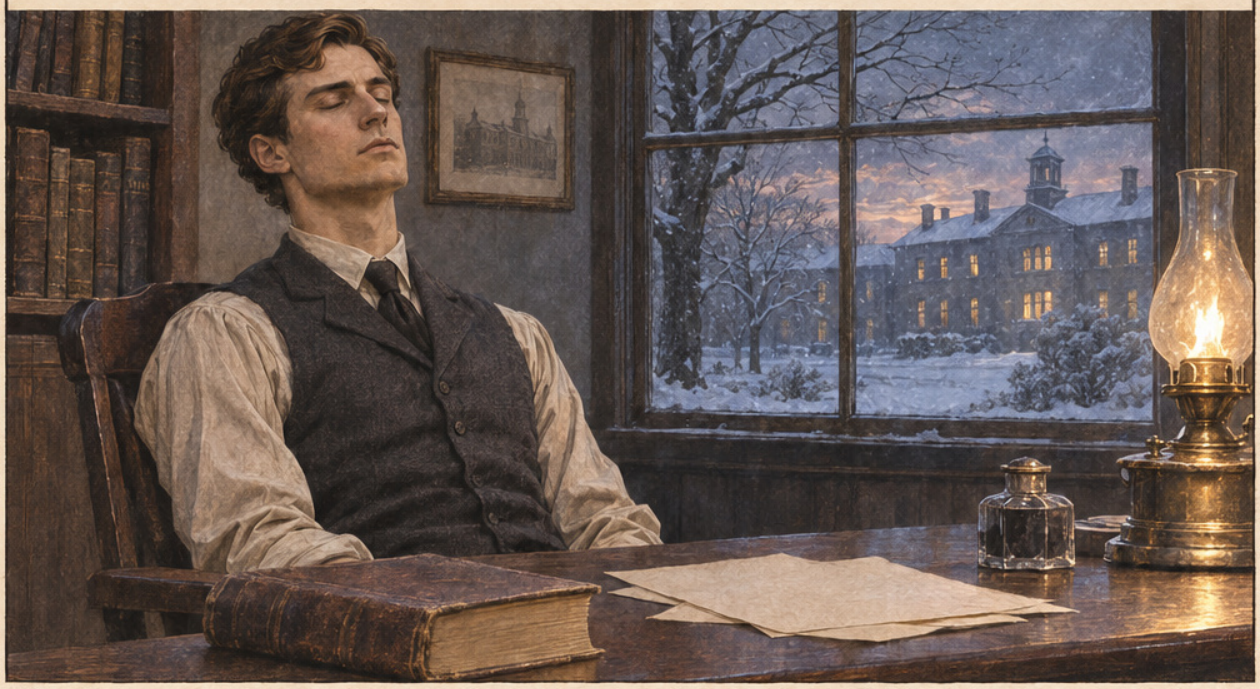
BEYOND THE WALL OF SLEEP

I HAVE FREQUENTLY WONDERED IF THE MAJORITY OF MANKIND EVER PAUSE TO REFLECT UPON THE OCCASIONALLY TITANIC SIGNIFICANCE OF DREAMS, AND OF THE OBSCURE WORLD TO WHICH THEY BELONG.



FROM THOSE BLURRED AND FRAGMENTARY MEMORIES WE MAY INFER MUCH, YET PROVE LITTLE.



...IN THE WINTER OF 1900-1901... JOE SLATER, WHO CAME TO THE INSTITUTION IN THE VIGILANT CUSTODY OF FOUR STATE POLICEMEN...



...THE HEAD SURGEON WROTE HIM DOWN AS A MAN OF ABOUT FORTY.



FROM THE MEDICAL AND COURT DOCUMENTS WE LEARNED ALL THAT COULD BE GATHERED OF HIS CASE.



...WITHIN AN HOUR AFTER AWAKENING WOULD FORGET ALL THAT HE HAD SAID...



...SOME 'BIG, BIG CABIN WITH BRIGHTNESS IN THE ROOF AND WALLS AND FLOOR, AND THE LOUD QUEER MUSIC FAR AWAY'.



...HIS DESIRE AND NEED TO FIND AND KILL A CERTAIN 'THING THAT SHINES AND SHAKES AND LAUGHS'.



...SLATER WAS GONE, LEAVING BEHIND AN UNRECOGNISABLE PULP-LIKE THING THAT HAD BEEN A LIVING MAN BUT AN HOUR BEFORE.



