

Kazam Collects

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"HAIL, JEWEL IN THE LOTUS," half whispered the stringy, brown person. His eyes were shut in holy ecstasy, his mouth pursed as though he were tasting the sweetest fruit that ever grew.

"Hail, jewel in the lotus," mumbled back a hundred voices in a confused backwash of sound. The stringy, brown person turned and faced his congregation. He folded his hands.

"Children of Hagar," he intoned. His voice was smooth as old ivory and had a mellow sheen about it

"Children of Hagar, you who have found delight and peace in the bosom of the Elemental, the Eternal, the Un-know-ingness that is without bounds, make Peace with me." You could tell by his very voice that the words were capitalized.

"Let our Word," intoned the stringy, brown person, "be spread. Let our Will be brought about Let us destroy, let us mould, let us build. Speak low and make your spirits white as Hagar's beard." With a reverent gesture he held before them two handfuls of an unattached beard that hung from the altar.

"Children of Hagar, unite your Wills into One." The congregation kneeled as he gestured at them, gestured as one would at a puppy one was training to play dead.

The meeting hall—or rather, temple—of the Cult of Hagar was on the third floor of a little building on East 59th Street, otherwise almost wholly unused. The hall had been fitted out to suit the sometimes peculiar requirements of the unguess-able Will-Mind-Urge of Hagar Inscrutable; that meant that there was gilded wood everywhere there could be, and strips of scarlet cloth hanging from the ceiling in circles of five. There was, you see, a Sanctified Ineffability about the unequal lengths of the cloth strips.

The faces of the congregation were varying studies in rapture. As the stringy, brown person tinkled a bell they rose and blinked absently at him as he waved a benediction and vanished behind a door covered with chunks of gilded wood.

The congregation began to buzz quietly.

"Well?" demanded one of another. "What did you think of

ur

"I dunno. Who's he, anyway?" A respectful gesture at the door covered with gilded wood.

"Kazam's his name. They say he hasn't touched food since he saw the Ineluctable Modality."

"What's thatr

Pitying smile. "You couldn't understand it just yet. Wait till you've come around a few more times. Then maybe you'll be able to read his book—The Unravelling.' After that you can tackle the 'Isba Kazhlunk' that he found in the Siberian ice. It opened the way to the Ineluctable Modality, but it's pretty deep stuff—even for me."

They filed from the hall buzzing quietly, dropping coins into a bowl that stood casually by the exit. Above the bowl hung from the ceiling strips of red cloth in a circle of five. The bowl, of course, was covered with chunks of gilded wood.

Beyond the door the stringy, brown man was having a little trouble. Detective Fitzgerald would not be convinced.

"In the first place," said the detective, "you aren't licensed to collect charities. In the second place this whole thing looks like fraud and escheatment. In the third place this building isn't a dwelling and you'll have to move that cot out of here." He gestured disdainfully at an army collapsible that stood by the battered roUtop desk. Detective Fitzgerald was a big, florid man who dressed with exquisite neatness. "I am sorry," said the stringy, brown man. "What must

Idor "Let's begin at the beginning. The Constitution guarantees

freedom of worship, but I don't know if they meant something like this. Are you a citizen?"

"No. Here are my registration papers." The stringy, brown man took them from a cheap, new wallet

"Born inPersia. Name's Joseph Kazam. Occupation, scholar. How do you make that out?"

"It's a good word," said Joseph Kazam with a hopeless little gesture. "Are you going to send me

away—deport me?"

"I don't know," said the detective thoughtfully. "If you register your religion at City Hall before we get any more complaints, it'll be all right"

"Ah," breathed Kazam. "Complaints?"

Fitzgerald looked at him quizzically. "We got one from a man named Rooney," he said. "Do you know him?"

"Yes. Runi Sarif is his real name. He has hounded me out of Norway, Ireland and Canada—wherever I try to reestablish the Cult of Hagar."

Fitzgerald looked away. "I suppose," he said matter-of-factly, "you have lots of secret enemies plotting against you."

Kazam surprised him with a burst of rich laughter. "I have been investigated too often," grinned the Persian, "not to recognize that one. You think I'm mad."

"No," mumbled the detective, crestfallen. "I just wanted to find out Anybody running a nut cult's automatically reserved a place in Bellevue."

