THE GREEN ALWAYS GROWS

by Stanley Lieber

1

"The cook must be in love."

Plinth Mold poked at his pad thai. Brittle. Dry. Overpriced. Inedible.

Still angry because the waiter had assumed he was a white man.

Ming shrugged.

Plinth sighed and set down his fork. His shoulders sagged. "The median is the message," he conceded.

He looked up at the giant clam.

"What on Earth did you plan to do with characters like that, anyway," he asked.

"Harrrrruuuuuuunnnnngggggggggggggg..." explained Ming.

"Of course," agreed Plinth.

2

Plinth continued to stare at the jumbo clam, unsure of what he had just heard.

Surprisingly, the precise repetition sharpened the intelligibility of his verbalization.

"Ah. Reassigned. I understand he's planning a family, some decades down the line. In any case his services are better deployed elsewhere. I'm keeping him in my back pocket. For a rainy day. Tucked away, snug in a cliché."

"Fired. Rehired." Plinth paused and stabbed once again at his *pad thai*. "Haha. I guess you had to be there."

"Theeeeee Jjjaaaaaaccccckkkkaaaaaassssss..." hissed Ming, inquisitively.

"Oh, you mean Slake? He accrued a large number of followers. Onolatry." And then: "But no man is a hero to his valet."

Both men laughed.

3

"I've considered it," explained Plinth. "War and peace—they've all been tried before."

Ming nodded, solemnly.

"What we need in this business is a sense of history, some semblance of respect for the work that has come before. The entities who made it all happen. But these characters..." he trailed off.

"Standby," he interrupted.

"All is buffering."

Ming produced from his shell a small projector, which he positioned at the center of the table and configured to display an aspect of Brandon's realm consistent with the ongoing passage of time.

Moving pictures.

Gradually, the image resolved. Plinth Mold leaned forward to examine its contents.

"Wretchedly literal. Painting the whole world green."

"Fffffiiiiixxxxx iiiiiitttt iiiinnnnnn pppppppoooosssttt..." erupted Ming.

"Black body radiation," Plinth remarked. "He's caught steam off headlines and co-signs. But there's no *there*, there."

Ming sat on his clam foot. He could only agree.

"Ah well. It's his problem now."

Plinth leaned back, interlocking his fingers behind his head.

"I mean."

"Right?"

5

Meal concluded, both men replaced their cutlery and napkins and made their excuses to leave.

Plinth took care of the check.

As Ming rolled away the tablecloth snagged in his mechanism. A raft of plates, forks, spoons, glasses of ice water, pitchers, garnishes, condiments, toothpicks, various chunks of picked over foodstuffs, and other various and sundry food-related items tumbled to the cheaply carpeted floor in disorganized fashion.

Revealed beneath the tablecloth was the usual assortment of bland disfigurements, including a vaguely relevant (for our purposes) inscription:

Who Is Buried In Plinth's Tomb?