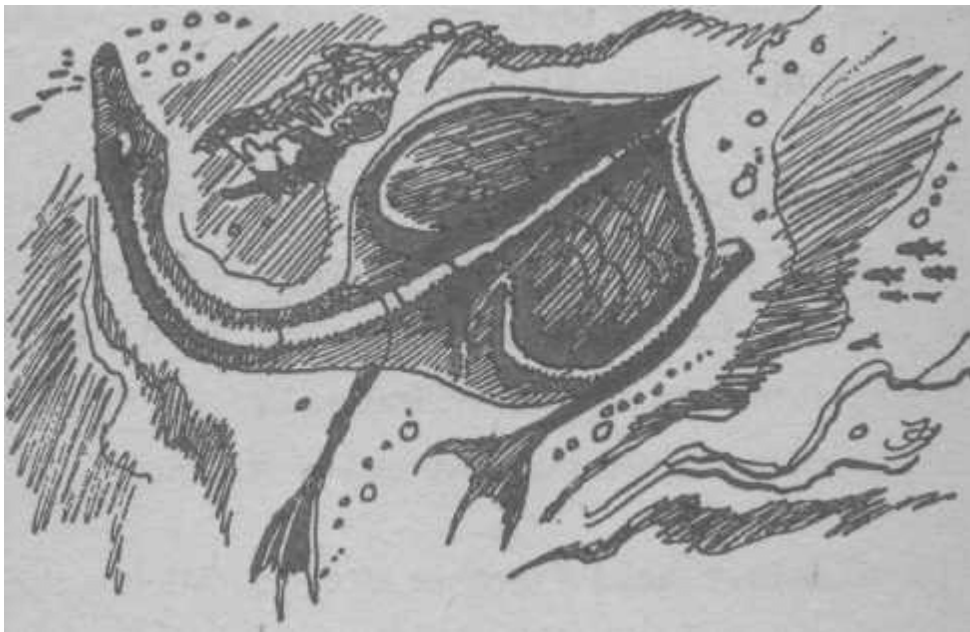


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# **The Ship from Atlantis by H. Warner Munn**



## ***I* MERLIN'S GODSON**

It was the Year of the Rabbit, in the chronology of Aztlan, and the day-sign being fortunate a great festival was taking place a few miles above the spot where the Misconzebe, Grandfather of Rivers, mingles with the salt waters of the Gulf.

For a month the invited guests had been arriving at Fortress Tollan, which held the entrance to this broad highway to the north and the rich lands of Tlapallan. The reeds which gave that district its name were gone, trampled into the mud by thousands of feet or woven into temporary shelters by the visitors. The shore was lined with watercraft.

Hide bull-boats, birch-bark and elm canoes or those carved from a single log rocked at anchor or lay bottom up until they might be needed. Decorated in fanciful patterns, they lay in colorful rows near the crowded city of weik-waums, wickiups and tepees which had sprung up around the palisade spined, earthen walled fortress. Few of those who had come to this mightiest of peace councils gave the fleet more than a passing glance. The novelty was beyond.

Drawn up in the shallows, well fastened against the tugging current, lay what any Briton would have recognized as a Saxon pirate ship. In this Year of our Lord 616, they crowded the rivers and estuaries of Britain, but in Alata, (as North America was known at that time) there was only one. Built almost twenty years before of stout oak planks, caulked with pitch and bison hair, it had been well cared for awaiting this moment.

It was seventy-seven feet in length and clinker built. At the prow and stern the decks were raised. In between, considerably lower, was a partial main deck or fighting platform, but the rowers' pit was open to the weather. Here were rowing benches, fifteen to each side, with a gangway down the center. Rows of wooden shields, emblazoned with the totems of those young Aztecs who had been chosen to wield the carven oars, were fastened to the sides to protect them from arrows or waves.

It was a well found ship and it needed to be, for in it the son of the King of the World's Edge was to set forth eastward to discover the world. From the dragon's head with golden mane at the stem post, to the tail at the stern decorated with glittering mica plates, it blazed with color. The hull was striped with red and white, fox tails hung for standards and weather vanes and a burnished copper band encircled the single mast.

The oar holes were provided with shutters to keep out the sea when under sail, as were the tiny windows in the commander's cabin at the poop and the arsenal and stores hold just forward. To the crowd, which continually milled and shifted along the shore, the *Feathered Serpent* was a great wonder.

They were as motley in appearance as their dwellings and their canoes. Many tribes and nations were represented here upon this gala day. Yonder strode caciques of the Az-teca with saw edged, obsidian toothed swords hanging by their sides. Feather fringed shields adorned their arms and plumed helmets graced their heads. Among them walked scarred fighters from the western moorlands armed with stone knife and tomahawk, short

horn bows upon their backs. Some of these wore bison headdresses; others wore warbon-nets betokening the taking of many coups.

Those who had come north from the great swamps bore blowpipes made of cane and carried slings and a pouch of stones, while the representatives from the Long House of the Five Nations looked with arrogance upon their smaller brothers in arms. These were tall men, distinguished by a single eagle feather fastened into a central roach of hair, and they had come far south from their homeland to attend the gathering. They were a fierce people, these Hodenosau-nee, but none wore war-paint for they had brought peace belts into the red land of Tlapallan where once they had marched under the battle standard of Merlin the Enchanter, to aid in the destruction of the hated Mian mound builders and their cruel empire.

Policing them all, the Dog Soldiers kept order in the camp, but there was little for them to do. It was a happy throng. There was laughing and feasting for all. There was smoking in council and storytelling for the old, using the universal sign language common to the many nations. The young men strove together. In competition they wrestled and leaped and threw the tomahawk, lance or atlatl dart. They bent the long bow at the archery butts, darted like fish through the river or hurled the racing canoes along its surface.

Many a maiden's dark eyes glistened with enjoyment and pride at the sight and many a moccasined foot would tread a new trail to a new home when the celebration was over. As ever, happiness was mingled with regret. Slim girls looked toward the high stepped mound near the river and sighed in vain desire, gazing upon the unattainable, and would not be consoled.

Here stood a strong young man whose brown hair and lighter skin set him apart from the others of his age. He was dressed much as they in doeskin loincloth, beaded headband, leggings and moccasins, for the weather was warm and he had recently competed in the games. His face was serious, for this was the final day of the feasting and the important business of the meeting was at hand.

The chief priest of the War God stepped forward and intoned;

"Oh, Tlaloc, He Who Makes Things Sprout, and thou his wife, Foam on the Water, look favorably on the mission of this young man, the son of

your brother Huitzilopoch-tli, the Raging and Terrible God!

"Huitzilopoehtli came among us when we were weak. We hid in the rocks like a rabbit. He gave us weapons, he taught us to walk in pride, he ended our fear. He created the nation of Aztlan. Behind him we marched upon our Mian oppressors. With the help of his brother god, Quetzalcoatl, Lord of the Wind, and our northern allies of the Hodenosau-nee, we killed the Mian Kukulcan and drove his people back to Atala.

"Now Tlapallan is at peace as Quetzalcoatl would have wished, for he loved peace as he was loved by us, though we are men of war. Today we are met in peace and there is no war anywhere in Alata. Our God and leader, Huitzilopochtli, has called us together to do honor to his son, Gwalchmai, the Eagle, who sails upon the Great Waters in yonder serpent ship. He will take the tale of our battling and valor to his father's people.

"We ask you, Tlaloc, to grant his favor and fair winds, a swift passage across the seas and a swift return to us who wish he need not leave us for even a little while."

He raised his hands in blessing and bowed his head and stepped aside. Another man came forward. His polished steel armor glittered in the sun. He raised his copper braceleted right arm in the Roman salute and although his hair was gray at the temples beneath his crested helmet, the strong muscles rippled under his bronzed skin. The crowd roared a greeting. He motioned for silence.

"This is my son and my messenger. His god-father was Quetzalcoatl, who is gone from us to the Land of the Dead, but who may yet return. Today we remember the Lord of the Wind and how his magic aided us all, both you of Alata and we Romans shipwrecked upon your shores. We knew him as a man of great knowledge. He was unafraid to do battle and unafraid to speak of mercy when battle was done. That others may know of his greatness, my wife and I send our only son back to Rome that he may carry the tale of his god-father's wisdom and bring other of our people here. Gold-Flower-of Day—"

A dainty woman came forward, smiling fondly upon her husband and son. She wore a beautiful cape of hummingbird's feathers over a hualpilli, or shift, of gauzy white cotton. Her black hair was glossy and long, coiled in the squash blossom fashion over and around each ear. On her wrists were bracelets of cowrie shells and around her neck hung a plaque of

matched pearls. Her waist, still slim, was cinctured with a belt of coins which could not have been duplicated elsewhere in Alata. These were joined Roman denari of silver and copper sesterces, linked together by gold. Divers had brought them up from the wrecked *Prydwen*, the warship of Arthur of Britain, in which Merlin Ambrosius had sailed across the Atlantic to find a new land. With him and his nine bards, Ventidius Varro, the centurion of the Sixth Legion, had also come to make himself a king and be worshipped as a god.

Gold-Flower-of-Day kissed her son and took the sword and belt which Ventidius removed and gave her. There were tears in her eyes as she buckled the belt upon her son, but they were tears of pride. She hugged him tightly once and released him. The crowd roared approbation and there was a great shaking of gourd rattles and blowing of bone whistles.

Ventidius raised his hand again. She stepped back and the tumult stilled. He held up a bronze cylinder so all could see.

"In this is the record of all that has been done here. Our battles in Azatlan, the joining of the Onguy nations to form the Long House, our march on Miapan, our crushing of the Tlapallican armies, our destruction of the Mian Empire.

"I send it to my Tecutli, my Lord across the sea, who will be happy to know that brave men dwell here as there. That it may not fail to reach its destination, I now place it in the keeping of my son, who, with his companions, will by strength of arm and his god-father's wisdom see it safely there. May fair winds and calm waters aid him and bring him safely back."

He gave it into the young man's hand. Gwalchmai slipped it into his belt and the two men gripped each other's forearm and gazed deeply into one another's eyes. There was no other word spoken nor other taking leave.

They slowly descended the steps of the teocalli and passed through the kneeling quiet crowd, followed by the priests. The thirty young Aztecan rowers who were to man the sweeps had already thrust the dragon ship a little way out from the shore. It was necessary for Gwalchmai to wade out thigh deep to embark.

He stood on the steersman's platform, with his hand on the whipstaff of

the tiller as the ship swung out into the current. He looked back at his parents standing on the shore. They were as impassive as he, Roman pride matching Aztec dignity, but if hearts could weep unseen—there would have been tears.

Thirty oars dipped in salute to the temple. Up rose the heavy cotton sail called "The Cloak of the Wind" with its winged serpent in red and green, ramping ready to strike. As the wind took it, the oars lashed the water and the ship picked up a bone in its teeth and borne by the stream went down to meet the rollers of the Gulf.

Ventidius and his wife stood watching as the ship grew small in distance. There was no sound from the crowd. For once, even the children were quiet, sensing the moment. There was a fleck of color far away. Was it a glint of sunlight upon an oar blade or a gleam upon a wave? A seagull's veering wing as it plunged into the water or the flicker of the dragon's movable tongue? No one could be sure, but it was gone.

They turned from the shore and went back through the waiting crowd, Ventidius' arm now about his wife, who walked leaning unashamedly against him, her eyes half closed, but dry.

Two men stepped out of the throng and walked beside them, without speaking: Gar-no-go-a-da-we, Man Who Burns Hair, the mighty emissary from the People of the Flint, and Ha-yon-wa-tha, Royaneh of the Onondaga.

Ventidius looked up from the ground and saw them and his face worked. Gold-Flower-of-Day smiled, reached out and touched them affectionately. "Old friends, dear friends —always there when we have needed you. Now that we are two again, we need you most of all."

Ventidius bent and kissed her. "Nay, dear one, we will always be three. Amavimus. Amamus. Amabimus. We have loved. We love. We shall love. We cannot know what he will find at the end of his journey. At the end of mine, I found you."

And the little group passed on, through the crowd, toward their own quarters; and the feasting began again.

Once out of the muddy channels of the Misconzebe delta, the dragon-ship turned eastward. The wind lay fair behind and the sail

strained away from the mast. There were small islands and shoals to avoid and other river mouths to discharge trees and floating debris. As their way lay coastwise for some while Gwalchmai gave the tiller into the hands of the steersman and directed him to hold away from the shore. So they sailed for a long day's run, keeping the distant greenery just visible to their left.

At evening they bore in under oars and beached upon a coral strand in a pleasant cove. A rill of sweet water emptied here into the sea and tracks dimpled deep into the mud tokened that this was a favorite watering place for deer. While some of the crew sought for oysters, mussels and crabs, others took their hunting gear from their chests under the rowing benches and slipped into the forest. It was not long before venison was roasting over a bed of driftwood coals which shimmered with heat and color.

After a tremendous meal in which none of the ship's stores had been used, most of the men lay down to sleep near the fire. The night was warm and no shelter was needed, although, as with most Saxon warships, it was possible to unship the light mast and drop the tip of it into the forked jackstaff at the prow.

Under this slanting ridgepole, when the sail was drawn over it and made fast, the rowers' pit would remain dry and the crew could sleep in comfort, either when drifting with a sea-anchor out or drawn up on a beach till morning.

The night passed uneventfully though sentries had been posted and regularly relieved. The next day Gwalchmai, following the instructions given him by his father, directed the course steadily southward to parallel the coastline of Florida, although at that time it had no name.

This had once been a country of dread. Even now it held few human inhabitants in spite of its beauty and plenitude of game. It was noisy with birds of all description during the day and the swamps boomed with the roar of the bull-alligators. Occasionally the scream of a hunting panther shrilled, but there was nothing to disturb the crew of the *Feathered Serpent*.

The weather remained fine. The god Hurakan slept, it appeared. They passed through a multitude of islands and coral reefs, still living off the land, putting in only to sleep, hunt and maintain their water supply carried in large earthenware pots. Then as they were about to round Cape

Sable adverse winds blew them southwesterly out of sight of land.

Had it not been for the little iron fish of Merlin's which, floating in a bowl of water, had guided the *Prydwen* westward across the ocean to Alata, they would have been well lost. As it was, when the seas quieted they were glad to see land and feel it under their feet again. The vegetation was lush and there was much fruit. On the beach they trapped a giant turtle and feasted upon it.

After the others were asleep, Gwalchmai studied his maps in his little cabin. This island was unmarked upon them, but so were hundreds of others they had seen and the coastline itself had not been as the maps presented it. He was forced to conclude that he could depend upon them only in the most general manner and in the end he rolled them up again and put the painted cotton strips back in Merlin's great chest.

Other magic things which he knew were more potent were kept there. Merlin had called them his tools and they were as familiar to Gwalchmai as his own right hand. Here were his witching herbs, his philters and his amulets. In a casket, covered with carvings, which did not always remain the same, were powders and pills not to be used without prayers and spells. Here, in a little tray, was his wand of power and the wizard's ring which he had always worn. Gwalchmai weighed it thoughtfully and slipped it on his finger.

He dimly remembered sitting on the old man's lap and pulling on the long white beard which had entranced him. Merlin had laughed and called him Hawk of Battle. He had been very small. Now Merlin was gone and Gwalchmai possessed his tools.

Here were his books of spells limned on fine parchment, and volumes of recipes for explosive powders and colored fires. Below them, in the bottom of the chest, were the Thirteen Magic Treasures of the Island of Britain, which he had brought away to preserve them from the Saxon pirates. Gwalchmai had just unwrapped the Cauldron of Plenty from the Cloak of Invisibility when an outcry from the shore startled him. Snatching up his father's shortsword he ran out, into a scene of horror.

A little earlier, strange scaly heads had poked up out of the sea, near the spot on the beach where the turtle had been butchered. The creatures paddled out of the water and snuffed the blood. As they did so, spined combs rose and fell on those heads like the crests of cockatoos, and under



their retreating chinless jaws wattled pouches flushed an angry purple with blotches of red.

Enraged, they dug into the blood soaked sand and flung it about with webbed clawed members which could only be called hands. They glared about with their round lid-less eyes and air hissed in and out of rudimentary gills.

Ventidius Varro had not thought to warn his son against these fearsome beings. Known to the nations of the southeast and the Illini as the Piasa, they called themselves Gronks. He had fought them and thought them exterminated. Only these few had found a refuge on this far island, to bear witness to what horrors Nature was capable of creating in a moment of madness.

As they caught sight of the ship a few started toward it on their bandy legs, their long sharp fangs clicking in anticipation. Most of the others fell to all fours and advanced upon the sleeping camp. Avoiding the fire, which was the only thing which these cold-blooded monsters held in dread, they circled and surrounded the unfortunate men. Although their bodies quivered with desire for the feast and their short stubby tails twitched as though they would lash like the tail of an infuriated alligator, they waited for the given signal.

While waiting they muttered together in low grunts and hissings, thus proving that they were more than beast if less than men. Then the leader roared, and as one, they hurled themselves into the camp.

The drowsy sentry fell instantly before that rush. It was a hopeless encounter from the start. No man of Alata ever slept apart from his weapons and confronted now by the horror their fathers had known these warriors of Gwalchmai's grappled with their terrible enemy. Torn limb from limb, their warm flesh eaten while it still held life, they struck out while they were able and died where they had slept.

The fierce cry of the Aztlan Valiants arose: "Al-a-la-la! Al-a-Ia-la!" But it grew weaker and fainter as those who sounded it fell with no time for death-songs.

By the time Gwalchmai reached the shore it was almost over and he saw that he could not reach his men. He turned and ran back to the ship. The only help they could hope for must now be found only in sorcery.

Unnoticed by him as he cut his way through the smallest group for the second time, the bronze cylinder with his father's message slipped out of his belt pouch and fell into the sand. He attained the deck again, but they were close behind.

At the sight of the monsters clambering over the rail and the death cries of his friends sounding in his ears, his heart failed for an instant. Avoiding the clawed embrace of the first pursuer, he plunged his sword to the hilt in its thinly armored underbelly. Then, as the overlapping scales clenched upon it when the attacker doubled up in its agony, he found he could not withdraw it.

He darted into the cabin, slammed and barred the door against the ponderous bodies which plunged against it. Again betraying an intelligence approaching that of man, one Gronk picked up an anchor stone out of the water by its rope and hurled it against the door, smashing in the stout oak planks.

By this time hordes of the scaly creatures were swarming over the camp, from which came no more war cries, nor any sound indeed but those of an obscene gobbling. Struggling to enter, those on the ship crowded one another to enter the cabin, but Gwalchmai had reached Merlin's chest and seized a talisman of great power from the little tray.

It writhed in his hand like a living thing as he pronounced the cantrip which activated it. Smoke curled up from his seared palm, but he clung to it grimly until he had finished the spell. The Gronk picked up the anchor stone again and felled him with it, but it was a dying reflex action. The creature dropped dying, decaying as it struck the deck, the flesh falling away from the skeleton in moments. All over the island the same thing was happening. The feasters perished in the act. Those hurrying to the feast never reached it even those who dwelt at the far ends of the island died without knowing what had struck them down.

Gwalchmai lay unconscious in his blood in the ruined cabin. Skeletons lay with him and on the deck, but there was nothing left alive to harm him. He lay there, murmuring incoherently, and when his eyes opened he looked about without knowledge. By and by he slept

The tide came gently in, lifting the prow of the *Feathered Serpent* from its trough in the sand, and because the other stones had been lifted from the sea by the other attackers, there was nothing to hold it upon the

beach.

The breeze blew softly that morning from the shore and the dragon-ship drifted away, spinning slowly with no hands at the whipstaff. Later an easterly wind gave it speed and direction, away from the coast, out into the open ocean.

After long hours the edge of the Gulf Stream caught it and hurried it on, away from Alata, away from his homeland and away from the island of death. Centuries later the Spaniards landed and christened it Cayo de los Huessos—Island of the Bones. Today we call it Key West.

