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WEBZINE

VOL. 13, ISSUE 13
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THE WEARGH RIDERS OF EIRA

BY JOHN C
ADAMS
THE GOBLINS
WERE SLY
AND WILY...

CHRIST ON THE WATERS

BY ROB BLISS
HE SOON HUNG
IN PLACE OF
THE OLD
SACRIFICE...

IN THE HOUSE OF SUDDHOO BY RUDYARD KIPLING

REVIEW
BY JOHN C
ADAMS

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Welcome to Schlock! the webzine for science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

Vol. 13, Issue 13

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Schlock! is a weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels, and novellas, within the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of new pulp fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

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This week's cover illustration is *Photo Manipulation Alien Foreign Inhuman Night* by [Javier-Rodriguez](#). Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

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SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

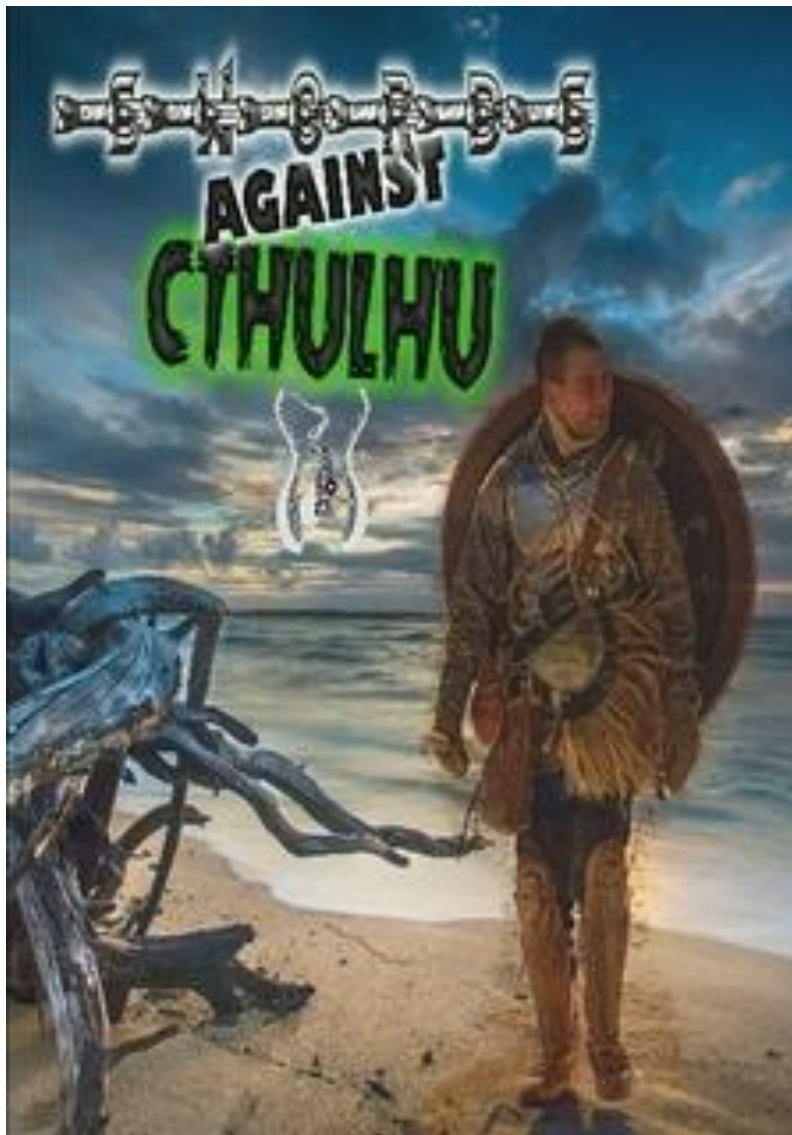
EDITORIAL

This week, Prince Eugene confronts the cannibalistic dark forces of a rival kingdom. A stranger is sacrificed on a sex-crazed South Sea island. An old man resorts to sorcery when his son falls ill. And John C Adams, who also contributes a short story this week, reviews *Legacy of Kings* by Celia Friedman.

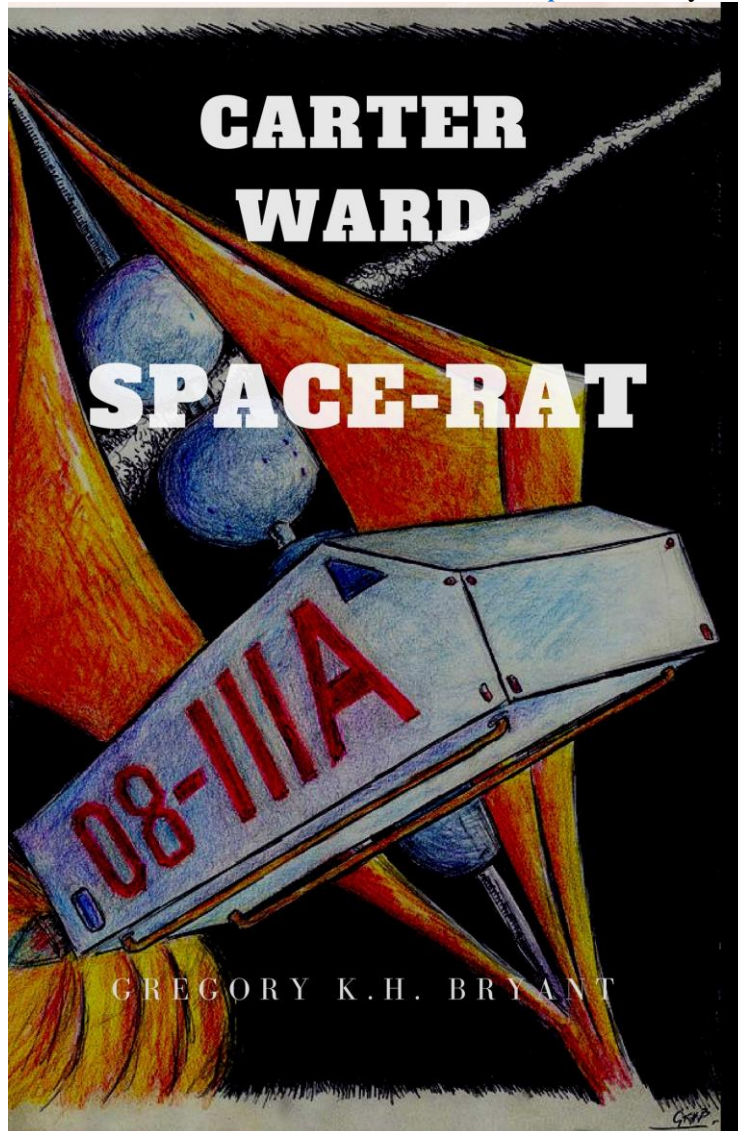
In the second part of *Lobster's Revenge* Flora and Fauna learn the identity of the kobolds' master. Turhan Mot entertains suspicions as to the owner of the ship he is pursuing. On Mars, our narrator enters the valley of the shadow. And the man of the Sun shows Cyrano de Bergerac all the marvels of the Moon.

—Gavin Chappell

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Now available from Schlock! Publications: [*Carter Ward—Space Rat*](#) by Gregory KH Bryant.



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THE WEARGH RIDERS OF EIRA by John C Adams

When Prince Eugene van Murkar saw the weargh riders and orcs assembling at the top of the hill, he frowned. But a moment or so later, the experienced commander overcame the young prince who was still eager to impress his father with decisive victories. He reminded himself that this was not the first time he'd met the Eiran dark multitudes in battle and seen them off.

Eugene shouted to his men to rally to the nobles commanding them. He pointed to the top of the hill. As Earl Toornig and Earl Stroomen followed his line of sight, their faces turned pale. But Toornig's cheeks were soon red and angry again, and Stroomen's stoical outlook quickly overcame his surprise.

The other earls, the barons, viscounts and lords who led the different sections delivered rousing speeches to their men one after the other. In the meantime, Chieftain Jarlath o'Cruach, the commander of the Eiran forces, had been joined at the brow of the hill by his patrons, Crown Prince Brandon and King Domhnall o'Eira. They sat on their destriers, watching their soldiers fighting a pitched battle with the Murkans, attempting to work out where to target these new forces to cause the most chaos amongst Eugene's army.

Eugene didn't flinch. The Eirans had the initial benefit of coming down the slope at top speed to meet the Murkan soldiers on the flat land down by the river. And they would take full advantage of it. But once they were there in the valley, the Murkan crossbowmen and the whole army's tightly maintained discipline would level the relative merits of the opposing forces.

Eugene pressed his way towards the bottom of the hill to meet his foe. At the top of the slope, Jarlath kicked his leg over the pommel of his saddle and slid to the ground. He drew his sword and took his shield from his servant. Then he ran down the hill, his blade held high, calling to his men to rally to him. It was an awesome sight.

Eugene was only twenty but he had faced the great Eiran army many times. It was only mustered after careful thought and much discussion within the Eiran Council of Wizards and a tribal gathering of clan leaders up at the capital, Liosmor. The Eiran king understood the price of loyalty extracted by the elves, dwarves, wearghs and orcs for fighting alongside his regular army and he didn't lightly incur that kind of debt. But the lure of recovering even an acre of the Lost Lands of South Eira from Murkar was so great, and the possibility of his men defeating the Murkan army decisively without the support of the fantastical realm so unlikely, that sometimes Domhnall paid their price to secure at least a temporary alliance with the darker forces available to him.

The trolls' loyalty to Domhnall was more enduring and had caused Eugene many problems in battle before. Decades earlier, Domhnall's father King Nolan had adopted a troll girl called Oonagh and brought her back from Orkna to live with Domhnall and his siblings. Oonagh had soon won the hearts of many in Eira. When she was old enough to marry, tribal chieftains had fought for her love. Eventually, Phelan, the head of the Tochar tribe, had won through the many challenges set by the king and been entitled to claim the hand of Nolan's adopted daughter.

Phelan and Oonagh had had many troll children. These were now adults and had married. Their unions had brought more trolls under the influence of the royal family. Over the years, word had spread abroad that trolls were welcome in Eira. Many had left the less friendly environments of Orkna, northern Aspatia, Albina and parts of the Northlands to emigrate there.

The trolls waited in large groups, partly determined by family lineage and partly by country of origin, on the eastern side of the Eiran host. Next to them, standing in long lines of impeccable straightness and regularity of length, were the army of goblins that Crown Prince Brandon had formed a year ago and trained to fight alongside Eiran men as equals. Eugene's pulse raced at the excitement of knowing he would soon meet them in battle for the first time since their initial encounter had traumatised his men's horses from sheer terror at their first sight of the wearghs. This time, he promised himself, the outcome would be different.

Brandon had taken a risk in reaching out to the goblin chieftain but Eugene's spies had told him that the chieftain was ancient and he was dying. The urge to hand his people over to a kind and nurturing master had apparently overcome his scruples in dealing with men. Brandon's offer had been accepted. After the chieftain's death, spies had reported back to Eugene that Brandon had taken immediate steps to limit the kind of meat eaten by the goblins. Their reports had made uncomfortable reading for the young prince and his father, the king of Murkar, about a new type of foe that they would soon meet in battle.

Some goblins had been beyond help, still aggressive and paranoid after decades of eating the flesh of their own kind and that of men whenever they could get their hands on it, or unwilling to give up their entitlement to feast on types of flesh they regarded as life giving. But others had changed for the better with their diet and that had given Brandon an opening into training and disciplining the goblins under his charge.

The wearghs stood in groups, resting before the call to advance. Their riders were young goblins, small and light and less likely to weigh down the creatures as they careered into the middle of the fray and tore their enemies apart with their teeth and claws. The goblin riders were carefully chosen and they formed strong bonds with their mounts, as a man did with the warhorse he rode into battle. Each goblin was paired with one weargh and they remained a team, along with the weargh handlers who looked after the beasts off the battlefield.

Eugene was in the midst of the battle, down by the river, surrounded by a clutch of men protecting him from any concerted onslaught by Jarlath's forces but still giving him the room to fight and kill many Eiran soldiers.

Jarlath climbed back up the hill to consult with his king.

Eugene held his sword aloft and shouted to his men to stand firm against the coming onslaught. The men at the front of his lines brought up their shields and held them in a strong formation that would hold off attack from Eiran spears and swords.

