

FRANKENSTEIN HORROR SERIES

# SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL



Deep inside  
Sacred Mountain  
waited  
Montezuma's gold,  
and the curse  
of Kum Rath—  
Lord of  
the Living Dead.

By **ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS**



# THE COMING OF THE ANTHS!

Almost paralyzed, you stare at the main tunnel. Something is moving there, something that is round like a worm or a huge snake is slipping toward the entrance, making batlike sounds as it travels. You cannot tell how long it is. For minutes it moves past the opening of the side tunnel. It might be fifty feet long, it might be a hundred. It is a very pale white, the kind of albino color that results from living too long in darkness.

It ripples as it moves. In its huge jaws it holds a struggling, mangled form. A form you don't recognize—until it screams and is devoured . . .





# **SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL**

**By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS**

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**SEVEN  
TICKETS  
TO HELL**



## CHAPTER ONE

Your name is Ben Harkle and you are a narcotics agent on special assignment south of the border in Mexico. At this moment, you are on a back street in Tijuana. Though you speak Spanish like a native, you are acting like any other gringo *turista* down in this town that has been called the "asshole of the world" to see the sights. There are sights to be seen. And heard. Up ahead of you youths lined up in the street are playing horns and beating drums, out of time, out of tune, but very loud. In Mexico, it doesn't make any difference how you play if you play loud enough. A man eases up to your left side and wants to know if you want a girl. You say no. He then asks you if you want two girls, "Very beautiful, *senor*. Virgins, *si!*" When you shake your head at his offer, he wonders if you want to see a girl and a burro. Your "No!" grows sharper and you walk past him. He shakes his head at the strange ways of the men from the north but does not attempt to follow you. Ahead on the thronged street another hustler is watching. When he sees the first one fail, he starts toward you, eager to try his luck. At your scowl, he turns away. Almost underfoot is a small child in ragged, torn clothes, a girl. She might be three years old and she might be eight but looks only three because she never had enough to eat. However, she is earning her living here on this thronged sidewalk of hell by begging. She clutches the hand of a grandmother in a black dress and looks up at you. Now you see the cataracts in both eyes and know that she is blind. In Mexico you always have a dollar bill in one pocket, a five in another, in a third a ten. Automatically you reach into the third pocket. The child does not see the bill. She will never see anything, but the eyes of the grandmother will never miss

it. The grandmother snatches the money. The child does not protest. She does not know the old woman got the money, and if she knew, would not dare protest. The grandmother is the only friend she has in the world—if the grandmother is a friend—and the child has no other source of food or protection.

Suddenly a little sick at your stomach, you walk on. You tell yourself the sickness is because of the dust, the heat, the odor of stale beer, the stench of urine coming from an alley.

You put the child out of your mind. You cannot solve her problem, nor the problems of Mexico. You cannot stop indiscriminate, perpetual breeding from producing poverty. There is hunger in this land, there is evil here in many forms. You are here to try to get a lead to one of the worst forms of evil, a supply of heroin that is flooding cities in the USA. That it comes over the border by air is fairly certain, that the Mafia has charge of wholesale and retail distribution through its system of pushers is sure, but the source of the brownish powder (Mexican heroin is brown rather than white) is not known. Mexico is a big, big land of many mountain ranges and hidden valleys where opium poppies can grow. Cooking opium into heroin is a simple task. Finding the hidden spot where the cooking is done is an almost impossible job.

However, it has to be found.

Ahead of you on the same side of the street with you is a pawn shop. Directly across the crowded street is a shooting gallery where anybody can get a shot of diluted heroin. Perhaps somewhere in this vicinity you will be solicited and can gain the confidence of some hustler.

This is Tijuana, Mexico, with its heat and its stink and its crime and its evil. Hundreds of thousands of peons literally starving in the interior have pushed their way into these border towns, hoping somehow or other to cross the border into the promised land of the USA, ending penned up here against the border fence, hoping somehow to find something to eat.

As with all border towns, all the evil known to earth is here. Up just any alley you can find a grandmother who will sell you a brew of herbs that will make your sweetheart come and jump into bed with you. She will sell you another

brew which includes a curse you can put on your love rival, so your girl won't run and jump into bed with him. These are little curses. This is little witchcraft. If you want the big curse you must find your way out to the sections where the rich people live. There the grandmother selling the curse will have a big reputation. She will also have servants to open the door for you and other servants to wait on you. If you want a girl while you are waiting, she can be had just for the asking, though her fee will be added to your bill by the grandmother's accountants. Did you expect to get it for free, *senor*? This is not the USA. Here everything has a price. Would you want to defraud the poor girl out of her wages? She has no other way to earn a living.

In this city you can buy a judge or a general or a license to commit murder. Mexico is a land of violent contrasts, a few very rich people, a great many very poor peons. It is also a land of vast superstitions. None of this interests you. You like women, but you don't want one right now. Witchcraft, black magic, love charms, and curses you suspect work much too often for the belief of scientists, but these do not interest you. You are on the trail of a sure evil, heroin. In this land the old gods still live and the old ways still flourish. You think it's superstitious nonsense until it hits you. Then you don't think at all because you're either incapable of rational thought—or you're dead. If you can still think enough to know you are not dead, your whole thought will be concentrated on wishing you were dead. Life here is always in hock to death.

Coming toward you along the thronged sidewalk is the most beautiful woman you have ever seen. Tall, her black hair caught in a lace mantilla, her skin an indescribable shade of brown that comes close to being bronze, her eyes downcast, this is not the kind of *senorita* you would expect to find in this section of Tijuana. Your first impression is that this is a goddess out of the old times come to walk again among men, to inspire and uplift them. You do not know what she is doing here on this vicious street. All you know is that she is here and you are glad of it. Just the sight of her and you have to stifle a happy shout of joy.

You know that when the Spanish came to Mexico under Cortez, they brought with them a mixture of blood streams

that had resulted from the Moorish occupation of Spain for seven hundred years. In Mexico they met the Aztecs and other races so old they had forgotten their history. Again, more mixing of blood streams. The result of all of this blending was sometimes as horrible as the little girl with cataracts—and sometimes as beautiful as this lovely woman walking along the sidewalk toward you.

In Mexico, you don't stare at a woman. Some man is certain to resent it. You glance at her, then look quickly at something else, in this case, the pawnshop. As you glance at it, two men run from it. Incredibly enough, they have the same copper-colored skin as the woman walking along the street. Inside the shop a gun goes off. A man whom you judge to be the owner comes out of the pawnshop. He has a pistol in his hand. He fires it at the second of the two men. You hear the bullet hit—*thwuck!* The second man begins to fall. The first man is already on the sidewalk. Trying to hold himself erect with one hand, with the other hand he is reaching for a pistol. Another bullet hits him. Dropping the gun he sprawls toward you.

Around you, pedestrians vanish. You don't know where these people go, you only know where you go. Into the gutter face down in the filth there. As you go down you see something fall from the outstretched hand of the man just struck by the second bullet. The object he drops tinkles along the broken sidewalk, rolls off the edge, and falls directly in front of your face. About as big as a pigeon's egg, it is oval-shaped and black. Your first thought is that it is a jewel. Since fate and a gun fight has thrust it into your hand, you pick it up.

You don't look up, you don't see what is happening on the sidewalk, but your ears tell you that guns are popping up there. They are also telling you that some lead is finding a target in flesh and that other slugs are bouncing off the sidewalk, making screaming noises as they ricochet upward. Near you somebody is talking in a language you do not understand, though you speak Spanish like a native. With these guttural noises are mixed gasping sounds as of someone trying to get enough air into his lungs to maintain life a few seconds longer. His lungs have little interest in such matters. They have bullet holes in them. Another shot comes. Hitting



flesh, the bullet goes *thwack*. Then comes the sound of a gun clattering on the sidewalk. This is followed by the thump of a body falling heavily. When there are no more shots, you venture to lift your head above the edge of the sidewalk.

In front of you, two men are either dead or dying. In front of the pawnshop is another man, probably the owner of the shop. He is the one you just heard fall. Now lying on the sidewalk, he is also working hard to breathe. Since none of the three look as if they are likely to fire another shot, you get to your feet and run. You run like hell. For blocks now the sidewalks and the streets are deserted. From the sidewalks pedestrians have fled into the alleys. In the street, cars have stopped, their drivers also legging it for the alleys. Far down the street in both directions horns are beginning to honk in protest at this stoppage of traffic. You duck into the nearest saloon and hurry to the bar. The place is empty. The bartender is hiding behind the bar. At your demand for whiskey, he finds the courage to rise to his feet and serve you. As this happens, the others in hiding, seeing that the crazy gringo is having a drink, find the courage to come forward and demand liquid courage. Within a few minutes the bar is crowded, voices are babbling questions, and the braver and more curious *senors* have ventured to go to the door and to peer from it along the street.

After a quick drink, you go to the door and do a little peering yourself. The shooting ended, a crowd has begun to collect in the street. In case the shooting should start up again, they are taking refuge behind parked cars. The sidewalk, however, is still deserted. On it in front of the pawnshop, three bodies are lying. Down the block a Tijuana policeman is coming slowly and carefully forward. You slip out of the door and into the street. Keeping the cars between you and the sidewalk, you move along the street until you are even with the sidewalk. There, three men are dead as hell, blood is all over the sidewalk, two of the men are obviously *banditos*, the third man the owner of the shop. Now you notice the two *banditos* who have skin the same color as that of the beautiful woman whom you saw walking along the sidewalk just before the shooting started. Skin the color of polished copper. You have never seen skin with such a color in all of your life. You wonder about this, you wonder

what happened to the woman; but mostly you wonder what was in the pawnshop that was worth risking death to steal. In the window is a display of cheap watches, obviously used, a pair of Jap-made field glasses, knives of many kinds, wigs, rings, cheap jewelry. You estimate the whole stock on display there is not worth one hundred dollars. Was there something else in the shop that had greater value, enough value to justify risking life to obtain? Is this shop a front for handling heroin? At the thought, a chill goes up your spine.

A gasp goes up from the crowd. You are still in the street. Others have pushed forward along the sidewalk and are blocking your vision. As you push forward, they begin to back away. "*Madre de Dios!*" a voice gasps. Backing hastily away the watchers are crossing themselves. They leave room. Now you can see. The policeman has reached the two men on the sidewalk. One of them is sitting up!

Caught between the urge to cross himself and the impulse to draw the big pistol at his hip, the cop is backing away.

You feel like backing away yourself but you don't do it.

You know the man now sitting up is dead. You heard the bullet hit him, you saw him fall, you heard him pray in a tongue unknown to you, you saw his blood spill on the sidewalk. Now you see him rise from a sitting position. For a moment, he stands erect in his own blood that was spilled, then he walks away. His boots making red splotches on the sidewalk, he turns into the nearest alley, disappearing there.

You stand frozen. You do not move, perhaps you cannot move. Even breathing is difficult. As you watch, the second bandito gets slowly to his feet. Blood squishing in his boots, he, too, walks away. As you stand staring, he turns into the same alley where the first one vanished, disappearing there.

Like two ghosts who have come from hell and have been shot dead on earth, these two men seem to walk back along the road to hell.

Chills are rising along your spine. Even in hot Tijuana, ice-cold air is blowing on your body. You look at the pawnshop owner. Will he rise and walk back into his shop? You stare at him. You wait and wait and wait. The policeman has hastily retreated far down the block. The pawnbroker does not move. If he came from the same hell as the two men and

was shot dead here on earth, he intends to remain here when he dies.

Looking at him, you realize his skin is not the same polished copper as the two men who walked away. His skin is darker than theirs. His complexion completely different. It was as if he belonged to a different race.

Suddenly you realize that you are the only person in sight on this street. You know that out of sight hundreds are watching. Literally, you can feel their eyes on you. You have the impression that you are very, very conspicuous. You don't want a taste of life in the Tijuana jail. It is your suspicion that when the policeman returns he is likely to arrest any gringo in sight. Also, it is your impression that to be conspicuous very long here is to be dead. Whatever devils are busy here, they may not have finished their work. You need another drink, bad, but as you start to turn, to beat it back to the bar, you see something that stops your motion. A shadow just inside the door of the pawnshop. A darkness about the size and shape of a man lurks there in the open door. That's all there is to it—a shadow, a darkness just beyond the body of the pawnbroker, a blackness that you are certain has eyes and can see. You can't see the eyes, you can't prove it can see, your logical mind says that this is impossible, but something deep in your mind yells that seeing without eyes is possible, if you know how to do it.

Inside your skin, your nerves begin to crawl. Your nerves can stand the sight of dead men. They can even stand the shock of seeing dead men getting to their feet and walking away with their own blood squishing in their boots, but your nerves cannot stand the sight of this darkness lurking just inside the pawnshop door. Somewhere deep in your subconscious mind something is screaming that inside this darkness is the control that sent the two banditos into the pawn shop in the first place and after they had been killed in an attempted holdup, inside this darkness lurks the force that brought them back to life again and which helped them—literally *forced* them—to walk away.

The sight of this dark shadow lurking just inside the pawnshop door—but looking out at everything on the street, including you—sends your nerves into wild panic. *Run, run,*

*run!* your nerves yell. *Evil, evil, evil!* they scream at you. *This thing is straight from hell!* they tell you. When you do not run, they have other comments to make. *This thing will take your soul away from you and will turn you into a zombie to walk the world like a mindless robot!*

You do not move. Your knees are trembling but you stand your ground. The shadow looks at you. You know it is looking at you. It moves, toward you.

Now you run. Bending low, you stay in the street where the cars parked at the curb will give you a little protection. You leave the street and dart across the sidewalk and into the bar. Here you request more whiskey. With your handkerchief you wipe sweat from your face and wish there was some way to wipe it from your soul. You watch the front door. If that shadow comes through the door, you will go out the back. But the shadow does not come—yet. You get your breath back and have a second shot.

The whiskey helps. Courage that has fled to the far-off recesses of your mind begins to come creeping back. You saw two men shot dead, you saw them get up and walk away. This shook you. The sight of that shadow shook you even more. Is the devil himself loose in this border town? You don't know the answer but you wish you were back in the USA where Satan wears evening clothes.

The place is full of Mexicans. Big Mexicans, little Mexicans, tall Mexicans, short Mexicans, black Mexicans, white Mexicans. Blood lines that have been mixing for thousands of years have flowed together here to produce a polyglot culture that includes the dark superstitions of remote ages and faraway places. People are here whose forefathers witnessed the blood sacrifices of the Aztecs, who watched rituals during which the heart of a living victim was ripped from his chest by a stone knife held in the hand of the high priest and given as an offering to the bloody gods of the tribe. Descendants are here of equally bloodthirsty Spaniards who came to this land with Cortez and his crew of thieves and who used the utmost in torture in efforts to wring from the Indians the hiding places of secreted treasure. Without exception, everyone here thinks that the bullfight is the greatest human spectacle, and their biggest thrill is to shout "*Ole!*" when the ex-

hausted bull is finally pierced by the sword and sinks helpless to its knees on the bloody sand of the ring.

To a man, they are scared. Not just frightened, *scared!* Ready to wet their pants. Possibly some have already done this. They didn't even see the shadow in the door of the pawnshop. All they saw was the two dead men get up and walk. They are huddling in groups around the room, they are in clumps along the bar, and a few have found the courage to go to the front door and to peer into the street. No one pays any attention to you. You are a gringo, either the enemy from the north, if they are remembering fancied insults to their personal or national pride, or the sucker from above the border, if they think they can sell you anything. Your government has passed laws to keep them out of the promised land of your country. They want to breed and breed and breed and then send the children which they make no pretense of supporting up to your land for food, clothing, and education, the good things which you are denying them by preventing them from crossing the border.

They don't pay any attention to you. You don't pay any attention to them.

You stand at the bar, you turn to your left, you do a double-take.

The beautiful woman whom you saw on the street is standing there beside you. Facing you, she is smiling. Behind the smile are two of the blackest, most intense eyes you have ever seen. You notice again that her skin is the color of copper.

"My name is Mona," she says. "And I want to talk to you." Her black head shakes firmly. "No, this isn't a pickup."

She speaks excellent English but the accent is wrong. It is even wrong for a Spanish-speaking Mexican. You don't know what her native tongue was, but your guess is that she attended a school in England and there learned to speak English. You look quickly toward the door, half-way expecting the two copper-colored dead men to be there. Or possibly worse, the dark shadow! You hear the sudden hiss of her in-drawn breath.

"You saw Kum Rath in the door!" From her tone of voice you know the words have been surprised out of her. You

surmise that the way you turned and looked at the door enabled her to jump to this conclusion.

"I saw what?" you ask.

"Nothing. It is of no importance," she answers.

"Who or what is Kum Rath?"

"I spoke hastily. Forgive me, please." The smile that appears on her face has the quality of Mona Lisa in it, enigmatic and haunting. It is the smile of a woman who knows far more than she ever intends to reveal. Suddenly she extends her hand toward you, palm up.

"Give it to me," she says.

Just watching her smile, just seeing the warm lights come and go in her dark eyes, just listening to the depths in her voice, you feel you will be glad to do anything she asks. However, even as you think this, you wonder if you are being a sucker in the oldest con-game on earth, the come-along-and-jump-into-bed-with-me game of a beautiful woman who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. The Nazis used beautiful women as spies. So did—and do—the French, the Russians, the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Persians—when there were Persians in the world. This beautiful woman smiling at you may be using the oldest sucker game on the planet.

"Give you what?"

You stare at her. She stares at you. Doubt comes over her face, a wave of it. "Don't you really know what I want?"

"No," you answer. You look at her. She is smiling again. Nobody in the room is paying any attention to you. This tells you how badly shaken these *senors* are. When they pay no attention to a woman as beautiful as this one, they've really got something on their minds.

Wiping sweat from your face, you look at her again. Her hand is still out, she is still smiling. You wonder how the devil she got into this place without you seeing her as she crossed the room. Most of the time your back was to the bar. You simply could not have missed her entrance.

"Pardon me, but I'm a little shaken. Something happened out there—" You nod toward the street. "Have a drink!" you say suddenly. This may not be the best thing to say but it will give you a moment to catch your breath and collect your mind. You need to pull your mind together. Things

have been happening a little too fast. And such unexpected things! A gunfight was not too unusual, but to have the dead men get up and walk away shook you. Then—the shadow in the doorway!

So far as you can see, the things that have happened have not concerned you, but you have a hunch they are going to concern you, and concern you big, in ways that may range all the way from dangerous to deadly.

"I'm Ben Harkle," you say suddenly. "And about that drink?"

"It's nice to know your name." She smiles gently. "But I do not drink. Will you please give me the stone of Tardu which you picked up in the gutter?" The hand extended toward you makes a little gesture of impatience. "For you, this stone is a ticket to hell!"

"Stone of what? Ticket to hell? I picked it up in the gutter." You stare at her in consternation.

For a moment her smile falters. "Are you trying to pretend innocence, or don't you really remember what happened outside?" She nods toward the street.

You still stare at her. Surprise crosses her face, then, as she stares back at you, sudden longing shows in her eyes. In this longing is revealed the secret heart of this mysterious woman. The longing in her eyes says that you have something that she wants very badly. Is it some stone of Tardu which she claims you picked up on the street—or is it you?

You don't know the answer to this question. Secretly you know that you would like nothing better than to have her wanting you. She would be an ornament at your breakfast table. You suspect she would be a wonder in bed.

"Do you ever—ever help ladies in trouble?" Her voice has a quiver in it.

"Well—" You want time to think about this.

"I'm in deep trouble. Deep, deep trouble." Her voice has a tone in it which says that she is on the edge of hysteria. "Even for talking to you about this, I can be—can be—killed!" Her eyes widen with sudden fear now at the edge of desperation. "I know I have no right to ask you to take such a risk, but—"

Fear is making a gibber in her voice, fear is putting tremors into her hands, fear is making her body shake. Part of the

words are English, words learned in an English finishing school, part are Spanish, part are out of some language you never heard before and do not pretend to understand. You understand what is happening, at least in part. Fear has blown the lid off of her inhibitions and is pouring out a wild appeal for help. Why has she turned to you? You don't know. She may be playing you for a sucker intending to lead you into a trap. Where heroin is involved, somewhere in the background is the Mafia or its local equivalent, somewhere in the background are large sums of money, and always lurking just off-stage is sudden death.

Heroin is that kind of stuff.

But you don't know that this woman is involved in heroin. She may be involved in something totally different but even more dangerous and deadly. Your mind keeps returning to the shadow that lurked in the pawnshop door.

"What kind of trouble are you talking about?" you ask.

What happens then you don't believe except you saw it happen with your own eyes. As if she has turned a switch somewhere inside her, this woman turns off the fear and the gibber. The tremor goes out of her hands, the trembles out of her body. She takes a step backward and is suddenly the coolest, calmest woman you have ever seen.

"How did you do that? I mean, why? You were scared. Very scared. You turned it off as water is turned off in a faucet."

"Yes," she says. "I remembered."

"Ah." This single grunted sign hides confusion in you. She had been at the edge of hysteria. She had remembered something—and had turned off hysteria! Perhaps one woman in a million could do this. "What did you—ah—remember?"

The dark eyes study you. In the depths, perhaps a note of hysteria lingers. She shakes her head. "I can't answer that."

"Can't or won't?"

"Both?"

"Did you happen to remember a shadow that lurked just inside the pawnshop door?"

In her eyes, the hidden hysteria leaps surfaceward. A flicker of it, then her will closes down over it again, hiding it in some secret place known only to her.



"Did you see that?" Her words are little drops of acid eating into your mind.

"I saw something. What it was, I do not know. A shadow of a shadow, a slight lessening of the light values."

As you talk, you watch her face and her eyes. Her face is calm and composed. You might be talking about the weather for all the emotion her face reveals. Only an occasional flicker in her dark eyes reveals panic lurking at the depths.

"What was this shadow that I saw?" you continue.

"The devil out of hell!" she answers.

"What kind of trouble are you in?"

"No. No!" Her words are sharp gusts of sound. "I can't talk about that!" Violently, she shakes her head. "You look like a nice person. Stay away from this! Just give me the little black stone you picked up in the gutter, then go back across the border and forget that Mexico even exists!"

Now you remember. The falling bandit dropped something. It rolled from his fingers into the gutter. You picked it up. What did you do with it?

"So you have remembered!" There is triumph in her voice. "It is as I thought. You weren't lying. You just didn't remember. Where is it? Give it to me! Quickly!"

"I remember picking it up—but I don't remember what I did with it!"

"Don't try to play games with me. I've been nice to you, so far. But I can play rough, deadly rough!"

You spread your hands in a little helpless gesture. "I believe you but I simply do not remember—"

"You hid it somewhere! Now you are trying to lie!"

"I'm telling the truth. I picked it up but all kinds of things were happening and I don't remember—" Your voice trails off into silence. Something has happened to you and you can't talk. You don't know what has happened. It seems as if your voice just froze. As you realize this, you also realize that all of your body has frozen and that you not only can't move but that you can't cry out to call attention to your plight. As this happens, you see that the hand thrust to you to receive the little black stone has changed. The palm is no longer up. The thumb and the three fingers are caught into the palm and only the index finger remains in sight. It is pointing at

you. You know without knowing how you know that the cold which has frozen your voice and which is paralyzing your body is coming from that pointing finger. Black magic? Maybe. More like a concentrated use of that energy which Anton Mesmer called *animal magnetism* and which he used to produce reactions in humans that both doctors and scientists said were impossible.

"All right, I'll let you talk," the woman called Mona says.

You don't see what she does, or that she does anything, but the freeze goes out of your vocal chords. You try to talk. There's a lot you have to say to this woman, and not all of it is complimentary, but all the sound that comes out of your mouth sounds like gargle.

"What did you do with that stone?" she asks.

"I—I—"

"Quickly! I am losing my patience!"

"I—I don't know," you stutter.

"If I point my finger at your eyes, you will go blind!" Her voice is a hiss now. The sound in it is that of a snake coiled and ready to strike.

"I can't remember, Mona. I just can't. My mind is blocked!" There is sweat on your face.

The finger moves closer and closer to your eyes.

"Meester—" For the first time, her perfect English falters. You know she is going to blind you. Your body is still held in the grip of that freezing energy flow from her pointing finger. You cannot move.

Around you others are moving. Probably not one patron of this bar knows what is happening but their nerves are already very much on edge from what happened in the street. They have been looking at this beautiful woman and wondering how it happened that you, a gringo, are the object of her interest. They know she is doing something to you though they do not know what. Under such circumstances, with nerves that are already jumpy, they begin to edge toward the back exits.

Toward the front door, heavy footsteps sound. These are not the footsteps of a normal man. They are too heavy for this. Also, they go *thump thump thump*. You would turn and look but the paralysis holds you motionless. Mona looks toward the front door, a single quick glance. Then, as if you

had ceased to exist, she turns and walks away toward the side door.

The paralysis vanishes. You can move. All you do is lean against the bar. This is all you *can* do. Inside, your emotions are in turmoil. If you were capable of emotional response you would scream at what you are seeing.

As she walks away, Mona is vanishing. Like smoke caught in a blowing wind, she begins to flow into intangibility. Like a ghost going from this world to that, she is walking out of existence. Going away, away, away, she is gone. She never reaches the side door toward which she started. On the way to the door, she vanishes.

As you stare, the sound of the heavy footsteps turns your head toward the front door again. Supporting yourself by holding on to the bar, your emotional world in screaming turmoil, you are suddenly certain in your mind that all around you, worlds hitherto invisible, are crowding in on you.

The footsteps come from the two men whom you saw die on the street in front of the pawnbroker shop and whom you saw rise from the sidewalk and limp away into an alley, their own blood squishing in their shoes.

Entering the front door, they see you standing at the bar. They walk toward you. Their movement is full of purpose.

Following behind them, obviously directing them, almost completely invisible, is the shadow you saw lurking in the door of the pawnshop.

As you glimpse this almost invisible shadow the feeling of unseen worlds crowding in around you becomes stronger and stronger.



## CHAPTER TWO

Your name is Roger Jesmer. You have a degree, Doctor of Science. You are employed part-time by a large university in southern California as a consultant in electronic physics. In addition, you are a part-time consultant for a large airplane manufacturing company and are on call for special problems with a large company engaged in manufacturing electronic equipment for the space program. In the USA, you have a beautiful home with a largish view of the ocean, but the nature of your work is such that it deals with realities other than the space-time continuum. Since the process of probing into other worlds with other laws produces heavy stress, you have a secret hide-out in the mountains of central Mexico. You come here to let your mind settle down and to get away from it all. There are problems even here, however; one being that poppies are grown here. These are converted into opium and the opium in its turn is cooked into heroin. This goes north into the USA, by truck, you think. You have also seen a VTOL—vertical take-off and landing craft—similar to the one you own, and which you use to reach this place, dropping to a landing near what the Indians of this region call their Sacred Mountain. Does this craft carry a load of heroin over the border at night? A VTOL can settle down and take off in the smallest landing area. In the USA, the Mafia probably takes delivery.

However, heroin is not your concern. You have made a handsome cash present to the mayor of the little town down below the tableland where you have your hideout. He in turn has promised you his undying affection and esteem, which means he will protect you against the Federal soldiers who occasionally come here to collect from the poppy and

marijuana farmers under threat of burning their fields if they don't pay off.

Mexico is the land of the payoff, the *mordida*, the bite. The soldiers have never bothered you and you, in your turn, have given them no trouble. You make no effort to report the suspected presence of opium and heroin to the Mexican or to the American authorities. This would not be news to the Mexicans, who are making a living off of this trade. If you reported what you suspect, the *mordida*, the payoff, would bring your reports to some pigeonhole. Because you had made such reports, your life would eventually be endangered. Yes, you know that the dope trade was invented in hell and perfected on earth. You know it is a killer of cities and in the long run the destroyer of civilizations. Bad as the drug traffic is, you suspect something is hidden here in this Sacred Mountain clearly visible to the east of you as you sit on the veranda of the house you rent. That is far worse, far more dangerous, far more deadly, far more subtle in its affects.

The *brujo*, the sorcerer, the medicine man, the *diablero* is your only link to this something. More, he is your friend. You and he in some strange way are fighting on the same side; you to uncover more of the night side of nature, the *brujo* to secure additional land for his people and enough food to keep them alive. You know he would give his life to see the little flock he shepherds able to buy rich farm lands where they could raise corn and beans and tomatoes to stay the never-ending hunger in their bellies. His little tribe was once a great people, you know. A series of conquerors, the Spaniards being last, forced them back into these barren lands of the thorn and the cactus.

You like the old *brujo*. The remnants of his people still live on and around the Sacred Mountain. He tells you strange stories about another, very ancient people who once lived in caverns and tunnels under this mountain. A very evil people, the *brujo* thinks. He doesn't talk much about them, he probably doesn't *know* much, and he doesn't like to talk about them since he believes they still exist and for fear that just the mention of them will somehow call him to their attention. But in the stories he is willing to tell, you catch tantalizing little glimpses of a science that once may have solved

the mysteries of life on Planet Earth. True, from the viewpoint of twentieth century science, this old science is not only irrational, but is also illogical. It is also illogical to the beliefs of the *brujo*, but he knows it exists. He fears it as he fears nothing else in Mexico. Something is hidden in the Sacred Mountain which the brain cells of the *brujo* will not accept. You don't know whether or not your brain cells will accept it either, whether they will stretch far enough to include this ancient thing which the *brujo* regards as the essence of evil, but if you can find a way to examine it thoroughly, you propose to find out. In doing this, you hope you can stay alive.

You sit on the breezeway in front of the little cabin that you rent here. You look at Sacred Mountain. At this time, the rugged peak is cut by streaks of rain falling from a black cloud that lies over it. It is a mountain of mystery, more mysterious now when shrouded by clouds and falling rain. As you wonder what secrets are hidden there—and there may be more than one—a cold wind seems to blow up your spine. Involuntarily, you shiver. You take your eyes off the mountain and bring your gaze down to the level land of the plateau surrounding you. Cactus grow here, wild buckwheat, an occasional sugar bush. This plateau gets little or no rain and as a result can support only plants capable of growing in the desert. There is something reassuring about these spiny-thorned cacti. There is something even more reassuring about your VTOL craft parked, chocked, and tied down, on the cleared level land to the left side of your rented cabin. You are a licensed pilot. This craft brought you down here from southern California. It is comforting to know that it is ready and waiting to take you back again any time the evil the *brujo* is sure is hidden in Sacred Mountain becomes too oppressive. You're not the type who runs away but on the other hand, if the evil in Sacred Mountain is as monstrous as the *brujo's* hints indicate it is, flight to fight another day may be the better part of valor.

The *brujo* is coming around the big cactus. Without seeming to see it, he walks around the VTOL. However, you know he saw the ship. The keen eyes of this old sorcerer never miss anything. Most Americans think that the talk of the abilities of some of these *brujos* is so much hot air, that

they cannot leave their bodies at will and fly around as a crow, or wander through the high country as a puma, and that they do not have allies who look human but are not.

You do not care what most Americans think. They are trapped in a materialistic culture which can only exist by denying the unreality of the spiritual worlds. You know that these *brujo*s have maintained contact to some degree with a vast invisible reality that includes the world you know and shades off into worlds you do not know. Are there other worlds? You don't talk to your colleagues about them, but your answer to this question is a resounding Yes! There are so many other worlds, all invisible, that man cannot count them all. They are as numerous as the stars in the sky. They exist simultaneously with physical earth. They interpenetrate the planet but are different from it. They are separated from it by the thinnest of veils. Here and there upon this planet are places that may perhaps be called *windows*, where the veil is extra thin. Things come through these windows to the earth, things go from earth through these windows. If a man has the secret of movement through these windows, he can traverse the worlds at will! If you listen at these windows, you can sometimes hear the rustle of wings in other skies, you can sometimes hear other voices speaking, and you can sometimes glimpse castles rising in the air of forlorn seas.

A shuddery thing when you think about it in the day, a shivery thing when you remember it in the night.

Is the Sacred Mountain such a window? Does the story of Aladdin refer in code to such a place? Is the word *Sesame*, which Aladdin finally remembered, a description of a key to pass through such a magic window? To what strange worlds did the magic carpet fly?

You think that the knowledge of how to pass into any of these worlds and to come back alive is one of the most important bits of knowledge that any human can have. Most people can't have it. Of course, if they did have it Aladdin's cave would be invaded by millions of desperate humans fleeing from the misery of Planet Earth. It would not be good, you are certain, for many humans to know the locations of these magic windows and the secret key for passing through them. They would certainly use such knowledge to escape from problems they ought to learn to solve them-



selves. Also in these other worlds may be found mind distortions, things that go bump in the night, plus death in many forms. Glimpses of some of the horror there have given some humans excellent referents for the word *hell*. There be devils there!

Although the *brujo* must be seventy years old, he walks with the easy stride of a scoutmaster on a hiking trip. His satchel, the coarse cloth bag which contains his possessions, a knife, a few beans, some tortillas, and the materials with which he works the simpler forms of his magic. To work the big magic, to make contact with non-human allies from the other worlds, he will use psychedelic substances, peyote, the sacred mushrooms from farther south, perhaps what he calls *the devil's weed*, but which Americans who know nothing of its powers call Jimson weed. With such simple tools, the *brujo* can open windows into other worlds. He is, however, very careful about opening such windows. Once left open, no one can say what might come back through it. Giants and unicorns and hungry beasts that would like nothing better than to live on human flesh, having become very hungry in their own sparsely-inhabited world.