"Forget it, sir. I spit on the Cult of Hagar. It is my livelihood, but I know better than any man that it is a mockery. Do you know what our highest mystery is? The Ineluctable Modality." Kazam sneered.

"That's Joyce," said Fitzgerald with a grin. "You have a sense of humor, Mr. Kazam. That's a rare thing in the religious."

"Please," said Joseph Kazam. "Don't call me that. I am not worthy—the noble, sincere men who work for their various faiths are my envy. I have seen too much to be one of them."

"Go on," said Fitzgerald, leaning forward. He read books, this detective, and dearly loved an abstract discussion.

The Persian hesitated. "I," he said at length, "am an occult engineer. I am a man who can make the hidden forces work."

"Like staring a leprechaun in the eye till he finds you a pot of gold?" suggested the detective with a chuckle.

"One manifestation," said Kazam calmly. "Only one."

"Look," said Fitzgerald. "They still have that room in Belle-

vue. Don't say that in public—stick to the Ineluctable Modality if you know what's good for you."

"Tut," said the Persian regretfully. "He's working on you."

The detective looked around the room. "Meaning who?" he demanded.

"Runi Sarif. He's trying to reach your mind and turn you against me."

"Balony," said Fitzgerald coarsely. "You get yourself registered as a religion hi twenty-four hours; then find yourself a place to live. I'll hold off any charges of fraud for a while. Just watch your step." He jammed a natty Homburg down over his sandy hair and strode pugnaciously from the office.

Joseph Kazman sighed. Obviously the detective had been disappointed.

That night, in his bachelor's flat, Fitzgerald tossed and turned uneasily on his modern bed. Being blessed with a sound digestion able to cope even with a steady diet of chain-restaurant food and the soundest of consciences, the detective was agitated profoundly by his wakefulness.

Being, like all bachelors, a cautious man, he hesitated to dose himself with the veronal he kept for occasions like this, few and far between though they were. Finally, as he heard the locals pass one by one on the El a few blocks away and then heard the first express of the morning, with its higher-pitched bickering of wheels and quicker vibration against the track, he stumbled from bed and walked dazedly into his bathroom, fumbled open the medicine chest

Only when he had the bottle and had shaken two pills into his hand did he think to turn on the light. He pulled the cord and dropped the pills in horror. They weren't the veronal at all but an old prescription which he had thriftily kept till they might be of use again.

Two would have been a fatal overdose. Shakily Fitzgerald filled a glass of water and drank it down, spilling about a third on his pajamas. He replaced the pills and threw away the entire bottle. You never know when a thing like that might happen again, he thought—too late to mend.

Now thoroughly sure that he needed the sedative, he swallowed a dose. By the time he had replaced the bottle he could scarcely find his way back to the bed, so sleepy was he.

He dreamed then. Detective Fitzgerald was standing on a plain, a white plain, that was very hot. His feet were bare. In

the middle distance was a stone tower above which circled winged skulls—bat-winged skulls, whose rattling and flapping he could plainly hear.

From the plain—he realized then that it was a desert of fine, white sand—spouted up little funnels or vortices of fog in a circle around him. He began to run very slowly, much slower than he wanted to. He thought he was running away from the tower and the vortices, but somehow they continued to stay in his field of vision. No matter where he swerved the tower was always in front and the little twisters around him. The circle was growing smaller around him, and he redoubled his efforts to escape.

Finally he tried flying, leaping into the air. Though he drifted for yards at a time, slowly and easily, he could not land where he wanted to. From the air the vortices looked like petals of a flower, and when he

came drifting down to the desert he would land hi the very center of the strange blossom.

Again he ran, the circle of foggy ccnes following still, the tower still before him. He felt with his bare feet something tinglingly clammy. The circle had contracted to the point of coalescence, had gripped his two feet like a trap.

He shot into the air and headed straight for the tower. The creaking, napping noise of the bat-winged skulls was very much louder now. He cast his eyes to the side and was just able to see the tips of his own black, flapping membranes. As though regular nightmares—always the same, yet increasingly repulsive to the detective—were not- enough woe for one man to bear, he was troubled with a sudden, appalling sharpness of hearing. This was strange, for Fitzgerald had always been a little deaf in one ear.

