

The Door to Saturn

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When morghi, the high priest of the goddess Yhoundeh, together with twelve of his most ferocious and efficient underlings, came at morning twilight to seek the infamous heretic, Eibon, in his house of black gneiss on a headland above the northern main, they were surprised as well as disappointed to find him absent.

Their surprise was due to the fact that they had every intention of taking him unawares; for all their plots against Eibon had been carried on with meticulous privacy in underground vaults with sound-proof bolted doors; and they themselves had made the long journey to his house in a single night, immediately following the hour of

his condemnation. They were disappointed because the formidable writ of arrest, with symbolic flame-etched runes on a scroll of human skin, was now useless and because there seemed to be no early prospect of trying out the ingenious agonies, the intricately harrowing ordeals which they had devised for Eibon with such care.

Morghi was especially disappointed; and the malisons which he muttered when the emptiness of the topmost room had revealed itself, were of truly cabalistic length and fearfulness. Eibon was his chief rival in wizardry, and was acquiring altogether too much fame and prestige among the peoples of Mhu Thulan, that ultimate peninsula of the Hyperborean continent. So Morghi had been glad to believe certain malignant rumors concerning Eibon and to utilize them in the charges he had preferred.

These rumors were, that Eibon was a devotee of the long discredited heathen god, Zhothaquah, whose

worship was incalculably older than man; and that Eibon's magic was drawn from his unlawful affiliation with this dark deity, who had come down by way of other worlds from a foreign universe, in primeval times when the earth was still no more than a steaming morass. The power of Zhothaquah was still feared; and it was said that those who were willing to forego their humanity by serving him would become the heritors of antemundane secrets, and the masters of a knowledge so awful that it could only have been brought from outlying planets coeval with night and chaos.

The house of Eibon was built in the form of a pentagonal tower and possessed five stories, including the two that were underground. All, of course, had been searched with painstaking thoroughness; and the three servants of Eibon had been tortured with a slow drip of boiling-hot asphaltum to make them reveal their master's whereabouts. Their continued denial of all knowledge, after a half hour of this, was taken as proof that they were genuinely ignorant.

No sign of a subterranean passage was unearthed by delving in the walls and floor of the lower rooms; though Morghi had even gone so far as to remove the flagstones beneath an obscene image of Zhothaquah which occupied the nethermost. This he had done with extreme reluctance, for the squat, fur-covered god with his bat-like features and sloth-like body, was fearsomely abhorrent to the high priest of the elk-goddess, Yhoundeh.

Returning in renewed search to the highest room of Eibon's tower, the inquisitors were compelled to own themselves baffled. There was nothing to be found but a few articles of furniture, some antique volumes on conjuration such as might be owned by any sorcerer, some disagreeable and gruesome paintings on rolls of

pterodactyl parchment, and certain primitive urns and sculptures and totem-poles of the sort that Eibon had been so fond of collecting. Zhothaquah, in one form or another, was represented in most of these: his face even leered with a bestial somnolence from the urn-handles; and he was to be found in half the totems (which were those of sub-human tribes) along with the seal, the mammoth, the giant tiger, and the aurochs. Morghi felt that the charges against Eibon were now substantiated beyond all remaining doubt, for surely no one who was not a worshipper of Zhothaquah would care to own even a single representation of this loathsome entity.

However, such additional evidence of guilt, no matter how significant or damnatory, was of small help in finding Eibon. Staring from the windows of the topmost chamber, where the walls fell sheer to the cliff and the cliff dropped clear on two sides to a raging sea four hundred feet below, Morghi was driven to credit his rival with superior resources of magic. Otherwise, the man's disappearance was altogether too much of a mystery. And Morghi had no love for mysteries, unless they were part of his own stock-in-trade.

He turned from the window and re-examined the room with minutely careful attention. Eibon had manifestly used it as a sort of study: there was a writing-table of ivory, with reed-pens, and various

colored inks in little earthen pots; and there were sheets of paper made from a kind of calamite, all scribbled over with odd astronomical and astrological calculations that caused Morghi to frown because he could not understand them.

On each of the five walls there hung one of the parchment paintings, all of which seemed to be the work of some aboriginal race. Their themes were blasphemous and repellent; and Zhothaquah figured in all of them, amid forms and landscapes whose abnormality and sheer uncouthness may have been due to the half-developed technique of the primitive artists. Morghi now tore them from the walls one by one, as if he suspected that Eibon might in some manner be concealed behind them.

