

HYPERBOREA

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BERSERKER

BOOKS



The Muse of Hyperborea

Too far away is her wan and mortal face, and too remote are the snows of her lethal breast, for mine eyes to behold them ever. But at whiles her whisper comes to me, like a chill unearthly wind that is faint from traversing the gulfs between the worlds, and has flown over ultimate horizons of ice-bound deserts. And she speaks to me in a tongue I have never heard but have always known; and she tells of deathly things and of things beautiful beyond the ecstatic desires of love. Her speech is not of good or evil, nor of anything that is desired or conceived or believed by the termites of earth; and the air she breathes, and the lands wherein she roams, would blast like the utter cold of sidereal space; and her eyes would blind the vision of men like suns; and her kiss, if one should ever attain it, would wither and slay like the kiss of lightning.

But, hearing her far, infrequent whisper, I behold a vision of vast auroras, on continents that are wider than the world, and seas too great for the enterprise of human keels. And at times I stammer forth the strange tidings that she brings: though none will welcome them, and none will believe or listen. And in some dawn of the desperate years, I shall go forth and follow where she calls, to seek the high and beatific doom of her snow-pale distances, to perish amid her indeseccrate horizons.

The Seven Geases

The Lord Ralibar Vooz, high magistrate of Commorion and third cousin to King Homquat, had gone forth with six-and-twenty of his most valorous retainers in quest of such game as was afforded by the black Eigiophian Mountains. Leaving to lesser sportsmen the great sloths and vampire-bats of the intermediate jungle, as well as the small but noxious dinosauria, Ralibar Vooz and his followers had pushed rapidly ahead and had covered the distance between the Hyperborean capital and their objective in a day's march. The glassy scaurs and grim ramparts of Mount Voormithadreth, highest and most formidable of the Eiglophians, had beetled above them, wedging the sun with dark scoriae peaks at mid-afternoon, and walling the blazonries of sunset wholly from view. They had spent the night beneath its lowermost crags, keeping a ceaseless watch, piling dead branches on their fires, and hearing on the grisly heights above them the wild and dog-like ululations of those subhuman savages, the Voormis for which the mountain was named. Also, they heard the bellowing of an alpine catoblepas pursued by the Voormis, and the mad snarling of a saber-tooth tiger assailed and dragged down; and Ralibar Vooz had deemed that these noises boded well for the morrow's hunting.

He and his men rose betimes; and having breakfasted on their provisions of dried bear-meat and a dark sour wine that was noted for its invigorative qualities, they began immediately the ascent of the mountain, whose upper precipices were hollow with caves occupied by the Voormis. Ralibar Vooz had hunted these creatures before; and a certain room of his house in Commorion was arrased with their thick and shaggy pelts. They were usually deemed the most dangerous of the Hyperborean fauna; and the mere climbing of Voormithadreth, even without the facing of its inhabitants, would have been a feat attended by more than sufficient peril: but Ralibar Vooz, having tasted of such sport, could now satisfy himself with nothing tamer.

He and his followers were well armed and accoutered. Some of the men bore coils of rope and grappling-hooks to be employed in the escalade of the steeper crags. Some carried heavy crossbows; and many were

equipped with long-handled and saber-bladed bills which, from experience, had proved the most effective weapons in close-range fighting with the Voormis. The whole party was variously studded with auxiliary knives, throwing-darts, two-handed simitars, maces, bodkins, and saw-toothed axes. The men were all clad in jerkins and hose of dinosaur-leather, and were shod with brazen-spiked buskins. Ralibar Vooz himself wore a light suiting of copper chain-mail, which, flexible as cloth, in no wise impeded his movements. In addition he carried a buckler of mammoth-hide with a long bronze spike in its center that could be used as a thrusting-sword; and, being a man of huge stature and strength, his shoulders and baldric were hung with a whole arsenal of weaponries.

The mountain was of volcanic origin, though its four craters were supposedly all extinct. For hours the climbers toiled upward on the fearsome scarps of black lava and obsidian, seeing the sheerer heights above them recede interminably into a cloudless zenith, as if not to be approached by man. Far faster than they the sun climbed, blazing torridly upon them and heating the rocks till their hands were scorched as if by the walls of a furnace. But Ralibar Vooz, eager to flesh his weapons, would permit no halting in the shady chasms nor under the scant umbrage of rare junipers.

That day, however, it seemed that the Voormis were not abroad upon Mount Voormithadreth. No doubt they had feasted too well during the night, when their hunting cries had been heard by the Commorians. Perhaps it would be necessary to invade the warren of caves in the loftier crags: a procedure none too palatable even for a sportsman of such hardihood as Ralibar Vooz. Few of these caverns could be reached by men without the use of ropes; and the Voormis, who were possessed of quasi-human cunning, would hurl blocks and rubble upon the heads of the assailants. Most of the caves were narrow and darksome, thus putting at a grave disadvantage the hunters who entered them; and the Voormis would fight redoubtably in defense of their young and their females, who dwelt in the inner recesses; and the females were fiercer and more pernicious, if possible, than the males.

Such matters as these were debated by Ralibar Vooz and his henchmen as the escalade became more arduous and hazardous, and they saw far above them the pitted mouths of the lower dens. Tales were told of brave hunters who had gone into those dens and had not returned; and much was

said of the vile feeding-habits of the Voormis and the uses to which their captives were put before death and after it. Also, much was said regarding the genesis of the Voormis, who were popularly believed to be the offspring of women and certain atrocious creatures that had come forth in primal days from a tenebrous cavern-world in the bowels of Voormithadreth. Somewhere beneath that four-coned mountain, the sluggish and baleful god Tsathoggua, who had come down from Saturn in years immediately following the Earth's creation, was fabled to reside; and during the rite of worship at his black altars, the devotees were always careful to orient themselves toward Voormithadreth. Other and more doubtful beings than Tsathoggua slept below the extinct volcanoes, or ranged and ravened throughout that hidden underworld; but of these beings few men other than the more adept or abandoned wizards, professed to know anything at all.

Ralibar Vooz, who had a thoroughly modern disdain of the supernatural, avowed his skepticism in no equivocal terms when he heard his henchmen regaling each other with these antique legendries. He swore with many ribald blasphemies that there were no gods anywhere, above or under Voormithadreth. As for the Voormis themselves, they were indeed a misbegotten species; but it was hardly necessary, in explaining their generation, to go beyond the familiar laws of nature. They were merely the remnant of a low and degraded tribe of aborigines, who, sinking further into brutehood, had sought refuge in those volcanic fastnesses after the coming of the true Hyperboreans.

Certain grizzled veterans of the party shook their heads and muttered at these heresies; but because of their respect for the high rank and prowess of Ralibar Vooz, they did not venture to gainsay him openly.

After several hours of heroic climbing, the hunters came within measurable distance of those nether caves. Below them now, in a vast and dizzying prospect, where the wooded hills and fair, fertile plains of Hyperborea. They were alone in a world of black, raven rock, with innumerable precipices and chasms above, beneath and on all sides. Directly overhead, in the face of an almost perpendicular cliff, were three of the cavern-mouths, which had the aspect of volcanic fumaroles. Much of the cliff was glazed with obsidian, and there were few ledges or hand-grips. It seemed that even the Voormis, agile as apes, could scarcely climb that wall; and Ralibar Vooz, after studying it with a strategic eye, decided that the only feasible approach to the dens was from above. A diagonal crack,

running from a shelf just below them to the summit, no doubt afforded ingress and egress to their occupants.

First, however, it was necessary to gain the precipice above: a difficult and precarious feat in itself. At one side of the long talus on which the hunters were standing, there was a chimney that wound upward in the wall, ceasing thirty feet from the top and leaving a sheer, smooth surface. Working along the chimney to its upper end, a good alpinist could hurl his rope and grappling-hook to the summit-edge.

The advisability of bettering their present vantage was now emphasized by a shower of stones and offal from the caverns. They noted certain human relics, well-gnawed and decayed, amid the offal. Ralibar Vooz, animated by wrath against these miscreants, as well as by the fervor of the huntsman, led his six-and-twenty followers in the escalade. He soon reached the chimney's termination, where a slanting ledge offered bare foothold at one side. After the third cast, his rope held; and he went up hand over hand to the precipice.

He found himself on a broad and comparatively level-topped buttress of the lowest cone of Voormithadreth, which still rose for two thousand feet above him like a steep pyramid. Before him on the buttress, the black lava-stone was gnarled into numberless low ridges and strange masses like the pedestals of gigantic columns. Dry, scanty grasses and withered alpine flowers grew here and there in shallow basins of darkish soil; and a few cedars, levin-struck or stunted, had taken root in the fissured rock. Amid the black ridges, and seemingly close at hand, a thread of pale smoke' ascended, serpentine oddly in the still air of noon and reaching an unbelievable height ere it vanished. Ralibar Vooz inferred that the buttress was inhabited by some person nearer to civilized humanity than the Voormis, who were quite ignorant of the use of fire. Surprised by this discovery, he did not wait for his men to join him, but started off at once to investigate the source of the curling smoke-thread.

He had deemed it merely a few steps away, behind the first of those grotesque furrows of lava. But evidently he had been deceived in this: for he climbed ridge after ridge and rounded many broad and curious dolmens and great dolomites which rose inexplicably before him where, an instant previous, he had thought there were only ordinary boulders; and still the pale, sinuous wisp went skyward at the same seeming interval.

Ralibar Vooz, high magistrate and redoubtable hunter, was both puzzled and irritated by this behavior of the smoke. Likewise, the aspect of the rocks around him was disconcertingly and unpleasantly deceitful. He was wasting too much time in an exploration idle and quite foreign to the real business of the day; but it was not his nature to abandon any enterprise no matter how trivial, without reaching the set goal. Halloing loudly to his men, who must have climbed the cliff by now, he went on toward the elusive smoke.

It seemed to him, once or twice, that he heard the answering shouts of his followers, very faint and indistinct, as if across some mile-wide chasm. Again he called lustily, but this time there was no audible reply. Going a little farther, he began to detect among the rocks beside him a peculiar conversational droning and muttering in which four or five different voices appeared to take part. Seemingly they were much nearer at hand than the smoke, which had now receded like a mirage.

One of the voices was clearly that of a Hyperborean; but the others possessed a timbre and accent which Ralibar Vooz, in spite of his varied ethnic knowledge, could not associate with any branch or subdivision of mankind. They affected his ears in a most unpleasant fashion, suggesting by turns the hum of great insects, the murmurs of fire and water, and the rasping of metal.

Ralibar Vooz emitted a hearty and somewhat ireful bellow to announce his coming to whatever persons were convened amid the rocks. His weapons and accouterments clattering loudly, he scrambled over a sharp lava-ridge toward the voices.

Topping the ridge, he looked down on a scene that was both mysterious and unexpected. Below him, in a circular hollow, there stood a rude hut of boulders and stone fragments roofed with cedar boughs. In front of this hovel, on a large flat block of obsidian, a fire burned with flames alternately blue, green and white; and from it rose the pale, thin spiral of smoke whose situation had illuded him so strangely.

An old man, withered and disreputable-looking, in a robe that appeared no less antique and unsavory than himself, was standing near to the fire. He was not engaged in any visible culinary operations; and, in view of the torrid sun, it hardly seemed that he required the warmth given by the queer-colored blaze. Aside from this individual, Ralibar Vooz looked in vain for the participants of the muttered conversation he had just overheard.

He thought there was an evanescent fluttering of dim, grotesque shadows around the obsidian block; but the shadows faded and vanished in an instant; and, since there were no objects or beings that could have cast them, Ralibar Vooz deemed that he had been victimized by another of those highly disagreeable optic illusions in which that part of the mountain Vormithadreth seemed to abound.

The old man eyed the hunter with a fiery gaze and began to curse him in fluent but somewhat archaic diction as he descended into the hollow. At the same time, a lizard-tailed and sooty-feathered bird, which seemed to belong to some night-flying species of archaeopteryx, began to snap its toothed beak and flap its digitated wings on the objectionably shapen stela that served it for a perch. This stela, standing on the lee side of the fire and very close to it, had not been perceived by Ralibar Vooz at first glance.

“May the ordure of demons bemire you from heel to crown!” cried the venomous ancient. “O lumbering, bawling idiot! you have ruined a most promising and important evocation. How you came here I cannot imagine. I have surrounded this place with twelve circles of illusion, whose effect is multiplied by their myriad intersections; and the chance that any intruder would ever find his way to my abode was mathematically small and insignificant. HI was that chance which brought you here: for They that you have frightened away will not return until the high stars repeat a certain rare and quickly passing conjunction; and much wisdom is lost to me in the interim.”

“How now, varlet!” said Ralibar Vooz, astonished and angered by this greeting, of which he understood little save that his presence was unwelcome to the old man. “Who are you that speak so churlishly to a magistrate of Commoriom and a cousin to King Homquat? I advise you to curb such insolence: for, if so I wish, it lies in *my* power to serve you even as I serve the Voormis. Though methinks,” he added, “your pelt is far too filthy and verminous to merit room amid my trophies of the chase.”

“Know that I am the sorcerer Ezdagor,” proclaimed the ancient, his voice echoing among the rocks with dreadful sonority. “By choice I have lived remote from cities and men; nor have the Voormis of the mountain troubled me in my magical seclusion. I care not if you are the magistrate of all swinedom or a cousin to the king of dogs. In retribution for the charm you have shattered, the business you have undone by this oafish trespass, I shall put upon you a most dire and calamitous and bitter geas.”

“You speak in terms of outmoded superstition,” said Ralibar Vooz, who was impressed against his will by the weighty oratorical style in which Ezdagor had delivered these periods.

The old man seemed not to hear him.

“Harken then to your geas, O Ralibar Vooz,” he fulminated. “For this is the geas, that you must cast aside all your weapons and go unarmed into the dens of the Voormis; and fighting bare-handed against the Voormis and against their females and their young, you must win to that secret cave in the bowels of Voormithadreth, beyond the dens, wherein abides from eldermost eons the god Tsathoggua. You shall know Tsathoggua by his great girth and his batlike furriness and the look of a sleepy black toad which he has eternally. He will rise not from his place, even in the ravening of hunger, but will wait in divine slothfulness for the sacrifice. And, going close to Lord Tsathoggua, you must say to him: ‘I am the blood-offering sent by the sorcerer Ezdagor.’ Then, if it be his pleasure, Tsathoggua will avail himself of the offering.

“In order that you may not go astray, the bird Raphtontis, who is my familiar, will guide you in your wanderings on the mountain-side and through the caverns.” He indicated with a peculiar gesture the night-flying archaeopteryx on the foully symbolic stela, and added as if in afterthought: “Raphtontis will remain with you till the accomplishment of the geas and the end of your journey below Voormithadreth. He knows the secrets of the underworld and the lairing-places of the Old Ones. If our Lord Tsathoggua should disdain the blood-offering, or, in his generosity, should send you on to his brethern, Raphtontis will be fully competent to lead the way whithersoever is ordained by the god.”

Ralibar Vooz found himself unable to answer this more than outrageous peroration in the style which it manifestly deserved. In fact, he could say nothing at all: for it seemed that a sort of lockjaw had afflicted him. Moreover, to his exceeding terror and bewilderment, this vocal paralysis was accompanied by certain involuntary movements of a most alarming type. With a sense of nightmare compulsion, together with the horror of one who feels that he is going mad, he began to divest himself of the various weapons which he carried. His bladed buckler, his mace, broadsword, hunting-knife, ax and needle-tipped anlace jingled on the ground before the obsidian block.

“I shall permit you to retain your helmet and body-armor,” said Exdagor at this juncture. “Otherwise, I fear that you will not reach Tsathoggua in the state of corporeal intactness proper for a sacrifice. The teeth and nails of the Voormis are sharp, even as their appetites.”

Muttering certain half-inaudible and doubtful-sounding words, the wizard turned from Ralibar Vooz and began to quench the tri-colored fire with a mixture of dust and blood from a shallow brass basin. Deigning to vouchsafe no farewell or sign of dismissal, he kept his back toward the hunter, but waved his left hand obliquely to the bird Raptontis. This creature, stretching his murky wings and clacking his saw-like beak, abandoned his perch and hung poised in air with one ember-colored eye malignly fixed on Ralibar Vooz. Then, floating slowly, his long snakish neck reverted and his eye maintaining its vigilance, the bird flew among the lava-ridges toward the pyramidal cone of Voormithadreth; and Ralibar Vooz followed, driven by a compulsion that he could neither understand nor resist.

Evidently the demon fowl knew all the turnings of that maze of delusion with which Exdagor had environed his abode; for the hunter was led with comparatively little indirection across the enchanted buttress. He heard the far-off shouting of his men as he went; but his own voice was faint and thin as that of a flitter-mouse when he sought to reply. Soon he found himself at the bottom of a great scrap of the upper mountain, pitted with cavern-mouths. It was a part of Voormithadreth that he had never visited before.

Raptontis rose toward the lowest cave, and hovered at its entrance while Ralibar Vooz climbed precariously behind him amid a heavy barrage of bones and glass-edged flints and other oddments of less mentionable nature hurled by the Voormis. These low, brutal savages, fringing the dark mouths of the dens with their repulsive faces and members, greeted the hunter's progress with ferocious howlings and an inexhaustible supply of garbage. However, they did not molest Raptontis, and it seemed that they were anxious to avoid hitting him with their missiles; though the presence of this hovering, wide-winged fowl interfered noticeably with their aim as Ralibar Vooz began to near the nethermost den.

Owing to this partial protection, the hunter was able to reach the cavern without serious injury. The entrance was rather strait; and Raptontis flew upon the Voormis with open beak and flapping wings, compelling them to withdraw into the interior while Ralibar Vooz made firm his

position on the threshold-ledge. Some, however, threw themselves on their faces to allow the passage of Raptontis; and, rising when the bird had gone by, they assailed the Commorian as he followed his guide into the fetid gloom. They stood only half erect, and their shaggy heads were about his thighs and hips, snarling and snapping like dogs; and they clawed him with hook-shaped nails that caught and held in the links of his armor.

Weaponless he fought them in obedience to his geas, striking down their hideous faces with his mailed fist in a veritable madness that was not akin to the ardor of a huntsman. He felt their nails and teeth break on the close-woven links as he hurled them loose; but others took their places when he won onward a little into the murky cavern; and their females struck at his legs like darting serpents; and their young beslavered his ankles with mouths wherein the fangs were as yet ungrown.

Before him, for his guidance, he heard the clanking of the wings of Raptontis, and the harsh cries, half hiss and half caw, that were emitted by this bird at intervals. The darkness stifled him with a thousand stenches; and his feet slipped in blood and filth at every step. But anon he knew that the Voormis had ceased to assail him. The cave sloped downward; and he breathed an air that was edged with sharp, acrid mineral odors.

Groping for a while through sightless night, and descending a steep incline, he came to a sort of underground hall in which neither day or darkness-prevailed. Here the archings of rock were visible by an obscure glow such as hidden moons might yield. Thence, through declivitous grottoes and along perilously skirted gulfs, he was conducted ever downward by Raptontis into the world beneath the mountain Voormithadreth. Everywhere was that dim, unnatural light whose source he could not ascertain. Wings that were too broad for those of the bat flew vaguely overhead; and at whiles, in the shadowy caverns, he beheld great, fearsome bulks having a likeness to those behemoths and giant reptiles which burdened the Earth in earlier times, but because of the dimness he could not tell if these were living shapes or forms that the stone had taken.

Strong was the compulsion of his geas on Ralibar Vooz; and a numbness had seized his mind; and he felt only a dulled fear and a dazed wonder. It seemed that his will and his thoughts were no longer his own, but were become those of some alien person. He was going down to some obscure but predestined end, by a route that was darksome but foreknown.

At last the bird Raptontis paused and hovered significantly in a cave distinguished from the others by a most evil potpourri of smells. Ralibar Vooz deemed at first that the cave was empty. Going forward to join Raptontis, he stumbled over certain attenuated remnants on the floor, which appeared to be the skin-clad skeletons of men and various animals. Then, following the coal-bright gaze of the demon bird, he discerned in a dark recess the formless bulking of a couchant mass. And the mass stirred a little at his approach, and put forth with infinite slothfulness a huge and toad-shaped head. And the head opened its eyes very slightly, as if half awakened from slumber, so that they were visible as two slits of oozing phosphor in the black, browless face.

Ralibar Vooz perceived an odor of fresh blood amid the many fetors that rose to besiege his nostrils. A horror came upon him therewith; for, looking down, he beheld lying before the shadowy monster the lean husk of a thing that was neither man, beast nor Voormi. He stood hesitant, fearing to go closer yet powerless to retreat. But, admonished by an angry hissing from the archaeopteryx, together with a slashing stroke of its beak between his shoulder-blades, he went forward till he could see the fine dark fur on the dormant body and sleepily portected head.

With new horror, and a sense of hideous doom, he heard his own voice speaking without volition: "O Lord Tsathaggua, I am the blood-offering sent by the sorcerer Egdagor."

There was a sluggish inclination of the toad-like head; and the eyes opened a little wider, and light flowed from them in viscous tricklings on the creased underlids. Then Ralibar Vooz seemed to hear a deep, rumbling sound; but he knew not whether it reverberated in the dusky air or in his own mind. And the sound shaped itself, albeit uncouthly, into syllables and words:

'Thanks are due to Egdagor for this offering. But, since I have fed lately on a well-blooded sacrifice, my hunger is appeased for the present, and I require not the offering. However, it may be that others of the Old Ones are athirst or famished. And, since you came here with a geas upon you, it is not fitting that you should go hence without another. So I place you under this geas, to betake yourself downward through the caverns till you reach, after long descent, that bottomless gulf over which the spider-god Atlach-Nacha weaves his eternal webs. And there, calling to Atlach-Nacha, you must say: 'I am the gift sent by Tsathog-gua.' "

So, with Raptontis leading him, Ralibar Vooz departed from the presence of Tsathoggua by another route than that which had brought him there. The way steepened more and more; and it ran through chambers that were too vast for the searching of sight; and along precipices that fell sheer for an unknown distance to the black, sluggish foam and somnolent murmur of underworld seas.

At last, on the verge of a chasm whose farther shore was lost in darkness, the night-flying bird hung motionless with level wings and down-dropping tail. Ralibar Vooz went close to the verge and saw that great webs were attached to it at intervals, seeming to span the gulf with their multiple crossing and reticulations of gray, rope thick strands. Apart from these, the chasm was bridgeless. Far out on one of the webs he discerned a darksome form, big as a crouching man but with long spider-like members. Then, like a dreamer who hears some nightmare sound, he heard his own voice crying loudly: "O Atlach-Nacha, I am the gift sent by Tsathoggua."

The dark form ran toward him with incredible swiftness. When it came near he saw that there was a kind of face on the squat ebon body, low down amid the several-jointed legs. The face peered up with a weird expression of doubt and inquiry; and terror crawled through the veins of the bold huntsman as he met the small, crafty eyes that were circled about with hair.

Thin, shrill, piercing as a sting, there spoke to him the voice of the spider-god Atlach-Nacha: "I am duly grateful for the gift. But, since there is no one else to bridge this chasm, and since eternity is required for the task, I can not spend my time in extracting you from those curious shards of metal. However, it may be that the antehuman sorcerer Haon-Dor, who abides beyond the gulf in his palace of primal enchantments, can somehow find a use for you. The bridge I have just now completed runs to the threshold of his abode; and your weight will serve to test the strength of my weaving. Go then, with this geas upon you, to cross the bridge and present yourself before Haon-Dor, saying: 'Atlach-Nacha has sent me.' "

With these words, the spider-god withdrew his bulk from the web and ran quickly from sight along the chasm-edge, doubtless to begin the construction of a new bridge at some remoter point.

Though the third geas was heavy and compulsive upon him, Ralibar Vooz followed Raptontis none too willingly over the night-bound depths. The weaving of Atlach-Nacha was strong beneath his feet, giving and swaying only a little; but between the strands, in unfathomable space below,

he seemed to descry the dim flitting of dragons with claw-tipped wings; and, like a seething of the darkness, fearful hulks without name appeared to heave and sink from moment to moment

However, he and his guide came presently to the gulf's opposite shore, where the web of Atlach-Nacha was joined to the lowest step of a mighty stairway. The stairs were guarded by a coiled snake whose mottlings were broad as buckles and whose middle volumes exceeded in girth the body of a stout warrior. The horny tail of this serpent rattled like a sistrum, and he thrust forth an evil head with fangs that were long as billhooks. But, seeing Raptontis, he drew his coils aside and permitted Ralibar Vooz to ascend the steps.

Thus, in fulfilment of the third geas, the hunter entered the thousand-columned palace of Haon-Dor. Strange and silent were those halls hewn from the gray, fundamental rock of Earth. In them were faceless forms of smoke and mist that went uneasily to and fro, and statues representing monsters with myriad heads. In the vaults above, as if hung aloof in night, lamps burned with inverse flames that were like the combustion of ice and stone. A chill spirit of evil, ancient beyond all conception of man, was abroad in those halls; and horror and fear crept throughout them like invisible serpents, unknotted from sleep.

Threading the mazy chambers with the surety of one accustomed to all their windings, Raptontis conducted Ralibar Vooz to a high room whose walls described a circle broken only by the one portal, through which he entered. The room was empty of furnishment, save for a five-pillared seat rising so far aloft without stairs or other means of approach, that it seemed only a winged being could ever attain thereto. But on the seat was a figure shrouded with thick, sable darkness, and having over its head and features a caul of grisly shadow.

The bird Raptontis hovered ominously before the columned chair. And Ralibar Vooz, in astonishment, heard a voice saying: "O Haon-Dor, Atlach-Nacha has sent me." And not till the voice ceased speaking did he know it for his own.

