After four minutes and twenty seconds a brown head emerged to his left, about sixty meters away; with a strange, desperate shudder which seemed at the same time as if paralysed, the Sinhalese clawed at the rocks, in one hand he had the knife, in the other some pearl bearing oysters. The captain scowled. "So, what's wrong?" he asked, sharply. The Sinhalese was still slithering up the rock, unable to speak with the horror of it. "What has happened?" the captain shouted.

"Saheb, Saheb," said the Sinhalese as he sank down on the beach, gasping for breath. "Saheb...Saheb..."

"Sharks?"

"Djinns," groaned the Sinhalese. "Demons, Captain. Thousands and thousands of demons!" He pressed his fist into his eye. "Everywhere demons, Captain!"

"Show me those oysters," the captain ordered him, and began to open one with the knife. Inside, there was a small, perfect pearl. "Find any more of these?" The Sinhalese drew another three oysters out from the bag he had hanging round his neck.

"There are oysters down there, Captain, but they are guarded by these demons...They were watching me as I cut them off..." The curls on his head stuck out with shock. "Not here, Saheb, not here!"

The captain opened the oysters; two of them were empty and in the third there was a pearl the size of a pea, as round as a drop of mercury. Captain van Toch looked at the pearl and then at the Sinhalese collapsed on the ground.

"won't you," he said hesitantly, "dive in there one more time?" Without a word, the Sinhalese shook his head. Captain J. van Toch felt a strong urge to castigate and shout at the Sinhalese; but to his surprise he found that he was speaking quietly and almost gently: "Don't you worry, lad. And what did they look like, these... demons?"

"Like little children," said the Sinhalese with a sigh. "They have a tail, Captain, and they're about this high," indicating about one meter twenty above the ground. "They stood all around me and watched what I was doing...a sort of circle of them..."  The Sinhalese shuddered. "Saheb, not here Saheb, not here!" Captain van Toch thought for a while.

"And what about when they blink; was it with their lower eyelid or what?"

"I don't know, Captain," the Sinhalese croaked. "There are ten thousand of them there!" The captain looked round to find the other Sinhalese; he stood about fifty meters away, waiting without interest with his hands crossed over on his shoulders; perhaps because when a person is naked he has nowhere else to put his hands than on his own shoulders. The captain gave him a silent signal and the gaunt Sinhalese jumped into the water. After three minutes and fifty seconds he re-emerged, clawing at the slippery rocks.

…

There was a sudden, piercing scream from the lagoon. Abe lifted himself up on his elbow so that he could see better. Li, his sweetheart, was screaming, waving her arms in the air and rushing through the water to the shore, floundering and splashing water all around. Abe jumped up and ran to her. "What is it, Li?" (Look at that stupid way she runs, the cool and critical voice remarked. She throws her legs about. She flaps her arms about. It just isn't nice. And she's even squawking as she does it, yes, she squawks.) "What's happened, Li?" called Abe as he ran to her assistance.

"Abe, Abe," squawked his sweetheart, and all of a sudden she was there hanging, cold and wet, around his neck. "Abe there's some kind of animal out there!"

"Why that's nothing," laughed Abe. "It must be some kind of fish."

"Not with an awful head like that," his sweetheart howled, and pressed her wet nose against Abe's breast. Abe wanted to pat her on the shoulder like a father, but on her wet body it would have sounded more like a slap.

"Alright, alright," he muttered, "look out there, there's nothing there any more." Li looked out to the lagoon.

"It was awful," she sighed, then suddenly started to howl again. "There, there, you see it?" There was the black head of something above the water slowly coming in to shore, its mouth opening and closing. Abe's sweetheart Li screamed hysterically and set off in desperate flight away from the water.

Abe did not know what he should do. Should he run after Li so that she would not be so afraid? Or should he stay where he was to show that he had no fear of this animal himself? He chose, of course, the second option; strode towards the sea until he was up to his ankles in water and, his fists clenched, looked the creature in the eye. The black head stopped coming closer, it swayed oddly, and said: Ts-ts-ts. Abe was somewhat uneasy about this, but he could not possibly let it be seen. "What is it you want?" he said sharply.

