

Mr. Young's new story arrives like a breath of fresh air which will, we trust, help blow away all those "sensational" theories about astronauts from space landing on ancient Earth to be worshipped as gods. Here, then, is the Way It Would Have Been in such a confrontation between space gods and ancient, naive Man and Woman.

The Star of Stars

by **ROBERT F. YOUNG**

In one sense, our story ends before it begins.

It ends long ago on Earth in the "Land of Shinar," on the Tigris-Euphrates Plain.

It begins in the present with the discovery of a perfectly preserved set of transspace holograms in one of the dead cities of the Planet of Lost Laughter.

The hero of the holograms is a prehistoric space traveler named Hwanonin. The "Hwanonin Holograms" do not record everything he did and thought and saw and said — this would manifestly have been impossible — and they omit his early years; but with the help of other holograms found in the same city and a modicum of poetic license, it is possible to reconstruct his life up until the moment his world lost contact with him.

He was born during the twilight years of his planet's civilization. His education was supervised by a mech-mentor, his physical and emotional needs attended to by a mech-mother. At the age of nine he knew all there was to be known about machines and was firmly grounded in the sciences and the humanities. This lifted him to the level of apprentice adulthood and entitled him to the use of all the facilities the city had to offer both in the way of pleasure and of higher learning. But in order to attain full adulthood he had first of all to choose a field of endeavor subject to his mech-mentor's approval and then to make a mark in it.

At the age of twelve, Hwanonin discovered sex but did not find it wholly to his liking. At the age of fifteen, he attained physical maturity (these are not Earth-years, but the difference is negligible). The pleasures the city had to offer were varied but far from stimulating to the senses. Hwanonin sampled all of them but found none to which he cared to return for more. Inevitably he gravitated towards higher learning. This was more in the city's line. Open-air classrooms abounded, and the sound of mech-mentors' voices never ceased. There were indoor-outdoor libraries and museums everywhere, and visual, auditory and tactile aids to learning were never more than a step away.

Hwanonin walked through a hundred fields before he came to one he liked. It had a name: "Para-evolutionary Patterns." Civilizations on the nearer inhabitable planets were kept under constant surveillance, just in case, and the progress of each was recorded daily. Up-to-date transspace holograms were available in every library in the city. Hwanonin wasted no time in availing himself of them.

His civilization was a vastly old one; viewing young ones from its eminence proved to be not only an edifying but a fascinating pastime. He felt sometimes like a god looking down upon a tiny ant hill, and he never ceased to marvel at the stupidities of the purblind creatures scurrying about in the sunlight "far below" him and hiding in their mud-brick tunnels by night.

All told, fourteen civilizations on ten different planets were kept under surveillance. One of the planets had four, one of them had two, and the rest had one apiece. Hwanonin found the two coexistent civilizations the most interesting, primarily because they were composed of beings similar — if not identical — to himself. According to the holograms, one of them was slightly older than the other; also according to the holograms, there had as yet been no contact between them.

He found the older one more intriguing. It was both a laughable and a lovable "ant hill." Everyday the human ants came out of their "tunnels," made the same mistakes and went back into them again. Most of the mistakes, to Hwanonin's way of thinking, were attributable to the same cause: the inability of these

primitive people to value anything unless it could be put to practical use. If somehow noble concepts could be injected into their thought-stream, they might stop warring amongst themselves; if somehow a real deity could be made to appear before them and speak the real truth, they might stop expending huge amounts of labor building temples to house nonexistent ones. If

Abruptly Hwanonin gasped.

Why *couldn't* a real deity be made to appear before them?

Why not indeed!

Hwanonin found his mech-mentor sitting in the sun-dappled shade of an open-air classroom. He told the mech-man the field of endeavor he had settled upon and outlined the nature of the mark he intended to make.

For a while the mech-man was silent and did not look at the youth (Hwanonin was seventeen at the time) who had sat so precipitately down beside him. Then he picked up two twigs, fashioned them into two stickmen and held them up for Hwanonin to see. "Look, I have made two men, Hwanonin. Would you say they are identical?"

"Yes," Hwanonin answered. "As identical as two men can be."

"No, Hwanonin. They are only *seemingly* identical. I have made them from two different kinds of wood. The one in my right hand is made of a pliant species. See how easily he can be bent, how quickly he springs back into shape? The one in my left hand is made of a different species. See, I can hardly bend him at all."

"If you were a god you could."

"Perhaps. But you are no more of a god than I am. Also, you have misconstrued my analogy. The stickman who resists change represents *your* race, the pliant one the race you wish to bend to your way of thinking. The flaw in your reasoning is represented by the tendency of the pliant stickman to reacquire his original shape."

"I consider the analogy unfair," Hwanonin said. "It is based on an arbitrary assumption."

"Very well," said the mechman, "I will approach the argument from a different angle: In addition to the difficulties you will encounter after you reach your destination, there are the difficulties you will encounter in the building of the vehicle you need in order to reach it."

"I can overcome them," Hwanonin boasted. "Our technology can solve any problem that arises, no matter how complicated it is. I'm surprised that such a vehicle has never been built before."

"One never has because up till now no one ever wanted to. Our technology is capable of innumerable things that no one cares to accomplish because their accomplishment in most cases would amount to no more than a *tour de force*. In all fairness, Hwanonin, wouldn't you say that the mark you intend to make falls into this category?"

"Perhaps," Hwanonin said. "But only by making it will I ever know for certain."

"There is yet another consideration," said the mech-man. "Time. Before you build your vehicle, you must invent it. Invent it, you undoubtedly will, but you will not do so overnight. A good ten years will pass before you can even begin your journey. And no matter how clever an inventor you may turn out to be, you won't be able to build a ship that can exceed the speed of light. Instead, you will have to travel just below it, which means that far more years will pass on the planet of your birth both during your voyage out and your return journey than will pass for you. Thus, the world to which you return will not be the same one you left, and you will find readjustment difficult, if not impossible. Do you think that making the mark you contemplate is worth such a high price?"

"Probably not," Hwanonin said. "But I am willing to pay it."

"Very well. Since you cannot be dissuaded, I have no recourse but to permit you to proceed. I'll make the necessary arrangements for your activities to be hologrammed for future reference."

It required Hwanonin twelve years to build his spaceship, not ten. Finding a practical energy source posed the major problem. He had to settle, finally, on /_2-/, an indigenous radioactive ore. It wasn't altogether a practical solution, because to carry enough to provide sufficient energy for a round trip

would necessitate building an enormous ore bin and in addition there would have to be heavy shielding to prevent leakage.

