

Under the Moons of Jizma

by Michael Andre-Driussi

To the Reader of this Work:

In submitting Doctor Lee's curious manuscript to you, I believe a few notes are in order. First of all, even though my uncle Doctor Lee has been legally pronounced deceased as of last year, I cannot be certain that he will not visit me tomorrow. Secondly, among my inheritance from him was a thick sheaf of handwritten pages, un-numbered, and varying greatly in legibility. So while I am not, strictly speaking, the author of this tale, it would be dishonest of me to claim that I was not its editor, arranging it into the form you have before you now.

Yours very sincerely,

Norm L. Bean (1912)

Narrator's prologue

I am old, rendered ancient beyond my years by the curious adventures I am about to relate. Looking at my withered frame you would be hard pressed to believe that I am only nine and thirty years--I might easily pass for a man twice that age.

I was born in 1857, heir to a modest plantation in Virginia. My inheritance was destroyed before my tenth year by the War, yet my family's pride and sacrifice sent me to Harvard. I graduated in 1879 with a few awards for pistol marksmanship and a degree in Chemistry, following in the footsteps of my late father, a gentleman-scientist of the old school. Upon returning to my ancestral home I was struck with a new appreciation of how much had been lost, and I renewed my determination to rebuild the family fortune.

Eight years went by, during which I obtained a license and became Pharmacist in a town forgotten by the Reconstruction. My only consolation was the regular correspondence with my college chum Teddy, who was first in New York City, then in the Dakota territory where he sought solace for a few years after losing his wife and his mother, then in New York again. Both of us longed for excitement and felt that life was passing us by--the railroads had already reached the Far West, signaling that the last Heroic Age was almost over.

But then in 1887 I received the call to adventure. My employer, Mr. Bradley Martin, had determined in the course of reading a few volumes of quaint and curious lore that the Age of Alcohol was nearly over and that a brand new world of soft drinks, women's suffrage, and free love was about to dawn.

"Look at Pemberton down in Atlanta," he said. "Coca-cola. Folks down there going crazy for it. I'm telling you, Will, it's going to get even bigger. Then there's Alderton out there in Waco, Texas, calls his concoction 'Doctor Pepper.' Hell, I *know* Doc Pepper--he prefers prune juice. You got the Women's Christian Temperance Union over in Ohio pushing for an end to alcohol, and you know it? They're going to win. But people have to drink something, so they'll come in here for a soda. We'll replace the saloons, get it?

"But we need something special, something new. Root beer just ain't going to cut it. We need a 'secret

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ingredient.' Ol' Pemberton is probably using a mite of cocaine in his drink, gives a body a healthy zip. Even the Brits are getting in on this--look at Schweppes and their tonic water, that's got quinine-malaria medicine. We need something unique, and the key is hidden somewhere in South America. Like the coca plant. The Amazon jungle must be overflowing with undiscovered treasures--who knows what secrets died with the Mayans and the Incas? Ah, if I were only younger, I'd set out for adventure to make my fortune..."

Wlm. Lee (1896)

My Adventure Begins

The mighty Amazon, Father of all Rivers, snaking through a colossal jungle so dark-green as to be almost black. At Bele'm I caught a steamboat heading upriver. I could feel the heat closing in every time the sun rose, and the equatorial humidity made the air so thick I thought I might swim in it. I felt as though, instead of going to the center of a continent, I were about to set off for another world entirely. I badly missed Teddy, sorry that he could not join me on this trip.

Nearly a week later I arrived at Manaus, in the heart of the jungle. It is the only major city within six hundred miles and was experiencing an economic boom in wild-rubber. That was my cover story--should anybody ask, I was there to harvest rubber; but the place was so full of adventurers and fortune-hunters that I felt I could pass amongst them unnoticed.

My Portuguese was even worse than my Spanish, however, so I sought out a physician in the hopes that his English (or Latin, should it come to that) would prove sufficient for communication. As luck would have it, I found a Doctor Monygham.

"I would guess, *senhor*, " he said, after I had introduced myself, "that you have not come to Manaus for the *borracha*, the rubber, eh? You search instead for the medicine, do you not?" My surprise must have been immediately evident, since he laughed out loud.

"How could you...?" I asked.

"You come from a good family," he explained. "Not like these desperados. You are a man of science, like me. But most important, you lack the gleam of gold in your eye. Besides, you are not working for Madame Sosostriis."

"Sosostriis'?" The name sounded vaguely familiar. I thought of Mr. Bradley Martin's small library.

" *Não tem importancia*, even if you are, I tell you the same thing. Here, take the easy one and go back home. There is a vine called by the savages 'Yage' or 'Ayahuaska'; our term is *bannisteria caapi*. It is a powerful narcotic--the medicine men use it for visions. Who knows? It may be the next morphine. Dried samples are totally inert, so take some vine clippings back to your home and plant them."

"You said that was the easy one. What else is there?"

"The hard one. It is like chasing a ghost..."

