



ATTRAVERSO LO SPECCHIO
THE LOOKING GLASS



Yzmuth, North Yemen, June 1952.

In the dead of night, a violent storm rages among the desert's sand dunes. In the distance, amidst the flashes of lightning, half-buried ruins of an ancient city may be glimpsed. An English expedition has set up its base camp in a clearing among the ruins. The tents, scaffolding and jeeps all seem abandoned, as a matter of fact, the camp is deserted; a faint light may be seen filtering through the entrance of one of the bigger tents which has been set up in a dip in the ground. There are three men inside the tent setting plans for the exploration of a recently found dig. Halogenous lamps hanging from the ceiling shed a faint light inside the tent. Reflectors have been set up around a hole in the ground into which a staircase disappears into the dark within a few meters of the entrance. The men, all of whom are in their middle thirties, are conversing around the opening in the ground. Nimian Croome is quite decidedly getting some equipment together while Su-Bam and Geoffrey Foulkes, seemingly quite perplexed, watch him.

Foulkes: «My God! Do we really have to go down there tonight?»

Su-Bam: «Ha! Ha! Ha! To tell you the truth, I don't like any of this myself, but you know how Croome is. It's impossible to make him come to reason when he's decided on something».

Croome: «Well then, let's get moving. Shall we?»

Foulkes: «If anything should happen to us... we're alone here at camp».

Croome: «Go tell it to those lazy Arabs who make up any excuse whatsoever so as not to work. I'll see to it that they only get half-pay».

Su-Bam: «The legend of the crazy Arab and the nameless city is the most frightening story imaginable. I don't blame them if they're scared».

Croome: «Silly superstitions born of the minds of undernourished illiterates. I believe only in the facts such as the bas-relief found during the Oxford Expedition».

Su-Bam: «That bas-relief tells the story of a legend and nothing else».

Croome: «There is something else, however. That story,

in contrast to the fantastic stories of our arab friends, is based on something-the nameless city».

Foulkes: «You haven't yet managed to convince anyone of this theory of yours. If it hadn't been for Su-Bam and myself, you never would have gotten the funding for this expedition».

Croome: «But the two of you are here now, your minds are not addled like those of the mummies sitting on the board, nor are they as weak as those of the obtuse arabs who are always chasing after false myths!»

Su-Bam: «The workers talked about strange beings who come out at night and move about the ruins. None of the workers wants to stay on after sundown. This is the reason why they set up camp so far from here».

Foulkes: «And what of the animals? We all saw how nervous they were around the ruins. We had to move their enclosure to another camp in order to avoid mishaps».

Croome: «So what? Nothing's happened to us and the sun has long since set. We shall go down there and do what we set out to do».

Foulkes: «Why must we do it at night? Why not tomorrow morning?»

Croome: «Night or day, it's always pitch black down there. If you want to pull out, go ahead, but I don't intend to share anything, and especially not the credit of a great discovery, with two good-for-nothing, frightened hangers-on».

Foulkes: «Now you listen to me....»

Su-Bam: «I'm ready to go!»

Croome: «Well?»

Foulkes: «All right, then! OK, let's go».

The three men, with Croome leading the way, start their descent through a corridor which leads to a narrow underground tunnel. Electric torches lighting the walls reveal writings the meaning of which is unknown to the scholars.

«Never seen anything like it, have you?», asks Croome barely hiding a note of sarcasm in his voice. «I discovered it this very morning, unfortunately I didn't get very far. There's a well at a certain point», he adds. No one speaks while the dancing of sinister shadows on the decorated





walls accompanies the men's descent.

After a few minutes of walking, the tunnel ends in front of a wall laden with symbols at whose center a narrow, trapezoidal shaped entrance opens into a hexagonal shaped, low-ceilinged room. A round well is found in the center of the room. The three slowly approach the opening of the well and use the torches to look inside it to try to determine its depth. Croome, who is now obviously quite excited, says, «This is it, this is the place». He ties the end of a rope around his waist and adds, «I'll go in first and signal when I get to the bottom. Then it'll be your turn to follow».