Domhnall, mounted on a grey warhorse, solemnly nodded. Jarlath bellowed out the command to advance and it was answered with a huge roar that shook the hills around them as the wider Eiran

army fell in and prepared to join the men already fighting down in the valley.

The goblins came first, surging down the slope, smacking into the Murkan shields at the bottom and bouncing off them. The goblins fell backwards and those still rushing downwards slammed into them. The more the goblins kept coming, the more they piled up against their fallen compatriots until Eugene's men were able to loosen their shieldwall and advance.

Eugene led the way over to the pile of goblins. They stank of stale ale and sweat. He lunged forward and ran a fallen goblin through with his sword. The tip pierced the creature's throat and blood splattered everywhere. Eugene wiped the warm drops from his cheeks. Some dripped into his mouth and he tasted the rank darkness of the goblin blood. He spat it out. More than a drop or two could spread a poison inside a man's system and weaken him. He coughed. The air hung heavy with their fetid odour.

The Murkan soldiers hacked and slewed into the press of goblins. Some of the creatures tried to cut through at the sides of the lines but they were brought down in their thousands by volley after volley of quarries from the Murkan crossbows thudding into them. The bowmen worked with the soldiers by firing over the tops of their shields to hit the goblins whilst remaining in strong formation, protected behind the tall wooden shields.

The goblins were sly and wily. They were naturally highly intelligent but in the past their cannibalism and their lack of training had weakened them physically and mentally.

The goblins kept coming down the hill. They stepped over the bodies of their fallen comrades and scurried towards Eugene's men. They were smaller than fully grown men and they carried a bizarre array of little swords, daggers, knives and spears on poles half the usual length. Every goblin was armed with a variety of tiny blades hanging from his belt. Their red eyes sparkled with the same greed for fighting and bloodshed Eugene had witnessed to his men's doom on the last occasion they'd fought goblins.

Eugene called out the order to stand firm in formation and fight on. He led the way over to the base of the hill, slaughtering goblin after goblin as he went. His men followed him and they gradually carved a path through the thronging goblins. The stench of the dead goblins was foul. Eugene tried not to breathe in too deeply. Almost as the bodies fell to the ground they began to emit the high, noxious stench of rotting flesh.

Above the clanging of blade against blade, and the shrieks and howls of the dying and injured goblins, Jarlath shouted the order for the wearghs to advance. Eugene braced for the next wave of the onslaught and called to his men to do the same.

The appearance of the wearghs at the top of the hill terrified the Murkan horses and Eugene called back the order for the nobles who were still mounted to get down from their horses and for the squires to lead them away from the lines. Whilst this was going on the weargh riders sat on their beasts and watched with sly, amused smiles playing across their faces. The weargh riders were young goblins: mostly short and light but strong and wiry. They were not heavy enough to slow down the wearghs as they galloped into battle but were strong enough to fight a man on

foot if they were unseated and were forced to defend themselves alone. The last time Eugene's army had faced them, the Murkan soldiers had discovered that it took two weargh riders on foot to fight one human soldier and that in most cases the young goblins could still both be defeated by one man. Once they were separated from their wearghs, the riders were vulnerable.

Once the horses had been led away, the Murkan lines reformed and the soldiers waited for the wearghs to come galloping down to meet them. King Domhnall himself bellowed the order. His craggy face split into a wide grin and he stood in his stirrups and waved the wearghs past him and into battle.

Eugene had been fighting right at the front of his lines and as he glanced along the Murkan forces he saw that each one of the nobles under his command was doing the same. It was the Murkan way to lead from the front and to do otherwise was viewed as cowardice that was well rewarded with a swift death.

The wearghs were larger than their wolf ancestors. They were smarter, too, with their own language and with a deep and abiding connection to the individual rider who mounted them and rode them into battle. Their long fangs dripped saliva down their mottled, furry chests and their red eyes glowed with loathing of their foe.

The weargh riders kicked their mounts on down the slope and they crashed through the shieldwall and into the midst of the Murkan soldiers. The crossbowmen fired over the heads of their fellows to take down the first wave of wearghs. The beasts cried in agony as the quarrels pierced their flesh. Some were shot in the head and fell where they stood. Other were hit in the chest and lumbered on a few strides before collapsing, dying, onto the ground. They were quickly surrounded by the Murkan soldiers.

The crossbowmen edged forward into the fray, taking their time in finding their aim and bringing down one weargh after another. The soldiers fell on the riders, running the young goblins through with their swords or hacking their heads from their bodies and tossing them aside. Eugene fought alongside his men, satisfied with the progress they were making in killing or maiming the first wave of wearghs and their riders.

At the top of the hill, Eugene spotted a fresh supply of wearghs lining up and waiting for the chance to gallop down to join the fighting. It had felt, from the moment he'd seen the goblins forming ranks an hour ago, as if Domhnall had an inexhaustible supply of creatures from the dark forces to fight his battle against Murkar for him.

The second wave of wearghs were more numerous than the first and it seemed to Eugene as if the beasts were larger. More of them survived the descent into the fighting and galloped into the ranks of his soldiers. The crossbowmen fired again and again to take the wearghs down but further beasts just kept coming.

A female weargh, young and inexperienced like her goblin rider, slipped over in front of Eugene, her long claws scrabbling to get a purchase in the soft, muddy soil. He stepped forward to cut her down but before he could swing his sword a crossbow quarrel whizzed over his head and

thudded into the young weargh's chest.

A male weargh, old and wiry but rippling with muscles, slid down the hill. Eugene lifted his greatsword and swung it over his head. He lunged forward and thudded into the weargh's neck. His sword tip pierced the creature's jugular and the beast slumped to the ground at his feet. He slewed his blade across the animal's throat and hot blood pulsed out and covered him and most of the men around him. The Murkan soldiers coughed and spluttered. Then they fell in and hacked the young goblin riding the weargh into pieces. The battlefield was beginning to stink of their congealing blood and guts, together with the ordure of every species present. The air was so thick it was becoming almost impossible to breathe.

Eugene held the goblin's head aloft and waved it at Domhnall, who was still sitting on his horse at the brow of the hill watching the battle unfold. Domhnall shook his head, yanked his reins and pulled his warhorse around. He disappeared from view and Eugene braced himself to attack the next weargh that came sliding down the slope towards his soldiers. Brandon remained on his horse, observing the fighting with the experienced eye of detachment as his father rode away.

Eugene was satisfied that, whatever stoicism Brandon and Jarlath exhibited, the Eiran king understood that the Murkans were turning the tide. The Murkans had made steady progress through the goblins and were now using the same strategy of letting their weargh enemies come to them. The latter were handier on open terrain where they could get up speed and crash into foot soldiers unprotected by strong formations. Their screams of dying agony ripped right through Eugene but he didn't flinch. If he succumbed to an iota of pity for them, it would mean death for his men.

The Murkan shieldwalls were preventing the wearghs from breaking through. Their crossbowmen were providing excellent cover for the soldiers on foot and, by leading their mounts away promptly, the Murkans had been able to neutralise most of the chaotic fear the wearghs had unleashed upon everyone's horses the last time Eira had used them in battle against Murkar.

Eugene had learned the lessons of that last combat well. It had been a bruising encounter for the Murkans but this battle was balanced in his favour: just.

The Eiran commander had been trying to get near Eugene since the battle had begun. Jarlath had ridden towards the near side of the Murkan formations with a strong force of mounted knights, all heavily armoured. They'd battered the shieldwall there for over an hour. But the Murkan lines held firm and with their shields up, and the crossbowmen still firing quarrel after quarrel at their enemies, Jarlath was no nearer to Eugene than when he'd started.

Eugene shouted for one final push through what was left of the wearghs and goblins. His men had decimated that section of the Eiran army this morning and Jarlath must now see that the battle was lost.

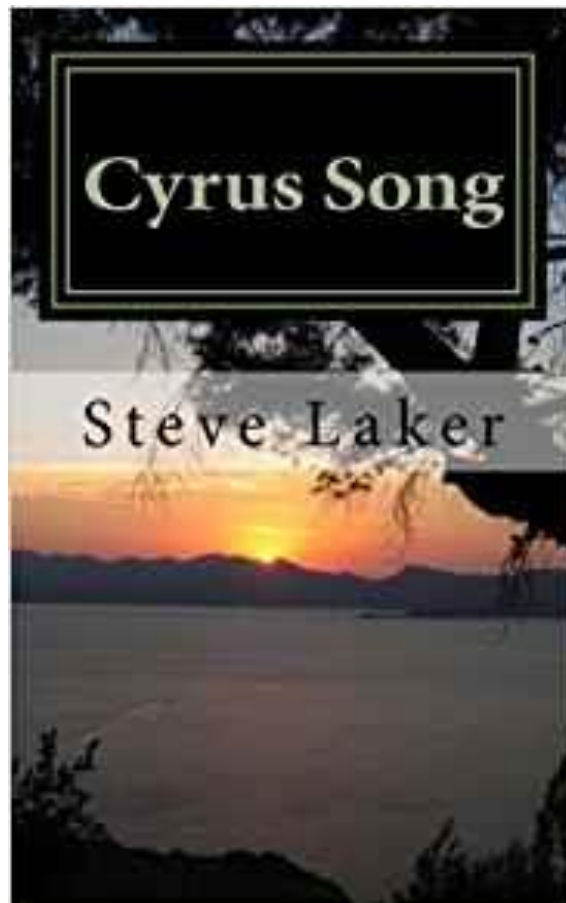
Jarlath's exhausted trolls and demoralised men were glad to have the order to retreat given. They clambered back up the muddy incline and gathered behind Domhnall on his grey destrier.

Domhnall shook his head and pulled his warhorse around, kicking her through their ranks away from the sight of the battle. Brandon followed, leaving the defeated Jarlath to deal with the wounded.

When no order to regroup for the next engagement was given, Eugene and his men finished off the dying wearghs, orcs and men around them by slitting their throats with daggers. Then they held the ground they'd won that morning and tended to their own wounded.

Eugene sat on a fallen log smoking his pipe and drinking a cup of ale waiting for Jarlath to come down the hill to negotiate the ceasefire. The Eirans were a worthy foe, especially when they marshalled the forces of darkness to their aid, but the Murkans had beaten them off once again and gained some territory. Eugene's father, Gortah van Murkar, would be the first to say that this was a good morning's work by anyone's calculations.

THE END



Now available from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000APR004)

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CHRIST ON THE WATERS by Rob Bliss

The people of Boca's Reef, a tiny sickle-shaped piece of land in the Pacific Ocean, didn't like strangers to land their boats on their territory.

If a boat landed and the sailor was starving or thirsty, he would be given food and water and told to take the supplies back to his boat and sail away. If his boat was damaged, the people would repair it, and tell the sailor he had to live on the beach by his boat and never venture beyond the limit they set for him. If the boat was damaged beyond repair, the people would decide what needed to be done. They were as merciful as they needed to be. They might build a raft and drift the sailor away in, perhaps, the right direction. Or something else.

The last time someone landed without the people knowing, 'something else' happened. The boat landed at night and the sailor crept up the beach, heading for firelight deep in the palms. His steps were quiet on the soft sand.

The island people were naked and painted with red and black in a clearing surrounded by their bamboo and palm leaf huts, many fires flickering yellow light against their nudity. They had sex with each other in a vast orgy, hard to tell person from person amongst the many limbs. They feasted while fucking, danced in a drugged haze around a totem to a god. An old god still worshipped by billions around the world.

A man was dressed in a loincloth with a crown of sharpened coral bleeding his forehead, nailed to a teak cross, blood slipping from his palms and feet down to the sand. The people at the base of the cross orgasmed. A priest in a headdress of feathers, with a necklace of shells and a rosary hanging down his naked chest, raced from his hut. His penis was erect and dripping semen as he rammed a knife into the sternum of the makeshift Christ, tearing a line down the stomach muscles to release blood and effluvia and organs. The Christ's body rained down on the people below as they continued to writhe across each other's bodies. The priest grabbed the nearest girl and entered her like a dog as the sacrificial blood rained down on them both.