"What is it?"

The doctor sighed. "There is a legend that far to the south of here there is an old medicine woman called Lupita. She lives in a cave and has ancient knowledge. But this is only a legend."

"I choose the hard way," I said. "I must find Lupita."

"But remember Ponce de Leon," said the doctor. "He too chased after a legend, and paid for it with his life."

"Schliemann found Troy nearly twenty years ago, doctor, but until that time it was thought to be only legendary as well. Can you help me find Lupita?"

"Yes, I will do what I can," he said. "It will cost money, but it will cost more than that, much more." From a desk drawer he withdrew a large pair of calipers. "I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there..."

"And when they come back, too?"

"Oh, I never see them," he said. "Besides, the changes take place inside, you know." He smiled, as if at some quiet joke.

After jotting down the measurements, he advised me to go back to the hotel and promised to send someone for me in a few days.

At the Heart of Darkness

My guide was dead, I was nearly out of bullets, and the nameless jungle savages were gaining on me. Blindly I crashed through the overgrowth, seeking higher ground to make my last stand. As I scrambled up the steep slope of a hill, arrows began to rain down around me, so when a cave mouth appeared I gratefully dove into it. Frantically I reloaded my S&W Safety Hammerless revolver for the last time and waited for the attack. The longest minutes of my life went by, but the attack didn't come. I heard a scuffling sound in the cave behind me and turned to see a weird, macabre sight. There was a tripod filled with something that gave off an eerie phosphorescent glow, and beside this was some kind of couch with a bundle of rags upon it. Glancing around I noticed at least a dozen bundles of honeycomb which had obviously been brought here by others, and I surmised that this chamber must be some sort of temple or shrine.

After I had taken a few steps closer I realized that the 'rags' I had seen were actually the mummified remains of a woman lying upon the couch, arms and legs akimbo. The corpse was naked except for some elaborate jewelry, and her shriveled lips exposed long yellow canines--could this be 'Lupita,' the little she-wolf?

I turned to examine the glowing powder more closely. As I reached in to pick some up, the pile shifted and I suddenly found a foot-long centipede wrapped around my arm, its head in my fist, its tail whipping around searching for purchase.

When the stinger struck home there was a moment of pain followed by a wave of heat spreading from my arm throughout my body. I threw the centipede away from me and noticed a few others already scurrying around. Despite this, a sense of delicious dreaminess overcame me, and my muscles relaxed. Unable to

stand, I tried to sit upon the couch but ended up sprawling onto it. Even face to face with the grinning horror of Lupita I could do nothing but look away toward the cave mouth. I felt my heartbeat slow. The day went by in what seemed to be only a few minutes; the night went by even faster as my heartbeat continued to slow until finally, sometime before dawn, it stopped altogether. For a moment I stood outside my body, looking down upon it as if from a vantage point on the ceiling. Then there was an instant of extreme cold and utter darkness.

The Master Mind of Jizma

I must have closed my eyes involuntarily during the transition through the ether, for when I opened them I was lying naked and prone on the cold tiled floor of a small room. A few yards away were the corpses of a boy and girl, both red-skinned and lacking craniums. A hellish baboon-like creature with six limbs seemed to be in the process of devouring their exposed brains, while standing over me with a mystified expression was the strangest looking individual I had ever seen, a man as red as an Indian and as shriveled as Methuselah.

A small, dirty window high up let in a bit of weak light, but the room was well lit by unearthly bars of light set in the ceiling. The man, who wore a blood-stained apron like that of a butcher, spoke to me in an unintelligible language that sounded for all the world like the various noises that insects make. I watched in horror as the baboon-thing scooped out the brains of first one corpse, then the other, dropping them to lie upon the filthy floor. The man continued trying to communicate with me, shifting into a variety of languages that sounded vaguely like Arabic or Greek. Finally he said, "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*"

"No," I responded, sitting up. "I speak English." His eyes lit up. The ghoul beside him noticed me for the first time and bared its prodigious teeth at me.

"Ah, English," said the man, gesturing the creature to step aside. "Very like German, yes? Me, Herr Doctor Benway," he thumped his chest. "This"--he gestured to the ghoul--"is mine assistant, Hovan." The beast touched its forehead and bowed. "And *du?* Who are you?"

"I am William Lee."

"*Wiggle'em Lie?*"

"No, William Lee."

"Too hard. I call you Will," he said. "You mind I work?" I had no answer, so he squatted down and picked up the boy's brain. "Very good. Now please to tell me where from you come?"

"I am from Virginia," I said.

"Va-jinya, Va-jinya," he mused as he put the brain into the girl's body and drove a strange silver instrument up the nostril of the corpse. "No, I have never heard of that place." He twiddled the instrument around several times, then turned to re-attach the cranium with what appeared to be a kind of glue.

"It is in America," I offered.

"Never heard of that place either. No matter, many places I know not. So, Will, what can I do you for?"