Even in blueprint form the ship looked ugly. The bin appeared as a huge single stage, with the module, ludicrously small by comparison, resting on top of it. He got rid of some but not all of the ugliness by incorporating steps in the bin, lending the illusion of a series of stages. As soon as the design was finished, he set the machines to work. They were sophisticated and ingenious machines, but they had their work cut out for them. The months sped by, the years. Hwanonin took advantage of the passing time to broaden his knowledge of the alien beings out of whose heaven he would someday descend.

Gradually the ship acquired form. It aroused mild interest, and the people of the city visited the outskirts in twos and threes and fours to view it. They were understandably amused. Some said it looked less like a ship than a hill. Superficially this was quite true: the ship *did* look like a hill — a terraced hill with a house sitting on top of it. But that didn't mean it couldn't get off the ground.

Hwanonin had the machines build a wide stairway on one side of the massive substructure. It provided a pleasant if incongruous decor and gave easy access to the module's locks. The outer lock opened onto a spacious landing that flanked the rectangular module on all four sides. The burnished hull of the substructure had a golden cast; in contrast, the trans-metal hull of the module gave forth a bluish glow. Vertical apertures interrupted the latter at even intervals. They were sealed now, but when opened would serve as windows.

The control room was centrally located. Directly behind it was the hydroponic garden, and to the left and right, respectively, of both control room and garden were Hwanonin's spacious cabin and the storeroom-galley. The forward section of the module consisted of a long, narrow room whose main appointments were a round trans-metal table and a richly upholstered divan. Beneath the module's desk, directly above the anti-124 shielding, were the reservoir, the artificial gravity unit and the oxygen-generating system. The γ -radiation converter was located just above the base of the bin.

At last all was ready. Hwanonin bade farewell to his mech-mentor and his mech-mother and climbed the stairway to the module. Such was the sophistication of his race that only a handful of his contemporaries came to witness his departure. He had by this time grown a whisk-broomlike beard and let his hair grow to his shoulders where it lay in rich dark curls and ringlets. His attire consisted of a plain yellow tunic, a yellow headband and black sandals with golden laces that crisscrossed his legs to his knees. He entered the module, sealed the locks and lifted the ungainly ship, which he had christened the *Star of Stars*, into the Planet of Lost Laughter's atmosphere. The long voyage began.

Today we know Hwanonin's birthplace not only by the sobriquet we have applied to it but by its official NRC listing as *a* Centauri VI. Astronomically speaking, it is close to Earth, and Hwanonin's voyage would have been far longer had he chosen to play god on one of the nine other "para-evolutionary worlds." Nevertheless, creeping along at just under the speed of light, it was long enough.

He spent the approximately six objective years of its duration studying the language, religion, and customs of the primitive humans he hoped to ennoble. Throughout, his enthusiasm for his chosen field remained undiminished, and not once did he experience loneliness. He found, as many voyagers had found before him and many would find after, that while the loneliness of long voyages is a state of mind produced by being apart from men, it cannot affect those who all their lives have been along while in the midst of men.

The success of his mission depended in part upon his arrival being witnessed by as many people as possible. So he timed his planetfall to coincide with midmorning on the Tigris-Euphrates Plain and set the *Star of Stars* down less than half a mile from one of the handful of city-states that comprised the civilization he had come to edify. To the west, hardly more than a stone's throw away, flowed the Euphrates; to the east, out of sight beyond the fields and marshes, and a range of rolling hills, flowed the Tigris. The sky was blue, the season summer. The city-state's name was Shuruppak.

No sooner did he deactivate the converter than the *Star of Stars* began to settle. He experienced a very bad moment, but fortunately the field of barley on which he had landed had a firm substratum, and

the *Star of Stars*, after sinking to the height of its first step, came finally to rest.

Hwanonin couldn't have asked for more witnesses. The surrounding fields were full of them; the city's walls were lined with them. Those in the fields were members of the temple community whose turn it was to donate their services to the goddess Ninlil; those on the walls were artisans, merchants, priests and laborers who had seen what appeared to be a mountain falling out of the sky and had hurried to a high place to obtain a better view. The former took one look at the *Star of Stars*, dropped their primitive implements, and ran; the latter, apparently considering themselves safe for the moment, remained where they were, their ranks swiftly swelling as word of the mountain that had dropped from the sky swept through the streets of the city.

The then king of Shuruppak was Zu-is-udu. He was renowned for his fearlessness in battle and for his fealty to Ea, counselor of the gods. Ea had told him in a dream to be on the lookout for an omen from the sky. Naturally when he heard about the "mountain," he assumed it to be just that.

Omen or not, however, it came under the jurisdiction of Shim-mu the *sangu*, not the king's. As custodian of the temple and supervisor of the temple community, the high priest functioned as a sort of liaison man between the citizens of Shuruppak and the gods, and the concept of the gods was so tightly tied in with the concept of mountains that it was virtually impossible to think of one without thinking of the other.

Shim-mu accepted the responsibility, if not with inner equanimity, then with outward calm. Summoning his *nubanda*, or steward, and choosing two husky acolytes, he left the temple-palace complex, passed through the city's Exalted Gate and out onto the plain. Between the *Star of Stars* and the city a field of millet undulated in the morning wind. Reluctantly the quartet waded into it. The king watched the procession from his chamber window; his second wife, Queen Il-yan-na, watched it from hers on the floor above. The rest of the populace watched from the walls.

Arriving at the base of the *Star of Stars'* stairway, the sacerdotal quartet halted. Their ankle-length skirts were hidden by the undulating millet, but the sunlight could be seen gleaming brightly on their shaven heads and naked backs.

All four were trembling even before Hwanonin emerged from the module and appeared at the top of the stairway. When he started down, they dropped to their knees, and only their heads were visible to the watchers.

Hwanonin halted on what was now the bottom stair. He paused for an appropriate moment, then: "I am Anu the sky-god," he said.

He bore not the slightest resemblance to the clay statue of Anu that stood in the subchapel in the Temple of Ninlil, goddess of the city. Like Shim-mu the *sangu* —and virtually all other Sumerian males — the clay Anu was short and stocky, had protuberant eyes, a noticeable nose and large ears. Hwanonin, on the other hand, was tall and lithe, and delicate of features. His whisk-broom beard lent him a maturity he hadn't quite attained, and his long black hair gave his handsome face a tenuous aura of beauty.

The sacerdotal quartet had by this time prostrated themselves and touched their foreheads to the ground. Hwanonin ordered them to stand up; then he said to Shim-mu, whose hierarchical office he had ascertained from the Chalcolithic sacrificial dagger in the *sangu's* belt, "Tomorrow at this same hour you will visit me alone, and I will inform you of what I want done. Meanwhile you will tell the people that Anu has descended from the sky to help, not harm them."

