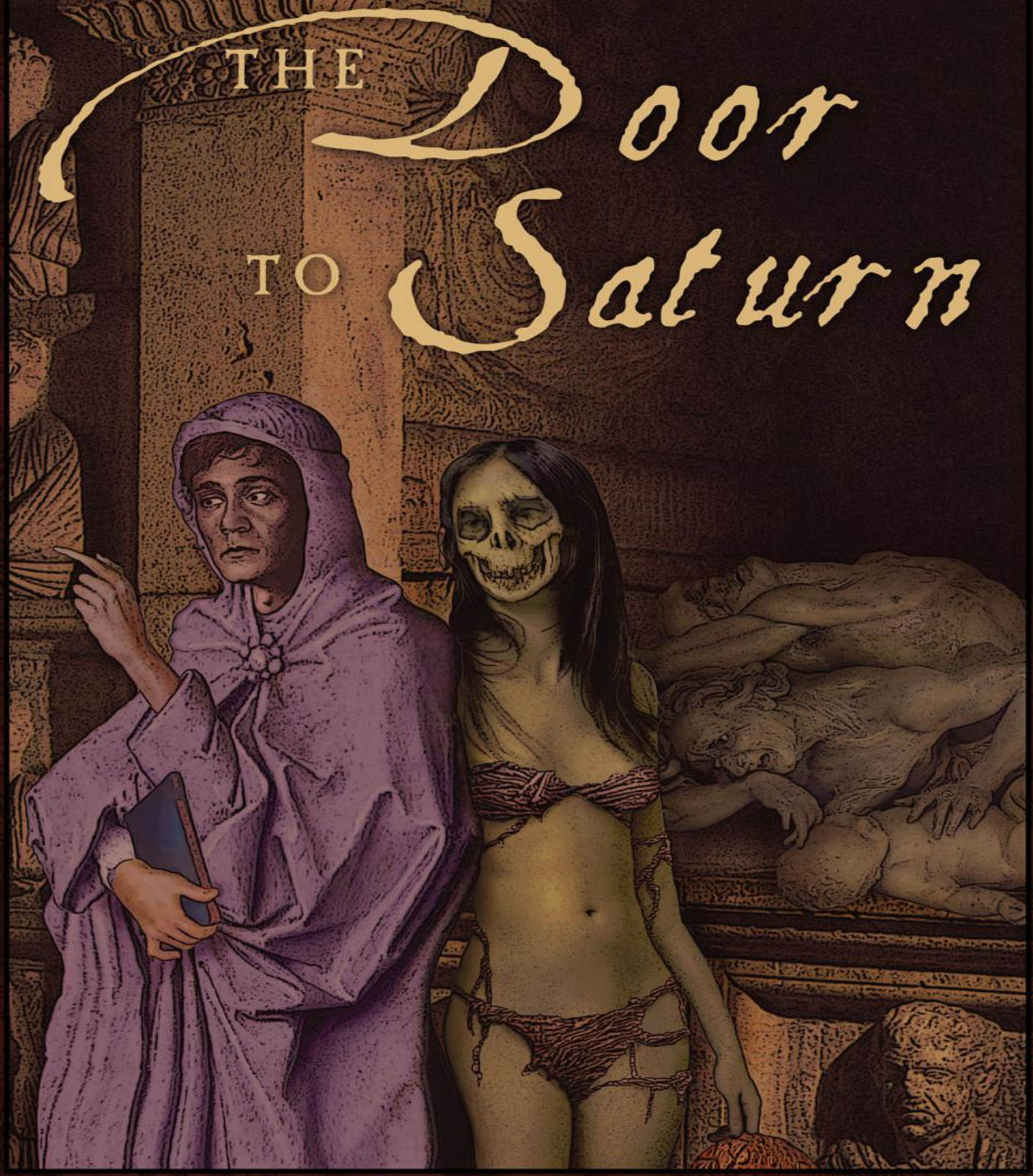
THE COLLECTED FANTASIES, VOLUME 2

THE DOOR TO SATURN



CLARK ASHTON SMITH

EDITED BY SCOTT CONNORS AND RON HILGER

Volume two of
The Collected Fantasies Of
Clark Ashton Smith

Edited by Scott Connors and Ron Hilger
With an Introduction by Ramsey Campbell

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INTRODUCTION

Behind all the colorful gods and heroes of Greek and Roman mythology—behind even Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos who measured out and snipped off the length of a man's life, and more unanswerable even than Zeus and Hera together—stood Fate. This force—not a person, personifying it would be as hard as personifying entropy—was what made Tantalus kill his own son and abominably serve him as dinner to the unwitting gods, what led Agamemnon to kill his daughter, what drove the Bacchantes to commit perverse murders incomprehensible even to themselves.

Those figures, so remote in ancient history, helplessly acted out their fated, prophesied roles. Free will was a mocking lie for Theseus and Oedipus and Hercules. Foreordained fatal error was the true story.

We live in a different universe now, or a differently-perceived one, at any rate. The Judeo-Christian world-view, even just coasting on past momentum as it mostly is these days, has introduced the ideas of justice and mercy—redemption. Even the Gnostic philosophy, with its bleak belief in an insane demiurge responsible for the creation of this world, acknowledged a perfect God, unapproachable but at least out there somewhere.

Modern writers can write stories set in those ancient Fate-cursed days, but they can't really assume or convey the perspective of being an organic part of that sort of world. Well, none of them besides Clark Ashton Smith.

> *I leaned from some black precipice, to see*
> *The pits beneath. One came, not far from me,*
> *Who hurled therein the sockets of the stars*
> *And shells of worlds that rattled emptily.*
> —Clark Ashton Smith

Really it's only in dreams, when the oldest catacombs of our brains serve up symbols that mystify as much as terrify, that we dimly comprehend the grammar of that merciless unredeemed universe. And dreams, like fairy tales, have their own compelling pre-rational "logic"—as Chesterton said of the stories in mythology, "we do not know why something stirs in the subconsciousness, or why what is impossible seems almost inevitable."

We don’t know why the culminating event in Smith’s “The Testament of Athammaus,” impossible though it is, is clearly inevitable. The Singing Flame, in its vast temple in the weirdly besieged city of Ydmos, is an image that seems to spring authoritatively from the earliest dreams we ever had.

I use the word “dreams,” not specifically “nightmares.” It would be careless to label Smith’s fantasies as “horror.” Certainly horror is an element in them, but the ugly or terrifying aspects are incidental features of a world that is simply not ours. They never seem to be the main point, and to focus on them is like paying attention only to the familiar-seeming instruments in a profoundly strange orchestra. The narrative voice often describes the most appalling scenes as dispassionately as it describes the most gorgeous ones. They’re often the same, in fact—the standard lumber of horror stories, all the decrepit old houses and possessed children and cosmopolitan vampires, fades to relative mundanity beside Smith’s vaultingly glamorous dooms.

Smith’s stories are truly “magic casements, opening on the foam/ Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.” They’re shot through with an antediluvian beauty which is indifferent to human security or even comprehension, but which is more siren-like because of that remoteness. Each of the creatures who gladly immolates itself in the Singing Flame has made a vast pilgrimage to attain it. And even then, Fate scrawls the last, bitter hieroglyph.

> *“And, leaning from the mouldered bed of lust,*
> *Love’s skeleton writes Nada in the dust.”*
> —Clark Ashton Smith

Not surprisingly, true love never seems to work out, in Smith’s worlds. Smith’s typical luckless protagonist is more likely to be endlessly seeking a long-lost lover, or endlessly mourning an irretrievably dead one, than enjoying the beloved’s company. Eroticism abounds, though, whether as dangerous as the variously deadly ladies in “The Kiss of Zoraida” and “A Rendezvous in Averoigne,” or as grotesque and ultimately funny as the “national mother” in “The Door to Saturn,” but it’s a fatal eroticism, and to give in to it is generally to be obliterated—though often we can queasily sympathize with the brave and foolhardy souls who choose just that. Lamiae, succubi, sirens—for the duration of a story, at least, Smith can convince you that plain love between a human man and woman is the

lowest possible reading on a meter than stretches very high, though nearly all of the calibrations are in the red-lit danger zone.

Ultimately we realize that the dazzling glamors we find in these stories are inextricable from, are in fact a consequence of, the merciless field-equations of Fate—the cold stone beneath the ornate and enchanted Bokhaira carpets. Even for the Emperor of Dreams, the narrator of Smith's grandest poem, "The Hashish-Eater," there waits at the end of all the splendors of a million universes,

> *"... a huge white eyeless Face*
> *That fills the void and fills the universe,*
> *And bloats against the limits of the world*
> *With lips of flame that open…"*

Tim Powers
March 2007

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Clark Ashton Smith considered himself primarily as a poet and artist, but he began his publishing career with a series of Oriental *contes cruels* that were published in such magazines as the *Overland Monthly* and the *Black Cat.* He ceased the writing of short stories for many years, but, under the influence of his correspondent H. P. Lovecraft, he began experimenting with the weird tale when he wrote "The Abominations of Yondo" in 1925. His friend Genevieve K. Sully suggested that writing for the pulps would be a reasonably congenial way for him to earn enough money to support himself and his parents.

Between the years 1930 and 1935, the name of Clark Ashton Smith appeared on the contents page of *Weird Tales* no fewer than fifty-three times, leaving his closest competitors, Robert E. Howard, Seabury Quinn, and August W. Derleth, in the dust, with forty-six, thirty-three and thirty stories, respectively. This prodigious output did not come at the price of sloppy composition, but was distinguished by its richness of imagination and expression. Smith put the same effort into one of his stories that he did into a bejeweled and gorgeous sonnet. Donald Sidney-Fryer has described Smith's method of composition in his 1978 bio-bibliography *Emperor of Dreams* (Donald M. Grant, West Kingston, R.I.) thus:

> First he would sketch the plot in longhand on some piece of note-paper, or in his notebook, *The Black Book*, which Smith used circa 1929-1961. He would then write the first draft, usually in longhand but occasionally directly on the typewriter. He would then rewrite the story 3 or 4 times (Smith's own estimate); this he usually did directly on the typewriter. Also, he would subject each draft to considerable alteration and correction in longhand, taking the ms. with him on a stroll and reading aloud to himself [. . .]. (19)

Unlike Lovecraft, who would refuse to allow publication of his stories without assurances that they would be printed without editorial alteration, Clark Ashton Smith would revise a tale if it would ensure acceptance. Smith was not any less devoted to his art than his friend, but unlike HPL he had to consider his responsibilities in caring for his elderly and infirm parents. He tolerated these changes to his carefully crafted short stories with varying degrees of resentment, and vowed that if he ever had the opportunity to collect them between hard covers he would restore the excised text. Unfortunately, he experienced severe eyestrain during the preparation of his first Arkham House collections, so he provided magazine tear sheets to August Derleth for his secretary to use in the preparation of a manuscript.

Lin Carter was the first of Smith's editors to attempt to provide the reader with pure Smith, but the efforts of Steve Behrends and Mark Michaud have revealed the extent to which Smith's prose was compromised. Through their series of pamphlets, the *Unexpurgated Clark Ashton Smith,* the reader and critic could see precisely the severity of these compromises; while in the collections *Tales of Zothique* and *The Book of Hyperborea* Behrends and Will Murray presented for the first time the stories just as Smith wrote them.

In establishing what the editors believe to be what Smith would have preferred, we were fortunate in having access to several repositories of Smith's manuscripts, most notably the Clark Ashton Smith Papers deposited at the John Hay Library of Brown University, but also including the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley, Special Collections of Brigham Young University, the California State Library, and several private collections. Priority was given to the latest known typescript prepared by Smith, except where he had indicated that the changes were made solely to satisfy editorial requirements. In these instances we compared the last version that satisfied Smith with the version sold. Changes made include the restoration of deleted material, except only in those instances where the change of a word or phrase seems consistent with an attempt by Smith to improve the story, as opposed to the change of a word or phrase to a less Latinate, and less graceful, near-equivalent. This represents a hybrid or fusion of two competing versions, but it is the only way that we see that Smith's intentions as author may be honored. In a few

instances a word might be changed in the Arkham House collections that isn't indicated on the typescript.

We have also attempted to rationalize Smith's spellings and hyphenation practices. Smith used British spellings early in his career but gradually switched to American usage. He could also vary spelling of certain words from story to story, e.g., "eerie" and "eery." We have generally standardized on his later usage, except for certain distinct word choices such as "grey". In doing so we have deviated from the "style sheet" prepared by the late Jim Turner for his 1988 omnibus collection for Arkham House, *A Rendezvous in Averoigne*. Turner did not have access to such a wonderful scholarly tool as Boyd Pearson's website, www.eldritchdark.com. By combining its extremely useful search engine with consultation of Smith's actual manuscripts and typescripts, as well as seeing how he spelled a particular word in a poem or letter, the editors believe that they have reflected accurately Smith's idiosyncracies of expression.

However, as Emerson reminds us, "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Smith may have deliberately varied his spelling and usages depending upon the particular mood or atmosphere that he was trying to achieve in a particular story. As he explained in a letter to H. P. Lovecraft sometime in November 1930,

> The problem of "style" in writing is certainly fascinating and profound. I find it highly important, when I begin a tale, to establish at once what might be called the appropriate "tone." If this is clearly determined at the start I seldom have much difficulty in maintaining it; but if it isn't, there is likely to be trouble. Obviously, the style of "Mohammed's Tomb"[1] wouldn't do for "The Ghoul;" and one of my chief preoccupations in writing this last story was to exclude images, ideas and locutions which I would have used freely in a modern story. The same, of course, applies to "Sir John Maundeville," which is a deliberate study in the archaic. (*SL* 137)

Therefore we have allowed certain variations in spelling and usage that seem to us to be consistent with Smith's stated principles as indicated above.

Four of the stories included in this volume were published after Smith's death in 1961. "Told in the Desert" was first published by August Derleth in

an original anthology from Arkham House, and no manuscript or typescript survives in either the Clark Ashton Smith Papers at Brown University or the August Derleth Papers at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Library in Madison, Wisconsin. A search of the remaining papers at Arkham House itself failed to locate any manuscript. "A Good Embalmer" was first published in *Strange Shadows,* a collection of unpublished stories, variants, fragments, synopses, notes, and other prose edited by Steve Behrends in 1989. A holograph manuscript exists at Brown's John Hay Library. Two stories, "The Red World of Polaris" and "The Face by the River," were long believed to be lost. A copy of the latter was located among the papers of the late Genevieve K. Sully. The original typescript of "The Red World of Polaris" was sold by Smith to a Brooklyn, New York fan named Michael DeAngelis, who planned to publish it in a fanzine. DeAngelis himself disappeared, and it was feared that the story disappeared with him. However, Ron Hilger located DeAngelis' co-editor Alan Pesetsky, who found a typescript that he had made in preparation for that aborted fanzine appearance, which we published in 2003 as part of the collected adventures of Captain Volmar.

Smith published six stories himself in a 1933 pamphlet, *The Double Shadow and Other Fantasies,* but later revised some of these for sale to *Esquire* (unsuccessfully) and *Weird Tales* (successfully) in the late 1930s. In these instances we use the version published by Smith himself.

Typescripts exist at the JHL of two stories included here, "An Offering to the Moon" and "The Kingdom of the Worm" (also known as "A Tale of Sir John Maundeville"), but in both cases it appears that these are of an earlier draft. In the case of the former it seems to us that the published version is the superior, possibly the result of the Smith of 1950 revising his earlier work, and in the latter evidence exists that a revised version was submitted to *Fantasy Fan* editor Charles D. Hornig that leads us to favor that text.

Although tearsheets from *Weird Tales* were used in the preparation of *Out of Space and Time,* the latter's text differs from both the magazine appearance and the original typescript in a manner not reflected elsewhere in the Arkham House editions. The first involves the elimination of some text and the merging of two paragraphs into one. We suspect that this represents a transcription error on the part of Alice Conger, August Derleth's secretary. The second occurs at the very end: both the typescript

and *Weird Tales* have as the last line “But Fleurette was still bemused with wonder, and could only answer him with a kiss.” *Out of Space and Time* changes this to “respond to his words...” This last change could have easily been changed in any of the several copies of *OST* corrected by CAS that we have been fortunate to consult, and he did not. The first change, however, while also not reflected in any of the corrected copies, might have been allowed to stand since its correction would have involved quite a bit of effort and would have altered the meaning but slightly. However, since that meaning is altered, we have decided to restore the missing text.

“The City of the Singing Flame” presents an unusual case. The text published in *Out of Space and Time* represents a fusion of this story with its sequel, “Beyond the Singing Flame” (*Wonder Stories* November 1931), that was carried out by Walter H. Gillings, editor of the British pulp magazine *Tales of Wonder,* when the stories were reprinted together in the Spring 1940 issue. Smith could provide Arkham House publisher August Derleth with neither the typescript nor tear sheets from the *Wonder Stories* appearance, so he resorted to the one version that he had at hand. Smith’s financial situation was such at the time that it was imperative he hand in the book as soon as possible. When Jim Turner was preparing the text for Arkham House’s collection *A Rendezvous in Averoigne,* he reversed many but not all of the changes. His text differs from both the final typescript prepared by Smith as well as the story’s original appearance in the July 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories.*

We regret that we cannot present a totally authoritative text for Smith’s stories. Such typescripts do not exist. All that we can do is to apply our knowledge of Smith to the existing manuscripts and attempt to combine them to present what Smith would have preferred to publish were he not beset by editorial malfeasance in varying degrees. In doing so we hope to present Smith’s words in their purest form to date so that the reader might experience what Ray Bradbury described in his foreword to *A Rendezvous in Averoigne*: “Take one step across the threshold of his stories, and you plunge into color, sound, taste, smell, and texture—into language.”

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Donald Sidney-Fryer, and Jason Williams for their help, support, and encouragement of this project, as well as Holly Snyder and the staff of the John Hay Library of Brown University, and D. S. Black of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, for their assistance in the preparation of this collection. Needless to say, any errors are the sole responsibility of the editors.

1. “Like Mohammed’s Tomb,” a science fiction story written in October 1930. As with “The Red World of Polaris,” Smith sold the only known manuscript to Michael DeAngelis.

THE DOOR TO SATURN

I

When Morghi, the high-priest of the goddess Yhoundeh, together with twelve of his most ferocious and efficient underlings, came at morning twilight to seek the infamous heretic Eibon in his house of black gneiss on a headland above the northern main, they were surprised as well as disappointed to find him absent. Their surprise was due to the fact that they had fully thought to take him unaware; for all their tribunals against Eibon had been carried on with meticulous privacy in underground vaults with sound-proof bolted doors; and they themselves had made the long journey to his house in a single night, immediately following the hour of his condemnation. They were disappointed because the formidable writ of arrest, with symbolic flame-etched runes on a scroll of human skin, was now useless; and because there seemed to be no early prospect of trying out the ingenious agonies, the intricately harrowing ordeals which they had devised for Eibon with such providential forethought.

Morghi was especially disappointed; and the malisons which he muttered when the emptiness of the topmost room had revealed itself, were of truly cabbalistic length and fearfulness. Eibon was his chief rival in wizardry, and was acquiring altogether too much fame and prestige among the peoples of Mhu Thulan, that ultimate peninsula of the Hyperborean continent. So Morghi had been glad to believe certain malignant rumors concerning Eibon and to utilize them in the charges he had preferred. These rumors were, that Eibon was a devotee of the long-discredited heathen god Zhothaqquah, whose worship was incalculably older than man; and that Eibon's magic was drawn from his unlawful affiliation with this dark deity, who had come down by way of other worlds from a foreign universe, in primeval times when the earth was still no more than a steaming morass. The power of Zhothaqquah was still feared; and it was said that those who

were willing to forgo their humanity by serving him would become the heritors of antemundane secrets, and the masters of a knowledge so awful that it could only have been brought from outlying planets coeval with night and chaos.

The house of Eibon was built in the form of a pentagonal tower, and possessed five stories, including the two that were underground. All, of course, had been searched with painstaking thoroughness; and the three servants of Eibon had been tortured with a slow drip of boiling-hot asphaltum to make them reveal their master's whereabouts. Their continued denial of all knowledge, after a half hour of this, was taken as proof that they were genuinely ignorant. No sign of a subterranean passage was unearthed by delving in the walls and floor of the lower rooms; though Morghi had even gone so far as to remove the flagstones beneath an obscene image of Zhothaqquah which occupied the nethermost. This he had done with extreme reluctance, for the squat, fur-covered god, with his bat-like features and sloth-like body, was fearsomely abhorrent to the high-priest of the elk-goddess Yhoundeh.

Returning in renewed search to the highest room of Eibon's tower, the inquisitors were compelled to own themselves baffled. There was nothing to be found but a few articles of furniture, a few antique volumes on conjuration such as might be owned by any sorcerer, some disagreeable and gruesome paintings on rolls of pterodactyl parchment, and certain primitive urns and sculptures and totem-poles of the sort that Eibon had been so fond of collecting. Zhothaqquah, in one form or another, was represented in most of these: his face even leered with a bestial somnolence from the urn-handles; and he was to be found in half the totems (which were those of sub-human tribes) along with the seal, the mammoth, the giant tiger, and the aurochs. Morghi felt that the charges against Eibon were now substantiated beyond all remaining doubt; for surely no one who was not a worshipper of Zhothaqquah would care to own even a single representation of this loathsome entity.

However, such additional evidence of guilt, no matter how significant or damnatory, was of small help in finding Eibon. Staring from the windows of the topmost chamber, where the walls fell sheer to the cliff and the cliff dropped clear on two sides to a raging sea four hundred feet below, Morghi was driven to credit his rival with superior resources of magic. Otherwise,

the man’s disappearance was altogether too much of a mystery. And Morghi had no love for mysteries, unless they were part of his own stock-in-trade.

He turned from the window and re-examined the room with minutely careful attention. Eibon had manifestly used it as a sort of study: there was a writing-table of ivory, with reed-pens, and various-colored inks in little earthen pots; and there were sheets of paper made from a kind of calamite, all scribbled over with odd astronomical and astrological calculations that caused Morghi to frown because he could not understand them. On each of the five walls there hung one of the parchment paintings, all of which seemed to be the work of some aboriginal race. Their themes were blasphemous and repellent; and Zhothaqquah figured in all of them, amid forms and landscapes whose abnormality and sheer uncouthness may have been due to the half-developed technique of the primitive artists. Morghi now tore them from the walls one by one, as if he suspected that Eibon might in some manner be concealed behind them.

The walls were now entirely bare; and Morghi considered them for a long time, amid the respectful silence of his underlings. A queer panel, high up in the south-eastern side above the writing-table, had been revealed by the removal of one of the paintings. Morghi’s heavy brows met in a long black bar as he eyed this panel. It was conspicuously different from the rest of the wall, being an oval-shaped inlay of some reddish metal that was neither gold nor copper—a metal that displayed an obscure and fleeting fluorescence of rare colors when one peered at it through half-shut eyelids. But somehow it was impossible even to remember with open eyes the colors of this fluorescence.

Morghi—who, perhaps, was cleverer and more perspicacious than Eibon had given him credit for being—conceived a suspicion that was apparently baseless and absurd, since the wall containing the panel was the outer wall of the building, and could give only on the sky and sea.

He climbed upon the writing-table and struck the panel with his fist. The sensations which he felt, and the result of the blow, were alike astounding. A sense of icy cold so extreme that it was hardly distinguishable from extreme heat, ran along his hand and arm through his whole body as he smote the unknown reddish metal. And the panel itself swung easily outward, as if on unseen hinges, with a high sonorous clang that seemed to fall from an incomputable distance. Beyond it, Morghi saw

that there was neither sky nor sea nor, in fact, anything he had ever seen or heard of, or had even dreamt of in his most outrageous nightmares...

He turned to his companions. The look on his face was half amazement, half triumph.

“Wait here till I return,” he commanded, and leapt headlong through the open panel.

II

The charges that had been brought against Eibon were indeed true. The sagacious wizard, in his life-long study of laws and agencies, both natural and supernatural, had taken account of the myths that were prevalent in Mhu Thulan regarding Zhothaqquah, and had thought it conceivably worth while to make a personal investigation of this obscure pre-human entity. He had cultivated the acquaintance of Zhothaqquah, who, in the desuetude of his worship, was now driven to lead an existence wholly subterranean; he had offered the prescribed prayers, had made the sacrifices that were most acceptable; and the strange, sleepy little god, in return for Eibon’s interest and his exvotes, had confided to him certain information that was more than useful in the practice of the black arts. Also he had told Eibon some autobiographical data that confirmed the popular legends in more explicit detail. For reasons which he did not specify, he had come to earth in former aeons from the planet Cykranosh (the name by which Saturn was called in Mhu Thulan); and Cykranosh itself had been merely a way-station in his travels from remoter worlds and systems. As a special reward, after years of service and burnt-offerings, he presented to Eibon a large thin oval plate of some ultra-telluric metal, instructing him to have it fitted as a hinged panel in an upper room of his house. The panel, if swung outward from the wall on open air, would have the peculiar property of giving admittance to the world Cykranosh, many million miles away in space.

According to the vague and somewhat unsatisfactory explanation vouchsafed by the god, this panel, being partly wrought from a kind of matter which belonged to another universe than man’s, possessed uncommon radiative properties that served to ally it with some higher

dimension of space, through which the distance to astronomically remote spheres was a mere step.

Zhothaqquah, however, warned Eibon not to make use of the panel unless in time of extreme need, as a means of escape from otherwise inevitable danger; for it would be difficult if not impossible to return to earth from Cykranosh—a world where Eibon might find it anything but easy to acclimate himself, since the conditions of life were very different from those in Mhu Thulan, even though they did not involve so total an inversion of all terrene standards and norms as that which prevailed in the more outlying planets. Some of Zhothaqquah's relatives were still resident in Cykranosh and were worshipped by its peoples; and Zhothaqquah told Eibon the almost unpronounceable name of the most powerful of these deities, saying that it would be useful to him as a sort of pass-word if he should ever need to visit Cykranosh.

The idea of a panel that would open on some remote world impressed Eibon as being rather fantastic, not to say far-fetched; but he had found Zhothaqquah to be in all ways and at all times a most veracious deity. However, he made no trial of the panel's unique virtues, till Zhothaqquah (who maintained a close surveillance of all underground doings) had warned him of the machinations of Morghi and the processes of ecclesiastic law that were being instituted in the vaults below the temple of Yhoundeh. Knowing as he did the power of these jealous bigots, Eibon decided that it would be injudicious to the point of folly if he were to let himself fall into their hands. Bidding a short and grateful farewell to Zhothaqquah, and collecting a small parcel of bread and meat and wine, he retired to his study and climbed upon the writing-table. Then, lifting aside the crude picture of a scene in Cykranosh with which Zhothaqquah had inspired some primeval half-human artist, he pushed open the panel it had served to conceal.

Eibon saw that Zhothaqquah was indeed a god of his word: for the scene beyond the panel was nothing that could ever find a legitimate place in the topography of Mhu Thulan or of any terrestrial region. It did not altogether appeal to him; but there was no alternative, save the inquisitorial cells of the goddess Yhoundeh. Envisaging in thought the various refinements and complications of torture which Morghi would have now prepared, he sprang through the opening into Cykranosh with an agility that was quite juvenile for a wizard of mature years.

It was only a step; but turning he saw that all trace of the panel or of his dwelling had now disappeared. He was standing on a long declivity of ashen soil, down which a sluggish stream that was not water, but some liquescent metal resembling mercury, ran from tremendous unscalable shoulders and horns of the mountain-heights above, to debouch in a hill-surrounded lake of the same liquid. The slope beneath him was lined with rows of peculiar objects; and he could not make up his mind whether they were trees, mineral forms or animal organisms, since they appeared to combine certain characteristics of all these. This preternatural landscape was appallingly distinct in every detail, under a greenish-black sky that was over-arched from end to end with a triple cyclopean ring of dazzling luminosity. The air was cold, and Eibon did not care for its sulphurescent odor, or the odd puckery sensation it left in his nostrils and lungs. And when he took a few steps on the unattractive-looking soil, he found that it had the disconcerting friability of ashes that have dried once more after being wetted with rain.

He started down the slope, half-fearing that some of the equivocal objects around him would reach out their mineral boughs or arms to arrest his progress. They seemed to be a kind of bluish-purple obsidian cacti, with limbs that ended in formidable talon-like spines, and heads that were altogether too elaborate for either fruits or blossoms. They did not move as he passed among them; but he heard a faint and singular tinkling with many modulations of tone, that preceded and followed him along the slope. Eibon conceived the uncomfortable notion that they were holding converse with each other; and were perhaps debating what should be done with him or about him.

However, he reached without mishap or hindrance the end of the declivity, where terraces and ledges of decomposing trap, like a mighty stairway of elder aeons, had rimmed the sunken lake of liquescent metal. Wondering as to the way he should now take, Eibon stood irresolute on one of the ledges.

His train of conjecture was broken by a shadow that fell suddenly athwart him and lay like a monstrous blot on the crumbling stone at his feet. He was not prepossessed by the shadow: it was outrageously defiant of all known aesthetic standards; and its malformation and distortion were no less than extravagant.

He turned to see what manner of creature had flung the shadow. This being, he perceived, was not easy to classify, with its insanely short legs, its exceedingly elongated arms, and its round, sleepy-looking head that was pendulous from a spherical body, as if it were turning a somnambulistic somersault. But after he had studied it awhile and had noted its furriness and somnolent expression, he began to see a vague though inverted likeness to the god Zhothaqquah. And remembering how Zhothaqquah had said the form assumed by himself on earth was not altogether that which he had worn in Cykranosh, Eibon now wondered if this entity was one of Zhothaqquah's relatives.

He was trying to recall the almost inarticulable name that had been confided to him by the god as a sort of pass-word, when the owner of that unusual shadow, without seeming to note Eibon's presence, began a descent of the terraces and ledges toward the lake. Its locomotion was mainly on its hands, for the absurd legs were not half long enough for the steps it had to take. Arriving at the lake-edge, the creature drank of the liquid metal in a hearty and copious manner that served to convince Eibon of its godship; for surely no being of an inferior biologic order would quench its thirst with a beverage so extraordinary. Then, re-ascending to the ledge where Eibon stood, it paused and appeared to notice him for the first time.

Eibon had finally remembered the outlandish name for which he was groping.

"Hziulquoigmnzhah," he sought to articulate. Doubtless the result was not wholly conformable to Cykranoshian rules; but Eibon did the best he could with the vocal organs at his command. His auditor seemed to recognize the word, for it peered at Eibon a little less sleepily than before, with its inversely situated eyes; and even deigned to utter something which sounded like an attempt to correct his pronunciation. Eibon wondered how he was ever to learn such a language; or, having learned it, how he was ever to pronounce it. However, it heartened him a little to find that he was understood at all.

"Zhothaqquah," he said, repeating the name three times in his most orotund incantatory manner.

The topsy-turvy being opened its eyes a trifle more, and again admonished him, uttering the word Zhothaqquah with an indescribable abbreviation of vowels and thickening of consonants. Then it stood regarding him for awhile as if in doubt or cogitation. Finally it raised one of

its ell-long arms from the ground and pointed along the shore, where the mouth of a low valley was discernible among the hills. It said distinctly the enigmatic words: "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh;*" and then, while the sorcerer was pondering the significance of this unusual locution, it turned away from him and started to re-ascend the higher steps, toward a rather spacious cavern with columned opening, that he had not heretofore perceived. It had hardly passed from sight into the cavern, when Eibon was greeted by the high priest Morghi, who had readily followed him by his tracks in the ashen soil.

"Detestable sorcerer! Abominable heretic! I arrest you!" said Morghi with pontifical severity.

Eibon was surprised, not to say startled; but it re-assured him to see that Morghi was alone. He drew the sword of highly tempered bronze which he carried, and smiled.

"I should advise you to moderate your language, Morghi," he admonished. "Also, your idea of arresting me is slightly out of place now, since we are alone together in Cykranosh, and Mhu Thulan and the temple-cells of Yhoundeh are many million miles away."

Morghi did not appear to relish this information. He scowled and muttered:

"I suppose this is some more of your damnable wizardry."

Eibon chose to ignore the insinuation.

"I have been conversing with one of the gods of Cykranosh," he said magniloquently. "The god, whose name is Hziulquoigmnzhah, has given me a mission to perform, a message to deliver, and has indicated the direction in which I should go. I suggest that you lay aside our little mundane disagreement, and accompany me. Of course we could slit each other's throats or eviscerate each other, since we are both armed. But under the circumstances I think you will see the puerility, not to mention the sheer inutility, of such a proceeding. If we both live we may be of mutual use and assistance, in a strange world whose problems and difficulties, if I mistake not, are worthy of our united powers."

Morghi frowned and pondered.

"Very well," he said grudgingly, "I consent. But I warn you that matters will have to take their course when we return to Mhu Thulan."

"That," rejoined Eibon, "is a contingency which need not trouble either of us. Shall we start?"

III

The two Hyperboreans had been following a defile that wound away from the lake of fluid metal among hills whose vegetation thickened and grew more various as their height decreased. It was the valley that had been indicated to the sorcerer by the topsy-turvy biped. Morghi, a natural inquisitor in all senses, was plying Eibon with questions.

"Who, or what, was the singular entity that disappeared in a cavern just before I accosted you?"

"That was the god Hziulquoigmnzhah."

"And who, pray, is this god? I confess that I have never heard of him."

"He is the paternal uncle of Zhothaqquah."

Morghi was silent, except for a queer sound that might have been either an interrupted sneeze or an exclamation of disgust. But after awhile he asked:

"And what is this mission of yours?"

"That will be revealed in due time," answered Eibon with sententious dignity. "I am not allowed to discuss it at present. I have a message from the god which I must deliver only to the proper persons."

Morghi was unwillingly impressed.

"Well, I suppose you know what you are doing and where you are going. Can you give me any hint as to our destination?"

"That, too, will be revealed in due time."

The hills were lapsing gently to a well-wooded plain whose flora would have been the despair of earthly botanists. Beyond the last hill, Eibon and Morghi came to a narrow road that began abruptly and stretched away in the distance. Eibon took the road without hesitation. Indeed there was little else to do, for the thickets of mineral plants and trees were rapidly becoming impenetrable. They lined the way with serrate branches that were like sheaves of darts and daggers, of sword-blades and needles.

Eibon and Morghi soon noticed that the road was full of large footprints, all of them circular in form and rimmed about with the marks of protruding claws. However, they did not communicate their misgivings to each other.

After an hour or two of progression along the yielding ashy thoroughfare, amid the vegetation that was more horrent than ever with

knives and caltrops, the travellers began to remember that they were hungry. Morghi, in his haste to arrest Eibon, had not breakfasted; and Eibon, in his natural hurry to evade Morghi, had committed a like omission. They halted by the wayside, and the sorcerer shared his parcel of food and wine with the priest. They ate and drank with frugality, however, since the supply was limited, and the landscape about them was not likely to prove a source of any viands that were suitable for human sustenance.

With strength and courage revived by this little refection, they continued their journey. They had not gone far when they overtook a remarkable monster that was plainly the originator of the numerous footprints. It was squatting down with its armored haunches toward the travellers, filling the whole road for an indeterminable distance ahead. They could see that it was possessed of a myriad short legs; but they could form no idea of what its head and forequarters were like.

Eibon and Morghi were much dismayed.

“Is this another of your ‘gods’?” asked Morghi with attempted irony.

The sorcerer did not reply. But he realized that he had a reputation to sustain. He went boldly forward and cried out: “Hziulquoigmnzhah” in the most resonant bellow that he could summon. At the same time he drew his sword and thrust it between two plates of the horny mail that covered the monster’s hindquarters.

Greatly to his relief, the animal began to move and resumed its progression along the road. The Hyperboreans followed it; and whenever the creature slackened its pace Eibon would repeat the formula which he had found so effective. Morghi was compelled to regard him with a certain awe.

They travelled on in this manner for several hours. The great luminous triple ring still over-arched the zenith, but a strangely small and chilly sun had now intersected the ring and was declining toward the west of Cykranosh. The forest along the way was still a high wall of sharp metallic foliage; but other roads and paths and byways were now branching off from the one that the monster followed.

All was very silent, except for the many-footed shuffling of this uncouth animal; and neither Eibon nor Morghi had spoken for miles. The high-priest was regretting more and more his rashness in pursuing Eibon through the panel; and Eibon was wishing that Zhothaqquah had given him the entrée to a different sort of world. They were startled out of their meditations by a

sudden clamor of deep and booming voices that rose from somewhere in advance of the monster. It was a veritable tintamar of unhuman guttural bellowings and croakings, with notes that were somehow suggestive of reproof and objurgation, like shrewish drums, as if the monster were being scolded by a group of unimaginable entities.

"Well?" queried Morghi.

"All that we are destined to behold will reveal itself at the proper time," said Eibon.

The forest was thinning rapidly, and the clamor of termagant bellows was drawing closer. Still ensuing the hindquarters of their multipedal guide, which was crawling on with reluctant slowness, the travellers emerged in an open space, on a most singular tableau. The monster, which was plainly of a tame and harmless and stupid sort, was cowering before a knot of beings no larger than men, who were armed only with long-handled goads. These beings, though they were bipeds, and were not quite so unheard-of in their anatomic structure as the entity which Eibon had met by the lake, were nevertheless sufficiently unusual; for their head and bodies were apparently combined in one, and their ears, eyes, nostrils, mouths, and certain other organs of doubtful use were all arranged in a somewhat unconventional grouping on their chests and abdomens. They were wholly naked, and were rather dark in color, with no trace of hair on any of their parts or members. Behind them at a little distance were many edifices of a kind which hardly conformed to human ideas of architectural symmetry.

Eibon strode valorously forward, with Morghi following discreetly. The torso-headed beings ceased their objurgation of the fawning monster and peered at the earth-men with expressions that were difficult to read on account of the odd and baffling relationship of their features.

"Hziulquoigmnzhah! Zhothaqquah!" said Eibon with oracular solemnity and sonority. Then, after a pause of hieratic length: "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*!"

The result was indeed gratifying, and was all that could be expected even from a formula so remarkable; for the Cykranoshian beings dropped their goads and bowed before the sorcerer till their featured bosoms almost touched the ground.

"I have performed the mission, I have delivered the message given me by Hziulquoigmnzhah," said Eibon to Morghi.

IV

For several Cykranoshian months the two Hyperboreans were the honored guests of this quaint and worthy and virtuous people, who called themselves the Bhlemphroims. Eibon had a real gift for languages and made progress in the local tongue far more readily than Morghi. His knowledge of the customs, manners, ideas, and beliefs of the Bhlemphroims soon became extensive; but he found it a source of disillusionment as well as of illumination.

The armored monster that he and Morghi had driven before them so valiantly was, he learned, a domestic beast of burden that had strayed away from its owners amid the mineral vegetation of the desert lands adjoining Vhlorrh, the chief town of the Bhlemphroims. The genuflections with which Eibon and Morghi had been greeted were only an expression of gratitude for the safe return of this beast; and were not, as Eibon had thought, an acknowledgment of the divine names he had quoted and the fearsome phrase, "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*." The being that Eibon had met by the lake was indeed the god Hziulquoigmnzhah; and there were dim traditions of Zhothaqquah in certain early myths of the Bhlemphroims. But this people, it seemed, were most regrettably materialistic and had long ceased to offer sacrifice and prayer to the gods; though they spoke of them with a sort of distant respect and with no actual blasphemy. Eibon learned that the words "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*" doubtless belonged to a private language of the gods, which the Bhlemphroims no longer understood; but which, however, was still studied by a neighboring people, the Ydheems, who maintained the ancient formal worship of Hziulquoigmnzhah and various related deities.

The Bhlemphroims were indeed a practical race, and had few if any interests beyond the cultivation of a great variety of edible fungi, the breeding of large centipedal animals, and the propagation of their own species. The latter process, as revealed to Eibon and Morghi, was somewhat unusual: though the Bhlemphroims were bisexual, only one female in a generation was chosen for reproductive duties; and this female, after growing to mammoth size on food prepared from a special fungus, became the mother of an entire new generation.

When they had been well-initiated into the life and customs of Vhlorrh, the Hyperboreans were privileged to see the future national mother, called the Djhenquomh, who had now attained the requisite proportions after years of scientific nourishment. She lived in an edifice that was necessarily larger than any of the other buildings in Vhlorrh; and her sole activity was the consumption of immense quantities of food. The sorcerer and the inquisitor were impressed, even if not captivated, by the mountainous amplitude of her charms and by their highly novel arrangement. They were told that the male parent (or parents) of the forthcoming generation had not yet been selected.

The possession of separate heads by the Hyperboreans seemed to lend them a remarkable biologic interest in the eyes of their hosts. The Bhlemphroims, it was learned, had not always been headless but had reached their present physical conformation through a slow process of evolution, in which the head of the archetypal Bhlemphroim had been merged by imperceptible degrees with the torso. But unlike most peoples, they did not regard their current stage of development with unqualified complacency. Indeed, their headlessness was a source of national regret; they deplored the retrenchment of nature in this regard; and the arrival of Eibon and Morghi, who were looked upon as ideal exemplars of cephalic evolution, had served to quicken their eugenic sorrow.

The sorcerer and the inquisitor, on their part, found life rather dull among the Bhlemphroims after the initial quaintness and feeling of exoticism had worn off. The diet was tiresome for one thing—an endless succession of raw and boiled and roasted mushrooms, varied only by the coarse and flabby meat of tame monsters. And this people, though they were always polite and respectful, did not seem to be greatly awed by the exhibitions of Hyperborean magic with which Eibon and Morghi favored them; and their lamentable want of religious ardor made all evangelistic endeavor a thankless task. And, being fundamentally unimaginative, they were not even duly impressed by the fact that their visitors had come from a remote ultra-Cykranoshian world.

“I feel,” said Eibon to Morghi one day, “that the god was sadly mistaken in deigning to send this people a message of any sort.”

It was very soon after this that a large committee of the Blemphroims waited upon Eibon and Morghi and informed them that after long consideration they had been selected as the fathers of the next generation

and were to be married forthwith to the tribal mother in the hope that a well-headed race of Bhlemphroims would result from the union.

Eibon and Morghi were quite overcome by the proposed eugenic honor. Thinking of the mountainous female they had seen, Morghi was prone to remember his sacerdotal vows of celibacy and Eibon was eager to take similar vows upon himself without delay. The inquisitor, indeed, was so overwhelmed as to be rendered almost speechless; but, with rare presence of mind, the sorcerer temporized by making a few queries anent the legal and social status which would be enjoyed by Morghi and himself as the husbands of the Djhenquomh. And the naive Blemphroims told him that this would be a matter of brief concern; that after completing their marital duties the husbands were always served to the national mother in the form of ragouts and other culinary preparations.

The Hyperboreans tried to conceal from their hosts the reluctance with which they both regarded the coming honor in all its stages. Being as usual a master of diplomatics, Eibon went so far as to make a formal acceptance on behalf of himself and his companion. But when the delegation of Bhlemphroims had departed he said to Morghi:

“I am more than ever convinced that the god was mistaken. We must leave the city of Vhlorrh with all feasible dispatch, and continue our journey till we find a people who are worthier to receive his communication.”

It did not seem to have occurred to the simple and patriotic Bhlemphroims that the fathering of their next national litter was a privilege that anyone would dream of rejecting. Eibon and Morghi were subjected to no manner of duress or constraint, and their movements were not even watched. It was an easy matter to leave the house in which they had been domiciled, when the rumbling diaphragmic snores of their hosts were ascending to the great rings of Cykranoshian moons, and follow the highway that led from Vhlorrh toward the country of the Ydheems.

The road before them was well-marked; and the ring-light was almost as clear and brilliant as full day. They travelled a long distance through the diversified and always unique scenery which it served to illumine, before the rising of the sun and the consequent discovery of their departure by the Bhlemphroims. These single-minded bipeds, it is likely, were too sorely perplexed and dumbfounded by the loss of the guests whom they had chosen as future progenitors to even think of following them.

The land of the Ydheems (as indicated on an earlier occasion by the Bhlemphroims) was many leagues away; and tracts of ashen deserts, of mineral cacti, of fungoid forests and high mountains intervened. The boundary of the Bhlemphroims—marked by a crude sculpturesque representation of the tribal mother beside the way—was passed by the travellers before dawn. And during the following day they journeyed among more than one of those unusual races who diversify so widely the population of Saturn. They saw the Djhibbis, that apterous and Stylitean bird-people, who roost on their individual dolomites for years at a time and meditate upon the cosmos, uttering to each other at long intervals the mystic syllables *yop*, *yeep*, and *yoop*, which are said to express an unfathomed range of esoteric thought. And they met those flibbertigibbet pygmies, the Ephiqhs, who hollow out their homes in the trunks of certain large fungi, and are always having to hunt new habitations because the old ones crumble into powder in a few days. And they heard the underground croaking of that mysterious people, the Ghlonghs, who dread not only the sunlight but also the ring-light, and who have never yet been seen by any of the surface-dwellers.

By sunset, however, Eibon and Morghi had crossed the domains of all the afore-mentioned, and had even clomb the lower scarps of those mountains which still divided them from the land of Ydheems. Here, on a sheltered ledge, their weariness impelled them to halt; and since they had now ceased to dread pursuit from the Blemphroims, they wrapped themselves more tightly in their mantles against the cold, after a meager supper of raw mushrooms, and fell asleep.

Their slumber was disturbed by a series of cacodemoniacal dreams in which they both thought they had been recaptured by the Bhlemphroims and were forced to espouse the Djhenquomh. They awoke shortly before dawn, from visions whose details were excruciatingly vivid, and were more than ready to resume their ascent of the mountains.

The slopes and cliffs above them were desolate enough to have deterred any travellers of inferior hardihood or less cogent fears. The tall woods of fungi dwindled ere long to alpine size; they lessened to forms that were no bigger than lichens; and after these, there was nothing but black and naked stone. The wiry and slender Eibon suffered no great inconvenience from the climb; but Morghi, with his sacerdotal girth and bulk, was soon winded. Whenever he paused to recover his breath, Eibon would say to him: “Think

of the national mother," and Morghi would climb the next acclivity like an agile but somewhat asthmatic mountain-sheep.

They came at noon to a pinnacle-guarded pass from which they could look down on the country of the Ydheems. They saw that it was a broad and fertile realm, with woods of mammoth mushrooms and other thallophytes that excelled in size and number those of any other region they had yet traversed. Even the mountain-slopes were more fruitful on this side, for Eibon and Morghi had not descended far when they entered a grove of enormous puff-balls and toadstools.

They were admiring the magnitude and variety of these growths, when they heard a thunderous noise on the mountains above them. The noise drew nearer, gathering to itself the roar of new thunders. Eibon would have prayed to Zhothaqquah, and Morghi would have supplicated the goddess Yhoundeh, but unfortunately there was no time. They were caught in a mighty mass of rolling puff-balls and toppling toad-stools overthrown by the huge avalanche that had started on the heights above; and, borne with increasing momentum, with vertiginous speed and tumult amid an ever-growing heap of shattered fungi, they finished their descent of the mountain in less than a minute.

V

Endeavoring to extricate themselves from the pile of thallophytic debris in which they were buried, Eibon and Morghi noticed that there still seemed to be a good deal of noise, even though the avalanche had stopped. Also, there were other movements and heavings than their own in the pile. When they had managed to get their necks and shoulders clear, they discovered that the commotion was being made by certain people who differed from their late hosts, the Bhlemphroims, in that they possessed rudimentary heads. These people were some of the Ydheems, on one of whose towns the avalanche had descended. Roofs and towers were emerging from the mass of boulders and puff-balls; and just in front of the Hyperboreans there was a large temple-like edifice from whose blocked-up door a multitude of the Ydheems had now tunneled their way. At sight of Eibon and Morghi they suspended their labors; and the sorcerer, who had

freed himself and had made sure that all his bones and members were intact, now took the opportunity to address them.

“Harken! I have come to bring you a message from the god Hziulquoigmnzhah. I have borne it faithfully on ways beset with many hazards and perils. In the god’s own divine language, it runs thus: ‘*lqhui dlosh odhqfonqh*.’”

Since he spoke in the dialect of the Bhlemphroims, which differed somewhat from their own, it is doubtful if the Ydheems altogether understood the first part of his utterance. But Hziulquoigmnzhah was their tutelary deity; and they knew the language of the gods. At the words: “*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*,” there was a most remarkable resumption and increase of activity, a ceaseless running to and fro on the part of the Ydheems, a shouting of guttural orders, and a recrudescence of new heads and limbs from the avalanche. Those who had issued from the temple re-entered it, and came out once more carrying a huge image of Hziulquoigmnzhah, some smaller eikons of lesser though allied deities, and a very ancient-looking idol which both Eibon and Morghi recognized as having a resemblance to Zhothaqquah. Others of the Ydheems brought their household goods and furniture forth from the dwellings; and, signing the Hyperboreans to accompany them, the whole populace began to evacuate the town.

Eibon and Morghi were much mystified. And it was not until a new town had been built on the fungus-wooded plain at the distance of a full day’s march, and they themselves had been installed among the priests of the new temple, that they learned the reason of it all and the meaning of: “*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*.” These words meant merely: “Be on your way,” and the god had addressed them to Eibon as a dismissal. But the coincidental coming of the avalanche and of Eibon and Morghi with this purported message from the god, had been taken by the Ydheems as a divine injunction to remove from their present location. Thus the wholesale exodus of people with their idols and domestic belongings.

The new town was called Ghlomph, after the one that the avalanche had buried. Here, for the remainder of their days, Eibon and Morghi were held in much honor; and their coming with the message, “*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*,” was deemed a fortunate thing, since there were no more avalanches to threaten the security of Ghlomph in its new situation remote from the mountains.

The Hyperboreans shared the increment of civic affluence and well-being resultant from this security. There was no national mother among the Ydheems, who propagated themselves in a far more general manner than the Bhlemphroims, so existence was quite safe and tranquil. Eibon, at least, was really in his element; for the news which he brought of Zhothaqquah, who was still worshipped in this region of Cykranosh, had enabled him to set up as a sort of minor prophet, even apart from the renown which he enjoyed as the bearer of the divine message.

Morghi, perchance, was not entirely happy: though the Ydheems were religious, they did not carry their devotional fervor to the point of bigotry or intolerance; so it was quite impossible to start an inquisition among them. But still there were compensations: the fungus-wine of the Ydheems was potent though evil-tasting; and there were females of a sort, if one were not too squeamish. So Morghi and Eibon both settled down to an ecclesiastic regimen which, after all, was not so radically different from that of Mhu Thulan or any other place.

Such were the various adventures, and such was the final lot of this redoubtable pair in Cykranosh. But in Eibon’s tower of black gneiss on that headland of the northern sea in Mhu Thulan, the underlings of Morghi waited for days, neither daring to follow the high-priest through the magic panel nor daring to leave in despite of his orders. At length they were recalled by a special dispensation from the hierophant who had been chosen as Morghi’s temporary successor. But the result of the whole affair was highly regrettable from the standpoint of the hierarchy of Yhoundeh. It was universally believed that Eibon had not only escaped by virtue of the powerful magic he had learned from Zhothaqquah, but had made away with Morghi into the bargain. As a consequence of this belief, the faith of Yhoundeh declined, and there was a wide-spread revival of the dark worship of Zhothaqquah throughout Mhu Thulan in the last centuries before the onset of the great Ice Age.

THE RED WORLD OF POLARIS

I

As he studied the slowly changing configuration of the stars in the huge reflectors of his ether-ship the *Alcyone,* Captain Volmar was now seized by a memory of his younger years, when he had been first officer of a trans-Atlantic liner. He recalled the broken mists and unclouded icy sapphire of nights when he had watched the pole-star from the vessel's bridge. For now, amid the scattered flecks of light that formed the rearranged and scarce identifiable constellations, a single flaming point had began to emerge beyond the rest and was taking on the proportions of a remote sun; and this point, as he knew from his astronomical chart, was Polaris.

His thin face, sharpened by the fires and rigors of well-nigh sacerdotal consecration to an ideal, was lit as with a reflection of the approaching orb. He watched it with the thrill of a mystic devotee as well as the eager curiosity of a scientist; and felt a renewal of all his pristine ardors, together with an actual sense of consummation. The terrestrial nights which he remembered so vividly, here in the everlasting night of space, had been marked by the inception of that unearthly vaulting ambition which had led years later to his first intersidereal voyage and then to his present project of circumnavigating the known universe. In those earlier times he had looked to Polaris as a far-off, unattainable goal; it had been the symbol of his dreams, the lodestar of his aspirations; and now he was nearing it, after more than a decade of cosmic voyaging among the illimitable systems.

To Jasper, the first mate of the *Alcyone,* to Roverton the second mate, to the five members of the crew, Polaris was only one of a myriad array of suns; and they regarded it with no more than the quotidian interest accorded to the others. Jasper was guiding the controls of the *Alcyone;* and without express comment he turned to Volmar and asked for instructions:

“We shall pass Polaris in about four hours, sir. Shall we keep the straight course, to the left?”

“No—steer to the right. I want to take a look at Polaris. Also, there may be a planetary system; and if so, I’m curious to see it.” The dry, formal voice betrayed no evidence of Volmar’s internal eagerness.

“Yes, sir.” Nothing more was said, as Jasper turned the heavy steering-rod of neo-manganese steel, and the vessel responded with inconceivable lightness, leaping through tremendous gulfs in the mere changing of its course, at more than the speed of any cosmical vibration.

Burning with preternatural whiteness in the black ether, Polaris broadened hour by hour to a huge incandescent disk. Soon the flames of its corona were visible, soaring in the face of the measureless night; and, falling through the crystalline ports of the ether-ship, its rays mingled weirdly with the violet-tinged illumination of the electric bulbs, and cast their supermundane gleams on the pale faces of Volmar and his crew.

Volmar, peering ahead with aquiline keenness, was the first to see the planets. Three of them were now discernible, one quite close to Polaris, at a distance comparable to that of Mercury from our sun; and the others travelling in more remote and widely divergent orbits. The inner world was very small; and the voyagers soon saw that it could be no more than a desert of torrid stone, of continental sands and gauntly rising mountains, with no trace of water or vegetation anywhere. The second world, as the *Alcyone* neared it, was found to differ little from the first; and Volmar and his men gave it merely a casual inspection, for all their interest was now centered on the third and outmost world, in its aphelion on the farther side of Polaris.

This world, even as seen from afar, was plainly remarkable. It glowed with a deep red that was both sullen and fulgurant, in opposition to the livid grey of the other two; and since it revolved in a far-ulterior orbit, at a distance where the reflected light of Polaris should be proportionately feeble, the brilliance of its ruddy luster was mysterious and difficult to explain.

Volmar and his crew watched it in a fascinated silence, as the ether-ship drove on and the strange planet became an ever-swelling globe. Its mystery grew with its apparent bulk, for there were no geographical or geological markings, no indications of seas or sea-beds, of mountains or hills, of valleys or elevations or depressions of any kind. It was an unbroken expanse of glowing red that dazzled the eyes and left an after-image of

changing colors. It was somehow suggestive of heated metal, and also gave the impression of an artificial rather than a natural body.

The space-voyagers had approached many planets in their journeying; they had even landed on a number; and they knew the limitless variations of planetary development. They had found worlds that were shrouded with mist or snow, with clouds or ice, or were belted with auroral flames or seas of burning bitumen. They had found ocean-covered worlds where gigantic algae towered like forests above incalculable leagues of water; they had seen others that were riven from pole to pole with typhonian fissures and chasms, where etiolated fungi large as hillocks grew in the sunless river-bottoms; they had seen still others that were lob-sided with their burden of colossal mountains. But they had never before encountered a world that in any way resembled this.

"What do you make of it, Captain?" queried Jasper.

"I don't know." Volmar's slow, deliberate voice was frankly puzzled. "Fly nearer—as near as you can."

The *Alcyone* dipped in a long spiral descent toward the monotonous ball that was now directly beneath. Soon it hung above the gleaming surface at an elevation of less than a mile. The red world was larger than Mars, though it lacked the dimensions of the Earth or Venus. But as far as the eye could see its horizons were perfectly smooth and level, and its plains were like a sheet of some luminous and deeply tinted copperish metal. The eyes of Volmar and his men were almost blinded with its glare. However, their approach to the weird orb had not occasioned any rise in the temperature of the space-vessel's interior; so evidently the first impression of glowing heat was erroneous.

"Still nearer—but be careful. We don't know what it is, or what properties it may possess."

The *Alcyone* descended until it almost skimmed the ruddy plain. Now it could be seen that the surface was apparently made of innumerable tiny darting sparks and coruscations, interweaving like a dance of fiery atoms at a speed which the eye could hardly follow.

"It must be some new form of matter," suggested Roverton. "It looks like a million quintrillions of red-hot filings chasing each other in a field of magnetic force."

"Perhaps." Volmar was studying the strange surface intently; and it seemed to him that directly below the vessel the gyrations of the dazzling

particles were becoming slower, and that many of them disappeared and did not return to visibility. Then, with incredible suddenness, a deep and yawning pit revealed itself below the *Alcyone,* forming a circular shaft in the unknown substance. At the same time the ether-ship pitched violently downward, though Jasper had not moved the clutch that should have held it perfectly level and motionless in space. It sank dizzily into the shaft, as if all the gears and engines and levitative mechanisms had become utterly powerless. Jasper switched on the full force of the electromagnetic turbines, and sought to reverse the descent, but all in vain. The vessel shook and trembled as though it were fighting some irresistible power that drew it nadir-ward; but it continued to fall at an undiminished rate between the red walls of the shaft. A second more, and it plunged into a vast open space, where a world of glaring light, of kaleidoscopically various forms and colors, leapt up to meet it like a reeling and ever-broadening mosaic.

II

The transition from the outer sky to this internal gulf beneath the glowing red surface had occupied merely a few moments; and only men of supreme nervous alertness and presence of mind could have adjusted themselves in any degree to a situation so extraordinary. Jasper still strove to arrest the *Alcyone*'s descent, while the others watched with a swift cognizance of all apparent detail the world toward which they were falling with headlong velocity. Then, turning from it to gaze upward, they saw that the unknown fiery substance was arched above them from horizon to horizon like the cope of some unnatural metallic heaven. The sudden shaft that had formed to admit them was no longer visible; and the vault presented an unbroken expanse, pouring down a blinding, fulgurating luster, though no sun was now discernible.

The vessel was helpless in the grip of the mysterious ultragravitational force that still dragged it downward. The roar of the fulminating engines, the response of the tightened brakes and the drawn levers, all served to attest that the machinery was in perfect order, and was struggling against a power such as never before had been encountered. Volmar and his crew resigned themselves to the seemingly inevitable crash; and all the events of

their intersidereal voyage were marshalled before them in a crowded flash that was virtually simultaneous with the thought-image of its disastrous end.

However, they were still able to note with astronomic interest the unknown world that surged toward them in geometric mazes of widening forms and spreading zones of color. There were belts that suggested water, there were others that gave the impression of a many-tinted vegetation, and still others denotive of a mineraloid character, like immense plots of ground with pavements of silver and cinnabar and lapis lazuli. And at intervals of many leagues on the great plain, colossal architectural piles upreared themselves to the zenith; and each separate edifice was vaster far than any terrene city.

The ether-ship was falling directly upon one of these piles, whose level diamond-shaped roof was outstretched below in multiform and labyrinthine patterns of a hundred hues, like parterres and flower-beds. The headlong descent began to slacken gently at an elevation of three or four miles, the vessel drifted down with a buoyant ease, it landed and was brought to rest as skillfully and adroitly as if Jasper himself had guided it.

Volmar and his men peered through the ports on a scene that was no less unbelievable than indescribable. They had come down on a vacant space at the center of the diamond roof, which reached away for a half-mile in every direction, and was seemingly made of some mineral substance unknown to terrene geology—a highly metallic stone with striations of black and yellow and bluish green. The roof was laid out like a garden with concentric rows of bizarre plants, all of which were either set in basins of fretted stone or were standing rootlessly on the bare pavement; and was crowded with living and moving creatures no less bizarre than the plants, who began immediately to collect around the *Alcyone.*

Volmar was almost startled out of his habitual ascetic reserve as he studied these beings; and the others exclaimed with frank amazement. The beings resembled a multitude of forms and types; and all of them were either clothed in shards of metal or else possessed bodies that were radically different in their biological composition from any that the vessel’s crew had ever seen. They glittered and shone in the glaring light with a myriad hues and lusters redoubled by the intricate irregular facets into which their surfaces were divided. The commonest type among them was perhaps five feet tall, with a perfectly spherical head which was joined without a neck to a triangular body that radiated on each side, from a common center, four

limbs that evidently served as both arms and legs since all of them were used alternately or simultaneously in locomotion and also in prehension. This type had a single cyclopean eye like a burning ruby in the middle of its silver face; and above the rounded dome of its head there were several glossy black antennae with vermicular segments, all terminating in tiny concave disks; and a short proboscis ending in a double mouth issued from the jointure of head and shoulders. There were other types, and certain unique individuals, varying monstrously in size and shape, and in the number or arrangement of their limbs and sense organs. But all of them gave the impression of artificial shells, of masks and armors, as if the entities that actuated them were unknowably domiciled within.

"Talk about robots!" cried Roverton. "Did you ever see anything like them? Look at those copper joints that are as flexible as the joints of an acrobat. Look at those fingers or toes with seven flanges that can bend in any direction."

Two-score of the multifarious entities had grouped themselves around the vessel and were examining it with their single or manifold eyes. Behind the fixed inhuman expression of their metal masks, in the movements of their cunningly constructed limbs, the curiosity of an incomprehensibly alien people somehow made itself felt. And the orchestral chattering of their voices, with notes that were resonant as drums, or shrill as clarions, or sweet as lute-strings, could be heard through the sound-valves of the *Alcyone*. They came nearer and touched the sides of the vessel as if to determine the material of which it was made; and some of them climbed the ladder to the man-hole and inspected it closely. After a little these latter descended and seemed to be holding a serious debate with the others, as if to decide a moot point or a course of action, while all of them continued to watch the *Alcyone*.

Now the crowd drew back and a number departed, to return in a few minutes bearing among them an instrument whose use defied conjecture. It was a large tripod of some antimony-type substance, supporting a revolving globe of the same material, from which issued a long, slender tube with a flaring mouth. The tube was levelled at the vessel's man-hole; and when a lever at the side of the tripod was pressed, a thin stream of ghostly yellow light emerged from the mouth and played upon the neo-vitriolene of the man-hole's lid. Then, as if in response to the electrical mechanism by which it was operated, the lid unscrewed; and likewise the inner door of the ether-

ship, giving on the compartment where Volmar and his crew were gathered, flew open to the same mysterious agency.

III

An atmosphere of humid warmth, laden as with hot-house odors of an ultra-tropical flora, flooded the vessel's interior. Obviously there were strange elements, non-terrestrial gases in this air, for Volmar and his men began immediately to gasp for breath, and to experience a peculiar giddiness and lightheadedness. Volmar pressed the button which should have closed the outer and inner doors; but the mechanism refused to work, as if the batteries had gone dead or their force had somehow been nullified or paralyzed.

"Quick! The respirative masks and air-tanks!" cried Volmar with a voice that fought the asphyxiating elements. These masks, covering the entire head and connected by a tube with a tank that was strapped to the shoulders, had been carried along for use in landing on alien worlds where the air might prove unfit for human respiration.

The apparatus was quickly donned, and none too soon; for one of the men fainted, and the others had to fasten his mask. All of them felt an instantaneous relief from the symptoms of vertigo and difficult breathing.

The act of putting on the masks had no sooner been completed, when a number of the weird multiform entities invaded the vessel one by one and surrounded Volmar and his crew. They gibbered among themselves with their instrument-like voices, they eyed the men with the unchanging glare of their single or triple or quadruple eyes, which offered the appearance of many-angled and diverse-tinted gems; they inspected and fingered the machinery and the furniture, and showed in many ways the investigative spirit which is the invariable mark of the scientist.

"Of all the burglarious entries!" exclaimed Jasper. "No earthly safe-cracker could compete with these beings."

All the men stood irresolute, wondering as to the best mode of procedure, and the motives and dispositions of their visitors. The invaders gave no sign of hostile or unfriendly intentions; but in every motion of their metal flanges, every silver or bronze or iron tone of their voices, a spirit

beyond the range of human sensation or understanding was manifest. They were plainly intelligent; but their exterior was that of highly organized and subtly animated machinery; and it was impossible to conceive them as possessing the motives, interests, or desires of normal biological forms.

With perspicacious immediacy they had singled out Volmar as the leader of the expedition, for they were now addressing him in tones vaguely suggestive of invitation. Then, one by one, they left the compartment, walking backward with perfect surety toward the man-hole, and making signs that Volmar and his companions should follow them.

"I believe they are asking us to be their guests," Roverton observed.

There was a brief discussion as to the best course of action.

"These people," said Volmar, "are plainly the masters of forces which we are perhaps not even fitted to understand. For some unknowable purpose, they have captured us; and any effort to escape would be fruitless, since the *Alcyone* is held as firmly as though it were anchored with a thousand chains and cables, doubtless by some magnetic ray. It would be more judicious not to antagonize our captors in any way, but to assent voluntarily to whatever they wish. I vote that we accept their invitation."

The others agreed that Volmar had summarized the situation and its potentialities very wisely and succinctly. They might as well yield without the ineffectual folly of resistance. And in spite of the humiliating and mystifying manner in which their vessel had been trapped, in spite of their ignorance regarding the intentions of these odd people, they were full of excited curiosity and were eager to see more of this remarkable world, which differed so uniquely from all others that they had hitherto examined.

Descending the vessel's steel ladder, they found that the throng had dispersed, leaving only a mere half-dozen of the beings with globular heads and triangular bodies, who were manifestly a reception committee. With elaborate genuflections that were like those of marionettes, these beings led the way through the fantastic roof-garden, with its winding spaces and pathways of stone, and semi-circular rows of indescribable plants and trees, toward a sort of open cupola that was visible about a hundred yards away.

The cupola was supported by pillars carven with anaglyphs of a character so unusual that it was impossible to know whether they were miniature bas-reliefs, picture-writings, or phonetic symbols. Within, there were two large circular pits in the floor, which seemed to descend to the very base of the building. Their walls were perpendicular, with no sign of

rungs or stairs or machinery of the elevator type. To the surprise and consternation of the earth-men, two of their guides stepped into the nearest pit as casually as if the descent were no more than a pace; and instead of falling headlong, they floated gently down with a feather-like movement utterly incongruous in view of their corporeal structure. The others made signs to the men that they should follow; and when the earthlings hesitated, another of them entered the pit and was wafted downward.

"Well," said Volmar, "if they can do it, I guess it is safe for us also. There must be a current of some gravity-negating force in the shaft."

He stepped over the circular verge, and felt as if he were being born on invisible cushions that sank slowly down between the walls of the shaft. His crew followed, and after them came the remaining three of the delegation of guides.

The shaft descended for a well-nigh incalculable distance, far greater than the height of any terrestrial building. At regular intervals there were landings that gave on the various innumerable stories of the edifice; and there were glimpses of unending rows of titan columns in rooms that seemed to stretch without walls till they terminated in far-off balconies; and there were smaller rooms whose construction displayed an unfamiliar geometry, where scores and hundreds of the metal-sharded people were engaged in tasks of an unsurmisable nature by the light from glowing spheres of ever-shifting iridescent colors that hung in mid-air without chains or brackets. Also, there were glimpses of the second shaft, in which people were continually ascending, and from which they could step on any of the landings as if by a mere effort of will.

Roverton and Jasper were side by side in the pit, behind Volmar.

"This is certainly a superior kind of elevator system," remarked Jasper, "I'd give something to know the secret of its operation."

"From all indications," rejoined Roverton, "we have struck a world whose mechanical knowledge and masterdom of natural forces make our scientific accomplishments look like simple arithmetic beside algebra and trigonometry."

After several minutes of that feather-like descent, which was accompanied by the sensation of an almost total loss of bodily weight, the earthlings reached the ground floor of the edifice. Here, in a mile-long hall with ceilings of tremendous height, the three preceding guides awaited them; and they were joined in a few moments by the others.

Now they were led along vistas of quadrangular columns more enormous than dolomites, through which there poured a saffron light of unbearable brilliance, emanating from the end of the hall. They passed many doors and intersecting halls, open or shut, and equally mysterious in what they concealed or revealed. Then, through a semi-circular portal, they entered a chamber of more moderate size, with septagonal walls. This chamber was the source of the light, which streamed from a huge globe suspended in mid-air. Beneath the globe, on a lofty tripodal chair of some electrum-like substance with alternate gleams of gold and silver, there sat a being who differed from the rest in the vaster dimensions of his bright orbicular head, which seemed to overweigh his wedge-shaped body like a full moon ensconced on a semi-lune. This entity turned his one eye, which resembled a great fiery carbuncle, on the earth-men; and addressed their guides in a voice of flute-like sweetness and modulation. One of the delegation left the room forthwith, and returned with a singular instrument, scarcely comparable in its form to anything used on earth, with many lenses of a transparent material arranged behind each other in a frame of spiral rods and arabesque filaments. This instrument was now fastened by a large circlet to the forehead of the being who sat upon the tripodal chair.

The being lifted one of his many-jointed limbs, and pointed at the bare, windowless wall of the room, which gleamed in the saffron light like a polished surface of reflecting mineral. There, as the men gazed, a picture suddenly sprang into life, as if from the slide of a magic lantern, and filled the entire opposite face of the wall. It was a picture of the red world as the voyagers had beheld it hanging in space on their first approach. Above the world there hovered a tiny glimmering speck; and as the great orb grew larger, till only a portion of its surface was depicted on the wall, it could be seen that the speck was the *Alcyone,* which descended till it almost touched the glowing plain. Then this picture disappeared abruptly, to be succeeded by a view of the roof of the Babel-like building on which the *Alcyone* had been drawn down. Here, with an optical instrument which resembled a periscope, one of the metal-sharded entities was peering at the red vault, which now seemed to become diaphanous, revealing the ether-ship beyond in space.

“Good Lord!” said Roverton in an awed voice. “That was how they saw us coming. That optical instrument must have been a sort of long-range X-ray apparatus.”

Even as he spoke, the picture faded. An enormous chamber was now disclosed, in which stood a labyrinthine mechanism of shining cubes and lozenges ramifying from a tall central cone of black, lusterless metal. The roof of the chamber became transparent, revealing the diaphanous vault of the heavens and the vessel itself once more as it still hung in outer ether. A dozen of the globe-headed people were grouped around the mechanism and were adjusting certain of its parts. Then one of them pulled a spiral lever, and a beam of some indescribable color, visible only for a moment, shot upward from the cone until it reached the space-vessel and curved around it like a grappling-hook. Then the *Alcyone* was seen to descend through a clear shaft in the vault, and was drawn down to the roof of the building in which the cone-mechanism was located.

"Well, that's plain enough," commented Volmar. "He—or it—is showing us how we were captured. The cone-machine must be the generator of some force that is infinitely more powerful than gravitation, though probably akin to it. Amazing—but the pictures themselves are even more astounding, for they must be thought-images rendered visible by the lens-apparatus attached to that creature's forehead. Who ever dreamed of a moving-picture machine capable of using the mind itself for a film?"

Other views now succeeded the one of the space-vessel's capture. They were plainly meant to depict the manner of hospitality which would be shown to the earthlings during their sojourn on the red planet: for the figures of Volmar and his crew were conspicuous in all of them, and were represented in the act of visiting many of the Babelian towers and viewing all sorts of mechanical wonders and marvellous plant or animal forms as they travelled throughout the world with their compulsory hosts. They were afterwards to remember and recognize many of these scenes. In one of them, a prodigious open shaft in the ground was shown, with people ascending and descending by thousands; and the impression was somehow conveyed that the shaft penetrated the entire diameter of the world, perhaps from pole to pole; and that those who sank into it at one end would arise to the surface at the other. Hundreds of titan towers, which apparently took the place of cities on the red world, were also shown; and the realm-wide agricultural fields, botanical gardens of forest-like extent, and breeding-pens of inconceivably monstrous animals, were likewise flashed on the wall together with many interior glimpses of the life led by this unique race.

Then, in rapid alternation, came another series of scenes that were plainly historical, and which seemed to unfold the chronicles of the red world from remotest time. The beings who were shown in the first of them were not sharded in metal; though they displayed forms that were recognizably similar, with all the features of the globe-headed type, they possessed a more usual integument of hairless animal skin. The world in which they lived was vaulted with a greenish sky, in which the sun Polaris burned like any other solar luminary. It was a fertile and flourishing world; and the long epochs of its evolution, and the evolution of its peoples, were rapidly hinted in brief flashes. Anon, a period of racial and planetary decadence was denoted; the seas dried up, the fertile zones were blotched with ever-spreading deserts, the atmosphere became cloudless and rarified and almost irrespirable; and the people themselves grew senescent, they no longer reproduced their kind, and were dying one by one. But among them were scientists who had attained a well-nigh supreme knowledge of natural laws and a mastery of many forces both familiar and obscure. These scientists gathered in conclave to determine some method of racial salvation; and the result of their conference, as shown in the next pictures, was beyond conception or belief. Several bodies, duplicating in every detail the physical formation of the race, were constructed of various metals. The minutest cells and nerves were somehow reproduced; and only the brain-space in the heads was left vacant. Then some of the scientists submitted to an unusual operation: their brains were removed and transferred to the metal heads, where they swam in a bath of some ruddy fluid that must have had elixir-like properties; for after an interval the artificial bodies moved and arose to their feet; and were manifestly controlled and animated by the living brains within them. Then more bodies were made; some of aberrant or whimsical types, according to the taste of their future occupants; and others of the dying race underwent the same operation; till within an incredibly short length of time all of them had discarded their perishable anatomies of flesh and were inhabiting corporeal forms that were virtually indestructible. The red fluid, which was replaced at certain intervals, preserved and nourished their brains till they grew wise with an accumulated knowledge of out-lived aeons. Invention progressed with colossal paces; and machines of many types and sizes were builded for the use and control of every cosmic or planetary power, from refracted and magnified rays to the force released by exploding atoms. Towers were

reared from heaps of desert sand by some of these machines, which could integrate and organize the molecules of matter in any desired pattern; and plants and animals were artificially created by a chemical duplication of the processes of life. There was no limit to the scientific genius of this people, who, in their metal bodies, retained no needs and passions other than those which were wholly intellectual. By a series of enormous magnetic engines, situated in every longitude of their world at regular intervals, they even enclosed their entire planet with a vault of metallic atoms in a zone of super-electric force, which served to insulate it from the encroaching cold of space, and also to conserve the remnants of the atmosphere, which was now gradually enriched and renewed by the addition of the necessary elements in gaseous form.

Thus, in short flashes, a pictorial account of the planet and its history was presented to the earthlings. They were dumbfounded by such revelations; and their amazement grew with every scene. The unearthliness of the things and events, of the alien peoples and epochs shadowed forth, was beyond the most extravagant vagaries of imagination.

The long display of images came to an end; and the lens-apparatus was removed from the brow of its user, who then vacated his chair. Volmar was motioned to come forward and seat himself on the tripod. Then, by a contraction of its circlet, which was formed in a series of regulable segments, the machine was fitted to his forehead.

Volmar concentrated on various ideas which he wished to express; but the results were unsatisfactory. The pictures that formed on the wall were too dim and shapeless and chaotic to be intelligible. Obviously his brain was not powerful enough in its thought-vibrations to effect the desired visualization. And when the apparatus was tried by Roverton, Jasper, and the others, the resultant images were equally negligible and disappointing.

IV

The being with the vast moon-like head made a gesture of dismissal; and the earth-men were now conducted by their guides along another hall which led to the exterior of the building.

The scene outside was overwhelmingly strange, and offered little resemblance in any detail to earthly landscapes or to those of other planets which the *Alcyone*'s crew had visited. Around the looming edifice with its innumerable stories and terrace-like balconies, there stretched a winding space of open pavement bordered with a park of vegetable growths that were no less variegated than extraordinary. Most of them, it was probable, were the synthetic creations of the metal-bodied beings; for they presented only a vague and distant likeness to the simpler flora that Volmar and his men had seen shadowed forth in the earlier historical tableau. They testified to a limitless horticultural ingenuity, with an inclination toward the grotesque, the ornate, and the recherché. Some of them seemed to imitate in their stems, foliage, and blossoms the forms of novel animals, birds, and insects; others had apparently derived their inspiration from the crystallizations of unthinkably elaborate minerals; others resembled structures of coral flowering with many-chaliced shells; and some were suggestive of outlandish sculptures and arabesques, of the mad and demon-wrought vagaries of unimaginable art. There were titan fungi which bore an architectural resemblance in their cinnabar or malachite or azurite tiers, to pagodas and ziggurats. There were cacti that offered the appearance of immense and complicated machines. Most of the plants were not associable even in a superficial degree to any mundane genus. Some were rooted in an ashen-blue soil; but others were rootless, and wherever allowed, they had spread to the pavements and were sprawling or standing about as if they might creep or stalk away at any moment. They gleamed with unearthly textures, and colors denotive of a transidereal spectrum, in the sultry and shadowless effulgence that flamed upon them from horizon to zenith on all sides.

The senses of the earthlings reeled in this blaze of inundating torrential light, this delirious riot of ultramundane form and supersolar iridescence. Their nerves were exasperated and then stunned by the continual impact of sensations which the human system was never meant to sustain. The vegetation seemed to dance like a sabbat of demons and witches; and the building they had left, and the further edifices that overtowered the plain, all staggered in drunken unison before their eyes as the metal guides conducted them along the pavement; and they heard as in a doubtful nightmare the voices of these beings, who were pointing out and apparently naming one object after another, in an effort to begin some sort of linguistic

tuition. It was difficult to reduce their tones to a phonetic basis and to approximate them with the human vocal chords, but, by careful attention and tireless experiment, Volmar and the others were able to achieve a partial articulation and a remote likeness to some of the words and syllables. In pointing to themselves the beings uttered many times a vocable which sounded like *tloong*, which was plainly the generic name of their species. And they repeatedly called the earthlings *ongar,* which doubtless meant something like “alien” or “outsider.” In this way, a few words were approximately mastered, and the rudiments of a sort of communication were established. But, under the nervous tax that the earth-men suffered, the attempt to hear, comprehend, and reproduce the sounds correctly was a further addition to the nightmare tension and feeling of unbearable delirium.

Many of the metal people were passing to and fro; the scene was one of perpetual activity; and certain air-vessels of novel types were continually embarking or disembarking their passengers on the pavement about the edifice, or upon the roof of its atlantean balconies. These vehicles were flat discs or oblong platforms of varying size, some of them large as the decks of ocean liners, which sailed through the air at any required speed with no visible enginery or ascertainable mode of levitation or locomotion.

After a large portion of the park had been inspected, one of the air-vessels was chartered by the guides, who motioned Volmar and his crew to accompany them. A lever was pressed, and the huge machine arose with unbelievable buoyancy, and floated through the cloudless, glaring atmosphere toward a horizon remotely dentilated with prodigious towers. The platform flew at no great elevation, apparently in order that the earth-men might view the topographical details of the landscapes above which they were journeying. But the speed which the air-vessel attained, and the ease, comfort, and lack of atmospheric resistance, was most amazing.

