

Dark Horizons

issue 15 • winter 1976







Produced and Edited for the BPS by Stephen Jones.

FICTION:

Bear.....	Brian Sibley	5
Daggerbroth.....	William Thomas Webb	7
Ffathnarion.....	Gordon Larkin	11
City of Gargoyles.....	Adrian Cole	16
The Witch of Nuide.....	Brian Mooney	25
The Collector.....	David Sutton	28
A Multitude of Realities.....	Andrew Darlington	32

POETRY:

Night-Wings.....	Christine Power	6
Parting.....	Keith Richmond	10
The Salph or The Go-between.....	John Hurley	15
The Truth About Waterfalls.....	Simon Gunsley	24
The People of the Hills.....	Marion Pitman	39

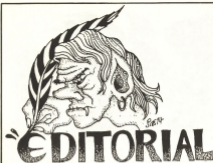
ARTWORK:

Front Cover, Pages 4, 7, 14, 27 by Jim Pitts.
Inside Front Cover, Pages 23, 42, Inside Back Cover by Stephen E. Fabian.
Pages 3, 15, 39 by John Grandfield.
Page 5 by Brian Sibley.
Page 11 by Chris Thomas.
Pages 16, 22, 41 by Russell Nicholson.
Pages 25, 38, 40 by Alan Hunter.
Page 28 by Stephen Jones.
Page 33 by David Lloyd.
Back Cover by David L. Fletcher.

DEPARTMENTS:

Editorial.....	Stephen Jones	4
Letters of Comment.....		40





By
stephen
jones

Welcome to my second "special" DARK HORIZONS, and my last issue as editor.

One of the constant criticisms of DH has been the fiction content; the purpose of this issue is to present a selection of what I feel is some of the best fiction I've recieved for the magazine during the past year.

Brian Sibley's Bear is a lovely tale of Evil, somewhat surprising coming from an expert on the somewhat 'lighter' fantasy of Lewis Carroll and the Pook books. Brian has also contributed the amusing heading drawing for his own story, an illustration which I feel captures perfectly the character of Bear. Bill Webb debuts in these pages with Daggerbroth, a nightmare tale almost reminiscent of the type of ghost story Robert Aickman is so expert in constructing - an apparently deserted railway station, smothered by the Dark, and a threatening atmosphere of mounting terror. In total contrast, Gordon Larkin's Ffathnarion has an almost fairy-tale quality in its story of a Quest for a Secret of Great Wisdom and True Understanding. All being well, we should be seeing an illustrated collection of Gordon's writings sometime next year. After the success of his two Dreamlord novels in America and his recent hardback, MAINESS EMERGING, from Robert Hale in this country, I'm pleased to present a new story by Adrian Cole; City of the Cargoviles starts as S.F., but its climax is absolute horror! Brian Mooney's The Witch of Nuide (and also Alan Hunter's accompanying illo) was originally scheduled to appear in Jon Harvey's never-completed BALTHUS 5; it has been two years since that fine magazine of fantasy literature and folk-lore folded, but thanks to Jon I can finally present this fine supernatural tale in DARK HORIZONS, and I'd like to welcome Brian back to these pages after too long an absence. After he finished editing SHADOW a couple of years ago, Dave Sutton successfully turned to writing fiction, and The Collector, written especially for this issue, proves that Dave is not only a good editor, but also a fine author. Andy Darlington's A Multitude of Realities can probably be considered pure S.F. depending on your definition of fantasy, but I make no excuses for including it here as it is an excellently crafted and imaginative story of 'alternative realities'.

Chris Toomey, whose inside back cover illo was very well recieved in DH14, returns this time with a drawing for Gordon Larkin's story, and joins the line-up of excellent artists who have contributed to this issue.

Christine Power, Keith Richmond, John Hurley, Simon Cunsley and Marion Fitman all present examples of their own particular styles of poetry, and the letters column once again concludes this issue.

I have now been editing DH for over two years, and within that period I've presented some very fine writers and artists within these pages; but the magazine now needs a new editor, someone who can take a fresh look at DH, introduce new ideas, and generally guide it on to better things. Over the past seven issues the magazine has, I think, improved, and it is now up to the new editor to continue this trend.

The new editor is Geoffrey Noel Smith, probably an unfamiliar name to most of you. Geoff has many new and interesting ideas for the magazine, and I'm certain that you, the readers, will give him all the support he'll need.

Finally, I'd like to thank all those contributors and readers who have supported DARK HORIZONS during my editorship, especially Jim Pitts and Dave Sutton who have both been of invaluable help, and I'd like to wish Geoff every success with the magazine...

BEAR

By
BRÍAN SÍBLEY



Bear.

Kim was devoted to him. They were inseparable.

Bear had been a present from Uncle Victor, the Christmas before last, arriving one cold December morning in a badly tied bundle of brown paper and torn Christmas wrappings.

Bear came with love from Uncle Victor. And Bear proved to be an ambitious and purposeful emissary of Uncle Victor's love.

Victor was seldom if ever mentioned, as is the way with most family black sheep. In fact, nobody knew very much about Victor - not that that had prevented them from arriving at suppositions about his degenerate character. And on the odd occasions when they had met Victor they could have been forgiven for finding him sinister, for he was a tall man whose face had been horribly distorted by a malicious scowl. His restless eyes pierced through you, looking away and beyond to someone or something in the shadowy middle-distance. His long bony hands moved with delicate orchestrated tensions, the fingers twitching - an imaginative person might suppose - to crush the fragile blossom of a Christmas Rose, or to tear a robin's tiny wings.

Mother did not approve of Victor; nor, from the moment of his arrival, did she approve of Bear.

Bear was fat. Even for an expensive Teddy Bear he was fat: gluttonously obese. Bear was slothful, and in some mysterious way - only hinted at in the sudden fall of dusk - curiously obscene.

But Kim loved Bear, doting on him from the first. Her other toys were soon discarded: Bear alone reigning supreme. He became the child's familiar, her confidant and sole companion.

Mother resented the unwanted intruder, and the loving attention lavished upon him by Kim. She felt nothing but revulsion at their whispered secrets; she was incapable of sharing her child's adoration of this monstrous toy, and came at last to the unbalanced conclusion that there was more to Bear than sawdust shavings and glass eyes. Above all she feared the way in which Bear's mouth turned down - twisted and sour: for all the world like Victor's.

Bear, of course, knew Mother's thoughts. He saw her watching them wherever they were, so he and Kim went to be together in the dusty attic at the top of the house. Here like brother and sister they played among the boxes and packingcases, cobwebs and hot-water pipes, where a silence lay withal like the dust of unsaid words. Here blossomed the terrible courtship of Bear and his mistress. Kim's friends ceased to call for her to go and play; but she cared little, for she had found the adult toy of love. Bear had insidiously taken her for his own. Summer came and the dry lethargic heat slumbered up from the parched earth. And in the cold attic, where sunlight filtered thin and pale, Kim played with Bear. It was the same when autumn came, and then through the long winter, tired with its snow-bound ponderings. No one heard from Victor that Christmas, but Bear was there. And spring discovered the lovers noticeably changed: one growing, if possible, fatter, the other growing pale and remote for the want of sun and air. Mother knew it must not be allowed to continue. All her rational senses told her she was foolish to worry over the child's harmless devotion to one of her toys. Yet other senses came to her in the primal dead of night, or when she heard the passionate murmurings as she passed the attic door - voices from the darkest recesses of her brain came to her, warned her, showed her the bond between Kim and Bear to be an unnatural one.

One sultry evening in early summer, Mother voiced her fears to Father. He sat thinking for some long while, drawing on his pipe, too distant to realise that it was out and cold.

Had similar thoughts crossed his mind? It seemed as though Mother had crystalised some idea as yet only half-born in his brain. But when at length he spoke it was with a casual reassurance. Mother remained unconvinced. A day or two later, Father stumbled on Kim and Bear, deep in conclave together in a dark doorway; she caressing his fur and whispering her undying love into his fluffy ear while he patiently listened, his amber eyes warm and moist. For one moment Father paused - a cloud passed across the sun and he shivered. But as the sun broke free again, he laughed at Kim's serious face, and pushed the image of fear quickly from him.

Time passed for the world, but stood still for the lovers. Kim grew daily more abstracted. Where there had been smiles, laughter, running feet, happiness and songs, there was nothing other than the terrible love she bore for Bear. There was only the silent footfall of conspirators and a moaning in the night.

Mother knew Bear must go. Kim would hate her, but Bear must be removed. She was convinced that Bear was evil: she would burn him, and bury the ashes together with those parts of Bear that would not burn.

But Bear knew what was happening. He understood that time was running out...

*

The decision reached, Mother crept quietly into Kim's bedroom.

The curtains moved gently in the half-breeze, and the moonlight streamed across the bed where Kim lay with Bear. He was close to her cheek, his head softly nuzzled against her neck as if he were sweetly telling her of his passion for the last time, of the love he would let no one destroy. Kim lay still and pale in the blanched moonlight and a tiny tear trailed across her downy cheek. Her lips smiled in an ecstasy of love.

Mother's heart pounded - she tore Bear from the child, but Kim did not stir: she lay quite still while a trickle of dark red blood glistened on her neck.

Moonlight and silence, shattered by Mother's screams, the silence and moonlight fled like startled owls. There in the sobbing night Bear lay in her arms, lifeless and inert, staring through her at the ceiling. Bear's face was blank, the stupid, inanitate features of a stuffed toy.

Bear had fulfilled his obligations, had shown himself to be a worthy emissary. And through her tears, Mother noticed Bear's blood-stained mouth - no longer turned down, but defiantly smiling at her with a strange malicious scowl.

NIGHT~WINGS

The hands of the storm
catch my cape,
and it tugs at my shoulders
like dark wings flaring
wide wings stretching...

"Run for shelter!" reason shouts,
but something older holds me there,
something deeper mocks the mind,
and lifts with the wind
on eagle-wings,
falcon-wings,
and albatross...

Thunder rolling in the night
fills my mind with drums of fire.
Cold rain falls in a sudden sheet -
- and my feet
are deep-rooted
in mire.

christine power



DABBERBROT

by

William Thomas Webb

That room seemed as cold and lifeless as a vault. A smell of rottenness hung in the air. It was the stench of some obscene incense in the Temple of Death, the stench of urine and ordure, of sweaty bodies and filthy old rags, the aroma of long extinguished cigarettes and the dregs of a million cups of railway tea. It was the stink of something infinitely worse than all these.

A host of rats, perchance, had died of gangrene beneath the floor.

The only other occupant was a scraggy-looking schoolboy. Huddled in the corner furthest from the door, with his cap pulled over his eyes, he seemed asleep. His face was hooded in shadow. One hand resting across his bony knees was thin and lifeless as if he suffered from some wasting disease.

Beside him on the bench lay a notebook. On the cover had been penciled a number of unpronounceable words. I took him to be a train-spotter, a member of that band of youngsters who delight in recognising engines and recording numbers.

I wished the urchin luck, and wondered why he had not gone home. For in this station, at this time of night, there appeared few trains to spot. In fact, out on the rails, and on the turn-tables, not a single locomotive seemed to be moving. And a little worm of worry

began to squirm within my cranium. Why was such a large station so silent? Had some national catastrophe occurred? Had I strayed into some eldritch, haunted region where only rats ran on the rails, and only the dead waited?

Then, as if in answer to my gloomy thoughts, a noise sounded outside, like the rapid shaking of some stiff papers. Other noises followed. And presently the lines began to hum, as they do when a train approaches. Listening for a while, I rose hurriedly and left the waiting-room, glad to be away from its rancid atmosphere and its one silent and cadaverous occupant.

But outside, the station, under its dome of glass and girders, seemed equally gloomy. An air of neglect and desolation hung over the place like something from a paranoid dream. Torn posters and crude graffiti covered the grimy walls. Leaves and paper littered the floor. A chilly dampness seemed to seep through to one's very bones. There was something uncanny about the place as if it had been abandoned years ago and no longer appeared on any map or time-table.

A large board bore the single word "DAGGERBROTHER", and I tried to remember where I had seen it before.

Such was my abhorrence of the place that I resolved to get away at the first opportunity. The very next train that departed from any platform would take me away from it, no matter where that train was going.

For legends say that certain areas on the face of this ancient land are accursed from time immemorial as if designed by some malignant power as the abode of ghouls and vampires, or of monsters from another world. Surely this was one of them!

The humming on the lines persisted. I peered into darkness. But there were no signs of any trains, and no suggestion of anything but the sombre platform and bridges, and the paired metal rails shooting off into a strange no-man's-land of black hills and trees, as murky as the depths of the sea.

With a heavy shudder I gazed 'round the poorly-lighted caverns, looking for some other benighted traveller with whom to share my woe. But all was deserted as a midnight graveyard. No solitary guard or porter came in sight - not a single passenger. What sort of depot had I come to? Were no trains at all running after nightfall?

The junction covered many acres. From where I stood, shivering, beside an abandoned kiosk, I could see platform after platform extending into the gloom. Each one mimicked its neighbour as in a maze of mirrors. Each was poorly-lighted, and damp-looking, and night-washed, with faceless notices here and there, and locked doors, empty seats, shapeless and mysterious bundles, and torn posters proclaiming trips to outlandish resorts.

To my left a long, covered bridge spanned the tracks. Its dark arches were festooned with bat-haunted cobwebs and shrouds of black moss, and scabbed with growths of leprous lichen. It looked like something ancient and sinister - a gloomy bridge of sighs going from one empty platform to another. The far end was swallowed in the stygian nightmare of Platform 13.

There was something repulsive about this monster bridge. An inner voice warned me not to venture upon it. To do so would endanger my very soul. Some memory from a dream, or a previous incarnation screamed out its warning.

But I found myself ignoring that warning and walking towards the bridge. As one in a nightmare I felt my knees bending and my feet slithering as I ascended the rusty steps.

Up on the span I looked back on the platform I had just left. In the windless air the door of the waiting-room was swinging mysteriously to and fro. Then I turned to the bridge. I hoped to find some night-duty official who might tell me the time and platform of the next train.

My footsteps rang on the ferrous pathway spanning the lines. At monotonously regular intervals flights of badly-lit steps led down to murky and lifeless platforms. Each looked sickeningly the same; a long line of desolate stone and wood raised above the lustreless rails.

Then, as I approached the final stairway - the one leading down to Platform 13 - I heard a new pattern of sounds; a rhythmic buzzing which grew louder every second.

