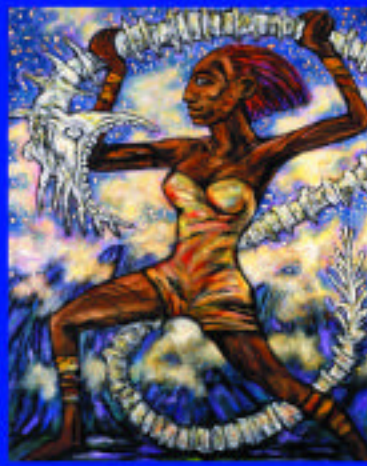


CLIVE BARKER

ABARAT



OCTOBER 2002

ALL ART IN THE FINAL BOOK
WILL BE FULL COLOR

EXCERPT FROM

ABARAT

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All artwork in the final book
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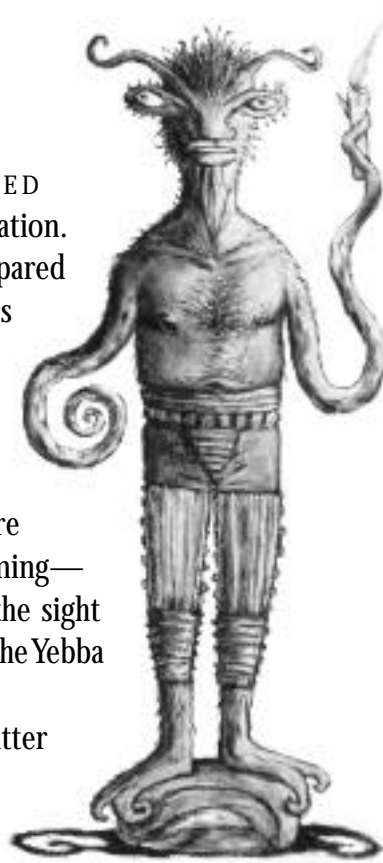
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IN THE GREAT HEAD

CANDY HAD ALWAYS PRIDED herself upon having a vivid imagination. When, for instance, she privately compared her dreams with those her brothers described over the breakfast table, or her friends at school exchanged at break, she always discovered her own night-visions were a lot wilder and weirder than anybody else's. But there was nothing she could remember dreaming—by day or night—that came close to the sight that greeted her in the Great Head of the Yebba Dim Day.

It was a city, a city built from the litter of the sea. The street beneath her feet was made from timbers that had clearly been in the water for a long time, and the walls were lined with barnacle-encrusted stone. There were three columns supporting the roof, made of coral fragments cemented together. They were buzzing hives of life unto themselves; their elaborately constructed walls pierced with dozens of windows, from which light poured.

There were three main streets that wound up and around these coral hives, and they were all lined with habitations and thronged with the Yebba Dim Day's citizens.

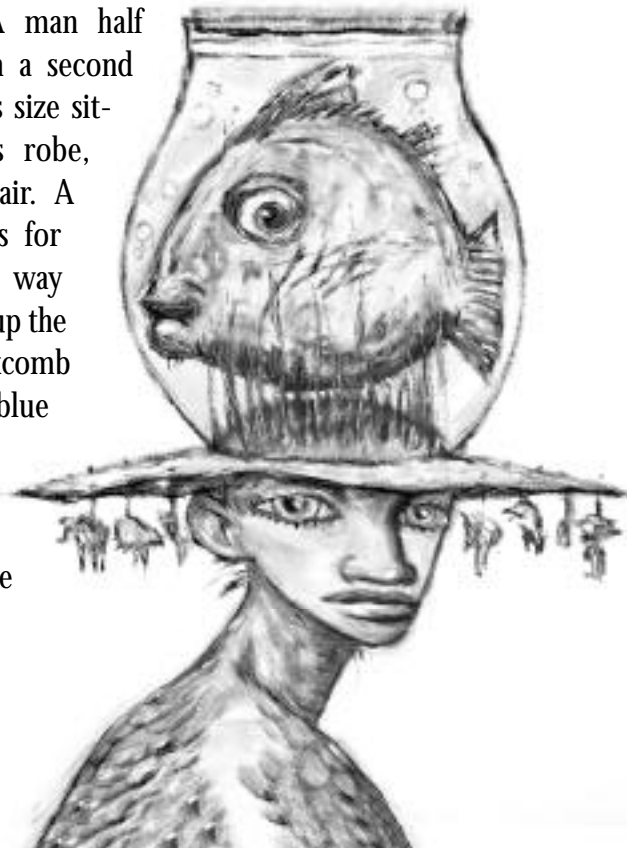


As far as Candy could see there were plenty of people who resembled folks she might have expected to see on the streets of Chickentown, give or take a sartorial detail: a hat, a coat, a wooden snout. But for every one person that looked perfectly human, there were two who looked perfectly *other* than human. The children of a thousand marriages between humankind and the great bestiary of the Abarat were abroad on the streets of the city.

