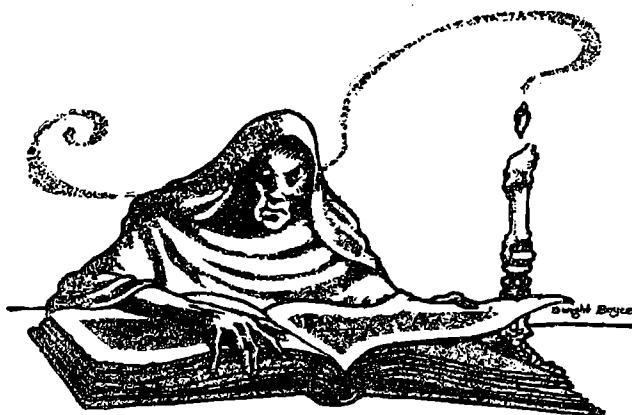


WEIRD TALES



NOVEMBER

1940

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Margaret Brundage

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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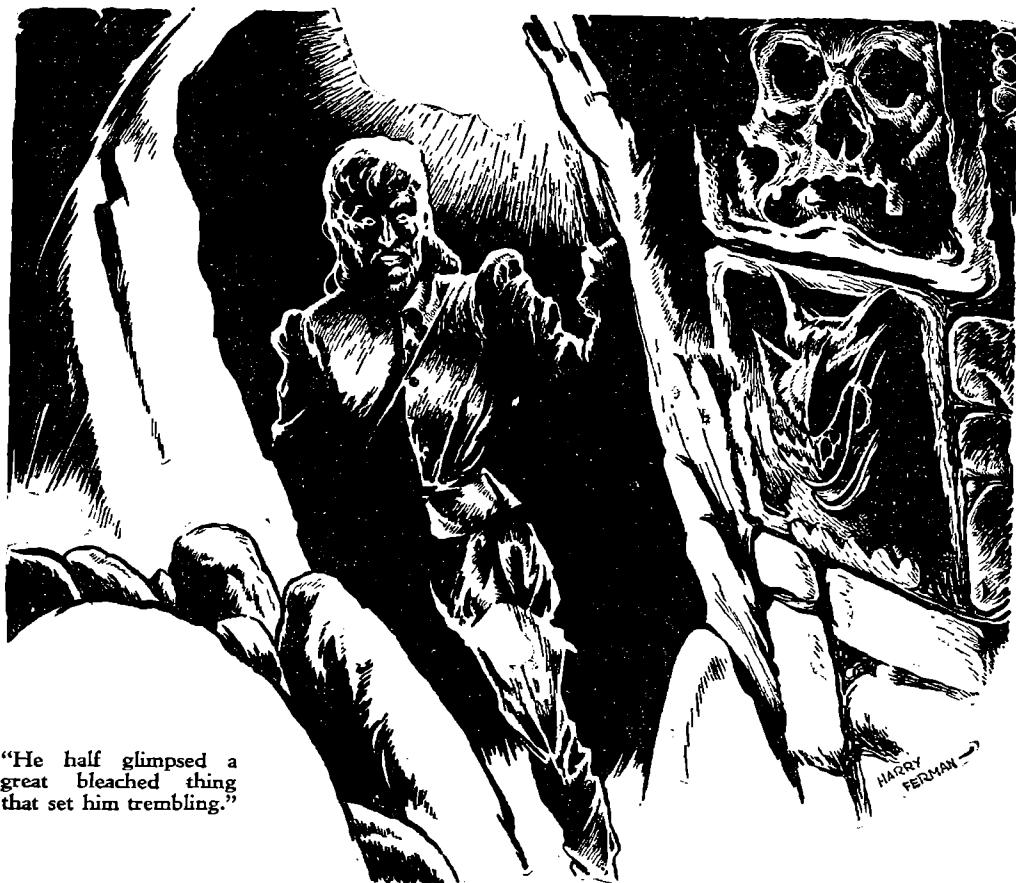
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D. MCILWRAITH, *Editor*,

H. AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor*.



"He half glimpsed a
great bleached thing
that set him trembling."

The Mound

By Z. B. BISHOP

A shuddery tale of a world so devilish and old that men refused even to speak of it—by the author of "The Curse of Yig."

AFTER ten years I have been able neither to forget nor explain the phenomena which, as a scientist, I should like to dismiss as a hallucination. I am an ethnologist, whose specialty is the origin of the various Indian cultures. As a sort of hobby I frequently combine my regular research with tracking down super-

stitions which the white men have inherited from their red neighbors.

My hobby naturally aroused my interest in the mound superstitions of Oklahoma, where my work had often taken me. I had seen many of these vast, lonely, artificial-looking mounds in the western part of the state; and in 1928, during a brief

lull in my work, I decided to investigate the oldest and most common of the mound legends, a local and distinctive tale which, though really old, was wholly new to the outside world of research. There was an added thrill in the fact that it came from the remote town of Binger, in Caddo County, a place I had long known as the scene of a very terrible and partly inexplicable occurrence connected with the old snake-god myth.

The tale, outwardly, was an extremely naïve and simple one, and centered in a huge, lone mound or small hill that rose above the plain about a third of a mile west of the village, a mound which some thought a product of nature, but which others believed to be a burial-place or ceremonial dais constructed by prehistoric tribes. This mound, the villagers said, was haunted by two Indian figures that appeared in alternation; an old man who paced back and forth along the top from dawn till dusk, regardless of the weather and with only brief intervals of disappearance, and a squaw who took his place at night with a blue-flamed torch that glimmered continuously till morning. When the moon was bright, the squaw's peculiar figure could be seen fairly plainly, and

over half the villagers agreed that the apparition was headless.

This and minor variant versions seemed to have been current ever since the settlement of the Wichita country in 1889; and were, I was told, sustained to an astonishing degree by still-existing phenomena which anyone might observe for himself.

Eager to see what bizarre wonders might be lurking in this small, obscure village so far from the searchlight of scientific knowledge, I went to Binger in the late summer of 1928, arriving at twilight, with a feeling of being cut off from wholesome and everyday things. The station platform was filled with curious loafers, all of whom seemed eager to direct me



when I asked for the man to whom I had letters of introduction. I was ushered along a commonplace main street whose rutted surface was red with the sandstone soil of the country, and finally delivered at the door of my prospective host. Those who had arranged things for me had done well, for Clyde Compton was a man of high intelligence and local responsibility. His mother, who lived with him and was familiarly known as "Grandma Compton," was of the pioneer generation, and a mine of anecdote and folklore.

That evening the Comptons summed up for me all the legends current among the villagers. The ghosts, it seems, were accepted almost as a matter of course by everyone in Binger. Two generations had been born and reared within sight of that queer, lone tumulus and its restless figures. The neighborhood of the mound was naturally feared and shunned, so that the village and the farms had not spread toward it in all the four decades of settlement; yet venturesome individuals had several times visited it.

Some had come back to report that they saw no ghosts at all when they neared the dreaded hill; that somehow the lone sentinel had stepped out of sight before they reached the spot, leaving them free to climb the steep slope and explore the flat summit. There was nothing up there, they said—merely a rough expanse of underbrush.

WHERE the Indian watcher could have vanished to, they had no idea. He must, they reflected, have descended the slope and somehow managed to escape unseen along the plain; although there was no convenient cover within sight. At any rate, there did not appear to be any opening into the mound; a conclusion which was reached after considerable exploration of the shrubbery and tall grass on all sides. In a few cases some of the more sensitive

searchers declared that they felt a sort of invisible restraining presence; but they could describe nothing more definite than that. It was simply as if the air thickened against them in the direction they wished to move.

But it was not from the tales of these sane, observant seekers that the chief terror of the ghost-mound sprang; indeed, had their experience been typical, the phenomenon would have bulked far less prominently in the local legendary. The most evil thing was the fact that many seekers had come back impaired in mind and body. Others had not come back at all.

The first of these cases had occurred in 1891, when a young man named Heaton had gone with a shovel to see what secrets he could unearth. He had resolved to get to the bottom of the mystery, and watchers from the village saw him hacking diligently at the shrubbery atop the mound. Then they saw his figure melt slowly into invisibility, not to reappear for long hours, till after the dusk drew on, and the torch of the headless squaw glimmered on the distant elevation.

