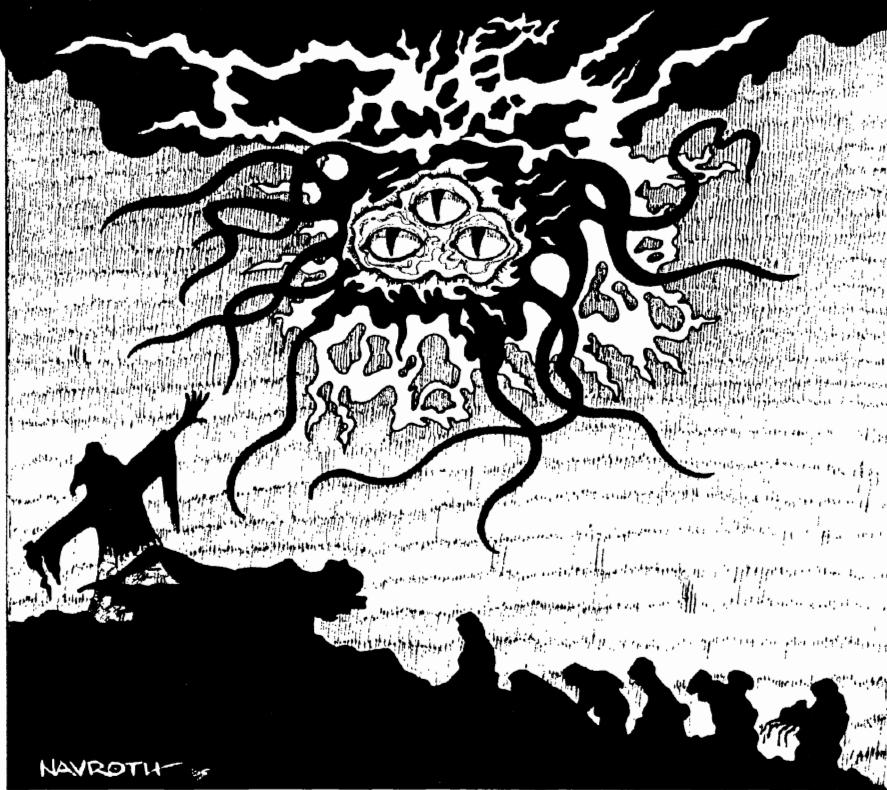


**SPECIAL WALPURGIS NIGHT ISSUE!**

**LOVECRAFT'S**

**WEIRD**

**#9 MYSTERIES \$5**



NAVROTH





# LOVECRAFT'S WEIRD

Vol. I **MYSTERIES** No. 9



*To those readers, writers and artists who seek and find enjoyment in the world of imagination and still believe in magic and a sense of wonder in our time of science and technology, and to the legacy of those who cast the first spells with word and vision, this magazine is respectfully dedicated.*



LOVECRAFT'S WEIRD MYSTERIES Vol. I, No. IX, Published by Arkham Press. Direct inquiries, requests for guidelines, etc., to the editorial office c/o John Navroth at PMB 270, 11410 NE 124th St., Kirkland, WA 98034-2168. Please include a SASE with all correspondence. Single copy price \$5.00 U.S. & CAN; \$7.00 Intl. Subscription rate: \$15.00 for 3 issues U.S. & CAN; \$21.00 Intl. Copyright ©2005 by John M. Navroth. All rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. No part of this magazine may be reproduced in any way without the express written consent of the publisher or creator. Except where noted, all reprinted material is believed to be in the public domain. Not responsible for lost or damaged moneys or unsolicited manuscripts in the mail.

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Contains some mature subject matter.

## CONTENTS

### NEW HORRORS

#### THE CHINESE SCREEN

by Charlee Jacob ..... 8  
(Photographic Montage by John Navroth)

#### BEYOND DEVIL REEF

by Linda Navroth ..... 22  
(Illustration by Linda Navroth)

#### SERVANT OF THE ORDER

by Gary Fry ..... 36  
(Illustration by Allen Koszowski)

### FEATURES

PNAKOTIC MANUSCRIPTS ..... 4

#### ROBERT BLOCK REVISITED: A CLASSIC INTERVIEW.....

17

#### WITCHY WOMAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH KIM HARRISON .....

24

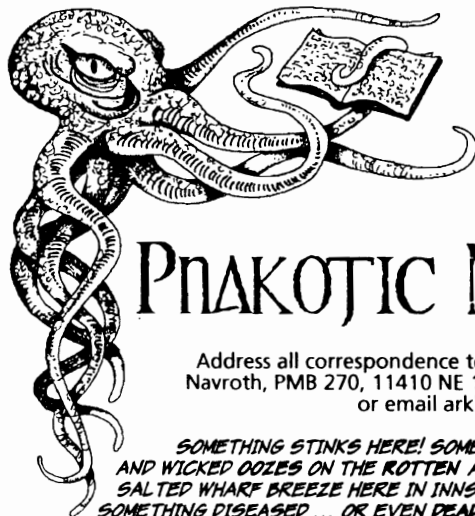
LOVECRAFTIAN LORE: WALPURGIS NIGHT IN THE WITCH-HOUSE..... Inside Back Cover  
(Photograph by John Navroth)

FRONT/BACK/INSIDE FRONT COVERS:

Linda Navroth

CONTENTS PAGE: Allen Koszowski





Letters  
Ephemera  
Miscellany

# PNAKOTIC MANUSCRIPTS

Address all correspondence to: Lovecraft's Weird Mysteries, c/o John Navroth, PMB 270, 11410 NE 124th St., Kirkland, WA 98034-2168 USA or email [arkhampress@verizon.net](mailto:arkhampress@verizon.net)

*SOMETHING STINKS HERE! SOMETHING VILE  
AND WICKED OZZES ON THE ROTTEN AND HEAVILY-  
SALTED WHARF BREEZE HERE IN INNSMOUTH ...  
SOMETHING DISEASED ... OR EVEN DEAD! IT'S  
PUTRESCENCE BURNS THE NOSTRILS LIKE FORMALDEHYDE OR  
THE BITTER FIRE OF BRIMSTONE FROM THE SCREAM-FILLED FITS  
OF HELL ITSELF! WHAT CAN IT BE? I BET THIS MALODOROUS  
MOOD-MACABRE HAS ONCE AGAIN SLITHERED INTO YOUR HEAD,  
HASN'T IT? ... LIKE A HUNGRY MAGGOT LOOKING FOR ITS NEXT  
MEAL! DON'T BE AFRAID ... IT'S ONLY THE LATEST ISSUE OF  
LOVECRAFT'S WEIRD MYSTERIES COMIN' BACK TO HAUNT YA  
AND GRAB YA BY THE ... THROAT!*

*THIS HERE'S YOUR OLD PAL, BROTHER GRIMSLY, SPEAKING TO  
YOU ON LOCATION IN SHADOW-HAUNTED INNSMOUTH ON THE EVE  
OF DEMON-PLAGUED WALPURGIS NIGHT! BACK AGAIN FOR MORE, EH?  
WELL, I PROMISE NOT TO LET YOU DROWN - I MEAN DOWN - FOR I ASSURE YOU, WITHIN  
THESE FEAR-FRAUGHT PAGES LIE THE STRANGEST STORIES YOU HAVE EVER READ! THIS  
ISSUE MARKS THE RETURN OF CHARLEE JACOB TO OUR WEIRD LITTLE FAMILY. YOU MAY RE-  
MEMBER HER FROM A FEW YEARS BACK IN THE PAGES OF THE LEGENDARY PENTAGRAM PUB-  
LICATIONS! 'BLACK LOTUS', THE MAGAZINE OF THE BEAUTIFUL & STRANGE! WE'VE ALSO  
GOT A TERROR TALE FROM THE PUTRID PEN OF GARY FRY, WHO, IN HIS SHORT, DEMONIC  
WRITING CAREER, HAS GARNERED PRAISE BY NONE OTHER THAN RAMSEY CAMPBELL! AND,  
JOINING US AGAIN, THIS TIME WITHOUT THE HELP OF HER SINISTER SIBLING, IS LOATHSOME  
LINDA NAVROTH, WHO PROVIDES US NOT ONLY WITH A STORY FROM THE ROTTING HARBOR  
PLANKS HERE IN INNSMOUTH, BUT ALSO WITH A FEW MORE ICHOROUS ILLUSTRATIONS TO  
BOOT! AND THAT'S JUST THE START, FELLOW FEARMEISTERS!*

*SO, GRAB A MOLDY MUG OF YOUR FAVORITE NOXIOUS NECTAR, TURN DOWN THE LIGHTS,  
BOLT THAT DOOR SHUT, AND SLITHER ON INTO YOUR MOOD-MACABRE! WHAT'S THAT SOUND  
YOU HEAR? THAT'S THE SOUND OF YOUR POOR HEART READY TO EXPLODE IN ANTICIPATION,  
YA INNSMOUTH THROWBACK! TIME TO ROLL THESE ROTTEN RAGS CALLED PAGES OVER YOUR  
CORTICES BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE! NOW, ENOUGH OF THIS DECAYED EDITORIAL MATTER ...  
ON WITH THE FREAK SHOW ...*

## REMEMBERING FRANK BELKNAP LONG

Mr. Richard Fawcett shares with us a few his remembrances regarding one of the original members of the Lovecraft Circle, Frank Belknap Long:

"During the 70's and well into the 80's, I was actively producing the August Derleth Society Newsletter and corresponding with any number of authors. Perhaps because I was middle-aged myself by then, or more likely because most writers seemed to be friendly, approachable people who thrive on attention, and understandably enjoy a bit of publicity, I found many of the writers with whom I corresponded quite willing to strike up an active correspondence. Among those who kept me busy on an almost daily basis were Mary E. Counselman, Hoffmann Price and Frank Belknap Long. Frank and Mary, in particular, would reply promptly to every letter and in some detail. Frank frequently used postal cards (in the style of HPL) with the equivalent of two eight and a half by eleven pages of writing



microscoped onto a single card. Frank came across, as you would assume, as a cultured, educated, well-read and literate person. Corresponding with Frank and meeting him in person produced, initially, two very different reactions. Not that he wasn't cultured, educated, well-read and literate in every sense of the word, but rather, because the first thing that hit you between the ears on meeting Frank was as thick a Brooklyn accent as ever graced the confines of Ebbets Field! Once you got past the initial shock Frank was an engaging conversationalist.

"I recall one conversation in which I asked Frank if he ever had the experience of writing something and when he'd finished the manuscript, reading it over, and then asking himself, 'Where the Devil did that come from?' His animated reply was that it had happened to him a number of times. So much so that there were times when he would have sworn that he not only had not written the manuscript, but didn't have the faintest idea where the plot came from nor did he know the first thing about the subject on which he had written. Shades of HPL!

"By the time I knew Frank, like many writers, he had fallen on hard times. Not having had the financial success that movie scripts and blockbuster best sellers bring, he was like so many dependent on financial dribs and drabs. Added to this was the fact that as the son of a once wealthy family he had failed to prepare properly for his old age, and family wealth had in the interim apparently eroded away. Frank never 'cried poor', but a conversation I had over breakfast one morning at WFCO with H. Warner Munn will illustrate.

"Warner Munn and I were seated alone at a table when he began to reminisce about the early days with Frank. I recall him telling me that he, Frank and a group of friends were gathered in Frank's parent's living room one day when he noticed that the butler kept coming to the door of their room, gazing respectfully at the guests with an increasingly puzzled air and then withdrawing. This went on for some time before it was discovered that each time Warner Munn leaned back in his chair he would strike a hidden bell that signaled the butler.

"Frank also told me that his Father was the engineer in charge of the erection of the base of the Statue of Liberty and that for many years the family had owned the flag that draped the base on dedication day.

"How sad that so much of value had slipped through Frank's fingers. Frank, to my mind was an innocent, who had no conception of finance. Another incident serves to illustrate this fact while also doing credit to the memory of another great writer of the past. It was at a WFCO in Baltimore to which my wife and I drove Frank and his wife Lyda. I was approached by the CON's director with a complaint that Frank's wife was running up too much of a telephone bill and I should do something about this. My rather heated response was that if there was dirty work to be done he was not about to get me to do his dirty work for him, when out of the corner of my eye I noticed Robert Bloch pretending not to listen intently to what was transpiring. A few hours later the same CON director approached me to say that everything was just fine. The matter had been taken care of. Anyone who knew Robert Bloch knows what happened [see the special Robert Bloch Interview in this issue for more! - Grimsly].

"That's quite enough for now. During my visits to the CONS in the 70's and 80's I met a host of interesting people and corresponded for many years with a number of fascinating people while operating the Derleth Society. The stories are endless, including an amusing story of meeting Ramsey Campbell and Stephen King, something that just doesn't happen anymore."

Mr. Fawcett adds: "Years ago I had lunch with Frank Long at WFCO in Providence. I asked him how to pronounce 'Cthulhu'. He answered: 'Damned if I know and I don't think Howard did either!'"

#### VIA SCARE-MAIL

From A.T. via email: "I just wanted to say how much I love LWM #8! I think I'm going to be a regular customer of the zine from now on. It is awesome! I love the tongue-in-cheek humor. I wasn't expecting that, but it is refreshing. Too many people take on a serious tone when dealing with Lovecraft. The stories are wonderful and I was VERY impressed with all of [Linda Navroth's] illos."

From D.B. via email: "I read 'The Face in the Smoke' today. Wow! That is probably the absolute best story ever in LWM. Utterly, incredibly great! You and Linda really captured the spirit, flavor, and essence of an HPL story. Linda's illustration enhanced the piece nicely, but the story is great on its own merits. Congratulations on a home run!"

# YOG-SOTHOTH FINALLY CLAIMS ITS SACRIFICE

Thirty-five years after menacing the blond sacrifice laid out for it on a rough-hewn altar stone by one Wilbur Whately, Yog-Sothoth had yet another chance as Sandra Dee passed away on February 20<sup>th</sup> of this year. We're certain, though, that her husband, Bobby Darin, helped her across to the other side unscathed.

Miss Dee's death by complications of kidney disease and pneumonia was announced to the press by her son. She was either 60 or 63, depending on what source to believe, as is so common in the cases of actors and actresses.

Miss Dee began her career with modeling at the age of 12, and landed her first movie role at the age of 14. She is most famous for her roles in "The Restless Years", "Gidget", "A Summer Place", and "Portrait in Black" (1958 through 1960). Of course, we all know her best for her role as Nancy Wagner in 1970's "The Dunwich Horror". R.I.P., Sandra.



## LOVECRAFT'S WEIRD MYSTERIES ON THE BESTSELLER LIST!

You heard it right, LWM #8 hit #1 on the Project Pulp Bestseller List in February! Arkham Press (formerly Pentagram Publications) has been partnered with Jon Hodge's Project Pulp (<http://www.projectpulp.com>) almost since it's inception. Now we're happy to announce that LWM is tops on the sales list. And if that's not enough to swell our pointy little heads o' bursting, LWM #7 is claiming the #7 spot on the list, too! Just goes to show ya that, long with a little help from the inspiration of the great HPL, we must be doing something right! And, don't forget to check out Jon's own 'zine, Wicked Hollow, available at the Project Pulp website. LWM calls it "wickedly delightful reading"!

## DANVERS' REVISTITED

Readers of LWM may remember the essay we ran back in issue #5 about the real-life HPL landmark, Danvers' State Hospital. It remains one of the most commented on articles we have ever printed. Now, as a follow-up to the information found on his website, Michael Amseur has released *HAUNTED PALACE: Danvers Asylum as Art and History* on CD-Rom and Download. This book contains 150 pages of memoirs, history, interviews with former patients and staff, paintings, photographs, poetry, and original literature by 20 contributors, including U.S. Films Director Brad Anderson (Session 9), prize-winning authors James Fitzgerald and Robert Whitaker, and Danvers Preservationist John Archer.

This book, years in the making, unfolds its history, from altruistic beginnings through tragic deterioration to brutal finish, and brings you up to date as to the present moment in its fate. Also included is a full chapter comprised of emails to the author from persons around the world who have been haunted by this beautiful, doomed, and amazing place. Your message included? There is only one way to find out. Visit the web site, where you may sample some pages, view the Table of Contents, "visit" the author and learn a bit more about his prodigious documentation of Danvers State Hospital — and order your book! WEBSITE: <http://www.thehauntedpalace.com/danversstate.html>.



## NEW VERSION OF NECRONOMICON UNLEASHED

Just when you thought the only copies left were locked up in the Orne Library, out slithers yet another version of the Necronomicon by that Mad Arab. Billed as "the first Necronomicon created in the true spirit of H.P. Lovecraft", here's the double-skinny with whipped cream direct from the publisher:

"A new Necronomicon is presented here that describes the fantastic journey of Abdul Alhazred and provides an in-depth exploration of Lovecraft's original universe. Many of Lovecraft's contradictory usages of the book in his various stories have been for the first time reconciled, and all of his original references can be found within, which is not true of previous attempts. In this version, the book is not only similar to a magical grimoire, but also serves as a guide to Alhazred's fantastic journey and Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos.

"Anyone familiar with H.P. Lovecraft's work knows of the Necronomicon, the black magic grimoire. There have been several attempts of creating this text, yet none stand up to Lovecraft's own descriptions of the Necronomicon . . . until now. Fans of Lovecraftian magic and occult fiction will delight in this Necronomicon, based purely within Lovecraft's own fictional universe, the Cthulhu Mythos. This grimoire traces the wanderings of Abdul Alhazred, a necromancer of Yemen, on his search for arcane wisdom and magic. Alhazred's magical adventures lead him to the Arabian desert, the lost city of Irem, ruins of Babylon, lands of the Old Ones and Damascus, where he encounters a variety of strange creatures and accrues necromantic secrets." For additional information and instructions on how to order this book, Hop-Frog over to the brand-new Arkham Press website at <http://mysite.verizon.net/resp7jls>.



