

The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar

William S. Burroughs

William S. Burroughs has been a major influence on literature in and out of the field of the fantastique for decades. Burroughs burst on the scene with his infamous hallucinogenic novel *Naked Lunch*, and continued with his experimental cut-up *The Ticket That Exploded*, and his more recent (and more accessible) novels *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Western Lands*. He has become a cultural icon, but, more importantly, his work has influenced several generations of writers, some of whom have written fiction for *Omni*. So, thinking it only fitting that *Omni* publish *his* fiction, I commissioned a science fiction story by William Burroughs in 1986, asking only that it not be too sexual (considering his literary reputation). What I received was “The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar,” an inspired literary and science fictional plea to save an endangered species in which Burroughs has taken a special interest. The story was first published in April 1987.

The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar

William S. Burroughs

The first name of the libertarian pirate Captain Mission, or Mission, is lost to history. All that we know of Mission comes from the book *A General History of the Most Notorious Pirates*, published in London in 1724 and written by one Captain Charles Johnson (although one historian attributes this to Defoe). The memoirs of Mission, handwritten in French, were saved by a member of the crew who survived Mission's last ship; and after passing through several hands they were translated by Johnson and included in his book.

Mission came from a wealthy Provençal family and studied humanity, logic, and mathematics at the University of Angers in the late seventeenth century. His first commission was a French man-o'-war called the *Victoire*, mounting thirty guns and commanded by a distant cousin. They sailed first to Naples, and Mission traveled to Rome, where he met a young priest named Signor Caraccioli. While Mission was making his confession, he was surprised to discover the young priest shared his own disgust for the hypocrisy of earthly power, temporal and spiritual. Caraccioli threw off his frock and signed on to the *Victoire*.

The frigate engaged and defeated two Algerian vessels, Caraccioli receiving a thigh wound. Other engagements were successful. The *Victoire* crossed the Atlantic, and off Martinique in the Caribbean they were set upon by the English *Winchelsea*, commanded by Captain Opium Jones. The first broadside killed the captain, second captain, and three lieutenants, whereupon Mission commanded the men, Caraccioli at his side, and they repulsed the English. Mission was named captain by the whole crew, and for their pirate flag they raised a white ensign with LIBERTY painted on it. After many other adventures on the Guinea

coast and West Africa, joined now by a captured English ship and crew, they helped the Queen of Johanna wage war on the neighboring island of Moheli, both islands lying between Mozambique and the great red island, Madagascar. They took a Portuguese ship and decided to settle down permanently on Madagascar. Here, around 1700 A.D., on a remote harbor at the north end of the island, Mission built two great octagonal forts; and with his band of several hundred French and English pirates, renegade seamen, and freed slaves, he established the free colony of Libertatia.

Together with his lieutenant Caraccioli and the converted English pirate captain Thomas Tew, Mission formulated a set of articles by which the settlement might live in peaceful democracy. These articles were remarkably like the ideas of Rousseau and the French and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century—and preceded them by more than sixty years. There would be no capital punishment, no slavery, no imprisonment for debt, and no interference with religion or sexuality. Signor Caraccioli divided the men into groups of ten, called States, and the position of Lord Conservator was established, as well as an annual plenary meeting. This first meeting lasted ten days. Tew was made Admiral, Caraccioli Secretary of State, and Mission became His Supreme Excellence the Lord Conservator.

On a cruise off southern Madagascar, Captain Tew and some English sailors he had recruited were marooned when they drank rum punch too late on the last night as the tide rose and carried the noble *Victoire* out to sea, where she cracked up on the rocks. The crew was lost, and Tew pitched a makeshift camp where he would wait to be rescued.

The word *lemur* means “ghost” in the native language. There were taboos against killing them, and Mission had imposed an article that prohibited the killing of ghosts, on penalty of expulsion from the settlement. If any crime deserved the death penalty, also prohibited under the articles, then this was that crime.

He was seeking a different lemur species, described by a native informant as much bigger . . . like a calf or a little cow.

“Where are the big ghosts?”

The native gestured vaguely inland. “You must be careful of the Evil Lizard that changes its colors. If you fall under its spell, you too will change colors. You too will turn black with anger and green with fear and red with sex.”

“Well, what is so wrong about that?”

“In a year you will die. The colors will devour your skin and flesh.”

“You were talking about a Big Ghost. Bigger than a goat . . . Where are

they?"

