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SANDS OF QUANAM

BY STANLEY S. WIATER

ART BY RICHARD CORBEN

The never ending waves smashed against the jagged, wind and water worn rocks. Again and again the churning water rose, only to fall and die on the debris littered beach. Each dying wave left a reminder of itself on the wet sand; here a torn piece of clothing, there a ruined plank or keg. The bright morning sun revealed little to view, save for a few crabs and sand spiders that were clambering over the corpses which also occupied space on the shore side.

There was but a single figure moving amongst the many still and bloated bodies that lay mixed with the assorted debris and wreckage. Dressed in the simple harness of a warrior, his dark grey cloak did not show him to be of any specific tribe or kingdom. It was his raven black hair and ironite colored eyes that told he was from the continent of Zambot, and that he was not a native of this land. He was young in age, but his tall form with lean physique was equal in strength to any man twice his age.

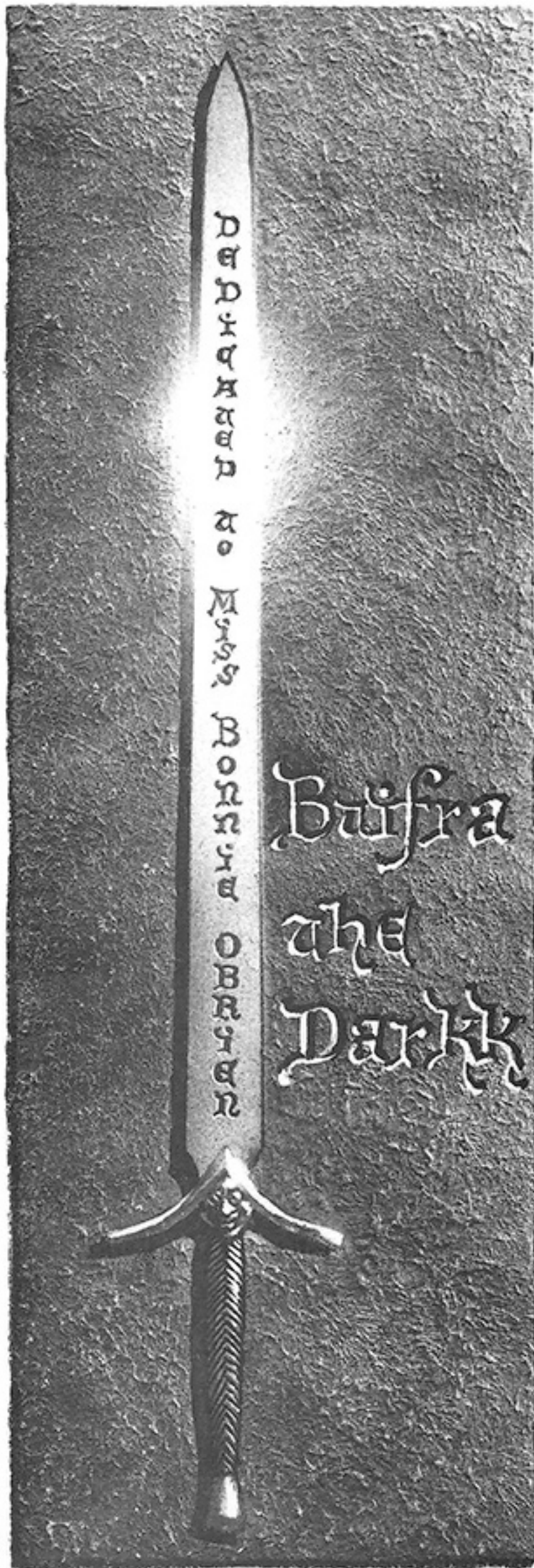
This was because he was no so-called civilized man, bred on wine and sweetmeats, and long grown weak of mind and body. No, this was a true barbarian, born with a sword in his hands and an unquenchable fire in his eyes. Although large in stature for his age, he carried not an ounce of unnecessary weight upon his pantherish form. His long black hair was kept from falling in his eyes by a thin band of copperan almost the same color as his sun darkened skin. A broadsword and a jeweled dagger scabbarded about his waist were the only possessions of mention he now owned.

Buifra the Darkk slowly took in the grim sights that lay on the beach before him. Having little else to do, he began to check the numerous bodies for signs of life. He already knew, however, that they must be all dead. He could not remember much of the actual shipwreck, but he recalled well the storm that had raged for three days and nights. He soon counted sixteen bodies that he had examined, one by one, to see if any still lived. He was the only survivor.

Looking seaward, Buifra scanned the towering rocks the ship had collided with and sank against during the height of the storm. There was nothing left of the storm they had encountered, and that same amount was all that remained of the ship that had brought him here. He felt for the ironite broadsword that never left his side. As always, it was still scabbarded to his waist, alongside the dagger. But as to how the cumbersome weapons had made it through the collision and swim to shore with him, Buifra did not give time to think.

He then noted the several black fins that were neatly cutting through the blood darkened waters. There would be no more bodies to be washed up on shore. Again the reminder that he was the sole survivor of a crew of twenty hit him like a hard slap across the face. The storm and the devils of the deep had seen to that.

The red sun burned down from the cloudless sky, and Buifra's parched throat soon felt its effect. He would have to find fresh water if he were to survive for even a day. In one direction, there was the salt filled sea. And in every other direction, he could see nothing but sand and rocks, stretching up and down the sea coast as far as he could see. It was the same inland, only with more sand than rocks. He almost wished that he could join his dead companions.