About two hours after nightfall he staggered into the village and burst into a shrieking monolog of disconnected ravings. He howled of shocking abysses and monsters, of terrible carvings and statues, of inhuman captors and grotesque tortures.

"Old! Old! Old!" he moaned over and over. "Great God, they are older than the earth. They know what you think, and make you know what they think—they're half man, half ghost—crossed the line—melt and take shape again—everything made of gold—monstrous animals, half human—dead slaves—madness—that white man—oh, my God, what they did to him! . . ."

Heaton was the village idiot for about eight years until he died. Since his ordeal,

there had been two more cases of mound-madness, and eight of total disappearance. Immediately after Heaton's mad return, three determined men had gone out to the lone hill together, heavily armed, and with spades and pickaxes. Watching villagers saw the Indian ghost melt away as the explorers drew near, and afterward saw the men climb the mound and begin scouting around through the underbrush. They were never seen again.

Only when the incidents of 1891 were largely forgotten did anybody dare to think of further explorations. Then, in 1910, a youth not old enough to recall the horrors made a trip to the shunned spot and found nothing at all.

By 1915 the acute dread and wild legendary of '91 had largely faded into the commonplace and unimaginative ghost-tales at present surviving—that is, had so faded among the white people. On the nearby reservation were old Indians who thought much and kept their own counsel. About this time a second wave of active curiosity and adventuring developed, and several bold searchers made the trip to the mound and returned. Then came a trip of two Eastern visitors with spades and other apparatus: a pair of amateur archeologists connected with a small college, who had been making studies among the Indians. No one watched this trip from the village, but they never came back. The searching-party that went out after them, among whom was my host Clyde Compton, found nothing whatsoever amiss at the mound.

By 1920, so short is human memory, the mound was almost a joke, and the tame story of the murdered squaw began to displace the darker whispers on everybody's tongue. Then two reckless young brothers—the especially unimaginative and hard-boiled Clay boys—decided to dig up the buried squaw and the gold for which the old Indian had murdered her.

They went out on a September after-

noon, about the time the Indian tom-toms begin their incessant annual beating over the flat, red-dusty plains. Nobody watched them, and their parents did not become worried at their failure to return for several hours. Then came an alarm and a searching-party, and another resignation to the mystery of silence and doubt.

Later one of them came back. It was Ed, the elder, and his straw-colored hair and beard had turned white. On his forehead was a queer scar like a branded hieroglyphic. Three months after he and his brother, Walker, had vanished, he skulked into his house at night, wearing nothing but a queerly patterned blanket which he thrust into the fire as soon as he had got into a suit of his own clothes.

He told his parents that he and Walker had been captured by some strange Indians, not Wichitas or Caddos, and held prisoners somewhere toward the west. Walker had died under torture, but Ed had managed to escape. The experience had been so horrible he could not talk about it. He must rest, and anyway, it would do no good to give an alarm and try to find and punish the Indians. They were not of a sort that could be caught or punished.

BEFORE he climbed the rickety flight to his room Ed took a pad and pencil from the living-room table, and an automatic pistol from his father's desk drawer. Three hours later Ed Clay put a bullet through his right temple. He left a sparsely written sheet of paper on the rickety table near his bed. He had, it later appeared from the whittled pencil-stub and stove full of charred paper, originally written much more; but had finally decided not to tell what he knew beyond vague hints. The surviving fragment was only a mad warning scrawled in a curiously backhanded script—the ravings of a mind obviously deranged by hard-

ships—and it read thus: rather surprisingly for the utterance of one who had always been stolid and matter-of-fact:

For gods sake never go nere that mound it is part of some kind of a world so devilish and old it cannot be spoke about me and Walker went and was took into the thing just melted at times and made up agen and the whole world outside is helpless alongside of what they can do—they what live forever young as they like and you cant tell if they are really men or just gosetes—and what they do cant be spoke about and this is only 1 entrance—you cant tell how big the whole thing is—after what we seen I dont want to livve aney more France was nothing besides this — and see that people always keep away o god they wood if they see poor walker like he was in the end.

Yrs truly

ED CLAY

At the autopsy it was found that all of young Clay's organs were transposed from right to left within his body, as if he had been turned inside out. Whether they had always been so, no one could say at the time, but it was later learned from army records that Ed had been perfectly normal when mustered out of the service in May, 1919.

That was the end of the explorations of the mound. In the eight intervening years no one had been near the place, and few indeed had cared even to level a spy-glass at it. The thing was accepted at face value as a mystery not to be probed, and by common consent the village shunned the subject.

It was very late, and Grandma Compton had long since gone upstairs to bed, when Clyde finished telling me this. I hardly knew what to think of the frightful puzzle, yet rebelled at any notion in conflict with sane materialism. Compton motioned me to follow him outdoors. We stepped from the frame house to the quiet side street, and walked a few paces in the light of a waning August moon to where the houses were thinner. As I looked out over the vast expanse of earth and sky in the direction Compton pointed, I saw a spark

that was not a star—a bluish spark that moved and glimmered against the Milky Way near the horizon. In another moment it was clear that this spark came from the top of a long, distant rise in the outspread and faintly-litten plain; and I turned to Compton with a question.

"Yes," he answered, "it's the blue ghost-light — and that is the mound. There's not a night in history that we haven't seen it—and not a living soul in Binger that would walk out over that plain toward it. It's a bad business, young man, and if you're wise you'll let it rest where it is. Better call your search off, son, and tackle some of the other Injun legends around here."

2

BUT I was in no mood for advice; and though Compton gave me a pleasant room, I could not sleep, through eagerness for the next morning with its chances to see the daytime ghost. I rose and dressed at dawn, and when I heard others stirring I went downstairs. Compton was building the kitchen fire while his mother was busy in the pantry.

After breakfast he lit his pipe, helped me collect my things and beckoned me to follow him. As we walked along the lane I stared at the mound, far away and very curious in its aspect of artificial regularity. It must have been from thirty to forty feet high, and at least a hundred yards from north to south. It was not as wide as that from east to west, Compton said, but had the contour of a rather thinish ellipse. He, I knew, had been safely out to it and back several times. My pulse mounted, and I seized quickly on the high-powered binoculars which Compton quietly offered me. Focussing them hastily, I saw at first only a tangle of underbrush on the distant mound's rim—and then something stalked into the field.

It was unmistakably a human shape, and I knew at once that I was seeing the daytime "Indian ghost." I did not wonder at the description, for surely the tall, lean, darkly robed being with the filleted black hair and seamed, coppery, expressionless, aquiline face looked more like an Indian than anything else in my previous experience. And yet my trained ethnologist's eye told me at once that this was no redskin of any sort hitherto known to history, but a creature of vast racial variation and of a wholly different culture-stream. Modern Indians are brachycephalic; round-headed: and you can't find any dolichocephalic or long-headed skulls except in ancient Pueblo deposits dating back 2500 years or more; yet this man's long-headedness was so pronounced that I recognized it at once, even at this vast distance and in the uncertain field of the binoculars. I saw, too, that the pattern of his robe represented a decorative tradition utterly remote from anything we recognize in southwestern native art.

As he paced back and forth along the top of the mound I followed him for several minutes with the glass, noting the kinesthetic quality of his stride and the poised way he carried his head; and there was borne in upon me the strong, persistent conviction that this man, whoever or whatever he might be, was certainly *not a savage*. He was the product of a *civilization*.

Compton left me when we drew near the mound. We shook hands and I tried to joke about the ghost, but Compton didn't smile. When I reached the mound I turned and watched his bent form shuffling homeward.

There were no signs of a path toward the top; and, burdened as I was, I managed to scramble up only with considerable difficulty. When I reached the summit I found a roughly level elliptical plateau about three hundred by fifty feet in di-

mensions, uniformly covered with rank grass and dense underbrush, and utterly incompatible with the constant presence of a pacing sentinel. This condition gave me a real shock, for it showed beyond question that the "Old Indian," vivid though he had seemed, could not be other than a hallucination.

I looked about with considerable perplexity and alarm, glancing wistfully back at the village and the mass of black dots which I knew was the watching crowd. Training my glasses upon them, I saw that they were studying me avidly with their glasses; so to reassure them I waved my cap in the air with a show of jauntiness which I was far from feeling. Then, settling to my work I flung down pick, shovel, and bag, using my machete to clear away underbrush. It was a weary task, and now and then I felt a curious shiver as some perverse gust of wind arose to hamper my motion with a skill approaching deliberateness.