"When you hear Chebahaka, Man-in-the-Trees, then big one not there. Her cannot be where noise is."

"Her?"

"Her He. For Big Ghost is the same."

"So him is where Man-in-the-Trees isn't?"

"No. He is when Man-in-the-Trees is silent." This occurred at dawn and sunset.

Captain Mission strapped on his double-barreled flintlock, which he kept loaded with shot charges, and thrust a short sword through his belt. He picked up his staff and walked out through the settlement, stopping here and there to talk to the settlers.

They had found an excellent red clay for bricks and were constructing two-story dwellings with second-story balconies supported by heavy hardwood pillars. These buildings had been joined to form a tier, with the dining and kitchen areas in the two downstairs rooms and the sleeping and dressing areas upstairs. The balconies were connected and were used for sleeping hammocks and pallets. These structures faced the sea, and steps led down to the bay, where a number of boats were moored. Mission was heading inland, up a steep path that leveled off at five hundred feet above the sea. He stopped, leaning on his staff, and looked back. The steep climb had not touched his breath or brought sweat to his face. He saw the settlement, the freshly molded red bricks and thatch already timeless as houses in fairyland. He could see the shadows under the pier, the lurking fish, the clear blue water of the bay, the rocks and foliage, all floating in a limpid, frameless painting.

Silence descended like a shroud that would crumble to dust when he moved. Now a cat's-paw of wind frisked across the bay and up through the ferns, bringing to his face a breath of panic. Little ghost paws rippled up his spine, stirring the hairs at the nape of his neck, where the death center flares briefly when a mortal dies.

Captain Mission did not fear panic, the sudden, intolerable knowing that everything is alive. He was himself an emissary of panic, of the knowledge that man fears above all else: the truth of his origin. It's so close. Just wipe away the words and look.

He moved through giant ferns and creepers in green shade without need of his cutlass and stopped on the edge of a clearing. A moment of arrested motion, then a bush, a stone, a log moved as a tribe of ring-tailed cat lemurs appeared, parading back and forth around one another, tails quivering above their heads. Then *whisk*—they were gone, drawing the space where they had

been away with them. In the distance he could hear the cries of the sifaka lemur the natives called Chebahaka, Man-in-the-Trees. With a quick motion he caught a grasshopper and knelt by a moss-covered log. A tiny face with round eyes and large, trembling ears peered at him nervously. He held out the grasshopper, and the little mouse lemur fell upon it with chirping squeaks of delight, holding it in his tiny paws and nibbling quickly with his tiny needle teeth.

Mission moved toward the sound, which was louder and louder. The Chebahakas saw him and let out a concerted shriek that pierced his eardrums. Suddenly the sound stopped, with an impact that threw him to the ground. He lay for some minutes in a half faint, watching the gray shapes swing away through the trees.

Slowly he rose to his feet, leaning on his staff. Before him stood an ancient stone structure, overgrown with creepers and green with moss. He stepped through an archway, stone slabs under his feet. A large snake, of a glistening bright green, glided down the steps leading to a basement room. Cautiously he descended to an underground room. At the far end an arch opened to admit the afternoon light, and he could see the stone walls and ceiling.

At the end of the room was an animal that looked like a small gorilla or a chimpanzee. This surprised him, since he had been told there were no true monkeys on the island. The creature was motionless and black, as if formed out of darkness. He saw also a large pig creature of a light pink color, lolling on its side against the wall to his right. Then, directly in front of him, he saw an animal that looked at first like a small deer. The animal came to his outstretched hand, and he saw that it had no horns. Its snout was long, and he glimpsed sharp teeth shaped like little scimitars. The long, thin legs ended in cablelike fingers. The ears were large, flaring forward; the eyes, limpid amber in which the pupil floated like a glittering jewel, changing color with shifts of the light: obsidian, emerald, ruby, opal, amethyst, diamond.

Slowly the animal raised one paw and touched his face, stirring memories of the ancient betrayal. Tears streaming down his face, he stroked the animal's head. He knew he must get back to the settlement before dark. There is always something a man must do in time. For the deer ghost there was no time.

Faster and faster downhill, tearing his clothing on rocks and thorny vines, by dusk he was back at the settlement. He knew at once that he was too late, that something was horribly wrong. No one would meet his eye. Then he saw Bradley Martin, standing over a dying lemur.