## **II**

### ***THE GOLDEN BIRD***

Gwalchmai woke, but he did not know that his name was Gwalchmai. He knew that he was a man and that he was on a ship, but what manner of ship it was or how he came to be there was lost knowledge. Yet nothing looked strange to him.

He knew that this was a mast and that was a sail. He swung the tiller and the *Feathered Serpent* answered the helm—sluggishly, because the sail was furled. He climbed up and cut the lashings and made the sheets fast. Now the gentle breeze bore him eastward. He felt that he was traveling in the right direction, but could not have said why it seemed right to him.

The reason for his satisfaction was buried deep in his injured memory. He frowned, trying to remember, and the wrinkling of his forehead pulled at the stiffened hair where it was stuck to the wound above his right temple. He explored the damage with his fingers and winced. The cut was wide and swollen. He let down a leather bucket overside and brought up water and bathed away the blood. The salt stung and burned, but afterward he felt better.

It came to him that he was very hungry. He seemed unusually weak and when he discovered the ship's stores, it was hard for him to open a tightly knotted sack of pemmican. He remembered having seen a long knife lying on the deck among some bones and went after it. It seemed a long journey and after he had retrieved it and brought it down into the hold he sat in

front of the sack which smelled so good trying to recollect what he had meant to do with the knife. After a moment in thought he stabbed the sack and the rich food gushed out.

He gorged with both hands until he was satisfied. The lean pulverized sun-dried antelope meat, mixed with fat, dried wild cherries, marrow and fish eggs was almost instantly digestible. It was not long before he felt stronger. Placing the shortsword in the scabbard which still hung at his belt, he opened a jar of water and drank deeply. Instinct told him he must not drink the water in which the ship floated.

Afterward he slept again, the rest of that afternoon and all through the night. While he slept, the wind continued to blow eastward and at dawn it still pushed the ship on, though by intermittent light waftings, until midday when it ceased entirely and the ship drifted in the doldrums.

It was very hot without the breezes. Pitch softened and ran in the deck seams. The sail hung limply from the mast. Drifting, he noticed that little patches of weed were coalescing into larger mats, upon which crabs and insects crawled. The days went by with little change. He managed to clear the deck of the skeletons, but he became infected with a fever which exhausted him and he lay in his cabin for a long time, sick to the point of dying.

It was a fight to crawl to the water jars and back again to his pallet. It was only sullen determination to live that enabled him to choke down food. Weeks passed. The *Feathered Serpent* worked its way out of the Gulf Stream current and entered a calm expanse of sea. No rain fell. The weed mats became islands. The islands joined and locked the becalmed ship fast.

His strength became again as it had once been, but still his past was a blank. And then one day as he sat on the afterdeck with a cup of water in his hand, looking reflectively at the horizon across a sea of weed, he saw that it lay everywhere that the eye could search. Close to the trapped ship, lanes of clear water could be discerned, but father away, in the direction whither ship and weed islands were slowly drifting, there seemed to be no breaks in the thickly packed mass.

Nothing disturbed the surface, except a long even swell which came irregularly as though some huge denizen of the undersea went privately about its business far beneath. There were no waves. No rollers surged to

break upon the coast of that seaweed continent, neither had the winds any power over it. This was the Sargasso, dread haven of dead ships, and only the sun and silence here conspired to drive men mad, before famine was to strike the mercy blow.

Far away the rays of the setting sun were reflected from some glistening object of ruddy golden hue, deep in the weed pack, and at this he stared while he sipped his water and wondered what it might be. Darkness hid the mystery and he retired. On the next day it was a little nearer.

Other days came and passed, dragging out their monotonous round. There was nothing to mark their passage but the sinking of the level in the water jars and the closer matting of the weed masses as the constant sluggish urging of the distant Gulf Stream forced them together. Then, as was inevitable, the last of the jars was emptied and all of the water was gone.

The brassy sky gave no promise of rain and his only relief now came from the moisture deposited upon the sail during the night, but the few drops he was able to gather tantalized him more than they satisfied. He searched through Merlin's chest for something to drink and found a small vial which held little more than a spoonful of clear syrup. It was pleasantly sweet and pungent and he drank it all.

Merlin had kept himself hale and hearty with it for many years, doling it out drop by drop, and Gwalchmai, in his proper senses, might have planned in other circumstances to do the same. It was a priceless potion worth all the gathered treasure of many a king. Gwalchmai was only aware that he no longer felt thirst, not knowing that he had emptied the only bottle in all the world which had ever contained the Elixir of Life.

Now he did not crave water. His cracked lips healed and he felt strong and exhilarated. Each evening he marked that the remote gleam had come a little nearer and it seemed that a form was almost visible in that far shining object—a form that as yet he could not recognize.

Once, when marking the downward progress of the sun, he saw upthrust against its half-hidden disk a protuberance from the sea. Tall, snaky, with huge horse head and shaggy mane, dripping water and weed, it poised there looking out over the surface in search of prey, but did not spy the ship and sank again, the sun descending with it.

Weary of the weight of his sword, he had given up the wearing of it some weeks before. Now he went thoughtfully below and strapped it on again. From that time, waking or sleeping, the sword never left his side.

Gwalchmai slid down a stay, through the rotting sail tatters of crimson and green, and pondered for a moment. From his lately accustomed post at the mast he had discovered that it was now possible to come closer to the mystery which interested him.

The moon had waxed and waned since any perceptible movement had-taken place in the ship's position, but this morning that oddly enticing glimmer had come much closer to him. Near now, scarcely a mile away, it looked like a glided long-necked waterfowl, asleep with head bowed upon its breast. Could there be birds of such hugeness in the world?

Rain had fallen some days previously and now while he ate and drank he studied the route he might take to reach it.

As though to coax him on where his wishes led him, a lane had opened in the weed overnight where there had been no sign of one when he had retired. Passing within a hundred feet of his vessel, it veered eastward directly toward the curious bird.

Could he open a passage to the channel for his small boat? Surely it was worth a trial. An inner feeling insinuated that yonder something fine and desirable was waiting, but if he was to leave it must be soon.

An hour of watching had shown him that the channel was already narrower than it had been at early dawn. The same close inspection should have brought to his attention the fact that the banks and edges of the lane were heaped and torn. Rotting vegetation had been brought up from below as though some mighty rushing body had pushed through the weed, forcing a passage, piling up the debris of its passing. This had escaped his notice. He saw a road to his desire and nothing else.

After placing the small boat overside, he pushed away from the dragon ship. He did not raise the sail, for there was no wind, and he took no food or water, though he felt certain that he would not return. In his still mazed mind this did not seem an unusual thing to do. Mystically, he felt himself guided—he could not have said by what or' whom. It seemed that a quiet voice was talking to him without actual words. It instructed, commanded,

and directed his actions. He gave himself up to the voice.

At first, progress was difficult. Weed gathered against the prow and hindered him. He was obliged to stop frequently and press these clumps below the surface with an oar in order to pass over and on. After a half-hour he broke through into the channel and it was then a simple matter either to row or scull.

The clear water ran straight as a canal, directly toward the distant glowing swan. Very soon he came close enough to see that although it was not a living creature, it was as nearly perfect a replica as man could make.

The position of the head and neck remained unaltered. The beak was partially open and there was an eye above it which was closed. The lid appeared movable. As the young Aztlanian drew closer he could see that the nearer wing was feathered, by skillful carving and molding, but damaged. Half the pinion was gone and where the remainder trailed in the water the edges showed no signs of corrosion, but were torn and jagged.

He paddled closer. Now that it was evident that this phenomenon was indeed a ship, Gwalchmai felt little surprise. The craft he had quitted possessed the figurehead of a fabulous monster, with fangs and a wobbling tongue. It was conceivable that other ships might be constructed to resemble birds.

But where was the open part of the vessel? Was there an entrance? Could there be within it another lonely voyager like himself? He must inspect the opposite side and find out.

Then, before he could move, a little ringing voice tinkled inside his brain, like a tiny tocsin pealing out danger:

"Look behind you!" it warned, and he turned. Coming, and swiftly, was the maker of the path upon which he had intruded.

Thirty feet above the water towered a head, green with weed, leeches and parasitic encrustations. Eyes larger than his own head glared down upon him as paddle-like flippers thunderously smote the water and a white wave creamed the long neck high with foam. The beast would be almost instantly upon him and although Gwalchmai had no name for this menacing creature, he knew that here swam Death! /

He stood up in his rocking boat and tugged out his shortsword as the jaws above him opened wider than those upon the figurehead of his own ship. He caught a glimpse of a pointed tongue, sharp fangs driving down and a blast of stench-laden air choked him. His ears were stunned by hissing louder than a scream.

Gwalchmai smote once, with all his strength, and felt the sharp steel bite through gristle. Then, over-balanced by the blow, he fell into the prow and the hideous bony head came down like a thunder stone upon the stern.

Up, up, high into the air he shot, clinging grimly to the sword hilt. Twisting there, unconsciously directed into a perfect dive, he fell again, piercing cleanly through the deep weed which lay hard against the golden ship.

Deep down, in clear water, still retaining his sword, he swam beneath the ship, noticing even then that the bird similarity continued under the surface. Feather carvings covered the metal and passing one huge dangling leg and then the other, he saw that each broad foot was webbed with a metallic membrane which quivered and waved as he stirred the water.

Driven by his own strong legs, he came to the surface, the matted weed offering little resistance to the keen edge he opposed to it. Now he found himself close to the other wing, which was undamaged though also hanging down and partially extended. By the rough corrugations and body carvings he climbed to the broad back. A quick glance showed him that the monster had submerged. An immense commotion beneath the surface rocked the golden bird and brought up bubbles of gas from the decaying weed. A wide scaly tail slapped the open water in the channel and the boat bobbed like a chip against it.

Instantly the hideous head reappeared beneath the boat, seized upon it, shook it, crunched it into splinters and spat out the remains.

Gwalchmai lay flat upon the sun-heated metal, covered with dry salt dust. He could see that one side of the great creature's head was oozing tears of slime. Upon that side, the horror was blind. His one wild stroke had sliced away the cornea of its eye!

Again the long neck shot up out of the choppy waves, turning, twisting



to catch sight of the enemy. Gwalchmai knew that he was seen and sprang to his feet. He tapped the sword point upon the bird's back. The metal rang delicately beneath him.

"Come! Help me fight!" he cried and swung the blade over his head to deliver a mighty blow, which would certainly be his only one.

But what was this? A thrill beneath his moccasins, a tingle which coursed through his whole body—a quiver which ran through the ship, *if it was altogether a ship!*

There was a movement like that of muscles tensing. The dripping wings half lifted and struck the surface. The long beautiful swan neck swung up and lay back. The eyes glared open. A brilliant white light shone through from behind crystal pupils and it stared like a living creature into the countenance of the onrushing titan.

Then, as the young man felt the perspiration start out upon his body in anticipation of the rending fangs, the bird's beak parted wider and from it issued a torrent of crackling flame, followed by a thunderclap so close that, dazzled by levin bolt and dazed by the stunning report, he was hurled to the metal beneath him.

The serpent's head whipped back, tattered rags of flesh, seared and charred, fluttering about the gushing neck stub. Then, guided only by its secondary brain at the spine's base, the dying survival from the primeval tore through the weed, blindly hurled itself against the deserted dragon ship and sank in the splintered ruins.

When Gwalchmai became conscious the sun was low and he still lay where he had fallen. His fingers were cramped tightly upon the sword hilt. He rose and looked about him. The sea was very quiet. The channel banks had closed and left no marks of their separation. There was nothing floating to show where the *Feathered Serpent* had lain.

He turned his attention to discovering an entrance to this peculiar craft. He sought for a long time and found nothing.

A little before dusk he concluded that a rectangular hairline, just abaft of the neck and between the shoulders of the artificial fowl, might be a doorway to the mysteries below. Still he could not conceive how he was to get inside. He tried to force the point of his sword deeply enough to pry up

an edge of this space, but although the substance gave to the pressure he could not scratch or move it.

At last, in darkness, he gave up the trial and lay down to sleep upon the queer metal which could not be damaged yet was soft beneath his body. It now seemed resilient and warm with a curious *aliveness*. He could not free himself from the thought that the great bird was aware of him, pitied him, and would care for and protect him through the hours of the night.

Although Merlin's magic potion had preserved his life, it could not forever eliminate the needs of the body. Hunger and thirst lay down with him and rose with him under the fiery morning sun. At dawn he attacked the supposed entrance again, but without fortune. By midday his misery had become acute.

The ruddy golden metal, so comfortable during the night, became a torturing grill under the tropical heat. He had lain upon his bunk in the drifting dragon ship, when the pitch stewed from the deck seams above him, but although the air had been close and hard to breath there had been shade, and water to drink. Here there was neither and he suffered.

Beneath his unprotected skull, his brain seemed to be cooking. He spoke or swallowed with great difficulty. He immersed himself twice in the tepid brine and obtained some relief, but the third time he found it almost impossible to climb back upon the broad wing and dared not try again.

At last, despairing of any help, he croaked, "Open! Open!"—and stopped, astounded at the effects of his command. Before him the door which all his efforts had been powerless to force was raising lightly without a sound. A short flight of steps led downward to a cool place of half-light, and a tinkle of purling water came up to greet him. There was no one on the stairs and no sign of whoever had opened the door.

Without hesitation he descended and as his weight left the bottom step the door above dropped into place as quietly as it had arisen.

### ***III***

## ***THE IMAGE IN THE ALCOVE***

It was like descending beneath the surface of a still, clean pool. Through the translucent sides of the ship, sunlight streamed in, made more golden

by the medium through which it passed. The reflections at the waterline, which was plainly discernible, mingled and blended into gradations of amber and jade, shading off by degrees into aquamarine as the water deepened.

The floor was chequered with black and white squares and the interior of the ship was very quiet until he strode forward, searching for that welcome sound of trickling water.

Instantly a chiming of fairy bells rang sweetly, in chords and pizzicato runs. He stopped, perplexed, and when he did so the music also ceased. Obviously there was a connection between his movements and the elfin sounds. He noticed that, at the moment, he was standing upon a white square.

He pressed gently upon a black square with one experimental foot. A faint trilling run of silver notes replied, which repeated itself more loudly as his full weight came upon the square. He stepped away to an ivory block. Silence followed. At this explanation of the mystery, his brow cleared and he walked boldly on, while every step meant harmony.

There were the sounds of harps and dulcimers as he progressed further, enraptured by beautiful scenes and vistas upon the walls, neither painted nor graven there. These seemed like magic windows through which he gazed upon lifelike displays of marble cities thronged by handsome, sturdy men and lovely women, so real that it seemed the breath of his passing should ruffle their flowing robes.

Thrumming woodwinds provided an undertone, as he walked on, to the higher notes of violin and monochord, blending and sinking away to a sighing murmur of waves when he stopped before a harbor view. Great ships, similar to the one he was exploring, breasted the water or were drawn up beside long quays where throngs of dark skinned slaves were about the business of discharging cargo.

High in the air soared other ships, equally at home in the clouds as on the ocean, while at the entrance to the bottlenecked port, another was landing, its wings half-furled, broad webbed feet thrust wide like a gull's, to meet the impact of the waves.

He passed on. Trumpets brayed and clamored, drums growled menacingly as he strode by a scene of war. From the sky the swan-ships

shot down levin bolts to meet the jagged lightning streaming up from the squat cities below. With seared off wings the warring craft fell wheeling, to be lost in clouds of fire and rolling smoke above the crumbled walls and towers.

Gwalchmai turned away. It was only a picture. Thirst again drove him on. At the end of the long room, two passages opened and diverged. He trod upon a white rectangle and while he hesitated the music died away.

The left-hand corridor curved sharply, as though it led back and around the wall of the room in which he stood. Its floor and walls, once white, were now the sunwarmed hue of old ivory, for dust lay thick upon them. The other passage bore straight ahead toward the neck and head of the giant fowl, but its end could not be seen for vision lost itself there in blackness.

Somber were the walls and ceiling, and the floor, once shining like polished ebony, was also dull with dust. Yet in this obvious evidence of long years of disuse and neglect could be seen unmistakable proof that somewhere within its eery depths was—life!

Here were tracks, recently made, human footprints and quite small, pointing in both directions. He bent above them, studying them, calling upon his experience in trail tracking. The tracks had been made by bare feet, delicately shaped, and the person who had made them had been in haste. Coming out of the dark corridor, the toe-prints were clear and distinct. Only occasionally had the dust been scuffed by a heel. Overlaying some of these were clear outlines of the whole foot, created as that person, walking, had returned. There were two sets of these spoor, made by the same feet. Twice, then, someone had come running out of that passage and re-entered it more slowly. Could it be the one who had opened the way for him?

He hesitated only a few seconds, though he could feel that some indefinable menace lay waiting in the dark way, like a beast of prey lurking beside the path which its hunter must eventually tread. Gwalchmai smiled faintly, a little nervous trait which marked him and which some men had learned to dread—but only with his lips.

His sword slid from its sheath. Surely it was better to reckon early with whatever he might find and either render it harmless or learn in what manner he could dwell with it in peace. He entered the passage.

Immediately he felt that the crouching beast had pounced.

Drums and brasses crashed deafeningly against him, threaded by a clarion trumpet cry as counterpoint. The uproar drowned out the sound of the fountain he sought. Almost at once, he found he had approached a ramp. He set his feet to it in the threatening dark and began to climb.

As he advanced further down the narrow way, a curious menacing note crept into the sounds. A discordant violence was disrupting the harmony, almost seeming to become an articulate bellowing, warning him against further daring. Did something forbidden lie ahead?

Once again, the feeling came to him that this great bird-like ship was something more than a mere fabrication of metal. *Was* it a living creature after all and these sounds its voice? Did harmony denote approval of his actions—and violent discordance indicate its disapproval and anger?

He felt himself being absorbed into the very gullet of the creature, but with his lips grimly set he stumbled on, probing into the almost tangible blackness with his sword-point. He pressed deeper into a deafening clamor of desperately crashing kettledrums and roaring serpentines, excruciatingly off-key; farther still into the stunning uproar, the jarring assault upon his ears and being. The very bones of his head thrilled and hummed with the painful vibrations which deafened him. On then! On with throbbing temples and fire-filled skull—to burst suddenly into another room, smaller than the first, peaceful, quiet, and drowned in pale green light.

The brilliance dazzled him and an instant hush, somehow ominous, rocked him like a blow. Intuitively, he felt that he was where he should not be, that this sanctum was the spot from which he had been meant to be turned aside by the strident voice of the ship. The commotion ceased, it was true, but now he sensed that he had made an implacable enemy. There was a feeling of hatred around him, never to leave him while he was on the ship. He was constantly to be aware of this sensation of something inimical, the "genius loci" perhaps, which he had offended and which, being deadly, powerful and patient, bode its time.

Without present thought of this, he now saw the fountain whose liquid invitation had drawn him thither, and running across the room, he plunged his aching head beneath the surface of its clear sweet pool. Limpid as the water was, the temptation to indulge immoderately proved

very strong and only with a distinct effort could the young Aztec force himself to withdraw from it.

Not until then did he see the girl who watched him.

She stood upon a little dais, raised slightly from the floor, set in an alcove in the farther undecorated wall. She was completely nude; no clothing could have enhanced the glory of her form, nor did any embarrassment appear upon her perfect but expressionless features. With both hands extended slightly in a beseeching attitude she seemed to invite him nearer.

For a few long seconds Gwalchmai stared across the face. Neither spoke, nor was there any interrupting sound except the musical plashing into the pool.

Sunlight poured through the translucent emeraldine ceiling, upon a rose-pink floor, reflecting upon the fair body before him, rendering it lovely as a dawn-colored pearl in its nacreous home. Time stood still, waiting—Then he rose to his feet, skirted the pool, moving forward not recking where he trod, bemused with beauty. Something crunched and splintered dryly beneath his moccasined feet and looking down with no great surprise, for everything here was strange, he saw that he trod in a tangle of human bones. He stepped over them with more care and confronted the girl. She did not move or show fear of this strange intruder into her lonely home.

Half timidly for one who had so bravely faced the sea-snake, he laid his hand upon her shoulder—and with a short laugh of disillusionment, he recoiled. Here was nothing human, to be companion for him in the wastes!

