

## THE LAKE OF LONG SLEEP

The surface of the barren, all along the edge of the grass land, had given way beneath the weight of the sambur herds, and the front ranks were being engulfed, with frantic snortings and awful groans, in what looked like a dense, blackish, glistening ooze. The ranks behind were being forced forward to this awful doom, in spite of their panic-stricken struggles to hold back; and it was the pressure of this battling mass that was creating the horrible, bulging undulation on the plain.

Grôm's quick intelligence took in the situation on the instant. The naked brown surface beneath the feet of the tribe was nothing more than a thin crust overlying a lake of some dense, dark, strange-smelling liquid.

His first impulse, naturally, was to turn back—and A-ya, with wide eyes of terror, was already dragging fiercely at his elbow. But to turn back was utterly impossible. That way lay the long strip of engulfing pitch, swallowing up insatiably the ranks of the groaning and kicking sambur. There was but one possible way of escape left open, and that was straight ahead.

But would the crust continue to uphold them? Already, under the weight of the whole tribe pressing together, it was beginning to sag hideously. With furious words and blows he tried to make the tribe scatter to right and left, so as to spread the pressure as widely as possible. Perceiving his purpose, A-ya and Loob, and several of the leading warriors, seconded his efforts with frantic vehemence; till in a few minutes the whole