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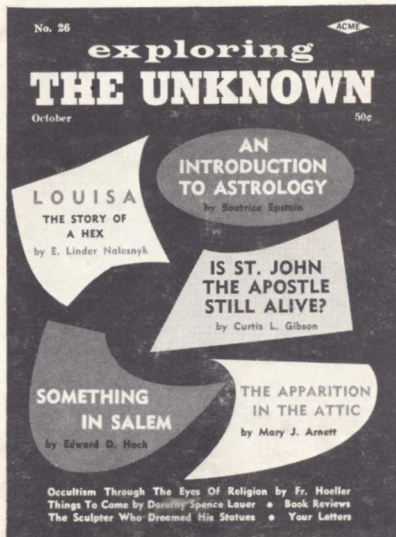
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magazine of HORROR and strange stories

Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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I wish that the relatively few of you who have objected to our use of tales from the old masters, not on the grounds that they are not good, but that they are "readily available everywhere" could see the influx of letters I receive from readers who welcome these stories with joy and say they have not seen them before.

It reminds me of my own experience back in 1930, when I first began to read the science fiction magazines regularly. The letter departments carried letters from readers, pleading for reprints, and letters saying, no, these are all readily available at any library. I noted the authors whose stories were asked for: Verne (novels not reprinted in the magazines), Wells (ditto), A. Merritt, Ray Cummings, Garrett P. Serviss (unreprinted novels), Homer Eon Flint, Austin Hall — these were just a few. I was living in Darien, Conn., at the time, and we had what I had thought a very good library there. (There was a bigger one in Stamford, but in those days, with the Depression just starting, regular trips to Stamford were not feasible — and I wasn't that much of a hiker.)

What could I find there in Darien? Poe — yes; all his fiction. Verne — there was **Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea**, **The Mysterious Island**, **From the Earth to the Moon**, **Around the World in Eighty Days**, Michael Strogoff — that was all. Wells — **The Time Machine and Other Stories**, **Tales of Space and Time**, **When the Sleeper Wakes**, **Men Like Gods**, **The Island of Dr. Moreau**, and various mainstream novels. (I didn't appreciate **The Sea Lady** in those days, although they had it.) A. Merritt, Ray Cummings, Garrett P. Serviss, Homer Eon Flint, Austin Hall, and later when I looked for Ralph Milne Farley, Otis Adelbert Kline, and George Allan England — nothing. There were some Tarzan books, but of the Burroughs Mars series, only **The Warlord of Mars**. (I was very fortunate, I learned later — what if it had been only **The God of Mars**, which ends on one of the most fiendish cliffhangers imaginable?) In fact, most of these science fiction and fantasy authors just weren't heard of at all.

Some of this material could be found in bookstores — but

(Turn To Page 126)

Caverns of Horror

by Laurence Manning

First seen in collaboration with the late Fletcher Pratt (*The City of the Living Dead*, SCIENCE WONDER STORIES, May 1930), Laurence Manning became a favorite with science fiction readers when his series of tales, *The Man Who Awoke*, appeared in WONDER STORIES in 1933. The demands for more from his typewriter brought forth another series, the tales of the "Stranger Club", which appeared in the same magazine in 1933, '34, and '35. In the first of these, *The Call of the Mech-Men* (WS, November 1933), we learn that the "Stranger Club" is a very exclusive little society, which does not welcome strangers at all. There is no sign on the door, and the bell does not ring; you have to have a key to enter. The author explains: "You see, this club has a particular purpose for existing. The meaning of its name is obvious upon entering the place. The door opens upon a large hall from which branch off three huge rooms. Close to the ceiling along the hall in large letters, runs this motto: — TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION." *Caverns of Horror* is the second of the five "Stranger Club" tales, and our thanks go to Richard Kyle for reminding us of it.

SOME TIME has passed since I first told you about the Stranger Club up on West 53rd Street. I have spent part of it in the great lounge listening to stories of one sort or another, but they must wait, for, start-

ing in this room last month, I have been led into as extraordinary an adventure as any I have been told and I must tell it as it befell. Perhaps the telling may help me to forget.

I suppose women are more

curious than men about some things. Quiet, reserved men who do not tell all they know, for instance, drive them frantic with curiosity. Many a man owes a pretty wife to the mere fact that she could not find out enough about him any other way than by marrying him. These are not idle remarks, for Smithers (though still single) is just that sort. I saw him once at a charity ball at the Plaza and you could fairly see the feminine fingers twitch to get at him — but then, Smithers seldom attended dances and the word “mystery” was written on the carriage of his body and in the slow amused smile that looked out from his handsome face. But the oddest thing about Smithers is that men feel the mystery as well. At the club, every one treats him with exaggerated familiarity whereas no one knows him really well. He has a curious knack for impersonal friendship. This story is largely about Smithers.

It started at the Stranger Club on a Friday evening. My friend Seeman was back from his latest trip to Africa and I had been licking my lips in anticipation of a good yarn. So far, however, he had only mumbled something in his meek, quiet voice about “trouble with the cannibals” up some river or other where he had been piloting an expedition looking for oil. He had admitted that it was “a

sort of a war” and that he had had to “pot a few of ’em,” also that three of his Basuto porters had “been scragged.” That is just exactly like Seeman. To think of him doing things in a heroic way seems absurd. How nature ever managed to crowd his adventurous temperament and brave mind into that dried-up, meek-looking little body of his is a puzzle. Also present at the club that evening was Colonel Marsh, and he and Seeman and I were wandering around the great lounge talking about Africa and examining some of the heads which the Colonel had bagged a year ago and presented to the Club. In particular was the head of a huge white rhinoceros that glared down from the wall on the right of the great fireplace.

SMITHERS HAD been reading and drinking whiskey sodas in the library and we had the lounge to ourselves. We had, I suppose, talked loudly enough for Smithers to overhear us in the next room. At all events, as we stood admiring the rhino, we became aware that Smithers was beside us. We eyed him silently for a moment. He was staring hard at the head on the wall and finally turned around to face Colonel Marsh with that teasing amused smile on his face. Marsh’s pipe-stained mustache bristled and his face grew redder than usual.

"Quite a beast!" said Smithers, with a half-smile.

"Weighed three tons — shook the earth when he charged!" snapped the colonel.

"But I suppose you had a good heavy rifle?"

"My Martinson express — wished it had been a howitzer!"

Smithers raised his eyebrows politely and sauntered off, leaving the worthy colonel sputtering with rage.

"The dam puppy! I'd like to see *him* face a charging rhino!"

We sympathized warmly, for both Seeman and myself had been puzzled by Smithers remarks, and Seeman, who ought to know, told Marsh that he rather envied him that head. Almost any one except a fool, I thought, knew that the white rhino was a prize from both the point of view of rarity and risk. Now certainly Smithers was not a fool. I began to wonder even then and curiosity was at the back of my mind during the next hour while we plied the heated colonel with cooling drink and smoothed his ruffled sensibilities in the quiet tap room. Smithers had not actually said anything calculated to insult, but his attitude had suggested sheer scorn, and the colonel fumed long over it. I left Seeman and Colonel Marsh after a while and sauntered into the lounge once more. There, legs braced apart and arms in pockets, stood Smithers in front of the rhino,

as though trying to stare down those glassy eyes. I thought to myself that if Colonel Marsh should happen in, there would be a certain explosion and, of course, even as I glanced around at the doorway, there he was — red and bristling!

I shuddered and closed my eyes. When I opened them again, the two were facing each other — the one lean and ironical, the other stout and furious. Smithers put his hand on Marsh's shoulder paternally. "You must come out to my place and have some real shooting sometime!"

"Take your hand away, sir! Dam puppy! You must be drunk, sir!"

"Never more sober. But what's the matter? Don't you like shooting?"

THE COLONEL boiled over and stamped away in a rage. Smithers turned to us.

"I thought he liked shooting! You two might care to come out, perhaps?"

"Smithers, you *are* drunk! You live in a respectable Long Island suburb — what do you propose to shoot?"

Smithers smiled maddeningly. "I'll bet one thousand dollars against a forty-four dum-dum that I'll give you more game to shoot — and bigger game — than ever was found in Africa!"

From the other side of the room the colonel's snort sounded

like a maddened beast. Smithers turned languidly toward him.

"That goes for you as well, Marsh!"

"I ought to take it — just to teach you a lesson — I *will* take it! You and Seeman hear?"

"But Marsh, he's drunk — must be!"

"Drunk or sober, it'll cost him one thousand!"

I shrugged. After all, Smithers was rich enough and certainly deserved it.

"All right — is it a bet, Smithers?"

"Right you are! When shall we say? This weekend?"

Seeman had an engagement, so we made it for the following week. Smithers looked slowly from one to the other of us and his face grew serious.

"Bring elephant guns and explosive shells," he said soberly, "and I'd suggest leather leggings and heavy shooting jackets. I'll expect you Friday evening!"

And he sauntered out of the room, leaving us half-amused and wholly angry at him. Big game shooting on Long Island! Well, we were going to be there (we decided) and we would take the man's money without the slightest compunction!

"After all, a thousand dollars is worth going for," said Seeman mildly and mixed himself another drink. I puzzled a moment over the incident. If the man had wanted us there *without fail*, he could not have han-

dled the invitation better than he had. But why did he want us? Certainly not for big game, I decided. Then what? Could it be to protect himself from something? Perhaps the man had enemies — unscrupulous ones. Possibly he had fallen foul of gangsters or racketeers in some way, although it was difficult to imagine the aristocratic Smithers mixed up in such matters.

During the following week I became more and more convinced that the invitation was serious. I phoned Seeman who pooh-poohed me out of countenance.

"He'll set us shooting mice or rabbits — that's about it."

"Well . . . you may be right. Rather humorous to shoot a mouse with an elephant gun, though."

He laughed. "Good, man! We'll take along the artillery and we'll dress the part, eh? This will tickle the colonel!"

AND SO ON Friday afternoon we gathered at Marsh's apartment and commenced preparations. We wore leather breeches and leggings and Seeman had heavy knee boots. We provided ourselves with pith helmets and each wore leather bandoliers filled with cartridges. We emptied two pints of the colonel's Bourbon during the dressing, and under such inspiration I insisted we each thrust two revolvers into our belts.

When we staggered down to the car with our heavy rifles, we must have made an extraordinary picture. The doorman stared and the Negro elevator boy swallowed his chewing gum at sight of us and almost wrecked the car before we got down to the street level. Out we marched across the sidewalk and into the car, while passers-by stopped and rubbed their eyes unbelievably at the sight: I drove until we were across the 59th Street bridge and then stepped on the accelerator.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at Paulings, on the north shore of Long Island, and asked a lonely and bored traffic policeman for direction. He gave it as though he wondered what we might want at Smithers'. He knew the house well enough; one could tell that. It was close to sunset when we turned up Smithers' drive. His place was rather unusual — a large area of woods through which the drive curved and autumn tints on the trees made it doubly attractive; then a broad sweep of lawn, tree-dotted, with the house set on a knoll and beyond that a small lake in a dell enclosed by all pine trees. We just had a glimpse as the day died and then we were at the door and a lean-faced butler took us over from the footman who opened to us. We were led into what must have served Smithers for a library.

"Mr. Smithers is expecting you and will be down directly," said the butler as he left us.

He came within the minute and stood in the doorway, cool and smiling eyeing our equipment with particular care, it seemed to me. I wondered suddenly how sober he had been at the club a few nights ago, and evidently, the colonel was thinking of the same thing, for he had the grace to blurt out, "We're here for that thousand dollars of yours, Smithers — hope you haven't forgotten!"

"Rather not! But first you must judge of the hunting; afterwards we settle the bet!"

"Oh come, Smithers, what nonsense! Do you still keep up the pretense of big game here on Long Island?"

Smithers gave him a quizzical look. "We eat first — hunt at night," said he. "Would you like to wash up?"

ALL THROUGH dinner, Colonel Marsh and I endeavored to pin our host down to the details of the "big game" he proposed to present us, but he was very noncommittal. "Is it tame?" I asked. "Some animals you have fenced in here on your se-
atte?" He shook his head at that.

"Wildcat?" snapped the colonel. Another negative. Seeman's thoughts were unreadable behind that fevered yellow face of his. But over our dessert he asked the most startling question of

all. "Huntin' *man* tonight, Smithers?" I gasped, but Smithers smiled more blandly than ever and shook his head.

"Don't you think you had better tell us, so that we can be prepared?" added Seeman. "That is, if the whole thing really isn't a joke of some kind."

"You will have time to judge for yourselves later on." Smithers said simply.

"Damn it all! It's all very well for you, but how about us?"

"*Afraid*, Colonel?" asked Smithers lazily.

The good colonel's neck swelled visibly and became a deep purple tint. His mustache quivered, and the lips set firmly. Not another question did he ask, and it was half an hour before he spoke to Smithers again. During that time there was something upon our host's mind — we could all see it. He was nervous and without his usual poise. Several times he cleared his throat as if to say something, but changed his mind every time. Finally he rose to his feet and shepherded us into a curious round room — not more than twelve feet across. Upon the walls were weapons of every conceivable description. Along the baseboard ran drawers which were filled with ammunition. Four cushioned seats were set in the wall in pairs — suggestive of bunks aboardship. From under one of these, Smithers drew whiskey and soda and

four glasses and pulled down a small folding shelf to set them on.

"We will start out from this room in a few minutes," he announced.

And now we all, I think, began to wonder together whether something serious might not lie ahead of us. What it was puzzled us to imagine. A barred and grated French door was set opposite the entrance, which had been closed. To this I went and peered out at the darkness. I could make out lights in houses some distance away and the stars revealed the edge of the woods. As I looked, Smithers came over and drew heavy curtains, smiling at me mysteriously.

We joined him around the table and sipped our drinks quietly while Smithers went over our equipment carefully and suggested that we each carry a revolver, bringing the necessary number down from the walls.

"But we already have one each," expostulated the colonel.

"These throw .44 explosive bullets," said Smithers quietly.

THE WHISKEY was strong, for the floor seemed unsteady once or twice — but I thought nothing of that at the time. The room began to feel oppressive and close. I suggested that the window be opened, and Smithers looked at me portentously.

"You don't know what you

ask," he remarked, and Seeman cocked his head slightly sideways and studied him with his expressionless eyes. Colonel Marsh fumed a second and then exploded with accumulated annoyance. "Hr-r-rmph!" he said.

"You young devil! How long are you going to keep us here? It's all stuff and nonsense — it is, don't deny it! I've a mind to leave your house this instant!"

His face fiery, he stamped to the door by which we had entered the room and seized the handle. It was locked!

"I really think, Smithers," put in Seeman quietly, "that you'd better explain!"

He looked from one to the other of us, smiling more teasingly than ever. "In five more minutes we will leave this room," was his answer. "We will go out and commence what will be the most exciting and perhaps the most dangerous hunting you have ever experienced. When we return, Colonel Marsh here will gladly pay me the bet."

The room was stifling by now and my eardrums throbbed and my head ached. Smithers drew from a drawer the largest hand-flashes I had ever seen and tried them, one by one. They cast great, searching beams of light against the narrow walls of the already well-lighted room. Silently he handed one to each of us. Then he prepared one more drink all around and bade us

down it. It tasted queer and Seeman eyed him sharply at the first sip. Smithers flushed slightly.

"It's all right," said he. "As a matter of fact, it's medicine. We'll need it where we're going." He held up his own empty glass as he spoke. When we had drained our glasses and set them down, he cleared them away and made the room ship-shape once again. Then he opened a drawer and drew out two dynamite bombs, placing them on the floor beside the curtained French door. The floor jarred slightly just a second before he did so and the walls seemed to quiver an instant — a matter which puzzled me and would have made me more curious than it did had my head not ached so or my ears not been drumming so loudly to the pulse of my heart. Smithers pulled aside the curtains and lifted a heavy bar which kept the door shut. We crowded out into the night.

II

IT WAS BLACK outdoors and smelt musty, nor was the air so fresh as it had been earlier. The sky was evidently overcast, also, for not a light could be seen in any direction, though I strained my eyes. It was deathly still and none of the usual night sounds could be heard. The nameless oppression upon

my senses became more pronounced than ever and my ears hurt me when I swallowed. Smithers said, "It's rocky going, for a bit; watch your step!" and turned his flash on the ground.

We were, I imagined, going down the slope to the little pond behind the house, but I hadn't remembered it as being so steep. And there was hardly a vestige of earth over the rocks — and no vegetation whatever. This puzzled me at the outset, but after we had walked a good half mile down a steep boulder-strewn incline, I was much more than puzzled — I was amazed. Smithers silenced one or two attempts at conversation, and we stepped as quietly as we could, but must have made noise enough to be heard a mile away in that quiet place. Presently he halted and turned off his light. We gathered around him in the intense unearthly darkness.

"Now we must go carefully — use your ears as much as your eyes," he whispered.

"Use them on *what*?" grunted Colonel Marsh from the black void.

"I can't tell you."

"Why not, man? Is it secret?"

"There are no words in the language to tell you — I have been here before and I saw . . . I can't tell you what. Don't you suppose I would if I could?"

"Will you tell me frankly," put in Seeman, "are you serious . . . not trying to play a joke?"

Smithers groaned impatiently. "If you would stop whispering and listen and look you might see for yourself!"

As he spoke, I saw something and gripped Seeman's arm hard. It was a faint, distant light, rather phosphorescent, I imagined, which seemed to float through the air a hundred yards away. It was receding and vanished shortly after I saw it. Memories thronged to my mind of tales my old Scotch nurse used to tell me when I was a child . . . will-o'-the-wisps! Silly, perhaps, but what rational explanation was there?

WE HAD all four of us seen it, evidently, for not a man moved — we barely breathed. Then three tiny sparks showed at some distance quite undeterminable in the darkness and seemed to play with each other, dancing in a dreamy pattern against the heavy velvet black. We heard Smithers shuffle forward cautiously and followed him in a bunch. For perhaps five minutes he continued — seeming to feel his way with his feet.

"This is as far as I came before," he said. "It drops away here sharply." As he spoke, he flashed his light down at his feet and we started back at the sight of a sheer cliff twenty feet or more deep, with a flat area extending away below into the darkness. The shock of sudden

light staggered us. Then the light flicked off and we could see nothing for a full minute. But we heard something! As if in answer to the light signal, a hissing began far away to the right and Smithers whispered, "Get your guns and lights ready!"

I flashed on my light at once and its great beam cut a hole through the darkness down toward the hissing. Something grayish-yellow moved there . . . was approaching. It seemed an enormous distance away but came on at a terrific rate of speed. Then it began to take shape and form to my eyes and . . . it was indescribable. A huge head filled with needle-like teeth and soft-looking, shapeless legs — that may give some idea. The mouth was open and its cavernous size shut off almost all view of the body. I had hardly time to gasp before Colonel Marsh's elephant gun went off like a thunderclap. He must have missed, for the onrush did not pause a second. The hissing was like steam escaping from a boiler now and the Thing flung itself against the rocky bulwark as Seeman and Smithers fired point-blank at its open mouth. But on it came, the momentum of its charge, I suppose, enabling it to give one last upward leap that brought it half over the ledge. We leaped away as the explosive bullets burst inside it, and my torch wavered

off the huge body an instant.

When I turned it back again in fear and trembling, half-expecting to see it charging me, I illuminated the great mass lying inert half over the precipice.

"Hold the light steady," Smithers called to me. "Let's try to pull it all the way up."

THE THREE of them tugged and strained for a few minutes and succeeded in moving it two feet. I moved up close and started back at the odd odor — like spoiled eggs. The Thing was easily twelve feet long and must have weighed a ton. It was brownish yellow and hairless. But the mouth was the startling part of it, for the jaws were like two semi-circles three feet in diameter and the teeth like so many spears set in it — hundreds of them. Somewhere I vaguely remembered seeing a mouth and teeth like that.

"Great God, Smithers! What is the thing?"

"You know as much as I. Do you suppose we could get it back to the gun room?"

"Better phone the police! A beast like this roaming the countryside . . ."

"Hmmm!" said Smithers. "Quiet a moment!"

We strained our ears and eyes. One of the distant lights was floating toward us! As we looked, it rose over our heads and swooped down. One of the guns roared out as my light re-

vealed a black, bat-like flying creature. The body twitched and tumbled at my feet. I stooped and picked it up in amazement, for its mouth and teeth were strongly suggestive of those of the great beast we had killed. From its forehead, a long springy tendon, dangled a bulbous lamp of phosphorescence! Now I remembered where I had seen such forms of life — photographs and paintings of deep-sea monsters. They were for all the world like it.

"We must get this great beast thrown back below!" announced Smithers suddenly and with alarm straining in his voice. "For God's sake lend a hand!" As he spoke, he began thrusting and pushing frantically and stopped a second to call out to me, "And put that light out!"

I did so and we all helped him at his task. It took us a full two minutes in the dark to move the carcass a foot or two nearer the edge, where it slowly toppled over and thumped down to the ground below. "Now keep quiet for your lives!" whispered Smithers from out of the sudden blackness.

I heard something then — a far-away hissing that approached until I could hear the soft thudding of great shapeless paws below — then a sudden loud hiss and the sound of jaws crunching on food. After a few seconds, the sounds ceased and another distant hissing was aud-

ible and still another in a different direction, both approaching. We were not breathing at all by now, I'm sure of it, and the hair on the back of my neck was bristling like a mastiff's. Suddenly, a furious snarling and crunching and scrambling broke out below us as the enormous beasts quarreled over their gruesome meal and so dark and utter was my blindness and so taut my nerves that when I felt a touch on my arm, I almost screamed aloud. But it was See-man pulling me away. He put his mouth to my ear and breathed: "Smithers says to get back while we can."

WE DARED no light, but Smithers seemed to know the way, and we stumbled, sweat-sodden, back up the rocky slope as quietly and quickly as we could. It took us fifteen minutes to come to the house — which was itself completely shrouded in the darkness — and the only way I knew we were there was by the feel of the doorway and the cold iron of the barred door. This was slammed to behind us and the heavy bar let down and the curtain pulled across before Smithers flicked on the electric lights. And even then, he uttered no word until he had pulled and adjusted the heavy curtain so that no light should shine through into that horror-ridden night outside.

Not until then did I realize

that I held clutched in my hand the dead body of the luminous bat, but once I did notice it, I smelt it. So did the others. It was a pretty bad stench, as such things go.

"Throw it outside," said the colonel.

"No . . . I have an electric refrigerator here. Let's keep it for examination tomorrow," and Smithers pulled out another drawer to reveal a compact electric ice-box. Then he busied himself wrapping the weird thing in wax paper and seemed to me to ask needless advice and to be attempting to keep all three of us watching him — as though he hoped we might not notice some mysterious matter he wished concealed. When the ice-box was closed, he examined Seeman's rifle and compared it with Colonel Marsh's. That left me free to look about and he noticed it — or so I felt — and suggested that we needed a drink or two all around. He took a long time preparing them, and before we were half through downing the first, he suggested a second.

Seeman looked at his watch. "Twelve-thirty! No more for me. I'll be turning in about now, if you don't mind."

Colonel Marsh glanced up sharply. "Before the police are notified? Do you realize that those beasts out there are a threat to the safety of thousands of unsuspecting people?"

Smithers cleared his throat nervously. "Who would believe you?" he asked.

"I'd bring them here and show 'em. Bring a regiment!"

"Tonight?" Smithers smiled scornfully.

That *did* stump us, for obviously, no one would come until morning — and what could we do to protect all Long Island between now and morning?

"But you've seen them before! Why hasn't something been done before this? Where could the things have come from?"

SMITHERS' FACE became teasingly earnest. "At dawn tomorrow, we will go out through this door and you will understand why nothing has been done," said he.

"I'm going to bed, then," announced Seeman and strode to the door. It was still locked and he turned impatiently toward Smithers, who walked slowly up to him and fumbled for a key in his pocket. He took forever to get it into the lock and then he did not turn it, but as if a sudden thought had struck him, he said: "How about that bet, Colonel?"

That worthy's mustache bristled and his face became suffused with the color of annoyance. "I suppose you've won," he admitted, "but it's a terrible thing to claim you have shown us dangerous beasts roaming in this suburb and in the same breath

deny that any steps should be taken to protect the citizens!"

And then I felt the floor give a slight jolt and I saw a gun that was hanging on the wall beside me quiver slightly. At the same instant, Smithers turned the key in the door and threw it open. We walked through the hall and into the library. Before we were shown up to our rooms for the night, Smithers assured us very earnestly once more that he knew what he was doing and that he would ask us not to make fools of ourselves by phoning the police then. "After you have looked over the ground tomorrow," he added, "you may do as you please — you will be puzzled, at least."

Colonel Marsh grunted, thought for a moment, and subsided dubiously.

SPEAKING FOR myself, I slept little, being too excited for rest, and at the first sign of dawn, I rose and looked out of the window in my room. From it I could see one corner of the lake and the slope down to it. Beyond rose a mere handful of pine trees and they screened — another house beyond! Where then, had we seen the beasts last night? I sat there bemused for half an hour and then dressed, descended to the library, and discovered Colonel Marsh fuming up and down the room. To my "Good morning!" he glared silently.

"Have you seen it? It's some foolishness of Smithers, depend on it!"

"What do you mean?"

"There is no such place as we thought we saw last night!"

"Oh, come!"

"Come out and see for yourself, man!"