Although he is a citizen of Mexico, this *brujo* coming toward you is no Mexican. His people lived in this land before the Spaniards came. Pure Indian. Perhaps his people were in this land before the Indians came. Tall, with a face that looks as if it had been cast from bronze, with black eyes and with hair still black in spite of his advanced years, this sorcerer seems to have found the fountain of youth.

Trotting behind him, clad in beaded, dressed deerskin, is an Indian girl. Her skin is almost as brown as the deerskin of her clothing. Her face is slightly oval and her eyes have just the faintest slant of the Mongol.

The *brujo* stops in front of you. You rise and you bow to each other. The *brujo* looks down at the child, a smile appears on his bleak face, and he says a single word, her name.

"Yinny. My daughter two times away from me."

"Granddaughter is the way we say it in the north," you say. You ask no questions, but the work of the *brujo* is strictly with men. No woman would ever be allowed even to watch one of his magic rituals, certainly no child. Yet he has brought this child here, and a girl child at that! The fact that

she is his grand-daughter would not obviate the taboo restriction against women and children participating in the magic work of the men. Is there something special about this girl child?

You ask no questions about Yin. The *brujo* will explain in time, or not at all. All members of his tribe are his children. He is a fierce old mountain lion protecting them, hoping that under his protection the greatness they once knew can be regained. That this hope has little chance of being realized, he well knows, but he hopes anyhow, knowing that it is only by keeping even slim hopes alive that they have any chance at all of ever coming true.

The child glances up at you from dark eyes. You love her instantly. You do not understand this, but as she looked at you, love surged up inside you. You felt it clearly, a pulse of love, strong, clear, powerful. Not sex. A love beyond sex, a love that until this moment you did not know existed on earth. It comes into existence somewhere in the region of your heart and moves upward. At this point, you love the child. As the love surges upward, it becomes a love of the whole world. You stare at the child in amazed wonder. What kind of magic is this that she can work?

"Do you feel it?" the *brujo* asks. He is watching closely.

"Of course!" Your voice is hoarse as you try to speak.

Love as sex you know. Up until the moment when this Indian child smiled at you, you thought sex was the only meaning for the word. Now, suddenly, you have a new meaning. With this new meaning, you realize that sex is only this love caught and trapped in a strait jacket. You suspect that what all humans seek in sex—and rarely find—is this love.

You had not expected anything like this from the *brujo*. Where did he get this child?

Yin has taken refuge behind the *brujo*. She is staring around his legs at you, suddenly shy. As love builds up in you again, she leaves the protection of the sorcerer and comes skipping toward you, holding out her hands to be caught up. You pick her up, you toss her into the air and catch her as she screams with delight. You set her down on the ground. Swiftly she turns and kisses you on the cheek. You suddenly know what it is like to be kissed by an angel.

The *brujo*, smiling like a benevolent tribal deity, watches.

You look beyond the *brujo* as a flicker of movement in the chaparral catches your eye. An Indian is hiding out there. You mention this to the sorcerer.

"One of her guard," he says, in explanation.

"Why does she need a guard?"

"It is not that she needs one, it is that she has one—in fact, many. Thus do we honor her." Turning, he waves his hand. In response, Indian faces appear among the cacti. You don't know how many are there, maybe ten. Some have rifles used for deer hunting, others have bows and arrows. You suddenly remember that this is Mexico and that the power of the Federal Government ends abruptly at the nearest cactus.

The *brujo* senses your feelings. "Nothing to worry about," he says. "Her people think of her as a goddess. Wherever she goes, her guard goes with her." He is silent, thinking. "A few days ago she was only another Indian child. Now she is our goddess." His voice slips away into silence as his mind considers remote things.

You don't say anything, but there is something about this that grabs your emotions. A girl child that a group of Indians have suddenly begun to regard as a goddess. What happened to cause such an obvious change in their attitude? You pick her up again, toss her into the air, she squeals with joy. You set her on the ground, give her little bottom a pat, and she goes tripping back into the chaparral where her guard is waiting. Aware that she is leaving, the *brujo* pulls his mind away from the ancient things he is considering and smiles at her. He makes no effort to restrain her.

"Do you let her run free like that?" you ask, in amazement.

"Certainly. Who would harm her?" Sudden anger glints in the old man's eyes.

"There are rattlesnakes and mountain lions—"

"No snake would rattle at her, the big cat would lie down and purr at her feet," the *brujo* says, looking at you. You have the impression that the *brujo* is suddenly thinking how stupid you are. "You say such things when you have felt the love flow from her? So would the snake feel it, and refuse to rattle, so would the lion feel it, and purr in her presence, so do her guards feel it, and consider that serving her is the greatest honor they have ever known."

"But how—"

"How does it happen that suddenly she has become our goddess, that what was only another Indian child a few days ago is now one of the great ones of this world? That is what I have come to tell you about—and to show you!"

Squatting, the *brujo* takes from his back the satchel that he carries. You hunker on your heels beside him. You know he carries his medicine in this satchel, you know he has powers and abilities that even the most learned professors in the biggest universities of the United States do not dream exist. But what medicine, what charm, could make enough change in an ordinary Indian child that her own people would suddenly accept her as a goddess?

The sorcerer takes many objects from the satchel, handling each one reverently and with care, until, from the very bottom he brings out a small box of the kind used in jewelry stores to hold a ring. Opening it, he holds it up for your inspection.

Nestled on some white packing material that looks like cotton is a small black stone about as big as the egg of a pigeon. In no way does it seem remarkable except in the quality of the polish on it. Polished to such perfection that it could serve as a mirror, it is the blackest black you have ever seen.

Your hand moves toward it, then, hastily you stop the motion. You remember that you do not touch or handle objects in this satchel without the *brujo's* permission. "Can I pick it up?"

The *brujo* takes a long breath. "Better not in your fingers," he says. From the satchel he takes a pair of wooden tongs. "Better to use these."

You take the tongs, but you hesitate to touch the little jewel even with them. "What is it?"

"It is one of what the Spanish friars called *the seven tickets to hell!* Hearing about these stones and the strange engine to which they belonged, the friars hunted many years for them, without success. If you have a piece of paper—"

You find a piece of paper. The *brujo* lays the little stone on it. You stare at it. Moved by the associative mechanism in your mind, memories of what you have read about black stones both large and small begin to pop into your mind.

"Perhaps a tektite," you say. The *brujo* does not understand and you explain that small black stones have been found around most of the world. Research has revealed that these stones were formed at extremely high temperatures and under the action of strong nuclear radiation. Who formed them? Nobody knows. Perhaps another great race which existed on earth prior to the advent of man and which has completely disappeared had a use for them. Again nobody knows. You tell all of this to the *brujo*. He shakes his head. "No tektite. Stone of Tardu. One of seven."

"Who is or was Tardu?"

"God of old people in old days. He had a ship that flew through the sky like—" He nods toward your VTOL. "—only different. With the seven stones, he made rivers run, winds blow, and ships fly. With them, he healed the sick. With them, he also cursed the fields and the mountains, if he chose."

"Cursed the fields and the mountains?" This sounds like radioactive power in operation. Fallout could be considered a blasting of the fields and earth. Wisely and knowingly used, the same power could work miracles and heal the sick!

In addition the tektites scattered around the world, there are other black stones that hold special significance by groups small and large. Such is the Kaaba, the sacred shrine of the Mohammedans at Mecca. Inside this shrine are three large black stones. No Western scientist has ever inspected these stones, nor has anyone ever chipped a fragment from them for chemical and radioactive analysis. Any Westerner, or any Arab, for that matter, who attempted this would be summarily destroyed by Moslem mobs defending their holy of holies. So nobody knows what is there but in your opinion a secret worth knowing is hidden inside the three black stones in Mecca that many devout Moslems travel thousands of miles to kiss.

There is the story of a man who laid the foundations for the rise to power of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party. He actually worshiped a black stone! With what kind of creatures did he communicate in his prayers to his black stone?

Even the question in your mind sends cold chills along your spine.

There are other stones that have loomed large in history.

Across all the ages there is the legend of the philosopher's stone, which turned base metal into gold by its touch. Was the philosopher's stone black? No one knows. There is no record of anyone actually seeing or possessing such a stone, though the claim has been made that this stone was also black. Perhaps there was no such thing, perhaps the real purpose of alchemy, which claimed to produce such a stone as a result of long and arduous efforts, was to turn the base metal of the alchemist himself into gold, into material of a quality finer than is found in the usual run of men!

Squatting on your heels, you and the *brujo* stare at the little black stone lying on the piece of white paper. You do not touch it. "This—this changed the little girl?" you ask.

The *brujo* nods. He never wastes language when a gesture will do the job. "Now she has love. Not sex love. The kind of love that comes from there!" He gestures skyward as he talks. "You felt it!"

"Yes. Yes." Cold chills are on your body. Did this child find something the equivalent of the philosopher's stone? "Do others notice this change too?"

"Yes. All. Everyone who sees her feels this love. She is a goddess sent among us from the old times when the gods walked more with men."

"Were there other changes too?"

"Si." The *brujo* took a deep breath. Doubt appeared on his rugged face. "I have heard of these things—" he said slowly.

"What things?"

The *brujo* seemed to plunge into words. "She saw you coming before your ship left the north country. She described you and the ship." He nodded toward the VTOL craft. "This is why we came, because she said we would meet here someone who will be very important in the lives of our people." The *brujo* shook his head. "I tell the truth."

"Um?" You almost wish you had not asked the *brujo* to be specific. You know that both clairvoyance and precognition exist in this world but when you are brought face to face with them you are a little shocked. Did this child gain these abilities as a result of touching the little black stone now lying on the sheet of paper? Impulsively you reach toward it,

then quickly draw your hand away at the brujo's hissed warning.

"A child is innocent in her heart," the brujo says. "She can touch it, and only good will result. Are you so innocent in your heart, my friend?"

You shudder and are silent. Guilt lurks somewhere in the depths of your mind. Not much of it for you have been a good man and have led a good life. But even a little guilt may grow to enormous size if magnified by this little black stone.

Yin comes trotting in from the chaparral. She smiles at you, and you feel again the pulse of love from her eyes. She finds a seat between the *brujo's* legs and sits there. Like a wise little owl, she watches you. Looking down at the stone, you see that it is no longer black.

It now has a reddish glow. As you stare at it, the color moves swiftly up through the spectrum to the ultra-violet region. There the color slips out of seeing and the stone again becomes black.

"Did you see that?"

"Si!" the *brujo* answers. "It became a little rainbow. Look! The rainbow is back again!"

You reach for it again but this time you have the foresight to reach first for the wooden tongs. The *brujo* hisses at you not to touch it, that the stone has come to life.

Yin is staring at it. Her round little face is tense and tight, and her hands are gripping the hands of the *brujo*. "It is saying—" she speaks very slowly, "—that enemies are coming."

The *brujo* grips her tightly, hissing questions at her. She does not answer. In the far distance another VTOL aircraft is settling slowly to a landing somewhere near or on Sacred Mountain. You ask the child if this is what she means. She nods first, then shakes her head. On the piece of paper the little black stone flickers through the rainbow spectrum again. The child reaches for the stone, the *brujo* not stopping her, picks it up, holds it against her forehead.

In the chaparral a rifle cracks.

The child squirms free of the *brujo's* arms. Turning, she faces in the direction from which the shot has come. Out there an Indian is backing away. Now he lifts the rifle and

fires at something you cannot see. From a cactus another rifle speaks. From a sugar bush an arrow leaps. A thrown spear comes from some hidden spot.

"What are they shooting at?" you cry out.

The child does not answer. The little black stone against her forehead, her eyes closed, she seems to be seeing into other worlds.

The Indian with the rifle backs toward you, firing as he backs away. He will give his life to protect this child. But what is coming? You see nothing.

Then you do see something—a shadow. It is barely visible. Now you see it, now you don't. Again the Indian fires the rifle at it. For a split second the shadow hesitates, lurches slightly, then moves forward again. Something that moves so fast it makes only a streak of flame in the air leaps from the shadow. Screaming, the Indian throws the rifle high into the air, spins in a circle, then drops to the sand. You know he is dead before he falls.

The shadow lurches forward, stops at the fallen Indian, stands over him, looking down. The shadow is without clear form. Whether it is human, or animal, or something that never established a physical form, you do not know. Obviously it does not see clearly. It stands over the dead Indian and looks down as if it sees him through a mist.

From the chaparral there is only silence. No rifle booms again, no arrow whistles outward, no spear is flung. Out there the Indian guard of an Indian child regarded as a goddess seems paralyzed.

The shadow straightens, stands erect and seems to peer from sightless eyes toward the house.

The *brujo* carrying the child, you go out the back door. The sorcerer would flee to the lower lands, but you will have none of this. You whisper your plan to him, he nods agreement. Circling through the cactus, you go around your cabin and return to the VTOL craft on the opposite side. Quickly you shove the *brujo* and the child into the cabin, quickly you release the tie-downs, quickly you knock the chocks from under the wheels, quickly you are inside and at the controls. The motors cough, then spring to life.

The shadow comes to the front door of your shack as the plane leaps into the air. No question in your mind but that



## SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL

he has searched it. Was he looking for the *brujo*, the child, or the little black stone that can change colors?

The ship leaps into the air, gains altitude. Looking down and back you glimpse the shadow still at the front door of your little cabin. The sightless eyes seem to be searching the sky for you.

To hell with this dark blob. You are in your ship and safely away. To the north lies the USA—and safety from such horrors as this.

Something leaps from the shadow toward the plane. It looks like a thin streak of lightning as it splits the air. Crackling sounds come from the motors as the fire streak hits the plane.

You feel the ship begin to lose altitude, and you know that somewhere in the vicinity of Sacred Mountain, you are going to have to make a forced landing.



## CHAPTER THREE

Your name is Ben Harkle. To hold your job as a narcotics field agent you have to pass tough medical, mental, and emotional examinations. These exams have to be repeated every six months, and you have to pass them. Yours is not an easy life and in six months much can happen that will disturb your mental and emotional equilibrium. You are expected to face guns, knives, brass knuckles, and the many other forms death can take in the carrying out of your assigned duties.

But no one has ever expected you to face this feeling of unseen, hidden, lost worlds coming subtly to life and crowding in around you that you face in this Tijuana bar, the two men who ought to be dead—plus the shadow standing beside them.

The men you can face. Perhaps they were not as badly wounded as you had thought. This is what you tell yourself. You know this isn't true, you know these men were dead, but you can lie to yourself about them.

You cannot lie to yourself about the shadow standing behind them. The shadow is there, a wedge of thin darkness visible against the light coming in from the front door. You cannot lie to yourself and say it is not there.

The two men are evil. You know they are evil. You saw them gun down a pawnshop owner. You saw the pawnshop man gun them down as he died. You saw them lying dead on the sidewalk, you saw them get up and walk away with their own blood squishing in their shoes. All of this says they are evil even for Mexico, where evil is common and horror is a way of life.

Bad as the two men are, dangerous as they are, the shadow behind them is worse.

How do you know the shadow is worse?

Not on evidence you can take into a court of law, not in any way you can identify and say, "This is bad for this reason." You *sense* that the shadow is evil personified. You do not know what the shadow is. In the depths of a mind threatening to go mad, you wonder if the shadow even belongs on Planet Earth. Perhaps it came here from some far-off solar system and is an entity that never was human and never will belong to the human race. Perhaps it *eats* people.

It gives some sort of a signal to the two men. They reach forward, one on each side, and attempt to grab your arms. *Spat! Spat!* Never in your life have you moved so quickly or hit anyone so hard. The one on your left you hit in the jaw. In the same motion you hit the one on your right in the stomach. It feels to you as if your fist goes clear through his stomach and hits his backbone. He coughs violently, spits in your face, and falls against you, clumsily clawing at you with hands that tell you he is out on his feet, knocked groggy by the fist in the stomach. You shove him away. He falls ponderously.

On your left, the man you hit on the jaw is on the floor. Face down, he is making wiggling motions like a snake that has been hit on the head with a rock and though stunned, is still wishing to strike again and will strike again if it gets the chance.

The big bar is empty. The *senors* have seen more than their nerves can stand. If a crazy gringo wishes to commit suicide by starting a fight in a bar, that's *his* business. Their business is down the avenue, preferably at the far end of it.

The shadow is still visible. On the floor, the two men that you have hit are making a variety of noises. The shadow has not moved. It stands staring at you. You back against the bar, to protect your rear. The gun comes out of your shoulder holster fast.

You have practiced this quick draw many times, not for publicity and not to win any contests on TV but to increase your chances of staying alive. This is what you have always thought. Or maybe what you hoped. You never anticipated having to outdraw a shadow that, so far as you know, does not even have a gun. You would not attempt it now except

you are rattled, badly shaken. What you really want to do is to get out of this bar, perhaps get the hell out of Mexico. Ordinary risks you are prepared to accept, but when invisible worlds blow past you and a shadow stalls you into a bar, you are badly bugged. Deep in your mind something is shouting, "Run! Run! Run!"

You don't dare run. Before you could reach a door, something would catch you in your flight, something, you know not what, something that can move faster than the two men on the floor, something that has legs faster than any man.

Your gun covers the shadow.

"I don't know what kind of a rig you're wearing to make yourself invisible, but I'm betting there's a man inside it. I'm also betting the man is flesh and blood, and that bullets will kill him!"

You're bluffing, you know it, but you hope the shadow won't know it. Science knows ways to bend light. This could explain the shadow—you tell yourself.

The shadow does not move. From some remote source that sounds as if it is infinities away, but which you localize within this patch of dim light, comes the sound of laughter. Not the booming laughter of hearty enjoyment. The harsh tinkling laughter of utter disdain, of contempt for you and your gun.

Your skin crawls at this sound. This is not the laughter of a human being, you think. This is the laughter of a devil out of hell.

Nobody believes in devils until he meets one. After you meet one, you realize they have been unseen around you all your life.

The shadow moves toward you.

You pull the trigger of the gun. In this bar the roar is loud and sharp. You see a spot of light explode on the shadow, marking the place where the bullet hit. Momentarily the light of a miniature sun flares there as a spot of intense brightness that almost blinds you. You pull the trigger again, the second shot being as involuntary as the first one. You are in a corner fighting for your life. Impulses deep within you say to shoot first and ask questions afterward—or there won't

be any afterward for you. The second bullet hits, another miniature sun flares with a brilliance that is a pain in your eyes, then is gone.

You can't see but you can hear. What you hear is more of that tinkling sadistic laughter that has no trace of amusement in it. This sound sends horror flooding through your mind.

You do not see the two men rise from the floor. You are still partly blinded from the flaring, small-sun lights that erupted when your bullets hit the shadow. In your mind at this moment are two thoughts, the first, that you have met the devil, you have shot at him, he has turned your bullets into miniature suns, and he has laughed at you for being stupid enough to try to stop him. The other thought that is in your mind has been there before: *run!* You can't see very well but memory tells you that if you will slide along the bar and turn left, you will find a back door somewhere in that direction. You start in this direction but stop when the shadow speaks.

You hear the haughty voice and you know it comes from the shadow but it speaks no language you have ever heard, not Spanish, not English, not the twisted idiom of the Mexican native. You don't know what the words mean, and you do not realize they are not addressed to you but to the two men until you are grabbed. The gun is jerked from your fingers. You are not struck but the two men jerk your arms behind your back, twisting them there until the pain has reached the screaming point. Again the shadow grunts an order in the language you do not understand. The twisting of your arms is released a trifle.

As this happens, your sight returns enough for you to see the shadow standing in front of you. Behind your back, your arms are twisted by one man. The second man moves in front of you and aims a heavy fist at your chin. You glimpse it coming and try to duck but your vision is still impaired. Also your hands are held behind your back. Your attempt to dodge fails. The blow lands on your jaw. After this, you can see again, but what you are seeing is stars, exploding galaxies of them, including comets and nova.

You know you have been knocked out and that you would fall, except the man behind you is holding you on your feet. When he lets go, you fall heavily. Then you drift away to

some land even unhappier than Tijuana, Mexico, if such a land exists.

The first sense that returns to you is that of hearing. You are not at all eager to have this sense return—or any other. Your hunch is that you are not going to like what you hear, or what you see, smell, or taste. Time passes while you refuse to let your ears hear. You can stop hearing, you know, if the desire to stop it is strong enough. Anybody can do it. You don't have to let your ears hear or your eyes see or your fingers feel or your nose smell. These senses are a great convenience and even a necessity while exploring and adventuring on Planet Earth, but you don't have to use them if you don't want to do so. If you so desire, you can exist utterly unaware of the world around you. Yogis have demonstrated the ability to stop the sensory functions, even to the extent of not feeling pain. The probability is great that some of the people burned at the stake in the Middle Ages felt no pain. In their time, they were called witches.

However, you are not a yogi, and you are not a witch, and you are not going to be burned at the stake—you hope. However, you wouldn't bet on it. Your guess is that you are going to face a personal disaster worse than burning, unless you let your senses function. So, reluctantly, you let your ears hear.

You hear two voices. Both voices have in them something of the tinkle that was in the bitter laughter of the shadow. You decide instantly that one voice comes from this monster. The other voice? You listen carefully. Recognition—and shock—come. The second voice is that of Mona.

My God, she can talk to that thing. She knows it. She is a confidante of it! Perhaps she is its slave, even its mistress! A woman as beautiful as Mona the mistress of a shadow! You don't want such thoughts in your brain cells! You don't like such thoughts, you don't want any part of them. What can you do about them? You don't know.

Mona and the shadow are talking in a language that sounds older than time. Certainly it is no tongue even remotely related to Spanish. You listen. It sounds a little like Chinese. It has a singing, undulating tone unlike any tongue you have ever heard.

A hot breeze blows over your skin. You feel it clearly. On

your bottom side your skin is cold. Slowly you realize you are lying on a stone floor—common in Mexico—and that you are naked—also common in Mexico. You don't open your eyes but you are aware that very near you someone is breathing very heavily. You don't look to see who it is. Your guess is that it is one of the two men who slugged you in the bar.

The talk between Mona and the shadow shifts to English. Or Mona starts talking English. The shadow seems to understand, but his responses are mostly in the one sound that is the same in any language, a grunt.

You suspect Mona has realized you are partly awake and has shifted to English because she wants you to understand what is being said.

"But he was telling the truth, I know he was," you hear her say. "He simply does not know where it is."

"E picking it oop in the gutter," the shadow says.

"But much was happening then," she answers quickly. "Guns began thundering right in his ears. Bullets were zipping around him. Maybe he didn't even pick it up. Maybe he picked it up, then dropped it when Carlos and Felix began shooting back at the pawnshop owner. Maybe he picked it up, then dropped it back into the gutter. This is what I would have done if I had found myself where he was."

"I looked in the gutter," the shadow says. There is a little doubt in his heavy voice. "If it rolled away when he got up and ran—"

"Maybe he dropped it in the bar. He went there for a drink."

"I couldn't find the bartender," the shadow says.

"He is probably so scared he is clear across Tijuana by now," Mona says. "Great One, I have an idea—"

"I wonder if he swallowed it," the shadow continues. "If he did—" Lost in thought, the shadow does not finish the sentence.

"I'm sure he didn't swallow it!" Mona says, hastily. "Great One, my idea is to take him south with us. There I will get from him the answer."

"Are you trying to protect him?" A hiss was suddenly in the voice of the shadow.

"Not at all, Great One. I am doing my best to help recover



the stone of Tardu that was stolen from our temple and brought here and sold to that miserable pawnbroker!"

"Um," the shadow says. He does not sound convinced. "In the past, women in love have tried to betray the secrets of our temple—"

"I am not one of those women!" Mona has a hiss in her own voice now. "Give him time, and he will remember what he did with the stone. We will take him south—"

"If he swallowed it—"

"No!" Mona's voice is hard and sharp. "You will not have Felix and Carlos cut him open and look through his insides to see if the stone is there!"

"If he has swallowed the stone, they will find it," the shadow says. His voice is that of a man trying hard to reason with a woman but pushed almost to the limit of his patience.

"They will also kill him!" Mona's voice has the sound of flint on steel, hard, sharp, and quick. "I will not permit Carlos and Felix to butcher him!"

"Then you are in love with him!"

"I am not! I am simply refusing to take stupid chances. He had this little metal badge on his clothes. I am sure it means he works for the gringo government—"

"What's he doing down here?"

"This is another thing I will find out, when we take him to Sacred Mountain. But I know if Carlos and Felix butcher him, the gringo government will not like it. They will speak to the generals in Mexico City, they will pay a large bribe, the generals will send the *soldados* to ask questions about our poppy fields. You do not want that!"

"No, I do not want that!" the shadow answers. "But gringos have died down here in the past, and no one has sent the soldiers to burn the poppy fields."

"Many gringos have died down here, unimportant ones, but when one dies who has one of these little badges, it is not good, Kum Rath. In the past, they would have sent an army over the killing of just one man. Now they have grown soft. They will not send an army, this will not look good in the eyes of the watching world, but they will hire a general and the general will send soldiers poking through our poppy fields—"

"All of this for just one gringo?" The shadow's voice has apprehension in it.

"For just one gringo!" There was neither apprehension nor doubt in Mona's voice. "You do not know these Americans as I do. They are treacherous, they are mean, but they also look after their own."

"Well—" The voice of the shadow said he was weakening.

"So we will take him south to our holy mountain and I will question him in such a way that he will remember." Her voice has the sound of a smile in it.

"Well, all right," the shadow says. He speaks again in the strange language. You dare to breathe again. They would have had you cut open from your mouth to your anus just to find a jewel they think you might have swallowed

You know that such things happened in lost dark ages when the human race was little more than animals with animal values, and they lived animal lives in which the strong ate the weak, literally.

You realize now why Mona and the shadow had shifted to English. They wanted to keep the two killers from understanding what they were saying.

One on each arm, Carlos and Felix jerk you to your feet. Rubber-legged and rubber-skinned, head sagging, you stand there. The shadow inspects you closely. Mona stands a little back and looks at your naked body in frank curiosity. You have the impression she is glad of the opportunity to look at a naked man, particularly a naked Americano. Perhaps she has never seen a white man before without his clothes, perhaps not any man unclad!

Your senses are all working, you're fully conscious now but you see no reason to reveal this fact by standing erect under your own power or by making any attempt to move. The shadow continues to inspect you. You still have no idea what is inside that shell of blackness, but whatever is there, it is evil.

"Do you hope by looking at him to see whether or not he swallowed the stone of Tardu?" Mona questions.

The shadow shrugs. "We will take him south with us, and if you do not find out from him what he did with the stone, I will have him cut open down there." He speaks sharply to Carlos and Felix in their own tongue.

The two zombies who ought to be dead, but aren't, pull your clothes on you. They get the shoes on wrong. When you try to walk, you fall down. Sitting down, you change your shoes so they are on the proper feet. The shadow goes away. Felix stays with him, but Carlos remains with you. Mona comes to you and speaks, sharply.

"Stop stalling! You are fully conscious and I know it!"

"Well—" You do not know what to make of her.

"Just remember one fact, gringo. You are completely in my power. If you don't remember what you did with that stone—"

She makes a gesture with her thumb from her mouth to her navel, a gesture that you understand perfectly.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Your name is Roger Jesmer. This much you remember. You do not remember much else. Memory seems to have fled into some remote corner of your mind and gone into hiding there. It makes whimpering noises from its hiding place which reveal your name and nothing else. Something has happened to you, but your memory does not want to deal with this data, yelling that to report what has happened will be unpleasant to the point of pain. *Better not ask about this, your memory whimpers, from the depths of your mind. Better forget it, better let it lie where it is, better leave it alone.*

You would agree with your memory and would block out of recall a segment of your recent life, except an angel is talking to you, in an Indian tongue, one that the *brujo* uses and which you can sort of understand. The angel is pulling at your hands, trying to get you up and moving, and is saying, "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Must hurry into caves! Must! Must! Must! Will wake up in hurry! Will wake up!"

The voice is gentle, soft, childlike, but there is an imperious, born-to-command quality in it. All of this convinces you that an angel is speaking to you. As a scientist, you never believed in angels, or in the "power, principalities, and dominions," that St. Paul talked about in the Bible, regarding all of this as the imaginative working of a primitive mind. Now that any angel is talking to you—and there is no question in your mind that this is an angel—you are not so certain of the validity of your previous beliefs. Or the lack of same.

There is a crackling sound near you like the noises made by flames rising and a feeling of heat. You ignore these sounds and the heat waves passing across your face, these

being part of recent data that your memory is refusing to admit to your consciousness. You are reasonably comfortable. What if the flames of hell are roaring so close to you that you can feel them on your face? Isn't an angel talking to you? The angel will keep the flames from you. The angel will save you from all harm, you think in one part of your mind. Another part of your mind thinks this first part is a visionary, a dreamer, and the biggest liar on earth.

As this feeling rises in you, your memory reluctantly reveals the data it has been trying to conceal. Or this is what it says it is doing, but the data it parts with comes from childhood and the time when you really did believe in angels. In fact, your memory recalls that as a child you had occasionally seen them, bright-eyed little winged creatures that looked like boys and girls, that looked human—but were not. As you had grown older, you had lost the ability to see them and had forgotten you had ever had this ability. You had known, somehow, that you would not see them any more until you were yourself a child again.

Now they had come back. You are so glad to know they are back and so eager to see them again that you open your eyes.

Instantly, you wish you hadn't done this.

It is no angel that is speaking to you. It is the little Indian girl, Yin, who is talking and tugging at your hands. You look at her, wondering if she is an angel, and look toward the crackling sound. Near you, and threatening to explode at any moment, is your VTOL craft, burning. A little distance away the *brujo*, Don Leon, is getting to his feet.

Where did the angels go?" you ask in the Indian tongue. You are still living in your childhood and are hungry for the happiness you knew when you could see angels.

Shaking her head, Yin tugs even harder at your arms. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

Flame leaps upward from the burning craft as a puff of yellow-tongued heat that seems to be trying to reach the blue sky so far overhead. Hastily you push yourself to your feet. A wave of gratitude washes through you because you are able to accomplish so simple a feat as standing erect. You know you have been thrown from the plane. Your body feels as if it is a mass of bruises and broken bones. Yin urging you,

you hurry to Don Leon. The *brujo* is on his feet but he is not smiling.

Without a word all three of you turn and run. You have made perhaps a hundred yards through the scrub brush, moving down hill, of course—when the fuel tanks explode—*Bloom!*—a sound so heavy it almost crushes your ear drums. Arrows of flaming gasoline and chunks of hot metal are hurled in a broad circle around what had once been a proud ship. You keep running. This is the only thing to do.

How you are going to get out of this mountainous region without your ship does not enter your mind. You have other things to think about: food, water, shelter, though you are not really concerned about any of these. This is Don Leon's country. He will know where to go to find the necessities of life. You wonder what has happened to Yin's guard of honor. Perhaps they are still back at your cabin hunting, or fleeing from the incredible creature that came through the chaparral and then knocked your ship out of the sky when you tried to flee? What was this thing? Your flesh crawls as your memory reluctantly brings back memories of it. Are there creatures on earth that are part of non-human evolutionary streams flowing through the planet parallel to the human race? You strongly suspect that such creatures exist, but you have never had the good luck to meet one of their representatives until now. Having met one, you no longer believe that meeting one of these creatures is good luck.

The *brujo* directing, you follow deer trails through the chaparral, winding and twisting but always going higher now. Below you, your ship is sending twisting tongues of smoke into the air. The sugar bush and the scrub cedar have caught fire and a circle of yellow flame is moving outward from the ship as the wind drives it.

"*Alto!*"

A voice rings out from a ledge above and beyond you. It speaks Spanish with an American accent, the single word, "Halt!"

You stop. Directly ahead of you, on a rock ledge above the deer trail you have been following, you see a rifle with a telescopic sight. Above it is a face with a red beard.

You don't like the looks of this face. It has cold blue eyes, the traditional eyes of the man killers of the Old West. You

realize also that Red Beard has companions as you glimpse other men with rifles behind the bright green of the sugar bushes growing behind the ledge.

You raise your hands. So does the *brujo*. Smiling vaguely, Yin stands staring. She does not understand what is happening and does not know what to do.

"You, you look like an American?" The rifle points at you.

"I am," you answer. "Name is Jesmer, Roger Jesmer."

"All right, Jesmer. Were you in the plane that crashed?"

"Yes. It was my ship."

"How did it happen you crashed?"

"I—" This is not a question you want to answer. "I—I lost control. A downdraft caught the ship. It crashed before I could regain control."

"Uh?" Red Beard regards you from cold blue eyes. "Did you own the ship, or rent it?"

"I owned it."

"A VTOL is expensive."

"Yes."

"Not many people can afford to own a ship like that."

"I guess I am one of the lucky few."

"If you can afford a VTOL, what are you doing down here?" Red Beard's eyes are the coldest blue you have ever seen. Unfilmed suspicion is in them.

"I—I come down here often, to rest, to get the fogs out of my mind, to—to get away from it all."

