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**ELYSIA: THE COMING OF CTHULHU**

**Part One: Far Lands, Strange Beings**

## Borea

**Kota'na, red Indians** straight out of America's Old West—Kota'na, Keeper of the Bears—watched Moreen at play with Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) a pair of cubs each bigger than herself and shook his head in admiration and amazement. The mother of the bears, huge Tookis, almost ten feet in height when she was upright, grunted and pawed the floor of the exercise cavern where she stood beside her master. Her mate was Morda, Kota'na's favorite among all the fighting bears, but Morda was not here. No, for he was out hunting with a pack of his brothers and their keepers, butchering food-beasts around the foot of the plateau for the larders of its tribes.

But the way this girl played with these cubs—without fear, laughing and biting their ears, and slapping their noses where they tumbled her—and them retaliating with howls and clumsy bounds, like puppies, but *never* going to strike her! Striking each other, certainly, with mighty, resounding, bone-breaking clouts; but not the girl, never the girl: And mighty Tookis, the mother of the cubs—the way she seemed to enjoy all of this, snorting her encouragement and thumping the floor—but if anyone else had dared to try it, maybe Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) even Kota'na himself ... well, good luck to him!

At at last Moreen had had enough. Laughing and panting she struggled free of the boisterous mounds of snowy fur which were Tookis' cubs, then leaned against the wall of the cavern to catch her breath. "They're too much for me!" she panted and laughed, shaking back her shoulder-length, golden hair. Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) "Why, I'd bet they're even too much for their own mother! Eh, Tookis?" And she flung an arm around the great bear's neck.

Tookis thought otherwise. With a low growl she shook Moreen off, shambled forward into the fray, raised a cloud of dust where she merged with the cubs; until their massed, tussling, rumbling bulk resembled nothing so much as a small white unevenly mobile mountain. Kota'na grinned and let the play of these giant descendants of Polar bears continue for a moment or two, then stopped it with a single word. Until now the animals had been completely free, harmless in the presence of their master, but Kota'na dared not leave them alone like that. The cubs were at that curious age and would explore if they could; it would never do to have them wandering free through the many levels and labyrinths of the plateau, with mighty Tookis shambling along behind them! And so now he chained all three by their collars to the wall, on tethers long enough they might continue their game, then stepped back and let them get on with it.

"There," he said, as the snarling, slavering and tumbling recommenced, in a very convincing

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imitation of the real thing, “let them weary themselves with play. It’s the best exercise I know. And while they play, will you not sit with me on the high balcony there, and look out over Borea while we talk?”

Moreen had her breath back; she stood up straight, all sixty-four inches of her, and dusted herself down. Then she gazed up in open admiration at the tall, bronzed Indian brave. He wore his shiny black hair in pigtailed that fell forward to the ridges of his collarbones, and his naked arms and deep chest were marked with the unfaded scars of many a battle. For Kota’na was a great hero of the plateau’s wars with Ithaqua’s wolf-warriors and his Children of the Winds, and his deeds were already legended as the deeds of any mere man may be. Now he kept the bears for Hank Silberhutte, the plateau’s Warlord; but more than that he was Silberhutte’s friend, the highest honour to which any man of the plateau might ever aspire.

And as Moreen regarded him, so Kota’na’s keen brown eyes stared back in mutual appreciation. De Marigny, man (or possibly magician) of the Motherworld, had got himself a fine woman here. She should bear him many strong sons.

The girl was lithe Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) and supple as a withe, with wide, bright blue eyes and skin like the pale honey of wild bees. She had about her an aura, a warmth she wore like some fine fur; which had only ever been torn aside by Ithaqua, black stalker between the Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) stars. Now, in her brown jacket and trousers of soft leather, she seemed almost boyish, and yet fragile for all that. Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) But her unaffected grace and loveliness, and Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) her youthful liveness, were perhaps set off by a not-quite innocence; for Moreen Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) had seen the Wind-Walker at his worst, and no one could remain wholly innocent after that.

To have seen Ithaqua raging—to be witness to his mindless slaughters—was to have the innocence mercilessly ripped from you. And yet she had come through all of that, had succeeded against all odds to be one with The Searcher, Henri-Laurent de Marigny. Aye, mortal and fragile as all human beings are, nevertheless Moreen bore a strength in her and a power; she was a free creature of Nature, and could commune with all creatures of Nature wherever she found them. This was her power, and thus her seeming familiarity with Tookis and her cubs.

As to Kota’na’s invitation: “Very well,” she said. “But what shall we talk about?—and please don’t ask me to tell you *again* about Numinos, or of our adventures in the ice-caves on Dromos. That was a very frightening time and I would like to forget it Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) ...” And for a moment, anyway, the laughter went out of her wide eyes.

