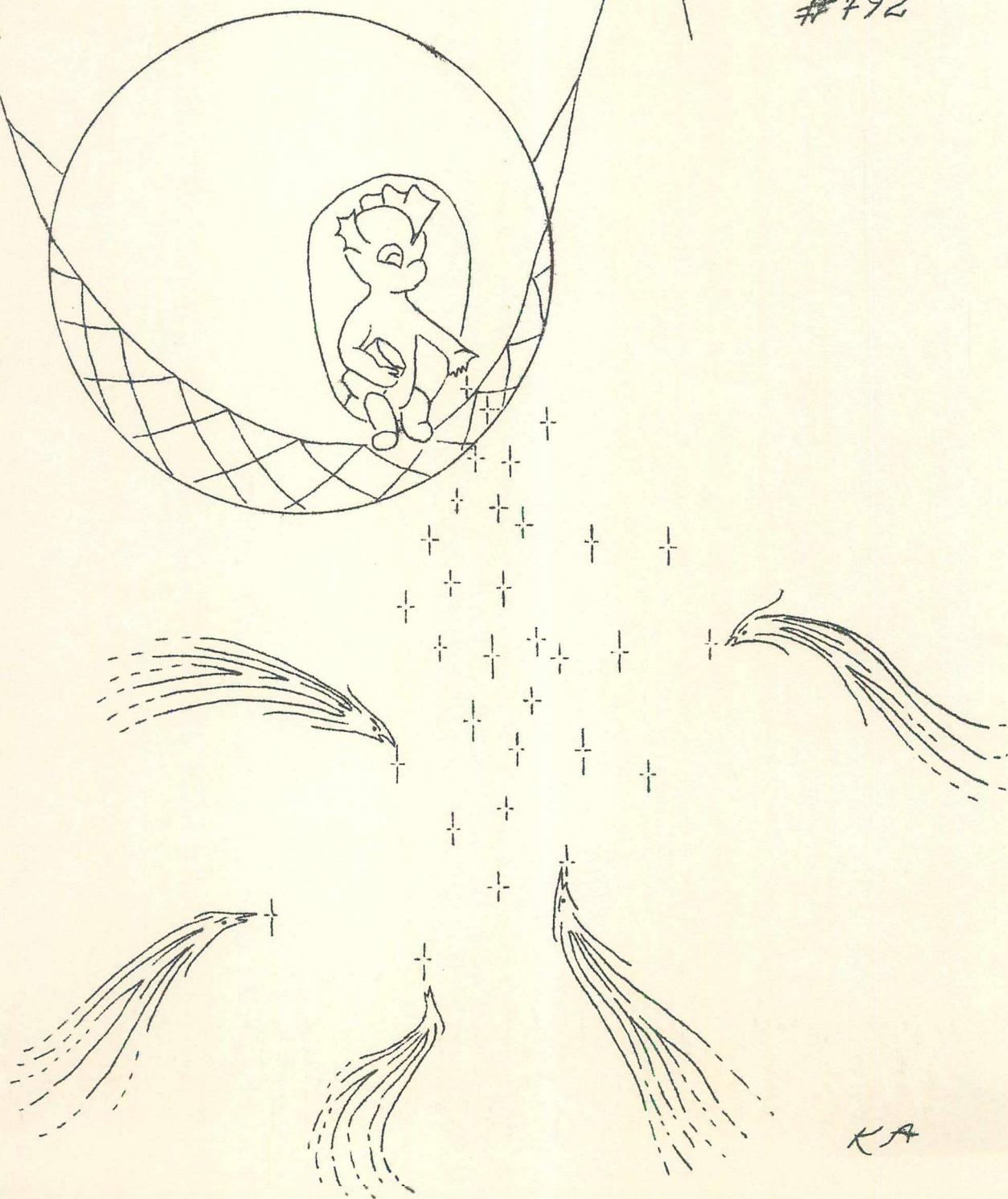


Die Zeitschrift
Vollständigen

für
Unsinn
#792



Situation Normal

That is, all fouled up. I wanted to put all kinds of goodies into this Zed, such as an article on the Fan Who May Once Have Been Known as Asshurbanipal, or the Pro W.M.O.H.B.K. as Sin-liqi-unninni (he wrote that crazy Gilgamesh stuff). I was going to do moiling comments --- yes I was, actually and literally. I was all full of fine fannish ardor, I was. I was taking dexedrine. Then my doctor had me stop taking it for two weeks for thyroid tests, and now I'm slowly working up with increasing dosages of thyroid . . . In a month or so, I may feel fairly copeful. But not now. So, naturally, I have SAPS and FAPA deadlines breathing down my neck.