But Seeman entered then, and a few minutes later Smithers' butler announced that we might have early breakfast if we wished. Mr. Smithers would, he indicated, sleep another hour. It was not yet seven. We ate hurriedly and made for the gunroom, which we found as we had left it. We pulled the curtains apart and opened the French doors upon the garden. Before us the ground sloped away — rock-strewn, it is true, but the rocks were in ledges and beautifully planted with dwarf and curious sorts of evergreens. At the foot of the incline gleamed the little lake and beyond that the pines marked the edge of the estate. I mentioned that I had seen another house beyond that again, but we all wanted to explore and see for ourselves. In ten minutes we were at the edge of the pine woods and looking out on several houses spaced in half-acre plots and a highway beyond!

What could be the explanation? Back and forth we hunted — Seeman suggesting that there might be a large cave opening, but we found no possibility of

this — lawns and shrubbery borders were neat and omnipresent. Yet somewhere here, the three of us, a few hours ago, had been in deadly danger of our lives!

Very much startled and full of wonder, we returned to the house and passed through the gunroom. Seeman stopped suddenly as we entered the laboratory. We looked up expectantly. "No," he announced to himself, "it couldn't be that . . . or could it?"

"What?"

"I was thinking . . . I've seen some queer things in the East — India and elsewhere — you don't suppose Smithers made us imagine all that last night?"

I laughed aloud, but Seeman's expressionless stare seemed to indicate some slight doubt, at least. As we stood there, Smithers came up behind the colonel at the doorway.

"Been out looking around?"

"Hr-r-rmph!"

"Want to phone the police, Colonel?" and his smile seemed like a match to that worthy's temper. I don't know what he didn't accuse Smithers of — dabbling in magic, attempting to win a bet by mesmerism, fraud, poor sportmanship, and much more.

Smithers smiled. "Have you looked in the ice-box where we left the smelly bird?"

Colonel Marsh started visibly "By George!" and he was gone.

WE FOLLOWED and found him in the gunroom trying to find the right drawer. Smithers went forward and pulled out the right drawer. Smithers went forward and pulled out the proper compartment and opened the air-tight cover. Then we held our noses for dear life, for the stench was frightful and Smithers reached a long knife that hung near by on the wall and lifted something dark brown and gruesome on the point. It was decaying by seconds as we stared, and we had just time for a glimpse of the outlines before they softened. Pieces dripped off onto the box beneath. "Ugh!" said Smithers, and let it all drop out of sight. He closed the cover.

Colonel Marsh stared at the closed box as though he had seen a rabbit produced from a magician's hat. Then he strode over to his rifle leaning against the wall, and opened the breach. "It must be true," he grunted and put the weapon back, to stalk in dignity back to the library.

"Don't suppose you'll tell," drawled Seeman.

Smithers merely smiled.

When we returned to the library, we found the colonel writing in his check book on the side table. He tore out the check, waved it dry and handed it to Smithers who accepted it gravely. "Was it really as we saw it last night?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Those beasts still exist now?"

Smithers nodded, seemed about to speak, changed his mind, and nodded again.

I was so curious by now that I thought I should burst. But when Seeman drawled that he thought he would start back to town, I agreed. It was maddening to stay here and have no way of learning anything more. Better to try to forget the whole affair. The colonel packed his things at the same time, and when we got to the door, our car had been brought around for us. We got in silently and Smithers stood beside the car bidding us good-by.

I started the engine and waved my hand. Smithers leaned on the window and said: "This is Saturday. If you three are at the Stranger Club about this time of the morning next Saturday, you might hear from me again." And he turned and started back to the house.

As we rolled along through Long Island traffic, we discussed the matter and agreed to be there — though what possible explanation could he have for what seemed to us an insoluble mystery?

III

THE FOLLOWING Saturday I was at the Stranger Club a few minutes after nine and

found Colonel Marsh stamping about through the empty rooms before me.

"Where's Seeman?" he demanded, and without waiting for an answer, continued pacing up and down. "Not that I really suppose Smithers will come or send any word — the most thoughtless young whippersnapper I ever knew! Here I am wasting a whole day waiting for nothing, and no one here to get me a drink!"

I was full of curiosity myself, but could not help smiling at the colonel. Somehow our adventure of a week ago seemed far away and unreal and — not very serious. We rather looked forward to an explanation, I believe. Great Heaven! I marvel now that I could so soon have forgotten that three-foot mouth set with a thousand teeth! But so we are made. The club steward arrived at nine-thirty, and the colonel blew him up until a drink was placed in his hands; after that he grew calmer, and presently Seeman arrived. We sat around in chairs and fidgeted for half an hour. The colonel was, in fact, just rising to his feet with the announcement that he would waste no more time on wild geese when the front door opened and we heard footsteps approaching. We turned as one and saw — Smithers' butler. He came forward and handed Colonel Marsh an envelope and retired to the hall where he wait-

ed patiently while the envelope was torn open and a dozen type-written sheets spread out. We three put our heads together and read. When we were half through, Seeman called to the butler: "Are you waiting for us?"

"The master said you might be coming out to Paulings. The chauffeur has the big town car outside, sir."

"Then let's start *now!*" I cried. We can finish this on the way out."

We reached for hats and coats and rushed out to the limousine at the curb. It started immediately at a speed which increased when we had finished the manuscript and had commenced to urge the chauffeur to hurry up. He half turned in his seat to look curiously back at us, but the butler beside him never showed any hint that he was interested — sat stiffly looking straight ahead.

This is the letter Smithers had written, addressed to all three of us by name:

* * *

PERHAPS YOU have not yet guessed the explanation of your adventure last week. It was a little cheeky of me to make you guess, but I have my reasons. Those animals, of course, do not roam Long Island. They are on a different level of existence — about two miles different. Now have you guessed? The gunroom

is my elevator — perhaps you noticed the floor shake as it came to rest? Down below the earth is a cavern of sorts. Here dwell the beasts that we shot.

I first came upon the entrance making my rock garden and climbed into a mere crack in the rock that led underneath my own cellar, then turned abruptly downward. The walls were smooth and showed signs of ancient heat, so that perhaps it was once (thousands of years ago) a vent for some prehistoric volcano. I blasted an entrance into it directly from the cellar and spent my days and nights exploring down its sheer depths with ropes and ladders supported on iron bars driven into the walls. Month after month I worked and hardly believed the depth I reached. I came to the bottom five thousand feet below and found the great cavern you mistook for a Long Island landscape in the dark. This was two years ago.

I determined to keep my find a secret and have all the fun of exploring to myself, but a mile's climb is no fun at all and I spent a good many thousand dollars arranging an electric lift and, finally, smoothing the walls and building an elevator cage in the form of a room. I do not know exactly what I intended — perhaps using the cavern, brilliantly lighted, for a grand ballroom or a theater. The true meaning of my discovery did not become

apparent until all that preliminary business was finished. I had had the workmen brought from a distance and discharged them in the hope that no one would believe any of them if they did talk. I also discharged all my servants, finding the good ones positions elsewhere, and hired a new staff who know nothing of the shaft or of the secret use of the innocent-looking gunroom, into which I retired for long periods and locked the door.

About six months ago, I armed myself with flashlight and lunch and descended to make my first exploring trip. I followed the course we took last Friday and came to the cliff. It is easy to climb down it and I did so, swinging my feeble light in awe over that great rocky plain and up to the blackness of the lofty cavern roof. I heard the hissing noise approach without fear, until my light revealed the charging monster at scarcely a hundred yards distant! I was totally unprepared for any danger and dropped the light to scramble panic-stricken up to safety. Here I stopped, panting, to see the still-burning light blotted out by the body of the attacker. The flash was ground to pieces and I began to wonder how safe I might be even there when a second beast charged and a furious fight broke out below me in the absolute darkness. I took advantage of the noise to make good my retreat and climbed

the long hill to where I thought the elevator was. Only it wasn't.

I HAD two matches in my pocket (no more, even though I am a pipe smoker) and I lit one to find myself in absolutely unknown territory. I imagine that I lost my head in the blackness down there and stumbled aimlessly for I know not how long, most of the way downhill again. Presently I bumped into a rocky wall and groped around to find myself in a tunnel about twenty feet across. I knew this was not the right direction and was about to turn and retrace my blind steps when my eyes, enormously sensitized by the constant dark, caught the faintest hint of redness on ahead. Perhaps the most foolish thing I could have done was to go forward to see what the light portended — but a man lost in the dark has no choice; he *must* follow the light even if it be a dim ghost of a gleam. My light led me half a mile to a cavern that felt large, though I could see none of it. What I saw was a sea of faint light.

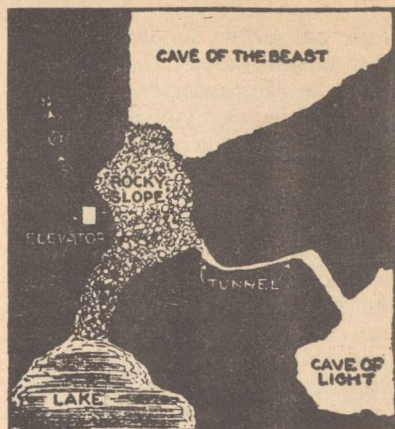
Close down on the ground it lay. I reached down my hand and touched something that crumbled and a stench assailed my nostrils that made me giddy. I walked in light up to the ankles, as though it were water. This, please, a mile or more below the surface of the earth — without benefit of rain or sun.

For the light was obviously phosphorescent and betokened life of some sort.

I was nauseated by the odor and weary. A sudden fear sent me scurrying back to make sure I could find the tunnel entrance again, for I knew that I must return. Further exploration could wait until I could equip myself properly. First I must find the elevator cage. I groped my way back along the tunnel and never really knew when I came out of it into the inner cave. But the ground began rising and felt boulder-strewn and I hoped that this fact might guide me. It did, after a fashion, and an hour later when I had despaired of ever succeeding. I lit my second and last match and saw my objective twenty feet away in the half-lit gloom. I entered and pulled the ascending lever and spent an impatient half-hour rising to my home above. I had been down seven hours by my watch.

I APOLOGIZE for this long history, but it is essential to an explanation of what I now intend doing. I made a second trip down a week later with a powerful flashlight and a good rifle. I determined to explore only the rocky slope at the summit of which the elevator shaft rested. I took a compass with me and paper and sketched a map which I give here.

To the north, as you see, the



slope ends in the low cliff and beyond that a huge area inhabited by beasts too dangerous for me to approach alone. On the east I found the entrance to the long tunnel that leads to the cave of light. But before examining in that direction, I made the circuit of the south and west and found it all walled in harmlessly except for one huge gap of a hundred yards where the rock steeply fell away into the water of a large underground lake. It was more than half a mile across, I judged, or I should have seen the far side in the unreal beam of my flashlight. It might be a hundred miles for all I could tell, for I have not yet gotten around to exploring its gloomy surface in a boat. This preliminary work occupied several hours. When I got back to the surface, I felt more comfortable about further work, for the beasts evidently could not at-

tack me unless I climbed down the natural barrier that hemmed them in. Fortunately, I did not tempt them, for you will remember that the one we shot almost reached the top of the cliff in his charge.

I determined to solve the mystery of the phosphorescence and made a trip into that tunnel-entered place for specimens. I got them, in spite of the smell, and brought them up for examination in the sunlight. They were more like mushrooms than anything I knew — the round puffball kind — but in the light of day, they quickly decayed and lost shape and form under my eyes. In a few minutes, they were putrescent, smelled to high heaven and dripped messily. I had the mess saved in a bowl over which I had been holding the things, and this bowlful I had analyzed. Then on another expedition, I saw one of the luminous bats and shot it and brought that up to examine. You know what happened to it, for you saw the one Colonel Marsh shot and how it looked the next morning. I had that analyzed too.

THE RESULTS weren't anything definite, but indicated something to me and I became interested in subterranean life generally. I got a good many books on the blind newts and fishes found in famous caverns the world over — managed to

get a few specimens as well, and I had them analyzed to compare with my own findings. Here's my theory, for what it's worth. Up to my discovery, all the underground life discovered has been merely surface types adapted to darkness; even the fish dredged up from the lowest depths of the sea have been considered merely adaptations of surface life. Now suppose that life had been trapped in caves far beneath the earth hundreds of thousands of years ago. Suppose that the pressure rose gradually and the caverns continued sinking and impurities were in the underground atmosphere — sulphur for instance — and over long periods of time life changed to meet these conditions and survived in a new form. Exits might occasionally appear leading up to the surface, and the emerging blind things would fall easy prey to the surface *carnivoræ*, so that all who emerged, died. Some types would be incapable of emerging because the rays of the sun would be painful and drive them back. These would breed and survive below.

Legendary history is full of such hints. Dragons were supposed to dwell beneath the ground and to emerge from caverns breathing fire. (Does this possibly mean that dragons were adapted to an atmosphere where oxygen was lacking, its place being taken perhaps by

sulphur, and that upon coming into the upper air their breath burned?) Moreover, if legend be credited, the Greeks believed Hades a place where men ate dust in dim darkness and hell-hounds with huge jaws guarded the entrance. It sticks in my fancy that we may have shot a regular classic hell-hound last week.

Well, then, how about devils? Might they really exist down below? Cloven hoofs, leathery hides, horned heads and forked tails — all complete? Frankly, I should not be surprised. Moreover I shall find out, if I live. A month ago I made an expedition to the cave of light and walked a good five miles by compass over its vegetable-dusty floor. I came to a canyon in the form of a gap in the floor half a mile across and almost that in depth. Peering over, I saw, far below, half a dozen pits of fire glowing — probably volcanic. The air down there is steamy and the light only a dull redness. I cannot be sure, but I am almost certain that I saw figures moving about the fires. I had a great coil of rope with me and the sides of the canyon were rough enough at one spot to attempt the descent. I did so, and half way down, the steamy air bellied up around me and I nearly choked, for it smells of "fire and brimstone," as the ancients put it. I clung, gasping, to the rock until the steam

swirled free so that I could climb up again.

IT WAS THEN that I determined to see whether I could obtain discreet assistance. You know how I inveigled you to my place and together we fought the hell-hounds. So poorly did the experiment work that I can see no advantage in having rifles back of me when I explore. Why risk four lives instead of merely my own? By the time you read this, I shall be down there solving the mystery of the fiery canyon. If its dangers are insurmountable, I shall gladly have your help in further studying and examining my underground kingdom — avoiding altogether the cave of the beasts.

I have made these preparations: a strong and light ladder of silk rope and a diver's suit and helmet of rubber — the kind with an oxygen tank strapped on the back. There is a telephone in the helmet and two fine copper wires lead back to the elevator cage behind me — more to enable me to find my way back at a run if the need should arise than for any necessity to be in communication. But I shall be able to communicate with you, if you wish, from the telephone hidden behind the encyclopedia in the library in my house. So, you see, you need not miss the fun even if I decline to permit you

to share the risk. I have made arrangements so that you can get out here if you want to about the time I start the descent from the floor of the cave of light down into the canyon.

There may be devils down there — or there may be dragons — or merely subterranean fire. If there are dragons, how about our bet, Colonel? Twice won?

* * *

WE FINISHED this amazing manuscript as the big car trundled across the 57th Street bridge. "Damn' fool!" snapped the colonel, with plain envy and admiration written all over his face. It was about then that we persuaded the chauffeur to really step on things and get us out to Paulings as soon as he could. Why we weren't arrested a dozen times, I cannot now imagine.

IV

WE THRUST our way past the scandalized footman at Smithers' house. He half turned after us as if to fight for the decencies, when the butler stalked up in dignity after us and made all right again. We burst headlong into the library, oblivious to all else, and threw the volumes of encyclopedia unceremoniously onto the floor. There was a telephone with its

receiver replaced by a small metal piece and connected by wire to a box type loudspeaker. Seeman leaned over and called "Smithers!" Then Colonel Marsh pushed him impatiently aside. "Smithers! You young idiot! Can you hear us?" he yelled.

The loudspeaker chuckled. Smithers' voice came quietly from the box. "You got up there pretty quick. I'm just adjusting the diving outfit now. If you'd called five minutes ago, you would have had to wait until I put this helmet on to get an answer."

"We want to come down and stand by while you climb into that canyon," said I.

The colonel burst out, "We are coming down, you hear?"

Another chuckle from the box. "Afraid that won't be possible. The elevator is pretty well concealed. I sent it up again, it's true — but to prevent any one coming down to this place rather than to permit them to do so."

"We'll smash the floor of the gunroom and climb down the ropes!"

"Two inches of steel and six inches of composition in that floor, Colonel. You'd need dynamite. Besides, what could you do? I've just fastened the silk ladder and thrown the tail of it over. Now I shall start climbing down. If you three were waiting for me here, you couldn't help me when I get down

below there. While I am climbing, I am safe from the hellhounds, but if one came into the cave of light while you were here, he would attack *you*. You can't help me but you can harm yourselves."

"Damn it all!" shouted the colonel. "Do you suppose we are afraid to risk ourselves? We're going to get down in spite of you!" And he rushed away to the gunroom with Seeman and myself following. We spent ten useless minutes searching every drawer and cupboard for hidden mechanism, but were compelled to give up the search. The colonel ruined a beautiful shotgun by using its barrel as a crowbar and pounding on the floor of the room with it. The floor gave off a very solid-sounding sort of thud and I left to go back to the telephone in the library.

"Where are you now, Smithers?" I asked.

"... Ugh ... just a ... ugh ... there! Pretty near halfway down." There were sounds of heavy breathing. "Did you all go away, or what happened?"

I told him of our attempt to find the hidden elevator apparatus. He laughed. "Foolish! You'd never find that! Besides, I set the controls from below when I sent the car back up to the surface. You'd better stay by the telephone and enjoy this adventure second-hand, instead of wasting your time."

SEEMAN AND Colonel Marsh entered just then and heard the last half of Smithers' remarks sheepishly enough.

"Hard work climbing — even on a ladder — and the darn thing swings a bit — and this diving suit is the most uncomfortable thing I ever wore — have to rest—every few minutes ... "and the loud-speaker panted.

It took Smithers half an hour to reach the bottom of that buried canyon. All through the climb, we exchanged the maddest kind of conversation — particularly during the brief and frequent periods he found it necessary to rest.

"The steam is swirling around my feet," he announced once. "It looks yellowish right now and the fires below are orange and the rock beside me is a smooth, shiny black — though there's so little light that the colors are more imagined than seen, except where the fires show through. I have my flashlight and an automatic, but somehow these don't seem the proper weapons for this world down here."

Then another time, "It's all black and cloudy around me now — I can make out the fires though, so I suppose I could see through the mist fairly well if there were any light. I don't dare turn on the flash. You know, if I do find life down here, it will be a queer sort of life! I suppose strong sunlight

would kill it in an instant . . . yet there's another idea. Millions of years from now when the sun cools and the air on earth freezes in its red rays, these creatures down here — if they exist — may come out onto the surface and inherit the earth."

Vague ideas flashed through my mind as he spoke: Powers of Darkness imprisoned down in the earth by the Face of Righteousness, evil things that cannot bear the light of day. "Smithers," I said. "They could come out now during the night!"

"Perhaps they do," he grunted. "This damned telephone string is a nuisance!"

"Don't you dare cut it!" thundered the colonel.

"Sha'n't, don't worry! I may need it to find my way back to the hanging ladder."

"What do you mean by saying 'perhaps they do'?" I persisted.

"Devils, dragons, will-o'-the-wisps, gnomes, elves — they are all night-going apparitions, aren't they? Maybe they used to sneak out of caves at night and return at dawn. Maybe they never existed. I don't know! . . . By Jove! No . . . *yes!* I'm at the bottom!"

There was a period of silence. We could hear Smithers' breathing as though we had stood beside him. For ourselves, we scarcely breathed at all. "Can't see the fires from down here . . . mighty dark . . . God! What

was that? . . . I thought I felt some little thing scuttle off through the darkness . . . it's disturbing not to be able to see or hear anything . . ."

THE VOICE trailed off and there was another moment of silence. I licked my lips dryly. We could hear the thud of slow feet and an occasional stumble and knew that Smithers was walking.

"I see a faint glow of red against the blackness," his voice whispered. "I suppose that's one of the fire pits . . . yes, it is, I can see it better now . . . but there doesn't seem to be any animals around it . . ."

Another pause. "Well, the coast's clear at this pit, anyway. Perhaps I only imagined that I saw things down here . . . but I was pretty sure I did, . . . Good Heavens . . ."

The voice stopped. "Speak up, man! What is it?" we shouted in unison.

"Hmml I suppose it's lava. The hole's twenty feet across and about a hundred yards deep, and the fiery stuff down at the bottom keeps moving slightly up and down — like a pulse beating in torn flesh. Rather giddy thing to look down into . . ." Then we heard the thump and shuffle of his further progress.

"Seems to be no life here at all. I'm going to chance the flashlight . . . Lord, but it's a

big place! And not a thing . . .” We heard the quick indrawn breath that held a second. “Dear God!” and the *thump, thump, thump* and the heavy panting breaths.

I leaned over to the instrument. “What is it Smithers?” I whispered anxiously. There was no answer but the sounds of running. Then, “The place is full of them . . . thousands . . . such horrible things . . . like a nightmare . . . thank the Lord I thought of leaving this string trail to follow . . . they are after me . . .” He was evidently talking to himself more than to us and we did not dare speak now. “There it is . . . thank God . . . about time, too . . . ahh!” Then we heard sounds of very heavy breathing which we took to mean he had found the ladder and was ascending — then a pause while we supposed he regained his breath.

“That was a close thing (pant) but I’m twenty feet up now (pant) and . . . they’ve come to the foot of the ladder but don’t dare climb it (pant). I can see them plainly in the light of the flash down there. You never saw such things . . . like brown leather . . .”

WE HEARD the sharp intake of breath and then slow and horrified, “This ladder is moving! *There’s something above me!*” Our nerves were taut to the breaking point, and the colonel

leaned forward with bulging eyes. “Shoot your way up!” he cried.

There was on the instant the sound of a shot and another and another in quick succession till we counted ten. Then Smithers cried out unintelligibly and we heard sounds of struggle and blows struck, evidently on the metal diving helmet, then a scream, long drawn out and blood-chilling, ending in a crash and silence . . .

“My God! I can’t stand this! He’s been knocked off the ladder and probably killed,” cried the colonel. He paced the floor claspings and unclasping his fingers.

But Smithers had not been killed — would to God he had! A groan came from the loud-speaker and we rushed to it. “Smithers, old man, can you hear us?”

Another groan. “I’m done for,” he said weakly. “I think my back is broken, for I can’t seem to move either leg . . . What a fool I was not to let you come down with me! . . . The flash-light didn’t break; it’s just out of my reach and lights up everything on my right side . . . that’s where *they are* . . . *they’re coming!* Colonel Marsh! Colonel Marsh! Turn off the speaker . . . ahh! — please turn it off! You mustn’t *hear* — no one must hear what . . . dear God in Heaven . . . this isn’t happening to me; it’s a nightmare! It must be! Just

a dream and I'll close my eyes and not see those teeth . . . when I wake up, I'll laugh at it all . . ."

Then we heard quick breathing and . . . the next five minutes were unendurable. I cannot bear to put it on paper. Colonel Marsh bowed his head so that his ears were cupped by the palms of his hands and he kept muttering and moaning to himself. Seeman stood with hands behind his back and his yellow parchment-like skin seemed to tighten on his cheek bones, but his face was as meek and expressionless as ever. When he reached forward with a horrible oath and ripped the instrument from the wall to smash it on the floor, his action seemed incongruously violent. In the sudden silence, I looked about the room aimlessly, trying desperately not to be ill and noticed how peacefully the sunlight rested on the table beneath the window — healing, sane sunlight . . .

WE MADE fools of ourselves then. We tried to tear up the steel-braced floor of the gun room and the butler objected. His master, he informed us, had left word that we were to be brought here — but he had no authority to permit us to tear the house apart. We tried to explain what had happened or was happening to poor Smithers, but he stared stiffly and incredulously and stalked off to phone the police.

That sobered us, but we agreed that the matter would have to be turned over to them anyway. We awaited their arrival in morose silence. We needed every drop of the stiff brandies we took while waiting, for our nerves were frayed to the breaking point. But when the two rather stupid patrolmen arrived they listened with growing suspicion to our frantic arguments.

Finally one leaned close to the colonel and sniffed reminiscently.

"Hmml!" he said with raised eyebrows. "So that's it, is it! Now do you three want to leave the house quietly and go to your homes, or would you prefer to make trouble and arrive at the police station? You should be ashamed of yourselves!"

"Blast your impudence!" snorted Colonel Marsh, "Smithers is down below the ground fighting leathery beasts this instant . . . I tell you, he told us so himself!"

That, you see, was pretty hopeless from then on. Even the colonel saw the point and stopped talking, to stand biting his lower lip with his teeth and tapping savagely with his foot.

"Let's go," said Seeman shortly.

WE MADE inquiries when we got back to the city — still only the afternoon of that incredible day — and learned

something of poor Smithers' affairs. He had a cousin, it seemed, who would inherit the estate. The cousin lived in England. I called up a lawyer I knew and put certain guarded questions to him. It appeared that nothing could be done by any one until at least seven years after Smithers vanished. Until then he would be presumed still alive. After that, we agreed wearily, the cousin might be approached with a view to buying the estate (Colonel Marsh is wealthy) and so there does remain a dim possibility of our

some day learning more about those caverns of horror.

Seeman and I tried hard to get drunk that night, but we couldn't do it. We consumed unbelievable quantities of hard liquor in my apartment and then went around to the Stranger Club and drank there. The horror of those last few minutes remained with me for three days and I still do not care to think about it more than I can help. Only last night I dreamed about it again — that high-pitched unnatural voice screaming . . . screaming . . . screaming . . .

