much because of these sisters, including most recently the humiliation in the Dumpster with the dead musician, Celestina's pencil-necked friend with a propensity for postmortem licking. The memory of that horror flared so vividly-every grotesque detail condensed into one intense and devastating flash of recollection-that Junior's bladder suddenly felt swollen and full, although he had taken a long satisfying leak in an alleyway across the street from the restaurant at which the postcard-painting poseur had enjoyed a leisurely dinner with Ichabod..What he saw next in the brochure wasn't the link that he sought, but it alarmed him so much that the three-fold pamphlet rattled in his hands. The reception for Celestina's show had been this evening, had ended more than three hours ago..He hadn't heard the cop get out of the chair and cross the dark room. Difficult."Maybe because we didn't want to be called witches," said Obadiah with a smile, "and give folks one more reason to hang us."Then by ambulance to the hospital, whisked into surgery, and for a while, blessed unconsciousness..The reception still roared in both showrooms of the gallery. Legions of the uncultured, taste-challenged in every regard except in their appreciation for hors d'oeuvres, yammered about art and chased their cloddish opinions with mediocre champagne..Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement..with an encircling and suggestive lick, and then licked his lips, too, when the cold steel slipped free of them..Alone with Paul, as he stood abashed, she removed her blouse and bra and, with arms crossed over her breasts, revealed to him her savaged back. Whereas her father had used open-hand slaps and hard fists to teach his twin sons the lessons of God, he preferred canes and lashes as the instruments of education for his daughter, because he believed that his direct touch might have invited sin. Scars disfigured Agnes from shoulders to buttocks, pale scars and others dark, crosshatched and whorled..Impressed by the sureness and swiftness with which the blind boy negotiated the steps and set off across the lawn, Tom didn't initially notice anything unusual about his stroll through the deluge..Matching her fierce attention with a sudden intensity of his own, Joey said, "Bartholomew."Rubbermaid container from his own pantry. Junior would never again use it to store leftover soup..The voice had come not from the armchair in the corner, but from immediately beside the bed..Sparky Vox-with less training in theology and philosophy than his guest, but with a spiritual insight that any overeducated Jesuit would have to admire, even if grudgingly-had settled Vanadium's uneasy conscience. "The problem with movies and books is they make evil look glamorous, exciting, when it's no such thing. It's boring and it's depressing and it's stupid. Criminals are all after cheap thrills and easy money, and when they get them, all they want is more of the same, over and over. They're shallow, empty, boring people who couldn't give you five minutes of interesting conversation if you had the piss-poor luck to be at a party full of them. Maybe some can be monkey-clever some of the time, but they aren't hardly ever smart. God must surely want us to laugh at these fools, because if we don't laugh at 'em, then one way or another, we give 'em respect. If you don't mock a bastard like Cain, if you fear him too much or even if you just look at him in an all-solemn sort of way, then you're paying him more respect than I ever intend to. Another glass of wine?"Maria was hand-repairing some of Joey's clothes, which Agnes had meticulously damaged earlier in the day..Junior got in the car once more, slammed the door, and said, "Panfaced, double-chinned, half-bald, puke-collecting creep."The sleeves of the pajama top were pushed up, revealing more of the disease's vicious work. The muscles of her useless left arm had atrophied; the once graceful hand curled in upon itself, as though holding an invisible object, perhaps the hope she never abandoned.."The princess is correct," he acknowledged,