"Ts-ts-ts," the head replied.

"Abe, Abe, A-a-abe," sweetheart Li shrieked.

"I'm coming," Abe replied, and he slowly (so that nobody would get the wrong idea) went back towards his girl. He stopped and turned to look severely at the sea. At the waters edge, where the sea never stops tracing its lacey patterns in the sand, there was some kind of dark-coloured animal standing on its hind legs. Its head was round and its body swayed. Abe stood where he was with his heart beating fast.

"Ts-ts-ts," said the animal.

"A-a-abe" wailed his sweetheart, close to fainting. Abe walked backwards, step by step, without letting the animal out of his sight. The animal did not move but merely turned its head to watch him. At last, Abe was once more with his sweetheart, who was lying with her face to the ground and howling and blubbering with the horror of it.

"It's...it's some kind of seal," said Abe uncertainly. "We really ought to go back to the ship, Li." But Li merely shuddered. "There's nothing there to be frightened of," Abe insisted. He wanted to kneel down beside Li, but it was his duty to stand like a knight in armour between her and the beast. He wished he were wearing more than just bathing trunks, or that he had at least something like a penknife with him, or that he could find a stick.

It was beginning to get dark. The animal came closer again and stopped about thirty paces away. And behind it were five, six, eight of the same animal appearing out of the sea and hesitantly, swaying and tip-tapping, they made their way to where Abe was protecting his sweetheart, Li. "Don't look, Li," gasped Abe, although this was quite unnecessary as Li would not have looked for anything in the world. More of the shadows came out of the sea and formed into a broad semi-circle. By now there was about sixty of them, Abe reckoned. That light patch was his sweetheart Li's bathing gown, the gown she had been asleep in only a short time before. The animals had come as far as this light patch, which lay carelessly thrown down on the sand.

Then Abe did something as natural and as nonsensical as the knight in the Schiller story who went into the lion's cage to fetch his lady's glove. There are many natural and nonsensical things that men will keep on doing for as long as the world is still spinning. Without thinking, and with his head erect and his fists clenched, Mister Abe Loeb went in among the animals to fetch the bathing gown belonging to his sweetheart, Li.

The animals stepped back slightly but did not run away. Abe picked up the gown, threw it over his arm like a toreador and remained standing where he was. "A-abe," came the desperate whine from behind him.

Mister Abe felt a sense of boundless strength and nobility. "What then?" he said to the animals, taking a step closer. "What exactly is it you want?"

"Ts-ts," hissed one of the animals, and then, in a rasping voice like an old mans, it barked, "Knife!" The other animals, a little way away joined in, barking like the first: "Knife, knife, knife!"

"A-abe!"

"Don't be afraid, Li," Abe called back.

"Li," came a bark from in front of him. "Li." "Li."

"A-a-abe!" To Abe it seemed like he was dreaming.

"What is it?"

"Knife!"

"A-a-abe!" wailed his sweetheart.  "Come back here!"

"Right away.--I don't have a knife. I'm not going to hurt you. What is it you want?"

"Ts-ts," hissed another of them as it swayed its way across to him. Abe stood with his legs apart, the gown still over his arm, but he did not retreat. "Ts-ts," it said.

"What is it you want?" The animal seemed to be offering Abe its front paw, but Abe did not like this at all. "What?" he said, somewhat sharply.

"Knife," barked the animal, and dropped something whitish, like a beads, from its paw. But they were not beads as they rolled across the sand.

"A-abe," stammered Li. "Don't leave me here!"

By now, Mister Abe was no longer afraid. "Get out of the way," he said, waving the bathing gown at the animals. The animals made a sudden and hasty retreat. It would now be possible for Abe to withdraw with honour, but so that Li would see what courage he had he stooped down to pick up the white things the animal had dropped from its paw and see what they were. There were three of them, hard, smooth and round and with a dull sheen to them. As it was getting dark, Mister Abe brought them up close to his eyes.

"A-abe," wailed his abandoned sweetheart, "Abe!"

