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# THE GODS

# OF NEOL- SHENDIS



by Lin Carter

Another Fantasy in The Ikranos Series

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The Gods of Neol-Shendis met on a mountain-top near the sea. Tremendous, fierce-eyed, robed in glory, They came to decide the fate of Neol-Shendis.

When All were congregated there upon that wind-swept peak, One rose amongst Them, Asador-Niath, Whom men worship with offerings of purple wine and young sheep that are without blemish; and He spoke to Them, saying: "Brothers, We gather here to bring Our wrath down upon Neol-

Shendis, which We built from the sandy waste-land when Ikranos was young and which now hath forgotten Us, the builders. Let Us then confer amongst Ourselves, and choose the method of doom."

Then arose Lord Duaborath, Who is worshipped by burnt offerings of black bulls and libations of honey and fresh milk, and He spoke, saying: "Thou speakest truth, O Brother! Lo, the people have forgotten Us, Who raised them to kingship over all the coasts of Neol-Shendis even unto the gates of The Eight Cities; for whose victories in battle We lent Our strength. No longer burn they the fragrant sandalwood before Our altars, nor lay wreaths of yellow roses upon Our shrines. And Our priests go hungry in the empty temples. Therefore, let Us smite the city with Our wrath and let Our doom fall upon them, even to the youngest child!"

A rumble of angry agreement came up from the assembled Gods, and Their fierce eyes kindled with wrath. But then spoke the Hieros Tengri, Whose domain is the Twelve Arts and Who is worshipped from altars of onyx: "Nay, Brothers; be Ye not exceeding wroth against Our children. Observe the heights to which they have aspired in the arts. Be mindful of the wondrous statues and the tapestries, which are the marvel of all Ikranos; think upon the golden poetry and the ageless writings of their philosophers, and pause, lest in Your vain rage Ye smite the children and make Your names forever cursed by the lovers and the students of the arts."

Next rose up Sadai-Argyros, Who is a God of the Sword, and Whose name is War. A vast and terrible form was He, clad in armor dazzling as the noonday sun, holding a sword that glittered with restless fires like a lightning-bolt. He spoke contemptuously: "Listen not to these milk-fed words of Our Brother! Dabbling paints on cloth and dreaming over pretty words are the pleasures of weaklings and women. I say let Us smite them with the sword, cleanse them with Our fury, and begin anew!"

An angry muttering surged up after the words of Sadai-Argyros, and the Gods moved restlessly amongst Themselves, as if impatient to visit Their doom upon the helpless city; but then spoke wise and ancient Ghorn Nombo, Who was the wisest of Them All. He spoke unto Them, and His voice was like wind moving under hollow mountains, and They fell silent before His words.

"My younger Brothers, let Us pause. The sins of Our children are indeed grievous, yet are their works mighty and admirable. Let Us therefore decide in another manner, for We can argue and debate here amongst Ourselves until Ikranos falls into dust and the million stars of heaven flicker out like candles, ere We come into agreement."

"What advisest Thou, O Ghorn Nombo?" the Gods cried.

Again the ancient form spoke in a voice of thunder: "Choose One amongst You, Who is neither excited to rage by their iniquities, nor blinded with admiration for their accomplishments, One Who would be fair and impartial, and by Whose decision Ye will All stand."

"Who? Whom from amongst Us shall We choose?" And so it came to pass

that the Gods of Neol-Shendis quarrelled and argued among Themselves there upon the mountain-peak all the night. The heavens shook with storm, for Their voices were thunder, and the flash of rage within Their eyes was the distant lightning. And in the city far below, the people hurried through the streets to flee the storm, and men ran for the shelter of a warm inn before the rain came down.

Finally, as dawn flushed the eastern skies with rose and coral, the Gods of Neol-Shendis came to an agreement. They chose Lord Ischaboath, Who is the Patron God of Fishermen, and Who is worshipped by spikenard burnt upon altars of jade and chalcedony. Smiling, fat, and lazy was old Ischaboath, Who cared for nothing more strenuous than basking on his favorite mountain top and sniffing the pungent odors of cooking fish wafted to Him from the waterfront. Yet He was a wise choice, although Asador-Niath and Sadai-Argyros disapproved of Him, and denounced Him as a fool and an old woman. The Hieros Tengri was well satisfied at the choice, for while the Fishermen's God shared no appreciation of the arts, yet was He mild and gentle and full of peace, and likewise cared nothing for the ways of war.

And thus it happened that Ischaboath took on the form of a mortal for the first time in all the long centuries of His life. He became a small, fat little man with a bald head and pink, smiling face and soft, kindly blue eyes. He stood on the windy peak and shivered in the chill breeze. It felt strange to be human after aeons of Godhood. The pebbles and rough rock cut through his thin sandals and bruised his feet, and he shivered again in the frigid wind.

