







WHAT WALKS THESE HILLS

by
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TEM**

It was the hum he'd been listening for. A hum made by no earthly being, one that filled the soul with thoughts of peace and soft rain and far-off, flickering lightning.

He listened until he felt it. And then followed.

And there, in the clearing below, he found it.

It was no sky-yacht, no rich wizard's toy, nor even the great luxury-craft of the indolent lords to the south. None could afford it, and if they could, of what would they have built it?

The wood was finer-grained and more lustrous than any found in forests known to the civilized tribes. The gleaming brasswork—if brass it was at all—iridescent and hypnotic, like the gleaming shell of some beautiful, exotic insect, dappled in undersea light. The delicate inlays, the silks, the smell of it, like coriander and the memory of woodfire.

And the machineries. As large and powerful as anything in an ocean-spanning freighter that creaked and groaned with the force of the upper winds, yet these meshed so smoothly their movements felt like liquid, like poetry. It walked, rather than sailed—he had seen it walk, with his own eyes—with that hum of forgotten storms and evening solace.

Now it lay below, couched like some slumbering predator, waiting, wary, one eye half-lidded for danger.

And the woman...

ILLUSTRATED BY INTUS PARRA





OHNNNN!!

You —
you —



Hooph. You startled the
life out of me, I swear.
Don't do that!

I didn't
mean to.
I just —

Goodness, but you're a fit
fellow, aren't you? One of
McCready's field boys?
Newly-promoted,
maybe?

Not that
I'd know if you'd
been active
for years, of
course —



— I haven't been back to
Central in a good century,
I think. Maybe more.

Look,
sorry if
I —

I've been
so utterly out
of touch.

You've been interacting with
the tribes, haven't you? Not
supposed to do any of that
these days, I hear.

And
wounded,
too!

I'm —



Careless, I suppose — you
new actives always are,
at first. Beta-beta!
Attend him!

Oh, don't be
a baby.

Wait —
what —

