

WILLIAM DIREEN

Onaevia

A FABLE

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HISTORY & MYTHOLOGY OF ONAEVIA

A fictional history and imaginary mythology of a people called the Onaevians. The fable is indexed for easy reference, indicating concepts, personages and events. Other appendices describe games, the origins of words and customs of the people in more detail.

This digitalised version makes use of internal hyperlinks. Clicking on the links will take you to the relevant appendices, and then back to the page you were last reading.

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Ó nævi! Dom næstr-nol-rvñjka!

—Ancient Onævian appeal

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HISTORY & MYTHOLOGY OF ONAEVIA



They came in groups and settled on the coast. They loved to feast and to honour those who were lucky. Their skins were pink, red, yellow, brown and black. Their hair was thin, straight, wavy, wispy and frizzy. There were tall and short among them, podgy and slim, bony, fleshy and muscled. The eyes of the fishermen were narrowed from habit, the fingers of the soothsayers dark with charcoal, the brows of the poets creased with care. You might have noticed wide jaws or pointed chins among them, or fleshy lips, dainty nostrils, long lashes, eyebrows that meet in the middle, hooked noses and lobeless ears. As for their diet, fish was the staple, a few enjoyed raw seaweed, while they became the envy of their neighbours for their flavoursome cuisine.

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After the evening meal came stories. In some of them the original Onævians were westward-faring nomads who had run out of puff, or they were eastward-faring adventurers from the other side of the ocean. No one could agree and no one really wanted to. The level-headed fishermen repeated tales about their ancestors who had sailed from along the coast a way, arriving haphazardly over the course of centuries. Young wild-eyed kestrel-hunters, who spent their afternoons on the cliffs overlooking the harbour, were convinced that proto-Onævians had dropped out of the sky in space cocoons, chosen survivors from a dying planet. Curiously, the version most popular with the game-loving children was the one fervently advanced by more conservative adults: the first Onævians had hatched from multicoloured bubbles sent up from the ocean deeps by the parent of all nature, Choral Pol.

One thing is sure, once settled, the early tribes hugged the shore, and the ocean played a telling part in their lives. From the look of their boats they weren't interested in sailing to other worlds. Their

‘huts upon the sea’, or *nævi** were sturdy but small, not the sort of thing that would have lasted long in mid-ocean.

Their first epic did feature a short voyage, followed by a gruelling chase after a sort of mammal-fish, whose name — Solus Monon — the hunter heard first in his dreams and then on the wind. From its description, scientists would have consigned it to a catalogue of the purely mythical, had not some of its bones been unearthed during the Age of the Boowigs, allowing its bizarre skeleton to be reconstructed.

The hunter, Ighmut, was a simple fisherman when he took on the quest. As a child he had attracted attention

* For more on *nævi* see Appendix 5, The sea-book (p. 111). Regarding pronunciation, Onævians used different vowels and consonants from those of today’s languages. The diphthong ‘æ’ as in *nævi* and *Onævía* would have been close to the Indo-European Anglo-American ‘e’ in San Diego.

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by winning contests in which the deciding ingredient was luck. People said he was ‘born lucky’ and expected him to succeed at anything he tried. In the days before his departure songs were invented and sung, while the children played on the shore.* The inhabitants of all the settlements wished him well when he set out, his raft weighed down by snow dogs and stacks of provisions. The fishermen chewed their pipes, sure of fair weather while the soothsayers threw dry iron splinters on their flames and intoned the sea-beast’s name, ‘Solus Monon!’

Accompanied by sea lions splashing all about, Ighmut and his dogs crossed the sea to the ice shelf. As they drew near they steered between many small icebergs, or ‘white water-rocks’ as he called them. He traversed the ice by sled, changing snow-dogs at the end of each day, till they reached the region where there was no night.

He fished through cut holes for three of our days and

*See Appendix 1. *Shore games* (p. 103).

nights until, supplies bolstered, he resumed his journey. Whenever he heard the name Solus Monon on the wind, he hacked and drilled into the ice to track his prey, and he had soon identified a narrow channel leading to a corrie in the hollow heart of an extinct volcano. This was the beast's waterfall-fed nest, to which it returned after its daily manoeuvres. Here the water was warmer than beneath the ice, and many varieties of edible plant grew in the crevices of its rock garden. The indolent Solus could nibble at random, or wash a mixed salad down into its pool with a flip of its only fin.

Ighmut's plan was to trap it in its lair and descend the ice cliff on the other side to chance his arm in single combat. For four of our days he loosened the ice above the entrance which he intended to block off. Four times the obese hulk woke, breakfasted and left its lair in search of cuttlefish. When it returned the fourth time, Ighmut waited until it had bumped and wobbled all the way along a slippery groove to the shallows of its den before levering a crucial ice-rock and setting off a cascade that effectively closed the portal. Taking rope and two har-

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poons, he climbed up and over the ridge of the hollow mountain. When the beast saw Ighmut descending the ice cliff, it tried to escape by bunting its head against the blocks that now covered the entrance. It had very nearly succeeded in freeing the jam, another ramming would have done it, when Ighmut hurled his harpoon. It struck half way along the spine, the hook lodging between two vertebrae. The beast shook and beat furiously for sixty hours. When it seemed to have little fight left in it, Ighmut risked his sabre harpoon. His throw was good, severing a blood vessel under the dorsal fin, and Solus Monon's destiny had been fulfilled.*

That night the waters on the shores of the rough settlements of Onævia turned purple and one-eyed polychrome jellyfish were washed up after high tide. The fishermen and the soothsayers, sure there had been a kill, built fires on the shores to guide their hunter home.

*See Appendix 2, *Mythology* (p.105).

Ighmut's snow dogs laboured hard, dragging Solus Monon over the ice cap towards the region of day and night. On arriving at the ocean edge, Ighmut constructed a small raft with a sail, and sent forward his smartest dog, Ron. No matter where he landed, Ron was sure to find his way to his master's village. The pack waited impatiently, eating the fish that sea lions had delivered to them out of the chilly waters. Ighmut invented a poem and was saying it to himself when the hounds and sea lions set up a tremendous chorus. They had heard Ron's voice on the wind. The village itself had come to them! A magnificent flotilla of *navi* was glittering on the horizon, the rims of their sails embroidered with silvered kestrel feathers, and each small boat was trailing behind it the mighty trunk of a stripped turpitude pine.

They strapped these trunks together to make a many-hulled catamaran, onto which they tilted the carcass of Solus Monon, and sailed back accompanied by the victorious howling of the hounds and the exuberant acrobatics of the sea lions. On his return Ighmut yielded up his poem which has come down to us in his famous last

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words. From this day dogs were sacred animals, and the barking sea lions too — eating their flesh was taboo, according to the saying

*Food of the sea
All but the barkers.*

All who saw the beast were astounded. With its two upper eye sockets and one lower, it must have been able to see around about itself, but only as a passenger in an airliner can see around, left and right, but is unable to see directly before or behind. With its inflexible-looking vertebrae, it must not have been very agile in the water, and its lone pelvic fin on the left side meant it could only have turned to the right. Such a beast might have navigated in a straight line by rolling belly upwards at intervals, but its musculature was not consistent with this. It is more likely that it spent the long day going round in a gigantic circle till it arrived again at the entrance to its lair.

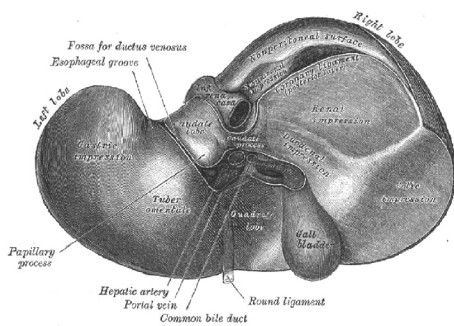
When the carvers cut up the trophy for the feast, they

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pulled a bone from its cervix which fell onto the stone floor without breaking. Because of its shape and its durability it was named the Unbreakable Spatula, and this is the one, the very one, that later rulers touched with their fingertips to cast off vindictiveness. The story goes that when the assembled guests who lived along the coast ate a portion of Solus Monon's heart, the Onævian language was born. True or not, this feast marks the beginning of time in Onævian annals. Each Year would have twelve summers. The hunter Ighmut would be king.



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*... it was enough to dine under a copy
of Ighmut's royal petroglyph ...*



Ighmut accepted kingship reluctantly for it meant an end to his former way of life. His first decree was that all meals must include the heart of a salt-water fish, symbol of his victory over Solus Monon. Power did not go to his head, however, not in the beginning. He remained as approachable as when he had been a modest fisherman, though his judgements grew increasingly severe.

One day a couple came to him accusing their neighbour of having eaten dog flesh. The neighbour told him that his dog had died and he had burned him, as was the custom. Certainly a feast followed in the dog's honour, but the cured flesh was not that of his dog nor of a sea-lion

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as his neighbour attested, it was the little-known pork of naked snorters found further up the River Sweat. In his defence the defendant presented a wondrously-shaped foot, which we call a trotter, to prove his case. Ighmut knew the truth when it was staring him in the face. He ordered that the feet of the accusing couple be cut off, the left of one and the right of the other. From this came the saying

*Trust your neighbour
Or suffer the sabre,*

and the quip that Ighmut had a 'finely-balanced' sense of justice.

Onævia flourished. Inland neighbours learned the language and adopted the customs of this people that seemed to have a lot going for it. The new members of the community could not observe the decree about the salt-water fish's heart, but, fearing for their feet, none of the longer-established citizens dared denounce them to Ighmut. It was the inland Onævians themselves who

complained to him about the difficulty of obtaining fresh fish supplies in the inland provinces. This led to Ighmut's second decree, an amendment of the first: instead of eating part of a fish's heart at every meal, it was enough to dine under a copy of Ighmut's royal petroglyph — a stone representation of Solus Monon's innards, its liver, kidney and spleen. Hundreds of miniatures were ordered to be hung in the nation's dining halls, and, though they responded with works of breath-taking originality, local sculptors found it hard to keep up with demand. With Ighmut's approval they turned from carving wood and stone to firing clay models or working in two dimensions, mixing powdered pigment with kestrel egg-yolk and applying paint with painstaking strokes of seal-fur brushes over solid oak panels.