My spirits rose. Could it be the hum of trainwheels on the track? Did it signify that trains called at this station? That it was a normal part of the railroad system and not some hideous level of purgatory where no succour ever came, and only the lost waited dismally until the Crack of Doom?

Quickly I descended the stairs and found myself on a long platform as poorly lighted as all the rest. This lighting seemed designed to conceal and disguise rather than illuminate. It cast ugly bat-shadows around every object. It lit up odd fragments here and there like ghost-faces, leaving all other things in mystery and shade.

On this platform the sounds rising from the rails were strangely louder. So were the strains of the newly-risen nightwind keening in the telegraph-wires which followed the track. The two groups of sounds mingled in a strange, off-key throndy which added sardonically to my unease.

Still no trains! What, I wondered, was making the lines moan? Where they picking up sounds of distant wheels speeding miles away in the night? Did they form a temporal radio-circuit tuned to detect and echo the rhythm of all the locos that had ever roared along them in the past? Or were they, exposed as they were, mile after mile, under the bleak, moonless sky, responding to malicious cosmic harmonies from outerpace - some baleful music of the spheres?

Such morbid and fantastic notions, on that unquiet platform, did not feel out of place. For there seemed something unspeakably horrible about that long slab of semi-darkness leading into the void. Terrible fear deterred me from walking along it.

At this point I remembered the skinny schoolboy I had seen in the waiting-room. If he had any sense he would be on his way home. I thought of returning to that room myself, in spite of the sickening stench, just to get away from this odious platform. But something made me linger.

Not since boyhood had I felt fear of the dark like this. Fear and madness run hand in hand, each goading the other. Cries aware of this I fought down a blind urge to run screaming from the spot.

Gradually I controlled my nerves. Should I not force myself to stride boldly to the very end of the platform to prove my manhood and preserve my sanity?

Then, from halfway along the slab, a terrible sound chattered through the gloom. I describe it as terrible. But there was nothing terrible in the sound itself. For it was merely a brief and rapid shaking of some stiff papers. Elsewhere such a sound would have carried little or no significance, and certainly no sinister overtones.

But, coming from that long, deserted platform, and mingling with the off-key polyphony of the rails and overhead wires, it seemed utterly spinechilling, like harsh, uncanny laughter issuing from an open grave.

Once more my reason strove for mastery over howling madness. That noise, I told myself, proved I was not alone on that nighted platform. Some person had shaken those papers. And I tried to shout to him. For I was sorely in need of human company.

But only a faint croaking would come from my throat. Even to my own ears this sounded almost as horrifying as the noise I had just heard, as the grave-cry of a ghoul. I tried again.

"Hello! Who's there?"

This time I produced intelligible sounds. Encouraged by this I peered into the depths of the night to discover if anyone had heard me, to learn if there was anyone there to hear me; and to assure myself that the shaking of papers was not a horrible grashing of teeth issuing from the same occult sources as the other noises of that haunted place.

For a while I saw only the big platform and its buildings, the dead doors, the posters, the dumb signs and signals, the broken coin-boxes, and those odious bundles, which might have been sheeted corpses, under the vague and widely-spaced lamps.

Presently, to my utter relief, I saw a man approaching. He ventured a few paces in my direction. Then he halted, peering about him as if looking for the one who had called.

Then he merged into shadow and vanished.

For a while, such was the horror of that place, I began to fear that he had been a mere phantom of my mind. But presently he appeared again and I saw him clearly by the light of one of the lamps.

He was tall and thin, with long legs and slightly hunched shoulders. His dress was the uniform which some years ago had been worn by all railwaymen. Once that livery, unaltered for decades, had been too familiar to cause comment. But now it looked pathetically old-fashioned. In his hands he carried a sheaf of yellowing papers. His round, peaked cap was pushed back on his cranium to reveal a wide, pale forehead. The lower part of his face was concealed by a bushy black moustache.

"Excuse me!"

I hurried towards him.

Minutes earlier I would have lacked the courage to venture in that direction. How hateful that platform seemed! The bridge was repulsive. But the platform at the end of it was undescribably worse. Every screaming nerve in my body reacted against its forbidding presence, its prickly shadows, its evil lights, and its audio-vibrations which did not belong to this world.

The sight of this uniformed official, however, gave me courage. Not completely could I

ignore my encompassing horrors; but they no longer held me hopelessly in thrall.

Whether or not he had seen me was uncertain. He seemed to be scrutinising a long, dark object which lay in the shadows some little distance away from him. Now and then he would peer at his papers as if checking some details. And once he looked up at a sign-board on which the word "DAGGERBROTH" had been printed in black, gothic letters.

Approaching closer I saw he was old and feeble-looking. His uniform was threadbare. But he seemed indifferent to the cold wind which blew along the platform, and deaf to the moaning and keening of the rails and wires.

As I came within a yard of him he shook his papers again. Violently and angrily he flourished them, his whole body vibrating with his rage. The sound was unnaturally loud. But it did not seem so hideous to my ears as it had done previously. It merely seemed a futile and angry gesture made by a frustrated old man compelled to walk the dark platforms of a moribund railway depot. Seen thus, the action seemed harmless and quite pathetic.

I took another look at the papers in his hand. And, rubbing my eyes with unbelief, I was horrified to learn that they were doctor's death-certificates. And instantly those yellowing, macabre documents held in that bony old claw brought back all my creeping horrors.

These horrors increased a hundredfold when I felt the man's gaze fix upon me. For, at the instant this happened, a strange transformation came over the creature.

A vibrant cry, resonant with the moaning of the rails and the scream of the night-wind, issued from his misshapen mouth. And in the half-light of that fear-haunted track the man seemed to grow taller, until, menacing and eldritch, he towered above me. Then, raising his arms, he swooped down upon me like a bird of prey.

As his face zoomed to within inches of my own I was able to see his teeth gleaming wetly below his black moustache. White and monstrous they were, with long, tapering canines.

But of his deadly vampire embrace I knew nothing, nor felt those terrible tusks puncture my throat. For I swooned into oblivion as black as the deepest tunnel.

*

Something terrible has happened to me, something I cannot describe. Certain that I shall never leave this accursed station, I am writing this in the waiting-room. The place seems as cold and lifeless as a vault. A smell of rottenness hangs in the air like the stench of some obscene incense in the Temple of Death.

My mind is going. Strange, alien words flood into it from I know not where.

Bekshance O Vorfentor -

The only other occupant of the room is the schoolboy train-spotter. I have used his notebook to scribble down this account as a warning to anyone else who might wander into this waiting room.

Now it is too late for me to do anything about it I have found the meaning of the word Daggerbroth but some hideous mental block prevents me from revealing it here.

The boy seems to have been dead for a long time. Yet now and then his fleshless fingers twitch, and his lips part to reveal white, inhuman teeth. He, too, knows the meaning of that forbi -

Bekshance O Vorfentor! Kramcavy wodgecome bolwiggon akh tyu Daggerbroth E -

Parting

Silver on a velvet sky
A mist, a lie.
Along the lake an old man wakes
And I must die.

Sly reeds whisper to the night
My weary plight.
Across the moon moves black, and soon
Will end the light.

keith richmond



PROLOGUE:

These are two gentlefolk travelling, leisurely, the long ways of green Normantis and they have come, with the late morning, to an old inn hidden amongst the trees until they are upon it. It seems deserted but for an aproned boy who promptly, almost as if he has been waiting for them, attends their needs. The sun has yet to noon and the day is warmly bright that the twin sup their ales outside, beneath the heavy trees.

In a while, from the hidden depths of the wood, through slanting, hazy sunbeams, comes a man, old and ragged with a staff in his hand although he walks upright and his eyes are bright.

"Good sirs," he addresses the travellers, his voice firm yet oddly distant, his manner most polite. "Yon seat is vacant. May I join you in a cup and a sunny converse ere the warmth and this moment are forever lost? I can see by your bearing that you are of noble breed and few such pass this way."

The travellers, amused and intrigued by his beggarly mien and well-spoken manner, agree and call for another cup bidding the old man to sit with them.

And as the sun arches its zenith, falling to night they speak those three of many things for the nobles have travelled far and, they say, seen many wonders of the world.

"Aahh!" says the old man. "If you will, and I know you must, allow me to tell you a tale that is a wonder not wholly of this world."

The cups are refilled and the tale is told.

Imagine, if you can, a mountain - a vast mountain in whose presence all earthly peaks would seem as slight hills on an endless plain. Truly, the mountain of which I tell, is immense; huge beyond imagining that, were it stood upon this world its summit would reach far out into the cold of space, even beyond the moon.

But, of course Ffathnarion - for so is the mountain named - does not exist within this narrow realm.

It rises enormously from a steaming quagmire, an endless slough couched in a nook on the

northern rim of Eternity.

To the bulbous and bloated inhabitants of the mire it is sacred and they do it worship as befits their kind. It is hung in mystery and draped with folding mists through which half-seen shadows weave, threading the clouds into a deeper wonder, an awesome tapestry. Sometimes weird, hollow cries come arching down to rudely pierce the stillness and disturb the marshy host; but such screechings are swallowed quite suddenly into the sticky morass and their echo is slight. So too, the howling winds that crash carelessly through the endless corridors and arched cloisters of the void, all muffled in that mire.

Pfathmarion is beyond the dominion of all the gods of men, unreachable even by the, almost limitless, voyagings of dream - and many have dreamed it. For within and upon that mountain is a Secret. It is a secret of Great Wisdom and True Understanding for which many a scholar - yes, and many a godling - has yearned. Wizards and sages have devoted lifetimes to the study of the road to Pfathmarion, but only one has ever trod that path and stood in the mountain's shadow.

Carved into one side of the mountain and shaped from the very rock and mist, there is a mighty throne facing, eternally, southwards. Upon the throne for all time sits the Keeper of the Secret...and he has no name, though he is, in essence, Pfathmarion.

The one of many who did attain Pfathmarion had devoted every instant of his life and every tear in his heart to that one end. He travelled far and in dubious lands gathering little wisdoms and great understandings, learning strange skills and developing a peace of mind achieved by few. He knew not the life of his fellows and cared even less, for in his solitude and in his quietly intimate meanderings he had discovered one of the paths to Pfathmarion.

After years of vain efforts, when his hair had whitened, his brow wrinkled and his distant youth been forgotten, then, with such sorceries he had fashioned from the utterings of daemons and gods, spirits dead and yet unborn, he commenced the casting for which he had lived.

It was long and arduous, that conjuration, and fraught with a great many dangers that any lesser mage would have had great difficulty withstanding. He fought the stages of the spell in many guises and on many levels of consciousness, winning past each until his effort produced the Tear.

"For Pfathmarion will weep when his secret is threatened," read the lore, "and his Tear shall be thy guide."

It appeared as a glimmering orb of flame, a shaftless candle to guide him through the depths of eternity. Exhausted though he was by his night-long necromancy, the questor indulged Pfathmarion's Tear and followed where it burned.

At first he found himself stumbling crazily along a narrow corridor whose mirrored walls rose sheer less than an arm's width on either side. Almost on the point of tripping over himself he continually bumped against the walls buffeted back and forth by his own reflection as if he was being disowned by an infinity of himself. Continually receding before him, the gold flame was iridescent in the still air - a small comfort amongst strange fears. The corridor was endless and confusing. Time and its measure left him and were it not for the guiding orb he would have been utterly lost. The constricting walls weighed heavily, giving him great difficulty in breathing such that he was tempted to turn back - but he would not do that. There would be much to endure before the end.

Abruptly, the walls tightened, crowding him until he could but shuffle sideways with his head pressed to one side. Still narrower it grew until his breath would not come at all - his chest sunk and unable to rise. Though the pain drew blurring clouds across his eyes he pressed on - for if he could not achieve Pfathmarion it would not matter that he lie dead somewhere amidst the oceans of infinity. His hopes faded along with the spark of his life.

Then quite suddenly the corridor came to an end.

He fell and his lungs bit greedily on cool air, his chest painfully working again. Downward and down he tumbled, through swirling mists, multi-based and, though he spun wildly, he fixed his gaze on the flaming tear now burning a watery emerald.

"This is the final fall," he prayed and even as he did, his tumble came to a sudden, bone-shaking halt.

When he had recovered his senses he found that he was lying on damp and spongy ground, the mists that had tossed him so fiercely thinning to feathery wisps and fading moistly. He arose and discovered that he was on an unpleasant and seemingly endless marsh that lay pocked to a greying horizon. Scattered in confusion across the steaming morass were clumps of weird, rustling foliage that were mauve and cluttered about with frilled wisps of an icy glimmering. Standing there, alone on the lifeless, yet teasing, slough of which he had heard

awesome tales, he felt the cold insistence of unknown fears pressing on him. He shivered.

Something!

A momentary indecision...he spun around. Tense.

The Mountain was there.

He gasped into the cold air for, though he knew he must be far from its feet, it was still immense, almost beyond his comprehension.

"Ffathmarion," he muttered in an awed and solemn whisper. "Ffathmarion."

Majestic indeed, even as he had heard tell - from the immortal wanderers beyond time - and his joy at the quest's realisation was boundless. Here was the goal of his life, the end and justification of his isolation - he had attained Ffathmarion and was bettered by none.

The thrill of its splendour over, he began the trek over the mire, weary beyond caring, and always, between him and the mountain, hovered the silver flame.

Were it not for that guide he would many times have been lost for, although he could see the end, the path twisted and turned annoyingly, sometimes bending back on itself and sometimes running parallel to the peak. Though the path was circuitous he dared not look beyond the flame for there was an evil here and it surrounded him. Those bubbling pools of slime and the strange, beaked things that squatted on their banks chirruping - were they heedful of his presence? And would the denizens of the marsh resent him? Entrap him before the end?

Ever as he progressed the air was still and heavy, a steady indefinite hum hanging like the perpetual echo of a gong struck a moment before. He felt an oppression on him and many unfriendly eyes.

The marsh did not want him.

Once only did he stumble from the path, his foot caught by a wandering root so that he plunged headlong into a sticky pond. At once a hundred thin roots twisted about his limbs and began to drag him down into the sucking mud. His moment of panic was swiftly disciplined and a spell was born. At that utterance the weeds released him and he climbed from the slough leaving it to moan and bubble in frustration.

After that he did not step from the path despite its irksome meanderings.