When I failed to answer, he added, "And how did you manage to get in through the locked door, anyway?"

"I woke up here."

"The room was empty before, and the door is still locked," he said as he performed the same operation on the other corpse. "What, are you some kind of *gigim*? A ghost?" He looked up in surprise. "Is that what your name is, Will Gigim?"

"No, I am not a ghost--at least, I don't think I am."

"Well you look pale enough to be a *gigim*," he said, continuing at his labor. "Maybe you are sick. Or maybe you just need a new body. I'd have to charge you full-price, since the resale value of the one you have now would be virtually nil--except as a curiosity, perhaps."

"No," I said. "I am happy with the body I have now." After resealing the second skull, he stood up and stretched. "Nurse, sew them up, revive them, and get them out of here. Our rental time runs out. Meet us back at the house when you are through." To me he said, "Come along." He unlocked the door. "We can look among new bodies for you, if nothing else." I hesitated.

"Surely you cannot stay here," he said. "And where else do you have to go?" There was truth in what he said, so I followed him into a cavernous room bustling with well-armed red men and women all scantily clad with leather harnesses. The women were as willowy and lissome as adolescent girls. I hid my nakedness until my patron lent me his apron to wear. We boarded a bullet-shaped vehicle that apparently operates on the pneumatic principle, travelling in excess of one hundred miles per hour to emerge in another cavernous room roughly forty-five minutes later. Following Benway's example, I leapt over a little hurdle and jogged behind him up a ramp spiraling to the surface where a stunning vision stopped me in my tracks: for there was the Moon, but it was too small; and even as I grappled with this intelligence, another moon, even smaller, shot across the sky.

"Where is this place?" I ejaculated, bewildered by the slender towers and the eggshell domes.

"Why, Annexia, of course," said Benway. "Lesser Freedonia."

"What planet?"

"*Planet?!* " cried Benway. "Do not become spooky on me, Will Gigim. This is planet Jizma, fourth from the Sun."

Linn of Mavrosia

I became a part of Benway's mansion menagerie, but once I exhibited my pharmaceutical knowledge I was graduated to staff. The aboveground structure was simple and slightly ruinous; the subterranean chambers held a few dozen bodies heaped about in disarray, preserved by an exotic embalming fluid the composition of which was known only to the Master Mind himself.

Days ran into weeks, weeks into months, as day by day I labored at the side of Benway, and more and more the old surgeon took me into his confidence, imparting to me the secrets of his skill and his profession. I quickly learned the Jizmatic language, which seems remarkably similar to ancient Greek, but

since Hovan lacked the vocal chords necessary for speech I had no one to talk to or confide in. One day a remarkable creature came to the mansion, a talking *gaidaros* or Jizmatic ass that introduced itself as "Linn" and asked to have audience with Benway. At their meeting, the gold colored *gaidaros* abased itself before Benway, begging for its former body and shedding copious tears. It was heartbreaking, and I immediately sided with Linn, wondering which of the svelte corpses in the chambers beneath us was hers.

Benway was not moved. "Linn, this was the punishment meted out to you by Ayssa, Empress of Mavrosia. You should not have thwarted Her, or thought that you could do so with impunity. Your attractive body, which She coveted, was taken from you and now you reside in the body of an ass until the end of your days several centuries hence, or until such time as Ayssa commutes your sentence." He paused for a moment, chin in hand. "In the unlikely event that She does grant you such a mercy, you would want to be close at hand in order to quickly regain your old shell. To help you in this, I offer to take you into my stable as a beast of burden, but heed this warning: do not speak to me again of betraying the desires of Ayssa, or I shall turn you out into the world to fend for yourself." In this manner Linn came to be my constant companion. Her body was not among those in our catacombs, but was kept by the fearful and despotic Ayssa, Queen of a far off land. In the weeks that followed I had seen much of Linn and in our daily intercourse there had been revealed to me little by little the wondrous beauties of her soul, until at last I no longer saw the dumb face of a donkey when I looked upon her, but a sweet mind peering out through those deep brown eyes. I resolved to secretly transplant that brain into the hebetic body of her choice, but when I broached the subject she was horrified and professed to wanting no body other than the one she was born with. I vowed to accomplish this seemingly impossible task.

Across the Floors of Seas Long Dead

There was a great deal of confusion in the aftermath of the raid. Benway was captured or fled for parts unknown, his mansion laboratory was in flames, and Linn and I were out on the streets of lesser Annexia without a roof over our heads, nor any money. All we had, in fact, aside from my harness and short sword, were a few scalpels and a small pot of the copper-colored skin paint which, when applied to my pale skin, allowed me to pass as a red Jizmatic.

It seemed like an opportune time to set out for Mavrosia, but we needed provisions for such an arduous trek across the wastelands. Manual labor did not offer enough money, nor could I find any use for my new talents as surgeon since I knew nobody in the sprawling metropolis outside of the mansion. We soon hit upon a form of streetside theater, playing upon Linn's unusual talents, and became minstrels for a few weeks until we had scrapped together enough money to outfit ourselves. And then we set out. Although there was a great deal of hardship out on the desolate plains, those were perhaps the happiest of my days on Jizma. As we walked side by side, Linn told me of Jizma, its history and peoples, thus filling in my sketchy knowledge.