ON THE THIRD DAY SLATER WAS FOUND UNCONSCIOUS IN THE HOLLOW OF A TREE, AND TAKEN TO THE NEAREST GAOL...



HE HAD AWAKED TO FIND HIMSELF STANDING BLOODY-HANDED IN THE SNOW BEFORE HIS CABIN... HORRIFIED, HE HAD TAKEN TO THE WOODS...



DR. BARNARD... NOTICED IN THE PALE BLUE EYES A CERTAIN GLEAM OF PECULIAR QUALITY...



...THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF FOUR MEN WERE NEEDED TO BIND HIM IN A STRAIT-JACKET.



...GREAT EDIFICES OF LIGHT, OCEANS OF SPACE, STRANGE MUSIC, AND SHADOWY MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS.



...IN DULL WONDER HE LOOKED AT HIS QUESTIONERS AND ASKED WHY HE WAS BOUND.



...SLATER WAS TRIED FOR MURDER, ACQUITTED ON THE GROUND OF INSANITY, AND COMMITTED TO THE INSTITUTION...



HE SEEMED TO SENSE A CERTAIN FRIENDLINESS IN ME...



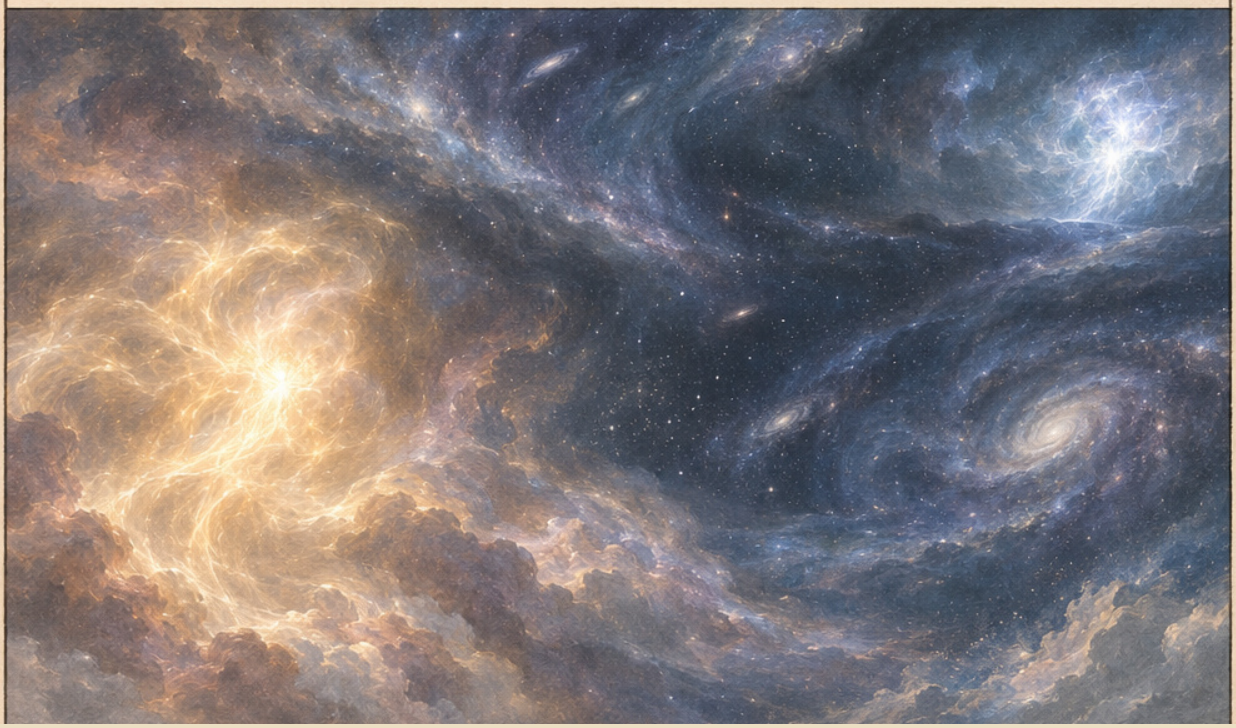
...SINCE HE COULD NEITHER READ NOR WRITE... HIS GORGEOUS IMAGERY WAS QUITE INEXPLICABLE.



...SLATER WANDERED OR FLOATED THROUGH RESPLENDENT AND PRODIGIOUS VALLEYS, MEADOWS, GARDENS, CITIES, AND PALACES OF LIGHT...



