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WEIRDBOOK THREE

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Information for Contributors: Type all manuscripts on one side, double spaced, using good bond paper. Return-addressed, stamped envelopes should accompany all submissions. Payment: \$1.00 per published page for stories and artwork, on publication. Editor's prizes are awarded for fiction (\$10.00) and poetry (\$5.00) on publication of the succeeding issue.

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Editorial

We are continuing our policy of publishing an issue of WEIRDBOOK about once every eight or ten months until the size of our subscription list has materially increased. Again we ask that you mention WEIRDBOOK to your friends, buy subscriptions as presents, review issues of the magazine in other amateur magazines, or mention it in your own magazines or in letters to other ones. Copies of the first issues continue to be available, and may be purchased by subscribers at the subscription price (or may be added to subscriptions).

The editor's prize for fiction in WEIRDBOOK TWO goes to Joseph Payne Brennan for his tale CITY OF THE SEVEN WINDS.

We are omitting a poetry prize this time since the three top poems (as determined by reader voting) were ineligible, two being reprints and the third being by your editor under a pseudonym. Instead the money goes to H. Warner Munn for RETURN OF THE SPY, a close second to the Brennan story. Honorable mention to Leo Kelley's LIKE FATHER, which was also well received.

Reader voting definitely influences the giving of the editor's prize. If you wish to cast your ballot please vote for the top three stories and the top three poems (ties are allowed) in order.

The next issue of WEIRDBOOK WILL feature stories by H. Warner Munn, Ray Jones, Walter Quednau, Daniel W. Preston (part 3 of his trilogy THE TOWN), Gregory Francis, and James Wade, among others. Mr. Wade has recently had a rather humorous short story in THE ARKHAM COLLECTOR and a long novelette in the Derleth anthology, TALES THE CTHULHU MYTHOS.

Since the first issue of WEIRDBOOK shyly appeared before the vast world (mailing 500 copies of it was like dropping them into the ocean with a lead brick attached--only two responses after a month!), interesting things have happened to weird fiction. Most startling of all, a professional magazine, COVEN 13 HAS APPEARED ON THE NEWSSTANDS. For well over a year I tried to think of an original name for a weird magazine, and failed, so I have to give them credit, first of all, for originality. The typography is excellent, although some of the illustrations, especially in issue no. 1, are unprofessional. But the stories are definitely not unprofessional--professional, in fact, is the word for them. A little slick, maybe, but quite palatable. The standard in no. 1. is fairly high, with the novelette by Alan Caillou being perhaps most outstanding. (The serial Unknown, in five parts, I have not yet read.) The stories are fairly traditional, except for THE POSTMAN ALWAYS. In the second issue the trend is reversed, the only traditional story being Harlan Ellison's THE ROCK GOD. This is, in my opinion, the best story in the first two issues. The others are weird fantasy versions of "new wave science fiction," which I don't usually like in its extreme forms, and I was not particularly fond of these--but they are interesting and competently written. If the editors can manage to walk the line between the two types of material exhibited in their first two issues, they will have a unique personality and a successful, well-balanced magazine, appealing to a large number of fantasy and weird story fans. Definitely recommended.

Another professional magazine is ANUBIS. The first two issues had already appeared before WEIRDBOOK ONE WAS published, but I had not seen them. I still do not have number one, but on the basis of number two I can't say I'm sorry, since that issue is pretty bad. On the other hand, issues 3 and 4 are quite good and issue 5 (if it ever appears) looks like a real winner. Three stories well worth reading (THE GATE OF DIMINISHINGNESS, by Andrew E. Rothovius, THE DIARY OF PROF. LEHAN, by R. J. Willis, and THE ALTAR OF FLAME, by Lyle Gaulding) and a fascinating article by E. Hoffman Price highlight issue number 3, with several good things in number 4, including a really fine story by Robert M. Slater, THE HUDDLESTONE HORROR (reminds me of Fritz Lieber), and a strange, indescribable thing called DEAD BONE, by Vaughn Bode. Number 5 is to contain previously unpublished work by Clark Ashton Smith. Subscription rate is \$2.00 for four issues; GOLDEN GOBLIN PRESS, Box 323, Arlington, Va. 22210

W. Paul Ganley

USURP THE NIGHT

by Robert E. Howard

Marjory was crying over the loss of Bozo, her fat Maltese who had failed to appear after his usual nightly prowls. There had been a peculiar epidemic of feline disappearances in the neighborhood recently, and Marjory was disconsolate. And because I never could stand to see Marjory cry, I sallied forth in search of the missing pet, though I had little hope of finding him. Every so often some human pervert gratifies his sadistic mania by poisoning animals of which people are fond, and I was certain that Bozo and the score of more of his kind which had vanished in the past few months had fallen victims to some such degenerate.

Leaving the lawn of the Ash home, I crossed several vacant weed-grown lots and came to the last house on that side of the street - a run-down, rambling estate which had recently been occupied - though not rejuvenated - by a Mr. Stark, a lonely, retiring sort of a man from the East. Glancing at the rambling old house, rising among the great oak trees and set back a hundred yards or so from the street, it occurred to me that Mr. Stark might possibly be able to cast some light on the present mystery.

I turned into the sagging, rusty iron gate and went up the cracked walk, noting the general delapidation of the place. Little was known about the owner, and though he had been a neighbor of mine for some six months, I had never seen him at close range. It was rumored that he lived alone, even without servants, though he was a cripple. An eccentric scholar of taciturn nature and with money to indulge his whims, was the general opinion.

The wide porch, half covered with ivy, crossed the whole front of the house and flanked both sides. As I prepared to lift the old-fashioned door knocker, I heard a limping, dragging step and turned to face the owner of the house who came hobbling about the corner of the porch. He was a striking figure, despite his deformity. His face was that of an ascetic and a thinker, with a high magnificent forehead, heavy black brows that almost met, and shaded deep dark eyes, piercing and magnetic. His nose was thin and high-bridged, hooked like the beak of some bird of prey, his lips were thin and firmly set, his jaw massive and jutting, almost brutal in its lines of uncompromising resolution. He was

not a tall man, even had he stood erect, but his thick short neck and massive shoulders promised power denied by his posture. For he moved slowly and with apparent difficulty, leaning on a crutch, and I saw that one leg was drawn up in an abnormal way, and on the foot he wore a shoe such as is worn on a club-foot.

He looked at me inquiringly and I said, "Good morning, Mr. Stark, sorry to have troubled you. I'm Michael Strang. I live in the last house on the other side of the street. I just dropped in to learn if you'd seen anything of a big Maltese cat recently.

His eyes bored into me.

"What makes you think I might know anything about a cat?" he asked in a deep-timbred voice.

"Nothing," I confessed, feeling rather foolish. "It's my fiance's cat, though, and she's broken-hearted over losing it. As you're her closest neighbor on this side, I thought there was a bare chance that you might have seen the animal."

"I understand," he smiled pleasantly. "No, I'm very sorry I can't help you. I heard some cats caterwauling among my trees last night - in fact, I heard them too distinctly, for I had one of my spells of insomnia - but I've seen nothing of the cat you mention. I am sorry to hear of its loss. Won't you come in?"

Rather curious to know more of my neighbor, I accepted his invitation and he showed me into a study redolent of tobacco and book leather. I glanced curiously at the volumes which lined the walls to the ceiling, but had no opportunity to examine their titles, as my host proved surprisingly talkative. He seemed glad of my call and I knew that his visitors were very rare, if any at all. I found him a highly cultured man, a charming conversationalist, and a most courteous host. He produced whiskey-and-soda from an antique lacquered cabinet whose door seemed to consist of a highly-polished, solid silver plate, and as we sipped our drinks he talked of various subjects in a most interesting manner. Learning from a chance remark that I was deeply interested in the anthropological researches of Professor Hendryk Brooler, he discussed the subject at some length and clarified several points on which I was extremely hazy.

Fascinated by the man's evident erudition, it was nearly an hour before I could tear myself away, though I felt exceedingly guilty when I thought of poor Marjory waiting for news of the missing Bozo. I took my departure, promising to return soon, and as I went out the front door, it occurred to me that, after all, I had learned nothing about my host. He

had carefully kept the conversation in impersonal channels. I also decided that though he knew nothing about Bozo, the presence of a cat in the house might be an advantage. Several times as we talked, I had heard the scampering of something overhead, though on second thought the noise had not particularly resembled the movements of rodents. It had sounded more like a tiny kid or lamb, or some other small hoofed animal, walking across the floor.

A thorough search of the neighborhood revealing no trace of the missing Bozo, I reluctantly returned to Marjory, bearing, as a partial consolation, a waddling, bench-legged bulldog with a face like a gargoyle and as loyal a heart as ever beat in a canine breast. Marjory wept over the lost cat and christened her new vassal Bozo in memory of the departed, and I left her romping with him on the lawn as if she had been ten instead of twenty.

The memory of my conversation with Mr. Stark remained very vivid in my mind and I visited him again next week. Again I was impressed at the deep and varied knowledge which was his. I purposely led the conversation into many different channels, and in each he showed himself master of the subject, going a little deeper into each than I had ever heard anyone go. Science, the arts, economics, philosophy, he was equally versed in all of them. Charmed as I was by his flow of conversation, I nevertheless found myself listening for the curious noise I had heard before, and I was not disappointed. Only this time the tapping sound was louder than before and I decided that his unknown pet was growing. Perhaps, I thought, he kept it in the house fearing it would meet the same fate as the vanished cats, and as I knew the house had no basement or cellar, it was natural that he would keep it in some attic room. A lonely and friendless man, it was probable that he felt a great deal of affection for it, whatever it might be.

We talked late into the night, and indeed, it was nearing dawn before I forced myself to take my leave. As before, he urged me to repeat the visit soon. He apologized for his inability to return my call, as he said his infirmity prevented his doing more than limp about his estate for a little exercise early in the morning before the heat of the day set in.

I promised to call again soon, but in spite of my desire to do so, business prevented me for some weeks, during which time I became aware of one of those minor neighborhood mysteries which occasionally spring up in some restricted locality, usually to die

away unsolved. Dogs, hitherto unmolested by the unknown destroyer of the cats, now began to vanish likewise and their owners were in constant fury.

Marjory picked me up in her little roadster as I was walking up from town, and I knew something had occurred to upset her. Bozo, her constant companion, grinned dragonishly at me and jovially lapped my face with a long wet tongue.

"Somebody tried to kidnap Bozo last night, Michael," she said, her deep dark eyes shadowed with worry and indignation. "I just bet it was the horrid beast who's been doing away with peoples' pets - "

She gave me the details and it appeared that the mysterious prowler had found Bozo too much of a handful. The family had heard a sudden uproar late in the night, and the sound of a savage struggle, mingled with the maddened roaring of the big dog. The sallyed forth and arrived at Bozo's kennel, just too late to apprehend the visitor whose sounds of flight they distinctly heard. The dog was straining his chain, his eyes blazing, every hair on his body standing on end, and his deep throat thundering his defiance. But of the attacker there was no trace; he had evidently broken away and escaped over the high garden wall.

I think the incident must have made Bozo suspicious toward strangers, for it was only the next morning that I was called on to rescue Mr. Stark from him.

As I have said, the Stark house was the last one on his side of the street, and mine was the last on my side. It was, in fact, the last house on the street, lying some three hundred yards from the lower corner of Stark's wide, tree-covered lawn. On the other corner that faced the street - the corner toward the Ash home - there stood a grove of small trees in one of the vacant lots which separated the Stark estate from the Ash place. As I was passing this grove on my way to the Ash home, I heard a sudden outcry - a man's voice shouting for help and the infuriated snarling of a dog.

Plunging through the clump I saw a huge dog leaping repeatedly up at a figure which clung to the lower branches of one of the trees. The dog was Bozo and the man was Mr. Stark, who, in spite of his crippled condition, had managed to scramble up into the tree just out of reach. Horrified and astounded, I sprang to the rescue and hauled Bozo away from his intended victim with some difficulty and sent him sulkily homeward. I sprang to assist Mr. Stark out of the tree, and hardly had he touched the earth when he collapsed completely.

However, I could find no sign of injury on him, and he breathlessly assured me - between

gasps - that he was quite all right except for the shock of fright and exhaustion. He said that he was resting in the shade of the grove, having tired himself by too long a walk about his estate, when the dog suddenly appeared and attacked him. I apologized profusely for Bozo, assured him it would not happen again, and helped him to his study where he reclined on a divan and sipped a whiskey-and-soda which I prepared for him from ingredients found in the lacquered cabinet. He was very reasonable about the matter, assured me that no harm had been done, and attributed the attack to the fact that he was a stranger to the dog.

Suddenly, as he talked, I again heard the tap-tap of hoofs upstairs, and I was startled; the sound was so much heavier than before, though somewhat muffled. It was such a sound as a yearling might make walking about over a rug-covered floor. My curiosity was so much aroused I could hardly keep from inquiring as to the source of the noise, but naturally refrained from such presumption, and feeling that Mr. Stark needed rest and quiet, I left as soon as he was comfortable.

It was about a week later that the first of the blood-chilling mysteries took place. Again it was an unexplained disappearance, but this time it was no cat or dog. It was a three-year-old tot who was seen playing in a lot near its own yard just before sun-down, and was seen no more by mortal eyes. No need to say that the town was up in alarm. Some people had thought to see a malevolent meaning behind the disappearance of the animals, and now this pointed indisputably to some sinister hand working out of sight.