"*You come down here to get away from it all?*" Red Beard's voice is as cold as his eyes. "You come down here often?"

"Well, yes, as often as I can." You don't like these questions, you don't like the expression in Red Beard's eyes, but you don't see much you can do about it. The man is covering you with a high-powered sporting rifle. You are still in mild shock from the crash. Under these circumstances you answer questions as politely as you can.

"You don't come down here to look for something else, something like gold, maybe?"

"Gold?" You are so startled that you do not know how to react.

"Yes, gold!" Red Beard answers. "You had better give me a straight answer, fast. People don't spend the cash necessary



to buy VTOL craft then fly down here into these mountains unless they have good reasons for doing it. Rest and getting away from it all ain't good enough. Talk, Jesmer, and talk straight and fast, if you want to stay alive."

From his talk, you know instantly why this man is here. Montezuma's gold! The legendary hoard of metal that the Aztecs, warned by their soothsaying priests that trouble was coming, took from Mexico City and hid—*somewhere*—before Cortez and his killers even landed. The Spaniards heard tales of the treasure they had missed. By torture, they forced the Aztec priests to reveal where it had been hidden. They sent out expeditions to find Montezuma's hidden gold. One of these expeditions, according to the history books, was led by a man named Coronado. It penetrated as far north as Kansas but did not find the lost treasure. At the same time, another of Cortez's lieutenants, Ullola, sailed north along the coast of Mexico, going as far north as Santa Barbara before he realized he had gone too far. Probably both Coronado and Ullola realized eventually that the priests dying under torture had lied to them about the hiding place of the treasure of Montezuma, the last king of the Aztecs.

What if this lost hoard of gold had actually been hidden somewhere near Sacred Mountain, in or around it?

Men like Red Beard were still hunting the Lost Dutchman mine in the Superstition Mountains in Arizona. Was this Red Beard hunting in the mountains of Mexico an even larger legendary hoard?

"So you are hunting Montezuma's gold?" Red Beard says.

"No," you answer firmly. "I'm a scientist. I'm not looking for lost treasure."

Red Beard stares at you. "A scientist?" he says. A sneer is in his voice. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

"No," you answer. Realizing this is the wrong thing to say, you try to change it. "Yes. I mean—I'm still in shock from the crash. I—I don't know what I'm saying—"

"I'll say you don't! And you're going to be in bigger shock before long!"

Without bothering to aim, he fires the rifle. Smoke and lead spurt at you. The bullet passes so close to your head that it clips away a chunk of your grayish hair.

In you, shock increases as you realize that this man means

to kill you simply because he does not want anybody else hunting for Montezuma's treasure. In the Superstition Mountains of Arizona, prospectors hunting the Lost Dutchman gold mine are still being killed, for the same reason. Panic spurting through your nervous system, you turn to run. The *brujo* and Yin are already turning.

As you run another bullet howls at you. By some miracle you cannot understand, it misses, too! Before a third shot can be fired, you are around a turn in the deer trail and are out of sight of the bearded man. This does not mean he stops shooting. It merely means he has no clear target for the telescopic sight on the long gun. As you flee along the deer path, bullets begin to hunt through the chaparral for you. More than one rifle is talking back there now. This tells you that the sugar bushes really held companions of the bearded man. How many? The rifle shots do not tell you. The rifles have no real targets in this thick cover. Bent over, you are running like one of the deer that made this trail. The *brujo*, also bent over, is just ahead of you. Yin is leading the way.

On your right your still-burning ship has started a vigorous brush fire. Smoke and tongues of flame are leaping upward there. Seeming to know instinctively how to find protection, Yin leads you around the fire. Beyond the fire, the rising smoke protects you from the riflemen. The shots cease. The deer trails lead downhill. This makes the running much easier, but in spite of going downhill, your heart is pounding heavily, making you remember that you are a scientist moving toward middle age. The *brujo* is showing no signs of distress. Running downhill seems to be only a pleasant scamper for Yin. She laughs as she runs, looking back at the two old people behind her. The nearness of death from bullets does not seem to concern her. Does she know the vital secret that few humans ever really learn, that fear of death is one of the many frauds that priests used to frighten humans into obeying them? She knows something for sure. In your mind, she is a wonder child, though you do not think of her as a little goddess the way her lost guards do.

A mile beyond the fire made by your plane, you stop to rest in the shade of a clump of green sugar bushes. You do not know why these green shrubs are called *sugar bushes* since they yield no sugar, but the name does not matter.

They do yield shade. The *brujo* is breathing easily and smoothly, Yin is laughing and ready to run farther, but you are panting and out of breath.

"Why did that man try to kill you?" the *brujo* asks. He understands English, sometimes, but much of the meaning escapes him.

"Because he thinks I am here to hunt for Montezuma's gold!"

The *brujo's* grunt is a sound that says everything—or nothing.

You tell him about the Lost Dutchman gold mine. "Not a year passes even now but that some prospector is found dead there, men who hunted gold and found death!"

The *brujo* grunts again, a toneless sound that still says everything—or nothing.

"Wherever gold is there men are also—and willing to kill each other for it. Did you ever hear, Don Leon, of Montezuma's gold being hidden here in or on Sacred Mountain?" You ask the question casually, expecting a negative answer. In your mind is the conviction that Red Beard and his companions are as crazy as the killers who lurk around Superstition Mountain in Arizona, and that Montezuma's gold, if it ever existed at all, is hidden somewhere else.

The *brujo* surprises you. "Yes," he says. "Yes, it is here somewhere."

"Do you mean this?" You gasp in surprise.

"Certainly I mean it!" Don Leon nods toward the south. "The stories my great grandfather told when I was very small said that many men came from the south, long, long ago. They are porters and they bear heavy loads. With them are many warriors. They go into the caves under the mountain." He nods at the forbidding bulk rising in the sky above them. "Later, the warriors came out and went back south. No porter ever came out. My grandfather was sure the warriors forced the porters to hide the gold, then killed them."

"Then there is gold here?"

"Yes."

"And you never tried to find it?"

The *brujo* shakes his head. "There are other things within Sacred Mountain more important to me than all the yellow metal ever mined." He seems to realize he has said more than

he had intended, for when he speaks again his voice is gruff and hard to understand. "My people must spend their time growing food. They could not eat gold even if they could find it."

"What is this other something that is more important to you than gold?" you ask.

"Somewhere in there is a great temple. In it is a stone god who is alive."

"Unh?" You grunt the question. "A stone god who is alive? What are you talking about?"

"I only know that I am stupid to be talking at all," the *brujo* answers.

"But you think the gold is actually there?"

"Yes. The bearded one knows what he is seeking. It is there. But it is guarded." A note of alarm sounds in the *brujo's* voice.

"Guarded now?" you persist. "Guarded by what?"

"I do not know what guards the gold. I have not seen it," the *brujo* answers. Now the alarm is clearly audible in his voice. "But it is worse, I think, than the shadow that came walking toward your house—and which knocked your ship out of the sky when we tried to get away!"

His face grim and his eyes bitter, Don Leon looks up at the vast bulk of Sacred Mountain. "I hope Red Beard finds the lost gold. He will find death is there with it. Those with him will find the same end. It is not good to find the gold the Aztecs hid!"

In the distance beyond the smoke rising from the plane, rifle shots sound, a volley of them.

"They are still following us!" you call out. "But what are they shooting at?"

As if in sudden pain, Yin cries out at the shots. The *brujo* takes her in his arms. As Indian children are trained to do, she weeps silently, big tears running down her cheeks. You stare at her in dismay. No bullet could have hit her—the shots were too far away. The *brujo* questions her and she whispers broken words in reply. He looks up at you.

"Yin says Red Beard has just killed Tomas," the *brujo* explains.

"Oh. I am sorry. But who is Tomas?"

"One of her guards," Don Leon answers. In the last few

minutes the lines on his timeworn face seem to deepen. "Her guards saw the smoke rising from the burning plane and came to it, thinking to find Yin near the fire. They found Red Beard and those with him. Tomas was killed." Now something close to tears appeared in the eyes of the *brujo*, slowly moving down the wrinkled cheeks. In bewilderment, you stare at the old man. An Indian medicine man crying! You have never expected to see such a sight.

"Tomas was my son," the *brujo* says, in a voice choked and hoarse.

"Oh!" you gasp. Understanding of the tears and sudden sympathy rise in you. For a moment you feel a touch of guilt as if your presence here has somehow brought pain and death to this old man and to those close to him. You did not wish this, you would never wish it. Realizing that this guilt is irrational, you dismiss it and try to find words to comfort Don Leon. "But perhaps Yin is wrong," you insist.

"No," the *brujo* denies. "I felt it too."

"Felt it? I do not understand. How could you feel something that happened a mile away?"

"How does the she-coyote know when her cub dies?" the *brujo* answers. "She feels it here!" The *brujo* touches his heart. "Also, Yin saw it."

You are more confused than ever. The science you know has taught you nothing about seeing at a distance. This talk is making you distinctly uncomfortable.

"She saw the pictures in her mind," the *brujo* explains. To him, he has explained all that is necessary.

To you, he has not explained enough. There are other questions you want to ask, many of them, but Yin is suddenly speaking again.

The *brujo* listens to her, then sets her on her feet.

"Red Beard and those with him are still following us," the *brujo* says. "Yin says she knows a place where we will be safe! It is where she went into the mountain and found the little stone that made her into a goddess. She says we must hurry!"

The child is already moving quickly along another of the many deer trails. You and the *brujo* follow her, but she has to slow down to let you keep up with her.

Back behind you the rifles speak again, sharply, savagely,

brutally. Yin gives one soft cry of pain, then moves even faster. You know from her little cry that another of her guard has died. Turning her head, the little Indian child urges you and the *brujo* to follow faster. As she turns her head, you see tears are again on her face.

She has harmed no one. So far as you know, her guard has harmed no one. To you, the guard seemed a harmless superstition from the past, from the days when such a guard might have been needed to protect the children of a tribal chieftain from wolves or wandering mountain lions, certainly harmless unless attacked. Now they are dying under high-powered rifles of gold hunters and this child is weeping as she flees. A wave of hatred rises in you that such things should exist. Suddenly you hate the gold hunters back behind you, you hate the whole human race, you hate all men. Then you remember that you are a man, too. For the first time in your life you feel like apologizing for being human.

Calling out sharply for you to follow, the child moves into a crevice between two rock formations. You follow her, then stop. Carved in the rock wall on your right is a round circle with rays radiating from it—a sun symbol. Eroded to a point where it is difficult to see, eroded by sun and rain, there is no question in your mind that this symbol was left here by some long-gone civilization. No modern Indian work, this carving! Older than the Aztecs, older than Mexico, perhaps!

You are a scientist, you are capable of concentrating to such a degree that you can forget the rifles that cracked so sharply behind you so short a time ago and immerse yourself in studying this ancient symbol. You stop the *brujo* coming behind you, point to the rock carving and ask questions.

“Made long, long ago,” the *brujo* answers. “Made by the people who lived before the moon was in the sky.”

“Before the moon was in the sky?”

“Yes. Legends tell of time of no moon. Go on, now, please. Yin wants us.”

You are going to ask more questions but Yin has come back and is pulling at your hand. “Come quickly. In there is where I found the little stone. I know the path.”

She moves easily over the rocks, here and there crawling over tumbled boulders, here and there going around prickly-pear clumps. Once this canyon was a wide passage

leading into the side of the mountain. Across the centuries earthquake and rain-loosened boulders have tumbled down into it. Climbing through and over these boulders is slow, hard work for you. Yin skips over them as easily and as lightly as a mountain goat, eventually moving through an opening between two boulders. Inside, she beckons for you to follow. You go down into the opening, then slip on treacherous footing. As the *brujo* comes down, he also slips at the same spot. Dropping to one knee, he examines the surface of the passage opening before you, feeling the rocky floor with one finger. You follow his example. The rock here is covered with pebbles and pieces of rough stone. These are slick, slippery, treacherous.

"It's slime of some kind," you say, examining it. "And it get slicker as you move farther into the opening."

"We are not going farther," the *brujo* says, decisively. "Something very evil passed this way very recently."

Yin has stopped moving toward the darkness. As you watch, she begins to back away.

"She has sensed it now," the *brujo* says.

He begins to climb back over and over the boulders.

Outside, on the lip of the canyon, a rifle cracks. A bullet screams as it bounces from the boulder just ahead of the *brujo*. Hastily, he drops back. Other bullets follow the first one.

You know now that you have no choice except to follow the path of slime into the darkness of what is obviously an ancient tunnel.





## CHAPTER FIVE

Your name is Ben Harkle, you think, but you're not really sure of this. You are in a room that looks out over a vast valley as forlorn as the doorsteps of hell. Near you, no green things grow, no water flows. Far down in the distance are vague patches of color, poppy fields far below you. Down there rain must fall or perhaps the poppies are watered by irrigation. *Poppies?* A chill passes through you. Where poppies grow, there gum opium is made. Where gum opium is made is also to be found the apparatus for cooking it into heroin. Where heroin is made, there hell begins! Where this happens, you are on the job.

You think you are in Mexico, but you are not sure. Blindfolded, with your hands tied behind your back, you were brought here from Tijuana in a big VTOL aircraft and while you *think* the ship landed in Mexico, it may have crossed Aztec land entirely to land in Central America. Or perhaps even in South America, in the high Andes. All you know is that you were in flight for several hours, guarded alternately by one of two men whom you took to be Carlos or Felix. On the flight you had the impression that either of them would like nothing better than to give you the big drop from the plane, their only concern being mild wonder as to whether you would bounce when you hit. However, Kum Rath gave no such orders, and you were not thrown from the ship.

Who is Kum Rath? Your mind shudders as you remember him. Is he really a shadow or is a man hidden under this disguise? Is he a shadow that can become a man when it chooses? Is he a man who can become a shadow, in a kind of a twist on the werewolf theme?

Remembering how your bullets sparked into incandescence, inches away from the shadow, you suspect the existence of some kind of electronic screen around his body which turns aside visible light rays and explodes metallic objects that strike it. Such screens are in the experimental stage in laboratories in the USA, along with much else that is strictly hush-hush, but where would Kum Rath get such a device? Is it possible that such a discovery was actually made by scientists in civilizations now lost to history? At this thought, cold winds blow over your body. You are of the opinion that much history taught in schools has a strong mixture of hot air in it, but is written history as wide of the mark as you suspect? Did historians actually overlook great civilizations that existed on earth in ages past?

You cannot answer these questions. You have to say, "No matter" and shrug them aside. You also have to hope that overlooked history does not come up behind you—and men everywhere—and stab you in the back when you're not looking.

Kum Rath is either a man who can become a shadow, or he is a shadow that can become human. In either case, he is a devil out of hell, you suspect. You know beyond any doubt that Carlos and Felix were shot dead on a Tijuana sidewalk. You saw them die there. You have seen a few men die, enough to know how they act when they are dead. These two men were dead. You also saw them get up and walk into an alley with their own blood gushing from their shoes. You also know that when you slugged them in the bar, you hit an object that was physical, alive, and solid.

Can Kum Rath make the dead return to life?

As this thought crosses your mind, the flesh again crawls all over your body, and you wish you were back in the USA where Satan looks like a congressman, makes promises like a congressman, and lies like a congressman, but he does not bid the dead rise up and walk and is obeyed. Better to face the father of all lies, Satan, than to face such a world as Kum Rath represents. No simple *brujo*, Kum Rath, no tricking conjurer, no double-dealing shaman! A man of power! A man of power that you had not thought existed on Planet Earth—and which you fervidly wish you did not know exists here.

You check your pockets. No money, no badge, no gun. Of course, there is always the twenty dollar bill slipped down behind the pocket of your jacket and reached through the inner pocket on the right side. It's an old, much-used twenty dollar bill, so old and much used that its crinkle will not betray its presence to fingers that might be searching you. Yes, the bill is still there! You feel better about this. In Mexico, twenty Yankee dollars will buy a lot including phone calls to the USA—if you were only free to use a phone. But the bill is still there, your exploring fingers tell you, even if you can't use it. Your exploring fingers also tell you that a small round object is nestled into the pocket that holds the bill.

Sudden suspicion enters your mind. Probing into the inner pocket, your fingers pull out the small round object.

There in your fingers, as black as the tunnel to hell, is the missing stone of Tardu that both Mona and Kum Rath have been trying to get from you!

As you hold it in your fingers, you remember how it got into your pocket. When you picked it up in the gutter, you automatically dropped it into your pocket. It slid down into the secret pocket between the lining and the pocket proper!

To say the least, you are glad to have it. If Kum Rath once becomes convinced you have swallowed it, you are absolutely certain he will have Carlos and Felix open you up from your gullet to your anus and hunt through your stomach and your guts until they find the stone! Nor will they make certain you are dead before they start their search. Quite the contrary!

You hold it in your fingers. Jet black, the little stone seems to wink light at you from thousands of microscopically-small facets. Your first thought was that it was smooth, but now you see it is faceted, like a diamond, but the facets are so tiny you can see them only with great difficulty.

What master jewel cutter cut the facets on this stone? For what purpose? Was it designed to be suspended around the throat of some queen of the old times? Did some dusky maiden wear it in her ear lobe? Or in her navel, perhaps? Or elsewhere?

Or did it have some other purpose, did it serve some function that you cannot even guess?

As you hold it in your fingers, staring at it, wondering

what skill produced it, what art and what science were involved in its shaping, you notice a strange thing is happening. From the little stone, a current of electricity is flowing into your fingers. Moving up your right arm, it flows gently through your body, obviously following the nerve paths. As this happens, you begin to feel an increase in physical strength!

Your first thought is that this is delusion, a kind of hallucination. Hastily you slip the little stone back into the inner pocket of your jacket, making certain it is resting in such a way that there is no contact with your skin.

Instantly the feeling of increased physical strength vanishes. It goes away—*puff!*—like smoke flowing before a rising wind. However, you know what you felt. Cautiously you slip your hand into your pocket, find the little stone, cradle it in your palm.

Again the electric feeling flows up your arm and spreads through your nervous system. This is not electricity, you feel certain, but it is some force akin to electrical energy, a force that flows through the nervous system and into the muscles, creating there the impression of additional strength. Is this strength real? It certainly feels real. How high will it increase? Only experience can answer this question. Suddenly you remember the old folk story of the giant who was so strong no one could whip him, as long as his feet touched the ground. Hercules defeated him by lifting his feet off the ground. Held in the air, the giant was helpless, he had no strength at all. Could the old tale have risen out of a folk memory of the little device you are cuddling in the palm of your hand? As long as you touch the stone, you have great strength. When you lose contact with it, your strength returns to normal.

Checking this idea, you again release the stone and take your hand out of your pocket. Again the flow of electrical energy up your arm and into your nervous system comes to a halt. You cuddle it again in your hand. The energy flow resumes its subtle movement up your arm.

You do not understand how this can happen. All you know is that it *is* happening. As you are convinced that you have in your possession a miracle-working stone, you clearly understand why a pawnshop owner in Tijuana would kill

two men who tried to take this stone away from him. This stone is valuable! Perhaps in its function somewhere is the secret of how two dead men can get up off a sidewalk and walk again and how a woman can walk out of existence and how something called Kum Rath can take on all the appearance of a shadow.

Magic? Yes and no, depending on how you define the term. Magic in the sense of going beyond cause and effect, you doubt. Magic in the sense of secret hidden knowledge that goes around what men *think* they know of cause and effect is best described as creative science. You do not doubt this. How can you doubt it? The world is a place of awe and mystery, of wonder piled on top of wonder, or miracle following miracle, all flowing unseen to man from some hidden unseen source usually called God. A little black stone about the size and the shape of a pigeon's egg with strength flowing from it fits somewhere in the pattern of dead men walking and shadows talking—and what else?

As you think what else may be involved in this situation, your mind wants to go blank. Your emotional world is not so blank. It sends chills through your body. Then you realize that behind you in the solid stone inner wall of this cell a door is opening, the chills increase. Hastily taking your hand out of your pocket, you turn.

Mona stands there.

She is smiling. You never saw a more beautiful woman in your life. Or a more seductive looking one. Above golden sandals a dress of foliage green rises around trim hips and passes over rounded breasts that never knew a bra.

"How are you feeling, Ben?" she asks.

"Broke," you answer. "No gun, no badge, no money."

She frowns, then smiles. "I am afraid neither the badge nor the money will get you anything here. Kum Rath felt you were not to be trusted with the gun. You might try to shoot him again."

"He has a point there. I might try again—and I might not miss next time."

She frowns at this. "You talk as if you do not value life highly."

You shrug. "Do I have a choice?"

For a moment, she studies you. A wistful look appears in

her eyes and she gives you the impression she is seeing something she has hoped for but never expected to find. "You have great courage," she says. "Most men, seeing what you have seen, would be on their knees begging instead of trying to bluff!"

"Am I bluffing?" you answer.

"You are in a place where you have no chance to escape, you are surrounded by forces that must seem magical to you, yet you act as if everything is quite okay."

"How would you act if you were in my position?"

She smiles and nods. "Just as you are acting. In addition, I would be pushing the fact that I am a woman. But—" she shakes her head. "Have you remembered where it is?"

You shrug the question away. "I do not know what you are talking about."

The dark eyes smile at you. Wistfully or approvingly? You cannot decide. For all you know, every word you say may be overheard. You have the feeling that you are walking on egg shells. Carefully you keep your hand out of the pocket of your jacket.

The dark eyes smile at you. "I think you know."

You smile back at her. "If I knew what you are talking about, how long would I stay alive?"

A startled reaction sends waves across her face. "I never thought of that!" Real concern is in her voice. The smile vanishes from her face. Little by little it comes back, then vanishes once more. "Kum Rath would not dare have you killed even if you tell him where you have hidden the black stone of Tardu!" The words have a hiss in them that is similar to that of a snake poised and ready to strike. Her eyes are hot with fury—and with alarm. The alarm tells you she is not sure of herself, that she thinks perhaps Kum Rath can have you killed in spite of anything she can do to prevent it—presuming she wants to prevent it.

Why should she want to save you from the man who is obviously her master? As this question comes into your mind, an emotion comes to life in the region of your heart. Does she love you? You tell yourself that this is nonsense. This beautiful woman does not and cannot love you, but she will help you if she can. She will try to save your life. The

fact that she is willing to try to save your life does not mean that she is in love with you. Never!

"What is Kum Rath to you?" you ask. You keep your voice casual, indicating this question has little meaning to you.

"Personally, less than nothing. I am high priestess here. He is high priest. My duties require that I serve him in certain god matters. That is all."

The hot intensity of her voice forces you to believe her. You shrug. "High priest and high priestess! These are old words in the history of the world. They have gone out of fashion in the modern day."

"Yes, I know. This only shows the stupidity of the modern day. Your scientists, your religious leaders, who think they know everything, really know nothing. Here in this mountain is greater power than they know exists. High priest and high priestess are only one way to say polarity. That is to say—sex. The smallest grain of matter and the sun are both founded on the solar principle. Every cell in your body, mine, too, has a positive and a negative end. When these function smoothly together, all is well. When there is no high priest and no high priestess the earth itself will cease revolving on its axis. Perhaps even the poles will switch place."

Her words are hot but in them you recognize a knowledge beyond modern science. "Where did you learn this?" you ask.

"My people have always known these things. Such knowledge is part of my training as a temple priestess."

"I don't see how the high priest and the high priestess can make the earth revolve," you protest.

"I am talking symbolically, not literally. The earth turns on its axis because of the polar forces. It moves in its orbit for the same reason."

You shake your head. "I never **knew** a woman who talks as you do, who knows what you know." There is honest admiration in your voice.

At this, she smiles. Her intensity and her fury suddenly gone, she is shy as a kitten. "The women in your world do not know these things? What do they talk about?"

"Sex, mostly. How to get a man, how to keep a man, how

to get rid of a man and get another one. After these things, they talk about clothes and how to do their hair and their nails. After this, they think about food, and maybe about their kids, if they have any."

"These are—cows!" Shock is in her voice. "Don't they ever wonder how the world is put together and what makes it run?"

"They *think* they think about these things, but the average woman probably feels she can do nothing to solve these problems. Hence, she ignores them. I don't blame them. Their world is already too complex to be understood, with maybe prices jumping sky high and the kids beginning to hit drugs. They simply don't have time to wonder about the polarity of planets or body cells."

"Um." She is silent. "Well, perhaps if I had children to occupy my attention, I would think less about my duties as a high priestess." A gesture of irritation crossing her face, she shakes her head. "But as long as I am high priestess, there is no point in thinking about having children. Kum Rath would have me strangled, according to the laws of the temple, if I had one."

"Would he really do that, if you had a child?"

"He most certainly would. And the people would back him up. Since the days when there was no moon, the high priestesses have been virgins. To break this law is to die." She looks appealingly at you. "Is it not the same in your land? In the school which I attended in Europe, they would not tell me these things."

"In my land, we have no priestesses," you answer. "As for virgins, all I can say is that I have heard of them."

"Are they scarce?"

"So I have also heard." You are smiling now and are almost at ease with this fantastic woman who holds your life in her hands. You wonder if perhaps Cleopatra, when she was a new and young queen in ancient Egypt, looked and talked and acted like this.

She seems startled at your words. "Well, you certainly live in a strange world. In the school across the water they told me that all Americanos were very, very rich, but they told me little about your women. Virgins scarce in your country! Tell me, do your women like it this way?"



"I do not know. They complain to each other how hard their life is, but it always seemed to me that these complaints were mostly an attempt to make themselves more important. I think many of them like the scarcity of virgins. At least, they do much to create this situation, so they must like it."

You see you have confused this woman. "Perhaps you are joking, no? What about their children? Do they know who their fathers are?"

"Usually they do. If they don't know, they pretend, mothers and children both. Usually pretending is just as good as knowing. Sometimes it is better."

"This, I understand." Unspoken questions are in her eyes. For an instant, she studies you in the manner of a woman who wants to ask questions but does not dare. "We hear so much about your great land to the north, but we do not know what is true and what is just another lie. But, if I should go to your country, how would I learn how to act?"

"By watching others. If you went there as a woman alone, you would have to learn which of the sex-hungry males you wished to encourage, which you wished to send away. If you went there as a wife in love with her husband, love would teach you how to act and what to say or do."

Fascinated, she listens to you. Then you use a word she does not understand. "*Love?*" Perplexity is on her face. "A wife in love with her husband? I do not know the meaning for this word. Will you tell me: what means this word *love?*"

"It means—" Suddenly you feel helpless. You had expected treachery from this woman but at this moment, she seems as naive as a schoolgirl. You try to think of the many meanings of love. "It is the way a man feels about a woman—and a woman feels about a man. When it is in you, you are happy. When it is not in you, you are miserable. When you are in love, you walk as tall as mountains. When you are not in love, the world is a miserable swamp through which you crawl on your stomach." You spread your hands in a gesture of despair. "How can I tell you about love? If you feel it, you know what it is. If you have never felt it, nobody can tell you about it."

Her eyes shift and change as you talk, now glowing, now dull. The expression on her face becomes a smile as you talk

about walking as high as mountains. It changes to sadness when you talk about crawling through swamps. Perhaps this woman does not know the meaning of love, from experience, but her eyes and her face reveal she could be taught.

"The sisters where I went to school teach me about sex, a little, and that little maybe mostly wrong. They tell me sex is nasty. Should I believe them?"

"No. Sex is nasty if you make it nasty. Otherwise, it is an ennobling experience. The sisters simply did not know from experience."

"Does this love you are talking about—" Her face is wistful again. "Does it come out of sex?"

"Some people think it does, but I suspect it is the other way around and that sex is only one way in which this love expresses itself."

Her eyes grow wide with wonder as she thinks about this. "Then this love comes first and sex comes second?"

You nod and smile at her. "Perhaps when you visit my country and see for yourself how we live, we can talk more about these things." If you are trying to lure this woman into helping you escape, you do not hate yourself for it.

Her eyes glow at your words. Impulsively, she takes a step toward you.

"You will take me to your country some day?" Her eyes have the wistful appeal of a three-year-old child asking for candy.

"You will not not take her to your country!" a voice speaks from the doorway. Mona quickly draws back from you. A man is standing in the doorway. You know instantly that this is Kum Rath.

Short in stature, perhaps five feet six inches tall, he is as broad at the shoulders as any football fullback who ever went up the middle. His skin is the same color as Mona's, a shining bronze, and his nose is hooked. His manner is imperious. He is like an ancient king who holds in his hands subject to his will alone the life or the death of his subjects.

Perhaps Kum Rath does hold in his hands the life or the death of his people here in this mountain, including the life of Mona. Certainly including you!

"I am an American citizen!" you say. "You cannot hold me prisoner!"

"Why can't I?" His words are poorly enunciated. You do not fully understand what he says but you get the impression that he has asked what stops him from holding you prisoner.

"Because I am an agent of the American government," you tell him. "If I do not report to my superiors, they will send men to find me, perhaps an army of them!" You are bluffing but you are hoping that Kum Rath does not know this.

"Hah!" Kum Rath's copper-colored face turns black as he answers. "They will send an army to rescue one man? Did they send an army to release their prisoners of war in Vietnam? If you do not return, they will send someone to search for you. When he does not return, they will bribe generals in Mexico City to send soldiers. What will the soldiers find? Not the secret of our holy mountain. For certain, they will not find you. Many gringos disappear down here. Perhaps their relatives come asking questions but who cares about relatives?" His shrug is more than adequate. "If you ever want to see your land again, you must remember where you hid the stone you picked up in the Tijuana gutter!" Kum Rath's voice is hard and flat. He sounds like an ancient king pronouncing the death sentence on a rebellious subject.

There is sweat on your face, sweat on the palms of your hands, sweat on your feet, but in spite of this, your shrug conveys indifference.

"It's a question of a blocked memory," you say. "Perhaps a hypnotist might open the block and find out what I did with the stone if I ever had it."

"You had it! Perhaps Carlos' knife beginning to open the top of your stomach may unblock your memory, too!"

You shrug again. Because you know your life is at this man's whim, you do not make your shrug too elaborate.

"And perhaps your memory will improve if I say that this time tomorrow, Carlos will start!" Fire flashes from the agate eyes.

Your shrug is a little more elaborate this time. Mona is watching in tense silence but she is keeping quiet. "I assume you know that if you kill me, it will be impossible for me to remember what I did with the stone, if I ever had it!"

Kum Rath swears at this answer, hot oaths in his native tongue. You do not understand the words but Mona grows pale at them. Kum Rath shakes a long finger at you and for a

moment you fear fire may flash from it and strike you dead, but no fire comes.

"Money, gold, much gold, jewels, drugs, I will give for the stone."

"What good would these things do me when my throat was cut?" you question.

"Who said anything about cutting throats?" Kum Rath asks. "That is an easy way to die. There are other ways that are not so easy. Is that not true?" He turns to Mona to ask this question. "Answer me!" he speaks, when she is silent.

"Y-yes, Great One."

"I don't doubt you have elaborate tortures, but will they give you the stone when I don't know where it is? Also, why is this stone so valuable? Is it a big diamond?"

"You don't know what it is?"

"How can I know what it is when I don't remember ever seeing it?"

Kum Rath stares at you. Wheels are turning in his mind. He is making a decision on what to do with you when the door opens and Felix bows himself into the room. He speaks quickly to Kum Rath in his own tongue, the high priest responding the same way.

"I must go now," Kum Rath says to you. "Just remember where you put the stone and tell Mona. If you hid it in Tijuana, just tell her where. I will have the town searched until it is found."

Finishing speaking, he turns and follows Felix from the room.

You wipe the threat out of your mind and turn to Mona. "I saw that man dead on the streets of Tijuana," you say, indicating Felix. "I saw him shot down. I saw him lie dead on the sidewalk. I saw him get up and walk away. Do the dead live again in this land?" Cold winds are blowing over your sweaty body. Your heart is beating much too fast for your comfort.

She is scared, too. Her face and her quick breathing reveal it.

"When you are dead in Mexico, you are dead forever, in most cases. But these men, and others like them, are no longer human. Kum Rath took their souls from their bodies. Now they live as he wills. If they are shot with bullets or

with arrows, Kum Rath wills that their flesh shall heal. If bones are broken, he wills that they heal—”

“Wait a minute, Mona. Do you mean to tell me that this high priest—”

“It is as I have told you,” she answers. “I am telling the truth as I know it to be true.”

Again cold winds are on your body. “What kind of a place do you have here?” Your voice has dropped to a whisper as you ask this question. You are not at all certain that you want an answer.

“A very strange place,” she answers. “So strange that most of the time I am afraid to breathe, almost. Felix has no soul of his own, no mind of his own, no will of his own. His soul now lives in Kum Rath’s soul and does Kum Rath’s bidding.”

“I do not understand this talk.”

“You saw its meaning with our own eyes when you saw dead men walk in Tijuana.”

This, you cannot dispute. You saw dead men rise and walk in Tijuana. You will never forget this sight. Nor will you ever forget the sound of the blood squishing in their shoes as they walked.

There is a question in your mind. There are a thousand questions in your mind, but there is a particular one that you want to ask but hardly dare. Finally you find the courage needed. “Are you—are you also one of Kum Rath’s slaves?”

“No!” Her voice is as cold as the north wind in Alaska. “I am no man’s slave.”