Today is December 27th. Oog.

Well, let's see . . . I was sewing clothes for the doll Astrid was getting for Christmas (it being December 22nd) and the phone rang.

"Will you accept a collect call from Hawaii? John Anderson is calling."

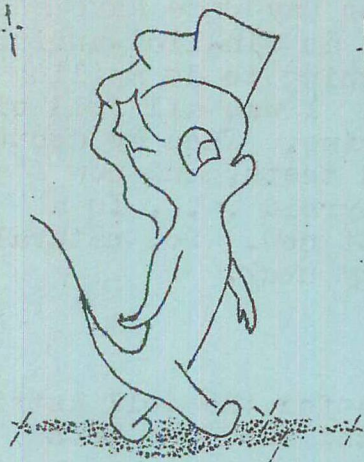
I would and did. Poul's brother was on his way home from the South Pole (not merely Antarctica; he'd been to the Pole itself and I have a postmark to prove it). He was to arrive in the Bay Area the following morning at some grisly hour like five o'clock, and leave roughly twenty-four hours later. So that's what happened to the 23rd, and why I only completed a dress and a petticoat for the blasted doll. . . Then on Christmas Eve I spent a couple of hours all told buying a goose and the proper trimmings (red cabbage, for instance.) I'd spent all my allowance and had been too busy (& too copeless) to make or buy Poul a present, so I happened to notice a package of green cheese at the delicatessen. It was shaped like a truncated cone; I wrapped it as a Vanguard (with broomstraw antennae) and explained that this moon was made of green cheese, even though it didn't make orbit. Another day where I didn't get much done. . .

Well, now, if I have five pages of text and four of artwork it should add up to six pages for activity purposes. The problem will be in filling out this fifth page of text --- the one you're looking at.

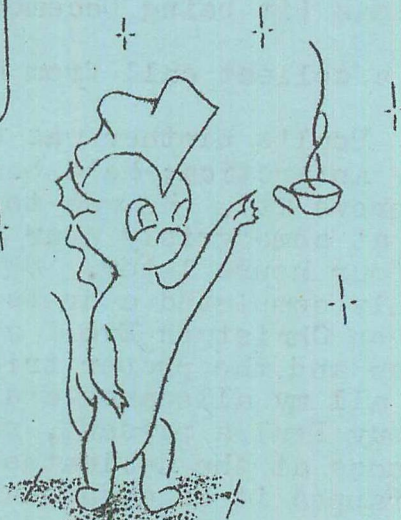
Right now FANAC is being run off on the equipment of a man for whom Ron Ellik works. Ron didn't want to walk up here, and if I drove him up I wouldn't be able to go home (I need to have my learner's permit chaperoned). So as soon as I've finished typing and he has finished FANAC, he'll run off the Zed. If it's ready to run.

I'll bet this reads perfectly ghastly. Ghastlily? Either one sounds wrong. Which reminds me of a Christmas card we got: This card wishes you GOOD *** Like a Christmas card should! And: It isn't the jingling bells one minds so much --- it's the TRAMP TRAMP TRAMP of the reindeer on the roof. And: I loathe overpublicized holidays: Happy Whitsuntide.

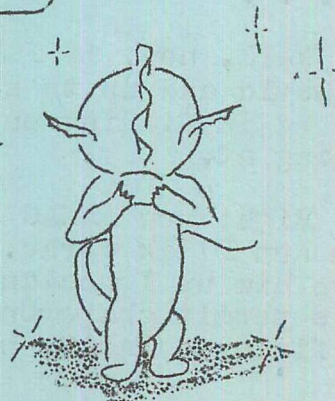
Well, Happy Whitsuntide to you all.



① Some of you are wondering
about me - what I am ...