The scene below shifted and changed with a kaleidoscopic rapidity. Everything, even to the wide spaces of uncultivated and wholly barren soil or stone, was marked by a perfectly symmetrical arrangement of squares, diamonds, ovals, triangles, and other geometric forms, like tessellations in a mosaic floor of transtellar giants. There were canals that ran in straight lines or systematic meanderings, from lakes and seas of an artificial regularity. And even certain jungles in which the primitive plant forms of the red world were recognized by the earthlings as they passed, were laid out within metes and bounds like vast botanical gardens.

They were skimming the very top branches of one of these jungles, when a singular incident occurred. Though the air was utterly still and windless, a small area of the foliage below was oddly agitated as the platform neared it. Trees crashed down, there was a wild tossing of leaves and branches; and then, with fearful expedition, the foliage began to disappear and was interspersed with formless crawling masses of a loathsome livid grey mottled with black and red. Soon, in a spreading tract of devastation, these masses had devoured and supplanted all the vegetation, and were steadily increasing in size and number.

Volmar and his men were astounded by the living masses, and also by the actions of their conductors, who had brought the platform to a full halt in mid-air as soon as they sighted the area of tossing foliage. Then, as the monstrous crawling creatures began to replace the obliterated jungle with their swelling and multiplying bulks, the earth-men heard a clangorous gong-like sound of intolerable acuity which was being emitted from the concave disks on the cerebral antennae of their guides. The sound was connotive of alarm and warning, and doubtless had a vibratory range like that of radio; for a few minutes later, as if in response, a score of air-vessels appeared from all sides and gathered above the spreading patch of devastation. All of them were crowded with Tloongs, and carried weapons emitting visible or invisible rays of deadly potency, which were turned upon the growing masses, causing them to dissolve one by one like vapor.

As if for the edification of the earth-men, their guides flew lower still, where the monsters could be studied in detail ere all of them were wiped out by the lethal rays. They possessed no visible organs except the round, sucker-like mouths with which they were entirely covered; their substance was extremely elastic and without any rudiments of a bony framework; and they took from minute to minute a multitude of forms, turning themselves into gibbous globes, or lengthening like serpents, or developing numerous projections like the trunks of elephants, or flattening themselves along the ground in horrible mats. They were ineffably weird and hideous, their vitality was more than sinister, and their activity was supremely terrifying. Their innumerable mouths dripped continually with a colorless semi-viscid fluid; and the plants to which they applied themselves seemed literally to melt away beneath the assiduous suckers.

These organisms were impossible to classify; for, apart from their animal traits, there was something about them which suggested a swift-

growing fungi. It would seem that they propagated themselves by means of a spore which developed with infernal celerity; for even when most of them were seemingly blotted out of existence, new organisms began to spring up. It was seen that the ray-weapons could achieve only a temporary victory; for time after time, when the infested area had been wholly cleared to all appearance, another horde of monstrosities would leap to life.

More of the air-ships appeared, and the Tloongs on some of them began to drop a sort of vegetable pulp which was eagerly devoured by the organisms. It must have contained a virulent poison; for the masses withered and blackened immediately, and lay dead without renewing themselves in their former manner. It was now seen that they had emerged from a large hole in the ground beneath the jungle; the last of them was slain as it crawled forth; and the hole was carefully sealed by means of atom-integrators which filled it with an adamantine material.

The legion of air-vehicles now dispersed, and the conductors of the earth-men resumed their journey. Soon the platform approached a building larger than any that Volmar and his crew had yet beheld, and landed on a midway terrace higher above the ground than any skyscraper. From this the men were led through numberless doors and unending corridors to an immense room at the heart of the edifice.

Here, on a high seat of some dazzling crystalline mineral wrought with arabesques that suggested the signs of an unfamiliar transcendental algebra, a being was enthroned who bore upon the gigantic orb of his head a superimposed sphere which afforded the sole illumination of the room. He held in one of his members a cone-shaped object which was probably a vessel of some Polarian chemical use; and other vessels, having a vague, fantastic likeness to retorts and cupels and test-tubes, were arranged beside his throne on lofty tables.

Making gestures of profound obeisance, the guides addressed this being with a long and curiously modulated form of salutation in which the word *koum* was repeated several times. Volmar and his men surmised that this term was perhaps equivalent to “king” or ‘‘emperor.”

In a voice more musical than a finely keyed and chorded dulcimer, the seated being began to question the guides, and a long dialogue ensued. The earthlings were thrilled by the celestial tones, and awed by the gaze of this entity, behind whose many-faceted diamond eye they felt the workings of a colossal brain embued with incalculable knowledge and illimitable power.

And they were somehow conscious that a decision was being made concerning themselves, and that their ultimate fate was now in process of determination. And when, at the close of the conversation, the throned being uttered after a significant pause a sentence of terrible and thrilling melody, they knew with a sense of esoteric fear and marvel that their fate was sealed, though what that fate might be they could not even conjecture.

The sentence had probably included, or implied, their dismissal. They were led back through the eternal corridors to the balcony where the flying platform had been left, and were then borne through mid-air above the retrograde horizons to the roof of that edifice on which the *Alcyone* had been drawn down. Here they were suffered to re-enter the space-vessel, and were even permitted to close the man-hole. The guides then departed; and though a throng of the metal people passed continuously about the *Alcyone*, or paused to stare and confer among themselves regarding it, the earthlings were not disturbed for several hours.

V

They were extremely glad to be back in the *Alcyone*; for their peregrinations in the red world had consumed the major part of a day; and they were hungry and thirsty, and were more than fatigued by their novel experiences and sensations. No food had been offered to them; and it was likely enough that no substances edible by human beings were to be found on the red planet.

“Perhaps,” said Volmar, “the Tloongs realize our need of rest and nourishment, and have brought us back to the spaceship for that reason. But I don’t think that they are going to let us depart in a hurry; something tells me that the Koum, or whatever they call him, has other intentions regarding us.”

There was much discussion anent the unique wonders and prodigies they had witnessed. The corporeal organization of the Tloongs and their virtual immortality, their mechanical and biological masterdom, and their amazing racial and planetary history, were enough to stagger not only the human reason but also the human imagination. Then too, there was the Tloongs’ disposition toward the crew of the space-flier, the meaning of their

capture and detention, and their conjectural destiny—all of which were problems that defied solution.

Time passed in this manner; till the throng of metal-bodied beings around the flier began to disperse. Soon all of them had vanished from sight in the cupolas covering the shafts of ascent and descent. Then, abruptly as the going out of a lamp, the light faded from the ruddy sky and darkness fell upon the world. In half an hour, however, the vaulting luminescence returned as suddenly as it had departed; and some of the Tloongs re-appeared on the roof shortly afterwards. It was learned later that the half-hour of darkness was artificially induced by the use of a black ray which occluded the light; and that this time of occultation was the space required for sleep by the people of the red world.

After eating, and after the discussion that accompanied and followed the meal, the earthlings snatched a few hours of much needed slumber. When they awoke, another delegation of the Tloongs was standing outside the space-flier and was evidently trying to attract the attention of the occupants with flashes of light projected through the ports from some sort of ray-apparatus. These flashes, they realized, had served to awaken them. This time, doubtless through consideration for the respiratory needs of the earth-men, the Tloongs had not opened the man-hole. But it was obvious that they wished their visitors to come forth again, so, donning their masks and air-tanks, Volmar and his crew complied with the signalled request.

Their conductors took them on an air-platform to another of the great Babelian-piles, lying at a considerable distance on the shore of a bright purple sea whose environing cliffs were like builded walls. Indeed, it was afterwards learned that they were really such, and that the waters of the sea had been created, or at least replenished, by means of a chemical process.

The building on which they now landed, and through whose various apartments they were systematically conducted, was plainly a scientific laboratory. Hundreds of the Tloongs, with the aid of unsolvably strange and recondite machinery, were engaged in all manner of mystifying labors or experiments, many of which seemed to involve the creation of protoplasm and its development into numberlessly varied forms. The earthlings shuddered at the masses of pulsing life which crawled or lumbered in crystalline cages. Some were without limbs or verifiable organs, and others were extravagantly equipped with a myriad eyes, ears, mouths, members,

and sense-organs whose use was not to be apprehended by any being with so limited a range of sensation as man.

In another section, the earth-men saw for the first time certain bodies preserved in a clear solution, which they recognized from the historic thought-pictures they had previously seen, as being the original plasmic bodies of some of the Tloongs. Later, they found out that most of these people had retained their own physical envelopes, and kept them about their households even as others might keep statues or family portraits. But some had been donated to the laboratories, where they were held as specimens for study, and were used as reference in repairing any of the metal organs and members which might have suffered damage. Tloongs engaged in such labors of restoration were to be seen toiling like plastic surgeons; and ever and anon a new subject for their ministrations entered, displaying injuries of mysterious origin, which occurred oftener about the head than any other part, and were like the ravages of some corroding acid. Also, new frames were being made for those who had tired of the old ones; and new heads of enormous capacity for brains that had outgrown their former tenements.

Here Volmar and his crew underwent one of the strangest of all their experiences in the red world. They were led before certain of the beings in this section of the laboratory, who forth with made an incredibly minute examination of their bodily structure. These beings differed from most of the Tloongs in that they possessed two sets of eyes. One of the sets was dull and lifeless during the first half of the examination but lit up with a blinding luster when all the external parts had been examined closely. Numerous life-size drawings and diagrams of each man were made on huge sheets of a parchment-like material; and when the drawings began to reveal every bone, muscle, nerve, and internal organ, it was clear that the second set of eyes owned by the examiners was similar or superior to the X-ray in its visual powers. It was a weird ordeal, and the men felt as if they were being dissected. They surmised that the Tloongs were merely gratifying their biologic curiosity regarding the formation of beings who differed so basically from themselves. The true reason was beyond the wildest dreams and maddest theorizings of the earth-men.

After the examination was completed and the drawings were all made and filed away in special cabinets, the men were shown through other parts of the laboratory, where they saw the chemical genesis of new plant-growths, and the minerals that grew visibly beneath rays designed to

promote the integration of the required atomic patterns. Their guides continued, as on the previous day, to instruct them in the language by naming every object and class of person encountered; and in this way their vocabulary was materially enriched, despite the difficulty of simulating the flute-like or horn-like intonations of the Tloongs.

After this tour of inspection, the earthlings were taken back to the *Alcyone* once more, and were permitted another term in which to eat, sleep, and otherwise recuperate. Every day, during the weeks that followed, they were conducted on other tours, some of which were quite extensive and were made possible in one diurnal period only by the use of passenger-bearing projectiles drawn by magnetic force through underground tubes. They were even shot through the great shaft which penetrated the world, and saw the multiform wonders of the antipodes. They soon formed a general idea of the conditions of life among the Tloongs, and, after weeks of linguistic study, were able to converse in a limited manner with their hosts.

These people, they found, were exempt from all the ordinary biological needs and desires. In their pre-metallic stage, they had respired, eaten, drunk and propagated themselves in a fashion not so widely dissimilar to that of other animal types. But now they needed nothing more in the way of nourishment than the mysterious ruby-colored fluid in which their brains floated; and through which they could seemingly convey the impulse of any desired action to their metal members, and could receive most if not all of the sense-impressions transmittable by physical nerves. Indeed, it appeared that some of them were the owners of faculties which implied a radio-like extension of hearing, sight, and tactility.

Their lives were devoted wholly to invention and research. The infinite grotesqueries which they devised and created, the vast gardens and forests which they tended, the animal monstrosities which they bred in prodigious numbers, were seemingly a source of both intellectual and aesthetic gratification. They had a written literature which was mainly concerned with problems of science and algebra; and also a pictorial art which was used for the representation of historical scenes and events, and the making of anatomical designs. They possessed musical instruments, many of which were played by invisible force-waves; but all their compositions were meant to express mathematical or even astronomical symbolisms, rather than any melody or harmony appreciable by human ears.

The machines they had builded were inexhaustibly diverse and ingenious. Their astronomical instruments, as well as others resembling microscopes, were based on a principle of television. Their air-vehicles were run and levitated by means of magnetic dynamos similar to those by which the vault of metallic atoms was maintained about the planet. By the use of the same principle, they could move their towers from place to place at will, or could transport entire mountains and huge masses of soil or stone. They had harnessed the few remaining volcanoes as a source of power, and also for aesthetic displays, like a sort of fire-works. All the elements were under their control; and the rare storms of rain or snow, and other meteoric phenomena, were induced only for spectacles.

It would seem, from the knowledge and supremacy they had attained, that their existence should have been free of anything in the way of trouble, danger, or disease. Such, however, was not altogether the case. Some of them, of later years, notably the eldest and most learned among their savants, had been seized by a strange form of madness—a madness which did not affect their general powers, but was marked by anti-social impulses and actions. In particular, the inventive experiments of these beings had assumed an absolute license from which the Tloongs had heretofore refrained. Certain rapidly multiplying forms of animal, plant, or even mineral life devised by the madmen, had been loosed upon the red world at various times; and had taxed the ingenuity of their confreres ere a means of retardation and destruction could be devised. None of these menaces, however, had defied eventual control; till one of the most revered and fertile-minded of the Tloongs had himself gone insane, and had created a new type of monster, half-vegetable, half-animal, which multiplied with more celerity than any other; and had turned some specimens of it loose in the inner caverns of the red planet, where it had increased to a countless horde ere it was discovered by the fellow-savants of the mad experimentalist. The monster, by reason of its odd physical organization, was supremely difficult to destroy; for, even if blasted into a million pieces, the fragments would reunite; and any single atom, if not resolved into its constituent electrons and protons, could become in time the center of a new organism. Also, it was omnivorous to a phenomenal degree, and would devour even stone and metal, eating its way through the surface of the world from the caverns that had been sealed by molecular walls as soon as its presence was known. It was continually escaping in some new spot,

often in unpeopled areas, where it would muster by hundreds and thousands and invade the cultivated portions, devouring everything that fell in its way. The Tloongs who came to the laboratories with damaged bodies or members, had all sustained their injuries in conflict with this monster, which was called the Murm. It preferred their brains to any other food, and would attack the Tloongs with unparalleled ferocity. Several had been borne down and utterly destroyed by its onslaughts. The only thing that could combat the *Murm* was a rare element, extremely difficult and expensive to prepare, which acted like a fatal poison when eaten by the monster. It was impossible to make a sufficient amount of the element at any one time; and therefore the red world was suffering more and more from the outbreaks of the cavern-imprisoned creatures.

VI

The earthlings learned that these malign organisms were the same which they had seen in the botanical jungle on their way to the tower inhabited by the Koum. It was not long before they witnessed other battles between the Tloongs and the rampant organisms; and they were told of more which occurred daily in different zones of the red world. On one occasion the tower of the Koum was invaded throughout its underground vaults; and some of the Murms had almost reached the royal presence before they were destroyed. The increasing number of such outbreaks was a source of serious worry to the Tloongs. Some of the invasions, occurring in remote uninhabited areas, had gained so much headway that it was impossible to annihilate all the monstrosities; and certain tracts were now virtually abandoned to them, apart from a cordon of air-vessels to prevent or at least delay their further incursions by feeding them with the lethal element, which was commonly enclosed in vegetable pulp and dropped from above. Also, their ravages in the planet’s interior were beginning to offer new and baffling problems. They were breaking through into the great shaft that ran from pole to pole, and were often found floating in the currents of levitational force. Casualties had occurred from their attacks on vessels and individuals travelling in the shaft. And, worst of all, the extent of their ramifications and self propagation was not determinable. But since

their life-habit was one of perpetual feeding and pullulation, it was surmised that the underground burrows must be growing more and more extensive. Several earthquakes, which were rare things in the red planet, had recently been noted, and were attributed by savants to the condition of internal erosion caused by the Murms. It was feared that some atlantean cataclysm would eventuate sooner or later. And in the meanwhile, nothing could be done except to fight, and sometimes annihilate, the organisms who had tunneled their way to the surface. These, however, were believed to be less than a fraction of the teeming hordes who had not yet seen the light; and who, in time, would leave nothing of the planet but a gutted shell. The minds of all the metal beings, wise with the garnered lore of outlived cycles, were bent upon the problem of controlling this menace; and it was hoped that some new and efficacious method might eventually be discovered.

Volmar and his crew, however, saw comparatively little of the monstrous menace. They were taken on more tours of inspection; they saw the terraced mountains which rose till they nearly touched the coruscating vault; they saw the seas and lakes whose waters were of sundry predetermined hues, ranging from nacarat yellow to richest violet. And they saw the building of a new Babelian edifice, by means of integrators that organized the desert sand in ever-lifting walls and floors, like Ilion rising to the music of Apollo.

Why the Tloongs should detain the *Alcyone*'s crew, and go to so much trouble in familiarizing them with all the conditions of life on the red planet, was still a mystery. The care that was taken in exhibiting all the natural phenomena and mechanical wonders, was indeed remarkable. Also, the attitude of this people was beyond analysis: it could not be known whether they respected or despised their visitors, whether they were friendly or unfriendly at heart. Their gestures, their words, their courtesies toward the strangers, though testifying to an enormous heritage of erudite and highly evolved civilization, were soulless and cryptic as those of a machine. Their precise feelings, their ultimate intentions, remained an enigma.

One day, following the half-hour of artificial darkness, a new delegation of the Tloongs, comprising several of the four-eyed surgeon type, appeared before the *Alcyone.* On being admitted, they announced in their musical metallic voices, with many formal genuflections, that the Koum had sent

them to conduct the strangers on a special journey. As usual, nothing was said regarding the objective of the journey.

Expecting another series of ultra-terrestrial scenes and marvels, the earthlings issued from the space-flier with their guides. They mounted an air-platform, and were taken to the laboratory they had once before visited, on the cliffs above a bright purple sea. Here, in the section where they had been examined so minutely, where drawings of all their organs and members had been made, an unbelievable sight awaited them. Several of the Tloong workman were just putting the final touches to a standing row of metallic bodies which duplicated in every detail, even to the respirative masks, the clothed bodies of Volmar and his men! These, it was evident, had been constructed from the drawings.

The earth-men stared in stupefaction at the metal replicas of their physical selves; and a thought which they hardly dared to formulate arose in their minds.

“Well,” said Roverton, trying to banish the thought, “the Tloongs are certainly the prize manufacturers of mannikins. Those things are so devilishly lifelike that one expects them to move or speak.”

“No terrestrial sculptor could do more,” agreed Volmar. Then he added slowly: “I wonder what the idea is. Probably they want to retain, along with their drawings, a plastic representation of our appearance.”

“Well, I hope it’s only that,” said Roverton softly.

Before the discussion could be continued, the leader of the Tloong delegation, a large-headed being with a physiognomy of recherché fantasticality, began to address the earthlings. They could understand no more than half of his speech, which seemed to be couched in a highly technical jargon, comparable to that employed by medical men. But this half was enough to fill them with horror. The Koum (said the Tloong) had decreed that incorruptible metal bodies should be made for the visitors, that their brains should be transferred to these bodies, and that they should remain permanently in the red world. In time, it was hoped, by virtue of their ensuing immortality and long contact with the supremely civilized people of this world, they might develop into beings of a high order of intelligence. Through motives of benignity, as well as curiosity regarding the biological result, the Koum had decided upon this experiment when he first beheld the earthlings; and the operation was to be performed as soon as the Koum should make his appearance to watch and supervise it.

As he ended his address, the Tloong pointed to a huge slab of ebon stone at one side of the room. Several surgeons, all equipped with formidable knives and saws, were standing beside it. It was obvious that the men were expected to lie down upon the slab and await the ministrations of these beings.

Volmar, who had learned to speak the language more fully and articulately than the others, began to expostulate, and tried to explain that he and his men preferred to inhabit their own fleshly bodies, no matter how frail, corruptible and faulty they might be. They appreciated (he went on) the extraordinary thoughtfulness of the Koum, and the trouble to which the Tloongs had gone in designing these indestructible metallic doppelgangers. But nevertheless this signal honor and proof of consideration must be regretfully declined.

The Tloongs, it was evident, were greatly puzzled. After some deliberation, their leader said that such a refusal was quite unheard-of and unthinkable, and that the will of the Koum must be obeyed without demur. The reluctance of the earth-men, he added, could be due only to their immature and imperfect mental development; it was sheer folly, and could not be permitted by the wise and benevolent people of the red world. If necessary, the operation would be performed by force. And when their benighted brains were free from the trammels of perishable matter, the earthlings would come to realize the kindness that had been shown them.

“Of all the pickles!” exclaimed Roverton. “Are we going to submit to this?”

“No.” said Volmar quietly, as he drew his automatic, and motioned the others to follow suit. All of them obeyed; and each man covered one of the surgeons with the muzzle of his gun. The Tloongs had seen these weapons before, but had given them only a cursory and perhaps rather contemptuous inspection; and Volmar and his crew had carried them at all times.

As the surgeons paused, doubtful of the meaning of this action and uncertain of the course of action to take, the Koum entered with a body-guard of cyclopean-headed beings chosen from among the most renowned savants of the red world. At the sight of the levelled automatics, and the hesitating surgeons, he uttered a few words of inquiry. Then, learning of the earthlings’ refusal, he eyed Volmar and the others with a contemplative stare such as a god might turn upon a group of rebellious insects.

“Proceed,” he commanded the surgeons.

Bearing in their metal members fuming censer-like vessels filled with a powerful anesthetic drug, the surgeons approached the earth-men. Their cold, mechanical movements, their two sets of eyes that were all burning with a fiery phosphorescence, betrayed no emotion whatever. One of them stepped up to Volmar, and holding his vaporing vessel close to the Captain's face, reached for the fastenings of the respirative mask.

A moment more, and the mask would have been torn away, and Volmar would have been forced to inhale the anesthetic fumes of censer. But thrusting his automatic into one of the surgeon's glowing eyes, Volmar pulled the trigger. There was a crash as of splintered crystal, louder and higher than the weapon's report, and the surgeon staggered back and fell motionless to the floor. A red fluid, brighter and thinner than blood, oozed from his shattered eye, bearing fragments of mineral together with clotted shreds of a greyish-green substance that must have been his brain.

The other surgeons hesitated when they saw their companion fall. The Koum, however, strode forward with no sign or fear of dubiety, lifting a long tubular instrument with three mouths, which he aimed at Volmar, who, in turn, had covered the great diamond eye of the Koum with his automatic. What would have happened next is doubtful; but at this moment there occurred a singular interruption, in the form of a high, strident, ever-mounting clangor which seemed to come from all sides and to fill the whole edifice with its disquieting vibration. It came from certain gongs at the heart of the building, which were operable from any planetary distance by force-waves. At this sound, which was clearly an alarm, and had a plainly understood import, the Koum and all the other Tloongs appeared to forget their designs on the earthlings, and rushed toward the outer galleries and balconies, uttering a babel of shrill, disordered cries. From certain words that they were able to distinguish, Volmar and his men inferred that a tremendous outbreak of the subterranean organisms had taken place, and that there had been more than one serious cataclysm due to the continued underground erosion.

Unheeded by any of the Tloongs, who had been thrown into a veritable pandemonium, the earth-men sought their way toward the terrace-like balcony on which they had alighted from the air-platform.

"If we can seize the platform," said Volmar, "we may have a chance of ultimate escape. By the way, who knows anything about the mechanism of the platform?"

“Lead me to it,” returned Jasper. “I’ve seen how they run those vessels; and I’m sure I could operate one of them.”

VII

The corridors through which they passed were interminable; and a wild and swiftly-growing confusion prevailed everywhere. The whole building was full of dissonant clangors and outcries. The gongs of alarm continued to ring, punctuating the pandemonium with their intolerable stridors; and ever and anon, above the voices of the Tloongs, there was the crash of some falling table or overturned retort or other chemical vessel. Some of the glowing air-suspended spheres by which the rooms and corridors were lit had gone out, or had fallen to the floor, where they burned fiercely, and seemed to ignite the very stone with a gradually spreading flame. The Tloongs were seemingly paralyzed by panic; and they ran to and fro in an aimless, frenzied manner, as if they had forgotten all the lore and wisdom of aeonian life.

As the earthlings neared the balcony, they heard a roar that drowned all other noises—a roar that was like the continual detonation of inestimable tons of some high explosive. It came from the direction of the purple sea. The building began to tremble with the vibration of the sound, and also with what was unmistakably a terrific earthquake. Rents appeared in the floors and ceilings, the pillars twisted like reeds, the walls reeled in a convulsion that never ceased but became more and more violent. The floor of the last corridors was pitching downward at a perilous degree, when Volmar and his men rushed through them and reached the balcony.

Here they beheld an appalling sight. The sea below had disappeared, leaving a rent and fissured bottom of bare, slimy stone at a vertiginous depth. And all the cliffs were riven in tremendous chasms extending through the landscape as far as the eye could see, to the very horizon; and from out the chasms a horde of monsters was pouring endlessly, bubbling up from the depths of the planet in noisome and irrepressible ebullition, to overflow the sea-bottom, to climb up the cliffs, to inundate the plain and to surround the laboratory and the other edifices of the red world. As Volmar and his men looked down from the slanting verge, they saw the seething of

the loathly shapeless organisms far below, where they had formed a solid mass about the base of the huge tower.

Many of the Tloongs were rushing up and down; and only a small minority seemed to have enough presence of mind to man the various air-platforms that stood about the balcony. The others were gazing stupidly, or with loud violin-like wails, on the ruin of their world. Luckily the platform used by the earth-men and their conductors was still in its place. Unhindered by any of the Tloongs, the men ran toward it, mounted it, and Jasper seized the lever by which the mechanism worked.

Even as he pulled the lever, another throng of the metal beings entered the balcony, pursued by a horde of swarming monsters, some of which must have penetrated the building from caverns below its nether vaults. The Koum was among the throng, and was grappling in a death-struggle with three of the organisms, who had fastened upon him with their multiple mouths. Others of the Tloongs went down beneath similar assaults as they reached the open air; and a medley of metallic moans and shrieks from inner rooms and hallways testified to the downfall of hundreds more.

One of the monsters had wrapped itself around the Koum's enormous head, and had muffled his whole face from sight. He staggered blindly, and fell in a mad convulsion of clattering limbs; and his fall loosened one of the monster's folds for an instant, revealing a large irregular hole that had been eaten in his forehead. A rill of ruby liquid was gushing forth and a mass of bluish and deeply convoluted brain-matter was projecting from the hole beneath the suction of the organism, whose multiple mouths were dripping with dissolved metal as well as the sustenance it had drawn from within. Then, as the Koum lay still, the fold returned, covering his entire head like a massive caul, and was re-applied to its frightful labor.

All this had happened in a few moments, while the platform was rising from the balcony. The helpless disorder of the Tloongs, and the diabolical speed and expedition shown by their assailants, were like something beheld in an evil delirium, and were strangely unreal at the time. Afterwards, the men were to recall the sight with profound terror, and were often to awake sweating from dreams in which its unexampled horrors were repeated.

The platform soared in air with a growing momentum, as the throng of metal beings reached the tilting edge in their mortal combat. Some of the Tloongs went hurtling into space with their formless and multiform adversaries from the pressure of the mêlée behind them; and it could now

be seen that the shaken building had slanted like a falling column. As the platform rose to a level with its roof beneath Jaspers' guidance, the great tower assumed an even sharper list; and then, with a detonation that was like a million peals of never-ending thunder, it plunged from the high cliff into the sea-drained abyss. The platform was nearly caught by its toppling verge, and was tossed like a feather in the maelstrom of gulfward-rushing air engendered by its fall. It was all that Jasper could do to right the vessel and steer it free from that atmospheric torrent.

The platform retrieved the level it had momentarily lost, only to plunge amid an elemental chaos. There were sudden hurricanes that began in mid-air, there were tornadoes that swooped from above or surged from beneath to buffet the vessel as it flew athwart the riven and reeling plain that was still shaken by incessant seismic throes. All the forces of nature, as well as the buildings and mechanisms of the Tloongs, were being thrown into catastrophic disorder, as the monster-eaten soil collapsed or was upheaved over hemispheric areas. The Murms were teeming everywhere, the plain was mottled with their spreading armies, and every new fissure vomited forth its boiling hordes. Other vessels, laden with Tloongs, were passed by the earth-men; but few of them were making any effort to fight the organisms. Their crews were apparently so demoralized with terror that they could not even guide the platforms in the mounting tempests; and many vessels pitched to the ground, where they were instantly overrun and buried from sight by the avid monsters, mad for the metal-sharded brains that they esteemed above any other delicacy. To see those creatures sucking forth the cerebral matter of the Tloongs like meat from a shell-fish, was enough to sicken the earth-men for life.

Jasper steered as directly as he could toward the far-off edifice on which the *Alcyone* was held captive. It was a voyage through an aerial bedlam, through an ever-rising frenzy of elements with planetary paroxysms of doom and destruction. The earth-men saw the downfall of more Babelian towers, and others that soared in air and careened away toward the tossing and rolling horizons when their magnetic engines went wild beneath the assault of the escalading organisms. There were realm-wide areas that had fallen in, leaving unfathomable pits; there were new chasms that seemed to divide the entire topography of the planet or even descend to its core; there were water-spouts and volcanoes that aspired in typhonian columns of flame and vapor to the ruddy vault; there were thick clouds of an ebon

blackness that gathered in mid-air with legerdemainic speed, and lightnings that netted or sheeted the whole welkin with violescent fire; there were brief intervals of sudden darkness, and momentary brightenings of the red vault to an insupportable candescence.

Somehow, beneath the skillful hand of Jasper, the platform held its course through all this elementary pandemonium. It was flung back and forth in the instantaneous hurricanes, it was tossed from level to level of the wild and shrieking air, it was mantled with cimmerian night and shrouded with electric fire. There were queer alternations of temperature; there were zones of insufferable heat through which the vessel passed to an absolute etheric or trans-arctic zero that would have turned the earth-men into statues of ice if it had lasted for more than a moment. The sound-phenomena that accompanied and followed all these cataclysmic manifestations were equally stupendous: the thunder of winds and lightning was mingled with, and surmounted by, the roar of widening rifts and chasms and the falling towers and wrecked or deranged machinery of the Tloongs. There were brazen clangors that climbed above the storm like the trumpet-calls of some demonian army in disaster; there were dull thuddings and pulsations of subterrene mechanisms that gave an unceasing ground-note to the whole infernal symphony; and from out the air on every side, there came the ringing of frantic gongs and the desperate moaning and wailing of the Tloongs, doubtless conveyed on disordered force-waves from widely remote areas, to add an overtone of supernatural terror.

At length the platform neared its destination. The tower on which the *Alcyone* was held began to heave from a horizon that was notched and serried with fissures. Soon it could be seen that the tower was pitching dangerously, and that its downfall was imminent. A great crack was broadening in its lower stories, and the plain around it was tossing like a sea, when Jasper landed the platform beside the space-vessel. Tloongs were running aimlessly about the roof; and some of them were battling with organisms who had already climbed the innumerable tiers of rooms and galleries to seek them out. But to all this the earthlings paid no heed, as they sprang from the platform and mounted one by one the steel ladder of the ether-ship.

Volmar came last; and he had no sooner closed the man-hole, when the building’s roof began to tilt like the prow of a sinking ship.

“Quick! We must start the engines!” Volmar cried.

A half-minute of utmost dubiety and anxiety followed, as Jasper set the machinery going and seized the steering-rod. If the ship were still thralled by the magnetic attraction that had drawn it down, they would plunge to destruction with the tower and its people. But if the force were broken, they might escape.

To the supreme relief of the earth-men, the *Alcyone* rose with a familiar lightness, and lifted above the tower. Even as it rose, the entire plain beneath appeared to collapse, as if the red world had caved in upon its hollow center, leaving a gulf that was hundreds of miles wide, and from which there issued a sound that was like the thunder of stricken planets. The *Alcyone* was tossed in an irresistable vortex of roaring and warring elements; and then, from the heavens above, there fell an inundating wave of darkness that was not darkness, but rather a red cloud of unknown origin and nature. The cloud enveloped the ether-ship, it clung to the ports till it blinded them, and the men within could see nothing. Then, in a flash of unhoped-for illumination, they were free from the red darkness and were lifting into the cold light of Polaris. There was no longer any sign of the ruddy vault; and looking back at the planet they had left, they saw that the red cloud was settling down on its cloven and pitted surface. Its ruinous mountains and towers were beginning to re-emerge; and among them a dull and lifeless dust of dark copper was swirling in twisted columns, was dancing like a million devils, to fall at last in a universal shroud on the dying world.

TOLD IN THE DESERT

Out of the fiery furnace of the desert sunset, he came to meet our caravan. He and his camel were a single silhouette of shadow-like thinness that emerged above the golden-crested dunes and disappeared by turns in their twilight-gathering hollows. When he descended the last dune and drew near, we had paused for the night, and we were pitching our black tents and lighting our little fires.

The man and his dromedary were like mummies that could find no repose in the subterranes of death, and that had wandered abroad beneath the goading of a cryptic spur, ever since the first division of the desert from the town. The face of the man was withered and blackened as by the torrefaction of a thousand flames; his beard was grey as ashes; and his eyes were expiring embers. His clothing was like tatters of the ancient dead, like the spoils of ghoulish rag-pickers. His camel was a mangy, moth-eaten skeleton such as might bear the souls of the damned on their dolorous ride to the realms of Iblis.

We greeted him in the name of Allah and bade him welcome. He shared our meal of dates and coffee and dried goat-flesh; and later, when we sat in a circle beneath the crowding stars, he told us his tale in a voice that had somehow taken on the loneliness, the eerie quavers and disconsolate overtones of the desert wind, as it seeks among infinitely parching horizons for the fertile, spicy valleys it has lost and cannot find.

Of my birth, my youth, and the appellation by which I was known and perhaps renowned among men, it would now be bootless to speak: for those days are one in remoteness with the reign of Al Raschid, they have gone by like the Afrit-builded halls of Suleiman. And in the bazaars or in the harems of my natal city, none would recall me; and if one spoke my name, it would be as a dying and never-repeated echo. And my own memories grow dim like the fires of hesternal wanderings, on which the sand are blown by an autumn gale.

But, though none will remember my songs, I was once a poet; and like other poets in their prime, I sang of vernal roses and autumnal rose-leaves, of the breasts of dead queens and the mouths of living cup-bearers, of stars that seek the fabled ocean-isles, and caravans that follow the eluding and illusory horizons. And because I was fevered with the strange disquietude of youth and poesy, for which there is neither name nor appeasement, I left the city of my boyhood, dreaming of other cities where wine and fame would be sweeter, and the lips of women more desirable.

It was a gallant and merry caravan with which I set forth in the month of the flowering of almonds. Wealthy and brave were the merchants with whom I travelled; and though they were lovers of gold and wrought ivory, of rugs and damascus blades and olibanum, they also loved my songs and could never weary of hearing them. And though our pilgrimage was long, it was evermore beguiled with recital of odes and telling of tales; and time was somehow cheated of its days, and distance of its miles, as only the divine necromancy of song can cheat them. And the merchants told me stories of the far-off, glamorous city which was our goal; and hearkening to their recountal of its splendors and delights, and pondering my own fancies, I was well content with the palmless leagues as they faded behind our dromedaries.

Alas! for we were never to behold the bourn of our journey, with its auriphrygiate domes that were said to ascend above the greening of paradisal trees, and its minarets of nacre beyond waters of jade. We were waylaid by the fierce tribesmen of the desert in a deep valley between hills; and though we fought valiantly, they bore us down from our hamstrung camels with their over-numbering spears; and taking our corded bales of merchandise, and deeming us all securely dead, they left us to the gier-eagles of the sand.

All but myself, indeed, had perished; and sorely wounded in the side, I lay among the dead as one on whom there descends the pall-like shadow of Azrael. But when the robbers had departed, I somehow stanched my streaming wound with tatters of my torn raiment; and seeing that none stirred among my companions, I left them and tottered away on the route of our journey, sorrowing that so brave a caravan should have come to a death so inglorious. And beyond the defile in which we had been overtaken with such dastardy, I found a camel who had strayed away during the conflict.

Even as myself, the animal was maimed, and it limped on three legs and left a trail of blood. But I made it kneel, and mounted it.

Of the hours that ensued I remember little. Blinded with pain and weakness, I heeded not the route that the camel followed, whether it were the track of caravans or a desert-ending path of Bedouins or jackals. But dimly I recalled how the merchants had told me at morn that there were two days of travelling in a desolation where the way was marked by serried bones, ere we should reach the next oasis. And I knew not how I should survive so arduous a journey, wounded and without water; but I clung dizzily to the camel.

The red demons of thirst assailed me; and fever came, and delirium, to people the waste with phantasmagoric shadows. And I fled through aeons from the frightful immemorial Things that held lordship of the desert, and would have proffered me the green, beguiling cups of an awful madness with Their bone-white hands. And though I fled, They dogged me always; and I heard Them gibbering all around me in the air that had turned to blood-red flame.

There were mirages on the waste; there were lucent meres and palms of fretted beryl that hovered always at an unattainable distance. I saw them in the interludes of my delirium; and one there was at length, which appeared greener and fairer than the rest; but I deemed it also an illusion. Yet it faded not nor receded like the others; and in each interval of my phantom-clouded fever it drew nearer still. And thinking it still a mirage, I approached the palms and the water; and a great blackness fell upon me, like the web of oblivion from the hands of the final Weaver; and I was henceforth bereft of sight and knowledge.

Waking, I deemed perforce that I had died and was in a sequestered nook of Paradise. For surely the sward on which I lay, and the waving verdure about me, were lovelier than those of earth; and the face that leaned above me was that of the youngest and most compassionate houri. But when I saw my wounded camel grazing not far away, and felt the reviving pain of my own hurt, I knew that I still lived; and that the seeming mirage had been a veritable oasis.

Ah! fair and kind as any houri was she who had found me lying on the desert’s verge, when the riderless camel came to her hut amid the palms. Seeing that I had awakened from my swoon, she brought me water and fresh dates, and smiled like a mother as I ate and drank. And, uttering little

cries of horror and pity, she bound my wound with the sootheness of healing balsams.

Her voice was gentle as her eyes; and her eyes were those of a dove that has dwelt aways in a vale of myrrh and cassia. When I had revived a little, she told me her name, which was Neria; and I deemed it lovelier and more melodious than the names of the sultanas who are most renowned in song, and remotest in time and fable. She said that she had lived from infancy with her parents amid the palms; and now her parents were dead, and there was none to companion her except the birds that nested and sang in the verdant frondage.

How shall I tell of the life that began for me now, while the spear-wound was mending? How shall I tell of the innocent grace, the child-like beauty, the maternal tenderness of Neria? It was a life remote from all the fevers of the world, and pure from every soilure; it was infinitely sweet and secure, as if in the whole of time and space there were no others than ourselves and naught that could ever trouble our happiness. My love for her, and hers for me, was inevitable as the flowering of the palms and their fruiting. Our hearts were drawn to each other with no shadow of doubt or reluctance; and the meeting of our mouths was simple as that of roses blown together by a summer wind.

We felt no needs, no hungers, other than those which were amply satisfied by the crystal well-water, by the purple fruit of the trees, and by each other. Ours were the dawns that poured through the feathering emerald of fronds; and the sunsets whose amber was flung on a blossom-purified sward more delicate than the rugs of Bokhara. Ours was the divine monotony of contentment, ours were the kisses and endearments ever the same in sweetness, yet illimitably various. Ours was a slumber enchanted by cloudless stars, and caresses without denial or regret. We spoke of naught but our love and the little things that filled our days; yet the words we uttered were more than the weighty discourse of the learned and the wise. I sang no more, I forgot my odes and ghazals; for life itself had become a sufficing music.

The annals of happiness are without event. I know not how long it was that I dwelt with Neria; for the days were molten together in a dulcet harmony of peace and rapture. I remember not if they were few or many; since time was touched by a supernal sorcery, and was no longer time.

Alas! for the tiny whisper of discontent that awakens sooner or later in the bosoms of the blest, that is heard through the central melodies of heaven! There came a day when the little oasis seemed no longer the infinite paradise I had dreamt, when the kisses of Neria were as honey too often tasted, when her bosom was a myrrh too often breathed. The sameness of the days was no longer divine, the remoteness was no longer security but a prison-house. Beyond the fringed horizon of the trees there hovered the opal and marble dream of the storied cities I had sought in former time; and the voices of fame, the tones of sultana-like women, besought me with far, seductive murmurs. I grew sad and silent and distraught; and, seeing the change that was on me, Neria saddened also and watched me with eyes that had darkened like nocturnal wells in which there lingers a single star. But she uttered no breath of reproach or remonstrance.

At last, with halting words, I told her of my longing to depart; and, hypocrite that I was, I spoke of urgent duties that called me and would not be denied. And I promised with many oaths to return as soon as these duties would permit. The pallor of Neria's face, and the darkening of her violet-shadowed eyes, were eloquent of mortal sorrow. But she said only, "Go not, I pray thee. For if thou goest, thou shalt not find me again."

I laughed at her words and kissed her; but her lips were cold as those of the dead, they were unresponsive as if the estranging miles had already intervened. And I, too, was sorrowful when I rode away on my dromedary.

Of that which followed there is much, and yet little, to tell. After many days among the veering boundaries of the sand, I came to a far city; and there I abode for awhile and found in a measure the glory and delight of which I had dreamed. But amid the loud and clamoring bazaars, and across the silken whisper of harems, there returned to me the parting words of Neria; and her eyes besought me through the flame of golden lamps and the luster of opulent attire; and a nostalgia fell upon me for the lost oasis and the lips of abandoned love. And because of it I knew no peace; and after a time I returned to the desert.

I retraced my way with exceeding care, by the dunes and remotely scattered wells that marked the route. But when I thought to have reached the oasis, and to see again the softly waving palms above Neria's abode, and the glimmering waters beside it, I saw no more than a stretch of featureless sand, where a lonely, futile wind was writing and erasing its aimless furrows. And I sought across the sand in every direction, till it

seemed that I must overtake the very horizons as they fled; but I could not find a single palm, nor a blade of grass that was like the blossomy sward on which I had lain or wandered with Neria; and the wells to which I came were brackish with desolation and could never have held the crystalline sweetness of the well from which I had drunk with her....

Since then, I know not how many suns have crossed the brazen hell of the desert; nor how many moons have gone down on the waters of mirage and marah. But still I seek the oasis; and still I lament the hour of careless folly in which I forsook its perfect paradise. To no man, mayhap, it is given to attain twice the happiness and security, remote from all that can trouble or assail, which I knew with Neria in a bygone year. And woe to him who abandons such, who becomes a voluntary exile from an irretrievable Aidann. For him, henceforward, there are only the fading visions of memory, the tortures and despairs and illusions of the quested miles, the waste whereon there falls no lightest shadow of any leaf, and the wells whose taste is fire and madness...

We were all silent when the stranger ceased; and no one cared to speak. But among us all there was none who had not remembered the face of her to whom he would return when the caravan had ended its wayfaring.

After awhile, we slept; and we thought that the stranger also slumbered. But awakening before dawn, when a horned moon was low above the sands, we saw that the man and his dromedary had disappeared. And far-off in the ghostly light a doubtful shadow passed from dune to dune like a fever-driven phantom. And it seemed to us that the shadow was the single silhouette of a camel and its rider.

THE WILLOW LANDSCAPE

The picture was more than five hundred years old; and time had not changed its colors, unless to touch them with the mellow softness of ancient hours, with the gathering morbidezza of bygone things. It had been painted by a great artist of the Sung dynasty, on silk of the finest weave, and mounted on rollers of ebony tipped with silver. For twelve generations it had been one of the most cherished possessions of the forefathers of Shih Liang. And it was equally cherished by Shih Liang himself, who, like all his ancestors, was a scholar, a poet, and a lover of both art and nature. Often, in his dreamiest or most meditative moods, he would unroll the painting and gaze upon its idyllic loveliness with the feeling of one who retires to the seclusion and remoteness of a mountain-warded valley. It consoled him in a measure for the bustle and blare and intrigue of the imperial court, where he held an official post of no small honor; since he was not altogether native to such things and would have preferred, like the olden sages, the philosophic peace of a leaf-embowered hermitage.

The picture represented a pastoral scene of the most ideal and visionary beauty. In the background arose lofty mountains rendered vague by the slow withdrawal of morning mists; in the foreground there ran a little stream, descending in mimic turbulence to a tranquil lake, and crossed on its way by a rustic bridge of bamboo, more charming than if it were made of royal lacquer. Beyond the stream and around the lake were willows of vernal green more lovely and delicious than anything that was ever beheld except in vision or memory. Incomparable was their grace, ineffable their waving: they were like the willows of Shou Shan, the Taoist Paradise; and they trailed their foliage as leaning women trail their unbound hair. And partly hidden among them was a tiny hut; and a maiden dressed in peony pink and white was crossing the little bamboo bridge. But somehow the picture was more than a painting, was more than a veritable scene: it possessed the enchantment of far-off things for which the heart has longed in vain, of years and of places that are lost beyond recall. Surely the artist

had mingled with its hues the diviner iris of dream or of retrospect, and the wine-sweet tears of a nostalgia long denied.

Shih Liang felt that he knew the landscape more intimately than any actual scene. Each time that he gazed upon it, his sensations were those of a returning wanderer. It became to him the cool and sequestered retreat in which he found a never-failing refuge from the weariness of his days. And though he was of an ascetic turn and had never married nor sought the company of women, the presence of the peony maiden on the bridge was by no means exceptionable: in fact, her tiny figure, with its more than mortal charm, was somehow an essential part of the composition and was no less important to its perfection than the stream, the willows, the lake, and the far-off mountains with their riven veils of mist. And she seemed to companion him in the visits and sojournings of reverie, when he would imagine himself repairing to the little hut or roaming beneath the delicate foliage.

In truth, Shih Liang had need of such refuge and of such companionship, illusory though they were. For, aside from his younger brother, Po Lung, a boy of sixteen, he was alone and without living relatives or comrades; and the fortunes of the family, declining through several generations, had left him the heritor of many debts and little cash or property, except a number of priceless art-treasures. His life was increasingly sad, and oppressed by ill-health and poverty; for much of the stipend from his secretarial post at the court was necessarily devoted to the canceling of inherited obligations; and the remainder was barely enough for his own sustenance and the education of his brother.

Shih Liang was approaching middle-age; and his honorable heart was rejoicing over the payment of the last family debt, when there came a fresh stroke of misfortune. Through no fault or remissness of his own, but the machinations of an envious fellow-scholar, Shih Liang was suddenly deprived of his position and found himself without means of support. No other position offered itself; for a certain amount of unmerited disgrace was attached to the imperial dismissal. In order to procure the necessities of life, and continue his brother’s education, Shih Liang was now forced to sell one by one many of the irreplaceable heirlooms, the antique carvings of jade and ivory, the rare porcelains and paintings of the ancestral collection. This he did with extreme reluctance, with a sense of utter shame and profanation,

such as could be felt only by a true lover of such things, and by one whose very soul was consecrated to the past and to the memory of his fathers.

The days and years went by, the collection dwindled piece by piece; and the time drew near when the studies of Po Lung would be completed, when he would be a scholar versed in all the classics and eligible for a position of both honor and profit. But, alas! the porcelains and lacquers, the jades and ivories had all been sold; and the paintings were likewise gone, all except the willow landscape so dearly cherished by Shih Liang.

A mortal and inassuageable sorrow, a dismay that was colder than the chill of death itself, entered the heart of Shih Liang when he realized the truth. It seemed to him that he could no longer live if he should sell the picture. But if he did not sell it, how could he complete the fraternal duty which he owed to Po Lung? There was but one possible course; and he sent word at once to the Mandarin Mung Li, a connoisseur who had purchased other pieces of the old collection, telling him that the willow picture was now for sale.

Mung Li had long coveted this picture. He came in person, his eyes gleaming in his fat face with the avidity of a collector who scents a bargain; and the transaction was soon concluded. The money was paid immediately; but Shih Liang begged leave to retain the picture for another day before delivering it to the mandarin. And knowing that Shih Liang was a man of honor, Mung Li assented readily to this request.

When the mandarin had gone, Shih Liang unrolled the landscape and hung it on the wall. His stipulation to Mung Li had been prompted by the irresistible feeling that he must have one more hour of communion with the beloved scene, must repair once more in reverie to its inviolate retreat. After that, he would be as one without a home or a sanctuary; for he knew that in all the world there was nothing that could take the place of the willow picture or afford a like asylum for his dreams.

The mellowing rays of earliest eventide were sifted upon the silk volumen where it hung on the bare wall; but for Shih Liang, the painting was steeped in a light of supernal enchantment, was touched by more than the muted splendor of the falling sun. And it seemed to him that never before had the foliage been so tender with immortal spring, or the mist about the mountain so glamorous with eternally dissolving opal, or the maiden upon the rustic bridge so lovely with unfading youth. And somehow, by an unaccountable sorcery of perspective, the painting itself

was larger and deeper than of yore, and had mysteriously assumed even more of reality, or the illusion of an actual place.

With unshed tears in his heart, like an exile who bids farewell to his natal valley, Shih Liang enjoyed the sorrowful luxury of looking upon the willow picture for the last time. Even as on a thousand former occasions, his fancy strayed beneath the branches and beside the mere, it inhabited the tiny hut whose roof was so tantalizingly revealed and concealed, it peered at the mountain-tops from behind the trailing foliage, or paused upon the bridge to converse with the peony maiden.

And now there happened a strange and inexplicable thing. Though the sun had gone down while Shih Liang continued to gaze and dream, and a twilight had gathered in the room, the picture itself was no less plain and luminous than before, as if it were lit by another sun than that of contemporary time and space. And the landscape had grown even larger, till it seemed to Shih Liang that he was looking through an open door on the veritable scene itself.

Then, as bewilderment assailed him, he heard a whisper that was not an actual voice, but which seemed to emanate from the landscape and become audible as a thought in his inmost mind. And the whisper said:

“Because you have loved me so long and so dearly, and because your heart is native here but alien to all the world beside, it is now permitted that I should become for you the inviolable refuge of which you have dreamed, and a place wherein you can wander and abide forever.”

So, with the surpassing joy of one whose fondest vision has been verified, the rapture of one who inherits the heaven of his reverie, Shih Liang passed from the twilight room into the morning picture. And the ground was soft with a flower-embroidered grass beneath his heel; and the leaves of the willows murmured in an April wind that blew from long ago; and he saw the door of the half-hidden hut as he had never seen it before except in fancy; and the peony maiden smiled and answered his greeting when he approached her; and her voice was like the speech of the willows and the blossoms.

The disappearance of Shih Liang was a matter of brief and passing concern to those who had known him. It was readily believed that his financial sorrows had driven him to suicide, probably by drowning in the great river that ran athwart the capital.

Po Lung, having received the money left by his brother from the sale of the last painting, was enabled to finish his education; and the willow landscape, which had been found hanging on the wall of Shih Liang's abode, was duly claimed by the Mandarin Mung Li, its purchaser.

Mung Li was delighted with his acquisition; but there was one detail which puzzled him considerably when he unrolled the volumen and examined it. He could remember only one figure, a maiden in pink and white, on the little bamboo bridge; and now there were two figures! Mung Li inspected the second figure with much curiosity, and was more than surprised when he noted that it had a singular resemblance to Shih Liang. But it was very tiny, like that of the maiden; and his eyes were dim from peering at so many porcelains and lacquers and paintings; so he could not be entirely sure. At any rate, the picture was very old; and he must have been mistaken about the number of the figures. However, it was undeniably peculiar.

Mung Li might have thought the matter still stranger, if he had looked more often at the painting. He might have found that the peony maiden and the person who resembled Shih Liang were sometimes engaged in other diversions than that of merely passing the time of day on the bamboo bridge!

A RENDEZVOUS IN AVEROIGNE

Gérard de l'Automne was meditating the rhymes of a new ballade in honor of Fleurette, as he followed the leaf-arrassed pathway toward Vyônes through the woodland of Averoigne. Since he was on his way to meet Fleurette, who had promised to keep a rendezvous among the oaks and beeches like any peasant girl, Gérard himself made better progress than the ballade. His love was at that stage which, even for a professional troubadour, is more productive of distraction than inspiration; and he was recurrently absorbed in a meditation upon other than merely verbal felicities.

The grass and trees had assumed the fresh enamel of a medieval May; the turf was figured with little blossoms of azure and white and yellow, like an ornate broidery; and there was a pebbly stream that murmured beside the way, as if the voices of undines were parleying deliciously beneath its waters. The sun-lulled air was laden with a wafture of youth and romance; and the longing that welled from the heart of Gérard seemed to mingle mystically with the balsams of the wood.

Gérard was a *trouvère* whose scant years and many wanderings had brought him a certain renown. After the fashion of his kind he had roamed from court to court, from château to château; and he was now the guest of the Comte de la Frênaie, whose high castle held dominion over half the surrounding forest. Visiting one day that quaint cathedral town, Vyônes, which lies so near to the ancient wood of Averoigne, Gérard had seen Fleurette, the daughter of a well-to-do mercer named Guillaume Cochin; and had become more sincerely enamored of her blonde piquancy than was to be expected from one who had been so frequently susceptible in such matters. He had managed to make his feelings known to her; and, after a month of billets-doux, ballades and stolen interviews contrived by the help of a complaisant waiting-woman, she had made this woodland tryst with him in the absence of her father from Vyônes. Accompanied by her maid and a man-servant, she was to leave the town early that afternoon and meet

Gérard under a certain beech-tree of enormous age and size. The servants would then withdraw discreetly; and the lovers, to all intents and purposes, would be alone. It was not likely that they would be seen or interrupted; for the gnarled and immemorial wood possessed an ill-repute among the peasantry. Somewhere in this wood, there was the ruinous and haunted Château des Faussesflammes; and, also, there was a double tomb within which the Sieur Hugh du Malinbois and his chatelaine, who were notorious for sorcery in their time, had lain unconsecrated for more than two hundred years. Of these, and their phantoms, there were grisly tales; and there were stories of loupgarous and goblins, of fays and devils and vampires that infested Averoigne. But to these tales Gérard had given little heed, considering it improbable that such creatures would fare abroad in open daylight. The madcap Fleurette had professed herself unafraid also; but it had been necessary to promise the servants a substantial *pourboire,* since they shared fully the local superstitions.

Gérard had wholly forgotten the legendry of Averoigne, as he hastened along the sun-flecked path. He was nearing the appointed beech-tree, which a turn of the path would soon reveal; and his pulses quickened and became tremulous, as he wondered if Fleurette had already reached the trysting-place. He abandoned all effort to continue his ballade which, in the three miles he had walked from La Frênaie, had not progressed beyond the middle of a tentative first stanza.

His thoughts were such as would befit an ardent and impatient lover. They were now interrupted by a shrill scream that rose to an unendurable pitch of fear and horror, issuing from the green stillness of the pines beside the way. Startled, he peered at the thick branches; and as the scream fell back to silence, he heard the sound of dull and hurrying footfalls, and a scuffling as of several bodies. Again the scream arose. It was plainly the voice of a woman in some distressful peril. Loosening his dagger in its sheath, and clutching more firmly a long hornbeam staff which he had brought with him as a protection against the vipers which were said to lurk in Averoigne, he plunged without hesitation or premeditation among the low-hanging boughs from which the voice had seemed to emerge.

In a small open space beyond the trees, he saw a woman who was struggling with three ruffians of exceptionally brutal and evil aspect. Even in the haste and vehemence of the moment, Gérard realized that he had never before seen such men or such a woman. The woman was clad in a

gown of emerald green that matched her eyes; in her face was the pallor of dead things, together with a faery beauty; and her lips were dyed as with the scarlet of newly flowing blood. The men were dark as Moors, and their eyes were red slits of flame beneath oblique brows with animal-like bristles. There was something very peculiar in the shape of their feet; but Gérard did not realize the exact nature of the peculiarity till long afterwards. Then he remembered that all of them were seemingly club-footed, though they were able to move with surpassing agility. Somehow, he could never recall what sort of clothing they had worn.

The woman turned a beseeching gaze upon Gérard as he sprang forth from amid the boughs. The men, however, did not seem to heed his coming; though one of them caught in a hairy clutch the hands which the woman sought to reach toward her rescuer.

Lifting his staff, Gérard rushed upon the ruffians. He struck a tremendous blow at the head of the nearest one—a blow that should have levelled the fellow to earth. But the staff came down on unresisting air, and Gérard staggered and almost fell headlong in trying to recover his equilibrium. Dazed and uncomprehending, he saw that the knot of struggling figures had vanished utterly. At least, the three men had vanished; but from the middle branches of a tall pine beyond the open space, the death-white features of the woman smiled upon him for a moment with faint, inscrutable guile ere they melted among the needles.

Gérard understood now; and he shivered as he crossed himself. He had been deluded by phantoms or demons, doubtless for no good purpose; he had been the gull of a questionable enchantment. Plainly there was something after all in the legends he had heard, in the ill-renown of the forest of Averoigne.

He retraced his way toward the path he had been following. But when he thought to reach again the spot from which he had heard that shrill unearthly scream, he saw that there was no longer a path; nor, indeed, any feature of the forest which he could remember or recognize. The foliage about him no longer displayed a brilliant verdure; it was sad and funereal, and the trees themselves were either cypress-like, or were already sere with autumn or decay. In lieu of the purling brook there lay before him a tarn of waters that were dark and dull as clotting blood, and which gave back no reflection of the brown autumnal sedges that trailed therein like the hair of suicides, and the skeletons of rotting osiers that writhed above them.

Now, beyond all question, Gérard knew that he was the victim of an evil enchantment. In answering that beguileful cry for succor, he had exposed himself to the spell, had been lured within the circle of its power. He could not know what forces of wizardry or demonry had willed to draw him thus; but he knew that his situation was fraught with supernatural menace. He gripped the hornbeam staff more tightly in his hand, and prayed to all the saints he could remember, as he peered about for some tangible bodily presence of ill.

The scene was utterly desolate and lifeless, like a place where cadavers might keep their tryst with demons. Nothing stirred, not even a dead leaf; and there was no whisper of dry grass or foliage, no song of birds nor murmuring of bees, no sigh nor chuckle of water. The corpse-grey heavens above seemed never to have held a sun; and the chill, unchanging light was without source or destination, without beams or shadows.

Gérard surveyed his environment with a cautious eye; and the more he looked the less he liked it: for some new and disagreeable detail was manifest at every glance. There were moving lights in the wood that vanished if he eyed them intently; there were drowned faces in the tarn that came and went like livid bubbles before he could discern their features. And, peering across the lake, he wondered why he had not seen the many-turreted castle of hoary stone whose nearer walls were based in the dead waters. It was so grey and still and vasty, that it seemed to have stood for incomputable ages between the stagnant tarn and the equally stagnant heavens. It was ancienter than the world, it was older than the light: it was coeval with fear and darkness; and a horror dwelt upon it and crept unseen but palpable along its bastions.

There was no sign of life about the castle; and no banners flew above its turrets or its donjon. But Gérard knew, as surely as if a voice had spoken aloud to warn him, that here was the fountain-head of the sorcery by which he had been beguiled. A growing panic whispered in his brain, he seemed to hear the rustle of malignant plumes, the mutter of demonian threats and plottings. He turned, and fled among the funereal trees.

Amid his dismay and wilderment, even as he fled, he thought of Fleurette and wondered if she were awaiting him at their place of rendezvous, or if she and her companions had also been enticed and led astray in a realm of damnable unrealities. He renewed his prayers, and implored the saints for her safety as well as his own.

The forest through which he ran was a maze of bafflement and eeriness. There were no landmarks, there were no tracks of animals or men; and the swart cypresses and sere autumnal trees grew thicker and thicker as if some malevolent will were marshalling them against his progress. The boughs were like implacable arms that strove to retard him; he could have sworn that he felt them twine about him with the strength and suppleness of living things. He fought them, insanely, desperately, and seemed to hear a crackling of infernal laughter in their twigs as he fought. At last, with a sob of relief, he broke through into a sort of trail. Along this trail, in the mad hope of eventual escape, he ran like one whom a fiend pursues; and after a short interval he came again to the shores of the tarn, above whose motionless waters the high and hoary turrets of that time-forgotten castle were still dominant. Again he turned and fled; and once more, after similar wanderings and like struggles, he came back to the inevitable tarn.

With a leaden sinking of his heart, as into some ultimate slough of despair and terror, he resigned himself and made no further effort to escape. His very will was benumbed, was crushed down as by the incumbence of a superior volition that would no longer permit his puny recalcitrance. He was unable to resist when a strong and hateful compulsion drew his footsteps along the margent of the tarn toward the looming castle.

When he came nearer, he saw that the edifice was surrounded by a moat whose waters were stagnant as those of the lake, and were mantled with the iridescent scum of corruption. The drawbridge was down and the gates were open, as if to receive an expected guest. But still there was no sign of human occupancy; and the walls of the great grey building were silent as those of a sepulcher. And more tomb-like even than the rest, was the square and overtowering bulk of the mighty donjon.

Impelled by the same power that had drawn him along the lake-shore, Gérard crossed the drawbridge and passed beneath the frowning barbican into a vacant courtyard. Barred windows looked blankly down; and at the opposite end of the court a door stood mysteriously open, revealing a dark hall. As he approached the doorway, he saw that a man was standing on the threshold; though a moment previous he could have sworn that it was untenanted by any visible form.

Gérard had retained his hornbeam staff; and though his reason told him that such a weapon was futile against any supernatural foe, some obscure

instinct prompted him to clasp it valiantly as he neared the waiting figure on the sill.

The man was inordinately tall and cadaverous, and was dressed in black garments of a superannuate mode. His lips were strangely red, amid his bluish beard and the mortuary whiteness of his face. They were like the lips of the woman who, with her assailants, had disappeared in a manner so dubious when Gérard had approached them. His eyes were pale and luminous as marsh-lights; and Gérard shuddered at his gaze and at the cold, ironic smile of his scarlet lips, that seemed to reserve a world of secrets all too dreadful and hideous to be disclosed.

“I am the Sieur du Malinbois,” the man announced. His tones were both unctuous and hollow, and served to increase the repugnance felt by the young troubadour. And when his lips parted, Gérard had a glimpse of teeth that were unnaturally small and were pointed like the fangs of some fierce animal.

“Fortune has willed that you should become my guest,” the man went on. “The hospitality which I can proffer you is rough and inadequate, and it may be that you will find my abode a trifle dismal. But at least I can assure you of a welcome no less ready than sincere.”

“I thank you for your kind offer,” said Gérard. “But I have an appointment with a friend; and I seem in some unaccountable manner to have lost my way. I should be profoundly grateful if you would direct me toward Vyônes. There should be a path not far from here; and I have been so stupid as to stray from it.”

The words rang empty and hopeless in his own ears even as he uttered them; and the name that his strange host had given—the Sieur du Malinbois—was haunting his mind like the funereal accents of a knell; though he could not recall at that moment the macabre and spectral ideas which the name tended to evoke.

“Unfortunately, there are no paths from my château to Vyônes,” the stranger replied. “As for your rendezvous, it will be kept in another manner, at another place, than the one appointed. I must therefore insist that you accept my hospitality. Enter, I pray; but leave your hornbeam staff at the door. You will have no need of it any longer.”

Gérard thought that he made a moué of distaste and aversion with his over-red lips as he spoke the last sentences; and that his eyes lingered on the staff with an obscure apprehensiveness. And the strange emphasis of his

words and demeanor served to awaken other phantasmal and macabre thoughts in Gérard's brain; though he could not formulate them fully till afterwards. And somehow he was prompted to retain the weapon, no matter how useless it might be against an enemy of spectral or diabolic nature. So he said:

"I must crave your indulgence if I retain the staff. I have made a vow to carry it with me, in my right hand or never beyond arm's reach, till I have slain two vipers."

"That is a queer vow," rejoined his host. "However, bring it with you if you like. It is of no matter to me if you choose to encumber yourself with a wooden stick,"

He turned abruptly, motioning Gérard to follow him. The troubadour obeyed unwillingly, with one rearward glance at the vacant heavens and the empty courtyard. He saw with no great surprise that a sudden and furtive darkness had closed in upon the château without moon or star, as if it had been merely waiting for him to enter before it descended. It was thick as the folds of a serecloth, it was airless and stifling like the gloom of a sepulcher that has been sealed for ages; and Gérard was aware of a veritable oppression, a corporeal and psychic difficulty in breathing, as he crossed the threshold.

He saw that cressets were now burning in the dim hall to which his host had admitted him; though he had not perceived the time and agency of their lighting. The illumination they afforded was singularly vague and indistinct; and the thronging shadows of the hall were unexplainably numerous, and moved with a mysterious disquiet; though the flames themselves were still as tapers that burn for the dead in a windless vault.

At the end of the passage, the Sieur du Malinbois flung open a heavy door of dark and somber wood. Beyond, in what was plainly the eating-room of the château, several people were seated about a long table by the light of cressets no less dreary and dismal than those in the hall. In the strange, uncertain glow, their faces were touched with a gloomy dubiety, with a lurid distortion; and it seemed to Gérard that shadows hardly distinguishable from the figures were gathered around the board. But nevertheless he recognized the assembled company at a glance, with an overpowering shock of astonishment.

At one end of the board, there sat the woman in emerald green who had vanished in so doubtful a fashion amid the pines when Gérard answered her

call for succor. At one side, looking very pale and forlorn and frightened, was Fleurette Cochin. At the lower end reserved for retainers and inferiors, there sat the maid and the man-servant who had accompanied Fleurette to her rendezvous with Gérard.

The Sieur du Malinbois turned to the troubadour with a smile of sardonic amusement.

“I believe you have already met everyone assembled,” he observed. “But you have not yet been formally presented to my wife, Agathe, who is presiding over the board. Agathe, I bring to you Gérard de l’Automne, a young troubadour of much note and merit.”

The woman nodded slightly, without speaking, and pointed to a chair opposite Fleurette. Gérard seated himself, and the Sieur du Malinbois assumed according to feudal custom a place at the head of the table beside his wife.

Now, for the first time, Gérard noticed that there were servitors who came and went in the room, setting upon the table various wines and viands. The servitors were preternaturally swift and noiseless, and somehow it was very difficult to be sure of their precise features or their costumes. They seemed to walk in an adumbration of sinister insoluble twilight. But the troubadour was disturbed by a feeling that they resembled the swart demoniac ruffians who had disappeared together with the woman in green when he approached them.

The meal that ensued was a weird and funereal affair. A sense of insuperable constraint, of smothering horror and hideous oppression, was upon Gérard; and though he wanted to ask Fleurette a hundred questions, and also demand an explanation of sundry matters from his host and hostess, he was totally unable to frame the words or to utter them. He could only look at Fleurette, and read in her eyes a duplication of his own helpless bewilderment and nightmare thralldom. Nothing was said by the Sieur du Malinbois and his lady, who were exchanging glances of a secret and baleful intelligence all through the meal; and Fleurette’s maid and man-servant were obviously paralyzed by terror, like birds beneath the hypnotic gaze of deadly serpents.

The foods were rich and of strange savor; and the wines were fabulously old, and seemed to retain in their topaz or violet depths the unextinguished fire of buried centuries. But Gérard and Fleurette could barely touch them; and they saw that the Sieur du Malinbois and his lady

did not eat or drink at all. The gloom of the chamber deepened; the servitors became more furtive and spectral in their movements; the stifling air was laden with unformulable menace, was constrained by the spell of a black and lethal necromancy. Above the aromas of the rare foods, the bouquets of the antique wines, there crept forth the choking mustiness of hidden vaults and embalmed centurial corruption, together with the ghostly spice of a strange perfume that seemed to emanate from the person of the chatelaine. And now Gérard was remembering many tales from the legendry of Averoigne, which he had heard and disregarded; was recalling the story of a Sieur du Malinbois and his lady, the last of the name and the most evil, who had been buried somewhere in this forest hundreds of years ago; and whose tomb was shunned by the peasantry since they were said to continue their sorceries even in death. He wondered what influence had bedrugged his memory, that he had not recalled it wholly when he had first heard the name. And he was remembering other things and other stories, all of which confirmed his instinctive belief regarding the nature of the people into whose hands he had fallen. Also, he recalled a folklore superstition concerning the use to which a wooden stake can be put; and realized why the Sieur du Malinbois had shown a peculiar interest in the hornbeam staff. Gérard had laid the staff beside his chair when he sat down; and he was reassured to find that it had not vanished. Very quietly and unobtrusively, he placed his foot upon it.

The uncanny meal came to an end; and the host and his chatelaine arose.

“I shall now conduct you to your rooms,” said the Sieur du Malinbois, including all of his guests in a dark, inscrutable glance. “Each of you can have a separate chamber, if you so desire; or Fleurette Cochin and her maid Angelique can remain together; and the man-servant Raoul can sleep in the same room with Messire Gérard.”

A preference for the latter procedure was voiced by Fleurette and the troubadour. The thought of uncompanioned solitude in that castle of timeless midnight and nameless mystery was abhorrent to an insupportable degree.

The four were now led to their respective chambers, on opposite sides of a hall whose length was but indeterminately revealed by the dismal lights. Fleurette and Gérard bade each other a dismayed and reluctant good-night beneath the constraining eye of their host. Their rendezvous was

hardly the one which they had thought to keep; and both were overwhelmed by the supernatural situation amid whose dubious horrors and ineluctable sorceries they had somehow become involved. And no sooner had Gérard left Fleurette than he began to curse himself for a poltroon because he had not refused to part from her side; and he marvelled at the spell of drug-like involition that had bedrowsed all his faculties. It seemed that his will was not his own, but had been thrust down and throttled by an alien power.

The room assigned to Gérard and Raoul was furnished with a couch, and a great bed whose curtains were of antique fashion and fabric. It was lighted with tapers that had a funereal suggestion in their form, and which burned dully in an air that was stagnant with the mustiness of dead years.

"May you sleep soundly," said the Sieur du Malinbois. The smile that accompanied and followed the words was no less unpleasant than the oily and sepulchral tone in which they were uttered. The troubadour and the servant were conscious of profound relief when he went out and closed the leaden-clanging door. And their relief was hardly diminished even when they heard the click of a key in the lock.

Gérard was now inspecting the room; and he went to the one window, through whose small and deep-set panes he could see only the pressing darkness of a night that was veritably solid, as if the whole place were buried beneath the earth and were closed in by clinging mould. Then, with an access of unsmothered rage at his separation from Fleurette, he ran to the door and hurled himself against it, he beat upon it with his clenched fists, but in vain. Realizing his folly, and desisting at last, he turned to Raoul.

"Well, Raoul," he said, "what do you think of all this?"

Raoul crossed himself before he answered; and his face had assumed the vizard of a mortal fear.

"I think, Messire," he finally replied, "that we have all been decoyed by a malefic sorcery; and that you, myself, the demoiselle Fleurette, and the maid Angelique, are all in deadly peril of both soul and body."

"That, also, is my thought," said Gérard. "And I believe it would be well that you and I should sleep only by turns; and that he who keeps vigil should retain in his hands my hornbeam staff, whose end I shall now sharpen with my dagger. I am sure that you know the manner in which it should be employed if there are any intruders; for if such should come, there would be no doubt as to their character and their intentions. We are in a castle which has no legitimate existence, as the guests of people who have

been dead, or supposedly dead, for more than two hundred years. And such people, when they stir abroad, are prone to habits which I need not specify."

"Yes, Messire." Raoul shuddered; but he watched the sharpening of the staff with considerable interest. Gérard whittled the hard wood to a lance-like point, and hid the shavings carefully. He even carved the outline of a little cross near the middle of the staff, thinking that this might increase its efficacy or save it from molestation. Then, with the staff in his hand, he sat down upon the bed, where he could survey the litten room from between the curtains.

"You can sleep first, Raoul." He indicated the couch, which was near the door.

The two conversed in a fitful manner for some minutes. After hearing Raoul's tale of how Fleurette, Angelique, and himself had been led astray by the sobbing of a woman amid the pines, and had been unable to retrace their way, the troubadour changed the theme. And henceforth he spoke idly and of matters remote from his real preoccupations, to fight down his torturing concern for the safety of Fleurette. Suddenly he became aware that Raoul had ceased to reply; and saw that the servant had fallen asleep on the couch. At the same time an irresistible drowsiness surged upon Gérard himself in spite of all his volition, in spite of the eldritch terrors and forebodings that still murmured in his brain. He heard through his growing hebetude a whisper as of shadowy wings in the castle halls; he caught the sibilation of ominous voices, like those of familiars that respond to the summoning of wizards; and he seemed to hear, even in the vaults and towers and remote chambers, the tread of feet that were hurrying on malign and secret errands. But oblivion was around him like the meshes of a sable net; and it closed in relentlessly upon his troubled mind, and drowned the alarms of his agitated senses.

When Gérard awoke at length, the tapers had burned to their sockets; and a sad and sunless daylight was filtering through the window. The staff was still in his hand; and though his senses were still dull with the strange slumber that had drugged them, he felt that he was unharmed. But peering between the curtains, he saw that Raoul was lying mortally pale and lifeless on the couch, with the air and look of an exhausted moribund.

He crossed the room, and stooped above the servant. There was a small red wound on Raoul's neck; and his pulses were slow and feeble, like those of one who has lost a great amount of blood. His very appearance was

withered and vein-drawn. And a phantom spice arose from the couch—a lingering wraith of the perfume worn by the chatelaine Agathe.

Gérard succeeded at last in arousing the man; but Raoul was very weak and drowsy. He could remember nothing of what had happened during the night; and his horror was pitiful to behold when he realized the truth.

“It will be your turn next, Messire,” he cried. “These vampires mean to hold us here amid their unhallowed necromancies till they have drained us of our last drop of blood. Their spells are like mandragora or the sleepy syrups of Cathay; and no man can keep awake in their despite.”

Gérard was trying the door; and somewhat to his surprise he found it unlocked. The departing vampire had been careless, in the lethargy of her repletion. The castle was very still; and it seemed to Gérard that the animating spirit of evil was now quiescent; that the shadowy wings of horror and malignity, the feet that had sped on baleful errands, the summoning sorcerers, the responding familiars, were all lulled in a temporary slumber.

He opened the door, he tip-toed along the deserted hall, and knocked at the portal of the chamber allotted to Fleurette and her maid. Fleurette, fully dressed, answered his knock immediately; and he caught her in his arms without a word, searching her wan face with a tender anxiety. Over her shoulder he could see the maid Angelique, who was sitting listlessly on the bed with a mark on her white neck similar to the wound that had been suffered by Raoul. He knew, even before Fleurette began to speak, that the nocturnal experiences of the demoiselle and her maid had been identical with those of himself and the man-servant.

While he tried to comfort Fleurette and reassure her, his thoughts were now busy with a rather curious problem. No one was abroad in the castle; and it was more than probable that the Sieur du Malinbois and his lady were both asleep after the nocturnal feast which they had undoubtedly enjoyed. Gérard pictured to himself the place and the fashion of their slumber; and he grew even more reflective as certain possibilities occurred to him.

“Be of good cheer, sweetheart,” he said to Fleurette. “It is in my mind that we may soon escape from this abominable mesh of enchantments. But I must leave you for a little and speak again with Raoul, whose help I shall require in a certain matter.”

He went back to his own chamber. The man-servant was sitting on the couch and was crossing himself feebly and muttering prayers with a faint,

hollow voice.

“Raoul,” said the troubadour a little sternly, “you must gather all your strength and come with me. Amid the gloomy walls that surround us, the somber ancient halls, the high towers and the heavy bastions, there is but one thing that veritably exists; and all the rest is a fabric of illusion. We must find the reality whereof I speak, and deal with it like true and valiant Christians. Come, we will now search the castle ere the lord and chatelaine shall awaken from their vampire lethargy.”

He led the way along the devious corridors with a swiftness that betokened much forethought. He had reconstructed in his mind the hoary pile of battlements and turrets as he had seen them on the previous day, and he felt that the great donjon, being the center and stronghold of the edifice, might well be the place which he sought. With the sharpened staff in his hand, with Raoul lagging bloodlessly at his heels, he passed the doors of many secret rooms, the many windows that gave on the blindness of an inner court, and came at last to the lower story of the donjon-keep.

It was a large, bare room, entirely built of stone, and illumined only by narrow slits high up in the wall, that had been designed for the use of archers. The place was very dim; but Gérard could see the glimmering outlines of an object not ordinarily to be looked for in such a situation, that arose from the middle of the floor. It was a tomb of marble; and stepping nearer, he saw that it was strangely weather-worn and was blotched by lichens of grey and yellow, such as flourish only within access of the sun. The slab that covered it was doubly broad and massive, and would require the full strength of two men to lift.

Raoul was staring stupidly at the tomb. “What now, Messire?” he queried.

“You and I, Raoul, are about to intrude upon the bedchamber of our host and hostess.”

At his direction, Raoul seized one end of the slab; and he himself took the other. With a herculean effort that strained their bones and sinews to the cracking-point, they sought to remove it; but the slab hardly stirred. At length, by grasping the same end in unison, they were able to tilt the slab; and it slid away and dropped to the floor with a thunderous crash. Within, there were two open coffins, one of which contained the Sieur Hugh du Malinbois and the other his lady Agathe. Both of them appeared to be slumbering peacefully as infants; a look of tranquil evil, of pacified

malignity, was imprinted upon their features; and their lips were dyed with a fresher scarlet than before.

Without hesitation or delay, Gérard plunged the lance-like end of his staff into the bosom of the Sieur du Malinbois. The body crumbled as if it were wrought of ashes kneaded and painted to human semblance; and a slight odor as of age-old corruption arose to the nostrils of Gérard. Then the troubadour pierced in like manner the bosom of the chatelaine. And simultaneously with her dissolution, the walls and floor of the donjon seemed to dissolve like a sullen vapor, they rolled away on every side with a shock as of unheard thunder. With a sense of indescribable vertigo and confusion Gérard and Raoul saw that the whole château had vanished like the towers and battlements of a bygone storm; that the dead lake and its rotting shores no longer offered their malefical illusions to the eye. They were standing in a forest-glade, in the full unshadowed light of the afternoon sun; and all that remained of the dismal castle was the lichen-mantled tomb that stood open beside them. Fleurette and her maid were a little distance away; and Gérard ran to the mercer’s daughter and took her in his arms. She was dazed with wonderment, like one who emerges from the night-long labyrinth of an evil dream, and finds that all is well.

“I think, sweetheart,” said Gérard, “that our next rendezvous will not be interrupted by the Sieur du Malinbois and his chatelaine.”

But Fleurette was still bemused with wonder, and could only respond to his words with a kiss.

THE GORGON

Yet it is less the horror than the grace
Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone.
—Shelley

I have no reason to expect that anyone will believe my story. If it were another's tale, probably I should not feel inclined to give it credence myself. I tell it herewith, hoping that the mere act of narration, the mere shaping of this macabre day-mare adventure into words will in some slight measure serve to relieve my mind of its execrable burden. There have been times when only a hair's-breadth has intervened betwixt myself and the seething devil-ridden world of madness; for the hideous knowledge, the horror-blackened memories which I have carried so long, were never meant to be borne by the human intellect.

