

WEIRDBOOK 15



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Address: WEIRDBOOK, P O Box 35, Amherst Br., Buffalo, NY 14226. Make checks and money orders payable to WEIRDBOOK. \$4.50 per copy, 3 issues for \$10. Back issues (please add 50¢ toward postage with any order): 7, 9, & 10 \$1 each; 11, 12, & 14 \$3 each; 13 \$5 (hard cover edition, 10th anniversary issue, \$15). WEIRDBOOK is published occasionally, but usually at least once a year when circumstances permit. WEIRDBOOK PRESS was founded in 1968.

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FOREWORD by the editor

As you probably know by now: in January, H. Warner Munn died of cancer. He was 77.

Harold Munn was in his middle seventies --- I am in my middle forties. He a real writer of fantasy in the best sense of the word --- I an amateur, a fan, really. He on the west coast --- I on the east coast. He --- out of the fantasy game for many years --- I having had nothing to do with sf or fantasy fandom for a dozen years or more. Funny that our lives should come together the way they did. That I should count him one of my best friends in the fantasy field. That I should sorrow as if he were my own kin.

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In 1967 I was bored. I'd taken a new job, teaching at Wilson College in Pennsylvania; I had gotten settled into the routine. I was restless. I bought an M.G.B. convertible. I took flying lessons. I found a few new girlfriends. I went to a World sf Con for the first time in 13 years. I figured out what was wrong --- I wasn't publishing anything. (My previous job had involved being an editor as well as teaching.) So I decided to start a magazine, called it WEIRDBOOK (after REDBOOK and BLUEBOOK), and started taking advertising a year ahead of time in every sf magazine I could think of. I got stories by Brennan and Howard for the first issue, but most of the rest I either wrote myself or dredged up from my old mimeographed fanzine of the early fifties.

One day about a month before I planned to go to press, a thick envelope came in the mail. The return address made my heart beat a little faster. I knew very well who H. Warner Munn was --- I had read WEREWOLF OF PUNKERT, and KING OF THE WORLD'S EDGE was one of my favorite fantasy tales. Inside the envelope was a bonanza --- four new manuscripts from Harold Munn. He was starting to write again. He had seen my advertisements. I imagine he hadn't the slightest idea who I might be --- but providence led him to me and I believe this had a lot to do with what success WEIRDBOOK enjoyed in those years. And these!

Afterwards, he sent more stories.

When my marriage broke up nearly two years ago, and I was despondent, he wrote me two or three letters telling me of some very personal feelings of his own --- it was more than just sympathy --- it had a lot to do with my being able to weather the storm --- and being here to write these words today.

And he wrote the third novelet in his "Wanderer" trilogy that he had begun in issues 12 and 13. I think he knew when he wrote this piece that he might not live to see it in print --- but he never said the slightest word to me about it. When I saw him at the convention in Baltimore, he seemed a little more feeble than usual, but after all, he wasn't young. And he took part in activities with considerable zest.

Harold Munn wouldn't be a bad role model for any young fantasy writer to follow --- or for any man anywhere, any time. We are a lot poorer today than we were a year ago.

This issue of WEIRDBOOK, with what might very well be Munn's last piece of fiction in it, is respectfully dedicated

to the memory of a fine writer
 and a fine man:

HAROLD WARNER MUNN.

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RECOGNITION

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I

"As to why I asked you all to join me here, and why I'm making it worth your while by paying each of you five hundred pounds for your time and trouble, the answer is simple. The place appears to be haunted, and I want rid of the ghost."

The speaker was young, his voice cultured, his features fine and aristocratic. He was Lord David Marriot, and the place of which he spoke was a Marriot property: a large, ungainly, mongrel architecture of dim and doubtful origins, standing gaunt and gloomily atmospheric in an acre of brooding oaks. The wood itself stood central in nine acres of otherwise barren moors borderland.

Lord Marriot's audience numbered four: the sprightly octogenarian Lawrence Danford, a retired man of the cloth; by contrast the so-called "mediums" Jonathan Turnbull and Jason Lavery, each a "specialist" in his own right; and myself, an old friend of the family whose name does not really matter since I had no special part to play. I was simply there as an observer --- an advisor, if you like --- in a matter for which, from the beginning, I had no great liking.

Waiting on the arrival of the others, I had been with David Marriot at the old house all afternoon. I had long known something of the history of the place... and a little of its legend. There I now sat, comfortable and warm as our host addressed the other three, with an excellent sherry in my hand while logs crackled away in the massive fireplace. And yet suddenly, as he spoke, I felt chill and uneasy.

"You two gentlemen," David smiled at the mediums, "will employ your special talents to discover and define the malignancy, if indeed such an element exists; and you, sir," he spoke to the elderly cleric, "will attempt to exorcise the unhappy--- creature?--- once we know who or what it is." Attracted by my involuntary agitation, frowning, he paused and turned to me. "Is something troubling you, my friend...?"

"I'm sorry to have to stop you almost before you've started, David," I apologized, "but I've given it some thought and --- well, this plan of yours worries me."

Lord Marriot's guests looked at me in some surprise, seeming to notice me for the first time, although of course we had been introduced; for after all they were the experts while I was merely an observer. Nevertheless, and while I was never endowed with any special psychic talent

that I know of (and while certainly, if ever I had been, I never would have dabbled), I did know a little of my subject and had always been interested in such things.

And who knows?--- perhaps I do have some sort of sixth sense, for as I have said I was suddenly and quite inexplicably chill with a sensation of foreboding that I knew had nothing at all to do with the temperature of the library. The others, for all their much-vaunted special talents, apparently felt nothing.

"My plan worries you?" Lord Marriot finally repeated. "You didn't mention this before."

"I didn't know before just how you meant to go about it. Oh, I agree that the house requires some sort of exorcism, that something is quite definitely wrong with the place, but I'm not at all sure that you should concern yourself with finding out *exactly* what it is you're exorcising."

"Hmm, yes, I think I might agree," Old Danforth nodded his grey head. "Surely the essence of the, *harumph*, matter, is to be rid of the thing --- whatever it is. Er, not," he hastily added, "that I would want to do these two gentlemen out of a job --- however much I disagree with, *harumph*, spiritualism and its trappings." He turned to Turnbull and Lavery.

"Not at all, sir," Lavery assured him, smiling thinly. "We've been paid in advance, as you yourself have been paid, regardless of results. We will therefore--- *perform* --- as Lord Marriot sees fit. We are not, however, spiritualists. But in any case, should our services no longer be required ---" He shrugged.

"No, no question of that," the owner of the house spoke up at once. "The advice of my good friend here has been greatly valued by my family for many years, in all manner of problems, but he would be the first to admit that he's no expert in matters such as these. I, however, am even less of an authority, and my time is extremely short; I never have enough time for anything! That is why I commissioned him to find out all he could about the history of the house, in order to be able to offer you gentlemen something of an insight into its background."

"And I assure you that it's not just idle curiosity that prompts me to seek out the source of the trouble here. I wish to dispose of the property, and prospective buyers just will not stay in it long enough to appreciate its many good features! And so if we are to lay something to rest here, something which ought perhaps to have been laid to rest long ago, then I want to know what it is. Damn me, the thing's caused me enough trouble!"

"So let's please have no more talk about likes and dislikes or what should or should not be done. It will be the way I've planned it." He turned again to me. "Now if you'll be so good as to simply outline the results of your research...?"

"Very well," I shrugged in acquiescence. "As long as I've made my feelings in the matter plain..." Knowing David the way I did, further argument would be quite fruitless; his mind was made up. I riffled through the notes lying in my lap, took a long pull on my pipe, and commenced:

"Oddly enough, the house as it now stands is comparatively modern, no more than two hundred and fifty years old; but it was built upon the shell of a far older structure, one whose origin is extremely difficult to trace. There are local legends, however, and there have always been chroniclers of tales of strange old houses. The original house is given brief mention in texts dating back almost to Roman times, but the actual site had known habitation --- possibly a druidic order or some such--- much earlier. Later it became part of some sort of fortification, perhaps a small castle, and the remnants of earthworks in the shape of mounds, banks, and ditches can be found even today in the surrounding countryside.

"Of course the present house, while large enough by modern standards, is small in comparison with the original; it's a mere wing of the old structure. An extensive cellar --- a veritable maze of tunnels, rooms, and passages --- was discovered during renovation some eighty years ago, when first the Marriots acquired the property, and then several clues were disclosed as to its earlier use.

"This wing would seem to have been a place of worship, of sorts, for there was a crude altar-stone, a pair of ugly, font-like basins, a number of particularly repugnant carvings of gargoyles or 'gods,' and other extremely ancient tools and bric-a-brac. Most of this incunabula was given into the care of the then curator of the antiquities section of the British Museum, but the carved figures were defaced and destroyed. The records do not say why...

"But let's go back to the reign of James the First.

"Then the place was the seat of a family of supposed nobility, though the line must have suffered a serious decline during the early years of the 17th century --- or perhaps fallen foul of the authorities or the monarch himself --- for its name simply cannot be discovered. It would seem that for some reason, most probably serious dishonor, the family name has been erased from all contemporary records and documents!

"Prior to the fire which razed the main building to the ground in 1618, there had been a certain intercourse and intrigue of a similarly undiscovered nature between the nameless inhabitants, the de la Poers of Exham Priory near Anchester, and an obscure esoteric sect of monks dwelling in and around the semi-ruined Falstone Castle in Northumberland. Of the latter sect: they were wiped out utterly by Northern raiders

--- a clan believed to have been outraged by the 'heathen activities' of the monks --- and the ruins of the castle were pulled to pieces, stone by stone. Indeed, it was so well destroyed that today only a handful of historians could ever show you where it stood!

"As for the de la Poers: well, whole cycles of ill-omed myth and legend revolve around that family, just as they do about their Anchester seat. Suffice it to say that in 1923 the Priory was blown up and the cliffs beneath it dynamited, until the deepest roots of its foundations were obliterated. Thus the Priory is no more, and the last of that line of the family is safely locked away in a refuge for the hopelessly insane.

"It can be seen then that the nameless family that lived here had the worst possible connections, at least by the standards of those days, and it is not at all improbable that they brought about their own decline and disappearance through just such traffic with degenerate or ill-advised cultists and demonologists as I have mentioned.

"Now then, add to all of this somewhat tenuously connected information the local rumours, which have circulated on and off in the villages of this area for some three hundred years --- those mainly unspecified fears and old wives' tales that have sufficed since time immemorial to keep children and adults alike away from this property, off the land and out of the woods --- and you begin to understand something of the aura of the place. Perhaps you can feel that aura even now? I certainly can, and I'm by no means psychic..."

"Just what is it that the locals fear?" Turnbull asked. "Can't you enlighten us at all?"

"Oh, strange shapes have been seen on the paths and roads; luminous nets have appeared strung between the trees like great webs, only to vanish in daylight; and, yes, in connection with the latter, perhaps I had better mention the bas-reliefs in the cellar."

"Bas-reliefs?" queried Lavery.

"Yes, on the walls. It was writing of sorts, but in a language no one could understand --- glyphs almost."

"My great-grandfather had just bought the house," David Marriot explained. "He was an extremely well read man, knowledgeable in all sorts of peculiar subjects. When the cellar was opened and he saw the glyphs, he said they had to do with the worship of some strange deity from an obscure and almost unrecognized myth cycle. Afterwards he had the greater area of the cellar cemented in --- said it made the house damp and the foundations unsafe."

"Worship of some strange deity?" Old Danford spoke up. "What sort of deity? Some lustful thing that the Romans brought with them, d'you

think?"

"No, older than that," I answered for Lord Marriot. "Much older. A spider-thing."

"A spider?" This was Lavery again, and he snorted the words out almost in contempt.

"Not quite the thing to sneer at," I answered. "Three years ago an aging but still active gentleman rented the house for a period of some six weeks. An anthropologist and the author of several books, he wanted the place for its solitude; and if he took to it he was going to buy it. In the fifth week he was taken away raving mad!"

"Eh? *Harumph!* Mad, you say? Old Danforth repeated me.

I nodded. "Yes, quite insane. He lived for barely six months, all the while raving about a creature named Atlach-Nacha --- a spider-god from the Cthulhu Cycle of myth --- whose ghostly avatar, he claimed, still inhabited the house and its grounds."

At this Turnbull spoke up. "Now really!" he sputtered. "I honestly fear that we're rapidly going from the sublime to the ridiculous!"

"Gentlemen, please!" There was exasperation now in Lord Marriot's voice. "What does it matter? You know as much now as there is to know of the history of the troubles here --- more than enough to do what you've been paid to do. Now then, Lawrence---" he turned to Danford. "Have you any objections?"

"*Harumph!* Well, if there's a demon here --- that is, something other than a creature of the Lord --- then of course I'll do my best to help you. *Harumph!* Certainly."

"And you, Lavery?"

"Objections? No. A bargain is a bargain. I have your money, and you shall have your noises."

Lord Marriot nodded, understanding Lavery's meaning. For the medium's talent was a supposed or alleged ability to speak in the tongue of the ghost, the possessing spirit. In the event of a non-human ghost, however, then his mouthings might well be other than speech as we understand the spoken word. They might simply be--- noises.

"And that leaves you, Turnbull."

"Do not concern yourself, Lord Marriot," Turnbull answered, flicking imagined dust from his sleeves. "I, too, would be loath to break an honourable agreement. I have promised to do an automatic sketch of the intruder, an art in which I'm well practiced, and if all goes well I shall do just that. Frankly, I see nothing at all to be afraid of. Indeed, I would appreciate some sort of explanation from our friend here --- who seems to me simply to be doing his best to frighten us off." He inclined his head inquiringly in my direction.

I held up my hands and shook my head. "Gentlemen, my only desire is to make you aware of this feeling of mine of... yes, premonition! The very air seems to me imbued with an aura of ---"

I frowned. "Perhaps disaster would be too strong a word."

"Disaster?" Old Danford, as was his wont, repeated me. "How do you mean?"

"I honestly don't know. It's a feeling, that's all, and it hinges upon this desire of Lord Marriot's to know his foe, to identify the nature of the evil here. Yes, upon that, and upon the complicity of the rest of you."

"But---" the young Lord began, anger starting to make itself apparent in his voice.

"At least hear me out," I protested. "Then--- I paused and shrugged. "Then... you must do as you see fit."

"It can do no harm to listen to him," Old Danford pleaded my case. "I for one find all of this extremely interesting. I would like to hear his argument." The others nodded slowly, one by one, in somewhat uncertain agreement.

"Very well," Lord Marriot sighed heavily. "Just what is it that bothers you so much, my friend?"

"Recognition," I answered at once. "To recognize our --- opponent? --- that's where the danger lies. And yet here's Lavery, all willing and eager to speak in the thing's voice, which can only add to our knowledge of it; and Turnbull, happy to fall into a trance at the drop of a hat and sketch the thing, so that we may all know exactly what it looks like. And what comes after that? Don't you see? The more we learn of it, the more it learns of us!"

"Right now this *thing*--- ghost, demon, 'god,' apparition, whatever you want to call it --- lies in some deathless limbo, extradimensional, manifesting itself rarely, incompletely in our world. But to *know* the thing, as our lunatic anthropologist came to know it and as the superstitious villagers of these parts think they know it --- that is to draw it from its own nighted place into this sphere of existence. That is to give it substance, to participate in its materialization!"

"Hah!" Turnbull snorted. "And you talk of superstitious villagers! Let's have one thing straight before we go any further. Lavery and I do *not* believe in the supernatural, not as the misinformed majority understand it. We believe that there are other planes of existence, yes, and that they are inhabited; and further that occasionally we may glimpse alien areas and realms beyond the ones we were born to. In this we are surely nothing less than scientists, men who have been given rare talents, and each experiment we take part in leads us a little further along the paths of discovery. No ghosts or demons, sir, but scientific phenomena which may one day open up into whole new vistas of knowledge. Let me repeat once more: there is nothing to fear in this, nothing at all!"

"There I cannot agree," I answered. "You must be aware, as I am, that there are well

documented cases of---"

"Self-hypnotism!" Lavery broke in. "In almost every case where medium experimenters have come to harm, it can be proved that they were the victims of self-hypnosis."

"And that's not all," Turnbull added. "You'll find that they were all believers in the so-called supernatural. We, on the other hand, are not..."

"But what of these well documented cases you mentioned?" Old Danford spoke up. "What sort of cases?"

"Cases of sudden, violent death!" I answered. "The case of the medium who slept in a room once occupied by a murderer, a strangler, and who was found the next morning strangled --- though the room was windowless and locked from the inside! The case of the exorcist," (I paused briefly to glance at Danford), "who attempted to seek out and put to rest a certain grey thing which haunted a Scottish graveyard. Whatever it was, this monster was legended to crush its victims' heads. Well, his curiosity did for him: he was found with his head squashed flat and his brains all burst from his ears!"

"And you think that all of---" Danford began.

"I don't know what to think," I interrupted him, "but certainly the facts seem to speak for themselves. These men I've mentioned, and many others like them, all tried to understand or search for things which they should have left utterly alone. Then, too late, each of them recognized... something... and it recognized them! What I think really does not matter; what matters is that these men are no more. And yet here, tonight, you would commence just such an *experiment*, to seek out something you really aren't meant to know. Well, good luck to you. I for one want no part of it. I'll leave before you begin."

At that Lord Marriot, solicitous now, came over and laid a hand on my arm. "Now you promised me you'd see this thing through with me."

"I did not accept your money, David," I reminded him.

"I respect you all the more for that," he answered. "You were willing to be here simply as a friend. As for this change of heart... At least stay a while and see the thing underway."

I sighed and reluctantly nodded. Our friendship was a bond sealed long ago, in childhood. "As you wish --- but if and when I've had enough then you must not try to prevent my leaving."

"My word on it," he immediately replied, briskly pumping my hand. "Now then: a bite to eat and a drink, I think, another log on the fire, and then we can begin..."

II

The late autumn evening was settling in fast

by the time we gathered around a heavy, circular oak table set centrally upon the library's parquet flooring, in preparation for Lavery's demonstration of his esoteric talent. The other three guests were fairly cheery, perhaps a little excited --- doubtless as a result of David's plying them unstintingly with his excellent sherry--- and our host himself seemed in very good spirits; but I had been little affected and the small amount of wine I had taken had, if anything, only seemed to heighten the almost tangible atmosphere of dread which pressed in upon me from all sides. Only that promise wrested from me by my friend kept me there; and by it alone I felt bound to participate, at least initially, in what was to come.

Finally Lavery declared himself ready to begin and asked us all to remain silent throughout. The lights had been turned low at the medium's request and the sputtering logs in the great hearth threw red and orange shadows about the spacious room.

The experiment would entail none of the usual paraphernalia beloved of mystics and spiritualists; we did not sit with the tips of our little fingers touching, forming an unbroken circle; Lavery had not asked us to concentrate or to focus our minds upon anything at all. The antique clock on the wall ticked off the seconds monotonously as the medium closed his eyes and lay back his head in his high-backed chair. We all watched him closely.

Gradually his breathing deepened and the rise and fall of his chest became regular. Then, almost before we knew it and coming as something of a shock, his hands tightened on the leather arms of his chair and his mouth began a silent series of spastic jerks and twitches. My blood, already cold, seemed to freeze at the sight of this, and I had half risen to my feet before his face grew still. Then Lavery's lips drew back from his teeth and he opened and closed his mouth several times in rapid succession, as if gnashing his teeth through a blind, idiot grin. This only lasted for a second or two, however, and soon his face once more relaxed. Suddenly conscious that I still crouched over the table, I forced myself to sit down.

As we continued to watch him, a deathly pallor came over the medium's features and his knuckles whitened where he gripped the arms of his chair. At this point I could have sworn that the temperature of the room dropped sharply, abruptly. The others did not seem to note the fact, begin far too fascinated with the motion of Lavery's exposed Adam's apple to be aware of anything else. That fleshy knob moved slowly up and down the full length of his throat, while the column of his windpipe thickened and contracted in a sort of slow muscular spasm. And at last Lavery spoke. He spoke --- and at the sound

I could almost feel the blood congealing in my veins!

For this was in no way the voice of a man that crackled, hissed and gibbered from Lavery's mouth in a --- language? --- which surely never originated on this world or within our sphere of existence. No, it was the voice of... something else. Something monstrous!

Interspaced with the insane cough, whistle and stutter of harshly alien syllables and cackling cachinnations, occasionally there would break through a recognizable combination of sounds which roughly approximated our pronunciation of "Atlach-Nacha;" but this fact had no sooner made itself plain to me than, with a wild shriek, Lavery hurled himself backwards --- or was *thrown* backwards --- so violently that he overturned his chair, rolling free of it to thrash about upon the floor.

Since I was directly opposite Lavery at the table, I was the last to attend him. Lord Marriot and Turnbull on the other hand were at his side at once, pinning him to the floor and steadying him. As I shakily joined them I saw that Old Danford had backed away into the farthest corner of the room, holding up his hands before him as if to ward off the very blackest of evils.

With an anxious inquiry I hurried toward him. He shook me off and made straight for the door.

"Danford!" I cried. "What on Earth is---" But then I saw the way his eyes bugged and how terribly he trembled in every limb. The man was frightened for his life, and the sight of him in this condition made me forget my own terror in a moment.

"Danford," I repeated in a quieter tone of voice. "Are you well?"

By this time Lavery was sitting up on the floor and staring uncertainly about. Lord Marriot joined me as Danford opened the library door to stand for a moment facing us. All the blood seemed to have drained from his face; his hands fluttered like trapped birds as he stumbled backwards out of the room and into the passage leading to the main door of the house.

"Abomination!" he finally croaked, and no sign of his customary 'harumph!' "A presence--- monstrous--- ultimate abomination --- *God help us...!*"

"Presence?" Lord Marriot repeated, taking his arm. "What is it Danford? What's wrong, man?"

The old man tugged himself free. He seemed now somewhat recovered, but still his face was ashen and his trembling unabated. "A presence, yes," he hoarsely answered, "a monstrous presence! I could not even try to exorcise... *that!*" And he turned and staggered along the corridor to the outer door.

"But where are you going, Danford?" Marriot called after him.

"Away," came the answer from the door. "Away from here. I'll --- I'll be in touch, Marriot---

but I cannot stay here now." The door slammed behind him as he stumbled into darkness and a moment or two later came the roar of his car's engine.

When the sound had faded into distance, Lord Marriot turned to me with a look of astonishment on his face. He asked: "Well, what was that all about? Did he see something, d'you think?"

"No, David," I shook my head, "I don't think he *saw* anything. But I believe he sensed something --- something perhaps apparent to him through his religious training --- and he got out before it could sense him!"

We stayed the night in the house, but while bedrooms were available we all chose to remain in the library, nodding fitfully in our easy chairs around the great fireplace. I for one was very glad of the company, though I kept this fact to myself, and I could not help but wonder if the others might not now be similarly apprehensive.

Twice I awoke with a start in the huge quiet room, on both occasions feeding the red-glowing fire. And since that blaze lasted all through the night, I could only assume that at least one of the others was equally restless...

In the morning after a frugal breakfast (Lord Marriot kept no retainers in the place; none would stay there, and so we had to make do for ourselves), while the others prowled about and stretched their legs or tidied themselves up, I saw and took stock of the situation. David, concerned about the aged clergyman, rang him at home and was told by Danford's housekeeper that her master had not stayed at home overnight. He had come home in a tearing rush at about 9 o'clock, packed a case, told her that he was off "up North" for a few days' rest, and had left at once for the railway station. She also said that she had not liked his colour.

The old man's greatcoat still lay across the arm of a chair in the library where he had left it in his frantic hurry of the night before. I took it and hung it up for him, wondering if he would ever return to the house to claim it.

Lavery was baggy-eyed and dishevelled and he complained of a splitting headache. He blamed his condition on an overdose of his host's sherry, but I knew for a certainty that he had been well enough before his dramatic demonstration of the previous evening. Of that demonstration, the medium said he could remember nothing; and yet he seemed distinctly uneasy and kept casting about the room and starting at the slightest unexpected movement, so that I believed his nerves had suffered a severe jolt.

It struck me that he, surely, must have been my assistant through the night; that he had spent some of the dark hours tending the fire in the great hearth. In any case, shortly after

lunch and before the shadows of afternoon began to creep, he made his excuses and took his departure. I had somehow known that he would. And so three of us remained... three of the original five.

But if Danford's unexplained departure of the previous evening had disheartened Lord Marriot, and while Lavery's rather premature desertion had also struck a discordant note, at least Turnbull stood straight and strong on the side of our host. Despite Old Danford's absence, Turnbull would still go ahead with his part in the plan; an exorcist could always be found at some later date, if such were truly necessary. And certainly Lavery's presence was not prerequisite to Turnbull's forthcoming performance. Indeed, he wanted no one at all in attendance, desiring to be left entirely alone in the house. This was the only way he could possibly work, he assured us, and he had no fear at all about being on his own in the old place. After all, what was there to fear? This was only another experiment, wasn't it?

Looking back now I feel a little guilty that I did not argue the point further with Turnbull --- about his staying alone in the old house overnight to sketch his automatic portrait of the unwanted tenant --- but the man was so damned arrogant to my way of thinking, so sure of his theories and principles, that I offered no slightest opposition. So we all three spent the evening reading and smoking before the log fire, and as night drew on Lord Marriot and I prepared to take our leave.

Then, too, as darkness fell over the oaks crowding dense and still beyond the gardens, I once again felt that unnatural oppressiveness creeping in upon me, that weight of unseen energies hovering in the suddenly sullen air.

Perhaps, for the first time, Lord Marriot felt it too, for he did not seem at all indisposed to leaving the house; indeed, there was an uncharacteristic quickness about him, and as we drove away in his car in the direction of the local village inn, I noticed that he involuntarily shuddered once or twice. I made no mention of it; the night was chill, after all...

At the Traveller's Rest, where business was only moderate, we inspected our rooms before making ourselves comfortable in the snug. There we played cards until about 10 o'clock, but our minds were not on the game. Shortly after ten-thirty, Marriot called Turnbull to ask if all was going well. He returned from the telephone grumbling that Turnbull was totally ungrateful. He had not thanked Lord Marriot for his concern at all. The man demanded absolute isolation, no contact with the outside world whatever, and he complained that it would now take him well over an hour to go into his trance. After that he might begin to sketch almost immediately, or he might not start until well into the night, or

there again the experiment could prove to be completely fruitless. It was all a matter of circumstance, and chances would not be improved by useless interruptions.

We had left him seated in his shirt-sleeves before a roaring fire. Close at hand were a bottle of wine, a plate of cold beef sandwiches, a sketch pad and pencils. These lay upon an occasional table which he would pull into a position directly in front of himself before sleeping, or, as he would have it, before "going into trance." There he sat, alone in that ominous old house.

Before retiring we made a light meal of chicken sandwiches, though neither one of us had any appreciable appetite. I may not speak for Marriot, but as for me... it took me until well into the wee small hours to get to sleep...

In the morning my titled friend was at my door while I was still half-way through washing. His outward appearance was ostensibly bright and breezy, but I sensed that his eagerness to get back to the old house and Turnbull was more than simply a desire to know the outcome of the latter's experiment; he was more interested in the man's welfare than anything else. Like my own, his misgivings with regard to his plan to learn something of the mysterious and alien entity at the house had grown through the night; now he would be more than satisfied simply to discover the medium well and unharmed.

And yet what could there possibly be at the place to harm him? Again, that question.

The night had brought a heavy frost, the first of the season, and hedgerows and verges were white as from a fall of snow. Half-way through the woods, on the long gravel drive winding in toward the house, there the horror struck! Maneuvering a slight bend, Lord Marriot cursed, applied his brakes and brought the car skidding to a jarring halt. A shape, white and grey --- and hideously red --- lay huddled in the middle of the drive.

It was Turnbull, frozen, lying in a crystalized pool of his own blood, limbs contorted in the agony of death, his eyes glazed orbs that stared in blind and eternal horror at a sight Lord Marriot and I could hardly imagine. A thousand circular holes of about one half-inch in diameter penetrated deep into his body, his face, all of his limbs; as if he had been the victim of some maniac with a brace and bit! Identical holes formed a track along the frosted grass verge from the house to this spot, as did Turnbull's flying footprints.

Against all my protests --- weakened by nausea, white and trembling with shock as he was --- still Lord Marriot raced his car the remainder of the way to the house. There we dismounted and he entered through the door which hung mutely ajar. I would not go in with him

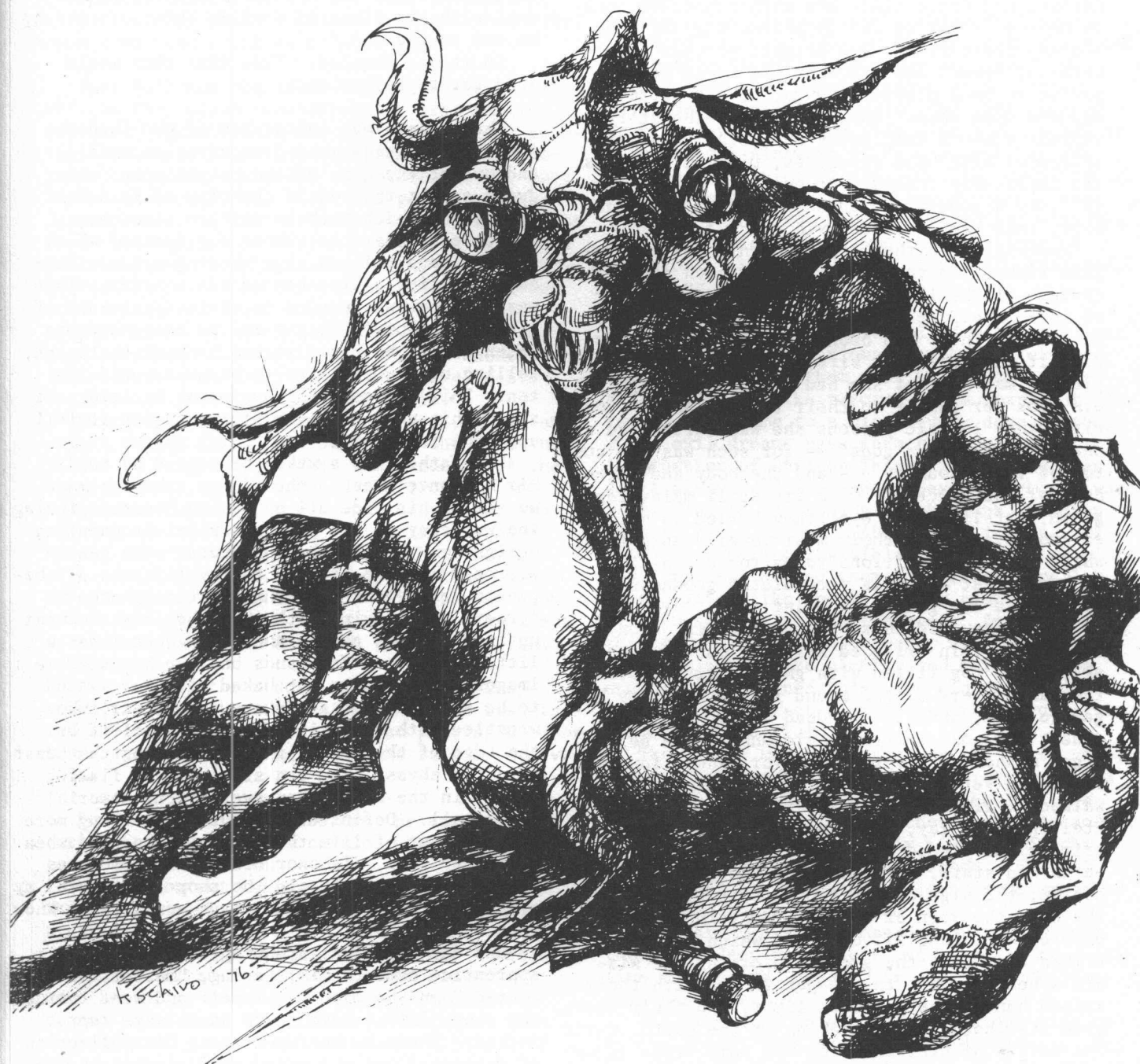
but stood dumbly wringing my hands, numb with horror, before the leering entrance.

A minute or so later he came staggering to the door. In his hand he carried a leaf from Turnbull's sketch pad. Before I could think to avert my eyes he thrust the almost completed sketch toward me, crying, "Look! Look!"

I caught a glimpse of something bulbous and black, hairy and red-eyed --- a tarantula, a bat,

a dragon --- whose jointed legs were tipped with sharp, chitinous darts. A mere glimpse, without any real or lasting impression of detail, and yet ---

"No!" I tried, throwing up my hands before my face, turning and rushing wildly back down the long drive. "No, you fool, don't let me see it! I don't want to know! *I don't want to know!*"



THE OTHER MURDER OF ETELVEN THIOS

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The evil mage Etelven Thios had been murdered by Oinath the rug merchant, as was already well known in the lands surrounding Dzim. Minstrels were beginning to sing of the deed, telling how the vengeful husband, whose wife had been foully molested by Etelven Thios, had lured the wizard out of his castle on a pretense, and into the desert, and there slain him with a hatchet, only to meet a frightful and doubtless magical doom shortly thereafter. The details of this fate were not known, and since by and large people prefer to hear pleasant songs, no one cared to expound upon them. But the rest of the story rapidly grew in complexity and detail, and, resplendent with bold struggles, midnight terrors, and implacable courage, it began to drift, slowly, like a poorly moored ship dragging its anchor, into the realm of myth.

Meanwhile, in the city of Garnish by the inland rivers, on the outskirts of which stood the cottage of the late Oinath, there was a matter of more immediate concern. The beheaded corpse of Etelven Thios had been found within, and beside it the shrieking wife, Themara, driven completely mad by what she had seen. The city fathers took her gently to their temple, where along with other lunatic persons she was worshipped as one touched by the gods --- for such was the custom of their country --- and the body and ruined head of the sorcerer, with its still malevolent green, cat-like left eye, they buried in hallowed ground, amongst their most revered ancestors, while chanting petitions to patron divinities, in hopes that all this accumulated goodness would make the grave lie quiet.

