THE WEIRDBOOK SAMPLER
[An introduction to WEIRDBOOK magazine, ISSN # 8755-7452]

FICTION
3 Brian Lumley, TO KILL A WIZARD
8 Jessica Amanda Salmonson, OATH OF AN HONORABLE GENTLEMAN
9 Gordon Linzner, THE RING OF AA
16 John Alfred Taylor, MAID OF ATHENS, ERE WE PART
19 Dennis M. Maloney, SILVER CROSS
24 Dan Crawford, IMP O' DARKNESS
25 Wayne Rile Williams, BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND
26 Albert J. Manachino, CHAMBER OF FEAR

ARTWORK
Front cover: © 1988 by STEPHEN E. FABIAN
Back cover & p. 31: © 1988 by DONNA GORDON
p. 15: © 1988 by JEAN CORBIN
p. 18: © 1988 by R. LUMLEY
p. 22: © 1988 by TOM MUZZELL
p. 23: © 1988 by CATHEY DANTZLER
p. 25: © 1988 by BRUCE STUART CONKLIN

POEMS
8 Darrell Schweitzer, TWO KNIGHTS
15 A. Arthur Griffin, EVOLUTION: 1988
18 Alan Ryan, MEETING ANCIENT MONSTERS
18 Susan Packie, NIGHT BEAST
18 Joseph Payne Brennan, GARDEN OF SILVER
23 W. Fraser Sandercombe, WINTERWOLF
23 B. L. Corbett, BARRIERS
23 Brian J. Groth, BATWING PAVILION
31 C. Youden, FOR F.K.
31 Will Guthrie, ULTRA-VISION: WHAT WE SAW

Address: WEIRDBOOK, W. PAUL GANLEY: PUBLISHER, P. O. Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226-0149.
Make checks & money orders payable to WEIRDBOOK or to W. PAUL GANLEY. Price per copy, $3 but add 75¢ for postage & handling.

WEIRDBOOK, the magazine for which this is a sampler, is $6 per copy ($10 for double-issue # 23/24), plus $1.50 postage & handling. Back issues: $5 each #11-#20, $6 each #21, 22. Add $1.50 for the first one ordered, 25¢ each additional. Issues 1-10 are available in copier reprints only at $3 each, all 10 for $25, plus postage & handling.

Subscriptions to WEIRDBOOK: 7 issues for $25 ($30 outside the U.S.). Dealer inquiries welcomed.
I also publish limited-edition books by authors such as Brian Lumley, Darrell Schweitzer, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, J. N. Williamson, etc. Please send 25¢ for a catalog; also ask for a FREE sample of my advertising quarterly, FANTASY MONGERS.

THE WEIRDBOOK SAMPLER: Copyright © 1988 by W. Paul Ganley. The right to reprint this issue is reserved. All other rights to each contribution are the property of the corresponding contributor.

FOREWORD
I might as well confess it right up front: I'm going to try to sell you something.

First, this. If you picked this up (in a specialty store, or at a convention), let me explain that it's just what it claims to be — it's a sampler for WEIRDBOOK. The basic difference is page number. WEIRDBOOK usually has 64 pages; the sampler only has 32. That's why it only costs half as much: surprise!

The idea is this. Sure, you've probably heard of WEIRDBOOK. This year (1988) is the 20th year anniversary of WEIRDBOOK, so it's been around a while, and then, too. WEIRDBOOK and I won a World Fantasy Award last Hallowe'en at the World Fantasy Convention in Nashville.

But still — maybe you haven't wanted to plunk down $6 of your hard-earned cash to look at a recent issue ($7.30 if by mail). After all, you don't know what it's really like. Here's your chance to find out at half price. Get a look at what WEIRDBOOK has to offer.

There is one major difference between the sampler and a regular issue, namely, I didn't feel I could include a story of ten or fifteen thousand words in length, as I usually do in the larger "Weirdbook" issues. Otherwise it's pretty typical. I'm hoping you'll like it and want to take a look at the "real thing." Oh, yes: all stories in this issue are new.

I also publish a quarterly advertising magazine called FANTASY MONGERS, which includes some articles, too, and you can get a FREE copy of that for the asking. I hope you will also be intrigued enough to send me a 25¢ stamp for my catalog. I think I've published some pretty good items, things of especial interest to the dedicated fan or reader of fantasy/horror/adventure tales.

As I go to press with the sampler, I am also getting ready to put together the 20th-year anniversary issue of WEIRDBOOK. It'll be over 128 pages in thickness (same size: 8½"x11"), with such writers as Lumley, Adrian Cole, Darrell Schweitzer, Richard Tierney, Gerald W. Page, Janet Fox, Joseph Payne Brennan, Jessica Salmonson, Al Sarrantonio, and quite a few others, and features a Fabian cover and lots of other artwork. The cover price is probably $10, and for you collectors, there's a hard cover edition (limited) for $30. Don't forget the $1.50 postage & handling fee. Or: check your regular dealer or store specializing in fantasy and science fiction.

A lot of readers also have writing aspirations, so I had better mention that I am overstocked and will be closed to unsolicited submissions for several years. To find out when I'm "reading" again (and look for other markets) send for my "information sheet."

Subscribers of the irregular magazine, EERIE COUNTRY, will be getting this as part of their subscription (it counts as issue #10).

If you have any questions or comments I am always glad to reply. Thank you for buying this! WPG
"They come and they go, these wizard-slayers," whispered Mylakhron to his currently favourite familiar, a one-legged jackdaw of spiteful mien. "Some creep in the night like thieves — the ancient mage stifled a yawn, of boredom perhaps — others bound boldly over the drawbridge, eyes flashing fire and swords aglint; and there are those who disguise themselves as simple men seeking an old, fatherly magician's advice." He chucked the bird gently under its curving beak. "But then, I don't need to tell you these things, do I? You yourself have slain a wizard or two, in your time."

"I have, I have," croaked the bird, his bright button eyes unblinking, his head cocked to catch his master's words. "You also, Mylakhron, I would have slain, were your protections less potent that time." And there was bitterness in the Jackdaw's croaky voice.

"Come now, Gyriiss," Mylakhron softly chastened, his voice like a fall of autumn leaves. "After all this time — how many years? — is there still enmity between us. You came to Tharamoon seeking to slay me, remember? And I wonder, were our roles reversed, would I still live to talk to you? I doubt it. As to your welfare; who else in all Theem'hdra would procure these good nuts, at today's prices, in order to pamper a balding, one-legged jackdaw?" He dangled his long fingers in a bowl of almonds.

"But once I had two good legs," croaked Gyriiss. "And as for nuts — which you magick out of thin air, at no cost at all — why, I ate only the rarest viands and drank only the finest wines!"

"Wines!" the wizard chuckled. "Choice meats. Whoever heard of a jackdaw eating rare viands? You're an ingrate, Gyriiss, and in a mood tonight, that's all. Was I ever unkind to you?"

"Only the once," came the answer, as sour a croak as ever Mylakhron heard.

"Ah! But then it was you or me," he answered, adjusting the wide sleeves of his rune-embroidered robe. And his voice was colder now. "Anyway, it bores me to review all that. What use to open up old wounds, eh? Now let it be, Gyriiss, and come tell me what you make of this." He nodded toward his great blue-green sheystone of crystal where it was set central at the flat apex of a tripod table all carved of black wood and inlaid with gold and ivory arabesques.

The jackdaw hopped from its perch to Mylakhron's shoulder with scarce a flutter, peered with him at the sheystone which, as the wizard drew an intricate figure in the air with his forefinger, at once grew cloudy as from some eruption of internal aethers.

"See! See?" said Mylakhron, as the mists in the crystal ball opened like ethereal curtains upon a bleak and wintry scene. "I've been watching him approach for days now, and at last he has reached Tharamoon itself. How say you? Is this not just such a wizard-slayer, come to try his luck?"

Gyriiss craned his feathery neck and looked closer, his beady eyes agleam. He saw a man in a boat, sailing stormy waters on the approach to Tharamoon's crescent bay. "Aye," he croaked, "but no ordinary slayer by a mile. I know this one. He is Humbuss Ank, a Northman — and quite recklessly mad!"

"A Northman!" Mylakhron narrowed his silver eyebrows, drew them close together over his sharp nose. "Mad, you say? Hah! But they are berserkers all, these men of the fjords! You, too, were a wild one, if memory serves..." And to himself he remarked the bird's keen eyesight, for he himself had discerned no clear detail of the figure in the boat except that it was a man.

The jackdaw's feathers stood up along his spine. He shook himself, sprang aloft, flew round the rim of the high tower room crying: "Berserkers all, berserkers all! — and alighted again on Mylakhron's hunched shoulder. "True, true," he croaked, "but even moreso in the case of Humbuss Ank. And with good reason."

"Say on," commanded Mylakhron, keenly interested. He had somehow guessed that Gyriiss might be knowledgeable in the subject of wizard-slayers.

"This one's father, mother, and elder brother," the Jackdaw explained, "were slain all three by the cold magicks of Khriissan ice-priests. It happened at a fording- and trading-place on the Great Marl River, and this is how it was:

"It was in the late autumn of the year and the coming winter would be a bad one; already the ice crept over the Reef of Great Whales, and the skies were ominously heavy with more than their fair share of snow and blizzard. Thull Ank, and his strapping wife Gubba had trapped well; their haul that year was of the highest quality. The trading went well — for a while, anyway. But Humbuss' brother, Guz, drank too much of the bitter wine of the ice-priests, and when he was drunk made much sport of their ice-gods and -goddesses.

"So they slew Guz and his father both with their magicks, and took Gubba back with them to Khriissa as a sacrifice to the very gods her son had scorned. Aye, and they stole all of their pelts and goods, too — word of which eventually got back to Humbuss, a mere lad then in Hjarpon Settlement. Since when he is grown to a man and lives only to kill wizards and priests and all such purveyors of magic wherever he may find them. And now at last it seems he's come for you, Mylakhron of Tharamoon..."

"My thanks, Gyriiss," said Mylakhron archly. "Though why I should detect accusation in your tone I cannot say! Towards myself? Because I, too, am a wizard? That is as it may be; but I am not one of Khriissa's cruel magers, nor indeed do I make human or any other sacrifice to strange gods. As for women, I respect them — the human sort, anyway. I forced myself upon a lamia or two in my youth, but only as ritual ingredients in my spells. So do not glare your beady accusations at me! Now then, let me look more closely at this berserker come to kill me..."

He narrowed his eyes at the bird, but deliberately refrained from asking how Gyriiss knew so much about Humbuss Ank. Then without further pause he drew another figure with his finger, a shape which seemed to fall slowly from fingertip to sheystone
and be absorbed by it. And lo! — the picture in the crystal ball swam up large as life, larger than the very crystal itself, until wizard and familiar both might fancy they were themselves integral in the frore and windswept scene.

And Mylakhron seemed to stand upon Tharamoon's pebbly strand within the bay, with Gyrriss flapping upon his shoulder; and they watched as the lone boat battled the breakers to finally shoot through the sharp volcanic rocks of the reef and into calmer water unscathed. The ragged sail was lowered as the boat swept on ashore, and down from his reeling craft sprang a man into the frothing surf even as the keel of his boat bit sand and grit; so that in a trice this northern adventurer was dragging his vessel ashore, hauling it up the beach with arms that looked utterly tireless.

Fingerling his beard, Mylakhron nodded thoughtfully. "A strong man, this one, Gyrriss."

And his familiar — perhaps too eagerly, too gladly — agreed saying: "That he is, that he is! No wily warrior this, Mylakhron, but merely strong. Brainy? — never! But brawny? As an ox, brawny! A man to laugh in the face of your magicks, this Humbuss — aye, even in the face of hell itself! He'll storm on through all your mirages and illusions, no matter how monstrous, and damn any demons you may conjure back to the dark where they're spawned. It is not so much that he is invincible, rather that he thinks he is. Mind over matter, O master — which is a sort of magick in itself!"

"Hmmp!" mused the wizard darkly, a trifle surly now. "Let me look closer. I wish to see his face."

Meanwhile: the Northman had made his boat secure in the lee of the cliffs, which now he set about to scale. And Mylakhron floated up light as a feather to where the invader swarmed up those sheer crags like a monkey. He looked into Humbuss' face, even into his blackly glittering eyes, and Humbuss saw him not. For of course this was only a picture in a shewstone, however real it might seem.

And Mylakhron saw a man whose soul was empty, bereft of any last vestige of honour or decency. His black eyes were narrow, cruel and full of lust; his hard mouth was twisted in a sneer; his blunt nose and hollow left cheek were grimly scarred, and his squat nostrils sniffed the chill night air like those of a great bloodhound. His narrow black mane stood up stiffly down his back, like the risen hackles of a dog; and diagonally across that broad, muscled back he bore a mighty broadsword, strapped there in its leather scabbard, its blade notched from many a fierce affray.

Then Mylakhron drew back and away into his tower retreat, and Gyrriss flapping still where he clung to his shoulder. And the wizard snapped his fingers, at which the shewstone cleared and became simply a blue-green ball of crystal, quiescent and opaque.

"Gyrriss," said Mylakhron then, "this man is a brutal slayer, and yet I relish not the thought of killing him. Indeed killing is not my way at all, for it lacks sensitivity. So tell me, how may I stop this thing before it goes any further?"

Gyrriss flew to his perch and sat preening, saying nothing.

"Well? Have you no ideas?"

"What can I say?" the jackdaw finally croaked.

"He's a brute and a berserker on a lifelong quest for revenge."

"Revenge? I think not," said Mylakhron. "No, there's more than that brings him here." At which the jackdaw gave a small start, glad that his master was looking the other way. "He may have started this life work of his out of some perverted sense of duty to his priest slain kith and kin," Mylakhron continued, "but since then it has got quite out of hand. Now I think he kills because he likes it, or for profit. So much I divined when I looked into his face. If it is the former, mayhap I'm in trouble. If the latter—"

"Then you can buy him off with a pouch of priceless gems," croaked Gyrriss.

"Why not?" said Mylakhron, bringing his pacing to an abrupt halt. "Indeed, why not? I have a vault full of jewels, and what use are they to me?"

"No use at all," said Gyrriss, "when you can simply conjure them out of the air — as you conjure my nuts!"

"But that must be a last resort," Mylakhron paced some more, holding up a finger. "For if I'm to give gems to this one, next year there'll be a dozen like him. First I shall attempt to deter him with magick!"

"But he scorns magick," answered Gyrriss. "Many another mage has tried to frighten him off. And where are they now?"

"I do believe you're enjoying this!" said Mylakhron with a glare. "Nathless, what you say is probably true. Still I shall try to frighten him away. It's that or kill him out of hand, and I won't spill blood if it can be avoided — as you are well aware." And he glowered pointedly at Gyrriss, who for his part croaked:

"You could always transport him back whence he came."

"In the last year or two I've transported — how many wizard-slayers?"

"Four, by my count," answered the bird at once, "plus a pirate ship and its motley crew."

"Correct!" snapped Mylakhron. "A pair of full brigands back to Klühn; a black pirate princeling back to his jungled island, him and his ship and all his crew with him; and a deranged Hrossak hunter back to the steppes. I weary of transporting! Also, word may soon get out that transportation is my sole defence! What's more, if it's true that this Humbuss Ank has killed so many sorcerers, by now he may well have some small understanding of magick himself. The cancellation of the rune of transportation is easily achieved, if a man knows the words. And once one spell is broken, then other enchantments are checked that much easier. Spells are like building blocks which interlock: remove one and the entire wall is weakened. No, I'd not risk that with this one — except if I fail first to scare him off."

"So," said Gyrriss, summing up, "you'll scare him, or transport him if he won't scare, or buy him off as a last resort. And is that the sum total of the measures you'll take against him?"