He had thrown in his lot with them, a group of adventurers, to go on a voyage across the Octin Ocean to the city of Kiva, which was on the southern continent of Quanam. Buifra had had no real reason for signing on as a crewmember of one of the four ships making the voyage to Kiva, save for the fact that he was broke as usual. Also, the thought of becoming rich in a strange and relatively unknown and unexplored land had appealed strongly to the young barbarian, who had become bored with his occupation as a thief on Clomyth.

The eight hundred mile voyage from the continent of Clomyth to Quanam was not expected to be without incidents of trouble, but for ten days it was just that. It was on the eleventh day out to sea that the storm struck. The four ships were quickly lost from sight of each other, and it was anyone's guess whether they were still on course or not. Buifra had seen storms before, but this one was more furious than any he had ever seen or heard of. It was as if the gods of the water and the sky had locked together in immortal combat.

During the third night of the storm, Buifra had sighted land, as he had volunteered to be on the lookout tower at the time. But although he could see the rocky monoliths that jutted out of the raging waters ahead of the ship, nothing he could say or do could prevent their crashing upon them. The ship was instantly crushed to kindling against the stone barriers, and it was only by some miracle of fate or the gods that he had been thrown free of the wreckage by the initial collision. Now there was nothing left of his friends and that ship but sixteen bloated corpses and a few boards and planks.

There was yet the possibility that one or two of the other ships had survived the storm and had made it to Kiva. Buifra could only pray that this was so. Meanwhile, he had to make it to Kiva himself. He was alone, without food or water, on a strange and unknown continent, that of Quanam. This was his present situation, and Buifra knew it was not a joyous one. But he was Buifra the Darkk, a warrior, and he would survive. Of that he had no doubts.

Surveying the barren terrain, Buifra figured that Kiva was somewhere to the north of him. There was nothing he could accomplish by remaining here, although he could not even guess how far north Kiva might be. Venomously cursing his luck, he resigned his fate to Gaaf and whatever gods he believed or half believed in.

Then, without a backward glance, the lone barbarian began his long walk up the coastline of eternal Quanam, largest land mass on all of Omentis. It was to be a memorable journey.

Buifra had not traveled far when he thought he heard something moving behind a group of rocks that lay before him.

"Who or what goes there?" he challenged, his broadsword shooting forth from its scabbard. "I command you to show yourself."

For the space of a few heartbeats, there was only silence. Then, from behind a large boulder came a single figure, completely swathed from head to foot in decaying white cloth and cloak. At least, the cloak had at one time been white, as it now was yellowed with what appeared to be incredible age or usage. Totally enveloped by the cloak, there was nothing upon him that was not covered or hidden by the thick material. Apparently it was to protect him both from the desert heat of the day and the chilling cold of the night.

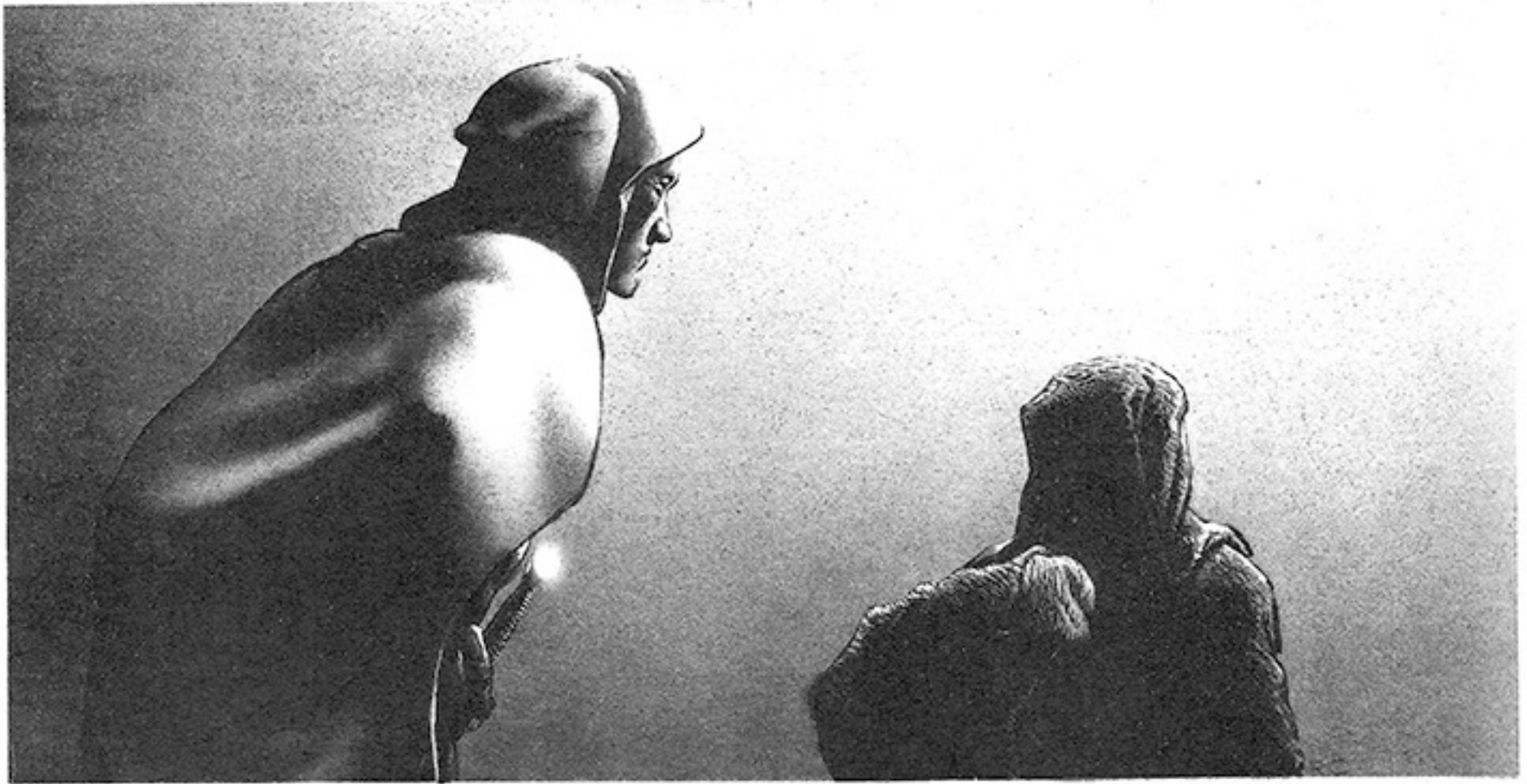
Buifra recognized him at once to be a desert nomad, but of what tribe, nationality or race, he was unable to tell. The cloak and other garments covered the figure so well that his only distinguishing feature was that he was slightly taller than the barbarian. And Buifra stood, for all his young age, well over six feet, six inches, in height.