The noises he heard were distressing things, things like the ticking of a wristwatch two floors beneath his flat, the gurgle of water in sewers as he walked tile streets, humming of underground telephone wires. Headquarters was a bedlam with its stentorian breathing, the machine-gun fire of a telephone being dialed, the howitzer crash of a cigarette case snapping shut.

He had his bedroom soundproofed and tried to bear it The inches of fibreboard helped a little; he found that he could focus his attention on a book and practically exclude from his mind the regular swish of air in his bronchial tubes,

the thudding at his wrists and temples, the slushing noise of food passing through his transverse colon.

Fitzgerald did not go mad for he was a man with ideals. He believed in clean government and total extirpation of what he fondly believed was a criminal class which could be detected by the ear lobes and other distinguishing physical characteristics.

He did not go to a doctor because he knew that the word would get back to headquarters that Fitzgerald heard things and would probably begin to see things pretty soon and that it wasn't good policy to have a man like mat on the force.

The detective read up on the later Freudians, trying to interpret the recurrent dream. The book said that it meant he had been secretly in love with a third cousin on his mother's side and that he was ashamed of it now and wanted to die, but that he was afraid of heavenly judgment. He knew that wasn't so; his mother had had no relations and detective Fitzgerald wasn't afraid of anything under the sun.

After two weeks of increasing horror he was walking around like a corpse, moving by instinct and wearily doing his best to dodge the accidents that seemed to trail him. It was then that he was assigned to check on the Cult of Hagar. The records showed that they had registered at City Hall, but records don't show everything.

He walked in on the cult during a service and dully noted that its members were more prosperous in appearance than they had been, and that there were more women present. Joseph Kazam was going through precisely the same ritual that, the detective had last seen.

When the last bill had fallen into the pot covered with gilded wood and the last dowager had left Kazam emerged and greeted the detective.

"Fitzgerald," he said, "you damned fool, why didn't you come to me in the first place?"

"For what?" asked the detective, loosening the waxed cotton plugs in his ears.

The stringy, brown man chuckled. "Your friend Rooney's been at work on you. You hear things. You can't sleep and when you do—"

"That's plenty," interjected Fitzgerald. "Can you help me out of this mess I'm in?"

"Nothing to it. Nothing at all. Come into the office."

Dully the detective followed, wondering if the cot had been removed.

The ritual that Kazam performed was simple in the extreme, but a little revolting. The mucky aspects of it Fitzgerald completely excused when he suddenly realized that he no longer heard his own blood pumping through his veins, and that the asthmatic wheeze of the janitor in the basement was now private to the janitor again. "How does it feel?" asked Kazam concernedly. "Magnificent," breathed the detective, throwing away his cotton plugs. "Too wonderful for words."

"I'm sorry about what I had to do," said the other man, "but that was to get your attention principally. The real cure was mental projection." He then dismissed the bedevilment of Fitzgerald with an airy wave of the hand. "Look at this," he said.

"My God!" breathed the detective. "Is it real?" Joseph Kazam was holding out an enormous diamond cut into a thousand glittering facets that shattered the light from his desk lamp into a glorious blaze of color.

"This," said the stringy, brown man, "is the Charity Diamond."

"You mean," sputtered the detective, "you got it from—" The very woman," said Kazam hastily. "And of her own free will. I have a receipt: 'For the sum of one dollar in payment for the Charity Diamond. Signed, Mrs.——'"

"Yes," said the detective. "Happy days for the Sons of Hagar. Is this what you've been waiting for?"

"This," said Kazam curiously turning the stone in his hand, "is what I've been hunting over all the world for years. And only by starting a nut cult could I get it Thank God tfs legal."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the detective. "Use the diamond for a little trip. You will want to come along, I think. You'll have a chance to meet your Mr. Rooney."

"Lead on," said Fitzgerald. "After the past two weeks I can stand anything."

"Very well." Kazam turned out the desk lamp. "It glows," whispered Fitzgerald. He was referring to the diamond, over whose surface was passing an eerie blue light, like the invisible flame of anthracite. "I'd like you to pray for success, Mr. Fitzgerald," said

Kazam. The detective began silently to go over his brief stock of prayers. He was barely conscious of the fact that the other man was mumbling to himself and caressing the diamond with long, wiry fingers.