Hwanonin-Anu raised his right arm, signifying that the momentous meeting was over. The sacerdotal quartet backed obsequiously into the field of millet, and he turned and ascended the stairs of the substructure to his module.

Deep in the devious corridors of the Shim-mu the *sangu's* mind there had long lurked a suspicion that the gods whose whims and ways he interpreted for the laity did not truly exist. But it was not until the arrival of Anu that he realized he did not *want* them to exist.

Moreover, he could not understand why Anu and not Ninlil had come. If the administration of temple affairs was at fault, seeing that it was corrected lay in her province, not the sky-god's.

Understandably, then, Shim-mu resented Anu's presence. Just as understandably, he dared not let his resentment show in any way whatsoever. The best way to hide it, he reasoned, would be to perform a multisacrifice at once.

Accordingly, upon his return to the city and after imparting to the king the minutes of the momentous meeting, he requisitioned ten goats and ten sheep from the temple compound and ordered a temporary wooden altar to be built at the foot of the "Temple of Heaven's" stairway. While the altar was being built, he and his *nubanda* assembled the major priests and appointed four acolytes to superintend the sacrificial livestock. Near midafternoon the group left the temple, passed through the Exalted Gate and entered the field of millet, Shim-mu in the lead, and the maaing, baaing goats and sheep bringing up the rear.

Virtually all activity, both in the city itself and in the fields encompassing it, had by this time come to a halt, and the walls and the higher rooftops were thronged with watchers. Only the king and his generals remained aloof from the forthcoming sacerdotal spectacle: they had assembled in the palace annex and were discussing the problems that might arise when the other Sumerian city-states got wind of Anu's presence.

When the sacrificial group arrived at the base of the Temple of Heaven's stairway, Shim-mu directed that one of the goats be brought forward and lashed upon the wooden altar. This was done. Then the *sangu* withdrew the sacrificial dagger from his belt and stepped forward. As he did so, he noted with satisfaction that Anu had come out of the temple proper and was standing at the head of the stairway, gazing down upon the proceedings below.

The sacrificial dagger was serrated along one of its edges to expedite dissection. Shim-mu raised it and began intoning the fourth propitiation-prayer. Halfway through it, he lifted his eyes and saw that Anu had left the landing and was hurriedly descending the stairs. Both his mien and the expression on his face bespoke his terrible anger.

So clearly did they bespeak it that workers standing in the farthest fields could detect it, that Queen Il-yan-na's ladies-in-waiting watching from the palace roof could see it; that Queen Il-yan-na herself, gazing through the clay grillework of her chamber window, could not mistake it.

Shim-mu's arm dropped to his side. The sacrificial dagger slipped from his fingers and fell to the ground. The fourth propitiation-prayer became dust in his throat.

Arriving at the base of the stairs, Hwanonin-Anu picked up the dagger, slashed the goat's lashings and threw the dagger halfway to the Euphrates. He turned the altar upside down, then faced the terrified high priest. "It is not the blood of a goat or a sheep I have descended from heaven for," he said, "but something of a far more noble nature. Return to your temple, *sangu*, and before you come back here tomorrow, give my words some thought."

The sacrificial party, with Shim-mu in the lead, half-fled back to the city. So confounded was the high priest by the sky-god's unorthodox behavior that several times his footsteps faltered and his *nubanda* had to steady him. Once he reached the relative coolness of the city's streets, his mind cleared somewhat; once in the temple, it cleared altogether. He saw now that in offering Anu such lowly fare as the blood of goats and sheep he had erred egregiously. But all was not lost: all he had to do to assuage Anu's anger was make the right offering, and he knew from the sky-god's words what that offering should be.

Summoning one of his acolytes, he dispatched him to the palace with word that the *sangu* wished an immediate audience with the king.

Hwanonin had been far angrier at himself than at Shim-mu. He should have anticipated the high priest's first act and have informed him not to conduct any sacrifices. But he hadn't, not even when the wooden altar had been built at the base of the stairway. Stepping from one thought-stream into another had proved to be more difficult than he had imagined.

Otherwise, his first day on Earth went quite well. He spent most of it sitting on the divan in his living quarters preparing the first of the series of lectures he intended to begin on the morrow. He had unsealed the module's apertures and had an excellent view of the city and the encompassing countryside. Repeatedly he glanced up from his work at the clusters of multicolored beehivelike houses beyond the

bright-yellow outer walls and at the alabaster-white temple-palace complex beyond the vermilion inner wall. He had chosen Shuruppak over the other city-states because it had fascinated him the most. Actually, however, it differed but negligibly from the others, and his fascination had stemmed from the fact that it had been the first Sumerian city he had studied.

With the setting of the sun the wind died down, and a hot stillness settled over the fields. Hwanonin prepared a simple meal, drawing upon the huge supply of rations he had brought with him. He reminded himself to build a raincatch in the morning to replenish his recycled water supply. Eventually he would accustom his system to native food and water, but not yet.

He ate at the trans-metal table in the main living quarters, gazing wistfully through the open lock at the city. Night had fallen by the time he finished, but he continued to sit at the table, gazing through the lock. The flames of torches ornamented the city's raven hair; the sound of musical instruments, of voices raised in song, reached his ears. The lonely hours tiptoed past. The torches grew feebler, one by one went out. He dozed. When he awoke, the moon had risen, and a silver mantle lay palely over the fields. Something had awakened him. He leaned forward in the darkness and stared into the moon-pale night. Listening.

Soon he heard the sounds again: a faint scraping, as of footsteps on the stairs; a silken whispering; a sigh. Her silhouette took shape against the city and the moon-pale sky as she paused without the door. When he wished on the module lights, she started; then she stepped hesitantly into the room.

A black wig interlaced with multicolored beads adorned her head and was augmented by a headdress fashioned of artificial flowers and fringed with copper pendants shaped like beech leaves. Enormous copper earrings seemed to be suspended from her hidden ears, but in actuality were attached to her wig. A six-strand necklace made of blue beads tightly encircled her neck, while a second, larger strand consisting of scarlet beads looped far down over her breast. Her arms, bare to the elbows, were heavily laden with copper amulets. Her white loose-fitting gown fell all the way to the floor.

Her eyebrows, black to begin with, were rendered more so by jet-black stain and were elaborated into perfect arches. Primitive eyeliner accentuated the deepness of her brown eyes; her nose, slightly broad, made her painted mouth seem smaller than it really was. Rouge-roses bloomed in both her cheeks, and sickish-sweet myrrh emanated from her in almost overwhelming waves.