It was an image only, formed from the same odd metal as the ship, ruddy as his own skin, warm, stronger than bronze or steel, yet softer to the hand almost than living flesh. Was there life here—of a sort?

He could not be sure. Again he touched her—cheek, throat, breast. Her hair lifted lightly in his palm and stirred to his breath. The substance of her body dimpled to the pressure of his finger tip, but so did the very wall behind her! Yes I She was metal. It was a strange, marvelous, uncanny metal, but she was unhuman.

There was one more test that he could make, though he felt that it was desecration. His blade was still unsheathed. He touched the point to her side and drew it down from breast to thigh; then, as she did not wince or change expression, he set it against the delicately rounded hip and twisted vigorously.

No scratch, no impression marred the diamond hard surface of her shapeliness—she was metal and an image, nothing more!

Deeply disappointed and lonely, he left this tantalizing mystery and inspected the bones to learn from them whatever he could. Dry, desiccated, crumbled away almost to dust, they powdered when he touched them, proving indisputably the hoary antiquity of these remains.

One skeleton was that of a woman, for it was adorned with a richly wrought golden necklace, but the other bones were certainly male. A short dagger lay at one hip and a small bell-mouthed instrument at the other. If a belt had once joined and supported these there was no sign of it now, nor any threads of clothing, but the metal was un-corroded by time.

He picked up the unfamiliar implement and examined it curiously. Could it be a weapon? Too light for a war club—perhaps a missile thrower of a sort? But the bell mouth was closed over by a thick curved piece of heavy crystal. No missile could be ejected through that! Life had suddenly become full of mysteries! He observed that the bones of the warrior's legs were broken between knee and ankle and knowing he had not trod in that direction, he bent to look at the fractures. As he did so, his finger slipped into a loop near the handle of the thing he held, unconsciously twitching it tight.

The next instant a dazzling flare of light almost struck him blind. The weapon, definitely proven to be such, leaped in his loose grasp and the concussion filled the room with dust.

When he could again see plainly, both skeletons had vanished, as had the golden necklace and the dagger sheath. The blade itself, molded from that mysterious sparkling metal, was not injured and the floor it lay upon was unharmed, though blackened by char and soot from the bones.

Respectfully, he eyed the powerful and deadly thing he held. Something like this, much larger, had killed the beast he had fought! If this needed an agency to set it off, then clearly the other weapon had been fired with

intention—to save his life. By whom?

The question could not be answered at present, but he determined to make a thorough search of the ship and find his unknown benefactor who so shyly avoided the thanks due him.

Three days later he was still searching, but without much expectancy.

During that time he had poked and pried into every dusty nook upon the ship, from the galley situated in the tail of the bird to the tiny chamber back of the great goggle eyes, still unlidded as he had seen them from outside. Here he had peered out and over the yet partially opened beak, and, by pulling a lever attached to an enormous replica of the belt weapon which he had appropriated, had seen the lightning crash into the sea, lashing the stagnant weed with crackling flames.

This was the manner of it, then, but where was the operator, his unknown savior? Not in the laddered neck which led down again to the room of the fountain, nor in the larger room he had first entered. He took the other corridor to the left, which wound down and around that room to a lower level.

Here were darker chambers, though illumined by a lambent shimmering inherent in all the walls. Forward, in the breast of the bird, was a large cargo compartment crammed with chests of flexible paper-thin metal which would not tear or be cut by sword edge. They opened easily when he tugged gently upon a small tab which he found was always situated in the upper right hand corners. Air hissed inward when he opened them, proving that they had been hermetically sealed.

These stores were the saving of him. In some chests he found dried fruits, in others a thick meaty paste, almost like pemmican. This was savory and good. Whatever the chest might hold, it needed only water to make the food swell into a tasty meal. In those three days he had learned to recognize the symbols which distinguished the two articles of food and although he felt sure that other edible substances were yet to be found, these alone were ample for his needs.

He discovered heat in the galley, by accidentally leaning against a wall stud; almost at once, a grid of coils set in a metal box against the wall had begun glowing red. Above this radiant heat he did his simple cooking, in pots of unfamiliar shape, eating with his fingers and knife from dishes



such as he had never seen.

Water came from pipes in the wall, fed, he was sure, from the reservoir upon the floor above, where the little fountain constantly played without ever filling the catch basin to overflowing.

Centrally, below the water line, were machines, and here Gwalchmai was entirely bewildered. He guessed that their purpose was to propel the ship through the water, for he could trace massive rods and levers from their first connections to the legs of the immense swan. Suspecting that, before the wing outside had been injured, this craft might have flown in the manner he had seen in the murals, he had verified this thought by further research. Other rods eccentrically wrought and bent to meet the shoulders from which those pinions hung proved his theory correct, but he remained mystified, unable to guess what power motivated the ship.

This room of machines was a room of dread. It was filled with a buzzing, a humming, which occasionally took on the very timbre of a snarl which issued from deep within the maze of wheels, levers and cogs. When this happened, Merlin's ring, which he still wore, became warm upon his finger. He did not know the cause, but he intuitively felt it to be a warning of danger and felt himself threatened. Occasionally also, fat blue sparks spat between metal and metal, without apparent reason, shaking his edgy nerves as he tiptoed cautiously about the room. He saw beneath his feet the little fish darting beyond the plates of metal, which here were quite transparent. He touched nothing, though his devouring curiosity compelled him to slide between the levers and pry into every cranny without success in his search for other life.

There *was* life here. He could feel it surging about him, prickling his skin, causing his scalp to burn and itch, his hair to rise, his feet to tingle—but it was not life as he knew it.

There was nothing human in the cold ferocity which he felt constantly regarding him. He was not daunted by it. His courage had never been questioned, but he felt uneasy in this eery place of power. Gwalchmai doubted now that anything even remotely approaching human emotion could be assumed as a part of this terrible hatred which he felt weighing upon him, close as a second skin.

On the third evening, almost firmly convinced that his search was useless, he sat again in the room of the fountain, dabbling his hands in the

water and glumly regarding the beautiful image. The green light, paler with the descending sun, bathed the room with peace and beauty. There is a healing quality in this color. It is the hue of living things, the lifeblood of the Earth Mother, and there is a benison and a blessing in it. In this room he felt that he was welcome and in this room only.

His loneliness seemed more than he could bear and suddenly memories came rushing back. Aztlan, his father and mother, his mission and his vow to complete it, the faces of his dead companions who were to him like brothers—all these and more he remembered as the light streamed down upon him and he buried his face in his hands and groaned at the hopelessness of his situation.

Lost and a prisoner on a mysterious ship locked tightly in a sea of weed! Alone and helpless to fulfill his vow. Here was the only companion he had found: an unseeing, insensate fabrication of metal, lovely as the dreams of an angel, but without voice, without emotion, without soul.

The silence bore heavily upon him also. No bird lofted in these skies, no fish could leap through the weed, no bee droned heavily by. After he had entered that sanctuary upon the first day, no sounds but the water in the fountain and the menacing fury of the room of power had broken the deathly stillness of the ship. He had stamped upon the black and white squares, pounded upon the floor of the dark corridor, but no chime, either harmonious or dissonant, had answered and he heard only the noise of his own making.

As he sat and inspected this cunning creation of some long-dead artist, he felt that even his solitude in the lonely dragon ship was preferable to this, for there he had no simulacrum of life to torment and tantalize him. He remembered how his old white bearded god-father Merlin had amused him when he was very small by causing a man-shaped mandrake root to leap and prance before him to make him laugh. He smiled.

He knew the spell. Should he try it now? And then, like a whisper in his ear, the thought came to him that there was no need of magic, either white or black. Upon this ship he had but to command to "be obeyed. There was nothing to suggest this idea; it was but a random fancy. There was no one, no thing, to command; yet it set him thinking further.

On the back of the swan-ship, awaiting the stroke of the monster, he had not asked for help. He had commanded it!

"Help me fight!" he had ordered and the unknown benefactor had responded.

Smiling a grim, twisted smile at his own ridiculous folly, he looked straight at the beautiful statue and muttered:

"Come here and talk to me—if you can!"

And with a tread that was feather light, the metal girl quitted her pedestal, advanced toward him and, when two strides away, sank upon her knees with bowed head, murmuring in soft tones like a muted golden bell:

"I am here! What does my lord require of his servant?"

## *IV*

### *THE SHIP FROM ATLANTIS*

To say that Gwalchmai was not surprised would be untrue, and he did recoil, as any other man might do, but he replied readily and after the first start he felt no thrill of fear. She was too lovely to be anything but kind and gracious, and the sweet voice, though metallic in timbre, charmed his senses.

"Tell me of yourself," he requested. "How did you come to be here and from what land? Are you the one who blasted the monster? Are there others of your kind and will they be friends with me or must I fight?"

Her expression did not change, nor did she move from her knees as she began to speak.

"When I was human and warm with life, my name was Corenice. With my father, Colrane, a star-seer, I dwelt upon a mountaintop in the drowned land of Poseidonis. Is the name familiar to you?"

The Aztlanian shook his head.

"I feared it," she mourned. "Even the memory of my lost homeland has passed away and I alone remember. Know this then, man: Poseidonis, an island continent, broad and powerful as it was in my youth, was but the tiny remnant of a mightier land, Atlantis, which perished for its sins.

"Because the people were wicked, in each of their generations the Spirit of the Wave sank miles of seacoast, giving meadowland, farms, villages and cities to the finny people of the sea.

"Still they did not give up their sin, for they did not recognize it as sin, at that time, and the dry land dwindled during the centuries."

"What was this wickedness?" Gwalchmai asked, curious.

"Murder, the unforgivable sin! The wanton slaying of man by man—the sin which men call war!

"Atlantis was the mistress of the world. Her colonies and tributary nations covered the globe. She had won them— and what she termed glory—by the sword, and in the eyes of the Gods she was no more than a loathsome sore, polluting even that which remained clean. Through the ages she was punished by earthquake and fire, by volcanoes and the encroaching sea, until only Poseidonis remained.

"At last, though late, a new generation forswore the ways of war. They developed beyond the simple worship of the visible and its symbols and came to adore the Spirit of the Wave. Immediately they began to thrive. The sea took no more land. As they learned to live peacefully, waging no more wars, demanding no more tribute, Ahuni-i, the Spirit of the Wave, took human shape and came to live among men, in the form of a beautiful woman."

During this recital, she had not altered her expression or her position in the slightest and her voice, though melodious, came in a monotone. Gwalchmai interrupted.

"Will you not rise and be at ease? You should not kneel to me."

She did not move. "I cannot, in this body, do aught else than obey a direct command. It was created to serve and its actions were determined by the patterns built into it by the constructor. If it is your pleasure that I rise, you must command me to do so, or give me the power of independent action, thus letting my mind control this artificial body as it suits me."

"How can I do this?"

"There is a stud between my shoulder blades. Turn it thrice to the right

and I will be able to act at my own volition."

The stud was not hard to find, for it was the only blemish on her exquisitely perfect back, but it was difficult to turn, being circular and very smooth. Finally he managed the required number of turns and the metal girl rose.

Now she was no longer a statue, but a person. She turned her face toward him and smiled. He found her now far lovelier, being animated, than he had thought when she seemed to be only an image. Corenice walked away a few steps and returned to him, a soft musical chiming "accompanying all her movements, as the metal parts of her body functioned in the manner for which they were intended.

He concluded that in Atlantis great artists had once dwelt.

She took his hand and drew him down beside her, to sit at the edge of the fountain. Her hand seemed live and warm and her fingers were soft, but in them he sensed a power and strength which could crush stone to powder. Her voice had cadence, expression and a tonal quality as she resumed her narrative. She was alive!

"Ah! Could you have seen the holy beauty of the long green rollers entering the sacred harbor of Colicynos, you too would have worshipped, as did all Poseidonis, the Spirit of the Wave. Here, the legend, old long before my time, tells us that Ahuni-i stepped out of the creaming foam and showed herself to mortals who, still dark in spirit, fell upon their faces and adored her. Here she dwelt until her mortal body grew aged and feeble and could not answer her desires. Here she returned to the Wave, walking down the strand, deeper and deeper into the receding tide, until she could grasp the white mane of a silver-footed sea horse and be carried to the halls of coral. There, forever young, she still dwells until the time comes once again for her to encourage good in the hearts of a favored race of men.

"The priest whom she had instructed for so many years filled her little footprints with molten gold-and built around them a walk of rainbow marble, extending from the greensward to a point far beyond low-water mark. It is the most beautiful sight in Colicynos—or was, for Poseidonis is no more!"

\*No more?" echoed Gwalchmai. "And why?"

Deep grief tinged her voice. \*\*A curse came down from the sky upon our ancient world. Men had been taught to abhor war. They had become gentle and peace loving, learned in the arts. One day a hot dry wind blew upon the City of the Golden Gates and folk went mad. They fell upon one another in the streets, striking out without reason, tearing at friend or stranger like beasts, cursing, killing, in a fever delirium of lust and hate. Suddenly the wind waned and with it passed the insanity.

"Halfway around the world it appeared again, blowing straight down from the zenith, like no other wind that had ever been known. It breathed upon Bassalonia and the people rose, raving, and hurled themselves over the border. Shandagone burned in the night, and Phorphar and Nina-zar, that mighty city! Ash, and ruin and tombs, all of them! Their folk put to death by sword and club and strangling hands, and none of them had hated one another before.

"Zimba Buei, the City of Gold, felt its hot breath, more burning than the tropical sun above, and the blacks came down, with axe and spear, leaving nothing but bones and crumbling walls to mark the site of our mining colony.

"Drums beat in Shamballa. Valusia divided itself into factions and roared with the pain of civil strife. With distrust and hate worldwide, almost in a single night Poseidonis rearmed!

"Vimanas, our swan-ships, meant for peaceful trade, were fitted with the dyro-blast and a fleet which darkened the sky soared northward into Cimmeriai to meet the fleet which we knew would soon be driving down upon us. They met near Congor and the historians relate that the sea boiled with the heat deflected down upon it from exploding ships. Neither fleet came home.

"All around the world similar scenes were taking place, but not until the strength of all nations was exhausted was the cause of the widespread dissension revealed. Then above the White Island, in the Gobi Sea, the sky seemed suddenly to change into a vast inverted bowl of flame, filled with clotted masses of fire. Before the astounded people below were incinerated they saw a gigantic black ship descending.

"It was the accursed Lord of the Dark Face! Coming from the Morning Star, he had invisibly poised above the great centers of population and with his subtle arts caused strife among men. When all nations were

weakened, their materials for resistance spent, his space ship descended to conquer enfeebled Earth.

"He rode upon fire! Stunning reverberations of heat and sound beat down upon the Gobi Sea, drying it to a desert of salt and sand. The White Island became a cinder with all human life extinct, but the Lord of the Dark Face peopled it with his followers.

"Most of them were artificial thought-forms of his own depraved mind, but they possessed a life of their own, a life that was altogether evil. As emissaries, taking on the semblance of the natives wherever they visited, they went out into all countries, preaching the dark gospel of the Kingdom of Pan. Down the long steep grade that leads to atavism all the peoples passed, lusting after the sins of the flesh and the greater abominations known only to the spirit.

"Only in Poseidonis was there any real resistance. For a long time a secret worship, led by the Priesthood of the Midnight Sun, had existed in dark earth-caverns which led down into unguessable depths. Here black magic was practiced under the favor of the Gods of the Nether World and the lore, these priests had attained was put to stem use at this bitter emergency. With one accord, at this time, the people of Poseidonis sought whatever weapons could be found to war against Oduarpa, the Lord of the Dark Face.

"The shining temples of Ahuni-i were left vacant and deserted, even by her priests, as the news came that the deluded hosts of all Earth, led in battle rank by the invaders from space and commanded by Oduarpa, were marching to embark from the coasts nearest to our country. At that despairing hour, men forgot to look into the square and pitying eyes of the Spirit of the Wave for wisdom and courage. They even denied that Ahun-i could save them. They surged down into the unthinkable abysses below the Siluane Hills and there in the eternal night they found what they sought.

"None who descended would later tell of that which lay below, but they found the strange and horrible land of the Dark Sun and became in form very similar to the inhabitants of that land.

"Up and out of the long tunnels they returned to the clawed, long-armed monstrosities. On others, leathery wings had sprouted, and many were no longer biped, but were horned and spined and doubly

dangerous. In the mad eyes of all there gleamed the lust to kill. In the under land the bodily form of each had taken on the semblance of his inner spirit and that spirit had been warped by blasphemous arts until, no matter how mild previously, it had become the contaminated soul of a murderer!

"The host, men and women once, crossed the sea and met the would-be invaders at Gebira. In their Vimanas they fell upon the assembled armies, scattered and destroyed them. Flakes of fire fell from the skies like snow. Whole lands became as ash and cinders. Oduarpa was killed and upon his death his lieutenants vanished, for their pseudo-life was an extension of his. Mercilessly, the murderers wandered to and fro upon the tortured surface of the Earth, ravaging, wantonly slaying, stamping civilizations flat, destroying the long work of eons.

"The White Emperor recalled them, but many would not come. Those have gone down in the pantheons of the other lands as fearful deities to be propitiated with blood and tears. Hawk-headed, dog-faced, baboon-shaped—lion- or bull-bodied monsters. Our loved ones of Poseidonis who fought and suffered and lost their souls to save our endangered country! *r*

"Some thousands came back. White Magic warred with Black Magic that they might be cured in the healing temples—our protectors who were at the same time our greatest criminals. Some were beyond redemption and were mercifully exterminated. The remainder resumed their human shape once more, but their kindly nature had been warped. Their behavior was unpredictable and it was found that the slightest irritation caused them to fly into fits of ungovernable fury.

"Yet, though they had been blighted by their experiences, the mass of the nation regarded them as heroes. In order that they might still continue to live and enjoy life as fully as possible, an island off the coast of Alata was set apart for them.

"This was surrounded by a wall of force through which they might not pass to continue the infection from which they suffered. It was a gentle exile and they were granted every luxury. Whole families went to dwell with those they loved and here through the ages that followed they found happiness as they and their descendants fulfilled their destiny. It was a fertile island and now and again new blood came to it when convicted murderers were sent there, for who can slay a murderer without becoming



one himself?

"Supplies were sent them for many years until they became self supporting and then, the need no longer existing, they were almost forgotten by Poseidonis. My country, now the only civilized land upon the globe, suffered terribly during the passing centuries.

"All the rest of the world had lapsed into deepest barbarism. Again men returned to the caves and the forests. In a few places they even forgot the use of metals and the value of fire. The Spirit of the Wave, not holding

Poseidonis guiltless for its part in the general ruin, caused the glaciers to melt and retreat into the north. The rising waters of her disapproval overwhelmed the large islands of Ruta and Daitya, remnants preserved from a former inundation.

"In other places there were encroachments, dismaying the people. Again they renounced war, and the last few happy years began for the dying continent of Atlantis. During this period, I was born.

"Several centuries before, an exploring expedition had crossed the dead sea bottom of the **Gobi**, searching for the fabled White Island. Its glories were gone, but they found Oduarpa's spaceship there and stripped it of its secrets. The metal of its structure was foreign to Earth and they called it orichalcum.

"This is the only metal in existence which lives. A tiny grain of it, added to a large quantity of lead, transmutes the lead into mercury, mercury into gold, and gold finally into orichalcum. This is the metal of which my artificial body is composed and all the substance of this Vimana!

"From that time onward, any body or movable thing constructed from orichalcum draws energy from sunlight and docilely submits to man's direction.

"When this discovery was made, aided by writings found on the spaceship, life was made easier for the inhabitants of Poseidonis. Artificially made men and women, scarcely to be recognized as non-human, carried on all the disagreeable work necessary without complaint or recompense. Swan-ships sailed the skies, never tiring, beautiful and swift, wafting the human population about in accordance to its frivolous will. Life became too easy. It no longer had purpose. Boredom

came.

"As I have said, Colrane, my father, was a star-seer. I helped him in his work in his observatory, high in the Siluane Hills, searching the sky night after night as thousands of others were doing, lest another visitation from the stars take us unaware.