"It is!" snapped Mylakhron. "And it must suffice, else I'll be left with no choice but to kill him."

"If you can," croaked Gyrriss quietly, wickedly.

"What?" cried the wizard. "If I can? And how, pray, may he prevail, against a fortress of magicks
and machineries such as this tower of mine? You try my patience, Gyrriss!" And he stamped his foot on stone flags. "Perhaps you'd welcome my demise? And would you remain a jackdaw forever? For you surely will if some barbaric doom befalls me. Who then to open my runebook and read the words which alone may unspell you, ungrateful bird?"

And Gyrriss was rightly cowed, and hunched down into himself upon his perch. "I meant only to say," he croaked, "that if you're to set guards and traps and such you'd best be about it. By now Humbuss Ank has scaled the cliffs and strikes this way. Some twenty miles, as I gauge it. Rough country, but still he'll be here before morning."

"Hmph!" grunted Mylakhron. And, "Calm yourself, Gyrriss. There's time enough and more. As for his chances: a snowflake would stand more chance in hell! Methinks you make too much of him. Myself: I shall be fast asleep when—if—he gets here. I would not soil my hands on him but leave such servile chores to others far less sensitive. Attend me if you will, I go now to make the arrangements..."

Mylakhron's tower was reached via a drawbridge across a chasm too wide for jumping, whose sheer sides went down endlessly into darkness. Beneath the tower itself were many mazy vaults whose contents were conjectural and at best dubious; above the ground stood six floors serving various purposes. Topmost consisted of a storeroom, pantry and kitchen, bath- and steam-room, small study, and observatory for astrological readings. Gyrriss had never seen those rooms: they were forbidden to him, as was the wizard's bedchamber and orchid-decked conservatory on the penultimate level.

That left four floors with which the jackdaw was familiar. The great room with the shewstone was one of three interconnected rooms on the fourth level, beneath Mylakhron's bedchamber, which also contained the vast majority and endless variety of his thaumatographical books and experimental apparatus. The next floor down was a maze of storerooms, usually all but empty, for Mylakhron conjured most of his supplies as required. But beneath that the two lower floors were dangerous places indeed for would-be intruders. For built into the rooms therein were certain mechanical devices so designed as to utterly incapacitate all unwary thieves and the like. They were veritable mantraps, which now Mylakhron would bait. But first he'd set his guards on the narrow and stony path beyond the drawbridge, by which route Humbuss Ank must needs approach.

So down he went to the vaults with Gyrriss (who didn't much care for the dark) where he animated three stone statues and led them stiffly up out of darkness and across the drawbridge. On the far side he turned and faced them, and scowled his disgust at them. For they were—had been—favored familiairs in their time, and he had placed some small trust in them. But many years ago they'd turned on him and deliberately lured a wizard-slayer here, for which Mylakhron had punished them by turning them to stone. He'd punished the wizard-slayer, too—one Gyrriss Kag—replacing them with him. But once in a while he'd bring them up and let them ease their joints, and at times he even had work for them. Now was such a time.

The three were chiropterans, great bats who wore the faces of the men they'd once been. Now as they stumbled in Mylakhron's wake he spoke to them, saying: "A man is coming who would kill me. You—" he pointed to the first man-bat, "—will remain here, at the drawbridge. If he comes this far you will offer him this for his trouble and tell him to turn aside." And he gave the chiropteran a fat pouch of gems. "Fail to turn him back," he warned, "and I'll stand you forever on the balcony of my tower observatory to weather in the wind and the rain."

Then he walked half a mile with the other two and paused again, speaking to the second of them: "You will remain here. If my would-be slayer comes this far, you will utter the rune of transportation and hurl him back whence he came. Failure to do so will see you broken in two halves upon this very spot, where time and nature will mold your pieces into small stones."

After a further half-mile he stopped again where the path wound down a steep cliff, and to the third bat-thing said: "You will astonish the man with illusions, and afraid for his life he'll flee. In the event he does not flee—you shall be dashed into small, small fragments. I, Mylakhron, have spoken!"

And with Gyrriss on his shoulder he returned to his tower, set his mechanical protections, proceeded up the winding central staircase to his bedchamber. At the door he took the jackdaw on his finger, saying: "There. And fear not for me, Gyrriss. I shall sleep like a babe, and this Northman shall not disturb me. Begone!" At which the bird descended to the room of the shewstone, where for a while he sat in utter silence, waiting for his master to fall asleep...

* * *

Within the half-hour, unable to hold off any longer, Gyrriss flapped silently to a balcony and across it into the fast approaching night, and flew up to peer into his master's bedchamber through the single great window there, which fortunately stood open. The room was all of mosaics, covering floor, walls and ceiling. Above flew ebony swallows in a lapis-lazuli sky; the walls were a jade forest with jewelled birds of paradise; and the floor was of chrysoulite ferns, inlaid with a hundred marble monkeys.

There slept Mylakhron, as his huddled form beneath the satin bedclothes testified. But to be absolutely certain, Gyrriss passed through the window into the forbidden room and swooped once on silent wings around the bed to hear the wizard snoring. Satisfied then, he left the tower and sped across the drawbridge, following the path toward the distant Bay of Tharamoon. And beneath him he spied the three chiropteran guards where Mylakhron had placed them. Eventually in the gloom he saw the Northman Humbuss Ank striding toward him and descended, flying well over the other's head.

"Humbuss!" he croaked then. "Look up. It is I, Gyrriss Kag."

The barbarian saw him, paused, guffawed and slapped his thigh. "What? And is it really you, Gyrriss, who once swigged ale with me and slew the occasional wizard? Come down and speak to me, if you're one and the same, and explain why you've called me here to this cold and lonely crag."
Gyriss alighted on the other's mighty shoulder. "I'm him, all right!" he croaked. "Do you remember that ill-omened night each of us boasted how he'd be the first to breach Mylakhrion's protections and kill him? Drunk, we were, and me so drunk that I set out at once to be started on the quest. But you held back, saying you'd work your way up to him by degrees. Do you remember?"

"I do," said Humbuss, still mirthful. "And it seems I was right to be cautious. He was too much for you, eh?"

"Indeed he was, and too much for many another I've called here. But not, I pray, too much for you. For with my help, old friend, you'll surely slay him."

"Well, so far so good," growled Humbuss. "I followed the course you set me across the sea and through the ragged reef, and here I am. You mentioned a treasure, Gyriss, and I desire it. Also, I desire the great prestige of killing Mylakhrion the so-called 'immortal.' But what would you have out of this?"

"Only my human form once more returned to me," answered Gyriss. "And the satisfaction of seeing Mylakhrion die! For after you've killed him you'll read a certain rune of restoration from his great runebook and I'll be a man again. After which I'll show you his treasure house."

"Good enough!" Humbuss agreed. "And now: how may you help me, eh?"

And Gyriss told him all about the three guardians of the way, and something about the drawbridge, and more about Mylakhrion's tower itself. Following which he flapped aloft and returned the way he'd come, his heart filled with treacherous satisfaction...

"* * *"

Meanwhile, back at the tower: a tiny black spider surveyed her jackdaw-ruined web at Mylakhrion's window, and angered spun a silken thread and drifted on it to where the wizard slept. She alighted on his cheek and crept into his ear, and Mylakhrion awakened, listened, smiled and sat up. He waited for her to emerge, then carefully carried her back to her web, which he repaired at once with a word and a wave of his hand.

"My thanks, small friend," he whispered, and slowly descended to his rooms of many magicks—even to the room of the shewstone...

"* * *"

Humbuss Ank came upon the first man-bat and commanded him, "Stand aside!"

"Much as I would like to, I cannot," answered the chiropteran, and he conjured an illusion wherein he swelled up massive as a mountain. Humbuss laughed and pushed him off the cliff, and stiff from his stony sojourn in the vaults he could not fly but fell like an icicle in the melt—and like an icicle was dashed into small, small fragments, as Mylakhrion had decreed.

Half a mile later Humbuss came to the second guard and said, "Out of my way, bat-thing!"

To which the other answered: "Sdroieh et ot kcab—Kna Ssubuh, enogebe"—which was the rune of transportation.

But Gyriss had told him the rune's reversal, and before the spell could take effect Humbuss cried: "Diputs, grud te!"—and hacked the chiropteran in twain. Just as Mylakhrion had prescribed.

And finally, when he came to the drawbridge, Humbuss found the third guard waiting, who offered him the jewels and bade him turn aside. But the Northman merely snatched the jewels from him and scornfully shouldered him out of the way, then ignored him utterly and turned to face the drawbridge. And scattering small handfuls of jewels into the abyss as Gyriss had instructed, he commanded: "Drawbridge, show me where you really are!" And the jewels passed through the illusory drawbridge and into the abyss; but to one side they fell not, and Humbuss stepped out across what seemed thin air, letting jewels drop in front to guide him safely across. And so at last he entered in through the door in the tower's base.

Now Gyriss had warned him about the two lower levels, and so Humbuss was wary. But even as he glanced in through the main door of the lower level's complex, so the jackdaw came fluttering down from above to remind him of the dangers:

"Ware, Humbuss! These are not treasures you spy but illusions!"

Humbuss looked again. The floor of the room behind the open door was tiled with small hexagonal mirrors, so that all in the room seemed duplicated. What he saw, therefore, seemed doubly awesome. For in that room were heaped treasures beyond all human dreams of avarice, where every known gem—and many unknown— spilled from piles upon the mirror floor! And even as he stood there with the juices of greed making his mouth moist, so a mouse scampered across the threshold and ran in amazement, ogling his mouse-reflection to and fro amidst the glitter and the wealth. But no harm befell the mouse.

"It is the floor!" cried Gyriss. "The mouse has no weight, but only place the tip of your great sword upon the floor beyond that door—"

Humbuss did so—and scarce had time to withdraw his blade before the scintillant illusion vanished! And in its place a brilliant flashing of silent, silver blades, a sieve of shimmering motion, a mesh of metallic teeth and shining scalpels. And all so silent! So that in a moment the room breathed out a fine damp mist of mouse-essence and closed its door gently in Humbuss' face.

And even Humbuss Ank a little awed by the room's deadly efficiency, so that he needed no urging to climb the stone stairs to the next level. Gyriss flapped along behind him, but the bird seemed more anxious now. "Ware, Humbuss, ware! When I came to kill Mylakhrion, I stepped upon a floor of fine mosaics, all shaped like a flight of jackdaws—and see what became of me?"

Already the Northman had reached the next level and would not have paused a moment—had not his narrowed eyes glimpsed beyond a second open door such a harem as to send even a eunuch into a frenzy of passion! And no eunuch Humbuss Ank but hot-blooded Northman.

"Stars!" he gasped. And the ladies where they feasted at a circular table all glanced his way, and smiled, and wriggled, and beckoned him to come in.

"No!" cried Gyriss. "This, too, is a machine, and that door is a door to another place, not of this world. It is a place Mylakhrion knows. Look again:
these are not women but succubi and lamias. And see what they're eating, Humbuss.

**Only look at their repast!**

Humbuss looked. Beneath the circular table, visible now that the mist of lust was off his eyes, the great fat body of a man writhed and twitched where it was bound to the table's central leg. But his head went up through the table, and was open at the top like an egg—into which the ladies dipped their silver spoons...

Shuddering, even Humbuss Ank, he drew back from the door and climbed again, and up past the third and fourth floors, until he went barbarian and bird together, to the very door of Mylakhirion's bedchamber—which also stood open.

Now Gyriss grew excited indeed. "Only once have I been within," he croaked as quietly as possible, "and so cannot help you here. The chamber seems innocent enough, but from here you're on your own. I will not watch, for I admit to feeling faint from my own treachery."

"What?" hissed Humbuss in amazement. "He's a foul magician, is he not?"

"The mightiest," Gyriss agreed. "But his magicks are more nearly white than black. I will not watch."

"Fainheart!" said Humbuss. "He made of you a crippled bird!"

"Because I came to kill him," squawked Gyriss, but not loudly. "Since when... he has not been unkind to me. You still have time to go back, Humbuss..."

"Bah!" thundered the barbarian. And, "Have done!" And he strode across the mosaic floor to where the wizard's figure stirred as he came sluggishly awake beneath satin bedclothes. And as if mysteriously guided, Humbuss' booted feet stepped not once upon a capering marble monkey, but always on the spaces between. Up went his sword as the bedclothes were thrown back, and down in an arc of tarnished, notched steel—

—To strike in halves a squawking, treacherous jackdaw!

And from behind, where Gyriss had fluttered at the door, now came a low sad sigh, and a somber voice saying: "Welcome, Humbuss Ank, to the house of Mylakhirion!"

Humbuss whirled, saw the magician materialize there, whose night-black wings grew into a cloak of glowing runes; and gawping his astonishment he stepped forward. Alas, his left foot came down upon a scampering monkey.

Then, in an instant, the mosaics parted and up from below hissed an hundred silver scythes, striking once and returning below before the mosaics could close again. And all so quick that Humbuss did not see, or even feel, the blade which sheared his trunk-like left leg cleanly above the knee...

* * *

In the morning Mylakhirion buried Gyriss in a tiny grave in his garden behind the tower. And watching from the high balcony of his observatory, a lone chiropteran of stone stared blindly down and prayed only for good weather. And chained to the neck of the stony man-bat a tiny one-legged monkey gibbered and complained bitterly.

Mylakhirion heard his cries, looked up and smiled. "No, no," he said, shaking his head. "There you stay for now, my friend. At least until your temper's improved. And even then you must be house-trained.

"Indeed, for the personal habits of Northmen are utterly notorious..."
There is a tale from the Reign of Terror about a man of pure heart and motive, arrested one dark dawn in his very bedclothes, and asked numerous questions regarding a blackguard. The man could not but tell the truth of the matter. He confessed that the information sought was indeed at his disposal, for it was true that he had had the displeasure of witnessing the very crimes described. "I assure you I in no wise favor the fiendish man you seek," said the good citizen, "but I must at all cost refrain from imparting to you the answers you require."

At first the officers of the revolution were seriously perturbed, until the prisoner explained himself more fully.

"The felon would not have spared a witness without certain guarantees. Thus he extracted from myself a binding oath never in my life to reveal his name."

The officers were impressed by the man's deep sense of honor. Nonetheless, they could not but warn him that the guillotine awaited enemies of the new state; and any man withholding requisite information was such an enemy.

"By my oath to the fiend," he reiterated, "I shall not reveal his identity for so long as I live."

"You shall, therefore, not live long," the officers sadly confirmed, and their prisoner was scheduled for the guillotine.

The news spread across Paris that a man of honor and merit was in such straits. Petitions were made in his behalf, but the terrible day arrived without hope of mercy. On the afternoon of the intended execution, all manner of Parisians were in attendance. A body of guards were brought out to insure the peace. Every eye was upon the fellow, whose hands were bound to his back; who was groomed well for the occasion; who approached the grim machine with fine dignity and composure.

Surely the protected felon knew of the events, for all Paris knew. Many prayers were made for the sake of the condemned, for the arrival of a moved and repentant criminal, and a gentleman's reprieve.

The innocent man went to his knees as before an altar and placed his head, without complaint, into the guillotine. A hooded executioner whispered with genuine compassion, "Brave sir, tell me the name of the foul criminal your silence defends. I have been instructed to free you to the crowd's delight, if you will but repent your unnecessary oath."

"I shall not," he replied. "In all my life, I cannot."

Salvation was not to be found, and the head of the meritorious man fell into the basket. Perhaps the executioner never regretted his occupation more greatly than he regretted it that day. He knelt before the basket, and peered within.

"Now sir, you are dead," said the executioner. "Tell me, therefore, the name of the felon who let you tumble thus."

