

# **SPADEVIL**

Written By

**David Lindsay**

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## Spadevil

Maskull found that his new organs had no independent function of their own, but only intensified and altered his other senses. When he used his eyes, ears, or nostrils, the same objects presented themselves to him, but his judgment concerning them was different. Previously all external things had existed for him; now he existed for them. According to whether they served his purpose or were in harmony with his nature, or otherwise, they had been pleasant or painful. Now these words “pleasure” and “pain” simply had no meaning.

The other two watched him, while he was making himself acquainted with his new mental outlook. He smiled at them.

“You were quite right, Tydomin,” he said, in a bold, cheerful voice. “We have been fools. So near the light all the time, and we never guessed it. Always buried in the past or future—systematically ignoring the present—and now it turns out that apart from the present we have no life at all.”

“Thank Spadevil for it,” she answered, more loudly than usual.

Maskull looked at the man’s dark, concrete form. “Spadevil, now I mean to follow you to the end. I can do nothing less.”

The severe face showed no sign of gratification—not a muscle relaxed.

“Watch that you don’t lose your gift,” he said gruffly.

Tydomin spoke. “You promised that I should enter Sant with you.”

“Attach yourself to the truth, not to me. For I may die before you, but the truth will accompany you to *your* death. However, now let us journey together, all three of us.”

The words had not left his mouth before he put his face against the fine, driving snow, and pressed onward toward his destination. He walked with a long stride; Tydomin was obliged to half run in order to keep up with him. The three travelled abreast; Spadevil in the middle. The fog was so dense that it was impossible to see a hundred yards ahead. The ground was covered by the green snow. The wind blew in gusts from the Sant highlands and was piercingly cold.

“Spadevil, are you a man, or more than a man?” asked Maskull.

“He that is not more than a man is nothing.”

“Where have you now come from?”

“From brooding, Maskull. Out of no other mother can truth be born. I have brooded, and rejected; and I have brooded again. Now, after many months’ absence from Sant, the truth at last shines forth for me in its simple splendour, like an upturned diamond.”

“I see its shining,” said Maskull. “But how much does it owe to ancient Hator?”

“Knowledge has its seasons. The blossom was to Hator, the fruit is to me. Hator also was a brooder—but now his followers do not brood. In Sant all is icy selfishness, a living death. They hate pleasure, and this hatred is the greatest pleasure to them.”

“But in what way have they fallen off from Hator’s doctrines?”

“For him, in his sullen purity of nature, all the world was a snare, a limed twig. Knowing that pleasure was everywhere, a fierce, mocking enemy, crouching and waiting at every corner of the road of life, in order to kill with its sweet sting the naked grandeur of the soul, he shielded himself behind *pain*. This also his followers do, but they do not do it for the sake of the soul, but for the sake of vanity and pride.”

“What is the Trifork?”

“The stem, Maskull, is hatred of pleasure. The first fork is disentanglement from the sweetness of the world. The second fork is power over those who still writhe in the nets of illusion. The third fork is the healthy glow of one who steps into ice-cold water.”

“From what land did Hator come?”

“It is not said. He lived in Ifdawn for a while. There are many legends told of him while there.”

“We have a long way to go,” said Tydomin. “Relate some of these legends, Spadevil.”

The snow had ceased, the day brightened, Branchspell reappeared like a phantom sun, but bitter blasts of wind still swept over the plain.

“In those days,” said Spadevil, “there existed in Ifdawn a mountain island separated by wide spaces from the land around it. A handsome girl, who knew sorcery, caused a bridge to be constructed across which men and women might pass to it. Having by a false tale drawn Hator on to this rock, she pushed at the bridge with her foot until it tumbled into the depths below. ‘You and I, Hator, are now together, and there is no means of separating. I wish to see how long the famous frost man can withstand the breath, smiles and perfume of a girl.’ Hator said no word, either then or all that day. He stood till sunset like a tree trunk, and thought of other things. Then the girl grew passionate, and shook her curls. She rose from where she was sitting she looked at him, and touched his arm; but he did not see her. She looked at him, so that all the soul was in her eyes; and then she fell down dead. Hator awoke from his thoughts, and saw her lying, still warm, at his feet, a corpse. He passed to the mainland; but how, it is not related.”