If only the nation had remained that way, united by imaginative games, art works of the highest quality and staunch devotion to a just ruler. But Ighmut's curiosity had been aroused by the case of the trotters and he had already sent swap negotiators to offer marinated jellyfish in exchange for inland mutton and pork. The negotiators

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returned with the necessary ambassadors, known in their dialect as tonguedancers, who had with them their beautiful and expert cooks. They arrived with great pomp on the very day the first cases of a debilitating intestinal malaise arose in the poorer quarters. It was after sipping mutton-broth and nibbling pigs' trotters that Ighmut suffered four nights of mental delirium. His fingers splayed out, pointing and jabbing, and his arms had to be pinioned to stop him poking the doctors' eyes out. When he recovered, Ighmut would not listen to reason, and some say he never listened to reason again. He was convinced the ambassadors' broth was to blame. The beautiful cooks, women every one, were executed without a trial and the ambassadors were sent back without their tongues.

Year Two had begun badly but worse was to come. Ambassadors were mistrusted as a matter of course, royal cooking was carried out by men, and inland meat was outlawed, especially the flesh of woolly cloven-hoofed beasts and their cousins the fat naked snorters. A cautionary rhyme took hold in the nurseries:

*Food of the sea
All but barkers,
Food of interior
Drives you starkers.*

Unusual reception rites were introduced for foreign visitors to the court. The feet were massaged by violet-lidded virgins trained in fungus detection. Shoes were scrutinised for dangerous traces. Less important members of an entourage were stripped and led to a salt-water pool under the kestrel sanctuary where their hair was shampooed in guano unction. All gifts were sprayed and, if possible, steamed, before being certified. On the eleventh autumn of Year Two, unable to accept the fact of his own ageing, Ighmut stripped the time keepers of their powers and ordained that the current year would have no end.

The people, who were not really aware of all this examination and interrogation, loved Ighmut as never before. The poets enjoyed his antics and his mad edicts and vied

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with each other to sing to him in the evenings, delivering their allotted section of the epic of the hunt:

Ighmut resolves to hunt the beast.

Ighmut crosses the ice cap.

Ighmut discovers the secret cove and cuts the ice blocks.

Ighmut harpoons Solus Monon.

Ighmut returns with the kill.

Ighmut enjoyed listening to the poets reciting from memory during the winter nights. He loved poetry, and he loved to hear about his own exploits, but as he grew older he wanted more — he wanted what had not yet been imagined. So it was that after a particularly splendid autumn, he announced the Dream-calling Conscriptions.

One young member of every household, healthy or infirm, the family rich or poor, was taken away each winter. Up to twenty at a time curled up in scooped-out seal carcasses lined with fat and fur. When they slept, they dreamed, and when they woke they told their dreams to

newly-appointed scribes. From these dreams, transmitted, some believe, by the immortal gods themselves, the Onævian pantheon and the genealogy of Solus Monon up to the time of Ighmut were born.

Early-age Onævians repeated variations of the foundation tales to each other, and they lasted — with slight variations — as long as Onævian did. Even in the modern age, state psychologies made sure the tales were present in some form or other in popular serials or in the efforts of the Boowigs' servile film-makers. The most popular story-line of all time was the one in which a born-lucky hero or heroine captured a malevolent beast and the survivors had a much-deserved nosh-up.

It might have all been so different. Due to a legibility crisis the foundation tales were nearly lost forever, but they were destined to undergo one more far from immortalising transfiguration in the devising of a standard calligraphy.

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... only letters that could be carved into a block of stone ...



When Ighmut's favourite poet Dawnlight died, Ighmut accorded him full funerary rites. At the burning of his jellyfish regaled corpse on the beach, Ighmut called for his verses about the harpooning of Solus Monon to be recited. No one could remember it and there was a mad scramble to locate Dawnlight's personal notebook. When it was found, his fellow-poets were unable to read his writing. The scribes couldn't read it either, not even the best-read of them. And so Ighmut ordered the devising of a standard calligraphy which would, inadvertently, very nearly topple the ageing king from power.

The argument began with low-toned exchanges of opinion between the lawyers and the scribes, who had devel-

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oped a penchant (encouraged, it should be noted, by the admiring poets), for using decorative letters and hieroglyphic codes. This, claimed the lawyers, was illegal, and Ighmut took the lawyers' side. The scribes and poets pleaded with him, but it was useless — only straight-edged letters that could be carved into a block of stone were to be employed.

Graffiti besmirched the walls of newly built towers. There was unrest in the dining halls. Poets hurled abusive rhymes. Lawyers screamed back rules. Ighmut armed his police and gave them extraordinary powers. Sadman, Ighmut's most sensitive poet, was beaten to death, his bones broken in fourteen places. Still Ighmut did not relent. Scribes and poets were arrested and detained so that many an ode and wistful lyric could be heard rising from the mouldy prison chambers after nightfall.

Their detention lasted four autumns until even the lawyers were bored witless. At that point Ighmut recalled the poets and scribes, those who had survived their dank

cells, and offered them a compromise. The scribes could write whatever and however they wished in their own writing-pelts, but they were to record the epics and myths in ‘comprehensible’ form on official ‘compromise’ hides destined for the royal library.

A new generation of poets and scribes, young writers, biddable and legible, succeeded the spirit-broken bards and eccentric calligraphists. In fact, few verses of much originality were constructed after this, and, following Ighmut’s death, the practice of dream-calling fell into abeyance.



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Hunt, feast, conquer ...



Cloth, woven from inland cotton and flax, was highly coveted, so when it was discovered that those plants could be cultivated if their seeds passed through the gut of cloven-hooves, an order to destroy the latter on sight was lifted. Live sheep and pigs everywhere were rounded up, spies were sent overland to learn the secret of spinning, and, against the advice of his council, Ighmut admitted five black-woollen cloven-hooves into the royal keep.

When mountain neighbours claimed Onævians had been stealing their stock, Ighmut accused them of pilfering Onævian recipes. A few skirmishes resulted and Onævia was soon at war with several neighbours at the same

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time. It won each battle thanks to some lucky turn or other, and with each victory the nation's territories expanded.

Returning soldiers told of customs beyond the cotton fields; they displayed tablets with letters carved into them in alphabets different from their own; they held up bewitching, sparkling crystals. Some veterans were driving bizarre sheep and goats, or so they called them — in fact, they were not sheep and goats at all but cows, geese and rabbits; no one dared to contradict an Onævian general who considered himself something of a zoologist!

Ighmut sent alchemists to the newly-conquered provinces who returned with seeds of superior grasses, the secret of rotating crops, and a shiny volcanic glass that made a sharper blade than flint. When spies noted the design of advanced new wheels and the secrets of bronze, new military chariots and weapons were fashioned enabling Onævians to put to the sword resistant pockets of the very peoples who had designed wheels for peaceful purposes and bronze for ornamentation. Alas, none

returned with a cure for Ighmut, who was suffering the effects of common ageing.

For time had caught up with Ighmut. He surrendered his life poem to a scribe, then, gathering his strength, he lifted the Unbreakable Spatula and pointed it here and there to choose a successor. Whenever it fell on a woman he ordered her from the bed-chamber, and this is why the remaining men decided that men should always rule Onævia. Finally, he aimed the Spatula at a hunter who, everybody agreed, must have been born lucky, since Ighmut had breathed his last and the Spatula remained fixed on him.

The new ruler gave up his family name for that of the dead king. At his coronation, upon officially accepting the Spatula, Ighmut the Second recited Ighmut the First's poem. The very oldest Onævians present could hardly believe their ears. They remembered having heard fragments of the poem before, long, long ago, in its earliest form, the day Ighmut the First returned from the great hunt:

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*What is it, after all
If not someone else's life?
What is that life
If not a preceding?*

*The hunter knows no bloodlust
He is one of us.
He breaks not with his fellows
Nor allows himself to be bought.*

*Hunt, feast, conquer!
Take the cup, pass it!
All who have gone
Occur a second time in others!*

*Drink, know yourselves
Together to be born.
Light the night
That knows no dawn.*

Ighmut 1
(Close of Year 2)

Ighmut's death brought about a period of heightened nationalism and religious fervour throughout which Ighmut the Second ruled as Ighmut the First had done. He supervised recipes, enforced interdictions, and superannuated poets in the accepted manner. When he died a third born-lucky hunter took over and so it continued until the Ighmuts, or Igs as they came to be affectionately known, were adhering to the written code without exercising any judgement at all. Poets became indolent in their work, replicating by rote, and cooks were garnishing marlin with whatever was handy. Judgements became inconsistent, the poetry far from divine, the sauces over-salty. At the same time, it became harder and harder to distinguish the rightful Ig from some young blade making out that he was born lucky.

One Ig had the idea of nominating his own son to succeed him, and since it was an Ig who suggested it, everyone acceded. Soon there were Igs on the throne who were not lucky at all, they were decidedly unlucky, sometimes being assassinated up the long-drop, the victims of conspirators who then claimed the right-to-rule for their

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own preferred family members. As yet no one was certain how sons and daughters came about, but when a scientist proved there was a connection between that activity best translated as ‘playing bandy’* and the procreation of offspring, Igs and their pretenders to the throne took to playing bandy left, right and centre in order to produce legitimate heirs. Some of these unwitting hopefuls were beheaded the moment their heads saw the light, but many survived to covet and contest power before being challenged for it by even more dedicated pretenders who, in turn, gained it and misused it.

Onævia, a nation once ruled by a lucky hunter who had never wished to be king, was now controlled by a succession of snooty adolescents bred expressly for that purpose. The first age had arrived at its decadence.

*See the entry in the word list of *Appendix 5*: ‘Sex with wife or concubine’ (page 113).



A fascination with military paraphernalia dates from this time. Archaeological sites have revealed playthings, fetishist collections and bodies laid to rest with medallions. For two things the Onævians were getting very good at were war and the administration of conquered provinces.

On his coronation day the last Ig Ardra's first kingly act was to declare himself Emperor, saying he was the bridge between the past and the future. He pointed to his name, Ardra, could it not be written backwards as well as forwards? Had not successive kings been preparing the nation for his mighty rule, as builders prepare the foundations for a great house?

Ardra permitted new recipes to be concocted and he commissioned new epics. He encouraged vanquished neighbours to learn the Onævian tongue while allowing scribes to admit a few foreign expressions into Onævian. He came to rule not only ancient Onævian, but the peoples of the mountains and plains whom Onævian soldiers had neglected to butcher and a good many more tribes who were shaking in anticipation of their attentions. To the surprise of his advisors, people from all walks of life, recent immigrants and founding families, not only soldiers but cooks, poets and villagers supported his bid to turn Onævian into an empire on which the sun might never set. Hundreds of little villages ever further inland were converted into settlements where Onævian fish and grass recipes were consumed under the ancient offal insignia. By the end of his reign, Ardra had established a highly effective system of degressive servitude. After two generations, as long as an oath of loyalty was taken and knowledge of the national myths could be displayed, the inhabitants of conquered villages had, in theory at least, the same rights as Onævians descended from long-standing families.