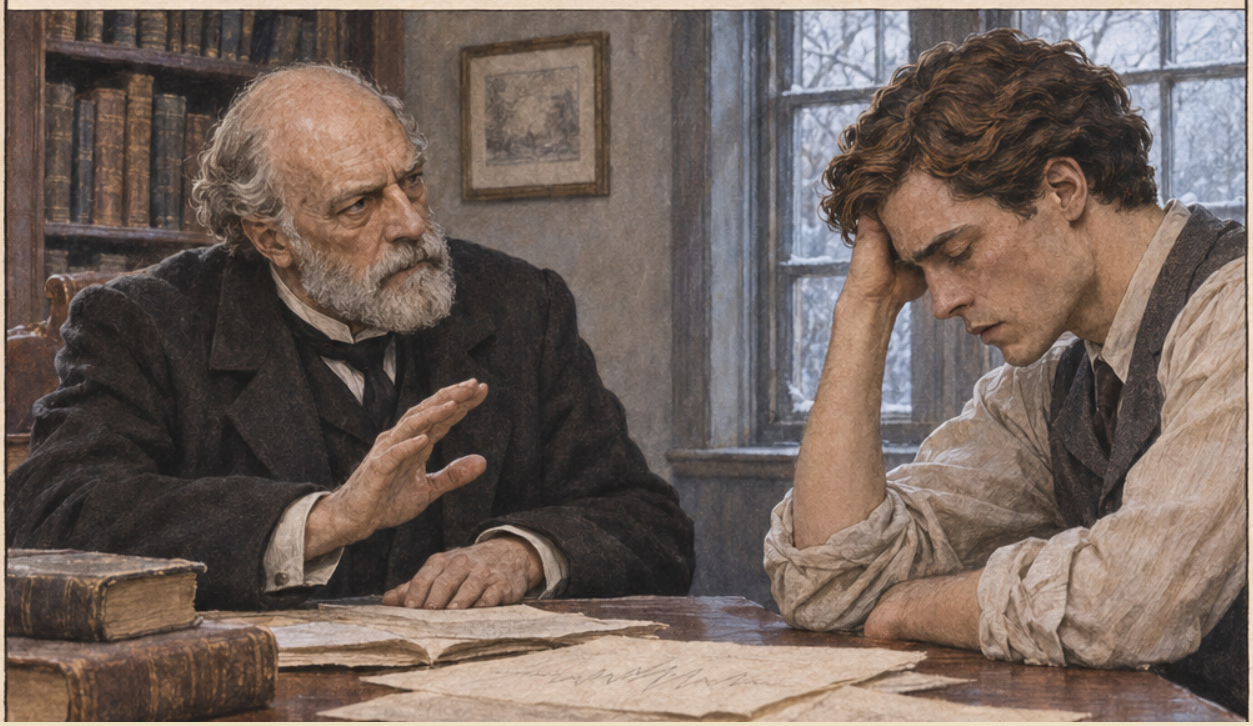
...IN HIS DREAM EXISTENCE THE MAN WAS HIMSELF A LUMINOUS THING OF THE SAME RACE AS HIS ENEMY.



...IF A TRUE DREAM-WORLD INDEED EXISTED, ORAL LANGUAGE WAS NOT ITS MEDIUM FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THOUGHT.



...THE HEAD OF THE INSTITUTION HAD BUT LATELY WARNED ME... THAT MY MIND NEEDED A REST.



...IN MY COLLEGE DAYS PREPARED A SET OF TRANSMITTING AND RECEIVING INSTRUMENTS... THESE I HAD TESTED WITH A FELLOW-STUDENT; BUT ACHIEVING NO RESULT...



...I SOUGHT THESE INSTRUMENTS AGAIN; AND SPENT SEVERAL DAYS IN REPAIRING THEM FOR ACTION.



...I WOULD FIT THE TRANSMITTER TO HIS FOREHEAD AND THE RECEIVER TO MY OWN...



ACCORDINGLY I CONTINUED MY EXPERIMENTS, THOUGH INFORMING NO ONE OF THEIR NATURE.



...DESPITE THE EXCELLENT CARE HE HAD RECEIVED, JOE SLATER WAS UNMISTAKABLY DYING.



I DID NOT STRAP ON THE STRAIT-JACKET... SINCE I SAW THAT HE WAS TOO FEEBLE TO BE DANGEROUS...



...HIS HEAD DROOP AWKWARDLY IN SLEEP... I MYSELF... MUST HAVE NODDED A LITTLE LATER.