The walls were now entirely bare; and Morghi considered them for a long time, amid the respectful silence of his underlings. A queer panel, high up in the southeastern side above the writing-table, had been revealed by the removal of one of the paintings. Morghi's heavy brows met in a long black bar as he eyed this panel. It was conspicuously different from the rest of the wall, being an oval-shaped inlay of some reddish metal that was neither gold nor copper -- a metal that displayed an obscure and fleeting fluorescence of rare colors when one peered at it through half-shut eyelids. But somehow it was impossible, with open eyes, even to remember the colors of this fluorescence. Morghi -- who, perhaps, was cleverer and more perspicacious than Eibon had given him credit for being -- conceived a suspicion that was apparently baseless and absurd, since the wall containing the panel was the outer wall of the building, and could give only on the sky and sea.

He climbed upon the writing-table and struck the panel with his fist. The sensations which he felt, and the result of the blow, were alike astounding. A sense of icy cold so extreme that it was hardly distinguishable from extreme heat, ran along his hand and arm through his whole body as he smote the unknown reddish metal.

And the panel itself swung easily outward, as if on unseen hinges, with a high sonorous clang that seemed to fall from an incomputable distance. Beyond it, Morghi saw that there was neither sky nor sea nor, in fact, anything he had ever seen or heard of, or even dreamed of in his most outrageous nightmares...

He turned to his companions. The look on his face was half amazement, half triumph.

"Wait here till I return," he commanded, and leaped headlong through the open panel.

The charges that had been brought against Eibon were indeed true. The sagacious wizard, in his lifelong study of laws and agencies, both natural and supernatural, had taken account of the myths that were prevalent in Mhu Thulan regarding Zhothaquah, and had thought it conceivably worth while to make a personal investigation of this obscure pre-human entity.

He had cultivated the acquaintance of Zhothaquah, who, in the desuetude of his worship, was now driven to lead an existence wholly subterranean; he had offered the prescribed prayers, had made the sacrifices that were most acceptable; and the strange, sleepy little god, in return for Eibon's interest and his devotion, had confided to him certain information that was more than useful in the practise of the black arts. Also he had presented Eibon with some autobiographical data that confirmed the popular legends in more explicit detail. For reasons which he did not specify, he had come to Earth in former aeons from the planet Cykranosh (the name by which Saturn was called in Mhu Thulan); and Cykranosh itself had been merely a waystation in his travels from remoter worlds and systems.

As a special reward, after years of service and burnt offerings, he presented to Eibon a large thin oval plate of some ultra-telluric metal, instructing him to have it fitted as a hinged panel in an upper room of his house. The panel, if swung outward from the wall on open air, would have the peculiar property of giving admittance

to the world Cykranosh, many million miles away in space.

According to the vague and somewhat unsatisfactory explanation vouchsafed by the god, this panel, being partly wrought from a kind of matter which belonged to another universe than man's, possessed uncommon radiative properties that served to ally it with some higher dimension of space, through which the distance to astronomically remote spheres was a mere step.

Zhothaquah, however, warned Eibon not to make use of the panel unless in time of extreme need, as a means of escape from otherwise inevitable danger; for it would be difficult if not impossible to return to Earth from Cykranosh -- a world where Eibon might find it anything but easy to acclimate himself, since the conditions

of life were very different from those in Mhu Thulan, even though they did not involve so total an inversion of all terrene standards and norms as that which prevailed in the more outlying planets.

Some of Zhothaquah's relatives were still resident in Cykranosh and were worshipped by its peoples; and Zhothaquah told Eibon the almost unpronounceable name of the most powerful of these deities, saying that it would be useful to him as a sort of password if he should ever need to visit Cykranosh.

The idea of a panel that would open on some remote world impressed Eibon as being rather fantastic, not to say far-fetched; but he had found Zhothaquah to be in all ways and at all times a most veracious deity. However, he made no trial of the panel's unique virtues, till Zhothaquah (who maintained a close surveillance of all underground doings) had warned him of the machinations of Morghi and the processes of ecclesiastic law that were being instituted in the vaults below the temple of Yhoundeh.