It was mid-morning on Borea, and the day was still and uncommonly bright. But “bright” is hardly the right word, for Borea has no real daylight as such; it is a world which dwells in a permanent half-light, certainly in its northern regions. And that was where the plateau’s vast hive of alveolate rock stood: in Borea’s northland. There it towered, mighty outcrop thrust up in ages past, flat-roofed and sheer-sided, the last redoubt Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) of Borea’s free peoples against Ithaqua and his Children of the Winds.

The Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) balcony Kota’na had mentioned lay through an archway in the

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wall of the great bears' exercise cavern, cut through where the cavern's wall came closest to the plateau's surface. One of many such observation points, it Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) was a wide ledge where benches had been carved from the solid rock; and beyond—only a chest-high wall separated Moreen and Kota'na from empty air and a sheer face that fell for well Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) over a hundred feet to the icy, scree-littered foot of the plateau.

It was cold there, where the occasional draught of frigid air Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) would come gusting in from the northern plains; and so Moreen kept on the move while they talked, hurrying to and fro Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) on the precipitous balcony and only pausing now and then to peer out and down at some freshly discovered feature spied on the gentling snow-slopes far below. Kota'na, on the other hand, impervious to the cold, as were most of the people of the plateau, simply stood stern-faced, his arms folded on his breast.

“No,” Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) he said after a moment, “I will not ask about the moons of Borea: Numinos, where you were born, or Dromos, where the Lord Sil-ber-hut-te and you others destroyed the ice-priests. I have remembered it well from your other tellings, and from what the Warlord himself has told me. It is Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) a tale I shall pass down to my children, when they are old enough to understand it; and when Oontawa their mother is old, and when I am a wrinkled, leathery Elder, then *our* children will tell it to theirs. That is the way of legends; it is how they live. No, this time I would know of the places you have seen since last you were here, and what brings you back here? And if it is not impertinent of me—for I know your man is a wizard, whose ways are hard to understand—I wish you would also say what ails him? Doubtless it is a pain I cannot ease, but if I could—”

Impulsively, Moreen stood on tiptoe and hugged the tall Indian's neck. “No wonder Hank Silberhutte loves you!” she burst out. “And Oontawa and the great bears and your people, too. That stern look you wear can't fool me, Kota'na; it is a mask. You and your legends and tales of derring-do. You're a romantic, that's all! You'd take the entire weight of the plateau itself on your own shoulders, if you could. The way Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) you talk about Hank, Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) as if Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) he were a god! He's a man of the Motherworld. But how can I blame you when he is exactly the same? You should hear *him*, sometimes, when he talks about how you killed the traitor Northan—and then would not give up his head until Hank had seen it and forgiven you for stealing his glory!”

Kota'na held her at arm's length and raised an eyebrow at her impetuosity; but she could tell Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) that he was pleased. He very nearly smiled. “The Lord Sil-ber-hut-te ... says these things?”

“What? Of course he does! He can't talk about his 'bear-brother' without puffing himself up first. You men!” Then she stepped back a little, hugged herself and shivered. And: “Come on, let's walk in the plateau,” she said; and in a moment her voice was serious again.

Back under the arch and into the exercise cavern they went, where Tookis and her cubs were sprawled, Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) panting, for the moment spent. Kota'na stopped and spoke briefly to a young Eskimo keeper, told him to tend the bears, and then he and Moreen passed on into the plateau's labyrinth. As they went, she said:

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“You ask what ails Henri. Well, I’ll tell you. Except, believe me, he is not a Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) wizard. His time-clock is a wizard’s device, or would seem to be, I’ll grant you; and its previous owner, now perhaps he really was a wizard!—or so I’d judge from what Henri says of him. But not de Marigny. He’s just a man, albeit a very wonderful man, and I love him. And you’re right, he is unhappy. Which is a hard thing to understand, I know. Through the time-clock he has all Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) space and time at his command; they are his to explore endlessly. And yet—”

“Yes?”

She shrugged, and now Kota’na could see that Moreen, too, was unhappy. Because of her man’s unhappiness. “The one thing he most desires,” she finally continued, “it is forbidden to him. The one place he would find, that remains hidden. The one voice he would hear, even across kalpas of space and time, stands silent. Indeed, the entire universe seems indifferent to his endless searching, even heedless of it. Do you know, but Henri is known as The Searcher now, on a hundred strange worlds? What ails him? It is this: someone once showed him a bright jewel place, where miracles are frequent and the impossible is commonplace—a place beyond imagining, called Elysia and said to be the home of the gods—and Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) all Henri finds are balls of mud and rock Elysia: Elysia (Titus Crow) twirling endlessly about their heart-suns. Worlds countless as grains of sand—and to him just as tasteless. Ah!—I will tell you, Kota’ na—but we have seen

## **Elysia Elysia Titus Crow**

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