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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LONGEVITY ***

LONGEVITY

By THERESE WINDSER

A morality tale—1960 style.

LEGEND had it, that many thousands of years ago, right after the Great Horror, the whole continent of the west had slowly sunk beneath the West Water, and that once every century it arose during a full moon. Still, Captain Hinrik clung to the hope that the legend would not be borne out by truth. Perhaps the west continent still existed; perhaps, dare he hope, with civilization. The crew of the Semilunis thought him quite mad. After all, hadn't the east and south continents been completely annihilated from the great sky fires; and wasn't it said that they had suffered but a fraction of what the west continent had endured?

The Semilunis anchored at the mouth of a great river. The months of fear and doubt were at end. Here, at last, was the west continent. A small party of scouts was sent ashore with many cautions to be alert for luminescent areas which meant certain death for those who remained too long in its vicinity. Armed with bow and arrow, the party made its way slowly up the great river. Nowhere was to be seen the color green, only dull browns and greys. And no sign of life, save for an occasional patch of lichen on a rock.

After several days of rowing, the food and water supply was almost half depleted and still no evidence of either past or present habitation. It was time to turn back, to travel all the weary months across the West Water, the journey all in vain. What a small reward for such an arduous trip ... just proof of the existence of a barren land mass, ugly and useless.

On the second day of the return to the Semilunis, the scouting party decided to stop and investigate a huge opening in the rocky mountainside. How suspiciously regular and even it looked, particularly in comparison to the rest of the countryside which was jagged and chaotic.

They entered the cave apprehensively, torches aflame and weapons in hand. But all was darkness and quiet. Still, the regularity of the cave walls led them on. Some creature, man or otherwise, must have planned and built this ... but to what end? Now the cave divided into three forks. The torches gave only a hint of the immensity of the chambers that lay at the end of each. They selected the center chamber, approaching cautiously, breath caught in awe and excitement. The torches reflected on a dull black surface which was divided into many, many little squares. The sameness of them stretched for uncountable yards in all directions. What were these ungodly looking edifices? The black surface was cold and smooth to the touch and quite regular except for a strange little hole at the bottom of each square and a curious row of pictures along the top.

They would copy these strange pictures. Perhaps back home there would be a scholar who would understand the meaning behind these last remains of the people of the west continent. The leader took out his slate and painstakingly copied:

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LONGEVITY ***

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