

**TWO CONTRASTING
EXCERPTS FROM
A DEVELOPING
WORK,**

**MYSTERY AT THE
VISHNU
HORIZON: A
GRAND CANYON
ADVENTURE**

—Roger Johnson

This first scene involves two 13 year olds, one a Havasupai Native American boy and the other a white girl. They are traveling on horseback after recovery of a mysterious object they found embedded in strata at the bottom of the Canyon. A storm hinders their return to their boarding school, the Chino Springs Academy, near the Canyon rim far above.

ARE YOU NUTS?

THE RAIN INTENSIFIED AS BETH AND ED-DIE RODE SINGLE FILE UP THE CANYON TRAIL. Cold downdrafts pried at Beth's ball cap, and whipped her hair and yellow slicker. Her jeans were soaked below the knees; she shivered.

In the late afternoon light, the downpour restricted Beth's view to just a couple of horse lengths beyond Eddie. He hunched forward, his black poncho glistening and his soaked hair matted against his head. With each step, Beth could see Hánaga's hooves sink into the mucky trail. Turbid rivulets cut across and plunged down the cliff side to her right; the Colorado below was lost in the haze of the cloudburst. Veins of lightning illuminated the clouds ahead, followed seconds later by the roll of thunder. George's ears laid back. His head quivered.

The deluge came in bursts, sheets of water marching over them. The roar of the downpour suppressed all other sounds. Eddie turned back in his saddle and shouted something to Beth. She put a hand to her ear, shook her head, and spurred George closer. Eddie cupped a hand to his mouth, "We've got to get off the trail. There's an Ancestor shelter above. We're almost to a place where we can get to it." After a turn in the trail, Eddie reined Hánaga to the left, up what looked like a footpath that zigzagged along the sloping, canyon side.

The horses lost footing on the slanted, soupy track and stumbled to regain balance. At the next switch-back, icy cold rain pelted Beth's face. She blinked to clear her vision. As the trail turned again, Beth saw a cavernous overhang ahead, sculpted from the red rock like a outdoor band shell. As they completed the final leg, something stung the back of her neck and George snorted. "We're almost there, boy," said Beth, patting his neck as pea size hail bounced around them. Under the shelter, Eddie and Beth dismounted onto soft dirt and led their mounts to the back wall, away from the storm's fury. With the side of her hand, Beth scraped water off George's coat. Steam rose from his body.

Above her on the rock wall, Beth noticed an Ancestor circle like the ones Eddie had shown her at the old, secret Indian redoubt. With her arms wrapped around herself, she turned to Eddie, and said, "This is so much better, but I'm freezing."

"Me, too," said Eddie. "There should be firewood that our tribe stores up here." He walked along the back wall, removed a tarp from over a pile of twigs and kindling. He returned with an armload and knelt to arrange the sticks from smaller to larger pieces into a cone-shaped structure.

"Ah, a tepee," said Beth.

Eddie looked up to her with a flat smile, "Still . . . with the Indian references?

"I do what I can."

Shaking his head, Eddie withdrew a small metal cylinder from the cloth pouch beneath his poncho, unscrewed its cap, and extracted a kitchen match.

"I was expecting flint and steel," said Beth.

"If you can wait, I'll start it with a friction bow and tinder."

"No, this is fine," Beth chuckled, hugging herself. "I'm ready for some warmth."

Beth watched as Eddie struck the match on the base of the metal cylinder, cupped his hand over the flaring flame, and carefully inserted it under the smallest twigs. As the infant fire gained strength, he added larger wood. Beth and Eddie crowded the blaze with their hands opened.

A flash illuminated the shelter, followed close by a crashing boom. Beth flinched. "How long do you think this will last?" she asked.

"It looked like it was moving south pretty fast. Maybe another hour. It's gonna' be so late before we make it to the Academy."

Beth rubbed her hands together and opened them again to the fire's comfort. "From what you told me about your people's history, the Academy must be on lands that once belonged to the Havasupai."