The shine of the stone grew brighter yet; strangely, though, it did not pick out any of the details of the room.

Then Kazam let out an ear-splitting howl. Fitzgerald winced, closing his eyes for just a moment. When he opened them he began to curse in real earnest.

"You damned rotter!" he cried. "Taking me here—"

The Persian looked at him coldly and snapped: "Easy, man! This is real—look around you!"

The detective looked around and saw that the tower of stone was rather far in the distance, farther than in his dreams, usually. He stooped and picked up a handful of the fine white desert sand, let it run through his fingers.

"How did you get us here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Same way I cured you of Runi Sarif's curse. The diamond has rare powers to draw the attention. Ask any jewel-thief. This one, being enormously expensive, is so completely engrossing that unsuspected powers of concentration are released. That, combined with my own sound knowledge of a particular traditional branch of psychology, was enough to break the walls down which held us pent to East 59th Street"

The detective was beginning to laugh, flatly and hysterically. "I come to you hag-ridden, you first cure me and then plunge me twice as deep into Hell, Kazam! What's the good of it?"

"This isn't Hell," said the Persian matter-of-factly. "It isn't Hell, but it isn't Heaven either. Sit down and let me explain." Obediently Fitzgerald squatted on the sand. He noticed that Kazam cast an apprehensive glance at the horizon before beginning.

"I was born in Persia," said Kazam, "but I am not Persian by blood, religion or culture. My life began in a little mountain village where I soon saw that I was treated not as the other children were. My slightest

wish could command the elders of the village and if I gave an order it would be carried out

"The reasons for all this were explained to me on my thirteenth birthday by an old man—a very old man whose beard reached to his knees. He said that he had in him only a small part of the blood of Kaidar, but that I was

almost full of k, that there was little human blood in me, "I cried and screamed and said that I didn't want to be Kaidar, that I just wanted to be a person. I ran away from the village after another year, before they began to teach me their twisted, ritualistic versions of occult principles. It was this flight which saved me from the usual fate of the Kaidar; had I stayed I would have become a celebrated miracle man, known for all of two hundred miles or so, curing the sick and cursing the well. My highest flight would be to create a new Islamic faction—number three hundred and eighty-two, I suppose.

"Instead I knocked around the world. And Lord, got knocked around too. Tramp steamers, maritime strike in Frisco, the Bela Kun regime in Hungary—I wound up in North Africa when I was about thirty years old.

"I was broke, as broke as any person could be and stay alive. A Scotswoman picked me up, hired me, taught me mathematics. I plunged into it, algebra, conies, analytics, calculus, relativity. Before I was done, I'd worked out wave-mechanics three years before that Frenchman had even begun to think about it.

"When I showed her the set of differential equations for the carbon molecule, all solved, she damned me for an unnatural monster and threw me out But she'd given me the beginnings of mental discipline, and done it many thousands of times better than they could have in that Persian village. I began to realize what I was.

"It was then that I drifted into the nut cult business. I found out that all you need for capital is a stock of capitalized abstract qualities, like AU-Knowingness, Will-Mind-Urge, Planetude and Exciliation. With that to work on I can make nry living almost anywhere on the globe.

"I met Runi Sarif, who was running an older-established •ect, the Pan-European Astral Confederation of Healers. He was a Hindu from the Punjab plains hi the North of India. Lord, what a mind he had! He worked me over quietly for three months before I realized what was up.

"Then there was a little interview with him. He began with the complicated salute of the Astral

Confederation and got down to business. 'Brother Kazam,' he said, 'I wish to show yen an ancient sacred book I have just discovered.' I laughed, of course. By that time I'd already discovered seven ancient books by myself, all ready-translated into the language of

the country I would be working at the time. The 'Isba Kazh-lunk' was the most successful; that's the one I found preserved in the hide of a mammoth in a Siberian glacier.

"Runi looked sour. 'Brother Kazam,' said he, 'do not scoff. Does the word Kaidar mean anything to you?' I played dumb and asked whether it was something out of the third chapter of the Lost Lore of Atlantis, but I remembered ever so faintly that I had been called that once.

" 'A Kaidar,' said Runi, 'is an atavism to an older, stronger people who once visited this plane and left their seed. They can be detected by*—he squinted at me sharply—*by a natural aptitude for occult pursuits. They carry in their minds learning undreamable by mortals. Now, Brother Kazam, if we could only find a Kaidar...'