#### **HPL FILM WAITING FOR RELEASE**

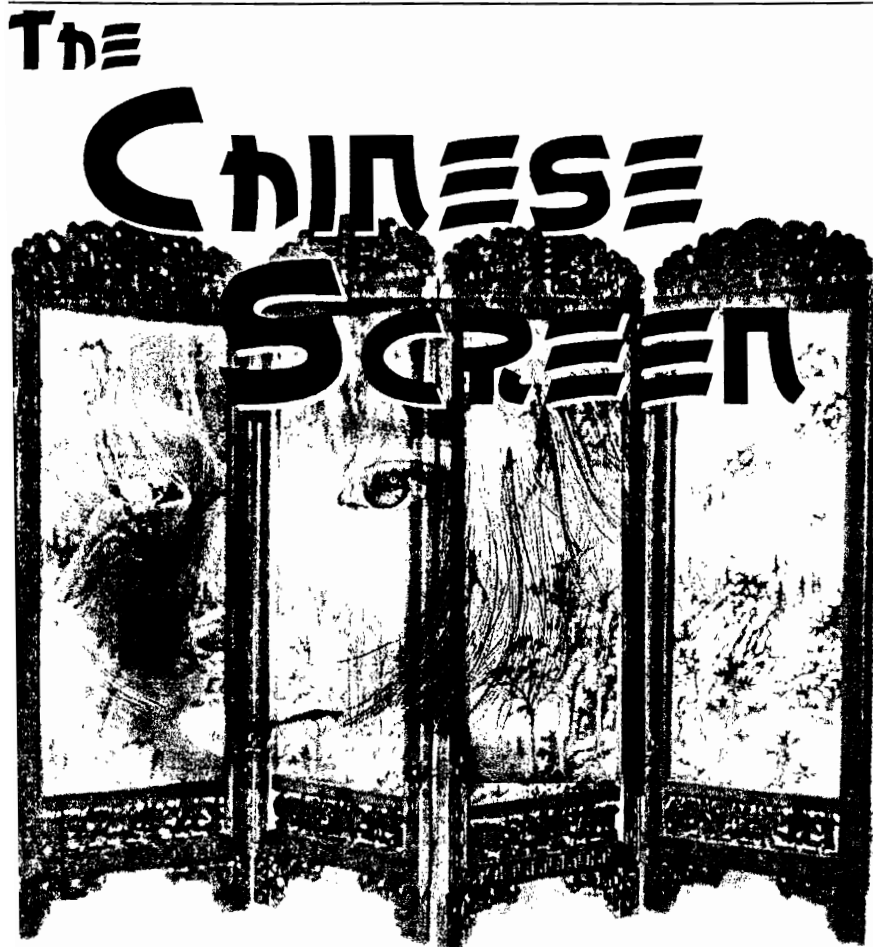
"In the dark forests of the Catskill Mountains hidden from the daily life of Ulster County, lies a lost civilization of mountain people. For ten generations they have lived secretly there subject to an otherworldly force of evil. Their isolation, coupled with their pact with the dark forces, has led them to an unthinkable way of life – one in which all taboos are broken. But, their isolation is soon broken, when a member of their ranks, Joe Slaader, is driven to madness and murder by powers he has no control over. Upon this violent outburst, he is discovered by the authorities and placed in the Ulster County Asylum for the Criminally Insane, a place where the well-to-do townspeople banish the misfits and the deranged. A dark place with horrors of its own." (from the film synopsis)

"'Beyond the Wall of Sleep' might just as easily be entitled 'The Film That Wouldn't Die'. Simply put, it's a project whose existence today is due solely to the sheer force of a triad of tenacious filmmakers – producer Koko Polosajian, and writer/directors Thom Maurer and Barret Klausman. Their partnership was and is founded on the simple, yet uncommon desire to tell a good story in a unique and bold way. Initially, however, it began just as an attempt to resuscitate the sad state of film adaptations of the writings of H.P. Lovecraft – the landmark horror and sci-fi writer whose brilliant works have been maligned consistently in almost every previous motion picture incarnation. What resulted in this effort was a script that boldly bucks that trend and gives new life to Lovecraft's voice." (from <http://www.beyondthewallofsleep.com> – soon to be released on DVD)

#### **☿ IMPORTANT NOTICE! ☿**

**New email address: [arkhampress@verizon.net](mailto:arkhampress@verizon.net)**

**New website: <http://mysite.verizon.net/resp7jls>**



by Charlee Jacob

*"Light is the child of force..."*

from RECREATIONS IN ASTRONOMY

Henry White Warren, D.D. (1886)

The two met at the college, each of them having turned twenty years old in 1850. One young man came from a well-to-do family with his own house in Kensington Gore and the other was a student from Tuscany. They soon discovered a mutual interest, being a belief that time and space were as elemental as earth, air, fire and water. As such, could these not be investigated metaphysically?

Yet it was difficult for the Italian -- on top of the requirements of his medical studies -- to pursue his theories in the cramped quarters he'd been forced to take.

"I propose you come live with me," Jeffrey Lamsely said. "We can then delve into these mysteries together with a great deal more elbow room."



Anthony Cercare was all too willing, ecstatic in fact, to find a like-spirit curious about the unexplored dimensions.

Most evenings, after work designated by their professors had been finished, they expanded their horizons with visionary rare books. They also expanded their minds with numerous substances, beginning with simple thorn apple and almost immediately sweeping toward opium -- most readily obtainable to them in the form of medical laudenum. They progressed soon enough to drugs mentioned in their curious and exotic texts: both amanita and psilocybe mexicana mushrooms, the dried leaves of Madagascar periwinkle and, alternately, the fresh leaves of the African khat plant, hydrangea, Egyptian henbane, and a variety of the more potent daturas. It wasn't but two months later that they discovered absinthe, an anise-flavored wormwood drink Henry-Louis Pernod had begun producing in 1797. Now, just over half a century later, absinthe was becoming quite popular with poets, artists, scientists -- all manner of secret seekers.

It was during a long night of narcotic mental-stretching that Jeffrey decided to take a year off from school.

"I know I *am* English but the atmosphere at the university is simply too stifling for those who would pursue beyond the normal confines. I'm going to see the world. Come along. My treat! Imagine what mysteries we'll find in the darkest corners."

Anthony agreed. "It is in the darkest corners light will shine most, yes?"

They sailed first to the Americas where native lore was only just beginning to be revealed, then kept going west until it became the ancient Far East, then down into the ever-enigmatic Subcontinent. Everywhere the two young men went they learned what each culture believed about time and space -- expansive concepts of matter and ether, far outside the Christian restraints of European upbringing. They also became familiar

with an even wider selection of herbs: Amazonian yagé, great U.S. western zygophyllum, Hawaiian baby wood rose, Asian mint, Indian cannabis.

A year after they had gone abroad, a letter caught up with Cercare while the two were in Cairo.

"What does it say, Tony?" asked Jeffrey, the Great Pyramid visible across their shoulders.

The Italian sighed, replying, "My father commands me to make haste back to school. Will you return with me?"

Young Lamsely shook his head. "I know I said a year but I'm nowhere near ready to abandon this adventure. But you go -- and please, continue to stay at my house as if it were your own. I do hope you will offer our theory to the professors."

\*\*\*

It was 1851 when Anthony returned to London. It was the year of the Great Exhibition, the first World's Fair which was built and held in Hyde Park. Additionally that year, the theory of planetary rotation had been successfully demonstrated by French physicist Jean Foucault; American physician Thomas Holmes was working diligently to promote the practice of embalming the dead; Verdi's opera "Rigoletto" -- based on a play by Victor Hugo, author of "The Hunchback Of Notre Dame" -- was staged in Venice; Modest Mussorgsky, who later wrote "Night On Bald Mountain", was eleven years old; Nicolai Gogol, author of "Viy", was losing his mind; Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote "The House Of The Seven Gables"; Henry James, later author of "The Turn Of The Screw", was eight years old; Ambrose Bierce, later author of "An Occurrence At Owl Creek Bridge", was at the age of nine; Robert Louis Stevenson, later author of "The Strange Case Of Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde", was one year old; Luke Sharp, later author of "Strange Happenings", was one year old; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, later author of "The Yellow

Wall Paper", was one year old; Guy De Maupassant, later author of "Diary Of A Madman", had reached his first birthday; Lafcadio Hearn, later author of "Kwaidan", was one year old; Emma Francis Dawson, later protégée of Ambrose Bierce and author of "An Itinerant House", was born; Mary Crawford, later author of "The Satanist", was born; J.S. Le Fanu, later to write the classic vampire novella "Carmilla", published his first book, "Ghost Stories and Tales Of Mystery"; President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's *coup d'etat* ended the active political interest of a Frenchman named Charles Baudelaire, driving him to focus his talents on poetry; Wilhelm Meinhold, author of "The Amber Witch", died; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly, creator of "Frankenstein", died; and, last but not least, Samuel Morton, American professor and author of "Cranium Americana", who promoted the theory that Caucasians were proved to be the superior race based upon the size of their skulls -- and, thus, their brains -- died.

\*\*\*

An excerpt of part of a meticulous paper permitted to be given before the faculty by student Anthony Cercare (who was present) and student Jeffrey Ramsey (who was not present): "It is, therefore, our contention that certain arcotics chemically open a heretofore unnamed pathway in the human brain which eliminates the physiologically customary barrier between the dimension governing the specific elements of time and space. These same narcotics also it would seem, unfortunately, tend to induce so great a state of languor that only the barest perception of the threshold is possible. The use of odd-chants, and other practices from inappropriately labeled 'primitive' belief systems, formulate a trance concentration that may enable the seeker to force himself out of the torpid state, making actual contact with this dimension feasible. It might be that the odd-chants in particular contain cer-

tain combinations of specific vowel and syllable sounds which help the generally subconscious part of the brain to attain the required focus of will to overcome the restraints imposed by a consciousness accustomed to nonsubjective conventions of ordinary reasoning, i.e., providing the generating power (for the brain is as an electrical engine) to facilitating the seeker in exerting himself from his stupor and into a tangible encounter with that which is otherwise beyond reach through time and/or space."

\*\*\*

These were the ramblings of a young man, ranting between lightning flashes. The illumination down the long stairway flared into xylophone banisters and madhouse bars. He talked, chanted, and shouted to himself during the caliginous spaces, even those which shook with thunder after the lightning danced away.

"Mi Dio! The ancient Greeks had knowledge of atoms. Moslems considered them as far back as the 11th century ... Descartes, Newton, Huygens! In 1808 John Dalton formulated atom theory. But these Englishmen in our own good time are not so wise? Damn narrow British science, concepts of space that reckon the solidity of bricks on that London Bridge -- but not the liquid nature of the Thames that runs beneath it!"

He fumed, drunk on bitterness and disappointment, fueled by their narrow minds that declared failure for Jeffrey's and his ideas before they could even be allowed to prove them. Neither, apparently, was disproving necessary. Their bibliophilistic brilliance was like the lightning, a burning which rendered the true visionary visionless, soon gone without a steadfast mass to ever prove it had been there at all.

He could still hear their laughter, some of it arrogantly bombastic, the rest merely the puerile snickers of lesser minds. These were the college's foremost thinkers, eh? Well, he and his

friend would show them time and space together as a water that men might move inexorably through. It would be delivered as a planet turning, not through rock but through mutable currents.

Anthony had been garnering top marks before his trip through the world. Was he any less a scholar because his apprenticeship had moved into areas generally thought to be esoteric? Because he had sat at the feet of great teachers in Calcutta, Kathmandu, Peking, America's painted desert? He and Jeffrey had seen wonders those conformist charlatans in their silk top hats couldn't begin to understand. But he was determined to make them look, against their religions and too-orthodox wills if need be.

Cercare wished Jeffrey were there to participate. But he was alone and plunged ahead with the need to see his intellect reclaimed. He had purified his body in water and salt. He fasted, then called upon the name of every deity he'd ever heard spoken or seen written. He loosed his mind of rigid university constraints with hoo-kah hemp and hashish from those early Arabic geniuses, opium from the farthest Orient, peyote from the wild American West, absinthe all in green fairy magic out of Paris, ergot scraped black from an East End market's bushel of tainted rye. All that he and Jeff had found to most readily produce the conducive of chargeable hallucinations.

The storm which had begun as he left the college, depressed and insulted, now blew outside at full strength while he flew through curtains of thunder. He climbed the wide stairs in a plastic dream, floating the way of the remarkable guru fakirs and Dalai Lamas, surroundings and hours all chameleon. He whispered incantations he and his friend had been taught by magnificent mullahs and painted shamans, focusing all his thoughts upon the alchemy of matter normally invisible to men.

He marched up to the top, where at the entrance to the corridor Jeffrey kept a Chinese screen his father had brought back years ago from a diplomatic journey abroad. The lightning flashed in the great window nearby, the one that during the day illuminated both this upper hallway and the downstairs foyer and front parlor. The jagged spectral fire came through the curtains like a searing frost, as bright as what he'd dreamed when two atoms mated. He winced and shrank back as it seemed to display the screen alive with sparks, fire playing among the scenes of mother-of-pearl to exhale a jasmine smoke as if from cones of exotic incense. He heard ... what? Sizzling? Hissing? Had lightning struck the house?

No, whispering, very similar to the sighs of ignition.

Afterward the screen sat silhouetted in the dark. There was movement there. Anthony perceived it as an imprint singed upon his retinas, subtle of the smallest increments which usually appeared still and silent to the naked eye.

He didn't hesitate but lurched a few steps nearer, then slid his hand through the carved ebony, vanishing up to his wrist. He no longer could see the hand but his fingers had penetrated fabled years to grasp a ghengis moonlight.

He didn't permit the slightest doubt to cross his mind. He didn't lapse into modern man's rational denial. He didn't gasp or sigh or allow even one iota of jubilation. Not yet. He still concentrated every thought and each measure of physical energy (his or the screen's? Both?) toward this configuration. Atoms -- not mating to create supernumerary dawns -- as the juice of stars were squeezed to form matter, temporarily molten.

He didn't hesitate when he touched heat somewhere within the boundaries of another side, a realm of essential substance he could only consider - without actually seeing it - as being hypostatic. He pulled it to him

through the screen, as easily as if lifted from a bath or delivered from a shadow. A revelation emerged, an eon of perfume and dimensions of a pale golden porcelain. *He stared with drugged triumph at an Oriental girl.*

Her brocade slippers smelled of gunpowder, emphasized by the storm through the great window as lightning (the radiance of which still caused him to shudder) mimicked pyrotechnic explosions. Peach blossoms and pale lettuce jade were intricately arranged in her panther hair. A dove slept in one of her long looped sleeves. In the other was a rice paper scroll printed with this poem:

*Plum maiden, slow mists dancing  
bearing moonlight in her bells.  
Princess of willows, spring ponds  
song full of dew and warm rain.*

Her cinnabar mouth was open in delight, as if she'd been watching an acrobat leap through wheels of fireworks. Her eyebrows were painted a rising green to resemble distant Kun Lun Mountains. Not injured from her ravel through the screen, no more than a journey through a cinnamon whisper, she believed Anthony was god or demon and entitled to be lord of her rainbow.

(Rainbow ... an arch of color in the part of heaven opposite the sun, a bending light created by the force of the sun through rain. But the sun's opposite couldn't be light. It must be darkness. Just as the opposite of good was evil.)

He touched the screen again. It was hard, cold wood. It had reverted from the supernatural back to the naturally inanimate. Yet he felt a strangeness round it, a pulsing as of a hollow egg to be filled.

He led her downstairs and offered her a seat on the sofa, then simply held her hand for what must have been hours. He expected her to disappear. Surely time would aright itself and claim her. Would she fall to dust?

A painful lucence nibbled at the edges but Anthony rubbed his eyes.

Blackness behind his lids shook it away, broken into aphotic cinders. She did not turn to powder. The storm outside rushed away as dawn broke through the great window. The dove in her sleeve began to coo.

"*Nin gui xing?*" Cercare asked her, voice crackling because he was in awe of what he'd accomplished – and because he was smitten. "What is your name?"

"Wen-Chi," she replied softly, her own inflections not very different from the dove's.

Elated, he immediately sent a letter to Jeffrey, listing as his friend's last known location: Cairo, Egypt. He didn't mention the slithering fulgence he'd seen out of the corner of his eyes, the half-seconds of incoherent whispers fading around corners. These were narcotic phantoms, after-effects of lightning flashburning in his fully dilated pupils. A disorder which would right itself in due time. Nothing a rational man would long contemplate.

Anthony then designed to introduce Wen-Chi to his professors, as proof of space being more floating variable than unyielding constant. He took precious little time to deliver her to the college. But they simply stared, looked her up and down, then shrugged with contemptuous smiles. They glanced at one another, eyebrows raised.

Obviously they were skeptical of her origins.

"Look at the weave and style of her clothes," he suggested. "Speak, Wen-Chi. Tell them where you come from, the province, the business of your honorable sire, your visits to the temple near the emperor's palace."

And she spoke, her voice pure music, birdsong and chimes, her eyes lowered respectfully. Not that many of them understood a word of it, although a few must have visited China. Yet even those who might have understood did not indicate so.

"Note, *per favore*, the curious and stilted shape of her dialect," he

pointed out. Then he gestured to her exquisite face. "Even the ingredients of her cosmetics are all of the most millennial composition."

They shook their heads and politely excused themselves, not even wasting time to ridicule him before the entire faculty. He saw them conversing away from him. Were they suggesting he'd purchased an unwanted daughter from some Singapore trader of ill-repute? Did they invent gossip that he'd dressed her in finery purloined from a careless museum?