Mission could see that the lemur had been shot through the body. He felt a concentration of rage, like a hot, red wave, but there was no reciprocal anger in Martin.

"Why?" Mission choked out.

"Stole my mango," Martin muttered indifferently.

Mission's hand flew to the butt of his pistol. Martin laughed. "You would violate your own article, Captain?"

"No. But I will remind you of Article Twenty-three: If two parties have a disagreement that cannot be settled, then the rule of the duel is applicable."

"Aye, but I have the right to refuse your challenge, and I do." Martin was an indifferent swordsman and a poor pistol shot.

"Then you must leave Libertatia, this very night, before the sun shall set. You have no more than an hour."

Without a word, Martin turned away and walked off in the direction of his dwelling. Mission covered the dead lemur with a tarpaulin, intending to take the body into the jungle and bury it the following morning.

In his quarters Mission was suddenly overcome by a paralyzing fatigue. He knew that he should follow Martin and settle the matter, but—as Martin had said—his own articles . . . He lay down and fell immediately into a deep sleep. He dreamed that there were dead lemurs scattered through the settlement, and woke up at dawn with tears streaming down his face.

Mission dressed and went out to get the dead lemur. The lemur and the tarpaulin were both gone. With blinding clarity he understood why Martin had shot the lemur and what he intended to do: He would go to the natives and say that the settlers were killing the lemurs and that when he objected, they turned on him and he had barely escaped with his life. Lemurs were sacred to the natives in the area, and there was the danger of bloody reprisal.

In a prerecorded and therefore totally predictable universe, the blackest sin is to tamper with the prerecordings, which could result in altering the prerecorded future. Captain Mission was guilty of this sin. He threatened to demonstrate for all to see that three hundred souls can coexist in relative harmony with each other, their human neighbors, and the ecosphere of flora and fauna. Big Ben strikes the hour. In a muted, ghostly room, the custodians of the future convene. Keepers of the Board Books: Mektoub, it is written. And they don't want it changed.

"If three hundred men—then three thousand, thirty thousand. It could spread everywhere. It must be stopped *now*."

"Our man Martin is on target. He is quite reliable."

A woman leans slightly forward. An arresting face of timeless beauty and evil, an evil that stops the breath like a deadly gas. The chairman covers his face with a handkerchief. She speaks in a cold, brittle voice, each word a chip of

obsidian: "There is a more significant danger. I refer to Captain Mission's unwholesome concern with *lemurs*." The word slithers out of her mouth writhing with hatred.

Mission had smoked opium and hashish and had used a drug the Indians of South America called yage. *There must, he decided, be a special drug peculiar to this huge island, where there are so many creatures and plants not found anywhere else.* After some inquiries he found that such a drug did exist: It was extracted from a parasitic fungus that grew only on a certain spiny plant found in the arid regions of the south. The drug was called indris, which means *look there* in the native language. With the promise of five gold florins on delivery, he obtained a small supply from a friendly native. The drug was in the form of greenish-yellow crystals. The man, whose name was Babuchi, showed him exactly how much to take and cautioned him against taking any more.

"Many take indris and see nothing different. Then they take more and see too much different."

"Is this a day drug or a night drug?"

"Best at dawn and twilight."

Mission calculated an hour till sundown—enough time to reach his jungle camp. "How long does it take to work?"

"Very quick."

Mission set out walking rapidly. Half an hour later, he took a small amount of the crystals with a sip of water from his goatskin water bag. In a few minutes he experienced a shift of vision, as if his eyes were moving on separate pivots, and for the first time he saw Lizard-Who-Changes-Color. It was quite large, about two feet in length, and difficult to see, not because it took on the colors of its surroundings but because it was absolutely motionless. He moved closer to the lizard, who brought one eye to bear on him and turned black with rage. Evidently Lizard-Who-Changes-Color did not like to be seen. His colors subsided to a neutral orange-yellow, mottled brown. And there was a gorkha lizard on a limb, as if carved from the bark. He winked a golden eye at Mission.

Despite the need for vigilance, Mission was spending more and more time in the jungle with his lemurs. He had converted the ancient stone structure he had found into a dwelling. It was completely enveloped by the roots of a huge, bulbous tree, as if held in a giant hand. The open arch in the second room was festooned with roots. There was a paved floor. He had covered the entrance with mosquito netting and arranged a pallet on the floor. Brushing the floor, he was surprised to find few insects, certainly no venomous varieties. The stone steps were worn smooth, as if with the passage of many feet, perhaps not human feet.

