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Originally published in Dragon Magazine #19, October 1978

All he could do was walk on the air as normals could walk on land and his four older brothers repeatedly told him that it was the most useless of all mental mutations. After Reveral's long training sessions for manhood, he was finally beginning to believe his brothers' taunts. His oldest brother Fer-in and his next oldest, Serpt, both could teleport themselves vast distances and had easily passed their tests of manhood. Karn, the brother closest to him in age, could read minds and, with great effort, control them, given time. He was even now on his test of manhood, but no one doubted that soft-spoken Karn would do anything but succeed. Reveral was starting to be concerned with his own chances at surviving the test.

His tribe, led by his father Meveral, required all adolescents to venture into the mutant-filled regions north of the tribe. This test served to cull out the weak members and gained valuable information on the weak points of the many fierce mutated creatures that continually came out of the forest to attack the tribe. The youths were highly trained in the use of shield, spear, and ax by the weapon masters. Then too, was the birth-gift of the Gods.

The Gods often gave young children powers of the mind ranging from lifting small objects to hurling fire or lightning from the finger tips. Meveral, his father had this last gift, and with long experience and courage ruled his people wisely. His youngest son often thought he noticed a look of sadness in his father's eyes when viewing him, undoubtedly because all he could do was walk the air. Reveral worked constantly at his weapon lessons to seek favor in his father's eyes in this manner, but even in this he was inept. At spear and ax his efforts were mediocre and while his shield defense was very good, defensive skills were not as favored as offensive ones. Knowing his limitations, he had taken to making secret trips into the fringes of the mutated forest, in hopes of gaining knowledge that would help him in his test soon to come. The danger from the creatures of the forest never came to his mind. All his effort was directed towards passing the manhood test and finding favor in his father's eyes. It was on one of these trips that he met the whispering vine. While his teachers had given him vast amounts of knowledge on all kinds of mutated creatures, no one had told him to expect one of these. He was deep in the northwest of the forest, in territory not well known by his tribe. While he was traveling down a cleared path, he heard and then saw a small vine walking towards him!

Fearing the worst, the boy raised his spear and shield and ran towards the vine. Suddenly all thoughts of attacking the mutant were gone in waves of peace that the creature was sending towards the boy with sonics. Soon the boy discovered that the plant, calling itself Fek, could talk and knew much more than he did about his world and the creatures within it. Fek and Reveral had long discussions in the following weeks about the world far to the North. The plant creature knew about tribes of walking dogs, areas of ground that were instant death to walk on, and God-machines that melted flesh and shattered metal. The thrill and comfort of his newfound friend was soon diminished by his brother Karn not returning in the normal time. His whole family became very worried and was considering the unprecedented step of all going out on a rescue mission, when his father put a stop to that thought.

"This tribe does not send good after bad," his father said in the tone of a ruler, not the tone of a father. While it was very true that his older brothers could not travel again into the northern regions he could and told his father so. While his time was not for many passings of the sun, no one in the village could fault him his desire and he went off with the ceremonial ax, spear, shield, and dried fruits. Into the forest he went with the kindly advice of his brothers still ringing in his ears. He quickly came to the resting place of his plant friend Fek and told it of his plans.

Reveral was all for storming the North until his brother was found. Fek quickly showed him the error of his ways and surprised them both by stating that he would travel with the boy until death or the finding of his brother.

The two set out through the forest with the boy sometimes carrying his small plant friend high into the air, much to the delight of Fek and the irritation of Reveral, who thought that there must be some other use for his ability other than plant portage. The two traveled for many days, until they came to an area with which Fek was very familiar. The plant guided the boy to an area of dense underbrush that opened into a large clearing filled with many of Fek's kind.

The boy's ears were then filled with many pleasant relaxing tones as the small plant communicated with its much larger cousins. The plants talked long into the night and Reveral fell asleep easily. The next morning the clearing was empty and Fek was carrying many fruits and nuts for the boy to eat.

"We must go on now, Reveral. My kind is going out to gather information for us and will send it along as they get it. Our job must be to also gather information and power."

The two went from the forest into grasslands that stretched as far as the eye could see. They also began to meet

mutations they could not run or hide from. The first of these was a large erect cat-creature. Three of these surprised them from the grass and ignored the boy and bit at the plant creature. Reveral threw his spear in one, an ax in another and smashed the third with his shield. As he did this he felt power much like his father's rip through his body and cause great pain.