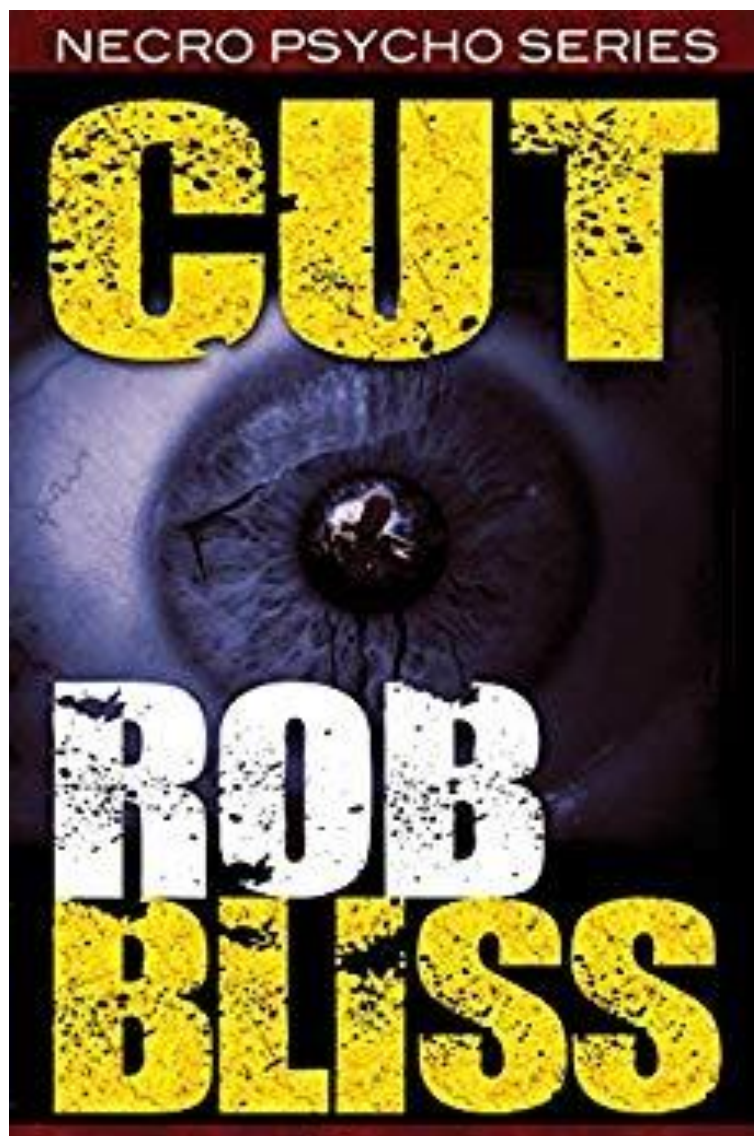
The sailor was discovered when he ventured too far into the firelight.

He soon hung in place of the old sacrifice, but he wasn't killed that night. An outsider was not allowed to die on sacred soil. In the morning, the cross was carried with the sailor nailed to it into the sea. Ropes had been tied to the four ends of the cross, anchored with stones.

The cross floated in place on the waters, and the sailor baked under the sun. The people went back to their huts and forgot about the sailor, ignoring him, happy he was gone from their home. They were commanded to keep their backs to the ocean for at least a day; to look at the ocean was forbidden. The tribe would not be causing the death of the intruder, god would.

Before the sun went down, the sailor's lips cracked and bleeding, hands and feet trickling blood into the salt water, god arrived in the form of a dorsal fin.

THE END



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IN THE HOUSE OF SUDDHOO by Rudyard Kipling

*A stone's throw out on either hand
From that well-ordered road we tread,
And all the world is wild and strange;
Churel and ghoul and Djinn and sprite
Shall bear us company to-night,
For we have reached the Oldest Land
Wherein the Powers of Darkness range.*

From the Dusk to the Dawn.

The house of Suddhoo, near the Taksali Gate, is two-storied, with four carved windows of old brown wood, and a flat roof. You may recognize it by five red hand-prints arranged like the Five of Diamonds on the whitewash between the upper windows. Bhagwan Dass, the bunnia, and a man who says he gets his living by seal-cutting, live in the lower story with a troop of wives, servants, friends, and retainers. The two upper rooms used to be occupied by Janoo and Azizun and a little black-and-tan terrier that was stolen from an Englishman's house and given to Janoo by a soldier. To-day, only Janoo lives in the upper rooms. Suddhoo sleeps on the roof generally, except when he sleeps in the street. He used to go to Peshawar in the cold weather to visit his son, who sells curiosities near the Edwardes' Gate, and then he slept under a real mud roof. Suddhoo is a great friend of mine, because his cousin had a son who secured, thanks to my recommendation, the post of head-messenger to a big firm in the Station. Suddhoo says that God will make me a Lieutenant-Governor one of these days. I daresay his prophecy will come true. He is very, very old, with white hair and no teeth worth showing, and he has outlived his wits—outlived nearly everything except his fondness for his son at Peshawar. Janoo and Azizun are Kashmiris, Ladies of the City, and theirs was an ancient and more or less honorable profession; but Azizun has since married a medical student from the North-West and has settled down to a most respectable life somewhere near Bareilly. Bhagwan Dass is an extortionate and an adulterator. He is very rich. The man who is supposed to get his living by seal-cutting pretends to be very poor. This lets you know as much as is necessary of the four principal tenants in the house of Suddhoo. Then there is Me, of course; but I am only the chorus that comes in at the end to explain things. So I do not count.

Suddhoo was not clever. The man who pretended to cut seals was the cleverest of them all—Bhagwan Dass only knew how to lie—except Janoo. She was also beautiful, but that was her own affair.

Suddhoo's son at Peshawar was attacked by pleurisy, and old Suddhoo was troubled. The seal-cutter man heard of Suddhoo's anxiety and made capital out of it. He was abreast of the times. He got a friend in Peshawar to telegraph daily accounts of the son's health. And here the story begins.

Suddhoo's cousin's son told me, one evening, that Suddhoo wanted to see me; that he was too old and feeble to come personally, and that I should be conferring an everlasting honor on the House of Suddhoo if I went to him. I went; but I think, seeing how well-off Suddhoo was then, that he

might have sent something better than an ekka, which jolted fearfully, to haul out a future Lieutenant-Governor to the City on a muggy April evening. The ekka did not run quickly. It was full dark when we pulled up opposite the door of Ranjit Singh's Tomb near the main gate of the Fort. Here was Suddhoo and he said that, by reason of my condescension, it was absolutely certain that I should become a Lieutenant-Governor while my hair was yet black. Then we talked about the weather and the state of my health, and the wheat crops, for fifteen minutes, in the Huzuri Bagh, under the stars.

Suddhoo came to the point at last. He said that Janoo had told him that there was an order of the Sirkar against magic, because it was feared that magic might one day kill the Empress of India. I didn't know anything about the state of the law; but I fancied that something interesting was going to happen. I said that so far from magic being discouraged by the Government it was highly commended. The greatest officials of the State practiced it themselves. (If the Financial Statement isn't magic, I don't know what is.) Then, to encourage him further, I said that, if there was any jadoo afoot, I had not the least objection to giving it my countenance and sanction, and to seeing that it was clean jadoo—white magic, as distinguished from the unclean jadoo which kills folk. It took a long time before Suddhoo admitted that this was just what he had asked me to come for. Then he told me, in jerks and quavers, that the man who said he cut seals was a sorcerer of the cleanest kind; that every day he gave Suddhoo news of the sick son in Peshawar more quickly than the lightning could fly, and that this news was always corroborated by the letters. Further, that he had told Suddhoo how a great danger was threatening his son, which could be removed by clean jadoo; and, of course, heavy payment. I began to see how the land lay, and told Suddhoo that I also understood a little jadoo in the Western line, and would go to his house to see that everything was done decently and in order. We set off together; and on the way Suddhoo told me he had paid the seal-cutter between one hundred and two hundred rupees already; and the jadoo of that night would cost two hundred more. Which was cheap, he said, considering the greatness of his son's danger; but I do not think he meant it.

The lights were all cloaked in the front of the house when we arrived. I could hear awful noises from behind the seal-cutter's shop-front, as if some one were groaning his soul out. Suddhoo shook all over, and while we groped our way upstairs told me that the jadoo had begun. Janoo and Azizun met us at the stair-head, and told us that the jadoo-work was coming off in their rooms, because there was more space there. Janoo is a lady of a freethinking turn of mind. She whispered that the jadoo was an invention to get money out of Suddhoo, and that the seal-cutter would go to a hot place when he died. Suddhoo was nearly crying with fear and old age. He kept walking up and down the room in the half light, repeating his son's name over and over again, and asking Azizun if the seal-cutter ought not to make a reduction in the case of his own landlord. Janoo pulled me over to the shadow in the recess of the carved bow- windows. The boards were up, and the rooms were only lit by one tiny lamp. There was no chance of my being seen if I stayed still.

Presently, the groans below ceased, and we heard steps on the staircase. That was the seal-cutter. He stopped outside the door as the terrier barked and Azizun fumbled at the chain, and he told Suddhoo to blow out the lamp. This left the place in jet darkness, except for the red glow from the two huqas that belonged to Janoo and Azizun. The seal-cutter came in, and I heard Suddhoo throw himself down on the floor and groan. Azizun caught her breath, and Janoo backed to one

of the beds with a shudder. There was a clink of something metallic, and then shot up a pale blue-green flame near the ground. The light was just enough to show Azizun, pressed against one corner of the room with the terrier between her knees; Janoo, with her hands clasped, leaning forward as she sat on the bed; Suddhoo, face down, quivering, and the seal-cutter.

I hope I may never see another man like that seal-cutter. He was stripped to the waist, with a wreath of white jasmine as thick as my wrist round his forehead, a salmon-colored loin-cloth round his middle, and a steel bangle on each ankle. This was not awe-inspiring. It was the face of the man that turned me cold. It was blue-gray in the first place. In the second, the eyes were rolled back till you could only see the whites of them; and, in the third, the face was the face of a demon—a ghoul—anything you please except of the sleek, oily old ruffian who sat in the daytime over his turning-lathe downstairs. He was lying on his stomach, with his arms turned and crossed behind him, as if he had been thrown down pinioned. His head and neck were the only parts of him off the floor. They were nearly at right angles to the body, like the head of a cobra at spring. It was ghastly. In the centre of the room, on the bare earth floor, stood a big, deep, brass basin, with a pale blue-green light floating in the centre like a night-light. Round that basin the man on the floor wriggled himself three times. How he did it I do not know. I could see the muscles ripple along his spine and fall smooth again; but I could not see any other motion. The head seemed the only thing alive about him, except that slow curl and uncurl of the laboring back-muscles. Janoo from the bed was breathing seventy to the minute; Azizun held her hands before her eyes; and old Suddhoo, fingering at the dirt that had got into his white beard, was crying to himself. The horror of it was that the creeping, crawly thing made no sound—only crawled! And, remember, this lasted for ten minutes, while the terrier whined, and Azizun shuddered, and Janoo gasped, and Suddhoo cried.

I felt the hair lift at the back of my head, and my heart thump like a thermantidote paddle. Luckily, the seal-cutter betrayed himself by his most impressive trick and made me calm again. After he had finished that unspeakable triple crawl, he stretched his head away from the floor as high as he could, and sent out a jet of fire from his nostrils. Now, I knew how fire-spouting is done—I can do it myself—so I felt at ease. The business was a fraud. If he had only kept to that crawl without trying to raise the effect, goodness knows what I might not have thought. Both the girls shrieked at the jet of fire and the head dropped, chin down, on the floor with a thud; the whole body lying then like a corpse with its arms trussed. There was a pause of five full minutes after this, and the blue-green flame died down. Janoo stooped to settle one of her anklets, while Azizun turned her face to the wall and took the terrier in her arms. Suddhoo put out an arm mechanically to Janoo's huqa, and she slid it across the floor with her foot. Directly above the body and on the wall, were a couple of flaming portraits, in stamped paper frames, of the Queen and the Prince of Wales. They looked down on the performance, and, to my thinking, seemed to heighten the grotesqueness of it all.

Just when the silence was getting unendurable, the body turned over and rolled away from the basin to the side of the room, where it lay stomach up. There was a faint "plop" from the basin—exactly like the noise a fish makes when it takes a fly—and the green light in the centre revived. I looked at the basin, and saw, bobbing in the water, the dried, shrivelled, black head of a native baby—open eyes, open mouth and shaved scalp. It was worse, being so very sudden, than the crawling exhibition. We had no time to say anything before it began to speak.

Read Poe's account of the voice that came from the mesmerized dying man, and you will realize less than one-half of the horror of that head's voice.