“Are you sure? I mean, it might be possible to be a slave of Kum Rath and not know it?”

Fear moves in the dark eyes. She seems to look back within herself, to study something there. You wonder if she is looking at her soul.

*Smack!* She slaps you.

You have been slapped by women before but never by one who did it so quickly. Nor have you ever seen a woman shift from fear to anger so quickly. Her hands come up, the index finger pointed at you, and you think she is going to freeze you as she did in Tijuana. You catch her quickly, one hand going around her waist, the other hand grabbing her arms and holding them tight against her body. You twist her body so that you are behind her.

Never in your life have you seen such fury. She kicks backwards at you, she bends her body like a bow and tries to break free, she twists her head and tries to bite.

"Easy, Mona," you whisper in her ear. "I don't want to hurt you but I've got to protect myself."

"From a woman you must protect yourself?"

"If the woman is you, yes. I remember how you paralyzed me in the bar in Tijuana."

At this, she slows her efforts to bite and kick. "And you thought I was going to do this again?"

"What else?"

"Then I do not blame you for grabbing me. Release me, please."

"And let you pop me with the energy which is in your finger? No, thank you!"

"I will not do it again. Or not because of this. I promise. If in the future you do something I do not like—"

"Then I will get it, huh?"

"Of course. You will deserve it!"

Can you trust this woman? You do not know. Without her, you are a dead man. With her on your side, you may have a fighting chance. You release her—and watch her closely.

Her first action is to rearrange her hair. This finished, she turns to you. "Do you still think I am one of Kum Rath's slaves?"

"Not any more."

"I am the slave of no man," she says. Like heat lightning, anger flickers in her voice. "That is a bad, bad thing to say about anyone. Come with me! I will show you how Kum Rath makes his slaves. When you have seen this, you will know the meaning of terrible horror."

Moving to the door, she opens it, and passes through. You follow her. Outside is a tunnel. There are no guards but the door is heavily barred on the outside. You follow her along this tunnel. Somewhere in the distance and below you voices are chanting. You call this to Mona's attention but she says no danger is involved and eventually you pass what seems to be a balcony of a huge theater. Pausing here, you look down, and gasp in surprise. Below you in a huge auditorium incense rises in slow curls in motionless air. Through the incense you

catch a glimpse of the chanters, dozens of them, sitting in semi-circular rows around a block of stone that must serve as an altar. Beyond the altar rises up a statue that must be a hundred feet tall, a human, perfectly proportioned but with the horns of a bull projecting from its head.

"Evil ruling the world!" you whisper.

"Kum Rath will not say it that way. He is trying to bring back the power that once lived in the god. Long ago, when there was no moon, our people worshipped here. In those days the god was powerful, his voice was thunder, his glance was lightning. In the faroff corners of the earth men heard his voice and trembled as they obeyed him. Then he lost his power." She shakes her head. "There is much here that I do not understand."

"How can Kum Rath restore power to what is only a statue carved from stone?"

"He has found the ancient writings and has studied them. From them he learned how to make himself invisible and how to make his slaves. What else he has learned I do not know but he thinks there is a way to bring power back to the god. Then the statue will not be just a thing of stone but will again be the seat of very great power."

As she talks, a sense of foreboding rises in you. With the chanting in your ears and the incense rising upward, you have the feeling that an ancient evil exists here in this vast chamber, an evil that is quiet now but that is on the verge of coming to life again. Does not the world have enough evils without awakening another one?

Or is the feeling of evil merely *your* impression, is it the way your mind thinks of power that is alien and which it does not understand?

You don't know the answer to this question but you do know you are scared right down to the soles of your feet. Mona seems to have the same impression. She shivers and draws closer to you as if for protection.

"People were here before Adam was," Mona whispers. "A very wise race, a great people."

"History knows nothing of such a people," you protest.

"I have studied your history," she answers. "It knows very little. Your civilization boasts of its science. Here was once a greater science than any known in your world today. Long

ago the race here mastered the mind, understood all its meanings, how it worked. Most of their knowledge is still lost but Kum Rath has understood part of it. He hopes to understand more about the god called Tardu—”

“You are looking for one of the stones of Tardu?”

“Yes. And I still think you know where it is. But no matter, now. If you will look far below you will see a flat altar in front of the statue. You cannot see them from this distance but on top of that altar are seven small round holes. The stones of Tardu once fitted into these little holes. When they were in place, the person in the center of the ring of stones was in touch with the god. Enormous power was available to him, mental and electrical power, greater than anything known in the world today. The little stones created an energy vortex over the altar, an energy spinning in circles, a—I do not know the word.”

“A generator? We have generators.”

“Generators of electricity, these you have, but the energy here was only akin to electricity, it was a force similar to electricity but different from it, more subtle, far more powerful, more dangerous. It shows in the Northern Lights and in the lightning. Your language has no word for this force but in my tongue it is called *telle*.”

Like a priestess before an oracle working with forces she does not understand, she seems to be musing. You have the vague impression that the huge statue itself is talking to her, giving her words.

“It works anywhere on earth,” she continues.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Does not your radio work anywhere on earth? So does *telle*. When the high priest sits in the middle of the circle of stones and the men and women are properly seated out from the altar, the high priest can see anything that is happening anywhere on earth. He can see his enemies far, far away, if he wishes, and can destroy them. That is what Kum Rath says is true, but I do not believe he has proved it as yet. He works in that direction.” She looks at you. “So you see why Kum Rath will have you slit from your throat to your backside if he thinks you have swallowed the stone of Tardu. Two stones are missing. You have one of them. He is searching desperately for the seventh and is sure he will soon find



it. With the seven stones of Tardu in place, Kum Rath can make himself ruler of Mexico, perhaps of North America."

"That's a grim picture you paint, but do you think the Mexicans or the Americans will let him gain so much power over them?"

"They will never know he is doing it—until it is done," Mona answers. "Then they will not know what has happened. Kum Rath will sit like a huge spider at the center of a gigantic web. Each strand in that web will run to an important man in the government. The government man will think he is making up his own mind on all issues but orders will actually come to him from Kum Rath over the *telle* threads."

Again she shivers and draws closer to you as you both walk along a tunnel. Behind you, the sound of chanting and the smell of incense fade slowly away. You think about what you have seen and what you have been told. Revulsion is in you. An occult Genghis Khan rising here in the mountains of Mexico, a monster living in filth and breeding horror.

"You said you were taking me to see a horror," you say.

"And so I am!"

"How can any horror be greater than that one?" You gesture with your thumb back toward the huge hall where incense curls upward as men lift their voices in supplication to a deity with horns. Your hands are sweaty and sickness is still crawling through your stomach. Deep in your heart you know Mona is not talking out of her imagination. She is talking of things that are real—though the reality is different from any you have ever imagined.

"A horror greater than the one behind us?" In the dimly lighted place you see a shiver pass through her body. "Come with me and you will see!"

Is she going to show you a horror—or is she going to shove you into it? You do not know.



## CHAPTER SIX

Your name is Roger Jesmer. You crouch in the dark entrance of an underground cavern with the *brujo*, Don Leon, and the child, Yin, beside you listening to the echoes of the rifle that fired a bullet at the *brujo* when he started to climb out of the entrance to the cave. The echoes of that rifle come back from crag and cliff, rolling back and forth until you think they will never stop.

"Are you hit?"

The *brujo* shakes his head. Looking back into the depths of the tunnel, he seems to have forgotten the rifle shot and the hot bullet that was aimed at him. Yin is also looking toward the dark tunnel, her dark eyes intent on something—she knows not what—that she is afraid she will see. You look too, a quick glance for you are concerned about the rifleman, but if anything is there in that dark place, you cannot see it. Certainly something has passed this way recently; it left a broad, slick trail on the rubble-covered floor of the tunnel, such a trail as might have been made by a snail.

But this slick, greasy trail is more than three feet wide! No snail ever made so big a track.

"Come out with your hands up!" a voice yells from outside.

The echoes pick up this voice and hurl it back and forth between crag and cliff.

You look at the *brujo*. He shakes his head. Another shot roars. Striking the floor of the tunnel, the bullet is deflected against the opposite wall. Fragments of hot metal howl away into the darkness. No one is hit. You may not be so lucky the next time.

"Back there, we will be safer," you say, nodding toward the depths of the tunnel.

The *brujo* nods. Very warily, with Yin behind him as if he expects to find the danger coming from ahead rather than from the rifle behind, the old medicine man moves along the tunnel. Outside, the rifle roars again.

The bullet does not enter the tunnel and it does not come skipping from wall to wall after you, but you jump involuntarily.

The tunnel ahead of you has a vague glow on the walls. The glow is very dim, giving enough light to see your hand in front of your face, but little more than this. As your eyes adjust to the light values in this place, you can see better. The surface under your feet is loose rock, pebbles, and chunks of stone that have fallen from the roof and the sides of the tunnel.

You wonder about this tunnel. Who dug it here and with what tools? What long lost lighting engineers put this glowing substance into the walls and the roof, doing so good a job that a remnant of light-producing values remain after centuries or millennia?

Under other circumstances both the tunnel and the glow on the walls would excite your curiosity as a scientist but with a rifle setting off thumping echoes behind you and something ahead of you that left a slimy trail, you have no energy to expend on scientific curiosity, this having been driven out of your mind by the problem of staying alive.

Far behind you the sound of heavy footsteps are audible. Red Beard has entered the tunnel! At any instant you expect a rifle to thunder behind you and a bullet to come screaming down the bore, bouncing from wall to wall as it comes.

At Yin's urging you move into a side tunnel.

And just in time! Behind you a rifle cracks again, the bullet howling down the tunnel you have just left, thudding heavily into something in the direction you have been going. A bat squeaks there! A bat? You have seen no bats in this tunnel. No bat would be able to squeak after being hit by a bullet. Yet the bullet struck flesh!

Suddenly you remember the trail of slime on the floor of the tunnel you were following.

You crouch in the darkness of the side tunnel waiting for

another shot. No shot comes. Red Beard has given up. You hear footsteps crunching away. Red Beard has no stomach for exploring this tunnel.

As you crouch there you see something moving toward the entrance of the tunnel you have just left. At the sight, you start to rise but the *brujo* prevents you, grabbing your arm and stopping your movement. Almost paralyzed, you stare at the main tunnel. Something is moving there, something that is round like a worm or a huge snake is slipping forward toward the entrance, making little squeaky bat-like sounds as it travels. It is at least three feet in diameter, perhaps thicker. You cannot estimate size in this dim light. You cannot tell how long it is, for minutes it moves past the opening of the side tunnel. It might be fifty feet long. It might be a hundred. It is a very pale white, the kind of albino color that results from living too long in darkness.

It ripples as it moves.

You do not doubt that this was the thing the bullet struck, and striking, awakened from sleep.

Hardly daring to breathe, you keep your back against the wall of the side tunnel. Beside you, Don Leon is holding Yin tight against his shoulder. You watch the creature pass.

"An *anth*," the *brujo* whispers. "I have never seen one until now."

"*Anth*?" There are questions you want to ask but the *brujo* is in no mood to answer questions. Whispering to you to move silently, he begins to creep away.

Suddenly, from the direction of the entrance, comes a flurry of rifle shots. A man screams there, once, the rifle shots come again, then stop as suddenly as they had started. Up toward the entrance Red Beard can be heard screaming for everybody to get back.

Stooping, the *brujo* points toward the tunnel you have just left. The *anth*—whatever an *anth* is—is backing up. It does not turn around, perhaps there is not enough room in the tunnel for it to turn, it is simply reversing the flow of the undulations of its body. As it moves a moaning sound is audible. When the head passes you see the source of the moaning sound. A man, one of Red Beard's companions, is caught in the many toothed mouth of the creature. From him the moans are coming.

The creature gulps the man deeper into its mouth. The moans decrease.

Still backing away, the *anth* moves on past. In horror—if you can still feel horror when you are past the point of emotional reaction—you watch the rippling undulations. When the beast has backed away and the sounds of the moans have ceased, you start back toward the main tunnel, intending to escape the way you entered. You have forgotten Red Beard and however many of his companions remain outside.

The *brujo* has not forgotten. He grabs you. Nodding his head, he indicates the way you are to go. It is away from the entrance.

He moves and you follow him. What else can you do except follow him? You would much rather be moving toward the border of the USA, but at this moment you have no choice of the direction in which you go.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Your name is Ben Harlde. In you the impulse to vomit is very strong. You are in a big room where stink has come alive and has taken on an existence of its own, where it has become an entity in its own right as real as hell and as horrible as the depths of the pit. This stink comes from the mixed foulness of human sweat, human excretions and human hate. Three naked men are lying on stone tables. Arteries and veins have been opened and tubes have been inserted in them. Scurrying around the men, watching the tubes, feeding different colored liquids into one tube, taking different colored liquids from another tube, are creatures that you regard as devils. They look up as you and Mona enter the room. At first a kind of greedy eagerness lights their eyes. They think you are another victim brought to them. At a signal from Mona, the greedy eagerness turns into surprise. This becomes fear and the fear turns into hate. One starts toward you. Mona's sharp command stops his motion toward you and sends him backing away, all apologetic bows.

"What is this place?" you ask Mona.

"I said I would take you to the place where Kum Rath creates his slaves, his robot soldiers who will obey him to the death, then will rise from death to obey him again." Her face is twisted, her nostrils almost closed as she tries to keep from breathing the foul air in this place.

"You mean, here—?" Your voice falters into silence. "But how—" You wish you had not asked this question.

Her face averted most of the time, Mona shows you how it is done. When she is in doubt she questions the devil who started toward you when you entered. His name is "Ecro," as near as you can understand. He glowers at you, but to

Mona, he is very polite. You know if he had his choice he would have you instantly on one of the stone tables, but Mona seems to control him. She translates what he says.

"The blood is taken from the body. It is then treated and changed chemically and electrically, changed in its smallest parts, Ecro says. I guess he means the atoms. The smallest parts are made different, then they are tuned to Kum Rath's mind—"

"How can that be done?" you gasp. You really don't want to know. You are just talking as a stall for a way to get out of this stinking place where devils work and horror dwells.

When he understands the question, Ecro takes you and Mona to an adjoining room. Here what you are certain is black magic is in operation. You call it black magic but even as these words cross your mind you realize that what is in operation here is actually a science of a very high order. You see what is being done to the blood of the three men lying on the stone tables in the other room. It is being tuned electronically to a miniature image of the high priest which actually contains a sample of Kum Rath's blood. After this treatment is finished and the cellular structure has been changed and the blood has been sensitized to the thinking of Kum Rath, and to his mental orders, it is returned to the body from which it was taken. These slave bodies live, because Kum Rath wills it; if injured, they repair themselves, because Kum Rath wills it. The cells themselves are obedient to the will of Kum Rath!

Is this the ancient source from which voodoo sprang? In such a place as this did men first learn how to stick a pin in a small doll to which they had given the name of an enemy? You do not know but it is all here, all black magic, attended now by the very real science that once existed and which could make it work. Is this the source from which black magic sprang? Perhaps it has been rediscovered many times in the long and often bitter history of the planet, by other races in other times and places.

"Kum Rath plans to have a whole army of such men to do his bidding," Mona says. "He will use it to maintain control around this mountain."

"And after that?"

She shrugs. Pain fights with stink for control of the ex-



pression on her face. "Is there any limit to the ambition of a man?"

"But he can't go very far," you protest. "Here in this mountain he may become king. This is a big mountain but Mexico is bigger and the United States is much, much bigger. If he gets too big, he may run into a hydrogen bomb. Even this mountain is not proof against that!"

"Who will order the bomb dropped?" Mona asks. "Remember the little threads I told you about." Shaking her head, she moves away.

Ecro bows her out.

"You will tell the Great One how efficiently I serve him?" Ecro says.

"I will tell him."

"If he wishes to send this one to me—" Ecro is looking at you.

"He does *not* wish to send this one to you!" Mona's voice is sharp.

Ecro accompanies them down the tunnel, then moves into a large room that opens outward. You glance into this room and ask a quick question.

"They prepare here the herb they use in making slaves," Mona answers. "I do not understand it. Perhaps Ecro will explain."

At her command, Ecro returns. He is very eager to explain.

"Here we prepare the herb for its final use," he says, Mona translating. "The powder that we make here is mixed into the treated blood before we return it to the body. It aids in opening the brain cells and makes the slave more obedient."

"Thank you. Is that all you use it for?"

"Oh, no. The Great One also sends much of it north in a flying ship, to sell to the gringos who live there. We do not know why they want it. Perhaps they use it to create slaves of their own."

"Yes," you answer, trying to keep from choking. You have seen many of those "slaves" and you understand how deep and how vicious is this "slavery." "Yes." Choking, you turn to follow Mona.

"Why are you making those strange noises in your throat?" she questions. "Has the stink got to you?"

"I—Yes, that's it. The stink. Doesn't it bother you too?"

"When I was a little girl, it bothered me very much. But I have—well, I guess I have sort of become used to it. It still makes my nose twist and my stomach tremble, though only a little."

"I guess we can get used to almost anything," you answer.

The powder they are making in this room is Mexican heroin.

Following Mona, you say nothing of this. You see several rooms devoted to the preparation of this brown powder. It is being made here in large quantities.

Is this the source of the heroin you came into Mexico to find? You suspect it is. Your first problem is to let your superiors know what you have found and its location. The second problem is to stay alive. Does Mona know the nature of this stuff? Do you dare risk asking her? You decide to take the chance.

"I know it is taken north and sold to the Americanos," she says. "I don't know what they do with it."

In short, gusty sentences, you tell her about the twisted bodies and the broken lives, about kids with the ten-dollar-a-day habit which they can only support by petty theft, about people with the fifty-dollar-a-day habit, about people with the hundred-dollar-a-day habit and no possible way to support it except by bank holdups, armed robberies, and other crimes in which violence is involved. You tell her how big is the business of smuggling heroin on a world scale and how it is growing bigger, with the vast profits being taken from it not only supporting criminal families but also being used to bribe public officials, to make men dishonest, to make the world a more vicious place. You are walking as you talk. Now and then she glances at you. Shifting emotions move in her eyes and her face shows pain.

"I did not know . . . I did not know. . . ." she says again and again. She nods backward toward the horror you have left behind you. "About this, I have always known. I—I guess I took it for granted, I guess I thought about it as a little girl thinks about the world, as something so big she could do nothing to change it. About what is happening in your country, I did not know."

Suddenly she has hold of your arm and is tugging at it.

"You do believe me, don't you? Please believe me! I am telling the truth."

You pat her hand that is tugging at your arm. "I have seen with my own eyes many things that I did not believe were possible. Why shouldn't I believe you?"

"Then you do believe me?" Longing as deep as the ocean is in her eyes.

"Yes," you answer.

She reaches up and kisses you on the cheek and you know you have won the gamble you took in telling her about heroin in American cities. Under other circumstances, you would tell her there are other places for kissing than the cheek, but too much horror is still in your mind for you to make such suggestions. Also, she is suddenly very shy and is an arm's length away from you. Nor will she let you get any closer as she takes you back to the cell where you are housed. This place is obviously the front room of hell and you know it from the stink lingering in your nostrils but even hell can produce an angel, you think, and has done so in Mona.

Inside your room you look again from the window. Far below, you see again the patches of color. Brightly-colored flowers bloom there—opium-producing poppies.

"If you are thinking you can escape through the window, don't," Mona says. "The face of the cliff has no hand-holds and the drop is over two hundred feet."

As you look out, a dot appears high in the sky. Dropping down, you see it is a VTOL aircraft. It is moving to a miniature landing field out of sight below you and you ask about it.

"It belongs to Kum Rath. It has delivered a load of this brown powder that you hate so much and now is returning here with American money, which Kum Rath will use to pay off the local judge and the generals in Mexico City."

"All bought with American money?"

"Yes. This is why Kum Rath was not really worried when you told him how many generals your country could buy and how they would send soldiers here to destroy him. He already owns the generals."

Silently you watch the great ship settle down. It passes so close you can see that it is filled with men. When it drops to

a landing out of sight, instantly the shots begin. You turn quickly to look at Mona. Surprise is on her face.

"I do not know who is shooting!" Alarm is on her face. "Our men would not be shooting. Did—" Suspicion is on her face. "—did your country's soldiers follow you down here?"

"I'm afraid not," you answer, shaking your head. "My people do not know where I am."

"That is right. We brought you down here from Tijuana. No one could have followed you. The ship left immediately with a load of the brown powder—"

"And now it is returning?"

"Yes."

"Where did it deliver the brown powder?"

"I do not know. Some place in the desert, perhaps a hide-out in the mountains, where men are waiting to pick up the brown powder and to pay the money for it—"

"Men were waiting for it?"

"Certainly. You could not deliver the brown powder just anywhere!"

"Who are the men who pick up the powder and who pay the money?"

"I do not know. Americanos, certainly, but I have never seen them and I do not know their names."

"Uh!" Suspicion is in your mind now. "Did you ever hear of the Mafia?"

"No. Who are they?"

"Did you ever hear of hijacking?"

"No. What is that?"

You start to answer but another burst of gunfire punctuates your sentence.

"A bunch of underworld criminals—" *Brrrp! Brp! Brp!* automatic weapons go. "—organized as so-called families—" *Brp! Brp!* "—in every city in the United States, perhaps in the world—" *BRRRRRRrrrrP!*

"Like the generals in Mexico City?"

"Something like that," you answer. "When your men delivered a load of heroin up north, the Mafia was waiting for them. Your men were killed, the Mafia grabbed your airship, flew it back down here—and intend to take over the heroin cooking plant in this mountain!"

*Brp! BrrrrRRRRP!*

SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL

You and Mona stare at each other. Dismay to the point of acute panic in on her face.

"You mean—killers from the North have come South?" she whispers.

"Exactly!" you answer.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

You had a name once but you can no longer remember what it was. You seem to have stepped out of the body that once carried the name you can no longer quite remember. That body is sitting on a stone ledge beside an old Indian who holds in his arms a small Indian girl.

Below you is the sound of water. Below you is another sound, that of things playing in this water.

You can't see these things. The light here is too dim to make them out. You don't know if they are fish or are something else that lives in water. They don't sound very big but they certainly are numerous. Perhaps they are playing games, perhaps they are spawning, perhaps they are eating each other. On Planet Earth, every creature stays alive by eating some smaller, weaker, less agile creature. Is the human race the biggest, greediest gobbler down of weaker creatures on earth? You do not know the answer to this question. Perhaps you do not want to know the answer.

Your memory seems to have fled into some far-off corner of your mind.

All you can remember is wading through knee-deep water for a long time, then being bitten, savagely, by the things making the splashing noises in the water. Your legs still sting from those bites. Reaching down you rub them, an automatic gesture that has no meaning. Your fingers come away covered by some sticky substance. In this place there is not enough light for you to identify this sticky stuff but you suspect it is blood.

You try to remember who you are. The effort fails. There are two of you, one who sits on a stone ledge and rubs stiff fingers at sticky, bloody legs. There is a second you who

stands behind the first one and who does not have bloody legs and who is not tired and confused, who is not hungry to the point of agony nor thirsty to the point of madness.

Which is the real you, the tired body sitting on the ledge or the second body which stands behind the first? You do not know but you suspect that if ever you make up your mind fully that you are the second body, the first body will be left sitting lifeless on the ledge.

If it falls off, then let the water beasts eat it!

At the question of which is the real you, dim memories rise in you, memories that say that once the second body was the real you and will instantly become again the real you, if only you can kick away the first body sitting on the ledge. It seems that in childhood, or in some time long before childhood, the second body was the real you. What was before childhood? Of course, as with all humans, there was a period in your mother's womb but what was before this prison of flesh? Nothing? Or did the second you exist from the beginning of time, obtaining new first bodies as the old ones wore out?

This question adds to your confusion. You remember that you are a scientist and that in order to communicate with their fellows, scientists need repeatable experiments which provide something called *proof*. If a scientist in southern California performs an experiment and another scientist in London perform the same experiment under the same conditions and the results are identical, this is called *proof*.

The child resting on the *brujo's* arm now is quiet. Perhaps she is too quiet. You lean closer to see if she is all right. In this way you see what is happening.

You recoil from the sight.

The *brujo* has opened a vein in his arm and is feeding the child with his own blood!

You remember reading how the Mongol warriors under Genghis Khan, in crossing the Himalayan mountain ranges, were sometimes without food or water. Under these circumstances the warriors sometimes opened a vein in the neck of their tough ponies and kept themselves alive by sucking raw blood from the vein of a horse!

These had been the actions of desperate men trying to stay alive.



The *brujo* senses that you are thinking. "The future lives in her," he says. "In me the past lives. Which is more important, that the past should live, or the future?" His voice is gentle but with overtones of incredible firmness.

"Why—I—" Your voice sinks to a whisper.

Now for the first time the second you speaks. "Greater love hath no man," it whispers, in the depths of your mind.

The first body is appalled into silence. It is seeing love in action, the giving of the blood of life, literally, for the sake of a child. Misunderstanding this, you were horrified by it.

There is a sickness in your stomach. The sickness does not come from what you are seeing but from your misinterpretation of it.

You are not proud of yourself or of your thoughts. Not the least proud of yourself. All the training you have had in great universities, all the work you have done in seeking for *proof* that scientists will accept, has not prepared you for the simple act of life sacrificing itself for another!

Mumbling apologies, you look again.

Her feeding finished, the child is now sleeping quietly in the *brujo's* arms. He is holding her as tenderly as any mother ever held her child. But he is weak from the loss of blood. You can hear him breathing slowly and heavily and you know he is trying to use breathing techniques to restore the energy lost in this strange transfusion.

There is so much that you want to say and no words to use to say it properly. "But I don't understand—"

"It is nothing," the *brujo* answers. "Often, among my people, the old die that the young may live. Is it not the same in your land?"

Again you are silent. Up until now you have regarded Don Leon as a primitive Indian still in the savage stage of life. To find him practicing, literally, the highest virtue claimed in your land—claimed but rarely practiced—is a shock to you. Is this old Indian medicine man really a product of a culture higher than yours? Is he farther advanced in understanding and using the life force than you are? The child sleeping in his arms makes you think he is.

In the dark water below the ledge, the commotion increases. The creatures down there, whatever they are, are chasing each other with even greater enthusiasm. Or are they

fleeing from some other creature moving through the tunnel? You suspect the latter is true. The water is literally alive with them. They are breaking the surface and apparently trying to climb over each other. In glimpses of them, you see they are wiggling like small snakes. Are they actually snakes? You hope not.

Now you see that your surmise was correct, that something is moving through the tunnel and that the little creatures are fleeing from it.

"Be very still," the *brujo* whispers. "Make not even the smallest noise."

You pull up your feet and sit sideways on the ledge, the *brujo* doing the same. In the water below you, the frantic turmoil increases. Something is coming closer and closer, something that seems to fill the tunnel from side to side. You can't see what it is but suddenly you know it is either the creature that the *brujo* called an *anth*, and which you last saw gulping down one of Red Beard's companions, or it is another just like that one. It has spread itself out so that it fills the tunnel. Moving forward, it is feeding on the little creatures trying to flee from it. Probably these are its own offspring, but this fact does not stop it from eating them. Hunger is an explanation for every evil.

As gigantic whales feed on tiny plankton in the sea, simply moving forward with the mouth open and scooping up the plankton by the barreland, so this creature is moving along the tunnel with its mouth open, scooping up its offspring by the barreland, now and then making a gulping noise as it swallows.

As the *anth* comes closer and closer, you do not move because you cannot. You can hardly breathe. The impulse to leap to your feet and run is strong within you. With you also is the strong memory picture of the way this thing—or another like it—held a human in its powerful jaws. This image freezes your impulse to flee. Also, if you tried to run, where would you go? The ledge is perhaps three feet wide. It may go somewhere, it may go nowhere.

The *anth* is now so close that you can see the great mouth gaping open and the little creatures being sucked into it. The lower jaw is triangular and armed with rows of pointed

teeth. Now and then it moves upward to crunch against the upper jaw.

Above the upper jaw are tiny, beady eyes. Living in darkness as it must most of the time, you wonder how this creature has kept even a semblance of eyes. However, this is a small matter. What is a big matter is the size of the mouth and the multitude of sharp teeth on the jaws. You can glimpse fragments of the smaller creatures clinging to the teeth. Though bitten into two pieces, the smaller heads are still trying to bite back.

You know this drama of the devouring of one's children. It was presented in ancient Greek plays and is probably as old as the planet, certainly as old as the idea of an eater and something to be eaten. You eat everything in sight including your own children. When you get as big as the world and there is nothing left to eat, you begin to eat yourself.

Now the *anth* is directly below. On the ledge, you crouch in rigid immobility, not making a sound, not daring to breath, wishing fervidly that you could slip back into your second body and forget forever what the eyes of your first body are seeing.

The only noise comes from the little creatures that are being devoured. This comes from the flapping of their tails as they leap from the water in an effort to escape death. Also, as the sharp teeth close over them, they seem to squeak like little bats, making little protesting cries against the death that now has them, crying out at the injustice of a universe which permits this to happen. From their viewpoint, this is the worst that could happen.

You could tell them that from the viewpoint of a human, there are worse things and worse ways to die, but as this thought crosses your mind, you wonder if death makes any difference no matter what species you belong to? Perhaps it is just as horrible for the little creatures fleeing in the dark water as it is for a man.

The huge head of the *anth* moves slowly past. You could reach down with a foot and kick the bulging back if you so chose. You do not so choose. All you do is hold your breath and wait for the head of the monster to move past you.

In the *brujo's* arms, the child stirs, uttering there a plain-

tive little cry which says she is lost in the dark, and will Daddy or Mommy come and take her by the hand and lead her back home?

The *brujo's* hand goes over her mouth shutting off the cry—too late.

Below you the monster stops moving. The bat-like cries of the little creatures go into silence as its jaws cease their chomping.

The monster can't see you, it has moved a little past you and cannot turn its head to see what is on the ledge. But probably its hearing is much better than its sight and it has heard Yin's little cry of alarm.

As you watch, horror rising in you, it begins backing up to discover the source of this little cry. It seems to wonder if it has missed something good to eat.

If so, you are it!

## CHAPTER NINE

"Who are these people who have come back in our ship?" Mona demands. Her face has lost much of its copper color and has become a sort of yellowish-white. Her enlarged eyes reveal she has gone *sanpaku* in her rising fear of coming death.

"I told you—Mafia highjackers. They're always looking for a source of dope of any kind. They've found a source in Mexico—and have moved in with automatic weapons!"

"How can they do such things?"

"In Mexico, you buy generals. In the USA, you buy politicians."

"But I thought your great country was a democracy—"

"It is, sort of."

"And that everyone is treated the same—"

"That's theory. The practice is different. The Mafia buys politicians. Maybe they do it indirectly working through business tycoons, but they pay off politicians on the national, state, and local level. They have often tried to buy fellow narcotics agents, and at times, I think they have succeeded. All they want an agent to do is look the other way while a shipment of drugs moves through. They don't pay him money for looking the other way, but some nice financial windfall comes his way, from a source that is perfectly legitimate. My country is going to hell, and the killers down below are helping it along the road!"

There is bitterness in your voice and sweat on your face. You wipe the sweat away but there is no way to wipe the bitterness away. As long as greedy men exist, the Mafia will exist. As long as thieves exist, as long as envious men exist, the bitterness will be in you.

However, being bitter won't help solve the problems you face. It won't help you stay alive. You turn to Mona. "Do you know a way out of this mountain?"

"There are many ways but if we get out—" She gestures out the window. "On one side of this mountain there is the desert where we cannot live. Below us are the poppy farmers. They will see us and report to Kum Rath if we go that way. I see no way except one way—" Her eyes grow wide. She takes a step away from you, and is not there.

She seems to swim out of existence, to go out of seeing, to slide away past some invisible veil into nothingness. You no longer see her. All that is left of her is a dim shadow that you are not certain you see.

Although you saw her do this in a Tijuana bar and know it can be done, skin crawls all over your body as she does it again.

One second she is here in front of your eyes, a frightened, very beautiful woman, the next second she has gone. All that remains is a sort of twisting motion in the air that reminds you of heat waves rising mirage-like in the desert. You take a quick step toward this spinning vortex of heat waves. It moves away from you. Out of the vortex swims Mona.

"How did you do that?" you gasp.

"I do it here." She points to her forehead. "When I was little, I had a jewel to help me but when I learned how, I no longer needed the jewel. It is done in the mind—" She points again to her forehead. "—we set up a little whirlwind of energy that moves very, very fast. Then we make it big enough to cover our entire body—"

"A mental thing! Mind over matter!"

"There is no matter. There is only mind. What you call matter is only a very great many little whirling bits of energy packed very close together."

"Is this what Kum Rath does when he becomes a shadow?"

"Yes. But he creates a black shadow because of his bitter nature."

"I shot at him in the Tijuana bar. The bullets struck what you call this spinning whirlwind of energy—and exploded. Would the same thing happen if I shot at you?"

"Yes. It would have happened to your hand if you had

ouched me while the whirlwind was around me. You would have felt a hot pain leap up your arm and through your body. The energy of the whirlwind might even have killed you. To save you was why I moved aside so quickly when you started toward me."

"The whirlwind spinning around you does not harm you?"

