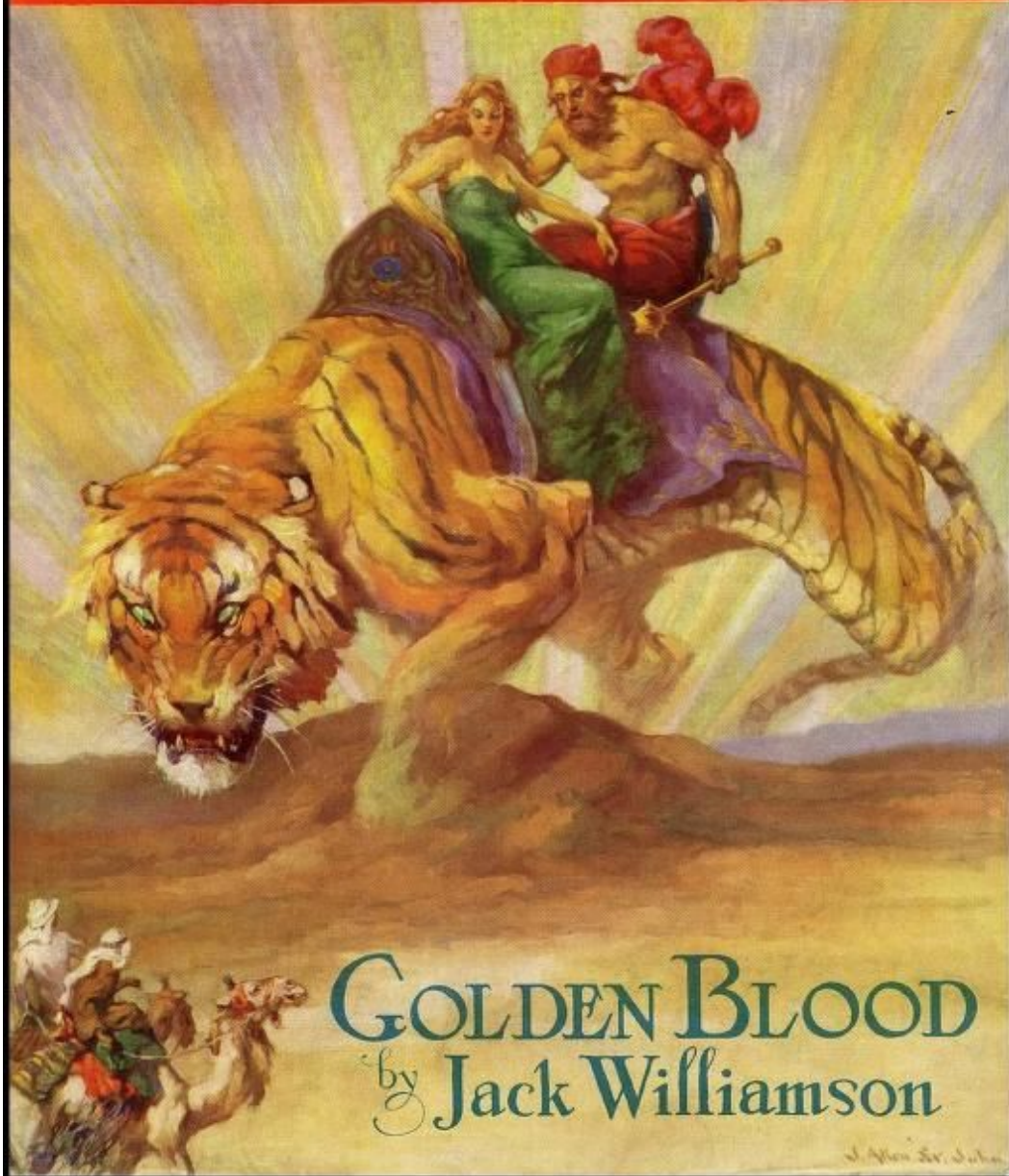


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Weird Tales

APRIL 25¢



GOLDEN BLOOD
by Jack Williamson

J. Ashton Smith

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The
Ice-Demon
By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

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The Ice-Demon

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First published *Weird Tales*, April 1933.