"Jizma has been settled by different races from different stars throughout the aeons. The first to arrive were the black-skinned Rmoahals, who call themselves the 'First Born' of Jizma. Their place of origin is unknown, either lost to the sands of time or a secret guarded by death. Next came the golden Draconians and the pale Arians."

"Arians?" I asked, my blood warming.

"Yes, from Aries. When I first saw you, I supposed you might be one of them, returned from a nearly forgotten time, since they have been extinct for hundreds of thousands of years. Of course, now I believe

your story, that you come from the planet Pyosis."

"Tell me of the Arians," I pressed. "How did they come to die off?"

"Legends say that they were not originally so ghost-like in complexion, they were more tan or brown. A terrible war was fought and lost, and the Arians were driven into deep caves while their continent was locked in an ice-age. This was in that remote time before the oceans dried up.

"Deep in these caves, the Arians had so little food that they had to resort to cannibalism, which is horror enough in itself, but in their case was even worse--since the first generation had been contaminated with *taqa*, or glowing-energy-poison, by eating this poisoned flesh they cursed themselves. They practiced unholy rites, as well, and developed strange new sorceries--including language. When at last they emerged from their ice-bound caves, they were pale from lack of sunlight and crazed from their poisons. They conquered all of Jizma."

"Then what happened?"

"As a last-ditch effort, the First Born and the Draconians unleashed the dreaded *ak-karu*, green newtmen of Puuntango [our Venus]. These terrible creatures killed indiscriminately, exterminating the Arians and driving all the others into the high-walled cities we still live in. The modern Jizmatic race of red men arose from the co-mingling of survivor races."

"How were the *ak-karu* halted?"

"The seas dried up," said Linn, flicking her head around to indicate the dry sea bed around us. "The newtmen are amphibious and need water to birth their young. The adults are slower on land, so the fighting is more evenly matched."

"Are they oviparous, like the red men?" I asked.

"Oviparous'? I suppose you could call the Jizmatic method something like that, since it does take place outside of the body. We usually call it *efevresis*. "

We ran out of food with one-third of the way left ahead of us. Linn was able to eke out some sustenance from the ocher lichen that was always underfoot, but I began to starve. We began resting during the heat of the day and traveling at night to conserve energy, but on the third such evening I fell and had a difficult time getting up again.

"Will, please ride me," said Linn. "Let me carry you."

"No, Linn," I mumbled. "I can't do that."

"Oh 'Iron Will,' you must bend a little," Linn continued, butting my arm with her nose. "The packs are empty now, your weight would not be so great."

"But it would be so degrading for you, treating you like an animal..."

"Think of how often I have relied upon your arms. Now is the time to rely upon my legs to get us through this rough spot."

At last I relented and mounted the finest golden ass of Jizma, and then, having done so, I nearly shed a tear for Linn's incomparable sense of self-sacrifice before I passed out from exhaustion.

Prisoners of the Green Jizmatics

The firearms of Jizma are wondrous marvels of advanced technology. Rather than having a metallic cartridge case, the bullet is embedded in a solid cake of propellant which is consumed when the bullet is fired. Reloading is quick and easy and since there is no ejection port, the weapon is completely sealed against the elements. The bullets themselves are of small caliber, making weapon recoil slight, but they are imbued with the explosive power of taqa, lending man-stopping power to a diminutive slug. Thus, there was no contest when we found ourselves looking down the wrong end of a dozen rifles after quenching our thirst at an oasis. We surrendered to the newtmen. Linn and I were separated and the party moved off across the desert at a gallop toward a hill on the horizon. It so happened that this hill had for its crown the ruins of an ancient sea port. As we neared the plaza of the dead city my presence was discovered and we were immediately surrounded by several dozen of the creatures, who seemed anxious to pluck me from my seat behind my guard. A word from the leader stilled their clamor and we proceeded at a trot across the plaza to the entrance of a palace that was magnificent even in death.

The edifice was low but covered an enormous area. It was constructed of white marble inlaid with gold and brilliant stones which sparkled in the sunlight. The entrance was some hundred feet in width, and a gentle incline to the second floor opened onto an enormous chamber encircled by galleries. On the floor of this chamber were assembled about forty or fifty male green Jizmatics around the steps of a dias covered with Aztec mosaics. Murals indicated that this once proud city had been built by the ancient Arians, yet now it was merely a temporary shelter for nomadic tribes and the air was cloyed with a sweet evil substance like decayed honey.

On the platform itself squatted an enormous green warrior festooned with metal ornaments, gay-colored feathers and beautifully wrought leather trappings. His lips were thin and purple-blue, slightly beaked like that of a snapping turtle, and his eyes were blank with insect calm. From his shoulders hung a short cape of white fur lined with brilliant scarlet silk.