As I turned up the soil with my trench-knife I could not help wondering at the relative thinness of the reddish regional layer. The country as a whole was all red sandstone earth, but here I found a strange black loam less than a foot down. It was such soil as one finds in the strange, deep valleys farther west and south, and must surely have been brought from a considerable distance in the prehistoric age when the mound was reared.

Kneeling and digging, I felt my implements strike a hard surface, and wondered if a rock layer rested beneath. Prying about with the trench-knife, I found that such was not the case. Instead, to my intense surprise and feverish interest, I brought up a mold-clogged, heavy object of cylindrical shape, about a foot long and four inches in diameter.

SITTING down, I cleaned the magnetic cylinder against the rough corduroy

of my knickerbockers. The carvings and chasings were horrible, nameless monsters and designs fraught with insidious evil; and all were of the highest finish and craftsmanship. I could not at first make head or tail of the thing, and handled it aimlessly until I spied a cleavage near one end. Then I sought eagerly for some mode of opening, discovering at last that the end simply unscrewed.

The cap yielded with difficulty, but at last it came off, liberating a curious aromatic odor. The sole contents was a bulky roll of a yellowish, paper-like substance inscribed in greenish characters, and for a second I had the supreme thrill of fancying that I held a written key to unknown elder worlds and abysses beyond time. Almost immediately, however, the unrolling of one end showed that the manuscript was in Spanish—the formal, pompous Spanish of a long-departed day. In the sunset light I looked at the heading and the opening paragraph, trying to decipher the wretched and ill-punctuated script of the vanished writer.

The yellow scroll with the green script began with a bold, identifying caption and a ceremoniously desperate appeal for belief in incredible revelations to follow:

RELACION DE PANFILO DE ZAMACONA Y NUNEZ, HIDALGO DE LUARCA EN ASTURIAS, TOCANTE AL MUNDO SOTERRANEO DE XINAIAN. A.D. MDXLV

En el nombre de la santissima Trinidad, Padre, Hijo, y Espiritu-Santo, tres personas distintas y un solo. Dios verdadero, y de la santissima Virgen nuestra Señora, YO, PANFILO DE ZAMACONA, HIJO DE PEDRO GUZMAN Y ZAMACONA, HIDALGO, Y DE LA DONA YNÉS ALVARADO Y NUNEZ, DE LUARCA EN ASTURIAS, juro para que todo que deco está verdadero como sacramento. . . .

I paused to reflect on the portentous significance of what I was reading. "The Narrative of Panfilo de Zamacona y Unex, gentleman, of Luarca in Asturias, Concerning the Subterranean World of

Xinaian, A.D. 1545." Here, surely, was too much for any mind to absorb all at once. A subterranean world—again that persistent idea which filtered through all the Indian tales and through all the utterances of those who had come back from the mound. And the date, 1545—what could this mean? In 1540 Coronado and his men had gone north from Mexico into the wilderness, but had they not turned back in 1542?

My eye ran questingly down the opened part of the scroll, and almost at once seized on the name *Francisco Vasquez de Coronado*. The writer of this thing, clearly, was one of Coronado's men, but what had he been doing in this remote realm three years after his party had gone back? I must read further, for another glance told me that what was now unrolled was merely a summary of Coronado's northward march, differing in no essential way from the account known to history.

It was only the waning light which checked me before I could unroll and read more, and in my impatient bafflement I almost forgot to be frightened at the onrush of night in this sinister place. Others, however, had not forgotten the lurking terror, for I heard a loud distant hallooing from a knot of men who had gathered at the edge of the town. Answering the anxious hail, I restored the manuscript to its strange cylinder. Leaving the pick and shovel for the next day's work, I took up my hand-bag, scrambled down the steep side of the mound, and in another quarter-hour was back in the village explaining and exhibiting my curious find. As darkness drew on, I glanced back at the mound I had so lately left, and saw with a shudder that the faint bluish torch of the nocturnal squaw-ghost had begun to glimmer.

Promising the townsfolk a clear account of my findings in the morning, and giving them ample opportunity to examine the bizarre and provocative cylinder, I accom-

panied Clyde Compton home and went up to my room to make the translation. Opening my hand-bag in the light of a single electric bulb, I took out the cylinder. The designs glimmered evilly on the richly lustrous and unknown metal, and I could not help shivering as I studied the abnormal and blasphemous forms that leered at me with such exquisite workmanship.

At last I took out the manuscript and began translating—jotting down an outline in English as I went, and now and then regretting the absence of a Spanish dictionary when I came upon some especially obscure or archaic word or construction. There was a sense of ineffable strangeness in thus being thrown back nearly four centuries in the midst of my continuous quest, thrown back to a year when my own forebears were settled, home-keeping gentlemen of Somerset and Devon under Henry the Eighth, with never a thought of the adventure that was to take their blood to Virginia and the New World; yet when that New World possessed, even as now, the same brooding mystery of the mound which formed my present sphere and horizon.

3

OF HIS youth in Luarca, a small, placid port on the Bay of Biscay, Zamacona told little. He had been wild, and a younger son, and had come to New Spain in 1532, when only twenty years old. Sensitive and imaginative, he had listened spell-bound to the floating rumors of rich cities and unknown worlds to the north. Hearing of Coronado's contemplated expedition in search of these wonders, and of the greater wonders whispered to lie beyond them in the land of buffaloes, young Zamacona managed to join the picked party of three hundred, and started north with the rest in 1540.

History knows the story of that expedi-

tion, how Cibola was found to be merely the squalid Pueblo village of Zuni, and how de Niza was sent back to Mexico in disgrace for his florid exaggerations; how Coronado first saw the Grand Canyon, and how at Cicuye, on the Pecos, he heard from the Indian called El Turco of the rich and mysterious land of Quivira, far to the northeast, where gold, silver, and buffaloes abounded, and where there flowed rivers two leagues wide. Zamacona told briefly of the winter camp at Tiguex on the Pecos, and of the northward start in April, when the native guide proved false and led the party astray amidst a land of prairie-dogs, salt pools, and roving, bison-hunting tribes.

When Coronado dismissed his larger force and made his final forty-two day march with a very small and select detachment, Zamacona managed to be included in the advancing party. He spoke of the fertile country and of the great ravines with trees visible only from the edge of their steep banks; and of how all the men lived solely on buffalo-meat. And then came mention of the expedition's farthest limit—of the disappointing land of Quivira with its villages of grass houses, its brooks and rivers, its good black soil, its plums, nuts, grapes, and mulberries, and its maize-growing and copper-using Indians. The execution of El Turco, the false native guide, was casually touched upon, and there was a mention of the cross which Coronado raised on the bank of a great river in the autumn of 1541—a cross bearing the inscription, "Thus far came the great general, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado."

These northerly natives seemed more reluctant to talk about the rumored cities and worlds than the Mexican Indians had been. Their vagueness exasperated the Spanish leader, but Zamacona, more patient than his chief, found the tales interesting, and he learned enough of the local

speech to hold long conversations with a young buck named Charging Buffalo, whose curiosity had led him into much stranger places than any of his fellow-tribesmen had dared to penetrate.

It was Charging Buffalo who told Zamacona of the queer stone gates or cave-mouths at the bottom of some of those deep, wooded ravines which the party had noticed on the northward march. These openings, he said, were mostly concealed by shrubbery, and few had entered them for untold eons. Those who went to where they led, never returned—or in a few cases returned mad or curiously maimed. But all this was legend, for nobody was known to have gone more than a limited distance inside any of them within the memory of the grandfathers of the oldest living men. Charging Buffalo himself had probably been farther than anyone else, and he had seen enough to curb both his curiosity and his greed for the rumored gold below.

Beyond the aperture he had entered there was a long passage running crazily up and down and round about, and covered with frightful carvings of monsters and horrors that no man had ever seen. At last, after untold miles of windings and descents, there was a glow of terrible blue light, and the passage opened upon a shocking nether world. About this the Indian would say no more, for he had seen something that had sent him back in haste.

But the golden cities must be somewhere down there, he added, and perhaps a white man with the magic of the thunderstick might succeed in getting to them. He would not tell the big chief Coronado what he knew, for Coronado would not listen to Indian talk any more. Yes—he could show Zamacona the way if the white man would leave the party and accept his guidance. But we would not go inside the opening with the white man. It was bad in there.