The five tales from the Stranger Club appeared in WONDER STORIES magazine, as follows: *The Call of the Mech-Men*, November 1933; *Caverns of Horror*, March 1934; *Voice of Atlantis*, July 1934; *The Moth Message*, December 1934; and *Seeds From Space*, June 1935.

Of the lot, only *Caverns of Horror* is a straight horror tale. *Call of the Mech-Men* deals with a secret race of intelligent machines; and *Seeds From Space* with vegetable entities growing from spores out of the void. The other two tales are slighter.

If you would like us to run any, or all of the other Stranger Club stories, won't you let us know, please?

Prodigy

by Walt Liebscher

Most of the troubles and tragedies of this world derive from the behavior of emotional infants who are adults chronologically. They are really no more mature than the narrator of this story and there is nothing funny about them. The child genius, however, can be quite frightening — and yet, amusing.

IT WAS A work of art, a genuine work of art. I'm definitely a genius and I can prove it.

I suppose all this delightful nonsense started when I was about seven months old. My Mother, having boned up on Spock, was holding me close and dispensing part of the daily ration of love and affection. You know — to make me feel wanted, secure, and all that jazz.

Of course I gurgled and smiled appropriately.

"Say Mama," she cooed. "Ma-aa Maaa."

In a fit of inspiration I lowered my voice the required number of decibels and said, "Go to Hell."

The resultant chaos was absolutely delicious. She thought my Father had said it and no amount of pleading on his part could convince her he was innocent of the heinous crime, as she called it. The argument lasted into the early morning hours and for the first time in my life I fell asleep.

It didn't take me long to realize I could manipulate them like

puppets, and as I grew older, I began to hate my Mother with a vengeance. She was a bitch from the word go.

Mother was all woman and she had the body to prove it. Despite the fact she treated my Father abominably, he still trembled when he was close to her or saw her traipse around nude, which she did at the slightest provocation.

Often, during the night, I would hear him plead with her to make love. She would lead him on interminable, and, when he was almost at the breaking point, *allow* him to have her. Then she would pour on the ardor and have it so quickly done that my Father would be left completely befuddled and quite unsatisfied. You could almost hear her gloat in the darkness while my father screamed silently, and my hate grew and grew.

There were other little niceties about her that were enormously distasteful. As I grew older, she gradually assumed management of the household money, spending most of it on herself and little me, leaving a comparative pittance for Father.

And my distaste for him grew also. Not only because he allowed her to dominate him, but for his complete lack of struggle. She had only to use a feather to push him into her hellhole of sick conformity, replete with dinners for the boss and his wife, the fashionable club bit, and the

useless round of cocktail parties with vapid women and hollow men whose only chance for real contentment was the grave.

The women adored him, the men envied him, and my Mother smiled smugly. Why shouldn't they? He had cocktailed his boss into a vice presidency, he had a gorgeous, sexy wife, a blue ribbon child, he could quote any batting average for the last twenty years. Actually he despised baseball, but it was another way of proving he was a man. Ah, yes, he was a success.

Well, as you can readily see, things finally approached the breaking point. The only thing I cared for were my pets and Aunt Martha, who was so simple and unwise I couldn't help but like her.

WHICH BRINGS me to my work of art. It took planning and patience and all the cunning I could muster. It was little old me who implanted in their adequate brains the idea of living in the country, partly because I insisted on having a pony, which I rode impeccably, and because I gently persuaded the doctor to suggest that the country air would be good for my health.

Actually, I'm not as puny as I pretend to be. But, sick children are less prone to discipline and get more presents, and so I made myself sick quite often, whenever I wanted something to go my way.

Besides, my work of art had to be accomplished with no one around. And so, while pretending to look at the pretty pictures in the encyclopedia, I boned up on poisons. You'd be surprised at the wonderful plants that grow in a country yard. Many of them have gorgeous flowers, or pleasant foliage, but it was so rewarding to discover how delightfully deadly some of them were, like the oleander bush for instance, and mushrooms. And the pantry contained ever so many goodies like rat poison with an arsenical compound, and DDT, and lye.

It wasn't very difficult to blank out Mother and cook up a nice little deadly brew with all those lovely ingredients on hand.

I waited for the proper day. Father was away on one of his numerous business trips. His business was of the monkey type with another woman. I wished him well. Through various bits of chicanery, I had forced my Mother to fire the maid, so we were alone. That lovely night when I was having my second Shirley Temple, I managed to pour a portion of my culinary artistry into her fourth martini. She died almost instantly. This made me mad as hell as I wanted to see her suffer a bit.

I put her in the deep freeze, and if you think that was easy, you're nuts. I had to rig up a system of levers and pulleys and

concentrate all my powers to do it. Then I let her fall too fast. Her body messed up all the neat rows of frozen foods and I had to straighten them all out. That so annoyed me I went into the living room and had a real cocktail.

The next few days were quite wonderful. I ate what I wanted, when I wanted. I walked a couple of miles through the woods to the river. I swam underwater to the other side so no one would see me and started a few fires in the forest just for kicks. At home I could go naked and float around the house without worrying about anyone seeing me.

I also had time to perfect my witches' brew so that it wasn't quite so potent, for I still had Father to experiment with.

Good thing, too, as he ruined my fun by returning a day early. I told him Mother was sleeping, slipped it in his coffee, then asked for some ice cream. It couldn't have been better. The timing was perfect. He lifted the lid of the freezer, saw Mother, and died with an unbelievable look of horror frozen on his face.

The only trouble was I had to go through the whole damn business with the levers and pulleys again to get his body into the freezer with Mother. But I succeeded in letting him down easy and didn't disturb the food, so it really wasn't too bad.

The wake was marvelous. I lit

candles all over the house, turned on the hi-fi and danced and floated through all the rooms in the house. It was a ball. A real ball!

But the best is yet to come. There's more fun pending. When I tire of being alone, I'm going to call Aunt Martha. Then I'll cry and say I'm all alone and can't find Mother or Father. Of course she'll break her neck getting here.

First, though, I'm going to turn off the deep freeze and wait until my dear departed parents are just about ripe. And then, when I ask Aunt Martha for some ice cream — well, you can imagine what fun I'm going to have.

Of course, I don't have a worry in the world about anyone suspecting me. After all, I'm only a five-year-old girl, and the best part is I only look four.

I never did look my age.

THE LOVECRAFT CORRESPONDENCE

Among your editor's most treasured souvenirs are two letters received from H. P. Lovecraft, the second written within a fortnight of his death, in February 1937. We were delighted when we heard in 1939, that August Derleth and Donald Wandrei planned to bring out collections not only of HPL's stories and novels, but also the correspondence; for while we still enjoy most of the stories, the letters revealed as fascinating and many-sided character as one could hope to encounter in these days.

Now, after many delays, the first of three volumes of the letters is being published by Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin. This volume, Mr. Derleth states, "contains the best of the available letters from the earliest letter found through the year 1926; it reveals many aspects of Lovecraft which have either been unknown or had scant publicity before. The letters are the product of an uncommonly erudite man, a gentleman and a scholar with a charming sense of humor . . ."

The price of this volume is \$6.00.

The Mask

by Robert W. Chambers

A reader writes to inquire if Robert W. Chambers ever wrote a three-act play entitled *The King In Yellow*, which he quotes in his short stories and novelets. To the best of our knowledge, he did not, any more than H. P. Lovecraft wrote a volume of horrendous and forbidden knowledge, entitled *The Necronomicon*, from which he quotes in his tales. In both instances, the fragments are all that exist. This is the third and last of the tales where-in the terrible King In Yellow is referred to. The first, *The Repairer Of Reputations*, appeared in our February 1964 issue; the second, *The Yellow Sign*, was in our August 1963 issue. Coming to the end of this story, we regretted once again that the King (both as a play which has such ghastly affect upon those who read it, and as a frightful being which seems to have some existence independent of the play) figures in less than half the length of the volume to bear that title. But, perhaps Chambers was wise in stopping before his readers had had enough!

Camilla. You, sir, should unmask.

Stranger. Indeed?

Cassilda. Indeed it's time. We all have laid aside disguise but you.

Stranger. I wear no mask.

Camilla (terrified, aside to *Cassilda*).

No mask? No mask!

—"The King in Yellow,"
act i., scene 2.

ALTHOUGH I knew nothing of chemistry, I listened fascinated. He picked up an Easter lily which Genevieve had brought that morning from Notre Dame and dropped it into the basin. Instantly the liquid lost its crystalline clearness. For a second

the lily was enveloped in a milk-white foam, which disappeared, leaving the fluid opalescent. Changing tints of orange and crimson played over the surface, and then what seemed to be a ray of pure sunlight struck through from the bottom where the lily was resting. At the same instant he plunged his hand into the basin and drew out the flower. "There is no danger," he explained, "if you choose the right moment. That golden ray is the signal."

He held the lily towards me and I took it in my hand. It had turned to stone, to the purest marble.

"You see," he said, "it is without a flaw. What sculptor could reproduce it?"

The marble was white as snow; but in its depths the veins of the lily were tinged with palest azure, and a faint flush lingered deep in its heart.

"Don't ask me the reason of that," he smiled, noticing my wonder. "I have no idea why the veins and heart are tinted, but they always are. Yesterday I tried one of Genevieve's goldfish — there it is."

The fish looked as if sculptured in marble. But if you held it to the light the stone was beautifully veined with a faint blue, and from somewhere within came a rosy light like the tint which slumbers in an opal. I looked into the basin. Once

more it seemed filled with clearest crystal.

"If I should touch it now?" I demanded.

"I don't know," he replied, "but you had better not try."

"There is one thing I'm curious about," I said, "and that is where the ray of sunlight came from."

"It looked like a sunbeam, true enough," he said. "I don't know, it always comes when I immerse any living thing. Perhaps," he continued, smiling — "perhaps it is the vital spark of the creature escaping to the source whence it came."

I saw he was mocking, and threatened him with a mahlstick; but he only laughed and changed the subject.

"Stay to lunch. Genevieve will be here directly."

"I saw her going to early mass," I said, "and she looked as fresh and sweet as that lily — before you destroyed it."

"Do you think I destroyed it?" said Boris, gravely.

"Destroyed, preserved, how can we tell?"

We sat in the corner of a studio near his unfinished group of "The Fates". He leaned back on the sofa, twirling a sculptor's chisel and squinting at his work.

"By-the-way," he said, "I have finished pointing up that old academic 'Ariadne', and I suppose it will have to go to the Salon. It's all I have ready this

year, but after the success the 'Madonna' brought me I feel ashamed to send a thing like that."

The 'Madonna,' an exquisite marble, for which Genevieve had sat, had been the sensation of last year's Salon. I looked at the "Ariadne". It was a magnificent piece of technical work; but I agreed with Boris that the world would expect something better of him than that. Still, it was impossible now to think of finishing in time for the Salon that splendid, terrible group half shrouded in the marble behind me. "The Fates" would have to wait.

WE WERE proud of Boris Yvain. We claimed him and he claimed us on the strength of his having been born in America, although his father was French and his mother was a Russian. Every one in the Beaux Arts called him Boris. And yet there were only two of us whom he addressed in the same familiar way — Jack Scott and myself.

Perhaps my being in love with Genevieve had something to do with his affection for me. Not that it had ever been acknowledged between us. But after all was settled, and she had told me with tears in her eyes that it was Boris whom she loved, I went over to his house and congratulated him. The perfect cordiality of that

interview did not deceive either of us, I always believed, although to one at least it was a great comfort. I do not think he and Genevieve ever spoke of the matter together, but Boris knew.

Genevieve was lovely. The Madonna-like purity of her face might have been inspired by the "Sanctus" in Gounod's Mass. But I was always glad when she changed that mood for what we called her "April Maneuvers". She was often as variable as an April day. In the morning grave, dignified, and sweet; at noon laughing, capricious; at evening whatever one least expected. I preferred her so rather than in that Madonna-like tranquility which stirred the depths of my heart. I was dreaming of Genevieve when he spoke again.

"What do you think of my discovery, Alec?"

"I think it wonderful."

"I shall make no use of it, you know, beyond satisfying my own curiosity so far as may be, and the secret will die with me."

"It would be rather a blow to sculpture, would it not? We painters lose more than we ever gain by photography."

Boris nodded, playing with the edge of the chisel.

"This new, vicious discovery would corrupt the world of art. No. I shall never confide the secret to any one," he said, slowly.

It would be hard to find any

one less informed about such phenomena than myself; but of course I had heard of mineral springs so saturated with silica that the leaves and twigs which fell into them were turned to stone after a time. I dimly comprehended the process, how the silica replaced the vegetable matter, atom by atom, and the result was a duplicate of the object in stone. This I confess had never interested me greatly, and, as for the ancient fossils thus produced, they disgusted me. Boris, it appeared, feeling curiosity instead of repugnance, had investigated the subject, and had accidentally stumbled on a solution which, attacking the immersed object with a ferocity unheard of, in a second did the work of years. This was all I could make out of the strange story he had just been telling me. He spoke again after a long silence.

"I am almost frightened when I think what I have found. Scientists would go mad over the discovery. It was so simple, too; it discovered itself. When I think of that formula, and that new element precipitated in metallic scales . . ."

"What new element?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of naming it, and I don't believe I ever shall. There are enough precious metals now in the world to cut throats over."

I pricked up my ears. "Have you struck gold, Boris?"

"No, better; but see here, Alec!" he laughed, starting up. "You and I have all we need in this world. Ah! how sinister and covetous you look already!" I laughed, too, and told him I was devoured by the desire for gold, and we had better talk of something else; so, when Genevieve came in shortly after, we had turned our backs on alchemy.

Genevieve was dressed in silvery gray from head to foot. The light glinted along the soft curves of her fair hair as she turned her cheek to Boris; then she saw me and returned my greeting. She had never before failed to blow me a kiss from the tips of her white fingers, and I promptly complained of the omission. She smiled and held out her hand, which dropped almost before it had touched mine; then she said, looking at Boris: "You must ask Alec to stay for luncheon."

This also was something new. She had always asked me herself until today.

"I did," said Boris, shortly.

"And you said yes, I hope." She turned to me with a charming conventional smile. I might have been an acquaintance of the day before yesterday. I made her a low bow. "*J'avais bien l'honneur, madame*"; but, refusing to take up our usual bantering tone, she murmured

a hospitable commonplace and disappeared. Boris and I looked at each other.

"I had better go home, don't you think?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know," he replied, frankly.

While we were discussing the advisability of my departure, Genevieve reappeared in the doorway without her bonnet. She was wonderfully beautiful; but her color was too deep and her lovely eyes were too bright. She came straight up to me and took my arm.

"Luncheon is ready. Was I cross, Alec? I thought I had a headache, but I haven't. Come here, Boris," and she slipped her other arm through his. "Alec knows that, after you, there is no one in the world whom I like as well as I like him, so if he sometimes feels snubbed it won't hurt him."

"*A la bonheur!*" I cried; "who says there are no thunder-storms in April?"

"Are you ready?" chanted Boris. "Aye ready"; and arm-in-arm we raced into the dining-room, scandalizing the servants. After all, we were not so much to blame; Genevieve was eighteen, Boris was twenty-three, and I not quite twenty-one.

II

SOME WORK that I was doing about this time on the deco-

rations for Genevieve's boudoir kept me constantly at the quaint little hotel in the Rue Sainte-Cecile. Boris and I in those days labored hard, but as we pleased, which was fitfully, and we all three, with Jack Scott, idled a great deal together.

One quiet afternoon I had been wandering alone over the house examining curios, prying into odd corners, bringing out sweetmeats and cigars from strange hiding-places, and at last I stopped in the bathing-room. Boris, all over clay, stood there washing his hands.

The room was built of rose-colored marble, excepting the floor, which was tessellated in rose and gray. In the center was a square pool sunken below the surface of the floor; steps led down into it; sculptured pillars supported a frescoed ceiling. A delicious marble. Cupid appeared to have just alighted on his pedestal at the upper end of the room. The whole interior was Boris's work and mine. Boris, in his working clothes of white canvas, scraped the traces of clay and red modelling-wax from his handsome hands and coquetted over his shoulder with the Cupid.

"I see you," he insisted; "don't try to look the other way and pretend not to see me. You know who made you, little humbug!"

It was always my role to in-

interpret Cupid's sentiments in these conversations, and when my turn came I responded in such a manner that Boris seized my arm and dragged me towards the pool, declaring he would duck me. Next instant he dropped my arm and turned pale. "Good God!" he said, "I forgot the pool is full of the solution!"

I shivered a little, and dryly advised him to remember better where he had stored the precious liquid.

"In Heaven's name, why do you keep a small lake of that gruesome stuff here of all places?" I asked.

"I want to experiment on something large," he replied.

"On me, for instance!"

"Ah! that came too close for jesting; but I do want to watch the action of that solution on a more highly organized living body; there is that big, white rabbit," he said, following me into the studio.

Jack Scott, wearing a paint-stained jacket, came wandering in, appropriated all the Oriental sweetmeats he could lay his hands on, looted the cigarette-case, and finally he and Boris disappeared together to visit the Luxembourg Gallery, where a new silver bronze by Rodin and a landscape of Monet's were claiming the exclusive attention of artistic France. I went back to the studio and resumed my

work. It was a Renaissance screen, which Boris wanted me to paint for Genevieve's boudoir. But the small boy who was unwillingly dawdling through a series of poses for it today refused all bribes to be good. He never rested an instant in the same position, and inside of five minutes I had as many different outlines of the little beggar.

"Are you posing or are you executing a song and dance, my friend?" I inquired.

"Whichever monsieur pleases," he replied, with an angelic smile.

Of course I dismissed him for the day, and of course I paid him for the full time, that being the way we spoil our models.

After the young imp had gone, I made a few perfunctory daubs at my work, but was so thoroughly out of humor that it took me the rest of the afternoon to undo the damage I had done, so at last I scraped my palette, stuck my brushes in a bowl of black soap, and strolled into the smoking-room. I really believe that, excepting Genevieve's apartments, no room in the house was so free from the perfume of tobacco as this one. It was a queer chaos of odds and ends hung with threadbare tapestry. A sweet-toned old spinet in good repair stood by the window. There were stands of weapons, some old and dull, others bright and modern, fes-

toons of Indian and Turkish armor over the mantel, two or three good pictures, and a pipe-rack. It was here that we used to come for new sensations in smoking. I doubt if any type of pipe ever existed which was not represented in that rack. When we had selected one, we immediately carried it somewhere else and smoked it; for the place was, on the whole, more gloomy and less inviting than any in the house. But this afternoon the twilight was very soothing; the rugs and skins on the floor looked brown and soft and drowsy; the big couch was piled with cushions.

I found my pipe and curled up there for an unaccustomed smoke in the smoking-room. I had chosen one with a long, flexible stem, and, lighting it, fell to dreaming. After a while it went out; but I did not stir. I dreamed on and presently fell asleep.

I AWOKE TO the saddest music I had ever heard. The room was quite dark; I had no idea what time it was. A ray of moonlight silvered one edge of the old spinet, and the polished wood seemed to exhale the sounds as perfume floats above a box of sandal-wood. Someone rose in the darkness and came away weeping quietly, and I was fool enough to cry out, "Genevieve!"

She dropped at my voice, and I had time to curse myself while I made a light and tried to raise her from the floor. She shrank away with a murmur of pain. She was very quiet, and asked for Boris. I carried her to the divan, and went to look for him; but he was not in the house, and the servants were gone to bed. Perplexed and anxious, I hurried back to Genevieve. She lay where I had left her, looking very white.

"I can't find Boris nor any of the servants," I said.

"I know," she answered, faintly, "Boris has gone to Ept with Mr. Scott. I did not remember when I sent you for him just now."

"But he can't get back in that case before tomorrow afternoon, and — are you hurt? Did I frighten you into falling? What an awful fool I am, but I was only half awake."

"Boris thought you had gone home before dinner. Do please excuse us for letting you stay here all this time."

"I have had a long nap," I laughed, "so sound that I did not know whether I was still asleep or not when I found myself staring at a figure that was moving towards me, and called out your name. Have you been trying the old spinet? You must have played very softly."

I would tell a thousand more lies worse than that one to see

the look of relief that came into her face. She smiled adorably and said, in her natural voice: "Alec, I tripped on that wolf's head, and I think my ankle is sprained. Please call Marie and then go home."

I did as she bade me, and left her there when the maid came in.

III

AT NOON next day when I called, I found Boris walking restlessly about his studio.

"Genevieve is asleep just now," he told me; "the sprain is nothing, but why should she have such a high fever? The doctor can't account for it; or else he will not," he muttered.

"Genevieve has a fever?" I asked.

"I should say so, and has actually been a little light-headed at intervals all night. The ideal — gay little Genevieve, without a care in the world — and she keeps saying her heart's broken and she wants to die!"

My own heart stood still.

Boris leaned against the door of his studio, looking down, his hands in his pockets, his kind, keen eyes clouded, a new line of trouble drawn "over the mouth's good mark, that made the smile." The maid had orders to summon him the instant Genevieve opened her eyes. We waited, and Boris, growing rest-

less, wandered about, fussing with modelling-wax and red clay. Suddenly he started for the next room. "Come and see my rose-colored bath full of death," he cried.

"Is it death?" I asked, to humor his mood.

"You are not prepared to call it life, I suppose," he answered. As he spoke he plucked a solitary goldfish squirming and twisting out of its globe. "We'll send this one after the other — wherever that is," he said. There was feverish excitement in his voice. A dull weight of fever lay on my limbs and on my brain as I followed him to the fair crystal pool with its pink-tinted sides; and he dropped the creature in. Falling, its scales flashed with a hot, orange gleam in its angry twistings and contortions; the moment it struck the liquid it became rigid and sank heavily to the bottom. Then came the milky foam, the splendid hues radiating on the surface, and then the shaft of pure, serene light broke through from seemingly infinite depths. Boris plunged in his hand and drew out an exquisite marble thing, blue veined, rose tinted, and glistening with opalescent drops.

"Child's play," he muttered, and looked wearily, longingly, at me — as if I could answer such questions! But Jack Scott came in and entered into the

"game", as he called it, with ardor. Nothing would do but to try the experiment on the white rabbit then and there. I was willing that Boris should find distraction from his cares, but I hated to see the life go out of a warm, living creature, and I declined to be present.

Picking up a book at random, I sat down in the studio to read. Alas, I had found *The King in Yellow*. After a few moments, which seemed ages, I was putting it away with a nervous shudder, when Boris and Jack came in, bringing their marble rabbit. At the same time the bell rang above and a cry came from the sickroom. Boris was gone like a flash, and the next moment he called: "Jack, run for the doctor; bring him back with you. Alec, come here."

I went and stood at her door. A frightened maid came out in haste and ran away to fetch some remedy. Genevieve, sitting bolt upright, with crimson cheeks and glittering eyes, babbled incessantly and resisted Boris's gentle restraint. He called me to help. At my first touch she sighed and sank back, closing her eyes, and then — then — as we still bent above her, she opened them again, looked straight into Boris's face, poor, fever-crazed girl, and told her secret. At the same instant our three lives turned into new channels; the bond that had

held us so long together snapped forever, and a new bond was forged in its place, for she had spoken my name, and, as the fever tortured her, her heart poured out its load of hidden sorrow. Amazed and dumb, I bowed my head, while my face burned like a live coal, and the blood surged in my ears, stupefying me with its clamor. Incapable of movement, incapable of speech, I listened to her feverish words in an agony of shame and sorrow. I could not silence her, I could not look at Boris. Then I felt an arm upon my shoulder, and Boris turned a bloodless face to mine.

"It is not your fault, Alec; don't grieve so if she loves you . . ." But he could not finish; and as the doctor stepped swiftly into the room, saying, "Ah, the fever!" I seized Jack Scott and hurried him to the street, saying, "Boris would rather be alone." We crossed the street to our own apartments, and that night, seeing I was going to be ill, too, he went for the doctor again. The last thing I recollect with any distinctness was hearing Jack say, "For Heaven's sake, doctor, what ails him, to wear a face like that?" and I thought of *The King in Yellow* and the Pallid Mask.

I WAS VERY ill, for the strain of two years which I had

endured since that fatal May morning when Genevieve murmured, "I love you, but I think I love Boris best," told on me at last. I had never imagined that it could become more than I could endure. Outwardly tranquil, I had deceived myself. Although the inward battle raged night after night, and I, lying alone in my room, cursed myself for rebellious thoughts unloyal to Boris and unworthy of Genevieve, the morning always brought relief, and I returned to Genevieve and to my dear Boris with a heart washed clean by the tempests of the night.

Never in word or deed or thought while with them had I betrayed my sorrow even to myself.

The mask of self-deception was no longer a mask for me; it was a part of me. Night lifted it, laying bare the stifled truth below; but there was no one to see except myself, and when day broke the mask fell back again of its own accord. These thoughts passed through my troubled mind as I lay sick, but they were hopelessly entangled with visions of white creatures, heavy as stone, crawling about in Boris's basin — of the wolf's head on the rug, foaming and snapping at Genevieve, who lay smiling beside it. I thought, too, of the King in Yellow wrapped in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle, and that bitter cry

of Cassilda, "Not upon us, O King, not upon us!" Feverishly I struggled to put it from me, but I saw the Lake of Hali, thin and blank, without a ripple or wind to stir it, and I saw the towers of Carcosa behind the moon. Aldebaran, the Hyades, Alar, Hastur, glided through the cloud rifts which fluttered and flapped as they passed like the scalloped tatters of the King in Yellow. Among all these, one sane thought persisted. It never wavered, no matter what else was going on in my disordered mind, that my chief reason for existing was to meet some requirement of Boris and Genevieve. What this obligation was, its nature, was never clear; sometimes it seemed to be protection, sometimes support, through a great crisis. Whatever it seemed to be for the time, its weight rested only on me, and I was never so ill or so weak that I did not respond with my whole soul. There were always crowds of faces about me, mostly strange, but a few I recognized, Boris among them. Afterwards they told me that this could not have been, but I know that once at least he bent over me. It was only a touch, a faint echo of his voice, then the clouds settled back on my senses, and I lost him, but he *did* stand there and bend over me *once* at least.