The mouth of the severed head moved with such careful manner that the executioner was able to read the lips, learning thereby the name of the coward who allowed this injustice.

"Rest well," said the man beneath the hood. "You shall be avenged."

Copyright © 1988 by J. A. Salmonson

TWO KNIGHTS

The old knight rode through wood and waste, before first light of day. The young knight met him on a hill above the darkened bay.

The old knight spoke; his armor gleamed beneath the brilliant stars. "Come ride with me, brave sir," he said, "and celebrate the wars—"

"Crusades for Christ, my son has fought, throughout the pagan lands, and relics of the Cross he's won, and held in trembling hands."

"A mighty ship, with banners bright, this morn on yonder shore shall rest, and so my son comes home, to wander nevermore."

Then came they to the wooden bridge, where living water flowed. The old knight clattered straight across; the young drew rein and slowed.

"Come ride with me," the old knight said "to welcome home my son. Come praise his name; come praise his fame; come praise the deeds he's done."

The young knight sat in silence there in darkness on the hill. His voice was like a cold, faint breeze, Quiet, rustling, still.

"I cannot cross the living stream, or ride with you again. I am the ghost of your dear son, in bloody battle slain."

"My coffin lies within the ship that anchors on the morrow. Father, greet me there alone, in silence and in sorrow."

"And speak not of my battles won, my glory, or my worth, for all the dead are equal when they lie beneath the earth."

"The rogue, the slave, the king, the lord, the wicked and the just— What matter names or words or deeds, when all are clay and dust?"

The old knight rode to meet the ship, in silence and in sorrow. He laid his son within a grave, and died upon the morrow.

Copyright © 1988 by Darrell Schweitzer
THE RING OF AA
by GORDON LINZNER

Hamish was a squat, overweight creature with a pug nose and tiny black eyes contributing to a porcine appearance. His head was void of any hair save the unsightly tufts in his ears and the thin strands, clinging to his upper lip, which he considered a moustache. Even his ruddy complexion had a greasy sheen to it. All in all, he cut so unpersonable a figure that he fit perfectly the conception of sorcerers held by the less educated peoples of the seven kingdoms. That fact played no small part in his choice of the profession.

Smiling, the face twisted into a hideous grin, more like that of a feasting ghoul than a happy man. The scowl he wore when upset was much better suited to his ill-proportioned features. It was fortunate, aesthetically, that Hamish was usually upset.

At the moment, it was because of his apprentice, Bolen, an ungodly peasant lad Hamish had purchased cheaply some months earlier.

"You blundering imbecile! You spawned of a she-goat! You haven't the brains of a retarded dwarf!" The sorcerer could, and often did, go on for hours with his catalogue of insults. Bolen was inured to it, and waited for the spate of invective to pass. Eventually the old man would get around to specifics.

"I send you out for three good-sized bat wings, and what do you bring me? Look at them!" He held the tattered bits of membrane beneath Bolen's nose, which wrinkled at the musty scent.

"No self-respecting bat would be caught dead with wings like these! They wouldn't keep a moth aloft! They're fakes! A blind man could tell they were cut from the skin of a lizard!"

"Well, you told me to keep the grocery bill down," Bolen answered petulantly. "Anyway, what difference does it make? You'll only boil them down into some awful-smelling goop."

"What difference does it make? If you'd paid the slightest attention to the wisdom I've been trying to drum into your thick skull, you'd know the difference. When you end up with a hungry blood-demon instead of a tame and toothless flying dragon, you'll know the difference. Pfah! You're hopeless! I'll have to go to the market-place myself to get the right thing!"

At those words, the sorcerer snatched his cloak from its wall peg. Bolen shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Clean up the library while I'm gone," Hamish concluded. "And this time dust the upper shelves!" The words echoed in the great entrance hall of the wizard's fortress-like mansion as he stalked out into the streets of Camarck.

Bolen smiled smugly at Hamish's departure. His hand reached to the waistband of his trousers, feeling the cold, hard, iron object hidden there.

On a small scale, the market-place of Camarck was very much like its counterparts in Pellnoran. There was a large open area near one of the city's gates, so that merchants would not have to transport wares through narrow streets. Most of the stalls lining its perimeter were manned by local merchants: fruiters, weapers, sellers of silk and coarser cloths, and of course the farming peasants from the outlying areas. The remaining stalls were reserved for traveling merchants and entertainers, and it was to the latter that Hamish was bound. The self-possessed witch-queen Naomi would have a booth in this section, made conspicuous by its cover of canvas to give the semblance of a tent.

Naomi was not really qualified to be a witch, let alone queen of the witches, but the handful of true practicing witches in the seven kingdoms preferred to be known as sorceresses. The word connoted a much more flattering physical image. None of them considered it worth the effort to dispute the woman's claim. And Naomi was so old and shriveled and wise-sounding, and concocted her love-charms with such enthusiastic care, the peasants who paid for her services did not doubt she was what she said.

The old woman also had good business contacts, access to many of the rare herbs, animal parts and other magical ingredients used by necromancers for their spells. What few items she could not stock, she knew where to get. She was an invaluable source of materials to over a score of practitioners of magic. The resulting sorcerous traffic reinforced her image for the peasantry.

Hamish's abrupt appearance at the entrance of Naomi's tent startled a plain-looking brunette having her fortune told. She wore the hooded cloak of a noblemoman, and as such was educated enough to know better — but, after all, one never knew. She recognized Hamish immediately, for a sorcerer living in a town as provincial as Camarck forsook anonymity. Her colorless cheeks grew even more pallid.

The witch-queen sat with her back to the sorcerer, and did not turn to face him. She knew her visitor. Even without benefit of her client's reaction, she could see his reflection in the strategically placed mirror all but hidden in the dark folds of canvas at the back of the stall. It proved very effective in greeting clients.

The old woman showed no emotion — she rarely did, since part of her face was palsied. And she had no fear of the necromancers she dealt with, confident of her position as the best supplier of their needs.

"I am busy," she stated flatly. "Return in half an hour and I will deal with you." Dismissing with a wave of her hand Camarck's master sorcerer — one of the most powerful in the seven kingdoms — Naomi again devoted full attention to her suitably impressed client.

Enough of Hamish's original rage had been dissipated on the long walk to the market-place for common sense to prevail. Anyone else Hamish would have struck dead for such effrontery, but the combined wrath of Naomi's other wizard customers would have made short work of him. As meekly as he could, which was not very, he backed out of the witch-queen's stall.

To the left was a local baker's stall, today
falling when Hamish once again approached Naomi's stall.

The canvas coverings were gone. So, too, was the witch-queen, who preferred to travel at night for reasons best known to herself. She would not return to Camarck for several weeks. Hamish could catch up to her at Portacol, but that meant a day's travel and a great deal of inconvenience.

Hamish arrived home in a blacker temper than when he had left. That his mood could grow any fouler seemed unlikely. But it would.

The top shelves in Hamish's library had not been dusted. In fact, none of the shelves had been properly cleaned. Some of those at eye level had, however, been cleared of their contents. Unruly piles of books and scrolls lay where they had been unceremoniously deposited on the floor.

His master catalogue still rested on its own podium, but the carefully placed silk bookmarks had been removed, tied together, and strung across the breadth of the room after the fashion of the gaudy market stalls. The book itself was opened to a blank page, on which was scrawled a crude and unflattering caricature of Hamish. Beneath the sketch was block-lettered the single word "Oink."

The huge center table, with its stacks of books, notes, and equipment for his most recent experiments, was overturned. The skull of a blood-enemy of Hamish's, now his favorite paperweight, peered out at an angle from a dusty corner. Its forehead was badly fractured, and two teeth freshly missing.

The sorcerer roared his apprentice's name, then launched into a series of expletives so vile and blasphemous that had they been uttered by a man untrained in the necromantic arts his bones would have turned to jelly.

Bolen did not appear.

Hamish tore through the house, finding room after room in various stages of disarray. The library, however, had taken the brunt of the abuse, a special object of spite.

At last the sorcerer concluded the boy had run away. The little fool! As if he could hide from a wizard of Hamish's standing! To strike the lad dead in his tracks would be too kind. He would devise a slow and painful method of dying. He would retire to his private sanctum to decide on something appropriate.

The sorcerer fumbled beneath his cloak for the thick, heavy key to the only room he felt the necessity to lock. It was here he could sleep without fear of attack by some jealous colleague, here that he kept the most valuable of books and relics, things that could not be trusted to discovery by ordinary men. He drew out the short, stout chain which held the key to his sanctum.

The key itself was gone.

And the door to the sanctum, when Hamish stood before it for the first time since his return, was slightly ajar.

Bolen sat cross-legged in the center of Hamish's enormous canopied bed. With his short dagger, the apprentice was calmly slashing soft, expensive bed silks into long ragged strips. He looked up with a wide grin as Hamish pushed the door fully open. He revealed in his master's displeasure.
"Good evening, O wise and powerful eater of dung," he greeted.

There are no meaningful calligraphic symbols for the oath with which Hamish replied. Several mice living in the walls died at the sound of it. "You miserable whoreson," he continued in more conventional phraseology. "I'll boil your eyes in your sockets! I'll tear you to pieces, reassemble you, and tear you apart again! I'll summon the demon Brandishmeer to suck the living marrow from your bones! I'll pluck..."

"Threaten all you like, O foulest of the foul! Even a mutton-head like you should realize I wouldn't be sitting here if there were the least chance you could make good on any of them." The apprentice held up his left arm. A thin band of silver circled it just above the elbow. It gleamed with more than the reflected light of the room's single dim candle.

"The ring..." The sorcerer's voice faded. His eyes flitted to the broken chest at the foot of his bed. He had not noticed it at first. Now it was the most significant object in the sanctum.

The ring had been forged by Aa, most powerful and obscure of the pre-Chaos gods. Knowledge of its original function had been lost in that upheaval, but the artifact survived. Man — a new and curious creature those ancient deities only vaguely conceived of — was quick to discover its power to protect its wearer from any kind of sorcerous attack. The ring once fit tightly on Aa's mighty finger, but was far too large for a man to wear as anything less than an armband.

And now that self-same ring of Aa, the most potent of all sorcerous protections, was wrapped around the arm of an ignorant, arrogant peasant boy barely past puberty.

Bolen delighted in the opportunity to mock his master. "You thought I paid no attention when you tried to teach me your trade? I listened, all right, more than you realized. Since the day my son of a father sold me to you for drinking money, I've thought of nothing but escape. You disgust me. But I respected your power. I knew if I left, you would track me down, punish me. So I waited, though I did not know what for. A chance to kill you in your sleep, or for you to grow tired of my planned bungling. And one night I heard you talking to yourself about this!"

Again he displayed his bracelet.

"But could I leave before you got back? the lad continued. "I had to say a proper goodbye, old war!"

Bolen leapt at the sorcerer. Hamish raised a protective hand to his throat, but the apprentice had another target in mind. He planted a wet kiss on his master's only jowl, then danced gaily away, spitting the taste of it on the floor — or, rather, on the rare and valuable snow-bear pelt which served as a rug.

Hamish raised a sleeve to his cheek, wiping away the dampness. He did not follow Bolen's progress out of the sanctum, down the stone stairs, and finally out into the dark streets of Camarack.

Hamish's rage had peaked and, apparently, died. But it was when the sorcerer assumed his calmest aspect that he was most dangerous. The energy no longer expended in invective now fed fuel to the cold calculations of his mind.

He would need help to recover the ring of Aa, much as it galled him to admit it. He would have to employ a mercenary, and therein lay his problem. Those swords-for-hire unscrupulous enough to take on such an unsavory task as the hunting down of a mere boy were also unprincipled enough to appropriate the ring for themselves. The boy could not be trusted to keep its secret safe.

Yet the answer had presented itself only that afternoon. When Hamish realized it, he took it as an omen. One man might be persuaded to take on any task, no matter how distasteful, if his price were met: one man, furthermore, who dared not render himself vulnerable to any magic until his price was met.

Hamish took a sheet of paper from the drawer of his night table and began composing a summons.

"Fourteen silvers," the stocky man said, pouring the coins into a leather sack. His watery eyes ached from counting in this dim light. "Not as good as yesterday. Not very good by any standards."

Dornik sat by the half-open door of the stall, staring out at the night. His left leg rested on a thick blanket. When he spoke, his voice was heavy with bitterness.

"We've been in Camarack three days, Roto. The novelty is wearing off. Time we were moving on."

Roto tucked the leather sack beneath his tunic. It made no appreciable bulge. "I wish you'd let me use some of this money for some decent props. An impressive display, like your holding back a pair of galloping stallions, would really establish our act."

"I told you when we first met, Roto, I don't intend doing this forever. Once we get enough money to buy the services of a good wizard..."

"Don't feed me that line again!" Roto complained. "We've been traveling together for nearly half a year, with less than a hundred silvers to show for it. Chaos knows we take in little enough, and what with food and lodgings, stall rentals, exhibition permit fees and assorted bribes, you'll be twice my age before you raise that much."

"I wonder," Dornik reflected. "Do you suppose, Roto, that my stone half will age along with the flesh?"

"Ah, there's no use talking to you when you get like this. Now what are you doing?"

Dornik sat more erectly, leaning forward to peer outside. "I thought I saw something."

"Some lost and wine-besotted husband, no doubt. Chaos, what I'd give for a drop of the purple right now!"

"No. I don't know what it was, but it wasn't human."

"A stray dog, then. I wish you'd close that damned door. This shanty is drafty enough as it is."

A scrap of paper whisked through the open door, propelled by an unseen, unfelt breeze. It hovered before Dornik. The warrior snatched it out of the air. He started to crumple it, but the parchment defied crumpling. It slid about in Dornik's fist like a living thing, rendering a one-handed crushing grip impossible. It seemed capable of flying from the young man under its own power, though it did not do so. Dornik stopped his single-handed juggling to read its message.
Dornik was born of a mountain people who believed education beyond practical day-to-day needs was wasted effort; he did not know how to read. Yet the message could have been no clearer to him had he been trained as a scribe in Pellnoran.

Its content was more wondrous to him than his sudden, inexplicable literacy.

"Roto!" he shouted.

"Keep it down, Dornik. I'm right here."

"Roto, this is it! What I've been hoping for, not really believing it possible!"

"What happened? Some rich uncle leave you the deed to his kingdom?"

"No, much better than that. Remember that ugly little man we saw in the audience today? I told you he looked like a sorcerer, and he is! This is from him! He says he can restore me to full humanity in exchange for a simple service!"

"Does he say what this service is?"

"No. I'm to see him tonight about it. But here, see here: 'I will make you whole.' In writing, Roto! If a sorcerer puts a promise in writing, he is bound by his own laws to fulfill it."

Roto studied the message in grim silence.

Dornik sought to console him.

"Don't take it badly, Roto. It means the end of the act, but we don't have to split up."

"You mistake me, Dornik. I do not worry for myself. Dealing with sorcerers on their own terms is risky business. The phrasing rings false."

"By the seven kingdoms," Dornik laughed. "And you were just now complaining of my melancholia? You know how wizards are — never use one word where ten will do."

"All the same, I don't like it."

Dornik tightened his lips. "You won't try to stop me from answering this, will you, Roto?"

"Ha! As if I could! Go on, you stubborn fool! I only hope you won't regret your action."

Dornik folded the paper — it gave way easily to his will now — and tucked it under his loincloth. He donned his tattered cloak, scant protection against the night.

"Dornik, Wait." Roto withdrew the leather sack from his tunic. "Half of this is yours. You may need it."

"I'll take five silvers. Keep the rest. We can use it for a new partnership when I return." The half-man, half-stone form vanished into the darkness of the now-empty marketplace.

