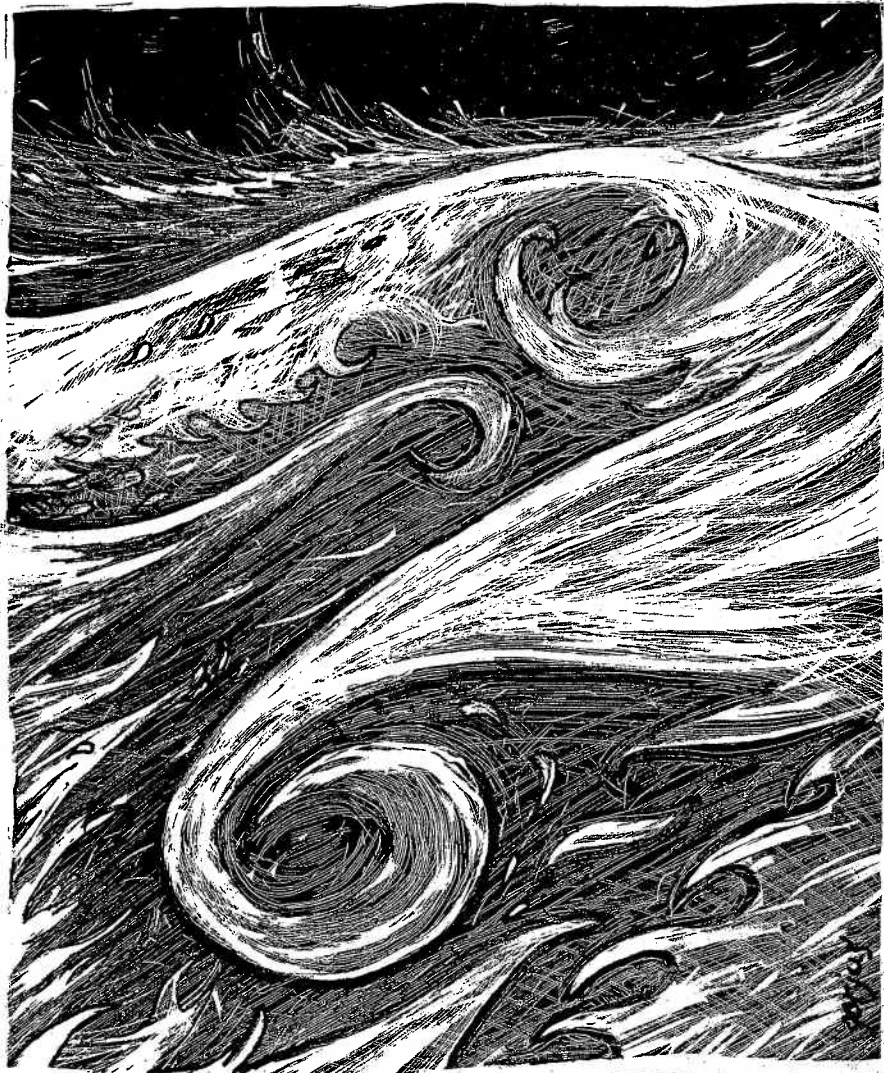


SANDUSKY



REVIEW



THE RIVER

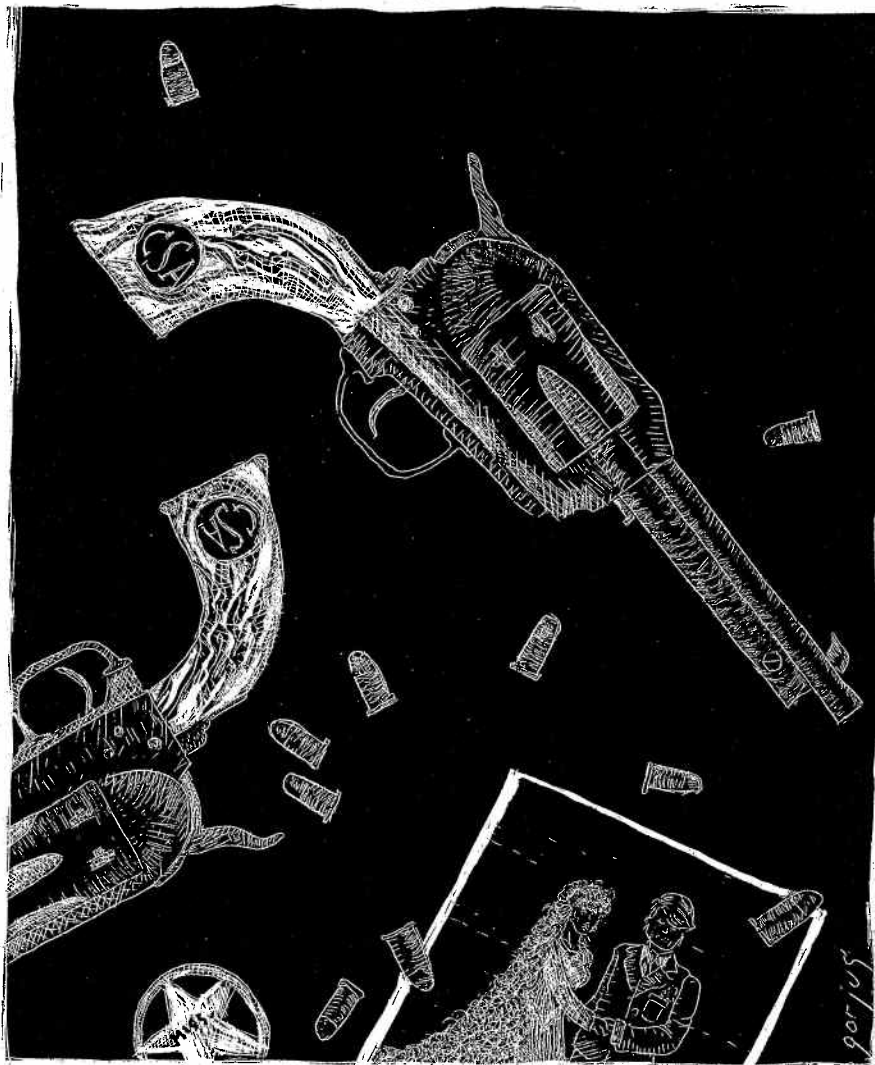
writhed and scraped its way past
Greenville like some mad, ancient god.

NOT SINCE

the fall of Vicksburg had a Mississippi town on the River meant so much. In 1935 commerce flowed thicker than ever on the River, dollars and cents shipped in the form of hand-bundled cotton and maize. In the wake of commerce came its cousins, art and luxury. Greenville was teeming with both merchants and mezzo-sopranos, twenty-two thousand souls strong, its streets wandered by white-haired lawyer-poets.

On its Main Street Greenville carried shops of all types, selling silk from Beijing, tea from Darjeeling, and oils and pastels from Paris. Alone in its time, the City had fought back the Klan ten years before, aided by a sheriff of the coldest blood.

And the babies born at King's Daughters Hospital were soaked with the language and prophecy of the River. As they grew older they would feud and fight and weep over their home, never decry, never deny, their poems and books and photographs and children all devoted to its celebration.



JOHN Tindime was the sheriff in those days. He wore two elaborate Colts, slung low on his hips & loaded.

THE SHERIFF

tended to speak only to his emerald-eyed wife and son. The son never talked much; he was like his mother in that regard, both spurned by certain segments of Greenville society, being neither trash nor class. The Sheriff played an important role but it was an elected one, and never does the choice of the citizenry confer that which money or status might grant.

Yet the people of the city spoke of John Tindime in respectful terms, as he understood his role. The right people were never arrested, and the wrong ones were. It was in this quiet understanding that the Sheriff excelled; he knew that it was okay to cuff that cousin, but not this one, as if there was some mark of Cain visible only to him.

Still: *that wife*. A midwife, she was black-haired, coarse and curly, her lineage much discussed in drawing rooms and porches, safe behind mahogany and stretched screens. *A greek of some sort* was the commonly reached conclusion, although *in'din* and *Norlins mullato* and *gipsy* were also tossed around like a baseball after lunch.