The police scoured town and country, but no trace of the missing child was found, and before the fortnight was over, four more had vanished in various parts of the city. Their families received no letters demanding ransom, no sign of any hidden enemy taking this revenge. The silence simply yawned and swallowed the victims and remained unbroken. Frantic people appealed to the civil authorities in vain, since they had done all they could and were as helpless as the public.

There was talk of asking the governor to send soldiers to patrol the city, and men began to go armed and to hasten back to their families long before nightfall. Dark whispers of supernatural agencies began to make the rounds, and folk said forebodingly that no mortal man could so snatch away children and remain unsuspected and unknown. But there was no insurmountable mystery in their abducting. It was impossible to patrol every inch of a large city and to keep an eye always on every child. They played

in the lonely parks and stayed out until after dusk at work or play, despite warnings and commands, and ran home through the gathering darkness. It was no supernatural thing for the unknown kidnapper, skulking in the shadows, to reach an arm from among the trees or bushes of park or playground and snatch a child strayed from its playmates. Even on lonely streets and dim back-alleys the thing could be done. The horror lay, not so much in the method of stealing, but in the fact that they were stolen. No sane or normal motive seemed to lie behind it all. An aura of fear hung like a pall over the city, and through this pall shot an icy wave of shuddering horror.

In one of the more secluded parks near the outskirts of the city, a young couple, indulging in what is popularly known as a "petting party," were frozen by a terrible scream from a black clump of trees, and not daring to move, saw a stooped and shadowy figure emerge, bearing on its back the unmistakable body of a man. The horror vanished among the trees, and the couple, frenzied with terror, started their auto and raced wildly for the lights of town. They tremblingly gasped out their story to the chief of police and in a short time a cordon of patrolmen had been thrown about the park. But it was too late; the unknown murderer had made good his - or its - escape. In the grove from which the slayer had been seen to emerge, was found a disreputable old hat, crumpled and blood-stained, and one of the officers recognized it as one which had been worn by a vagabond picked up by him the day before and subsequently released. The wretch must have been sleeping in the park when doom fell upon him.

But no other clue was found. The hard springy soil and thick grass gave up no footprint, and the mystery was as much a mystery as ever. And now the fear that hung over the whole city grew almost unbearable in its intensity. I often thought of Mr. Stark, living alone and crippled in that sombre old house, practically isolated, and often feared for him. I made it a point to drop by his place almost every day to assure myself that he was safe. These visits were very brief. Mr. Stark seemed preoccupied, and though he was affable enough, I felt it better not to intrude myself upon him. I did not, indeed, enter his house at all during this period, as I invariably found him hobbling about the lawn or reclining in a hammock between two great oak trees. Either his infirmity was troubling him more than usual, or the horrid mystery which hung over the town had affected him likewise. He seemed tired most of the time, and his eyes were deeply shadowed as if from mental stress or physical weariness.

A few days after the disappearance of the tramp, the city authorities warned all citizens to be on their guard, as, calculating from past events, it was feared that the unknown killer would strike again soon, possibly that night. The police force had been increased to nearly twice its regular number, and a score of citizens were sworn in as special deputies. Grim-faced men patrolled the streets heavily armed, and as night fell, a suffocating tension settled over the whole city.

It was shortly after dark when my telephone rang. It was Stark.

"I wonder if you'd mind coming over," he said, and his voice sounded rather apologetic. "My cabinet door is jammed and I can't get it open. I wouldn't have bothered you, but it's too late to get a workman here to open it - all the shops are closed. My sleeping powders are in the cabinet, and if I can't get them, I'll spend a wretched night; I feel all the symptoms of an attack of insomnia."

"I'll be right over," I promised.

A brisk walk took me to his door, where he let me in with much apologies.

"I'm frightfully sorry to have caused you all this trouble," he said, "but I haven't the physical strength to pry the door open, and without my sleeping powders, I'd toss and tumble the whole night through."

There was no electric wiring in his house, but several large candles on the table shed sufficient light. I bent before the lacquered cabinet and began to wrestle with the door. I have mentioned the silver plate of which the door appeared to be made. As I worked my gaze fell on this plate which was so highly polished it reflected objects like a mirror. And suddenly my blood chilled. Over my shoulder I saw the reflected countenance of John Stark, unfamiliar and hideously distorted. He held a mallet in his hand which he lifted as he stealthily approached me. I rose suddenly, wheeling to face him. His face was as inscrutable as ever, except for an expression of faint surprise at my abruptness. He extended the mallet.

"Perhaps you might use this," he suggested.

I took it without a word, still keeping my eyes on him, and striking one terrific blow, literally burst the cabinet door open. His eyes widened in surprise, and for a moment we faced each other unspeaking. There was an electric tenseness in the air, then above my head I heard again the clumping of hoofs. And a strange chill, like a nameless fright, stole over me - for I could have sworn that it was nothing smaller than a horse which tramped about in the rooms overhead!

Throwing the mallet aside, I turned without a word and hastened out of the house, nor did

I breathe entirely easy until I had gained my own library. There I sat pondering, my mind a chaotic jumble. Had I made a fool of myself? Had not that look of fiendish craft on John Stark's face as he stole up behind me been merely a distortion of reflection? Had my imagination run away with me? Or - and here dark fears whispered at the back of my brain - had the reflection in that silver plate been all that saved my life? Was John Stark a madman? I shook with a ghastly thought. Was it he who was responsible for the recent detestable crimes? The theory was untenable. What possible reason could a refined, elderly scholar have in abducting children and murdering tramps? Again my fears whispered that there might be a motive - whispered shuddersomely of a ghastly laboratory where a crazed scientist carried out horrible experiments with human specimens.

Then I laughed at myself. Even supposing John Stark to be a madman, the recent crimes were physically beyond his power. Only a man of almost superhuman strength and agility could carry off strong young children soundlessly and bear the corpse of a murdered man on his shoulders. Certainly no cripple could do it, and it was up to me to go back to Mr. Stark's house and apologize for my foolish actions - and then a sudden thought struck me like a dash of ice-cold water - something which at the time had impressed itself on my sub-conscious mind, but which I had not consciously noticed - when I had turned to face John Stark before the lacquered cabinet, he had been standing upright, without his crutch.

With a bewildered shake of my head, I dismissed the matter from my mind and, picking up a book, settled myself to read. The volume, selected at random, was not one calculated to rid my mind of haunting shadows. It was the extremely rare Dusseldorf edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*, called the Black Book, not because of its iron-clasped leather bindings, but because of its dark contents. Opening the volume at random, I began idly to read the chapter on the summoning of daemons out of the Void. More than ever I sensed a deep and sinister wisdom behind the author's incredible assertions as I read of the unseen worlds of unholy dimensions which Von Junzt maintains press, horrific and dimly guessed, on our universe, and of the blasphemous inhabitants of those Outer Worlds, which he maintains at times burst terribly through the Veil at the bidding of evil sorcerers, to blast the brains and feast on the blood of men.

Reading, I drowsed, and from my doze awoke with a cold fear lying upon my soul like a cloud. I had dreamed fitfully and in my dream I had heard Marjory calling to me faintly, as

if from across misty and terrible abysses, and in her voice was a blood-freezing fear as if she were menaced by some horror beyond all human understanding. I found myself shaking as with ague and cold sweat stood upon my body as in a nightmare.

Taking up the telephone, I called up the Ash home. Mrs. Ash answered and I asked to speak to Marjory.

Her voice came back over the wire tinged with anxiety, "Why, Michael, Marjory has been gone for more than an hour! I heard her talking over the phone, and then she told me you wanted her to meet you by the grove on the corner of the Stark place, to take a ride. I thought it was funny that you didn't drive by the house as you always do, and I didn't like the idea of her going out alone, but I supposed you knew best - you know we always put so much faith in you, Michael - so I let her go. You don't think - you don't think - anything - anything -"

"Oh no!" I laughed, but my laughter was hollow, my throat dry. "Nothing's happened, Mrs. Ash. I'll bring her home, right away."

As I hung up the receiver and turned away, I heard a sound outside the door - a scratching sound accompanied by a low whimper. Such a small thing can be vested with unknown fear at times - my hair prickled and my tongue clove to my palate. Expecting to see I knew not what, I flung open the door. A cry broke from my lips as a dusty, blood-stained shape limped in and staggered against my legs. It was Marjory's dog, Bozo. He had evidently been brutally beaten. One ear was split open and his hide had been bruised and torn in half a dozen places.

He seized my trouser leg and pulled me toward the door, growling deep in his throat. My mind a seething hell, I prepared to follow him. The thought of a weapon entered my mind, and at the same instant I remembered I had loaned my revolver to a friend who feared to traverse the streets at night unarmed. My gaze fell upon a great broadsword hanging on the wall. The weapon had been in the family for eight centuries and had let blood on many a battlefield since it first hung at the girdle of a Crusading ancestor.

I tore it from the scabbard where it had rested undisturbed for a hundred years and the cold blue steel glimmered unstained in the light. Then I followed the growling dog into the night. He ran staggeringly but swiftly, and I was hard put to keep up with him. He went in the direction my inmost intuition had told me he would go - toward the house of John Stark.

We approached the corner of the Stark estate and I caught Bozo's collar and drew

him back, as he started across the crumbling wall. I knew enough. John Stark was the fiend incarnate who had laid the cloud of terror over the city. I recognized the technique - a telephone call which lured the victim forth. I had walked into his trap, but chance had intervened. So he had chosen the girl - it would not be difficult to imitate my voice. Homicidal maniac or crazy experimenter, whatever he might be, I knew that somewhere in that dark house Marjory lay, a captive or a corpse. And I did not intend that Stark should have the opportunity to shoot me down as I walked in upon him openly. A black fury gripped me, bringing with it the craft that extreme passion often brings. I was going into that dark house, and I was going to hew John Stark's head from his body with the blade that in old times had severed the necks of Saracens and pirates and traitors.

Ordering Bozo to keep behind me, I turned from the street and went swiftly and cautiously along the side wall until I was even with the back part of the house. A glow above the trees to the east warned me that the moon was coming up, and I wished to get into the house before the light might betray me to any watcher. I climbed the tumble-down wall, and with Bozo following me like a shadow, I crossed the lawn, keeping close under the shadows of the trees.

Silence gripped the dark house as I stole up upon the rear porch, my blade ready. Bozo sniffed at the door and whined deep in his throat. I crouched, waiting for anything. I knew not what peril lurked in that mysterious unlighted building, or whether I was daring one lone madman or a gang of murderers. I lay no claim to courage, but the black rage in my brain swept all thought of personal fear away. I tried the door cautiously. I was not very familiar with the house, but believed the door led into a store-room. It was locked on the inside. I drove my sword-point between the door and the jamb and pried, carefully but powerfully. There was no such thing as breaking the ancient blade, forged with forgotten craft, and as I exerted all my strength, which is not inconsiderable, something had to give. It was the old-fashioned lock. With a groan and crash that seemed horribly loud in the stillness, the door sagged open.

I strained my eyes into the utter blackness as I stole forward. Bozo passed me silently and vanished in the gloom. Utter silence reigned, then the clink of a chain sent a chill of nameless fear through me. I swung about, hair bristling, sword lifted - and then I heard the muffled sound of a woman sobbing.

I dared to strike a match. Its flare showed me the great dusty room, piled high with nondescript junk - and showed me a pitiful girlish

form crumpled in a corner. It was Marjory and Bozo was whining and licking her face. Stark was nowhere to be seen, and the one other door leading from the store-room was closed. I stepped to it quickly and slid the old-fashioned bolt. Then I lighted a stump of a candle which I found upon a table, and went quickly to Marjory. Stark might come in upon us unexpectedly through the outer door, but I trusted to Bozo to warn me of his coming. The dog showed no signs of nervousness or anger to indicate the near presence of a lurking enemy, but now and then he looked up toward the ceiling and growled deep and ominously.

Marjory was gagged and her hands tied behind her. A small chain about her slim waist shackled her to a heavy staple in the wall, but the key was in the lock. I freed her in an instant and she threw her arms convulsively about me, shaking as with an ague. Her wide dark eyes stared unseeingly into mine with a horror that shook my soul and froze my blood with a nameless grisly premonition.

"Marjory!" I panted, "What in God's name has happened? Don't be afraid. Nothing shall harm you. Don't look like that! In Heaven's name, girl - "

"Listen!" she whispered shuddering. "The tramp - the terrible tramp of the hoofs!"

My head jerked up, and Bozo, every bristle on end, cringed, sheer terror blazing in his eyes. Above our heads sounded the clomping of hoofs. But now the footfalls were gigantic - elephantine. The house trembled to their impact. A cold hand touched my spine.

"What is it, in God's name?" I whispered. She clung closer to me.

"I don't know! I dare not try to guess! We must go! We must run away! *It* will come down for us - *it* will burst *its* prison. For hours I've listened to *it* - "

"Where is Stark?" I muttered.