A fantastic tale of an animate, sentient sheet of ice, and the wild adventure of Quanga the hunter, who sought to dig royal rubies from that glacial tomb

Quanga the huntsman, with Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tسانth, two of the most enterprising jewelers of Iqqua, had crossed the borders of a region into which men went but seldom—and wherefrom they returned even more rarely. Travelling north from Iqqua, they had passed into desolate Mhu Thulan, where the great glacier of Polarion had rolled like a frozen sea upon wealthy and far-famed cities, covering the broad isthmus from shore to shore beneath fathoms of perpetual ice.

The shell-shaped domes of Cerngoth, it was fabled, could still be seen deep down in the glaciation; and the high, keen spires of Oggon-Zhai were embedded therein, together with fern-palm and mammoth and the square black temples of the god Tsathoggua. All this had occurred many centuries ago; and still the ice, a mighty, glittering rampart, was moving south upon deserted lands.

Now, in the path of the embattled glacier, Quanga led his companions on a bold quest. Their object was nothing less than the retrieval of the rubies of King Haalor, who, with the wizard Ommum-Vog and many full-caparisoned soldiers, had gone out five decades before to make war upon the polar ice. From this fantastic expedition, neither Haalor nor Ommum-Vog had come back; and the sorry, ragged remnant of their men-at-arms, returning to Iqqua, after two moons, had told a dire tale.

The army, they said, had made its encampment on a sort of knoll, carefully chosen by Ommum-Vog, in full sight of the vanward ice. Then the mighty sorcerer, standing with Haalor amid a ring of braziers that fumed incessantly with golden smoke, and reciting runes that were older than the world, had conjured up a fiery orb, vaster and redder than the southward-circling sun of heaven. And the orb, with blazing beams that smote from the zenith, torrid and effulgent, had caused the sun to seem no more than a daylight moon, and the soldiers had almost swooned from its heat in their heavy panoply. But beneath its beams the verges of the glacier melted and ran in swift rills and rivers, so that Haalor for a time was hopeful of reconquering the realm of Mhu Thulan over which his forefathers had ruled in bygone ages.

The rushing waters had deepened, flowing past the knoll on which the army waited. Then, as if by a hostile magic, the rivers began to give forth a pale and stifling mist, that blinded the conjured sun of Ommum-Vog, so that its sultry beams grew faint and chill and had power no longer on the ice.

Vainly the wizard had put forth other spells, trying to dissipate the deep and gelid fog. But the vapor drew down, evil and clammy, coiling and wreathing like knots of phantom serpents, and filling men's marrows as if with the cold of death. It covered all the camp, a tangle

thing, ever colder and thicker, numbing the limbs of those who groped blindly and could not see the faces of their fellows at arm's-length. A few of the common soldiers, somehow, reached its outer confines and crept fearfully away beneath the wan sun, seeing no longer in the skies the wizard globe that had been called up by Ommum-Vog. And looking back presently, as they fled in strange terror, they beheld, instead of the low-lying mist they had thought to see, a newly frozen sheet of ice that covered the mound on which the king and the sorcerer had made their encampment. The ice rose higher above the ground than a tall man's head; and dimly, in its glittering depth, the fleeing soldiers saw the imprisoned forms of their leaders and companions.

Deeming that this thing was no natural occurrence, but a sorcery that had been exerted by the great glacier, and that the glacier itself was a live, malignant entity with powers of unknown bale, they did not slacken their flight. And the ice had suffered them to depart in peace, as if to give warning of the fate of those who dared to assail it.

Some there were who believed the tale, and some who doubted. But the kings that ruled in Iqqua after Haalor went not forth to do battle with the ice; and no wizard rose to make war upon it with conjured suns. Men fled before the ever-advancing glaciations; and strange legends were told of how people had been overtaken or cut off in lonely valleys by sudden, diabolic shiftings of the ice, as if it had stretched out a living hand. And legends there were, of awful crevasses that yawned abruptly and closed like monstrous mouths upon them that dared the frozen waste; of winds like the breath of boreal demons, that blasted men's flesh with instant, utter cold and turned them into statues hard as granite. In time the whole region, for many miles before the glacier, was generally shunned; and only the hardiest hunters would follow their quarry into that winter-blighted land.

