

IN THE WAKE OF THE NIGHT
an excerpt

Editor's note: In the Wake of the Night was a long-planned Kane novel about the voyage of the Yhosal-Monyr, originally referred to in Bloodstone. Conceived to be 150,000 words long when finished, Karl recalled: "I've been working on it since 1970, back during my stay in Haight-Ashbury, when inspiration grabbed me while I was tripping on acid at a Procol Harum concert at the Fillmore. "Although never completed, the following is from the novel's prologue.

Kethrid's Dream

Rush, crash,
Waves fall back—
The sand, the surf;
Surf, sand—and back again.
At night...
Waves climb high, climb higher, and crest;
Then fall with a crash I can hear a thousand miles.
At night...
At night the black surf is a pounding beat,
A surging roar of the earth's vast heart—
Pulsing life-flow of the universe of night—
A heartbeat I can hear a thousand miles.
At night...
When sleep will not come,
And restless, I feel the pulse, hear the roar
Of seething black surf on distant dark shores,
Where night has lain a thousand years.
And on what unseen coasts, on what untrod sands—
Where does the night close a veil never rent,
Only rippled by the roar of distant black surf?
To sight these coasts, to tread these sands,
To scale these cliffs, to know these lands,
Beyond the wake of the night...
The surf lures me on, sighing promises upon broken rocks.
Dare...
An unspanned ocean, to cross an unknown sea;
Know the vision of distant coasts,
Know the touch of unknown sands.
Dare to follow in the wake of the night.
The roar of the surf on uncharted shores—
Heartbeat of infinity, its pulse eternal—
Calls to me at night, as it will through night eternal.
Black surf in the night, challenging distant shores—
I hear its call ten thousand miles,
Across ten thousand years.

Prologue

How long the ship had lain there, no man could say. A century?
For the ship was there when man first came to this shore. Perhaps it was there when man fled the flaming death of Eden. It may have been there at the moment of man's birth. Or long before.
Perhaps a thousand years.
The ship.
Like some unthinkably huge sea monster the ship rested against the shore.

For the span of a thousand feet it was the shore—a curving black cliff that rose from the sand, ten times the height of a tall man.

A dead leviathan cast forth by the sea. No grave could hold a corpse so vast. Perhaps it was too huge to decay. Not the rotting hand of time, not the scouring brush of waves and sand, not the searing breath of the wind could erode the immovable strength of its black shell.

Perhaps the leviathan only rested.

But its sleep was as great as its size, for the ship had rested throughout the memory of man.

The first men to sight it had crept into its shadow on legs tense with awestricken fear. Minds inured to the marvels of the Earth's elder races were nonetheless stirred with wonder at the silent giant. Might it not awaken and devour them, or in its slumber roll and crush them?

No. It was dead. A great wound gouged through its back. Sand and seadrift filled its belly. It must lie here in death.

And the men passed by and left the ship on its bier of sand-wreathed in seaweed, shrouded in spray. A hundred miles down the coast men raised a village upon the broken ruins of prehuman dream; the village grew into a city and men called it Carsultyal. But the ship remained, vast and lonely—for few cared to disturb its ghost.

If, indeed, it was dead.

I. Vision

Riders in the surf.

Horses' hooves smacked against the wet sand—the sound of their passing swallowed in the roar of the waves. A handful of men, cloaks streaming in the sea-wind, rounded a point of headland and paused in the shadow of grey cliffs.

"There," spoke Nays, pointing needlessly.

Kethrid's breath caught, then hissed unheeded in a long "Ahhh. . ." He raised his spare frame against his stirrups and gazed intently ahead. His yellow eyes shone in the morning sun.

Sprawled against the shoreline beyond, the ship resembled some beached whale of fantastic size. Its ebony hull dwarfed the grey cliffs behind it. Its mass must be immense, for countless seasons of storms had not been able to force the ship back against these grey fangs. Instead the ship had stolen the shoreline from the cliffs, for even in these deep waters the ship lay grounded immovably some distance offshore. In the shelter of its hull, waves piled up sand and drift, so that the ship and its bier made a promontory.

"You seized prey too great to swallow," mused Kethrid aloud. "And now it has strangled you."

Nays glanced at him, then nodded—he had been with Kethrid long enough to follow the twisting course of his thoughts. "It would only have broken its fangs on its shell. The material of that hull is less yielding than the rock."

Kethrid continued to stare, entranced. The sea-wind flapped the azure cloak about his bony frame, hung bits of spray in the tightly curled brown hair that haloed his thin, beardless face. Solid Nays sipped brackish water from a canteen, and passed it among the rest of their party—a dozen soldiers, eyes wary for mermen, and Bryssla, flat face alert and unreadable. The merchant prince waved aside the canteen and unstop-pered a small flask of wine from his panniers.

"You can see more from up close," Nays reminded sardonically.