"Up - up there!" she shuddered. "I'll tell you quickly - then we must run! I thought your voice sounded strange when you called me up, but I came to meet you, as I thought. I brought Bozo with me because I was afraid to go out in the dark alone. Then when I was in the shadow of the grove, something sprang upon me. Bozo roared and leaped, but he struck him down with a heavy club and struck him again and again as he lay writhing in the dust. All the time I was struggling and trying to scream, but the creature had gripped my throat with a great gorilla-like hand, and I was half-strangled. Then he flung me over his shoulder and carried me through the grove and across the wall into the Stark estate. I was only half-conscious and it was not until he had brought me into this room that I saw

it was John Stark. But he did not limp and he moved with the agility of a great ape. He was dressed in dark close-fitting garments which blended so well with the darkness as to render him almost invisible.

"He gagged me while I pleaded in vain for mercy, and bound my hands. Then he chained me to the wall, but left the key in the lock as if he intended taking me away soon. I believe he was mad - and afraid, too. There was an unearthly blaze in his eyes and his hands shook as with palsy. He said, 'You wonder why I have brought you here? I will tell you, because what you know will not matter anyhow, since within an hour you will be beyond all knowledge!'

"Tomorrow the papers will scream in headlines that the mysterious kidnapper has struck again, under the very noses of the police! Well, they'll soon have more to worry them than an occasional disappearance, I fear. A weaker personality than mine might well feel some vanity in outwitting the authorities as I have done - but it has been so easy to evade the stupid fools. My pride is fed on greater things. I planned well. When I brought the *thing* into being, I knew it would need food - much food. That is why I came out where I was not known and feigned lameness and weakness, I who have the strength of a giant in my thighs. None has suspected me - unless it is Michael Strang. Tonight I read doubt in his eyes - I should have struck anyhow, when he turned to face me - should have taken the chance of mortal combat with him, powerful as he is -

"You do not understand. I see in your eyes that you do not understand. But I will try to make you understand. Men think I am deeply cultured; little do they guess how deep my knowledge is. I have gone further than any man in the arts and sciences. They were toys for paltry brains, I found. I went deeper. I experimented with the occult as some men experiment with science. I found that by certain grim and ancient arts a wise man could tear aside the Veil between the universes and bring unholy shapes into this terrestrial plane. I set to work to prove this thing. You might ask me, why? Why does any scientist make experiments? The proving of the theory is reason enough - the acquiring of knowledge is the end that justifies the means. Your brain would wither and crumble away were I to describe to you the incantations and spells and strange propitiations with which I drew a mewling, squalling, naked *thing* out of the Void.

"It was not easy. For months I toiled and studied, delving deep into the ungodly lores of blasphemous books and musty manuscripts. Groping in the blind dark Outer chasms into which I had projected my bodiless will, I first

felt the existence and presence of unhallowed beings, and I worked to establish contact with them - to draw one, at least, into this material universe. For long I could only feel *it* touching the dark borderlands of my own consciousness. Then with grim sacrifices and ancient rituals, I drew it across the gulfs. First it was but a vast anthropomorphic shadow cast upon a wall. I saw its progression from nothingness into the mold and being of this material sphere. I saw when its eyes burned in the shadow, and when the atoms of its non-terrestrial substance swirled and changed and clarified and shrank, and in shrinking, crystallized and became matter as we know it.

"And there on the floor before me lay the mewling, squalling, naked thing from out the Abyss, and when I saw its nature, even I blanched and my resolution almost failed me.

"At first it was no bigger than a toad. But I fed it carefully, knowing that it would thrive only on fresh blood. To begin with I fed it living flies and spiders, insects which draw blood from other things. At first it grew slowly - but it grew. I increased its food. I fed it mice - rats - rabbits; then cats. Finally a full-grown dog was none too large a meal for it.

"I saw where this was leading, but I was determined not to be balked. I stole and gave it a human infant, and after that it would touch no other food. Then for the first time, a thrill of fear touched my soul. The thing began to grow and expand appallingly on its feasts of human blood. I began to fear it. I no longer looked upon it with pride. No longer I delighted in watching it feed upon the prey I caught for it. But now I found I was caught in a trap of my own making. When even temporarily deprived of its food, the thing grew dangerous to me. It demanded its food oftener; I was forced to take desperate chances to obtain that food.

"Tonight by the barest chance, your lover escaped the fate which has befallen you. I hold Michael Strang no ill-will. Necessity is a cruel taskmaster. I will take no pleasure in laying you, alive and writhing, before the monster. But I have no other choice. To save myself, I must continue to gorge it on human blood, lest it take me for its prey. You might ask me, why do I not destroy that which I have created? It is a question I ask myself. I dare not try. I doubt if human hands can slay it. My mind is no longer my own. I who was once its master, am become no more than a slave to provide it food. Its terrible non-human intelligence has robbed me of my will-power and enslaved me. Come what may, I must continue to feed it!

"It may keep on growing until it bursts

its prison and stalks slaving and ravening forth into the world. Each time it has fed of late, it has grown spans in height and girth. There may be no limit to its growth. But I dare not refuse it the good it craves."

"Here he started as the house trembled to the impact of a great lumbering tread somewhere upstairs. He turned pale. 'It has awakened and is hungry!' he hissed. 'I will go to it - tell it it is too soon to be fed!' He took the candle which was burning on the table and hurried away, and I heard him ascend the stairs - " she sunk her face in her hands and a shudder shook her slim frame.

"One terrible scream burst forth," she whimpered, "then silence, save for a hideous rending, crunching sound, and the tramp - tramp - tramp of the terrible hoofs! I lay here - it seemed for ages. Once I heard a dog whining and scratching at the outer door and knew that Bozo had recovered consciousness and followed me here, but I couldn't call to him, and soon he went away - and I lay here alone - listening - listening - "

I shuddered as if a cold wind were blowing upon me from outer space. And I rose, gripping the ancient sword. Marjory sprang up and seized me with convulsive strength.

"Oh, Michael, let us go!"

"Wait!" I was in the grip of an unconquerable depriving urge. "Before I go I must see what hides in those upstairs rooms."

She screamed and clung to me frantically.

"No, no, Michael! Oh, God, you don't know what you're saying! It is some terrible thing not of this earth - some ghastly being from *outside*! Human weapons cannot harm it. Don't - don't, for my sake, Michael, don't throw away your life!"

I shook my head.

"This is not heroism, Marjory, nor is it mere curiosity. I owe it to the children - to the helpless people of this city. Did not Stark say something about the thing breaking out of its prison? No - I must go against it now, while it is cornered in this house."

"But what can you do with your puny weapon?" she wailed, wringing her hands.

"I don't know," I answered, "but this I do know - that demoniac lust is no stronger than human hate, and that I will match this blade, which in old days slew witches and warlocks and vampires and werewolves, against the foul legions of Hell itself. Go! Take the dog and run home as fast as you can!"

And in spite of her protests and pleas, I disengaged her clinging arms and pushed her gently out the door, closing it in the face of her despairing wail. Then taking up the candle, I went swiftly into the hallway on which the store-room abutted. The stair showed dark

and forbidding, a black well of shadows, and suddenly a faint draught of wind blew out the candle in my hand, and groping in my pockets, I found I had no matches to relight it. But the moon shone faintly through the small high-set windows, and in its dim light I went grimly up the dark stairs, driven irresistibly by some force stronger than fear, the sword of my warrior-ancestors gripped in my hands.

All the time overhead, those gargantuan hoofs blundered to and fro and their ponderous fall froze the very blood in my veins, and on my clammy flesh, cold sweat froze. I knew no earthly feet made those sounds. All the dim horror-ridden shadows beyond ancestral fears clawed and whispered at the back of my mind, all the vague phantasmal shapes that lurk in the subconsciousness rose titanic and terrible, all the dim racial memories of grisly prehistoric fears awoke to haunt me. Every reverberation of those lumbering foot-falls roused, in the slumbering deeps of my soul, horrific, mist-veiled shapes of near-memory. But on I went.

The door at the head of the stairs was furnished with a snap lock - evidently within as well as without, since after I had drawn back the outer catch, the massive portal still held firm. And within I heard that elephantine tread. In a frenzy, lest my resolution give way to screaming black panic, I heaved up my sword and splintered the panels with three mighty blows. Through the ruins I stepped.

The whole upstairs space consisted of one great room, now faintly illuminated by the moonlight which streamed in through the heavily barred windows. The place was vast and spectral, with bars of white moonlight and floating oceans of shadow. And an involuntary, unhuman cry broke from my dry lips.

Before me stood the Horror. The moonlight illumined vaguely a shape of nightmare and lunacy. Twice as tall as man, its general outline was not unlike that of a human; but its gigantic legs terminated in huge hoofs and instead of arms, a dozen tenacles writhed like snakes about its huge bloated torso. Its color was a leprous, mottled reptilian hue, and the crowning horror came when it turned its loose slavering blood-stained jowls toward me and fixed me with its sparkling million-faceted eyes which glittered like bits of fire. There was nothing of the human about that pointed, malformed head - and God help me, there was nothing of the bestial either, as human beings understand the beasts. Tearing my eyes from that grisly head for the sake of my sanity, I was aware of another horror, intolerable in its unmistakable implication. About those giant hoofs lay

the dismembered and fang-torn fragments of a human body, and a bar of moonlight fell upon the severed head which lay staring upward with glassy dead eyes of horror - the head of John Stark.

Fear can become so intense it defeats itself. Now as I stood frozen, and out of that shambles the ghastly fiend came lumbering toward me, my fear was swept away by a red blaze of berserker fury. Swinging up my sword I leaped to meet the horror and the whistling blade sheared off half its tentacles which fell to the floor, writhing like serpents.

With an abhorrent high-pitched squeal, the monster bounded high above my head and stamped terribly downward. The impact of those frightful hoofs shattered my upflung arm like matchwood and dashed me to the floor, and with a soul-shaking bellow of triumph the monster leaped ponderously upon me in a ghastly death-dance that made the whole building groan and sway. Somehow I twisted aside and escaped those thunderous hoofs, that else had hammered me into a red pulp, and rolling aside, gained my feet, one thought uppermost in my mind - drawn from the shapeless void and materialized into concrete substance, the fiend was vulnerable to material weapons. And with my one good hand I gripped the sword that a saint had blessed in old times against the powers of darkness, and the red wave of battle-lust surged over me.

The monster wheeled unwieldily toward me, and roaring a wordless warcry I leaped, whirling the great sword through the air with every ounce of my powerful frame behind it. And straight through the pulpy unstable bulk it sheared, so that the loathsome torso fell one way and the giant legs the other. Yet the creature was not dead, for it writhed toward me on its tentacles, rearing its ghastly head, its eyes blazing fearfully, its forked tongue spitting venom at me. I swung up my sword and struck again and again, hacking the monstrosity into bits, each of which squirmed and writhed as if endowed with separate life - until I had hewed the head into pieces, and then I saw the scattered bits changing in form and substance. There seemed to be no bones in the thing's body. Except for the huge hard hoofs and the crocodile-like fangs, all was disgustingly flabby and pulpy, like a toad or a spider.

And now as I watched, I saw the fragments melt into a viscous black stenching fluid which flowed over the fragments of what had been John Stark. And in that black tide those fragments of flesh and bone crumbled and dissolved, as salt melts in water, faded and vanished - became one with the black abhorrent pool which whirled and eddied in the center of

the room, showing a million facets and gleams of light, like the burning eyes of a myriad huge spiders. And I turned and fled down-stairs.

At the foot of the stairs I stumbled over a soft heap, and a familiar whine woke me from the mazes of unutterable horror into which I had fallen. Marjory had not obeyed me; she had returned to that house of horror. She lay at my feet in a dead faint, and Bozo stood faithfully over her. Aye, I doubt not, if I had lost that grim battle, he would have given up his life to save his mistress when the monster came lurching down the stairs. With a sob of horror I caught up the girl, crushing her limp form to me; then Bozo cringed and snarled, gazing up the moon-flecked stairs. And down these stairs I saw a black glittering tide flowing sluggishly.

I ran from that house as I would flee from Hell, but I halted in the old store-room long enough to sweep a hasty hand over the table where I had found the candles. Several burnt matches littered the table, but I found one unstruck. And I struck it hurriedly and tossed it blazing into a heap of dusty papers near the wall. The wood was old and dry; it caught quickly and burned fiercely.

And as, with Marjory and Bozo, I watched it burn, I at least knew what the awakened townspeople did not guess; that the horror which had hovered over the city and the countryside was vanishing in those flames - I most devoutly hope, forever.



MESSENGER OF DEATH

by W. Fraser Sandercombe

Application for the job,
accepted by
a wild-eyed corpse.

"You're hired," says he.
"begin burying your past.
Set your sails high.
Ride freely to the living
and give them death."

The dull thud of blade on meat
turns your stomach,
and the blood and death stench
makes you want to quit,
but they quickly pass.
Enjoy the slaughter
meat packer.
It pays sixty-five dollars,
clear, every week.

DOOM SEASON

by A. Arthur Griffin

4 A.M. Fantasy:
Bubble nodding skulls
in the star dark streets

white bone winds
with a Cheshire hollow groan
through an avenue of window shades winding;

flaccid flesh clutching
at the coral cool air,
mushroom rubber fingernails
drifting toward doom dawn.

Tumblewood terror
dwindlepages down
to a rivulet of 5 A.M. reality.

