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New York, 1886.

The RAGNAROK cut across a fast-moving thundercloud and set down in a deserted field on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Thomas Bright, Jr. stomped down the ship's boarding ramp, shining in his usual terrycloth robe and flip-flops.

Flap, flap, flap, flap, echoed his footwear.

"Chicory?" he offered, extending a tin mug of piping hot coffee to his twin brother Piotr.

Piro leaned back in his coveralls and boots, propping himself up against the rickety wooden fence. His breath was expressive in the cold morning air, emitting oblique smoke signals between quick bites of scrambled eggs and bacon.

"Negatory," he replied, and turned the page in his leaf.

"Suit yourself," shrugged Thomas, who blew on the mug and then promptly downed a gulp of the steaming liquid.

Piro put down his plate and closed his leaf as a customer approached.

2

"Move along now, past the cow, down to the far fencepost to collect your product." Piro's instructions were illustrated by the precise motions of his gloved hands. He nodded affirmative towards a hired assistant, who, in lieu of a receipt, always checked with the boss before dispensing from the barrel.

"Let's get a saddle on that thing," suggested Thomas, staring at the cow.

Gradually, a crowd gathered around the makeshift retail environment.

"Ladies, seniors, and all those other citizens whose sedentary employment causes nervous prostration, irregularities of the stomach, bowels and kidneys; those who require a nerve tonic and a pure, delightful diffusible stimulant; those who experience mild to semi-mild discomfort on a regular basis; please to enjoy our delicious, refreshing, exhilarating, invigorating valuable brain tonic for a limited time only!"

Thomas stepped backward as the stranger elbowed his way onto the team's platform. He carried in his hands a portable device that modulated the amplitude of his voice.

"What the fuck? Where did this guy come from?"

Piro was stoic. Knowing. Displaying the easy competence that never failed to irritate Thomas in the midst of a field operation. Of course, he had an answer ready and waiting.

"John Stith Pemberton."

"..."

"Run a search."

Pause.

Click.

Scroll.

"...The Coke guy? Hotlanta? The fuck's he doing in New York?"