For a long time the silence seemed infrangible. There was no stirring of the high-seated figure. But Ralibar Vooz, peering trepidantly at the walls about him, beheld their former smoothness embossed with a thousand faces, twisted and awry like those of mad devils. The faces were thrust forward on necks that lengthened; and behind the necks malshapen shoulders and

bodies emerged inch by inch from the stone, craning toward the huntsman. And beneath his feet the very floor was now cobbled with other faces, turning and tossing restlessly, and opening ever wider their demoniacal mouths and eyes.

At last the shrouded figure spoke; and though the words were of no mortal tongue, it seemed to the listener that he comprehended them darkly:

“My thanks are due to Atlach-Nacha for this sending. If I appear to hesitate, it is only because I am doubtful regarding what disposition I can make of you. My familiars, who crowd the walls and floors of this chamber, would devour you all too readily; but you would serve only as a morsel amid so many. On the whole, I believe that the best thing I can do is to send you on to my allies, the serpent-people. They are scientists of no ordinary attainment; and perhaps you might provide some special ingredient required in their chemistries. Consider, then, that a geas has been put upon you, and take yourself off to the caverns in which the serpent-people reside.”

Obeying this injunction, Ralibar Vooz went down through the darkest strata of that primeval underworld, beneath the palace of Haon-Dor. The guidance of Raphtontis never failed him; and he came anon to the spacious caverns in which the serpent-men were busying themselves with a multitude of tasks. They walked lithely and sinuously erect on pre-mammalian members, their pied and hairless bodies bending with great suppleness. There was a loud and constant hissing of formulae as they went to and fro. Some were smelting the black nether ores; some were blowing molten obsidian into forms of flask and urn; some were measuring chemicals; others were decanting strange liquids and curious colloids. In their intense preoccupation, none of them seemed to notice the arrival of Ralibar Vooz and his guide.

After the hunter had repeated many times the message given him by Haon-Dor, one of the walking reptiles at last perceived his presence. This being eyed him with cold but highly disconcerting curiosity, and then emitted a sonorous hiss that was audible above all the noises of labor and converse. The other serpent-men ceased their toil immediately and began to crowd around Ralibar Vooz. From the tone of their sibilations, it seemed that there was much argument among them. Certain of their number sidled close to the Commorian, touching his face and hands with their chill, scaly digits, and prying beneath his armor. He felt that they were anatomizing him with methodical minuteness. At the same time, he perceived that they

paid no attention to Raphontis, who had perched himself on a large alembic.

After a while, some of the chemists went away and returned quickly, bearing among them two great jars of glass filled with a clear liquid. In one of the jars there floated upright a well-developed and mature male Voormi; in the other, a large and equally perfect specimen of Hyperborean manhood, not without a sort of general likeness to Ralibar Vooz himself. The bearers of these specimens deposited their burdens beside the hunter and then each of them delivered what was doubtless a learned dissertation on comparative biology.

This series of lectures, unlike many such, was quite brief. At the end the reptilian chemists returned to their various labors, and the jars were removed. One of the scientists then addressed himself to Ralibar Vooz with a fair though somewhat sibilant approximation of human speech:

“It was thoughtful of Haon-Dor to send you here. However, as you have seen, we are already supplied with an exemplar of your species; and, in the past, we have thoroughly dissected others and have learned all that there is to learn regarding this very uncouth and aberrant life-form.

“Also, since our chemistry is devoted almost wholly to the production of powerful toxic agents, we can find no use in our tests and manufactures for the extremely ordinary matters of which your body is composed. They are without pharmaceutic value. Moreover, we have long abandoned the eating of impure natural foods, and now confine ourselves to synthetic types of aliment. There is, as you must realize, no place for you in our economy.

“However, it may be that the Archetypes can somehow dispose of you. At least you will be a novelty to them, since no example of contemporary human evolution has so far descended to their stratum. Therefore we shall put you under that highly urgent and imperative kind of hypnosis which, in the parlance of warlockry, is known as a geas. And, obeying the hypnosis, you will go down to the Cavern of the Archetypes. . .

The region to which the magistrate of Commoriom was now conducted lay at some distance below the ophidian laboratories. The air of the gulfs and grottoes along his way began to increase markedly in warmth, and was moist and steamy as that of some equatorial fen. A primordial luminosity, such as might have dawned before the creation of any sun, seemed to surround and pervade everything.

All about him, in this thick and semi-aqueous light, the hunter discerned the rocks and fauna and vegetable forms of a crassly primitive world. These shapes were dim, uncertain, wavering, and were all composed of loosely organized elements. Even in this bizarre and more than doubtful terrain of the under-Earth, Raptontis seemed wholly at home, and he flew on amid the sketchy plants and cloudy-looking boulders as if at no loss whatever in orienting himself. But Ralibar Vooz, in spite of the spell that stimulated and compelled him onward, had begun to feel a fatigue by no means unnatural in view of his prolonged and heroic itinerary. Also, he was much troubled by the elasticity of the ground, which sank beneath him at every step like an oversodded marsh, and seemed insubstantial to a quite alarming degree.

To his further disconcertion, he soon found that he had attracted the attention of a huge foggy monster with the rough outlines of a tyrannosaurus. This creature chased him amid the archetypal ferns and club-mosses; and overtaking him after five or six bounds, it proceeded to ingest him with the celerity of any latter-day saurian of the same species. Luckily, the ingestment was not permanent for the tyrannosaurus' body-plasm, though fairly opaque, was more astral than material; and Ralibar Vooz, protesting stoutly against his confinement in its maw, felt the dark walls give way before him and tumbled out on the ground.

After its third attempt to devour him, the monster must have decided that he was inedible. It turned and went away with immense leapings in search of comestibles on its own plane of matter. Ralibar Vooz continued his progress through the Cavern of the Archetypes: a progress often delayed by the alimentary designs of crude, misty-stomached allosaurs, pterodactyls, pterandons, stegosaurus, and other carnivora of the prime.

At last, following his experience with a most persistent megalosaur, he beheld before him two entities of vaguely human outline. They were gigantic, with bodies almost globular in form, and they seemed to float rather than walk. Their features, though shadowy to the point of inchoateness, appeared to express aversion and hostility. They drew near to the Commorian, and he became aware that one of them was addressing him. The language used was wholly a matter of primitive vowel-sounds; but a meaning was forcibly, though indistinctly, conveyed:

“We, the originals of mankind, are dismayed by the sight of a copy so coarse and egregiously perverted from the true model. We disown you with sorrow and indignation. Your presence here is an unwarrantable intrusion; and it is obvious that you are not to be assimilated even by our most esurient dinosaurs. Therefore we put you under a geas: depart without delay from the Cavern of the Archetypes, and seek out the slimy gulf in which Abthoth, father and mother of all cosmic uncleanness, eternally carries on Its repugnant fission. We consider that you are fit only for Abthoth, which will perhaps mistake you for one of Its own progeny and devour you in accordance with the custom which It follows.”

The weary hunter was led by the untirable Raptontis to a deep cavern on the same level as that of the Archetypes. Possibly it was a kind of annex to the latter. At any rate, the ground was much firmer there, even though the air was murkier; and Ralibar Vooz might have recovered a little of his customary aplomb, if it had not been for the ungodly and disgusting creatures which he soon began to meet. There were things which he could liken only to monstrous one-legged toads, and immense myriad-tailed worms, and miscreated lizards. They came flopping or crawling through the gloom in a ceaseless procession; and there was no end to the loathsome morphologic variations which they displayed. Unlike the Archetypes, they were formed of all too solid matter, and Ralibar Vooz was both fatigued and nauseated by the constant necessity of kicking them away from his shins. He was somewhat relieved to find, however, that these wretched abortions became steadily smaller as he continued his advance.

The dusk about him thickened with hot, evil steam that left an oozy deposit on his armor and bare face and hands. With every breath he inhaled an odor noisome beyond imagining. He stumbled and slipped on the crawling foulnesses underfoot. Then, in that reeky twilight, he saw the pausing of Raptontis; and below the demoniac bird he descried a sort of pool with a margin of mud that was marled with obscene offal; and in the pool a grayish, horrid mass that nearly choked it from rim to rim.

Here, it seemed, was the ultimate source of all mis-creation and abomination. For the gray mass throbbed and quivered, and swelled perpetually; and from it, in manifold fission, were spawned the anatomies that crept away on every side through the grotto. There were things like bodiless legs or arms that flailed in the slime, or heads that rolled, or floundering bellies with fishes' fins; and all manner of things malformed

and monstrous, that grew in size as they departed from the neighborhood of Abthoth. And those that swam not swiftly ashore when they fell into the pool from Abthoth, were devoured by mouths that gaped in the parent bulk.

Ralibar Vooz was beyond thought, beyond horror, in his weariness: eke he would have known intolerable shame, seeing that he had come to the bourn ordained for him by the Archetypes as most fit and proper. A deadness near to death was upon his faculties; and he heard as if remote and high above him a voice that proclaimed to Abthoth the reason of his coming; and he did not know that the voice was his own.

There was no sound in answer; but out of the lumpy mass there grew a member that stretched and lengthened toward Ralibar Vooz where he stood waiting on the pool's margin. The member divided to a flat, webby hand, soft and slimy, which touched the hunter and went over his person slowly from foot to head. Having done this, it seemed that the thing had served its use: for it dropped quickly away from Abthoth and wriggled into the gloom like a serpent together with the other progeny.

Still waiting, Ralibar Vooz felt in his brain a sensation as of speech heard without words or sound. And the import, rendered in human language, was somewhat as follows:

“I, who am Abthoth, the coeval of the oldest gods, consider that the Archetypes have shown a questionable taste in recommending you to me. After careful inspection, I fail to recognize you as one of my relatives or progeny; though I must admit that I was nearly deceived at first by certain biologic similarities. You are quite alien to my experience; and I do not care to endanger my digestion 'with untried articles of diet.

“Who you are, or whence you have come, I can not surmise; nor can I thank the Archetypes for troubling the profound and placid fertility of my existence with a problem so vexatious as the one that you offer. Get hence, I adjure you. There is a bleak and drear and dreadful limbo, known as the Outer World, of which I have heard dimly; and I think that it might prove a suitable objective for your journeying. I settle an urgent geas upon you: go seek this Outer World with all possible expedition.”

Apparently Raptontis realized that it was beyond the physical powers of his charge to fulfill the seventh geas without an interim of repose. He led the hunter to one of the numerous exits of the grotto inhabited by Abthoth: an exit giving on regions altogether unknown, opposite to the Cavern of the Archetypes. There, with significant gestures of his wings and beak, the bird

indicated a sort of narrow alcove in the rock. The recess was dry and by no means uncomfortable as a sleeping-place. Ralibar Vooz was glad to lay himself down; and a black tide of slumber rolled upon him with the closing of his eyelids. Raphtontis remained on guard before the alcove, discouraging with strokes of his bill the wandering progeny of Abthoth that tried to assail the sleeper.

Since there was neither night nor day in that subterrene world, the term of oblivion enjoyed by Ralibar Vooz was hardly to be measured by the usual method of time-telling. He was aroused by the noise of vigorously flapping wings, and saw beside him the fowl Raphtontis, holding in his beak an unsavory object whose anatomy was that of a fish rather than anything else. Where or how he had caught this creature during his constant vigil was a more than dubious matter; but Ralibar Vooz had fasted too long to be squeamish. He accepted and devoured the proffered breakfast without ceremony.

After that, in conformity with the geas laid upon him by Abthoth, he resumed his journey back to the outer Earth. The route chosen by Raphtontis was presumably a short-cut. Anyhow, it was remote from the cloudy cave of the Archetypes, and the laboratories in which the serpent-men pursued their arduous toils and toxicological researches. Also, the enchanted palace of Haon-Dor was omitted from the itinerary. But, after long, tedious climbing through a region of desolate crags and over a sort of underground plateau, the traveller came once more to the verge of that far-stretching, bottomless chasm which was bridged only by the webs of the spider-god Atlach-Nacha.

For some time past he had hurried his pace because of certain of the progeny of Abthoth, who had followed him from the start and had grown steadily bigger after the fashion of their kind, till they were now large as young tigers or bears. However, when he approached the nearest bridge, he saw that a ponderous and slothlike entity, preceding him, had already begun to cross it. The posteriors of this being was studded with un-amiable eyes, and Ralibar Vooz was unsure for a little regarding its exact orientation. Not wishing to tread too closely upon the reverted talons of its heels, he waited till the monster had disappeared in the darkness; and by that time the spawn of Abthoth were hard upon him.

Raphtontis, with sharp admonitory cawings, floated before him above the giant web; and he was impelled to a rash haste by the imminently

slavering snouts of the dark abnormalities behind. Owing to such precipitancy, he failed to notice that the web had been weakened and some of its strands torn or stretched by the weight of the sloth-like monster. Coming in view of the chasm's opposite verge, he thought only of reaching it, and redoubled his pace. But at this point the web gave way beneath him. He caught wildly at the broken, dangling strands, but could not arrest his fall. With several pieces of Atlach-Nacha's weaving clutched in his fingers, he was precipitated into that gulf which no one had ever voluntarily tried to plumb.

This, unfortunately, was a contingency that had not been provided against by the terms of the seventh geas.

The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqquan

“Give, give, O magnanimous and liberal lord of the poor,” cried die beggar.

Avoosl Wuthoqquan, the richest and most avaricious money-lender in all Commoriom, and, by that token, in the whole of Hyperborea, was startled from his train of reverie by the sharp, eery, cicada-like voice. He eyed the supplicant with acidulous disfavor. His meditations, as he walked homeward that evening, had been splendidly replete with the shining of costly metals, with coins and ingots and gold-work and argentry, and the flaming or sparkling of many-tinted gems in rills, rivers and cascades, all flowing toward the coffers of Avoosl Wuthoqquan. Now the vision had flown; and this untimely and obstreperous voice was imploring him for alms.

“I have nothing for you.” His tones were like the grating of a shut clasp.

“Only two *pazoors*, O generous one, and I will prophesy.”

Avoosl Wuthoqquan gave the beggar a second glance. He had never seen so disreputable a specimen of the mendicant class in all his wayfarings through Commoriom. The man was preposterously old, and his mummy-brown skin, wherever visible, was webbed with wrinkles that were like the heavy weaving of some giant jungle spider. His rags were no less fabulous; and the beard that hung down and mingled with them was hoary as the moss of a primeval juniper.

“I do not require your prophecies.”

“One *pazoor* then.”

“No.”

The eyes of the beggar became evil and malignant in their hollow sockets, like the heads of two poisonous little pit-vipers in their holes.

“Then, O Avoosl Wuthoqquan,” he hissed, “I will prophesy gratis. Harken to your weird: the godless and exceeding love which you bear to all material things, and your lust therefor, shall lead you on a strange quest and bring you to a doom whereof the stars and the sun will alike be ignorant.

The hidden opulence of earth shall allure you and ensnare you; and earth itself shall devour you at the last.”

“Begone,” said Avoosl Wuthoqquan. “The weird is more than a trifle cryptic in its earlier clauses; and the final clause is somewhat platitudinous. I do not need a beggar to tell me the common fate of mortality.”

It was many moons later, in that year which became known to preglacial historians as the year of the Black Tiger.

Avoosl Wuthoqquan sat in a lower chamber of his house, which was also his place of business. The room was obliquely shafted by the brief, aerial gold of the reddening sunset, which fell through a crystal window, lighting a serpentine line of irised sparks in the jewel-studded lamp that hung from copper chains, and touching to fiery life the tortuous threads of silver and similar in the dark arrases. Avoosl Wuthoqquan, seated in an umber shadow beyond the aisle of light, peered with an austere and ironic mien at his client, whose swarthy face and somber mantle were gilded by the passing glory.

The man was a stranger; possibly a traveling merchant from outland realms, the usurer thought—or else an outlander of more dubious occupation. His narrow, slanting, beryl-green eyes, his bluish, unkempt beard, and the uncouth cut of his sad raiment, were sufficient proof of his alienage in Commoriom.

“Three hundred *djals* is a large sum,” said the money-lender thoughtfully. “Moreover, I do not know you. What security have you to offer?”

The visitor produced from the bosom of his garment a small bag of tiger-skin, tied at the mouth with sinew, and opening the bag with a deft movement, poured on the table before Avoosl Wuthoqquan two uncut emeralds of immense size and flawless purity. They flamed at the heart with a cold and ice-green fire as they caught the slanting sunset; and a greedy spark was kindled in the eyes of the usurer. But he spoke coolly and indifferently.

“It may be that I can loan you one hundred and fifty *djals*. Emeralds are hard to dispose of; and if you should not return to claim the gems and repay me the money, I might have reason to repent my generosity. But I will take the hazard.”

“The loan I ask is a mere tith of their value,” protested the stranger. “Give me two hundred and fifty *djals*. . . . There are other money-lenders in Commoriom, I am told.”

“Two hundred *djals* is the most I can offer. It is true that the gems are not without value. But you may have stolen them. How am I to know? It is not my habit to ask indiscreet questions.”

“Take them,” said the stranger, hastily. He accepted the silver coins which Avoosl Wuthoqqan counted out, and offered no further protest. The usurer watched him with a sardonic smile as he departed, and drew his own inferences. He felt sure that the jewels had been stolen, but was in no wise perturbed or disquieted by this fact. No matter whom they had belonged to, or what their history, they would form a welcome and valuable addition to the coffers of Avoosl Wuthoqqan. Even the smaller of the two emeralds would have been absurdly cheap at three hundred *djals*; but the usurer felt no apprehension that the stranger would return

to claim them at any time---No, the man was plainly a thief, and had been glad to rid himself of the evidence of his guilt. As to the rightful ownership of the gems— that was hardly a matter to arouse the concern or the curiosity of the money-lender. They were his own property now, by virtue of the sum in silver which had been tacitly regarded by himself and the stranger as a price rather than a mere loan.

The sunset faded swiftly from the room and a brown twilight began to dull, the metal broideries of the curtains and the colored eyes of the gems. Avoosl Wuthoqqan lit the fretted lamp; and then, opening a small brazen strong-box, he poured from it a flashing rill of jewels on the table beside the emeralds. There were pale and ice-clear topazes from Mhu Thulan, and gorgeous crystals of tourmaline from Tscho Vulpa-nomi; there were chill and furtive sapphires of the north, and artic carnelians like frozen blood, and diamonds that were hearted with white stars. Red, unblinking rubies glared from the coruscating pile, chatoyants shone like the eyes of tigers, garnets and alabraundines gave their somber flames to the lamplight amid the restless hues of opals. Also, there were other emeralds, but none so large and flawless as the two that he had acquired that evening.

Avoosl Wuthoqqan sorted out the gems in gleaming rows and circles, as he had done so many times before; and he set apart all the emeralds with his new acquisitions at one end, like captains leading a file. He was well pleased with his bargain, well satisfied with his overflowing caskets. He

regarded the jewels with an avaricious love, a miserly complacence; and one might have thought that his eyes were little beads of jasper, set in his leathery face as in the smoky parchment cover of some olden book of doubtful magic. Money and precious gems—these things alone, he thought, were immutable and non-volatile in a world of never-ceasing change and fugacity.

His reflections, at this point, were interrupted by a singular occurrence. Suddenly and without warning—for he had not touched or disturbed them in any manner—the two large emeralds started to roll away from their companions on the smooth, level table of black *ogga*-wood; and before the startled money-lender could put out his hand to stop them, they had vanished over the opposite edge and had fallen with a muffled rattling on the carpeted floor.

Such behavior was highly eccentric and peculiar, not to say unaccountable; but the usurer leapt to his feet with no other thought save to retrieve the jewels. He rounded the table in time to see that they had continued their mysterious rolling and were slipping through the outer door, which the stranger in departing had left slightly ajar. This door gave on a courtyard; and the courtyard, in turn, opened on the streets of Commoriom.

Avoosl Wuthoqqan was deeply alarmed, but was more concerned by the prospect of losing the emeralds than by the eeriness and mystery of their departure. He gave chase with an agility of which few would have believed him capable, and throwing open the door, he saw the fugitive emeralds gliding with an uncanny smoothness and swiftness across the rough, irregular flags of the courtyard. The twilight was deepening to a nocturnal blue; but the jewels seemed to wink derisively with a strange phosphoric luster as he followed them. Clearly visible in the gloom, they passed through the unbarred gate that gave on a principal avenue, and disappeared.

It began to occur to Avoosl Wuthoqqan that the jewels were bewitched; but not even in the face of an unknown sorcery was he willing to relinquish anything for which he had paid the munificent sum of two hundred *djals*. He gained the open street with a running leap, and paused only to make sure of the direction in which his emeralds had gone.

The dim avenue was almost entirely deserted; for the worthy citizens of Commoriom, at that hour, were preoccupied with the consumption of their evening meal. The jewels, gaining momentum, and skimming the ground lightly in their flight, were speeding away on the left toward the less

reputable suburbs and the wild, luxuriant jungle beyond. Avoosl Wuthoquan saw that he must redouble his pursuit if he were to overtake them.

Panting and wheezing valiantly with the unfamiliar exertion, he renewed the chase; but in spite of all his efforts, the jewels ran always at the same distance before him, with a maddening ease and eery volitation, tinkling musically at times on the pavement. The frantic and bewildered usurer was soon out of breath; and being compelled to slacken his speed, he feared to lose sight of the eloping gems; but strangely, there-afterward, they ran with a slowness that corresponded to his own, maintaining ever the same interval.

The money-lender grew desperate. The flight of the emeralds was leading him into an outlying quarter of Commorion where thieves and murderers and beggars dwelt. Here he met a few passers, all of dubious character, who stared in stupefaction at the fleeing stones, but made no effort to stop them. Then the foul tenements among which he ran became smaller, with wider spaces between; and soon there were only sparse huts, where furtive lights gleamed out in the full-grown darkness, beneath the lowering frondage of high palms.

Still plainly visible, and shining with a mocking phosphorescence, the jewels fled before him on the dark road. It seemed to him, however, that he was gaining upon them a little. His flabby limbs and puffy body were faint with fatigue, and he was grievously winded; but he went on in renewed hope, gasping with eager avarice. A full moon, large and amber-tinted, rose beyond the jungle and began to light his way.

Commorion was far behind him now; and there were no more huts on the lonely forest road, nor any other wayfarers. He shivered a little—either with fear or the chill night air; but he did not relax his pursuit. He was closing in on the emeralds, very gradually but surely; and he felt that he would recapture them soon. So engrossed was he in the weird chase, with his eyes on the ever-rolling gems, that he failed to perceive that he was no longer following an open highway. Somehow, somewhere, he had taken a narrow path that wound among monstrous trees whose foliage turned the moonlight to a mesh of quicksilver with heavy, fantastic raddlings of ebony. Crouching in grotesque menace, like giant retiarii, they seemed to close in upon him from all sides. But the money-lender was oblivious of their shadowy threats, and heeded not the sinister strangeness and solitude of the

jungle path, nor the dank odors that lingered beneath the trees like unseen pools.

Nearer and nearer he came to the fleeting gems, till they ran and flickered tantalizingly a little beyond his reach, and seemed to look back at him like two greenish, glowing eyes, filled with allurements and mockery. Then, as he was about to fling himself forward in a last and supreme effort to secure them, they vanished abruptly from view, as if they had been swallowed by the forest shadows that lay like sable pythons athwart the moonlit way.

Baffled and disconcerted, Avoosl Wuthoqqan paused and peered in bewilderment at the place where they had disappeared. He saw that the path ended in a cavern-mouth yawning blackly and silently before him, and leading to unknown subterranean depths. It was a doubtful and suspicious-looking cavern, fanged with sharp stones and bearded with queer grasses; and Avoosl Wuthoqqan, in his cooler moments, would have hesitated a long while before entering it. But just then he was capable of no other impulse than the fervor of the chase and the prompting of avarice.

The cavern that had swallowed his emeralds in a fashion so nefarious was a steep incline running swiftly down into darkness. It was low and narrow, and slippery with noisome ooings; but the money-lender was heartened as he went on by a glimpse of the glowing jewels, which seemed to float beneath him in the black air, as if to illuminate his way. The incline led to a level, winding passage, in which Avoosl Wuthoqqan began to overtake his elusive property once more; and hope flared high in his panting bosom.

The emeralds were almost within reach; then, with sleightful suddenness, they slipped from his ken beyond an abrupt angle of the passage; and following them, he paused in wonder, as if halted by an irresistible hand. He was half blinded for some moments by the pale, mysterious, bluish light that poured from the roof and walls of the huge cavern into which he had emerged; and he was more than dazzled by the multitudinous splendor that flamed and glowed and glistened and sparkled at his very feet.

He stood on a narrow ledge of stone; and the whole chamber before and beneath him, almost to the level of this ledge, was filled with jewels even as a granary is filled with grain! It was as if all the rubies, opals, beryls, diamonds, amethysts, emeralds, chrysolites and sapphires of the

world had been gathered together and poured into an immense pit. He thought that he saw his own emeralds, lying tranquilly and decorously in a nearer mound of the undulant mass; but there were so many others of like size and flawlessness that he could not be sure of them.

For awhile, he could hardly believe the ineffable vision. Then, with a single cry of ecstasy, he leapt forward from the ledge, sinking almost to his knees in the shifting and tinkling and billowing gems. In great double handfuls, he lifted the flaming and scintillating stones and let them sift between his fingers, slowly and voluptuously, to fall with a light clash on the monstrous heap. Blinking joyously, he watched the royal lights and colors run in spreading or narrowing ripples; he saw them bum like steadfast coals and secret stars, or leap out in blazing eyes that seemed to catch fire from each other.

In his most audacious dreams, the usurer had never even suspected the existence of such riches. He babbled aloud in a rhapsody of delight, as he played with the numberless gems; and he failed to perceive that he was sinking deeper with every movement into the unfathomable pit. The jewels had risen above his knees, were engulfing his pudgy thighs, before his avaricious rapture was touched by any thought of peril.