LIEBESTRAUM

by Marie-Louise

No one knew how old she was. "Crazy Kate," they called her, and she spent her days in solitude in the big, stone house on the avenue. There was a timeless quality about the house and grounds. In the day-time, no signs of activity were ever discerned. Drawn blinds shut out the brazen world, and old Kate crept around in the dark depths with only her memories for company.

But at night the house seemed to come alive. Lights streamed from every window, sometimes till the dawn. Passersby on this lonely edge of town were not frequent. Still, there were some who claimed to have heard music and laughter spilling from inside. And the sound of gay, young voices singing to the piano, although everyone knew Crazy Kate lived alone. She had no visitors, and on the rare occasions that she ventured out in her rusty black, looked neither to right nor left and spoke to no one.

Two lovers, passing the house on a crisp, Fall evening, slowed their footsteps and looked curiously at the brightly-lighted windows. Through the long, narrow panes they could see old Kate in the deep, blue chair, an open book in her lap. Her lips seemed to be moving rapidly, and she turned her head this way and that as if she might be addressing her remarks to a gathering. The dark, sensitive face of the boy reflected his uneasy thought. "Wonder if she really does see the people she's talking to?"

"Poor, old soul," the girl said pityingly. Her soft voice hung on the still air. "I hope she does! I hope she's happy. And how do we know she isn't? Perhaps even happier than we."

The young man looked down at her reproachfully. "Now THAT," he said plaintively, "is plain blasphemy." The girl laughed delightedly, and swinging hands, they continued on down the long avenue leaving the night to Autumn and Crazy Kate.

* * * *

Inside the warmly-lighted house, Kate regarded her family contentedly. The big living-room was crowded and noisy, as usual. From the kitchen came sounds of sullen mutterings and crashing of china, obvious evidence that it was Barbie's turn at dishes. At her feet, the two small boys fought joyously over Carrom. Near her, in his favorite chair, sat Dan, his pipe gone dead as he

perused the evening paper, and studied with rising indignation the latest bungling attempts on the part of the diplomats to bring about world chaos.

At the piano, Gene and Marney took Hungarian Dance number 5 apart and put it together again in a catchy, choppy arrangement that set Kate's foot tapping unconsciously. The two young men standing on either side of the piano watched the flying fingers and turned pages with the experience of long practice. "Ye gods," Hank said admiringly. "Old Brahms would turn in his grave if he ever got a load of this murder."

The music stopped and Marney gave him thoughtful attention. "Perhaps," she agreed. "Perhaps not. Perhaps he might even enjoy it. I've read a good many biographies of musicians and composers and they all seem to possess one virtue in common. A magnificent sense of humor."

"And when a man's got that," Gene said decidedly, "He's got everything as far as I'm concerned. Deliver me from the smug, pious kind, the life is real, life is earnest variety. Holy poop!"

"Gene, watch your language," Kate said, more from force of habit than conviction. Hank, gazing at his ring shining on Gene's thin finger, laughed fondly. To him, she seemed perfect and everything she said or did was wonderful.

Ann, crouched over her book on the floor beside Dan, lifted a rapt face. "Listen, Mother, isn't this perfectly beautiful? 'And down the long and silent street, The dawn with silver-sandalled feet, Crept like a frightened girl.'"

"Oscar Wilde," Marney said instantly. "Should she be reading him, Mother?"

"Why not?" Kate answered. "Poetry, like music, is a universal language. Read anything and everything, Annie, but especially poetry. Great verse *is* pure music, pure pleasure, pure pain, and an outlet for our own half-formed thoughts and desires."

Marney looked proudly at Rand. "Have we got ourselves a Mother, or have we got ourselves a Mother?"

"You've got yourselves a Mother," he said obligingly. "Where's your coat, Marney? Let's take a walk along the river road. It's moonlight and the temperature registers fifty-five."

"There's something wrong with that statement," Marney said, frowning. "Romance and statistics hardly go hand in hand. My coat's on the couch."

"Who mentioned romance?" queried Rand. "You flatter yourself, woman. I can barely stand the sight of you."

Marney stretched round arms above her head, and the small, high breasts pushed proudly against the filmy, white blouse. "Autumn," she said dreamily. "I love Autumn. Listen to the wind! 'O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being..."

"One thing I can't abide," observed Rand returning with the red coat, "is a female spouting poetry all over the place. Don't you ever have any thoughts of your own?"

"Oh yes," Marney said cheerfully. "But why bother to be original when someone else has already said it so much more beautifully?"

Kate watched the big, young man helping her daughter into the red coat, turning the collar up under the round chin, listened to their banter, and was not deceived. Rand was a fine boy, and Marney, with her passion for living, her intense capacity for sorrow or joy, would be well taken care of. The door opened to a chill wind, and the two went laughing, hand in hand out into the night. And suddenly a chill wind blew across Kate's spirit. I shall never be any happier than I

am now, she thought with panic. Don't let go, don't let go! They're still here.... Marney, Gene, Dan... Dan! No use. No use. She lifted her head and looked around the long, empty room. Just a moment ago it had pulsed with life. Now it was grey with silence. But they'll be back, they always come back. They've just stepped out for a moment. She sat quiet, listening. The wind came raging down from the mountains and ravished the round maples by the porch. The exulting sound rose to a high whine, and the heavy, oak door opened as if by an invisible hand. Kate rose stiffly to close it. Then she seated herself at the black, shining Chickering, and the long, thin fingers that had never lost their magic touch caressed the black and ivory keys. Passersby, at that moment, might have seen "Crazy Kate" sitting upright and alone at the piano playing "Liebestraum." The tender, nostalgic charm of it filled the long empty room and floated out into the Autumn night.

TIME

and FALLING SNOW

by

Joseph

Payne

Brennan

In my own mind
falling snow and a fracture
of the time continuum
have got mixed up.
When snow slants
down a winter's street,
sifting past the sooty bricks
of old Victorian houses,
I think that perhaps
if I walk long enough,
and far enough, I will enter
another sphere of time.
Foolish whim!
But I never give up.
Winter after winter
you will see me
prowling the snowy streets
like a questing wraith.
There were moments when I thought
that I was on the edge,
moments when the eerie silence
held no echo;
in that muffled curious world
I felt time fall away.
It seemed there was just
a thin veil left to penetrate;
I could almost see
the coaches and the gaslight,
the forgotten dress
of swathed and hurrying strangers!

THE WAVEMAKER

by W. Fraser Sandercombe

On calm days, during the twentie's, when I knew the lake would be still, I used to walk down the most dismal of all the streets in my town, to sit on a dirty, ashen rock and watch the mirror surface of the ugly grey waters.

Once while I was down there, I noticed the lanky form of a red-headed Gael. He stood with his arms outstretched on the pinnacled crest of a jagged, grotesquely shaped rock. His lips moved, as if in prayer. He closed his eyes for just a second and the calm was burst asunder. Winds shrieked through the polluted air, and waves surged upwards, reaching with seaweed fingers towards the one upon the rock.

When they missed him, he laughed, harshly, and they died, along with the banshee wind.

I didn't see him again after that for almost two years. During that time I'd attended a quaint little high school in this wretched little town of Burlington. Also during that time, I'd found out that his name was Darby Macnicol. A friend of mine had acquainted me with that fact, knowing because he'd played with the lad when he was younger, before Darby's parents died. After that incident it seems the red-head grew surly, and wanted no human companionship.

When finally I did see him again, it was a dark, calm but electric night. A full, bloated moon hung low across the water, like a lonely streetlamp on an otherwise black, forboding avenue.

An icy chill froze the pit of my stomach when I heard a shrill voice screaming vile chants at the inky waters. It was Darby, fully a half foot taller than when I last saw him on that same rock. He was clad in black robes that hung limp around his frame.

Arms outstretched, he cursed the water with foul prayers to unholy priests. His rock vibrated. A malodourous wind roared its warnings, and the water lunged up; a hideous fungoid creature, clenching and unclenching its garbled hands. It dashed itself to death on the rock, spewing a final party of acid droplets at Darby. He howled in pain.

I breathed finally, and the vile stench was gone from the air. Crouched in the shadows of a large, chunky stone, I waited, watching as Darby began his ritual again.

The waves missed him, as I knew they would. He was quite good at his profession, and the prodigious waves hated him for it. They knew that never would they catch him, as skilled as he was.

I trailed him to his house that night, and watched him enter, to be sure the house was his.

The abode was small, and its tiled roof was gabled. Creeping ivy covered three walls, and I wondered how he brought himself to dwell in that drear place, with the dead oaks on the overgrown lawn, and the unlikely number of thirteen on the street called "Dunwyth."

The following day I went back to Dunwyth Street, and approached Darby with a proposition, or rather, a blackmail threat. "Either you train me in your art, or I write a very descriptive letter about you to the local newspaper," was what I had said.

For the next two months, Darby Macnicol lectured me, and read passages to me from a text entitled, "The Grandiose" by Zardaph Catalin.

Then came midsummer. The night was dark. Wafting fingers of mist curled up from the water's face, like wraiths, drifting aloft to be lost among the stars.

On a distant hilltop we could see a fire, and black shadows danced around it.

Together we stood on the rock. Darby chanted. Up sprang the noisome wind, preceding the parasite waves.

Darby's screams faded to a gurgle, and then silence, when I pushed him.

Now I'm the wavemaker.

PTERODACTYLS flap/flap
soar

in the beauty of 20 feet
of wrinkled old leather.

Great beaks gap/gap
snapshut
on something
that writhes sickeningly

Barndoors of wings
foldup
like umbrellas and they perch,
knobbed heads jutting.

Janet Fox

THE TOWN

by Daniel W. Preston

1. TO ATTEMPT ESCAPE

The wind was whistling quietly through the leaves and the moon, half hidden by dark and brooding clouds, was a dull lamp gleaming through the slowly moving treetops and onto the street below. The street was empty. Dead and withered leaves scraped listlessly about in the gutters with each change of the breeze. Dim lights glowed from behind bolted windows and tightly drawn curtains as people huddled about their fires, speaking in low whispers. Evil things were about.

Above the midnight wind, a quick, barely audible scraping could be heard. A moment later, a man appeared at the top of an ancient wrought-iron fence. Quickly putting both feet over the rusted spikes he shifted his weight and let himself down onto the cobbled walk. He was not an intruder. He had not robbed from the dry carcass of a house that slumped for three stories above the moldy grass and lifeless trees. He had climbed the fence for the gate would have screeched his death note on its old and rusted hinges. Huddled in a thick wool overcoat he walked briskly and quietly down the street, clutching the top of his turned up collar with frozen fingers in place of the shiny brown buttons that had long since worn away. Suddenly a strong gust of wind disturbed the trees and his coat flew open. A yellowed tag was on the inside. "Jacob Christopher," in dark red hand lettering. Fumbling desperately at the flaps of the coat he closed it more tightly around himself, laying furtive glances about the windswept street and dark alleys. The increased speed of his pace betrayed his extreme nervousness to any who might be watching. He shivered in a swirl of leaves that whipped about his face and scraped his shoes as if examining him more closely. The wind tugged steadily at the flaps of his coat.

Passing a darkened house he let out a gasp. "Old Jeb. They got him!" Breaking into a near run he sped past the crumbling and deserted house. Looking fearfully about he raced across the street into the telephone booth. Its twenty-watt bulb burned bravely against the oppressive night. Grabbing the handle he slid the door open and stepped quickly in, shutting it immediately behind him. From his pocket he produced an old worn coin. He'd found it only by accident and, knowing what it was, he dared not wait longer for fear that they would find it. Fitting it

nervously into the slot he hesitated for a moment then dialed a dimly remembered number. As the dial tone sounded he lifted a shaky hand to his neck where he unconsciously picked at the two small identical scabs that hid behind the front upturned collar of his coat.

After long, endless moments he heard a voice on the other end of the line. With a sickly-sweet hissing sound it said, "Mr. Christopher! How thoughtful of you to call! We're ever so glad you discovered how to use a telephone. It's our newest addi. . ." He slammed the receiver down and cold sweat broke out all over his body. He started to smash the revealing light of the booth but thought better of it, quickly opened the door and sped out into the near-moonless night. They'd been waiting for him. They'd known all along. They'd probably even planted the coin among his books knowing that sooner or later he would come upon it and use it, as he had, falling totally and stupidly into their trap.

It had happened before. With the houses specially protected, they could enter but they could not attack those who resided within. But now and again someone would leave a door or window unbolted, as he undoubtedly had, one of them would slip in, and the trap would be set. Not even the sorcery-protected houses could prevent a man from leaving, as now and then, someone did. Never to be heard of again.

On he ran. Passing street after street. Far ahead was the edge of town and the forest. If he could reach it he might be safe.

All at once the wind stopped. Dead. He slowed his gait momentarily then renewed it with a new desperate burst of fear-wrought energy. The heels of his shoes clacking loudly against the cobblestone as he raced down the street. He came to the end of a block and stopped. They were there. Waiting. A sob escaped his lips as he turned to run the opposite way. He could sense the moon sliding behind the clouds, leaving him alone in the darkened street; pitch black, except for a house back down the block where a dimly lit lamp filtered through the tightly shut curtains, and for the light of the telephone booth gleaming feebly in the distance. His legs were hot and heavy. Every nerve, every instinct told him to run. Run! He did run. Blindly stumbling across the crumbling bricks he ran with his might down the walk and across the lawn of the house. Tripping clumsily up the steps he threw himself against the door and pounded frantically, his silently screaming voice caught in his throat and shoved into the frozen pits of his stomach. No Answer.