The ideas of humor among the green men of Jizma are widely at variance with our concepts, as I was about to learn. The death agonies of a comrade are, to these strange creatures, cause of the wildest hilarity, while their main form of amusement is to inflict death upon their prisoners of war in various ingenious and horrible ways. Their laughter signifies torture, suffering, and death. A guard brought out a pale white boy, the sight of which caused a surge of recognition throughout the chamber--an age-long racial hatred among the green men, whereas I felt a sense of kinship for the lad. The leader tied the boy's hands behind him with a red silk cord. An assistant parted the silk curtains, revealing a gallows on the dais, and the leader propelled the Arian boy up the steps and under the noose.

The boy struggled valiantly but was easily subdued by the green man who towered nearly four feet over him. The leader slipped the noose over the boy's head and tightened the knot. The boy looked straight, ahead breathing deeply. The green Jizmatic began striking at the boy's back with his tail, lightly at first, but then flailing savagely until it seemed that the lad would faint and strangle himself. Then, tired of playing, the laughing tormentor reached down and snapped the boy's neck, and at this grisly climax the members of his inner circle moved in to feed upon the victim's essence. The horror! The horror!

I looked away from this ghoulish feast and realized with sickening dread that I would be next in the

afternoon's entertainment. I wheeled around with my back to the nearest pillar, expecting to be overwhelmed but determined to give them as good a battle as the unequal odds would permit before I gave up my life.

Things were at their grimmest. Linn was at my side, protecting my flank with bone-breaking kicks, while I emptied the magazines of every pistol I could lay hand to with deadly accuracy, and though the bodies piled up around us, still they kept coming. Then, suddenly, a series of terrific explosions sounded outside, and before long a hundred ebony-skinned warriors flowed into the palace, cutting down the awful green men in their wake with sword-and-gun play. When they caught sight of the hanged boy, their fighting took on a new fury.

Within minutes the massacre was over. As a group of the victors moved to cut down the boy and others began the looting of the dead, their commander shouted over to us, "You there! Who are you? Friend of the newtmen or foe?"

"Foe," I answered, advancing slowly with my hands up. "I was next in line for the gallows, I am afraid."

"Hold," he said. "You wear the trappings of Freedonia."

"We are simple entertainers from Annexia," I explained.

"'We'?" he asked, looking around for other red men.

"This gaidaros and I," I said. "We were travelling to a distant place and captured on our way by these monsters. Thank you for saving us."

"But we are at war with Freedonia," he said, drawing his pistol. "So you are our prisoner. Or prisoners. You can save your stories for the Empress."

At this point, Linn spoke up. "Iron Will, meet Steelie Dan, Lord Captain of the Black Pirates of Jizma. Steelie Dan, meet Iron Will, the man from Pyosis."

Queen of Life and Death

The pirates took us aboard their fantastic airships which operated by a cosmic force unknown to Earth science. The landscape below raced by in excess of two hundred miles per hour as my savior-captors forced me to remove the remaining red paint from my skin. Dawn found us descending over the ruins of Koreh, a vast city in a broad mountain valley across the equator and nearly half-way around the world from Freedonia. It offered a sight both imposing and melancholic--mile after mile of toppled columns, demolished temples, and crumbling palaces scattered throughout the green of an unleashed vegetation that seemed out of place on this arid world.

But it was not entirely abandoned. The ships quickly landed and I was escorted into a temple where, standing before a burnished throne that shone like beaten gold, stood a glorious and regal figure. I must have become overly accustomed to the adolescent physiques of Jizmatic women in my several months on their world, for the sight of a full-figured woman made me literally dumb with wonder. Her long thick hair fell in dark tapering ringlets on her lovely white neck. Just above her brow shown a round disk. Her many-colored robe was of fine linen; part was white, part yellow, part red. But what caught and held my

eye more than anything else was the deep black luster of her mantle, slung from shoulder to hip, and embroidered with glittering stars on the hem.

"My Queen," said Steelie Dan, bowing low. "Prince Kerz, he is dead." With a low moan Ayssa sat down upon the throne. I was torn by a storm of conflicting emotions--this creature was more than a queen, she was a goddess incarnate. But what of Linn? The base impulses of my heart were grappling with the more noble aspirations of my mind.

"All is not lost," continued Steelie Dan. "We brought his body back. And by strange chance and coincidence we captured a white madman who wears the harness of Freedonia yet claims to be from Pyosis."

I stepped forward, but before I could utter a salutation her blue eyes flashed with fire and she bolted upright.

"You!" she cried. "Marcus!"

"O Queen Ayssa, I am William Lee of Earth, third planet from the sun," I said, suddenly finding my tongue. "I set out from Lesser Annexia in the company of Linn the talking ass with the single purpose of journeying to your court in order to beg of you to show mercy upon your subject and return Linn's brain to its previous body."