At last, one morning I awoke

to find the sunlight falling across my bed, and Jack Scott reading beside me. I had not strength enough to speak aloud, neither could I think much less remember, but I could smile feebly as Jack's eye met mine, and, when he jumped up and asked eagerly if I wanted anything, I could whisper, "Yes, Boris." Jack moved to the head of my bed, and leaned down to arrange my pillow; I did not see his face, but he answered, heartily, "You must wait, Alec, you are too weak to see even Boris."

I WAITED and I grew strong; in a few days I was able to see whom I would, but meanwhile I had thought and remembered. From the moment when all past grew clear again in my mind, I never doubted what I should do when the time came, and I felt sure that Boris would have resolved upon the same course so far as he was concerned; as for what pertained to me alone, I knew he would see that also as I did. I no longer asked for anyone. I never inquired why no message came from them; why, during the week I lay there, waiting and growing stronger, I never heard their names spoken. Preoccupied with my own searchings for the right way, and with my feeble but determined fight against despair, I simply acquiesced in Jack's reticence, taking

for granted that he was afraid to speak of them, lest I should turn unruly and insist on seeing them.

Meanwhile, I said over and over to myself how it would be when life began again for us all. We would take up our relations exactly as they were before Genevieve fell ill. Boris and I would look into each other's eyes, and there would be neither rancor nor cowardice nor mistrust in that glance. I would be with them again for a little while in the dear intimacy of their home, and then, without pretext or explanation, I would disappear from their lives forever. Boris would know; Genevieve — the only comfort was that she would never know. It seemed, as I thought it over, that I had found the meaning of that sense of obligation which had persisted all through my delirium, and the only possible answer to it. So, when I was quite ready, I beckoned Jack to me one day, and said: "Jack, I want Boris at once, and take my dearest greeting to Genevieve . . ."

When at last he made me understand that they were both dead, I fell into a wild rage that tore all my little convalescent strength to atoms. I raved and cursed myself into a relapse, from which I crawled forth some weeks afterwards a boy of twenty-one who believed that

his youth was gone forever. I seemed to be past the capability of further suffering, and one day, when Jack handed me a letter and the keys to Boris's house, I took them without a tremor and asked him to tell me all. It was cruel of me to ask him, but there was no help for it, and he leaned wearily on his thin hands to reopen the wound which could never entirely heal. He began very quietly.

"Alec, unless you have a clue that I know nothing about, you will not be able to explain any more than I what has happened. I suspect that you would rather not hear these details, but you must learn them, else I would spare you the relation. God knows I wish I could be spared the telling. I shall use few words.

"That day when I left you in the doctor's care and came back to Boris, I found him working on 'The Fates.' Genevieve, he said, was sleeping under the influence of drugs. She had been quite out of her mind, he said. He kept on working, not talking any more, and I watched him. Before long I saw that the third figure of the group — the one looking straight ahead, out over the world — bore his face; not as you ever saw it, but as it looked then and to the end. This is one thing for which I should like to find an explanation, but I never shall.

"WELL, HE worked and I watched him in silence, and we went on that way until nearly midnight. Then we heard a door open and shut sharply, and a swift rush in the next room. Boris sprang through the doorway, and I followed; but we were too late. She lay at the bottom of the pool, her hands across her breast. Then Boris shot himself through the heart."

Jack stopped speaking, drops of sweat stood under his eyes, and his thin cheeks twitched. "I carried Boris to his room. Then I went back and let that hellish fluid out of the pool, and, turning on all the water, washed the marble clean of every drop. When at length I dared descend the steps, I found her lying there as white as snow. At last, when I had decided what was best to do, I went into the laboratory, and first emptied the solution in the basin into the waste-pipe; then I poured the contents of every jar and bottle after it. There was wood in the fireplace, so I built a fire, and, breaking the locks of Boris's cabinet, I burned every paper, notebook, and letter that I found there. With a mallet from the studio I smashed to pieces all the empty bottles, then, loading them into a coal-scuttle, I carried them to the cellar and threw them over the red-hot bed of the furnace.

"Six times I made the jour-

ney, and at last not a vestige remained of anything which might again aid one seeking for the formula which Boris had found. Then at last I dared call the doctor. He is a good man, and together we struggled to keep it from the public. Without him I never could have succeeded. At last we got the servants paid and sent away into the country, where old Rosier keeps them quiet with stories of Boris's and Genevieve's travels in distant lands, whence they will not return for years. We buried Boris in the little cemetery of Sevres. The doctor is a good creature, and knows when to pity a man who can bear no more. He gave his certificate of heart disease and asked no questions of me."

Then, lifting his head from his hands, he said, "Open the letter, Alec; it is for us both."

I tore it open. It was Boris's will, dated a year before. He left everything to Genevieve, and, in case of her dying childless, I was to take control of the house in the Rue SainteCecile, and Jack Scott the management at Ept. On our deaths the property reverted to his mother's family in Russia, with the exception of the sculptured marbles executed by himself. These he left to me.

The page blurred under our eyes, and Jack got up and walked to the window. Present-

ly he returned and sat down again. I dreaded to hear what he was going to say; but he spoke with the same simplicity and gentleness.

"Genevieve lies before the 'Madonna' in the marble room. The 'Madonna' bends tenderly above her, and Genevieve smiles back into that calm face that never would have been except for her."

His voice broke, but he grasped my hand, saying, "Courage, Alec." Next morning he left for Ept to fulfill his trust.

IV

THE SAME evening I took the keys and went into the house I had known so well. Everything was in order, but the silence was terrible. Though I went twice to the door of the marble room, I could not force myself to enter. It was beyond my strength. I went into the smoking room and sat down before the spinet. A small lace handkerchief lay on the keys, and I turned away, choking. It was plain I could not stay, so I locked every door, every window, and the three front and back gates, and went away. Next morning Alcide packed my valise, and, leaving him in charge of my apartments, I took the Orient express for Constantinople. During the two years that I wandered through the

East, at first, in our letters, we never mentioned Genevieve and Boris, but gradually their names crept in. I recollect particularly a passage in one of Jack's letters replying to one of mine:

"What you tell me of seeing Boris bending over you while you lay ill, and feeling his touch on your face and hearing his voice, of course troubles me. This that you describe must have happened a fortnight after he died. I say to myself that you were dreaming, that it was part of your delirium, but the explanation does not satisfy me, nor would it you."

Towards the end of the second year a letter came from Jack to me in India so unlike anything that I had ever known of him that I decided to return at once to Paris. He wrote: "I am well, and sell all my pictures, as artists do who have no need of money. I have not a care of my own; but I am more restless than if I had. I am unable to shake off a strange anxiety about you. It is not apprehension, it is rather a breathless expectancy — of, what, God knows! I can only say it is wearing me out. Nights I dream always of you and Boris. I can never recall anything afterwards; but I wake in the morning with my heart beating, and all day the excitement increases until I fall asleep at night to recall the same experience. I am

quite exhausted by it, and have determined to break up this morbid condition. I must see you. Shall I go to Bombay or will you come to Paris?"

I telegraphed him to expect me by the next steamer.

When we met I thought he had changed very little; I, he insisted, looked in splendid health. It was good to hear his voice again, and as we sat and chatted about what life still held for us we felt that it was pleasant to be alive in the bright spring weather.

We stayed in Paris together a week, and then I went for a week to Ept with him, but first of all we went to the cemetery at Sevres, where Boris lay.

"Shall we place 'The Fates' in the little grove above him?" Jack asked, and I answered:

"I think only the 'Madonna' should watch over Boris's grave." But Jack was none the better for my homecoming. The dreams, of which he could not retain even the least definite outline, continued, and he said that at times the sense of breathless expectancy was suffocating.

"You see, I do you harm and not good," I said. "Try a change without me." So he started alone for a ramble among the Channel Islands, and I went back to Paris. I had not yet entered Boris's house, now mine, since my return, but I knew it must be done. It had been kept

in order by Jack; there were servants there, so I gave up my own apartment and went there to live. Instead of the agitation I had feared, I found myself able to paint there tranquilly. I visited all the rooms — all but one. I could not bring myself to enter the marble room, where Genevieve lay, and yet I felt the longing growing daily to look upon her face, to kneel beside her.

ONE APRIL afternoon I lay dreaming in the smoking room, just as I had lain two years before, and mechanically I looked among the tawny Eastern rugs for the wolf skin. At last I distinguished the pointed ears and flat, cruel head, and I thought of my dream, where I saw Genevieve lying beside it. The helmets still hung against the threadbare tapestry, among them the old Spanish morion which I remembered Genevieve had once put on when we were amusing ourselves with the ancient bits of mail. I turned my eyes to the spinet; every yellow key seemed eloquent of her caressing hand, and I rose, drawn by the strength of my life's passion to the sealed door of the marble room. The heavy doors swung inward under my trembling hands. Sunlight poured through the window, tipping with gold the wings of Cupid, and lingered like a nimbus over

the brows of the "Madonna". Her tender face bent in compassion over a marble form so exquisitely pure that I knelt and signed myself. Genevieve lay in the shadow under the "Madonna," and yet, through her white arms, I saw the pale azure vein, and beneath her softly clasped hands the folds of her dress were tinged with rose, as if from some faint, warm light within her breast.

Bending, with a breaking heart, I touched the marble drapery with my lips, then crept back into the silent house.

A maid came and brought me a letter, and I sat down in the little conservatory to read it; but as I was about to break the seal, seeing the girl lingering, I asked her what she wanted.

She stammered something about a white rabbit that had been caught in the house, and asked what should be done with it. I told her to let it loose in the walled garden behind the house, and opened my letter. It was from Jack, but so incoherent that I thought he must have lost his reason. It was nothing but a series of prayers to me not to leave the house until he could get back; he could not tell me why; there were the dreams, he said — he could explain nothing, but he was sure that I must not leave the house in the Rue Sainte-Cecile.

As I finished reading I raised

my eyes and saw the same maid-servant standing in the doorway holding a glass dish in which two gold-fish were swimming. "Put them back into the tank and tell me what you mean by interrupting me," I said.

With a half-suppressed whimper she emptied water and fish into an aquarium at the end of the conservatory, and, turning to me, asked my permission to leave my service. She said people were playing tricks on her, evidently with a design of getting her into trouble; the marble rabbit had been stolen and a live one had been brought into the house; the two beautiful marble fish were gone, and she had just found those common live things flopping on the din-

ing room floor. I reassured her and sent her away, saying I would look about myself. I went into the studio; there was nothing there but my canvasses and some casts, except the marble of the Easter lily. I saw it on a table across the room. Then I strode angrily over to it. But the flower I lifted from the table was fresh and fragile, and filled the air with perfume.

Then suddenly I comprehended, and sprang through the hallway to the marble room. The doors flew open, the sunlight streamed into my face, and through it, in a heavenly glory, the "Madonna" smiled, as Genevieve lifted her flushed face from her marble couch and opened her sleepy eyes.

Of the remaining tales that make up the volume, *The King in Yellow*, only one is definitely a weird tale, "The Demoiselle Dys". This has been reprinted in several anthologies, to our knowledge, although, so far as we know, there has been no magazine reprint of it since the late '40's. Would you like to see it in a future issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR AND STRANGE STORIES*?

Some of the other material can be considered strange; these are mood pieces for the most part. If you would like us to select the most outstanding for future reprint, let us know.

The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde

by Robert Barbour Johnson

In our first issue (August 1963), we offered you *A Thing of Beauty*, by Wallace West, a story which had been rejected by Farnsworth Wright of WEIRD TALES as being too horrible. The present story was not rejected by that magazine; it was accepted — but, alas, the publication was suspended before the story could appear. Robert Barbour Johnson's tales appeared in the 30's in WT, and one of them (*Far Below*) was selected for an anthology entitled *Editor's Choice in Science Fiction*, published by McBride in the '50's. Edited by Sam Moskowitz, this could have been an outstanding volume, but the interference of McBride's general editor, and the publisher itself, made it a travesty. *Far Below* was only one of the stories which had no place in such an anthology (in fact, only two out of the twelve could be considered science fiction at all), but it was and is a very fine weird tale, a serious treatment of the ghoulish theme. The present story takes a different track.

IT SEEMS indeed curious that the affair of Mr. Thaddeus Warde should have attracted so little attention.

Almost three years have passed since those singular events in the Catskills; and still hardly anything has been written about them. Even verbal discussion seems to have complete-

ly died out. One would almost think that the thing had never happened, at all!

Which is a most inexplicable state of affairs. For even in an age of Sputniks and Space Races, what took place in that epic September of 1958 would still seem to be important. Indeed, it might be described as

world-shaking! For here, fully documented and attested, we have what seems to be the only absolutely authentic instance of survival after Death that modern history records. If one accepts its implications (and it is difficult to do otherwise, in view of all the evidence) then we are confronted by something quite outside the normal limits of our human experience.

And yet, though contemporary Mankind has presumably been seeking just such proof, it seems strangely hesitant to seize upon that evidence, now that it has actually been presented. There is a noticeable tendency to ignore it, even to try to forget about it, entirely. Spiritualist organizations and religious groups especially have manifested this tendency. One seeks in vain, in their publications, for even a mention of Mr. Thaddeus Warde. Which is, perhaps, not wholly inexplicable; for while the facts surrounding that gentleman's decease do seem to prove Survival of a sort, still, it is not exactly the kind of Survival they mean. . . .

And yet it *did* happen; there is no doubting that. The evidence is overwhelming. Police reports, testimony of reputable witnesses, Coroner's verdicts, newspaper files, all combine to attest it. The posthumous doings of Mr. Thaddeus Warde are as well attested as, let us say, the living doings of Mr. Dwight D.

Eisenhower during that same period.

Indeed, the only part of the whole account which is in the least obscure is the previous history of its protagonist. Like the thane in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, nothing in Mr. Thaddeus Warde's life so became him as the leaving it—or at least attracted nearly so much publicity! We first hear of the man only as he lies dying, in his ancestral mansion at Deyvillkill, in New York State — one of those small, but very wealthy communities that dot that fashionable region. Before that, he seems to have attracted absolutely no notice.

But then, men like Mr. Warde do not particularly seek to attract the world's attention and acclaim; they are quite content merely to exist. For Mr. Warde belonged to that small and rare portion of the American populace known as "the Idle Rich". It is generally believed that there are no more Idle Rich in a nation convinced of their total disappearance before modern Progress. But despite more than twenty years of hostile National administrations there do still contrive to survive here and there, a few persons who subsist entirely upon unearned increment. And Mr. Thaddeus Warde was one of these.

HE WASN'T a "Montgomery" Ward; there is an "e" in the name. He was one of the New

England textile Wardes, the shipping Wardes, and the oil Wardes — to mention only a few of the activities in which his ancestors had been engaged for generations, and become principal stockholders. His income, even after present-day taxes, was still around a couple of million dollars per annum, which sufficed for his simple needs. Mr. Warde toiled not; neither did Mr. Warde spin. He did nothing, and had done nothing for almost fifty years of life but be born, grow up, attend Groton and Harvard, travel a bit, and putter about his ancestral estate at Deyvillkill-On-The-Hudson. He did not even maintain, as did most of his male associates, offices in the Metropolis to which they commuted daily, under the pretense that they were working. Mr. Warde was an old-fashioned Idle Rich, and saw no reason for such masquerade. Moreover he was parsimonious, and resented putting up money for the rent. . . .

Such a man could not but remain obscure in a nation universally devoted to exactly opposite ideals. He would have been deplored equally by Rotary Club members and Mr. Norman Thomas! He was a drone, an excrescence upon Society, and completely indefensible. He was not even attractive physically — being a frail, runty individual, with large ears and gold-rimmed spectacles, and almost complete-

ly bald. He had never participated in any sports or athletics; the only trophies he had ever won were on the Groton Debating Team (which seems to have lost consistently during the years he was a member of it) and he was definitely not what was known as a 'mixer'. In short, there was absolutely nothing outstanding or even interesting about Mr. Thaddeus Warde, up to his moment of departure.

And his death, when it occurred, seemed equally commonplace. For it was, apparently, the result of a hunting accident — one of scores that take place in the Catskills every Fall, and attract hardly any notice. There was, perhaps, some passing irony in the fact that the one thing remotely resembling a sport in which Mr. Warde occasionally indulged should be the cause of his demise. Or, as his detractors put it, he couldn't even go pheasant shooting on his own estate without contriving to shoot himself!

Be that as it may, he had been found lying in a thicket about a half-mile from his house, half-way through a barbed-wire fence, his discharged shotgun lying beside him, and with a hole in his back. He had been carried home by servants and neighbors, placed in his own bed and breathing his last in the most decorous and prosaic manner imaginable. His obituary — already 'set up' in

newspapers, both local and Metropolitan, and only awaiting final word to be printed — simply listed him as among the many victims of the oldest and most routine accident since the invention of firearms!

THERE WERE, of course, one or two small details that did not seem to square with this comforting explanation. It did seem a bit odd that a mere shotgun, dropped accidentally and going off, could have done such very extensive damage to Mr. Warde's interior! That would seem to be possible only if the muzzle were actually pressing against his back when discharged. However, it was certainly Mr. Warde's own gun; there was no trace of anyone else around, and no evidence of foul play. And there's no way of predicting the exact size of the wound any gun will make. This was a very large one; that was all that could be said.

There was, however, the matter of the curious expression on Mr. Warde's face when he was found. Though completely unconscious (and nothing was more certain than that he would never again regain consciousness in this world!) his features registered not shock or surprise, but such a look of concentrated fury and malignity as to startle his finders, when they turned him over. Traces of that expres-

sion were, in fact, still visible as he lay now on his last bed.

But while such minor matters might arouse curiosity, and even gossip, they were not enough to bring about any sort of police investigation — certainly not in a place like Deyvillkill! Its population being almost exclusively socialite (with the exception of a few stolid Dutch burghers viewing the antics of these fashionable invaders of their original homeland with their usual massive incuriosity) even the slightest hint of a crime was deplorable, and to be avoided at all costs. That attitude is traditional, and has always been. It will be recalled that when an attempt was made to assassinate J. P. Morgan some years ago, the sole concern of the intended victim and his family was to hush the whole matter up, and avoid publicity — which was deemed far worse than the crime itself.

The local police force (five men and a superintendent) were quite aware of this point of view — and also, who paid their salaries! They had no intention of doing anything that would cause the slightest unpleasantness. They dropped around, received the information, filed a routine report of accidental death; and that was that. The following day, a Coroner's Jury reached a similar verdict, without leaving the box. As for the State Troopers, when they

arrived, they confined their efforts to directing traffic in front of the estate.

So the scene was one of complete decorum and respectability, with nothing whatever to mar it. Outside, the multi-hued glory of the Catskills in Fall, the stately old mansion with its white columns amid still-green lawns, the constant procession of glittering motor vehicles, arriving and departing with messages and condolences to the stricken household. And inside, behind drawn blinds, the servants going about on tiptoe. While in the kitchen, the black-clad minions of Mr. Daniel Grew, the fashionable undertaker, were waiting to take over the 'remains' as soon as they might be officially certified as such.

In the old-fashioned Dutch parlor, the grieving widow was being consoled by a few close friends. For Mr. Warde had a wife! Perhaps the only unconventional thing in his otherwise conventional life. A couple of years before, he had succumbed to matrimony — not in his own set, but a dazzling young woman from the New York musical stage. Her name had been 'Crystal Dawn', though it was whispered that it was really O'Shaunessy (of the Lower Flatbush O'Shaunessys). However, her conduct had been irreproachable since her arrival in Deyvillkill; and her beauty and

charm had made her, on the whole, better liked than her husband was! She had been an excellent spouse in every respect, during her short tenure; and there was no mistaking her tearful grief for her husband now. Indeed, it struck some of the bystanders as a bit excessive; as they whispered privately, she was not only being relieved of an unpleasant pipsqueak many years her senior, but was about to become one of New York State's richest heiresses in the bargain! Nevertheless, she seemed to be completely prostrated.

INDEED, THE only part of the whole house where anything indecorous was going on was in that shuttered upper bedroom, where the master of the house lay in what was supposed to be extremis — surrounded by doctors, nurses, medical paraphernalia, and odors of iodoform and antiseptics. Since the per capita wealth of the Deyvillkill region is perhaps the highest in the United States, its medical talent is probably the best, outside of the Metropolis itself — and no less than three of the town's doctors were in attendance on Mr. Warde. The trouble was, there was absolutely nothing they could do for him; there was no earthly possibility of saving a man with injuries so extensive. Important portions of Mr. Warde's inner workings were clearly visible through the

hole in his back, even dangling whitely out onto the bedclothes. If there was little bleeding, this was only because most of his life-blood had already drained away before he was found, staining the fallen autumn leaves a deeper purple. He should, in short, have been a corpse a long time ago.

And yet he wasn't — quite! That was the incredible fact that faced his physicians. Almost three hours had passed since the accident, and yet life was not wholly extinct in what lay on the bed. There was still an occasional flutter of pulse in the wrists (though one had only to look inside to see that the heart was not beating). A mirror held before the blue lips, still misted occasionally. There was even, from time to time, a twitching of muscles or the flutter of an eyelid.

In other words, Mr. Warde still lingered in this vale of tears — though how he was managing to do so in his mangled state was quite beyond scientific comprehension. His doctors could only stand there and stare at him, fidgeting, glancing surreptitiously at their watches, and beginning to worry about whether they'd even get home for dinner. Meanwhile, they mentally composed articles for medical journals on the strangest case that any of them had ever encountered — a man who, with all the physical mechanism of

living completely destroyed, still clung, however microscopically, to life.

Matters were still in this unsatisfactory state when young Gordon Van Der Vere arrived. He was a neighbor, a somewhat impecunious gentleman who lived in a small cottage not far from the Warde acres. He was of impeccable pedigree, for New York State, several of his ancestors being Stuyvesants — and one, on his grandmother's side, reputedly a Van Der Roosevelt. But he had squandered his own portion of the family inheritance a long time ago, and was now reduced (it was whispered) to earning a living by writing stories for magazines, under an alias — something very similar to a crime in Deyvillkill! Yet curiously, he was also one of Mr. Warde's close friends, which meant he was one of a select few, the latter's somewhat wintry personality not attracting many. But a surprising intimacy seemed to have developed between the two dissimilar types; and it was remarked that young Van Der Vere seemed to spend almost as much time in the Warde home as he did in his own small cottage only a couple of miles away. He had been scheduled to accompany his elderly colleague on the ill-fated hunting excursion, but urgent business with his publisher had compelled him to beg off and drive up to the city instead.

HE NOW returned hastily, having, he said, heard the sad news in the city and racing his convertible back along the Storm King Highway. He had not expected to find Mr. Warde still technically in the land of the living, and expressed amazement; the story in New York was that he was already dead. Everyone assured him that that was undoubtedly true in all but name; it would only be a matter of minutes — in fact, no one could make out what was holding him up!

Mr. Van Der Vere professed appropriate sorrow and grief, and even some self-blame. "If only I'd been with him today, as I promised I would be — if this blasted magazine thing hadn't interfered — it mightn't have happened."

Everyone consoled him and assured him that it was not in any way his fault.

"Don't be silly," an elderly neighbor told him. "How could anyone know the damned idiot would be dumb enough not to keep the safety catch on his gun?" The remark caused raised eyebrows, but was apparently an accurate summary of the facts.

Mr. Van Der Vere also spoke a few words of condolence to the widow; they withdrew into a corner and talked in low tones, and he was seen to pat her hand. Then he hurried upstairs to re-

ceive the latest bulletins on "poor old Thad!"

The doctors, hearing him coming, intercepted him in the outer hall. "There's no earthly point in your going in," they assured him. "You'd only harrow yourself for nothing — it's an unpleasant sight, and there's nothing anyone can do. He'll die any minute."

"You don't suppose there's a chance that he might recognize me?" Van Der Vere asked.

"Recognize? Good heavens, no! He'll never know anyone again. It's quite hopeless." They started to describe Mr. Warde's puzzling condition, but in the middle of it there was a sudden wild scream from the nurse inside, and also a curious dull thud.

They all rushed to the sick-room door and flung it open. A most extraordinary sight confronted them. The nurse, open-mouthed, was crouching behind the bed and pointing wildly. Mr. Warde was not in the bed; he was lying on the floor facing them. He lay prone, arms and legs extended and head raised stiffly like a turtle's. His eyes were wide open and he seemed to be staring at them. His mouth was also wide open, with an effect of snarling. The dim light lent a curious illusion of movement, as if he were actually crawling toward them.

For a moment, sheer amazement held them all paralyzed.

Then the doctors rushed forward, lifted the prone form, and hastily restored it to the bed. It was immediately apparent what happened. Some last dying convulsion, a rigor of muscles.