There was an interval of a second or two between each word, and a sort of "ring, ring, ring," in the note of the voice, like the timbre of a bell. It pealed slowly, as if talking to itself, for several minutes before I got rid of my cold sweat. Then the blessed solution struck me. I looked at the body lying near the doorway, and saw, just where the hollow of the throat joins on the shoulders, a muscle that had nothing to do with any man's regular breathing, twitching away steadily. The whole thing was a careful reproduction of the Egyptian teraphin that one read about sometimes and the voice was as clever and as appalling a piece of ventriloquism as one could wish to hear. All this time the head was "lip-lip-lapping" against the side of the basin, and speaking. It told Suddhoo, on his face again whining, of his son's illness and of the state of the illness up to the evening of that very night. I always shall respect the seal-cutter for keeping so faithfully to the time of the Peshawar telegrams. It went on to say that skilled doctors were night and day watching over the man's life; and that he would eventually recover if the fee to the potent sorcerer, whose servant was the head in the basin, were doubled.

Here the mistake from the artistic point of view came in. To ask for twice your stipulated fee in a voice that Lazarus might have used when he rose from the dead, is absurd. Janoo, who is really a woman of masculine intellect, saw this as quickly as I did. I heard her say "Asli nahin! Fareib!" scornfully under her breath; and just as she said so, the light in the basin died out, the head stopped talking, and we heard the room door creak on its hinges. Then Janoo struck a match, lit the lamp, and we saw that head, basin, and seal-cutter were gone. Suddhoo was wringing his hands and explaining to any one who cared to listen, that, if his chances of eternal salvation depended on it, he could not raise another two hundred rupees. Azizun was nearly in hysterics in the corner; while Janoo sat down composedly on one of the beds to discuss the probabilities of the whole thing being a bunao, or "make-up."

I explained as much as I knew of the seal-cutter's way of jadoo; but her argument was much more simple:—"The magic that is always demanding gifts is no true magic," said she. "My mother told me that the only potent love-spells are those which are told you for love. This seal-cutter man is a liar and a devil. I dare not tell, do anything, or get anything done, because I am in debt to Bhagwan Dass the bunnia for two gold rings and a heavy anklet. I must get my food from his shop. The seal-cutter is the friend of Bhagwan Dass, and he would poison my food. A fool's jadoo has been going on for ten days, and has cost Suddhoo many rupees each night. The seal-cutter used black hens and lemons and mantras before. He never showed us anything like this till to-night. Azizun is a fool, and will be a pur dahnashin soon. Suddhoo has lost his strength and his wits. See now! I had hoped to get from Suddhoo many rupees while he lived, and many more after his death; and behold, he is spending everything on that offspring of a devil and a she-ass, the seal-cutter!"

Here I said:—"But what induced Suddhoo to drag me into the business? Of course I can speak to the seal-cutter, and he shall refund. The whole thing is child's talk—shame—and senseless."

"Suddhoo *is* an old child," said Janoo. "He has lived on the roofs these seventy years and is as senseless as a milch-goat. He brought you here to assure himself that he was not breaking any law of the Sirkar, whose salt he ate many years ago. He worships the dust off the feet of the seal-cutter, and that cow-devourer has forbidden him to go and see his son. What does Suddhoo know of your laws or the lightning-post? I have to watch his money going day by day to that lying beast below."

Janoo stamped her foot on the floor and nearly cried with vexation; while Suddhoo was whimpering under a blanket in the corner, and Azizun was trying to guide the pipe-stem to his foolish old mouth.

Now the case stands thus. Unthinkingly, I have laid myself open to the charge of aiding and abetting the seal-cutter in obtaining money under false pretences, which is forbidden by Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code. I am helpless in the matter for these reasons, I cannot inform the Police. What witnesses would support my statements? Janoo refuses flatly, Azizun is a veiled woman somewhere near Bareilly—lost in this big India of ours. I cannot again take the law into my own hands, and speak to the seal-cutter; for certain am I that, not only would Suddhoo disbelieve me, but this step would end in the poisoning of Janoo, who is bound hand and foot by her debt to the bunnia. Suddhoo is an old dotard; and whenever we meet mumbles my idiotic joke that the Sirkar rather patronizes the Black Art than otherwise. His son is well now; but Suddhoo is completely under the influence of the seal-cutter, by whose advice he regulates the affairs of his life. Janoo watches daily the money that she hoped to wheedle out of Suddhoo taken by the seal-cutter, and becomes daily more furious and sullen.

She will never tell, because she dare not; but, unless something happens to prevent her, I am afraid that the seal-cutter will die of cholera—the white arsenic kind—about the middle of May. And thus I shall have to be privy to a murder in the House of Suddhoo.

THE END

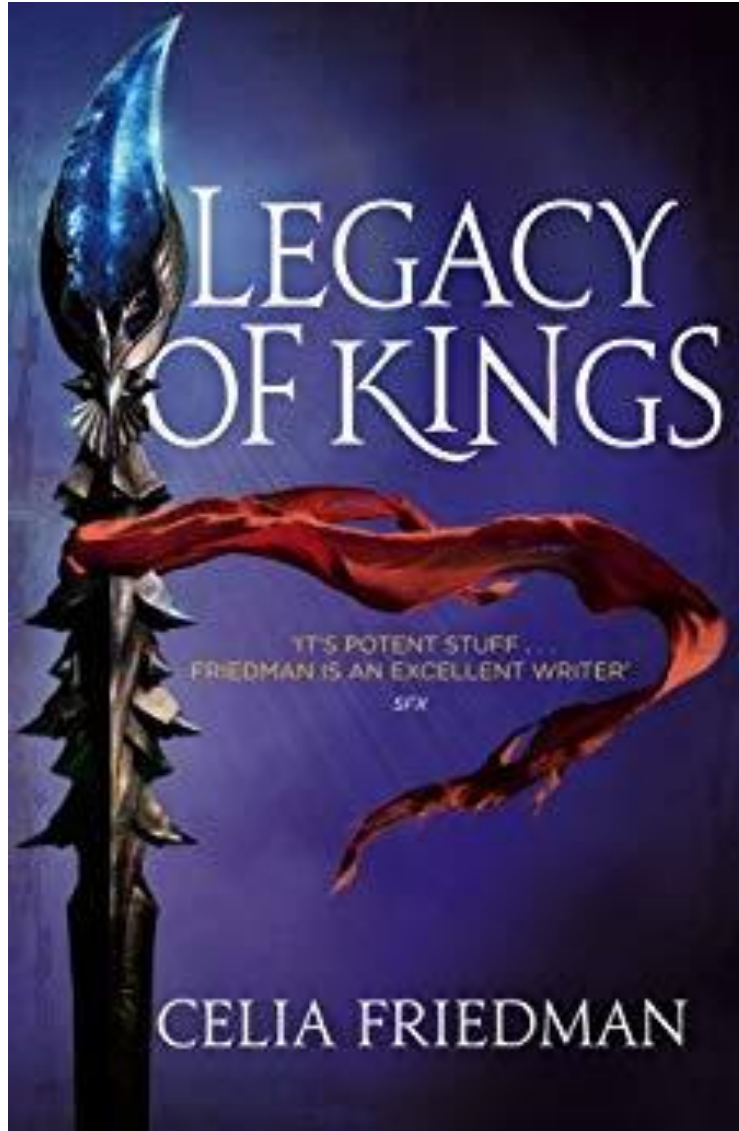
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Sherlock Holmes and the Beast-men of Atlantis

Milly 'Mad Dog'
McGuigan

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REVIEW by John C Adams



[Legacy of Kings by Celia Friedman](#)

This fantasy novel, the third in the Magister trilogy, brings the relationship between Magisters (sorcerers) centre stage.

Struggling to trust each other, even in the interest of the greater good, and intensely territorial, sparks fly whenever two Magisters end up in the same place, as Colivar quickly discovers.

'We are incapable even of talking face-to-face with our own kind without bestial instincts taking control of us. What kind of law do you envision for us? How do you propose to punish transgressors?'

But those words died on his lips, unvoiced. Because the suggestion, mad as it was, struck a chord deep within him. A human chord.

Meanwhile, female Magister Kamala is facing the difficult choice of whether to embrace her birthright, a terrifying force that will ensure her physical safety, if she can defeat the Souleaters.

She'd thought herself immune to such emotions and it was deeply disturbing to feel it take root with her now, spreading like a gangrenous infection through her psyche. It made her want to take the foul creatures in her naked hands and tear them limb from limb.

Siderea has control of the Souleaters (for now) and is looking to use them to expand her existing empire.

The fact that the Sleep had nothing to do with the gods, and everything to do with the male Souleaters who circled restlessly about Jezalya, feeding upon everything outside the borders, was a secret no one but Siderea needed to know. Like dogs on a leash, the great beasts circled restlessly about their mistress, sucking Jezalya's enemies dry.

Friedman has quite a rhetorical style, which I rather liked once I'd got used to it. Her style suits the dramatic interplay between Magisters and scholars like Salvator—they may appear physically unassuming but their powers will determine the fate of whole nations.

There was a strong intellectual feel to this novel, coming from the focus on characters whose skills lie in sorcery rather than brute force on the battlefield, which I appreciated. The characterisation was also very strong. These heroes and villains are feisty!

I also liked the delicate portrayal of the spiritual side of human life. Fantasy does quite often deal with religion, but this was far subtler than those novels that use religious themes or topics as an excuse to push their own particular world view. It gave you room to think for yourself—and that's never a bad thing.

Enjoy!

THE END

[Legacy of Kings by Celia Friedman](#) is available from [Amazon](#).
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LOBSTER'S REVENGE by Jesse Zimmerman

Part Two

I don't know how long my sister and I gazed at one another, warming in the glow of sunlight, the echo of a lone bird from up high the only thing heard.

We remain on that wooded ridge overlooking the clearing, the two fallen kobolds still in place, untouched by their own party that had captured our ranger friend. I would never have imagined such a thing happening; the Challenger was a great fighter. I would have expected him to chop off all their hands—good old Challenger!—Instead he was captured by these strangely tall and bulky kobolds and taken before our eyes.

Eventually we slip down to the clearing, finding a hidden trail, the one the Challenger had taken in his attempt to sneak up on the two guards. The troupe of kobolds had taken the roasted meat off the fire, of course, leaving nothing but ashes and crisped wood. I stand over the dead fire, looking at this new trail the kobolds had just gone down, while my sister inspects the two kobolds.

I step on a leathery small bag on the ground, some weird green ooze flowing out from its tied-up mouth. Leaning over, I grab hold of the bag by its single string, peering inside the mouth of it, seeing nothing but this bright green goo, wondering if it's some kind of kobold food.

"What are these things?" my sister asks as she steps upon the chest of the kobold that she had just dropped a wasp nest upon.

"I don't know," I say honestly. "In all my readings I've never heard of tall kobolds that stand as tall as people folk. Mind you, until a few days ago I thought kobolds were lizard-like creatures rather than rat-like things!"

These kobolds are different from the ones we'd encountered in Hair-Neck Valley. While furry and rat-like, these two and the ones that took the Challenger are far taller and stockier than any other we've seen. They are dressed in mail armour with a reddish tinge.

The kobold underneath Fauna's feet suddenly groans; he is alive, for now. We saw the Challenger slash at him, but as I look closely I see that he merely clinked the mail armour, and the blood that was on the kobold had splattered on him when he stabbed his own mate by mistake.

My sister grabs her bow, loading it with an arrow that she hovers over the injured kobold's swollen snout. The beast grunts as I move to my sister's side, pulling out my dagger from my belt in case she needs back-up.

"Speak swift!" Fauna shouts down to him, pulling her bowstring further. "Lest I give you more pain!"

“Nice line!” I compliment from her side.

“Thanks,” she says, pink appearing on her cheeks. “Now speak; what are you? Who do you work for?”

“Whom do you work for?” I correct her. She gives me an annoyed glare.

“Ah crikey!” grumbles the creature beneath us, spittle and blood spewing from his mouth as he speaks. “Youse too late! Chaos will be defeated!”

My sis groans. “Another weirdo,” she says. “Where did they take our friend?”

“Your friend? The thief? ‘E is doomed if we have taken him!” the kobold grumbles with a laugh. “The Master knows how to deal with such folk!”

“Master? Where is your master?” I ask, waving my dagger over his face.

The kobold guard grunts, spits, and then laughs again. I see him moving one of his arms slowly, reaching for his spear, which had fallen earlier.

“Fauna, watch out! He’s going for his spear!” I yell.