Knowing as he did the power of these jealous bigots, Eibon decided that it would be injudicious to the point of folly if he were to let himself fall into their hands. Bidding a short and grateful farewell to Zhothaquah, and collecting a small parcel of bread and meat and wine, he retired to his study and climbed upon the writing-table. Then, putting aside the crude picture of a scene in Cykranosh with which Zhothaquah had inspired some primeval half-human artist, he pushed open the panel it had served to conceal.

Eibon saw that Zhothaquah was indeed a god of his word: for the scene beyond the panel was nothing that could ever find a legitimate place in the topography of Mhu Thulan or of any terrestrial region. It did not altogether appeal to him; but there was no alternative, save the inquisitorial cells of the goddess Yhoundeh.

Envisaging in thought the various refinements and complications of torture which Morghi would have now prepared, he sprang through the opening into Cykranosh with an agility that was quite juvenile for a wizard of mature years.

It was only a step; but turning he saw that all trace of the panel or of his dwelling had now disappeared. He was standing on a long declivity of ashen soil, down which a sluggish stream that was not water, but some liquescent metal resembling mercury, ran from tremendous unscalable shoulders and horns of the mountain heights above, to debouch in a hill-surrounded lake of the same liquid.

The slope beneath him was lined with rows of peculiar objects; and he could not make up his mind whether they were trees, mineral forms, or animal organisms, since they appeared to combine certain characteristics of all these. This preternatural landscape was appallingly distinct in every detail, under a greenish-black sky that was overarched from end to end with a triple cyclopean ring of dazzling luminosity. The air was cold, and Eibon did not care for its sulphurescent odor or the odd puckery sensation it left in his nostrils and lungs. And when he took a few steps on the unattractive-looking soil, he found that it had the disconcerting friability of ashes that have dried once more after being wetted with rain.

He started down the slope, half-fearing that some of the equivocal objects around him would reach out their mineral boughs or arms to arrest his progress. They seemed to be a kind of bluish-purple obsidian cacti, with limbs that ended in formidable talon-like spines, and heads that were altogether too elaborate for either fruits or blossoms. They did not move as he passed among them; but he heard a faint and singular tinkling with many modulations of tone, that preceded and followed him along the slope. Eibon conceived the uncomfortable notion that they were holding converse with each other; and were perhaps debating what should be done with him or about him.

However, he reached without mishap or hindrance the end of the declivity, where terraces and ledges of

decomposing trap, like a mighty stairway of elder aeons, had rimmed the sunken lake of liquescent metal. Wondering as to the way he should now take, Eibon stood irresolute on one of the ledges.

His train of conjecture was broken by a shadow that fell suddenly athwart him and lay like a monstrous blot on the crumbling stone at his feet. He was not prepossessed by the shadow: it was outrageously defiant of all known esthetic standards; and its malformation and distortion were no less than extravagant.

He turned to see what manner of creature had flung the shadow. This being, he perceived, was not easy to classify, with its ludicrously short legs, its exceedingly elongated arms, and its round, sleepy-looking head that was pendulous from a spherical body, as if it were turning a somnambulistic somersault. But after he had studied it a while and had noted its furriness and somnolent expression, he began to see a vague though inverted likeness to the god Zhothaqquah. And remembering how Zhothaqquah had said the form assumed by himself on Earth was not altogether that which he had worn in Cykranosh, Eibon now wondered if this entity was one of Zhothaqquah's relatives.

He was trying to recall the almost inarticulate name that had been confided to him by the god as a sort of password, when the owner of that unusual shadow, without seeming to note Eibon's presence, began a descent of the terraces and ledges toward the lake. Its locomotion was mainly on its hands, for the absurd legs were not half long enough for the steps it had to take.

Arriving at the lake-edge, the creature drank of the liquid metal in a hearty and copious manner that served to convince Eibon of its godship; for surely no being of an inferior biologic order would quench its thirst with a beverage so extraordinary. Then, re-ascending to the ledge where Eibon stood, it paused and appeared to

notice him for the first time.

Eibon had finally remembered the outlandish name for which he was groping.

"Hziulquoigmnzah," he sought to articulate. Doubtless the result was not wholly conformable to Cykranoshian rules; but Eibon did the best he could with the vocal organs at his command. His auditor seemed to recognize the word, for it peered at Eibon a little less sleepily than before, with its inversely situated eyes; and even deigned to utter something which sounded like an attempt to correct his pronunciation. Eibon wondered how he was ever to learn such a language; or, having learned it, how he was ever to pronounce it. However, it heartened him a little to find that he was understood at all.