«Be careful and good luck!», exclaims Su-Bam while Foulkes, having safely secured the other end of the rope to a rock spur, moves closer to the well's opening. Croome answers back with a strange sort of smile, one almost of scorn for his two colleagues.

He then drops himself into the well while the shadows close in around the faint aura coming from his flashlight. After several interminable minutes Croome's voice, inviting his companions to follow, emerges from the dark opening. Using the same rope, the two men lower themselves down until they get to an imposing room. The dense darkness makes it difficult for them to immediately figure the exact size of the room and to understand its singular architectural design.

The large, circular room is surrounded by concentric rings of tall monoliths whose summit cannot be seen in the torchlight. The floor, made up of irregular blocks of stone set one within the other, is strewn with mummified cadavers. The macabre discovery is repulsive to Foulkes and Su-Bam, but not to Croome. He is visibly quite taken in by it all stating, «This is the greatest discovery of all time, I assure you!» The three continue exploring the place to discover a ramp at the back of the room. Two rows of parallel steps lead to the summit where a faint glimmer illumines a great stone atop a golden pedestal.

Moving quickly, Croome approaches the pedestal, engraved with indecipherable symbols, and enraptured, admires the glow coming from the shining prism. The prism

is an oval-shaped, faceted crystal, about twenty centimeters in diameter and about thirty centimeters tall, emitting a disquieting luminescence from within. Behind the pedestal, and at Croome's back, the mummified remains of the priestly king Konodosor lie on a finely engraved throne. With his eyes wide open and reflecting the light from the prism, Croome exclaims: «Look! Look! What did I tell you? It's true. All of it. You both saw the babylonian bas-reliefs, too! The legends about shining Ulthar of the walls girded in gold and of the great Iiv are not just myth!»

Foulkes numbed by the discovery, stutters: «No... no it can't be...».

In a crescendo of delirium Croome continues: «It's the fantastic truth of a new era that is opening up before your incredulous eyes! This prism is the tangible proof! As you know, the legend narrates that the prism is an immeasurable source of power that only a few elect will own. There is something more I have not told you; no mortal can ever control this power. Only a god may!».

While Croome faces his companions and speaks, his image seems to «dissolve» into the grimacing mummy on the throne behind him.

From the bottom of the ramp, Foulkes exclaims: «What in God's name are you raving about?»

Su-Bam exclaims: «He's gone mad!»

And Croome answers: «You still haven't understood! The power of the Great Ancients has led me here. The Supreme Mysterious One has chosen me! I, too, am a god now! Ha! Ha! Ha!».

While his insane laughter echoes off the ageless stones, Croome seizes the prism with both his hands and takes it from the pedestal.

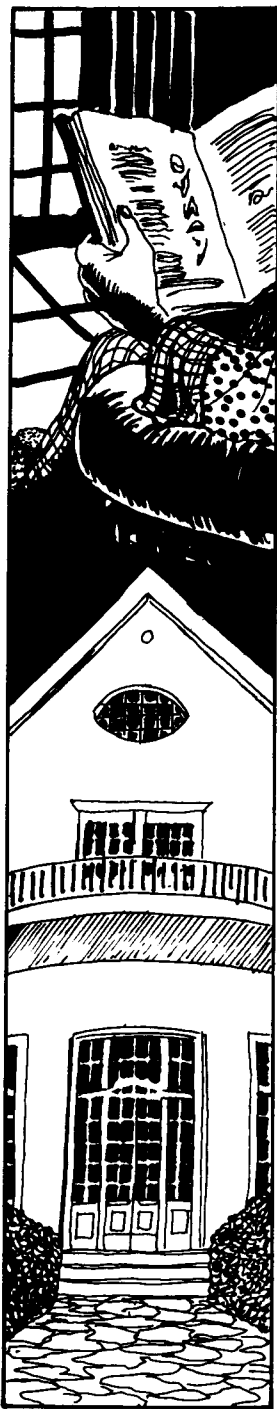
Having understood his intentions, Su-Bam yells: «Don't touch it! It could be a ...» (hidden device).

