THE OTHER GODS

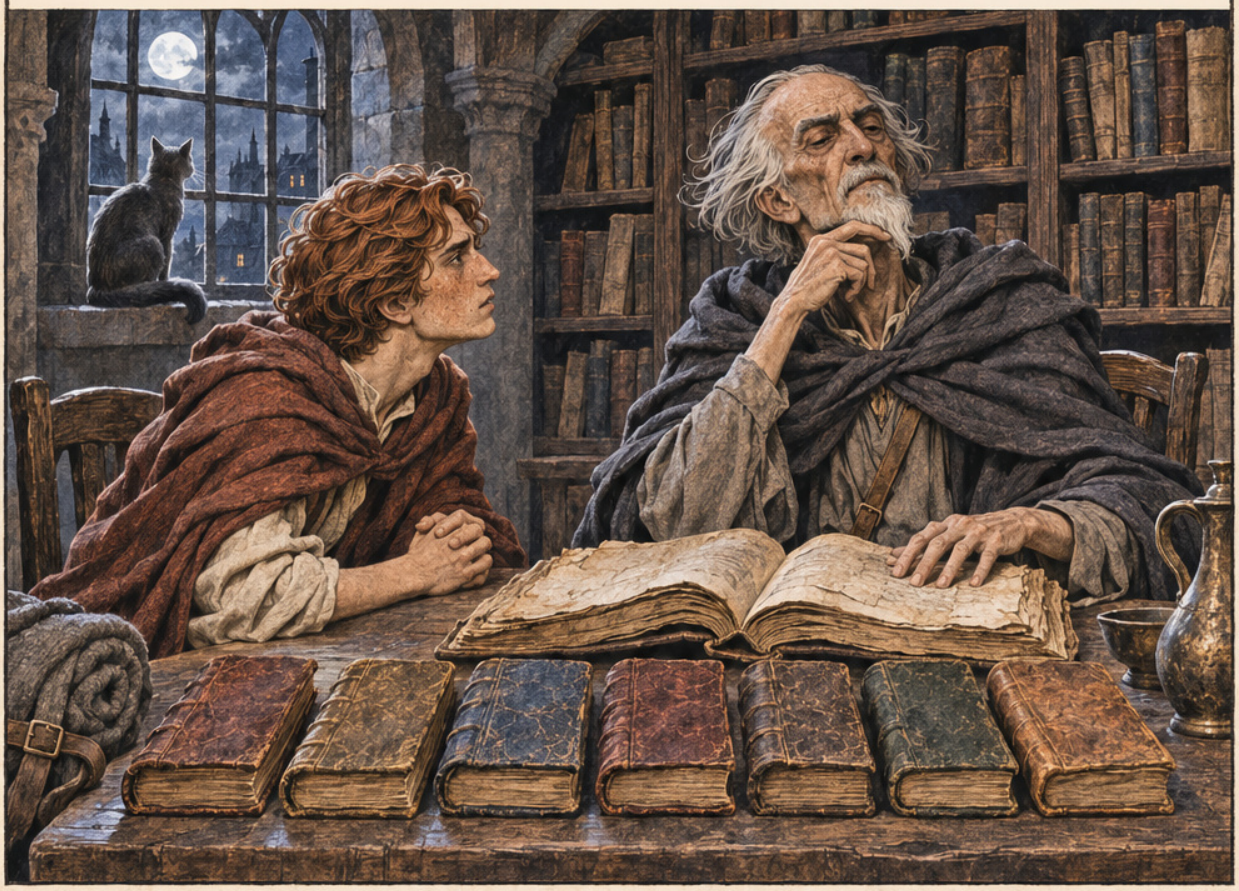
ATOP THE TALLEST OF EARTH'S PEAKS DWELL THE GODS OF EARTH, AND SUFFER NO MAN TO TELL THAT HE HATH LOOKED UPON THEM.