It enraged him, even as he knew they must only be jealous. That a mere student had been capable of such dimensional manipulation ought to be galling.

He bit back on his anger so hard that he shuddered. He wouldn't permit himself to create a scene, for this would only further embarrass Wen-Chi. He was determined to shield her from any more indignities.

He took her back to Jeffrey's home, aware that the neighbors peered at the couple from windows and doorways, disapproving a Chinese girl being in their neighborhood as anything but a servant. Who was he to bring her there anyway? He was only an Italian and not a noble one. His family probably had Moorish blood from conquest centuries ago.

She saw them and blushed, the color to her cheeks only rendering her even more beautiful.

Cercare ignored them, plucked marigolds lining the street in front of the fine Kensington Gore house, and handed them to her with the courtliest bow he could manage.

He told her, "Never you mind them, my dear Wen-Chi. Their ancestors were little better than unwashed savages who lived in peat bogs with breaths thick with onions, at the same time you lived in a world fluent with alchemy and perfection."

But once inside the house, he felt wretched though he tried not to show it.

Anthony took Wen-Chi in a carriage to see Victoria's castles and to spy upon the stiffly regal queen from the cobbled streets. He showed her Big Ben's goliath clockwork and the rose gardens of the long dead Tudors. He guided her through Westminster Abbey and the old London Bridge where the stones seemed to hold nothing in common with the cosmic after all.

(Occasionally a stone in the street would be missing. There would be a hole. He'd see it, almost falling helplessly toward it. So empty. It pleaded to be filled. Sometimes the hole would be filled with brackish water, and hideous rainbows played upon the surface -- light just as opposite of the sun as wrong was from right. He'd have to rub his eyes to make himself steady again.)

They toured wonders of Piccadilly Circus. And as horses' hooves and metal wheels of phaetons, victorias, and other carriages sang through Belgravia, they went to see the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park's Exposition, a wonder of glittering architecture with a million square feet of glass and some 5,000 columns and girders. But he'd had to buy himself a pair of dark spectacles such as sightless men wore to keep from suffering in the resulting dazzle. Was he becoming hemeraplopic: day-blind?

At least he felt comforted by the boom of machines in demonstration. They drowned out whispers in the spatial vacancy that rasped from the void. Had he been less educated than he was, he might have suspected the creature in Wen-Chi's sleeve of being a waking serpent instead of a sleeping dove.

She always managed a smile, even if everywhere he escorted her they felt the frost. Ice of blue eyes walled the couple inside glaciers. Blizzards of racism diminished Anthony's celestial princess of dynasties into an opium den doll. Hearing the comments they made, she was pure grace. He began to believe this was the real proof of mutable current, dignified under as-

sault, even if always soft as the silk cocoon.

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Part of a letter from the college:

"We shall be investigating the matter of your bizarre behavior and making a decision on your future at this university."

It was also brought to Cercare's attention that a petition was being circulated among the neighbors (who were always anxious to relate the positive incidences of their contributions to African missionaries). They intended to have him evicted from Lamsely's residence.

They even sent a delegation to ask him to move out. They sat primly in the front parlor, not even deigning to look at Wen-Chi as she served tea. Did they even understand what an honor she did them? She was a princess!

He telegraphed Jeffrey. His friend wrote back.

Dear Tony,

Do not let them chase you from the house. Since I gave you permission to visit your London residence at my home and you have used this as your address for more than a year, they cannot simply pitch you out.

Meanwhile, I am making contact with an uncle in Parliament, a very influential fellow. Neither you nor I shall be dropped from the college. Too many notable Lamselys are alumni.

I will make arrangements to soon leave Egypt. It may be weeks before I can be there. But rest assured, I will come quickly as I can.

Then we shall show them, eh?

Your conspirator in science,

Jeff

Wen-Chi never complained, ever gracious, dutiful, sweet. Yet Anthony knew she hated the filthy London streets, the air of dung heaps, burning coal and factory foundries. She shuddered and shivered, lamenting silently as the dove in her sleeve died.

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Cercare glanced at himself in the mirror one morning. The curtains were drawn but he constantly squinted and flinched from phosphorescent shapes he still saw in the peripheral. Shouldn't these hallucinations have dissipated by now? Now matter how hard he rubbed his eyes, they were haunted, giving him the look of a man who has decided he's given away too much.

He went down the hall. A tainted shimmer crawled up the walls to melt into the ceiling, seeking voids -- drained of their sense and science -- that implored to be filled. He slipped into Wen-Chi's room and stood by her bed. She slept but this only made it easier for him to tell her, "I regret, *Principessa*, that what genteel Asian miracles I might have drawn in honey from seas of fluid time are not timeless after all. The ages will never embrace as long as fools view real human exploration with denial. Worse than they am I. I mourn the man I might not be if I fail to claim my century. I have no choice but to live in it. I do not deserve you. I must send you back."

(The sibilant murmur around each sharp corner shifted and seemed to laugh.)

Again he bathed in water and salt. He fasted. He chanted. He took the drugs of the magi. He'd hoped for a calm night but it was as it had been when he did the first experiment. The Italian raved as lightning etched gruesome bodhisattvas in all the windows, especially the great window. All the shapes he'd seen for weeks now blazed in, faces of a twisted flaming space which defied everything he'd ever contemplated of order.

He led Wen-Chi up the staircase distorted in storm. He endeavored to push her through the Chinese screen, to return her to valleys and years of jade palaces, picnics under parasols on the beaches of the Yellow Sea.

"No, Anthony! *Jiu ming!*" She wept, struggling. Her elaborate gown tore as he shoved only that much harder. Toward those bending flames of dam-

aged color massing across the screen, reaching for her. Reaching for him, too?

He hoped to hear the murmur of bamboo flutes and zithers, the tangy ping of bronze cimbals. Yet the flutes he heard sizzled and spat; all music from beyond roared in volcanic bedlam.

Even distant wind chimes rattled harshly ... He realized somehow, disconnected as from far away, that these were her bones breaking, more fragile than the lacquered wood which splintered and came apart. Its visions of white pearl herons in coral rushes under galloping gilded clouds snapped. The screen's rigid measurements -- not fluid, not molten -- were restricted and dense, infinitely cruel because it was old, because it was too young and possessive of severity dealt to every second it owned. The visions crackled, crooked light the child of force. Laughter smoked as the screen fractured. Not a burned husk left, no char nor ash dissolving in ember. Just a metaphor for fixations of neverness, hard and adamant after all.

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Anthony found himself sitting there when morning came, in a stupor, his eyes stung, hands covered in dried blood.

Wen-Chi's celestial body lay among the pieces of the smashed screen. He twitched, looking about him apprehensively. No quirks of unnatural luster. No features unrecognizable by any legendary, earthbound geometry.

How she must have suffered.

Why hadn't he used chloroform on her first? Would it have been better to use the same drugs on her he'd employed on himself? Did the passage-way in her brain need to be opened for her to return? Yet she hadn't been drugged when he first pulled her through.

Hours had passed as his senses returned. He'd been there all evening, out of his mind on the combination of narcotics.

It *was* the next morning, wasn't it? Or had several days and nights elapsed?

As a medical student he noted that Wen-Chi's body must have stiffened some time ago, then slackened again. The flesh had reached lividity long before this and now softened. As he leaned close to touch her, not as a doctor but as a mourning rainbow lord -- no, never a rainbow! -- he saw what the flies had done.

So it was not merely the next morning.

"*Cielo, m'auiti, per favore,*" he muttered, running scabbed knuckles across his lips. "*Mi perdone!* I killed her."

He managed to get up, bathed again as he prayed to his former god every moment with the identical fervor with which he'd chanted his spells. He scrubbed deeply until the water turned a frothing pink. He dressed and went out as a proper man does, accepting as his an evil deed, as evil was often made without malice. (Or was this exactly what defined malice? And intolerance?)

He'd been raised a Catholic. The Church had definite and prescribed beliefs about evil. (Even if what he'd glimpsed had resembled nothing ever suggested at their altar.)

He insisted to himself that it was a terrible accident. Anthony was no savage bigot. He'd never suffered that particular madness which was one of the many insanities men were subject to. And he hadn't committed a crime just to redeem himself back to his era. It could never have been that sin lurking as the motive's root. He'd loved Wen-Chi.

He brought back the police and led them up the stairs where Wen-Chi's shattered body had quivered like the dying dove.

"All right, Mr. Cercare. We'll get t' th' bottom of it. We're right be'ind you," the officers assured him, boots stamping up the fine Persian carpet stretched upon each step.

But where was she? All they found was the broken screen, no tears or blood or children or flies.

"You're a mite inebriated are you, sir?" one of them asked him.

"She was here, where you see the shambles," Anthony argued.

The other officer winked at his partner but asked the young Italian, "Sure you didn't just imagine 'er, gu-ner?"

The tone angered him. He'd been called a fool too often of late. Anthony stumbled back down the stairs, across the foyer, staggered outside and into the yard. He screamed Wen-Chi's name toward every house as he went down the street.

"Calm down, sir," the police said as they caught up with him. "We'll be forced t' arrest you. You don't want that."

"Ask them," he commanded, gesturing to the houses on the hill. "They will tell you she was real."

The officers obliged and knocked on every door. Not one neighbor admitted to ever seeing an Oriental girl, either in the area or on the Lamsely remises.

Anthony swayed, overwrought and incredulous.

"What do you mean? Did you not come with the xenophobic committee to ask me to leave?" he hissed as he reminded them. "No one may dream that much hatred."

One man finally said, "We only wanted you to go because you talk to the air. We figured you for a drunk or an addict. Granted, sometimes addicts make great writers. Even statesmen with vision. But you're frightening, boy, rambling in jibberish only coolies understand."

The police escorted Cercare back to the Lamsely house.

"Go t' bed, there's a good fellow. And 'ere now, stay off th' gin."

Anthony collapsed in the living room, passing through fevers and chills that lasted for days. This was a product of the narcotics his body had begun to hunger for. It was also the

result of grief. He crept up the staircase on the fifth evening and bent to the shattered screen. There was no storm tonight. Yet the moonlight and gaslight streaming in through the glass was almost as bad as the lighting.

Among the broken pieces of black lacquer and gilt he found a wilted blossom, a fragment of teardrop jade, and the poem from Wen-Chi's sleeve.

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Jeffrey finally returned and, shocked by his friend's condition, determined to make him well again.

But sometimes just before dawn Anthony would clutch a crucifix and mumble a prayer from the Church he'd fled back to. He'd force himself to look, seeing contorted light for a split second, nitid '*spettro*' inches and light years away.

But then there would only be a womanly shape, bent as the back of a wounded dragonfly. A scent of ginger and rust ... and something rotten. Wen-Chi would feel close in the aberration of light. He'd consider reaching out but was afraid. For she'd not gone home. And she was not alone.

He rubbed his eyes until darkness chased away the shimmering beasts. Yet he always stopped just short of damaging himself. For if he continued, he'd be worse than blind. He'd create hollows that begged to be filled.

But he knew someday he'd grind those pupils down until they were as the dust between centuries. Fathoms of nothing, endless as China.





**"I have the heart of a child. I keep it  
in a jar on my shelf."**

# Robert Bloch Revisted

*The creator of "Psycho" talks about  
Weird Tales and "The Lovecraft  
Circle" in this unearthed . . .*

Interview by  
Graeme Flanagan



**"I haven't had so much fun since the  
rats ate my baby sister."**

GF: What was it that attracted you to that first copy of *Weird Tales* back in August 1927?

RB: I think that what actually attracted me to that first copy of *WT* was the Egyptian motif of the cover plus the appeal of the word *Weird* in the magazine's title. As my early stories attest, I was greatly interested in Egyptian mythology.

GF: How did you acquire your interest in Egyptian mythology, and do you still maintain such an interest?

RB: I became interested in Egyptology through childhood visits to museums and art galleries in Chicago -- starting as soon as I was able to walk. The Chicago Art Institute has some fine statuary and objets d'art -- and so did the Field Museum. I am still interested, and a lot more knowledgeable; much of what I wrote about Egypt was inaccurate, due to limited source material. In those days reference books were hard to come by if one didn't have access to a university library.

GF: What, in your opinion, were the "golden years" of *Weird Tales*, and why?

RB: 1925-1936 -- the years in which *WT*'s best writers were at their peak.

Nothing much happened before, and only two more important writers made their debuts afterward -- Fritz Leiber and Ray Bradbury. But during those twelve years *WT* made its enduring impression upon fantasy, in my opinion. Let me, however, qualify my use of the term "important" when referring to writers who first appeared in *WT* during its latter years. There were many fine talents among them and they produced some stories of superior quality -- but only Leiber and Bradbury were "important" in the sense that their innovative approach influenced other writers and the fantasy field per se. Some of the best-known writers of the golden years were not "important" by the terms of this definition; Derleth's actual fantasy-writing influenced nobody, as far as I can tell, although of course his editing and publishing ensure his stature in the genre. Nor am I an influence -- no one has ever bothered to imitate me. (Except, of course, in the 4,367 films which have borrowed bits or the entire corpus of *Psycho* -- but that has nothing to do with *WT*.)

GF: To what do you attribute the longevity of *Weird Tales*, and what do you feel finally brought about its demise?

RB: I think WT's longevity was due to combination of fortuitous circumstances; the tenacity of a small group of readers who needed their monthly or bimonthly "fix" of fantasy -- the patience of impoverished writers who were willing to wait for payment of five cent per word on publication or even some while thereafter -- and probably above all the hitherto-ignored fact that the magazine never fell into the hands of one of the big publishing houses like Street and Smith or Popular Publications. Had it done so, WT would have been chewed up and spit out the moment issues began losing money. Publishers putting out dozens of even scores of issues and titles per month are not inclined to be patient with a loser in their lineup, and WT could have been an early casualty of a bad business operation. When at last it died, WT was a victim of an epidemic which struck down almost all the pulps reaping paperbackitis.

F: Did you ever meet Weird Tales editors Farnsworth Wright and Dorothy McIlwraith?

3: I met Farnsworth Wright in Chicago a number of times; he was a fine gentleman and a considerate editor. I have the feeling, in retrospect, that he very much wanted -- in those Depression days -- to make WT a commercial success, and to this he committed himself to the sexy covers, the godawful Satan series, and other supposed sales-stimulators. Despite Lovecraft's opinion, I think Wright would have happily printed everything he wrote were it not that he had a publisher to satisfy. But his record speaks for itself, and eloquently enough.

I met Dorothy McIlwraith only once, in late 1939; she seemed pleasant, I recall little about her, and her words of acceptance -- together with the of associate Lamont Buchanan -- don't linger in my memory. Actually, I think she's far too neglected; I can't miss anyone who published Leiber, Sturgeon, Brown and other talents. And I think that she would have published more, had she been

given the budget to compete with Unknown Worlds, F&SF, and other comparable markets. But that lousy one cent a word -- and sometimes bimonthly publication -- induced few writers to remain in WT once better rates were obtainable elsewhere. I lasted longer than most, because I was always a bit stupid. (Still am, writing short stories today when I should be knocking out TV episodes at roughly 100 times the fee, plus an additional 100 times for reruns over the years.) But WT was my first market, my favorite reading as a young fan, and I felt -- and feel -- that I owed it a lot.

GF: How did you feel about Dorothy McIlwraith's decision to eliminate readers' comments from The Eyrie? As an author did you appreciate the feedback provided by the column?

RB: The Eyrie did give some of us "regulars" a helping of egoboo which wasn't otherwise easily obtainable in those days before the advent of organized fandom, but I can't recall any marked reaction on my part when the department was dropped.

GF: Could you please list your favorite authors among those who also wrote for Weird Tales?

RB: Lovecraft, of course, then Clark Ashton Smith, C.L. Moore, Robert E. Howard in his non-Conan appearances, Frank Belknap Long, Donald Wandrei, Manly Wade Wellman, E. Hoffman Price, Fritz Leiber, Ray Bradbury and Henry Kuttner, of the "regulars."

GF: Can you recall your reaction when you received a reply to your "fan letter" to H.P. Lovecraft? How frequently did you correspond with HPL between 1932 and the time of his death in 1937?

RB: Of course I can recall my reaction when you first received a letter from H.P. Lovecraft -- I was excited and elated to hear from someone I considered a supreme author of fantasy whom I so greatly admired. What 15-year-old wouldn't be pleased and flattered by such a warm and generous response? I must have received about forty letters from him during the ap-

proximately four year period before his death, plus many cards.

GF: Which of H.P. Lovecraft's stories do you regard as favorites?

RB: My HPL favorites are "Pickman's Model," "The Whisperer In Darkness," "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Silver Key," "The Picture In The House," "The Outsider," "The Thing On The Doorstep," "The Haunter Of The Dark," and "The Color Out Of Space."

GF: Many Weird Tales writers contributed stories to the so-called "Cthulhu Mythos," yourself included. There are several listings of such stories, but the compilers of these listings seem unable to agree on a definition of exactly what constitutes a Mythos story. My own feeling is that a story requires more than a fleeting reference to the Necronomicon or perhaps one of the Old Ones to qualify as part of the Mythos. Which of your own stories would you consider to be part of the Cthulhu Mythos?

RB: Stories of mine which I would consider part of the Cthulhu Mythos would be "The Shambler From the Stars," "The Creeper In The Crypt," "The Shadow From The Steeple," "Notebook Found In A Deserted House," "The Unspeakable Betrothal," and "Terror In Cut-Throat Cove," and my new novel Strange Eons. I agree with your feelings about Cthulhu Mythos listings, and that's why I limited my stories to those which have some direct affiliation with HPL's cosmology beyond mere use of nomenclature. I think the notion of including every story using the name "Cthulhu" in the Mythos is as absurd as classifying every story mentioning God or Jesus as a religious tale.

