

I placed my hand upon it's surface. It felt solid enough—if my feeling of touch was not being deceived in some manner beyond my ken—and was cold and slightly damp. The way was completely barred, the stone abutting the wall on both sides as well as the ceiling and floor. Looking it over, my spine tingled slightly at the vague speculation of what strange arts could have produced it, for its surface bore ripples and bulges as if great heaps of molten rock had poured down from above and hardened immediately.

*Unnatural powers, capable of breeding foul things mortal eyes were never meant to see . . .*

I set off at a sprint toward the figure, with Shatho Kyer ready to sink the serpent's fang in the bosom of this maker of nightmares. As I raced ahead I beheld the wizard raise his arms while seeming to move his hands in some bizarre pattern, and I thought I could hear the uttering of some low, mumbled words. Almost involuntarily I slowed my pace and came to an abrupt halt. There was an odd sort of trembling feeling from the surrounding air; I cannot adequately explain it in words, it was as though the very atmosphere itself began to shake and vibrate as the ground does during an earthquake. Again I had the premonition that to remain where I stood would mean death, and just as I began to back away, there was a brief, dazzling flash of eerie light, like a veil over one's eyes ripped apart to reveal the sun. Recoiling, I had reflexively shut my eyes against the blinding brilliance for a moment, and now, opening them again, beheld a ghastly monstrosity staring back at me.

The wan light limned and accentuated its most distinctive attributes, such that I could see it clearly. It appeared only vaguely manlike in shape, standing to a height of some eight to nine feet, with a massive torso and arched, hunched back. Shaggy hair clothed its underbelly, while golden scales covered over its horn-studded limbs, of which there were ten—two short, bulky legs, almost apish in build, and eight long, powerful arms, four from each shoulder joint, and each terminating in a paw resembling a great cat's. The monster's head was quite large and horrible to look upon, not unlike some insane cross