Alas, they did these things in vain. On a night when rain drizzled silently out of a grey sky, while fog filled with ghosts drifted over the land, every single mound in the cemetery began to stir, and all the dead arose, from the oldest and most brittle skeletons to the beloved Urga, mother of the town's mayor, whose funeral robes had yet to gather mold. An unliving army walked or limped or crawled to the place where Etelven Thios lay, and removed the signs the priests had placed over him --- the sign of the earth and stars, inverted with the stars on the bottom; the sign of the thunderbolt transfixing the asp; the sign of the dry fountain --- and they drew out the long silver sword which had been driven deep into the ground, piercing the wizard's heart. Then they began to dig with their ruined hands, their broken limbs, and their teeth, even stillborn babies clawing at the earth, until the coffin of Etelven Thios was completely uncovered.

The next morning there were discovered a pit, a heap of shattered planks, and a trail of corpses leading out of the city, across the plains, and even to where the desert began. No one cared to find the end of it.

A council of prominent citizens and the ruling elders was held. Said one: "Lords, soon Etelven Thios will plague us with renewed fury, unless we swiftly dispatch him once and for all." Said another: "One must not impugn the courage of Oinath the rug merchant, or his righteous quest for vengeance, but it must be admitted that he had no prior experience in wizard-killing. He was hardly qualified to deal with the likes of Etelven Thios. In short, he was an amateur."

So it was decided. This time they would send for a professional.

There was a man called Eom of the Shadows, for all his deeds were done after nightfall, and out of the gaze of the bright moon, who dwelt across the sea in the city of Kosh-Ni-Hye, about which much is written elsewhere. There he kept a shop, above the door of which swung a hand-painted sign showing a man with a sword killing a nine-headed sea monster. This was all that was needed to advise passersby of his trade, but if they cared to hear more, he often was to be found seated beneath that sign, telling of his exploits to any who would listen. This was good for business, he said. It spread his name about, till eventually it fell upon the right ears.

"My father was a maker of jugs," he told his audience once. "When I was a boy he made me sit by his side all my waking hours, spinning the wet clay on the potter's wheel or painting designs on the finished products. You can scarcely imagine how tedious my life was. I began to dream, first of running through the streets and playing with the other boys, caught up in frivolous games, and then, when I was a little older, of far lands and the heroes whose images I painted on the baked clay. I wanted to be as brave and as famous as Ganhuil, who wrestled with the Bull of Fire on a cliff by the edge of the world, finally casting the beast into the abyss. You can still see it flaming there, in the sunset, an everlasting memorial to Ganhuil. Definitely I wanted something more exciting out of life than jug-working, and when my father died, dishonorable to his memory as it may have been, I sold the shop and assumed my present occupation, about which you already know much.

One day as he was speaking thus, Kamdok his apprentice came to him, saying, "Master, we are wanted," and he excused himself and went inside the shop, into a room which was always kept locked. There he searched among his collection of enchanted and empowered swords until he found

the one he wanted, a huge, silver broadsword forged by a godling who dwelt in the heart of a sun. It glowed in the dark and gave off slight heat. To complement this he took a shield made of arctic ice, frigid and permanent by virtue of the runes carved upon it and the magical light entrapped within its center. On his head he placed a helm of coral and the bones of dead mermen. He selected also a dwarfish dagger for Kamdok, and then, dressed in ordinary street cloaks, the two of them went to the docks, bought passage on a ship, and sailed over the Middle Sea to the other end of the world, coming at last to Ptnarnir, then passing overland to Garnish, where the city fathers welcomed them with smiles, open arms, and promises of much gold.

They followed the route Oinath had taken, as well as they could reconstruct it from the accounts of eyewitnesses who preferred to say nothing. On camel-back they crossed the desert beyond Dzim, past the place of colored sands, past the mountain Cloudcap where the gods no longer danced, and into that dreadful forest of leafless trees where branches swayed without any wind and had whispered "Death, death, death," to the terrified Oinath. This time, since there were two intruders beneath its boughs, the wood was distinctly heard to say "Death-death, death-death, death-death." Kamdok was uneasy, but whenever he looked into the calmly determined face of his master, his fears were still a while.

Emerging into the desert once more, they came upon a ruined ship, half buried in the sand and tilted to one side, so that the yardarms of the leaning masts nearly touched the ground. This too Oinath had seen, and he had conversed with the captain of the madmen who sailed it, never moving from that spot, convinced that only by such a paradox could they escape Etelven Thios. Now the sails flapped ragged. Silence lay upon the decks like a sated beast, and all over there were deep gashes cut into the wood, as if from nibbling.

At last, in the middle of the night, they spied the two mountains called the Dark Sisters and the constellation of the Toad peering between them, and knew they had found the lair of Etelven Thios.

Eom and Kamdok stood before the massive ebon gates of the sorcerer's castle, wondering how to get in.

"Could you not take your sword and cut away the gate in great ringing slices?" asked the apprentice.

"I could," said the man of Shadows. "There is precedent for such a thing, set of old by the hero Leothric, but I think this particular instance calls more for stealth and finesse than the magic of a blade and the sheer strength of the wielder's arm. Behold."

And the boy beheld as his master walked into the darkness before the gate, and straining his eyes to the utmost, he perceived Eom stooping to whisper something to a seated figure. Cautiously Kamdok came closer, and saw that there were two persons sitting in the sand, both mummies of a very ancient sort, which had remained unmoving for so long that the desert caressed their laps as the sea does rocks at high tide. Between them was a chessboard on a stand. They had been playing for aeons, each unable to defeat the other, by the design of Etelven Thios.

When Eom spoke into the ear of one of the mummies, the creature rose. Sand fell from bandaged legs, and joints creaked like dry wood. Unsteadily it walked to where the two gates joined, and made before them a sign. There was a deep rumbling, and lo! the gates spread apart, leaving a space wide enough for a man to slip through sideways if he were not too fat.

Then, returning to the game, the mummy moved a single piece, checkmated its opponent, and crumbled into dust, having been bribed with the promise of victory and won the privilege of oblivion. The other sat forlornly in the sand, regarding eternity.

Inside was a courtyard filled with sand, out of which grew metal flowers. The master bade the boy not touch them, for he saw how their petals glinted like razors in the starlight. The two of them came to a black ivory door, through which evil dreams pass into the world from the imagination of Etelven Thios. This hung open, as it always did at night. Beyond it was a vast room, floored in shining black stone, held up with pillared arches. Above them in the darkness, the ceiling invisible, lay a nesting place for vampires; around them in darkness, yellow eyes drifted like sparks from a campfire. Somewhere unearthly voices tinkered. In front of the intruders, leading upward, was a stairway of what looked like glowing red marble. Eom and Kamdok examined this more closely, and saw that it was in fact a clear substance containing a bubbling red fluid.

The Shadow Man put a foot on the first step, and a little scream rose up, fluttering like a moth until lost in the distance above. He mounted the second, and another scream ascended. Kamdok was quivering, nearly ill from fright, when the master finally understood. Each of these steps was a prison, holding some wretched soul bound there by Etelven Thios.

And taking his sun-forged sword, he thrust the point deep into the first step, at the same time whispering, "Peace, friend, your deliverance has come."

The step died in silence, blood spurting onto the floor. The second one did likewise, and by saying to each as he slew it, "Peace, friend,"

Eom was able to climb the flight of stairs without any first alarms. Kamdok followed closely behind, knees shaking and eyes wide. When they were at the top, the stairway behind them was a pale, delicate thing, like a row of shattered glass coffins. All the gore had drained out, forming a pool on the floor below, to which hunched shapes from the gloomy corners of the room came to drink.

The stairs had brought them to a room filled with the Essence of Night, a blackness so unfathomable that no earthly light could penetrate it, and against which the star-sword was reduced to the barest hint of a glow.

Carefully, guiding his apprentice with one hand, Eom made his way through this room. The Night seemed to welcome him. He was in his own element. He groped for the metal knob of another door, opened it, and emerged into light (which somehow did not pass beyond him to illuminate the previous room), and found himself in the lair of a dragon, without which no evil wizard's castle would be respectable in story or in song.

Before he even saw the beast, he knew the nature of his foe, for the room was not well or often cleaned; the rushes were stale, the air thick with the odor of the dragon droppings which seemed to be everywhere. Then the monster unwound itself from the top of a pillar and came slithering down. It was a magnificent specimen, a hundred feet long and more, lined all along the top of its body with barbed spikes, and with a two-edged plate like an executioner's axe on the end of its tail. Its mouth was too dreadful to contemplate for long; out of that cavern lashed a tongue like a leather whip, and the teeth lining it were like an armory of swords set aside for an especially strenuous war. From within came the drum-like throbbing of the dragon's heart, and occasionally a low moan from some poor soul swallowed perhaps ten years before, and digested slowly. When it moved, the creature made sounds like huge trees being felled with each step, and like laborers dragging those trees, bound in chains, across the smooth floor.

With his first blow Eom struck off the end of the tongue which sought to ensnare him. The dragon let out a bellow of rage and pain, and twin clouds of burning vapor burst from its nostrils. With another blow he chipped one of the teeth; with yet another he parried the awesome tail. But he knew he could not slay his enemy, for all the scales of the upper body were of polished steel, stronger than his sword, magical as it was. Only the tender belly, protected by nought but thin bronze, was vulnerable. He had to get the dragon onto its back, a seemingly hopeless task, since dragons only roll over when sleeping, and only then when having discontented dreams. (So Keothak the Traveller says in his *Beastlary*. I take his word for it.)

There was only one thing to do. He retreated

back into the room filled with Night, with Kamdok scurrying before him. He stood to one side of the door, and when the dragon had gone within, he closed it behind him.

Now the only light was that of the sword, and the occasional snorts of the beast. Eom hid the blade under his cloak, and he and Kamdok stood flat and absolutely still against the wall, on either side of the door. Utter darkness. The dragon wandered about, dragging its tail noisily, but was unable to locate the two humans.

At last, tiring, it lay down and slept. Because of its failure to catch Eom and Kamdok, it went to sleep hungry, and its dreams were discontented indeed. After a short while it rolled over, its armor against the floor making a noise like rocks being ground in a quarry. When it was still again Eom inched in the direction of the sound, then, when he was sure he stood almost near enough to reach out and touch the bronze scales, he uncovered the sword. By the light of it he saw he was correct, and swiftly, before the dim glow could make the shiny eyelids flutter, he drove the blade with all his might into the gigantic mass before him, reaching deep, until the tip pricked the dragon's heart. All its life blood spouted from the wound, and the body seemed to deflate like a punctured water bag until it lay in flaccid ruin on the floor. Again the two left a lake of gore in their wake, and things came to sip from it.

"Someday you'll be doing that by yourself, my boy," he said.

"Y-yes, master. Maybe I should have been a pot maker."

Eom of the Shadows only laughed, and led Kamdok through the befouled lair of the dragon, down a corridor decorated with murals celebrating the wickedness of mankind, and into the roof garden of Etelven Thios.

Moonlight shone through a crystal skylight on many marvellous plants and the gleaming stones of the pathways that ran between them. There was a thing as tall as a sunflower which whispered something distressingly like, "Food," over and over, and lashed out with leafy mandibles as the two passed. There was a toadstool the size of a fat woman's rump, on which sat a twisted thing vaguely suggesting a toad. Even as they watched this thing quivered, made a feeble attempt to hop, and exploded into a cloud of spores. As Eom and Kamdok watched, miniature versions of the first, complete with tiny toads, began to grow out of the soil, the pavement, and their clothing. They hurried on, then stopped to scrape the things off with their knives, gagging at the putrid odor they gave off when pierced. As soon as the blades touched each one, it wiggled, fell to the stones, and died. Next they came upon

plants which bore a strange, heavy fruit on the ground, hidden among shadows and twists of vine: vegetable women, which were becoming more human, more beautiful, and less attached to the parent stalks even as the intruders watched. One plant, which seemed to be diseased from the way its foliage drooped, bore a shrivelled hag.

There were lovely plants, too, among the horrors. One spread golden petals three yards across, and sang when moonbeams touched it. Another shone of lace and silver, like the aftermath of an ice storm in winter.

Eom and his apprentice suddenly found themselves in a square, where all the paths converged, with Etelven Thios. The wizard did not look well. He moved stiffly, as if just barely able to control his limbs. His frame seemed shrunken and bent beneath his red cloak. And they were not exactly face to face with him, because he had no face. His head was missing.

A voice thundered from somewhere.

"Ah, botanists, I presume, here to admire my humble garden."

"Yes," said the master, stalling for time until he could spot the inevitable traps. "How did you know?"

Laughter echoed through the garden. He still couldn't tell where it was coming from. Kamdok looked six weeks dead.

"You have many... unusual specimens here," Eom continued.

"Yes," said Etelven Thios. "Here is an especially remarkable one."

He led them a short distance, to the edge of the square. Half buried in the loam, just beyond the end of the pavement, was a man, or what had been a man. The naked, pale grey skin showed here and there above soil and leaves. One arm stood crookedly upward, the wrist limp, the hand twisted, and young vines growing in place of the fingers. The chest was exposed, and the upper legs, but from the knees downward they were either missing, or covered. Eom couldn't tell, and Kamdok was in no condition to try. Etelven Thios wasn't telling.

There was part of a face. The head was bent far back, chin up. The eyes and forehead were buried, but the rest was clear. Out of the mouth grew a perfect red rose.

And Etelven Thios, taking a pair of scissors from his pocket, cut that rose. At once blood spewed out of the mouth. In a spasm the body nearly sat up, dirt smeared eyes rolled in mindless terror, while a scream in the throat died in a gurgle. Then the thing lay still, and out of the bloody mouth another rose grew.

And Etelven Thios held the first one up above the stump of his neck, as if invisible nostrils were sniffing it. The blossom wilted.

"You are right, sir," said Eom of the Shadows. "I have never seen a plant like that before."

"It bears an uncanny resemblance to a certain

purveyor of cheap carpets." The voice seemed distracted, and Eom had a hint of where it was coming from. But he didn't wait to find out. As the wizard stood there, momentarily off guard, he slipped a hand under his cloak and drew forth Rumor, a dagger famed for being swifter than its namesake, and with a single, silken motion slid it between the ribs of Etelven Thios, deep into his ancient and thoroughly black heart.

The result was instantaneous. There was an explosion of wind blowing in all directions from the body, sending Eom and Kamdok sprawling in opposite directions, to either end of the square. Then a wall of flame rose from the stones, encircling the corpse but not touching it--- a wall of protection.

Phalanxes of flaming soldiers, with long red-hot spears lowered, appeared in the pathways converging on the would-be assassins. The plants around them stirred hungrily.

The hand of Etelven Thios removed the knife, and the body remained standing, even if it swayed unsteadily. The voice laughed, louder, louder --- and suddenly Eom knew its source.

On the far side of the square, behind where his assistant was now standing, in a patch of innocuous, broad-leafed shrubs, lay what looked at this distance like a melon.

A melon? How could something so tame, so mundane, be in the garden of Etelven Thios? Of course!

"Kamdok! There! Behind you! Grab it!"

The molten spears were only a few yards away, advancing steadily.

The apprentice turned. His training overcame his fear. Without even a flash of thought he obeyed his master's voice, and snatched the thing from beneath the leaves. It wasn't a melon. It was the head of Etelven Thios, still mutilated from the blows of Oinath's hatchet, but healing. The green, cat-like eye glared balefully.

Again instinctively Kamdok moved. He drew his dagger, called Terror, the brother of Rumor, and plunged it into the green orb before it could blink, bursting the iris like a rotted grape, the tip reaching up through the skull into the brain.

At once the flames and the soldiers were gone, and the headless remains of Etelven Thios fell limply on the stones. The realization of what he had done came to the apprentice, and in dumb shock he let go of the head. It too fell and lay still. All was quiet in the garden for an instant, and then Eom of the Shadows, the master assassin, began to laugh, out of joy for his victory and the irony of how it had come about.

And like an echo came the laughter of another!

Kamdok screamed, and pointed. There, standing over what had been Etelven Thios was ----

Etelven Thios! He was tall and slightly stooped, as he had been in life, his face a white mask of hate, entirely unscarred, his green eye a beacon of doom.

Eom paused, startled, but then casually advanced, drew his sword, and slashed at the apparition. The blade passed through without meeting resistance, rippling it like the reflection on the surface of a pool.

"You see, my boy? It's only his ghost. A mere insubstantial wisp. It can't hurt us. Remember this adage, which has been known for

countless ages: *Anything you can't cut with a sword isn't material enough to worry about.*"

He laughed again. Kamdok forced a smile.

And, laughing also, the spirit of Etelven Thios drifted into Eom of the Shadows, superimposing itself over him, cutting him off from air, suffocating him as smoke can.

When the master was dead, Etelven Thios turned to the boy, who cowered before him in helpless, babbling terror.

Before he did anything he waited, giving him enough time to go mad.



THE FINAL? MURDER? OF ETELVEN THIOS?

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Little is known of the early life of the student Guetheric. It is said that he was born in one of the teeming slums of some fishing and trading city along the coast of the Great or Eastern Continent, perhaps in Irtash or Claris-drui, and that as a child he knew much of hunger, deprivation, and death. By one account he had an elder brother who was blinded for thievery at the age of fifteen, when Guetheric was twelve, and shortly thereafter his father ran off, his mother died mad, and his hapless brother was sold to a doctor of physick. In any case, there can be little doubt that his beginnings were unhappy.

Somehow Guetheric gained the rudiments of an education and the patronage of the wife of a Tarsian noble, and with such credentials sailed across the narrow sea from Irtash to the Isle of Sorcerers, enrolling in the university there.

One of his teachers, the Windmaster Aelgemark, remembers him:

"Guetheric was a frail youth. One felt he should have been stocky, but he was lean, almost skeletal. He had a gaunt, expressionless face, and deepset eyes which struck most as mysterious ... oh yes, that sounds strange. Mysterious. Even as a would-be sorcerer he was mysterious. Showed lots of promise, he did. I remember also he had the beginnings of a red beard, pointed, as the young men were wearing them in those days. Was he a good student? Yes, he most certainly was. The best I ever had. I never saw anyone grasp the fundamentals of name-wrestling or summoning as quickly or as thoroughly as he did. He worked hard, but that was his downfall, I suppose. He was obsessive. Never mixed much with the other students, never gamed or went to festivals. They complained he was a miser, but he had one extravagance. Burned midnight oil like a light-house, up every night all night, poring over eldritch tomes. I don't know what he did for sleep. Perhaps he found a spell to suspend time in one of those things. Read even more than the Masters, he did. Brother Librarian, may Lerad gaze upon him forever, used to insist he went through every volume in the place, covering them systematically by section: first Forgotten Lore, then Forbidden, then Blasphemous, then Nameless --- fiendishly hard to find anything there, because none of the books have titles --- and finally Eldritch. I haven't even been through those myself. I think Guetheric was looking for something. And I'm afraid he found it. Did he have any friends? No, not really. He stayed to himself. Of course, there was Tzano, with whom he shared a room. A harmless sort of boy, possibly not very bright,

and certainly not good for much. The complete opposite of Guetheric, always at the dice or drowned in his cups. On trips to the mainland, he used to conjure in the streets, just to show off. Deep learning wasn't for him, and I knew he'd never last out his first year. Of course he didn't, but it was because of the terrible tragedy..."

The tragedy began on a spring evening. The week-long Festival of Light was drawing to a close, and the entire population of the university, except for Guetheric, laid aside routine cares and celebrated. Illusions were not frowned on for this night of nights. It was the time for all things unseen and never before seen. A huge crystalline bird, aflame with pale blue light, soared over the island and vanished into the sea like a second sunset, its image caught by one quick-thinking soul in a recording glass, that it might overawe succeeding generations of students.

But throughout all this, Guetheric sat alone in his dormitory tower, annoyed by the noise and the sparkling flashes beneath his window, staring at a repulsive object.

He had just taken a human head out of a leather sack, and placed it on the table at which he was seated. Perhaps it was the head of a man. It was too grotesquely mutilated for anyone to be sure. The skin had long since dried into a hard, leathery brown, its surface slightly powdery to the touch. Contracted muscles drew the remnants of the upper lip back to reveal broken, nearly black teeth. The lower jaw was gone, ragged flaps of tissue hanging where it had been. But it was the upper part which was the most severely ruined. The whole crown of the skull was shattered as if by a tremendous blow from an axe or sword, down to the top of the nose. The left eye socket, which was twice as large as the right, held traces of a rubbery green substance. In the right was an eye, probably once yellow, now shrivelled and the color of an olive. The back of the head wasn't recognizable as anything.

Guetheric had paid a considerable sum for this grisly relique, and if it was what he thought it was, no price would have been too much. He had found the thing in a certain shop in an alley in a very disreputable section of a disreputable city, in a country depicted by most geographers as a blank spot on the map. The person from whom he had purchased it could no longer vouch for its authenticity, for shortly after the transaction took place he had been found, or more precisely not found, sprawled over and around his counter --- much blood, a trace of grey brain, a few small bones, and a tooth or two, which admittedly could have belonged to anyone. Another person, an importer of the most unusual sorts of novelties, with whom the first sometimes did business, was similarly and untidily missing. All this bothered Guetheric only a trifle. Death, he knew,

was the most common coinage in many places never mentioned in polite society.

His intent now was to discover if the charnel souvenir was in fact the head of the famed and most malignant sorcerer, Etelven Thios, whose many centuried career had come to an end about a hundred years before Guetheric was born. He knew the standard tales, how Etelven Thios so brutally abused the wife of Oinath the rug merchant, and of the horrors that followed his "death" and burial. In the Valley of Shadow, between two weeping mountains which had once been the daughters of Etelven Thios, still stood the mage's violated fortress, perhaps even yet haunted, but certainly with its major terrors long gone. About this was whispered a more secret tale, of the earth opening up to reveal wealth beyond the most fevered imaginings of mankind--- the treasure of Etelven Thios.

He gazed at the head in the starlight, hoping to discern mystic patterns in the face not visible under the sun's rays, which might reveal the presence of magic, but before long Tzano came noisily up the stairs.

Hastily Guetheric put his prize back in the bag.

"Hello! It's me!"

The youth fumbled with the lock on the door. Guetheric rose and let him in, his face an expressionless mask to hide his anger. Not that it mattered anyway --- the other was drunk beyond caring. He nearly dropped the taper he was carrying. Before he accidentally burned the whole university down, Guetheric took it from him.

"Gueth---Guetheric... Where have you been? You missed all the fun."

"I had more important things to do."

"Wha--? How can anything be more important than... *wine!... women!...* We had some girls brought over from I dunno where... and S--"

With that he passed out. Guetheric caught him before he hit the floor, bundled him over one shoulder and dragged him up into the sleeping loft. Soon contented snores filled the room.

Guetheric got the head out again and tried to resume his work, but couldn't concentrate. Soon the smoke from the taper made his eyelids heavy, and the regular snoring of Tzano seduced him also into sleep.

Some hours later he awoke with a start.

The courtyard was quiet below, the study totally dark. The taper had long since gone out, and not even a trace of its smoke remained. In the dim starlight from the window he could see that the head on the table before him was gone. Frantically he leapt to his feet, fumbling for a candle, but just then there came a scraping sound from above, then a surprised cry, a kind of gurgling, and one brief terrified scream.

Tzano.

Something small dropped to the floor on the other side of the room, near the ladder to the

loft. By this time Guetheric had found a candle and a flint and steel lighter, and he struck a light.

There revealed in the gloom before him, creeping across the floorboards, was the ruined head, perched atop a three-legged footstool. The wooden legs bent and moved as if alive. All over it, and dripping from those abominable teeth, was something which even in the dimness was clearly blood.

Quickly he grabbed the leather bag, and muttering a spell of power, seized the head from off the stool. It became a dead thing again, just a weight as he pulled the strings tight over it. He was not afraid, but joyful. He had never found Tzano more than a nuisance anyway. He was delighted because now he *knew* his money had been well spent. He had in his possession the genuine article, the head of Etelven Thios.

Lights were coming on throughout the tower and in surrounding buildings, but before anyone could come up to investigate, Guetheric had packed a few essentials, taken up his prize, and slipped down the back stairs. By this time there were cries of alarm. Someone had discovered what was to be discovered. With all attention attracted there, it was no problem for Guetheric to make his way undetected to the university's storehouse. There he whispered a sleeping rhyme to the cat-like familiar of Brother Watchkeeper, the only thing resembling a sentinel he encountered, and then an unbinding spell into the lock of the door he wished to open. He entered the main storeroom and found the chest he sought, beneath a heap of stuffed crocodiles. Within were various lengths of knotted rope, each constraining a wind. The one he took twisted and stirred as he picked it up. He then proceeded to the island's wharf, stole a boat, and was off, loosing the knot enough to let the wind fill his sail. He knew that soon his absence would incriminate him, but he cared little. He had gambled everything and won. He was not coming back.

The captive breeze propelled him over the sea for three days and nights. He never once put ashore, but followed the coast of the mainland southward, passing at night the three great cities there, each to him no more than a glow on the horizon. Once beyond the headland of Dzim, he came closer to the shore, and into the morning wind uttered a word. Far away a camel snorted, cast off its startled nomad rider, and ran away, following the path of Guetheric's command to a certain cove, where it knelt on the wet sand, ready to serve him. He arrived late one afternoon, changed his boat for concealment into a pile of stones, mounted the camel, and was off.

He knew what to expect from tales earlier told--- a forest of whispering trees, a place of multi-colored sand, unmoving ships awash in

desert dunes. But none of these things were encountered that night beneath the stars. Instead he found only a limitless plain of fine ash, without feature, which curiously did not stir in the wind, but which fell back into place so quickly when disturbed that his camel made no tracks in it.

Onward he persevered, the constellation of the Toad before him, and one evening, just as the stars began to appear, he spied the Toad squatting between two mountains, the Weeping Hills, also called the Dark Sisters, the former daughters of Etelven Thios. All this had been foretold, and all had come to pass. But the Valley of the Shadow remained as silent as the desert beyond. The Sisters wept not a tear when he passed between them, or even an avalanche.

Before him stood the huge basalt castle of Etelven Thios, its walls still firm, its black gate slightly ajar. He gazed upon it for a while in final confirmation of his hopes and speculations, but ventured no closer. Instead he bade his steed kneel, dismounted, and sat down in the sand. He took the brittle, ruined head out of its bag and held it in his lap, waiting.

Four hours passed in silence. Then the camel became uneasy, first turning its head this way and that, then snorting and wheezing in displeasure. Finally, about an hour before dawn, Guetheric spied a dark figure approaching, not from the direction of the castle, but out of the desert. The camel saw it also, lurched to its feet, and galloped off. Guetheric made no attempt to restrain it, knowing he could call it back by magic any time he chose.

Thus he was alone, still seated, with the head in his lap, when the spectre drew near. He addressed it calmly, as if it were another traveler, even though he knew otherwise.

"Greetings, stranger. I trust your midnight walk was a pleasant one."

In reply came only a faint hiss. The figure stood where it was.

Guetheric held the head up, so the other could see it clearly. The thing began moving again, in a motion half like walking, half like the drifting of mist.

He spoke a word of power.

"E^lam."

The thing recoiled like a man from a viper. Angrily it stalked around him in a circle, its footfalls now making a definite pad, pad, pad. It drew closer, as he turned to face it, still not rising. Now he could see the outline of a thin, bent man, with face entirely covered by a hood.

"O^lam."

And again the thing recoiled, but not far, and still it circled, coming ever closer, like a great fish being slowly reeled in.

"Ae^lam."

It loomed over him now. There was a stifling

odor of decay about it.

"Th^hoh!"

All human semblance fell away. The creature became a cloud of dust. Guetheric held up the head, turning it so the empty left socket was nearest the spirit. Like water down a drain it was drawn through the place where the eye had been, into the head of Etelven Thios.

Flesh and soul were united once more. Guetheric had captured the ghost of Etelven Thios. Quickly, before it could discern what had happened, he took a large cork out of his pocket and shoved it firmly into the eye socket, passing his hand over it afterwards, whispering a spell of sealing. Likewise with the crumpled leather bag he blocked the opening where the head had joined the neck and sealed it, and with a handkerchief he stuffed up the hole in the top where the axe had gone through. Now Etelven Thios was his prisoner. The head trembled in anger, but he held it firmly.

"Hear me," he said.

"I hear you," came a voice from within.

"Do as I say, or I shall bind you forever within a stone and cast that stone into the deepest part of the sea."

"I hear and obey." The grim trophy shivered again, with uncontrolled rage and humiliation.

"You have a treasure beyond all imagining."

"Beyond your imagining in any case. It is vast."

"Take me to it."

"Arise."

He stood up and went where the voice directed him. They came to the massive gates of the castle and passed through. Nothing stood guard there but sand. They crossed the equally empty courtyard and came to the ivory door of evil dreams, which also hung open and untended. Within was a room of once shiny black stone, now faded with the slow invasion of the desert. It had not been licked clean in quite a while. All was noiseless and still. No vampires tittered in the rafters. The castle was empty.

They passed a stairway going upward made of what seemed to be shattered glass coffins, continuing until they came to another door richly imbedded with the skulls of rodents. As the head approached a bar slid back on the other side, and the hinges began to creak for the first time in aeons. The door swung wide.

Within was more gold than could be hoarded by all the kings of Earth from the beginning of time till the end. Precious stones stood in heaps to the vaulted ceiling far above. Brilliant ornaments filled countless open chests. At the sight of all this Guetheric let out an involuntary "Oh!" and nearly dropped the head. But still he grasped it.

"Mere baubles to please barbarians," sneered the disappointed Etelven Thios. "I have a

greater treasure than this."

"Greater?"

Overwhelmed by greed beyond all reason and description, caution fled.

"In the middle of the room is a trapdoor. Open it and descend."

Clearing aside thousands of perfectly round pearls, Guetheric found an iron ring, pulled on it, and raised the door, revealing a narrow stone stairway into the earth. Down he went for what seemed like miles and must have been thousands of feet. Etelven Thios let out a kind of snort or cough, and torches set in the walls flared, revealing an altar of white stone, atop which lay a long silver sword, intricately decorated from tip to hilt.

"With this sword all victory comes. With it you can conquer all men. With it you can take all the treasure in the world."

Guetheric reached for it.

"The perfect gift," continued Etelven Thios, "for some mindless mercenary. But for men of learning and intelligence, I have something even greater."

"Greater?"

"Beyond the altar is the head of the *glimich*. Press it."

Indeed, there in stone was the head of the most feared of all beasts never wholly seen by man. Guetheric was at first loathe to touch it, but greed drove him on. It slid easily back into the wall. Counterweights dropped. Stones rumbled, and a passage was opened into another chamber.

Within, a simple writing desk, a quill pen, an inkwell, and a sheet of parchment.

"Are you sure this is the right room?"

"Yes," thundered Etelven Thios. "With this pen you may write all the secrets of all the worlds. With lore from this inkwell, with the pronouncements on this parchment, you may make yours even those things the sword can never conquer or the treasure buy. It is a far, far more potent thing than either of them."

So Guetheric made to take up the pen and write.

"Mighty and wise one, you have forced me to reveal my final, greatest treasure."

In truth he had done nothing of the sort, and thought only of writing a mighty rune with the pen, using it to carry off the sword and the gold, and to bind Etelven Thios forever, so he could never be revenged. But all had gone well so far, so he was willing to extend his scheme to a fourth phase.

"Yes? What now?"

They went through another door, and Guetheric was surprised to find himself outside the castle, in the bottom of a vast gorge. He glanced up at the battlements. He had never seen the place from this side before.

Believing still that Etelven Thios was in

his power, he went as directed, until they came to a ledge overlooking a flat expanse of sand.

"Now raise your wand and repeat the words you used before."

A pause. Silence. He did nothing.

"What troubles you?" jeered Etelven Thios.

"Are you a wizard or are you not? *Your wand!*"

"Modern sorcery eschews wands as a useless encumbrance---"

A sigh. "*Just do it...*"

He raised his right hand --- the left held the head --- over the flat space, fingers outspread, and he spoke the words of summoning and binding.

"Elam. Olam. Aelam. *Thhoh!*" The spell worked, and a long standing theoretical argument was set to rest.

Before him the earth was rent apart, revealing not an abyss, but a boiling mass of protoplasmic slime, without form or shape or intelligence. Noxious vapors nearly suffocated Guetheric, and as he reeled the head of Etelven Thios flew from his hand, either of its own power or flung by a command from elsewhere than his brain. It dropped into the seething stuff but did not splash; instead it was absorbed instantly, and the face of Etelven Thios, not the dried wreck, but *the full living face, with the cat-like green eye glaring malevolently*, spread across the surface like a film, a thousand times larger than it had been in corporeal life.

"Behold! Behold! My greatest treasure. You have brought me back to my true body, that which I spawned and from which I was spawned, in the days before the earth had any shape. I stretch beneath all the seas and lands of the world, primordial and powerful, ready to rise up and make them mine. I am my greatest treasure, next to which the parchment will do you no more good than an autumn leaf, the sword is a toothpick, and the jewels a heap of bird droppings. *Behold! In every deep place of the earth you shall find me!*"

And screaming, near to madness, Guetheric fled the Valley of Shadow, all thoughts of riches and power forgotten. It was only as he struggled across the desert three days later that exhaustion and thirst slowed him down, and he was able to think coherently enough to recall the word he had used to summon the camel. Then he rode, never resting, never dismounting, until he came to the sea where his boat still was, in the form of stones. He changed it back, but as yet there was no opportunity to relax. As he was loading the supplies from the back of the camel into the boat, he chanced to look behind him into the mouth of a cave by the shoreline. There, staring back at him was the vertically slit eye of Etelven Thios, large enough to fill the entire opening.

With a hoarse shriek he tumbled into the boat, untied the knotted rope almost all the way, just able to prevent himself from letting the wind escape altogether. He was off, with no idea of where he was going.