GF: Has time mellowed your opinion of Conan, since you referred to him in The Eyrie as "the Cimmerian Chipmunk" and suggested that "he be sent to Valhalla to cut out paper dolls?"

RB: Time hasn't mellowed my opinion of Conan, though I do pay my respects to Howard and the rest of his output in the introduction I wrote for Glenn

Lord's edited collection, The Black Stone, which I assume is soon to appear. Neither Conan nor Jules de Grandin turned me on, though I was extremely taken with Northwest Smith and Jirel de Joiry. Dr. Satan was to me, approximately, the pits.

GF: Did you ever meet Clark Ashton Smith?

RB: No, I never met Clark Ashton Smith. We did correspond for a time and he sent me sketches, which I kept – but, alas, not his letters! He was a very erudite and pleasant man, as I recall.

GF: Who was your favorite Weird Tales artist?

RB: Virgil Finlay was always my personal favorite.

GF: Do any of Finlay's illustrations for your own stories strike you as being particularly outstanding?

RB: I think Finlay's illustration for "The Faceless God" is one of the best things he ever did. So did HPL, who dedicated a poem to it. But his work on my yarns was consistently outstanding and captured the mood of his stories; oftentimes more so than my writing did.

GF: What is your opinion of Margaret Brundage's cover paintings?

RB: In my opinion, Margaret Brundage did excellent cover paintings. My only reservation revolved around the fact that these paintings appeared on the covers of WT, where – in many instances – I felt they misrepresented the contents and misled purchasers who would react in anger when they discovered they weren't reading S & M material. I also felt that they scared off potential customers who would have flipped over HPL but never got a clue that WT offered anything but the Thirties equivalent of porn. Nonetheless, Maggie Brundage was one hell of an artist – one only has to compare her work with some of the hack efforts of the actual S & M pulps of the same period to see just how good she was.

GF: Can you say a little about Henry Kuttner?

RB: Henry Kuttner was my friend for twenty-two years. I count myself fortunate for having known him, and I

count the fantasy and sf field fortunate for having enjoyed the upgrading influence of his best work, most of it in collaboration with C.L. Moore. Together I feel they brought sophistication and characterization to an area of writing which sadly lacked both before their advent. As for Hank himself, he was a charming, warm, generous guy with a wild sense of humor. Both as a professional and as a person, he deserves far more attention than has been accorded him. One of the all-time greats.

GF: "The Black Kiss" was printed in *Weird Tales* as a Bloch/Kuttner collaboration, but when it was reprinted in *Avon Fantasy Reader* in 1951, Kuttner was given no credit. Can you give me the background to this story?

RB: Kuttner wrote a first draft himself, which he couldn't sell, and asked if I'd rewrite it as a collaboration. I did so – very extensively – and the story sold. Some years later, when there was a British reprint sale ("Sea Kiss" (1945)), he asked that his name be taken off it, so he felt the story was largely mine.

GF: Can you tell me something about Earl Peirce Jr., who had several stories published in *Weird Tales* between 1936 and 1940?

RB: I knew Earl Peirce Jr. in Milwaukee as a fan in 1935-37. He was a bright, personable young man, about my age, whose father was in the U.S. Forestry Department. He contacted me, expressing an interest in writing, and I encouraged it – introducing him to my circle of friends and (via mail) to various writers I knew. He wrote and sold several stories – "Doom of the House of Uryea," a vampire yarn, was his best – then moved to Washington with his family. In late '41 I visited him there with my friend Harold Gauer: he had married and was (I seem to recall) working for the Navy Department. That was the last I saw or heard of him for at least twenty-five years. Then he showed up here, with a different wife, and spent a day with me. He had changed so much that I'd never have recognized him, and there wasn't a

trace of the rather intense and imaginative fantasy devotee who had once dreamed of starting an organization to rule the world – the "Si-Fan," modeled on Sax Rohmer's secret society in the *Fu Manchu* series.

GF: Who were Nathan Hindin and Jim Kjelgaard? (Stories published in *Weird Tales* under both names are to be found in bibliographies as collaborative efforts.)

RB: Nathan Hindin and Jim Kjelgaard were real people. Hindin was a musician with a law degree; he kept after me to collaborate on some ideas he had, and to get him off my back I wrote two stories under his byline. The notions he furnished were, frankly, pretty simplistic, and I did what I could with them; not too much I'm afraid. Kjelgaard was a writer of "outdoor stories," many of which were aimed at teen-age boys, but he wanted desperately to do a weird piece and tried many, to no avail. He showed me one and I agreed to rewrite it – which I did, completely – and it ran under his name. Jim was a nice guy and a fine craftsman, but he didn't have the feel for fantasy. Poor man, he died young and without deserved recognition.

GF: Which of your own *Weird Tales* stories do you regard as your favorites, and which do you like the least?

RB: My WT favorites? "Lucy Comes to Stay," "Catnip," "Sweets to the Sweet," "Enoch," "The Cheaters," "One Way to Mars," "The Bogey Man Will Get You," and I suppose I'd better evidence my gratitude to "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper." As to which I like least – most of the rest in varying degrees. Looking back, I can't imagine how some of them got printed. On the other hand, I'm fortunate they did; publication encouraged me, gave me much-needed income, and an opportunity to practice my various techniques and learn through experiment and experience. But I did so much dreary stuff! One of the greatest misfortunes of my writing career is that I got so many ideas for stories before I was equipped to handle them properly.

Things I wrote in 1940 would have been better written in 1950 – and much better still in 1960, or 1970 – or hopefully, in 1980!

GF: Did Farnsworth Wright reject any of your stories apart from "Satan's Servants"?

RB: I kept no record of Farnsworth Wright's rejections, and must rely on memory. I do know that he rejected the three stories which appeared in fanzines ("Lilies," "Laughter of a Ghoul," "The Black Lotus") and several of my earliest WT yarns were also rejected on first submission, only to be accepted after my revisions. He also rejected several of the pieces which later appeared in *Strange Stories*. Among the latter I can safely list "The Curse of the House," "The Sorcerer's Jewel," "A Question of Identity," "Pink Elephants," and my collaboration with Henry Kuttner, "The Grip of Death." I'm not sure about "The Power of the Druid" or several others.

GF: Six of your *Weird Tales* stories which were acknowledged as feature stories were given cover illustrations. However, a number of other stories, including "The Bat is My Brother," "The Skull of the Marquis de Sade," "The Cheaters," and "Tell Your Fortune," also seem to be regarded as feature stories, yet were not similarly honored with a cover illustration. Can you explain the reason for this?

RB: It's likely that they didn't get cover illos because they didn't deal with naked girls ala Conan's yarns in the Thirties. In the Forties there was an erratic policy I've never quite comprehended; my guess is that a lot of artists were employed only because their work was inexpensive, and some of it seems almost caricature. Finlay, who liked my stuff, was long gone from WT. Bok, whom I never knew, reportedly detested my work.

GF: You adapted quite a number of your *Weird Tales* stories for the radio series *STAY TUNED FOR TERROR*. Can you tell me a little about the series?

RB: An announcer and radio actor friend brought my work to the atten-

tion of John Neblett, a sportscaster, and his friend, agent Berle Adams. Neblett produced the show, Adams bought into it and marketed it, and my friend, James Doolittle, took the lead. Other performers were his brother Donald, an actor named Wilms Herbert (now deceased) and Angeline Orr, who later married Neblett. They did all the roles – as was customary in those days. The director, Howard Keegan, had previously directed *LIGHTS OUT* and gave us excellent assistance.

The shows were recorded in Chicago, at the Wrigley Building studios, one night a week, three shows per session. I attended and made suggestions at the rehearsals. I never rewrote a script – but I should have, as they were dreadful by today's standards, I'm sure. Doolittle used a pseudonym ("Craig Dennis") but I believe the rest of the cast were listed by their own names.

The shows sold, here and in Hawaii, and to the entire Canadian Broadcasting Network. A second series of thirty nine was about to be ordered when John Neblett died in the crash of his private plane which he was piloting either to or from a football game down South. The series died with him.

GF: Do you still possess many copies of *Weird Tales*?

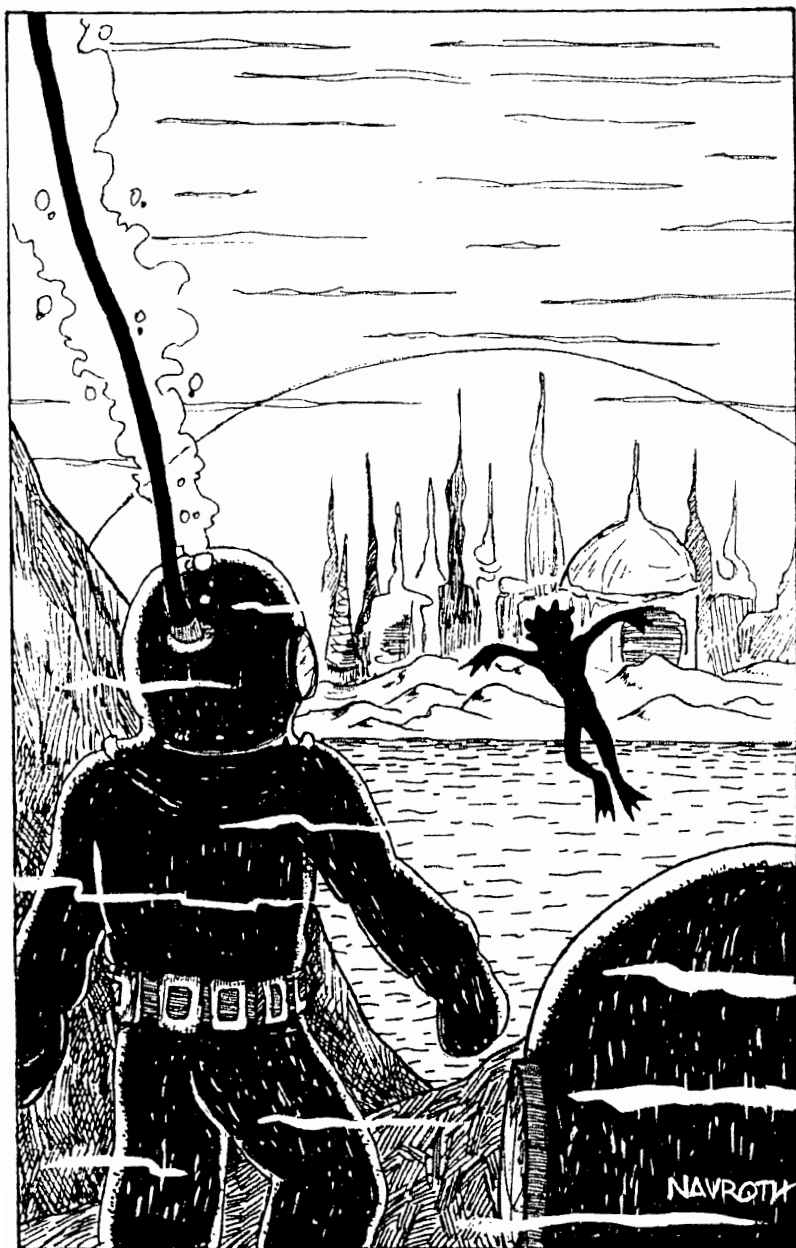
RB: I have most of the issues containing my own stories, but that's all. To me the best years were 1928-34, but these I totally lack. Can't afford them at today's prices, which I bitterly regret.

GF: Do you think *Weird Tales* could be a success if it were to be revived today?

RB: No, I think that WT's time has passed.

NOTE: This interview originally appeared in *Robert Bloch: A Bio-Bibliography* (July 1979), and was reprinted with the kind permission of Graeme Flanagan. Mr. Flanagan is the webmaster of a site devoted to the master of mystery paperback cover artists, Robert McGinnis. Visit his site at:

[www.graemeflanagan.com](http://www.graemeflanagan.com)



## Beyond Devil Reef

by Linda Navroth

My friend Darrow contacted me by letter about a year ago with a fantastical story and I was suspicious of it from the very first. He said he had stumbled upon a bizarre underwater city while deep diving off a remote island near the Marquesas. He begged me to join him on another dive there to film what he'd found, since he'd run out of funds to procure the proper camera equipment. To stir my curiosity, he sent some drawings that he'd made from memory, which were at once unbelievable and compelling in their content, for they showed gigantic monuments, columns, and other architecture out of place to any historical era I was then familiar with.

As I said, Darrow was a friend. We'd known each other since boyhood and the two of us had always been fascinated by stories of magic and the occult and we had spent many a summer day lying around and sharing magazines such as *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories*. Darrow had a particular fondness for stories by H. P. Lovecraft, and he would read them over and over again until he could recite whole passages by heart.

Darrow was so intrigued by those stories that I think he started to believe them as truth. In his junior year world history class he found the myths of Medusa and Poseidon very interesting indeed, and he began to draw correlations between them and the fictional characters places we'd read about in the pages of *Weird Tales*, such as Dagon, the Deep Ones, and Cthulhu.

Our college years were spent at the same university in Arkham, he studying oceanography and I archaeology, specializing in Mayan epigraphy. Darrow had a parallel interest in archaeology, though his ruins often lay beneath the waves. He became an expert diver and his expeditions to sunken cities in the Mediterranean were well known, but what he found there finally led him to the Pacific and its myriad chains of uncharted islands.

One summer Darrow announced that he had his doctoral theory nearly wrapped up, and his study of the sunken city of Thera had yielded a new line of inquiry that demanded an immediate trip to the Pacific. He postponed our plans for a diving trip in the Caribbean and said we would make it

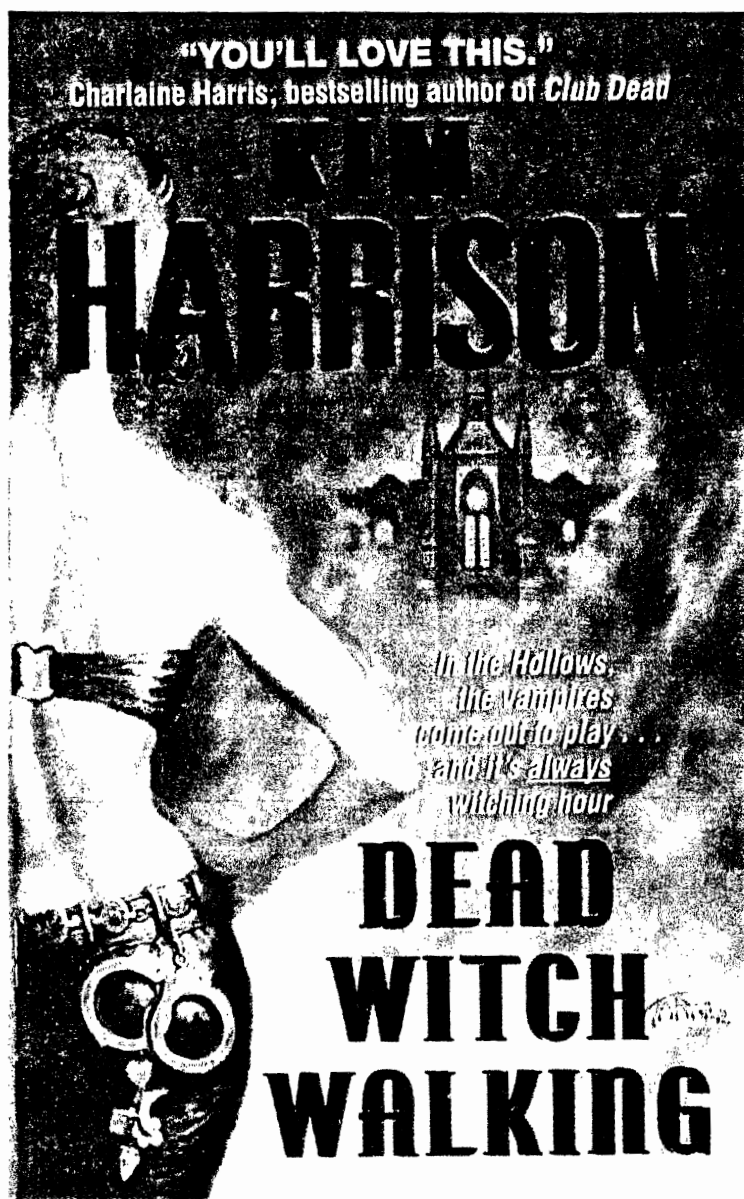
up at some later date. He packed hastily and left a diary for me to look over while he was gone. It was the diary that first brought to light my friend's precarious mental state.

The notebook looked ordinary at first glance—brown cardboard covers and cheap paper pages—but once I explored inside, I discovered that every page was covered with Darrow's miniscule scrawl and numerous crude drawings. He had begun the diary when we were still seniors in high school and had amassed a great deal of information by the time he gave it to me. At that time I had no idea that Darrow was even remotely interested in the archaeological and mythological subjects in high school, and what was contained in the diary, coupled with the erudition of his writing, took me even more by surprise. It appeared that my best friend had another whole side to him that was unknown to me.

It began, he wrote, when he tied together some of the stories in *Weird Tales* with what he'd been learning about Greek mythology, and this went far beyond juvenile musings; these were ideas set down in earnest and with complete seriousness. It was a side of my friend that I'd never seen when we were younger and the fact was acutely distressing to me now as I read his words.

As I read further, I began to remember how Darrow was rarely around during our first year at Miskatonic University and the few times we did manage to get together he told me that he was extremely busy with his studies. He apologized for not being able to socialize more often, as he was, he claimed, on the verge of a great breakthrough and asked me if I remembered the Lovecraft stories that he'd been so fond of. I recall that I told him that I did, though in truth, I scarcely remembered anything about them at all. I was puzzled by his question and wondered what he meant.