Tydomin shuddered. “You too have met your wicked woman, Spadevil; but your method is a nobler one.”

“Don’t pity other women,” said Spadevil, “but love the *right*. Hator also once conversed with Shaping.”

“With the Maker of the World?” said Maskull thoughtfully.

“With the Maker of Pleasure. It is told how Shaping defended his world, and tried to force Hator to acknowledge loveliness and joy. But Hator, answering all his marvellous speeches in a few concise,

iron words, showed how this joy and beauty was but another name for the bestiality of souls wallowing in luxury and sloth. Shaping smiled, and said, 'How comes it that your wisdom is greater than that of the Master of wisdom?' Hator said, 'My wisdom does not come from you, nor from your world, but from that other world, which you, Shaping, have vainly tried to imitate.' Shaping replied, 'What, then, do you do in my world?' Hator said, 'I am here falsely, and therefore I am subject to your false pleasures. But I wrap myself in *pain*—not because it is good, but because I wish to keep myself as far from you as possible. For pain is not yours, neither does it belong to the other world, but it is the shadow cast by your false pleasures.' Shaping then said, 'What is this faraway other world of which you say "This is so—this is not so?" How happens it that you alone of all my creatures have knowledge of it?' But Hator spat at his feet, and said, 'You lie, Shaping. All have knowledge of it. You, with your pretty toys, alone obscure it from our view.' Shaping asked, 'What, then, am I?' Hator answered, 'You are the dreamer of impossible dreams.' And then the story goes that Shaping departed, ill pleased with what had been said."

"What other world did Hator refer to?" asked Maskull.

"One where grandeur reigns, Maskull, just as pleasure reigns here."

"Whether grandeur or pleasure, it makes no difference," said Maskull. "The individual spirit that lives and wishes to live is mean and corrupt-natured."

"Guard you your pride!" returned Spadevil. "Do not make law for the universe and for all time, but for yourself and for this small, false life of yours."

"In what shape did death come to that hard, unconquerable man?" asked Tydomin.

"He lived to be old, but went upright and free-limbed to his last hour. When he saw that death could not be staved off longer he determined to destroy himself. He gathered his friends around him; not from vanity, but that they might see to what lengths the human soul can go in its perpetual warfare with the voluptuous body. Standing erect, without support, he died by withholding his breath."

A silence followed, which lasted for perhaps an hour. Their minds refused to acknowledge the icy winds, but the current of their thoughts became frozen.

When Branchspell, however, shone out again, though with subdued power, Maskull's curiosity rose once more. "Your fellow countrymen, then, Spadevil, are sick with self-love?"

"The men of other countries," said Spadevil, "are the slaves of pleasure and desire, knowing it. But the men of my country are the slaves of pleasure and desire, not knowing it."

"And yet that proud pleasure, which rejoices in self-torture, has something noble in it."

"He who studies himself at all is ignoble. Only by despising soul as well as body can a man enter into true life."

"On what grounds do they reject women?"

“Inasmuch as a woman has ideal love, and cannot live for herself. Love for another is pleasure for the loved one, and therefore injurious to him.”

“A forest of false ideas is waiting for your axe,” said Maskull. “But will they allow it?”

“Spadevil knows, Maskull,” said Tydomin, “that be it today or be it tomorrow, love can’t be kept out of a land, even by the disciples of Hator.”

“Beware of love—beware of emotion!” exclaimed Spadevil. “Love is but pleasure once removed. Think not of pleasing others, but of serving them.”

“Forgive me, Spadevil, if I am still feminine.”

“*Right* has no sex. So long, Tydomin, as you remember that you are a woman, so long you will not enter into divine apathy of soul.”

“But where there are no women, there are no children,” said Maskull. “How came there to be all these generations of Hator men?”

“Life breeds passion, passion breeds suffering, suffering breeds the yearning for relief from suffering. Men throng to Sant from all parts, in order to have the scars of their souls healed.”

“In place of hatred of pleasure, which all can understand, what simple formula do you offer?”

“Iron obedience to duty,” answered Spadevil.

“And if they ask ‘How far is this consistent with hatred of pleasure?’ what will your pronouncement be?”

“I do not answer them, but I answer you, Maskull, who ask the question. Hatred is passion, and all passion springs from the dark fires of self. Do not hate pleasure at all, but pass it by on one side, calm and undisturbed.”