Who, or what, could have built this structure, and for what purpose?

Since his first encounter he had located a troop of the larger lemurs. These lemurs were too big and heavy to be comfortable in arboreal conditions and lived mostly on the land, in an area of grass and scrub where the forest thinned out, a mile from his campsite. Ideal grazing land, Mission realized with a shudder. The creatures were so trusting and gentle and open to human affection. Mission hurried on. He wanted to reach the ancient stone structure before twilight, and he hoped his special lemur would be there. He often slept with the lemur beside him on his pallet, and had named the lemur Ghost.

As he walked up, Ghost gave a little chittering cry of welcome. Mission took off his boots and hung his outer garments on wooden pegs driven into chinks in the stone wall. The only furniture was a table of rough hewn planks supported on two logs, with an inkpot, quill, pens, and parchment. In one corner was a small keg with a spigot for water, some cooking utensils, an ax, a saw, hammers, a musket. Powder and shot were kept in the footlocker. Mission sat at the table beside his phantom, his Ghost, contemplating the mystery of the stone structure. Who could have built it? *Who?*

He poses the question in hieroglyphs . . . a feather . . . he chooses a quill pen. Water . . . the clear water under the pier. A book . . . an old illustrated book with gilt edges. *The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar*. Feather . . . a gull diving for garbage . . . the wakes of many ships in many places. A feather of the great bird that lived here once, and the sacred lake two days' walk west, where every year a heifer is sacrificed to a sacred crocodile. Still the *who?* eludes him. He wonders if there are other, similar structures on the island. . . . *Where?*

A loaf of bread . . . water . . . a goose tied to a stake. Looking through the eyes of Lizard-Who-Changes-Color from one end of the island to the other. The appalling answer comes back: nowhere, none. Why appalling? He doesn't know yet, but he knows. *When?*

A reed . . . a loaf of bread . . . a bird wheels in the sky. A woman plucks feathers from a fowl, takes a loaf of bread from an adobe oven. The split between the wild, the timeless, the free, and the tame, the time-bound and binding, the tethered, like the tethered goose of *where?* The tethered who will forever resent their bondage.

The structure was built at the one time it could have been built, before the split widened to an impassable chasm.

The concept of a question is reed and water. The question mark fades into reeds and water. The question does not exist.

Strange creatures are fitting stones together. He can't see them clearly, only their hands, like gray ropes. He senses the immense difficulty of an

unaccustomed task. The stones are too heavy for their hands and bodies. Yet for some reason they must build this structure. *Why?*

There is no *why*. Mission is there. *Look there.*

Ghost stirred beside him and belched a sweet scent of tamarind fruit. Despite Babuchi's warning, Captain Mission knew he must learn more.

He lit a candle and poured a very large dose of indris crystals into his hand and downed them with a cup of water. He remembered the dream gorilla in the basement room, the strange pig creature, and then the gentle deer lemur. Mission lay down by his Ghost. He wasn't sure he wanted to see what the indris would show him, knowing that what he saw would be sad beyond his endurance. He looked out through tree roots as night sopped up the remaining light like a vast, black sponge.

He lay there in the gray light, his arm around his lemur. The animal snuggled closer and put a paw up to his face. Tiny mouse lemurs stole out of the roots and niches and holes in the ancient tree and frisked around the room, falling on insects with little squeals. Their tails twitched above their heads; their great flaring ears, thin as paper, quivered to every sound as their wide, limpid eyes swept the walls and floors for insects. They have been doing this for millions of years. The twitching tail, the trembling ears mark the passage of centuries. The little squeak of triumph was heard before the birth of man.

As the light drained into the sponge of night, the room grew ever brighter. He could see for miles in every direction: the coastal rain forests, the mountains and scrub of the interior, the arid southern regions where the lemurs frisk in the tall, spiny cactus. They gambol, leap, and whisk away into a remote past before the arrival of man on this island, before the appearance of man on Earth, before the beginning of time.

An old picture book with gilt-edged lithographs, onion paper over each picture. . . . *The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar* in gold script. Giant ferns and palms, bulbous tamarind trees, vines, and bushes. In a corner of the picture is a huge bird, ten fat feet high, a plump, dowdy, helpless bird, obviously flightless—never get that off the ground. This bird tells one that here is a time pocket. There can be no predators in this forest, no large cats. In the middle of the picture is a ring-tailed lemur on a branch looking straight out at the viewer. Now more lemurs appear, like a picture puzzle. . . .