"No. I create it. We belong to each other, it to me and me to it." Pausing she seems to collect her thoughts. "Why I have told you this is because we were talking about a way to escape. With this, we can slip out and never be seen. We can dodge the poppy farmers, we can go up north, to your country, we can live there and be happy." A glow comes over her face as she talks. As she looks at you, the glow fades. "But what is wrong?"

"You can make yourself invisible and escape—but I will be left here."

"You will go with me!" Her voice has a command quality in it you have not heard before. "I will make you invisible, too."

"But I can't even touch you—"

"I will show you how to touch me. Here! Stand facing me! Place your right hand in my left hand and your left hand in my right hand. In this way we form what is called a *couple*, a union of male and female energies—"

Can you trust this woman? She grew up here in the dark, treacherous interior of this mountain, in a place where life has far different values than it does in the land to the north. At times you have wondered if it has any value at all here.

"Trust me! I will show you." She senses your distrust. "Become as a little boy. Play I am your mother—"

"But you are not my mother."

"And aren't you glad of it? I am! Please! Trust me!"

Imperiously, she takes your hands—and instantly draws back from you. "You have found it! You have had it all along!"

"I have found what?"

"The little stone of Tardu! You were lying when you said you could not remember!"

"And if I was lying, was not my life at stake?" For an instant, anger surges in your voice. You control it. You are still

within the power of this woman. If the Mafia finds you with her, they will shoot you for being a narcotics agent—and they will use her as a sex object.

“Yes, of course. I am glad you lied but if Kum Rath ever finds out—”

“At first, I could not remember what I had done with the stone. Then, here in this room, I found it hidden in the inner pocket of my jacket. See! Here it is!”

Bringing out the stone, you hold it up for her inspection. The instant you touch it, energy begins to flow up your arm and into your body. You hold the stone toward her. She backs away from it.

“No! Do not hold it too long. It is the stone of power and of strength. No man can hold it very long. No, don’t give it back to me. Put it back into your clothes where it will not touch the skin!”

Her alarm is real. You do as she wishes.

“If Kum Rath learns you have that stone, he will kill you—and take the stone.”

“I gathered something like that and lied to him. Why does he want this particular stone?”

“It is one of a set of seven. Two are missing. You saw the chanters before the god. All seven stones belong on the altar there. With the stone of power back in place, only one stone will still be missing—the stone of love.”

Wonder rising, you stare at her.

“This is part of the knowledge of the people of the old time, like disappearing, like making dead men live again as slaves. Kum Rath has found part of the knowledge. He thinks the seven stones will be all he needs.”

“The stone of love, where is it?”

“We do not know. Without the stone of love, the other six stones are dangerous.”

“I can understand that. If all the stones are back in place, what then?”

“Then the man who sits in the center of the circle of stones will have the powers of the god who lives in the statue. Or so the legends say and so Kum Rath believes.” As she speaks, her eyes widen in apprehension. “It is not good to speak of these things aloud.” Her voice drops to a whisper.

Gun fire sounds again below. You move to the window



and look down but nothing is to be seen. The aircraft is out of sight under the overhang below.

"If we are to get away—" Mona whispers near you.

"How did you know I had that stone?"

"I felt it as soon as I touched you. The life force was so strong in you that I knew you had found the stone and had been using it. Now that you have touched it again as you showed it to me, the energy will be even stronger. I do not know if I can stand it now." Indecision close to despair moved across her face. "I must stand it! I simply must! Here! Face me and take my hands!"

This time you do not resist. As your hands meet, her face grows taut, muscle tremors moving up both arms. Pain is in her body, the pain of spasm, and she begins to tremble. You think of breaking the hand grip but she seems to read your mind and shakes her head violently. You protest that this connection is hurting her.

"Let it hurt! If I can stand it, surely you can!"

From this you know how great is the strain she is undergoing. Her face ties itself into a knot.

"You—you have grown—" Her voice is now as twisted as her face. "You have grown very strong. I don't—I don't know—Hold my hands tightly—Hold me up—"

She sways toward you and you hold her up by her hands. Your impulse is to release her hands but when you try to do this, she fights you like a woman resisting rape. You have the strong impression of energies in conflict between the two of you.

Then it is all over. Between you the energies balance. She releases your hands. And vanishes, slipping out of sight like a ghost walking away into a fog. Instantly, in the snap of a finger, in a micro-second, the room has become another place. Mona has vanished into thin air. The hard stone of the walls is gone showing now as thin outlines of sparkling mist. The window has become an opening through which pours a river of flashing jewel-scintillating light. Sound has changed, grown distant and far away. You know Mona is speaking to you but you cannot make out what she is saying. The room seems empty, of her and of you!

"Where are you?" You grope for her.

"I'm here. If the room around you looks strange, it is be-

cause you have become invisible and you're looking out through the screen around you. Wait a few minutes and you will see and hear almost normally."

You wait. The room seems to be changing subtly. Or is the change taking place in you? Your vision is distorted and you seem to be looking out through a sparkling screen. Also there is a new flow of energy through your body. You can feel this new energy pulsing in your brain as if new channels have been opened in the brain cells and a new energy is flowing through them.

"How do I turn this off?" you ask.

"It will fade away in a few hours. If not, I'll help you turn it off when the time comes."

"If it turns off, how can I turn it back on?"

"I doubt if you can turn it back on without my help. Many years of training are needed to establish these energy patterns so you can control them yourself."

You can see Mona again, but not clearly. What you really see is the energy vortex that surrounds her. You also think you can catch glimpses of the woman inside the whirlwind of spinning energy, though you suspect your imagination may be at work here to help you mock-up a taut copper-colored face and a pair of worried black eyes.

"How many ships are down below?"

"One. They are very expensive—"

"Can you guide me down to the ship with both of us remaining invisible?"

"Yes. But I thought we were going to slip out of the mountain and find our way north—"

"So we are—in a VTOL craft!" you answer. "I've got a private pilot's license. If we can grab that ship, we'll fly over the mountains instead of walking through them!"

"But that is a big risk—"

"Do you know anything that isn't? Come on!"

As if for the first time, she dares to hope, you glimpse her face lightening at your words. You do not tell her that your license is for single-engine craft only and that you have never flown the much heavier and more powerful VTOL craft.

## CHAPTER TEN

You have long since forgotten it but if you could remember your name it would be Roger Jesmer. You would also remember that once upon a time, perhaps a million years ago, you were a scientist and lived in a land called Southern California.

All of this history is long gone, lost in some place called *the past*, forgotten by you, worthless to you.

You are watching a monster called an *anth* try to back up in a tunnel. The creature squirms and twists. It looks like a snake trying to go into reverse gear and finding the operation difficult. You stare at the creature. The *brujo* stares at it. Yin is out of his arms and on her feet, trying to move the *brujo* along the ledge, yanking at his arm, calling to him. He seems not to hear her. Perhaps, he has given away so much blood that he no longer has the strength to hear!

Below you, the head of the monster comes into view. It has bent back upon itself. Beady eyes look along the ledge. Even with its limited vision, the *anth* could see the humans. Perhaps it could smell them, hear their hearts beating, hear them breathing. It begins a twisting motion with its head, trying to get into position where it can pick the humans off the ledge. No easy task, this. The creature almost fills the tunnel now that it has doubled over on top of itself. Even in this position, it can't reach them. All it can do is spit at them. This it does. The sound is similar to that of a huge snake. Spitting, it keeps twisting its body and trying to move backward. On the ledge are juicy morsels, and it means to have them.

You see the *brujo* push himself to his feet, you see his hands clasped in an ancient gesture of prayer and submission,

but you do not understand what is on his mind until Yin's shrill screams penetrate your consciousness.

Then you know the *brujo* is going to leap into the mouth of the *anth*, making of himself a living sacrifice in the hope that the creature will be satisfied and that you and Yin can escape while it is eating him!

The mouth of the *anth* opens, the old medicine man starts to leap, you catch him and hold him on the ledge. The *anth* reaches for him, he struggles against you, yelling "Let of me go! The *anth* satisfied with me will be. It will forget about you and Yin. You can run along the ledge—"

"Maybe it will forget about me but I won't forget about me, ever."

Yin tugs at him. Surprisingly he yields.

The *anth* is spitting at you again. As you shove the *brujo* along the ledge, you get a whiff of the creature's breath. Never in your life have you smelled a worse stink.

The *brujo* follows Yin along the ledge but his movement is slow. Whether his slowness is from exhaustion or is from some lingering thought of sacrificing himself so the child might live, you do not know. As the monster spits at you, you urge the medicine man to move faster. The ledge is narrow and the *brujo* is having difficulty in keeping his footing on it. For that matter, so are you, as you discover when your foot slips and you almost fall off. You clutch the wall, trying to dig a handhold in solid rock. Below you the *anth* is still trying to back up but you are out of reach now of the head and the bulging jaws.

You do not know where you are going. You are reasonably sure that neither the child, who is leading, nor the *brujo*, who is following her, know where they are except that they are in a maze of tunnels that seem to be as old as time itself.

Finally, you leave the spitting monster behind you. Somewhere behind, you can hear it make bat-like squeaks of rage and grunting and splashing in the dark water of the tunnel. The tunnel branches. Yin turns to the left. Still staying on the ledge you move so far away that you can no longer hear the squeaking or the splashing of the *anth*. But always there is water below you and always little *anths* are splashing there, chasing each other in the eternal game of *run fast or*

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*I'll eat you alive.* You remain on the ledge. Both the big *anth* and the little *anths* will eat you, the big one quickly, in one fast gulp, the little ones a bite at a time.

The ledge widens and becomes an alcove. Yin moves into the alcove—and sags to the floor, very, very tired. The *brujo* and you are also tired. There is machinery in the back of this alcove, what you think is a kind of a pump that was used when these caverns were inhabited. You haven't the strength to be interested in ancient pumps. Hunger is a gnawing knot in your middle. There is nothing to eat, but there is water, plenty of it, seeping down the wall and dripping into the tunnel. You drink all you want. It has an iron taste and is heavy with other minerals, but it will satisfy thirst. Putting your back against the ancient pump, you are instantly asleep. Monsters crawl through your dreams, they reach at you with gulping mouths, they spit at you. You try to run but your legs are mired in some kind of sticky goo and you can't make them work. When you manage to struggle out of the goo, you slide back into it. If hell has any more horror than this, you do not want to see hell. You twist and struggle trying to crawl like a snake. You go nowhere. The monster is still spitting at you.

In the far distance you dream you hear voices shouting. Instantly in your dreaming mind appears the image of Red Beard who forced you into this maze of underground tunnels. You hope he roasts in hell a hundred million years! Something is eating your stomach. You don't know what is eating but you can feel it gnawing there. Eventually the pain becomes so acute that you are forced to struggle to wakefulness. Near you, the *brujo* is asleep, the child cradled in his arms. Nothing is eating your stomach. What you are feeling is hunger pangs.

You force yourself fully awake. There is no food but you stumble to the back of the alcove, passing the ancient pump, and drink the water trickling down the walls. It is not food but it relieves a little the pain in your stomach. No doubt it will give you diarrhea, tomorrow, or maybe today, but this seems unimportant. How long can a man live on water? A long time.

Come to think of it, when is tomorrow?

You stumble back to your resting place and settle yourself down again. Sleep is sluggish. You lie down. A rock under your arm is causing pain. You roll over—and roll right out of your first body and into your second body.

This does not surprise you too much. It does not frighten you. For a long time, you have been wanting this to happen again. Quickly, in your second body, you rise to your feet. The first body, the physical you, is lying on the rocky floor. With its mouth open and its lower jaw sagging, it is breathing heavily. You stand there laughing at it! The first body is so stupid! It has hardly any IQ at all. Yes, you know that up North in the university circles, men regarded your physical body with respect and considered it very intelligent. A lot they knew! What knowledge do scientists have in comparison to the knowledge that is to be had? Very little. The knowledge of all the scientists is like one grain of sand on a beach that girdles every continent of the world, all the other grains of sand, so many there is no counting them, representing the knowledge that science does *not* have. Or that any scientist will ever have, as long as he lives in the limiting body of a human being.

To hell with that clumsy body breathing so heavily there on the rocky floor. Let it stay there. And rot, for all you care! It is too stupid to deserve consideration. . . . The tunnel walls have lightened, the water has disappeared, the pump is running, the hungry little creatures are gone. People are coming. You hear them chant as they trot.

You shrink back against the wall. A dozen bronze-skinned men trot past you. Four are in front of a lumbering two-wheeled cart, pulling it, four are behind, pushing, the equivalent of a corporal struts ahead, the equivalent of a private first class trots behind.

They chant as they move, soft words in a musical, singsong tongue that you have never heard before.

You are in your second body. You watch this procession pass. Crouching in the cart is a young woman wearing flowers as her only garment. In her hair are gay yellow blooms. Draped over her shoulders is a rope of flowers like a Hawaiian *lei*. Rings of flowers circle her breasts, her slim abdomen is draped with them. Around her the cart is heaped

full of flowers, exotic blooms, yellows and reds, orchids of many kinds.

*In this mountain region, where did they get those flowers?* you wonder.

You dismiss the thought from your mind. Where they got the flowers is not important. Why they have decorated this young woman with them is important. Even more important is the way she crouches in the cart. Her attitude is that of a doped, trapped wild animal.

If she feels trapped—and her crouching attitude indicates that she does—why doesn't she leap out of the cart and flee. The bed of the rude cart is no more than a foot deep. Surely she could leap from it if she so desired!

The cart moves past you and out of sight.

Something has happened to you in your second body. What has happened is not clear.

As the cart moves past you, you wonder if they don't know about the big *antb!* You call out to them sharp and shrill, to warn them. When they don't hear your cry, you run after the cart to tell them what lurks here in these tunnels. You leap from the alcove to the floor of the tunnel and hurry so fast that your feet do not touch the ground. Also, you run through the four men pushing the cart, you run through the cart, you run through the men pulling the cart, you stop in front of the corporal. Halting there, you turn and yell at him.

He struts straight at you as if he does not see you. Hastily you move to the wall of the tunnel. The whole procession moves past you without one chanter noticing you. Perhaps the girl in the cart casts a single despairing glance in your direction, but you are not certain she even sees you, either! You stare after them, you stare at yourself. Slowly, you realize again that you are in your second body and that this second body is very different from that clumsy, stupid first body, the physical you. These people, whoever they are, can't even see you in your second body!

There is a sense of freedom in this knowledge. You can explore without being seen! Emboldened, you began to wander through this strange world.

You find a vast underground world, a fortress, really, with

thousands of bronze-skinned people living in and around it. You look out of holes in the outer walls and see a green tropical world below. Hundreds of patches of color represented cultivated fields. If an enemy approaches, the people who till these fields can run to safety in this vast mountain fortress.

You have the impression, however, that these people did not dig these tunnels. Perhaps they enlarged and extended them but another, now lost race dug them, the present occupants moving in after the tunnel-diggers had passed away. The present occupants had simply moved in.

*Present* occupants? *When* is the present? The people you are watching don't belong to the same time period as the stupid physical body you left back there in the alcove. They belong to some other time period, to some other continuum, to some other frequency, whether the past or the future you know not. Perhaps they will occupy this mountain in some far-off future millennium but you think it far more likely that they occupied it in the past.

You pass among them unobserved, moving freely. Now and then one of them, usually a young child or a woman, glances in your direction in a manner which indicates puzzled interest. Perhaps some of them can *almost* see you.

You have the impression that some festival is in progress. Both men and women are dressed in garments of flowers—and nothing else. The men are splendid savages dressed in flower robes that make no effort to conceal their sexual organs. The women are high-breasted, broad-hipped savages who look as if they have the strength to perform all day in the fields and all night in bed.

Groups of people are moving along the tunnels, all in the same direction and all walking. Now and then another cart comes rumbling along, guarded as was the first one, each with its occupant a single flower-clad maiden crouching in the vehicle. You follow the flow of the walkers. Ahead, far in the distance, is the sound of chanting, voices rising and falling with the chanting growing louder as you move forward. In a big open chamber with a big hole in the middle, the chanters are gathered. Standing at the edge of the hole in the center are men with beautiful headdresses made of flowers. Splendid physical specimens, these men seem to have great authority.



Now a cart rumbles into the big chamber. The people quickly make room as it is drawn up to the hole. The men with the feather headdresses bow to the young woman who rides in the cart. For a moment you have a glimpse of some pagan queen out of the old times of the planet, some youthful goddess from the days when the earth itself was young. She does not move, but you can see tremors in her body.

The chanting picks up, rises to crescendo. Moving quickly, the men in the feather headdresses grab the young woman in the cart, carry her to the edge of the hole, and throw her out and over it. She screams once, as she falls, then from somewhere below comes a heavy splash.

Sick with horror, you would prefer to run from this spot but a morbid curiosity holds you here. The cart is wheeled away. The men in the flower headdresses stand staring down into the pool. You move closer so you can see too. Then you wish you had not looked.

Down below on a ledge circling the pool men have pulled the young woman from the pool and are trying to question her. She is not responding. Either shock from the fall killed her or she was left too long in the pool with the result that she drowned.

The purpose was not to kill her, you know, but to almost kill her, then to question her to try to find out what the gods told her while she was almost dead on earth and presumably was alive in the land of the gods.

This is a sacrificial well. In later centuries, the Mayans had such wells into which they threw young women and gold and jade. From such wells in Yucatan, gold and jade ornaments of great value have been recovered. From them have also been recovered quantities of human bones.

Another cart is lumbering to the edge of the pool. Another young woman is jerked from it and thrown into the pool.

In no sense is this a punishment for breaking tribal laws or violating tribal taboos. Instead, this is a high honor. Only the best are sent to question the gods! From the edge of the hole, you watch what is happening down below.

Water is down there, dirty black water, roiling now. The men on the ledge down there watch the water intently and when a leg shows, they grab it, pulling hard. The body of the young woman comes into sight and is quickly pulled on

the ledge. The men bend over her, talking quickly, rubbing her arms. She does not answer. You have the impression that she will never answer, that the gods will not speak through her.

The men on the ledge reach the same conclusion. One shakes his head in decision. A heavy rock is roped to one foot and the young woman, whether still living or dead, is kicked into the pool.

On the edge of the pool, one of the men in flower head-dresses looks toward a tunnel that is an entrance, gestures in that direction. From this opening another cart rumbles forward. Another young woman is crouched in it. As it moves to the edge of the pool, the chants begin to rise again.

Horror is in you again. You realize that the idea is to almost kill the young women, then revive them, and ask them what the gods told them when they were almost dead. Probably this practice began when someone accidentally fell into the room, and recovering, told grand stories of visiting the land of the gods. Quickly grasping the idea, the priests began to send young women to walk in the pastures of heaven. If the messengers have enough life left in them to give a satisfactory answer when they are pulled from the pool, they become honored and revered high priestesses for the rest of their lives. Their people will believe that through them the gods speak.

If they do not have enough life left to answer, then they are of no further use and are disposed of in the easiest way.

You watch another cart brought to the edge of the pool. This time the girl leaps from it and tries to run. To no avail! Caught by the crowd, she is carried, screaming, to the priests with the tall flower headdresses, and as the chants pick up, by them she is thrown into the well. This time no effort is made to pull her from the water. She has tried to flee from the gods! When her head surfaces above the dirty liquid down below, it is quickly thrust back under by the men on the ledge.

Your impulse—and it is very strong—is to get behind the priests at the edge of the pool—and kick them in too! After this is done, you would like to kick into the water the ones on the ledge below.

You fight the impulse and restrain it by remembering you are watching what once was real but which is no longer in this category. What you are seeing is like a motion picture show taken in some remote age. Somehow, in your second body, you have set the projector running again. That's all it is—a show that is no longer real. There is nothing you can do to change the show or rewrite the script.

You watch another young woman tossed from the edge of the hole. Shouts come up from below. The flower-draped priests listen, their faces showing disappointment. From below comes another heavy splash as another young woman goes back into the dark water with a rock tied around her foot. The chief of the priests turns again to a tunnel entering the huge room, beckoning there. Again, like a tumbrel carrying a victim to the guillotine over the streets of Paris during the Reign of Terror, is heard the sound of rumbling cart wheels. Again horror rises in you.

As the horror rises, hands grab you from behind.

Now it is your turn to scream. As you scream, the whole scene vanishes from your eyes like a projector that has stopped running and the show dissolves in flickers of uncomfortable light.

You are back in your physical body. Still screaming, you try to leap to your physical feet. Hands are holding you, very real, very physical hands. Other hands are holding food to your mouth.

Out of the corner of your eyes you see the brujo and Yin. Both are eating. Those feeding them, and trying to feed you, are the remnants of Yin's honor guard.

Some escaped the bullets of Red Beard and those with him. Risking the horrors of this underground hell, they have trailed their goddess here.

At the thought of the *anth*, you look hastily down at the water in the tunnel below. It has receded. As the water drained away, the little *antbs* went with it.

Confusion is thick within your mind. You went away in some kind of a second body and saw incredible scenes. All of this now seems to have been a strange, very vivid dream, a nightmare fleeing at the edge of waking. You are not sure now that you have a second body. Perhaps this idea was

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nothing but a dream produced by stress and hunger! This old physical body, that you thought so clumsy and so stupid, suddenly feels very good to you.

The dried deer meat the men are holding to your mouth tastes wonderful. You eat like the starving man that you are.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Your name is Ben Harkle—or once was Ben Harkle—but Ben Harkle following a spinning vortex down an underground tunnel with faintly glowing walls is something you never imagined would happen. Bullets hitting you you had imagined, knives you had imagined, various forms of torture including strands of barbed wire tied tightly around your testicles, then pulled until the testicles were pulled off, this you had imagined happening to you. It had happened to one agent! You had seen his body afterward. Never on the face of any other human had you seen such twisted evidence of incredible pain.

Knives, guns, torture, these things could happen in Mexico but walking down a tunnel behind an invisible woman, you being invisible, too, was something that you thought could never happen, not even in Mexico.

Male voices sound ahead of you, voices laughing in exultation, a heavy raw voice giving orders, voices with accents from Brooklyn, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Detroit. Coming through the screen that makes you invisible, the voices are distorted, the tones are twisted, but you can still hear Brooklyn, Chicago, and New Orleans. You have the impression you have heard the heavy gruff voice before but you are not certain where.

Ahead of you, the twisting vortex that is making Mona invisible steps into a huge cavern. To your right is a VTOL craft, being loaded.

Around the plane, loading it with brown paper packages, are six men. Each has slung over his shoulder one of the vicious little automatic weapons with a short barrel. Extra clips

of ammo bulge from their pockets. You also think that some of the pocket bulges come from hand grenades.

Those brown paper packages! Heroin! The devil's drug!

From a tunnel came a single shot, then two more in quick succession. This tells you that clean-up operations are still in progress somewhere in this vast mountain fortress. The men loading the heroin are laughing.

"This haul is going to make Slats so rich he can buy the Chicago Loop," one says.

"Hell, he already owns that!" a second man says, disdainfully. "With this set-up, he can buy Milwaukee."

This is a name you recognize. Sam (Slats) Slattery, one of the biggest of the overlords. You have not met him but you have heard about him. Your agency has a file a foot thick on him. You would like nothing better than to bust Slats Slattery.

"How did Slats get on to this set-up?" a loader asks.

A shrug is his answer. "How does Slats get on to anything? Because he pays stoolies to watch!"

"What stoolie would tell him about this mountain down in Mexico?"

"I can't answer that question. If you were smart, you wouldn't even ask it. Slats don't like people asking questions. He may figure they're trying to find out something!"

The questioner shivers and hastily shuts up.

You understand his shivering. Slats Slattery is many times over a murderer. In his Family, he does not tolerate treachery or betrayal. If one of his men breaks his rules, he rubs that man. Personally. Sometimes, while underlings hold the man in disfavor, Slattery uses a baseball bat to break the man's arms, legs, ribs, eventually his skull.

Slats has been known to use a knife instead of a baseball bat. Open a vein in one arm, let the guy bleed a little, then open another vein in the other arm, let the guy bleed some more. Keep this up for hours, all night maybe, the guy tied to a bed, gagged so he can't scream. If he's still alive the next day, open another vein, let the blood drip a little more.

Maybe, if the guy is lucky, Slats eventually slits his throat.

When this sort of information gets around among Slattery's boys, they forget how to talk. About anything, even the weather. Slats might not like their opinion on whether

or not it is raining. Eventually they get so silent they can hardly open their mouths.

In silence, they continue loading the brown-paper packages into the VTOL.

There are corpses on the floor of this vast cavern that has been converted into a hangar, several of them. You have neither the time nor the inclination to count them. With copper-colored skins, you recognize them as Mona's people. Ahead of you, she is dimly visible as a swirl of energies. The question is how are you going to get into the aircraft? On the theory that the men can't really see you, you walk boldly forward, Mona now following. The man nearest you has a crooked nose. He suddenly stares in your direction, then nudges a companion.

"I get the feeling this place is haunted!" Crooked Nose says. "If I didn't know there ain't no such things, I'd swear there are ghosts walking around here."

The second man looks furtively around. "Slats is the only man who has haunting rights, so far as I'm concerned. I don't see him anywhere."

"I'm not talking about Slats! It's something else. Look right there!"

Crooked Nose points straight at you.

The second man stares, then shakes his head. "You been sampling this stuff?" He nods at the package of heroin he is lifting into the ship. "Slats will chew a leg off of you if he catches you sampling his horse."

"I ain't touched it!" Crooked Nose says, indignantly. He stares at you for a moment, then looks past and across the cavern. You turn your head and glance in that direction. Over there a dead man is getting slowly to his feet.

You saw this happen in Tijuana, but Crooked Nose has never seen it anywhere. He calls out harshly. Stopping loading the ship, the men stare at the corpse getting to its feet. Shock is visible on the faces of the Mafia men. "There's another one getting up!" Crooked Nose says, his voice so hoarse it is frog-thick.

As he speaks, the little automatic weapon comes from the sling over his shoulder. It roars once, a blast of hideous sound. The dead man lurches, goes to his knees, and hangs

there, tough. Another man looses another burst of slugs at him.

"I hit him!" the gunner whispers. "Why don't he fall?"

The man is still on his hands and knees.

"I saw the bullets hit!" Crooked Nose says, his voice only a gulp now. "You saw me hit him too!" He looks around for confirmation—and gets it. "We saw you do it. Yes, yes. We saw it!"

As they stare the man rises to his feet.

"What's helping him get up?"

This question threatens to send the whole gang into panic. They have seen dead men before, but they have never seen one get to his feet. Is someone invisible to them helping this man to his feet? Has something given him the power to live again after he has been twice struck down by slugs?

Fear blows through them like a wave coming in and smashing on a rocky headland.

You understand their fear. You had plenty of it too when you saw this same thing happen in Tijuana. Now that you understand it—suddenly you realize that you don't understand it at all, that you really know nothing about it, that it is still as weird as any ghost ever seen by any man.

Crooked Nose lifts his gun again. This time he fires the whole clip, the automatic weapon setting up wild echoes in the huge chamber.

This time the dead man goes to the floor. You hear the scared voices of the men from the gang.

"Half his head gone—and him still walking!"

"A hole in his guts you could stick your fist in—and him still moving!"

"A hole in his chest—and him still breathing!"

These men have seen death and plenty of it but they have never seen a man who would not die. Their voices are croaking whispers, Brooklyn, Chicago, and New Orleans having vanished from them. They have seen a sight which has shaken their accents out of them.

Other corpses are rising from the floor but they are watching this one. He is on the floor. The hoods begin to back away from him. You see why. In spite of the obvious fact that half his head is gone, that he has a whole in his chest, and that his guts are spilling in ragged fragments out



of a hole in his belly, he is still trying to get to his feet. He obeys a will stronger than human!

Is Kum Rath watching somewhere? Hastily, you look around. If he is here, you cannot see him.

"I think we had better get into the plane," Mona whispers.

"Do you see Kum Rath?"

"No. He does not have to be present to control his men. He can call to them from miles away and they will come to him. We had better get into the plane."

"Right. You first."

You see the twisting mirage that is Mona swing up into the cabin. You follow her. Piled everywhere inside are brown-paper packages. Also in the ship is a small arsenal brought by Slattery and his men, extra automatic weapons, a couple of sporting rifles with telescopic sights, extra clips of ammo, extra grenades.

Their nerve finally breaking, they are running toward the ship. You slam the door in their faces. Seeing the door close but not seeing you and Mona inside, they stop short—and probably wonder what new horror hell has in store for them now!

You almost feel sorry for them. Behind them, dead men are walking. In front of them, the open door of their aircraft has just closed with no person visible to shut it.

Their faces reflect confusion. You do not doubt that they are confused. Badly! You can imagine the wheels in their minds trying, slipping their clutches as they try to turn in such a way so that the impossible they have seen with their eyes can be fitted into what they think they know about the working of the world around them. In their world, dead men stay dead!

*Spat!*

An arrow leaps from a tunnel mouth. One of the Mafia men sprouts the arrow in his back. Trying to turn and grab the shaft and jerk it free, he falls heavily.

The dead man is on his feet again.

"When are these Indians dead?" Crooked Nose yells. He throws a grenade. It rolls to a stop at the feet of the dead man who is now standing again, explodes there in flame and thumping fury. His legs blown off, the dead man goes down again.

"This time he won't get up and walk!" Crooked Nose says, satisfaction in his voice.

No other arrow comes. Lifting the wounded man, the Mafia men move again toward the ship only to be stopped again by the closed door.

"Who shut this door?" Crooked Nose demands.

"The wind, maybe."

"There ain't no wind in here, egghead!"

"Then it shut itself."

"Doors don't just shut up themselves!" Moving to the door, Crooked Nose tries to open it. "It's locked on the inside!" His voice has the tense quaver of a man about to explode. Backing off he tries to see into the cabin. "I tell you this goddamned place is haunted!"

*Whap!*

Another arrow leaps from a tunnel. It passes within inches of Crooked Nose's head. Ducking, he fires a random burst. In response another arrow comes from another tunnel. Missing Crooked Nose by inches, it flashes past him and strikes one of the tires of the VTOL. Air hisses as it rushes out.

Inside, you have solved the problem of the controls. You feel the ship tilt. Looking out you see the arrow in the tire. A VTOL craft will take off almost vertically, *almost* but not quite. A few feet of runway are needed. Also the ship must be out of the cavern hangar before it can take off at all. Will it roll out of the hangar on a flat tire?

The motors grind, then belch fire and flame, then catch. Outside, you can see Crooked Nose and the others hastily backing away from the ship. You catch a glimpse of another arrow leaping from a tunnel. One of the men is hit in the leg. As the ship begins to move, Crooked Nose throws up his gun again. Holes appear in the cabin permaglass. You duck involuntarily. The ship is beginning to move. On the flat tire, it veers. In spite of everything you can do to control it, the ship strikes the side wall. There is a rattle of breaking glass, a shear of grinding metal, a scream of motors running wild. Hastily you cut the motors. The ship settles down. As you are wondering where Mona is, flames begin to lick from the motors.

"Mona!" Your voice is sharp with fear.

Then you see her. She did not know to fasten her seat belt

and the impact of the plane threw her forward, her head striking a jutting door hinge.

She is visible! Apparently the jolt of the crash was enough of a shock to break her concentration. She is not only visible but you are visible too!

Crackling flames tell you that you must get out of the ship, quickly! Outside, on the right, Crooked Nose and his men are trying to watch the burning ship and at the same time to dodge arrows coming from different tunnels.

You slip out of the plane on the side away from Crooked Nose, pull Mona after you, gather her in your arms, start running—and stop when a bullet splits the air within inches of your head.

“Hey, you!” Crooked Nose yells behind you.

You stop. Holding Mona, you turn. Crooked Nose runs to you, gun ready. At the sight of you, he stops.

“By God, you’re white!” he gasps. Surprise is heavy in his voice. He lowers the muzzle of the weapon as he stares at you.

“I thought you were another one of these copper bellies!”

He walks toward you, stares at Mona, then at you, and lifts his gun.

“All right, white boy, if you want to be alive sixty seconds from now, talk fast!”

Behind him, his men are ready. The burning plane is gusting smoke and flame into the air. An occasional arrow is coming from a tunnel. Across the tunnel another man supposed to be dead is getting to his feet and is limping away.

“You can kill me—but how can you keep me dead?” you ask.

“I’m damned if I know but I’ll find a way!” Crooked Nose answers. The question has shaken him. “Who are you? What are you doing here? How did you get into our ship without being seen? Talk, white boy, while you’re still alive!”

“If you kill me, Slats won’t get to talk to me,” you answer.

“Do you know Slats?” Crooked Nose’s voice has a gulp in it.

“Sure.” The man with the arrow in his back is breathing very heavily. You nod toward him. “That man is dying!”

“Let him die! Where’d you know Slats?”

An arrow leaps from a tunnel. From the same tunnel,

gunfire bellows. Riddled by bullets, the Bowman stumbles from the tunnel. Men follow him. Leading them is a man that makes Crooked Nose forget all about you.

This man is screaming in wild rage. "You let my ship catch fire! Now we're trapped here."

"No, no, Slats!" Crooked Nose answers. "We didn't do it. He did it!"

He points to you.

In your arms, Mona stirs. You set her on her feet. Crooked Nose points again at you.