“What is the criterion of pleasure? How can we always recognise it, in order to avoid it?”

“Rigidly follow duty, and such questions will not arise.”

Later in the afternoon, Tydomin timidly placed her fingers on Spadevil’s arm.

“Fearful doubts are in my mind,” she said. “This expedition to Sant may turn out badly. I have seen a vision of you, Spadevil, and myself lying dead and covered in blood, but Maskull was not there.”

“We may drop the torch, but it will not be extinguished, and others will raise it.”

“Show me a sign that you are not as other men—so that I may know that our blood will not be wasted.”

Spadevil regarded her sternly. “I am not a magician. I don’t persuade the senses, but the soul. Does your duty call you to Sant, Tydomin? Then go there. Does it not call you to Sant? Then go no farther. Is not this simple? What signs are necessary?”

“Did I not see you dispel those spouts of lightning? No common man could have done that.”

“Who knows what any man can do? This man can do one thing, that man can do another. But what all men can do is their duty; and to open their eyes to this, I must go to Sant, and if necessary lay down my life. Will you not still accompany me?”

“Yes,” said Tydomin, “I will follow you to the end. It is all the more essential, because I keep on displeasing you with my remarks, and that means I have not yet learned my lesson properly.”

“Do not be humble, for humility is only self-judgment, and while we are thinking of self, we must be neglecting some action we could be planning or shaping in our mind.”

Tydomin continued to be uneasy and preoccupied.

“Why was Maskull not in the picture?” she asked.

“You dwell on this foreboding because you imagine it is tragical. There is nothing tragical in death, Tydomin, nor in life. There is only right and wrong. What arises from right or wrong action does not matter. We are not gods, constructing a world, but simple men and women, doing our immediate duty. We may die in Sant—so you have seen it; but the truth will go on living.”

“Spadevil, why do you choose Sant to start your work in?” asked Maskull. “These men with fixed ideas seem to me the least likely of any to follow a new light.”

“Where a bad tree thrives, a good tree will flourish. But where no tree at all can be found, nothing will grow.”

“I understand you,” said Maskull. “Here perhaps we are going to martyrdom, but elsewhere we should resemble men preaching to cattle.”

Shortly before sunset they arrived at the extremity of the upland plain, above which towered the black cliffs of the Sant Levels. A dizzy, artificially constructed staircase, of more than a thousand steps of varying depth, twisting and forking in order to conform to the angles of the precipices, led to the world overhead. In the place where they stood they were sheltered from the cutting winds. Branchspell, radiantly shining at last, but on the point of sinking, filled the cloudy sky with violent, lurid colors, some of the combinations of which were new to Maskull. The circle of the horizon was so gigantic, that had he been suddenly carried back to Earth, he would by comparison have fancied himself to be moving beneath the dome of some little, closed-in cathedral. He realised that he was on a foreign planet. But he was not stirred or uplifted by the knowledge; he was conscious only of moral ideas. Looking backward, he saw the plain, which for several miles past had been without vegetation, stretching back away to Disscourn. So regular had been the ascent, and so great was the distance, that the huge pyramid looked nothing more than a slight swelling on the face of the earth.

Spadevil stopped, and gazed over the landscape in silence. In the evening sunlight his form looked more dense, dark, and real than ever before. His features were set hard in grimness.

He turned around to his companions. “What is the greatest wonder, in all this wonderful scene?” he demanded.

“Acquaint us,” said Maskull.

“All that you see is born from pleasure, and moves on, from pleasure to pleasure. Nowhere is *right* to be found. It is Shaping’s world.”

“There is another wonder,” said Tydomin, and she pointed her finger toward the sky overhead.

A small cloud, so low down that it was perhaps not more than five hundred feet above them, was sailing along in front of the dark wall of cliff. It was in the exact shape of an open human hand, with downward-pointing fingers. It was stained crimson by the sun; and one or two tiny cloudlets beneath the fingers looked like falling drops of blood.

“Who can doubt now that our death is close at hand?” said Tydomin. “I have been close to death twice today. The first time I was ready, but now I am more ready, for I shall die side by side with the man who has given me my first happiness.”

“Do not think of death, but of right persistence,” replied Spadevil. “I am not here to tremble before Shaping’s portents; but to snatch men from him.”