A singular confession, no doubt, for one who has always been a connoisseur of horrors. The deadly, the malign and baleful things that lurk in the labyrinth of existence have held for me a fascination no less potent than unholy. I have sought them out and looked upon them as one who sees the fatal eyes of the basilisk in a mirror; or as a savant who handles corrosive poisons in his laboratory with mask and gloves. Never did they have for me the least hint of personal menace, since I viewed them with the most impersonal detachment. I have investigated many clues of the spectral, the ghastly, the bizarre, and many mazes of terror from which others would have recoiled with caution or trepidation... But now I could wish that there were one lure which I had not followed, one labyrinth which my curiosity had not explored...

More incredible than all else, perhaps, is the very fact that the thing occurred in twentieth century London. The sheer anachronism and fabulosity of the happening has made me doubt the verities of time and space; and ever since then I have been as one adrift on starless seas of confusion, or roaming through unmapped dimensions. Never have I been

quite able to re-orient myself, to be altogether sure that I have not gone astray in other centuries, in other lands than those declared by the chronology and geography of the present. I have continual need of modern crowds, of glaring lights, of laughter and clangor and tumult to reassure me; and always I am afraid that such things are only an insubstantial barrier; that behind them lies the realm of ancient horror and immemorial malignity of which I have had this one abominable glimpse. And always it seems to me that the veil will dissolve at any moment, and leave me face to face with an ultimate Fear.

There is no need to detail the events that brought me to London. It should be enough to say that I had endured a great grief, the death of the only woman whom I had loved. I traveled as others have done, to forget, to seek distraction among the novelties of foreign scenes; and I tarried long in London, because its grey and mist-enfolded vastness, its ever-varying throngs, its inexhaustible maze of thoroughfares and lanes and houses, were somehow akin to oblivion itself, and offered more of refuge from my sorrow than brighter cities had given.

I do not know how many weeks or months I lingered in London. Time meant little to me, except as an ordeal to be undergone; and I recked not of its disposal. It is hard to remember what I did or where I went; for all things were blurred in a negligible monotone.

However, my meeting with the old man is clear as any present impression—and perhaps clearer. Among the faint recollections of that period, it is etched as with some black acid. I cannot recall the name of the street on which I saw him; but it was not far from the Strand, and was full of a late afternoon crowd, beneath a heaven of high fog through which the sun had not penetrated for days or weeks.

I was strolling idly along, amid hurrying faces and figures that meant no more to me than the featureless heavens or the uniform shops. My thoughts were idle, empty, immaterial; and in those days (since I had been brought face to face with an all-too-real horror) I had relinquished my search for the darker mysteries of existence. I was without forewarning, without anticipation of anything but the daily drabness of the London streets and people. Then, from that anonymous welter of humanity, the man stood before me with the terrifying suddenness of an apparition; and I could not have sworn from which direction he had come.

He was not unusual in regard to frame or stature, apart from the erectness with which he carried himself notwithstanding his extreme and manifest age. Nor were his garments uncommon, aside from the fact that they too were excessively old, and seemed to exhale an air of greater antiquity than was warranted even by their cut and fabric. It was not these, but the man's visage, which electrified all my drowsy faculties into a fascinated and awe-struck attention. With the mortal pallor of his deeply wrinkled features, like graven ivory, with his long, curling hair and beard that were white as moon-touched vapor, with his eyes that glowed in their hollow sockets like the coals of demon fires in underworld caverns, he would have made a living model for Charon, the boatman who ferries the dead to Hades across the ebon silence of the Styx. He seemed to have stepped from an age and land of classic mythology, into the teeming turmoil of that London street; and the strange impression which he made upon me was in no wise modified by his habiliments. I paid so little attention to these that I could not remember their details afterward; though I think that their predominant color was a black that had begun to assume the green of time, and suggested the plumage of some sinister bird. My astonishment at the appearance of this singular old man was increased when I saw that no one else in the throng seemed to notice anything unusual or peculiar about him; but that all were hastening on their way with no more, at most, than the off-hand scrutiny which one would give to some aged beggar.

As for me, I had paused in my strolling, petrified with an instant fascination, an immediate terror which I could not analyze or define. The old man, too, had paused; and I saw that we were both a little withdrawn from the current of the crowd, which passed so obliviously, intent on its own fears and allurements. Evidently realizing that he had caught my attention, and perceiving the effect which he had upon me, the old man stepped nearer, smiling with a hint of some horrible malevolence, some nameless antique evil. I would have drawn back; but I was bereft of the power of movement. Standing at my very side, and searching me with the gaze of his coal-like orbs, he said to me in a low tone which could not have been overheard by any of the passers-by:

"I can see that you have a taste for horror. The dark and awful secrets of death, the equally dreadful mysteries of life, allure your interest. If you care to come with me, I will show you something which is the quintessence of

all horror. You shall gaze on the head of Medusa with its serpent locks—that very head which was severed by the sword of Perseus."

I was startled beyond measure by the strange words, uttered in accents which seemed to be heard by the mind rather than the ear. Somehow—unbelievable as this will seem—I have never been quite sure in what language he spoke: it may have been English, or it may have been Greek, which I know perfectly. The words penetrated my understanding without leaving any definite sense of their actual sound or linguistic nature. And of the voice itself, I know only that it was such as might have issued from the very lips of Charon. It was guttural, deep, malign, with an echo of profound gulfs and sunless grottoes.

Of course, my reason strove to dismiss the unaccountable feelings and ideas that had surged upon me. I told myself that it was all imagination; that the man was probably some queer sort of madman, or else was a mere trickster, or a showman who took this method of drumming up custom. But his aspect and his words were of necromantic strangeness, they seemed to promise in a superlative degree the weirdness and bizarrerie which I had sought in former time; and of which, so far, I had found little hint in London. So I answered him quite seriously:

"Indeed, I should like to see the head of Medusa. But I have always understood that it was quite fatal to gaze upon her—that those who beheld her were turned immediately into stone."

"That can be avoided," returned my interlocutor. "I will furnish you with a mirror; and if you are truly careful, and succeed in restraining your curiosity, you can see her even as Perseus did. But you will have to be very circumspect. And she is really so fascinating that few have been able to refrain from looking at her directly. Yes, you must be very cautious. He! he! he!" His laughter was more horrible than his smile; and even as he laughed, he began to pluck my sleeve, with a knotted hand that was wholly in keeping with his face, and which might well have gripped through untold ages the dark oars of the Stygian barge.

"Come with me—it is not far," he said. "And you will never have a second opportunity. I am the owner of the Head; and I do not show it to many. But I can see that you are one of the few who are fitted to appreciate it."

It is inexplicable to me that I should have accepted his invitation. The man's personality was highly abhorrent, the feeling he aroused in me was a

mixture of irresistible fear and repugnance. In all likelihood he was a lunatic—perhaps a dangerous maniac; or, if not actually mad, was nurturing some ill design, some nefarious purpose to which I would lend myself by accompanying him. It was madness to go with him, it was folly to even listen to his words; and of course his wild claim concerning the ownership of the fabled Gorgon's head was too ridiculous even for the formality of disbelief. If such a thing had ever existed, even in mythic Greece, it was certainly not to be found in present-day London, in the possession of a doubtful-looking old man. The whole affair was more preposterous than a dream... but nevertheless I went with him. I was under a spell—the spell of unknown mystery, terror, absurdity; and I could no more have refused his offer than a dead man could have refused the conveyance of Charon to the realms of Hades.

"My house is not far away," he assured me, repetitiously, as we left the crowded street and plunged into a narrow, lightless alley. Perhaps he was right; though I have no precise idea of the distance which we traversed. The lanes and thoroughfares to which he led me were such as I could hardly have believed to exist in that portion of London; and I was hopelessly confused and astray in less than a minute. The houses were foul tenements, obviously of much antiquity, interspersed with a few decaying mansions that were doubtless even older, like remnants of some earlier city. I was struck by the fact that we met no one, apart from rare and furtive stragglers who seemed to avoid us. The air had grown extremely chill, and was fraught with unwonted odors that somehow served to reinforce the sensations of coldness and utter age. Above all there hung a dead, unchanging sky, with its catafalque of oppressive and superincumbent greyness. I could not remember the streets through which we passed, though I was sure that I must have traversed this section of the city before in my wanderings; and a queer perplexity was now mingled with my feeling of dismay and bemusement. It seemed to me that the old man was leading me into a clueless maze of unreality, of deception and dubiety, where nothing was normal or familiar or legitimate.

The air darkened a little, as with the first encroachment of twilight, though it still lacked an hour of sunset-time. In this premonitory dusk, which did not deepen, but became stationary in its degree of shadow, through which all things were oddly distorted and assumed illusory proportions, we reached the house which was our destination.

It was one of the dilapidated mansions, and belonged to a period which I was unable to name despite my extensive architectural knowledge. It stood a little apart from the surrounding tenements; and more than the dimness of the premature twilight seemed to adhere to its dark walls and lampless windows. It impressed me with a sense of vastness; yet I have never been quite sure concerning its exact dimensions; and I cannot remember the details of its facade, apart from the high and heavy door at the head of a flight of steps which were strangely worn as by the tread of incalculable generations.

The door swung open without sound beneath the gnarled fingers of the old man, who motioned me to precede him. I found myself in a long hall, illumed by silver lamps of an antique type such as I had never before seen in actual use. I think there were ancient tapestries and vases; and also a mosaic floor; but the lamps are the only things which I remember clearly. They burned with white flames that were preternaturally still and cold; and I thought that they had always burned in this manner, unflickering, unreplenished, throughout a frozen eternity whose days were in no wise different from its nights.

At the end of the hall, we entered a room that was similarly litten, and whose furniture was more than reminiscent of the classic. At the opposite side was an open door, giving on a second chamber, which appeared to be crowded with statuary; for I could see the outlines of still figures that were silhouetted or partially illumined by unseen lamps.

“Be seated,” said my host, indicating a luxurious couch. “I will show you the Head in a few minutes; but haste is unseemly, when one is about to enter the very presence of Medusa.”

I obeyed; but my host remained standing. He was paler and older and more erect than ever in the chill lamplight; and I sensed a sinewy, unnatural vigor, a diabolic vitality, which was terrifyingly incongruous with his extreme age. I shivered with more than the cold of the evening air and the dank mansion. Of course, I still felt that the old man’s invitation was some sort of preposterous foolery or trickery. But the circumstances among which I found myself were unexplainable and uncanny. However, I mustered enough courage to ask a few questions.

“I am naturally surprised,” I said, “to learn that the Gorgon’s head has survived into modern times. Unless the query is impertinent, will you not tell me how it came into your possession?”

“He! he!” laughed the old man, with a loathsome rictus. “That is easily answered: I won the Head from Perseus at a game of dice, when he was in his dotage.”

“But how is that possible?” I countered. “Perseus lived several thousand years ago.”

“Yes, according to your notation. But time is not altogether the simple matter which you believe it to be. There are short-cuts between the ages, there are deviations and overlappings among the epochs, of which you have no idea... Also, I can see that you are surprised to learn that the Head is in London... But London after all is only a name; and there are shiftings, abbreviations, and interchanges of space as well as of time.”

I was amazed by his reasoning, but was forced to admit internally that it did not lack a certain logic.

“I see your point,” I conceded... “And now, of course, you will show me the Gorgon’s head?”

“In a moment. But I must warn you again to be supremely careful; and also, you must be prepared for its exceeding and overwhelming beauty no less than for its horror. The danger lies, as you may well imagine, in the former quality.”

He left the room, and soon returned, carrying in his hand a metal mirror of the same period as the lamps. The face was highly polished, with a reflecting surface well-nigh equal to that of glass; but the back and handle, with their strange carvings of Laocoön-like figures that writhed in a nameless, frozen agony, were black with the tarnish of elder centuries. It might well have been the very mirror that was employed by Perseus.

The old man placed it in my hands.

“Come,” he said, and turned to the open door through which I had seen the crowded statuary.

“Keep your eyes on the mirror,” he added, “and do not look beyond it. You will be in grave peril as soon as you enter this door.”

He preceded me, averting his face from the portal, and gazing back across his shoulder with watchful orbs of malignant fire. My own eyes intent on the mirror, I followed.

The room was unexpectedly large; and was lit by many lamps that depended from chains of wrought silver. At first sight, when I had crossed the sill, I thought that it was entirely filled with stone statues, some of them standing erect in postures of a painful rigor, and others lying on the floor in

agonized eternal contortions. Then, moving the mirror a little, I saw that there was a clear space through which one could walk, and a vaster vacant space at the opposite end of the room, surrounding a sort of altar. I could not see the whole of this altar, because the old man was now in my line of mirrored vision. But the figures beside me, at which I now dared to peep without the mirror's intermediation, were enough to absorb my interest for the moment.

They were all life-size; and they all offered a most singular medley of historical periods. Yet it would seem that all of them, by the sameness of their dark material, like a black marble, and the uniform realism and verisimilitude of their technique, might well have been sculptured by the same hand. There were boys and bearded men in the chitons of Greece, there were medieval monks, and knights in armor, there were soldiers and scholars and great ladies of the Renaissance, of the Restoration, there were people of the eighteenth, the nineteenth, the twentieth centuries. And in every muscle, in every lineament of each, was stamped an incredible suffering, an unspeakable fear. And more and more, as I studied them, a ghastly and hideous conjecture was formulated in my mind.

The old man was at my elbow, leering and peering into my face with a demoniac malice.

"You are admiring my collection of statuary," he said. "And I can see that you are impressed by its realism... But perhaps you have already guessed that the statues are identical with their models. These people are the unfortunates who were not content to see Medusa only in a mirror... I warned them... even as I have warned you... But the temptation was too much for them."

I could say nothing. My thoughts were full of terror, consternation, stupefaction. Had the old man told me the truth, did he really possess anything so impossible and mythical as the Gorgon's head? Those statues were *too* life-like, *too* veridical in all their features, in their poses that preserved a lethal fear, their faces marked with a deadly but undying torment. No human sculptor could have wrought them, could have reproduced the physiognomies and the costumes with a fidelity so consummate and so atrocious.

"Now," said my host, "having seen those who were overpowered by the beauty of Medusa, it is time for you to behold the Gorgon herself." He stepped to one side, eyeing me intently; and I saw in the metal mirror the

whole of that strange altar which his body had partially intercepted from my view. It was draped with some funereal black fabric; and lamps were burning on each side with their tall and frozen flames. In the center, on a broad paten of silver or electrum, there stood the veritable Head, even as the ancient myths have depicted it, with vipers crawling and lifting among its matted locks.

How can I delineate or even suggest that which is beyond the normal scope of human sensation or imagining? I saw in the mirror a face of unspeakably radiant pallor—a dead face from which there poured the luminous, blinding glory of celestial corruption, of superhuman bale and suffering. With lidless, intolerable eyes, with lips that were parted in an agonizing smile, she was lovely, she was dreadful beyond any vision ever vouchsafed to a mystic or an artist; and the light that emanated from her features was the light of worlds that lie too deep or too high for mortal perception. Hers was the dread that turns the marrow into ice, and the anguish that slays like a bolt of lightning.

Long did I gaze in the mirror, with the shuddering awe of one who beholds the veilless countenance of a final mystery. I was terrified, appalled—and fascinated to the core of my being; for that which I saw was the ultimate death, the ultimate beauty. I desired, yet I did not dare, to turn and lift my eyes to the reality whose mere reflection was a fatal splendor.

The old man had stepped closer; he was peering into the mirror and watching me with furtive glances, by turns.

“Is she not beautiful?” he whispered. “Could you not gaze upon her forever? And do you not long to behold her without the intermediation of the mirror, which hardly does her justice?”

I shivered at his words, and at something which I sensed behind them.

“No! no!” I cried, vehemently. “I admit all that you say. But I will not gaze any longer; and I am not mad enough to let myself be turned into a stone image.”

I thrust the mirror into his hands as I spoke, and turned to leave, impelled by an access of overmastering fright. I feared the allurement of Medusa; and I loathed that evil ancient with a loathing that was beyond limit or utterance.

The mirror clattered on the floor, as the old man dropped it and sprang upon me with a tigerish agility. He seized me with his knotted hands, and though I had sensed their sinewy vigor, I was not prepared for the

demoniacal strength with which he whirled me about and thrust me toward the altar.

“Look! look!” he shrieked, and his voice was that of a fiend who urges the damned to some further pit of perdition.

I had closed my eyes instinctively, but even through my lids I felt the searing radiance. I knew, I believed implicitly the fate which would be mine if I beheld Medusa face to face. I struggled madly but impotently against the grip that held me; and I concentrated all my will to keep my lids from lifting even by the breadth of an eyelash.

Suddenly my arms were freed, and I felt the diabolic fingers on my brow, groping swiftly to find my eyes. I knew their purpose, and knew also that the old man must have closed his own eyes to avoid the doom he had designed for me. I broke away, I turned, I grappled with him; and we fought insanely, frantically, as he strove to swing me about with one arm and tore at my shut eyelids with his other hand. Young as I am, and muscular, I was no match for him; and I swerved slowly toward the altar, with my head bent back till my neck was almost broken, in a vain effort to avoid the iron fumbling of his fingers. A moment more, and he would have conquered; but the space in which we fought was narrow, and he had now driven me back against a row of the stone figures, some of which were recumbent on the floor. He must have stumbled over one of these, for he fell suddenly with a wild, despairing cry, and released me as he went down. I heard him strike the floor with a crash that was singularly heavy—a crash as of something harder and more massive and more ponderous than a human body.

Still standing with shut eyes, I waited; but there was no sound and no movement from the old man. Bending toward the floor, I ventured to look between half-open lids. He was lying at my feet, beside the figure on which he had tripped; and I needed no second glance to recognize in all his limbs, in all his lineaments, the same rigidity and the same horror which characterized the other statues. Like them, he had been smitten instantaneously into an image of dark stone. In falling, he had seen the very face of Medusa, even as his victims had seen it. And now he would lie among them forever.

Somehow, with no backward glance, I fled from the room, I found my way from that horrible mansion, I sought to lose it from sight and memory in half-deserted, mysterious alleys that were no legitimate part of London. The chill of ancient death was upon me; it hung in the web of timeless

twilight along those irrecognizable ways, around those innominable houses; and it followed me as I went. But at last, by what miracle I know not, I came to a familiar street, where people thronged in the lamplit dusk, and the air was no longer chill except with a falling fog.

AN OFFERING TO THE MOON

I

"I believe," announced Morley, "that the roofless temples of Mu were not all devoted to solar worship, but that many of them were consecrated to the moon. And I am sure that the one we have now discovered proves my point. These hieroglyphics are lunar symbols beyond a doubt."

Thorway, his fellow-archaeologist, looked at Morley with a surprise not altogether due to the boldly authoritative pronouncement. He was struck anew by the singularity of Morley's tones and expression. The dreamy, beardless, olive features, that seemed to repeat some aboriginal Aryan type, were transfigured by a look of ecstatic absorption. Thorway himself was not incapable of enthusiasm when the occasion seemed to warrant it; but this well-nigh religious ardor was beyond his comprehension. He wondered (not for the only time) if his companion's mentality were not a trifle… eccentric.

However, he mumbled a rejoinder that was deferential even though non-committal. Morley had not only financed the expedition, but had been paying a liberal stipend to Thorway for more than two years. So Thorway could afford to be respectful, even though he was a little tired of his employer's odd and unauthorized notions, and the interminable series of sojourns they had made on Melanesian isles. From the monstrous and primordial stone images of Easter Island to the truncated pyramidal columns of the Ladrones, they had visited all the far-strewn remains which are held to prove the former existence of a great continent in the mid-Pacific. Now, on one of the lesser Marquesas, hitherto unexplored, they had located the massive walls of a large temple-like edifice. As usual, it had been difficult to find, for such places were universally feared and shunned by the natives, who believed them haunted by the immemorial dead, and could not be hired to visit them or even to reveal their whereabouts. It was

Morley who had stumbled upon the place, almost as if he were led by a subconscious instinct.

Truly, they had made a significant discovery, as even Thorway was compelled to admit. Except for a few of the colossal topmost stones, which had fallen or splintered away, the walls were in well-nigh perfect preservation. The place was surrounded by a tangle of palms and jackfruit and various tropical shrubs; but somehow none of them had taken root within the walls. Portions of a paved floor were still extant, amid centurial heaps of rubble. In the center was a huge, square block, rising four feet above the ground-level, which might well have served as an altar. It was carved with rude symbols which appeared to represent the moon in all its digits, and was curiously grooved across the top from the middle to one side with a trough that became deeper toward the edge. Like all other buildings of the sort, it was plain that the temple had never supported a roof.

“Yes, the symbols are undoubtedly lunar,” admitted Thorway.

“Also,” Morley went on, “I believe that rites of human sacrifice were performed in these temples. Oblations of blood were poured not only to the sun but to the moon.”

“The idea is maintainable, of course,” rejoined Thorway. “Human sacrifice was pretty widespread at a certain stage of evolution. It may well have been practiced by the people who built this edifice.”

Morley did not perceive the dryness and formality of his confrere’s assent. He was preoccupied with feelings and ideas, some of which could hardly have been the natural result of his investigations. Even as in visiting many others of the ancient remains, he had been troubled by a nervous agitation which was a compound of irresoluble awe and terror, of nameless, eager fascination and expectancy. Here, among these mighty walls, the feeling became stronger than it had been anywhere else; and it mounted to a pitch that was veritably distracting, and akin to the disturbed awareness that ushers in the illusions of delirium.

His idea, that the temple was a place of lunar worship, had seized him almost with the authority of an actual recollection, rather than a closely reasoned inference. Also, he was troubled by sensory impressions that bordered upon the hallucinative. Though the day was tropically warm, he was conscious of a strange chill that emanated from the walls—a chill as of bygone cycles; and it seemed to him that the narrow shadows wrought by a meridian sun were peopled with unseen faces. More than once, he was

prompted to rub his eyes, for ghostly films of color, like flashes of yellow and purple garments, came and went in the most infinitesimal fraction of time. Though the air was utterly still, he had the sense of perpetual movement all around him, of the passing to and fro of intangible throngs. It was many thousand years, in all likelihood, since human feet had trodden these pavements; but Morley could have cried aloud with the imminence of the long-dead ages. It appeared to him, in a brief glimpse, that his whole life, as well as his journeyings and explorations in the South Seas, had been but a devious return to some earlier state of being; and that the resumption of this state was now at hand. All this, however, continued to perplex him mightily: it was as if he had suffered the intrusion of an alien entity.

He heard himself speaking to Thorway, and the words were unfamiliar and remote, as if they had issued from the lips of another.

"They were a joyous and a child-like race, those people of Mu," he was saying; "but not altogether joyous, not wholly child-like. There was a dark side… and a dark worship—the cult of death and night, personified by the moon, whose white, implacable, frozen lips were appeased only by the warm blood that flowed upon her altars. They caught the blood in goblets as it ran from the stone grooves… they raised it aloft… and the goblets were swiftly drained in mid-air by the remote goddess, if the sacrifice had proven acceptable."

"But how do you know all this?" Thorway was quite amazed, no less by his companion's air than by the actual words. Morley, he thought, was less like a modern, everyday American than ever. He remembered, inconsequently, how all the natives of the various island-groups had taken to Morley with an odd friendliness, without the reserve and suspicion often accorded to other white men. They had even warned Morley against the guardian spirits of the ruins—and they did not always trouble to warn others. It was almost as if they regarded him as being in some manner akin to themselves. Thorway wondered… though he was essentially unimaginative.

"I tell you, I *know*," Morley said, as he walked up and down beside the altar. "I have seen…" his voice trailed off in a frozen whisper, and he seemed to stiffen in every limb, and stood still as with some momentary catelepsy. His face grew deadly pale, his eyes were set and staring. Then, from between rigid lips; he uttered the strange words, "*Rhalu muvasa than*," in a monotonous, hieratic tone, like a sort of invocation.

Morley could not have told what it was that he felt and saw in that moment. He was no longer his known and wonted self; and the man beside him was an unheeded stranger. But he could remember nothing afterward—not even the odd vocals he had uttered. Whatever his mental experience may have been, it was like a dream that fades instantly when one awakens. The moment passed, the extreme rigidity left his limbs and features, and he resumed his interrupted pacing.

His confrere was staring at him in astonishment, not unmingled with solicitude.

“Are you ill? The sun is pretty hot today. And one should be careful. Perhaps we had best return to the schooner.”

Morley gave a mechanical assent and followed Thorway from the ruins toward the seashore, where the schooner they had used in their voyaging was anchored in a little harbor less than a mile distant. His mind was full of confusion and darkness. He no longer felt the queer emotions that had seized him beside the altar; nor could he recall them otherwise than dimly. All the while he was trying to recollect something which lay just below the rim of memory; something very momentous, which he had forgotten long, long ago.

II

Lying in a cane couch beneath an awning on the schooner’s deck, Morley drifted back to his normal plane of consciousness. He was not unwilling to accept Thorway’s suggestion, that he had suffered a touch of sun among the ruins. His ghostly sensations, the delirium-like approach to a state of awareness which had no relation to his daily life, were now unlikely and unreal. In an effort to dismiss them altogether, he went over in his mind the whole of the investigative tour he had undertaken, and the events of the years preceding it.

He remembered his youthful luctations against poverty, his desire for that wealth and leisure which alone makes possible the pursuit of every chimera; and his slow but accelerative progress when once he had acquired a modicum of capital and had gone into business for himself as an importer of Oriental rugs. Then he recalled the chance inception of his

archaeological enthusiasm—the reading of an illustrated article which described the ancient remains on Easter Island. The insoluble strangeness of these little-known relics had thrilled him profoundly, though he knew not why; and he had resolved to visit them some day. The theory of a lost continent in the Pacific appealed to him with an almost intimate lure and imaginative charm; it became his own particular chimera, though he could not have traced to their psychal origin the feelings behind his interest. He read everything procurable on the subject; and as soon as his leisure permitted, he made a trip to Easter Island. A year later, he was able to leave his business indefinitely in the hands of an efficient manager. He hired Thorway, a professional archaeologist with much experience in Italy and Asia Minor, to accompany him; and purchasing an old schooner, manned by a Swedish crew and captain, he had set out on his long, devious voyage among the Islands.

Going over all this in his thoughts, Morley decided that it was now time to return home. He had learned all that was verifiable regarding the mysterious ruins. The study had fascinated him as nothing else in his life had ever done; but for some reason his health was beginning to suffer. Perhaps he had thrown himself too assiduously into his labors; the ruins had absorbed him too deeply. He must get away from them, must not risk a renewal of the queer, delusory sensations he had experienced. He recalled the superstitions of the natives, and wondered if there were something in them after all; if unwholesome influences were attached to those primeval stones. Did ghosts return or linger from a world that had been buried beneath the waves for unknown ages? Damn it, he had almost felt at times as if he were some sort of *revenant* himself.

He called to Thorway, who was standing beside the rail in conversation with one of the Norse sailors.

“I think we have done enough for one voyage, Thorway,” he said. “We will lift anchor in the morning and return to San Francisco.”

Thorway made little effort to conceal his relief. He did not consider the Polynesian isles a very fruitful field for research: the ruins were too old and fragmentary, the period to which they belonged was too conjectural, and did not deeply engage his interest.

“I agree,” he rejoined. “Also, if you will pardon me for saying it, I don’t think the South Sea climate is one of ideal salubriousness. I’ve noticed occasional indispositions on your part for some time past.”

Morley nodded in a weary acquiescence. It would have been impossible to tell Thorway his actual thoughts and emotions. The man was abysmally unimaginative.

He only hoped that Thorway did not think him a little mad—though, after all, it was quite immaterial.

The day wore on; and the swift, purpureal darkness of eventide was curtailed by the rising of a full moon which inundated sea and land with warm, ethereous quicksilver. At dinner, Morley was lost in a taciturn abstraction; and Thorway was discreetly voluble, but made no reference to the late archaeological find. Svensen, the captain, who ate with them, maintained a monosyllabic reticence, even when he was told of the proposed return to San Francisco. After eating, Morley excused himself and went back to the cane couch. Somewhat to his relief, he was not joined by Thorway.

Moonlight had always aroused in Morley a vague but profound emotion. Even as the ruins had done, it stirred among the shadows of his mind a million ghostly intimations; and the thrill he felt was at times not unalloyed with a cryptic awe and trepidation, akin, perhaps, to the primal fear of darkness itself.

Now, as he gazed at the tropic plenilune, he conceived the sudden and obsessing idea that the orb was somehow larger, and its light more brilliant than usual; even as they might have been in ages when the moon and earth were much younger. Then he was possessed by a troublous doubt, by an inenarrable sense of dislocation, and a dream-like vagueness which attached itself to the world about him. A wave of terror surged upon him, and he felt that he was slipping irretrievably away from all familiar things. Then the terror ebbed; for that which he had lost was far-off and incredible; and a world of circumstances long-forgot was assuming, or resuming, the tinge of familiarity.

What, he wondered, was he doing on this queer ship? It was the night of sacrifice to Rhalu, the selenic goddess; and he, Matla, was to play an essential part in the ceremony. He must reach the temple ere the moon had mounted to her zenith above the altar-stone. And it now lacked only an hour of the appointed time.

He rose and peered about with questioning eyes. The deck was deserted, for it was unnecessary to keep watch in that tranquil harbor. Svensen and the mate were doubtless drinking themselves to sleep as usual; the sailors

were playing their eternal whist and pedro; and Thorway was in his cabin, probably writing a no less eternal monograph on Etruscan tombs. It was only in the most remote and exiguous manner that Morley recollected their existence.

Somehow, he managed to recall that there was a boat which he and Thorway had used in their visits to the isle; and that this boat was moored to the schooner's side. With a tread as lithe and supple as that of a native, he was over the rail and was rowing silently shoreward. A hundred yards, or little more, and then he stood on the moon-washed sand.

Now he was climbing the palm-clustered hill above the shore, and was heading toward the temple. The air was suffused with a primal, brooding warmth, with the scent of colossal flowers and ferns not known to modern botanists. He could see them towering beside his way with their thick, archaic fronds and petals, though such things have not lifted to the moon for aeons. And mounting the crest of the hill, which had dominated the little isle and had looked down to the sea on two sides, he saw in the mellow light the far, unbounded reaches of a softly rolling plain, and sealess horizons everywhere, that glowed with the golden fires of cities. And he knew the names of these cities, and recalled the opulent life of Mu, whose prosperity had of late years been menaced by Atlantean earthquakes and volcanic upheavals. These, it was believed, were owing to the wrath of Rhalu, the goddess who controlled the planetary forces; and human blood was being poured in all her fanes to placate the mysterious deity.

Morley (or Matla) could have remembered a million things; he could have called to mind the simple but strange events of his entire pre-existence in Mu, and the lore and history of the far-flung continent. But there was little room in his consciousness for anything but the destined drama of the night. Long ago (how long he was not sure) he had been chosen among his people for an awful honor; but his heart had failed him ere the time ordained, and he had fled. Tonight, however, he would not flee. A solemn religious rapture, not untinged with fear, guided his steps toward the temple of the goddess.

As he went on, he noticed his raiment, and was puzzled. Why was he wearing these ugly and unseemly garments? He began to remove them and to cast them aside one by one. Nakedness was ordained by sacerdotal law for the role he was to play.

He heard the soft-vowelled murmur of voices about him, and saw the multi-colored robes or gleaming amber flesh of forms that flitted among the archaic plants. The priests and worshippers were also on their way to the temple.

His excitement rose, it became more mystical and more rhapsodic as he neared his destination. His being was flooded by the superstitious awe of ancient man, by the dreadful reverence due to the unknown powers of nature. He peered with a solemn trepidation at the moon as it rose higher in the heavens, and saw in its rounded orb the features of a divinity both benign and malevolent.

Now he beheld the temple, looming whitely above the tops of titan fronds. The walls were no longer ruinous, their fallen blocks were wholly restored. His visit to the place with Thorway was dim as a fever fantasy; but other visits during his life as Matla, and ceremonials of the priests of Rhalu which he had once beheld, were clear and immediate in his memory. He knew the faces he would see, and the ritual wherein he would participate. He thought mostly in pictures; but the words of a strange vocabulary were ready for his recollection; and phrases drifted through his mind with unconscious ease; phrases that would have seemed unintelligible gibberish an hour before.

Matla was aware of the concentrated gaze of several hundred eyes as he entered the great, roofless fane. The place was thronged with people, whose round features were of a pre-Aryan type; and many of the faces were familiar to him. But at that moment all of them were parcel of a mystic horror, and were awesome and obscure as the night. Nothing was clear before him, save an opening in the throng, which led to the altar-stone around which the priests of Rhalu were gathered, and wherein Rhalu herself looked down in relentless, icy splendor from an almost vertical elevation.

He went forward with firm steps. The priests, who were clad in lunar purple and yellow, received him in an impassive silence. Counting them, he found that there were only six instead of the usual seven. One there was among them who carried a large, shallow goblet of silver; but the seventh, whose hand would lift a long and curving knife of some copperish metal, had not yet arrived.

Thorway had found it curiously hard to apply himself to the half-written monograph on Etruscan tombs. An obscure and exasperating restlessness

finally impelled him to abandon his wooing of the reluctant muse of archaeology. In a state of steadily mounting irritation, wishing that the bothersome and unprofitable voyage were over, he went on deck.

The moonlight dazzled him with its preternatural brilliance, and he did not perceive for a few moments that the cane couch was empty. When he saw that Morley was gone, he experienced a peculiar mixture of alarm and irritation. He felt sure that Morley had not returned to his cabin. Stepping to the schooner's shoreward side, he noted with little surprise the absence of the moored boat. Morley must have gone ashore for a moonlight visit to the ruined temple; and Thorway frowned heavily at this new presumptive evidence of his employer's eccentricity and aberration. An unwonted sense of responsibility, deep and solemn, stirred within him. He seemed to hear an inward injunction, a strange half-familiar voice, bidding him to take care of Morley. This unhealthy and exorbitant interest in a more than problematic past should be discouraged or at least supervised.

Very quickly, he made up his mind as to what he should do. Going below, he called two of the Swedish sailors from their game of pedro and had them row him ashore in the ship's dinghy. As they neared the beach the boat used by Morley was plainly visible in the plumy shadow of a clump of seaward-leaning palms.

Thorway, without offering any explanation of his purpose in going ashore, told the sailors to return to the ship. Then, following the well-worn trail toward the temple, he mounted the island-slope.

Step by step, as he went on, he became aware of a strange difference in the vegetation. What were these monstrous ferns and primordial-looking flowers about him? Surely it was some weird trick of the moonlight, distorting the familiar palms and shrubs. He had seen nothing of the sort in his daytime visits, and such forms were impossible, anyway. Then, by degrees, he was beset with terrible doubt and bewilderment. There came to him the ineffably horrifying sensation of passing beyond his proper self, beyond all that he knew as legitimate and verifiable. Fantastic, unspeakable thoughts, alien, abnormal impulses, thronged upon him from the sorcerous glare of the effulgent moon. He shuddered at repellent but insistent memories that were not his own, at the ghastly compulsion of an unbelievable command. What on earth was possessing him? Was he going mad like Morley? The moon-bright isle was like some bottomless abyss of nightmare fantasy, into which he sank with nightmare terror.

He sought to recover his hard, materialistic sanity, his belief in the safe literality of things. Then, suddenly and without surprise, he was no longer Thorway.

He knew the real purpose for which he had come ashore—the solemn rite in which he was to play an awful but necessary part. The ordained hour was near—the worshippers, the sacrifice and the six fellow-priests awaited his coming in the immemorial fane of Rhalu.

Unassisted by any of the priests, Matla had stretched himself on the cold altar. How long he lay there, waiting, he could not tell. But at last, by the rustling stir and murmur of the throng, he knew that the seventh priest had arrived.

All fear had left him, as if he were already beyond the pain and suffering of earth. But he knew with a precision well-nigh real as physical sight and sensation the use which would be made of the copperish knife and the silver goblet.

He lay gazing at the wan heavens, and saw dimly, with far-focused eyes, the leaning face of the seventh priest. The face was doubly familiar… but he had forgotten something. He did not try to remember. Already it seemed to him that the white moon was drawing nearer, was stooping from her celestial station to quaff the awaited sacrifice. Her light blinded him with unearthly fulgor; but he saw dimly the flash of the falling knife ere it entered his heart. There was an instant of tearing pain that plunged on and on through his body, as if its tissues were a deep abyss. Then a sudden darkness took the heavens and blotted out the face of Rhalu; and all things, even pain, were erased for Matla by the black mist of an eternal nothing.

III

In the morning, Svensen and his sailors waited very patiently for the return of Morley and Thorway from the island. When afternoon came and the two were still absent, Svensen decided that it was time to investigate.

He had received orders to lift anchor for San Francisco that day; but he could not very well depart without Thorway and Morley.

With one of the crew, he rowed ashore and climbed the hill to the ruins. The roofless temple was empty, save for the plants that had taken root in the crevices of its pavement. Svensen and the sailor, looking about for the archaeologists, were horrified from their stolidity by the stains of newly dried blood that lined the great groove in the altar-block to its edge.

They summoned the remainder of the crew. A daylong search of the little island, however, was without result. The natives knew nothing of the whereabouts of Morley and Thorway, and were queerly reticent even in avowing their ignorance. There was no place where the two men could have hidden themselves, granting that they had any reason for a procedure so peculiar. Svensen and his men gave it up. If they had been imaginative, it might have seemed to them that the archaeologists had vanished bodily into the past.

THE KISS OF ZORAIDA

With one backward look at the bowery suburbs of Damascus, and the street that was peopled only by the long, faint shadows of a crescent moon, Selim dropped from the high wall among the leafing almonds and flowering lilacs of Abdur Ali's garden. The night was almost sultry; and the air was steeped with a distilled languor of voluptuous perfume. Even if he had been in some other garden, in another city, Selim could not have breathed that perfume without thinking of Zoraida, the young wife of Abdur Ali. Evening after evening, for the past fortnight, during her lord and master's absence, she had met him among the lilacs; till he had grown to associate the very odor of her hair and the savor of her lips with their fragrance.

The garden was silent, except for a silver-lisping fountain; and no leaf or petal stirred in the balmy stillness. Abdur Ali had gone to Aleppo on urgent business and was not expected back for several more days; so the slightly tepid thrill of anticipation which Selim felt was untinged by any thought of danger. The whole affair, even from the beginning, had been as safe as that sort of thing could possibly be: Zoraida was Abdur Ali's only wife, so there were no jealous women who might tattle to their common lord; and the servants and eunuchs of the household, like Zoraida herself, hated the severe and elderly jewel-merchant. It had been unnecessary even to bribe them into complaisance. Everything and everyone had helped to facilitate the amour. In fact, it was all too easy; and Selim was beginning to weary a little of this heavy-scented happiness and the over-sweet affection of Zoraida. Perhaps he would not come again after tonight, or tomorrow night…. There were other women, no less fair than the jeweler's wife, whom he had not kissed so often… or had not kissed at all.

He stepped forward among the flower-burdened bushes. Was there a figure standing in the shadow, near the fountain? The figure was dim, and darkly muffled, but it must be Zoraida. She had never failed to meet him there, she was ever the first at their rendezvous. Sometimes she had taken him into the luxurious harem; and sometimes, on warm evenings like this,

they had spent their long hours of passion beneath the stars, amid the lilacs and almonds.

As Selim approached, he wondered why she did not rush to meet him, as was her wont. Perhaps she had not yet seen him. He called softly: “Zoraida!”

The waiting figure emerged from the shadow. It was not Zoraida, but Abdur Ali. The faint moon-rays glinted on the dull iron barrel and bright silver frettings of a heavy pistol which the old merchant held in his hand.

“You wish to see Zoraida?” The tone was harsh, metallically bitter.

Selim, to say the least, was taken aback. It was all too plain that his affair with Zoraida had been discovered, and that Abdur Ali had returned from Aleppo before the appointed time to catch him in a trap. The predicament was more than disagreeable, for a young man who had thought to spend the evening with a much-enamored mistress. And Abdur Ali’s direct query was disconcerting. Selim was unable to think of an apt or judicious answer.

“Come, thou shalt see her.” Selim felt the jealous fury, but not the savage irony, that underlay the words. He was full of unpleasant premonitions, most of which concerned himself rather than Zoraida. He knew that he could not look for mercy from this austere and terrible old man; and the probabilities before him were such as to preclude more than a passing thought of what might have befallen, or would befall, Zoraida. Selim was something of an egoist; and he would hardly have claimed (except for the ear of Zoraida) that he was deeply in love. His self-solicitude, under the circumstances, was perhaps to be expected, even if not wholly to be admired.

Abdur Ali had covered Selim with the pistol. The young man realized uncomfortably that he himself was unarmed, except for his yataghan. Even as he was remembering this, two more figures came forward from amid the lilac-shadows. They were the eunuchs, Cassim and Mustafa, who guarded Abdur Ali’s harem, and whom the lovers had believed friendly to their intrigue. Each of the giant blacks was armed with a drawn scimitar. Mustafa stationed himself at Selim’s right hand and Cassim at his left. He could see the whites of their eyes as they watched him with impassable vigilance.

“Now,” said Abdur Ali, “you are about to enjoy the singular privilege of being admitted to my harem. This privilege, I believe, you have arrogated to yourself on certain former occasions, and without my knowledge. Tonight I

shall grant it myself; though I doubt if there are many who would follow my example. Come: Zoraida is waiting for you, and you must not disappoint her, nor delay any longer. You are later than usual at the rendezvous, as I happen to know."

With the blacks beside him, with Abdur Ali and the levelled pistol in his rear, Selim traversed the dim garden and entered the courtyard of the jewel-merchant's house. It was like a journey in some evil dream; and nothing appeared wholly real to the young man. Even when he stood in the harem interior, by the soft light of Saracenic lamps of wrought brass, and saw the familiar divans with their deep-hued cushions and coverings, the rare Turkoman and Persian rugs, the taborets of Indian ebony freaked with precious metals and mother-of-pearl, he could not dispel his feeling of strange dubiety.

In his terror and bewilderment, amid the rich furnishings and somber splendor of the room, he did not see Zoraida for a moment. Abdur Ali perceived his confusion and pointed to one of the couches.

"Hast thou no greeting for Zoraida?" The low tone was indescribably sardonic and ferocious.

Zoraida, wearing the scanty harem costume of bright silks in which she was wont to receive her lover, was lying on the sullen crimson fabrics of the divan. She was very still, and seemed to be asleep. Her face was whiter than usual, though she had always been a little pale; and the soft, child-like features, with their hint of luxurious roundness, wore a vaguely troubled expression, with a touch of bitterness about the mouth. Selim approached her; but she did not stir.

"Speak to her," snarled the old man. His eyes burned like two spots of slowly eating fire in the brown and crumpled parchment of his face.

Selim was unable to utter a word. He had begun to surmise the truth; and the situation overwhelmed him with a horrible despair.

"What? Thou hast no greeting for one who loved thee so dearly and so unwisely?" The words were like the dripping of some corrosive acid.

"What hast thou done to her?" said Selim after awhile. He could not look at Zoraida any longer; nor could he lift his eyes to meet those of Abdur Ali.

"What have I done? I have dealt with her very gently, all things considered. As thou seest, I have not marred in any wise the perfection of her beauty—there is no wound, and not even the mark of a blow, on her

white body. I did not play the butcher and slay her with the sword, as others would have done. Was I not more than generous…to leave her thus…for thee? Her lips and bosom are still warm—though doubtless you will not find them so responsive as usual."

Selim was not a coward, as men go; yet he gave an involuntary shudder.

"But… thou hast not told me."

"It was a rare and precious poison, which slays immediately and with little pain. A drop of it would have been enough—or even so much as still remains upon her lips. She drank it of her own choice. I was merciful to her… as I shall be to thee."

"I am at thy disposal," said Selim with all the hardihood he could muster. "Of course, it would be useless to deny anything."

The jewel-dealer's face became a mask of malignity, like that of some avenging fiend.

"You need not confess—I know everything—I knew it even from the first. My trip to Aleppo was only a blind so that I could make sure. I was here in Damascus, watching, when you thought me leagues and leagues away. It is not for you to affirm or deny your guilt—your place is only to obey and do my will. My eunuchs know their master, and they will slice thee limb from limb and member from member if I give the word."

Selim looked at the two Negroes. They returned his gaze with impassive eyes that were utterly devoid of all interest, either friendly or unfriendly. The light ran without a quiver along their gleaming muscles and upon their glittering swords.

"What is thy will?"

"Merely that you should prove yourself a good and faithful lover to Zoraida. In bringing you here tonight, I have performed an act of the most remarkable abnegation, as you must know. Other husbands would have slain you like a jackal when you entered the garden… However, I am capable of still further abnegation."

"But, I do not understand. What would you have me do?"

"I have already told you… Zoraida was untrue to me for your sake; but it is in my mind that you shall never be false to her, as one of your brood is certain to be sooner or later, if you are permitted to go hence alive."

"Dost thou mean to kill me?"

"I have no intention of slaying thee myself. Thy death will come from another source."

Selim looked again at the armed eunuchs.

“No, it will not be that—unless you prefer it.”

“In Allah’s name, what dost thou mean, then?” The tawny brown of Selim’s face had turned ashen with the horror of suspense.

“Thy death will be one which any true lover would envy,” said Abdur Ali.

Selim was powerless to ask another question. His nerves were beginning to crumble under the ordeal. The dead woman on the couch, the malevolent old man with his baleful half-hints and his obvious implacability, the muscular Negroes who would hew a man into collops at their master’s word—all were enough to break down the courage of hardier men than he.

He became aware that Abdur Ali was speaking once more.

“I have brought thee to thy mistress. But it would seem that thou art not a very ardent lover. Have you nothing to say to her? Surely there is much to be said, under the circumstances?”

“In the name of the Prophet, cease thy mockery.”

Abdur Ali did not seem to hear the tortured cry.

“It is true, of course, that she could not reply even if thou shouldst speak to her. But her lips are as fair as ever—even if they are growing a little cold with thy unlover-like delay. Hast thou no kiss to lay upon them, in memory of all the other kisses they have taken—and given ?”

Selim was again speechless.

“Come—you are not very demonstrative, for one who was so amorous only yesternight.”

“But… you said there was a poison which—”

“Yes, and I told thee the truth. Even the touch of thy lips to hers, where a trace of the poison lingers, will be enough to cause thy death.” There was an awful gloating in Abdur Ali’s voice.

Selim shivered and looked again at Zoraida. Aside from her utter stillness and pallor, and the faintly bitter expression about the mouth, she differed in no apparent wise from the woman who had lain so often in his arms. Yet the very knowledge that she was dead was enough to make her seem unspeakably strange and even repulsive to Selim. It was hard to associate this still, marmoreal being with the affectionate mistress who had always welcomed him with eager smiles and caresses.

“Truly, you are a fortunate young man,” said Abdur Ali. “She loved you to the end… and you will die from her last kiss. Few men are so lucky.”

“Is there no other way?” Selim’s question was little louder than a whisper.

“There is none. And you delay too long.” Abdur Ali made a sign to the Negroes, who stepped closer to Selim, lifting their swords in the lamplight.

“Unless thou dost my bidding, thy hands will be sliced off at the wrists, to begin with,” the jeweler went on. “The next blows will sever a small portion of each forearm. Then a little temporary attention will be given to other parts of your body, before returning to the arms. And I leave the rest to your conjecture. I am sure thou wilt prefer the other death, which will be quick and almost painless, apart from its other advantages.”

Selim stooped above the couch where Zoraida lay. Terror—the abject terror of death—was his one emotion. He had wholly forgotten his love for Zoraida, had forgotten her kisses and endearments. He feared the strange, pale woman before him as much as he had once desired her.

“Make haste.” The voice of Abdur Ali was steely as the lifted scimitars.

Selim bent over and kissed Zoraida on the mouth. Her lips were not entirely cold, but there was a queer, bitter taste. Of course, it must the poison. The thought was hardly formulated when a searing agony seemed to run through all his veins. He could no longer see Zoraida, in the blinding flames that appeared before him and filled the room like ever-widening suns; and he did not know that he had fallen forward on the couch across her body. Then the flames began to shrink with an awful swiftness, and went out in a swirl of soft gloom. Selim felt that he was sinking into a great gulf, and that someone (whose name he could not remember) was sinking beside him. Then, all at once, he was alone… and was losing even the sense of solitude… till there was nothing anywhere but darkness and oblivion.

THE FACE BY THE RIVER

It was after the commission of the deed, and during his nation-wide flight from its legal consequences, that Edgar Sylen began to develop an aversion for rivers, and a dread of women's faces. It had never occurred to him before that so many rivers resembled the Sacramento; nor had he imagined that anything sinister could attach itself to the leaning willows and alders along their banks. Now, wherever he went, by some macabre coincidence he was always coming at afterglow of a sullen sunset to the edge of tree-fringed running waters, from which he would recoil with guilty fright and repulsion. Also, he saw resemblances to the dead woman everywhere, in the girls that he passed on the streets of unfamiliar towns and cities. He had never thought, even before he began to see her with the altered vision of enamorment, that Elise belonged to a frequently encountered type. But now, with observational powers that were morbidly sharpened in this one regard, he found that her short oval face with its pallor untouched by rouge, her high, faintly pencilled brows above eyes of deep violet-grey, her full, petulant mouth, or her slender but well-curved figure, were seemingly to be met on every pavement and in every train, street-car, shop, restaurant and hotel.

Sylen was not aware of any consuming remorse for his act, in the usual sense of the word. But certainly he had reason to regret it as a piece of overwhelming and irremediable folly, into which he had been driven by the goading of some devilish fatality. Elise had been his stenographer: the propinquity of business association had drawn them into a more intimate relationship; and he had loved her for awhile, till she became too exacting, too exorbitant in her demands. He was not brutal or cold-blooded, he had never dreamed of killing her at any time; and even when he had tired of her, and even in that last walk at twilight by the river, when she had threatened with bitter, hysterical reproaches to tell his wife of their affair, he had not really wanted to harm the girl. His feeling had been a mixture of alarm at the menace to his domestic security, and a sudden, mad desire to still the

intolerable, shrewish clamor of her tedious voice. He hardly knew that he had gripped her by the throat, that he was choking her with ferocious fingers. Such an action was totally foreign to his own conception of himself; and when he realized what he was doing, he had loosed her and pushed her away from him. All he could see at that moment was her frightened face, her throat with the visible marks of his fingers—white as an apparition in the dusk, and appallingly distinct in every detail. He had forgotten that they were so close to the river's edge, had forgotten that the water was very deep below the bank at that particular place. These things he had remembered when he heard the splash of her fall; and he had also remembered, with a numb sense of terror, that neither he nor Elise could swim. Perhaps she had lost consciousness when she fell: for she had sunk immediately, and had not risen to the surface again. The whole scene was dim and confused in Sylen's mind, apart from that final glimpse of her face on the shore. His flight from California was vague to him also; and his first clear memory was that of a newspaper he had seen the next morning in a neighboring state, with pictures of Elise and himself above a lurid conjectural description of the crime. The horror of those headlines, in which he seemed to meet the accusing eyes of a vast multitude of people, was branded ineffaceably upon his brain. Henceforth it was a perpetual miracle to him that he could manage to evade arrest. Like most criminals, he felt that the world was pre-occupied with himself and his crime; and did not realize its manifold oblivion, its absorption in multiform pursuits and interests.

He was stunned by the consequences of the deed, by the break that it entailed with his whole past life, with everything and everyone he had known. His flourishing business, the respectable place he had won in his community, his wife and two children—all were lost beyond recovery through something which, as he had soon persuaded himself, was no more than a fatal accident. The idea of himself as a fugitive from justice, as a vulgar murderer in the eyes of the world, was alien and confusing to the last degree. He retained enough wit, however, to disguise himself with a touch of subtlety, and to double upon his trail in a manner that baffled the police. He bought some second-hand clothing, of the type that would be worn by a laboring-man, and disposed of his neat tailor-made suit by leaving it at night beneath a pile of old lumber. He allowed his beard to grow, and purchased a pair of heavy-rimmed spectacles. These simple measures

transformed him from a well-to-do realtor to a socialistic carpenter out of work. In trying to conceal his furtiveness, his perennial fear of observation, he acquired a rough and fierce air that was quite compatible with the role of a discontented workman.

Sylen was well supplied with money. Even when prolonged security had diminished his fear of arrest, he did not dare to linger in any place. A queer, morbid restlessness impelled him to go on. And always, it seemed to him, there was a willow-bordered river to remind him of the scene of his act; and always there were women who resembled Elise. The mere sight of a stream, or a girl with the fancied likeness, even in one feature or detail of costume, would send him toward the nearest railroad station. He tried not to think of Elise, and sometimes succeeded; but any chance resemblance was too much for his nerves. The damnable frequency of such resemblances became one of his chief worries. He could not account for them as part of the natural order of things.

Often, with apparitional suddenness and irrelevance, he would remember Elise as he had seen her in that last moment, when her face had emerged from the twilight with such preternatural pallor and vividness. Even when he managed to forget her, there was a sense of some troublous haunting in the background of his mind. He developed also a physical feeling that he was not alone—that an unseen presence accompanied him wherever he went. But at first he did not connect this feeling with Elise, nor did he associate with her the earliest beginnings of the actual visual hallucination from which he eventually came to suffer.

Sylen was well aware of his growing nervousness, and made desultory efforts to overcome it. He knew, or had been told, that such a condition might lead to insanity. He tried by means of auto-suggestion to dismiss the irrational fears and impressions that dogged him in his wanderings. He felt that he was succeeding to some extent, that his haunting obsessions were growing fainter. Then, simultaneously with this, he began to think that there was something wrong with his eye-sight. He was troubled by a small, blurred image, somewhat to one side in his field of vision—an image that he could not seize or define, and which followed him everywhere, maintaining always the same position. He could even see it when he lay awake in the darkness—as if it were possessed of a pale luminosity. It occurred to him that the glasses he wore were injuring his eyes; and forthwith discarded them; but the unaccountable blurring still persisted. For

some reason, other than his natural fear of optical disease, it made him horribly uneasy. But, for the time being, he did not think so often of Elise. Also, he was not quite so afraid of rivers and women as he had formerly been.

One evening, in a strange city far from the state he had left, Sylen deliberately went for a walk by the shore of a tree-fringed river. He wanted to reassure himself, wanted to feel that he was mastering his old terrors.

It was still twilight when he neared the water—that deceptive half light which alters the position and proportion of objects in a manner so illusory. All at once, Sylen became aware than the strange blur in his field of vision was now directly before him instead of at one side. Also, the blur had defined itself to a human face, seen as in some diminished perspective, at an interval of vague distance. But the face was unnaturally clear in every feature, and was outlined in luminous pallor against the dark flowing of the stream. It was the face of Elise, even as Edgar Sylen had last seen her…

Sylen was unable afterward to recollect the circumstances of his flight from the apparition. Any real consciousness of his actions was drowned for awhile by a primordial tide of unreasoning terror. When he came to himself, trembling like an ague patient, he was sitting in the lighted smoker of a moving train. He could not even remember where he was going, till he looked at the ticket which he held in his hand. He no longer saw the face of Elise; but, even as before, there was a blurred image in his field of vision—perhaps not so far to one side as it had been as first.

For several days, it was only at twilight that the image became definite. But all the time it was moving nearer to the center of his vision. Then he saw the face at various hours during the day, and also at night. It was always pale and luminous, it was detached and disembodied, like a face that has been superimposed on a photographic plate. But the clearness of detail was abnormal; even at the remote perspective which it maintained for many days, he could see the horror-widened eyes, the parted lips, and the livid marks of his fingers on the white throat. It appeared to him on the streets, in trains, in restaurants and hotel-lobbies; it came between him and the visages of people when he passed; he saw it in the foliage of trees, and among the faces of actors in the plays or films to which he had gone in the hope of temporary distraction. But at first the haunting was not continual; the face came and went at varying intervals, and left him always with the same

paralyzing horror, which would wear off in some slight degree before the next appearance.

Sylen had never been a believer in the supernatural. But he knew a little about brain diseases and morbid hallucinations. His fear of the dead woman was more than doubled by a fear of madness. He felt that he was unquestionably headed for some sort of lunacy. At first he tried to reason with himself in the interludes of his panic. Among other things, he went to a public library with the idea of consulting various medical volumes on brain-pathology. He did not repeat his visit: for while he was reading one of the pages in a work of this type, the letters suddenly began to blur and fade; and it seemed to him that he was looking through and beyond them into a shadowy gulf, in which swam the face of Elise.

From that time onward, the appearances of the face were more frequent day by day; till the hour came when he saw it continually. For awhile, he drank soddenly; he sought the anodyne of drugs; but without losing the specter even in the ultimate delirium of his intoxication. Then his mind succumbed to a fear that was utterly beyond reason; and he dwelt henceward in a hell of fantasmal and superstitious terrors. The thing was no longer a mere hallucination, it had come back from the cryptic realms of the dead, from a gulf beyond mortal perception, to freeze his blood and his brain with ghastly intimations of all that is hidden in the depths of death. Perhaps his mind had already given way; for he soon lost the fear of madness in a greater and more abysmal fear of the woman herself, and the unknown world into which he had precipitated her by his crime. In his heedlessness of anything but the apparition, he would stumble against people on the street; and he was often in danger from passing vehicles. But in some miraculous manner, like a somnambulist, he would avoid them without ever knowing his peril or his escape.

The face was nearer now. It sat opposite him at every table, it moved before him along the pavements, it stood at the feet of his bed through the night-time. It was always the same, with widely staring eyes, and lips that were parted in an eternal gasp. Sylen was no longer conscious of what he did or where he went. It was some automatic portion of his brain which enabled him to continue the daily movements and actions of life. He was wholly obsessed by the image of Elise, he lived in a kind of mental catalepsy. Held by a dreadful hypnosis, he watched all day in open sun or rain or shadowy rooms, the thing that was stamped upon his vision; and he

watched it during the night, by lamplight or in utter darkness. He slept very little, and when he did sleep, Elise hovered before him in the vistas of his dreams. It was mostly at night, lying awake, that he became aware of the abyss that lay behind and beneath her face—an abyss in which he could see the slow sinking of dim, macabre forms, of corpse-like or skeleton-like things that appeared always to fall and decompose in unfathomable gloom. But the face itself never sank into the abyss.

Sylen knew nothing of time. The moment in which he had last seen Elise was re-lived by him in a virtual eternity through the perpetuation of her visual image. And he knew nothing of the cities through which he passed, nor the route by which he returned on a latter evening, still oblivious of his whereabouts, to the city and the river-side of his crime. He knew only that the face was leading him somewhere, to an end which his palsied faculties could not even imagine.

He stared about him with sightless eyes. Here, in the dusk, beneath the unheeded willows, beside the unrecognized flowing of the Sacramento, the face drew nearer still. The phantom throat was within arms' length for the first time—even as when he had loosed his fingers from the living throat of Elise and had pushed her back toward the water in a sullen twilight many months before.

Sylen did not perceive that he was standing close to the river-brink. He saw only the features of Elise, knew only that her throat was within seeming reach of his fingers once more. It was a mad impulse of frantic fear, of ultimate desperation, which made him clutch at the white phantom, with its changeless eyes and mouth, and the livid, never-fading marks below its chin…. He still saw the face for a little while, when he sank beneath the water. It seemed to swim on a fathomless abyss, where human bones and cadavers were slowly drowning in a darkness that was like the deliquescence of the world and of all past years and eras. The face was very close to him as he went down… and then it began to recede in a lessening perspective… and then, suddenly, he saw it no longer.

THE GHOUL

During the reign of the Caliph Vathek, a young man of good repute and family, named Noureddin Hassan, was haled before the Cadi Ahmed ben Becar at Bussorah. Now Noureddin was a comely youth, of open mind and gentle mien; and great was the astonishment of the Cadi and of all others present when they heard the charges that were preferred against him. He was accused of having slain seven people, one by one, on seven successive nights, and of having left the corpses in a cemetery near Bussorah, where they were found lying afterwards with their bodies and members devoured in a fearsome manner, as if by jackals. Of the people he was said to have slain, three were women, two were traveling merchants, one was a mendicant, and one a grave-digger.

Ahmed ben Becar was filled with the learning and wisdom of honorable years, and withal was possessed of much perspicacity. But he was deeply perplexed by the strangeness and atrocity of these crimes and by the mild demeanor and well-bred aspect of Noureddin Hassan, which he could in no wise reconcile with them. He heard in silence the testimony of witnesses who had seen Noureddin bearing on his shoulders the body of a woman at yester-eve in the cemetery; and others who on several occasions had observed him coming from the neighborhood at unseemly hours when only thieves and murderers would be abroad. Then, have considered all these, he questioned the youth closely.

"Noureddin Hassan," he said, "thou has been charged with crimes of exceeding foulness, which thy bearing and thy lineaments belie. Is there haply an explanation of these things, by which thou canst wholly clear thyself, or in some measure mitigate the heinousness of thy deeds, if so it be that thou art guilty? I adjure thee to tell me the truth in this matter."

Now Noureddin Hassan arose before the Cadi; and the heaviness of extreme shame and sorrow was visible on his countenance.

"Alas, O Cadi," he replied, "for the charges that have been brought against me are indeed true. It was I and none other, who slew these people;

nor can I offer an extenuation of my act."

The Cadi was sorely grieved and astonished when he heard this answer.

"I must perforce believe thee," he said sternly. "But thou hast confessed a thing which will make thy name henceforward an abomination in the ears and mouths of men. I command thee to tell me why these crimes were committed, and what offense these persons had given thee, or what injury they had done thee; or if perchance thou slewest them for gain, like a common robber."

"There was neither offense given nor injury wrought by any of them against me," replied Noureddin. "And I did not kill them for their money or belongings or apparel, since I had no need of such things, and, aside from that, have always been an honest man."

"Then," cried Ahmed ben Becar, greatly puzzled, "what was thy reason, if it was none of these?"

Now the face of Noureddin Hassan grew heavier still with sorrow; and he bowed his head in a shamefaced manner that bespoke the utterness of profound remorse. And standing thus before the Cadi, he told this story:

The reversals of fortune, O Cadi, are swift and grievous, and beyond the foreknowing or advertence of man. Alas! for less than a fortnight agone I was the happiest and most guiltless of mortals, with no thought of wrong-doing toward anyone. I was wedded to Amina, the daughter of the jewel-merchant Aboul Cogia; and I loved her deeply and was much beloved by her in turn; and moreover we were at this time anticipating the birth of our first child. I had inherited from my father a rich estate and many slaves; the cares of life were light upon my shoulders; and I had, it would seem, every reason to count myself among those whom Allah has blest with an earthly foretaste of Heaven.

Judge, then, the excessive nature of my grief when Amina died in the same hour when she was to have been delivered. From that time, in the dire extremity of my lamentation, I was as one bereft of light and knowledge; I was deaf to all those who sought to condole with me, and blind to their friendly offices.

After the burial of Amina my sorrow became a veritable madness, and I wandered by night to her grave in the cemetery near Bussorah and flung myself prostrate before the newly lettered tombstone, on the earth that had been digged that very day. My senses deserted me, and I knew not how long

I remained on the damp clay beneath the cypresses, while the horn of a decrescent moon arose in the heavens.

Then, in my stupor of abandonment, I heard a terrible voice that bade me rise from the ground on which I was lying. And lifting my head a little, I saw a hideous demon of gigantic frame and stature, with eyes of scarlet fire beneath brows that were coarse as tangled rootlets, and fangs that overhung a cavernous mouth, and earth-black nails that were longer and sharper than those of the hyena. And the demon said to me:

"I am a ghoul, and it is my office to devour the bodies of the dead. I have now come to claim the corpse that was interred today beneath the soil on which thou art lying in a fashion so unmannerly. Begone, for I have fasted since yester-night, and I am much anhungered."

Now, at the sight of this demon, and the sound of his dreadful voice, and the still more dreadful meaning of his words, I was like to have swooned with terror on the cold clay. But I recovered myself in a manner, and besought him, saying:

"Spare this grave, I implore thee; for she who lies buried therein is dearer to me than any living mortal; and I would not that her fair body should be the provender of an unclean demon such as thou."

At this the ghoul was angered, and I thought that he would have done me some bodily violence. But again I besought him, swearing by Allah and Mohammed with many solemn oaths that I would grant him anything procurable and would do for him any favor that lay in the power of man if he would leave undespoiled the new-made grave of Amina. And the ghoul was somewhat mollified, and he said:

"If thou wilt indeed perform for me a certain service, I shall do as thou askest." And I replied:

"There is no service, whatsoever its nature, that I will not do for thee in this connection, and I pray thee to name thy desire."

Then the ghoul said: "It is this, that thou shalt bring me each night, for eight successive nights, the body of one whom thou hast slain with thine own hand. Do this, and I shall neither devour no dig the body that lies interred hereunder."

Now was I seized by utter horror and despair, since I had bound myself in all honor to grant the ghoul his hideous requirement. And I begged him to change the terms of the stipulation, saying to him:

“Is it needful to thee, O eater of corpses, that the bodies should be those of people whom I myself have slain?”

And the ghoul said: “Yea, for all others would be the natural provender of myself or of my kin in any event. I adjure thee by the promise thou hast given to meet me here tomorrow night, when darkness has wholly fallen or as soon thereafter as thou are able, bringing the first of the eight bodies.”

So saying, he strode off among the cypresses, and began to dig in another newly made grave at a little distance from that of Amina.

I left the graveyard in even direr anguish than when I had come, thinking of that which I must do in fulfillment of my sworn promise, to preserve the body of Amina from the demon. I know not how I survived the ensuing day, torn as I was between sorrow for the dead and my horror of the coming night with its repugnant duty.

When darkness had descended, I went forth by stealth to a lonely road near the cemetery; and waiting there amid the low-grown branches of the trees, I slew the first passer with a sword and carried his body to the spot appointed by the ghoul. And each night thereafter, for six more nights, I returned to the same vicinity and repeated this deed, slaying always the very first who came, whether man or woman, or merchant or beggar or grave-digger. And the ghoul awaited me on each occasion, and would begin to devour his provender in my presence, with small thanks and scant ceremony. Seven persons did I slay in all, till only one was wanting to complete the agreed number; and the person I slew yesternight was a woman, even as the witnesses have testified. All this I did with utmost repugnance and regret, and sustained only by the remembrance of my plighted word and the fate which would befall the corpse of Amina if I should break the bond.

This, O Cadi, is all my story. Alas! for these lamentable crimes have availed me not, and I have failed in wholly keeping my bargain with the demon, who will doubtless this very night consume the body of Amina in lieu of the one corpse that is still lacking. I resign myself to thy judgment, O Ahmed ben Becar, and I beseech thee for no other mercy than that of death, wherewith to terminate my double grief and my twofold remorse.

When Noureddin Hassan had ended his narrative, the amazement of all who had heard him was verily multiplied, since no man could remember hearing a stranger tale. And the Cadi pondered for a long time and then gave judgment, saying:

“I must needs marvel at thy story, but the crimes thou has committed are none the less heinous, and Iblis himself would stand aghast before them. However, some allowance must be made for the fact that thou hadst given thy word to the ghoul and wast bound as it were in honor to fulfill his demand, no matter how horrible its nature. And allowance must likewise be made for thy connubial grief and the piety which caused thee to forfend thy wife’s body from the demon. Yet I cannot adjudge thee guiltless, though I know not the punishment which is merited in a case so utterly without example or parallel. Therefore, I set thee free, with this injunction, that thou shalt make atonement for thy crimes in the fashion that seemeth best to thee, and shalt render justice to thyself and to others in such degree as thou art able.”

“I thank thee for this mercy,” replied Noureddin Hassan; and he then withdrew from the court amid the wonderment of all who were present. There was much debate when he had gone, and many were prone to question the wisdom of the Cadi’s decision. Some there were who maintained that Noureddin should have been sentenced to death without delay for his abominable actions, though others argued for the sanctity of his oath to the ghoul, and would have exculpated him altogether or in part. And tales were told and instances were cited regarding the habits of ghouls and the strange plight of men who had surprised such demons in their nocturnal delvings. And again the discussion returned to Noureddin, and the judgment of the Cadi was once more upheld or assailed with divers arguments. But amid all this, Ahmed ben Becar was silent, saying only:

“Wait, for this man will render justice to himself and to all others concerned, as far as the rendering thereof is possible.”

So indeed it happened, for on the morning of the next day another body was found in the cemetery near Bussorah, lying half-devoured on the grave of Noureddin Hassan’s wife, Amina. And the body was that of Noureddin, self-slain, who in this manner had not only fulfilled the injunction of the Cadi but had also kept his bargain with the ghoul by providing the required number of corpses.

THE KINGDOM OF THE WORM

Foreword

This tale was suggested by the reading of *The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Maundeville*, in which the fantastic realm of Abchaz and the darkness-covered province of Hanyson are actually described! I recommend this colorful fourteenth-century book to lovers of fantasy. Sir John even tells, in one chapter, how diamonds propagate themselves! Truly, the world was a wonderful place in those times, when almost everyone believed in the verity of such marvels.

Now in his journeying Sir John Maundeville had passed well to one side of that remarkable province in the kingdom of Abchaz which was called Hanyson; and, unless he was greatly deceived by those of whom he had inquired the way, could deem himself within two days' travel of that neighboring realm of Georgia.

He had seen the river that flowed out from Hanyson, a land of hostile idolators on which there lay the curse of perpetual darkness; and wherein, it was told, the voices of people, the crowing of cocks and the neighing of horses had sometimes been heard by those who approached its confines. But he had not paused to investigate the verity of these marvels; since the direct route of his journey was through another region; and also Hanyson was a place into which no man, not even the most hardy, would care to enter without need.

However, as he pursued his wayfaring with the two Armenian Christians who formed his retinue, he began to hear from the inhabitants of that portion of Abchaz the rumor of an equally dread demesne, named Antchar, lying before him on the road to Georgia. The tales they told were both vague and frightful, and were of varying import: some said that this country was a desolation peopled only by the liches of the dead and by loathly phantoms; others, that it was subject to the ghouls and afrits, who devoured the dead and would suffer no living mortal to trespass upon their dominions; and still others spoke of things all too hideous to be described, and of dire necromancies that prevailed even as the might of emperors doth prevail in more usually ordered lands. And the tales agreed only in this, that Antchar had been within mortal memory one of the fairest domains of Abchaz, but had been utterly laid waste by an unknown pestilence, so that its high cities and broad fields were long since abandoned to the desert and

to such devils and other creatures as inhabit waste places. And the tellers of the tales agreed in warning Sir John to avoid this region and to take the road which ran deviously to the north of Antchar; for Antchar was a place into which no man had gone in latter times.

The good knight listened gravely to all these, as was his wont; but being a stout Christian, and valorous withal, he would not suffer them to deter him from his purpose. Even when the last inhabited village had been left behind, and he came to the division of the ways, and saw verily that the highway into Antchar had not been trodden by man or beast for generations, he refused to change his intention but rode forward stoutly while the Armenians followed with much protest and some trepidation.

Howbeit, he was not blind to the sundry disagreeable tokens that began to declare themselves along the way. There were neither trees, herbs nor lichens anywhere, such as would grow in any wholesome land; but low hills mottled with a leprosy of salt, and ridges bare as the bones of the dead.

Anon he came to a pass where the hills were strait and steep on each hand, with pinnacled cliffs of a dark stone crumbling slowly into dust and taking shapes of wild horror and strangeness, of demonry and Satanry as they crumbled. There were faces in the stone, having the semblance of ghouls or goblins, that appeared to move and twist as the travellers went by; and Sir John and his companions were troubled by the aspect of these faces and by the similitudes which they bore to one another. So much alike, indeed, were many of them, that it seemed as if their first exemplars were preceding the wayfarers, to mock them anew at each turn. And aside from those which were like ghouls or goblins, there were others having the features of heathen idols, uncouth and hideous to behold; and others still that were like the worm-gnawed visages of the dead; and these also appeared to repeat themselves on every hand in a doubtful and wildering fashion.

The Armenians would have turned back, for they swore that the rocks were alive and endowed with motion, in a land where naught else was living; and they sought to dissuade Sir John from his project. But he said merely, Follow me, an ye will, and rode onward among the rocks and pinnacles.

Now, in the ancient dust of the unused road, they saw the tracks of a creature that was neither man nor any terrestrial beast; and the tracks were of such unwonted shape and number, and were so monstrous withal, that

even Sir John was disquieted thereby; and perceiving them, the Armenians murmured more openly than before.

And now, as they pursued their way, the pinnacles of the pass grew tall as giants, and were riven into the likeness of mighty limbs and bodies, some of which were headless and others with heads of Typhoean enormity. And their shadows deepened between the travellers and the sun, to more than the umbrage of shadows cast by rocks. And in the darkest depth of the ravine, Sir John and his followers met a solitary jackal, which fled them not in the manner of its kind but passed them with articulate words, in a voice hollow and sepulchral as that of a demon, bidding them to turn back, since the land before them was an interdicted realm. All were much startled thereat, considering that this was indeed a thing of enchantment, for a jackal to speak thus, and being against nature, was foreominous of ill and peril. And the Armenians cried out, saying they would go no further; and when the jackal had passed from sight, they fled after it, spurring their horses like men who were themselves ridden by devils.

Seeing them thus abandon him, Sir John was somewhat wroth; and also he was perturbed by the warning of the jackal; and he liked not the thought of faring alone into Antchar. But, trusting in our Saviour to forfend him against all harmful enchantments and the necromancies of Satan, he rode on among the rocks till he came forth at length from their misshapen shadows; and emerging thus, he saw before him a grey plain that was like the ashes of some dead land under extinguished heavens.

At sight of this region, his heart misgave him sorely, and he misliked it even more than the twisted faces of the rocks and riven forms of the pinnacles. For here the bones of men, of horses and camels, had marked the way with their pitiable whiteness; and the topmost branches of long dead trees arose like supplicative arms from the sand that had sifted upon the older gardens. And here there were ruinous houses, with doors open to the high-drifting desert, and mausoleums sinking slowly in the dunes. And here, as Sir John rode forward, the sky darkened above him, though not with the passage of clouds or the coming of the simoon, but rather with the strange dusk of midmost eclipse, wherein the shadows of himself and his horse were blotted out, and the tombs and houses were wan as phantoms.

Sir John had not ridden much further, when he met a horned viper, or cerastes, crawling toilsomely away from Antchar in the deep dust of the road. And the viper spoke as it passed him, saying with a human voice, Be

warned, and go not onward to Antchar, for this is a realm forbidden to all mortal beings except the dead.”

Now did Sir John address himself in prayer to God the Highest, and to Jesus Christ our Savior and all the blessed Saints, knowing surely that he had arrived in a place that was subject to Satanical dominion. And while he prayed the gloom continued to thicken, till the road before him was half nighted and was no longer easy to discern. And though he would have still ridden on, his charger halted in the gloom and would not respond to the spur, but stood and trembled like one who is smitten with palsy.

Then, from the twilight that was nigh to darkness, there came gigantic figures, muffled and silent and having, as he thought, neither mouths nor eyes beneath the brow-folds of their sable cerements. They uttered no word, nor could Sir John bespeak them in the fear that came upon him; and likewise he was powerless to draw his sword. And they plucked him from his saddle with fleshless hands, and led him away, half swooning at the horror of their touch, on paths that he perceived only with the dim senses of one who goes down into the shadow of death. And he knew not how far they led him nor in what direction; and he heard no sound as he went other than the screaming of his horse far off, like a soul in mortal dread and agony: for the footfalls of those who had taken him were soundless, and he could not tell if they were phantoms or haply were veritable demons. A coldness blew upon him, but without the whisper or soughing of wind; and the air he breathed was dense with corruption and such odors as may emanate from a broken charnel.

For a time, in the faintness that had come upon him, he saw not the things that were standing beside the way, nor the shrouded shapes that went by in funereal secrecy. Then, recovering his senses a little, he perceived that there were houses about him and the streets of a town, though these were but scantly to be discerned in the night that had fallen without bringing the stars. However, he saw, or deemed, that there were high mansions and broad thoroughfares and markets; and among them, as he went on, a building that bore the appearance of a great palace, with a facade that glimmered vaguely, and domes and turrets half swallowed up by the lowering darkness.

As he neared the facade, Sir John saw that the glimmering came from within and was cast obscurely through open doors and between broad-spaced pillars. Too feeble was the light for torch or cresset, too dim for any

lamp; and Sir John marvelled amid his faintness and terror. But when he had drawn closer still, he saw that the strange gleaming was like the phosphor bred by the putrefaction of a charnel.

Beneath the guidance of those who held him helpless, he entered the building. They led him through a stately hall, in whose carven columns and ornate furniture the opulence of kings was manifest; and thence he came into the great audience-room, with a throne of gold and ebony set on a high dais, all of which was illumed by no other light than the glimmering of decay. And the throne was tenanted, not by any human lord or sultan, but a grey, prodigious creature, of height and bulk exceeding those of man, and having in all its over-swollen form the exact similitude of a charnel-worm. And the worm was alone, and except for the worm and Sir John and those beings who had brought him thither, the great chamber was empty as a mausoleum of old days, whose occupants were long since consumed by corruption.

Then, standing there with a horror upon him as no man had ever envisaged, Sir John became aware that the worm was scrutinizing him severely, with little eyes deep-folded in the obscene bloating of its face, and then, with a dreadful and solemn voice, it addressed him, saying:

I am king of Antchar, by virtue of having conquered and devoured the mortal ruler thereof, as well as all those who were his subjects. Know then that this land is mine and that the intrusion of the living is unlawful and not readily to be condoned. The rashness and folly thou hast shown in thus coming here is verily most egregious; since thou wert warned by the peoples of Abchaz, and warned anew by the jackal and the viper which thou didst meet on the road into Antchar. Thy temerity hath earned a condign punishment. And before I suffer thee to go hence, I decree that thou shalt lie for a term among the dead, and dwell as they dwell, in a dark sepulcher, and learn the manner of their abiding and the things which none should behold with living eyes. Yea, still alive, it shall be thine to descend and remain in the very midst of death and putrefaction, for such length of time as seemeth meet to correct thy folly and punish thy presumption.”

Sir John was one of the worthiest knights in Christendom, and his valor was beyond controversy. But when he heard the speech of the throned worm, and the judgement that it passed upon him, his fear became so excessive that once again he was nigh to swooning. And, still in this state, he was taken hence by those who had brought him to the audience-room.

And somewhere in the outer darkness, in a place of tombs and graves and cenotaphs beyond the dim town, he was flung into a deep sepulcher of stone, and the brazen door of the sepulcher was closed upon him.

Lying there through the seasonless midnight, Sir John was companioned only by an unseen cadaver and by those ministrants of decay who were not yet wholly done with their appointed task. Himself as one half dead, in the sore extremity of his horror and loathing, he could not tell if it were day or night in Antchar; and in all the term of endless hours that he lay there, he heard no sound, other than the beating of his own heart, which soon became insufferably loud, and oppressed him like the noise and tumult of a great throng.

Appalled by the clamor of his heart, and affrighted by the thing which lay in perpetual silence beside him, and whelmed by the awesomeness and dire necromancy of all that had befallen him, Sir John was prone to despair, and scant was his hope of returning from that imprisonment amid the dead, or of standing once more under the sun as a living man. It was his to learn the voidness of death, to share the abomination of desolation, and to comprehend the unutterable mysteries of corruption; and to do all this not as one who is a mere insensible cadaver, but with soul and body still inseparate. His flesh crept, and his spirit cringed within him, as he felt the crawling of worms that went avidly to the dwindling corpse or came away in glutted slowness. And it seemed to Sir John at that time (and at all times thereafter) that the condition of his sojourn in the tomb was verily to be accounted a worse thing than death.