Fek laid on the ground almost bitten in two, and this made the Boy take another swipe at the cat creature with his shield, forcing it to flee and driving Reveral into unconsciousness. He woke up in dim twilight and the sight of two Feks standing straight and tall near him.

"Fek, what has happened to you, my friend? I had thought you near death by the actions of those strange monsters."

"Know Reveral, that my race needs the threat of near death to stimulate our reproductive abilities," both plants said. "We two have all the knowledge-of the parent plant and are much stronger." Only one of the new plants came with the boy.

Then news of his brother came to Reveral in the form of a huge bird that came to them in the night. The creature, standing almost five feet tall, and calling itself a Hawkoid, woke the boy as it came to rest by their fire. In its hands was a strange weapon of strings and sticks and sharp stones, that the boy could not figure out.

"Travelers, the one you seek is in the mountains far to the north and west. It is held by a race of man-lizards that delight in the pain of their captives. On your path to these fierce creatures is many areas of death-earth, many mutant-filled regions, and more dangerous than all the rest, there are a few villages of the old Gods in your path. Walk carefully and may the luck of the High Ones be with you."

With this the bird creature flew off and left the two preparing for the next day's journey. In the morning it rained, as it always did every third day. The rain was welcomed by the pair, on Reveral's part because it washed the grime of travel off of him and on Fek's part because it provided needed moisture to his plant tissues. As the pair traveled on that day, the once plentiful game became scarce. The rolling grasslands gave way to shorter, sparcer forms of grass. This type also gave way to no vegetation at all. When Reveral approached this area he intuitively knew that this was some of the ground that was death to walk on. So again they travelled through the air and the boy began to appreciate his little talent. When they were high in the air a new section of green grass became visible far to the east. Travel towards this grassland also revealed a large black strip of stone, heading as far as the eye could see to the north. While Fek wanted to call this new wonder a highway, Reveral knew that it could only be a God-Road, famed in campfire tales as the path to wonders and great power! The God-Road had no grass growing on it and was not worn on any part of its surface. The boy knew that to travel on this thing was to be lucky forever and that's what they did!

A new lift came to the boy's feet as they went along and he often found himself traveling just off the road in the air, without even trying to use his power. It went to such an extreme that the poor plant Fek couldn't keep up with the pace his friend set. As the two rested and enjoyed the last of the fruits from Reveral's village, they both noticed a strange flashing light to the east and a little north of the road they traveled on. Later

investigation showed them both a huge tower with no visible entrances and waves of cold emanating from its sides.

"It is too cold for plant kind, I will not be able to approach this hut. Do not let this stop you from seeking the entrance. I have learned through others of my type that such structures always contain much in the way of ancient God-Tools."

The flashing came from the top of the tower and circled it at the same rate every few heart beats. The boy walked through the air to the top and was greeted with an open cavity just below the bright light. While the chamber he entered was at first dark, it began to glow with a weird light, much like that of some insects and creatures of the forest. The numbing cold of the outside was lacking in this area, and much to Reveral's amazement the chamber was made of metal. This substance was so rare in his village that only his father and the village shaman had bits of it! A tunnel showed itself, under further inspection, and he traveled down its length to a set of ledges that led down. The ledges were remarkable in that they were all exactly spaced and of the same metal material. As the boy traveled down this new God-Path he became aware of a curious thrumming sound that grew in intensity the deeper he went. The strange God-Path curved in a circle around itself and then suddenly ended in a large open area with some bits of rectangular gray patches about man height on three distinct walls of metal. These three patches were very much different from the wall metal in that not only were they a different color, they were patterned to look like waves of water. He tried pushing, shoving, and pulling on these strange areas to no avail. He had to give up in disgust and as he sat on the floor he noticed behind the stairs on the floor a curious pile of white powder. He moved it with his spear tip and found a strange bracelet buried in the pile. It was a simple band of metal obviously made to encircle the wrist. At the top of this piece of jewelry was a patch of gray just like the patches on the God-Doors. The thought came to Reveral in a flash of insight and seemed so natural that he knew it was the correct one. He pressed the bit of gray band to the same gray band of the God-Door and he was rewarded with the portal opening with a sigh of air. He was then smashed to the ground by two hurtling creatures of metal! These things ignored him and flew up the stairs faster than his eyes could travel. He was so astounded to just be alive that he sat on the floor where he had been thrown and looked into the opening he had just created. The chamber within was very small and smelled of some strange liquid that oozed from a small opening on the other side of the wall. Reveral knew enough not to touch unknown substances. The campfire stories were full of tales of burning water or poisoning things that killed simply by touching the skin. He again touched the gray bracelet to the portal rectangle and it sealed itself. Not wanting to leave the God-House without something more tangible, he readied himself and moved the middle portal. He was greeted with two more metal creatures, but this time he was ready for them! His spear came up and hit the first monster square in what Reveral thought was its chest. The boy thought to himself that his masters would be proud at his skill with that hit. He saw his spear break in three different places and his shield was broken by the claw-like arm of the second monster as it passed by. This time he was smashed unconscious and woke up with his eyes showing stars and his brain all fogged up. When he glanced into the opening he saw another small chamber and another puddle of