Then, startled by the realization that he was sinking into his newfound wealth as into some treacherous quicksand, he sought to extricate himself and return to the safety of the ledge. He floundered helplessly; for the moving gems gave way beneath him, and he made no progress but went deeper still, till the bright, unstable heap had risen to his waist.

Avoosl Wuthoquan began to feel a frantic terror amid the intolerable irony of his plight. He cried out; and as if in answer, there came a loud, unctuous, evil chuckle from the cavern behind him. Twisting his fat neck with painful effort, so that he could peer over his shoulder, he saw a most peculiar entity that was crouching on a sort of shelf above the pit of jewels. The entity was wholly and outrageously unhuman; and neither did it resemble any species of animal, or any known god or demon of Hyperborea. Its aspect was not such as to lessen the alarm and panic of the moneylender; for it was very large and pale and squat, with a toad-like face and a swollen, squidgy body and numerous cuttlefish limbs or appendages. It lay fiat on the shelf, with its chinless head and long slit-like mouth overhanging the pit, and its cold, lidless eyes peering obliquely at Avoosl Wuthoquan. The usurer was not reassured when it began to speak in a

thick and loathsome voice, like the molten tallow of corpses dripping from a wizard's kettle.

"Ho! what have we here?" it said. "By the black altar of Tsathoggua, 'tis a fat money-lender, wallowing in my jewels like a lost pig in a quagmire!"

"Help me!" cried Avoosl Wuthoqquan. "See you not that I am sinking?"

The entity gave its oleaginous chuckle. "Yes, I see your predicament, of course. . . . What are you doing here?"

"I came in search of my emeralds—two fine and flawless stones for which I have just paid the sum of two hundred *djals*."

"*Your* emeralds?" said the entity. "I fear that I must contradict you. The jewels are mine. They were stolen not long ago from this cavern, in which I have been wont to gather and guard my subterranean wealth for many ages. The thief was frightened away . . . when he saw me ... and I suffered him to go. He had taken only the two emeralds; and I knew that they would return to me—as my jewels always return—whenever I choose to call them. The thief was lean and bony, and I did well to let him go; for now, in his place, there is a plump and well-fed usurer."

Avoosl Wuthoqquan, in his mounting terror, was barely able to comprehend the words or to grasp their implications. He had sunk slowly but steadily into the yielding pile; and green, yellow, red and violet gems were blinking gorgeously about his bosom and sifting with a light tinkle beneath his armpits.

"Help! help!" he wailed. "I shall be engulfed!" Grinning sardonically, and showing the cloven tip of a fat white tongue, the singular entity slid from the shelf with boneless ease; and spreading its flat body on the pool of gems, into which it hardly sank, it slithered forward to a position from which it could reach the frantic usurer with its octopus-like members. It dragged him free with a single motion of incredible celerity. Then, without pause or preamble or further comment, in a leisurely and methodical fashion, it began to devour him.

The White Sybil

Tortha, the poet, with strange austral songs in his heart, and the umber of high and heavy suns on his face, had come back to his native city of Cemgoth, in Mhu Thulan, by the Hyperborean sea. Far had he wandered in the quest of that alien beauty which had fled always before him like the horizon. Beyond Commorion of the white, numberless spires, and beyond the marsh-grown jungles to die south of Commoriom, he had floated on nameless rivers, and had crossed the half-legendary realm of Tscho Vulpanomi, upon whose diamond-sanded, ruby-graveled shores an ignescent ocean was said to beat forever with fiery spume.

He had beheld many marvels, and things incredible to relate: the uncouthly carven gods of the South, to whom blood was spilt on sun-approaching towers; the plumes of the *huusim*, which were many yards in length and were colored like pure flame; the mailed monsters of the austral swamps; the proud argosies of Mu and Antiilia, which moved by enchantment, without oar or sail; the fuming peaks that were shaken perpetually by the struggles of imprisoned demons. But, walking at noon on the streets of Cemgoth, he met a stranger marvel than these. Idly, with no expectation of other than homely things, he beheld the White Sybil of Polarion.

He knew not whence she had come, but suddenly she was before him in the throng. Amid the tawny girls of Cemgoth with their russet hair and blue-black eyes, she was like an apparition descended from the moon. Goddess, ghost or woman, he knew not which, she passed fleetly and was gone: a creature of snow and norland light, with eyes like moon-pervaded pools, and lips that were smitten with the same pallor as the brow and bosom. Her gown was of some filmy white fabric, pure and ethereal as her person.

In wonder that turned to startled rapture, Tortha gazed at the miraculous being, and sustained for a moment the strangely thrilling light of her chill eyes, in which he seemed to find an obscure recognition, such as a long-veiled divinity, appearing at last, would vouchsafe to her worshipper.

Somehow, she seemed to bring with her the infrangible solitude of remote places, the death-deep hush of lonely plateaus and mountains. A silence, such as might dwell in some abandoned city, fell on the chaffering, chattering crowd as she went by; and the people drew back from her in sudden awe. Before the silence could break into gossiping murmurs, Tortha had guessed her identity.

He knew that he had seen the White Sybil, that mysterious being who was rumored to come and go as if by some preterhuman agency in the cities of Hyperborea. No man had ever learned her name, or her nativity; but she was said to descend like a spirit from the bleak mountains to the north of Cemgoth; from the desert land of Polarion, where the oncoming glaciers crept in valleys that had once been fertile with fern and cycad, and passes that had been the highways of busy traffic.

No one had ever dared to accost or follow her. Often she came and went in silence; but sometimes, in the marts or public squares, she would utter cryptic prophecies and tidings of doom. In many places, throughout Mhu Thulan and central Hyperborea, she had foretold the enormous sheet of ice, now crawling gradually downward from the pole, that would cover the continent in ages to come, and would bury beneath oblivious drift the mammoth palms of its jungles and the superb pinnacles of its cities. And in great Commorion, then the capital, she had prophesied a strange doom that was to befall this city long before the encroachment of the ice. Men feared her everywhere, as a messenger of unknown outland gods, moving abroad in supernal bale and beauty.

All this, Tortha had heard many times; and he had wondered somewhat at the tale, but had soon dismissed it from his mind, being laden with marvelous memories of exotic things. But now that he had seen the Sybil, it was as if an unexpected revelation had been offered to him; as if he had discerned, briefly and afar, the hidden goal of a mystic pilgrimage.

In that single glimpse, he had found the personification of all the vague ideals and unfixd longings that had drawn him from land to land. Here was the eluding strangeness he had sought on alien breasts and waters, and beyond horizons of fire-vomiting mountains. Here was the veiled Star, whose name and luster he had never known. The moon-cold eyes of the Sybil had kindled a strange love in Tortha, to whom love had been, at most, no more than a passing agitation of the senses.

However, on that occasion, it did not occur to him that he might follow the visitant or come to learn more concerning her. Momentarily, he was content with the rare vision that had fired his soul and dazzled his senses. Dreaming such dreams as the moon might inspire in a moth; dreams through which the Sybil moved like a woman-shaped flame on ways too far and too steep for human feet, he returned to his house in Cemgoth.

The days that ensued were dim and dream-like to Tortha, and were presided over by his memory of the white apparition. A mad Uranian fever mounted in his soul, together with the sure knowledge that he sought an impossible fruition. Idly, to beguile the hours, he copied the poems he had written during his journey, or turned over the pages of boyish manuscripts. All were equally void and without meaning now, like the sere leaves of a bygone year.

With no prompting on the part of Tortha, his servants and visitors spoke to him of the Sybil. Seldom, they said, had she entered Cemgoth, appearing more often in cities remote from the ice-bound waste of Polarion. Truly, she was no mortal being, for she had been seen on the same day in places hundreds of miles apart. Huntsmen had sometimes met her on the mountains above Cemgoth; but always, when encountered thus, she had disappeared quickly, like a morning vapor that melts among the crags.

The poet, listening with a moody and absent mien, spoke of his love to no one. He knew well that his kinsfolk and acquaintances would think this passion a more errant madness than the youthful yearning that had led him to unheard-of lands. No human lover had aspired to the Sybil, whose beauty was a perilous brightness, akin to meteor and fireball; a fatal and lethal beauty, bom of transarctic gulfs, and somehow one with the far doom of worlds.

Like the brand of frost or flame, her memory burned in Tortha. Musing among his neglected books, or walking abroad in reverie on which no outward thing could intrude, he saw always before him the pale radiance of the Sybil. He seemed to hear a whisper from boreal solitudes: a murmur of ethereal sweetness, sharp as ice-bom air, vocal with high, unearthly words, that sang of inviolate horizons and the chill glory of lunar auroras above continents impregnable to man.

The long summer days went by, bringing the outland folk to trade their furs and eider in Cemgoth, and damaskeening the slopes beyond the city with flowers of bright azure and vermilion. But the Sybil was not seen

again in Cemgoth, nor was she heard of in other cities. It seemed as if her visitations had ceased; as if, having delivered the tidings committed to her by the outer gods, she would appear no more in the haunts of mankind.

Amid the despair that was twin to his passion, Tortha had nurtured a hope that he might again behold the visitant. Slowly the hope grew fainter; but left his longing undiminished. In his daily walks he now went farther afield, leaving the house and streets and turning toward the mountains that glowered above Cemgoth, guarding with icy horns the glacier-taken plateau of Polarion.

Higher he went each day on the hills, lifting his eyes to the dark crags from which the Sybil was rumored to descend. An obscure message seemed to call him on; and still, for a time, he did not dare to obey the summons wholly, but turned back to Cemgoth.

There came the forenoon when he climbed to a hill-meadow from which the roofs of the city were like littered shells beside a sea whose tumbling billows had become a smooth floor of turquoise. He was alone in a world of flowers: the frail mantle that summer had flung before the desolate peaks. The turf rolled away from him on every hand in broad scrolls and carpetries of flaming color. Even the wild briars had put forth their fragile, sanguine-tinted blossoms; and the very banks and precipices were heavily arrassed with low-hanging bloom.

Tortha had met no one; for he had long since left the trail by which the squat mountain people came to the city. A vague prompting, which seemed to include a promise unspoken by any voice, had led him to this lofty meadow from which a crystal rill ran seaward amid the bright cascades of flowers.

Pale, diaphanous beneath the sun, a few cirrus clouds went floating idly toward the pinnacles; and the quarrying hawks flew oceanward on broad red wings. A perfume, rich as temple-incense, rose from the blossoms whereon he had trampled; the light lay still and heavy upon him, dazzling his senses; and Tortha, a little weary from his climbing, grew faint for a moment with some strange vertigo.

Recovering, he saw before him the White Sybil, who stood amid the flowers of blood-red and cerulean like a goddess of the snow attired in veils of moon-flame. Her pale eyes, pouring an icy rapture into his veins, regarded him enigmatically. With a gesture of her hand that was like the

glimmering of light on inaccessible places, she beckoned him to follow, as she turned and went upward along the slope above the meadow.

Tortha had forgotten his fatigue; had forgotten all but the celestial beauty of the Sybil. He did not question the enchantment that claimed him, the wild Uranian ecstasy that rose in his heart. He knew only that she had reappeared to him, had beckoned him; and he followed.

Soon the hills grew steeper against the overtowering crags; and barren ribs of rock emerged gloomily through the mantling flowerage. Without effort, light as a drifting vapor, the Sybil climbed on before Tortha. He could not approach her; and though the interval of distance between them increased at times, he did not altogether lose sight of her luminous figure.

Now he was among bleak ravines and savage scarps, where the Sybil was like a swimming star in the chasmal, crag-flung shadows. The fierce mountain eagles screamed above him, eyeing his progress as they flew about their eyries. The chill trickle of rills bom of the eternal glaciers fell upon him from overbeetling ledges; and sudden chasms yawned before his feet with a hollow roaring of vertiginous waters far below.

Tortha was conscious only of an emotion such as impels the moth to pursue a wandering flame. He did not picture to himself the aim and end of his pursuit, nor the fruition of the weird love that drew him on. Oblivious of mortal fatigue, of peril and disaster that might lie before him, he felt the delirium of a mad ascent to superhuman heights.

Above the wild ravines and escarpments, he came to a lofty pass that had led formerly between Mhu Thulan and Polarion. Here an olden highway, creviced and chasmed, and partly blocked with debris of avalanches and fallen watchtowers, ran between walls of winter-eaten rock. Down the pass, like some enormous dragon of glittering ice, there poured the vanguard of the boreal glaciers to meet the Sybil and Tortha.

Amid the strange ardor of his ascent, the poet was aware of a sudden chill that had touched the noontide. The rays of the sun had grown dull and heatless; the shadows were like the depth of ice-hewn Arctic tombs. A film of ochreous cloud, moving with magical swiftness, swept athwart the day and darkened like a dusty web, till the sun glowed through it lifeless and pale as a moon in December. The heavens above and beyond the pass were closed in the curtains of leaden-threaded grey.

Into the gathering dimness, over the glacier's machicolated ice, the Sybil sped like a flying fire, paler and more luminous against the somber

cloud.

Now Tortha had climbed the fretted incline of the ice that crawled out from Polarion. He had gained the summit of the pass and would soon reach the open plateau beyond. But like a storm raised up by preterhuman sorcery, the snow was upon him now in spectral swirls and blinding flurries. It came as with the ceaseless flight of soft wide wings, the measureless coiling of vague and pallid dragons.

For a time he still discerned the Sybil, as one sees the dim glowing of a sacred lamp through altar-curtains that descend in some great temple. Then the snow thickened, till he no longer saw the guiding gleam, and knew not if he still wandered through the walled pass, or was lost upon some boundless plain of perpetual winter.

He fought for breath in the storm-stifled air. The clear white fire that had sustained him seemed to sink and fall in his icy limbs. The unearthly fervor and exaltation died away, leaving a dark fatigue, an ever-spreading numbness that rose through all his being. The bright image of the Sybil was no more than a nameless star that fell with all else he had ever known or dreamed into grey forgetfulness. . . .

Tortha opened his eyes to a strange world. Whether he had fallen and had died in the storm, or had stumbled on somehow through its white oblivion, he could not guess: but around him now there was no trace of the driving snow or the glacier-shackled mountains.

He stood in a valley that might have been the inmost heart of some boreal paradise—a valley that was surely no part of waste Polarion. About him the turf was piled with flowers that had the frail and pallid hues of a lunar rainbow. Their delicate forms were those of the blossoms of snow and frost, and it seemed that they would melt and vanish at a touch.

The sky above the valley was not the low-arching, tender turquoise heaven of Mhu Thulan, but was vague, dreamlike, remote, and full of an infinite violescence, like the welkin of a world beyond time and space. Everywhere there was light; but Tortha saw no sun in the cloudless vault. It was as if the sun,, the moon, the stars, had been molten together ages ago and had dissolved into some ultimate, eternal luminescence.

Tall, slender trees, whose leafage of lunar green was thickly starred with blossoms delicate as those of the turf, grew in groves and clumps above the valley, and lined the margin of a stilly flowing stream that wound away into measureless misty perspectives.

Tortha noticed that he cast no shadow on the flowered ground. The trees likewise were shadowless, and were not reflected in the clear still waters. No wind lifted the blossom-heavy boughs, or stirred the countless petals amid the grass. A cryptic silence brooded over all things, like the hush of some supernal doom.

Filled with a high wonder, but powerless to surmise the riddle of his situation, the poet turned as if at the bidding of an imperatory voice. Behind him, and near at hand, there was an arbor of flowering vines that had draped themselves from tree to tree. Through the half-parted arras of bloom, in the bower's heart, he saw like a drifted snow the white veils of the Sybil.

With timid steps, with eyes that faltered before her mystic beauty, and a flaming as of blown torches in his heart, he entered the arbor. From the bank of blossoms on which she reclined, the Sybil rose to receive her worshipper. . . .

Of all that followed, much was forgotten afterwards by Tortha. It was like a light too radiant to be endured, a thought that eluded conception through surpassing strangeness. It was real beyond all that men deem reality: and yet it seemed to Tortha that he, the Sybil, and all that surrounded them, were part of an after-mirage on the deserts of time; that he was poised insecurely above life and death in some bright, fragile bower of dreams.

He thought that the Sybil greeted him in thrilling, mellifluous words of a tongue that he knew well, but had never heard. Her tones filled him with an ecstasy near to pain. He sat beside her on the faery bank, and she told him many things: divine, stupendous, perilous things; dire as the secret of life; sweet as the lore of oblivion; strange and immemorable as the lost knowledge of sleep. But she did not tell him her name, nor the secret of her essence; and still he knew not if she were ghost or woman, goddess or spirit.

Something there was in her speech of time and its mystery; something of that which lies forever beyond time; something of the grey shadow of doom that waits upon world and sun; something of love, that pursues an elusive, perishing fire; of death, the soil from which all flowers spring; of life, that is a mirage on the frozen void.

For a while Tortha was content merely to listen. A high rapture filled him, he felt the awe of a mortal in the presence of a deity. Then, as he grew accustomed to his situation, the woman-like beauty of the Sybil spoke to

him no less eloquently than her words. Vacillant, by degrees, like a tide that lifts to some unearthly moon, there rose up in his heart the human love that was half of his adoration. He felt a delirium of desire, mixed with the vertigo of one who has climbed to an impossible height. He saw only the white loveliness of his divinity; and no longer did he hear clearly the high wisdom of her speech.

The Sybil paused in her ineffable discourse; and somehow, with slow, stumbling words, he dared to tell her of his love.

She made no answer, gave no gesture of assent or denial. But when he had done, she regarded him strangely; whether with love or pity, sadness or joy, he could not tell. Then, swiftly, she bent forward and kissed his brow with her pallid lips. Their kiss was like the searing of fire or ice. But, mad with his supreme longing, Tortha strove rashly to embrace the Sybil.

Dreadfully, unutterably, she seemed to change in his arms as he clasped her—to become a frozen corpse that had lain for ages in a floe-built tomb—a leper-white mummy in whose frosted eyes he read the horror of the ultimate void. Then she was a thing that had no form or name—a dark corruption that flowed and eddied in his arms—a hueless dust, a flight of gleaming atoms, that rose between his evaded fingers. Then there was nothing—and the faery-tinted flowers about him were changing also, were crumbling swiftly, were falling beneath flurries of white snow. The vast and violet heaven, the tall slim trees, the magic, unreflecting stream—the very ground under him—all had vanished amid the universal, whirling flakes.

It seemed to Tortha that he was plunging dizzily into some deep gulf together with that chaos of driven snows. Gradually, as he fell, the air grew clear about him, and he appeared to hang suspended above the receding, dissolving storm. He was alone in a still, funereal, starless heaven; and below, at an awesome and giddy distance, he saw the dimly glittering reaches of a land sheathed with glacial ice from horizon to far-curved horizon. The snows had vanished from the dead air; and a searing cold, like the breath of the infinite ether, was about Tortha.

All this he saw and felt for a timeless instant. Then, with the swiftness of a meteor, he resumed his fall toward the frozen continent. And like the rushing flame of a meteor, his consciousness dimmed and went out on the bleak air even as he fell.

Tortha had been seen by the half-savage people of the mountains as he disappeared in the sudden storm that had come mysteriously from Polarion.

Later, when the blinding flurries had died down, they found him lying on the glacier. They tended him with rough care and uncouth skill, marvelling much at the white mark that had been imprinted like a fiery brand on his sun-swart brow. The flesh was seared deeply; and the mark was shaped like the pressure of lips. But they could not know that the never-fading mark had been left by the kiss of the White Sybil.

Slowly, Tortha won back to some measure of his former strength. But ever afterward there was a cloudy dimness in his mind, a blur of unresolving shadow, like the dazzlement in eyes that have looked on some insupportable light.

Among those who tended him was a pale maiden, not uncomely; and Tortha took her for the Sybil in the darkness that had come upon him. The maiden's name was Hlara, and Tortha loved her in his delusion; and, forgetful of his kin and his friends in Cemgoth, he dwelt with the mountain people thereafter, taking Blara to wife and making the songs of the little tribe. For the most part, he was happy in his belief that the Sybil had returned to him; and Illara, in her way, was content, being not the first of mortal women whose lover had remained faithful to a divine illusion.

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 fore-ran the desertion of Commorion 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 Commorion, as every one 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 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 Commorion. My father, Manghai Thai, 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 Commorion, when in this gray 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 Commorion, 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 Commorion, 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 were 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 Commorion.

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 headsmen 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 Commorion.

I remember well, on account of their 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 Commorion, 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 beastlike 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 any one 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 Commorion that it was usually classed as a suburb. Here he and his filthy 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 countryside; 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 billbearers, 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 every one 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 framework—which made me view the captive, and also my incumbent task, with an unaccustomed 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 to 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 overly 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 Commorion by eight judges in turn and solemnly reaffirmed 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 unflinching 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 silver and nacarat 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 billhooks 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 ax.

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 unmounted grave between two middens. The power of the law had now been amply vindicated; and every one was satisfied, from Loquamethros himself to the villagers that had suffered from the depredations of the decreased 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 cacodemoniactal 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 vein 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 cognition; and the aforesaid sentiment, and all the horror, were dimly but indissolubly bound up with these.

Awaking unrefreshed and weary from what seemed an eon 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 myriad cries of rage, horror, fear and lamentation that were seemingly caught up and repeated by every one 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 signaled 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 *djonguaseber* 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 every one 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 passage of a special statute, calling for rejudgment, and allowing re-execution, of such malefactors as might thus return from their lawful graces. 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 trans-stellar 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 mom. 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 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 reunion, 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; 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 eyes were able to determine, the effects of the shearing blow were all that could be desired. The head rolled forward on the *eighori-wood*, and the torso and its members fell and lay supinely on the *maculated flags*. *From a legal viewpoint, this doubly nefarious 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 die 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 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 titan 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 muskrat. 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 reappeared, it was obvious to every one 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 dewlaps or wattles, into which his kneecaps had now 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 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 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 sight 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 struck them in crevices between the flagstones 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 Commorion 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 confined and so remotely sundered from its odious body. And 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 blow 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 sarcophagus was heaving and pitching in a most unseemly fashion amid its ring of flaring torches. First on one end or comer, 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 flagstones 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 suburb of Commoriom in which the body of Knygathin Zhaum had been entombed. 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 aboard 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-shaped 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, fantasmal 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 countryside. 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 whereon 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 reunion 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, despite this, and the wholly stupendous enormity of the miscreation before us, we were still prepared to fulfil 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 to violently, that we could not use our weapons without grave danger of impaling or otherwise injuring our two fellow-citizens. At length, however, the stragglings and heavings grew less vehement, as the substance and life-blood of the men were 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 *eighorhblock*. 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 soiling 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 hissings 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 now entirely without a king, a judicial system, a constabulary or a people, I finally abandoned the doomed city and followed the others.

The Coming of the White Worm

Evagh the warlock, dwelling beside the boreal sea, was aware of many strange and untimely portents in midsummer. Chilly burned the sun above Mhu Thulan from a heaven clear and pallid as ice. At eve the aurora was hung from zenith to earth like an arras in a high chamber of gods. Wan and rare were the poppies and small the anemones in the cliff-hidden vales behind Evagh's house; and the fruits in his walled garden were pale of rind and green at the core. He saw by day the unseasonable flight of great multitudes of fowl, going southward from the isles beyond Mhu Thulan; and by night he heard the clamor of other passing multitudes.

Now Evagh was troubled by these portents, for his magic could not wholly interpret them. And the rude fisher-folk on the shore of the haven below his house were also troubled in their fashion. Day by day they had gone forth through the summer in their coracles of elk-hide and willow, casting their seines: but in the seines they drew only dead fishes, blasted as if by fire or extreme cold, and because of this, as the summer drew on, it came to pass that few of them fared any longer to sea.

Then, out of the north, where ships from Cemgoth were wont to ply among the Arctic islands, a galley came drifting with idle oars and aimlessly veering helm. And the tide beached it among the fishermen's boats on the sands beneath the cliff-built house of Evagh. And, thronging about the galley, the fishers beheld its oarsmen still at the oars and its captain at the helm. But the faces and hands of all were white as leprosy; and the pupils of their open eyes had faded strangely, being indistinguishable from the whites; and a blankness of horror was within them like ice in deep pools fast frozen to the bottom.

Loath were the fishers to touch the dead men; and they murmured, saying that a doom was upon the sea, and a curse upon all seafaring things and people. But Evagh, deeming that the bodies would rot in the sun and would breed pestilence, commanded them to build a pile of driftwood about the galley. And when the pile had rise above the bulwarks, hiding from view the dead rowers, he fired it with his own hands.

High flamed the pile, and smoke ascended black as a storm-cloud, blowing in windy volumes. But when the fire sank, the bodies of the oarsmen were still sitting amid the mounded embers, and their arms were still outstretched in the posture of rowing, and their fingers were clenched; though the oars had now dropped away from them in brands and ashes. And the galley's captain stood upright still in his place: though the burnt helm had fallen beside him. Naught but the raiment of the corpses had been consumed; and they shone white as marble above the charrings of wood; and nowhere upon them was any blackness left by the fire.

Deeming this thing an ill prodigy, the fishers were all aghast, and they fled swiftly to the highmost rocks. But the sorcerer Evagh awaited the cooling of the brands.

Quickly the brands darkened; but smoke arose from them still throughout the noon and afternoon; and still they were overhot for human treading when the hour drew toward sunset. So Evagh fetched water in urns from the sea and cast it upon the ashes and charrings so that he might approach the corpses. After the smoke and hissing had died, he went forward. Nearing the bodies he was aware of a great coldness; and the coldness began to ache in his hands and ears, and smote sharply through his mantle of fur. Going still closer, he touched one of the bodies with his forefinger-tip; and the finger, though lightly pressed and quickly withdrawn, was seared as if by flame.