"Zhothaqquah," he said, repeating the name three times in his most orotund incantatory manner.

The topsy-turvy being opened its eyes a trifle more, and again admonished him, uttering the word Zhothaquah with an indescribable abbreviation of vowels and thickening of consonants. Then it stood regarding him for a while as if in doubt or cogitation. Finally it raised one of its ell-long arms from the ground and pointed along the shore, where the mouth of a low valley was discernible among the hills. It said distinctly the enigmatic words: "Iqhui dlosh odhqlongh," and then, while the sorcerer was pondering the significance of this unusual locution, it turned away from him and started to re-ascend the higher steps, toward a rather spacious cavern with columned opening, that he had not heretofore perceived. It had hardly passed from sight into the cavern, when Eibon was greeted by the high priest, Morghi, who had readily followed him by his tracks in the ashen soil.

"Detestable sorcerer! Abominable heretic! I arrest you!" said Morghi with pontifical severity.

Eibon was surprised, not to say startled; but it reassured him to see that Morghi was alone. He drew the sword of highly tempered bronze which he carried, and smiled.

"I should advise you to moderate your language, Morghi," he admonished. "Also, your idea of arresting me is slightly out of place now, since we are alone together in Cykranosh, and Mhu Thulan and the temple-cells of Yhoundeh are many million miles away."

Morghi did not appear to relish this information. He scowled and muttered: "I suppose this is some more of your damnable wizardry."

Eibon chose to ignore the insinuation.

"I have been conversing with one of the gods of Cykranosh," he said magniloquently. "The god, whose name is Hziulquoigmnzah, has given me a mission to perform, a message to deliver, and has indicated the direction in which I should go. I suggest that you lay aside our little mundane disagreement, and accompany me. Of course we could slit each other's throats or eviscerate each other, since we are both armed. But under the circumstances I think you will see the puerility, not to mention the sheer inutility, of such a proceeding. If we both live we may be of mutual use and assistance, in a strange world whose problems and difficulties, if I mistake not, are worthy of our united powers."

Morghi frowned and pondered.

"Very well," he said grudgingly, "I consent. But I warn you that matters will have to take their course when we return to Mhu Thulan."

"That," rejoined Eibon, "is a contingency which need not trouble either of us. Shall we start?"

The two Hyperboreans had been following a defile that wound away from the lake of fluid metal among hills whose vegetation thickened and grew more various as their height decreased. It was the valley that had been indicated to the sorcerer by the topsy-turvy biped. Morghi, a natural inquisitor in all senses, was plying Eibon

with questions.

"Who, or what, was the singular entity that disappeared in a cavern just before I accosted you?"

"That was the god Hziulquoigmnzhah."

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

"He is the paternal uncle of Zhothaquah."

Morghi was silent, except for a queer sound that might have been either an interrupted sneeze or an exclamation of disgust. But after a while he asked:

"And what is this mission of yours?"

"That will be revealed in due time," answered Eibon with sententious dignity. "I am not allowed to discuss it at present. I have a message from the god which I must deliver only to the proper persons."

Morghi was unwillingly impressed.

"Well, I suppose you know what you are doing and where you are going. Can you give me any hint as to our destination?"

"That, too, will be revealed in due time."

The hills were lapsing gently to a well-wooded plain whose flora would have been the despair of Earthly botanists. Beyond the last hill, Eibon and Morghi came to a narrow road that began abruptly and stretched away in the distance. Eibon took the road without hesitation. Indeed there was little else to do, for the thickets of

mineral plants and trees were rapidly becoming impenetrable. They lined the way with serrate branches that were like sheaves of darts and daggers, of sword-blades and needles.

Eibon and Morghi soon noticed that the road was full of large footprints, all of them circular in form and rimmed about with the marks of protruding claws. However, they did not communicate their misgivings to each other.

After an hour or two of progress along the yielding ashy thoroughfare, amid the vegetation that was more horrent than ever with knives and caltrops, the travelers began to remember that they were hungry. Morghi, in his haste to arrest Eibon, had not breakfasted; and Eibon, in his natural hurry to evade Morghi, had committed a like omission. They halted by the wayside, and the sorcerer shared his parcel of food and wine with the priest. They ate and drank with frugality, however, since the supply was limited, and the landscape about them was not likely to yield any viands that were suitable for human sustenance.