Now it happened that the fearless huntsman Iluac, the elder brother of Quanga, had gone into Mhu Thulan, and had pursued an enormous black fox that led him afar on the mighty fields of the ice-sheet. For many leagues he trailed it, coming never within bowshot of the beast; and at length he came to a great mound on the plain, that seemed to mark the position of a buried hill. And Iluac thought that the fox entered a cavern in the mound; so, with lifted bow and a poised arrow at the string, he went after it into the cavern.

The place was like a chamber of boreal kings or gods. All about him, in a dim green light, were huge, glimmering pillars; and giant icicles hung from the roof in the form of stalactites. The floor sloped downward; and Iluac came to the cave's end without finding any trace of the fox. But in the transparent depth of the further wall, at the bottom, he saw the standing shapes of many men, deep-frozen and sealed up as in a tomb, with undecaying bodies and fair, unshrunk features. The men were armed with tall spears, and most of them wore the panoply of soldiers. But among them, in the van, there stood a haughty figure attired in the sea-blue robes of a king; and beside him was a bowed ancient who wore the night-black garb of a sorcerer. The robes of the regal figure were heavily sewn with gems that burned like colored stars through the ice; and great rubies red as goutts of newly congealing blood were arranged in the lines of a triangle on the bosom, forming the royal sign of the kings of Iqqua. So Iluac knew, by these tokens, that he had found the tomb of Haalor and Ommum-Vog and the soldiers with whom they had gone up against the ice in former days.

Overawed by the strangeness of it all, and remembering now the old legends, Iluac lost his courage for the first time, and quitted the chamber without delay. Nowhere could he find the black fox; and abandoning the chase, he returned southward, reaching the lands below the

glacier without mishap. But he swore later that the ice had changed in a weird manner while he was following the fox, so that he was unsure of his direction for a while after leaving the cavern. There were steep ridges and hummocks where none had been before, making his return a toilsome journey; and the glaciation seemed to extend itself for many miles beyond its former limits. And because of these things, which he could not explain or understand, a curious eery fear was born in the heart of Iluac.

Never again did he go back upon the glacier; but he told his brother Quanga of that which he had found, and described the location of the cavern-chamber in which King Haalor and Ommum-Vog and their men-at-arms were entombed. And soon after this, Iluac was killed by a white bear on which he had used all his arrows in vain.

Quanga was no less brave than Iluac; and he did not fear the glacier, since he had been upon it many times and had noticed nothing untoward. His was a heart that lusted after gain, and often he thought of the rubies of Haalor, locked with the king in eternal ice; and it seemed to him that a bold man might recover the rubies.

So, one summer, while trading in Iqqua with his furs, he went to the jewelers Eibur Tsanth and Hoom Feethos, taking with him a few garnets that he had found in a northern valley. While the jewelers were appraising the garnets, he spoke idly of the rubies of Haalor, and inquired craftily as to their value. Then, hearing the great worth of the gems, and noting the greedy interest that was shown by Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, he told them the tale he had heard from his brother Iluac, and offered, if they would promise him half the value of the rubies, to guide them to the hidden cave.

The jewelers agreed to this proposition, in spite of the hardships of the proposed journey, and the difficulty they might afterward encounter in disposing surreptitiously of gems that belonged to the royal family of Iqqua and would be claimed by the present king, Ralour, if their discovery were learned. The fabulous worth of the rubies had fired their avarice. Quanga, on his part, desired the complicity and connivance of the dealers, knowing that it would be hard for him to sell the jewels otherwise. He did not trust Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, and it was for this reason that he required them to go with him to the cavern and pay over to him the agreed sum of money as soon as they were in possession of the treasure.

The strange trio had set forth in midsummer. Now, after two weeks of journeying through a wild, sub-arctic region, they were approaching the confines of the eternal ice. They travelled on foot, and their supplies were carried by three horses little larger than musk-oxen. Quanga, an unerring marksman, hunted for their daily food the hares and waterfowl of the country.

Behind them, in a cloudless turquoise heaven, there burned the low sun that was said to have described a loftier ecliptic in former ages. Drifts of unmelting snow were heaped in the shadows of the higher hills; and in steep valleys they came upon the vanward glaciers of the ice-sheet. The trees and shrubs were already sparse and stunted, in a land where rich forests had flourished in olden time beneath a milder climate. But poppies flamed in the meadows and along the slopes, spreading their frail beauty like a scarlet rug before the feet of perennial winter; and the quiet pools and stagnant-flowing streams were lined with white water-lilies.