And Hwanonin? He looked through the layers of make-up, peered through the haze of perfume, and saw — or thought he did — the face of a young and innocent girl.

He had got to his feet. Trembling, she knelt before him, looked imploringly up at his face. He saw terror in her brown eyes.

He told her to stand up. When she obeyed, myrrh engulfed him, seeming to dim his sight. He was angry. Where in the world had the *sangu* got the notion that he wanted to be visited by a virgin? "It was the *sangu* who sent you, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes. I am the eldest daughter of the king."

His anger transmuted to astonishment. He had known from her attire that she was no common virgin, but it was unthinkable that she should be the king's daughter.

Or was it? Would the *sangu*, on the first night of Anu's visit, have dared to offer less?

He made her sit beside him on the divan, hoping to drive some of her terror away. She sat stiffly on the pillows, gazing straight before her. He discovered that he was staring at her. Compared to the tall angular women of the Planet of Lost Laughter, she seemed short and dumpy. He should have found her ugly. Oddly, he did not.

Why was she so afraid? Suddenly he knew — or thought he did. She was afraid that he might consider her unworthy, that he might spurn her the way he had spurned the goat.

Timidly he touched her painted cheek. He felt a sudden emptiness in his chest, a faint throbbing deep within him.

She said, "Lion, my name is Nur-ad."

He thought for a moment that her terror had departed, but when he covered her hand with his and felt the trembling of her fingers, he knew that it had not. That it would not, until, until—

But could such a union be consummated? She was, after all, a member of a slightly different species than he. True, there were no apparent differences, but for all he knew there might be many that were *not*

apparent.

And then again, there might not be.

He repeated her name: "Nur-ad."

She did not move.

He wished out the lights, felt for her in the darkness. Her gown rustled as he removed it, whispered as it fell to the floor. A faint muskiness mingled with the myrrh, half maddening him. Her necklace of beads rattled faintly as it joined her gown upon the floor. Moonlight crept into the room and bathed their intermingled limbs. Hwanonin felt himself falling through the deeps of space, through swarms of iridescent stars. There was a star far brighter than the others. He reached for it as he fell, and as he touched it, it exploded into a thousand shards of blinding therapeutic light.

Lying beside him in the dawn light, no longer afraid, Nur-ad said, "That I have pleased thee well, Lion, will make my death less hard to bear."

"Does custom dictate that you must die?"

"No, but Shim-mu said it would be your wish."

"It is not my wish, and I will so inform him. You will stay here with me until he comes."

With Anu's reaction to the attempted sacrifice of the goat still fresh on his memory, Shim-mu was not surprised. This is not to say, however, that he wasn't disappointed. "But it is imperative that she die," he objected. "That the temple altar be purified by her blood."

"You're always eager, aren't you, Shim-mu, to let someone else's blood. But from now on, the only blood you let will be your own!"

Shim-mu bowed his head.

"Upon your return to the city," Hwanonin-Anu continued, "you will make it known that soon after the sun-god Utu departs his midday throne Anu will begin spreading knowledge from the steps of his temple and that he wishes all those who are not at work to gather in the field below."

The *sangu* was horrified. Knowledge was the sacred province of the priesthood. Spreading it would be tantamount to undermining the temple, and if the temple fell, the city would follow soon after. Was the sky-god mad?

Perhaps he *wanted* the temple to fall.

Since entering Anu's temple, Shim-mu had been covertly eyeing every detail of the long, narrow room in which Anu had received him, particularly the trans-metal table which in the *sangu's* eyes had the aspect of solid gold. But even more fascinating than the room in which he stood was the room immediately beyond. He could not see all of its interior through the connecting archway, but he could see enough of it to lend him hope that perhaps the sky-god could be thwarted if it was his intention — as would certainly seem to be the case — to destroy the power of the priesthood. Specifically, he could see the magnificent altar upon which Anti made sacrifices for the purpose of raising and lowering the Temple of Heaven. It stood to reason that if the sky-god could raise and lower the temple by making sacrifices, then Shim-mu could also. And it followed as naturally as floods followed rain that were the *sangu* to prove himself capable of performing such a feat, his esteem in the eyes of the people would go up, and simultaneously Anu's would go down.

But before he could even lay the groundwork for such an exhibition, he must first dream a dream that would tell him which sacrifices to make and which prayers to utter while he was making them. Meanwhile he would have to play along with the mad sky-god and make extra offerings to Ninlil the Earth Mother so that she would keep Anu from peering into his mind.

"Very well, O Anu," he said unctuously, "I will convey your wishes to the people. And I will inform them that before Utu has retired for the night they will be far wiser than they were when he arose."

Shim-mu's fears were not entirely groundless. While it was not Hwanonin's intention to destroy the priesthood, he would not hesitate to do so if it could not be bent to the New Attitude he hoped to bring into being.

That afternoon he delivered the first of the series of lectures that should have etched him deeply in the minds of his listeners. They were legion even on that first day, overflowing into the fields on either side. Astronomy was his first subject. The Sumerians believed the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars to be made of wind (albeit they worshipped them as gods) — a wind that differed from the earthly variety in that it possessed luminosity. They also believed the earth to be a flat disk and the sky to be made of tin. He did not attempt to dissuade them of these convictions, but merely pointed up the few facts they had at their fingertips by adding others they were capable of accepting, hoping to make them as proficient as the priesthood in computing the seasons.

He accomplished his real purpose — i.e., the seeding of noble concepts — by occasionally interjecting a comment that seemingly had something to do with what he was talking about. E.g., "The tallest tower reaches no closer to heaven than its lowliest foundation stone."

At first his audience was confined to the inhabitants of Shuruppak and the immediate countryside. But as the weeks passed and word of his presence spread, pilgrims came from Sippar, Larak, Eridu and Ur and camped in goatskin tents on Shuruppak's environs so that they might attend his daily talks. Always he had his audience's absolute attention. Even he was at a loss to explain the intentness with which they seemed to listen to his every word and the fascination with which they looked up at him; for his voice, even aided by the miniaturized loudspeaker which he secretly employed, was anything but commanding, while his aspect, despite his physical attractiveness, was anything but arresting. He finally ascribed their absorption and their fascination to a natural reaction to his godhood and to a natural hunger for knowledge. He was wrong on both counts.

Often he glimpsed Nur-ad standing among his listeners, and her gaze would be soft and warm upon his face. Shim-mu had sent him many virgins since that first night, and he had found one or two of them to his liking. But invariably it was Nur-ad of whom he dreamed when he drifted off to sleep.