He choked as in a quiet hissing tone a

voice from the darkness behind him said, "Why don't they answer, Mr. Christopher? Do you remember two nights ago when you heard such a pounding on your door?" He shivered and remembered. He had huddled down under his bed until the pounding had ceased. "You thought it was one of us . . . one of us trying to trick you into coming out, didn't you, Mr. Christopher? But it was not us, you see. It was Mr. Johnston. He, too, tried to escape and bring help."

"Jeb!" he thought with a frightening, new realization.

"And he learned what the price is for those who try to escape, as you, too, Mr. Christopher shall now learn."

He shuddered and sobbed feebly at the door as he felt a cold presence growing nearer him. He clawed blindly at the iron latch as cold, steel-like hands gripped his shoulders. He cried quietly as twin searing needles pierced his neck. And then he knew no more.

Moments later, a dark figure lifted itself from the stilled body. The figure walked slowly down the steps and spread its arms. In a moment, the figure was gone, and in its place was a small black flutter of wings that quickly disappeared into the night. For Jacob Christopher had, indeed, learned what the price was. And he paid it, down to the last drop.



2. THE ESSENCE OF TERROR

A low fire burned in the hearth. Ebbing and flickering as each new gust of wind found its way down the chimney. Careful hands turned the pages of the brown and wrinkled book, passing the same page for the seventh time. Lines memorized went unread as eyes passed over them. Lines not yet known by heart went by unobserved. Eyes glanced toward the tightly drawn shutters for the hundredth time, taking but little reassurance from the sturdy chain lock. Hands shuddered as leaves of a tree brushed against a window somewhere upstairs. Bony fingers with shredded nails set down the book and twitched nervously in the lap. Legs crossed and uncrossed and eyes stared trancelike at the fire, not daring to look anywhere else.

Crooked brows and wrinkled lips creased in fear as a loosened shutter banged against the house.

Outside, the moon slowly slipped behind the clouds, leaving the streets in a tense darkness. Unseen leaves rustled about in the gutters and scraped with a barely distinguishable rhythm up onto the sidewalk. Brushes creaked silently in the wind and breathed strange secrets to the grass. Far off, a sharp and steady clacking floated on the wind, growing steadily closer. Ancient oaks muttered and groaned to the tall and silent poplars, and the dust in the wind whispered to the sidewalks. Then the wind stopped. The clacking slowed for a moment, then increased the speed of its approach. Growing nearer each second.

Old hands lifted up the book and slowly the man's eyes went to the pages as before. His eyes had just glanced up to the fire when suddenly he sensed something had happened. There was no wind. It was gone. The old heart pumped and thudded like a thousand wooden drums as terror stricken blood coursed through hardened veins. The old hands trembled and the book dropped to the floor; and all he could hear was the sound of his blood, pounding, pounding through his ears.

The fire crackled anxiously.

Feet stumbled up the porch and the door shook and rattled with a heavy pounding. The old man sat frozen in his chair. Muffled chokes and sobs issued from the door and a low voice hissed further away. And still the man did not move. Fingernails pawed weakly at the door for a moment, then silence was

restored. Dull footsteps went lightly across the porch, down the steps, and were replaced by a soft, diminishing flap of wings. Then all was quiet.

All, save the man's heart, as silence filled the room. He knew what had happened. And his heart knew as it trembled and roared

in its organic prison. Sweat streamed down the yellow wrinkled forehead as his heart pounded louder and louder. His withered body trembled and quaked while the heart began to convulse violently. It heaved and throbbed. Harder, harder. Then it stopped.

And only silence remained.

ODE TO MALDRONAH

Death is a black wine, my brother.
Oh trust it, for it is your friend.
Embrace it, and look for no other,
For the best part of life is its end.

It is quiet, dear brother, so quiet,
Let the peace of the grave be your goal.
Surrender, you cannot deny it,
Man yearns for the death of his soul.

So turn from the foul ways of living,
For death is so blessedly near.
A tomb is so dark and forgiving--
Once dead there is nothing to fear.

Oh come, let a coffin be your bed,
And let those who come after mourn.
Yes, it's good, very good, for a man to be dead,
But far better is ne'er to be born.

Tim Powers

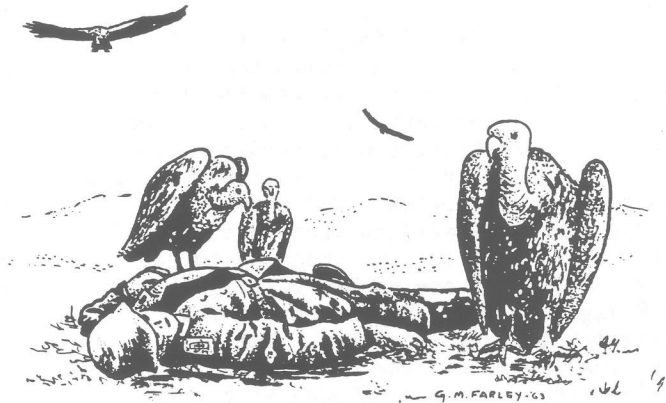


SUMMONS

They came for me in my sleep,
The winged gnomes,
Muttering incantations,
In long lost tongues.
They bore me up,
And we rode the breasts of the night storm,
Across dark mountains,
Past the realms of man,
Over the pits,

Where unspeakable monstrosities
Howl and shriek,
Across seas of lava,
To the shores of death,
And beyond.....

Darrell Schweitzer



BODY AND SOUL

by Walter Quednau

I was dead--I realized that the minute I peered into my coffin. I'd had a vague premonition, of course, but ever since the accident I had been dazed. I had been unable to think clearly at all. The shock of seeing myself lying dead in a coffin--rigid, powdered, rouged, embalmed--brought me to my senses.

Why was I here? Where were the gold dust streets of heaven, the white robes and harps? Why wasn't I floating on a fleecy cumulus cloud singing hymns? Or, even more likely, being done to a turn over the fiery flames of hell? What was I doing here on this same old mortal coil, watching my friends and in-laws come to mourn at my bier?

I tried to puzzle it out. Maybe I wasn't as lucid as I had thought, even yet. Things were still fuzzy. I remembered dying, however. I'd had a wee bit too much bourbon and soda at a party, followed by a small quarrel with my wife, Nancy. Nothing really serious; a lover's quarrel. But I had found myself driving much too fast, then skidding on a wet spot on the road and turning over. Yes, I must have turned over; I remembered lying in the car upside down, like a child in its womb, trying feebly to push my way out in the darkness, feeling the blood gushing from the wounds in my head and oozing over my clothes like sticky sweat. That was all.

No one could see me now, of course. I was invisible--a spirit. No one paid me the slightest attention. Two people even walked right through the place where I was standing, staring down at my own corpse, but they didn't even notice. As far as I could tell, I still possessed a body, just like the one I had always had, and to me it was substantial. But to them I was a wraith, less than a puff of wind.

Now I had a flash of inspiration. Now I knew what it was that had attracted me here. I was still drawn to it. It was the ring! I had found it accidentally in a little hole-in-the-wall pawnbrokers shop hardly a week before the accident. It was ancient, a plain gold ring, much scratched and worn, with strange symbols inscribed upon it front and back. I had been curious, meaning to get Nancy's father or one of his colleagues in the Religion Studies Department of the university to translate them. But I had never really pressed the matter--her father had just laughed when I showed it to him, saying the symbols were meaningless to him,

and I had let it go at that.

They had buried me with that old ring on my little finger, probably because I was wearing it when I died; and it was the ring that attracted me.

There was a repulsion, too, a repulsion from my surroundings and from the very earth itself, a force that seemed to tell me, "your destiny lies upward, go upward and outward to find it." But the force of the ring was an attractive force, and it was the stronger of the two.

I wanted the ring. I needed the ring. The nearer I approached to my corpse, the more urgent that desire. It was almost like a life-line--the old tie between my corpse and my spirit, incredibly amplified by some power embedded in the ring.

I reached out a wraith-like hand to touch the ring and I gasped in astonishment. I was suddenly swept from my feet as though a whirlwind had spun into this very room; I was thrust into a vortex that propelled me sideways and around. Momentarily I lost consciousness. Then I regained my senses once more.

For a moment any understanding of what had happened was beyond my comprehension. Then, as though by some inner awareness normally not open to me, comprehension returned.

I lay in my coffin.

I inhabited my own body once more, and I lay in my coffin.

I could feel the ring on my finger. It burned. I wanted to remove it because it burned. That was the only thought, the only desire, in my mind. Slowly, creakingly, like the ancient rotor of a rusty dynamo whirring into motion at the touch of a long disused switch, my right hand moved. It moved over my body, clutched at the ring, and tried to tear it from my finger. But the ring would not budge. It seemed to be welded there.

All my senses, all my efforts, all my concentration were directed toward that ring. Yet from the periphery of my awareness I was conscious of other things. I heard the gasps of the people who had come to the funeral. I heard the droning voice of the minister stop in the middle of its oration.

I could not get the ring off.

Slowly, frustrated, I raised myself to a sitting position and opened my eyes.

Though the light of the funeral parlor was subdued, it nearly blinded me. My senses were swimming, but I did not entirely lose consciousness.

I was alive.

"He's not dead!" someone shrieked.

There was a swift stampede from the room, a jumble of lesser souls who could not face

the return of a corpse from his coffin.

Then I saw Nancy. She stood aghast in the first row, the expression on her face a compromise between stark fear and loving hope.

I felt dubiously of my cold body. I knew the heart within me did not and never again would beat. I was certain that stark fear would eventually triumph over loving hope. I moved my lips, strained my throat. I had to take a breath of air, consciously and painfully, for I no longer needed to breathe for any other purpose but to speak.

"Nancy," I mumbled.

A hush swept over what remained of the mourners.

"I'm alive," I said. "Nancy, help me."

She came to me at once, drew momentarily back at the touch of my cold, dead skin, then steeled herself for the effort and helped me to crawl from the coffin, and stand.

On my finger the ring burned! It burned!

In the background I heard my family doctor whisper loudly to the mortician and the preacher. "He was dead," the doctor said. "I know he was dead. He was ruptured internally and could hardly have lived five minutes after the accident."

"I know it better than you do," retorted the mortician. "I embalmed him myself."

The minister said nothing at all.

"Nancy, take me home," I begged.

Nancy shuddered, but she was still game, and I could see that her love for me had not vanished.

"Yes, darling," she said simply. She helped me to walk out of that place and out to our car.

No one tried to stop us. No one wanted to touch me. For a moment I thought Reverend Black would do so, but he hadn't the nerve, either.

Nobody sees me now, except Nancy of course. She lives here still. The servants have vacated the premises, and the rest of my own family is dead. Nancy's relatives haven't come anywhere near us. I had been quite wrong about Nancy's love for me. It had endured and even strengthened under adversity. But I know it is very hard for her to live with me. Every moment of her waking life, and maybe in her sleep, too, she has to face the astounding, chilling fact that she is married to a living dead man.

If only I could have gathered the courage, that first day, to do what I knew I should: to take a meat axe and sever the little finger of my left hand, on which the queer old ring remains frozen, burning, burning, always burning. Then I could have died once

again, this time for all eternity.

But I love Nancy and I love life, even this travesty of life, too much to let them go, though not enough to give them up.

It's getting worse. I was embalmed, my flesh is dead; and embalming is not a perfect process. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, I am beginning to *decay*.

We have fitted up one room of the house with refrigerated coils, so that the decay can be inhibited. We are using all the money we own, which is a considerable quantity, to try to arrest it. Several research biologists are working on the problem, though they are unaware of the practical purpose behind their work or the source of their funds. But at present the outlook is poor.

And I have the world's best linguists studying photographs of the inscriptions on that cursed ring, trying to decipher them so that I can understand the bizarre circumstances in which I have been involved.

And I have hired detectives to try to trace that ring. The detectives have unearthed a fantastic story, and they do not for one moment grasp its implications. But it was clear to me at once. The former owner of the pawnshop where I bought the ring apparently disappeared one day a few weeks before I entered his shop. No one knew much about him; his clerk, a not very bright young man, inherited the shop. On the floor behind the counter a skeleton had been discovered. No one connected the skeleton with the absent owner, of course; they assumed it was an exhibit of some sort, possibly stolen from a medical school, and merely stuffed it into a dim corner with a price tag on it. I even remembered, very vaguely, having spied it on my visit to the place.

But the skeleton had apparently had some connection with the ring, for it had been found on the third finger bone of its left hand.

I knew. I knew the truth. I knew what destiny lies before me, and I did not view it with enthusiasm.

But I no longer hope to find the courage to chop off my finger.

And there's Nancy. I love her. And living like this is hell, but it is living.

I have evolved one real hope. Somewhere in this mad world must be another ring like mine, or some way to duplicate it. I cannot bear to live like this with Nancy alive and breathing, beautiful but ephemeral. I know I shall still exist hundreds of years from now, and Nancy-- Nancy will be dead. Unless I can find a way to duplicate that ring.

If I can duplicate that ring, I shall kill Nancy, and then we can live together forever. Or until the flesh rots from our very bones.