"If you return," Roto added softly, and not without a trace of concern.

Dornik's voice thundered over the gay revelry. "I want to talk to Bolen. Where is he?"

The ex-apprentice found himself suddenly alone, staring across an expanse of room at the warrior who broke up his party.

"I asked where Bolen was. I was told he would be here."

"You were told rightly." The boy's voice was slurred, but it only seemed deeper to him. Louder, too. "I am Bolen, fool of sorcerers. You may congratulate me."

"You? You're just a boy. I thought..."

"Watch that 'boy' stuff. I'm as much a man as anyone here!" He waved one hand casually, indicating a group of harlots gathered at the long table.

"Boy or man, I've given my word. You have stolen an object from the wizard Hamish. I am to recover it. In any way I find necessary."

So, thought Bolen as the words pierced the wine-induced fog in his brain. The old man's got someone else to do his dirty work. Well, let him come! The sword in Dornik's left hand didn't frighten him. Just let him have a weapon of his own; he'd show this braggart he was a man.

"A sword!" he cried. "Throw me a sword!"

No one moved. The scene in the common room of the Dragon's Eye was a frozen tableau. Then Dornik strode to the crossed swords displayed against one wall. They were bolted in place to preclude their use in brawls, but bolts meant nothing to the power in his right arm. He tore one loose, tossed it hilt first on the table in front of Bolen.

"As you will," the warrior said. "I've no taste for the slaughter of children, but I'll feel better if you're armed."

The lad fumbled before gripping the hilt firmly. It dawned on him that perhaps he had bitten off more than he could chew.

Dornik's blade crashed down, biting deeply into the thick oak table-top. Bolen withdrew his own blade quickly, trying to steady it in what he thought was a solid defense. The warrior struck again at the furniture, hoping to frighten the boy into surrender. But this second blow was dealt by his stone fist. The table splintered to toothpicks.

Bolen was suddenly sobered.

Fear pumped adrenaline into the boy's veins, dissipating the effects of the alcohol. With a clear mind, Bolen assessed the situation. There was but one logical course of action.

He ran.

Leaping from his chair was a force that bowled it over, the youth flung to his left. He did so only long enough for Dornik to commit himself in that direction. Then he reversed himself, ran the length of the long table, and was gone into the dark streets before Dornik could recover. The boy's great advantage was the sluggish pace at which the warrior moved due to his lithic limbs.

Something like a cheer sounded from the crowd at the Dragon's Eye, but Dornik's baleful stare smothered it. He limped angrily from the common room. No word was said, no move made against him.

Dornik cursed his petruous parts. The boy would never have gotten past his old self. Now the
warrior stood helpless at the entrance of the inn, peering down ill-lit streets, seeing nothing. If Bolen had any sense he'd have gone down the first side street and found a secure hiding place. Dornik would find him eventually, but every minute wasted was another trapped in this hated form.

A soft noise came from an alleyway to his left. A choking, watery sound. The streets of Camarck were deserted at this hour. So far as the warrior knew, only one other person was out here.

He thought of enlisting Roto's aid, but rejected the idea. This was his fight alone. Only he would benefit from the hunting down of the youth. Only he would bear the shame of it.

He moved toward the sound.

Bolen's first impulse was to put as much distance between the superhuman warrior and himself as possible; his stomach foiled that plan. He'd had too much to eat and drink for such strenuous activity. No sooner did he enter the sanctuary of this alley than he felt to his knees, retching.

His head swam. Crouched on all fours over the pool of vomit, legs too rubbery to stand on, he breathed long and deep. It had suddenly gone all wrong. Even if he escaped this time, he would spend the rest of his life fleeing from Hamish's agents.

The sound of stone grating against stone came from the street beyond. Not a steady sound, as a stone-wheeled carriage would make; this sound was stop, go, stop, go...

And Dornik stood at the end of the alley, looking down at the nauseated youth.

Bolen struggled to his feet. He still clung to the blade from the inn, though now he could barely lift it.

"Back, you scum," he gasped, bracing himself against the wall of the alley. "Back, or I'll run you through."

Under other circumstances, Dornik would have smiled at the threat and slit his foe's throat. But his foe would be a full-grown man, not a green and callow youth.

"I want only the armlet, boy," he said. "Just that, and you can go."

Bolen glanced along the enclosing walls. The windows here were shuttered tightly. There was no law against closing one's shutters, but it was unusual for all to be shut. The boy could expect no help from the people of Camarck. The ring protected him from Hamish's wrath, but could do nothing for any who might aid him.

Cold water dripped down the boy's back. A drainpipe hung over his head. He looked down at his sword, its point dragging in the dirt. He felt more secure carrying a blade, but recognized his inability to put it to use. He hurled it clumsily at the warrior.

The weapon traveled low, hilt first. It could not have done any damage. But Dornik instinctively stepped back, lashing out at it with his own sword, smashing it to the ground before him. The action took only a second, but that was time enough for Bolen to clamber up the drainpipe and out of Dornik's reach.

The warrior dragged himself forward, grasping the end of the pipe. He pulled. Chips of masonry flew from the wall, bouncing from the warrior's chest, leaving scratches on his flesh-and-blood half. The whole construction crashed on the ground about him, but Bolen had already reached the top.

The youth raced across the roof of the Dragon's Eye. This was a temporary respite, he knew. With no one he could count on for aid, the number of places he could hide in Camarck were limited. Those relentless stone limbs—for now he remembered the warrior from his morning trip to the market-place—might slow him down, but they also made him a tireless pursuer. Sooner or later, Dornik would catch up; if not on his own, then with the magical arts of Hamish, who could find him even if he could take no direct action.

He had to shake Dornik from his tail—and to lure him into a trap. A place where the power of his stone limbs would be a deadly disadvantage.

Three kilometers south of Camarck lay the bog, a small marshy area known to swallow cattle without a trace. There the former apprentice would find his sanctuary.

The southern gates of Camarck were closed but not locked. No guards stood by. A small town could not afford more than a handful of guardsmen, nor did they need more with a powerful wizard dwelling within her gates.

The iron gate was heavier than Bolen anticipated, but he opened it wide enough to slip outside.

The road was straight and offered little cover. Every few minutes Bolen glanced back over his shoulder at the pursuing warrior. The path veered sharply eastward at the marsh, but Bolen continued on straight, making sure Dornik saw him.

Now the boy moved carefully, almost as slow as the warrior with his stone leg. He tested the ground before him with a branch, and did not move one foot from a solid patch until the other was secure. More than animals had been lost in this swampland, small as it was compared to bogs farther south.

The first rays of a new dawn lit the skies when Bolen broke free on the opposite side of the marsh. The nightmare was over now. The way he'd come would surely doom his pursuer. Even if Dornik avoided the deadlier sinkholes by following Bolen's footsteps, there were places a boy could walk that were too soft to support the weight of a man. Certainly not a man carrying half a ton of rock.

He sat on a low hillock, looking back at the swamp. Would he hear Dornik's death screams, he wondered, or would the man be swallowed up too quickly, smothered by the bog before he realized what had happened?

Bolen suddenly felt sick again. His stomach heaved, but only green bile spewed forth. Then, exhausted by his ordeal, Bolen lay back to watch the rising sun. He was asleep before the first true light of day appeared.

Reawakened consciousness came in the form of a sharp and pressing pain in his left forearm. Bolen ignored it, thinking it abrasion from the ring of Aa, until he realized the pain came from much farther along his arm than the ring was located. He blinked his eyes open. They watered under the bright overhead sun.
A rock pinned down his arm. No, not a rock... it was shaped like... like... a human foot!

Horror brought the boy fully awake. He looked up into Dornik's cold gaze.

"A clever move," the warrior said. There was no anger in his voice. There was no emotion at all. That lack was more terrifying than a thousand hate-filled curses.

"I almost entered your death-trap," Dornik continued. "But when I sank to my knee, I knew why you had led me here. I simply circled around. I knew you would not spend the night in a swamp."

"Free my arm," the boy whimpered. It was not the sun which now made Bolen's eyes water. He was crying.

"If you will give me the ring of Aa."

The boy's whole body shook as tears gave way to a desperate, maniacal laughter. "You don't know? He didn't tell you?"

"I was told to recover the ring by any means necessary. Nothing more. I was not told how young you were..."

"Would that have made a difference?"

Dornik was silent.

"The ring — this thin, fragile looking strip of metal — it cannot be removed. It is frozen in place. It will not relinquish its hold on living flesh. That is why Hamish would not wear it himself, but continually searched for the hinted-at secret of its safe removal. You'll have to kill me, warrior."

Dornik cursed. He'd thought himself capable of any act to be rid of his disability, but to kill a helpless boy? The memory would make him as much an outcast as his body did now.

Yet if he failed to get the ring, he would lose his chance to be normal again.

The point of his blade wavered over Bolen's heart. The apprentice lay on his back, exposing his breast. If he had to die, it would be a clean death. He tried to fix Dornik with a cold, accusing stare, but trembling lips betrayed his fear. Tears streaked the layer of dirt on his face.

"Do your worst!" he cried at last, shutting his eyes.

For long minutes, there was a scraping of steel against stone. Honing the edge, Bolen realized. The end would be quick and painless.

He felt the sharp, burning bite of the weapon, and then his mind went black.

Dornik slipped the ring from the bloody, lifeless arm. He held it aloft. It seemed too small an object for all this agony and trouble. He wanted to crush it beneath the power of his stone hand. But it was his only hope of humanity. He dropped the ring of Aa into his pouch and bent over Bolan's body.

The boy had fainted. Good. Dornik would have no further recriminating stares to haunt his dreams. The blade, heated by friction against his lithic torso, had cauterized the wound. It bled, but not enough to cause the boy's death. The warrior tore a strip of cloth from his cloak and wrapped it tightly about the stump of the left arm, staunching the flow of gore.

Dornik slipped his five silvers into the boy's purse. He could see a thin line of smoke rising to the east, indicating a farm not far away. Somebody would take care of the boy. He'd be all right.

The warrior repeated that statement several times, to convince himself of its truth.

He dragged the severed limb behind him, to toss into the bog on the way back to Camarck. No sense leaving it as a reminder. The boy would soon enough discover what had happened.

Once he was wholly human again, Dornik swore, Hamish would pay for this.

The sorcerer's tiny black eyes glowed eagerly as he opened the door to his fortress-like home. Dornik stood grimly in its arch. His face was set. Only the eyes betrayed the loathing he held for Hamish.

The wizard did not notice those eyes. Only one thing mattered. "Have you got the ring?"

"Yes. Here's your damned ring!" Dornik threw the pouch at the wizard's feet.

The fat little man bent down and tore at the leather straps. The strip of silver gleamed in the darkness of Hamish's foyer, illuminating the walls more brightly than the few weak rays of sunlight filtering in from the shadowed doorway could.
"Excellent! Ah... you took care of the boy, I gather?"

"He won't trouble you again." You bastard.

"Good, good. I expect you'll be wanting your payment, then. Where's the old man who was with you in the booth?"

"Roto? What has he to do with this?"

"I thought you knew. The simplest way to accomplish your desire is to transfer the life force of another's limbs to yours. Of course, then someone else will have to make do with a half-petrified body, but that shouldn't concern you."

"You stinking little pig!" A stone hand shot out, gripped Hamish by the collar of his dressing gown. The sorcerer was lifted fully a foot into the air.

"Do you think after the life I've spent in this freakish form I would condemn anybody to the same fate? Especially the only man to pledge his friendship to me these past months?"

"All right, take it easy," Hamish replied. He clasped both his hands around Dornik's, attempting to lose the warrior's grip. Dornik permitted him to.

The sorcerer fell gracelessly to the floor.

"I could kill you where you stand," Hamish threatened.

"And violate your written oath? You would not dare. No demon would bend to your will, once the faith was broken."

"If you know that, you also know what must be done for you to regain your humanity. If not your friend, then someone else..."

"No one! The witch-queen Naomi told me stone could be transformed to human flesh by a powerful necromancer. Surely your magic is potent enough for that!"

"Yes. But it takes enormous energy. I'm an old man..."

Dornik's rough-edged sword dug its point into the sorcerer's stomach. "You'll not get any older if you don't fulfill your bargain."

"Very well," the wizard replied.

Dornik could think, though such thoughts moved sluggishly along stiff, non-conductive synapses. He could see, but only a single view—he could not move his eyes. His gaze would remain always on the northern wall of the mansion's foyer.

Hamish had kept his promise to the word, if not the spirit. He had made Dornik whole. Wholly.

The sorcerer smiled. The statue added a touch of class to his decor.

---

**EVOLUTION: 1988**

Entrap the wild tiger—

rattle him to the city

incarcerated in a yellow cab

and tip the taximan a dollar

for his terror.

Educate the tiger:

Render him fashionable:

Brushcut him:

clip the follicles

about his face and breast:

Wax his whiskers neatly:

chapeau him:

equip him with an onyx cane:

Introduce him to the society

doof rubbers and umbrella,

overshoes

for snow-milk mornings.

Bundle the tiger busily

into any vacant place

in our placid pegboard pattern

and forget him there.

Reader:

will you remember

which cautious commuter

once read WEIRD TALES

or wore a tiger pelt?

© 1988 by A. Arthur Griffin
The sun was setting behind the west wing of Sandover Hall when Stephen Clark emerged from the post-chaise to be greeted by his half-brother Joseph, Lord Sandover. Even this ruddy glow was too much, and Stephen blinked his light-lashed eyes uncertainly, his whole figure like a man of flame descending from a furnace arrived on burning wheels. Then his elder shouted "Hallo Stephen," and stepped forward to embrace him, and Stephen's flame shriveled and went out.

"And how was the last leg of your Grand Tour?"
"Long," said Stephen, "but grander than the rest because it led home."

"You haven't written since Athens," Sandover grumbled. "We didn't know you were back till your note three days ago."

The youth frowned. "My remaining funds were barely enough to bring me home from the Continent, much less a letter."

Behind Lord Sandover waited the Reverend Lewis, chaplain to the Hall, no matter how he smiled unable to see whether he was noticed. Repeatedly and pointedly he cleared his throat, but the lead horses stamped and rendered him unheard.

Because of its accidental omniousness, the coachman and servants unloading the bags and trunks remembered the next exchange a decade after Victoria was crowned. "You could have asked for help."

"I'm already far gone in debt to the Jews, dear brother."

Joseph laughed. "But then I charge no interest."

"They earn theirs lying awake at night."

"Wondering if they'll ever be repaid, eh?"

Sandover asked, secretly certain that all loans to his half-brother were to be repaid only on his own decease.

"Precisely." The young man looked more closely at his rival. "You're not wearing mourning—"

Lord Sandover's men grew solemn. "Caroline's been mourned enough."

Then he smiled again, seeing the man slowly emerging from the coach behind Stephen. "Dammie, but it's Mr. Bromley. How's the leg, sir?"

His old tutor planted himself on the ground before answering. Even swollen with dropsy, he had a certain dignity in his plain gray travelling coat. "Better now it's not being jounced about."

"And did you keep my brother's nose to the grindstone all this time?"

"His Greek is much improved, milord."

"Modern or Attic?" Sandover turned to his half-brother, winking ponderously. "I'd be willing to bet on Romainc. Maid of Athens, ere we part, eh Stephen?"

The youth blanched, whether in anger or from some other cause, before the old Tutor spoke up for him. "No maid of Athens has been keeping his nose to the grindstone, unless she's two millenniums dead."

"Or never," Stephen whispered, only overheard by the coachman who had approached with a small bag of goatskin.

"Begging your pardon," the coachman said, "but you wanted to have this in your hands the moment we arrived."

The youth smiled bleakly, and took the bag, which dragged down his arm more than seemed natural. "Oh yes, oh yes. I do need this."

