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colon the conqueror

by . . . *John Boardman*

Instinct warned him that his broadsword, with two bodies spitted on it, would be useless. He drew another weapon.

THE dank night winds softly moaned as they whirled around the precipitous crags of the Nemesis Mountains, and the weird cries that came from no human or animal throat echoed through the black gorges. A small band of five men halted beneath an overhanging rock and took advantage of the poor shelter which it afforded.

"A bad storm, this," said one of their number. "We had best go back ere the fiends of the mountains find us."

"Poltroon!" roared a tall, broad-shouldered man with a voice of authority. "Know that the end of a twelve years' quest is near up this night, and I would not turn back if all the jewels of the dark land of Stenchia awaited."

The speaker was a powerful barbarian who stood eight feet tall. Neither a Hyperthyroidean like his companions nor a Stenchian like the inhabitants of the mysterious land through which they had fought their way, this giant was of the strange and almost unknown barbarian tribe of the Cinnamonians. Born in the dark northern forests where his people worshipped the great god Crum, he had made his way in the world by

Californian John Boardman is a graduate student in theoretical physics at Syracuse University (he got his M.S. at Iowa State in 1956), but more than this he is, as will be seen, a devoted student of the life and deeds of the fantastic and almost legendary King of Aquaregia, Colon the Cinnamonian.

robbery, piracy, mercenary soldiering, and stuffing ballot boxes in the merchant republic of Selumshortia, until, five years before, he had become king of Aquaregia, most powerful of the Hyperthyroidean nations. Tales of his past varied; some said he had been exiled from his native Cinnamonia through the machinations of his half-brother Semi-Colon; other whispered stories of how he had singlehandedly wiped out the devil-priests of the great stone city of Ungawah, armed only with a hand ax and the shinbone of the ancient Stenchian king Snephren the Snub-nosed; still others told how he had once led a band of black corsairs in the sack of the supposedly invincible fortress-city of Xaxoxixlan. In all the nations of the Hyperthyroidean Age his name was known, from frozen Sjarpfang where the snow-apes howled at the moon as they sucked marrow from the bones of men, to the steaming jungles of Hottes-Haydes, where amid ruined stone temples in a sacred palm-grove the blind sorceress Seezallia sang endlessly of ancient, ocean-buried Atlantis and of the unborn future, when Hyperthyroideans and Stenchians alike would be crushed under moving mountains of ice. Invincible in combat, relentless in war, tempestuous in love-making, and a perfect hog at the table, Colon the Cinnamonian had overthrown all obstacles before him to become King of Aquaregia and greatest of the heroes of the Hyperthyroidean Age.

Now, accompanied only by a de-

voted band of followers, the survivors of the long campaign through ever-hostile Stenchia, Colon lay encamped in the highest crags of the Nemesis Mountains, determined to seek out the evil sorceress Ophthalmia and her demon consort Yog-Thuthuthoth, and to end the witchcraft which had caused no babies to be born in Aquaregia for the past seven years.

"Hear you those cries!" exclaimed the man who had spoken to Colon. "Those are things from across the black gulfs of nameless space, called to our hindrance by the dark arts of the she-demon Ophthalmia. Methought I heard one cry, saying that ere dawn the soulless things of the nether depths would use our intestines for dental floss."

"Publius Delerius, you are not worthy of the name of man!" Colon roared. "Had you been at the siege of Haemophilia eight years ago, when men on horseback froze in full gallop, then might you perhaps be able to talk of the cold and the hardships of war."

"True, Sire," spoke a third, "and well do I remember, for I fought at your side when we were both mercenaries serving under Queen Libidonia—"

"You said it!" the barbarian monarch interrupted.

"But at that siege, Sire, we opposed nought but the slave armies of Florentius the Flatulent. This night there are arrayed against us all the dark powers at the command of the thrice accursed Yog-Thuthuthoth!"

"O faithful Gasbert, are you also succumbing to the courage-devouring spells of the evil Ophthalmia?" said the king, toying with a twenty-inch poignard. "Onward must we go, to rid the land of Aquaregia of the seven-year curse of sterility!"

Colon's shout was echoed by a low rumble from the slopes high above them, and a hollowly resounding laugh boomed from side to side of the narrow defile. A thousand tons of avalanche-driven snow hurtled down into their midst, and Publius Delerius was swept away into the mile-deep gorge that yawned at their feet.