Among those who passed her as she ventured up the street were creatures which seemed related to fish, to birds, to cats and dogs and lions and toads. And those were just the species she recognized. There were many more she did not; forms of face that her dream-life had never come near to showing her.

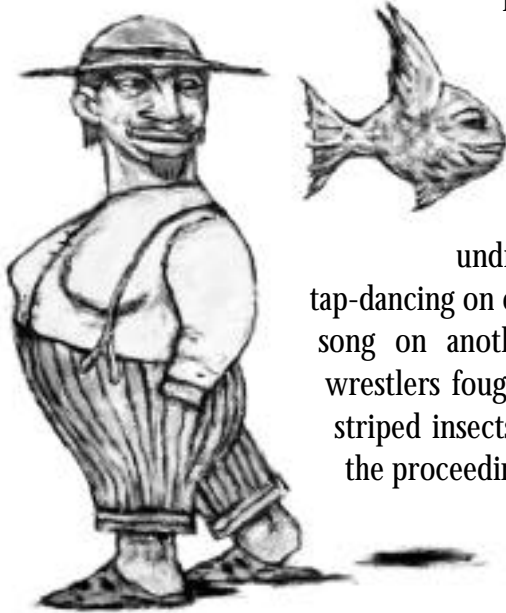
Though she was cold, she didn't care. Though she was weary to her marrow, and lost—oh so very lost—she didn't care. This was a New World rising before her, and it was filled with every kind of diversity.

A beautiful woman walked by wearing a hat like an aquarium. In it was a large fish whose poignant expression bore an uncanny resemblance to the woman on whose head it was balanced. A man half Candy's size ran by with a second man half the first fellow's size sitting in the hood of his robe, throwing nuts into the air. A creature with red ladders for legs was stalking its way through the crowd farther up the street, its enormous coxcomb bright orange. A cloud of blue smoke blew by, and as it passed a foggy face appeared in the cloud and smiled at Candy before the wind dispersed it.



Everywhere she looked there was something to amaze. Besides the citizens there were countless animals in the city, wild and domesticated. White-faced monkeys, like troupes of clowns, were on the roofs baring their scarlet bottoms to passersby. Beasts the size of chinchillas but resembling golden lions ran back and forth along the power cables looped between the houses, while a snake, pure white but for its turquoise eyes, wove cunningly between the feet of the crowd, chattering like an excited parrot. To her left a thing that might have had a lobster for a mother and Picasso for a father was clinging to a wall, drawing a flattering self-portrait on the white plaster with a stick of charcoal. To her right a man with a firebrand was trying to persuade a cow with an infestation of yellow grasshoppers leaping over its body to get out of his house.

The grasshoppers weren't the only insects in the city. Far from it. The air was filled with buzzing life. High overhead birds dined on clouds of mites that blazed like pinpricks of fire. Butterflies the size of Candy's hand moved just above the heads of the crowd, and now and then alighted on a favored head, as though it were a flower. Some were transparent, their veins running with brilliant blue blood. Others were fleshy and fat; these the preferred food of a creature that was as decadently designed as a peacock, its body vestigial, its tail vast, painted with colors for which Candy had no name.



And on all sides—among these astonishments—were things that were absurdly recognizable. Televisions were on in many of the houses, their screens visible through undraped windows. A cartoon boy was tap-dancing on one screen, singing some sentimental song on another, and on a third a number of wrestlers fought: humans matched with enormous striped insects that looked thoroughly bored with the proceedings. There was much else that Candy

recognized. The smell of burned meat and spilled beer. The sound of boys fighting. Laughter, like any other laughter. Tears, like any other tears.