Evagh was much amazed: for the condition of the corpses was a thing unknown to him heretofore; and in all his science of wizardry there was naught to enlighten him.

Returning to his house ere night, he burned at each door and window the gums that are most offensive to the northern demons. Afterward he perused with sedulous care the writings of Pnom, in which are collated many powerful exorcisms against the white spirits of the pole. For these spirits, it seemed, had laid their power upon the galley's crew; and he could not but apprehend some further working of their power.

Though a fire burned in the chamber, piled with fat pine and terebinth, a deadly chill began to invade the air toward midnight. And Evagh's fingers grew numb on the sheets of parchment, so that he could scarce turn them. And the cold deepened steadily, slowing his blood as if with ice; and he felt on his face the breathing of an icy wind. Yet the heavy doors and stout-

paned windows were tightly closed; and the fire blazed high in no need of replenishment.

Then, with eyes whose very lids stiffened about them, Evagh saw that the room grew brighter with a light shining through the northern windows. Pale was the light, and it entered the room in a great beam falling directly upon him where he sat. And the light seared his eyes with a chill radiance, and the cold sharpened as if somehow one with the brightness; and the wind blew swiffler out of the light, seeming no longer air but an element rare and unbreathable as ether. Vainly, with numbing thoughts, he strove to recall the exorcisms of Pnom. And his breath forsook him on the thin wind, and he fell down in a sort of walking swoon that was nigh to death. He seemed to hear voices muttering unfamiliar spells, while the bleak light and ether ebbed and flowed like a tide about him. And in time it seemed that his eyes and his flesh were tempered to endure them, and he breathed once more, and his blood quickened again in his veins; and the swoon passed, and he rose up like one that rises from the dead.

Full upon him poured the strange light through the windows. But the stiffness of cold was gone from his limbs, and he felt no more of chillness than was natural to the late summer night. Looking forth from one of the windows, he witnessed a strange marvel: for in the harbor there towered an iceberg such as no vessel had yet sighted in its seafaring to the north. It filled the broad haven from shore to shore, and sheered up to a height immeasurable with piled escarpments and tiered precipices; and its pinnacles hung like towers in the zenith. It was vaster and steeper than the mountain Yarak, which marks the site of the boreal pole; and from it there fell upon sea and land a frosty glittering paler and brighter than the light of the full moon.

On the shore below were the charrings of the beached galley, and among them the corpses incombustible by fire. And along the sands and rocks, the fisher-folk were lying or standing upright in still, rigid postures, as if they had come forth to behold the great iceberg and had been smitten by a magic sleep.

And the whole harbor-shore, and the garden of Evagh, filled with that pallid splendor, was like a place where frost has fallen thickly over all.

Feeling a great wonder, Evagh would have gone forth from his house: but, ere he had taken three steps, a numbness came upon all his members, and deep sleep overpowered his senses even where he stood.

The sun had risen when he awoke. Peering out, he beheld a new marvel: for his garden and the rocks and sea-sands below it were visible no longer. In their stead were level spaces of ice about his house, and tall ice-pinnacles. Beyond the verges of the ice he saw a sea that lay remotely and far beneath; and beyond the sea the low looming of a dim shore.

Terror came to Evagh now, for he recognized in all this the workings of a sorcery beyond the power of mortal wizards. Plain it was that his stout house of granite stood no longer on the coast of Mhu Thulan but was based now on some upper crag of that stupendous iceberg he had beheld in the night. Trembling, he prayed and knelt to the Old Ones, who dwell secretly in subterrene caverns or abide under the sea or in the supermundane spaces. And even as he prayed, he heard a loud knocking at his door.

Fearfully he arose and opened the portals. Before him were two men, strange of visage and bright-skinned, who wore for mantles such rune-enwoven stuffs as wizards wear. The runes were uncouth and alien; but when the men bespoke him he understood something of their speech, which was in a dialect of the Hyperborean isles.

“We serve that Outer One whose name is Rlim Shaikorth,” they said. “From spaces beyond the north he has come in his floating citadel, the ice-mountain Yikilth, from which pours an exceeding coldness and a pale splendor that blasts the flesh of men. He has spared us alone amid the inhabitants of the isle Thulask, tempering our flesh to the rigor of his abode, making respirable for us the air no mortal man may breathe, and taking us to go with him in his sea-faring upon Yikilth. Thee also he has spared and acclimated by his spells to the coldness and thin ether. Hail, O Evagh, whom we know for a great wizard by this token: since only the mightiest of warlocks are thus chosen and exempted.”

Sorely astonished was Evagh; but seeing that he had now to deal with men who were as himself, he questioned closely the two magicians of Thulask. They were named Doom and Ux Loddhan, and were wise in the lore of the elder gods. They would tell him nothing of Rlim Shaikorth but avowed that their service to this being consisted of such worship as is given to a god, together with the repudiation of all bonds that had linked them heretofore to mankind. And they told Evagh that he was to go with them at once before Rlim Shaikorth, and perform the due rite of obeisance, and accept the bond of alienage.

So Evagh went with the Thulaskians and was led by them to a great pinnacle of ice that rose unmeltable into the sun, beetling above all its fellows. The pinnacle was hollow, and climbing therein by stairs of ice, they came at last to the chamber of Rlim Shaikorth, which was a circular dome with a round block at the center, forming a dais.

At sight of that entity which occupied the dais, Evagh's pulses were stilled for an instant by terror; and following upon the terror, his gorge rose within him through excess of loathing. In all the world there was nothing that could be likened for its foulness to Rlim Shaikorth. Something he had of the semblance of a fat white worm; but his bulk was beyond that of a sea-elephant. His half-coiled tail was thick as the middle folds of his body; and his front reared upward from the dais in the form of a white round disk and upon it were imprinted vague lineaments. Amid the visage a mouth curved uncleanly from side to side of the disk, opening and shutting incessantly on a pale and tongue-less and toothless maw. Two eye sockets lay close together above the shallow nostrils, but the sockets were eyeless, and in them appeared from moment to moment globules of a blood-colored matter having the form of eyeballs; and ever the globules broke and dripped down before the dais. And from the ice-floor there ascended two masses like stalagmites, purple and dark as frozen gore, which had been made by this ceaseless dripping of the globules.

Dooni and Ux Loddhan prostrated themselves, and Evagh deemed it well to follow their example. Lying prone on the ice, he heard the red drops falling with a splash as of heavy tears; and then, in the dome above him, it seemed that a voice spoke; and the voice was like the sound of some hidden cataract in a glacier hollow with caverns.

"O Evagh," said the voice, "I have preserved thee from the doom of others, and have made thee as they that inhabit the bourn of coldness and inhale the airless void. Wisdom ineffable shall be thine, and mastery beyond the conquest of mortals, if thou wilt but worship me and become my thrall. With me thou shalt voyage amid the kingdoms and isles of earth, and see the white falling of death upon them in the light from Yikilth. Our coining shall bring eternal frost on their gardens, and shall set upon their people's flesh the rigor of trans-artic gulfs. All this shalt thou witness, being as one of the lords of death, supernal and immortal; and in the end thou shalt return with me to that world beyond the pole, in which is mine abiding empire."

Seeing that he was without choice in the matter, Evagh professed himself willing to yield worship and service to the pale worm. Instructed by his fellow-wizards, he performed the rites that are scarce suitable for narration, and swore the vow of unspeakable alienage.

Strange was that voyaging, for it seemed that the great iceberg was guided by sorcery, prevailing ever against wind and tide. And always, as they went, the chill splendor smote afar from Yikilth. Proud galleys were overtaken, and their crews were blasted at the oars. The fair Hyperborean ports, busy with maritime traffic, were stilled by the iceberg's passing. Idle were their streets and wharves, idle was the shipping in their harbors, when the pale light had come and gone. Far inland fell the rays, bringing to the fields and gardens a blight more lasting than that of winter; and forests were frozen, and the beasts that roamed them were turned as if into marble, so that men who came long afterward to that region found the elk and bear and mammoth still standing in all the postures of life. But, sitting in his house or walking abroad on the berg, Evagh was aware of no sharper cold than that which abides in summer shadows.

Now, besides Doom and Ux Loddhan, there were five other wizards that went with Evagh on that voyage, having been chosen by Rlim Shaikorth and transported with their houses to the berg through unknown enchantment. They were outlandish men, called Polarians, from islands nearer the pole than broad Thulask. Evagh could understand little of their ways; and their sorcery was foreign and their speech unintelligible to him; nor was it known to the Thulaskians.

Daily the eight wizards found on their tables all provender necessary for human sustenance; though they knew not the agency that supplied it. All were seemingly united in the worship of the worm. But Evagh was uneasy at heart, beholding the doom that went forth eternally from Yikilth upon lovely cities and fruitful ocean-shore. Ruthfully he saw the blasting of flower-girdled Cemgoth, and the stillness that descended on the thronged streets of Leqqan, and the frost that seared with sudden whiteness the garths and orchards of the sea-fronting valley of Aguil.

Ever southward sailed the great berg, bearing its lethal winter to lands where the summer sun rode high. And Evagh kept his own counsel and followed in all ways the custom of the others. At intervals that were regulated by the motions of the circumpolar stars, the warlocks climbed to that lofty chamber in which Rlim Shaikorth abode perpetually, half-coiled

on his dais of ice. There, in a ritual whose cadences corresponded to the falling of those eye-like tears that were wept by the worm, and with genuflections timed to the yawning and shutting of his mouth they yielded to Rlim Shaikorth the required adoration. And Evagh learned from the others that the worm slept for a period at each darkening of the moon; and only at that time did the sanguine tears suspend their falling, and the mouth forbear its alternate closing and gaping.

At the third repetition of the rites, it came to pass that only seven wizards climbed to the tower. Evagh, counting their number, perceived that the missing man was one of the five outlanders. Later, he questioned Dooni and Ux Loddhan and made signs of inquiry to the four northrons; but it seemed that the fate of the absent warlock was a thing mysterious to all. Nothing was seen or heard of him; and Evagh, pondering long and deeply, was somewhat disquieted. For, during the ceremony in the tower chamber, it had seemed to him that the worm was grosser of bulk and girth than on any former occasion.

Covertly he asked the Thulaskians what manner of nutriment was required by Rlim Shaikorth. Concerning this, there was some dispute, for Ux Loddhan maintained that the worm fed on the hearts of white arctic bears, while Dooni swore that his rightful nourishment was the liver of whales. But, to their knowledge, the worm had not eaten during their sojourn upon Yikilth.

Still the iceberg followed its course beneath the heightening sun; and again, at the star-appointed time, which was the forenoon of every third day, the sorcerers convened in the worm's presence. Their number was now but six, and the lost warlock was another of the outlanders. And the worm had greatedened still more in size, thickening visibly from head to tail.

Now, in their various tongues, the six remaining wizards implored the worm to tell diem the fate of their absent fellows. And the worm answered; and his speech was intelligible to all, each thinking that he had been addressed in his own language: "This matter is a mystery, but ye shall all receive enlightenment in turn. Know this: the two that have vanished are still present; and they and ye also shall share even as I have promised in the ultramundane lore and empery of Rlim Shaikorth."

When they had descended from the tower, Evagh and the two Thulaskians debated the interpretation of this answer. Evagh maintained that their missing companions were present only in the worm's belly; but

the others argued that these men had undergone a more mystical translation and were now elevated beyond human sight and hearing. Forthwith they began to make ready with prayer and austerity, looking for some sublime apotheosis which would come to them in due turn. But Evagh could not trust the worm's equivocal pledges; and fear and doubt remained with him.

Seeking for some trace of the lost Polarians to assuage his doubt, he made search of the mighty berg, on whose battlements his own house and the houses of the other warlocks were perched like the tiny huts of fishers on ocean-cliffs. In this quest the others would not accompany him, fearing to incur the worm's displeasure. From verge to verge he roamed unhindered, and he climbed perilously on the upper scarps, and went down into deep crevasses and caverns where the sun failed and there was no other light than the strange luster of that unearthly ice. Embedded here in the walls, as if in the stone of nether strata, he saw dwellings such as men had never built, and vessels that might belong to other ages or worlds; but nowhere could he detect the presence of any living creature; and no spirit or shadow gave response to his evocations.

So Evagh was still fearful of the worm's treachery; and he resolved to remain awake on the night preceding the next celebration of the rites of worship. At eve of that night he assured himself that the other warlocks were all housed in their separate mansions, to the number of five; and then he set himself to watch without remission the entrance of Rlim Shaikorth's tower, which was plainly visible from his own windows.

Weirdly and coldly shone the great berg in the darkness, pouring forth a light of frozen stars. The moon rose early on the eastern sea. But Evagh, holding vigil at his window till midnight, saw that no visible form emerged from the tower, and none entered it. At midnight there came upon him a sudden drowsiness, and he could sustain his vigil no longer but slept deeply throughout the remainder of the night.

On the following day there were but four sorcerers who gathered in the ice-dome and gave homage to Rlim Shaikorth. And Evagh saw that two more of the outlanders, men of bulk and stature dwarfish beyond their fellows, were now missing.

One by one thereafter, on nights preceding the ceremony of worship, the companions of Evagh vanished. The last Polarian was next to go; and it came to pass that only Evagh and Ux Loddhan and Doom went to the tower; and then Evagh and Ux Loddhan went alone. And terror mounted

daily in Evagh, and he would have hurled himself into the sea from Yikilth, if Ux Loddhan, divining his intention, had not warned him that no man could depart therefrom and live again in solar warmth and terrene air, having been habituated to the coldness and thin ether.

So, at the time when the moon had waned and darkened wholly, it occurred that Evagh climbed before Rlim Shaikorth with infinite trepidation and loath, laggard steps. And, entering the dome with downcast eyes, he found himself the sole worshipper.

A palsy of fear was upon him as he made obeisance; and scarcely he dared to lift his eyes and regard the worm. But soon, as he began to perform the customary genuflections, he became aware that the red tears of Rlim Shaikorth no longer fell on the purple stalagmites; nor was there any sound such as the worm was wont to make by the perpetual opening and shutting of his mouth. And venturing at last to look upward, Evagh beheld the abhorrently swollen mass of the monster, whose thickness was now such as to overhang the dais' rim; and he saw that the mouth and eye-holes were closed in slumber. Thereupon he recalled how the wizards of Thulask had told him that the worm slept for an interval at the darkening of each moon.

Now was Evagh sorely bewildered: for the rites he had learned could be fittingly performed only while the tears of Rlim Shaikorth fell down and his mouth gaped and closed and gaped again in a measured alternation.

And none had instructed him as to what rites were suitable during the slumber of the worm. And being in much doubt, he said softly: "Wakest thou, O Rlim Shaikorth?"

In reply, he seemed to hear a multitude of voices that issued obscurely from out the pale, tumid mass before him. The sound of the voices was weirdly muffled, but among them he distinguished the accents of Dooni and Ux Loddhan; and there was a thick muttering of uncouth words which he knew for the speech of the five Polarians; and beneath this he caught, or seemed to catch, innumerable undertones that were not the voices of any creatures of Earth. And the voices rose and clamored, like those of prisoners in some profound oubliette.

Anon, as he listened in awe and horror, the voice of Dooni became articulate above the others; and the manifold clamor and muttering ceased, as if a multitude were hushed to hear its spokesman. And Evagh heard the tones of Dooni, saying:

“The worm sleeps, but we whom the worm has devoured are awake. Direly has he deceived us, for he came to our houses in the night, devouring us bodily one by one as we slept under his enchantment. He has eaten our souls even as our bodies, and verily we are part of Rlim Shaikorth, but exist only in a dark and noisome dungeon; and while the worm wakes we have no separate being, but are merged wholly into the being of Rlim Shaikorth.

“Hear, then, O Evagh, the truth which we have learned from our oneness with the worm. He has saved us from the white doom and has taken us upon Yikilth for this reason, because we alone of all mankind, who are sorcerers of high attainment and mastery, may endure the lethal ice-change and become breathers of the airless void, *and thus, in the end, be made suitable for his provender.*

“Great and terrible is the worm, and the place wherefrom he comes and whereto he returns is not to be dreamt of by mortal men. And the worm is omniscient, save that he knows not the waking of them he has devoured, and this awareness during his slumber. But the worm, though ancient beyond the antiquity of worlds, is not immortal and is vulnerable in one particular. Whosoever learns the time and means of his vulnerability, and has heart for the undertaking, may slay him easily. Therefore we adjure thee now by the faith of the Old Ones to draw the sword thou wearest beneath thy mantle and plunge it into the side of Rlim Shaikorth; for such is the means of his slaying.

“Thus only shall the going forth of the pale death be ended; and only thus shall we, thy fellows, obtain release from our blind thralldom and incarceration; and with us many that the worm has betrayed and eaten in former ages and upon distant worlds. And only by the doing of this thing shalt thou escape the worm’s mouth, nor abide henceforward as a ghost among other ghosts in his belly. But know, however, that he who slays Rlim Shaikorth must necessarily perish in the slaying.”

Evagh, in great astonishment, made question of Dooni and was answered readily concerning all that he asked. Much did he learn of the worm’s origin and essence, and the manner in which Yikilth had floated down from transpolar gulfs to voyage the seas of Earth. Ever, as he listened, his abhorrence greatedened; though deeds of dark sorcery had long indurated his flesh and soul, making him callous to more than common horrors. But of that which he learned it were ill to speak now.

At length there was silence in the dome; for Evagh had no longer any will to question the ghost of Dooni; and they that were imprisoned with Doom seemed to wait and watch in a stillness of death.

Then, being a man of much resolution and hardihood, Evagh delayed no longer but drew from its ivory sheath the short and well-tempered sword of bronze which he carried at his baldric. Approaching close to the dais, he plunged the blade into the over-swollen mass of Rlim Shaikorth. The blade entered easily, slicing and tearing, as if he had stabbed a monstrous bladder, and was not stayed even by the broad pommel; and the whole right hand of Evagh was drawn after it into the wound.

He perceived no quiver or stirring of the worm; but out of the wound there gushed a sudden torrent of black liquescent matter, swiftening and deepening till the sword was caught from Evagh's grasp as if in a mill-race. Hotter far than blood and smoking with strange steamy vapors, the liquid poured over his arms and splashed his raiment as it fell. Quickly the ice was awash around his feet; but still the fluid welled as if from some inexhaustible spring of foulness; and it spread everywhere in meeting pools and runlets.

Evagh would have fled then; but the sable liquid, mounting and flowing, was about his ankles when he neared the stairhead; and it rushed down the stairway before him like a cataract. Hotter and hotter it grew, boiling, bubbling, while the current strengthened and clutched at him and drew him like malignant hands. He feared to essay the downward stairs; nor was there any place in the dome where he could climb for refuge. He turned, striving against the tide for bare foothold, and saw dimly through reeking vapors the throned mass of Rlim Shaikorth. The gash had widened prodigiously, and a steam surged from it like waters of a broken weir; and yet, for further proof of the worm's unearthly nature, *his bulk was in no wise diminished thereby*. And still the black fluid came in an evil flood; and it rose swirling about the knees of Evagh; and the vapors seemed to take the form of myriad phantoms, wreathing and dividing obscurely as they went past him. Then, tottering giddily on the stairhead, he was swept away and hurled to his death on the ice* steps far below.

That day, on the sea to eastward of middle Hyperborea, the crews of certain merchant galleys beheld an unheard-of thing. As they sped north, returning from far ocean isles with a wind that aided their oars, they sighted in the late forenoon a monstrous iceberg whose pinnacles and crags loomed

high as mountains. The berg shone in part with a weird light; and from its loftiest pinnacle poured an ink-black torrent; and all the ice-cliffs and buttresses beneath were astream with rapids and cascades and sheeted falls of the same blackness, that fumed like boiling water as they plunged oceanward; and the sea around the berg was clouded and streaked for a wide interval as if with the dark fluid of the cuttlefish.

The mariners feared to sail closer; but, full of awe and marveling, they stayed their oars and lay watching the berg; and the wind dropped, so that their galleys drifted within view of it all that day. The berg dwindled swiftly, melting as though some unknown fire consumed it; and the air took on a strange warmth between gusts of arctic coldness, and the water about their ships grew tepid. Crag by crag the ice was runneled and eaten away; and huge portions fell off with a mighty splashing; and the highest pinnacle collapsed; but still the blackness poured out as from an unfathomable fountain. The watchers thought, at whiles, that they beheld houses running seaward amid the loosened fragments; but of this they were uncertain because of those ever-mounting vapors. By sunsettime the berg had diminished to a mass no larger than a common floe; yet still the welling blackness oversteamed it; and it sank low in the waves; and the weird light was quenched altogether. Thereafter, the night being moonless, it was lost to vision. A gale rose, blowing strongly from the south; and at dawn the sea was void of any remnant.

Concerning the matters related above, many and various legends have gone forth throughout Mhu Thulan and all the hyperboreal kingdoms and archipelagoes. The truth is not in such tales, for no man has known the truth heretofore. But I, the sorcerer Eibon, calling up through my necromancy the wave-wandering spirit of Evagh, have learned from him the true history of the worm's advent. And I have written it down in my volume with such omissions as are needful for the sparing of mortal weakness and sanity. And men will read this record, together with much more of the elder lore, in days long after the coming and melting of the great glacier.

Ubbo-Sathla

... For Ubbo-Sathla is the source and the end. Before the coming of Zhothaquah or Yok-Zothoth or Kthulhut from the stars, Ubbo-Sathla dwelt in the steaming fens of the new-made Earth: a mass without head or members, spawning the gray, formless efts of the prime and the grisly prototypes of terrene life.....And all earthly life, it is told, shall go back at last through the great circle of time to Ubbo-Sathla.

—The Book of Eibon

Paul Tregaidis found the milky crystal in a litter of oddments from many lands and eras. He had entered the shop of the curio-dealer through an aimless impulse, with no object in mind, other than the idle distraction of eyeing and fingering a miscellany of far-gathered things. Looking desultorily about, his attention had been drawn by a dull glimmering on one of the tables; and he had extricated the queer orb-like stone from its shadowy, crowded position between an ugly little Aztec idol, the fossil egg of a dinomis, and an obscene fetish of black wood from the Niger.

The thing was about the size of a small orange and was slightly flattened at the ends, like a planet at its poles. It puzzled Tregaidis, for it was not like an ordinary crystal, being cloudy and changeable, with an intermittent glowing in its heart, as if it were alternately illumed and darkened from within. Holding it to the wintry window, he studied it for awhile without being able to determine the secret of this singular and regular alternation. His puzzlement was soon complicated by a dawning sense of vague and irrecognizable familiarity, as if he had seen the thing before under circumstances that were now wholly forgotten.

He appealed to the curio-dealer, a dwarfish Hebrew with an air of dusty antiquity, who gave the impression of being lost to commercial considerations in some web of cabalistic revery.

“Can you tell me anything about this?”

The dealer gave an indescribable, simultaneous shrug of his shoulders and his eyebrows.

“It is very old—palagean, one might say. I can not tell you much, for little is known. A geologist found it in Greenland, beneath glacial ice, in the Miocene strata. Who knows? It may have belonged to some sorcerer of primeval Thule. Greenland was a warm, fertile region beneath the sun of Miocene times. No doubt it is a magic crystal; and a man might behold strange visions in its heart, if he looked long enough.”

Tregardis was quite startled; for the dealer’s apparently fantastic suggestion had brought to mind his own delvings in a branch of obscure lore; and, in particular, had recalled *The Book of Eibon*, that strangest and rarest of occult forgotten volumes, which is said to have come down through a series of manifold translations from a prehistoric original written in the lost language of Hyperborea. Tregardis, with much difficulty, had obtained the mediaeval French version— a copy that had been owned by many generations of sorcerers and Satanists—but had never been able to find the Greek manuscript from which the version was derived.

The remote, fabulous original was supposed to have been the work of a great Hyperborean wizard, from whom it had taken its name. It was a collection of dark and baleful myths, of liturgies, rituals and incantations both evil and esoteric. Not without shudders, in the course of studies that the average person would have considered more than singular, Tregardis had collated the French volume with the frightful *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred. He had found many correspondences of the blackest and most appalling significance, together with much forbidden data that was either unknown to the Arab or omitted by him ... or by his translators.

Was this what he had been trying to recall, Tregardis wondered—the brief, casual reference, in *The Book of Eibon*, to a cloudy crystal that had been owned by the wizard Zon Mezzamalech, in Mhu Thulan? Of course, it was all too fantastic, too hypothetical, too incredible—but Mhu Thulan, that northern portion of ancient Hyperborea, was supposed to have corresponded roughly with modern Greenland, which had formerly been joined as a peninsula to the main continent. Could the stone in his hand, by some fabulous fortuity, be the crystal of Zon Mezzamalech?

Tregardis smiled at himself with inward irony for even conceiving the absurd notion. Such things did not occur—at least, not in present-day London; and in all likelihood, *The Book of Eibon* was sheer superstitious

fantasy, anyway. Nevertheless, there was something about the crystal that continued to tease and inveigle him. He ended by purchasing it, at a fairly moderate price. The sum was named by the seller and paid by the buyer without bargaining.

With the crystal in his pocket, Paul Tregardis hastened back to his lodgings instead of resuming his leisurely saunter. He installed the milky globe on his writing-table, where it stood firmly enough on one of its oblate ends. Then, still smiling at his own absurdity, he took down the yellow parchment manuscript of *The Book of Eibort* from its place in a somewhat inclusive collection of *recherché* literature. He opened the vermiculated leather cover with hasps of tarnished steel, and read over to himself, translating from the archaic French as he read, the paragraph that referred to Zon Mezzamalech:

“This wizard, who was mighty among sorcerers, had found a cloudy stone, orb-like and somewhat flattened at the ends, in which he could behold many visions of the terrene past, even to the Earth’s beginning, when Ubbo -Sathla, the unbegotten source, lay vast and swollen and yeastly amid the vapping slime. . . . But of that which he beheld, Zon Mezzamalech left little record; and people say that he vanished presently, in a way that is not known; and after him the cloudy crystal was lost.”