But before Su-Bam finishes his sentence, a sharp, metallic sound confirms his fears and the sound of a muted rumble, exploding from below ground fills the room. Foulkes turns to Su-Bam and asks, «What in ... is happening?»

«That lunatic set something off... a device ... now we better get out of here and fast!»

Croome raises the prism above his head and, his face trans-





figured into a mask of delirium, screams, «Look! This is The Power!»

His words hang in the space enclosed by the ancient building for a few seconds. Then a terrible earthquake explodes below. A few pillars crumble to the ground, others turn into columns of dust and sand. Stones and sand fall from above. A great fissure opens in the floor separating the two men from the ramp and from their companion. Croome, oblivious to the danger around him, holds the mysterious prism as it grows intensely brighter and recites some incomprehensible dirge, «Isbulat! Htohtos Goy, Sogururu, yuz otsorothewy...». Su-Bam looks at Foulkes saying: «We must get out of here before it's too late!»

Foulkes, still trying to save Croome, yells: «Croome, you damned idiot, come away from here!»

But Croome, now completely delirious, continues to recite unknown words: «... osoek otarew, osewmys, osoek uiu, isbulat! Ulu! Ayud ulu! Goy Sogururu...».

Foulkes turns to Su-Bam and says: «He's gone stark raving mad! We must do something!» An incredible noise almost covers the sound of their voices as Su-Bam answers: «There isn't time! Everything is about to crumble!».

Having given up on trying to save Croome, Foulkes and Su-Bam head down a dark corridor amidst crumbling pillars. Croome, having realized their attempt to escape, yells: «Do not run away! I order you to come back! Damned you! I will find you and I will make you pay! Do you hear? You shall pay!»

Exhausted, Croome falls to his knees before the pedestal and continues speaking: «How could you abandon the greatest discovery of all time?! You cannot go...».

Holding the prism close to him in order to shelter it from the imminent collapse of the building, he utters his last words, «... you cannot leave me here... alone...».

A river of sand and rubble falls onto him from above, burying him. In the meantime, Croome's two companions have retraced their steps and have finally arrived at the exit; they escape out of the tent opening into a violent downpour. Worn out and breathing hard, they turn to face the tent just as a blinding flash of lightning strikes it and burns it

to the ground.

Su-Bam's face is full of fear as is Foulkes', his wet hair blows in the wind and wide-eyed with terror he opens his mouth to scream emitting no sound.

Darkness surrounds the memories of that night and the sound of thunder brings Lord Foulkes' mind back to the present. He is in his London home...

LONDON, 16 JUNE 1992

Foulkes, seated in an armchair in the living room of his villa, is reading a very old book while a storm rages outside. He stops reading for a second to reflect: «... thunder... just like that night... I shall never be free of the past, its ghosts continue to come back to haunt me. I have tried in vain for all these years to forget». The book resting on Foulkes' knees is an old arab manuscript, its pages are full of cabalistic and astrological symbols (it is an authentic copy of the infamous «Necromicon») and it is open on a drawing of the monstrous city of R'Iyeh as it rises out of the waters.

In the very same moment, Dylan Dog is having a nightmare: during a terrible storm, an ancient, cyclopic city made of dark blocks of stone and monoliths of irregular shapes rises out of the sea. Everything is covered in incrustations and dripping muck. Strange, incomprehensible hieroglyphics are sculpted vertically on the walls and pillars. Lightning flashes and thunder explodes among the gigantic stones while an impetuous wind drags a rhythmic and prolonged drumroll along with it. Out of unfathomable depths beyond the stone walls, someone or something is mumbling these words, «... in the dead city of R'Iyh, Cthulu awaits dreaming». Dylan moves about in his sleep rambling, «Abdui ... the crazy Arab sings in the desert wind... the call of insane drums... the city... the sea... R'Iyeh... no... no... nooooo!!! Dylan wakes up drenched in sweat, screaming. He sits up on the bed and tries to remember what shook him up so: «A nightmare! The storm... the distant sound of drums... the submerged city... everything was so vivid... as if it were real. What a dream! Right... just a bad dream».

Dylan then falls back asleep.