To her amazement, she heard English spoken everywhere, though there were dozens of dialects. And of course the mouth parts that delivered the words also went some way to shape the nature of the English that was being spoken: some of it was high and nasal, a singsong variation that almost



seemed about to become music. From other directions came a guttural version that descended at times into growls and yappings.

All this, and she had advanced perhaps fifty yards in the Yebba Dim Day.

The houses at the lower end of The Great Head, where she was presently walking, were all red, their fronts bowed. She quickly grasped why. They were made of boats, or the remains of boats. To judge by the nets that were hung as makeshift doors, the occupants of these houses were the families of fishermen who'd settled here. They'd dragged their vessels out of the cool evening air, and taken a hammer and crowbar to the cabins and the deck and hold, peeling apart the boards, so as to make some kind of habitation on land. There was no order to any of this; people just seemed to take whatever space was available. How else to explain the chaotic arrangement of vessels, one on top of the other?

As for power, it seemed to be nakedly stolen from those higher up in the city (and therefore, presumably, more wealthy). Cables ran down the walls, entering houses and exiting again, to provide service for the next house.

It was not a foolproof system by any means. At any one moment, looking up at the hundreds, perhaps thousands of heaped-up houses, *somebody's* lights were flickering, or there was an argument going on about the cables. No doubt the presence of monkeys and the birds, pecking at the cables, or simply swinging from them, did not improve matters.

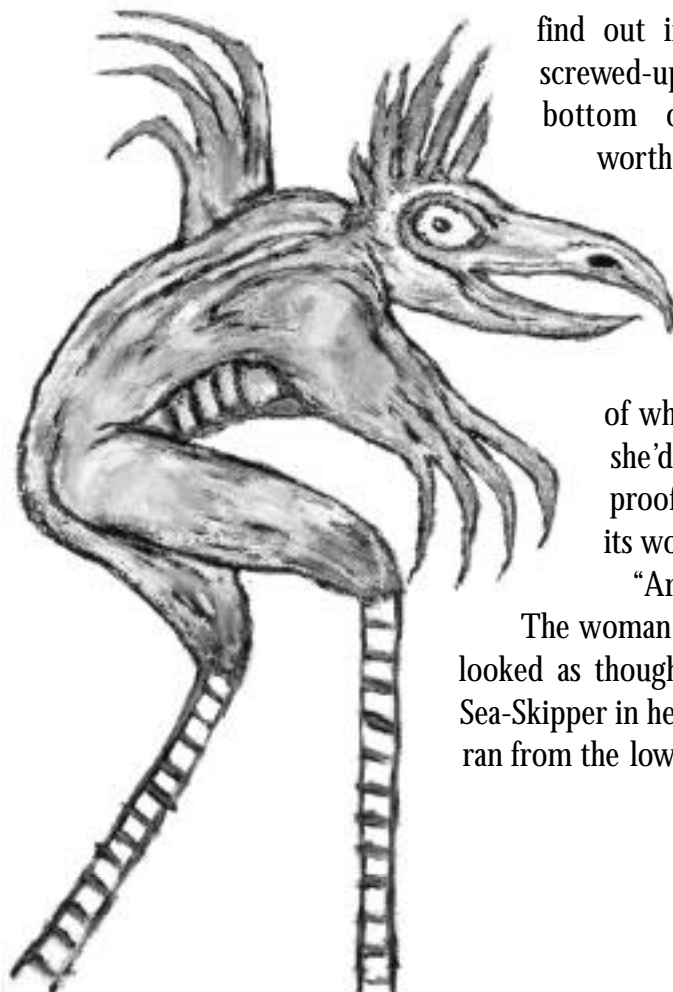
It was a wonder, Candy thought, that this outlandish collection of people, animals and habitations worked at all. She could not imagine the people of Chickentown putting up with such chaotic diversity. What would they think of the ladder-legged creature or the smoke creature, or the baby beast throwing nuts in the air?

I need to remember as many details as I can, so when I get back home I can tell everybody what it was like, down to the last brick, the last butterfly. I wonder, she thought to herself, *if they make cameras here? If they have televisions, she reasoned, then surely they have cameras.*

Of course she'd first have to find out if the few soaked and screwed-up dollars she had in the bottom of her pocket were worth anything here. If they were, and she could find somewhere to purchase a camera, then she could make a proper record of what she was seeing. Then she'd have proof, absolute proof that this place, with all its wonders, existed.

"Are you cold?"