Reverend Lewis followed the others in, unable to imagine how warmly the half-brothers felt concerning Mr. Bromley, sure Stephen had purposefully snubbed him, almost wondering if his patron had meant to snub him as well. He would watch this young man, be sure he did no harm.

* * *

"I do hope my brother plans to marry again," said Stephen to the chambermaid.

She blushed and nodded. "Indeed sir, I do think so."

"Soon enough to assure an heir of course."

"Miss Janet Newbury they say. Very soon, sir, perhaps a month or two."

"Wonderful," Stephen observed.

"Wonderful indeed sir," she agreed from the doorway. "I wish you a good night."

"Thank you," the young man said, though once Stephen was alone a good night seemed unlikely, the way he paced by the flickering light of the candelabra, then went to the goatskin bag to pick at the tangled knot that closed its end. He too could quote Byron. I have not loved the world, nor the world me, he told himself as the first hitch sealed with black wax so many months ago came open.

A half-hour later he lifted out a small packet wrapped in double parchment; it was sealed with red wax and very heavy for its size.

Stephen began whistling carelessly as he cut it open with his penknife—Tartini's "Devil's Trill," though only a keen ear could have recognized it in such a distorted form.

When he had the seam open he pulled the end of the tablet out and shook it loose over the stand by the bedside; the sound when it dropped was so lacking in resonance as to be barely metallic. Bringing the candelabra over, he examined the marks graved in the sheet of lead. The inscription would not be hard to change; or would correct be a better word for what he was planning? And the moon was in the dragon's tail, even if it was early June.

* * *

That evening Lord Sandover and his old tutor sat long over the port; Stephen had pleaded tiredness, but Mr. Bromley insisted he was too tired to sleep.

"You claim my brother had no affairs of the heart in Athens?"

"Not to the best of my knowledge, milord. Nor anywhere else in our travels."

"Then why did Stephen pale when I quoted Byron?"

"Pride, Joseph, pride. These months together have taught me more of him than the years we spent with Virgil and Cicero. Your half-brother is a man of strong and secret passions, with more sang-froid than most his age."
"And of what sort are these strong and secret passions?"

"That remains to be seen. But nothing dishonorable, let me assure you."

Lord Sandover lifted the decanter. "A bit more port, Mr. Bromley?"

The tutor pushed his glass across the table. "One last touch, milord."

"Then what did you two occupy yourselves with so long in Athens?"

"The visible remains, such as they are, and what they could tell us for our studies of the classics. Stephen was especially taken with our excursion to Eleusis."

"You mean the Mysteries and such?"

"Yes, though the ruins are disappointing. The Turks have much to answer for. But he read everything I could find concerning the rites."

"Surprising he should take an interest in things like that."

"No more surprising than your interests when young, Joseph. Do you remember how you begged me to buy that silly book of (shall we call them recipes?) after you read Horace's description of the witches at work?"

SANDOVER rolled his eyes up in momentary bafflement before remembering, then chuckled. "Oh yes, The Magus! Do you know, I think it's still somewhere in the library. But now I study something more practical, though equally arcane—the latest improvements in agriculture."

"And the estate books, I assume."

"Till my head spins. But then perhaps Stephen and I involve ourselves with the same subject, since the Eleusinian Mysteries concerned agriculture—partly concerned it sir, if I rightly remember what you taught me."

"You do indeed," Mr. Bromley said, "though not the reason for Stephen's fascination. His care is sowing, not sprouting."

Lord Sandover shook his head as much in admiration as exasperation. "Another pedagogic riddle?"

Bromley's mouth was grim. "No, milord. He found his own riddle. To remind you, Kore the Maiden was carried off by Hades; by the time Mother Demeter found her she had eaten the pomegranate seeds in the underworld, so was forever condemned to a half-year in Hades before escaping to the half-year above."

"Spring and Summer. I remember."

"But your half-brother found his own way to read the story. Depending on the season, the goddess is Maiden or Persephone. The year repeats, but no matter what month, she exists as both at once. And Persephone raises the dead."

"But what follows from that?"

His ex-tutor lowered his gaze. "I don't know, Joseph. Most likely nothing—at least that's my hope."

Sandover thumped his empty glass on the table. "Then what should I hope for, Mr. Bromley, the end of the world? You lisp and hint like a Bath lady, not forthright as the man who birched me when I slacked my lesson."

The older man nodded apologetically, laughing though he blushed. "Honestly spoken, milord, honestly spoken. I hint because I only suspect, and may be foolish in my suspicion."

"But what do you suspect?" demanded Lord Sandover. "Why do you suspect?"

"At times Stephen left our rooms at night, always when he thought I was asleep."

"Yet you swear he had no interest in women."

"He never smelled of perfume, yet our room was close in the winter."

"Not all ladies can afford perfume, or care for it if they can."

"But he smelt of fear, Joseph. Remember I was not always sedentary, and know the smell from experience."

His auditor nodded, remembering how many times he'd led his tutor away from the lesson with questions about the Peninsular Campaign. "You always said But 'twas a famous victory, and barely mentioned fear."

Bromley chuckled. "I meant the refrain as Mr. Southey meant it, dear boy, ironically (no matter how easy an irony). And as for fear, why mention what always marched with us, and slept in the same bed?"

"You were always the man for bottom, sir. But what was Stephen afraid of?"

"Of having found what he sought, I would guess."

"Another riddle?"

"I mean the way to Hades, milord."

"Mr. Bromley, you're too strong and wise a man to have the vapors. A bit more port?"

* * *

Sandover Hall slept under a waning moon. Lord Sandover snored robustly. Mr. Bromley sighed and gasped in the next room, beset with dreams or dropys. Only the shadow of a cloud usurping the lawn knew whether Stephen woke or slept.

Sandover Park was less calm, even if the owls were nearly still: perched in trees, they hooted and shifted, while in their burrows the foxes snapped at their own tails. Tonight something larger hunted, a darkness sliding nearer among the parallel shadows of the beeches, a half-acre inkblot crawling up the brook against the current.

Then came the first scream, then the second from the other end of the hall. Even barely awake, Mr. Bromley knew his fears had been justified, no matter how vague. Joseph had cried first, he thought, thumping down the hall in nightshirt and bare feet.

He found his ex-student tangled in the sheets and halfway on the floor. Because there was no pulse and he heard others rushing up the stairs, Bromley ran the opposite way, to find Stephen dead as well, stark and stiff in a chair beside the bed.

Hovering over the young man's body was a person he took to be a servant until he noticed the strange gray robes and poppies in her hair. Then she turned and smiled.

Though he tried to cry out, Mr. Bromley was unable to make a sound. He felt as if a lump of ice had been placed in his chest where his heart beat a moment before, as if his bones were water.

His delirium lasted a day and a half, he was later told, and the first thing he saw when he opened his eyes as his own self was the Reverend Lewis sitting by the bed. "What happened?" he asked. Then he remembered and began trembling uncontrollably.
"Water, Mr. Bromley?" said the chaplain. "Or would brandy be preferable?"

Watching the Reverend, Mr. Lewis' visage express the tiny fraction of Christian charity of which he was capable, pleased to see only the ardor and pride and sin of flesh, the old man sighed. "An equal portion of both, if you please."

Sitting up to plump his pillow while Mr. Lewis complied, Bromley noticed a gray metal tablet on the table between the decanter and the pitcher; except for one spot scoured of oxide and niter, its pitted surface was furrowed with half-obliterated writing. "Exactly as I feared," he whispered.

"Exactly?" demanded the chaplain, offering the brandy and water. "But what exactly? I can read New Testament koine, but some of this is beyond me, and what I can read seems vile."

"And rightly so," observed Mr. Bromley. "Is it a curse, a spell?"

The ex-tutor bowed over his brandy and water. "Most certainly. It seems a fine specimen of what the Greeks called katakesis and the Romans tabellae dificationes, but let me be sure." He gestured for his glasses, then for the rag of sheet lead. Mr. Bromley nodded after the first second, after longer contemplation shook his head. "What I expected. This conjures the gods below, though only Persephone by name, to bind and take the person named. Usually these were buried in grave sites, I suppose to carry the victim down with the dead man. Though you've noticed the original name has been erased and Joseph's name scratched in?"

"Of course," said the chaplain. "But what killed Stephen?"

Mr. Bromley took a gulp of brandy and water. "Recoil. When you fire a gun, the bullet goes out the muzzle and the butt kicks you in the shoulder. Only in this case the gun and bullet were the same."

"And what does that mean?"

Mr. Bromley hummed to himself before answering. "I used to think the pagan gods were poetic fancies——"

"And now?"

"I think Milton was right to call them demons."

"Why?"

"Because Stephen invoked Persephone, and I saw her stooping over him. His hand shook and what was left of the brandy and water spilled unnoticed on the coverlet. "She smiled at me, she smiled, she smiled."

Copyright © 1988 by John Alfred Taylor

MEETING ANCIENT MONSTERS

They've been there all along, of course, beneath the hill and out of sight, and though men sense their presence, no one yet has felt the fright of meeting ancient monsters filled with spite.

They've been there all along, of course, resolved and patient, measuring time, and though men sense their presence, no one yet has made the climb up the hillside to prevent a dreadful crime.

They've been there all along, of course, breathing deep and waiting long, and though men sense their presence, no one yet has made a song that can hush the hint of danger fierce and strong.

They've been there all along, of course, wild in aspect, huge in size, and though men sense their presence, no one yet has been so wise as to write a soothing lyric, but the poet tries.

Copyright © 1988 by ALAN RYAN

NIGHT BEAST

Water lashes the windowpane like a hungry, enraged tiger clawing at the flap of a pup tent on a night lit only by lightning.

© 1988 by Susan Packie

GARDEN OF SILVER

Abandoned now by lark and thrush, the garden lies in a silver hush. In the moon's prolific zone silver shines on every stone; a muted splendid shimmers free on stem and petal, leaf and tree. This silent splendor casts a spell upon the night. Even time, in its mighty sweep, seems to pause in silver sleep.

© 1988 by Joseph Payne Brennan
SILVER CROSS

by DENNIS M. MALONEY

"OK. I understand that this particular story is not 'right' for your readers now. But, but maybe your associate firms and their editors might be interested?" Bill kept his voice level, striving to be all business.

Lips pursed, the editor behind the cluttered desk doubted it. Glancing at his watch and then down at Bill's manuscript, Furbman was still polite. "Good stuff, Bill, but needs quite a bit of work. Angle on the wolverine and things don't ring solid somehow." Brightening, the editor found a dismissal. "Sorry, but our other companies wouldn't want it either. Maybe try Westerns for a while, huh? Or Goths for a change? And thanks a million for dropping by. Love to talk to authors personally, you know. Too buried here in paperwork and pencils, eh? Ha ha."

It was after five o'clock by the time Bill Lansing left the building, shoulders hunched against invading rain as he vainly sought a cab. The leather coats and shiny briefcases always seemed to fill New York cabs first, leaving him mad at no one in particular and wishing he were home. Maybe it was a pact, an unwritten agreement between dead animal skin with brassy plastic and the silent cruising metal monsters who hungered for the feel of leather and leatherette.

"Christ, now you're babbling again," Bill remonstrated aloud, annoyed at a troublesome habit. Two eyes followed him briefly, a weary commuter on the sidewalk edging away. And caught a cab.

Bill slogged off, deciding to walk the twenty or so blocks home. Probably help clear my mind, he thought. Or drown me, he grimaced, tucking his neck in to push back runnels of sullen water.

Car horns, distant sirens, and sloppy plashes blended in a mind cacophony that was almost silence. Bill trudged homeward, considering Furbman's advice. Probably be better off trying a different area, maybe a spicier Western with some hinted sex, a dozen brawling bravadoes, and hammering six-guns. Or the lazy, comfy thrill of a haunted house, half-pulled shutters, and a pale heroine who dreams too much of her brother? No, he reluctantly admitted, he was hooked. His SILVER CROSS was a good story. A very good story.

Once inside his apartment, Bill skipped dry clothes and settled for a double Scotch. Scrunched in his favorite chair, he brooded, barely listening as clinking ice matched window pane tinkle of tumbling rain. As the liquor warmed certain parts, other parts shivered. Something was wrong. Furbman was the sixth editor in a row to turn down a perfectly good horror novel, even if the theme was a little odd. Crap, Furbman probably knew what he had wanted before he had knocked on the door. Had he lost his touch?

The phone rang in the small room, causing Bill to start, then sheepishly answer.

"Lo? Oh, Harry. Hi. When you getting back, huh? Some agent. I drown and flatten my feet, and you'll still get your cut."

The voice on the other end sounded worried. "Bill? Jesus, you sound awful. Got a cold or what? Never mind. Be back this weekend. Marge and the kids are finally as sick of the rolling hills of the Catskills as I was before we left the city. Ummm, you OK?"

"Yeah, yeah, fine. Furbman at Commonwealth just turned down SILVER CROSS—said it wasn't right. Shit."

A moment's silence, then a concerned, "Bill, you've got plenty of good stuff to work on. I still can't figure why you wrote that thing on spec anyway. Stop trying to sell the thing— I'm supposed to do the selling, remember? Spend some time on something else, anything else. Every one can't be a bestseller, you know." Chuckling, portly and affable Harry Timms tried to bolster his client. Bill was an all-right guy, talented as the devil, but God, did he have some moods.

Bill hung up after some desultory chatter and poured himself another round. What was wrong with SILVER CROSS? Or, shudder shudder, was he just going sour? The well worn grey, the bubbling fountain of creativity gone sere and silent? "Ah, Christ, it's only a book," he muttered into his glass.

Funny though, what Furbman had let slip during one part of the too-brief meeting, about how most of the houses that published horror fiction were owned by a European conglomerate. Harry had never mentioned anything like that to Bill, and Harry was one of those omniscient agents, seemingly aware of books yet unwritten and policies not yet established by editors not yet hired.

A week later, trying to forget SILVER CROSS, Bill was buried happily in the dusty stacks of his favorite library. Research on eastern European folk tales was providing grist for a new story when he happened to notice a reference section previously ignored. SILVER CROSS suddenly loomed huge and shiny in his mind as he began tracing publisher addresses, books in print, and old reference works.

Hours later, he had it. The records weren't complete, and some companies looked like they had more than one name, but he had it! Maybe this was how Woodward and Bernstein had felt at first, the nervous stomach and the fierce desire to grin at everybody.

The next afternoon, Bill was flying to London. With his own cash, too, not wanting word to get around and blow his coup. He took along SILVER CROSS as an excuse, something to peddle if he could find that address, that one smudged entry found in a dusty book long out of print. Could one family really have controlled European publishing for so many years? For centuries perhaps? And why so secretive? He had never heard the name before Furbman had let it slip. Bolingbroke. Not really an unusual name, but he couldn't recall having heard it before.

Trying to sell direct to the guy who owned it all was laughable, but Bill was after glory. A Pulitzer wouldn't hurt right now. And there was something sinister about the power the Bolingbrokes must have. Not the power of merged multinationals, but the old power of candle-lit meetings, dust-laden shelves, pewter inkwells, and tax collectors who
never returned. Bill still recalled the initial shock that had hit when he had realized that it was possible that everything he had ever read about witchcraft, everything, could have come one way or another from a book published by the Bolingbrokes.

Bill had not yet wondered why Furbman had mentioned the name.

He landed in early morning London, greeted by the typical fog and damp at Heathrow, and set off sleepily for the train station. Bedraggled and grumpy, he found that tepid tea and dry biscuits snatched between stations did little to improve his humor. As the day waned, the intermittent sun gave up and retired as he passed Salisbury and Exeter, traveling southeast through the Salisbury Plain and the crowded farmlands of lowland Britain. Late that night he lodged in Tavistock in Devon, just short of the Tamar River that formed a boundary between legendary Cornwall and peaceful Devon. That hostelry was well kept, quiet, and Bill collapsed for twelve hours of solid sleep.