The place was about a five-days' march to the south, near the region of great mounds.

These mounds had something to do with the evil world down there; they were probably ancient closed-up passages to it, for once the Old Ones below had had colonies on the surface and had traded with men everywhere, even in the lands that had sunk under the big waters. It was when those lands had sunk that the old Ones closed themselves up below and refused to deal with surface people.

The refugees from the sinking places had told them that the gods of outer earth were against men, and that no men could survive on the outer earth unless they were demons in league with the evil gods. That is why they shut out all surface folk, and did fearful things to any who ventured down where they dwelt. There had been sentries once at the various openings, but after ages they were no longer needed. Not many people cared to talk about the hidden Old Ones, and the legends about them would probably have died out but for occasional ghostly reminders of their presence.

ZAMACONA was held spellbound by the Indian's tale, and at once resolved to accept his guidance to the cryptic doorway in the ravine. He did not believe the accounts of strange ways attributed by legend to the hidden people, for the experiences of the party had been such as to disillusion one regarding native myths of unknown lands; but he did feel that some sufficiently marvelous field of riches and adventure must indeed lie beyond the weirdly carved passages in the earth.

At first he thought of persuading Charging Buffalo to tell his story to Coronado—offering to shield him against any effects of the leader's testy skepticism—but later he decided that a lone adventure would be better. If he had no aid, he

would not have to share anything he found, but might perhaps become a great discoverer and owner of fabulous riches. Success would make him a greater figure than Coronado himself, perhaps a greater figure than anyone else in New Spain, including even the mighty viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza.

On October 7, 1541, at an hour close to midnight, Zamacona stole out of the Spanish camp near the grass-house village and met Charging Buffalo for the long southward journey. He traveled as lightly as possible, and did not wear his heavy helmet and breast-plate. Of the details of the trip the manuscript told very little, but Zamacona records his arrival at the great ravine on October 13th. The descent of the thickly wooded slope took no great time, and though the Indian had trouble in locating the shrubbery-hidden stone door again amidst the twilight of that deep gorge, the place was finally found.

It was a very small aperture as doorways go, formed of monolithic sandstone jambs and lintel, and bearing signs of nearly effaced and now undecipherable carvings. Its height was perhaps seven feet, and its width not more than four. There were drilled places in the jambs which argued the bygone presence of a hinged door or gate, but all other traces of such a thing had long since vanished.

At sight of this black gulf, Charging Buffalo displayed considerable fear, and threw down his pack of supplies with signs of haste. He had provided Zamacona with a good stock of resinous torches and provisions, and had guided him honestly and well, but refused to share in the venture that lay ahead. Zamacona gave him the trinkets he had kept for such an occasion, and obtained his promise to return to the region in a month; afterward showing the way southward to the Pecos Pueblo villages. A prominent rock on the plain above them was chosen as a meeting-place;

the one arriving first was to pitch camp until the other should arrive.

In the manuscript Zamacona expressed a wistful wonder as to the Indian's length of waiting at the rendezvous—for he himself could never keep that tryst.

Zamacona felt no immediate premonition of evil upon entering that ominous doorway, though from the first he was surrounded by a bizarre and unwholesome atmosphere. The passage, slightly taller and wider than the aperture, was for many yards a level tunnel of cyclopean masonry, with heavily worn flagstones underfoot, and grotesquely carved granite and sandstone blocks in sides and ceiling.

For three days, as best he could reckon, Panfilo de Zamacona scrambled down, up, along, and around, but always predominantly downward, through this dark region of paleogean night. Once in awhile he heard some secret being of darkness patter or flap out of his way, and on just one occasion he half glimpsed a great bleached thing that set him trembling. The quality of the air was mostly endurable, though fetid zones were now and then met with. One great cavern of stalactites and stalagmites afforded a depressing dampness.

At what he considered the end of the third day, Zamacona reached a level passage of artificial masonry with dark, basaltic blocks. There was no need for a torch now, for all the air was glowing with a bluish, quasi-electric radiance. It was the strange light of the inner world that the Indian had described; and in another moment Zamacona emerged from the tunnel upon a bleak, rocky hillside which climbed above him to a seething, impenetrable sky of bluish coruscations, and descended dizzyly below him to an apparently illimitable plain shrouded in bluish mist.

He had come to the unknown world at last, and a strange sense of glory filled him, for he had imagination enough to know what it meant to stand alone in an inex-

plicable nether world whose existence no other white man suspected.

SEATING himself for rest and thought, Zamacona lightened his pack by removing an amount of food and torches sufficient to take him back through the tunnel. These he proceeded to cache at the opening, under a cairn hastily formed of the rock fragments which everywhere lay around. Then, readjusting his lightened pack, he commenced his descent toward the distant plain, preparing to invade a region which no white man had ever penetrated, and from which, if legend were to be believed, no organic creature had ever returned whole.

Zamacona strode briskly along down the steep, interminable slope, his progress checked at times by the bad walking that came from loose rock fragments, or by the excessive precipitousness of the grade. The distance of the mist-shrouded plain must have been enormous, for many hours' walking brought him apparently no closer to it than he had been before.

The rock-strewn nature of the soil gave few opportunities for tracks of any kind, but at one point a rather level interval had caused the loose detritus to accumulate in a ridge, leaving a considerable area of dark-gray loam absolutely bare. Here, in a rambling confusion indicating a large herd aimlessly wandering, Zamacona found abnormal prints.

It is to be regretted that he could not describe them more exactly, but the manuscript displayed far more vague fear than accurate observation. Just what it was that so frightened the Spaniard can only be inferred from his later hints regarding the beasts.

Zamacona finally gave way to weariness and slept beside what seemed to be an ancient road. Next day he rose early and resumed his descent through this world of blue mist and desolation and preternatural

silence. As he advanced, he at last became able to distinguish a few objects on the distant plain below: trees, bushes, rocks, and a small river that came into view from the right and curved forward at a point to the left of his contemplated course. Then he saw a blurred mass moving over the distant plain. He had seen no more of the sinister footprints, but something about that slowly and deliberately moving mass sickened him. Nothing but a herd of grazing animals could move just like that, and after seeing the footprints he did not wish to meet the things which had made them.

The next afternoon, to use the language of the outer world as the manuscript did at all times, Zamacona reached the silent plain and crossed the soundless, slow-running river on a curiously carved and fairly well-preserved bridge of black basalt. The water was clear, and contained large fishes of a wholly strange aspect. At last he came upon a crumbling temple, decorated with nauseous bas-reliefs depicting scenes and beings, objects and ceremonies, which could certainly have no place on this or any sane planet. The door of the place stood open, and absolute darkness filled the windowless interior. Conquering the repulsion which the sculptures had excited, Zamacona took out flint and steel, lighted a resinous torch, pushed aside curtaining vines, and crossed the ominous threshold.

For a moment he was quite stupefied by what he saw. It was not the all-covering dust and cobwebs of immemorial eons, the fluttering winged things, the shriekingly loathsome sculptures on the walls, the bizarre form of the many basins and braziers, the sinister pyramidal altar with the hollow top, or the monstrous, octopus-headed abnormality in some strange, dark metal leering and squatting broodingly on its hieroglyphed pedestal, which robbed him of even the power to give a startled

cry. It was merely the fact that, with the exception of the dust, the cobwebs, the winged things, and the gigantic emerald-eyed idol, every particle of substance in sight was composed of pure and evidently solid gold.

Even the manuscript, written in retrospect after Zamacona knew that gold is the most common structural metal of a nether world containing limitless lodes and veins of it, reflects the frenzied excitement which the traveler felt upon suddenly finding the real source of all the Indian legends of golden cities.

Zamacona's ecstasy was dispelled by a tremendous wave of fear as, for the first time in this silent world, he heard a rumble of very definite and obviously approaching sound. There was no mistaking its nature. It was a thunderously charging herd of large animals. He looked about frantically for a refuge in the great, gold-painted interior. He felt he must close the long-disused door, which still hung on its ancient hinges, doubled back against the inner wall.

Soil, vines, and moss had entered the opening from outside, so that he had to dig a path for the great gold portal with his sword; but he managed to perform this work very swiftly under the frightful stimulus of the approaching noise. The hoof-beats had grown still louder and more menacing by the time he began tugging at the heavy door itself, and for awhile his fears reached a frantic height, as hope of starting the age-clogged metal grew faint.