BUT NOW THEY HAVE BETAKEN THEMSELVES TO UNKNOWN KADATH IN THE COLD WASTE WHERE NO MAN TREADS... IN CLOUD-SHIPS THE GODS ARE WONT TO TRAVEL...



...A MAN DEEPLY LEARNED IN THE SEVEN CRYPTICAL BOOKS OF HSAN, AND FAMILIAR WITH THE PNAKOTIC MANUSCRIPTS OF DISTANT AND FROZEN LOMAR. HIS NAME WAS BARZAI THE WISE...



HE BELIEVED THAT HIS GREAT SECRET KNOWLEDGE OF GODS COULD SHIELD HIM FROM THEIR WRATH...



...BARZAI HEEDED THEM NOT WHEN HE CAME FROM NEIGHBOURING ULTHAR WITH THE YOUNG PRIEST ATAL, WHO WAS HIS DISCIPLE.



...TALKED OF EARTH'S GODS BY THEIR CAMPFIRES AT NIGHT.



ON THE THIRTEENTH DAY THEY REACHED THE MOUNTAIN'S LONELY BASE, AND ATAL SPOKE OF HIS FEARS.



...THEY HEWED AND PLODDED UPWARD WITH STAVES AND AXES.



FOR THREE DAYS THEY CLIMBED HIGHER, HIGHER, AND HIGHER TOWARD THE ROOF OF THE WORLD; THEN THEY CAMPED TO WAIT FOR THE CLOUDING OF THE MOON.



FOR FOUR NIGHTS NO CLOUDS CAME...



THEN ON THE FIFTH NIGHT, WHICH WAS THE NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON, BARZAI SAW SOME DENSE CLOUDS FAR TO THE NORTH...



...WHEN BARZAI BEGAN TO CLIMB HIGHER AND BECKON EAGERLY, IT WAS LONG BEFORE ATAL WOULD FOLLOW.



...HE COULD SCARCE SEE THE GREY SHAPE OF BARZAI ON THE DIM SLOPE ABOVE IN THE CLOUDED MOONLIGHT.



VERY SUDDENLY BARZAI WENT OUT OF ATAL'S SIGHT... THEN THROUGH THE HIGH MISTS HE HEARD THE VOICE OF UNSEEN BARZAI SHOUTING WILDLY IN DELIGHT:



