

Prologue to Trumps Of Doom from Amberzine #4 August, 1993

by Roger Zelazny

It was almost too easy. A turning, a twisting, a doubling back...

And then he faced a rough, slanted wall, looked up and saw the shaft. He commenced climbing.

It was no longer easy. A swaying sensation began--faint, then distinct--as if he were mounting into the uppermost branches of a tall tree. His way brightened and then dimmed, repeatedly, in no perceptible pattern. After a time, his eyes ached. Images doubled, wavered...

When the way grew suddenly level he doubted his vision, till his extended hand assured him that there was indeed a choice of passages.

He leaned and moved his head into each of these. The faint musical sound seemed slightly louder in the one to the left, and he followed it. Of that, at least, he was certain.

Now his way rose and fell. He climbed up, he climbed down. The brightening and dimming continued, only now the brightness was brighter and the dimness dimmer.

And the sensations of external movement had not abated. The floor of the tunnel seemed to ripple beneath his feet, the walls and roof to contract and expand. He stumbled, caught himself. Stumbled again...

At the next turning the sounds grew slightly louder, and he realized that they were not a tune, but rather a totally random concatenation of noises.

He climbed. He descended. The passageway shrank, and finally he crawled.

The sensations of movement increased. At times he seemed to be spinning; other times, it felt as if he were falling into an enormous abyss.

The flashes of light now drove nails of pain into skull. He began to hallucinate. Faces and figures. Flames. Or were they hallucinations?

He felt the first faint pulsation upon his left wrist...

How long had he been moving? His clothes were already in tatters and he bled, painlessly, from a dozen scrapes and lacerations.

He descended a well and emerged somehow upward onto a floor. Mad laughter rang about him, ceasing only when he realized it to be his own.

The sounds grew even louder, until it lefts as if he negotiated a gallery of demonic bells-- wild, out of phase, their vibrations beating against him.

Thinking became painful. He knew that he must not stop, that he must not turn back, that he must not take any of the lesser turnings where the sounds came softer. Any of these courses would prove fatal. He reduced this to one imperative: Continue.

Again, a pulsing at his wrist, and a faint, slow movement...

He gritted his teeth when he saw that he must climb once more, for her limbs had grown heavy. Each movement seemed as if it were performed underwater - slowly, requiring more than normal effort.

A screen of smoke offered frightening resistance. He drove himself against it for an age before he passed through and felt his movement become easy once again. Six times this occurred, and each time the pressure against him was greater.

When he crawled out, drooling and dripping blood, on the other side of the chamber from which he had entered, his eyes darted wildly and could not fix upon the small, dark figure which stood before him.

"You are a fool," it told him.

It took some time for the words to register, and when they did he lacked the strength with which to reply.

"A lucky fool," it went on, darkness flowing about it like wings. (Or were they really wings?) "I had not judged you ready to essay the Logrus for a long while yet."

He closed his eyes against this speaker, and an image of the route he had followed danced within his mind's seeing, like a bright, torn web folding in a breeze.

"...And a fool not to have borne a blade and so enchanted it... or a mirror, a chalice, or a wand to brace your magic. No, all I see is a piece of rope. You should have waited, for more instruction, for greater strength; What say you?"

He raised himself from the floor, and a mad light danced within his eyes.

"It was time," he said. "I was ready."

"And a cord! What a half-ass-luck!"

The cord, glowing now, tightened about his throat.

When the other released it, the dark one coughed and nodded.

"Perhaps you knew what you were doing--on that count..." it muttered. "Is it really time? You will be leaving?"

"Yes."

A dark cloak fell upon his shoulders. He heard the splash of water within a flask.

"Here."

As he drank, the cord wrapped itself about his wrist and vanished.

"Thanks, Uncle." he said, after several swallows.

The dark figure shook its head.

"Impulsive," it said. "Just like your father."