"Extraordinary!" Dr. Pelham muttered. "Never encountered one of such magnitude and violence. I must write it up for the Journal. . . . Must have flung the dying man into that fantastic position." For that he was dead, there was now no question. The mirror no longer misted; the flesh no longer twitched. Mr. Thaddeus Warde was now completely and certifiably dead.

The doctors drew the conventional sheet over his face, gathered up their paraphernalia, and left the room. "Er — no need to mention that little contretemps downstairs, eh Mr. Van Der Vere?" But Van Der Vere seemed quite incapable of mentioning anything.

BELOW, THE doctors received the wan thanks of the widow and her friends, and accepted drinks that the servants were passing around. Then, with the air of men whose work has been well done, they hurried out to their waiting limousines and home to belated dinners. In the room they'd left behind, Mr. Grew's young men in black, unleashed at last, were already preparing to load the corpse onto their portable trestle and

whisk it away to the undertaking parlors.

They got it aboard (flirting with the nurses meanwhile) and started out with it — through the back way, so as not to disturb the guests below. But halfway along the hall, there was an interruption. "Look out! He's sliding off!" one of them gasped. "Grab him!"

It was true; one of Mr. Warde's limp hands was already touching the carpet. They managed to right him, with some effort, and moved on.

"Funny!" the other young man muttered. "Never knew a stiff to slide off the wheelbarrow before, did you?" But the same thing happened twice more before they got the remains downstairs and loaded into their sleek black van. Though completely inert, Mr. Warde evidenced a most odd disinclination to stay put. It was decided that one of the men would ride inside to steady him in place, while the other drove the vehicle slowly and carefully to Mr. Grew's neat Georgian brick establishment on the main street of Deyvillkill, some seven miles away.

Mr. Daniel Grew himself was waiting for them at the service entrance, fuming and looking at his watch. "What the devil kept you so long?" he barked as they drove up. He was anxious to get home to his own dinner; but, in view of his client's prominence, he had thought it best to tarry.

"Had to wait for the old buzzard to kick off!" the assistant explained. "He took an awful long time doing it. Docs can't figure it out. And he kept sliding off the meat cart when we were wheelin' him down. That held us up still more."

"Sliding off the trestle, eh?" Mr. Grew eyed him balefully. "If there's one thing I won't stand for it's drinking on the job! All right, you lugs, I'll wheel him in myself. You two walk on each side of him, and brace him. That way, we'll take no chances."

That was the order followed. The body was trundled to soft recorded organ music, through the already flower-banked chapel and posh retiring-rooms to a large bare laboratory in the rear, where the more utilitarian aspects of the profession were carried on. And even Mr. Grew had to admit that the body did have a curious tendency to fall off.

"Odd!" he grumbled. "Guess we'll have to order a new trestle; that one must be wearing out. Oh, well, when I bill the Departed's estate for this job, I can afford a whole new buildin'!"

Then, after an interval for dining, the staff rolled up its sleeves and got to work preparing the remains for the formal 'lying in state' the next day. And they labored far into the night. Over the precise details of their

work, we will not linger, since it might prove disturbing to sensitive readers. Suffice it to say that if Mr. Warde had not been dead when they began, he certainly was by the time they finished with him! And if there were moments when the rubber-gloved and aproned Mr. Grew and his assistants seemed to be wrestling with the corpse, it was only because a premature rigor mortis seemed to have set in, curiously resisting their work at times.

But of life, there could be no question. Modern embalming processes, if not quite so thorough as those of the ancient Egyptians, likewise involve the total removal of interior organs, the draining of all blood, and filling of the veins with poisonous preservative fluids. What was left on the slab when the job was done was not a man at all, but only a sort of husk — scarcely more than the discarded shell of a cicada. Everything vital had been flushed down drains or rendered in vats.

The countenance of the deceased presented a more difficult problem. All through the proceedings it persisted in wearing an expression which the youthful assistants found distinctly upsetting, even in the bright laboratory lights.

"It's scary!" one of them complained. "Never saw anything like it. My God, we can't show

him like that! People would faint . . . ”

Mr. Grew was finally compelled to resort to some small metal clips, which he produced from a drawer. “Always keep these for emergencies,” he said, hammering them expertly into place. “Never know when you’ll get one of these stubborn bastards! Much better than safety pins.” The shiny points, protruding slightly, he camouflaged with lip-rouge. So with a little glue on the eyelids, and some cotton waste up the nostrils, the face of the dead man was finally made to assume its proper expression of dignity and peace.

THE BODY LAY in the chapel all through the next day and night, while everybody who was anybody in upper New York State filed past to view it. The spectators, of course, did not say “Doesn’t he look natural?” but they murmured well-bred equivalents. Mr. Grew, hovering about with somewhat the air of a sculptor unveiling a masterpiece, received many compliments. There were no untoward incidents of any kind during the period the remains were in the Parlors — though, judging from the strained expression of the staff, there seemed to be some apprehension that there might be! Mr. Grew, for reasons best known to himself, cranked the heavy metal coffin-lid down when the place was closed for

the night at ten o’clock. And if the watchman heard peculiar sounds in the midnight hours — well, the building was known to harbor rats.

The following afternoon, the funeral took place; and the coffin was interred with due ceremony in the Warde family plot in Greenwood Cemetery. Almost a hundred of Warde’s social equals saw him laid to rest amid flowers and eulogies, while a hired choir sang “Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. . . .”

The ceremonies, however, were rudely marred. One of those sudden, violent thunderstorms that plague the Catskill region descended with some fury, just when the Reverend Mr. Denby reached his “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” Rain descended in torrents and thunder quite drowned out the service. The mourners, in drenched organdy and broadcloth, sought hasty refuge in their automobiles and watched from there, through intermittent lightning flashes, while the coffin was hurriedly lowered into the grave and tarpaulins spread over the excavation as a temporary shelter. Filling in of the soil would have to wait until the storm had ended. The bedraggled cortege then returned to town and the restoration of liquid refreshments. It was a curiously sinister ending for the event — and perhaps an omen for what was come.

For it was only a couple of hours later that the great scandal broke. The storm had not blown itself out quickly as Catskill storms usually do, but had settled to a steady down-pour that might last indefinitely. So about four o'clock, the sextons finally sallied forth, rain-coated, to begin filling in the grave before it accumulated too much water. And they made a most shocking and mysterious discovery. Wild telephone calls brought police cars screeching to the scene, and patrolmen and gray-clad Troopers were soon swarming all over the cemetery.

THERE HAD apparently been a case of body-snatching in broad daylight, and without conceivable motive! Persons unknown had somehow removed Mr. Warde's body from the open grave and made off with it, under cover of the storm. It is possible that in the excitement, the lid of the "Eternity Coffin" had not been properly sealed. At all events, it was now standing open; the inner glass lid had been smashed and the white silk cushions beneath were quite empty. Of its late occupant there was no trace, except some curious marks in the turf where something had apparently been dragged away. There were 'no footprints or other evidence of vandalism. No one had seen a car arrive or leave, and the grave was at least half a mile

from the cemetery's iron gates.

The whole thing baffled the police completely; they'd never had a case like it. And despite all efforts to keep it quiet, it leaked out to the press. Newspapers in distant Times Square and Broadway were proclaiming the crime within an hour. AP and UP dispatches soon had it all over the nation, and even abroad. It created something of a sensation. The morbid nature of the snatching, plus the wealth of the 'victim', combined to make it almost another Lindbergh case. Mr. Thaddeus Warde's name suddenly became almost as famous, posthumously, as that of a television crooner, or a hatchet murderer. And Deyvillkill itself was the focus of nationwide attention, to the horror of its staid inhabitants. Reporters, investigators, and the morbidly curious descended on the hapless community from all sides, taxing its resources and making investigation the more difficult.

The entire State Police organization was thrown in, to assist the overburdened local force, and a carload of trained city detectives were rushed down from New York to help in the search. The whole end of the State was turned upside down. Yet, two days went by without even a trace of the missing remains being found or even a clew as to why they might have been abstracted. A wild

theory that the body might be "held for ransom" gradually faded out as time went on and no demands were made. Another theory, that it might have been stolen for medical research (which seemed fantastic in these modern days; but the authorities were grasping at straws) also petered out. Officialdom found itself at a complete dead end. There was absolutely no rational explanation of why Mr. Warde's body should have been taken. Yet, it was gone; and it stubbornly refused to turn up.

The rain was continuing all this time — a record Fall down-pour, turning roads to running streams and earth to quagmire, hampering the searchers still further. But the harried police could not wait for the weather to change; they were under too much pressure from the influential residents to get the thing cleared up and shift the unbearable spotlight of publicity away from their community, which had never endured such a horror before. The hunt went on.

AND, TO ADD to their problems, the harried police found themselves plagued by a second mystery, one that seemed to have no conceivable connection with the other. The desk-sergeant who took the first call on it, looked completely bewildered.

"We ain't got troubles e-

nough!" he announced. "Now it's alligators!"

"Alligators?" the Superintendent snapped. "What are you talking about?"

"Fact! Guy just 'phoned in to say he seen an alligator out on the old North Road. It was crawlin' along in a ditch 'bout two miles from the Cemetery. He passed it in his car. He stopped an' went back to look for it, but it had slithered off in the grass. But he swears it was at least six feet long!"

"He's crazy!" His superior frowned. "There aren't any alligators in New England. They belong in Florida, thousands of miles to the south! None has ever been seen in these parts, certainly not one that size. Of course, one might have escaped from a circus or carnival. And that big, it could certainly be dangerous!"

"Yeah." The sergeant yawned. "However, the way I figger it, the guy was plastered! He sounded like it over the 'phone."

But alas, the explanation was not that simple. In the days that followed, at least a dozen people reported seeing something long and blackish and wetly shimmering, crawling blindly through the rain and mud of the old North Road. It was glimpsed in car headlights at night and even in daylight. It was seen splashing through flooded ditches, slithering in tall grass, and even crossing highways. Once

it was recorded as swimming in a swollen mountain pool.

All descriptions tallied and seemed to suggest some sort of large reptile. It dragged itself along on its belly with curiously stiff and fumbling movements, head down and shoulders humped. It was apparently between five and six feet in length. It was strangely bold and fearless, keeping close to paved roadways, and ignoring passing vehicles. But it always contrived to slither off into bushes and thickets when approached on foot.

No one ever got a close look at it, but it left tracks in deep mud which remained visible until the rain washed them out. And one of the police officers, who had been born in Louisiana, identified these prints as distinctly "gator-like". He even pointed out hand-shaped marks that could have been made by the forefeet, and a wavy line in the rear that suggested the dragging tail. . . .

However, no real search was made for the creature. The authorities were far too busy to engage in an alligator-hunt, along with their other troubles. There were no reports of missing livestock or injury to anyone; the beast seemed harmless, whatever it was. It appeared to be circling the town itself, avoiding it, keeping to back lanes and alleys. There was an odd suggestion of purpose in its move-

ments. Though progressing only a short distance in a day, it kept going, and always in the same general direction — very strange behavior, indeed, for a saurian! It was first seen on the cemetery side of the town, then behind it, and then on the far road heading toward the large estates that lay beyond. It seemed only a nuisance, not an actual menace. The authorities issued orders to their men to shoot the thing on sight, if they should encounter it, and, in the meantime, keep going on their main search.

But the 'beast' aroused much comment and speculation. Some of the visiting newshawks, lacking anything on the Warde Case to write about, cabled in lurid descriptions of it, enlarging its size considerably. One or two of the more sensational ones even recalled the old Dutch legends of Deyvill's mythical 'dragonlike' monsters, supposed to have inhabited the Catskills in early days, that had given the town its name. They suggested that this might be a modern, dwarfed survival. Which was, in a sense, perhaps nearer to the truth than they dreamed. . . .

FOR IT WAS on the evening of September 18th that a *third* mystery arose — one that was to provide at least a partial explanation of the other two.

It began around midnight with a series of wild telephone

calls from Mr. Gordon Van Der Vere in his small tumbledown cottage out by the edge of the Warde estate. Someone, or something, Mr. Van Der Vere insisted, was trying to break into his house! He demanded that the police come out and protect him from it.

He had, he told the desk-sergeant, been out for the evening (he didn't say where) and on his return, on foot, something had come out of the bushes and followed him up the driveway. He'd gotten into his house safely and slammed the door, but "it" was now besieging the place. He was curiously inexplicit as to the nature of his attacker, and indeed, tended to become almost hysterical when pressed for details, or when it was suggested that someone might be playing a joke on him. That the thing's intent was hostile and lethal he seemed to have no doubt. He spoke vaguely of scratchings and poundings on the front door, of attempts on the windows, and even of sounds indicating that it had crawled up on the roof and was trying to come down the chimney! He had, he said, caught glimpses of his assailant in the moonlight, and had even fired at it through the windows with his revolver, but apparently without result. He must have immediate help, he insisted; his life was in danger!

The police were sympathetic,

but in no position to comply with his request. With the Warde search still in full swing, and taxed far beyond their small capacity, they could not spare a man to hold the hand of some drunken socialite who was probably only panicked by some prowling animal! The Catskills abound with all sorts of wild life, despite close proximity to the world's largest city; they got such routine calls almost every night. They advised him to stay indoors, keep all doors locked, and if the creature tried to break in, simply to shoot it. His reply that he had already shot at it through the windows and was certain that he had hit it, but with no visible effect, was disregarded as proof of advanced intoxication.

Two subsequent appeals, each wilder and more hysterical than the last, met with a similar reception. They were polite but firm; he would have to wait. Another call shortly before midnight (made in a sort of cawing shriek, and completely incoherent) was cut off; the desk-sergeant hung up on him. "That guy's completely nuts!" he grunted in disgust.

There was, however, no possibility of disregarding the final call, which came in shortly before midnight. Mr. Van Der Vere's voice, though still hysterical, had the tone of a man who has come to a momentous decision. He wished, he said, to

confess to the murder of Mr. Thaddeus Warde. He demanded that the police come and arrest him for it. He had never liked Warde — only pretended to in order to enjoy an affair with his wife; and the millions she would inherit was the motive for the shooting which he now deeply regretted. (His voice rose wildly at that point.) But he was ready to sign a full confession once he was locked up and safe — that was the word he used and he accented it heavily — in jail!

Naturally, this produced immediate results. The Superintendent and the sergeant were in the former's car and racing toward the scene in less than one minute! Granted the man was drunk, his story made sense and had to be investigated. They picked up a Trooper car enroute, a motorcycle officer, and a carload of the invidious reporters, who were cruising about looking for any developments. Quite a cavalcade of assistance rolled up in front of the Van Der Vere cottage in almost less time than it takes to tell about it.

Even so, they were too late. The place stood curiously silent and deserted-looking in the pale autumn moonlight. The lights inside were all on and blazing brightly, but no one answered their repeated knockings.

"Queer!" one of the officers

muttered, "after all that excitement . . ."

They moved around to the side of the house and discovered one of the French windows smashed and open, as if something had crashed through it and entered that way. Within they found the living-room a complete shambles, furniture overturned, and vases broken, as though a terrific struggle had taken place. Mr. Gordon Van Der Vere was lying in the middle of it, an empty revolver in his hand, and quite dead.

There was not a mark on his body, and his death was officially pronounced as heart failure — though there were certainly contributing factors! For one thing, lying quite near the body was what the police first thought was a bundle of old clothes. But when they turned it over, they found it was the missing corpse of Mr. Thaddeus Warde! Still very dead — but with what remained of its hands almost touching Van Der Vere's throat . . .

AS I SAID at the beginning, the case of Mr. Thaddeus Warde is the only completely authentic case of survival after death that modern history records. There are those, of course, who will not admit that, to this day; who still prate vaguely of persons unknown who somehow managed to smuggle a prominent body out

of a cemetery in broad daylight and keep it hidden during the most extensive police search in Upper New York State's whole annals. Who these all-knowing and all powerful ones may have been, of course, they do not say. Still, it is a comforting theory; and I, for one, only wish I could believe it.

But there are a few details that simply cannot be made to square with it. There was, for one, the condition of Mr. Warde's body when they found it. It was not at all in the shape of one that has merely been kept somewhere! Mr. Grew and his men, indeed, threw up their hands at the task of restoring it and reburied it hastily, without ceremony. It was battered, it was rain-soaked and bedraggled, and curiously *worn away* in portions underneath, as if it had been dragged for miles over asphalt. The neat funeral clothing was in rags and tatters, likewise, mostly underneath. As for its hands, they were mere vestigial stumps, the flesh quite worn away and not even fingers remaining on them. There were bits of glass embedded all over the corpse, and several fresh bullets were in it — bullets which the ballistics experts matched exactly with Van Der Vere's emptied revolver.

In short, that body was in precisely the condition it would have been in had it somehow

managed to escape from its coffin, crawl out of its own grave, and somehow drag itself over the dozen or more miles that separated it from its goal; taking days and nights in the journey; seen by many people along the way but mistaken for an animal, (which it must have been, of course, or even lower) all semblance of humanity departed. Blind, crawling, unable to stand erect or walk — not even conscious, for there was no brain — yet still moving, powered by Something, perhaps only an urge, like that of a homing pigeon — with the exception, of course, that a homing pigeon happens to be alive! And reaching the cottage, breaking into it, ignoring bullets and resistance to pull down the unsuspected one who had betrayed and murdered him. I am not offering this as an explanation, you understand. I am simply stating the facts which are on record and can be easily verified. You may draw your own conclusion.

But there is one other small detail which seems to confirm it. For it was observed by all when they turned him over; that on what remained of Mr. Warde's face, there was now a singularly broad, malignant, and wholly triumphant smile!

Though that, perhaps, may have been only because a couple of Mr. Grew's steel clips seemed somehow to have worked loose.

The Feminine Fraction

by David Grinnell

David Grinnell's first story, *Top Secret*, appeared in 1950; and while he has written some novels since then, the majority of his appearances have been with brief, sardonic tales, often exploring little-known scientific theories or crochets.

YOU KNOW, just sitting around here in Paris in the springtime, brings back so many old memories, Jack, that I'm glad you showed up. Isn't there some old saying that if you sit here at this corner, sipping an aperitif, that by and by the whole world will pass by? So you're proof of it — an old buddy from my company I hadn't seen in — gosh, how many years has it been since we were mustered out?

Anyway, this is a great place to sit and ogle the girls. Paris has changed a bit, but these little French chicks, they're still a

delight to the eye. So feminine. Makes me wonder sometimes about Weininger's theory.

Weininger? You never heard of him? Well, I guess that's not surprising, considering he was a boy genius who died in his early twenties after writing just one great thesis. He was the fellow who brought out the idea that there is no such thing as one hundred per cent male and a hundred per cent female. He said every person has something of the opposite sex in him. Every man has maybe ten or twenty per cent woman in him and every woman has ten or twenty

per cent man. Some people have more, some have less, but we all have some.

I know, you don't believe it at first. Seems to insult your manhood, but think about it. I don't really think that a person who was 100% masculine could even stand to be around a woman. Everything she did would be incomprehensible and annoying. Acutely irritating. No, I think it's pretty obvious when you ponder it. Most psychologists today agree the theory is valid.

Oh, I know — you always were a skeptic. Prove it? Well . . . I can, as a matter of fact. Sure, I can. Hold on a minute, order another cognac and I'll see if I can refresh your memory.

Remember Louis Tyler who used to be in our outfit back when we were first in training? Sure, you do. I thought you would: Rather slight, fair-haired boy, quiet but real clever. He used to hang out with us, you and me and one or two others. Then he was shifted from our company and sent to some sort of hush-hush OSS school. He spoke French like a native — he'd been raised here as a boy and they were going to use him for some pre-D-Day operations.

I saw him several times in England before we went in — we were still the best of friends. He'd get off on a leave once in a while, look me up and I'd wangle a pass for the evening.

We'd make a night of it. He was actually a pretty lonely guy, I guess. I learned a lot about him. His mother had been in France when the Nazis came in — he had heard she was dead according to some underground source in the OSS offices. His father — divorced or something. He never mentioned him. Hated him, I think.

LOUIS USED TO confide some of his worries to me, but he was a nice guy. We used to go wenching together in London and he had a way with the gals. Maybe it's that French upbringing, or maybe he sort of understood them better than most, but he sure could knock 'em dead.

Anyway, he was dropped by parachute into France a few weeks before the invasion. I don't know his exact mission, but it was pretty important. I believe he knew the exact dates and places of the landings — not the false information that had been let slip, but the real dope. It was vital for certain people in the French Underground to know them. Louis was one of the men chosen to tell them.

I saw him before he jumped. He couldn't tell me his mission — what I know I found out after the war — but I knew he was set to go because he was nervous. Louis was a brave guy — but he was a little nervous that

night. Who wouldn't be? He asked me then did I mind the fact that he'd named me his heir in case he never came back? He'd nobody else he really trusted. I said, "Heck, you'll be back." He shrugged . . . said if he didn't, would I at least try to find out what happened to him, maybe put a marker on his grave. Louis was sort of religious and a very sincere guy.

So when we shook hands that night in London, I said, "Don't worry. I never let a friend down." He looked me in the eye and said, "I trust you."

D-Day came and went. My outfit was in it, and I'm not talking about it because you were there alongside me, Jack, and you know what it was like. Hell, sheer hell.

But now think, Jack. Remember a certain town we went through on our way to Paris — a small village, let's see — Bois le Chateau, no, that's not quite right, well, something like that. And do you remember that I was on recon on our front and went into that village a bit ahead of the rest of the company. The Germans had pulled out fortunately, or maybe I wouldn't be here to tell the tale.

Let me explain something you don't know and didn't know then. I was attached to Intelligence — and I had a private mission to perform. We had heard that the Nazis had some of our OSS men here — 'chutists

they'd captured and had been interrogating at the old chateau that gave the town its name. I was supposed to get there first, if I could, find out what happened, maybe get the dope or the papers or whatnot before the rest of the company came along.

So I go there. The Germans had left, the villagers had gone into hiding, and I got into the chateau with my sidekicks covering me with Garands.

It was the place, all right. We found several of our men down in the cellar, in dungeons left over from the ancient times. Two were dead — they'd tried to get information from them the crude way and failed. I won't go into the details. You've read about Gestapo methods — they're just what they said they were, and worse.

A COUPLE more were insane. It seems they'd had a new technique they were trying out, a really vicious thing — and I can say it didn't succeed in spite of everything. Our men were good — they never talked.

This device — it had been invented very shortly before and they were testing it on this batch of 'chutists because they guessed somebody among them might know the date of the coming attack. They were right — but they didn't know the stamina of our fellows.

It seems they first drugged

their victim, a sort of hypnotic type of drug that can cause permanent damage, the splitting of personality, schizophrenia, dementia, death. Under the drug, they focussed some sort of electric current and pressure that loaded the victim with electricity — painful, which was part of it, and having a terrible effect on the brain and nervous system, as well as the whole body — and that was another part of it.

The idea was to shatter his personality so thoroughly that everything hidden in the mind would be fragmented, completely torn apart from everything else. It literally shredded, splintered the ego and left the memories flying wide open . . . At least that was the theory. The first man we found alive was hopelessly insane, terribly burned, a quivering wreck.

He didn't live long. There was nothing to be done for him.

I found the Gestapo's lists, and Louis Tyler's name was on it. He was down there somewhere, in the dungeons, a victim of the new technique.

We found a couple more guys first, also out of their minds, dying. One was badly twisted in body, sort of torn apart, strangely burned — melted is how I'd describe his appearance. I don't like to think about it.

I found the cell where Louis was supposed to be. I got it

open — the Nazis had left only a few hours before.

No, I didn't find Louis. Louis was gone; well, 90 per cent of him was gone. There is no such person. I found something in that cell. Crouching in the corner was a little girl. Just a little girl, blondish, looking about five years old, whimpering, wearing part of a man's shirt — a French workman's blue blouse like Louis would have worn when he 'chuted in.

I took that little girl with me. She knew me, came running to me when she saw me. She took my hand and she trusted me. I took her back with me to the town and the company.

Of course, I didn't take her through the war. I had to turn her over to the folks who took care of the war orphans, but I put my claim on her. I adopted her, because nobody else ever claimed her. Officially adopted her. She's been raised in France at my expense and on the money from Louis Tyler's G.I. insurance. Private schools, foster homes, all that — after all, I'm not married and what was I going to do with a little girl tugging at my heels back in the States?

Anyway, I come to France every year and meet her and act like a father to her. She's a dear — engaged now and wanted me to meet her boy friend and give my approval. I'm waiting for

her now. She's going to meet me here.

Who was she really? Well, I don't know. I know that story about Louis Tyler sounds sort of wild — and, sure that's all conjecture about Weininger. So maybe ten per cent of any man is feminine. I guess that held true for Louis, like anyone else. I like to kid myself into thinking so.

Oh, here she is. See that pretty blonde coming across the square? The one with the cute pill box hat and the long hair.

Some figure, eh? Ahh, these Paris cuties. Mmmm.

"Hello, darling, my you're looking good. Oh, may I introduce an old Army buddy. Oh, you know him, remembered him from back when. Sure, you're right, darling, this is Jack Oldfield. Some things come back to you . . .

"Jack, don't stand there gaping. For gosh sake, pull yourself together. May I introduce my adopted daughter, Louise?"

In our May issue, we asked if you, the readers, would like to see H. P. Lovecraft's famous essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* run here, explaining that, due to the length, it would have to be presented in installments.

This is being written about a month later than the material presented in this issue's "It Says Here". So far, the votes have been something more than two to one in favor. However, we need a great many more returns from you on this question before we can reach a fair decision. If you have not expressed yourself, won't you let us know how you feel on this question?

Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

In his love for the past and the free play of his imagination within self-imposed bounds, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) makes one think of H. P. Lovecraft, but we cannot push the resemblance any farther, except perhaps for a common love of symbolism. For although in his own life and personal philosophy, Lovecraft was no less the ethical gentleman than Hawthorne, you do not find very much moralizing in HPL's fiction, while Hawthorne's tales are permeated by Puritanism and ethicism. Highly imaginative as his short stories are, filled with the stuff of fantasy and weird fiction, it would have been unthinkable for him to write such a tale for its own sake; all must lead up to the moral instruction which is the reason for the narrative. Despite this, the *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) retain their initial charm, and the moral is bearable for the sake of a well-told story.

THAT VERY singular man, old Dr. Heidegger, once invited four venerable friends to meet him in his study. There were three white-bearded gentlemen, Mr. Medbourn, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, and a withered gentlewoman, whose name was the Widow Wycherly. They were all melancholy old creatures, who had been unfortunate in life, and whose greatest misfortune it was that they

were not long ago in their graves.

Mr. Medbourne, in the vigor of his age, had been a prosperous merchant, and had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was now little better than a mendicant. Colonel Killigrew had wasted his best years, and his health and substance, in the pursuit of sinful pleasures, which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout,

and divers other torments of soul and body. Mr. Gascoigne was a ruined politician, a man of evil fame, or at least had been so, till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation, and made him obscure instead of infamous. As for the Widow Wycherly, tradition tells us that she was a great beauty in her day; but, for a long while past, she had lived in deep seclusion, on account of certain scandalous stories, which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her. It is a circumstance worth mentioning, that each of these three old gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne were early lovers of the Widow Wycherly, and had once been on the point of cutting each other's throats for her sake. And, before proceeding farther, I will merely hint, that Dr. Heidegger and all his four guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves; as is not unfrequently the case with old people, when worried either by present troubles or woeful recollections.

"My dear old friends," said Dr. Heidegger, motioning them to be seated, "I am desirous of your assistance in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study."

If all stories were true, Dr. Heidegger's study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned cham-

ber, festooned with cobwebs and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Over the central bookcase was a bronze bust of Hippocrates, with which, according to some authorities, Dr. Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations, in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet, with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward.

The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full-length portrait of a young lady, arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin, and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress. Above half a century ago, Dr. Heidegger had been on the point of marriage with this young lady; but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swal-

lowed one of her lover's prescriptions, and died on the bridal evening. The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned; it was a ponderous folio volume, bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back, and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic; and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it, merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor, and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror; while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned, and said, "Forbear!"

SUCH WAS Dr. Heidegger's study. On the summer afternoon of our tale, a small round table, as black as ebony, stood in the center of the room, sustaining a cut-glass vase, of beautiful form and elaborate workmanship. The sunshine came through the window, between the heavy festoons of two faded damask curtains, and fell directly across this vase; so that a mild splendor was reflected from it on the ashen visages of the five old people who sat around. Four champagne-glasses were also on the table.

"My dear friends," repeated Dr. Heidegger, "may I reckon on your aid in performing an

exceedingly curious experiment?"

Now Dr. Heidegger was a very strange old gentleman whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories. Some of these fables, to my shame be it spoken, might possibly be traced back to mine own veracious self; and if any passages of the present tale should startle the reader's faith, I must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction-monger.

When the doctor's four guests heard him talk of his proposed experiment, they anticipated nothing more wonderful than the murder of a mouse in an air-pump, or the examination of a cobweb by the microscope, or some similar nonsense, with which he was constantly in the habit of pestering his intimates. But without waiting for a reply, Dr. Heidegger hobbled across the chamber, and returned with the same ponderous folio, bound in black leather, which common report affirmed to be a book of magic. Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume, and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue, and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

"This rose," said Dr. Heidegger, with a sigh, "this same withered and crumbling flower, blos-

somed five-and-fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder; and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five-and-fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?"

"Nonsense!" said the Widow Wycherly, with a peevish toss of her head. "You might as well ask whether an old woman's wrinkled face could ever bloom again."

"See!" answered Dr. Heidegger.

He uncovered the vase, and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first, it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon, however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred, and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the the flower were reviving from a deathlike slumber; the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green; and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It was scarcely full-blown; for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bloom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.

"That is certainly a very pret-

ty deception," said the doctor's friends; carelessly, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjuror's show; "pray how was it effected?"

"Did you never hear of the 'Fountain of Youth,' " asked Dr. Heidegger, "which Ponce de Leon, the Spanish adventurer, went in search of, two or three centuries ago?"

"But did Ponce de Leon ever find it?" said the Widow Wycherly.

"No," answered Dr. Heidegger, "for he never sought it in the right place. The famous Fountain of Youth, if I am rightly informed, is situated in the southern part of the Floridian peninsula, not far from Lake Macao. Its source is overshadowed by several gigantic magnolias, which, though numberless centuries old, have been kept as fresh as violets, by the virtues of this wonderful water. An acquaintance of mine, knowing my curiosity in such matters, has sent me what you see in the vase."

"Ahem!" said Colonel Killigrew, who believed not a word of the doctor's story; "and what may be the effect of this fluid on the human frame?"

"You shall judge for yourself, my dear Colonel," replied Dr. Heidegger; "and all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this admirable fluid as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own

part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment."

WHILE HE spoke, Dr. Heidegger had been filling the four champagne-glasses with the water of the Fountain of Youth. It was apparently impregnated with an effervescent gas, for little bubbles were continually ascending from the depths of the glasses, and bursting in silvery spray at the surface. As the liquor diffused a pleasant perfume, the old people doubted not that it possessed cordial and comfortable properties; and, though utter skeptics as to its rejuvenescent power, they were inclined to swallow it at once. But Dr. Heidegger besought them to stay a moment.

"Before you drink, my respectable old friends," said he, "it would be well that, with the experience of a lifetime to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance, in passing a second time through the perils of youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be, if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age."

The doctor's four venerable friends made him no answer, except by a feeble and tremu-

lous laugh; so very ridiculous was the idea, that, knowing how closely repentance treads behind the steps of error, they should ever go astray again.

"Drink, then," said the doctor, bowing. "I rejoice that I have so well selected the subjects of my experiment."

With palsied hands, they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Dr. Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more woefully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of nature's dotage, and always the gray, decrepit, sapless, miserable creatures who now sat stooping round the doctor's table, without life enough in their souls or bodies to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water, and replaced their glasses on the table.

ASSUREDLY THERE was an almost immediate improvement in the aspect of the party, not unlike what might have been produced by a glass of generous wine, together with a sudden glow of cheerful sunshine, brightening over all their visages at once. There was a healthful suffusion on their cheeks, instead of the ashen hue that had made them look so corpse-like. They gazed at one

another, and fancied that some magic power had really begun to smooth away the deep and sad inscriptions which Father Time had been so long engraving on their brows. The Widow Wycherly adjusted her cap, for she felt almost like a woman again.

"Give us more of this wondrous water!" cried they, eagerly. "We are younger — but we are still too old! Quick — give us more!"

"Patience, patience!" quoth Dr. Heidegger, who sat watching the experiment, with philosophic coolness. "You have been a long time growing old. Surely, you might be content to grow young in half an hour! But the water is at your service."

Again he filled their glasses with the liquor of youth, enough of which still remained in the vase to turn half the old people in the city to the age of their own grandchildren. While the bubbles were yet sparkling on the brim, the doctor's four guests snatched their glasses from the table, and swallowed the contents at a single gulp. Was it delusion? Even while the draft was passing down their throats, it seemed to have wrought a change on their whole systems. Their eyes grew clear and bright; a dark shade deepened among their silvery locks; they sat around the table three gentlemen of middle age,

and a woman, hardly beyond her buxom prime.

"My dear widow, you are charming!" cried Colonel Killigrew, whose eyes had been fixed upon her face, while the shadows of age were flitting from it like darkness from the crimson daybreak.

The fair widow knew, of old, that Colonel Killigrew's compliments were not always measured by sober truth; so she started up and ran to the mirror, still dreading that the ugly visage of an old woman would meet her gaze. Meanwhile, the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner, as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities; unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a lightsome dizziness, caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years.

Mr. Gascoigne's mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present, or future, could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory, and the people's right; now he muttered some perilous stuff or other, in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents, and a deep-

ly deferential tone, as if a royal ear were listening to his well-turned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly bottle-song, and ringing his glass in symphony with the chorus, while his eyes wandered toward the buxom figure of the Widow Wycherly. On the other side of the table, Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents, with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice, by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs.

As for the Widow Wycherly, she stood before the mirror curtsying and simpering to her own image, and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world beside. She thrust her face close to the glass, to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's-foot had indeed vanished. She examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

"My dear old doctor," cried she, "pray favor me with another glass!"

"Certainly, my dear madam, certainly!" replied the complaisant doctor; "see! I have already filled the glasses."

THERE, IN FACT, stood the

four glasses, brimful of this wonderful water, the delicate spray of which, as it effervesced from the surface, resembled the tremulous glitter of diamonds. It was now so nearly sunset, that the chamber had grown duskier than ever; but a mild and moon-like splendor gleamed from within the vase, and rested alike on the four guests, and on the doctor's venerable figure. He sat in a high-backed, elaborately-carved oaken armchair, with a gray dignity of aspect that might have well befitted that very Father Time, whose power had never been disputed, save by this fortunate company. Even while quaffing the third draft of the Fountain of Youth, they were almost awed by the expression of his mysterious visage.

But, the next moment, the exhilarating gush of young life shot through their veins. They were now in the happy prime of youth. Age, with its miserable train of cares, and sorrows, and diseases, was remembered only as the trouble of a dream, from which they had joyously awoke. The fresh gloss of the soul, so early lost, and without which the world's successive scenes had been but a gallery of faded pictures, again threw its enchantment over all their prospects. They felt like new-created beings, in a new-created universe.

"We are young! We are young!" they cried exultingly.

Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly marked characteristics of middle life, and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters, almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsomeness of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire, the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men, and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor, like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his nose, and pretended to pore over the black letter pages of the book of magic; a third seat-himself in an armchair, and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Dr. Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully, and leaped about the room. The Widow Wycherly — if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow — tripped up to the doctor's chair, with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

"Doctor, you dear old soul," cried she, "get up and dance with me!" And then the four young people laughed louder than ever, to think what a queer figure the poor old doctor would cut.

"Pray excuse me," answered the doctor, quietly. "I am old

and rheumatic, and my dancing days were over long ago. But either of these gay young gentlemen will be glad of so-pretty a partner."

"Dance with me, Clara!" cried Colonel Killigrew.

"No, no, I will be her partner!" shouted Mr. Gascoigne.

"She promised me her hand, fifty years ago!" exclaimed Mr. Medbourne.

THEY ALL gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp — another threw his arm about her waist — the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces, by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalry, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of three old, gray, withered grandsires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shriveled grandam.

But they were young; their burning passions proved them so. Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite with-

held her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another's throats. As they struggled to and fro, the table was overturned, and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments. The precious Water of Youth flowed in a bright stream across the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly, which, grown old in the decline of summer, had alighted there to die. The insect fluttered lightly through the chamber, and settled on the snowy head of Dr. Heidegger.

"Come, come, gentlemen! — come, Madam Wycherly," exclaimed the doctor, "I really must protest against this riot."

They stood still and shivered; for it seemed as if gray Time were calling them back from their sunny youth, far down into the chill and darksome vale of years. They looked at old Dr. Heidegger, who sat in his carved armchair, holding the rose of half a century, which he had rescued from among the fragments of the shattered vase. At the motion of his hand, the four rioters resumed their seats; the more readily, because their violent exertions had wearied them, youthful though they were.

"My poor Sylvia's rose!" ejaculated Dr. Heidegger, holding it in the light of the sunset clouds; "it appears to be fading again."

And so it was. Even while the party were looking at it, the flower continued to shrivel up, till it became as dry and fragile as when the doctor had first thrown it into the vase. He shook off the few drops of moisture which clung to its petals.

"I love it as well thus, as in its dewy freshness," observed he, pressing the withered rose to his withered lips. While he spoke, the butterfly fluttered down from the doctor's snowy head, and fell upon the floor.

His guests shivered again. A strange chillness, whether of the body or spirit they could not tell, was creeping gradually over them all. They gazed at one another, and fancied that each fleeting moment snatched away a charm, and left a deepening furrow where none had been before. Was it an illusion? Had the changes of a lifetime been crowded into so brief a space, and were they now four aged people, sitting with their old friend, Dr. Heidegger?

"Are we grown old again, so soon!" cried they, dolefully.

In truth, they had. The Water of Youth possessed merely a virtue more transient than that of wine. The delirium which it created had effervesced away. Yes! they were old again. With a shuddering impulse, that showed her a woman still, the widow clasped her skinny hands before her face, and wished that the coffin lid were over it, since it

could be no longer beautiful.

"Yes, friends, ye are old again," said Dr. Heidegger; "and lo! the Water of Youth is all lavished on the ground. Well — I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to bathe my lips in it — no, though its delirium were for years in-

stead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me!"

But the doctor's four friends had taught no such lesson to themselves. They resolved forthwith to make a pilgrimage to Florida, and quaff at morning, noon, and night from the Fountain of Youth.

ARKHAM HOUSE'S 25th ANNIVERSARY ANTHOLOGY

August Derleth of Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, announces a collection of 18 tales of the fantastic and macabre, none of which have ever been published before in any form. The contents of this volume is as follows:

The Crew of the Lancing, by William Hope Hodgson; *The Last Meeting of Two Old Friends*, by H. Russell Wakefield; *The Shadow in the Attic*, by H. P. Lovecraft; *The Renegade*, by John Metcalfe; *Told in the Desert*, by Clark Ashton Smith; *When the Rains Came*, by Frank Belknap Long; *The Blue Flame of Vengeance*, a last Solomon Kane Story, by Robert E. Howard; *Crabgrass*, by Jesse Stuart; *Kincaid's Car*, by Carl Jacobi; *The Patchwork Quilt*, by August Derleth; *The Old Lady's Room*, by J. Vernon Shea; *The North Knoll*, by Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Huaco of Senior Perez*, by Mary Elizabeth Counselman; *Mr. Alucard*, by David A. Johnstone; *Castling the Stone*, by John Pocik; *Aneanoshian*, by Michael Bailey, and *The Stone on the Island*, by J. Ramsey Campbell.

The title of this collection is *Over the Edge*, and the book jacket is by Frank Utpatel. \$5.00.

The Pacer

by August Derleth

When the short story, *Bat's Belfry*, appeared in the May 1926 issue of WEIRD TALES, no one except editor Farnsworth Wright (and personal acquaintances of the author) knew that August Derleth was 14 years old when he submitted the tale. A steady stream of short-short stories followed, some of them in collaboration with Mark Schorer, and over 20 of them appeared before Derleth burst the bonds of the short-short tale. While *Old Mark* is slightly over the 2500 word general top length for the short-short tale, *The Pacer* can be considered the author's first published short weird tale. In the meantime, Derleth had gotten into correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft, and at the end of this tale you will see an excerpt from the author's essay, "Lovecraft As Mentor", relating to HPL's generous assistance to young authors and to this story in particular. As of August 1963, Mr. Derleth wrote us that he has had some 5,000 pieces published since *Bat's Belfry*, his 103d book had come out, and "five more are due by 2/64." After Lovecraft's death in 1937, Derleth founded Arkham House, Publisher's, in partnership with Donald Wandrei, in order to bring out HPL's collected works, and the first volume *The Outsider and Others* appeared in 1939. The volume is out of print and was commanding \$100 per copy some years ago; we have not seen it advertised recently at any price. Known for his regional novels, Derleth also has a high reputation among the Baker Street Irregulars and other lovers of Sherlock Holmes, for his fine pastiches of the great detective in the many adventures of Solar Pons, several collections of which are available in hard covers. Just as many of the Solar Pons stories are based upon cases referred to in Dr. Watson's notes, Derleth's continuation of the Cthulhu Mythos is, in many tales, based upon themes referred to in Lovecraft's notes, letters, and *Commonplace Book*.

MR. WILLIAM LARKINS adjusted his monocle with a very determined air. Then he brushed an imaginary thread from his lapel, raised his eyebrows slightly, and turned to the house agent, still talking volubly.

"It is people in my business, Mr. Collins," said Mr. Larkins somewhat icily, "who start rumors of this sort. This is by far the most desirable of the houses you have yet shown me, and I am determined to take it for the winter at the price you quoted me."

"You authors are a funny lot," answered the agent somewhat testily. "But we take no responsibilities — especially in regard to anything out of the ordinary that may happen while you're in the building."

Mr. Larkins regarded the agent for a moment; then he removed his monocle, polished it, and returned it to his eye. The agent shuffled his feet nervously. "I should think that the modern businessman would have something else on his mind than stories of haunted houses," remarked Mr. Larkins dryly.

Mr. Collins became suddenly apologetic. "It's not that we believe these things, Mr. Larkins," and he spread his hands and smiled deprecatingly, "but the amount of complaints we've received from other people who've rented this place can't be entirely disregarded. Then there's that

closed room; a lot of people object to that, but one fellow opened it, and — well, he died shortly after." Mr. Collins coughed.

"It will not be necessary that I use the second floor at all," put in Mr. Larkins, "So you need have no fear about that closed room. As long as it doesn't bother me, I'll not bother the room."

"Of course," said Mr. Collins, and "Of course," again, and would perhaps have gone on, but Mr. Larkins interrupted him.

"If I may ask on what are these rumors based?"

"Just noises — as if someone were walking around up there." The agent made a vague sort of gesture that included the entire second story.

"I see," said Mr. Larkins thoughtfully.

"Of course, all these stories go back to the time when John Brent lived here," the agent went on.

"You refer to the scientist Brent? The man who died insane?" asked Mr. Larkins, absently tapping on the wall with his stick.

"Yes, that's the man. Perhaps you knew him, Mr. Larkins?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Collins. It is not a practice of mine to associate with people who are slightly unbalanced mentally. I can say that I remember him, however; the man and his ridic-

ulous theories attracted quite a bit of public attention."

"He died here in this house."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Larkins, for the first time showing interest. "And is it his ghost that walks?"

"No! No! Mr. Larkins. It's quite a different story; we — none of us fully understand it, and it's supposed that this man Brent had a hand in what's haunting the house."

"Something to do with one of his theories?"

"Yes, that's it. I'm not quite sure what it's all about, Mr. Larkins, but I can find out, if you wish."

"Oh! no, don't go to any trouble. The matter doesn't worry me in the least, Mr. Collins. It's merely a passing interest. Don't trouble yourself."

"As far as I know," continued Mr. Collins, "it had something to do with some theory about drawing spirits out of the ether — or some such idea."

"I think I've heard of it," interrupted Mr. Larkins. "I understand it was not quite a success."

"I couldn't say, Mr. Larkins; I'm sure I couldn't say."

"No," said Mr. Larkins rather sharply. "I didn't suppose you could. But as I said before, the matter is inconsequential, of very little importance, indeed, and I believe that we can dismiss it. Shall we, Mr. Collins?"

"Oh! yes, Mr. Larkins. Yes, sir; of course."

"Good!" said Mr. Larkins, and was about to go on, when the agent interrupted him.

"And you're still certain you want this house?"

"Quite," said Mr. Larkins in a cold voice edged with reproof. "And the sooner, the better. In fact, I suggest that we attend to the matter at once, without further delay."

"Anything you say, Mr. Larkins."

"Very good. We shall go at once."

MR. WILLIAM LARKINS' forte was the romantic novel, and he had just succeeded in arousing the literary critics of the Continent to a sense of his importance. At the appearance of his first book they hailed him as "Just another new writer," which so irritated Mr. Larkins that he produced his masterpiece, *Ysola*, which caught and held the veneration of such capable men as Alonso Compson of the *Mirror*, to say nothing of Carlo Jenkins of the *Times*.

Mr. Larkins was engaged on his third novel, *Island Gods*, when he discovered the necessity of quiet and unassuming winter quarters. Whereupon he departed at once for St. John's Wood, a section of London that he had before been pleased with. Not quite a week later, he descended with his belongings on Number 21 and took quiet possession.

Mr. William Larkins had quite forgotten all about the rumors concerning the haunting of Number 21, when the matter was brought to his mind in a very irritating manner. It was six days after he had taken up occupation, and Mr. Larkins was at work on his third novel — as a matter of fact, he had just succeeded in depositing his hero on a desert island, with no immediate thought of how to rescue him — when he became aware of a most annoying disturbance on the second floor. For a moment Mr. Larkins forgot his surroundings; he began to curse the tenants above under his breath in no very genteel manner. But suddenly he bethought himself of the emptiness of the floor above. It took him some moments more to think of the rumors he had heard from the agent.

Mr. Larkins was distinctly not a believer in any form of the supernatural. For some time he sat very still, listening. The sound seemed to be that of a man pacing to and fro in a narrow space; Mr. Larkins had a mental picture of the closed room. The pacing was not, however, very regular; it was punctuated at odd intervals by a furious pounding sound — as if the tenant were hammering on the door or the walls, reflected the author. Usually such an interval was followed by a curious padding sound, as if the tenant

were running in a circle around the room. Eventually this resolved into the steady pacing, which became to Mr. Larkins, more and more monotonous as he sat there listening.

Another of Mr. Larkins' attributes was an unshakable bravery. Torn between the impossibility of writing with such an annoying disturbance above his head, and investigating, leaving his hero to languish for some unpremeditated hours on the island, Mr. Larkins decided upon the latter course. Arming himself with a revolver and a flashlight, he made his way carefully into the hall and up the stairs. The first door to his right as he mounted the last step was that of the closed room. Before this room he paused, listening. Certainly it was from here that the sound came! It was more subdued now, but still recognizable. Mr. Larkins argued with himself: should he enter, or not? He decided that, just as a matter of surety, he would look into the other rooms first.

There was nothing in them, and when he had finished, the annoying pacing had stopped. Consequently, Mr. Larkins decided to put off his investigation of the closed room until he had fortified himself with more data in regard to the late Brent and his theories. Mr. Larkins was not admitting to himself the possibility of the supernaural; he was still convinced that there was

something perfectly natural behind this disturbance. In any event, he reflected, it would do no harm to know a little more about the house. He resolved on the spur of the moment to look up the case of the man who had died after opening the closed room.

In accordance with his decision, Mr. Larkins descended to his floor and went directly to the typewriter, where he removed his hero bodily from the machine. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to the late Mr. Brent's co-worker, Jonathan Roberts.

ON THE following day Mr. Larkins wandered casually down to the offices of the *Times*, where he spent a considerable part of the afternoon. He emerged at last, and he carried under his arm a number of newspapers. When he reached Number 21 he was pleasantly surprised to find that Mr. Jonathan Roberts had replied to his letter of the preceding night by special messenger.

It was the letter, quite a lengthy document, which first engaged Mr. Larkins' attention. Of special interest were these paragraphs, constituting the latter half of the letter:

... Those are a number of his theories, which I have come to regard as fully ridiculous as the press regards them. But I believe the particular theory you refer to is his theory of

the predestination of souls. This was engrossing his attention at a time when I was spending some weeks at Liverpool, in attendance upon my mother, who was, at the time, seriously ill. However, I will tell you what I can in regard to the theory.

It was his idea that such places as heaven and hell did not exist for the soul; he did not mean to say that he believed that good and evil were also non-existent for the soul after death. On the contrary, his entire theory hinged on this point. He believed that all souls, good and bad alike, were projected into the ether at the moment of death, to roam there for the remainder of their existence, to which he designated no end. For the good souls happiness abounded; for the evil, only evil.

He developed this theory by advancing another; that since these souls were merely passing to and fro in the ether, it would be a comparatively easy thing to draw them back, *if one had a body to put them into*. The last time I saw him — just before I left for Liverpool — he had actually found a young man who had consented to his plan of driving from the subject's body his soul, and drawing another from the ether to replace it.

He admitted that the chief argument against this latter theory was, in the light of his first theory, that in drawing a soul from the ether, one could make no distinction between a good and evil soul. Also, one could not tell to what proportions the evil and good had expanded. He believed, as many of us do, that evil breeds evil, and he said he had the chance of one in a hundred of drawing a soul of cosmic evil from the ether. In my presence, one day, he made certain vague references to ancient gods of evil — I candidly admit that what he said went over my head.

How this experiment of his came out, I can not say. It was the last he worked, for he was dead when I returned from Liverpool. The papers

contained no mention of it; he himself, in his letters to me — letters, often as not, very incoherent — was very sparse with information regarding it. I gathered, however, that the experiment was a success, or that he believed it so; most likely the latter, for to admit the former would be to admit his grossly improbable theory to the realm of the probable. Beyond that I can say nothing. I don't think he ever gave me the name of the young man, for I should certainly have looked him up. It was consistently my idea that the fellow was a derelict, or surely his relatives would have some knowledge of him; or, having none, would certainly raise a devil of a row over his disappearance.

I was under the impression also, from his letters, that Brent kept a diary in his last days, but I could find nothing at the time when I looked about Number 21 after his death. However, I remember being in a rush; if you searched, you might find something of interest.

Another thing that rather puzzles me: have you ever wondered about that peculiar bare spot beneath the lilac bush at the back of the house?

Very cordially yours,

JONATHAN ROBERTS.

P. S. — If you should want me, call Picadilly 49-A.

THE LAST paragraph of the letter caught Mr. Larkins' eye; he resolved to investigate the matter the first thing in the morning, regretting somewhat that dusk had fallen so early. The mention of a diary, too, stimulated his interest; he mentally noted that this was another factor to absorb his attention on the following day.