"Yeah, the school dates back to the rancher who settled there in the eighteen hundreds. But, Mr. Babcock's family had always been friendly with us and our cousins, the Walapai. The Babcock's supported the return of a lot of our land. Of course, not their land." Eddie tossed a stray twig at the fire.

Beth watched a frenzy of sparks rise and burn out like miniature shooting stars. "You said things went from bad to worse after the railroad surveyors came through."

"Well, we didn't have a reservation from the government then. The Army said that all Indians not on a reservation were hostiles, and would be shot on sight. So what were we to do? We hid in the Canyon." Eddie stared into the fire. "Finally, we were recognized, but that didn't get us much. We went from a nation of hundreds of square miles down to five hundred acres, pretty much just our Havasu canyon. The problem was there's nothing to eat there in the winter. It'd been our way of life to farm the canyon in summer and hunt game on the upper plateau in winter."

Beth removed her slicker, placed it over the powdery dirt, and sat down. She turned her side against the fire and tilted her head back to avoid the spiraling smoke. "So, what happened?"

"We came close to dying out. We had to go up to the plateau to

find meat regardless. Then the whites made the plateau a national forest and wouldn't let us in to hunt. And, then they made the Canyon a national park and we lost about everything. They even wanted our Havasu canyon so they could open our sacred falls to the tourists. But, it gets worse." Eddie poked at the fire with a piece of wood launching more sparks.

Beth felt remorse for the way Eddie's people had been treated and wanted to know more, but she recognized that frustrated look he got when talking about his people's history with the whites. Scooting back from the hot fire, she said, "Let's look at that thing we dug up. What's on the other sides?"

Eddie rummaged in his pouch and took out the prism. "It's still ice cold," he said. He examined the sides that had been buried. "Look at this mark. It's like one of our signs."

Beth leaned over. In the flickering firelight, Eddie pointed to a symbol of a cross with its arms bent at right angles. "That's a swastika," Beth said. "Native Americans use that?"

"A lot of tribes have, mostly the Navajo. They call it the 'Whirling Logs.' It represents the travels of the Ancients, physical and spiritual. It's a good luck symbol for us. And, Indians had it long before the Nazis ever existed!" said Eddie, throwing another twig at the fire.

A lightning stroke jolted the shelter like the concussion of an exploding bomb. Eddie stood, looked at the prism in his hand, then out at the storm, and walked toward the front of the overhang. Beth got up and followed. A fine mist sprayed Eddie as he reached the edge of the sanctuary. With his left hand, he held the prism above his head. The object began to glow. Beth felt the hairs at the back of her neck and on her arms standing up. The prism glowed brighter and she felt a prickling sensation in her skin. She looked down at her hands as her whole body tingled. She smelled something pungent, like bleach. At a crackling sound, she looked up at Eddie and cried, "Oh, no!" Eddie was on his tiptoes reaching to the sky. His hair stood straight out like porcupine quills, surrounded by a faint blue aura. Beth leaned forward, grabbed Eddie at the waist by his belt, pulled him backward, and threw him to the ground.

"Are you nuts?" she shouted.

Eddie said, "Did you see it glow? Could you feel it? It was like the Ancestors were filling me with power."

"Yeah, well, I think you're full of it alright. When the lightning hits, it'll be you glowing . . . and then smoldering. We were feeling the charge build-up before a strike."

"What about the glow?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's

like . . . when a florescent lightbulb is held up toward high tension wires; the bulb'll glow. That would be a lot like this, I suppose. But who knows what this thing does? It's alien!"

Eddie wrinkled his forehead and tightened his mouth. He looked out at the storm, then down at the now dark prism, picked it up, and walked back to the dying campfire. He placed the last of the wood on the glowing embers as Beth approached. Eddie did not make eye contact, but turned and walked away toward the wood stack. He started to pick up more firewood, but stopped and stood motionless, turning his good right ear toward a heap of rocks beyond. He moved toward the pile like a hunter stalking prey, one deliberate step before another, and then started pulling at the rocks. Beth thought now what? She feared his fixation on the Ancestors and the alien prism were starting to make him loopy. She walked over to his excavation.