Tavistock was no backwater village, but he knew that many of its seven thousand inhabitants would know of him before the day was out.

"Oh, aye, the Dartmoor's been here since the time of Robin Hood, and longer," the stocky innkeeper winked as he served Furbman kippers for his American lodger, lingering to converse over breakfast. "It's a forest with a long memory, Dartmoor is." "Managed by the government, isn't it? I mean, there aren't many forests left in England, I've heard."

"You've 'eard right enough, Mr. Lansing. The guv'ment now, that's a pretty mess. D'you know that...?"

Bill let the sonorous vowels roll over him as he ate gratefully, discovering that he liked tea more than he had thought. Nodding occasionally when the innkeeper paused, Bill didn't really care about the rather gloomy forest noted just before the train had clattered into Tavistock last night, but it was a way to start a conversation. With farming and dairy herds predominating this part of Devon, except for the Dartmoor, Bill feared he had chased the proverbial goose clean across the Atlantic.

"Publishing firm? No sir, none of it here. Honest farm work, and the finest milk cows in England, bless 'em sir." Smiling bemusedly at the American tourist, the keeper shook his head and moved toward his regular customers, men coming in with chilled faces and curious eyes cast briefly at the writer. 

"Well, what about the name of Bolingbroke, then?" Bill queried, raising his voice slightly as the man departed.

Abruptly, Bill knew he had struck a nerve, and as quickly wished he hadn't. No one had said a word. Other early diners looked everywhere but at him, and the keeper actually paused in mid-stride before continuing.

"No, sorry sir, none by that name here," he replied over his shoulder, hastily greeting old acquaintances and herding kitchen help with a hollow-sounding gusto.

After washing up, Bill left the hostelry to walk about a bit, both to settle his meal and because that's what tourists did. No one was overtly rude, but as the day progressed he got the distinct impression that the townspeople would rather he were somewhere else. While shopping at the market for items forgotten at home, Bill was astounded when one seemingly friendly chap hinted that he should head south. Down to Devonport and Plymouth way, scenic ports with wonderful tourist attractions, don't you know?

More convinced now than ever that something was afoot, Bill eventually wound up at the town library, a modest edifice that looked too old to remember when it was built and too small to care. The rooms were narrow, cluttered with wooden cases that reached nearly to the high ceiling, and cubicles paraded silently after each other in a tired dance of worn memories and yellowed paper. The librarian was quite young, apparently new to Tavistock, and singularly unattractive. But at least she hadn't known about him before he walked in.

"Bolingbrooke?" she frowned in concentration. "I don't think so, but I've only moved here a fortnight ago.

I can check the town registry, if you like."

"Please, if you don't mind, I would greatly appreciate it." He smiled his charming best.

Head bobbing, she left to search, returning shortly. "I'm so sorry, sir, but there's no such name listed. Tracing your family, are you?"

She was eager to help, almost pathetically so, but Bill faced a dead end. Did he want to stay in a town that didn't want him, vainly searching for a family supposedly in control of vast publishing holdings? What if the hints turned to threats? And did he want to keep using his savings for a quest that was becoming more surreal as time went on? Not particularly.

"No, no really, but thanks anyway. I guess I— what's the matter?"

Blushing, she looked down in confusion. "A trick of my mind, sir, is all." At his urging, she added, "I'm a reader of occult, you see. Of unusual things. Bolingbrooke is the name of a fifteenth or sixteenth century sorcerer, uh, warlock. He was said to be able to summon the devil, and did all sorts of horrid things, so they hanged him, or burned him, I don't remember, really. In London, sir, it was. But not around here."

"I see, Miss. Umm, thank you, thank you," he mumbled distractedly, leaving the library to wander back to his room. This is crazy, he thought, absolutely crazy. Walking down the creaking corridor, he unlocked his door, deciding to pack and go home, to end this nonsense. He was halfway into the room when the sickly, cloying odor stopped him.

There was blood all over his room.

Staining the neat white coverlet on the poster bed. Speckling the faded pastel of the limp wallpaper. Fouling his wardrobe, littering the drapes, and drenching a crimson pentagram on the carpet around his book, the SILVER CROSS.

He stood frozen, breathing heavily. Then, seeing nothing moving, he backed out slowly, closed the door carefully, and kept backing up until a reassuring wall stopped him. Leaning against the hallway wall on the opposite side from his room, he soon recovered enough to hunt up the landlord.

The police were puzzled, disgusted, and more
than half convinced that he had done it himself, "as an American publicity prank," the constable had muttered. The landlord was distraught but seemed to Bill more worried about the cleaning bill than his lodger's health. The constable called Bill later to confirm that it was human blood, but as there were no reports of any missing persons, no charges would be filed—yet.

In a different room down the hall that night, Bill lay awake, staring fixedly at the ceiling. Two lights were left on, and he got up every so often to check the new lock on the door, installed at his insistence and his expense. Vowing to catch the first train to Exeter, he kept seeing again and again his manuscript on the floor, encircled by blood in traditional cabalistic fashion. Superstitious, like many of his colleagues, Bill had retrieved from his luggage and now wore about his neck a solid silver cross, a long ago present from a fervently religious mother. He had often joked to friends that, with the rising price of silver, it was his portable inflation hedge. Its weight was a comforting pressure as he tried, and failed, to belittle his fears. He slept poorly.

With his pick of tables in the empty dining room the next morning, Bill breakfasted with his back to a wall, facing the street door. The formerly cheerful landlord had nothing to say to him, brightening only when he settled the account, hoisted his suitcase, and headed for the door. Bill paused, waiting for the stranger now filling the doorway to enter, briefly surprised that anyone had dared the hostelry this morning.

Bill glanced back at the innkeeper, wondering dimly if the man would see his fortunes returning with Bill leaving and the local arriving. Startled, Bill saw the landlord's pale fixed stare and sudden sweat, incongruous in the silent room and chilly morning.

Bill tried once to discern the stranger's features, oddly shadowed and darkened by low brim hat and fitful light. He failed. The fog crept in, swirling around Bill's unmovimg legs, crawling up his stillled form, seeping into his ears and marring his brain. Jerkily, stiffly, Bill followed the man out into the street. Deserted of all but fog wraiths and damp trickles, the beaten stones echoed somberly as he tramped blindly out of town, remembering no speech but obeying a binding command. Deep in his mind, down deep in the innermost recesses of that which was him, Bill Lansing was two years old, shaking in terror at a vague and horrific dream. No one heard his infant cries.

Sitting in an overstuffed chair, staring at the composed features across the ancient wooden desk, Bill tried desperately to remember how he had gotten there. Flashes of sights: farmland, trees, more trees but older (Dartmoor?), the stranger's dark cloak always ahead, always leading. Some smells (dead leaves, a thousand dank winters), but no sounds after leaving town.

"Ah, I must apologize, Mr. Lansing, both for myself and for my countrymen. You've had a nasty shock, I warrant, and you've not been yourself at all. Someone mistakenly tried to frighten you, when all the time I wanted so to meet you." Smiling kindly, his urbane tones blending smoothly into the stuffy air, his host preferred a drink.

"Gin and tonic, sir, a lovely, warm drink. And so civilized, so tame. Just the thing in times like these." Eyebrows arched, his patrician face sharply lined, the man seemed to look straight through Bill, focusing on him only rarely. Shaken, Bill couldn't decide what color the man's eyes were. It seemed important, somehow. Should be a dark brown to fit the black hair, black brows, and precisely trimmed mustache.

"One of my servants found you wandering near my estate. You were irrational, I'm afraid, almost wild. We found some identification on you, made some inquiries, and took the liberty of having our physician administer a small sedative. You slept for a space. It's now 2 o'clock in the afternoon and, I must say, I'm dreadfully sorry that merry old England has been so cruel to you. Oh, by the way, when we rang up the hostel, the owner said you had left with a suitcase. But all we found with you was this manuscript. You're a writer, then? I so enjoy books, don't you?" Ginerly, the man laid the SILVER CROSS in the exact middle of his desk, the corner of his mouth twitching.

Dully, Bill looked at his manuscript. There seemed only one question to ask.

"What's your name?" he whispered.

"Why, I thought you knew, Mr. Lansing. It's Bolingbroke. Roger Bolingbroke." He looked amused, the way a spider might tease a fly.

Biting his lip, Bill gazed around the room. Heavy drapes, ruged furniture, thick rugs—it was hard to place the style or the date. There was an aged quality to all, a penetrating feel of crumbling centuries and gray dust.

"You've had some trouble getting this sold, I understand."

Bill blinked, remaining silent.

Bolingbroke looked down with growing contempt at the thick sheaf of typescript. "Yes, I had a word with a Mr. Furbman about it, a few days ago. Quite some book, isn't it, this SILVER CROSS of yours? And then you did some research, found an old book, one that was recalled by its publishers long before you were born."

Frowning momentarily, Bolingbroke looked vexed, then smiled sadly. "You couldn't have heard yet, of course, but do you know that a library burned down in New York last night? Probably vandals, you know how children are these days." Lips thinning to a pale parchment, Bolingbroke showed his teeth. They seemed long.

His mouth dry, Bill found that he needed another drink. He couldn't seem to feel the chair anymore. "Now this book of yours, this SILVER CROSS. Imaginative, but rather radical in your field, hum?" Cocking his head slightly, Bolingbroke tapped the glistening desk top near the manuscript. "Surely we've always known that wolfsbane and mistletoe, iron and running water, and—of course—the eminent silver will keep the creatures of dark at bay. But this book of yours, it refutes this. Then what is left, I wonder?"

"But that's it, that's the point of my book!" Bill found his voice, author's pride buoying his ebbing spirits. "There is no defense against demons, devils, witches, and uh, things," he finished lamely, avoiding Bolingbroke's intense gaze. "Not even silver, which is what most of it is about," he
pointed at his manuscript. "See, in the book, people that rely on those things are easy pickings for the creatures and all. They should be figuring out what really works. It's a whole new twist. But nobody wanted to buy it," Bill complained. "Nobody."

"You work alone, don't you, Mr. Lansing? Well, of course you do. And your agent doesn't even know you're here, does he?" Sensing the sudden fear, Bolingbroke soothed his newest victim, keeping Bill's adrenaline from polluting the rich blood. "Ah, but surely there are copies of the manuscript back home, aren't there? Good, good."

Bolingbroke was half-reclining now on the arm of Bill's chair, his thin strong fingers massaging Bill's neck muscles and rolling away the waves of shudders that shook Bill. Bolingbroke's droning dulcet voice buried Bill in despair and thick-tongued sleep.

"Why, if people read your book, Mr. Lansing, and believed all that nonsense, why imagine what would happen to the order of things. No, mustn't have that, must we, hmmm?" His tongue tickled Bill's ear, his lips caressed the small of the neck.

In a final desperate grab, Bill found the silver cross inside his shirt, pulling it from deep-bound molasses to hold it trembling before the transforming face, the burning eyes. Resolution firming his grip, Bill saw himself rising above an ebon pool, reaching to keep from drowning.

Checking abruptly, Bolingbroke reared his head, then smiled again, wider than before. Crooning as to a lover, Bolingbroke's whisper shattered Bill's nerve. "Because you see, your book is almost right. Those defenses, like silver, are nothing. They act in our favor!"

Seeing the light die in Bill's eyes, Bolingbroke pressed his body against Bill, delighted fingertips pausing here and there as Bolingbroke lived again. Casually ripping the silver cross from its chain, Bolingbroke tossed it aside.

"One thing can stop us, my young friend, and one thing only. But you had little enough, as is true of most. And I intend to keep it that way." Pausing, licking crimson pouting lips, Bolingbroke leisurely placed SILVER CROSS on a shelf among other such mementoes.

The next day, a freakish explosion destroyed several rooms in an apartment building in New York, destroying all their contents. It made the bottom of page 20 in the Times.

Copyright © 1988 by Dennis M. Maloney

---

**WINTERWOLF**

Wolf winter, winter wolf, ocean blue jay blue indigo shadow rippling through the twilight, first on two legs, then on four, while you prance around the campfire and clutch your cross so close.

Footsteps crunching the crusty starlit snow, as you count the lengths of firewood realizing there isn't quite enough to get you through the night.

© 1988 W. Fraser Sandercombe

---

**BARRIERS**

The monsters that guard The coffers of this world Are invisible and varied On dragon wings we never see The subtle deception is carried They secretly malignly spy Perhaps behind a friendly eye They embrace you closely in the night With passionate, ulterior spite Ultimately we're doomed to blunder As our lamblike souls are split asunder!

© 1988 by B. L. Corbett

---

**BATWING PAVILION**

At the batwing pavilion they boil newts dress thespians in macbeth's suits witches wards and warlocks words meet dance and bounce off the funhouse walls vampire bill and phantom jack walk hand-in-hand by the railroad track what's past is past and won't come back.

© 1988 by Brian J. Groth
IMP O' DARKNESS

by DAN CRAWFORD

Paul Sangesgoxe got off his knees and studied the smoke rising from the brazier with some satisfaction. Nor did this satisfaction decrease when a dark shadowy object leaped down from the hot coals onto his bedroom rug with a smell of hot, elderly sulfur. The shadow gradually took shape, becoming a furry, somewhat spiderish body with thin arms and legs, bat ears, eyes on long stalks, and, most alarmingly, yellow bunny slippers.

"How do you do," said Paul.

"Very well, thank you," said the creature. "And yourself?"

"The same," Paul replied. "You are..."

"I am the demon you summoned to grant your every wish," the creature answered. "But I'm afraid there's been a mistake."

"A mistake?" inquired Paul.

"Yes," said the demon. "Due to an unfortunate scribal error in the text you were using, you used the wrong tense of the word 'babverambix' in the third line."

Paul reached for the ancient tome and flipped it open to a page marked with a cut-out Bloom County strip. The demon was correct. The printed incantation had, instead of "babverambix," in the oblate tense, "babrevambix," the putative case.

"Damn that bookseller," muttered Paul. "He told me this was the revised edition. So you aren't going to grant my every wish?"

"I'm afraid not," the demon replied. "I'm going to strangle you a bit, and then pull out your facial and body hair. I will then bite off your genitals, after which I will tear you into irregular fragments. I shall finish by whipping these torn but shockingly alive fragments with electrical tentacles until each is writhing in an individual and highly original manner."

"I see," said Paul. "And when are you going to do all this?"

"Why?" asked the demon. "Did you... have plans?"

"Well," said Paul, checking his watch, "it's just five minutes until Mr. Dax's Comedy Classics Hour, and I wanted to see the Three Stooges short."

"I really don't see..." the demon began.

"Oh, Paul," called a tentative voice. "Paul?"

"Excuse me for a moment, would you?" said Paul. "Yes, Aunt Rose, what is it?"

"Were you doing anything?" asked a small, elderly woman, coming to the door.

"Well, yes," said Paul. "What did you want?"

"Don't let me interrupt, then," said Aunt Rose. "I was just going to ask you if you had seen little Chamois. I can't find him anywhere."

"He's right behind you, Aunt Rose," said Paul.

"I looked in his little corner of the couch, to see if he was sleeping," she went on, "but he wasn't there. But I won't interrupt you if you're busy. I'm sure he's somewhere."

"Right behind you," said Paul, a little louder.

"Oh, do you see him?" asked Aunt Rose.

"Right behind... no, now he's gone into the kitchen," Paul told her. She turned.

"I see him," she said. "Thank you, thanks a lot."

"Now," said Paul, turning back into the bedroom, "where were we?"