"Little we suspected, with our eyes turned heavenward, the land slumbering peacefully about us, the nearby harbor of Colicynos a crescent moon of soft light upon the bosom of the dark sea, that destruction was creeping upon us from the realms beneath the ground.

"After the defeat of the nations, our people in their fear had tumbled in the entrance to the Land of the Dark Sun, sealing it with talismans, shutting it off, they thought, forever. But now, in their boredom and idleness, fools opened the unhallowed road and passed within, while back along the way they had trod, came the inhabitants of the Dark Land to seize upon upper Earth.

"From our observatory my father and I • felt the concussion and saw the flare as Mount Gartola split wide open. Father swung around the small scanner and focused it upon the rent, but with the naked eye I could see black winged things tumbling out of the mountain, hurling themselves down upon the plain and the sleeping city below.

"His face was white with fear as he dropped the tube. He clutched my arm, hurried me out upon the landing and into our Vimana. Earth shocks almost threw us from our feet. The Vimana rocked and fell from the landing, but caught itself without attention from us. It sprang into the air and spread its pinions.

"Father willed it to Mount Gartola and as we soared above the seething abominations he seared them with the dyro-blast. The Vimana flew back and forth just in front of their line of advance. I think he hoped to drive them back below ground, but if so there was no time. The Spirit of the Wave was at last enraged beyond forgiveness with the folly of sinful Atlantis.

"Far out at sea we saw the wild white line coming at us, while we wheeled and fought. The crest of the Wave was higher than any mountain I had ever seen. It pounded down upon Colicynos, and when it fell, flame leapt from the hills to meet it. Water rushed down into the Dark Land,

Poseidonis blew itself apart in thunder—something struck against the Vimana's wing; I heard the crash and the crumpling—I knew we were falling but I do not remember the shock of striking the water.

"When I again became conscious, I was in dreadful pain. My back was broken and I felt that I had only moments to live. My father was near me, also suffering intensely. His arm was broken, both legs and several ribs. I could see that his condition was most desperate.

'Daughter,' he whispered, 'our bodies are dying, yet we need not die unless we will it. Shall we take, the bodies of the servants?'

Tie referred to two bodies of orichalcum, made to serve —one permanently placed upon a dais as an object of art and to be available if needed, the other packed away for future use. These were usually made in the likeness of living persons in the family which owned them. It was possible for an adept to will his or her astral self into such a body, becoming its ego. This was often done when a person's fleshy body was weary of living and it hampered a spirit still restless to complete a problem or an experiment. It was not a difficult matter to adjust oneself into its new home and it is only a little harder to take over a real body for a short time and look out of its eyes at strange surroundings."

"I know about that," Gwalchmai interjected. "My godfather, Merlin, spoke of it in his books of magic. He called it possession."

"Yes, it is possession, and it was then that we meant to possess the orichalcum bodies, activating them to take the place of our own. The heaving of the Vimana upon the turbulent ocean, as it swam half-submerged, gave me excruciating pain. I gasped, 'Anything, father, but do it quickly!'

"He gazed steadily at this female figure and I added my thoughts to his. I felt a sudden cessation of pain. I opened my eyes, which I did not remember having closed, and found myself standing, looking down upon two distorted figures on the floor. The experiment had been successful. Father said, faintly, 'Come here to me.'

"I walked toward him, feeling alive, human as any normal girl, which was odd to think about, although this metal body was modeled from my living form. He raised himself, high as he was able, trying to reach the stud on my back. The experiment was never performed without an

assistant close at hand to do this when the interchange was completed. I could have lifted him, but he did not command it and this servile form responded only to commands. I could not help him or myself.

"His good arm reached upward to my knees, my waist —his breath whistling with pain. He touched the small of my back and I felt his fingers fall away. I heard the thud as he fell and I knew he was dead, but I could do nothing. Oh, Ahuni-i! I could not even cry.

"Then the body, receiving no other order, returned to its original spot on the dais, as it must always do upon the completion of a command. In it, I was imprisoned. I could never escape from it through any act of my own will. Here, magnetically held, I have stood for untold years. Waves cradled the ship, winds have rocked it, weed has gripped it fast, but nothing has stirred me.

"I have projected my astral body far. In spirit I have roved the world. For moments I have looked out of other eyes and heard with other ears. I have known of love, of hate, of death—all the emotions of others, never of mine.

"I have seen great nations rise from barbarism and sink into oblivion, and other nations, a score of times, build proud new cities on the ruins of the old, whose very names had been forgotten. I have seen the land rise and fall like the waves of the sea and forests become deserts and lakes become dry land and lake again and I have stood here waiting.

"I have learned languages for my amusement, of which no word is now spoken upon any living tongue, but rove as I might, learn what I would, I could not escape from my prison.

"Then, looking down upon the sea out of the eyes of an albatross, I saw your little wooden boat being borne to me into the weed by the currents and the breeze. I studied you. I knew that I must draw you to me and I influenced the sea worm to make a channel through the weed, a path which I hoped your curiosity might urge you to follow. You have a strong mind, when it is not sick. I could not move you to my will and it surprised me.

"You know the rest, but know this too: I could have done nothing to help you had you not given this unruly body of mine definite orders for it to obey. In my deep gratitude, you may command anything in my power

to fulfill and it shall be done. At last I am mistress! Mistress of myself!"

"I have no commands," said Gwalchmai. "I do not know who I am or how I came to be here, and I am weary of loneliness."

Corenice studied the young man's face. She took his head between her hands and pressed it to her breast. Her touch was warm and soothing and her hair fell upon his shoulders as gently soft and trailing as that of a girl of flesh and blood.

He felt a sense of healing pouring into his mind and suddenly the blank spot there was filled. Again he had an identity. He remembered his parents and his mission. He recalled his promise to fulfill the duty he had vowed to complete whatever might intervene—Now it was the man who fell to his knees in gratitude, telling her his story and giving thanks that it would, with her help, be possible to complete his vow. Surely it was for this that he alone had escaped alive from the island of the thirty slain.

Surprisingly, she agreed and smiled upon him. It was a young, gay, girlish smile. He was good to look upon. Gwalchmai saw it and wondered. Could her story be true? Was it possible that she was not human? He studied her. In every aspect, except for little golden glints which twinkled just under a translucent skin, if it was skin, and her golden color, she was as other girls that he had known in Aztlán.

Her nudity, to Gwalchmai, was nothing to be concerned about. With his upbringing in a hot climate and his background, clothing of any sort meant only an opportunity for embellishment, or a protection against the weather. This was normal and as it should be, yet as Corenice twisted her metallic hair into a coiled coronet, dimples sprang out in her cheeks. As she stood before him with her head thrown back, her every gesture was so purely feminine that the breath caught in his throat.

Her tiniest motion was grace and beauty. He was stirred as none of the girls in his father's capital of Miapan had ever affected him, and they were the pride of the empire.

"When you were as I am, Corenice, did you seem as I see you now?"

"Would you like to see me as I was then?" she asked, almost shyly.

"It would please me very much, if I could; but so long ago, you say—?"

She opened a compartment in a desk and took out a transparent block. Two little figures stood within it.

"My father and I appeared thus upon my last birthday. Hold it to your eye, so—and press this corner hard."

Now, to Gwalchmai, the figures seemed life size. They moved and smiled at each other. The man said something. The girl laughed and pirouetted before him in a swirl of white silk while he stood back and admired her. There was great love in his expression. She kissed him on the cheek.

Then, with their arms about each other, they stood and seemed to look directly into Gwalchmai's eyes. He gasped. The girl in the cube looked exactly like the living statue.

"That is you and this is you! You are the same!"

"I told you the image was molded from my living body. Now, thanks to you, I live again."

"How old were you then, Corenice? How old are you now?"

But Corenice was rearranging her hair and although he repeated it, she obviously did not hear the question, for she did not answer. When she had finished, she looked upon him seriously.

"Your vow I will help you keep. I shall be most happy to do anything for you that you can ask and I can do, but I am, in my own way, as firmly bound to a duty as are you. There is a vow I made to my ancestors during the long centuries I stood alone in yonder alcove, looking out upon the wickedness of the world. There is a danger coming which I alone can ward away, lest other lands be destroyed as was Atlantis and for the same reason. I swore to somehow thwart that danger if I were ever set free, and Ahuni-i listened and sent you. That promise binds me now.

"My observations of you and of the sword you carry, and perhaps also the ring you wear, lead me to believe that your help would be valuable to me. If you would not come with me, I will take you now upon your way, aid you to complete your mission, and bring you back to your own country, but I would have you gladly at my side when I do what I must, for I may need help and time runs short."

"Where will your vow take us?" Gwalchmai asked.

"North! North to the coast of Alata. North to Atlantis' last surviving colony on all Earth's surface—to Nor-um-Bega, the Island of the Murderers!"

"I will go, Corenice of Colicynos. My sword hand upon it and my sword when you need it!"

Perhaps, since man first learned the binding power of a handclasp, no stranger pact had ever been sealed in that manner, nor one fraught with more far-reaching consequences.

## V

### ***THE PEOPLE OF THE DAWN***

They had again seated themselves at the rim of the pool while they were talking. Corenice sprang to her feet with a harmonious chiming of mechanism.

"Follow me!" she cried, like a peal of elfin bells, and led the way below to the engine room. As before, the fishes swam beneath the transparent floor and green-gold light flooded over the humming power boxes and the weed fronds waved lazily below in the slow currents. As on his other visits, the excess energy spat and snapped, as for uncounted centuries it had done, exhausting itself into the sea. At last, it was to be directed by an intelligence and work again for man.

Gwalchmai noticed, for the first time, that the ominous feeling of being watched by an enemy had passed away. This room seemed no more to be dreaded than any of the others, except for a sense of caution which bade him keep his distance from the machinery.

"We cannot fly, as I should like to do," explained Corenice, "because of the broken wing. However, as you can see through the observation panels, the feet are uninjured. Our trip will be longer, but we shall reach our destination as surely, by swimming."

"How about this crowding weed? Can the swan-ship force a way?"

"We could burn a channel through, but all our power may be needed

before we are done. There is yet an easier way."

She depressed five of a bank of keys upon a horizontal panel board and the Vimana woke once more from its long rest. Air raced out in swift bubbles along the translucent sides. The weed fronds lashed and swung as shadows danced against the walls. Water rumbled into hidden tanks. The long arching neck and head dipped like a diving bird, and leaving only a clear spot in the weed-carpeted sea to mark its passing, the swan-ship plunged beneath the surface.

Down, down, in long easy spirals, driven by the powerful thrusts of the webbed feet. Deeper yet, while the sunlight dimmed and the interior of the ship grew twilight dark and the eternal cold of the great deeps drove away the long stored warmth of the upper air.

Other keys being depressed, heat returned from glowing grids in the walls and brilliant shafts of light shot downward from the eye lenses. Briefly illuminated, as they wheeled and circled lower, marine creatures darted to safety, some huge and monstrous, fearsome, tentacular, with powerful snapping beaks which might easily rend metal.

Gwalchmai repressed a shudder, but the girl, unmoved, sat peering down through the floor, waiting patiently as the searchlights cut broad swathes through the dark water.

Suddenly and with a sharp ejaculation, she snapped down another key which released the first five from their previous positions, and, leveling out, the ship hung at that level with lights still showing. The bottom, which had become as visible as a beach on a misty day, rushing up at them abruptly, now slid easily by with the yet unexpended impetus of their descent. For some moments he could see only ooze and broad furrows made by crawling things, though it was apparent by her interest that Corenice was aware of something more.

Then, as though by a trick of changing vision, a mound of mud assumed a more regular form and a rectangular outline could be distinguished surrounding a central dome. The hand of the metal maiden quivered upon the key bank. She pointed down.

"Atlantis!" she murmured. "Behold its people!"

Upon the dome sprawled a long ribbon-like form, coil upon coil



surrounding something more than half hidden by the windings. Pulsations ran through the lax body as it fed. The horrible head lifted, sensing the unfamiliar light, and they could see the bones it was mumbling, nearly stripped of flesh, still mingled in the wreckage of the Saxon ship.

Gwalchmai was about to inquire if the wreck could be searched for Merlin's chest of magic treasures, but the creature poised only an instant in indecision. Then, with jaws agape to show row upon row of fangs, it came swimming with long undulations to investigate the edibility of this strange visitor.

Fast as it came, the Vimana was faster. Upward again, in a long steep slant, they rose to a point where light beat down upon them in thin rays through the tangled weed. Hour after hour, just below the longest streamers, they sped along. Gwalchmai tired, but would not give in to sleep.

Finally, the girl, whose metal body could not know weariness, perceived his need.

At the time, they were in the room of the murals depicting the past glories of Atlantis. Without saying what she intended to do, Corenice rose and" began to dance. Softly as thistledown, lightly as a windblown leaf, she leapt and spun and swung from one black square to another, waking melodies no human ear had heard since the seas had marched over Poseidonis.

Softer and more sweetly yet, the mystical harmonies sounded, interrupted by not a single discord. Gracefully the lithe figure swayed and postured, every movement a poem of beauty. His eyelids grew heavier and, drooping, finally closed. He lay back upon the soft metal of the bench and the music stopped.

Corenice smiled to herself and crossed the room. She stepped heedlessly from square to square, but now there were no answering sounds. Even the chiming bells of her mechanism were muted.

A concealed spring in the frame of the harbor scene let down a soft folding couch from the wall, the existence of which he had not suspected. She lifted him in her metal arms, easily as a mother lifts a baby, and laid him gently and tenderly down.

Long ago all fabrics had disappeared from the Vimana. Age had seen to that, and the sea air, but the couch was still comfortable as a bed of feathers, made from that wondrous orichalcum which could be either down-soft or diamond-hard.

She left him there and went to the control room in the bird's head. Frowning with concentration, she willed, having set the controls for mental operation. The speed increased. The broad, webbed feet beat the water with redoubled power. The ship tore on, fifty feet below the surface, toward the North. The strange girl stared out through the lenses, tireless, strong, more than human, unwinking and watchful. Only she knew what her thoughts might be and what the thoughts of the Vimana—for it did think, as no other creation of man had ever done, since the beginning of the world.

He did not waken when, far beyond the borders of the weed, the ship slanted upward to the surface of a calm, smooth sea. Morning came, finding him still sleeping, and another night.

Upon the surface, the swan swam faster. Its broad breast skimmed over the waves, and its wings, even though one was crippled, were spread enough to give a slight lifting power which increased the speed. With its long neck laid well back and its head down between its shoulders, it hurtled along.

As though the steady rumble of shafting had a soothing, soporific effect upon his exhausted body, Gwalchmai slept on and on. The vibration did not disturb him or the gentle rocking of the giant bird as first one and then the other paddle thrust against the water.

Again, through the second night, the swan-ship swam steadily northward, but slower, for it followed now a rocky, well-wooded coastline. When he finally awoke, a little after sunrise, the bed no longer vibrated under him, though he felt a slight lifting and falling and could hear a lapping of baby waves against the sides of the vessel.

To dress was the simple matter of putting on his moccasins, and, leaving his weapons where they lay, he went above to the upper deck in search of the girl. The air was chill as he emerged upon the back of the Vimana. He was surprised to see that early autumn had laid coloring fingers upon the leaves of the maple and oak trees which fringed the shores of the little cove, where, sheltered from the outer breakers, the ship

lay at anchor. He had not realized until then how far the year must be advanced, nor how long he must have been drifting.

The seasons had passed unnoticed during the time he had been locked in the southerly sea of weed, but now he knew that months had elapsed, many precious days stolen from his life, in which he might have gone far upon his way.

A hail from the shore interrupted his thoughts and he saw Corenice waving to him.

"Ohi!" she called. "Are you really alive again? Accouter yourself and come to land."

He waved back, laughing, and in a few moments reappeared fully armed. One broad wing of the Vimana lay fully extended over the water, its tip touching some scattered rocks. It was easy to leap from one to another and gain the shore where she was waiting.

Her merry mood had passed when he reached her and pausing only for a brief clasp of hands she turned to serious business, hurrying him away from the edge of the beach, into the edge of the wood.

Here she paused and, pointing toward the ground, indicated to him the faint beginnings of a narrow trail.

"Many times I have passed along this way, in the spirit, following the makers of this path and helpless to warn against the wrongs they intended. Now I am here, in the body, and here my vow begins its fulfillment! You must say now, man, if you are with me. From this place, once we begin, we shall not turn back."

"Lead on," said Gwalchmai, "I follow."

She smiled. "I was sure I could depend upon you, but first there is a thing to be done. While you were sleeping I followed up the path a little way to be quite certain that there was no mistake in my recognition of the locality.

"As we may have far to go, we cannot leave the Vimana here to be seen and perhaps taken by an enemy. I

will send it away, over the horizon, to await our return."

"You will do what?"

"Watch and see."

She turned toward the water. Through an opening in the tree clusters, the cove was plainly visible, and also the floating Vimana. Without making a discernible movement and without speech, she looked intently at the ship.

Gwalchmai thought he heard a faint clicking somewhere within her beautiful frame, a sound unlike the usual musical sounds accompanying her movements. At once a harsh rattling was heard from the cove. The Vimana, by itself, was taking in its anchor!

The wide-spread pinion furred tight against the shining body, the long neck swayed high and the powerful head turned purposefully about, as though the swan-ship was looking for its mistress. She waved her arm in a commanding sweep and after an instant of hesitation, almost human in its indecision, the great bird turned in a welter of foam and raced out to sea. <<

"Now, just how did you do that?" the young Aztlanian asked, deeply puzzled.

Corenice laughed, a chiming peal of melody. "Perhaps I have instruments within me to direct it from afar. Perhaps" —her voice was low and mocking—"it may have understood me! Are not we two of one flesh?"

He grunted in disbelief. Still smiling to herself, she led the way into the wood. They had not gone far before a little brook of sweet water crossed the path and here he lay and drank, long and deeply.

She stood and watched him, knowing his need. Somewhat wistfully she recalled that once, ages ago, she too had drunk and eaten with enjoyment of the good things that life in a body of flesh desired.

"You are hungry also?" she asked. "I did not remember. My energy comes directly from the sun, not by eating the things which the sun causes to grow. I made no provision for you, but yonder in the trees are vines and upon them grow purple grapes. If they would do for the moment—?"

She waited while he plucked ripe, heavy clusters, frost sweetened, eating avidly, selecting bunches to carry as they walked on.

"Are they juicy and good?" she queried, a bit ruefully. "I remember I used to enjoy them very much, long ago, when I was alive."

He nodded, mouth too full to reply, and they passed deeper and deeper into the forest, along the trail, leaving the cover far behind.

Nunganey, the Abenaki, lay flat as the rattlesnake he resembled, with his death-paint of yellow upon his belly and brown and black blotches on his back. Wood ashes smeared his cheeks and he was softly chanting his death song as from a lofty oak limb he looked down the forest trail.

Along this way came always the red-haired killers from Akilinek, the Island of Demons, somewhere on the tidal sea.

He did not know just where it might be situated. Once thirty canoes had gone to seek it. A great war party, the strength of three tribes. None had ever returned, taken either by the sleek green wolves of Squant, the square-eyed sea-goddess, or Hobbamock the foul, who dwelt upon that island to be the curse of men.

Twice each year the hairy killers came ravening through the forests of the Abenaki—when the snow was one moon gone from the hills and again shortly before it returned. Never had they been conquered. They came as they pleased, with their heavy axes and their shirts from which the arrows bounced and their war-bonnets upon which stone tomahawks broke.

They plundered, slew, ravaged and were gone to sea again, paddling over the horizon in their curious stone boats (for Nunganey knew nothing of metals) with their weighty loads of maize, furs, meat and captives.

When they had gone, Nunganey's people were destitute. Still they clung to their homeland and hunting grounds, loving their country savagely, refusing to be driven away or to fall permanently into the position of a subject nation. They always fought, though they never won.

Nunganey thought moodily on these things, striking softly into the thick bark with his stone hatchet as he waited.