With strength and courage revived by this little refection, they continued their journey, They had not gone far when they overtook a remarkable monster that was plainly the originator of the numerous footprints. It was squatting down with its armored haunches toward the travelers, filling the whole road for an indeterminate

distance ahead. They could see that it was possessed of a myriad of short legs; but they could form no idea of what its head and forequarters were like.

Eibon and Morghi were much dismayed.

"Is this another of your 'gods'?" asked Morghi ironically.

The sorcerer did not reply. But he realized that he had a reputation to sustain. He went boldly forward and cried out: "Hziulquoigmnzah" in the most resonant bellow that he could summon. At the same time he drew his sword and thrust it between two plates of the horny mail that covered the monster's hindquarters.

Greatly to his relief, the animal began to move and resumed its march along the road. The Hyperboreans followed it; and whenever the creature slackened its pace Eibon would repeat the formula which he had found so effective. Morghi was compelled to regard him with a certain awe.

They traveled on in this manner for several hours. The great luminous triple ring still over-arched the zenith, but a strangely small and chilly sun had now intersected the ring and was declining toward the west of Cykranosh. The forest along the way was still a high wall of sharp metallic foliage; but other roads and paths and

byways were now branching off from the one that the monster followed.

All was very silent, except for the many-footed shuffling of this uncouth animal; and neither Eibon nor Morghi had spoken for miles. The high priest was regretting more and more his rashness in pursuing Eibon through the panel; and Eibon was wishing that Zhothaquah had given him the entrée to a different sort of world. They

were startled out of their meditations by a sudden clamor of deep and booming voices that rose from somewhere in advance of the monster. It was a veritable pandemonium of unhuman guttural bellowings and croakings, with notes that were somehow suggestive of reproof and objurgation, like shrewish drums, as if the monster were being scolded by a group of unimaginable entities.

"Well?" queried Morghi.

"All that we are destined to behold will reveal itself at the proper time," said Eibon.

The forest was thinning rapidly, and the clamor of termagant bellows was drawing closer. Still following the hindquarters of their multipedal guide, which was crawling on with reluctant slowness, the travelers emerged in an open space and beheld a most singular tableau. The monster, which was plainly of a tame and harmless and stupid sort, was cowering before a knot of beings no larger than men, who were armed

only with long-handled goads.

These beings, though they were bipeds, and were not quite so unheard-of in their anatomic structure as the entity which Eibon had met by the lake, were nevertheless sufficiently unusual; for their head and bodies were apparently combined in one, and their ears, eyes, nostrils, mouths, and certain other organs of doubtful use were all arranged in a somewhat unconventional grouping on their chests and abdomens. They were wholly naked, and were rather dark in color, with no trace of hair on any part of their bodies. Behind them at a little distance were many edifices of a kind which hardly conformed to human ideas of architectural symmetry.

Eibon strode valorously forward, with Morghi following discreetly. The torso-headed beings ceased their scolding of the fawning monster and peered at the Earth-men with expressions that were difficult to read on account of the odd and baffling relationship of their features.

"Hziulquoigmznzah! Zhothaquah!" said Eibon with oracular solemnity and sonority. Then, after a pause of hieratic length: "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh!"

The result was indeed gratifying, and was all that could be expected even from a formula so remarkable; for the Cykranoshian beings dropped their goads and bowed before the sorcerer till their featured bosoms almost touched the ground.

"I have performed the mission, I have delivered the message given me by Hziulquoigmznzah," said Eibon to Morghi.

For several Cykranoshian months the two Hyperboreans were the honored guests of the quaint and worthy and virtuous people, who called themselves the Bhlemphroims. Eibon had a real gift for languages and made progress in the local tongue far more readily than Morghi. His knowledge of the customs, manners, ideas, and beliefs of the Bhlemphroims soon became extensive; but he found it a source of disillusionment as well as of illumination.

The armored monster that he and Morghi had driven before them so valiantly was, he learned, a domestic beast of burden that had strayed away from its owners amid the mineral vegetation of the desert lands adjoining Vhlorrh, the chief town of the Bhlemphroims. The genuflections with which Eibon and Morghi had been greeted were only an expression of gratitude for the safe return of this beast; and were not, as Eibon had thought, an acknowledgment of the divine names he had quoted and the fearsome phrase, "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh."