Then, with a creak, the thing responded to his youthful strength, and a frenzied siege of pulling and pushing ensued. Amidst the roar of unseen stampeding feet success came at last, and the ponderous golden door clanged shut, leaving Zamacona in darkness but for the single lighted torch he had wedged between the pillars of a basin-tripod. There was a latch, and

the frightened man blessed his patron saint that it was still effective.

Sound alone told the fugitive the sequel. When the roar grew near it resolved itself into separate footfalls, as if the evergreen grove had made it necessary for the herd to slacken speed and disperse. But feet continued to approach, and it became evident that the beasts were advancing among the trees and circling the hideously carven temple walls. The curious deliberateness of their tread Zamacona found alarming and repulsive, nor did he like the scuffling sounds which were audible even through the thick stone walls and heavy golden door. Once the door rattled ominously on its archaic hinges, as if under a heavy impact, but fortunately it still held. Then, after a seemingly endless interval, he heard retreating steps and realized that his unknown visitors were leaving.

Since the herds did not seem to be very numerous, it would perhaps have been safe to venture out within a half-hour or less, but Zamacona took no chances. Opening his pack, he prepared his camp on the golden tiles of the temple's floor, with the great door still securely latched against all comers; drifting eventually into a sounder sleep than he could have known in the blue spaces outside.

4

ALTHOUGH it was late, I continued my translation of the singular document I had unearthed at the mound. Determined to discover the source of the legend of the ghostly walkers, the old man by day and the apparently headless squaw by night, I plunged deeper into the archaic Spanish manuscript of Panfilo de Zamacona, anxious to find possible clues to the Oklahoma mound legends which this Sixteenth Century Spaniard might reveal.

Fascinated by his dramatic account of

the timeless underworld with its gold and strangely horrible footprints, I relighted my pipe and went back to the difficult task of translation.

Zamacona, once the mysterious horde had left him securely locked in the golden temple, slept from exhaustion. What finally roused him was a thunderous rapping at the door. It beat through his dreams and dissolved all the lingering mists of drowsiness as soon as he knew what it was. There could be no mistake about it—it was a definite, human, and peremptory rapping, performed apparently with some metallic object, and with all the measured quality of conscious thought or will behind it. As the awakening man rose clumsily to his feet, a sharp vocal note was added to the summons. Feeling sure that his visitors were men and not demons, and arguing that they could have no reason for considering him an enemy, Zamacona decided to face them openly. He fumbled with the ancient latch till the golden door creaked open from the pressure of those outside.

As the great portal swung back, Zamacona stood facing a group of about twenty individuals of an aspect not calculated to give him alarm. They seemed to be Indians, though their tasteful robes and trappings and swords were not such as he had seen among any of the tribes of the outer world, while their faces had many subtle differences from the Indian type. That they did not mean to be irresponsibly hostile was very clear, for instead of menacing him in any way they merely probed him attentively and significantly with their eyes, as if they expected the gaze to open up some sort of communication.

The longer they gazed, the more he seemed to know about them and their mission, for although no one had spoken since the vocal summons before the opening of the door, he found himself slowly realizing that they had come from the great

city beyond the low hills, mounted on animals, and that they had been summoned by animals who had reported his presence; that they were not sure what kind of a person he was or just where he had come from, but that they knew he must be associated with that dimly remembered outer world which they sometimes visited in curious dreams. How he read all this in the gaze of the two or three leaders he could not possibly explain, though he learned why a moment later.

As it was, he attempted to address his visitors in the Wichita dialect that he had picked up from Charging Buffalo, and after this failed to draw a vocal reply he successively tried the Aztec, Spanish, French, and Latin tongues—adding as many scraps of lame Greek, Galician and Portuguese, and of the peasant *patois* of his native Asturias, as his memory could recall. But not even this polyglot array—his entire linguistic stock—could bring a reply in kind.

When, however, he paused in perplexity, one of the visitors began speaking in an utterly strange and rather fascinating language whose sounds the Spaniard later had much difficulty in representing on paper. Upon his failure to understand this, the speaker pointed first to his own eyes, then to his forehead, and then to his eyes again, as if commanding the other to gaze at him in order to absorb what he wished to transmit.

Zamacona, obeying, found himself rapidly in possession of certain information. The people, he learned, conversed by means of soundless radiations of thought, although they had formerly used a spoken language which still survived as the written tongue, and into which they still dropped orally for tradition's sake, or when strong feeling demanded a spontaneous outlet. He could understand them merely by concentrating his attention upon their eyes, and could reply by summoning

up a mental image of what he wished to say, and throwing the substance of this into his glance.

When the thought-speaker paused, apparently inviting a response, Zamacona tried his best to follow the prescribed pattern, but did not appear to succeed very well. So he nodded, and tried to describe himself and his journey by signs. He pointed upward, as if to the outer world, then closed his eyes and made signs as of a mole burrowing. Then he opened his eyes again and pointed downward, in order to indicate his descent of the great slope. Experimentally he blended a spoken word or two with his gestures; for example, pointing successively to himself and to all of his visitors and saying "*un hombre*," and then pointing to himself alone and very carefully pronouncing his name, *Panfilo de Zamacona*.

BEFORE this strange conversation was over, a good deal of data had passed in both directions, but Zamacona in particular had learned many things. The underground world, he found, was called "*Xinaian*," or "*K'n-yan*," as it could probably best be represented phonetically to Anglo-Saxon ears. The people of *K'n-yan* possessed various marvelous abilities. They had conquered the phenomena of old age and death so that they no longer grew feeble or died except through violence or will. They could also regulate the balance between matter and abstract energy, even where the bodies of living organic beings were concerned, by the sheer force of the technically trained will. In other words, with suitable effort a learned man of *K'n-yan* could dematerialize and rematerialize himself, or, with somewhat greater effort and subtler technique, any other object he chose; reducing solid matter to free external particles and recombining the particles again without damage. Had not Zamacona answered his visitors' knock

when he did, he would have discovered this accomplishment in a highly puzzling way, for only the strain and bother of the process prevented the twenty men from passing bodily through the golden door without pausing for a summons. This art could be taught to some extent, though never perfectly, to any intelligent person.

The people of *K'n-yan* all dwelt in the great, tall city of *Tsath* beyond the mountains. Formerly several races had inhabited the underground world, but the men of *Tsath* had conquered and enslaved the rest, interbreeding them with certain horned and four-footed animals of the red-litten region. The slave class was by now extensive and highly composite, being bred not only from ancient conquered enemies, but also from outer-world stragglers, from dead bodies curiously galvanized into effectiveness, and from the naturally inferior members of the ruling class. The acts of the slaves were controlled by their masters who gave them hypnotic impressions in the morning of all they were to do during the day. The most mechanical of the slaves were those called the *y'm-bhi*, organisms which had died, but which had been mechanically reanimated for industrial purposes by means of atomic energy and thought-power. It was the *y'm-bhi* who were used for the amusement of the people in the amphitheater, and many of them consequently showed evidences of horrible subtractions, distortions, transpositions, graftings, and even of decapitation. The flesh of a special slave class was the principal meat stock of *K'n-yan*, and especially of the *gyaa-yothm*, the great floundering white beasts which so horrified Zamacona that he only hinted at the black fur on their backs, the rudimentary horn on their forehead, and the unmistakable trace of human or anthropoid blood in their flat-nosed, bulging-lipped faces.

In government, *Tsath* was a kind of semi-anarchical state; habit rather than law

determining the order of things. The race suffered from a paralyzing ennui and decadence, and was interested solely in physical fundamentals and new sensations, desiring only that the mutual encroachments of pleasure-seeking should not cripple the massed life of the community. Family organization and the civil and social distinction of the sexes had long ago perished.

As the conversation continued, Zamacona felt a growing repulsion and alarm—at what was told, at the strange, telepathic manner of telling, and at the inference that he must never return to tell the outer world of the existence of K'n-yan and its golden treasures. In fact, the men of Tsath were so displeased to learn that men from Spain and France and England were exploring those parts of the upper world where the passages to K'n-yan lay, that they determined to post sentries once more at all the unblocked passages to the outside world which they could remember. Their decision made Zamacona wish he had never descended to this region of magic and abnormality, but he realized that for the present his policy should be to appear to acquiesce and to furnish his visitors with all the information they might desire. They, on their part, were fascinated by the outer-world data which he managed haltingly to convey.