The woman who had addressed her looked as though she might have some Sea-Skipper in her heritage. Vestigial gills ran from the lower half of her cheek into



her neck, and there was a faintly mottled quality to her skin. Her eyes had a subtle cast of silver about them.

“Actually I am a little,” Candy said.

“Come with me. I’m Izarith.”

“I’m Candy Quackenbush. I’m new here.”

“Yes, I could tell,” Izarith said. “It’s cold today; the water gets up through the stones. One day this place is just going to rot and collapse on itself.”

“That would be a pity,” Candy said.

“You don’t live here,” Izarith said, with a trace of bitterness.

She led Candy to one of the houses made from fishing boats. As she followed the woman to the threshold, Candy felt just a little pang of doubt. Why was she being invited into Izarith’s house so quickly, without any real reason, beyond that of a stranger’s generosity?

Izarith seemed to sense her unease. “Don’t come in if you don’t want to,” she said. “I just thought you looked in need of a fire to warm you through.”

Before Candy could reply there was a series of crashes from outside the Head, accompanied by a din of yells and screams.

“The dock!” Candy said, looking back toward the door.

Obviously the jetty had finally given out beneath the weight of the crowd. There was a great rush of people out to see the calamity, which was of course only going to make matters worse out there. Izarith showed no desire to go and see what had happened. She just said: “Are you coming?”

“Yes,” said Candy, offering the woman a smile of thanks and following her inside.

Just as Izarith had promised there was a fire in the little hearth, which the woman fueled with a handful of what looked like dried seaweed. The kindling was consumed quickly and brightly. A soothing wave of warmth hit Candy. “Oh, that’s nice,” she said, warming her hands.

On the floor in front of the fire was a child of perhaps two, her features one generation further removed from the sea-dwelling origins of her grandparents, or perhaps her great-great-grandparents.

"This is Maiza. Maiza, this is Candy. Say *hello*."

"Hell. O," said Maiza.

With her duty to courtesy done, Maiza returned to playing with her toys, which were little more than painted blocks of wood. One of them was a boat, painted red; a crude copy, perhaps, of the vessel whose boards had built these walls.

Izarith went to check on the other child in the room; a baby, asleep in a cot.

"That's Nazré," she said. "He's been sick since we came here. He was born at sea, and I believe he wants to go back there."

She bent low, talking softly to the baby.

"That's what you want, isn't it, dearling? You want to be out away from here."

"You want that too?" Candy said.

"With all my heart. I hate this place."

"Can't you leave?"

Izarith shook her head. "My husband, Ruthus, had a boat, and we used to fish around the Outer Islands, where the shoals are still good. But the boat was getting old. So we came here to trade it in for a new one. We had some money from the season's fishing and we thought we'd be able to get a good boat. But there were no new boats to be had. Nobody's building any more. And now we're almost out of money. So my husband's working putting in toilets for the folks in the towers, and I'm stuck down here with the children."

As she told her tale, she pulled back a makeshift curtain which divided the little room in two and, sorting through a box of garments, she selected a simple dress, which she gave to Candy.

"Here," she said. "Put this on. If you wear those wet clothes much longer you'll get phlegmatic."

Gratefully, Candy put it on, feeling secretly ashamed of her initial suspicion. Izarith obviously had a good heart. She had very little to

share, but what she had, she was offering.

"It suits you," Izarith said, as Candy tied a simple rope belt around her waist. The fabric of the dress was brown, but it had a subtle iridescence to it; a hint of blue and silver in its weave.

"What's the currency here?" Candy asked.

Plainly Izarith was surprised by the question; understandably so. But she answered anyway. "It's a zem," she said. "Or a paterzem, which is a hundred zem note."

"Oh."

"Why do you ask this question?"

Candy dug in the pocket of her jeans. "It's just that I have some dollars," she said.

"You have *dollars*?" Izarith replied, her mouth wide in astonishment.

"Yes. A few."

Candy pulled the sodden notes out and carefully spread them on the hearth, where they steamed in front of the fire.

Izarith's eyes didn't leave the bills from the moment they appeared. It was almost as though she was witnessing a miracle.

"Where did you get those . . . ?" she said, her voice breathless with astonishment. Finally she tore her gaze from the hearth and looked up at Candy.

"Wait," she said. "Is it possible?"

"Is *what* possible?"

"Do you . . . come from the Hereafter?"