"Sheathe your weapon," rasped the face hidden nomad, "I carry no weapons, nor do I desire to harm thee." His cloak covered arms hung limply at his sides. Buifra lowered his sword, but as was his custom, did not scabbard it as he had been asked. He was not as yet convinced that the mysterious figure who stood in front of him would not be of any danger. It was the same feeling he had toward everyone, but it was a habit that helped keep him alive.

"What are you doing here?" Buifra asked uneasily, keeping a safe distance away from the one he had spoken to. It was not easy for him to understand the guttural speech of the Quanamite nomad, but a member of the crew had taught him enough of the language to be understood and to understand what was said to him.

"My name is Lamn Ameb," answered the nomad, bowing his hidden form to Buifra. "I was scouting for a caravan when a sand storm separated me from my companions. Becoming lost in the midst of the storm, my horse threw me a few miles back." He pointed to some featureless sand dunes in the distance. "I heard waves breaking upon the rocks and came here to see what I could find. As you can see, all my provisions were attached to my horse and thus lost. And, unfortunately, one cannot drink the salted waters of the sea."





But who be you, who speaks with such a barbaric accent? I see that you have the trappings of a warrior, but surely you cannot be of Quanam?"

"No," replied Buifra, idly fingering the yellowite hilt of his sword, "I was shipwrecked last evening on this accursed shore, the sole survivor of the crew. Doubtless the same storm that brought me here separated you from your caravan. I am known as Buifra, Buifra the Darkk. I'm a mercenary traveling from far Zamobt and I was bound for the city of Kiva. Do you know where we are in relation to its location?"

The young barbarian then scabbarded his sword, hoping that this action would make Lamn Ameb feel easier to speak. It was obvious that he couldn't be of any harm to Buifra or anyone else.

"The city you seek lies two days journey to the north," answered Lamn Ameb solemnly. "But as you know, the salt water of the ocean cannot be drunk, and neither of us is with provisions. Yet we need not worry, for before I was separated from the caravan, I had almost reached a little known oasis. If my thinking is correct, it is but a half a day's journey inland from where we now stand."

As he had listened, Buifra ran his hand over cracked and blistered lips. He had not forgotten his attempt to dampen his burning throat with the salty water, succeeding only in wetting his lips and making him even thirstier than he had been before. Now this talk of an oasis nearly had him quivering with expectation. He urged Ameb to go on.

"I see that I do not need to ask twice the question of your accompanying me to the oasis. So be it. I will be glad to take you there. I'll also need protection from the fierce desert wolves, as we Zuttites carry all our weapons upon our horses instead of on our persons."

The Darkk thought it a strange and perhaps unwise tradition that the nomadic Zuttites of Quanam did not carry any weapons on their person. But as he did not wish to show his youthful ignorance of such matters, he said nothing about it. He knew nothing of the ways of the Zuttites, yet he still thought it odd that Lamn Ameb covered his body with so much unneeded material. He couldn't help but stare, nor could he prevent himself from having the nomad notice his staring.

"You will forgive me if I don't show you my face," said Lamn Ameb, "but a recent affliction of the skin makes it imperative that the harsh rays of the sun do not touch upon my flesh. But do you still wish to accompany me? For the sun is at its zenith, and if we depart now, we can reach the oasis by nightfall."

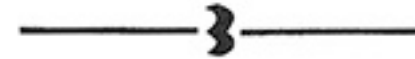
"A man must have water," replied Buifra, his mouth feeling like a bowl of dried clay. "And where there is water,

there is most likely food of some sort. Lead on then, for we must have both if we are ever to reach Kiva."

Positioning his cloak over his head to protect his face from the searing rays of the red sun of Omentis, Buifra then checked the placement of his ironite broadsword and dagger. They were sharp as ever and could be grasped in practically a moment's thought. He was ready now for anything.