He at once proceeded to lead the way up the staircase. Tydomin gazed upward after him for a moment, with an odd, worshiping light in her eyes. Then she followed him, the second of the party. Maskull climbed last. He was travel stained, unkempt, and very tired; but his soul was at peace. As they steadily ascended the almost perpendicular stairs, the sun got higher in the sky. Its light dyed their bodies a ruddy gold.

They gained the top. There they found rolling in front of them, as far as the eye could see, a barren desert of white sand, broken here and there by large, jagged masses of black rock. Tracts of the sand were reddened by the sinking sun. The vast expanse of sky was filled by evil-shaped clouds and wild colors. The freezing wind, flurrying across the desert, drove the fine particles of sand painfully against their faces.

“Where now do you take us?” asked Maskull.

“He who guards the old wisdom of Sant must give up that wisdom to me, that I may change it. What he says, others will say. I go to find Maulger.”

“And where will you seek him, in this bare country?”

Spadevil struck off toward the north unhesitatingly.

“It is not so far,” he said. “It is his custom to be in that part where Sant overhangs the Wombflash Forest. Perhaps he will be there, but I cannot say.”

Maskull glanced toward Tydomin. Her sunken cheeks, and the dark circles beneath her eyes told of her extreme weariness.

“The woman is tired, Spadevil,” he said.

She smiled. “It’s but another step into the land of death. I can manage it. Give me your arm, Maskull.”

He put his arm around her waist, and supported her along that way.



“The sun is now sinking,” said Maskull. “Will we get there before dark?”

“Fear nothing, Maskull and Tydomin; this pain is eating up the evil in your nature. The road you are walking cannot remain unwalked. We shall arrive before dark.”

The sun then disappeared behind the far-distant ridges that formed the western boundary of the Ifdawn Marest. The sky blazed up into more vivid colors. The wind grew colder.

They passed some pools of colourless gnawl water, round the banks of which were planted fruit trees. Maskull ate some of the fruit. It was hard, bitter, and astringent; he could not get rid of the taste, but he felt braced and invigorated by the downward-flowing juices. No other trees or shrubs were to be seen anywhere. No animals appeared, no birds or insects. It was a desolate land.

A mile or two passed, when they again approached the edge of the plateau. Far down, beneath their feet, the great Wombflash Forest began. But daylight had vanished there; Maskull’s eyes rested only on a vague darkness. He faintly heard what sounded like the distant sighing of innumerable treetops.

In the rapidly darkening twilight, they came abruptly on a man. He was standing in a pool, on one leg. A pile of boulders had hidden him from their view. The water came as far up as his calf. A trifork, similar to the one Maskull had seen on Disscourn, but smaller, had been stuck in the mud close by his hand.

They stopped by the side of the pond, and waited. Immediately he became aware of their presence, the man set down his other leg, and waded out of the water toward them, picking up his trifork in doing so.

“This is not Maulger, but Catice,” said Spadevil.

“Maulger is dead,” said Catice, speaking the same tongue as Spadevil, but with an even harsher accent, so that the tympanum of Maskull’s ear was affected painfully.

The latter saw before him a bowed, powerful individual, advanced in years. He wore nothing but a scanty loincloth. His trunk was long and heavy, but his legs were rather short. His face was beardless, lemon-coloured, and anxious-looking. It was disfigured by a number of longitudinal ruts, a quarter of an inch deep, the cavities of which seemed clogged with ancient dirt. The hair of his head was black and sparse. Instead of the twin membranous organs of Spadevil, he possessed but one; and this was in the centre of his brow.

Spadevil’s dark, solid person stood out from the rest like a reality among dreams.

“Has the trifork passed to you?” he demanded.

“Yes. Why have you brought this woman to Sant?”

“I have brought another thing to Sant. I have brought the new faith.”

Catice stood motionless, and looked troubled. “State it.”

“Shall I speak with many words, or few words?”

“If you wish to say what is *not*, many words will not suffice. If you wish to say what is, a few words will be enough.”

Spadevil frowned.

“To hate pleasure brings pride with it. Pride is a pleasure. To kill pleasure, we must attach ourselves to *duty*. While the mind is planning right action, it has no time to think of pleasure.”

“Is that the whole?” asked Catice.