revealing that this hand was still empty. Then he reached to the girl and plucked the quarter from her ear..Having risen higher in the sky during the past couple hours, the gold-coin moon reminded itself as silver, and in the black lake, its reflection rolled across the knuckles of the quiet wavelets..Outside, Celestina took Angel's hand as they descended the front steps to the street.."Take care you don't beat evil into him," said his aunt..As he was wheeled headfirst into the operating room, Barty raised off the gurney pillow. He fixed his gaze on his mother until the door swung shut between them..After a minute, he slipped his hand into his pocket. The quarter was still there..A sense of mystery overcame Agnes, unnerving but not entirely or even primarily unpleasant..In a state of wonderment that was laced with dread rather than delight, he looked up from the quarter, seeking an explanation from Vanadium, expecting to see that anaconda smile..After a hesitation, she said, "You're the boogeyman, except when I saw you, I was hiding under the bed where you're supposed to be."."You're heaven-sent," Grace assured Paul at breakfast Saturday morning. "With all your stories, you lifted our hearts when we most needed to be lifted."."No," said Vanadium, "you only think you know who I am and what I am, but you don't know anything. That's all right. You'll learn."..Another of Junior's self-improvement projects, since moving to California, was to become a knowledgeable gourmet, also a connoisseur of fine wines. San Francisco was the perfect university for this education, because it offered innumerable world-class restaurants in every imaginable ethnic variety.."Maybe," said Angel. "Or maybe to The Monkees ... or maybe to where you didn't get run down by the rhinosharush."..Agnes saw no arc of color from candle to candle, and she thought that he must mean for her to look at the many cut-crystal wineglasses and water glasses, in which the lambent flames were mirrored. Here and there, the prismatic effect of the crystal rendered reflections of the flames into red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet spectrums that danced along beveled edges.."Maria brought that from Mexico," Barty said. "She thought it was pretty funny. So do I. It's a hoot. Mom says it isn't really blasphemous, because it wasn't meant to be by the people who made it, and because Jesus would want you to have cookies, and, besides, it reminds us to be thankful for all the good things we get."."Tragic. Her string's been cut too soon. Her music's ended prematurely," Junior said, feeling confident enough to dish a serving of the maniac cop's half-baked theory of life back to him. "There's a discord in the universe now, Detective. No one can know how the vibrations of that discord will come to affect you, me, all of us."..Over potato soup and an asparagus salad, the dinner conversation got off to a promising start: a discussion of favorite potato dishes, observations on the weather, talk of Mexico at Christmas..A door slammed, and after the briefest of internal debates about whether to rise or act, Junior left Ichabod straddling the threshold. He must get to Celestina before she reached a telephone, and then he could come back and finish moving the body.."He came through the surgery well. He'll be in post-op for a while, then brought here to the ICU. His condition's critical, but there are degrees of critical, and I believe we'll be able to upgrade him to serious long before this day is over. He's going to make it."..Instruction in Braille wasn't recommended for three-year-olds, but an exception was made in this case. Agnes arranged to have Barty receive a series of lessons, although she suspected that he'd absorb the system and learn to use it in one or two sessions..thickened with the odors of antiseptics and blood, until breathing required an effort..Jacob scared people. He was Edom's identical twin, with Edom's boyish and pleasant face, as soft-spoken as Edom, well barbered and neatly groomed. Nevertheless, on the same mission of mercy as Edom, Jacob would leave the pie recipients in a state of deep uneasiness if not outright terror. In his wake, they would bar the doors, load guns if they owned any, and lay sleepless for a night or two..On Joey's side, there was no family to provide help. His mother had died of leukemia when he was four. His dad, fond of beer and brawling--like father not like son--was killed in a bar fight five years later. Without close relatives willing to take him in, Joey went to an orphanage. At nine he wasn't prime adoption material--babies were what was wanted--and he'd been raised in the institution..Magusson's idea of a laugh. "And they didn't even bother to post a warning. In fact, that sign was still up, inviting hikers to enjoy the view from the observation deck."..He feared that suicide was a ticket to Hell, and he knew that sinless Perri was not waiting for him in those lower realms..On this momentous day, however, drawing provided no solace. Frequently, her hands shook, and she could not control the pencil..Thereafter, Junior managed to drive four miles before he was forced to pull off the road at another service station, after which he felt that his ordeal might be over. But less than ten minutes later, he settled for more rustic facilities in a clump of bushes alongside the highway, where his cries of anguish frightened small animals into squeaking flight..NOLLY SAT BEHIND his desk, suit jacket draped over the back of the chair, porkpie hat still squarely on his head, where it remained at virtually all times except when he was sleeping, showering, dining in a restaurant, or making love..A deep-set casement window. Two latches on the right side, one high, one low. Detachable hand crank lying on the foot-deep sill. Mechanism socket in the base casing..With one tiny hand, Barty reached up for his mother. She gave him her forefinger, to which the sugar-bag boy clung tenaciously..On he went, up he went, trunk to limb, limb to branch, branch to limb, to limb, to trunk. Hand over hand up the vertical parts, gripping with his knees, then standing and walking like a tightrope artist along limbs horizontal to the ground, swinging over empty air and stepping from one woody walkway to another, ever upward toward the highest bower, dwindling as though he were growing younger during the ascent, becoming a smaller and smaller boy. Forty feet, fifty feet, already far higher than the house, striving toward the green citadel at the summit..Junior was accustomed to having women seduce him. His good looks were a blessing of nature. His commitment to improving his mind made him interesting. Most important, from the books of Caesar Zedd, he had learned how to be irresistibly charming..Nolly shrugged. "He can't know for sure. And anyway, he didn't get the pushed idea until he'd already taken the case."..Off with the cap. Yellow capsules in the bottle, also blue. He managed to shake one of each color into the palm of his left hand without spilling the rest on the floor..Although the only light on the back porch came from the pale beams that filtered out through the curtains on the kitchen windows, all these faces seemed luminous, almost

preternaturally aglow, like the kiln-fired countenances of saints in a dark church, lit solely by the flames of votive candles. The rain—a music of sorts, and the jasmine and incense, and the moment sacred. Celestina finally zipped shut the satchel. "You better watch out for the big bad wolf." Lipscomb said, "We're only two and a half blocks from the best Armenian restaurant in the city. I'll dash over there, bring back some chilled bubbly and an early dinner, if you'll allow me." "All right. Well ... Jesuits are encouraged to pursue education in any subject that interests them, not theology alone. I was deeply interested in physics."

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