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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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Abstract

The fire had gone out and I was unable to get it started again. I had been a Boy Scout and all that, but without dry kindling I could not get more than a few flickers of flame.

Additional Keywords

Fiction; Passage In The Night; Brian Mason

PASSAGE IN THE NIGHT

by Brian Mason



he fire had gone out and I was unable to get it started again. I had been a Boy Scout and all that, but without dry kindling I could not get more than a few flickers of flame. With disgust I gave up as the first few stars were becoming visible in the east. High in the

west, somewhere near greatest elongation, was the eveningstar. As high as it was, it would probably keep me company for a couple of hours or more. Even now, seeing it in its perilous radiance, it was easy to see why early men held it in reverence. I had been hiking in the mountains for a couple of weeks, and had just begun to realize that my hope of reaching Fontana Dam before the end of summer break was beyond me. I was just five days out from Blood Mountain and did not seem to have the endurance of my youth. I began to try to stir the embers of my campfire. Giving up, I laid down upon the fern bank and began to watch the sky. I was about to drift back off to sleep when something disturbed me.

I felt communication inside me. It was a feeling that I find it very difficult to describe. Undoubtedly emotional, it was as if I was understanding on a higher level. The source of these feelings seemed to be the eveningstar. The star seemed to be summoning me to come towards it. With nothing better to do, I grabbed my compass, pedometer, flashlight and belt pouch, and set out westward.

I descended into an overgrown brake, and was in deepest night. The trees themselves seemed to prohibit my passage. Soon the evening chill was driven from my body but, eventually, I made it out of the thickets and began to move quickly cross country, over undulating hills. I remember going through two such descents and ascents and was beginning another ascent when I was shocked and amazed by the smell of sea spray. I was a full 300 miles or so from the Atlantic, yet the smell was unmistakable: a clean, moist smell, unlike any other. Across the vale, on the further ridge, was something I never expected to see. It was a tower. A very tall, thin tower, somewhat reminiscent of a minaret. The topmost part was a darker hue but glimmered in the bright light of the eveningstar, which was directly above it and still calling me onward. I descended and ascended once again and approached the immense tower. It tapered towards the summit, and had a door facing east.

After my initial inspection I could see that the tower appeared to be made of marble, and was smooth, and that while the grooves between the great blocks could be seen, they could not be felt. It rose to a great height above the ground and was approximately thirty feet in diameter, contracting to about half that at the summit. I opened the wooden door and went in. There was a lit torch to my immediate right and another directly across the circular room. The room within was lined with ropes from one side to the other. The ropes were a pale grey and disappeared into the wall behind them. At first I considered pulling on or examining the ropes, but I seemed to know that the ropes were not my goal. To my right, along the circumference of the interior wall, a stair began to climb to the left, making a circular turn and disappearing into the ceiling of the room. Ascending the stairs, I found that I was in another lit room completely void, and that, after a short landing, the stair continued winding upwards. Upwards was my goal.

I passed through other empty rooms; each room was progressively smaller and completed three-quarters of a circle on the way up. The third floor was not void, but had a double door, opening inward. I opened the door and saw before me a window, facing west. Between me and the window was a large black table about five feet in diameter with a latched black dome sitting on top of it. In front of the table was a low stool. Both the table and the stool seemed to be made of marble. The hinged box looked different. It was dull black, and reminded me of a stony-iron meteorite, yet it was fashioned as if it had been cast.

Slowly I unlatched the dome, lifted it from the table and set it aside. Directly underneath it, sitting in a depression in the table, was a marvelous globe of black crystal. No bigger than a foot in diameter, it seemed to be the terminus of my journey. I sat in the stool and looked in the crystal. At first I saw nothing, and then the blackness faded to the Sea: boundless, and without shore. I began to move across it with increasing speed, and the Sea seemed to fall beneath my sight and yet, in a vague, half dreamlike way, to continue onward. The Sea seemed to be moving by with greater speed. And then, suddenly I saw before me an island with a wharf full of white ships, and beyond that, a brilliant white beach, and a mountain, taller than tall, beautiful and yet terrible. I passed out.

When I awoke I was on the greensward upon which had been the tower. The tower was gone and also, apparently, my madness. Ω