Eddie said, "I haven't been up here when it was raining like this. There's a stream running under here. There may be a cave behind this." Beth heard the sound of water like a cascading brook. Eddie pulled down two more slabs and peered between the rocks into a black cavity. He retrieved a flashlight from his bag, scrambled on top of the rock pile, thrust his

light into the recess, stuck his head in, and squirmed his body through, his feet disappearing into the blackness.

"Eddie, come back here!"

"Come on in. It is a cave!"

* * *

Below, the character Irg is a Grand Canyon area resident who lived long before there was a Canyon.

Irg, an amphibian, is temporarily off planet on an accidental quest.

In the course of the full story, the reader discovers that the mysterious prism Eddie unearthed at the bottom of the Grand Canyon belonged to the primeval Irg. Eddie's people, the Havasupai, might consider Irg among their ancient ancestors, magical primal creatures that, in Havasupai origin myths, took the form of animals.

THE ELDER

Irg swam deep below the surface of the clear lake, angling down toward the dark center of a cave's entrance. The opening looked like a craggy mouth gouged into the wall of a long-dead coral reef. Kicking against an out-flowing current, he felt Vero's arms tightening about his neck; he didn't know how long she could hold her breath.

Past the cave's jagged threshold, the pale light from the surface faded, and blackness enveloped

them. Irg opened his mouth and emitted high-pitched croaks to measure proximity to the walls. The weaker intensity and longer time for the return echos indicated they were entering a large cavern. The water here was calmer and tasted sparser of oxygen, but with more flavor of calcium. Irg sensed his movements slowing from the water's penetrating cold. Vero pounded twice on his back with her fist. Irg hastened his scan for an exit.

At a distance to the right, a school of small, aquatic organisms emitted an iridescent aqua blue radiance. They shimmered brightly at each of Irg's croaks. To the left, a dimly glowing, green beast spiraling upward from the blackness below startled Irg. Beneath piecing red eyes, rows of dagger teeth filled the face of the luminous eel-like brute. With each of Irg's acoustic soundings, the monster adjusted its trajectory toward them. Irg ceased croaking and the creature stopped its pursuit, moving its huge head back and forth, and then wriggling below, past them.

Ahead through the dark waters, Irg spotted a yellow, saucer-shaped illumination above; the light appeared to be incandescent as it wavered like a flame. With smooth undulating motion, Irg maneuvered his body upward with Vero in tow.

Breaking the water's surface,

Vero gasped for air and choked. They were in an oval pool centered in a subterranean chamber. It was like a sculpted, egg-shaped cathedral, walls and ceiling rounded, ivory in color. On the shore, six pyres, spaced equally around the pool, blazed. The air was warm and heavy with incense. Vero still clung to Irg.

"You can put your feet down here," he advised softly.

They stood together, shoulder deep in the dark water. The pool's rippling surface reflected the pyres' glimmer onto the domed ceiling above like dancing smiles. Ahead on the shore stood a pink pyramid constructed of polished, stone blocks; Irg estimated it to be 15 heads tall. His gaze fixed on the pyramid's apex, to a carved symbol of an eye that dominated the structure.

Wading forward together, Vero nudged Irg to attention, and pointed toward a sole figure, twice their size, who knelt before the base of the pyramid. The form, covered with an emerald green wrap, rested its elbows on a railing fronting the structure, its head bowed, forehead against folded hands.

"She's a Sargonian Elder. You hardly ever see them in person," whispered Vero as she cleared water from her throat and nose.

At their approach to the pool's edge, the figure stirred.

Standing in a single fluid motion, with arms folded across her chest, she turned to look down upon the two. Her full length robe flowed around her like a shroud over a statue.