He then told me that he'd stumbled upon new evidence based on what Lovecraft had introduced in his story, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, with its 'fish people' and 'deep ones' that inhabited the town, and also a place called Devil Reef which lay just outside the harbor at Innsmouth. I think I may have laughed at first, telling him it was



## Witchy Woman

Kim Harrison Talks About Her Books

Interview by John Navroth



Hot on the (spiked) heels of such small screen successes as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed*, the publishing industry hasn't wasted any time capitalizing on the hot trend of female lead characters in situations and settings that can be best described to us horror fans as "supernatural fantasy". Sizzlingly popular and highly entertaining, authors such as Laurell K. Hamilton, Kelley Armstrong, and L.A. Banks have provided slaving readers with a steady diet of vampire huntresses, post-millennium sorceresses and women who run with werewolves.

Kim Harrison has also flown in to throw her pointy hat into the ring with her series of supernatural spellcraftings starring Rachel Morgan ... who just happens to be a witch. Introduced in *Dead Witch Walking*, continuing her adventures in *The Good, The Bad, and The Undead*, and with yet another, *Every Which Way But Dead*, due out this summer from Harper Torch, Miss Harrison is sure to keep us charmed with her unique magical blend of horror and just the right dash of humor to make it all work. In fact, *Dead Witch Walking* was recently awarded PEARL's (Paranormal Excellence Award for Romantic Literature) "Best Science Fiction novel of 2004" and Harrison as "Best New Author". But, don't let the "romance" tag fool you – these books are not your Grandma's bodice rippers! Matter of fact, *Lovecraft's Weird Mysteries* loves 'em and gives this series an enthusiastic two claws up!

Kim graciously took a few moments to spend some time answering a few questions from her lair via email. Here's what she had to say:

*LWM: Did you just suddenly arrive on the scene with your Rachel Morgan books or have you been "lurking about" with other writing for awhile?*

KH: Have I been lurking? It's the rare writer who manages to get their first attempt at a full manuscript out on the market. Writing is often a self-taught profession, and that's the path I took. I've got a closet full of manuscripts in various stages of development. I wrote and rewrote the first Rachel Morgan book more times than I can count, and I was very fortunate to have landed it with the editor who guided the last few rewrites into what you see on the shelf today. The Morgan series stands right now at a wonderful six books, but I've got more for Rachel to do than that, so we'll see how it all plays out.

*LWM: What's a typical workday like for you?*

KH: A typical workday for me starts about seven with a good hour to two on the internet computer, answering mail, updating my web site, eavesdropping on a few lists, drinking a cup or two of caffeine to get my eyes to focus. Then it's four hours or so on my work computer. Hunger will usually bring me around at noon, where I eat my lunch on the internet again, winnowing my emails and answering the gottas. Then it's back to work until sundown where my mind stops working logically and I have to put everything away. Somewhere in there I try to do my yoga/stretching a couple of times a week, hit the post office, and sign and return books. It's the rare day, though, that my work stops there, and I generally do a lot of plotting in my head while I'm taking care of the day-to-day living aspects that keep intruding. I love being able to plan my day, and I will often work like a dog so I can take a day off to do some long-term plotting at the local pool hall or over a cup of coffee.

*LWM: How did you come by the supernatural milieu in your books? Background research? First hand experience? Do you carry any charms or practice any magic yourself?*

KW: Oh, I see where you're going with these questions, and I can't help but smile. I majored in the sciences in college, focusing on the biological area, so some of the knowledge is an extension of that. But the witchcraft rituals and magic systems of earth magic and ley line magic? Well, I've been asked before if I practice Wicca to which I can answer a sincere no. I've made a conscious decision to keep Wicca out of the Hollows, preferring to come up with rituals out of my head, trying to base them on a few laws of nature such as nothing is created or destroyed--just changed, and for every action there is a reaction. I like to think that for every act of magic there ought to be a price. Waving a magic wand and having a miracle occur should only be allowed after a lot of practice and maybe a little pain. I did very little book research, (I've only got one "magic manual," and I only looked at once to make sure what I was doing made some kind of sense. No charms in it, just theory.) I pulled on common myth and knowledge that the man on the street would know and built on that, trying to keep it familiar but adding my own feel to it.

*WM: Is Rachel Morgan Kim Harrison or would she like to be?*

EH: I really respect Rachel Morgan as she struggles through her shades of gray. I hope that I would be able to react with half her guts and determination if ever put to the test. That said, I will admit my wardrobe is a fairly even mix of Rachel's casual jeans and halter tops and Ivy's black leather. And the boots. I loooooove my boots.

*WM: Do you know the female/male split of your readership?*

H: No, actually, I don't. I have a yahoo group which I am active on, and seems a fairly equal split as far as the vocal members. I can't say about the lurkers. Most of the people who leave messages on my comment's board are female, but that could be artificially inflated.

*WM: What do you think is the strongest draw for women in your books?*

H: That's easy. The strong-willed female character who can kick butt but is still vulnerable.

*WM: What can men find in your books?*

H: That's easy, too. The strong-willed female character who can kick butt but is still vulnerable.

*WM: I noticed a national bookstore carries your books in it's "Horror" section, and there seems to be a leaning towards characterizing your works under the Romance lines. If you had a choice, where would you like to see your titles on a bookstore's shelves?*

EH: I love finding my books in the horror section, though to be honest, I don't really think they can be classified as a hard-core horror story. The cross-over appeal, though, is strong with the vampire elements, and there's an equally strong interest from those who read romance as I try to work in a developing, possibly dangerous, relationship plotline in with the harder plotline of a bounty hunter/detective. I didn't write DEAD ITCH WALKING with any genre in mind, focusing on trying to tell a

story of the heart and mind rather than adhering to pre-established guidelines for any particular genre. HarperTorch backed it phenomenally, giving me a lot of headroom. You asked if I had a choice where would I like to see my titles in a bookstore, and if I had my choice, I'd like to see them on the best seller shelf. (grin) But barring that, the general fiction shelf will do.

*LWM: Can one wear too much black?*

KH: Absolutely. I always wear white undies. Well, almost always.

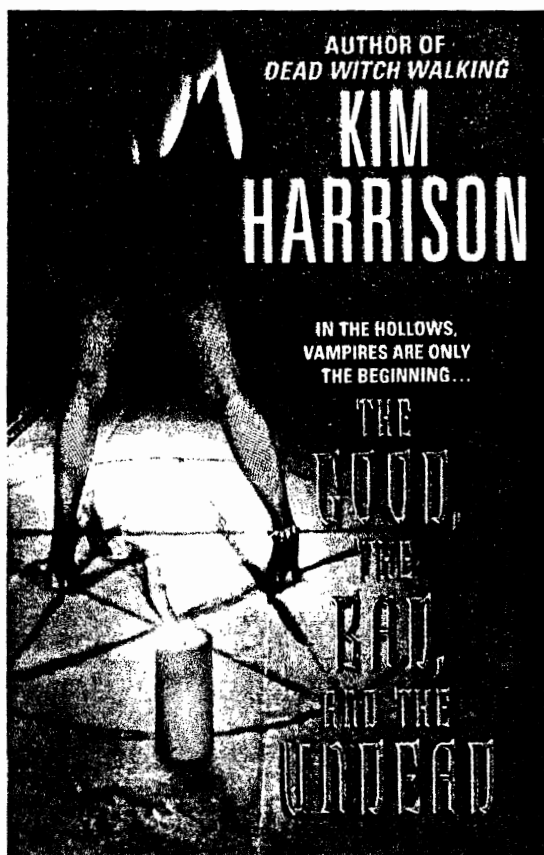
*LWM: Any words of wisdom?*

KH: Words of wisdom? No, I'm afraid not. Except perhaps treat people with understanding when you can, and fake it when you can't until you do understand.

*LWM: Thank you, Kim Harrison.*

KH: You're very welcome. I really appreciated the chance to talk with your readers, and I would like to extend a welcome to them to join me at my Yahoo group or contact me personally from my website.

**WWW.KIMHARRISON.NET**



a stretch from Greek myth to Innsmouth and besides, the creatures mentioned in Lovecraft's story had come from the South Seas, not Greece.

Darrow told me that something very much like the Deep Ones had been around for a long time and that they had made appearances whenever it was convenient for them to mix with human beings. The Greeks, for instance, with their inclination towards worshipping various gods and goddesses, would have been very receptive to the appearance of such creatures—terrified perhaps, but receptive nonetheless. Darrow got me to agree with him that most myths had some basis in fact or actual events, but I still saw nothing that would lead me to believe that there could be a correlation between the Greek world and the South Seas. But beyond this he remained mute.

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After I finished studying Darrow's journal and looking again at the drawings that he'd made in the Pacific, I must say I was stunned. It actually made some kind of crazy sense in light of his past behaviors and rantings about the Deep Ones. Out of sheer curiosity, I made up my mind to do as Darrow requested and made arrangements for the camera gear. I took a refresher course in hardhat diving up in Boston and then made the trip back to Arkham to visit Darrow, who had just returned again from the Pacific.

When I saw him again, for the first time in six months, I was aghast at his appearance. Once stocky, he had rimmed down and was, I thought, painfully thin. His eyes bulged slightly, as if he'd developed a thyroid problem. His skin had a pallid, almost translucent cast to it. I remarked on the odd lumps on the sides of his neck and he nervously explained that there had been an accident on the ship; he'd said he'd been caught up in some malfunctioning equipment and was nearly decapitated. As to his general appearance, he said that there was radiation emanating from the site of the underwater ruins that had affected his body in profound ways. He assured me that he was fine, however, and that only his appearance had been adversely affected.

Darrow asked me if I'd read his journal and I said I had—though I told him that it disturbed me greatly. I asked him just how he planned to prove such a wild theory and he assured me that the photos I would be taking would be all the proof he needed. There was a sort of wildness in Darrow's eyes that I'd never seen before and everything he said had an edge to it that was filled with extreme excitement. Even after expressing concern for his sanity, he remained adamant that he knew exactly what he was doing, and that there was nothing whatsoever wrong with his mind. I decided it would be best to just follow his lead, wherever it might take us. I owed him that much as his friend, even though I was filled with a nagging dread that this would not come out well.

We packed our gear and went back up to Boston where he'd chartered the same ship and crew as before; he'd paid handsomely for their loyalty and secrecy, so I knew now why Darrow had run out of money. On Friday we left the harbor and everything that I would see of the normal world for more than a month faded slowly off the fantail of the ship.

A course was laid out for the Pacific, via the Panama Canal and it was mostly an uneventful voyage for me. I spent my time working on my own project, and was reading a treatise on a Mayan city that had recently been discovered near the coast of Belize. There was evidence of much violence and sacrifice there, as well as a stele that was reputed to have images of a strange and heretofore-unknown god carved upon it, which had many scholars speculating as to its rightful provenience at the location. There was, in fact, a larger question as to whether the city was Mayan at all. The god in question had been described in the most recent papers as a "bat-like creature, with large forefeet or paws equipped with gigantic talons, the head of some sort of cephalopod creature with tentacled facial features, and huge wings". I initially read this description with some amusement, as it was sure to mean the end of someone's career. But then I noticed that the discoverer of the site was none other than my friend Darrow. I wondered if he'd gone completely mad—that his belief in Love-

craft's monsters had gotten the better of his brilliant, though impressionable mind. This of course put a whole new spin on my interest in this voyage and I was more determined than ever to keep a close watch on my friend.

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We hit a horrible storm somewhere off Easter Island, a three-day tempest that pitched us upon waves so large that I thought we would surely capsize. I was so sick during the storm that I could not leave my cabin, and what sleep I had was disturbed by strange dreams. They were unlike any I'd ever had before and their horrific nature greatly disturbed me.

In them, I found myself standing in the midst of a strange landscape, which was bathed in an odd quality of light. Everywhere I looked I saw a towering edifices of odd shape and decoration, many of which resembled the giant limestone stele I'd seen standing in the plazas of Mayan archaeological sites--except these were larger and of a more profane nature. Carved upon their surfaces were characters I could not read, for they did not look like any glyphs that I'd seen before. There was something unsettling about the way the figures looked which hinted at things that made me feel nauseous with dread. Perhaps it was the tossing of the sea that was affecting my dream-state, I thought, but I doubted it--this was a sick feeling quite apart from the seasickness caused by the heaving motions of the storm-tossed ship.

There was also a profound stench that swirled about this strange landscape, an odor so incredibly primeval and fetid that it made my skin crawl; it was if every fish in the ocean had died and been left there for centuries to rot and decay. Even now it is a horror to recall.

Gradually I discerned the sound of chanting voices and in reply came a deep, sonorous bellowing that sounded like a great underwater leviathan was struggling to come to the surface from some deep, aeon-darkened place. Then I found myself standing before a great stone entryway, which was blocked by an even larger stone. Carved upon this stone were more of the strange glyphs, and I found that through some new

power working within myself that I was now able to read them:

*"In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulu waits dreaming."*

I woke up screaming then, dripping with sweat and covered in my own vomit. But the worst part of all was the dreadful smell of fish that lingered in my room. I lay there panting and trying to get a grip on my sanity, telling myself that it was just a dream, just a dream, just a dream. But I felt with awful dread that it had been more than a dream.

The storm finally broke on the afternoon of the fourth day, ending as suddenly at it had begun. When I finally emerged from my cabin I was much weakened, and what I saw just off the port bow made me reel anew.

The sky, though clear, had a peculiar green cast to it. The water, reflecting this jade-like color, was equally green, and had an oily, viscous consistency; it was water and somehow more than water. The air was deathly quiet and not a breath of wind stirred. It was not hot; it was not cold. There was, for lack of a better description, an absolute lack of temperature. I am unable to describe it further, for there are not words in our vocabulary for the sensation; it was eerie, unsettling, and most unnatural, yet at the time it was utterly seductive and compelling.

"Whoa, old man! Won't due to fall overboard now, would it? I see you're still a little woozy from the storm." Darrow shouted.

I realized I had been leaning far over the rail in an effort to get a better look, and Darrow had grabbed me by my belt to pull me back.

"But I must know what that is--where we are!" I was enraptured, mesmerized by the sight before me.

"We're near Ponape, but we still have a little way to go yet," Darrow said trying to reassure me. Then he pushed me back by the shoulders and shouted in mock amazement, "You're a fright, man! Go clean yourself up and have something to eat. We've a long day ahead yet."

"Yes," I said again, not wanting to take my eyes off of the dream-like scene before me. I stood there for a long time trying to fathom the reality of what I was witnessing. Finally I did

as Darrow suggested, though; I put on clean clothes and then had a small meal in the galley, but without appetite. The place had already gotten on my nerves.

Later I joined Darrow on the deck. The quality of light seemed unchanged, even though more than an hour had passed since I went below.

"You still look a little green, if you'll pardon the pun," he said as I walked towards where he was working on some diving equipment. "We'll get our gear together and go for a dive as soon as you feel up to it," Darrow said as he coiled some hoses. I'm just doing the final checks on the air supply now."

For the first time I realized that Darrow showed no ill effects from the storm. He had always suffered terribly from seasickness, a fact made light of in the past by anyone who sailed with him. Now he seemed untouched by it and it bothered me. I decided to let it go for the time being and went back to my cabin.

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It was five o'clock by my watch when I met up with Darrow again. I'd taken a nap and was feeling revived. We'd finally dropped anchor and all hands were scurrying about the deck, busy with one task or another to ready for the dive. I noted again that the quality of light was unchanged and then wondered if night ever fell in this place. In normal waters it would almost be sunset. But here the green suffused light remained steady and untouched by any of nature's laws.

"All set?" Darrow asked as he caught sight of me. "You sure look a lot better than you did earlier."

"I had a nap," I said. "I feel great. Let's get going before I lose my nerve."

"Lose your nerve? Good God, man, you aren't getting scared are you?" He asked incredulously. "I always counted on your nerves of steel whenever we've gone diving."

"This is different," I said dryly. "Very different and you know it. I haven't a clue as to where we are or what you're really up to Darrow."

"I told you we were in Ponape—that should be enough for now," Darrow snapped. He had grown irritable and nasty lately and I didn't like it.

"I don't see an island here," I said sarcastically.

"Island? Who said Ponape was an island?" he answered.

"But you said..."

"I never said it was an island," he interrupted. "Ponape is a *place*, not a bloody island!"

"I don't understand," I said wearily. "I don't understand anything you say any more. So let's just get on with it, shall we? Let's get your photos, so I can get out of here."

"Very well," Darrow snorted. "I was afraid this would happen sooner or later—but still I'd hoped that it would not. You're my best friend and I thought I could count on you no matter what. I wanted to share something magnificent with you and for you to be a part of something that will change the way everyone looks at the world. But you've lived with your head in books for too long—too many books and not enough experience! You've grown too soft over the years and your mind is closing. A shame."

"My mind is far from closed!" I cried a little too shrilly. "I just don't like this place, Darrow. It's evil. There is something sinister about the way this place looks, the way it *smells*. Can't you *smell* the evil here, Darrow? And I've had terrible dreams, too—too terrible to tell about."

Darrow looked at me seriously. "Dreams? What sort of dreams?"

"I can't —no, I won't say! But it's connected to this crazy place, I'm sure of it!" I stammered, trying to maintain what little composure I had left in front of the crew, who were now watching us with rapt attention.

"What did you see in your dreams?" Darrow asked excitedly. "Describe to me what you saw."

"I can't, as I've said. It's too awful..." I started to say, then found myself spilling it to him in spite of myself; "I saw a God-forsaken landscape of giant stone monuments, with terrible writing on them, and an even more terrible foreboding of danger that lurked somewhere nearby. And the smell, my God, Darrow, it was the most horrific stench you could imagine!"