A little to the east, they saw the fuming of volcanic peaks that still resisted the inroads of the glaciers. On the west were high, gaunt mountains whose sheer cliffs and pinnacles were topped with snow, and around whose nether slopes the ice had climbed like an inundating sea. Before them was the looming, crenelated wall of the realm-wide glaciation, moving equally on plain and hill, uprooting the trees, and pressing the soil forward in vast folds and ridges. Its

progress had been stayed a little by the northern summer. Quanga and the jewelers, as they went on, came to turbid rills, made by a temporary melting, that issued from beneath the glittering blue-green ramparts.

They left their pack-horses in a grassy valley, tethered by long cords of elk-thong to the dwarfish willows. Then, carrying such provisions and other equipment as they might require for a two days' journey, they climbed the ice-slope at a point selected by Quanga as being most readily accessible, and started in the direction of the cave that had been found by Iluac. Quanga took his bearings from the position of the volcanic mountains, and also from two isolated peaks that rose on the sheeted plain to the north like the breasts of a giantess beneath her shining armor.

The three were well equipped for all the exigencies of their search. Quanga carried a curious pick-ax of finely tempered bronze, to be used in disintombing the body of King Haalor; and he was armed with a short, leaf-shaped sword, in addition to his bow and quiver of arrows. His garments were made from the fur of a giant bear, brown-black in color.

Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, in raiment heavily quilted with eider-down against the cold, followed him complainingly but with avaricious eagerness. They had not enjoyed the long marches through a desolate, bleakening land, nor the rough fare and exposure to the northern elements. Moreover, they had taken a dislike to Quanga, whom they considered rude and overbearing. Their grievances were aggravated by the fact that he was now compelling them to carry most of the supplies in addition to the two heavy bags of gold which they were to exchange later for the gems. Nothing less valuable than the rubies of Haalor would have induced them to come so far, or to set foot on the formidable wastes of the ice-sheet.

The scene before them was like some frozen world of the outer void. Vast, unbroken, save for a few scattered mounds and ridges, the plain extended to the white horizon and its armored peaks. Nothing seemed to live or move on the awful, glistening vistas, whose nearer levels were swept clean of snow. The sun appeared to grow pale and chill, and to recede behind the adventurers; and a wind blew upon them from the ice, like a breath from abysses beyond the pole.

Apart from the boreal desolation and dreariness, however, there was nothing to dismay Quanga or his companions. None of them was superstitious, and they deemed that the old tales were idle myths, were no more than fear-born delusions. Quanga smiled commiseratively at the thought of his brother Iluac, who had been so oddly frightened and had fancied such extraordinary things after the finding of Haalor. It was a singular weakness in Iluac, the rash and almost foolhardy hunter who had feared neither man nor beast. As to the trapping of Haalor and Ommum-Vog and their army in the glacier, it was plain that they had allowed themselves to be overtaken by the winter storms; and the few survivors, mentally unhinged by their hardships, had told a wild story. Ice—even though it had conquered half of a continent—was merely ice, and its workings conformed invariably to certain natural laws. Iluac had said that the ice-sheet was a great demon, cruel, greedy, and loth to give up that which it had taken. But such beliefs were crude and primitive superstitions, not to be entertained by enlightened minds of the Pleistocene age.

They had climbed the rampart at an early hour of morning. Quanga assured the jewelers that they would reach the cavern by noon at the latest, even if there should be a certain amount of difficulty and delay in locating it.

The plain before them was remarkably free of crevasses, and there was little to obstruct their advance. Steering their way with the two breast-shaped mountains for landmarks before them, they came after three hours to a hill-like elevation that corresponded to the mound of Iluac's story. With little trouble, they found the opening of the deep chamber.

It seemed that the place had changed little if at all since the visit of Iluac, for the interior, with its columns and pendant icicles, conformed closely to his description. The entrance was like a fanged maw. Within, the floor sloped downward at a slippery angle for more than a hundred feet. The chamber swam with a cold and glaucous translucency that filtered through the dome-like roof. At the lower end, in the striated wall, Quanga and the jewelers saw the embedded shapes of a number of men, among which they distinguished easily the tall, blue-clad corpse of King Haalor and the dark, bowed mummy of Ommum-Vog. Behind these, the shapes of others, lifting their serried spears eternally, and receding downward in stiff ranks through unfathomable depths, were faintly discernible.