As soon as his armies reached countries possessing little natural wealth, Ardra decided it was time to stop expanding and keeping the rest of the world out became his primary obsession. The Department of Offence was renamed the Organ of Defence, which set about recruiting hundreds of truncheon-equipped Stepupons to defend not only their country but also their country's *ways*.

Ardra accepted the inevitability of his passing and nominated a little known courtier, Arty, as his successor. Arty appeared to have a mediocre pedigree — he was apparently the third son of a charwoman — but Ardra assured his council that the Emperor-apparent was ‘born lucky’ and should not be overlooked.

Arty proved to be quite lacking in military ambitions. His rule was peaceful and many building projects were realised during his term. Soldiers turned their swords into mortar-trowels, foundries turned from moulding shields and armour to smithying household implements, masons turned from cutting memorial stones to fashioning cornices. He did not erect a single monument to

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himself, but using money from a newly imposed gambling tax he founded a magnificent city in honour of Ardra's tyranny.

We know from tree-ring dating that the inland city of Ardrapop was settled on the banks of the Sweat during a very dry summer. It was remarkable for the innovative construction methods of the masons, for the subtlety of its architecture, and for its large number of eerily-lit chance halls. The houses of the rich and poor were built according to the same principles on a greater or smaller scale, but showiness itself was discouraged. Their construction was overseen by Arty's architects, so that even the simplest dwellings of Ardrapop were expertly designed and finished and did not lack a certain majesty. Only in the centre of the city was unabashed ostentation permitted. The festive atmosphere at the dedication of the city's self-funding centre-piece, the rotating Ardrapop Gambling Spire, must have been like that at the first joyous feast when *nævi*-builders shared in the heart of Solus Monon. The Spire could be seen for miles around. On a clear day it was visible from Mount Maurolico.

There was no charge for taking the lift to the top of the Spire, but few left as wealthy as when they arrived. In the less conspicuous, but equally new and shining Palace of Judgement, judges were encouraged to touch the Spatula for luck, previously a royal privilege, and court rulings were very nearly free of all vindictiveness.

With prosperity came traders, wandering scholars and troupes of actors from all quarters of the known landmass. Local people were naturally hospitable to travellers and migrant workers from beyond the frontiers. New games of chance were introduced from abroad. Many border villages employed foreign artists to execute murals, while in the free college of Ardrapop it was not unusual to come across a group of Infran scholars discussing philosophy with local students.

It wasn't long before the strangers' very strangeness came to the attention of the Organ of Defence's Step-upons. Arty was consulted and told that foreigners were taking advantage of Onævians' native hospitality, coldly exploiting Onævian delight in innovative hairstyles and

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creative jewellery.* He let himself be persuaded that these foreigners were greedy and rude, their beads and ornaments nothing but eccentric, their sexual customs puzzling and their cuisine bizarre — he could not but agree that Onævian *ways* were in danger.

Stepupons wore uniforms, but in the matter of height no two were the same. They differed from each other with such precise regularity that if you lined them up side by side in their flat-headed helmets they gave a good impression of a measured staircase. But they were not to be stepped upon, not at all. It was they who did the stepping upon. They broke up multi-national gatherings, demolished the collective mural and kept a close eye upon the games of the children. If naturalised Onævians were deemed to have suffered an anti-Onævian influence, the Stepupons had the power to blacklist them and deprive them of privileges. Unwarranted generosity to foreigners — self-interest was the only justification — was consid-

* See *Appendix 4. Ornamentation* (p. 110)

ered a menace to state security, and culprits were taken in for re-education. If re-education failed, their houses were demolished and they were never seen again. When these tactics failed to discourage the border people's hospitality or stem the influx of wanderers from beyond the fringe, the Organ of Defence closed strategic bridges, blocked mountain passes, and recommended a project to keep the outside world out. Arty was not long in giving the go-ahead for the most ambitious project in Onævia's history. Every kilometre of battlemented Fender would have a shapely turret for surveillance, a carved stone pulpit for distributing propaganda in every direction and a steel-and-glass toll-gate. Arty declared it would be finished in five years and stand for all time. Its eventual construction was a colossal labour that spanned five generations and took one day to fall.

All along the frontier citizens' rights were suspended and never truly restored. The border people had no choice but to submit without question to the will or whimsy of crapulent master masons. Right up to the last age before the fall of Onævia they were known as the 'shadow folk',

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not only because they now lived in the shadow of the Fenders, but because they carried with them the dark legacy of the abuses they had suffered during construction. You might have heard the expression ‘the luck of the shadow-folk’, which is to say no luck at all.

Arty, who missed the colour which the foreigners had added to Ardrapop, sent relay spies to distant lands to bring back exotic scents and news of scientific developments. From the far east came a can of worms who could spin the sensuous silk-like material known as pearlywool, and from the land of the Infrans came an explosive powder that could render a Fender a pile of rubble if you weren’t very careful.

According to the spies, gunpowder had been discovered in the Infran lands during the quest for an imperial aphrodisiac—a harmless enough anecdote; but in the interests of national security the Organ of Defence was obliged to invent another story altogether. When Ardra had declared himself Emp, he had announced that he was contained in all and all in him. He had pointed out

that his name could be read forwards and backwards, and the common folk had drawn the only logical conclusion — the emperor was, like the parent of all gods, divinely asexual. As far as they were concerned, Ardra did not know one end of a woman's anatomy from the other. An emperor was undesiring and undesired, that was what made him the complete ruler. We know that the opposite was true. Ardra had himself conceived the second emperor, Arty, during sex-play with an imperial charwoman. It was a fiercely-kept secret that Ardra and Arty and all the emperors who followed availed themselves of a hand-picked harem who never saw their families after selection and were lucky to even see daylight.

Few within the palace knew of the existence of the concubines, and fewer still knew of the macabre rites associated with their passing. Kilometres of eerie echoing tombs were scooped out of the lime layer for the purpose of their final concealment. Artist-monks sworn to secrecy decorated the smooth walls, whose surfaces were themselves so like bones. They took advantage of handsome stipends to order materials and tools of the highest

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quality. As a result they could develop stylised representations of the Onævian pantheon that astounded the art world when they were recently discovered.

Although part of their day was spent in clearing their minds of unhelpful thoughts by means of meditation, and although they were dedicated to a dignified routine in search of truth, health and the mystery of life, the artist-monks turned a blind eye to the obsessive and pathological rites that surrounded the women's entombment. After the bones of a concubine had been boiled clean, they were laid in a seal carcass where her skull could 'dream its last dream', as the requiem prayer had it. The bone stripping itself was carried out in a specific order of cranium, arm-bones, finger-bones, leg-bones and ribs, honouring, in descending order, the parts of the body most favoured by the emperor.

If Arty did nothing to undo the seclusion and humiliations of the concubines far from the eyes of credulous Onævians, he did commission hundreds of public sculptures, murals for the Fenders, and public readings of

decaying seal-pelts. All the same, his reign is remembered for a creeping physical and mental malaise that prefigured the ultimate collapse of Onævia. Children grew uncontrollable, the sleep of the adults was disturbed, soothsayers doubted their intuitions, poets developed stammers, and a fever affecting recall became widespread. Little suspecting that these and other symptoms were due to a deception the order of which their history had never known, the Organ of Defence looked about for someone to blame.

The arrival of ships on their coasts was inopportune. The refugees squeezed into their holds were survivors of a distant war where pacifying chemicals had been used, they had been drifting over the ocean for weeks, perhaps months. Those healthy enough to lead a deposition to the emperor made no secret of the fact that there had been instances of cannibalism. They should have concealed that ghastly truth, for the Organ of Defence supposed that whatever the boat-people's revelations, they were surely covering up even greater atrocities in trying to infiltrate Onævia by any means at their disposal. The

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simplest solution to their existence was to end it. The ships were invited to enter port then, one by one, they were holed. Bargees with poles prevented the flailing victims from swimming to safety. An estimated five thousand and sixty three were drowned.

Inland Onævians were taking the law into their own hands. Unwitting travellers and traders who had been admitted quite legally through the Fenders were being lynched by adolescent gangs. Others were arrested by self-styled military guards on the slightest pretext. Arty's successor, his son Sickly, fearing a foreign conspiracy, authorised the use of torture at the Fenders in the interrogation of strangers, and made it clear he did not much care what happened to them afterwards. Many innovations of which Onævians were proud in time to come resulted from information elicited from these doomed guests. One such visitor would usher in the new age.

How often it is obvious to the disinterested observer that repulsion is never far from attraction, fear from curiosity, nor hatred from fascination! Exotic jewellery,

embroidery and booklets were being bought and sold on illegal markets for crazy prizes. Onævians from tavern keepers to the Emperors themselves stashed their trinkets in cellars to be brought out for favoured dinner guests. Differents — Onævian or foreign — were cruelly persecuted. To have your goods and chattels confiscated it was enough to have a certain air about you. It did not matter that many Onævians secretly admired you. It did not matter that many regular Onævians were wearing outlandish clothing at private parties and collecting unusual ornaments, having bid for them in secret auctions. It did not matter that the unfortunate Differents became the chief source of creative fantasy in Ardrapop. It did not matter that you might not have been very different at all, but a modest cook or bottle-washer endowed with nothing less than an independent mind or a lively personality. No. Once thus deemed, you were, irredeemable.

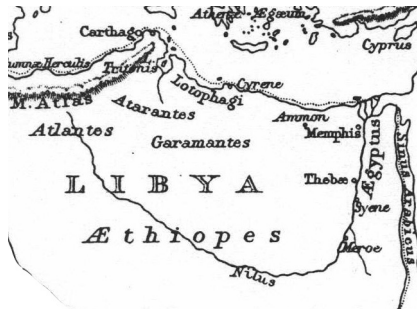
The covertly conceived offspring of Emps succeeded each other as Differents were tortured in ever more shocking ways. Their courage and pride drove the generals in the

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Organ of Defence to 'arrest on suspicion', while hundreds of citizens who were not Differents in public were accused of being Differents in their bedrooms. It was a time of false accusation and chicanery. Vain, unjust and deluded, the last Emp Wimmo paid a poet to write a factitious account of his birth. He so much wanted the people to believe he had been born to the fragrance of wild roses, to sweet local music, in a little-known Onævian village near the source of the Sweat — anywhere but the dusty birth-crypt of the innermost catacomb where swaddling blankets had prevented him from betraying his existence with a cry.