THE SOUND OF WEIRD LYRIC MELODY WAS WHAT AROUSED ME.



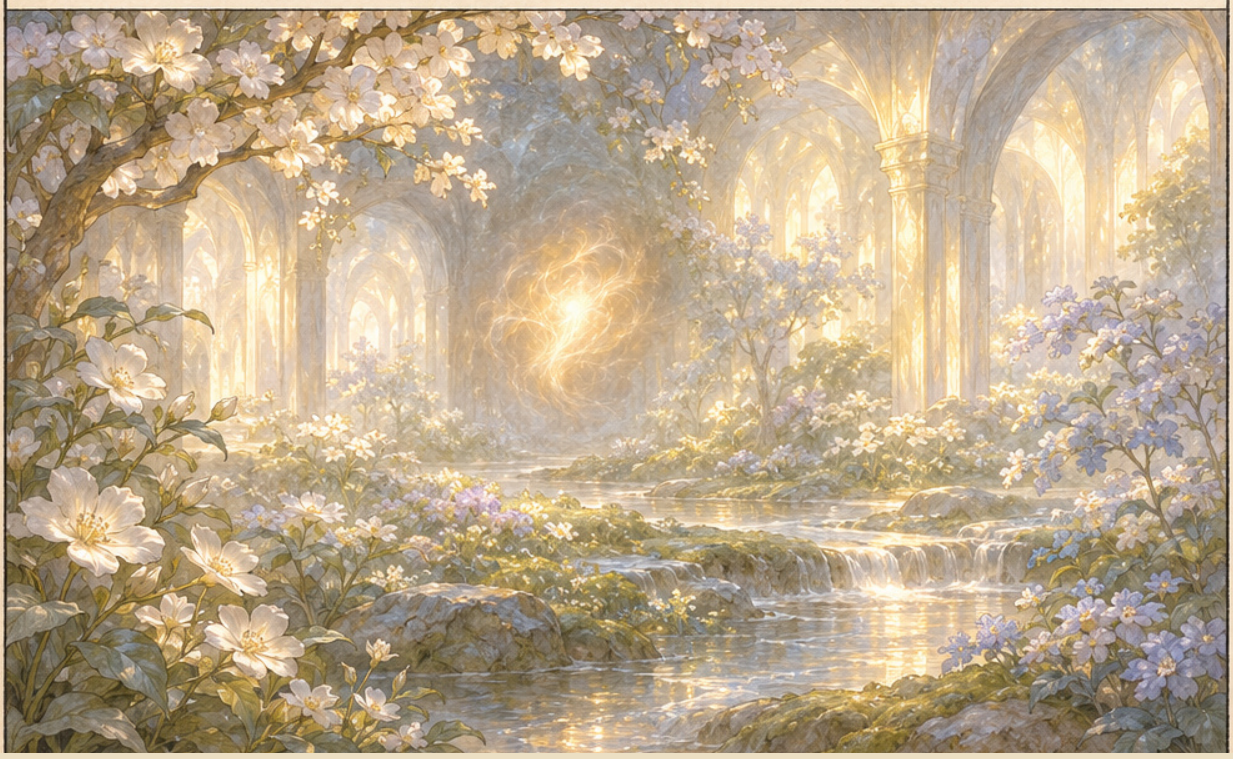
WALLS, COLUMNS, AND ARCHITRAVES OF LIVING FIRE BLAZED EFFULGENTLY AROUND THE SPOT WHERE I SEEMED TO FLOAT IN AIR...



...EACH VISTA WHICH APPEARED TO ME, WAS THE ONE MY CHANGING MIND MOST WISHED TO BEHOLD.



AMIDST THIS ELYSIAN REALM I DWELT NOT AS A STRANGER...



...MY BROTHER OF LIGHT DREW NEAR AND HELD COLLOQUY WITH ME, SOUL TO SOUL, WITH SILENT AND PERFECT INTERCHANGE OF THOUGHT.



...ESCAPING FOREVER, AND PREPARING TO FOLLOW THE ACCURSED OPPRESSOR EVEN UNTO THE UTTERMOST FIELDS OF ETHER...



...MY SUDDEN AND SOMEWHAT SHAMEFACED AWAKENING...



...A PAIR OF LUMINOUS, EXPANDED EYES WHOSE BLUE SEEMED SUBTLY TO HAVE DEEPENED.