INCANTATION

by David Anthony Kraft

Green branches brushed the cabin roof with a gentle scraping sound, and a soft wind blew in through the open window. The brown-haired man at the stout wooden desk leaned back, rocking his chair on two legs. Then he stood up, and went to the window.

Outside, it was pleasantly warm, and the shade under the canopy-like roofs of the great trees was spotted with golden shafts of sunlight. His mind, however, occupied itself with other thoughts than the beauty of the scene; the typewriter on the desk sat stopped in the middle of a paragraph. The occult history he worked on had run up against a barrier, and nowhere in his notes could he find sufficient documentation to back the case he had been building. Reluctantly, he returned to the desk.

Resolving to try a different approach, he put his fingers to the worn keys and continued writing. This time it came easier, and page after page joined the pile of completed work. The morning wore away, and it was well into the afternoon when he looked up from the typewriter to discover that he had forgotten lunch. Again he pushed back his chair and arose. Striding to the kitchen of the small cabin, he rumaged around, coming up with bread and some sandwich meat. Along with this, he prepared a cool glass of tea, and placing it all on a small metal platter, carried it out onto the small porch. There he settled into a comfortable folding patio chair, and still thinking of the unfinished manuscript, proceeded to indulge himself.

As he was vacantly staring out over the low, swaying grass he saw the diminutive figure of a young woman come swiftly toward him. Of all things, this was the one he had least expected; his cabin in the mountains was known for its isolation.

She approached quite rapidly on running legs, and it was only a few minutes until she stood before him, breathless. Blushing slightly, she said, "Hello. I was just taking a walk when I saw the cabin," then apologetically, "I didn't think there'd be anyone here."

He smiled and answered, "I'm Roland Randalls, and I'm up here to write for the summer."

She noted his brown hair, the heavy eyebrows, and the straight, relaxed face. "My name is Redda; I live over there," and she made a broad gesture encompassing half the forest.

"Have something to eat?"

"No, I have to get back. Bye." And she was

off, running back the way she had came.

He finished eating, puzzled more than once over the girl and her strange behavior, and returned to the stout desk. He typed until late afternoon, and was up early the next morning pounding away on the manuscript. That day, toward evening, she stopped by again just as he was taking a short walk through the yard.

"I can only stay a minute," she said, walking beside him.

He took the chance to ask her if she had been living in the area very long.

"Once, long ago. I finally returned." He was going to question her about the location of her home or cabin, but before he could, she was off again. He decided to put her out of his mind, and go to bed.

A week elapsed before her next visit, and he had almost completely displaced memory of her, involved in the manuscript as he was. This time she came to the door, interrupting him as he typed. He invited her in.

"Bet you forgot all about me!"

"No, not at all," he lied. "Have a chair," and he indicated the only other stool in the cabin.

"Is that your manuscript?"

He nodded, scooped it up, straightening the loose pages, and handed it to her. She looked through it for a moment, and handed it back.

"You're intrigued with the occult and mysterious?" she asked, eyebrows arched.

"You might say that. I'm editor of a small occult magazine; this is the first vacation I've been able to manage in more than a few years."

She expressed interest in seeing the magazine, and he went to a cupboard and brought out a few of the latest issues. Just as abruptly as she had come, she made excuses and departed.

Roland Randalls, experienced in the mysterious as he was, yet admitted to a mystery beyond his power to fathom in the girl. Perhaps next time he would follow her. At any rate, he wasn't expecting her at 8:00 the following morning. He had just sat down to the typewriter, when she rapped on the door. It stood partly ajar, and he motioned her in.

"I brought something I thought you might be interested to see." She held a folded paper.

"What is it?"

"A translation of the *Incantation to Call Forth the Devil*; I thought a man of your interests would enjoy looking it over," and she handed him the paper.

He opened it, scanning it briefly. Then he read it softly aloud.

"May the gods of the lower regions favor me! Goodbye to the Trinity! Hail, spirits of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth! Prince of the East, Belzebub, Monarch of Burning Hell, and Demogorgon, we pray to you that Mephistophiles may appear and rise!"

By Jehovah, Gehenna, and the holy water, which I now sprinkle, and the sign of the cross which I now make, and by our vows, may Mephistophiles rise to serve us."

The girl looked at him inquisitively; he was expected to remark, and he did. "If its an *Incantation to Call Forth the Devil*, why all the reference to Jehovah and holy water?"

"You're a devotee of the occult and don't know that? The sign of the cross is made upside down with holy water stolen from a church."

"Can I print it in my magazine?"

She blushed visibly. "No! My brother translated it, and the risk and dangers involved with its recitation by someone ignorant of the proper lore could be devastating--I showed it to you because I thought you had that knowledge!" Then, looking extremely confused, she rushed past him and out the door. By the time he got outside, she was gone.

He went inside, and attempted to write, but the incident floated about his mind, until he was forced to quit typing and go for a walk through the woods in hopes of seeing her again. This proved unsuccessful, and he returned home at dusk to discover her waiting there for him.

She appeared rather nervous, but acted as though she had resolved something, and when he drew close she handed him the incantation; it was plain that she was embarrassed over her earlier behavior. He could print it if he wished.

Strolling in the forest, he had resolved to ask her where and how she had obtained it, and why. But her actions were so timid now, that he sought to calm her by proposing to make some changes in the incantation before printing it. His readers would never know the difference, and he could still bill it as the authentic translation; in fact, seeing how seriously she took it, he even vowed to try the new version before publishing it.

This reassured her, and they parted with a smile.

Despite his involvement with the weird and supernatural, Roland Randalls regarded the field as merely an outlet for escape reading. He had met few people who actually took the occult seriously, and as he didn't himself, he had found it rather difficult to sympathize with those who did. But it was different with the girl.

Entering the cabin, he prepared himself a small dinner, and sat down at the desk to rewrite the incantation. He would have postponed it until he felt more like doing it, but the mail only came through once a week, and tomorrow was that day. He scanned it intently; there were several portions where he could subtly alter the text without arousing any suspicion from astute readers. He set to work, and as he switched words and phrases, he began to see that he was giving them a rhythm they had not possessed. In fact, his new version read better!

Several hours later, he was satisfied with the incantation. Packing it up, he prepared it to be sent to the office of his magazine, for publication in the fall issue, which was now being set up on the presses. Then he retired.

If nothing else, Roland Randalls was a man of his word. He arose early the following morning, ate breakfast, and prepared to test the new version before the mail truck came. Before him lay his rearranged *Incantation*, and from a desk drawer he took a faded ink drawing on yellowed newsprint. Editing a horror-fiction journal, he had for years possessed a representation of the Black Magic Pentagon; now he would employ it in conjunction with the recital. Every issue of his magazine carried a reproduction of the pentagon, so with the publication of the incantation any reader could stage a personal recital. All nonsense, but he had given his word....

He began the incantation, touching first one point of the faded newsprint, then another. His voice traced the rhythm of the lines, until the intonation became almost trance-like in its intensity, until he was lost in the emphatic enunciation of evil. He went on and on, until at last he outlined a final outlandish inscription on the newsprint, and the paper from which he was reading slipped to the floor.

Nothing happened. Which didn't surprise him; he had known nothing would result when he promised Redda to try it before sending it out for publication.

A horn honked; the mail truck had arrived. Grabbing the stack of outgoing mail from the cupboard top, he rushed out and gave it to the driver. A number of letters had arrived for him, and he sauntered indoors to peruse them leisurely.

There was another presence in the room, a malign presence--a presence he was destined to know for eternity.

"The translation was correct, Mr. Randalls, but in your eagerness to present it to the public you jumbled it enough to cancel my

vow to serve whomever recites it. I chose not to appear until you had mailed the copy off to be published; thus, in addition to forfeiting your own soul, you have sent the Incantation out to be read and probably performed by thousands of other people whose souls, too, will now be mine..."

LULLABYE

Do not sleep, my little one.
Rise tonight and join our game.
Often, you have wondered why
Others shuddered at our name.
Spread your wings, my little love.
Bare your fangs, and drink tonight.
Not for our kind is the sun.
Such as we revere moonlight.
Now, you'll have revenge, my child,
On the ones who mocked your face.
Soar above the moon with us.
Fly with cat-like, bat-like grace.
Learn your heritage with joy.
'Tis a bloody one, my dear.
Legends full of death are ours.
Night and murder, dark and fear.
Fly with us and learn tonight.
With your people, weird and wild.
Learn the glorious taste of blood.
Wake, my darling vampire child!

Linda-Susan Miller



NOCTURNE

Come, silent one, sing to me
As you coil and uncoil
Your wet hair around my shoulders and neck
Let the notes low in your throat
Weave threads through the air,
Webbing my soul as your hair has my body.
Cling to me, throb through me,
While I lie prostrate,
Meshed in your mouth with its murmurs of music.

Drowned in your wet hair, ocean encompassing,
Still I see islands and visions enticing:
Temples and tombs of a marvelous time
Ribbonlike boatsawash in a pale sea--
Echoes of voices long sunken in surges,
Rippling of colors now swirling in darkness,
Glimpses of faces deep covered by sea-sand.

Ghost of that long perished time,
Silent one, stay with me now;
Bind me to death
By your song of enticement,
For I ardently cling to you,
Seek for no other:
Keep still your loins at my loins,
Your lips at my throat---
Vampire, feed on.

James Wade

SAY IT WITH SPIDERS

Wilma was dreaming, her doughy face squeezed into unpleasant shapes. She walked between two narrow walls of sweating rock and upon them was a nasty whitish mass, sticky threads that clung to the bare skin of her arm when she brushed against the wall. A dull gurgling sound came from somewhere behind her, and as she looked around, a great black spider was crawling up behind her -- the great squashy sac of its body barely fitting between the narrow walls, its legs covered with bristling black hair. She tried to run, but found herself frozen.

"Wilma, what is it?"

"Oh! Oh Harry, it was a dream. I guess."

"You were screaming. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes, it was silly. I dreamed about a spider, probably because of that big black one I found in my shoe yesterday. I've always been terrified of spiders; you know that."

"Well, it's all over now."

"Yes, and I'd better get up and make you some breakfast. I don't want you to be late for work." She hauled her heavy body out of bed and eased into a shabby green wrapper. The ghostly image of her own puffy face rose before her in the mirror as she ran a comb disinterestedly through her limp brown hair.

Harry lay back on the pillows to wait for her call, looking much younger and fresher than his thirty-seven years. A moment later, though, after her broad back had disappeared through the door, he jumped from bed and went to the closet where the suit he had worn the day before hung. Reaching into the jacket pocket, he brought forth a small white box that might have been ordinary except for a cluster of pinholes punched in the top.

Wilma fixed the usual eggs and bacon. She moved even more slowly than usual, the bad dream had left her groggy. She still had a prickly sensation on her skin, as if some of the webs of her dreams had clung to her. Harry ate without saying anything and started off to work. For a long time she dawdled in front of the TV set, watching beautiful, slim women who had no boring housework to do, only involved romantic problems to resolve. At last she decided she must get dressed.

As she reached into the drawer which held her lingerie, something tickled across her hand and upward onto her wrist. She

shrieked as she saw the large brown spider, and the convulsive movements of her hand sent it flying. Looking down into the open drawer, she saw another spider crawl across a white garment and under a fold, out of sight. She knew it was foolish, but her skin seemed tingling with the touch of spider's feet, and her heart pounded until she had to ease herself down onto a bed to keep from fainting.

Nothing in the house seemed safe. Every time she opened a drawer or a door, she froze with fear. Thinking of what might be there was actually worse than seeing a spider.

She was glad when Harry came in, whistling and smiling. He even kissed her cheek.

"Hope you're feeling better, Hon. Maybe we could go out to a movie tonight. There's one I've been wanting to see."

"That sounds like fun. We haven't gone anywhere in ages."

"Oh yeah," he added, pulling an oblong box from his pocket. "I bought this for you on the way home. I guess it's kind of silly since it isn't your birthday or anything, but ..."

"It was very thoughtful of you. They're my favorite kind of chocolate." Hurriedly, she stripped off the pink wrapper, excited by Harry's unexpected kindness and eager for a taste of the rich carmel and chocolate that the label promised. She opened the box, pulled off the tissue, and inside --

Inside there were spiders, dozens of them, crawling and swarming, their bodies blotchy and flaccid, their legs scrambling desperately. Screaming as if she would burst her immense lungs, she dropped the box and collapsed in a sobbing heap on the sofa. For several minutes she lay there.

"Wilma, please, what's wrong? Can't I help?" At Harry's pleading voice and warm caressing hands, she managed to stifle her sobs and look up to find his face looking puzzled.

"I don't get it. What was wrong with the candy? I thought you liked it." Shuddering, she thrust herself to a sitting position on the sofa and forced herself to look at the box on the floor. Chocolates lay scattered on the linoleum, just the candy and nothing more. They had not been in the box, she realized. They crawled inside her head. She could almost feel them pawing impatiently, climbing and sliding on the slick insides of her eyes like the glass of a jar. Every inch of her skin was crawling, but somehow she made herself get up. "I'm sorry, Harry. I really am. I don't know what gets into me."

"Honey, you really ought to tell me about

it," said Harry, kneeling beside her to help her pick up the spilled candy.

"No, I'm perfectly okay now. I've just been kind of nervous lately. I'll get your supper on now; it's almost ready."

"I guess that movie is out," said Harry disappointedly as he helped her set the table.