Her gaze cooled considerably. "So, the proud Polluxian is behind this? Is Linn here? Bring the beast at once!" Then she turned to me again. "Why is your skin so pale? Are you a Polluxian like Linn? Or perhaps a Spician?"

"No, my Queen," I said. "I am a Virginian, from Pyosis."

"A Virgoan colony on Pyosis?" she said, arching an eyebrow. "What a novel thought. Perhaps you are mad."

Ayssa Unveiled

Once we were alone in her private chambers, Ayssa turned to me and said, "How are things in Rome these days?" It was another shock, since she had spoken to me in Latin!

I answered in kind, saying, "I know not, my Queen, since Rome lies far to the east of my country, across the ocean."

"Ah, so you come from the Hesperides," she said in Greek, smiling. "And how fares the mighty Republic?"

How prospers the family of Caesar?"

"The family of Caesar is long extinct, O Queen," I responded, struggling to keep up.

"And his Republic?"

"Long faded, O Queen."

"How long ago?" she asked in the Jizmatic tongue. "Of what year is the city? I would guess it to be nearly 940 years of age."

"I know not the age of Rome, my Queen," I said. "But nearly two millennia have passed since the death of Caesar."

"You lie!" she shouted.

"No, mighty Queen."

"Heed me, mortal," she said. "I will not be toyed with. If this be some elaborate jape, your fate is sealed with a death undreamt by the newtmen. Your miserable, worthless life hangs by the slenderest of threads. Now tell me the whole of your life and adventure, I command it!" Cast in a role like that of Scheherezade, but compelled to truth rather than fabrication, I told of the adventures and misadventures which had led me from my ancestral home of Virginia through the jungles of the Amazon to my advent upon Mars.

"You materialized in a public lavatory?" she asked.

"Yes, O Queen," I answered. "At the Pneumatic Tube Station of Greater Annexia."

"Continue," she commanded.

I told of my apprenticeship under Benway, Master Mind of Jizma, which abruptly terminated with the raid by the Health Police, then of my desert trek with Linn.

"You seem rather fond of Linn," said Ayssa.

"I am," I declared. "Linn has been my best and truest friend on Jizma."

"Might your feelings for Linn be described as love?"

"Yes, they might," I said, feeling anew that tangle of emotions.

"Do you think Linn more beautiful than I?" she said, arching her back slightly.

"No," I stammered. "Of course not, O Queen. You are more beautiful than anyone."

"Perhaps you only say that because I hold your life in my hand," she said softly with a wan smile.

"Continue with your account."

I did so. As I finished, who should be escorted into the chamber but Benway himself, summoned by way of wireless telephony and transported by swift airship. He immediately prostrated himself upon the floor and cried, "Hail Empress Ayssa, Queen of Life and Death! This slave is yours to dispose of."

"Arise, Benway," she said. "Behold this man--do you know him?" The Master Mind turned to me and his docile expression gave way to the astonishment of recognition.

"You!" he ejaculated. "Will Gigim! Are you truly a ghost this time?"

"Silence, Will," said Ayssa. "Doctor, answer the question." Benway corroborated my story as I stood by in silence.

"Explain the raid," she said.

"Either the Health and Hygiene League or Security Troops from the Ministry of Health. Whichever one, the hand of Pretender Koyotel is behind it."

"Koyotel!" she cursed. "We should have killed her long ago. How is her power?"

"She now controls the Ministries of Health and Labor and seems to have succeeded in bending the ear of her husband the King. I fear an expedition fleet is being assembled against us."

"Why did you not tell me this before?" demanded Ayssa. "Why did you not bring this man Will to me immediately?"

"A thousand excuses leap to my tongue," said Benway after a pause. "But none of them dare to face thee, O Queen. Kill me now, if you wish."

"I hope that your skills as scientist will be more useful than your skills as spy. I charge you to your workshop to create the armies of synthetic men you have promised me. With them we may be able to fend off the Freedomian attack. Without them we are doomed. Go."

"Yes, O Queen," said Benway, prostrating himself again. "With the assistance of Will I can achieve this goal in half the time..."

"I will send him soon--now go!"

Once we were alone again, Ayssa turned to me. "Will, I am impressed with your story. There are some details which yet puzzle me, but there are many things you have spoken of which are unknown to the people of Jizma. I, too, am from Earth, but this is a closely guarded secret. You must swear to tell no one!"

I swore upon my honor, and then she sketched for me her own fantastic adventure, of how she had died in a manner similar to me (in her case, the bite of an aquatic centipede) and awoke among the ruins of Koreh. Her materialization was witnessed by the black pirates using the area as their base, and they had readily accepted her as a goddess.

"You have called me beautiful, such as men have named me on both worlds," she said. "But I have not changed a bit since the day I woke up here, and that was some two hundred and thirteen years ago!"

