

THE ACOLYTE

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PROSE PASTELS

CLARK
ASHTON
SMITH

9. NARCISSUS

Splenic pale Narcissus, in the green dead depth of some rotting pool thou seest thine image drown and re-emerge amid the shifting iridescent films of corruption, the beautiful bright scum that damascenes with fantastic arabesques the fetid waters. Or in the brazen mirrors, mottled with verdigris, of queens that were fair and fatal, avid and insatiate of love or pain in lands the desert has now obliterated, perchance thou viewest the implacable perverse nympholepsy of thy sien. Or in the rusting shield of some ancestral warrior, peering with a casual curiosity, thou findest thine eyes alone reflected in pools of clear steel amid the tarnish, and in them a spark that has fallen from the perished flambeaux, a gleam from the brave and rutilant camp-fires whose ashes have fed the fertility of alien fields, sown and harvested a thousand times since the red autumn of the last, legendary battle.

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