Haalor stood regal and erect, with wide-open eyes that stared haughtily as in life. Upon his bosom the triangle of hot and blood-bright rubies smoldered unquenchably in the glacial gloom; and the colder eyes of topazes, of beryls, of diamonds, of chrysolites, gleamed and twinkled from his azure raiment. It seemed that the fabulous gems were separated by no more than a foot or two of ice from the greedy fingers of the hunter and his companions.

Without speaking, they stared raptly at the far-sought treasure. Apart from the great rubies, the jewelers were also estimating the value of the other gems worn by Haalor. These alone, they thought complacently, would have made it worth while to endure the fatigue of the journey and the insolence of Quanga.

The hunter, on his part, was wishing that he had driven an even steeper bargain. The two bags of gold, however, would make him a wealthy man. He could drink to his full content the costly wines, redder than the rubies, that came from far Uzuldaroum in the south. The tawny, slant-eyed girls of Iqqua would dance at his bidding; and he could gamble for high stakes.

All three were unmindful of the eeriness of their situation, alone in that boreal solitude with the frozen dead; and they were oblivious likewise to the ghoulish nature of the robbery they were about to commit. Without waiting to be urged by his companions, Quanga raised the keen and highly tempered pick of bronze, and began to assail the translucent wall with mighty blows.

The ice rang shrilly beneath the pick, and dropped away in crystal splinters and diamond lumps. In a few minutes, he had made a large cavity; and only a thin shell, cracked and shattering, remained before the body of Haalor. This shell Quanga proceeded to pry off with great care; and soon the triangle of monstrous rubies, more or less encrusted still with clinging ice, lay bare to his fingers. While the proud, bleak eyes of Haalor stared immovably upon him from behind their glassy mask, the hunter dropped the pick, and drawing his sharp, leaf-shaped sword from its scabbard, he began to sever the fine silver wires by which the rubies were attached cunningly to the king's raiment. In his haste he ripped away portions of the sea-blue fabric, baring the frozen and dead-white flesh beneath. One by one, as he removed the rubies, he gave them to Hoom Feethos, standing close behind him; and the dealer, bright-eyed with avarice, drooling a little with ecstasy, stored them carefully in a huge pouch of mottled lizardskin that he had brought along for the purpose.

The last ruby had been secured, and Quanga was about to turn his attention to the lesser jewels that adorned the king's garments in curious patterns and signs of astrological or hieratic

significance. Then, amid their preoccupation, he and Hoom Feethos were startled by a loud and splintering crash that ended with myriad tinklings as of broken glass. Turning, they saw that a huge icicle had fallen from the cavern-dome; and its point, as if aimed unerringly, had cloven the skull of Eibur Tsanth, who lay amid the débris of shattered ice with the sharp end of the fragment deeply embedded in his oozing brain. He had died, instantly, without knowledge of his doom.

The accident, it seemed, was a perfectly natural one, such as might occur in summer from a slight melting of the immense pendant; but, amid their consternation, Quanga and Hoom Feethos were compelled to take note of certain circumstances that were far from normal or explicable.

During the removal of the rubies, on which their attention had been centered so exclusively, *the chamber had narrowed to half of its former width, and had also closed down from above*, till the hanging icicles were almost upon them, like the champing teeth of some tremendous mouth. The place had darkened, and the light was such as might filter into arctic seas beneath heavy floes. The incline of the cave had grown steeper, as if it were pitching into bottomless depths. Far up—incredibly far—the two men beheld the tiny entrance, which seemed no bigger than the mouth of a fox's hole.

For an instant, they were stupefied. The changes of the cavern could admit of no natural explanation; and the Hyperboreans felt the clammy surge of all the superstitious terrors that they had formerly disclaimed. No longer could they deny the conscious, animate malevolence, the diabolic powers of bale imputed to the ice in old legends.

Realizing their peril, and spurred by a wild panic, they started to climb the incline. Hoom Feethos retained the bulging pouch of rubies, as well as the heavy bag of gold coins that hung from his girdle; and Quanga had enough presence of mind to keep his sword and pick-ax. In their terror-driven haste, however, both forgot the second bag of gold, which lay beside Eibur Tsanth, under the débris of the shattered pendant.

