



OK, the deal is, I write the first chapter (or, until I run out of space, whichever comes first) and all you talented if-only-I-had-a-break-I-could-do-better-than-(Asimov/Ellison/Heinlein/Clarke/De Camp/...) would be pro's write the next segment. I'll also continue it and we'll see how each of us handles it differently. (If you don't want to play the game, well, Cthulhu take you!) Here goes.

#### THE ELDER GODS GO SENILE

The skies darkened, the clouds gathered, the winds blew fiercely, and a shadow crept over the moon. Leathery wings flapped, and a shriek curdled the dank air. The musty smell approached decay and then went rancid. Somewhere a toad threw up.

The Woman was running, running as she had never ran before. Fear raked her mind, fear burned the soles of her feet, fear spurred her on, digging deep into her long, curvaceous flanks. She tripped, and Terror picked her up, Dread dusted her off, and Horror gave her back her breath. Then fear overtook her again and she began running.

She stopped to gather her breath. As her panting died down, sounds behind her became audible. Rustling. Shambling. Slithering! A basso profundo belch!

She hurled herself forward, felt the slimy swamp surround her feet, crawl up her thighs, tickle her bottom. She pulled herself out by a tree creeper, then began sliding back in as her grip was lost.

She hung onto the shore line, something squishy and fetid under her arms on which she buried her head, crying.

"Bad trip?"

She raised her head, whipped back her long, beautiful, swamp-dampened hair. Her eyes widened and her mouth formed an O. "Who..."

The man was quite young, early twenties, perhaps, wearing Levis, a T-shirt, and swamp boots. On the T Shirt was written New York University Science Fiction Society. He had a FIAWOL button pinned on the shirt.

\*Slup, slup, slup\*

He extended a hand and helped her climb out. Then he looked her over critically. She was roughly the same age as him, svelte, light brown hair all over in the right places.

"Nude, of course," he remarked.

"Well," she flushed, perturbed over his taking it so matter-of-factly, "I am not in the habit of taking my clothes off and running through swamps, chased by giant tentacled, slithering monstrosities."

\*Slup, slup, slup\*

"Why did you expect me to be nude?"

"This is a fantasy setting, isn't it?"

"It's getting closer," she whispered as she huddled against his body. "Oh, no, I think I can see it!"

"There, there," he said, putting his arm around her and patting her comfortingly. "Tell me all about it."

"Stop patting me comfortingly there."

"Hmm. Maybe this is hard SF."

"Well, it all started when I found out that Leonard Nimoy's ears weren't naturally pointed. I was so disillusioned with life, I took to reading Harlan Ellison. I came here to get away from that Sick Evil Malevolent Universe Out There,"

"Sure picked the right place."

She ignored his laconic rejoinder. "So when I told my friendly bar man my troubles, he told me about this groovy cult down the block. Well, they seemed to empathise with my wanting to give it all up, so I went along to their rituals. Then they stripped me, performed obscene acts, which I eventually objected to, and threw me to their pet monster in their basement, Cringerat, which I strenuously objected to. I mean, not that I had not gone through the rest of that at LASFS meetings, but they eventually drew the line!"

"Ah, not only beautiful, but of exotic origins."

"It's coming closer...it's got a tentacle round my ankle...it's pulling me into its orifice...won't you helppp...?"