IN the summer of 1935
something evil walked
the fields of the **DELTA.**

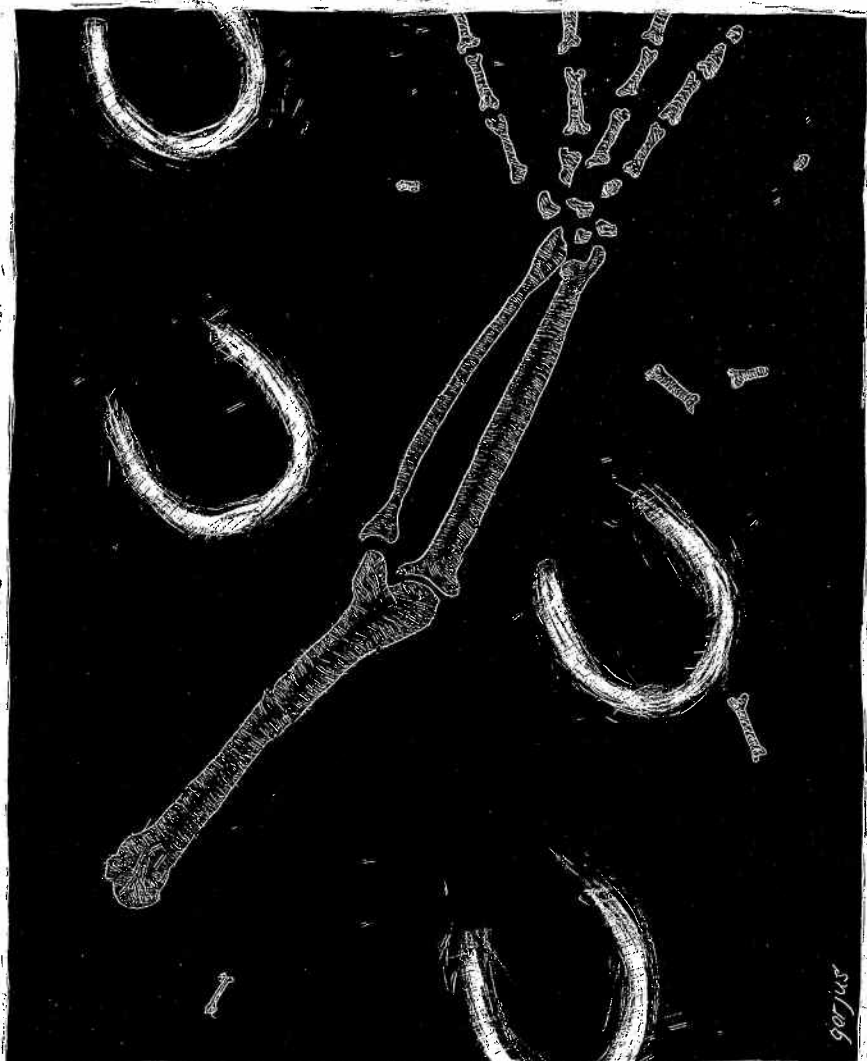
It started simply enough that year: near about every dog in the county went missing. Nobody kicked up too much of a fuss until one of the Dyer's good hunting curs turned up gone, and the constant jangle of the Sheriff's phone twisted his arm to investigate.

It's not enough to say he was pissed. Greenville was good, but it was still wild, and murder and crime could flare up from embers in a flash. People got worse, John thought, when the River was high, and when the moon was full.

Built into people who lived in the Delta was the fear that the River might one day take them all, that it could if'n it wanted, and when it got high like this, licking up around the tops of the levees, it was like a bully hitching up his pants.

The men turned out to guard the levees, stood nervously at the crest to watch for boils, and stockpiled loads of sand and crushed rocks if reinforcement was needed. Songs were sung as this old play was acted: that men could stop the River from doing what it wanted.

So people got scared, and acted the fool, and fists were balled and triggers were pulled and Sheriff Tindime knew why people got crazy during that full moon, all them old gods tossing lightning down from their broken and forgotten palace, and *come on, now, Mister Dyer, looking up after a old mutt is just more than is what I am really supposed to be doing right now. I got seventy-five miles of county along the dang River, and my men are stretched this way and that.*



THEN up on the levee
they found a little
arm, bones bleached dull, a line
of prints marching toward town.

A panic enshrouded Greenville. You could taste it in your mouth, same as if you scooped up a handful of road gravel and rattled it around against your molars, let it slide out your mouth and down your best dress shirt. People shut up their houses, put crosses over the doors, and no child was allowed out past dark.

Churches and saloons alike rang forth with the same complaint—*why us? Why here? Why now?* Many answers were proposed. The Baptists were sure this was simply the end times, the advent of the return of their God to purge the world of his enemies and call his people home; if a few unfortunates got in the way, well, it was God's will.

The Methodists were more gentle: this was a test which they might overcome, through rigorous attention to scripture, and a similarly rigorous attention to good bourbon whiskey.

At Mass and in the Synagogue caution and pragmatism trumped fear. Those faiths were old, and based upon beliefs older still, and had fought devils and their kin for centuries. There were rules and guidelines in place; and so letters were written, calls were made, and names invoked, primordial procedures and regulations carefully executed.

But in the little jooks outside of town and in the shack-boats down by the River folks knew the truth: the Devil walked in the Delta because *somebody done called him.*