“The truth is simple, even for the simplest man.”

“Do you destroy Hator, and all his generations, with a single word?”

“I destroy nature, and set up law.”

A long silence followed.

“My probe is double,” said Spadevil. “Suffer me to double yours, and you will see as I see.”

“Come you here, you big man!” said Catice to Maskull. Maskull advanced a step closer.

“Do you follow Spadevil in his new faith?”

“As far as death,” exclaimed Maskull.

Catice picked up a flint. “With this stone I strike out one of your two probes. When you have but one, you will see with me, and you will recollect with Spadevil. Choose you then the superior faith, and I shall obey your choice.”

“Endure this little pain, Maskull, for the sake of future men,” said Spadevil.

“The pain is nothing,” replied Maskull, “but I fear the result.”

“Permit me, although I am only a woman, to take his place, Catice,” said Tydomin, stretching out her hand.

He struck at it violently with the flint, and gashed it from wrist to thumb; the pale carmine blood spouted up. “What brings this kiss-lover to Sant?” he said. “How does she presume to make the rules of life for the sons of Hator?”

She bit her lip, and stepped back. “Well then, Maskull, accept! I certainly should not have played false to Spadevil; but you hardly can.”

“If he bids me, I must do it,” said Maskull. “But who knows what will come of it?”

Spadevil spoke. “Of all the descendants of Hator, Catice is the most wholehearted and sincere. He will trample my truth underfoot, thinking me a demon sent by Shaping, to destroy the work of this land. But a seed will escape, and my blood and yours, Tydomin, will wash it. Then men will know that my destroying evil is their greatest good. But none here will live to see that.”

Maskull now went quite close to Catice, and offered his head. Catice raised his hand, and after holding the flint poised for a moment, brought it down with adroitness and force upon the left-hand probe. Maskull cried out with the pain. The blood streamed down, and the function of the organ was destroyed.

There was a pause, while he walked to and fro, trying to staunch the blood.

“What now do you feel, Maskull? What do you see?” inquired Tydomin anxiously.

He stopped, and stared hard at her. “I now see straight,” he said slowly.

“What does that mean?”

He continued to wipe the blood from his forehead. He looked troubled. “Henceforward, as long as I live, I shall fight with my nature, and refuse to feel pleasure. And I advise you to do the same.”

Spadevil gazed at him sternly. “Do you renounce my teaching?”

Maskull, however, returned the gaze without dismay. Spadevil’s image-like clearness of form had departed for him; his frowning face he knew to be the deceptive portico of a weak and confused intellect.

“It is false.”

“Is it false to sacrifice oneself for another?” demanded Tydomin.

“I can’t argue as yet,” said Maskull. “At this moment the world with its sweetness seems to me a sort of charnel house. I feel a loathing for everything in it, including myself. I know no more.”

“Is there no duty?” asked Spadevil, in a harsh tone.

“It appears to me but a cloak under which we share the pleasure of other people.”

Tydomin pulled at Spadevil’s arm. “Maskull has betrayed you, as he has so many others. Let us go.”

He stood fast. “You have changed quickly, Maskull.”

Maskull, without answering him, turned to Catice. “Why do men go on living in this soft, shameful world, when they can kill themselves?”

“Pain is the native air of Surtur’s children. To what other air do you wish to escape?”

“Surtur’s children? Is not Surtur Shaping?”

“It is the greatest of lies. It is Shaping’s masterpiece.”

“Answer, Maskull!” said Spadevil. “Do you repudiate right action?”

“Leave me alone. Go back! I am not thinking of you, and your ideas. I wish you no harm.”

The darkness came on fast. There was another prolonged silence.

Catice threw away the flint, and picked up his staff. “The woman must return home,” he said.

“She was persuaded here, and did not come freely. You, Spadevil, must die—backslider as you are!”

Tydomin said quietly, “He has no power to enforce this. Are you going to allow the truth to fall to the ground, Spadevil?”

“It will not perish by my death, but by my efforts to escape from death. Catice, I accept your judgment.”

Tydomin smiled. “For my part, I am too tired to walk farther today, so I shall die with him.”

Catice said to Maskull, “Prove your sincerity. Kill this man and his mistress, according to the laws of Hator.”

“I can’t do that. I have travelled in friendship with them.”