Orono, the chief, had derided his plans for vengeance after the last raid,

when Cosannip, his blood brother, had been taken captive, for what purpose no one knew. Nunganey had refused to become discouraged. He kept on, climbing daily into his high tree with bags of pebbles on his back.

Now, forty feet above the ground, there were suspended two ponderous sacks of stones, each made from the hide of a large black bear. Between them hung a latticework of saplings, studded with foot-long stakes, sharpened and burned stone hard. A single cut of his hatchet upon a single thong would release the cunning fastenings which held the whole suspended over the trail below.

He would see if these stonish men were proof against *that*, as they were against dart and spear. Then he would follow swiftly, sliding down the rawhide rope which lay ready to his hand. He would drop among them to kill and kill and kill again, until Cosannip was avenged and he himself lay dead.

That he would be slain he had no doubt. There was no man of the People who could stand singly against a demon's axe. He could not help marveling at the return of the killers, so soon after their raid. Generally one trip was all at each season, though the old men told that, in their grandfather's time, three visits a year had been the custom, and N`karnayoo—of old time—even oftener. He had only hoped, without reason, that they might return and fall into his trap.

Always, it would appear these demons, these Chenoo, had persecuted the Abenaki, the Children of the Dawn. Now here they were and he was waiting. Wan-pe, the fisher, had seen them on the shore and fled into the village to warn the people and Nunganey had sought the great oak and was ready.

Here they came at last, striding noiselessly over the forest floor. Where they so confident, these Chenoo, that two alone thought that they could walk among the wickams to choose and take as they would? Nunganey growled deep in his corded throat. He would see!

But what in the name of Kiehtan were they?

The man was dressed in somewhat similar manner to the invaders, but his hair was brown, not flaming red—his skin bronzed, not pallid like the Chenoo. Nor was his companion like any Abenaki woman. Entirely naked, her very flesh like the hard integument which the Chenoo put off or on at

will, she was a beautiful demon who must die.

Both were strangers, however strangely armed, and they came from the sea. That alone marked them as enemies, in Nunganey's mind.

A score of strides more—ten—five—! The Abenakis' dark eyes glittered and his hatchet fell upon the restraining thong.

Gwalchmai and Corenice had come a long way without speaking. The forest was very still, but neither\*\* suspected “danger until a blue-jay squawked. Then a whir in the air and a dark blur crashing down caused the metal girl to whirl quick as a tree-cat against him. Thrusting him violently aside and crouching, she received upon herself the full ringing impact of that mighty blow.

Flat on his back, Gwalchmai jerked out the flame gun at his belt. A blast of livid light crashed into the tree and Nunganey, already swinging from his rope, fell thudding from bough to bough, followed by a rain of debris as that rope was clipped above him.

‘Down smashed the entire treetop with a splintering roar. He saw the painted body strike the earth in a coil of rawhide, to be instantly covered with swishing leaves. He plunged into the foliage, yanking out the stunned Abenaki, and, stepping back, was about to cut down upon him with the flame swathe when Corenice called:

"Save that man alive! I want speech with him!"

Glowering, holding his surly prisoner rigid under the menace of that crystal lens, he turned upon her. Unscratched, unharmed, with her golden hair flying loose, she stood in the wreckage of the lattice. Its many prongs were driven deep around her, broken and askew. The two weights had fallen on either side, to burst the bags and send stones flying afar, splashing up the turf like soft mud.

Bewildered at her odd shortness of stature, he could at first only grin as, all woman in the midst of ruin, her first care was to wipe away a splotch of black loam from her face. She smiled back at him, quite undismayed, and easily cleared away the lumber in front of her, snapping stout pieces of seasoned oak with those dainty hands which looked so small and frail.

Then, still knee-deep, as she had been driven into the forest mold, she took seven steps through the soft earth as though it had been snow. The knees of Nunganey quaked as she approached him, warrior though he was. For an instant he sagged against the tree at his back as he wailed, "M'teoulin! Magician!" But then, stiffening proudly, he began to chant his death song. Desperation was in his eyes, but no more fear.

Gwalchmai looked at Corenice as she spoke to the Abenaki in his own language. "Man! Say now! Know you me?"

"Ho! Bumole the Night Woman art thou! Whom spear cannot touch nor hatchet harm! Slay me quickly and be done!"

Corenice thought swiftly, She was familiar with Abenaki legends. Upon many winter evenings of story telling, she had invisibly haunted the wickams and long houses, when lonely for humanity she sought to learn—and forget her sterile existence. If she could use those legends to her own advantage, so much the better. So much easier her task would be.

"Right, Netop, Bumole am I, and this is Glooskap the mighty, master of the thunder! Long ago, I swore to aid the Abenaki against their enemies and at last the time has come to dwell among you for a space. We would be treated by you as an ordinary hunter and his mate might be. We wish to live with you, play with you, perhaps fight for you if you prove worthy!"

Nunganey fell to his knees before her to prove his shame, but Corenice laid her little hand on his shoulder like an accolade, saying:

"Numchalse! Arise! Let us all be equal together, for if we are to help you, I also need your help. To enter your village, I must be clothed after the manner of your women, lest I be recognized as no human and thought no friend. Say, Netop, can you find me garb befitting a maiden of your people?"

Nunganey stammered in his joy and surprise, proud to be addressed as comrade by one so mighty, but finally answered:

"My sister, Keona, was to be a bride. One full year she worked with soft doe skin and porcupine quills to make herself beautiful in the eyes of her lover, but the Chenoo took her and she is no more. A boy then, I have grown to become a man, but still my mother cherishes the garments that she made. If satisfaction to the Night Woman, these shall be hers, though



they are not lovely enough for her!"

Corenice beamed upon him at the unexpected compliment "Wurragen!" she said. "It is well!"

Gwalchmai lowered his weapon, at her nod, and Nunganey sped without other permission into the forest. The young Aztlanian had followed most of the conversation as the language was somewhat similar to that of the Hoden-osaunee, where Merlin had held court in their forest towns, and the wearer of Merlin's ring could understand the languages that Merlin had known.

"Do you think he will come back?" he asked. Corenice did not trouble to answer, merely signing him to follow as she walked on in the direction the Abenaki had taken.

They had covered perhaps a mile when they heard the padding of a runner approaching. Nunganey appeared, panting, bearing a pack upon his back. He shrugged it down and cried:

"My people await you with dancing and a feast! I have told them the Chenoo shall come against us in vain, now that the gods love us! They anxiously wait!"

"Then let it not be I to keep them waiting long!" gaily remarked Corenice, as she disappeared into a dense clump of low hemlock. In a few moments she reappeared and the two men gasped at the change.

Her soft shirt of white doeskin, lined with the breasts of woodpigeons, displayed her perfect throat. Careful embroidery, of colored porcupine quills and shell beads, could be seen beneath the open tunic worn outside the shirt and two narrow belts of tiny beads crossed between her breasts. Her tunic, short skirt and leggings were also ornamented and were deeply fringed with seagreen thrums. Moccasins of caribou skin covered her small feet and over her gleaming braided hair she had drawn the pointed hood of deer hide which was attached to the blue-gray fur cloak of wolf skin which she wore over all.

She was pleased at the admiration of the two men and was delighted further when Nunganey timidly proffered to the grim Aztlanian a broad belt of Siwan and plastron of the same, with a handsome beaver fur blanket. In the south, Gwalchmai had been more accustomed to wearing

ornaments of feathers than these heavy beaded articles. He took the gifts, but grumbled aside to Corenice:

\*I'd trade the whole outfit, fine as it is, for the hind leg of a dead deer, well roasted, and a baked squash with it!"

She laughed and Nunganey smiled anxiously, not understanding.

"You men! A rag would suit you all your little lives, had you but your bellies full twice a day! Now these are the first fine new clothes I have had for ten thousand years and I think such a marvelous present was well worth the waiting!"

So, with quip and answering jest, they took once more to the forest road, which led now at long last to friends.

## **VI**

### ***THE ISLAND UNDER THE SEA***

In the days that followed they were taken to the hearts of the simple kindly people, who gladly gave them welcome. Gwalchmai learned to admire them as a dignified and noble race. Accustomed to a higher level of civilization among his own people, he at first thought of them as savages, but he soon realized that although they did no stone carving and had no system of writing, in their own way they were as skillful in astronomy as himself. Their eyes were as keen as his to pick out the tiny star in the Little Dipper which they called "the baby on the mother's back" and they could see things upon the moon which he could not discern. With their fine memories to aid them, they could recite lineages much farther back than his and quote from ancient speeches or tell stories in rolling lines equal to the finest compositions of Merlin's bards. They had an instinctive sense of drama and would act out a tale with such expressive gestures that a deaf man could have followed and enjoyed it.

As a fighting man, he was impressed by their ability, physique and courage. He joined in their hunts against wolf, bear and wolverine, testing their courage as they were observing his. When he killed in singlehanded encounter the great cougar of the North, he earned their respect as a man, though they were in awe of him as Glooskap, the mischievous mountain god.

Winter came and the youths played in the snow, wrestling, sliding on hides down icy slopes, snowballing one another. Gwalchmai vied with them as they strove for skill in the swift uproarious game of the Snow Snake, hurling darts at the crooked peeled stick sliding so erratically down the slope. Laughing, young and joyous, they slogged through the woods on snowshoes, and groaned together kneading out one another's cramps.

In the wickams, Corenice, world old, lived after long years the life of humans, mimicking their ways as much as her metal body would permit. No eyes as quick as hers to find and thread the needle some old feeble hand had dropped; no fingers as soft and gentle as hers to comfort an aching body racked with pains of the winter cold; no arms that could rock a baby weary of the cradle board more quickly into quiet slumber.

The muted tinkling of tiny bells which accompanied her slightest movement fascinated the children. The elfin sounds charmed the adults also, confirming their knowledge that she was far from being as other women. No one feared her; they feared only the coming of the day when she and her mate must leave them.

Both listened to the elders in council and did not presume to give advice, considering themselves as transients. Gwalchmai's sympathetic heart burned to hear of the wrongs they had suffered from the Nor-um-Begans and though he said little, he was becoming fixed in the mood Corenice had wished him to develop. It was not without purpose that she had planned to spend the winter with the People of the Dawn. Although he had already agreed to be Corenice's man, until her purpose was accomplished, he felt drawn to them for it seemed to him that their ways were much similar to the ways of his own far distant land. It was this feeling that she had wished to foster. Now there would be no drawing back.

He and Nunganey became firm friends as the winter wore on, being nearly the same age. When the snow disappeared from the woods and the river was free from ice, the village began to prepare for the inevitable spring raid which was fast approaching. The young maidens made tearful farewell to their families and left for a secret place deep in the hills and the men and boys made ready to fight their usual hopeless battle.

Now Corenice was ready also to try to forestall that coming attack. As the two announced that they must depart, neither was surprised that Nunganey insisted upon going with them to aid in the furtherance of the

plans she had secretly made.

So, on a bland day in the Sugar Moon, they dropped down the river in Nunganey's stout log canoe, fighting the incoming tide, until it turned and raced backward with them, leaving their warmhearted friends lining the river-bank, calling farewells.

Nunganey raised his paddle in one final salute to the disappearing land and then all about them lay only the boundless sea. He, for one, had no expectation of ever returning.

In his own mind, he was already dead.

As they headed into the eye of the rising sun, the direction in which, so many times, the invading fleet had been observed to vanish, Gwalchmai's keen eye caught a golden glint winking low on the horizon. Corenice followed his gaze and nodded.

"The Vimana? In truth, it is coming to meet us and I must send it back. I have been in touch with it all these white months, guarding it from drifting in too close in storms and helping it to avoid floating ice. It wants u to be with us, but that is no purpose of mine at present. There are other plans."

She looked steadily in that direction for some time and he could not tell when it disappeared, but looking up later from his even paddling he found that the gleam had gone.

They labored on and on, farther than the bravest fisherman had ever dared to go out into the waste. Nunganey was silent, teeth clamped tight, looking ever and again at his strong new bow to give himself courage. Gwalchmai had helped to make it, but the Abenaki had strung it with a bowstring twisted from his mother's hair, that it might avenge his sister and never miss. He thought of her often, but deepest in his heart, stronger even than family ties, were thoughts of Cosannip, his comrade and brother by the rites of mingled blood.

Corenice still wore her stout hide garments and the hood which covered her resplendent hair. As an additional disguise she had stained her face and hands with dye of berries and roots until now she seemed sister in hue to the **Hien**.

So they appeared to be what they hoped to be taken for, three native fishermen, blown out to sea against their will.

The canoe rose and fell upon the hills of ocean as the stately rollers marched under on their lonely parade from the far coasts of Europe. A little after midday, Nunganey raised his paddle and pointed ahead.

The prow dipped and the others could not see what he had indicated. On the next high wave a tall thin pinnacle of black rock showed plainly, though far away, like an upright needle almost buried in crumpled satin.

"Akilinek!" muttered Nunganey.

"Nor-um-Bega!" Corenice corrected softly.

An hour later, favored by a following wind, they were close enough to see foam clots and streamers drifting by-born, Gwalchmai thought, where waves crashed against that stony obstacle. But as they drew nearer, he could see that the dashing spray did not actually touch the rock at all. Instead, the waves went creaming up and up toward Heaven, flatly and high, some little distance away, bubbling back, sliding down again as though a wall of glass lay between the peak and the attacking surf.

Yet there was nothing tangible to be seen, except an almost imperceptible turbulence in the air, like the convection currents of heat which go streaming up from hot iron, or a ledge of blistering rock on a scorching summer day.

To the left lay quieter water. Into this they steered, avoiding the turmoil of crashing breakers ahead. Here, bobbing less furiously, though still fighting eddies and sucking whirlpools, they could discern that not far beyond lay an end to the water, a rim over which it could not pour, a titanic hole in the ocean I

Forging through little choppy waves which, on the lee side, lapped up against the phantasmal barrier, they approached it closer. The voyagers soon saw through it, far below, the shining roofs of stone buildings, glittering metal plate on spire and dome and pinnacles, gay paint on low stone mansions and high facaded temples.

Broad white paved streets and avenues geometrically divided the blocks of buildings, and velvety green grass in park and plot was set about it all,

like a toy city erected upon a carpet.

And all a hundred feet below the level of the broad Atlantic, with nothing more substantial than a breath of quivering air between that land of glamor and the ocean's fury!

"As Atlantis sank and the glaciers melted, the waters were released into the oceans. The sea level rose on all the coasts of the world. It lifted here as well and at the same time the island settled lower. Through the ages the power units have lessened in strength. Although the ocean cannot seep through the force wall, the islanders devised a way to pierce it at its upper edge where it is attenuated and much weaker," announced Corenice.

"It is like the magic ring of smoky air within which Vivienne ensorcelled Merlin, in the wood of Broceliande," Gwalchmai said. "No one could enter or leave until she decided to set him free."

Nunganey only clutched his medicine bag for protection, but his lips moved silently as he stared down, while they drew closer to that uncanny edge. New vistas continued to open to their gaze and the men were bemused with wonder.

A strong wall of masonry, dividing the island into two segments, separated the city proper from the tilled fields beyond. Gwalchmai could catch the twinkling gleam of hoe or shovel as laborers toiled, too far away for eye to make but their form or dress. The wall was pierced centrally by a single, high-arched gateway, closed and guarded, for he could see the flash of golden armor as a sentry paced his walk. Other glints on the wall proved that it also was patrolled.

Among the fields were set wickams and long houses for the slaves and further yet stretched mile upon mile of forest, interspersed with roofless stone ruins as though there had been other cities now abandoned and overgrown. The tossing green conifers held a scattering of birch and hard woods, thickly covering hills and swales, and out of the dense forest ran a silver streamlet, feeder for a large lake, bisected by the high stone wall. Evaporation from the lake obviously equaled its intake, supplemented by rainfall, so that there was neither dearth of water nor danger of flood.

So lost in these sights had all become that they had no eyes for anything closer at hand, until a loud hail startled them. Looking up, they saw on the peak, less than twenty yards away and about the same distance above

them, a crouching white-robed man, peering over the railing set around the platform he stood upon.

He held a mallet poised over the trigger of a stone thrower, which was cranked back and ready. A massive boulder lay in the hopper.

"He says not to move away or he will sink us!" whispered Corenice.

While they still gazed upward, observing now that the mountain was artificial, for the jointings between the black blocks of Cyclopean masonry were clearly to be seen, the sentinel lifted a long trumpet and sent a harsh braying across the city.

Gwalchmai had seen pictures, in his god-father's books, of the pyramids of Khemi, and he had climbed the Mian earth mounds and the myriad steps between the terraces of the teocallis of Tolteca, but this edifice was unlike them all. It much resembled the ziggurats of Babylonia, in the respect that a steep railless ramp wound from base to top in seven decreasing spirals. However, there was machinery where the sentinel stood in the place of the temple sacred to Nabu.

The ramp now bustled with life and movement. Groups of brown and red-skinned slaves came running up, urged to haste by occasional white, red-haired overseers, busily plying metal tipped scourges as though they loved their work.

The slaves stopped on a broad platform, a little above the water level, seizing windlass cranks, bending to their toil as though their very lives depended upon their efforts. The top of the tower revolved, the sentinel walking around to keep the canoe in view, and the three could see a long beam swinging around like a giant's arm. A large, oval box of metal, shaped like a huge closed clamshell, swung from cables at the beam's end.

The sharp edge of this was forced into the area of disturbed air, which boiled and eddied about it as it squealed and the box, lowered by its cables, slapped into the nearby waves, filling the canoe ankle-deep with water.

The flanges separated then, the upper one raising and swinging back, and the guard above motioned them to enter. Gwalchmai and Nunganey hesitated. That open-jawed black clam looked so much like a trap to crunch them I

"This is what we came for, isn't it?" Corenice said dauntlessly, and she stepped over the rim. The others followed and their little canoe went bobbing away, their last sight as the lid snapped down over their heads and they felt themselves being raised in air.

It was dark as night in the windowless lift and they could not see one another, but they clung together to avoid falling, while it swayed beneath them and the whole fabric rocked and creaked, complaining noisily as ungreased cogs drew the beam and chamber back through the bubble-thin wall of force.

Then the lid of their conveyance swung up and a flood of sunlight dazzled the dilated pupils of the two men. The gaunt faced guard peered in upon them. His look was strained and wild, and his unkempt, dingy white hair flew free about his head and shoulders.

"Who are ye, strangers?" he creaked in Abenaki. "Why do ye come of choice to Nor-um-Bega?"

Nunganey spoke up proudly: "These be Glooskap and his mate, Bumole, the Night Woman, come to visit Hobba-mock the foul—and I am Nunganey the Abenaki, from Atinien, their friend and guide!"

The hawk-faced ancient laughed—a short, unpleasant sound, with disbelief in it—and they could see that his lips were chewed and ragged. His shoulders and arms bore marks of teeth, white scars and new wounds, some scarcely healed, as though in fits of pain or madness he had gnawed at his own flesh in wolfish passion.

"This has been my home since I was whelped," he growled, "and never before have any come here willingly. Since you are among us, believe now you will surely not go away. Strong men are useful!"

His sharp eyes peered into the shadow of the girl's hood and Gwalchmai feared lest the disguise be pierced, but he only favored her with a sour smile.

"And Caranche, our king, will be well pleased to entertain *you*, Woman of the Night!"

Yet he helped her courteously enough to step over the rim of the lift, as Corenice pretended timidity in crossing to the platform, extending her



gloved hand to be swallowed up in his wrinkled yellow-nailed paw. Several metal boats were bottom-up on the platform, ready for launching, and an oar rack was near by. Avoiding these, she stepped aside and her companions, needing no such assistance, jumped down with their hands close to their weapons. No attempt was made to disarm them.

Nunganey narrowly eyed the docile slaves as they filed down the ramp, urged on by the stinging whips. Cosannip was not there, his sad face announced, as the three followed the lead of the old man and joined the tail of that dreary procession.