Paul Tregardis laid the manuscript aside. Again there was something that tantalized and beguiled him, like a lost dream or a memory forfeit to oblivion. Impelled by a feeling which he did not scrutinize or question, he sat down before the table and began to stare intently into the cold, nebulous orb. He felt an expectation which, somehow, was so familiar, so permeative a part of his consciousness, that he did not even name it to himself.

Minute by minute he sat, and watched the alternate glimmering and fading of the mysterious light in the heart of the crystal. By imperceptible degree, there stole upon him a sense of dream-like duality, both in respect to his person and his surroundings. He was still Paul Tregardis—and yet he was some one else; the room was his London apartment—and chamber in some foreign but well-known place. And in both milieus he peered steadfastly into the same crystal.

After an interim, without surprize on the part of Tregardis, the process of re-identification became complete. He knew that he was Zon Mezzamalech, a sorcerer of Mhu Thulan, and a student of all lore anterior to his own epoch. Wise with dreadful secrets that were not known to Paul

Tregardis, amateur of anthropology and the occult sciences in latterday London, he sought by means of the milky crystal to attain an even older and more fearful knowledge.

He had acquired the stone in dubitable ways, from a more than sinister source. It was unique and without fellow in any land or time. In its depths, all former years, all things that had ever been, were supposedly mirrored, and would reveal themselves to the patient visionary. And through the crystal, Zon Mezzamalech had dreamt to recover the wisdom of the gods who died before the Earth was bom. They had passed to the lightless void, leaving their lore inscribed upon tablets of ultrastellar stone; and the tablets were guarded in the primal mire by the formless, idiotic demiurge, Ubbo-Sathla. Only by means of the crystal could he hope to find and read the tablets.

For the first time, he was making trial of the globe's reputed virtues. About him an ivory-panelled chamber, filled with his magic books and paraphernalia, was fading slowly from his consciousness. Before him, on a table of some dark Hyperborean wood that had been graven with grotesque ciphers, the crystal appeared to swell and deepen, and in its filmy depth he beheld a swift and broken swirling of dim scenes, fleeting like the bubbles of a mill-race. As if he looked upon an actual world, cities, forests, mountains, seas and meadows flowed beneath him, lightening and darkening as with the passage of days and nights in some weirdly accelerated stream of time.

Zon Mezzamalech had forgotten Paul Tregardis— had lost the remembrance of his own entity and his own surroundings in Mhu Thulan. Moment by moment, the flowing vision in the crystal became more definite and distinct, and the orb itself deepened till he grew giddy, as if he were peering from an insecure height into some never-fathomed abyss. He knew that time was racing backward in the crystal, was unrolling for him the pageant of all past days; but a strange alarm had seized him, and he feared to gaze longer. Like one who has nearly fallen from a precipice, he caught himself with a violent start and drew back from the mystic orb.

Again, to his gaze, the enormous whirling world into which he had peered was a small and cloudy crystal on his rune-wrought table in Mhu Thulan. Then, by degrees, it seemed that the great room with sculptured panels of mammoth ivory was narrowing to another and dingier place; and

Zon Mezzamalech, losing his preternatural wisdom and sorcerous power, went back by a weird regression into Paul Tregardis.

And yet not wholly, it seemed, was he able to return. Tregardis, dazed and wondering, found himself before the writing-table on which he had set the oblate sphere. He felt the confusion of one who has dreamt and has not yet fully awakened from the dream. The room puzzled him vaguely, as if something were wrong with its size and furnishings; and his remembrance of purchasing the crystal from a curio-dealer was oddly and discrepantly mingled with an impression that he had acquired it in a very different manner.

He felt that something very strange had happened to him when he peered into the crystal; but just what it was he could not seem to recollect. It had left him in the sort of psychic muddlement that follows a debauch of hashish. He assured himself that he was Paul Tregardis, that he lived on a certain street in London, that the year was 1933; but such commonplace verities had somehow lost their meaning and their validity; and everything about him was shadow-like and insubstantial. The very walls seemed to waver like smoke; the people in the streets were phantoms of phantoms; and he himself was a lost shadow, a wandering echo of something long forgot.

He resolved that he would not repeat his experiment of crystal-gazing. The effects were too unpleasant and equivocal. But the very next day, by an unreasoning impulse to which he yielded almost mechanically, without reluctance, he found himself seated before the misty orb. Again he became the sorcerer Zon Mezzamalech in Mhu Thulan; again he dreamt to retrieve the wisdom of the antemundane gods; again he drew back from the deepening crystal with the terror of one who fears to fall; and once more—but doubtfully and dimly, like a failing wraith—he was Paul Tregardis.

Three times did Tregardis repeat the experience on successive days; and each time his own person and the world about him became more tenuous and confused than before. His sensations were those of a dreamer who is on the verge of waking; and London itself was unreal as the lands that slip from the dreamer's ken, receding in filmy mist and cloudy light. Beyond it all, he felt the looming and crowding of vast imageries, alien but half familiar. It was as if the fantasmagoria of time and space were dissolving about him, to reveal some veritable reality—or another dream of space and time.

There came, at last, the day when he sat down before the crystal—and did not return as Paul Tregardis. It was the day when Zon Mezzamalech, boldly disregarding certain evil and portentous warnings, resolved to overcome his curious fear of falling bodily into the visionary world that he beheld—a fear that had hitherto prevented him from following the backward stream of time for any distance. He must, he assured himself, conquer his fear if he were ever to see and read the lost tablets of the gods. He had beheld nothing more than a few fragments of the years of Mhu Thulan immediately posterior to the present—the years of his own lifetime; and there were inestimable cycles between these years and the Beginning.

Again, to his gaze, the crystal deepened immeasurably, with scenes and happenings that flowed in a retrograde stream. Again the magic ciphers of the dark table faded from his ken, and the sorcerously carven walls of his chamber melted into less than dream. Once more he grew giddy with an awful vertigo as he bent above the swirling and milling of the terrible gulfs of time in the world-like orb. Fearfully, in spite of his resolution, he would have drawn away; but he had looked and leaned too long. There was a sense of abysmal falling, a suction as of ineluctable winds, of maelstroms that bore him down through fleet unstable visions of his own past life into antenatal years and dimensions. He seemed to endure the pangs of an inverse dissolution; and then he was no longer Zon Mezzamalech, the wise and learned watcher of the crystal, but an actual part of the weirdly racing stream that ran back to reattain the Beginning.

He seemed to live unnumbered lives, to die myriad deaths, forgetting each time that death and life that had gone before. He fought as a warrior in half-legendary battles; he was a child playing in the ruins of some olden city of Mhu Thulan; he was the king who had reigned when the city was in its prime, the prophet who had foretold its building and its doom. A woman, he wept for the bygone dead in necropoli long-crumbled; an antique wizard, he muttered the rude spells of earlier sorcery; a priest of some pre-human god, he wielded the sacrificial knife in cave-temples of pillared basalt. Life by life, era by era, he retraced the long and groping cycles through which Hyperborea had risen from savagery to a high civilization.

He became a barbarian of some troglodtic tribe, fleeing from the slow, turreted ice of a former glacial age into lands illumed by the ruddy flare of perpetual volcanoes. Then, after incomputable years, he was no longer man

but a man-like beast, roving in forests of giant fern and calamite, or building an uncouth nest in the boughs of mighty cycads.

Through eons of anterior sensation, of crude lust and hunger, of aboriginal terror and madness, there was someone—or something—that went ever backward in time. Death became birth, and birth was death. In a slow vision of reverse change, the earth appeared to melt away, to slough off the hills and mountains of its latter strata. Always the sun grew larger and hotter above the fuming swamps that teemed with a crasser life, a more fulsome vegetation. And the thing that had been Paul Tregardis, that had been Zon Mezzamalech, was a part of all the monstrous devolution. It flew with the claw-tipped wings of a pterodactyl, it swam in tepid seas with the vast, winding bulk of an ichthyosaurus, it bellowed uncouthly with the armored throat of some forgotten behemoth to the huge moon that burned through Liassic mists.

At length, after eons of immemorial brutehood, it became one of the lost serpent-men who reared their cities of black gneiss and fought their venomous wars in the world's first continent. It walked undulously in ante-human streets, in strange crooked vaults; it peered at primeval stars from high, Babelian towers; it bowed with hissing litanies to great serpent-idols. Through years and ages of the ophidian era it returned, and was a thing that crawled in the ooze, that had not yet learned to think and dream and build. And the time came when there was no longer a continent, but only a vast, chaotic marsh, a sea of slime, without limit or horizon, that seethed with a blind writhing of amorphous vapors.

There, in the gray beginning of Earth, the formless mass that was Ubbo-Sathla reposed amid the slime and the vapors. Headless, without organs or members, it sloughed from its oozy sides, in a slow, ceaseless wave, the amebic forms that were the archetypes of earthly life. Horrible it was, if there had been aught to apprehend the horror; and loathsome, if there had been any to feel loathing. About it, prone or tilted in the mire, there lay the mighty tablets of star-quarried stone that were writ with the inconceivable wisdom of the pre-mundane gods.

And there, to the goal of a forgotten search, was drawn the thing that had been—or would sometimes be —Paul Tregardis and Zon Mezzamalech. Becoming a shapeless eft of the prime, it crawled sluggishly and obliviously across the fallen tablets of the gods, and fought and ravened blindly with the other spawn of Ubbo-Sathla.

Of Zon Mezzamalech and his vanishing, there is no mention anywhere, save the brief passage in *The Book of Eibon*. Concerning Paul Tregardis, who also disappeared, there was a curt notice in several London papers. No one seems to have known anything about him: he is gone as if he had never been; and the crystal, presumably, is gone too. At least, no one has found it.

The Door to Saturn

When Morghi, the high priest of the goddess Yhoun-deh, 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 every intention of taking him unawares; for all their plots 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 care.

Morghi was especially disappointed; and the malisons which he muttered when the emptiness of the topmost room had revealed itself, were of truly cabalistic 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, Zhothaquah, 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 Zhothaquah was still feared; and it was said that those who were willing to forego 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 Zhothaquah 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 fearsome-ly 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, some 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. Zhothaquah, 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 Zhothaquah 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 Zhothaquah figured in all of them, amid forms and landscapes whose abnormality and sheer uncouthness may have been due to the half-developed techniques of a 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 southeastern 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, with open eyes, even to remember 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 sensation 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 even dreamed 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 leaped headlong through the open panel.

The charges that had been brought against Eibon were indeed true. The sagacious wizard, in his lifelong 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 devotion, had confided to him certain information that was more than useful in the practise of the black arts. Also he had presented Eibon with 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 password 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 land 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 esthetic 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 ludicrously 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 a while 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 not one of Zhothaquah's relatives.

He was trying to recall the almost inarticulable name that had been confided to him by the god as a sort of password, 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-ledge, the creature drank of the fluid 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.

"Hziulquoigmzshah," 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 the 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.

"Zhothaquah," he said, repeating the name three times in his most rotund incantatory manner.

The topsy-turvy being opened its eyes a trifle more, and again admonished him, uttering the word Zhothaquah with an indescribable abbreviation of vowels and thickening of consonants. Then it stood regarding him for a while 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 odkqlongh*," 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 reassured 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 Hziulquoigmnzah, 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?”

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 Hziulquoigmnzah.”

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

“He is the paternal uncle of Zhothaquah.”

Morghi was silent, except for a queer sound that might have been either an interrupted sneeze or an exclamation of disgust. But after a while 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 progress along the yielding ashy thoroughfare, amid the vegetation that was more horrent than ever the knives and caltrops, the travelers 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 way-side, 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 yield 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 travelers, filling the whole road for an indeterminable distance ahead. They

could see that it was possessed of a myriad of 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 ironically.

The sorcerer did not reply. But he realized that he had a reputation to sustain. He went boldly forward and cried out: “Hziulquoigmnzah” 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 march 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 traveled 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 Zhothaquah had given him the entree 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 pandemonium 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 following the hindquarters of their multipedal guide, which was crawling on with reluctant slowness, the travelers emerged in an open space and beheld 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 bangs, 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 chest and abdomens. They were wholly naked, and were rather dark in color, with no trace of hair on any part of their bodies. 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 scolding 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.

“Hziulquoigmnzah! Zhothaquah!” said Eibon with oracular solemnity and sonority. Then, after a pause of hieratic length: “*Iqhui dlosh odhqlongh1*”

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 Hziulquoigmnzah,” said Eibon to Morghi.

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 acknowledgement of the divine names he had quoted and the fearsome phrase, "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*."

The being that Eibon had met at the lake was indeed the god Hziulquoigmnzah; and there were dim traditions of Zhothaquah in certain 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 Hziulquoigmnzah 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 farther national mother, called the Djhen-quomh, 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 first feeling of exoticism had worn off. The diet was tiresome for one thing—an endless succession of raw and boiled and roasted mushrooms, varied at rare intervals 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-Cykranshian 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 Bhlemphroims 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 Bhlemphroims 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 which they both regarded die 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.”

Apparently it had never occurred to the simple and patriotic Bhlemphroims that the fathering of the 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 snores of their hosts were ascending to the great ring of Cykranoshian moons, and to 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 traveled 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 desert, 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 travelers 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 aforementioned races, and had even climbed 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 Bhlemphroims, 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 cacode-moniactal 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 travelers of inferior hardihood or less cogent fears. The tall woods of fungi dwindled ere long to tiny growths, and soon 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 Zhothaquah, 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 toadstools 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.

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 beginning to emerge 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!" he said with great importance. "I have come to bring you a message from the god Hziulquoigmnzah. I have borne it faithfully on ways beset with many hazards and perils. In the god's own divine language, it runs thus: *Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh.*"

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 Hziulquoigmnzah was their tutelary deity; and they knew the language of the gods. At the words: "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh,*"⁹⁹ 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 Hziulquoigmnzah, some smaller icons 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 odhqlongh.*" 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 themselves and their gods from their present location. Thus the wholesale exodus of people with their idols and domestic belongings.

The new town was called Ghloiph, 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 odhqlongh,*" was deemed a fortunate thing, since there were no more avalanches to threaten the security of Ghloiph 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 Zhothaquah, 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 and as the founder of the new town of Ghloiph.

Morghi, however, 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. Consequently, 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 on the planet of their birth.

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 wishing to follow the high priest through the magic panel nor daring to leave in disobedience 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 widespread revival of the dark worship of Zhothaqquah throughout Mhu Thulan in the last century before the onset of the great Ice Age.

The Ice-Demon

Quanga the huntsman, with Hoorn Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, two of the most enterprising jewelers of Iqqua, had crossed the borders of a region into which men went but seldom—and wherefrom they returned even more rarely. Travelling north from Iqqua, they had passed into desolate Mhu Thulan, where the great glacier of Polarion had rolled like a frozen sea upon wealthy and far-famed cities, covering the broad isthmus from shore to shore beneath fathoms of perpetual ice.

The shell-shaped domes of Cemgoth, it was fabled, could still be seen deep down in the glaciation; and the high, keen spires of Oggon-Zhai were embedded therein, together with fern-palm and mammoth and the square black temples of the god Tsathoggua. All this had occurred many centuries ago; and still the ice, a mighty, glittering rampart, was moving south upon deserted lands.

Now, in the path of the embattled glacier, Quanga led his companions on a bold quest. Their object was nothing less than the retrieval of the rubies of King Haalor, who, with the wizard Ommum-Vog and many full-caparisoned soldiers, had gone out five decades before to make war upon the polar ice. From this fantastic expedition, neither Haalor nor Ommum-Vog had come back; and the sorry, ragged remnant of their men-at-arms, returning to Iqqua, after two moons, had told a dire tale.

The army, they said, had made its encampment on a sort of knoll, carefully chosen by Ommum-Vog, in full sight of the vanward ice. Then the mighty sorcerer, standing with Haalor amid a ring of braziers that fumed incessantly with gold smoke, and reciting runes that were older than the world, had conjured up a fiery orb, vaster and redder than the southward-circling sun of heaven. And the orb, with blazing beams that smote from the zenith, torrid and effulgent, had caused the sun to seem no more than a daylight moon, and the soldiers had almost swooned from its heat in their heavy panoply. But beneath its beams the verges of the glacier melted and ran in swift rills and rivers, so that Haalor for a time was hopeful of reconquering the realm of Mhu Thulan over which his forefathers had ruled in bygone ages.

The rushing waters had deepened, flowing past the knoll on which the army waited. Then, as if by a hostile magic, the rivers began to give forth a pale and stifling mist, that blinded the conjured sun of Ommum-Vog, so that its sultry beams grew faint and chill and had power no longer on the ice.

Vainly the wizard had put forth other spells, trying to dissipate the deep and gelid fog. But the vapor drew down, evil and clammy, coiling and wreathing like knots of phantom serpents, and filling men's marrows as if with the cold of death. It covered all the camp, a tangible thing, ever colder and thicker, numbing the limbs of those who groped blindly and could not see the faces of their fellows at arm's-length. A few of the common soldiers, somehow, reached its outer confines and crept fearfully away beneath the wan sun, seeing no longer in the skies the wizard globe that had been called up by Ommum-Vog. And looking back presently, as they fled in strange terror, they beheld, instead of the low-lying mist they had thought to see, a newly frozen sheet of ice that covered the mound on which the king and the sorcerer had made their encampment. The ice rose higher above the ground than a tall man's head; and dimly, in its glittering depth, the fleeting soldiers saw the imprisoned forms of their leaders and companions.

Deeming that this thing was no natural occurrence, but a sorcery that had been exerted by the great glacier, and that the glacier itself was a live, malignant entity with powers of unknown bale, they did not slacken their flight. And the ice had suffered them to depart in peace, as if to give warning of the fate of those who dared to assail it.

Some there were who believed the tale, and some who doubted. But the king that ruled in Iqqua after Haalor went not forth to do battle with the ice, and no wizard rose to make war upon it with conjured suns. Men fled before the ever-advancing glaciations; and strange legends were told of how people had been overtaken or cut off in lonely valleys by sudden, diabolic shiftings of the ice, as if it had stretched out a living hand. And legends there were, of awful crevasses that yawned abruptly and closed like monstrous mouths upon them that dared the frozen waste; of winds like the breath of boreal demons, and blasted men's flesh with instant, utter cold and turned them into statues hard as granite. In time the whole region, for many miles before the glacier, was generally shunned; and only the hardiest hunters would follow that quarry into that winter-blighted land.

Now it happened that the fearless huntsman Huac, the elder brother of Quanga, had gone into Mhu Thulan, and had pursued an enormous black

fox that led him after on the mighty fields of the ice-sheet. For many leagues he trailed it, coming never within bowshot of the beast; and at length he came to a great mound on the plain, that seemed to mark the position of a buried hill. And Quae thought that the fox entered a cavern in the mound; so, with lifted bow and a poised arrow at the string, he went after it into the cavern.

The place was like a chamber of boreal kings or gods. All about him, in a dim green light, were huge, glimmering pillars; and giant icicles hung from the roof in the form of stalactites. The floor sloped downward; and Huac came to the cave's end without finding any trace of the fox. But in the transparent depth of the further wall, at the bottom, he saw the standing shapes of many men, deep-frozen and sealed up as in a tomb, with undecaying bodies and fair, unshrunk features. The men were armed with tall spears, and most of them wore the panoply of soldiers. But among them, in the van, there stood a haughty figure attired in the sea-blue robes of a king; and beside him was a bowed ancient who wore the night-black garb of a sorcerer. The robes of the regal figure were heavily sewn with gems that burned like colored stars through the ice; and great rubies red as goutts of newly congealing blood were arranged in the lines of a triangle on the bosom, forming the royal sign of the kings of Iquua. So Iluac knew, by these tokens, that he had found the tomb of Haalor and Ommum-Vog and the soldiers with whom they had gone up against the ice in former days.

Overawed by the strangeness of it all, and remembering now the old legends, Quae lost his courage for the first time, and quitted the chamber without delay. Nowhere could he find the black fox; and abandoning the chase, he returned southward, reaching the lands below the glacier without mishap. But he swore later that the ice had changed in a weird manner while he was following the fox, so that he was unsure of his direction for a while after leaving the cavern. There were steep ridges and hummocks where none had been before, making his return a toilsome journey; and the glaciation seemed to extend itself for many miles beyond its former limits. And because of these things, which he could not explain or understand, a curious eery fear was born in the heart of Iluac.

Never again did he go back upon the glacier; but he told his brother Quanga of that which he had found, and described the location of the cavern-chamber in which King Haalor and Ommum-Vog and their men-at-

arms were entombed. And soon after this, Iluac was killed by a white bear on which he had used all his arrows in vain.

Quanga was no less brave than Iluac; and he did not fear the glacier, since he had been upon it many times and had noticed nothing untoward. His was a heart that lusted after gain, and often the thought of the rubies of Haalor, locked with the king in eternal ice; and it seemed to him that a bold man might recover the rubies.

So, one summer, while trading in Iqqua with his furs, he went to the jewelers Eibur Tsanth and Hoom Feethos, taking with him a few garnets that he had found in a northern valley. While the jewelers were appraising the garnets, he spoke idly of the rubies of Haalor, and inquired craftily as to their value. Then, hearing the great worth of the gems, and noting the greedy interest that was shown by Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, he told them the tale he had heard from his brother Iluac, and offered, if they would promise him half the value of the rubies, to guide them to the hidden cave.

The jewelers agreed to this proposition, in spite of the hardships of the proposed journey, and the difficulty they might afterward encounter in disposing surreptitiously of gems that belonged to the royal family of Iqqua and would be claimed by the present king, Ralour, if their discovery were learned. The fabulous worth of the rubies had fired their avarice. Quanga, on his part, desired the complicity and connivance of the dealers, knowing that it would be hard for him to sell the jewels otherwise. He did not trust Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, and it was for this reason that he required them to go with him to the cavern and pay over to him the agreed sum of money as soon as they were in possession of the treasure.

The strange trio had set forth in mid-summer. Now, after two weeks of journeying through a wild, subarctic region, they were approaching the confines of the eternal ice. They travelled on foot, and their supplies were carried by three horses little larger than muskoxen. Quanga, an unerring marksman, hunted for their daily food the hares and waterfowl of the country.

Behind them, in a cloudless turquoise heaven, there burned the low sun that was said to have described a loftier ecliptic in former ages. Drifts of unmelting snow were heaped in the shadows of the higher hills; and in steep valleys they came upon the vanward glaciers of the ice-sheet. The trees and shrubs were already sparse and stunted, in a land where rich forests had flourished in olden time beneath a milder climate. But poppies flamed in the

meadows and along the slopes, spreading their frail beauty like a scarlet rug before the feet of perennial winter; and the quiet pools and stagnant-flowing streams were lined with white water-lilies.

A little to the east, they saw the fuming of volcanic peaks that still resisted the inroads of the glaciers. On the west were high, gaunt mountains whose sheer cliffs and pinnacles were topped with snow, and around whose nether slopes the ice had climbed like an inundating sea. Before them was the looming, crenelated wall of the realm-wide glaciation, moving equally on plain and hill, uprooting the trees, and pressing the soil forward in vast folds and ridges. Its progress had been stayed a little by the northern summer. Quanga and the jewelers, as they went on, came to turbid rills, made by a temporary melting, that issued from beneath the glittering blue-green ramparts.

They left their pack-horses in a grassy valley, tethered by long cords of elk-thong to the dwarfish willows. Then, carrying such provisions and other equipment as they might require for a two days' journey, they climbed the ice-slope at a point selected by Quanga as being most readily accessible, and started in the direction of the cave that had been found by Iluac. Quanga took his bearings from the position of the volcanic mountains, and also from two isolated peaks that rose on the sheeted plain to the north like the breasts of a giantess beneath her shining armor.

The three were well equipped for all the exigencies of their search. Quanga carried a curious pick-ax of finely tempered bronze, to be used in disintombing the body of King Haalor; and he was armed with a short, leaf-shaped sword, in addition to his bow and quiver of arrows. His garments were made from the fur of a giant bear, brown-black in color.

Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, in raiment heavily quilted with eider-down against the cold, followed him complainingly but with avaricious eagerness. They had not enjoyed the long marches through a desolate, bleakening land, nor the rough fare and exposure to the northern elements. Moreover, they had taken a dislike to Quanga, whom they considered rude and overbearing. Their grievances were aggravated by the fact that he was now compelling them to carry most of the supplies in addition to the two heavy bags of gold which they were to exchange later for the gems. Nothing less valuable than the rubies of Haalor would have induced them to come so far, or to set foot on the formidable wastes of the ice-sheet.

The scene before them was like some frozen world of the outer void. Vast, unbroken, save for a few scattered mounds and ridges, the plain extended to the white horizon and its armored peaks. Nothing seemed to live or move on the awful, glistening vistas, whose nearer levels were swept clean of snow. The sun appeared to grow pale and chill, and to recede behind the adventurers; and a wind blew upon them from the ice, like a breath from abysses beyond the pole. Apart from the boreal desolation and dreaminess, however, there was nothing to dismay Quanga or his companions. None of them was superstitious, and they deemed that the old tales were idle myths, were no more than fear-bom delusions. Quanga smiled commiseratively at the thought of his brother Huac, who had been so oddly frightened and had fancied such extraordinary things after the finding of Haalor. It was a singular weakness in Iluac, the rash and almost foolhardy hunter who had feared neither man nor beast. As to the trapping of Haalor and Ommum-Vog and their army in the glacier, it was plain that they had allowed themselves to be overtaken by the winter storms; and the few survivors, mentally unhinged by their hardships, had told a wild story. Ice— even though it had conquered half of a continent—was merely ice, and its workings conformed invariably to certain natural laws. Iluac had said that the ice-sheet was a great demon, cruel, greedy, and loth to give up that which it had taken. But such beliefs were crude and primitive superstitions, not to be entertained by enlightened minds of the Pleistocene age.