Then he gave his attention to the newspapers, going over them one by one and discarding

them. From the last he clipped a column which contained a summary of the affair; this clipping he placed beside the letter and proceeded to reread it:

LONDON, August 7 — The death of Mr. Holman Davitt at Number 21 St. John's Wood was last night declared due to heart failure caused by severe shock. Physicians in charge of the inquest were led by the Honorable Seymour Lawlor.

Mr. Holman Davitt was found dead at his lodgings on August 1. He was found at the foot of the stairs under circumstances that aroused immediate suspicion and caused an investigation to be made. Nothing, however, was discovered, save that Mr. Davitt seemed to have fallen down the stairs, as several bruises on his body indicated. There were no broken bones. Doctors were loth to declare death due to failure of the heart because Mr. Davitt's attending physician, Dr. Sax Borden, declared his condition tip-top.

It is Dr. Lawlor's opinion, as expressed at the final inquest last night, that Mr. Davitt died of fright; Dr. Borden, on the other hand, cites specific instances of Mr. Davitt's bravery and nerve. A peculiar feature of the affair is the curiously hardened and cold condition of the corpse; it is still in the condition in which it was discovered.

By way of mention, Number 21 was the residence of the late John Brent, who was found dead under very similar conditions.

Mr. Larkins pondered over the excerpt for a moment; then he took up the letter and began to reread it. He noticed with gathering astonishment that neither the clipping nor the letter made mention of the closed

room. Did the matter seem too flippant for the respective writers? Or was it merely an oversight? The closed room, as something of importance, began to deteriorate in the eyes of Mr. Larkins.

But he could not escape the fact that the body of Mr. Davitt had been found at the foot of the stairs, down which it had evidently fallen. And Dr. Lawlor had mentioned fright. Mr. Collins, the agent, had said that the tenant died soon after opening the door of the closed room. Perhaps — it was quite possible — Collins deceived him. Mr. Larkins observed that Mr. Davitt might very well have died the same night he opened the door. Could it not then be possible that something in that room so frightened Mr. Davitt as to bring on heart failure? Mr. Larkins admitted it to himself; he was much disposed to believe it. It would be natural for a realtor to suppress any such story, of course.

A clock on the mantel struck 10 and Mr. Larkins shot an enlightened glance toward his bed chamber. He rose, stretched himself, and yawned. He placed the letter and clipping under a paperweight on the top of his table, where he would not fail to see them first thing in the morning. As he turned the light out, he reflected with a half-smile, that the hero of *Island*

Gods was still languishing on a desert isle.

MR. LARKINS rose much earlier than usual the next morning, but since it was Sunday, he had first to go to mass. Directly on his return he went out into the garden behind the house. At the end of the cobblestone walk he found the lilac bush, and beneath it the spot that Roberts had mentioned. He stopped and frowned down at it. It was nothing more than a vague, irregular patch of ground on which the grass grew very sparsely, in scraggly clumps of thin blades, which appeared at first to be dried, but were instead of some dark color that Mr. Larkins could not identify. To Mr. Larkins it seemed at first glance only the usual bare space that one finds in places where the sun does not shine, where there is continual shadow. Mr. Larkins polished his monocle meditatively and screwed it into his eye. Then, looking upward, he caught the line of the lilac bush. It was then that he noticed that the bare spot was not directly under the bush — certainly it was not always in its shadow. Mr. Larkins bent to one knee to inspect the area more closely.

In no place under the bush was the grass exceptionally heavy; the strange thing was that the barest spot was that at the extreme outer edge and that

it must be this portion that Roberts had reference to. Mr. Larkins cast a sudden glance at the sky; in less than an hour the sun would be shining directly upon the spot before him. With an exclamation, he bent again to the scrutiny. Then he noticed that there was a suggestion of definite form to the spot, despite the inroads of grass: something more distinct than he had first imagined. It was a shape inexplicably suggestive of something he knew — something he could recognize.

Then suddenly he started up; his monocle fell from his eye and swung on its ribbon. He bent forward once more. Yes, certainly, it was as if a human body were crouched there on its side — its knees pressed into its breast. For a moment Mr. Larkins stared at it. Did Roberts mean — could it be that this spot marked a grave? Mr. Larkins shuddered, and turned his face full into the sunlight.

IN THE HOUSE once more, Mr. Larkins began his search for the diary of the scientist. He looked thoroughly in every room; he even penetrated the dismal cellar. But he found nothing. Coming back to his study at last he considered opening the closed room, but the clipping before him did not argue favorably. It was then that he caught sight of the boarded-up fireplace. He hesitated only for a

moment; then he began to tear the boards away.

He was not disappointed, though his find was meager. Almost covered with ashes, he found two charred pieces of paper, which were most certainly from Brent's diary. He carried them carefully over to his table and placed them side-by-side with the letter and the clipping. But his disappointment rose when he found that the writing was almost illegible and the contents were most incoherent. The excerpts were dated a week apart. The first read, as well as Mr. Larkins could decipher the script:

May 10 — I did it today — it was all I could do. Who would have thought it? One chance out of one hundred! What annoys me is that I have succeeded, and can not announce it to the world. . . . I buried him in the back . . . I wonder if . . . neighbors will see? I shall never forget . . . his face . . . his air of unholy . . . of sinful glee . . . his first struggles for life, and the expression . . . face, such cosmic . . .

The remainder of the paper was burnt away. Mr. Larkins would have liked to know what word followed "cosmic". He turned his attention to the second excerpt.

May 17 — I know he is dead! It was with my own hands! And still he paces — one, two, three, four, and over again. And that hellish pounding. My God! Will he never stop? It

is driving me mad; people on the street turn and give me curious stares.

If I had not locked his room? But surely I am safe here? . . . He can not come here. How could it be? It is to defy all the laws that mankind has been brought up to revere — but have not I myself proved the folly of these very laws? I now champion? . . . What am I writing? As if the atmosphere of this old house could harm me! It is all my imagination. But no, there he goes again; pounding and pacing . . . pacing! Seeking for substance for a new body — for a new material entity. He will need three — three living bodies. . . . What have I done? His room must not be opened. It establishes a link — a contact with that thing out there — it will draw him closer and closer — and closer. God! that devilish, devilish pacing! Always! Always! *Always!* *What if he should come out?*

MR. LARKINS was startled to say the least. His natural conservatism urged him to take these excerpts as proof of Brent's insanity; but something in him was inclined toward the opposite view. It was the second excerpt that seemed to awaken a long-dead memory in Mr. Larkins' mind. It was of something he had read long ago, something that drummed insistently through his consciousness. He could not recall the title of the wrok, but it seemed to him to be an old paper on certain forms of ancient, barbaric magic mingled with designated ritualistic rites of old Chinese ancestor-worshipers. It seemed to him that there had been certain notes, certain cryptic comments, that virtually underscored a sen-

tence in the second excerpt of Brent's diary:

Seeking for substance for a new body — for a new material entity. He will need three — three living bodies.

There was something of age-old gods of evil, genii older than those of the *Arabian Nights*, who inhabited the nethermost spaces of the cosmos. And there were paragraphs of weird, horrible rites — of materialization of these ancient demons — and certainly there was something of three living sacrifices, from whom all life was extracted, leaving them cold and stiffened as arctic stone.

Mr. Larkins was stunned by the immensity of his speculations. His mind was channeled — it led but to one thing. Could it be that the fingers of Mr. Brent's ghastly experiment had reached out much farther than intended? — that the experiment had reached through space into the cosmos and touched upon . . .? Mr. Larkins shook off the impression, and slipped the excerpts together with the letter and clipping under the paper-weight. Then he rose, donned his topcoat and stick, and went for an afternoon in Hyde Park.

SOMEWHAT DELAYED on the underground, Mr. Larkins arrived at Number 21 shortly after dark had fallen. He had forgotten all about the matter of the closed room, and ap-

proached his work, eager to rescue the hero of *Island Gods* from the desert island.

He had moved his hero approximately twenty miles into midocean when the pacing began. Mr. Larkins stopped work at once; he cast a sidelong glance at his flash and revolver, still where he had put them two nights before. His conservatism urged him to investigate; again some opposing factor urged him to flee — to leave the house.

But his conservatism won. Mr. Larkins took up his flashlight and revolver and crept cautiously up the stairs. Halfway up, he stopped and listened. The disturbance was exactly the same as that of the night before. Then, tightening his grasp on his weapon, he went resolutely on.

It was only natural that he should stop a moment to listen before the door, before he took from his keyring the key to open the room. For an interval he heard nothing; then the slow, monotonous pacing sound again. He threw open the door and shot his flash around.

There was nothing in the room — but the pacing continued! Suddenly, inexplicably, Mr. Larkins felt frightened. Had he but found some living thing — something to challenge! But this inexplicable nothingness — and that awful pacing!

Then abruptly his flashlight went out. For a moment Mr.

Larkins was stunned. Then he noticed that the window at the end of the room looked directly down on the lilac bush, and above the bare spot hung a shadow, distinct in the glow of the street lamp — a shadow that was not of the lilac bush.

Mr. Larkins watched as if fascinated. The shadow rose like a cloud, hung for a moment suspended in the air, then shot swiftly toward the window. Mr. Larkins turned to flee, and at that instant he saw before him, limned against the window, an awful thing.

He ran headlong into the hall and down the stairs. As he fumbled at the door of his library, he threw over his shoulder a quick, scared glance. Then the door opened, and he stumbled into the room. At once he slammed the door to, and stood with his back against it, breathing heavily. Leaning there, he listened. From upstairs came a sound as of some heavy lumbering object pacing — and almost immediately after, an ominous creak of hall boards. Suddenly the telephone on the table caught Mr. Larkins' eye — and close by, the letter from Roberts.

The letter from Roberts — in a flash, the postscript:

If you should want me, call Piccadilly 49-A.

HE FOUND himself at the instrument, frantically repeating a number to the operator. Then

from over the wire, a voice. "Roberts? Larkins! Listen, I've opened the closed room — and it's coming — down the stairs — a horrible thing — from that spot — the grave under the bush . . . I can hear it coming — a great, awful thing. What ungodly creation is buried there? . . . It towers — ghoulish — but with a face — a human face that glows hellishly — a glow that lights every gray contour. It is evil — cosmic evil — and cold as arctic stone. There are ancient gods . . . It is all clear now — your letter, the diary. Brent. It is still on the stairs — but it is coming — coming. There is something wrong — I can not move — as if I were chained. But I will shoot this thing! . . . It is in the hall now. . . . The

knob is turning. . . . Oh! Christ!"

The telephone struck the table with a loud clatter; immediately after, a shot echoed through the house.

It was the shot that brought the "bobby" who discovered the author's body. The "bobby" says that the body was very cold and rigid, as if something vital had been drawn from it; yet he affirms that he entered the house immediately after the shot: this certainly can not be true. He also asserts that there was someone else in the house, for he distinctly remembers a ghastly chill about his throat, a sudden draft — as if someone had opened a door somewhere — and a steady low pacing sound creeping away into the distance.

LOVECRAFT AND "THE PACER"

The Lovecraft-Derleth correspondence started in July 1926, when August Derleth was seventeen; he wrote HPL to ask where he could find M. P. Shiel's story, *The House of Sounds*. As many others discovered, HPL wrote enthusiastically and at length to anyone writing to him who showed an interest in weird fiction. He invited young writers to send him their mss. for criticism. Derleth notes:

"From week to week, Lovecraft read my many manuscripts with singular patience. Sometimes he rewrote entire endings in the course of his letters, and many times he devoted several pages to a discussion of relatively minor points. And always the nuggets of advice for a struggling young writer shone like pure gold.

" . . . He wrote a lengthy letter of information about Roman Britain in connection with a manuscript of mine titled *Incident in a Roman Camp*, which was later revised in accordance with his suggestions, retitled *Old Mark*, and sold to WEIRD TALES, where it appeared in the issue for August 1929. . . .

"He was customarily enthusiastic about the stories his young correspondents submitted, evidently because he felt that he ought to give encouragement, he ought not to discourage talent, and so he spurred hope in the owner of even the thinnest and least visible talent. But there were degrees to his enthusiasm. *'Coleman's Shoulder'* is splendid — full of genuine atmosphere — and I strongly hope it will see print eventually. Your teacher's suggestion is good, unless it means a definite abandonment of the *possibility* of supernatural action. Don't

go to that length — leave a *horrible doubt* in the reader's mind. That's the secret of an effective terror-tale.' Thus, in April. (1928) In August: 'I like *The Pacer* exceedingly — it is really one of the best things you have done so far. The atmosphere and suspense are very convincing, and the denouement is powerful enough to justify the elaborate preparation. If Wright doesn't take it, I shall believe that his recent lucid interval was a phenomenally brief and insubstantial one.

" 'As for a criticism — as usual, I'd suggest your taking a little more pains regarding the fine points of style — precise selection of words, avoidance of repetition, skillful management of rhythms and tone-colour, & & . . . Now, as to the actual structure — the most obvious fault is having the grave distinguishable as a *mound* — the conventional symbol of a grave — over his victim's place of interment. And mounds don't sprout of themselves above inhuman corpses! The best way to suggest a grave is to have a spot where the grass does not grow well — a spot shaped something like a man. That likewise suggests the essentially horrible and unholy nature of what lies beneath. One other thing — you are aware, I suppose, that fastidious technicians frown on the delineation of incidents which leave no survivor to tell about them; since a story seems much less convincing when it flatly contradicts all conceivable possibility. Careful authors always avoid killing off all the witnesses or destroying all the evidence of a given scene or happening — for if all record is lost, how is the teller of the tale supposed to know about it? . . .

" 'Now you have no way to explain how you know what Larkins saw or what his actions in the death scene were. Could you have him call somebody up on the telephone toward the last, and gasp out an account of what was confronting him? Could you have him attempt to photograph the thing and have the negative developed afterward? Could you have him try to scrawl a last message to the world? Something like that is really necessary if the story is to be perfect. Lastly — I'd use a little more care, detail, and *striking novelty and originality* in describing the monster. I spent enormous pains thinking out *Cthulhu*, and still more in describing the two blasphemous entities that figure in my new *Dunwich Horror*. It's a good thing to work *slowly and carefully*, and never to set anything down until you can see and feel it poignantly and realistically yourself. My advice to all writers is to cut out all "dash" and jauntiness with a relentless hand; using instead a quiet, deadly objectivity and *seriousness* of tone, and a careful and scholarly attention to plausibility and accuracy of detail, which will serve in the end to build up a haunting atmosphere of convincingness and realism! But don't mind these trifling remarks on details. It's a fine story, and Wright will surely take it if he has any sense. . . . Wright is really an admirably amiable, conscientious and honourable person despite his limitations in critical judgment.'

"When Wright rejected *The Pacer* at first — he later accepted it — Lovecraft warned against taking Wright's suggestions for alterations. 'It never pays to mix in any ideas save your own. Suggestions are all right when you have the privilege of weighing them and accepting only those which your own judgment backs up — but don't take anybody else's advice when you really have a strong feeling that your original version is the proper thing.' — advice which I found sound throughout the years and all the books since then, and which today I pass on to the students in my various creative writing classes."

(From "Lovecraft As Mentor", by August Derleth, in the volume *The Shuttered Room & Other Pieces* by H. P. Lovecraft (& Divers Hands), copyright 1959 by August Derleth. Arkham House: Publisher's, Sauk City, Wisconsin; \$5.00. Reprinted by permission of Arkham House.)

The Moth

by H. G. Wells

From the collection, *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents*, which appeared in 1896, this is one of Wells' early explorations into psychology. When it was reprinted in *AMAZING STORIES* in 1928, T. O'Connor Sloane wrote: "It is a queer as well as startling penetration into the realm of the human mind, and this sort of thing occurs very much more often than most of us realize." Since then, of course, the subconscious has been mined heavily in popular fiction, so that *The Moth* is by no means as startling as it might have been then; but it remains effective, and we were struck by the thought of how little change would be needed in order to pass it off as a contemporary work, written for British readers.

PROBABLY YOU have heard of Hapley — not W. T. Hapley, the son, but the celebrated Hapley, the Hapley of *Periplaneta Hapliia*, Hapley the entomologist.

If so, you know at least of the great feud between Hapley and Professor Pawkins, though certain of its consequences may be new to you. For those who have not, a word or two of explanation

is necessary, which the idle reader may go over with a glancing eye if his indolence so incline him.

It is amazing how very widely diffused is the ignorance of such really important matters as this Hapley-Pawkins feud. Those epoch-making controversies, again, that have convulsed the Geological Society are, I verily believe, almost entirely un-

known outside the fellowship of that body. I have heard men of fair general education even refer to the great scenes at these meetings as vestry-meeting squabbles. Yet the great hate of the English and Scotch geologists has lasted now half a century, and has "left deep and abundant marks upon the body of the science." And this Hapley-Pawkins business, though perhaps a more personal affair, stirred passions as profound, if not profounder. Your common man has no conception of the zeal that animates a scientific investigator, the fury of contradiction you can arouse in him. It is the *odium theologicum* in a new form. There are men, for instance, who would gladly burn Sir Ray Lankester at Smithfield for his treatment of the Mollusca in the Encyclopedia. That fantastic extension of the Cephalopods to cover the Pteropods. . . . But I wander from Hapley and Pawkins.

It began years and years ago with a revision of the Microlepidoptera (whatever these may be) by Pawkins, in which he extinguished a new species created by Hapley. Hapley, who was always quarrelsome, replied by a stinging impeachment of the entire classification of Pawkins.*

*"Remarks on a Recent Revision of Microlepidoptera," *Quart. Journ. Entomological Soc.*, 1863.

Pawkins in his "Rejoinder"† suggested that Hapley's microscope was as defective as his power of observation, and called him an "irresponsible meddler" — Hapley was not a professor at that time. Hapley in his retort,‡ spoke of "blundering collectors," and described, as if inadvertently, Pawkins' revision as "miracle of ineptitude." It was war to the knife. However, it would scarcely interest the reader to detail how these two great men quarreled, and how the split between them widened until from the Microlepidoptera they were at war upon every open question in entomology. There were memorable occasions. At times the Royal Entomological Society meetings resembled nothing so much as the Chamber of Deputies. On the whole, I fancy Pawkins was nearer the truth than Hapley. But Hapley was skillful with his rhetoric, had a turn for ridicule rare in a scientific man, was endowed with vast energy, and had a fine sense of injury in the matter of the extinguished species; while Pawkins was a man of dull presence, prosy of speech, in shape not unlike a water-barrel, over-conscientious with testimonials, and suspected of jobbing museum appointments. So the young men gath-

†"Rejoinder to Certain Remarks," etc. *Ibid.* 1864.

‡"Further Remarks," etc. *Ibid.*

ered round Hapley and applauded him. It was a long struggle vicious from the beginning and growing at last to pitiless antagonism. The successive turns of fortune, now an advantage to one side and now to another — now Hapley tormented by some success of Pawkins, and now Pawkins outshone by Hapley, belong rather to the history of entomology than to this story.

BUT IN 1891 Pawkins, whose health had been bad for some time, published some work upon the "mesoblast" of the Death's-Head Moth. What the mesoblast of the Death's-Head Moth may be does not matter a rap in this story. But the work was far below his usual standard, and gave Hapley an opening he had coveted for years. He must have worked night and day to make the most of his advantage.

In an elaborate critique he rent Pawkins to tatters — one can fancy the man's disordered black hair, and his queer dark eyes flashing as he went for his antagonist — and Pawkins made a reply, halting, ineffectual, with painful gaps of silence, and yet malignant. There was no mistaking his will to wound Hapley nor his incapacity to do it. But few of those who heard him — I was absent from that meeting — realized how ill the man was.

Hapley got his opponent down, and meant to finish him.

He followed with a brutal attack upon Pawkins, in the form of a paper upon the development of moths in general, a paper showing evidence of an extraordinary amount of labor, couched in a violently controversial tone. Violent as it was, an editorial note witnesses that it was modified. It must have covered Pawkins with shame and confusion of face. It left no loophole; it was murderous in argument, and utterly contemptuous in tone; an awful thing for the declining years of a man's career.

The world of entomologists waited breathlessly for the rejoinder from Pawkins. He would try one, for Pawkins had always been game. But when it came it surprised them. For the rejoinder of Pawkins was to catch influenza, proceed to pneumonia, and die.

It was perhaps as effectual a reply as he could make under the circumstances, and largely turned the current of feeling against Hapley. The very people who had most gleefully cheered on those gladiators became serious at the consequence. There could be no reasonable doubt the fret of the defeat had contributed to the death of Pawkins. There was a limit even to scientific controversy, said serious people. Another crushing attack was already in the press and appeared on the day before the funeral. I don't think Hapley

exerted himself to stop it. People remembered how Hapley had hounded down his rival and forgot that rival's defects. Scathing satire reads ill over fresh mold. The thing provoked comment in the daily papers. It was that made me think you had probably heard of Hapley and this controversy. But, as I have already remarked, scientific workers live very much in a world of their own; half the people, I dare say, who go along Piccadilly to the Academy every year could not tell you where the learned societies abide. Many even think that research is a kind of happy-family cage in which all kinds of men lie down together in peace.

IN HIS private thoughts Hapley could not forgive Pawkins for dying. In the first place, it was a mean dodge to escape the absolute pulverization Hapley had in hand for him, and in the second, it left Hapley's mind with a queer gap in it. For twenty years he had worked hard, sometimes far into the night, and seven days a week, with microscope, scalpel, collecting-net, and pen, and almost entirely with reference to Pawkins. The European reputation he had won had come as an incident in that great antipathy. He had gradually worked up to a climax in this last controversy. It had killed Pawkins, but it had also thrown Hapley out of gear,

so to speak, and his doctor advised him to give up work for a time, and rest. So Hapley went down into a quiet village in Kent, and thought day and night of Pawkins and good things it was now impossible to say about him.

At last Hapley began to realize in what direction the preoccupation tended. He determined to make a fight for it, and started by trying to read novels. But he could not get his mind off Pawkins, white in the face and making his last speech — every sentence a beautiful opening for Hapley. He turned to fiction — and found it had no grip on him. He read the *Island Nights' Entertainments* until his "sense of causation" was shocked beyond endurance by the Bottle Imp. Then he went to Kipling, and found he "proved nothing" besides being irreverent and vulgar. These scientific people have their limitations. Then unhappily he tried Besant's *Inner House*, and the opening chapter set his mind upon learned societies and Pawkins at once.

So Hapley turned to chess, and found it a little more soothing. He soon mastered the moves and the chief gambits and commoner closing positions, and began to beat the Vicar. But then the cylindrical contours of the opposite king began to resemble Pawkins standing up and gasping ineffectually a-

gainst checkmate, and Hapley decided to give up chess.

Perhaps the study of some new branch of science would after all be better diversion. The best rest is change of occupation. Hapley determined to plunge at diatoms, and had one of his smaller microscopes and Halibut's monograph sent down from London. He thought that perhaps if he could get up a vigorous quarrel with Halibut, he might be able to begin life afresh and forget Pawkins. And very soon he was hard at work in his habitual strenuous fashion at these microscopic denizens of the wayside pool.

It was on third day of the diatoms that Hapley became aware of a novel addition to the local fauna. He was working late at the microscope, and the only light in the room was the brilliant little lamp with the special form of green shade. Like all experienced microscopists, he kept both eyes open. It is the only way to avoid excessive fatigue. One eye was over the instrument, and bright and distinct before that was the circular field of the microscope, across which a brown diatom was slowly moving. With the other eye Hapley saw, as it were, without seeing. He was only dimly conscious of the brass side of the instrument, the illuminated part of the tablecloth, a sheaf of note-paper, the foot of

the lamp, and the darkened room beyond.

Suddenly his attention drifted from one eye to the other. The tablecloth was of the material called tapestry by shopmen, and rather brightly colored. The pattern seemed displaced, and there was a vibrating movement of the colors at this point.

Hapley suddenly moved his head back and looked with both eyes. His mouth fell open with astonishment.

It was a large moth or butterfly; its wings spread in butterfly fashion!

It was strange it should be in the room at all, for the windows were closed. Strange that it should match the tablecloth. Stranger far that to him Hapley, the great entomologist, it was altogether unknown. There was no delusion. It was crawling slowly towards the foot of the lamp.

"New Genus, by heavens! And in England!" said Hapley, staring.

Then he suddenly thought of Pawkins. Nothing would have maddened Pawkins more . . . And Pawkins was dead!

Something about the head and body of the insect became singularly suggestive of Pawkins, just as the chess king had been.

"Confound Pawkins!" said Hapley. "But I must catch this." And looking round him for some means of capturing the moth, he rose slowly out of his chair.

Suddenly the insect rose, struck the edge of the lampshade — Hapley heard the "ping" — and vanished into the shadow.

In a moment Hapley had whipped off the shade, so that the whole room was illuminated. The thing had disappeared, but soon his practiced eye detected it upon the wallpaper near the door. He went towards it poisoning the lampshade for capture. Before he was within striking distance, however, it had risen and was fluttering round the room. After the fashion of its kind, it flew with sudden starts and turns, seeming to vanish here and reappear there. Once Hapley struck, and missed; then again.

The third time he hit his microscope. The instrument swayed, struck and overturned the lamp, and fell noisily upon the floor. The lamp turned over on the table and, very luckily, went out. Hapley was left in the dark. With a start he felt the strange moth blunder into his face.