He moves his hand swiftly, grabbing the shaft, about to strike it upward at her. “Hold! Hold!” Sis yells at the wretched creature beneath her, stepping hard with her boot onto the mid-point of the spear, snapping it in half.

“You busted me spear, you has!”

“She’ll bust more if you don’t listen to what she says!” I warn him, Fauna giving me a glare and a small grin, clearly impressed that I’ve taken over her badass role.

“Bloody females!” curses our captive.

“You’ll be bloody if you don’t shut up!” I retort.

“Mmm,” says Fauna. “That line was just banking off the last one. Anyway, get up! Up, slowly!”

The tall kobold scrunches his rat-like maw, shaking his head a little as he leans upward, both of his black eyes on the arrow-tip that rests apprehensively a few inches from his furry face.

“Should’ve known we was being watched! Failed we did!”

“Who is the master we heard you speak of?” I ask.

“Labstruman,” he declares, a hint of pride in his voice.

Fauna pulls her bowstring back again. “Where can we find this ‘Labstruman’?”

His beady eyes narrow in on me, and then he laughs, his raised upper snout revealing sharp canine-like teeth about a lolling red tongue. “Females? Aye, wanting to listen to Labstruman? Ha ha!”

“We want our friend,” I say, realizing he may not be cooperative. “That’s all! Now lead us there!”

He shakes his furry head. “No! You females are not worthy of our Master! You will bring only chaos!”

“Females? What, wasn’t your mother a female?” I ask him, confused.

“Nah, we kobolds spawn from slime-pits, all males, all fighters,” he chuckles back, crossing his hairy arms. “We are lucky that Master Labstruman gives us order!”

“We’re getting nowhere!” Fauna suddenly snaps, and for a moment I think she’s going to pull so hard on the bow it’ll snap. “Let’s just kill this loser and find his master ourselves!”

At this point I am so frustrated I almost agree. I raise my dagger before his ugly face and shriek: “This is your last chance; help us or die!”

The kobold grins, licks his lips, and stares at the small blade I wield. He is bold, strangely brave. I realize that he won’t tell us. “Fine,” I say. “Then we’ll let you go.”

“Flora!” Sis shouts from my side. I turn myself about, still carrying the bag of goo. I slyly make a tiny cut in it with the tip of the dagger. A bit of goo slowly trickles out. Reaching behind me, I loosen Barpar’s knapsack about my backside, flinging it to the ground, placing the leaking bag of goo inside it. I turn about, tie up Barpar’s bag, and throw it to him, yelling him to take his slime with him. He straps it to his back.

I nudge back, wink to her. “Go and don’t look back or my sister here will shoot you as you run!”

The kobold laughs loudly, his voice coarse and high-pitched at once, a truly hideous sound. And then he charges off, clambering out of the clearing and onto a hitherto unseen forest trail, the same one his mates had taken the Challenger down. My sister loses an arrow that slams into a trunk by his side, clearly visible to the fleeing enemy, and then she loads up another.

“Why did you free him?” she asks me, going from pink to bright red.

“Shoot Barpar’s bag, just do it,” I tell her in reply.

She does so, striking its midpoint, the kobold leaping up and down as he tears away from sight. “Come,” I say, waving my hand, taking off after the foe. She immediately understands. We are going to follow him to the lair of Labstruman. As we make our way down the path we see tiny drops of the green goo here and there. At one point, as we turn alongside a woodland creek, we

lose the trail, only for me to spot a dab of the goo on the other side of the stream. We vault across and continue on. Thankfully we find an apple tree and satiate our hunger for the time being.

Evening falls when we find ourselves at a treeless mound in a large clearing. This earthen barrow raises nearly four stories above the ground, covered in tall grasses and weeds, some rocks jutting here and there along its rising surface. I tell Fauna that it looks like an ancient burial spot, or possibly a subterranean temple. It is not too different from the mound we saw in Hair Neck Valley a few days ago, and just like that hilly mound back there, we see an entranceway, a man-sized portal that leads downward.

“Not this again,” my sis mutters, sword in hand, pointing with her free hand to the drops of green goo that lead into the doorway and down some steps into darkness. “We can’t go in the front door. Here, I feel a breeze from elsewhere, a gust of hot air.”

“You’ve been around the Challenger for too long,” I say, meaning it as a compliment, her skills.

Fauna walks around the stony doorway, stepping onto the mound’s upward sloping surface, sifting between tall wobbly flowers with bright red petals. Further up she finds a rock that is around her size. She kicks it off the hill, revealing, from where I stand at the base, a small hole. I run up to join her while she pokes her head in the hole. It is the size of a large dog, just enough for our smallish, thin forms to fit through. I feel what she was referring to, warm air coming through.

As usual she goes in first, disappearing quickly, the soles of her red boots the last thing I see. She calls back to me, tells me it widens further down. I hesitate for a moment, but remember the Challenger, and I dive in next. At first, I can only wiggle forward, kicking at the earth walls behind me, nudging forward towards my sister’s stinky feet, but, like she says, as I move forward I slowly find I can move my arms and shoulders more. Soon we are crawling on our hands and knees through a space, bumping our heads lightly on a rocky roof. Hot air pushes past us, and, as we descend deeper into the earth, we begin to feel heat, and hear voices.

They are grumbling things, likely the kobolds, or so we both hope and dread. After some time in the darkness we see a reddish-orange light at this tunnel’s end, fire. I see the walls of the space we crawl through flicker beyond Fauna’s bobbing head. And then we hear a singular voice. It is dry, a near monotonous in tone, the voice echoing off the walls of a nearby chamber.

I hear it and I listen carefully:

“Ye have all assembled here to harken to me rage,
Cognizant of all obstacles of our incongruous age,
Of absurdity and inanity of agents of change,
That would lead to countenance derange,
Tis I who advert your clans from disaster,
Look upon me, your leader, your hard-shelled master,
For without such hierarchic structures all would be bored,
If not for me, your crustacean overlord,

Who took you from snivelling rats, useless and poor,
Whose buttocks hovered inches from the floor,
The antidote to any chaotic insipidity,
'Tis an expeditious acceptance of all hierarchy,
For in hierarchy we find our meaning,
With logic, reasoning, and fact-leaning,
Those on the bottom ought to remain,
And those on the top get to lay claim,
We strive to keep things as they are,
To cease life from getting too bizarre,
Remain hierarchical, at all times,
But now I tire of generating these rhymes,
Now you shall have a lecture, straight and fast,
To teach you of the future and times of past!"

Fauna groans under her breath as we make it to the end of the low-ceilinged tunnel, finding ourselves upon a rocky perch in a large chamber. We must be underneath the ground, for this big room is far too large to be contained in the mound alone. It's like a balcony, this place we find ourselves on, and we look down and around a great open space. Beneath us we see them; a great many kobolds—or alphabolds—these large man-sized beasts, all clad in the same red armour. There have to be at least thirty of them, all facing the front of the room, away from where we peer over.

They all face a tall earthen wall, the ceiling made of rock with immense stalactites projecting downward like a hundred stone knives, their shadows cast nightmarishly upon the room's walls, mingling with the shadows of the spears wielded by the two-legged creatures. Beneath this wall sits a great stone chair, a throne of kinds that looks like it could seat five of me. Seated upon this is a bulky figure in a black cloak, its face unseen under the hood, as well as its arms and hands. All I can see is a pair of thick red feet clad in big brown boots that rest underneath the cloaked figure.

"So, you've toughened up," the dry voice speaks from behind the draped hood. "Today I am told there is news, but first, let me enunciate a narrative for us to ponderously observe. We all know I grew you, taught you of the intrinsic value of hierarchies, but today I speak of my past. I once lived in a place called Silver Coast, a great city."

"Represent," Fauna peeps, but I am too shocked to respond.

This being is saying he is from our home city?

"I was once a lonely thing, great and wise, familiar with all kinds of knowledge of embodiments and patterns. In my youth, as I learned at the campus, I found myself a victim of a great injustice. It seemed that those with great minds like myself were destined to be alone, while those muscled men at the top had all the opportunities to engage in mating, procreating, and eventually child-rearing. It is an injustice and it continues! Things ought to be changed, made fairer, so all of us lonely things can flourish as well!"

There are grunts, squeals, and screeches from the standing crowd; spears rise and fall in waves that start from the back rows and end at the front nearest the cloaked thing that speaks.

Fauna and I turn to face one another in perfect synch, and I am sure that I look as perplexed as she does. Sis looks like her face is scrunched up like a stress ball.

“Did he not just sing a whole song about not challenging hierarchies?” she asks me.

“I thought that was the point, so not sure what he’s saying now.”

“Well, don’t correct him. Let’s not give ourselves away.”

“Oh, it’s me who is going to leap down there recklessly?”

“Got to be ready,” she says, turning back to the assembly. While we gaze over the ugly things I wonder if there is a way to convince them that this leader of theirs is a fraud, but as I look over the snivelling, slobbering mass, I start to doubt that they can be convinced. For creatures as stupid as them, this leader probably appears intelligent.

“Look at your spears striking above your heads in perfect order, harmony,” the speaker says next, his voice echoing off the walls just as it did when he had been singing. “Before we start, have we any news? Patrols?”

A kobold steps forth. I see Fauna at my side sliding her bow off of her nearly flat body. It’s the kobold we’d followed here, stains of green seen all over his furry backside. He takes off the decrepit knapsack, raising it in both of his hairy palms.

“The prisoner has friends he does!” the smaller one squeaks. “This came from them!”

“Ah!” cries the figure on the throne. “A backpack covered in the antidote!”

Fauna nudges me, pointing with her arrow down the way to the side of the first row of kobolds. I see him. It’s the Challenger!

The ranger stands before two of the kobolds, his hands bound with rope, his face showing no sign of fear, though it is hard to tell from this distance. He blinks with his one eye, looking about the chamber, turning away when I try to give him a tiny wave. He does not see us. Maybe they will question him. Maybe he will lie and convince them to let him go. He always tells us he has a high charisma level, whatever that means.

A small kobold, half the size of these others, like the ones we’ve seen before, scatters out from the crowd, running toward the gooey knapsack at the feet of the throne-sitter. The creature grabs it, bringing it over to the concealed hands of this being. This is when I see it, the dark claw that emerges from the black sleeve, and as quickly as it appears it becomes covered from my vantage point by Barpar’s bag.

“Uh-oh,” I whisper to Sis.

“What is it?”

“Lasbtruman,” I say, realizing it: “Lobster-Man!”

And then the thing with the monotonous voice goes wild, a booming gasp shooting out from beneath the dark hood. “Murderers!” he shouts. “Usurpers!”

The kobolds reel back for a second, even from our sight appearing confused before they all echo: “Murderers! Usurpers!” making the cave walls shake.

“Be you friends of Barpar?” cries Lobster-Man.

The Challenger speaks: “Yes. What’s it to you?”

I groan, hearing the tightening of the bowstring aside my left ear.

“Barpar! Murderer! He has slain my best friends! Frog-Boy! Slug-Lord! I barely made it here alive!” the voice shouts. The cloak falls back as the big thing stands up from the throne.

“Ew!” says Fauna, but no one hears save me because the crowd below us is now roaring and clashing their weapons.

Lobster-Man is tall, taller than these kobolds by nearly three feet. His legs and arms are spindly, but his middle thick and pink, his claws three times the size of his big head. The face though, it looks not like a lobster’s, but of a man’s; circular, red, with big round black eyes, a tiny nose and a grinning mouth without teeth. Upon his head, above his four small antennae and two dangling, long pink feelers, there is hair, greyish, a brimmed brown hat, similar to the slain Slug-Lord’s hat.

“You’re Lobster-Man!” the Challenger shouts. The kobolds all murmur angrily, while the two behind the ranger both grab his arms tightly.

“Yes! And you’re going to pay for burning me! I’ll slap you!” retorts the Lobster angrily, raising one of his claws, this one black, the other red like the rest of him.

“You wouldn’t let us go!” the prisoner says. “We didn’t want to be in your stupid game!”

“Well now you’ll die for Slug-Lord and Frog-Boy! For the sake of order over chaos!” Lobster-Man shrieks, his kobolds all rushing forth at once towards the Challenger.

“Chaos wins! And don’t think I don’t know where you got that green goo from! It’s not yours! You didn’t create it!” we hear him yell as the furry bodies cover our sight of him. Fauna and I stand to our feet at once, my dagger already in my hand, her arrow already fired. It hits a nearby

kobold in the back, and he falls and screams, writhing in pain at the feet of the others, but none of them notice. She readies another.