"I wish you'd go and see it anyway," said Wilma. "Maybe it wouldn't be much fun alone, but----"

ell, I'll go, if you're sure you won't be afraid staying here alone."

"Of course not, silly, I do want you to go and have a good time. I'll be fine by tomorrow."

Harry was cheerful company at dinner. It was a good thing because Wilma said hardly a word. She held herself firmly in check when a shadow crept up the wall and a bit of black thread was blown across the floor. There was no use screaming. They were inside her, not outside. Perhaps if she opened her mouth, they would spill out, dribbling down her chin and onto the food, black and squirming.

"Wilma you're not eating a thing. It's all very good."

She pinched together a smile with compressed lips. "I don't feel much like it," she mumbled, careful not to let a spider slip out with the words.

Singing a popular song, Harry took a shower and put on a fresh shirt and best suit. He seemed very careful about his appearance. Wilma did her best to seem cheerful when he left, but she was afraid when he had gone, leaving behind him the scent of the exotic after-shave he wore, because the small spiders inside her had fused into one, and it was growing.

She could feel the long, spider legs reaching, stretching down into her own, and up into her arms, and when she looked at her arms carefully, the fine brown hair on them was turning coarse and jet black. Her body grew great and soft and mottled, and she could feel her mouth hardening into chitinous mandibles slick with poison slime.

Night closed down upon the house, but no lights were turned on. The spider crept softly here and there, gathering together materials for a web. Rope made sticky with honey and molasses from a kitchen cabinet was knotted patiently into an intricate web and draped above the front door.

At 2:07 an unsteady key tapped against the lock, finally finding the right spot. The door opened, letting gray light from outdoors outline the man in the doorway. The spider pulled a certain cord and the web tumbled

down onto his head. His struggles took him to the floor where the spider threw her soft, stifling bulk upon him and bit him again and again. (The blade of the kitchen knife made a silver arc in the darkness).

The prey soon ceased struggling, and the spider crouched back on her haunches, content. "I'll not be hungry for a long time," she said.

Janet Fox

THE CREEPING SHADOWS

they came at dark
long and tall
and grey unshaven faces
eyes of blood
and the looks of a shark

they came at night
and crept the streets
crying for all they lost
yet knowing it's no good
for there's no light

they slept and walked
through the streets
of the emptyfaced city
and when there was nothing
left ... they talked

their voices were bad
and hard and full
of hate and fear for all
they lost ... their memories
of the voices became sad

they listened to a lonely bard
and when he stopped to sing
they went ... they went ... all of them
all the dark and creeping shadows
back toward their grave

E. Bertin

THE THROWAWAY MAN

by Steve Chapman

Lots of things happen that people don't see. They happen just the same. Lots of things move through the air and walk on the ground, that nobody knows about. That's because so few have the time to watch the moths and leaves and the little things that sometimes get stirred up like dead flowers on river water when something odd is going on.

Something was moving in the junk yard. Something deep in the center of the stockpiled radio tubes and twisted fenders and tomato cans and cog wheels was making tiny clanking and scratching noises in the moonlight. The moths knew it. The leaves knew it.

The ocean beside the junk yard was wise and knew that the clockwork thing was bad. The machine didn't want to stay where it was, and it wanted to leave because it wanted to slice and rip and crush.

Why? Even the tides didn't know surely. Maybe the junk didn't want to be junk. Maybe it had anger in it.

But first the machine had to be ready. Every oddly shaped piece of metal had to be in place, before it could hobble down the road and out the gate into the world of people like you who break things and use things up and throw things away.

Which comes first: good or evil? Usually evil. Good counters.

Because something was moving under the wharf. Something was putting itself together from the algae strands and snails and tiny centipedes and wood slivers and oil slick on the rotten wooden posts of the wharf by the junk yard.

Was it good? Maybe. It only knew about the junk one and knew that the clockwork, spider-crab, stainless-whistle chopper had to be stopped in its tracks, before people could even see it and know enough to be afraid.

And the wharf one had time. Time to accumulate itself, sort itself out, gather strength from the tides and warm rain and cold wind. Time to wait for the full moon. Did I tell you that the confrontation was to take place under a full moon? That's what the crickets thought, and they should know.

The carp stayed away from the pier for fear of being sucked into the demanding goodness. Fishing was poor that month. Fisherman in hip boots and barefoot kids and curious dogs and stray cats didn't know what was going on. But the crayfish in the muddy underwater peered in to the shadow of the wharf with their eyes on

stalks and wondered. Sparrows avoided the junk yard. Migratory patterns were interrupted by the vibrations in the air and quiet wind.

So. The time came. The sharp-metal, ratchet-wheel, tinker's nightmare snapped and clattered and sharpened itself against itself and jerked into motion. The wet thing shivered and squinted and poured onto the wharf and rolled toward the mainland with a rustle and a scuffle.

They met at the fork in the road, the one thing heading for the world of people like you, the other thing heading for the machine. The wharf one lapped against the pipe-legs of its enemy and climbed up from there.

So they fought. A fight to the death from death.

Since the ocean thing had no substance and no strength to batter metal or pull apart joints, the best it could hope to do was to stop up the works. It seeped into the center of the machine, past the brass knobs, past the aluminum plates, through the iron grids. The springs and cogwheels of the shiny thing felt the rippling snail-scape on its insides, and it turned its scissor-claws inward. The ticky thing snapped at its own coil-spring muscles and tried to use its bent knives to scrape away the devouring goodness that ate away at its bright tin fingers.

They did not hate each other. They felt nothing. Not even pain. But they were drawn together. They had no choice.

Soon it was hard to tell the two of them apart. The glittering jackknife appendages thrashed in a pile of seething colloid. The bug-leg appendages were snapping listlessly, rusting away, going limp, one by one.

But an evil star sparkled in the night sky and reanimated the scrap-metal day-creeper, which went sputtering, hammering, rolling, chugging into the ditch by the road. They tumbled and slid and lurched past the towers of plastic throw-aways and discarded appliances and abandoned conveniences and through a barb wire fence, which was restructuring the next month, and down a slope of clean grass. And onto the wharf. That decided the battle.

With a liquid roar of triumph, the slime glued itself tight and sucked at a rotten wharf post and threw them into the waves, destroying the web of a dock spider which began repairs immediately.

There were no bubbles to mark the spot. Only a trail of grease and sand which ended abruptly. And a small pile of filth and junk ripped off by a razor blade mouth. The hunk was kicked aside two days later by an early fisherman.

Whether the salt sea rinsed away the substance of the wharf thing, or rusted out the

soul of the junk thing, or both, no one knew.
Not even the crayfish wanted to look.

And no one knew what had happened, or what
had cancelled out what, or why. No one knew

at all.

But the sparrows are waiting on the wharf
for something to come up.

CRYPTIC SUMMONS

by Wade Wellman

"How many times can the prowler speak
Your name in the soundless night?"
"Only once, as the legends tell;
Once alone, till the morning bell
Of the church rings over the ocean swell,
And the shore explodes in light."

"But I last night heard solemn tones
And a hand that touched my door;
Out of the grave the prowler came,
Two times loud it called my name,
Twice in echoes of hellish flame,
And then was heard no more."



Some of the forests and swamps here in the South are so deep and thick that they've never seen men. Vast dark regions still exist here--cyclopean columns of wood, hoary with grey moss forever curtaining off dim recesses astir with primeval forces.

Inroads have been made in these lands, but the swamp is stubborn and falls back reluctantly, and sometimes leaves behind strange relics.

I considered myself very lucky, actually, despite the age and general run-down condition of the place. Being a student, I was in quite a pinch for funds, even during my summer vacation - and this old farmhouse was a god-send. It was just far enough from town so that I could study for my upcoming classes undisturbed, but not far enough to prohibit weekly or even daily trips to the college library.

My first year here was over, and I had made up my mind to get an apartment in town instead of living in the dormitory. I had come here because the dorm was too noisy, and I couldn't yet afford the apartment. Anyway, I had decided to spend the next three years at Lee University after all.

Originally, I had been going to college in California, but I was getting frustrated with

the scarcity of class meetings. Then, after I had to go to the hospital for a week when a "peace" demonstrator bounced a brick off my head, I decided to go somewhere else.

The South seemed to be having the least trouble in this department, so after considerable deliberation I decided to go there. I must confess that I stepped off the plane with considerable trepidation; like most Northerners, I had been thoroughly saturated with anti-South propaganda. My misgivings quickly evaporated. I found the people friendly, helpful, and not at all the clods that certain persons try to make them out to be.

After I moved in, I began to explore the area. The house was near the edge of a great, incredibly dense forest. Several moderate size farms were scattered about, some coming right up to the edge of the damp, overgrown forest. It was mildly amusing to learn that the farmers refused to visit these nether fields by night, and in most cases they were used only in time of financial hardship. I listened with interest to curious hints about old legends and tales about the deeper glades and about grotesque results from some plantings in certain areas.

One afternoon I was returning rather late -- the Maddocks had virtually forced me to stay for supper -- and I decided to stop and watch the sunset over the great forest. I then noticed something that hadn't caught my attention before. It was probably some quality of the slanting light, but I could now see that just beyond the first few trees was an open space.

Intrigued, I crossed the colonnade of trees and found myself in a little, irregular open space dominated by a small ring of irregular stones in the center. I was surprised to find that it was a well! I couldn't imagine how a well should come to be here, or why it should be of such unusual structure.

Extreme age marked the well; the rocks were rounded from erosion and a ring of fine rock crumbs girdled its base. If there had ever been a wooden bucket support, there was no sign of it now.

Dropping a rock down the shaft, I evoked a tinkling splash. I raced to the storage shed, fetched a bucket and rope, and was shortly examining the water.

It seemed clear as crystal and smelled sweet as a breeze.

Then in my city-ignorance about such matters, I drank some of it. It's hard to describe the taste--mostly it was rather sweet and cool, but there was a thread running through it, a thread of ... well ... spice. Actually, it couldn't be classified

as a taste anyway, it was ... unplaceable. It touched all my senses, yet it wasn't "material," it wasn't something you could pin down, like this is the *Color* green, or the *taste* of lemon, or the *sound* of a bee ... it was just *there* ... unknowable and un-touchable.

That night I had the first of my many odd experiences. During my history studies that evening, I found myself having difficulties in concentration. Daydreams flitted through my mind uncontrollably. The reading of only a few lines of the text on Greek history sent slippery images of warriors and temples coursing through the back of my consciousness.

Finally, I slammed the book shut and sat back to let the thing run its course. It was very hard to *consciously* let these fantasies come, but finally I slipped into my daydreams....

I imagined myself as some sort of priest leading a group of followers into some sort of bizarre temple. The capitals of the columns and the walls were carved with terrible shapes and leering monsters.

The chanting devotees followed me into the inner blackness--blackness relieved only by our torches. We formed a great semi-circle before a huge altar. Behind this stone, carved with oddly familiar but indecipherable hieroglyphics, was a large hole provided with steep steps leading into the earth. Our chanting grew louder and louder and seemed to tremble in the air like something possessing a terrible sentience of its own.

To my surprise, I heard a strange slow scraping sound coming from the pit. It seemed to tear me between a mindless ecstasy and an infinite, distasteful loathing.

The scraping grew louder and louder as our chanting deteriorated into a shockingly bestial screeching and gibbering. Through the cacophony I heard a soggy flopping sound mixed with the eldritch scraping.

I was wrenched by the sight of the thing that reared its giant bulk over the altar -- half of me wanted to scream aloud and race from the spot as fast as possible, while the other half wanted to throw itself before the thing in revolting obeisance.

Huge the thing was. A vast black, worm-like bulk towered twenty feet into the air, a bulk that nether end of which disappeared into the pit. Its body was studded with myriads of objects resembling sword blades. It must have been these metal-seeming blades which caused the scraping sound.

Without warning, two of the worshippers emitted terrible shrieks and flung themselves into the altar. The black nauseous mass collapsed across the block, simultaneously writhing its blades so that the prone forms

were ripped flesh from blood-jetting flesh.

Like a maniac, I tore through the soft veils of slumber -- veils acquiver with my own screaming...

I awoke in a chair where I found myself sodden with sweat and my muscles shot with veins of cold trembling.

II

I mused for some time about the incident over my breakfast the next morning. True, I considered myself to be imaginative, and I can recall some pretty outre dreams, but this was something far out of my normal experiences. Obviously, my mind was starting to suffer from the unmerciful load I had imposed on it, and immediate corrections were necessary. This in mind, I resolved to take the day off and to drastically reduce my schedule for the rest of the week.

And to make my unexpected vacation a little more enjoyable, I went to get some more of that delicious well-water. I was about to fling in my bucket-and-rope apparatus when something arrested my attention. I hadn't noticed it in last night's gloom, but there was carving on the rocks. The slabs of the well were exceedingly eroded, but there were definite symbols of some sort present.

Then I saw something else I missed in the twilight. In five places around the well the barren earth was discolored, as if by oil. I noted with a start that they formed five symbols--each different, yet each having counterparts in the wall carvings!

III

Night was falling as I left the library. My research had been fruitless--I was unable to find anything even vaguely similar to the odd symbols which I had copied from the stones.