② I'm Doheug, of course.
What else?



And then ...

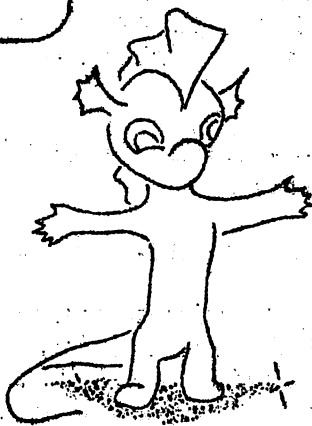
③

KA



-Then you wonder where
I am.

④



Well, gosh! I'm here!
But what I wonder is...

⑤



Where are you?

⑥

ODILE

...CONCLUSION

Synopsis: Rupprecht, seeking adventure, has agreed to perform a service for the sorceress Odile. Without actually being aware of her orders, he makes his way to the Erlberg, and enters the tower of the Erlmeister. Recognizing Rupprecht as the latest of Odile's attacks on him, the Erlmeister attempts to learn her plan, and fails to draw the knowledge from Rupprecht's mind. It is night now and he allows Rupprecht to remain, but locks him into his room and sets a basilisk to guard him. When the moonlight through the window strikes Rupprecht's face, he acts to carry out Odile's scheme.

When Rupprecht woke, a thinly gilt sky flooded his bedchamber with chilly light. He pulled the blankets closer about him and was on the point of going back to sleep when he heard the door bolt rasp in its socket. When the Erlmeister stepped in, Rupprecht was fully alert.

"Did you hear anything --- notice anything at all --- during the night?" asked the Erlmeister.

"Not a thing," replied Rupprecht. "I slept soundly."

The Erlmeister frowned. "I might learn more under moonlight --- but that could be too late! Young sir, I confess I am in grave need of any assistance you can give me. I think that you were sent as a decoy, either by Odile or by someone using her. I have been robbed of some very precious things; and I know only that you could not possibly have accomplished the theft. Will you help me learn what has happened?"

Rupprecht sat up and ran fingers through his hair. Why not? Odile hadn't promised him anything definite, after all, and he had no idea what she expected him to do.

"I'll do the best I can," he replied. "But I'd rather have a more definite idea of what I'm to do, and what pay I can expect, than Odile gave me."

"Granting success, you may have all the gold you can carry --- but you may find it brings danger with it. Power I cannot give you; it must be cultivated through a long apprenticeship. A young man like you can do well for himself without wizardry. But if we have no success by moonrise, it may be that we'll share crumbs for tomorrow's breakfast."

"Fairly spoken, sir," answered Rupprecht. "I'll accept on those terms. I trust there's somewhat better than crumbs for breakfast this morning?"

"I have as yet certain familiars who serve me," said the Erlmeister. "When you have dressed, return to the room where I met you last night, and breakfast will be ready."

When he rejoined the Erlmeister, Rupprecht found that breakfast was gratifyingly substantial: trout beautifully fried and perfectly boned, a cold pork pasty, wine delightfully fragrant with woodruff. Some time later, when the dishes had removed themselves, the Erlmeister refilled Rupprecht's goblet and detailed the events of last night in so far as he knew them.

"You must understand," said the Erlmeister, "that the greater part of my power is contained in a certain sigil cut of tingaribine stone, and that the secrets of its use are written in a book no taller than your smallest finger. Properly used, that sigil cannot be defeated by any power known to me.

"I do not know what has happened, but I no longer possess the sigil. When I scried for it I learned only that it was where I could not put my hand on it.

"I believe that either Odile sent another agent last night --- or that someone else, some other wizard, has seized on her scheme and incorporated it onto one of his own. I think this because of what happened to you in the copper beeches. Someone trapped you there and terrorized you --- with the result that you arrived here in a state requiring my hospitality for the night. Odile would know that you would be placed in that room and guarded by the basilisk if you were here overnight. However, when I looked into your mind last night, there was indeed a plan that I could not read. Odile meant you to do something here; and you were prevented from doing it by the person who delayed your arrival. Does this seem reasonable?"

"Quite reasonable, sir."