The Lemur People are older than *Homo sap*, much older. They date back sixty million years to the time when Madagascar split off from the mainland of Africa. They might be called psychic amphibians—that is, visible only for short periods when they assume a solid form to breathe, but some of them can remain

in the invisible state for years at a time. Their way of thinking and feeling is basically different from ours, not oriented toward time and sequence and causality. They find these concepts repugnant and difficult to understand.

One might think that a species that leaves no fossil record is gone forever, but Big Picture, the history of life on Earth, is there for anyone to read. Mountain landmasses and jungles glide past, some slowing, some accelerating, vast rivers of land on the move or stagnating in wide deltas, whirlpools of land like saws splitting off islands, a great fissure, the landmasses rubbing against each other, then splitting, flying apart faster and faster . . . slowing down to the great red island, with its deserts and rain forests, scrub mountains and lakes, its unique animals and plants and the absence of predators or venomous reptiles, a vast sanctuary for the lemurs and for the delicate spirits that breathe through them, the glint in the jeweled eyes of a tree frog.

Above the wild time of Moving Lands, whole continents gliding past each other, gathering silent speed like trains; and any enterprising young man could get a few acres on the move and join up with other folks—going our way? There were accidents aplenty, volcanoes and earthquakes of every magnitude, plugs of molten rock suddenly thrown into the air, and vast, steaming sump holes and boiling lakes.

When attached to Africa, Madagascar was the ultimate landmass, sticking out like a disorderly tumor cut by a rift of future contours, a long rift like a vast indentation, like the cleft that divides the human body. The rift is a mile across in places, and in others narrows down to a few hundred feet. It is an area of explosive change and contrast, swept by violent electrical storms, incredibly fertile and yet barren. The first People of the Rift were a race apart, frenzied entrepreneurs.

“These prices is too good to last, folks!”

An ominous tremor shakes the bargaining table.

The People of the Cleft, formulated by chaos and accelerated time, flash through sixty million years to the split. Which side are you on? Too late to change now. Separated by a curtain of fire. Like a vast, festive ship launched by fireworks, the great red island moved majestically out to sea, leaving a gaping wound in the earth’s side, bleeding lava and spurting noxious gases. It has lain moored in enchanted calm for sixty million years.

Time is a human affliction. Not a human invention but a prison. So what is the meaning of sixty million years without time? And what does time mean to foraging lemurs? No predators here, not much to fear. They have opposing thumbs but do not fashion tools: They have no need for tools. They are untouched by the evil that flows in and fills *Homo sap* as he picks up a weapon—now he has the

advantage. A terrible gloating feeling comes from knowing you've *got it!*

Lemurs don't need it. Six minutes, sixty million years—no difference. Nothing is happening. A feeling of desolation closes round the human essence at the thought. How long have the lemurs paraded before each other in their sad and perfect beauty? How long have the singing gibbons sung their timeless song, as little gibbons clinging to their backs attempted to sing too?

Beauty is always doomed. "The evil and armed draw near." *Homo sap* with his weapons, his time, his insatiable greed, and ignorance so hideous it can never see its own face. "Just let me club down some seal pups, cut an Injun's hands off, burn a Nigra's balls off and watch 'em pop, then we'll all feel a lot better."

These are unsightly tricks.

"Whaddaya think this is, a beauty contest?"

A lemur frisks toward the man, and he slashes it viciously, leaves it bleeding, sobbing, dying. "Try and bite me, will you . . . fucking animals!"

Man was born in time. He lives and dies in time. Wherever he goes, he takes time with him and imposes time.

Captain Mission was drifting out faster and faster, caught in a vast undertow of time. "Out, and under, and out, and out," a voice repeated in his head. . . .

Erase the concept of a question from your mind. The Egyptian glyph is a reed or feather and water. The question dissolves in reed and water as a poet writes on water. Who? The water the feather the book. Wipe it out with the squawking goose of where and the bread of when, fading into a great, extinct, flightless bird in a swampy pool.

Mission knows the stone temple is the entrance to the biological Garden of Lost Chances. Pay and enter. He feels an impact of sadness that stops his breath, a catching, tearing grief. This grief can kill. He is beginning to learn the coinage here.