ooze on the floor. He got up, closed this God-Door and with grim determination opened the last one.

He was greeted with the source of the thrumming, in the form of three more metal monsters putting together other metal monsters. These creatures ignored Reveral and moved bits of metal and thin rope-like strands together into creatures just like themselves. He ran up to the closest one and smashed it over the head, breaking his stone ax in the process.

“Metal thing,” shouted Reveral, “if stone and skill can’t smash into your hide then I will use like against like to ruin you!”

He grabbed a claw arm from a pile of them and began hitting the monster with it. A huge metal rope came out of the machine and took the metal arm away from him as a parent would take a harmful thing from a child. It then proceeded to again build new monsters with the others. Reveral felt so helpless when facing the power of these metal monsters that he cast around for something, anything to use against these creatures.

The room was very large, in fact he couldn’t see the end of it on two sides. It was full of metal in all shapes and sizes. Again he had an idea and this time he knew it would hurt these creatures much more than he had been hurt. In the building process Reveral had noticed that a great deal of long thin metal rope was being used. He took a long thin, sharp piece of metal and cut all the rope in sight. When the monster came to get more of the rope it stopped still and shortly began searching through the mess that Reveral had made. It stood up and made a humming sound different from the general thrum of the room and the other metal monsters came over. While this was happening, Reveral had been searching and found two more piles of thin rope, which he made a mess of. The monsters came to these piles and passed their metal arms through the small pieces of rope. With this they stopped dead in their steps and the room became silent. In that second the boy knew something deadly was going to happen. He picked up the nearest metal things to hand and ran straight up the Path of the Gods ignoring the ledges for the quickness his power gave him.

As he came out into the open air he saw immediately that the light that would blind was no longer flashing. The air was warm where it had been cold and he knew that death was in that building. He shouted to Fek, who was waiting at the edge of the former cold area to run or die, and Reveral headed straight into the air as fast as he could. In a few heartbeats he felt intense heat to his back and a blast of blinding light blurred his vision for many more. When he could again see he looked back and discovered the tower had turned into a giant puddle of lava. He also saw Fek lying on the ground near the glow in a shrivelled condition. Reveral ran out of the sky to the body of his friend and poured all his water on the plant. He was greeted with Fek’s pleasant hum and he knew then everything would be all right.

After resting till late in the day, the two set out for the God-Road and Fek told Reveral what had happened while he was in the tower. It seems that the four metal creatures had flown out of the tower, circled the area once and flew straight north at an amazing speed. Fek was equally amazed at the story the boy told. He could impart no extra knowledge of the strange monsters or the purpose of the tower. He did know that the gray bracelet was something other tribes called “God-Activators” and it was a thing of Power. With this news, Reveral knew the road

had given him luck, and any thoughts of leaving it went from his mind. They traveled on till dusk and the boy was able to bring down a large bird with the metal spear he had picked up in the tower. This led him to investigate the other metal pieces he had completely forgotten about in the day’s excitement. The largest thing was a metal cylinder with a clear end, much like hard water would be, if a person could make it hard. The other two bits were small rectangular things, with one colored blue and one colored yellow. The only thing he wanted to keep was the spear, but Fek made him carry the other stuff saying that things like that could prove valuable. As they rested for the night, Reveral could see Fek splitting again, but he was just too tired to watch the interesting process.