They had climbed the rampart at an early hour of morning. Quanga assured the jewelers that they would reach the cavern by noon at the latest, even if there should be a certain amount of difficulty and delay in locating it.

The plain before them was remarkably free of crevasses, and there was little to obstruct their advance. Steering their way with the two breast-shaped mountains for landmarks before them, they came after three hours to a hill-like elevation that corresponded to the mound of Duac's story. With little trouble, they found the opening of the deep chamber.

It seemed that the place had changed little if at all since the visit of Iluac, for the interior, with its columns and pendant icicles, conformed closely to his description. The entrance was like a fanged maw. Within, the floor sloped downward at a slippery angle for more than a hundred feet. The chamber swam with a cold and glaucous translucency that filtered

through the domelike roof. At the lower end, in the straited wall, Quanga and the jewelers saw the embedded shapes of a number of men, among which they distinguished easily the tall, blue-clad corpse of King Haalor and the dark, bowed mummy of Ommum-Vog. Behind these, the shapes of others, lifting their serried spears eternally, and receding downward in stiff ranks through unfathomable depths, were faintly discernible.

Haalor stood regal and erect, with wide-open eyes that stared haughtily as in life. Upon his bosom the triangle of hot and blood-bright rubies smoldered unquenchably in the glacial gloom; and the colder eyes of topazes, of beryls, of diamonds, of chrysolites, gleamed and twinkled from his azure raiment. It seemed that the fabulous gems were separated by no more than a foot or two of ice from the greedy fingers of the hunter and his companions.

Without speaking, they stared raptly at the far-sought treasure. Apart from the great rubies, the jewelers were also estimating the value of the other gems worn by Haalor. These alone, they thought complacently, would have made it worth while to endure the fatigue of the journey and the insolence of Quanga.

The hunter, on his part, was wishing that he had driven an even steeper bargain. The two bags of gold, however, would make him a wealthy man. He could drink to his full content the costly wines, redder than the rubies, that came from far Uzoldaroum in the south. The tawny, slant-eyed girls of Iqqua would dance at his bidding; and he could gamble for high stakes.

All three were unmindful of the eeriness of their situation, alone in that boreal solitude with the frozen dead; and they were oblivious likewise to the ghoulish nature of the robbery they were about to commit. Without waiting to be urged by the companions, Quanga raised the keen and highly tempered pick of bronze, and began to assail the translucent wall with mighty blows.

The ice rang shrilly beneath the pick, and dropped away in crystal splinters and diamond lumps. In a few minutes, he had made a large cavity; and only a thin shell, cracked and shattering, remained before the body of Haalor. This shell Quanga proceeded to pry off with great care; and soon the triangle of monstrous rubies, more or less encrusted still with clinging ice, lay bare to his fingers. While the proud, bleak eyes of Haalor stared immovably upon him from behind their glassy mask, the hunter dropped the pick, and drawing his sharp, leaf-shaped sword from its scabbard, he began

to sever the fine silver wires by which the rubies were attached cunningly to the king's raiment. In his haste he ripped away portions of the sea-blue fabric, baring the frozen and dead-white flesh beneath. One by one, as he removed the rubies, he gave them to Hoom Feethos, standing close behind him; and the dealer, bright-eyed with avarice, drooling a little with ecstasy, stored them carefully in a huge pouch of mottled lizardskin that he had brought along for the purpose.

The last ruby had been secured, and Quanga was about to turn his attention to the lesser jewels that adorned the king's garments in curious patterns and signs of astrological or hieratic significance. Then, amid their preoccupation, he and Hoom Feethos were startled by a loud and splintering crash that ended with myriad tinklings as of broken glass. Turning, they saw that a huge icicle had fallen from the cavern-dome; and its point, as if aimed unerringly, had cloven the skull of Eibur Tsanth, who lay amid the debris of shattered ice with the sharp end of the fragment deeply embedded in his oozing brain. He had died, instantly, without knowledge of his doom.

The accident, it seemed, was a perfectly natural one, such as might occur in summer from a slight melting of the immense pendant; but, amid their consternation, Quanga and Hoom Feethos were compelled to take note of certain circumstances that were far from normal or explicable.

During the removal of the rubies, on which their attention had been centered so exclusively, *the chamber had narrowed to half of its former width, and had also closed down from above*, till the hanging icicles were almost upon them, like the champing teeth of some tremendous mouth. The place had darkened, and the light was such as might filter into arctic seas beneath heavy floes. The incline of the cave had grown steeper, as if it were pitching into bottomless depths. Far up— incredibly far—the two men beheld the tiny entrance, which seemed no bigger than the mouth of a fox's hole.

For an instant, they were stupefied. The changes of the cavern could admit of no natural explanation; and the Hyperboreans felt the clammy surge of all the superstitious terrors that they had formerly disclaimed. No longer could they deny the conscious, animate malevolence, the diabolic powers of bale imputed to the ice in old legends.

Realizing their peril, and spurred by a wild panic, they started to climb the incline. Hoom Feethos retained the bulging pouch of rubies, as well as the heavy bag of gold coins that hung from his girdle; and Quanga had

enough presence of mind to keep his sword and pick-ax. In their terror-driven haste, however, both forgot the second bag of gold, which lay beside Eibur Tsanth, under debris of the shattered pendant.

The supernatural narrowing of the cave, the dreadful and sinister closing-down of its roof, had apparently ceased. At any rate, the Hyperboreans could detect no visible continuation of the process as they climbed frantically and precariously toward the opening. They were forced to stoop in many places to avoid the mighty fangs that threatened to descend upon them; and even with the rough tigerskin buskins that they wore, it was hard to keep their footing on the terrible slope. Sometimes they pulled themselves up by means of the slippery, pillar-like formations; and often Quanga, who led the way, was compelled to hew hasty steps in the incline with his pick.

Hoorn Feethos was too terrified for even the most rudimentary reflection. But Quanga, as he climbed, was considering the monstrous alterations of the cave, which he could not aline with his wide and various experience of the phenomena of nature. He tried to convince himself that he had made a singular error in estimating the chamber's dimensions and the inclination of its floor. The effort was useless: he still found himself confronted by a thing that outraged his reason; a thing that distorted the known face of the world with unearthly, hideous madness, and mingled a malign chaos with its ordered workings.

After an ascent that was frightfully prolonged, like the effort to escape from some delirious, tedious nightmare predicament, they neared the cavern-mouth. There was barely room now for a man to creep on his belly beneath the sharp and ponderous teeth. Quanga, feeling that the fangs might close upon him like those of some great monster, hurled himself forward and started to wriggle through the opening with a most unheroic celerity. Something held him back, and he thought, for one moment of stark horror, that his worst apprehensions were being realized. Then he found that his bow and quiver of arrows, which he had forgotten to remove from his shoulders, were caught against the pendant ice. While Hoorn Feethos gibbered in a frenzy of fear and impatience, he crawled back and relieved himself of the impeding weapons, which he thrust before him together with his pick in a second and more successful attempt to pass through the strait opening.

Rising to his feet on the open glacier, he heard a wild cry from Hoorn Feethos, who, trying to follow Quanga, had become tightly wedged in the entrance through his greater girth. His right hand, clutching the pouch of rubies, was thrust forward beyond the threshold of the cave. He howled incessantly, with half-coherent protestations that the cruel ice-teeth were crunching him to death.

In spite of the eery terrors that had unmanned him, the hunter still retained enough courage to go back and try to assist Hoorn Feethos. He was about to assail the huge icicles with his pick, when he heard an agonizing scream from the jeweler, followed by a harsh and indescribable grating. There had been no visible movement of the fangs—and yet Quanga now saw that they had reached the cavern-floor! The body of Hoorn Feethos, pierced through and through by one of the icicles, and ground down by the blunter teeth, was sporting blood on the glacier, like the red mist from a winepress.

Quanga doubted the very testimony of his senses. The thing before him was patently impossible—there was no mark of cleavage in the mound above the cavern-mouth to explain the descent of those awful fangs. Before his very eyes, but too swiftly for direct cognition, this unthinkable enormity had occurred.

Hoorn Feethos was beyond all earthly help, and Quanga, now wholly the slave of a hideous panic, would hardly have stayed longer to assist him in any case. But seeing the pouch that had fallen forward from the dead jeweler's fingers, the hunter snatched it up through an impulse of terror-mingled greed; and then, with no backward glance, he fled on the glacier, toward the low-circling sun.

For a few moments, as he ran, Quanga failed to perceive the sinister and ill-boding alterations, comparable to those of the cave, which had somehow occurred in the sheeted plain itself. With a terrific shock, which became an actual vertigo, he saw that he was climbing a long, insanely tilted slope above whose remote extreme the sun had receded strangely, and was now small and chill as if seen from an outer planet. The very sky was different: though still perfectly cloudless, it had taken on a curious deathly pallor. A brooding sense of inimical volition, a vast and freezing malignity, seemed to pervade the air and to settle upon Quanga like an incubus. But more terrifying than all else, in its proof of a conscious and malign

derangement of natural law, was the giddy poleward inclination that had been assumed by the level plateau.

Quanga felt that creation itself had gone mad, and had left him at the mercy of demoniacal forces from the godless outer gulfs. Keeping a perilous foot-hold, weaving and staggering laboriously upward, he feared momentarily that he would slip and fall and slide back for ever into arctic depths unfathomable. And yet, when he dared to pause at last, and turned shudderingly to peer down at the supposed descent, he saw *behind* him an acclivity similar in all respects to the one he was climbing: a mad, oblique wall of ice, that rose interminably to a second remote sun.

In the confusion of that strange *bouleversement*, he seemed to lose the last remnant of equilibrium; and the glacier reeled and pitched about him like an overturning world as he strove to recover the sense of direction that had never before deserted him. Everywhere, it appeared, there were small and wan parhelia that mocked him above unending glacial scarps. He resumed his hopeless climb through a topsy-turvy world of illusion: whether north, south, east or west, he could not tell.

A sudden wind swept downward on the glacier; it shrieked in Quanga's ears like the myriad voices of taunting devils; it moaned and laughed and ululated with shrill notes as of crackling ice. It seemed to pluck at Quanga with live malicious fingers, to suck the breath for which he had fought agonizingly. In spite of his heavy raiment, and the speed of his toilsome ascent, he felt its bitter, mordant teeth, searching and biting even to the marrow.

Dimly, as he continued to climb upward, he saw that the ice was no longer smooth, but had risen into pillars and pyramids around him, or was fretted obscenely into wilder shapes. Immense, malignant profiles leered in blue-green crystal; the malformed heads of bestial devils frowned; and rearing dragons writhed immovably along the scarp, or sank frozen into deep crevasses.

Apart from these imaginary forms that were assumed by the ice itself, Quanga saw, or believed that he saw, human bodies and faces embedded in the glacier. Pale hands appeared to reach dimly and imploringly toward him from the depths; and he felt upon him the frost-bound eyes of men who had been lost in former years; and beheld their sunken limbs, grown rigid in strange attitudes of torture.

Quanga was no longer capable of thought. Deaf, blind, primordial terrors, older than reason, had filled his mind with their atavistic darkness. They drove him on implacably, as a beast is driven, and would not let him pause or lag on the mocking, nightmare slope. Reflection would have told him only that his ultimate escape was impossible; that the ice, a live and conscious and maleficent thing, was merely playing a cruel and fantastic game which it had somehow devised in its incredible animism. So, perhaps, it was well that he had lost the power of reflection.

Beyond hope and without warning, he came to the end of the glaciation. It was like the sudden shift of a dream, which takes the dreamer unaware; and he stared uncomprehendingly for some moments at the familiar Hyperborean valleys below the rampart, to the south, and the volcanoes that fumed darkly beyond the southeastern hills.

His flight from the cavern had consumed almost the whole of the long, subpolar afternoon, and the sun was now swinging close above the horizon. The parhelia had vanished, and the ice-sheet, as if by some prodigious legerdemain, had resumed its normal horizontality. If he had been able to compare his impressions, Quanga would have realized that at no time had he surprized the glacier in the accomplishment of its bewildering supernatural changes.

Doubtfully, as if it were a mirage that might fade at any moment, he surveyed the landscape below the battlements. To all appearances, he had returned to the very place from which he and the jewelers had begun their disastrous journey on the ice. Before him an easy declivity, fretted and runneled, ran down toward the grassy meadows. Fearing that it was all deceitful and unreal—a fair, beguiling trap, a new treachery of the element that he had grown to regard as a cruel and almighty demon—Quanga descended the slope with hasty leaps and bounds. Even when he stood ankle-deep in the club-mosses, with leafy willows and sedgy grasses about him, he could not quite believe in the verity of his escape.

The mindless prompting of a panic fear still drove him on; and a primal instinct, equally mindless, drew him toward the volcanic peaks. The instinct told him that he would find refuge from the bitter boreal cold amid their purlieus; and there, if anywhere, he would be safe from the diabolical machinations of the glacier. Boiling springs were said to flow perpetually from the nether slopes of these mountains; great geysers, roaring and hissing like infernal cauldrons, filled the higher gullies with scalding

cataracts. The long snows that swept upon Hyperborea were turned to mild rains in the vicinity of the volcanoes; and there a rich and sultry-colored flora, formerly native to the whole region, but now exotic, flourished throughout the seasons.

Quanga could not find the little shaggy horses that he and his companions had left tethered to the dwarf willows in the valley-meadow. Perhaps, after all, it was not the same valley. At any rate, he did not stay his flight to search for them. Without delay or lingering, after one fearful backward look at the menacing mass of the glaciation, he started off in a direct line for the smoke-plumed mountains.

The sun sank lower, skirting endlessly the southwestern horizon, and flooding the battlemented ice and the rolling landscape with a light of pale amethyst.

Quanga, with iron thews inured to protracted marches, pressed on in his unremitting terror, and was overtaken gradually by a long, ethereal-tinted twilight of northern summer.

Somehow, through all the stages of his flight, he had retained the pick-ax, as well as his bow and arrows. Automatically, hours before he had placed the heavy pouch of rubies in the bosom of his raiment for safekeeping. He had forgotten them, and he did not even notice the trickle of water from the melting of crusted ice about the jewels, that seeped upon his flesh from the lizardskin pouch.

Crossing one of the innumerable valleys, he stumbled against a protruding willow-root, and the pick was hurled from his fingers as he fell. Rising to his feet, he ran on without stopping to retrieve it.

A ruddy glow from the volcanoes was now visible on the darkening sky. It brightened as Quanga went on; and he felt that he was nearing the far-sought, inviolable sanctuary. Though still thoroughly shaken and demoralized by his preterhuman ordeals, he began to think that he might escape from the ice-demon after all.

Suddenly he became aware of a consuming thirst, to which he had been oblivious heretofore. Daring to pause in one of the shallow valleys, he drank from a blossom-bordered stream. Then, beneath the crushing load of an unconsciously accumulated fatigue, he flung himself down to rest for a little while among the blood-red poppies that were purple with twilight.

Sleep fell like a soft and overwhelming snow upon his eyelids, but was soon broken by evil dreams in which he still fled vainly from the mocking

and inexorable glacier. He awoke in a cold horror, sweating and shivering, and found himself staring at the northern sky, where a delicate flush was dying slowly. It seemed to him that a great shadow, malign and massive and somehow *solid*, was moving upon the horizon and striding over the low hills toward the valley in which he lay. It came with inexpressible speed, and the last light appeared to fall from the heavens, chill as a reflection caught in ice.

He started to his feet with stiffness of prolonged exhaustion in all his body, and the nightmare stupefaction of slumber still mingling with his half-awakened fears. In this state, with a mad, momentary defiance, he unslung his bow and discharged arrow after arrow, emptying his quiver at the huge and bleak and formless shadow that seemed to impend before him on the sky. Having done this, he resumed his headlong fight.

Even as he ran, he shivered uncontrollably with the sudden and intense cold that had filled the valley. Vaguely, with an access of fear, he felt that there was something unwholesome and unnatural about the cold — something that did not belong to the place or the season. The glowing volcanoes were quite near, and soon he would reach their outlying hills. The air about him should be temperate, even if not actually warm.

All at once, the air darkened before him, with a sourceless, blue-green glimmering in its depths. For a moment, he saw the featureless Shadow that rose gigantically upon his path and obscured the very stars and the glare of the volcanoes. Then, with the swirling of a tempest-driven vapor, it closed about him, gelid and relentless. It was like phantom ice—a thing that blinded his eyes and stifled his breath, as if he were buried in some glacial tomb. It was cold with a trans-arctic rigor, such as he had never known, that ached unbearably in all his flesh, and was followed by a swiftly spreading numbness.

Dimly he heard a sound as of clashing icicles, a grinding as of heavy floes, in the blue-green gloom that tightened and thickened around him. It was as if the soul of the glacier, malign and implacable, had overtaken him in his flight. At times he struggled numbly, in half-drowsy terror. With some obscure impulse, as if to propitiate a vengeful deity, he took the pouch of rubies from his bosom with prolonged and painful effort, and tried to hurl it away. The thongs that tied the pouch were loosened by its fall, and Quanga heard faintly, as if from a great distance, the tinkle of the rubies as they

rolled and scattered on some hard surface. Then oblivion deepened about him, and he fell forward stiffly, without knowing that he had fallen.

Morning found him beside a little stream, stark-frozen, and lying on his face in a circle of poppies that had been blackened as if by the footprint of some gigantic demon of frost. A nearby pool, formed by the leisurely rill, was covered with thin ice; and on the ice, like gouts of frozen blood, there lay the scattered rubies of Haalor. In its own time, the great glacier, moving slowly and irresistibly southward, would reclaim them.

The Tale of Satampra Zeiros

I, Satampra Zeiros of Uzuldaroum, shall write with my left hand, since I have no longer any other, the tale of everything that befell Tirouv Ompallios and myself in the shrine of the god Tsathoggua, which lies neglected by the worship of man in the jungle-taken suburbs of Commoriom, that long-deserted capital of the Hyperborean rulers. I shall write it with the violet juice of the suvana-palm, which turns to a blood-red rubric with the passage of years, on a strong vellum that is made from the skin of the mastodon, as a warning to all good thieves and adventurers who may hear some lying legend of the lost treasures of Commoriom and be tempted thereby.

Now Tirouv Ompallios was my life-long friend and my trustworthy companion in all such enterprises as require deft fingers and a habit of mind both agile and adroit. I can say without flattering myself or Tirouv Ompallios either, that we carried to an incomparable success more than one undertaking from which fellow-craftsmen of a much wider renown than ourselves might well have recoiled in dismay. To be more explicit, I refer to the theft of the jewels of Queen Cunambria, which were kept in a room where two-score venomous reptiles wandered at will; and the breaking of the adamantine box of Acromi, in which were all the medallions of an early dynasty of Hyperborean kings.

It is true that these medallions were difficult and perilous to dispose of, and that we sold them at a dire sacrifice to the captain of a barbarian vessel from remote Lemuria: but nevertheless, the breaking of that box was a glorious feat, for it had to be done in absolute silence on account of the proximity of a dozen guards who were all armed with tridents. We made use of a rare and mordant acid. . . . But I must not linger too long and too garrulously by the way, however great the temptation to ramble on amid heroic memories and the high glamor of Valiant or sleightful deeds.

In our occupation, as in all others, the vicissitudes of fortune are oftentimes to be reckoned with; and the goddess Chance is not always prodigal of her favors. So it was that Tirouv Ompallios and I, at the time of which I write, had found ourselves in a condition of pecuniary depletion,

which, though temporary, was nevertheless extreme and was quite inconvenient and annoying, coming as it did on the heel of more prosperous days, of more profitable midnights. People had become accursedly chary of their jewels and other valuables, windows and doors were double-barred, new and perplexing locks were in use, guards had grown more vigilant or less somnolent—in short, all the natural difficulties of our profession had multiplied themselves. At one time we were reduced to the stealing of more bulky and less precious merchandise than that in which we customarily dealt; and even this had its dangers. Even now, it humiliates me to remember the night when we were nearly caught with a sack of red yams; and I mention all this that I may not seem in anywise vainglorious.

One evening, in an alley of the more humble quarter of Uzuldaroum, we stopped to count our available resources, and found that we had between us exactly three pazoors—enough to buy a large bottle of pomegranate wine or two loaves of bread. We debated the problem of expenditure.

“The bread,” contended Tirouv Ompallios, “will nurture our bodies, will lend a new and more expeditious force to our spent limbs, our toil-worn fingers.”

“The pomegranate wine,” said I, “will ennoble our thoughts, will inspire and illuminate our minds, and perchance will reveal to us a mode of escape from our difficulties.”

Tirouv Ompallios yielded without undue argument to my superior reasoning, and we sought the doors of an adjacent tavern. The wine was not of the best, in regard to flavor, but the quantity and strength were all that could be desired. We sat in the crowded tavern and sipped it at leisure, till all the fire of the bright red liquor had transferred itself to our brains. The darkness and dubiety of our future ways became illumined as by the light of rosy cressets, and the harsh aspect of the world was marvelously softened. Anon, there came to me an inspiration.

“Tirouv Ompallios,” I said, “is there any reason why you and I, who are brave men and nowise subject to the fears and superstitions of the multitude, should not avail ourselves of the kingly treasures of Commorion? A day’s journey from this tiresome town, a pleasant sojourn in the country, an afternoon or forenoon of archeological research—and who knows what we should find?”

“You speak wisely and valiantly, my dear friend,” rejoined Tirouv Ompallios. “Indeed, there is no reason why we should not replenish our

deflated finances at the expense of a few dead kings or gods.”

Now Commoriom, as all the world knows, was deserted many hundred years ago because of the prophecy of the white sybil of Polarion, who foretold an undescribed and abominable doom for all mortal beings who should dare to tarry within its environs. Some say that this doom was a pestilence that would have come from the northern waste by the paths of the jungle-tribes; others, that it was a form of madness: at any rate, no one, neither king nor priest nor merchant nor laborer nor thief, remained in Commoriom to abide its arrival, but all departed in a single migration to found at the distance of a day’s journey the new capital, Uzuldaroum. And strange tales are told, of horrors and terrors not to be faced or overcome by man, that haunt forevermore the mausoleums and shrines and palaces of Commoriom. And still it stands, a luster of marble, a magnificence of granite, all a-throng with spires and cupolas and obelisks that the mighty trees of the jungle have not yet over-towered, in a fertile inland valley of Hyperborea. And men say that in its unbroken vaults there lies entire and undespoiled as of yore the rich treasure of olden monarchs; that the high-built tombs retain the gems and electrum that were buried with their mummies; that the fanes have still their golden altar-vessels and furnishings, the idols their precious stones in ear and mouth and nostrils and navel.

I think we should have set out that very night, if we had only had the encouragement and inspiration of a second bottle of pomegranate wine. As it was, we decided to start at early dawn: the fact that we had no funds for our journey was of small moment, for unless our former dexterity had altogether failed us, we could levy a modicum of involuntary tribute from the guileless folk of the countryside. In the meanwhile, we repaired to our lodgings, where the landlord met us with a grudging welcome and most ungracious demand for his money. But the golden promise of the morrow had armed us against all such trivial annoyances, and we waved the fellow aside with a disdain that appeared to astonish if not to subdue him.

We slept late; and the sun had ascended far upon the azure acclivity of the heavens when we left the gates of Uzuldaroum and took the northern road that runs toward Commoriom. We breakfasted well on some amber melons, and a stolen fowl that we cooked in the woods, and then resumed our wayfaring. In spite of a fatigue that increased upon us toward the end of the day, our trip was a pleasurable one, and we found much to divert us in

the varying landscapes through which we passed, and in their people. Some of these people, I am sure, must still remember us with regret, for we did not deny ourselves anything procurable that tempted our fancy or our appetites.

It was an agreeable country, full of farms and orchards and running waters and green, flowery woods. At last, somewhere in the course of the afternoon, we came to the ancient road, long disused and well-nigh overgrown, which runs from the highway through the elder jungle to Commorion.

No one saw us enter this road, and thenceforward we met no one. At a single step we passed from all human ken; and it seemed that the silence of the forest around us had lain unstirred by mortal footfall ever since the departure of the legendary king and his people so many centuries before. The trees were vaster than any we had ever seen; they were interwoven by the endless labyrinthine volumes, the eternal web-like convolutions of creepers almost as old as they themselves. The flowers were unwholesomely large, and their perfumes were overpoweringly sweet or fetid, and their petals bore a lethal pallor or a sanguinary crimson. The fruits along our way were of great size, with purple and orange and russet colors, but somehow we did not dare to eat them.

The woods grew thicker and more rampant as we went on, and the roads, though paved with granite slabs, were more and more overgrown, for trees had rooted themselves in the interstices, often forcing the wide blocks apart. Though the sun had not yet neared the horizon, the shades that were cast upon us from gigantic boles and branches became ever denser, and we moved in a dark-green twilight fraught with oppressive odors of lush growth and of vegetable corruption. There were no birds nor animals, such as one would think to find in any wholesome forest; but at rare intervals a stealthy viper with pale and heavy coils glided away from our feet among the rank leaves of the roadside, or some enormous moth with baroque and evil-colored mottlings flew before us and disappeared in the dimness of the jungle. Abroad already in the half-light, huge purpureal bats with eyes like tiny rubies arose at our approach from the poisonous-looking fruits on which they feasted, and watched us with malign attention as they hovered noiselessly in the air above. And we felt, somehow, that we were being watched by other and invisible presences; and a sort of awe fell upon us,

and a vague fear of the monstrous jungle; and we no longer spoke aloud, or frequently, but only in rare whispers.