"What we have here?
An Ansion aspirating,
water wet.
And, an
un-dry unfamiliar.
Extra exotic event."

The Sargonian was speaking Ansion words that Irg understood individually, but this tortured prose challenged his comprehension.

Shivering in the cold waters, now at her waist, Vero pleaded, "Please forgive us, Elder. We had no intention to intrude."

The Elder motioned for Irg and Vero to approach one of the pyres on the shore of the pool. Ascending white marble steps, Vero backed up to the fire as Irg stood beside her, his eyes focused on the Elder.

The creature thrust the hood of her robe, trimmed in gold, back onto her shoulders. Irg marveled at the beast's face and hands . . . or paws . . . covered with a tan fur. Her nose was subdued above the mouth, nostrils flaring. Long, snow white hairs bristled from each cheek. Her narrow, yellow eyes flashed in the firelight. Atop her head, pronounced, pointed ears

shifted back and forth.

“Why where
peculiar pair
audaciously afloat,
shamelessly swimming
forbidden fluid?”

Vero said, “Gracious Elder, abductors were pursuing us. The lake and these caves offered our only sanctuary. We surfaced here, desperate for air. Please forgive our trespass.”

Squinting at the reply, the Elder did not respond. She gazed from Vero to Irg, carefully looking him up and down. Irg began to feel self-conscious without his tunic. The Elder reached out and touched the six-armed, starfish talisman hanging around Irg’s neck.

“Can companion converse?”

Vero gave Irg an encouraging nod.

“Greetings, Elder,” said Irg as he lowered his head in respect, but maintained eye contact. Vero nudged him, and whispered, “Don’t stare.”

“Abode afar?” asked the Elder.

Taking a moment to calculate the meaning, Irg said, “Yes, Elder, my home system is very distant, many light units away. I am a Corbog.”

Gesturing toward Vero, “Unusual union.”

“The Ansions saved my life, Elder,” said Irg. “They permitted me to join their crew until they can

return me to my home world. Although I don’t know when that will ever be,” his voice trailing off.

Motioning toward the pool, the Elder asked, “Fluid familiar?”

“My people live on a planet with much water. I have cousins who still live in the sea. Your fluid is very welcomed and refreshing for me.”

The Elder raised an eyebrow, “Breathe below?”

Pointing to the gills at the base of his neck, Irg said, “Yes, Elder, I can breathe underwater.”

“Prestigious power,
confederate Corbog.”

Vero smiled.

Feeling encouraged, Irg said, “Elder, if I may be so bold, you have the sign of my people’s Great Seer at the top of your pyramid. Do you revere Him as well?”

Vero’s smile suddenly disappeared and her eyes widened. “Gracious Elder,” she blurted, “please . . .”

The Elder’s sudden raised paw with six scimitar-like claws flashing in the firelight halted Vero mid-sentence. The Elder leaned forward, her ears flattened against her head, and stared at Irg for an interminable time. The soft hissing of gas fueling the pyres and the echo of water lapping the pool steps filled the void of conversation. The Elder’s ears gradually returned to an erect position. “Honor Her!” she said.

How intriguing, thought Irg, their deity is feminine! Stepping a pace forward, he cocked his head slightly and looked up into the Elder's glaring eyes. Choosing his words carefully, he replied, "Fascinating . . . faith. Desire . . . deeper discovery. Acquire additional . . . appreciation."

The elder's eyes softened, and she drew back into an upright position. She looked from Irg to Vero, and announced,

"Sanctuary shared,
damp duo.
Follow fast."

The Elder abruptly turned and quickly strode toward the back of the pyramid. As Irg and Vero exchanged looks, water splashed behind them. Turning, they saw the huge green serpent's head circling in the dark pool, bearing toward them with its lipless mouth of spiked teeth glistening and its two red eyes burning like hungry embers. Without discussion, Irg and Vero sprinted after the Elder.