The next morning again there were two Feks and again one stayed behind and the other followed along with Reveral. They marched along the road for many days and while Fek was surprised that they had not come across any of the many fearful mutations of these areas, Reveral just passed it off as more luck given to him by the God-Road. He was getting concerned with the length of time it was taking to get to the mountains. Every day he would travel high into the sky looking for some sight of them ahead and always he would be disappointed, until one day he saw in the far distance his mountains, and much closer, what must have been a City of the Gods. Fek was all for going around the city but the boy knew the luck of the God-Road would help them in any dangerous situation. Game in the form of large four-legged beasts was plentiful and they never ran away until Reveral attacked one of the herd. Just before dusk they came upon the City of the Gods and the pair decided to wait until daylight before entering. When the sun disappeared a miraculous transformation occurred in the city. The whole thing began to glow with the light of day and the sun was now out of sight!

Reveral, unable to rest with this sight in view, made a reluctant Fek accompany him into The City, as he had begun to subconsciously, refer to it. They traveled down the broad main path and on either side of them were evenly spaced huge huts of some unfamiliar material. Each hut had hard water patches and an entrance that was always closed. The huts were also decorated in many colors and many magical symbols, much like the writings the shaman of the tribe used for her most powerful magic. They travelled down to an intersection where two God-Roads crossed each other. Here they found four structures very different from all the rest. These new huts were not much taller than a man from his village and each was in the shape of a giant shell. At chest height on the right side of each was a rainbow pattern with his gray rectangle represented. He went up to the pattern and pressed his bracelet to the proper color and the door opened with a sigh of air. The well-lit small chamber revealed another set of ledges and they both went down them, with the small plant complaining about the insanity of such strange God-Devices. The bottom of the ledges exposed a huge platform with another God-Hut at its edge. This hut had many hard water openings and an open doorway. It, unlike the huts above the ground, was made of metal and was much smaller. They entered and saw row upon row of soft benches. Resting on them was like resting on the softest straw-filled beds of the village. They heard the door shut and then felt the hut moving. They both rushed to the now closed opening, trying to force it open. Their efforts got them nothing, and Reveral sat realizing that the power of the Gods must be great indeed if they could make huts fly like the

wind. Then they heard the God-Voice. It sounded like gibberish at first, but words like north, city, and traveling, were quite understandable. The hard water patch to the front of the hut was now colored with many designs and pictures of food, clothes of odd form, and people dressed in these odd clothes. These people were like none the pair had ever seen. The pictures also moved, which Reveral did not find surprising since the Gods had obviously made them. The pictures moved in and out of God-Cities in God-Devices never seen before by the two. During these pictures the God-Voice spoke in a pleasant tone with music behind the voice.

Suddenly the small cylinder that Reveral had gotten from the tower was pictured in the hands of a human. This picture showed the human moving one of the small metal things on the cylinder and light shining forth from the small hard water patch. The boy got out his cylinder and copied the picture's actions. A light beam came out of the end and all thought of their movement problem was cast aside in the pleasure of trying out the light-beam-thing. It was impossible to judge the passing of time in this strange hut under the ground, but the two knew they had been traveling for what seemed like a very long time. The thing stopped without warning and opened its door. The two leapt for the opening, fearing that the moving God-Hut would change its mind; and again they saw the platform, just as they had left it. They rushed up the stairs and opened the doorway at the top. The door opened easily and they were stunned to see they were no longer in the city.

Mountains surrounded their position and the shell hut was covered with vines and brush. Reveral climbed into the sky and saw far to the south what could only be the city they had just been in. It was still the middle of the night and the city stood out quite clearly in its own glow. The luck of the God-Road had again helped them and brought them to the mountains in a night. The boy went to sleep with Fek standing guard.

Just before sunrise they were attacked by the furred ones. These creatures were common to the forests near the boy's village and Reveral knew all about them. They must have once been human, because they still retained the same form. The resemblance ended there; they always ran on all fours, were covered in patches of fur, and their hands were now clawed paws with poison sacs at the tips. They usually hunted in large packs that would attack anything moving. This time there were thirty of them and their baying cries filled the night. Reveral leapt up into the air and ordered Fek to remain motionless. He then turned on his light cylinder and flashed it in the eyes of the mutants. The affect was immediate and took the form of fear in any beast the light touched. Soon the whole pack was running in all directions, much to the delight of both travelers. The dawn came and with it the rain that both welcomed.