Also numbered among his listeners were warriors armed with spears. At the moment peace endured among the city-states, but a multitude comprised of the peoples of Shuruppak, Sippar, Larak, Eridu and Ur was an unpredictable multitude at best, and the king was taking no chances. Neither he nor his generals ever appeared: the latter were too busy mapping campaigns for future wars, while the former was too preoccupied with the task Ea had ordained for him.

"The sole purpose of a dwelling," said Hwanonin-Anu, "is to shelter its inhabitants and keep them warm. To accomplish this, it need be neither larger nor more pretentious than its neighbors."

"Those things that cannot be touched," said Hwanonin-Anu, "can never be obtained by accumulating those that can."

"Would the greatest structure on Earth be the least bit different from an ordinary hill," asked Hwanonin-Anu, "if man were not present to make the distinction?"

Winter came. The days and nights grew cold, and Shim-mu the *sangu* wore goatskins when he visited the Temple of Heaven. Anu summoned him several times a week, primarily because he was lonely and wanted someone to talk to; but since their conversations amounted mainly to questions concerning the temple community on his part and to answers on the *sangu's* part, Shim-mu became more convinced than before that Anu's sole purpose in descending from the sky was to destroy the priesthood. Augmenting the conviction were the heretical words Shim-mu himself had heard the sky-god interject into his lectures.

The priesthood, however, was as remote from Hwanonin's thoughts as the Planet of Lost Laughter was from Earth. For weeks now he had not slept well, and there were times during his daily lectures when his mind wandered so far from what he was saying that he could not remember afterward what it was he had said. His appetite, birdlike to begin with, vanished altogether. He sat for hours at a time in the open lock, gazing lackadaisically toward the city.

He grew more and more despondent. Finally one morning he said to Shim-mu, "It has been a long while since I have been visited by the eldest daughter of the king."

At first, Shim-mu didn't get the message, and he regarded Hwanonin-Anu puzzledly.

"I would be visited by her again."

The *sangu's* first reaction was bewilderment. "But what will be the manner of her sacrifice, O Anu?"

She has already placed her maidenhead upon the altar. What has she left to give?"

"She has herself to give. And that can be given many times. I would see her, tonight."

Shim-mu bowed his head. "It shall be as you wish, O Anu. Upon my return to the temple, I will send word to the king."

The *sangu's* second reaction was elation. He had already dreamed the dream that told him which sacrifices to make and which prayers to utter in order to raise and lower the Temple of Heaven, and now the means of luring Anu away from the Temple had been virtually tossed into his lap by the sky-god himself.

But there were still details to be worked out, among them choosing a confederate who had access to all parts of the palace and devising a way to hold the sky-god prisoner once he had been lured into Nur-ad's chamber. Shim-mu shelved them for the moment: it was enough for now to know that his ambition had been lifted from the realms of fantasizing into the world of hard cold facts.

That night, as the *sangu* had promised, Nur-ad mounted the stairway of the Temple of Heaven. She rushed into Hwanonin's arms. It was cold, and she wore outerclothing made of sheepskin and gloves lined with the fleece of lambs. Defying customs, she had coiffured her black hair into an elaborate swirl of waves and ringlets that made the wig she had worn on her first visit seem plain. Her headdress was a riotous garden of rosettes, and shining pendants shaped like stars hung across her forehead.

"Lion, I have missed thee."

"Princess, I have missed thee too..."

She removed her heavy outer clothing, let it fall to the floor. Beneath it she wore a flowing burnt-orange gown. He took her hand and led her into the control room and thence into his cabin. "I smell growing things," she said.

"Yes. I have a garden."

He led her into the hydroponic room. She gasped in surprise and from delight. Flowers grew in the vats along the walls. In the center of the room there was a miniature forest of ferns and little trees. He kissed her in the green luminescence.

"Lion, undress me."

Her gown whispered as it crumpled to the floor. She wore nothing underneath it. Her primitive perfume intermingled with the fragrance of the flowers. He removed his own clothing, picked her up and carried her back into the cabin and deposited her on the bed. He knelt and kissed her thighs, her stomach, her breasts. She parted her legs, and he felt the warm wetness of her against his flesh. The nipples of her breasts extended themselves to meet his famished lips. He felt her legs wind round his waist.

He moved up and into her and heard her sigh. Again he felt himself falling through the deeps of space. Around him he heard the whispering of the stars. *Love*, they whispered. *Love*...and the deeps brightened as about him a trillion roses bloomed in the far-flung fields of night.

In the morning, Nur-ad departed. He would have had her remain, but such an arrangement would have clashed too violently with the polygamous character of the god whose avatar he was supposed to be. Instead, he instructed her to mount the temple stairs each evening after the sun had sunk from sight and instructed her to let it be known to her friends and acquaintances that Anu had chosen her to represent all the maidens of Shuruppak in order that they might be free to marry ordinary mortals like themselves.

Gradually winter released its grip upon the land, and warm rains ushered in a sodden spring. Except for their warmth, they were but little different from the rains that had fallen intermittently all winter, but they brought a green flush to the fields and carried with them the promise of spring.

On the debit side, they turned the Tigris and the Euphrates into swollen muddy torrents and brought to mind the countless springs when both had overflowed their banks.

It was the custom in Shuruppak to celebrate the arrival of the New Year by carrying the statue of

Ninlil through the streets, the while intoning prayers for a fruitful season. This year, Shim-mu saw to it that the statue of Anu was also carried through the streets so as not to incur the sky-god's wrath and so that he would be fooled into thinking, when he heard about it through Nur-ad, that the high priest was his most devoted disciple.

Throughout the ceremony and during the weeks that followed, the *sangu's* mind dwelled upon the plan he had devised to lure Anu from the Temple of Heaven long enough for the *sangu* to apotheosize himself by raising and lowering it. The plan was a simple one: Anu would be told by an as yet to be decided emissary from the palace that Nur-ad was seriously ill; whereupon he would rush to her side, forgetting in his agitation to secure the door of the Temple. He would then be detained in Nur-ad's chamber till after Shim-mu, in the presence of a large number of high-ranking eyewitnesses, performed his feat. Afterward there would be no recourse but to free the sky-god; but with the *sangu* automatically elevated to godhood — or at least demigodhood — by his feat, Anu would not dare to punish him for fear of incurring the displeasure of the people. Instead, he would have to accept Shim-mu as an equal — or at least a near-equal — and abandon his plan to destroy the priesthood.

There was only one drawback: Nur-ad's chamber doorway could be barricaded in the twinkling of an eye, but would a mere barricade suffice to hold a god at bay? Might not Anu walk right through it, or, ignoring it, walk right through the chamber wall? It was true that Shim-mu had never seen Anu walk through a wall, but this did not mean he couldn't.