Among other things, we had contrived to procure along our way a large leathern bottle full of palm-spirit. A few sips of the ardent liquor had already served to lighten more than once the tedium of our journey; and now it was to stand us in good stead. Each of us drank a liberal draft, and presently the jungle became less awesome; and we wondered why we had allowed the silence and die gloom, the watchful bats and the brooding immensity, to weigh upon our spirits even for a brief while; and I think that after a second draft we began to sing.

When twilight came, and a waxing moon shone high in the heavens after the hidden daystar had gone down, we were so imbued with the fervor of adventure that we decided to push on and reach Commorion that very night. We supped on food that we had levied from the country-people, and the leathern bottle passed between us several times. Then, considerably fortified, and replete with hardihood and the valor of a lofty enterprise, we resumed our journeying.

Indeed, we had not much farther to go. Even as we were debating between ourselves, with an ardor that made us oblivious of our long wayfaring, what costly loot we would first choose from among all the mythical treasures of Commorion, we saw in the moonlight the gleam of marble cupolas above the treetops, and then between the boughs and the boles the wan pillars of shadowy porticoes. A few more steps, and we trod upon paven streets that ran transversely from the highroad we were following, into the tall, luxuriant woods on either side, where die fronds of mammoth palm-ferns overtopped the roofs of ancient houses.

We paused, and again the silence of an elder desolation claimed our lips. For the houses were white and still as sepulchers, and the deep shadows that lay around and upon them were chill and sinister and mysterious as the shadow of death. It seemed that the sun could not have shone for ages in this place—that nothing warmer than the spectral beams of the cadaverous moon had touched the marble and granite ever since that universal migration prompted by the prophecy of the white sybil of Polarion.

“I wish it were daylight,” murmured Tirouv Ompallios. His low tones were oddly sibilant, were unnaturally audible in the dead stillness.

“Tirouv Ompallios,” I rejoined, “I trust that you are not growing superstitious. I should be loth to think that you are succumbing to the infantile fancies of the multitude. Howbeit, let us have another drink.”

We lightened the leathern bottle appreciably by the demand we now made upon its contents, and were marvelously cheered thereby—so much so, indeed, that we forthwith started to explore a left-hand avenue, which though it had been laid out with mathematical directness, vanished at no great distance among the fronded trees. Here, somewhat apart from the other buildings, in a sort of square that the jungle had not yet wholly usurped, we found a small temple of antique architecture which gave the impression of being far older even than the adjoining edifices. It also differed from these in its material, for it was builded of a dark basaltic stone heavily encrusted with lichens that seemed of a coeval antiquity. It was square in form, and had no domes nor spires, no facade of pillars, and only a few narrow windows high above the ground. Such temples are rare in Hyperborea nowadays; but we knew it for a shrine of Tsathoggua, one of the elder gods, who receives no longer any worship from men, but before whose ashen altars, people say, the furtive and ferocious beasts of the jungle, the ape, the giant sloth and the long-toothed tiger, have sometimes been seen to make obeisance and have been heard to howl or whine their inarticulate prayers.

The temple, like the other buildings, was in a state of well-nigh perfect preservation: the only signs of decay were in the carven lintel of the door, which had crumbled and splintered away in several places. The door itself, wrought of a swarthy bronze all over-greened by time, stood slightly ajar. Knowing that there should be a jewelled idol within, not to mention the various altar-pieces of valuable metals, we felt the urge of temptation.

Surmising that strength might be required to force open the verdigris-covered door, we drank deeply and then applied ourselves to the task. Of course, the hinges were rusted; and only by dint of mighty and muscular heavings did the door at last begin to move. As we renewed our efforts, it swung slowly inward with a hideous grating and grinding that mounted to an almost vocal screech, in which we seemed to hear the tones of some unhuman entity. The black interior of the temple yawned before us, and from it there surged an odor of long-imprisoned mustiness combined with a queer and unfamiliar fetidity. To this, however, we gave little heed in the natural excitement of the moment.

With my usual foresight, I had provided myself with a piece of resinous wood earlier in the day, thinking that it might serve as a torch in case of any nocturnal explorations of Commoriom. I lit this torch, and we entered the shrine.

The place was paven with immense quinquangular flags of the same material from which its walls were built. It was quite bare, except for the image of the god enthroned at the farther end, the two-tiered altar of obscenely figured metal before the image, and a large and curious-looking basin of bronze supported on three legs, which occupied the middle of the floor. Giving this basin hardly a glance, we ran forward, and I thrust my torch into the face of the idol.

I had never seen an image of Tsathoggua before, but I recognized him without difficulty from the descriptions I had heard. He was very squat and pot-bellied, his head was more like that of a monstrous toad than a deity, and his whole body was covered with an imitation of short fur, giving somehow a vague suggestion of both the bat and the sloth. His sleepy lids were half-lowered over his globular eyes; and the tip of a queer tongue issued from his fat mouth. In truth, he was not a comely or personable sort of god, and I did not wonder at the cessation of his worship, which could only have appealed to very brutal and aboriginal men at any time.

Tirouv Ompallios and I began to swear simultaneously by the names of more urbane and civilized deities, when we saw that not even the commonest of semi-precious gems was visible anywhere, either upon or within any feature or member of this execrable image. With a niggardliness beyond parallel, even the eyes had been carved from the same dull stone as the rest of the abominable thing; the mouth, nose, ears, and all other orifices were unadorned. We could only wonder at the poverty or avarice of the beings who had wrought this unique bestiality.

Now that our minds were no longer enthralled by the hope of immediate riches, we became more keenly aware of our surroundings in general; and in particular we noticed the unfamiliar fetor I have spoken of previously, which had now increased uncomfortably in strength. We found that it issued from the bronze basin, which we proceeded to examine, though without any idea that the examination would be profitable or even pleasant.

The basin, I have said, was very large; indeed, it was no less than six feet in diameter by three in depth, and its brim was the height of a tall man's

shoulder from the door. The three legs that bore it were curved and massive, and terminated in the likeness of feline paws displaying their talons. When we approached and peered over the brim, we saw that the bowl was filled with a sort of viscous and semi-liquescient substance, quite opaque and of a sooty color. It was from this that the odor came—an odor which, though unsurpassably foul, was nevertheless not an odor of putrefaction, but resembled rather the smell of some vile and unclean creature of the marshes. The odor was almost beyond endurance, and we were about to turn away when we perceived a slight ebullition of the surface, as if the sooty liquid were agitated from within by some submerged animal or other entity. This ebullition increased rapidly, the center swelled as if with the action of a powerful yeast, and we watched in utter horror while an uncouth amorphous head with dull and bulging eyes arose gradually on an ever-lengthening neck, and stared us in the face with primordial malignity. Then two arms—if one could call them arms—likewise arose inch by inch, and we saw that the tiling was not, as we had thought, a creature immersed in the liquid, but that the liquid itself had put forth this hideous neck and head, and was now forming these damnable arms, that groped toward us with tentacle-like appendages in lieu of claws or hand!

A fear which we had never experienced even in dreams, of which we had found no hint in our most perilous nocturnal excursions, deprived us of the faculty of speech but not of movement. We recoiled a few paces from the bowl, and coincidentally with our steps, the horrible neck and arms continued to lengthen. Then the whole mass of the dark fluid began to rise, and far more quickly than the suvana-juice runs from my pen, it poured over the rim of the basin like a torrent of black quicksilver, taking as it reached the floor an undulant ophidian form which immediately developed more than a dozen short legs.

What unimaginable horror of protoplasmic life, what loathly spawn of the primordial slime had come forth to confront us, we did not pause to consider or conjecture. The monstrosity was too awful to permit of even a brief contemplation; also, its intentions were too plainly hostile, and it gave evidence of anthropophagic inclinations, for it slithered toward us with an unbelievable speed and celerity of motion, opening as it came a toothless mouth of amazing capacity. As it gaped upon us, revealing a tongue that uncoiled like a long serpent, its jaws widened with the same extreme elasticity that accompanied all its other movements. We saw that our

departure from the fane of Tsathog-gua had become most imperative, and turning our backs to all the abominations of that unhallowed shrine, we crossed the sill with a single leap and ran headlong in the moonlight through the suburbs of Commoriom. We rounded every convenient comer, we doubled upon our tracks behind the palaces of time-forgotten nobles and the warehouses of unrecorded merchants, we chose preferably the places where the incursive jungle-trees were highest and thickest; at last, on a by-road where the outlying houses were no longer visible, we paused and dared to look back.

Our lungs were intolerably strained, were ready to burst with this heroic effort, and the various fatigues of the day had told upon us all too grievously; but when we saw at our heels the black monster, following us with a serpentine and undulating ease, like a torrent that descends a long declivity, our flagging limbs were miraculously reanimated, and we plunged from the betraying light of the road into the pathless jungle, hoping to evade our pursuer in the labyrinth of boles and vines and gigantic leaves. We stumbled over roots and fallen trees, we tore our raiment and lacerated our skins on the savage brambles, we collided in the gloom with huge trunks and limber saplings that bent before us, we heard the hissing of tree-snakes that spat their venom at us from the boughs above, and the grunting or howling of unseen animals when we trod upon them in our precipitate flight. But we no longer dared to stop or look behind.

We must have continued our headlong peregrinations for hours. The moon, which had given us little light at best through the heavy leafage, fell lower and lower among the enormous-fronded palms and intricate creepers. But its final rays, when it sank, were all that saved us from a noisome marsh with mounds and hassocks of bog-concealing grass, amid whose perilous environs and along whose mephitic rim we were compelled to run without pause or hesitation or time to choose our footing, with our damnable pursuer dogging every step.

Now, when the moon had gone down, our flight became wilder and more hazardous—a veritable delirium of terror, exhaustion, confusion, and desperate difficult progression among obstacles to which we gave no longer any distinct heed or comprehension, through a night that clung to us and clogged us like an evil load, like the dragging toils of a monstrous web. It would seem that the creature behind us, with its abnormal facilities of motion and self-elongation, could have overtaken us at any time; but

apparently it desired to prolong the game. And so, in a semi-eternal protraction of inconclusive horrors, the night wore on. But we never dared to stop or look back.

Far off and wan, a glimmering twilight grew among the trees—a foreomening of the hidden morn. Wearier than the dead, and longing for any repose, any security, even that of some undesecrated tomb, we ran toward the light and stumbled forth from the jungle upon a paven street among buildings of granite and marble. Dimly, dully, beneath the crushing of our fatigue, we realized that we had wandered in a circle and had come back to the suburbs of Commorion. Before us, no farther away than the toss of a javelin, was the dark temple of Tsathoggua.

Again we ventured to look back, and saw the elastic monster, whose legs had now lengthened till it towered above us, and whose maw had widened till it could have swallowed us both at a mouthful. It followed us with an effortless glide, with a surety of motion and intention too horrible, too cynical to be borne. We ran into the temple of Tsathoggua, whose door was still open just as we had left it, and closing the door behind us, with a fearful immediacy, we contrived, in the superhuman strength of our desperation, to shoot one of the rusty bolts.

Now, while the chill dreamess of the dawn fell down in narrow shafts through the windows high in the wall, we tried with a truly heroic resignation to compose ourselves, and waited for whatever our destiny should bring. And while we waited, the god Tsathoggua peered upon us with an even more imbecile squatness and vileness and bestiality than he had shown in the torchlight.

I think I have said that the lintel of the door had crumbled and splintered away in several places. In fact, the beginning process of ruin had made three apertures, through which the daylight now filtered, and which were large enough to have permitted the passage of small animals or sizable serpents. For some reason, our eyes were drawn to these apertures.

We had not gazed long, when the light was suddenly intercepted in all three openings, and then a black material began to pour through them, and ran down the door in a triple stream to the flagstones, where it re-united and resumed the form of the thing that had followed us.

“Farewell, Urouv Ompallios,” I cried, with such remaining breath as I could summon. Then I ran and concealed myself behind the image of Tsathoggua, which was large enough to screen me from view, but,

unfortunately, was too small to serve this purpose for more than one person. Tirouv Ompallios would have preceded me, with the same laudable idea of self-preservation, but I was the quicker. And seeing that there was not room for both of us to the rearward of Tsathoggua, he returned my valediction and climbed into the great bronze basin, which alone could now afford a moment's concealment in the bareness of the fane.

Peering from behind that execrable god, whose one merit was the width of his abdomen and his haunches, I observed the actions of the monster. No sooner had Tirouv Ompallios crouched down from view in the three-legged bowl, when the nameless enormity reared itself up like a sooty pillar and approached the basin. The head had now changed in form and position, till it was no more than a vague imprint of dissolving features on the middle of a body without arms, legs or neck. The thing loomed above the basin for an instant, gathering all its bulk in an imminent mass on a sort of tapering tail, and then like a lapsing wave it fell into the bowl upon Tirouv Ompallios. Its whole body seemed to open and form an immense mouth as it sank down from sight.

Hardly able to breathe in my horror, I waited, but no sound and no movement came from the basin—not even a groan from Tirouv Ompallios. Finally, with infinite trepidation and caution, I ventured to emerge from behind Tsathoggua, and passing the bowl on tiptoe, I managed to reach the door.

Now, in order to win my freedom, it would be necessary to draw back the bolt and open the door. And this I greatly feared to do because of the inevitable noise. I felt that it would be highly injudicious to disturb the entity in the bowl while it was digesting Tirouv Ompallios; but there seemed to be no other way if I was ever to leave that abominable fane.

Even as I shot back the bolt, a single tentacle sprang out with infernal rapidity from the basin, and, elongating itself across the whole room, it encircled my right wrist in a lethal clutch. It was unlike anything I have ever touched, it was indescribably viscid and slimy and cold, it was loathsomely soft like the foul mire of a bog, and mordantly sharp as an edged metal, with an agonizing suction and constriction that made me scream aloud as the thing tightened upon my flesh, cutting into me like a vise of knife-blades. In my struggles to free myself, I drew the door open and fell forward on the sill. A moment of awful pain, and then I became aware that I had broken away from my captor. But looking down, I saw that

my hand was gone, leaving a strangely withered stump from which little blood issued. Then, gazing behind me into the shrine, I saw the tentacle recoil and shorten till it passed from view behind the rim of the basin, bearing my lost hand to join whatever now remained of Tirouv Ompallios.

The Theft of Thirty-nine Girdles

Let it be said as a foreword to this tale that I have robbed no man who was not in some way a robber of others. In all my long and arduous career, I, Satampra Zeiros of Uzuldaroum, sometimes known as the master-thief have endeavored to serve merely as an agent in the rightful redistribution of wealth. The adventure I have now to relate was no exception; though as it happened in the outcome, my own pecuniary profits were indeed meager, not to say trifling.

Age is upon me now. And sitting at that leisure which I have earned through many hazards, I drink the wines that are heartening to age. To me, as I sip, return memories of splendid loot and brave nefarious enterprise. Before me shine the outpoured sackfuls of djals or pazoors, removed so dexterously from the coffers of iniquitous merchants and money-lenders. I dream of rubies redder than the blood that was shed for them; of sapphires bluer than depths of glacial ice; of emeralds greener than the jungle in spring. I recall the escalade of pronged balconies; the climbing of terraces and towers guarded by monsters; the sacking of altars beneath the eyes of malign idols or sentinel serpents.

Often I think of Vixeela, my one true love and the most adroit and courageous of my companions in burglary. She has long since gone to the bourn of all good thieves and comrades; I have mourned her sincerely these many years. But still dear is the memory of our amorous, adventurous nights and the feats we performed together. Of such feats, perhaps the most signal and audacious was the theft of the thirty-nine girdles.

These were the golden and jeweled chastity girdles, worn by the virgins vowed to the moon god Leniqua, whose temple had stood from immemorial time in the suburbs of Uzuldaroum, capital of Hyperborea. The virgins were always thirty-nine in number. They were chosen for their youth and beauty, and retired from service to the god at the age of thirty-one.

The girdles were padlocked with the toughest bronze and their keys retained by the high-priest who, on certain nights, rented them at a high price to the richer gallants of the city. It will thus be seen that the virginity

of the priestesses was nominal; but its frequent and repeated sale was regarded as a meritorious act of sacrifice to the god.

Vixeela herself had at one time been numbered among the virgins but had fled from the temple and from Uzuldaroum several years before the sacerdotal age of release from her bondage. She would tell me little of her life in the temple; I surmised that she had found small pleasure in the religious prostitution and had chafed at the confinement entailed by it. After her flight she had suffered many hardships in the cities of the south. Of these too, she spoke but sparingly, as one who dreads the reviving of painful recollections.

She had returned to Uzuldaroum a few months prior to our first meeting. Being now a little over age, and having dyed her russet-blond hair to a raven black, she had no great fear of recognition by Leniqua's priests. As was their custom, they had promptly replaced her loss with another and younger virgin, and would have small interest now in one so long delinquent.

At the time of our foregathering, Vixeela had already committed various petty larcenies. But, being unskilled, she had failed to finish any but the easier and simpler ones, and had grown quite thin from starvation. She was still attractive and her keenness of wit and quickness in learning soon endeared her to me. She was small and agile and could climb like a lemur. I soon found her help invaluable, since she could climb through windows and other apertures impassable to my greater bulk.

We had consummated several lucrative burglaries, when the idea of entering Leniqua's temple and making away with the costly girdles occurred to me. The problems offered, and the difficulties to be overcome, appeared at first sight little less than fantastic. But such obstacles have always challenged my acumen and have never daunted me.

Firstly, there was the problem of entrance without detection and serious mayhem at the hands of the sickle-armed priests who guarded Leniqua's fane with baleful and incorruptible vigilance. Luckily, during her term of temple service, Vixeela had learned of a subterranean adit, long disused but, she believed, still passable. This entrance was through a tunnel, the continuation of a natural cavern located somewhere in the woods behind Uzuldaroum. It had been used almost universally by the virgins' visitors in former ages. But the visitors now entered openly by the temple's main

doors or by posterns little less public; a sign, perhaps that religious sentiment had deepened or that modesty had declined.

Vixeela had never seen the cavern herself but she knew its approximate location. The temple's inner adit was closed only by a flagstone, easily levitated from below or above, behind the image of Leniqua in the great nave.

Secondly, there was the selection of a proper time, when the women's girdles had been unlocked and laid aside. Here again Vixeela was invaluable, since she knew the nights on which the rented keys were most in demand. These were known as nights of sacrifice, greater or lesser, the chief one being at the moon's full. All the women were then in repeated request.

Since, however, the fane on such occasions would be crowded with people, the priests, the virgins and their clients, a seemingly insurmountable difficulty remained. How were we to collect and make away with the girdles in the presence of so many persons? This, I must admit, baffled me.

Plainly, we must find some way in which the temple could be evacuated, or its occupants rendered unconscious or otherwise incapable during the period needed for our operations.

I thought of a certain soporific drug, easily and quickly vaporized, which I had used on more than one occasion to put the inmates of a house asleep. Unfortunately the drug was limited in its range and would not penetrate to all the chambers and alcoves of a large edifice like the temple. Moreover it was necessary to wait for a full half hour, with doors or windows opened, till the fumes were dissipated; otherwise the robbers would be overcome together with their victims.

There was also the pollen, of a rare jungle lily, which, if cast in a man's face, would induce a temporary paralysis. This too I rejected. There were too many persons to be dealt with, and the pollen could hardly be obtained in sufficient quantities.

At last I decided to consult the magician and alchemist, Veezi Phenquor, who, possessing furnaces and melting-pots, had often served me by converting stolen gold and silver into ingots or other safely unrecognizable forms. Though skeptical of his powers as a magician, I regarded Veezi Phenquor as a skilled pharmacist and toxicologist. Having always on hand a supply of strange and deadly medicaments, he might well be able to provide something that would facilitate our project.

We found Veezi Phenquor decanting one of his more noisome concoctions from a still bubbling and steaming kettle into vials of stout stoneware. By die smell I judged that it must be something of special potency; the exudations of a polecat would have been innocuous in comparison. In his absorption he did not notice our presence until the entire contents of the kettle had been decanted and the vials tightly stoppered and sealed with a blackish gum.

“That,” he observed with unctuous complacency, “is a love-philter that would inflame a nursing infant or resurrect the powers of a dying nonagenarian. Do you—”

“No,” I said emphatically. “We require nothing of the sort. What we need at the moment is something quite different.” In a few terse words I went on to outline the problem, adding:

“If you can help us, I am sure you will find the melting down of the golden girdles a congenial task. As usual, you will receive a third of the profits.”

Veezi Phenquor creased his bearded face into a half-lubricious, half-sardonic smile.

“The proposition is a pleasant one from all angles. We will free the temple-girls from incumbrances which they must find uncomfortable, not to say burdensome; and will turn the irksome gems and metal to a worthier purpose—notably, our own enrichment. As if by way of afterthought, he added:

“It happens that I can supply you with a most unusual preparation, warranted to empty the temple of all its occupants in a very short time.”

Going to a cobwebbed comer, he took down from a high shelf an abominous jar of uncolored glass filled with a fine grey powder and brought it to the light.

“I will now,” he said, “explain to you the singular properties of this powder and the way in which it must be used. It is truly a triumph of chemistry, and more devastating than a plague.”

We were astounded by what he told us. Then we began to laugh.

“It is to be hoped,” I said, “that none of your spells and cantrips are involved.”

Veezi Phenquor assumed the expression of one whose feelings have been deeply injured. “I assure you,” he protested, “that the effects of the powder, though extraordinary, are not beyond nature.”

After a moment's meditation he continued: "I believe that I can further your plan in other ways. After the abstraction of the girdles, there will be the problem of transporting undetected such heavy merchandise across a city which, by that time, may well have been aroused by the horrendous crime and busily patrolled by constabulary. I have a plan. . .

We hailed with approval the ingenious scheme outlined by Veezi Phenquor. After we had discussed and settled to our satisfaction the various details, the alchemist brought out certain liquors that proved more palatable than anything of his we had yet sampled. We then returned to our lodgings, I carrying in my cloak the jar of powder, for which Veezi Phenquor generously refused to accept payment. We were filled with rosiest anticipations of success, together with a modicum of distilled palm-wine.

Discreetly, we refrained from our usual activities during the nights that intervened before the next full moon. We kept closely to our lodgings, hoping that the police, who had long suspected us of numerous peccadilloes, would believe that we had either quitted the city or retired from burglary.

A little before midnight, on the evening of the full moon, Veezi Phenquor knocked discreetly at our door—a triple knock as had been agreed. Like ourselves, he was heavily cloaked in peasant's homespun.

"I have procured the cart of a vegetable seller from the country," he said. "It is loaded with seasonable produce and drawn by two small asses. I have concealed it in the woods, as near to the cave-adit of Leniqua's temple as the overgrown road will permit. Also, I have reconnitered the cave itself.

"Our success will depend on the utter confusion created. If we are not seen to enter or depart by the rear adit, in all likelihood no one will remember its existence. The priests will be searching elsewhere.

"Having removed the girdles and concealed them under our load of farm produce, we will then wait till the hour before dawn when, with other vegetable and fruit dealers, we will enter the city."

Keeping as far as we could from the public places, where most of the police were gathered around taverns and the cheaper lupanars, we circled across Uzul-daroum and found, at some distance from Leniqua's fane, a road that ran country-ward. The jungle soon grew denser and the houses fewer. No one saw us when we turned into a side road overhung with leaning palms and closed in by thickening brush. After many devious turnings, we came to the ass-drawn cart, so cleverly screened from view

that even I could detect its presence only by the pungent aroma of certain root-vegetables. Those asses were well-trained for the use of thieves: there was no braying to betray their presence.

We groped on, over hunching roots and between clustered boles that made the rest of the way impassable for a cart. I should have missed the cave; but

Veezi Phenquor, pausing, stooped before a low hillock to part the matted creepers, showing a black and bouldered aperture large enough to admit a man on hands and knees.

Lighting the torches we had brought along, we crawled into the cave, Veezi going first. Luckily, due to the rainless season, the cave was dry and our clothing suffered only earth-stains such as would be proper to agricultural workers.

The cave narrowed where piles of debris had fallen from the roof. I, with my width and girth, was hard put to squeeze through in places. We had gone an undetermined distance when Veezi stopped and stood erect before a wall of smooth masonry in which shadowy steps mounted.

Vixeela slipped past him and went up the steps. I followed. The fingers of her free hand were gliding over a large flat flagstone that filled the stairhead. The stone began to tilt noiselessly upward. Vixeela blew out her torch and laid it on the top step while the gap widened, permitting a dim, flickering light to pour down from beyond. She peered cautiously over the top of the flag, which became fully uptilted by its hidden mechanism and then climbed through motioning us to follow.

We stood in the shadow of a broad pillar at one side of the back part of Leniqua's temple. No priest, woman or visitor was in sight but we heard a confused humming of voices at some vague remove. Leniqua's image, presenting its reverend rear, sat on a high dais in the center of the nave. Altar fires, golden, blue and green, flamed spasmodically before the god, making his shadow writhe on the floor and against the rear wall like a delirious giant in a dance of copulation with an unseen partner.

Vixeela found and manipulated the spring that caused the flagstone to sink back as part of a level floor. Then the three of us stole forward, keeping in the god's wavering shadow. The nave was still vacant but noise came more audibly from open doorways at one side, resolving itself into gay cries and hysterical laughters.

"Now," whispered Veezi Phenquor.

I drew from a side-pocket the vial he had given us and pried away the wax with a sharp knife. The cork, half-rotten with age, was easily removed. I poured the vial's contents on the back bottom step of Leniqua's dais—a pale stream that quivered and undulated with uncanny life and luster as it fell in the god's shadow. When the vial was empty I ignited the heap of powder.