Days of delirium and nightmare followed. Steadily the vessel glided over the choppy sea, into colder waters where pieces and then mountains of ice drifted by. At last the chill air and his hunger brought him to his senses, and he looked blearily ahead. The dim shape of a coastline appeared out of a bank of mist. He took the tiller in hand and steered toward it. Landfall came in the middle of the afternoon. He walked a short way over the bare rocks of what turned out to be the tip of a peninsula, and discovered on the other side a massive tomb, covered with carvings but now rubbed plain by waves and the weather. At this sight he was relieved, for he knew this to be the final resting place of Grimgril, a very great hero of ancient times, who, it was said, rose from the dead eleven times to aid mankind against the

primal darkness. This was his twelfth and last abode. Surely his lingering power would ward off any evil. Surely here Guetheric would be safe.

He went back to the beach and prepared a meal. There were clumsy, flightless birds tottering over the desolate landscape. He summoned one with a simple spell, raised fire out of the sand with a snap of his fingers, and roasted it.

Then he took from the bags of the trader who had owned the camel a wineskin and a brass goblet, and poured himself a drink.

This was his penultimate mistake, for as he raised the cup to his lips he saw staring up at him--- *Etelven Thios!* Before he could cry out to the spirit of Grimgril, or even drop the cup, he was gone. A limb of the seething mass reached through and dragged him bodily, in defiance of all laws of perspective, into the very goblet he held and out of three dimensional space altogether.



THE PAINTING AT THE WRIGHTS

© 1981 by Michael Avallone

In the wonderfully ornate private den of Grant Gordon Fothergill, the eminent man of letters and confidential advisor to Presidents and Kings, the fieldstone wall above the monster fireplace holds a unique canvas in oils. A painting by none other than the mad genius, Starling.

Starling's painting is called *Satan's Summer*.

To the left of the canvas is a gold-plated plaque which bears the following legend in meticulous script:

SATAN'S SUMMER Peter Paul Starling 1924-57

A superb example of the noted English artist's command of brush stroke and color. His highly imaginative coordination of both imparts to the observer the very breath of reality and personal inclusion in the scene. Starling's ill-timed death by drowning only served to bring forth a wealth of newspaper coverage concerning his never proved associations with black magic, Voodoo and other forms of charlatanry. Indeed, Starling had once shocked conservative English art circles with his pronunciamento that he actually mixed human blood with his oils to achieve such extra-sensory results. True or false, he remains to this day a secure genius in the painting world. SATAN'S SUMMER is one of the finest examples of his school of art.

Grant Gordon Fothergill is not a devotee of famous painters. Let alone a Starling fan.

The painting is a collector's item to him, however.

He has never quite forgotten the circumstances which brought the canvas into his unwilling hands.

* * *

"Lord, what a startling scene!"

Fothergill blurted the words beyond the rim of his cocktail glass. He shivered with appreciative fright. He was cold. The painting did it. The canvas in oils directly above the Wright fireplace.

It was a very warm, very typical July afternoon. The French windows leaned inward, urged by capricious breezes. The measured green of the lawn with its rural backdrop of tall trees and sun-drenched mountains was visible beyond the Wright living room.

It was warm because it was the high part of the afternoon. The happy occasion of another Wright cocktail party. Yet, his nut-brown hand encircling the stem of the glass was shaking. Fear?

He couldn't believe the *thing* he saw in the

painting.

"Really, Gil!" Myra Wright was mocking him from her queenly perch on the lounge. "You mustn't stare at that painting so! It isn't as if it were one of those fabulous nudes. Just a Starling that Paul and I picked up last summer in London."

Fothergill stared at her, seeing her red mouth parted over fantastically correct teeth, making of her face a proper setting for such pearls.

"My dear Myra. I don't know---" Fothergill stumbled in vocal confusion.

"Gilly!" Myra's mockery changed to pique. "You haven't heard a word I said."

Fothergill's eyes came down from the grip of the painting with quick embarrassment. Paul Wright, firmly entrenched at his wife's side, snickered over his pipe. At the other end of the not-in-use fireplace, Rangerson's blond head bobbed in amusement. They were all staring at him now as if he had come up with something new.

Why not? He was Fothergill, the wealthy idler, the great humorist, the Old Fool. Why shouldn't he whip up something new for them? Why not indeed? He was too old for anything else but games.

Their smiling faces told Fothergill all this as he returned to his drink, hiding his fear.

"What is it this time, you old faker?" Rangerson boomed from his corner of the fireplace. "That picture conjure up a few memories for you?"

"I'll bet he has another funny story to tell us," Myra caroled with matchless good humor. Paul Wright chuckled in his placid way like some great cow content to graze till nightfall.

Fothergill put down his glass.

"I don't know quite what to say. You mean you haven't --- you don't see --- anything wrong with that painting?" He faltered lamely, certain he was the victim of some pre-arranged practical joke.

Myra's perfect face lost its radiant smile and an expression of small surprise replaced it. "There's nothing wrong with that painting."

"Oh, I see what you're all up to! he bellowed at her sudden show of ignorance. He roared and waved his arms in a semaphore to show them they weren't fooling him a bit. "Come off it, all of you. I see what you're up to---"

"See what, Gil?" Myra's surprise got bigger.

He stared at her. He wasn't going to be snowed under by her blank stare and their uncomprehending eyes. Sixty five or no sixty five, he wasn't senile.

But Rangerson and Paul Wright were exchanging glances that were reserved for consultants in mental cases, strictly. Fothergill frowned in irritation.

"Myra Wright, you're not going to sit there in all your innocent loveliness and tell me you

haven't changed that painting since the last time I was here!"

She erupted in a most unlady-like fashion for Myra Wright. The laugh seemed to charge from her white throat.

"Oh, Gil! This is priceless. You've invented another funny game. How do we play this one?"

"One drink too many, Maestro?" mocked Rangerson out of cold, twinkling eyes. Paul Wright shook in his bovine manner. Fothergill suddenly hated both of them again. Rangerson, the austere product of the New World of Statistics, ever ready to shout his battle cry of "Down With The Old!" Paul Wright, stuffy scion of century-old fortunes. No amount of money could lift him from the mediocrity of his personality.

Myra leaned forward, her dimpled knees showing, hands joyously clasped like some bewitching elf. There was mischief in every curve of her.

"Tell us, Gilly. Why do you think we switch-paintings on you---"

"---or whatever it is you seem to think we did," amended Rangerson.

Fothergill didn't know what to say. He was angry now and gave rein to a temper he had almost buried in years of untroubled living.

"Now, dammit, that is not the one I saw here before. It's different! It's hellish --- it's --- I don't mind a joke but --- have you all gone mad?"

Myra looked at her husband and Rangerson, then back to Fothergill again.

"You really mean what you say, don't you, Gil? You're serious about the painting?"

Rangerson's face with its angles and cruel features, intervened between them.

"Look here, Fothergill. That painting really looks different to you?"

"Of course it does!" Fothergill was trembling now. He could see by their artless faces that they weren't shamming, that he wasn't the butt of some tasteless joke. A cold wave of something dreadful washed through him. Suddenly, he was mixing himself another drink. Clumsily.

Rangerson kept after him, his words barely masking an immense satisfaction at this abrupt emergence of the long-awaited senility of Grant Gordon Fothergill.

"It isn't that you forgot what the painting looked like that last visit? Or possibly you have it confused with some of the work over at my place? I have a rather strong collection, if you remember."

Fothergill shook his big head like some St. Bernard confused at its master's commands.

"No, no, I can't be mistaken. I can't be. What sort of humor is this? Myra, what in God's name---?" She was at his side now, her tapering fingers curled about his fleshy arm, her limpid eyes shining with genuine affection.

"Gil, you old dear. Why not tell us about it?"

He didn't understand her. "Tell you about it---?"

"Yes," she persisted. "The painting. It's only a pastoral scene. But what do you see." She led him right below the canvas and he recoiled, unable to check the movement. "Come on, now. Tell us what you see and we'll tell you what we see. We'll make a game of it."

Myra's voice, the voice that could have moved mountains, made him stay where he was, the hellish canvas just above him. He was below the monster he was sure he was seeing, now. The terror he was certain they could not.

"Come on, Fothergill," Rangerson prodded. "Let's have it."

Fothergill steadied his emotions with a great effort. They were all watching him with varying levels of interest. Rangerson, alert and poised to strike at his first sign of weakness. Paul Wright, politely, patiently waiting for an honored guest to continue. Only Myra, pink tongue wetting her red lips, was eager, expectant, an odd look of concern stamping her beauty in still another mood.

Fothergill squared his broad shoulders within the restricted confines of his dinner jacket. He'd have to go through with it now. He was convinced that somehow, somewhere, by some ill-conceived trick of time and place, he was able to see something they could not. He wasn't shocked that his perception was beyond theirs. Fothergill had his conceits. What shocked him was *what he saw*, not the mystical reasons of why *he alone had seen*. How could he explain it to them? They would never understand. They couldn't.

"Well, Old Man," Rangerson prompted maliciously, palpably enjoying the fresh ruins of a great mind. "We're waiting."

Fothergill cleared his throat with a thundering laugh. "Well, this!" His mammoth finger poked at the canvas, a scant yard from his head. "In the foreground of what passes for a scene of rural grandeur, I see trees. Elms, I think. Bordering a rutted dirt road that is winding out of sight to the left of the painting. Beyond it, there is a pool of crystal-clear water. Sort of a blue-white effect that makes it all seem so peaceful. Then there are a few mountains, of course, brown and gold in the sunlight, backgrounding the whole setting. It's quite a well-rendered scene---"

"But Gil---really!" Myra was erect now, protesting. "That's exactly right. You've described the painting to a T. What was all that fuss about?"

She had given him his out and Rangerson's sudden glare of disappointment was ill-concealed.

"Let me finish, my dear," Fothergill continued with new calm. "It was just an association of

ideas, I'm afraid. You all know about my papers on Clairvoyance. I fully realize that you, Rangerson, don't fancy that sort of thing as an exact science, but I'm hopelessly interested in it. Sorry I led you down the garden path. It didn't work, I'm afraid."

He chuckled self-consciously and that was part of the charm that had made him so much in demand this late in his life. It was his periodic laugh at himself, the indulgent good-humor of him that people forgave. That and his story-telling powers.

"I'm sorry I gave you all such a bad performance. Worse luck, I've been guilty of a little unscientific research." This to hide his own uneasiness, his own reckless turmoil of mind. He had lied, of course. Time was needed now. Time at home in the seclusion of his own home where he could think.

He had had to lie. The painting was still there. The *thing* in it was still there.

"Gilly," Myra sighed. "Whatever are you talking about?"

"Sorry, Myra. I was merely indulging in an experiment. I wanted to get your thought processes in working order. I was going to pretend to see something ominous and very out-of-the-ordinary in your painting. Then I was going to read the future for all of us. I was going to gauge your reactions --- which were very instructive, by the way --- as far as they went. I see where I've my work cut out for me convincing laymen of the ability of far sight and foresight in other people."

"Sometimes you confuse me," purred Rangerson. "Then I remember your fame for easy exit. That was quite a show."

"Hear, hear," mumbled Paul Wright.

Fothergill laughed. "I must confess, Rangerson, that I botched the whole experiment by breaking down in midstream. Must be the aging influences of alcohol and party life on my old carcass. I apologize, Gentlemen, and to you, Myra."

Paul Wright smiled. "Nonsense, Fothergill. It was rather funny."

Fothergill kept his back to the painting. Rangerson bit his lip and Myra pealed with laughter, her concern for him washed away on his inspired explanation.

"You're a tonic," Paul Wright mumbled again, busily stoking his briar pipe. "Myra's always told me you could produce rabbits out of hats."

"He did better than that this time," grumbled Rangerson. "There was no hat."

"Myra understands me for the old fool I am." Fothergill smiled at her with great affection. "Everyday toys fail to satisfy me."

She eyed him with new appraisal and blew him a kiss off her glistening palm. After that, there was only more talk, a game of bridge, another drink, and a steady curtain of smoke from their various forms of tobacco.

Fothergill sat with his back to the fireplace all night.

That night Fothergill could not sleep.

The trees, elms, he thought. A dirt road winding out of sight. The pool of crystal-clear water. A range of mountains backgrounding the scene. Sun-drenched, gold and brown. Warm. Alive with oils.

Yes, he had seen all that because *it was there*. But he had seen something else too. Because *it was not there*? Maybe so.

All that evening and the next day, alone in the rambling cottage he maintained for his summer wants, he pondered the painting. How could he describe it to them? Even such a man as he --- the Great Fothergill. The port in any intellectual storm. You just can't explain things like that to anyone. Not even the Devil. Or could you?

He closed his eyes and barricaded his mind, confident that its sensible walls would imprison the evil, not let it escape. Alone, he thought about what he had seen, let it roam the arena of his mind, challenging it to walk before him in the full light of sanity. He could explain it away for the fancy imagery it was.

Yes, the trees. The road. The water. The mountains. They were still there. But that other thing---

He had seen a motion picture once in which a bevy of sun-tanned Hollywood actors had lived through a hurricane of storm-tossed trees, huts and ocean. It had been a terrific spectacle, a superb Special Effects job and the movie makers had reaped a box-office harvest. Oddly, the painting reminded him of that film. Oddly, because there was no destruction or storm-lashing visible in the painting. It was the essence of a serene, rural setting for that matter. Yet the canvas, the oils, fairly bristled with approaching chaos.

He groaned at the mental image. It was still fresh in his memory. The onslaught of sleeping nature in that quiet scene.

Those elms were leaning with the wind-swept caress of a storm soon to break. Dead leaves were at the very prelude of their death dance down the dirt road. The waters of the pool were subtly agitated, over-run with tiny ripples wrinkling its placid surface. And the warm sky overhead was gradually darkening with the gathering of some silent fury, some leashed ferocity of Nature and God.

It was this that terrified him so when he realized they had not seen, sensed or even suspected the monumental warning of the painting. Bitterly, he admitted that with all the manifestations of impending doom in the work, the very immensity of the menace he had seen was a wonderfully subtle thing. He had had to look upon it, long and hard, before its message came home to him.

Was that it? Was that why its meaning had been lost on unschooled eyes? Rangerson and Paul

Wright he didn't care about. Myra was a different matter entirely. He loved Myra Wright.

True, she was a mere infant compared to his stature of age and mentality. Yet, he would always love Myra. As a father, brother, husband and lover. He was that big a man in everything he did. He could be all things to one woman. He was Grant Gordon Fothergill.

Amazing how she looked, spoke and was characteristic of his dead wife, Myrna. Myrna. Myra. How fitting. Why had she given in to such an oaf as Paul Wright?

The painting, the painting. It meant something. It had to. It was no trick of lighting. You just don't see things, get signs like that, for no good reason.

Fothergill was enough of an intellect to admit the evidence all around of a hand stronger than life. But what did the blasted painting mean?

Battled, Fothergill went to sleep, his mind alive with visions of Manifest Destiny.

"Myra!"

Fothergill awoke, shouting her name, a terrible sweat cramping his vitals, the terror of a bad dream hammering at him. But he wasn't dreaming. The black telephone on the night stand was jangling noisily.

He fumbled for the lamp cord, tugged it, seizing the receiver with his other hand.

"Yes---" he mumbled thickly, still half-awake.

"Oh, Gil---!" Myra's unforgettable voice shrielled at him from the other end of the line. "You must come here right away! There's something terribly wrong---"

"Myra, what is it?"

"Gilly, it's the storm. Everything's working so awfully around here. I never heard it like this before---"

"What do you mean, Myra? For God's sake---"

"Gil, please come right away. I can't talk anymore---" He strained as if he could reach into the phone. "Oh, if you could only see---" She never finished what she was saying. Fothergill's ear reverberated with her piercing scream. Then the line went suddenly, unaccountably dead.

His brain boiled. Myra was in danger. The grave danger mocked at in romances. He had felt it. Now, the phone call had certified it.

He dressed and flung out of his bedroom and down the stairs faster than any sixty five year old man ever should. He was half-way down before he realized it was raining. Storming was more like it. The unfastened shutters clattered and clamored against the cottage. Thunder rumbled overhead. All about him, trees shuddered with fear. But Myra was his blind spot. He had to see her and investigate that canvas again. No matter what ridicule he exposed himself to. Ran-

gerson could go hang.

What could have happened at the Wrights for Myra to call like that?

Rain was smacking the earth with separate globules of violence as he splashed out to the car nestling in the now-thoroughly dampened shed. It was early morning but the vast patches of grey and black in a sea of surging sky gave the eye a sense of dead timelessness.

Fothergill stifled an oath as he fumbled with the collapsible top of the small coupe. His hands were busy but his mind was seeing the painting again. Ugly and real. This time hearing the wind whistling down from those gold-brown hills that backgrounded the whole affair.

The Wrights lived at the very turn of the highway just where its long ribbon of concrete de-toured off to the South. As he wheeled his car onto the private drive, there were no lights of any nature visible. He almost missed the turn. The storm had not let up. The howling of the wind and the staccato pound of rainwater had made of his trip a hazardous, miserable thing.

The absence of any light frightened him. He calmed himself but it was hard to forget Myra's phone call. Still, with the storm as bad as it was---

Numbed, he stumbled up the paved driveway and cut over to the gate. The hulking shadow of the Wright cottage loomed larger as each running step through the rain brought him further up the pebbled walk to the front door. Why wasn't somebody up if Myra had called only minutes ago?

There was no sound whatsoever save for the slashing insistency of the downpour and the wailing score of the wind through the surrounding trees. The flashlight he had rammed into his pocket before cutting the car motor didn't seem so juvenile now. Perhaps the Wrights were up and about trying to repair the lighting system. The storm might have done something like that. If so, he was coming to their rescue, flashlight and all.

At the end of the long, pebbled walk, he halted. There was no point in ringing the bell or even knocking now. The door was flung back wide, its wooden rectangle beating the side of the structure with each fresh spurt of the wind.

Overcome with mounting panic, Fothergill bounded up the stone porch and flung himself into the darkness of the interior, yelling hoarsely.

"Myra --- Myra!--- MYRA!"

There was no answer. Only the drip-drip-drip of the rain, the wail of the screaming wind.

He remembered the flash and tearing it from his side pocket, he thumbed it on. In his frantic haste, his hand slammed against what must have been the lower post of the balustrade curving up toward the second landing. The torch skittered from his bruised fingers, its stabbing beam marking its downward arc to the floor.

A scream of surprise choked in his chest.

The gradual V of electric light shot across

the floor into the depths of the living room where the cocktail party had been only a day ago. The light rippled and wavered before his unbelieving gaze. He blinked with the optical illusion of it. Was he mad? But, no---

There was water filling the sunken corners of the living room below the landing on which he stood. Water just lapping gently above the stair level, washing the lens of the flashlight, bobbing it slowly to the left and then to the right, like some life buoy at the mercy of the high seas.

It was soaked when he picked it up, the drops trickling off its metal sides. Wordlessly, he aimed it into the living room and followed the beam, his shoes swishing foolishly on the watery flooring.

He found the light switch. He flicked it on. He turned.

Something kicked, in his brain. Kicked and died.

It was like some fantastic cartoon. Like some especially created goldfish bowl -- the way

the lower room held the clear, oh so clear, rainwater. The way the three bodies spiralled lifelessly in its depths, swayed so gently with its will.

It was an underwater scene out of Hell with the lounge, the chairs, the ashstands as upright as a squad of soldiers at attention. And still the bodies swayed, spiralled and danced. In a ballet that might have been beautiful if it wasn't so pathetically real.

Fothergill's mind had stopped. It was just like that movie again. Only Myra, Paul Wright and Rangerson had not survived. Children of the storm-

From the safety of the landing, Fothergill's eyes madly sought the painting over the fireplace. It was still there.

But even from where he stood now in chaotic, unbreathing silence, he could see that it was only a very heartwarming, cheery landscape. Trees, dirt road, mountains gold and brown.

There was no suggestion of anything else.

ARKHAM SEQUENCE

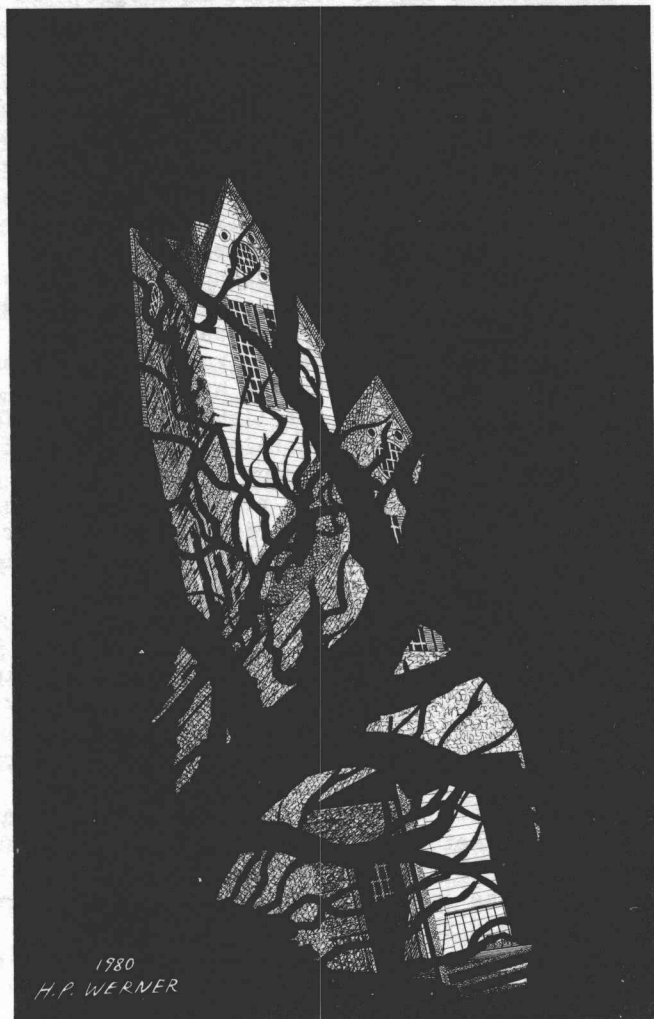
- I. Cold Spring drizzle ---
Last month's suicide still hangs,
But does not decay.
- II. Summer pond-lilies ---
Amid them, flexing slowly:
White claws, long and sharp.
- III. Autumn funeral ---
Eyes stare out, not wholly blank,
From the cracked coffin.
- IV. Winter snowstorm ---
Dim shambling shape leaves red drops:
Blood, but not its own.

© 1981 by R. C. Walker

NO MORE REMEMBERED

When I find myself fretting too much
over a few phrases which will scarcely endure,
I remind myself sternly
that someday I will be part of the past,
a person who lived long ages ago,
no more remembered
than the flowers of a forgotten spring
or the falling amber leaves
of an autumn lost in time.

© 1981 by Joseph Payne Brennan



THE CLIMBING TREE

© 1981 by LEE BARWOOD

Dougie Watson was not exactly a typical, everyday boy. He didn't do a great many things that most boys do as they grow up. Also, Dougie was a dreamer --- and for this he preferred to be alone. So he became an expert--- a master, if you will --- at doing one thing all the other boys in his home town *did* do. Dougie climbed trees.

His was a rural small town; there were trees everywhere. Great oaks lined the sidewalks in the wealthy section of town; pines stood proudly in many yards. There were clumps of birch and willow down by the lake in the park, and the cherry orchard on the outskirts of town was famous in two counties. Elm Street really did have elms, just as Maple Street had maples, Walnut Street had walnuts and Chestnut Street had chestnuts. Of course there were many other kinds of trees as well, and Dougie knew them all. He knew the leaves, the seeds, the bark, the branches; even if he didn't know the names of all the trees, he knew their differences and their personalities. For to Dougie they all had personalities. There was the slick, challenging bark of the birch and the willow, and the lack of good thinking branches in the birches once their height had been scaled. Weeping willows were different, though; they often had big enough limbs for a boy Dougie's size to sit and contemplate the world. There was a whole different view of things from inside the gently weaving veils of slender green leaves. Then there were the sharp, spiny branches of the locust trees; he didn't climb them too often. There was too much sway up above with the wind, and if the trees were older their branches were far too brittle even for his weight. He loved evergreens; their regularly arranged branches were easy to climb, and the lovely scent of their needles lent a special quality to his meditations. The hanging needles of the firs edged the sky in deep green fringe and enforced his belief that he could really enter another world in his arboreal expeditions. Dougie loved his havens up above the rest of the world.

He wandered on the town limits a good deal in his quest to get away from the rest of the world, and it was in this way that he finally found the Climbing Tree. That was what he called it. He never knew what kind of tree it was; it seemed to be the only one of its kind around. Its trunk was broad and smooth, and he couldn't get his arms even halfway around it. It had great, regular limbs that came out at

almost ninety degree angles from the trunk before they turned upward at an angle almost like that of the back of an easy chair. Dougie the expert tree climber could only get up into its welcoming branches by throwing the coiled strap he carried in his pocket up and over to haul himself up to the lowest limb.

This tree was very special to Dougie. He could climb all the way up its dizzying height on its regular, strong branches. It had its own special scent and had very tiny flowers in the spring, and it seemed to understand Dougie's wish to enter his own special world by climbing trees. At least, he thought so. He thought he could see marvelous things in the meadow from the Climbing Tree that he saw from no other tree. He could watch the knights jousting just as he had read in fairy tales; he could watch the webbed shadows of dragon wings wheeling in the sky; he could hear the delicate music of fairy voices singing joyfully around him. He saw the fabled unicorn dart across the clearing; he saw strange herds of mythical beasts thunder across the sky. Dreaming his dreams in the Climbing Tree, he spun the magic of his mystical world there. His own world of strict, quarrelling parents, repulsive classes, impatient teachers, unfriendly peers and fears of loneliness and isolation did not exist in the Climbing Tree.

Douglas Watson, grown, was still fanciful. He was bookish and imaginative, and had left his home town far behind to take a job in a city some several hundred miles away. He worked hard at his job and did his best to make a home for the young woman he'd married. Karen was a gentle thing, with a dreaming soul like that of her husband, and they were very happy together. Karen kept their little apartment comfortable and spent many hours each day making clothes for the baby they expected in a few months. Doug, in his turn, took an extra job at night to give them a bit extra to prepare for the baby's coming.

But somehow, things began to go wrong. His day job was swallowed up in a reorganization after his company was sold, and try as he might, he couldn't find another. He managed to hold on to the night job--- night clerk in a rather unsavory hotel --- but that was all. Karen tried to find work, but all she could get was a home job stuffing envelopes. There was little else she could do, six months pregnant and not very strong. But it was better than nothing, and they struggled along as best they could.

Doug's job gave him a good deal of time in which to read --- and to think. He read, when he read, of days long gone by; of sorcerers and enchanters, of lords and ladies, of days of magic and glory. He'd never lost his taste for the worlds of fancy. He thought, when he thought, of Karen and the baby --- and he worried. They were already dipping into their meager savings for

Karen's doctor bills, and what they would do when the baby came he didn't know. And he remembered, when reading was impossible and thought was too unpleasant, the uncomplicated world he'd known as a child in the Climbing Tree.

He met some "contacts" in his long nights at the hotel; pawns of the mob who offered to take his bets, to give him "work," to lend him money. But he refused all offers; he'd never been a gambling man, and while he daren't for Karen's safety do anything about the mob, he didn't want their tainted money either. And he had a horror of borrowing money when he was unsure of being able to pay back. Time drifted on, and they were careful with their money. They might have been all right.

But the baby came a month early. It was a poor little mite, and the birth was hard. It died within two days. And Karen didn't heal. She took the baby's death much better than anyone had expected, but physically she was greatly the worse. The hospital bills mounted; Doug was shocked at the cost of his tiny dead son's burial; and Karen was growing weaker all the time. Then another doctor came in, and he had an idea for treatment. But it was expensive, and Doug was already being dunned. In desperation he went to the only place where he knew he could get money; the loan shark from the hotel.

He got another job, and Karen began to improve. He paid and paid on the loan, happy only that his wife was able to get the care she needed. At last she came home from the hospital, pale and far too thin, but recovering. He began to feel that all was not quite so bad, after all. They could have no more children, but at least they still had each other, and there was always adoption. They began to plan for the future again.

The Climbing Tree stood in the meadow and waited. It dreamed its dreams and spun its magic, with each growing season a little farther, a little stronger, as it had for countless years.

But then there was to be a factory built outside town --- and the site chosen was the home of the Climbing Tree. Against such things its magic was helpless --- or so it seemed.

The Tree groaned in agony as the saws bit into its bark, and the crash when at last it was felled was deafening. And as if in retribution for the slaying of a Being far older than any man has power to imagine, the factory was never built. Construction began --- and ended --- with the death of the Climbing Tree.

It was a bad winter, and Karen caught the flu. She was ill, very ill. Doug was laid off. It was an economy move, and he was given no warning --- and no prospects. The loan still had to be paid, but Karen needed doctors and

medicines---and his salary at the hotel didn't even cover that. He asked for more time --- and was denied. Karen spent weeks in the hospital before she died. Doug was heartbroken --- and in desperate straits. He had managed, with odd jobs, to keep the loan shark pretty much off his back; but now, with his wife dead, he was too upset to care. They must have known he would react that way, for they met him at the hospital the night she died to demand payment. He begged and pleaded, but to no avail. They worked him over thoroughly, and told him he had twelve hours --- no more.

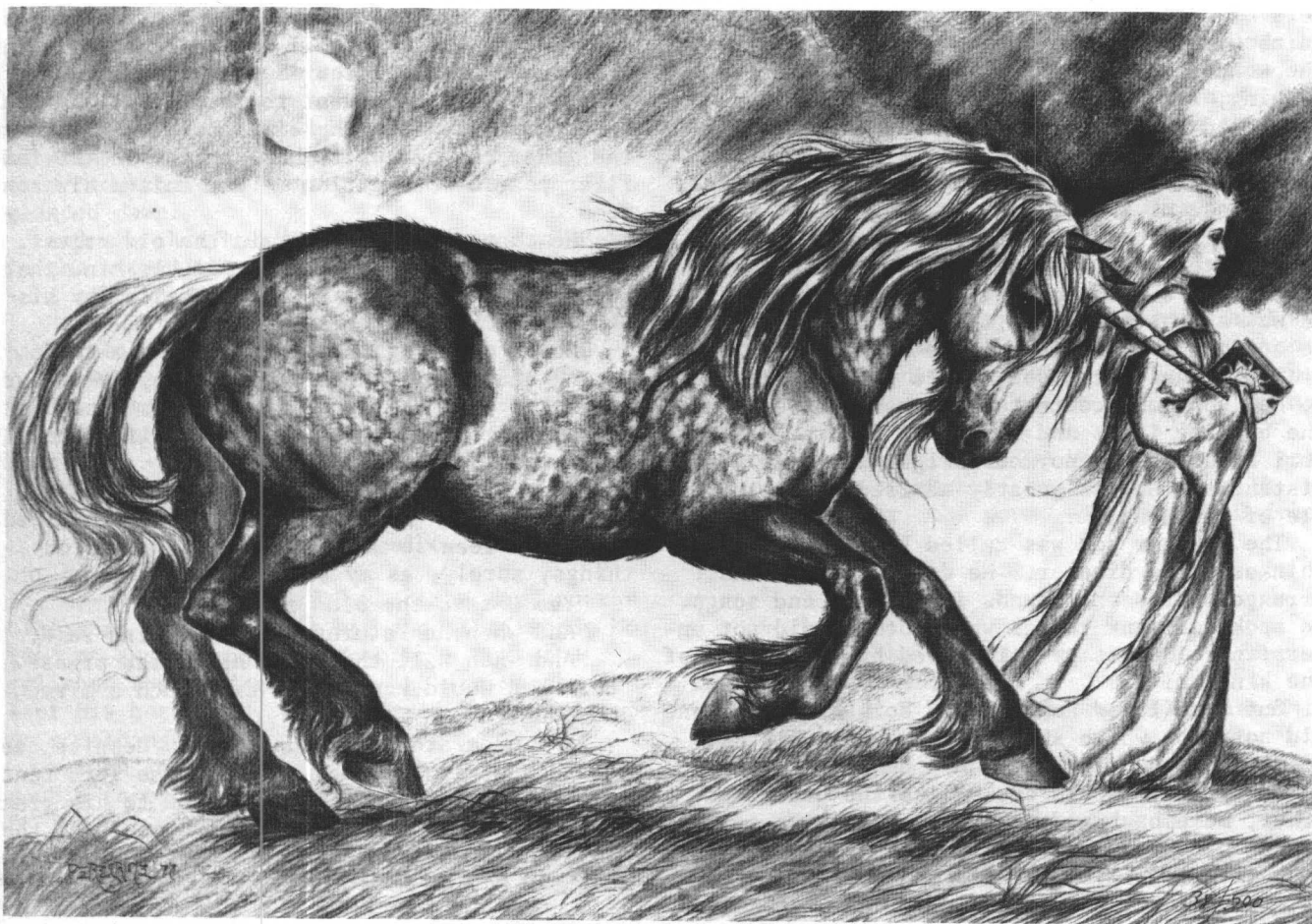
Beaten within an inch of his life and afraid to go to the police, he began to run. He managed to scrape together a few dollars by pawning Karen's engagement ring, all they'd had left. Then he got into his car and started driving. He drove through the night, going by instinct and knowing he was being followed. He was afraid even to stop for gas, but his pursuers merely followed, in the hopes that he would lead them to a means of collecting on his loan.

The sun was just rising as he took the turn-off from the highway that led to the town where he was born. He headed for the back roads that led to the place where he'd found peace and solitude so many years before. His pursuers were gaining on him, and he knew he'd have to be lucky to make it safely. He was getting very weary, and the job of trying to watch for his now-conscious destination and keeping the car on the road was really more than he could handle. The car went off into a ditch just as he spotted it. The Climbing Tree! He struggled out of the car as the one following him came into view, gunning its engine so as not to lose him. Stumbling, he ran across the field to the massive tree that dominated the landscape. He automatically reached into his pocket for the climbing strap he hadn't carried in years --- that bottom branch was so much higher, now --- and miraculously, it was there. He heard shouts behind him and felt pounding feet as he slung the strap over that low branch and drew himself up into the Tree's sheltering embrace. The world he'd known so many years before came rushing back --- and he began to climb. The huge old branches seemed almost eager to have him back; he scaled the heights of the old tree easily, quickly, effortlessly, no longer tired. He heard some popping noises in the distance, but they no longer concerned him. He reached the top of the tree and all his cares passed from memory. He peered out from among the great leaves and tiny blossoms, early this year, and saw the familiar creatures he'd spent so many hours watching as a child rushing across the sky. There was a loud whinny, and he looked down toward the ground to see a magnificent unicorn pawing the ground and tossing his head as if in encouragement to someone.