"Baraldabay am I," the guard remarked. "Keeper of the Tower. Too old for war, too tough to die. I bide here and watch the Killers go and come and long for death myself. But I am forgotten, it seems, so I live on and on in this dull hole and never go a-roving. It is worse when the moon is full and the mood comes upon me to slay. Perhaps I shall ask for one of you. You are the first who ever came here unless they were brought."

"And perhaps we will be the last," supplemented Core-nice, very softly, with a somber ring in her voice like a funeral bell.

Baraldabay obviously felt that his position was one without honor and was morosely glad to have someone to talk with, even if only for a few moments. As they passed lower along the circling ramp they went by bays curved into the ziggurat's walls. Here were more close-packed arrays of metal longboats, upside-down on rollers, where the crane jaws could easily grip them and carry them through the thinnest part of the force wall.

Corenice asked, "Will you tell us something of your past?"

"In the beginning, we Nor-um-Begans were a mighty people. It is said that large ships regularly plied the seas between this place and Atlantis, our homeland—"

Corenice and Gwalchmai exchanged quick glances.

"That was when our shores were above the sea. Then danger threatened our beautiful colony. The land sank and the sea rose. Around our island, to preserve us, was set the charmed wall of invisibility, so strong that nothing could penetrate it at its base and only with much difficulty at the top."

Gwalchmai wondered if this horrible old man was really as mad as he

seemed. Had time perverted their history until the truth was no longer known? Did he not understand that he was a descendant of generation upon generation of inbred criminals and wanton murderers? A denizen of a penal colony?

"It is said that the original population of the island was divided into two classes—normal people like myself and others who were so impossibly good that they were impossible to live with.

"The latter were the first settlers, old soldiers from a war who had come bringing their women. They thought killing was a sin instead of being the proudest means of gaining honor! My ancestors came later, a few at a time, and they knew better. They grew stronger and stronger in numbers, until their descendants far outnumbered the earlier colonists\* offspring.

"A high, guarded wall divided the island between the two classes. *They* held it and also the tower, where they worshipped Hun-ya, the square-eyed witch, who is our goddess of battle now. By way of the tower they lifted in their supplies and their wall kept us away from it, so we could not leave if we chose. We were their prisoners, but one night my forefathers carried that wall and put all upon it and in the city to death!

"That marks the real beginning of our glorious civilization. We stormed out upon the mainland in our thousands, establishing cities, developing the wilderness, subduing the savages—"

Nunganey grunted.

"We wiped away the budding and rival empire of the Horicon. Later by many, many years we smashed the Talagewi—they who began the mound cities the Mians finished, in the interior valleys, when they came up from the Hot Lands of the South. Those were good days, our best days!"

His eyes glistened like a gloating spider. Then his voice dropped and sadness crept into it:

"But I never saw them. It was all over and done before my time, those days of glory, long ago! Constant battling sapped our strength. No other enemy was worthy of us and our cities turned their axes against one another. One by one, the forest took them back again. Our women grew less fertile and we were too proud to mate with the savages, unless for an hour, with any by-blow from the union slain at birth, lest the purity of our

noble race be impaired.

"Finally Nor-um-Bega, Island of Heroes, took back all that were left of her mainland "colonists and we are what remains.

"Only once, in all my life, have I known the joy of fighting in a great army. Twenty years ago, every man and boy of us allied ourselves with the savages, for the sport of war, and helped to destroy the Mian Empire of Tlapal-lan. We fought to reach that country, fought in the war and fought to reach home again!

"Hun-ya! That was a great killing!"

Corenice gestured at the encircling wall of jade-dark water, one hundred feet high, its gentle hundred mile curve smooth as polished glass around the sunken country, and Baraldabay followed her gaze.

Sun rays slanted down through it, in parallel beams, quivering with the turmoil of waves high above the level of the street where they now stood. Bathed in this fluctuating light they walked along. A swimming school of cod followed their progress, peering in upon them, marveling, gaping goggle-eyed at the strange two-legged denizens of this underwater aquarium. As at some signal they whirled and went as one about their private business.

"Why do you continue to live here when the mainland would be so much safer?"

Baraldabay was amazed. "Why not? This is our home!"

"Are you not afraid that someday this may tumble in upon you and destroy you all and everything you possess, including your fair city and its wealth?"

The oldster grinned.

"Nay, lady, that can never be. Long ago it was prophesied by the sorcerers who set the magic wall here to protect us that never by any will of ours should it be torn down.

"Never—'until the Thunder Eagle should come to Nor-um-Bega!"

"What does that mean?" asked Corenice.

"No one knows exactly. There is a semblance of a monstrous eagle in the sky, outlined in light, seen when the Fire Children play along the Road of Ghosts, during the cold of winter when the nights are cloudless.

"Some superstitious ones think the prophecy refers to this phenomenon, but often and often it has been a good omen for us. It has predicted great victories for us in the past. It must be Hun-ya's pet. The Killers time their spring raids by its last appearance. It is quite harmless."

Gwalchmai saw Nunganey motioning him urgently to fall back a little out of earshot.

"My people know that Thunder Eagle," he quickly muttered. "The bird lives on Sleeping Giant Cape, on the northern shore of the Inland Sea. If it stays in the sky above the cape, war involves the people of the north countries, but if it moves across the sky, the war takes place in the direction the Eagle travels.

"It never fails to mean sorrow for someone. Sometime it will hang over Akilinek and all the Abenaki will rejoice!"

"Maybe, brother, but I have remembered only now a thing which I had long forgotten."

"And that is?"

"My name I am called Gwalchmai, not Glooskap, and that word means—Eagle!"

The road they followed diverged from the ocean wall, curving into the suburbs, and as they progressed deeper among the houses they could see that the beauty of the city was viewed best from afar, like that of a woman, once lovely, who retains in age only her dignity of form and carriage.

Beyond a columned portico, a slovenly man was chopping wood upon a tessellated marble floor and the carven pillars were wantonly hacked and defaced as if in some fit of maniac fury.

Between the knife-thin joints of the paved street, grass had found its way and tree roots in thickening had raised and displaced stone slabs

weighing many tons. Often they went around or over heaps of rubble, where house walls had collapsed into the streets, so long ago that upon some grew stately oaks, feeding upon the rotten wood of their fallen ancestors before them. Many otherwise pleasant homes stood roofless to the sun and rain, with leaves and mold knee deep over fine mosaics, fountain bowls and toppled statues of marble.

Never, apparently, was anything repaired. Nowhere could be seen anything new.

No dogs, cats or other pets rambled about, and such children as were visible scowled at the passersby with such wicked, knowing looks that Gwalchmai wondered if they ever played and if so what their games could possibly be.

Some women had built a cooking fire in the center of-a little square, where, judging by the refuse strewn heedlessly about, most of the surrounding houses seemed to be occupied, and above it meat was stewing for the evening meal.

The cauldron was silver and had never been intended for that purpose, but its deeply chased engravings were blurred with soot and the design could not be seen.

While waiting, a group of boys and young men were kicking around a rolling object and Gwalchmai saw it to be a human skull upon which still hung a few shreds of flesh and a little black hair. They did not stop at the approach of the strangers, but went on with their grim sport in a spirit of dull ferocity. It seemed to be a duty or a custom, and they appeared to find little enjoyment in the exercise.

But there was worse to follow before the quartet could pass beyond this squalid section.

Out of a tumbledown, windowless building a shrieking virago ran, lugging a squalling infant by the heels. Though it could scarcely be a year old, it scratched at her flying legs with its tiny nails, biting and yelling like a changeling imp.

Finally she could stand the uproar no longer and stopped to pound its head against the stones.

Corenice clutched Baraldabay's robe. "Stop it Stop it!" she cried, but he was indifferent.

"What would you? She is the child's mother. Here we do as we please!"

"But why? Why should she do that?" Nunganey asked, in horror at an unnatural parent who would strike a child even lightly, much less beat it to death.

"Who knows?" Baraldabay answered. "Possibly it bit her while it suckled. Woman's temper is always unpredictable, here perhaps more than elsewhere. We are a dying people—let us die in our own way!"

The baby's wails whimpered away into complete silence before they had gone very far. Afterward, they heard a long hysterical cry—half laugh, half scream, as the frenzy passed and the infanticide's shaky reason returned to haunt her. If she was in grief or merely sadistically excited, they had no way of knowing.

They passed on, without speaking, and Gwalchmai's impression was that there had been little sincerity in Corenice's plea. He felt that it had been made only to bring out more plainly the philosophy governing the actions of all the denizens of this grand yet hideously savage city-state.

He wondered anew what her motives were in coming here, a strange missionary from the past. What change did she mean to bring about? What could she hope to accomplish?

In a few more years, at the present rate of declining births and frequent strife, the inhabitants must render themselves extinct. Why not let them eliminate themselves in their own cruel way?

They looked down a lateral street where, at a distance, an old slave was staggering through a gauntlet of young boys, who were striking at him with sticks and light wooden axes. He went down and they fell upon him, but he did not cry out.

Baraldabay saw their glances and their pity. He shrugged.

"He belongs to them. That is how boys learn to become men."

Lost in moody reverie, Gwalchmai took no more notice of the passing

scene and was surprised when they debouched into a broad, impressive square. They walked across this, suiting their gait to the old man's halting pace, and climbed a long series of time-rounded steps fronting a high pillared building, once a temple to Poseidon and still in a good state of preservation.

Ancient carvings on the pediment showed men on horseback hunting down a mammoth with bow and lance, but without time for inspection they were hurried through a wide doorway. Choking black smoke rolled out above their heads as they entered, finding egress at its own will. Just inside the portico they stopped where an armorer had set up his forge near the altar, which had been tipped over upon its side to make room for it. He was busily beating out a half-moon head for a ponderous war axe.

He lifted his deep set bloodshot eyes to them, to answer Baraldabay's question.

"Caranche? The king? He went beyond the Wall this morning. There was a disturbance among the field slaves and the foresters gave shelter to the runaways. Some more of them want to be sent into the Hole!"

He chuckled grimly and began to hammer again upon the cooling steel.

They passed down a dark corridor and into an open courtyard.

Here stood the magnificent chariot of Poseidon, drawn by leaping dolphins of bronze, each ridden by laughing Nereids. The chariot, of gold and silver, was decorated with stylized octopi and seahorses swam in dipping procession around the border upon the base. The fountain before it was dry and the statue of the god, still brandishing his trident, was headless.

Corenice gave it one agonized glance and averted her eyes.

"You have the liberty of the building," said Baraldabay, succinctly. "Take any vacant sleeping room you choose. Food will be brought you here and you may keep your weapons until Caranche gives orders concerning you. He may be gone two or three days. Until then, all entrances will be guarded. If you try to leave you will be killed!"

When they were alone, Corenice turned to the men.

"What do you think of these people whom Ahuni-i loved —and whose very name has been corrupted by them?"

There was iron in Gwalchmai's voice as he replied, "They cannot be allowed to go on. They are totally evil and a menace to the Abenaki."

Nunganey muttered, "They must be destroyed!"

"I determined that long ago, in my floating prison—looking upon them astrally, abominating their evil plans—knowing what I must do, lest they bring destruction upon the whole world. I know what it may cost me. But we will give them a chance they never gave the Abenaki, brother. I do not remember this king of theirs—he may be of a better breed.

"We will wait his coming. If in that time we find one spark of good in this people, or in him—! Well, let us bide in patience and learn what more we may."

## **VII**

### ***THE HOLE***

Caranche, King of Nor-um-Bega, came back to his city before evening of the second day of their incarceration, but when the prisoners were brought before him darkness had fallen, owing to the mountainous wall of water between them and the low sun.

Flaming cressets lit the throne room and one glance told the young Aztlanian that here was a man not likely to be deceived by any naive claims of Nunganey concerning his own and Corenice's divinity. He motioned furtively to the Abenaki, in the almost universal sign language common to all nations of polyglot Alata, that he was to keep silent. Nunganey nodded in answer. But the mischief had already been done.

Caranche was a very ox of a man, bull throated, mightily muscled, his arms and legs furred with red bristles. His mop of carrotty hair fell over his fierce restless eyes into his tangled beard.

He sprawled in his seat, peering morosely through his unkempt locks at die strangers, occasionally lifting a ham-like hand to suck a small bleeding wound on his wrist. Gwalchmai saw several in the throneroom who wore bandages or moved carefully. He guessed that Caranche's punitive



expedition against the foresters had not had everything its own way.

Either the smart or the manner in which the king had received the scratch irked him, making his mood more ugly than usual. The surrounding men-at-arms gave him fearful respect and the three surmised that this man was, like his subjects, of an invariably quick temper and vicious whims.

Baraldabay, their sponsor, went up and whispered something to him which they could not catch. Caranche at once favored Gwalchmai with an intent and interested gaze, centering on the flame-gun at his belt. He motioned Gwalchmai to advance, peremptorily beckoning with a pudgy finger glittering with jewels and coming to the point without preamble.

"My Tower Man tells me what I can see for myself," he rumbled, in Abenaki. "You have a weapon of the Old Ones who built this city. Where did you get it?"

Gwalchmai stammered, trying to think of an answer which would not disclose the true identity of Corenice.

"Never mind! Let me have it" the king interrupted, holding out his hand.

Gwalchmai shot a look of indecision at the girl. She nodded imperceptibly and he unwillingly gave up the weapon.

Caranche fingered it inexpertly, turning it over and over, while they hoped fervently that he might manage to blow his head off with it. Scarcely lifting his eyes from it, he grunted to an attendant:

"Bring in those field slaves!"

A group of crippled and bleeding red men were herded in and lined up against the farther wall. None had their wounds attended and some were in a dying condition, being supported by their companions. Obviously these were unfortunates who had been handled with malicious and unnecessary violence, by men who loved the sight of suffering. Nunganey's relieved sigh told the others that his friend was not among them.

The king looked hard at Gwalchmai.

"We have a storeroom filled to tie top with these things and not one of them will work. If this one does what our legends say it should, I will make you chief armorer and commander of a hundred!"

He raised it, took aim and pulled the trigger. The echo of the long and continued discharge filled die broad hall with thunder as charred heaps, which had once been men, fell to the floor half buried under cascades of masonry torn from the wall behind them. Heedless of the destruction he was causing, Caranche swung the besom of flame back down the long line. He had not quite finished when the light waned rapidly, running down the spectrum from brilliant blue-white to dark cherry—red, then went completely black like a cooling ember.

Caranche was furious and swung upon the three.

"Did you do that? How can I recharge it?"

"Go to Mictlampa and find out, you blood-soaked murderer!"

Gwalchmai snatched for his sword, while the Abenaki and the girl from Atlantis pressed closer to him in silent approbation. His action was not quick enough. He and Nunganey fell buried beneath a dozen guardsmen and were overpowered at once. They were carried off, weaponless, though Corenice, who oddly enough had not used her miraculous strength, was led peaceably in another direction, smiling secretly at them to be unafraid.

Caranche shouted after them, beside himself with fury:

"Give them a sight of the Hole! Take them down with the relief lot, but bring them back to the pits until morning. They can decide then to tell me or to die!"

The two men were hurried out to the street, where they joined a line of perhaps forty men with only minor wounds, and were linked to them by a long chain. Then, under close guard, they passed out of the city through a gate in the wall and were marched across the open fields beyond. After about a mile of traveling they came to a place where heaps of jagged rock encumbered the ground, in mounds higher than houses.

Far as eye could see in the dusk, these mounds stretched away to left and right, refuse heaps from some industry fit for Titans.

Torches were lit at this point and they pressed forward under the flickering light. They followed a well traveled road and after a half hour of steady marching among the mounts they came to an unencumbered field. Here stood a high tower of metal with a guiding wheel at its top over which a cable ran, and slaves there were chained to a winch, waiting their coming.

Without delay ten men were separated and led upon a platform which sank into the ground and disappeared out of sight to the creaking accompaniment of the winch and the cracking of whips.

Not long after, it rose again with a load of rock upon it, wet and shining in the torchlight. Slaves came forward and cleared this away and another ten men took place upon the platform and followed the others.

Again this was repeated, and again, and at last Nunganey and Gwalchmai also sank into the depths. The shaft was lined with metal and planks until bedrock was met and from there only the natural living granite met their gaze. Peering over the sides, they saw lights below and soon with a grating bump they came to a stop.

This was not the bottom. The shaft widened out into a chamber, broad and high, with another framework beside them and another contingent of slaves. Here too, another platform waited, and after its load of rock had been transferred to the one upon which they had come down, they stood upon the scarred planks and were carried deeper.

Again they sank from chamber to chamber of this tremendous shaft. There seemed to be no end to lower levels. It became hard to breathe. The least effort was an exertion; the air seemed drenched with fog and the torches would not burn.

They dropped past chambers lit wanly with clustered luminous fungi feeding upon rotten wood left there for that purpose. The floor glowed with foxfire and shining glow worms hung from the roofs of the chambers on long threads, winking like little stars as they swung in the slow movement of the dead air.

They felt their eyes starting from their heads and their eardrums cracking from the pressure. A dead man came up on a rock-loaded platform. They transferred him as well and were lowered once again.

The platforms began fitting the shaft more snugly and were no longer able to hold more than five men. Butterfly valves in the floors opened as the lifts sank and were closed as they rose. Like a piston in a pump, the rising and falling of the platforms helped to change the fetid atmosphere.

Now at this depth the fungi could no longer grow and luminous paint took its place, providing a hazy effulgence in which the newcomers could barely see. The others, though suffering, seemed to experience less distress. They still descended, moving the rock which waited for them and lowered still deeper, from platform to platform by the animalized slaves.

At last they heard picks and hammers below them and came into a partly finished chamber hewn in the basalt, miles below the very lowest of the strata with which men are now familiar. Here, in the very bones of Earth's carcass, the slaves strove and died at the command of Caranche, the king, who carried on the plans of rulers dead long before him.

Here was a man smearing luminous paint, bent over by the weight of his small can and brush, fighting for air with straining lungs. Beside him another had fallen over his hammer and was painting in weakness. His eyes were closed, nor did he open them under the urging lash of an overseer, himself in little better condition.

The picks and hammers rang in the dense air. At each stroke, an echo seemed to rise through the rock below the workmen. At first, Gwalchmai and Nunganey thought it was only an echo, but when the work stopped for the change of workers, the deep sounds continued. It was clearly evident that from some unknown depth of horror a second shaft was being driven *upward* to meet this one which so painfully sank.

The two comrades saw no more than this of the lowest chamber of the Hole. Almost at the same time the dreadful meaning of the years of digging became apparent to Gwalchmai, both of them collapsed upon the splintered floor, bleeding at nostrils and ears. They did not know when they were dragged roughly upon the next heap of rock, hurriedly piled from platform to platform, rising jerkily with it by slow stages once again to the upper levels.

A cool wind revived them. They saw stars shining down upon them through a roughly circular opening. It enlarged as they watched and the stars became flaring torches. They felt hands upon them, cuffing them from their swoon, and then they were stumbling like automatons, stupidly,

heavily, back to the city.

Once more at Poseidon's temple, they were led down a step, dark, poorly ventilated ramp whose walls glistened in the torchlight with stinking slime and luminous molds.

Caranche met and followed them down and saw them locked behind iron bars. The guards left them alone and the king growled:

"So you are the mighty Glooskap, Son of the Mountain? You came here to visit Hobbamock, they tell me! Well, the slaves here talk of Hobbamock, but we know him not. Could it be possible that you were born to be a slave?"

"You, shall die a slave's death tomorrow, Glooskap, unless you tell me what I want to know. It may be that you will go back to the Hole, for as long as you chance to live. I promise you, in that case, you shall not come out alive. Possibly we may decide to use some charming little custom of your own country. We must be hospitable to a guest and make him feel at home.

"Shall we wrap you with red-hot chains or warm your feet with coals or throw ashes in your eyes? Eh? Would that help you to remember?"

"The Black Captain take you!" Gwalchmai grunted, and turned his back in disgust. This seemed to amuse Caranche mightily. He went down the corridor, taking the torch with him and laughing in his beard.

When they thought themselves finally alone, but for the scurrying rats, Nunganey turned to Gwalchmai in the dark.