"There is only one way that the sigil could be hidden from me, who know it so well," mused the Erlmeister. "It has been tied in a seven-thonged sack. My arts cannot detect such a sack, and even if I saw it with my eyes, I would not be able to open it. But few know the art of tying the seven-thonged sack."

"Is this disability peculiar to you, sir?" asked Rupprecht.

"My arts are governed by Saturn and by the House of Sagittarius," answered the Erlmeister. "Other planets and Houses have other disabilities. But --- There is a possibility here! Do you know the date of your birth?"

"The second day of August."

"Excellent! Full in the House of Leo! That is a strong sign,

and completely unaffected by the seven-thonged sack. "

Under the Erlmeister's direction, Rupprecht found a polished steel mirror. This he rubbed with his shirt and warmed between his hands. Then he breathed on it, and suddenly was able to see through it as through a window.

He saw the seven-thonged sack inside his own saggdlebag.

He remembered.

Putting aside the scrying mirror, he suddenly knew what he must do, and raced down to the stables where his horse had been accommodated. He snatched the sack and dashed back up the stair to the Erlmeister.

Odile was already there.

"Well, madam! Did you feel me slip from under your hand?" said Rupprecht.

The Erlmeister was stiff with shock. Rupprecht turned toward him and went on, "Her plan was an ingenious one. When the moonlight touched my face, I took out the sack she'd given me and got a leaf out of it. The leaf made the bolts open and caused the basilisk to avoid looking at me. Then I found the tingaribine sigil and the book, returned to my room, caused the bolts on the door to close again, and tied everything into the seven-thonged sack. I remembered all this when the scrying-mirror broke the spell she'd laid on me."

Odile moved toward him. "My Rupprecht! she murmured. "What cannot we two do together, with the power of that sigil?"

He felt her nearness. If he turned his head only slightly, he would look into those wonderful eyes that promised him so much. He could feel the warmth of her body already, inches away from him, and there was a scent of roses about her.

The Erlmeister, seeing defeat, bowed his head.

"Bitch!" snarled Rupprecht, smashing the back of his hand against her face. She fell, whimpering. "I'll not look into your deceiving eyes again. I know you now. You offer me nothing, and never did. Share power? Not you!"

He untied the complex knots of the seven thongs and took out book and sigil from the sack.

"You can't use that yourself!" cried Odile. "The power must be taught by one who knows!"

"Do you think I'll believe that you will teach me how to use

that sigil? I doubt that you would make the mistake of passing on your secrets to one who might use them against you --- as the Erlmeister passed them on to you, Odile! You were not controlled by Sagittarius, and from the first you employed spells that he could not --- and so you learned to thwart your master. Did you see yourself as another Nimue, bewitching another Merlin?"

Rupprecht crossed the room to the Erlmeister and returned book and sigil to their proper owner.

"You are wise to understand so much, young sir," said the wizard. "How did you learn that she was my pupil?"

"It was obvious she'd been here; she knew where everything was. But she'd never had anybody here even overnight before, though she knew where I'd be put --- and that the moon would shine on my face when I went to bed. And you took it for granted that she knew all this."

"Quite so! And she knew that basilisk-guarded room well indeed: it was hers until she left me. You have done far better than I had expected this morning. I promised you then as much gold as you desired. Name your fee, but remember that danger follows too much gold."

"I'll ask, if I may, for something more useful to me: advice. In what direction shall I travel next?"