Then he saw Karen, coming out shyly from the other side of the clearing, dressed in a gossamer gown of silver and carrying a healthy-looking baby boy --- their infant son. Then he knew he had indeed found his way to the world he'd known only glimpses of long ago. He looked around curiously from his vantage point at the top of his refuge. All was as he had remembered it. He smiled and began to climb down to rejoin his little family. Karen would be wondering what had kept him.

* * *

The two men in dark clothing stood in the little clearing as the sun rose brilliantly in the east. Their guns drawn, they looked around in consternation for their prey, who had evidently vanished into the air after climbing the massive old stump at the end of the field. He had seemed to keep right on climbing until he'd disappeared, but that was nonsense; the old stump was only five feet high.



TWO PRINCES OF SATURN

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There was a king called Fent, who was a good king respected by the people of other nations and loved by the people of his own. He had two sons and was proud of both of them. He was an ordinary king in many ways, and an extraordinary one in some. He was a king of Saturn.

Now, the sky of Saturn is filled with wonders, the wonders of its many moons, the wonders of the rings which span the sky like huge rainbows rising from one horizon to the other, the wonders of the stars. For a long time, one evening, Fent sat on a parapet of his castle and gazed upward at this wondrous sky and thought about his sons.

On Saturn, the people do not die. But there is a phase of their lives, a stage, that is not living. It is a stage of strangeness, quite complicated and very remarkable, and those who enter it are said to be 'gone.' Fent knew that he was approaching this stage, and he knew that he could not remain king once he was gone.

Thul, the oldest son, was a great athlete. He had won many contests, run many races, swum the boiling lakes and rivers of Saturn. He could hurl boulders of enormous weight and leap great distances. He was greatly admired by the people of the kingdom.

The younger son was called Lant. He was a thinker and a dreamer. He drew pictures and arranged words and sounds into poems and songs. He spoke of many things which others did not understand. He was greatly loved by the people of the kingdom.

But Fent loved and admired both his sons, and did not know which should be named as his successor. So he sent them on a quest.

On Saturn, quests are unlike the quests of other, more backward worlds. No battles are fought because there are few people who regard themselves as anyone else's enemy. No dragons or other creatures are slain for they are cherished by the natives of Saturn. No foreign lands are searched for things of value, because no man can find more of value than what lies in his own yard. So Thul and Lant went each to a different temple where they sat and meditated, searching themselves for the prize each would bring back from his quest.

And after a passage of much time, Thul returned and said, "My mind has wandered all over our world, Father. I have seen the polar lands where giants as white and cold as winter build tall structures of frozen oxygen. I have seen the lands of our neighbors, with their strong

buildings and imposing pyramids. I have seen the boiling seas where brave sailors travel aboard ships, running the risk of scalding or burning. I have seen deserts where the few travellers hear strange songs that some say come from the rings but which most of us do not comprehend at all. I have talked with men who spoke in strange and musical languages which I understood only in my mind. I have seen the great mushroom forests and the mountains that flow like lava."

"And have you learned from this, my son?" the king asked.

"I have learned how little I know, O Father." And hearing this, Fent was pleased.

Yet Lant had not returned, and after another passage of time was still not to be seen in the great hall of his father's palace. So Fent stirred himself and went to the temple where his son meditated. And the elder priest led him to the inner chamber where his son sat in the familiar pose of meditation. Fent called his son's name.

"He cannot hear you," said the old priest.

"But where could he wander in his mind that he could not hear his name when called by his own father?" the king asked.

"He is questing, as you ordered him to do. But he quests not on Saturn, nor on any of our moons, or even the great rings. His mind has travelled to the stars, where it drifts among the constellations and galaxies."

"None has quested so far before," said the king, amazed. "None has ever before travelled so far or seen so many strange and marvelous things, surely, as my son has."

"Yes," said the old priest.

"And when he returns," the old king said.

"And when will that be?" asked the priest.

"For when would you return from such a miraculous quest?"

Fent understood. He understood despite the desire that it be otherwise. And he left Lant in the temple chamber and returned to his great palace. And on the morning which would be the last of his reign, Fent called Thul before him and told him he would be king.



THE CHILL

© 1981 by DENNIS ETCHISON

The thing that shocked him was that he wasn't shocked.

Morgan came out of the health food store, cut over the grass at the corner and was about to dig into his jeans for the keys when he clipped it with his foot. It was soft and rubbery.

Then he was stumbling into some kind of pot-hole, flailing one arm for balance --- only there was no hole. At least there was not supposed to be.

It was then that he saw the people gathered around.

He laughed at himself and shook his head. But he wondered why they, all fifteen or twenty of them, continued to watch. He touched his fly, glanced down.

And saw that he was standing in a small hole in the sidewalk. The cement was cracked down in a concave circle, like a shallow crater.

"Now wait a minute," he muttered. He shifted his armload of groceries uneasily.

It was screwy. *I walked this way twenty minutes ago, he thought. Same side of the street, too. And there was no hole--- there wasn't.*

"Move along, son."

"What?"

A cop supported Morgan's elbow, helping him out of the chuckhole.

"Keep the area clear," said the cop, to the others as well. He was big and flat-faced; Morgan got a close-up glimpse of his gun, the polished rosewood grip. As he led Morgan he kept his head down, as if afraid he might step on something.

Morgan looked down with him. And did a double-take.

The cop was high-stepping over a pair of white tennis shoes, set out on the pavement at a nice, neat angle. The laces were still tied.

"Wait a minute," he said again.

He stopped. The cop kept walking. His fingers left Morgan's elbow.

"What's going on?"

Some of the people turned away. A man in a shiny suit escorted a woman through the glass doors of a building. She glanced nervously back at Morgan. At Morgan's feet.

Morgan looked down again, and to the side and behind him, and saw finally what he had nearly stepped on the first time.

A hand. A man's hand, gray like the cement. The hand was attached to an arm that led under a mound of dull army-green canvas. The bulk of the tarpaulin lay in the street, between the

wheels of a parked car.

Morgan walked backwards, staring at the formless shape. He stumbled again at the curb, regained his balance and crossed the street quickly to the parking lot.

He sloughed the groceries into the car and stood there by the open door. He started to step in onto the floorboard, then paused, balancing from foot to foot on the blacktop, watching over the roof of the car.

He thought about the body under the tarp. It must have hit at terrific speed --- and, unbelievably, bounced, judging by the dented sedan at the curb.

Well, the building was tall enough, he guessed. He craned his neck. Ten, twelve... twenty-six stories. Offices or apartments, he couldn't tell which. Gray and black and hazy silver, layered between floors with a thin, dirty metallic icing: mid-twentieth century Crackerbox Imposing. It reminded Morgan of a stack of folded aluminum deck chairs. The filtered glare of the sun, down now behind the crow's feet TV antennae atop the laundromat, glazed the rows of smoky windows, the reflected light wavy on glass panes that were lidded by unmoving metal awnings. At the very top, on the roof between a pair of blocklike structures, stood two figures, their trouser legs blowing like flags.

Morgan considered. The vitamins would keep, certainly, but the half-gallon of raw milk, the natural cheddar, the pound of frozen DES-free ground beef....

He couldn't take long.

He locked the car and, dragging his feet, went back to the street.

He stood at a decent distance, his hands in his back pockets.

"That was the car, was it?" A man in walking shorts and black socks sidled up to him. The man inclined his head conspiratorially. "You saw him get hit, did you?"

Morgan made a noncommittal gesture. He needed answers himself. But he knew the police would not bother with his questions now; they were preoccupied with notebooks, with squad car radios, with each other, talking their own kind of reassuring shop in low voices that seemed not to move their lips. An un-uniformed man with crewcut handled a walkie-talkie officiously, aiming it like a pointer at the figures on the roof.

A woman in a sleeveless blouse came up and took possession of the man in walking shorts. Morgan heard a clucking begin in her throat.

"Excuse me," he said, and crossed the street.

At the curb one of his feet caught, nearly causing him to fall.

He felt a chill coming on as he hurried to the building.

At the doors a security guard waved him back.

"I live here," he tried. The guard hesitated. Morgan ducked inside, not looking back, and slipped through the milling crowd in the lobby.

The desk phones were all in use, hunched over by nervous, quick-eyed men who cupped their hands around the mouthpieces as they spoke. At the elevator he finally looked back at the glass doors. He saw a station wagon stenciled with the call letters of a local TV channel parking across the street. He punched the button and waited.

He waited while the other elevator opened and closed once, twice, three times; each time a full load of passengers squeezed out, followed by two officers who blocked the door with their shoulders as a third man checked names off a list; then the officers reboarded and took the elevator up again. He watched the light on the wall move up and down and up without a stop.

The light over his elevator never wavered from the top floor. After a few minutes it went off, and the words NOT IN SERVICE blinked on.

He pivoted slowly, casually--- only to find himself reaching out for balance again. He groped, found an ashtray, steadied himself, hoping no one would notice.

He scanned the busy faces. No one had.

What happened?

His foot, no, his whole lower leg was asleep.

From standing, waiting so long? That was it.

He pretended to adjust the ashtray, a sand-filled canister into which countless cigarets had plunged and extinguished. *Shake a leg*, he thought, *shake a leg*.

He made his way down the hall.

Morgan found a service elevator at the first turn, at the end of a row of offices, flanked by a maintenance closet and a restroom for EMP. ONLY.

He thumbed the button and tried to focus through the safety glass, waiting for the compartment to lower into view.

The double doors parted; it was already there.

He leaned his head back into the padded interior. He shut his eyes.

He squinted down through slitted lids at his legs. The right leg still felt cold. The foot, through some oddity of perspective, appeared very far away. He tried to thum his toes but felt nothing, though the round, scuffed rubber end of the sneaker flexed like a mound of earth

beneath which some unseen creature moved.

In fact the sensation, or lack of it, had now crept up to his knee; he rocked forward, took a step, but felt nothing. No blood coursing, no pins-and-needles. Only a coldness.

The floor locked into place, and the doors slid back.

Well, he could still walk.

He hobbled into the hall.

2642... 2644... twenty-sixth floor.

The elevator thumped closed behind him.

He had come up here for something. *What? So I'm just as morbid as the rest of them*, he thought. *Maybe worse*. No, he decided, not worse; they'd all be up here now, too, if they could, just to see where it happened, to savor the thought of it, turning it over and over before their minds' eyes like the secret behind the door at the end of the hall in the middle of the night in a house they thought they'd forgotten.

But he was already as high as the machinery would take him. He'd have to take the stairs the rest of the way, to the roof.

All but dragging one leg, Morgan tried to make it to the end of the long hall.

He passed door after door, yet he had the impression that they were moving past him while he remained in place, as if struggling on a treadmill. Each door was closed tight, sealed. Only if the doors were suddenly to swing wide could the lives they hid impinge upon him, or he upon them. And what then? Would their eyes recoil at the unexpected contact, would they slam soundproofed doors at his passing? Or would they stand frozen, fascinated?

Probably neither, he decided. They would most likely pretend that he was not there, that he did not exist.

He wondered in passing how many of the guests, insulated within these structures in which their lives played out --- how many of them knew what was down there in the street right now? Would they *want* to know? What *about* the one who had chosen to leave his hermetic safety, to climb out under an alien sky, to scream down, straining to burn like a shooting star in the steely dusk?

He stopped, breathing heavily.

He leaned against a wall, and felt something cold touch his skin.

He turned: a fire extinguisher.

In the glass, behind the words BREAK IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, the reflection of his face.

The dim image reminded him: twenty-five, thirty extra pounds, so that the lines of his features were now soft, the face puffed, the skull beneath almost hidden by granola, wheat germ, yogurt, honey, unpasteurized milk, acid-

ophilis culture, dessicated liver, torula yeast, turbinado sugar, dried fruits and cashew butter and whole wheat spaghetti and Brockmeyer's ice cream and date nut bread and banana bread and carrot cake, and brown rice... it was *good* food. But now he looked at himself, unable for the moment to walk, and the fear returned, the fear that sapped and took the place of his will, and he forced himself to see and be reassured. But he could not look back, not for long. *That's right, nodding sadly, turning away, you can serve it up, can't you? But when it's on the plate, you can't see it. Can you?*

"Shit," he said aloud. The first thing he had thought when he saw him in the street was, *I'm glad it wasn't me!*

The left side of his body was cold, and growing colder.

But still he wanted to be there, to be up there, to be where he had been, to know what it was like.

He had to swing one leg around, using the other as the axis, and reach down with his good right hand and hold the knee from folding. In that way he managed to go on. To the fire door.

The stairs were a problem.

From here Morgan could see the Pacific Ocean beyond the shadow palm trees at the end of Wilshire Boulevard. The shoreline was broken by the ragged teeth of silhouetted buildings and, above it all, the clouds seemed to be bleeding dull colors that were illuminated from behind, masked by drifts of suspended particles.

He approached the edge of the roof.

He felt currents of air rising to meet him. He stopped between the two blocklike structures, which he now recognized as ventilation outlets. Droplets of moisture fell on his face and neck. They were like warm pinpricks.

The left side of his body, from toes to fingertips, was icy cold, numb.

He moved closer to the edge.

When he looked down, there was no sense of dizziness. At this distance the body on the street would be just another dark spot on the sidewalk.

He could not see it.

There were only a few raptorial stragglers left around the entrance, a single police car, the sedan with the dent and the TV station wagon. The man under the tarp had been cleared away. It had all started when he touched the hand, the empty hand curled heavenward; the cold hand. He wondered about the body. He pictured a collapsed sac, crushed bones, the gools of blood inside.

He heard a door slam. The door to the roof. But he had closed it. The wind? He stretched his neck but could not see around the air outlets.

Then he heard voices.

Police, probably. Or in-house security, checking, rehandling the details like beads until they satisfied themselves that it was a simple suicide.

And what would they think, finding him here?

But they could not see him. They would not, as long as they stayed away from the edge.

He turned back, swaying slightly.

Now several new dots angled on the sidewalk, and others moved jerkily across the street to gather at the front of the building. With a peculiar calmness, he realized that they were clustering together to watch him.

How long had he been standing here? Long enough for the police to notice, to send someone up? Did they think---

He waited. No footsteps behind him, no shouts, no grappling of arms.

He waited, taking more and more of his weight onto his right side as the left side of his body grew heavy, a dead weight, unresponsive; and still he waited. He no longer had voluntary control over the stiffening joints, the leaden shoe. He watched with detachment as it began to move in the rising wind. The foot lost contact with the graveled roof, rose an inch, two inches into the air and swung, slowly at first, then in an increasing arc, nearer and nearer the edge. Now in space, now over the roof, now in space, now over the roof.

He waited, watching with growing concentration and concern, and presently he began to wonder which way it would fall.

Heads cocked and eyes fixed, his own and many others.

AFTER ROBERT GRAVES

Mickle sorrow, mickle care,
Free my lady come a hare.
Sweet maid, mother, ageless hag,
Free my lord swift come a stag.

Mickle sorrow, mickle show,
Free my lady come a crow.
New moon, full moon, waning old,
Free my lord come fish swim cold.

Cup and dagger, pouch and horn,
Mickle grow my lady's corn.

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DRAKE SINGS OF YESTERDAY

by Robert E. Howard

On Devon downs I met the ghost of Drake;
His sigh was like a wind that whispered past

*The barnacles encrust the rotting strake
And sea-weed shrines the fallen mizzen-mast.
The sword of glory long has turned to rust,
And shattered now the prows that years of yore
Beat up the sunset through the blinding gust
That lashed us off the magic Carib shore.*

*The glory and the glamor and the glee,
The raiding and the roving and the rage,
Have faded like the smoke upon the sea,
And History turns down another page.*

*Where are the bawcocks and the bullies bold,
The swaggerers, the rufflers, all of they
Who strutted on the deck and filled the hold
With silk and spice and yellow Spanish gold,
The loot of Indies, Darien and Cathay?*

*Oh, frown upon their deeds if so ye will,
And name them crimson handed, black of heart---
They braved the unknown world and had their fill
Of death and danger where the sunsets spill
Unreckoned perils; and they took their part
Of cannonade and cutlass, wind and rack.
They paved the way for ye who were to come,
And ye who followed rode a beaten track---
Oh, winds that set our rigging all a-hum!
Oh, tides that gripped our prows on unmapped seas!
Oh, galleons that loomed against the dawn!
Oh, battle-thunder off the wide, white leas,
Oh, hissing cutlass backed by English brawn!
Oh, plunder from the shattered cargoes drawn!*

*Boots of Cordovan leather, silken sash,
Damascus steel, doubloons and silver plate;
Rough carven gems to match the starlight's flash,
And gold moidores and many a piece-of-eight.*

*Tuns of brown ale and barrels of black rum,
And many a pipe of sharp Canary wine;
Toledo blades that shimmer, gleam and hum,
And bales of spice and gods of strange design.*

*Oh, dreams that grip and cut me like a knife!
Let others rest in slumber and in death---
I cannot sleep; I need the sting of life,
The pounding of the veins, the fire, the strife,
The slashing spray, the sea-wind's blasting breath!
The joy, the pain, the peril, heat and snow,
The tavern, and the ale at Plymouth Hoe.*

*I may not rest in Nombre Dios Bay---
Up through the emerald fathoms I arise
When night reels up to drink the dying day
And stars are silver daggers in the skies.
And night on night, I live it all again ---
My boyhood, manhood --- Devon and the Main!*

*I met the ghost of Drake one Devon night;
He sang of sail and sword and rover's bench---
And in his eyes there gleamed the Magic Light
Of Deathless Life not even Death can quench.*

THE PRAYER MACHINE

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*I will cross ten-thousand passes;
 Passes in the lands of strangers.
 I will listen and obey,
 When I hear the voice of Mehra!*

Prayer Song of the Bon-po

"Ommmmmm Mammadummm. Do!ma Khy-ga Mammadummm.
 Phrang-nu Mammadummm. Fang Ammm Rii-gompo. Om Matri
 Salei Du. Om Mane Padme Hun!" wailed the henna-
 robed lama from the narrow parapet on the roof of the
 monastery. Nine times he chanted his appeal into the
 gathering darkness --- half singing, half praying.
 "Hail, Blessed One. Honor forever The Blessed One.
 Protect us, Blessed One, from spirits of darkness.
 Hail to The Most Perfect Light. Hail to the Jewel in
 the flower of the lotus."

Each time that he paused, two other lamas would
 blow twice on the great horns of wood and silver that
 hung, suspended by ancient, hand-wrought chains, in
 the spacious courtyard below. Then, for more than
 half a minute, deep, hollow vibrations filled the huge
 valley and rumbled from peak to peak along the tremend-
 ous range of ice-sheathed mountains to the north. Af-
 ter the last, faint reverberations from the great
 horns had finally died away among the ragged spires and
 glistening ice-falls of the Kanjiroba and Patrasi Him-
 als, the only sounds that remained were the gentle low-
 ing of yaks and *dzhums* beyond the monastery's thick
 stone walls, and the distant, but immensely powerful,
 rumbling of the milk-white Leadula Khola River as it
 thundered through its granite gorge, four thousand
 feet below. A few moments later, the warm glow of
 butter lamps trickled feebly through the wooden slats
 of the monastery's shuttered windows --- a faint glim-
 mer of warmth and life amid the growing darkness and
 crystalline cold of the Himalayan night.

Amber sunlight of a late October afternoon, fil-
 tering through the sere, yellow leaves of patriarchal
 campus elms and the dusty windows of the Smith College
 Library, illuminated the spines of several dozen of the
 six hundred and forty-one volumes of the Albert S. Lar-
 sen Asian Ethnology and Eastern Religions Collection.
 This small but important collection of bound volumes,
 unpublished notes, and photographs would, I hoped,
 provide some essential background information and
 corroboration that I needed to complete research for
 my doctoral thesis on "Religious Divergence and Assim-
 ilation in the Trans-Himalayan Kingdoms." For several
 hours I had been browsing through the collection's ex-
 tensive Tibetan section, pausing occasionally to con-
 sult the indexes in several early, or obscure, volumes.
 I was at least passingly familiar with most of the
 material and there was little that could shed further
 light on the topics that I was most interested in. Then,
 on the fourth shelf, sandwiched between Sir Charles
 Bell's *The Religion of Tibet* and Gordon's *The Icon-
 ography of Tibetan Buddhism*, I discovered an uncatalog-
 ead copy of Oliver Jones-Myerson's 1926 classic, *Ancient
 Religions of South Central Asia*.

I was ecstatic! The only existing copies of this
 book that I knew of were two badly damaged and incom-
 plete volumes in the Widener Library at Harvard, and a
 single copy, in French, in the Biblioteca Sandoval in
 Madrid. Jones-Myerson was, of course, listed in many
 early bibliographies and was extensively quoted by
 Bell, and others, but though there were probably several

other copies in private collections, this was the
 first complete copy of the book that I had come
 across.

As I excitedly thumbed through its pages, I noticed
 that the volume had been inscribed. "To Walter N.
 Harding, with warmest personal regards, Henderson.
 Cambridge, Massachusetts, August, 1958." Presently,
 a yellowed newspaper clipping fell from the back of
 the book and, picking it up, I absentmindedly stuffed
 it into my jacket pocket and continued reading. Final-
 ly, after five and a half more hours of assiduous read-
 ing and note-taking, I returned the extremely rare and
 interesting volume to its place on the shelf and retired
 to Northampton's unpretentious Berkshire House for a
 late dinner.

It was while the waitress was pouring my third cup of
 coffee that I remembered the newspaper clipping and re-
 trieved it from the pocket of my jacket. A penciled
 notation in the margin indicated that it had been clipped
 from the May 3rd, 1962, edition of *The New York Times*.
 The clipping was headlined, "Harvard College Professor
 Disappears on Himalayan Expedition," and the text went on
 to read:

The American Embassy in Kathmandu, Nepal,
 announced yesterday that Robert C. Henderson,
 Blair Professor of Anthropology at Harvard Col-
 lege, apparently has died under mysterious cir-
 cumstances while leading an expedition into a
 particularly remote and little-known area in
 the Western Himalayan Mountains.

The remaining members of the expedition,
 which had planned to climb Putha Churen, a peak
 of over twenty-thousand feet in Nepal's Kanji-
 roba Region, declined to provide any additional
 details of the tragedy, saying only that Pro-
 fessor Henderson, an expert and highly-experi-
 enced alpinist, had been alone at the time of
 his disappearance.

In a parallel development, the *Times* has
 learned that Walter N. Harding, the expedition's
 Deputy-Leader, was detained for several days of
 questioning by Nepalese and Indian Army officers
 in connection with a reported border violation
 by Chinese troops stationed in Tibet, just north
 of the Nepalese village of Phijorgaon.

American consular officers have indicated to
 the *Times* that they believe Professor Henderson
 may have been ambushed by Chinese patrols that
 have, on several recent occasions, penetrated
 Nepalese territory along the Tibetan frontier as
 part of a continuing policy of harassment of the
 Indian protectorates.

It is expected that other expedition members,
 including Mr. Harding, will arrive back in the
 United States sometime this week.

I had never heard of Harding, but Henderson, of course,
 was practically a mythical figure because of his re-
 search and writing in the fields of anthropology and
 religion. In fact, my own thesis advisor, James Owen
 Lassiter, had been a protege of Henderson's at Columbia
 in the early fifties. It was common knowledge among
 students of anthropology that Henderson had disappeared
 somewhere in Asia in the early nineteen-sixties, but no
 one, including Lassiter, seemed to know anything more
 about it.

I reread the clipping several times, and though there
 was little to be learned from the *Times'* article, one word
 bothered me a great deal. Why had the other members of
 the expedition "declined" to discuss the circumstances of
 Henderson's disappearance? Was this just a case of a news
 correspondent's unfortunate choice of words --- or did it,
 in fact, mean that the other members of Henderson's ex-

pedition really did know what had happened to him but, for reasons of their own, had chosen not to discuss it with anyone else? Although it wasn't directly related to my own thesis research, I sensed that Robert Henderson's disappearance in the mountains of Nepal was somehow very important to me.

The following morning I placed a call to the Alpine Club in New York. I assumed that Walter Harding, Henderson's deputy-leader, was, or at least had been, a member of the club and that through them, perhaps, I could obtain his address. A young woman answered the telephone.

"Harding?" No, the name wasn't familiar to her, but she would check with someone else in the office. An elderly-sounding man with a slightly British accent came to the phone.

"Harding? Walter Noel Harding?" Yes, he had been a member of the club for many years. Unfortunately, he had died two years ago. Why did I want to know, please?

I explained my own research in ethnology and religion and my interest in the Henderson expedition and that I had wanted to contact Harding, or some other member of the team, to try to learn more about Henderson's disappearance.

"Unfortunately, I don't believe there are any members of that expedition still living," he replied. "Several were killed in subsequent climbing mishaps... Lackland in Austria somewhere, and Smith in... uh... Norway, I think it was. Jagger and Lethbridge were lost at sea near Tasmania when the research vessel *Tahquitz* capsized. That was in 1974. Then... let's see. Burke died in hospital in Boston, O'Brien died of a stroke only last year, and Schatz was killed in a hunting accident in Alaska around 1971 or two... I can't remember which."

"I see. Was Harding married?" I asked.

"Yes. In fact, his wife still receives the club journal," replied the elderly gentleman. Grace Harding, I learned, still lived in their country house near Hanover, New Hampshire. The address was R.F.D. #2, Cobble Mountain Road.

By one o'clock that afternoon I was driving north through Vermont on Interstate 91. Rough October winds had stripped most of the leaves from the maples and birch that cloak and soften the hills along both sides of the Connecticut River Valley and the day, though dry, was gray and somewhat melancholy.

The driving was restful --- there was little traffic on the interstate highway --- and my mind kept wandering to visions of snowy peaks, plunging torrents, and ancient, brooding monasteries. What *had* happened to Henderson? The circumstances surrounding the famous anthropologist's disappearance began to seem far more interesting to me than did my own research into the assimilation of Bon, and other shamanistic religions in Central Asia, by the growing power and influence of Buddhism in the Eighth Century.

At Norwich, Vermont, I crossed the Connecticut River into New Hampshire. It was almost five o'clock as I drove through Hanover Common, past the beautiful and serene old buildings of Dartmouth College, and on into the darkening hills east of the town. I found the Harding residence at the end of a mile-long gravel road, just at the edge of an old hayfield that was rapidly being overgrown with raspberries and junipers. The house, itself, was surrounded by a dozen, or more, enormous white pines. As I drove into the spacious yard, I realized that I had simply assumed that Mrs. Harding would be at home. Fortunately, she was.

Grace Harding was a small, cheerful woman in her early sixties but who was, sad to say, almost blind. She was attended by an elderly companion and a thin,

frail-looking man of fifty, or so, who seemed to serve as cook, handyman, and occasional chauffeur. After a few initial reservations, she didn't seem to mind talking about her late husband, or my prying into his relationship with Henderson. She knew, however, virtually nothing about the ill-fated expedition. After returning home, Walter Harding had been extremely reluctant to talk about it with her, or, apparently, with anyone else.

"I discovered one of your husband's books in the Smith College Library," I said, as her companion returned from the kitchen with a tray of coffee and shortbread. "It was one that had been given to him by Professor Henderson."

"Oh yes," she replied. "Just before he died, Walter had been selecting a number of his books that he planned to give to several different libraries. After his death, I sent out those that he had already packed, though the bulk of his collection is still here in his study."

She went on to explain that Walter Harding had been a consulting geologist and mining engineer but that, ever since his first expedition to India in 1949, his great passion, along with mountain climbing, had been collecting Asian art. He had also, she said, begun to develop a strong interest in the ethnology of the Himalayan Region after first meeting Robert Henderson in 1957 while doing research work at Harvard.

"If you would be interested in looking through his books, Mr. Davis, why don't you stay here with us tonight? We have a large guest room in the wing, and I know that Walter would be happy to have someone make good use of his collection."

I was delighted, and thanked her profusely for the generous offer. There was, in fact, an excellent chance that Harding's collection contained material that would be useful to me in my thesis research. Mrs. Harding's companion showed me into the study where I spent a productive hour before supper. The collection was surprisingly large and varied and, even though Harding had given away many of his books before he died, I still discovered four valuable and extremely interesting volumes --- one by the Conways, two by Younghusband, and an early account of Bell's travels through Tibet and Mongolia in the nineteen-twenties.

After supper, I returned to the library, intending to do some serious research. Gathering together several of the more interesting volumes, I sat down in a comfortable chair at Harding's enormous old desk. At the back of the desk, looking as if they had probably been untouched since his death, were several thick stacks of papers and notes. Much of this material seemed to be various correspondence and geological and engineering abstracts. Casually poking through one of the piles of papers, however, I uncovered a thin, weatherbeaten notebook and, out of curiosity, I opened it.

It was written in a cramped longhand, and in pencil, but there, on the first page, I could clearly read: "An account of the 1962 Putha Churen Expedition. Walter Noel Harding, Deputy-Leader. Kathmandu, Nepal. April 21, 1962." The penciling was faint and the notebook had obviously been submerged in water at some point for the pages were crinkled and heavily stained.

For several hours I struggled to read the blurred text of Harding's description of that tragic expedition. It was slow going because many of the pages were water-stained almost beyond legibility. At nine o'clock, John, the handyman, came into the study with a carafe of coffee and another log for the fire that was crackling cheerfully in the small fireplace. On the wall, an antique banjo clock ticked comfortably, while outside a strong, cold wind from the northwest churned and rattled through the branches of the big pines.

I was trembling by the time I finished reading the manuscript late that night, but I finally understood why it was that Walter Harding had never told his wife what

had happened to them in the mountains of Nepal, or why his close friend Robert Henderson had never returned from those dark hills. I began to comprehend, too, something of the maddening, mind-wrenching terror that must have haunted Harding and the other members of the team for years afterward, driving Schatz to suicide (as I later discovered) and sapping the lives of the rest for as long as they lived.

I debated with myself whether or not to destroy the notebook then and there, but on reflection I realized that, even after all these years, too many questions concerning Henderson's disappearance still dogged the memory of that expedition. There had been no official explanation of his apparent death at the time the expedition had returned to the United States and Harding and the others had had to live with rumors and speculations concerning their own negligence, or worse, in the affair. Robert Henderson was too experienced a mountaineer, too strong and competent, and as a scholar, far too well-known for many of his friends and colleagues not to pursue, vigorously, but without success, the question of what had happened to him in the brooding vastness of the Kanjiroba Himal.

To relieve lingering suspicions, spoken or otherwise, that Harding and the other members of the expedition were somehow culpable in Henderson's death, I have decided to release the true story. Except for brief passages that were impossible to read, this is, then, word-for-word, Walter Noel Harding's account of what transpired so many years ago in that dark and far-off range. Some will not believe it but I, personally, have no doubt whatever in its veracity.

Singha Durbar

Kathmandu, Nepal. April, 1962.

It is obvious that I will be held here by the Nepalese Authorities for several more days, at least --- probably until the Indian Army Major Chakra has completed his investigation and returned from Phijorgaon. It is not clear to me how the authorities learned about the Chinese incursion, but Chakra will find nothing, of course, because there is nothing to find. Lahira and the Sherpa Nwangu will never be found, and the bodies of Henderson and the Chinese soldier were buried four meters deep in the moraine. The lamas will simply say that Henderson disappeared one night and never returned --- the literal truth! Hasn't such a thing happened many times before, where a man wanders away from his companions and is never seen again? It has happened in London and New York, why not in the vast emptiness of the Himalayas?

Jagger came to see me today and is worried about Schatz. He feels that Schatz is unstable, and I agree. The rest will say nothing but I am certain that none of them has had a night's sleep since the fifth. Lethbridge reports that the others have all had a strong feeling that they would soon die. I have a sense of this myself, though I saw nothing. Schatz did, and is the one I am most worried about. He has spoken to Burke more than once of suicide and is a broken man.

Therefore, in case something like Henderson's horrible fate should overtake us in the near future, I will attempt to recount here the events leading to his death, though I am not sure why I am doing this. I am convinced that no one could believe the horror as we knew it --- which is the reason that none of us can openly tell the true story of what happened that night at the Rhangcho Monastery.

To the north of that portion of the earth's surface

where the broad valley of the Sacred Ganges divides the ochre-brown plains of Northern India from the sodden, leech-infested forests of the Nepalese Terai, towers the great wall of the Himalayas, "The Abode of Snow." Encompassed within these endless ranges of savage, ice-sheathed peaks, enormous glaciers, and remote, cold, and nameless valleys, lie thousands of square miles of the most spectacular and beautiful terrain imaginable.

The greater part of this vast territory is unmapped, for the most part uninhabited, and virtually unknown to the rest of the world. Near its center, close to the Nepalese-Tibetan frontier, rises the high massif of the Kanjiroba Himal. Locked in a chaos of glacially-carved cirques and valleys, groaning ice-falls, plunging cataracts, and crumbling moraines, much of this range is as remote and mysterious as if it were a satellite of earth, rather than part of the roof of the earth itself. Here and there, a few, scattered villages huddle in the lowest and warmest valleys at the foot of the great peaks. To the few inhabitants of these distant and almost inaccessible valleys, this region is also the abode of spirits and demons of incalculable power and ferocity. It was to this area that our small expedition had made its way.