At last, when many hours or days had gone over him, leaving the tomb’s darkness unchanged by the entrance of any beam or the departure of any shadow, Sir John was aware of a sullen clangor, and knew that the brazen door had been opened. And now, for the first time, by the dimness of twilight that had entered the tomb, he saw in all its piteousness and repulsion the thing with which he had abode so long. In the sickness that fell upon him at this sight, he was haled forth from the sepulcher by those who had thrust him therein; and, fainting once more with the terror of their touch, and shrinking from their gigantic shadowy stature and cerements whose black folds revealed no human visage or form, he was led through Antchar along the road whereby he had come into that dolorous realm.

His guides were silent as before; and the gloom which lay upon the land was even as when he had entered it, and was like the umbrage of some

eternal occultation. But at length, in the very place where he had been taken captive, he was left to retrace his own way and to fare alone through the land of ruinous gardens toward the defile of the crumbling rocks.

Weak though he was from his confinement, and all bemazed with the things which had befallen him, he followed the road till the darkness lightened once more and he came forth from its penumbral shadow beneath a pale sun. And somewhere in the waste he met his charger, wandering through the sunken fields that were covered up by the sand; and he mounted the charger and rode hastily away from Antchar through the pass of the strange boulders with mocking forms and faces. And after a time he came once more to the northern road by which travellers commonly went to Georgia; and he was rejoined by the two Armenians, who had waited on the confines of Antchar, praying for his secure deliverance.

Long afterwards, when he had returned from his wayfaring in the East and among the peoples of remote isles, he told of the kingdom of Abchaz in the book that related his travels; and also he wrote therein concerning the province of Hanyson. But he made no mention of Antchar, that kingdom of darkness and decay ruled by the throned worm.

AN ADVENTURE IN FUTURITY

Chapter I

The Mystery of Conrad Elkins

A survivor from the lost continents of Mu or Atlantis, appearing on our modern streets, would have seemed no stranger, no more different from others, than the man who called himself Conrad Elkins. And yet I have always found it difficult to define, even in my own thoughts, the many elements which served to constitute this strangeness. It would seem (since we think mainly in words and are often dependent upon them for the clarification of our ideas) that the adjectives which would fitly describe Elkins were as yet non-existent in our vocabulary; that they could be found only in some unimaginably subtle, complex and refined language, such as might be developed through long cycles of elaborating culture and civilization on an older and riper planet than ours. Even at first sight I was greatly struck—not to say startled—by the man's personality. Perhaps the thing which arrested me more than all else was the impossibility of assigning him to any known ethnic stock. It is my theory that no human being is so individual that he does not possess obvious ear-marks which place him immediately among the tribes of mankind; and I am prone to pride myself on a sedulously cultivated gift for analyzing off-hand the nationality and racial affiliations of any given person. But Elkins baffled me: his extreme pallor, his fine hair and clear-cut lineaments were, in a general sense, indicative of Caucasian origin; yet I could not find the distinguishing features of any American, European or Asiatic branch of the white race. Also, I could not have told his age: he seemed young, when one considered the smoothness of his face; and yet there was a hint of something incalculably old in his expression.

His garb was modish and well-tailored, with nothing in the least unusual or eccentric. In this, as in all other things, he gave always the subtle impression of desiring to avoid notice. He was a little under medium height and of strangely delicate build; and his features, considered by themselves, were almost effeminate, apart from the great brow of uncorrugated ivory, which resembled the one that we see in the portraits of Edgar Allan Poe.

The small, intricately convoluted ears, the short, deeply curved lips, and the queer exotic moulding of the sensitive nostrils all seemed to bespeak the possession of more highly developed senses than are normal to mankind. His eyes were very large and luminous, of an indescribable purplish color, and did not flinch, as I had occasion to observe, before the most intense light. His hands too were quite remarkable: in their extreme fineness, flexibility and vigor, they were the hands of a super-surgeon or a super-artist.

The man's habitual expression was wholly enigmatic. No one could have read his mind, and this not from any lack of mobility or expressiveness in the lineaments themselves, but rather, I felt sure, from the unknown character of his ideas and motivations. About him there was an aura of remote, recondite knowledge, of profound wisdom and aesthetic refinement verging upon the decadence which comes sooner or later to all mature peoples. Assuredly he was a mystery from all angles; and any one who has gone into chemistry as I have is almost inevitably a lover of mysteries. I made up my mind to learn all that I could concerning him.

I had seen Elkins a number of times, on the streets and in libraries and museums, before the beginning of our actual acquaintance. Indeed, the frequency of our meetings in the multitudinous babel of New York was so phenomenal that I soon decided that he must have lodgings near mine and was perhaps engaged in similar studies. I made inquiries regarding him from librarians and curators, but learned nothing more than his name and the fact that he had been reading the works of Havelock Ellis and other modern authorities on sex, as well as many books in biology, chemistry and physics. The motives which prompted his visits to the Metropolitan and other museums were seemingly of a general nature. But evidently he was seeking to familiarize himself with certain branches of modern science as well as archaeology. Being myself a student of chemistry, who had given nearly a decade of collegiate and post-graduate effort to the subject, and also several years of independent work and experimentation in my laboratory on Washington Square, my curiosity was touched with fraternal interest when I learned of Elkins' studies.

Others than myself, I found, had been struck by the man's appearance; but no one really knew anything about him. He was extremely taciturn, volunteering no information whatever regarding himself, though impeccably polite in all his dealings with others. Apparently he desired to

avoid making friends or acquaintances—a far from difficult procedure in any large city. Yet oddly enough I did not find it hard to know him—which, as I later learned, was due to the fact that Elkins had somehow conceived an interest in me and also was well aware of my interest.

I came upon him one May afternoon as he was standing in the Metropolitan Museum before a case of artifacts from the Mounds of the Mississippi Valley. To all appearance he was deeply absorbed. I had made up my mind to address him on some pretext or another, when suddenly he forestalled me.

"Has it ever occurred to you," he said in a grave, finely modulated voice, "how many civilizations have been irretrievably lost, how many have been buried by deluge, glacial action and geological cataclysm, and also by profound social upheavals with their subsequent reversions to savagery? And do you ever think that present-day New York will some time be as fragmentary and fabulous as Troy or Zimbabwe? That archaeologists may delve in its ruins, beneath the sevenfold increment of later cities, and find a few rusting mechanisms of disputed use, and potteries of doubtful date, and inscriptions which no one can decipher? I assure you, this is not only probable but certain. The very history of America, in some future epoch, will become more or less legendary; and it would surprise you to know the theories and beliefs regarding the current civilization which will some day be prevalent."

"You speak as if you had some inside information on the subject," I replied half-jestingly.

Elkins gave me a quick, inscrutable glance.

"I am interested in all such things," he said. "And by the same token, Mr. Pastor, I believe you are something of a speculative thinker yourself, along different lines. I have read your little thesis on the cosmic rays. Your idea, that these rays might become a source of illimitable power through concentration, appeals to me. I can safely say that the idea is quite ultra-modern."

I was surprised that he knew my name; but obviously he had made inquiries similar to mine. Also, of course, I was pleased by his familiarity with a treatise that was generally looked upon as being rather advanced, not to say fantastic, in its theories.

The ice being thus broken, the growth of our acquaintance was rapid. Elkins came to my rooms and laboratory many times; and I in turn was

admitted to his own modest lodgings, which as I had surmised were only a few blocks away from mine on the same street.

A score of meetings, and the development of a quasi-friendship, left me as fundamentally ignorant concerning Elkins as I had been at first. I do not know why he liked me—perhaps it was the universal human need of a friend, inescapable at all times and in all places. But somehow the half-affectionate air which he soon adopted toward me did not make it any easier to ask the personal questions that seethed within me. The more I came to know him, the more I was overcome by a sense of impossible seniority on his part—by the feeling that he must be older, and intellectually more evolved than myself, in a fashion that could not be measured by tabulated years or classified knowledge. Strangely—since such a feeling has been unique in my experience—I was almost like a child before him, and grew to regard him with something of the awe which a child conceives toward an elder who is seemingly omniscient. Nor was the awe conditioned at first by anything which he actually said or did.

The furnishings of his rooms were as non-committal as the man himself. There was nothing to seize upon as indicating his nationality and antecedents. However, I saw at once that he was a linguist, for there were books in at least four modern languages. One, which he told me he had just been reading, was a recent and voluminous German work on the physiology of sex.

“Are you really much interested in that stuff?” I ventured to ask. “There is, it seems to me, overmuch discussion and all too little knowledge regarding such matters.”

“I agree with you,” he rejoined. “One hears of special knowledge, but it fails to materialize on investigation. I thought that I had an object in studying this branch of twentieth century science; but now I doubt greatly if there is anything of value to be learned.”

I was struck by the tone of intellectual impersonality which he maintained in all our discussions, no matter what the subject. His range of information was obviously vast, and he gave the impression of boundless reserves, though there were certain avenues of science, generally looked upon as important in our day, to which he seemed to have given only a somewhat cursory and negligent attention. I gathered that he did not think much of current medicine and surgery; and he startled me more than once by pronouncements on electricity and astronomy that were widely at

variance with accepted ideas. Somehow, at most times he made me feel that he was discreetly curbing the full expression of his thoughts. He spoke of Einstein with respect, and seemed to regard him as the one real thinker of the age, mentioning more than once with great approval his theories concerning time and space.

Elkins showed a tactful interest in my own chemical researches; but somehow I felt that he looked upon them as being rather elementary. Once, in an unguarded manner, he spoke of the transmutation of metals as if it were already an accomplished everyday fact; explaining the reference, when I questioned him, as a rhetorical flight of imagination in which he had lost himself for the moment.

The late spring and early summer passed, and the mystery which had drawn me to Elkins was still unsolved. I did indeed learn from a casual remark that he was a native of North America—which failed to render his ethnic distinction any the less baffling. I decided that he must represent a reversion to some type whose lineaments have not been preserved in history, or must be one of those rare individuals who anticipate in themselves a whole era of the future evolution of the race. I will not deny that the truth occurred to me more than once; but how was I to know that the truth was a thing so utterly improbable?

Much as I had grown to admire and even revere him, Elkins was to me the most incomprehensible and alien being on earth; and I sensed in him a thousand differences of thought and emotion, and a world of unfamiliar knowledge which for some reason he was trying to withhold from my apprehension.

One day, toward the end of the summer, he said to me:

“I must leave New York before long, Hugh.”

I was startled, since hitherto he had made no reference to leaving or to the duration of his stay.

“You are returning home, perhaps? I hope it will at least be possible for us to keep in touch with each other.”

He gave me a long, unreadable glance.

“Yes, I am going home. But, odd as it may seem to you, there will be no possibility of future communication between us. We part for all time—unless you should care to accompany me.”

My curiosity seethed anew at his cryptic words. Yet somehow I was still unable to ask the questions that arose to my lips.

“If you mean that as an invitation,” I said, “I shall be glad to accept and pay you a visit.”

“Yes, it is an invitation,” he rejoined gravely. “But before accepting, would you not prefer to know where you are going? Perhaps, when you hear the truth, you will not care to accept. And perhaps you will not even believe me.”

For once, my inquisitiveness was stronger than my respect.

“Do you live on Mars or Saturn, then?”

He smiled. “No, I am a denizen of the earth; though it may surprise you, in the present infantile condition of astronautics, to learn that I have made more than one voyage to Mars. I realize your natural curiosity concerning me; and an explanation is now necessary. If, when you have learned the truth, you still care to accompany me as my guest, I shall be overjoyed to take you with me and to offer you my hospitality for as long as you wish to remain.”

He paused a moment. “The mystery that has troubled you will be fully explained when I tell you that I am not a man of your own era, but have come from a period far in the future—or what is known to you as the future. According to your notation, my proper time is about 15,000 A. D. My real name is Kronous Alkon—I have assumed the vaguely analogous one of Conrad Elkins, as well as the speech and garb of your time, for reasons which will be fairly obvious.

“At present I shall give you only a brief summary of the causes which prompted my visit to the twentieth century. It would require a long discourse to even offer you an adequate sketch of our social anatomy and problems; and I speak merely of one aspect. Humanity in our age is menaced with gradual extinction through an increasing overpreponderance of male children; and a method of sex-control, which would restore in some degree the balance of nature, is urgently desired.

“Your age, the first great mechanistic era, is a well-nigh mythical period to us, and less known even than certain earlier periods, because of the all-engulfing savagery to which man reverted at its end. There ensued long dark ages, through which only the most fragmentary records survived, along with a legendry of vast, uncouth machines which the superstition of atavistic peoples identified with avenging demons—perhaps not without reason, since the abuse of machinery was one of the main causations of your *débâcle*. Also, there remained a widespread popular belief, accepted

even now by many of our scientists, that the people of the twentieth century could determine at will the sex of their offspring; and that the secret of this determination was lost in the ensuing barbarism, along with certain minor secrets of chemistry and metallurgy which no later civilization has ever re-discovered.

"The former belief has no doubt arisen because the sexes are well known to have been numerically equal in your time; and because they have not been equal since. For many thousands of years after the re-building of an enlightened civilization on the ruins of yours, girl-children predominated; and the whole world became a matriarchy. The period known as the Amazonian wars, which were the most sanguinary and merciless wars in history, put an end to the matriarchy by wiping out all but a few hundred thousand of the human race. These reverted to the most primitive conditions: there were more dark ages, and then, slowly, the evolution of our present cycle of renewed culture, in which the male predominates both numerically and intellectually.

"It was to recover the fabled secret of sex-determination that I came back through the ages, and have lived among you for a full year of twentieth century time. It has been a fascinating experience, and I have learned many things regarding the antique world which are altogether unknown and unverifiable to my fellows. Your crude, cumbrous machines and buildings are not unimpressive in their way; and your science is not without a few inklings of our later discoveries. But obviously you know even less regarding the mysterious laws of biology and sex than we do; your supposed method of determination is truly fabulous, and I have no reason for tarrying any longer in an alien epoch.

"Now to become personal. Hugh, you are the only friend I have cared to make in this epoch. Your mind is in some respects beyond the age; and though everything will seem different to you in our time, and much will be incomprehensible, I am sure you will find a surpassing interest in the world of 15,000 A. D. I shall of course provide you with a safe means of return to your own era whenever you wish. Will you go with me, Hugh?"

I could not reply for a moment. I was awed, astonished, bewildered even to stupefaction by the remarkable things that my friend had just told me. His statements were no less than miraculous—yet somehow they were not incredible. I did not doubt his veracity for an instant. After all, it was

the only logical explanation of everything that had puzzled me in Conrad Elkins.

"Of course I'll go with you," I cried, overcome and dazzled by the strange opportunity which he offered me.

Chapter II

Into 15,000 A.D.

There were a hundred obvious questions that I wanted to ask Elkins. Anticipating certain of these, he said:

"The machine in which I travelled through time is a vessel commonly used among us for space-travel. I will explain to you later the modification of the original mechanism which rendered possible a journey in that fourth-dimensional space known as time. I have reason to believe that the invention is wholly unique and has never been duplicated.

"I had nurtured for many years my project for visiting your period; and in preparation for this, I made a prolonged study of all available historic data bearing thereon, as well as the archaeological and literary remains of antique America. As I have said, the remains are fragmentary; but the language, being the root-stock of our own tongue, is fairly well-known to our scholars. I took pains to master it as far as possible; though I have since found that some of our pronunciations and definitions are erroneous; also, that the vocabulary is much ampler than we had supposed.

"I studied likewise the costumes of your period, of which a few plates are still extant, and made for myself habiliments which would enable me to pass unnoticed upon my arrival."

Elkins paused, and went to his clothes-closet. He opened it and brought out a suit of some soft brown fabric. It was not badly tailored, though the cut was unfamiliar. Later, I found that the actual plate from which it had been designed belonged to the year 1940, ten years in advance of our own date.

Elkins went on. "My departure was carefully planned, and I am supposed to have gone on a voyage to the asteroids, several of which, notably Pallas, Vesta and Ceres, have been colonized by human beings for hundreds of years past.

"I made the actual time-journey in a state of unconsciousness. This, as you will soon learn, was inevitable because of the temporary abstraction from everything that creates or contributes to what we know as

consciousness. I was prepared for it, and had made all the necessary calculations and adjustments beforehand, and had carefully synchronized the movement of the vessel in the time-dimension with the movement of the earth and the solar system in space. Geographically speaking, I would not move an inch during the entire trip.

"Rising to an elevation of thirty thousand feet above the earth, I started the time-mechanism. There was a period of absolute oblivion (a second or a million years would have seemed the same) and then, with the ceasing of the time-flight, I recovered my senses. Knowing that I was now in the twentieth century, if my calculations were correct, and not choosing to advertise my strangeness, I sought for a place where I could land quietly and without detection.

"The place which I selected after much circumnavigation and study was an inaccessible cliff in the Katskill Mountains, far from any settlement. There I descended at night and left my machine, whose presence was indetectable either from below or above. I finished my descent of the cliff by the use of an anti-gravitational device, and made my way from the wilderness. The next day I was in New York, where, for the most part, I have remained ever since and have carried on unobtrusively my studies of your civilization. For monetary needs, I had brought with me some disinterred coins of your period, and also a few small ingots of chemically wrought gold."

He showed me one of the coins—a silver dollar that was stained almost beyond recognition, like an ancient obolus, by the oxidation of untold centuries. Then he brought out another garment from the clothes-closet—a short flaring tunic of dull red with a long graceful mantle that could be detached at will, since it was fastened to the shoulders by two clasps of carven silver. The fabric, as well as the garment itself, was strange to me. Kronous also brought out a pair of sandals, vaguely resembling those of the ancients, though they were not made of leather but of some stiff, indestructible cloth.

"This," he said, "is the raiment in which I left Akameria, the America of 15,000 A. D. I will have a similar tunic made for you by some costume-tailor here in New York—and also sandals, though I suppose the sandals will have to be made of leather, since the material used in these is a chemical product of my own time. I am planning to leave the day after tomorrow, and I hope that will not be too soon for you."

“Indeed it won’t,” I replied. “I haven’t many preparations to make—there’s nothing to do but lock up the laboratory and phone a few friends that I am leaving for a world-tour of indefinite length. I don’t imagine there’ll be any search-parties.”

Two days later, with an hour of daylight still before us, Elkins and I had reached the base of the unsurmountable cliff on which the time-machine was hidden. The last four hours of our journey had been on foot. We were in the wildest section of the Katskills; and staring up at the terrible mountain-wall, I felt an increased awe of my strange companion, who seemed to have no doubt whatever of his ability to scale it.

He opened a small satchel, whose contents he had not hitherto revealed to me, and took out the anti-gravitational device of which he had spoken. The thing was a hollow disk of some dull, unidentifiable metal, with chains of an equally ambiguous material which secured it to the body. Elkins showed me the simple operation of the mechanism which, he said, was electronic in its nature. Then he strapped it to his chest, set the apparatus running, and rose slowly in air till he reached the top of the precipice. There he disappeared from view; but a few moments later, the metal disk was lowered at the end of a long cord for my use in surmounting the cliff.

Following directions, I proceeded to adjust the mechanism and start it going. The feeling of utter weightlessness as I floated upward was a most unique experience. It was as if I were a feather wafted on an imperceptible air-current. Being unused to the apparatus, I did not understand the finer technique of movement beneath its influence; and when I came to the cliff-edge I would have continued to drift skyward if my companion had not reached out and stopped me.

I found myself standing beside him on a broad ledge overhung by another cliff which rose immediately above it. Certainly Elkins could not have chosen a safer hiding-place for his time-machine.

The vessel itself, whose door he now proceeded to unlock, was a long, spindle-shaped affair, evidently designed for swift movement in air or ether. It could not have carried more than three people. Inside, it was lined with lockers and machinery, and three great slings or cradles in which the driver and passengers were immovably suspended. This, of course, was requisite during the loss of gravity and normal weight in ether-flight. Elkins said that he had found it equally convenient to strap himself into one of the slings during his voyage in time.

Both of us were still dressed in twentieth century attire. Elkins now donned the tunic and sandals of his own age, which he had brought along in the satchel together with the duplicates that had been made for me by a somewhat mystified costumer. These Elkins directed me to put on. I obeyed, feeling like a masquerader in the odd garb.

"That is the last of Conrad Elkins," said my companion, pointing to his discarded suit. "Henceforth you must call me Kronous Alkon. Your name will seem pretty outlandish among us; so I think I will introduce you as Huno Paskon, a young colonial born on Pallas."

Kronous Alkon now busied himself with the machinery of the vessel. This, to my untrained eye, was awesomely intricate. He adjusted a series of movable rods that were set in a notched board, and seemed to be winding up a clock-like apparatus with a numbered dial and three hands. There were hundreds—perhaps thousands—of figures on the dial.

"That," he said, "is to control within precise limits the extent of our forward movement in the time-dimension. We are all set for the proper year, month and day."

He now fastened me, and then himself, in the complicated slings, and turned to a small key-board with many knobs and levers, which seemed to be distinct from the rest of the machinery.

"These," he said, "are the controls for atmosphere and ether-flight. Before turning on the time-power, I shall rise to a higher altitude and fly south for about fifty miles."

He turned one of the knobs. There was a low, drumming sound; but I would not have been conscious of any movement, if a sudden sunset-glow through the vessel's ports had not shown that we were rising above the level of the cliffs.

After a few minutes, Kronous Alkon moved one of the levers; and the drumming ceased. "The power of space-flight," he said, "is provided by atomic disintegration. Now, for the time-flight, I shall make use of a very different kind of power—a strange, complex energy derived from the repercussion of cosmic rays, which will transport us into what, for lack of a better name, is called the fourth dimension. Properly speaking, we will be outside of space, and, from a mundane view-point, will be non-existent. I assure you however that there is no danger. When the time-power shuts off automatically in 15,000 A.D., you and I will awaken as if from a deep sleep. The sensation of dropping off may prove rather terrific, but no more

so than the taking of certain anaesthetics. Simply let yourself go and realize that there is nothing to fear."

He seized a large rod and gave it a powerful jerk. I felt as if I had received an electric shock that was tearing all my tissues apart and disintegrating me into my ultimate cells and molecules. In spite of the reassurance of Kronous Alkon, I was overwhelmed by an unspeakably confusing terror. I had the sensation of being divided into a million selves, all of which were whirling madly downward in the maelstrom of a darkening gulf. They seemed to go out one by one like sparks as they reached a certain level; till soon all were gone, and there was nothing anywhere but darkness and unconsciousness….

I came to myself in a manner which was like the direct reversal of my descent into oblivion. First, there was that sense of remote and spark-like entities, which increased to a multitude, all of them drifting upward in cosmic gloom from an ultimate nadir; and then the gradual merging of these entities into one, as the interior of the time-machine resumed coherent outline around me. Then I saw before me the figure of Kronous Alkon, who had twisted about in his sling, and was smiling as he met my gaze. It seemed to me that I had slept for a long, long time.

My companion pressed a knob, and I had the feeling of one who descends in an elevator. It was not necessary for Kronous Alkon to tell me that we were sinking earthward. In less than a minute, trees and buildings were visible through the ports, and there was a slight jar as we landed.

"Now," said Kronous, "we are on my country estate near Djarma, the present capital of Akameria. Djarma is built on the ruins of the city of New York, but is hundreds of miles inland, since there have been extensive geologic changes during the past 13,000 years. You will find that the climate is different too, for it is now sub-tropical. Weather conditions are pretty much under human control, and we have even reduced by artificial means the permanent areas of ice and snow at the poles."

He had unstrapped himself and was performing the same service for me. Then he opened the door of the vessel and motioned me to precede him. I was met by wafts of warm, perfume-laden air as I stepped out on a stone platform adjoining a sort of aerodrome—a great, shining edifice in which were housed various air-craft of unfamiliar types. Not far away was another building, marked by a light, graceful architecture, with many tiers of open galleries, and high, fantastic, Eiffel-like towers. There were extensive

gardens around this building; and broad fields of vegetables that I did not recognize ran away on each side of the distance. Somewhat apart, there stood a group of long, one-storied houses.

"My home," said Kronous. "I trust that everything is well. I left the estate in charge of my two cousins, Altus and Oron. Also, there is Trogh the Martian overseer, and a barracoon of Venusian slaves, who do all the agricultural labor. All our necessary menial and industrial tasks are performed by such slaves, who have been imported to earth for many generations, and are now becoming a problem in themselves. I hope there has not been any trouble during my absence."

I noticed that Kronous had taken from an inner pocket of his tunic a small rod, vaguely resembling a flash-light and having a ball of red glass or crystal at one end. This he was carrying in his hand.

"An electronic projector," he explained. "The current paralyzes temporarily, but does not kill, at any distance up to fifty yards. Sometimes we have to use such weapons when the slaves are recalcitrant. The Venusians are a low, vicious type and require careful handling."

We started toward the house, whose lower stories were half-concealed by tall trees and massed shrubbery. No sign of life was manifest, as we followed a winding path among fountains of colored marble, and palms and rhododendrons, and baroque, unearthly-looking plants and flowers that would have baffled a present-day botanist. Kronous told me that some of these latter were importations from Venus. The hot, humid air was saturated with odors which I found oppressive, but which Kronous appeared to inhale with delight.

Rounding a sharp turn in the path, we came to an open lawn immediately in front of the house. Here an unexpected and terrific scene revealed itself. Two men, attired like Kronous, and a huge, barrel-chested, spindle-legged being with an ugly head like that of a hydrocephalous frog, were fronting a horde of bestial creatures who would have made the Neanderthal man look like an example of classic beauty in comparison. There must have been a score of these beings, many of whom were armed with clubs and stones, which they were hurling at the three who opposed them. Their brown-black bodies were clothed only with patches and tufts of coarse, purple hair; and perhaps half of their number were adorned with thick, bifurcated tails. These, I learned later, were the females—the males, for some obscure evolutionary reason, being undistinguished in this respect.

“The slaves!” cried Kronous, as he ran forward with his projector levelled. Following him, I saw the fall of one of the two men beneath the impact of a large stone. A dozen of the slaves were lying senseless on the lawn; and I could see that the persons they were attacking were armed with projectors.

Our approach had not been noticed; and Kronous made deadly use of his weapon at close range, stretching slave after slave on the ground. Turning, and apparently recognizing their master, the remainder began to disperse sullenly. Their rout was completed by the heavy-chested giant, who hurled after them with his catapult-like arms much of the ammunition which they had dropped on beholding Kronous.

“I fear that Altus is badly hurt,” said Kronous as we joined the little group on the lawn. The other man, whom Kronous now introduced to me as his cousin Oron, was stooping over the fallen figure and examining a hidden wound from which blood was streaming heavily amid the fine black hair. Oron, who acknowledged the introduction with a courteous nod, had himself been cut and bruised by several missiles.

The introduction had been made in English. Kronous and Oron now began to talk in a language that I could not understand. Apparently some explanation was being made regarding myself, for Oron gave me a quick, curious glance. The giant had ceased hurling stones and clubs after the departing Venusians, and now came to join us.

“That is Trogh, the Martian overseer,” said Kronous to me. “Like all of his race he is extremely intelligent. They are an old people with an immemorial civilization that has followed a different trend from ours but is not therefore necessarily inferior; and we of earth have learned much from them, though they are highly reserved and secretive.”

The reddish-yellow body of the Martian was attired only in a black loin-cloth. His squat, toad-like features, under the high, bulging, knobby brow, were impossible to read; and I was chilled by the sense of an unbridgeable evolutionary gulf as I looked into his icy green eyes. Culture, wisdom, power, were manifest behind his gaze, but in forms that no human being was properly fitted to understand. He spoke in a harsh, guttural voice, evidently using human language, though the words were difficult to recognize as being in any way related to those employed by Kronous and Oron, because of an odd prolongation of the vowels and consonants.

Carrying among us the still unconscious form of Altus, Oron, Kronous, Trogh and myself entered the portico of the nearby house. Both the architecture and the material of this building were the most beautiful I had ever seen. Much use was made of arabesque arches and light decorative pillars. The material, which resembled a very translucent onyx, was, as Kronous told me, in reality a synthetic substance prepared by atomic transmutation.

Within, there were many couches covered with unknown opulent fabrics of superb design. The rooms were large, with lofty, vaulted ceilings; and in many cases were divided only by rows of pillars, or by tapestries. The furniture was of much beauty, with light, curving lines that conformed to the architecture; and some of it was made from gem-like materials and gorgeous metals that I could not name. There were scores of paintings and statues, mainly of the most bizarre and fantastic nature, and testifying to supreme technical skill. I learned that some of the paintings were first-hand depictions of scenes on alien planets.

We laid Altus on a couch. The man was indeed severely injured, and his breathing was slow and faint. In all likelihood he had suffered some degree of brain-concussion.

Kronous brought out a bulb-shaped mechanism ending in a hollow cone which, he explained to me, was the generator of a force known as *osc*—a super-electric energy used in the treatment of wounds as well as of illness in general. It was of sovereign power in restoring the normal processes of health, no matter what the cause of derangement might be. When the generator was set in action by Kronous, I saw the emission of a green light from the hollow end, falling on the head of the wounded man. The pulse of Altus became stronger and he stirred a little, but did not awaken as yet. When Kronous turned off the green ray after a few minutes, he asked me to examine the wound; and I found that it was already beginning to heal.

“Altus will be perfectly well in two or three days,” said Kronous.

“The real problem,” he went on, “is the Venusians—and not only for me but for everyone else. It was a dreadful mistake to bring them to earth in the beginning; they are not only ferocious and intractable, but they breed with the most appalling fecundity, in opposition to the dwindling numbers of the human race. Already they outnumber us five to one; and in spite of our superior knowledge and weapons, I believe that they constitute our worst menace. All that they require is a little organization.”

Chapter III

The Black Rot

Evening had now fallen. Trogh had retired to his own quarters, presided over by his Martian wife, at some distance from the house. A meal consisting mainly of delicious fruits and vegetables, most of which were new to me, was served by Oron. I learned that one of the vegetables was a species of truffle imported from Venus. After we had eaten, a strong, delicately flavored liqueur, made from a fruit that vaguely resembled both the peach and the pineapple, was brought out in deep, slender glasses of crystal.

Kronous now spoke at some length. He told me that he had already confided the truth concerning his time-voyage and myself to Oron. “The reason I did not want my trip to be known,” he said, “is because of the mechanical principle involved, which might be stolen or duplicated by some other inventor. And I am dubious of its value to mankind in general. We of the present era have learned not to abuse mechanical devices in the gross manner of earlier generations; but even so, it is not well that man should know too much. We have conquered space, and the conquest has entailed new perils. On the whole, I think it would be better if the conquest of time should remain an isolated exploit. I can trust Oron, and also Altus, to keep the secret.”

He went on to speak of various things which he felt that it was necessary for me to know. “You will find,” he soliloquized, “that our world is motivated by desires and ambitions very different from those which are most prevalent in your own. The mere struggle for existence, for wealth and power, is almost alien to our comprehension. Crime is extremely rare among us, and we have few problems of administration or government. When such occur, they are submitted to the arbitration of a board of scientists. We have infinite leisure; and our aspirations are toward the conquest of remote knowledge, the creation of rare art-forms, and the enjoyment of varied intellectual and aesthetic sensations, aided by the long life-span, averaging three or four hundred years, which our mastery of

disease has made possible. (I myself am 150 years old, as it may surprise you to learn.) I am not sure, however, that this mode of life has been wholly to our advantage. Perhaps through the very lack of struggle, of hardship, of difficulty, we are becoming effete and effeminate. But I think we will be put to a severe test before long.

"Coming as you have from a commercial age," he went on, "it will no doubt interest you to be told that half of our own commerce is interplanetary. There are whole fleets of ether-craft that ply between the earth, Mars, Venus, the moon and the asteroids. However, we are not on the whole a commercial people. Apart from those of us who have chosen to live in cities, the remainder are mostly the owners of large plantations where everything necessary is produced or manufactured by slave-labor. It is, of course, only our dwindling numbers that have made this system possible.

"We possess the power, if we so desire, of manufacturing everything through a mode of chemical synthesis. However, we find that natural food-stuffs are preferable to the synthetic kind; and we make less use of our knowledge in this regard than you might suppose. Perhaps the chief use of our mastery of atomic conversion is in the making of fabrics and building-materials.

"There is much more that I might tell you; but you will see and learn for yourself. Tomorrow morning, Oron and myself will begin to instruct you in our language."

Thus began several quiet weeks of life on Kronous' estate. I made rapid progress in the language, which bore about the same relation to English that English bears to Latin. I was given access to a fine and extensive library filled with the latest scientific works, with fiction and poetry of the latter-day world, and also a few rare items dating from periods which, though long subsequent to our own time, were nevertheless buried in the dust of antiquity. On several occasions Kronous took me through his laboratory, in which he could perform the most incredible marvels of atomic transformation, and feats of microscopic analysis that revealed a whole world in the electron. I realized that the science of our time was child's-play compared with that of the era into which I had been transported.

One day Kronous showed me a cabinet full of objects that had been recovered from the ruins of New York and other antique cities. Among them were porcelain dinner-plates, Masonic emblems, pearl necklaces, China door-knobs, twenty dollar gold-pieces, and spark-plugs. The sight of

them, and the realization of their extreme age, combined with their familiarity, aroused in me the most violent nostalgia—an intolerably desperate homesickness for my own period. This feeling lasted for days; and Kronous did not show me any more ancient relics.

Altus had recovered fully from his wound; and I heard of no more insubordination from the slaves of Kronous. However, I could not forget the terrible scene which had formed my initiation into life on the estate. I saw many times the savage-looking Venusians, who went about their agricultural labors with a sullen air of mindless brooding; and I was told much concerning them.

Their ancestors were inhabitants of the deep and noisomely luxuriant jungles of Venus, where they lived under the most primitive conditions, in perpetual conflict with terrible animals and insects, and also with each other. They were cannibalistic by nature, and their habits in this respect had proven hard to curb. Every now and then on the plantation one of their number would disappear surreptitiously. The slave-trade had flourished for several centuries, but had languished of late years, since those brought to earth had now multiplied in excess of the required quota. The original Venusian slaves were mostly, though not all, the captives of tribal raids and wars; and they had been purchased very cheaply by terrestrial traders in exchange for alcoholic liquors and edged weapons. However, the Venusians had been willing to sell even members of their own tribes. Apparently there was little attachment or loyalty among them; and their instincts were those of wolves and tigers.

The Martians had come to earth mainly as traders; though their services were sometimes procurable for such positions as the one held by Trogh. They were taciturn and aloof; but they had permitted certain of their chemical and astronomical discoveries to be utilized by human beings. They were a philosophical race, much given to dreaming, and were universally addicted to the use of a strange drug, known as *gnultan*, the juice of a Martian weed. This drug was more powerful than opium or hashish, and gave rise to even wilder visions, but its effects were physically harmless. Its use had spread among human beings, till a law was passed forbidding its importation. It was still smuggled both by Martians and Terrestrials, in spite of all the efforts made to stop it; and addiction to the drug was still fairly common among humanity.

By means of radio and television, both of which were now employed in vastly simplified and improved forms, Kronous and his cousins were in hourly touch with the whole world of their time, and even with the earth-stations on Mars, Venus, the moon and the larger asteroids. I was privileged to see in their televisors many scenes that would have appeared like the maddest visions of delirium back in 1930.

We were posted on all the news of the world; and with my growing mastery of the language, I soon came to the point where I no longer required the interpretation of Kronous to understand the announcements. Much of this news was not reassuring, but served to confirm the prophetic fears that had been voiced by my host. There were daily outbreaks on the part of Venusian slaves all over the planet; and in many cases much damage was inflicted before they could be subdued. Also, these outbreaks were beginning to display a mysterious concertion and a degree of mentality of which the Venusians had not hitherto been believed capable. Acts of sabotage, as well as personal assaults, were increasingly common; and the sabotage in particular often showed a rational intelligence. Even at this early date, there were those who suspected that the Venusians were being aided and incited by the Martians; but there was no tangible proof of such abetting at the time.

One day, from Djarma, there came the news of that bizarre mineral plague known as the Black Rot. One by one the buildings in the suburbs of Djarma were being attacked by this novel disease, which caused their synthetic stone and metal to dissolve inch by inch in a fine black powder. The Rot was the work of a micro-organism which must somehow have been introduced from Venus, where its ravages had been noted in certain mountain-ranges. Its appearance on earth was a mystery, but had all the air of another act of sabotage. It was capable of devouring half the elements known to chemistry; and off-hand, nothing could be discovered to arrest its progress, though all the Akamerian chemists were at work on the problem.

Kronous and I watched in the televisor the working of the Black Rot. Somehow, it was inexpressibly terrifying to see the slowly spreading area of silent and utter devastation, the crumbled or half-eaten buildings from which the occupants had fled. The thing had started on the outskirts of Djarma, and was steadily devouring the city in an ever-broadening arc.

All the best-known scientists of Akameria were summoned in conclave at Djarma to study the Rot and devise if possible a means of retardation.

Kronous, who was a renowned chemist and microscopist, was among those called upon. He offered to take me with him, and of course I accepted with the utmost eagerness.

The trip was a matter of no more than forty miles, and we made it in a light air-vessel belonging to Kronous—a sort of monoplane run by atomic power.

Though I had already familiarized myself with many of the scenes of Djarma by television, the city was a source of absorbing fascination to me. It was far smaller than New York and was widely spaced, with many gardens and exuberant semi-tropical parks meandering through its whole extent. The architecture was nearly all of the same open, aerial type that I had seen in Kronous' home. The streets were broad and spacious and there were comparatively few large buildings. The whole effect was one of supreme grace and beauty.

The streets were not overcrowded with people, and no one ever seemed to be in a hurry. It was strange to see the grotesque Martians and bestial Venusians mingling everywhere with humans of the same type as Kronous. The stature and build of Kronous were about the average and it was rare to see a man who was taller than five feet six inches. I, of course, with my five feet eleven, was very conspicuous and attracted much attention.

The conclave of savants was being held in a large edifice, builded expressly for such meetings, at the heart of Djarma. Entering, we found that about two hundred men, some of whom were extremely old and venerable, had already gathered in the council-chamber. Much general discussion was going on; and those who had ideas to suggest were listened to in respectful silence. Kronous and I took seats amid the gathering. So intent were all these men on the problem to be solved, that few of them even vouchsafed me a curious glance.

Peering at the faces about me, I was awed by an impression of supreme intellectuality and wisdom—the garnered lore of incalculable ages. Also, on many of these countenances I perceived the marks of a world-old ennui, and the stamp of a vague sterility, an incipient decadence.

For some time, Kronous and I listened to the discussion that was in progress. Pondering the various data brought forward, I was struck by the fact that all the elements assailed by the Black Rot belonged at the opposite end of the scale from radium in regard to their atomic activity and explosiveness.

Sotto voce, I commented on this to Kronous. “Is it not possible,” I suggested, “that radium might be of some use in combatting the plague? I believe you have told me that radium, like any other element, is easily manufacturable nowadays.”

“That is a striking inspiration,” said Kronous thoughtfully. “And it might be worth trying. With our chemical mastery we can make all the radium we need at will in our laboratories. With your permission I am going to broach the idea.”

He arose and spoke briefly amid the attentive silence of the assembly. “Credit for the idea,” he announced as he ended, “must be given to Huno Paskon, a young colonial from Pallas, whom I have brought to earth as my guest.”

I felt myself abashed by the grave, unanimous gaze of these erudite and revered savants, who all eyed me in a manner that I could not fathom. Somehow, it seemed unthinkably presumptuous for me to have made any suggestion in their presence.

However, there appeared to be much serious debate going on—a widespread discussion in which the proposed use of radium was manifestly meeting with great favor. At last a venerable savant named Argo Kan, who was spokesman of the assembly, rose and said:

“I vote for an immediate trial of the method suggested by Kronous Alkon and Huno Paskon.”

Others, one by one, stood up and cast similar verbal votes, till the motion had been approved by nearly everyone present.

The meeting then dispersed, and I learned from Kronous that work was being immediately begun in local laboratories for the preparation of radium on a large scale and its utilization in the most effective form.

In less than an hour, several chemists were ready to visit the area of destruction with portable machines in which radium was disintegrated and used as a fine spray. It was magical in arresting the Black Rot, which had been eating its way continuously into the city, creeping from house to house along the crumbling pavements. The whole affected area, which now covered several square miles, was soon surrounded by a cordon of men equipped with the radium-machines; and, to the vast relief of the people of Djarma and Akameria, the plague was pronounced under control.

Chapter IV

Captured by Cannibals

During our stay in Djarma, Kronous and I were guests in a fine building set apart for the use of visiting scientists. I was amazed at the sybaritic luxury developed by this people—a luxury which, though illimitably and unimaginably resourceful, was at no time in excess of the bounds of good taste. There were baths that would have been the envy of a Roman emperor, and beds that would have reduced Cleopatra to beggary. We were lulled by rich, aerial music from no visible source, and were served with food and with all other necessities as if by intangible hands, at the mere verbal expression of a wish. Of course, there was a mechanical secret to such wonders; but the secret was cleverly hidden, and the means never obtruded itself. Humbly I realized how far ahead of ourselves were these men of 15,000 A.D., with their quiet and consummate mastery of natural laws—a mastery which none of them seemed to regard as being of any great value or importance.

I was somewhat embarrassed by the honor paid to myself as the originator of a means of retarding the Black Rot, and could only feel that my inspiration had been merely a fortunate accident. Compliments, both written and verbal, were showered upon me by scientific dignitaries; and it was only through the intercession of Kronous, who explained my aversion to publicity, that I was able to avoid numerous invitations.

Finding that he had certain business to transact, Kronous was not ready to return to his estate for several days. Since he could not devote all of his time to me, I formed the habit of going for long walks on the streets of Djarma and through its environs.

Walking slowly amid the changing scenes of a metropolis has always been a source of unending fascination for me. And of course, in this unfamiliar city of the future, where all was new and different, the lure of such wanderings was more than doubled. And the sensations of knowing that I trod above the ruins of New York, separated from my own period by

13,000 years with their inconceivable historic and telluric vicissitudes, was about the weirdest feeling that I had ever experienced.

It was a strange spectacle through which I sauntered. Vehicles were used, of a light, noiseless, gliding type without visible means of propulsion; and there were many air-vessels which flew deftly and silently overhead and discharged their passengers on the roofs or balconies of the higher buildings. And the landing or departure of great, shining ether-ships was an hourly occurrence. However, it was the throng of foot-passengers which engaged my attention most. Both sexes and all ages were attired in gaily colored costumes. I was impressed by the practical absence of noise, tumult and hurry; all was orderly, tranquil, unconfused. From the scarcity of women in the crowd, I realized how true were the racial fears expressed by Kronous. The women whom I saw were seldom beautiful or attractive according to twentieth century standards; in fact, there was something almost lifeless and mechanical about them. It was as if the sex had long reached the limit of its evolutionary development and was now in a state of stagnation or virtual retrogression. Such, I learned from Kronous, was indeed the case. But these women, because of their rarity and their value to the race, were shielded and protected with great care. Polyandry was prevalent; and romantic love, or even strong passion, were unknown things in this latter-day world.

A horrible homesickness came over me at times as I roamed amid this alien throng and peered into shop-windows where outlandish food-stuffs and curiously wrought fabrics from foreign planets were often displayed. And the feeling would increase whenever I approached the Martian quarter, where dwelt a considerable colony of these mysterious outsiders. Some of them had transported their own many-angled and asymmetrical architecture to earth. Their houses defied the rules of geometry—one might almost say those of gravity; and the streets about them were full of exotic odors, among which the stupefying reek of the drug *gnultan* was predominant. The place allured me, even though it disturbed me; and I strolled often through the tortuous alleys, beyond which I would reach the open country and wander among luxuriant fields and palmy woods that were no less baffling and unfamiliar than the scenes of the city.

One afternoon, I started out later than usual. As I passed through the city, I noticed that there were few Venusians in the throng, and overheard rumors of fresh revolts. However, I paid little attention to these at the time.

Twilight had overtaken me when I turned back from the open country toward the Martian quarter. The sylvan wilderness, in which I had never met many people, was quieter even than usual. I was following a narrow path bordered with thick shrubbery and palmettoes; and I began to hurry with a vague apprehensiveness, remembering the rumors I had heard. Heretofore I had been unafraid; but now, in the thickening twilight, I was aware of some indefinable menace; and remembered that I had foolishly forgotten to arm myself with the electronic projector which Kronous had given me to carry in my wanderings.

I had not seen anyone in the neighborhood. But now, as I went along, I scrutinized the deepening shadows of the shrubbery on each side of the path. Suddenly I heard a sound behind me that was like the scuffling of heavy, naked feet; and turning, saw that seven or eight Venusians, several of them armed with clubs, were closing in upon me. They must have been crouching amid the leafage as I passed. Their eyes gleamed like those of ravenous wolves in the twilight; and they uttered low, snarling, animal noises as they hurled themselves upon me. I avoided the viciously swinging weapon of the foremost and laid him out with a neat upper-cut; but the others were at me in a moment, using indiscriminately their clubs and dirty talons. I was aware of claws that tore my clothing and slashed my flesh; and then something descended upon my head with a dull crash, and I went down through reeling flame and whirling darkness to utter insensibility.

When I came to myself I was conscious at first only of my pain-racked head and limbs. The crown of my head was throbbing violently from the blow I had received. Then I heard a mutter of thick unhuman voices, and opening my eyes, beheld the flame-lit faces and bodies of a score of Venusians who were dancing around a great fire. I was lying on my back; and it required only a tentative effort at movement to tell me that my hands and feet were bound. Another man, similarly bound and perhaps dead or dying, was stretched on the ground beside me.

I lay still, deeming it inadvisable to let the Venusians know that I had recovered consciousness, and watched the lurid scene. It was something out of Dante’s Inferno, with the red reflection that ran bloodily on the uncouth, hairy limbs and hideous, demoniacal features of the interplanetary slaves. Their movements, though they had a semblance of some rude, horrible rhythm, were nearer to the capering of animals than they were to the dancing of even the lowest terrestrial savages; and I could not help but

wonder that such beings had mastered the art of lighting a fire. The use of fire, I was told, had been unknown to them in their own world till the advent of men. I remembered hearing also that they sometimes employed it nowadays in their cannibalistic revels, having acquired a taste for cooked meat. Likewise it was rumored of late that they were not averse to human flesh, and that more than one unfortunate had fallen a victim to their practices.

Such reflections were not conducive to my peace of mind. Also, I was oddly disturbed by a large sheet of metal grating, lying near the fire and having a grotesque resemblance to a giant gridiron, which was visible at intervals between the whirling figures. At second glance I recognized it as a sort of perforated tray which was used in the dehydration of various fruits. It was about eight feet in length by four in width.

Suddenly I heard a whisper from the man beside me, whom I had supposed unconscious.

“They are waiting for the fire to die down,” he said, almost inaudibly. “Then they will broil us alive over the coals on that sheet of metal.”

I shuddered, though the information was far from novel or unexpected.

“How did they get you?” I enquired, in a tone as low as that of my interlocutor.

“I am, or was, the owner of these slaves,” he answered. “They caught me unaware this time; but I believe, or hope, that my family has escaped. I made the mistake of thinking the slaves were thoroughly cowed from punishments that I inflicted not long ago. I gather that there has been a concerted revolt this afternoon, from what the savages themselves (whose speech I understand) have let drop. They are not so unintelligent as most people believe them to be; and I have a theory that the terrene climate has served to stimulate their mentality. They possess secret means of communication among themselves over the most unbelievable distances, that are no less efficient than radio. I have long suspected, too, that they have a tacit understanding with the Martians, who are covertly abetting them. The micro-organism that caused the Black Rot was no doubt smuggled from Venus by the Martians in their ether-vessels; and there is no telling what sort of plague they will loose next. There are some queer and frightful things on those alien planets—things that are deadly to terrestrials though harmless enough to the natives. I fear that the end of human supremacy is near at hand.”

We conversed in this fashion for some time; and I learned that the name of my fellow-captive was Jos Talar. In spite of our dire and seemingly hopeless predicament, he showed no evidence of fear; and the abstract, philosophical manner in which he viewed and discussed the situation was truly remarkable. But this, as I had occasion to observe, was characteristic of the temper of mankind in that era.

A full half hour must have passed, as we lay there bound and helpless. Then we saw that the huge fire was beginning to die down, revealing a vast bed of glowing coals. The light grew dimmer on the antic figures around it, and the beast-like faces of the Venusians were more loathsome than ever in the lowering gloom.

The dancing ceased, as if at an unspoken signal; and several of the dancers left the circle and came to where Jos Talar and myself were lying. We could see the gloating of their obscene eyes and the slavering of their greedy mouths, as they dug their filthy talons into our flesh and dragged us roughly toward the fire.

In the meanwhile others had stretched the huge metal tray upon the bed of coals. All of them stood eyeing us with a hyena-like avidity that made me shiver with sickness and repulsion.

I will not pretend that I was able to regard with any degree of complacency the prospect of becoming in the near future a Venusian *pièce de résistance.* But I nerved myself to the inevitable, reflecting that the agony would soon be over. Even if they did not knock us on the head beforehand, there would be a swift though terrible death on the bed of coals.

Our captors had now seized us by our feet and shoulders, as if they were about to fling us upon the improvised gridiron. There was an awful moment of suspense; and I wondered why the Venusians did not complete the expected action. Then I heard from their lips a low snarling, with an unmistakable note of alarm, and saw that all of them were watching the starlit heavens. They must have possessed keener senses than those of humanity, for at first I could neither see nor hear anything to justify their attention. Then, far-off among the stars, I perceived a moving light such as was carried by the Akamerian air-vessels.

At first I did not connect the light with any idea of possible rescue; and I wondered at the perturbation of the slaves. Then I realized that the light was flying very low and was descending straight toward the fire. It drew near with meteoric rapidity, till Jos Talar and myself and the cowering savages

were illumined by the full beams of the bluish searchlight. The vessel itself, like all of its kind, was almost noiseless; and it slid to earth and landed with preternatural speed and dexterity, within twenty paces of the fire.

Several men emerged from its dim bulk and ran toward us. The slaves had loosened their hold on Jos Talar and myself; and, growling ferociously, they crouched as if ready to leap upon the advancing figures.

The men were all armed with tubular objects, which I supposed were the usual electronic projectors. They levelled them at the Venusians; and thin rays of flame, like those from acetylene torches, issued from them and stabbed across the gloom. Several of the savages screamed with agony and fell writhing to the ground. One of them dropped among the coals and howled for a few instants like a demon who has been taken in some pitfall prepared for the damned. The others began to run, but were followed by long, slender beams that searched them out in their flight, dropping several more. Soon the survivors had disappeared from view in the darkness, and the fallen had ceased to writhe.

As our rescuers approached, and the glow of the dying fire illumed their faces, I saw that the foremost was Kronous Alkon. Some of the others I recognized as scientists whom I had met in Djarma.

Kronous Alkon knelt beside me and severed my bonds with a sharp knife, while someone else performed a like service for Jos Talar.

“Are you hurt ?” asked Kronous.

“Not severely,” I replied. “But you certainly came just in the proverbial nick of time. A moment more, and they would have thrown us upon the fire. Your coming is a miracle—I cannot imagine how it happened.”

“That is easily explained,” said Kronous as he helped me to my feet. “When you did not return this evening, I became alarmed; and knowing the usual directions of your wanderings, I studied this part of the environs of Djarma very closely with a nocturnal televisor, which renders plainly visible the details of the darkest landscape. I soon located the Venusians and their fire and recognized one of the bound figures as being yourself. After that, it required only a few minutes for me to collect several companions, arm them, charter an air-vessel, and seek the spot indicated by the televisor. I am more than thankful that we arrived in time.

“There has been,” he went on, “a world-wide revolt of the slaves during the past few hours. Two of the continents, Asia and Australia, are already in their hands; and a desperate struggle is going on throughout Akameria. We

are no longer using the electronic projectors, which merely stun. The weapons we used tonight are heat-ray generators, which kill. But come—we must return to Djarma. I will tell you more afterwards.”

Chapter V

The Struggle for the World

Our flight to Djarma was uneventful; and Kronous and I were landed by our companions on the roof of the building in which we had been housed. Here we said good-bye to Jos Talar, who went on with the rescuing scientists to find certain relatives and to learn if possible the fate of his family.

Kronous and I descended to our rooms, where we found Altus, who had just arrived from the estate. He told us that Oron had been killed in a terrific combat with the slaves that afternoon. Trogh had mysteriously disappeared; and Altus himself had been compelled to flee in one of the air-vessels belonging to Kronous.

My bruised head and lacerated body required attention, and Kronous gave me an application of the green ray, which marvellously relieved all my pain and soreness. Altus, miraculously, had escaped injury this time in his hand-to-hand fighting with the slaves.

We sat for hours while Kronous told us the events of the day and while fresh reports continued to arrive. The world-situation had indeed become serious; and apart from the universal revolt of the slaves, many new and unlooked-for perils had disclosed themselves. In the actual conflict the Venusians had suffered more heavily than the Terrestrials, and thousands of them had been slain and others compelled to flee before the superior weapons of mankind. But to counterbalance this, a number of new and baffling plagues had been loosed by the savages, who, it was now universally felt, were being assisted in this regard by the Martians. In the western part of Akameria great clouds of a vicious and deadly Martian insect had appeared—an insect which multiplied with the most damnable rapidity. In other sections gases had been freed in the air that were harmless to both Venusians and Martians but deleterious to human beings. Vegetable moulds from Venus, which fed like malignant parasites on all terrene plant-forms, had also been introduced in a hundred places; and no one knew what

else the morrow would reveal in the way of extraplanetary pests and dangers. I thought of the prophecy of Jos Talar.

"At this rate," said Kronous, "the world will soon be rendered uninhabitable for man. With our heat-rays and other weapons we might wipe out the revolutionists in time; but the plagues they have brought in are a different problem."

There was little sleep for any of us that night. We rose at early dawn, to learn the appalling news that the whole of Europe was now subject to the interplanetary slaves. The bacteria of a score of awful Martian and Venusian diseases, to which the outsiders had developed more or less immunity, were decimating the human population, and those who survived were unable to cope with their conquerors. Similar diseases were appearing in Akameria; and all the other plagues were spreading with malign celerity.

"We must go to my estate immediately and retrieve the time-machine, which I left in the aerodrome," said Kronous to me. "You can then return to your own age—it is not fair to ask you to stay longer in a world that is nearing ultimate ruin and chaos. We, the last remnants of mankind, will fight it out as best we can; but the war is not yours."

I protested that I had no desire to leave him; that I would remain to the end; and also that I had implicit faith in the power of humanity to overcome its ultra-mundane foes.

Kronous smiled, a little sadly. "Nevertheless," he persisted, "we must recover the time-machine. Thus your means of escape will be assured, no matter what happens. Will you go with me? I intend to make the trip this very forenoon."

Of course, I could not object to this; and I was eager to accompany him. Apart from any use which I myself might make of it, the time-machine was too rare and valuable a thing to be left at the mercy of Venusian vandals, who might well destroy it in their campaign of nation-wide sabotage.

Kronous, Altus and myself made the brief trip in the same light air-vessel that had been used for the journey to Djarma. The fertile, luxuriant country-side with fronded woods and tall, airy spires of embowered mansions above which we had flown less than a week before, was now patched and blotched with devastation. Many of the houses had been gutted by fire; and the ravages of the vegetable mould from Venus had blighted many fields and forests, whose grass and foliage rotted beneath it to a nauseous grey slime.

Approaching the estate of Kronous, we saw that we should arrive none too soon. The Venusians had fired the house, and even their own quarters, and columns of smoke were arising from the doomed edifices. A dozen slaves were nearing the aerodrome with the obvious intention of trying to set it on fire, or of destroying or damaging the vessels which it contained.

The features of Kronous were deadly pale with anger. He said nothing as he steered the atomic monoplane directly toward the slaves, who had now seen us and were running headlong in a futile effort to escape. Several of them had been carrying lighted torches, which they now dropped. We swooped upon them, flying only a few feet above the ground in the open space that surrounded the aerodrome. Two of the slaves were caught and mangled by the sharp prow of the flier; and Altus and myself, using heat-ray projectors, accounted for five more as we passed them. Only three remained; and wheeling the vessel around in a sharp curve, and steering with one hand, Kronous himself dispatched them with his heat-ray.

We landed near the entrance of the aerodrome. Kronous went in; and a minute later, the time-vessel flew gently forth and settled on the platform. Kronous opened the door and called to me.

“You and I, Hugh, will return to Djarma in the time-ship; and Altus will take charge of the monoplane.”

No more of the Venusians were in sight; though we saw enough of their handiwork as we circled above the plantation before starting for Djarma. Kronous sighed at the ruin that had been wrought; but otherwise he gave no evidence of emotion, and maintained a stoical silence.

Half an hour later we were back in our apartments at Djarma; and the time-machine was securely housed in an aerodrome nearby. Since it had all the appearance of a small interplanetary flier, no one but ourselves ever dreamt of its real nature and use.

Every hour brought fresh news of the national damage inflicted by the planetary aliens and their plagues. The Martians had now declared open hostility. Their first movement had been to destroy all the human embassies and trading-stations on Mars and to seize a vast amount of ether-shipping; but before these overt actions were generally known, they had also assumed the offensive everywhere on earth. They possessed a frightful weapon, the zero-ray, which could penetrate animal tissue in an instant with fatal frost-bite. This weapon had been kept a secret; its invention and mode of operation were obscure to human scientists; and it was no less lethal and

effective than the heat-ray. A battle was now going on in the Martian quarter of Djarma; and the Martians were holding their own. Air-vessels had tried dropping explosives on the quarter; but this was found to be more dangerous to humanity than to the Martians; for the latter were using some sort of unknown ray which detonated the explosives in mid-air, or even while they were still on board the air-vessels.

Chapter VI

The Departure

I was forced to marvel at the equanimity shown by the people of Akameria in the face of all these dire problems and dangers. Everywhere, scientists were coolly endeavoring to combat the new pests and were seeking to devise more efficacious weapons for use against the outsiders. No fear or alarm was exhibited by anyone. Probably the secret of this calm, imperturbable attitude lay in the lofty mental evolution and philosophic detachment that had been universally attained by the human race.

Knowing how insecure and impermanent was their tenure of existence among the inimical forces of the cosmos, men were prepared to meet their doom with resignation and dignity. Also, the race had grown old; and many, perhaps, were tired of the quotidian sameness of life and were ready to welcome anything, no matter how hazardous, in the nature of change.

Djarma was now full of refugees from the outlying plantations; and more were arriving hourly. But, gazing on the calm, unhurried throng, no one could have guessed the parlousness of the general situation. There was no evidence of strife or peril or apprehension; and even the war in the Martian quarter was conducted silently, since the weapons employed were all noiseless. Some of the Martian buildings, however, had been fired by heat-rays; and a pall of black smoke was rising and mushrooming above the ruddy flames.

Djarma had suffered less, so far, than most of the other Akamerian centers. The whole country was in disorder, and all communication was becoming seriously deranged. However, a few hours after the return of Kronous, Altus, and myself, there came from southern Akameria the warning of a new and more lethal plague than any which had hitherto appeared. A tiny Venusian micro-organism, a sort of aerial algae, which spread and increased with phenomenal celerity, had been turned loose and was rendering the air unbreathable for human beings over a vast and ever-growing area. It was harmless to the Venusians themselves, for the thick, vaporous air of their native jungles was full of it; and though it was

deleterious to the Martians, the latter had prepared themselves beforehand and were all equipped with respiratory masks and atmospheric filters. But men were dying of slow asphyxiation, marked by the most painful pneumonic symptoms, wherever overtaken by the strange pest. It was visible in the air, which displayed a saffron color when invaded by the organism. For this reason, it soon became known as the Yellow Death.

Beyond the manufacture and distribution of air-masks on a large scale, nothing could be done by savants to combat the new plague. The saffron cloud was rolling northward hour by hour—a noiseless and irresistible doom; and the situation was indeed desperate. A conclave of scientists was called; and it was soon decided that humanity must evacuate the regions menaced by the deadly aerial scourge. The only resource was for men to retreat toward the Arctic circle and entrench themselves in dominions where the organism could not penetrate, since it thrived only in warm, tropical air.

"This," said Kronous to me, sorrowfully, "is a preparatory step toward our final abandonment of the earth. The planetary aliens have conquered, as I knew they would. The cycle of human domination has completed itself; and the future belongs to the Venusians and Martians. I venture to predict, however, that the Martians will soon enslave the Venusians and rule them with a far stricter hand than we humans."

He went on. "Hugh, the hour of our parting will soon arrive. You could leave us at any time, as you know; but perhaps you will wish to see the drama to its end."

I pressed his hand but could say nothing. There was a tragic pathos in the swift doom which threatened the final remnant of the race. Remote and alien as these people were in many of their customs and ideas and feelings, they were still human. I admired their stoical courage in the face of irretrievable disaster; and for Kronous himself, after our long association and mutual vicissitudes, I had conceived a real affection.

All of Djarma was now astir with preparations for the northward flight. Every air-vessel or space-craft available was mustered for use; and more were being built with miraculous expedition. There were great air-liners and freighters in which personal belongings, food-supplies and laboratory equipment were transported; and the skies were thronged with their departure and their return for new cargoes. Perfect order and organization prevailed, and there was no trace of hurry or confusion anywhere.

Kronous, Altus and myself were among the last to leave. An immense bank of smoke was looming above the Martian quarter, and the weird, hydrocephalous inhabitants were being driven forth by the flames and were invading the deserted streets of the human section when we rose above the city in the time-vessel and steered northward. Far to the south, we could see a saffron cloud that had covered the horizon—the micro-organic plague that was smothering the whole of Akameria.

Beneath the guidance of Kronous, our vessel rose to a lofty elevation where more than the ordinary atmospheric speed was possible. Flying at seven hundred miles per hour, we soon neared the realms of perpetual winter and saw the sheeted ice of the polar regions glittering far below us.

Here humanity had already entrenched itself; and whole cities were being reared as if by magic amid the eternal wastes of snow. Laboratories and foundries were erected, where synthetic foods and fabrics and metals were prepared in immense quantities. The polar domains, however, were too inhospitable, and the climate too rigorous for a warmth-loving race, to form more than a way-station in the flight of humanity. It was decided that the larger asteroids, which had long been successfully colonized by man, would form the most suitable cosmic refuge. A great fleet of space-vessels was soon assembled in readiness for departure; more were built amid the ice and snow; and each day was marked by the arrival of ships from mid-ether, plying among the planets, which had been warned by radio of existing terrestrial conditions and had come to assist in the universal hegira.

In those days, before the ultimate farewell, I came to know Kronous better than at any previous time. His altruism and imperturbable fortitude aroused my deepest admiration. Of course he had cast in his lot with the people of his own era, and official posts on one of the ether-liners had already been assigned to Altus and himself. Those who displayed any interest in the matter were informed by Kronous that I, Huno Paskon, intended to return alone in a small ether-vessel to Pallas, my supposedly natal asteroid. Even between ourselves, we seldom mentioned the real nature of my journey.

Kronous gave me careful instruction regarding the mechanisms, both spatial and chronological, of the time-machine; but to avoid any error, he himself arranged all the controls in preparation for my flight through backward time. All that I would have to do was to turn on the power of the cosmic rays; and the machine would land me in 1930.

The day of departure came, when vessels were ready for the inter-cosmic transportation of the world's remaining people. It was an awful and solemn moment. Ship by ship and fleet by fleet, from the ice-founded platforms on which they had been resting, the long bulks of glittering metal soared upon the Aurora Borealis and disappeared in the chill, dreadful gulfs of outer space. The ship to which Kronous had been assigned was one of the last to leave; and he and I stood for a long while beside the time-vessel and watched the soaring of those skyward flocks. Altus had already said a farewell to me and had gone aboard the great ether-liner, which loomed near at hand.

For me, the hour was full of infinite sadness and a strange excitement, in the realization that man was abandoning his immemorial home and would henceforward be an exile among the worlds. But the face of Kronous was a marble mask; and I could not surmise his thoughts and feelings.

At last he turned to me and smiled with an odd wistfulness. "It is time for me to go—and time for you also," he said. "Good-bye, Hugh—we shall not meet again. Remember me sometimes, and remember the final fate of the human race, when you are back in your own epoch."

He pressed my hand briefly and then climbed aboard the space-liner; and he and Altus waved to me through the thick crystal of a sealed port as the huge vessel rose in air for its flight upon the interplanetary void. Sadly, regretting almost that I had not insisted upon accompanying them, I locked myself in the time-vessel and pulled the lever which would begin my own flight across the ages.

THE JUSTICE OF THE ELEPHANT

Nikhal Singh, Rajah of Anapur, was acquiring the obese complacency of middle-age; and his memories were blurred and befogged by a liberal use of Rajput opium. It was seldom that he recalled Ameera; though, as a general rule, an unfaithful woman is not the easiest thing in the world to forget. But Nikhal Singh had possessed so many wives and concubines; and one more or less was of no great importance, even though she had been eyed like the sloe and footed like the gazelle and had preferred an elephant-driver to a Rajah. And as Nikhal Singh grew older, and became wearier of women and fonder of opium, such matters were even less memorable or worthy of consideration.

However, the incident had angered him greatly at the time; and the doom he had devised for Ameera was the most atrocious one conceivable. Her story was long remembered and whispered in the royal zenana; though whether or not the example had served to deter others from similar derelictions is a moot problem.

Ameera was a dancing-girl, and therefore of low birth; and her rise in the Rajah's favor had not been regarded with unqualified approval by his legitimate wives. Under the circumstances, it was highly unwise for Ameera to carry on a love affair with the comely young elephant-driver, Rama Das; for there were many jealous eyes to note the amour, and jealous tongues to bear tattle thereof to Nikhal Singh. Ameera had been watched; and a man was seen leaving her apartments in the early morning hours. The man was not positively identified as Rama Das; but the presence of anyone save the Rajah in those sacrosanct purlieus was enough to damn the unfortunate girl.

The punishment inflicted by Nikhal Singh was no less swift than dreadful. The girl was condemned to a death usually reserved for the lowest criminals; and her suspected lover, Rama Das, by a refinement of Rajput cruelty, was chosen as her executioner. She was made to kneel and place her head on a block of stone in the palace courtyard; and thereupon the great

elephant ridden by Rama Das, at a signal from the driver, lifted one of his enormous hoofs and brought it down on the head of the dancing-girl, crushing her to an instant pulp. During the awful ordeal, no sign of recognition or emotion was betrayed either by Rama Das or Ameera; and the gloating Rajah was perhaps disappointed in this respect. A day or two afterward the young elephant-driver disappeared from Anapur; and no one knew whether he had been secretly made away with by Nikhal Singh or had vanished of his own accord.

Ten years had now passed; and the affair was overlaid, even in the minds of the Rajah's eldest wives, by a score of later scandals and by the petty happenings of the palace. And when the position of mahout to Ragna, the huge elephant that bore the Rajah himself on all formal occasions, became vacant through death, no one would have connected the half-forgotten Rama Das with the new applicant, Ram Chandar, who vowed his fitness to take charge of Ragna and offered credentials testifying to years of faithful and efficient service under the Maharajah of a state in Bundelcund. And least of all would it have occurred to Nikhal Singh himself that the grave, taciturn, heavy-bearded Ram Chandar and the blithe, beardless Rama Das were the same person.

Somehow, though there were many other applicants, Ram Chandar insinuated himself into the desired position. And since he was a competent driver, who had obviously mastered the language of elephants down to its last and most subtle inflection, no one, not even his fellow mahouts, found reason to disapprove or criticize his appointment. Ragna, also, appeared to like his new driver; and that ideal confidence and understanding which often exists between the mahout and the animal soon sprang up between these two. Ragna, after the fashion of a well-tutored elephant, was wise and erudite in regard to all that it was proper for him to know; but he learned some new manners and graces beneath the instruction of Ram Chandar; and was even taught in private one or two tricks that are not usually part of the curriculum of a state elephant. Of these latter, no one dreamt; and Ram Chandar preserved an inscrutable silence. And Nikhal Singh was wholly unaware of the strange, sardonic, sinister regard with which he was watched by the new mahout from Bundelcund.

Nikhal Singh had grown fonder than ever of his opium, and cared less and less for other pleasures or distractions. But now, in his fortieth year, for political reasons, it was agreed upon by his ministers that he must take

another wife. The Ranee had recently died without leaving him a male heir; and the young daughter of the neighboring Rajah of Ayalmere was selected as her successor. All the necessary arrangements and elaborate protocols were made; and the day was set for the marriage. Nikhal Singh was secretly bored by the prospect but was publicly resigned to his royal duty. The feelings of the bride, perhaps, were even more problematical.

The day of the marriage dawned in torrid saffron. A great procession coming from Ayalmere was to bring the bride into Anapur; and Nikhal Singh, with another stately procession, was to meet her outside the gates of his capital.

It was a gorgeous ceremony. Nikhal Singh, seated in a golden and jewel-crusted howdah on the superb elephant Ragna, passed slowly through the streets of Anapur followed by the court dignitaries on other elephants and a small army of horsemen, all splendidly caparisoned. There was much firing of jezails and cannon by the soldiers and banging of musical instruments among the populace. The mahout, Ram Chandar, grave and impassive as usual, sat on Ragna's neck. Nikhal Singh, who had fortified himself with a large lump of his favorite drug, was equally impassive on his broidered cushions in the howdah.

The procession emerged through the open gate of Anapur, and beheld at some distance, in a cloud of summer dust, the approach of the bride and her attendants, forming an array no less magnificent and sumptuous than that which was headed by Nikhal Singh.

As the two processions neared each other, an event occurred which was not a pre-arranged part of the ceremonial. At a secret signal from Ram Chandar, perceived and understood only by the elephant himself, Ragna suddenly halted, reached into the great howdah with his trunk, seized Nikhal Singh in a tenacious embrace, and haling the Rajah forth in a most undignified and ignominious manner, deposited him on his the knees in the road and forced him to bow his head in the dust before the bride's approaching litter. Then, almost before his action was comprehended by the stupefied throng, Ragna raised one of his front hoofs and calmly proceeded to crush the Rajah's head into a flat, formless jelly. Then, trumpeting wildly, menacing all who stood in his way, and apparently defying the frantic signals and commands of his driver, Ragna plunged through the crowd and quickly vanished in the nearby jungle, still carrying Ram Chandar and the empty howdah.

Amid the confusion and consternation that prevailed, it was assumed that Ragna had been seized by the vicious madness to which elephants are sometimes liable. When a semblance of order had been restored, he was followed by a troop of the Raja's horsemen, armed with jezails. They found him an hour later, browsing peacefully in a jungle-glade without his driver, and dispatched him with a volley, not trusting his appearance of renewed mildness.

The assumption that Ragna had gone *musth* was universal; and no one thought of Rama Das and the death of Ameera, ten years before. However, the disappearance of the new mahout, Ram Chandar, was no less a mystery than the earlier vanishment of Rama Das, if anyone had remembered to draw the parallel. The body of Ram Chandar was never found, and no one knew to a certainty whether he had been killed by Ragna in the thick jungle or had run away from Anapur through fear of being held responsible for Ragna's behavior. But mad elephants are prone to wreak their malignity on all accessible victims, even their own mahouts; so it was considered very unlikely that Ram Chandar could have escaped.

THE RETURN OF THE SORCERER

I had been out of work for several months; and my savings were perilously near to the vanishing-point. Therefore I was naturally elated when I received from John Carnby a favorable answer inviting me to present my qualifications in person. Carnby had advertised for a secretary, stipulating that all applicants must offer a preliminary statement of their capacities by letter; and I had written in response to the advertisement. Carnby, no doubt, was a scholarly recluse who felt averse to contact with a long waiting-list of strangers; and he had chosen this manner of weeding out beforehand many if not all of those who were ineligible. He had specified his requirements fully and succinctly; and these were of such nature as to bar even the average well-educated person. A knowledge of Arabic was necessary, among other things; and luckily I had acquired a certain degree of scholarship in this unusual tongue.

I found the address, of whose location I had formed only a vague idea, at the end of a hill-top avenue in the suburbs of Oakland. It was a large, two-story house, overshaded by ancient oaks and dark with a mantling of unchecked ivy, among hedges of unpruned privet and shrubbery that had gone wild for many years. It was separated from its neighbors by a vacant, weed-grown lot on one side and a tangle of vines and trees on the other, surrounding the black ruins of a burnt mansion.

Even apart from its air of long neglect, there was something drear and dismal about the place—something that inhered in the ivy-blurred outlines of the house, in the furtive, shadowy windows, and the very forms of the misshapen oaks and oddly sprawling shrubbery. Somehow, my elation became a trifle less exuberant, as I entered the grounds and followed an unswept path to the front door.

When I found myself in the presence of John Carnby, my jubilation was still somewhat further diminished; though I could not have given a tangible reason for the premonitory chill, the dull, somber feeling of alarm that I experienced, and the leaden sinking of my spirits. Perhaps it was the dark

library in which he received me as much as the man himself—a room whose musty shadows could never have been wholly dissipated by sun or lamplight. Indeed, it must have been this; for John Carnby himself, in a manner, was very much the sort of person I had pictured him to be.

He had all the ear-marks of the lonely scholar who has devoted patient years to some line of erudite research. He was thin and bent, with a massive forehead and a mane of grizzled hair; and the pallor of the library was on his hollow, clean-shaven cheeks. But coupled with this, there was a nerve-shattered air, a fearful shrinking that was more than the normal shyness of a recluse, and an unceasing apprehensiveness that betrayed itself in every glance of his dark-ringed, feverish eyes and every movement of his bony hands. In all likelihood his health had been seriously impaired by over-application; and I could not help but wonder at the nature of the studies that made him a tremulous wreck. But there was something about him—perhaps the width of his bowed shoulders and the bold aquilinity of his facial outlines—which gave the impression of great former strength and a vigor not yet wholly exhausted.

His voice was unexpectedly deep and sonorous.

"I think you will do, Mr. Ogden," he said, after a few formal questions, most of which related to my linguistic knowledge, and in particular my mastery of Arabic. "Your labors will not be very heavy; but I want someone who can be on hand at any time required. Therefore you must live with me—I can give you a comfortable room, and I guarantee that my cooking will not poison you. I often work at night; and I hope you will not find the irregular hours too disagreeable."

No doubt I should have been overjoyed at this assurance that the secretarial position was to be mine. Instead, I was aware of a dim, unreasoning reluctance and an obscure forewarning of evil as I thanked John Carnby and told him that I was ready to move in whenever he desired.

He appeared to be greatly pleased; and the queer apprehensiveness went out of his manner for a moment.

"Come immediately—this very afternoon, if you can," he said. "I shall be very glad to have you—and the sooner the better. I have been living entirely alone for some time; and I must confess that the solitude is beginning to pall upon me. Also, I have been retarded in my labors for lack of the proper help. My brother used to live with me and assist me; but he has gone away on a long trip."

I returned to my down-town lodgings, paid my rent with the last few dollars that remained to me, packed my belongings, and in less than an hour was back at my new employer's home. He assigned me a room on the second floor, which, though unaired and dusty, was more than luxurious in comparison with the hall bedroom that failing funds had compelled me to inhabit for some time past. Then he took me to his own study, which was on the same floor, at the further end of the hall. Here, he explained to me, most of my future work would be done.

I could hardly restrain an exclamation of surprise as I viewed the interior of this chamber. It was very much as I should have imagined the den of some old sorcerer to be. There were tables strewn with archaic instruments of doubtful use, with astrological charts, with skulls and alembics and crystals, with censers such as are used in the Catholic Church, and volumes bound in worm-eaten leather with verdigris-mottled clasps. In one corner stood the skeleton of a large ape; in another, a human skeleton; and overhead a stuffed crocodile was suspended. There were cases overpiled with books, and even a cursory glance at the titles showed me that they formed a singularly comprehensive collection of ancient and modern works on demonology and the Black Arts. There were some weird paintings and etchings on the walls, dealing with kindred themes; and the whole atmosphere of the room exhaled a medley of half-forgotten superstitions. Ordinarily I should have smiled if confronted with such things; but somehow, in this lonely, dismal house, beside the neurotic, hag-ridden Carnby, it was difficult for me to repress an actual shudder.

On one of the tables, contrasting incongruously with this mélange of medievalism and Satanism, there stood a type-writer, surrounded with piles of disorderly manuscript. At one end of the room there was a small, curtained alcove with a bed in which Carnby slept. At the end opposite the alcove, between the human and simian skeletons, I perceived a locked cupboard that was set in the wall.

Carnby had noted my surprise, and was watching me with a keen, analytic expression which I found impossible to fathom. He began to speak, in explanatory tones.

"I have made a life-study of demonism and sorcery," he declared. "It is a fascinating field, and one that is singularly neglected. I am now preparing a monograph, in which I am trying to correlate the magical practices and demon-worship of every known age and people. Your labors, at least for

awhile, will consist in typing and arranging the voluminous preliminary notes which I have made, and in helping me to track down other references and correspondences. Your knowledge of Arabic will be invaluable to me, for I am none too well-grounded in this language myself, and I am depending for certain essential data on a copy of the *Necronomicon* in the original Arabic text. I have reason to think that there are certain omissions and erroneous renderings in the Latin version of Olaus Wormius."

I had heard of this rare, well-nigh fabulous volume, but had never seen it. The book was supposed to contain the ultimate secrets of evil and forbidden knowledge; and, moreover the original text, written by the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, was said to be unprocurable. I wondered how it had come into Carnby's possession.

"I'll show you the volume after dinner," Carnby went on. "You will doubtless be able to elucidate one or two passages that have long puzzled me."

The evening meal, cooked and served by my employer himself, was a welcome change from cheap restaurant fare. Carnby seemed to have lost a good deal of his nervousness. He was very talkative, and even began to exhibit a certain scholarly gaiety after we had shared a bottle of mellow Sauterne. Still, with no manifest reason, I was troubled by intimations and forebodings which I could neither analyze not trace to their rightful source.

We returned to the study; and Carnby brought out from a locked drawer the volume of which he had spoken. It was enormously old, and was bound in ebony covers arabesqued with silver and set with darkly glowing garnets. When I opened the yellowing pages, I drew back with involuntary revulsion at the odor which arose from them—an odor that was more than suggestive of physical decay, as if the book had lain among corpses in some forgotten graveyard and had taken on the taint of dissolution.

Carnby's eyes were burning with a fevered light, as he took the old manuscript from my hands and turned to a page near the middle. He indicated a certain passage with his lean forefinger.

"Tell me what you make of this," he said, in a tense, excited whisper.

I deciphered the paragraph, slowly and with some difficulty, and wrote down a rough English version with the pad and pencil which Carnby offered me. Then, at his request, I read it aloud:

> It is verily known by few, but is nevertheless an attestable fact, that the will of a dead sorcerer hath power upon his own body and can raise it up from the tomb and perform therewith whatever action was unfulfilled in life. And such resurrections are invariably for the doing of malevolent deeds and the detriment of others. Most readily can the corpse be animated if all its members have remained intact; and yet there are cases in which the excelling will of the wizard hath reared up from death the sundered pieces of a body hewn in many fragments, and hath caused them to serve his end, either separately or in a temporary re-union. But in every instance, after the action hath been completed, the body lapseth into its former state.