His death came about when he decided to be more sporting to the Differents. His approach was simple. The more eloquently they expressed themselves, the more cleverly they answered his riddles about life and the universe, the longer they stayed alive. One enterprising suspect, the bearded Democraton, so fired his imagination that Wimmo would not take his daily bath without him, a bent that cost Wimmo his life and Onævian the empire.

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Democraton had grown up in a tiny village near the only subterranean source of the Sweat. At this time, the Sweat's known tributaries were fed either by melting snow, moss meadows or seeping swamps, but no explorer had yet discovered the spring to which early pelt-scripts referred. As a baby, Democraton had drunk its pure waters, and when he was a boy he used to go and sit beside it, as if drawn to it, as if he knew that his destiny was inseparable from it.

As he grew to manhood Democraton's desire to go down the Sweat was equalled only by that of Onævian explorers to go up it. As a teenager he used to venture to a stone lookout on Mount Maurolico to stare over the

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foothills and plains, following the meandering river towards the great smog clouds hanging over Ardrapop.

His mother had long known he would go. She asked only that he return one day so she might hold his baby in her arms. Her eyes were dry as she watched him trek around the base of Mount Maurolico to where the rapids of the Sweat levelled out. There he hollowed a pine, stripped off his peasant clothes and climbed inside to let the current be his guide. He glided into Onævian territory right under the noses of the lookouts and lynching gangs, entering Ardrapop two days later under cover of night. He tied his log to a pier, murdered the first man he saw for his city clothes and identity papers, and sent the stripped corpse downstream in its floating coffin.

The following day he entered the chance halls where he won just enough money to live on.* Because of his melo-

*For more on these games of chance see *Appendix 3. Chance-ball games of Ardrapop* (p. 109).

dious way of speaking everyone knew he was not from the capital, but many assumed he was of Onævian peasant stock, or one of the shadow folk who had overcome the curse of the Fenders.

He enjoyed a comfortable life for a while. His winnings were so moderate that people didn't mind losing to him at all. On the contrary, they treated it as a kind of entertainment. He never doubted that his lucky streak would continue, but he was less confident about the tolerance of the Onævians, and he saw the wisdom of losing. Try as he might, he could not. He played for shorter periods and spent heavily, but this only drew more attention. He came to be recognised on the street, and a following developed among local lads. Wimmo came to power, the persecution of Differents took hold, Democraton was arrested and Wimmo fell immediately under his spell.

In height, build and complexion they were as alike as peas in a pod, though the first thing you noticed was a superficial difference — Democraton sported a thick black beard while Wimmo shaved closely. By the end of

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their first interview Wimmo, who felt an uncommon attraction for Democraton, was all for pardoning him. He told his security council the splendid news that Democraton knew the secret of the Sweat's first fountain, and so the members of the council agreed that, for the moment at least, Democraton was not a Different at all, but a regular patriot.

So it was that Democraton became Wimmo's special friend. When they bathed together Wimmo asked him again and again to describe the flora and fauna at the source of the Sweat. Democraton would tell him of the unusually warm climate in the mountains around Mount Maurolico, of the spice-laden air of the woods around about, of cavern-cooled, ancient water whose bubbling music invigorated you, and of the multicoloured reflections that rebounded when morning light played on the rippling pool.

In the evenings, Democraton worked on a series of intricate maps of the area leading to the Source. Swamps, glaciers, flaking rocks, sinking sand, all the pitfalls that

had claimed some of Onævia's finest explorers were identified. He took as long as was humanly possible over the most minute details, faithfully depicting the stream that ran from the source and all the tributaries to the Sweat. He was, of course, playing for time. Ever more esoteric activities were required, he said, by the secrets of cartomancy. His brushes were to be renewed at the beginning of each week with bristles freshly pulled from hogs in the palace keep. To represent the woods of the region he absolutely had to have little pads made from the wool of the black sheep there. The parchment itself was to be of the highest quality, the inks and colours were to be concocted from the best ochre and from charcoal burned ritualistically, and those animals in the keep, their excrement was to be frequently examined to be sure that the map was proceeding in a lucky enough manner.

Now Democraton had been the first to remark that his and Wimmo's physiques were almost identical and, being aware plots were afoot to assassinate him, he devised a plan. One night he descended into the palace keep with

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shears and removed some clumps of wool from a black sheep. Next morning he shaved himself, put on a false beard made from this wool, and went to meet Wimmo. He coolly passed a covey of generals who were meeting at that moment to decide how best to murder him. He stepped before Wimmo and bowed with ceremony and, as usual, Wimmo rose and took him into a side chamber for their bathing ritual. Democraton seized his chance. He whisked out the shears, jabbed the hapless Emp's jugular and in a flash he had put his own kilt, clogs and black sheep's beard on Wimmo crying 'Treason!' for all he was worth. Wimmo's advisors were overjoyed; they sent the corpse of the supposed Democraton to the offal vats without a second thought. Within a few days the emperor declared that in order to claim Democraton's chance-hall luck and have a better chance of following his maps to the secret of the Source, he must adopt the name of his would-be assassin! Certain constitutional changes rapidly followed.

Democraton was a reformer, and many of his reforms were concerned with battling superstition. He proved by

simple experiment that drinking mutton or pigsfoot broth could not possibly cause finger-splaying delirium. Legislation allowing the sale and preparation of sheep or goat meat was passed without opposition. The language expanded thanks to many words from up the Sweat that he introduced, words that had a cognate familiarity about them. He humanised the leadership by admitting that he, too, liked to play bandy. He annexed the source of the Sweat and gave his mother a baby to hold in her arms. He sealed up the catacombs and annulled the imperial privileges of the Bone Palace, saying that all Onævians could be buried there if they wished — and a pile-up of good citizens' bones demarcates the epoch. The Bone Palace was extended, and a new wing was opened at the election of each new Democraton, as all future elected rulers were now titled. Democraton's ultimate legacy was electoral reform, which promised much and changed very little.

The elections were a near-perfect copy of the first Democraton's method of seizing power. Hopeful candidates, nominated by the outgoing Democraton, could

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be told apart by their collars — blue, green or yellow but never the feared red. The one who gained more votes than his or her rivals was the winner, though this never amounted to more than half of the total vote. The outgoing Democraton cohabited with his successor for a few weeks, before enjoying a retirement of unparalleled luxury.

The people were enthralled by the novelty of electing their very own Democraton. Many a heart was stirred by the anthems and chants that rang through the towns on election night: ‘Bring in the new in the clothes of the old!’ or ‘Democraton is dead! Long live Democraton!’ Death and Progress had become inseparable. To eliminate crime the state needed only to eliminate the lawbreakers! A turbulent phase ensued marked by public executions of all types. Drawing and quartering was carried out in chance halls, hanging and guillotining occurred on sports fields. Execution became so popular that no subsequent Democraton dared to outlaw it. As arms, medicine and technology developed, the firing squad and poison injection had their day while in the age of

electricity, the Electric Chair was as common as the weather report. Crowds would assemble to watch the last moments of an unfortunate and commentaries were carried to all corners of the democracy. The illiterate trembled. What further proof was needed of the might of the democracy, of the innate ineducability of the criminal? And before you knew it the idea of divinity was implicit at every level of the processes of justice.

A hundred and ten acts were punishable with death, and few of those acts were really what you would call crimes. It was enough to be deemed guilty. Macabre practices developed in the provinces. Children were given toy instruments of policing, replicas of torture machines, mini-scaffolds, and dollies with breakable necks.

State cruelty touched everyone's conscience when, following an insurrection, first-born sons were put to the fish-knife before the eyes of their mothers. The Democratic Youth Clearances, as they were known, might have led to a revolution had a kindly Democraton

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known in his youth as Oxeye not come to power. He insisted on tolerance and understanding and abolished the death penalty for all crimes except multiplicity; an insistence that marks the beginning of yet another dark age for Onævia.

Oxeye, who really did have one eye large and brown and friendly like that of an Upsweat beast of burden, set great store by the annals. When he saw that some of the calligraphy on the early seal pelts was fading, and that the pelts themselves were disintegrating, he ordered the early histories and poems to be rewritten. Scribes set to, giving the old words new pelts, and all might have been well but that Oxeye asked his scholars, while they were at it, to find the source of the word Onævia.

An eminent etymologist, Phod Garga, identified the word *Onæ* in an early sea-book and convinced himself it was a genitive form of the Onævian word for One. Oxeye loved it. He burst out in slogans. 'Onæ Onævia! All for One!' To make the connection plain he simplified the spelling of Onævia to Onevia, and in so doing

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became the champion of what we know as the Myth of Manifest Unity.

As you have probably guessed, the word Onævia had as much to do with Unity as Wimmo had to do with a sheepswool beard. The words in the sea-book of the fishermen were not *Onæ vi* (which Phod Garga read as ‘a single life’, or ‘a single way’), but *O nævi!* an address to their boats and a veiled reference to the beauty-moles of the wonder-women.*

No amount of luck could save them now.

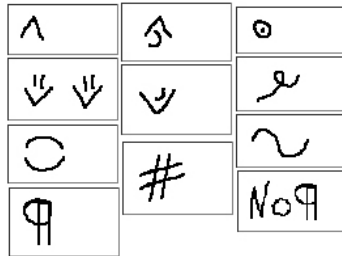


*See *Appendix 5, The sea-book* (p. 111).

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... a single currency was to operate ...



Much-loved Oxeye dictated his Meditations to the scribe Slip-up (who could hardly understand democratic Onevian let alone spell it), closed his one eye, and turned up his toes having failed to nominate a successor. His body's tour of the country in a sealed glass bier generated such emotion that his suggestions for reform were followed to the letter.

Oxeye's Meditations went something like this: all the Igs, Emperors and Democratons since the death of Ighmut had brought about nothing but 'barbaric cleavages' between ruler and people resulting in a rash of 'rustic custom-cults' better suited to tribes of 'childish savages'. It was time for the nation to realise its 'Destiny

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of Unity'. A new Constitution was to be formulated. Power should no longer be entrusted to a succession of individuals, the people were now to be ruled by themselves in the form of representatives, one for every few hundred persons. These, in turn, were to make up boards in charge of the state's institutions. Oxeye suggested these representatives be called Do-bigs, but thanks to Slip-Up, once his recommendations were implemented, boards of Boowigs soon ruled Onevia.