Leaving Calcutta, India, on the fourth of February, we traveled by truck and bus to Lucknow where, after some delay, we transferred ourselves and our equipment into two empty boxcars of the Bengal and North Western Railway. Two and a half days later we arrived at the end of the rail line, at the southern border of Nepal, ten miles south of the town of Nepalganj. From that point, along with our six Sherpas and eight Ticali porters, whom Henderson had previously recruited in Kathmandu, we headed north, on foot, over the Saliwak Hills and down into the lush valley of the Behri Ganga. In twenty-three days we ascended the valleys of the Behri Ganga and its principal tributary, the Leadula Khola, to the tiny village of Hurikot, a distance of one hundred and forty miles. Hurikot, a collection of flat-roofed, stone buildings in the Tibetan style, is situated on a narrow shelf, twelve hundred feet above the Leadula Khola Gorge.

Our main objective was Putha Churen, an unclimbed peak four miles west of the great, fluted obelisk of Chiang-Sen. No Western party had ever approached its base, but photo-reconnaissance by members of the 1957 German Kanjiroba Expedition had led us to believe that the huge peak was, in fact, climbable --- possibly even by a small expedition such as ours. Triangulation had established that the mountain's height was approximately 22,340 feet.

Leaving Hurikot on the fifth of March, we crossed the Leadula Khola for the last time and slowly climbed up onto the southern flanks of the Kanjiroba Himal. By mid-morning of the following day, we were finally able to see our objective for the first time, though Putha Churen still lay more than fourteen miles further off to the northwest and was partially hidden by the massive, white bulk of the slightly lower Chiang-Sen. Somewhat closer, clustered near the top of a broad, low ridge, we could plainly see the reddish-brown and creamy-white buildings of the village of Chumlak, the most isolated settlement in the Kanjiroba Valley. Descending, we crossed the silt-laden Likhu Kosi, half a mile above its junction with the larger Leadula Khola, and then, climbing again, crossed the crumbling twin moraines below the Meandi-Khola Glacier. Another day's travel brought us to the small, poor village of Chumlak and the ancient Rhangcho Monastery, situated on a prominent hilltop a half mile beyond the last stone hut.

We had intended to establish a temporary camp in one of the small fields or apricot orchards below the village while we waited for the arrival of Lieutenant Lahira, our Nepalese liaison officer, but the moment we entered the village we were met by a lama from the monastery who insisted

ed that we erect our camp within the courtyard of the monastery itself. We were honored, but more, we were delighted to accept his hospitality for the high, stout walls of the ancient structure would offer protection for our tents and supplies from the depredations of the roving herds of yaks and mountain cattle and packs of scruffy dogs belonging to the villagers. By nightfall, the Sherpas and porters had set up five of our large, blue tents and several plastic tarpaulins in the spacious yard and were in the process of preparing supper. Several fires had been built for warmth and cooking and three or four gasoline lanterns were placed strategically around the compound.

(The next five sentences in Harding's journal are illegible but he obviously begins to attempt an accurate reconstruction of events and dialog, particularly of that between himself and Henderson.)

... I had climbed a flight of worn, stone steps to a narrow balcony that ran along the inside of the massive walls on three sides of the enclosure. I was sitting on the sill of one of the rough stone archways that pierced the wall above the balcony at irregular intervals when Henderson suddenly appeared beside me out of the rapidly gathering gloom.

"Nyima says supper will be ready in fifteen minutes," he said, staring out through the rough opening in the outer wall. "Oh, yes... and we've been invited to tea later this evening." Henderson turned toward me and I could see his huge smile even in the semi-darkness. He produced a gigantic pipe from one of the seemingly infinite pockets in his anorak and began packing it with some of the coarse, Russian tobacco that he'd traded a pair of socks for in Hurikot.

"By the lamas?" I asked.

"Yes. Ang Dawa, the abbot, has invited all the sahibs and the climbing Sherpas," he replied through clouds of blue, aromatic smoke. "He says that our expedition is a sign of the best possible luck for the village and the monastery. I don't know why he thinks so. We haven't hired any of the village men as porters, though perhaps we may later on. Anyway, we're to come to the main room directly after supper."

"Did you get that from Nyima?" I asked, knowing full well that our Sherpa boss was usually very inaccurate in his translations concerning time or appointments.

"No, from Ang Dawa himself. He speaks English quite well, considering how little opportunity he has to use it. You know that when the head lama of one of these monasteries dies his successor is picked from among the very young children in the surrounding region, don't you?"

"Yes," I replied, stuffing my hands into the pockets of my heavy anorak against the rapidly increasing chill. "Don't they believe that the old lama is reincarnated immediately and they search the whole countryside to find him? I think there are supposed to be a number of significant markings that are looked for on the child's body... tests of memory of an earlier existence... that sort of thing."

"That's right. Then, when the young man is old enough, it's the custom to send him to India for several years of schooling. They usually send several of the older lamas along with him as tutors and guardians. Ang Dawa, apparently, spent four years in English-speaking schools in Calcutta and Delhi."

At that moment, a loud "whoop" from the sirdar, Nyima Teng, informed us that supper was ready and we gladly abandoned the chilly balcony for the cozy warmth of the mess tent. At eight-thirty, we left the porters in charge of clearing away the remains of the meal and securing the camp for the night while we prepared to present ourselves to Ang Dawa and the other lamas of the Rhangcho Monastery.

There were nine of us "sahibs," and six Sherpas, and I had rather expected a crowded and uncomfortable few hours as the interiors of old, Buddhist monasteries are not famous for either spaciousness or excessive ventilation. The main room of the ancient building, however, proved to be quite large and well-furnished. We filed in and, by the flickering light of several dozen butter lamps, found places to sit on the floor, along both sides of a central dias. In the production of light, butter lamps are none too efficient, but in the creation of vast quantities of sooty, greasy smoke they excel. Very soon, the smoke from the lamps, combined with fumes of tobacco and incense, produced a thick, murky atmosphere in the low-ceilinged chamber that exaggerated the surrealistic qualities of the scene itself.

I could vaguely see that the walls were covered with intricate paintings of various manifestations of the Buddha and with representations of monstrous tutelary deities. Along the far end of the large room, between two heavy, wooden doors, several glass-fronted cabinets seemed to be stuffed to capacity with books, a variety of metal dishes and goblets, and what appeared to be dried flowers and numerous small statues. When we were all seated, Ang Dawa rose in front of nine, red-robed lamas.

"We wish to convey the blessings of this monastery on your expedition," he began, in halting, though surprisingly accurate, English. "You may stay in the courtyard as long as you wish to remain in Chumlak. We would be honored if the sahibs would stay in the monastery itself. We have prepared several rooms."

"You are very generous, Ang Dawa," replied Henderson, "but we do not want to impose ourselves on your kindness."

"Our blessings are freely given to all who come to Chumlak and the doors of Rhangcho Gumpa never close. Your people have always been good to the people of these mountains. You bring much work for the men of the villages. Since the border passes to Tibet have been closed, there is little work and no trading. Always, fortune has come with you."

"He must mean the Swiss and German expeditions of '55 and '57," I whispered to Henderson, who nodded in agreement as Ang Dawa continued speaking.

"Only the men of the North bring evil with them. Since the Dalai Lama was forced to leave the Forbidden City, they have become our enemies. Some day the God-King will return to the Potala."

Ang Dawa paused and his face assumed an expression of great sadness that quickly hardened into a visage of ferocious malevolence. In the dim light of the smoky chamber, a strange illumination suddenly played in his eyes... a light without heat, a fire without warmth! This lasted for no more than a second or two and then the abbot's face softened into a mask of placid benevolence that often seems characteristic of many churchmen of whatever faith. There was no hint of emotion in his face or voice as he continued.

"They have destroyed sacred *chortens* and killed very many of our people. Only the snows of the high mountains have kept them from trying to enter these valleys."

There was no doubt that the abbot was referring to the Chinese who had overrun and annexed Tibet in 1951 and who had, since the late fifties, maintained a belligerent military posture along the northern frontiers of Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim.

He suddenly turned and motioned with his hand to one of the lamas sitting behind him. The man immediately rose to his feet and left the room through one of the large wooden doors at the back of the chamber as Ang Dawa continued speaking.

"They have brought death and evil fortune to many, but the *Tro-wo* will protect the Vale of Patrasi and the Valley

of the Kanjiroba. If the Chinese cross the high passes into these valleys... they will cross no others!"

There was a resolute tone in the abbot's voice that left no doubt of his conviction that, should Chinese soldiers sweep down over the high Nāmja and Yānjar passes from neighboring Tibet, some sure and potent power could be brought to bear to stop them.

"How will the *Tro-wo* protect you, Ang Dawa?" I asked, not unconvinced of his sincerity, but curious as to what he thought he and his lamas and their gods could do to stop heavily-armed and well-trained troops.

The abbot seemed to reflect for a few moments before answering. "I am a Buddhist, but, though I follow the teachings of Buddha, my mind is not closed to the older religions of our people. I know enough of your faiths and culture to realize that you are skeptical of many of our beliefs and practices... yet, I know that your skepticism is not founded in contempt or ridicule. I will say only this. If the Chinese soldiers, or any other enemies, come down upon us, there is one in this gumpa who has the knowledge and the power to release the *Tro-wo*. Among these is *Laku-tohra*, the dreaded servant of *Mara*. I, myself, know not how this is done, but here in this monastery lives a priest called Da-Phong-Si, the twentieth reincarnation of the lama Si-thar, the greatest of the priests of Bon. To him has this power been given... and to Mema-lar, though he is very young."

Turning to the row of priests behind him, Ang Dawa made a curious gesture with his hands and two burly lamas immediately got to their feet. Quickly crossing the large chamber, they drew aside an ornate tapestry to reveal a smaller anteroom decorated with religious murals and several pieces of antique furniture. The abbot led us all through this room and into a larger one beyond that was, apparently, carved out of the solid rock comprising the large outcrop behind the main buildings of the ancient monastery. The room was close and poorly illuminated by a dozen smoking butter lamps.

In the center of this chamber, resting on a massive platform of heavy, wooden timbers, was an enormous, silver prayer-wheel, at least seven feet in diameter and nearly as high. Raised characters, in what Henderson later said was a very primitive form of Sanskrit, had been worked into the top and bottom edges of the huge wheel, while forming a central band around its entire circumference were a number of indecipherable, but vaguely disturbing, shapes and designs.

A young lama sat cross-legged on the platform beside the wheel. His head had been shorn and he wore a robe of coarse, dark-red muslin. The prayer-wheel, which had been turning slowly as we entered the chamber, perceptibly began to lose momentum, wobbling slightly on the vertical, iron axle that ran from the wooden platform to the smoke-begrimed ceiling of the strange room. The youth raised his right hand as we watched and pushed firmly, twice, against the textured side of the great wheel. As its speed increased, he lapsed again into a state of rigid immobility and seemed perfectly unaware that there were now over twenty of us with him in the dim chamber. It was several seconds before Ang Dawa broke the eerie silence.

"While the Wheel of *Mara* turns, the power of his servant, *Laku-tohra*, is withheld and it lies imprisoned somewhere in the great ice mountains to the west --- but should this wheel cease to turn, then *Laku-tohra* is freed, and he who has the knowledge can call it down from the high peaks to crush those who would do harm to the people of these valleys. I, myself, have never seen this happen, yet it is told that nearly eighty years ago, a powerful lama from the NajārGumpa named Ang Pemba called *Laku-tohra* down from the icy towers in the West to destroy the bandit Nanku and all his men."

Ang Dawa suddenly broke off in the middle of his story and, turning to his assistant lamas, indicated that tea

was to be served. He led us back into the main room of the monastery and we resumed our places as before. The young lamas to whom he had spoken returned almost immediately with several large urns of strong, Tibetan-style tea, thoroughly laced with gobs of rancid butter. Finely wrought cups of bone and silver were distributed among us by the attending lamas. Before pouring the tea, however, each one filled a cup from the urns and carried it to the darkest corner of the smoky chamber. There, to our great surprise, sat an incredibly ancient, withered old lama on a small rug. We hadn't noticed him when we reentered the room, so dim was the light thrown out by the flickering butter lamps... nor had he indicated his presence by the slightest sound or motion.

The two cups were presented to him by the young attendants. Raising his head, he kissed each cup in turn before a tiny portion of the tea was poured into a small silver bowl in his lap. The cups were then returned to Ang Dawa who emptied their contents into the large urns at his feet. Immediately, the assistants began to distribute the steaming beverage among us "sahibs," the Sherpas, and the other lamas.

"Watch it!" cautioned Henderson, under his breath. "The stuff will be damnably hot."

"Da-Phong-Si," said Ang Dawa, "the last and greatest priest of Bon, has blessed the tea of Rhangcho." It was strong and very hot.

While we were served seemingly endless cups of this beverage, Ang Dawa discussed our plans for the climb and offered us the use of the monastery courtyard when we returned through the village. Finally, the abbot rose and spoke to one of his assistants. The young lama left the room and quickly returned with a number of white silk scarves. Ang Dawa then proceeded around the room, bestowing a scarf around the neck of each sahib and Sherpa.

"These scarves are a sign and token of the friendship between you and the people of Chumlak." Then, turning once more to Henderson, he produced two more scarves, one red and one yellow. These, he instructed, were to be placed on the summit of Putha Churen or, failing that, at the highest point reached. The scarves would, he assured us, win the favor of the particular gods of the mountain and insure our safe return.

Henderson then emptied the contents of a small pack onto the floor in front of the abbot; two silver candlesticks and several dozen tall, white candles acquired in Calcutta. He presented these to Ang Dawa in the name of the expedition and of the people of the United States. They were accepted with obvious pleasure and immediately installed in a place of honor on a small table near the center of the chamber. There followed more tea, more discussion, and final blessings from the old lama, Da-Phong-Si, before we rose to retire for the night.

As he had promised, Ang Dawa saw to it that all the sahibs were comfortably accommodated in several small, but adequate, rooms in the west wing of the monastery. The Sherpas returned to their tents in the courtyard. As we crossed the courtyard, however, we could see that the Tecali porters were all still huddled around a gasoline lantern at the far side of the enclosure. Occasionally, we could hear shouts of "Cha!" and "Chalee! Chalee!"

"What are they doing?" I asked Henderson, as we descended the stone steps into the yard.

"Gambling. It's a game called *Jung*," he replied, through thick, spicy emissions from his pipe. "Curt paid off all those who are heading back to Hurikot tomorrow. This is the first time in months that most of them have had any real money to play with. They'll probably be at it all night and half of them will have lost their shirts to the other half by morning."

The wind had died and the sky was perfectly clear, so I decided to return for a few minutes to my balcony seat on the courtyard wall before turning in for the



night. Henderson accompanied me.

"Well," he said, after a pause of some minutes, "what do you think of Ang Dawa and his prayer machine?"

"I don't know, frankly. He is certainly very intelligent and comparatively well-educated... hospitable too... but I really haven't decided just how much of this business with the prayer wheel he actually believes and how much was staged for our benefit. What are the *Tro-wo*, by the way?"

Henderson puffed silently on his pipe for several seconds before replying. "*Tro-wo* are the terrifying or ferocious aspect of lamaist divinities. They're basically protective, though, and their aspect in those hideous forms is designed to ward off evil. The Mahāyana Buddhists of Tibet believe that local demons and divinities... from the old Bon religion, primarily... could be converted into defenders of the new faith... Buddhism. The whole process started some time in the First Century A.D. *Mara*, of course, represents the unconverted manifestation of spiritual evil... the tempter of Buddha."

There was another pause in the conversation while we watched the track of a brilliant meteor arc across the sky and disappear behind the Kanjiroba Range to the north. For a few moments, the light it produced was strong enough to reflect faintly off the snowy peaks and ice-fluted aretes.

"Then you don't believe Ang Dawa's story about *Mara's* servant, *Laku-tohra*, and the bandit, Nanku, do you?" continued Henderson, a disembodied voice in the darkness behind the faint, reddish glow from the bowl of his huge pipe.

"If you mean, do I believe that the story is the literal truth?" I replied, "then no, of course not... although there is usually some grain of truth to a story like that. I don't doubt that there was such a bandit. Hell, there are bandits in parts of the country today, even with army troops along both sides of the frontier. Even so, I don't buy that part about the gods sending down a spirit or demon to destroy the whole gang of them. That's obviously just an embellishment on what *might* have actually happened."

"Perhaps you should reconsider on that, Walter. There would appear to be more than just 'a grain of truth,' as you put it, behind Ang Dawa's tale of divine retribution. In fact, his version seems quite pale beside some other accounts."

"What do you mean?" I asked, my interest beginning to be aroused by Henderson's thoughtful, knowing manner. "Have you heard of this before?"

"While I was researching the route descriptions for this area, prior to organizing the expedition, I came across a very remarkable article in an old copy of the *Scottish Alpine Journal*. It was written by Forbes Redfield, a member of the 1921 British Himalayan Survey Expedition. They didn't get anywhere near this area, of course, but Redfield did collect some pretty amazing legends and other bits of folklore from the expedition Sherpas and porters. Apparently he was an amateur anthropologist and fairly knowledgeable."

"Anyway, it seems that about eighty years ago there actually was a vicious Tibetan bandit named Nanku, who ranged all over southern Tibet and parts of Nepal. He had about a hundred men and it must have taken quite a bit of thieving and extortion to support such a large number. Their favorite targets were the rich lamaist monasteries. The usual method was for twenty or thirty of them to invade a monastery, gather up all the silver ornaments, altar-pieces, and everything else of value they could find, and then disappear back into the mountains along the frontier. Some of the stolen articles found their way back to the monasteries through merchants and traders in Tibet, but the greater part of

the more valuable pieces eventually ended up in China.

"This had been going on for some years, apparently, but one day, seven of Nanku's men brutally murdered two young women in the town of Darchen. One of them was the sister of the abbot of Najār Gompa, a lama named Ang Pemba. You remember that Ang Dawa referred to him earlier this evening. In any event, even the most blatant extortion of the monasteries and callous disregard for the sacred shrines by Nanku's barbarians had failed to provoke any resistance by the lamas... until the bodies of the two girls were found on the steps of the Najār Monastery. Then they decided to retaliate."

"Ang Pemba happened to be one of the most powerful and respected men in Tibet at that time. Supposedly, he had direct access to the gods and spirits of the earth, and some even claimed that he was part god himself... very much like the Dalai Lama is believed to be. At any rate, he must also have been a sorcerer or wizard because, according to the account that Redfield heard and recorded, he caused the sun to shrink and dim until it became no brighter than the moon and the color of blood. For three days that hideous sun bathed the Himalayas in a ghastly and terrifying light. Then Ang Pemba touched the wheel of *Mara* and it ceased to turn. According to the legend, the earth began to tremble, violently, and enormous masses of ice and rock cracked off the sides of the great peaks and crashed into the valleys below. Over the mountains and deserts, thunder rumbled continuously."

"During this time, Ang Pemba fasted in order to gain the spiritual strength that he would need to control *Mara's* servant, *Laku-tohra*, when he finally released it from its imprisonment somewhere in the western mountains. According to Redfield, *Laku-tohra* is not a name, as such, but a phrase that is almost impossible to correctly translate into English, but that means something like 'That Which Comes.' On the fourth day, the sun grew still dimmer and the lamas prayed feverishly--- then it came!

"Nanku and his men had taken over an abandoned monastery north of the village of Darchen, but during that night the monastery was totally destroyed and the bodies of the bandits scattered around like chaff. Ang Pemba had ordered all the people of Darchen and the surrounding villages to remain in their houses while the *Laku-tohra* walked the Himalayas but, on the fifth day, when the sun had finally returned to its normal size and brilliance, and the men began to search for the herds of yaks and cattle that had scattered in panic, they discovered the ruined monastery and the fate of Nanku and his men became clear. Their bodies were strewn for miles across the high pastures. According to Redfield's account of the story as he heard it, many of the bodies were crushed beyond description and even the stones of the old monastery had been pulverized. The servant of *Mara* had revenged the death of the two girls."

There was a long, significant silence before either of us spoke.

"That's quite a tale," I finally said, groping for some hold on a fading sense of reality. In fact, Henderson's vivid description of the death of the Tibetan bandits had left us both with a vague, but unsettling, feeling that the story Redfield had recorded was somehow closer to being historical fact than just a colorful bit of folklore enhanced and exaggerated by a thousand retellings."

"I'll tell you something, Walter," replied Henderson, in a voice somewhat lower than before, "this is my fourth expedition to Nepal and, naturally, when I wasn't actually climbing, I've had a chance to poke around and get to know the country fairly well. I'm even beginning to understand a bit of Nepali, although, of course, I'm nowhere near being fluent in it."

"One thing I have learned is to never off-handedly dismiss any miraculous or bizarre stories concerning the

lamas. I've seen some things with my own eyes that I could hardly believe at the time... and yet they happened, indisputably. For instance, two years ago on the Kangtega Expedition we had a man fall into a deep crevasse. He was in there for over sixteen hours before we found him and could get him out. He was alive, barely, but his legs were so badly frostbitten that they were the color of candle wax and he had no feeling in either of them from the knees down. Our expedition doctor felt sure that the man would eventually lose both legs, because gangrene is almost certain to occur where tissue is that badly damaged.

"The Sherpas did not assume this had to happen, however, and they sent for a lama from the Pangboche Monastery who had a reputation as a great healer. This lama came to our base camp, looked at the man, and when he saw what was wrong, leaned over him and breathed heavily on the swollen legs. Twenty-four hours later, the injured man had sensation, without pain, in his calves and feet and the flesh was pink and healthy-looking. In four more days, believe-it-or-not, the man was well enough to climb again. Our doctor was absolutely dumbfounded. He simply couldn't explain what had happened." Henderson sat down on the edge of the parapet and rekindled his pipe before continuing.

"There's no question about it. Some of these lamas possess very strange, truly inexplicable powers. Undoubtedly you'll find it difficult to accept at first --- I certainly did --- but the fact remains that they do have them. It seems to be all tied up with religion, mysticism, demonology... and a very strong faith. There may be so many things involved... hypnotic suggestion, telekinesis, outright magic... I just don't know."

"Well," I said, "I'll take your word for it about the climber's legs being healed by the lama. Perhaps they weren't as badly frozen as they appeared. You'll have to admit, though, that there's a world of difference between some medical hocus-pocus, effective or not, and the destruction of a hundred or more men by some supernatural force. One may defy explanation, but the other defies belief."

There were a few moments of silence before Henderson spoke again and I followed his gaze across the courtyard to where the porters were still huddled over the *Jung* sticks under the warm glow of one of our gasoline lanterns.

"Walter, you're a Catholic, aren't you?"

"Nominally," I replied, "though I don't go to Mass more than half a dozen times a year."

"I guess I'm in the same situation, though in our own ways, I think we both have a fairly strong faith and believe in the basic tenets of the church. My point is that our own religion asks us to have faith in, and believe, many things that are even more incredible than either of these stories. *Genesis*, 19:24, for example, 'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.'"

"A volcanic eruption," I countered, "or a shower of meteorites."

"Come, come, Walter. You're a geologist, and you know perfectly well that there is no evidence of anything of that sort in the area where the cities were supposed to have been. The actual site, in fact, is fairly well established, just south of the Dead Sea. All right, how about *Exodus*, 12:12. 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment.'"

"Possibly an epidemic of some sort," I said, without conviction.

"Wonderful. And how about *Isaiah*, 37:36. 'Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.'"

"Food poisoning," I said, laughing. "They had lousy cooks in those days."

Henderson chuckled and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Right," he returned, sarcastically. "Well, you see what I'm getting at, don't you?"

I nodded in agreement.

(The next three lines of Harding's journal are completely illegible due to severe water staining of the page.)

... even in the deep shadows of the courtyard we could distinguish piles of climbing gear and other equipment; coils of nylon rope, a bundle of ice-axes, crampons, boxes of food, batteries, and photographic equipment, and the twelve-foot aluminum pole that served as our radio mast.

All of these things, both sights and sounds, reinforced the sense of the present and the familiar... but I was still left with the feeling that neither of us could fully appreciate the significance of that enormous slowly-turning wheel in the innermost chamber of the ancient monastery. "A prayer wheel," Ang Dawa had said ... but I wondered, "to what strange god?"

The stars, cold, brilliant, and remote, contrasted sharply with the few warm, yellow lights in the town below the monastery. Henderson was in the process of recharging his pipe for the third time, and because he seemed in no hurry to retire for the night, I decided to pursue the matter further.

"Bob, I thought prayer wheels were peculiar to the Buddhist Faith," I said. "Ang Dawa referred to this one as 'The Wheel of Mara.'"

"I know," he replied, thoughtfully, "although there is a connection. Almost without exception, I believe, the peoples of these northern valleys are Mahayana Buddhists of the Kar-Gyud-Pa Sect, the oldest unreformed church of Tibet. Originally, they all looked to Lhasa and the Dalai Lama for both spiritual and temporal leadership. Gradually, though, the monasteries such as Rhangcho here, became more and more powerful and important as authority began to be centered in them.

"Also, of course, Buddhism assimilated, and to a great extent was assimilated by, a much more ancient religion called Bon. Many of the superficial aspects of the Buddhists were adapted to serve the Bon priests ... while most of the savage Bon spirits were seen to evolve into defenders and protectors of the Buddhist Faith... for the most part, that is. To Buddhists, *Mara* represents the essence of unreconstructed evil, similarly to our concept of Satan. In this case, *Mara*, as Ang Dawa knows him, seems to incorporate the power and ferocity of some ancient Bon deity."

"What is Bon?" I asked.

"Bon is a form of animism that involves sorcery, witchcraft, sacrifice... that sort of thing. Every mountain is supposed to have its own special god or demon, and every tree, rock, cave, and stream is believed to contain a spirit that protects and animates it under certain conditions. Most of these are considered to be beneficial, or at least non-threatening, but some are thought to be evil and extremely dangerous if not continually pacified in some manner. When Buddhism began to invade Tibet and what is now northern Nepal, the Bon priests merely borrowed the trappings of the Buddhist lamas and were, in no sense, converted spiritually. There was no great hostility between the new religion and the older one, for the most part, but gradually Buddhism gained dominance over Bon. Now, only a few lamas also claim to be priests of

Bon as well, like Da-Phong-Si in there apparently does."

"Where does that prayer wheel fit into all this?" I asked. "I mean, just what do the lamas believe is its power?"

"Prayer wheels and prayer flags," replied Henderson, "are not considered to be a way of appealing to the gods in the Christian sense. Each time that the flags flap in the wind, or the wheels revolve, it is felt that the effect is beneficent in a general sort of way. I suppose it's analogous to saying 'Hail Marys.' There's more to it than that, of course, but I really can't explain it more thoroughly because it just isn't comparable to any Christian attitude toward prayer or obeisance."

He paused for a moment, as if uncertain whether to continue or not. "There's something... peculiar... about the wheel that Ang Dawa showed to us earlier this evening, though."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "It is larger than most."

"No, it's not the size that matters. Superficially, it looks just like any other, it's just that... well, it's that ordinarily a prayer wheel is made to turn as a means of generating praise... it's a positive thing. This wheel seems to be operating in a negative sense. Do you see what I'm getting at? Apparently, that wheel is kept turning continuously in order to prevent something from happening."

As Henderson sat there in the darkness, puffing thoughtfully on his pipe, I could see, by an occasional flare from the porter's lamps across the courtyard, a look of anxiety and puzzlement cross his face.

"I don't know," he said at last. "Why don't we turn in." We had descended the stone steps and were halfway across the compound before he spoke again. "I think we may as well rest over here for a few days and reshuffle the loads for the porters that are going on with us. We'll send them on with Nyima and the Sherpas to the head of the moraine field. They can dump the loads there and return here by late afternoon. Perhaps we can buy some potatoes and a chicken or two in the village. Lieutenant Lahira ought to catch up with us by tomorrow or the next day, at the latest. Technically, we're not supposed to travel beyond Chumlak without him. There are apt to be Nepalese Army patrols in this area from time to time and I'll be happier when Lahira is here to deal directly with any problems that might develop in that area. What do you think?"

"Good," I said. "That will give me some time to prowl around here and take some pictures. Besides, my boots could use a day or two to dry out."

Crossing the rest of the courtyard toward the wing of the monastery that Ang Dawa had assigned to the sahibs, we found the door to our compartment guarded by whole legions of fantastically writhing shades and menacing forms. Hideous things seemed to threaten the entrance to the dark cave that was the door to our room. "Cha!" shrieked a porter in delight, as he jumped up from the group huddled over the *Jung* sticks, overturning and extinguishing the lamp in the process. Instantly, the shadowy forms vanished and we had to resort to my mundane, if useful, flashlight in order to locate our sleeping bags on the crowded floor of the small room.

Sleep came quickly, that night, bringing with it a confused jumble of thoughts and vivid pictures of orchids, lamas, prayer flags, demons, a beautiful Indian girl in Calcutta, blue, cold glaciers, and, finally... nothing. Just for that lingering moment before I slipped into oblivion, my mind's eye focused on the scenes that had taken place earlier that evening in the old monastery. They seemed to float in the air before my eyes, assisted, no doubt, by the heavy fragrance of incense that clung tenaciously to our clothes.

The next several days passed uneventfully. Nyima,

the sirdar, organized the Sherpas and remaining porters into several teams and began the transfer of nearly two hundred sixty-pound loads of food and equipment from the monastery courtyard, seven miles up the valley, to the head of the moraine field below the great glacier on Putha Churen's East Face. The weather was cool and dry, though the sky was thickly overcast.

On the morning of March 10th, however, I awoke to a stream of brilliant sunshine pouring into the room through a glassless window in the outer wall. A quick survey of the various cocoon-like sleeping bags that were scattered around the floor of the small room assured me that I was the first to be up. I could hear yaks bellowing outside the walls of the monastery and the drone of a large insect that seemed to be endlessly circling the room.

I was in the process of lacing my boots when I suddenly became aware of the sounds of a violent argument in the courtyard. One of the voices was certainly that of our Sherpa boss, Nyima Tensing. The other voice was equally belligerent and was, unmistakably, Chinese. At the first sound of the argument, Henderson and the others had begun to stir. They quickly finished getting dressed and followed me out into the terrific glare of mid-morning. There was Nyima, hands planted squarely on his hips, his face contorted with anger, shouting and screeching with incredible volume, first to the other Sherpas and porters, and then to a young Chinese soldier who was standing in the middle of the sunny courtyard.

By the time we reached Nyima's side, two more Chinese, one of whom was obviously an officer, appeared through the massive stone gateway. The officer was wearing a well-tailored uniform of gray serge, while the other two wore the familiar, quilted-cotton, pajama-like clothing of the Chinese Army. The officer was carrying a heavy revolver in a black leather holster at his waist. The other two men each had a lethal-looking sub-machine gun slung over their left shoulders, with belts holding a dozen or more clips of appropriate ammunition over the other. Each of the soldiers also carried several grenades.

"Nyima!" demanded Henderson. "What's the matter? Who is this?" He stepped between the two furious men just as the officer and the second soldier came up to them.

"Bara Sahib. This man say we are in Tibet. He say we cross border twelve miles from Phijorgaon. He say we must leave very soon!" poured out Nyima, giving the Chinese officer such a look of hatred and contempt that his face became as flushed with anger as Nyima's own.

Regaining his composure after a moment, the officer turned to Henderson. "Allow me to introduce myself," he said, in very heavily accented English that was, at first, almost impossible to understand. "I am Major Lin Teng Chang of the 10th Security Force of the People's Republic of China. I assume you realize that you have violated the established border between Nepal and the Autonomous Province of Tibet as determined by the 1959 Bandung Conference."

"Like Hell!" growled Burke, who had just arrived in time to hear the officer's accusation. "The border is a good twenty miles north of Kanjiroba." He pointed in the direction of the gleaming white, serrated ridge to the north.

"He's right, Major," said Henderson, trying to be somewhat more diplomatic. I think there has been a serious error on your part. We both know perfectly well that the village of Chumlak is on the Nepalese side of the frontier. The government wouldn't have given our expedition permits to travel anywhere within twenty-five miles of the border. You and your men are in Nepal."

"Perhaps your maps are inaccurate," replied the officer, unrolling a large, oilcloth map which he proceeded to spread out on the gravel surface of the courtyard in

front of us. The map clearly showed the village of Chumlak and the monastery in which we were standing to be well on the Tibetan side of the frontier. While we were pondering the obviously doctored map, Ang Dawa suddenly appeared in the main doorway of the monastery, accompanied by half a dozen henna-robed lamas.

"What is the matter, Sa'b?" he asked. Then, as we turned to face him, he recognized the gray, quilted uniforms of the Chinese soldiers. His normally placid expression dissolved into a mask of anger and indignation. "Why are you here?" he demanded, quickly walking over to confront the Major. "You are not welcome in these valleys. Our doors are closed to you. You will leave the Monastery of Rhangcho and the village of Chumlak at once."

Nyima had been interpreting all that was said for the benefit of the Sherpas, and though they had been chuckling over the preposterousness of the Chinese officer's claims, they suddenly ceased laughing and every face became a mirror of Ang Dawa's. The two soldiers began to shift the weapons on their shoulders and finger them nervously, but Major Chang snapped at them in Chinese and they quickly backed away toward the main gate of the compound.

"Perhaps you have blundered across the border unintentionally," he said, attempting to maintain an air of authority in his voice. "You may have until this evening to pack your equipment and leave this village. I will return to see that you have done so." With that, he turned smartly on his heel and, striding off through the monastery gate, quickly disappeared down the hill toward the village.

"Evil has come to Chumlak," muttered Ang Dawa, glowering after the departing soldiers.

We didn't see the Chinese for the rest of the day, though one of the Sherpas reported that they had set up various instruments on the far side of the village and were, apparently, taking measurements of some kind. Later that morning, as we all gathered for coffee and discussion in the mess tent, Henderson told us that he had instructed Nyima to send a runner back to Hurikot to see if he could find out where our liaison officer, Lieutenant Lahira, was and bring him back to Chumlak as quickly as possible to deal with the Chinese and straighten the matter out. It was obvious to everyone that Chang's map was highly inaccurate and probably even deliberately falsified, but why, we wondered? Was it a bluff to keep us from stumbling onto a secret Chinese installation on the frontier or was it, perhaps, an attempt to stage another embarrassing "incident" as part of China's policy of harassment of the Indian protectorates? We never knew.