It was really the first reliable surface information they had had since the refugees straggled back from Atlantis and Lemuria eons before; for all their subsequent emissaries from outside had been members of narrow and local groups without any knowledge of the world at large: Mayas, Toltecs and Aztecs at best, and mostly ignorant tribes of the plains. Zamacona was the first European they had ever seen, and the fact that he was a youth of education and brilliancy made him of still more emphatic value as a source of knowledge.

The long conversation of Zamacona and

his visitors took place in the green-blue twilight of the grove just outside of the temple door. Some of the men reclined on the weeds and moss beside the half-vanished walk, while others, including the Spaniard and the chief spokesman of the Tsath party, sat on the low, monolithic pillars that lined the temple approach. Almost a whole terrestrial day must have been consumed in the colloquy, for Zamacona felt the need of food several times, and ate from his well-stocked pack while some of the Tsath party went back for provisions to the roadway, where they had left the animals on which they had ridden. At length the leader of the party brought the discourse to a close, and indicated that the time had come to proceed to the city.

There were, he said, several extra beasts in the cavalcade, upon one of which Zamacona could ride. The prospect of mounting one of those ominous hybrid entities whose fabled nourishment was so alarming was by no means reassuring to the traveler. There was, moreover, another point about the things which disturbed him greatly; the apparently preternatural intelligence with which some members of the previous day's roving pack had reported his presence to the men of Tsath and had brought out the present expedition. But Zamacona was not a coward, and followed the men boldly down the weed-grown walk toward the road where the things were stationed.

The party observed Zamacona's discomfiture and hastened to reassure him as much as possible. The beasts or *gya-yothn*, they explained, surely were curious things, but were really harmless.

It argues well for the intrepid fiber of those Renaissance Spaniards who conquered half the unknown world, that Panfilo de Zamacona actually mounted one of the morbid beasts of Tsath and fell into place beside the leader of the cavalcade: the man named Gll-Hthaa-Ynn, who had

been most active in the previous exchange of information. It was a repulsive business; but after all, the seat was easy, and the gait of the clumsy *gyaa-yoth* surprisingly even and regular. No saddle was necessary, and the animal appeared to require no guidance whatever.

WHEN the cavalcade drew near the compact outskirts of Tsath, and well within the shadow of its terrifying towers, Gll-Hthaaynn pointed out a monstrous circular building before which enormous crowds were lined up. This, he indicated, was one of the many amphitheaters where curious sports and sensations were provided for the weary people of K'n-yan. He was about to pause and usher Zamacona inside the vast curved façade, when the Spaniard demurred. This was the first of those friendly clashes of taste which were to convince the people of Tsath that their guest followed strange and narrow standards.

Tsath itself was a network of strange and ancient streets; and despite a growing sense of horror and alienage, Zamacona was enthralled by its intimations of mystery and cosmic wonder. The over awing towers, the monstrous surge of teeming life through its ornate avenues, the curious carvings on its doorways and windows, the odd vistas glimpsed from balustrated plazas and tiers of titan terraces, and the enveloping gray haze which seemed to press down on the gorge-like streets in low ceiling-fashion, all combined to produce such a sense of adventurous expectancy as he had never known before.

He was taken at once to a council of executives which held forth in a gold-and-copper palace behind a gardened and fountained park, and was for some time subjected to close, friendly questioning in a vaulted hall frescoed with vertiginous arabesques. A daily program was laid down for the visitor, after he was em-

phatically told he must never think of returning to the upper world. There were to be conversations with persons of learning in various places, and lessons in many branches of Tsathic lore. Liberal periods of research were allowed for, and all the libraries of K'n-yan both secular and sacred were to be thrown open to him as soon as he might master the written language. Rites and spectacles were to be attended, except when he might especially object, and much time would be left for the enlightened pleasure-seeking and emotional titillation which formed the goal and nucleus of daily life.

A house in the suburbs or an apartment in the city would be assigned him, and he would be initiated into one of the large affection-groups, including many noblewomen of the most extreme and art-enhanced beauty, which in latter-day K'n-yan took the place of family units. Several horned *gyaa-yothn* would be provided for his transportation and errand-running, and ten living slaves of intact body would serve to conduct his establishment and protect him from thieves and sadists and religious orgiasts on the public highways.

Upon his choosing an apartment in preference to a suburban villa, Zamacona was dismissed by the executives with great courtesy and ceremony, and was led through several gorgeous streets to a cliff-like carven structure of some seventy or eighty floors. Preparations for his arrival had already been instituted, and in a spacious ground-floor suite of vaulted rooms slaves were busy adjusting hangings and furniture. There were lacquered and inlaid taborets, velvet and silk reclining-corners and squatting-cushions, and infinite rows of teakwood and ebony pigeon-holes with metal cylinders containing some of the manuscripts he was soon to read, standard classics which all urban apartments possessed.

There were windows, but at this shadowy ground-level they were of scant illuminating value. In some of the rooms were elaborate baths, while the kitchen was a maze of technical contrivances. Supplies were brought, Zamacona was told, through the network of underground passages which lay beneath Tsath, and which had once accommodated curious mechanical transports.

Before his inspection was finished, the permanent staff of slaves arrived and were introduced, and shortly afterward there came some half-dozen freemen and noble-women of his future affection-group, who were to be his companions for several days, contributing what they could to his instruction and amusement. Upon their departure, another party would take their place, and so onward in rotation through a group of about fifty members.

5

THUS was Panfilo de Zamacona absorbed for four years into the life of the sinister city of Tsath in the blue-litten nether world of K'n-yan. All that he learned and saw and did is clearly not told in his manuscript, for a pious reticence overcame him when he began to write in his native Spanish tongue, and he dared not set down everything. Much he consistently viewed with repulsion, and many things he steadily refrained from seeing or doing or eating. For other things he atoned by frequent countings of the beads of his rosary.

He explored the entire world of K'n-yan, including the deserted machine-cities of the middle period on the gorse-grown plain of Nith, and made one descent into the red-litten world of Yoth to see the cyclopean ruins. He witnessed prodigies of craft and machinery which left him breathless, and beheld human metamorphoses, dematerializations, rematerializa-

tions, and reanimations which made him cross himself again and again. His capacity for astonishment was blunted by the plethora of new marvels which every day brought him.

But the longer he stayed, the more he wished to leave, for the inner life of K'n-yan was based on impulses very plainly outside his radius. As he progressed in historical knowledge, he understood more, but understanding only heightened his distaste. He felt that the people of Tsath were a lost and dangerous race—more dangerous to themselves than they knew—and that their growing frenzy of monotony-warfare and novelty-quest was leading them rapidly toward a precipice of disintegration and utter horror.

As a means of keeping the image of home in mind, he began about this time to make rough drafts of the manuscript relating his adventures; delighting in the loved, old, Spanish words and the familiar letters of the Roman alphabet. Somehow he fancied he might get the manuscript to the outer world, and to make it convincing to his fellows he resolved to enclose it in one of the Tulu-metal cylinders used for sacred archives.

But even while he planned, he had little real hope of ever establishing contact with the earth's surface. Every known gate, he knew, was guarded by persons and forces that it were better not to oppose. His attempts to escape had not helped matters, for he could now see a growing hostility to the outer world he represented. He hoped that no other European would find his way in, for it was possible that later comers might not fare as well as he.

In the year 1545, as he reckoned it, Zamacona grew hopeful. An opportunity for escape came from an unexpected source: a female of his affection-group who conceived for him a curious individual infatuation based on some hereditary memory of the days of monogamous wedlock

in Tsath. Over this female—a noblewoman of moderate beauty and of at least average intelligence, named T'la-yub—Zamacona acquired the most extraordinary influence, finally inducing her to help him in an escape, under the promise that he would let her accompany him.

Chance proved a great factor in the course of events, for T'la-yub came of a primordial family of gate-lords who had retained oral traditions of at least one passage to the outer world which the mass of people had forgotten.

Zamacona, now working feverishly to get his manuscript into final form in case anything untoward should happen to him, decided to take with him on his outward journey only five beast-loads of unalloyed gold in the form of the small ingots used for minor decorations—enough, he calculated, to make him a personage of unlimited power in his own world.