Of course, all this was errant gibberish. Probably it was the strange, unhealthy look of utter absorption with which my employer listened, more than that damnable passage from the *Necronomicon,* which caused my nervousness and made me start violently when, toward the end of my reading, I heard an indescribable slithering noise in the hall outside. But when I finished the paragraph and looked up at Carnby, I was more than startled by the expression of stark, staring fear which his features had assumed—an expression as of one who is haunted by some hellish phantom. Somehow, I got the feeling that he was listening to that odd noise in the hallway rather than to my translation of Abdul Alhazred.

"The house is full of rats," he explained, as he caught my inquiring glance. "I have never been able to get rid of them, with all my efforts."

The noise, which still continued, was that which a rat might make in dragging some object slowly along the floor. It seemed to draw closer, to approach the door of Carnby's room; and then, after an intermission, it began again and receded. My employer's agitation was marked— he listened with fearful intentness and seemed to follow the progress of the sound with a terror that mounted as it drew near and decreased a little with its recession.

"I am very nervous," he said. "I have worked too hard lately, and this is the result. Even a little noise upsets me."

The sound had now died away somewhere in the house. Carnby appeared to recover himself in a measure.

"Will you please re-read your translation?" he requested. "I want to follow it very carefully, word by word."

I obeyed. He listened with the same look of unholy absorption as before; and this time we were not interrupted by any noises in the hallway. Carnby's face grew paler, as if the last remnant of blood had been drained from it, when I read the final sentences; and the fire in his hollow eyes was like phosphorescence in a deep vault.

"That is a most remarkable passage," he commented. "I was doubtful about its meaning, with my imperfect Arabic; and I have found that the passage is wholly omitted in the Latin of Olaus Wormius. Thank you for your scholarly rendering—you have certainly cleared it up for me."

His tone was dry and formal, as if he were repressing himself and holding back a world of unsurmisable thoughts and emotions. Somehow I felt that Carnby was more nervous and upset than ever, and also that my rendering from the *Necronomicon* had in some mysterious manner contributed to his perturbation. He wore a ghastly brooding expression, as if his mind were busy with some unwelcome and forbidden theme.

However, seeming to collect himself, he asked me to translate another passage. This turned out to be a singular incantatory formula for the exorcism of the dead, with a ritual that involved the use of rare Arabian spices and the proper intoning of at least a hundred names of ghouls and demons. I copied it all out for Carnby, who studied it for a long time with a rapt eagerness that was more than scholarly.

"That, too," he observed, "is not in Olaus Wormius." After perusing it again, he folded the paper carefully and put it away in the same drawer from which he had taken the *Necronomicon*.

That evening was one of the strangest I have ever spent. As we sat for hour after hour discussing renditions from that unhallowed volume, I came to know more and more definitely that my employer was mortally afraid of something, that he dreaded being alone and was keeping me with him on this account rather than for any other reason. Always he seemed to be waiting and listening with a painful, tortured expectation; and I saw that he gave only a mechanical awareness to much that was said. Among the weird appurtenances of the room, in that atmosphere of unmanifested evil, of untold horror, the rational part of my mind began to succumb slowly to a recrudescence of dark ancestral fears. A scorner of such things in my normal moments, I was now ready to believe in the most baleful creations of superstitious fancy. No doubt, by some process of mental contagion, I had caught the hidden terror from which Carnby suffered.

By no word or syllable, however, did the man admit the actual feelings that were evident in his demeanor; but he spoke repeatedly of a nervous ailment. More than once, during our discussion, he sought to imply that his interest in the supernatural and the Satanic was wholly intellectual—that he, like myself, was without personal belief in such things. Yet I knew infallibly that his implications were false—that he was driven and obsessed by a real faith in all that he pretended to view with scientific detachment, and had doubtless fallen a victim to some imaginary horror entailed by his occult researches. But my intuition afforded me no clue to the actual nature of this horror.

There was no repetition of the sounds that had been so disturbing to my employer. We must have sat till after midnight with the writings of the mad Arab open before us. At last Carnby seemed to realize the lateness of the hour.

“I fear I have kept you up too long,” he said apologetically. “You must go and get some sleep. I am selfish, and I forget that such hours are not habitual to others, as they are to me.”

I made the formal denial of his self-impeachment which courtesy required, said good-night, and sought my own chamber with a feeling of intense relief. It seemed to me that I would leave behind me in Carnby’s room all the shadowy fear and oppression to which I had been subjected.

Only one light was burning in the long passage. It was near Carnby’s door; and my own door at the further end, close to the stair-head, was in deep shadow. As I groped for the knob, I heard a noise behind me, and turned to see in the gloom a small, indistinct body that sprang from the hall-landing to the top stair, disappearing from view. I was horribly startled; for even in that vague, fleeting glimpse, the thing was much too pale for a rat and its form was not at all suggestive of an animal. I could not have sworn what it was; but the outlines had seemed unmentionably monstrous. I stood trembling violently in every limb, and heard on the stairs a singular bumping sound, like the fall of an object rolling downward from step to step. The sound was repeated at regular intervals, and finally ceased.

If the safety of the soul and body had depended upon it, I could not have turned on the stair-light; nor could I have gone to the top steps to ascertain the agency of that unnatural bumping. Anyone else, it might seem, would have done this. Instead, after a moment of virtual petrification, I entered my room, locked the door, and went to bed in a turmoil of unresolved doubt and

equivocal terror. I left the light burning; and I lay awake for hours, expecting momentarily a recurrence of that abominable sound. But the house was silent as a morgue; and I heard nothing. At length, in spite of my anticipations to the contrary, I fell asleep and did not awaken till after many sodden, dreamless hours.

It was ten o'clock, as my watch informed me. I wondered whether my employer had left me undisturbed through thoughtfulness, or had not yet arisen himself. I dressed and went downstairs, to find him waiting at the breakfast table. He was paler and more tremulous than ever, as if he had slept badly.

"I hope the rats didn't annoy you too much," he remarked, after a preliminary greeting. "Something really must be done about them."

"I didn't notice them at all," I replied. Somehow, it was utterly impossible for me to mention the queer, ambiguous thing which I had seen and heard on retiring the night before. Doubtless I had been mistaken, doubtless it had been merely a rat after all, dragging something down the stairs. I tried to forget the hideously repeated noise and the momentary flash of unthinkable outlines in the gloom.

My employer eyed me with uncanny sharpness, as if he sought to penetrate my inmost mind. Breakfast was a dismal affair; and the day that followed was no less dreary. Carnby isolated himself till the middle of the afternoon; and I was left to my own devices in the well-supplied but conventional library downstairs. What Carnby was doing alone in his room I could not surmise; but I thought more than once that I heard the faint, monotonous intonations of a solemn voice. Horror-breeding hints and noisome intuitions invaded my brain. More and more the atmosphere of that house enveloped and stifled me with poisonous, miasmal mystery; and I felt everywhere the invisible brooding of malignant incubi.

It was almost a relief when my employer summoned me to his study. Entering, I noticed that the air was full of a pungent, aromatic smell and was touched by the vanishing coils of a blue vapor, as if from the burning of Oriental gums and spices in the church censers. An Ispahan rug had been moved from its position near the wall to the center of the room, but was not sufficient to cover entirely a curving violet mark that suggested the drawing of a magic circle on the floor. No doubt Carnby had been performing some sort of incantation; and I thought of the awesome formula I had translated at his request.

However, he did not offer any explanation of what he had been doing. His manner had changed remarkably, and was more controlled and confident than at any former time. In a fashion almost business-like he laid before me a pile of manuscript which he wanted me to type for him. The familiar click of the keys aided me somewhat in dismissing my apprehensions of vague evil, and I could almost smile at the recherché and terrific information comprised in my employer's notes, which dealt mainly with formulae for the acquisition of unlawful power. But still, beneath my re-assurance, there was a vague, lingering disquietude.

Evening came; and after our meal we returned again to the study. There was a tenseness in Carnby's manner now, as if he were eagerly awaiting the result of some hidden test. I went on with my work; but some of his emotion communicated itself to me, and ever and anon I caught myself in an attitude of strained listening.

At last, above the click of the keys, I heard that peculiar slithering in the hall. Carnby had heard it, too, and his confident look had utterly vanished, giving place to the most pitiable fear and agitation.

The sound drew nearer and was followed by a dull, dragging noise, and then by more sounds of an unidentifiable slithering and scuttling nature, that varied in loudness. The hall was seemingly full of them, as if a whole army of rats were hauling some carrion booty along the floor. And yet no rodent—or number of rodents—could have made such sounds, or could have moved anything so heavy as the object which came behind the rest. There was something in the character of those noises—something without name or definition—which caused a slowly creeping chill to invade my spine.

"Good Lord! What is all that racket?" I cried.

"The rats! I tell you it is only the rats!" Carnby's voice was a high, hysterical shriek.

A moment later, there came an unmistakable knocking on the door, near the sill. At the same time I heard a heavy thudding in the locked cupboard at the further end of the room. Carnby had been standing erect; but now he sank limply into a chair. His features were ashen, and his look was almost maniacal with fright.

The nightmare doubt and tension became unbearable. I ran to the door and flung it open, in spite of a frantic remonstrance from my employer. I

had no idea what I should find as I stepped across the sill into the feebly litten hall.

When I looked down and saw the thing on which I had almost trodden, my feeling was one of sick amazement and actual nausea. It was a human hand which had been severed at the wrist—a bony, bluish hand like that of a week-old corpse, with garden-mould on the fingers and under the long nails. *The damnable thing had moved*, it had drawn back to avoid me, and was crawling along the passage somewhat in the manner of a crab! And following it with my gaze, I saw that there were other things beyond it, one of which I recognized as a man's foot and another as a fore-arm. I dared not look at the rest. All were moving slowly, hideously away in a charnel procession—and I cannot describe the fashion in which they moved. Their individual vitality was horrifying beyond endurance. It was more than the vitality of life—yet the air was laden with a carrion taint. I averted my eyes and stepped back into Carnby's room, closing the door behind me with a shaking hand. Carnby was at my side with the key, which he turned in the lock with palsy-stricken fingers that had become as feeble as those of an old man.

"You saw them?" he asked in a dry, quavering whisper.

"In God's name, what does it all mean?" I cried.

Carnby went back to his chair, tottering a little with weakness. His lineaments were agonized by the gnawing of some inward horror, and he shook visibly like an ague patient. I sat down in a chair beside him; and he began to stammer forth his unbelievable confession, half-incoherently, with inconsequential mouthings and many breaks and pauses:

"He is stronger than I am—even in death... even with his body dismembered by the surgeon's knife and saw that I used... I thought he could not return after that... after I had buried the fragments in a dozen different places... in the cellar... beneath the shrubs... at the foot of the ivy-vines. But the *Necronomicon* is right ... and Helman Carnby knew it. He warned me before I killed him—he told me he could return—*even in that condition*. But I did not believe him. I hated Helman, and he hated me too. He had attained to higher power and knowledge and was more favored by the Dark Ones than I... That was why I killed him—my own twin-brother, and my brother in the service of Satan and of Those who were before Satan. We had studied together for many years. We had celebrated the Black Mass together... we were attended by the same familiars... But Helman Carnby

had gone deeper into the occult... into the forbidden, where I could not follow him. I feared him, and I could not endure his supremacy.

“It is more than a week—it is ten days since I did the deed. But Helman—or some part of him—has returned every night... . God! his accursed hands crawling on the floor!... his feet, his arms, the segments of his legs, climbing the stairs in some unmentionable way to haunt me! ... Christ! his awful, bloody torso lying in wait!... I tell you, his hands have come even by day to tap and fumble at my door ... and I have stumbled over his arms in the dark.

“Oh, God! I shall go mad with the awfulness of it... But he wants me to go mad, he wants to torture me till my brain gives way. That is why he haunts me in this piecemeal fashion. He could end it all at any time, with the demoniacal power that is his. He could re-knit his sundered limbs and body and slay me as I slew him.

“How carefully I buried the portions, with what infinite forethought! And how useless it was!... I buried the knife and saw, too, at the further end of the garden, as far away as possible from his evil, itching hands... But I did not bury the head with the other pieces—I kept it in that cupboard at the end of my room. Sometimes I have heard it moving there—as you heard it a while ago... . But he does not need the head—his will is elsewhere, and can work intelligently through all his members.

“Of course, I locked all the doors and windows at night when I found that he was coming back... But it made no difference. And I have tried to exorcise him with the appropriate incantations—with all those that I knew. Today I tried that sovereign formula from the *Necronomicon* which you translated for me... I got you here to translate it. Also, I could no longer bear to be alone... and I thought that it might help if there were someone else in the house... That formula was my last hope. I thought it would hold him—it is a most ancient and most dreadful incantation. But... as you have seen... it is useless....”

His voice trailed off in a broken mumble, and he sat staring before him with sightless, intolerable eyes in which I saw the beginning flare of madness. I could say nothing—the confession he had made was so ineffably atrocious. The moral shock, and the ghastly supernatural horror, had almost stupified me. My sensibilities were stunned; and it was not till I had begun to recover myself that I felt the irresistible surge of a flood of loathing for the man beside me.

I rose to my feet. The house had grown very silent, as if the macabre and charnel army of beleaguerment had now retired to its various graves. Carnby had left the key in the lock; and I went to the door and turned it quickly.

“Are you leaving? Don’t go,” Carnby begged in a voice that was tremulous with alarm, as I stood with my hand on the door-knob.

“Yes, I am going,” I said coldly. “I am resigning my position right now; and I intend to pack my belongings and leave your house with as little delay as possible.”

I opened the door and went out, refusing to listen to the arguments and pleadings and protestations he had begun to babble. For the nonce, I preferred to face whatever might lurk in the gloomy passage, no matter how loathsome and terrifying, rather than endure any longer the society of John Carnby.

The hall was empty; but I shuddered with repulsion at the memory of what I had seen, as I hastened to my room. I think I should have screamed aloud at the least sound or movement in the shadows.

I began to pack my valise with a feeling of the most frantic urgency and compulsion. It seemed to me that I could not escape soon enough from that house of abominable secrets, over which there hung an atmosphere of smothering menace. I made mistakes in my hurry, I stumbled over chairs, and my brain and fingers grew numb with a paralyzing dread.

I had almost finished my task, when I heard the sound of slow, measured footsteps coming up the stairs. I knew that it was not Carnby, for he had locked himself immediately in his room when I had left, and I felt sure that nothing could have tempted him to emerge. Anyway, he could hardly have gone downstairs without my hearing him.

The footsteps came to the top landing and went past my door along the hall, with that same dead, monotonous repetition, regular as the movement of a machine. Certainly it was not the soft, nervous tread of John Carnby.

Who, then, could it be? My blood stood still in my veins; I dared not finish the speculation that arose in my mind.

The steps paused; and I knew that they had reached the door of Carnby’s room. There followed an interval in which I could scarcely breathe; and then I heard an awful crashing and shattering noise, and above it the soaring scream of a man in the uttermost extremity of fear.

I was powerless to move, as if an unseen iron hand had reached forth to restrain me; and I have no idea how long I waited and listened. The scream had fallen away in a swift silence; and I heard nothing now, except a low, peculiar, recurrent sound which my brain refused to identify.

It was not my own volition, but a stronger will than mine, which drew me forth at last and impelled me down the hall to Carnby's study. I felt the presence of that will as an overpowering, superhuman thing—a demoniac force, a malign mesmerism.

The door of the study had been broken in and was hanging by one hinge. It was splintered as by the impact of more than mortal strength. A light was still burning in the room, and the unmentionable sound I had been hearing ceased as I neared the threshold. It was followed by an evil, utter stillness.

Again I paused, and could go no further. But this time it was something other than the hellish, all-pervading magnetism that petrified my limbs and arrested me before the sill. Peering into the room, in the narrow space that was framed by the doorway and lit by an unseen lamp, I saw one end of the Oriental rug, and the gruesome outlines of a monstrous, unmoving shadow that fell beyond it on the floor. Huge, elongated, misshapen, the shadow was seemingly cast by the arms and torso of a naked man who stooped forward with a surgeon's saw in his hand. Its monstrosity lay in this: though the shoulders, chest, abdomen and arms were all clearly distinguishable, the shadow was headless and appeared to terminate in an abruptly severed neck. It was impossible, considering the relative position, for the head to have been concealed from sight through any manner of foreshortening.

I waited—powerless to enter or withdraw. The blood had flowed back upon my heart in an ice-thick tide, and thought was frozen in my brain. An interval of termless horror; and then, from the hidden end of Carnby's room, from the direction of the locked cupboard, there came a fearsome and violent crash, and the sound of splintering wood and whining hinges, followed by the sinister, dismal thud of an unknown object striking the floor.

Again there was silence—a silence as of consummated Evil brooding above its unnamable triumph. The shadow had not stirred; there was a hideous contemplation in its attitude; and the saw was still held in its poising hand, as if above a completed task.

Another interval; and then, without warning, I witnessed the awful and unexplainable *disintegration* of the shadow, which seemed to break gently and easily into many different shadows ere it faded from my view. I hesitate to describe the manner, or specify the places, in which this singular disruption, this manifold cleavage, occurred. Simultaneously, I heard the muffled clatter of a metallic implement on the Persian rug, and a sound that was not that of a single body but of many bodies falling.

Once more there was silence—a silence as of some nocturnal cemetery, when grave-diggers and ghouls are done with their macabre toil, and the dead alone remain.

Drawn by that baleful mesmerism, like a somnambulist led by an unseen demon, I entered the room. I knew with a loathly prescience the sight that awaited me beyond the sill—the double heap of human segments, some of them fresh and bloody, and others already blue with beginning putrefaction and marked with earth-stains, that were mingled in abhorrent confusion on the rug. A reddened knife and saw were protruding from the pile; and a little to one side, between the rug and the open cupboard with its shattered door, there reposed a human head that was fronting the other remnants in an upright posture. It was in the same condition of incipient decay as the body to which it had belonged; but I swear that I saw the fading of a malignant exultation from its features as I entered. Even with the marks of corruption upon them, the lineaments bore a manifest likeness to those of John Carnby; and plainly they could belong only to a twin brother.

The frightful inferences that smothered my brain with their black and clammy cloud, are not to be written here. The horror which I beheld—and the greater horror which I surmised—would have put to shame the foulest enormities of nether hell in their frozen pits. There was but one mitigation and one mercy—I was compelled to gaze only for a few instants on that intolerable scene. Then, all at once, I felt that something had withdrawn from the room; the malign spell was broken, the overpowering volition that had held me captive was gone. It had released me now, even as it had released the dismembered corpse of Helman Carnby. I was free to go; and I fled from that ghastly chamber and ran headlong through an unlit house and into the outer darkness.

THE CITY OF THE SINGING FLAME

Foreword

We had been friends for a decade or more, and I knew Giles Angarth as well as anyone could purport to know him. Yet the thing was no less a mystery to me than to others at the time, and it is still a mystery. Sometimes I think that he and Ebbonly had designed it all between them as a huge, insoluble hoax; that they are still alive, somewhere, and are laughing at the world that has been so sorely baffled by their disappearance. And sometimes I make tentative plans to re-visit Crater Ridge and find, if I can, the two boulders mentioned in Angarth's narrative as having a vague resemblance to broken-down columns. In the meanwhile no one has uncovered any trace of the missing men or has heard even the faintest rumor concerning them; and the whole affair, it would seem, is likely to remain a most singular and exasperating riddle.

Angarth, whose fame as a writer of fantastic fiction will probably outlive that of most other modern magazine contributors, had been spending that summer among the Sierras, and had been living alone till the artist Felix Ebbonly went to visit him. Ebbonly, whom I had never met, was well known for his imaginative paintings and drawings; and he had illustrated more than one of Angarth's novels. When neighboring campers became alarmed over the prolonged absence of the two men and the cabin was searched for some possible clue, a package addressed to me was found lying on the table; and I received it in due course of time, after reading many newspaper speculations regarding the double vanishment. The package contained a small, leather-bound notebook. Angarth had written on the fly-leaf:

> Dear Hastane,
>
> You can publish this journal sometime, if you like. People will think it the last and wildest of all my fictions—unless they take it for one of your own. In either case, it will be just as well. Good-bye.
>
> Faithfully,
>
> Giles Angarth.

I am now publishing the journal, which will doubtless meet the reception he predicted. But I am not so certain myself, as to whether the tale

is truth or fabrication. The only way to make sure will be to locate the two boulders; and anyone who has ever seen Crater Ridge, and has wandered over its miles of rock-strewn desolation, will realize the difficulties of such a task.

The Journal

July 31st, 1930. I have never acquired the diary-keeping habit—mainly, no doubt, because of my uneventful mode of existence, in which there has seldom been anything to chronicle. But the thing which happened this morning is so extravagantly strange, so remote from mundane laws and parallels, that I feel impelled to write it down to the best of my understanding and ability. Also, I shall keep account of the possible repetition and continuation of my experience. It will be perfectly safe to do this, for no one who ever reads the record will be likely to believe it.

I had gone for a walk on Crater Ridge, which lies a mile or less to the north of my cabin near Summit. Though differing markedly in its character from the usual landscapes roundabout, it is one of my favorite places. It is exceptionally bare and desolate, with little more in the way of vegetation than mountain sun-flowers, wild currant-bushes, and a few sturdy, wind-warped pines and supple tamaracks. Geologists deny it a volcanic origin; yet its outcroppings of rough, nodular stone and enormous rubble-heaps have all the air of scoriac remains—at least, to my non-scientific eye. They look like the slag and refuse of Cyclopean furnaces, poured out in pre-human years, to cool and harden into shapes of limitless grotesquery. Among them are stones that suggest the fragments of primordial bas-reliefs, or small prehistoric idols and figurines; and others that seem to have been graven with lost letters of an indecipherable script. Unexpectedly, there is a little tarn lying on one end of the long, dry Ridge—a tarn that has never been fathomed. The hill is an odd interlude among the granite sheets and crags, and the fir-clothed ravines and valleys of this region.

It was a clear, windless morning and I paused often to view the magnificent perspectives of varied scenery that were visible on every hand —the titan battlements of Castle Peak the rude masses of Donner Peak, with its dividing pass of hemlocks the remote luminous blue of the Nevada Mountains, and the soft green of willows in the valley at my feet. It was an aloof, silent world and I heard no sound other than the dry, crackling noise of cicadas among the currant-bushes.

I strolled on in a zig-zag manner for some distance and coming to one of the rubble-fields with which the Ridge is interstrewn, I began to search the ground closely, hoping to find a stone that was sufficiently quaint and grotesque in its form to be worth keeping as a curiosity. I had found several such in my previous wanderings. Suddenly I came to a clear space amid the

rubble, in which nothing grew—a space that was round as an artificial ring. In the center were two isolated boulders, queerly alike in shape, and lying about five feet apart. I paused to examine them. Their substance, a dull, greenish-grey stone, seemed to be different from anything else in the neighborhood; and I conceived at once the weird, unwarrantable fancy that they might be the pedestals of vanished columns, worn away by incalculable years till there remained only these sunken ends. Certainly the perfect roundness and uniformity of the boulders was peculiar; and though I possess a smattering of geology, I could not identify their smooth, soapy material.

My imagination was excited, and I began to indulge in some rather overheated fantasies. But the wildest of these was a homely commonplace in comparison with the thing that happened when I took a single step forward in the vacant space immediately between the two boulders. I shall try to describe it to the utmost of my verbal ability though human language is naturally wanting in words that are adequate for the delineation of events and sensations beyond the normal scope of human experience.

Nothing is more disconcerting than to miscalculate the degree of descent in taking a step. Imagine then what it was like to step forward on level, open ground, and find utter nothingness underfoot! I seemed to be going down into an empty gulf, and at the same time the landscape before me vanished in a swirl of broken images and everything went blind. There was a feeling of intense, hyperborean cold, and an indescribable sickness and vertigo possessed me, due, no doubt; to the profound disturbance of equilibrium. Also—either from the speed of my descent or for some other reason—I was totally unable to draw breath. My thoughts and feelings were unutterably confused, and half the time it seemed to me that I was falling *upward* rather than downward, or was sliding horizontally or at some oblique angle. At last I had the sensation of turning a complete somersault; and then I found myself standing erect on solid ground once more, without the least shock or jar of impact. The darkness cleared away from my vision, but I was still dizzy, and the optical images I received were altogether meaningless for some moments.

When finally I recovered the power of cognizance, and was able to view my surroundings with a measure of perception, I experienced a mental confusion equivalent to that of a man who might find himself cast without warning on the shore of some foreign planet. There was the same sense of

utter loss and alienation which would assuredly be felt in such a case—the same vertiginous, overwhelming bewilderment, the same ghastly sense of separation from all the familiar environmental details that give color and form and definition to our lives and even determine our very personalities.

I was standing in the midst of a landscape which bore no degree or manner of resemblance to Crater Ridge. A long, gradual slope, covered with violet grass and studded at intervals with stones of monolithic size and shape, ran undulantly away beneath me to a broad plain with sinuous, open meadows and high, stately forests of an unknown vegetation whose predominant hues were purple and yellow. The plain seemed to end in a wall of impenetrable golden-brownish mist, that rose with phantom pinnacles to dissolve on a sky of luminescent amber in which there was no sun.

In the foreground of this amazing scene, not more than two or three miles away, there loomed a city whose massive towers and mountainous ramparts of red stone were such as the Anakim of undiscovered worlds might build. Wall on beetling wall, and spire on giant spire, it soared to confront the heavens, maintaining everywhere the severe and solemn lines of a wholly rectilinear architecture. It seemed to whelm and crush down the beholder with its stern and crag-like imminence.

As I viewed this city, I forgot my initial sense of bewildering loss and alienage, in an awe with which something of actual terror was mingled; and, at the same time, I felt an obscure but profound allurement, the cryptic emanation of some enslaving spell. But after I had gazed awhile, the cosmic strangeness and bafflement of my unthinkable position returned upon me; and I felt only a wild desire to escape from the maddeningly oppressive bizarrerie of this region and regain my own world. In an effort to fight down my agitation, I tried to figure out if possible what had really happened.

I had read a number of trans-dimensional stories—in fact, I had written one or two myself; and I had often pondered the possibility of other worlds or material planes which may co-exist in the same space with ours, invisible and impalpable to human senses. Of course, I realized at once that I had fallen into some such dimension. Doubtless, when I took that step forward between the boulders, I had been precipitated into some sort of flaw or fissure in space, to emerge at the bottom in this alien sphere—in a totally

different kind of space. It sounded simple enough in a way—but not simple enough to make the *modus operandi* anything but a brain-racking mystery.

In a further effort to collect myself, I studied my immediate surroundings with a close attention. This time, I was impressed by the arrangement of the monolithic stones I have spoken of, many of which were disposed at fairly regular intervals in two parallel lines running down the hill, as if to mark the course of some ancient road obliterated by the purple grass. Turning to follow its ascent, I saw right behind me two columns, standing at precisely the same distance apart as the two odd boulders on Crater Ridge, and formed of the same soapy, greenish-grey stone! The pillars were perhaps nine feet high, and had been taller at one time, since the tops were splintered and broken away. Not far above them, the mounting slope vanished from view in a great bank of the same golden-brown mist that enveloped the remoter plain. But there were no more monoliths—and it seemed as if the road had ended with those pillars.

Inevitably I began to speculate as to the relationship between the columns in this new dimension and the boulders in my own world. Surely the resemblance could not be a matter of mere chance. If I stepped between the columns, could I return to the human sphere by a reversal of my precipitation therefrom? And if so, by what inconceivable beings from foreign time and space had the columns and boulders been established as the portals of a gateway between the two worlds? Who could have used the gateway, and for what purpose? My brain reeled before the infinite vistas of surmise that were opened by such questions.

However, what concerned me most was the problem of getting back to Crater Ridge. The weirdness of it all, the monstrous walls of the nearby town, the unnatural hues and forms of the outlandish scenery, were too much for human nerves; and I felt that I should go mad if forced to remain long in such a milieu. Also, there was no telling what hostile powers or entities I might encounter if I stayed. The slope and plain were devoid of animate life, as far as I could see; but the great city was presumptive proof of its existence. Unlike the heroes in my own tales, who were wont to visit the fifth dimension or the worlds of Algol with perfect *sang froid*, I did not feel in the least adventurous; and I shrank back with man’s instinctive recoil before the unknown. With one fearful glance at the looming city and the wide plain with its lofty, gorgeous vegetation, I turned and stepped back between the columns.

There was the same instantaneous plunge into blind and freezing gulfs, the same indeterminate falling and twisting, that had marked my descent into this new dimension. At the end I found myself standing, very dizzy and shaken, on the same spot from which I had taken my forward step between the greenish-grey boulders. Crater Ridge was swirling and reeling about me as if in the throes of earthquake; and I had to sit down for a minute or two before I could recover my equilibrium.

I came back to the cabin like a man in a dream. The experience seemed, and still seems, incredible and unreal; and yet it has overshadowed everything else, and has colored and dominated all my thoughts. Perhaps by writing it down I can shake it off a little. It has unsettled me more than any previous experience in my whole life, and the world about me seems hardly less improbable and nightmarish than the one that I have penetrated in a fashion so fortuitous.

August 2nd. I have done a lot of thinking in the past few days—and the more I ponder and puzzle, the more mysterious it all becomes. Granting the flaw in space, which must be an absolute vacuum, impervious to air, ether, light and matter, how was it possible for me to fall into it? And having fallen in, how could I fall out—particularly into a sphere that has no certifiable relationship with ours? …But, after all, one process would be as easy as the other, in theory. The main objection is: how could one move in a vacuum, either up or down or backward or forward? The whole thing would baffle the comprehension of an Einstein; and I do not feel that I have even approached the true solution.

Also, I have been fighting the temptation to go back, if only to convince myself that the thing really occurred. But, after all, why shouldn't I go back? An opportunity has been vouchsafed to me such as no man may ever have been given before; and the wonders I shall see and the secrets I shall learn are beyond imagining. My nervous trepidation is inexcusably childish under the circumstances.

August 3rd. I went back this morning, armed with a revolver. Somehow, without thinking that it might make a difference, I did not step in the very middle of the space between the boulders. Undoubtedly as a result of this, my descent was more prolonged and impetuous than before, and seemed to consist mainly of a series of spiral somersaults. It must have taken me minutes to recover from the ensuing vertigo; and when I came to, I was lying on the violet grass.

This time, I went boldly down the slope; and keeping as much as I could in the shelter of the bizarre purple and yellow vegetation, I stole toward the looming city. All was very still; and there was no breath of wind in those exotic trees, which appeared to imitate in their lofty upright boles and horizontal foliage the severe architectural lines of the Cyclopean buildings.

I had not gone far when I came to a road in the forest—a road paved with stupendous blocks of stone at least twenty feet square. It ran toward the city. I thought for awhile that it was wholly deserted—perhaps disused; and I even dared to walk upon it, till I heard a noise behind me and turning saw the approach of several singular entities. Terrified, I sprang back and hid myself in a thicket, from which I watched the passing of those creatures, wondering fearfully if they had seen me. Apparently my fears were groundless, for they did not even glance at my hiding-place.

It is hard for me to describe or even visualize them now, for they were totally unlike anything that we are accustomed to think of as human or animal. They must have been ten feet tall and they were moving along with colossal strides that took them from sight in a few instants beyond a turn of the road. Their bodies were bright and shining, as if encased in some sort of armor; and their heads were equipped with high, curving appendages of opalescent hues which nodded above them like fantastic plumes, but may have been antennae or other sense-organs of a novel type.

Trembling with excitement and wonder, I continued my progress through the richly-colored undergrowth. As I went on, I perceived for the first time that there were no shadows anywhere. The light came from all portions of the sunless amber heaven, pervading everything with a soft, uniform luminosity. All was motionless and silent, as I have said before; and there was no evidence of bird, insect or animal life in all this preternatural landscape. But when I had advanced to within a mile of the city (as well as I could judge the distance in a realm where the very proportions of objects were unfamiliar) I became aware of something which at first was recognizable as a vibration rather than a sound. There was a queer thrilling in my nerves, the disquieting sense of some unknown force or emanation flowing through my body. This was perceptible for some time before I heard the music; but having heard it, my auditory nerves identified it at once with the vibration.

It was faint and far-off, and seemed to emanate from the very heart of the titan city. The melody was piercingly sweet and resembled at times the

singing of some voluptuous feminine voice. However, no human voice could have possessed the unearthly pitch, the shrill, perpetually sustained notes that somehow suggested the light of remote worlds and stars translated into sound.

Ordinarily I am not very sensitive to music; I have even been reproached for not reacting more strongly to it. But I had not gone much farther when I realized the peculiar mental and emotional spell which the far-off sound was beginning to exert upon me. There was a siren-like allurement which drew me on, forgetful of the strangeness and potential perils of my situation; and I felt a slow, drug-like intoxication of brain and senses. In some insidious manner, I know not how nor why, the music conveyed the ideas of vast but attainable space and altitude, of superhuman freedom and exultation; and it seemed to promise all the impossible splendors of which my imagination has vaguely dreamt.

The forest continued almost to the city walls. Peering from behind the final boscage, I saw their overwhelming battlements in the sky above me, and noted the flawless jointure of their prodigious blocks. I was near the great road, which entered an open gate large enough to admit the passage of behemoths. There were no guards in sight; and several more of the tall, gleaming entities came striding along and went in as I watched. From where I stood, I was unable to see inside the gate, for the wall was stupendously thick. The music poured from that mysterious entrance in an ever-strengthening flood, and sought to draw me on with its weird seduction, eager for unimaginable things.

It was hard to resist, hard to rally my will-power and turn back. I tried to concentrate on the thought of danger—but the thought was tenuously unreal. At last I tore myself away and retraced my footsteps, very slowly and lingeringly, till I was beyond reach of the music. Even then the spell persisted, like the effects of a drug; and all the way home I was tempted to return and follow those shining giants into the city.

August 5th. I have visited the new dimension once more. I thought I could resist that summoning music; and I even took some cotton-wadding along with which to stuff my ears if it should affect me too strongly. I began to hear the supernal melody at the same distance as before, and was drawn onward in the same manner. But this time I entered the open gate!

I wonder if I can describe that city. I felt like a crawling ant upon its mammoth pavements, amid the measureless Babel of its buildings, of its

streets and arcades. Everywhere there were columns, obelisks, and the perpendicular pylons of fane-like structures that would have dwarfed those of Thebes and Heliopolis.

And the people of the city! How is one to depict them or give them a name? I think that the gleaming entities I first saw are not the true inhabitants, but are only visitors—perhaps from some other world or dimension, like myself. The real people are giants too; but they move slowly, with solemn, hieratic paces. Their bodies are nude and swart, and their limbs are those of caryatides—massive enough, it would seem, to uphold the roofs and lintels of their own buildings. I fear to describe them minutely: for human words would give the idea of something monstrous and uncouth; and these beings are not monstrous but they have merely developed in obedience to the laws of another evolution than ours, the environmental forces and conditions of a different world.

Somehow, I was not afraid when I saw them—perhaps the music had drugged me till I was beyond fear. There was a group of them just inside the gate, and they seemed to pay me no attention whatever as I passed them. The opaque, jet-like orbs of their huge eyes were impassive as the carven eyes of andro-sphinxes, and they uttered no sound from their heavy, straight, expressionless lips. Perhaps they lack the sense of hearing; for their strange, semi-rectangular heads were devoid of anything in the nature of external ears.

I followed the music, which was still remote and seemed to increase little in loudness. I was soon overtaken by several of those beings whom I had previously seen on the road outside the walls; and they passed me quickly and disappeared in the labyrinth of buildings. After them there came other beings, of a less gigantic kind, and without the bright shards or armor worn by the first-comers. Then, overhead, two creatures with long, translucent, blood-colored wings, intricately veined and ribbed, came flying side by side and vanished behind the others. Their faces, featured with organs of unsurmisable use, were not those of animals; and I felt sure that they were beings of a high order of development.

I saw hundreds of those slow-moving, somber entities whom I have identified as the true inhabitants. But none of them appeared to notice me. Doubtless they were accustomed to seeing far weirder and more unusual kinds of life than humanity. As I went on, I was overtaken by dozens of

improbable-looking creatures, all going in the same direction as myself, as if drawn by the same siren melody.

Deeper and deeper I went into the wilderness of colossal architecture, led by that remote, ethereal, opiate music. I soon noticed a sort of gradual ebb and flow in the sound, occupying an interval of ten minutes or more; but by imperceptible degrees it grew sweeter and nearer. I wondered how it could penetrate that manifold maze of builded stone and be heard outside the walls.

I must have walked for miles, in the ceaseless gloom of those rectangular structures that hung above me, tier on tier, at an awful height in the amber zenith. Then, at length, I came to the core and secret of it all. Preceded and followed by a number of those chimerical entities, I emerged on a great square in whose center was a temple-like building more immense than the others. The music poured, imperiously shrill and loud, from its many-columned entrance.

I felt the thrill of one who approaches the sanctum of some hierarchal mystery, when I entered the halls of that building. People who must have come from many different worlds or dimensions, went with me and before me along the titanic colonnades whose pillars were graven with indecipherable runes and enigmatic bas-reliefs. Also, the dark, colossal inhabitants of the town were standing or roaming about, intent, like all the others, on their own affairs. None of these beings spoke, either to me or to one another; and though several eyed me casually, my presence was evidently taken for granted.

There are no words to convey the incomprehensible wonder of it all. And the music? I have utterly failed to describe that, also. It was as if some marvellous elixir had been turned into sound-waves—an elixir conferring the gift of superhuman life, and the high, magnificent dreams which are dreamt by the Immortals. It mounted in my brain like a supernal drunkenness as I approached the hidden source.

I do not know what obscure warning prompted me now to stuff my ears with cotton ere I went any farther. Though I could still hear it, still feel its peculiar, penetrant vibration, the sound became muted when I had done this; and its influence was less powerful henceforward. There is little doubt that I owe my life to this simple and homely precaution.

The endless rows of columns grew dim for awhile as the interior of a long, basaltic cavern; and then, at some distance ahead, I perceived the

glimmering of a soft light on the floor and pillars. The light soon became an overflooding radiance, as if gigantic lamps were being lit in the temple's heart; and the vibrations of the hidden music pulsed more strongly in my nerves.

The hall ended in a chamber of immense, indefinite scope, whose walls and roof were doubtful with unremoving shadows. In the center, amid the pavement of mammoth blocks, there was a circular pit above which seemed to float a fountain of flame that soared in one perpetual, slowly lengthening jet. This flame was the sole illumination; and also it was the source of the wild, unearthly music. Even with my purposely deafened ears, I was wooed by the shrill and starry sweetness of its singing; and I felt the voluptuous lure and the high, vertiginous exaltation.

I knew immediately that the place was a shrine, and that the trans-dimensional beings who accompanied me were visiting pilgrims. There were scores of them—perhaps hundreds; but all were dwarfed in the cosmic immensity of that chamber. They were gathered before the flame in various attitudes of worship; they bowed their exotic heads, or made mysterious gestures or adoration with unhuman hands and members. And the voices of several, deep as booming drums, or sharp as the stridulation of giant insects, were audible amid the singing of the fountain.

Spell-bound, I went forward and joined them. Enthralled by the music and by the vision of the soaring flame, I paid as little heed to my outlandish companions as they to me.

The fountain rose and rose, till its light flickered on the limbs and features of throned, colossal statues behind it—heroes or gods or demons from the earlier cycles of alien time, staring in stone from a dusk of illimitable mystery. The fire was white and dazzling, it was pure as the central flame of a star; it blinded me, and when I turned my eyes away, the air was filled with webs of intricate color, with swiftly changing arabesques whose numberless, unwonted hues and patterns were such as no mundane eye had ever beheld. I felt a stimulating warmth that filled my very marrow with intenser life.

The music mounted with the flame; and I understood now its recurrent ebb and flow. As I looked and listened, a mad thought was born in my mind—the thought of how marvellous and ecstatical it would be to run forward and leap headlong into the singing fire. The music seemed to tell me that I should find in that moment of flaring dissolution all the delight and

triumph, all the splendor and exaltation it had promised from afar. It besought me; it pleaded with tones of supernal melody; and despite the wadding in my ears, the seduction was well-nigh irresistible.

However, it had not robbed me of all sanity. With a sudden start of terror, like one who has been tempted to fling himself from a high precipice, I drew back. Then I saw that the same dreadful impulse was shared by some of my companions. The two entities with scarlet wings, whom I have previously mentioned, were standing a little apart from the rest of us. Now, with a great fluttering, they rose and flew toward the flame like moths toward a candle. For a brief moment the light shone redly through their half-transparent vans, ere they disappeared in the leaping incandescence, which flared briefly and then burned as before.

Then, in rapid succession, a number of other beings who represented the most divergent trends of biology, sprang forward and immolated themselves in the flame. There were creatures with translucent bodies, and some that shone with all the hues of the opal; there were winged colossi, and titans who strode as with seven-league boots; and there was one being with useless abortive wings, who crawled rather than ran, to seek the same glorious doom as the rest. But among them there were none of the city's people: these merely stood and looked on, impassive and statue-like as ever.

I saw that the fountain had now reached its greatest height and was beginning to decline. It sank steadily but slowly to half its former elevation. During this interval there were no more acts of self-sacrifice; and several of the beings beside me turned abruptly and went away, as if they had overcome the lethal spell. One of the tall, armored entities, as he left, addressed me in words that were like clarion-notes, with unmistakable accents of warning. By a mighty effort of will, in a turmoil of conflicting emotions, I followed him. At every step the madness and delirium of the music strove with my instincts of self-preservation. More than once I started to go back. My homeward journey was blurred and doubtful as the wanderings of a man in an opium-trance; and the music sang behind me and told me of the rapture I had missed, of the flaming doom whose brief instant was better than aeons of mortal life.

August 9th. I have tried to go on with a new story, but have made no progress. Anything that I can imagine, or frame in language, seems flat and puerile beside the world of unsearchable mystery to which I have found admission. The temptation to return is more cogent than ever, the call of

that remembered music is sweeter than the voice of a loved woman. And always I am tormented by the problem of it all, and tantalized by the little which I have perceived and understood. What forces are these whose existence and working I have merely apprehended? Who are the inhabitants of the city? And who are the beings that visit the enshrined flame? What rumor or legend has drawn them from outland realms and ulterior planets to that place of inenarrable danger and destruction? And what is the fountain itself, and what the secret of its lure and its deadly singing? These problems admit of infinite surmise, but no conceivable solution.

I am planning to go back once more—but not alone. Someone must go with me this time, as a witness to the wonder and the peril. It is all too strange for credence—I must have human corroboration of what I have seen and felt and conjectured. Also, another might understand where I have failed to do more than apprehend.

Who shall I take? It will be necessary to invite someone here from the outer world—someone of high intellectual and aesthetic capacity. Shall I ask Philip Hastane, my fellow fiction-writer? Hastane would be too busy, I fear. But there is the Californian artist, Felix Ebbonly, who has illustrated some of my fantastic novels. Ebbonly would be the man to see and appreciate the new dimension, if he can come. With his bent for the bizarre and unearthly, the spectacle of that plain and city, the Babelian buildings and arcades, and the temple of the flame, will simply enthrall him. I shall write immediately to his San Francisco address.

August 12th. Ebbonly is here—the mysterious hints in my letter, regarding some novel pictorial subjects along his own line, were too provocative for him to resist. Now I have explained fully and given him a detailed account of my adventures. I can see that he is a little incredulous, for which I hardly blame him. But he will not remain incredulous for long, for tomorrow we shall visit together the city of the singing flame.

August 13th. I must concentrate my disordered faculties, I must choose my words and write with exceeding care. This will be the last entry in my journal, and the last writing I shall ever do. When I have finished, I shall wrap the journal up and address it to Philip Hastane, who can make such disposition of it as he sees fit.

I took Ebbonly into the other dimension today. He was impressed, even as I had been, by the two isolated boulders on Crater Ridge.

“They look like the guttered ends of columns established by pre-human gods,” he remarked. “I begin to believe you now.”

I told him to go first, and indicated the place where he should step. He obeyed without hesitation, and I had the singular experience of seeing a man melt into utter, instantaneous nothingness. One moment he was there—and the next, there was only bare ground, and the far-off tamaracks whose view his body had obstructed. I followed, and found him standing in speechless awe on the violet grass.

“This,” he said at last, “is the sort of thing whose existence I have hitherto merely suspected, and have never even been able to hint in my most imaginative drawings.”

We spoke little as we followed the lines of monolithic boulders toward the plain. Far in the distance, beyond those high and stately trees with their sumptuous foliage, the golden-brown vapors had parted, showing the pale vistas of an immense horizon; and past the horizon were range on range of gleaming orbs and fiery, flying motes in the depth of that amber heaven. It was as if the veil of another universe than ours had been drawn back.

We crossed the plain, and came at length within ear-shot of the siren music. I warned Ebbonly to stuff his ears with cotton-wadding, but he refused.

“I don’t want to deaden any new sensations which I may experience,” he observed.

We entered the city. My companion was in a veritable rhapsody of artistic delight when he beheld the enormous buildings and the people. I could see, too, that the music had taken hold upon him: his look soon became fixed and dreamy as that of an opium-eater. At first he made many comments on the architecture and the various beings who passed us, and called my attention to details which I had not perceived before. However, as we drew nearer to the temple of the flame, his observational interest seemed to flag, and was replaced by more and more of an ecstatic inward absorption. His remarks became fewer and briefer; and he did not even seem to hear my questions. It was evident that the sound had wholly bemused and bewitched him.

Even as on my former visit, there were many pilgrims going toward the shrine—and few that were coming away from it. Most of them belonged to evolutionary types that I had seen before. Among those that were new to me, I recall one gorgeous creature with golden and cerulean wings like

those of a giant lepidopter, and scintillating, jewel-like eyes that must have been designed to mirror the glories of some Edenic world.

I too felt, as before, the captious thralldom and bewitchment, the insidious, gradual perversion of thought and instinct, as if the music were working in my brain like a subtle alkaloid. Since I had taken my usual precaution, my subjection to the influence was less complete than that of Ebbonly; but nevertheless it was enough to make me forget a number of things—among them, the initial concern which I had felt when my companion refused to employ the same mode of protection as myself. I no longer thought of his danger or my own, except as something very distant and immaterial.

The streets were like the prolonged and wildering labyrinth of a nightmare. But the music led us forthrightly; and always there were other pilgrims. Like men in the grip of some powerful current, we were drawn to our destination.

As we passed along the hall of gigantic columns and neared the abode of the fiery fountain, a sense of our peril quickened momentarily in my brain, and I sought to warn Ebbonly once more. But all my protests and remonstrances were futile: he was deaf as a machine, and wholly impervious to anything but the lethal music. His expression and his movements were those of a somnambulist. Even when I seized and shook him with such violence as I could muster, he remained oblivious.

The throng of worshippers was larger than upon my first visit. The jet of pure, incandescent flame was mounting steadily as we entered, and it sang with the white ardor and ecstasy of a star alone in space. Again, with ineffable tones, it told me the rapture of a moth-like death in its lofty soaring, the exultation and triumph of a momentary union with its elemental essence.

The flame rose to its apex; and even for me, the mesmeric lure was well-nigh irresistible. Many of our companions succumbed; and the first to immolate himself was the giant lepidopterous being. Four others, of diverse evolutional types, followed in appallingly swift succession.

In my own partial subjection to the music, my own effort to resist that deadly enslavement, I had almost forgotten the very presence of Ebbonly. It was too late for me to even think of stopping him, when he ran forward in a series of leaps that were both solemn and frenzied, like the beginning of some sacerdotal dance, and hurled himself headlong into the flame. The fire

enveloped him, it flared up for an instant with a more dazzling whiteness; and that was all.

Slowly, as if from benumbed brain-centers, a horror crept upon my conscious mind, and helped to annul the perilous mesmerism. I turned, while many others were following Ebbonly's example, and fled from the shrine and from the city. But somehow the horror diminished as I went; and more and more, I found myself envying my companion's fate, and wondering as to the sensations he had felt in that moment of fiery dissolution…

Now, as I write this, I am wondering why I came back again to the human world. Words are futile to express what I have beheld and experienced; and the change that has come upon me, beneath the play of incalculable forces in a world of which no other mortal is even cognizant. Literature is nothing more than the shadow of a shadow; and life, with its drawn-out length of monotonous, reiterative days, is unreal and without meaning now in comparison with the splendid death which I might have had—the glorious doom which is still in store. I have no longer any will to fight the ever-insistent music which I hear in memory. And—there seems to be no reason at all why I should fight it. Tomorrow, I shall return to the city.

A GOOD EMBALMER

I

Jonas Turple and Caleb Udley, joint owners of the sole undertaking establishment in Ramsville, were continuing an immemorial dispute.

"You couldn't embalm a salted herring," said Turple, with the air of jocose and rubicund contempt which he usually adopted in referring to his partner's technical abilities and methods. "Look at the job you did on old Aaron Webley, five years ago, when I was away at the embalmers' convention. Of course no one would have been the wiser if the family hadn't decided to transfer him to their home lot in Georgetown, ten months after. The condition of the corpse wasn't much of an advertisement for us. I believe in doing a thorough job, one that will endure and stand up under all vicissitudes. And I tell you, there's nothing like corrosive sublimate, and plenty of it. You can have your Peruvian bark, your camphor and cinnamon and other aromatics, and your sulphate of zinc; but all this stuff is mere trimming if you ask me."

Turple, a large, florid, middle-aged bachelor, who looked more like a restaurant owner than a mortician, terminated his remarks with a resonant sniff and eyed his confrere with semi-jovial belligerence.

"Sulphate of zinc is good enough for me," maintained Caleb Udley, with much acerbity. He was a thin, meager, deacon-like person, alternately bullied by his wife and his business partner. He was, however, more recalcitrant toward the latter than toward the former, and rarely made an attempt to uphold his own views.

"Well, you'll never shoot any of it into me," said Turple. "You'd make a mess of it anyway. I'd certainly hate to be at your mercy and have you try to embalm me, if I were dead."

"Even at that, there are times when I wouldn't mind having the chance," returned Udley, with a tart malice.

“The hell you say. Look here, Caleb, if I should die before you do, and you start your blundering operations on me, I’ll simply rise up from the dead.”

“But the dead don’t rise,” said Udley, who was not only something of a Sadducean, but was also rather literal-minded.

II

It is not the function of this story to record in detail, or even in rough outline, the lives of two country undertakers.

For many years after the discussion related above, Turple and Udley pursued the somewhat funereal tenor of their ways. In the face of their perennial disputation, half-humorous, half-contemptuous on one side and wholly acrimonious on the other, it would have been difficult to determine the exact degree of brotherly love which existed between them. Turple continued to deride his confrere’s professional capacities and opinions; and Udley never failed to resent the derision. With slight variations, their quotidian quarrel was repeated a thousand times.

The situation was modified only by the admission of a third and younger partner, one Thomas Agdale, into the firm. Agdale, who was comparatively inexperienced, and was also mild-tempered, became the butt of both his seniors; and, in especial, of Udley, who thus succeeded in transferring to another victim some of the scorn and contumely which he himself endured at the hands of Turple.

Even undertakers, however, are not exempt from the common laws of mortality. Turple, who had long shown an apoplectic tendency, but nevertheless had not expected a so sudden and early demise, was found dead one morning in the local hotel-room which he had occupied for more than twenty years. His partners, as was natural, were deeply shocked and surprised by the news; but, since he had omitted to leave any instructions to the contrary, they proceeded to take charge of his body with all due expedition.

The feelings of Udley, when Turple’s corpse was laid out before him on the embalming-table, were somewhat peculiar and difficult to analyze. How much of real regret or sorrow they included, I am not prepared to say: but,

undeniably, there was a more or less furtive undercurrent of actual triumphancy, of self-vindication if not of vindictiveness. After all of Turple's manifold and life-long aspersions on his capabilities as an embalmer, Udley was now in a position to render the last services to his vilifier. It would not be proper to say that he rejoiced in this situation; but certainly his emotions were those of a wronged man who beholds the final balancing of the scales of justice.

Agdale was present, but Udley had resolved that he himself would perform everything necessary and would utilize the services of Agdale only in the mere lifting of the corpse into the grimly sumptuous casket that had been prepared for it.

The March afternoon was murky and foggy; and the lights had been turned on in the rear room of the undertaking parlor, where Udley and Agdale were about to begin their gruesome task. They gave a semi-nocturnal touch to the macabre scene.

"So I couldn't embalm a salted codfish, hey?" thought Udley to himself, remembering his partner's habitual jest with the sour resentment of one who is wholly without humor. "Well, we'll see about that."

He approached the pursy and somewhat abdominous corpse, and was about to begin the preliminary incisions. These, however, were not made—at least not by Caleb Udley. For, even as he stooped above it, the cadaver stirred, its eyelids fluttered and opened, and that which had been the earthly shell of Jonas Turple sat up suddenly and heavily on the cold slab.

Udley leapt back. His lean frame exuded from head to foot an icy, instantaneous perspiration, and terror had deprived him of the power of thought and reason. Something seemed to have gone wrong with his heart, also; and he felt an awful choking sensation between the intolerably suspended beat. Agdale, who had a superstitious vein, had given one look at the animated corpse and was fleeing from the shop by the back door.

"What did I tell you, Caleb?" Udley was aware that the cadaver had spoken. Its voice seemed to issue from a deep vault, and was hideously muffled, as if it had made its way through some intervening medium of a viscous or semi-liquescent nature. It was not the familiar voice of the living Turple: but one could readily have imagined it as issuing from the lips of Lazarus after his resurrection.

If any further remarks or observations were made by the corpse, they were not heard by Udley. His heart, at the sound of that unnatural voice, had

refused to continue its disordered throbbing, and he had fallen dead on the floor.

III

It was two hours later when Agdale mastered his terrors sufficiently to admit of returning. In the meanwhile, he had confided to several of the townspeople, including the doctor who had signed Turple's death-certificate, the unbelievable circumstances which had occasioned his hasty departure. It was a resolute and valiant committee of investigation which finally entered the undertakers' parlors.

The situation which revealed itself here was more mysterious and more remarkable than even the superstitious Agdale had expected. The corpse of Turple was lying decorously in the very same place and position in which it had been laid out by Udley and Agdale; and there was not the faintest hint of life or supernatural re-animation. Dr. Martin needed no more than a glance to re-confirm his original opinion, that the deceased was properly and lawfully dead.

For a few moments, no one noticed Udley. He had been alive when Agdale fled; and the latter not unnaturally surmised that Udley had followed suit. Somehow, no one had given him much thought.

It was Agdale who made the singular discovery that the new casket which had been provided for Turple's reception was now occupied—and that the occupant was Caleb Udley! But it remained for Dr. Martin, in his official capacity as coroner, to make a discovery that was even more singular, if possible. *The corpse of Udley had been fully and efficiently embalmed; and the chief agent employed was corrosive sublimate.* The body of Turple, however, was still in need of this service.

THE TESTAMENT OF ATHAMMAUS

It has become needful for me, who am no wielder of the stylus of bronze or the pen of calamus, and whose only proper tool is the long, double-handed sword, to indite this account of the curious and lamentable happenings which foreran the universal desertion of Commoriom by its king and its people. This I am well-fitted to do, for I played a signal part in these happenings; and I left the city only when all the others had gone.

Now Commoriom, as everyone knows, was aforetime the resplendent, high-built capital, and the marble and granite crown of all Hyperborea. But, concerning the cause of its abandonment, there are now so many warring legends and so many tales of a false and fabulous character, that I, who am old in years and triply old in honors, I, who have grown weary with no less than eleven lustrums of public service, am compelled to write this record of the truth ere it fade utterly from the tongues and memories of men. And this I do, though the telling thereof will include a confession of my one defeat, my one failure in the dutiful administration of a committed task.

For those who will read the narrative in future years, and haply in future lands, I shall now introduce myself. I am Athammaus, the chief headsman of Uzuldaroum, who held formerly the same office in Commoriom. My father, Manghai Thal, was headsman before me; and the sires of my father, even to the mythic generations of the primal kings, have wielded the great copper sword of justice on the block of *eighon*-wood.

Forgive an aged man if he seem to dwell, as is the habit of the old, among the youthful recollections that have gathered to themselves the kingly purple of removed horizons and the strange glory that illumines irretrievable things. Lo! I am made young again when I recall Commoriom, when in this grey city of the sunken years I behold in retrospect her walls that looked mountainously down upon the jungle, and the alabastrine multitude of her heaven-fretting spires. Opulent among cities, and superb and magisterial, and paramount over all was Commoriom, to whom tribute was given from the shores of the Atlantean sea to that sea in which is the

immense continent of Mu; to whom the traders came from utmost Thulan that is walled on the north with unknown ice, and from the southern realm of Tscho Vulpanomi which ends in a lake of boiling asphaltum. Ah! proud and lordly was Commoriom, and her humblest dwellings were more than the palaces of other cities. And it was not, as men fable nowadays, because of that maundering prophecy once uttered by the White Sybil from the isle of snow which is named Polarion, that her splendor and spaciousness was delivered over to the spotted vines of the jungle and the spotted snakes. Nay, it was because of a direr thing than this, and a tangible horror against which the law of kings, the wisdom of hierophants and the sharpness of swords were alike impotent. Ah! not lightly was she overcome, not easily were her defenders driven forth. And though others forget, or haply deem her no more than a vain and dubitable tale, I shall never cease to lament Commoriom.

My sinews have dwindled grievously now; and Time has drunken stealthily from my veins; and has touched my hair with the ashes of suns extinct. But in the days whereof I tell, there was no braver and more stalwart headsman than I in the whole of Hyperborea; and my name was a red menace, a loudly spoken warning to the evil-doers of the forest and the town, and the savage robbers of uncouth outland tribes. Wearing the blood-bright purple of my office, I stood each morning in the public square where all might attend and behold, and performed for the edification of all men my allotted task. And each day the tough, golden-ruddy copper of the huge crescent blade was darkened not once but many times with a rich and wine-like sanguine. And because of my never-faltering arm, my infallible eye, and the clean blow which there was never any necessity to repeat, I was much honored by the King Loquamethros and by the populace of Commoriom.

I remember well, on account of their more than unique atrocity, the earliest rumors that came to me in my active life regarding the outlaw Knygathin Zhaum. This person belonged to an obscure and highly unpleasant people called the Voormis, who dwelt in the black Eiglophian Mountains at a full day’s journey from Commoriom, and inhabited according to their tribal custom the caves of ferine animals less savage than themselves, which they had slain or otherwise dispossessed. They were generally looked upon as more beast-like than human, because of their excessive hairiness and the vile, ungodly rites and usages to which they

were addicted. It was mainly from among these beings that the notorious Knygathin Zhaum had recruited his formidable band, who were terrorizing the hills subjacent to the Eiglophian Mountains with daily deeds of the most infamous and iniquitous rapine. Wholesale robbery was the least of their crimes; and mere anthropophagism was far from being the worst.

It will readily be seen, from this, that the Voormis were a somewhat aboriginal race, with an ethnic heritage of the darkest and most revolting type. And it was commonly said that Knygathin Zhaum himself possessed an even murkier strain of ancestry than the others, being related on the maternal side to that queer, non-anthropomorphic god, Tsathoggua, who was worshipped so widely during the sub-human cycles. And there were those who whispered of even stranger blood (if one could properly call it blood) and a monstrous linkage with the swart, Protean spawn that had come down with Tsathoggua from elder worlds and exterior dimensions where physiology and geometry had both assumed an altogether inverse trend of development. And, because of this mingling of ultra-cosmic strains, it was said that the body of Knygathin Zhaum, unlike his shaggy, umber-colored fellow-tribesmen, was hairless from crown to heel and was pied with great spots of black and yellow; and moreover he himself was reputed to exceed all others in his cruelty and cunning.

For a long time this execrable outlaw was no more to me than an horrific name; but inevitably I thought of him with a certain professional interest. There were many who believed him invulnerable by any weapon, and who told of his having escaped in a manner which none could elucidate from more than one dungeon whose walls were not to be scaled or pierced by mortal beings. But of course I discounted all such tales, for my official experience had never yet included anyone with properties or abilities of a like sort. And I knew well the superstitiousness of the vulgar multitude.

From day to day new reports reached me amid the preoccupations of never-slighted duty. This noxious marauder was not content with the seemingly ample sphere of operations afforded by his native mountains and the outlying hill-regions with their fertile valleys and well-peopled towns. His forays became bolder and more extensive; till one night he descended on a village so near Commoriom that it was usually classed as a suburb. Here he and his feculent crew committed numerous deeds of an unspecifiable enormity; and bearing with them many of the villagers for

purposes even less designable, they retired to their caves in the glassy-walled Eiglophian peaks ere the ministers of justice could overtake them.

It was this audaciously offensive act which prompted the law to exert its full power and vigilance against Knygathin Zhaum. Before that, he and his men had been left to the local officers of the country-side; but now his misdeeds were such as to demand the rigorous attention of the constabulary of Commoriom. Henceforth all his movements were followed as closely as possible; the towns where he might descend were strictly guarded; and traps were set everywhere.

Even thus, Knygathin Zhaum contrived to evade capture for month after month; and all the while he repeated his far-flung raids with an embarrassing frequency. It was almost by chance, or through his own foolhardiness, that he was eventually taken in broad daylight on the highway near the city's outskirts. Contrary to all expectation, in view of his renowned ferocity, he made no resistance whatever; but finding himself surrounded by mailed archers and bill-bearers, he yielded to them at once with an oblique, enigmatic smile—a smile that troubled for many nights thereafter the dreams of all who were present.

For reasons which were never explained, he was altogether alone when taken; and none of his fellows were captured either coincidentally or subsequently. Nevertheless, there was much excitement and jubilation in Commoriom, and everyone was curious to behold the dreaded outlaw. More even than others, perhaps, I felt the stirrings of interest; for upon me, in due course, the proper decapitation of Knygathin Zhaum would devolve.

From hearing the hideous rumors and legends whose nature I have already outlined, I was prepared for something out of the ordinary in the way of criminal personality. But even at first sight, when I watched him as he was borne to prison through a moiling crowd, Knygathin Zhaum surpassed the most sinister and disagreeable anticipations. He was naked to the waist, and wore the fulvous hide of some long-haired animal which hung in filthy tatters to his knees. Such details, however, contributed little to those elements in his appearance which revolted and even shocked me. His limbs, his body, his lineaments were outwardly formed like those of aboriginal man; and one might even have allowed for his utter hairlessness, in which there was a remote and blasphemously caricatural suggestion of the shaven priest; and even the broad, formless mottling of his skin, like that of a huge boa, might somehow have been glossed over as a rather

extravagant peculiarity of pigmentation. It was something else, it was the unctuous, verminous ease, the undulant litheness and fluidity of his every movement, seeming to hint at an inner structure and vertebration that were less than human—or, one might almost have said, a sub-ophidian lack of all bony frame-work—which made me view the captive, and also my incumbent task, with an unparallelable distaste. He seemed to slither rather than walk; and the very fashion of his jointure, the placing of knees, hips, elbows and shoulders, appeared arbitrary and factitious. One felt that the outward semblance of humanity was a mere concession to anatomical convention; and that his corporeal formation might easily have assumed—and might still assume at any instant—the unheard-of outlines and concept-defying dimensions that prevail in trans-galactic worlds. Indeed, I could now believe the outrageous tales concerning his ancestry. And with equal horror and curiosity I wondered what the stroke of justice would reveal, and what noisome, mephitic ichor would befoul the impartial sword in lieu of honest blood.

It is needless to record in circumstantial detail the process by which Knygathin Zhaum was tried and condemned for his manifold enormities. The workings of the law were implacably swift and sure, and their equity permitted of no quibbling or delay. The captive was confined in an oubliette below the main dungeons—a cell hewn in the basic, Archean gneiss at a profound depth, with no entrance other than a hole through which he was lowered and drawn up by means of a long rope and windlass. This hole was lidded with a huge block and was guarded day and night by a dozen men-at-arms. However, there was no attempt at escape on the part of Knygathin Zhaum: indeed, he seemed unnaturally resigned to his prospective doom. To me, who have always been possessed of a strain of prophetic intuition, there was something overtly ominous in this unlooked-for resignation. Also, I did not like the demeanor of the prisoner during his trial. The silence which he had preserved at all times following his capture and incarceration was still maintained before his judges. Though interpreters who knew the harsh, sibilant Eiglophian dialect were provided, he would make no answer to questions; and he offered no defense. Least of all did I like the unabashed and unblinking manner in which he received the final pronouncement of death which was uttered in the high court of Commoriom by eight judges in turn and solemnly re-affirmed at the end by King Loquamethros. After that, I looked well to the sharpening of my sword, and promised myself that I

would concentrate all the resources of a brawny arm and a flawless manual artistry upon the forthcoming execution.

My task was not long deferred, for the usual interval of a fortnight between condemnation and decapitation had been shortened to three days in view of the suspicious peculiarities of Knygathin Zhaum and the heinous magnitude of his proven crimes.

On the morning appointed, after a night that had been rendered dismal by a long-drawn succession of the most abominable dreams, I went with my unfailing punctuality to the block of *eighon*-wood, which was situated with geometrical exactness in the center of the main square. Here a huge crowd had already gathered; and the clear amber sun blazed royally down on the ermine and eider of court dignitaries, the hodden of merchants and artisans, and the rough pelts that were worn by outland people.

With a like punctuality, Knygathin Zhaum soon appeared amid his entourage of guards, who surrounded him with a bristling hedge of bill-hooks and lances and tridents. At the same time, all the outer avenues of the city, as well as the entrances to the square, were guarded by massed soldiery, for it was feared that the uncaught members of the desperate outlaw band might make an effort to rescue their infamous chief at the last moment.

Amid the unremitting vigilance of his warders, Knygathin Zhaum came forward, fixing upon me the intent but inexpressive gaze of his lidless, ochre-yellow eyes, in which a face-to-face scrutiny could discern no pupils. He knelt down beside the block, presenting his mottled nape without a tremor. As I looked upon him with a calculating eye, and made ready for the lethal stroke, I was impressed more powerfully and more disagreeably than ever by the feeling of a loathsome, underlying plasticity, an invertebrate structure, nauseous and non-terrestrial, beneath his impious mockery of human form. And I could not help perceiving also the air of abnormal coolness, of abstract, impenetrable cynicism, that was maintained by all his parts and members. He was like a torpid snake, or some huge liana of the jungle, that is wholly unconscious of the shearing axe. I was well aware that I might be dealing with things which were beyond the ordinary province of a public headsman; but nathless I lifted the great sword in a clean, symmetrically flashing arc, and brought it down on the piebald nape with all of my customary force and address.

Necks differ in the sensations which they afford to one’s hand beneath the penetrating blade. In this case, I can only say that the sensation was not such as I have grown to associate with the cleaving of any known animal substance. But I saw with relief that the blow had been successful: the head of Knygathin Zhaum lay cleanly severed on the porous block, and his body sprawled on the pavement without even a single quiver of departing animation. As I had expected, there was no blood—only a black, tarry, fetid exudation, far from copious, which ceased in a few minutes and vanished utterly from my sword and from the *eighon*-wood. Also, the inner anatomy which the blade had revealed was devoid of all legitimate vertebration. But to all appearance Knygathin Zhaum had yielded up his obscene life; and the sentence of King Loquamethros and the eight judges of Commoriom had been fulfilled with a legal precision.

Proudly but modestly I received the applause of the waiting multitudes, who bore willing witness to the consummation of my official task and were loudly jubilant over the dead scourge. After seeing that the remains of Knygathin Zhaum were given into the hands of the public grave-diggers, who always disposed of such offal, I left the square and returned to my home, since no other decapitations had been set for that day. My conscience was serene, and I felt that I had acquitted myself worthily in the performance of a far from pleasant duty.

Knygathin Zhaum, as was the custom in dealing with the bodies of the most nefarious criminals, was interred with contumelious haste in a barren field outside the city where people cast their orts and rubbish. He was left in an unmarked and unmounded grave between two middens. The power of the law had now been amply vindicated; and everyone was satisfied, from Loquamethros himself to the villagers that had suffered from the depredations of the deceased outlaw.

I retired that night, after a bounteous meal of *suvana*-fruit and *djongua*-beans, well-irrigated with *foum*-wine. From a moral standpoint, I had every reason to sleep the sleep of the virtuous; but, even as on the preceding night, I was made the victim of one cacodemoniacal dream after another. Of these dreams, I recall only their pervading, unifying consciousness of insufferable suspense, of monotonously cumulative horror without shape or name; and the ever-torturing sentiment of vain repetition and dark, hopeless toil and frustration. Also, there is a half-memory, which refuses to assume any approach to visual form, of things that were never intended for human

perception or human cogitation; and the aforesaid sentiment, and all the horror, were dimly but indissolubly bound up with these. Awaking unrefreshed and weary from what seemed an aeon of thankless endeavor, of treadmill bafflement, I could only impute my nocturnal sufferings to the *djongua*-beans; and decided that I must have eaten all too liberally of these nutritious viands. Mercifully, I did not suspect in my dreams the dark, portentous symbolism that was soon to declare itself.

Now must I write the things that are formidable unto earth and the dwellers of earth; the things that exceed all human or terrene regimen; that subvert reason; that mock the dimensions and defy biology. Dire is the tale; and, after seven lustrums, the tremor of an olden fear still agitates my hand as I write.

But of such things I was still oblivious when I sallied forth that morning to the place of execution, where three criminals of a quite average sort, whose very cephalic contours I have forgotten along with their offenses, were to meet their well-deserved doom beneath my capable arm. Howbeit, I had not gone far when I heard an unconscionable uproar that was spreading swiftly from street to street, from alley to alley throughout Commoriom. I distinguished a myriad cries of rage, horror, fear and lamentation that were seemingly caught up and repeated by everyone who chanced to be abroad at that hour. Meeting some of the citizenry, who were plainly in a state of the most excessive agitation and were still continuing their outcries, I inquired the reason of all this clamor. And thereupon I learned from them that Knygathin Zhaum, whose illicit career was presumably at an end, had now reappeared and had signalized the unholy miracle of his return by the commission of a most appalling act on the main avenue before the very eyes of early passers! He had seized a respectable seller of *djongua*-beans, and had proceeded instantly to devour his victim *alive*, without heeding the blows, bricks, arrows, javelins, cobblestones and curses that were rained upon him by the gathering throng and by the police. It was only when he had satisfied his atrocious appetite, that he suffered the police to lead him away, leaving little more than the bones and raiment of the *djongua*-seller to mark the spot of this outrageous happening. Since the case was without legal parallel, Knygathin Zhaum had been thrown once more into the oubliette below the city dungeons, to await the will of Loquamethros and the eight judges.

The exceeding discomfiture, the profound embarrassment felt by myself, as well as by the people and the magistracy of Commoriom, can well be imagined. As everyone bore witness, Knygathin Zhaum had been efficiently beheaded and buried according to the customary ritual; and his resurrection was not only against nature but involved a most contumelious and highly mystifying breach of the law. In fact, the legal aspects of the case were such as to render necessary the immediate passing of a special statute, calling for re-judgement, and allowing re-execution, of such malefactors as might thus-wise return from their lawful graves. Apart from all this, there was general consternation; and even at that early date, the more ignorant and more religious among the townsfolk were prone to regard the matter as an omen of some impending civic calamity.

As for me, my scientific turn of mind, which repudiated the supernatural, led me to seek an explanation of the problem in the non-terrestrial side of Knygathin Zhaum's ancestry. I felt sure that the forces of an alien biology, the properties of a transtellar life-substance, were somehow involved.

With the spirit of the true investigator, I summoned the grave-diggers who had interred Knygathin Zhaum and bade them lead me to his place of sepulture in the refuse-grounds. Here a most singular condition disclosed itself. The earth had not been disturbed, apart from a deep hole at one end of the grave, such as might have been made by a large rodent. No body of human size, or, at least, of human form, could possibly have emerged from this hole. At my command, the diggers removed all the loose soil, mingled with potsherds and other rubbish, which they had heaped upon the beheaded outlaw. When they reached the bottom, nothing was found but a slight stickiness where the corpse had lain; and this, along with an odor of ineffable foulness which was its concomitant, soon dissipated itself in the open air.

Baffled, and more mystified than ever, but still sure that the enigma would permit of some natural solution, I awaited the new trial. This time, the course of justice was even quicker and less given to quibbling than before. The prisoner was again condemned, and the time of decapitation was delayed only till the following morn. A proviso concerning burial was added to the sentence: the remains were to be sealed in a strong wooden sarcophagus, the sarcophagus was to be inhumed in a deep pit in the solid stone, and the pit filled with massy boulders. These measures, it was felt,

should serve amply to restrain the unwholesome and irregular inclinations of this obnoxious miscreant.

When Knygathin Zhaum was again brought before me, amid a redoubled guard and a throng that overflowed the square and all of the outlying avenues, I viewed him with profound concern and with more than my former repulsion. Having a good memory for anatomic details, I noticed some odd changes in his physique. The huge splotches of dull black and sickly yellow that had covered him from head to heel were now somewhat differently distributed. The shifting of the facial blotches, around the eyes and mouth, had now given him an expression that was both grim and sardonic to an unbearable degree. Also, there was a perceptible *shortening* of his neck, though the place of cleavage and re-union, midway between head and shoulders, had left no mark whatever. And looking at his limbs, I discerned other and more subtle changes. Despite my acumen in physical matters, I found myself unwilling to speculate regarding the processes that might underlie these alterations; and still less did I wish to surmise the problematic results of their continuation, if such should ensue. Hoping fervently that Knygathin Zhaum and the vile, flagitious properties of his unhallowed carcass would now be brought to a permanent end, I raised the sword of justice high in air and smote with heroic might.

Once again, as far as mortal eye was able to determine, the effects of the shearing blow were all that could be desired. The head rolled forward on the *eighon*-wood, and the torso and its members fell and lay supinely on the maculated flags. From a legal view-point, this doubly nefandous malefactor was now twice-dead.

Howbeit, this time I superintended in person the disposal of the remains, and saw to the bolting of the fine sarcophagus of *apha*-wood in which they were laid, and the filling with chosen boulders of the ten-foot pit into which the sarcophagus was lowered. It required three men to lift even the least of these boulders. We all felt that the irrepressible Knygathin Zhaum was due for a quietus.

Alas! for the vanity of earthly hopes and labors! The morrow came with its unspeakable, incredible tale of renewed outrage: once more the weird, semi-human offender was abroad, once more his anthropophagic lust had taken toll from among the honorable denizens of Commoriom. He had eaten no less a personage than one of the eight judges; and, not satisfied with picking the bones of this rather obese individual, had devoured by way

of dessert the more outstanding facial features of one of the police who had tried to deter him from finishing his main course. All this, as before, was done amid the frantic protests of a great throng. After a final nibbling at the scant vestiges of the unfortunate constable's left ear, Knygathin Zhaum had seemed to experience a feeling of repletion and had suffered himself to be led docilely away once more by the jailers.

I, and the others who had helped me in the arduous toils of entombment, were more than astounded when we heard the news. And the effect on the general public was indeed deplorable. The more superstitious and timid began leaving the city forthwith; and there was much revival of forgotten prophecies; and much talk among the various priesthoods anent the necessity of placating with liberal sacrifice their mystically angered gods and eidolons. Such nonsense I was wholly able to disregard; but, under the circumstances, the persistent return of Knygathin Zhaum was no less alarming to science than to religion.

We examined the tomb, if only as a matter of form; and found that certain of the superincumbent boulders had been displaced in such a manner as to admit the outward passage of a body with the lateral dimensions of some large snake or musk-rat. The sarcophagus, with its metal bolts, was bursten at one end; and we shuddered to think of the immeasurable force that must have been employed in its disruption.

Because of the way in which the case overpassed all known biologic laws, the formalities of civil law were now waived; and I, Athammaus, was called upon that same day before the sun had reached its meridian, and was solemnly charged with the office of re-beheading Knygathin Zhaum at once. The interment or other disposal of the remains was left to my discretion; and the local soldiery and constabulary were all placed at my command, if I should require them.

Deeply conscious of the honor thus implied, and sorely perplexed but undaunted, I went forth to the scene of my labors. When the criminal re-appeared, it was obvious not only to me but to everyone that his physical personality, in achieving this new recrudescence, had undergone a most salient change. His mottling had developed more than a suggestion of some startling and repulsive pattern; and his human characteristics had yielded to the inroads of an unearthly distortion. The head was now joined to the shoulders almost without the intermediation of a neck; the eyes were set diagonally in a face with oblique bulgings and flattenings; the nose and

mouth were showing a tendency to displace each other; and there were still further alterations which I shall not specify, since they involved an abhorrent degradation of man’s noblest and most distinctive corporeal members. I shall, however, mention the strange, pendulous formations, like annulated dew-laps or wattles, into which his knee-caps had evolved. Nathless, it was Knygathin Zhaum himself who stood (if one could dignify the fashion of his carriage by that word) before the block of justice.

Because of the virtual non-existence of a nape, the third beheading called for a precision of eye and a nicety of hand which, in all likelihood, no other headsman than myself could have shown. I rejoice to say that my skill was adequate to the demand thus made upon it; and once again the culprit was shorn of his vile cephaloid appendage. But if the blade had gone even a little to either side, the dismemberment entailed would have been technically of another sort than decapitation.

The laborious care with which I and my assistants now conducted the third inhumation was indeed deserving of success. We laid the body in a strong sarcophagus of bronze, and the head in a second but smaller sarcophagus of the same material. The lids were then soldered down with molten metal; and after this the two sarcophagi were conveyed to opposite parts of Commoriom. The one containing the body was buried at a great depth beneath monumental masses of stone; but that which enclosed the head I left uninterred, proposing to watch over it all night in company with a guard of armed men. I also appointed a numerous guard to keep vigil above the burial-place of the body.

Night came; and with seven trusty trident-bearers I went forth to the place where we had left the smaller of the two sarcophagi. This was in the courtyard of a deserted mansion amid the suburbs, far from the haunts of the populace. For weapons, I myself wore a short falchion and carried a great bill. We took along a plentiful supply of torches, so that we might not lack for light in our gruesome vigil; and we lit several of them at once and stuck them in crevices between the flag-stones of the court, in such wise that they formed a circle of lurid flames about the sarcophagus.

We had also brought with us an abundance of the crimson *foum*-wine in leathern bottles, and dice of mammoth-ivory with which to beguile the black nocturnal hours; and eyeing our charge with a casual but careful vigilance, we applied ourselves discreetly to the wine and began to play for

small sums of no more than five *pazoors*, as is the wont of good gamblers till they have taken their opponents' measure.

The darkness deepened apace; and in the square of sapphire overhead, to which the illumination of our torches had given a jetty tinge, we saw Polaris and the red planets that looked down for the last time upon Commoriom in her glory. But we dreamed not of the nearness of disaster, but jested bravely and drank in ribald mockery to the monstrous head that was now so securely coffined and so remotely sundered from its odious body. The wine passed and re-passed among us; and its rosy spirit mounted in our brains; and we played for bolder stakes; and the game quickened to a goodly frenzy.