The being that Eibon had met by the lake was indeed the god Hziulquoigmzhah; and there were dim traditions of Zhothaquah in certain early myths of the Bhlemphroims. But this people, it seemed, were most regrettably materialistic and had long ceased to offer sacrifice and prayer to the gods; though they spoke of them with a sort of distant respect and with no actual blasphemy.

Eibon learned that the words "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh" doubtless belonged to a private language of the gods, which the Bhlemphroims no longer understood; but which, however, was still studied by a neighboring people, the Ydheems, who maintained the ancient formal worship of Hziulquoigmzhah and various related deities.

The Bhlemphroims were indeed a practical race, and had few if any interests beyond the cultivation of a great variety of edible fungi, the breeding of large centipedal animals, and the propagation of their own species. The latter process, as revealed to Eibon and Morghi, was somewhat unusual: though the Bhlemphroims were bisexual, only one female in a generation was chosen for reproductive duties; and this female, after growing to mammoth size on food prepared from a special fungus, became the mother of an entire new generation.

When they had been well initiated into the life and customs of Vhlorrh, the Hyperboreans were privileged to see the future national mother, called the Djhenquomh, who had now attained the requisite proportions after years of scientific nourishment. She lived in an edifice that was necessarily larger than any of the other buildings in Vhlorrh; and her sole activity was the consumption of immense quantities of food. The sorcerer and the inquisitor were impressed, even if not captivated, by the mountainous amplitude of her charms and by their highly novel arrangement. They were told that the male parent (or parents) of the forthcoming generation had not yet been selected.

The possession of separate heads by the Hyperboreans seemed to lend them a remarkable biologic interest in the eyes of their hosts. The Bhlemphroims, it was learned, had not always been headless but had reached their present physical conformation through a slow process of evolution, in which the head of the archetypal Bhlemphroim had been merged by imperceptible degrees with the torso.

But, unlike most peoples, they did not regard their current stage of development with unqualified complacency. Indeed, their headlessness was a source of national regret; they deplored the retrenchment of nature in this regard; and the arrival of Eibon and Morghi, who were looked upon as ideal exemplars of cephalic evolution,

had served to quicken their eugenic sorrow.

The sorcerer and the inquisitor, on their part, found life rather dull among the Bhlemphroims after the first feeling of exoticism had worn off. The diet was tiresome for one thing -- an endless succession of raw and boiled and roasted mushrooms, varied at rare intervals by the coarse and flabby meat of tame monsters. And this people, though they were always polite and respectful, did not seem to be greatly awed by the exhibitions of Hyperborean magic with which Eibon and Morghi favored them; and their lamentable want of religious ardor made all evangelistic endeavor a thankless task. And, being fundamentally unimaginative, they were not even duly impressed by the fact that their visitors had come from a remote ultra-Cykranshian world.

"I feel," said Eibon to Morghi one day, "that the god was sadly mistaken in deigning to send this people a message of any sort."

It was very soon after this that a large committee of the Blemphroims waited upon Eibon and Morghi and informed them that after long consideration they had been selected as the fathers of the next generation and were to be married forthwith to the tribal mother in the hope that a well-headed race of Bhlemphroims would result

from the union.

Eibon and Morghi were quite overcome by the proposed eugenic honor. Thinking of the mountainous female they had seen, Morghi was prone to remember his sacerdotal vows of celibacy and Eibon was eager to take similar vows upon himself without delay. The inquisitor, indeed, was so overwhelmed as to be rendered almost speechless; but, with rare presence of mind, the sorcerer temporized by making a few queries anent the legal and social status which would be enjoyed by Morghi and himself as the husbands of the Djhenquomh. And the naive Blemphroims told him that this would be a matter of brief concern; that after completing their marital duties the husbands were always served to the national mother in the form of ragouts and other culinary preparations.

The Hyperboreans tried to conceal from their hosts the reluctance with which they both regarded the coming honor in all its stages. Being as usual a master of diplomacy, Eibon went so far as to make a formal acceptance on behalf of himself and his companion. But when the delegation of Bhlemphroims had departed he said to Morghi:

"I am more than ever convinced that the god was mistaken. We must leave the city of Vhlorrh with all feasible dispatch, and continue our journey till we find a people who are worthier to receive his communication."