As often happens, what appeared to be an insuperable problem turned out to be no problem at all. This became apparent during a business call the *sangu* paid the queen early that spring.

The call concerned Queen Il-yan-na's annual donation of six head of cattle to the temple community to insure the perpetual burning of incense in her personal niche in the *Aemenna* (the subchapel in which the clay statue of Anu stood). This year, for some reason, the cattle had not been forthcoming, and it was Shim-mu's job to find out why.

The queen received him in her innermost chamber, a richly appointed room (by Sumerian standards) whose tiny grilled windows provided a view of the fields bordering the Euphrates and of the towering Temple of Heaven. For a member of the "black-haired people," she was quite tall and had only recently gone to fat. Despite her obesity, she still retained traces of her former voluptuous attractiveness, and Shim-mu recalled how, long ago when it had been necessary for him to shave all of his head instead of only part of it, he had toyed with the idea of becoming one of her lovers.

By way of introduction to the subject of his visit, he made a joking allusion to the understandable tendency on the part of royalty to forget matters that to them were trivial but which to others were frequently of considerable importance. At this juncture, the queen stopped him cold. "I'm not in the habit of forgetting anything, Shim-mu," she said. "I withheld the cattle."

"You *withheld* them?"

"Yes. Incense burned by fools will no more insure the perpetuation of my beauty than were I to burn it myself!"

Shim-mu blinked. "But the task is performed by the most esteemed of my priests. Sometimes I even perform it myself. Certainly you don't regard *me* as a fool?"

"I regard anyone as a fool who climbs the steps of the so-called Temple of Heaven and fawns at the feet of the false Anu."

Shim-mu was aghast. However much he might hate the sky-god, he did not doubt his divinity. "The most beautiful of all mortal women must have good reason to make so blasphemous an accusation."

"I do indeed. Nur-ad."

"Nur-ad?"

"What manner of god is it that cannot distinguish between a virgin and a slut? Who can enter into a woman and not even note the absence of virgin's blood?"

Hope sent the veins of Shim-mu's temples to throbbing, but incredulity still retained a foothold in his mind. "But the king himself assured me of her purity, of—"

"The king is a fool! Who else but a fool would build a boat high in the hills where En-ki, god of the sweet waters, has never been known to tread? Nur-ad's brother entered into her even before her

maidenhair appeared, and he was far from the last. She is nothing but a common slut, and your precious Anu is a fool!"

Shim-mu swallowed. If Anu was a fool, what did that make him?

Well at least he was a fool with the means to avenge his having been made one, and certainly no fool ever had a more powerful ally. Recovering his wits, he said, "Yes, yes, of course he is a fool. I suspected as much from the very beginning, and that is why I have invented a plan to expose him. You, Queen Il-yan-na, can be of immense help to me in carrying it out."

After swearing her to secrecy, he told her what he had in mind. "It would be unthinkable, of course, beautiful lady," he said, "for you to deliver the message in person, and I myself cannot deliver it because Anu might become suspicious. Thus, it must be entrusted to your most faithful lady-in-waiting. However, you yourself must make the arrangements for barricading Anu in Nur-ad's chamber."

"You are going to raise the Temple of Heaven?" Queen Il-yan-na laughed raucously. "You, who can no longer even raise your own member are going to raise a *mountain*?" She laughed again, and the *sangu* was somehow reminded of the garbage congeries lining Shuruppak's south wall. "Very well, Shim-mu — you shall have the opportunity. I will see to it that the message is delivered tomorrow morning while Nur-ad is sleeping off her nightly exertions, and when her lover enters her chamber, I will see to it that he stays there. Now begone, Shim-mu — begone!"

Hypertension and humiliation coloring his face a violent red, Shim-mu withdrew from the queen's presence. Once the palace was behind him, he hurried to the *Aemenna*. There, he prayed to the real Anu. The clay one.

"Lion, caress me."

"Princess, you have given me the gift of love."

"Lion, take me."

"Thy legs are as two pillars surmounted by a nest of love."

"Lion, enter the nest."

"The nest of love is honey-filled; honey-filled is the nest of love."

"Deeper."

"Princess, I am falling, falling from the pinnacles of pain —"

"Thy loins are as strokes of summer lightning. —"

"Into the nest of love —"

"Lion..."

It would take years for the moist Mesopotamian climate to eat through the thick hull of the *Star of Stars*, but the process had already begun.

Standing in the midmorning sunlight staring at the large rusted area he had just discovered high on the foreside of the substructure, Hwanonin knew dismay.

Why dismay? Long before seepage could possibly occur, his mission would be finished; he would have said all he had to say and be on his way back to the Planet of Lost Laughter.

Was it possible he no longer wished to return? Did his dismay arise from the realization that the rusted area made his leaving Earth inevitable? Made his leaving Nur-ad inevitable?

For him to take her with him was unthinkable. She would go — gladly. But she belonged to a young civilization. An old civilization might be able to guide a young one along the proper paths; but essentially, old civilizations were like old men: they spent their declining years sitting in the warm rays of dying suns, meditating not upon what they were going to do but upon what they had already done.

On the Planet of Lost Laughter, Nur-ad would be as a chained lioness among sheep.

Sadly Hwanonin gazed upon the land he had come to love.

The spring rains, for the time being at least, had ceased. The vegetation lining the banks of the still swollen Euphrates was a moist rich green. Here and there, palm trees stood like slender girls with garish headdresses. The members of the temple community whose turn it was to work were in the fields, plying their crude implements. From the city, barely audible above the roar of the Euphrates, came the sound of

song.

Presently he found himself gazing in the direction of the Exalted Gate. From it had emerged a woman riding upon an ass. As he watched, she guided the ass onto the damp field where last summer millet had undulated in the wind. Her head and shoulders were covered by a scarlet mantle. Her face at this distance was no more than a white blur, but he knew it was not Nur-ad's.

When it became evident that her destination was the *Star of Stars*, he made his way to the stairs and descended them to meet her. She dismounted and knelt before him. He glimpsed an elaborate neckpiece of lapis lazuli and from it surmised that she came from the palace, that she might be a lady-in-waiting to the queen.

She introduced herself as such when he told her to stand up. Then she said, "The queen bids you to accompany me back to the palace at once, O Anu. It is Nur-ad. She is gravely ill."

Without a backward look at the *Star of Stars*, Hwanonin began striding with god-long steps toward the Exalted Gate.

We see Shim-mu standing villainously in the wings. Now, as Hwanonin-Anu exits, we see him step furtively up on the stage. He is wearing a blue cloak that falls all the way to his ankles, and there is a bag slung over his shoulder. It contains three waterfowls and three turtledoves.