“What’ll we do?” I ask her, hearing the fear in my voice. Part of me wants to run, or rather crawl fast, back from where we came, out of this cursed place! But we can’t. I know we can’t leave him.

“Stop!” cries Lobster-Man, his voice now louder than ever. The crowd of kobolds all freeze, and I see the Challenger as some step back from him, his face already a little bloodied. The lobster being raises both claws over his head, wailing in apparent rage. “Bring him here! I shall show you how to deal with chaotic soy-folk!”

Laughter follows from the so-called alphabolds. Some near the front step back, while others behind the Challenger nudge him forward, spears at his back, the man-like rat things cackling as he steps forward.

“Tell me your name, so I will know whose head I claw off!” the master demands, his grin taking up most of his face as he leans his long, flat shelled-covered neck forward.

“The Challenger!”

The crowd is silent. Lobster-man shakes his head and says “I ask for you real name, not some name you made up! You cannot force me to say your made-up title!”

“I am the Challenger! Is Lobster-Man even your real name? Repeat my name before me and remember it!”

Fauna draws her bow once more, this time aiming for the lobster. I hope she can get him right in the soft spot, wherever that is.

“I am Lobster-Man! I have the alpha spot on the food-chain! I have more than you! I control an army of enhanced kobolds, alphabolds, my servants!” he shouts, turning to his soldiers. “All you alphabolds I have made! My fighting soldiers! Who do you serve?”

“Labstruman!” they all shout back at once, the walls throbbing once more.

I can’t take any more of this!

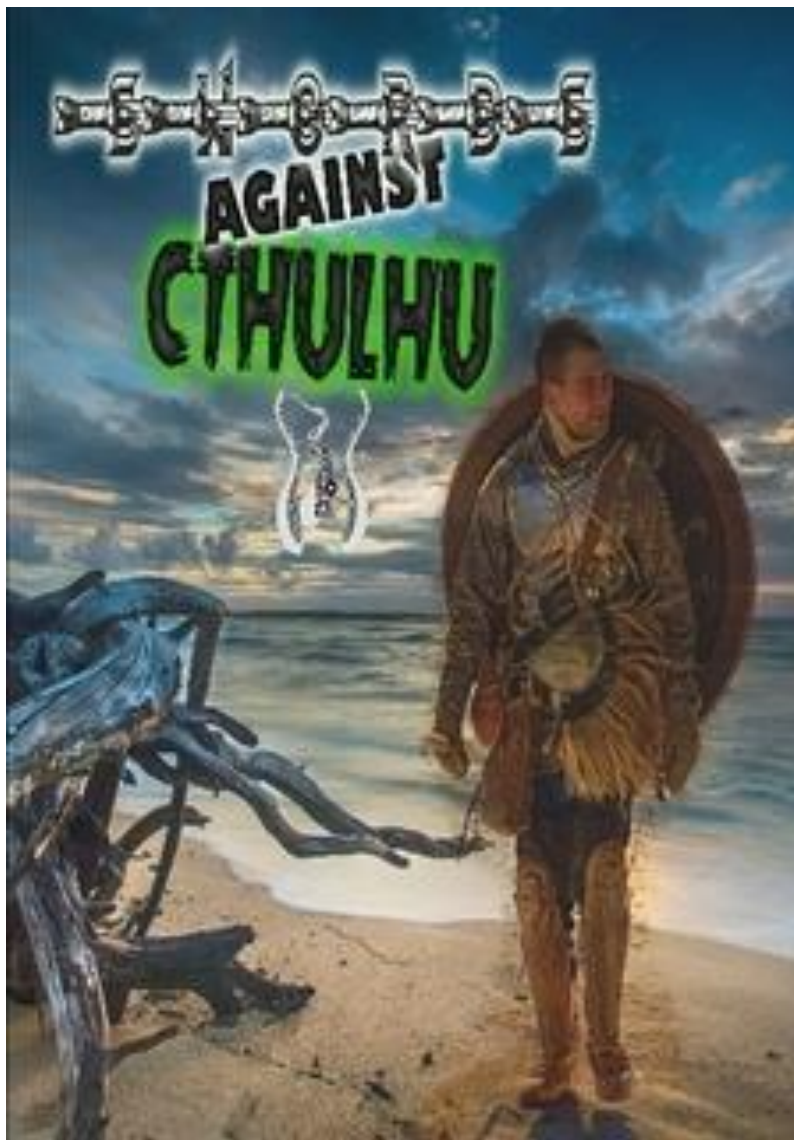
Standing in place upon the high perch, I just shout: “It’s whom do you serve, not who do you serve! How can you preach lessons when you don’t even know rudimentary grammar?” my voice leaps over the precipice and flows throughout the chamber, echoing like Lobster-Man’s voice had.

There is silence save the sound of their thirty or so bodies shuffling and turning about. They see us. Lobster-man gives the enraged order to slay us all.

*What's this?
Genetically enhanced kobold killing machines?
A creature who loves hierarchies except the ones he's at the bottom of?
The Challenger, a prisoner of Lobster-Man?
Flora and Fauna standing above a literal echo chamber with all weapons trained on them?
Is this the end of our talkative trio?
Find out next week!
Same Lobster zine! Same Lobster website!*

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THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE by Gregory KH Bryant

Part Twenty-One

Turhan Mot stood beside Tu Hit at the bridge of the silent, and nearly invisible ship, the “Dawnsmasher”. Turhan Mot, standing just several inches short of seven feet at these distant places, where gravity is scarce, and light, fumed silently to himself. Though this short mission was of his own planning, he must please Horst Dal, whose taste for cruelty was most practiced.

So it was that Turhan Mot served as Tu Hit’s second in this mission, as Horst Dal most generously funded it, and by that act of generosity, purchased for himself the right to determine who would serve upon that mission, and in what capacity.

So Turhan Mot found himself serving under Mokem Bet. Chagrined though he was to find himself in so awkward a position, yet still he kept his outward composure still and silent. There was no need to give those so hated him the satisfaction they craved. Let them work for it.

For their own parts, Horst Dal and Yamir were satisfied with the humiliation they had already inflicted upon Turhan Mot. Though they were perfectly capable of shocking cruelty when circumstances required it, they were very practical men, and never exceeded the needs of the moment. Their point had been made, there was no need in press it any further.

And Mokem Bet knew better than to antagonize his former master in any way. Turhan Mot had been his commander for too many years for Mokem Bet ever to forget, even for so much as a minute Turhan Mot’s taste for extreme cruelty. And if anything were certain, it was the man’s cunning. Turhan Mot had been his commander before. And nothing, except dying, would stand in the way of him taking command of the “Grand Marquis” and its crews again.

And again, Tu Hit’s sole interest was in piloting the “Grand Marquis”. He had no interest in seeking to wrest command of the ship away from Turhan Mot.

So it was that to a large degree, Turhan Mot found his position largely unchanged, except for the paperwork. Which went far in tempering his rage. Mokem Bet had developed a cunning method of communicating orders, in such a way that though they appeared to come from Mokem Bet, they in truth, came from Mokem Bet himself.

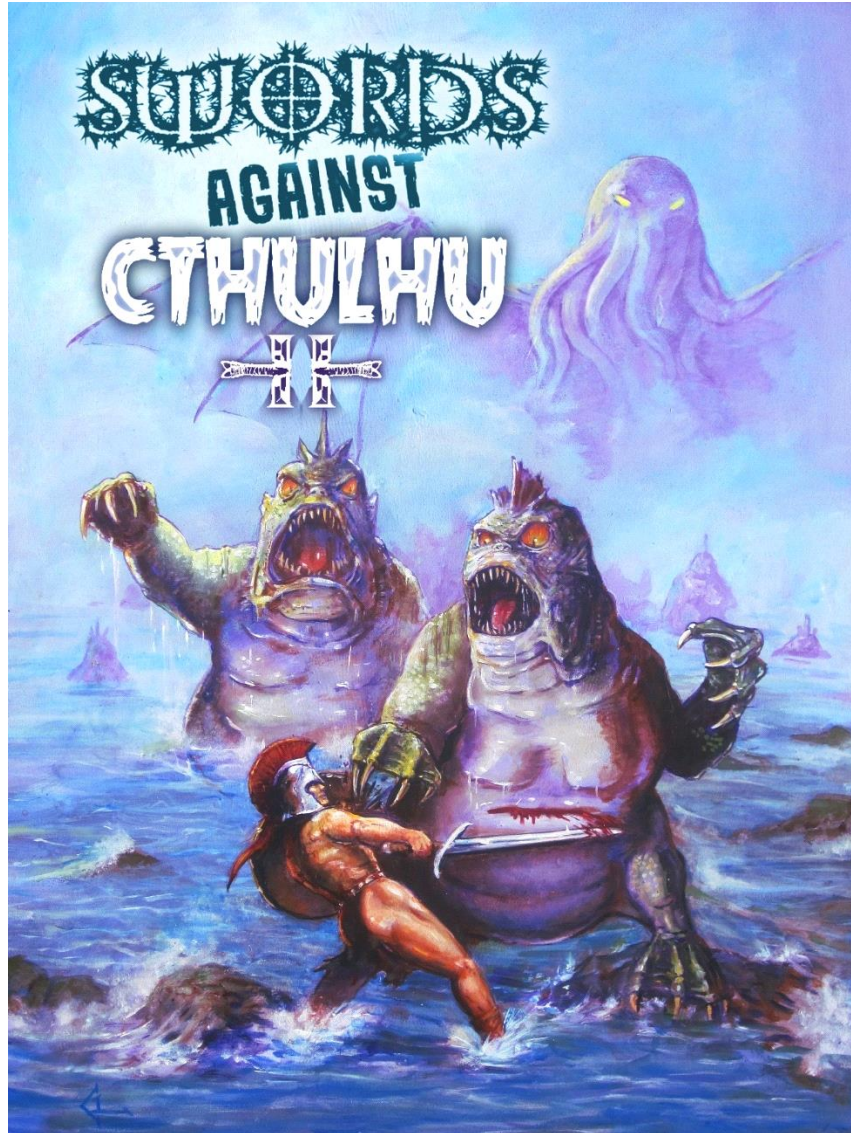
Most often, the commands came directly from Turhan Mot himself. And the mission was to follow Kharl Stoff and his flotilla to the Derelict. Once Stoff and his crew had captured the Carter Ward, they’d carry Ward and whoever was with him to Horst Dal.

It happened several times that the ship Turhan Mot was following slowed its speed. Each time it did, Ward’s ship slowed its own speed. Carter Ward’s suspicions grew even greater.

Turhan Mot became surer that the ship he was pursuing was Carter Ward’s very own 08-111A.

“Follow her in,” he commanded. “But not too closely. That ship is deadly.”

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ACROSS THE ZODIAC by Percy Greg

Chapter XXVII—The Valley of the Shadow.

If I could have endured to describe to Eveena the terrible trial scene, that which occurred before she had the chance to question me would have certainly sealed my lips. The past night had told upon me as no fatigue, no anxiety, no disaster of my life on Earth had ever done. I awoke faint and exhausted as a nervous valetudinarian, and I suppose my feeling must have been plainly visible in my face, for Eveena would not allow me to rise from the cushions till she had summoned an ambâ and procured the material of a morning meal, though the hour was noon. Far too considerate to question me then, she was perhaps a little disappointed that, almost before I had dressed, a message from her father summoned me to his presence.

“It is right,” he said quietly, and with no show of feeling, though his face was somewhat pale, “that you should be acquainted with the fulfilment of the sentence you assisted to pass. The outcast was found this morning dead in his own chamber. Nay, you need not start! We need no deathsman; alike by sudden disease, by suicide, by accident, our doom executes itself. But enough of this. I accepted the vote which invested you with the second rank in our Order, less because I think you will render service to it here than that I desired you to possess that entire knowledge of its powers and secrets which might enable you to plant a branch or offshoot where none but you could carry it ... That you will soon leave this world seemed to me probable, before the anticipations of practical prudence were confirmed by the voice of prophecy. Your Astronaut shall be stored with all of which I know you have need, and with any materials whose use I do not know that you may point out. To remove it from Asnyea would now be too dangerous. If you receive tidings that shall bring you again into its neighbourhood, do not lose the opportunity of re-entering it.... And now let me take leave of you, as of a dear friend I may not meet again.”