A Race Against Time

Linn's surgical transfer was preceded by a simple yet curious ceremony of atonement. In a large assembly hall filled with the few hundred of her subjects, Ayssa held out a single red rose. Linn approached slowly, bowed deeply, and then ate the rose from her hand. Benway led Linn away for the operation and I went back to work on the vats.

Several hours later I stumbled into the Queen's dining chamber by previous appointment. Ayssa, Benway,

and Stealie Dan were already seated. I apologized for being late.

"How did the surgery go?" I asked Benway as one of Ayssa's half-dozen or so white princes acted as server.

"Well, very well," Benway answered. "But what of your work?"

"It progresses, but slowly." We then launched into a technical discussion of growing tissue in vat cultures, a conversation that lasted for most of the meal. I had noticed the lad attending us kept trying to make eye contact with me, and was getting slightly annoyed at him. As the scientific talk died down, I returned to the previous subject.

"So tell me, doctor, how is the patient? I am surprised that Linn did not join us for supper."

"Ah, but Linn did join us," said the Master Mind, a laugh on his lips. With a sweep of his hand he indicated our waiter. "Iron Will, meet Prince Linn of the Polluxi. Prince Linn, meet Iron Will of Pyosis." No doubt my face showed some fraction of the surprise and horror I felt. The others began laughing loudly, and Linn fled the room in shame.

"What...have you done?" I finally managed to blurt out.

"Exactly what you asked me to do--I returned Linn's brain to his original body. Do you not like him? Is he not a fine specimen?"

"O my Will, what visions I have seen!" cried Ayssa. "Methought you were enamored of an ass." She redoubled her laughter.

Suddenly my crisis of rage and confusion dissolved in catharsis; and realizing that my feelings for Linn had always been those of comradeship or brotherly love rather than any other kind, I laughed along with them.

My heart and mind were now drawn to one object, the peerless Ayssa, and by some strange magic, she too was drawn to me. I vowed to be her slave and she offered me marriage instead, speaking of how we would found a new race on Jizma, the Fifth Race of prophesy.

"A virile race of kings," she murmured when we were back in her private chambers after the ceremony.

"We will sweep clean this decadent planet, uniting all under our banner. We will shun *efevresis* in favor of our old Earth magic. Let the subject races hatch and decant their pathetic offspring, ours will be born. You see, Will, this has been my secret, I am the only real woman on this world. Do you understand?"

They have forgotten, in their racial senility. We have that which they lack. Jizma is a no-man's world, and I have been so lonely, ever so lonely without you, but now you are here."

"Yes, my Ayssa."

"Ayssa' is just a title," she said. "When we are alone together, you may call me Thea, since that is my name. Now look, Will, see here the sign of our new race." She drew a circle with a cross inside. "By this sign shall we conquer Jizma with Earth magic..."

The Pillar of Light

Having never been in battle before, I have difficulty expressing the horror and confusion that met us on the morning when the attack finally came. By the time I arrived on the scene, several of our pirate vessels lay destroyed on the ground, while the others had either fled or were fighting beyond the valley wall. Drifting across the sky was a fearsome armada flying the crossed hammer-and-sword of Freedonia, slowly moving in for the kill. Explosive projectiles were going off all around, from the sharp cracks of the small arms up through to the thunderous blasts of heavy ordnance.

Since even our rifles were useless against the ship hulls, Linn and I were desperately trying to prevent ships from landing and discharging troops by waiting until they came in close and then spraying the decks with rapid fire. Nearby, our only heavy gun emplacement was valiantly hammering away at the Freedonian ships with one-inch-diameter bullets. A stream of these potent projectiles managed to tear a gash in the buoyancy tank of a ship maneuvering to land, and it plummeted into the tangle of jungle covered ruins. The crew of another enemy ship struggled to extinguish a deck fire while Linn and I tried to keep them from succeeding.

A few pirate vessels swooped into view from the west, giving us hope, but then our heavy gun fell suddenly silent. The gunner had been killed, but the gun itself appeared to be operable, and since it was all that we had, I ran over to man it myself.

I never got there. Instead I ran into what I can only describe as a pillar of light. There was pain, a great deal of pain. I saw my life flash before my eyes, the past, the present, and even the future...

"...in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there..." A game of Jizmatic chess, red against white, where pieces can turncoat unexpectedly... Koyotel snarled, "Die, Conquistador! Die!"...

...Jizma is only the outer plain, threshold to the astral plain...

Ayssa held out a single red rose...

"What, are you some kind of *gigim*? A ghost..."

Finally, the whiteness became so white that it was black.

The Embrace of Death

It was dawn when I opened my eyes again, awakened by the sound of my own death-rattle. My mouth was full of dust and strange, stiff garments were upon my body; garments that cracked into powder as I rose to a sitting posture.

As I comprehended the desiccated corpse on the couch beside me I realized that I was back in the cave of Lupita. My death on Jizma had sent me back to Earth! But I was as weak as a newborn babe. It took all of my energy and a good part of the morning to crawl across the cave to where the bundles of wild honey sat, offerings to savage gods unnamed. As I reached for the honey, I saw my own hand for the first time and was horrified to see its shrunken and macerated appearance. I had somehow been mummified!