"Surely," Kethrid agreed, shrugging off the mazed spell. "Let's be getting there, then."

The horses started forward, slowly covering the distance of a few miles that separated the men from the ship. Kethrid was too stricken with wonder to fidget with his customary impatience. On the barren shoreline the wreck had seemed less than a mile away. More than ever the realization of the ship's enormous size was borne upon him.

Even then, his imagination was overwhelmed as they reached their goal and

full awareness came to them. Muttering hushed exclamations, Kethrid let his horse slowly pick his way past the piled drift that nested against the wreck. The tide was at ebb, and although it took a quarter of an hour, they were able to circle the entire length of the ship.

Standing in its shadow, Kethrid's initial impression of a beached leviathan held true. Its hull seemed organic, streamlined—like the shape of some impossibly huge whale. The long, black, curved hull tapered toward either end, with its stern slightly more rounded. The ship seemed to rest on its side. The lower sections of its hull thrust against the surf—exposing a blunt keel like the elongated dorsal fin of a shark. At the keel's trailing edge, a number of evenly spaced protuberances made dull blisters many yards across. Toward its upper sections the hull flattened, appeared to frame onto a single open deck for most of the vessel's great length. But much was buried in sand here on its shore-ward face.

And here the ship had received its deathwound. A jagged tear pierced through the canted deck, like the blow of some gigantic harpoon through the back of a whale. It had gored a path of perhaps fifty yards along the hull, making a cavern into the ship's belly.

Kethrid dismounted. The lips of the wound were about ten feet apart, ragged edges strangely fused and pitted. So the black metal could be destroyed after all, he mused, wondering what vast energies had burned such a cleft. Kethrid had worked with samples of this metal in his forge in Carsultyal, and even temperatures that transmuted iron into steel had not melted the alien alloy.

Lighter, yet harder than steel, the black metal would be of untold worth to mankind, if he could only discover how to work it. There were countless secrets hidden in the ruins of Elder Earth. Kethrid had wrested many such secrets from oblivion already; perhaps the black metal would be next.

He stood before the cavernous rift and peered within. He heard the slap-lap of hidden waters, stirred by the pounding of the surf. A strong stench of stagnant sea and rotting jetsam came from within. Sand and shells had poured into the canted ship; seaweed and driftwood festooned the opening. It seemed an impenetrable tangle, and Kethrid wondered if the entire belly of the ship were packed with such debris. The jagged wound seemed to have burned through at least one of the lower decks and beyond.

"Strike us a light," he ordered, poking his coffin-jawed face through the aperture

"I wouldn't go inside just yet," Nays cautioned. "The hold stinks of mermen and sea scorpions."

Kethrid grunted, but did not press on. Bryssla joined him at the opening, gazing about impassively while a soldier crouched to shelter his tinderbox from the wind.

"Have you ever seen a thing like this?" Bryssla asked suddenly.

Kethrid shook his head. "No. At least, never all in one piece. I've seen ruins that would dwarf this, but never an intact, free moving vessel of this size."

"Intact. Free moving." Bryssla snorted and spat. "At the present this is neither. I find it doubtful that such an enormous structure as this could ever have floated."

"Size is of no consequence," Kethrid pointed out, "so long as the weight of the ship is less than that of the water it displaces. And we know that the elder races sailed craft such as this. Sailed the skies and sailed the stars, it's true—though we've lost the secrets that gave them such power."

A sudden scurrying cut him off. The soldier had gotten his torch alight. As he thrust forward into the shelter of the ship's hold, a panic-stricken merman came tumbling down from concealment within the tangled drift.

"Fire! Fire! Evil men!" it cursed them in Old Tongue—shielding its huge, lidless eyes with a blue-scaled forearm. Half-blinded, it darted toward the torchbearer—slashing with its black-taloned hands.

Swords flickered as the others closed on it. The merman squealed shrilly—moving with the uncanny speed of its race. A sudden leap, a blurring slash.

Two men spun away from their smaller opponent—bleeding furrows ripped across leather hacquetons and flesh. Then Nays lunged with a spear. The bulky man's thrust pinned the merman to the bunker of drift. It spat and cursed, clawed out toward his face. Swords rose and hacked. Eventually its struggles ceased.

The men puffed and glared, looked to their wounds. Those slashed hurried into the surf to wash their wounds in salt water, for a merman's claws were certain to cause festering.

"This is your ship!" scoffed Bryssla. "A den of vermin! A cargo of sand and muck! This ship is dead, Kethrid. You're a fool to dream of restoring such a vessel!"

Kethrid touched the silent hull. Through the black metal he could feel the drumming song of the surf. His eyes were lost in dream.

"I shall name her Yhosal-Monyr," he breathed. "In Old Tongue, Light Reborn."

"You're a fool," swore Bryssla. "The ship is dead."

But Kethrid was listening to the call of his dream. His answer was unshadowed by doubt. "The ship will sail again."