Apparently it had never occurred to the simple and patriotic Bhlemphroims that the fathering of the next national litter was a privilege that anyone would dream of rejecting. Eibon and Morghi were subjected to

no manner of duress or constraint, and their movements were not even watched. It was an easy matter to leave the house in which they had been domiciled, when the rumbling snores of their hosts were ascending to the great ring of Cykranoshian moons, and to follow the highway that led from Vhlorrh toward the country of Ydheems.

The road before them was well marked; and the ringlight was almost as clear and brilliant as full day. They traveled a long distance through the diversified and always unique scenery which it served to illumine, before the rising of the sun and the consequent discovery of their departure by the Bhlemphroims. These single-minded

bipeds, it is likely, were too sorely perplexed and dumbfounded by the loss of the guests whom they had chosen as future progenitors to even think of following them.

The land of the Ydheems (as indicated on an earlier occasion by the Bhlemphroims) was many leagues away; and tracts of ashen deserts, of mineral cacti, of fungoid forests, and high mountains intervened. The boundary of the Bhlemphroims -- marked by a crude sculpturesque representation of the tribal mother beside the way -- was passed by the travelers before dawn.

And during the following day they journeyed among more than one of those unusual races who diversify so widely the population of Saturn. They saw the Djhibbis, that apterous and Stylitean bird-people who roost on their individual dolomites for years at a time and meditate upon the cosmos, uttering to each other at long

intervals the mystic syllables yop, yeep, and yoop, which are said to express an unfathomed range of esoteric thought.

And they met those flibbertigibbet pygmies, the Ephiqhs, who hollow out their homes in the trunks of certain large fungi, and are always having to hunt new habitations because the old ones crumble into powder in a few days. And they heard the underground croaking of that mysterious people, the Ghlonghs, who dread not only the sunlight but also the ring-light, and who have never yet been seen by any of the surface-dwellers.

By sunset, however, Eibon and Morghi had crossed the domains of all the aforementioned races, and had even climbed the lower scarps of those mountains which still divided them from the land of Ydheems. Here, on a sheltered ledge, their weariness impelled them to halt; and since they had now ceased to dread pursuit from the Blemphroims, they wrapped themselves more tightly in their mantles against the cold, after a meager supper of raw mushrooms, and fell asleep.

Their slumber was disturbed by a series of cacodemoniactal dreams in which they both thought they had

been recaptured by the Bhlemphroims and were forced to espouse the Djhenquomh. They awoke shortly before dawn from visions whose details were excruciatingly vivid, and were more than ready to resume their ascent of the mountains.

The slopes and cliffs above them were desolate enough to have deterred any travelers of inferior hardihood or less cogent fears. The tall woods of fungi dwindled ere long to tiny growths, and soon they lessened to forms that were no bigger than lichens; and after these, there was nothing but black and naked stone. The wiry and slender Eibon suffered no great inconvenience from the climb; but Morghi, with his sacerdotal girth and bulk, was soon winded. Whenever he paused to recover his breath, Eibon would say to him: "Think of the national mother," and Morghi would climb the next acclivity like an agile but somewhat asthmatic mountain-sheep.

They came at noon to a pinnacle-guarded pass from which they could look down on the country of the Ydheems. They saw that it was a broad and fertile realm, with woods of mammoth mushrooms and other thallophytes that excelled in size and number those of any other region they had yet traversed. Even the mountain-slopes were more fruitful on this side, for Eibon and Morghi had not descended far when they entered a grove of enormous puff-balls and toadstools.

They were admiring the magnitude and variety of these growths, when they heard a thunderous noise on the mountains above them. The noise drew nearer, gathering to itself the roar of new thunders. Eibon would have prayed to Zhothaqquah, and Morghi would have supplicated the goddess Yhoundeh, but unfortunately there

was no time. They were caught in a mighty mass of rolling puff-balls and toppling toadstools overthrown by the huge avalanche that had started on the heights above; and, borne with increasing momentum, with vertiginous speed and tumult amid an ever-growing heap of shattered fungi, they finished their descent of the mountain in

less than a minute.