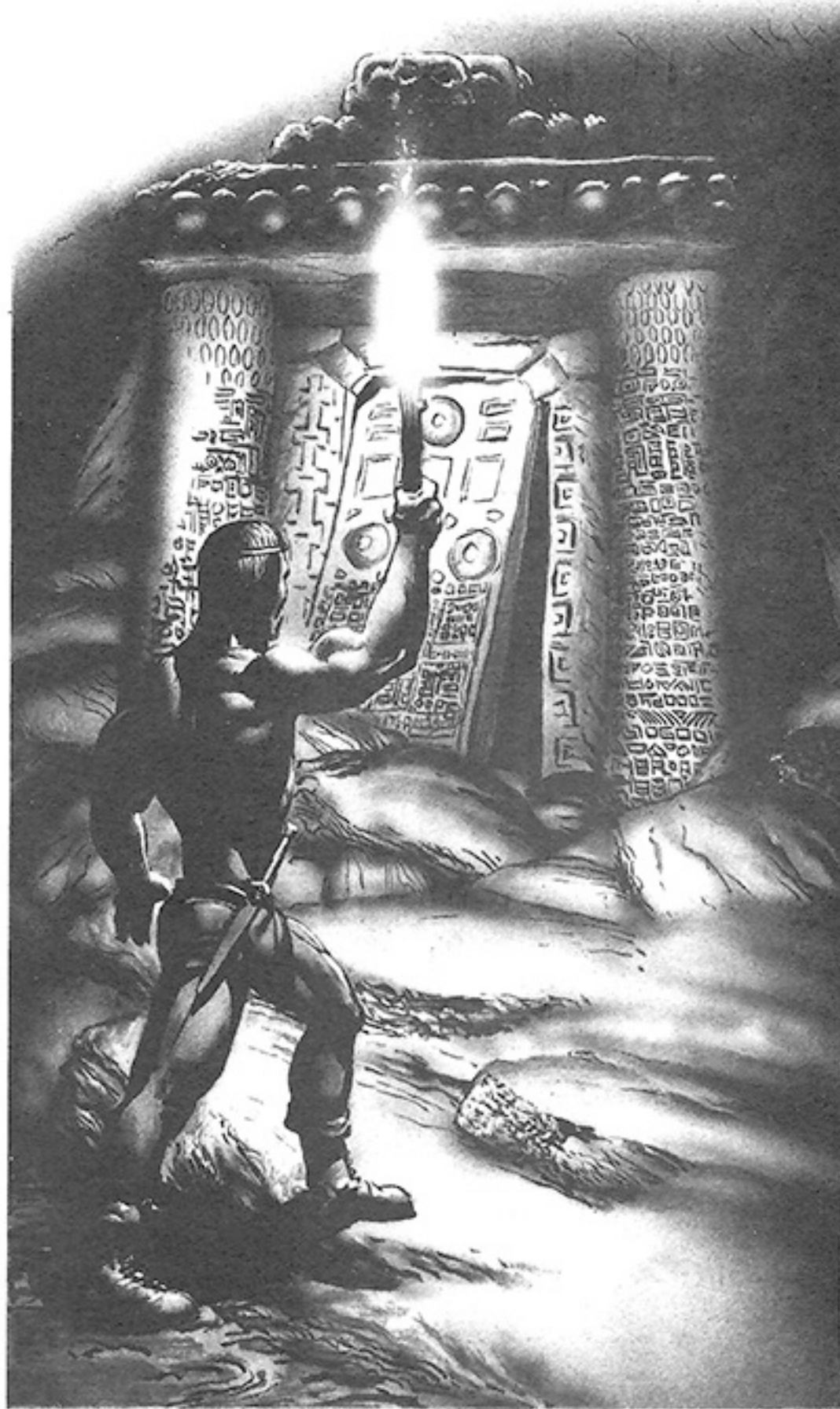
Glancing up at the fiery orb that hung overhead, the young barbarian was reminded of the single red eye of a species of devil-apes that he had once encountered a few years ago. A trio of the four-armed beasts had attacked him while he had been hunting in his native country of Zamobt, and he had dispatched them all without receiving a scratch. He had been but fifteen years old at the time, and he was not much older now.

Looking away from the sun, Buifra fell in step behind the Zuttite, who already was disappearing over the closest sand dune. As he did so, he felt the sand steaming beneath his booted feet. If not well known, the Quanamitic deserts of death were at least well named.



Buifra cursed to himself as he tried to keep up with the swiftly moving Zuttite. He could not understand how Lamn Ameb could keep such a steady pace in the oppressing heat. It did not even appear that Ameb was breathing hard. Still, Buifra realized that the nomad had lived in this climate all his life, and therefore had become accustomed to the heat. Stumbling into an unseen pocket of sand, Buifra fell to his knees with a noise that was half a gasp and half a curse. The sand burned his hands and unprotected knees. The heat of the late afternoon sun was as intense as it had ever been, and Buifra thought he would go mad if he did not have water or shade soon. As he fell again after just regaining his balance, the Darkk wished he had never acquired this seemingly incurable wanderlust of his.

Without a look behind him or speaking a single word, Lamn Ameb glided across another barren dune of sand. On his feet once more, the exhausted barbarian lumbered on to stay up with him. It was far from easy, but it was done. For Buifra had never been beaten by man or beast before, and he was not going to let that happen now. Again he stumbled and reeled, but this time, did not fall.



The sun had set but a few minutes when Buifra first saw the date trees swaying in the distance. There were only a half dozen of them, growing beside a small lake, but they were a welcome sign of food for the taking. Buifra was glad to see them, as even a barbarian couldn't have lasted much longer without food or drink. Never accustomed before to

such exposure to the sun and heat, he could feel the sunburnt skin peeling from the areas of his body that had not been covered by his cloak. The cooling night breeze did little to ease the burning, but Buifra had other things on his mind to worry about.