" 'Don't cany yourself away,' I said. 'What good would that be to us?'"

"Silently he produced what I swear was actually an ancient sacred book. And I wouldn't be surprised if he'd just discovered it, moreover. It was the psaltery of a small, very ancient sect of Edomites who had migrated beyond the Euphrates and died out. When I'd got around the rock-Hebrew it was written in I was very greatly impressed. They had some noble religious poems, one simply blistering exorcism and anathema, a lot of tedious genealogy in verse form. And they had a didactic poem on the Kaidar, based on one who had turned up in their tribe.

"They had treated him horribly—chained him to a cave wall and used him for a sort of male Sybil. They found out that the best way to get him to prophesy was to show him a diamond. Then, one sad day, they let him touch it. Blatn! He vanished, taking two of the rabbis with him. The rabbis came back later; appeared in broad daylight raving about visions of Paradise they had seen.

"I quite forgot about the whole affair. At that time I was obsessed with the idea that I would become the Rockefeller of occultism—get disciples, train them carefully and spread my cult. If Mohammed could do it, why not I? To this day I don't know the answer.

"While I was occupying myself with grandiose daydreams, Runi was busily picking over my mind. To a

natural cunning and a fantastic ability to concentrate he added what I unconsciously knew, finally achieving adequate control of many factors.

"Then he stole a diamond, I don't know where, and vanished. One presumes he wanted to have that Paradise that the rabbis told of for his very own. Since then he has been trying to destroy me, sending out messages, dominating other minds on the Earthly plane—if you will excuse the jargon—to that end. He reached you, Fitzgerald, through a letter he got someone else to write and post, then when you were located and itemized he could work on you directly.

"You failed him, and he, fearing I would use you, tried to destroy you by heightening your sense of hearing and sending you visions nightly of this plane. It would destroy any common man; we are very fortunate that you are extraordinarily tough in your psychological fibre.

"Since then I have been dodging Runi Sarif, trying to get a diamond big enough to send me here through all the barriers he has prepared against my coming, You helped me very greatly." Again Kazam cast an apprehensive look at the horizon.

The detective looked around slowly. "Is this a paradise?" he asked. "If so I've been seriously misled by my Sunday School teachers." He tried weakly to smile.

"That is one of the things I don't understand—yet," said the Persian. "And this, is another unpleasantness which approaches."

Fitzgerald stared in horror at the little spills of fog which were upending themselves from the sand. He had the ghastly, futile dream sensation again.

"Don't try to get away from them," snapped Kazam. "Walk at the things." He strode directly and pugnaciously at one of the little puffs, and it gave way before him and they were out of the circle.

"That was easy," said the detective weakly.

Suddenly before them loomed the stone tower. The winged skulls were nowhere to be seen.

Sheer into the sky reared the shaft, solid and horribly hewn from grey granite, rough-finished on the outside. The top was shingled to a shallow cone, and embrasures were black dots in the wall.

Then, Fitzgerald never knew how, they were inside the tower, in the great round room at its top. The winged skulls were perched on little straggling legs along a golden rail. Aside from the flat blackness of their wings all was crimson and gold in that room. There was a sickly feeling of decay

and corruption about it, a thing that sickened the detective.

Hectic blotches of purple marked the tapestries that hung that circular wall, blotches that seemed like the high spots in rotten meat. The tapestries themselves the detective could not look at again after one glance. The thing he saw, sprawling over a horde of men and women, drooling flame on them, a naked figure still between its jaws, colossal, slimy paws on a little heap of human beings, was not a pretty sight.

Light came from flambeaux in the wall, and the torches cast a sickly, reddish-orange light over the scene. Thin curls of smoke from the sockets indicated an incense.

And lastly there was to be seen a sort of divan, heaped with cushions in fantastic shapes. Reclining easily on them was the most grotesque, abominable figure Fitzgerald had ever seen. It was a man, had been once. But incredible incontinence had made the creature gross and bloated with what must have been four hundred pounds of fat. Fat swelled out the cummerbund that spanned the enormous belly, fat welled out the cheeks so that the ears of the creature could not be seen beneath the embroidered turban, gouts of fat rolled in a blubbery mass about the neck like the wattles of a dead cockerel.