Fearlessly the survivors girded themselves for the last leg of their climb, and, led by Colon, they slowly plodded up the accursed mountain towards the haunted castle where the fiend-born Ophthalmia called forth hidden things from the measureless darkness between the worlds.

Twelve hours later only Colon survived, standing armed to the teeth before the great bronze gate of Castle Eldritch, home of the sorceress Ophthalmia. His other companions had perished before the perils of the Nemesis Mountains and the black arts of the sorceress: Gasbert had been carried away by a heavily furred vampire bat the size of a lion, Cynides the Cynosure had been slain by a Thing which they had encountered on the trail, and Abimelech son of Abich had been swallowed alive by a hole which had opened in the narrow path.

Nor had Colon himself escaped

unscathed from the perils. A scar on the lobe of his left ear showed where the Thing had wounded him in its death-throes, and a giant white mountain-eagle had made away with a tuft of hair from his chest. Otherwise unharmed, the barbarian surveyed the great locked gate which stood before him.

On the gate, sharply outlined in the moonlight, were two great ivory knockers. (For a moment Colon thought of Queen Libidonia.) One of them was labeled "Ophthalmia, High-Class Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Necromancy. Gold Medal, Gehenna County Fair; Holder of the C'thulhu Seat of Applied Thaumaturgy at Dom Daniel University." The other was simply inscribed in world-ancient black letters "Yog Thuthuthoth, the Old One."

Without hesitation the fearless Colon hammered on both the knockers. Instantly the huge bronze gate creaked open, and three brass-bound doors faced him, guarded by a woman slave who was chained to the knob of the middle door. The three doors were inscribed "Residents' Entrance," "Tradesmen's Entrance," and "Heroes' Entrance."

"Art thou man, beast, or devil?" cried the chained girl.

Colon looked at the slave. She was a beautiful Aquaregian girl, about twenty years of age. She was tall, well-built, and unnaturally pale, as if she had passed through some terrible experience.

"Save me, if man thou art!" she cried. "I am a slave of Ophthalmia,

kidnapped in my infancy and forced to serve her in her dark and devilish works!"

Colon advanced towards the slave. He flexed his mighty arms, thicker than the thighs of an ordinary man, and pounded three times on the Heroes' Entrance.

"Your name, wench?" asked Colon as he awaited a reply.

"I hight Leucorrhea, daughter of Crustaceus, Duke of Claustrophobia," she replied. "Take me from this awful place and I will be thy willing servant forever."

Colon swept the fainting form of the damsel into his steel-banded arms and embraced her. She fell instantly limp, all the bones in her torso mangled.

"I lose more women that way," muttered Colon, flinging her broken body from him.

At that minute thirteen men in steel armor came pouring out of the door, and Colon lay about him with his broadsword, which would have fit a lesser man as a claymore. Within instants the thirteen lay decapitated, and Colon strode boldly into the great hall.

The hall was deserted; only three mouldering skeletons on the floor, and one on the ceiling, showed that it had ever been occupied. One of the skeletons at Colon's feet lay on its back, the bones of the face contorted in an attitude of stark fear. The other two skeletons lay together, each with a knife in the other's ribs. One of the bony frames was human; the other had two horns growing out

of its forehead and five-inch claws on its hands. The fourth skeleton was too far away to be conveniently inspected.

Colon looked up from the grisly remains to see one of the extramundane defenders of Castle Eldritch. An unearthly creature of the nether gulfs stood before him, summoned forth from the night of ages by the sorceress and her unspeakable consort. The apparition stood twelve feet above the tessellated floor of the hall, and its slime-washed belly was six feet from side to side. A fang-filled, slavering mouth filled most of its face, and above it three crimson eyes glittered balefully. The monster had four arms, the upper two ending in huge, long-clawed, grasping hands and the lower two trailing obscene tentacles on the floor behind. A pungent odor of brimstone, open graves, and B. O. hung around the thing, and as it advanced slithering towards him Colon heard a repulsive slobbering sound emerge from its gaping maw.

Instantly the barbarian knew that his broadsword would be useless against this being who obeyed no earthly laws. He swiftly drew from his scabbard a weapon with which he had been provided by the great Hyperthyroidean white magician Allbull Allhazard before he had started his quest. This weapon was nothing less powerful than the shinbone of the ancient semi-mythical Aquaregian hero Diomedes the Dromedary, and as Colon drew it the unworldly monster checked its progress towards

him and prepared to do battle. Relying on his quick barbarian reflexes, Colon swiftly shoved the shinbone upright into the jaws of the apparition, and the creature of darkness emitted a howl of pain and gave birth to three premature young which the hero dispatched with his sword.