Much time passed though its passage was unreflected in the ghosted sky and the mountain seemed no nearer. He rested when space and his fear allowed but he dared not linger in one place over long as such elicited unpleasant, excited notions on either side.

At times he was aware of hags, lumbering shadows heaving on the periphery of his sight, but turning to look more carefully there was nothing but the endless, breathing mire.

Then, too, came the sounds of watery gulping on the path immediately behind him, but on looking, there was nothing save his slowly shallowing foot-prints.

Agas would pass as tiresomely as this - it seemed he had been treading that path for all time. The flaming orb was growing in size and brightness as the journey progressed and he was quite startled when it stopped its gentle movement to burn motionless at eye level. The mountain still seemed hugely distant and he was concerned at the orb's seeming hesitancy.

Ffathmarion was supernally glorious, robed in a colourless, swirling mystery and wreathed with silver stars that were a diadem supreme. Strangely vibrant shadows flitted beneath the mist and the air occasionally echoed with piercing, eldritch calls.

The orb, now large as himself, rose upwards, slowly at first, drawing the Questor's eyes onto the mountain's wide face. A moment it hovered, then, flashing liquidly into the mists, it split the veil, cracking the clouds which fell away as though severed by a mighty axe.

As the clouds withdrew there was revealed a high throne carved of, and into, the mountain itself. Seated serenely there was a giant clad in long, folded robes of gray that bled hazily into the rocks of his seat.

The Questor gazed fearfully on the giant's countenance, so far away yet so clearly benign, and beautiful in its way. It was an old face, ancient as Ffathmarion and worn by eternity's cold wind. His pate was hairless save where long thin strands of whiteness fell to his shoulders...so too had he a wispy beard. The giant was the mountain and the mountain he.

A mighty voice echoed down and it was a voice of supreme contentment.

"What would you of Ffathmarion?"

The Questor was amazed that he was visible to the giant at such a distance...he must have appeared as a speck of dust.

Nonetheless the excitement of his achievement overcame his anxiety.

"I have come to learn the Secret," he shouted, loudly as he might.

The giant lifted a massive, cloaked arm slowly to one ear and a stony frown creased his brow.

"Do not shout so, little one. I can hear well enough."

The Questor, uncertainly, continued as though they spoke face to face.

"I have come to learn the Secret which you carry and which you must impart to me by virtue of my having attained Pfatharion." He hoped his arrogance would not annoy the giant.

"It is long since I pondered that secret, for secrets serve no purpose when there are none to hear them. But yes, it is your right to learn, if you so wish. Come sit upon the throne and learn."

The giant disappeared suddenly and whilst the Questor was still confused an unearthly rushing wind came upon him. It seemed to be blowing throughout his body and in the immense caverns of his skull as though there were a greater vastness within, a huger infinity. That storm was swift for, abruptly, a calmness was upon him and he was unsurprised when he knew he could actually sit upon the throne, large as he was.

Thus sitting, he looked southwards from Eternity and upon all things...

he saw the endless oceans of night
and the silver ships there navigating;
he saw deities most high,
and where time fell, as leaves from a tree;
he saw the anonymity of the First Eternity
and where sorrows sea;
he saw universes a-birthing
and children dying;
he saw the first sunrise in the first east
and the last sunset...

All these things, and more, he witnessed and the clouds that had impaired his sight, that had coloured his understanding and darkened the truth, vanished like the fog they were. He recognised the harmony of being and the scope of existence...and this was the Secret.

EPILOGUE:

The gentlefolk are silent, uncertain if the tale is ended. Evening is upon them and there is a chill wind that whispers through the forest. The old man pulls tight his cloak and rises.

"But," says one, "surely the tale does not end so suddenly? What became of the Questor?"

"Ahhh!" and again his voice is a weary hush. "He returned the seat to the giant. Now the Questor's life is done. He can only hope for the peace of death, his torment so great. He learned the Secret, ay, but cannot impart its true significance to any for he has not the words to colour it. And yet he is compelled to tell his tale to all who might listen in the hope that somewhere he will find a companion in the supreme understanding."

"Old man, what is your name?"

He laughs emptily, "I have no name."

With that he turns and walks back into the trees whence he came.

The gentlefolk look to each other, puzzled both.

"Did he not say that only one ever attained Pfatharion?"

"He did so."

They rise and call after the old man, searching the trees which took him, but he is gone and they cannot find him.

They return to the inn...but there is no inn.

The horses stand quietly in a glade and there is no sign that there had ever been anything there.

They look at each other in silence and smile, for these are gentlefolk who have seen a great many of the wonders of the world.

An owl hoots three times and the day is done.





THE SALPH or the Go-Between

From the lips of the Elgis to the pink-winged butterfly was a rhyme spoken.
And the salph flew to the air, magic-eyed as a wizards token.
Pass trinkling waters and secret ponds; through rainbows that simmered out
of 'falls.
Over foxglove crowns and buttercup downs; to the crest of opalescent halls.
Through the no-gate door; past the cloths of the shore, to the rocs of throne
and rune.
Where the salph fluttered low; pink wings spread aglow, to the emperor was
spoke the tune.
And the daffodil-king let the salph hear him sing, and then return with a
word of light.
So the salph with his love, flew the land with sun's glove, and softness was
touched to his flight.
And the Elgis were told of the king's gift of gold, and they joyed on the
gifted plain.
Of the salph, no-one knew, where he sat or flew. But he lie faded in the
down-coming rain.

JOHN HURLEY



City of Gargoyles

By

adrian cole

Skimming like a silver stone across the surface of a lake, the dish-like craft was buffeted and blistered by the turbulent currents of the thermal storm. Kozos had no regard for insolent aliens who sought to speed with controlled deliberateness through its storm-wracked upper air, and like the hands of some titanic elemental the thermal storm cuffed the craft across a new and uncharted route, searing its steel hull with sand blasts, brushing it with fingers of burning heat.

With its autobooters overheating in a frantic bid to combat the sudden hurricane brew of the thermal storm, the craft hurled high up over the lip of a stark plateau, a thousand miles from the relative security of the Colony. Sand curled and eddied in spiralling columns fifty miles high and the craft lurched groundwards as the autobooters failed and clogged, sputtering their refusal to function further. Inside the dizzily wheeling craft that sank lower like a stricken bird the lone occupant sought to bring his landing propellers into play, but they sputtered half-heartedly, mocked by the churning sand and the shrieking derision of the sand-wind.

Over the plateau edge the craft tumbled, knifing towards the thick dust that had been flung up from the desert below and had collected in the narrow ravines and bare snaggles of rock. Skidding and jolting through the broken, eroded teeth of disintegrating stone, the craft gouged up a mile-long furrow that quickly filled with sand. As it bounced into an outcrop of tougher rock it shuddered to a halt, the thermal storm blowing furiously away out towards the desert lowlands, leaving a low moaning wind to worry faintly at the stricken ship like a suspicious hound.

For a long time nothing happened. Dust spread itself inevitably over the craft like a shroud as it had heaped itself everywhere in this forsaken wilderness of rock. The huge orange ball of the sun filled the sky, casting a lurid light down upon the stark landscape of desolation, scattering red and gold shadows across the pocked surface of the plateau. The craft gave a last spasmodic lurch, quivering in death, then disgorged its sole occupant from its opening belly.

The man, his face protected from the stinging whip of the granule-laden wind, stumbled out into the pitiless terrain and searched through tear-filled eyes for some possible route of escape from this private hell.

His fading scanners had shown this plateau to be a solid block of etched stone, rearing thousands of feet up into the sky from the desert floor, its only companions here in the bleak northlands of Kozos being other lesser blocks and a few humped ranges of mountains beyond.

Cursing the ill-luck that had flung him to so remote a fastness, the man made off for the more sheltered overhangs of rock. There was little in the craft that would aid him here, and he dared not linger by it while the autobooters threatened to explode. Walking on through the sand that sucked at his knees sapped what little strength he had retained after his numbing crash, and he made slow progress. He crossed the wave shapes of a score of dunes then slumped to a halt at the top of yet another, peering down hopefully into the wide hollow before him. Vague shadows were etched down there across the rippling orange sea of desert. He forced himself to go on, reached a jutting spur of low rock and ran his hand over its shape. He gave a grunt of relief, for it was a wall.

Beyond him the shadows materialised into crude dwellings, the rough-cut stone pieced together jaggedly to form a resisting force against the persistent wind. Stopping at the first building in the alcove of its dome, the man rapped out loudly at the wooden barrier that served for a tightly secured door. Minutes went by, then it opened slowly and the man thrust himself rudely inside and fell clumsily down unseen steps that led to a sandy depression. The door bumped shut and silence fell abruptly.

The man pulled his veil from his eyes dizzily and looked up into torchlight, aware of the thick fumes that made the low-domed house reek. A dozen pairs of slanted eyes observed him curiously. From the maddled watchers a single old man detached himself, scowling down at the intruder. He was no bigger than a young boy of the latter's race, his clothes ragged, his face seared with age, puckered and wrinkled by a lifetime of burrowing in the sand of Kozos. He and his companions were 'Grubbers' as the desert men of Kozos were called by the outsiders. They were not unlike men, but were small and frail as insects, their skins dried and shrivelled, their faces pointed.

"What do you want with us?" piped the old man. "Has your species not learned yet that Kozos wants none of them?"

The intruder struggled into a sitting position and spat sand from his dry mouth. He had picked up a smattering of the local language.

"My name is Izarev," he said in a broken dialect, his brows meeting in a scowl. He had never taken to the dwarfish inhabitants of this grim world. While they had never been openly

hostile to the men at the Colony, their resentment of the men from other worlds was plain. Dnarev waved outwards as though to signify the thermal storm. "The storm brought my craft down. I am lost. If you can help me to return to my people, I will not trouble you."

There seemed to be no hint of compassion in the squinting eyes of the Grubbers.

"You mock the wind gods of Kosmos with your ship, yet you beseech your fate when they strike you down. Why should we defy the judgement put on you?"

"Look, all I want to know is the way off this plateau. Show me a way down and I will leave you." Dnarev looked at them levelly, watching the wasp-like faces sniffing the air like rodents as they caught his scent. He cared little for their fading culture on this decaying old planet, though others at the Colony had been more patient with them, pointing out that they were at least useful in helping locate the valuable ores that had brought men here. Apart from those ores there was nothing for men on Kosmos, and even the eager young archaeologist, Garrol, had made little of the enigmatic and dust-eaten ruins of the skeletal cities in the dried landscapes. He had been more taken with the colourful myths and legends of Kosmos' remote past.

"There is no way off the plateau of Yllarnodym. My people have dwelt here for generations," piped the old man. "We have never left the plateau. If the wind gods have driven you here, it is for them to remove you." The Grubbers made weird assenting sounds.

Dnarev chewed his lip. His transmitter had been wrecked so his chances of being rescued were nil. He was harassed with a handful of scuttling Grubbers. He looked piercingly at the old man.

"If there is no way off, what are you going to do with me?" he challenged, though he suddenly felt very tired. If these people decided on hostility, they would better him in spite of his superior size.

"We are not violent," said the old man as though he had read the thoughts of the alien. "You are free to move at will. Live here if you must. If you need food and water, there is enough. But you will not find life on the plateau easy."

Food appeared as if from thin air, and Dnarev took the dried roots and crusty bread from the bony hands of one pinched-faced Grubber with a grunt of thanks. He ate hungrily and swigged at the water he was given.

"What did you say this place was called?"

"Yllarnodym," replied the old man and the heads around in the guttering light bowed in silence as though the strange figures were praying.

"Haven't I heard that name somewhere? It has a ring to it I should recall."

"In your tongue it means 'beloved of the gods'," said the old man, speaking Dnarev's native words fluently. Dnarev stopped drinking and looked at the gnarled Grubber suspiciously.

"If you speak my language, you must have left this rock to learn it!" he snapped, but the old man shook his head.

"No. But we have learned much of your people's coming. There are ways - old ways - in which we still communicate. But I have not lied. There is no way off Yllarnodym."

Dnarev turned the word over in his mind. "Yllarnodym. Beloved of the gods." Garrol knew as much of the folklore of Kosmos as anyone; he would know -

Then Dnarev had it. A tale told by Garrol months ago about a fabulous lost kingdom from Grubber history.

"There is an old legend amongst the desert dwellers of the lowlands," he said. "They speak of a legendary city that has been lost for centuries, if it existed at all. They talk of it as their paradise - the place where the dead once travelled to be at peace with their gods."

The old man listened as Dnarev spoke the words aloud. "Yes. It is here, the lost city, Yllarnodym. A city of unparalleled beauty, of unfailing wonder, where the most favoured of our people lived - and a place where the gods smiled upon us and lavished upon us their eternal love. Wondrous gods beyond words, who blessed us and favoured us."

"This is it?" said Dnarev incredulously.

"No," said the other patiently. "It is across the plateau."

"Your brethren of the lowlands speak of it as though it houses fabulous treasures and boasts wealth accumulated over millennia. Yet you wear rags and make a poor living in the sand. Does not your paradise offer you happier rewards?"

"Yllarnodym is not for us."

Dnarev scowled and finished his drink. "When I have rested I think I shall seek your city. If it was your wind god that brought me down here, I would speak to him. No doubt he will be at this city of gods?" he said cynically.

"Of all our cities, only Yllarnodym has won the love of the gods. Perhaps you will find the key that you seek there and you will find your way back to your own kind."

"Is it far?"
"You will reach it easily from here."
"After I have rested I will leave you."
"As you wish."

A pale orange wash daubed the heavens in a parody of dawn as Dnarev left the clustered stone huts of the desert people and began his trudge across the wind-whipped plateau. No life stirred here, not even the screechy birds of the lowlands with their staccato calls. Visibility varied according to the gusting sand-wind, but as Dnarev walked on he passed pillars of flaking stone, already being worn away into nothingness as the wind performed its frenetic sculptures.

Dnarev had to go out of his way several times to cross gaping cracks that ran like huge segments of a crazy paving over the terrain, but after two hours he saw something ill-defined pressed up against the side of a sheer cliff of red rock, and instinct told him that this was the fabled structure of Yllarnodm. Titanic blocks of stone had been meticulously placed on top of each other, slotting into a distinct pattern, forming a massive bastion against the elements that hardly seemed touched by ravaging time. Yet the Grubbers of today could never have raised this colossal structure. Their technology could never have achieved such geometry or engineering.