I know not how many stars had gone over us in the smoky heavens, nor how many times I had availed myself of the ever-circling bottles. But I remember well that I had won no less than ninety *pazoors* from the trident-bearers, who were all swearing lustily and loudly as they strove in vain to stem the tide of my victory. I, as well as the others, had wholly forgotten the object of our vigil.

The sarcophagus containing the head was one that had been primarily designed for the reception of a small child. Its present use, one might have argued, was a sinful and sacrilegious waste of fine bronze; but nothing else of proper size and adequate strength was available at the time. In the mounting fervor of the game, as I have hinted, we had all ceased to watch this receptacle; and I shudder to think how long there may have been something visibly or even audibly amiss before the unwonted and terrifying behavior of the sarcophagus was forced upon our attention. It was the sudden, loud, metallic clangor, like that of a smitten gong or shield, which made us realize that all things were not as they should have been; and turning unanimously in the direction of the sound, we saw that the sarcophaghus was heaving and pitching in a most unseemly fashion amid its ring of flaring torches. First on one end or corner, then on another, it danced and pirouetted, clanging resonantly all the while on the granite pavement.

The true horror of the situation had scarcely seeped into our brains, ere a new and even more ghastly development occurred. We saw that the casket was bulging ominously at top and sides and bottom, and was rapidly losing all similitude to its rightful form. Its rectangular outlines swelled and curved and were horribly erased as in the changes of a nightmare, till the thing became a slightly oblong sphere; and then, with a most appalling

noise, it began to split at the welded edges of the lid, and burst violently asunder. Through the long, ragged rift there poured in hellish ebullition a dark, ever-swelling mass of incognizable matter, frothing as with the venomous foam of a million serpents, hissing as with the yeast of fermenting wine, and putting forth here and there great sooty-looking bubbles that were large as pig-bladders. Overturning several of the torches, it rolled in an inundating wave across the flag-stones and we all sprang back in the most abominable fright and stupefaction to avoid it.

Cowering against the rear wall of the courtyard, while the overthrown torches flickered wildly and smokily, we watched the remarkable actions of the mass, which had paused as if to collect itself, and was now subsiding like a sort of infernal dough. It shrank, it fell in, till after awhile its dimensions began to re-approach those of the encoffined head, though they still lacked any true semblance of its shape. The thing became a round, blackish ball, on whose palpitating surface the nascent outlines of random features were limned with the flatness of a drawing. There was one lidless eye, tawny, pupilless and phosphoric, that stared upon us from the center of the ball while the thing appeared to be making up its mind. It lay still for more than a minute; then, with a catapulting bound, it sprang past us toward the open entrance of the courtyard, and disappeared from our ken on the midnight streets.

Despite our amazement and disconcertion, we were able to note the general direction in which it had gone. This, to our further terror and confoundment, was toward the portion of Commoriom in which the body of Knygathin Zhaum had been intombed. We dared not conjecture the meaning of it all, and the probable outcome. But, though there were a million fears and apprehensions to deter us, we seized our weapons and followed on the path of that unholy head with all the immediacy and all the forthrightness of motion which a goodly cargo of *foum*-wine would permit.

No one other than ourselves was abroad at an hour when even the most dissolute revellers had either gone home or had succumbed to their potations under tavern tables. The streets were dark, and were somehow drear and cheerless; and the stars above them were half-stifled as by the invading mist of a pestilential miasma. We went on, following a main street, and the pavements echoed to our tread in the stillness with a hollow sound, as if the solid stone beneath them had been honeycombed with mausolean vaults in the interim of our weird vigil.

In all our wanderings, we found no sign of that supremely noxious and execrable thing which had issued from the riven sarcophagus. Nor, to our relief, and contrary to all our fears, did we encounter anything of an allied or analogous nature, such as might be abroad if our surmises were correct. But, near the central square of Commoriom, we met with a number of men, carrying bills and tridents and torches, who proved to be the guards I had posted that evening above the tomb of Knygathin Zhaum's body. These men were in a state of pitiable agitation; and they told us a fearsome tale, of how the deep-hewn tomb and the monumental blocks piled within it had heaved as with the throes of earthquake; and of how a python-shapen mass of frothing and hissing matter had poured forth from amid the blocks and had vanished into the darkness toward Commoriom. In return, we told them of that which had happened during our vigil in the courtyard; and we all agreed that a great foulness, a thing more baneful than beast or serpent, was again loose and ravening in the night. And we spoke only in shocked whispers of what the morrow might declare.

Uniting our forces, we searched the city, combing cautiously its alleys and its thoroughfares and dreading with the dread of brave men the dark, iniquitous spawn on which the light of our torches might fall at any turn or in any nook or portal. But the search was vain; and the stars grew faint above us in a livid sky; and the dawn came in among the marble spires with a glimmering of ghostly silver; and a thin, phantasmal amber was sifted on walls and pavements.

Soon there were footsteps other than ours that echoed through the town; and one by one the familiar clangors and clamors of life awoke. Early passers appeared; and the sellers of fruits and milk and legumes came in from the country-side. But of that which we sought there was still no trace.

We went on, while the city continued to resume its matutinal activities around us. Then, abruptly, with no warning, and under circumstances that would have startled the most robust and affrayed the most valorous, we came upon our quarry. We were entering the square in which was the *eighon*-block on which so many thousand miscreants had laid their piacular necks, when we heard an outcry of mortal dread and agony such as only one thing in the world could have occasioned. Hurrying on, we saw that two wayfarers, who had been crossing the square near the block of justice, were struggling and writhing in the clutch of an unequalled monster which both natural history and fable would have repudiated.

In spite of the baffling, ambiguous oddities which the thing displayed, we identified it as Knygathin Zhaum when we drew closer. The head, in its third re-union with that detestable torso, had attached itself in a semi-flattened manner to the region of the lower chest and diaphragm; and during the process of this novel coalescence, one eye had slipped away from all relation with its fellow or the head and was now occupying the navel, just below the embossment of the chin. Other and even more shocking alterations had occurred: the arms had lengthened into tentacles, with fingers that were like knots of writhing vipers; and where the head would normally have been, the shoulders had reared themselves to a cone-shaped eminence that ended in a cup-like mouth. Most fabulous and impossible of all, however, were the changes in the nether limbs: at each knee and hip, they had re-bifurcated into long, lithe proboscides that were lined with throated suckers. By making a combined use of its various mouths and members, the abnormality was devouring both of the hapless persons whom it had seized.

Drawn by the outcries, a crowd gathered behind us as we neared this atrocious tableau. The whole city seemed to fill with a well-nigh instantaneous clamor, an ever-swelling hubbub, in which the dominant note was one of supreme, all-devastating terror.

I shall not speak of our feelings as officers and men. It was plain to us that the ultra-mundane factors in Knygathin Zhaum's ancestry had asserted themselves with a hideously accelerative ratio, following his latest resurrection. But, maugre this, and the wholly stupendous enormity of the miscreation before us, we were still prepared to fulfill our duty and defend as best we could the helpless populace. I boast not of the heroism required: we were simple men, and should have done only that which we were visibly called upon to do.

We surrounded the monster, and would have assailed it immediately with our bills and tridents. But here an embarrassing difficulty disclosed itself: the creature before us had entwined itself so tortuously and inextricably with its prey, and the whole group was writhing and tossing so violently, that we could not use our weapons without grave danger of impaling or otherwise injuring our two fellow-citizens. At length, however, the strugglings and heavings grew less vehement, as the substance and life-blood of the men was consumed; and the loathsome mass of devourer and devoured became gradually quiescent.

Now, if ever, was our opportunity; and I am sure we should all have rallied to the attack, useless and vain as it would certainly have been. But plainly the monster had grown weary of all such trifling and would no longer submit himself to the petty annoyance of human molestation. As we raised our weapons and made ready to strike, the thing drew back, still carrying its vein-drawn, flaccid victims, and climbed upon the *eighon*-block. Here, before the eyes of all assembled, it began to swell in every part, in every member, as if it were inflating itself with a superhuman rancor and malignity. The rate at which the swelling progressed, and the proportions which the thing attained as it covered the block from sight and lapsed down on every side with undulating, inundating folds, would have been enough to daunt the heroes of remotest myth. The bloating of the main torso, I might add, was more lateral than vertical. When the abnormality began to present dimensions that were beyond those of any creature of this world, and to bulge aggressively toward us with a slow, interminable stretching of boa-like arms, my valiant and redoubtable companions were scarcely to be censured for retreating. And even less can I blame the general population, who were now evacuating Commoriom in torrential multitudes, with shrill cries and wailings. Their flight was no doubt accelerated by the vocal sounds, which, for the first time during our observation, were being emitted by the monster. These sounds partook of the character of hissings more than anything else; but their volume was overpowering, their timbre was a torment and a nausea to the ear; and, worst of all, they were issuing not only from the diaphragmic mouth but from each of the various other oral openings or suckers which the horror had developed. Even I, Athammaus, drew back from those hissings and stood well beyond reach of the coiling serpentine fingers.

I am proud to say, however, that I lingered on the edge of the empty square for some time, with more than one backward and regretful glance. The thing that had been Knygathin Zhaum was seemingly content with its triumph; and it brooded supine and mountainous above the vanquished *eighon*-block. Its myriad hisses sank to a slow, minor sibilation such as might issue from a family of somnolent pythons; and it made no overt attempt to assail or even approach me. But seeing at last that the professional problem which it offered was quite insoluble; and divining moreover that Commoriom was by now entirely without a king, a judicial

system, a constabulary or a people, I finally abandoned the doomed city and followed the others.

A CAPTIVITY IN SERPENS

Chapter I

"This world," said Volmar, "plainly belongs to the Mercurian type. One side is always presented to the sun; the other confronts eternal night; though it may be that there is a very slow and incomplete diurnal rotation. One hemisphere, as we have seen, is a blazing desert, and the other is sheeted with ice and frozen snow, except for the twilight zone in which we have landed."

After eight unbroken months of ether-voyaging, in their attempted circuit of the universe, Captain Volmar and his men had felt the need of stretching their legs again on some sort of Terra Firma. The cramped quarters of the ether-ship *Alcyone*, the monotony of a never-ceasing flight through spatial emptiness and darkness, with only far-strewn suns and systems and nebulae for mile-posts, had palled on everyone, even the ascetically ardent Volmar. A brief respite on some planetary body was deemed advisable. They had made a number of such pauses during their half-decade of journeying.

They were nearing a lesser, unnamed sun in Serpens when this decision was made. Of course, the sun might not possess a planetary system. However, as they drew closer, the *Alcyone*'s telescopic reflectors revealed four planets that were circling it in wide-flung orbits. In the position which it then occupied, the innermost world was nearer to the space-ship than the others; and it soon attracted the curiosity of the voyagers by its odd markings.

Between the deserts of the sunlit hemisphere and the ice-fields and mountains that glimmered palely on the nightward side beneath two diminutive moons, a dark, narrow zone suggesting vegetation was visible—a zone that encircled the planet from pole to pole. Clouds and vapors above this penumbral belt had proved the presence of an atmosphere. A landing had been made; and Captain Volmar, Jasper the mate, Roverton, and the other members of the crew, had emerged cautiously from the flier's man-hole after determining the temperature and chemical constituents of the outside air.

The temperature was moderate—about 60°. But the existence of one or two unknown, uncertain gases in the air had denoted the advisability of

wearing masks and carrying oxygen-tanks. Equipped with these, and armed with automatics, the party sallied forth into a strange landscape.

The *Alcyone* had descended on a low, level, open hill-top. The ground resembled a coarse turf, and was pale-blue in color. When the men trod upon it for the first time, they found that it was not covered with anything in the least related to grass, but with a peculiar growth, two or three inches high, like a thin, branching fungus. It was not rooted in the soil; and it fell over or crumbled readily beneath the footsteps of the explorers.

They could see plainly enough in the weird twilight, strengthened as it was by the glimmering of the two moons, one of which was crescent and the other gibbous. Far-off, a row of mound-like hills, interspersed with sharp dolomites, was outlined on an afterglow of torrid saffron that soared in deepening rays to assail the green heavens. A few stars, and the other planets of the system, were visible.

Volmar and his men approached the edge of the hill-top. Below them, a long, undulant slope descended to a plain covered with the dark vegetation which they had descried from afar in space.

It was a mass of purples and blues and mauves, ranging from the palest to the darkest tints, and it seemed to vary in height from shrub-like growths to things that presented the size, if not the natural aspect, of full-grown forest trees. Some of the smaller forms, like an advance guard, had climbed mid-way on the acclivity. They were very heavy at the base, with dwindling boles like inverted carrots and many nodular outbranchings of an irregularity more grotesque than that of any terrene cacti. The lower branches appeared to touch the ground, with the ungainly sprawl of crab or tarantula legs.

“I’d like to have a look at those things,” said Volmar. “Do you want to come with me, Roverton? The rest of you fellows had best remain within sight of the flier. We haven’t seen any sort of animate life yet; but there’s no telling what might be lurking in the neighborhood.”

He and Roverton went down the slope, with the fungoid turf crunching beneath their feet. They neared the foremost plant-forms rather cautiously, remembering their unpleasant experiences with flesh-eating trees and vegetables in other worlds. These forms, however, though they were extremely uncouth and even ugly, displayed none of the usual characteristics of carnivorous plants.

“What are they?” Volmar was frankly puzzled. “Cacti? Fungi? Aerophytes? I don’t believe they have any root-systems at all—they look as if one could knock them over very easily.”

He approached one of the short, heavy boles, and pushed it with his foot. It fell to the ground and lay sprawling with its thick, ungainly limbs in the air. Unlike the tiny growths underfoot, it was very tough and rubbery, and none of its branches were broken or in any wise injured by the fall. On the contrary, they had bent with elastic ease where they were caught underneath the bole.

“The thing must be an air-plant,” said Volmar. “I don’t see any sign of root-attachments.”

He was turning away, when Roverton touched his arm.

“What do you think of that, Captain?”

The overthrown plant was moving, albeit with great slowness and sluggishness, in a manifest effort to right itself. The top heaved, the branches that were doubled beneath it seemed to straighten and lengthen, while those beneath the base contracted. The thing was plainly trying to secure a sort of leverage. At last, after several vain attempts, it resumed an upright position, on the very same spot from which Volmar had displaced it.

“That’s interesting,” Volmar commented. “These things have the power of mobility when such is needed. I wouldn’t be surprised if all this vegetation were migratory. Doubtless it has developed the ability to move from place to place on account of the severely changing climatic conditions. In all likelihood the habitable twilight zone shifts more or less during the planet’s annual rotation, and these plants follow it, to avoid the extreme heat of full daylight or the utter cold of darkness. If there is any animal life, it is probably nomadic also.”

“Shall we go on?” asked Roverton. “That forest at the bottom of the hill should be worthy of study.”

“Alright,” assented Volmar. “But we mustn’t wander too far from the others. There’s no use taking chances in an unexplored world—we’ve done that before and have gotten into some tight places.”

A hundred yards, and they were among the outposts of the strange forest. Many of the growths resembled the first shrubs in type, though they were heavier and taller. Others grew in recumbent positions, like vast vegetable centipedes or many-legged monsters. Some retracted their outer limbs in a sluggish caution before the approach of the men; but most of

them did not appear to move at all. There seemed to be nothing to fear from these plants; so Volmar and Roverton went on among the irregularly scattered groups, examining them with much curiosity. So far, they had seen no evidence whatever of animal or insect life.

In their scientific absorption, the explorers did not realize how far they had wandered, till they saw that the plants around them were becoming higher and thicker. Many of them were twenty or thirty feet tall; and they stood so close that further progress among them was difficult.

“I guess we’d better turn back,” said Volmar.

He and Roverton started to retrace their steps, which were plainly marked in the trodden fungi. To their surprise, when they had gone only a little distance, they found that the path was now blocked in many places by thickets of the strange trees, which must have closed in stealthily behind their passing, though no movement of this sort had been discernible at the time. Perhaps these plants had been impelled to follow them by some obscure instinct or stirring of curiosity. But evidently they were not aggressive or dangerous; and their motor activity was of the most torpid kind.

Because of this re-arrangement of the growths, however, the men were compelled to divagate from their direct route as they returned toward the *Alcyone.* But they did not anticipate any real difficulty, and were not likely to go astray, since the low hill from which they had descended was visible in many places above the tops of the vegetation.

Presently they came to some old footmarks, characterized by three toes of preternatural length and sharpness. The prints were very far apart, suggesting that their originator was possessed of phenomenally long legs.

Volmar and Roverton followed the tracks, insomuch as these appeared to be going in the general direction of the space-flier. But a little further on, in the lee of a dense clump of vegetation, the tracks entered a huge burrow, into which the men could almost have walked without stooping, on a gentle incline. Both eyed it rather warily as they passed; but there was no visible sign of its occupant.

“I’m not sure that I’d care to meet that customer, whatever it is,” observed Roverton. “Probably it’s some loathsome overgrown insect.”

They had gone perhaps seventy feet beyond the burrow’s entrance, when the ground suddenly caved in beneath Volmar, who was in the lead, and he disappeared from Roverton’s sight. Hastening to the edge of the hole

into which his companion had fallen, Roverton met a similar fate, for the ground crumbled beneath him and he was precipitated into a dark pit seven or eight feet deep, landing beside Volmar. Both were a little bruised by the fall but were otherwise unhurt. They had broken through into the burrow, whose entrance they could now see from where they were lying. The place was filled with a noisome, mephitic smell, and was damp with disagreeable oozings. Picking themselves up, the men started toward the entrance at once, hoping that the burrow's owner had not been aroused by their involuntary intrusion.

As they approached the mouth, they were startled by a medley of shrill, piping sounds which arose from without—the first sounds they had heard in this fantastic world. As they drew still nearer, they saw the silhouettes of two figures that were standing just outside the cave. The figures were bipedal, with thick legs of disproportionate shortness, and arms that reached almost to the ground. The heads could not be seen from within the tunnel. These extraordinary beings were stretching a narrow, heavy-stranded net, weighted at the ends with balls of metal or mineral, which they held between them across the entrance. They continued their piping noise; and their voices grew shriller still and took on an odd, cajoling note.

Volmar and Roverton had paused.

"Now what?" whispered Roverton.

"I think," Volmar whispered in reply, "that those creatures, whoever or whatever they are, must be waiting for the owner of the burrow to come out. They have tracked it, or perhaps have even driven it here. Probably they're planning to wind that net around its long legs when it emerges."

"Or," suggested Roverton, "maybe they saw us fall into the pit and are planning to take us captive."

They returned cautiously toward the caved-in portion of the burrow, and stopped when they saw that several more of the weird hunters, some of them equipped with nets and others armed with trident-headed lances, were grouped around the opening above and were peering down. The heads of these beings were even more peculiar than their limbs, and were quite hideous from a human stand-point. They possessed three eyes, two of which were set obliquely in close juxtaposition to a slit-like mouth surrounded with waving or drooping tentacles, and the other near the top of a long, sloping brow that was lined with sparse bristles. There were rudimentary projections from each jowl, that might have been either ears or wattles; but

nothing even remotely suggestive of nostrils was detectible. The whole expression was supremely wild and ferocious.

“Can’t say that I admire the looks of those customers,” murmured Roverton. “Plainly they’re a hunting-party; and we, or the occupant of this burrow—or both—have been marked out as their meat.”

The guards at the entrance had continued their piping song. Suddenly it seemed to find a far-off echo in the depths of the cavern. The sound approached and grew louder and shriller. Volmar and Roverton could see the gleaming of two greenish, phosphorescent eyes in the darkness beyond the circle of dim light that fell from the caved-in roof.

“The hunters are luring that beast,” said Volmar, “by imitating the voices of its own kind.”

He and Roverton, with their automatics ready, now retreated slowly toward the entrance, watching over their shoulders as they went to the phosphoric eyes that continued to advance from the gloom.

Now they could see two enormous, spraddling, many-jointed legs, and a squat, shaggy face and globe-like body; and then the two hind-legs, as the creature came into the light. Somehow, it was more like an insect than an animal—like some Gargantuan, over-nourished arachnid. As the monster passed beneath the opening, the two men saw the flash of a spear cast by one of the watchers above. It sank into the dark, hairy body, and the piping rose to a harsh scream, as the creature leapt forward upon Volmar and Roverton.

With their automatics flaming and crackling in the gloom, the men turned and ran toward the entrance. Their maddened pursuer, seemingly undeterred by the bullets, was close upon their heels.

The weighted net was still stretched across the burrow’s mouth, and Volmar and Roverton now fired their last cartridges at the legs of the two beings who held it. Both of these creatures fell sprawling and dropped the net. The men burst forth into the light, only to find themselves confronted by a dozen similar beings, all armed with nets or spears. These bizarre hunters gave no evidence of fear or surprise at the appearance of the earthlings, but proceeded with calm, methodical swiftness to form in a ring. The men rushed upon them hoping to break through, but with ineluctable speed and deftness each was entangled in the heavy meshes cast about him, and went to the ground with pinioned arms and legs. Their automatics had fallen from their fingers and were beyond reach. Lying helpless, they saw

the emerging of the monster that had driven them from the burrow. It was neatly trapped in its turn by the guards; and it lay palpitating on the ground, bleeding a thick bluish fluid from the spear and bullet wounds it had received.

Chapter II

The two men could scarcely move, so closely were the weighted meshes wound about them.

“This is a pretty tight situation,” remarked Roverton, whose wit was unquenchable by any hardship or danger, no matter how desperate.

“Yes, and it may be tighter before we are through,” added Volmar grimly, as he lay staring up into the strange faces of their captors, who had gathered in a circle about the earth-men and were surveying them with manifest curiosity. Seen close at hand, these beings were truly hideous and repulsive, though it was likely that they represented an evolutionary type similar in mental endowment to aboriginal man. They were of gigantic stature, averaging seven or eight feet. Their naked, dark-grey bodies were covered with a hairless skin marked off into rudimentary scales or plates, possibly denotive of some reptilian origin or affinity. Their three eyes, their sloping brows and tentacle-fringed mouths gave them an indescribably weird appearance. Their long arms were triple-jointed, in opposition to the squat, single-jointed legs, which ended in webbed feet. Their fingers were seemingly boneless, but extremely powerful and supple, and were wrapped like tentacles about the terrific trident spears which they carried. The heads and shafts of these weapons were both made of the same copper-colored metal.

The hunters began to gibber among themselves, in guttural growling voices that were evidently their natural tones, and were quite unlike the shrill pipings with which they had lured the monster from its burrow. Their speech seemed to consist of monosyllabic sounds whose exact phonetic nature would have defied human imitation or classification.

After what was plainly a sort of debate two of them stepped forward and proceeded to unbind the legs of the earth-men, leaving their arms tied by the knotted nets, and prodded them roughly with spear-butts to make them stand up.

Volmar and Roverton scarcely needed this urging. They rose awkwardly and stiffly. Then, bearing them along in its midst, the whole party started off through the woods in an opposite direction from the hill on which the flier had landed. Some of the hunters had tied the trussed monster to a sort of

light metal frame with handles and were carrying it among them. The two that had been wounded by the earth-men limped along in the rear. Short-legged as they were, these beings made rapid progress, and Volmar and Roverton were soon compelled to quicken their pace.

"Now whither?" asked Roverton. "I suppose you and I are going into the tribal pot along with that monster."

Volmar did not answer. He was examining the net by which his arms were bound. It was made of a finely linked metal, like highly tempered copper, and was very strong. The workmanship was so delicate and regular as to arouse wonderment. Also, the spears carried by the giants were exquisitely wrought.

"I wonder," soliloquized Volmar, "if these nets and weapons were made by their owners?"

"Probably," said Roverton. "Of course, the work seems to betoken a considerable degree of manual skill and civilization; and these beings are a pretty low and bestial-looking lot from a human aesthetic viewpoint. But after all we can't tell much about them from their appearance. All the extraplanetary peoples we have met were more or less monstrous according to our standards."

"That's true," assented Volmar slowly. "But somehow I have a hunch that our captors aren't the only beings on this world."

"Maybe; but I'm not very curious to know. I hope Jasper and the others will follow our trail—they must be worrying about us by now. A little rescue party would certainly be welcome."

"We may have to rescue ourselves—it all depends on what we get into. Our captors are doubtless nomads who roam from place to place in the twilight zone, like the vegetation. There's no telling what sort of abodes they have—if any. It is possible that they may dwell underground."

"Christ! I've had enough burrows for one day," ejaculated Roverton. "Also, I'm not likely to forget the experience that Deming, Adams and myself had with those troglodyte pygmies in Andromeda."

Several miles were traversed by the party. The way led deviously over a flat plain, amid clumps of the rootless vegetation. The row of mound-like hills and sharp dolomites which the men had seen from the *Alcyone*'s landing-place was now very near. The trees became sparser, and ended on the verge of a shallow, rock-strewn valley where thin streams of water ran tortuously down to a long, winding lake. Crossing this valley, whose soil

was covered by small fungi, and fording one of the streams, the party entered a deep gorge which wound slowly upward among the further hills. Here there were deep chasms, and crags of roughly splintered stone with outcroppings of unknown metal, and dark torrents that fumed with iridescent vapors. However, there was a well-marked path, and progress was not difficult.

Now the path began to slope downward. Soon the party emerged in an amphitheater surrounded by crags and pinnacles. Here an unexpected sight awaited the earth-men. To one side, in the lee of a cliff, were a number of rude stone huts; and in the middle of the amphitheatre there reposed a huge, glittering object, perfectly oval in form, and plainly of an artificial nature.

“I’ll wager,” cried Roverton, “that that thing is some kind of air-vessel, or even space-craft.”

“I never bet,” rejoined Volmar. “But I shouldn’t be surprised if you were right.”

Many figures were moving about the oval object; and as the party drew nearer, it could be seen that they were not all of the same type or species. Many were like the hunters who had captured Volmar and Roverton; but others differed as widely from these as the hunters differed in their turn from the earth-men. They were about four feet tall, with spindling limbs and delicate bodies, pinched in the center like those of ants, and heads of such disproportionate size as to give at once the impression of artificial masks. These creatures were gorgeously colored, with all the hues of the harlequin opal, and contrasted extremely with the dark giants. Seen closer at hand, the oval object revealed a series of small ports filled with a vitreous, violet-hued material, and an open circular door in its side from which a stair-case of light aerial structure, doubtless collapsible, ran to the ground.

The two groups of unearthly beings were engaged in a lively conversation, and the gruff gutturals of the giants were surmounted by the sweet, piercing sibilants of the dwarfs. Several strange animals of varying size and monstrosity, bound with nets, were lying on the ground at one side, and some of the dwarfs were bringing copper-colored nets and spears and other weapons or implements of more doubtful use from the interior of the oval vessel. When some of these articles were handed over to the giants, the earth-men surmised that they were being bartered in exchange for the trussed animals.

“What did I tell you?” cried Volmar. “I knew that those nets and tridents weren’t made by our captors. And I doubt very much if the dwarfs are natives of this planet at all. I believe they have come from a neighboring world of this same solar system. Possibly they are zoologists, and are collecting specimens of the local fauna. I think those head-pieces of theirs are respirative masks—they don’t seem to fit with the rest of their anatomy. No doubt they are unable to breathe the atmosphere of this world, at least in its pure state; and it is probable that those masks include some sort of filtering apparatus. There is nothing to be discerned in the nature of air-tanks.”

Seeing the approach of the hunters with Volmar and Roverton in their midst, the two groups interrupted their bargaining and stared in silence at the new-comers. The heads, or masks, of the dwarfs were fitted with two pairs of green eyes, set vertically and far apart; and their gaze was uncannily intent and wholly unchanging. The eyes were divided into many facets, like those of an insect, and blazed with emerald light. Between and below the eyes there was a short, trumpet-like attachment, which doubtless served as a mouth-piece; and its hollow tube might well have contained the filtering apparatus surmised by Volmar. Two curving horns, perforated like flutes, arose from the sides of those curious heads, and suggested an auditory mechanism. The limbs and torsos of the dwarfs were seemingly nude, and glittered like the shards of bright-colored beetles, with nacreous lights that ran and melted into each other with every movement.

A brief interval of silence, as if all these beings were overcome with amazement at the appearance of Volmar and Roverton; and then the dwarfs began to talk and gesticulate excitedly among themselves, pointing at the earth-men with their thin, pipe-like arms, which ended in rather intricate-looking hands whose fingers were fine as antennae. Then they addressed the giant hunters in tones of interrogation, and a long discussion followed. Some of the dwarfs approached Volmar and Roverton and examined their clothing, masks and oxygen-tanks with minute attention. The tanks, which were built into the suits of flexible vitriolene, were apparently a source of special interest. There was much argument among the dwarfs in their sweet, hissing voices; and it was plain that some were maintaining one theory and some another. Their whole air was one of great puzzlement and perplexity.

“I’ll bet,” said Roverton, “that they think we’re some new species of animal native to this world, and are trying to classify us.”

“They have the look of investigative scientists,” agreed Volmar. “And it must be giving them a lot of trouble to place us in their system of biology or zoology.”

Now the dwarfs addressed themselves again to the hunters. There was much voluble expostulation on both sides.

“Guess they’re trying to drive a bargain for us,” conjectured Roverton. “And the hunters want full value in trade before they part with such rare specimens.”

A little later, to confirm this surmise, the dwarfs brought out a pile of odd but exquisitely wrought implements, some of which were perhaps designed for culinary use, and several large bell-shaped receptacles of semi-vitreous earthen-ware filled with varicolored materials that resembled roughly-ground farinaceous food-stuffs. These were laid before the hunters, who continued to demur and chaffer; and then some huge, abdominous bottles, made of an unidentifiable substance that was neither glass nor metal nor porcelain, were brought forth and added to the pile. Their contents were past the conjecture of the earth-men, but obviously they were prized by the giants and were considered as clinching the bargain. The chaffering came to an end, and attention was now turned to the wounded monster which the giants had captured with Volmar and Roverton. The dwarfs appeared to be rather dubious about purchasing this creature, and examined its wounds in a somewhat cursory manner. Their decision was plainly negative; for after a little while the captors of the earth-men, as well as the other group of giants, broke up and went away in the direction of the stone huts, bearing the various articles of barter and the dying animal as well as several other curious creatures which the dwarfs for one reason or another had declined to buy.

“Sold!” laughed Roverton, as he peered at the unique menagerie of which he and Volmar were seemingly a part. There were at least a dozen of these quaint monsters, who represented the fauna of the planet. Some were undreamable mixtures of serpentine, insect and mammalian forms, others were loathsome, enormous annalids, and others still were not alliable with any known genus or combination of genera. Many were plainly ferocious, and were still struggling convulsively against their bonds. Anyone who came within reach of their dart-like talons or saw-like teeth would have fared badly.

“I wonder how the dwarfs are going to handle them?” questioned Volmar, as he eyed the contrast between these monsters, many of which were quite huge and bulky, and the frail iridescent beings.

As if in answer to his query, a tackle of strong metallic-looking ropes was lowered from the door of the vessel. Then two dwarfs, armed with long rods of a dull bluish material terminating in circular disks covered with blunt prongs of some brighter substance, came forward from amid the group. Each applied the end of his rod to the spine of one of the struggling animals. Instantly, with a single shudder, the monsters lay still, as if dead. Manifestly some paralyzing force was emitted by the rods. The lowered ropes were then fastened about the inert monsters by other dwarfs, and they were hauled up by a sort of mechanical windlass and disappeared within the oval vessel. Two more were treated in the same manner; and then the rod-bearers approached Volmar and Roverton.

“Hell! They’re going to lay us out too,” cried Roverton. He and Volmar looked about at the dwarfs, who surrounded them in a circle. Many of these frail beings were armed with the strange rods or with other instruments of dubious nature. But with their attenuated arms and pinched bodies they did not seem very formidable.

“Let’s make a break for it,” said Volmar. He and Roverton leapt back from the advancing rod-bearers, and hurled themselves at the circle. The dwarfs gave way, avoiding them with agility; and one of them reached out with his rod and touched Volmar on the chest while another caught Roverton in the abdomen. Neither was aware of any shock from the contact: the effect was more that of some narcotic or anaesthetic, pervading the entire body with instant numbness and insensibility. Darkness seemed to rush upon them from all sides, and both men became totally unconscious.

Chapter III

Emerging from the bournless midnight of oblivion, Roverton heard a deep thrumming sound which conveyed at once to his reviving brain the idea of some powerful mechanism. The sound was incessant and appeared to come from above. Roverton could feel its vibration in all the tissues of his body.

Opening his eyes, he received a series of visual impressions which for the moment were altogether confusing and were quite meaningless. There was a bright chaos of lights, of unearthly forms and angles, which baffled his brain. Then his eyes began to establish a sort of order, and he realized that he was lying on the floor of an unfamiliar structure, made of transparent panes in a frame-work of massive metal bars. The structure was perhaps seven feet in height by nine in diameter, and was shaped like a huge box or cage. Volmar, still unconscious, was lying beside him; and both Volmar and himself were no longer bound by the copperish nets. Between the bars he could see other structures of a similar type, in which the monsters trapped by the giant hunters and sold to the dwarfs were reposing. Some of these creatures were beginning to recover from their paralysis, while others were still insensible and immobile. The cages were in a long room with curving walls and a low, arched ceiling. There were numerous ports in the walls, which gave a rich purple light through their stained transparency.

Roverton was still bewildered as he studied these details. Then, as remembrance returned, he understood. He and Volmar were on board the oval vessel; and the deep thrumming sound was the noise of the engines. If, as he had surmised, the vessel was an ether-ship, they were now in the midst of interplanetary space on their way to some unknown world!

Stunned and overwhelmed by the situation, he turned again to Volmar, and saw that the Captain was beginning to revive. His eyes opened, his fingers stirred; and then he lifted his right arm, rather feebly. A moment more, and he spoke.

“Where are we, Roverton?”

“I don’t know, exactly. But we’re all boxed up and ready for delivery to the zoo, wherever it is. And I think we are now in mid-space. In all

likelihood the planet to which we are being taken is one that belongs to this same system. There are four worlds, as you will remember, and there's no telling which one is our destination. Our chances of ever seeing the *Alcyone* again are none too gaudy under the circumstances. Hell, what a prospect!"

"The situation is rather dubious, to say the least," assented Volmar. "Apart from our ignorance as to where we are being taken, and the practical impossibility of escape or rescue, we shall soon have the problems of air and food to cope with—problems for which there is no solution as far as I can see. "Our air-masks and tanks have not been tampered with; and we had a twelve-hours' supply of compressed air when we left the *Alcyone*. But since we do not know how long we have been unconscious, we cannot compute how much of the supply still remains; and in any case asphyxiation is highly probable at no remote time."

Roverton had been inspecting the cage with careful attention. He now noticed a curving metal tube which entered it through the floor at one end. Putting his hand over the mouth of the tube, he felt an air-current.

"I think," he remarked, "that our cage, and doubtless the others, are being supplied with some sort of compressed air—probably the atmosphere of the Mercurian world on which we were captured. No doubt the air in the room itself is that of the world to which the dwarfs are native, and is not respirable by these monsters."

The room had been untenanted, save for the earth-men and their fellow-captives. Now Volmar and Roverton saw that five of the opalescent dwarfs had suddenly appeared, carrying receptacles of exotic forms, some of which were filled with liquids and others with objects resembling truffles and tubers. The dwarfs proceeded to open a panel worked by some hidden spring in the side of each cage and then introduced into each a vessel filled with fluid and one filled with the unknown foodstuffs. This was done very quickly and cautiously, and a mechanical arm-like apparatus was used in the actual transmission of the vessels. Afterwards the panels were closed immediately. When all the cages had been supplied in this manner, the dwarfs stood watching their occupants, who in most cases were greedily absorbing the food and water. The earth-men perceived that the dwarfs were now without their masks, revealing a physiognomy with elaborate eyes, proboscides and antennae, such as might well be looked for in connection with their delicate bodies.

When they noticed that Volmar and Roverton made no effort to touch the provender, the five dwarfs gathered about their cage, eyeing them curiously and carrying on an eager discussion or disputation.

“I’m hungry and thirsty enough,” confided Roverton to the Captain. “But how is one to eat and drink through a respirative mask—even granting that that stuff is fit for human consumption? However, I suppose the dwarfs think the masks are part of our anatomy, along with the suits and tanks. They must be pretty dumb not to realize that we are intelligent beings, who make use of artificial contrivances even as they themselves.”

“Literal-mindedness isn’t confined to human beings, I suspect,” said Volmar. “These fellows are evidently taking us at our face value. They found us on the Mercurian world, along with the zoological specimens they were collecting; and doubtless it never occurred to them that we might have come there in a space-ship, like themselves. Anyway they are probably so conceited as to believe that their own world is the only one capable of producing highly evolved and intelligent life-forms. Such conceit, as you know, is not unusual. I remember, back in my boyhood, before space-travel became an actuality, how many of our own astronomers and other scientists argued that the earth was the only world in all the universe that was inhabitable by any kind of organic life.”

Presently the dwarfs departed; and time wore on. Overcome by their strange and perilous situation, the earth-men talked in a desultory manner, and lapsed into lengthening intervals of silence. They studied the interior of their prison, wondering if it would be possible to break out. The panes, whether of glass or some other transparent material, were enormously thick and were manifestly very strong; and anyway, escape would have been futile under the circumstances. Nevertheless, the idea appealed to them. Any sort of action, no matter how desperate or hopeless, seemed preferable to the monotony of supine waiting.

Roverton now inspected the vessel containing the tuber-like objects. It was made of earthen-ware and was quite heavy. Roverton emptied the contents on the floor, and then hurled the object with all his strength at one of the vitreous panes. There was a terrible crash; but to the amazement of himself and Volmar, neither the vessel nor the pane was broken or even splintered or cracked by the impact. Both the earthen-ware and the transparent material, it was obvious, were possessed of an iron toughness not characteristic of such substances in their mundane forms.

“Well, that’s that.” Roverton’s tone was rueful. “I guess we’re not going to bust out in a hurry.”

He and Volmar were consumed by growing thirst and hunger. They began to eye the water and food-stuffs avidly.

“What do you say we try it?” Roverton suggested.

“Go ahead. If you survive, I’ll experiment myself. But be careful.”

Roverton unfastened his helmet and removed it very cautiously. He took a deep breath. The air in the cage was heavy, with a queer smell that stung his nostrils and smarted in his lungs. It was breathable enough, as far as he could tell, though its cumulative effect on the human respiratory mechanism was an uncertain quantity.

He raised the deep vessel containing the water to his lips, and sipped it. The fluid was semi-opaque and flavorless. Then, gingerly, he picked up one of the tubers, which was about the size and shape of a large potato, and bit into it. The thing was tough-skinned, with a porous, fungoid-looking interior, and its taste was unpleasantly bitter. Roverton made a wry face, as he swallowed a scanty mouthful.

“Can’t say that I care for the grub.” He returned to the water and sipped a little more of it while Volmar proceeded to remove his own mask. Roverton then passed him the water and Volmar drank some of it cautiously and afterwards sampled one of the tubers but rejected it summarily without swallowing any of the unpalatable substance.

“I’m dubious of that stuff,” he observed. “As you know, lots of things which are perfectly good foods for ultra-terrestrial life-forms are sheer poison for us. I hope you didn’t swallow much of it.”

“Only a little,” rejoined Roverton. “And maybe the stuff is poisonous—I don’t believe I feel so very well.” A sudden sickness had come upon him, with vertigo and violent internal pains and he sat down on the floor of the cage.

Volmar began to feel a little sick himself; and since he had not eaten any of the tuber, he concluded that the unfamiliar water, and perhaps the air, were contributing to this condition. However, he did not develop the agonizing pains, fever and delirium which progressively characterized Roverton’s case. Writhing convulsively, moaning, and out of his head half the time, Roverton lay on the floor while Volmar watched beside him, totally unable, for lack of medicinal remedies or even precise knowledge, to do anything that would palliate his sufferings.

An hour or two passed in this manner without bringing any marked change in the sick man's condition. Absorbed in his vigil, Volmar did not perceive the approach of two dwarfs who had entered the room, till he heard the excited babble of their shrill voices. They were standing beside the cage and were gesticulating with much animation as they peered at himself and Roverton. Volmar was puzzled by their excitement, till he remembered that he and Roverton were now without their masks and the dwarfs had never seen them before in such disattire. Evidently the discovery that the masks were artificial and removable had provoked much interest.

After a minute or so the dwarfs hastened from the room, and soon returned in company with half a dozen others, who surrounded the cage and peered at the earth-men with their bulging, many-angled orbs. Much debate was going on among them; but Volmar was too deeply worried about his comrade's condition to give more than a perfunctory attention to their gestures and crowding faces. Also he was beginning to feel a little light-headed, probably from some element in the air that was ill-suited to human respiration. His brain attached no significance to the re-departure of one of the dwarfs; and even when this being came back a minute later, bearing two of the strange anaesthetic rods, Volmar remembered with apathetic slowness and indifference the former use which had been made of these instruments.

Very quickly and cautiously, one of the dwarfs opened a panel in the cage. Two others, standing in readiness with the rods, thrust their weapons with equal quickness through the opening and applied them to the two men. Instantly, as before, Volmar fell senseless; and the sick, delirious Roverton ceased to moan and mutter and lapsed into merciful oblivion.

Chapter IV

The men awakened simultaneously from their second plunge into this mysterious anaesthesia. The circumstances under which they found themselves were even more baffling and more incredible than their confused senses could at first comprehend. It was evident at once that they were no longer on the ether-ship, for the room in which they were lying was very spacious and was walled and roofed and floored with an alabaster-like stone of great luster and beauty. There were many open windows, of an oval form, through which bewildering glimpses of an intricate alien architecture were visible against a violet sky. The impression conveyed was that they were in an upper story of some lofty edifice. The air was pervaded with a tropic warmth.

They were lying on a broad couch, covered with a flossy, mottled material of red and saffron, and inclined at an angle of perhaps fifteen degrees. The room was furnished with several small tables, supported on frail, spidery legs and littered with outlandish implements and quaintly shaped vials such as the surgeons or chemists of an unknown world might employ. Except for Volmar and Roverton, the room was seemingly untenanted.

More curious even than their surroundings, however, were the sensations of the two men. Contrary to all natural expectation, there was no least trace of illness, hunger, thirst or fatigue on the part of either. Also, with a feeling that amounted to stupefaction, both realized that they were breathing a pure, well-oxygenated air—and that they were wearing their masks, which must have been replaced during their period of unconsciousness. It seemed as if the air-supply in the tanks must in some unaccountable manner have been renewed by their captors. Both men were conscious of a singular buoyancy, a remarkable alertness and bodily well-being.

“Are you all right?” asked Volmar, as he sat up on the couch and turned to Roverton.

“Never better in my life. But I can’t understand why I should feel that way. The last I can remember is being deadly sick in that infernal menagerie

cage. And where are we, anyway? It certainly looks as if we had arrived somewhere."

"I judge," answered Volmar, "that we are on the particular planetary body to which our captors belong. Plainly, when they found us with our masks off, they realized that we were intelligent beings like themselves, and not mere monsters; and they have been treating us since with more consideration. They must have analyzed the remaining air in our tanks, and then replenished it with a synthetic substitute of their own. What else they've done to us I don't know. But probably we'll find out before long."

"Speaking for myself," said Roverton, "I feel as if I had been well-dined and wined, and had received a shot in the arm to boot. They must have found some way to feed us while we were unconscious—and something non-poisonous and assimilable by the human organism to feed us with."

"Truly," admitted Volmar, "it is a remarkable situation. I don't know how it will all end; but we are lucky to be alive under the circumstances. And no doubt there are some even more extraordinary experiences in store for us."

"I don't care how extraordinary they are," returned Roverton. "I'd rather be back on board the *Alcyone.* What do you suppose Jasper and Deming and the rest are doing anyway? There isn't one chance in a billion that they could follow us or find out what has happened to us. Probably they are combing that damned Mercurian planet in an effort to discover what has swallowed us up."

"They may have seen the departure of the strange ether-ship. Whether or not it would occur to them that we were on board is another matter. And even if they did figure this out, it would be a miracle if they could have done it quickly enough to follow the alien flier, keep it in sight, and locate its destination."

Before Roverton could reply, he and Volmar saw that three dwarfs were standing beside them. These beings were taller, with a more authoritative bearing, with more delicate antennae and proboscides than the ones they had seen on the space-vessel; and their coloration partook of deep red and orange and Tyrian tones. With queer, jerky genuflections, like nodding insects, they addressed the men. Their words were scarcely articulate to human ears; but an idea of formal courtesy and obeisance was somehow conveyed.

Volmar and Roverton, rising to their feet, returned the greeting in the best manner they could muster.

Plucking the sleeves of the mens' clothing with their antennal fingers, with elaborate gestures whose meaning was obvious, the dwarfs led the way through an odd, elliptical door that had been concealed from sight in an angle of the wall. Thence, at the end of a short passage, the party emerged on a sort of balcony.

The earth-men gave an involuntary gasp of amazement and were seized by a slight dizziness as they approached the verge; for the balcony was merely a scant ledge without walls, railings or hand-holds of any kind; and below, at an awful depth, were the streets of a monstrous city. It was like looking down from a precipice into some alpine chasm.

All around and above there soared other buildings of the same white material and the same bizarre structure as the one on whose balcony the earth-men were standing. These edifices were of colossal extent and many of them culminated in airy spires and pinnacles of a fairy delicacy, thronging the bright purple heavens like a host of shining obelisks. At frequently recurring intervals, the buildings were connected by bridges of gossamer thinness and fragility, which formed a gleaming web-work in the air. They were wrought of that pale, alabastrine substance; and one of them issued, without sign of jointure, from the narrow ledge at the earth-men's feet, and ran to the midway story of a titan pile that was more than fifty yards distant.

The scene, in its crowding, multiform strangeness, was such as to bewilder and baffle human vision. All was incognizably foreign—a teeming babel of undreamt and baroque architectural forms. Far down in the abysmal streets, and on the lofty bridges, the frail people of the city passed like iridescent motes. All was weirdly silent, apart from certain recurrent rumblings and mutterings which seemed to come from underground, like the pulsing of hidden, gigantic engineries.

Spell-bound by the vision, and dazed by its vistas, Volmar and Roverton became slowly aware that one of their guides had stepped from the balcony to the bridge and was signing them to follow.

"Holy smoke!" was Roverton's exclamation. "Are we supposed to walk on that?"

The railless bridge was barely a yard in width, and the drop to the street was terrific—at least a full half-mile. The guide, however, seemed to

possess the equilibrium of a bird or an insect. His two companions were standing behind the earth-men, and were armed with weapons like double-pointed goads. As Volmar and Roverton hesitated, these beings came forward, lifting the formidable points in a gesture of menace.

“Well,” said Volmar, “I guess we’d better move along. After all, the bridge isn’t quite so bad as a tight-rope.”

The earth-men followed their guide, who was tripping lightly and unconcernedly before them. Accustomed though they were to cosmic elevations, they still did not care to peer downward at the dreadful gulfs on either hand, but kept their eyes on the balcony ahead. With short and careful paces, they managed to cross the long, attenuated span. It seemed to take them a long time; and they gained their goal with much relief.

Looking back from their new vantage, they saw that the building they had left was much lower than those around it, and possessed a flat, towerless roof. Several glittering vessels, similar to the one in which they had travelled through space from the Mercurian world, were lying on the edge of this roof, which was plainly a landing-stage for such craft. Beyond, were rows of high towers, some of which were inclined at oblique angles and were inter-connected in the same fashion as the main structures.

They were now conducted into the heart of the edifice in which that precarious bridge had ended. Through labyrinthine corridors, and down slanting floors and serpentining stairs with awkward little steps, they were led for a distance impossible to estimate. They soon passed from purple daylight to the red, unflickering glare of columnar flames that issued from black, funnel-shapen vases.

The building appeared to be a sort of scientific laboratory. On every hand, in rooms of an asymmetrical construction, they saw the curious apparatus of a foreign and inconceivably advanced chemistry. People of the dwarf race were busy everywhere with arcanic tests and abstruse labors. They paid little heed to the earth-men, and were intently absorbed in the queer crucibles, vats, alembics and other mechanisms of a less classifiable nature which they tended.

At last the earthlings and their guides entered a vast room, filled with transparent cages, most of which were occupied by fearsome and variegated monsters. Among these, the men recognized certain of their former companions in captivity. Some of the creatures had been rendered unconscious; and dwarfs wearing atmospheric masks had entered their

cages and by means of little suction-pumps attached to crystalline vials were extracting various amounts of the life-fluids, or perhaps of certain special glandular secretions, from the moveless monsters. Somewhat sickened, Volmar and Roverton watched the flowing of diverse-colored fluids into the vials as they went by.

“So that’s the game,” was Roverton’s comment. “But I wonder what they use the stuff for.”

“There’s no telling. Those fluids may provide valuable serums for aught we know; or they may be used in the compounding of drugs, or even be employed as food.”

Passing between endless rows of cages, they reached an open space at the center of the huge apartment. Here, from floor to ceiling, there ran a great circular upright tube of the same transparent material as the cages. It was at least eight feet in diameter. Pausing before it, the guide touched its apparently unbroken surface with his fingers, and a section of the wall swung open on almost invisible hinges, leaving a small doorway. Volmar and Roverton were motioned to enter.

They obeyed, with much wonder and dubiety, and the door was closed upon them. They found that they were standing on a floor of some nacreous mineral. Above them, where it met the ceiling at a height of thirty feet, the tube ended in a dull, greyish disk.

“Now what?” Roverton’s voice was unnaturally loud and resonant in the closed columnar space.

A number of the laboratory attendants had gathered and were standing about the tube with their fantastic faces pressed against its wall. As if in answer to Roverton’s query, one of them raised his arm with a swift and sweeping gesture.

It must have been a signal. Immediately, as if some hidden switch had been turned on, the earth-men were dazzled by a ruddy light that fell upon them from above. Glancing up, they saw that the grey disk had become luminous as a great fiery jewel. Soon the radiance changed from red to green, and then from green to blue, from blue to violet, from violet to an insupportable whiteness fraught with the imminence of ultra-spectral hues. Looking down, through the blurs of color that clung to their vision, the men saw that the floor was glowing like molten metal and was becoming translucent beneath the weird ray.

Then, all at once, they perceived an even stranger thing. Each saw that the vitriolene of his companion's suit had grown transparent, revealing every feature of head and body. Then the flesh itself grew gradually diaphanous, showing every bone and internal organ as if floating in some clear solution. Stage by stage, not with the mere shadowing of the X-ray, but with full color and minutest detail, the process went on, while the outer portions turned to a ghostly outline. Simultaneously, the men were aware of an icy sensation, that seemed to pierce their very vitals inch by inch along with the penetrating beam.

They felt a strange faintness, as if they were becoming actually insubstantial. All about them seemed to waver and recede, and they saw as from a fluctuating distance the intent, unreadable staring of the dwarfs.

The white ray was suddenly turned off, and the men resumed their normal tangibility of aspect. Both, however, were still faint and chilly from the unfamiliar force to which they had been subjected.

The door was opened, and they were signalled to come forth. They tottered with a queer weakness as they stepped out into the main room.

The dwarfs began to disperse, till only the three guides remained. Volmar and Roverton, reeling with a sickness that persisted and grew upon them, were led through halls and chambers of which they were hardly half-cognizant, and were thrust into a small room whose door was then closed with a gong-like clang. The room was occupied by four dwarfs who wore atmospheric masks, and was filled with mysterious implements that were sinister as those of a torture-chamber.

Here the men were directed to remove their suits and helmets. They obeyed, recovering sufficient mental clarity to realize that the air in the shut room was the same that they had been breathing from their tanks. Evidently it had been prepared for their reception.

Neither could remember fully afterwards the complicated and peculiar tests through which they were put during the next hour. Ill and confused and faint, they were dimly conscious of multiform instruments that were applied to their bodies, of changing lights that blinded them, of the purring and clicking of coiled mechanisms, and the high sibilant voices of their examiners conferring together. It was an ordeal such as no human beings had ever before undergone.

Toward the end, through clouds of numbness and confusion, they felt a stinging sensation in their chests, and each realized vaguely that an incision

had been made in his flesh with a tiny tusk-like knife and that suction-pumps of the same type as those employed in drawing animal fluids from the caged monsters were being applied to these incisions. Dully and half-obliviously, they watched the blood that was drawn slowly through thin black elastic tubes into squat-bellied bottles of gill capacity. Their brains were unable to attach any real meaning to this process; and it would not have occurred to them to resist. They accepted it as part of a senseless and troublous delirium.

Both were on the point of virtual collapse from increasing malaise. They scarcely noticed when the tubes were withdrawn and the filled bottles corked and laid carefully aside. Nor did they perceive the subsequent action of their examiners till there came a sharp prickling in their shoulders. Almost instantly their senses cleared, and they saw that a light-green fluid was being injected into their veins by transparent hypodermics with double needles curved like serpents' teeth.

The fluid must have been a powerful drug, for every sign of illness or even nervousness disappeared within a minute or two after its administration. Both men felt the same sense of well-being, of mental alertness and physical fitness and buoyancy, with which they had awakened from their last period of unconsciousness. They surmised that they were not experiencing the effects of the drug for the first time.

"Well," remarked Roverton, "that dope is what you might call an all-round panacea. I don't feel as if there ever had been or ever could be anything the matter with me. The stuff seems to take the place of food, drink and medicine."

"It's a pretty fair tonic," agreed Volmar. "But watch out for the possible hang-over."

Now, with returning normality, they observed the vials of drawn blood; and the memory of what had happened came back to them with a new potentiality of significance.

"I hope," said Roverton, "that these people will be satisfied before they reach the dissection stage. Apparently they mean to learn all they can about us. Do you suppose they are trying to determine our fitness to become citizens of their world?"

"That's not so unlikely. Or perhaps they are trying to find out what use they can make of us, what particular sort of serum or gland-extract we

might afford. Personally, I have an intuition that there is something pretty horrible behind all this.”

Chapter V

The examination was seemingly over. The men were signalled to resume their clothing and helmets. Then the door was opened, and they were permitted to emerge. Their examiners followed, bringing the vials of blood, and removing the masks which had been worn for protection in that specially prepared atmosphere.

Many of the dwarfs in the outer room thronged curiously around and seemed to be questioning the examiners. These beings, however, were intent on some purpose of their own, and gave brief answers to the inquiries as they led Volmar and Roverton through the clustering laboratory workers and down a hall where the customary red flames that illumined the building were succeeded by others of a cold lunar blue.

Their destination proved to be a circular apartment with similar lighting. Here a dozen dwarfs were gathered, as if to await the earth-men and their conductors. All were the usual type in regard to size, formation and markings, with the exception of two who appeared to represent a cruder and more primitive tribe of the same race, with duller coloring and less finely developed proboscides and antennae.

Most of them were seated on spidery-looking stools arranged in a semi-circle. Some were armed with anaesthetic rods, and others carried instruments or weapons that consisted of thin ebon-black shafts with glowing cones of a cold green fire, possibly radio-active, at one end. The two who suggested an aboriginal type were standing, and neither carried any weapon or implement. Near them was a little table on which hypodermics and other instruments were displayed.

“What’s all this? Another test?” muttered Roverton.

“We’ll soon see.”

Two of the examiners, each bearing one of the vials of human blood in his delicate, sinuous fingers, came forward and conferred with the seated beings.

Then, by the former, two crystal hypodermics were filled with blood from the vials. Their bearers approached the aboriginals, who maintained a stolid and indifferent air, and proceeded to puncture the abdomens of their

ant-shapen bodies with the fang-like needles and inject the blood till the hypodermics were empty.

All the assembled beings looked on in attentive silence, like a medical conclave. Volmar and Roverton, fascinated and a little horrified by this mysterious experiment, were unable to speak.

“Trying it on the dogs, eh?” Roverton finally whispered.

Volmar made no answer; and the words had barely passed Roverton’s lips when the two aboriginals suddenly lost their impassivity and began to leap and twist as if in terrible pain. Then they fell to the floor with vehement cries that were half hisses, half shrieks. Both were swelling visibly, as if from the effects of some deadly poison; and the dull-hued integument of their bodies was blackening moment by moment. The injected venom of a hundred cobras could not have produced a more immediate or more appalling result.

“Who could have imagined that?” said Volmar, in low tones of dismay and consternation.

“It certainly looks as if human blood didn’t mix very well with the life-fluid of these creatures.” Roverton was too horrified to make any further or crisper comment.

The convulsions of the agonized victims were lessening by ghastly degrees; and their cries grew fainter, like the hiss of dying serpents. Their heads, bodies, and even their antennae, were puffed beyond recognition and had turned to a putrid purple-black. With a few final spasms and twitches, they lay still and did not stir again.

“Ugh! I hope the doctors are satisfied with their experiment.” It was Roverton who spoke. He and Volmar tore their eyes away from the ghastly sight on the floor in time to see that one of the seated conclave-members had risen and was moving toward them, lifting as he came the ebon shaft with fiery terminal cone which he carried.

The use of this implement, the nature of the cold green flame, and the purpose of its bearer, were all equally uncertain. As the men afterwards reflected, the dwarf’s intentions were not necessarily hostile, and may have been those of mere curiosity. But their nerves were on edge with all the cryptical, uncanny adventures and experiences they had gone through, and following on the hideous outcome of the experiment they had just beheld, the sudden movement of the dwarf was fraught with connotations of unknowable menace.

Roverton, who stood a little in advance of Volmar, sprang to one side before the dwarf, and seized the fragile-looking table that was supported on tarantula-like legs. Hypodermics, vials, and other utensils of an unknown medical art clattered on the floor, as he lifted the table and held it in front of him like a shield. Then, facing the suspected assailant, he began to retreat toward the open door with Volmar at his side.

The dwarf, it would seem, was puzzled or confounded by this action for an instant. He paused, then came on with a loud, sibilant cry, waving his weapon. His confreres, rising from their seats in a body, also followed, and ran to intercept the men before they could escape from the room. Their movements were quick as the darting of angry insects.

Swinging the table aloft, Roverton hurled it in the face of his attacker. The creature was beaten down, releasing the lambent-headed wand as he fell; and it shot forward and dropped at Roverton's feet. In a flash, Roverton picked it up, and he and Volmar sprang for the door.

Two dwarfs, fleeter than the others, had managed to head them off and were standing on the threshold. Both were armed with the familiar anaesthetic rods.

Not knowing the properties of the implement which he had snatched from its fallen bearer, but surmising that it must have some efficacious use, Roverton charged the two beings in the doorway. His superior length of arm enabled him to smite one of them on the breast with the green cone, while he himself avoided their paralyzing weapons. The effect of his blow was amazing and terrific: the glowing cone, whatever it was, seemed to burn an instant way through the bodily substance of the dwarf, like white-hot iron in butter. The creature fell dead with a dark and gaping hole in his bosom, and Roverton, surprised and thrown off his balance, barely evaded the outflung rod of the other.

However, with a deftness that would have done honor to a professional swordsman, he swerved his weapon, almost continuing its initial movement, and smote the body of the second dwarf, who went down beside the first.

All this had occurred in a mere fraction of time, and a split-second of faltering or a single misstep would have been fatal. The earth-men leapt across the fallen bodies and cleared the threshold just in time to evade the main group of their pursuers.

They were in a long corridor, wholly deserted for the nonce, which led on one hand to the huge room of monster-cages, and on the other to parts as yet unknown. They chose the latter direction. Their situation was irredeemably desperate, and even if they could escape from the building, they would find themselves hemmed in at every turn by the perils and pitfalls of a world inevitably hostile to human life through its very strangeness. But, after their captivity, and the queer ordeals to which they had perforce submitted, it was good to move freely again, even though their flight could only end in recapture or the unconceived horror of some strange death.

They sprinted down the corridor, with a dozen dwarfs at their heels, and found that their longer legs would enable them to distance their pursuers by degrees. At intervals they met others of the laboratory attendants, mostly unarmed, who all leapt back in obvious terror before the lethal wand that Roverton brandished in their faces.

The earth-men also encountered a sleepy-looking monster, like a sort of wingless dragon, which was probably a pet. It was lying stretched across the hall; and it gave a torpid and protesting bellow as they hurdled its spiny back and continued their flight.

The corridor, lit by unwavering rubescent flames, ran straight for an interminable distance, and then turned at a sharp angle. Through open doors, or either side, the fleeing earth-men caught outlandish glimpses of incomprehensible activities.

Again the corridor turned, at a reverse angle; and its ruddy flames were succeeded by the glaring mauve of daylight. Volmar and Roverton emerged on a narrow balcony as the ever-swelling swarm of their pursuers came in sight.

Before them again was the vast, bewildering vision of the white city, with its web of alabaster bridges woven gossamer-wise between buildings that were alabaster mountains with multi-angled scarps and strange pinnacles. It was noon in this world, for the sun which they knew as an unnamed star in Serpens, poured down from a vertical elevation the cruel and tyrannic splendor of its super-tropic beams to illumine the vertigo-breeding depth of the chasmal streets below.

The balcony, or ledge, was barely seven feet in width, and like all others in this preternatural architecture, was void of walls or railings. Doubtless it

circled the whole edifice; and at frequent intervals there were bridges which connected it with the balconies of other mammoth piles.

Blinded by the glare and shrinking from the dreadful gulfs, the men followed the ledge for some distance, but paused in consternation when a horde of dwarfs issued from a door-way just ahead. These beings, it was plain, had been sent to intercept them.

The first group of pursuers, which now numbered at least a score, was closing in from behind. There were no accessible doors or windows by which to re-enter the building; and the only means of continuing their flight was to cross one of those appalling bridges.

“Here goes,” cried Roverton, panting, as he led the way along the slender span. The bridge was unoccupied; but it seemed preferable that he, being armed, should go first in case of possible opposition.

It was a mad race. The men dared not slacken their speed, for their pursuers, two abreast, were crowding the bridge behind them like ants. The danger of being overtaken gave them an added coolness and poise, and they ran with flying leaps on a path where even the least indecision or miscalculation might have plunged them into the abyss.

They were nearing the opposing pile, when three dwarfs armed with the paralyzing rods, emerged from a door in its cyclopean mass and ran forward to meet them on the bridge.

Holding his own weapon like a lance, Roverton faced these beings without hesitation. It was a perilous combat, for two of them were side by side, and he could dispose of only one at a time. He struck and parried with lightning agility; and the two, with yawning holes in their thoraxes from the impact of the fearsome igneous cone, went down in swift succession and hurtled into the half-mile chasm beneath. The third, however, had advanced within reach of Roverton, and thrust viciously with his rod.

Roverton dodged, and would have lost his footing as he teetered within an inch of the verge, if Volmar, standing close behind, had not put out an arm to steady him. Missing, the third dwarf ran headlong upon Roverton’s weapon, which pierced him through till his body hung impaled on the ebon shaft. Roverton disengaged it, and kicked the falling corpse aside to join its companions in the gulf.

The earth-men reached the opposite building without further interruption; but their pursuers had gained appreciably during the combat and were dogging them closely as they plunged into the new edifice.

This building, as far as they could tell, was wholly deserted; and it differed materially in its furnishings and apparent use from the one they had left. The unpeopled rooms into which they glanced as they hurried along a main hall, were panelled with fantastic paintings and designs that might have been astronomical maps. In some of them, there were huge globes and hemispheres of metal, and appliances like alien cosmospheres and planispheres.

An angle of the hall took the men temporarily beyond sight of their pursuers.

“Quick! Let’s find a hiding-place or a stairway,” whispered Roverton.

They hesitated before a little door which gave on a dark chamber where the beams of the red fires in the hall were powerless to penetrate. Then, in an alcove, they perceived a flight of stairs.

Trusting that their pursuers would continue along the corridor, they began to ascend the stairs, taking three or four of the tiny steps at a leap. They would have preferred to descend, with the hope of eventually finding themselves on some sort of Terra Firma, but were deterred by an inexplicable noise, a metallic whirring and jarring, that suddenly started on the floors below. Above, there was utter silence.

“Haven’t these people any elevator systems?” asked Roverton, after they had climbed steadily for several minutes. “It must take them all eternity to go up and down in their skyscrapers like this.”

“There may be some other method of transit, though probably it wouldn’t be of any use to us without special knowledge regarding its mechanism.”

For hours, it seemed, the earth-men toiled from story to story of that interminable edifice. The sounds of pursuit had died out; and apparently the dwarfs were still seeking them on lower levels. They met no one in all that endless range of red-lit stairs and rooms. All had grown silent, except for the subterranean rumblings from beneath the city, which became fainter as they went upward. They must have been in the heart of the building; and at no time did they approach the outer rooms and balconies or attain even a far-off glimpse of sunlight. They ceased to count the number of floors they had ascended, and it seemed to them that they were lost in some awful, topless tower of eternity and infinity. They marvelled at the mania for space and magnitude which must have prompted this tiny people to rear such colossal structures.

Their legs were turning to lead, and each added step was like the heaving of a mighty weight. They gasped for breath within their aerated helmets, and heard the pounding of heavy pulses in their temples like the roar of driven torrents.

“Where are we going, anyway?” questioned Roverton, as they paused for a momentary respite. “And why are we going there? The end is a foregone conclusion, with all the cards that are stacked against us. There must be about a million deadly contingencies, I should think. We’ll do well if we live long enough to exhaust our present supply of air.”

“The air of this particular world might not be fatal to us,” said Volmar. “We haven’t sampled it yet, if you’ll remember. Our dwarf friends were considerate enough, evidently, to re-fill our tanks with a chemical synthesis of the same air that they found in them.”

“Well, I’d rather not try the local atmosphere till I have to. But what’s the use of climbing any further? We’ve got the whole planet against us. Probably there are billions of these dwarfs with their devilish chemistry, all of them ready to hunt us down like wild beasts.”

“Why worry about a little thing like that? Come on—there should be a good view from the top of this tower of Babel, when we get to it.”

Following the slow, tedious spiral of the stairs, at length they saw a gleam of purple daylight above them, and came out on the building’s roof, where a single central spire continued to escalade the heavens. The flat roof itself was crowded with orb-like mechanisms that were perhaps used for the observation of solar and stellar force. Crystal wheels and spheres were turning silently within larger spheres of the same substance.

No one was in sight, and the roof was seemingly unoccupied. But several air-craft were approaching, and fearing to be seen by their occupants, the earth-men entered a door in the great spire. Here they found a staircase, and resumed their eternal climb.

At the top they emerged in a curious open cupola whose lofty dome was filled with large perforations. The place was lined with instruments that were doubtless astronomical. There were cosmolabes and armillaries designed for a universe not measured heretofore by man; there were strange double and triple mirrors of white mineral with surfaces of baffling convex angles; there were lenses arranged behind each other in curving, semi-circular frames, and adjusted to an unhuman vision. In the center of the alabastrine floor, the men perceived a sable disk, perhaps four feet in

diameter, and depressed about six inches below the floor-level. From the middle of the disk, and close together, there rose two upright rods.

At first they did not see that the cupola was occupied. Then, behind the litter of strange appliances, they perceived a wizened and aged-looking dwarf, bowed above a sort of dial on which was slanting rows of rubricated ciphers. He was unarmed, and did not hear the earth-men till they were close upon him. Then he turned and saw them.

Ungovernably startled, it would seem, by the apparition of beings who must have been supremely monstrous from his view-point, he darted away from the dial and sprang toward the black disk. Roverton intercepted him, being dubious on general principles regarding the intention of this movement. Terrified by the glowing weapon which the earth-men waved in his face, the dwarf circled back among the crowded instruments and contrived to elude both Volmar and Roverton and win the head of the stairs. There he disappeared from their ken at breakneck speed.

“Too bad we didn’t get him,” said Roverton. “I wasn’t anxious to hurt that fellow, but now he’ll spread the good word among the others as to where we are hiding. The whole pack will be here presently, if not sooner.”

“Well, let’s take a look at the view anyway, being as we’re here.”

They stepped to the verge of the open cupola, which was supported on a circle of thin pillars, and looked out on a staggering scene. They could see the whole extent of the mighty city, which reached for many miles in every direction, lying below them at a depth which turned the people in its streets to microscopic motes. Around the city was a landscape of ineffable bizarrerie, with wide canals of blood-red water that intersected each other to form terraced isles, and then wound away through fields and forests of a vegetation whose coloring was more violent than that of futuristic paintings. Beyond it all, in sharp, airless outline on the violescent heavens, were horn-like mountains of jetty black and others of a whiteness more dazzling than that of Pentelic marble.

“Golly,” was Roverton’s ejaculation. “The outlook is almost worth the climb. But I’d rather be seeing it from the *Alcyone*.”

There came a confused babel of shrilling voices, and a horde of dwarfs emerged on the roof below them and streamed toward the central spire.

“They couldn’t have been so very far behind us, after all,” Volmar commented. “And of course our friend the astronomer had told them how we invaded his observatory and dispossessed him.”

Roverton was considering the various instruments in the cupola with an estimating eye. Some of them were set in the floor by means of metal bars and pivots, but many others were detached or loosely mounted. He picked up a singular object consisting of no less than seven concave lenses framed among rods and wires of a malachite-colored metal. It was satisfyingly heavy and would make an effective missile.

“We can hold the stairs while the ammunition lasts,” he said.

Volmar was lifting a small armillary to try its weight. Between them, the men collected everything movable in a great pile at the stair-head. They had no sooner finished doing this, when the foremost of their pursuers came in sight. The winding steps were packed with these creatures, most of whom were furnished with anaesthetic rods, ignescent wands, and other odd weapons.

The men began to hurl their fantastic missiles at the throng—a barrage of metal orbs and mirrors, and queer-angled things which may have served the purpose of telescopes, eye-glasses, and spectroscopes. The front rows of assailants were driven back with crushed heads and broken limbs, and many were slain or paralyzed by their own weapons as they went down in a tangled mass that blocked the stairway.

In an orderly manner, seemingly unperturbed by all these casualties, the dwarfs proceeded to clear away their dead and wounded, and then came on as before. More were swept down by the remainder of the observatory’s detachable paraphernalia; and much havoc in particular was inflicted by two armillaries which Volmar raised in his arms and sent crashing into the vanward files.

The supply of missiles was now exhausted; but Roverton still retained his death-dealing wand, and Volmar had reserved a sort of lens-apparatus which he intended to use as a mace when their attackers came within reach.

With the same hideous, unhuman imperturbability, after halting long enough to remove the victims of that final barrage, the dwarfs resumed their advance, while the earth-men awaited them at the stair-head.

Roverton, quick-eared and alert, as he watched the thronging onset, was aware of an odd noise from behind, as if something had clashed lightly against the cupola. Turning, he perceived that an air-vessel, shaped somewhat in the fashion of a long, crescent-prowed barge, but without wings or any visible agency of levitation, had attached itself by coiling

tendril-like chains to the cupola-columns, and was discharging a dozen dwarfs into the observatory.

Roverton called Volmar's attention to the new danger.

"If you can hold the stairs, Captain, I'll tend to these customers," he said, and sprang to meet the invaders. These latter were furnished with weapons of a kind which the earth-men had not hitherto encountered—long, trumpet-like tubes, which they levelled immediately at Roverton. Their curling fingers played on certain knobs which studded the tubes, and from the mouth of each weapon there issued a jet of pearly vapor. All were aiming at Roverton's head, and he surmised that the vapor was some sort of deadly gas or anaesthetic. The goggles of his mask were blinded by the fumes, and he could see nothing as he groped among the strange paraphernalia in the dome.

Tripping against some unseen object, and trying to save himself from a fall, he lurched forward and stepped down with a terrific jar on the broad central disk that was set below the floor-level.

Clear of the pearly fumes, which still played overhead, he saw his assailants for an instant, crowding toward him with their weird weapons, as he clutched with his free hand at one of the upright rods which rose from the disk. Then he heard Volmar cry out, and turned his head toward the Captain, jerking the rod involuntarily as he did so. He saw in the merest flash of time that Volmar had fallen, and was half-hidden by the dwarfs who thronged about him from the stairs. Then the scene vanished, as if a black curtain had rushed upward from it, and Roverton realized that the disk was dropping away beneath him with dizzy velocity in a long, dark shaft.

Chapter VI

He surmised that he was in a sort of elevator. The jerking of the rod as he steadied himself in turning toward Volmar had started its downward flight. The thing was falling like a plummet, and he clung to the rod to keep from striking the walls of the shaft.

Soon, in the darkness, there came a series of red flashes, almost merging with one another. These must indicate openings from the shaft into the various floors of the main building. Doubtless, by manipulating one or other of the rods, he could check or reverse his descent. For a moment, he thought of trying to do the latter. He would go back to the tower and die fighting beside the fallen Volmar. But Volmar was dead—and what was the use? Heart-sick, lost, unutterably confused and bewildered, he felt a black weariness descend upon him like the clinging of some material thing. His remaining will was broken, his initiative was crushed beneath it.

With a dull fatalism, a leaden despair, he watched the red flashes. There must be hundreds of them, he thought. He was plunging down to a world whose actual soil neither he nor any other man had yet trodden; before the end came, he would perhaps attain a glimpse of maddening, insuperable mysteries, and would pierce a little further among the all-encompassing terrors and perils of a hostile planet. He resigned himself. He was not yet weaponless, for the lethal wand, with its green cone glowing brightly in the darkness, was still clutched in his right hand.

Abruptly, with no noise or jarring, the elevator came to a full stop. Roverton's limbs and body were inundated by a stream of saffron light which poured into the shaft through a low doorway. At the same time, his ears were assailed by a medley of rumbling sounds and deep metallic throbbings which appeared to come from all around him. He had the feeling that he was underground, that his descent had precipitated him from that topmost tower into the nether vaults of the colossal city.

Cautiously he stooped and squeezed himself through the opening, which could afford ample passage for beings like the opalescent dwarfs but was rather scanty for a full-grown earth-man. Blinking in the saffron brilliance, he peered about him on a chamber so enormous, of such indeterminate scope that it seemed to partake of infinitude. It was filled with gigantic

engines that appeared to use and combine every possible geometric form in their overbeetling bulks of dark stone and burnished metal. The yellow light emanated from a sort of open vat or furnace in which was a glowing mass of molten substance. There were other flaming furnaces at intervals, and great red eyes that burned in many of the machines, pouring down a lurid effulgence.

From some of the mechanisms, huge, ramifying pipes went up and vanished in the darkness of a funnel-like dome. In the wildly flickering patches of light, and monstrous masses of shadow, Roverton saw dim, titanic figures, but did not realize at first that they were living beings. They were ten or twelve feet in height, and were strange and uncouth as the mechanisms which they tended. There were also two or three dwarfs among them, who appeared to be supervising their labors.

Roverton surmised that he had stumbled into a power-plant of some unknown kind. The giants, mayhaps, were members of a subject people enslaved by the dwarfs and compelled to toil in their subterranean vaults.

The nearest furnace, watched by a single giant, was fifty feet away, and its warder had his back to Roverton. Hoping to escape observation in the vastness and gloom of the chamber, the earth-man started to make his way toward certain of the towering mechanisms that were dark and seemingly untended. He had no idea where he was going or what he would find; and he had reached the exhaustion point, both physically and mentally. The drug injected by the dwarfs seemed to be dying out in his veins, and he tottered with an intermittent weakness. Also, he was stunned by the loss of Volmar, his Captain and comrade. His brain, his senses, his muscles, were no longer functioning normally. It did not even occur to him that he might have stayed in the elevator shaft and found his way back to some other level where escape would not offer so many hazards.

He had nearly reached the shadow of a huge pyramidal mechanism, when one of the giants saw him and started in pursuit. The creature came on with lumbering, elephantine paces, and looking back as he fled, Roverton saw its face for the first time in the lurid furnace-glare. The thing was a biological nightmare, with one swollen, blazing, sulphur-yellow eye where the mouth would be in a human face, and all the rest a mass of writhing, viperish tentacles around a central slit. The limbs and body were no less monstrous than the face.

Roverton ran, in an access of horror-stimulated strength; and doubling in and out among the dark machines, he contrived to throw his clumsy pursuer off the track. But there were harsh roarings, audible above the noise of the engines, which indicated that others were joining in the chase. Also, he heard the shrill, sweet sibilation of one of the supervising dwarfs.

Luckily, this part of the chamber was untenanted. He ran madly, interminably in the semi-darkness, and came at last to the chamber's end. Here he discovered a dimly yawning exit, and plunged headlong through it on an inclined plane, going downward at an angle of twenty degrees. The plane led to another vault, deserted and perhaps disused, where he would have found himself in utter darkness if it had not been for the glowing wand which he still carried. By its weird light, he saw the looming bulks of other massive engineries.

Hastening on between rows of these mechanisms, he heard the roar of pursuit and saw the red flare of moving lights behind him in the gloom. He fled on through an eternity of cyclopean metal cones and cylinders, of black retorts and flameless furnaces, and reached another exit. This led into what was plainly a natural cavern, with rough nodular walls in which he caught the glistening of pale, mercurial ores.

The cavern turned and twisted like a serpent, and soon began to narrow. Its floor and sides were damp with drippings, were mottled with a soft, oozy marl. His feet slipped in puddles from which loathly creatures, half-batrachian, half-insect, writhed and wriggled in sluggish alarm to avoid his feet.

With dimming senses and failing muscles, he still went on. His mind was becoming a partial blank: he had almost forgotten everything that had happened, and the horror of it all was a vague amorphous blur. Even his own identity was doubtful as a half-remembered dream. He was only a dying atom of consciousness, lost in a monstrous world without meaning or reason, without boundary or end.

Slowly, obscurely, he perceived that something was retarding his progress. Long, whitish ropes and tendrils were hanging in a curtain from the cavern-roof; and he had blundered into them without seeing. What they were he could not imagine. His brain groped for analogies, for similes that he could not recall.

The ropes and tendrils seemed to be twining about him, growing over him, enmeshing him from head to foot like a web of whip-snakes; and some

of them recoiled and twisted with an undulating motion at the touch of the fiery-headed wand in his hand.

Roverton fought instinctively to free himself, in a nightmare of dim terror and exhaustion. He swayed back and forth but the ropy meshes held tenaciously. He sank into a half-swoon, and the wand fell from his fingers; but he himself did not fall, but was supported by the clinging growths. What these were he never knew; but doubtless they belonged to some type of organism mid-way between the vegetable and animal kingdoms.

He heard voices, and saw a flash of light on the pale, hundred-stranded web that held him. With a start of returning consciousness, he knew that his pursuers had found him. But it did not seem to matter greatly. Nothing mattered, now that he had lost Volmar and had gone astray in the clueless labyrinth of a dark infinity.

Chapter VII

Roverton's memories of what followed were partial and fragmentary. There were starts of full awareness during a period of semi-oblivion, in which he realized that he was being carried by the boa-thick arms of one of the giant laborers who had pursued him. By flashes of sullen, lurching light, he saw the unthinkable face of this creature above him, and saw the indistinct bulks of the subterranean mechanisms.

He seemed to go on for aeons in some underground avenue, cradled by an ever-swaying movement that lulled him to a troubled drowsiness. Then, all at once, though he knew not how nor where, he was going upward in a great abyss of darkness toward some far-off, watching eye of light, and metal chains were about him in lieu of the giant arms. He closed his lids to avert a feeling of dizziness. Then, after a little, his swoon became complete; and he saw no more till he opened his eyes in a glaring radiance.