He emerges from the Exalted Gate and makes his way upstage toward the looming *Star of Stars*. His *nubanda* follows, then come the *masmasu*-priests, then the *eribbitu* priests, then the *urigallu*-priests, and finally the acolytes. Bringing up the rear are carefully selected members of the aristocracy and the military whom the acolytes have alerted to the forthcoming event.

We see the procession come to a halt halfway to the *Star of Stars*; then we see the *sangu* walk alone to the foot of the stairs and begin to climb them. Three quarters of the way to the landing, he turns and dramatically doffs his blue cloak. He pulls his sacrificial dagger from his belt and stands there for a moment in the morning sunlight, gazing defiantly at the sky. Finally we see him turn around and boldly climb the rest of the distance to the landing, step through the open lock and disappear.

Actually, Shim-mu's boldness was pure bravado. Terror, self-doubt, desperation — these were his major emotions as he walked through Hwanonin-Anu's living quarters, stepped into the control room and halted before the "altar."

The sheer complexity of the altar overawed him. There were three levels, each inlaid with multicolored shells. The first was even with his knees, the second with his waist and the third with his chest. The entire structure rested upon a transparent base filled with silver threads and golden beads, arranged in a pattern that was utterly incomprehensible to him.

He told himself that it did not need to be comprehensible to him, that nothing in the entire temple needed to be comprehensible to him. All that he had to do to accomplish his end was to perform the sacrifices and intone the prayers specified in his dream. The three waterfowls were for raising the temple, the three turtledoves for lowering it. Shim-mu could understand, now that he had seen the altar at close range, why the dream had specified three of each kind.

Hands trembling, he opened the bag and pulled out one of the three waterfowls. He held it over the highest tier; then, intoning the appropriate prayer, he slit the poor creature's throat and waved the shuddering body back and forth till the tier was covered with blood.

He repeated the process with the second waterfowl, this time saturating the middle tier with blood. He slit the throat of the third, saturating the lowest tier. Then he stepped back and waited.

Nothing happened.

Nothing, that is, that Shim-mu was aware of.

Actually, however, a number of things were going on. Although the controls were locked into place and could not in any case have been set in their proper sequence by anyone except Hwanonin himself, the console was by no means impervious to seepage. A quantity of the blood of the three waterfowl had already trickled down into the maze of wiring in the base and established a series of unorthodox interrelationships. These resulted presently in the escape of /_2-/- radiation into the deactivated

oxygen-generating system, the draining of water from the reservoir into the bin and the accidental activation of the /_2-/radiation converter.

Shim-mu's first intimation that all was not quite as it had been before and would never be again was when he glanced down in response to a tingling of his right hand and saw five fleshless fingers gripping the hilt of the sacrificial dagger. He screamed.

An awesome shudder racked the massive Temple of Heaven. There was a great popping sound as the imbedded base of the substructure broke free from the earth. It was as though Ninlil had erupted after a heavy meal.

Shim-mu screamed again. This time the escaping /_2-/radiation had found his left foot. He saw the gray bones of his metatarsus and phalanges.

As the awed secular and nonsecular audience fell back, the temple rose into the sky. Slowly at first, then with terrifying swiftness. Priest, merchant, general — all broke and ran wildly toward the city, accompanied by the workers in the nearby fields who had also borne witness to Shim-mu's success. Near the relative safety of the wall, surrounded by the startled pilgrims from Sippar, Larak, Eridu and Ur, the more courageous turned and looked back. They had to raise their eyes to see the Temple of Heaven, for it was high in the sky and had diminished to the size of a bird,

Abruptly the bird burst, and vanished.

The heavens darkened, and Utu the sun-god disappeared. Blue bolts of lightning shattered the sky. Thunder shook the Land of Shinar.

It began to rain.

Hwanonin witnessed the disintegration of the *Star of Stars* through the grilled window of Nur-ad's chamber. He had guessed Shim-mu's intention the moment he found Nur-ad well and himself a prisoner in her room; now he deduced the imbalance that Shim-mu had accidentally created, although he had no idea how the *sangu* had managed it. At first he drew no connection between the massive release of /_2-/radiation and the sudden downpour. But when the rain turned torrential, he knew. /_2-/ was an alien element: the downpour was a meteorological side effect of its absorption into Earth's atmosphere.

The sound of the falling rain filled the room. Running through it like a hellish leitmotif was the crescendo roar of the Euphrates.

He had already tried to move the heavy stele that had been used to block the archway leading to the corridor. Now, with Nur-ad's help, he tried again. But apparently the stele had been braced from the other side: it would not budge.

Hwanonin returned to the window, smashed its baked-clay bars and leaned over the mud-brick sill. The palace wall dropped sheerly down to the rain-wet paving of an inner courtyard. He drew back into the room, his black hair soaking wet. A gust of wind blew sheets of rain through the window, and a puddle formed upon the floor.

It was only a matter of time before the Euphrates would reach flood level if the downpour continued. The fields and the city streets would be inundated, and while the water would never reach as high as Nur-ad's chamber, she and Hwanonin would be marooned without food or drinkable water, perhaps for weeks.

If, somehow, they could escape from the palace, they might be able to reach the hills to the east of the city. There, they would be safe.

"Nur-ad, isn't there someone you could call who would let us out?"

"I will try, Lion."

Placing her mouth close to the stele's juncture with the arch, she began screaming the names of her handmaidens, and screaming for the Officer of the Palace Guard. Between screams, footsteps were faintly audible in the corridor beyond the stele, but they invariably died away, and the stele remained where it was.

"It is my stepmother's work!" Nur-ad said vehemently. "She hates me — she always has. Shim-mu visited her yesterday. I think she connived with him to imprison you here so that Shim-mu could destroy your temple."

The Euphrates was not visible from Nur-ad's window, yet both knew the moment it burst its banks. They knew from the screams that rose from the city's streets, from the new note that came into the river's roar. And presently they knew from the muddy river water that crept into the courtyard below.

"Lion, we are doomed."

Lightning tore the lowering sky to tatters; thunder shook the palace to its mud-brick roots. Hwanonin took Nur-ad into his arms, thinking to reassure her. But she needed reassurance of another kind. She pulled him over to her bed and down upon it. It astonished him that at such a moment she could want him, even more that he could want her. She was wearing a flimsy sleeping gown; savagely he tore it away. He kissed her feet, her knees, her thighs, her breasts. She moaned, her hips rising and falling rhythmically. She wound her legs around his waist, dug her heels into the small of his back. The sound of her breathing rose above the roar of the deluge. When he entered into her, he tried to enter all of himself; she uttered little short screams of bliss. He knew the furious rise and fall of his hips and hers coming to meet them, the blending of their pubic hair and the warm wetness, the warm wet wet wet wetness, and then the outflowing of himself and the savage spasms of her simultaneous orgasm; and still her hips rose and fell and his descended to meet them; she screamed as a second orgasm shook her, moaned at a third and a fourth; again he felt an outflowing of himself, and slowly subsided upon her.