The supernatural narrowing of the cave, the dreadful and sinister closing-down of its roof, had apparently ceased. At any rate, the Hyperboreans could detect no visible continuation of the process as they climbed frantically and precariously toward the opening. They were forced to stoop in many places to avoid the mighty fangs that threatened to descend upon them; and even with the rough tigerskin buskins that they wore, it was hard to keep their footing on the terrible slope. Sometimes they pulled themselves up by means of the slippery, pillar-like formations; and often Quanga, who led the way, was compelled to hew hasty steps in the incline with his pick.

Hoom Feethos was too terrified for even the most rudimentary reflection. But Quanga, as he climbed, was considering the monstrous alterations of the cave, which he could not aline with his wide and various experience of the phenomena of nature. He tried to convince himself that he had made a singular error in estimating the chamber's dimensions and the inclination of its floor. The effort was useless: he still found himself confronted by a thing that outraged his reason; a thing that distorted the known face of the world with unearthly, hideous madness, and mingled a maligned chaos with its ordered workings.

After an ascent that was frightfully prolonged, like the effort to escape from some delirious, tedious nightmare predicament, they neared the cavern-mouth. There was barely room now for a man to creep on his belly beneath the sharp and ponderous teeth. Quanga, feeling that the fangs might close upon him like those of some great monster, hurled himself

forward and started to wriggle through the opening with a most unheroic celerity. Something held him back, and he thought, for one moment of stark horror, that his worst apprehensions were being realized. Then he found that his bow and quiver of arrows, which he had forgotten to remove from his shoulders, were caught against the pendant ice. While Hoom Feethos gibbered in a frenzy of fear and impatience, he crawled back and relieved himself of the impeding weapons, which he thrust before him together with his pick in a second and more successful attempt to pass through the strait opening.

Rising to his feet on the open glacier, he heard a wild cry from Hoom Feethos, who, trying to follow Quanga, had become tightly wedged in the entrance through his greater girth. His right hand, clutching the pouch of rubies, was thrust forward beyond the threshold of the cave. He howled incessantly, with half-coherent protestations that the cruel ice-teeth were crunching him to death.

In spite of the eery terrors that had unmanned him, the hunter still retained enough courage to go back and try to assist Hoom Feethos. He was about to assail the huge icicles with his pick, when he heard an agonizing scream from the jeweler, followed by a harsh and indescribable grating. There had been no visible movement of the fangs—and yet Quanga now saw that they had reached the cavern-floor! The body of Hoom Feethos, pierced through and through by one of the icicles, and ground down by the blunter teeth, was spurting blood on the glacier, like the red mist from a wine-press.

Quanga doubted the very testimony of his senses. The thing before him was patently impossible—there was no mark of cleavage in the mound above the cavern-mouth, to explain the descent of those awful fangs. Before his very eyes, but too swiftly for direct cognition, this unthinkable enormity had occurred.

Hoom Feethos was beyond all earthly help, and Quanga, now wholly the slave of a hideous panic, would hardly have stayed longer to assist him in any case. But seeing the pouch that had fallen forward from the dead jeweler's fingers, the hunter snatched it up through an impulse of terror-mingled greed; and then, with no backward glance, he fled on the glacier, toward the low-circling sun.

For a few moments, as he ran, Quanga failed to perceive the sinister and ill-boding alterations, comparable to those of the cave, which had somehow occurred in the sheeted plain itself. With a terrific shock, which became an actual vertigo, he saw that he was climbing a long, insanely tilted slope above whose remote extreme the sun had receded strangely, and was now small and chill as if seen from an outer planet. The very sky was different: though still perfectly cloudless, it had taken on a curious deathly pallor. A brooding sense of inimical volition, a vast and freezing malignity, seemed to pervade the air and to settle upon Quanga like an incubus. But more terrifying than all else, in its proof of a conscious and malign derangement of natural law, was the giddy poleward inclination that had been assumed by the level plateau.

Quanga felt that creation itself had gone mad, and had left him at the mercy of demoniacal forces from the godless outer gulfs. Keeping a perilous foothold, weaving and staggering laboriously upward, he feared momentarily that he would slip and fall and slide back for ever into arctic depths unfathomable. And yet, when he dared to pause at last, and turned shudderingly to peer down at the supposed descent, he saw *behind* him an acclivity similar in all respects to the one he was climbing; a mad, oblique wall of ice, that rose interminably to a second remote sun.