One thought which amazed and mystified him was the dexterity of Lamn Ameb, who stood a short distance ahead of him. The Zuttite had not spoken a single word since their first meeting, but Buifra was not offended by his silence. He was only relieved to know that the nomad had led them straight to the oasis as he had said he would.

The two moons had both risen, casting their pale fingers of silvery light upon the water and trees. Pulling off his dust caked cloak, Buifra rushed past the Zuttite and dived headlong into the clear water when he finally reached the oasis. He was underwater for some minutes, then he came up to the surface again, laughing, while at the same time coughing on the water that had gotten into his lungs. The Zuttite said nothing, but stood silently by the side of the lake.

"Drink your fill, man," cried Buifra, the moon lit water reaching to his waist. "Fear not! The water is clean and pure." He dived under again, anxious to wash off the dust and sand from his aching body. Without a word, Lamn Ameb walked over to the very edge of the lake and bent down to drink. Beneath the surface, the Darkk could hear water being splashed above him. But whether the Zuttite was drinking or not, he didn't know or care. He rose to the surface.

"You search for some food," Buifra said as he waded out of the water. "I'll go get some dry wood for a fire." Buifra chuckled to himself, wondering where he would find wood that wasn't dry in the middle of the desert. Cleaning his cloak in the water, he glanced back to where he had left Lamn Ameb, he saw that the nomad had already gone to gather some dates for their meal.

By the light of the two moons, Buifra collected a fair amount of wood that he had found lying about at the far end of the lake. But something else was also revealed to him by the moonlight. For there, half buried in a receding sand dune, was what appeared to be a group of artificially carved slabs of rock. Going over to it, Buifra saw that it in reality was some sort of tomb. Most likely, this too had been uncovered by that same accursed storm. Using the fragment of heat-stone he had saved from the shipwreck, the Darkk quickly constructed a torch to get a better look.

The tomb had the appearance of being unbelievably ancient in design and construction. Two ornately carved columns stood next to either side of what was apparently the entrance slab into the tomb. Time and the wind and sand had worn away most of the bas-reliefs and carvings that had at one time covered every inch of the columns. On closer inspection of the entrance slab, Buifra discovered a form of hieroglyphics unlike any he had ever seen before carved upon it. He also noted a large crack between one of the side slabwalls and the entrance slab of the tomb.

Bringing his torch light next to the crack, Buifra could see that it was a little too small for him to slip through. The light of the torch flickered oddly, and the barbarian then smelled the musty odor that issued from the crack in the tomb wall. It was the smell of something that had long been dead. Thrusting the torch momentarily into the crack, Buifra could still see nothing of the tomb's ghostly interior. He shivered in spite of himself.

Why a tomb had been constructed in the middle of nowhere, Buifra had no idea. He was curious to know the reasons why, but he was unable to translate the writing of a civilization that had existed centuries before his great grandfather had ever been born. Even the type of rock the tomb was composed of was somehow unlike any stone or rock that he had ever come upon in all his wanderings.

Then the thought that Lamn Ameb might be able to translate the hieroglyphics presented itself to Buifra. He had nothing to lose by asking. Gathering up the wood he col-

lected earlier, he headed back toward the part of the lake where he had last seen the Zuttite. But not until he had put the still burning torch in by another minor crack in the tomb to guide him here when he returned.

Reaching the spot where they had separated, Buifra found Lamm Ameb already there and waiting for him. Lying on the sand before Ameb was a small pile of dates. Buifra knew it was only his imagination, but if it wasn't for the dates being in front of the Zuttite, he would have sworn that the nomad hadn't moved since he had left.

Again using his fragment of heat-stone, Buifra soon had a good sized blaze going. He tended it for a few moments, and then took a fistful of dates in each hand from the pile that Lamm Ameb had gathered.

"Aren't you going to eat?" mouthed the barbarian who had been surnamed the Darkk. For although the Zuttite sat in easy reach of the dates, he made no sign that he was going to eat them. "Gaaf and Wambreug, you must be just as starved as I am." He poked at the fire with a piece of wood.

"Thank you, barbarian," replied Ameb quietly, "but no, I ate my share before you returned with the wood for the fire." His voice sounded to Buifra like the wind being blown through dry, hollow reeds. "And besides," continued the Zuttite, "I never really cared for eating...dates."

Buifra nodded in assent, aware that the nomad was never going to use more words in his conversation than were absolutely necessary. However, he could not keep himself from staring at Lamm Ameb, who sat opposite him from the fire. He had yet to get a good look at the Zuttite, if Zuttite he truly was. He had been unable to tell as Ameb had made sure, though not noticeably, that the heavy folds of cloth never revealed any part of his body to sight. The silence in which both men sat began to unnerve Buifra, and he decided to ask about the tomb he had discovered.

"Do you know any of the ancient writings of this land?" Buifra began, making another torch as he spoke. The large mound of cloth that sat a few feet away from him moved slightly, and Buifra knew that Ameb was awake and listening.

"That I do, young warrior," answered the Zuttite. "I have learned many forgotten and obscure languages in my treks across the vast deserts of Quanam. Why do you ask?" He abruptly pulled his cloak closer about him.

"I was but wondering if you could decipher some inscriptions I have found not far from here. They're written on an ancient tomb or crypt, and I have to admit that I'm curious as to what the inscriptions say." Interested though he appeared in the writings on the tomb, Buifra was far more interested in the possibility that there might be treasure of some kind hidden within the tomb. But of this train of thought, he said nothing, although Buifra imagined the nomad would be just as greedy for gems and jewels as he was. Nor

would he mind splitting the treasure, if there were any, with Ameb. It was he who had saved his life by bringing him to this oasis of life. There was only one way to find out if

there was treasure, and that would be by returning to the tomb.