“Do you know,” I said, more touched by the tone than by the words, “that Eveena asked and I gave a promise that when I do re-enter it she shall be my companion?”

“I did not know it, but I took for granted that she would desire it, and I should have been grieved to doubt that you would assent. I cannot disturb her peace by saying to her what I have just said to you, and must part from her as on any ordinary occasion.”

That parting, happily, I did not witness. Before evening we re-entered our vessel, and returned home without any incident worthy of mention.

To my surprise, my return plunged me at once into the kind of vexation which Eveena had so anxiously endeavoured to spare me, and which I had hoped Eunané’s greater decision and less exaggerated tenderness would have avoided. She seemed excited and almost fretful, and before we had been half an hour at home had greeted me with a string of complaints which, on her own showing, seemed frivolous, and argued as much temper on her part as customary petulance on that of others. On one point, however, her report confirmed the suggestions of Eveena’s previous experience. She had wrested at once from Eivé’s hand the pencil that had hitherto been used in absolute secrecy, and the consequent quarrel had been sharp enough to suggest, if not to prove,

that the privilege was of practical as well as sentimental moment. Though aggravated by no rebuke, my tacit depreciation of her grievances irritated Eunané to an extreme of petulance unusual with her of late; which I bore so long as it was directed against myself, but which, turned at last on Eveena, wholly exhausted my patience. But no sooner had I dismissed the offender than Eveena herself interposed, with even more than her usual tenderness for Eunané.

“Do not blame my presumption,” she said; “do not think that I am merely soft or weak, if I entreat you to take no further notice of Eunané’s mood. I cannot but think that, if you do, you will very soon repent it.”

She could not or would not give a reason for her intercession; but some little symptoms I might have seen without observing, some perception of the exceptional character of Eunané’s outbreak, or some unacknowledged misgiving accordant with her own, made me more than willing to accept Eveena’s wish as a sufficient cause for forbearance. When we assembled at the morning meal Eunané appeared to be conscious of error; at all events, her manner and temper were changed. Watching her closely, I thought that neither shame for an outbreak of unwonted extravagance nor fear of my displeasure would account for her languor and depression. But illness is so rare among a race educated for countless generations on principles scientifically sound and sanitary, inheriting no seeds of disease from their ancestry, and safe from the infection of epidemics long extirpated, that no apprehension of serious physical cause for her changes of temper and complexion entered into my mind. To spare her when she deserved no indulgence was the surest way to call forth Eunané’s best impulses; and I was not surprised to find her, soon after the party had dispersed, in Eveena’s chamber. That all the amends I could desire had been made and accepted was sufficiently evident. But Eunané’s agitation was so violent and persistent, despite all Eveena’s soothing, that I was at last seriously apprehensive of its effect upon the latter. The moment we were alone Eveena said—

“I have never seen illness, but if Eunané is not ill, and very ill, all I have gathered in my father’s household from such books as he has allowed me, and from his own conversation, deceives me wholly; and yet no illness of which I have ever heard in the slightest degree resembles this.”

“I take it to be,” I said, “what on Earth women call hysteria and men temper.”

To this opinion, however, I could not adhere when, watching her closely, I noticed the evident lack of spirit and strength with which the most active and energetic member of the household went about her usual pursuits. A terrible suspicion at first entered my mind, but was wholly discountenanced by Eveena, who insisted that there was no conceivable motive for an attempt to injure Eunané; while the idea that mischief designed for others had unintentionally fallen on her was excluded by the certainty that, whatever the nature of her illness, if it were such, it had commenced before our return. Long before evening I had communicated with Esmo, and received from him a reply which, though exceedingly unsatisfactory, rather confirmed Eveena’s impression. The latter had taken upon herself the care of the evening meal; but, before we could meet there, my own observation had suggested an alarm I dared not communicate to her—one which a wider experience than hers could neither verify nor dispel. Among symptoms wholly alien, there were one or two which sent a thrill of terror to my heart;—which reminded me of the most awful and destructive of the scourges wherewith my Eastern life had rendered me but too

familiar. It was not unnatural that, if carried to a new world, that fearful disease should assume a new form; but how could it have been conveyed? how, if conveyed, could its incubation in some unknown vehicle have been so long? and how had it reached one, and one only, of my household—one, moreover, who had no access to such few relics of my own world as I had retained, of which Eveena had the exclusive charge? All Esmo's knowledge, even were he within reach, could hardly help me here. I dared, of course, suggest my apprehension to no one, least of all to the patient herself. As, towards evening, her languor was again exchanged for the feverish excitement of the previous night, I seized on some petulant word as an excuse to confine her to her room, and, selfishly enough, resolved to invoke the help of the only member of the family who should, and perhaps would, be willing to run personal risk for the sake of aiding Eunané in need and protecting Eveena. I had seen as yet very little of Velna, Eunané's school companion; but now, calling her apart, I told her frankly that I feared some illness of my own Earth had by some means been communicated to her friend.

"You have here," I said, "for ages had no such diseases as those which we on Earth most dread; those which, communicated through water, air, or solid particles, spread from one person to another, endangering especially those who come nearest to the sufferers. Whoever approaches Eunané risks all that I fear for her, and that 'all' means very probably speedy death. To leave her alone is impossible; and if I cannot report that she is fully cared for in other hands, no command, nothing short of actual compulsion, will keep Eveena away from her."

The girl looked up with a steady frank courage and unaffected readiness I had not expected.

"I owe you much, Clafempta, and still more perhaps to Eveena. My life is not so precious that I should not be ready to give it at need for either of you; and if I should lose Eunané, I would prefer not to live to remember my loss."

The last words reminded me that to her who spoke death meant annihilation; a fact which has deprived the men of her race of nearly every vestige of the calm courage now displayed by this young girl, indebted as little as any human being could be to the insensible influences of home affection, or the direct moral teaching which is sometimes supposed to be a sufficient substitute. I led her at once into her friend's chamber, and a single glance satisfied me that my apprehensions were but too well-founded. Remaining long enough to assure the sufferer that the displeasure I had affected had wholly passed away, and to suggest the only measures of relief rather than of remedy that occurred to me, I endeavoured for a few moments to collect my thoughts and recover the control of my nerves in solitude. In my own chamber Eveena would assuredly have sought me, and I chose therefore one of those as yet unoccupied. It did not take long to convince me that no ordinary resources at my command, no medical experience of my own, no professional science existing among a race who probably never knew the disease in question, and had not for ages known anything like it, could avail me. My later studies in the occult science of Eastern schools had not furnished me with any antidote in which I believed on Earth, and if they had, it was not here available. Despair rather than hope suggested an appeal to those which the analogous secrets of the Starlight might afford. Anxiety, agitation, personal interest so powerful as now disturbed me, are generally fatal to the exercise of the powers recently placed at my command; so recently that, but for Terrestrial experience, I should hardly have known how to use them. But the arts which assist in and facilitate that tremendous all-

absorbing concentration of will on which the exertion of those powers depends, are far more fully developed in the Zveltic science than in its Earthly analogues. A desperate effort, aided by those arts, at last controlled my thoughts, and turned them from the sick-room to that distant chamber in which I had so lately stood.

I seemed to stand beside her, and at once to be aware that my thought was visible to the closed eyes. From lips paler than ever, words—so generally resembling those I had previously heard that some readers may think them the mere recollection thereof—appeared to reach my sense or my mind as from a great distance, spoken in a tone of mingled pity, promise, and reproof:—

“What is youth or sex or beauty in the All-Commander’s sight?
For the arm that smote and spared not, shall His wisdom spare to smite?
Yet, love redeems the loving; yet in thy need avail
The Soul whose light surrounds thee, the faith that will not fail.
Thy lips shall soothe the terror, call to yon couch afar
The solace of the Serpent, the shadow of the Star!
Strength shall sustain the strengthless, nor the soft hand loose its grasp
Of the hand it trusts and clings to—till another meet its clasp....
—Steel-hard to man’s last anguish, wax-soft to woman’s mood!—
Death quits not the death-dealer; blood haunts the life of blood!”

Returning to the peristyle, I encountered Eveena, who had been seeking me anxiously. Much alarmed for her, I bade her return at once to her room. She obeyed as of course, equally of course surprised and a little mortified; while I, marvelling by what conceivable means the plague of Cairo or Constantinople could have been conveyed across forty million miles of space and some two years of Earthly time, paced the peristyle for a few minutes. As I did so, my eye fell on the roses which grew just where chance arrested my steps. If they do not afford an explanation which scientific medicine will admit, I can suggest no other. But, if it were so, how fearfully true the warning!—by what a mysterious fate did death dog my footsteps, and “blood haunt the life of blood!”

The reader may not remember that the central chamber of the women’s apartments, next to which was Eunané’s, had been left vacant. This I determined to occupy myself, and bade the girls remove at once to those on its right, as yet unallotted. I closed the room, threw off my dress, and endeavoured by means of the perfumed shower-bath to drive from my person what traces of the infection might cling to it; for Eveena had the keys of all my cases and of the medicine-chest, and I could not make up my mind to reclaim them by a simple unexplained message sent by an ambâ, or, still worse, by the hands of Enva or Eivé. I laid the clothes I had worn on one of the shelves of the wall, closing over them the crystal doors of the sunken cupboard; and, having obtained through the amban a dress which I had not worn since my return, and which therefore could hardly have about it any trace of infection, I sought Eveena in her own room.

That something had gone wrong, and gravely wrong, she could not but know; and I found her silent and calm, indeed, but weeping bitterly, whether for the apprehension of danger to me, or for what seemed want of trust in her. I asked her for the keys, and she gave them; but with a mute appeal that made the concealment I desired, however necessary, no longer possible. Gently, cautiously as I could, but softening, not hiding, any part of the truth, I gave her the full confidence to which she was entitled, and which, once forced out of the silence preserved for her sake, it was an infinite relief to give. If I could not observe equal gentleness of word and manner in absolutely forbidding her to approach, either Eunané's chamber or my own, it was because, the moment she conceived what I was about to say, her almost indignant revolt from the command was apparent. For the first and last time she distinctly and firmly refused compliance, not merely with the kindly though very decided request at first spoken, but with the formal and peremptory command by which I endeavoured to enforce it.

"You command me to neglect a sister in peril and suffering," she said. "It is not kind; it is hardly worthy of you; but my first duty is to you, and you have the right, if you will, to insist that I shall reserve my life for your sake. But you command me also to forsake you in danger and in sorrow; and nothing but the absolute force you may of course employ shall compel me to obey you in that."

"I understand you, Eveena; and you, in your turn, must think and feel that I intend to express neither displeasure nor pain; that I mean no harshness to you, no less respect as well as love than I have always shown you, when I say that obey you shall; that the same sense of duty which impels you to refuse obliges me to enforce my command. At no time would I have allowed you to risk your life where others might be available. But if you were the only one who could help, I should, under other circumstances, have felt that the same paramount duty that attaches to me attached in a lighter degree to yourself. Now, as you well know, the case is different; and even were Eunané not quite safe in my hands and in Velna's, you must not run a risk that can be avoided. You will promise me to remain on this side the peristyle or in the further half of it, or I must confine you perforce; and it is not kind or right in this hour of trouble to impose upon me so painful a task."

With every tone, look, and caress that could express affection and sympathy, Eveena answered—

"Do what seems your duty, and do not think that I misunderstand your motive or feel the shadow of humiliation or unkindness. Make me obey if you can, punish me if I disobey; but obey you, when you tell me, for my own life's sake or for any other, to desert you in the hour of need, of danger, and of sorrow, I neither will nor can." I cut short the scene, bidding her a passionate farewell in view of the probability that we should not meet again. I closed the door behind me, having called her whom at this moment and in this case I could best trust, because her worse as well as her better qualities were alike guarantees for her obedience.

"Enva," I said, "you will keep this room till I release you; and you will answer it to me, as the worst fault you can commit, if Eveena passes this threshold, under whatever circumstances, until I give her permission, or until, if it be beyond my power to give it, her father takes the responsibilities of my home upon himself."

I procured the sedatives which might relieve the suffering I could not hope to cure. I wrote to Esmo, stating briefly but fully the position as I conceived it; and, on a suggestion from Eivé, I despatched another message to a female physician of some repute—one of those few women in Mars who lead the life and do the work of men, and for whose attendance, as I remembered, Eunané had expressed a strong theoretical preference.