The bombastic Boowigs, who said and did everything in the name of One Indivisible Onevia, immediately set to work stripping the nation of its assets. Oxeye had imagined the liberated system would create a family of man driven by a spirit of generosity and collective pride in individual achievement, but the most 'individual' thing that happened was that the wealth of each Boowig increased, as did mass poverty. Subsidiary boards came to be less and less well-equipped until the institutions they were in charge of lost sight of their essential purpose, preoccupied as they were with ever smaller amounts of money. Schools were no longer teaching, hospitals

were no longer curing, work accidents multiplied, and this happened right under the noses of the people themselves who were distracted with all this talk of *One Onevia*. The Boowigs kept up the parley, repeating inane phrases about One-ness, until it became a self-perpetuating 'verity' that progress was impossible without One-ness. Extraordinary laws were passed without a murmur. Organisations were to be monolithic not branching. Barter was criminalised, a single currency was to operate throughout the land and in the schools words were to be defined by synonym (preferably synonyms of one syllable), while essays were to be of no more than one sentence, preferably no longer than one line.

People made a great effort to be seen doing one thing or another. They explained to each other in the simplest possible terms how they were doing that one thing, and why. They ate from the same menu and relationships were strictly monogamous. Boowigs appeared on television singing in unison. They talked on and on about how they were acting not only in the spirit of One Indivisible Onevia but in the spirit of the first great

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‘individual’ of the people, Ighmut, and yet, in spite of their solidarity, never arguing with each other and supporting each other in their conviction that new ways were right ways, the Onevians, or Ones, as they were now known, had to admit privately that they possessed a proclivity towards being twos or even ‘moros’. For although they were good at appearing to do one thing, they were much better at actually doing another. They could not deny it to themselves. They caught sight of their reflections in the pool and they knew fear.

Another slip-up by Slip-Up, who had recommended ‘righting friction’ instead of ‘writing fiction’, generated a swirl of activities for combating ‘morosis’, elsewhere defined as ‘the condition of non-Oneness’. Friction was likened to gravity, which it was necessary to overcome in order to elevate oneself. Friction was a force, regrettable, omni-present, One-threatening, which could be overcome by exertion — and before you knew it the sports grounds and gymnasiums were full of Onevians trying to right it.

Meanwhile, an emissary from the Infrans seeking trade, brought a mosaic mirror inlaid with pearls as a gift for the wife of a Boowig. This gift of many reflections was considered a multiple insult and he returned with a declaration of war. Some enthusiastic Onevian generals catapulted rockets into Infran territory, which poisoned many civilians. The Infrans replied with poisoned letters causing Ones who read them to die of shame. A 'cold' phase developed. The Infrans concocted antidotes and sent back unexploded bombs. The Onevians burned Infran letters or returned them without opening them.

The Boowigs soon regretted their bellicosity. They had hoped there would be one winner, Onevia, but it now seemed that there could very well be two losers. A returned bomb exploded near the Fenders and some of the shadow folk began to lose their hair and shake. It is not impossible that the tics and shakes and the final Peeling were due in some part to leeching-down of Onevia's own military chemicals into the drinking water of Ardrapop. Perhaps the Boowigs had intelligence of the danger of a modern military encounter, for they were happy for war

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to pass into long-winded diplomacy. To divert the attention of the populace they published photographs of families reunited by peace and of the wonderfully decorated catacombs of the concubines, discovered while the Boowigs had been digging bomb shelters for themselves.

A new menace arose. Worship and wonder had always happened in the same houses, but the Boowigs made places of worship (thenceforth known as churches) distinct from places of wonder (galleries). Not content with this, they took objects out of churches and put them into galleries and sometimes forgot the distinction between the two. Needless to say, the people were confounded. Was it correct to honour objects in one, in a way better suited to worshipping in an other? You could often see peasants kneeling or making the sign of one-finned Solus Monon before a painting or sculpture in a gallery, while many a scribe was incensed at the appearance of the uppity son of a Boowig wandering through a church as if he owned it (which by now was not impossible), commenting in a resounding voice on the school or style of the figurines! It was one such son who had the notion that if

a blood descendant of the first Ig could be found, he or she should have the right to replace the Boowigs. How he came up with such a notion is too sinuous to relate, but many apparently well-educated young men took to indulging in secret handshakes and wearing their Ighmutian Society tie-pins, a miniature of the ancient Iggish offal insignia, as a sign to other devotees.

In the last epoch before the Terminal Peeling, when certain telltale smirks had already been noted, haircuts became the chief index of patriotism.* Sometimes people without the haircut of the month were arrested on the spot by roving coiffure-marshals. Only imagos were exempted. They had the same position in society as the poets used to have and would have performed the same function if they had been called upon to do so. Imagos could have whatever haircut they wished, as long as they wore an equilateral triangle intersected by a recumbent crescent as a sign of their trade. This represented the in-

* See *Appendix 4. Ornamentation* (p. 110)

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terruption of the stable form by the changeable, the moon in its state of nascence. Imagos were chosen at birth or after an accident, and were considered to be brain-damaged. If a child fell from a height or suffered a trauma he or she was sent to schools where the emphasis was on line, image or etymology. Later, during their training, they were given access to the bone chambers to familiarise themselves with essential deathly shapes.

It was said at the time that imagos had freedom of expression but only writings of which the Boowigs approved were made public. If their work was not approved of, imagos were branded non-compliant and were asked to account for themselves. They had the right of a one-handed trial — a prelude to a term of imprisonment.

Thanks to an oversight by the history censors, one imago's electro-pelt survived in a dovecote of judicial exhibits. Accused of conspiring to subvert the Boowig's reductive line towards unity, her writing was used in evidence against her:

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Put yourself in a position where there are two ways to act. You would not choose either of them if you were free. How can your decision express anything about you? You can only choose to do one thing or the other, or neither of them or both of them. Does it not tell us more about them, the ones who invented the choices?

A car leaves the road. You have only to listen to the highway nurses who arrive late, too late to know. It happened in such a way, they say, but they cannot be sure. Not even survivors can be sure. Nothing can be told. There is more than one explanation. There is more than explanation. As there is more than this, my gesture, my offering, comrades.



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Pre-empire meals were sold in new preserving tins.



The skeleton of Solus Monon was discovered on the site of a planned gallery and the Boowigs organised a colossal dinner to unveil its reconstruction.

The first speaker, an unconvincing philosopher in the pay of the Boowigs, read a paper in which he argued that a bone found on the Solus Monon site was the tip of the first Ighmut's harpoon. An astronomer, a popular personality who had his own television programme, followed. He had discovered that old Copernickel liked to bet on the dice from time to time. Another philosopher guessed correctly that the Emps' frustrated grief for their concubines was the cause of complex Onevian funerary rites. At this, the Boowigs' wives — for most

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Boowigs were men who had chosen their wives for their dependable reactions — reached for their handkerchiefs.

To compensate for decreasing supplies of marlin in the markets, dieticians and geneticists had come up with a tasty synthesised fish-heart. A Boowig wearing an offal insignia tie-pin vowed it was just as good as the real thing and that Ighmut would have approved of it. A businessman presented the new product, a flavoured extract of modified Soya bean called Ardra's Cardiac.

A scribble analyst and part-time comedian followed the entrepreneur. He had deciphered some writing on the outside of a sealskin cocoon in which two dead concubines had been laid. He read out his own lewd translation of a tender elegy, at which many a Boowig's wife smiled naughtily.

Next up was an ambitious linguist who should have known better than to back the theories of Phod Garga, the academic who caused the false etymology of Onevia to spread. A Boowig pinned a medal on him and declared

him Linguist Laureate. Then, without more ado, and without any introduction, a mathematician unveiled a huge carved zero.

Since Phod Garga's 'discovery' about the word Onævia, the number one had assumed mystical importance, so the unveiling of the zero caused a flurry of furious excitement among scientists and Boowigs. The mathematician might easily have been escorted away and never heard of again had she not exonerated herself in the nick of time by showing that her new system of numbering would not in the least interfere with the old one. It's chief value, she smiled winningly, was that it would generate a lot of lovely circles!

Speakers followed speakers. It seemed that any hypothesis at all might be correct and any suggested change would be for the better. An economist who knew nothing about ancient Onevian annal script had it on the authority of a poorly qualified scribble analyst that one of the Sweat's tributaries, the River Goathead should really be called the River Goahead. The news was greeted with

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wild applause from the Boowigs, their wives and their guests — all modern, going-ahead types.

Finally the right to speak was granted to Doc Deoxy and Professor Casio. These two learned men had been examining life for the tiniest significance of all. They looked at their beloved nature and they saw that all nests are comprised of hair and dust, and they decided that we too, are made up of little strands of life. As Doc Deoxy unravelled his theory of nucleic strands the dinner hall was silent, wondrous, appreciating. Finally, Professor Casio rose to the podium and announced that, thanks to Doc Deoxy's discovery, he could now be certain 'The last Emperor was an imposter, not a One at all, not even a shadow of a shadow person!' And the Bone Palace was shaken to its foundations.

In the weeks that followed the people eagerly supported the suspension of any edicts traceable to Democraton. Myriad grievances resurfaced. The custom of burning Infrans actual or suspected was revived and the secret service had Professor Casio watched day and night.

When he was heard remarking that Boowigs were pompous and inefficient he was arrested and sentenced to solitary confinement. Deprived of family, friends and his professional tools, he was reduced to playing an eternal game of Trivia until he lost his mind.

The Ones, who dared not admit the slightest tendency to be twos or moros, educated their children according to the principles of MUT, Me, Us and Them. Everything was clear-cut, or seemed to be. Changes of mind and simultaneity of conflicting ideas were unconstitutional. Public circumstance celebrated single events. Constructions were one brick on top of an other. Stacks, levels upon levels, how they loved them! On top, the achievers in the penthouses of Ardrapop, on the bottom, practical failures, or not very lovely zeroes. In between, the rest, hopeful or disappointed, selling up, buying in, dropping out, or sending monosyllabic messages between them.