"I wouldn't mind doing this for you, if it is all you ask for your protecting me across the desert wastes. Where is this tomb of which you speak?" The Zuttite slowly raised himself off the hard packed sand.

"I'll show you," Buifra said excitedly, lighting the torch with a brand from the fire. "Follow behind me. It's on the far side of the lake." Without another word, the unusually silent nomad began to follow behind him. Too anxious to wait for him, Buifra walked more quickly than Ameb on their way to the tomb. And this time it was Lamm Ameb who

hastened his pace to keep up with the barbarian, who, torch in hand, was heading toward the ancient structure he had found.



— 5 —

The two torches produced weird and flickering shadows over the tomb entrance as Buifra and Lamm Ameb studied the slab which contained the hieroglyphics. By the added light of the second torch, Buifra could see the tomb more clearly than he had been able to earlier. The tomb was constructed from a substance which closely resembled black marble, al-





though it was evident that no such kind of stone had been carved by human hands for over thousands of years. The Darkk had seen this kind of stone before, although he couldn't remember exactly when or where. Nor did he realize that he would someday see this black stone again.

"Well," he said gruffly, impatient to know what was in the tomb, "can you decipher it or not?"

"I can," replied Ameb, who had been studying the inscriptions for some time now, having brushed the sand away from most of the hieroglyphics that remained intact. "I know this form of writing quite well, though few now know of its existence or how to read it." He turned his cloak covered head to Buifra. "Do you wish to know what it says?"

"Of course I do!" breathed Buifra. "That's why I brought you here to see the tomb. Read on, I implore you!" He moved closer to the Zuttite, with the torchlight hovering over him like spectral eyes.

"Much of what is to be read has been obscured or erased by the sands of time, so I cannot be very specific. But I can translate what I have been able to read like this: It seems that a black sorcerer of the Chjem-ka was entombed here, alive, over eight or nine hundred years ago."

"The Chjem-ka!" swore Buifra, hearing the name of the first race of humans who had lived and died upon Omentis so many thousands of years ago.

"It was one of their kind who was buried here," continued Lamm Ameb, crouching before the entrance slab. "The majority of the inscription is a warning to those who come upon this tomb."

The Zuttite stopped short in his reading as the howl of a desert wolf was heard in the distance. Buifra could not prevent himself from trembling with excitement as he motioned for Ameb to read the warning. The lone wolf had since stopped howling, but neither seemed to notice it.

"It goes on to say that no one should ever dare open the tomb or let it be opened, as the sorcerer within would then be able to escape, being possessed of the power of life everlasting. But it is an unnatural immortality, as this sorcerer would also need men's blood to sustain its unholy half life. Unfortunately, the remainder of what is written has since been erased or filled in by the sand."

"Do you have any knowledge of who was buried here?" inquired Buifra, taking an uneasy glance at the crack in the side of the tomb that had been caused by the weight of the sand being shifted over the centuries. The repulsive odor that issued forth from the crack seemed to press upon him, causing Buifra to back away a few feet from Ameb and the tomb.

"I do," said the Zuttite, rising to his full height. "I know well who was entombed here so long ago, to wait for man or the elements to release him from that black hole in the desert sands. I am surprised that you have not realized who it is by now, as part of his name has been mentioned to you before."

"Who, then?" asked Buifra, unable to control his youthful, yet inane curiosity. Up above, the moons had themselves become buried in the clouds, darkening the strange tableau.

"The one named Lamntrenvisetiz Amebronusucces, black sorcerer of the Chjem-ka."

Then, moving faster than a moment's thought, the cloak covered hands of the undead sorcerer went straight for Buifra's throat.

6

His hands prevented from reaching his broadsword or dagger by the unexpected attack, Buifra fought to keep his balance. The undead thing clawed madly at his thickly corded throat, as it tried to fasten its vampirous teeth upon his jugular vein. Buifra himself struggled desperately, noting how the fetid breath of Amebronusucces hideously matched the odor of the tomb he had escaped from. The enveloping death shroud of the Chjem-kan sorcerer hampered Buifra's own attempts to get a grip on the thing's throat.

The veins stood out on the Darkk's forehead as Amebron-

usucces slowly began to cut off the barbarian's intake of air. Buifra knew he would have to break that hold soon or he would eventually black out from lack of air, never to awaken again. With the sorcerer's weight and cloak both pinning him and entangling him, it was impossible for Buifra to reach his weapons. His ears were beginning to ring as his vision faded before him.

If he was going to escape, it would have to be by sheer strength alone. Then Buifra suddenly recalled a tactic that had been shown to him by an old Thekola, when the Darkk had been but a young lad. It was his last chance, for no more air was entering into his lungs, and all was a blood red haze that pounded like a hammer throughout his entire being. And still he stood upright, while the hands of the undead sorcerer closed tighter and tighter about his neck.

Choking with pain, Buifra clenched his hands into fists, making himself believe that they were as hard as rocks. He concentrated on that one thought; that his fists were blocks of stone, able to smash through anything. The red haze was now turning black, but still he continued to concentrate on the power of his fists. It was all he had to use. Concentrate, the witch-woman had told him, for the mind can sometimes be of more strength to the body than any sword or dagger.