T'la-yub he would perhaps allow to share his fortune, for she was by no means unattractive; though possibly he would arrange for her sojourn among the plains Indians, since he was not overanxious to preserve links with the manner of life of Tsath. For a wife, of course, he would choose a lady of Spain, or at worst, an Indian princess of normal outer-world descent and a regular and approved past. But for the present T'la-yub must be used as a guide. The manuscript he would carry on his own person, encased in a book-cylinder of the sacred and magnetic Tulu-metal.

THE expedition itself is described in the addendum to Zamacona's manuscript, written later, and in a hand showing signs of nervous strain. He set out after taking the most careful precautions, proceeding as far as possible along the faintly lighted passages beneath the city. Zamacona and T'la-yub, disguised in slaves' garments, bearing provision-knapsacks, and leading

the five laden beasts on foot, were readily taken for commonplace workers; and they clung as long as possible to the subterranean way, using a long and little-frequented branch which had formerly conducted the mechanical transports to the now ruined suburb of L'thaa.

Amidst the ruins of L'thaa they came to the surface, thereafter passing as rapidly as possible over the deserted, blue-litten plain of Nith toward the Grh-yan range of low hills. There, in the tangled under-brush, T'la-yub found the long-disused entrance to the forgotten tunnel; a thing she had seen but once before—eons in the past. It was hard work getting the laden gyaa-yothn to scrape through the obstructing vines and briars, and one of them displayed a rebelliousness destined to bear dire consequences—bolting away from the party and loping back toward Tsath on its detestable pads, golden burden and all.

It was nightmare work burrowing by the light of blue-ray torches upward, downward, forward, and upward again through a dank, choked tunnel that no foot had trodden since ages before the sinking of Atlantis; and at one point T'la-yub had to practice the fearsome art of dematerialization on herself, Zamacona, and the laden beasts in order to pass a point wholly clogged by shifting earth-strata. It was a terrible experience for Zamacona; for although he had often witnessed dematerialization in others, and even practiced it himself to the extent of dream-projection, he had never been fully subjected to it before. But T'la-yub was skilled in the arts of K'n-yan, and accomplished the double metamorphosis in perfect safety.

At last they came to a very narrow place where the natural or only slightly hewn cave-walls gave place to walls of wholly artificial masonry, carved into terrible bas-reliefs. At this point the passage opened into a prodigious vaulted and circular chamber of human construction, wholly

covered with horrible carvings, and revealing at the farther end an arched passageway with the foot of a flight of steps. T'la-yub knew from family tales that this must be very near the earth's surface, but she could not tell just how near. Here the party camped for what they meant to be their last rest-period in the subterraneous world.

IT MUST have been hours later that the clank of metal and the padding of beasts' feet awakened Zamacona and T'la-yub. An alarm had been given at Tsath by the returning *gyaa-yohn* which had rebelled at the briar-choked tunnel-entrance, and a swift party of pursuers had come to arrest the fugitives. Resistance was clearly useless, and none was offered.

Zamacona and T'la-yub were tried before the three *gn'agn* of the supreme tribunal in the gold-and-copper palace behind the gardened and fountained park, and the Spaniard was given his liberty because of the vital outer-world information he still had to impart. He was told to return to his apartment and to his affection-group, taking up his life as before, and continuing to meet deputations of scholars according to the latest schedule he had been following. No restrictions would be imposed upon him so long as he might remain peacefully in K'n-yan, but it was intimated that such leniency would not be repeated after another attempt at escape.

The fate of T'la-yub was less happy. There being no object in retaining her, and her ancient Tsathic lineage giving her conduct a greater aspect of treason than Zamacona's, she was ordered to be delivered to the curious diversions of the amphitheater; and afterward, in a somewhat mutilated and half-dematerialized form, to be given the functions of a *y'm-bhi* or animated corpse-slave and stationed among the sentries guarding the passage whose existence she had betrayed.

Zamacona soon heard, not without many pangs of a regret he could scarcely have anticipated, that poor T'la-yub had emerged from the arena in a headless and otherwise incomplete state, and had been set as an outermost guard upon the mound in which the passage had been found to terminate. She was, he was told, a night-sentinel, whose automatic duty was to warn off all comers with a torch; sending down reports to a small garrison of twelve dead slave *y'm-bhi* and six living but partly dematerialized freemen in the vaulted, circular chamber if the approachers did not heed her warning. She worked, he was told, in conjunction with a day-sentinel—a living freeman who chose this post in preference to other forms of discipline for certain offenses against the state.

It was now made plain to him, though indirectly, that his own penalty for another escape-attempt would be service as a gate-sentry. It was intimated that he, or parts of him, would be reanimated to guard some inner section of the passage, within sight of others, where his abridged person might serve as a permanent symbol of the rewards of treason. But, his informants always added, it was of course inconceivable that he would ever court such a fate. So long as he remained peacefully in K'n-yan, he would continue to be a free, privileged and respected personage.

Yet in the end Panfilo de Zamacona did court the fate so direfully hinted to him. True, he did not really expect to encounter it, but the nervous latter part of his manuscript makes it clear that he was prepared to face its possibility. What gave him a final hope of scathless escape from K'n-yan was his growing mastery of the art of dematerialization. Having studied it for years, and having learned still more from the two instances in which he had been subjected to it, he now felt increasingly able to use it independently and effectively.

Of course he could not bear away any gold, but mere escape was enough. He would, though, dematerialize and carry with him his manuscript in the Tulu-metal cylinder, even though it cost additional effort, for this record and proof must reach the outer world at all hazards. He now knew the passage to follow, and if he could thread it in an atom-scattered state, he did not see how any person or force could detect or stop him. The only trouble would be if he failed to maintain his spectral condition at all times. That was the one ever-present peril, as he had learned from his experiments.

For many nights after his ultimate resolution Zamacona prayed to St. Pamphilus and other guardian saints, and counted the beads of his rosary. The last entry in the manuscript—which toward the end took the form of a diary more and more—was merely a single sentence: "*Es mas tarde de lo que pensaba—tango que marcharme*" . . . "It is later than I thought! I must go." After that, only silence and conjecture—and such evidence as the presence of the manuscript itself, and what that manuscript could lead to, might provide.

6

WHEN I looked up from my half-stupefied reading and note-making, the morning sun was high in the heavens. The electric bulb was still burning, but such things of the real world—the modern outer world—were far from my whirling brain. I knew I was in my room at Clyde Compton's at Binger, but upon what monstrous vista had I stumbled? Was this thing a hoax or a chronicle of madness? If a hoax, was it a jest of the Sixteenth Century or of today? The manuscript's age looked appallingly genuine to my not wholly unpractised eyes.

Moreover, what a monstrously exact explanation it gave of all the baffling phe-

nomena of the mound, of the seemingly meaningless and paradoxical actions of diurnal and nocturnal ghosts, and of the queer cases of madness and disappearance! It was even an accursedly *plausible* explanation, evilly *consistent*, if one could adopt the incredible. It must be a shocking hoax devised by someone who knew all the lore of the mound. There was even a hint of social satire in the account of that unbelievable nether world of horror and decay. Surely this was the clever forgery of some learned cynic, something like the leaden crosses in New Mexico, which a jester once planted and pretended to discover as a relic of some forgotten Dark-Age colony from Europe.

Upon going down to breakfast I hardly knew what to tell Compton and his mother, as well as the curious callers who had already begun to arrive. Still in a daze, I gave a few points from the notes I had made, mumbling my belief that the thing was a subtle and ingenious fraud left there by some previous explorer of the mound—a belief in which everybody seemed to concur when told of the substance of the manuscript.

When I reached the mound that morning, there was no one in sight. Repeating my upward scramble of the previous day, I was troubled by thoughts of what *might* lie close at hand, *if* any miracle, any part of the manuscript *were* actually half true. In such a case, I could not help reflecting, the hypothetical Spaniard Zamacona must have barely reached the outer world when overtaken by some disaster, perhaps an involuntary rematerialization.

He would naturally, in that event, have been seized by whichever sentry happened to be on duty at the time—either the discredited freeman, or, as a matter of supreme irony, the very T'la-yub who had planned and aided his first attempt at escape, and in the ensuing struggle the cylinder with the manuscript might well have

been dropped on the mound's summit to be neglected and gradually buried for nearly four centuries.

It was a very real shock which chased this morbid speculation from my head, for upon glancing around the elliptical summit I saw at once that my pick and shovel had been stolen. This was a highly provoking and disconcerting development; baffling, too, in view of the seeming reluctance of everyone in Binger to visit the mound. Was this reluctance a pretended thing, and had the jokers of the village been chuckling with anticipation of my discomfiture as they solemnly saw me off ten minutes before? I took out my binoculars and scanned the gaping crowd at the edge of the village. No; they did not seem to be looking for any comic climax.