Zerophobia spread. Onevians exhorted their little ones to excel, out of fear of receiving a zero. Greater still was the fear of *being* a zero. It was inconceivable for an

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Onevian to be a two or a moro, but the family next door could quite conceivably be a bunch of good-for-nothing zeroes.

Culinary standards plummeted. People were buying their dinners ready-made. Companies were turning out single products comprised, wherever possible, of one chief ingredient, printing its name loudly on the wrapping. Most of the time you'd have been better off eating the packet. Fashion degenerated into a means of differentiating class. The dogs, who had lost none of their prestige, were decked out according to the quality of their diet. Some of them were trained to perform, to stand on their hind legs in the hope of a reward. As for hobbies, it wasn't enough to be active, there had to be a winner, often called a Oner, while at night some of the Onevians who had time to spare could be seen standing upright, heads raised, looking every bit like their trained animals, stargazing, as if even those distant specks of light belonged to them, to them alone. They renamed them, the stars, after living Boowigs. They did away with the complex multi-dimensional index devised by Copper-

nickel and created a new cardboard-cut-out universe. Always new categories, with highly-priced subdivisions. Calculation replaced philosophy as the discipline for the brightest students. Entropy, enthalpy, but above all *worth*, everything became calculable. Some mathematicians were honoured as geniuses, but only those who made a virtue of unity. Posters of unpopular mathematicians could sometimes be seen on the walls of 'cocoons', as students' tiny rented rooms were called, but they dared not publicly avow their partiality for fear of 'being failed'.

Experts published, they announced the gratification that would conclude desire, they had concrete proof of the existence of the mind. They fell ill, they were operated on, they recovered. They oppressed their neighbours and convinced themselves again that there was no war which they could not win. If they were seriously ill they gave each other hope for impossible cures, fresh beauty, and even for eternal life. They manufactured single products to excess and traded off their gluts to the detriment of artisans. In contrast, they delighted in collecting, in the

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steady accumulation of small hand-made things that continued to be produced in spite of their repressive measures. But as the commercial centres of Ardrapop and its satellites developed platinum-shiny towers and self-cleaning windows, sublime nature became afflicted with sterility. They hardly blinked. Species of tree disappeared. Like its inner-cities of sparkling death, Onævia's favoured nature was turning barren. It was nothing if not spectacular, like autumn.

If you had any concerns you did well to keep your mouth shut — nothing was amiss; and no wanton displays of dithering, that might give you away! A true 'One' must remain loyal and decisive.

Insane crimes of all varieties were recorded. Iggish tie-pins were selling like crazy. People had recourse to old maxims of lost origins. They warned each other to watch out for the 'white-water rocks' though few knew that these were the icebergs Ighmut had encountered. Fear and chariness became everyday companions. They spoke in caveats to each other about pitfalls in their everyday

dealings, but really it was from fear of finding themselves in the thought chambers that they made such a fuss: the greater the brouhaha, the surer they were to be approved of by the Boowigs. They emphasised how much trouble they had gone to, and how their effort would benefit Onevia, and the expense they had suffered, they never forgot that. Every One repeated the Onevian proverbs: 'You can't make a pearlywool purse from a snorter's ear', or 'You can't scoff your offal and have it afterwards.' You can understand why indigestion was their most common ailment.

Their remedies grew more violent. Anaesthesia, vivisection, impaling and extraction were practised, not necessarily in that order, but certainly in some order. Other remedies were derided, especially those of the Infrans, who were, in fact, more advanced in the healing arts than their neighbours. For Onevians, the human body was a finite number of sites, nameable and knowable. As long as they named them, they knew them, and if they knew them they could treat them, or remove them. It's not hard to see what happened when we look back in posses-

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sion of the facts. 'The rocks below grind when the lower eye is blind,' as their own ancient proverb had it. It was an age of endless, meaningless revivals. The further back the better. Ancient dress codes made their appearance; Ighmutian societies held their meetings in the open air.

It was during the Age of the Boowigs that the idea developed of pinching offspring to make them more 'Iggish'. The child, beset from both sides by its supposed parents, turned into a 'biddable' One or was identified as a 'difficult' One. If the former, a promising career was likely, if the latter, medication was usually forced down the child. Compliant Ones had deformed ears. Difficult Ones looked as if they were sleep-walking. Certain journalists argued against sexual discrimination in child-rearing, but gold-earning and spoon-feeding on the Ig-age basis of genitalia — Onævian type Ejaculate and Onævian type Menstruate — became law.

Further laws were voted in to reimpose old ways. Pre-empire meals were sold in new preserving tins. Fragments

of ancient seal-pelt inscriptions were collected by enthusiastic dealers and sold for enormous sums. Worthless scribbling, rags and mundane relics too. 'Oh look at that old sign saying River Goathead, how quaint!' Meanwhile, every day at the same hour they informed themselves about events that had occurred in the previous 24 hours. It was as if there was no longer a present.

More cities arose, cities more grandiose than Ardrapop, making even the skies seem limited. They slapped each other on the back in 'Oneship' though their business dealings were blatantly duplicitous, relying as they did on manipulation and crass reciprocity. In contrast, certain Ones took themselves far from the luminous cities. Emaciated physically, offended by the gambling towers but concentrated in spirit, they slept in shacks on the desert tundra beyond Mount Maurolico, meditating Ighmut's last words and the mystery of reincarnation. They knew the Ones were not what they seemed and would have a hard job proving otherwise. They knew nothing had been well appointed or put to good use for hundreds of years. They saw the decadence and they

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foresaw the Peeling. Unlike the imagos, many of these had attained some high position in society before isolating themselves. For this they were scorned all the more, some fell prey to lynching gangs, and yet these hermits were in many ways more One-like than the Ones, living and thinking alone, separated even from others like them.

Shortly after the persecution of the hermits the Boowigs held a competition among school children to describe the birth of the Onevian nation as briefly as possible:

Once upon a time, hundreds of persons who couldn't have been more different from each other chose a king to sort out their differences.

Deep in the mists of time, many fishing people rescued a hunter stranded with his kill, and when everybody cooked and ate the monster the Onevian language and the Onævian nation were born.

The first Onevians dropped into the sea in space cocoons and

swam to shore to found our first village.

Once, a mighty hunter called Ighmut followed heavenly signs and defeated a fierce monster in fair combat, thereby gaining divine right to rule the tribes of Onevia, even in death.

The author of this last one was declared the winner and presented with a gold-plated sculpture of a hollowed-out seal carcass. Her future in the armed services of Onevia was assured and her history was read out in all the schools. The Boowigs liked this version very much, but not everyone was happy with it. Dissidents made their views known in pamphlets and recorded their thoughts on cassettes which they distributed through the underground. They insisted that Ighmut had no divine right to rule, he was fulfilling the beast's destiny but not his own. He had not followed heavenly signs, he had stupidly followed an auditory hallucination. He had not battled the monster in fair combat, he had trapped it where it could not escape. The monster was not fierce, but timid, inexperienced in combat, slow-moving and clumsy. As for continuing to guide us 'even in death', they

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considered this a vague idea, and a dangerous one for the future of their kind.

When the Boowigs found out that pamphlets and cassettes were being traded in cafés, they bought the land under some of the cafés and bull-dozed them down. When journalists published articles to help people see reason, the Boowigs replaced the editors of their newspapers, who replaced the journalists. When historians published well-researched books that asked prickly questions, and when these were acquired by libraries and found their way into Onævian schools and homes, the Boowigs put their heads together and decided literature was telling lies. They opted for a short-term solution practised only rarely by highly developed nations: they burned the libraries.





On the surface it appears to be nothing more serious than an affection of the fifth cranial nerve with paroxysms in the face and fore-head—the convulsive motion is relieved by incision. But tendonectomy and plastic surgery do nothing to forestall a chronic masked wasting of neurofibrils. I have seen score 3 cellular deterioration, inefficiency of the thyroid and hypothalamus, with phase 1 polychromatic inflammation of myelinated networks. At phase 2 it seats itself in the serous glands of Ebner at the base of the circumvallate papillae, from there it liberates millions of spores when Onevian speech sounds are uttered.

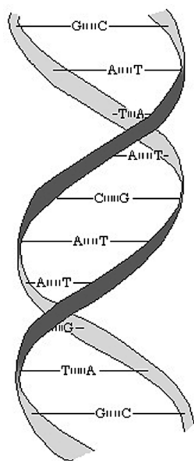
We have tried everything. We lanced some pairings to extirpate patient predisposition but susceptibility spans the genetic chain. We are dealing with a late-age mutative response to an unknown

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environmental stimulus and I doubt that there is a scientist on the planet who can cure it.

One strategy remains: to begin life again. We have selected an ancestor and extracted the information. We lack only the certitude that what we are doing is right.

—From the Journal of Doc Deoxy





You or I would not have noticed the first tics but the Ones' power of fault-finding was exceptional. Modern Ones believed the face should present a 'maskarum', and one only. It should be controlled. If they ever noticed a facial flinch in a friend or family member it was considered an act of neighbourliness if not of generosity to point it out. But the tics became so common that soon everyone was quite as irritated by all the pointing out as by their own deficiencies. They tried to control their tics, and to control their conceitedness if they saw others tic-ing, but it wasn't long before the manifestation, along with an anti-symptomatic smirk, was pandemic.

Doctors examined their charts and acted on the site. A

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tic was eliminated by a snip that left a mark. A smirk took a few more snips. They were fanatical in carrying out this treatment, and a large number of Onevians had been snipped or booked in to be snipped out of tics or smirks before the primary symptoms of the Terminal Peeling masked themselves.

The common folk, who had a history of primitive practices, had already reverted to human sacrifice. Not only Infrans but hundreds of Onevians had been topped and entrained without so much as a trumped-up charge. The Boowigs had taken to holding televised summit meetings at which they wore black woollen cagoules to scare the people back to their senses. Troops were on their way into the provinces and the Onevians might have wiped themselves out there and then if the tics hadn't gone under.

But go under they did, and the Ones went back to telling each other how Oneish they were. They couldn't very well forget the tics, since so many of them had been snipped, so they had to admit that perhaps they were

‘not perfect’—this became an often heard witticism at which it was polite to smile, if indeed you still could. They were not perfect and they were becoming less and less so. They would soon achieve their most spectacular and their most pathetic age, as some ships are remembered for their voyages of discovery, but some only for the manner of their wrecking.