High up the block tiers rose, each one embossed with curious designs and curling sigils that bespoke of a culture and history long forgotten. There were arches crossing the uppermost bastions, while tall spires soared upwards like swords at the sky, oblivious to the driving wind and the acid erosion of the scouring sand. The wind howled around the base of the lower blocks, trying to burst inwards through the crevices and race down the hidden streets and sanctuaries, but the colossal gates remained closed and as unmoved as the impressive mountain wall.

Dnarev grinned and made his way laboriously through the scree from the mountain towards those gates. He sank to his waist several times but pulled himself free and at length came under the shadows of the doors. They were stitched with iron and bands of filigreed metal, solid and dauntless, covered with leering faces intricately worked into the dark wood. He knew he would never pass them so he began walking around the banked sand drifts at the base of the towering walls. He was like an ant, insignificant and paltry before the soaring edifice.

Rounding a buttress he noticed a black smear on the wall ahead, then realised the error of his thinking, for it was a doorway: small and choked with sand, but large enough to allow him ingress into the walls. The door itself had torn loose and doubtless been buried long since. Dnarev doubled up and began a long crawl into the half-light, eventually dropping down to find himself in a chasm-like alleyway that wound between the outer and inner walls of the city. Orange-tinged light from above barely reached him but he quickly made his way down the broken slope and came out into a vast courtyard within the gates. Sand had insinuated itself into the place, coating everything so that peculiar humps and shapes were hidden by the drapings of the desert.

Beyond stretched the huge blocks of the inner city, cut and chiselled by unknown hands into tall buildings that could have been temples, mausoleums, palaces - they crowded each other and clustered upwards in endless tiers, vying for supremacy. Two things about them struck Dnarev - they went on upwards and outwards and created an impression of vast size, and they were hung by an air of emptiness, like a dreaming necropolis. The alien drew in his breath in respect for the soiled majesty of Yllarnodm. He crossed the square like a hopping insect and climbed the hundreds of steps that led to the fluted colonnades of the first building. Columns rose up before him like huge legs, as though the gods of this ancient place did straddle it in splendour. Whistles of sand whined about the columns as though spirits were nervous at the presence of an interloper. Dnarev looked up to see angry and menacing faces challenging him, but it was only the stonework of the gargoyles that hung about the roofs in profusion. No doors barred his way, so he passed into the huge chamber beyond.

Through clouds of dust motes he looked up in awe at the vaults and cross-beams of the distant ceiling, so far above it was almost lost in the ill-lit reaches of dust. Hanging from up there were twisted metal frames that could once have provided artificial light, while some had torn free of their mountings and shattered on the stone floor. A thin layer of sand had even managed to filter within here, and what remained of any furnishings had turned to dust and blown away. There were stone blocks and stairs, but nothing had been used for an age. Yllarnodm was deserted by all but the crawling things of the desert.

Dnarev crossed the vast chamber, awed by its size. Beloved of the gods, he mused, think-

ing that the gods had forsaken this place now. He found another stairway and climbed it wearily, emerging into a corridor that was free of sand. Over arches he went, and down curved alleyways, under bridges and through chambers and crypts. There seemed only the shell of a city. Into another meandering corridor he went, surprised by the eerie green glow of phosphorescent walls that provided dim lighting. He stopped short at a bend and stared at the thing crumbling in the sand. There were bleached fingers of bone and the scattered debris of a small skeleton - a Grubber? As Dnarev passed it and went further down the corridor, he found more. They were lying at odd angles, as though thrown carelessly aside by the wind.

Dnarev continued, his curiosity aroused, and the wind came to him from afar like a desperate soul seeking comfort from the vaults and turrets through which it moaned. There were doors leading from the serpentine corridor, and Dnarev began trying them, kicking down the rotting wood when they resisted him. Smaller chambers he found, and most of them contained skulls, while others bore peculiar etchings and engravings on their dark walls. There were chains and metal artifacts that lent an atmosphere of gruesomeness to the cold rooms.

Deep into the heart of the silent city he went, and now that the wind was muffled by the thickness of stone above him, the stillness became uneasy. It was so deep, this stillness, that it was as though Dnarev had become deaf. Yet somehow his other senses seemed to sharpen. He could smell something familiar, though he could put no name to it. Ahead of him an alcove had been cut into the wall, and it contained a stone shelf. In the greenish glow of the rock, Dnarev could see another skull. He examined its outlines - a Grubber. And the smell here was all-pervasive. The stone shelf was like a tiny altar, its hollow dark and stained, as though smeared with tar.

But the smell became more familiar and Dnarev recognised it with a stir of horror - it was dried blood. Somehow the petrified air in this tunnel had preserved that reek over the centuries, as it had preserved the ubiquitous skulls. What had happened here, and why had so many of the desert people died? Dnarev was no coward but he thought twice about continuing down the corridor - it could well be the lair of some hitherto unknown denizen of Komos, although that was unlikely. Nevertheless he moved up another branching stairway and came into a lower chamber. Here his eyes narrowed further at what he saw.

Stretched along the walls in a long line on either side were more skeletons. They were draped randomly like broken dolls over long spikes that thrust up javelin-like at the ceiling. Dnarev grunted - the Grubbers had evidently all been impaled, though in what ritual he could not fathom. There were hundreds of them, all gathering dust. He had no wish to traverse that foreboding hallway so went back, finding a new route into the city's vitals. The smell of blood clung to the air now and again he found himself wondering what calamity could have overtaken the inhabitants. Invaders, perhaps? Yet the plateau was unassailable.

As he came to the door of another chamber, he looked up and his eyes widened. Above the cracking lintel was a hideous face, carved out of the stonework. Its mouth roared and gaped silently and its revolting eyes looked out madly, like some demonic being from a nether world of evil. Dnarev grimaced and tore his eyes from that frightful gaze. He passed into the chamber; it was rounded and part of its high domed roof had fallen in to allow beams of slanting light entrance. They fell upon the painted floor, spotlighting cracks and basking lizards which scuttled away at Dnarev's approach.

In here there were stone statues, gargoyle-like and carved in fantastic poses - all had the heads of nightmare beings, and their arms entwined about each other in lascivious petrification, their perverse embraces preserved for an eternity. Across the floor was a grim block that spoke of altars and sacrifices for its base was knee-deep in broken bones. More skulls were cast about the room, and Dnarev looked up at the bas-reliefs to see hundreds of eye-sockets peering at him from the skulls set into the walls.

What barbaric rituals had been practised here?

Only the sighing of the wind answered his unspoken question from beyond the dome. Dust, decay and death littered the corridors in this unsavoury city, no longer beloved of the gods. Those gods of old had forsaken it and passed it on to darker forces.

Dnarev found limitless rooms and lofty chambers - all were filled with the stench of blood, and all bore the crude smears on the walls that told of dire deeds. Even the mortar of the bricks seemed to have been mixed with blood.

Dnarev emerged into a courtyard and this sunlight bathed him for a moment. Before him was another building, though this had been hewn into a squatting and remarkable statue that glowered frog-like from its enormous carved eyes. In the belly of this toad-like monstrosity was the door that led to some dubious temple. Around it had been carved more of the gargoyle-figures, their mouths open to spew out any sand that drifted down from the back of the toad-edifice. Dnarev elected to by-pass the weird building, but beyond it he found all

manner of awesome statues, crowding around him like huge monoliths, and all had their doors leading to inner recesses. The simple bare blocks of the city had metamorphosed into a contortion of bizarre and sorcerous sculpture, as though the hands of the artists had lost all control and taste for beauty. And the macabre faces of the gargoyles glared from every cornerstone.

As Dnarev crossed a curling span and rounded a raised block, he felt a renewed surge of fear as he faced the awesome building ahead. He went as still as the stones for he was facing an immense head, the jade-green eyes of which bored into his own remorselessly as though it sought a view of the farthest reaches of space. It took only a moment for him to realise that it was carved from rock like all the other blasphemies here, but the effect of the stare was numbing. The head had a yawning mouth that led to another inner temple. Dnarev hesitated. But it was dead rock, no more.

He moved on like one hypnotised, watching the blind eyes as though they clutched for his soul. Into the yawning darkness he stepped. The chamber was circular, lit by the pale green of the rocks. The walls were fascinating - they were rich in murals that stretched right around the circumference, depicting masses of people - the Grubbers of Komos. Figures could be seen building the city, cavorting and dancing, making merry and feasting wildly, while the titanic blocks went soaring upwards to the skies and the faceless gods. Idols and statues could be seen in the painted city, and gargoyles on every roof.

There was pictographic writing here, but Dnarev had not taken the trouble to learn anything of the old culture of Komos, so could not read it. But the lurid mural told something of a story about the former inhabitants of Yllarnodya. It was not easy for the man to decipher all of the story nor to piece it together accurately, due to the poor light in here. And not only did darkness obscure much of the painting, but many of the works had chipped and crumbled, flaking into dust, so that the result was an episodic and fragmentary series of incidents.

Yet it was clear that the Grubbers had once flourished in this city, and in great numbers. The artists who had so colourfully daubed these walls depicted a milling populace, and one that enjoyed a full life of pleasure - some more decadent than others. There appeared to be much feasting and drinking and lovenaking - libations were offered to the huge idols that glowered and gloated over the city, whose outlines were unmistakable.

Dnarev could see why the city was called beloved of the gods and the paradise of the desert people of Komos. The paintings showed wealth, beauty, happiness and all worldly needs. The outsider looked back at the rocs, the smeared altar and the heaped skulls, the knee-high piles of bones. Why then had it come to this? Had the benign gods become angered at the idolatry and the evident depravity?

Dnarev walked around the room, trying to see more of the mural. Each panel he picked out showed the inhabitants growing more abandoned - there were erotic couplings depicted lewdly and sports in which brutality held sway. It had been like this throughout the history of his own kind, reflected Dnarev, for the declining civilizations of man had revelled in debauchery and wantonness just as the desert people had done. The idols in the mural looked down upon lasciviousness and bestiality.

Moving further around the wide chamber, he stopped before one flaking panel and felt the first shiverings of real fear cooling his back like an unwelcome draught. For in this chipped, bizarre painting the desert people were seen intermingling with gargoyle-like figures, tiny replicas of the stone beings that Dnarev had seen out in the city. It was as though they had leapt down from their lofty perches to cavort and desport with the inhabitants. What had whirled caused the artists to paint so tasteless an episode? Dnarev grimaced at the ugly faces as the capering imps and Grubbers became almost indistinguishable.

He went on, but he could make out little of the remaining panels. Thin beams of light dropped onto some brief sections and threw a few hideous details into view - bestiality beyond the earlier panels that went best unseen, and gruesome sacrifices upon the altars with hundreds of violent deaths. Now the smell of blood and the scattered bones began to suggest to the outsider something of the city's true fate. What terrible forces had struck at this grim city? Had the gods that loved it deserted it and let it fall to the demonic devils that had flourished? The last of the mural was destroyed, so Dnarev drew his own conclusions.

Lurching out into the cloud-dimmed sunlight, he stared up at the clustering statues that froze over him like stone gods, gloating at his loneliness and insecurity. He looked at the carved gargoyles and thought coldly of the mural within. With a shake of his head he returned by way of the winding stairs. Soon he was deep below the upper levels. There must



still be treasure here, unless scavengers from outside had swept in after the fall of the inhabitants. As he kicked through the omnipresent bones, he listened to the whisperings of the wind. Down through a tomb-like area he padded like a lone predator.

He stood very still, the wind still muttering as though putting obscene words into his ears. But there was more than the wind echoing round the stairwells and squat colonnades. Perhaps the ghosts of the past stirred in their fitful sleep. Dnarev moved on - he decided to leave Yllarnodym and seek a way off the plateau. The dead could keep their dusty treasures.

As he neared the end of the catacomb, he heard rustling, as though old leaves of parchment were idly blowing down a corridor. The wind seemed capable of reaching even these remote layers of stone. Through another archway went Dnarev and into another of the interminable chambers. He drew a sharp intake of breath, for skulls were piled high in mounds about the walls, rising up to be hidden in thick festoons of dust-laden cobwebs.

He made to turn and heard the sounds out in the catacombs gather like wind about the parapets, as though a thermal storm were building. Piping sounds invaded the sanity of the stillness. Dnarev inadvertently withdrew into the chamber of skulls, his heart thudding against his chest. Little shadows trickled across the corridors like sand. Creaking, shuffling sounds seemed to draw closer about him. In the chamber the thick curtains of cobweb shifted as though stirred by an uneasy breeze.

The light in here was faint and Dnarev felt sudden coldness. Whispers teased his ears.

And then, like a sudden gust, they came.

It was too dark to see their faces - at first he thought it was a gathering of the Grubbers, but as they sped in and snatched at him with veiled claws he knew they were something as alien to Grubbers as he was. Before he could act he was flung to the floor and overwhelmed. He sought to cry out but could not. Thick folds of darkness covered him like a cloak, and all he knew was the sharp, cruel bite of the claws. He was dragged helplessly across the bone-strewn floor, his gut churning with icy terror.

He was raised up and then he was hanging over what must have been a well, looking upwards. There seemed to be no ceiling to this nightmare vault, and instead of the distant orange sky there was only the black void of night, peppered with stars. He struggled hopelessly at the unseen hands that held him out over that unguessable gulf, but they clung to him tenaciously like starving beggars to a crust. Up into the funnel of night he stared in terror.

Against the backdrop of pinpoint stars, Dnarev saw the huge shadows move like clouds. Slowly they took on vague shape and hung lower over the distant rooftops, growing vastly and gradually blotting out the night sky of Komos as they descended.

And Dnarev felt the freezing cold rush in from across the interlunar gulfs as the total dark poured down into the vessel that was his shaking body, while the dim shapes about him burst into their insane, joyful song. The riddle of the city flashed across Dnarev's inner eye as he thought of the capering gargoyles in the mural. Yllarnodym was indeed beloved of the gods. Yet her people had truly won favour. For they had never worshipped the gods of light, but the gods of eternal chaos, and had gone to their awesome wells of nightmare willingly.