"I'm coming," Mister Abe called back. "Li, I've got something here for you! Li, Li, I'll bring it right over!" With the bathing gown whirling above his head, Mister Abe Loeb ran across along the shore like a young god.

Li was squatting a little way off and shaking. "Abe," she sobbed as her teeth chattered. "How could you,...how could you..." The triumphant Abe knelt down in front of her.

"Lily Valley, the gods of the sea, the Tritons, come to pay you homage. I am to tell you that ever since Venus emerged from the foaming deep no artist has ever impressed them like you. As proof of their awe they send you this." Abe held out his hand. "Look, three pearls."

"Don't talk garbage, Abe," snorted his sweetheart, Li.

"Honest, Li. Take a look, they're genuine pearls!"

NEWT MARKET

(Czechoslovak Press Agency) Reports issued by the Salamander Syndicate for the end of the quarter show a thirty percent rise in newt trading. Nearly seventy million newts were supplied over this period, especially to south and central America, Indochina and Italian Somalia. Plans are in progress for deepening and widening the Panama Canal, dredging Guayaquil harbour and the deepening of shallow waters in the Torres Straits, which, according to the latest estimates will involve moving nine thousand million cubic metres of firm land. Construction of islands for major airports between Madeira and Bermuda is not due to start until next spring. Creation of the Marian Islands, under Japanese authority, is still in progress; eight hundred and forty acres of new land--light land as it is called--has been created so far between the islands of Tinian and Saipan. Newt prices are very strong, due the increasing demand, at Leading 61 and Team 620. Supplies are adequate.]

At one in the morning on the 20th. November, radio hams over most of Europe suffered serious interference to their reception, as if a new and exceptionally strong broadcaster was operating. They located the interference at two hundred and three metres; it sounded something like the noise of machinery or rushing water; then the continuous, unchanging noise was suddenly interrupted by a horrible, rasping noise (everyone described it in the same way: a hollow, nasal, almost synthetic sounding voice, made all the more so by the electronic apparatus); and this frog-like voice called excitedly, "Hello, hello, hello! Chief Salamander speaking. Hello, chief Salamander speaking. Stop all broadcasting, you men! Stop your broadcasting! Hello, Chief Salamander speaking!" And then another, strangely hollow voice asked: "Ready?" "Ready." There was a click as if the broadcast were being transferred to another speaker; and then another, unnaturally staccato voice called: "Attention! Attention! Attention!" "Hello!" "Now!"

A voice was heard in the quiet of the night; it was rasping and tired-sounding but still had the air of authority. "Hello you people! This is Louisiana. This is Kiangsu. This is Senegambia. We regret the loss of human life. We have no wish to cause you unnecessary harm. We wish only that you evacuate those areas of coast which we will notify you of in advance. If you do as we say you will avoid anything regrettable. In future we will give you at least fourteen days notice of the places where we wish to extend our sea. Incidents so far have been no more than technical experiments. Your explosives have proved their worth. Thank you for them.

"Hello you people! Remain calm. We wish you no harm. We merely need more water, more coastline, more shallows in which to live. There are too many of us. Your coastlines are already too limited for our needs. For this reason we need to demolish your continents. We will convert them into bays and islands. In this way, the length of coastline can be increased five-fold. We will construct new shallows. We cannot live in deep ocean. We will need your continents as materials to fill in the deep waters. We wish you no harm, but there are too many of us. You will be free to migrate inland. You will not be prevented from fleeing to the hills. The hills will be the last to be demolished.

"We are here because you wanted us. You have distributed us over the entire world. Now you have us. We wish that you collaborate with us. You will provide us with steel for our picks and drills. you will provide us with explosives. You will provide us with torpedoes. You will work for us. Without you we will not be able to remove the old continents. Hello you people, Chief Salamander, in the name of all newts everywhere, offers collaboration with you. You will collaborate with us in the demolition of your world. Thank you."

The tired, rasping voice became silent, and all that was heard was the constant noise resembling machinery or the sea. "Hello, hello, you people," the grating voice began again, "we will now entertain you with music from your gramophone records. Here, for your pleasure, is the March of the Tritons from the film, Poseidon."