The hands went first. Hands of corruption and of false multiplication, of betrayal and unethical experimentation. Hands of feigned accepting, of hired writing and of ghost designing. Their doctors medicated. They operated on those with insurance. They gave them new hands, hands of those who had no insurance. But soon even the insured knew no cure. There was a confusion of quiet sounds, a thrumming, a vibration as if winds were playing on far-off aeolian strings, of recalcitrant flies in unseen webs. It was the sound of a people trying to sing, though their mouths could hardly open and their voices had lost all range.

The statues in the churches and galleries, the bronzes,

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the marbles, the sealed-off images of the hewn-stone handed, the images of their holy, they too were slowly cracking. The upstart organ of their male, all body as it was, trunk without limbs, the barrel of continuance, shrivelled out of sight. And the sex of the female grew thorns within. In desperation, beyond detection, each Onevian committed a single crime repeatedly.

Corrupt religious leaders made gestures over the bowed heads of the faithful, stumps crossed and raised and lowered in supplication. Boowigs thumped lecterns, promising a cure. Some of them had false hands, which deceived most of the people. Some of them, their methods, were gentle, there was a lack of operatic gesture, they were kindly, their voices sweet, reasonable; and these were the ones who grasped power as never before.

Survivors lied in each other's faces, all was deception and infantile manipulation. Bodies flaked into necrotic pieces. Torches burned through the night. There was the flavour of roast meat on the air. Morning discovered them desiring amnesia, to flee the humiliation of memory,

to no longer be faced with the obviousness of their affliction. And the young threw themselves from windows.

A foreign tribe was blamed for the Peeling and exterminated. The Boowigs' wives retired to their salons and their useless pianos. They tried to play them. Their stumps thumped the keys. Hermits were burned alive in bonfires whose spark-clouds spelt out a final curse on Onevia. Not that it was a matter for divination. Parents were offering their daughters as bribes to authorities, still believing in bureaucracy. Crimes of the state and of superstition multiplied. The Boowigs demanded answers. They consulted their scientists. They hoped for miracles, for a Saviour. They prayed for the spirit of Ighmut made man!

Still the speeches, the theories, the replies and railings, the disease spreading with the very syllables which only their language could make. They bit each other, they bit themselves. Eyes darkened, arms withered. Piers, toll gates, bridges were desolate. No one moved. What could soothe them whose eyes had not lost that look of cold

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murder, who, as if in fulfilment of their wish to be 'Ones', were dying alone and friendless.

They left their yards, court yards, stock yards, yards of their dreams, yards of images in obscurity, mouths dry, wounds sulphurous. They left their cinemas, their banks, to wander with half-closed eyes, currents of biotic dust all-obscuring. The remaining trees poured a liquorice juice from their sides. The spoilers spoiled, this people that supped on a three-eyed beast was itself walking purblind. They cried, arms outstretched before them as the peeling set in, all-depriving.

Their numbers diminished. Now you could count them if you put your mind to it. Now there are a hundred, fifty. Now there is one. Weak from starvation, he toys with the Unbreakable Spatula attached to a cord around his wrist. He survives, bone, tendon and gut. He crawls to the ancient Ruler's Podium. Why has he not wasted away, why can he not? He is the last One, the one with the resistant nucleic filament. He is the One who can not die, who has the secret of immortality. How he

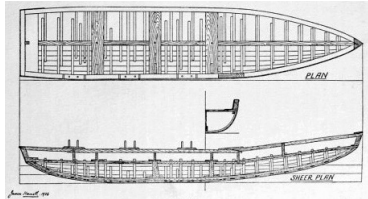
wishes he had not been born lucky, this man whose features are identical to those of the first king Ighmut.

Infran scientists are astounded at his resistance to the disease that has exterminated the Onevians. They are determined to capture him. Their searchlights enter through the embrasures, casting golden pitchforks over a litter of skeletons. A voice shouts to him not to be afraid, they are going to save him. Masked Infran medics descend on ropes. They beckon him to cross the sea of bones towards them. He shakes the Spatula at them. He will not go. He warns them not to approach, his mouth releasing those fatal spores. The surgical masks covering the medics' faces can not protect them. They succumb, ripping the masks from their faces, gasping. As they do so, their throats release that faint humming.

A week passes. A crash of masonry comes from the North then from the east turning finally with the Sweat to the south. Before evening the work of five generations, the mighty Fenders, have fallen.

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The Infrans return with a remote-controlled rescue vehicle. This hermetically sealable glass bubble is lowered into the Bone Palace by means of an enormous walking crane. Guided arms lift the last One into the capsule which closes over him. The Infran scientists act quickly, taking samples from the last One using needles the thickness of a hair. They penetrate his organs and discover the reason for his resistance in the cells of his heart. The Onevian sickness can be controlled. Infrans have only to include a synthetic fibre based on those cells in their meals. They need no longer fear the Onevian tongue. Some researchers are weeping for joy but see — the last One is trying to speak. They turn up the monitors. His mouth opens, his tongue is purple within, bunched, itself, like a heart. His breath scathes the desert of his windpipe. Will they not let him die? A wretched cry echoes down the membrane-red corridors. His hand turns slowly, in its palm, an electro-pelt.



I was raised the son of a low-order Boowig. Limb-wasting had devastated the population. My father told me what he had sworn never to reveal. I ran.

I roamed city and plain from the Rock of Leda to the source of the Sweat beyond Mount Maurolico. I questioned the hermits of the tundra. They knew it was possible to create life that way. They told me that the story of my origins was true.

The gates of the Fenders were open when I returned, wide open for the first time since Ardra. I resided with the shadow folk and re-entered the provinces, no longer myself, but shadow peasant and hermit, king and commoner. I was, or would soon be, the last Onævian.

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Impulsively, craving death, I confessed to some that I was unnatural, less than a creature, a monster formed from the nucleic strand of a thousand year dead king. Peasants drove me from their village with pitchforks and stones.

Naked in the marshes of the Sweat, a fisherman, seeing only a defenceless lunatic, tried to ram me among the bull-rushes. By chance, he hit a hidden tree stump and fell overboard. I killed him with one blow, dressed in his clothes, and drifted downstream to rejoin the Sweat. Spying the dying multitude from my boat, I saw there was no longer any hope. I was the only one not afflicted.

I moored and curled up in the curved hull of the boat. When I slept I dreamed of sea-beasts of a people not its own devouring a three-eyed monster. Upon waking, I walked among them, the dying. Some touched the hem of my cloak, and some cried that they had been healed by that, though I knew it was not, could not be true. I ate one mouthful for all. I ate because even kings have to eat, we can't rule on thin air. Am I that, a ruler? A king? No, I am a something nothing, a rogue who would kill you for your clothes.

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This is how it is. You try your arm. You win or lose. Cravings come and go. Your doctors remind you of your muscles, your blood, of the need to be prudent.

This is how it will be. One, then another will be gone, without mystery or questions.

*'What is it, after all
If not someone else's life?
What is that life
If not a preceding?'*

He is here, I am he, the first hunter, the last,

Ighmut.

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Appendix

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Children's games involved throwing, climbing, snaring, tumbling or racing. Quoits were aimed to encircle a stick placed in the sand. Harpoons were thrown so as to land upright within a circle made of sea-kelp. Steep rocks were scaled to the cries of encouragement of spectators. Gulls were snared for sport using circular fishing nets weighted in seven places with hollowed stones. At the end of a day dedicated to games, the provisional winners came together to decide the overall winner by tumbling. Pairs raced each other for a set distance, the hands of one around the ankles of the other. The winning pair then rolled independently for the distance of a stone's throw and the one who happened to be foremost at the end was declared the winner of all.

When children reached adolescence they took part in an event featuring a skilled fire-controller facing up to a scantily-clad group. Whether this was a game or a competition, (if it was not a dance or a form of theatre), is unclear. In late adolescence a team organised according to the principle of captaincy was pitted against another organised by that of co-operation. The outcome of this engagement (battle? display?) was a mock-crowning accompanied by music more delirious than formal. It all took place in excellent humour — those crowning betrayed no subservience, the one crowned displayed no condescension.

Musical instruments. Clay and bone flutes, reed pipes and wooden

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drums have survived. There is no evidence that skins of any form were used for drumming. Songs took the form of incantation, perhaps of a specifically Onævian phoneme. The atmosphere during songs of celebration appears to have been wild, the atmosphere anarchic. Songs of hope were said to be 'thrown'. They were declaimed in the way that the fishermen cast their nets and seed-sowers cast seeds. The singer, as a means of identifying him- or herself at the beginning of a song, made a symbolic gesture of throwing out over the heads of the participants. On special occasions an accompanying solo dancer or group made synchronized gestures of a similar type.

Finding games date from the very earliest times. Boys scaled cliffs for a painted kestrel egg, young women scoured the dunes or the foreshore for a bone-white egg-shaped stone. The winners embraced each other and were crowned with a wreath of dried seaweed by a member of the opposite sex saying the words 'I will kiss you so you will like it.' Boys and girls then arranged peach-stones on the shore to make a shape that they considered pleasing. Spectators chose the one which they agreed was the most pleasing. If they could not agree there was no overall winner.

Re-enactments were popular, particularly those of the discovery of Onævian itself. The discovery of the first recipe was a popular theme.

Gift-offering, in spite of its apparent informality, was a reciprocal, subtle and simultaneous occurrence. It took place at times of reunion and celebration. Gifts were carefully chosen, since the happiness and

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success of a gathering depended to a great extent on the modest value and high appropriateness of the gifts, as well as on the success of their 'mirroring'. This was accompanied by wild music. An unprovoked gift (or an inappropriate offer of food), or the absence of music at reunions could generate a serious conflict. Gift-giving at reunions was gradually displaced by the offer of food by the hosts followed by music and dancing.

Early flags were used on games days. To make flags, participants threw berries onto rectangular pieces of cloth. When the cloth was littered with berries of different colours, a crowd of eager children was released to scramble for them. In the rush many of the berries were crushed, and the randomly-stained blue- red- yellow- and green-coloured flags were then hoisted aloft on a dune overlooking the beach where the games were scheduled to begin.

2. Mythology

Return to: p. 14

Chief among the gods was a many-headed single-armed parthenogen known as Choral Pol, whose offspring bubbled out of boiling crevices in the ocean floor.

The amphibious Klomathon used to climb onto land and surprise mortals, hypnotising them with a weeping, vengeful eye that emerged

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from his grieving-sac. He dragged his starry-eyed victims into the sea to satisfy himself or his siblings.

Breakbark used to swirl to the surface and break into the air, whistling and screeching many a mariner's doom. He preyed without warning upon all manner of fishes and the fruits of the sea.