The Truth About Waterfalls

A POEM IN THE TRADITION OF LORD DUNSANY

Should you venture very close
So as to tread the rocks so slippery and smooth
Your life suspended by the slender branch
Of some precarious tree
Then you might hear
Above the surface babble of those waterfalls
Which hurtle down the mountainsides
Or wander over rocks in faerie dells
The sound of words
Mysterious and ancient
Do not voice them.
Do not etch them in the sand
With sticks or pointed stones
Rather, let them carry in the wind and pass you by
For they bring doom to those who speak them
Likewise doom to those who set them into words
For these are prayers to ancient, evil gods
Long since passed away from dreams of men
And yet, the waterfalls still worship them so secretly
That no one save the curious would know.
But once, I came upon a waterfall
Which uttered prayers to other, kinder gods
Its waters did not hurtle to a violent end
To dash themselves upon the rocks with cries of spray
Rather, did its waters rise into the sky
Formed into flight upon flight of sparkling silver stairs
Which climbed and climbed until at length
They splashed into the sun
Therein to run through streams of liquid sunshine
Till they came to rest in seas of bright delight.

simon dunsley



The Witch of Nuide

By BRIAN MOONEY

If a stranger had been asked, about the middle of the 16th Century, whom it was that controlled that part of the Spey Valley surrounding Kingussie, Nuide and Ruthven he would probably have answered, "Why, the laird, I suppose. Or maybe the Warden." He would have been in error. At that time nothing was done without the sanction of Mairi Dhu - Black Mary - the Witch of Nuide.

Such was Mairi Dhu's reputation that all men - the farmers of Ruthven and of Nuide, the crofters from the outlying districts, even the officers and the dignitaries - walked in fear of her.

This woman, it was said, was a particularly favoured disciple of the Evil One. He it was who had granted her the power to blast men, and beasts, and property. And he it was who had granted her the even more sinister power to stalk the land by day and by night in the guise of any animal that she wished. So she prospered, for the farmers and crofters made her lavish gifts: those who had money paid her with money; those who had none gave her a proportion of their hardworked crops or of their precious livestock. For no man wished his cattle to be stricken dry or barren, or for his stock to die, or for his family or home to be destroyed. The time even came when none would set forth on a journey without the blessing of Mairi Dhu.

When the witch had held sway for many years a stranger, Duncan, came to take tenancy of a farm at Ruthven. Duncan, who was a Lowlander, prided himself on being a rational man, scoffing belief in the powers of darkness, saying that witchcraft was "...a way to frighten the bairns, or to keep simpletons in their place!" Duncan had not been in Ruthven very long when a neighbour, Gavin, came visiting, ostensibly to discuss cattle, but actually to tell Duncan of his duty to the Witch of Nuide. After perhaps an hour's discussion of the vicissitudes of breeding and of the market, Gavin circumspectly suggested to Duncan that he might care to make a gift - in cash or in kind - to Mairi Dhu.

Duncan cocked a cynical eyebrow at the man. "And why would I be wishing to do that?" he asked.

"Why, man," came the answer, "she's a witch - and a very powerful one. There's no' a thing is done in the valley without Mairi's consent. You's a fine and valuable herd you have there. You'd no' want them to die!"

Duncan stared for a moment, then guffawed loudly. "You mean to tell me that you bribe a simple-minded crone to leave you in peace?" he cried. "Why, and I thought you Highlanders to be hard men! Aye, you can shuffle your feet and look discomfited. Now you away and tell

this witch o' yours, this Mairi Dhu or whatever her damny name is, that she'll no' get a penny-piece from Duncan, and that she can peddle her childish superstitions elsewhere! And if I see her near my land, then I'll lay my stick over her back!

Gavin expostulated frantically, trying to make Duncan see sense, but the Lowlander remained adamant. At last, with an expression of regret, the neighbour strode off.

Some days later, Duncan, accompanied by his herd-boy, was standing in the pastures near Ruthven Castle watching his cattle graze, when a hare appeared and began to gambol towards the cattle. Suddenly, and to the amazement of the two watchers, the hare sprang beneath a cow and seemed to suckle from an udder. Then it moved to another cow and repeated the action, then another, and another....

"I'll be damned!" swore Duncan. "I've heard of hedgehogs doing such things, but never hares!"

The youth beside him clutched at his arm. "Hares don't do that, Master!" he quavered. But witches do! Yon's Mairi Dhu of Nuide!"

"You're cracked, laddie!" snorted Duncan, "See here - I'll prove to you that the beast's quite normal." The farmer took his heavy pistol from his belt and, approaching closer, fired a shot at the animal. Duncan had always prided himself on his prowess as a marksman, but on this occasion all that happened was that the hare scampered away a few paces and then sat up on its hunches, gazing at Duncan and twitching its whiskers derisively. "Mock me, would you?" growled the farmer. "We'll see about that!" He hastily recharged the weapon, aimed carefully and fired a second round. This time the hare didn't even bother to move, but returned Duncan's stare complacently. Then, averred the herd-boy, when telling his friends the tale, the hare made a vulgar gesture and laughed mockingly. Needless to say, Duncan would not admit to this part of the event.

Over the next week or so Duncan's puzzlement grew, for all these cows molested by the hare ceased to yield milk. Duncan tramped the pastures for a long time before stubbornly maintaining that there was no supernatural agency at work. The reason for the cow's affliction was, he declared, the presence of a certain weed on the pasture. He had the herd-boy drive the cattle to fresh meadows where there was no trace of the weed, but the action was to no avail. Gradually all of the cattle sickened, and some died, and still the farmer held that there would be a rational explanation.

One day, the herd-boy reported having seen a hare - "...the same hare, Master!" - playing around Duncan's hay cart. Two days later the Lowlander fell from the hay cart and broke his arm.

"It grieves me to admit it," he told his friends, "but I am forced to agree that you Highlanders can only be right: my land is bewitched." To the herd-boy he said, "I want you to select the two fattest fowl that we have and take them to Mairi Dhu. And by God, I hope that they choke her!"

Mairi Dhu was waiting by the door of her cottage when the herd-boy approached. She stepped into his path and pointed to the two plump ducks which he carried. "You can take those back whence they came, my lad!" she snapped. "And if your master should want to know why I rejected them, say to him that I fear they might choke me! But tell your master also that I will choke him before the year is out!"

Thereafter Duncan found himself left in peace, and within two months he had all but forgotten the incidents. Then he was reminded most unpleasantly. It happened that he set out to walk to Newtonmore Fair, his only companions his two dogs, and as he walked he was beset by an uneasiness, a prickling of the hair which caused him to shiver often. At last he cast a furtive glance behind him and there, following him at a distance of perhaps one hundred paces, was Mairi Dhu. So baleful was her stare that the brawny Duncan felt tangible fear and he lengthened his pace. But no matter how fast he walked, the old woman maintained the same distance behind him. At last he came to the River Spey, to the fording place just above Nuide. The weather had been wet for some days and the river was running full, but the ford was still passable. Duncan crossed the river and when he looked back he saw the hag had stopped at the bank. Duncan remembered that the old lore held it to be impossible for an evil being to cross running water. Nevertheless, he was gravely disquieted.

That evening in the tavern at Newtonmore Duncan told his drinking companions of the aforementioned encounter and freely admitted that he did not relish the return journey to Ruthven. "I foolishly left my sword and pistol at home," he confessed, "and I doubt my stick could prevail against sorcery."

An old tinker sitting by the fire spoke up. "For as little as a shilling, Master, I can strengthen your fine staff against some of the evil things of the night."

"And how can you do that, old man?" asked Duncan.

"I have in my pack here some strips of silver, said to have been blessed by the Holy Father

himself. It's well-known that witches and kelpies and were-creatures cannot endure the touch of silver. Further, Master, it is said that if a man can beat a witch, or turn her spell against her, then her powers will decline and Auld Scratch himself will come and take her! A shilling, Master?"

"Done!" agreed Duncan.

Swiftly the tinker set to work and very soon had bound the thin silver crown about the head of Duncan's stick. Soon afterwards the farmer decided to set out on the four-mile return trip to Ruthven and, calling his dogs to heel, he left the tavern. When he arrived at the fording-place he found that the Spey was in spate and that the ford was now unpassable. The Lowlander realised that he would have to go to the bridge at Ballis, south of Newtonmore, and return to Ruthven by Nuide. Grimacing, he set off.

After Duncan had crossed the Ballis bridge and begun to walk towards Nuide the night seemed to darken, and a strange and eerie mist began to swirl about him. Duncan crossed himself and drew his cloak closer about his person. His dogs, normally an ebullient pair, came in close by his heels, and every now and again one of them would loose a low growl or a whimper. A small distance beyond Nuide the farmer slowly became aware that he and his dogs were not alone in the mist. Out of sight something padded softly, keeping abreast with him. Again Duncan made the sign of the cross and gripped his stick more firmly. A vicious snarl ahead of him halted the man suddenly. At the same moment the eldritch fog whirled away, and Duncan gave a startled cry. Confronting him, illuminated by an unnatural and unholy effulgence, crouched a huge she-wolf, shaggy-pelted and with lustrous green eyes. Emitting a second snarl, the beast launched itself at Duncan's throat.

Calling on his maker, Duncan snote the creature a terrible blow between the eyes. When the silver-handled stick struck the wolf the thing screamed aloud, a sound uncannily like a woman in agony. At this the two dogs regained their courage and attacked the wolf without mercy. Several more blows were landed by Duncan before the wolf broke away and fled, blood pouring from its flanks where the dogs' fangs had slashed. The dogs pursued it closely, savaging it, until the trio disappeared from view.

Then, from a distance, the farmer heard a woman's voice screaming, "Duncan! Duncan! the dogs! call off your dogs!" The man sailed grimly, but made no reply. After a while the dogs returned of their own volition, exhausted but wagging their tails triumphantly.

Mairi Dhu was never seen again, but several days later Duncan heard the sequel to his weird adventure. An itinerant poet, Walter, who roamed the Highlands collecting songs and stories, had stopped off to sup with Duncan. In the course of the evening's conversation he told Duncan of something which had happened to him on the night of the attack on Duncan.

"I was crossing the hills near the River Dalnain," said Walter, "when I encountered a panic-stricken woman. She was quite naked, and her body showed evidence of a recent and merciless beating. There were many bruises about her, the most obvious being a great contusion on her forehead. There was also an abundance of bloody gashes about her limbs and flanks. The woman hailed me and begged me to direct her to Dalacroissie Churchyard. I had hardly time to point her way before she was off again! About half-a-mile on I was passed by a pack of gigantic hounds. Black and silent they were, with blazing red eyes, and lolling tongues and flashing fangs. I was a-frighted, but they paid me no heed at all. Behind them came a lone horseman. Like the hounds the horse was scarlet-eyed and black and silent. The horseman reined in and called me to him. Now, I looked but once into his face, and then I averted my eyes and crossed myself while he laughed at me, for what I saw there made me fear for my immortal soul. He demanded of me, 'Have you seen a woman and a pack of hounds pass this way?' 'Aye, sir!' I muttered, not wishing to say more to him than need be, and pointed the path to him. He laughed eagerly and hideously and galloped away. You're a newcomer, Duncan. We have a tradition hereabouts that when a fallen witch is being chased by the Devil, if she can but make Dalacroissie Churchyard then she'll be safe from him."

"Then there's a chance the besom escaped!" bellowed Duncan, chagrined.

"Oh, I doubt if she did..." mused Walter, "I recognised her for Mairi Dhu, you see, so I directed her wrongly!"





The Collector by David Sutton

Guyler was amused and attracted to the tombstone. The cemetery in which it stood was one of those immense, sprawling tracts of land littered with multitudes of the things. They stood upright, or tilted in their masses, symbols of a population gone mad in an orgy of... what? Guyler tried to find a suitable metaphor. Yet that was also his preoccupation: Death.

He collected it with rabid intensity.

The tombstone was one among thousands, yet Guyler's march between the rows had at least been to some benefit. The initial benefit was amusement, for, inscribed perfectly into the rough stone was, "George Priddy - Magician," and underneath, "Finally Joining His Audience In Heavenly Retirement."

However, aside from the inscription, which would not have been particularly humorous but for the fact that the grave was surrounded by hundreds of others, there was something else. On the neatly cultivated plot of the grave stood a bronze vase. In it stood the bedraggled remains of a bunch of flowers and Guyler, bending, soon had those scattered unceremoniously over the plot as he scrutinized the object d'art. It was certainly bronze, though a green tarnish now blotched most of its surface. It was heavy and stood about eighteen inches high, its shape more or less straight from top to bottom, but with a slight fluting at the top. This decoration gave it a delicate, light appearance which belied its obvious weight. Its diameter was about four or five inches. Guyler next looked at the design moulded around the outside and was even more delighted that he had taken a stroll through the boneyard.

What a find, he thought, as he walked away from the grave. The vase had for decoration the most unusual design. Around the circumference were repeated two distinct motifs. The first was that of a man, who seemed to be wearing a long robe stretching to his feet and who held in his hands something that Guyler could not quite make out. The other figure was more disturbing, for it was the image of a gaunt, gnome-like, dwarfish man, whose eyes

leered evilly at the other figure. These two representations were repeated around the vase.

It was superb, but puzzling. The morose because it had rested on the grave of a man who had obviously been a stage magician, a conjuror. Yet if the tombstone had not had that bit about "his audience", Guyler surmised, you could almost believe that the grave was that of some supposed 'real' magician. But of course it was the twentieth century and the vase was, perhaps, just a relic of the man's family or even a stage prop. Either way, it would fit in nicely with Guyler's little collection.

He took from his pocket a plastic shopping bag, which he unfolded and into which he deposited the encoffined vase. No point advertising the fact that he had stolen it. He walked briskly away from the scene, the numerous memorial's stretching before him, sparkling in the sunshine of a perfect June day. Guyler left the cemetery with a friendly nod to two old ladies who sat, florally decked and hatted, on a bench near the entrance.

Guyler unpacked the vase, dispensing with the bag unceremoniously as he hurried downstairs into the cellar of his house. He never thought of it as a cellar though, since he had taken the trouble of decorating and carpeting it. The cellar had become Guyler's musee de la mort as he liked to think of it.

He clicked on the light switch and the cellar was bathed in a painful red glow. Guyler was dead set on creating the right atmosphere for his museum. An ordinary hundred-watt light bulb or a fluorescent tube would have been anathema to him and the effect he wanted. Thus the red light created just the right tone. Around the walls of his museum were tables of handsomely polished teak wood and glass-topped cases which sparkled. Guyler had wallpapered the room in that now rather common pattern of paper and fabric which the Chinese restaurants favoured so much and the colour was, naturally, red. The carpet was of a plain dark brown. Along the walls he had framed prints of the paintings of Bosch, Breughel, Pitts, Jones and other masters of the horrific. The atmosphere was just right.