“You denied duty; and now you must do your duty,” said Spadevil, calmly stroking his beard.

“Whatever law you accept, you must obey, without turning to right or left. Your law commands that we must be stoned; and it will soon be dark.”

“Have you not even this amount of manhood?” exclaimed Tydomin.

Maskull moved heavily. “Be my witness, Catice, that the thing was forced on me.”

“Hator is looking on, and approving,” replied Catice.

Maskull then went apart to the pile of boulders scattered by the side of the pool. He glanced about him, and selected two large fragments of rock, the heaviest that he thought he could carry. With these in his arms, he staggered back.

He dropped them on the ground, and stood, recovering his breath. When he could speak again, he said, “I have a bad heart for the business. Is there no alternative? Sleep here tonight, Spadevil, and in the morning go back to where you have come from. No one shall harm you.”

Spadevil’s ironic smile was lost in the gloom.

“Shall I brood again, Maskull, for still another year, and after that come back to Sant with other truths? Come, waste no time, but choose the heavier stone for me, for I am stronger than Tydomin.”

Maskull lifted one of the rocks, and stepped out four full paces. Spadevil confronted him, erect, and waited tranquilly.

The huge stone hurtled through the air. Its flight looked like a dark shadow. It struck Spadevil full in the face, crushing his features, and breaking his neck. He died instantaneously.

Tydomin looked away from the fallen man.

“Be very quick, Maskull, and don’t let me keep him waiting.”

He panted, and raised the second stone. She placed herself in front of Spadevil’s body, and stood there, unsmiling and cold.

The blow caught her between breast and chin, and she fell. Maskull went to her, and, kneeling on the ground, half-raised her in his arms. There she breathed out her last sighs.

After that, he laid her down again, and rested heavily on his hands, while he peered into the dead face. The transition from its heroic, spiritual expression to the vulgar and grinning mask of Crystalman came like a flash; but he saw it.

He stood up in the darkness, and pulled Catice toward him.

“Is that the true likeness of Shaping?”

“It is Shaping stripped of illusion.”

“How comes this horrible world to exist?”

Catice did not answer.

“Who is Surtur?”

“You will get nearer to him tomorrow; but not here.”

“I am wading through too much blood,” said Maskull. “Nothing good can come of it.”

“Do not fear change and destruction; but laughter and joy.”

Maskull meditated.

“Tell me, Catice. If I had elected to follow Spadevil, would you really have accepted his faith?”

“He was a great-souled man,” replied Catice. “I see that the pride of our men is only another sprouting-out of pleasure. Tomorrow I too shall leave Sant, to reflect on all this.”

Maskull shuddered. “Then these two deaths were not a necessity, but a crime!”

“His part was played and henceforward the woman would have dragged down his ideas, with her soft love and loyalty. Regret nothing, stranger, but go away at once out of the land.”

“Tonight? Where shall I go?”

“To Wombflash, where you will meet the deepest minds. I will put you on the way.”

He linked his arm in Maskull’s, and they walked away into the night. For a mile or more they skirted the edge of the precipice. The wind was searching, and drove grit into their faces. Through the rifts of the clouds, stars, faint and brilliant, appeared. Maskull saw no familiar constellations. He wondered if the sun of earth was visible, and if so which one it was.

They came to the head of a rough staircase, leading down the cliffside. It resembled the one by which he had come up; but this descended to the Wombflash Forest.

“That is your path,” said Catice, “and I shall not come any farther.”

Maskull detained him. “Say just this, before we part company—why does pleasure appear so shameful to us?”

“Because in feeling pleasure, we forget our *home*.”

“And that is—”

“Muspel,” answered Catice.

Having made this reply, he disengaged himself, and, turning his back, disappeared into the darkness.

Maskull stumbled down the staircase as best he could. He was tired, but contemptuous of his pains. His uninjured probe began to discharge matter. He lowered himself from step to step during what seemed an interminable time. The rustling and sighing of the trees grew louder as he approached the bottom; the air became still and warm. Inky blackness was all around him.

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He at last reached level ground. Still attempting to proceed, he began to trip over roots, and to collide with tree trunks. After this had happened a few times, he determined to go no farther that night. He heaped together some dry leaves for a pillow, and immediately flung himself down to sleep. Deep and heavy unconsciousness seized him almost instantly.