The next day we saw nothing of the Chinese and that evening we were still waiting for the return of Nyima's runner and the liaison officer, when Ang Dawa again invited all the sahibs to have tea in the monastery. Except for the presentation of the scarves, the ritual was similar to that of the first night. Courtesy once more demanded that we consume more tea than seemed either possible or proper, yet we were thoroughly enjoying the abbot's description of the various deities portrayed in the colorful, if begrimed, murals that decorated the walls of the main room.

Ang Dawa gave no indication of his discomfiture at the appearance of the Chinese the day before and was just beginning to describe his hopes to convince the government to build a school in the village, when he was suddenly interrupted by the return of Major Chang and his men. Five more, identically uniformed soldiers now accompanied the two that had been with Chang the previous day, and Nyima, who was standing near the door, indicated that another four were waiting on the steps outside.

As the Chinese stormed into the room, we could tell at

a glance that the Major's mood was anything but pleasant. Ignoring the abbot, he turned immediately to Henderson and demanded to know why we had not removed ourselves and our equipment from the village to the "Nepalese" side of the frontier. Henderson replied that we had no intention of leaving and that we were awaiting the arrival of a representative of the Nepalese Army who had already been sent for and who was expected momentarily.

"There will be no representative!" said Chang, curtly.

"You're wrong," replied Henderson. "Lieutenant Lahira will be here by tomorrow morning at the latest. I am sure he will conclude that you and your men are the intruders ... not us!"

"I think not," retorted the Chinese officer. "This afternoon our patrols discovered three men attempting to cross the border into Tibet over the Lang-Chola Pass. Two appeared to be in uniform. The third man wore gray pants and a blue anorak and was, no doubt, their guide."

"That must have been our liaison officer, Lieutenant Lahira, his aide, and our Sherpa, Bama Nwangu, on their way here from Hurikot," I said.

"That now appears to have been the case," replied Chang, sarcastically. "At the time, however, my men could only assume that they were intelligence agents or saboteurs and they attempted to arrest them. Several shots were fired over their heads but they refused to obey an order to halt. Instead, they returned fire, killing one of my men and wounding another. There was an exchange of fire for several minutes, and, in the end, all three of the intruders were killed."

We were stunned to hear the Chinese officer proclaim that his men had killed our liaison officer, another Nepalese soldier, and the Sherpa Bama Nwangu, but Henderson seemed inclined to doubt Chang's story.

"I don't believe you, Major," he said, looking the Chinese squarely in the face. "You and I both know that the Lang-Chola Pass is nearly twenty miles inside the border of Nepal and I doubt very much that you would be foolish enough to murder two Nepalese Army officers and a Sherpa that far from your own lines and risk a clash with Nepalese and Indian troops. You know perfectly well that there is a large garrison in Tarapgaon. If these men were really killed, as you say, then show us the bodies."

"Unfortunately, that is impossible. A rock avalanche, set off, no doubt, by the sound of the firing, swept their bodies from the narrow trail west of the pass and they fell more than a thousand meters onto the Chola Glacier. We were, of course, unable to recover them."

I had a sinking feeling as I realized that Chang's account of the deaths of the three men could have, in fact, happened exactly as he related it. As our expedition had crossed the same treacherous pass on the way from Hurikot, we had found it necessary to install safety lines in some places for the protection of the heavily-laden porters. Even so, there had been a few close calls. I remembered, too, that rocks and ice had been falling more-or-less continuously along several sections of the trail where it traversed the extremely steep slopes west of the pass itself. It was certainly possible that Chang's account of the avalanche was true, for a rockfall of even moderate proportions could easily have swept a hundred men off those narrow ledges and carried them into the yawning gulf above the frozen chaos of the Chola Glacier.

It was also probable that Lahira and his aide would have responded in kind to any warning shots fired by Chang's men, assuming, no doubt, that they had encountered one of the skirmishing patrols that the Chinese occasionally sent over the frontier to harass the Nepalese and Indian sentries along the Nepalese side. They would hardly have expected to be otherwise challenged so far south of the actual border.

In any event, at that point there was little question that the Chinese had the upper hand. While we waited for

Chang's next move, I reluctantly began to visualize our own. Since the Chinese soldiers could obviously evict our entire expedition from Chumlak by force, if necessary, we had no alternative but to agree to pack our equipment and return to Hurikot immediately. Once there, we would at least be able to report the Chinese intrusion and their attack on Lieutenant Lahira's party to the commander of the Indian garrison at Tarapgaon. There was little time for further speculation, however, for Major Chang turned abruptly to Ang Dawa and, indicating us, said angrily.

"These people are not your friends. They can bring you only trouble. You should have nothing to do with them."

Ang Dawa's eyes glittered with hate and rage as he stood for a moment, towering over the Chinese officer, his powerful frame trembling in barely controlled fury.

"You are evil! You and your soldiers have brought misery and death to the people of Tibet. You have forced the Dalai Lama to flee to India and you have profaned the sacred Potala. You and your men will leave the Rhangcho Gumpa at once!" The abbot extended his arm toward the door. Chang, now plainly furious, hesitated for a moment, as if he were trying to regain control of his temper, but a second later all restraint left him and he screamed at the tall abbot.

"You are wrong, priest! You are stupid and impotent! You understand nothing. The people in this village live in fear of you and your priests because they think you have power over them. You have no power... and your ridiculous gods have no power. This is power!" he roared, striking one of the soldier's weapons with his hand. "You think these Americans are your friends, but they use you. They are in league with your Indian masters."

"You know nothing of these men!" retorted Ang Dawa, vehemently. "The Americans and the English and the Germans have come to our valleys many times to climb the great peaks. Always, they have been good to our people. They have brought much work for the men of the villages. Before the Chinese came to Tibet, our people lived by trading. Now we can no longer exchange cloth and salt from India for furs and silver from Tibet. Your soldiers have closed the mountain passes. We have seen the destruction of our holy places and the slaughter of our priests. No, these men are our friends. They do not despise us. They do not mock our religion."

"Stupid priest! You will die in ignorance. You and your people live like animals in this stinking, miserable village because your ridiculous fears and superstitions forbid you to accept what is truly good. Your religion is false and it will die with you."

Ang Dawa stepped down from the dais and glared directly at the Chinese officer.

"Your words have offended *Mara* and your actions have angered the *Tro-wo*, for you have killed Bama Nwangu, a man of these mountains. I make no idle threats. We can destroy you! There is more in our religion than you would wish, could you but understand it."

(Beyond this point, the text of Harding's journal becomes extremely difficult to read, impossible in several places, due to severe water damage to a number of pages. I have not attempted to reconstruct missing portions, but have chosen to record here only what is actually legible. I do not believe that the missing words and phrases will significantly hinder an understanding of Henderson's fate by the reader. T. M. Davis)

... The abbot turned to glance at Da-Phong-Si who was seated on his rug in the darkest corner of the room, precisely as he had been on the first evening.

"Who is that?" demanded Chang. "You will stand up in the presence of an officer of the People's Republic of China."

"He is very old and cannot stand," replied Ang Dawa.

"He will stand!" screamed the Major. He barked an

order to his men and two soldiers quickly pushed their way into the dark corner of the crowded chamber. When they reached the ancient lama, they grabbed the old man's arms and lifted him, roughly, from the floor. As they did so, a muffled gasp came from the throat of every lama in the room.

(Illegible section) ... cried Ang Dawa, a look of genuine horror suddenly distorting his face. The other lamas threw themselves to the floor and began chanting, furiously. Nyima and the other Sherpas looked extremely uneasy and seemed not to know whether they should bolt for the door or remain in the immediate proximity of Ang Dawa and, hopefully, in the abbot's protection.

The Major snapped another order in Chinese and the two soldiers dropped the old priest in a heap and instantly returned to their positions near the door, unslinging their weapons as they did so. Chang then produced a piece of white chalk from a pocket in his tunic and, walking over to one of the huge murals portraying the monastery's tutelary deities, made large smudges across the faces of several.

"Agghh!" gasped the ancient priest, from the deep shadows in the corner. Startled by the sound, we turned as one to find him standing again. As he hesitantly staggered out into the relative brightness in the center of the chamber, we could see his eyes for the first time. Though the emaciated body of the old lama could easily have been well over one hundred and fifty years old, his eyes were those of a much younger man, and infused with the same cold fire that I had observed in the eyes of Ang Dawa on our first evening in Chumlak when he had invited us into the monastery.

Even Chang shrank back, as the old priest stumbled out into the center of the room. A thrill of terror surged through me as I watched his eyes grow wide... pulsating with a strange, white light. Deep, guttural sounds came from his throat as he tried to form the dimly-remembered, long-unspoken words of an ancient prayer. Finally they came, crisp and clear, through the smoky, still air of the crowded chamber.

"Dang-si camu phomo la. Seru nan Mara somé nāna. Dahnu Mara sanan phu. Laku-tohra sanan phu. Om Matri Salei Du!" He stood for a moment, trembling from the terrible exertion, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, the tapestry covering the entrance to the prayer wheel chamber was flung back and the young lama whom we had seen sitting beside it entered the room. In an instant, he crossed the chamber and prostrated himself before the wizened Da-Phong-Si. Pure terror now registered on the face of every lama in the room. Ang Dawa, his face the color of ashes, turned and spoke to Chang.

"This is the guardian of the Wheel of *Mara*," he said, trembling visibly. "Nemba-lar has come because Da-Phong-Si, the greatest of the priests of Bon, has commanded him to allow the wheel to cease its endless turning. *Mara* will be enraged and his servant, *Laku-tohra*, will be released from its prison of blue ice." The abbot paused and we followed his gaze through the open archway of the prayer wheel chamber. In the dim light, it was just possible to see that the great, silver wheel was still turning... but very slowly. A few seconds later, even as we watched, it stopped with an audible thump.

"*Laku-tohra* is now free and the mountains echo the thunder of its tread. It would drive you mad, were you to know the nature of that which now seeks you. None can escape the fury of *Laku-tohra* and many will die. Once the servant of *Mara* has been released, only a priest of Bon, such as Da-Phong-Si, can control and direct its wrath. It will have blood."

Most of the lamas, by this time, seemed to be in a state of shock. Even the Chinese soldiers were obviously terrified. Though the abbot spoke in English, they could sense the growing horror that was enveloping the Sherpas and the lamas of Rhangcho. I could see that Henderson,

Burke, and the others were also looking more and more apprehensive and I began to be horribly certain that every ominous word Ang Dawa had spoken was true.

Only Chang seemed immune to the terror that was rapidly infecting everyone within the monastery's ancient walls. As he surveyed the large, but crowded, chamber, his face became an ugly visage of hate, bewilderment, and scorn.

"This is your power?" he snarled, sarcastically. "Do you think that you can frighten us with your childish stories and painted devils... and ridiculous prayers to absurd gods? Do you think we are so stupid and weak-minded that we can be panicked by your tales of demons?" The officer pointed to the huge, silver wheel in the inner chamber. "Do you think there is power in that... a metal drum revolving on an iron axle... a machine to appeal endlessly to gods that never hear... for help that never comes... a prayer machine? This is the source of your power?" A sneer of contempt distorted his face as he turned back to face Ang Dawa and the other lamas. Sweat glistened on his forehead and his eyes blazed, malignantly.

"You don't understand..." began the abbot, before Chang cut him off.

"I understand enough. One day we will sweep into these valleys and crush all who oppose us. You expect old men like this to turn us back? He cannot even protect himself!"

Chang's hand dropped suddenly to his waist and, whipping his revolver from its leather holster, he fired point-blank at Da-Phong-Si. The old lama's withered body lurched backward and crumpled, lifeless, to the floor. At such close quarters, the weapon's report stunned and deafened us and the acrid smoke made our eyes water freely. Too horrified to move, we stood for what seemed like minutes, staring stupidly at the small, blood-spattered body of the Bon priest. Finally, Chang spoke, his words calm and deliberate.

"By noon, tomorrow, I expect you all to be gone from this village," he said, pointedly thrusting the still-smoking barrel of his heavy revolver in each of our faces in turn. Then he reholstered his weapon and stalked out of the room. His men, still visibly shaken, shouldered their own weapons and followed on his heels.

Most of the lamas were insensible with fear and grief, but in Ang Dawa, and one or two of his attendants, the debilitating terror of the previous few minutes seemed to resolve itself into a grim strength of purpose and necessity. Still trembling slightly, the abbot bent down and gently lifted the body of Da-Phong-Si, carefully placing it on the low dais in the center of the room. His attendants gathered a dozen of the flickering butter lamps from around the chamber and placed them near the body.

The shock of seeing the old lama... *(Illegible word)* ... brutally murdered in front of us had left everyone dazed and speechless... *(The remainder of the sentence and several words at the beginning of the next are illegible.)*

... finally, I heard Henderson mutter, "Let's go... we can't do anything here. Ang Dawa and the lamas will take care of this."

As we started to file out of the room, however, the abbot spoke to our sirdar, Nyima Tensing, telling him to take all the Sherpas and porters with him into the village, for it would not be safe, he said, for them to remain in the monastery's courtyard that night. He instructed the rest of us to go directly to our sleeping quarters in the west wing of the building and to stay there... no matter what might happen.

"Only if you remain in those rooms," he said, "and do nothing to attract attention or to interfere with what may come to pass, do you have a chance to survive

this night. Though I feel it is best for you to remain in the monastery itself, you must not leave those rooms for any reason."

We left the abbot, with our condolences, to return to our two rooms for the night as he had instructed. As we crossed the courtyard, we could see that the Chinese had elected to pass the night on the wide porch of a large building on the other side of the enclosure. One of the soldiers was standing a little off to one side, cradling his machine gun in the crook of his elbow. Another, similarly armed, patrolled the balcony on the wall above. Chang and the other soldiers were on the porch, apparently cooking their supper on a small stove. A heavy-caliber machine gun mounted on a small tripod had been set up in the courtyard directly in front of them.

We found the door to our sleeping quarters and entered the relatively small, dimly-illuminated chambers. Still shaken by the murder of the old priest and the presence of the Chinese soldiers outside in the courtyard, none of us felt in the least like sleeping. After a few minutes, however, we unrolled our sleeping bags and extinguished the solitary oil lantern that glimmered, fitfully, in the corner of the first room. Ten or fifteen minutes later, I could sense that Henderson and Burke, at least, were still awake.

"Why was Ang Dawa so insistent that we not leave this room tonight?" Burke asked, softly.

"Because," Henderson replied, "he is genuinely afraid that something may happen. In fact, he's certain of it."

"What do you mean?" asked Schatz, who had just rolled over in his sleeping bag to join the conversation. "Do you think the Chinese will start something during the night?"

"No, I don't think so. Chang knows damn well which side of the border he's on and I doubt like hell that he'd want to take a chance on getting involved in a pitched battle this far into Nepal."

"There's not much we can do about it," said Burke.

"Obviously not," Henderson replied, "but Chang must know that there is at least a regiment of Gurkhas at Tarāpgaon. They're bound to hear about this...and very soon. Somebody from the village will go there to report it, certainly."

"Then why the hell did he murder the old priest?" I asked.

"I don't know. It doesn't make sense... any more than it does for them to be here in the first place. There must be something around here that they don't want us to see... some military installation... evidence of some atrocity... that's all I can figure. Possibly he killed Da-Phong-Si because he thought the old man could scare his men into getting the hell out of here and back into Tibet. Don't think they're not perfectly aware that this is very risky business. There is only a dozen or so of them and, probably, two hundred or more Nepalese and Indian troops less than two days away. That still doesn't explain why they are here in the first place, though."

"No," I said, "and it doesn't explain what is terrifying Ang Dawa and the other lamas, either. If it isn't Chang, and his soldiers, then what is it?"

No one said anything for several minutes, but I could hear Henderson sit up, unzip his sleeping bag, and fumble in the darkness for his pipe and tobacco. Soon, a small, ruddy glow penetrated the almost tangible gloom.

"Look," he said at last, "you must understand that Ang Dawa believes every word he says."

"You mean about some demon being sent down by the gods to punish Chang and his men?" asked Burke.

"That's exactly what I mean," Henderson replied, "although it isn't just a demon, as we might think of it... it's something infinitely more horrible. I'm not sure I can explain it very well but, as I understand it, that business with the prayer wheel is just symbolic...stopping

the wheel apparently represents the disruption of the harmonious world by the presence of evil.

"These people believe that in the mind of every person lurks a horror more fearful and powerful than anything that can be imagined. For that reason, there have never been any attempts to portray this thing in stone or in painted murals. The *Tro-wo*, the ones pictured in the monastery in there, pale in comparison. Likewise, there was never any attempt to name this thing... other than *Laku-tohra*, which Redfield translated as 'That Which Comes.'

It was believed that only when a man was fully conscious could he be certain that this thing would not haunt him. If a man were wicked enough, however, it would, eventually, drive him mad. Insanity, therefore, was considered to be a sure sign of an evil mind. This demon, or whatever it was, couldn't actually harm a man physically, of course, because it was still just a nebulous sort of spirit or force. These lamas, however, believe that, centuries ago, the Bon priests somehow discovered the secret of animating, giving physical substance to, and controlling this thing they call *Laku-tohra*. In essence, they could create a living, breathing monster of substance out of a sort of 'negative' life-force and use its awful strength for whatever purposes suited them. It's not an uncommon concept in primitive religions. Ang Dawa believes that Da-Phong-Si released the *Laku-tohra* before Chang shot him."

"But now the old priest is dead and no one can control it!" said Schatz, under his breath.

"Except perhaps the young lama, Nemba-lar, who is also a Bon priest," replied Henderson. "Although the *Laku-tohra* would, in this case, have been created from Da-Phong-Si's mind, Nemba-lar may possibly be able to control it, at least partially."

Henderson stopped and, in the darkness, I could feel my heart pounding as I thought over this horrible possibility. What can the mind not produce... at least in one's imagination. Already, mine had populated the darkness with a host of obscene, crawling, slobbering nightmares! Sleep was impossible for hours but, sometime well after midnight, fatigue served to subdue my imagination and I was on the verge of an uneasy, restless oblivion... when the frantic lowing of yaks just outside the monastery wall snatched me back from the brink and I was instantly wide awake. The others had been awakened, too, and all around me in the darkness they struggled to sit up in their confining sleeping bags.

The next sound we heard was a tremendous crash against the further courtyard wall... then another, even louder. Several beams of light began to sweep the compound and one flashed through the open, doorless archway of our quarters. Several seconds of absolute silence were followed by another thunderous crash. Suddenly, the starless night was pierced by screams of insane terror and the darkness was shattered by the chattering roar of a machine gun. We crushed ourselves against the stone floor as the gunner's fire raked the entire west wing of the monastery and a dozen or more bullets whined through the open archway and flattened themselves against the further wall.

A moment later, the room rocked in a deafening roar as a Chinese grenade exploded against the wall outside. Bits of smoking, red-hot metal rattled on the stone floor as acrid smoke began to filter into the room. A second machine gun opened fire and, in the staccato flashes of the heavier weapon, a towering figure suddenly appeared silhouetted in the open doorway. It was Ang Dawa. "Stay!" he roared, above the noise of the guns... before disappearing into the smoke-filled courtyard.

The firing stopped... and for a moment there was complete silence. Then, to our inexpressible horror, there

was a tremendous "crunch" on the monastery's flat, slate-covered roof. The ceiling cracked above us and we were showered with dust and bits of mud-plaster. The great carrying timbers groaned, hideously, as something... something beyond our wildest, screaming nightmares, stomped across the roof of the building.

There was another shuddering crash and... suddenly... a huge shadow passed across the open doorway. There was a chorus of blood-chilling screams and, again, the machine guns thundered... bullets tearing futilely into masonry and wood. More light... and we could hear Chang screaming above the others... screaming and screaming. In the flickering light from the heavier gun, I could see Henderson get out of his sleeping bag and reach the door.

"Oh... Oh my God! My God! My God!" he groaned, again and again. Burke, Schatz, and I struggled to get out of our bags but before we could reach Henderson's side, he was pulled... *snatched*... through the open doorway and out into the courtyard. Schatz reached the door first... and screamed! For a moment he blocked the door and then tumbled back into the room and collapsed, his hands over his eyes. The guns stopped. It was silent. We could hear only one thing... the sound of something huge as it shuffled through the outer gate and away into the night.

We huddled together, not daring to move, until the first rosy glow began to lighten and warm the sky. Not until the sun had risen bright and clear did we dare leave the small room and venture out into the courtyard. The Chinese were gone, their weapons lay scattered about on the stones. That afternoon, beyond the village, at the edge of an old apricot orchard, we found one of the soldiers... *crushed*! Nyima and I followed a wide swath of shattered trees and tumbled stone walls, and, finally, half a mile further on, discovered what was left of Henderson's body. Ang Dawa and the lamas helped us bury Henderson and the soldier, deep in the loose rubble of the moraine, two miles from the village. We performed a simple service, but left no marker.

Early the next morning we started back to Hurikot. Ang Dawa and Nemba-lar accompanied us to the edge of the village. They said nothing, but the abbot grasped my hand for a long moment and held it, warmly. Behind us, two long, low notes from the great silver horns in the monastery courtyard echoed and reechoed in the crystalline fastness of the Kanjiroba Himal.

Four years after my publication of Harding's journal, I found myself in Nepal attached, as a non-climbing member, to the American Manaslu North Face Expedition. Following the successful ascent and retreat from the mountain, I was able to engage three of the expedition's porters for an additional six weeks to help me complete a photographic study of the several distinct variations in Lamaist monastery architecture in the north-central part of the kingdom. With their help, I was able to reach five isolated monasteries and shrines north of the great Annapurna and Dhaulagiri Ranges. Finally, near the end of our journey, we descended into the Suli Gud Valley on the Eastern Fringe of the Kanjiroba Region.

One evening, as the porters set up our tents under a grove of fine, old apricot trees, I thought again of Harding's journal and his bizarre account of Henderson's horrible fate. At that moment, I could not honestly have said whether I believed the story or not, but I said to the Head Porter, as he sat cooking chapatis over a small smoky fire, "Can we get to Chumlak from here, Pemba?"

The man narrowed his eyes and looked at me quizzically for a moment before replying, "Yes, Sahib, but it is a difficult journey."

"How long?" I asked.

"One week...but the Sahib does not want to go there!"

"Why not? I want to see the Rhangcho Monastery," I countered.

"No good, Sahib. The monastery was destroyed."

"What?" I exclaimed. "When did this happen?"

"Two years ago, Sahib."

"What about the lamas who lived there?"

"All gone, Sahib, ... all but one or two."

"What happened?" I asked, stunned by the porter's revelation.

"No one knows, Sahib, but I have heard it told that in the night a great storm destroyed the temple. The ground trembled. You do not want to go there, Sahib. It is no good anymore."

I did want to go there, however, and six days later we crossed the twin moraines of the Meandi-Khola Glacier and, that night, camped at the edge of the tiny, dusty village of Chumlak. A short distance away, on a prominent hill behind the village, I could clearly see the ruins of the ancient monastery. The next morning I met the only two remaining lamas from the once thriving and powerful temple. One was Ang Dawa and the other was Nemba-lar.

At first, both men seemed distant and unresponsive, but when I told them what I knew of Henderson's ill-fated expedition of twenty years before, Ang Dawa's face

softened and he took my hand in what seemed to be a spontaneous gesture of sympathy and trust.

"Is it true?" I asked. "Can you show me where Henderson is buried?"

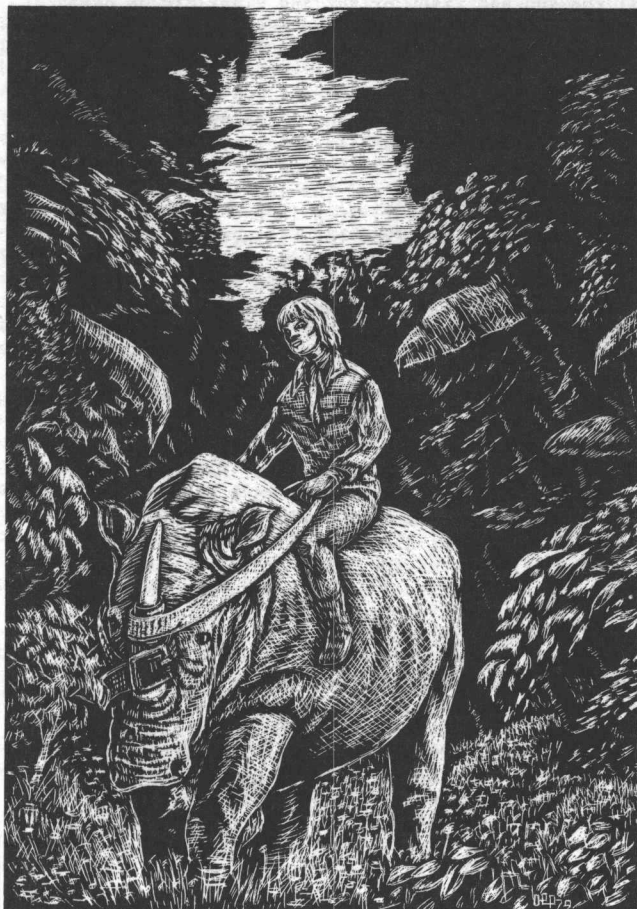
"The glacier moves," replied the old lama. "I cannot show you... but come. I will show you something else."

He led me up a faint path toward the ruined monastery. The younger lama, Nemba-lar, followed us, walking a few paces behind.

"There is nothing to see... and there is everything to see," said Ang Dawa, as we approached the broken and tumbled wall that had once enclosed the main buildings of the Rhangcho Monastery. As I viewed the scene of devastation, a paralyzing feeling of terror overwhelmed me.

"It is still with us," said the abbot, "though its power diminishes slowly. Nemba-lar has not yet the strength or wisdom to drive it out." He gestured toward the ruins with his hand.

As I followed his gaze, I understood and my mind reeled in revulsion and horror. Harding's journal was all too true. No storm or earthquake had destroyed the monastery. Its stones and timbers were scattered everywhere and the great rocks that had formed the foundation of the temple were pulverized into a fine, grey dust.



DARK DAUGHTER

Let the colors enter into me,
the colors of God ---
in a poisoned time,
I see joy sometimes.

I stand in the strong sun and
the birds on the trees
sing me *your* songs.

At night *your* stars bubble silver
and I seem to be turning
with the big wheel of the sky.

But often when I don't feel *you're* doing things right
I feel like an onion in the field.

Then I am *your* dark daughter,
made up of many moods and poems.
But no matter how much I disbelieve
Your beauty is always spinning into me
like a conscience I used to have.

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PATHWAYS

Long have I hungered and briefly fed.
Now, know this which hunger teaches men:
The entrances into the well of life
Begin and end within the same world.
Each portion of the tenuous façade
Faces the sun.
How may cobweb consciousness comprehend
The essence of existence,
The rare distillate of history
Or eternity,
Amongst the histrionic hordes of man?

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IODONIS AND THE TWIN TITANS

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In order that Iodonis, the first god of men, might bring the molten earth out of the chaotic broth at the bottom of the universe, it was necessary to overcome Thenis and Arda, the imbecilic titan twins who leered and drooled and kept the earth upon their sea of chaos as might some mortal child keep a toy boat in his bath water.

Mightiest of all gods was Iodonis, and tall, yet compared in size to the blithering titans, he was only as large as one small finger. And the bubbling, boiling sea was deadly environment to anyone other than the identically ugly and witless giants to which chaos gave life. Therefore it was not just a matter of doing them simple battle and winning away the earth. Iodonis was to employ the keenest of weapons against the doltish: his intellect.

Iodonis fashioned a boat of unmeltable ice and, using an icicle as oar, he set out upon the chaotic ocean, taking care that the sluggish waves did not pour into his craft, nor the popping bubbles splatter him, lest he be sunk or killed. Iodonis thus became the first navigator in the universe and remains to this day without equal, for it took unapproachable skill to direct a course through those colorful and madly whirling eddies.

He came upon Thenis and Arda sitting face to face in what to them were shallows, their toes sticking out of the waste-deep chaos. They gayly floated the earth back and forth between their sprattled legs as though it were some grand toy ball, laughing intermittently in deep rumbling voices that echoed in the cosmos, acidic saliva dribbling from their ever-gaping mouths.

When Arda beheld the tiny white boat of unmelting ice approaching from between two mountains, rolling waves, his hideous face twisted into a visage of excitement and joy. As his hand reached out for this new toy, Iodonis stabbed between the tripod of thick fingers with the sharp end of the icicle-oar. Arda withdrew his arm and began to scream and wail and kick his feet in a fit of temper and pain, causing incredible plasmic waves to rise threateningly all around the little craft that Iodonis had built. To escape death, Iodonis turned himself into a flying serpent and writhed up into the cosmos, leaving his boat behind.

Thenis fetched up the white boat which was being tossed about unmanned, and it was so cold that it hurt his stubby fingers merely to clutch it, but was such a wondrous and unusual toy he

could not put it down. After a few moments, the frost had solidly frozen the boat to his gripping hand.

When Arda's stab wound ceased aching and he forgot his whining and kicking, he became jealous of his brother's plaything, especially considering how Arda had spied it first. He tried to wrestle it from Thenis, but Thenis held it firmly both because of stubborn greed and the fact that it had stuck itself to him. They tugged back and forth until Arda's hand, too, was frozen tightly to the boat.

There was no winning their selfish contest, for neither could have let go even had he wanted, not that either desired to do such a thing. Each remained determined to force the other to give up the prize, though neither could possibly loosen his grasp, so on and on their obdurate battle went.

The cosmos above chaos filled with the raving and squealing of two headstrong titans. They bit each other's arms and necks, called each other childish names in incoherent voices of thunder, and kicked each other with their feet, stirring up the strange sea about them with their antics and tantrums. Both were too obstinate and simple minded to comprehend the hopelessness of their condition.

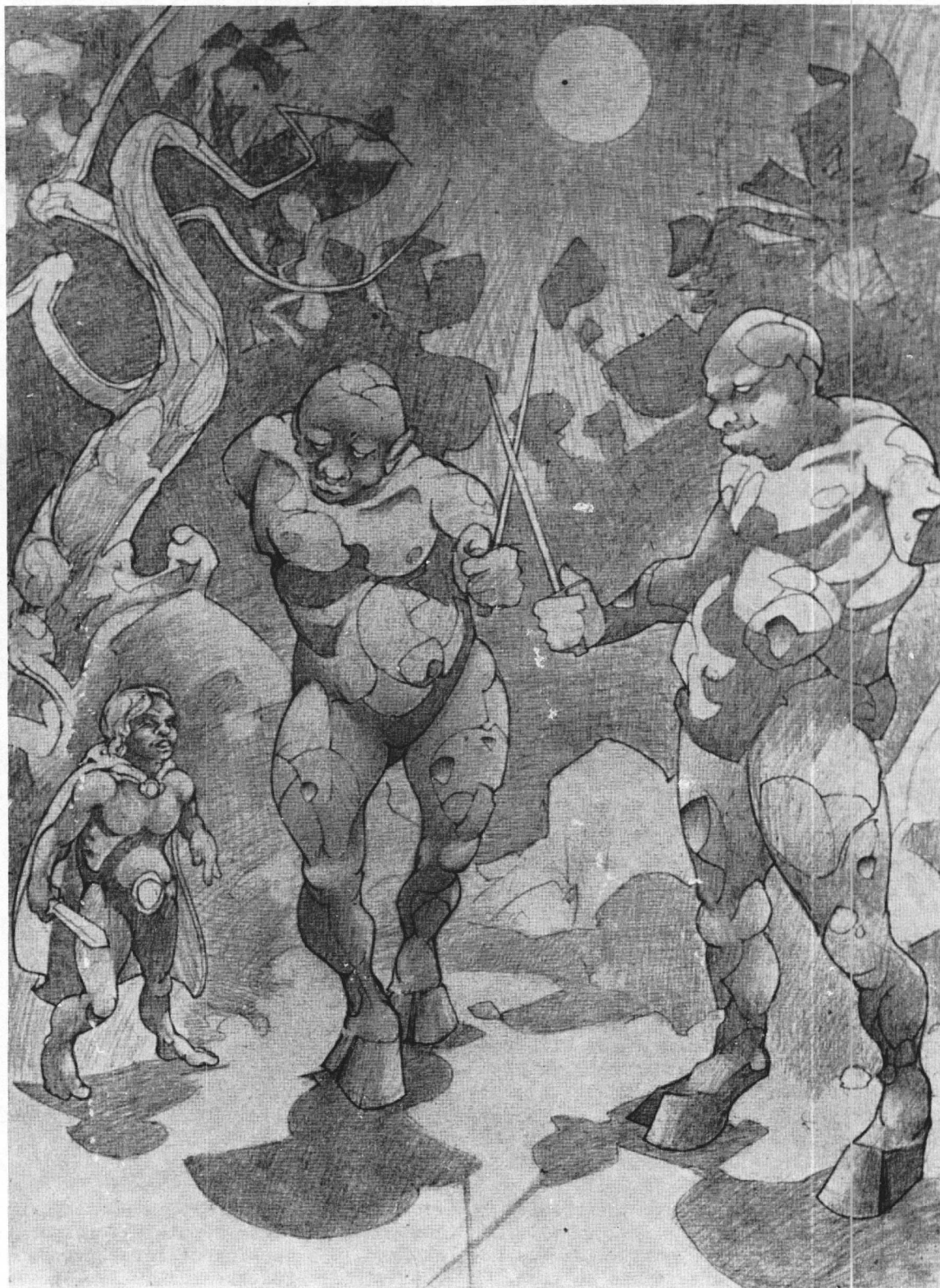
Both of Thenis' hands were attached to the elongate bowl-shaped vessel, while Arda clung tightly with just one of his hands. With his free hand, Arda found by chance the icicle-oar and with unthinking anger he thrust it deep into his brother's eye.

Thenis stood up and screamed with the cold spear stuck in his eye, shimmering green fluid oozing from the wound, and then he fell back into the sea with a splash that carried the earth away like a bobber on a monstrous tidal wave. Arda did not see the earth go, but he could not have chased after it anyway. Even in death, Thenis held on to the ship with both hands and Arda could not move quickly while towing such a burden as Thenis provided.