In the confusion of that strange *bouleversement*, he seemed to lose the last remnant of equilibrium; and the glacier reeled and pitched about him like an overturning world as he strove to recover the sense of direction that had never before deserted him. Everywhere, it appeared, there were small and wan parhelia that mocked him above unending glacial scarps. He resumed his hopeless climb through a topsy-turvy world of illusion: whether north, south, east or west, he could not tell.

A sudden wind swept downward on the glacier; it shrieked in Quanga's ears like the myriad voices of taunting devils; it moaned and laughed and ululated with shrill notes as of crackling ice. It seemed to pluck at Quanga with live malicious fingers, to suck the breath for which he fought agonizingly. In spite of his heavy raiment, and the speed of his toilsome ascent, he felt its bitter, mordant teeth, searching and biting even to the marrow.

Dimly, as he continued to climb upward, he saw that the ice was no longer smooth, but had risen into pillars and pyramids around him, or was fretted obscenely into wilder shapes. Immense, malignant profiles leered in blue-green crystal; the malformed heads of bestial devils frowned; and rearing dragons writhed immovably along the scarp, or sank frozen into deep crevasses.

Apart from these imaginary forms that were assumed by the ice itself, Quanga saw, or believed that he saw, human bodies and faces embedded in the glacier. Pale hands appeared to reach dimly and imploringly toward him from the depths; and he felt upon him the frost-bound eyes of men who had been lost in former years; and beheld their sunken limbs, grown rigid in strange attitudes of torture.

Quanga was no longer capable of thought. Deaf, blind, primordial terrors, older than reason, had filled his mind with their atavistic darkness. They drove him on implacably, as a beast is driven, and would not let him pause or flag on the mocking, nightmare slope. Reflection would have told him only that his ultimate escape was impossible; that the ice, a live and conscious and maleficent thing, was merely playing a cruel and fantastic game which it had somehow devised in its incredible animism. So, perhaps, it was well that he had lost the power of reflection.

Beyond hope and without warning, he came to the end of the glaciation. It was like the sudden shift of a dream, which takes the dreamer unaware; and he stared uncomprehendingly for some moments at the familiar Hyperborean valleys below the rampart, to the south, and the volcanoes that fumed darkly beyond the southeastern hills.

His flight from the cavern had consumed almost the whole of the long, sub-polar afternoon, and the sun was now swinging close above the horizon. The parhelia had vanished, and the ice-sheet, as if by some prodigious legerdemain, had resumed its normal horizontality. If he had been able to compare his impressions, Quanga would have realized that at no time had he surprized the glacier in the accomplishment of its bewildering supernatural changes.

Doubtfully, as if it were a mirage that might fade at any moment, he surveyed the landscape below the battlements. To all appearances, he had returned to the very place from which he and the jewelers had begun their disastrous journey on the ice. Before him an easy declivity, fretted and runneled, ran down toward the grassy meadows. Fearing that it was all deceitful and unreal—a fair, beguiling trap, a new treachery of the element that he had grown to regard as a cruel and almighty demon—Quanga descended the slope with hasty leaps and bounds. Even when he stood ankle-deep in the great club-mosses, with leafy willows and sedgy grasses about him, he could not quite believe in the verity of his escape.

The mindless prompting of a panic fear still drove him on; and a primal instinct, equally mindless, drew him toward the volcanic peaks. The instinct told him that he would find refuge from the bitter boreal cold amid their purlieus; and there, if anywhere, he would be safe from the diabolical machinations of the glacier. Boiling springs were said to flow perpetually from the nether slopes of these mountains; great geysers, roaring and hissing like infernal cauldrons, filled the higher gullies with scalding cataracts. The long snows that swept upon Hyperborea were turned to mild rains in the vicinity of the volcanoes; and there a rich and sultry-colored flora, formerly native to the whole region, but now exotic, flourished throughout the seasons.

Quanga could not find the little shaggy horses that he and his companions had left tethered to the dwarf willows in the valley-meadow. Perhaps, after all, it was not the same valley. At any rate, he did not stay his flight to search for them. Without delay or lingering, after one fearful backward look at the menacing mass of the glaciation, he started off in a direct line for the smoke-plumed mountains.