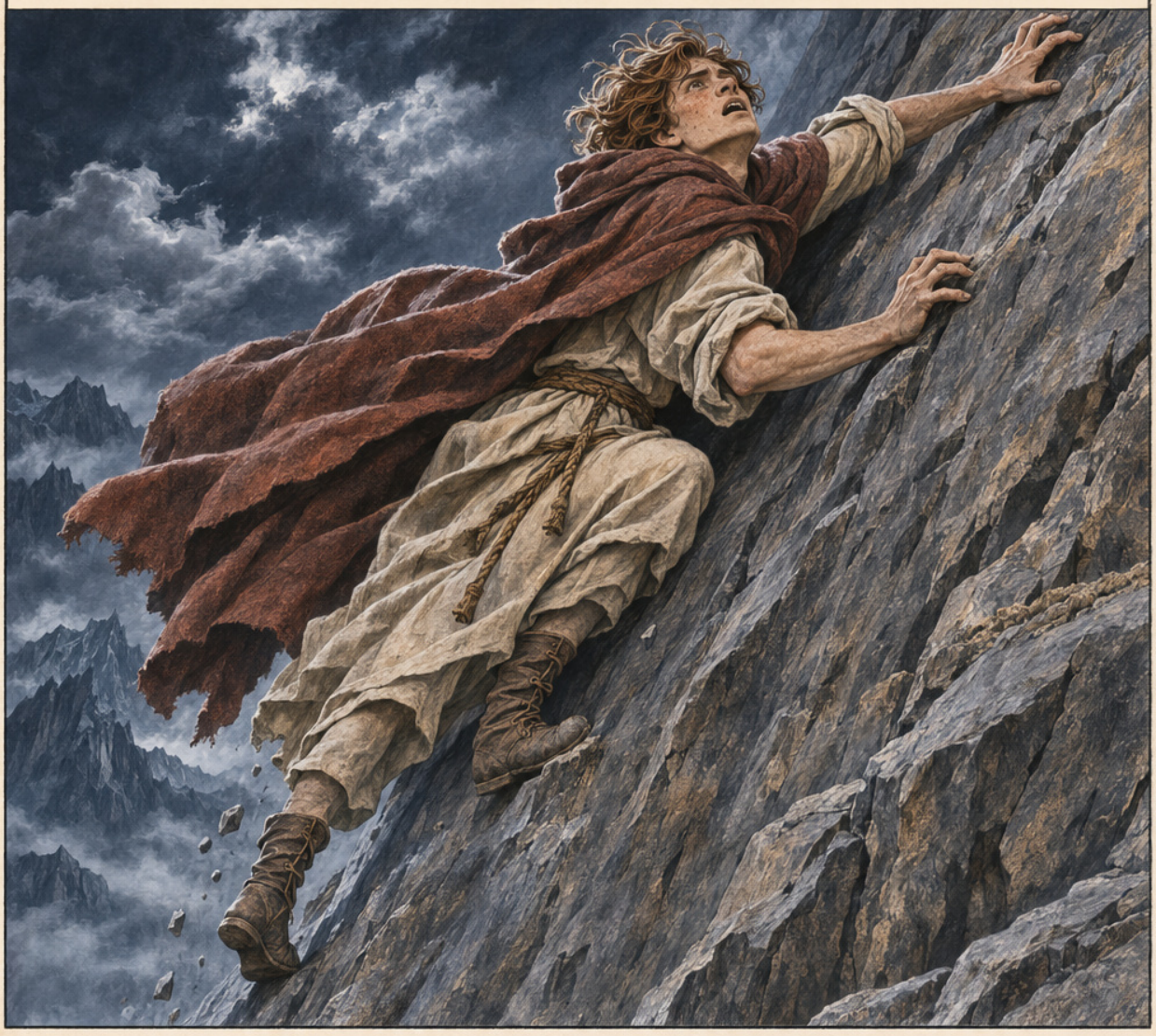
I HAVE HEARD THE GODS! I HAVE HEARD EARTH'S GODS SINGING IN REVELRY ON HATHEG-KLA!



...I SHALL SEE THE DANCING FORMS OF THE GODS THAT LEAP AND HOWL IN THE MOONLIGHT...



...AS IF THE LAWS OF EARTH WERE BOWING TO GREATER LAWS...



THE MOON IS DARK...AN ECLIPSE FORETOLD IN NO BOOKS OF MEN OR OF EARTH'S GODS...



THE OTHER GODS! THE OTHER GODS! THE GODS OF THE OUTER HELLS THAT GUARD THE FEEBLE GODS OF EARTH!... LOOK AWAY!... GO BACK!... DO NOT SEE!...



...MERCIFUL GODS OF EARTH, I AM FALLING INTO THE SKY!

...THAT TERRIBLE PEAL OF THUNDER WHICH AWAKED THE GOOD COTTERS OF THE PLAINS...



...ATAL WAS SAFE ON THE LOWER SNOWS OF THE MOUNTAIN WITHOUT SIGHT OF EARTH'S GODS, OR OF THE OTHER GODS.