He took the vase and placed it carefully on one of the tables. At first he considered cleaning off the verdigris, but thought better of it, since its natural state of decay added that touch of glamour to it. Of course, he would never know what the magician held in his hands, because the green tarnish had obliterated that and many other fine details, but so what? Among the other exhibits it looked good.

The other exhibits were a solely collection, but all neatly labelled and described on white cards on which Guyler had carefully applied fancy Old English letter-set. There were the obvious things, the human skulls, mummified hands, blood-stained daggers whose reputations as murder weapons would otherwise have come under harsh criticism. But for Guyler it didn't matter, since no one other than himself had, or probably would, see his personal museum. Not that all the exhibits were rubbish by any means.

The skulls were real enough, as was the South American shrunken head, and the Indian scalp. Some of the objects were under glass and they looked impressive. There was an, apparently used, shroud and a dinner jacket with what appeared to be bullet holes in the back and the brownish, dried stains of blood. There was also an urn, neatly inscribed with his mother's name and in it, no doubt, were the ashes of his mother.

There were in addition one or two instruments of torture that Guyler had managed to pick up. Thumbcrews and an iron boot which crushed the victim's foot. These, however, he considered somewhat superfluous since his museum was basically objects connected with death. Torture was a subsidiary to it. In one corner of the cellar stood a coffin, its lid theatrically leaning to one side to reveal a grotesque yellowed skeleton hanging within, the vertebrae of the neck circled by a coarse rope which was fixed to the top of the coffin with a large, rusty nail. Guyler had a bit of the showman about him and he felt that those few bits of 'fairground' grue added a little spice and made one shiver just that bit more at the real exhibits.

His interest did not stop at human death either, since he had several large jars containing the pickled, disemboweled remains of small animals. A small collection of occult books in a glass-fronted bookcase completed the varied list of curios in his musee de la mort.

Guyler drew up an ornate but uncomfortable chair to a small bureau which stood in one corner of the museum. He raised the shutter and took out pencil, ruler and from a pigeon-hole his labels and a small stock of instant lettering. He began methodically making a label for his new item.

Quite suddenly the normally warm cellar felt considerably cooler. If it had not been summer, Guyler would have believed that the central heating had gone off. It was summer though and very warm, yet the coolness of the air down here was distinct and somewhat

uninviting. Gayler turned as though to note some reason for the coolness. The door to the room, however, was closed. As he gazed round the cellar, the red light caught the mottled bronze vase and its inscrutable and ugly representation of a dwarf. From where he was the rest of the vase's features were absorbed into the darkness, but the grotesque eyes and teeth were highlighted in the ruddy glow, the green tarnish adding to give an impression of something very unwholesome.

With an impulse, Gayler left the cellar museum, his label unfinished, and he took a walk in the warmth of the summer afternoon. Finally he arrived in the city centre and he decided to have a walk round a real museum. He made straight for the antiquities section of the natural history museum and thence to the Egyptian cases. Amidst crumbling mummies, broken pottery and hieroglyphs, Gayler spent a good couple of hours.

The Egyptians were obsessed with death and that was what appealed to him, since he was similarly inclined. If reincarnation was a truth, Gayler felt that in a previous incarnation he would have been an ancient Egyptian of the Old Kingdom, since that was the glorious millenium when the Pharaohs built the magnificent pyramids and learned the noble art of embalming and preserving the dead. So efficient were the Egyptians with body preservation, so Gayler had read, that the skin cells of a certain mummified princess over two-thousand years old, were still capable of life. As he stood and gazed at the antiquities, he noticed the Egyptian ankh, the hieroglyph for "life". Many of the Pharaohs were shown holding representations of the ankh, but Gayler had felt he had seen it more recently than here in the museum. Then he remembered: the vase he had misappropriated. The magician-type figure on it wore an ankh round its neck.

Perhaps it would be a good idea after all to clean up the vase, since it seemed obvious that there would be other fine details like the ankh, but which were obscured by the verdigris. In any case, he would have to return home soon for dinner and he could mull over it then with the thing in front of him. Gayler was not one for hasty decisions and a vase in its natural rusty state or clean and shining could only be thought about with the thing in one's view.

*

That evening, by the monotonous sound of a hanging wall clock that ticked with slow deliberation, Gayler examined the bronze vase. After a brief glimpse at the surface he realised that he had never looked inside it. The point being, of course, that he had removed a bunch of decaying flowers from it at the cemetery and had presumed it therefore quite empty. Such was not the case, however. As he peered in, Gayler was first struck by a maldourous smell, then he noticed something greyish in colour resting at the bottom. The vase was large enough to take his hands with ease and so he dipped into it with anticipation, grasping the object at the bottom.

He squealed in sudden shock.

The hand, plus adhering thing were revealed as the vase crashed to the floor and rolled heavily against the skirting board. Attached to his hand Gayler saw a soggy, oozing lump of fungus. A sticky ichor dripped through his fingers on to the carpet and it began to crumble in his hand. It had the texture of a soft, bloated fungoid growth on the exterior and a wet, dripping, slimy mass inside. He shook his hand involuntarily and the lump, roughly circular in shape, flew across the room, connected with the wall leaving a yellow mark on the paper before falling with a sodden plop to the floor.

Gayler retched and was almost sick. After cleaning his tainted hands and cleaning up the mess on the carpet he returned the vase to the cellar. His mental attitude towards the thing had now more than subtly altered. Unlike the various other exhibits in his museum, the vase now seemed tangibly menacing. He felt almost as if he had been punished for stealing it. Common sense returned soon enough, though, and putting the vestiges of such idiotic and paranoid thoughts behind him, Gayler retired to bed.

His sleep unfortunately would remind him about the vase.

In his dream Gayler felt himself drawn to the cemetery, drifting as though antrally projected. He saw grey, boiling clouds tumble across a darkening sky as the reddened sun blazed the horizon in fire. Floating between the gravestones, black-shadowed, he stopped at the plot of George Friddy with the vase standing bleakly on the fresh-turned earth. Gayler felt his eyes moving, surveying the silent ranks of the head stones in the necropolis and by those night-swathed memorials a small, stunted figure moved. Nimbly it scampered like a nymph, no sounds issuing from its movements, but its movements themselves a horrible avatar of something ancient, hopping, jumping. The gnome-like creature approached Gayler and rushed furiously at the stone in front of him. Then it began to grunt audibly as it lashed at the granite, but the rock was not solid, it was a fungus and the creature ripped and tore at the

grey mould. Showers of star-like spores began to fill the air, shining and twinkling against the grim scene. Then the dwarfish figure turned, its white, bulbous eyes blind, yet somehow aware of Gaylor. The mouth, a maimed slash in the monstrous face opened and snarled. Gaylor could see blobs of fungus hanging within. He began to back away, floating, unable to use his legs.

The creature hobbled forward. Gaylor drifted with agonizing slowness. The goose hopped forward, closer... closer...

Gaylor awoke sweating, taking his breath in heaving spasms. With relief he threw water over his face in the bathroom, finally steadying his nerves enough to descend to the kitchen and make a cup of coffee. He could not remember the last time he had had such a powerful and frightening nightmare. He rarely remembered his dreams at all, but obviously the nasty, dripping contents of the vase had triggered something off in his brain and it had been necessary for his mind to clear itself of the unknown fears.

There was no doubt though, that the vase held some considerable fascination. Gaylor did not believe it retained any supernatural properties, his dream had merely proved once again to him that the average human mind is capable of intense and imaginative creativity. The mystery that his nightmare had created had, at least, convinced him to do one thing: He would definitely clean up the vase. So at midday he was once more in his cellar with cleaning cloths and an old tin of Brasso.

The harsh, but dim glow of the red light would be totally unsuited to the job, so Gaylor dispensed with it and instead brought down a small desk lamp which he placed on the bureau. Its bright, yellow glow illuminated that corner of the room and cast faint glints of luminance elsewhere. Gaylor almost thought it looked better than the red light because in the opposite corner, where stood the coffin and its occupant, the throttled skeleton, the dim radiance caught mere aspects of the grisly object. The highlights of teeth and bony forehead, of ribs and yellowed finger bones, contrasted with the black shadows of the skeleton's cavernous thorax and the fuzzy eyesockets. The gleams also threw themselves feebly upon the expensively framed prints, giving new life and form to the cacophonous contents of the Bosch paintings.

Gaylor thought about it for a moment and then convinced himself that he would go one better than the table lamp even. He would bring in a couple of ornate candelabra and have candles burning. The flickering light would add an extra dimension and would add movement and shadows to his musée de la mort, where before the static exhibits had only themselves to recommend them. He might even invite a few friends round for a meal and drinks - to finally round off the evening with the first revelation of his morbid hobby. Halloween would be a good day, he thought, smiling to himself.

Obviously he would need to acquire a few more decent pieces to add to the collection, but he had plenty of time to do that. Gaylor's wandering thoughts finally returned to the vase and he gazed again at the beautifully carved figures in bas relief around its surface. He noticed that although both figures were repeated twice, in each of them the same tarnishing effect had obliterated the hands of the magician and almost the whole of the body of the dwarf-man.

There was still a raw, nasty smell exuding from inside the vase which reminded him of the mouldy lump of decaying matter, but the biting tang of the Brasso soon replaced the slightly nauseous odour. He began to rub the liquid over the first dwarf-man.

Quite distinctly Gaylor felt the temperature in the cellar drop. He decided that there must be some means of ingress for cool air, yet he could not explain how cool air could be blowing when the day had been so hot. The original cellar grating, where coal had at one time tumbled down, he had blocked off and plastered over, except for one small grill for fresh air, and this was covered by a hood to stop rain falling in. What Gaylor did not seem to realise was that the drop in temperature had not been through a breeze, but literally a sudden cooling of all the air within the cellar...

Gaylor began to use a fresh cloth to burnish the vase and he noticed to his dismay that the first dwarf-man had been damaged. There was a livid-looking gash down the figure's chest. He began to clean up the magician, his long robe becoming clean and showing intricate folds. The snk around the neck shining up nicely and the delicately wrought features of the face revealing a light of triumph. In contrast the dwarf-man's face was coarse and held an aura of agonizing hatred. Its fish-like, protruding eyes took a sheen from the lamp and they appeared dead and glazed. The hands of the figure were held up, the fingers taut and bony.

Despite the damage Gaylor assumed had been done to the vase, he was becoming pleased with the obvious artistic and imaginative qualities of the unknown artist who had created the two motifs. Though he was becoming decidedly chilly, he persisted in cleaning it fur-

ther. He thought he heard the front door knocker or the door itself alarm, but he knew he had closed it and was not expecting visitors anyway. He went on applying the Brasso.

The cellar was silent. Guyler polished the hands of the magician and the thing they held. Silently but abruptly the cellar door at the top of the steps flew open wide.

It was beyond understanding that...Guyler thought.

The magician held in his hand... a small, roundish thing, from which dripped something. The cellar door closed again... It resembled more than anything else, although Guyler was at a loss to understand it, a human heart.

Then the gash in the dwarf-man's chest fluttered across his thoughts and it added up somewhat. The agony of that face... Guyler looked without thinking into the dark corner below the cellar steps. Pitch black it lay until something hobbled out into the yellow glow. It was hunched up, its body hairy, ape-like. He stood up and ran for the stairs, a shriek beginning to issue from his strangulated throat. A bony hand grabbed his thigh and pulled him back... turning him to face dead, white eyes that somehow looked into his. It hopped, Guyler sliding, bumping down the stone steps. The vase slid past his vision, still rolling to and fro where he had dropped it. The skeleton leered from its coffin as he rolled over, drawing himself up on legs reduced to quivering ice. His head burned as though on fire and he turned. Something crawled about over the glass topped display cases, the glass crashing in. A hiss of foetid breath hit Guyler as he collapsed to the floor again, and by the dim radiance about him the dagger blade came into view followed by that shadowy gnomelike monster.

The first cut he felt not at all, but as the dwarf alashed with a lust that Guyler could not fathom he began to feel his chest and the flaps of skin torn to either side... the thing finally smashed at his rib cage and Guyler could no longer feel the incessant, furious pumping of his shockingly tortured heart.

A Multitude of Realities

By andrew darlington

The Tavern-Keeper was trying to recreate a concept on the Art-Screen before him. The concept was the death of time. He had concentrated on the idea, the general outline of the idea. A hazy shape had appeared on the screen in response to the impressions. The image that was the direct distillation of his thoughts. He had taken a brush to begin the task of solidifying the outline using infinite patience. At one point he had reshaped his idea slightly, the image had twisted like smoke to conform to the altered design. So the thought took shape.

Next he minimised his concentration into smaller units. Responding electronically to his thought impulses each segment of the whole had moved to the shape he had mentally dictated. Adding the intricacies of fine detail.

As he did so, change returned to the city that had forgotten its existence. The door of the Tavern opened awkwardly. Still air from beyond was laced with frost. It invaded the room in a sudden, violent inrush. The door closed obediently behind two strangers. They stood within the reception area, within their Government uniforms. The Tavern-Keeper looked up from the Art-Screen. The hazy outlines fading as he did so, leaving only the paintwork that ran the gamut from bold to intricate. His eyes absorbed the travellers. The youth was tall by the standards of the race, with slightly swarthy skin. Hair cut short, cleanly defined, as could be expected of a Government Embassy from the distant Capital. The girl wore a long voluminous cloak with a cowl that eclipsed her face in shadows.

"You were prompt" said the Tavern-Keeper.

"We must investigate each lunatic claim." The Government Collators strode decisively into the Tavern. "We will judge your claim. Fit it into the scheme against which it must be measured."

"Personally I have doubts" said the girl. The cowl had fallen to her shoulders revealing



slightly oriental features. "What can you add to the knowledge of the Universe?" The tone was condescending.

"I am a master of knowledge past and present," smiled the Tavern-Keeper. "I can tell you of the reality of the ground beneath your feet, the air that you inhale, the food that you eat, the stars that control destiny, the galaxy that turns. I can tell you the truth of the flying cities, their origins, design, their masters. Of the civilisations that sank beneath the waves of time, the empires that strain through centuries for fulfillment. The globes of light that litter the mountain slopes, knowledge of the crawling creatures upon which you tread, the symbiosis within you." For a moment his eyes left the electronic Art-Screen that transformed ideas into visual shapes. He stared at, perhaps beyond, the walls. His eyes were old, they looked into infinity. The walls of the low-roofed Tavern that was his home glowed dully with the reflected light of the fire in the grate that burned enthusiastically. Yet he did not appear to see it. He saw instead the city of which the Tavern was part. How one it had lived, how time, since then, had died.