Feeling his veins ready to burst with the strain of Amebronusucces' grip around his throat, Buifra swung his fists together to where he imagined the Chjem-kan's head to be. Then, with a sound comparable to a clay urn shattering, he smashed his rock hard fists against the head of Amebronusucces. Blacking out, Buifra prayed that the power of suggestion had as much strength as the Thekola had said it did. For if it did not, he would never awaken again to tell her so.

7

Groaning softly, Buifra slowly rolled away from the thing that lay still and silent in the sand, its head shattered like so much pottery. Cold sweat covered the Darkk's nerve racked form as he gulped down huge amounts of the cold night air. He felt for the marks on his throat that were forever to be a reminder of his first meeting with the un-

dead beings that inhabited various areas of all Omentis.

As he rose weakly to his feet, Buifra looked down at what lay before him, still entirely covered with the moulding cloth. He unscabbarded his ironite broadsword, for he was not going to take any more chances that the long dead Chjem-kan sorcerer might yet be capable of tearing and maiming for men's blood.

Through it all, the torches had remained burning, and pulling one loose from its niche in the tomb wall, Buifra took it with him to investigate what was left of Amebronusucces. Shuddering because of he knew not what, he tore the cloak away from the corpse with the tip of his sword. Then Buifra leaped back aghast, a blasphemous oath bursting from his lips, and the torch falling from his grasp. He had received his first good look at what had been his companion to this oasis of death.

Buifra's immediate thoughts were to run back to the coast again, far away from this bewitched lake and tomb. This he proceeded to do, his booted feet making little noise in the everlasting sands of Quanam.

For what had attacked him had not been a Zuttite, nor even a Chjem-kan, as he had heard them described. As beneath the burning cloth which had been set afire by the fallen torch lay no man, but an age blackened skeleton with the crushed skull of a wolf. The thing that had introduced itself to Buifra as Lamm Aneb.

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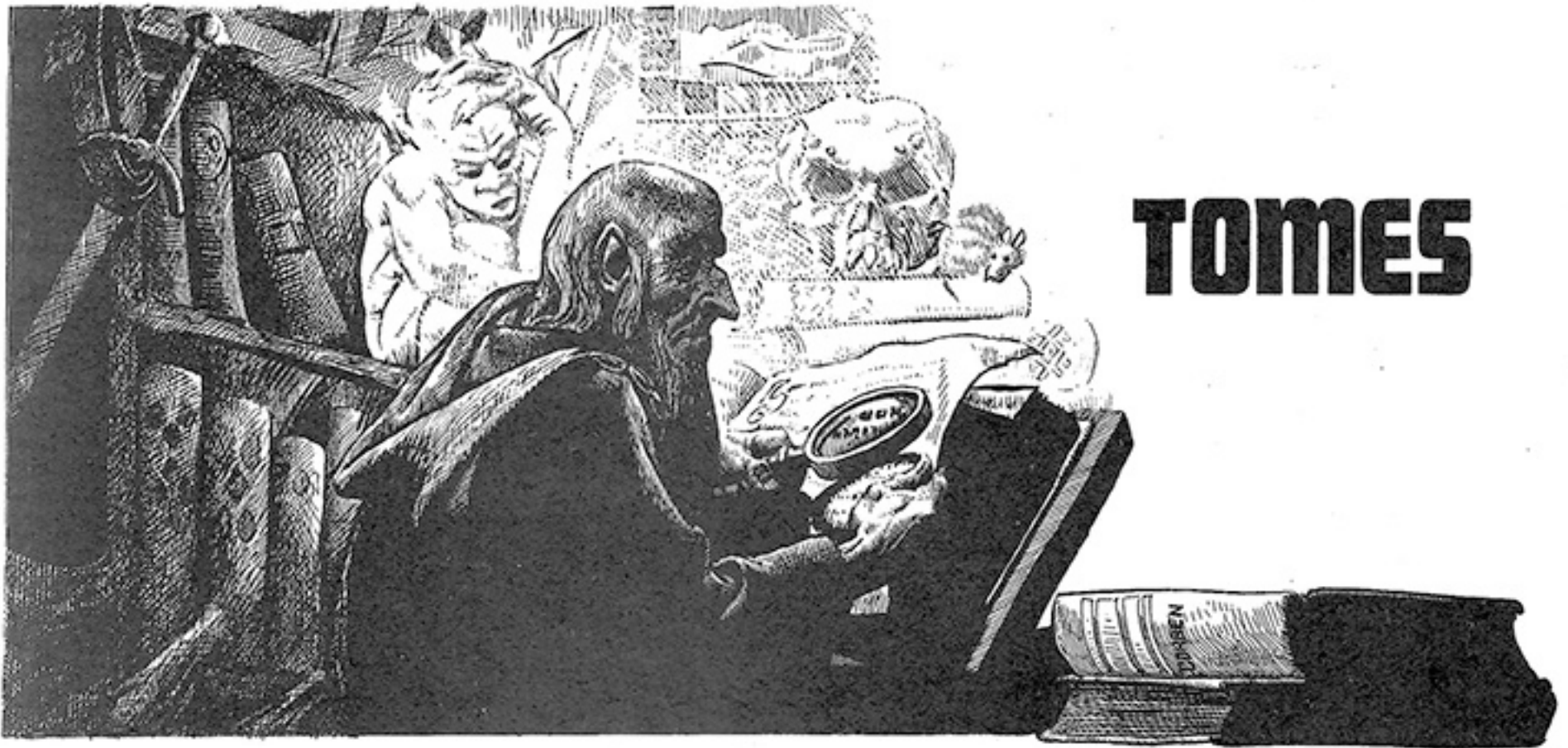
Buifra the Darkk was never sure of how he made it to Kiva alone, and without food or water. Nor did he actually care, for in Kiva he was safe for the moment. He remembered little of what had occurred in the day and night it took him to reach his originally planned destination, having been delirious at the time. There was but one thing that remained stuck in his memory, like a burr sticks upon a goat.