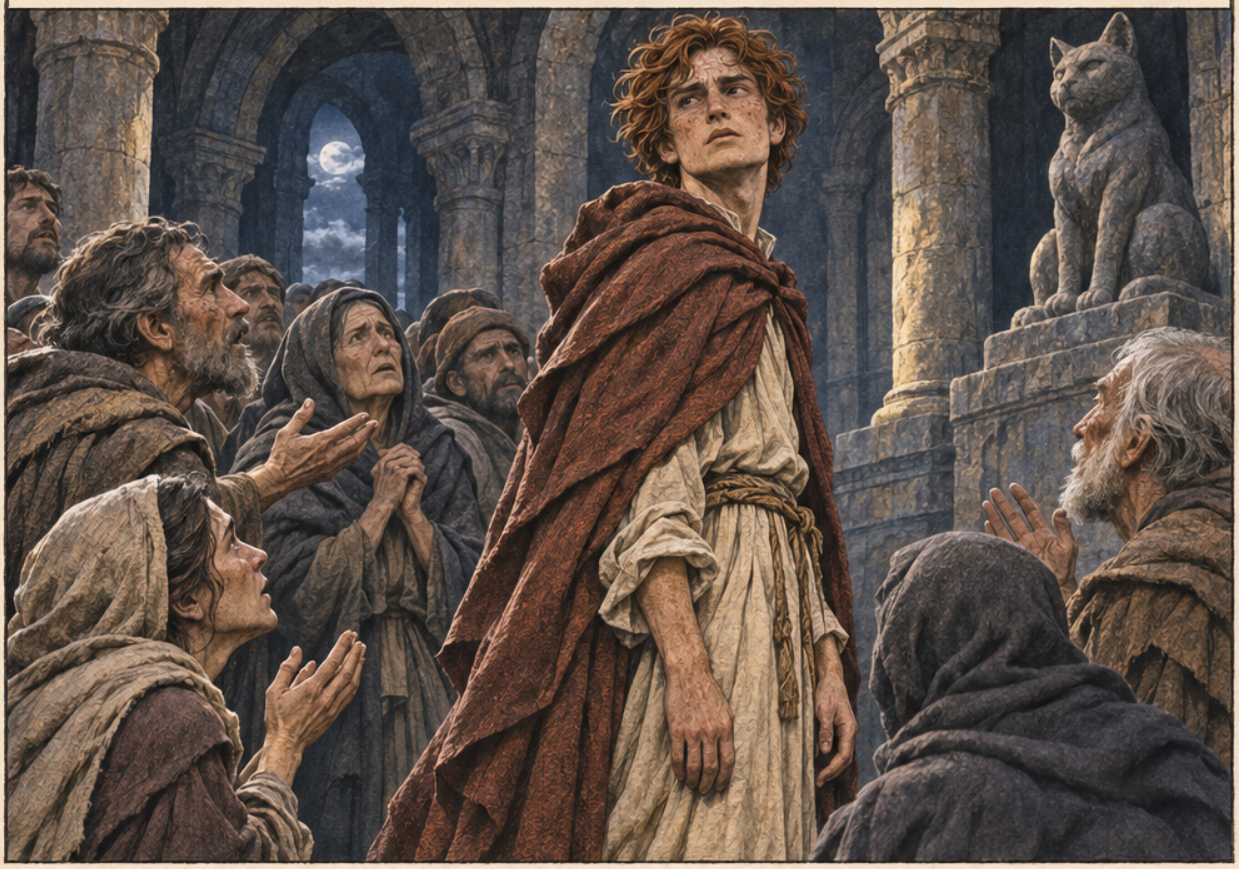
...THE MEN OF ULTHAR AND NIR AND HATHEG CRUSHED THEIR FEARS AND SCALED THAT HAUNTED STEEP BY DAY IN SEARCH OF BARZAI THE WISE...



...A CURIOUS AND CYCLOPEAN SYMBOL FIFTY CUBITS WIDE...



BARZAI THE WISE THEY NEVER FOUND, NOR COULD THE HOLY PRIEST ATAL EVER BE PERSUADED TO PRAY FOR HIS SOUL'S REPOSE.



...EARTH'S GODS SOMETIMES DANCE REMINISCENTLY; FOR THEY KNOW THEY ARE SAFE...