"I was saying that I probably can't..." the demon began.

"Paul?" came the voice of Aunt Rose. "Can I interrupt you again?"

"Excuse me," said Paul. The demon waved a hand in permission.

"What is it, Aunt Rose?" Paul demanded.

"It's Chamois," said the woman. "He's eating, in the kitchen, you know, and I thought I would let him. He won't be in your way, will he?"

"Oh, no," said Paul. "I'll be working in here."

"I wouldn't want him to be where someone might fall over him," she said. "They might not see him in the dark."

"It's quite light today, Aunt Rose," said Paul. She smiled, like someone humoring a beloved, but obstinate and slightly stupid, child. "All right," she said. "You're sure he won't cause you any trouble?"

"Not at all," said Paul. "Not at all."

"Okay," she said, and departed once more.

Paul walked back into the bedroom and turned on a small portable television. "I can at least watch while you're working, can't I?" he asked.

The demon started to answer, but the voice that spoke was Aunt Rose's. "Paul," it called.

Paul did not excuse himself. Before he could inquire, his aunt lifted a small white poodle for him to see. "I found Chamois," she said. "He was in the kitchen, eating. I think I'll put his leash on him and take him in my room, where he won't be causing any more trouble."

"But he..." Paul began, but quickly amended this to, "That sounds like a good idea, Aunt Rose. You do that."

"Okay," she said.

"Your aunt," said the demon, as Paul returned to the bedroom.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Paul, "I should have introduced you. She hasn't any children, and she can't live alone any more, so..."

"I quite understand," the demon replied. "The Roadrunner's on right now. Do you want to start now, or wait?"

"Well, if you want to watch the Roadrunner..." Paul began.

"Oh, Paul?" called a voice from the door.

Paul sighed. "Yes, Aunt Rose?" he asked, walking back.

"Chamois was whimining and crying in the bedroom," she said, "and I think he must be hungry. I'm going to open some dog food and take his little dish in to him. Okay?"


"Doesn't she ever let up?" asked the demon, as Paul returned to the bedroom.

"No," Paul replied. "That was going to be my first wish."

"I may grant you just that one," said the demon.

"I... What is that entrancing odor?"

Paul sniffed at the air and coughed. "That's the dog food Chamois likes," he said. "You find it entrancing?"
"I don't get much variety in my diet," the demon admitted. "Do you think it would be all right if I were to sneak in and take a small taste?"
"Oh, heavens," said Paul. "Oh, please pardon the expression! I'll open you a whole can." He led the way to the kitchen and selected a bowl.
"This is too kind of you," the demon replied. "You realize, of course, that this in no way alters our relationship: maimer to maimed."
"I never mix socializing with business," said Paul, opening the dogfood can and filling the bowl. He watched as the demon, delicately at first, but then ravenously, devoured the victuals before him. When he judged the moment to be proper, he took advantage of the demon's inattention to mutter the spell that would send the being back to the Underworld.

"Paul?" called Aunt Rose. "Are you working in the kitchen? Is there anything I can do to help?"
"No," said Paul. "No, no. You've done enough, thanks." He walked back to the bedroom to leaf through the ancient volume again. Aunt Rose did have her uses, but perhaps there was a spell for quietly doing away with small, noisy poodles.

Copyright © 1988 by Dan Crawford

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND
by WAYNE RILE WILLIAMS

Click.

Somewhere, a TV set is turned on.
The video image swims up to the screen.
It's my image, Lennie deVile, thirty years ago.
I see my full face. It's freckled and smiling beneath a thatch of red hair.
They are rerunning my sitcom, LUCKY'S TAVERN.

I tell a joke. It's answered by canned laughter... the laughter of ghosts.
"When did the laughter start, Lennie, the first time? Remember?" my conscience asks, in this dark place I have come. In this void behind the TV screen.

"Brooklyn, New York. Cold water brownstone. Growing up in poverty didn't hurt so much if you could make a joke," I answer.

"The neighborhood gangs, Len," my conscience says. "They wanted to beat you up, you couldn't outfight them, so you..."

"I made a joke. I made them laugh and they let me go."

"You're O.K., Lennie," "Youse some funny guy," they would laugh and say, those kids of long ago.

"You had a gift. That gift brought you fame, got you parts in movies, your own TV show," the voice inside me says.

My show is over. Thirty minutes gone. Now I can rest for another day.

Click.

A TV set is turned on once more. Am I on again so soon?"

I see silver figures dancing on a black screen.
It's me again. This time I'm in an army comedy.
Slapstick. God, I look so young!
Fade out.

Click.

It's time for LUCKY'S TAVERN again. I'm alive once more. I'm alive, and I remember my past.
The 50's, McCarthyism. I was blacklisted. I lost my show, my wife, everything.

I see a montage of lips, retracted in sneers. I remember what they called me.

"Dirty commie!"
"Traitor!"
"Pinko!"

I remember the taste of too many barbiturates lying heavily on my tongue.

They found me in a hotel room, too late to pump my stomach.

Thirty minutes are up. My show is over. No more time today for memories.

Click.

The LUCKY'S TAVERN show is on again. I am aware once more.

Ten years passed after my death, the first time.

Then, they ran my reruns on TV.
I was alive again. My soul was, and is, part of my old kinescopes. I will never die, as long as there are new eyes to see my face on the idiot box. This is my punishment for taking my own life.

Wait. What is this?
Suddenly all is blackness. I lay my head on a pillow of shadow. Darkness is my blanket. For how long?... ten seconds?... ten minutes?... ten years?... Time has no meaning in eternity.

I have one last tired hope. Let it be over.
Please, let me rest. No one must play my tapes....

LUCKY'S TAVERN is tuned in once again.
My video image swims up on the screen.

Copyright © 1988 by Wayne Rile Williams
CHAMBER OF FEAR
by ALBERT J. MANACHINO

In a bedroom on the second floor of a luxurious mansion, three men stood in a circle about a wheelchair. Its occupant wore hospital-type pajamas. Fluid drained into him from a long thin tube; he was being fed.

He stared listlessly at the floor or at the ceiling or at the walls. Whatever position Dr. Cromwitch moved his head, there it remained. Cromwitch addressed Paul Guir, the young man's father.

"Your son seems incapable of reacting." The customary reflex tests might as well have been administered to a cadaver. Nor did the invalid react to sound, light, pain or shock. "Technically, he should be unconscious."

"Gordon still has involuntary reflexes," responded the father. "He breathes, he soils his linen."

The condition of Gordon's pajamas made this obvious.

"Which is fortunate for him," commented the third man, who was attired in the street garb of a Roman Catholic priest. "How long has he been in this condition?"

"One week, Father Dunn."

"He was normal before that?"

"Yes, Father. Gordon was an exceptionally brilliant scholar, which makes this contrast all the more horrible."

Saliva leaked from the corners of his son's mouth. Gordon gave no indication of hearing or understanding what was being said. He was oblivious to their presence. His mind focussed inward on a hellish, twisted landscape that could never exist in a normal world... on a world of endless night where sunlight had no reality... where its dwellers slunk from graves to crypts to dank unsanitary dungeons piled high with bones and alchemical apparatus... where the only light came from guttering candles and fires burning in metal braziers.

The door opened. An attendant carrying fresh bed linens and pajamas entered. Paul Guir led his visitors out of the room.

"You say this occurred overnight?" Cromwitch spoke as they walked along a seemingly endless corridor. "My examination seems to preclude narcotics."

"Gordon did not use drugs," Paul responded quietly. "He didn't even smoke."

Guir paused before the library door. He preceded Dr. Cromwitch and Father Dunn into the room. They sat in comfortable leathered chairs. The library was a true book-lover's paradise.

"What you observed," began their host, "was as sudden, as abrupt, as the drawing of a shade."

The doctor spoke. "Barring a great emotional shock, to become as your son has, from an active intelligent young man, to a vegetable almost instantaneously, is unheard of. Something must have happened."

Paul Guir agreed. "There were preliminary indications of a sort. Gordon became very nervous... secretive, you might say. It was very much as if he had discovered something he did not wish me to know about."

"Was there reserve between you?" asked the priest.

"No, father, our relationship had always been a very open one. There were no secrets between us. Gordon was a scholar, his weakness was books—an enthusiasm in which I shared."

"Then," commented the doctor, "whatever intruded must have come about as a result of his studies."

Paul nodded. "I greatly fear so. Their chairs faced a huge, sliding panoramic window through which the entire front of the estate could be seen without more than a turning of the head. "Gordon changed when he got the book."


Paul sensed the doctor's scepticism. "It was a very unusual book. He stopped as if realizing the inadequacy of his words. They waited. "Yes, a very unusual book... which is why I requested the presence of a priest as well as a doctor."

"You feel, then, your son is a victim of possession?" Father Dunn asked gently.

"Yes... in a way," Dr. Cromwitch listened silently.

"It is not possession as we normally think of it," Paul continued. "By a demon or another of hell's species."

"Hell's species cover a wide interpretation," the priest remarked. "It need not be the familiar demon or imp. There are only two factions on our physical level that can possess—heaven and hell. Heaven rarely utilizes the privilege in preference to freedom of choice."

"Possession by demon is usually quite boisterous," the doctor agreed. "The demon boasts of it, flaunts it in everyone's face. Whereas your son, for all practical purposes, is asleep. Did the book deal with occult subjects?"

"I don't know; I assume it did. Gordon always hid the book when I came upon him studying it. A bag of tarnished gold cloth came with it, something on the order of a pillow slip. He concealed the book with this cloth during these interruptions. Once I received a peculiar impression the cloth slipped over the book by itself. But, of course, that cannot be."

"Can you describe the book?"

"To a limited degree; I caught only a glimpse of it. It was black with gilt lettering I did not understand... about ten inches square, perhaps five wide. The pages struck me as being unusually thick."

"If you were unable to understand the lettering, how was it Gordon could?" asked the priest. "Was it in a foreign language?"

"None I'm familiar with," Paul responded. "I speak and write seven languages. I don't know how Gordon was able to understand it. He was able to, of that I'm sure. The book gave an impression of being very very old."

Father Dunn shook his head. "It doesn't sound like any I've ever heard of — the gold cloth is unique. Still, many books were privately printed and sewn together by the writers. I could not know of them all."

"How did it come into Gordon's possession?"
Cromwitch asked.
"Again, I'm not sure. Charles tells me..."
"Charles is your buttler?"
"Yes. He responded to the bell one night. A little man holding a blue handbag stood before the door. He knew my son was a book collector and he had a very old, rare volume he wished to dispose of."
"Didn't the buttler think it unusual for a bookseller to be doing business at night in that manner?" spoke the priest.
"He thought so, yes. But he assumed the visit was by prearrangement. Gordon has neglected to inform us of some of his appointments in the past. Charles led the caller into the library where my son was still reading."
"Did the buttler remain in the library?"
"No, Father. The visitor took something out of the canvas bag and showed it to Gordon. Gordon became visibly excited. He dismissed Charles."
"Can Charles describe the object?"
"No, the visitor stood between them. His back hid whatever he showed my son but Charles is certain it was a book. I've caught only a fleeting glimpse of it myself."
"Can you describe the bookseller?"
"Yes, Doctor. He was a little man, not much over five feet in height. His eyes were a washed-out blue and his hair unkempt... a sort of lemon tinted blond. He needed a shave. Everything about him was shabby, down at the heels, as if he had been travelling about and sleeping in his clothes a very long time. Charles mentioned he looked incredibly weary."
"And Charles admitted this man into your home?" spoke the priest.
"Yes, there was something compelling about him. Charles was not able to refuse him admittance as was his inclination. Nor was he able to tell him to wait outside the door while he checked. There is no doubt he would be recognized were he to be seen again."
"Was any money missing... as if your son had paid for an expensive and no doubt, valuable book?"
"It did not occur to me to check, Father."
"Still, Gordon acquired the book."
"It was not paid for by check and we are not in the habit of keeping large sums in the library safe."
"A large sum is relative. From your description of the visitor, a few hundred dollars might have been a very large sum."
"If any money is missing, Father, it is not an appreciable amount."
Cromwitch reminded them, "There may have been no money exchanged at all. The visitor does not seem to have mentioned selling. That assumption came from Father Dunn."
Paul Gur appeared thoughtful. "Now that's absurd. Why would a shabby, nondescript person, obviously in need of money, give away a valuable property?"
"To get rid of it... the passing of a burden. You say, Charles stated he looked incredibly weary."
Paul stood and went to the window. He looked out upon the spacious, well-tended lawns before responding. "You're right. I didn't think of that. The passing of a curse—like the albatross around the neck of the Ancient Mariner."

The library was roomy and well lighted. Thousands of volumes displayed their spines in glass-fronted teakwood shelves. A happy combination of wealth and culture. A giant chessboard waited patiently for contestants in the middle of a long, highly finished reading table. A magnificent brick fireplace slept till the first chills of winter would awaken it to resume its accustomed function of providing heat and cheer.

"Whatever happened, happened here in this room," Paul continued. "You feel it, don't you?"

Despite the excellent ventilation and the brilliant sunlight, the library felt stuffy, as if a weight hung in the air. The priest particularly felt the unease.
"Yes, it's like a burial vault."
"I've felt the same way in a morgue," the doctor added.
"I'm afraid to come here at night, even in company. Whatever it is has turned this room into a chamber of fear. The book is here... somewhere. Gordon hid it; I'm sure. But... where?"
"I take it, you've searched for it?"
Paul Gur studied the doctor with a subdued envy before responding.
"Yes, unsuccessfully."

The contrast between Cromwitch and the priest was almost startling. While the doctor combined all the best features of the classical Greek athlete, Father Dunn was very plain... almost ugly.

The doctor began cautiously, "I would not ask this of anyone but a knowledgeable bibliophile or an occultist. Have you ever heard of the Book of Limbo?"

"Otherwise known as The Devil's Bible? "Yes. It's one of those legendary things like the phoenix or the dragon, spoken of but non-existent."

"And yet, Gordon displays all the symptoms of having been exposed to it."
"It's a fable," Paul insisted. "Such a thing could never be, could not possibly have existed... a book that absorbs its reader's knowledge."

And eventually leaves its victim a complete idiot," the doctor finished.
"Charles did not mention the visitor appeared to be abnormally dull or retarded," their host reminded them.

"He need never have opened it," Cromwitch argued. "His purpose is to pass it on."

"And... after that?"
"After that, to someone else. I'm sure the book will return to him. You may be in great danger. You may come upon it unexpectedly. If you do, do not, under any circumstances, open it... especially if you are alone."

There was a vivid mood change in the atmosphere of the room. They sensed frustration mingled with anger.

"It will attempt to seduce you," Cromwitch warned, "with promises of limitless knowledge. You must not listen. All it wishes is to destroy you."

"Can we be sure it's here?" Paul asked.
"Remember, I've searched every inch of this room without finding it."

"Are you sure it's here?" the priest repeated.
"After all, impressions are based on expectancy, what you expect to find where you expect to find it."

Cromwitch shook his head. "No, I'm not sure of
anything. But... it is the most probable place. Gordon studied here. It would have been more convenient to him to have left it where he had ready access to it. You mustn't reject impressions. To a person who is psychically sensitive... well, doesn't the atmosphere impress you? Doesn't it tell you something evil is lurking in the background, something capable of generating great fear?"

"It is very depressing," Paul agreed. "It was never like that."

"We must learn something of the book before we can make plans."

"How, Doctor? You said whoever opened it was destroyed... it absorbed all they knew, leaving them no better than robots."

"This room is saturated with its presence. One of us must remain here to gather impressions... at night when it is strongest."

"How can that help my son?"

"I don't know. If we can find it, find a way to destroy it, his soul may be released."