Everything else on the mound was as I had left it: brush cut by my machete, slight, bowl-like depression toward the north end, and the hole I had made with my trench-knife in digging up the cylinder. Deeming it too great a concession to the unknown jokers to return to Binger for another pick and shovel, I resolved to carry out my program as best I could with the machete and trench-knife in my hand-bag; so, extracting these, I set to work excavating the bowl-like depression which my eye had picked as the possible site of a former entrance to the mound. As I proceeded, I felt again the suggestion of a sudden wind blowing against me which I had noticed the day before—a suggestion which seemed stronger, and still more reminiscent of unseen, formless, opposing hands laid on my wrists, as I cut deeper and deeper through the root-tangled red soil and reached the exotic black loam beneath.

Then, quite without warning, the black, root-woven earth beneath my feet began to sink cracklingly, while I heard a faint sound of sifting, falling matter far below me. I saw that the earth was sifting down into some large cavity beneath, so as to

leave a good-sized aperture when the roots that had bound it were gone. A few more hacks of the machete did the trick, and with a parting cave-in and uprush of curiously chill and alien air the last barrier gave way. Under the morning sun yawned a huge opening at least three feet square, and showing the top of a flight of stone steps down which the loose earth of the collapse was still sliding. My quest had come to something at last! With an elation of accomplishment almost overbalancing fear, I replaced the trench-knife and machete in my hand-bag, took out my powerful electric torch, and prepared for a triumphant lone, and utterly rash invasion of the fabulous nether world I had uncovered.

IT WAS difficult getting down the first few steps, both because of the fallen earth which had choked them and because of a singular up-pushing of a cold wind from below. The electric torch showed dank, water-stained and salt-encrusted walls fashioned of huge basalt blocks, and now and then I thought I despaired some trace of carving beneath the nitrous deposits.

My descent became swifter, and I avoided studying the terrible bas-reliefs and intaglios that had unnerved me. All at once I saw an arched opening ahead, and realized that the prodigious staircase had ended at last. But with that realization came horror in mounting and magnitude, for before me there yawned a vast vaulted crypt of all-too-familiar outline—a great circular space answering in every least particular to the carving-lined chamber described in the Zamacona manuscript.

It was indeed the place. There could be no mistake. And if any room for doubt yet remained, that doubt was abolished by what I saw directly across the great vault. It was a second arched opening, commencing a long, narrow passage and having at

its mouth two huge opposite niches bearing loathsome and totanic images of shockingly familiar pattern.

From this point onward I ask no credence for what I tell—for what I *think* I saw. It is too unnatural, too monstrous and incredible, to be any part of sane human experience or objective reality. My torch, though casting a powerful beam ahead, naturally could not furnish any general illumination of the cyclopean crypt; so I now began moving it about to explore the giant walls little by little. As I did so, I saw to my horror that the space was by no means vacant, but was instead littered with odd furniture and utensils and heaps of packages which bespoke a populous recent occupancy—no nitrous relic of the past, but queerly-shaped objects and supplies in modern, everyday use. As my torch rested on each article or group of articles, however, the distinctness of the outlines soon began to grow blurred, until in the end I could scarcely tell whether the things belonged to the realm of matter or to the realm of spirit.

Wild conceits surged through my mind. I thought of the manuscript and what it said about the garrison stationed in this place—twelve dead slave *y'm-bhi* and six living but partly dematerialized freemen—that was in 1545—three hundred and eighty-three years ago—What since then? Zamacona had predicted change—subtle disintegration—more dematerialization—weaker and weaker—It occurred to me with shuddering force that I was building my speculations out of a full belief in the Zamacona manuscript—this must not be—I must get a grip on myself. . . .

But every time I tried to get a grip I saw some fresh sight to shatter my poise still further. This time, just as my will-power was driving the half-seen paraphernalia into obscurity, my glance and torch-beam had to light on two things of

very different nature; two things of the eminently real and sane world which grew more instead of less distinct the longer I looked at them. I say they were of the eminently real and sane world, yet they did more to unseat my shaky reason than anything I had seen before—because I knew what they were, and knew how profoundly, in the course of nature, they ought not to be there. *They were my own missing pick and shovel, side by side, and leaning nearly against the blasphemously carved wall of that hellish crypt.*

The cursed hypnotism of the manuscript got at me, and I actually *saw* the half-transparent shapes of the things that were pushing and plucking—those leprous paleogean things with something of humanity still clinging to them—the *complete* forms, and the forms that were morbidly and perversely *incomplete* . . . all these, and hideous *other* entities—the four-footed blasphemies with ape-like face and great projecting horn . . . and not a sound so far in all that nitrous hell of inner earth. . . .

Then there *was* a sound—a flopping; a padding; a dull, advancing sound which heralded beyond question a being as structurally material as the pickax and the shovel—something wholly unlike the shadow-shapes that ringed me in, yet equally remote from any sort of life as life is understood on the earth's wholesome surface. My shattered brain tried to prepare me for what was coming, but could not frame any adequate image. I could only say over and over again to myself, "It is of the abyss, but it is *not* dematerialized."

The padding grew more distinct, and from the mechanical cast of the tread I knew it was a dead thing that stalked in the darkness. Then—oh, God, *I saw it in the full beam of my torch; saw it framed like a sentinel in the narrow passage. . . .*

LET me collect myself enough to hint at what I saw—to explain why I dropped torch and hand-bag alike and fled empty-handed in the utter blackness, wrapped in a merciful unconsciousness which did not wear off until the sun and the distant yelling and shouting from the village roused me as I lay gasping on the top of the accursed mound. I do not yet know what guided me again to the earth's surface. I only know that the watchers in Binger saw me stagger up into sight three hours after I had vanished; saw me lurch up and fall flat on the ground as if struck by a bullet. None of them dared to help me; they knew I must be in a bad state, so tried to rouse me by yelling in chorus and firing off revolvers.

It worked in the end, and when I came to I almost rolled down the side of the mound in my eagerness to get away from that black aperture which still yawned open. My torch and tools, and the hand-bag with the manuscript, were all down there; but it is easy to see why neither I nor anyone else ever went after them. When I had staggered across the plain and into the village I dared not tell what I had seen. I only muttered vague things about carvings and statues and snakes and shaken nerves. And I did not faint again until somebody mentioned that the ghost-sentinel had reappeared about the time I had staggered halfway back to town. I left Binger that evening, and have never been there since, though they tell me the ghosts still appear on the mound as usual.

But I have resolved to hint here at last what I dared not hint to the people of Binger on that terrible August afternoon. I don't know yet just how I can go about it—and if in the end you think my reticence strange, just remember that to imagine such a horror is one thing, *but to see it is another thing*. I saw it.

I think you'll recall my citing early in this tale the case of a bright young man named Heaton who went out to that mound one day in 1891 and came back at night as the village idiot, babbling for eight years about horrors and then dying in an epileptic fit. What he used to keep moaning was "*that white man—or, my God, what they did to him . . .*"

Well, I saw the same thing that poor Heaton saw—and I saw it after reading that manuscript; so I know more of its history than he did. That makes it worse, for I know all that it *implies*—all that must be still brooding and festering and waiting down there. I told you it had padded mechanically toward me out of the narrow passage, and had stood sentry-like at the entrance. That was natural and inevitable—because the thing *was* a sentry. It had been made a sentry for punishment, and it was quite dead, besides lacking head, arms, lower legs and other customary parts of a human being. Yes, it had been a very human being once; and what is more, it had been *white*. Very obviously, if that manuscript was as true as I think it was, this being had been used for the *diversions of the amphitheater*, before its life had become wholly extinct and supplanted by automatic impulses controlled from outside.

On its white and only slightly hairy chest some letters had been gashed or branded—I had not stopped to investigate, but had merely noted that they were in an awkward and fumbling Spanish; an awkward Spanish implying a kind of ironic use of the language by an alien inscriber familiar neither with the idiom nor the Roman letters used to record it. The inscription had read: "*Secuestrado a la voluntad de Xinain en el cuerpo decapitado de Tlayub*" — "*Seized by the will of K-n-yan in the headless body of T'la-yub.*"