"Ah," hissed Joseph Kazam. "Runi Sarif ..." He drew from his shirt a little sword or big knife from whose triangular blade glinted the light of the flambeaux.

The suety monster quivered as though maggots were beneath his skin. In a voice that was like the sound a butcher makes when he tears the fat belly from a hog's carcass, Runi Sarif said: "Go—go back. Go back—where you came from—" There was no beginning or ending to the speech. It came out between short, grunting gasps for breath.

Kazam advanced, running a thumb down the knife-blade. The monster on the divan lifted a hand that

was like a bunch of sausages. The nails were a full half-inch below the level of the skin. Afterwards Fitzgerald assured himself that the hand was the most repellent aspect of the entire affair.

With creaking, napping wingstrokes the skulls launched themselves at the Persian, their jaws clicking stonily. Kazam and the detective were in the middle of a cloud of flying jaws that were going for their throats.

Insanely Fitzgerald beat at the things, his eyes shut. When he looked they were lying on the floor. He was surprised to see that there were just four of them. He would have sworn

to a dozen at least. And they all four bore the same skillfully delivered slash mark of Kazam's knife.

There was a low, choking noise from the monster on the divan. As the detective stared Kazam stepped up the first of the three shallow steps leading to it.

What followed detective Fitzgerald could never disentangle. The lights went out, yet he could plainly see. He saw that the monstrous Runi Sarif had turned into a creature such as he had seen on the tapestry, and he saw that so had Kazam, save that the thing which was the Persian carried in one paw a blade.

They were no longer in the tower room, it seemed, nor were they on the white desert below. They were hovering in a roaring squalling tumult, in a confusion of spheres which gently collided and caromed off each other without noise.

As the detective watched, the Runi monster changed into one of the spheres and so, promptly, did Kazam. On the side of the Kazam sphere was the image of the knife. Tearing at a furious rate through the jostling confusion and blackness Fitzgerald followed, and he never knew how.

The Kazam sphere caught the other and spun dizzily around it, with a screaming noise which rose higher and higher. As it passed the top threshold of hearing, both spheres softened and spread into black, crawling clouds. Suspended in the middle of one was the knife.

The other cloud knotted itself into a furious, tight lump and charged the one which carried the blade. It hurtled into and through it, impaling itself.

Fitzgerald shook his head dizzily. They were in the tower room, and Runi Sarif lay on the divan with a cut throat. The Persian had dropped the knife, and was staring with grim satisfaction at the bleeding figure.

"Where were we?" stuttered the detective. "Where—T At the look in Kazam's eyes he broke off and did not ask again.

The Persian said: "He stole my rights. It is fitting that I should recover them, even thus. In one plane—there is no room for two in contest."

Jovially he clapped the detective on the shoulder. "I'll send you back now. From this moment I shall be a card in your Bureau of Missing Persons. Tell whatever you wish—it won't be believed."

"It was supposed to be a paradise," said the detective.

"It is," said Kazam. "Look."

They were no longer in the tower, but on a mossy bank above a river whose water ran a gamut of pastels, changing hues without end. It tinkled out something like a Mozart sonata and was fragrant with a score of scents.

The detective looked at one of the flowers on the bank. It was swaying of itself and talking quietly in a very small voice, like a child.

"They aren't clever," said Kazam, "but they're lovely."

Fitzgerald drew in his breath sharply as a flight of butterfly things passed above. "Send me away," he gasped. "Send me away now or I'll never be able to go. I'd kill you to stay here in another minute.*1

Kazam laughed. "Folly," he said. "Just as the dreary world of sand and a tower that—a certain unhappy person— created was his and him so this paradise is me and mine. My bones are its rock, my flesh is its earth, my blood is its waters, my mind is its living things."

As an unimaginably glowing drift of crystalline, chiming creatures loped across the whispering grass of the bank Kazam waved one hand in a gesture of farewell.

Fitzgerald felt himself receding with incredible velocity, and for a brief moment saw an entire panorama of the world that was Kazam. Three suns were rising from three points of the horizon, and their slanting rays lit a paradise whose only inglorious speck was a stringy, brown man on a riverbank. Then the man vanished as though he had been absorbed into the ground.