The problem facing them now that they were in the mountains was which direction should they head. Going the wrong way would lose them precious time and there was no God-Road to help them in this area.

The problem was unsolvable at the moment, so they marched towards a large area of vegetation Reveral had seen from the sky. Shortly they were in a forest of small bushy trees and much game. The boy killed several large birds that proved delicious and he ate as they walked. Then from a side trail came the feared jawed plant. This creature was known by his tribe as a thing that was not only to be feared for its tearing jaws, but also

its ability to attack mentally and paralyze its victims. The carnivorous plant attacked and Fek was unable to move, caught in its mental attack. Reveral resisted the mental attack and pierced the thing with his spear, while ducking a venom dripping jaw. He resisted another assault on his mind and again stabbed successfully at the plant. One of the two jaws fell lifeless to the ground, but the other grabbed the boy around the waist. Reveral desperately stabbed for the third time into the center of the plant. As his spear sunk home awareness of everything but the venom burned through his veins; then there was only blackness.

He woke up feeling dizzy and disorientated with Fek applying shaman powder to his wounds. This white substance was given every hunter of his tribe to be used when poison entered, or was thought to enter the body. Fek had used it all up in an effort to save his friend and it had obviously worked. They rested all of that day and Reveral coated his metal spear with the juices of the monster plant. Poison of this type was seldom used by his tribe because accidents could easily occur. The boy knew it was necessary in his weakened condition to give himself a fighting edge of some type.

Travel the next day was slow and his wounds kept opening up, causing more delays. That night they glimpsed a glow, much like that of the city, in the woods to the west of them. They approached slowly and Reveral activated his light-cylinder to help them through the brush. Another God-Hut lay in the middle of a clearing and this one was different from all the others they had seen so far.

This hut was made of normal wood, but this wood glowed as the God-Huts of the city. It was much longer than a tribal hut and had a wood roof instead of thatch. There were also two metal monsters resting on the ground in front of the large door.

These were different from the creatures of the tower in size and shape, but they were obviously monsters because they had the same eyes and metal arms. Reveral also noticed rectangles of white on what must be the heads of the creatures and a matching white one at the side of the door. Further inspection showed him that these rectangles were about the same size and form as the gray ones of the tower. He touched his bracelet to the door patch and jumped back, knowing what usually happened when God-Doors opened. The portal remained shut and Reveral tried again, this time holding his bracelet for a longer time, again with no results. With nothing to lose he tried the patch on the metal monster which started humming and moving its eyes towards the two. Then it spoke in much the same manner as the God-Voice in the moveable hut. This voice had many more understandable words from the tribe in its speech. The monster called itself a "servo-meca something", and Reveral from then on addressed it as Servo. The creature (Reveral no longer could think of it as a monster) came over to him and passed several of its appendages over his body stopping several times over his wounds.

"Toxins have entered your system and these abrasions have become infected. This unit is equipped with apparatus to heal you, with your permission."

The boy could only understand one word in every three, but he could tell the creature wanted to help him. Reveral said it was a good idea and the creature opened the side of its body, out came strange thorns that bit into his skin. The feeling left his

side and other blades cut away the skin closest to the wounds while light beams came from another part of the creature's arm. With two final thorn stabs the boy felt new energy flow into his body and he thanked the creature for its help.

"Your wounds should heal completely within two days," said the creature, "This unit suggests you proceed to the city for a complete physical, at your convenience." It then turned back to the side of the doorway and again rested on the ground with no hum or flash to its eyes.

The two walked over to it and Reveral asked Fek "Do you think it has killed itself?"

"No, this must be a God-Device and you can never tell about devices of the Gods. First we are walking peacefully along and the road forces us on that moving hut ride. Before that one of their towers tried to burn me to a crisp! I tell you, Reveral, we plants do not favor anything made of metal, just because you can never tell which way the things will jump!"

Reveral was unaffected by his friend's statements.

He had heard them many times during the trip and while some of the God-Machines weren't too safe to be around, most of them were quite beneficial.