"There's the man who tried to steal your ship, boss! We caught him in the act. If it hadn't been for us, he would have gotten away with it!"

Slattery comes across the cavern and stands in front of you.

"He said he knew you, boss," Crooked Nose says.

"I never saw him before in my life," Slattery answers.

"Do you want me to shoot him for you, boss?" Crooked Nose asks. "Him and the broad?"

Slattery stares at Mona and whistles his pleasure.

"Do you want me to shoot 'em for you, boss, do you?"

"I'll do my own shooting," Slattery answers, "when the time comes for it."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Your name is Roger Jesmer, you surmise. You think you could remember your name if you put enough effort into it. Is the memory worth the effort? You doubt it. You are lost, the *brujo* is lost, Yin is lost, her guards that brought you food are lost. The guards are also confused. They could find their way to their goddess but once they have found her, they are lost.

In the tunnels at this level water rises, then subsides. When the water is in the tunnel, the little biting devils are there and you must seek refuge on the ledge to keep from having the flesh bitten from your legs to the bone. The big *antb* has not appeared again. Most sincerely you hope he got stuck in a tunnel back there where you saw him last. Where did you see him last? You don't know. Nor do you know where *here* is. Is *here* a place? Or is it a segment of time? Or is it an intimate blending of space and time?

As this question passes through your mind, you suddenly remember that you are a scientist. Or that you *were* one, once. For you, yesterday, today, and tomorrow have blended into a sort of infinite *now* that is full of fear, hate, horror and hunger. The food Yin's guard brought has run low. You think how wonderful are dried jerky and dried beans now that you have hardly any left. How much is really left? Maybe nibbles for a couple of days. How long is a couple of days? Here in this underground world, where no sun has ever shone, a couple of days seem as long as eternity. One eternity has already passed since you entered this underground world, another may lie ahead of you. The *brujo* walks like a living dead man, you don't walk any better, Yin's guard has begun to stumble, only Yin is still full of life and energy.

And she has begun to stoop. Perhaps she does not know she is drooping but the fact shows in the stoop of the little shoulders inside the beaded deerskin garments.

Why is life carrying her forward to death, what role does she play in the cosmic drama? For that matter, what role do you play? Or are all of you owned by fate who presently will have some new and more horrible twist up her sleeve for you?

Death is in the damp tunnel, whether the bore is partly full of water and you are on the ledge that always runs above the water, or whether the water has receded and you are stumbling along the slick floor. Perhaps a thousand years in the future some explorer may find scattered bones in this damp place and wonder how they got here. You suspect this won't happen. You are certain the water will eventually rise again and that the big *antb* will come along again through this tunnel, sweeping it clear of everything including heaps of old bones.

You find yourself leaning against a wall.

You do not know how this happened. It seems as if your body simply veered of its own will and finally stopped in such a way that your shoulder was comfortably nestled against the wall. Leaning feels so good, you let the others walk past you without noticing. You settle down to the floor and find a sitting position. Sitting feels even better than leaning . . .

You awaken with Yin's rugging at your hand. You tell her to go away, that you just want to rest a few minutes and that soon you will rejoin the others. As if she knows you are lying, she continues jerking at your hands, urging you to rise. You tell her you will rise as soon as your strength returns. She calls you an outright liar and slaps your face, hard. At this, you pull yourself to your feet and move forward with her. Ahead of you is the light of day.

The sight of a streak of honest daylight rouses hope in your tired mind. You move forward faster. The *brujo* and Yin's guards are lying on their stomachs looking down into an enormous hole—and looking up at a streak of daylight that comes down into the hole from far above.

You drop down beside them at the lip of the hole and look

up, then look down. Down below is a smaller hole. In the depths of it, you catch a glimpse of dark water.

Confusion rises in you. This is the place you saw in your dream—if it *was* a dream—this is the place where the flower-clad maidens were tossed into the well of sacrifice in an effort to learn from them the will of the gods, if the maidens lived to report what the deities said.

Gone now, the maidens, the chanting people, the lumbering carts, the men with the flower headdresses who tossed the maidens into the pool, the men on the ledge down below who tried to pull them from the water just before they drowned—and often failed, gone, lost in that strange region called *the past*. Gone now, the killers and the killed, the watchers who sought to profit from the information brought back by the young women, gone, no more.

Down below are other people, men with beards, several men, one deserving the name of Red Beard. You stare at them wondering who they are. The memory of the flower maidens dying is still strong in your mind and you cannot force these mental images away well enough to remember who Red Beard is. You notice one of Yin's guards fitting an arrow to his bow. Yin shakes her head at him and he lowers the bow. Slowly the memory of the flower maidens fades from your mind. Other memories come in—of Red Beard with a rifle.

Suddenly you remember everything. Hot anger leaps to the surface of your mind. For a moment, you think of trying to take the bow from Yin's guard and using it yourself, but before you can carry this impulse into action, you not only remember the rifle Red Beard used, you also see rifles down below. Besides, the brujo is shaking his head at you and is pointing down below.

You look again. In a big pile are golden ornaments, great golden suns, golden moons in crescent, a huge lion, an eagle with a rattlesnake in his talons, all done in heavy gold. There are other pieces which you do not recognize forming a pile at least ten feet square and three feet high.

Slowly you realize that these ornaments are actually real gold and you know that this is the legendary treasure of Montezuma, the golden hoard which the Aztecs hid from the Spaniards and which have been hunted ever since.

Córtez destroyed an Indian nation trying to find this gold. His men tortured Indians trying to force them to reveal where the gold had been hidden. No Indian had ever talked. Perhaps some of them, under the torture that leads eventually to death, had whispered a few words and had given enough information to send men like Coronado and Ulloloa scurrying through northern Mexico hunting for this hidden treasure, but no Indian had ever given enough information to enable the foreign thieves to find the hidden treasure of his people.

The water level is high in the pool now, almost to the top. As you watch, one of the men begins to crank the handle of the nylon rope. A leg in a flipper flops over the surface, then a man emerges to be helped from the pool. Then a net breaks the surface and is swung over the pile of golden ornaments. Excitedly the men remove the contents of the net. Their excited voices come up to you.

"How many millions do you reckon we have raised so far, Allen?" one asks of Red Beard.

"Don't know, can't guess. More important, is how much more is down there."

"Plenty! But some of it's hard to dig out. There's muck, ooze, tree trunks, and bones. How do you suppose all of those bones got down there?"

"The story on the map I found in Spain was written by a priest whose conscience was hurting him. He said the Aztec warriors killed all the porters who helped carry the gold here," Red Beard answers. "If so, it wouldn't be the first time. Dead men tell no tales!"

"You wouldn't be talking about us, would you, Allen?" one of his companions asked.

At this question, a silence fell.

"Hell, no!" Red Beard answered. "We'll need every hand we've got to get this stuff down the mountain to our trucks. After that, we'll need every man to get it on board our boat. When we get it on the boat—Hong Kong! There we'll melt it down and peddle it to the Chinks! After that, we'll each take his share and split—never to see each other again."

Red Beard looks at his companions. "Who goes down next? You? Come on, get with it. Get down under the water and fill that net again."



One man was already leisurely pulling on flippers and mask. He dropped backward into the pool. Fingering the golden objects that had been brought up by the last load, Red Beard added them to the pile.

Anger is hot within you as you watch. "Why don't we go find their trucks and run them into a ravine?" you question. "They'll never be able to get this gold out of here without trucks!"

The *brujo* negates this idea quickly. "How will we get out of here?" he questions. "And if we damage their trucks, Red Beard will round up my people to use as porters, and when he is finished with them, he will shoot them!"

"But they are stealing gold that belongs to you and to your people!"

"It does not belong to me or to my people! The Aztecs stole it in the first place. The Spanish tried to steal it from the Aztecs. It is the usual fate of gold to be stolen. It does no good for anyone. My people do not need gold. They need land, to grown corn and beans."

"They can use gold to buy land," you protest.

For a time the *brujo* is silent. When he speaks, there is pain in his voice. "There are big thieves in Mexico City. If we have gold and they learn about it, they will take it by claiming it is a national treasure and belongs to all of the people. When they get it into their hands, it will belong only to them."

"Well—"

"The bearded man down there has the only answer. Take the gold to China or to some other far-away land, melt it down, and sell it there—if he can get it out of the mountain!"

"If he can get it out of the mountain? Who is to stop them?"

"The Aztec *brujos* set guards over it," Don Leon answers.

"What do you mean?"

"I do not know what I mean," the *brujo* answers, his voice now a whisper. He shakes his head for you to be silent. Yin creeps to his arms. A touch of chill moves through your tired body.

"This is not *your* world," the *brujo* continues. "There are things here that men in your land think do not exist. Even my people no longer believe these things exist. If I tried to tell you, you would call it superstitious nonsense!"

"Well—" You are uncomfortable. The *brujo* has hit much too close to the truth. "Remembering what I have seen here, I doubt if I will call anything nonsense again!"

The net vanishes beneath the water, the cable following it down. Another man in flippers and diving equipment goes down with it. Minutes later the nylon cable stops paying out and you know the net has reached the bottom of the pool. You know that down there men are trying to separate the valuable from the worthless and are finding among the gold, bones grown slick and slimy—occasionally finding a leg bone with a rock still tied to it. How they must wonder about that! Now and then the cable tightens as some heavy object is placed in the net far below. Then the water is broken as a diver surfaces there, to swim frantically for the edge of the pool.

"Hey, you're not supposed to be up yet!" Red Beard yells at him.

Like a seal coming out of water to find a resting place on a wet rock, the diver slides out of the pool. Hastily he begins to shed flippers and mask. In response to Red Beard's yells, he jerks a thumb toward the pool, then, without speaking, scrambles for a rifle.

You find yourself holding your breath.

Beside you, Yin is trying to dig a deep hole in the *brujo's* arms, huddling there like a human waif washed ashore on a beach where devils dwell.

The second diver breaks the surface, leaping out of the water like some strange fish trying to escape from the depths of the pool. Your first thought is that he was swimming so rapidly surfaceward that his momentum carried him out of the water.

Then you realize he was thrown out of the pool.

Thrown ten feet above the surface, his flippers flying, his tank twisting, his black suit shining, he seems to be trying to do a hazardous backward flip.

Whatever the dive he is attempting, he does not complete it. Before he reaches the water, a head with a double row of sharp teeth reaches upward and grabs him, catching his body around the middle and literally biting it into two pieces.

"An *anth!*" you gasp.

"*Si!*" the *brujo* says.

A second *anth* follows the first one. For a time there is a

bloody froth on the water as the two *anths* battle for the same man. Now a third *anth* joins the first two, then a fourth appears, then a fifth!

"How many *anths* exist?" you question.

"Too many, maybe ten, maybe hundreds, maybe thousands," the *brujo* answers.

On the ledge Red Beard has grabbed a rifle. With his two remaining companions, they are firing shot after shot at the creatures in the pool. The vast chamber rings with the echoes from the rifle fire. Now an *anth* comes over the rocky edge of the pool, leaping out of the water like a sea lion coming out of the sea.

A rifleman sees it. He fires one shot at it. At this short range he cannot miss. Bat squeals come from the wounded creature. The *anth* keeps moving toward the man who fired the shot, crawling like a gigantic snake. One bullet will not stop it. The rifleman fires again and again. Spreading a slimy trail, the *anth* keeps wiggling toward him. Meanwhile, behind the first, a second has come out of the water. Lifting its ugly head it is peering from weak eyes for the nearest object that can be eaten. It sees the man who is shooting at the first *anth* that surfaced—and immediately begins to run a race toward him.

The two monsters run a dead heat. The rifleman empties his weapon into the mouth of the first one, then is seized, gun and all.

*Crunch!*

The barrel of the rifle protrudes from one side of the *anth's* mouth, the wiggling, kicking legs of the human stick out from the other.

*Crunch!*

The second *anth* gets into action, searing off the kicking legs in one bite.

The rifleman becomes a peristaltic movement in the first *anth*, his legs become a similar movement in the second monster.

After the man has become a peristaltic movement, you have the impression that you can hear him screaming as he goes down the gullet of the *anth*. You also have the impression that you can see his legs still kicking as they go down the throat of the second monster.

As if they are looking for other worlds to conquer, the two *anths* rise like gigantic snakes and peer from weak eyes for more food. Red Beard and two companions catch their eyes. They move in this direction.

Meanwhile, additional *anths* are surging out of the pool of black water. The surface of the pool is literally boiling with slanted tails flapping on the water and with huge heads and broad backs splashing there.

"Where do they all come from?" you ask.

"Connecting tunnels down below," the *brujo* answers.

"Are these the guards left by the Aztec priests?"

"Could be. Could be other guards too."

Like gigantic worms, the *anths* are crawling out of the pool. Red Beard and his two companions are fighting. Between them and the pool, one *anth* is writhing in the death struggle, struck by a dozen bullets. You can hear the three men screaming at each other.

"What are these things?"

"Devils out of hell!" Red Beard shouts an answer.

"They're going to learn I'm a tougher devil!"

Another *anth* is groping toward them.

"We had better get out of here, Allen!" one man shouts.

"And leave this?" Red Beard jerks his chin toward the pile of golden ornaments. "We went through hell to get this stuff and I'm not going to let go of it!"

"And we'll be worm food if we stay here!" the first man answers. "I'm getting out while I can!" Turning, he bolts toward the nearest tunnel opening.

An *anth* grabs him and gobbling at him, squirms over its slimy trail back to the pool. There others of its kind fight it for possession of its prey.

Now there are two men, Red Beard and one companion. *Anths* come at them from two directions. Red Beard's companion is caught in hungry jaws.

Now there is one man.

From all directions *anths* are moving toward him. Firing one final shot, he throws his empty rifle at the nearest one, and is caught—*crunch*—in powerful jaws.

Other *anths*, struggling with the one that has caught Red Beard, knock priceless golden ornaments into the pool. Gold means nothing to them, food means everything.

## SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL

When the last morsel of human flesh is gone, the *anths* begin to try to eat each other. Biting each other, fighting each other, they knock more golden ornaments into the dark waters.

From a tunnel opening not twenty feet above the pool, you watch the last golden ornament knocked into the pool. As you watch, your stomach ties itself into knots. You do not in the least question that Red Beard and his companions are getting exactly what they deserve. What ties your stomach into knots is the fact that any human should deserve such a fate. You are suddenly ashamed of belonging to the same race that spawned Red Beard and his companions.

The *brujo* nudges you and begins very slowly to draw back from the lip of the hole. Looking down, you see the reason. An *anth* has scented you and is trying to climb the wall to get to you. It falls back but immediately begins again to try to climb the wall.

Now other *anths* have also scented your presence in the mouth of the tunnel above the pool. Other creatures are trying to climb the wall. Still others, hungry but sensing the impossibility of getting at food by climbing the wall, are moving toward tunnel openings.

You suspect they are entering the tunnels in an effort to find their way to you. You face the prospect of being hunted through this maze of tunnels by hundreds of these creatures.

The *brujo* motions for you to rise. Leading Yin by one hand, he moves as quickly as his old and tired legs will permit away from this vast chamber wherein is hidden the wealth of Montezuma deep in a pool of black water guarded by monstrous eels called *anths*.

When you reach an intersecting tunnel, he consults Yin as to the direction to be taken. You realize again that the *brujo* is completely lost and is trusting for guidance to the intuition of a child.

You mention to the *brujo* that you fear the *anths* are hunting for you.

He nods agreement.

"Hunt high, hunt low, go through tunnels, go up ramps, go down ramps. Very, very hungry now."



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Your name is Ben Harkle. You are looking at a man called Slats Slattery, but he is not looking at you. His attention is on Mona. He is looking at her as if he has never seen a woman in his life.

You have read the agency file on Slattery. Besides being a killer and the boss of a Family, he is known as a lady killer, meaning that he likes women very, very much. Any woman, any time, any place, a new one every night. The expression on his face says he likes Mona. You think that Slattery is quite capable of forgetting he is in the midst of enemies and will stop shooting long enough to rape Mona here and now, with you watching, his men holding you.

The file you read had only hints of such actions on Slattery's part but it hinted at them, saying many times that Slattery was oversexed and that he will tolerate no interference with the satisfaction of his sexual drives.

Slattery ignores the burning VTOL craft, he ignores you, he ignores his men around him.

"Haven't I met you somewhere before?" Slattery asks Mona, grinning.

"No!" Mona says. The tone of her voice would strip the hide off a crocodile.

"Then the next time we meet, you will be certain to remember me." Slattery's grin widens.

"We'll never meet again," Mona says.

"Why not?"

"Because you'll be dead before it happens!"

Slattery howls with laughter. "Don't talk like that to one of your good friends, lady. And you and I are going to be

good friends. The best of friends." As he speaks, he pats her on the bottom.

*Spat!*

You never saw a masher hit so hard or so quickly. Your first thought is that if they had trained Mona to swing in this way in the private school she had attended in England, they had done a good job. Your second thought is how Slattery will react. Your third thought is a wild wonder if you can kill him before he can use the pistol on you.

You started to ball your left hand into a fist, then you see that Crooked Nose has his gun on you. Crooked Nose would like nothing better than an excuse to empty the magazine through you, if for no other reason, to convince Slattery what a good man he has working for him.

You don't swing the fist.

Slattery tosses his gun to Crooked Nose.

"Hold this, knucklehead, while I explain a few things to this broad!"

With this, Slattery starts to grab Mona. His intentions are obvious: instant rape.

As he reaches for her, she seems to glide out of existence. Slattery grabs a handful of air.

You know what has happened, she has gone invisible, but Slattery doesn't know it. He stands and stares at the spot where Mona had been standing, then shakes his head and rubs his hand across his eyes, then looks around the big chamber. No woman is in sight. Sounds of flame still come from the burning plane but this does not interest this man. He wants a woman, now. Let the damned plane burn! He can always steal a VTOL, but a woman like this is not to be found every day. When he does not see her, his gaze comes to you.

"Where'd the broad go?" he asks.

You shrug. Slattery nods toward Crooked Nose and is instantly given his gun.

"Mister, I've shot the balls off a few men who didn't answer my questions!" Slattery says.

"I believe you!" Sweat is on your face, covering there the rubble of whiskers and smoke. You do not dare brush the sweat away. The slightest movement of either hand might be interpreted as a threat. If he thought he was threatened, Slattery would shoot, instantly.



"Where'd the broad go?" Slattery repeats the question.

"She didn't go anywhere," you answer. "She is still here, somewhere, but she is invisible."

"Invisible! Now you're telling me she's invisible!"

Slattery lifts his gun. At the movement of the weapon, sweat spurts more strongly from your skin. Slattery stares at you. "If you will ask around, you will find that nobody ever pulls a fast one on Slats Slattery!"

"I'm telling the truth. Whether or not you believe me is up to you, but I ask you, if you were standing in my shoes, would you be lying?"

"If I was in your place, I'd be thinking of some prayers to say. Do you know any?" Slattery answers. "Now tell me the truth: what actually happened to that broad?"

"I told you the truth. There is a science here in this mountain thousands of years old—or older. The ability to put a vibrational screen around your body is one of the smallest accomplishments of this science."

Slattery stares at you. His eyes, you notice, are a greenish-gray. They are also filled with suspicion.

"How does she do it?"

"In her mind."

"Can you do it?"

"No."

"You were in the ship and we couldn't see you," Crooked Nose says. "If you can't make this invisibility thing work, how come we couldn't see you?"

"I was invisible then too."

"But you just said you couldn't do it!" Slattery says. His face is more grim than before.

"I wasn't doing it. The woman was doing it."

"What did she do, put a spell on you?"

"Something like that. Actually she brought me into the screen field which she generates mentally. The crash of the plane knocked her out of concentration necessary to hold this difficult condition. When this happened, we both became visible."

Slattery continues staring at you. "If I could learn how to do that or get that broad to do it for me—" His face twists as he speaks and saliva begins to drip from his lips. Inside this

man is enormous hunger. It shows in the expression on his face. "Would she teach me?"

"If you rape her, I doubt if she will do anything for you except kill you!"

"Hunh!" Slattery looks really startled. He lifts his gun in a threatening gesture. "Whatta ya mean, kill me?"

"She could walk up behind you right now and you couldn't see her. You wouldn't know she was around until you felt her slip a knife between your ribs." You speaks quietly, being careful to emphasize no word at the expense of any other word. The tone of your voice indicates you might be talking about the weather. Will it rain tomorrow? Depends on where you are!

At your words, Slattery turns quickly to look behind him. He has really never learned the meaning of fear. He learns it now. Yelling at Crooked Nose to stand behind him, he turns and faces you.

"You saw dead men get up and walk—" you continue. "If you can't kill 'em, how can you lick 'em?"

The questions shakes Slattery but he sets his jaw. "I want this woman," he says. The fact that he calls Mona a woman instead of a broad indicates the intensity of his feelings. He glares at you. "Have you been having her?"

You shake your head. "She belongs to herself, not to me." You shake your head again. "And you keep forgetting what I said. She is beautiful, granted; she is also deadly." Again you speak softly.

"If you will ask around, you will find I am generally regarded as being pretty deadly myself," Slattery says.

"So I've heard but all men of experience will tell you what all big-game hunters know, that the female is deadlier than the male. Being a man of wide experience, I am sure you already know this."

"I know," Slattery nods. "The broads are always trying to find some way to get even. But not with me. No matter what they do, I'm always ahead."

You look beyond him. Halfway across the cavern another dead man is rising. Seeing you are watching something behind him, Slattery thinks you are trying to get him to look in that direction so you can jump him while his back is

turned. He speaks quickly to Crooked Nose, asking him what is happening.

"An—another dead man is getting to his feet," Crooked Nose says. Pulling a grenade from a bulging pocket, he throws it with expert aim. The grenade explodes, the rising man goes down. Now Slattery turns to look. You do not move.

"We shot him, he was dead—" Crooked Nose whispers. "B—boss, I think we oughta get out of here. This place is haunted by things that ain't human."

"When I want you to tell me what to do, I'll ask for your opinion!" Slattery says. "Cover him," he says, jerking his head to indicate you, "while I go look at your dead man."

Crooked Nose is glad to cover you. Slattery walks toward the man who has just been grenaded. He walks very slowly like a man expecting a trap. Beyond him, you can catch glimpses of the broken body still trying to move. It is trying to hump itself along on its belly like a grotesque, wounded worm. Slattery stares at it, kicks it to make certain it is really a man, then fires a burst into its head.

"Let's see you walk now," he says. The body does not move again. His face twisted, a tic now showing in his right cheek, Slattery walks back to you. "Whatta ya have to do to kill one of these gooks dead?" he asks.

"I don't know any more about this place than you do," you answer. "I didn't even know it existed. They grabbed me in Tijuana and brought me down here. I don't know why they grabbed me or what they want." You spread your hands in a helpless gesture. "All I want is a chance to get away."

"Where'd you meet that invisible woman?"

"In Tijuana. I think she's the reason they grabbed me and brought me down here."

"And you want a chance to escape with her?"

"With or without her."

"Was this why you were trying to steal my ship?"

"What other reason would I have? When you have seen some of the things that are down here, you don't waste any time thinking about a woman. All you will think about is how to get away!"

"What else did you see down here?"

You nod toward the pile of brown-paper packages. "I saw that stuff being cooked."

"You know what's in those packages?"

"Yes."

"That's a dangerous thing to know."

"Just being here is dangerous."

"You saw it being cooked, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then if you want to get out of here alive, you take me to the place where you saw that stuff being cooked!" Slattery says. "I want to know where the place is, bad. I want to know this more than I want that invisible woman. If you don't take me, as sure as hell—" The aim of the gun is below your waistline. "If you are a good boy and take me where I want to go, I'll not only help you get out of here, I'll cut you in on the deal."

"How much will my cut be worth?"

"A big chunk of dough. And if you will tell me how to find that invisible woman, I'll cut you in for an ever bigger share."

"How can I help you find her when I don't know where she is?" you answer. "For that matter, while I've seen the place where the stuff is being cooked, I can't guide you to it."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't find my way there alone. Mona, the woman, guided me." You spread your hands. "Maybe you don't know it yet but this whole mountain is full of tunnels. They're on many levels, some deep down, others up high, with connecting ramps. If you don't know your way around, you can get lost so bad you'll never find your way out. Believe me, this is true."

Grudgingly, Slattery nods. "We found this out, which is why we came back here." His gaze fixes on you. "But this broad, Mona, the one you can't see, she knows her way around this place?"

"Some of it, certainly. Whether or not she knows all of it, I don't know. I haven't been here long enough to find out much."

"Then that's another reason I want her. Buddy, if you ever

figure on being any good to her—" His gun points again at your lower abdomen.

"How can I find her?"

"That's for you to figure out. As sure as hell you can come closer to finding her than anybody else I know. So—" With the gun, he draws a careful bead.

"If you kill me, how will you ever find her?" Sweat is on the stubble beard on your face again. Now it is running down into the corners of your eyes. In fact, sweat is all over your body. Tremors are appearing in your muscles. Is Slattery bluffing?

"Oh, I won't kill you right away," Slattery says. "I'll just fix you so you'll beg me to kill you, to get you out of pain. I've shot a few men, buddy. It ain't no fun—for them!"

The expression on Slattery's face says he is not bluffing.

"If you try to run, I'll shoot you in the leg—first!" Slattery says.

You feel hands on your shoulders from behind. Small hands. You do not turn your head. You watch Slattery. Is he trying to break your nerve, to force you to talk by threats of torture? If you don't talk he will carry out the threats. How long before he will shoot? There is no way to answer this question. At any instant. He is at the point where anything, the slightest noise, the smallest movement, may trigger off the gun.

Behind you, the fingers tighten on your shoulders. You do not turn your head to look. You know who is behind you.

"As I said before, dead men tell no tales," you say.

"If you think I won't shoot—"

"I know you will shoot. I just don't see how shooting me will help you."

"It'll encourage you to talk and that will help me," Slattery says. "Before you die, you'll tell me anything I want to know."

The expression in his muddy greenish-gray eyes says he is going to shoot.

Behind you, the hands tighten on your shoulders—hard. From each hand a living stream of energy akin to electricity shoots through your body. Part of the energy goes into your head, where it turns on millions of exploding stars. Part of it

goes down your spine. Your vision shifts, changes, the world around you becomes different.

The hands are moving, you move hastily to one side. Not fast enough! Slattery pulls the trigger. The bullets hit the ion screen that is now around you, flashing there like miniature flaming suns.

"Run!" Mona says, behind you.

Your first impulse is to hit Slattery, to slug him, to knock him down and jump on him with both feet. Whatever happens to Slattery, if it's bad, he deserves it. You see him there in front of you, staring at the spot where you vanished. You start to hit him. Mona pulls you away.

"If you hit him, your screen may collapse!" she whispers behind you. "Run!"

As you turn to follow Mona you catch another glimpse of Slattery's face. His jaw is sagging, his eyes are bulging as he strains to see you. He hasn't fired a second burst. He has no target.

As you follow Slattery across the cave, you can hear Slattery shouting, "Where'd he go? Where is he?"

Slattery is encountering a world he did not know existed, a world where people slip out of existence before his eyes. He does not like this world.

You don't like it, either. The problem is how to stay alive long enough to escape from it. Just escape. Nothing more.

Ahead of you, a twisting vortex moving rapidly, is Mona. Her voice is a chirping sound through the shields. You cannot understand what she is saying except that she is urging you to hurry. She needn't waste her breath on this. You are hurrying. Behind you come a rattle of shots, the whole burst being fired back where you were, but the slugs bounce off the stone floor of the cavern far away from you. Slattery and his men are shooting wild. They have no target.

You pass the dead man. He is still trying to move. You swing wide around the burning plane. If the tanks explode, this cavern will become an anteroom of hell but so far the gasoline is burning with a vapor explosion. Yellow flames leap up from the ship and smoke blackens the roof of the cavern. The heroin in the ship is also burning. You get a whiff of these fumes and almost vomit. Another burst of shots sound but Slattery and his men have no targets and are

shooting in an effort to strengthen their own faltering nerves by the sound of their own gunfire.

Mona dives into a tunnel. Full tilt, you follow her. She stops so quickly you almost run over her. Quickly she moves to the side of the tunnel and tries to flatten herself against the wall.

From the distance comes the thump of a drum.

You hear it far away.

*Thump—thump—thump—*

Regular, rhythmic, compulsive, it grows louder. As if moving by the drum beat, you see the robot soldiers of Kum Rath marching toward you, men who have been through his treatment process and have become his slaves, marching now to battle the invaders of their mountain, the men of Slat Slattery. They are armed with spears, swords, and short bows, the bows in their hands, the swords in scabbards at their right hips. These are ancient weapons but the soldiers march with a relentless precision that is full of meaning.

As if they are programmed to hear the beat of the drum and to be aware of nothing else, they seem not to see you and Mona crouching against the wall of the tunnel. In single file, they march past you. Following is the drummer. Following the drummer is a shadow, either Kum Rath or one of his priests.

The robot soldiers do not notice you but the shadow does. Turning toward you, he harshly demands to know who you are and what you are doing there.





## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Your name is Roger Jesmer. This much you remember now but little else. You follow an Indian child who in turn is being guided by intuition through endless tunnels and up endless, tiring ramps. Following somewhere behind you, hunting you through these damp caverns, following you by smell or by some other sense they have developed during centuries of life here in these underground caverns, are eels big enough to gulp down a grown man in one bite. You know they can do this, you have seen them do it. You are as hungry as the eels but Yin's guard is out of dried jerky and beans except for the smallest quantity, which they are saving for her. Each member of her guard is as willing to die for her as is the *brujo*, Don Leon, by starvation, if necessary. You wonder what emotional attachments grown men can have for a child to motivate them to such actions.

You decide they are motivated by the little black stone the *brujo* has somewhere in his satchel. The stone is still working, you know, still broadcasting its little whispers of an emotion called *love*. Under other circumstances, you would be very curious about this stone, how it works and who made it, but now all you can think about are eels and hunger.

Time passes, how much of it you do not know. Part of the time you are in your second body, wandering through this honeycomb of tunnels when the great race still lived here. Slowly you are coming to realize that more than one race lived here in the great span of time that is behind you. The first tunnels were part of a gold mine, ancient man seeking for gold as hard as modern men. Silver was also found here in the past. Ancient man worked both metals, fashioning them into intricate ornaments which expressed his magical

way of looking at the world. The men who dug these tunnels—all of them through all history—did not think as modern men. For them, everything was magic in a world that was all alive. Their purpose in life was to discover how this magic could be made to help them as individuals, as families, and as races, the individual seeking his gain through the unity of the whole universe.

There comes a time when only Yin can go farther, when the guards, the *brujo*, and you had to sit down and rest. Somewhere eels were hunting you. You could not see or hear them, you had no idea how far away they were. "In the end, we're all worm food," you think. Eels are only big underwater worms. If the big worms don't get you, the little worms will!

You know that this thinking is not only evidence that you are near death but in itself will bring death closer. A man can think himself to death!

As you think such thoughts, you hastily move away into your second body and soar away into the past of the people who once lived and died here in this Sacred Mountain. This place goes back to the days of Atlantis. And even earlier! A few traces of Atlantis can be found on earth, the great stone causeway near Bimini, the huge stone cities lost in the Amazon jungles, the large stone balls found in the Caribbean islands! Little enough evidence to prove the existence of a great empire that once stretched through a chain of islands across the Atlantic Ocean. What will be left of Los Angeles after fifty thousand years have passed over it? Perhaps a trace of the freeways, perhaps a few stones still fitted together along what was once Wilshire Boulevard. What will be left of San Diego, of Chicago, of Detroit, of New York? Will an archeologist be able to find any traces of London and Tokyo fifty thousand years from now? You think not. But here in this great mountain traces of Atlantis have survived. And of still older civilizations!

Ranging through space and time in your second body, you see the civilizations come and go, you see vast battles fought on the plains outside this mountain, battles fought between land troops armed with weapons that seem to discharge compressed air, also between vast armadas of high-flying ships. You also see land changes around this mountain, you see

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solid ground move in waves like the ocean when earthquakes come, the mountain itself rising and falling but always remaining intact. You see it battered by tidal waves that sweep in from oceans in turmoil. Always the mountain remains.

You wonder, how much longer before you can stay permanently in your second body? You like this body? No hunger, no pain, no sorrow. Say goodbye to Mother Earth! You were a lot of fun at times, but you were also a lot of pain. A curious place where no one ever solved all of your mysteries—mother of mystery, this was the planet! Not the least of your mysteries was this creature called *man*! Did you originate here on this planet, or were you seeded here from other planets now lost in space?

In your second body, you can solve these problems! At this thought, hope leaps in you. Hope—you are back in your first body! You do not know how or why this happens. All you know is that hope pulled you back into the physical structure that men call Dr. Roger Jesmer. You open utterly tired eyes and look at the tunnel around you.

The *brujo* has moved and is now sitting cross-legged in the center of the tunnel. Before him, mounted on a rock, is a piece of candle perhaps an inch long. Throwing a wavering flame upward, the dim light is reflected from the bronze hawk-like face of the *brujo* and from Yin's face. Yin is sitting cross-legged exactly opposite the old medicine man.