The power of Iodonis was so intense that he raised the earth from chaos by strength of will and was thereby so overcome with the joy of success that he wept over the planet. His tears cooled and solidified the once red and tenuous globe and these tears became oceans. Then he breathed atmosphere onto the world and later would make trees and men. But presently he had to return to the bottom of the universe and turn the boat into common ice which instantly vanished in a cloud of steam, utterly destroyed at such a burning temperature.

Arda's hand was now free and he wandered away from the body of Thenis, wondering where the boat had gone, until he completely forgot it had ever existed. So lacking of intelligence or memory was he that Arda eventually forgot even that he had once had a brother, remembering much less that he had murdered him, and before long he

stumbled upon a small silver orb floating about on chaos. This became the focus of his attention and he took it up as his newest possession. The silver orb is now the earth's moon and someday you must hear the tale of how Iodonis won it from the imbecile titan Arda.



PRISONER OF THE OMEGA

© 1981 by William Scott Home

To pass from a reading of scriptures to a reading of their substance might seem a simple step, but it was in fact a transformation. From following the pale reflections of gutturals upon a page to listening for the long amorphous syllables spoken through the fabric of the universe --- audible from the beaks of volcanoes, the auricles of seashells, the keening of hooks and risers through the chat of the upper air --- both his ears and eyes began diffusing throughout the integument of his body, fusing in their perceptions of those vast vibrations which pass beyond the grasp of ink and sinuosity. Abstruse limitations had been clamped on these sibilants and dentals as they were trapped, one by one, by quizzical jealous scribes, who having seized them maintained in domesticity the very archetypes which quivered through their bodies indifferently with the whole matrix of the cosmos, coming themselves with whatever relationship to those pallid reflections to mould and rule those very scribes.

If he knew that the much-quoted second commandment was of them all the vainest --- itself the issue of that slow reduction of clear tones and jagged phonemes to graven images, visible formulations of abstract sounds (and like the clear tones of a song spattered in neumes across a page, bubbles of sound tintured with the joy and freedom they mime, compress), fixing sculptures to the wind and waves of vowels, the mineral consonants, founding less than intruding upon that manspeech from which all thoughtspeech buds --- he was consoled by the fact that there are scripts among us still which defy the power of any living man to read, in which are bottled vibrations unimaginable, unvoiced, fossil sounds extinct from tongues and brains of men, but which have a being in some tonal horizon... haunts among the world's rich ringings. A search through the vocabulary of many earths might reclaim them, but that thought, having its thrill of confrontation with the unknown, bore likewise that terror which rides upon it like the remora upon the shark.

The Kabbalists had perceived the preexistence of their letters, as letters only, anterior to man and even his world, but could not detect that differentiation between the elemental humming and the awkward shapes which housed them, which had themselves writhed and transmuted in the crucible clutch of time. Even the digamma and koppa of the Greeks had eluded both their glottal muscles and their gluey brushes in the end, spun free through blotting mists while the brands of other

and more docile letters were pushed by those hunting the exiles' peculiar sounds again, with less success. Glottals, clicks, and nasals, eluding both inky grasp and rebounding tympana among most peoples, appeared to have the highest potential for independence, dancing like colours against the molecular landscape, unchained or rarely reduced to the flat submission of the page. That there was power there none had observed.

But tracing a history among these oscillating tones, he was struck by the persistence of certain immutable sounds, caught in form after form by people after people, nowhere changed in essence. Those smooth and unharmonious tones which were the most neutral --- having in their vibrations none of those jagged edges, the capitals of dissonance, which convey the greatest identity, limn the most distinctive faces, --- flagged down through tongues without metamorphosis from age to age.

Above all that gentle hollow ringing from the fulness of space, the holy sound which had captivated so many tropists toward the unseen ultimates --- the great focus of inflowing life and time, the Great O, OMeGa, --- echoed again and again both in the commerce of man and at the apex of his dreams. Paradisiacal longings tended to swirl into it as into a whirlpool; bubbles of sound, the clarity of sun-song, the languages of the universe itself --- the battlecries of birds, abyssal rumblings in the sea, the manifold dialects whose sun-touched echo through the atmosphere themselves fell into that hollow tone --- were its creatures, incarnated it, unbonded to other entities.

Even in his day, Jenny's tonoscope had revealed that the clear ringing enunciation of the Great O formed in the inert semiliquid matter which was its index a perfect sphere, adding one new dimension to its stake upon the lips. Thus had the planets (allowing perhaps for a slight lisp or cleft, a dialectic variant, their geoidal warping) been bubbled up from the thick sputum of the primal lava, and from its chaotic seed, the apollonian fire-spheres of lightning-talk wooed out of the heavy broth at dawn the microspheres of germ-life, the megasphaeromorphs which swelled to titans... in which the basic vibrations of this universe, springing across the earth and its elements within his body for billions of years, had waited for the opening of a window to them. Their harmonies rang together in a broadside symphony from horar to quark, gluing world to world, nebula to galaxy --- yet the diabolical power of the Great O had confined him apart from this ecstasy, this fulfilment, planting him upon a surface sadistically finite while seemingly unbounded, parcelling out his being into sensitive pastilles which could support his dreams or enable his awareness of the responses

summoning him in the totality of their inharmonious billions, compelled by the complexity of their fusion to rot the foundations of his potential, susceptible even to fragmentation by the mere intensity of those very vibrations he would seek out.

In those limits, then --- the puffed planets and the blown cells, the clots of galaxies --- he saw the glassy boundaries which had been laid upon his spirit. Even the plasma furnaces of the stars, or those cold massive slag-lodes to which they sank, were composed by this returning cycle of memory, ambition, and painful dust, of law and fate, barring even the best-armed of iconoclasts from breaking through to those demesnes of reality and perfection which but shivered the walls of his prison, and spoke of vibrations he could express only in unspoken formulae or in symbols alien to all letters --- lest those themselves prove even more subtly treacherous in consort than had the Great O in solitude.

Yet it had not elected subtlety. Rather it had mounted a frontal attack upon the ylem itself, and as sphere had triumphed. He realised that it was among the most powerful of all the archontes and archetypes, the peerless primate of entities. Neither in the sum of his cells nor the summation of his cells and planets could he transgress the bubble-barrier; had not the archimage Einstein postulated, invitingly --- consciously proselytising? --- that the cosmos in its wholeness was ensorcelled by the Great O, aligning itself utterly with the geometry of a sphere (whether positive or negative depended merely on the vantage-point of the final mind) in which the Monster Sphere, limiting the essence of psyche as much as mattergy, exulted? By blurred degrees the spheres of beginning passed to spheres of ending. He was prisoner of the omega.

Of all those demons men have conjured out of their own heads with the flute-music of invention and set to dancing around them in time to their sympathetic shudders of horror and ecstasy, this caesaric collapsar alone had been insufficiently demonified to warn any treader of the ever-unknown path. Its danger lay in its simplicity: nowhere were there excrescences or members on which to hang recognisable fangs or claws, scales or horns --- and so overwhelming was its magistry, that those earliest prophets who had foreseen empery in capturing in chiselled and illuminated images the flutters of the planes of space-time had not seen its dominance, its black majesty --- its horror as an arbiter of boundings and conclusions, subjecting them to eternal recurrence for as long as conscious mind could function. Even he could no longer imagine in what mode or model such hideous power could be cast, or in what body to design the smooth-walled worm which rode like a gape-mawed incubus that jewel, the will to freedom and oneness,

which had been bred mysteriously in every spherical cell, every hemispherical brain, by some transcendent, and now evaporated, gong.



ARTEMIS

that there is wealth
in your motion
I cannot deny
yet my yearning
walks a nameless land
where none but the ages 'bide

that there are years
to guide me thro' that realm
my spirit is twilight-blest
yet shadowed my pattern
and there is ever
a darkness in my deeds.

lo! in the sundering of the seasons
my horns are bound with mistletoe
and even the beasts of the wood
aid in that endless binding
(O where now the Huntress?)

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THE FATE OF ENOCH WHATELY

© 1981 by Sol Kanemann and William Tredinnick

The unmelodious murmur of mineral-laden water greeted Enoch Whately as he descended the stairs with his infant niece held in the crook of one arm. She kicked her chubby legs and cried as Enoch, acolyte to beings he had never seen, held her to the chill wind wailing through the subterranean chamber--- a wind which was almost visibly black and whose source, he knew, was not of this world.

Although the chamber was deep beneath his late brother's mansion, ensorcelled windows admitted some little moonlight to reveal dimly a huge, tentacled idol in one corner.

Enoch tugged a robe over his thin shoulders, for the air here was damp. He smiled and contemplated the child. The time at last was near; no orison protected her, and the stars were in line for the first time in seventeen years.

"I *will* prevail! Ia! Ia! S'Stru-Oth! Ihagn-aghtr-aa S'Stru-Oth!"

A lectern stood before the enormous, squat obscenity hewed from the same volcanic outcropping on which the mansion was built, and he placed a tattered parchment on it. Reading with difficulty words designed for no human throat, he stumbled more than once.

The child's sobbing broke his concentration and he cursed. He could feel sweat dampen the collar of his robe. He shuddered. What if he had misread or misunderstood some portion of the yellowed text?

He finished the final portion with a sigh of relief. His one remaining task was to slay the child.

His heart began to pound --- had he heard footsteps?

He quickly turned. "Who dares!" he shrieked, peering into the darkness.

"I," said a quiet voice.

He turned again. An old man stood by the lectern, the skin of his face much like the parchment from which Whately had read.

"Who are you?" whispered Enoch Whately.

The old man didn't answer, but gestured with distaste at the idol. "It is written that you shall not rear up an image, nor serve it," he said. "Such abominations did not exist from the Beginning, nor will they be with us forever."

"No! No!" Whately cried madly, reaching beneath the lectern for his knife. "He will come! It is time!"

"It is *not* time," the old man stated. "Like an abortive birth which melts away, or a still-born child which never sees the sun, so, too, shall all your odious labors be in vain."

Whately raised the knife which seemed to hesitate in his hand. Again he raised it, desperately striving to plunge it into his niece's body and thus finish the *Calling*. Again his arm hesitated, and tears of frustration wet his cheeks.

Something had reached across the ether into his brain and for a brief moment he was riding the sky on pallid rays, traveling Cosmic distances at the bidding of One he knew as Yiggael, the Far-Seeing.

Forgotten were the sacrifice and the old man. He knew only that the moon's light had faded and, streaming through the colored panes in its place were shifting green and yellow beams arcing and changing hue, spreading swiftly through the air. With an enormous thunderclap, *something* rode out of the sky on those rays into Enoch Whately's chamber.

"There are beings," continued the old man, "created for vengeance, and in their fury they lay on grievous torments." He took the infant from Whately's trembling grasp and slowly mounted the stairway. Whately's shadow suddenly lengthened before him as if a small sun were forming in the darkness at his back. There came an unearthly humming as of numerous hives and, as the old man turned, Enoch Whately stared into his compassionate eyes and knew the awful truth at last.

An icy grip rested on his soul and he screamed and cried aloud to the Deity he had blasphemed for more than twenty years. He could not turn, could not move, as he heard his fate approach.

He felt the stones trembling beneath the monotonous slap-slapping of horrible steps coming ever nearer, dragging hard talons with them.

His very blood seemed frozen, and he screamed once as the black-robed Warder of the Elder Gods shuffled into view, its beak-nosed triangular face wrinkling down at the man and speaking in an authoritative, star-born tongue.

The child on the stairs gurgled and smiled, soothed by the tone of the strange words and by the weird, continuous humming in the background.

Enoch Whately's mouth remained open in a silent scream as his body flickered and melted, losing its human mask to reveal the degenerate features of a *follower*.

The words the Warder spoke were understood by no human now living, but this did not disturb the servant of those named by the earthlings of antiquity the *Elder Gods*. It was enough that the child lived and Enoch Whately's attempt to raise the Ancient One had failed.

Gathering into its arms the mewling and whimpering thing that had been Enoch Whately, the Warder left as it had come; its destination an incredibly distant and horrible alien star.

There was no sign of the girl or the old man, but his whispered "I am sorry" mingled with the fading echoes of Enoch Whately's last, desperate shriek.

NEVER TOUCHING

© 1981 by Eddy C. Bertin

Zone 0 He was watching the mobile, watching it turn in the warm air, the many multi-colored fish always turning around each other, face and eyes and tail, turning around their axes, turning around the others. Suspended on their silken threads, they moved like silent dancers through the empty ballroom of air, the golden and the black, the red and the yellow and the white, their staring eyes eager for each other, eager to meet and caress, their glances crossing with each turn, but never touching, no, never touching.

Ralph He had never liked wine; she knew it. They had been together for some time now, and she should have known about his habits and dislikes by now. That was what their quarrel had been all about. It wasn't that she wasn't very intelligent, or that he couldn't talk to her about the things that interested him. It was just that he had *told* her that he didn't like wine; she should have known better than to bring a bottle of the stuff. He was sure he had told her a thousand times!

Caroline And now he didn't like wine! Well, well, what do you know! When they first had been going together, he hadn't minded at all. She liked to drink a glass of wine now and then, and she knew he had tasted this particular brand before, which was why she had bought it. So why in heaven's name did he have to make such a god-damn fuss about it? She had pleasantly asked him to be calm; there hadn't been the slightest reason for him to smash the bottle against the wall, specially not exactly against the picture hanging on the wall, the first picture in which they had ever been photographed together. Of course it had all been a silly pretense on his part, the only thing he had wanted was to smash that picture. She knew now that he hated her, that he must have hated her for these last months. He was just tired of her, as he had become tired of all the women who certainly had lived here before her. He was tired of her --- she felt it in bed --- she tasted it in the coldness of his kisses.

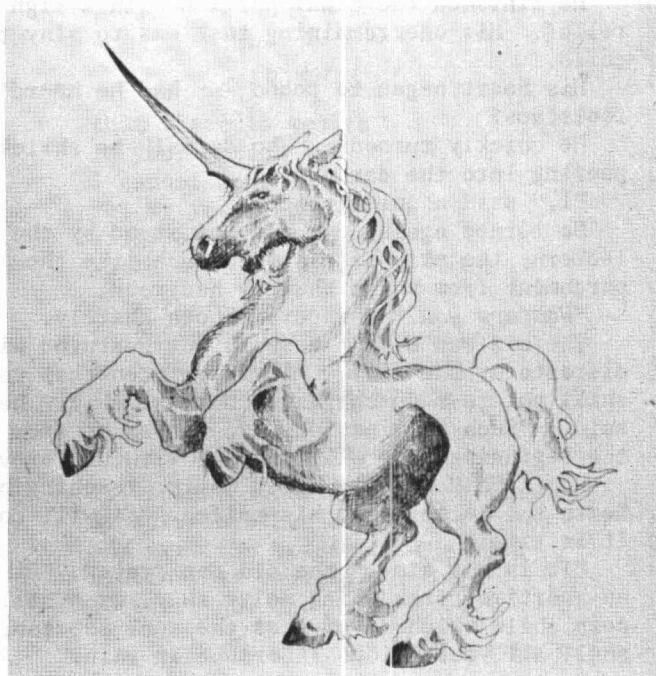
Ralph Of course, maybe he shouldn't have yelled so hard, maybe she had meant well. But after all, she *had* bought that blasted bottle and why did she have to throw it from the table as he had said that he didn't like wine? But then, probably she only wanted a chance to have a good cry, and make a Big Thing out of such a small incident. She had been acting strangely the last time, ever since they had met that guy at the party, what was his name, well, it didn't

matter. But from *that* moment on, she had become frigid in bed, withholding her lips when he wanted to kiss her, unresponsive to his caresses, lying beside him like a beautifully sculptured block of ice.

Caroline And if that was what he wanted, well, he could get it, she'd walk out on him, just like *that*! He had never loved her; she had been only a toy for his desires, something to play with and then discard as something useless. Something to be amused with, something to tolerate. He had never treated her as a woman.

Ralph If she wanted out that badly, she could have gone quietly, couldn't she? There had been no need for the stinging words, the insults. There had been no need for her to throw the contents of her glass in his face!

Zone 0 He mounted the ladder, slowly, carefully placing his slippery feet. Then he looked at the fish of the mobile, closely studying their stupid, unresponding, paper eyes, saying nothing, knowing nothing. He began cutting the threads, one by one, and saw them flutter down, down to cover the body of the girl who was lying there, very quiet now, very still, as blood and a grey mass oozed out of her fractured skull. Small pieces of glass from the broken bottle were still standing upright in her head, pointing up at him like crimson daggers. She was spoiling his expensive carpet that way. The smoke of his cigarette was lazily curling upwards, stinging his eyes, as he cut the mobile down. He watched the fish swim down peacefully, like old colored leaves, and even while falling, they never, no, never, touched....



WANDERERS OF THE WATERS

by H. Warner Munn

[Editor's note: this is the third in a trilogy, beginning with THE MERLIN STONE in WB 12 and THE STAIRWAY IN THE SEA in WB 13. The author thinks this piece will stand alone; I don't, and I urge you to read the other two before embarking on one final sea voyage to end all such voyages!]

PRELUDE

A glowing spark in the vastness of space. Closer. Fire. Raging fountains of flame, painting the undersides of clouds, miles thick and issuing upward from this sphere of molten rock, which seethes with volcanoes rearing birth-pangs, shouting agonies to the uncaring stars.

Milleniums pass. Wrinkles form deep chasms. Valleys which are broader than the continents that rise and fall, bathed in steaming deluges. These wash both the heights and the abysses, descending in roaring torrents to rise again in hissing steam and join the clouds from which they came.

Time brings change. The shrouds thin. Now the water remains comparatively quiet. Warmed by the land below and the sun above, which now appears, it swarms with life. It is a broth of chemicals, a nursery for the future --- a promise of creation for plant and animal --- an arena for savage contests in the satisfaction of hunters --- an opportunity for the creation of souls.

Phytoplankton. Zooplankton. Tiny plants and animals appear. Krill. Dinoflagellates. Diatoms.

Years go by in millions. The seas become peopled with trilobites. It is the Silurian Age. Even then, there are predators. Among these, for a hundred million years, the Euripterids prey. They are spider-like creatures, large as lions, strong as gorillas, with massive crushing jaws.

Perhaps because of fear, some life now emigrates from the oceans to establish a precarious foothold on land. The sea-scorpions do not, but there are other dreads to come.

The thunder-lizards hold sway, cleaving the waters in their myriad forms, wallowing in the marshes, shaking the ground, slanting the airy avenues of the skies --- voracious appetites seeking satiation. Some remain in the birthing waters; some turn their backs on the unfriendly soil and return to the seas, seeking the depths when dispossessed by the mammals.

There are survivors through geologic and climatic changes.

Now the giant beasts have their time of domination, through eons of tooth and claw, satisfying roaring lusts and hungers, owning in their turn earth and air, and some --- in their turn --- also seek the fostering mother of all --- the sheltering Sea. Not from necessity but from choice.

Back come the whale; the dolphin; the amphibians. They face the problem of change. To cope with this, the brains enlarge. The convolutions increase and deepen. Here lies emotion, language, communication; courage --- affection.

Speech and song echo in the deeps as also upon the land. Parallel developments in both mediums take place.

Idealism, sympathy, understanding; compassion --- love. The cousins of the shore and sea develop in their own ways. Eventually they must impinge upon one another, either as predators or friends.

CHAPTER ONE

The Beautiful Day

It began as murder.

At dawn there had been mist on the water, but by noon this cleared and visibility was good. The factory ship, Rorqual, had several days earlier left its anchorage in Royal Sound at Desolation Island and cruising deeper into the rich Southern Ocean had come into sight of broad expanses of krill.

With diesels throttled low and keen eyes scanning the red-brown patches of huge concentrations of the little shrimp-resembling animals, those who fed upon these rich pastures were being sought.

It takes ten tons of krill to grow one ton of whale. Sailing through strips up to a quarter mile long and two hundred yards across, Erlend Isaksen, Captain of the Rorqual, estimated casually that there might be thirty to forty million tons swarming in eddy currents stretching to the horizon.

Far to the East, his powerful glasses sighted his nearest neighbor cruising the farther edge, the Japanese factory ship, Yamamo Maru. The catcher boats were spread widely for the hunt, working busily among a pod of sei whales, poor in oil but rich in meat.

"Those Japanese!" Immediately regretting his scorn, Isaksen turned a half-sneer into a cough. The first mate, who stood close, apparently had not heard. Isaksen had the reputation of having no arrogance within him. The Rorqual could afford to be choosy. The take had been good, with its store of oil almost complete and gained mostly from humpback and fin.

The other, perhaps, could not.

He sighted again upon the distant double funnels, arranged side by side to allow whales to be dragged by immense tongs up the slipway and so along the center of the ship.

Yes, the Yamamo Maru rode high. Luck had been poor. He wondered how the Russian, far to the south and working the ice edge, was making out. There had been little recent news.

He sighed. The First turned, an unspoken question in his eyes. Isaksen spoke hastily. They were good friends and from the same Norwegian town. There were few secrets between them and they understood one another.

"Just thinking, Magnus. A little homesick for Signe and the girls."

Magnus Nielsson nodded without speaking. Laconic by nature and subject himself to dark moods, he was no stranger to introspective brooding. He held out his hand for the binoculars and scanned the sea.

Suddenly he stiffened. Almost midway between the two ships and their questing catchers --- a blow! Not the double 'V' of a right whale; not the steeply angled one of a longed for sperm, with a treasure of certainly enough oil to see them prosperously home with an added bonus of spermaceti and maybe ambergris, valuable as jewels.

No, neither of these. The tall and still rising plume of water, steam and oily air marked the giant of the oceans: the spouting of a rare, protected and seldom seen Great Blue!

He pointed and stammered in his excitement. Isaksen grabbed the binoculars and sprang to the radio.

"Forget the sei!" he shouted, as though his catchers could hear his unaided voice across the miles separating them from the Rorqual. "Cast loose if you are fast! Let the Japs have them. Center on the Blue!" But already they were swinging away from their first quarry and others were doing the same. He knew that all were loading, unless some had expended their harpoons and bob-lances.

A thin fume of Diesel smoke veiled the krill meadows. Through them and into this, the Rorqual followed. The plume vanished as the Great Blue, alarmed by the roaring engines, sounded. Both men on the Rorqual's bridge knew that the huge lungs could not have been filled in that short time. The whale, largest animal that has ever lived on land or sea, must soon rise. Where?

The two factory ships circled like wrestlers ready to come to grips. The catchers, dwarfed by their immensity, ready to turn their cannon upon one another, swung away in tight spirals. Not the first sighting, but the first strike, would win the treasure. Where?

Then, not far from the Norqual, a welling up-

ward of the waters as the whale breached. It was a dome of green, sprinkled with the brown of krill, a bubble of liquid not of air. Another blow, but this time more like a hurried gasp. The mighty cetacean surfaced and beside it another, tiny only in comparison. A huge female, ninety feet long, close to 100 tons of bone and flesh, equivalent to a herd of elephants or 1500 men--- motivated by hunger, anger and --- can it be doubted? --- by love.

For, as she rolled and eyed these invaders from the land, she protectively flung one immense flipper around her baby and held it close.

No catcher was near enough to fire upon them. She gasped hurriedly and sounded. It could be seen that the small one, itself as large as one of the hunting craft, was suffering for air. It struggled for release, but the two vanished from sight together.

Now the combined fleet, bomb lance cannons ready, marking the direction of that enormous magnitude of disturbance, began to trail the flight of the fleeing pair. The small sei whales were forgotten, the living lingering as though they knew they were no longer in danger, some nosing the carcasses that stained the water with blood from wounds of explosions or from congregating sharks that ripped and tore.

It was unnecessary to mute the engines in this pursuit. The technique of close contact known as prøyser-jag hurried the chase to allow no deep breathing and short submersions.

The end was inevitable. Each factory ship turned on its tracing asdic equipment. The high frequency pulses which frighten whales to frenzy began resounding at their limit.

As the fugitives became weary, the little one first which the mother would not desert, they surfaced. At first it was possible to come up for air at intervals of less than ten minutes, still outrunning the catchers. Then the intervals slowed to two or three. They appeared, blowing, gasping, submerging only when they must to elude the relentless hunters.

At last the baby lay belly up, exhausted. In vain the mother clasped it tight and tried to sink once more. It slipped loose. She nudged it hopelessly and turned in fury upon her pursuers. Men shouted. Engines roared. Boats scattered like hens before a rabid dog, as she tore through their midst, completely upon the surface in her rage.

On either side the cannon roared from the untouched boats, though some, closely packed, splintered and sank in her wake and men flew high, spread-eagled in the air.

Now more blood streamed in oily scarlet to draw the sharks. Now there was shouting, exultant and joyous from the Norqual. The first strike had been made! Now boats of two nations faced one another, with nervous fingers on deadly

triggers and lethal tempers rising. Here a fortune had been won and lost and --- perhaps--- if no one else knew, so far away, this could be reversed.

And --- a voice from the dying mother --- for whales *do* talk --- came piteously beseeching across the watery waste to be heard, far away, by sympathetic ears.

The baby, almost recovered, nuzzled against her side. Once the flipper rose to come gently down across its back. It never moved again, as the hollow lance attached to an airline was thrust deep into the mother's belly and the body cavity inflated.

Neither did the baby move away, as the lucky catcher, engines straining, began to tow the carcass toward the Rorqual.

Now the butchering, the processing. Then the factory ship --- its tanks full --- could turn toward the North. The Rorqual catchers, wary of those who could become enemies, swung in.

Men of the Yamamo Maru, still resentful, reluctantly answered peremptory calls and, cursing, turned toward the remaining pod of sei. They shrugged, but faced the inevitable. It was hard to lose prosperity almost within one's grasp. It is even harder to lose one's life.

Now, captive and secured, the cow was winched, tail first, up the Rorqual's slipway and onto the flat. Almost before it had come to a standstill it was attacked by the men with long-handled, razor sharp knives to cut great slits down the entire length to free the blubber.

Although no veins or arteries existed in this coating to be unreeled, rivers of blood coursed down the slipway, where the baby flung itself frantically to come to its mother.

At first, some of the flensers laughed. Then, as the misery and hopelessness of the little one's efforts became apparent, one man looked up at the watching captain.

He nodded slowly, knowing that there was no other choice. He struck his hand down on the rail and turned away, as the man who did not laugh picked up a rifle and began, grim-faced, to shoot --- one magazine of cartridges after another, until movement ended and the quiet body slipped away to the depths.

But there had been other sounds from the baby. Sounds which no one on the Rorqual could have heard without electronic aid. Sounds of pain and fear and these *were* heard by one who came rushing but was still so far away.

Sunset. Redness on the water encircling the Rorqual. Crimson waves lapping against the Japanese ship. Scarlet stripes drifting behind both as they moved among the slaughtered whales, the pod not decimated --- too weak, that word! exterminated --- in that area of the Antarctic.

Now there was meat for the butcher shops of Tokyo. Soap, margarine, glycerine. Varnish, printing ink, cosmetics. Cat-food and food for dogs. And song from many voices stilled.

And now --- for the first time in centuries of slaughter --- retribution!

Up and out of the stained waters --- a rising! It began with an upthrust of five tall prongs, blunt, each tipped with a sinister curved hook, jet black, but gleaming with water encarnadined with floating gore and the sinking sun.

As it rose, the aghast sailors saw that a thick flexible web joined these fingers together. In an instant the hand towered higher, the wrist, the arm, fit for a Titan.

Behind it loomed a dome of ebony, ridged with a crest of bone, the smooth, hairless carapace fitted with eyes larger than an elephant's skull. These blinked in the light, but fixed themselves fiercely upon the cowering men.

They saw, briefly, nostrils that flared and closed, issuing steaming vapor with the sound of a liner's booming blast, or a conch which Poseidon might use to call Tritons to battle.

They saw cheeks, lined with sharp edged scales, and open jaws which brought them no comfort. There was a smile because Nature had created one, but it was the smile of the crocodile.

And there was a tongue which thrust out, hard pointed and huge, behind rows and rows of fangs.

The monstrous head rose upon a neck where gills flexed open and shut. It rose out of the sea as though it would never stop, higher than the bulwarks, higher than the rail, rushing ever into the upper air to disclose a massive chest plated with oblong flexible panels of chitin, like the armor which protects back and belly of the giant sea-turtle.

It rose, with the impetus of its vengeance-motivated hurry from the depths. Then, as it sank --- but not far --- the other arm appeared, to seize with powerful hand upon the taffrail, bearing down the stern of the Rorqual with its weight, casting screaming men into the water.

The disturbed waves rushed inward along the slipway. The free hand followed, tearing loose cables, to reach, grasp and pet the almost unrecognizable remains of the Great Blue.

It hooked steely talons into the winch itself, which pulled free like a child's toy, with sharp reports as bolts parted from the deck.

Drawn carefully from this man-made cavern inside the ship, snarled in wire and sheathed in blood of the butchery, the body of the mother was hauled out, raised, inspected, and touched fondly with fingers that probed and stroked.

Milk which would never nourish another baby poured out with the affectionate pressure. The

huge head of the amazing hominid turned, scanning the upper deck of the Rorqual with eyes pooled with reflected fire. They seemed to glow with an angry inner light on those few sailors who, recovering a little from the initial panic, had grabbed up rifles and were shooting.

Contemptuously, the giant swept them aside, leaned a massive arm upon the side and pressed the Rorqual down. It sank with an uprush of bubbles from bursting bulkheads and a roar of pleasure from the creature.

To the one survivor who surfaced and who was able to climb into a boat that tore loose, later to be picked up by the Russian factory ship, which was on the way North already, answering S.O.S. signals, all this brought temporary madness.

He, disregarded as unimportant, had seen the Yamamo Maru driving in to help. He saw it stopped against all the power of its engines, pounded into fragments with one hammering hand, while the other held the pitiful carcass of the Great Blue against that unbelievably broad armored chest. He had seen the scattered boats swept away like chips.

And he had heard a recognizable word, over and over reiterated. The same that the savage laughing mouth had first shouted, when first those lurid eyes had caught sight of what had been drawn out of the Rorqual.

One word only, but he understood it, unexplainable that it should so be spoken, or that such a creature could speak at all, or be more than a survival from some past age.

One word, but it was enough, added to what he had experienced. A word, expressed in Stentorian thunder, repeated many times.

It intimated much and it was not meant for the creature's enemies, as he destroyed that which floated on that sea of horror and carnage and as he disappeared from sight, once more it bellowed out while submerging, carrying the body of the mother whale into the abyss from which he had come.

It was a wail of anger. "*Friends!*" A scream of grief.

It was no longer a beautiful day.

CHAPTER TWO

Twilight for Man?

Alastair returned the bound volume of the *London Query* to its place on the shelf. He returned to the comfortable and capacious chair where he had been sitting and reading aloud to the small group in his father's library. He clasped his hands, sighed and looked at their grave faces.

"So that is how it began," he said. "I never really knew."

There was an instant of quiet, in which only the bubbling of an ascending column of air in the nearby saltwater aquarium was heard. A little seahorse bobbed forward and back among fronds of kelp.

Sir Hugh Lamont, who had been standing there, but listening attentively, now came back to the long mahogany table and placed his hands affectionately on the shoulders of his wife.

She smiled, and looked up as he took her fingers in his warm clasp. "How cold you are, Shiela. Shall I fetch your shawl?"

She drew him down on his side of the ornate, upholstered gossip bench. They leaned across the S shaped back between them and kissed, uncaring of the fond smiles of the others.

There was much understanding between them all, especially Tammas McLeod and Anne, their daughter. Quiet communion was good, now that the children were sound asleep upstairs.

To visit their grandparents, all the way from the Highlands, had been a great treat and they had taken noisy advantage of it.

Shiela said, "No, dear." Her lips quivered. "Just a momentary chill. I was thinking as he read. I was remembering. Too much, maybe, but it is hard to forget, even after all these years.

"Alastair, I am so glad that you have given up the sea, now that it is no longer really ours. Anne --- must you and Tammas live in Pixy Glen? Knowing what we do, don't you worry sometimes? Don't you wonder if maybe --- ? How about the children?"

Tammas laughed. "Now, Lady Shiela --- Mother --- Lord, I'll ne'er get used to calling you that! You'll be well knowing that Pixy Glen is a sight safer than it is where you live.

"We of the Highlands look skeptic at all you Lowlanders, most of all the doited ones in the cities. Remember, some eldritch things even came up the Thames during the war."

Anne gave him a quieting dig in the ribs with her elbow. "Bide a bit, love. Don't you know Grandmothers always worry? These days one place is not much more dangerous than another, is it? The Wanderers, if they want to, can go anywhere, so long as they are not out of water too long. Pixy Glen is not too far."

"But there is no reason since the Truce." Tammas placed his arm across her shoulders and hugged her close. Now it was the turn of the elder pair to watch and smile. "Ten years of fighting. Two years of peace. They have what they want --- we have what we need. We trade what each lacks.

"The Sea and the Land have come to terms at last."

"Not so." Alastair shook his head. "Brother-in law, you are wrong there. There is nothing permanent in an armistice. There can never be a true peace between peoples who are so different, whose ambitions are so far apart. Even though we

stem from common ancestors, and we recognize them as people, still we have diverged too much. Our aims are not the same."

"You think, then, both sides are only resting?"

"Resting, recuperating, rebuilding. Whatever you want to call it. Planning, surely. This is a stalemate which can be broken at any time."

"We have our politicians making secret and deadly dangerous plans. They always have. They always will. There is little doubt that the Wanderers have theirs. And we know that there are factions on both sides eager to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the rest."

"Ah yes," said Sir Hugh. "That, if nothing else, proves a common humanity. Then, what of the future?"

Alastair replied. "There were some rather purple passages, I thought, in that obviously fictionized account in the *Questioner*. The writer got carried away a little, but he did come up with a good line that I can agree with, even if his imagination did fill in some of the spots that the survivor of the Rorqual left open."