For awhile he could recall nothing of all that happened to him, could understand nothing on which he gazed. His eyes were half-blinded by a pitiless light, were assailed and stabbed by stupendous imageries. He seemed to be looking down into a violet-purple gulf, in which hung the inverted alabaster walls and portals and towers of a gigantic architecture; and he himself was suspended, as if by some reverse gravitation, from the bottom of this topsy-turvy world.

Then, all at once, he had the feeling that he was not alone. Turning his head with a great effort, he found to his incredulous amazement that Volmar, bound with thick leathery-looking cords to pegs in a metallic surface, was hanging beside him.

Whether Volmar was dead or alive, he could not yet know. The closed lids beneath the goggles of the Captain's mask were wan and still as marble. But Roverton felt a joyous surprise that they were together again, and the emotion served to revive him and clarify his muddled faculties. Yet he feared to speak, lest Volmar should not answer him.

There was an instant of uncanny *bouleversement*, while all about him seemed to whirl and circle like a mighty wheel. Then he knew that he was lying on his back and was staring up at the heavens between the buildings

of that city to which he and Volmar had been conveyed in the alien ether-ship.

He tried to sit up, and discovered that he also was bound by means of leathery cords to the metal surface. His head alone was free, and twisting as far as he could, he saw that the Captain and himself were in the center of a wide street or square, with the people of the city standing about them in a solemn, silent crowd. The men were tied to something that appeared to be a sort of platform. Its area was indefinite, but it could not have risen more than a foot above the street-level.

Roverton, felt the enigmatic gaze of the nacre-colored dwarfs, who were all looking on in absolute stillness. Beyond their crowding heads, beyond the myriad structures, at the end of an almost infinite avenue, he beheld a sinking sun that had nearly touched the horizon and was ringing the white towers with supernal rose and amethyst.

What was to happen, he wondered? Were he and Volmar destined as a sacrifice to some ultra-sidereal deity? Were they to be the victims of some occult, unknowable scientific experiment? The silence of the throng about them was laden with a meaning which he could not apprehend, and was ominous with unreadable secrets of a trans-cosmic psychology. He knew nothing, never would know anything, of this incomprehensible race.

The dead, utter silence was broken by a loud click, followed by a whirring sound as of some metal wheel or spring. The world beneath Roverton seemed to quiver and surge, the staring faces disappeared from his vision, and he saw that the thing to which Volmar and himself had been bound was rising rapidly in air among the fantastic bridges and structures of the white city.

Balconies rushed by him, he caught flying glimpses of the dwarf people who were passing to and fro on slender spans. Then he was level with the roofs and towers, and as these fell away beneath him, he had once more that horrible sensation of hanging downward, and felt that he was sinking into some unfathomable gulf. About him now there was nothing but empty space.

“Where are we?” A feeble voice had spoken at his side.

“Are you really alive?” cried Roverton, as he turned toward Volmar and saw that the pale eyelids had opened.

“Apparently we’re both alive, incredible as the fact may be. But that isn’t answering my question as to where we are.”

“As far as I can tell, we are on some sort of anti-gravitational raft and are headed for outer space. Our hosts, it would seem, have definitely decided that you and I are undesirable aliens in their world…. But what happened to you in the tower? The last I saw, you had fallen; and I thought surely you were dead.”

“I’ve certainly been dead to the particular planet which you say we are quitting. Those fellows started throwing their anaesthetic rods at me, while you were fighting the crew from the air-ship. One of them got me with the business-end—and that is the whole story as far as I am concerned. I suppose yours is about the same.”

Roverton gave the Captain a brief outline of his own adventures, as well as he could recollect them.

“Then there was an elevator,” said Volmar. “I wondered about that black disk the astronomer was in such a hurry to reach.”

“It’s a wonder they didn’t kill us outright, considering all the damage we inflicted,” was Roverton’s comment after a minute of silence. “Maybe they didn’t mean to hurt us at all, in the beginning.”

“Yes,” said Volmar sadly, “we may have misunderstood them. Certainly that can happen all too easily, between members of such wholly divergent races, who have no medium of communication and, in all likelihood, no ideas or motivations in common.”

Their ascent had continued at an undiminished rate. Though they were soaring into full sunlight, the sky had darkened rapidly and was taking on the ebon of ultra-atmospheric space. Stars were visible everywhere. They must be penetrating the planet’s envelope of air; and they would soon reach the interstellar ether. The warmth of the world below had given place to a boreal cold that made itself felt through their insulated clothing.

“Well, I guess this is the end,” said Volmar. “You and I will continue our spatial voyage indefinitely—but we won’t be in a condition to know anything about it. A few more minutes and we will freeze so stiff that we could be broken into powder with a hammer. Then we will drift on in space, among the whirling suns and systems, and perhaps afford a third-rate meteor for some world whose gravitational influence is strong enough to attract the mechanism on which we are bound.”

“Yes, I suppose it’s the end. Well, good-bye, Captain.”

“Good-bye, Roverton.”

The cold stung like a million needles, then the stinging became blunted and both men began to feel drowsy. They would have fought the drowsiness, but there seemed to be no use in prolonging their period of suffering. Numbly, somnolently, they resigned themselves to the inevitable Lethe and closed their eyes on the black circle of space with its myriad suns.

A far-off thrumming, faint as with the gulfs of incomputable distance, but mechanically persistent, seemed to draw them back from the deadly depth into which they were sinking.

They opened their eyes. A long, shining bulk was poising above them in the heavens. It was the *Alcyone!* They rose toward it, they saw it veer and dip and soar again to keep pace with their ascent. It came close, it paralleled their flight with looming sides in which a man-hole had opened. Grappling-irons were thrown out, and the thing on which they rode was caught and drawn level with the ether-ship. Then, incredibly, someone had emerged from the man-hole, was standing above them, was cutting their bonds with a knife. Strong arms lifted them, and carried them through the air-lock into the warm interior of the *Alcyone.*

Half an hour later, after a course of vigorous massage to ward off possible frost-bite, and a good meal to fortify their starved and exhausted systems, they lay in their bunks and exchanged narratives with Jasper and the crew.

Jasper, it seemed, had been impelled by an intuition of evil to follow them with three of the men when they did not return to the ship within an hour after starting for that saunter among the woods of the Mercurian world.

They had traced Volmar and Roverton readily by their footprints, and had found their automatics near the animal-burrow. From there on, the trail was even plainer, with the multitude of strange tracks which gave evidence of capture by unknown beings.

Jasper and his companions had hastened on, running most of the way, and had sighted the alien space-flier in time to see the two men lifted aboard. The vessel had risen immediately afterwards and had flown slowly away in the twilight heavens, heading apparently for an orb which they identified as the second planet of the unnamed sun.

Hastening back to the *Alcyone,* they had given pursuit, and had managed to come in sight of the strange vessel once more, after many

hours, as it landed in the white city at dawn. They had carefully located the huge, central spireless building on whose roof it had gone down. Then, during the short, nine-hour day of the planet, they had hung aloof in space, waiting for darkness, with the intention of descending and making some effort to find Volmar and Roverton and rescue them.

Nursing this heroic and wholly desperate plan, they had seen the mechanism on which Roverton and the Captain were bound, floating up from the city like a mote in the fiery sunset, and had flown to investigate.

“Of all the lucky breaks!” said Roverton, when the tale was finished.

“With that kind of luck,” added Volmar, “I don’t think that anything can keep us from navigating one or two more solar systems, at least.”

THE LETTER FROM MOHAUN LOS

Introduction

Some who read this narrative will no doubt remember the disappearance of the eccentric millionaire Domitian Malgraff and his Chinese servant Li Wong, which provided the newspapers of 1940 with flamboyant headlines and many columns of rumor and speculation.

Reams were written concerning the case; but, stripped of all reportorial embellishments and luridities of surmise, it can hardly have been said to constitute a story. There were no verifiable motives nor explanatory circumstances, no clues nor traces of any kind. The two men had passed from all mundane knowledge, between one hour and the next, as if they had evaporated like some of the queer volatile chemicals with which Malgraff had been experimenting in his private laboratory. No one knew the use of these chemicals; and no one knew what had happened to Malgraff and Li Wong.

Few, perhaps, will consider that any reliable solution of these problems is now afforded through the publication of the manuscript received by Sylvia Talbot a year ago in the fall of 1941.

Miss Talbot had formerly been affianced to Malgraff, but had broken off the engagement three years prior to his disappearance. She had been fond of him; but his dreamy disposition and impractical leanings had formed a decided barrier from her view-point. The youth had seemed to take his dismissal lightly and had afterwards plunged into scientific researches whose nature and object he had confided to no one. But neither then nor at any other time had he shown the least inclination to supplement by his own efforts the huge fortune inherited from his father.

Regarding his vanishment, Miss Talbot was as much in the dark as everyone else. After the breaking-off of the engagement she had continued to hear from him at intervals; but his letters had grown more and more

infrequent through his absorption in unnamed studies and labors. She was both surprised and shocked by the news of his disappearance.

A world-wide search was made by his lawyers and relations; but without result. Then, in the late summer of 1941, the strange vessel containing the aforesaid manuscript was found floating in the Banda Sea, between Celebes and the Spice Islands, by a Dutch pearler.

The vessel was a sphere of some unknown crystalline substance, with flattened ends. It was eighteen inches in diameter and possessed an interior mechanism of miniature dynamos and induction coils, all of the same clear material, together with an apparatus resembling an hour-glass, which was half-filled with a grey powder. The outer surface was studded with several tiny knobs. In the very center, in a small cylindrical compartment, was a thick roll of greenish-yellow paper on which the name and address of Miss Sylvia Talbot were plainly legible through the various layers of the sphere. The writing had been done with some sort of brush or an extremely heavy pen, in pigment of a rare shade of purple.

Two months later, the thing reached Miss Talbot, who was startled and amazed when she recognized the writing as that of Domitian Malgraff.

After many vain experiments, by manipulating certain of the exterior knobs, the vessel was opened; and it came apart in two hemispheric sections. Miss Talbot found that the roll of paper contained a voluminous letter from Malgraff, written on yard-long sheets. This letter, with the omission of a few intimate paragraphs and sentences, is now offered to the public in obedience to the writer’s wish.

Malgraff’s incredible tale, of course, is easily enough to be explained on the ground of imaginative fabrication. Such, in the opinion of those who knew him, would be far from incompatible with his character. In his own whimsical and fantastic way, he is said to have been something of a joker. A new search has now been instituted, on the supposition that he may be living somewhere in the Orient; and all the isles adjacent to the Banda Sea will be carefully examined.

However, certain collateral details are somewhat mysterious and baffling. The material and mechanism of the sphere are unfamiliar to scientists, and are still unexplained; and the fabric on which the letter was written, as well as the pigment used, have so far defied analysis. The paper, in its chemical composition, seems to present affinities with both vellum and papyrus; and the pigment has no terrestrial analogue.

The Letter

Dear Sylvia:

You have always considered me a hopeless dreamer; and I am the last person who would endeavor or even wish to dispute your summary. It might be added that I am one of those dreamers who have not been able to content themselves with dreams. Such persons, as a rule, are unfortunate and unhappy, since few of them are capable of realizing, or even approximating, their visionary conceptions.

In my case, the attempted realization has led to a singular result: I am writing this letter from a world that lies far-off in the twofold labyrinth of time and space; a world removed by many million years from the one wherein you live, the one whereto I am native.

As you know, I have never cared greatly for the material things of earth. I have always been irked by the present age, have always been devoured by a sort of nostalgia for other times and places. It has seemed so oddly and capriciously arbitrary that I should be *here* and not *otherwhere,* in the infinite, eternal ranges of being; and I have long wondered if it would not be possible to gain control of the laws that determine our temporal or cosmic situation, and pass at will from world to world or from cycle to cycle.

It was after you dismissed me that my speculations along such lines began to take a practical turn. You had told me that my dreamings were no less impossible than useless. Perhaps, among other things, I desired to prove that they were not impossible. Their utility or inutility was not a problem that concerned me, nor one which any man could decide.

I shall not weary you with a full recountal of my labors and researches. I sought above all else to invent a machine by which I could travel in time, could penetrate the past or the future. I started from the theory that movement in the time-dimension could be controlled, accelerated, or reversed by the action of some special force. By virtue of such regulation, one would be able to remove forward or backward along the aeons.

I shall say only that I succeeded in isolating the theoretic time-force, though without learning its ultimate nature and origin. It is an all-pervading energy, with a shorter wave-length than that of the cosmic rays. Then I invented a compound metal, perfectly transparent and of great toughness,

which was peculiarly fitted for use in conducting and concentrating the force.

From this metal I constructed my machine, with dynamos in which I could develop an almost illimitable power. The reversal of the force, compelling a retrograde movement in time, could be secured by passing the current through certain rare volatile chemicals imprisoned in a special device resembling a large hour-glass.

After many months of arduous effort, the mechanism stood completed on the floor of my Chicago laboratory. Its outward form was more or less spherical, with flattened ends like those of a Chinese orange. It was capable of being hermetically sealed, and the machinery included an oxygen-apparatus. Within, there was ample room for three people amid the great tubular dynamos, the array of chronometric dials, and the board of regulative levers and switches. All the parts, being made of the same material, were transparent as glass.

Though I have never loved machinery, I surveyed it with a certain pride. There was a delightful irony in the thought that by using this super-mechanical device I could escape from the machine-ridden era in which I had been born.

My first intention was to explore the future. By travelling far enough in forward time, I expected to find one of two things: men would either have learned to discard their cumbrous and complicated engines, or would have been destroyed by them, giving place to some other and more sensible species in the course of mundane evolution. However, if the human future failed to inveigle me in any of its phases, I could reverse the working of the time-force and go back into the aeons that were posterior to my own epoch. In these, unless history and fable had lied, the conditions of life would be more congenial to my own tastes. But my most urgent curiosity was concerning the unknown and problematic years of ages to come.

All my labors had been carried on in private, with no other aid than that of Li Wong, my Chinese cook, valet, and housekeeper. And at first I did not confide the purpose of the mechanism even to Li Wong, though I knew him to be the most discreet and intelligent of mortals. People in general would have laughed if they had known what I was trying to do. Also there were cousins and other relations, all enviously watchful of my inherited wealth… and a country full of lawyers, alienists, and lunatic asylums. I have always had a reputation for eccentricity; and I did not choose to give my dear

relatives an opportunity which might have been considered legally sufficient for the well-known process of “rail-roading.”

I had fully intended to take the time-voyage alone. But when I had finished building the machine, and all was in readiness for departure, I realized that it would be impossible to go without my factotum, Li Wong. Apart from his usefulness and trustworthiness, the little Chinaman was good company. He was something of a scholar in his own tongue, and did not belong to the coolie class. Though his mastery of English was still imperfect, and my knowledge of Chinese altogether rudimentary, we had often discussed the poetry and philosophy of his own land, as well as certain less erudite topics.

Li Wong received the announcement of our projected journey with the same blandness and aplomb which he would have shown if I had told him we were going into the next state.

“Me go pack,” he said. “You want plentee shirt?”

Our preparations were soon made. Apart from the changes of raiment suggested by Li Wong, we took with us a ten days’ supply of provisions, a medicine kit, and a bottle of brandy, all of which were stored in lockers I had built for the purpose. Not knowing what we might find, or what might happen by the way, it was well to be prepared for emergencies.

All was now ready. I locked Li Wong and myself within the time-sphere, and then sat down before the instrument-board on which the controlling levers were ranged. I felt the thrill of a new Columbus or a Magellan, about to sail for undiscovered continents. Compared with this, all former human explorations would be as the crawling of emmets and pismires.

Even in the exultation of that moment, though everything had been calculated with mathematical precision, had been worked out to an algebraic degree, I recognized the element of uncertainty and danger. The effect of time-travelling on the human constitution was an unknown quantity. Neither of us might survive the process of acceleration in which lustrums and decades and centuries would be reduced to mere seconds.

I pointed this out to Li Wong. “Maybe you had better stay behind after all,” I suggested.

He shook his head vigorously. “You go, I go,” he said with an imperturbable smile.

Making a mental note of the hour, day, and minute of our departure. I pulled a lever and turned on the accelerative force.

I had hardly known what to anticipate in the way of physical reactions and sensations. Among other contingencies, it had even occurred to me that I might become partially or wholly unconscious; and I had clamped myself to the seat to avoid falling in case of this.

However, the real effect was very strange and unforeseen. My first feeling was that of sudden bodily lightness and immateriality. At the same time, the machine seemed to have expanded, its walls, dynamos, and other portions were a dim and shining blur, and appeared to repeat themselves in an endless succession of momentary images. My own person, and that of Li Wong, were multiplied in the same manner. I was incredibly conscious of myself as a mere flickering shadow, from which was projected a series of other shadows. I tried to speak, and the words became an indefinitely repeated echo.

For a brief interval, the sphere seemed to be hanging in a sea of light. Then, incomprehensibly, it began to darken. A great blackness pressed upon it from without; but the outlines of everything within the sphere were still visible through a sort of luminosity that clung to them like a feeble phosphorescence.

I was puzzled by these phenomena, and, in particular, by the outside darkness, for which I could not account. Theoretically, the days and nights through which we were passing at such supreme velocity would merge in a sort of greyness.

Centuries, aeons, *kalpas* of time, were going by in the strange night. Then, mysterious as the darkness, there came a sudden, blinding glare of light, intenser than anything I have yet known, which pervaded the sphere, and died away like a lightning-flash. It was followed shortly by two lesser flashes, very close together; and then the outer gloom returned once more.

I reached out, with a hand that became a hundred hands, and succeeded somehow in turning on the light that hung above my instrument board and chronometric dials. One of these dials was designed to register my forward motion in time. It was hard to distinguish the real hands and figures in the ghostly blur by which they were surrounded; but somehow, after much poring, I found that I had gone onward into the future for no less than twenty thousand years!

Surely this would be enough, at least for the initial stage of my flight. I groped for the levers, and turned off the accelerative power.

Instantly, my visual sensations became those of a normal three-dimensional being in normal time and space. But the feeling of lightness and immateriality still persisted. It seemed to me that I should have floated in mid-air like a feather, if it had not been for the metal clamps that held me to the seat.

I heard the voice of Li Wong, whom I had practically forgotten for the moment. The voice came from above! Startled, I saw that the Chinese, with his wide sleeves flapping ludicrously, had floated upward and was bobbing about in the air, trying vainly to recover his equilibrium and re-establish his feet on the floor!

“Me fly all same sea-gull,” he tittered, seeming to be amused rather than frightened by his novel predicament.

What on earth had happened? Was the force of gravity non-existent in this future world? I peered out through the glassy walls, trying to determine the geographical features of the terrain in which we had landed.

It must be night, I thought, for all was darkness, shot with a million cold and piercing stars. But why were the stars all around us, as well as above? Even if we were on a mountain-top, we should be surrounded by the vague masses of remote nocturnal horizons. But there were no horizons anywhere —only the swarming lights of irrecognizable constellations. With growing bewilderment, I looked down at the crystalline floor, and beneath me, as in some awful gulf, there swam the icy fires of unknown galaxies! I saw, with a terrific mental shock, that we were suspended in mid-space.

My first thought was, that the earth and the solar system had been annihilated. Somewhile during the past twenty thousand years, there had been a cosmic cataclysm; and Li Wong and myself, moving at inconceivable speed in the abstract time-dimension, had somehow managed to escape it.

Then, like a thunder-clap, there came the realization of the truth. *The sphere had moved only in time*; but, in the interim, the earth and the sun had been travelling away from us in space, even as all stellar and planetary bodies are said to travel. I had never dreamt of such a contingency in all my calculations, thinking that the laws of gravitation would keep us automatically in the same position relative to the earth itself at which we had started. But evidently these laws were non-effective in the ultra-spatial

dimension known as time. We had stood still in regard to ordinary space, and were now separated from the earth by twenty thousand years of cosmic drift! Considered as a time-machine, my invention was a pretty fair vehicle for interstellar transit.

To say that I was dumbfounded would only prove the inadequacy of human words. The feeling that surged upon me was the most utter and abominable panic that I have ever experienced. The sensations of an explorer lost without a compass amid the eternal, unhorizoned ice of some Arctic desert would have been mild and infantile in comparison. Never before had I understood the true awfulness of intersidereal depth and distance, of the gulf wherein there is neither limitation nor direction. I seemed to whirl like a lost mote on the winds of immeasurable chaos, in a vertigo of the spirit as well as of the body.

I reached out for the lever that would reverse the time-energy and send the sphere backward to its starting-point. Then, in the midst of all my panic, of all my violent fear and reeling, topsy-turvy confusion, I felt a reluctance to return. Even in the bleak abyss that yawns unbridgeable between the stars, I was not allured by the thought of the stale commonplace world I had left.

Miraculously, I began to recover something of stability, of mental equipoise. I remembered the bright flashes that had puzzled me. These, I now realized, had marked the passage of an alien sun and planetary system, coinciding in its orbit with the former position of the earth in space. If I went on in abstract time, other bodies would doubtless occupy the same position, in the everlasting drift of the universe. By slowing the movement of the sphere, it might be feasible to land on one of them.

To you, no doubt, the sheer folly and madness of such a project will be more than obvious. Indeed, I must have been a little mad, from the physical and psychic strain of my unparalleled experience. Otherwise, the difficulties of the landing which I so coolly proposed to myself—not to mention the dangers—would have been glaringly manifest.

I resumed the time-flight, at a speed reduced by half. This, I calculated, would enable me to sight the next approaching orb in time to prepare for landing.

The darkness about us was unbroken for an interval of many ages. It seemed to me that eternity itself had gone by in the rayless void ere a brilliant glare of light betokened a nearing sun. It passed us very close,

filling half the heavens for an instant. Apparently there were no planets—or, at least none that came within sight.

Steadily we went on in time; till I ceased to watch the dial with its blurred and multiplied ciphers. I lived only in a dream of unreal and spectral duration. But somehow, after awhile, I knew that more than a million years had been travelled by the sphere.

Then, suddenly, another solar orb swam up before us. We must have passed through it, for the sphere was briefly surrounded by an incandescent flame, that seemed as if it would annihilate us with its intolerable flare. Then we were out of it, were suspended in black space, and a smaller, gleaming body was hurtling toward us.

This, I knew, would be a planet. I slowed the sphere to a rate of speed that would permit me to examine it. The thing loomed upon us, it whirled beneath us in a riot of massed images. I thought that I could distinguish seas and continents, isles and mountains. It rose still nearer, and appeared to surround us with swirling forms that were suggestive of enormous vegetable growths.

My hand was poised in readiness on the lever that would terminate our flight. As we swung dizzily amid the swirling forest, I brought the machine to a full stop, no doubt risking an instantaneous destruction. I heard a violent crash, and the vessel rocked and reeled deliriously. Then it seemed to right itself, and stood still. It was lurching half to one side, and I had nearly been wrenched from my seat, while Li Wong was sprawling in an undignified position on the floor. But nevertheless, we had landed!

Still giddy, and trying to regain my equilibrium, I peered through the crystalline walls on a weird and exuberant tangle of bewildering plant-forms. The time-machine was lodged between the swollen, liver-colored boles of certain of these plants and was hanging four or five feet in air above a pink and marshy soil from which protruded like sinister horns the brownish-purple tips of unknown growths. Overhead, there were huge, pale, flabby leaves with violet veinings in which I seemed to detect the arterial throb of sluggish pulses. The leaves depended from the bulbous top of each plant like a circle of flattened arms from a headless torso.

There were other vegetable forms, all crowding and looming grotesquely in the green, vaporous air whose density was such as to give almost the appearance of a submarine garden to the odd scene. From every side, I received a confused impression of python-like rattans, of poddy,

fulsome, coral-tinted fronds and white or vermilion fungoid blossoms that were large as firkins. Above the jungle-tops, an olive-golden glimmering in the thick atmosphere betokened the meridian rays of a muffled sun.

My first feelings were those of astonishment—the scene before me was a source of giddiness to eye and brain. Then, as I began to distinguish new details in the medley of towering, outlandish shapes, I conceived a superadded emotion of horror, of veritable disgust. At intervals there were certain immense, bowl-like flowers, supported on strong, hispid stems of a curious tripodal sort, and hued with the ghastly greens and purples of putrefying flesh. In these bowls the squat bulks of mammoth insects—or, rather, of what I took to be such at the moment—were crouching in an evil immobility with strange antennae and other organs or members hanging down over the rims of the bowls.

These monsters appeared to mock the cadaverous coloring of the flowers. They were inexpressibly loathsome, and I shall not endeavor to describe their anatomy with any degree of minuteness. I shall, however, mention the three snail-like horns, ending in ruby-red eyes, that rose above their bodies and watched the forest around them with a baleful vigilance.

About the base of each of the tripodal stems, I perceived the carcasses of quaint animals, lying in a circle, in varying stages of decomposition. From many of these carrion, new plants of the same type as the bowl-flowers were issuing, with dark, ghoulish buds that had not yet unfolded.

As I studied these plants and their guardians with growing repulsion, a six-legged creature, something between a wart-hog and an iguana, emerged from the jungle and trotted past within a dozen feet of the time-sphere. It approached one of the bowl-shaped blossoms, and sniffed at the hairy triple stem with a thin ant-eater snout. Then, to my horror, the squatting form in the huge bowl sprang forth with lightning rapidity and landed on the spine of the hapless animal. I saw the flash of a knife-like sting that was buried in the grotesque body. The victim struggled feebly, and then lay supine, while its assailant proceeded to make use of an organ that resembled the ovipositor of the ichnemon-fly.

All this was highly revolting; and even more repulsive was my discovery that the insect-form was actually a part of the flower in which it had been reposing! It hung by a long, pallid, snaky rope, like a sort of umbilical cord, from the center of the tilted bowl; and after the hideous thing had finished with its victim, the cord began to shorten, drawing the

monster back to its lurking-place. There it squatted as before, watching for fresh prey with its ruby eyes. It was damnably obvious that the plant belonged to a semi-faunal genus and was wont to deposit its seeds (or eggs) in animal bodies.

I turned to Li Wong, who was surveying the scene with manifest disapprobation in his almond eyes.

“Me no likee this.” He shook his head gravely as he spoke.

“Can’t say that I care much for it, either,” I returned. “Considered as a landing-place, this particular planet leaves a good deal to be desired. I fear we’ll have to go on for a few more million or trillion years, and try our luck elsewhere.”

I peered out once more, wondering if the other plant-types around us were all possessed of some disagreeable and aggressive character or ability, like the bowl-flowers. I was not reassured when I noticed that some of the serpentine rattans were swaying sluggishly toward the time-sphere, and that one of them had already reached it and was creeping along the wall with tiny tendrils that ended in suction-cups.

Then, from amid the curling vapors and crowding growths, a bizarre being appeared and ran toward the time-machine, barely avoiding one of the cord-suspended monsters as it launched itself from a tall blossom. The thing fell short of its intended prey by a mere inch or two, and swung horribly in mid-air like a goblin pendulum before it was retracted by the long, elastic cord.

The aforesaid being was about the height of an average man. He was bipedal, but exhibited four arms, two of which issued from either side of his elongated, pillar-like neck and the other two from positions half way down on his wasp-waisted thorax. His facial features were of elfin delicacy, and a high, fluted comb of ivory rose from his broad and hairless crown. His nose, or what appeared to be such, was equipped with mobile feelers that hung down beside his tiny puckered mouth like Oriental mustaches; and his round, discoid ears were furnished with fluttering, streamer-like diaphanous membranes, thin as strips of parchment, on which were curious hieroglyphic markings. His small, sapphire-brilliant eyes were set far apart beneath ebon semi-circles that seemed to have been drawn with pigment on his pearly skin. A short cape of some flossy vermilion fabric served to cover his upper body; but, apart from this, there was nothing that one could distinguish as artificial raiment.

Avoiding several more of the plant-monsters, who lunged viciously, he neared the time-machine. Plainly he had seen us; and it seemed to me that his sapphire eyes implored us for succor and refuge.

I pressed a button which served to unlock and open the door of the sphere. As the door swung outward, Li Wong and I were assailed by numerous unearthly smells, many of which were far from pleasant. We breathed the surge of an air that was heavy with oxygen and was also laden with the vapors of unfamiliar chemical elements.

With a long, flying leap, the strange entity sprang in air and gained the crystal sill of the open machine. I caught the flexible three-fingered hands of his lower arms and drew him to safety. Then I closed the door, just as one of the cord-hung monsters hurtled against it, breaking its keen, steely-looking sting and staining the clear metal with a rill of amber-yellow venom.

“Welcome, stranger,” I said.

Our guest was breathing heavily; and his facial feelers trembled and swayed with the palpitation of his fine, membranous nostrils. Apparently he was too breathless for speech; but he made a series of profound inclinations with his crested head, and moved his tenuous fingers with fluttering gestures that were somehow expressive of regard and gratitude.

When he had recovered his breath, and had composed himself a little, he began to talk in a voice of unearthly pitch, with sharp cadences and slowly rising intonations which I can compare only to the notes of certain tropic birds. Of course, Li Wong and I could only guess at his meaning, since the words, whenever distinguishable as such, were totally different from those of any human tongue or dialect.

We surmised, however, that he was thanking us and was also offering us an explanation of the perils from which we had rescued him. He seemed to be telling us a lengthy tale, accompanied with many dramatic gestures of an odd but eloquent sort, and from certain of these, we gathered that his presence in that evil jungle was involuntary; that he had been abandoned there by enemies, in the hope that he would never escape from the wilderness of monstrous plants. By signs, he told us that the jungle was of enormous extent, and was filled with growths that were even more dreadful than the bowl-flowers.

Afterwards, when we had learned to understand the language of this quaint being, we found that our surmises had been correct; but the narrative,

in its entirety, was even stranger and more fantastical than we had imagined.

As I listened to our guest, and watched the swiftly weaving movements of his four hands, I became aware that a shadow had fallen upon us, intercepting the green, watery light of the blurred heavens. Looking up, I saw that a small air-vessel, of discoid form, surrounded with turning wheels and pointed wings that whirred like the sails of a wind-mill, was descending toward us and was hovering just above the time-machine.

Our guest perceived it also, and broke off abruptly in his story-telling. I could see that he was greatly alarmed and agitated. I inferred that the air-vessel belonged, perhaps, to his enemies, to the very beings who had left him to a cruel doom in that fearsome terrain. No doubt they had returned to make sure of his fate; or else their attention had in some manner been attracted by the appearance of the time-sphere.

The alien air-ship was now hanging near the tops of the giant plants between whose boles the sphere had become lodged in landing. Through the silvery whirl of its rotating wings and wheels, I saw the faces of several entities who bore a general likeness to our guest, and were plainly of the same racial type. One of these beings was holding a many-mouthed instrument with a far-off resemblance to the Gatling gun, or mitrailleuse, and was aiming it at the time-machine.

Our passenger gave a piercing cry, and clutched my arm with two of his hands while he pointed upward with the others. I required no interpreter, and no lengthy process of reasoning, to understand that we were in grave danger from the foreign vessel and its occupants. I sprang immediately to the instrument board, and released the lever that would send us onward in time at the utmost speed of which the machine was capable.

Even as I pulled the lever, there came from the air-ship a flash of cold and violescent light that seemed to envelop the time-sphere. Then all things in the world without were resolved to a flying riot of formless, evanescent images, and around us once more, after a brief interval, was the ebon darkness of interstellar space. Again the machine was filled with momentary, repeated phantoms, to which were added those of our curious guest. Again the dials, the levers and the dynamos multiplied themselves infinitely in a dim, phosphorescent glow.

Later, I learned that our flight into forward aeons had saved us from utter annihilation only by the fraction of a second. The force emitted by the

many-mouthed weapon on the air-vessel would have turned the sphere into vanishing vapor if we had sustained it for more than a moment.

Somehow, I managed to clamp myself into the seat once more, and sat watching the weirdly manifolded hands and ciphers that registered our progress in universal time. Fifty thousand years—a hundred thousand—a million—and still we floated alone in the awesome gulf of the everlasting cosmic midnight. If any suns or planets had passed us during the interim, they had gone by at a distance which rendered them invisible.

Li Wong and the new passenger had clutched at the handles of the lockers in which our provisions were stored, to keep themselves from drifting aimlessly about in mid-air. I heard the babble of their voices, whose every tone and syllable was subdivided into a million echoes.

A peculiar faintness came upon me, and a dream-like sense of the unreal and irrational attached itself to all my impressions and ideas. I seemed to have gone beyond all that was conceivable or comprehensible, to have overpassed the very boundaries of creation. The black chaos in which I wandered was infinitely lost from all direction and orientation, was beyond life itself or the memory of life; and my consciousness seemed to flicker and drown in the dark nullitude of an incommensurable void.

Still we went on along the ages. On the far-off, receding earth, as well as on other planets, whole civilizations had evolved and elapsed and been forgotten, and many historical epochs and geological eras had gone by. Moons and worlds and even great suns had been destroyed. Travelling down their eternal orbits, the very constellations had all shifted their stances amid the infinite. These were inconceivable thoughts; and my brain was overwhelmed by the mere effort to visualize and comprehend their awfulness. Strangest of all was the thought that the world I had known was lost not only in sidereal immensity, but in the rayless night of a remote antiquity!

With more than the longing of a derelict sailor, adrift on chartless seas, I desired to feel underfoot once more the stable soil of Terra Firma—no matter where, or what. We had already made one landing in the dizzy labyrinth of time and space; and somewhere, somehow, among the aeons through which we were passing, another cosmic body might offer itself, intersecting in its spatial path our own position in abstract time.

Again, as before our initial landing, I slowed our progress to a rate that would allow inspection of any sun or world we might happen to approach.

There was a long, dreary interval of waiting, in which it seemed that the whole universe, with all its systems and galaxies, must have gone by us and left us hanging alone in the void that lies beyond organized matter. Then I became aware of a growing light; and, retarding the time-machine still further, I saw that a planet was nearing us; and beyond the planet were two larger and fierier bodies that I took for a binary system of suns.

Now was our opportunity, and I determined to seize it. The new planet whirled beneath us, it rolled upon us again, as we still moved in time at a rate whereby whole days were reduced to minutes. A moment more, and it rose from the gulf like some gigantically swelling bubble to surround us with a maze of half-cognizable imageries. There were atlantean mountain-tops through which we seemed to pass, and seas or level deserts above which we appeared to hover in the midst of broken cloud-strata. Now, for an instant, we were among buildings, or what I assumed to be such; then we were hurled onward to a broad, open space. I caught a confused glittering of many-pointed lights and unidentifiable, thronging forms, as I reached out and brought the sphere to a sudden halt.

As I have said before, it was a perilous thing to stop thus in accelerated time above a moving planet. There might well have been a collision that would have destroyed the machine; or we might have found ourselves embedded beneath fathoms of soil or stone. Indeed, there were any number of undesirable possibilities; and the only wonder is that we escaped annihilation.

As it was, we must have come to a halt in mid-air, perhaps fifteen or twenty feet above the ground. Of course, we were seized immediately by the gravitational influence of the new world. Even as my sense-impressions cleared with the cessation of the time-flight, we fell with a terrible, ear-splitting crash, and the sphere almost seemed to rebound and then rolled over, careening on its side. I was torn from my seat by the shock of impact, and Li Wong and our passenger were hurled to the floor beside me. The stranger and myself, though sorely bruised and shaken, contrived to retain consciousness; but I saw that Li Wong had been stunned by the fall.

Giddily, with swaying limbs and reeling senses, I tried to stand up, and somehow succeeded. My first thought was for Li Wong, who was lying inert against the tilted dynamos. A hasty examination showed me that he was uninjured. My second thought was for the time-machine, whose tough

metal revealed no visible damage. Then, inevitably, the world into which we had fallen in a manner so precipitate, was forced upon my attention.

We had come down in the very center of what appeared to be an active battle-field! All around us was a formidable array of chariot-like vehicles, high-wheeled and high-bodied, drawn by quaint monsters that recalled the dragons of heraldry, and driven by beings of an unearthly kind who were little more than pygmies. There were many foot-soldiers, too, and all were armed with weapons such as have never been used in human history. There were spears that ended in curving, saw-toothed blades, and swords whose hilts were in the middle, and spiked balls at the end of long, leathern thongs, which were hurled at the enemy and then drawn back by their owners. Also, each of the chariots was fitted with a catapult, from which similar balls were flung.

The users of these weapons had paused in the midst of what was plainly a ferocious battle, and were all staring at the time-machine. Some, I saw, had been crushed beneath the heavy sphere as it plunged among them. Others had drawn back, and were eyeing us doubtfully.

Even as I surveyed this singular scene, with bewilderment that permitted no more than a partial cognizance of its baffling details, I saw that the interrupted combat was being resumed. The monster-drawn chariots swayed back and forth, and the air was thick with flying missiles, some of which hurtled against the walls of the sphere. It seemed, perhaps, that our presence was having an effect on the morale of these fantastic warriors. Many of those who were nearest to the sphere began to retreat, while others pressed forward; and I was able for the first time to distinguish the members of the two factions, who obviously belonged to different races.

Those of one faction, who were all foot-soldiers armed with spears and swords, were seemingly a rude barbaric type. They outnumbered the others greatly. Their fearsome, uncouth features were like graven masks of fury and malignity; and they fought with a savage desperation.

Their opponents, who comprised all the chariot-drivers, as well as a smaller body of foot-soldiers, were more delicate and civilized in appearance, with slighter limbs and anatomies. They made a skillful use of their catapults; and the tide of the battle seemed to be turning in their favor. When I perceived that all those who had been struck down by the time-machine belonged to the more barbarous type, I inferred that possibly our apparition had been construed as favorable to one faction and inimical to

the other. The catapult-users were gaining courage; and the spear and sword bearers were becoming visibly demoralized.

The combat turned to an ever-growing rout. The corps of chariots gathered in a crushing mass about the time-sphere and drove the enemy swiftly back, while, in the heat of conflict, a barrage of singular weapons continued to assail our hyaline walls.

Ferocious-looking as they were, the dragons seemed to take no active part in the struggle, and were plainly mere beasts of draught or burden. But the slaughter was terrific; and crushed or trodden bodies were lying everywhere. The role of *deus ex machina* which I appeared to be playing in this outlandish battle was not one that I should have chosen of my own accord; and I soon decided that it would be better to fare even further afield in universal time.

I pulled the starting-lever; but, to my confoundment and consternation, there was no result. The mechanism in some manner had been jarred or disconnected by the violence of our fall, though I could not locate the precise difficulty at that moment. Afterwards, I found that the connection between the instrument-board and the dynamos had been broken, thus rendering the force inoperative.

Li Wong had now recovered consciousness. Rubbing his head, he sat up and appeared to be pondering our remarkable milieu with all the gravity of an Oriental philosopher. Our passenger was peering out with his brilliant sapphire eyes on this world to which he was no less alien than Li Wong and myself. He seemed to be eyeing the odd warriors and their dragon-teams with a cool scientific interest.

The more civilized of the two factions was now driving its enemies from the field in a tide of carnage. Our sound-proof walls prevented us from hearing the clash and rumble of chariot-wheels, the clangor of clashing weapons, and the cries that were doubtless being emitted by the warriors.

Since nothing could be done at the moment to repair our machinery, I resigned myself, not without misgivings, to an indefinite sojourn in the world whereon we had landed so fortuitously.

In perhaps ten minutes, the raging battle was over, the unslain remnant of the barbarians was in full flight, and the conquerors, who had poured past us in an irresistible torrent, were returning and massing about the sphere at a little distance.

Several, whom I took for commanding officers, descended from their cars and approached us. They prostrated themselves before the machine in the universal posture of reverence.

For the first time, I was able to form an exact impression of the appearance of these beings. The tallest of them was barely four feet in height, and their limbs, which were normal in number according to human ideas, were slender as those of elves or leprechauns. Their movements were very swift and graceful, and were seemingly aided by a pair of small wings or erigible membranes attached to their sloping shoulders.

Their faces were marked by a most elaborate development of the nostrils and eyes; and the ears and mouths were little more than vestigial by contrast. The nasal apparatus was convoluted like those of certain bats, with mobile valves arranged in rosettes, and a nether appendage that recalled the petals of a butterfly orchid. The eyes were proportionately enormous and were set obliquely. They were furnished with vertical lids and possessed a power of semi-circular rotation and also of protrusion and retraction in their deep orbits. This power, we learned later, enabled them to magnify or reduce any visual image at will, and also to alter or invert the perspective in which it was seen.

These peculiar beings were equipped with body-armor of red metal marked off in ovoid scales. Their light-brown arms and legs were bare. Somehow their whole aspect was very gentle and un-warlike. I marvelled at the prowess and bravery which they had shown in the late battle.

They continued their obeisances before the time-machine, rising and prostrating themselves anew, in an alternation like a set ritual with gestures and genuflections of hieratic significance. I conceived the idea that they regarded the machine itself as a conscious, intelligent and perhaps supernal entity; and that we the occupants, if perceived at all, were considered as internal and integral parts of the mechanism.

Li Wong and I began to debate the advisability of opening the doors and revealing ourselves to these fantastic devotees. Unluckily, I had neglected to provide the sphere with any device for determining the chemical composition of otherworld atmospheres; and I was not sure that the outside air would prove wholly suitable for human respiration. It was this consideration, rather than any actual fear of the mild, quaint warriors, that caused me to hesitate.

I decided to defer our epiphany; and I was about to resume my examination of the deranged machinery, when I noticed an ebullition in the massed ranks of soldiers that were drawn up around us at some little distance. The ranks parted with a swift, flowing motion, leaving a wide lane through which, presently, a remarkable vehicle advanced.

The vehicle was a sort of open platform mounted on numerous low, squat wheels, and drawn by a dozen of the dragon-creatures, arranged in teams of four. The platform was rectangular, and the small, castor-like wheels served to elevate it little more than a foot above the ground. I could not determine its material, which was copperish in color and suggested a heavy metallic stone rather than a pure, smelted metal. It was without furnishings or superstructure, aside from a low breast-work at the front, behind which three drivers stood, each holding the separate reins of a tandem of monsters; and at the rear, a strange outward-curving arm or crane of some black, lustrous material ending in a thick disk, which rose high in the air. One of the elfin people stood beside this crane.

With exquisite and admirable skill, the drivers brought their unwieldy conveyance forward in a sweeping arc through the empty space between the time-vessel and the surrounding army. The devotees of the sphere, who must have been commanding officers, retired to one side; and the monster-hauled vehicle, passing us closely, was adroitly maneuvered and drawn about till it came to a halt with its rear end opposite the sphere and the black arm inclining above our very heads with its heavy horizontal disk.

The being who stood beside the curving arm began to manipulate an oddly shaped and movable projection (which must have been a sort of lever or control) in its dark surface. Watching him curiously, I became aware of a sudden and increasing glare of light overhead; and looking up, I saw that a lid-like cover was sliding back from the disk at the arm’s end, revealing a fire-bright substance that dazzled the eye.

Simultaneously, I felt a sensation of corporeal lightness, of growing weightlessness. I reeled with vertigo, and reaching toward the wall in an effort to steady myself, I floated buoyantly from the floor and drifted in mid-air. Li Wong and the stranger, I perceived, were floundering eerily and helplessly about amid the machinery.

Perplexed by this phenomenon of degravitation, I did not realize at first that there had been a similar levitation of the time-sphere itself. Then, as I turned in my aerial tumbling, I saw that the sphere had risen from the

ground and was now on a level with the floor of the strange conveyance. It occurred to me that an unknown magnetic force was being emitted by the bright disk above our heads; and no sooner had I conceived this idea, when the outward-curving arm began to rotate, swinging back upon the vehicle of which it formed a part; and the time-machine, as if suspended by invisible chains, swung with it, maintaining a vertical position beneath the moving disk. In a trice, it was gently deposited on the platform. Then, like the switching-off of a light, the glaring disk was covered again by its dark lid, and the properties of normal weight returned to my companions and to me.

The whole process of loading the sphere upon the platform had been accomplished with remarkable celerity and efficiency. As soon as it was completed the three drivers, with perfect concertion, reined their tandems of dragons about in a long semi-circle, and started off on the route by which they had come. Moving at considerable speed, we rolled easily along the wide lane that had been opened through the quaint army. The chariots and foot-soldiers closed behind us as we went; and looking back, I saw them wheel about and reform, with the chariots in the van. Passing through the outermost ranks, we took the lead, and the whole army followed us in martial order across a low plain.

I was struck by the seeming discrepancy between the preter-human control of gravitation possessed by this curious people, and their somewhat primitive modes of warfare and conveyance. Judging them, as I did, by terrestrial standards, I could not reconcile these things; and the true explanation was too bizarre and fantastic for me to have imagined it beforehand.

We proceeded toward our unknown destination, with the dragons trotting at a leisurely pace that covered more ground than one would have expected. I began to observe the surrounding milieu and to take note of much that had escaped me heretofore.

The plain, I saw, was treeless, with low hummocks and intervals of winding mounds, and was wholly covered with a short, lichenous growth that formed a kind of yellow-green turf. One of the two suns was hanging at meridian; and the other was either just rising or setting, for it hovered close to a far-off horizon of glaucous hills. The sky was tinted with deep green, and I saw that this color was due to the combined light of the suns, one of which was azure blue and the other verging upon amber.

After we had gone on for several miles and had passed a row of intervening hummocks, I beheld a strange city in the near distance, with low mushroom domes and peristyles of massive pillars that gleamed like rosy marble in the sunlight amid plots of orange and indigo and violet vegetation.

This city proved to be our objective. It was thronged with people among whom we passed on the dragon-drawn platform, borne like the trophies of a triumph. The buildings were roomy and well-spaced and were characterized by deep porticoes with swelling, bulbous columns. We learned subsequently that the material used in their construction was a sort of petrified wood, belonging to a genus of giant prehistoric trees, that had been quarried in enormous blocks.

After passing through many streets, we neared, in what was apparently the center of the town, a huge circular edifice. It consisted of a single dome upborne on rows of open, colossal pillars, with an entrance broad and high enough to admit with ease the vehicle on which the time-sphere was being carried. We rolled smoothly through the portals and along a level pavement beneath the vast dome.

The place was illumed by the horizontal rays of the sinking yellow sun, which fell on the ruddy floor in broad shafts between the massy pillars. I received an impression of immense empty space, of rosy-golden air and light. Then, in the center, as we went forward, I saw a sort of dais on which stood an extraordinary machine or contrivance of parti-colored metals, towering alone like an idol in some pagan fane. The dais, like the building, was circular, and rose four or five feet above the main pavement. It was perhaps sixty feet in diameter, and there were several stairs, graduated to the steps of the pygmy people, that gave access to it. Around the dais, in semi-circles on the pavement, with ample space between, there stood many low tables, supported on carven cubes and with benches about them, all of the same material as the edifice itself. The tables were set with numerous black pots, deep and shallow and multiform, in which grew flowers of opulent orange and cassava colors, together with others of delicate white, of frail pink and silvery green.

These details I perceived hastily and confusedly as our conveyance moved on toward the central dais without endangering any of the tables. A sprinkling of people, who gave the impression of menials, were hurrying about the place, bringing new flower-pots or re-arranging certain of the

ones that had already been disposed. Many of the elfin warriors, dismounting from their chariots, had followed us through the great portals.

Now the vehicle had drawn up beside the dais. By the operation of the black arm with its magnetic disk, the time-machine was lifted from the platform and deposited on the dais not far from the tall contrivance of multi-colored metals. Then, circling the dais, the vehicle withdrew with its dragon-team and vanished through the open entrance.

Whether the place was a temple or merely a public hall, I could not decide. It was like the phantasmagoria of some bewildering dream, and the mystery of it all was not solved when I noticed that hundreds of the faery people were seating themselves at the flower-laden tables and were bending toward the blossoms with a regular contraction and expansion of their voluted nostrils, as if they were inhaling delicious perfumes. To complicate my bewilderment still further, I could distinguish nothing on any of the tables in the form of food, nourishment or even drink, such as these heroic warriors might well be expected to require after an arduous battle.

Dismissing temporarily the baffling enigma, I turned my attention to the peculiar mechanism which occupied the dais together with the time-sphere. Here, too, I found myself at a loss, for I could not even surmise its nature and purpose. I had never seen anything like it among the most ingenious, pernicious and grotesque inventions of terrene mechanics.

The thing was quite gigantic, with a bristling, serried and fearsome array of highly polished rods and pistons, of long, spiral bands and abrupt, angular flanges, behind which I made out the half-hidden outlines of a squat cylindrical body, mounted on at least seven or eight ponderous legs that terminated in huge pads like the feet of hippopotami.

Above the complicated mass, there towered a sort of triple head, or superstructure of three globes, one above the other on a long metal neck. The heads were fitted with rows of eye-like facets, cold and bright as diamonds, and possessed numerous antennae and queer, unnamable appendages, some of great length. The whole apparatus had the air of some mysterious living entity—a super-machine endowed with sentience and with intellect; and the three-tiered head with its chill eyes appeared to watch us malignly and inscrutably like a metal Argus.

The thing was a miracle of machinery; and it gleamed with hues of gold and steel, of copper and malachite, of silver and azurite and cinnabar. But more and more I was impressed by an evil and brooding intentness, an aura

of the sinister and the inimical. The monstrosity was motionless—but intelligent. Then, as I continued my inspection, I saw a movement of the foremost legs, and became aware that the machine was advancing stiffly on its massive pads toward the time-vessel.

It paused at an interval of five or six feet, and put out a long, thin, supple, many-jointed tentacle from the mass of appendages that adorned its topmost head. With this tentacle, like a raised whip, it struck smartly several times at the curving wall of the sphere.

I could not help feeling somewhat alarmed as well as puzzled; for the action was unmistakably hostile. The blows of the tentacle were somehow like a challenge—the equivalent, so to speak, of an actual slap in the face. And the wary movement with which the machine stepped back and stood facing us, after delivering the whip-sharp blows, was curiously like the maneuvre of a fighter, squaring himself for combat. The thing seemed almost to crouch on its elephantine metal legs and pads; and there was an air of covert menace in its poised array of mysterious, deadly-looking parts and appendages.

At this moment there occurred a singular interruption which, in all likelihood, was the means of averting our death and the destruction of the time-globe. A group of the elfin people, four in number, ascended the stairs of the dais and approached us, bearing among them a large vessel, like an open shallow urn or deep basin, which was filled to the brim with a sluggish, hueless liquid, suggesting immediately some sort of mineral oil. Behind this group there came a second, carrying another vessel full of the same oleaginous fluid.

The two delegations, moving forward in perfect unison, deposited their burdens at the same instant, with the same peculiar genuflections, setting one of the basins before the time-sphere and the other at the feet of the belligerent alien mechanism. Afterwards they retired discreetly as they had come. The whole performance had the air of a religious rite—a sacrificial offering, intended to appease doubtful or angry deities.

Not without inward amusement, I wondered what use the time-sphere was supposed to make of the oily liquid. It seemed probable that we and our conveyance were regarded as a single mechanism, active and intelligent, and perhaps similar in kind to the curious Robot we had found occupying the dais.

The latter machine, however, was manifestly familiar with such offerings; for, without acknowledgement or ceremony, it proceeded to stoop over and dip certain of its metal proboscides in the oil. These organs, I perceived, were hollow at the ends, like the trunks of elephants; and I saw that the liquid in the basin was diminishing rapidly, as if it were being sucked up. When the vessel was half empty, the monster withdrew its proboscides; and then, by the simultaneous use of these members, turning and coiling with great suppleness in different directions, it began to oil the innumerable joints and flanges of its intricate machinery. Several times it suspended this remarkable process, eyeing the time-sphere balefully as if watching for a hostile movement. The whole performance was inconceivably grotesque and ludicrous—and sinister.

The main floor of the huge pillared hall, I now saw, had filled with the pygmy warriors, who were seated about the flower-burdened tables. All of them seemed to be inhaling the odors of these flowers in a manner that resembled actual ingestation; and I conceived the idea that they were regaling themselves with a feast of perfumes and perhaps required no other nutrient.

Turning from this quaint spectacle, to which I had given only a cursory glance, I perceived that the metal monster had apparently finished the anointing of its complex machinery and was again posting itself in an attitude preparatory for battle. There was a stealthy turning of half-hidden wheels and cogs, a covert throbbing of well-oiled pistons, as the mechanism faced us; and certain of its tentacles were poised in air like lifted weapons.

What would have happened next, in the normal course of events, I am not altogether sure; but the probabilities are that we would have been blotted out of existence very promptly, efficiently and summarily. Again, by a singular intervention, the time-vessel was saved from the anger of its strange antagonist.

Without warning, there came a flash of brilliant blinding flame, as if a thunder-bolt had issued from mid-air between the dais and the dome. There was a crashing, shivering noise that shook and penetrated our virtually sound-proof walls; and everything about us seemed to rock with the convulsions of a violent earthquake. The concussion hurled us back upon our dynamos; and I thought for an instant that the sphere would be flung from the dais. Recovering myself, I saw that a third machine had materialized on the dais, opposite the time-sphere and its opponent!

This machine differed as much from the hostile Robot as the latter, in its turn, differed from the time-globe. It was a sort of immense polyhedron, with an arrangement of numberless facets alternately opaque and transparent. Through some of the facets, clearer than glass, I was horrified and astonished to behold the thronging faces of entities similar to, or perhaps identical with, the beings who had threatened us from the air-vessel in that far-off world where we had picked up our unusual passenger.

There could be only one explanation: we had been pursued through the cosmic continuum by these vengeful and pertinacious creatures, who had evidently employed a time-space vehicle of their own; and who must have possessed unique instruments of incredible range and delicacy by which to detect and follow our course in the labyrinth of stellar gulfs and ages! Turning to our passenger, I saw by his troubled air and frantic gestures that he too had recognized the pursuers. Since I had not yet been able to repair our machinery, the position in which we now stood was a serious dilemma. We were without weapons of any kind, for it had not even occurred to me to bring along a revolver. I began to wish that I had fitted the time-machine with the arsenal of an American racketeer.

However, there was little time for either regret or apprehension. The course of events was now taking an unforeseen and incalculable turn. The formidable Robot, diverted from its war-like designs upon us by the appearance of the newcomer, had immediately squared itself around to face the polyhedron, with its metal members raised in a flailing gesture of menace. The occupants of the polyhedron, on their part, seemed to disregard the Robot. Several of the opaque facets began to slide back in the manner of ports, and revealed the yawning mouths of tubular weapons, all of which were levelled at the time-sphere. It appeared that these people were intent only on destroying us, after having followed us with fantastical vindictiveness through many aeons.

The Robot, it would seem, construed the opening of the ports as an act inimical to itself. Or perhaps it did not wish to yield its legitimate prey, the time-sphere, to another and foreign mechanism. At any rate, it bristled forward, winnowing the air with all its tentacles and proboscides, and tramping heavily on the dais with its myriad pads, till it stood within grappling-distance of the polyhedron. Coils of greyish vapor were beginning to issue from valves in its cylindrical body and pipe-like throat; and raising one of its hollow proboscides, it snorted forth a sudden jet of

crimson flame—a briefly flaring tongue that struck an upper facet of the polyhedron, causing it to melt and collapse inward like so much solder.

The occupants of the alien time-machine were now slewing their tube-weapons around to face the Robot. A violescent fire leapt from one of the tubes, spreading like a fan, and severing cleanly an upraised tentacle of the monster. At this the angry mechanism seemed to go mad, and hurled itself at the polyhedron like some enormous octopus of metal. Jets of scarlet fire were issuing from several of its trunk-shaped organs, and great ruinous rents appeared in the facets of the polyhedron beneath their incessant playing. Undismayed by this, the wielders of the tube-weapons concentrated their violet beams on the Robot, inflicting terrific damage. The uppermost of the three globular heads was partly shot away, and metal filaments trailed from its broken rim like a shredded brain. The serried array of tossing members was torn and lopped like a flame-swept forest. Rods, cogs, pistons, and other parts dripped on the dais in a molten rain. Two of the foremost legs crumpled in shapeless ruin—but still the monster fought on; and the polyhedron became a twisted wreck beneath the focussing of the red fires.

Soon several of the violet beams were extinguished, and their wielders had dissolved into vapor and ashes. But other beams were still in action; and one of them struck the central cylinder of the Robot, after demolishing the outer machinery, and bored into it steadily like an acetylene torch. The beam must have penetrated a vital part, for suddenly there was a tremendous, all-engulfing flare, a cataclysmic explosion. The immense dome appeared to totter on its trembling columns, and the dais shook like a stormy sea. Then, an instant later, there fell from a dark cloud of swelling steam, a rain of metal fragments, glancing along our crystalline sides and strewing the dais and the main floor for some distance around. The monster, in its explosion, had involved the alien time-vessel, which was wholly riven asunder; and nothing remained of our pursuers but a few blackened cinders. Apart from this mutual and highly providential destruction of the inimical mechanisms, no serious damage had been done; for the main building, I now perceived for the first time, was deserted—the pygmies had abandoned their feast of odors and had retired discreetly, perhaps at the very onset of the battle. The time-sphere, though it had taken no part in the combat, was left by a singular and ironic fortuity in sole possession of the field.

I decided that fortune, being so favorably disposed toward us, might be tempted even further with impunity. So I opened the vessel's door, and found that the atmosphere of the world outside was perfectly breathable, though laden with an odd mixture of metallic fumes that lingered from the late explosion, and fruity and luscious fragrances from the potted blossoms.

Li Wong and the passenger and I emerged on the dais. The yellow sun had gone down, and the place swam with the blue, religious light of its ascendant binary. We were examining the littered ruins of the strange machines when a large delegation of elfin warriors re-entered and approached us. We could not divine their thoughts and emotions; but it seemed to me that their genuflections were even more expressive of profound reverence and gratitude than those with which the time-sphere had been hailed after the routing of the barbarian army. I received an almost telepathic impression that they were thanking us for a supposed act of deliverance at which we had been merely the onlookers.

In time, this impression was to be fully confirmed. The metal monster, it seemed, had come originally, like ourselves, from the outside universe, and had settled itself among this perfume-eating people. They had treated it with all due respect, had housed it in their public hall of assembly and had supplied it liberally with certain mineral lubricants which it required. The machine, in exchange, had deigned to instruct them regarding a few scientific and mechanical secrets such as that of degravitation by means of a reverse magnetic force; but the people, being somewhat non-inventive and non-mechanical by nature, had made little use of this Robot-imparted knowledge.

The metal monster, in time, had become disagreeably exacting and tyrannical; and moreover, it had flatly refused to help the pygmies in their war with another people when need arose. Therefore they were glad to be rid of it; and they seemed to take it for granted that we had made away with the monster as well as with the invading time-machine. So far, I have not thought it worth while to disillusion them in this regard.

No less than seven terrestrial months have now gone by since the landing of the sphere. My companions and I are still sojourning among the perfume-eaters; and we have no reason to complain of our lot, and no cause to lament the worlds we have left so far behind us in time and space.

In the interim, we have learned many things, and are now able to hold converse with our hosts, having familiarized ourselves by slow degrees with

the peculiar phonetics of their speech.

The name of the world, as well as I can render it in human spelling, is Mohaun Los. Being subject to the gravitational pull of two solar bodies, it follows a somewhat eccentric and prolonged annual orbit. Nevertheless, the climate is equable and salubrious; though marked by meteoric phenomena of an unearthly sort.

The people among whom we are dwelling call themselves the Psounas. They are a fine and estimable race, though bizarre from a human standpoint as any of the mythic tribes whose anatomy and customs were described by Herodotus. They are the ruling race of the planet, and are inconceivably more advanced in many ways than their rude weapons and methods of warfare would lead one to imagine. Astronomy and mathematics, in particular, have been developed by them to a degree that is far beyond the achievement of human savants.

Their food consists of nothing grosser than perfumes; and at first, it was not easy to convince them that we required a more material nourishment. However, once they had grasped the idea, they supplied us abundantly with the meaty fruits in which Mohaun Los abounds; and they did not seem to be shocked or scandalized by our base appetites—even though fruits and other non-atomizable matters are eaten only by animals and the more aboriginal races of this world. The Psounas, indeed, have shown toward us at all times a spirit of urbane tolerance and *laissez faire*.

They are a peaceful race, and during their whole former history have had little need to acquire the martial arts. But the recent evolutionary development of a half-bestial tribe, the Gholpos, who have now learned to organize themselves and to make weapons, and have become quite aggressive as a consequence, has compelled the Psounas to take the field in self-defense.

The descent of the time-machine, falling upon their enemies during a crucial battle, was a most fortunate happening; for these ignorant savages, the Gholpos, regarded it as a manifestation of some divine or demoniac power in league with the Psounas, and were henceforward altogether broken and cowed.

The Psounas, it seems, were prone even from the first to a more naturalistic supposition regarding the character and origin of the time-sphere. Their long familiarity with the strange ultra-stellar Robot may have helped to disabuse them of any belief in the supernaturalism of mere

machinery. I have had no difficulty in explaining to them the mechanism of our vessel and the voyage we have made along the aeons. My efforts, however, to tell them something of my own world, of its peoples and customs, have so far met with polite incredulity or sheer incomprehension. Such a world, they say, is quite unheard-of; and if they were not so courteous, probably they would tell me that it could not even be imagined by any rational being.

Li Wong and I, as well as the Psounas, have learned to talk with the singular entity whom I rescued from the diabolic living flowers on a world midway between the earth and Mohaun Los. This person calls himself Tuoquan, and he is a most erudite savant. His ideas and discoveries, being somewhat at variance with the notions that prevail in his own world, had caused him to be regarded with suspicion and hatred by his fellows; and, as I surmised, he had been abandoned by them, after due process of law, to a cruel doom in the jungle. The time-machine in which they had followed us to Mohaun Los was, he believed, the only vessel of the kind that had so far been invented by this people. Their zealous and fanatic devotion to legality and law-enforcement would have led them to pursue us beyond the boundaries of the universal continuum. Fortunately, there was small likelihood that they would ever dispatch another time-machine on our trail: for the lingering etheric vibrations that had enabled them to follow us, as dogs follow the scent of their quarry, would die out long before they could construct a duplicate of the unreturning polyhedron.

With the aid of the Psounas, who have supplied me with the necessary metallic elements, I have repaired the broken connection in the time-sphere. I have also made a miniature duplicate of the mechanism, in which I am planning to enclose this letter and send it backward through time, in the seemingly far-fetched and fantastic hope that it may somehow reach the earth and be received by you.

The astronomers of the Psounas have helped me to make the needful computations and adjustments which, indeed, would be utterly beyond my own skill or the mathematical knowledge of any human being. By combining in these calculations the chronometric records of the dials in the time-sphere with the ephemerides of Mohaun Los during the past seven months, and allowing for the pauses and changes of speed which we made during our journey, it has been possible to chart the incredibly complicated course which the mechanism must follow in time and space. If the

calculations are correct to the most infinitesimal degree, and the movement of the device is perfectly synchronized, the thing will stop at the very moment and in the very same place from which I left the earth in retrograde time. But of course it will be a miracle if it reaches the earth at all. The Psounas have pointed out to me a ninth-magnitude star which they think is the solar orb of the system in which I was born.

If the letter should ever reach you, I have no reason to think that you will believe my tale. Nevertheless, I am going to ask you to publish it, even though the world in general will regard it as the fantasy of a madman or a practical joker. It pleases an obscure sense of irony in my mental make-up, to know that the truth will be heard by those among whom it must pass for a fantastic lie. Such an eventuation, perhaps, will be far from novel or unprecedented.

As I have said before, I am well enough contented with life in Mohaun Los. Even death, I am told, is a pleasant thing in this world, for when the Psounas wax old and weary, they repair to a hidden valley in which they are overcome by the lethal and voluptuous perfumes of narcotic flowers.

However, it may be that the nostalgia of new ages and new planets will seize me anon, and I shall feel impelled to continue my journey among future cycles. Li Wong, it goes without saying, will accompany me in any such venture: though he is quite happily engaged at present in translating the Odes of Confucius and other Chinese classics for the benefit of the people of Mohaun Los. (This poetry, I might add, is meeting with a better reception than my tales regarding Occidental civilization.)

Tuoquan, who is teaching the Psounas to make the fearfully destructive weapons of his own world, may decide to go with us; for he is full of intellectual curiosities. Perhaps we shall follow the great circle of time, till the years and aeons without number have returned upon themselves once more, and the past is made a sequel to the future!

Yours ever,

DOMITIAN

Editor’s Note: Granting the truth of Domitian Malgraff’s narrative, and admitting that his letter was launched from a world in future time, there are still certain problems that baffle explanation. No one knows how long the

mechanism containing the letter had been floating in the Banda Sea before it was picked up: but in order to reach the earth at all, in the unimaginably complicated maze of temporal and spatial movement, it must have fallen there not long after the departure of the time-machine from Malgraff's laboratory. As Malgraff himself indicates in his letter, if the timing had been absolutely perfect it would have landed in his laboratory at the very moment when he and Li Wong began their journey!

THE HUNTERS FROM BEYOND

I have seldom been able to resist the allurement of a book-store, particularly one that is well supplied with rare and exotic items. Therefore I turned in at Toleman's to browse around for a few minutes. I had come to San Francisco for one of my brief, bi-annual visits; and had started early that idle forenoon to an appointment with Cyprian Sincaul, the sculptor, a second or third cousin of mine, whom I had not seen for several years. His studio was only a block from Toleman's, and there seemed to be no especial object in reaching it ahead of time. Cyprian had offered to show me his collection of recent sculptures; but, remembering the smooth mediocrity of his former work, amid which were a few banal efforts to achieve horror and grotesquerie, I did not anticipate anything more than an hour or two of vaguely dismal boredom.

The little shop was empty of customers. Knowing my proclivities, the owner and his one assistant became tacitly non-attentive after a word of recognition, and left me to rummage at will among the curiously laden shelves. Wedged in between other but less alluring titles, I found a de luxe edition of Goya's *Proverbes*. I began to turn the heavy pages, and was soon engrossed in the diabolic art of these nightmare-nurtured drawings.

It has always been incomprehensible to me that I did not shriek aloud with mindless, overmastering terror, when I happened to look up from the volume, and saw the thing that was crouching in a corner of the book-shelves before me. I could not have been more hideously startled if some hellish conception of Goya had suddenly come to life and emerged from one of the pictures in the folio.

What I saw was a forward-slouching, vermin-grey figure, wholly devoid of hair or down or bristles, but marked with faint, etiolated rings like those of a serpent that has lived in darkness. It possessed the head and brow of an anthropoid ape, a semi-canine mouth and jaw, and arms ending in twisted hands whose black hyena talons nearly scraped the floor. The thing was infinitely bestial, and, at the same time, macabre; for its parchment skin was

shrivelled, corpse-like, mummified, in a manner impossible to convey; and from eye-sockets well-nigh deep as those of a skull, there glimmered evil slits of yellowish phosphorescence, like burning sulfur. Fangs that were stained as if with poison or gangrene, issued from the slavering, half-open mouth; and the whole attitude of the creature was that of some maleficent monster in readiness to spring.

Though I had been for years a professional writer of stories that often dealt with occult phenomena, with the weird and the spectral, I was not at this time possessed of any clear and settled belief regarding such phenomena. I had never before seen anything that I could identify as a phantom, nor even an hallucination; and I should hardly have said off-hand that a book-store on a busy street, in full summer daylight, was the likeliest of places in which to see one. But the thing before me was assuredly nothing that could ever exist among the permissible forms of a same world. It was too horrific, too atrocious, to be anything but a creation of unreality.

Even as I stared across the Goya, sick with half-incredulous fear, the apparition moved toward me. I say that it moved—but its change of position was so instantaneous, so utterly without effort or visible transition, that the verb is hopelessly inadequate. The foul specter had seemed five or six feet away—but now it was stooping directly above the volume that I still held in my hands, with its loathsomely lambent eyes peering upward at my face, and a grey-green slime drooling from its mouth on the broad pages. At the same time I breathed an insupportable fetor, like a mingling of rancid serpent-stench with the mouldiness of antique charnels and the fearsome reek of newly decaying carrion. In a frozen timelessness that was perhaps no more than a second or two, my heart appeared to suspend its beating, while I beheld the ghastly face with a clearness too obscene for depiction. Gasping, I let the Goya drop with a resonant bang on the floor, and even as it fell, I saw that the vision had vanished.

“What is wrong, Mr. Hastane? Are you ill?” Toleman, a tonsured gnome with shell-rimmed goggles, had rushed forward to retrieve the fallen volume. From the meticulousness with which he examined the binding in search of possible damage, I knew that his chief solicitude was concerning the Goya. It was plain that neither he nor his clerk had seen the phantom; nor could I detect aught in their demeanor to indicate that they had noticed the mephitic odor that still lingered on the air like an exhalation from

broken graves. And, as far as I could tell, they did not even perceive the greyish slime that still polluted the open folio.

I do not remember how I managed to make my exit from the shop. My mind had become a seething blur of muddled horror, of crawling, sick revulsion from the supernatural vileness I had beheld, together with the direst apprehension for my own sanity and safety. I recall only that I found myself on the street above Toleman's, walking with feverish rapidity toward my cousin's studio, with a neat parcel containing the Goya volume under my arm. Evidently, in an effort to atone for my clumsiness, I must have bought and paid for the book by a sort of automatic impulse, without any real awareness of what I was doing.

I came to the building in which was my destination but went on around the block several times before entering. All the while I fought desperately to regain my self-control and equipoise. I remember how difficult it was even to moderate the pace at which I was walking, or refrain from breaking into a run; for it seemed to me that I was fleeing all the time from an invisible pursuer. I tried to argue with myself, to convince the rational part of my mind that the apparition had been the product of some evanescent trick of light and shade, or a temporary dimming of eyesight. But such sophistries were useless; for I had seen the gargoylish terror all too distinctly, in an unforgettable fullness of grisly detail.

What could the thing mean? I had never used narcotic drugs nor abused alcohol. My nerves, as far as I knew, were in sound condition. But either I had suffered a visual hallucination that might mark the beginning of some obscure cerebral disorder, or had been visited by a spectral phenomenon, by something from realms and dimensions that are past the normal scope of human perception. It was a problem either for the alienist or the occultist.

Though I was still damnably upset, I contrived to regain a nominal composure of my faculties. Also, it occurred to me that the unimaginative portrait-busts and tamely symbolic figure-groups of Cyprian Sincaul might serve admirably to sooth my shaken nerves. Even his grotesques would seem sane and ordinary by comparison with the blasphemous gargoyle that had drooled before me in the book-shop.

I entered the studio-building, and climbed a worn stairway to the second floor, where Cyprian had established himself in a somewhat capacious suite of rooms. As I went up the stairs, I had the peculiar feeling that somebody

was climbing them just ahead of me; but I could neither see nor hear anyone; and the hall above was no less silent and empty than the stairs.

Cyprian was in his atelier when I knocked. After an interval which seemed unduly long, I heard him call out, telling me to enter. I found him wiping his hands on an old cloth, and surmised that he had been modeling. A sheet of light burlap had been thrown over what was plainly an ambitious but unfinished group of figures, which occupied the center of the long room. All around were other sculptures, in clay, bronze, marble, and even the terra-cotta and steatite which he sometimes employed for his less conventional conceptions. At one end of the room there stood a heavy Chinese screen.

At a single glance, I realized that a great change had occurred, both in Cyprian Sincaul and his work. I remembered him as an amiable, somewhat flabby-looking youth, always dapperly dressed, with no trace of the dreamer or visionary. It was hard to recognize him now, for he had become lean, harsh, vehement, with an air of pride and penetration that was almost Luciferian. His unkempt mane of hair was already shot with white; and his eyes were electrically brilliant with a strange knowledge, and yet somehow were vaguely furtive, as if there dwelt behind them a morbid and macabre fear.

The change in his sculpture was no less striking. The respectable tameness and polished mediocrity were gone; and in their place, incredibly, was something little short of genius. More unbelievable still, in view of the laboriously ordinary grotesques of his earlier phase, was the trend that his art had now taken. All around me were frenetic, murderous demons, satyrs mad with nympholepsy, ghouls that seemed to sniff the odors of the charnel, lamias voluptuously coiled about their victims, and less namable things that belonged to the outland realms of evil myth and malign superstition.

Sin, horror, blasphemy, diablerie—the lust and malice of pandemonium—all had been caught with impeccable art. The potent nightmarishness of these creations was not calculated to reassure my trembling nerves; and all at once I felt an imperative desire to escape from the studio, to flee from the baleful throng of frozen cacodemons and chiselled chimeras.

My expression must have betrayed my feeling to some extent.

“Pretty strong work, aren’t they?” said Cyprian, in a loud, vibrant voice, with a note of harsh pride and triumph. “I can see that you are surprised—you didn’t look for anything of the sort, I dare say.”

“No, candidly, I didn’t,” I admitted. “Good Lord, man, you will become the Michelangelo of diabolism if you go on at this rate. Where on earth do you get such stuff?”

“Yes, I’ve gone pretty far,” said Cyprian, seeming to disregard my question. “Further even than you think, probably. If you could know what I know, could see what I have seen, you might make something really worth while out of your weird fiction, Philip. You are very clever and imaginative, of course. But you’ve never had any experience.”

I was startled and puzzled. “Experience? What do you mean?”

“Precisely that. You try to depict the occult and the supernatural without even the most rudimentary first-hand knowledge of them. I tried to do something of the same sort in sculpture, years ago, without knowledge; and doubtless you recall the mediocre mess that I made of it. But I’ve learned a thing or two since then.”

“Sounds as if you had made the traditional bond with the Devil, or something of the sort,” I observed, with a feeble and perfunctory levity.

Cyprian’s eyes narrowed slightly, with a strange, secret look.

“I know what I know. Never mind how or why. The world in which we live isn’t the only world; and some of the others lie closer at hand than you think. The boundaries of the seen and the unseen are sometimes interchangeable.”

Recalling the malevolent phantom, I felt a peculiar disquietude as I listened to his words. An hour before, his statement would have impressed me as mere nebular theorizing; but now it assumed an ominous and terrifying significance.

“What makes you think I have had no experience of the occult?” I asked.

“Your stories hardly show anything of the kind—anything factual or personal. They are all palpably made up. When you’ve argued with a ghost, or watched the ghouls at meal-time, or fought with an incubus, or suckled a vampire, you may achieve some genuine characterization and color along such lines.”

For reasons that should be fairly obvious, I had not intended to tell anyone of the unbelievable thing at Toleman’s. Now, with a singular mixture of emotions, of compulsive, eerie terrors and desire to refute the animadversions of Cyprian, I found myself describing the phantom.

He listened with an inexpressive look, as if his thoughts were occupied with other matters than my story. Then, when I had finished:

"You are becoming more psychic than I imagined. Was your apparition anything like one of these?"

With the last words, he lifted the sheet of burlap from the muffled group of figures beside which he had been standing.

I cried out involuntarily with the shock of that appalling revelation, and almost tottered as I stepped back. Before me, in a monstrous semi-circle, were seven creatures who might all have been modeled from the loathly gargoyle that had confronted me across the folio of Goya drawings. Even in several that were still amorphous or incomplete, Cyprian had conveyed with a damnable art the peculiar mingling of primal bestiality and mortuary putrescence that had signalized the phantom. The seven monsters had closed in on a cowering, naked girl, and were all clutching foully toward her with their hyena claws. The stark, frantic, insane terror on the face of the girl, and the slavering hunger of her assailants, were alike unbearable. The group was a masterpiece, in its consummate power of technique—but a masterpiece that inspired loathing rather than admiration. And, following my recent experience, the sight of it affected me with indescribable alarm. It seemed to me that I had gone astray from the normal, familiar world into a land of detestable mystery, of prodigious and unnatural menace.

Held by an abhorrent fascination, it was hard for me to wrench my eyes away from the figure-piece. At last I turned from it to Cyprian himself. He was regarding me with a cryptic air, beneath which I suspected a covert gloating.

"How do you like my little pets?" he inquired. "I am going to call the composition 'The Hunters from Beyond'."

Before I could answer, a woman suddenly appeared from behind the Chinese screen. I saw that she was the model for the girl in the unfinished group. Evidently she had been dressing, and was now ready to leave, for she wore a tailored suit and a smart toque. She was beautiful, in a dark, semi-Latin fashion; but her mouth was sullen and reluctant, and her wide, liquid eyes were wells of strange terror as she gazed at Cyprian, myself and the uncovered statue-piece.

Cyprian did not introduce me. He and the girl talked together in low tones for a minute or two, and I was unable to overhear more than half of what they said. I gathered, however, that an appointment was being made

for the next sitting. There was a pleading, frightened note in the girl's voice, together with an almost maternal concern; and Cyprian seemed to be arguing with her or trying to reassure her about something. At last she went out, with a queer, supplicative glance at me—a glance whose meaning I could only surmise and could not wholly fathom.

"That was Marta," said Cyprian. "She is half Irish, half Italian. A good model; but my new sculptures seem to be making her a little nervous." He laughed abruptly, with a mirthless, jarring note that was like the cachinnation of a sorcerer.

"In God's name, what are you trying to do here?" I burst out. "What does it all mean? Do such abominations really exist, on earth or in any hell?"

He laughed again, with an evil subtlety, and became evasive all at once. "Anything may exist, in a boundless universe with multiple dimensions. Anything may be real—or unreal. Who knows? It is not for me to say. Figure it out for yourself, if you can—there's a vast field for speculation—and perhaps for more than speculation."

With this, he began immediately to talk of other topics. Baffled, mystified, with a sorely troubled mind and nerves that were more unstrung than ever by the black enigma of it all, I ceased to question him. Simultaneously, my desire to leave the studio became almost overwhelming—a mindless, whirlwind panic that prompted me to run pell-mell from the room and down the stairs into the wholesome normality of the common, twentieth century streets. It seemed to me that the rays which fell through the skylight were not those of the sun but of some darker orb; that the room was touched with unclean webs of shadow where shadow should not have been; that the stone Satans, the bronze lamias, the terra-cotta satyrs, and the clay gargoyles had somehow increased in number and might spring to malignant life at any instant.

Hardly knowing what I said, I continued to converse for awhile with Cyprian. Then, excusing myself on the score of a nonexistent luncheon appointment, and promising vaguely to return for another visit before my departure from the city, I took my leave.

I was surprised to find my cousin's model in the lower hall, at the foot of the stairway. From her manner, and her first words, it was plain that she had been waiting for me.

“You are Mr. Philip Hastane, aren’t you?” she said, in an eager, agitated voice. “I am Marta Fitzgerald. Cyprian has often mentioned you; and I believe that he admires you a lot.

“Maybe you’ll think me crazy,” she went on, “but I had to speak to you. I can’t stand the way that things are going here; and I’d refuse to come to the place any more, if it wasn’t that I… like Cyprian so much.

“I don’t know what he has done—or what has been done to him—but he is altogether different from what he used to be. His new work is so horrible—you can’t imagine how it frightens me. The sculptures he does are more hideous, more hellish all the time. Ugh! those drooling, dead-grey monsters in that new group of his—I can hardly bear to be in the studio with them. It isn’t right for anyone to depict such things. Don’t you think they are awful, Mr. Hastane? They look as if they had broken loose from hell—and make you think that hell can’t be very far away. It is wrong and wicked for anyone to… even imagine them; and I wish that Cyprian would stop. I am afraid that something will happen to him—to his mind—if he goes on. And I’ll go mad, too, if I have to see those monsters many more times. My God! No one could keep sane in that studio.”