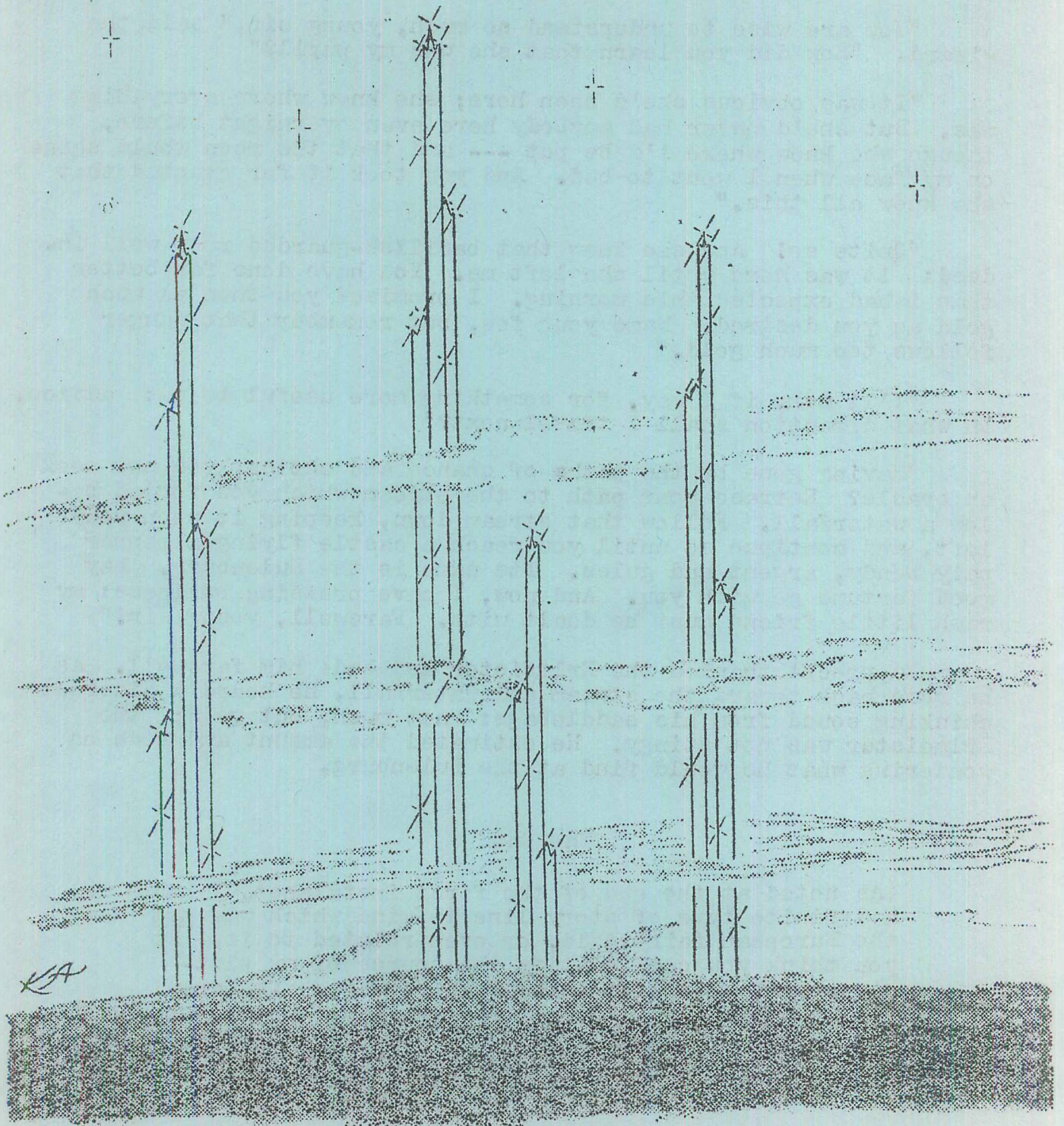
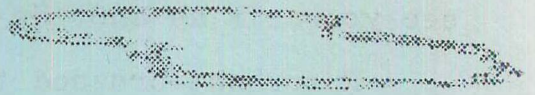
"Having gone by the paths of chance and choice, you now seek an oracle? Retrace your path to the stream which you forded below a waterfall. Follow that stream down, keeping it upon your left, and continue so until you reach a castle flying a banner paly bendy, argent and gules. Its name is the Eulenburg. May good fortune go with you. And now, I have pressing business: my rash little friend must be dealt with. Farewell, young sir!"

Rupprecht thanked the Erlmeister and bade him farewell. As he rode back toward the stream and waterfall, he heard a discreet chinking sound from his saddlebags: not much, but gold; the Erlmeister was not stingy. He estimated the amount and rode on wondering what he would find at the Eulenburg.

The End

(As noted at the end of the first instalment, I had a definite type of story line in mind which was not the European fairy tale, or even related to it. Do you think you can identify the source of my plot-structure? I'd like to hear your ideas. --Karen)

The City of the
Ivory Gate



KA