It was when he had been set upon by a pack of wild desert wolves. There had been six of them, yet he had killed them all without receiving a single wound. How he had been able to do it in his condition, he did not know. But for Buifra, it was something well worth remembering. And whatever happened before that, to him, was well worth forgetting.

THE END



TOMES



a book review by J.S. Strnad

In the infantile escape fantasy trash department we have *The Sorcerer's Ship* by Hannes Bok. Being a great fan of infantile escape fantasy trash, and also a great fan of Hannes Bok as an artist, I couldn't pass it up. The story, according to Emil Petaja, was originally purchased by John Campbell "because Bok threw in the art virtually for nothing." Somehow, when Ballantine got around to buying it for their Adult Fantasy series, they managed to avoid purchasing a single illo, and wrapped the book in an irrelevant cover by Ray Cruz. The cover, one of mermaids and sea serpents, manages to capture the flavor of the book to some degree, but totally misses as far as accuracy is concerned. I doubt that Mr. Cruz had ever heard of the book, let alone read it, when he painted the cover illustration; if Ballantine is going to ignore the fact that Bok should illustrate Bok, they should at least have had Mr. Cruz do something appropriate.

But they didn't, so all we're left with is the story itself. It isn't much, as far as heavy, thought-provoking reading matter goes, and isn't intended to be. In fact, overall the book tends toward an ultra-simplistic style typical of budding authors: standard plot, little transition from one emotion to the next, and sexual naivete. Still, Hannes Bok was no ordinary person, and his writing sporadically demonstrates the creative vision evident in his art.

Plot: An office clerk from New York finds himself mysteriously transported to another world, one of warring cities and sorcery. Falling in love with a princess, he must conquer the opposing city, prove his manhood, etc. etc. Enlisting the aid of a sorcerer, he hopes to defeat the invading city and to settle down with his princess--a laudable ambition for us all.

Amid this tepidity, however, occur at random small snatches of description and outright cleverness that produce a scintillating feeling of wonder in me. For instance, remember the classic Korda movie *The Thief of Baghdad*? With the winged horse and imprisoned genie and all? Hannes Bok creates this kind of magic, as opposed to the rather morbid 7th Voyage of Sinbad, Robert E. Howard, Frank Frazetta sort of thing. Not that I necessarily prefer one or the other; it's just that there are so many REH/FF sorts now, and so few (if any) Hannes Bok/Korda sorts. I like Bok's conception of sorcery: small clay figures that are brought to life, paper birds that fly under their own power, mystic illusions, and the like. But all is not Pollyanna-ish romping with magic, for he also includes one of the most gruesome giant monsters (constructed from mangled corpses) yet described by an s&s author.

The ending is as ridiculous as the beginning and middle--deviating from the standard but no less naive. But the book is such a short, easy trip that I found it well worthwhile spending the moments to breathe air a little different from that found elsewhere.

and a couple by Mark Cole

The first book this time around is by a Welsh writer, I.P. Davies. The title is *Psychogeist* and it is going to be rather difficult to review since it is undoubtedly one of the best structured and developed books I have read. This is the first book that I have ever felt truly deserved to be said to "unfold", and the feeling can only be compared to that experienced when watching one of those old nature films showing a flower bloom. To try to explain the book without destroying this growth, I'll tell it this way: all the action in the book takes place in the present on Earth, but the reader is also made aware of events "on a faraway planet, a million lightyears away, somewhere on the dark lonely fringes of the galaxy, in a cavern deep in the heart of the Mountains of the Lost Moon." As for its appeal, ex- and present comic fans should be particularly drawn to this book since its story is, in a very real sense, influenced by comics. Admittedly, the old earthling sleeps / alien awakes style plot is overused, but it receives here a new twist that saves it and should be of special interest to any psychologists in the audience. After reading through chapter 11 you'll be hooked on this book and on the creative Mr. Davies.

The second book is one of those books we seldom find in modern science fiction--a good translation. Written in French by Robert Merle, *The Day of the Dolphins* was translated into English by Helen Weaver. To begin, let me say that any of you who are interested in dolphins and other cetaceans (look it up) because of *Flipper*, *Namu the Killer-Whale*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and assorted Ivan Tors productions can forget the book right now; any of you interested despite the aforementioned will find this book perfect. It is a mature, believable story about research with dolphins, governmental intrigues and back-stabbing, the first dolphins to learn English, and the crisis that might cause World War III. Be warned before you begin though, if you are not the least political this may not be your bag of cetaceans, because there is nearly as much attention paid to hawks and doves as to dolphins. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the book is the section dealing with U.S. and world reaction to American scientists communicating with dolphins. Here, the author creates political, religious, and sociological persons and events as real as any in today's news magazines. He doesn't merely picture America's ethnocentric prides and prejudices, but its speed to adapt its culture to embrace new heroes as well. When one adds some stylistic devices too original to explain here (such as the use of commas instead of periods for whole paragraphs) the book becomes what is tritely called a "must". In conclusion, if after you finish this book you don't find yourself sitting and quietly contemplating what a botched-up world we have, you better get help quick.

Got a hidden classic by an obscure author that you think should be shared with the world? Let us know!