Above him towered the forms of his Brothers, and suddenly They had become to him tremendous, vast shapes, full of light and splendor, looming in colossal majesty even unto the clouds. Now, he felt different from Them, half-afraid of his gigantic Brethern.

Then the magnificent, blazing shape That was Ghorn Nombo bent down from Its cloudy heights and touched him with a dazzling finger, and spoke to him in a voice that was as the thunder of a hurricane through a forest:

"Go thy way, little brother, and make thy decisions. We shall wait here for thee and promise not to visit Our wrath upon Neol-Shendis until thou returnest unto Us. Look thee well; make thy decisions. We shall abide by them."

Old Ischaboath hurried from that place of tremendous, blinding shapes and eyes that glared down at him like falling stars, and scurried down the mountain slope to the city by the sea. The body he had assumed was old and fat and rather short of breath, so he was quite winded by the time he reached the foot of the mountain, and he had to pause there by the sea-shore to catch his breath.

Ischaboath stood there on the shore and gazed about him with delight. Never had he seen the sea or the sky before through mortal eyes. The beach was a curving stretch of soft white sand, and here and there over it scuttled tiny crabs hurrying to their little caverns. Tufts and clumps of long sea-grass rose from the sand, and the tangy breeze sang through them with a wild and mournful dirge. The emerald

waves rolled in slowly, whispering over the wet sand to foam in a lacy pattern of creamy white bubbles around the glistening sea shells and sliding so reluctantly back into the sea again. The water was cold and pale green-blue and deliciously wet as it curled around his toes.

Above him, the sky was vague and lost in tremendous masses of high-piled clouds, tinted coral-pink and peach-yellow by the sunrise, clouds that drifted overhead with slow, awful majesty -- cities and islands and castles of richly-colored mist, borne on their mysterious journey by the great, silent winds of morning in the upper regions of the sky.

Here and there, white sea gulls swooped and hovered and arced through the fresh salt breeze with sharp, raucous cries. The salt spray stung his lips and flapped and fluttered his loose garments. It was altogether marvelous.

Heretofore he had seen these things through Godly eyes, and all had seemed small and insignificant, for then the splendor of His Own being had outshone the sunrise, and His towering height had dwarfed the mighty clouds. But now the glory and wonder of this simple scene, through the small perspective of his mortal senses, was dazzling and awesome and breathtaking; and Ischaboath seemed to himself humble and tiny before the magnificence of nature.

"So this is what it's like to be a mortal," he whispered with delight as he slowly made his way along the shore. He stooped often to pick up glistening sea-shells, brushing the wet sand from them and admiring their clear, rich colors. He fingered the stiff, dry sea-grass and let the fine white sand sift through his fingers.

Ere long he came upon a fisherman drawing his boat into shore, heavy with the early morning catch. Ischaboath stopped, half fearful, to watch the man at his task. He found himself timid; never before had he seen a man so close. Yet this one did not seem so terribly wicked and not at all as sinful as Asador-Niath had sworn they all were.

The fisherman was of middle age, tall and spare, with a grey beard that hung to his chest. His skin was burnt by the sun and salt spray to the hue and texture of old leather, and he was garbed in rough woven clothes that were stiff with salt and faded by the sun. His face was kindly and wise. His eyes were keen and bright, set in a net of laughter-wrinkles, and his lips were smiling.

"Peace and plenty, friend!" the fisherman hailed him with a wave of his hand. "'Twill be a pleasant day, eh?"

Ischaboath mumbled a reply and



Ischaboath



watched as the man hauled a great, dripping net-full of fish on to the shore.

"Aye, a good day, friend, and a pleasant evening 'twill be," the fisherman went on cheerfully, with a jolly wink. "Thanks be to Good Lord Ischaboath, my nets were full this morn!"

The other warmed at this familiar yet reverent remark and took such courage from the fisherman's apparent harmlessness that he edged closer and even essayed a question in a rather quavering voice. He had reminded himself of his task, and so he ventured to ask, "What -- ah, what think you of Neol-Shendis, O fisherman?"

"The city? Eh? Well, friend, 'tis a goodly place for them as likes to be scooped within walls. Perhaps a bit crowded for such as me, but still a fine, proud town, as fair as Memmos. I'd wager! Aye, Chorbwa the Merchant gives fair prices for my catch, and the wine-shops don't ask your last coin for a flask. The bazaar is a wondrous exciting place, and the harbour is full of strange sights, with many ships and sailors from the far places, and oh, the tales they tell of



the islands they've seen!" He chuckled at the memory.

"But come," he said, fixing Ischaboath with an apologetic eye, "I'm forgetful o' my manners. I am Buorchan the fisherman. You?"