Leaving the huge demon-beast helpless and dying, Colon marched down the length of the hall and through the wall at its end. There he came upon four huge slaves who dragged between them a haggard, badly beaten man who appeared to be a Shammite from the wide meadows to the northeast. Instantly the slaves wheeled and faced Colon, drawing long bloody scimitars as they did so.

"Ha!" cried their leader. "It is Colon, dog of Cinnamonia!"

"Whence do you know me, jungle-scum?" the barbarian demanded.

"I was in the service of Constantius the Concupiscent, Duke of Steatopygia, when your thrice-damned troops sacked the city seven years ago," said the black. "You were then chief of the mercenaries of Libidonia, Queen of Paraphilia. Do you remember Mongwo the Unconquerable, captain of the Black Legion of Steatopygia?"

"I do, verily," said Colon. "I opposed him in single combat, and struck his head from his body."

"Know, O dog of a white," snarled the huge slave, "that I am Mongwo the Unconquerable's brother, Mb'nggwg the Unpronounceable,

and I will here avenge his death. At him, men!"

Catlike, Colon glided forward and spat one of the black men on his sword. Then, with the corpse still on his sword, he charged into the group. Another of the warriors fell before his rush, but the other two pulled back, regrouped, and came at him from both sides.

Some primitive fighting instinct warned Colon that his broadsword, with two bodies spat on it, would be of little use in combat. He flung it aside and drew another weapon, and at the sight of it the others drew back in astonishment. For Colon had taken from under his breastplate the shinbone of the ancient Agravation pirate chieftain Niord the Ignored, and with two quick blows Mb'nggwg and his companion were felled with shattered skulls.

Colon turned to the Shammite whose life he had saved. The man blubbered profusely in his native tongue, and kissed the feet of the barbarian.

"What is your name, man?" asked Colon in the fluent Shammite he had acquired while a cutpurse in the Open District of the Shammite city of Slivovitz.

"I am Yankel ben-Kalvah," replied the wretch in a quivering voice. "And whom must I thank a thousand-fold for my deliverance?"

"I am Colon the Cinnamonian, King of Aquaregia," said the barbarian.

The Shammite kissed his rescuer's feet again. "Who has not heard of

the great hero Colon the Conqueror!" he babbled. "Of how he strangled the Ghastly Ghoul of Ghory Ghorge with his bare hands! Of how, in the service of Queen Libidonia, he conquered the Steatopygians, the Holothurians, and the Catamites! Of how, in single combat, he slew the Kozak warrior Myerinovitch with the shinbone of the ancient Shammite priest Kecha-Skechkan!"

"Enough of that," snapped the barbarian, wiping his feet. "Where are the chambers of the sorceress Ophthalmia?"

"Oh, great king, do not go there!" pleaded the Shammite. "The world has need of Colon living, not Colon dead and fed up to the nameless fiends that the she-demon Ophthalmia calls up from the nether regions!"

The great stone wall at their side slowly creaked open. Colon and Ben-Kalvah stared, astounded, at the sight which appeared before their eyes. The room which the folding wall revealed was undoubtedly the private thaumaturgical laboratory of the evil mistress of the mountain castle.

"So!" a chillingly remote voice exclaimed. "You are Colon of Cinnamonia, who would invade Castle Eldritch and destroy the sorceress Ophthalmia!"

Before them stood a tall, slender, stately woman whose deathly pale face and hands shone in pallid contrast to her long black gown. Colon had no doubt that this was the witch

who had cast the curse of sterility on his kingdom, eleven years ago.

Behind her stretched the grisly outlines of her sanctum sanctorum. Colon saw with horror the many evidences of her dark practices which lined the great room. In one place stood a tall mummy case with a lock on the cover. Next to it a whole unicorn roasted on a spit. Beyond that was a television set tuned to the 1960 Republican convention. In another corner a huge arrangement of glassware decocted a suspiciously reddish fluid into a large vat labeled "For Medicinal Purposes Only." From the high ceiling hung a human skeleton ten feet tall, and next to it a mammoth tusk half again as long. An odious, other-worldly stench pervaded the room, and a greenish haze partially obscured a brass-bound oaken door at the other end of the chamber.