He muttered, "That Sachem! He is no real man at all Never heard of Hobbamock, said he. I think he is Hobbamock the foul, and none other! The body you chose to dwell in, Glooskap, is too weak to fight these people. They are demons. Do you think the Night Woman can master him?"

Gwalchmai laughed shortly.

"Who? Cor—Bumole? She can take care of herself. Don't worry about her at all. We'll be out of here before you know it. As for that stupid fool—that red bear! If he only knew that he had but to flip up the pan over the butt of the flame-gun and expose the interior to direct sunlight for an

hour, in order to completely restore the charge—"

A cackle of mad laughter interrupted him and bare feet pounded in the dark passageway as their unseen listener scurried away to the upper air.

"He may not have known it before," tersely remarked the Abenaki, "but he soon will! All that remains to us now is to pray to Kiehtan and daub on the deathpaint."

Gwalchmai groaned. There was only one thought to cheer him in his self-disgust: Merlin's ring lay cold upon his finger. Danger was not very close.

That night, all North Alata lay under a cold, cloudless sky. The very air seemed snapping with electricity and above the Inland Sea the Ghost Dancers roamed, paling the cold majesty of the moon. Perhaps because of the huge copper deposits there, or for other, more terrible, reasons, a broad-winged bird shape took form, high in the heavens.

Beneath it, men looked up and marked it well and wondered whither it would fly to forecast war between the nations. The aged Hayonwatha, called from his lodge in Onondaga, saw the angry crimson of its rippling wings as it hung above the Long House of the Five Nations and his eyes narrowed, thinking that he must call a council to learn what danger threatened.

It moved away, toward the East. He yawned, relieved, and went back to his furs with a peaceful mind.

The phenomenon did not change in formation. It drifted on, a little faster, flickering low, then brightly, pulsating with odd brilliance and changing colors. Riding upon, or driven by, the mysterious magnetic currents of the upper air it hastened easterly along die Ghost Road.

It glowed in pastel shades indicating peace, above the unafraid Abenaki, rosy pearl, shimmering metallic blue, fluctuating yellow, and sped onward in wide curve out to sea.

Its contours had not changed when it poised over Nor-um-Bega, but its color ranged in tinge from blood to flame and now a wrathful aura fringed it like smoke. It hung there, menacing, and hurried on, beyond the world's great round to meet the rising sun.

Caranche heard about it and hastened from his bed to scan the sky, laughing in his strength to see the good omen which meant to him only success in another spring raid. Beneath him in separate cells below ground, where they could see nothing, Corenice nodded secretly to herself and her two imprisoned friends slept uneasily, unknowing of the portent.

## **VII**

### ***THE FIGHT FOR THE TOWER***

The king's throne had been set up in a small courtyard, when the prisoners were brought before him, blinking in the strong light of dawn. Beside him, held lightly, stood Corenice, still disguised. Facing them were two stone posts, their bases blackened with soot, as were also the fire-corroded chains hanging from it. A group of attendants stood close by, near bundles of fagots. Except for these, the enclosure was empty.

Caranche beamed down upon them with a heavy benignancy and indicated their weapons, piled in a small heap at his feet.

"Because you have told me what I wanted to know, however unwittingly, I am minded to spare your lives. Say, therefore, will you be my men? I will make you overseers."

For answer, Gwalchmai spat at him.

Caranche did not fly into a fury, but signed for the two men to be fastened against the posts. While this was being done, he said:

"Since you refuse and, by his silence, so does your companion, most mighty Glooskap who are perhaps no more than an impostor after all, let me mention for your delight that you will soon have ample opportunity to show proof of your divinity.

"An hour, I think you said, in the heat of the sun? Then the toy yonder will be fully recharged? First we will have wood piled around you." His attendants commenced this work.

"And then, when all is ready, a little practice, eh? If it is fully charged, you should not feel much pain when we burn your legs off—to the hips! If so—well, the burning wood will soon end your troubles.

"Of course, if you are Glooskap it will doubtless not affect you. Surely a god would not permit his friends to feel distress if he could save them—or would he? It is a matter of some interest to me.

"Now, take this thought with you, Glooskap, as you go. In the spring—when the maple leaves are the size of the squirrel's ear—that is the time for war! It is very near.

"Then we will fall upon the Abenaki with axe, knife and fire. We will leave nothing alive, not even the cur at the wickam door! We need no more new slaves. Their work is done once we recharge the weapons of the Old Ones.

"We will blast out the bottom of the Hole during my own lifetime! We will reach the Land of the Dark Sun as they did, learn the powers of that land and become lords among the heathen! Yea, the whole world shall yet bow to the might of Nor-um-Bega! The Island of Heroes shall subdue continents!

"Still we must wait nearly an anxious hour, must we not, in order to find if you have told the truth? Waiting is such a tedious thing that I and thy woman, Glooskap, will while it away in tender dalliance!"

He turned to Corenice, standing patiently, face hidden in her fur-trimmed hood.

"And as for you—you shall come to me for a time... then to the commanders of my hundreds... and finally to the cauldrons, that the slaves may be fed!"

His men roared with laughter, bending over, slapping their knees, as Corenice with suspicious meekness followed the king into a little chamber. The thick door closed behind them with as final a thud as if a chapter of history closed with it.

A few quiet seconds followed. Then, even as the men were stooping for fagot bundles, they were stopped by a dreadful long screaming from the dark interior of that inner chamber. It was a sound which held the very quintessence of horror—agony—and surprise!

Amost before the startled men could straighten up, Caranche came hurtling out, carrying the door from its hinges. He was no more than a



mangled mass of flesh with white ribs protruding from his crushed chest. With all life gone, he flew through the air, to thud with flapping arms and legs upon the stones twenty feet away.

Nunganey gave a wild whoop of exultation as Corenice strode out, but the men-at-arms stared aghast at this stalking figure from their most ancient legends. Her hood was thrown back from off her glittering hair and with her sleeve she had wiped away the masking stain upon the shining metal of her cheeks.

No longer could she be mistaken for anything even remotely human, and the strong men shrank back against the courtyard wall, leaving the stone posts and the prisoners as she approached.

Her face was set in the grim lines of a sad destroying angel intent upon carrying out a just sentence. She swept up the flame-gun and snapped down the butt plate. Her expression did not change or her hand tremble when, with one smooth motion, she waved them out of existence.

The instrument flared briefly and quickly discharged itself again, but it had lasted long enough to bring the wall of the courtyard tumbling down. The street beyond was empty.

She turned to her bound companions and, not bothering to unhook their chains, she twisted the thick links apart as though they had been cast from wax. It was then she spoke in a voice of doom:

"Thus perish the first of the defaming enemies of Ahuni-i!"

Nunganey said glumly, "We got in here easily enough, but we may have trouble getting out."

Corenice laughed.

"Spoken with your usual optimism, my friend. Yonder lies the road and here are your weapons. Let us go, then."

Gwalchmai grunted. "Whither can we go, maiden of Atlantis? There is no spot in all this land that holds a friend to us, except beyond the Slave Wall. There we would be not better off. We are but three!"

She bowed her pretty head. "Nay, man, we are four. Ourselves—and

Ahuni-i, for whom I act. As for our destination, I am instructed to take the Tower and wait there for whatever may chance to befall!"

"We go to our deaths," said Nunganey, under his breath. While Corenice was assisting Gwalchmai with the buckles of his sword belt, he surreptitiously rubbed soot off the greasy chains, smearing it upon his cheeks and forehead. Afterward, feeling more suitably dressed for his last battle, he trotted after the others, plotting out a new and magnificent stanza for his death song.

Although the sun was high overhead, it was still early dawn for the late rising city dwellers overshadowed by the dark rim of water. No one was afoot in the mean district that the three passed through to the ziggurat, which was easy to discern, being the highest edifice in the city. Avoiding the ways they had been led before, they passed by heavily shuttered houses, their doors locked and barred against the fear of midnight assassination.

In Nor-um-Bega, no man trusted a neighbor.

Luck was with them also in the next street, a foul lane wandering between heaps of moldering garbage, but it could not long continue. As they turned to the right into a prouder avenue, they saw a man coming toward them not far away. He was fully armed and armored and as he came he was whistling gaily and looking carelessly about him. They shrank back around the corner into the squalor they had just left.

"A change of guard for the Hole," Corenice murmured. "Can you take him Nunganey? Silently?"

A savage gleam of white flashing teeth was her answer and the Abenaki slipped loose his war hatchet from its sheath and weighed it in his hand, testing its well tried balance.

On came the unsuspecting guard, obviously in no hurry to take his place in the deep shaft. He strode jingling by the street entrance without seeing them in the deep embrasure of a doorway. As he passed on, Nunganey stepped out to gain the room for a long cast. His hatchet flew, wheeling, spinning, to bury its keen flint edge to the thong wrapped handle, just where basinet did not quiet meet gorget and red locks escaped, parted and severed, redder now than ever before.

It was the work of a few moments to strip the dead guard, in the filthy alley nearby. When they were done, out from that alley came an armored man, with brown hair well tucked out of sight. His face was masked with a dropped visor and his sword was out. With it he prodded on before him a red-skinned slave and a hooded girl. The bundles both carried contained Gwalchmai's and Nunganey's own weapons wrapped in the dead guard's inner tunic.

Thus disguised, they came into familiar places which they could no longer avoid and passed down a broad avenue where people were, but without attracting much curious attention. Their next turning took them into the miserable settlement where again the silver cauldron was boiling for the morning meal. Few children were awake, and they pushed on through the square without hindrance or comment. At last they came again to the grass grown pavement which circled along the base of the perpendicular cliff of brine which perpetually menaced this sea-girt land.

Now here, as they walked hurriedly beside the dark un-moving water, they noticed mysterious, ill-defined movements beyond the intangible obstruction between them and the submerged land. They became aware that a blurred and shadowy form was following their progress—outside the invisible wall.

It swerved toward them, avoiding some rise in the sea bottom, and they could see it clearly, nosing against the other side of that transparent dam against the ocean's ponderous weight. A long-bodied prowling shark, looking for food, with others behind it in the murk! Gently fanning the water, it swam beside them, watching them intently with its little piggish eyes.

"The sea-wolves of Ahuni-i!" said Corenice. "They have been sent for and they are gathering!"

Their road veered away from the trailing pack, but they knew that they were still being dogged.

So they came at last to the black stone tower, unchallenged and unharmed, against all of Nunganey's somber expectations. As they set their feet to the first steps of that winding stairway a great shouting and uproar burst out not very far away. They wheeled and saw a confused mass of red-bearded soldiery rushing in pursuit, without discipline or apparent leader.

It was evident that they would soon be overtaken, but the three ran up a dozen steps to a little landing and here, with Corenice and the Abenaki thrust behind him, Gwalchmai turned to fight.

Strong as he was and with the elevation of his stand also in his favor, only his fine Roman sword saved him in the first encounter. It was fortunate that his father Ventidius, the former centurion, had trained him well. He had a skill which no Aztec could possess, for the maccahuitl with its teeth of volcanic glass was essentially a striking, smashing weapon without a point. The Roman gladius was a thrusting blade also.

At first, he had no time for science. By sheer weight they pushed him back from the landing, up and up the contested stairs, his blue steel dripping, singing in a circle no man could step inside and live.

Luckily for him, their armor was not the strangely alive orichalcum, but only an alloy similar in color. Like bronze, it turned the edge of a soft iron weapon or hindered an axe of the same alloy, but the good legionary steel shore through it like tin.

Up and back they pushed him along the broad stair-way until, when halfway around the first spiral, Gwalchmai heard the thrum-m-m of Nunganey's stout bow. There was a whir above his shoulder and an attacker groaned and fell in mid-stroke.

A tall, finely armored man ran out from the crowd, tossing his axe from hand to hand. His head was bare and his almost scarlet locks flew free as a flame. There was a rapt look on his face and it was easy to see that he cared little for life.

As he ran, he chanted the Song of the Sun:

*"Earth and Sky are things eternal,  
Man must die!  
Old age is a thing of evil!  
Charge and die!"*

He coughed once as Nunganey's arrow took him in the throat, and went down on his knees at the edge of the stair. He cast himself over and down, out of the way of those who came behind him—and even while falling, his joyous expression did not change.

Like venomous angry bees the avenging arrows whizzed and flew, until

from very lack of room to fight, the Nor-um-Begans were forced to give way and dodge the rolling dead. Gwalchmai leaned against the wall and panted. Core-nice tore loose one of the slabs of stone set here and there to serve as benches and hurled it into the crowd. The three had a short respite.

Then, while a few heavily armored men tried to hook away the bodies and clear the path through the slain, others threw long knives to protect their fellows. This continued until Gwalchmai, in desperation, sprang down and engaged the workers.

Again it was rattle, clang and crash, but the wooden shafted, spears, despite their length, were no match for a steel sword wielded by one who had been taught by the finest swordsman in the personal guard of Arthur of Britain. Presently Nunganey, out of arrows, picked up a quantity of the knives and hurled them back with unerring accuracy, a game he well understood.

So they held the stair for a little time. Fresh waves of fighting men washed up against them from the now fully aroused city. Unblooded, new in strength, insanely delighted in the prospect of battle, their numbers forced the valiant three higher and higher toward the next landing. Corenice turned and ran toward it.

Nunganey, struck down by a flying axe, lay stunned but not gashed and Gwalchmai bestrode him, hammering and stabbing at a dozen moving, fighting, golden statues, knowing this to be his last stand and determined to die well.

Corenice's clarion voice cried, "Fall, Aztlanian!" As he instantly did so, the flame-gun's blast turned the very air to fire above them, whiffing away his antagonists in a burst of thunder. With them, twenty feet of the ziggurat's ramp crashed into dust, leaving a gap which could not soon be crossed.

Still, though out of reach, they were not out of danger until, in a shower of spears and knives, with now and then a ponderously wheeling axe clattering down to strike sparks from the worn steps, Corenice lifted the two men by the middles. With one beneath each arm, she ran lightly up the steps and around the next bend, leaving the discharged flame-gun where it lay.

She dropped them upon the platform which ran flatly around the black tower, without proceeding to the stair which led to the peak. Their breathing became less painful. The glazed look passed from Nunganey's eyes. He sprang up with a whoop, tugging at his hatchet, the only weapon now left to him.

A sheepish look came over his face almost at once. It was strange to see the softening of that stern, grim countenance beneath the death paint. Gwalchmai grinned and a slow, sympathetic smile curved the sweetly formed lips of the metal maiden, for the first time in their long retreat. It quickly passed as cries and the sound of cracking whips came up from below. The three looked over the edge of the platform.

Directly beneath, half a hundred feet away, yawned the gap in the ramp. Toward it a horde of red-skinned Abenaki slaves were being driven, laden with heavy balks of timber, staggering beneath weighty beams and thick planks.

Their respite, it could be seen, would be short.

The work went on swiftly. Planks were stood up on end and allowed to fall and though several rebounded and vanished in the gulf below, finally one lay firm. A slave ran quickly across, holding the end fast, while others carefully slid a beam along it, under the sharp directions of their overseer. With this in place, more beams followed, to be overlaid immediately with planking.

Gwalchmai missed Corenice from her place at his side; looking around, he saw her wedging a pointed bar, torn from one of the windlasses, beneath a ponderous paving stone.

He sprang to help her tip it down upon the bridge, but Nunganey, catching the movement and seeing what they were doing, sprang up, his face working, stoicism forgotten.

"These are my people, Bumole!" he begged. "Not upon them!"

"They *were* your people. They no longer are quite human, Nunganey. These men have been brutalized until their very souls are dead. They will fight you with the vigor of their masters if they can reach you!"

"Perhaps," admitted Nunganey, "but not upon these slaves, Night

Woman. Wait for the Chenoo to cross."

Corenice stared at him for a long moment, then flung the bar clanging down and stalked forward to look below.

It was already too late. As though some guiding mind had taken authority and foreseen what she had proposed to do, both slaves and the red-haired axe men were surging across the bridge in an intermingled mass.

She waited until the last slave had crossed, then sent a ton of chiseled stone crashing through the scintillating stream of armored Nor-um-Begans. The makeshift bridge collapsed with a splintering boom, falling swiftly away from them. It was pursued into the depths by twisting, wailing figures which struck and rebounded from the lower ramps, to tear wide holes in the milling crowd which packed the Square of the Boats.

"Too late," said Corenice, grimly. Already the first of the pursuit had reached the platform and was racing toward them, almost naked Abenaki waving weapons they had picked up from the littered stairs as they came. They seemed as demoniac in temper and visage as the bearded, better armed, grinning Killers, who impelled them on to take the brunt of the battle.

Nunganey shrilly incited them to turn on their captors, but either disregarding his pleas or totally misunderstanding his motives, the frantic slaves flung themselves upon the three. It was well that the two men had been able to rest, for these antagonists, unimpeded by armor, were agile and quick to leap and dodge. Fighting hard, though unwillingly, Gwalchmai and Nunganey were pressed back upon the last stairway leading to the top of the tower from whence there could be no retreat.

Again, in their former order, they contested the way, striking now only to stun when facing an Abenaki, but to kill when opposed by Nor-um-Begans.

Fortunately, this stairway was narrower, steeper and more winding, for the tower narrowed rapidly toward its peak and thus it afforded less opportunity for knife and axe throwing. This was an advantage to Gwalchmai, for the Roman sword was used best in stabbing between armor joints. His antagonists knew the weak spots of armor better than he and presently he bled even more from new shallow spear wounds and

could feel his arm weakening, his sword growing heavier.

It was because of this that he could not parry the axe blow which sent his basinet clanking down the steps and which brought him to his knees.

Nunganey sprang in front of him, protecting his friend with his own naked chest, striking out with his flint hatchet, splintering it on the corselet of a burly giant. He roared with contempt and swung up his weightier weapon for the Stroke which would finish both at once.

Somewhere in the crowd the Abenaki war-cry shivered up—that yell which chills the blood of the stalking cougar— and a scarred one-eyed warrior ploughed through the press.

"Ho! Ho! Cosannip!" shouted Nunganey, falling forward to grapple the Killer's knees, and as he did so Cosannip came down on the enemy with his own terrible half-moon axe. One horn of it protruded from the nape of the Nor-um-Began's neck, while the other was lodged in the teeth of his lower jaw.

The two halves of his split head lay over upon either shoulder as Cosannip yanked out the blade and the red Killer fell.

Nunganey instantly picked up the dead man's axe, and side by side the reunited blood brothers held the stair, cleared the way and drove back the horde for a precious moment. Gwalchmai dazedly reached for his basinet, but all strength seemed gone from his fumbling hands. Nunganey stooped and clapped it on his head. He wavered to his feet, supporting himself by his sword. The end seemed very near.

A plunging body swooped through the air from above to crash among the yelping pack. Another followed, screaming. Mad Baraldabay, the Tower Man who had lamented the lack of war, hurled now from the tower top. All eyes turned to the pinnacle. Corenice stood there, a living statue of avenging Fury incarnate. Her upper clothing had been torn from her gleaming body and with the wind whipping her skirt, she stared out over the fighting, far across the water.

"Look!" she cried. Took well, Killers of Nor-um-Bega, for yonder rides your doom, sent by Ahuni-i!"

The fighting stopped. A gasp of horror ran through the assembled



throng. The reinforcements charging over the rebuilt bridge slackened their wild pace as they reached the platform and in their turn, from above water level, could look out through the force wall. Weapons slipped from lax hands and some stout warriors fell to their knees in dread.

For beyond the invisible protection to their little world, only a short distance away, rising and falling lightly to the lift of the waves—the Vimana came hastening over the sea!

## **VIII**

### ***VALE! THUNDER BIRD!***

Swiftly propelled by its broad webbed feet, the swan-ship of Atlantis breasted the billows. When it drew nearer, Gwalchmai and the two Abenaki could hear, as they hurried up the few remaining steps to stand beside Corenice, the stamp and go of the powerful machinery that drove it

Even over the grumble of the crashing surf upon the impalpable sea-wall, a new sound became audible: a prolonged and dreadful whistling like the angry hiss of a colossal enraged serpent.