Darrow listened attentively, thoughtfully. He then noticed that the men had stopped working and barked orders for them to get back to it. Then he turned to me and said quietly, "You will be

even more amazed, then, to see what lies below."

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The foreboding still lingered as we began getting into the thick canvas diving suits. Two of the crewmen helped us with the heavy boots and gloves, securing them with the coupling devices to make a watertight seal. Then the large, round helmet was set in place, turned, and snugged with a twist. The ship noises were abruptly cut off and there was silence. A moment later I heard a hiss and my head was bathed in clean oxygen, which was altogether more pleasant than that hideous fish smell.

We would be able to talk to each other via two-way radio hook-up and we would be tethered to the ship with safety lines. After we climbed onto a metal-grated platform, the crew lowered us into the 'water.' When we'd reached the surface, we stepped off the platform and began our descent into that hellishly green liquid.

As I said, it was not water we entered, but some sort of thick, mucus-like substance. Yet it was very much like water and after the initial plunge, it was hard to tell any difference. But I saw no fish, plants, or other living things, such as I would expect to find under the ocean; just that bizarre green stuff, as far as the eye could see.

As we lowered down farther and farther—150 feet now, by my depth gauge—I started the movie camera rolling. I had made the watertight and pressure-proof housing myself, improving on some others that I'd used over the years. The camera itself was a 16mm Bolex with a 50mm lens and special fast emulsion film for use at low light levels. Darrow carried additional lighting in the form of a hand-held, high wattage flashlight we'd procured from some of the boys in the biology department, which they used for time-lapse photography. If there was anything down here, I was sure to capture it on film.

At a depth of 200 feet I finally saw it, appearing out of the gloom like an apparition. There before us was the magnificent, yet repulsive ruins of some blasphemous ancient city, resembling very much the drawings Darrow had done, which, I realized, he'd not done justice to with mere pencil and paper.

We touched the bottom of this 'sea' or whatever it was and Darrow motioned for me to follow. He lit the high-powered torch and the ruins glowed in all of their spectral dreadfulness. I was stupefied to realize that this was the very place that I had dreamed about during those awful nights during the storm and I was relieved that I could not *smell* it now.

It was all there, exactly like I'd dreamt during the storm: the architecture built by otherworldly hands with a most alien sense of aesthetics, and unmatched anywhere on earth for its sheer size. As we neared the outer perimeter of the city, I thought I caught movement off to my left. I turned my body around so as to get a better view out of the larger porthole in the front of my helmet. As I turned, I saw I was not mistaken, for there was someone...no, some *thing*, some alien creature moving towards us very rapidly. I hollered at Darrow and he, too turned in the direction of the thing.

It was a man, yet not a man, having arms and legs, yet not exactly arms and legs as we have. It was definitely aquatic, for I saw wide, webbed 'hands' and 'feet,' and a body that was covered in something like scales—but they were not scales of any sort I'd ever seen. The head was too big for its body, with large, protruding eyes and thick, rubbery lips that mouthed something we could not hear.

Darrow had reached my side by now and grabbed me by the left arm, as if to steady me. I yelled at him to put the torch on the thing and perhaps scare it away, but I could see Darrow shaking his head inside his helmet and to my surprise, he flicked the torch off. The thing, seeing the torch go out, stopped swimming towards us, raised a hand as if to acknowledge Darrow's action, then turned and swam off.

Darrow pulled on my arm and motioned me to follow him again. We lumbered in the direction of a huge portal—a dark, yawning abyss. I pulled up short, hesitant to move any further, but Darrow prodded me again and I reluctantly followed. We crossed the threshold and were instantly enshrouded in the most profound darkness imaginable. I suddenly had a feeling of vertigo and felt myself falling. There was no up, down, or sideways—



just the infernal blackness enveloping me like an evil predator. I felt a lack of oxygen and struggled briefly against it before losing consciousness.

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When I awoke I was in a large, dimly lit room. It was empty, save for the body of Darrow stretched out next to me. I was baffled to see I was not wearing my diving suit, and it lay with Darrow's in a heap to one side, along with the camera and lighting equipment. I gagged when I realized that the air, though breathable, was saturated with a disgustingly malign fish smell.

Darrow woke up just then and sat up groggily, rubbing his head and gingerly running his fingers over the slits on one side of his neck.

"Whew! What a stink!" he bellowed, his voice echoing back from the massive, cavernous walls that surrounded us. "I'd forgotten how bad it was."

"No mere photograph could bring back proof of this stench—my God, man, no one would believe this!" I said, joking half-heartedly.

"I do hope the film will be enough," Darrow said thoughtfully. Then he suddenly popped to his feet and said, "C'mon, we need to get moving though ... before they come for us."

"They? Who are you talking about? They already know we're here! What about that thing we saw outside?"

"That was only a sentinel. As long as you show no fear or resistance, it will let you pass. For some reason it has no fear of us if we do not threaten it. But there are others here, in great numbers, which are far less benign. Come on then—let's get going!"

Darrow got to his feet and helped me to mine. We trotted off down a long corridor carved through stone, lit irregularly by some glowing substance smeared on the walls at odd intervals. It gave off a bluish phosphorescent light not unlike that produced by plankton, I thought. Odd—very odd indeed. Our footfalls slapped noisily on the damp floor and I feared the whole time that it would give our location away.

"What happened when we entered that portal back there?" I asked as we puffed along at a steady gait. "I've never felt so dizzy and helpless in my life."

"Near as I can figure it's some sort of wrinkle in the fabric of reality of this place. It allows those from outside to come inside. And vice-versa. During the time we were in that black void, it somehow altered us physiologically, in a way that enables us to breathe down here." Darrow said, running his fingers along his neck again. "Check your neck, old man—you've got some of these now, too!"

I reached for my neck in an instinctively defensive manner and to my great terror felt three rows of slits. I reached to the other side and there were three more! I pulled my hand away in disgust. Then I looked at Darrow and noted that when he breathed, the slits opened slightly, then closed again.

"Gills," he said matter of factly, "Primitive, rudimentary gills. Just like our ancestors had, no doubt!"

"In the name of God! What is happening to us?" I cried.

"Oh, settle down, will you? You'll get used to them—and they'll come in handy, too, you'll see."

I did not want to know any more right now. This was way more than I bargained for and all my energy was now focused on maintaining my sanity. I just wanted to photograph whatever it is that Darrow wanted and get back to the ship, though I now had my doubts that we would be able to leave this accursed place without further trouble.

We ran for what seemed like hours but was probably only a few minutes, for it appeared that my sense of time was altered as well. Finally we came to a large doorway that overlooked a most fantastical scene. Spread out before us in every direction was the vast, ruined city, with its decaying avenues, crumbling titanic monuments, and colossal leaning spires of white stone—exactly as I'd seen in my dream. Now I knew with great certainty that whatever entity lived—or lurked—here had been sending out a 'greeting' of sorts even before I'd arrived; it knew we were coming and I it made me shiver.

"You've got that camera on, don't you?" Darrow asked.

"I'm getting this, don't worry," I answered. The scientist in me wasn't going to let my fear intrude on opportunity.



We then descended some steps that led down to the street below, and upon reaching the bottom, Darrow took off quickly and I had to run quite fast to keep up. It was darker here outside the building, except for a place bathed in a phosphorescent glow off in the distance. And it was towards this glow that Darrow ran.

He led us down a series of narrow streets, each more ruinous than the first. It seemed to me that the buildings got more decayed the closer we got to the center of the city. We passed through grim, dusky alleys that seemed to be dead ends, only to find our way out to broad, empty avenues. Everywhere I looked there were crumbling columns, some already fallen. A slimy-looking brown substance coated nearly everything and the stench of fish was overpowering, though for some odd reason I'd now become accustomed to it.

When we were within what seemed mere blocks of our goal, we saw a group of *things* emerging from a dark side street. They were different in aspect from the sentinel, for these had a stooping gait on two misshapen legs. Their shoulders were broad, but their heads were huge and their faces had distinctly batrachian features. They began waving what looked like some sort of weapons at us threateningly. I heard low grunts and a sort of speech issuing from their unsettlingly wide mouths. But I could not understand them and we picked up our pace, soon leaving them behind.

"What were *those*?" I yelled to Darrow, who now was at least twenty feet ahead of me now.

"Deep Ones," he yelled back, "minions of the great power that rules this place. But they're too slow to catch us. C'mon! Keep moving!"

"Surely there can't be anything more powerful here than that smell!" I said, trying to make light of a situation that was becoming more bizarre by increasing steps.

"The smell is nothing," Darrow shouted over his shoulder to me. "If I'm right—and I have good reason to think that I am, we are going to prove that Lovecraft was writing all around the truth. There are Deep Ones. There is probably a Dagon somewhere—who I got close to finding in Thera, by the

way—you remember the stories of Medusa, don't you? Anyway, following that trail logically I knew there must be a Cthulu—or at least something very much like him..."

Then it really hit me what we were heading towards. My illness and the wild events that had transpired since our coming here had prevented me from thinking clearly. The dreams I'd had, the strange creatures here—everything pointed to the clues Lovecraft had sprinkled throughout his stories. Not only Lovecraft, but also myths from many cultures also hinted at such things. And now the Belize site became more proof of the existence of something profoundly ancient and evil that had once exerted its influence in the world of men.

I was suddenly afraid that we had been lured into coming here, by whatever monstrous evil lay dormant within this city, in order to affect its release from whatever confined it, for I knew now that Darrow and I shared a sensitivity of mind, minds more sensitive to the call of this waiting, eldritch horror. Whatever it was, it had perceived our curiosity and openness to accept the possibility of such things and had taken advantage of it by drawing us here. Lovecraft had warned about that, too!

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Finally we reached the outer perimeter of what appeared to be a gigantic tomb and ascended upwards along a zigzagging path, worn smooth by the tread of many inhuman feet. We were now in the heart of the ruined city—a black, blasphemous heart that lay slowly beating within the walls of the great stone resting place of the unknown and terrifying behemoth. The city itself had been built around the structure, which I could see now that I stood a ways above it; all of the streets angled away from the center in malign, radiating arms stretching far into the distance. The cyclopean stones towering over us all but disappeared in a kind of white, radiant mist and the stench of fish threatened to overwhelm our senses. An immense door barred the way to what appeared to be the entrance to the tomb, and upon its stained rock surface were a myriad of glyph-like characters surrounding an enormous symbol carved in the center.

It was a five-pointed star, but the arms of the star were oddly skewed in such a way as to make it resemble not so much a star as a *starfish*. It had a vaguely organic look to it and at the same time it reminded me of the streets radiating outward from the base of the tomb. In the center of the star were some other images that looked like flames enclosed in two offset crescents. I'd seen this symbol before—I was sure of it—not in my dreams, but in Darrow's Mayan city in Belize!

Possibilities overwhelmed me, mixing with primal terror and numbing dread of what it might mean. The images from the monuments in Belize flooded my mind: the horrific squid-like faces, the bloody sacrificial rituals, and the implications that the rituals were meant for unleashing a heretofore-unnamed dread upon the earth. All the glyphs from that site had proved to be indecipherable and the argument had been strong that they were not Mayan in origin. But if not Mayan, then *whose*? What race built that city and to what grotesque god did offer their human sacrifices?

Darrow read the puzzlement on my face and said reassuringly, "We're just here to take pictures—nothing more. We are not going beyond this door!"

"You better believe we're not going to go in there—more specifically—let that thing out! I've seen this mark before," I cried, "I've dreamed about this place—or this place put itself in my dreams. And I've seen the mark in your city in Belize. What lies beyond this door is too evil to comprehend with a mortal's mind—what lies here is immortal; dead, yet not dead; *dreaming*, as it were, like in a state of suspended animation. But it still has power, I know that much, though it's much diminished from its true potential. My God, Darrow! Is this R'lyeh? Is this is the resting place of the dreaded Cthulu himself?"

"Easy, old man," Darrow replied, "Get a hold of your nerves. I don't know if it's Cthulhu that lies dreaming behind this door, though it would be the find of the century! I don't know what it is exactly. But I believe it is something like what Lovecraft described, however, perhaps a brother—or a mate. To be sure, it is horrible and

dangerous and we shall not release it from its prison."

I stood there, aghast. This was too much to take in, even for someone who was much used to making awesome discoveries in remote places if the world.

Darrow spoke again, starting to appear nervous himself. "Take the pictures—take them quickly and let's get out of here!"

I needed no further prompting and fumbled with the camera equipment until I got everything right. I shot several rolls of 16mm film with the Bolex and two rolls of film with my Rolliflex still camera. I was very careful to get close-ups of all of the glyphs carved on the door.

Just as I'd finished taking the last frame, a deep rumbling shook the ground, flowed by a mournful and soulless bellow, the exact sound of which is nearly indescribable.

"Here!" Darrow yelled, handing me some wads of cotton that he had tucked in his pants pocket, "Stuff this in your ears quickly! If we can't hear it, it can't us direct us to do its bidding. Hurry!"

I did as he said until the sound became barely audible. Darrow then motioned for us to leave and we bounded down the path, tripping occasionally with frightened, unsteady steps, and made for the outskirts of the city. We saw no more Deep Ones, but I was sure they followed us for I could smell an awful, batrachian stink wafting in the air. The ground trembled a few more times, but by then we had reached the tunnel access that led to the outside. Then what? I thought, suddenly alarmed that I had not considered it before; how were we to return to the ship without our diving gear?

"Darrow!" I yelled at him as he ran ahead, "How are we going to get back to the ship without our hardhats?"

"We won't need them," he answered, "have you forgotten the slits on the sides of your neck?"

"Surely you don't mean that we can swim to the surface without the aid of oxygen? That's madness! We'll drown before we've gone two strokes in that vile, viscous liquid."

"Trust me," he said, "We will make it. How do you think I got back to the ship the first time?"

"This is madness! I can't believe I've let you get me into this! What did you hope to gain by bringing me here to photograph this awful place?"

"Gain? Can't you see the potential in this? Your mind is more closed than I realized. I shouldn't have kept you in the dark all these years—perhaps it wouldn't have come as such a shock. But listen—this is the find of a lifetime for someone like you. Me, I only wanted to prove to myself that Lovecraft was on to something whether he was conscious of it at the time or not. Maybe he had some sort of mental connection with Cthulhu or whatever it is—I don't know. All I know is that the damned thing is right here and I thought the world should know about it."

I didn't have time to answer him before a group of Deep Ones came out of a side tunnel and grabbed him forcefully. He struggled, knocking two of the creatures down, but a third managed to touch Darrow with his weapon; there was an electrical discharge, whereupon he went limp in the arms of the two that restrained him. His head lolled back obscenely and a line of drool slid down a corner of his mouth. He tried to speak to me through some sort of paralysis.

"Run!" he gasped weakly, "Get out of here...get those pictures home! I've already got what I came for. Run!"

I had but a moment to think, but my instinct for survival was great. I knew that Darrow wanted me to survive, but leaving my life-long friend to these frog-faced abominations was not a pleasant thought. But I did run—ran until I reached the barrier that separated the ruined city from the green liquid that surrounded it. I rushed through the portal and was surprised to find that the darkness did not affect me this time. I merely noted a change of atmosphere and then found myself swimming frantically towards where I remembered the ship lay on the surface. I swam like the very hordes of hell were on my tail and made it to the ship without further interference.

Once aboard, I took command and we returned by reverse course as fast as I could get the men to move. The

crew of course was nervous that Darrow had not returned and I had a hard time explaining to them how I'd managed to escape without him. But money talks and it finally proved to be the thing to shut them up. On the way back we encountered another fierce storm, which I now believe is a sort of barrier to keep all but true believers from accessing the ruined city. Once on calm waters I had time to think about what had happened to Darrow and about how I should handle the report I would be required to hand in.

I had no dreams during the trip back, but many an evening I stood on deck, gazing out to sea, rubbing my fingertips gently over the slits on my neck. We returned to Boston just over a month after we'd left, and I promptly went into seclusion.

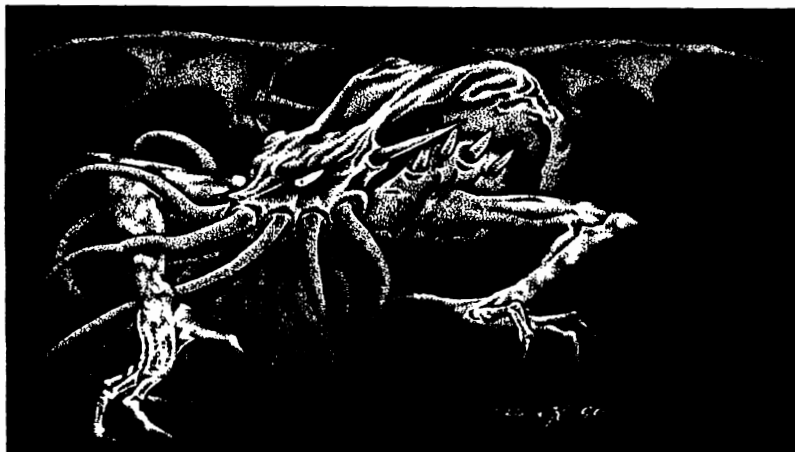
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It would take more than a year to process and write up all of my reports and to put the film together. Once done, I flew to the Grand Caymans and deposited the material in a secure bank vault. While there I partook of the vacation that Darrow and I had planned and put off, and that diving trip that I'd so looked forward to.

After taking care of the documentation from the voyage and was satisfied that no human being would ever find that blasphemous city again and disturb what slept there, I headed for the docks to rent a boat.