...THOUGH NO ACTUAL LANGUAGE WAS EMPLOYED... I SEEMED TO BE RECEIVING THE MESSAGE IN ORDINARY ENGLISH.



JOE SLATER IS DEAD... HE HAS BEEN MY TORMENT AND DIURNAL PRISON FOR FORTY-TWO OF YOUR TERRESTRIAL YEARS.



I AM YOUR BROTHER OF LIGHT, AND HAVE FLOATED WITH YOU IN THE EFFULGENT VALLEYS.



NEXT YEAR I MAY BE DWELLING IN THE DARK EGYPT WHICH YOU CALL ANCIENT, OR IN THE CRUEL EMPIRE OF TSAN-CHAN WHICH IS TO COME THREE THOUSAND YEARS HENCE.



YOU AND I HAVE DRIFTED TO THE WORLDS THAT REEL ABOUT THE RED ARCTURUS...



...DWELT IN THE BODIES OF THE INSECT-PHILOSOPHERS THAT CRAWL PROUDLY OVER THE FOURTH MOON OF JUPITER. HOW LITTLE DOES THE EARTH-SELF KNOW OF LIFE AND ITS EXTENT!



...YOU... IDLY GAVE TO ITS BLINKING BEACON THE NAME OF ALGOL, THE DAEMON-STAR.



TONIGHT I GO AS A NEMESIS BEARING JUST AND BLAZINGLY CATACLYSMIC VENGEANCE. WATCH ME IN THE SKY CLOSE BY THE DAEMON-STAR.



WE SHALL MEET AGAIN—PERHAPS IN THE SHINING MISTS OF ORION'S SWORD... PERHAPS IN UNREMEMBERED DREAMS TONIGHT...



...I CROSSED OVER TO THE COUCH AND FELT OF HIS WRIST, BUT FOUND IT COLD, STIFF, AND PULSELESS.



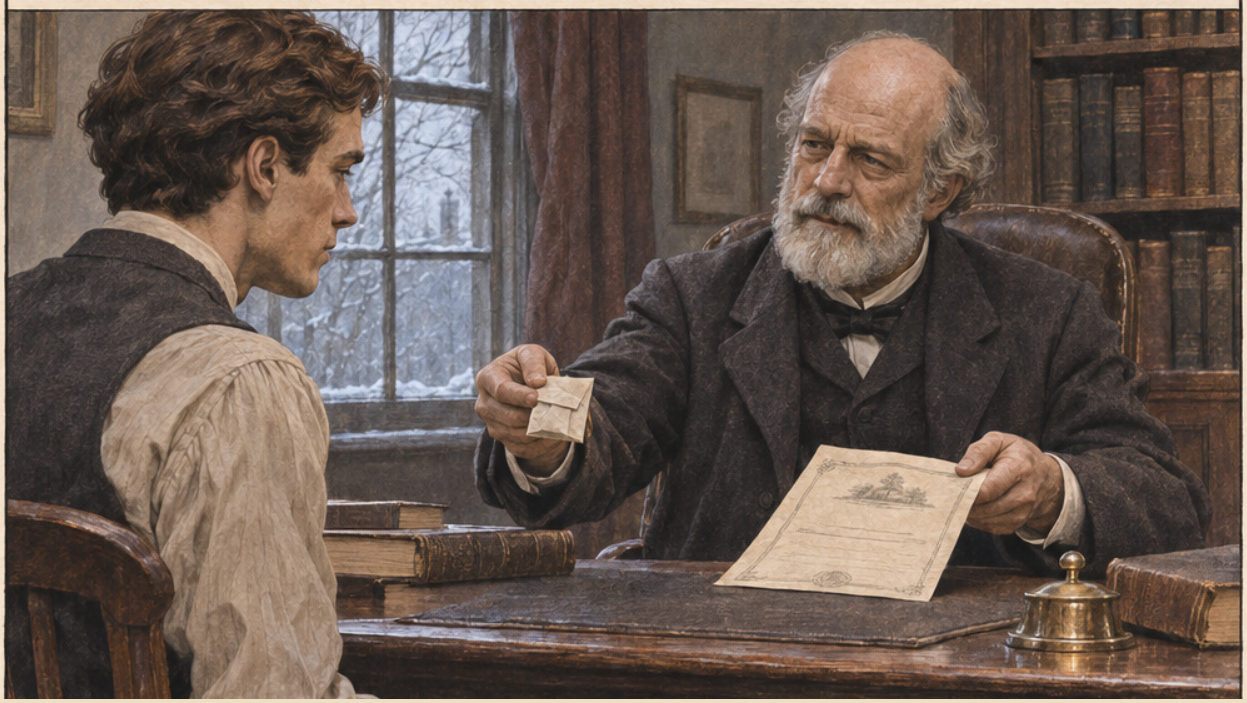
...PULLED A BLANKET OVER THE HIDEOUS FACE, AND AWAKENED THE NURSE.