I will not bore you with the details of my return to civilization. Suffice to say, after gorging myself upon

honey and rainwater for three days, I emerged from the cave and made my way north. When I arrived at the town of Manaus I found it greatly expanded, more than I thought possible in the year or so I had been away. Dr. Monygham was nowhere to be found. Then I learned that the year was 1896, and fully nine years had passed since I had set out into the jungle.

With the financial assistance of missionaries and scientists I returned to my homeland. If strangers had difficulty accepting my story, that was nothing compared to friends and family. They were by turns shocked, horrified, skeptical, and sympathetic. Gradually they came to believe in my identity, if not in my whereabouts for the last decade.

It seems that Mr. Bradly Martin, my employer, had married my widowed mother within a few months of my departure, thinking that I would soon return from what he thought was a wild goose chase and grow to accept his new status in the house as a *fait accompli*. As for my old college chum Teddy, he is still living in New York City, now as head of the police board, but he is gravitating towards Washington, D.C. again, having served there for a few years during my absence. Telling him of my adventure rekindled the old fires, and he talked of organizing expeditions, though I sensed even he only halfheartedly believed me.

But that is no matter, since I know what I know. Thanks to Benway's advanced science, I have created a new painkiller, more powerful than morphine yet lacking its addictive properties. I call it "Ayssa" after the person I consider the real heroine of this adventure, my wife and queen on another world. In addition, we have a secret ingredient for a new soft drink--Mr. Bradly Martin's prediction has proven remarkably accurate, as witnessed by the rise of the Anti-Saloon League in Ohio. A Mr. Asa Candler bought the secret of Coca-cola for the princely sum of two-thousand three hundred dollars. Clearly Pemberton thinks it has topped out, but we are willing to bet that Candler will go far and we intend to catch or surpass him. Look out, Coke, here comes "Jazmine!"

It seems that Madame Sosostris died in the same year that Candler made his purchase. But I wonder if that was the last we will see of her. For in searching for a new chemical compound, it seems that I have stumbled upon a Fountain of Youth, if not Immortality itself.

You might laugh at such a claim coming from this withered body. My own experience proves that time passes more swiftly on Earth than on Jizma, at a ratio of roughly nine to one. Whole vistas of ancient and forgotten science have opened up for me. I now know the secrets of the Pharaohs, and why honey was placed in their tombs for their eventual return. Consider Ayssa, with her two Jizmatic centuries of incomparable beauty, and how nearly two thousand years have passed on Earth in that period. I have learned her identity on Earth--she is none other than Thea Philopater, better known as Cleopatra--and plan to re-enter Jizma from Alexandria, Egypt, in order to arrive at the ruined city of Koreh. But I must hurry. Even now the battle rages. Though I have time dilation on my side, still every second counts. Has the red queen Koyotel yet succeeded in killing my white queen Ayssa? Has brave Linn fallen in battle or been taken prisoner? Has Benway completed the army of synthetic men? I find that liberal use of cocaine allows me to complete more work within the brief hours of a day, but I must return to Jizma as quickly as possible.

The red planet is calling me. Mars, the god of war, but his more ancient title is the flayed god, He-who-is-sacrificed. Jizma summons me, a call I cannot resist. Ayssa beckons me, and it is She-who-must-be-obeyed.

WATCH for the Exciting Sequels: "The Gods of Jizma" and "Secret Master of Jizma"!!

AFTERWORD

The very beginning was when I was reading Samuel R. Delany's *The Jewel Hinged Jaw*. There are only two things I really remember about it, and one of them was a glib quip about William Burroughs and Edgar Rice Burroughs as being poles apart, or polar opposites, or something like that. Well sure, that's easy to see: but the more I thought about it, the more I moved away from the immediate differences and into some striking similarities, including: libertarian streak; strong distrust of organized religion; repugnance towards sex; juvenile-seeming love objects; caucasian troglodytes; etc. Even Delany's main point, that of racism, began to blur: one man's

"racism" is another person's "racial awareness". I had a wild notion of a Burroughs Gemini; or that ERB and WB were different pseudonyms of the same man.

Anyway, eventually I settled down to the more pedestrian experiment "What if ERB had written *Naked Lunch* as his first novel?" It seemed to me that certain key scenes and sequences of *Naked Lunch* would be quite easy to translate, yet they would still be obvious WB riffs, and even the "wild" differences could be covered in ERB fashion. The thing wrote itself. The hardest part, surprisingly, was the title. I couldn't think of what to call it: I was stuck in neutral somewhere between *Naked Lunch* and *A Princess of Mars*. I asked Gene Wolfe for help, and he started punning around with titles like "Na Ked's Punch" and

"The Waiters of Mars", and that is when I suddenly remembered the earlier Barsoom title. It was done.