In front of the candle on Yin's side is a small porcelain teacup filled with water. You have no idea where this came from but you suspect it came out of Don Leon's satchel. Directly in front of the candle on Don Leon's side is an object you know came from his satchel—a small black stone.

This is the stone the *brujo* showed you back at your cabin. It is one of the objects which the Spanish friars called the *seven tickets to hell*. Found by a little Indian girl named Yin, this stone made her into an angel and an object of worship by her followers. What could be bad about this stone? From what you have seen of Yin and her guard, they are fine people. However, this is only one of seven stones. Perhaps when used with the other six stones, the results may not be so beneficent. A human has in him the potentials of six devils and one angel. Perhaps without the angel stone, the other six stones produced devils?

Do you believe this is true? Your conscious mind wants to shout "No!" but other levels of your mind remind you how little you know about the world in which you live. Perhaps these stones open a door into a land where devils dwell.

Softly, the *brujo* begins to chant.

At the sound, you remember eels! What if they hear this chant?

You try to move but find you cannot. Either you are too weak or the chant has entranced you.

You hope it is the former.

Sitting opposite each other on opposite sides of the candle, Yin's guard does not move. Nor does Yin. She stares at the candle. The chant lifts up, then dies down, then up, then down, in a soothing lullaby that has overtones of suggested sleep in it. As you wonder what purpose is served here, Yin's head begins to droop.

Suddenly you remember the flower-clad maidens who were flung into the sacrificial pool in that time called *long ago*. You do not know why this memory comes to the surface of your mind, but you suspect some association based on similarity has pulled it surfaceward. You do not like this memory. You like it even less when you notice that in front of Yin is a cup of water. In the world of magic and in the associations of the human mind like calls to like, always.

The chant grows louder, then softens, rising, falling, rising again, falling again. You do not know the language the *brujo* is using. It has in it the sing-song quality of ancient Chinese, in which the meaning of a word is dependent on the tone in which it is spoken. The chant is a prayer, for help.

The *brujo* is trying to make contact with *something*, what, you do not know, perhaps he does not know either, but you sense he is trying to reach an ancient god or an ancient source of power. The ingredients of his prayer or of his magic are a chant, a child, and a small black stone.

You are aware of a sudden tension in the air. Energy is present. It seems to have come out of nowhere. The eyes have not detected its coming, the ears have not heard it but you are aware that it is present. It is intelligent energy. It is listening energy. It understands, it comprehends. Has it come in response to the love flowing through the stone, like calling to like?

Slowly, Yin begins to move. Her hands come together, they lift in a diving motion—and you have the startling impression she is going to dive into the cup of water!

Yin is echoing the leap of the flower maidens but she is doing it of her own choice.

As she brings her hands together and puts them into the diving position, the chant ends. The tunnel is suddenly very silent. Too silent. It is the kind of silence in which you can imagine eels talking to each other, telling each other which ramp to use and which turn to take and how far they have to writhe to find food.

As you watch Yin, the intelligent energy also watching and listening, you have the impression that you see a miniature doll leap out from her and dive smoothly into the cup of water. The effect is so perfect that you hastily look at the child to make certain she is still sitting where she was before. Head erect, her hands in a diving position, she has not moved. You realize that this scene is symbolic. Horror rises in you as you again remember the flower-clad maidens being flung into the pool. In miniature, what is happening here is identical in symbolic content.

As the old-time priests flung their flower maidens to probable death in a sacrificial pool, so the *brujo* has sent this child, in symbol, to reach the gods, to summon the intelligent energy, to bring it to help. Like the old-time priests, he is using water as his highway to the land of the gods!

Water! The road to the gods! Still surviving in the Western world in the ritual of baptism! How old is the ritual of baptism? You do not know, you do not dare to guess. It is so old it turns up in the dreams of sleeping men as crossing a river or as diving into a lake or as walking on waters.

What will happen here? You can feel your eyes trying to bulge from your forehead as you try to see—*something!* Your biggest wish is that you could see this from the viewpoint of your second body, and remaining in it forever, to solve such mysteries as are taking place in front of your physical eyes. However, you suspect that if you could look from the eyes of your second body, you would only see other mysteries, more difficult to solve than this one, mystery after puzzle after enigma, each one more bewildering than the last. Mysteries are before your eyes now. As the chant lifts and falls,

Yin's clothing of soft deerskin seems to give way to flower garments. This is hallucination, you decide, but the hallucination makes you wonder if in some past time she actually was a flower maiden who was thrown to her death in the black waters of the sacrificial pool!

You do not know the answer to this enigma. Yin is staring now with horrible fascination at the cup of water in front of the wavering candle flame. Soft little cries are coming from her throat, sounds that resemble in miniature the death screams of a flower maiden heard across infinities of time. The screams end in a gurgle that is so realistic it sends shudders through your body. A flower maiden drowning in the black water of the sacrificial pool might have sounded like this as she struggled to talk to some god that she had found in some other dimension, in some different time.

Then something happens. Again you sense a presence here in this tunnel where water drips from a rocky roof and drains off in little rills toward some distant pool—and had dripped and drained for centuries beyond the counting. The presence here is not a physical thing. It is here as a feeling that is riding on the intelligent energy you sensed earlier. The eyes do not see it, the ears do not hear it, but the emotions feel it. The emotions trust it. Somehow it is one with the emotions, it comes out of their invisible realm, it belongs to them, they belong to it.

The chant stops. The *brujo*, Yin, and her guards have all sensed this presence. Recognizing that a being great enough to be called a god is here, they have lowered their heads to the floor in total submission.

Whatever this presence is, they know it is here. Their actions indicate that they regard it as having enormous power, perhaps power as great as St. Paul had in mind when he talked about "powers, principalities, and dominions." A creature from another universe, from another time-space continuum, from another world, akin to ghosts, to specters, to haunts, to creatures that walk in darkness and go bump in the night, pulled here by the love from a little black stone flowing through a child.

Men have always believed in the existence of these superior beings. As a scientist, you have scoffed at such beliefs.

Because they could not be demonstrated in a laboratory, you have denied their existence.

Is a nonexistent creature now coming in from chaos and dark night to face you with the fact of its existence? If not, then why is your flesh crawling and your stomach knotting itself into lumps and your heart picking up this wild flutter?

You cannot see the thing that you know is present. Your emotional reactions tell you that it is here. Your impulse is to leap to your feet and run. You throttle this impulse. To run is to leave this little group. It is also to face the fact of huge eels called *antbs*. You cannot demonstrate these eels in your laboratory, either, but you know damned well that they exist! Besides, you do not have the strength to run very far.

The truth, and you recognize it, is that you are paralyzed and could not run if you tried. Your muscles will not respond to your will, your legs will not lift your body. All you can do is sit and stare from bulging eyeballs as an impossible creature from an incredible world tries to appear before you.

Something is here, something that was summoned by the brujo's chanted prayer, by Yin's symbolical diving into a cup of water, and by the energy flowing through a little black stone. You sense it, you feel it, you can almost hear it. You sense that it is good, that it means you no harm, and that definitely it means Yin good.

You do not know what form its good may take. This may be totally different from any meaning you have for the word *good*. You sense it intends to protect her, to save her from all harm, *in its own way*. Your flesh crawls as you try to think what its way may be.

Behind the *brujo*, you see a shadow moving.

As the shadow appears, the presence recoils. There is a brief, silent fight. The presence is gone. The shadow remains.

Leaning over the body of the *brujo*, the shadow lifts from in front of the candle the little stone of Tardu. You hear an exclamation of triumph.

Now you recognize this shadow. It is the same shadow that came walking through the chaparral toward your cabin, the shadow from which you, the *brujo*, and Yin fled, the shadow which launched a lightning bolt at your plane when the ship was in the air.

It wanted the stone then. Now it has it.

Rising, Yin's guard launches themselves at this shadow. It lifts a quick hand. Paralyzed, the guard goes down. A second one leaps, then a third. The shadow deals with them. The guards are not dead, just temporarily paralyzed.

The air is cold.

The *brujo* does not move. Neither does Yin. Nor do you.

In the silence there are three sounds. One is the chuckle of the shadow as it grasps the stone of Tardu, the second is that of many voices blended in a chant, the third is the twittering of bats.

The shadow also hears the sound of bats. Lifting its hand, it points in the direction in which the bats are squeaking. Something flashes down the tunnel from the hand.

The bats are silent.

But they are silent only for an instant. Almost immediately the twittering comes again. It is louder now. And angrier.

The shadow grunts an order in a language you do not understand. The *brujo* rises. Yin gets to her feet. The shadow speaks in a harsh tone of voice to Yin's guard. Like hypnotized men, they rise to their feet to trudge slowly down the tunnel in the direction away from the sound of bats twittering.

The shadow gestures at the *brujo*. The medicine man follows the men. It looks at Yin. Like a tired, worn elf, like a small goddess who has lost all her power, she follows the *brujo*. The shadow has not seen you. You keep very quiet.

On the imitation altar, the candle remains burning. The cup of water remains as a symbol out of a lost time of man's ancient history.

The shadow lifts a foot and brings it down. The candle goes out. It is snuffed out like the life of the flower maidens who tried to find the gods in the dark pool in this mountain. The water spurting in various directions, the cup breaks into fragments.

You know now that the shadow is only a shield covering a man. The shadow is a guard set here in this tunnel.

Still without seeing you, the shadow follows Yin, her guards, and the *brujo*. The little procession moves in the direction of the distant chanting.



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Instantly you get to your feet and go in the other direction.

A twittering sound, similar to that made by bats awakening, stops you in your tracks.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Your name is Ben Harkle but as the shadow following the file of robot soldiers turns toward you and harshly demands to know who you are and what you are doing here, you have no time to remember that you even have a name. The robot soldiers may be armed with inferior weapons, but they have the supreme weapon: an immunity to death. You saw one blown to bits with a hand grenade. You saw the bits struggle to come together again to function as a soldier of Kum Rath.

You have the impression that the shadow thinks you are one of his kind, one invisible man looking very much like another, and that his concern is that you are supposed to be somewhere else.

Mona answers him. Surprised, he turns toward her. He had not noticed her. If you had answered him, and he had not liked your answer, he would have had his robot soldiers destroy you.

But Mona is different. He knows her, she has a right to be here. She has something else—authority. Hastily this shadow bows to her, muttering words that you do not understand but which sound apologetic. They talk. The file of robot soldiers mark time as they wait, their sandal-clad feet clumping on the stone floor. The drum is silent.

Up ahead is Slats Slattery. What is happening back there you do not know but Slattery will rally his own nervous system, and his own men and will attack again. Like any good general, Slattery is certain to have reserves waiting somewhere. He will make desperate efforts to conquer and control this source of heroin. To the Mafia, heroin is the financial blood of life. Slattery and other Mafia leaders associated with him in other Families will go to any length to

control a heroin supply. Enough heroin is being cooked here to supply the whole United States, perhaps enough to supply foreign markets as well. To them a source of heroin in the high mountains of Mexico, with the deadly drug flown over the border at night and dropped off at various designated points, a new drop-off point being established for each trip, is worth a fortune. This is a system that can't miss. Every gang in the USA will be glad to help secure it.

Mona and the shadow finish talking. The shadow grunts at you. Coming through the screen surrounding his body and the screen surrounding your body, his voice is like the far-off grating of gears in an automobile on a cold night. The sound grates on your ears but you have no idea what was said to you or how to answer it. Answering for you, Mona saves you again. The shadow turns his attention to the file of robot soldiers marking time. They step out promptly. No order was given for them to move but perhaps the order was given mentally. You saw this done in Tijuana and you know it can be done.

As the file of soldiers moves away, you and Mona go in the other direction, fast!

As you move away, you hear the rattle of automatic weapons begin behind you. The file of warriors has found Slats and his men. The thump of grenades tells you that the robot fighters have moved to close quarters. How can even robot soldiers stand up against the blasting explosions of grenades? The answer is, they can't, but even if they are wounded to death, the robot warriors will continue trying to destroy Slattery and his men. The robot soldiers are more numerous than Slats' men. In addition, Kum Rath is certain to have reserves.

Mona releases the invisibility on both of you. "To maintain for two people is very exhausting," she explains.

You move hastily, through endless tunnels, up ramps, up more ramps, you pass very quickly the huge chamber where incense rises and men chant endlessly to a picture of a god with horns made in the form of a huge stone statue. Apparently not even an attack on the mountain can be allowed to disturb this ritual.

If Slattery wins, it will be disturbed!

Mona is moving rapidly. The sound of firearms and the thump of grenades dies in the distance, lost now in the endless tunnels. You note that the tunnel you are in seems familiar. With this you remember you are back at the door of the room where you were first held prisoner, where the window looks out on lower slopes bright with the colors of growing poppies.

Mona opens the door. You start to enter, then try to back out.

Kum Rath is standing there. Behind him are Carlos, Felix, and Ecro.

The face of the high priest is murderous.

Mona shoves you into the room, steps around you, and kneels before Kum Rath. She points up at you. Her words are without meaning to you but when she points at your pocket, you understand that she is telling Kum Rath that you have the stone of Tardu.

Kum Rath motions to Carlos and Felix. They move around him and toward you.

You reach into your pocket, hastily, and find the stone of Tardu. As you close your fingers around it, the energy sweeps up your arm. Like a tidal wave it flows into your body. You take your right hand out of your pocket and hold the stone in your fist.

Carlos reaches for you with an arm as long as that of a gorilla. He shows no sign of the bullet damage he suffered in Tijuana. On his face is a grin. You are a gringo, an enemy from the north. Nothing good has ever come from the north.

As his long arm reaches for you, you step to one side. That this step takes you closer to Felix is an error you will have to correct later. Stepping inside the reach of Carlos' long arm, you hit him on the chin with your left fist.

Your first impression is that Carlos' head simply vanishes. Your second impression is that you have knocked his head from his shoulders. Then you realize that your strength is now so great that you have simply knocked Carlos backward and over Mona and that he in turn had knocked her flat on her face. You feel that this is exactly what the treacherous witch deserves. Going over her, Carlos stumbles against Kum Rath. The high priest goes to the floor.

There is power in this little black stone of Tardu! With it in your glove, you could become heavyweight champion of the world, wiping out all opponents with one blow.

You have no time to waste feeling good about your new strength. Felix has dived at you and has grabbed you about the middle with both hands, locking his hands tight behind your back.

With your left hand, you strike down at him in a chop aimed at the back of his neck. The chop lands. You hear Felix's neck bones crack and you know his neck is broken. What you do not know is how long his neck will remain broken! His arms sag and he slides down you to the floor.

You intend to turn and run. Even with the strength given you by the power stone of Tardu, there is no percentage in fighting as a loner against this crew.

As you turn toward the door, Carlos grabs you by the leg. You fall flat on your face. The whole bunch jumps you.

Your first impression is that a mountain has fallen on top of you. Carlos has you by the right leg, Felix has you by the left leg. Somebody, you think it is Ecro, is lying directly across your chest and is grabbing for your throat. Somebody, you think it is Kum Rath, is kicking at your head.

If you ever needed the strength of Samson, you need it now. And you have it. At the desire for it, energy leaps from the stone and into your body, a tidal wave of it, more strength than you ever knew existed, energy that your mind can direct and which your muscles will obey, instant strength, tremendous strength. All the tales of magic energy which the human race has treasured through countless centuries have come from folk memories of the power stone of Tardu! Once the source of strength was real, then it passed into hiding when the then-existing human race was hit by catastrophe and went into hiding too as it tried to find protection from flood and comet fire rained down from heaven. During the dark night that had followed, the memory had remained hidden in some dark cranny of the human mind, perhaps lurking in the mysterious real that Jung called the "collective unconscious" and which others have called "reincarnation."

You kick the man off your left leg. He screams as your heel hits his stomach. The man on your right leg makes

grumpy grumbling sounds as your heel hits his chin. Ecco you pick up in one hand and literally throw across the room. You get to your feet.

Kum Rath is the boss here, Kum Rath is the man who was kicking you in the head, Kum Rath is the man you want. Left hand outstretched to grab him by the throat, you launch yourself at Kum Rath. You cannot open your right hand, you are clutching the little black stone in it.

A look of utter surprise crosses Kum Rath's grim, copper-colored face as you reach him. Up until this moment, the high priest had thought he was invulnerable to attack. He dodges to one side, you miss his throat, you ball your left fist and send it home on the side of his jaw. His copper-colored face seems to dissolve in smoke as you hit him. Hitting the wall, he slides down it. Your thought is that you have killed him. For you, for millions of heroin addicts, this is good news.

However, Carlos is on his feet again, Felix is getting to his feet, and Ecco is struggling to stand erect. Mona is leaning against the wall and is saying, "No! No! No!" endlessly, like a stuck phonograph record. You do not know what she is saying "No!" to but you have some things in mind to say to her, the treacherous witch!

Carlos rushes you and gets knocked into the middle of next week. Felix comes at you from behind, Ecco from the side. You hit Felix first, one blow is enough, and Ecco second, one blow being enough for him too. Against the wall, Kum Rath has not been able to get to his feet.

Exultation such as you have never known sweeps through you. You feel like strutting, you feel like pounding on your chest and uttering a savage yell like Tarzan, you feel like you are king of the hill.

Against the wall Mona is still muttering "No! No! No!" and is shaking her head. Fear to the point of terror is on her face. Now she changed her tune.

"Please drop the stone—please drop the stone—please drop the stone—"

Despair is mixed with the terror on her face.

"Drop this stone?" You hold up your right hand with the little stone clutched in your fist. "Never!"

In this stone is strength. And this broad is telling you to

drop it. "I trusted you. When we came in here, you told Kum Rath I had the stone. That was the double-cross!"

"He already knew you had it!" Her voice has a wail in it. "He would have killed you to get it. And me too, if I hadn't told him. I told him you were ready to give it to him. That's the only reason you lived long enough to touch it! Please believe me!"

You stare at her. On the fringes of your mind something is happening but it is so far away you do not pay any attention to it. To linger here is certain, sudden death. Around you are men who will kill you instantly once they recover enough from your blows to realize what is happening. Seconds count. You look at Mona. Her face is tight with pain and her lips are moving in silent appeal. You turn toward the door and take one step. The floor jumps out from under your feet!

This is your impression. You cannot understand how solid stone can jump out from under your feet but you have the impression that this has taken place. You grab hastily at the floor to keep from falling—and hit it with your chin.

As you sit up and try to understand what has happened, something that has been on the fringes of your mind comes sweeping through you in the wildest pulsation you have ever encountered. Your body begins to shake, your legs shake, your hands shake.

The little black stone is shaken loose from your right hand. Tinkling across the floor it ends up against the wall. Mona starts toward it, but Kum Rath shoves her to one side, sending her sprawling toward you.

Kum Rath does not touch the little black stone with his fingers. From a bag dangling from his shoulders he jerks a pair of wooden tongs. With these he carefully picks up the stone. The bag yields a piece of cloth. Wrapping the stone in the cloth, he puts it into the bag.

Then he yells, a scream of pure triumph, of savage exultation. The scream says that after years of struggle he has achieved some goal.

You hardly hear the yell. Now every muscle in your body is shaking, jerking, twisting, going instantly from complete flaccidity to full spasm. The pain is so intense that you think every muscle is being pulled loose from its anchor point on



bone. You have never felt such pain as this. It seems as if every muscle is being stretched far beyond its limit and is screaming in protest at this treatment. Blackness is coming into your mind. Back of the blackness is a feeling of utter weakness, of complete desolation, of absolute loneliness. You are certain you do not have the strength to rise to your feet again, that your muscles cannot lift your body and never will be able to do so. Your heart is racing out of control as it tries to move suddenly old tired blood through sagging arteries and painful veins.

Trying to rise to a sitting position, you find you cannot make it. You let your head sag back. To your surprise you find that your head lands in Mona's lap.

"Do not try to move," she whispers. "Do not even try to think. Just lie still and breathe slowly. Slowly now, slowly. Do not hurry. You are very near to death!"

"What happened?"

"Shhh! I told you not to talk!"

"But—"

"Breathe. The power stone gave you great strength but the strength was bought at a price of complete exhaustion. Breathe now. Your strength will come back."

"If I live—"

"Yes."

You let yourself relax and breathe. There is nothing else you can do. There is sense somewhere in what Mona said. Everything in the universe has its opposite. The opposite of strength is weakness. The energy of the little stone forced your muscles to use up their stores of strength with the result that the muscles have now lost the ability to act at all.

You lie in her lap. It is comfortable here. Strength is coming back, though slowly and with reluctance. You know she is giving strength to you.

In the distance, becoming louder, you hear the roar of motors. Kum Rath moves to the window, then looks back at you and shouts a question. Mona shakes her head indicating you do not have the strength to move. Kum Rath speaks to Carlos and Felix. They pick you up, one on each side of you, and carry you to the window. The roar of motors is louder now.

Another VTOL is dropping slowly down into the valley

between the mountains. Inside the ship, you can see men staring out.

You know instantly that these are Slattery's reserves. High in the sky you can see another VTOL circling as it waits for a landing.

"How many ships, how many men?" Kum Rath growls at you.

You whisper to him that you do not know. Scowling at you, he speaks to Carlos and Felix. They release you. You fall like a sack of potatoes. You cannot rise. When Carlos kicks you—and his kick makes you realize how well he remembers the feel of your fist on his chin—you still cannot move. Now Felix begins to kick you on the other side.

You have seen the bodies of men who have been literally kicked to death by Mafia killers.

The Mafia could not teach this bunch anything!

You hear Mona begging them to stop.

Then you do not hear anything.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Your name is Roger Jesmer, you dimly remember, and you are following a shadow down a dimly-illuminated tunnel, said shadow being so pleased at gaining possession of the little black stone of Tardu that once belonged to an Indian child named Yin that it did not notice you crouched against the wall of the tunnel.

Ahead of you is the sound of chanting, now rising in volume, now dropping so low it is inaudible.

Behind you, also now audible, now inaudible, bats are squeaking.

Ahead of you the shadow is herding Yin, the *brujo*, and Yin's guards as if they were cattle going to the slaughter pens. The shadow seems very pleased with itself. You do not understand why unless it is because he has the little black stone that Yin found somewhere in this underground maze of tunnels.

Why does the shadow want this stone? It creates a flow of love in the mind and heart of the person who touches it. What does the shadow know of love?

As this question crosses your mind, you realize that you are thinking as if the shadow is really a screen of some kind around a man. If this is true—You look down. Here and there on the floor of the tunnel are rocks, some as big as pebbles, some as big as footballs.

You do not think about what you are going to do. You do it. Reaching down, you pick up a rock as big as a football and hit the shadow on the head with it.

Light flares as bright as the sun, light that is extremely painful to eyes so long accustomed to semi-darkness as yours are. The shadow staggers. Certain now that it is a man, you

leap at him. Light leaps from the shadow to you. You fall. Slowly you rise to your feet. Your first thought is that the shadow is going to kill you. However, he gestures for you to get in line with your group. You do this. You are alive.

Not that being alive is an advantage. Instead, it is a liability, a tragedy, a horror to be endured. If only you could escape into your second body and go somewhere else and stay there!

You dismiss this thought as wishful thinking. At death, you will move into your second body. You hope!

Ahead of you the chant grows louder. Now you catch the tang of incense, though you hardly notice this. You are listening to the shadow clumping angrily along behind you. If he is hot, you can't blame him for it. You hit him on the head with a rock as big as a football. Obviously, he is a guard set on watch here in this tunnel.

Behind you, bats are squeaking. Hearing them, the shadow fires another blast of fire along the tunnel. The bats stop squeaking.

You reach the end of the tunnel. Ahead of you is a huge hall. Guards are looking at you there. The shadow calls out to them and they step aside to let you enter. Amazed at what you see, you stop.

You are in a huge, oval-shaped hall so big you could get two football fields into it. Set back against the far wall is a huge statue which you instantly recognize as another variant of the ancient symbol known around the globe, the horned god. You can see a big altar in front of the statue. Clouds of incense drift slowly to a vent somewhere in the ceiling far overhead. The chanters are seated in concentric semi-circles around the huge idol with aisles leading from the entry tunnels up to the altar.

You wonder how long this chant has been in progress, the chanters working in relays. Days, weeks? Centuries, perhaps! If you should discover that the latter figure is the true one, you would not be surprised. How long did the vestal virgins tend the sacred fires in ancient Rome? So long, perhaps, have these chanters been praying here. What are they praying for? You do not know. Do they think that the huge statue in front of the hall is a god who can grant their prayers? As a

scientist, you regard such prayers as nonsense. As a human being, you suspect that more is in operation here than any scientist knows exists. Here worlds are piled on top of worlds which are on top of still other worlds.

Around the altar a group of men stand guard. They are armed with short swords and oval shields, weapons out of some remote past brought forward into the present. These people have more powerful weapons than swords, spears, bows, and arrows but they use these weapons as links with an ancient past.

The shadow who found you in the tunnel is a shadow no longer. As he steps forward, he becomes a short, powerful, copper-skinned man. He moves quickly toward the altar. A guard in a plumed helmet steps forward to meet him, sword ready. The man who was once a shadow calls out. The sword point is dropped. The ex-shadow opens a pouch at his waist, takes something from it. A dazed expression on his face, Plumed Helmet backs away.

"The stone of Tardu," the *brujo* whispers beside you. You glance at him. He is suddenly old. Now he moves to squat against the wall. Yin moves between his legs. Her guards squat beside the *brujo*. Listless, now, all of them, except Yin. The stone that made her a goddess may be gone but she is still alive and alert.

"It is my stone the copper man is showing," she says.

Great excitement erupts in the group around the altar. Even the chanters are infected by it and the chant falters as they wonder what is happening. Plumed Helmet shouts at them and the chant picks up again, quicker now, stronger. The chanters sense that perhaps their prayers have been answered!

Plumed Helmet sends a runner to report the good news to someone.

The tunnel out of which you came is guarded but now the guards seem to be less interested in what is happening at the altar than they are in sounds coming from the tunnel. You see them listening. Are bat squeaking eels back there somewhere?

You don't much care. To be swallowed by a giant eel may not be the best way to die but at least it will be quick!

The runner returns. Following him is another priest. Wounded men limp behind this second priest. Plumed Helmet prostrates himself before this second priest.

"Kum Rath," the *brujo* says. "They have found the stone of power." Rising to his feet, the *brujo* stares at the group around the altar. From the tunnel mouth, a guard threatens the *brujo* with a spear. Hastily he sinks back to a sitting posture.

"I don't understand," you say to him.

Out of the corners of his eyes, the *brujo* watches the guard with the spear. He speaks in whispers, partly in broken English, partly in Spanish, partly in the tongue of his own people. You are not sure you understand a fourth of it but the glimpse of past ages he gives you in a few broken words lifts you.

"The god people . . . here long ago . . . Before the moon was, the god people were . . . God king sat in circle of stones of Tardu on top of altar. The god in the statue heard his prayers . . . gave orders . . . world obeyed. . . ."

So much you understand out of the *brujo's* whispered words. In them you get a glimpse of a part of the long, long history of a place called Planet Earth, of one of the races that once lived on this planet, and of the scientific achievements of this race. Excitement rises in you.

"What do you mean *world obeyed*?"

"Just that," the *brujo* answers. "God king sat in circle of magic stones on top of altar. Sitting in this way, he spoke through the god in the statue. Everybody everywhere heard his voice speak. Obeyed—or *whap!*" To illustrate his meaning, Don Leon hits himself on the jaw with his fist, then bats his eyes at the effect of the blow. "Since I was a little boy, I have searched for this place."

"Why? What did you want that is here?"

"I wanted to learn how to be one of the god people," the *brujo* slowly answers. "Wanted new lands for my people." His voice falters and he shakes his head. "When I was young I had great dreams. Now the dreams no longer come. . . ." Sadness deep enough to engulf the world seems to settle on him. "Now my people do not wish to search for the gods. All they want to do is to suck the juice of the poppy and let their lives waste away."

"Not all people, Grandpa," Yin says vigorously. "I love the gods." She tries to comfort the old man. A fondness comes over his face as he looks at her. "I wonder who and what you are?" he muses. "Are you one of the old-time goddesses come back to live among us to show us how to make our lives better?"

You do not know what to make of this talk and of this kind of a belief system. In the long history of the planet, men have believed everything. Often the wise men have been greatly embarrassed to discover they had been teaching half-truths, distorted truths, and simple lies. If anyone had told you as true what you have seen within this mountain with your own eyes, you would have called him a liar.

Far away comes a blast of gunfire. You look at the *brujo*.

"Red Beard is dead," he says, and you nod agreement. "What other gringos have come into our mountain?"

You shrug.

In the front end of the vast hall, directly around the altar, there is a flurry of activity. From some storage place men are bringing costumes.

"They are dressing themselves to go to the gods," the *brujo* says. "Now that all the stones of Tardu are back in place, the god will hear them, the legends say."

"Then what will happen?"

The *brujo* shrugs. "No man can say what the gods will do."

From the distance, still far away, comes another burst of gunfire. At this sound, the activity around the altar increases. The chanting picks up, and moving faster, comes in on a quicker beat.

Watching all of this, you are aware that you are also hearing, closer now, the twittering of bats. Much twittering. Many bats.

Now that there is so little of it left, life in a physical body is suddenly very precious to you.





## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"Drink this," a woman is saying. "Open your mouth and drink this. It will make you feel better. Please, Ben."

As a mother talks to a hurt, stubborn child, this woman is talking to you. Whoever this woman is, you have no intention of opening your mouth. When you were a very small boy, and very sick, your mother asked you to open your mouth. Trustingly, you did as she asked. She thrust a spoonful of a horrible greasy stuff called castor oil into your mouth. Much of the sticky stuff ran down your cheeks but enough of it got into your mouth for you to get a good taste of it. Since then you have been reluctant to open your mouth for any woman trying to get you to drink something that she claims will make you feel better.

Muttering "Go away!" you close your mouth firmly. You are not at all certain you are not back in the bathroom of long ago and that your mother is not trying to get a dose of castor oil down your throat. There is pain in your body with every muscle hurting. There is pain in your head and your ribs hurt. Have you been kicked in the head and in the ribs?

"Please open your mouth, Ben," the woman says. "Drink this! I don't have time to beg you. I have to go to the temple."

You wonder where she is going. Not that it matters much. At this moment in your mind all broads have come from hell and are going back there, soon. The sooner the better.

"At any minute, Ecro will be coming to take you to the robot room," the woman says. "Open your mouth, you idiot, and drink his. No matter what you think of me, I'm better than Ecro."

You think about this. You are very weak and thinking about the meaning of her words causes pain in your head.

"You have to get your strength back!" the woman says, desperation in her voice. "You held the power stone too long and it left you exhausted. The stones of Tardu are for the gods to use, not for men. Drink this! It will give you strength." Again she holds the container to your lips.

This time, just to show her you're not stubborn, you open your mouth and drink. "You!" This stuff tastes worse than castor oil! You try to spit it out but she holds your mouth shut. "Swallow it, Ben, please! It's your only chance to stay alive!"

With your mouth held shut and with very little strength in your muscles, you have no choice except to swallow. The stuff tastes like liquid fire going down your throat. When it reaches your stomach, the fire becomes a blaze. The blaze in turn seems to be transmitted immediately to your bloodstream. It passes through your arteries as a surging tidal wave moving with the beat of your heart. There is strength in this liquid. Whatever part of your body it reaches, strength begins to appear there, the muscle cells grabbing greedily for it. You realize now you are holding your eyes shut. You open them and stare at Mona. You are sitting down. She is sitting beside you. You wipe your mouth.

"That stuff tastes like hell! What happened? Where am I?"

"Carlos and Felix were kicking you. They intended to kill you! The great ship came outside. While they were watching the ship, I picked you up and ran away with you."

"Thanks." Your mouth is oily, and you feel oily inside. "Thanks for nothing. You had just betrayed me to Kum Rath."

"I had to do that. Kum Rath knew you had the stone of power. He also knew I knew it. Unless I told him what he already knew, he would have had you killed."

Her face is a mask twisted by horror. "If he did not kill you, he would have sent you to the robot rooms, to be made into a robot soldier. This is what he will do with you now, if he remembers about you and can catch you. Right now—" The rattle of gunfire comes from the distance. "Right now he has much else to think about."

"Such as Slattery."

"Yes. And much else."

Enough strength has come back into your body to make you think you can get to your feet. Mona watching anxiously, you try rising—and fall flat on your face. Anxiously inquiring if you are all right, Mona helps you to rise. By leaning against the wall, you manage to stand erect. You ask where you are. "In my rooms," Mona tells you. "I brought you here because they will think last of looking for you here. If they find you here, they will kill us both."

"Me, yes, but why you? For hiding me?"

"No." Her copper skin shows signs of a blush. "Because I am a temple virgin and as such am not allowed to be with men."

The tradition of women vowed to remain virgins in the service of the temple is as old as the human race, you know. This is the first time you have realized that Mona might be in such a category. Your first thought is that you don't like the idea. Your second thought is that you don't see what you can do about it. Before you can do anything about it, you will have to get her out of here. And you with her.

In the distance a drum beat begins to sound. Mona rises quickly. "I must go to the temple. The ritual of power is beginning. I must take part in it."

She moves to the door. "Wait here. In this place you will be safe. When I return—" She smiles at you. "We will leave this mountain and we will flee far away, to your country, perhaps." Longing is in her smile.