Endeavoring to extricate themselves from the pile of thallophytic debris in which they were buried, Eibon and Morghi noticed that there still seemed to be a good deal of noise, even though the avalanche had stopped. Also, there were other movements and heavings than their own in the pile. When they had managed to get their necks and shoulders clear, they discovered that the commotion was being made by certain people who differed from their late hosts, the Bhlemphroims, in that they possessed rudimentary heads.

These people were some of the Ydheems, on one of whose towns the avalanche had descended. Roofs and towers were beginning to emerge from the mass of boulders and puff-balls; and just in front of the Hyperboreans there was a large temple-like edifice from whose blocked-up door a multitude of the Ydheems had now tunneled their way. At sight of Eibon and Morghi they suspended their labors; and the

sorcerer, who had freed himself and had made sure that all his bones and members were intact, now took the opportunity to address them.

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

Since he spoke in the dialect of the Bhlemphroims, which differed somewhat from their own, it is doubtful if the Ydheems altogether understood the first part of his utterance. But Hziulquoigmnzah was their tutelary deity, and they knew the language of the gods. At the words: "Iqhui dlosh odhqfonqh," there was a most remarkable resumption and increase of activity, a ceaseless running to and fro on the part of the Ydheems, a shouting of guttural orders, and a recrudescence of new heads and limbs from the avalanche.

Those who had issued from the temple re-entered it, and came out once more carrying a huge image of Hziulquoigmnzah, some smaller icons of lesser though allied deities, and a very ancient-looking idol which both Eibon and Morghi recognized as having a resemblance to Zhothaqquah. Others of the Ydheems brought their

household goods and furniture forth from the dwellings, and, signing the Hyperboreans to accompany them, the whole populace began to evacuate the town.

Eibon and Morghi were much mystified. And it was not until a new town had been built on the fungus-wooded plain at the distance of a full day's march, and they themselves had been installed among the priests of the new temple, that they learned the reason of it all and the meaning of: "Iqhui dlosh odhqfonqh." These words meant merely: "Be on your way," and the god had addressed them to Eibon as a dismissal. But the coincidental coming of the avalanche and of Eibon and Morghi with this purported message from the god, had been taken by the Ydheems as a divine injunction to remove themselves and their goods from their present location. Thus the wholesale exodus of people with their idols and domestic belongings.

The new town was called Ghloiph, after the one that the avalanche had buried. Here, for the remainder of their days, Eibon and Morghi were held in much honor; and their coming with the message, "Iqhui dlosh odhqfonqh," was deemed a fortunate thing, since there were no more avalanches to threaten the security of Ghloiph in its new situation remote from the mountains.

The Hyperboreans shared the increment of civic affluence and well-being resultant from this security. There was no national mother among the Ydheems, who propagated themselves in a far more general manner than the Bhlemphroims, so existence was quite safe and tranquil. Eibon, at least, was really in his

element; for the news which he brought of Zhothaquah, who was still worshipped in this region of Cykranosh, had enabled him to set up as a sort of minor prophet, even apart from the renown which he enjoyed as the bearer of the divine message and as the founder of the new town of Ghlomph.

Morghi, however, was not entirely happy. Though the Ydheems were religious, they did not carry their devotional fervor to the point of bigotry or intolerance; so it was quite impossible to start an inquisition among them. But still there were compensations: the fungus-wine of the Ydheems was potent though evil-tasting; and there were females of a sort, if one were not too squeamish. Consequently, Morghi and Eibon both settled down to an ecclesiastic regimen which, after all, was not so radically different from that of Mhu Thulan or any other place on the planet of their birth.

Such were the various adventures, and such was the final lot of this redoubtable pair in Cykranosh. But in Eibon's tower of black gneiss on that headland of the northern sea in Mhu Thulan, the underlings of Morghi waited for days, neither wishing to follow the high priest through the magic panel nor daring to leave in disobedience of his orders.

At length they were recalled by a special dispensation from the hierophant who had been chosen as Morghi's temporary successor. But the result of the whole affair was hardly regrettable from the standpoint of the hierarchy of Yhoundeh. It was universally believed that Eibon had not only escaped by virtue of the powerful magic he had learned from Zhothaquah but had made away with Morghi into the bargain. As a consequence of this belief, the faith of Yhoundeh declined, and there was a widespread revival of the dark worship of Zhothaquah throughout Mhu Thulan in the last century before the onset of the great Ice Age.