The sun sank lower, skirting endlessly the southwestern horizon, and flooding the battlemented ice and the rolling landscape with a light of pale amethyst. Quanga, with iron thews inured to protracted marches, pressed on in his unremitting terror, and was overtaken gradually by the long, ethereal-tinted twilight of northern summer.

Somehow, through all the stages of his flight, he had retained the pick-ax, as well as his bow and arrows. Automatically, hours before, he had placed the heavy pouch of rubies in the bosom of his raiment for safekeeping. He had forgotten them, and he did not even notice the trickle of water from the melting of crusted ice about the jewels, that seeped upon his flesh from the lizardskin pouch.

Crossing one of the innumerable valleys, he stumbled against a protruding willow-root, and the pick was hurled from his fingers as he fell. Rising to his feet, he ran on without stopping to retrieve it.

A ruddy glow from the volcanoes was now visible on the darkening sky. It brightened as Quanga went on; and he felt that he was nearing the far-sought, inviolable sanctuary. Though still thoroughly shaken and demoralized by his preterhuman ordeals, he began to think that he might escape from the ice-demon after all.

Suddenly he became aware of a consuming thirst, to which he had been oblivious heretofore. Daring to pause in one of the shallow valleys, he drank from a blossom-bordered stream. Then, beneath the crushing load of an unconsciously accumulated fatigue, he flung himself down to rest for a little while among the blood-red poppies that were purple with twilight.

Sleep fell like a soft and overwhelming snow upon his eyelids, but was soon broken by evil dreams in which he still fled vainly from the mocking and inexorable glacier. He awoke in a cold horror, sweating and shivering, and found himself staring at the northern sky, where a delicate flush was dying slowly. It seemed to him that a great shadow, malign and massive and somehow *solid*, was moving upon the horizon and striding over the low hills toward the valley in which he lay. It came with inexpressible speed, and the last light appeared to fall from the heavens, chill as a reflection caught in ice.

He started to his feet with the stiffness of prolonged exhaustion in all his body, and the nightmare stupefaction of slumber still mingling with his half-awakened fears. In this state, with a mad, momentary defiance, he unslung his bow and discharged arrow after arrow,

emptying his quiver at the huge and bleak and formless shadow that seemed to impend before him on the sky. Having done this, he resumed his headlong flight.

Even as he ran, he shivered uncontrollably with the sudden and intense cold that had filled the valley. Vaguely, with an access of fear, he felt that there was something unwholesome and unnatural about the cold—something that did not belong to the place or the season. The glowing volcanoes were quite near, and soon he would reach their outlying hills. The air about him should be temperate, even if not actually warm.

All at once, the air darkened before him, with a sourceless, blue-green glimmering in its depths. For a moment, he saw the featureless Shadow that rose gigantically upon his path and obscured the very stars and the glare of the volcanoes. Then, with the swirling of a tempest-driven vapor, it closed about him, gelid and relentless. It was like phantom ice—a thing that blinded his eyes and stifled his breath, as if he were buried in some glacial tomb. It was cold with a transarctic rigor, such as he had never known, that ached unbearably in all his flesh, and was followed by a swiftly spreading numbness.

Dimly he heard a sound as of clashing icicles, a grinding as of heavy floes, in the blue-green gloom that tightened and thickened around him. It was as if the soul of the glacier, malign and implacable, had overtaken him in his flight. At times he struggled numbly, in half-drowsy terror. With some obscure impulse, as if to propitiate a vengeful deity, he took the pouch of rubies from his bosom with prolonged and painful effort, and tried to hurl it away. The thongs that tied the pouch were loosened by its fall, and Quanga heard faintly, as if from a great distance, the tinkle of the rubies as they rolled and scattered on some hard surface. Then oblivion deepened about him, and he fell forward stiffly, without knowing that he had fallen.

Morning found him beside the little stream, stark-frozen, and lying on his face in a circle of poppies that had been blackened as if by the footprint of some gigantic demon of frost. A near-by pool, formed by the leisurely rill, was covered with thin ice, and on the ice, like gouts of frozen blood, there lay the scattered rubies of Haalor. In its own time, the great glacier, moving slowly and irresistibly southward, would reclaim them.

[The end of *The Ice-Demon* by Clark Ashton Smith]