He remembers the pink pig creature, lost in passive weakness, slumped hopelessly against the wall, and the black simian against the far wall by the entrance, very still and very black, a blackness that glows. And the gentle deer lemur, extinct for two thousand years, the Ghost that shares his pallet. He moves forward through the roots that trail from the ancient stone arch. Somehow the black monkey creature is in front of him, and he looks into his eyes, completely black. He is singing a black song, of a blackness too pure to survive in time. It is only compromise that survives, and that is why *Homo sap* is such a muddled,

unsightly creature, precariously and hysterically defending a position that he knows is hopelessly compromised.

Mission moves through a black tunnel, opening on a series of dioramas: The last deer lemur falls to a hunter's arrow. Passenger pigeons rain from the trees to salvos of gunfire and plump down on the plates of fat bankers and politicians with their gold watch chains and gold fillings. They belch out the last passenger pigeon. The last Tasmanian wolf limps through a blue twilight, leg shattered by a hunter's bullet. And the almos, the might-have-beens, who had one chance in a billion and lost. Seeing the planet as an organism, it is obvious who the enemies of the planet are. Their name is legend. They dominate and populate the planet. "The deceived and the deceivers who are themselves deceived." Did *Homo sap* think other animals were there just for Him to eat? Apparently. Bulldozers are destroying the rain forests, the cowering lemurs and the flying foxes, the singing Clos gibbons, who produce the most beautiful and variegated music of any land animal, and the gliding colugo lemurs, who are helpless on the ground. All going, to make way for more and more devalued human stock, with less and less of the wild spark, the priceless ingredient—energy into matter. A vast mud slide of soulless sludge.

Doom and sadness hangs with the gray mist in these damp cages. It's there in every face, and any kid cracks up and starts screaming I CAN'T STAND IT will get slapped by John Wayne. It's Zoo City here. Strange dream animals roam the ghost midways and sideshows. Margaras slinks into the White Cat bar—"Seen any black cats lately?"—"Not lately, Whitey, they all got bleached out like you, got the light inside, you might say, and they lit up with a pure white flame. Wasn't nothing I could do to prevent it."

Margaras turns up the silvery light, the silvery white light, searing moonlight flooding in shredding flesh to silver film flakes—let go and let it happen, let yourself flake on out flake on out like snow it's all raining down behind you all your past life breaking loose and raining down in chunks of malevolence and joy and fear and the pure killing purpose, little scenes like soap bubbles bursting in air. Whose flag was still where? Everything is fading, falling to pieces behind you as you move and now ahead of you as well—where who are you? Who were you why? It has no reality, it leaves nothing behind save the observer. Observe the observer observed.

As indris can give eyes to see another reality, it can also, in the hands of a skilled sorcerer, impose tunnel vision in his native victims: "A man appeared and said they were bad people and had to be killed." While Captain Tew waited at his lonely, distant cove. In the dead of night two huge bands of Malagasy

natives swept down upon Libertatia and wiped out the colony. Lieutenant Caraccioli died in this attack, and Mission escaped with only forty-five men and two sloops. In time he found his way to Captain Tew's remote harbor, and the two men decided to retire to America, where they were both unknown. In a great storm off Cape Infantes, Captain Mission's sloop was lost beneath the waves.

Author's note: Now, in 1987, the lemurs of Madagascar are threatened with extinction. When humans first arrived on the island 1,500 years ago, there were some 40 species; now only 22 remain, and all are considered endangered. In some parts of the island the natives hunt the slow lemurs for their meat, although in other places they are protected by a taboo. The human population is growing rapidly and may reach 12 million by the year 2000, and the ongoing forestry and slash-and-burn agriculture have destroyed 90 percent of the forests, the lemurs' habitat. It is projected that the lemurs of Madagascar may be gone in a hundred years—the legacy of 60 million years destroyed in our lifetimes.

In an 8,300-acre forest near Durham, North Carolina, the Duke University Primate Center maintains a colony of more than 600 prosimians, mostly lemurs. This colony was started at Yale in 1958 and moved to Durham in 1968. When a ruffed lemur gave birth in that year, it was the first birth in captivity anywhere in 40 years. More than 300 lemurs have been born at the primate center since then. Director Elwyn L. Simons has established good relations with the Malagasy government and was able to bring nine wild-caught sifakas to the Duke compound last year.

The Duke University Primate Center needs financial support from concerned individuals. Write to DUPC, Duke University, Durham, NC 27706.