Sleep was the farthest thing from his mind and so they traveled through the forest using the light cylinder to easily go through the brush. The two walked all night and most of the morning when Fek stopped on the path and turned as if hearing something. "There is an intelligent creature near us, but the thing is not an animal or a normal plant. I can't even tell where it is, except that it is near and aware of us."

The two saw nothing unusual in the forest except for a large patch of green moss on one of the trees. With this thought in both of their minds they felt the thoughts of the intelligent creature.

"Yes, beings, we have intelligence. Long have we grown and developed our power. Thus we sense all in the forest near us and have young in other parts of the forest that relay to us all that happens within its depths."

"Can you tell me if a race of man-lizards lives near here or if my brother Karn has gone through in the last twelve passings of the sun?"

"We know of this tribe and of the being you seek, but the price you must pay is the light of the beamer you call the light cylinder. We can use the energy it gives off to grow stronger."

Reveral considered it a fair trade, even though he hated to part with the God-Device. The knowledge of the monster tribe and his brother came into his mind also an unusual request. "We would like you to take a small part of us with you, in order that we may grow in knowledge from your experience. For this favor you can expect help from us when you are in danger."

Reveral placed a portion of the moss in a spare pouch and they started off through the forest, directly towards the village. Neither one knew how they were going to get Karn out; both thought that problem would have to solve itself when they got there. The village was only three day's travel through the mountain forest and Reveral decided to approach the camp at night hoping that these lizards were like smaller ones around his village that became weaker when the sun went down, taking the heat with it.

The village was dark and smelled of decaying flesh. The huts were made out of large logs stacked together. There

were no guards to be seen and Fek and Reveral entered, not quite sure how to find Karn amongst all the huts. The two were looking for a hut different from all the rest, one where these creatures might keep slaves.

"The entity you are seeking is in the hut to the right of this path." came the thought from the moss patch.

That thought also started the sentries howling.

Mind Beasts! thought Reveral. These creatures were sensitive to the slightest use of the God-Power. When in the presence of that Power, the creature would howl with all those near suffering damage in the form of skin burns. These Mind Beasts were all stationed on the perimeter of the village and couldn't harm them yet, but their masters would.

They both hurled themselves into the hut but the moss patch had told them of and were attacked by a lizard man just getting up from the ground. It swung and hit Fek with its club and found that the plant had entangled its vines around the weapon, not allowing the lizard to draw it back. Reveral pierced its throat to its brain and the thing fell dead. A hurried search of the hut found his brother unconscious and tied up on the floor in the corner. By this time there was loud hissing coming from all over the village as the monsters roused themselves and poured out of their huts. Unable to get his brother conscious Reveral lifted him and Fek on his shoulders, ran out the door and up into the sky. Never again would his brother laugh at his power after this story was told. The lizard men noticed him too late to stop his flight, and while a few tried to hit him with thrown clubs, he easily avoided their casts. He was forced to leave his metal spear there, but the dead lizard holding it for him was welcome to it! He walked through the sky, far into the night both to hinder any possible pursuit and to travel as quickly as possible to the God-Devices that cured the sick. He knew that his brother needed help. His skin was covered with cuts and bruises and he still wouldn't wake up, no matter what Reveral tried.

When sunrise came he was just too tired to go on any further. The three came to rest in a clearing and Reveral went to sleep while Fek stood guard. In the afternoon he woke and tried again to rouse his brother, but every attempt failed. Reveral knew if something wasn't done soon Karn would die from his wounds. Then the moss patch thought to him.

"If you wish this entity to recover, we can help by taking your strength and giving some of it to the damaged one. The process will weaken you, but will save this other entity's existence."

Reveral gave his permission and the moss patch moved out of the pouch, touched both Karn and Reveral, and strength drained from Reveral's body.

He became weak and bruises and cuts formed on his body. His brother, on the other hand, became less pale and started breathing faster and stronger. Then Karn opened his eyes and sat up! The two brothers hugged each other in affection and started speaking at once, each wanting to know what had happened to the other.

The trip back to the village was long and arduous but without mishap. The people of the village of the fifth level greeted two men with open arms. Reveral would have many tales to tell around the fire in the months to come, and somehow he felt he would do more brave things before he settled down to raise many strong sons for the tribe.