I HAD AN INSISTENT AND UNACCOUNTABLE CRAVING FOR A SLEEP WHOSE DREAMS I SHOULD NOT REMEMBER.



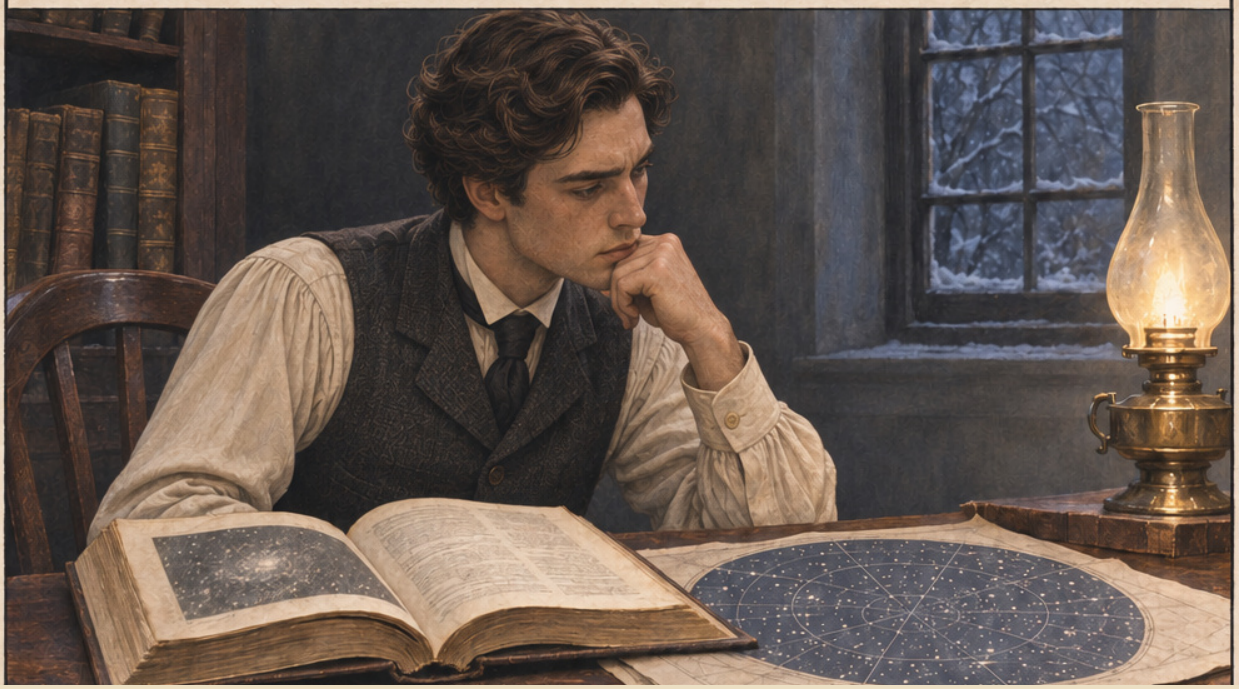
...DR. FENTON, DENIES THE REALITY OF EVERYTHING I HAVE RELATED. HE VOWS THAT I WAS BROKEN DOWN WITH NERVOUS STRAIN...



...I CANNOT FORGET WHAT I SAW IN THE SKY ON THE NIGHT AFTER SLATER DIED.



...ANOTHER'S PEN MUST ADD THIS FINAL TESTIMONY... PROF. GARRETT P. SERVISS...



ON FEBRUARY 22, 1901, A MARVELLOUS NEW STAR WAS DISCOVERED BY DR. ANDERSON, OF EDINBURGH, NOT VERY FAR FROM ALGOL. NO STAR HAD BEEN VISIBLE AT THAT POINT BEFORE.



WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS THE STRANGER HAD BECOME SO BRIGHT THAT IT OUTSHONE CAPELLA. IN A WEEK OR TWO IT HAD VISIBLY FADED, AND IN THE COURSE OF A FEW MONTHS IT WAS HARDLY DISCERNIBLE WITH THE NAKED EYE.