A scraping sound came from the corridor, followed by a resounding crash. A bulky man in his middle years entered the room. Hwanonin stared at him with glazed eyes.

The man wore an ankle-length skirt. A copper band encircling his neck proclaimed him to be a skilled artisan. He said to Nur-ad, either unaware of Hwanonin's identity or not wishing to embarrass him, "The king wishes you to join him in the hills. I will conduct you there when you are ready." Visibly shocked, he withdrew from the room.

Nur-ad dressed quickly. "You will come with me, Lion. Hurry!"

All was pandemonium in the palace. Servants, soldiers, pages, ladies-in-waiting, kitchen wenches — all milled about in the chambers and the corridors, packing their belongings or trying to make their way out of the building. A section of the east palace wall had collapsed, and rain drove through the dark rooms and halls. In places, puddles were inches deep upon the floor. The messenger from the king knew the shortest way to the street, and soon he, Hwanonin and Nur-ad were walking through knee-deep muddy water toward the Exalted Gate. They were joined by others along the way, and Hwanonin realized that it was not Nur-ad alone whom the king had sent for. Nor, aside from Nur-ad, had he sent for members of the royalty. The people walking with them were clearly from the working classes, and many of them wore neck bands signifying them to be skilled artisans or craftsmen.

The fields were a vast quagmire awash with rain- and river-water that grew deeper by the second. Darkness lay heavily over the land, dissolving with each lightning flash, only to rematerialize an instant later. Walls of rain moved back and forth in the constantly shifting wind. The water came to Hwanonin's hips, to Nur-ad's waist.

At length he could make out the hills. They acquired ephemeral substance with each lightning flash, then faded into dark, unreal blurs. He held Nur-ad's hand tightly, steadying her when she stumbled, pulling her free when she became mired in the mud. Her black hair was plastered against her cheeks and neck; the gown she had grabbed at random was already bedraggled and clung to her as tightly as though it were her skin. It shocked him to find desire for her building up in him again. Was he mad? Or did she possess a quality the women of the Planet of Lost Laughter lacked? Had he rediscovered something his own race had lost in its determination to replace the coarse apparel of savagery with the smooth silks of civilization?

The mech-mentor's stickman analogy had been wrong on one count at least: Hwanonin had bent — not much, perhaps, but he was no longer quite the same person who had built the *Star of Stars*.

He hoped fervently that it had been wrong on the second count too. The coarse apparel of savagery might be preferable in some instances to the smooth silks of civilization, but in others — such as the senseless waging of internecine wars and the erecting of elaborate shrines to glorify psychopathic deities — it could only be deplored. In his own mind there was no doubt that he had bent his audience to some

extent. But now that his lectures were over — probably for good — might not those same listeners who had given him their whole-hearted attention behave like the mech-mentor's stickman and spring back to their original form?

One thing at least was certain: he could not leave Earth now even if he wanted to. In a way, he was responsible for the present deluge, and someday, he knew, the fact would haunt him. But it did not haunt him now. Instead, he was glad that the *Star of Stars* had disintegrated. For Hwanonin had come to know himself quite well, and he knew that if the means for leaving Earth still existed, he might still be civilized enough to make the wrong decision.

He became aware that now the water came only to his knees, and he thought at first that the flood was receding. Then he realized that he and Nur-ad and the others had reached higher ground. The hills lay immediately before them. Upon one of them, in the brief brightnesses of the lightning flashes, Hwanonin discerned a strange structure. Square, multi-tiered and with no apparent prow or stern, it had the aspect of an ungainly house. A ramp extended down to the ground from a large aperture in one of its four sides, and as Hwanonin grew closer, he saw that livestock were being herded into the interior.

He halted, and so did Nur-ad and the others. Presently a man came walking through the downpour to meet them. He greeted Nur-ad, and Hwanonin knew that he was looking at the king. In the immediate background, standing bedraggled in the pouring rain, were several young people —probably Nur-ad's brothers and sisters. Significantly, the queen was nowhere to be seen.

The king regarded Hwanonin for some time, whether in awe or annoyance, or both, Hwanonin could not tell. Finally, "I did not expect you, O Anu," he said, "but room can always be made for a god. My captain will see to it that you and Nur-ad have ample space. Soon, the waters will — "

Here, the transspace holograms come to a close.

For the ending of our story we must turn first to Mesopotamian legend. From it, we learn that King Zu-is-udu, or Zuisudu, was the Sumerian prototype of the Babylonian Ut Napishtim, and, later on, of the Biblical Noah.

But legend makes no mention of a god who descended from heaven in a great temple, who spoke words of wisdom to the multitude and who survived the Flood in King Zu-is-udu's ark. Is it possible that the memory of Hwanonin's tenure as Anu disappeared altogether from the minds of men?

It did not wholly disappear, but to find evidence of it we must turn from Mesopotamian legend to Mesopotamian architecture, meanwhile keeping in mind that the collective unconscious is a vast storehouse of handed-down memories and impressions, and that what one generation creates is often no more than an artistic recrudescence of what a previous generation experienced.

Here, in outline form, is the ziggurat, or tiered pyramid, of Ur-Nammu, built by Ur-Nammu and his son Dungi, circa 2112 B.C.:

Here, in similar form, is the Babylonian ziggurat of Etemenanki, considered by most archaeologists to have been the Tower of Babel:

And here, in simplified form, is Hwanonin's blueprint for the *Star of Stars*:

Just because our story ends before it begins does not mean it ends unhappily. Nor does Hwanonin's failure to make the cuneiform tablets of the *Gilgamesh Epic* mean that the disintegration of the *Star of Stars* reduced him to a nonentity. Legend, like history, for the most part records the deeds of madmen and murderers. Hwanonin was neither.

As for his failure to accomplish his purpose on Earth, how many men *do* accomplish their purpose on

Earth? And when all is said and done, do not most men's lives amount to broken dreams?

No, there is no reason to suppose that Hwanonin and Nur-ad did not lead full and happy lives. On the contrary, there is every reason to suppose that they did. If we listen hard enough to the wind of time that sometimes breathes out of the past, we can hear them whispering softly in the night

Lion, caress me.

Princess, you have given me the gift of love...