Again Gwalchmai sensed that oppressive feeling of merciless hatred which he had so strongly felt aboard the mysterious ship, but not this time directed at himself alone. An alien thought began beating against his consciousness, and it was: "Kill! Kill! Kill! He looked at Corenice. Her face was stern, implacable.

Then the swan-ship drove close, the long undulant neck lay sinuously back upon its shoulders and its beak opened wide. Again the round crystal eyes flared with light and evil. Me as a forked stream of blazing wild-fire smashed into the force wall. But it was not like the earlier levin-bolt which Gwalchmai had himself discharged into the sea of weed or the one which had slain the sea serpent. This was a fiercely livid blue ray, narrow and hard and dazzling to the eye.

As the beam impinged upon the tissue thin barrier a shining iridescent halo took form around the spot which it touched, shot with all the hues seen in a bubble just before it bursts. Seemingly without end the rush of energy poured into that shimmering circle,- heating it, breaking down its resistance, destroying the pattern of its composition, rearranging its

atomic structure.

The wall bellied in before that wash of fury, deeper, deeper, and in through it tore the strange fulguration to crash half way across the sunken land. It hung and waved there in their sky like a fiery portent to warn those below of the Day of Judgment. Then the ray died, but all around that evenly punched hole, the edges began to burn!

Slowly at first, then more rapidly as more space opened for their feeding, little smokeless flames licked and ate away the curtain of force. No heat could be felt by those on the tower, closer than any others to the torrent of fire that finally raved by them to the sky, burning high to the attenuated edge of the unseen substance which so long had held the ocean back from Nor-um-Bega. A wide rent opened almost to the water's edge. Away rushed the destroying corrosion to left and right. It became hundred foot pillars of flame hasting away to complete the circuit of the doomed island and meet once more at its farther end, dashing on with ever increasing acceleration to unite and pass away forever in that union.

Downward also burned the devouring flames. It appeared to be a heatless, cinderless line of light sinking toward the level of the sea. It dropped slowly, as the energy fed by disintegrating atoms in the rock of the sea bottom rose upward, feeding the force-wall, as it had been meant to do by the engineers of ancient Atlantis. Faster than that energy could be renewed, it could be destroyed!

Now the surf beat over the edge, not extinguishing that steadily lowering mark of destruction. As the waves came in, gusts of salt rain fell down into the Square of the Boats, drenching the upturned faces of the aghast crowd below. A long wail of terror rose up to those on the tower top.

Already the serrated ramps of the ziggurat were crowded with climbers. All knew that soon this would be the only spot projecting above the water and the last place to offer any refuge. Gwalchmai could see people setting the inverted boats upright and knew it to be a hopeless task.

The swan-ship rocked, idly waiting, head craned out as though it could watch and was amused by the scrambling below.

Nunganey and Cosannip were staring toward the Slave Wall. Here there was fighting and already a dark rush of their enslaved countrymen had

crossed over. No golden Killers could be seen among them as they streamed through the streets of the ruined city on the way to the Tower.

They too had recognized the doubtful promise of that height.

From the peak, the lamentation of the doomed populace came up as a moan scarcely to be heard above the solemn boom of the deluge and the rumble of tumbling stone houses crumbling like sugar beneath the force of the cataract.

All the upper curtain of force had vanished away and in a hundred places along the edge, where energy units were weaker than others, water poured over in spurts and splashes.

Little rivulets shone silver as the spray caught the sunlight or were illumined from beneath by the falling, un-quenched flames. The streams grew to sluices, running together, and cascades came into being as great combers rolled over the brink without interruption. The foam and spindrift curved down the thickening glassy edge in long rivers, tumbling down in an inundation dwarfing the falls of Ne-ah-ga-ah.

Beyond the immediate flood below, the beleaguered group could see from their eminence that the water had surged through the running crowd of slaves, washing them back from their objective. Even further away the rushing streams had coalesced and lipped around the edge of the Hole.

Windlasses, cordage and lumber all vanished into that maw. The structure above, with its pulleys and tackle, collapsed and fell and was carried instantly away. The coping of masonry and the mounds of earth and stone melted away and the Hole yawned wider and wider as though Earth gaped thirstily.

Now, even above the heavy roar of the descending ocean, could be heard the measured thud and boom of *Workers* from the accursed depths who sought to break through the thin shell of rock which separated them from the upper air and domination of the fair green lands above.

Upon that separating layer the cataract thundered down, building up an incalculable tonnage, crushing, splintering away the barrier. A bubble of air rushed up through the zigzag shaft. In it was a mutilated *Shape* whose form remotely approached the human, but which dwarfed man as

the mammoth dwarfs the mouse! With it came a battered tree, its trunk and foliage chalk-white from lack of chlorophyll.

The creature waved a gashed and bleeding arm, once only, above the waters, then sank forever.

Momentarily the waters paused at that shrieking blowhole where spray rose hundreds of feet into the air. The column of froth dwindled, became less high and sank to a widening creamy circle marking where lay the deepest shaft ever sunk by mortal man. This was the only remaining evidence that below lay the ruined labors of a thousand years of toil and slavery. Sealed forever by it was the cavern which to the inhabitants of the Land of the Dark Sun must have been but the merest antechamber.

A tremendous bore of water, carrying with it a scum of debris, rushed down the city's central avenue into the Square of the Boats, overturning the metal craft like chips, washing away the drowning crowd. It thundered high upon the ramps, pounding away the climbers, sucking them under in a welter of spume.

It circled about the ziggurat's base, gnawing into the green hill the structure had been based upon, undercutting its foundation.

The mighty man-made mountain trembled, shook itself and leaned ponderously toward the sea, bowing majestically to superior force, shaking from its shoulders the climbing swarm which infested it.

The long boom swung groaning around, hanging far out over the smooth water where the waves were being flattened level by the suction of the current plunging headlong into the maelstrom below. The Vimana, still obeying the un-spoken commands of Corenice, swam below the end of the boom, fighting the indraught of the vortex. The four companions, finding it impossible to use the attached car, clambered recklessly down the latticework of girders and braces toward the ship.

Gwalchmai cast one hurried glance behind him. A few islanders and slaves were crawling after. Beyond them, no edifice cleared the surface of the flood. Beneath it lay mansion, hovel, palace and fane. Above it rose a titanic, cold, white column of mist and spray, bowing, swaying, like the guardian genius of Atlantis come to mourn over the passing moments of its last, lone colony, however wicked and forgotten.

The others, already clustered upon the back of the Vimana, called to him. The boom shuddered and dipped lower. He leapt upon the wet and slippery metal. Corenice caught him by the sword belt and drew him in to safety.

Once more the trap opened and disclosed the stairway and the four hastened below. Already others were dropping upon the bird's back. The door sealed itself tightly into its flanges and the machinery drummed louder as the swan-ship strove to tear itself away from the suction of the cataract. A terrific blow battered them under the surface and all could hear the collapsing roar of the ziggurat's destruction. Then the boom flailed against the Vimana a second time—the power faltered for an instant and they were drawn into the whirlpool.

Fortunately the depth of water below was now sufficient to cushion their fall, but they were whirled about and up and down, thrown hither and thither by cross eddies. The humans were battered against the unyielding sides of the ship, although Corenice was able to maintain her position at the controls by magnetic attraction, fighting to bring them all safely through.

It was not long before the three men were unconscious.

The scene went out in a burst of sparks for Gwalchmai, as his head struck the metal of the ceiling when they were rolled completely over for the last time. Corenice looked on, unable to help, knowing that none other than they still lived who had seen the beauty and terror of Nor-um-Bega, certain that above their heads rolled only a wild and empty waste of tossing waters.

And so it was that the Thunder Bird came to Murderer's Isle—as had been prophesied of old time.

Far to the north, the Vimana lay placidly in a little landlocked bay. A week of tender nursing had brought back strength and health to pounded human bodies, and two Abenaki had been set regretfully ashore to return to their homes. The others were together in the control room poring over a chart, acid etched upon thin metal.

"Observe carefully," she said, looking upon him fondly. "Land has risen and fallen again since this chart was made. Coastlines have trembled and twisted. Mountains no longer exist. Yet the great land masses are much

the same and this is the way you must travel to fulfill your vow as I promised I would help you to do.

"North and westerly dwell the Inuete, savages, unfriendly to the people of the forests. Northeasterly, the Beothuks have their home on a fair land, though cold, since the sinking of Atlantis diverted the warm sea currents from their shores. There is no help in either place for you. Northward, still farther, Cimmeria lies, deep down and buried beneath the snows of ten thousand years.

"Beyond, these countries lies your road. Here are islands and continental projections leading on and downward into Europe. Here is Estotiland and Miura and the land the Greeks, our ancient enemy, called Thule. So you shall reach, in time, your destination."

"You speak only of me, Corenice," Gwalchmai said, with a somewhat downcast air. "Surely we should not separate?"

She made a little impulsive gesture as though to touch him. Instead she pressed her hand to her side, where a faint glimmer of light shone through her hide garment.

"We must, my dear one, and this is the reason. We have come to an ending, you and I. Both I and the ship which carries us are doomed. Life is departing from us.

"As you have fancied more than once, the Vimana has a life of its own. It may seem impossible, but you must realize that man would not be truly man without the Divine Spark within him which sets him apart from the animal. It was this spark, derived from the Spirit of the Wave, which the Killers allowed to die in themselves, bringing about their own ruin.

"Metal of any land could never live without the tiny bit of added orichalcum, which like yeast spreads its influence over the whole and transforms the original substance.

"In the beginning, this Vimana was built by human hands, of crass metal, but by the presence of my orichalcum body within it, the particles of its substance have been transmuted. Because it received into those particles energy from the sun, holding, storing it for the thousands of years we drifted over sunken Atlantis, acquiring an affinity with me, the Vimana has taken on a life of its own. A sluggish sentience, it is true, but a

real life!

"Because the controls of it were constructed to be operated mentally and because in my orichalcum body resides the ego of a human being it derived knowledge from me. I, Corenice of Colicynos, have an intelligence superior to that slowly developing metal one and have been able to control and direct that other ego. I have a soul—the Vimana has none. Yet, almost without any help from, me, it came to Nor-um-Bega and rescued us. In its curious way, the Vimana loves me!"

"I can understand that," murmured Gwalchmai.

Corenice hesitated, almost shyly.

"It hates you, because it knew that by your coming, our long communion would be broken—as it has been. But, oh, Gwalchmai—it has been so good to be alive!

"It tried to warn you away from the chamber where I waited, with the only voice it had, the harmonies built into it, originally placed there for man's amusement. You persisted and came to me. After that, it sulked—I could feel its thoughts—hating you more and more, wanting to destroy you, so it and I could be alone once more. That was impossible because you and I were always together and my will was stronger.

"Now, soon, I must leave you and you must go on alone."

Sadness was in her voice. She raised a hand when he would have spoken...

"You have seen the glimmer which is spreading over my body, sparkling around me, making the shining metal turn dull and dead under it. The hard rays emitted from the burning force wall struck into me when I crossed above them, setting up a reaction. The Vimana has caught it from me. Cells in both of us are losing their vitality, returning to their original state of insensate metal, or decaying away into a fog of glowing particles inside of which we move.

"When that process is complete, to all purposes we shall be dead. But before that happens, I will set you on your path.

"You could not cross the wide ocean from here in a frail wooden boat.

There are dangers. Men of Atlantis sailed the Worm Sea in wooden ships and were drowned. Worms ate the bottoms out of their vessels and they sank. Only metal is proof against them.

"The Vimana will not last to carry you straight across to your destination. North we must go, into the cold waters, amid the ice cakes, passing from land to land while I can still force the ship to do my bidding.

Then we shall part—you to cross whatever land you must, on foot, making friends with its people, securing boats to carry you upon your way, dropping down the continental coasts by easy journeys until you reach your goal and deliver your message. Yet, I have a thought, I know not from where, that it may take longer than you think."

"And you?" queried Gwalchmai. She smiled.

"I? Think not of me. Long ere that, I shall have come to know what end has been reserved for me by destiny and Anuni-i."

Days of journeying followed. They quitted the coast and sailed northeast, finding and skirting other inhospitable coasts. Folk came out to intercept them in skin boats, but were left behind. In other places shaggy beast-like men came down to the shore, quite unafraid, to shake clubs at them, daring them to come inland and be killed.

They went on, following ancient maps. Corenice spent much of her time in the control room and they were not often together, she fearing that he would be burned in the golden mist which emanated from the walls of that chamber and which was also poised about her own body like a wisp of sunset cloud

Ominous clankings from the machinery spoke of coming ruin and dissolution, and one day these signs could no longer be ignored.

They had passed the ice pack by this time and were steadily approaching a warmer clime. Finally they made landfall.

The country was rocky and Corenice could not find that it agreed with her maps, but from its position and volcanic smokes on the horizon, she judged it to be a young land upraised since her time.

If there were inhabitants, no sign of them could be seen as the



swan-ship limped along the southern coast. Here were no bays and few landing places. The sea beat in upon an inhospitable shore where there was much floating ice from the glaciers which came down from the sea. Dust fell upon them from the frequent eruptions and at night the skies glowed red. They determined it to be an island and the only sign that indicated it to have ever been visited by man came from the sighting of a skin boat floating bottom up. There was no one near it.

A pillar of volcanic ash and smoke stood ten thousand feet in the air over the center of the island as they stood in for a landing. It seemed a dreadful place to set Gwalchmai ashore, yet Corenice knew that there was no alternative. Further traveling was impossible. Helping him with much difficulty, since her refractory body would scarcely any longer obey her will, they carried in supplies to a low shelving beach at the end of a long firth where an ice-river came down to the sea.

Gwalchmai's hair had turned quite white from exposure to the continually discharging rays from the disrupting cells of the ship. He found his faculties were unimpaired and his strength not diminished, when they climbed the gentle slope of land leading to a height overlooking the glacier.

Snow was falling upon the bleak expanse in large soft flakes. They sat and looked down the hill at the waiting swan-ship. It was almost hidden from them by an overhanging cloud of dancing golden motes. Corenice moved within a similar aura, if anything even more lovely because of the deadly mist.

She spoke and moved with difficulty and he felt a throb of heartbreak as he remembered her gay vitality as she had danced and made music for him, so very long ago.

"This, then, must be our place of farewell. Oh, Gwalchmai! Have I brought you so far upon your way only to leave you to your death?"

"The Spirit of the Wave cannot have meant to be so cruel to us."

"Your goddess would not have permitted you to become so dear to me if there was to be no other ending. I know now that when I drank my god-father Merlin's magic potion that I prolonged my life. You, my precious one, who have roamed the world in spirit and looked out of the eyes of others in many ages, must find a way to come back to me. Surely it

will be allowed to us in time to come that we shall meet again."

She smiled with a great effort.

"Then you feel, as I do, that death of the body cannot be an end of life? This body is dying, but it has brought me little pleasure. To feel myself alive and know that I am metal! To know myself alive, to feel desire and to long for love! To live so long and crave death and now to die and wish to live! Oh, Gwalchmai!

"Yet this life means little to me. You and I would never be nearer in it. If we meet again, let it be in some future existence."

"We must. We shall!" He clasped her tight. She disengaged herself easily and continued:

"There is no time for love-making! No time for anything more. You must flee far inland, for your life, for know that when I am gone the Vimana may return to seek you out and slay you. I am going now, to drive it far to sea and perhaps destroy it if I can, before my faculties fail and the power over it and my body is entirely gone.

"This is my punishment, which I deserve. I completed my vow. I slew murderers and became a Killer myself, the sin I was taught was unforgivable. Because of that sin, I die, but Ahuni-i forgive me, I cannot feel that I am wicked."

"You are not," he groaned. "Oh, Corenice! Murder and the love of killing will not be less in the world because the Nor-um-Begans are gone. Strife is a part of man, born in him, never to be removed."

"Perhaps," she gasped. "But love is better and now that I am dying, I can say it—such an unmaidenly thing, Gwalchmai, and so strange that a girl of metal can love—but it is you who are my heart's darling—I never love another."

Gwalchmai bowed his white head and great sobs shook him. Her little fingers touched his cheek. They were still soft, but burning with the corroding action of the disintegrating metal. There was a rapt look in her eyes. She seemed to be listening. Her voice was very soft

"I have received the promise. I am forgiven. This is not the end in this

place of ice and fire."

He caught her to him again, regardless of the pain the action caused him.

"Let me die with you," he murmured. "Here, together, like this!"

She tore herself violently away and stood up, swaying, with a little of the old imperiousness.

"No!" she cried, but the bell music of her voice was sadly jangled. Then in swift regret she stooped and kissed him with lips that were tender and sweet as any girl of flesh.

"This is not goodbye, my very dear, for now that I know you love me, I will find a way to come again. I will see you complete your vow and somehow I will help you on your long journey. Have faith and we shall be together in some other life. Yea, we shall meet and live and love again—though it be two hundred year!

"Ahuni-i protect you now, my lover, for I cannot any longer!"

She turned away and ran, stumbling, down the slope toward the waiting ship, an aura of glowing vapor all about her, a golden ghost in a golden cloud.

"Wait, Corenice, wait!" he cried in anguish, running after. "Let me go with you! When shall we meet? How shall I know you in another life?"

She looked back over her shoulder.

"Know me by gold!" she cried and vanished below the

Vimana's deck. Almost instantly it wheeled, heading out to sea.

He climbed to his former point of eminence, sitting there with his head in his hands, watching the ship until it passed out of sight. The ring on his finger became burning hot.

Disregarding her last warning, he remained motionless upon his rock, eyeing dully the grim and forbidding horizon. Thick dark clouds let down a heavy sifting of snow-flakes upon him and the wind grew bitter, but he did not bestir himself to find shelter, though night was rapidly falling.

Then a brilliant glow became visible upon the far line where sky met sea, as though the sun were rising again. With a start, he realized that it was rapidly growing more huge and distinct. It was an effulgent blur, a cloud of fire tearing across the surface of the water in his direction.

Now it was at the entrance to the firth! The swan-ship on its way back to destroy him—free at last of any restraint!

Without stopping for any of his supplies, he ran inland across the surface of the glacier, far and fast, leaping cracks scarcely visible in the blinding snow which grew momentarily more like falling sparks in the rapidly approaching light behind him.

Frantic, knowing that he could not escape, he turned. The Vimana had reached the strand. Its head lay back for the discharge and the hissing of a thousand serpents filled the air. He stood still to die.

At that instant, an apparition took form on the ice before him. At first, he thought it Corenice mystically returned to be with him, but as she turned and smiled upon him, he saw her to be a stranger.

Her face was oval, but not human! Beautiful it was beyond the telling, but her eyes were square and her skin was faintly edged with jewel-like scales, Sea-green were her robes and dripping with brine. She was armored to the waist and helmeted, but bore no weapon of any kind. Instead, she carried a concave shield, emblazoned with a great serpent, represented as in the act of swallowing its own tail.

The brilliance of her metal hurt his eyes as she waved him behind her. The terrific blast of the Thunder Bird tore over the ice, but quicker even than that the strange being swung up her shield to cover him, deflecting the ray back upon its sender.

Up to the very storm clouds thundered a sheet of "fire, a fountain of rocketing heat, as every disrupted atom in the swan-ship gave up its mite to create an unparalleled gush of energy into the heavens.

The bottom of the firth became visible, steaming and black, but the water discharged into the sea soon came rushing back higher than before, thudding against the glacier.

The whole face of it slipped off and splashed down into the turbulent

waves, splitting between the two, carrying away his savior into the sea from whence she had come.

Back from the dangerous edge he ran. New cracks had opened from the shock. He avoided these, but a few hundred feet away a snow bridge covered an old crevasse which he did not see.

It collapsed beneath him and he fell with it, deep down within the heart of the glacier, striking, rebounding, striking again, to be buried deeper yet and unconscious in the massed drifts below. More snow, dislodged by his body, fell now upon him, packing itself around him as he lay there, and upon it all, as he lay encoffined, a soft shroud of flakes descended into the crevasse, sealing him away from the world.

A tiny spark of knowledge lit his memory for a brief instant before it went out in the blackness over which he had no control.

"We shall meet and love again—though it be two hundred year!"