"Won't you come in?" asked the sorceress in a silken voice. "Have a cup of tea—my own special brew."

Colon dashed the cup to the floor, through which it burned a large hole. "You know why I've come here!" he snarled. "Tonight your accursed existence ends under my war-ax, with which I slew the old Aquaregian king Sextus the Oversexed."

"Presumptuous one!" said Ophthalmia coldly. "Observe my power, and know that this night shall you satisfy the hunger of my consort, the powerful demon Yog-Thuthuthoth." So saying, she gestured at Ben-Kalvah with a ring on her left hand, and the Shammite screamed in agony.

Colon watched in horror as the prisoner of Ophthalmia slowly, painfully melted away into a mass of semi-solid putrescence. The sorceress whistled sharply, and four dogs the size of bears bounded into the room. Each of the huge beasts had two pairs of horns on its head, and a pair of long black wings folded along its back.

Colon seized his ax, and the four devil-hounds sprang on him. With two strokes he laid the beasts low, and then, a look of disgusted hatred on his noble barbarian features, the Aquaregian king advanced upon Ophthalmia.

"Now I shall end the curse of sterility that has plagued Aquaregia these eight years past," he said. "Pray to whatever dark gods you worship that your evil soul shall find its deserved place in the hell from which it crawled!"

"Watch your ax," said the sorceress softly, a ghost of a smile fleeting across her pallid face.

The edge of Colon's ax slowly dripped white-hot molten metal on the floor. In anger the barbarian flung the useless weapon across the laboratory and into the door at the room's far end. The heavy oak burned away instantly.

"This, barbarian, is your end," hissed Ophthalmia. "Beyond that door is my consort, the most powerful of all the demons who inhabit the outer depths of the non-human world."

Amidst the smoke and mist there advanced towards Colon the most eldritch of an eldritch race, the ulti-

mate horror beyond description, Yog-Thuthuthoth!

Colon swiftly drew from the sleeve of his byrnie his last weapon, the only one that would have effect against this hideous monstrosity from the ancient world-night: the shinbone of the ancient Achornian magician Nausithous the Nauseating. Armed with this irresistible weapon, he feinted a direct thrust at the demon, then struck him heavily from the side against his big toe.

Yog-Thuthuthoth roared a bestial roar of pain, and raised two of his trunks and a tentacle to crush the Cinnamonian. When Colon artfully dodged the blow, the demon raised himself to his full height of thirty feet, rapidly blinked four of his larger eyes, and brought his left middle foot squarely down above the Cinnamonian hero.

Colon stood his ground, raised his shinbone above him, and plunged it into the crevice between the hooves of the extra-mundane monster. The ancient demon stood transfixed as Colon thrashed about with his weapon, and then, his purple maw opened wide, he sent roar after thundering roar echoing from the walls of the great chamber.

"Help!" screamed the devil, waving his horns in the putrid air. "He's tickling me!"

The eldritch monster fell convulsed to the floor, gasped and heaved a few times, threw up several arms and legs, and lay still and decaying. Colon retrieved the shinbone, looked from the huge mass

beside him to the slender figure of Ophthemia, and said dazedly, "I wonder how they ever managed it."

"Thrice accursed!" screamed the sorceress. "I am bereft! I die!" She drew an ivory dagger from her bosom and poised it before her throat.

With an iron grip Colon stayed her hand. "First remove the curse of sterility from Aquaregia," he demanded.

Ophthemia laughed hysterically and spat in his face. "There never was any curse, you fool," she snarled. "Ever since you first arrived in Aquaregia, in the train of the Ophidian king Sigmund the Sagging, the women of the kingdom made such a commotion over your manly attri-

butes that every other male in the land just plain gave up. But I die happily now, because I will be revenged! At this moment the Horned Guardsmen of Hell are rushing towards this chamber to avenge upon you the deaths of their master Yog-Thuthuthoth and myself. Farewell!" And with a dying effort she wrenched her hand from the grip of the barbarian and plunged the dagger into her throat.

Colon wheeled towards the door, just as a stream of horned swordsmen rushed in. He raised the first above his head, dashed him to the ground, seized his sword, and waded into the others. On and on he went, hacking and hewing, hewing and hacking. . . .