Candy nodded. "Actually I come from a place called America."

"America." Izarith spoke the word like a prayer. "You have dollars, and you come from America." She shook her head in disbelief.

Candy went down on her haunches before the fire and peeled the now almost dried dollars off the hearth. "Here," she said, offering them to Izarith. "You have them."

Izarith shook her head, her expression one of almost religious awe.

"No, no I couldn't. Not dollars. Angels use dollars, not Skizmut like me."

“Take it from me,” Candy said, “I’m not an angel. Very far from it. And what’s a Skizmut?”

“My people are Skizmut. Or they were, generations ago. The bloodline’s been diluted, over the years. You have to go back to my great-grandfather for a pure Skizmut.”

She looked melancholy; an expression which suited the form of her face better than any other.

“Why so sad?”

“I just wish I could go back into the deeps and make my home there, away from all this . . .”

Izarith cast her sad eyes toward the window, which was without frames or panes. The crowd outside moved like a relentless parade. Candy could see how hard it would be to exist in this tiny hovel, with the twilight throng moving up and down the street outside, all the hours that God sent.

“When you say the deeps,” Candy replied, “Do you mean the sea?”

“Yes. Mama Izabella. The Skizmut had cities down there. Deep in the ocean. Beautiful cities, made of white stone.”

“Have you ever seen them?”

“No, of course not. After two generations, you lose the way of the fish. I would drown, like you.”

“So what can you do?”

“Live on a boat, as close as we can to the deeps. Live with the rhythm of Mother Izabella beneath us.”

“Well, perhaps the dollars will help you and Ruthus buy a boat,” Candy said.

Candy handed Izarith a ten and one single, keeping six for herself.

Izarith laughed out loud, the music in her laughter so infectious that her daughter, Maiza, started laughing too.

“Eleven dollars? *Eleven*. It would buy *two* boats! *Three* boats! It’s like ten paterzem! More, I think!” She looked up, suddenly anxious. “And this is *really* for me?” she said, as though she was afraid the gift would be reclaimed.

“It’s all yours,” Candy said, feeling a little odd about sounding too magnanimous. After all, it was only eleven bucks.

“I’m going to spend a little piece of this one,” Izarith said, selecting a single, and pocketing the rest. “I’m going to buy some food. The children haven’t eaten this day. I think you haven’t either.” Her eyes were shining; their joy increased by the silvery luster that was the gift of her Skizmut breeding. “Will you stay with them, while I go out?” she said.

“Of course,” Candy said. She suddenly realized she was starving.

“And Maiza?”

“Yes, Muma?”

“Will you be kind to the lady from the Hereafter, while I fetch bread and milk?”

“Grish fritters!” said Maiza.

“Is that what you want? Grish fritters with noga seeds?”

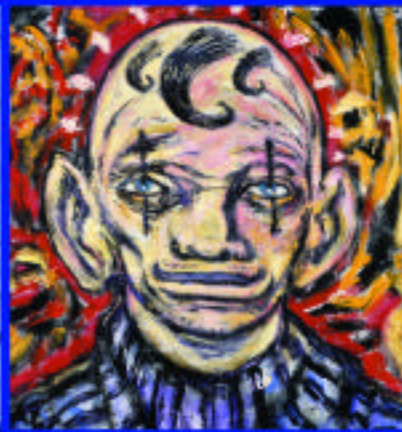
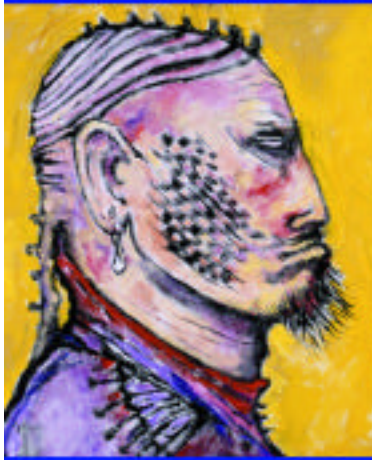
“Grish fritter with noga seeds! Grish fritter with noga seeds!”

“I won’t be long,” Izarith said.

“We’ll be fine,” Candy said, sitting down beside the child in front of the fire. “Won’t we, Maiza?”

The child smiled again, her tiny teeth semitranslucent, carrying a hint of blue.

“Grish fritters with noga seeds!” she said. “All for me!”



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