"We have travelled far to answer your claim" said the youth slumping easily onto one of the bare wooden benches. "First, though, we will eat. Perhaps wash some of the dust of the journey from us."

"Food shall be served to you. Your animals shall be stabled, your rooms prepared. I hope that you will find the journey has been worthwhile."

"That, surely, is up to you," said the girl. She turned to her companion. "Why waste time eating? We have a job to fulfill."

"We also have stomachs to fill," he smiled in satisfaction at the attempted pun. The meal was served in shallow dishes. Simple rice spiced with vegetables brought to them by a woman of indeterminate age or station. She could have been the old man's daughter, mistress, even wife. There was no introduction or explanation of their relationships. The ambiguity bothered the youth's analytical mind. He told himself that the importance of etiquette could be expected to diminish the further they travelled from the Capital, the centre of world culture.

The girl in Government uniform, however, having made the gesture of protest, removed her cloak and cowl readily, then sat down to eat. "Where does your knowledge come from in such a city as this? A place of stagnation devoid of even the rudiments of order," the girl's delicate oriental features mirrored a kind of scorn.

"Where is knowledge found?" countered the Tavern-Keeper. "Is it found only in gleaming systems of logic? Cannot it be found beyond the dust-free corridors of the Capital. Locked, filed away within patterns of electronic matrix's. Perhaps it can be found amongst the careless garbage dropped in the street. This city is old, its knowledge ancient, bred of centuries. Its knowledge is inherent in its decay."

The meal was continued in a silence broken only by the Tavern-Keeper's rhythmic champing which faintly annoyed the travellers. Such a breach of the social rituals of etiquette was an affront to Universal Order. Almost unforgivable even considering the geographical isolation of the ancient city from the main-stream of world culture.

"What knowledge?" prompted the Collator at length.

The Tavern-Keeper thought quickly. "There was a continent," he indicated vaguely in the direction of the sea. "For many centuries its people lived in peace. Their great cities prospered. But their land was low-lying, the sea encroached with every passing year despite their expert irrigation. At length, in desperation, they built many of their cities upon great platforms raised on piles from the marshy ground, yet still the waters rose until there was no land. Still frightened as the water-level rose, the people constructed giant bladders of helium beneath the platforms. The cities, buoyed up by the gases, rose slowly, thousands of feet into the sky, where they could be navigated over land or sea alike, giant ships of the sky. They can still be seen every now and then as they pass overhead."

The Collator listened in stunned disbelief as their empty plates were efficiently removed.

"But that is utter rubbish!"

"You summoned us to impart these lies? Any turtorial knowledge of historical geography will disprove even the existence of such a lost continent."

"You must realise," added the girl, "that heresy against Truth is punishable by death."

"What makes you think I speak of this geological time-cycle, or even this reality?"

"What other reality is there?"

"There is a multitude of realities. For example, many generations ago a man sat travelling through an area of the Northern mountains beyond the plain of tundra became lost. He sheltered from a sudden blizzard in a cave. He noticed that the cave levelled out into a long subterranean tunnel slanting downwards and followed its twisting course deep into the ground until he perceived a circle of light far ahead. He emerged from what was, apparently, exactly

the same cave that he had entered so many hours ago. Yet the scenery was strangely different, there were great globes of pure light hanging from the trees, littering the hillside, floating in the sky. The man had, in fact, discovered an 'alternative reality' that exists beneath the one we think of as the globe Earth. The world is, in fact, just a shell, beneath which exists a second shell which is inhabited by conscious, sentient globes of light. They think of their shell as being the only world, the only reality. Beneath their domain lies yet another shell, then another, to an infinity that the rational mind finds inconceivable. In the same way the sky, the stars we see above us are merely implanted upon the underside of the shell above us. Worlds, realities, are like the layers of an onion, only they have no end."

The girl turned in eloquent silence. She moved to the base of the stair-case beyond which the rooms waited. The youth, catching the gleam of triumph in the Tavern-Keeper's eyes, waited as the next fantasy was elaborated.

"We conceive time as a constant stream, or a river, flowing from its source in the past, to a future that does not, as yet, exist. The knife-edge of what we call the present being transient. This is not so. What we call time is in fact an illusion created by many millions of almost identical worlds, each slightly out of step to the tune of an infinite fraction of a second with its neighbour. Past, present and future exist simultaneously, rendering such terms meaningless. It is only the passage of the pin-prick of human consciousness from 'present' to 'present' that gives the illusion of temporal progression."

As he rose the youth glanced at the half-finished picture on the Art-Screen in front of the Tavern-Keeper. The intricacy of detail took him by surprise. The images were timeless with a pervading air of peace. A beauty he had never before experienced. The image was made up of a man's face in silhouette, hair, pores, glimpsed where light filtered from an unseen source. The lips grinned in what may have been agony or ecstasy. Emerging from the shadows to fill the shape were half-figures from a dream-world. A hundred tiny facets of life trapped, encapsulated into the whole. Scenes from the life the artist lived, the lives he dreamed. Men and women in strange, garish clothes. Animals roaming the twilight streets of alien cities overshadowed by baroque minarets. Cobble winding streets leading nowhere, lovers of diverse races entwined in concealment. Each tiny scene seemed to live within its dimension, yet merged perfectly into the greater complexity. Independent, yet integral.

One of the tiny images represented a warrior in crested helmet, yet there was no brutality in his face. He crouched on the parapet of a walled city looking through crenellations at a fleet of trireme warships on a purple ocean. There was no anger, only resignation, acceptance of inevitability on the soldier's face as he awaited the invasion.

Conflicting thoughts assailed the youth as he explored the half completed vista of uncontained imagination. The old man was obviously no fool. Yet the 'truths' he had claimed to be of value were obvious fiction. One falsity could have been explained as delusion, yet the stories he had told lacked even internal consistency. For these obvious lies he had summoned Government Collators from the distant Capital? Putting his own well-being in danger, leaving himself open to charges of heresy - for the sake of a joke?

The youth turned away. Walked to the door. He stepped out into the bitter cold that was strangely stimulating. The street was cobbled, narrow, running gently down towards the harbour of the ancient port. The cobbles gleamed with dew, edged with silver lichen. Small pools of water, laced with ice, fringed the street. The walls of the buildings around him were covered with ivy. The sun, visible as a pale disc above the distant mountains, cast intertwining shadows amid the creeper creating a delicate cross-hatch of subtle shades.

No order, no symmetry, he reflected. None of the mathematically perfect architecture or design of the Capital where he had been brought up and educated. The youth in uniform began unburiedly down the gradient. His echoing footfall laughed back at him. There was no hurry. He paused to look casually at some empty villas that the vines of decay were rapidly engulfing. The centuries had taken their toll. He stopped to watch the random progress of a rattling pebble that he had dislodged as it proceeded him down the slope. He breathed heavily, watched his breath dissolve. Two men in rough animal skins emerged from the twilight. They mouthed conversation incoherently at each other as they passed into the tangle of confused shadows.

It was then that the youth realised with stunning clarity that the rambling disorder of the city was efficient in its way. It had existed for centuries before the construction of the Capital. It had remained unchanged while systems had been formulated, while plans had been laid and executed. It reflected an unconscious, concealed philosophy of its own. An alternative, but equally efficient system of survival to the neat well-ordered, maintained city in which the laws of Ultimate Truth had been formulated. Not just a city of decay but

an expression of a vision of reality. Just as the imposed ordered symmetry of the Capital mirrored a reality.

It also seemed suddenly apparent that a few short hours ago such an observation, for him, would have been impossible. He would have been capable of seeing only the negativity, the chaos inherent in the city. He would have felt the legacy of superiority that he had inherited from the Capital, and would have felt only scorn for any other system that failed to measure up to the standards of Ultimate Truth. Yet here he was equating both systems, order and chaos, as equals. The catalyst had been the confusing paradox of the Tavern-Keeper.

He returned to the Tavern. The door seemed to open of its own accord. The old man, washed by fire-light, sat patiently at the Art-Screen. The girl in Government uniform sat on a bare bench by the stairs that led upwards.

"We shall pack and leave as soon as dawn returns," she said, half questioning.

"Not yet, I wish to stay."

He turned to the Tavern-Keeper and the carefully constructed picture on which he worked. As he glanced down at it he reflected that the city in which he stood had had a past that was mirrored within the paint-work. When the climate had coaxed plants to grow freely the city had boasted a fine harbour. Busy trade among the people of the islands beyond the horizon. Its periphery had fringed the shore of the ocean that had been the city's source of wealth, then had retracted the pulses of life inwards towards its heart as the population had dwindled. Time was motion, he thought. Time was change and incident. Without change time becomes no more than a philosopher's concept. When each day was different there was a clearly defined yesterday as distant from today as tomorrow. When there was no change there was only a limitless present. The city had known no change for many centuries. Only the gradual, almost imperceptible chilling of the air, the lengthening of the winters as the continental ice-wastes had proliferated beyond the Northern mountain chain. The glacial fingers that encroached slowly, yet inexorably. The hear frost that had been its emissary, that had discouraged trade from the city, had been replaced by early light snow. Plants grew less profusely, or not at all. Less people had come to the city, the flow of activity had become a trickle, until it had dried up almost completely. The city had slipped effortlessly into old age. Time had died for there was no change.

The old man nodded.

"What is real?" said the youth at length.

"Reality is the world. A globe in space as you know. But not convex as you think, but concave. The surface being upon the inside of the globe - the inner skin not the outer. In fact, if it were not for the swirl of stars and planetary bodies at its centre, and the limitations of human vision, it would be possible to see, spread out like a map, the continents and oceans beyond the sky on the other side of the world."

"What is reality?" he pressed.

"Reality is lies," breathed the Tavern-Keeper.

The youth slept little that night. Cramped within the claustrophobic boundaries of the Tavern, and those of his body, while he perused the vista of possibilities opened up to him by the Tavern-Keeper. It was possible, after all, that reality was not finite. That it could not be ordered by human beings into a 'system' of mere action and re-action. The youth realised that within the Capital he had been taught to discover the Universal Truth by acquiring knowledge, measuring the height of mountains, cataloguing the names of sub-species of insects. Imposing upon the world a set of values, a force of order that did not exist beyond the mode of human perception and interpretation. Reality cannot be learned, it must be experienced, he realised. The 'shock' attack on the whole system of order presented by the Tavern-Keeper's stories had at first mildly interested the youth in the way that breaking windows excites the rebellious instincts of children. The girl had merely refused the whole concept as time-wasting trivia, as she would probably have dismissed childhood petty vandalism.

However, as continued examination of the themes of the Tavern-Keeper's stories, applied to yet wider accepted concepts of order continued to show them as mere two-dimensional surmises, his excitement grew.

When dawn again slanted from beyond the mountains he dressed hurriedly. There were meals awaiting them. He found the necessity of eating suddenly time-wasting and uninteresting, a division of time into self-contained units of trivia.

He sat opposite the girl.

"We are leaving today?" she asked.

"No - not yet." Could he explain to her? He could not even explain to himself in rational terms the reason why he wanted to remain. The precise nature of his 'vision' that had made the old concepts of Universal Order seem so narrow. Possibly, he realised, the seeds of such a revelation had lain dormant within him beneath the veneer of acceptance. All that

had been needed was a trigger. The trigger had caused a chain-reaction of ideas that had carried him through the night.

"The Tavern-Keeper is a fool. Senile at best, a dangerous heretic at worst," she began from a different angle of attack.

"Perhaps."

The inn was empty but for the two Government Collators. Her hair was neatly brushed back, well disciplined. She ate carefully, systematically. The Art-Screen glowed dully behind them casting shadows across the room, rivaled by the dawn-glow shadows from the latched windows. The old man was nowhere to be seen.

"We can learn nothing here. We waste time."

He was almost oblivious to her presence, but continued to consume his meal mechanically. The first stage of conscious, he thought, is perhaps a kind of bewildered awe of the universe. A religious excitation of its wonder without any attempt at comprehension. The second level was an attempt at order. An attempt to understand, by scientific exploration. The method deified by the Capital as Ultimate Truth. Yet understanding is a trap - for it is also a myth of control, a means of acquiring security. What is understood is not feared. What can be understood can be controlled. Yet beyond that level is a degree of even greater understanding. The realisation of the limitations of possible comprehension. The path that the Tavern-Keeper had pointed out. But to reach that level it is first necessary to dispense with the secure myths of control and self-importance.

He stood up slowly.

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill? Has the old man affected you with his insanity?"

"I'm alright."

"You are either ill - or affected by heresy."

"I will explain. But it will take time. You must give me time to think."

"Think well - perhaps you will not have as long as you expect." Her words were bitterly pointed with implications that he missed.

He closed the street door behind him leaving the meal half-eaten, and the timeless atmosphere of the inn suspended. The girl was excited, she was confused. She would learn. But at the moment she was irrelevant, a side-issue. He wanted to observe. He felt the cool air exciting his cheek, felt the throbbing vibrancy of the street about him as if it were a living organism. He began to move down the gradual incline towards the harbour. It lay below him glittering in the light of the dawning sun. At length he reached the shore where the still, almost tideless ocean met the land, to compromise in a stony beach where fishermen worked. Beyond the ancient harbour were rows of small coracles that the men ventured out into the ocean, using fine nets for collecting plankton to supplement the meals of grain and locally grown herbs. Everywhere was motion, activity that seemed to be as highly ritualised as the gentle swell of the water itself, as men worked to repair craft or nets, or graded and stored their 'harvest'.

He crouched on the pebbles which were sharp, damply sensual beneath him, while the sea beat its billion year litany of attack and retreat. He looked at the ocean as if seeing it for the first time. Saw it as swirling electrons and neutrons trapped into planetary motions and micro-cosmic galaxies. Saw it as energy patterns of gravity and magnetic fields, the energy that drives the atoms. Saw it as a molecular balance between hydrogen and oxygen. Saw it seething with micro-biological animal life-forms, crystal mineral formations suspended within each drop of water. Saw it as a fish does, to whom the ocean is an environmentally experienced sensation, a universe complete.

Light, which had travelled ninety-three million miles through space danced across the crest of each wave. He thought of the Tavern-Keeper's story of the sunken continent, the flying cities. He smiled, then turned his back on the ocean to retrace his footsteps to the industry of fishing coracles. The labouring, sweating men were oblivious to his presence, continuing their crafts as the youth mounted the inclined road, retracing his footsteps.