"I'll sleep here," the priest volunteered. "It is my duty to combat the devil."

"No! I'll spend the night here," Paul insisted, "if you think it will help my son."

"We could all stay here," Father Dunn suggested. "Multiple impressions may be doubly helpful."

Cromwitch rejected the suggestion. "I don't think the book will manifest itself under those conditions. I sense it needs to be alone with its prospective victim. Our volunteer must be asleep to remove protective barriers... it seems capable of dealing with only one person at a time in the initial stages of exercising dominance. I base this on Paul's description of his son's sudden secretiveness and evasiveness. If the relationship between them was as stated, Gordon's natural inclination would have been to share his discovery. Instead, he tried to hide it. Obviously, he was being influenced. I think Paul would be the best choice as he was closer to his son."

"Under those circumstances, I would say sleep was impossible," the priest objected.

"I will have to hypnotize him."

"I don't want to sound like a coward," Paul remarked, "but will there be any safeguards for me?"

"Such psychic safeguards as I command will be incorporated in the hypnosis. Physically, all Father Dunn and I can do is wait outside the library door. If we hear anything, we'll come to your aid immediately. I'm almost certain you don't have to worry about this kind of danger."

"But the psychological peril?" Father Dunn protested.

"I think there is no real danger to anyone who has not opened the book. Paul will experience nightmares and horrible visions. It is from these I hope to gather information on which to base our reaction. Paul's function will be somewhat similar to that of a medium's. We must see and hear through him."

There was a rap on the door. Charles entered pushing the freshly cleaned Gordon in the wheelchair before him. The young man wore yellow pajamas.

"Place him by the window," Paul directed.

"Very good, sir." Charles bowed and turned to leave.

Cromwitch stopped him. "Charles, did you escort the visitor—the bookseller—to the door on his way out?"

"No, sir. Master Gordon said it was not necessary."

"Did anyone see him leave?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

"Do you think he could still be on the premises?"

Charles thought. "Not without the aid of at least one of the household staff, sir."

"That's absurd, Cromwitch," Paul Guir protested. "They've all been with me for years... long before this started."

"I was not impugning their loyalty. I was thinking... if he has to return for the book when it has finished, he must remain somewhere near."

"If we find him, we can make him reveal where it is."

The doctor shook his head. "I doubt he would know. The book would command him."

"Will that be all, sir?"

"Yes, Charles, thank you."

The butler left.

Paul Guir stood a moment by his son and then sadly moved away. He glanced at the late afternoon sun outside the window. "This was our favorite time of day. An hour or two of chess and then to our favorite books."

Gordon moved. The three froze as he spun the wheelchair around. Paul gasped. Cromwitch gripped his arm.

"Shh! Watch!"

The rosary moved through Father Dunn's fingers. His lips recited a silent prayer. Gordon stopped the wheelchair before the chessboard. He waited. "Go to him," the doctor urged. "He wants to play."

Paul Guir sat opposite his son. The tableau was ghastly. Gordon's features were waxen... immobile. He looked like an embalmed corpse. Paul made the opening move. His arm shook. Gordon remained motionless. He made no response. "I don't think he wants to play me, Cromwitch. He wants to play you."

"Chess is not one of my accomplishments," Cromwitch addressed the words to Gordon. "Can you hear me? Do you understand what I say?"

The young man threw his head back and laughed horribly.

Paul blanched. "That's not my son." He spoke in a whisper.

"No. It's the book."

Gordon stood. His eyes, previously glazed, now burned ferociously. He leaned forward across the table for a heavy brass lamp. Cromwitch brought him to the floor with a flying lunge. His arms closed about Gordon like bands of steel. He raised the young man to his feet and carried him out of the room.

Outside the library, Gordon became limp and passive again. His father brought the wheelchair outside. Cromwitch placed the young man back in it.

"The book isn't able to control him outside the library, otherwise he would still be trying to kill me. Its power seems limited."

Paul Guir was still pale. "It might make me
attack you with a... there's a gun in the drawer of
the reading table."

"Did your son know of it?"

"No, I put it there after the possession."

"It proves what Gordon didn't know, the book
doesn't know. However, it would be best to remove
it lest you be tempted to suicide."

* * *

Dr. Cromwitch and the priest stood a restless
vigil outside the library. Neither smoked but they
consumed large quantities of hot, black coffee and
conversed in whispers. Paul's moanings and trash-
ings could be heard through the closed door.

"Even under hypnosis," the priest whispered.

"It must be ghastly," the doctor admitted. "We
mustn't interfere unless physical danger threatens."

Occasionally they opened the door and looked in.
Paul lay on a cot. The moonlight revealed he had
thrown off the sheets. His hands were clenched.
His body arched stiffly and his eyes stared vacantly
at the ceiling.

"He's asleep and he's not asleep," Cromwitch
observed.

"He's in hell."

"I greatly fear so." Cromwitch closed the door
gently. "I think he's strong enough to withstand
the strain."

The vigil ended at one o'clock. A crash brought
Father Dunn and the doctor to their feet. Father
Dunn tested the door.

"It's locked."

"It wasn't ten minutes ago. I removed the key
to prevent this." Cromwitch produced the key. It
refused to fit. "There's another inside the lock." 

Cromwitch drew back and lunged. The door
splintered and fell apart.

Paul Guir had slid back one of the halves of the
panoramic window. He stood on the ledge. The
doctor captured him just before he jumped. Cro-
mwitch brought Gordon's helplessly struggling father
back into the library. Father Dunn turned on the
light. Rage and frustration again beat at them
from all corners of the room.

The priest gasped. "It's never been this strong."

"That was too close. I didn't foresee a second
key. My advice was very poor." Cromwitch
carried the somnambulist out of the library and
placed him in a chair in the corridor. "Paul! Do
you hear me?"

There was a faint, faraway response. "Yes, I
hear you."

"Tell me what you see."

"In the name of mercy," cried the priest, "bring
him back first."

"He may not remember anything then. Speak to
me, Paul, what do you see?"

Guir's mouth worked loosely. Froth and saliva
mingled on his chin. He whimpered like a beaten
dog. His features were contorted almost to the
point of being unrecognizable.

"Please..."

Cromwitch ignored the priest. "Talk to me,
Paul. Tell me what is happening."

"I'm confused. I'm in the library... many years
ago. I'm in bed. Our old Collie, Lady, who died
long ago is with me." He stopped.

"Go on, Paul, go on. Don't stop."

"A terrible man enters the room. He is dressed
like a butler but I've never seen him before. He
looks like a toad."

"What does he want?"

"I don't know. He doesn't speak and he won't
leave the room when I order him to. He sticks his
tongue out... a long, hideous tongue like a serpent
and grasps it in his hands. He pulls and more and
more of the tongue comes out of his mouth. Lady
is huddled against me for protection. The tongue
coils on the floor. Soon it becomes his intestines.
He continues to pull. His stature is diminishing as
the pile grows higher. At the end, nothing is left
but the intestines.

"They stir and begin to move. The heart, liver
and other organs develop eyes. The light is also
diminishing. Soon it is completely dark. A single
candle burns somewhere."

Paul Guir began to sob. He trembled convul-
sively. Father Dunn listened in horror as Paul's
voice changed into the whining and crying of a
terrified dog.

"God protect you, Paul." The rosary trembled in
his hands.

"Paul, you must be brave. Father Dunn and I
will protect you. This is only a dream. Gordon's
life and sanity depend on you."

"I hear you, Doctor. The bed has vanished.
Lady and I remain on the mattress. She huddles as
close to me as she can get. For protection?" Paul
laughed derisively. "I cannot protect anything."

"She seeks companionship in peril."

"The floor around us is alive with thousands of
squirming rodents. They burrow under the
mattress. Soon we move. A hole appears in the
wall.

"The rodents carry us through the hole into a
pitch black tunnel. A terrible wind is coming from
below. It carries the stench of a million burials
and other things impossible to describe. We are
moving downward gradually. Lady is frothing and
uttering piteous cries. She must know I can't
protect her... or myself."

"The tunnel is behind us. The landscape is
lighted by an awful, rotted moon. And still, the
rodents carry us onward. We come to an abandoned
cemetary. The mausoleums are as large as
mansions. It is into the cellar of one of these the
rats take us.

"Cages imprisoning vaporous forms hang sus-
pended from the ceiling. I recognize Gordon; he is
in one of the cages. I am unable to cry out.

"Two hideous parodies of humanity are huddled
over a stone slab. On it are the remains of a third.
They have evidently just finished dissecting him and
one of them puts the pieces, one at a time, into a
fire burning in a brazier while the other recites
incantations from some dreadful book... no, not our
book.

"Other things are going into the brazier also. I
am forced to watch silently; I cannot speak and no
one notices me. Lady is still and rigid by my side.

"The flames consume the last of the pieces. He
did not burn like flesh... more like rotted wood.
The flames die. The ashes are carried to a simmer-
ing pot suspended from a metal tripod. They are
carefully stirred in with the contents. The second
figure, I think he is a sorcerer, continues to recite
incantations in a language I do not understand and makes revolting motions over the pot.

"In time, the contents of the pot are poured onto a fine screen and pressed thin with a roller. The fluids are drained away. The screening is in a frame. More of the contents are poured onto other frames which are then set to dry. I don't know what they're doing."

"They're making paper," Cromwitch whispers to the priest. "The ashes of a wizard went into the making of the paper of the book."

Paul contined to speak as if from an unimaginable distance. "The material is dry. They are removing it from the frames and cutting it into smaller squares about ten inches on a side. One of them is transcribing material from loose folios onto the smaller squares... that's what they are—pages.

"I don't understand the alphabet. It's asymmetric and makes me ill to look at it. The letters are alive but convey no intelligence. They're sick... idiots... hungry idiots. One of the wizards is holding a page for me to see..." Paul screamed.

Cromwitch delivered a stinging slap. "Come back, Paul! Don't look; you've seen enough." He slapped Paul again.

Paul reacted like a swimmer under water too long. His rise to the surface seemed dangerously long.

"Too slow," Cromwitch thought.

The doctor wiped Paul's face with a pungent, aromatic cloth and held it under his nose.

"Don't dream any more, Paul. You're entering your own home, you're safe."

"Lady! Where are you? I want to bring Lady with me," Father Dunn recited a silent litany. "The rope... the rope... must climb it. Ah! I got it. Climb... climb..."

Paul Guir struggled to open his eyes.

"I think he sees your rosary, Father. Give it to him."

Father Dunn pressed the beads into Paul's hands. He was making motions as if climbing a rope. His eyes opened.

"Where am I, Cromwitch?" Paul recognized them. He pushed the aromatic cloth away.

Cromwitch exhaled a deep sigh of relief. "Twice I've exposed you to deadly peril through my ignorance. You're home. Do you remember anything?"

"No, I had an awful nightmare. I'm afraid to remember it."

"I thought that might happen. That is why I didn't bring you back at once."

"Will you have some coffee, Paul?"

"Yes, yes." Eagerly he accepted the priest's offer. "Anything warm."

Father Dunn held the steaming coffee to his lips. After a couple of sips, Paul was able to hold the cup. He shivered as he drank.

"I think I was in hell. Did we learn anything?"

"Yes. The book is made of physical materials and, as such, it is subject to physical destruction. All that remains is to find it."

"I'll burn this house down to destroy it. Is there any hope for my son?"

"There is a possibility. Once the book is destroyed, the hold it exercises over its victims may vanish."

"Shall I reinstitute a search?"

"No, you failed once. I'm sure you'll fail again—as long as it does not wish itself found. As a test of nerve, do you think you can reenter the library—in our company, of course."

"I'll try. God! I'll try."

Hatred and menace beat at them as they entered. Paul held the priest's beads before him.

"This room is alive," Cromwitch spoke. "Somewhere here, among all these fine books, is a terrible, rotten heart and a diseased mind."

"The menace seemed to single him out."

"It hurts you. The filthy thing hears you... and is afraid of you."

"Yes, it has reason to fear." He faced Paul Guir. "We will not be able to find it while it does not wish us to. Are you really willing to burn this house down to destroy it?"

"At once. The sooner the better."

* * *

Charles detected fire. He sniffed and bounded up the stairs. Smoke poured out from under the library door.

"Fire!" he shouted. The butler raced back down the steps shouting for help. "Fire! Fire!" He encountered his master on the first floor. "Sir," he gasped, "there is a fire in the library."

"Evacuate the staff and Master Gordon to safety," Paul instructed the butler quietly.

"Father Dunn picked up the telephone. "It's dead. I can't call the fire department."

"Carry out your orders, Charles. Dr. Cromwitch and I will see how much headway the fire has made."

Hungrily the butler left.

Cromwitch scented the air. "It seems confined to the second floor."

"As it should be," remarked the priest.

"Gentlemen."

They turned to face the speaker. A little man with unkempt blond hair confronted them. He held a blue canvas bag.

"You've come for the book," Paul stated flatly.

"Yes."

He started up the steps. Father Dunn stood before him holding a crucifix.

"You cannot pass. The book must die."

The stranger winced as at some invisible light emanating from the crucifix. He looked first at Dr. Cromwitch and then at Paul.

"Your son will die with it."

"If God wills, so be it."

"Do you have a name, sir?" asked the doctor.

"I'm William Button."

"Do you have a soul, William Button?" asked the priest.

"I had one, but now I must obey the book." An impression, so strong that it was almost a scream, came from the library. "Quickly!" he addressed Paul again. "A bargain."

"What kind of a bargain?"

"One just between you and I. These others cannot enter into it."

Paul Guir looked at them helplessly.

"It will have to be entirely up to you, Paul," spoke the doctor.
Father Dunn nodded. "Your son will be returned to you—as if this had never happened, if you let me remove the book."

"But it will go on destroying other minds."

"That is no concern of yours. Your son for the book."

Paul lowered his head. "How do I know you will keep your word?"

"I will swear on your rosary."

Paul held the beads out to him.

William Button took them in his hands. "If I do not honor my promise, may I be swallowed into hell at once." He returned the beads.

Dr. Cromwitch led the file up the stairs. They reentered the library. He went to the fireplace and opened the flue. Smoke immediately began to escape up the chimney instead of into the room.

"You're clever, Doctor."

"Not really, Mr. Button. I borrowed that one from Sherlock Holmes."

Again rage and frustration beat at them. The three men smiled. William Button went to the reading table. The book, in its tarnished cloth cover, lay beside the chessboard.

"I hold you to our bargain, Mr. Button."

"My word is good, Mr. Guir." He picked the book up and put it back into the blue canvas bag. Tiredly, he turned and left the room.

"I feel sorry for him," spoke the priest. "I have a feeling he has many more miles to travel."

"Perhaps forever," agreed the doctor.

Paul held his head in a listening attitude. "The room is calm. Something has left."

They reached the first floor and went to the door. Paul beckoned to Charles standing on the lawn with the other servants.

"You may tell the staff they can return. The danger is over."

A tall, young man had accompanied the butler. He went directly to Paul.

"Father, I've had a terrible dream."

Copyright © 1988 by Albert J. Manachino

white curves
danger money
the tassels of your bell-cord hair, lisping out of a year-book
distances
grammar that projects a tattoo of certain symbols
deal picture-frame
crying over the cure of idiots
through a window on the maimed
dog-eared sunspot on a balcony of wrought-iron tears and shy hems

Copyright © 1988 by C. Youden

 ULTRA-VISION: WHAT HE SAW (To X.)


A nudity giving way to void. The engines of hearts, the powerlines of molecules.

Nuclei blazing. A carousel of stars.


Hocking, Heisenberg, Einstein, Spinoza: planetdeath. God's grimace in a headlong fall, and a joke as the spell reverberates:

"Help me! Help me! I can still see!"

Copyright © 1988 by Will Guthrie