I motored to a secluded lagoon, took off the high-collared shirt that had now grown uncomfortably warm in the tropical heat, stripped down to my swimming trunks, and dove into the clear, pale-blue water. I swam down, deeper and deeper until it became cooler. I stretched out my arms and pulled myself easily through the water. Two minutes ... five minutes ... fifteen minutes ... a half hour. Darrow was right; the gills did come in handy. ❧





## Servant of the Order

by Gary Fry

"The *Necro*...er, I'm sorry, sir, could you spell that for me?"

"N-E-C-R-O-" the voice began. Perhaps there was a fault on the line, since it sounded as if the speaker were entombed in vast space - a church maybe, or somewhere not nearly so honourable. The spelling of the book title was completed. "-N-O-M-I-C-O-N."

Preciss had carved the word neatly onto an order-pad and now his mind needed to master the pronunciation. "The *Necronurr*... The *Necro-no-mi-con*," he ventured, enunciating the syllables. Now he had it. "The *Necronomicon*. How was that?"

"Not bad," the booming voice returned, a trifle brusque in its tone, though the words had emerged outrageously laboured. "And I understand that your shop is near enough to my place for you to deliver. Arkham Grove. Do you know it?" Preciss did; he possessed a schematised knowledge of the town. The Arkham estate was slum, a student region, but it was on his route home. "Free delivery is not my general policy, yet I dare say I might bend the rule on this occasion. I'll have to check on the availability of the item before getting back to you. I can obtain your telephone number by dialling 1-4-7-1. Will that be all, sir?"

"You appear to provide an efficient quick service. Good."

Had the customer broken the connection before adding the word 'bye' to his comment? If so, or if not for that matter, he had been unspeakably rude! Preciss reanimated the line and then pecked in the four digits, jotting down the crisply articulated telephone number. Then he turned the key in the till: 12:00PM, the electronic figures informed him. Exactly the time for his dinner-hour.

"I'm going to the bank now to deposit the CAB, Haze'." He had always knocked the L from the end of his assistant's name. A single syllable was more orderly. Like CAB: cash awaiting banking. "See if you can find this in the ABS directory while I go down to the safe."

Preciss offered the order-pad to the woman who stood at his side. In a cynical mood (though this was not something that often beset his rigorously marshalled psyche) he might have regarded Hazel to be actually in front of and slightly behind him too, she was that *big*. As the woman reached out with her free hand - in

the other, she was clutching a half-eaten chocolate bar - the fat of her underarm wobbled unattractively. Might the sight perturb his customers?

"Kay, Alan. I'll swee what hi can do."

Troubled, Preciss made for the door in the far corner of the showroom. Good God, his employee could hardly speak now! The fat on her face was tugging her mouth out of shape. As he stepped into the cellar and removed a heavy cloth bag from the safe, he compared the twenty-year-old monstrosity upstairs with the slender school-leaver he'd employed when he'd opened the shop in Skirby. There must be four of the former to the one of the latter! It was of course the same woman. Hadn't her doctor ascribed the problem to freak hormones? Preciss had doubts about this diagnosis. Even now as he climbed the stone stairs, he could see his only staff-member in the convex mirror above the cellar doorway: she was gorging a packet of crisps. No *discipline*. The distorting glass, mounted to magnify the activities of potential thieves, made Hazel appear hideously enlarged, though in truth, this image was not very far departed from the face-to-face. How long before, as in the mirror, she almost filled the shop?

"Hi've fround a copy in re catalogue," Hazel announced through quite a mouthful. "But rare's not enuff yet for an horder ris week. Shall hi add some childwen's stuff to re list so we can phwone it hin for Monday?"

"No. Hold fire." Somehow Preciss had managed to deduce the gist of the statement. Was it really worth pushing through an order for just the one customer? "I'll try and get it from *Sampson's*. I can drive it to the customer when I go home this evening."

"Hokay," Hazel concluded, and as she tore open a packet of fruit-gums, Preciss left the building.

The day-to-day operations of the town were toiling under a gloom that reminded him of the imminent onset of winter. Tatty shadows cast by storm-cloud made the roads and pavements appear grubby. This impression wasn't helped by the litter cluttering the corners that a sharp breeze couldn't get at. Preciss recalled that it was festival week; the tourists who were good for the local economy were also a challenge to the fastidious ways of his fellow inhabitants of Skirby. In the town square, some kind of mobile zoo was being prepared. Dark cages emitted intermittent brays of unidentifiable creatures. But Preciss had reached the bank.

He deposited £400, swelling his account to £10,500: a good solid figure. Next he moved on through the streets of market-stalls - New Age quackery, fly-by-night gadget dispensers, noisy audio/video selections - and only ceased his anxious march when he stole inside *Sampson's Book Emporium*. Here he was able to ask the anatomically symmetrical young woman (*Lucy*, her name-tag read) at the till-point for a copy of the book, whose pronunciation Preciss got right at a first attempt. He was feeling pleased with himself, but moments later Lucy returned with what appeared to be a fat comic that looked almost too lurid even to gaze at. Some kind of immense human-esque monster was slumped on the cover, crunching the heads off doll-like corpses, and the lettering above - *Necronomicon* - dripped copious quantities of blood.

"Er, it's not for me," Preciss immediately qualified, and was immediately annoyed with himself for his use of the 'er'. "I own *The Book Shelf* across the town. I specialize in non-fiction. I'm a friend of Harry Sampson, your employer. Whatever I need in his line - fiction - he lets me have. And vice versa, of course. We have an agreement: 20% discount. Are you new here?"

Lucy informed Preciss that she'd started work in the shop the previous week, and after she checked a box of customer accounts, she bagged up the disgusting book and had him sign an invoice. Preciss then left in a hurry.

There was just time for a sandwich - salad in an unevenly halved bread-cake - before his return at one pm. A titanic welcome awaited him, all quaking flesh and self-hindering limbs. Preciss employed Hazel between eleven and three o'clock each day, though what with the additional custom at present, it might help if she could stay until closing time. She told him that she'd made plans for today (she who lived miserably alone in a bedsit on the southern outskirts of Skirby, right?), but that she could probably work the extra tomorrow. This precluded Preciss's habitual patrol of the shop, the better to monitor light-fingered schoolboys who were alleviating the drudgery of the autumn half-term. He had to use the convex mirror instead, a technique that rendered his quarry larger than life. Even when he made the phone call, he was watching scrupulously.

"I have a copy of the book you requested. It'll be nine-pounds-ninety-nine."

"That's excellent! Oh, how very quick! And so surprisingly cheap!" But the palpable excitement of the customer was eliminated by the sluggishness with which his words were expressed. "The address is number six, Arkham Grove, Skirby. I'll pay by cheque. If you shove the book through the letterbox, I'll push the payment under the front door. I'm afraid I haven't been well lately. What I have...what I have could be contagious."

Was this the reason his voice sounded the way it did - deep, lackadaisical, enormous? In any case, by the time Preciss had closed for the day, he put an end to speculation, such an unproductive habit. Business was business, and the money he was losing on the comic-book would be easily made up tomorrow: Saturday was his busiest time. He tossed the bagged-up copy into the passenger seat of his two-door hatchback and then drove off through the rapidly encroaching night.

There was a delay in the town centre as two garishly decorated lorries rolled slowly along the high street. Might these garage more animals for display in the miniature festival zoo? In what little light the street-lamps and a wan full moon afforded, Preciss was unable to decipher the words painted on the sides of the trailers. He was glad to escape the congestion and make his way north out of Skirby, and before long, into the network of roads, streets, avenues, groves, terraces, and more grouped under the collective name Arkham.

Where was the Grove? Crawling down the Road whose housing appeared to consist entirely of tumbledown tenements, Preciss's headlights eventually picked out a dog-eared metal sign hanging crooked on a low broken wall: ARKHAM GROVE. He took a sharp left and then found himself on a short cul-de-sac flanked by squat semi-detached properties, the gardens of which crouched behind numbered gateposts. Here to the right was number 3; the evens must be on the other side. Preciss glanced that way, and amid a profusion of overgrown shrubs and weeds, spotted a lopsided 6 on a picket of wood. Though he couldn't yet see the property, he realized that this was his customer's abode. He parked up, climbed out, and then shuffled through the gate with the book.

At least some of the other buildings had offered up signs of occupancy! The semi at the head of a short garden path was blacked out. Had there been movement in the window to the right of a flaking front door? It was too late to observe in any more detail, because now Preciss, cowering from the chill inside a tipsy open porch, was knocking on the wood to the left of a panel of frosted glass. Almost immediately he heard a response.

Good God, how many of them were there? Had all four or five or six of the tenants rushed at the door simultaneously? Preciss had certainly heard the walls on either side of what must be a hallway brushed violently with the pace of the onslaught. The frosted glass lost its sheen like a giant lid closing over a massive eyeball. Preciss could see nothing through the pane - just a kind of fractured blur

of tan that put him bizarrely in mind of animal hide. Was there a sound like famished salivating?

Perhaps these were students, hungry through lack of funds; could the comic-book be a part of some new craze? Whatever the situation, Preciss was suddenly resolved to make his delivery before leaving as expediently as he'd arrived. *Shove the book through the letterbox*, he'd been instructed, and without further hesitation, he obliged. The slot was rusted, but just wide enough to accommodate the width of the package, and then swallow it.

Raucous scrabbling resulted - a multiple snatching of many hands? - during which Preciss was granted a moment to wonder whether he had acted wisely. He hadn't been paid in advance! Just at that moment, however, there was a rustling of paper as a white slip appeared under the splintered doorframe: the cheque. Preciss grabbed it and ran - down the bumpy path, across the Grove to his car. As he climbed behind the steering-wheel, he attempted to rid his mind of what he could only have imagined he'd heard from within the bungalow: an awful kind of glee, an inhuman species of laughter.

He started the engine, his hands shaking terribly. When he released the hand-brake, the car rolled forwards and Preciss felt as if he were fleeing a treacherous part of himself. The visit had been just another bit of business, cleanly completed; the weirdness he'd perceived could be attributed to his tiredness after another full day. Indeed, as he passed the gate to number 6, he was able to gaze through the foliage-free gap above. A light had gone on in the window beside the door. Yeah, this must be a penniless student pad. A poster was hanging at the pane, possibly in lieu of curtains. Was that a Picasso print? Undoubtedly the face behind the glass was obscenely disproportionate, the eyes far too wide apart to be an accurate depiction of the human form.

He didn't let up on the accelerator-pedal until he'd reached his bungalow on the outskirts of Skirby. There beneath a canopy of trees that had strayed from the nearby wood, Preciss climbed out of the car and advanced to his front entrance, twitching and meandering as he wrestled with his key. He poured himself a neat whisky from the bottle his parents had bought him the previous Christmas, and then set the shower running, washing until the blades of water sliced the fretfulness from his brain. Now he was ready to curl up alone in front of Radio 3, with a favourite of his many rare texts on his lap.

He'd read the whole of a chapter about Edwardian architecture in North Yorkshire before he remembered that he had left the cheque in the inside pocket of his suit-jacket. Controlling his thoughts by counting, Preciss went to retrieve the slip before - the grandfather clock in his hallway registering ten o'clock - retreating to his bedroom with a mug of malted milk. He'd struggled out of his dressing gown and then under the duvet in his pyjamas before he could muster enough courage to look.

He was being silly really, they'd had been nothing more than inane students. Of course the cheque would be honoured, even written out like this. The handwriting was almost unreadably spiky, as though delineated by a hand unsuited to pens. Perhaps the lad had been on mild drugs today - wouldn't that also explain his reluctance to reveal himself, and the incongruous voice? What was the customer's name? Preciss examined the erratic scrawl to the right of the paper - *Howard L. Philips*, was it? A decidedly old-fashioned monicker that! But the grand titles were again acceptable these days. If Preciss had ever had a child, he fancied that he would have christened him Frederick or George or perhaps Albert. Not that there'd ever been any much chance of this.

To lull himself to sleep he would flick through his fine collection of Victorian photography. He set the cheque on the bedside table beside his semi-drained mug and then slipped the book from beneath the mattress. Here were respect-



able females, their bodies bridled by sensible underwear. The women of the modern age had lost their dignity. When nothing was left to the imagination there was no frisson of delight. Oh, Preciss *had* dated in his time. But he hadn't been able to bear the moods, the unpredictability. And there had always been elements of his partners' bodies that he couldn't regulate; a wedge of cellulite would thoroughly repulse him. So why bother? Better to have a flawless image between the covers of a book than a hugely inferior surrogate between those of one's bed!

Now he'd grown aroused, and that wasn't good for his ruthlessly monitored equilibrium. He quickly snapped shut the book before finishing his drink and then flicking out the light. There was a hectic day ahead tomorrow; he needed rest. Once he'd returned the book to its hidey-hole, he shuffled down, his whirling head comforted by the pillow, and very soon fell soundly sleep.

He dreamed of fat. It was hanging from his arms, his throat, his painfully distended breast. He tried to close his legs, but was unable, so padded were his thighs. When he looked in a narrow body-length mirror he couldn't see the great majority of himself - just the centre strip of a face whose eyes had been pushed inexorably apart. Impelled to stagger back aghast, he felt his outer extremities restrained by an immovable something that he immediately turned his mammoth head to address. Walls: one each to the left and right, and two more at the front and rear. He was *filling* a room...

He awoke, oily sweat streaming across his scrawny frame. Daylight filled his window, spotlighting the alarm-clock that stood upon a chest of drawers at the foot of the bed. Preciss left it there so that he might arise promptly to silence its disagreeable shrieking. This morning, however, he had beaten the clock to the dawn - 6:25AM, the implacable dial indicated - and once he'd dressed hurriedly, he terminated the preset alarm with a single nudge of his thumb. After a breakfast of unsweetened muesli he fled to his car, and to whatever the day might guide his way. It only occurred to him that he'd left the cheque of Howard L. Philips on his bedside table when he was halfway through his journey. It didn't matter; there'd be no rush to process it.

The town was in the grip of festival fever. Preciss parked the car in his usual spot and then walked across the centre of Skirby, taking in the developing atmosphere. Various grunts and yowls yammered from the makeshift zoo. Gypsy-looking men and women scurried to and fro, fixing together fairground rides and gaming stalls and small tents in which futures might be read with mystical aplomb. It was all in the spirit of fun, though little of this ancient entertainment was appreciated nowadays - either that, or it was taken far too seriously. Still, when the visitors tired of the historical attractions, there was always shopping to occupy them. Preciss grinned broadly as he turned the corner to *The Book Shelf* - and it was then that his stomach plunged like a dead weight.

Had Hazel misunderstood yesterday and resolved to put in a full day? Of course that was ridiculous - a knee-jerk explanation - because he'd never offered her a key. So why was the door to the shop wide open? Preciss advanced to the threshold, his heart drumming. On the tight-weave carpet he spotted flakes of wood; the lock had been forced, he realized, and the metal tongue torn out of its chiselled housing. Good God, had somebody battered their way inside? He paced in, scrutinizing the stock. Though many of his displays had been barged askew, and one table turned completely turtle, nothing appeared to be obviously missing. Here were his shelves of first-editions, and there beneath his till was the cabinet full of undisturbed trade-catalogues. The door to the cellar remained clenched in its frame; there was little money in the safe anyway. This was not a professional job, more like sheer bloody-minded vandalism! Nevertheless, Preciss was not long in grabbing the phone to call the police and, after a frantic con-



sultation of the *Yellow Pages*, the first joiner his forefinger selected. Time whirled past before either turned up.

"Looks like a common break-in. But you say nothing you can see has been taken."

"No, not a thing. I've even done a rudimentary stock-take. Everything is here. And the cellar door - they didn't even touch that."

"They?"

"Pardon?"

The policeman's face grew quizzical. "You said 'they', sir?"

"Yeah," added his colleague, a woman perhaps half his age. "Why do you assume that there was more than just the one entrant?"

"Well, have you seen the door? It's been popped like a cork out of a bottle!"

"An' the funny thing is," contributed the joiner, illustrating with his screw-driver, "there's no sign o' it been bashed in. Whatever hit it must a' been 'ard - like them batterin'-rams you Blues use. But look: the door's unmarked! It's like summat soft 'as wopped it, summat soft an' *very* heavy."

"Maybe it's our friend from the zoo," the young policewoman suggested, but then laughed scornfully.

"What's that?" Preciss enquired.

"Oh, nothing for you to worry about, sir," the elder constable explained, with an uncomfortable smile on his otherwise saturnine face. "This morning we had a - well, a particularly distressed old chap, shall we say? - in the station. One of the homeless from Cheswick Street there. You know it?"

"Yes. I drive past it on my way home every evening."

"I see, Mr. Preciss. Well, during the early hours of the morning, this fella claims to have seen a - get this, ho, ho - a *baby elephant* thundering into Skirby centre!"

"Of course, what with the zoo in town, me and Constable Johnson checked it out. Nope, no animals at all escaped from the crew!"

"That's right, Constable Meers. Anyway, the guy was drunk as a bishop - I could smell it on his breath. But I knew this even before he got up close. I've been on the force a long time, and let me tell you, when they start suggesting that their elephant had *no trunk*, and a kind of *human face*, you figure these things out!"

After the police and the joiner had left - "Keep an eye out for any customer today behaving suspiciously," was the parting shot of the former, and "Give us a bell if y' fancy one of them alarms fittin'," from the latter - Preciss checked the time on the till: 11:25AM. Hazel was late. Quite apart from trouble from outside the shop, now there was rebellion within! He would allow her until noon, his lunchtime. Then he might telephone and relieve her of the position. Indeed, it was perhaps time that he sought somebody less visibly disagreeable.