She paused, and appeared to hesitate. Then:

“Can’t you do something, Mr. Hastane? Can’t you talk to him, and tell him how wrong it is, and how dangerous to his mental health? You must have a lot of influence with Cyprian—you are his cousin, aren’t you? And he thinks you are very clever too. I wouldn’t ask you, if I hadn’t been forced to notice so many things that aren’t as they should be.

“I wouldn’t bother you either, if I knew anyone else to ask. He has shut himself up in that awful studio for the past year; and he hardly ever sees anybody. You are the first person that he has invited to see his new sculptures. He wants them to be a complete surprise for the critics and the public, when he holds his next exhibition.

“But you’ll speak to Cyprian, won’t you, Mr. Hastane? I can’t do anything to stop him—he seems to exult in the mad horrors he creates. And he merely laughs at me when I try to tell him the danger. However, I think that those things are making him a little nervous sometimes—that he is growing afraid… of his own morbid imagination. Perhaps he will listen to you.”

If I had needed anything more to unnerve me, the desperate pleading of the girl and her dark, obscurely baleful hintings would have been enough. I

could see that she loved Cyprian, that she was frantically anxious concerning him, and hysterically afraid: otherwise, she would not have approached an utter stranger in this fashion.

“But I haven’t any influence with Cyprian,” I protested, feeling a queer embarrassment. “And what am I to say to him, anyway? Whatever he is doing is his own affair, not mine. His new sculptures are magnificent—I have never seen anything more powerful of the kind. And how could I advise him to stop doing them? There would be no legitimate reason—he would simply laugh me out of the studio. An artist has the right to choose his own subject-matter, even if he takes it from the nether pits of Limbo and Erebus.”

The girl must have pleaded and argued with me for many minutes in that deserted hall. Listening to her, and trying to convince her of my inability to fulfill her request, was like a dialogue in some futile and tedious nightmare. During the course of it, she told me a few details that I am unwilling to record in this narrative; details that were too morbid and too shocking for belief, regarding the mental alteration of Cyprian, and his new subject-matter and method of work. There were direct and oblique hints of a growing perversion; but somehow it seemed that much more was being held back; that even in her most horrifying disclosures she was not wholly frank with me. At last, with some sort of hazy promise that I would speak to Cyprian, would remonstrate with him, I succeeded in getting away from her, and returned to my hotel.

The afternoon and evening that followed were tinged as by the tyrannous adumbration of an ill dream. I felt that I had stepped from the solid earth into a gulf of seething, menacing, madness-haunted shadow, and was lost henceforward to all rightful sense of location or direction. It was all too hideous—and too doubtful and unreal. The change in Cyprian himself was no less bewildering, and hardly less horrifying, than the vile phantom of the bookshop, and the demon sculptures that displayed a magisterial art. It was as if the man had become possessed by some Satanical energy or entity.

Everywhere that I went, I was powerless to shake off the feeling of an intangible pursuit, of a frightful, unseen vigilance. It seemed to me that the worm-grey face and sulphurous eyes would reappear at any moment; that the semi-canine mouth with its gangrene-dripping fangs might come to slaver above the restaurant table at which I ate, or upon the pillow of my

bed. I did not dare to reopen the purchased Goya volume for fear of finding that certain pages were still defiled with a spectral slime.

I went out, and spent the evening in cafés, in theaters, wherever people thronged and lights were bright. It was after midnight when I finally ventured to brave the solitude of my hotel bedroom. Then there were endless hours of nerve-wrung insomnia, of shivering, sweating apprehension beneath the electric bulb that I had left burning. Finally, a little before dawn, by no conscious transition and with no premonitory drowsiness, I fell asleep.

I remember no dreams—only the vast incubus-like oppression that persisted even in the depth of slumber, as if to drag me down with its formless, ever-clinging weight in gulfs beyond the reach of created light or the fathoming of organized entity.

It was almost noon when I awoke, and found myself staring into the verminous, apish, mummy-dead face and hell-illumined eyes of the gargoyle that had crouched before me in the corner at Toleman's. The thing was standing at the foot of my bed; and behind it as I stared, the wall of the room, which was covered with a floral paper, dissolved in an infinite vista of greyness, teeming with ghoulish forms that emerged like monstrous, misshapen bubbles from plains of undulant ooze and skies of serpentining vapor. It was another world—and my very sense of equilibrium was disturbed by an evil vertigo as I gazed. It seemed to me that my bed was heaving dizzily, was turning slowly, deliriously toward the gulf—that the feculent vista and the vile apparition were swimming beneath me—that I would fall toward them in another moment and be precipitated forever into that world of abysmal monstrosity and obscenity.

In a start of profoundest alarm, I fought my vertigo, fought the sense that another will than mine was drawing me, that the unclean gargoyle was luring me by some unspeakable mesmeric spell, as a serpent is said to lure its prey. I seemed to read a nameless purpose in its yellow-slitted eyes, in the soundless moving of its oozy, chancrous lips; and my very soul recoiled with nausea and revulsion as I breathed its pestilential fetor.

Apparently, the mere effort of mental resistance was enough. The vista and the face receded, they went out in a swirl of daylight; I saw the design of tea-roses on the wallpaper beyond; and the bed beneath me was sanely horizontal once more. I lay sweating with my terror, all adrift on a sea of

nightmare surmise, of unearthly threat and whirlpool madness; till the ringing of the telephone bell recalled me automatically to the known world.

I sprang to answer the call. It was Cyprian, though I should hardly have recognized the dead, hopeless tones of his voice, from which the mad pride and self-assurance of the previous day had wholly vanished.

“I must see you at once,” he said. “Can you come to the studio?”

I was about to refuse, to tell him that I had been called home suddenly, that there was no time, that I must catch the noon train—anything to avert the ordeal of another visit to that place of mephitic evil—when I heard his voice again.

“You simply must come, Philip. I can’t tell you about it over the phone, but a dreadful thing has happened: Marta has disappeared.”

I consented, telling him that I would start for the studio as soon as I had dressed. The whole environing nightmare had closed in, had deepened immeasurably with his last words; but remembering the haunted face of the girl, her hysteric fears, her frantic plea and my vague promise, I could not very well decline to go. I dressed and went out with my mind in a turmoil of abominable conjecture, of ghastly doubt, and apprehension all the more hideous because I was unsure of its object. I tried to imagine what had happened, tried to piece together the frightful, evasive, half-admitted hints of unknown terror into a tangible coherent fabric; but found myself involved in a chaos of shadowy menace.

I could not have eaten any breakfast, even if I had taken the necessary time. I went at once to the studio, and found Cyprian standing aimlessly amid his baleful statuary. His look was that of a man who has been stunned by the blow of some crushing weapon, or has gazed on the very face of Medusa. He greeted me in a vacant manner, with dull, toneless words. Then, like a charged machine, as if his body rather than his mind were speaking, he began at once to pour forth the atrocious narrative.

“They took her,” he said, simply. “Maybe you didn’t know it, or weren’t sure of it; but I’ve been doing all my new sculptures from life—even that last group. Marta was posing for me this forenoon—only an hour ago—or less. I had hoped to finish her part of the modelling today; and she wouldn’t have had to come again for this particular piece. I hadn’t called the Things this time, since I knew she was beginning to fear them more and more. I think she feared them on my account more than her own… and they were making me a little uneasy too, by the boldness with which they sometimes

lingered when I had ordered them to leave—and the way they would sometimes appear when I didn't want them.

"I was busy with some of the final touches on the girl-figure, and wasn't even looking at Marta, when suddenly I knew that the Things were there. The smell told me, if nothing else—I guess you know what the smell is like. I looked up, and found that the studio was full of them—they had never before appeared in such numbers. They were surrounding Marta, were crowding and jostling each other, were all reaching toward her with their filthy talons; but even then, I didn't think that they could harm her. They aren't material beings, in the sense that we are; and they really have no physical power outside of their own plane. All that they do have is a sort of snaky mesmerism, and they'll always try to drag you down to their own dimension by means of it. God help anyone who yields to them; but you don't have to go, unless you are weak, or willing. I've never had any doubt of my power to resist them; and I didn't really dream they could do anything to Marta.

"It startled me, though, when I saw the whole crowding hell-pack, and I ordered them to go pretty sharply. I was angry—and somewhat alarmed, too. But they merely grimaced and slavered, with that slow, twisting movement of their lips that is like a voiceless gibbering; and then they closed in on Marta, just as I represented them doing in that accursed group of sculpture. Only there were scores of them now, instead of merely seven.

"I can't describe how it happened, but all at once their foul talons had reached the girl, they were pawing her, were pulling at her hands, her arms, her body. She screamed—and I hope I'll never hear another scream so full of black agony and soul-unhinging fright. Then I knew that she had yielded to them—either from choice, or from excess of terror—and knew that they were taking her away.

"For a moment, the studio wasn't there at all—only a long, grey, oozing plain, beneath skies where the fumes of hell were writhing like a million ghostly and distorted dragons. Marta was sinking into that ooze—and the Things were all about her, were gathering in fresh hundreds from every side, were fighting each other for place, were sinking with her like bloated, misshapen fen-creatures into their native slime. Then everything vanished—and I was standing here in the studio—all alone with these damned sculptures."

He paused for a little, and stared with dreary, desolate eyes at the floor. Then:

“It was awful, Philip, and I’ll never forgive myself for having anything to do with those monsters. I must have been a little mad; but I’ve always had a strong ambition to create some real stuff in the field of the grotesque and visionary and macabre. I don’t suppose you ever suspected, back in my stodgy phase, that I had a veritable appetence for such things. I wanted to do in sculpture what Poe and Lovecraft and Baudelaire have done in literature, what Rops and Goya did in pictorial art.

“That was what led me into the occult, when I realized my limitations. I knew that I had to *see* the dwellers of the invisible worlds before I could depict them. I wanted to do it, I longed for this power of vision and representation more than anything else… And then, all at once, I found that I had the power of summoning the unseen.

“There was no magic involved, in the usual sense of the word—no spells and circles, no pentacles and burning gums from old sorcery-books. At bottom, it was just will-power, I guess—a will to divine the Satanic, to summon the innumerable malignities and grotesqueries that people other planes than ours, or mingle unperceived with humanity.

“You’ve no idea what I have beheld, Philip. These statues of mine—these devils, vampires, lamias, satyrs—were all done from life, or, at least from recent memory. The originals are what the occultists would call elementals, I suppose. There are endless worlds, contiguous to our own, or co-existing with it, that such beings inhabit. All the creations of myth and fantasy, all the familiar spirits that sorcerers have evoked, are resident in these worlds.

“I made myself their master, I levied upon them at will… Then, from a dimension that must be a little lower than all others, a little nearer the ultimate nadir of hell, I called the innominate beings who posed for this new figure-piece.

“I don’t know what they are—but I have surmised a good deal. They are hateful as the worms of the Pit, they are malevolent as harpies, they drool with a poisonous hunger not to be named or imagined… But I believed that they were powerless to do anything outside of their own sphere; and I’ve always laughed at them when they tried to entice me—even though that snakish mental pull of theirs was rather creepy at times. It was as if soft,

invisible, gelatinous arms were trying to drag you down from the firm shore into a bottomless bog.

“They are hunters—I am sure of that—the hunters from Beyond. God knows what they will do to Marta now that they have her at their mercy. That vast, viscid, miasma-haunted place to which they took her is awful beyond the imagining of a Satan. Perhaps—even there—they couldn’t harm her body. But bodies aren’t what they want—it isn’t for human flesh that they grope with those ghoulish claws, and gape and slaver with those gangrenous mouths. The brain itself—and the soul, too—is their food: they are the creatures who prey on the minds of madmen and madwomen, who devour the disembodied spirits that have fallen from the cycles of incarnation, have gone down beyond the possibility of rebirth.

“To think of Marta in their power—it is worse than hell or madness… Marta loved me—and I loved her, too, though I didn’t have the sense to realize it, wrapped as I was in my dark, baleful ambition and impious egotism. She was afraid for me—and I believe she surrendered voluntarily to the Things. She must have thought that they would leave me alone—if they secured another victim in my place…”

He ceased, and began to pace idly and feverishly about. I saw that his hollow eyes were alight with torment, as if the mechanical telling of his horrible story had in some manner served to re-quicken his crushed mind. Utterly and starkly appalled by his hideous revelations, I could say nothing, but could only stand and watch his torture-twisted face.

Incredibly, his expression changed, with a wild, startled look that was instantly transfigured into joy. Turning to follow his gaze, I saw that Marta was standing in the center of the room. She was nude, except for a Spanish shawl that she must have worn while posing. Her face was bloodless as the marble of a tomb, and her eyes were wide and blank, as if she had been drained of all life, of all thought or emotion or memory—as if even the knowledge of horror had been taken away from her. It was the face of the living dead, the soulless mask of ultimate idiocy; and the joy faded from Cyprian’s eyes as he stepped toward her.

He took her in his arms, he spoke to her with a desperate, loving tenderness, with cajoling and caressing words. But she made no answer, no movement of recognition or awareness, but stared beyond him with her blank eyes, to which the daylight and the darkness, the void air and her lover’s face, would henceforward be the same. He and I both knew, in that

instant, that she would never again respond to any human voice, or to human love or terror; that she was like an empty cerement, retaining the outward form of that which the worms have eaten in their mausolean darkness. Of the noisome pits wherein she had been, of that bournless realm and its pullulating phantoms, she could tell us nothing: her agony had ended with the terrible mercy of complete forgetfulness.

Like one who confronts the Gorgon, I was frozen by her wide and sightless gaze. Then, behind her, where stood an array of carven Satans and lamias, the room seemed to recede, the walls and floors dissolved in a seething, unfathomable gulf, amid whose pestilential vapors the statues were mingled in momentary and loathsome ambiguity with the ravening faces, the hunger-contorted forms that swirled toward us from their ultra-dimensional limbo like a devil-laden hurricane from Malebolge. Outlined against that boiling measureless cauldron of malignant storm, Marta stood like an image of glacial death and silence in the arms of Cyprian. Then, once more, after a little, the abhorrent vision faded, leaving only the diabolic statuary.

I think that I alone had beheld it; that Cyprian had seen nothing but the dead, mindless face of Marta. He drew her close, he repeated his hopeless words of tenderness and cajolery. Then, suddenly, he released her with a vehement sob of despair. Turning away, while she stood and still looked on with unseeing eyes, he snatched a heavy sculptor’s mallet from the table on which it was lying, and proceeded to smash with furious blows the newly-modelled group of gargoyles, till nothing was left but the figure of the terror-maddened girl, crouching above a mass of cloddish fragments and formless, half-dried clay.

APPENDIX ONE:
STORY NOTES

***Abbreviations Used**:*

AWD August W. Derleth (1909-1971), Wisconsin novelist, *Weird Tales* author, and founder of Arkham House.

AY The Abominations of Yondo (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1960).

BB The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1979).

BL Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

CAS Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961).

DAW Donald A. Wandrei (1908-1937), poet, *Weird Tales* writer and co-founder of Arkham House.

EOD Emperor of Dreams: A Clark Ashton Smith Bio-Bibliography by Donald Sidney-Fryer et al. (West Kingston, RI: Donald M. Grant, 1978).

ES The End of the Story: The Collected Fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith, Volume One. Ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2006).

FFT The Freedom of Fantastic Things. Ed. Scott Connors (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2006).

FW Farnsworth Wright (1888-1940), editor of *Weird Tales* from 1924 to 1939.

GL Genius Loci and Other Tales (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1948).

HPL Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937), informal leader of a circle of writers for *Weird Tales* and related magazines, and probably the leading exponent of weird fiction in the twentieth century.

JHL Clark Ashton Smith Papers and H. P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.

LL Letters to H. P. Lovecraft. Ed. Steve Behrends (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1987).

LW Lost Worlds (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1944).
MHS Donald Wandrei Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
OD Other Dimensions (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1970).
OST Out of Space and Time (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1942).
PD Planets and Dimensions: Collected Essays. Ed. Charles K. Wolfe (Baltimore: Mirage Press, 1973).
PP Poems in Prose (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965).
RAA Rendezvous in Averoigne (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1988).
RHB Robert H. Barlow (1918-1951), correspondent and collector of manuscripts of CAS, HPL, and other *WT* writers.
RW Red World of Polaris. Ed. Ronald S. Hilger and Scott Connors (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2003).
SHSW August Derleth Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin Library.
SL Selected Letters of Clark Ashton Smith. Ed. David E. Schultz and Scott Connors (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 2003).
SS Strange Shadows: The Uncollected Fiction and Essays of Clark Ashton Smith. Ed. Steve Behrends with Donald Sidney-Fryer and Rah Hoffman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989).
ST Strange Tales, a pulp edited by Harry Bates in competition with *WT.*
SU The Shadow of the Unattained: The Letters of George Sterling and Clark Ashton Smith. Ed. David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2005).
TI Tales of India and Irony. Ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2007).
TSS Tales of Science and Sorcery (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1964).
WS Wonder Stories, a pulp published by Hugo Gernsback and edited first by David Lasser and then Charles D. Hornig.
WT Weird Tales, Smith's primary market for fiction, edited by FW (1924-1940) and later Dorothy McIlwraith (1940-1954).

The Door to Saturn

Completed on July 26, 1930, "The Door to Saturn" was one of Smith's favorites among his own tales "partly on account of its literary style."[1] (He later remarked that "I take out the ms. and read it over, when I am too bored to read anything in my book-cases!"[2])CAS explained to HPL that "I find it highly important, when I begin a tale, to establish at once what might be called the appropriate 'tone.' If this is clearly determined at the start I seldom have much difficulty in maintaining it; but if it isn't, there is likely to be trouble. [...] The style of a yarn like 'The Door to Saturn'" forms still another genre; and this tale seemed unusually successful to me in its unity of 'tone.'" Unfortunately its "light ironic touch helped to make it seem 'unconvincing' to Wright,"[3] who rejected it no fewer than three times.[4] He would later fume to Lovecraft that

> The style—or lack of it—required by nearly all magazine editors, would call for a separate treatise. The idea seems to be that everything should be phrased in a manner that will obviate mental effort on the part of the lowest grade moron. I was told the other day that my 'Door to Saturn' could be read only with a dictionary—also, that I would sell more stories if I were to simplify my vocabulary.[5]

The story finally found a home at *ST*, whose editor, Harry Bates, appreciated "the slight humor that emerges from time to time."[6] Smith appreciated the irony of the situation, noting "It will be a josh if *Strange Tales* should take ['The Door to Saturn']" because *ST* paid "exactly double" what he "would have received from Wright" for the story.[7] However, Bates had noticed that the typescript was somewhat battered from its repeated rejections, so he asked CAS "to tell him, for his own edification, what reasons other editors had given for turning it down."[8] Smith selected the story for inclusion in *OST*, but it was not collected until *LW*.[9] Our text uses a carbon copy of the typescript held by the JHL.

1. CAS, letter to AWD, September 15, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
2. CAS, letter to AWD, January 20, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. November 16, 1930 (*SL* 137).
4. "The only way I can land a lot of my stuff is through repeated submission, revision, etc. One needs to be hard-boiled about rejections. I

doubt, though, if I'll ever achieve the persistence of Derleth, who says that he has sold some of his things to Wright on the tenth or eleventh trip! Three submissions of a tale (to Wright) has been my limit so far; but some of my things have gathered a multitude of 'regrets' before landing. 'The Door to Saturn,' for example, garnered at least six or seven rejections." CAS, letter to HPL [c. mid-March 1932] (*LL* 35).

5. CAS, letter to HPL, c. mid-December 1930 (*LL* 23).
6. Harry Bates, letter to CAS, July 31, 1931 (ms, JHL).
7. CAS, letter to DAW, August 7, 1931 (ms, MHS).
8. CAS, letter to AWD, September 15, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
9. CAS, letter to AWD, September 5, 1941 (*SL* 333).

The Red World of Polaris

As was described in *ES* (274-75), Captain Volmar and the crew of the ether-ship *Alcyone* made their first appearance in "Marooned in Andromeda" (*WS* October 1930). David Lasser, who edited the magazine for publisher Hugo Gernsback, surprised Smith by proposing "a series of tales about the same crew of characters (Capt. Volmar, etc.) and their adventures on different planets, saying that they would use a novelette of this type every other month."He described it as "pseudo-scientific with a vengeance: it deals with a race of people who had their brains transplanted into indestructible metal bodies, and who were going to perform the same office for the humans who visited their world." He added that "there are possibilities in this type of story, though I'd prefer writing something even more extra-terrestrial, with no human characters at all." Smith completed the first draft during a camping trip to the nearby Sierra mountains late in August 1930, wryly telling HPL that the magnificent scenery "is more likely to be a source of distraction than inspiration, except in retrospect."[1] He would later reconsiderthis, admitting that "Probably the mountain scenery was a stimulant to my writing—but it was so tremendous that it temporarily altered and confused my sense of values. Mere words didn't seem to stand up in the presence of those peaks and cliffs. But now, amid the perspectives of familiar surroundings, 'The Red World' doesn't seem so bad. The last chapter could afford themes for Doré or Martin, in regard to cataclysmic scope at any rate."[2]

Smith wrote to Lovecraft a couple of months later that the editors were requesting that he add some action to the story, objecting that the first part was "almost wholly descriptive;" he added that "this pretense of being scientific gives me a pain. The mythology of science is not one that intrigues me very deeply."[3] Other complaints by Lasser may have found their way into another letter to Lovecraft: "Most interplanetary yarns might as well have been laid on earth—as far as I can see—the characters seem no more affected by their alien milieu than if they were in some exotic terrestrial region. But certainly, the usual editorial requirements militate against any attempt at a sound psychological treatment... 'The story is too leisurely.' 'No plot, no complications.' 'Put some more action in it.'"[4]

Despite some perfunctory attempts at revision, Lasser finally ended up rejecting the story. Smith would later describe the story to Robert H.

Barlow as “passably written, but suffers from triteness of plot.”[5] This may be the reason why he did not spend any further effort on revising the story, since at 13,000 words he had already invested a relatively tremendous amount of time and effort into the tale. This is too bad, because while “The Red World of Polaris” would not have fit into the “Cowboys-and-Indians-in-space” formula of *Astounding Stories* at this time, Mike Ashley suggests that “it would almost certainly have appealed to F. Orlin Tremaine when he became editor of *Astounding Stories* a few years later, in 1933, when the magazine was developing its ‘thought variant’ stories,” or even with a little rewrite to FW at *WT* itself.[6]

Smith sold the only typescripts of two stories, “The Red World of Polaris” and “Like Mohammed’s Tomb” (written *circa* October 1930), to Michael DeAngelis, a fan then living in Brooklyn, New York who had reprinted CAS’ poem “The Ghoul and the Seraph” as a limited edition pamphlet in 1950. DeAngelis planned to publish the two stories either as separate pamphlets or in a fanzine, but vanished, taking the typescript with him. (It is believed that he had sold the typescript for “Like Mohammed’s Tomb” to another Brooklyn fan, but it remains at this time still lost.) Numerous attempts to locate DeAngelis were made over the years by Smith, Derleth, Roy Squires, Donald Sidney-Fryer, Douglas A. Anderson, and Steve Behrends, but all met with failure until Ron Hilger thought to contact DeAngelis’ co-editor for the fanzine *Asmodeus*, Alan H. Pesetsky, in May 2003. Pesetsky located a typed copy of the story that he had prepared for publication in their fanzine, and was kind enough to provide us with a copy. It was first published as the title story of the collected Volmar stories by Night Shade Books in 2003.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, August 22, 1930 (*SL* 117-118). (Note: this letter was incorrectly described as *to* CAS *by* David Lasser in both *ES* (275, n5) and our introduction to *RW*, “The Magellan of the Constellations,” page 3.)
2. CAS, letter to HPL, c. mid-September 1930 (*SL* 119-120).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. October 24, 1930 (*LL* 15).
4. CAS, letter to HPL, November 10 [1930] (*SL* 132).
5. CAS, letter to RHB, May 16, 1937 (*SL* 301).
6. Mike Ashley, “Evoking Wonder.” *Lost Worlds* no. 3 (2006): 31.

Told in the Desert

This story was conceived in late 1929 and according to Smith's "Completed Stories" log was written after the completion of "The Red World of Polaris" in late August 1930 but before "The Willow Landscape." According to a surviving synopsis, it was to have been originally entitled "Neria":

> A wanderer in the desert, who finds an oasis inhabited only by a beautiful girl, named Neria. He loves her, and is content to dwell with her for awhile; but at last he feels that he must return to the world for awhile, in spite of the girl's warning that he will never find her again if he does. He goes away, and later seeks to find the oasis again, but spends his whole life searching for it in vain.[1]

Smith sent August Derleth the typescripts of three unpublished stories, "The Metamorphosis of the World," "An Offering to the Moon," and this, late in the summer of 1950; in his letter Smith described the tale as "a lengthy and rather uneven prose-poem."[2] While Derleth was able to place the first two stories with *WT*, "Told in the Desert" remained unpublished until 1964, when Derleth included it in an anthology of original or unpublished stories, *Over the Edge*, published by Arkham House. No manuscript or typescript survives at either JHL or SHSW, and a search of the remaining archives at Arkham House failed to locate the tale. It was collected posthumously in *OD*.

1. *SS* 157.
2. CAS, letter to AWD, August 7, 1950.

The Willow Landscape

Completed on September 8, 1930, "The Willow Landscape" was rejected by FW "as it does not seem exactly suited to *Weird Tales*, and it lacks the swift action that we want for *Oriental Stories*."[1] This evoked the following response from Lovecraft: "It is like Wright to reject 'The Willow Landscape'. The damn fool! *Action*—hell, what a standard! And yet I know that is the god of the herd."[2] Smith then submitted it to *Ghost Stories* where it "drew the only editorial compliment ('very charming and poetic') which this tale has yet received."[3] As an example of the lengths to which Smith was willing to pursue a sale, he finally managed to place the tale with the *Philippine Magazine*, noting that "The rates are nothing very gaudy; but the editor seems to be appreciative."[4] It was published in the May 1931 issue "with a very charming illustration by a native artist."[5]

Smith would later include "The Willow Landscape" in *DS*, describing it on an advertising flyer he prepared for the booklet as "A fanciful Chinese tale, about an impoverished scholar and the old landscape painting with which he was loath to part." FW later accepted the story and published in the June-July 1939 issue of *WT*, accompanied by a fine illustration by Virgil Finlay. It was included in *GL*. However, "The Willow Landscape" has the singular distinction in Smith's work of being selected for performance by the monologist "Brother Theodore" (Theodore Gottlieb) on his 1959 LP album *Coral Records Presents Theodore In Stereo.* The present text comes from a typescript presented to Genevieve K. Sully that was checked against *DS*.

1. FW, letter to CAS, September 22, 1930 (ms, JHL).
2. HPL, letter to CAS, October 17, 1930 (ms, JHL).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. January 27, 1931 (*SL* 144).
4. CAS, letter to AWD, May 8, 1931 (*SL* 153).
5. CAS, letter to AWD, June 15, 1931 (*SL* 154).

A Rendezvous in Averoigne

One of Smith's most popular and most reprinted stories, "A Rendezvous in Averoigne" was completed on September 13, 1930. As discussed in the notes to "The Satyr" (*ES* 271-272), Lovecraft encouraged Smith to write further stories set in his imaginary medieval French province, and that summer CAS wrote him that "I think of beginning one as soon as I can work out a suitable plot, and will carry it on alternately with new 'shorts' and novelettes. Averoigne in medieval times might be a fruitful milieu."[1] FW snapped the story up, telling CAS that "I would be insensible to the appeal of pure beauty if I rejected this story, 'A Rendezvous in Averoigne.' I am only sorry that we cannot pay a higher rate for it."[2] (Wright paid Smith fifty-six dollars for the tale.) Lovecraft waxed rhapsodic in an undated postcard:

> Magnificent!! It's a wonder Wright took it—but I guess he was charmed into recognizing merit & laying aside his cheap-tradesmen standards for once in his life! I don't know when I've ever seen so fine an evocation of malign & sinister atmosphere. Rotting, unwholesome ambiguity drips & oozes & festers on every page! Averoigne is surely a place where one had better keep to the high-roads! The central idea makes me think of something I was going to write—albeit in a very different way—one of the notes in my commonplace book reads: "A very ancient tomb in a deep wood where a 17th century Virginia manor-house once stood. The bloated, undecayed thing found inside it." My tale would probably be of a Randolph Carterish sort—but quasi-realistic, & contemporary in period! There would be an historic antecedent, harking back to the earliest days of Jamestown, & a moldy document found & perused with nightmare trepidation.[3]

Smith responded that "I am greatly pleased to learn that the new Averoigne tale was so much to your taste. It is one of my own favorites—in fact, I like it much better than the celebrated 'End of the Story'."[4] A few days earlier Smith contrasted the composition of stories such as this with the stories he was writing for *WS*, complaining that "I would vastly prefer to write tales of the supernatural and the purely fantastic like 'Averoigne',"[5] which illustrates how he came to prefer to set his stories in secondary

worlds that he invented out of whole cloth. The story was published in the April-May 1931 issue of *WT*, and was voted the most popular story in that issue by the readers in its letter column, “The Eyrie.”

When the John Day Company published the anthology *Creeps By Night*, which was ostensibly edited by Dashiell Hammett, they approached both Wright and Derleth for story recommendations, and both recommended “A Rendezvous in Averoigne;” unfortunately, it did not achieve the dignity of hard covers until it was collected in *OST*. It provided the title for Arkham House’s 1989 omnibus of “the best of Clark Ashton Smith.” The text for this story is derived from the carbon copy of the typescript at JHL, compared with the original *WT* appearance and a copy of *OST* that was corrected by Smith.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, June 29, 1930 (ms, JHL).
2. FW, letter to CAS, September 22, 1930 (ms, JHL).
3. Private collection.
4. CAS, letter to HPL, c. October 24, 1930 (*SL* 129).
5. CAS, letter to HPL, c. October 21, 1930 (*LL* 15).

The Gorgon

Originally titled “Medusa,” this story was completed on October 2, 1930. The theme was long a favorite of Smith’s, dating as far back as his first collections of poetry: *The Star-Treader and Other Poems* (San Francisco: A. M. Robertson, 1912) contained the poems “Medusa” and “The Medusa of the Skies,” and “The Medusa of Despair” was included both in *Odes and Sonnets* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1918) and *Ebony and Crystal: Poems in Verse and Prose* (Auburn, CA: Auburn Journal Press, 1922). Lovecraft called the story “really splendid, & I read it over twice with increasing admiration. You strike an atmospheric note to which I am particularly susceptible—the mystery of unknown, ancient, & labyrinthine streets—& I have never seen that alluring theme more effectively handled. If Wright doesn’t snap that up, he’s absolutely out of his head!”[1] Naturally, Wright rejected the story, calling it “unconvincing,” only to accept it a year later upon resubmission.[2] Smith also submitted the story to *Ghost Stories*, which returned the manuscript “after holding it six weeks, with a personal letter expressing interest in my work and a desire to see more of it. I’m surprised to infer, from this, that they gave the story serious consideration—which was hardly to be expected in view of their standards, which seem to call for a combination of spookiness and raw human interest.”[3] Harry Bates of *ST* also didn’t care for the story and returned it.[4]

After August Derleth pointed out to Smith that *WT* had published a story called “Medusa” several years earlier (“Medusa” by Royal W. Jimerson appeared in the April 1928 issue). Smith changed the title to “Medusa’s Head” and finally to “The Gorgon.” Wright used the story as filler in the April 1932 issue of *WT.*“The Gorgon,” along with “The Venus of Azombeii,” received third ranking in the *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1932*, edited by Blanche Colton Williams (New York: Doubleday, 1932); Smith remarked that “Personally, I think it’s a long way from being my best. But there you are. Judges, editors, critics, all of them are more or less bughouse. And I suppose that any kind of a weird tale is lucky to receive official mention in an age tyrannized over by realism.”[5] Text is based upon the typescript at JHL; BL has a carbon that CAS presented to Donald Wandrei, but this copy lacks several handwritten changes found on the JHL copy.

1. HPL, letter to CAS, October 17, 1930.
2. CAS, letter to AWD, October 23, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. November 16, 1930 (*SL* 134).
4. Harry Bates, letter to CAS, May 20, 1931 (ms, JHL).
5. CAS, letter to AWD, November 24, 1932 (*SL* 197).

An Offering to the Moon

As CAS continued to write and sell stories to *WT*, *WS*, and other markets, he and HPL began a discussion of their respective theories regarding aesthetics, realism versus romanticism, and related topics. On October 17, 1930, Lovecraft revealed the following personal glimpse in support of his "conception of phantasy, as a genuine art-form, is *an extension rather than a negation of reality*";

> In fact I *know* that my most poignant emotional experiences are those which concern the lure of unplumbed space, the terror of the encroaching outer void, & the struggle of the ego to transcend the known & established order of time, [...] space, matter, force, geometry, & natural law in tantalising mnemonic fragments expressed in unknown or half-known architectural or landscape vistas, especially in connexion with a sunset. Some instantaneous fragment of a picture will well up suddenly through some chain of subconscious association —the immediate excitant being usually half-irrelevant on the surface —& fill me with a sense of wistful memory & bafflement; with the impression that the scene in question represents something I have seen & visited before under circumstances of superhuman liberation & adventurous expectancy, yet which I have almost completely forgotten, & which is so bewilderingly uncorrelated & unoriented as to be forever inaccessible in the future.[1]

Smith replied that

> I don’t think I have had anything quite like the pseudo-mnemonic flashes you describe. What I have had sometimes is the nocturnal dream-experience of stepping into some totally alien state of entity, with its own memories, hopes, desires, its own past and future-none of which I can ever remember for very long on awakening. This experience has suggested such tales as “The Planet of the Dead”, “The Necromantic Tale,” and “An Offering to the Moon”. I think I have spoken of the place-images which often rise before me without apparent relevance, and persist in attaching themselves to some train of emotion or even abstract thought. These, doubtless, are akin to the images of which you speak, though they are always clearly realistic.[2]

Completed no later than October 21, 1930, “An Offering to the Moon” may have resulted from Smith’s recent reading: “The book by James Churchward, *The Lost Continent of Mu*, [...] is truly interesting, especially in the mass of data relating to South Sea ruins which is presented.”[3] Although he recognized that it “perhaps isn’t quite my best,” Smith was eager to learn what HPL made of the tale.[4] Lovecraft enjoyed the story, adding that

> Mnemonic tales, vaguely suggesting reincarnation or other-dimensional existence, are peculiarly fascinating to me; & nothing stirs my fancy more than the inexplicable stone ruins of the Pacific. [...] Your sense of totally alien worlds must be vastly more fascinating than my own fragmentary & incomplete detachments, & you certainly make effective use of them in tales like ‘An Offering to the Moon.’ The place-images are likewise highly alluring, & I hope to see many fictional reflections of them.[5]

FW rejected it, calling it “wordy and somehow—I do not know why—unconvincing; though that is a splendid paragraph on page 14 describing the death of Morley on the altar. Part of what follows seems anti-climax....”[6] Smith remarked that “... I suspect, too, that ‘An Offering to the Moon’ was doubtless queered with him by the addition of an element which was far from weird—that is to say, the full development of the stodgy Thorway as a

foil to Morley. Of course, the ‘action’ was held up by the archaeological discussion which brought out this difference.”[7] Smith tried the story on other markets, including *Ghost Stories* and the *Philippine Magazine*, before re-submitting the story to *WT*. Wright rejected it once more, adding that it was “not a bad story—in fact I don’t think you have ever sent me a truly poor story; but it seems far from being your best work.”[8] (One reason why it might have been rejected the second time is that it was submitted along with “The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis,” which FW accepted, so it seemed all the poorer by comparison. In addition, most publishers do not view too great a backlog of stories by any one writer as a good thing.)

The story languished until 1950, when Smith sent three unpublished stories to Derleth for use in a possible original anthology. (The other two were “The Metamorphosis of the World” and “Told in the Desert.”) Dorothy McIlwraith, Wright’s successor at *WT*, accepted the story for its September 1953 issue, but as of October 1954 the magazine had not paid Smith for the story; and as it went bankrupt after publishing the September 1954 issue, he might never have received his check for the tale.

A carbon of the original typescript may be found at JHL, but it differs considerably from the version published in *WT* and later collected posthumously in *OD*. Smith’s letter to August Derleth of November 3, 1931 suggests that the second submission to FW may have represented a rewritten version, but no such version has yet come to light.[9] It is even possible that Derleth rewrote part of the story and submitted this to McIlwraith on Smith’s behalf, although we have no evidence to suggest that this is the case except for Derleth’s history of such alteration to stories by William Hope Hodgson and others. Insomuch as the version published in *WT* addressed FW’s main objection—that some of the story after Morley’s death was an anti-climax—we have chosen to regard the JHL typescript as an earlier draft and use the published version for our text. And when all is said and done, we feel that the version published by *WT* represents the better text.

1. HPL, letter to CAS, October 17, 1930 (*Selected Letters III*, Ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei [Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1971]: 196-197.).
2. CAS, letter to HPL, c. October 24, 1930 (*SL* 128).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, November 16, 1930 (*SL* 135).

4. CAS, letter to HPL, November 10, 1930 (*SL* 132).
5. HPL, letter to CAS, November 7, 1930 (ms, private collection).
6. FW, letter to CAS, November 11, 1930 (ms, JHL).
7. CAS, letter to HPL, c. November 16, 1930 (*SL* 137).
8. FW, letter to CAS, October 29, 1931 (ms, JHL).
9. CAS, letter to AWD, November 3, 1931 (*SL* 164).

The Kiss of Zoraida

FW announced during the summer of 1930 plans to launch a new magazine, *Oriental Stories* (later renamed *The Magic Carpet*). Smith may have had this market in mind when he completed this story on October 15, 1930. He described it to Lovecraft a few days later as “an ungodly piece of pseudo-Oriental junk.”[1] FW rejected it at first, but later accepted it on grounds that it was “ ‘distinctively Oriental’ when I sent it in last year. The insertion of a few thees and thous in the dialogue, and the omission of one or two ironic touches that were more universal than Eastern, seem to have changed his opinion.”[2] Smith would describe the story as “not a weird tale at all, but what the French would call *un conte cruel.* It is well enough done, with some touches of terrific irony.”[3] The story first appeared in *The Magic Carpet* for July 1933, and was reprinted posthumously in *OD*. The present text comes from a typescript presented to Genevieve K. Sully.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, c. October 21, 1930 (ms, JHL).
2. CAS, letter to AWD, November 3, 1931 (*SL* 164).
3. CAS, letter to AWD, November 12, 1931 (ms, SHSW).

The Face by the River

Written on October 29, 1930, CAS wrote Lovecraft that he composed the tale in a single day, and described it as not having "much of the cosmic in it; but it might interest you as an attempt at psychological realism."[1] There is no record of Smith's having submitted it anywhere, but in his reply of November 7, 1930, Lovecraft observed that "The element of relentless Nemesis-pursuit in 'The Face' is very effectively handled—& given a realism too seldom cultivated in tales with this theme."[2]

Its genesis may be found in some remarks he had penned a few days earlier, also to HPL. As part of an ongoing exchange regarding realism, romanticism, and aesthetic theory in general, CAS informed his correspondent that "I have undergone a complete revulsion against the purely realistic school, including the French, and can no longer stomach even Anatole France."[3] Yet here he has written a story that deals with "the morbidly exaggerated prying into one's own vitals—and the vitals of others—which Robinson Jeffers has so aptly symbolized as 'incest'."[4] He further clarified his objections to realism as being based upon an aversion to "the limiting and sterilizing influence of a too slavish, uninspired literalism," and singled out Thomas Hardy as an example of realism which included "an ever-present apprehension of the cosmic mysteries and fatalities that environ life."[5] Smith's onetime literary executor Roy A. Squires found a copy of the manuscript among Smith's papers after his death, but by the time these papers had been deposited at JHL it was no longer there. A carbon copy was found among the papers of Genevieve K. Sully. It was first published in the premiere issue of the scholarly journal *Lost Worlds: The Journal of Clark Ashton Smith Studies* in 2003.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, October 30, 1930 (*SL* 130).
2. HPL, letter to CAS, November 7, 1930 (ms, JHL).
3. CAS, letter to HPL [c. late October 1930] (*SL* 123).
4. Letter to "The Reader Speaks," *WS* (August 1932); in *PD* 12. (as "On Garbage-Mongering").
5. Letter to "The Reader Speaks," *WS* (February 1933); in *PD* 20 (as "Realism and Fantasy").

The Ghoul

Smith completed "The Ghoul" on November 11, 1930. He described it to Lovecraft as depicting a "legend... so hideous, that I would not be surprised if there were some mention of it in the *Necronomicon*. Will you verify this for me?"[1] Lovecraft response was in the same spirit: "Oh, yes—Abdul mentioned your ghoul, & told of other adventures of his. But some timid reader has torn out the pages where the Episode of the Vault under the Mosque comes to a climax—the deletion being curiously uniform in the copies at Harvard & at Miskatonic University. When I wrote to the University of Paris for information about the missing text, a polite sub-librarian, M. Leon de Vercheres, wrote me that he would make me a photostatic copy as soon as he could comply with the formalities attendant upon access to the dreaded volume. Unfortunately it was not long afterward that I learned of M. de Vercheres' sudden insanity & incarceration, & of his attempt to burn the hideous book which he had just secured & consulted. Thereafter my requests met with scant notice—& and I have not yet looked up any of the other few surviving copies of the *Necronomicon*." In a more serious vein Lovecraft praised the story as possessing "the Arabian Nights atmosphere to perfection, both in content & language, & if Wright is in his senses he will snap it up for *Oriental Stories*... it savours completely of the Beckford-Vathek period, & of the banks of the Tigris itself."[2]

FW rejected it for both *WT* and *OS* (the latter was not accepting any weird stories),[3] as did Harold Hersey for *Ghost Stories*.[4] Smith later gave the story away, first to Carl Swanson and then to Charles D. Hornig, who published it in the January 1934 issue of *The Fantasy Fan*. The text is based upon a manuscript at JHL.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, c. November 16, 1930 (*SL* 136).
2. HPL, letter to CAS, November 18, 1930 (ms, JHL).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. mid-December 1930 (ms, JHL).
4. CAS, letter to HPL, c. January 27, 1931 (*SL* 144).

The Kingdom of the Worm

Sir John Mandeville, or Maundeville as Smith preferred, was a 15th century English knight whose book of travel tales reveal him to be something of a Munchausen. His exotic and frequently weird imagination found a receptive audience among the circle of writers centered upon Smith and H. P. Lovecraft; Frank Belknap Long wrote one of his poems depicting Sir John's marriage. Smith owned a much-battered copy of Maundeville's *Voyages and Travels* that he rebound himself in cardboard and colored paper, adding that "the effect, with the aid of gold paint and water color, is very rich and ornate."[1] Sir John's colorful history lead Smith to write "A Tale of Sir John Maundeville" between November 16 and 18, 1930, about the same time that he wrote "The Ghoul." Like the latter, Smith composed the story as "a deliberate study in the archaic."[2] He slyly remarked to Lovecraft in that same letter that "The Kingdom of Antchar, which I have invented for this tale, is more unwholesome, if possible, than Averoigne!" Lovecraft agreed, writing that

> Your Maundeville tale packed a great kick for me, because that description of Abchaz & the zone of darkness had stuck persistently in my memory ever since the first reading of Sir John. You have certainly developed the idea with tremendous effectiveness, & in a manner worthy of the wandering knight himself. I hope Wright will take this—it is both weird & Oriental, but one never can tell about Brother Farnsworth. Antchar surely surpasses Averoigne in potency of terror, & ought to be good for a whole series of tales.[3]

Unfortunately, FW returned the story, remarking that it was "interesting, but there is very little plot to it; in fact, I might almost say that there is no plot at all."[4] This rejection irked Smith considerably, since in a discussion of Wright's sometimes capricious editorial policy he complained that "Certainly he has turned down some of my best things too—'The Door to Saturn' and 'A Tale of Sir John Maundeville' being notable instances, not to mention 'Helman Carnby'."[5] Smith later gave the story to Carl Swanson, and then to Charles D. Hornig after Swanson's planned magazine failed to appear. It was published in the second (October 1933) issue of *The Fantasy*

Fan as “The Kingdom of the Worm,” and collected posthumously in *OD* under the title “A Tale of Sir John Maundeville.”

This is where things begin to get somewhat tricky. The typescript of the story at JHL is an eleven-page typed draft under the title “A Tale of Sir John Maundeville.” This version differs considerably from the version published by Hornig. Smith may have suffered editorial tampering when that was the only way to ensure a sale, but it is doubtful that he would have taken this from a non-paying amateur for whom he was doing a favor. Since Smith had three more stories appear in *The Fantasy Fan*, we doubt that the changes are the result of Hornig’s tampering. There is also the matter of the “Foreword” that appears in the amateur appearance. This is not present in the surviving draft. Smith’s letter to Derleth of July 12, 1933, indicates that he either originated the change of title to “The Kingdom of the Worm” or, unlike the various name changes his stories suffered at the hands of Lasser and Gernsback, at least agreed with the change, as with the change of “Medusa” to “The Gorgon.” Our decision to follow the text as it appears in *The Fantasy Fan* was reinforced by the discovery that a ten-page typescript under the title “The Kingdom of the Worm” was offered for sale by the California bookman Roy A. Squires, who was Smith’s literary executor for a time. Squires, who was known for his precise and accurate descriptions of all items in his catalogs, described this typescript as “THE KINGDOM OF THE WORM. Original typewritten manuscript of the story published in *The Fantasy Fan*, October 1933. Ten 4to leaves. Numerous discreet pencil marks by the printer; twice folded, a bit soiled.”[6] This is probably the typescript used by Hornig in the preparation of his magazine. If the owner of this typescript somehow reads this, please contact the editors care of the publisher.

The central image of this story is one that Smith found to be very powerful, since he returned to it often. For instance, in his poem “The Hashish-Eater” we read in lines 386-89

> On the throne
> There lolls a wan, enormous Worm, whose bulk,
> Tumid with all the rottenness of kings,
> Overflows its arms with fold on creasêd fold
> Obscenely bloating.[7]

In addition, one of the editors once owned a pencil drawing by Smith, originally given to Samuel Loveman that he purchased from book dealer Gerry de la Ree in the early seventies, which Smith had given the title “The Worm Enthroned,” depicting precisely what the title would imply.

1. CAS, letter to AWD, May 12, 1933 (*SL* 205).
2. CAS, letter to HPL, c. November 16, 1930 (*SL* 137).
3. HPL, letter to CAS, November 18, 1930 (ms, JHL).
4. FW, letter to CAS, July 7, 1931 (ms, JHL).
5. CAS, letter to DAW, August 7, 1931 (ms, MHS).
6. Roy A. Squires, *Clark Ashton Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert H. Barlow: Catalog II* (Glendale, CA, 1969): item 26.
7. CAS, “The Hashish-Eater; or, The Apocalypse of Evil.” In *The Last Oblivion: Best Fantastic Poems of Clark Ashton Smith* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2002): 24-25.

An Adventure in Futurity

This story originated in a suggestion from editor David Lasser of *WS*:

> We can use in the near future in *Wonder Stories* a good time traveling story, concerning the adventures of a twentieth century man in the future.
> I would be glad to work the details of one out with you and help you to whip a good plot in shape. My thought is, in general, that you could show the adventures of a contemporary in some future century, and make it quite realistic.
> I believe that you have the ability to portray local color, so that you could show not only the difference in the physical surroundings and the mode of life of our descendants, but also in their different habits of thought. It is quite possible for a man going into the future, to find an entirely different set of moral and social ideas, as is illustrated very well in Shaw's "Back to Methuselah". He would find these people absorbed in entirely different ideas, and he would be truly lost as he would be among people of a different race.
> I have in mind a story in which no use is made of the old hackneyed, outworn plots. There need not be any rescues of fair maidens of the future, but instead I believe you could work out a stirring drama in which our twentieth century hero is a part.[1]

Smith had formed the idea of what would later become "The Letter from Mohaun Los" the previous month, and he was struck by the coincidence: "Odd that the idea of time-travelling stories should have been so much in my mind of late. Not long ago, I received a letter from the *Wonder Stories* editor, suggesting that I write for him a yarn of this type dealing with the future. I cooked up a synopsis which was approved; and I am now going ahead with the junk as fast as my cold will permit [...] With the former I am depicting an earth modified by interplanetary commerce and immigration, with the problem of 'unassimilable aliens' from Mars and Venus."[2] He finished the story on December 27, 1930, despite battling a severe cold, but confided to HPL that

> the time-story strikes me as an awful piece of junk. The Venusian slaves and their Martian abettors are left to divide the earth at the end, while the remainder of humanity (which has been driven to the polar regions) takes flight for the farther asteroids. I agree with you that inter-cosmic immigration will never do! The Martians might smuggle in the Black Rot, which devours whole cities and turns half the elements known to chemistry into a fine black powder. Also, there is the Yellow Death, that microscopic aerial algae from Venus, which grows in the air, turning it to a saffron color, and causing all terrestrials who breathe it to die of slow asphyxiation with violent pneumonia symptoms.[3]

Despite this frank appraisal of his story, Lovecraft (whose own personal aversion to immigrants is well known) wrote him that he found "An Adventure in Futurity" "really engrossing," and congratulated CAS on being able "to hit on a tone acceptable to these eckshun-hounds without succumbing utterly to the mechanical banality of their ideal. But of course anybody not a slave to their mannerisms will inevitably encounter a high rejection-percentage."[4]

And what did Lasser have to say of the story when he published it in the April 1931 issue of *WS*?

> The stories of Clark Ashton Smith ring with truth. He writes so well and so easily that the scenes that he tries to picture cannot help but be impressed on the minds of his readers.
>
> To write a real story of the future, needs this unusual faculty of writing imaginatively. The author must describe something that has not happened, in an age that has not yet arrived. To do this requires skill of the highest sort. That our author has this skill will be evident from almost the first words of the present story.
>
> The world of the future may not be the paradise that some people imagine. It is quite possible that for every advance in science there will comes with it some subtle damage to our bodies, our minds, our civilization. And it is quite possible that even when man thinks that he has found a golden age, he may realize, as the Greeks did, that destruction is just around the corner.[5]

Our text is from a typescript at JHL; judging from Lovecraft's letter to Smith of April 16, 1931, it appears that either Lasser or Gernsback made some "inane interpolations" to what Smith had written, which have been eliminated. The story was collected posthumously in *OD*.

1. David Lasser, letter to CAS, November 29, 1930 (ms, JHL).
2. CAS, letter to HPL, c. mid-December 1930 (*LL* 22).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. early-January 1931 (*SL* 141-142).
4. HPL, letter to CAS, April 16, 1931 (ms, JHL).
5. Editorial remarks to Clark Ashton Smith, "An Adventure in Futurity." *WS* 2, no. 11 (April 1931): 1232.

The Justice of the Elephant

Completed on December 29, 1930, Smith described this to Lovecraft as being "grim and gruesome; but [FW] *might* take it, since it doesn't involve the supernatural and is not at all poetic. The plot idea is quite similar to that of a tale which I sold to *The Black Cat* back in my boyhood."[1] (Smith refers to his story "The Mahout," first published in *The Black Cat* for August 1911, collected posthumously in *OD* and *TI*.) FW accepted the story for the August 1931 issue of *Oriental Stories* and paid Smith the total of fourteen dollars.[2] It was collected posthumously in *OD*. JHL possesses the holograph first draft, the first, revised typed draft, and a carbon copy of the final version accepted by FW.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, c. early January 1931 (*SL* 142).

2. Popular Fiction Publishing Company, letter to CAS, October 28, 1931 (ms, JHL).

The Return of the Sorcerer

Smith wrote to HPL on November 16, 1930 that "I seem to have had quite an influx of ghastly and gruesome ideas lately. Some of them will be real terrors, if they are developed properly. ...Another idea concerns a dismembered corpse, whose parts the murderer has buried in various spots. But presently he encounters some of the members running around and trying to re-unite and re-join the head, which he has kept in a locked closet!"[1] Smith's papers include the following synopsis for a proposed story to be called "The Re-union:" "A corpse has been dismembered, and its parts buried in different places by the murderer. He develops the hallucination that the pieces are trying to re-unite, and sees them running separately about in quest of each other."[2] Smith embraced Lovecraft's suggestion that "both the murderer and the victim [should be] practitioners of the Black Arts," and acknowledged this debt by "introducing the *Necronomicon*—in its original Arabic text."[3] The story went through several name changes, beginning with "Dismembered," then "A Rendering from the Arabic," before Smith settled on "The Return of Helman Carnby." Needing a break from cranking out "pseudoscience" for *WS*, Smith completed a typed draft on January 4, 1930, but continued to make revisions even after mailing out the story for comments among his correspondents; for instance, he wrote Lovecraft "On looking over 'Helman Carnby', which I sent you the other day, the word 'fragments' strikes me as being too strained and incorrect. On p. 7 read: 'a body hewn in many *portions*'; on p. 14: 'I had buried the *portions*, etc.'; on p. 19, 'lay facing the medley of *remnants*;' and on p. 20, 'the fresh *segments* of that other.' There may be other slips—I wrote the story at white heat."[4] After reading the typescript, Lovecraft suggested that "if there were any way of piling on another shudder, I'd say it would be by veiling the final horror a little more obscurely from actual sight, & trying to *hint* or *imply* the blasphemous abnormality which sent the secretary fleeing from that accursed habitation. I certainly hope that the tale will find a typographical haven."[5] CAS "was greatly pleased and gratified by your reaction to

> "Carnby"—a tale to which I devoted much thought. The more veiled ending you suggest as possible was my original intention—certainly it would have been the safest and most surely successful method. I think

> what tempted me to the bolder and more hazardous revelation, was the visualizing of the actual *collapse* of that hellishly vitalized abnormality. If the tale is rejected as too gruesome, I can try the other ending, and have the secretary unable to enter the room till *all* is over, and there are merely *two* heaps of human segments on the floor.... I am going to adopt your suggestion about "Carnby" if it comes back from *Ghost Stories*. Here is the way it can be worked: the secretary finds himself physically unable to enter the room till *all* is over; but standing at the threshold, he *hears* the head as it breaks from the cupboard, and *sees* for a few moments the shadow of that headless monstrosity, and the singular disintegration of the shadows, followed by a sound that is not that of a *single* body falling, but of many. Then, entering, he flees from the inenarrable vision of that *confused heap* of human segments, some flesh and some putrefying, which are lying on the floor, with the surgeon's saw still clutched in a half-decayed hand.[6]

CAS had already submitted the story to *Ghost Stories*, drawn by its rate of two cents a word, despite his reservations about the magazine's editorial policies: "it will be impossible to sell them anything that depends on subtle atmosphere. A lurid yarn like 'Carnby' *might* get over on its dramatic suspense, despite the atmospheric element."[7] (Smith had not sold any stories to the magazine, but had received encouraging personal letters with the returned manuscripts.) Sometime in February *Ghost Stories* returned the manuscript, so Smith rewrote the ending and submitted it again, only to have it rejected once more "a most amusing letter from the editor."[8] The story was still " 'too horrific'— the editor told me very gravely that 'the reactions of our staff-readers showed plainly that you have sinned in this respect'."[9] Smith next sent the story to *WT*, only to have FW return the story "because many of our readers would be sure to find it sickening."[10] Smith changed the title to "The Return of the Sorcerer" when Harry Bates bought the story for the first issue of *Strange Tales* (September 1931), and it was included in *OST.*

"The Return of the Sorcerer" represents Smith trying to achieve two goals that might be thought mutually contradictory: on the one hand, he hoped "to achieve the limit in sheer gruesomeness," while at the same time he found the shadowy ending more satisfying personally: "One can usually get more horror out of shadows than out of the actual presented substance;

on the same principle, I suppose, that one's imagination or anticipation of some pleasure always exceeds hugely the reality."[11] One of Smith's most famous stories, it has been repeatedly anthologized and also adapted into comic form by Richard Corben and for television as an episode for *Rod Serling's Night Gallery*, starring Vincent Price as John and Helman Carnby. Our text is based upon the typescript dated January 6, 1931 at JHL. We are including the original ending, from the typescript dated January 4, 1931, also at JHL, as Appendix 2.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, November 16, 1930 (*SL* 136).
2. *SS* 159.
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. early January 1931 (*SL* 142).
4. CAS, letter to HPL, January 10, 1931 (ms, JHL).
5. HPL, letter to CAS, January 1931 (Arkham House transcripts).
6. CAS, letter to HPL, c. January 27, 1931 (*SL* 144).
7. CAS, letter to AWD, January 27, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
8. CAS, letter to AWD, March 8, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
9. CAS, letter to DAW, March 24, 1931 (ms, MHS).
10. FW, letter to CAS, March 21, 1931 (ms, JHL).
11. CAS, letter to HPL, c. early January 1931 (*SL* 142); letter to AWD, February 26, 1931 (ms, SHSW).

The City of the Singing Flame

In the autumn of 1930 Smith sent Lovecraft a specimen of rock from Crater Ridge, near the Donner Pass in northern California near the Nevada border, whose form suggested various outré entities from his stories. Lovecraft was delighted with this gift, and bestowed upon it various nicknames such as "He Who Waits" and the Nameless Eikon. (Crater Ridge was also the site of the camping trip during which his friend Genevieve K. Sully first suggested to Smith that he ought to take up writing for the pulps as a reasonably congenial means of supporting his parents.) Perhaps because of these associations, Smith wrote a new story on January 15, 1931. He announced to HPL that he had written

> a new trans-dimensional story, "The City of the Singing Flame", in which I have utilized Crater Ridge (the place where I found the

> innominable Eikon) as a spring-board. Some day, I must look for those two boulders “with a vague resemblance to broken-down columns”. If you and other correspondents cease to hear from me thereafter, you can surmise what has happened! The description of the Ridge, by the way, has been praised for its realism by people who know the place.[1]

Lovecraft responded even more enthusiastically than usual:

> Gad, Sir, but you have struck twelve with this latest opus! I don’t know when anything has given me such a kick in months—for the whole thing corresponds to just the sort of dreaming I relish, & just the sort of dimensional plunging I tend to invisage when faced by a flaming & apocalyptic sunset. When I passed near the Nameless Eikon with the manuscript in my hand, the leaves fluttered strangely—as if {?} in a wind, despite the still air of my shadowy & totally _____ chamber. The description of Crater Ridge gives It an enormously vivid immediate background, whilst other parts of th narrative raise disquieting apprehensions concerning its more ultimate provenance. Can it be that... but it is well to restrain the wilder & darker speculations of the curious fancy. I feel sure that both Derleth & Wandrei will take at once to the tale—& if Wright fails to accept it, I shall lose my last shred of respect for him.[2]

Instead of submitting it to *WT* (who “might have taken the tale; but God knows when they would have printed it”[3]), CAS submitted it to Hugo Gernsback and *WS*, who published it in the July 1931 issue (and paid Smith the sum of fifty-two dollars in early April 1932.) It proved popular enough with the readership that a sequel was commissioned and published in the November issue as “Beyond the Singing Flame.” David Lasser’s successor as editor of *WS*, Charles D. Hornig, included “The City of the Singing Flame” as number seven on a list of the ten most popular stories ever printed by the magazine, as published in the January 1935 issue.[4]

1. CAS, letter to HPL, c. January 27, 1931 (*SL* 144-145).
2. HPL, letter to CAS, February 8, 1931 (ms, MHS).
3. CAS, letter to AWD, March 25, 1931 (ms., SHSW).

4. See T. G. L. Cockcroft, “The Reader Speaks: Reaction to Clark Ashton Smith in the Pulps.” *Dark Eidolon* no. 2 (June 1989): 16.

A Good Embalmer

In the same letter where he first mentioned the plot germ that became "The Return of the Sorcerer," Smith discussed another idea (which should really take the palm for macabre grotesquerie) concerning

> two undertakers, business partners, whom (for temporary convenience) we might call Jake and John. John has a very poor opinion of Jake's professional abilities, especially as an embalmer, and tells him one day that if he (John) should die before Jake does, and has to be subjected to the latter's mercies, he will rise up from the dead... Well—John eventually dies, and his partner is about to begin operations on the corpse, when John suddenly sits up. Jake drops dead from heart-failure at the shock... Next morning, *two* corpses are found laid out in the undertaking establishment; and it is discovered that the corpse of *Jake* has been very efficiently embalmed....[1]

This is the same story outlined among Smith's papers as "The Undertakers:"

> Two undertakers, one of whom has a poor opinion of his partner's abilities, particularly as an embalmer. He tells him, 'If I die before you do, and you try to embalm me, by God, I'll get up and embalm *you*!' Years later he dies suddenly. His partner takes charge of the body, and is about to begin professional operations, when the corpse suddenly sits up. The living partner drops dead through shock. The next morning, two corpses are found laid out in the parlor; and the one that *died last* has been carefully *embalmed*.[2]

Smith spent three days working on the story before completing it on February 7, 1931. He remained dubious of its merits, telling August Derleth that it "may not even have the dubious merit of being salable."[3] Part of the problem was that Smith knew "next to nothing about the subject; so you might warn me if I have 'pulled any boners.' Anyway, it didn't seem necessary or advisable to dwell on the technical side."[4] (Lovecraft reassured him "No—I can't pick any flaws in the embalming tale; for despite my authorship of the banned 'In the Vault' I have not a shred of inside

knowledge of the profession! One has to bluff beyond one's scholastic means now & then…."[5]) Derleth wrote that "the plot is okeh, but I don't think you were feeling particularly good when you wrote it. It seems disconnected, and somehow you do not hit the end right. It is the kind of story Wright might take in a pinch but a reader would forget it the moment he had read the last word," adding "Of course, it does not at all compare with anything else of yours I have recently seen."[6]

CAS almost managed to sell the story to *ST*. According to editor Harry Bates, "I liked it myself, and would have bought it, but Mr. Clayton thought we had better not. I did not support it very strongly, for I just as leave have something of greater length to represent you next time."[7] Smith then appears to have given the story to Charles D. Hornig for his fanzine *The Fantasy Fan*, since an announcement for a story called "The Embalmers of Ramsville," by Michael Weir, appears on page 96 of the February 1934 issue. "Michael Weir" is almost certainly a pseudonym of Smith's, probably derived from Poe's poem "Ulalume." The story remained unpublished until 1989, when Steve Behrends included it in *Strange Shadows: The Uncollected Fiction and Essays of Clark Ashton Smith.* Our text is based upon the original holograph manuscript at JHL.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, November 16, 1930 (*SL* 136).
2. *SS* 159.
3. CAS, letter to AWD, February 7, 1931(ms, SHSW).
4. CAS, letter to HPL, c. February 15-23, 1931 (ms, JHL).
5. HPL, letter to CAS, March 26, 1931 (*Arkham House Transcripts* 31.77).
6. AWD, letter to CAS, May 20, 1931 (ms, JHL).
7. Harry Bates, letter to CAS, July 7, 1931 (ms, JHL).

The Testament of Athammaus

Smith completed this, the third of his tales of Hyperborea, on February 22, 1931, although he had conceived of the plot as early as April 1930: "Athammaus, the public executioner of Commoriom, beheads the outlaw, Nicautal Zhaun, and afterwards oversees his entombment. The next day, Nicautal Zhaun reappears on the streets of Commoriom, is again captured, beheaded, and interred. Seven times is this repeated, till all the people flee from Commoriom, taking it as an evil and supernatural portent. The baffled Athammaus, mocked by Nicautal Zhaun, reluctantly follows them."[1] He elaborated on this to Lovecraft, explaining how "this outlaw (who was connected with Tsathoggua on his mother's side) managed to *leak* or *ooze* from the tomb on each occasion," concluding that "The tale should make a rollicking hell-raiser."[2] After completing the story, Smith wrote that "I really think he (or it) is about my best monster to date," after admitting "In my more civic moods, I sometimes think of the clean-up which an entity like Knygathin Zhaum would make in a modern town."[3]

Smith wrote that he would "be rather peeved if Wright turns ['Athammaus'] down; since it is about as good as I can do in the line of unearthly horror."[4] Wright wrote Smith on March 21, 1931 that "if is with real reluctance that I am returning 'The Testament of Athammaus,' for it is an ingenious and well-told tale. However, our readers have shown a dislike for stories of cannibalism," adding "It may be, if the story remains vividly in my mind for six months, as did 'Satampra Zeiros,' that I will sometime ask you to send this to me again."[5]

Lovecraft offered this assessment: "Wright is... just old Farnsworth. Eternally the same! He'll be asking for 'Athammaus' all over again before long. It probably never occurred to him that the 'cannibalism' connected with prehistoric anthropophagous monsters is something entirely different in its emotional implications from such realistic cannibalism as might occur among actual human beings in a contemporary setting."[6] Smith remarked to Derleth that "Wright seems to have lost what little nerve he ever had. He has returned my two best horror tales, on the plea that they would be too strong for his readers. I think, though, that he will take 'The Testament of Athammaus' later on—it seems to have impressed him greatly. But 'Helman Carnby' is quite beyond the pale. This latter tale really seems to be something of a goat-getter."[7]

The story apparently remained very vivid in Wright's memory, since Smith bragged to Donald Wandrei "Have I mentioned Wright's final acceptance of 'The Testament of Athammaus', a month after he had declined it?"[8] Smith's memory may have been slightly off, since he mentions its rejection by Bates and *ST* to AWD in May 1931.[9] "The Testament of Athammaus" was the second most popular story in the October 1932 issue of *WT,* being beaten out by Jack Williamson's "The Wand of Doom." Smith included it in *OST.* The present text is from a typescript given to R. H. Barlow and later presented by him to the Bancroft Library.

Following his assessment of Knygathin Zhaum as his "best monster to date," Smith offered the following commentary upon his conception of Hyperborea:

> This primal continent seems to have been particularly subject to incursions of "outsideness"—more so, in fact, than any of the other continents and terrene realms that lie behind us in the time stream. But I have heard it hinted in certain obscure and arcanic prophecies that the far-future continent called Gnydron by some and Zothique by others, which is to rise millions of years hence in what is now the South Atlantic, will surpass even Hyperborea in this regard and will witness the intrusion of Things from galaxies not yet visible; and, worse than this, a hideously chaotic *breaking-down* of dimensional barriers which will leave *parts* of our world in other dimensions, and vice versa. When things get to that stage, there will be no telling where even the briefest journey or morning stroll might end. The conditions will shift, too; so there will be no possibility of charting them and thus knowing when or where one might step off into the unknown.

1. *SS* 157-158.
2. CAS, letter to HPL, April 2, 1930 (*SL* 112).
3. CAS, letter to HPL, c. February 15-23, 1931 (*SL* 149).
4. Quoted by Steve Behrends, "An Annotated Chronology of the Fiction of Clark Ashton Smith." In *FFT* 340.
5. FW, letter to CAS, March 21, 1931 (ms, JHL).
6. HPL, letter to CAS, April 16, 1931 (ms, JHL).
7. CAS, letter to AWD, April 9, 1931 (*SL* 150-151).

8. CAS, letter to DAW, August 7, 1931 (ms, MHS).
9. CAS, letter to AWD, May 8, 1931 (*SL* 153).

A Captivity in Serpens

After *WS* editor David Lasser rejected "The Red World of Polaris," he clarified *WS*'s editorial requirements in a letter which unfortunately does not survive among Smith's papers at JHL, but from which CAS quoted liberally (and bitterly) in his own correspondence. As Smith recounted to Lovecraft, Lasser and Gernsback wanted:

> "A play of human motives, with alien worlds for a background." But if human motives are mainly what they want, why bother about going to other planets—where one might conceivably escape from the human equation? The idea of using the worlds of Alioth or Altair as a mere setting for the squabbles and heroics of the crew on a space-ship (which, in essence, is about what they are suggesting) is too rich for any use. Evidently *Astounding Stories* is setting the pace for them with its type of stellar-wild-west yarn. There doesn't seem to be much chance of putting over any really good work, and a survey of the magazine field in general is truly discouraging.[1]

After being informed of these editorial requirements, Smith put aside a third Volmar story, "The Ocean-World of Alioth," which he had already outlined and begun, and began work on "A Captivity in Serpens," at 17,000 words the longest piece of mature fiction he would complete. He vowed to Lovecraft that "I'll give them their 'action' this time,"[2] and Lasser must have agreed, as it was not only accepted but also received the cover illustration when it appeared in the Summer 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories Quarterly* as "The Amazing Planet." In accepting the story Lasser told Smith that "we were quite pleased with the story and believe it strikes the proper note for effective interplanetary atmosphere."[3]

The typescript at JHL is missing several pages, so the text of its original magazine appearance was consulted. It was collected posthumously in *OD* and included with the other Volmar stories in *RW*.

1. CAS, letter to HPL, c. November 16, 1930 (*SL* 134).
2. CAS, letter to HPL, November 10 1930 (*SL* 132).
3. David Lasser, letter to CAS, March 27, 1931 (ms, JHL).

The Letter from Mohaun Los

According to surviving notes, Smith originally intended to call this story "An Excursion in Time:" "The time-travelling machine, which goes into the future... and lands in a foreign world when it stops, because it has stood still in space while the earth and the solar system {...} whirling on".[1] He developed this idea further in correspondence:

> By the way, I may tackle the well-worn idea of a time-travelling machine some day, and bring it to its logical denouement. A journey behind or ahead of earth-time would, it seems to me, land the voyager in some alien corner of space, unless he had made special provision for accompanying the movement of the earth and the solar system during the same backward or forward period. If he went far enough into the future, he might find himself in some world of Hercules! But this is an abstruse subject![2]

The first version of this tale was completed by April 9, 1931, but failed to sell. The reason for its rejection may have been a weak ending, as CAS intimated to Derleth: "Funny—I seem to have more trouble with the endings of stories than anything else. God knows how many I have had to re-write. I have a dud on hand now—'Jim Knox and the Giantess' [*original title of "The Root of Ampoi"*]—which will have to be given a brand-new wind-up if it is ever to sell. The same applies to my 10,000 word pseudo-scientific, 'The Letter from Mohaun Los'."[3] Finishing the revision on March 29, 1932, Smith submitted the story to Wright, who held it for over three weeks before returning it. However, by the end of May Smith could announce that "*Wonder Stories* has accepted 'The Letter from Mohaun Los,' which will appear in the Aug. issue under a new title, Flight into Super-Time, which fails to elicit my enthusiasm. This tale contains a fair amount of satire, like 'The Monster of the Prophecy.' Among other things, there is an uproarious fight between a Robot and a time-machine, in which the two mechanical monstrosities succeed in annihilating each other."[4] Smith would later include the story in *LW*, referring to it at the time as "one of my more ironic *Wonder Stories* contributions but I'm sure most of its readers missed the double-barrelled satire."[5]

Smith incorporated elements from his previous work into “The Letter from Mohaun Los.” The battle between the warring pygmies occurs in his poem “The Hashish-Eater:”

> Then
> I watch a war of pygmies, met by night,
> With pitter of their drums of parrot’s hide,
> On plains with no horizon, where a god
> Might lose his way for centuries; [...][6]

Steve Behrends suggests that the rescue of the persecuted alien sage Tuoquan may derive from Smith’s synopsis for a proposed sequel to “The Monster of the Prophecy.”[7] In “Vizaphmal in Orphiuchus,” Smith describes how

> Tsandai, a savant of Zothique, a world of one of the suns of Ophiuchus, has fallen foul of the local scientific fraternity in general; and they are about to turn him, by the use of a transforming-ray, into a low, brainless type of monster. Vizaphmal, the Antarean wizard-scientist, using his space-annihilator at random, for the sake of adventure, appears in the chamber where the transformation is about to take place. Comprehending the situation telepathically, he rescues Tsandai and carries him away to the uninhabited equatorial zones of the planet.[8]

1. *SS* 160.
2. CAS, letter to HPL, November 10, 1930 (*SL* 132).
3. CAS, letter to AWD, August 18, 1931 (*SL* 160).
4. CAS, letter to AWD, May 26, 1932 (ms, SHSW).
5. CAS, letter to AWD, April 31[*sic*], 1943 (*SL* 339-340).
6. CAS, “The Hashish-Eater; or, The Apocalypse of Evil.” In *The Last Oblivion: Best Fantastic Poems of Clark Ashton Smith* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2002).
7. “Notes to the Text.” *SS* 260n47.
8. *ES* 266, *SS* 143.

The Hunters from Beyond

Smith was working on "The Holiness of Azédarac" when he "suspended work on it to write a 6000 word modern thriller, 'The Hunters from Beyond,' which I have just completed. I hope it will have enough 'plot,' etc. for the new Clayton magazine."[1] (Smith was referring to Harry Bates' *Strange Tales*, which paid two cents a word upon acceptance, as opposed to *WT* which usually paid a cent a word upon publication.) Smith was somewhat ambivalent regarding the story, telling Derleth that it was "probably junk."[2] Derleth liked the story and made some suggestions:

> I daresay if you wanted to you could make it into either a long space story (pursuit of these hunters from beyond, etc etc) or a first rate horror story with a perfectly ghoulish climax (the girl and Cyprian both keeping silent anent their work, the horror gradually encroaching, closing in upon them, Hastane perceiving only hints here and there, until in the end the whole hellish thing bursts on him. But it is good as it stands, and I like it. The end I find just a little weak. It is as if you had got up some morning and said Now I must write and story and evolved this and got tired of it near the end.[3]

As if to confirm Derleth's assessment, Smith politely thanked him for his suggested revisions, adding "good; but I'm none too fond of the story, and shan't feel like reworking any of it if I can sell it anywhere as it stands. I have other ideas that interest me more."[4]

By this time Smith was submitting those stories that he thought had a chance to *Ghost Stories* because of their higher rate of payment, and by mid-June he was still waiting to hear back from its editor Daniel Wheeler. Its rejection may be inferred from the fact that he next submitted it to Wright, who also rejected the story on grounds that "it lacks the convincingness of most of your stories. It is not nearly as convincing or thrilling, for instance, as Lovecraft's 'Pickman's Model'—to mention a story of similar theme."[5] (This may have stung a little, since Smith acknowledged that story as the inspiration for his own.)[6] Smith also mentions that Harry Bates returned the manuscript "ostensibly for lack of print space."[7]

Some weeks after Wright's rejection Smith made some changes to the story, "leaving it more in doubt as to what is actually going on in the studio up to the last moment, and adding at the end, for contrast to the mindless girl who is beyond 'even the memory of horror,'a last vision of the ghoul-infested gulf, 'the ravening faces, the hunger contorted forms that swirled toward us from their ultra-dimensional limbo like a devil-laden hurricane from Malebolge'."[8]

At first Smith was still not satisfied with "The Hunters from Beyond:" "The tale doesn't please me very well—the integral mood seems a little second-rate, probably because the treatment of modern atmosphere is rather uncongenial for me."[9] Not long after writing this, less than ten days, Smith began to change his opinion: "'The Hunters' looked pretty good when I read it over the other day, and I think I prefer it to the Helman Carnby thing now, though I didn't at first."[10] He elaborated upon this later , explaining that "my preference for 'The Hunters from Beyond' is based on its style, too. I agree that Carnby has a more original plot; but it seems to need some additional atmospheric development."[11] However, the reevaluation or reassessment seems to have been rather short-lived, since when Bates bought the revised version Smith called it "the least original of my recent yarns."[12] When it appeared in the October 1932 issue of *ST*, where it received the cover illustration that Smith rather liked, he told Derleth "'The Hunters' is no great favorite of mine either; but it seems to shine by comparison with the other tales."[13] He later selected it for inclusion in *LW*. Our text is based upon the typescript dated August 11, 1931 at JHL.

The story may have been inspired by an actual experience that occurred while the young Smith was suffering from an attack of tuberculosis. Writing in the November 1934 issue of Charles D. Hornig's fanzine *The Fantasy Fan*, CAS described in "The Demonian Face" how

> About 1918 I was in ill health and, during a short visit to San Francisco, was sitting one day in the Bohemian Club, to which I had been given a guest's card of admission. Happening to look up, I saw a frightful demonian face with twisted rootlike eyebrows and oblique fiery-slitted eyes, which seemed to emerge momentarily from the air about nine feet above me and lean toward my seat. The thing disappeared as it approached me, but left an ineffaceable impression of malignity, horror, and loathsomeness. If an hallucination, it was

certainly seen amid appropriate surroundings; if an actual entity, it was no doubt the kind that would be likely to haunt a club in one of our modern Gomorrahs.[14]

1. CAS, letter to AWD, May 1, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
2. CAS, letter to AWD, May 8, 1931 (*SL* 153).
3. AWD, letter to CAS, May 12, 1931 (ms, JHL).
4. CAS, letter to AWD, May 15, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
5. FW, letter to CAS, June 30, 1931 (ms, JHL).
6. CAS, letter to AWD, May 8, 1931 (*SL* 153).
7. CAS, letter to AWD, July 11, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
8. CAS, letter to AWD, August 18, 1931 (*SL* 160-161).
9. CAS, letter to AWD, August 28, 1931 (*SL* 161).
10. CAS, letter to AWD, September 6, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
11. CAS, letter to AWD, September 15, 1931 (ms, SHSW).
12. CAS, letter to DAW, November 21, 1931 (ms, MHS).
13. CAS, letter to AWD, July 19, 1932 (ms, SHSW).
14. *PD* 40.

APPENDIX TWO:
ALTERNATE ENDING TO
"THE RETURN OF THE SORCERER"

Begins immediately after the paragraph "It was not my own violition…"

I seemed to know with a loathly prescience the sight that awaited me beyond the sill. But the reality would have put to shame the foulest enormities of the nether pits. Carnby—or what remained of him—was lying on the floor; and above him stooped an unbelievable thing—the nude, headless body of a man, already blue with incipient putrefaction, and marked with earth-stains. At wrist and elbow and shoulder, at knee and ankle and hip, there were red sutures where the sundered limbs had been knit together in some hellish fashion, by the power of a will that was more than mortal. The Thing was holding a bloody surgeon's saw in its right hand; and I saw that its work had been completed….

Surely, it would seem, I was viewing the climax of all conceivable horror. But even as the Thing knelt with its ghastly tool suspended above the remains of its victim, there came a violent crash from the cupboard, as if something had been hurled against the door. The lock must have been defective; for the door burst open, and a human head emerged and bounded to the floor. It rolled over, and lay facing the medley of human fragments, that had been John Carnby. It was in the same condition of decay as the body; but I swear that the eyes were alive with malignant hate. Even with the marks of corruption upon them, the features bore a manifest likeness of those of John Carnby; and plainly they could belong only to a twin brother.

I was beyond horror, beyond terror; and I do not believe I could have stirred again if it had not been for the thing that happened now. As if the animating and uniting power had been removed with the completion of its task, the headless cadaver toppled to the floor, scattered in all its original portions. The life had gone out of the eyes in that terrible head; and there was nothing but a heap of mouldy members, beside the fresh fragments of that other.

The spell was broken. I felt that something had withdrawn from the room—the overpowering volition that had held me captive was gone. It had released me, even as it had released the corpse of Helman Carnby. I was free to go; and I fled from that ghastly room and ran headlong through an unlit house, and into the outer darkness.

APPENDIX THREE:
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