Sometimes the sea would glitter and the sea floor burst into bloom so that the ocean displayed all the colours that we know, and streaming among the hues two figures could be seen fluidly giving and receiving, defining themselves as each defined the other. It was the love of these two, known as Form and Content, that produced the second generation of gods and goddesses, children who had a tendency to fulfil their desires immoderately.

Madness, the oldest, could inhabit any of the forms in Choral Pol's realm. He did so without regard to size or importance. Some plants developed unplantlike tendencies such as trapping and digesting fellow plants or animals; others took to dancing, ripping their roots out of the sea-floor as they did so. Under his influence whales were prone to displays of mass morbidity and jellyfish covered the shores of Onævia. If the humans of the shoreline ate fish or leaves containing traces of Madness they, too, became possessed. Part of him remained, therefore, on land, trapped within Onævians. This is why Choral Pol predicted the Onævian's downfall, when their skin would fall and their parts dissolve in burning rain, returning Madness to her.

Madness' sister, Sublime, rendered the ocean pleasant to behold. Her position in the pantheon was little more than that of a domestic. She

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was prone to bouts of wandering, imbuing the seas, hot, cold, still and troubled, with her qualities, and in her teenage years, when she first stepped upon the sea of fragrance, as she called land, she made the forests of Onævia the most blessed of natural gardens. She dreamed up new colours, fierce, at times blinding, and set to work modifying existing combinations, moderating oranges with creams, exciting silvers with trims of fizzy lime. Thanks to her the people living along the coast, who had until then eaten mainly sea-food, were attracted to the land and its yield. Cereals came to be eaten by all, mammoth grass was collected, and materials were mixed to make houses draught-proof. When Sublime entered neighbouring valleys, when she created glistening wonder in the mountains and plains round about, the Onævians craved ownership of that too. They claimed wider and wider tracts of land, and the resulting skirmishes led to unending wars.

Deception, the third-born of Choral Pol's grand-children, had sprung from a union of Form and Content so perfect that there was nothing to distinguish one from the other in the water. This was the source of her power which she exercised at will. She could blend a defenceless fish into its background as a hunter roamed by, or camouflage a plant against a voracious browser. When all went her way you'd hardly have noticed her presence, but if one of her tricks was discovered the whole ocean heard about it, for she was a very bad loser and would set up such a tantrum that eddies formed on the surface. If Choral Pol, or Form and Content, or her brother and sisters, did not intervene, a maelstrom might develop, causing no end of carnage. She became

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unpopular in the deeps, and a rumour spread that she was not of royal blood at all, not in the least divine, nothing more than a foundling upon whom Form and Content had taken pity and raised as their own.

Flood was the fourth child of the second generation. Redundant, you might think, in the sea. But he liked nothing better than to glut himself on the shoreline and coastal plains. He reached his slime-coated needle-toes up, and scooped mouthfuls of soil down into his sieve-like gullet. He rose into the sky making beautiful clouds, before rushing down to have his pleasure of the earth, spreading amorphous over the valleys and plains, gathering huts, animals, soil and inhabitants, before spilling, with his plunder, into the discoloured ocean.

The youngest was History. He was so adored and pampered in infancy by his brothers and sisters that he found adolescence quite disappointing. His parents tried to interest him in philosophy, but History, who was shaped like a coiled whip and had a bark that made a seal's cry sound quite tuneful, could not get his mind off the matter of copulation. If only he could have found a mate somewhere, anywhere! But none would accept him willingly. He would probably have ended up as a concubine-satisfied minor tyrant of the waves had he not, while playing innocently with himself, released the spring that held him together. Within a few seconds History was a thousand incoherent bits and pieces toasting on the rocks, and was soon devoured by seven one-eyed crabs and a pair of mating kestrels. As luck would have it, his unleashed reproductive seed had sped from the centre of

his frustrated loop in the direction of his mother, Content, impregnating her.

So it was the asymmetrical auto-sexual monster Solus Monon was conceived from the union of its father with its father's mother, or, if you will, from the union of its mother with its mother's son. Content carried the baby Solus Monon for fourteen winters, craving cuttlefish every day, until her belly burst. With the last of her strength she transferred the helpless lump to a pouch in the belly of Form. Fortunately for Solus Monon, Form was endowed with sacral teats, but unfortunately for Form, Solus Monon cut all its teeth at once, fed too eagerly and devoured its grandfather. Not having yet learned moderation, it swam over to Content and ate her up as well. For this crime, Choral Pol condemned Solus Monon to rove the lesser and greater oceans to be sought, ravaged and dragged over hard water by a common human and his commoner dogs.

3. *Chance-ball games of Ardrapop*

Return to: p.52

The games at which Democraton excelled without trying, and at which he could not lose, were Kestrel-fighting (betting on a contest between clipped males), Roulette, (a spinning wheel with random numbers), Straw (picking the shortest straw in the hands of an experienced dealer), Quoits (from the ancient game, you tried to throw

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the quoit upon an upright rod while spectators placed bets in one of eight squares around it; if you circled the rod, you won all bets, if it fell in a square, the gambler's return depended on the value of the square), Skittles (identifying the heaviest skittle in the routine of a juggler), and Bluff (a card game similar to modern Poker).

4. *Ornamentation*

Return to: p.42 Return to: p.69

This was first practised as a pastime and then as a means of celebrating individual achievement. Bracelets and necklaces using sea-shells and stones were worn by children before being adopted by adults as prestige symbols. String ornaments were augmented by bone finger-rings and a variety of ear-rings, some with inlaid precious or semi-precious stones probably brought to Onævia by migrating families. Gut or hemp string was looped over the ears, with pearls hanging in front of and behind them. Hairstyling, at first playful, soon had its ceremonial uses. In the Age of the Boowigs certain styles became compulsory in everyday life. Tiny tattooing tools have been found, with tips of strong, sharp bone. A single drawing on a seal-pelt suggests that scribes carried out tattooing before the introduction of Standard Calligraphy and that its function appears to have been primarily literary. If so, its representation in other ink-related arts would have been superfluous.

The disintegrating sea-book that changed the course of Onævian history after the rule of Oxeye dates from the middle of Year 2. It was written in the colourful decorative style used by scribes before standard calligraphy was invented, and was probably the work of a runaway scribe who had escaped persecution by going to live among the fishermen. The legible fragments that survive record oaths and mariners' songs in a rare dialect. It is likely that many words retained in modern Onævian had their origins in this dialect, but these origins became obscured by the restrictions of Standard Calligraphy (against 'obsolete' language). It is also probable that evidence of this Ur-dialect was ignored or covered up by politically-motivated academics.

The most complete fragment in the sea-book is the appeal whose botched translation had such dire consequences for Onævia. It is a supplication which modern scriptology permits us to write using the Latin alphabet as:

Ó nævi! Dom næstr-nol-rvñjka!

Phod Garga interpreted this to mean, 'One life! Our entrance to immortality!' and while it is true that he was mistaken about the etymology of the word Onævia, most of his interpretation can be justified in one way or another.

Similarities between root syllable "kernels" connect the dialect with

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other Indo-European source languages, and if the supplication is rendered in Latin itself, we get:

Naviculae(piscatoriae)! Domum nullo periculo (nos referte)!

or ‘O little (fishing) boats! [Carry us] Home without harm!’

However, ancient Onævian was polyvalent and any chosen syllable might have several meanings. For example, *dom* in this dialect was ‘home’ as well as ‘port’, ‘estuary’ as well as ‘mouth’ and other orifices. It is known that the Onævian method of articulating consonants was responsible for the spread of the disease that destroyed Onævia, but is it not also possible that hidden polyvalency was a contributing factor?

Some related groups of modern and medieval Latin terms are offered below. The Onævian dialect-term [O] is followed by its Latin approximative [L]:

boats (little huts upon the sea), *nævi*, *naviculae* (*naeviculae piscatoriae = fishing boats*).

mole upon the body, (not discovered in [O]), [L] *naevus*.

with care, *naev* (?), *næve* (*gnæve*).

sea, *ævi*, *mare*.

woman, *evi*, *femina*.

port, *dom*, *portus*.

mouth of a river, *dom, portus*.

pay, *do, dissolvere*.

undiluted wine drunk by the intemperate, *dom, merum*.

[our] life, *næstr* (not *vi* as Phod Garga thought), *vita*.

naked, uncovered, *næstr, merum*.

violence, *næstr, violentia*.

sloping in the sense of not upright, *næst, declivis*.

prostitute, *æstr, meretrix*.

Return to: p.36.

sex with wife or concubine, [O] a complex nominalised verb present vestigially in the forked (and sometimes ornamented) letters “v” and “y” which privileges the notion of pleasure without losing sight of the purely playful aspect (e.g. that found in the encircling game of quoits). It is best rendered in translation as *playing bandy*, cf. [L] *coitus*. A coarse relative used by the early fishermen was (see below) *vido*. ‘negative phrase’ (=without), *nol, nullo* (*without any*)

drunkenness, *rvñjk, vinolentia*.

wine, *vñ, vinum*.

drunk/intoxicated, *’vñjk, bene potus*.

sex (with prostitute), *vido, fornicio*. (Note: VID is an I-E root for ‘depriving’ so: [L] *vidui viri*, men lacking wives.)

rope, *vñ, retinaculum*.

net, *’vñjk, reticulum*.

storm, *vñj, tempestas/fluctus*.

return, *rvñj, revenire/reversio*.

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sloping in the sense of immoral or unjust, *rvñj, malus, injuria*.

wrongly positioned, *rvñjka, injuriâ*.

harm, calamity [fault], *rvñjka, periculum [malum]*.

to resound, *ñjk, retinneo*.

(to make an) oath, [to be more favourable to], *ñjk, juro, [malo]*.

insult, *ñjka, injuria*.

topmast/wicked/bad quality, *rvñj, malus*.

stupid, *ka, stupidum*.

A less restrained translation in English of the mariners' appeal might, therefore, read: 'We have gathered in the rope and drawn in the net [deprived the sea of rope and the net], now pay us back in kind by getting us to port and the [rollicking(?), sloped(?), 'ill-famed'(?)] oath-ing house *without* injury or calamity (from mast-toppling tempests?) so that we may drink a river of the best liquor, without having sore topmasts in the morning, and may the best fisherman among us [the most resounding(?)] have first choice at bandy with the (beauty-moled? naked?) wonder-women.'

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