'Sight' he thought, 'is a method of translating the world into understandable terms. Colour, the interpretation of the play of reflected light on the retina, causing the brain to see images approximating what is real. In the same way the mind must 'see' only what it can translate into its own terms. The 'essence', the real 'reality' remains beyond comprehension. Human beings only understand the universe in human terms. Their systems of understanding is through human senses. They can learn, but always they are limited to the subjectivity of human understanding, with its implied narrowness. There is a multitude of realities.

The old man was waiting outside the Tavern as he returned. The youth felt an irrational flow of affection for the man. He had many questions to ask, much he wished to learn before returning to the Capital. The Tavern-Keeper was gesticulating wildly to him, calling in-

audibly, until the distance that separated them was reduced sufficiently for sound to carry.

"You have returned safely," began the old man.

"Why, what's wrong?"

"The girl, your companion. She is frightened. She is convinced that your actions, your words this morning, were proof that your mind has become contaminated."

"She will learn."

"She is frightened. She will not allow herself to learn. Neither will she allow others to learn."

"She is confused - I will explain to her."

"She sees neither the truth or the falseness of words - all she sees is the denial of the basis upon which her world is built. Perhaps she has seen the full implications more completely than you. The regime of the Capital is based on the idea of Order - such concepts, even mistaken ones, are a necessary part of the building of rational societies. The social achievements of the regime are great, but could not survive the puncture of the concept on which they are built. The girl is concerned only with the preservation of the Capital's strict definition of order. People will fight without mercy or consideration of right or wrong to maintain the illusion of control. Not even the question must remain to trouble them." He averted his eyes from the youth. "We must flee while there is still time."

"I will stay. Talk. I will reason."

"She has gone to the militia - don't you understand? She has gone to get you certified morally insane. Can you talk from an asylum - who will listen? Can you reason from a cell?"

Involuntarily the youth began to walk, to follow the Tavern-Keeper along the street in the opposite direction from which he had come. He continued talking, arguing with each yard of dusty road they traversed. They moved slowly yet deliberately through the inhabited part of the city as people drifted past them on unknown errands without sparing a glance at the incongruous figures. At length they reached the acres of ancient decaying villas that surrounded the still-living heart of the port. They walked on, talking less, sporadically, the youth merely following the Tavern-Keeper's direction. The incline took them gradually above the city, away from all signs of human intervention. Occasionally, when a hillock or outcrop afforded a view, the city could be glimpsed behind them, like a toy against the glimmering expanse of ocean.

"Where are we going?" breathed the youth at length. His feet were reacting to the unaccustomed exertion. Yet the Tavern-Keeper showed no signs of fatigue. He moved like a prophet, white hair shifting in the slight breeze. He did not reply. Eventually they approached a large, almost artificially symmetrical amphitheatre cut from the brush and scattered vegetation. A natural plateau.

As the old man moved towards the perimeter of the huge circle of empty sand, the youth felt a chill. Became aware of the shadow that was eclipsing the sunlight. Watched almost fearfully as the Tavern-Keeper stopped, raised his eyes to the sky. The youth looked up, at the source of the shadow.

And the immense city was above him. He saw the helium bladders, saw the propelling devices that drove it through the skies, saw the faces of the people who returned his gaze. He watched, mesmerised, as the flying city came in to land.



DARK HORIZONS is published three times a year by The British Fantasy Society. Membership is £2.00 or \$6.00 overseas per annum, which should be sent to: Brian Mooney, The Secretary, The British Fantasy Society, 447A Porters Avenue, Dagenham, Essex, RM9 4ND, England.

★

DARK HORIZONS 15 is Copyright (c) by Stephen Jones and the BFS. All copyrights to their material are owned by

the individual writers and artists who contributed to this issue. Please note, the new editorial address is: DARK HORIZONS, c/o 113a High Street, Whitstable, Kent, CT5 1AY, England.



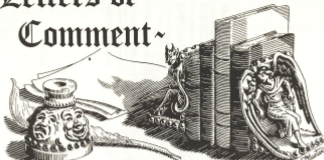
The People of the Hills

They were slender and dark and fair to look upon,
They were robed and veiled in green mist as a spring tree;
Their horses stepped like light falling on the ground,
They were hung about with silver bells that shivered as they stepped;
Upon each brow was a mark that shone.

They spoke and I did not hear them,
I put out my hand and did not touch them,
I looked, and our eyes did not meet.
They passed again beyond the wall of air;
There were only shadows and rain.

marion pitman

Letters of Comment~



From, BRIAN LUMLEY, Chichester Sussex:

I'm delighted with DH14, and I thank you for presenting what literally amounts to a tribute, of sorts, and of course I also thank the writers, artists and snicker-abouters who so splendidly put the whole thing together. Much of the bibliography (ever-so-slightly out of date now) was from my own hopelessly jumbled notes, so I know what a job they had.

I simply haven't the time to write to each and every individual, and so would be obliged if in DH15 you'd mention how chuffed I am with what you've all done for me.

From, DAVID SUTTON, Birmingham:

I don't know whether I ought to be commenting on issue 14 of DARK HORIZONS since the Brian Lumley survey I did with Mike Barrett forms such a significant chunk of it, but nevertheless I shall make some observations. Let's take the illustrative side first. The Fabian cover is competent but hardly in the realm of his best work. Although some detail may have been lost in reproduction, I tend to feel the photographic "negative" effect is intentional. His illustration for Lumley's story Mother Love is obviously older work, but it is good to see the original drawing for this story re-appearing. Jim Pitt's back cover is darkly macabre, his inside front cover is less powerful, the foreground figure rather "flat". This is also true of the figures in the Dylath-Leen drawing, which were also rather one-dimensional. His title-page to the Lumley survey is better and is complemented by Fabian's "illuminated" letters.

The Russ Nicholson's are competent, but I think we have seen better stuff of his elsewhere; although I rather liked the drooling yeti-thing on page 41 and the squatting imp accompanying Christina Power's poem on page 11. Of the Alan Hunter's, the illo for The Sister City is by far the best, capturing an indefinably alien quality, it seems, by means of the nature of the figure and the composition of the picture itself, using wavy lines and shadows. The one for Ant Heater was grotesque but the story does not lend itself very readily to illustration. The same can be said of Problem Child, which Steve himself chooses to illustrate. Fine, detailed work, but unfortunately without giving away the point of the story, one is left with little else to communicate visually. Chris Tomze is a new name to DH, I think, and his inside back cover, an array of grim visages, is hopefully the first of further work in the magazine. Which brings me finally to David Lloyd. I could not get along with his illo on page 6, but the "Cthulhu" drawing on page 23 is the most evocative piece in the whole of this issue. It destroys one's suspicion that Cthulhu monsters are best left to the imagination and a certain aura of the awesome monstrousness of Mythos gods is certainly well captured here.

Let's see now, the fiction. Well, Brian Lumley's two tales overshadow everything else, although Problem Child is more a vignette, as though he were passing time with a bit of literary doodling. Mother Love, on the other hand is far superior, despite a SF setting and its characters are real, responding to the ordeal of life after an annihilative war in ways we could easily expect them to. A well delineated and neatly horrifying climax too. I found the conclusion to Mike Chinn's The Second Dragons readable but in total rather uninspiring

and preferred John Martin's Hole-Meal, with its attention to creating believable American characters. The plot, though short, is compelling and the ending, though somewhat whimsical is nevertheless disturbing.

Jon Harvey's article on Fantasy in the Theatre was interesting, but one couldn't help coming to the conclusion that Jon is overstressing the importance and amount of fantasy on the stage. Indeed, there are less theatres than movie-houses, but this I feel has something to do with what Jon himself says: "the theatre is a medium with its own limitations and advantages." It would seem that the operative word is limitations. The advantages, if any, are the dubious ones about such work being able to stick fairly close to the plot of a literary work. Also of course the rapport which a theatre's live performance creates (although one can and does frequently find oneself in a spiritual or emotional involvement with the so-called "barrier" of the silver screen). A few years ago I witnessed the incredibly atmospheric DRACULA with Valentine Dyall as the Count - and this did take various aspects of Stoker's novel and without ambiguity translated them into a stage play. The eerie lighting and a fine mesh that created a "fog" effect was very good, but even so it's limitations were apparent. At least they became apparent immediately one looks at films. Abysmal films taken from literary originals of note are not abysmal simply because the scriptwriter has taken liberty's with the original story line. Far from it, although Jon would no doubt have us believe this. In fact, a film is bad because it has a lousy screenwriter, director, actors or was generally an incompetent job. The pedestrian DRACULA lends itself rather well to the theatre, but translate that to film and the result is, for instance, Tod Browning's DRACULA with Lugosi, a boring and inept film. So it can work both ways. The theatre would hardly be able to competently handle JAWS, which by the way, far overshadowed Benchley's insipid novel. Jon may be right in thinking many people view the theatre as top-hat tails and cocktails, but its limitations are still nevertheless there, no matter how the audience dress and I think it's patently obvious that most people would still be drawn to the cinema if given the choice.

Finally, I would like to correct an error that appeared in the Fiction Survey of the Lumley survey. On page 24, the final sentence should continue: "but he is also a powerful writer of non-mythos fiction, of which he has written more than many people may think. In particular, A Thing About Cara and No Way Home are intensely atmospheric horror stories, unassociated but both set among the older hamlets and villages of the Midlands, whilst The Cyprus Shell and The Pearl chillingly demonstrate their author's fascination with the sea and things aquatic. It makes an interesting exercise at this point to look at Brian Lumley's 'sea' stories" - text continues as on the first line of page 26. ((Thanks Dave, for correcting that mistake last issue; I also owe Christine Power an apology for adding a 's' to her name on page 11 of DH14. SJ)).

From, LOAY HALL, Blackwell, Okla., U.S.A.:

I recieved DARK HORIZONS 14 today - in fact, just an hour ago - and I wanted to comment briefly on the issue. It is a tremendous publication; better than the majority of the sines we have on this side of the Wavy Blue; well written, superbly illustrated; a publication the BFS can be infinitely proud of!

The poems by Marion Pitman and John Hurley are very fine, altho I prefer Hurley's of the two; Pitman's snacks of 'free verse' - a form of poetry I have never been enthusiastic about - but is superior to most that I've read.

The Second Dragons by Mike Chinn is interesting; regrettably I missed the first part of this tale. Chinn is an outstanding fictioneer; he should go far if he possesses literary ambitions.

Christine Power's Entus Sapiens is delightful, as is Russ Nicholson's accompanying illo. Ms Power's poem is reminiscent





of L. Sprague de Camp's charming doggerel; it is without question my favorite bit of poetry this time around!

Fantasy in the Theatre is an unusual piece indeed. I found it very interesting. Fantasy in American Theatre is rare indeed, although it should be pointed out that America has never been noted for its reverence of stage productions. I envy those who are close to a theatre; I wish Oklahoma was more theatre-conscious than it is. (We have several theatres - mainly in Oklahoma City - but fantasy has never been scheduled). Jon Harvey has my thanks for his excellent article!

Eole-Meal by John Martin is delightfully gruesome; I read it twice just to experience the ending again. I admire writers who can write so simply and effectively. And John has my admiration.

Brian Lumley: Latter Day Lovecraftian is the real reason I found DB14 so sensational. Lumley is, with the possible exception of Lovecraft and Derleth, the finest writer to work in the Cthulhu Mythos corpus; I respect him above all the other Mythos writers. I know I can depend upon him to be entertaining and wholly original. (That is why I'm presently in contact with him preparing WHERE LUMLEY LURES, a tribute). His character Titus Crow is the best single character to come out of Mythos fiction, and his dwelling Blows House (destroyed in THE

BURROWERS BENEATH) is as familiar to me as 221B Baker Street is to most Sherlockians. This tribute to Brian and his creative genius is timely and mandatory, and I'm delighted that the BPS has chosen to do a 'Special' Brian Lumley evaluation. Barrett's and Sutton's Fiction Survey is well-written and thorough, giving much insight into Brian's fiction. The interview with Lumley is very well done; Brian answers honestly and eloquently. I was especially pleased with his comments concerning the late Augie W. Derleth, a gentleman which many Lovecraftians have maligned here of late. Augie was a magnificent writer and editor, and a very special human being, and those who came into contact with him realized this. Brian Lumley is one. The reprinting of Mother Love and Problem Child is apropos to the tribute. The former is excellent, a short and imaginative piece, while the latter is a nice tale, competently written, but its ending seems hurried. The Bibliography is a most welcomed piece, and a relief: I haven't missed as much Lumley material as I had feared! My congratulations to Mike and Dave on their superb handling of the Lumley material!

The letters of comments were all interesting, particularly Marion Pitman's sardonic one.

From, WAYNE WARFIELD, Aberdeen, U.S.A.:

The one element of DB (and the BPS in general) that tends to frustrate me is the almost total domination of the macabre theme. I have discussed this with Gordon Larkin, who informs me he would like to expand the BULLETIN's coverage of other areas. I hope you feel likewise with DB.

I tend to cringe at the vast over-use of the word 'fantasy' as is, and the worlds of Morris, Howard, Burroughs, Tolkien, etc. do not even seem to belong within your DB...which reads like the literary magazine of the British Horror Society. ((Once again we have that hoary cry that there is too much Horror in the BPS and DARK HORIZONS; since I've been editing the magazine, I've tried hard - and I think succeeded quite well - in extending the zine's Horizons: a brief look through past issues will, I think, testify to this. SJ)).

Back to the over-use of the word 'fantasy', I've had running debates with numerous fans in my country re this. I'm at the point now where I'd love to chuck the word altogether in favour of the following categories: 1. Adult Fantasy; 2. Horror; 3. Burroughsian Fantasy; 4. Sword and Sorcery; 5. Related. This system of classification is, in fact, what I'm using in my own magazine PHANTASY DIGEST. And, yes, the spelling was to get away from the word 'fantasy' ((sic. SJ)). According to TV GUIDE, SWITCHED is fantasy! ((Surely it is! SJ)). According to the dictionary, just about anything is fantasy! It's all gotten out of hand. We do have a distinct genre to deal with, and dragging in all sorts of media fadsome is getting far from the point.

Of course, I am a fan of the macabre tale. So, in spite of my bandstanding soapbox above, I can safely say that I found your Brian Lumley section in number 14 to be the highlight of this issue!