It burned instantly with a clear, high-leaping flame. Immediately, it seemed, the air was full of surging phantoms—a soundless, multitudinous explosion, beating upon us, blasting our nostrils with charnel fetors till we reeled before it, choking and strangling. There was however no sense of material impact from the hideous forms that seemed to melt over and through us, rushing in all directions, as if every atom of the burning powder released a separate ghost.

Hastily we covered our noses with squares of thick cloth that Veezi had warned us to bring for this purpose. Something of our usual aplomb returned and we moved forward through the seething rout Lascivious blue cadavers intertwined around us. Miscegenations of women and tigers arched over us. Monsters doubleheaded and triple-tailed, goblins and ghouls rose obliquely to the far ceiling or rolled and melted to other and more nameless apparitions in lower air. Green sea-things, like unions of drowned men and octopi coiled and dribbled with dank slime along the floor.

Then we heard the cries of fright from the temple's inmates and visitors and began to meet naked men and women who rushed frantically through that army of beleaguering phantoms toward the exits. Those who encountered us face to face recoiled as if we too were shapes of intolerable horror.

The naked men were mostly young. After them came middle-aged merchants and aldermen, bald and potbellied, some clad in undergarments, some in snatched-up cloaks too short to cover them below the hips. Women, lean, fat or buxom, tumbled screaming for the outer doors. None of them, we saw with approbation, had retained her chastity girdle.

Lastly came the priests, with mouths like gaping squares of terror, emitting shrill cries. All of them had dropped their sickles. They passed us, blindly disregarding our presence, and ran after the rest. The host of powder-bom specters soon shrouded them from view.

Satisfied that the temple was now empty of its inmates and clients, we turned our attention to the first corridor. The doors of the separate rooms

were all open. We divided our labors, taking each a room, and removing from disordered beds and garment-littered floors the cast-off girdles of gold and gems. We met at the corridor's end, where our collected loot was thrust into the strong thin sack I had carried under my cloak. Many of the phantoms still lingered, achieving new and ghastlier fusions, dropping their members upon us as they began to diswreathe.

Soon we had searched all the rooms apportioned to the women. My sack was full, and I had counted thirty-eight girdles at the end of the third corridor. One girdle was still missing; but Vixeela's sharp eyes caught the gleam of an emerald-studded buckle protruding from trader the dissolving legs of a hairy satyrlike ghost on a pile of male garments in the corner. She snatched up the girdle and carried it in her hand henceforward.

We hurried back to Leniqua's nave, believing it to be vacant of all human occupants by now. To our disconcertion the High Priest, whose name Vixeela knew as Marquanos, was standing before the altar, striking blows with a long phallic rod of bronze, his insignia of office, at certain apparitions that remained floating in the air.

Marquanos rushed toward us with a harsh cry as we neared him, dealing a blow at Vixeela that would have brained her if she had not slipped agilely to one side. The High Priest staggered, nearly losing his balance. Before he could turn upon her again, Vixeela brought down on his tonsured head the heavy chastity girdle she bore in her right hand. Marquanos toppled like a slaughtered ox beneath the pole-ax of the butcher, and lay prostrate, writhing a little. Blood ran in rills from the serrated imprint of the great jewels on his scalp. Whether he was dead or still living, we did not pause to ascertain.

We made our exit without delay. After the fright they had received, there was small likelihood that any of the temple's denizens would venture to return for some hours. The movable slab fell smoothly back into place behind us. We hurried along the underground passage, I carrying the sack and the others preceding me in order to drag it through straitened places and over piles of rubble when I was forced to set it down. We reached the creeper-hung entrance without incident. There we paused awhile before emerging into the moon-streaked woods, and listened cautiously to cries that diminished with distance. Apparently no one had thought of the rear adit or had even realized that there was any such human motive as robbery behind the invasion of terrifying specters.

Reassured, we came forth from the cavern and found our way back to the hidden cart and its drowsing asses. We threw enough of the fruits and vegetables into the brush to make a deep cavity in the cart's center in which our sackful of loot was then deposited and covered over from sight. Then, settling ourselves on the grassy ground, we waited for the hour before dawn. Around us after a while, we heard the furtive slithering- and scampering of small animals that devoured the comestibles we had cast away.

If any of us slept, it was, so to speak, with one eye and one ear. We rose in the horizontal sifting of the last moonbeams and long eastward-running shadows of early twilight.

Leading our asses, we approached the highway and stopped behind the brush while an early cart creaked by. Silence ensued, and we broke from the wood and resumed our journey cityward before other carts came in sight.

In our return through outlying streets we met only a few early passers, who gave us no second glance. Reaching the neighborhood of Veezi Phenquor's house, we consigned the cart to his care and watched him turn into the courtyard unchallenged and seemingly unobserved by others than ourselves. He was, I reflected, well supplied with roots and fruits.

We kept closely to our lodgings for two days. It seemed unwise to remind the police of our presence in Uzuldaroum by any public appearance. On the evening of the second day our food supply ran short and we sallied out in our rural costumes to a nearby market which we had never before patronized.

Returning, we found evidence that Veezi Phenquor had paid us a visit during our absence, in spite of the fact that all the doors and windows had been, and still were, carefully locked. A small cube of gold reposed on the table, serving as paper-weight for a scribbled note.

The note read:

"My esteemed friends and companions: After removing the various gems, I have melted down all the gold into ingots, and am leaving one of them as a token of my great regard. Unfortunately, I have learned that I am being watched by the police and am leaving Uzuldaroum under circumstances of haste and secrecy, taking die other ingots and all the jewels in the ass-drawn cart, covered up by the vegetables I have providentially kept, even though they are slightly

stale by now. I expect to make a long journey, in a direction which I cannot specify—a journey well beyond the jurisdiction of our local police, and one on which I trust you will not be perspicacious enough to follow me. I shall need the remainder of our loot for my expenses, et cetera. Good luck in all your future ventures. Respectfully, Veezi Phenquor

“POSTSCRIPT: You too are being watched, and I advise you to quit the city with all feasible expedition. Marquanos, in spite of a well-cracked mazard from Vixeela’s blow, recovered full consciousness late yesterday. He recognized in Vixeela a former temple-girl through the trained dexterity of her movements. He has not been able to identify her; but a thorough and secret search is being made, and other girls have already been put to the thumb-screw and toe-screw by Leniqua’s priests.

“You and I, my dear Satampira, have already been listed, though not yet identified, as possible accomplices of the girl. A man of your conspicuous height and bulk is being sought. The Powder of the Fetid Apparitions, some traces of which were found on Leniqua’s dais, has already been analyzed. Unluckily it has been used before by both myself and other alchemists.

“I hope you will escape ... on other paths than the one I am planning to follow.”

The World's Rim*



*Since most of the weird fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith fall into one or another of his several story-cycles, I have the feeling that the short tales which follow are the surviving fragments of yet another such cycle: one which was abandoned, or left undeveloped, for some reason we can only conjecture. I may be wrong in this assumption; however, I have collected here the brief tales to which I refer, grouped under a heading of my own devising.

— L. C.

The Abominations of Yondo

The sand of the desert of Yondo is not as the sand of other deserts; for Yondo lies nearest of all to the world's rim; and strange winds, blowing from a gulf no astronomer may hope to fathom, have sown its ruinous fields with the gray dust of corroding planets, the black ashes of extinguished suns. The dark, orblike mountains which rise from its wrinkled and pitted plain are not all its own, for some are fallen asteroids half-buried in that abysmal sand. Things have crept in from nether space, whose incursion is forbid by the gods of all proper and well-ordered lands; but there are no such gods in Yondo, where live the hoary genii of stars abolished, and decrepit demons left homeless by the destruction of antiquated hells.

It was noon of a vernal day when I came forth from that interminable cactus-forest in which the Inquisitors of Ong had left me, and saw at my feet the gray beginnings of Yondo. I repeat, it was noon of a vernal day; but in that fantastic wood I had found no token or memory of spring; and the swollen, fulvous, dying and half-rotten growths through which I had pushed my way, were like no other cacti, but bore shapes of abomination scarcely to be described. The very air was heavy with stagnant odours of decay; and leprous lichens mottled the black soil and russet vegetation with increasing frequency. Pale-green vipers lifted their heads from prostrate cactus-boles and watched me with eyes of bright ochre that had no lids or pupils. These things had disquieted me for hours past; and I did not like the monstrous fungi, with hueless stems and nodding heads of poisonous mauve, which grew from the sodden lips of fetid tarns; and the sinister ripples spreading and fading on the yellow water at my approach were not reassuring to one whose nerves were still taut from unmentionable tortures. Then, when even the blotched and sickly cacti became more sparse and stunted, and rills of ashen sand crept in among them, I began to suspect how great was the hatred my heresy had aroused in the priests of Ong; and to guess the ultimate malignancy of their vengeance.

I will not detail the indiscretions which had led me, a careless stranger from far-off lands, into the power of those dreadful magicians and

mysteriarchs who serve the lion-headed Ong. These indiscretions, and the particulars of my arrest, are painful to remember; and least of all do I like to remember the racks of dragon-gut strewn with powdered adamant, on which men are stretched naked; or that unlit room with six-inch windows near the sill, where bloated corpse worms crawled in by hundreds from a neighboring catacomb. Sufficient to say that, after expanding the resources of their frightful fantasy, my inquisitors had borne me blindfolded on camel-back for incomputable hours, to leave me at morning twilight in that sinister forest. I was free, they told me, to go whither I would; and in token of the clemency of Ong, they gave me a loaf of coarse bread and a leathern bottle of rank water by way of provision. It was at noon of the same day that I came to the desert of Yondo.

So far, I had not thought of turning back, for all the horror of those rotting cacti, or the evil things that dwelt among them. Now, I paused, knowing the abominable legend of the land of which I had come; for Yondo is a place where few have ventured wittingly and of their own accord. Fewer still have returned— babbling of unknown horrors and strange treasure; and the life-long palsy which shakes their withered limbs, together with the mad gleam in their starting eyes beneath whitened brows and lashes, is not an incentive for others to follow. So it was that I hesitated on the verge of those ashen sands, and felt the tremor of a new fear in my wrenched vitals. It was dreadful to go on, and dreadful to go back, for I felt sure that the priests had made provision against the latter contingency. So after a little I went forward, sinking at each step in loathly softness, and followed by certain long-legged insects that I had met among the cacti. These insects were the color of a week-old corpse and were as large as tarantulas; but when I turned and trod upon the foremost, a mephitic stench arose that was more nauseous even than their color. So, for die nonce, I ignored them as much as possible.

Indeed, such things were minor horrors in my predicament. Before me, under a huge sun of sickly scarlet, Yondo reached interminable as the land of a harsh-dream against the black heavens. Far-off, on the utmost rim, were those orb-like mountains of which I have told; but in between were awful blanks of gray desolation, and low, treeless bills like the backs of half-buried monsters. Struggling on, I saw great pits where meteors had sunk from sight; and divers-colored jewels that I could not name glared or glistened from the dust. There were fallen cypresses that rotted by

crumbling mausoleums on whose lichen blotted marble fat chameleons crept with royal pearls in their mouths. Hidden by the low ridges, where cities of which no stela remained unbroken—immense and immemorial cities lapsing shard by shard, atom by atom, to feed infinities of desolation. I dragged my torture-weakened limbs over vast rubbish-heaps that had once been mighty temples; and fallen gods frowned in rotting psammite or leered in riven porphyry at my feet. Over all was an evil silence, broken only by the Satanic laughter of hyenas, and the rustling of adders in thickets of dead thorn or antique gardens given to the perishing nettle and fumitory.

Topping one of the many mound-like ridges, I saw the waters of a weird lake, unfathomably dark and green as malachite, and set with bars of profulgent salt. These waters lay far beneath me in a cup-like hollow; but almost at my feet on the wave-worn slopes were heaps of that ancient salt; and I knew that the lake was only the bitter and ebbing dregs of some former sea. Climbing down, I came to the dark waters, and began to lave my hands; but there was a sharp and corrosive sting in that immemorial brine, and I desisted quickly, preferring the desert dust that had wrapped me about like a slow shroud.

Here I decided to rest for a little; and hunger forced me to consume part of the meager and mocking fare which I had been provided by the priests. It was my intention to push on if my strength would allow and reach the lands that lie to the north of Yondo. These lands are desolate, indeed, but their desolation is of a more usual order than that of Yondo; and certain tribes of nomads have been known to visit them occasionally. If fortune favored me, I might fall in with one of these tribes.

The scant fare revived me, and, for the first time in weeks of which I had lost all reckoning, I heard the whisper of a faint hope. The corpse-colored insects had long since ceased to follow me; and so far despite the eeriness of the sepulchral silence and the mounded dust of timeless ruin, I had met nothing half so horrible as those insects. I began to think that the terrors of Yondo were somewhat exaggerated.

It was then that I heard a diabolic chuckle on the hillside above me. The sound began with a sharp abruptness that startled me beyond all reason, and continued endlessly, never varying its single note, like the mirth of an idiotic demon. I turned, and saw the mouth of a dark cave fanged with green stalactites, which I had not perceived before. The sound appeared to come from within this cave.

With a fearful intentness I stared at the black opening. The chuckle grew louder, but for awhile I could see nothing. At last I caught a whitish glimmer in the darkness; then, with all the rapidity of nightmare, a monstrous Thing emerged. It had a pale, hairless, egg-shaped body, large as that of a gravid she-goat; and this body was mounted on nine long, wavering legs with many flanges, like the legs of some enormous spider. The creature ran past me to the water's edge; and I saw that there were no eyes in its oddly sloping face; but two knife-like ears rose high above its head, and a thin, wrinkled snout hung down across its mouth, whose flabby lips, parted in that eternal chuckle, revealed rows of bats' teeth.

It drank avidly of the bitter lake; then, with thirst satisfied, it turned and seemed to sense my presence, for the wrinkled snout rose and pointed toward me, sniffing audibly. Whether the creature would have fled, or whether it meant to attack me, I do not know; for I could bear the sight no longer but ran with trembling limbs amid the massive boulders and great bars of salt along the lakeshore.

Utterly breathless, I stopped at last, and saw that I was not pursued, I sat down, still trembling, in the shadow of a boulder. But I was to find little respite, for now began the second of those bizarre adventures which forced me to believe all the mad legends I had heard.

More startling even than that diabolic chuckle was the scream that rose at my very elbow, from the salt-compounded sand—the scream of a woman possessed by some atrocious agony, or helpless in the grip of devils. Turning, I beheld a veritable Venus, naked in a white perfection that could fear no scrutiny, but immersed to her navel in the sand. Her terror-widened eyes implored me and her lotus hands reached out with beseeching gesture. I sprang to her side—and touched a marble statue, whose carven lids were drooped in some enigmatic dream of dead cycles, and whose hands were buried with the lost loveliness of hips and thighs. Again I fled, shaken with a new fear; and again I heard the scream of a woman's agony. But this time I did not turn to see the imploring eyes and hands.

Up the long slope to the north of that accursed lake, stumbling over boulders of basanite and ledges that were sharp with verdigris-covered metals; floundering in pits of salt, on terraces wrought by the receding tide in ancient aeons, I fled as a man flies from dream to baleful dream of some cacodemoniactal night. At whiles there was a cold whisper in my ear, which did not come from the wind of my flight; and looking back as I reached one

of the upper terraces, I perceived a singular shadow that ran pace by pace with my own. This shadow was not the shadow of man nor ape nor any known beast; the head was too grotesquely elongated, the squat body too gibbous; and I was unable to determine whether the shadow possessed five legs, or whether what appeared to be the fifth was merely a tail.

Terror lent me new strength, and I had reached the hilltop when I dared to look back again. But still the fantastic shadow kept pace by pace with mine; and now I caught a curious and utterly sickening odour, foul as the odour of bats who have hung in a charnel-house amid the mould of corruption. I ran for leagues, while the red sun slanted above the asteroidal mountains to the west; and the weird shadow lengthened with mine but kept always at the same distance behind me.

An hour before sunset I came to a circle of small pillars that rose miraculously unbroken amid ruins that were like a vast pile of potsherds. As I passed among these pillars I heard a whimper, like the whimper of some fierce animal, between rage and fear, and saw that the shadow had not followed me within the circle. I stopped and waited, conjecturing at once that I had found a sanctuary my unwelcome familiar would not dare to enter; and in this the action of the shadow confirmed me, for the Thing hesitated, then ran about the circle of columns, pausing often between them; and, whimpering all the while, at last went away and disappeared in the desert toward the setting sun.

For a full half hour I did not dare to move; then, the imminence of night, with all its probabilities of fresh terror, urged me to push on as far as I could to the north. For I was now in the very heart of Yondo, where demons or phantoms might dwell who would not respect the sanctuary of the unbroken columns.

Now, as I toiled on, the sunlight altered strangely; for the red orb, nearing the mounded horizon, sank and smouldered in a belt of miasmal haze, where floating dust from all the shattered fanes and necropoli of Yondo was mixed with evil vapors coiling skyward from black enormous gulfs lying beyond the utmost rim of the world. In that light, the entire waste, the rounded mountains, the serpentine hills, the lost cities, were drenched with phantasmal and darkening scarlet.

Then, out of the north, where shadows mustered, there came a curious figure—a tall man fully caparisoned in chain-mail—or, rather, what I assumed to be a man. As the figure approached me, clanking dismally at

each step on the sharded ground, I saw that its armour was of brass mottled with verdigris; and a casque of the same metal, furnished with coiling horns and a serrate comb, rose high above its head. I say its head, for die sunset was darkening, and I could not see clearly at any distance; but when the apparition came abreast, I perceived that there was no face beneath the brows of the bizarre helmet, whose empty edges were outlined for a moment against the smouldering light. Then the figure passed on, still clinking dismally, and vanished.

But on its heels, ere the sunset faded, there came a second apparition, striding with incredible strides and halting when it loomed almost upon me in the red twilight—the monstrous mummy of some ancient king, still crowned with untarnished gold, but turning to my gaze a visage that more than time or the worm had wasted. Broken swathings flapped about the skeleton legs, and above the crown that was set with sapphires and orange rubies, a black Something swayed and nodded horribly; but, for an instant, I did not dream what it was. Then, in its middle, two oblique and scarlet eyes opened and glowed like hellish coals, and two ophidian fangs glittered in an ape-like mouth. A squat, furless, shapeless head on a neck of disproportionate extent leaned unspeakably down and whispered in the mummy's ear. Then, with one stride, the titanic lich took half the distance between us, and from out the folds of the tattered sere-cloth a gaunt arm arose, and fleshless, taloned fingers, laden with glowering gems, reached out and fumbled for my throat...

Back, back through aeons of madness and dread, in a prone, precipitate flight, I ran from those fumbling fingers that hung always on the dusk behind me; back, back forever, unthinking, unhesitating, to all the abominations I had left; back in the thickening twilight toward the nameless and sharded ruins, the haunted lake, the forest of evil cacti, and the cruel and cynical inquisitors of Ong who waited my return.

The Desolation of Soom

The desert of Soom is said to lie at the world's unchartable extreme, between the lands that are little known and those that are scarcely ever conjectured. It is dreaded by travelers, for its bare and ever-moving sands are without oases, and a strange horror is rumored to dwell among them. Of this horror many tales are told and nearly all the tales are different. Some say that the thing has neither visible form nor audible voice, and others that it is a dire chimera with multitudinous heads, horns and tails, and a tongue whose sound is like the tolling of bells in deep funereal vaults. Of the caravans and solitary wanderers who have ventured into Soom, none has returned without a story to tell; and some have never returned at all, or have come back with brains devoured to madness by the terror and vertigo of infinite empty space . . . Yes, there are many tales, of a thing that follows furtively or with the pandemonium of a thousand devils; of a thing that lurks and lies in wait behind the unstable dunes; of a thing that roars or whispers balefully from the sand or from the wind; or stirs unseen in the coiling silence; or falls from the air like a crushing incubus; or yawns like a sudden pit before the feet of the traveler.

But once on a time there were two lovers who came to the desert of Soom, and who had occasion to cross the sterile sands. They did not know the evil rumor of the place; and, since they had found an abiding Eden in each other's eyes, it is perhaps doubtful if they even knew that they were passing through a desert. And they alone, of all who have dared this fearsome desolation, have no tale to relate of any troublous thing, of any horror that followed or lurked before them, either seen or unseen, inaudible or heard; and for them there was no multi-headed chimera, no yawning pit or incubus. And never could they comprehend the stories that were told by less fortunate wayfarers.

The Passing of Aphrodite

In all the lands of Illarion, from mountain-valleys rimmed with unmelting snow, to the great cliffs of sard whose reflex darkens a sleepy, tepid sea, were lit as of old the green and amethyst fires of summer. Spices were on the wind that mountaineers had met in the high glaciers; and the eldest wood of cypress, frowning on a sky-clear bay, was illumined by scarlet orchids . . . But the heart of the poet Phaniol was an urn of black jade overfraught by love with sodden ashes. And because he wished to forget for a time the mockery of myrtles, Phaniol walked alone in the waste bordering upon Illarion; in a place that great fires had blackened long ago, and which knew not the pine or the violet, the cypress or the myrtle. There, as the day grew old, he came to an unsailed ocean, whose waters were dark and still under the falling sun, and bore not the memorial voices of other seas. And Phaniol paused, and lingered upon the ashen shore; and dreamt awhile of that sea whose name is Oblivion.

Then, from beneath the wrestling sun, whose bleak light was prone on his forehead, a barge appeared and swiftly drew to the land: albeit there was no wind, and the oars hung idly on the foamless wave. And Phaniol saw that the barge was wrought of ebony fretted with curious anaglyphs, and carven with luxurious forms of gods and beasts, of satyrs and goddesses and women;

and the figurehead was a black Eros with full unsmiling mouth and implacable sapphire eyes averted, as if intent upon things not lightly to be named or revealed. Upon the deck of the barge were two women, one pale as the northern moon, and the other swart as equatorial midnight. But both were clad imperially, and bore the mien of goddesses or of those who dwell near to the goddesses. Without word or gesture, they regarded Phaniol; and, marvelling, he inquired, "What seek ye?"

Then, with one voice that was like the voice of hesperian airs among palms at evening twilight in the Fortunate Isles, they answered, saying:

"We wait the goddess Aphrodite, who departs in weariness and sorrow from Illarion, and from all the lands of this world of petty loves and pettier

mortalities. Thou, because thou art a poet, and hast known the great sovereignty of love shall behold her departure. But they, the men of the court, the marketplace and the temple, shall receive no message nor sign of her going-forth, and will scarcely dream that she is gone. ... Now, O Phaniol, the time, the goddess and the going-forth are at hand.”

Even as they ceased, One came across the desert; and her coming was a light on the far hills; and where she trod the lengthening shadows shrunk, and the grey waste put on the purple asphodels and the deep verdure it had worn when those queens were young, that now are a darkening legend and a dust of mummia. Even to the shore she came and stood before Phaniol, while the sunset greatened, filling the sky and sea with a flush as a new-blown blossom, or the inmost rose of that coiling shell which was consecrate to her in old time. Without robe or circlet or garland, crowned and clad only with the sunset, fair with the dreams of man but fairer yet than all dreams: thus she waited, smiling tranquilly, who is life or death, despair or rapture, vision of flesh, to gods and poets and galaxies unknowable. But, filled with a wonder that was also love, or much more than love, the poet could find no greeting.

“Farewell, O Phaniol,” she said, and her voice was the sighing of remote waters, the murmur of waters moon-withdrawn, forsaking not without sorrow a proud island tall with palms. “Thou hast known me and worshipped all thy days till now, but the hour of my departure is come: I go, and when I am gone, thou shalt worship still and shalt not know me. For the destinies are thus, and not forever to any man, to any world or to any god, is it given to possess me wholly. Autumn and spring will return when I am past, the one with yellow leaves, the other with yellow violets; birds will haunt the renewing myrtles; and many little loves will be thine. Not again to thee or to any man will return the perfect vision and the perfect flesh of the goddess.”

Ending thus, she stepped from that ashen strand to the dark prow of the barge; and even as it had come, without wafture of wind or movement of oar, the barge put out on a sea covered with the fallen fading petals of sunset. Quickly it vanished from view, while the desert lost those ancient asphodels and the deep verdure it had worn again for a little. Darkness, having conquered Illarion, came slow and furtive on the path of Aphrodite; shadows mustered innumably to the grey hills; and the heart of the poet Phaniol was an um of black jade overfraught by love with sodden ashes.

The Memnons of the Night

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Ringed with a bronze horizon, which, at a point immensely remote, seems welded with the blue brilliance of a sky of steel, they oppose the black splendour of their porphyritic forms to the sun's insuperable gaze. Reared in the morning twilight of primeval time, by a race whose towering tombs and cities are one with the dust of their builders in the slow lapse of the desert, they abide to face the terrible latter dawns, that move abroad in a starkness of fire, consuming the veils of night on the vast and Sphinx-like desolations. Level with the light, their tenebrific brows preserve a pride as of Titan longs. In their lidless implacable eyes of staring stone, is the petrified despair of those who have gazed too long on the infinite.

Mute as the mountains from whose iron matrix they were hewn, their mouths have never acknowledged the sovereignty of the suns, that pass in triumphal flame from horizon unto horizon of the prostrate land. Only at eve, when the west is like a brazen furnace, and the far-off mountains smoulder like ruddy gold in the depth of the heated heavens—only at eve, when the east grows infinite and vague, and the shadows of the waste are one with the increasing shadow of night—then, and then only, from their sullen throats of stone, a music rings to the bronze horizon—a strong, a sombre music, strange and sonorous, like the singing of black stars, or a litany of gods that invoke oblivion; a music that thrills the desert to its heart of adamant, and trembles in the granite of forgotten tombs, till the last echoes of its jubilation, terrible as the trumpets of doom, are one with the black silence of infinity.

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