

But Oliver did not answer Haldane.

The eager creature-pig squealed in triumph as it found its own way up the rock.

The horn blew just below. It said: *The game is up. The game is up.*

But it was not, for Haldane could still pull the Pall of Darkness down around his shoulders and steal away down Barrow Hill. No mortal eyes could see him. He could go away and continue to live as he was. He could be safe.

But for the pig! But for the black pig!

Haldane turned and looked away from the rock and over the moonlit country at his alternative. And before him, curving away, there was a stone bridge. It was clearly limned. Below it there was mist and voidness. The bridge was without foundation. Where the bridge led was lost to sight in the mist. He who fell from that bridge would be forever forgot.

Bridges may fall down, as all who know Nestor know.

The pig was upon him then, and he fell onto his knees before its power. It struck him with its heavy body and then it was past him. Haldane looked up and the pig grunted and trotted out onto the bridge as though it were substantial and might easily bear great weight. Haldane watched to see what the pig would do. It had lost all interest in him and it walked out farther and farther on the bridge that had no support. Haldane wanted to call to it.

He thought once more of the Pall of Darkness and looked out to see Arngrim, and Romund and Ivor. But he could not see them anywhere. Where had they gone? Where were the other Gets who had come from all Nestor? He could not see them around the base of the rock.

The mist circled the base of the rock now. Beneath it, there was great nothing. Haldane stood on the rock in the Void that supported the bridge over the Void. There was bright moonlight and there was mist clear as cloth.

Haldane looked to see the black pig. As he looked, the animal became a white wurox and disappeared into the mist.

Chapter 21

Haldane stepped cautiously onto the bridge. The Winds of the Void that had surged about him through the night now whistled like hollow desolation and waited below in the emptiness for him. Haldane tested the stone, but it bore his weight without wag or sag.

How strange, how very strange this all was. Since Morca's Banquet, all was always strange. It was a mystery and a delight and an awfulness how strange things had been. Those things that had befallen him were like nothing that had ever befallen him before.

What was this place? What was this bridge?

It was a causeway over the Abyss, resting on nothing, passing over the Void. How could such a bridge, hanging giddily, hang? It wound slightly, sometimes curving as though following the slope of emptiness. Everything that Haldane knew—his senses, his fears, his desire to survive—all these told him that the bridge was not to be trusted, even though the wurox might walk upon it.

But his chief strength, which was his new ability to find his way within the inner mysteries of the land, insisted that he walk forward boldly, that this was the true way.

And so he paused, torn between nightmare and dream.

He knew only this: that he was afoot in a universe that always changed. He was not in Morca's old world where all was safe and still until the world broke. He was in a universe that always moved and never broke.

The old unmoving world had broken that he might not break. Now, he might break, but he knew this new ever-changing world would not.

Was this nightmare? Was this a place he did not fit and could not fit? Was it always to be endless whirling confusion? Was it Libera, the hideous caterpillar creature, She Who lured, promised and lied, toying with him still as though he were a little spider made to run madly on a green grass stem?

Or was this the place that he dreamed of? That place where he was at home, even though all was always strange, because he was one with that great mysterious power which inhabited this country.

Before him, the wurox returned to stare silently out of the fartherness of the mist. Then it became vanished again in the white folds