As the minutes dripped by, the morning's steady stream of browsers began to resemble a deluge. There were many children among the throng, and Preciss found himself examining small hands carrying empty bags. One moment, while serving a legitimate middle-aged customer, he thought he'd seen a hardback copy of a book about wild animals go missing, but when he halted the teenager at the doorway there was nothing inside his coat. The young man had sworn at Preciss, an episode that had only contributed to his escalating sense of frustration. Where in hell was Hazel? She was needed *now*. Preciss plucked his notebook from beside the telephone, and then turned to the page on which he'd written his employee's details.

This was missing. The paper had been ripped along its margin, as though the thief had been seeking nothing more than Hazel Mock's address and contact number. Surely that wasn't why the shop had been burgled! Preciss found this notion so preposterous that before he could think to any useful degree, he had

drifted across the carpet of his premises and into the far corner, before the cellar door. There'd been a lull in his custom, and just now the shop was empty. Preciss stood alone, with only the accompanying strains of Berlioz on the stereo speakers - but that was when somebody entered from behind, their bulk straining against the limitations of the newly repaired doorframe.

Preciss saw it first in the mirror above his head: a vast presence blundering into his shop. The convex glass expanded its proportions, though the source was patently large enough to fill any reflective surface. That it was a monster, Preciss understood immediately, though at present he was madder at it than perhaps it might ever be with him. Snapping shut the notebook in his greasy palms, Preciss whirled to address his solitary member of staff.

"Where on earth have you been, Haze'?"

The woman was clearly aware of her lateness, and was also feeling guilty on account of it, because she kept her head bowed, the eyes trained on the arms full of junk food she supported on the flat of her colossal chest. Here were chocolate bars and crisps and sweet packets. With the extended shift in mind, had she spent the last hour shopping for provisions? Preciss wanted to be furious, but somehow Hazel's plaintive unresponsiveness got the better of him. Was she having a particularly bad day? In her plain pink ankle-length dress, she looked *swollen* - that was the least offensive way to describe her appearance. The lardy flesh of her bare arms and throat seemed to be under threat from the fat it only tenuously withheld. Good God, overnight had she grown *bigger*? Though Preciss was unable to see the whole of her face, he fancied that the muscle beneath her ears and the wadding at her temples had become inflated. Perhaps the female hormones were mutinous at present.

"Well, you're here now," Preciss commented at length, disinclined to become too involved in whatever was besieging Hazel. Quite apart from anything else, he found that her condition thoroughly repulsed him. "I'd like to take my dinner now. Keep a watch on the little 'uns, won't you."

As Preciss retreated to the head of the cellar staircase to collect his jacket, he reflected that neither of his final comments to Hazel had been particularly sensitive. Still, if she was unwilling to help herself - witness all the garbage she had brought along - why should anybody else be expected to? He crossed the shop to the doorway, loath to spare the woman behind his till so much as a further glance. In any case, she had somehow stooped to the cabinet beneath the counter. Was she hunting out a catalogue, or was she simply stashing her booty? Surely not the former; there wasn't a customer in sight just now. Preciss then left her to it, relieved to evade, if only for only an hour, her hideous presence.

The Skirby festival was in full swing. Purely on account of curiosity, Preciss felt he might stroll through its epicentre, to see what tradition might offer. Not a great deal, he rather hastily concluded. Most of the vendors were probably unshaven geezers and canny housewives in headdresses, eager to earn very modern money out of replica antiquities, mass-produced in the far east. Nobody had any respect for the past any more. Surely the middle age peasant hadn't actually eaten hotdogs and popcorn and candyfloss. Nevertheless, that's all by way of refreshment the visitor was afforded. (However, this did not prevent Preciss from munching at a burger in a bun.) He moved on, heading rather sullenly for the miniature zoo. At least with the animals you were sure of a real deal.

The reptile pad was a stone scoop inside the roofless trailer of a truck. Once Preciss had plugged a five-pence piece into the slot of a bucket marked ALL DONASHONS WELCUM, he surmounted a set of mobile steps and glared in through a kind of reinforced Perspex. Amid fake undergrowth, a crocodile snapped and slithered. Children to the left and right of Preciss *Oohed* and *Aahed*, though their parents seemed more unmoved than he was. The zebra-paddock

was a cage in which two of the creatures had been wedged head-to-rear, the better that every member of the surrounding crowd might pat a nose or ruffle a tail. Preciss shambled on, dull resignation weighing him down, and paused again only when he reached the elephant house (another trailer stripped of its roof). Something about the huge grey head lolling heftily over the side of the compound, its trunk swaying laxly, induced Preciss to hurry on, through the sparsely day-lit town, back to his shop.

He took a shortcut along several wide alleyways, the exertion a sudden shock to his scant wiry frame. Perhaps it was the blood in his ears that exacerbated the flurry of footfalls in his wake; they sounded tremendous, massive. When he turned to look, there was a queer blurring of perception. On the man who was jogging behind in this shadowed stretch of alley, Preciss's mind had idiotically superimposed the head of the festival elephant, only there was no trunk, and the eyes were perhaps - however fractionally - closer together, more human-esque. Did the pursuer's mammoth belly scrape both of the flanking brick walls?

Suddenly Preciss had emerged onto a pedestrian-packed pavement. As soon as he crossed the road to enter *The Book Shelf*, he cast a single treacherous glance back at the mouth of the alley. Save for a tangle of shadows that the restless sky had set in motion, it was dark and empty. Preciss decided to put aside his crazed imagining and ready himself for a busy afternoon of work.

The chance might be a fine thing! As Preciss attempted to step in through the vacant doorway he was delayed by the clumsy passage of a burly man in a flat cap. The customer appeared harried, muttering such things as "Ooh!" and "Urr!" Then he was gone, rapidly into the milling crowd. Preciss shook his head, wondering what it was with the world today, and then he entered his shop to discover.

The carpet was covered with catalogues, all of which splayed open, many of the spines strained beyond breaking resistance. When Preciss glanced at the till-point he noticed that there was nobody there guarding his money! He had to pick his way unsteadily across the impromptu paper flooring, in which he immediately detected a commonality: each of the alphabetically-arranged booklets was open at the section listing titles beginning with the letter N. *Neolithic weaponry*, heralded the subheading of one page - that of Preciss's guide to publications on war. *Neanderthal man*, indicated another: his anthropology directory. Additionally, there were *Nebula gases*, *Neptune's moons*, *Nefarious Gods*, and more. Here was *Necrophilia*. Something about this announcement unsettled Preciss, to such a degree that before he could make sense of any of this, he was around the counter and staring lividly at the space that ought to be occupied by his entrusted assistant.

But she *was* there. Despite her enormousness he'd been unable to spot her, since she was sitting sprawled on the floor, her head simultaneously chomping a king-size chewy-bar and rabidly scanning the page (the N division, Preciss would have wagered, if he'd been a gambling man) of another catalogue. Behind her, the wastepaper basket was crammed to overflowing with the discarded wrappings of her fearsome lunch. There were crumbs all around the base of the cabinet, chocolate smeared on the handles of the doors. Much the same might be observed of Hazel's convulsive face.

"Haze", what the - " Oh, there was nearly a swearword in him then. But Preciss was typically able to contain himself. "Just what *are* you doing?"

"Cwustomer. Not 'appy." The woman didn't switch her gaze from the sheet of book names. Her food-laden mouth worked as fitfully as her eyes. "Needs hus to try agwain."

Preciss looked around the showroom. Unsurprisingly it was empty. He turned and squatted in front of his employee. "Has somebody been in while I was out?"

"Yeah - while we was hall hout!" Hazel replied, chuckling maniacally as if in recognition of the abstruseness of her comment.

"Did he leave a name?" Preciss added, presupposing not only the gender of the caller, but also Hazel's answer.

"Nwope. Nwo name."

There was a pause, during which for the first time since the onset of the afternoon shift, the sales assistant glanced up at her boss.

*It was horrible.* Undeniably the flesh had broadened on a skull whose contours were scarcely visible within the haphazard mask of her face. The irises stood out a stark green against red-cracked whites, the pupils dilated to ferocious pricks. Thick lips parted to reveal yellowed teeth that were pressed into ulcerous gums, and as her jowls jangled jauntily, the woman spoke again.

"Bwut he said hin the dark rat he was ha customer of yours."

During the rest of the working day, matters grew worse. What few customers the shop attracted left almost immediately, though the skies had darkened considerably, with the danger of a thunderstorm becoming a dismaying possibility. The problem was not that the catalogues still layered the floor-space, since Preciss had himself re-filed these multiple booklets. Rather folk were clearly perturbed by the sounds elicited by Hazel as, still flicking doggedly through the reference literature, she continued to feed her insatiable appetite. She hadn't stopped eating for hours! At three o'clock she stomped out for her fifteen-minute break and returned in half the allowance, carrying a fresh supply of rations. Preciss had already emptied the bin behind the till twice in the afternoon, and now it was full again! Dear God, he only paid her around £75 per week; had she spent half of that today on junk food?

This *had* to be a medical condition. Wasn't there something called the thyroid gland, and couldn't compulsive eating be caused by this being either over- or underactive? Preciss wasn't sure, and as time ticked on, he found himself scouring the medical shelves in search of a book that might inform him. Anything, in fact, that would get him away from the till-point and the frenzied activity of his ravenous assistant! Was she scrutinizing yet another list of books whose titles began with the letter N? Probably, because more of the catalogues lay flat on the counter. Whatever the case, Preciss couldn't wait for the day to end. He would ring Hazel on Monday morning and suggest that maybe it wasn't a good idea for her to remain in his employ -

Suddenly Preciss's resolve faltered. How could he call when her telephone number had gone missing?

Who had taken the page from the notebook? The burglar? If so, who had *that* been? The same 'unhappy nameless' customer who'd complained to Hazel while everybody else was 'out in the dark'? Had the woman meant that the man had visited her in the night? He would certainly know her address; was all this somehow linked to her monstrous behaviour?

These questions harassed Preciss until near closing-time. On several occasions, between regretful forays of customers who stepped in out of the grim early-evening, he'd steeled himself to cross-examine his assistant, to allay his creeping fear. But whenever he was about to make his move, he'd seen the woman in the peripheries of his vision. Had the great white mass of her twitched out of shape, as if on the verge of bloating inhumanly, striving beyond the constraints of what was currently her merely modest figure?

Then there was the dark shape beyond the window behind the till. Preciss couldn't be sure, since every time he stared that way there was nothing, but at the end of the alley across the road, he sensed movement: a lolling head, and two elusive winks that were like eyes, but much too far apart. Was the shop being watched? And by *what*?

It was time to shut *The Book Shelf*. Exhaling uneasily, Preciss made for the door and then locked out any more customers so that he might cash-up in safety. A storm was brewing, the first soft patter of rain flicking against his windows, but if he was quick he could be at his car before the full meat of it. He turned for the counter before pacing around Hazel, who was busy with another catalogue and a six-strong pack of doughnuts. Preciss twisted the key in the till, and as he retrieved the moneybags from the cabinet below, the drawer flew open with a chink of coins. He had no intention of counting out a float this evening, nor of itemizing his cheques and card sales. Better to pile it all in the cloth bags, slam the loot in the safe, and then beat a hasty retreat. He could tackle the resultant fiscal mess next week, along with the cheque of Howard L. Philips that he'd bring from his house.

Oh, and just now he wanted that home so badly...

"Come along, Haze', put the catalogues away," Preciss instructed, pouring out the plastic trays of the till. "We're finished for the day."

Nothing could have prepared him for the vehemence of her response.

"But the customer!" she yelled with a mix of anger and fear, spraying chunks of semi-chewed foodstuff. "We can't leave until we find hit. He'll be so mard!"

Something about her words persuaded Preciss to glance unhesitatingly across the road and into the black mouth of the alley. There was nothing there, only a kind of insidious *absence*. Nevertheless, a shiver scuttled the length of his spine as the skies opened wider to unleash a belch of raw thunder. The storm was underway. The town appeared suddenly deserted.

Preciss returned his gaze to his wilful assistant.

"Come along! We'll get wet!"

"Least hof our worries, twust me."

Whatever could she mean? But his patience had run thin. Without further hesitation, he snatched away the catalogue that Hazel had been perusing. Before he clapped the covers shut he was able to read what lay at the head of the one page.

*Necro -*

Now a memory of his experience yesterday filled his mind. Something like a tape-loop in his ears played back the sluggish speech he'd heard on the telephone. There'd been a comic-book, a delivery, an spasmodically signed cheque. And then the dream...

Preciss added the errant catalogue to a pile of them before slamming the lot back inside his cabinet. He locked the door quickly. Then he gathered the bags of cash.

"I'm going into the cellar now to put away the money." He drew breath to speak his last. "Then we're leaving."

"NWOOO!!!"

Hazel's fat quivered horrendously as her face registered rage. Was she now straining her dress to the point of ripping? Somehow her skin looked thinner, rife with bluish capillaries. Perhaps she was blowing out her cheeks - her head was suddenly as broad as a football - in preparation of adding yet more nonsensical words. Suddenly there was a sound like inexorably tearing gristle.

But that was when Preciss, revolted and determined in equal measure, turned away and darted for the door to the cellar. As he keyed the latch, he heard a magnificent sound of wood cracking from behind him. Good God, had the woman broken open the cabinet? If so, what with - her bare podgy hands? But he didn't care to chase any of the details. The sooner he could set the money in the safe and then himself and his assistant out of the front door, the less endangered he would feel from the horrors he was only just beginning to suspect. He thumped down the steps and then across the concrete slab of the cellar floor. He

did his thing with the safe before re-assaulting the staircase. He'd reached halfway up the flight when an incredible noise from above powered him to halt.

"YOG-SOTHOTH! SHAGGAI! CTHULHU!"

The voice was like the man's on the telephone - deep, echoic, monumental - though didn't this one possess an absurdly female timbre?

Then the stone-steps at Preciss's feet began to shake as something proceeded to thump monstrosly at the fragile earth.

Was that an effect of the storm? A second roll of the mighty thunder? No, this was closer, infinitely more terrible. The whole of the shop seemed to be moving to the beat of the racket. Many things shifted across the unseen carpet above, clawed metal feet scraping at fabric. Were these his shop fittings, blundered out of place? Gargantuan thuds shook the plaster loose from the underside of the showroom's floor, the ceiling of the cellar; this shattered in ragged clumps on the concrete below. Preciss's vision grew distorted, the head of the stairwell trembling as if in a process of demolition. Then there was a hiatus, a fragmentary silence, during which Preciss suddenly understood that what he saw was not a fault of his eyes. His premises were being shaken apart.

"CTHULHU! CTHULHU! CTHULHU!"

So Preciss had delivered the wrong title, and in retaliation the recipient had recruited his own assistant. The man - always assuming that he could still be described thus - had poached Hazel surreptitiously when in fact he could have taken her with Preciss's blessing! Despite his situation, the shop-owner couldn't suppress laughter. Was he growing delirious, the sanest way of accepting his realizations? He was calm even when he realised that he knew why Howard L. Philips had contacted a *non-fiction* specialist. The *Necronomicon* was *real* - a book of hideous import. Why, one only had to look at the effect one of its cohorts was having on young Hazel to reach that conclusion. *What I have could be contagious*, the customer had warned, and that had been no lie.

"YOG-SOTHOTH! CTHULHU! SHAGGAI!"

As severed halves of book catalogues, some of them as thick as telephone directories and surely beyond the tearing capacity of even the ablest human, rained down upon Preciss, he worked his way upstairs, towards the doorway out of the cellar. Then he began giggling, hysteria bringing him to a halt.

By some quirk of architecture the convex mirror was still hanging in its place in the corner. The outwardly bulging glass exploded all that its reflective depths drew in, though in this instance, the field was limited. It took in only one subject.

Hazel. The huge white naked continent of her.

Finally she filled the shop. From wall to wall, window to window, there was nothing else in the mirror. Had his stock been crushed aside, jammed along the broad extremities of this undisciplined obscenity?

"CTHULHU! CTHULHU! CTHULHU!" released a black man-sized slit on the ocean of lard in the glass: the awful starving mouth.

Preciss felt suddenly sickened. His only consolation was the knowledge that although what had been the woman still stamped and shuffled in her makeshift cage, she couldn't yet reach him here in the cellar. But worse was the thought of an eventual escape. What dark thing awaited him outside in the suddenly enfeebled world? How would the customer, hunting Preciss down with animal intelligence, go about demanding his money back?

But Preciss was to be spared this indignity, because then with a stupendous crash, the floor of the showroom caved in, and his face was pressed inexorably into a sallow naked flabby tissue that immediately precluded all sight and thought and movement.

It was several minutes before the moist lips found him and the monster continued to eat. ❧



## WALPURGIS NIGHT AT THE WITCH-HOUSE

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. . . The passage through the vague abysses would be frightful, for the Walpurgis-rhythm would be vibrating, and at last he would have to hear that hitherto-veiled cosmic pulsing which he so mortally dreaded."

- H.P. Lovecraft, "Dreams In the Witch-House"



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- H.P. Lovecraft, from Selected Letters, No. 679 (Jan. 13, 1934)

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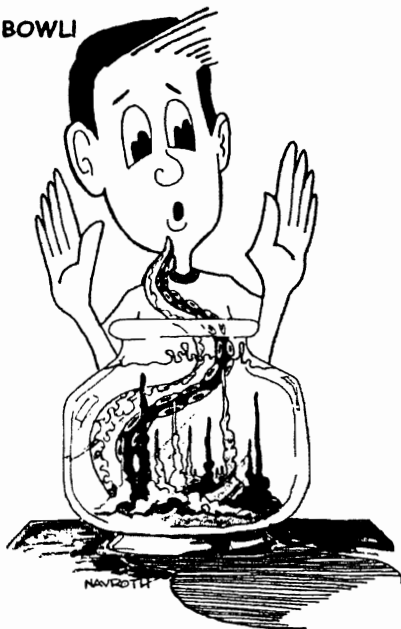
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