From that time I scarcely left her chamber save for a few minutes, and Velna remained constantly at her friend's side, save when, to give her at least a chance of escape, I sent her to her room to bathe, change her dress, and seek the fresh air for the half hour during which alone I could persuade her to leave the sufferer. The daftare (man-woman) physician came, but on learning the nature of the disease, expressed intense indignation that she had been summoned to a position of so much danger to herself.

I answered by a contemptuous inquiry regarding the price for which she would run so much risk as to remain in the peristyle so long as I might have need of her presence; and, for a fee which would ensure her a life-income as large as that secured to Eveena herself, she consented to remain within speaking distance for the few hours in which the question must be decided. Eunané was seldom insensible or even delirious, and her quick intelligence caught very speedily the meaning of my close attendance, and of the distress which neither Velna nor I could wholly conceal. She asked and extracted from me what I knew of the origin of her illness, and answered, with a far stronger feeling than I should have expected even from her—

“If I am to die, I am glad it should be through trying to serve and please Eveena.... It may seem strange, Clafempta,” she went on presently, “scarcely possible perhaps; but my love for her is not only greater than the love I bear you, but is so bound up with it that I always think of you together, and love you the better that I love her, and that you love her so much better than me.... But,” she resumed later, “it is hard to die, and die so young. I had never known what happiness meant till I came here.... I have been so happy here, and I was happier each day in feeling that I no longer made Eveena or you less happy. Ah! let me thank you and Eveena while I can for everything, and above all for Velna.... But,” after another long pause, “it is terrible and horrible—never to wake, to move, to hear your voices, to see you, to look upon the sunlight, to think, or even to dream again! Once, to remove a tooth and straighten the rest, they made me senseless; and that sinking into senselessness, though I knew I should waken in a minute, was horrible; and—to sink into senselessness from which I shall never waken!”

She was sinking fast indeed, and this terror of death, so seldom seen in the dying, grew apparently deeper and more intense as death drew near. I could not bear it, and at last took my resolve and dismissed Velna, forbidding her to return till summoned.

“Ah!” said Eunané, “you send her away that she may not see the last.

Is it so near?”

“No, darling!” I replied (she, like Eveena, had learnt the meaning of one or two expressions of human affection in my own tongue), “but I have that to say which I would not willingly say in her presence. You dread death not as a short terrible pain, and for you it will not be so, not as a

short sleep, but as eternal senselessness and nothingness. Has it never seemed to you strange that, loving Eveena as I do, I do not fear to die? Though you did not know it, I have lived almost since first you knew me under the threat of death; and death sudden, secret, without warning, menacing me every day and every hour. And yet, though death meant leaving her and leaving her to a fate I could not foresee, I have been able to look on it steadily. Kneeling here, I know that I am very probably giving my life to the same end as yours. I do not fear. That may not seem strange to you; but Eveena knows all I know, and I could scarcely keep Eveena away. So loving each other, we do not fear to die, because we believe, we know, that that in us which thinks, and feels, and loves will live; that in death we lay aside the body as we lay aside our worn-out clothing. If I thought otherwise, Eunané, I could not bear this parting.”

She clasped my hands, almost as much surprised and touched, I thought, for the moment by the expression of an affection of which till that hour neither of us were fully aware, as by the marvellous and incredible assurance she had heard.

“Ah!” she said, “I have heard her people are strange, and they dream such things. No, Clafempta, it is a fancy, or you say it to comfort me, not because it is true.”

The expression of terror that again came over her face was too painful for endurance. To calm that terror I would have broken every oath, have risked every penalty. But in truth I could never have paused to ask what in such a case oath or law permitted, “Listen, Eunané,” I said, “and be calm. Not only Eveena, not only I, but hundreds, thousands, of the best and kindest men and women of your world hold this faith as fast as we do. You feel what Eveena is. What she is and what others are not, she owes to this trust:—to the assurance of a Power unseen, that rules our lives and fortunes and watches our conduct, that will exact an account thereof, that holds us as His children, and will never part with us. Do you think it is a lie that has made Eveena what she is?”

“But you think, you do not know.”

“Yes, I know; I have seen.” Here a touch, breaking suddenly upon that intense concentration of mind and soul on a single thought, violently startled me, gentle as it was; and to my horror I saw that Eveena was kneeling with me by the couch.

“Remember,” she said, in the lowest, saddest whisper, “the Veil that guards the Shrine.”

“No matter, Eveena,” I answered in the same tone, the pain at my heart suppressing even the impulse of indignation, not with her, but with the law that could put such a thought into her heart. “Neither penalty nor oath should silence me now. Whether I break our law I know not; but I would forfeit life here—I would forfeit life hereafter, rather than fail a soul that rests on mine at such a moment.”

The clasp of her hand showed how thoroughly, despite the momentary doubt, she felt with me; and I could not now recur to that secondary selfishness which had so imperiously repelled her from the sick-chamber.

“I have seen,” I repeated, as Eunané still looked earnestly into my face, “and Eveena has seen at the same moment, one long ages since departed this world—the Teacher of this belief, the Founder of that Society which holds it, the ancestor of her own house—in bodily form before us.”

“It is true,” said Eveena, in answer to Eunané’s appealing look.

“And I,” I added, “have seen more than once in my own world the forms of those I have known in life recalled, according to promise, to human eyes.”

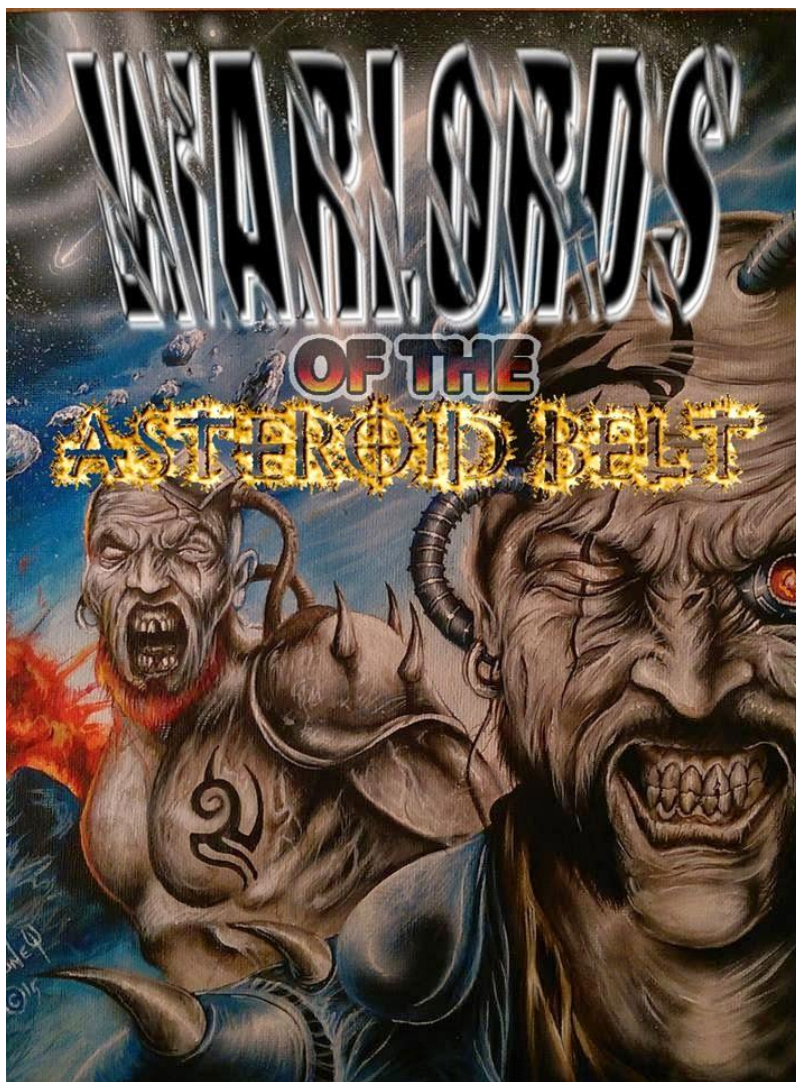
The testimony, or the contagion of the strong undoubting confidence we felt therein, if they did not convince the intellect, changed the tone of thought and feeling of the dying girl. Too weak now to reason, or to resist the impression enforced upon her mind by minds always far more powerful than her own in its brightest hours, she turned instinctively from the thought of blackness, senselessness eternal, to that of a Father whose hand could uphold, of the wings that can leap the grave. Her left hand clasped in mine, her right in Eveena’s,— looking most in my face, because weakness leant on strength even more than love appealed to love—Eunané spent the remaining hours of that night in calm contentment and peace. Perhaps they were among the most perfectly peaceful and happy she had known. To strong, warm, sheltering affection she had never been used save in her new home; and in the love she received and returned there was much too strange and self-contradicting to be satisfactory. But no shadow of jealousy, doubt, or contradictory emotion troubled her now: assured of Eveena’s sisterly love as of my own hardly and lately won trust and tenderness.

The light had been long subdued, and the chamber was dim as dimmest twilight, when suddenly, with a smile, Eunané cried—

“It is morning already! and there,—why, there is Erme.”

She stretched out her arms as if to greet the one creature she had loved—perhaps more dearly than she loved those now beside her. The hands dropped; and Eveena’s closed for ever on the sights of this world the eyes whose last vision had been of another.

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A VOYAGE TO THE MOON by Cyrano de Bergerac

III.—Marvels of the Moon

There are two kinds of towns on the Moon: travelling towns and sedentary towns. In the travelling towns, each house is built of very light wood, and placed on a platform, beneath the four corners of which great wheels are fixed. When the time arrives for a voyage to the seaside or the forest, for a change of air, the townspeople hoist vast sails on the roofs of their dwellings, and sail away altogether towards the new site.

In the sedentary towns, on the other hand, the houses are made with great strong screws running from the cellars to the roofs, which enable them to be raised or lowered at discretion. The depth of the cellar is equal to the height of every house; in winter, the whole structure is lowered below the surface of the ground; in spring, it is lifted up again by means of the screw.

As, owing to the father's neglect, the house in which we were staying could not set sail until the next day, my companion and I accepted an invitation to stay the night there. Our host then sent for a doctor, who prescribed what foods I should smell, and what kind of bed I should lie in.

"But I am not sick!" I said to the Man of the Sun.

"If you were," he replied, "the doctor would not have been sent for. On the Moon, doctors are not paid to cure men, but to keep them in good health. They are officers of the state, and, once a day, they call at every house, and instruct the inmates how to preserve their natural vigour."

"I wish," I said, "you could get him to order me a dozen roasted larks instead of the mere smell of them. I should like to taste some solid food just for a change."

He spoke to the doctor, and at a sign from him, our host took a gun and led me into his garden.

"Are those the kind of birds you mean?" he said, pointing to a great swarm of larks singing high up in the sky.

I replied that they were, and he shot at them, and thirty larks tumbled over at our feet, not merely dead, but plucked, seasoned, and roasted.

"You see," said my host, "we mix with our gunpowder and shot a certain composition which cooks as well as kills."

I picked up one of the birds and ate it. In sober truth, I have never tasted on Earth anything so deliciously roasted.

When I had finished my repast, I was conducted to a little room, the floor of which was strewn with fine orange blossoms about three feet deep. The Men of the Moon always sleep on these thick, soft heaps of fragrant flowers, which are chosen for them every day by their doctors. Four servants came and undressed me, and gently rubbed my limbs and my body, and in a few

moments I was fast asleep.

Early next morning I was awakened by the Man of the Sun, who said to me:

“I know you are anxious to return to your Earth and relate the story of all the strange and wonderful things you have seen on the Moon. If you care to while away an hour or two over this book, I will prepare for your return voyage.”

The book which he put into my hand was an extraordinary object. It was a kind of machine, full of delicate springs, and it looked like a new kind of clock. In order to read it, you had to use, not your eyes, but your ears. For on touching one of the springs, it began to speak like a man. It was a history of the Sun, and I was still listening to it when my companion arrived.

“I am now ready,” he said. “On what part of the Earth would you like to land?”

“In Italy,” I replied. “That will save me the cost and trouble of travelling to Rome—a city I have always longed to see.”

Taking me in his arms, the Man of the Sun rose swiftly up from the Moon and carried me across the intervening space, and dropped me rather roughly on a hill near Rome. When I turned to expostulate with him, I found that he had disappeared.

NEXT WEEK: THE MOON POOL by A MERRITT

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