Driving home, my thoughts tried to organize themselves. Could the carvings have been a hoax? If so, by whom? Whomever dug the well? The thing was surely centuries old, yet the swamp had been totally impenetrable up until only decades ago. Was the inscription made later? It couldn't have been--the carvings just didn't look any newer than the rocks.

Arriving home, I took a flashlight and went to take another look and try again to get some more water. Oddly, shining the light into the well illumined it very little, the inner darkness seemed to seek up the light and nullify it.

In any event, I finally got back with my water and had a long, refreshing draught before pouring over my notes.

I sought to make some sense of the patterns of symbols in the well inscriptions--and inscriptions I now thought them to be.

Finally, I gave up and went to bed in disgust.

But the matter kept preying on my mind and would give me no rest. It even crept into my dreams, apparently, and produced the following oddity:

The landscape around me was weird in the extreme. The sky was as blue as ever and the usual white clouds sprawled atop the atmosphere. But the plants!! Such plants grew around me as I had seen in no book! They were not densely crowded, but spread out, leaving room for low and shaggy vegetation between. No flower bloomed, but large, overnourished fungi gave an occasional brilliant relief to the redundant green.

I moved purposely through the bush, pushing aside the leathery branches of the bizarre greenery and occasionally circumventing a larger patch of fungus, but always heading in a definite direction.

Involuntarily, I crouched behind one of the thick-leaved bushes and caught sight of my objective.

The large circular stone pavement didn't hold my attention, nor did the irregular hole in the middle which seemed to sink endlessly. It was the animate shapes which I watched.

They were *TRILOBITES!!* Giant, land-living trilobites crawled across the great stone disk! Tentacles grew from the central axis of their bodies and held unidentifiable objects.

They seemed to approach the well with an almost religious aspect, making what might have been obeisances. A peculiar ritual of some sort began, with the flat, chitinous things falling into group patterns and shifting the incomprehensible objects among them. This continued for some moments, and then three trilobites left their groups and approached the central shaft. After another ceremony among themselves, they lowered a bucket-like contraption into the well and hauled out some of the water. The prize once captured, they all backed away from the water-pit and did not turn around until they were all off the stone plain.

A mist then seemed to spring up around me, rising and thickening until it blotted out the entire area, rising and thickening until its greyness completely blinded me.

Then came a faint, crimson flash as if from far away, and a distant rumbling shook the ground beneath my feet. The mists began to clear. Stronger were the shocks, accompanied by thunderous crashes from the distance. The mists vanished and I was thrown face-down by the force of the tremor.

About me the scene had changed staggeringly. The tall plants had been cast down, and many had fallen into the canyons of cracks which

criss-crossed the area.

Everywhere the horizon was inflamed by volcanoes spouting the black gases which roofed the sky and burned my lungs.

Before me, I saw the great stone disk covered almost totally by the shifting ground. Four trilobites were gathered about the well. Precambrian stonemasons had hastily erected a tube around the opening, irregular to complement its irregularity. Obviously, this was to prevent the migrating earth from creeping into the shaft.

Still the earth shuddered me from my feet and made doubly difficult the task of the chitinous scribes who were attempting to grave inscriptions upon the higher rocks.

Then, from the south-west, came a nova flash of leprous green "light" which cut through the volcanic haze. Immediately I was torn from my position by a mad hurricane of sub-absolute zero air which carried me into the ether like one of the damned lovers who occupy the wind-torn second ring of Dante's Hell.

With a cry, I made the crashing transition between sleep and waking and lay trembling in my bed.

A dream...just another dream like the other one. Shockingly realistic perhaps, but yet a dream... a dream.

Racing to the tool shed, I grabbed a shovel and an electric lantern and ran to the accursed spot. The barren earth seemed to be a thousand times as vast as I approached it.

I stopped and leaned heavily upon my shovel, trying to regroup my scattered wits. What was I doing here? A twenty year old American boy, a college student, was standing in a swampy forest at four in the morning and preparing to expend God-knows-how-much effort with a shovel to contradict a nightmare!

But it was useless to speculate, I had to know, I *had* to! With berserk fury I attacked the crusted earth, clawing through the ground stained by one of the maddening symbols. Dirt flew, and my back began to smart from the force of my exertions. Still, and still again I dug.

Crack! The world stood still in that colossal eldritch second. The shock of impact turned to cold cement in my stomach and I trembled with nameless terror. Half insane with fear, I uncontrollably reached down and began to scrape at the bottom of the pit.

I must be calm here...I will try to express my feelings, but you must understand...the settings, the dream...my long nurtured morbid thoughts...no....it's useless; no words or phrases of man can express the absolute, totally overpowering shock of that instant *as my hands came in contact with the very polished surface upon which I had watched the movement of sentient creatures dead and gone*

aeons before the oldest rock strata known to man!

IV.

I sat trembling in my room. The shades were drawn--I couldn't bear to look out onto a ground which had so suddenly turned from a quaint if overly-rustic setting for my mental rambles to a place of unspeakable fear and screamingly intangible nightmare.

To say I was confused was an understatement. Obviously, I couldn't tell anyone my dream and expect him to take me seriously, yet surely the knowledge about that well should be brought to the attention of related authorities. I've never believed the myth of forbidden knowledge, but rather that the secrets of time and space, no matter how dark, how twisted, how unhuman, should be made known. And if our globe was once the abode of a rational and intelligent race of creatures not even of the same *Phylum* as man, then that fact must be recognized and accepted no matter *what* its nightmare implications.

Truth, if such a thing exists in our universe, should be a goal...and a goal of greater importance than flickering flashes of emotion in the languid unrolling of time. The search for truth is the only *TRULY* constructive activity we engage in, aside from the occasional kindnesses that pass between men.

And yet, for all this, I still felt a vague dread about the whole business, as if I were on the perimeter of formless truths of a nature so galactic and blasting that we must leave them for a future and infinitely more resilient race of thinkers, else there be no future thinkers of human thoughts.

But as to the matter immediately at hand; it would be good if I had something to take to the professors. They *may* be able to prove the age of the well, but it will surely take something unusual to persuade them to try... The trilobites! Surely they from time to time accidentally dropped something down the shaft. Perhaps even one or more of those unanalyzable *shapes* which I saw in my dream. I remember seeing an old grappling hook with some rope in the tool shed; no telling what archaic artifacts may come to light.

My decision was to immediately plumb those waters of dreams...waters of dream?

Suddenly, I was crashingly aware of what the reader has surely realized before. Only twice in my life had I known dreams of such terrible intensity and illimitable detail. And only twice had I tasted the questionable waters of that mysterious well.

But that made no sense--how could simple well-water have such drug effects? And even if it could, how would it be able to excite in me visions of something I had never known,

or could never otherwise have imagined?

Another experiment was obviously a necessity. I must again drink of those eldritch waters.

V

I floated in a strange, crystalline universe shot with all hues and shades. Gigantic masses of intricate, polychromatic geometry turned slowly, and languidly shifted in color, form and position. It was an eternal dance of unknown laws, hypnotically beautiful, yet totally alien. As I drifted in this world, like a tiny flaw in an swirling liquid diamond, the thought somehow came to me that this existence was a stress zone or buffer region between our 3-dimensional space and inscrutable outer voids.

As I drifted, the nature of the incredible color-pattern-scape around me seemed to be changing. Shifting lines tried to enmesh me and hold me back, yet some force propelled me on and yet on, until I felt a terrible wrench and found myself floating in the awful gulfs of the *True* "deep space."

Of the nature of this vastness I cannot speak, for its being was of such texture that my mind cannot hold it for analysis--its fabric was so incomprehensible that I couldn't explain it if I *did* have the words. I *saw* in the absence of light, I *heard* in the absence of sound, my senses were as those of the dead and yet my mind was flooded with such *Impressions* from so many channels that I was staggered by the complexity and total non-humanness of it. It was more than unearthly, it was non-universe altogether!

My movements began to accelerate through this superspace--my surroundings, as I *tried* to fathom them through my grotesquely twisted and alienated senses, seemed to be becoming more complex, as if my helpless form was passing into concentric globes of dimension. I passed through realms of light and dark, realms where they twined in warped embrace. As I passed the universes of worlds and spheres where music was mad cacophony, I slowly came to see that matter and energy are alike because they are both derivatives of higher states. Space and time themselves are derivatives of this awesome Hyle; *and I learned of other Derivatives!* Weird states which I cannot even imagine after having actual contact with them. And above all was the infinity, the magnitude of it, the space, the void... the vast leagues between our galaxies would be swallowed up as nothing in these dreamless abysses. Whole universes could be lost in endless gulfs between endless gulfs...

And so I passed, through ever burgeoning circles of complexity. Sphere after sphere, order after order, totally gone was anything

earthly to which I could cling--I was alone, *Totally* alone, not merely divorced from my species and wrenched from my world, but parted from the *very laws which created my being!* Can anyone understand that? I can't--not now, not now that I'm again in my own world...

My senses continued to go through wild evolutions, twistings, and reorientations... yet still, I began to perceive strange patterns. I was conscious of a weird, rhythmic pulsing, complex and polydimensional and somehow terribly frightening. The space--if it could be called that--jerked and swirled out-ward around me.

I will try to explain what happened next in terms of vision, but you must remember that eyes, or any other physical sense organs, would have been useless here. I was approaching what could be described as a vast space, bigger than all the empty ether in our universe of galaxies and light and time. It was vast, and splintered into an *infinite* multiplicity of dimensions--it was empty space, beyond light or darkness, heat or cold, or even time, yet in it was the sum complexity of Creation...it was the *Ultimate*... the *Great Abyss*.

And madly pulsing outward from this region were straggling strands of cosmic existence, worlds whirled madly out in new circles, spheres flaming with the newness of their creation. New-spun time reeled out in a spiral vaster than all the cosmic fabric I had yet seen, save for the all-consuming emptiness into which I now devolved.

I fell toward the center through cold and silent spaces. My new senses strained the darkness with all their might, yet could report nothing--I was a lone point on an infinite plane. Only the pulsing was there, in its alien rhythm. With all my being I strove to fight away from the quivering core infinitely below me.

To one side, massive as a galaxy, stood a creature that I cannot name. Its form possessed certain peculiarities, or vague suggestions of incorrectness, which rendered it descriptionless. Somehow it grasped an object--which for want of better descriptions, I will call a flute--and produced the pulsing which evoked such terror in my soul.

Further on I came to the writhing core; with a sudden wash of loathing and repugnance, I saw that I was approaching a legion of twisted and fungused bat-like creatures which twitched their questionable members and jerked their titan bulks to the mad pipings of the unholy musician.

Of what occurred next, I can say little. Most has been blasted by the natural propensity of the brain for smoothing over unbearable shocks. Seeking other explanations would be

useless...I've tried them all; delusions, dreams, even madness, but nothing can match the stark reality of it. I have studied, since, the questions of astral travel. But on this I cannot say. Indeed, *Nothing* can seem certain to me any more, save that I have traveled beyond that which marks the limits of Einstein's space, and through nightmare gulfs of darkness, drenched with awesome alienness. And I looked at the very center and saw the *Mad Beast at the center of the Universe!*

My entire consciousness was riven asunder by that loathsomeness...my altered senses pulled back in horror and disgust, *BUT IT WAS TOO LATE*--my mind had been permanently seared and numbed; left with a gaping, rotten pit which imprisoned a memory that, if released, would flood the brain and by sheer monstrousness reduce it to an incoherent electric chaos!

So maddening was the fear and disgust that it tore me back to our poor and finite world. I can remember little, my mind was literally and truly shattered. But I can faintly recall somehow grasping the hook and rope which I had prepared and racing to that pit of Hell--that gulf of Tartarus from whose inky and unholy depths I had drawn that hateful water...

If I had not spent that time, working off the nervous trauma which I had built up, I could quite possibly be totally mad today.

Finally, the fact penetrated to me that I was grasping some object in my hands. Closing

my eyes, I slumped down against the well, breathing heavily, and trying to draw in the torn shreds of my sanity.

Settling myself somewhat I glanced to the form which I clutched so tightly. My screams reverberated through the countryside and attracted the attention of my neighbors.

I was holding a three-dimensional image of the very nightmare which had so unbalanced me!

Most of its horror was lost in the picturing, but still...*still!* That shapeless, lightless main bulk perched on its queerly-angled pedestal...the spreading bat-wings! *That Eye!* That *Three-Lobed Eye* of some nameless red which seemed, edges obscured by translucent layers of the main substance, to...*To Burn!*

My last conscious thought before the dark waters of madness closed in was of smashing the obscene thing against the well...

VI

I awoke from my uneasy sleep in the nearby hospital. My hands were bandaged--I had bitten myself severely in my madness.

The doctors listened to my story...then tried to convince me that it was all nervous shock of some sort.

Later I went back to that awful grove. The oil-stainsymbols were gone from the ground, and from the well arose the stench of polluted water. Scattered about were small fragments of some unrecognizable stony material.

And the rocks of the well have begun to crumble with unnatural speed.

THE TEMPLE

The desert casts its shroud around
The Temple of the Bat,
Wherein are placed the amber thrones
On which dead monarchs sat.

The sacred catafalques resound
With death's unholy glee,
While censers fume amid the bones
Of vanished royalty.

No remnant here, no lingering sound:
The worshippers have fled.
The gods they knew are less than stones,
Not slumbering, but dead.

Andrew Duane