"There is nothing I would like better than to take you to my land," you answer fervidly.

You want to hug her, to kiss her, but she will have none of this. You want to forbid her to leave. She will have none of this either. You want to know the nature of this ceremony of power which she must attend.

"From you, Kum Rath got the stone of power," she explains. "From some other source, they obtained the one missing stone, the stone of love. The other stones they already have." Her dark eyes are filled with worry and foreboding. "Now that all the stones are together again, Kum Rath will go through the ancient ritual which will make him into a god."

"Do you really believe that?"

"No-o. I do not know what I believe. I never saw it happen, but the old legends tell about it. I must go now. You wait here until I return."

She leaves the door open. You watch her move along a tunnel until she is out of sight, then you follow her. Coming to an intersecting tunnel, you do not know which way she went. From the tunnel on your right comes the faint sound of gunfire. This tells you what is in that direction. You turn to the left. Far in the distance is a sound like the twittering of hungry bats in flight in the dusk.

What this sound means you do not know and you do not wish to find out. As you hesitate from the tunnel directly ahead comes the sound of a drum plus the murmur of chanting. This sound tells you the direction in which Mona went. Crossing the intersecting tunnel, you follow her. Or you hope you are following her!

You catch a glimpse of her ahead of you. As she enters the great hall that she calls the temple, guards spring up to stop her, then recognizing her, give her an escort. This leaves the mouth of the tunnel unguarded. You go through it and are in the great hall of the horned god that you saw before.

The first time you saw this vast chamber was from an opening in the wall high above. Now you see it from the ground floor. From this level, you get a good grasp of its size. "The work of giants!" you think. How was this huge hall cut here in this mountain, how were these tunnels dug? You do not know, but you have read of other huge works done in stone by the men of old, Stonehenge, the gates of the sun at Tihuanaco, the vast columns of Baalbek, the pyramids around the whole world, the giants of Easter Island, all vast stone constructions done in the past of Planet Earth. If other men could build such vast structures as are known to exist, men could have quarried out this gigantic hall, could have erected the squat stone block which serves as an altar, and could have fashioned and put into place the huge stone statue of a god with horns.

A god with horns, known as the god of the witches, was worshiped all over Europe in past ages. The statue is evidence that the same beliefs had once existed here.

The chant is almost deafening now that you are inside the temple. The great drum is hidden somewhere out of sight

but you can both hear and feel the *thump* of its rhythm. As it beats, it seems to shake your whole body. You sense that your own heart is moving in rhythm with the drum.

In semi-circular rows around the horned god statue, the chanters are sitting. Looking forward and perhaps partly in *trance*, they do not notice you. Around the altar are many men. Approaching them, Mona throws herself on the floor in front of Kum Rath. As she does this, the guards who have formed her escort turn and retrace their steps toward the tunnel where she—and you—had entered.

There are gaps in the rows of chanters. You slip hastily into the nearest gap, pull your legs up under you as best you can, and pretend to take part in the chanting. The chanters on either side seem not to notice you. The tunnel guards return to their place. Mona rises and slips away behind the big altar. On your left, out of the corner of your eyes, you catch a glimpse of a forlorn group huddled against the wall. One is wearing a pair of very dirty slacks and a jacket that looks as if it has been torn by briars. An American! Whatever he is doing here, you wish him luck. He looks as if he is going to need it. In the lap of the man next to the American a child is sitting. A child here? You see no other children. Your strong impression is that this place is for adults only. In a way, this vast temple is a church. Here ancient men tried to relate themselves to—to what? God? Well, to something that they thought had enormous power. If this place is a church, it certainly is not the kind of church that will have a Sunday school for children connected with it. However, there is power here. It reveals itself as a kind of electric tension which makes your skin tingle. Around the head and the shoulders of the chanter directly in front of you a purple glow is dimly visible. As you alternately bow your forehead to the floor, then look up at the face of the huge statue in rhythm with the other chanters, you notice that the same thin purple glow fills the entire hall.

You do not know what this means, or if it means anything. Mona, dressed entirely in flower garments made to resemble flowers, has reappeared around the altar. She, or her garment, or lack of it, commands your attention. Behind her are other women similarly clad.

You do not know what these garments mean, or if they

mean anything, but you see the old American try to start up from the wall in protest. He seems to know what they mean. The guard at the tunnel entrance whams the old man over the head with the butt end of his spear. The old man sinks to the floor.

The old Indian with the child sitting between his knees does not move. The young braves sitting against the wall have faces cast from bronze, but they are not watching what is happening up in front. Their eyes are on the child.

The flower-clad women form a long line on one side of the altar. Now, on the other side, men appear.

"*Thump!*" goes the hidden drum, in a faster beat. In front of the altar the flower-clad women and the flower-clad men meet. As each pair meet, they bow to each other, then to the god behind the altar, then turn and move away from the altar, slipping here into what is suspiciously close to the Yoga lotus posture, then becoming statues facing each other. The next couple goes through the same routine. This continues until there is a line of couples extending out the middle aisle from the altar to the front wall.

Suddenly you realize that all energy is a relationship between the positive and negative poles, that every cell in the human body has a negative and a positive end, and that the relationship between male and female expresses the same thing. You do not doubt that this line of men and women facing each other is doing something to energy—releasing it, transforming it, creating it. What happens when a hydrogen bomb explodes? The energy that has been held apart in the opposite poles rushes together in micro-seconds. The result is devastation.

Something similar may be due to happen here. Perhaps not an explosion but an orderly release of enormous amounts of energy. The old-time scientists who established this routine and built this vast hall and created this huge idol of a god with horns may have known exactly what they were doing!

Around the head and shoulders of the chanters the purple glow becomes a more intense violet. Now little flecks of reddish light begin to appear in it, from the opposite end of the light spectrum, indicating that other polar opposites are

meeting. Rising from each couple sitting opposite each other, the whole hall is filling with this intense purple glow. Like the incense, it seems to rise around the face of the horned god. "Thump—thump—thump!" goes the drum in a faster beat.

In front of the altar feather-clad priests are very busy. You recognize one of them as Kum Rath.

Far in the distance you hear a sound, and it shocks you. That can only be the thump of an exploding grenade.

At the thump of the grenade, the drum misses a beat and the chanters gulp and go off-key. The purple glow that is filling the vast hall falters momentarily. Like miniature fireballs playing at the edge of night, red spots run through the purple glow. You know Slattery and his men will turn this vast hall-temple into a slaughterhouse if they ever get here. You can imagine the effect of hand grenades tossed into the chanters here. Automatic weapons fire will slaughter them to the last person.

At the tunnel exits, the guards are exhibiting signs of increasing nervousness. They have heard the distant thump of grenades and the sounds of automatic weapons. Probably they have never seen a grenade, but they can judge its danger by the sound it makes. You don't know what happened to the file of warriors you saw moving to the hangar where the VTOL craft was housed. Perhaps Slattery's grenades wiped them out. Perhaps back there in the underground hangar fragments of flesh are trying to get together again.

At the front of the hall, Kum Rath was mounted to the altar. He stands alone there, hands upraised, facing the huge statue. Seven times he bows to it, then he steps into the now complete circle of stones of Tardu, called by the Spanish friars who first entered this region the *seven tickets to hell*. To have given them such a name, the padres must have heard of them though they probably did not see them.

Again the drum picks up its beat. Now it is a heart beating very fast. The heart is no longer human. You know this because it is going too fast for a human heart. It is the heart of some super-being whose blood moves at a faster rate than that of a human, who lives in worlds beyond the physical. Listening to the fast drum beat, you have the impression that

your own heart is trying to move into step with it. You have the impression that every heart in the vast hall is being similarly influenced. Back against the wall, you see the old American is sitting up. The child the old Indian has been holding is on her feet, her face alive and alert. Only the men and the women facing each other in the energy couples seem unaffected. They look as if they had forgotten how to breathe. Are their hearts beating so fast that the beats have become nothing but a blur?

Energy is suddenly a living current in the room. The purple glow becomes more solid. The drum is beating faster and the chant is picking up.

Far across the hall, loud enough to be heard above the drum beats and in between the pauses of the chanting, you hear bats squeak. There is hunger in the squeaks and a vast eagerness. A starving creature suddenly seeing vast quantities of food might make a sound like this. A man yells.

You do not rise, you do not dare move. Out of the corners of your eyes you look toward the yell. Then you wish you hadn't looked. Something that looks like a gigantic worm is oozing from a tunnel there. Uttering bat-like squeaks, it is snatching at those nearest to it, grabbing them, tossing them into the air, catching them as they come back down, crunching them between powerful jaws, reaching for another before the first one has vanished fully from sight.

With spears, two guards are fighting this worm. It likes guards as much as it likes chanters. It eats the guards alive.

The chant is breaking now as the chanters are trying to rise. However, they are not succeeding. They are held in their positions by some force they do not understand. You discover the same force is holding you when you try to get to your feet. It is not, you think, that a force is holding you down. The purple glow that fills the hall is paralyzing their muscles.

You know *you* could move, with tremendous effort, but you doubt if the others could. Your guess is that they believe some godforce is holding them in place. With this belief strongly fixed in their minds, few of them can make any effort to move, even to save their own lives.

Their lives are just exactly what is at stake here.



Another worm has wiggled out of the mouth of a tunnel and with happy, bat-like cries, is eating the chanters.

On the altar, Kum Rath has been seated in the center of the circle of stones. Now he lifts himself slowly to his feet, turns, and sees the huge worms. The expression on his face is one of bewildered horror.

The purple glow is strong over the high priest now. He looks like a man who has been painted blue, then daubed with red spots. Were there ever blue men in human history? There certainly were! Your memory seems to have picked up additional energy and is now working with lightning speed. It brings into your mind fragments of some book on ancient history. Blue men once existed in England. There was a time when the rulers of Europe were thought to have blue blood in their veins. Was the blue color now filling this vast hall so strongly that it colors even the copper visage of Kum Rath the source of the legend of the blue men?

No matter now. Kum Rath is blue! Energy is loose in this vast hall. And so is death!

Kum Rath points his hand toward the worm that first entered the temple. In a sizzling stream, living light leaps from his finger. As Mona was able to direct a stream of paralyzing cold from her finger, so Kum Rath is able to send flashing lightning. You can hear the air crackle as it passes. Perhaps this is a kind of laser beam that can be directed by the will through the pointing finger of the directing hand.

Power is in it.

The head of the worm sizzles, turns green, then turns black. The creature rears itself high into the air and tries to strike at the beam of energy that has struck it. The beam holds in focus on it. The worm sizzles heavier. The stink of the creature is suddenly in the air, plus the stink of frying flesh.

You never saw such a sight in your life, you never heard such sounds as the bat-like squeaks from the wounded creature, you never smelled such horrible stinks. You would like to close your eyes but the horror of the scene holds your gaze glued fast to the sight. Your flesh crawls. You are aware of a sickness rising in your stomach.

The worm—you think of this creature as a worm though

## SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL

you know it is not—dies in a blast of sizzling fire and stinks as it perishes. Thrown back against the wall of the temple, it writhes there in undulating convulsions like a huge snake shot through the head, dead, but refusing to die.

The blast of electric fire from Kum Rath shuts off. On the altar the high priest stands like some god out of the old time, all-seeing and all-powerful, with lightning chained in his hands. The drum beat, which had sunk to a whisper, picks up again, shouting now in triumph. The chant rises, saluting a man who has the powers of a god in his hands.

There is a second worm thrusting its hungry head from a tunnel.

Kum Rath turns to it.

The second worm dies as did the first one.

Again the lighting dies from Kum Rath's hand, again the stench floods the room.

For the second time, the high priest is the triumphant god standing on the altar erected to him. Again the drum beat lifts, again the chant rises.

Kum Rath shouts.

Instantly drum and chanting go into silence.

He shouts again, words that you do not understand. The tunnel guards do understand them. They come racing from the tunnels and begin searching among the chanters. Before they reach you, you know they are searching for you, that Kum Rath has discerned the presence of a stranger in this holy place. Perhaps he saw you there in one of the rear rows. Perhaps he sensed you there by some other means.

The guards are after you.

You get to your feet but do not try to fight. Fists against spears would only result in spears being run through your body. They think you are not going to resist. Holding their spears to one side, they grab for you.

Now is the time to risk the spears!

You hit one guard on the chin, a blow as heavy as any you ever struck. You knock the first guard end over end.

The second guard grabs you around the stomach. The third guard is coming at you.

Now, if you had the strength that the stone of power gave—but you don't have this strength. You are now an ordinary

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man, perhaps stronger than most but you do not have the wonderful strength the power stone gave you.

The third guard hits you over the head with the butt of his spear. Stars explode in your brain. You do not pass out. Not quite. Vaguely you know the guards are dragging you to the altar where Kum Rath stands like an angry, revengeful god out of the old days of Planet Earth.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

If you could remember your name, it would be Roger Jesmer. Crouching against the wall, you see the first *anth* appear. You also see the fire flash from the pointing hand of the man the *brujo* said was Kum Rath, you see the *anth* sizzle, burn, and die.

You would be shaken—except you are past the shaking point. The only personality facet left alive in you is a scientific curiosity. All other personality clusters are dormant, perhaps dead.

You saw the young American enter the tunnel when the guards were escorting the woman to the altar. You could have gone to him had the *brujo* permitted.

Two eels come, and die. You regard Kum Rath with superstitious awe. But more eels are coming. Does Kum Rath have enough lightning in his hands to kill all the eels? You doubt it.

You do not look at Yin. You cannot bear the thought of her going down the gullet of an eel.

You see the guards grab the young American, you see him try to fight them off. Again you would go to him, to try to help, but again the *brujo* stops you.

"Sit!" The *brujo's* voice is a hiss in your ear. "You can do nothing except get yourself killed. Wait. The god himself is here. He knows more than any man can know."

You think the *brujo* has gone stark, raving crazy but you have no idea what he has in mind. Holding Yin close to him, his eyes are almost shut. He is like a man on the edge of a trance. Are his own private gods talking to him, telling him what to do?

The young American is dragged to the front of the tem-

ple. He is still fighting, still trying to escape, but he has no change. A guard holding him on each side, they stand him in front of Kum Rath.

Kum Rath's face is a mask of horror as he stares down at the young man. The expression on his face is that of a blood-hungry god of the old days. You know what is going to happen before the high priest signals the guards to stand away from the young man.

The young man, whoever he is, has guts! He faces Kum Rath with utter defiance. In this moment, you admire him more than you have ever admired anyone in your life. You are proud to be a citizen of the land that has produced him. Your biggest wish is that you can face death with the same defiant courage when your time comes, even if death is in the gullet of a hungry eel!

The drum has stopped, the chanting has gone into silence. Over this vast hall is silence so complete you can hear the gurgling in the stomach of a dead eel, digestion continuing even after the monster is dead.

You are aware that the *brujo* is completely quiet. It is as if the old medicine man has forgotten how to breathe. The drummer and the chanters also seem to have stopped breathing. Are they remembering that it is one thing for a man to kill an eel? This is the oldest war on earth, man against nature. It has gone on since men first met a leopard, a baboon, or a lion. A man killing a man is different. A man killing a man who has no chance to fight back is more different still.

There is no doubting that Kum Rath has the power to kill. The still-sizzling remnants of the two eels prove his power. Nor is there any doubting that he has the will to use his power.

You start to rise to your feet. Perhaps if you explain—

Again the *brujo's* quick hand on your arm restrains you.

"No warrior, you! Only get yourself and others killed!" the *brujo* hisses. "Keep still. This fight is for others!"

"But the priest will kill that man!" you protest.

"Maybe so, maybe not. Is it better to be killed by lightning or eaten by an *anth*?"

You still protest.

"Kum Rath rides the lightning," the *brujo* says. "Can Kum Rath control his horse?"

You have other protests but you do not voice them. Kum Rath is obviously going to make a spectacle out of the execution of this young man. Lifting his hand, Kum Rath points. Lightning leaps from his finger. The bolt misses the young man. Smoke boils upward where the energy discharge hits the stone floor.

The young man vaults on the altar, leaping at Kum Rath.

The lightning bolt hits this time but with diminished power. The young man is knocked from the altar to the floor. There he tries to get to his feet.

Standing on the altar above him, Kum Rath laughs at him, a booming, mocking sound in the utter silence that grips the temple.

The young man tries to rise. In your mind is the vague memory of another young man who ran the money changers out of a temple, somewhere, sometime. This man is young but all he has is courage and only enough strength to get himself tortured, then killed. However, you know he will be trying to leap upon that altar and drag from it this high priest, until he is dead.

Kum Rath lifts his hand to point again. There is no question of his intention now. Like the cat that has played long enough with the mouse and intends to kill, the high priest is finished with this game and intends to end it.

Your first impression is that the young woman comes from nowhere. There is a soft whisper of sandal-clad feet moving very fast across a stone floor, then the young woman is standing in front of the young man.

From out of her flower garments comes a knife. She throws it at Kum Rath!

The high priest dodges and the knife passes harmlessly through the air. It strikes the idol. Steel rings on stone. Almost losing his balance, Kum Rath takes a quick side-step which leaves him with one foot inside the circle of the Stones of Tardu and the other foot outside it. Lifting his hand, he glares at the young couple standing below him. He points.

Instantly, his body is alive with flaming energy.

The electric charge does not leave his hand as flaming electricity. Lightning does not leap through the air to destroy its target.

You know instantly what has happened. The high priest is standing with one foot inside the circle of stones and one foot outside it. In effect this is a short circuit, a ground for the current flowing from and through the stones. Kum Rath is that ground.

Hotter than the current in any electric chair, as the energy goes through him Kum Rath's body seems to catch on fire. One sound comes from him, a yell that becomes a horrible moan. For a moment he stands on the altar, a man who tried to take on the powers of a god, a man who tried to ride the lightning and who now is burning in the horrible energies he had thought he could control.

Exactly as the eels had sizzled, Kum Rath sizzles. He tries to turn backward to the giant statue of a horned god behind the altar, to seek forgiveness from his god. In so doing he loses his footing and falls from the altar. Does he fall, or does the god hurl him from its face? For a second he looks like a flaming spear thrown by the god to find its proper resting place far below.

Thus speaks the god!

There is silence in the hushed hall. The drum and the chanters had been ready to strike up the hymn to victory, but what they have seen is a man climb up to heaven, hoping there to seize the powers of a god. They have seen the god hurl him away from it.

In this is no occasion for a hymn to victory!

The chanters make no sound. You start to get to your feet. Again the *brujo* stops you.

"It is *not* finished!" he says.

"What else is left?" You want to examine that altar and that horned statue behind the altar. Something is hidden there that the power-hungry world can use, power to turn wheels, power to light cities, power to drive cars.

From your right, something is thrown into the room. The young American standing before the altar grabs it and flings it back in the direction from which it came.

As it explodes in the air, with a violence that sends tremors through the floor of the vast hall, knocking down rows of chanters, you realize it is a hand grenade. You shove yourself back against the wall.

There is another grenade explosion, muffled now, and just



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out of the hall and inside a tunnel. This grenade has struck one of the guards there. His body splashes into bits of broken meat. Instantly, from deeper in the tunnel, an automatic weapon begins to spout hot lead into the temple.

Barely above the tumult, you hear again the squeaking of bats.

Mafia gangsters coming from one direction, creatures so primitive they are hardly more than worms coming from another.

Kum Rath, the only man who can control the lightning, dead.

The chanting has turned into screaming. Now the chanters realize that they are not chained to the floor and are running toward the tunnel exits. Here they meet either gangsters or eels. The result is death in turmoil.

Near the altar, the young American and the young woman have sought refuge behind this massive stone block which stands in front of the statue of the horned god. The couples that sat so rigidly in the lotus posture down the long main aisle have risen to their feet. They do not know what to do. Some are running in one direction, some in another. Kum Rath's robot soldiers, trying to stop the advance of the gunmen, do not know what to do now that their leader is dead. They are robots and are almost invulnerable to damage from ordinary weapons. But left without a leader, they are so much meat to be cut down. Without Kum Rath they died like ordinary men.

You are not in much better shape than the robot soldiers. You have a brain as good as any in any university in the United States, but in this situation you do not know what to do either.

You do not know who is going to win, the Mafia or the eels, but you never expect to see your home again.

Now the *brujo* holds Yin in front of him. Tenderly, he kisses her on the forehead.

"Go!" he says. "Now is the time. Go!"

You have no idea what he means, but there is on his face so much grim concentration that he seems to be some minor god out of the lost history of the human race. As the child turns toward the altar, her guard starts to rise. Fiercely the *brujo* gestures to them to sit down again. They obey him,

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going face down on the floor before the child whom they regard either as a goddess in her own right or as a reincarnation of a goddess. You are not sure which.

However they regard her, whether their regard is right or wrong, does not seem to matter. She is only a child. What can a child do here?

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

You hear the bullets scream as they bounce off the massive stone altar and off the huge statue of the god behind the altar. you are holding her close. She is not resisting. You are rubbing her black hair back from her forehead and kissing her firm, full lips.

"My dear, my dear, my dear!" you say to her. "You should not have taken such a risk. He would have killed you!"

"He would have killed you if I hadn't given him something else to think about," Mona answers. "I—I didn't think I'd miss with the knife."

You know this woman is as wild a pagan as ever breathed the air of the planet. You know she has occult skills that you had not dreamed existed. None of this matters. All that matters is that you know you love her and that she is not resisting.

You see no point to love at this time. Bullets are whistling past the stone altar behind which you are crouching. Far away you can again hear the twittering bats, wildly excited now. Around the temple, Kum Rath's people, and his soldiers, are in wild flight.

As long as he was alive, he could bring his robot soldiers back to life, but with their leader dead, the robot soldiers have no one to cure their wounds.

If the robot soldiers can think and feel, this must be a moment of absolute horror for them. Now they can die like ordinary men! When they realized this, the robot soldiers discover a new emotional climate in them. Pure panic!

## SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL

You kiss Mona. You kiss her again and again. She kisses you back. You discover the meaning of wonder and you think this is a fine thing to discover just before you die. Mad thoughts are in your mind, of escape, of fighting Slattery hand to hand, of killing huge worms with your fists. You feel capable of performing these deeds for the sake of the woman you love and who loves you. You know these thoughts are madness, that grenades and automatic weapons will surely kill you and the huge worms. You know Slattery won't kill Mona—immediately!

She looks past you, stiffens, and whispers sharply for you to look too.

A child is running across the vast hall, a child wearing deerskin garments and a blue glow. She is running past dead chanters sprawled on the floor. Bullets are whistling around her but she does not seem to hear them. She is running toward you.

You motion to her to run to you beside the altar and be safe there from the bullets. She does not seem to see you. Mona shouts and waves at her. She does not seem to see Mona either. Running past the still-smoking body of Kum Rath who was hurled like a flaming spear from the altar, she leaps toward the top of this huge stone, catches the edge with her fingers, and pulls herself to the top.

Strong in your mind is the memory of what happened to Kum Rath on this altar and you do not want this to happen to a child. So you try to grab her.

Eluding your reaching hands, she reaches the top of this stone. Bullets whistle there. She bows to the statue of the horned god. For all the attention she pays to the hot slugs, she might be playing in a sunny meadow on the side of the sacred mountain.

From the statue a beam of light comes down, light so blue it is a mixture of purple and violet. The light beam enfolds the child. Bathed in this radiance, she turns and hops easily into the circle of the Seven Tickets to Hell.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

You are a statue inside a huge chamber carved from solid rock inside a mountain in Mexico. You were carved from tough black granite—the kind of stone that is used to make machine tool bed rests for the shops of the industrial cities of America—by men who had skills lost on earth for tens of thousands of years. The men who carved you from the tough black stone were not common technicians, hewers of wood and drawers of water. They were experts in working hard stone. In addition, they had men working with them who were experts in a science lost to earth since they passed away. You are a stone, but as a result of the work of these skilled and learned men, you are also something else. You are an intelligent energy residing within the stone, finding a home in the spaces between the molecules, living between the atoms. An energy not only fed by the chanters but also by the men and women sitting facing each other in such a way that the sexual forces came into existence between them.

When you were first established here in this vast temple; you were a mediator between the people who built you and the intelligent energies that rule the planet, then and now, and with the energies beyond the planetary level which rule the solar system, and with the far more subtle and powerful energies which rule the galaxy. The statue was made of stone and will eventually disintegrate, but the energy system within the stone will not disintegrate. Since this energy system is you, you are immortal. If driven out of the stone which is your habitation, you will simply join and become a part of the planetary energy system, functioning there as an intelligent entity within the planetary intelligence, as a minor god in the vast hierarchy of planetary deities.

You were set in place here long ago. During the time that has passed, you have changed. Your original worshipers have gone. Other worshipers have come. In their turn they have gone too. Always as one tribe of worshipers left another tribe has come. Always the new tribe coming into your presence has been a little lower in intelligence, in ethics, in ideals, in their dreams for themselves and for others. You had hoped, as time passed, that your worshipers might learn to live together as little children, trusting each other, working with and for each other, using your wisdom and your enormous strength when emergencies came, feeding you the kind of energy you needed and in return taking from you what they needed. Gods and men working together! This had been your dream.

When the seven stones were taken from your altar and your focal point was gone, you lost most of your interest in men and in their doings. Indeed, with the stones gone, you were largely out of contact with men. You knew that over the centuries groups chant but you had little interest in their chanting. The stones of Tardu were the key to your relationship with men. You did not know what had happened to the stones. You assumed that greedy men had stolen them and had peddled them as jewels to other greedy men who wished to impress women by giving them as body ornaments.

You are greatly surprised when the seven stones return.

You are surprised when the ancient system of energy couples are set up between men and women. Somebody has been reading the ancient records!

You are even more surprised when you discover what is happening in your temple. Men killing each other! Creatures from the lower life levels attacking and eating men. When Kum Rath leaps upon your altar and takes a position within the circle of stones, you see for the first time what kind of man he is. Across the millennia you had forgotten the meaning of horror. Now, as you sense what is inside Kum Rath, as you sense his ideas for the future, you learn again the meaning of long-forgotten shame. The ancient scientists who designed and constructed you, who carved your physical embodiment from hard black stone, had no such thoughts in their minds as Kum Rath has. They dreamed of a fair future for all men. They built their dreams into you. Though long

overlooked, these dreams are not lost and are not forgotten. These ancient dreams come to life in you, and you hurl Kum Rath from your altar like a flaming spear cast into outer darkness. He has shamed you. He belongs to the past, not to the future. He does not fit your dreaming.

You blast him and cast him from your high place where the magic stones of Tardu are now working.

This done, you feel that all problems are now solved. You start to withdraw into yourself. As you do this, you are again aware that in your sacred hall men armed with strange weapons are shooting other men. You see your male and female couples break up, you see your chanters fleeing.

You are not concerned. Let the humans kill each other, let the big worms eat them. If there are in your vast hall a dozen humans fit to live you do not see them.

Then you see a child running toward you.

A child? You had forgotten that children exist, and even as you remember, you do not know what they are. You continue withdrawing. The men with the strange weapons will kill the child, the big worms will eat her. What does this matter, to you?

The running child comes more deeply into the blue glow that is your electromagnetic field. You recognize her. She has touched one of the Seven Stones. Far more important, she has touched the love stone, and your love is now in her.

The touching of the love stone has changed her forever. It has made her belong to you, and you to her. You cease withdrawing. As she leaps to your altar, you send down a beam of light to protect her. When she hops into the circle of the Seven Stones, you protect her from the flying missiles. As you see her more clearly and as you see what is happening in the vast chamber, you begin to act, you begin to use your vast power, as only you can.

Horror moves into your hall of worship. Men who have seen you in action know the meaning of the fear of the gods.

When you have finished acting, you lift the child upward, into your arms, forever.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Crouched beside the altar, trying to shield Mona with your body from the screaming bullets, hearing the horrible gobbling sounds of the giant worms—they would just as soon eat a dead body as a live one—you hear the lightning and the thunder begin. A person does not hear lightning unless he is very close to it. You hear this lightning. The blasts of sharp thunder as the lightning rends the tortured air almost tears your eardrums out of your ears. The roars of thunder as the torn air comes back together hit you with the force of physical blows.

Looking up, you can glimpse the child standing on top of the altar. She is not directing the lightning, she is not hurling the thunder, she is simply standing there with her hands lifted in supplication to the huge stone figure worshiped in this temple. Did Kum Rath make a mistake in trying to *direct* these tremendous energies? You suspect he did. The child is not making this mistake. She is asking, not ordering. Above her lightning is flashing and thunder is roaring but she is unharmed. Before the thunder began, bullets were whipping past her. You saw them tug at her deerskin garments but no bullet touches her. You try to get to your feet, to call out to her to jump from the stone to you, where she will be safer. As you move, something inspects your whole body, cell by cell, molecule by molecule, something looks into your brain and into your heart, checking you out, and finding nothing wanting, passes to the woman beside you, checks her out as it checked you, and moves on at the same speed with which it came. It is pleased that you thought of protecting the woman and the child, but it tells you that your help is not needed.

Chaos continues exploding the vast hall. You do not know

when the rattle of the machine weapons stops but you see Slattery inside the hall. Lightning reaches for him with terrible fingers. You have the impression that Slattery is literally torn atom from atom, organ from organ, limb from limb. Crooked Nose, beside him, suffers the same fate.

At Slattery's death the reinforced Mafia men begin to drop away and try to flee. Lightning follows them, destroying them. Some manage to escape into the tunnels. Ball lightning follows them. For a time, screams come back. Then there are no more screams.

You can, however, hear the squealing and the gobbling of the eels. Lightning reaches its devastating fingers toward them. The stink is terrible. Mona is holding her nose. And so are you.

Silence. Just silence. No weapon fire, no grenades, no gobbling of eels.

The child is rising. She is being lifted up toward the face of the statue, up, up, up! You have the impression that she is moving at infinite speed *somewhere*. Where she is being taken is *not here*. There is happiness on her face.

The impression you have is that of a child going back to the place where she longed to be, going home.

As you stare, she vanishes.

Silence. No sound. None whatsoever. You are not certain you can stand but you lift yourself by putting one hand against the altar. The big stone is warm. Energy in enormous quantities has been flowing through it.

Footsteps sound. Shoving Mona behind you, you turn toward them. The old American you saw sitting against the wall is coming toward you. Behind him are others who are obviously Indians.

"Name is Jesmer," the old man says. "Roger Jesmer."

You give him your name. As both of you are trying to explain your presence to the other, the old Indian brushes past you. Obviously a medicine man, he leaps to the top of the altar. In front of it, the young men kneel. You look up. On the top of the altar, the *brujo* is on his knees staring down. Tears are visible in his eyes.

You leap to the top of the altar, then help Mona and Jesmer up. The *brujo* points to seven little holes in the top of the altar. "Gone," he whispers. "The stones of the god of Tardu are gone." He points to the hole. You look. Each hole is now filled with black dust finer than sand. Dead dust. Dust with the lightning gone from it.

Now you understand why the whole altar is warm. Energy was released here in large quantities. Jesmer is babbling. You understand that he is a scientist.

"The greatest energy source ever discovered. Probably similar to atomic power but under mental control. Gone!" An ache is suddenly in his voice. "I would give all the gold that Montezuma's porters dumped in the sacrificial pool for the secret of these little stones. With it, we could remake a world." He pauses. "Remake a world—or blow it to bits!"

"The god, Tardu, destroyed his stones—" The *brujo* looks up at the huge statue. "—so no one will ever again solve his secret. He took Yin with him to his own world." He shakes his head. Tears are again visible in his eyes. He drops from the altar and speaks to the kneeling young men. They rise and follow him toward a tunnel. They do not look back. Nor does the *brujo*.

Jesmer calls to them. "You've got to help me get out of here! I'm lost!"

As if they do not hear him, they do not look back.

"I've got somebody here who can guide us out," you say, pointing to Mona.

"Yes," she says, smiling. "Yes, of course. If you are going to take me to your country."

"Taking you to my country is only the start of what I am going to do to you!" you say. "But are we going to walk? Slattery's men brought two more VTOL craft with them. If only we could fly them."

"I can fly a VTOL," Jesmer says. "I've got a pilot's license."

As you walk out of the temple, you try not to look at the horror around. You see Felix and Carlos. An eel got half of Felix. The lightning got all of Carlos. As it did Ecro. In the vast hall is silence and death. The huge statue, now only stone, broods in silence over its ancient temple.

## SEVEN TICKETS TO HELL

The two VTOL craft are in the hangar. Slattery took all of his reserves with him to the attack, including the pilots of the last two ships to arrive.

Jesmer selects one of the craft. Under his guidance it slips out of the hangar and lifts itself on its sky hook.

Below you as the craft rises the vast bulk of Sacred Mountain with its bleak outcroppings of rocks and its poppy patches is visible. No more opium will be made from those beautiful flowers, no more brown heroin will be cooked in this mountain, no more VTOL craft will fly from this hidden spot to secret landings in the north. Perhaps the remaining Families will wonder what happened to Slats Slattery south of the border, but they are not likely to find out.

Beside you in the plane, Mona is looking northward toward your land and a strange new life with you. As if she is seeing happy times ahead, a vague smile is on her bronze face.

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