"In the beginning of the account, do you remember? 'It began with murder!' I will add something to that, which it is hard to fault, and say --- It has ended in war!"

"And wars do not safely end in armistices?" Sir Hugh briefly scanned serious faces. "Alastair is right. What we have is no more than a breathing spell."

"We have destroyed some individuals, some gatherings, some --- shall I call them armies? They have sunken our ships, crushed our submarines. Their scientists have recycled our atomic wastes and other detritus we regarded as trash and used them against us."

"Yes," agreed Tammas. "And avoided our dredges and most of our depth bombs, remained aloof from our deposits of poisons and sought the depth of the abysses against our sonar and television probes."

"And so much lost forever. So much beauty gone." Anne's voice was low and sad. "The wonders of Istanbul. The priceless paintings in Florence. I think I regret Venice the most, sunken deep in marsh and mud with all its treasures."

"I wonder what the Wanderers lost to match these. They must have had much they prized that cannot be replaced."

Her father said, "Yes, we had certain gains, but not to equal our losses. Since the Straits were closed with their dam and the banks of Suez levelled, the Mediterranean has shrunk down by evaporation into the two lakes it originally was. Now we have more land surface all around them to occupy, but seeing that there are not so many people as before the war, that is of small

benefit just now."

"And the weather, too. So cold in our mountains." Anne shivered, although the library fireplace sent out a cheerful glow.

Sir Hugh went on. "Not too many of us realized that the Arctic Ocean was a natural thermostat for the world, before the Bering Straits were closed. The Red Sea is becoming stagnant with pollution, since Bab el Mandeb was blocked and the Persian Gulf is landlocked since the Wanderers built the dam at the Strait of Hormuz."

"You will be remembering how the battles at each place turned out. It is only lately that canals are being allowed to be built to bypass these. It is still forbidden by treaty to touch the dams."

"But we do have control of the air and of Space," Alastair interrupted.

"True, but only for a while, I am sure. They merely do not have anything comparable to prevent our use of either."

"So we are able to spy on their blockaders with our satellites."

"Yes, and blown whole congregations of them into scraps with conventional explosives and a few nuclear devices, before we found that for every success which we could not estimate, we had an equivalent loss to be considered much worse."

"After one bombing --- the destruction of Venice by undermining; after another --- the artificial tsunami that devastated the Japanese string of islands. Where is Midway now? Why is Mauna Loa still pressing out lava across half of Hawaii? Why and how have Vesuvius and Mt. Etna been triggered off, to remain continuously in eruption for the last five years?"

"Why does the Ring of Fire outline the Pacific with five hundred flaming mouths roaring at the skies?"

"I know, Father. These are not natural catastrophes. Their control of Earth's safety valves more than equals our artificial destroying appliances."

Tammas sighed. "And the cold. It is bad everywhere. The diversion of the Japanese Current has ruined the climate all along the West Coast of the States and Canada. The change in course of the Gulf Stream is freezing our own Isles to the ruin of our agriculture and the health of our decimated population."

Anne said, "Of course, dear, I know that. That is why we sued for peace. Did you know, Alastair, that while you were away, the Northern Lights were seen last winter in Spain? That had never happened before."

"I heard. Because of the cold and other reasons, we paid the indemnity they asked. A shameful thing to give them tools and what they wanted to use against us. That is why the armistice. And the politicians say 'We have not lost the war.' It will begin again."

"Alastair. No!" Shiela broke in. "It mustn't."

It can't! It is unthinkable that it should. We are not fighting now. Why can't it stay this way? We are surviving. We have come to terms. It seems their demands have been satisfied. Can we not let well enough alone now?"

The young man looked at his mother as though he could not understand.

"Completely impossible! Incredible! Two intelligent races, so incompatible, cannot occupy the same planet.

"Neither can leave. One must be destroyed. There can never be a lasting peace and an armistice is nothing but a breathing space for two enemies to back away from each other, glare, bind up their wounds, bleed a while and go at it once more.

"Oh, I know our ships sail again. I will seek a berth before long. England would have starved if the war had gone on much longer, but now the Channel ports are closed in the winter and a man can walk from Dover to Calais on the ice.

"I know we are getting food from the West, but I know that the wheatfields of Alberta do not stretch as far to the North as they did before. Icebergs float over the Dogger Banks. Ice sheaths the coasts of Greenland and Nova Scotia. Almost nothing grows in the Maritimes and Hudson Bay may never be entered again.

"This simply can't be allowed to continue. Why the Arctic Circle can now be considered as to be traced somewhere south of Iceland. Do you know the Lapps pasture their reindeer just north of Stockholm?"

"I am with you there, brother." Tammas rapped out the dottle from his pipe and refilled it. He took several deep puffs before reflecting aloud:

"I suppose, if it were truly known, that there are head men, rulers, politicians, war-chiefs --- I don't really know what to call them. The Wanderers must have a central government, maybe a King --- we certainly know they have good generals ---" he grinned, ruefully. "Probably they are saying pretty much the same to each other as we are here, tonight.

"Something like, 'So long as the land-dwellers live, they will always hate us.' 'They will never let us alone.' 'They will never give up.' 'If we do nothing, they will try to exterminate us!' 'Unless we drive them deep into their mountains; unless, perhaps, we destroy them and their works so they cannot recover, we can never feel safe.'

"I am sure that is what they are thinking and saying. Do you remember Cato and his 'Carthage must be destroyed!'"

"He never ended a speech in the Roman senate in any other way. I am pretty sure that in some Wanderer's Senate under the sea, in some undiscovered city we did not reach with our bombs, that some Wanderer Cato is closing with those very same words today.

"And he will go on saying them until more bombs fall, more islands and waterfront cities sink and more of our precious diminished land is reduced by earthquake and volcano.

"Of course, this may result in mutual destruction for both races. We all live on the very thin skin of the Orange and what is little more than a film of moisture in comparison.

"We can no longer afford to let politicians think for us."

Sir Hugh had been attentively listening, running impatiently tapping fingers along the carved dividing rim of the gossip bench. Shiela covered his hand with hers. He let the warm comfort remain briefly, then withdrew to gesture with a pointing finger at a World Map on the farther wall. This had been recently made. It showed not only the revised coastlines, but also the area blocked away from sea traffic.

Here were the new sea lanes being used and those forbidden by the treaty between Man and Wanderer.

Here also, in murky scarlet, were indicated the areas which had been blasted. One could easily imagine the still present spouting and surging of deep nuclear activity. Probable currents stemming from these were shown, which must be avoided by both humans and the Dwellers below.

It was suspected that, having been exposed to such contamination for many years, the Wanderers were far better fitted to withstand such peril. After all, they had used Earthmen's waste to terrible advantage, with apparently small danger to themselves. Their science had to be superior in a sense, to find use in material which had been thrown away.

Hugh got up and took a pointer.

"We destroyed the collection of dwellings at Devil's Reef" --- the pointer touched briefly a spot off the Massachusetts coast --- "and it seems likely that all the amphibians who used to terrorize Arkham, Kingsport and Innsmouth are gone from that area.

"Unfortunately most of the coastline was cauterized.

"We incinerated Nan Madol, that Atlantis of the Pacific, and there has not been much talk of Great Cthulhu since the line of bombs was dropped all along the Marianas Trench.

"There may be good reason for that." He laughed and swept the pointer along its length.

"Think of it! Seven miles deep and we reached down and burned the land under all that water! Is it any wonder that the Wanderers retaliated by exploding the undersea caves beneath Los Angeles and San Francisco and drowning those cities with accompanying rips all along the San Andreas Fault?"

"You see, we each can reach the other. We use bombs. They do the same to utilize the greater forces of the Earth's weak spots and open cracks right down into the magma.

"Tit for Tat! You burn my people --- I drown

and burn yours! Still it was a long war."

As you said," commented Tammias. "This confirms a common humanity for both races. We learn slowly."

Anne looked seriously into her husband's face. "But there is more to humanity than war and killing and vengeance."

"Remember what the survivor of the Rorqual said he heard the Wanderer repeat so many times? He hugged the Great Blue to his breast and sank, still shouting into the depths."

"She was his friend. Humans killed her. He killed them. That was purely revenge, which is terrible, but nothing new in our history."

"There was affection, too. If the Wanderers, which do seem to be human in appearance, can feel emotion for animals like whales and dolphins, they must feel it more for themselves."

"Father, you told me how the Picts of Pixy Moss were once like us, only darker and smaller. Somehow they survived by making themselves into amphibians who could breathe both air and water. You said Grandfather Alastair told you that this was possible if the process of gestation was halted at the time the foetus possesses incipient gills."

"Now don't you think that if there were geneticists among the Picts, so long ago, who could do this and --- as we know --- there was an underground and underwater channel from Pixy Moss to the sea --- that similar geneticists have upheld the tradition? Can it be that these are the descendants of the Picts?"

"There had to be some who are naturally inclined toward giantism. That growth has been encouraged? The scientists would surely know which."

Sir Hugh faced his daughter with a dawning astonishment. The pointer drooped.

"Father called them The People. He spoke with pity and considerable compassion. Some fear, too, of course. He thought that those who were destroyed when Sandy Gowlie brought down the roof of the underground hiding place retreat to bury himself and them under fifty feet of mud were not the whole tribe."

"He believed those destroyed were only the leaders of many undersea settlements of transformed Picts, who used Pixy Moss as their Mecca, their Canterbury. It seems to be so."

"He contended that they used it only for their important religious ceremonies and did not live there. Maybe he was right. It does seem as though we can assume a more huge population of our cousins underwater than we dreamed of. What a pity that they are and must remain our enemies."

He turned again to the map. "Here you have it," he said in his most didactical voice, as though he was lecturing to a class of students. "The sea covers about 71 per cent of the Earth's surface. From the Moon, it looks like what it

really is --- a water planet."

"There are great ranges of mountains. There are other tremendous canyons in addition to the Mariana Trench --- remember Kapitan Manfred Bohnen's diary --- the submarine commander of the Cornelius Van Drebbel, who was trapped on the guyot of the Milwaukee Deep?"

"Remember how he saw the first Wanderer who crushed the sub in his giant hand? And how Bohnen was only saved by being in the specially strengthened conning escape tower which floated to the surface?"

"I had not thought to connect those creatures --- either the small ones or the monster --- with the Picts we saw and fought --- before this talk, before this night."

"Now, Anne, I believe with your woman's intuition, you have hit upon the truth. Maybe, just maybe, what worked against the little People to prevent them coming out and doing harm to crofters and shepherds in Pixy Glen, may also work against the giants they have created to protect them and fight us."

"We may have the final and decisive overlooked weapon that we need!"

"Then, Father!" cried Alastair, starting up from his chair. "Then, if so, the seas will be ours again! Then the manganese dredges can operate and I will be going back to work."

"We can destroy them. Break down the dams. Open the blockades and everything will go back to what it was before. The climate will change. Man --- our kind of Man --- will rule the sea and who rules the Sea rules the world. What is the weapon."

"Not so fast, my enthusiastic son." Sir Hugh favored him with a somewhat sour grin. "It may not be quite that easy and not very soon. At the least, let us hope that we have learned something. We may win the next war. There is bound to be one, as you have all assumed. We may not."

"Even suspecting what we do and feeling sure of our kinship in my heart, there is an obstacle to their complete destruction which it seems you have not considered."

Shiela rose, crossed the room, and slipped her arm into his.

"I think I know what you mean, my love." She laid her head on his shoulder. "Isn't it called --- The Golden Rule?"

"Precisely." He turned and kissed her. "It would be you, my tender and forgiving one, to be first to think of that."

"They *are* our kin, however far removed. We know the armistice cannot go on. We know that another war is inevitable. We know that it must be brutal on both sides and the sooner ended the sooner scars can heal. We do not know --- and this I most firmly will now deny --- that it must be to the death."

"If politicians on either side insist on prolonging such a mutually destructive conflict, it

is they who must go."

She said, "There is that old song I used to like so well. Remember? It dates back, even to the Napoleonic wars. Jeanette and Jeannot? The sweethearts say 'Let those who make the battles, be the only ones to fight.'"

"True. Perhaps it can at last set an example to future generations if a bloodless solution to this struggle can be found. We have a chance to establish a precedent --- the singling out of the true war criminals before the shooting starts on either land or under sea.

"We can no longer afford to have another Cuba wrecked to compensate for the sterilizing of another Milwaukee Deep."

The other two men rose and came to face the map, Anne between them. She said, "There has to be some greater center of population somewhere. There, before us. All the places that have been found and blasted during the war were small.

"There has to be something comparable to one of our great manufacturing cities that feed the other centers. Their heartland. Their most sensitive spot to touch, even if we no more than threaten it. But, where?"

Alastair shook his head at his sister. "Where, indeed?" He swept his arm widely across the map's surface. "I have seen a little of the bottom on the Telly scanners. We saw manganese. We saw sunken ships. We saw marine life.

"We even probed crevasses five miles down in the blackness, where hot springs rose and saw marvels of life no other human eye had seen before or suspected that such could be.

"During the war, we saw wreckage of the Wanderer's culture and that was marvelous and unsuspected, too, and bodies great and small.

"We think that something that went rapidly by, huge and long and swimming ribbonly, might have been the legendary Sea Serpent. It could have been a sixty foot eel. I don't think so.

"We never came across anything that looked like what you want to find. Never any large centers. Nothing to truly dominate with danger or dread, if we do come up with something new that will do that to them."

"We must," said Sir Hugh. "There is no other choice." And both Anne and Shiela nodded.

"I don't know what you and Anne have in the backs of your minds, Father. I do know something of the size of the undertaking. The old Aquarian Star that I was on at Parambatang did a lot of research, for all she was a gluttonous old manganese sucking rust-bucket.

"Most of this area in front of us here is the abyssal plain. There are 200 million kilometers of it --- 70 million square miles, if that sounds any better.

"Somewhere in all that, we must finger a spot no larger than a pinpoint, hover over it in some ship, menace it, force it to surrender, and what is even harder --- keep it permanently

in such fear that it will induce all other groups of hotheads --- wetheads --- to behave.

"Just what do you think those underneath will be doing to any ship that lingers like that more than a few minutes? It will be in the same size splinters as the Rorqual was, that I have just been reading about.

"Face it, all of you. You dream of the impossible. We are in the middle hours of the Twilight of Man!"

CHAPTER THREE

Back to Pixy Moss

From Loch Linnhe to Moray Firth, the scar of the Great Rift had been widened now to twice its former width by disaster, and was much deeper than before the war. Now the Highlands were an island appendage of Scotland, joined only by the new bridge at Inverness, still under construction and passable by a single lane.

Looking down for the first time into waters that surged with the incoming tide, Sir Hugh remarked, somewhat wryly, "At least the Wanderers did us one good turn. The Caledonian Canal needs no more locks and it is wide enough --- too wide really for bridges and too deep for piers to support them for the passage of the largest aircraft carriers and tankers afloat.

"Yes." Tammas' voice was proud. "The suspension bridge is the longest and the highest in the world. A monument to Scottish designers and a memorial to those who perished here when the quakes ripped open the land."

Anne signed. "I am glad we left the children in London. This brings back too many memories for them to hear. I wonder how many of the Wanderer's skeletons line this trough.

"They were soldiers too, in their own way. Don't you suppose women of their own hugeness mourn them somewhere? Children of the Giants may be wondering still why their fathers do not come home.

"They will be waiting to grow up and seize the trident and the sword. Perhaps they are listening even now, to the persuasive propaganda of their leaders, probably as strong and violent as that we hear so constantly."

"*DeLenda est Carthago*? Probably. Those who are bereaved think of vengeance. Those who are not, forget so soon of other's wounds and dream of glory and conquest yet to come."

The Rolls carried its passengers on in silence for a few moments. Then:

"In all the accounts of the contest," meditated Shiela, aloud, "I have noticed one important clue to their thinking. The Wanderers have never attacked first. Every time that we attacked, anywhere in the world, a disaster greater than the one brought them was answered in almost the same area."

"I had not thought of that." Alastair glanced away from the road at his pensive mother. "What did we do here? I was in the south then."

"I think I can answer that better," said Sir Hugh. "I am sure it was one of their few mistakes. The Russians had put up a huge concave mirror of mylar to catch the sun and concentrate a point of light and heat to illuminate and burn the depths of the Baltic. Of course, we had to shoot it down to protect ourselves, but much too late."

"Obviously there were communities of the Wanderers living there, although they had taken no part in the war at that time."

"Some, no doubt, were obliterated by the boiling water. Others must have been blinded by the scourging beam. In retaliation, the Baltic, as you know, was sealed off between Kopenhagen and Malmo; again between Goteborg and Fredericks-havn, although Norway and Sweden had had nothing to do with this."

"No matter. Now the Kattegat is almost an enclosed lake and all ocean traffic has been forbidden Baltic ports."

"Now, of course I am only an arm-chair geographer and have never been a sailor myself." He beamed upon Alastair who was attentively listening. "But it seems to me that the Wanderers --- perhaps for good measure, or maybe as a warning to us not to interfere --- or even thinking we were partly to blame --- just moved what apparatus they have for creating catastrophes due West from the Skagerrak."

"Maybe the Grampian Hills were a little much, even for them, but coasting North only a little way --- I assume they may have better maps of the Undersea than we do --- there was the Caledonian Canal, already opened long ago by another earthquake."

"They attacked, and widened it, giving us an indirect favor by doing so."

"Yes, we have an excellent waterway now," said Anne. "Some of the mystery is gone and I am sorry about that. Whatever was in Loch Ness has been freed to course the oceans of the world. Maybe it was the Great Orm, or one of its companions --- I am sure there was more than one, brother --- that you saw on the Telly scanner."

"I don't believe we will ever see one here again, even though the waters do run clear as crystal in the Loch and all the peat particles wash away that hindered viewing before."

"When I was a little girl," said Shiela, "I had a strange fancy that sometimes comes back to me now. I used to walk the beaches with your grandfather and he would point out where houses used to be and how cliffs were being undermined and headlands were narrowing."

"Once most of the land rose out of the sea. Don't you, too, sometimes feel, when you see the untiring power of it, relentlessly pounding,

never stopping, always beating, grasping, pulling at the land, that it wants it back? I do."

"And now that it has had help and the geography of the world has changed," Tammás mused, "it can never be quite the same again for them, the elements, or us."

"But we are on our way," said Sir Hugh, "to correct what we can."

The rest of the journey North was quiet, each of the party lost in thoughts which were too foreboding to share.

There had been many changes along the rocky coast, but at the Naval Base constructed during the war at Glen Havis, they were warmly welcomed. Neither Tammás nor his pretty wife were strangers here.

The others were glad to learn that there was no longer any need to make the twenty mile run to Pixy Glen in a small motorboat. Instead, a hovercraft was waiting their arrival to ferry the travelers the remainder of the journey.

It was pleasing to the older couple to note the obvious deference paid to their handsome son-in-law, although Tammás as The McLeod of the Glen, appeared to take it only as his due and nothing of special account.

Anne, however, saw satisfaction in the eyes of her parents and was pleased. This would be a pleasant visit, she thought. How right I was to leave the children in the care of their old nurse, for a few days! This will be a vacation for us all --- even them.

It had been two years since Sir Hugh and his Shiela had come to Pixy Glen. They were surprised at what they saw. The old pier was gone and a new one in its place had moorings for at least twenty small fishing boats.

Tumbledown houses, long vacant, had been rebuilt and refurbished. New ones, with neatly stoned walls and firm enclosures, lined the length of the Glen. Piles of kelp were composted in many a sunny spot.

Pixy Water, still tumbling down from the farther end as outlet for Loch Pixy, ran no longer at its own will, but was confined by stout stonewalling against overflow over the single street that paralleled it from the pier.

They walked along this. Those goats and sheep on the lower slopes look well fed, Shiela thought, looking at them with a crofter's eye. She marked the obvious gladness shown by the people they met, saluting Tammás and Anne coming home to their decent mansion strongly designed against the rock cliff wall.

"It looks almost like a fortalice," said Alastair, scanning windows, narrow and with heavy swung-back shutters. "It could stand a siege."

"One of the older ones, brother," Tammás replied. "People hereabout built to last back when the Glen was first settled."

"Slides, storms, an earthquake a century ago, shakings of the hills during the war; it has withstood them all. We made only a few improvements for comfort. It needed no more than that, even when the People of the Pit prowled the Glen and ravaged from up there."

He pointed at the pinnacle which dominated all the scene --- the high tor of the Druid's Thumb. Shiela, remembering how she had been rescued from it, gave a sharp intake of breath and leaned against her husband. Sir Hugh put a supporting arm around her waist and held her close. She was trembling and he knew her thoughts.

Here, as a boy, he had fished the burn still known as Pixy Water. Here with his young companion, Sandy Gowlie, son of a shepherd friend of his father's, they had played and walked and dreamed of great deeds. Here the two had fled in panic from that which wailed in Pixy Water and that which wept in Pixy Moss.

Well, Pixy Moss was Loch Pixy now, although above it, the Druid's Thumb still stood high, impressive and ominous as ever and it was still as necessary to go up before one could go down --- down into the roofed over hollow secret place, perhaps, where the People had held their sacrifices and their revels.

Down someone must go tomorrow to bring back the powerful thing which could not only end this war to be, but if luck held strong, by doing so set an example to prove that wars might not be necessary ever again.

No! he thought. Pixy Moss was no longer a marsh; nor any longer a hiding place for the little amphibians who once had been men and who had, in their strength and ambition, become a scourge to those who trod the land and thought in their arrogance that they ruled the Sea as well.

Here, Sandy Gowlie, in his own strength and anger had, as man fighting for the daughter that he loved, seen her go up the long stairway in the hollow Thumb towards the upper air and safety, borne thence by the two friends who had come to help from so far away.

Here the strong old Highlander had set his thews against the pillars which upheld the roof. Here, with his might and the aid he had beseeched from the God he worshipped, had shouted in exultation and wonder: "Lord, what *is* Man, that thou takest knowledge of him?" And here he died, with his enemies, under the falling of great stones and the roaring of great waters.

And here, at the top of the Druid's Thumb, the entrance downward still remained where hopefully would be found the stone upon which Merlin, the Mage, had carved with deep incisions, 'I guard against the People of the Pit!'

The Merlin Stone that fell from the stars--- that still held magic within its space chilled crystals and which had become the Stone of Destiny in very truth!

Knowing these things and each concealing his or her hopes and doubts, they entered the house of the McLeods. They ate, they drank, they chatted carelessly but with long silences --- and they slept.

So, after a restless night, dawn came and it was time to act.

"Well," said Tammas in a cheery tone which fooled no one, after a good breakfast of kippers and bannocks, washed down with strong tea laced with a bit of brandy, "I think I hear our whirly-bird."

"From the Base?" asked Sir Hugh.

"Truly. Did you think we were going to fly kites again to get a string up to lift a cord that would heist a rope ladder?"

"Nay, father of my dear one, there has been some little progress in the world since you went exploring to rescue the other precious desire of my heart. Ladies, look not at each other with such jealousy, I pray!

"'Tis true I am but one man and you are kin, but you can share me. I will not fight. I will not resist. Nor will I run very fast away, should either of you try to kiss me when I bring back the Stone!"

Sir Hugh laughed, but shook his head in denial. "That is my privilege. My father threw it into the faces of the little fiends who chased us. I will bring it back."

"Come now!" Tammas was laughing, too, but there was more than a hint of seriousness in his tone. "I was too young to share in that rescue of my Lady Shiela. Being but a lad, I missed all the fun.

"Besides, I am the McLeod. This is my Glen. It is my duty."

Alastair, moody since awakening, spoke for the first time. "And I am the youngest and the most fit --- and --- I am going. So that ends the argument."

So, with a lady's firm hand of dissent, each gripping tightly the arm of her own special man to emphasize her feelings on the matter, it did.

The top of the tor was some thirty feet across. Long ago, not quite into pre-history but not much later, little men and women had worked mightily here with stone mauls, fire and frost to trim down the sharp peak and flatten a platform which should provide a standing room.

At first it might have been a place for a beacon against incursions by the Scoti tribes. Maybe later against the Romans. Each, in their turn, had looked upon the Picts as animals, to be hunted down as the Dutch had later done to Hottentots and Bushmen.

Under that beacon's shattering heat perhaps a crack had opened into the hollow tor, to be widened

for an entrance into a refuge for the People should Pixy Glen be invaded.

Then, one can imagine some genius among the little People planning to roof over the upper end of the Glen with strong well fitted blocks, impervious to the water, which would form below not only a stronghold, but a refuge for the future.

So, the stair which led down, which now Alastair, once lowered from the waiting 'copter, saw descending into darkness and mystery.

In his mind's eye, he saw what the People had done. First ladders on the outside of the Druid's Thumb to scale the peak. Then as time went on and they knew themselves surrounded by enemies too strong to combat, they knew they must open a broader world for themselves where pursuers could not go.

An underwater connection with the Sea; a transmutation of the flesh, to bring a means for breathing water, brought many changes. Gills. Sucking, clinging cups on fingers and toes, with which to hold and climb smooth surfaces with no need for ladders. Scales to cover bodies cold as any fish. Amphibians now.

But for all their changes, a residue of memory which retained the Old Religion; a need for sacrifices to appease their gods; and a hatred for those of the upper world and the land.

And against them, no one but Merlin, the Mage, who found the potent Sky-Stone and fashioned it against them with his arts to hold this entrance fast.

He turned and waved to the pilot, who swung away in the stiff wind blowing across the high flat from Ben Havis to its companion mount, Ben Mhor. Circling back and around, the 'copter waited in position, cable and basket still dangling from its winch. Alastair switched on his torch and went down.

He had been told that when his father and grandfather, Alastair the first, had entered here, the steps were slimy with green ooze. This was no longer true, for it had been a number of years since small, clawed, sandaled feet had tracked up bathybian ooze rich with plankton.

Deeper, expecting to be met with the rising fog of which he also had heard. There was none, but as he descended still lower, cautiously sweeping each step with light before placing foot upon it, he detected a faint fishy smell of carrion.

Descending still, going around and around a spiral stair cut for little feet, the treads narrow, the risers low, he came upon a plug of earth and knew himself at the base of the hollow tor.

Here, once, when the roof had been brought down, the soft detritus which had formed the deep swamp called Pixy Moss that lay upon it, had been forced upward in a mucky tide to drown and crush those who fled upward before it.

And here their relics were! Splinters, white and mossy green, to crunch brittly under his foot. Bones of leg and rib, curiously misshapen, but recognizably human in total.

Here and there was interspersed a rounded skull, each centrally ridged with a bony crest no real human now owned.

Among them, partially lodged in a tangled group, a block of stone, cubed and shapen by tools long ago. He ran his fingers along its edges, gasping at the cold which struck into his hands. He felt the filed nicks which told him that he had found what he sought.

Here was the Merlin Stone, still charged with the cold of space from which it had come; still containing the power which had held the People of the Pit prisoner below; still vibrating with potent energy which could be tapped.

Yes, truly it did emit for lasting good that strength preserved in it by the great Mage, for the protection of those he loved against those who hated them!

He stripped off his leather windcheater, wrapped it around the forty pound block, feeling it thrill under his touch like a living thing, and staggered up the winding stair.

Nothing would follow him. Nothing lived below. It was not needed there any more. It never would be again. But it was needed bitterly elsewhere and thither it would be carried!

Some years later, Sir Hugh, like a lecturer, called his visiting grandchildren, now young man and woman, in their turn, to give undivided attention to the large map in the library.

The pointer he had used so many times before swept again across the apparently empty spaces of the Pacific Ocean.

"Here," he said, "lie the immense cities of our friends, the Wanderers. They are satisfied to be there. We are satisfied to have them there. They visit us occasionally in peaceful trade and amity. Perhaps sometime you two may visit them. They have ways to make you free of the Deeps."

The pointer tapped and described a couple of circles on the map.

"These are the wastes we once called the Sea Deserts. We thought them not worth charting or exploring --- the water so deep, the depths so dark. No fish finned those slow currents --- no sea herds fed there.

"So, undisturbed, unbothered, the People gathered, made their homes, perfected their plans, tapped sources of heat which nurtured their sciences and built their culture.

"Here they created the giants to wander the abyssal plains, avoiding our dredges, our submarines, our scanners and our wars.

"Sometimes the ships remained floating, but the people were gone forever, without a clue

as to their disappearances, but all this was not war. These events were no more than casual incidents --- tokening minor frictions between the two races.

"Until driven to desperation by the slaughter of those whom they had made their friends, fearing the extinction of them and themselves, they finally intervened.

"I suppose we will never know by what eloquent leaders they were urged to make total war. There were warmongers on both sides. I think, in all, they were more tolerant, less malevolent, than we. That is how it began. We know how it ended.

"You learned in school how the Merlin Stone was hurriedly analyzed, its calming vibrations matched and incorporated in hundreds of ultrasound broadcasting units which swept the Undersea in all its community holding crannies.

"You know well what this did. It is history now. No one was harmed. No one was killed. We have come to terms and are enemies no more.

"Above the great cities of both land and sea, the motionless satellites hang, beaming down forever the radiations which have brought peace and friendship to all the nations."

Alastair, who had been listening, said, "Whale hunting has stopped all over the world. Greenpeace was disbanded long ago. There was never anything derived from the bodies of our brothers of the sea which could not have been duplicated and supplied by other means."

"Except meat."

"Yes, meat of course, but there are other sources of protein and we are still developing them. But now the population of the world is much less than before the war. And it is remaining stable. We have learned something.

"The Wanderers avoided us when we seined for fish. The Treaty allows us to send out our trawlers. We, in our turn, will no longer pollute their waters. We will not send our remotely controlled vehicles crawling into their habitats, digging trenches, laying cable without permission and searching for oil and gas domes. The international Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Police are enforcing this.

"These agreements are part of the truce. They must be faithfully observed on both sides. Now that the oceans are usable, but not really free to us --- being owned by the intelligent denizens thereof --- this may prove the deterrent to wars between the nations that has been so earnestly sought for decades.

"If the supplies and materiel cannot be carried between the continents without displeasing and harming the People of the Sea, wars upon land will have to be decisive and short."

"Quite true," agreed Sir Hugh. "Now that we know what we know --- that the world is one --- that it, too, may possess a form of life all its own, of which we can hardly conceive --- that, in itself, it sends out messages we cannot decipher

or understand, to other worlds in space, we must be careful.

"It may result that we are all here only on sufferance. We do know that in its two major mediums of Land and Water, there dwells intelligence in each which must be compatible with each other, compensating and completing what the other lacks.

"We can no longer afford petty bickering. We must stop blindly stumbling along, depending upon our leaders as blind as we are to somehow do the right and sensible thing.

"Oh, nothing is perfection! There are and will be problems. There may someday be another Genghis; another Napoleon; another Hitler. Our permanent concern is to see that there isn't.

"Perhaps the best way will be to gather up all the politicians, give all of them clubs and a big field! I don't know the answers. That must be the worry of your children. Let's hope they are smarter than we are and that our fathers have been."

Alastair interrupted. "I will tell you something that I have not told anyone before. On one of our last missions in the war, we passed by one of the little unnamed islets in Micronesia. It was very small and almost covered by the sea, just one of those little mountain tops that jut up.

"We hardly noticed it at first. Then something moved, higher, much higher than the few palm trees which formed its only vegetation.

"A Wanderer was sitting there, in the very attitude of Rodin's Thinker. He had been meditating. I would like to know his thoughts. I would like to believe he was the one who took the whale from the Rorqual.

"I only do know that we had cannon trained upon him and something kept us from firing. He lifted his head and saw us. Then he raised his arm and waved and sank his chin again upon his fist, gazing across the waters.

"We take hikes; walking tours; pilgrimages. Perhaps he was doing the same. I would like to think so. We sailed on and left him there.

"The blackfellows do their walkabouts, seeking relief from too accustomed places. They bother no one. They find their inner peace as we have now. I would like to meet that giant again. I think we would find something in common to talk about.

"Perhaps for all of us, Wanderer and Man --- we have found our Dreaming Time."

Shiela said, softly, "The world turns. It creaks on its axis. Sometimes it almost stops. It even appears to go backward occasionally. But it does go forward.

"It is enough for now, for me at least, to know that once again, for those who want to listen, they will be able to hear the singing of the whale as they go about their affairs in the clear depths among those whom they know to be their friends."

Anne looked upon them all with love.

"It began with murder --- it continued as war --- there had to be

an end.



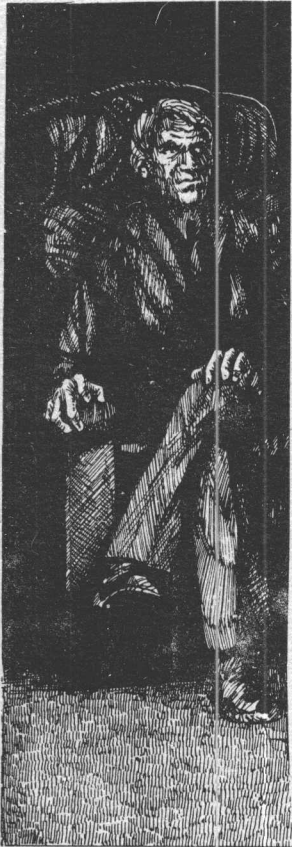
JAMES WILLIAM HJORT

he saw them
dissonance, a
...ing anxiety, still held
...y quicker of to try anew, when
... the hand lightning bolt or corpse moved. And
Yothin's fingers grabbed Malraz by his own viper,
about Malraz's wrist, and closed quickly and firmly. Dead
in a vise-like grasp, and moved no more, locked
instinctively at the sudden
currence, his heart sear-
his veins and his breath sear-
coffin, to
ta.
iro.
agai
tesque
... upon the stiff fingers main-
... or manacles of copper. Again and
Malraz did not to wrench free of that gro-
occurrence, to conjecture whether
to some sudden stiffening of
haps something more.
ed his mind, ...
wrist.

Distantly ahead, Mysak heard the rising of an eerie hum, a high-pitched wail like the outcry of a thousand pleading voices, the ululations of a myriad tortured souls. Long before he saw them the sounds rose to a screaming dissonance, an evil melody penetrating than

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