The other faltered. "I -- I am -- Yischa Borat," he said, using the first thing that came into his mind.

"Are you a fisherman?"

"Of -- of sorts," he muttered lamely.

"Then we are brothers of the same trade! Come friend Yischa, help me carry my netful of fish up to the cottage, and I'll share my morning meal with you! It's not a feast, but ..."

And so the two made their way up the sand-dunes to the small cottage nestled by a hill. And all that day they talked together; and Buorchan showed his new friend his nets drying in the sun, his small garden plot, and the flowerbed. He demonstrated to his fascinated guest the skill and art of hooks and oars and how to read the currents and the winds. The day passed swiftly, and before Ischaboath knew it the evening drew nigh and the sun sank redly behind the towers of Neol-Shendis and a cold salt breeze sprang up from the nighted sea.

Within the cottage a warm fire was burning on the grate; and it cast a ruddy, cheery glow around the small room, a room which was comfortable and not ill-furnished. There the fisherman bade the god be seated before the driftwood fire and gave him red wine in a wooden tankard and a goodly meal of fried fish, fresh fruit, and coarse white bread. Ischaboath had never eaten of mortal food before and found the rich glow this simple meal sent coursing through his veins an exciting new experience, vastly more satisfying than the vaporous viands that had previously sated his divine hungers.

All that evening they sat before the cozy fire and sipped ale and wine; and the fisherman told stories he had heard from the sailors, of far-off Shai and Thaijan and Kemis of the Hundred Gates, while the god told haltingly some of the lore of the sea.

Lying in his soft bed that night, relaxed, drowsy, and comfortable, he thought vaguely that next morning he should start for the city to finish the task he had been sent here to do; but when morning came, and he rose and broke his fast with the kindly fisherman, there were nets to be repaired and fish to be cleaned; and when Buorchan left for the day's fishing, he could not very well leave the cottage unattended, so he remained to hoe and water the little garden and gather driftwood from the shore for their evening fire.



Buorchan



Ischaboath found this new life rich and rewarding, crowded with a thousand new sights. new sounds. new tastes, smells, and experiences. Everywhere he looked was some new beauty to be seen, some new wonder to stand in awe before. He came to know the sea as he had never known her. he who had once been a God of the sea -- the thousand-facèd sea. with her many moods and her million colors. And there was the wonder of flowers to be experienced, the marvel of sunset and the miracle of rain. The great. golden moon. The splendor of her silken, pearly light upon the moving waters. The glory of the stars.

And the days passed like the swift strokes of a gull's wing. His memory of his Brothers and his former life became dimmer and dimmer as the days drifted into weeks and the weeks piled up into months. His thoughts were so brim-full of this new life and all its marvels that his Godly memories were crowded out and faded along the labyrinth of his mind.

The months passed, and "Yischa Borat" became a fisherman with Buorchan. The two men became as brothers, sharing together the same boat and the same roof and the same fire through the cold nights. Together they enjoyed the triumphs and bore the hardships of this life and Lo! it came to pass that Buorchan and his brother lived together all the days of their life.

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And high above the city of Neol-Shendis, the Gods waited upon the mountain top for the Brother who did not come. Yes, They waited long and very long, for They could not leave the mountain top and were bound by Their promise not to strike the city with Their wrath until Ischaboath should return and deliver unto Them a decision. And even though there was no return, yet still They could not visit Their awful doom upon the helpless city, for They had promised; and it was written in the Book of Truth when Ikranos was young, that the promise of a God may not be broken.

All this was very long ago, and no man knows the ending of the story. Yet Neol-Shendis still stands by the sea, and I somehow think that never did the Lord Ischaboath, Who was worshipped by spikenard burnt upon altars of jade and chalcedony, return to His Brothers upon the mountain top. And as for the Gods of Neol-Shendis, for all I know or care, They may still be waiting upon that windy mountain peak near the sea, tremendous, fierce-eyed, robed in glory.

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Number 7 of The Howard Collector (vol. II, No. 1), published by Glenn Lord, Box 775, Pasadena, Texas, 77501, \$0.60, contains: "Spear & Fang", REH's first professional sale (to WT, July '25); an elementary Neanderthal--Crô-Magnon story. Four letters from REH, two to Harold Preece, one to Kirk Mashburn, one to Emil Petaja; the first is psychologically interesting, having been written in one of REH's despondent moods. Two poems by REH, the first, "The Dust Dance" being actually four poetic fragments; the second is "Cimmeria". "Cupid vs Pollux", a juvenile short story. Two photographs showing REH horsing around with a couple of friends. An index of books with Howard stories (SKULL-FACE & OTHERS, &c) with lists of contents. Three poems by admirers of Howard and a letter from a former collaborator. Glenn Lord has gone to the 6" x 8" size.

^ ^ L Sprague de Camp  
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