It was maddening. He had no lights. If he opened the door of the room the thing would get away. In the darkness he saw Pawkins quite distinctly laughing at him. Pawkins had ever an oily laugh. He swore furiously and stamped his foot on the floor.

There was a timid rapping at the door.

Then it opened, perhaps a

foot, and very slowly. The alarmed face of the landlady appeared behind a pink candle flame; she wore a nightcap over her gray hair and had some purple garment over her shoulders.

"What *was* that fearful smash?" she said. "Has anything . . ." The strange moth appeared fluttering about the chink of the door.

"Shut that door!" said Hapley, and suddenly rushed at her.

The door slammed hastily. Hapley was left alone in the dark. Then in the pause he heard his landlady scuttle upstairs, lock her door, and drag something heavy across the room and put against it.

IT BECAME evident to Hapley that his conduct and appearance had been strange and alarming. Confound the moth! and Pawkins! However, it was a pity to lose the moth now. He felt his way into the hall and found the matches, after sending his hat down upon the floor with a noise like a drum. With the lighted candle he returned to the sitting-room. No moth was to be seen. Yet once for a moment it seemed that the thing was fluttering round his head. Hapley very suddenly decided to give up the moth and go to bed. But he was excited. All night long his sleep was broken by dreams of the moth, Pawkins, and his landlady. Twice in the

night he turned out and soused his head in cold water.

One thing was very clear to him. His landlady could not possibly understand about the strange moth, especially as he had failed to catch it. No one but an entomologist would understand quite how he felt. She was probably frightened at his behavior, and yet he failed to see how he could explain it. He decided to say nothing further about the events of last night. After breakfast he saw her in her garden, and decided to go out and talk to reassure her. He talked to her about beans and potatoes, bees, caterpillars, and the price of fruit. She replied in her usual manner, but she looked at him suspiciously, and kept walking as he walked, so that there was always a bed of flowers, or a row of beans, or something of the sort, between them. After a while he began to feel singularly irritated at this, and, to conceal his vexation, went indoors and presently went out for a walk.

The moth, or butterfly, trailing an odd flavor of Pawkins with it, kept coming into that walk though he did his best to keep his mind off it. Once he saw it quite distinctly, with its wings flattened out, upon the old stone wall that runs along the west edge of the park, but going up to it he found it was only two lumps of gray and yellow lichen. "This," said Hapley, "is

the reverse of mimicry. Instead of a butterfly looking like a stone, here is a stone looking like a butterfly!" Once something hovered and fluttered round his head, but by an effort of will he drove that impression out of his mind again.

In the afternoon Hapley called upon the Vicar, and argued with him upon theological questions. They sat in the little arbor covered with brier, and smoked as they wrangled. "Look at that moth!" said Hapley, suddenly, pointing to the edge of the wooden table.

"Where?" said the Vicar.

"You don't see a moth on the edge of the table there?" said Hapley.

"Certainly not," said the Vicar.

Hapley was thunderstruck. He gasped. The Vicar was staring at him. Clearly the man saw nothing. "The eye of faith is no better than the eye of science," said Hapley awkwardly.

"I don't see your point," said the Vicar, thinking it was part of the argument.

That night Hapley found the moth crawling over his counterpane. He sat on the edge of the bed in his shirtsleeves and reasoned with himself. Was it pure hallucination? He knew he was slipping, and he battled for his sanity with the same silent energy he had formerly displayed against Pawkins. So persistent is mental habit that he felt as if it were still a struggle with Paw-

kins. He was well versed in psychology. He knew that such visual illusions do come as a result of mental strain. But the point was, he did not only *see* the moth, he had heard it when it touched the edge of the lampshade and afterwards when it hit against the wall, and he had felt it strike his face in the dark.

He looked at it. It was not at all dream-like but perfectly clear and solid-looking in the candle-light. He saw the hairy body and the short feathery antennae, the jointed legs, even a place where the down was rubbed from the wing. He suddenly felt angry with himself for being afraid of a little insect.

HIS LANDLADY had got the servant to sleep with her that night, because she was afraid to be alone. In addition she had locked the door and put the chest of drawers against it. They listened and talked in whispers after they had gone to bed, but nothing occurred to alarm them. About eleven they had ventured to put the candle out and had both dozed off to sleep. They woke with a start, and sat up in bed, listening in the darkness.

Then they heard slipped feet going to and fro in Hapley's room. A chair was overturned and there was a violent dab at the wall. Then a china mantel ornament smashed upon the fender. Suddenly the door of the room opened, and they heard

him upon the landing. They clung to one another, listening. He seemed to be dancing upon the staircase. Now he would go down three or four steps quickly, then up again, then hurry down into the hall. They heard the umbrella-stand go over, and the fanlight break. Then the bolt shot and the chain rattled. He was opening the door.

They hurried to the window. It was a dim, gray night; an almost unbroken sheet of watery cloud was sweeping across the moon, and the hedge and trees in front of the house were black against the pale roadway. They saw Hapley, looking like a ghost in his shirt and white trousers, running to and fro in the road and beating the air. Now he would stop, now he would dart very rapidly at something invisible, now he would move upon it with stealthy strides. At last he went out of sight up the road towards the down. Then while they argued who should go down and lock the door, he returned. He was walking very fast, and he came straight into the house, closed the door carefully, and went quietly up to his bedroom. Then everything was silent.

"Mrs. Colville," said Hapley, calling down the staircase next morning. "I hope I did not alarm you last night."

"You may well ask that!" said Mrs. Colville.

"The fact is, I am a sleep-walker, and the last two nights

I have been without my sleeping mixture. There is nothing to be alarmed about, really. I am sorry made such an ass of myself. I will go over the down to Shoreham, and get some stuff to make me sleep soundly. I ought to have done that yesterday."

But halfway over the down, by the chalk pits, the moth came upon Hapley again. He went on, trying to keep his mind upon chess problems, but it was no good. The thing fluttered into his face, and he struck at it with his hat in self-defense. Then rage, the old rage — the rage he had so often felt against Pawkins — came upon him again. He went on, leaping and striking at the eddying insect. Suddenly he trod on nothing, and fell headlong.

There was a gap in his sensations, and Hapley found himself sitting on the heap of flints in front of the opening of the chalk-pits, with a leg twisted back under him. The strange moth was still fluttering round his head. He struck at it with his hand, and turning his head saw two men approaching him. One was the village doctor. It occurred to Hapley that this was lucky. Then it came into his mind with extraordinary vividness, that no one would ever be able to see the strange moth except himself, and that it behooved him to keep silent about it.

LATE THAT night, however,

after his broken leg was set, he was feverish and forgot his self-restraint. He was lying flat on his bed, and he began to run his eyes round the room to see if the moth was still about. He tried not to do this, but it was no good. He soon caught sight of the thing resting close to his hand, by the night-light, on the green tablecloth. The wings quivered. With a sudden wave of anger he smote at it with his fist, and the nurse woke up with a shriek. He had missed it.

"That moth!" he said; and then: "It was fancy. Nothing!"

All the time he could see quite clearly the insect going round the cornice and darting across the room, and he could also see that the nurse saw nothing of it and looked at him strangely. He must keep himself in hand. He knew he was a lost man if he did not keep himself in hand. But as the night waned the fever grew upon him, and the very dread he had of seeing the moth made him see it. About five, just as the dawn was gray, he tried to get out of bed and catch it, though his leg was afire with pain. The nurse had to struggle with him.

On account of this, they tied him down to the bed. At this the moth grew bolder, and once he felt it settle in his hair. Then, because he struck out violently with his arms, they tied these also. At this the moth came and crawled over his face, and Hap-

ley wept, swore, screamed, prayed for them to take it off him, unavailingly.

The doctor was a blockhead, a just-qualified general practitioner, and quite ignorant of mental science. He simply said there was no moth. Had he possessed the wit, he might still perhaps have saved Hapley from his fate by entering into his delusion, and covering his face with gauze as he prayed might be done. But, as I say, the doctor was a blockhead; and until the leg was healed Hapley was kept tied to his bed, with the imaginary moth

crawling over him. It never left him while he was awake and it grew to a monster in his dreams. While he was awake he longed for sleep, and from sleep he awoke screaming.

So now Hapley is spending the remainder of his days in a padded room, worried by a moth that no one else can see. The asylum doctor calls it hallucination; but Hapley, when he is in his easier mood and can talk, says it is the ghost of Pawkins, and consequently, a unique specimen and well worth the trouble of catching.

A reader asks why we do not announce more than one story on our "coming next issue" page. One reason for this is our memory of the times when we saw a story announced for the next issue of a science fiction magazine, our eager awaiting of the next issue, and our disappointment when we found it was not there. "Sorry, crowded out", we'd read; and sometimes the story would appear in yet another month, and sometimes it would be several months.

However, we can tell you about a few stories that we hope to present in our next issue, which will be Volume 2, Number 1. There is *The Phantom Farmhouse*, by Seabury Quinn, which has appeared on several request lists; another asked-for tale is *The Thing From — Outside*, by George Allan England. There are new stories by Wallace West and Joseph Payne Brennan. But, if you'll excuse us, we'll stop now while we still may be in the realm of the feasible.

The Door To Saturn

by Clark Ashton Smith

Early in September 1930, science fiction fans were dazzled by the appearance of the October issue of *Wonder Stories*, bearing one of Frank R. Paul's most vivid covers — a scene where a huge plant on an alien planet has seized an explorer and is drawing him into its flower mouth. The story was *Marooned in Andromeda* by Clark Ashton Smith, who was seen frequently in that magazine and its quarterly thereafter. Readers of *WEIRD TALES* had encountered numerous poems by CAS (including translations from Baudelaire), and one short story, *The Ninth Skeleton*, had appeared in 1928, but 1930 was the year that the stream of tales which were to be one of the hallmarks of WT's appeal really began, with a sardonic tale of ecclesiastic turpitude and a lamia (*The End of the Story*.) Gentle satire on misbehavior of the religious (both Christian and imaginary pagan) forms one vein of Smith's fiction. These tales revive the gentle but nonetheless biting tone of mediaeval tales of monastic and clerical irregularity, which are amusing and pointed, but do not have the bitterness of later anti-clerical writing. Being fantasy, of course magic and sorcery play a large part in these tales, and the logic of them is such that inquisitional endeavors often enter the plots. Despite the title, the present tale cannot be considered science fiction in any sense, as no such Saturn ever existed. Most of Clark Ashton Smith's published short stories and novelets have appeared in three collections issued by Arkham House. The first two, *Out of Space and Time*, and *Lost Worlds*, are out of print, but the third, *Genius Loci*, can still be obtained from Arkham House, Publisher's, Sauk City, Wisconsin for \$3.00. Our thanks to Doug Bodkin for helping us decide which of the many Smith tales we wanted to offer you would be presented first.

WHEN MORGHI, the high priest of the goddess Yhoundeh, together with twelve of his most ferocious and efficient underlings, came at morning twilight to seek the infamous heretic, Eibon, in his house of black gneiss on a headland above the northern main, they were surprised as well as disappointed to find him absent.

Their surprise was due to the fact that they had every intention of taking him unawares; for all their plots against Eibon had been carried on with meticulous privacy in underground vaults with sound-proof bolted doors; and they themselves had made the long journey to his house in a single night, immediately following the hour of his condemnation. They were disappointed because the formidable writ of arrest, with symbolic flame-etched runes on a scroll of human skin, was now useless; and because there seemed to be no early prospect of trying out the ingenious agonies, the intricately harrowing ordeals which they had devised for Eibon with such care.

Morghi was especially disappointed; and the malisons which he muttered when the emptiness of the topmost room had revealed itself, were of truly cabalistic length and fearfulness. Eibon was his chief rival in wizardry, and was acquiring altogether too much fame and prestige among the peoples of Mhu-

Thulan, that ultimate peninsula of the Hyperborean continent. So Morghi had been glad to believe certain malignant rumors concerning Eibon and to utilize them in the charges he had preferred.

These rumors were, that Eibon was a devotee of the long discredited heathen god, Zhothaqua, whose worship was incalculably older than man; and that Eibon's magic was drawn from his unlawful affiliation with this dark deity, who had come down by way of other worlds from a foreign universe, in primeval times when Earth was still no more than a steaming morass. The power of Zhothaqua was still feared; and it was said that those who were willing to forego their humanity by serving him would become the heritors of antemundane secrets, and the masters of a knowledge so awful that it could only have been brought from outlying planets coevil with night and chaos.

THE HOUSE of Eibon was built in the form of a pentagonal tower, and possessed five stories, including the two that were underground. All, of course, had been searched with painstaking thoroughness; and the three servants of Eibon had been tortured with a slow drip of boiling-hot asphaltum to make them reveal their master's

whereabouts. Their continued denial of all knowledge, after a half hour of this, was taken as proof that they were genuinely ignorant.

No sign of a subterranean passage was unearthed by delving in the walls and floor of the lower rooms; though Morghi had even gone so far as to remove the flagstones beneath an obscene image of Zhothaqquah which occupied the nethermost. This he had done with extreme reluctance, for the squat, fur-covered god, with his bat-like features and sloth-like body, was fearsomely abhorrent to the high priest of the elk-goddess, Yhoundeh.

Returning in renewed search to the highest room of Eibon's tower, the inquisitors were compelled to own themselves baffled. There was nothing to be found but a few articles of furniture, some antique volumes on conjuration such as might be owned by any sorcerer, some disagreeable and gruesome paintings on rolls of pterodactyl parchment, and certain primitive urns and sculptures and totem-poles of the sort that Eibon had been so fond of collecting. Zhothaqquah, in one form or another, was represented in most of these: his face even leered with a bestial somnolence from the urn-handles; and he was to be found in half the totems (which were those of sub-human tribes) along with

the seal, the mammoth, the giant tiger and the aurochs. Morghi felt that the charges against Eibon were now substantiated beyond all remaining doubt; for surely no one who was not a worshipper of Zhothaqquah would care to own even a single representation of this loathsome entity.

HOWEVER, such additional evidence of guilt, no matter how significant or damning, was of small help in finding Eibon. Staring from the windows of the topmost chamber, where the walls fell sheer to the cliff and the cliff dropped clear on two sides to a raging sea four hundred feet below, Morghi was driven to credit his rival with superior resources of magic. Otherwise, the man's disappearance was altogether too much of a mystery. And Morghi had no love for mysteries, unless they were part of his own stock-in-trade.

He turned from the window and re-examined the room with minutely careful attention. Eibon had manifestly used it as a sort of study: there was a writing-table of ivory, with reed-pens and various-colored inks in little earthen pots; and there were sheets of paper made from a kind of calamite, all scribbled over with odd astronomical and astrological calculations that caused Morghi to frown because he could not understand them.

On each of the five walls there hung one of the parchment paintings, all of which seemed to be the work of some aboriginal race. Their themes were blasphemous and repellent; and Zhothaquah figured in all of them, amid forms and landscapes whose abnormality and sheer uncouthness may have been due to the half-developed technique of the primitive artists. Morghi now tore them from the walls one by one, as if he suspected that Eibon might in some manner be concealed behind them.

THE WALLS were now entirely bare; and Morghi considered them for a long time, amid the respectful silence of his underlings. A queer panel, high up in the southeastern side above the writing-table, had been revealed by the removal of one of the paintings. Morghi's heavy brows met in a long black bar as he eyed this panel. It was conspicuously different from the rest of the wall, being an oval-shaped inlay of some reddish metal that was neither gold nor copper — a metal that displayed an obscure and fleeting fluorescence of rare colors when one peered at it through half-shut eyelids. But somehow it was impossible, with open eyes, even to remember the colors of this fluorescence.

Morghi — who, perhaps, was cleverer and more perspicacious

than Eibon had given him credit for being — conceived a suspicion that was apparently baseless and absurd, since the wall containing the panel was the outer wall of the building, and could give only on the sky and sea.

He climbed upon the writing-table and struck the panel with his fist. The sensations which he felt, and the result of the blow, were alike astounding. A sense of icy cold so extreme that it was hardly distinguishable from extreme heat, ran along his hand and arm and through his whole body as he smote the unknown reddish metal. And the panel itself swung easily outward, as if on unseen hinges, with a high sonorous clang that seemed to fall from an incomputable distance. Beyond it, Morghi saw that there was neither sky nor sea nor, in fact, anything he had even dreamed of in his most outrageous nightmares. . . .

He turned to his companions. The look on his face was half amazement, half triumph.

"Wait here till I return," he commanded, and leaped headlong through the open panel.

THE CHARGES that had been brought against Eibon were indeed true. The sagacious wizard, in his lifelong study of laws and agencies, both natural and supernatural, had taken account of the myths that were prevalent in Mhu Thulan re-

garding Zhothaqquah, and had thought it conceivably worth while to make a personal investigation of this obscure pre-human entity.

He had cultivated the acquaintance of Zhothaqquah, who, in the desuetude of his worship, was now driven to lead an existence wholly subterranean; he had offered the prescribed prayers, had made the sacrifices that were most acceptable; and the strange, sleepy little god, in return for Eibon's interest and his devotion, had confided to him certain information that was more than useful in the practice of the black arts. Also he had presented Eibon with some autobiographical data that confirmed the popular legends in more explicit detail. For reasons which he did not specify, he had come to Earth in former aeons from the planet Cykranosh (the name by which Saturn was called in Mhu Thulan); and Cykranosh itself had been merely a way-station in his travels from remoter worlds and systems.

As a special reward, after years of service and burnt-offerings, he presented to Eibon a large thin oval plate of some ultra-telluric metal, instructing him to have it fitted as a hinged panel in an upper room of his house. The panel, if swung outward from the wall on open air, would have the peculiar property of giving admittance to

the world Cykranosh, many million miles away in space.

According to the vague and somewhat unsatisfactory explanation vouchsafed by the god, this panel, being partly wrought from a kind of matter which belonged to another universe than man's, possessed uncommon radiative properties that served to ally it with some higher dimension of space, through which the distance to astronomically remote spheres was a mere step.

ZHOTHACQUAH, however, warned Eibon not to make use of the panel unless in time of extreme need, as a means of escape from otherwise inevitable danger; for it would be difficult if not impossible to return to Earth from Cykranosh — a world where Eibon might find it anything but easy to acclimate himself, since the conditions of life were very different from those in Mhu Thulan, even though they did not involve so total an inversion of all terrene standards and norms as that which prevailed in the more outlying planets.

Some of Zhothaqquah's relatives were still resident in Cykranosh and were worshipped by its peoples; and Zhothaqquah told Eibon the almost unpronounceable name of the most powerful of these deities, saying that it would be useful to him as a sort of password if he

should ever need to visit Cykranosh.

The idea of a panel that would open on some remote world impressed Eibon as being rather fantastic, not to say far-fetched; but he had found Zhothaqquah to be in all ways and at all times a most veracious deity. However, he made no trial of the panel's unique virtues, till Zhothaqquah (who maintained a close surveillance of all underground doings) had warned him of the machinations of Morghi and the processes of ecclesiastic law that were being instituted in the vaults below the temple of Yhoundeh.

Knowing as he did the power of these jealous bigots, Eibon decided that it would be injudicious to the point of folly if he were to let himself fall into their hands. Bidding a short and grateful farewell to Zhothaqquah, and collecting a small parcel of bread and meat and wine, he retired to his study and climbed upon the writing-table. Then, lifting aside the crude picture of a scene in Cykranosh with which Zhothaqquah had inspired some primeval half-human artist, he pushed open the panel it had served to conceal.

EIBON SAW that Zhothaqquah was indeed a god of his word for the scene beyond the panel was nothing that could ever find a legitimate place in the topography of Mhu Thulan

or of any terrestrial region. It did not altogether appeal to him; but there was no alternative, save the inquisitorial cells of the goddess Yhoundeh. Envisaging in thought the various refinements and complications of torture which Morghi would have now prepared, he sprang through the opening into Cykranosh with an agility that was quite juvenile for a wizard of mature years.

It was only a step; but turning he saw that all trace of the panel or of his dwelling had now disappeared. He was standing on a long declivity of ashen soil, down which a sluggish stream that was not water, but some liquescent metal resembling mercury, ran from tremendous unscalable shoulders and horns of the mountain heights above, to debouch in a hill-surrounded lake of the same liquid.

The slope beneath him was lined with rows of peculiar objects; and he could not make up his mind whether they were trees, mineral forms or animal organisms, since they appeared to combine certain characteristics of all these. This preternatural landscape was appallingly distinct in every detail, under a greenish-black sky that was over-arched from end to end with a triple cyclopean ring of dazzling luminosity. The air was cold, and Eibon did not care for its sulphurescent odor or the odd puckery sensation it left

in his nostrils and lungs. And when he took a few steps on the unattractive-looking soil, he found that it had the disconcerting friability of ashes that have dried once more after being wetted with rain.

HE STARTED down the slope, half-fearing that some of the equivocal objects around him would reach out their mineral boughs or arms to arrest his progress. They seemed to be a kind of bluish-purple obsidian cacti, with limbs that ended in formidable talon-like spines, and heads that were altogether too elaborate for either fruits or blossoms. They did not move as he passed among them; but he heard a faint and singular tinkling with many modulations of tone, that preceded and followed him along the slope. Eibon conceived the uncomfortable notion that they were holding converse with each other; and were perhaps debating what should be done with him or about him.

However, he reached without mishap or hindrance the end of the declivity, where terraces and ledges of decomposing tarp, like a mighty stairway of elder aeons, had rimmed the sunken lake of liquescent metal. Wondering as to the way he should now take, Eibon stood irresolute on one of the ledges.

His train of conjecture was broken by a shadow that fell suddenly athwart him and lay

like a monstrous blot on the crumbling stone at his feet. He was not prepossessed by the shadow: it was outrageously defiant of all known esthetic standards; and its malformation and distortion were no less than extravagant.

He turned to see what manner of creature had flung the shadow. This being, he perceived, was not easy to classify, with its ludicrously short legs, its exceedingly elongated arms, and its round, sleepy-looking head that was pendulous from a spherical body, as if it were turning a somnambulistic somersault. But after he had studied it a while and had noted its furriness and somnolent expression, he began to see a vague though inverted likeness to the god Zhothaquah. And remembering how Zhothaquah had said that the form assumed by himself on Earth was not altogether that which he had worn in Cykranosh, Eibon now wondered if this entity was not one of Zhothaquah's relatives.

HE WAS trying to recall the almost inarticulate name that had been confided to him by the god as a sort of password, when the owner of that unusual shadow, without seeming to note Eibon's presence, began a descent of the terraces and ledges toward the lake. Its locomotion was mainly on its hands, for the absurd legs were not

half long enough for the steps it had to take.

Arriving at the lake-edge, the creature drank of the fluid metal in a hearty and copious manner that served to convince Eibon of its godship; for surely no being of an inferior biologic order would quench its thirst with a beverage so extraordinary. Then, re-ascending to the ledge where Eibon stood, it paused and appeared to notice him for the first time.

Eibon had finally remembered the outlandish name for which he was groping.

"Hziulquoigmznzhah," he tried to articulate. Doubtless the result was not wholly conformable to Cykraoshian rules; but Eibon did the best he could with the vocal organs at his command. His auditor seemed to recognize the word, for it peered at Eibon a little less sleepily than before, with its inversely situated eyes; and even deigned to utter something which sounded like an attempt to correct his pronunciation. Eibon wondered how he was ever to learn such a language; or, having learned it, how he was ever to pronounce it. However, it heartened him a little to find that he was understood at all.

"Zhothaqquah," he said, repeating the name three times in his most orotund incantatory manner.

The topsy-turvy being opened its eyes a trifle more, and again

admonished him, uttering the word Zhothaqquah with an indescribable abbreviation of vowels and thickening of consonants. Then it stood regarding him for a while as if in doubt or cogitation. Finally it raised one of its ell-long arms from the ground and pointed along the shore, where the mouth of a low valley was discernible among the hills. It said distinctly the enigmatic words: "*Iqhui dlosh od-hqlongh;*" and then, while the sorcerer was pondering the significance of this unusual elocution, it turned away from him and started to re-ascend the higher steps, toward a rather spacious cavern with columned opening, that he had not heretofore perceived. It had hardly passed from sight into the cavern, when Eibon was greeted by the high priest, Morghi, who had readily followed him by his tracks in the ashen soil.

"Detestable sorcerer! Abominable heretic! I arrest you!" said Morghi with pontifical severity.

EIBON WAS surprised, not to say startled; but it reassured him to see that Morghi was alone. He drew the sword of highly tempered bronze which he carried, and smiled.

"I should advise you to moderate your language, Morghi," he admonished. "Also, your idea of arresting me is slightly out of place now, since we are alone

together in Cykranosh, and Mhu Thulan and the temple-cells of Yhoundeh are many million miles away."

Morghi did not appear to relish this information. He scowled and muttered, "I suppose this is some more of your damnable wizardry."

Eibon chose to ignore the insinuation.

"I have been conversing with one of the gods of Cykranosh," he said magniloquently. "The god, whose name is Hziulquoigmnzah, has given me a mission to perform, a message to deliver, and has indicated the direction in which I should go. I suggest that you lay aside our little mundane disagreement, and accompany me. Of course we could slit each other's throats or eviscerate each other, since we are both armed. But under the circumstances, I think you will see the puerility, not to mention the sheer inutility, of such proceeding. If we both live we may be of mutual use and assistance, in a strange world whose problems and difficulties, if I mistake not, are worthy of our united powers."

Morghi frowned and pondered.

"Very well," he said grudgingly, "I consent. But I warn you that matters will have to take their course when we return to Mhu Thulan."

"That," rejoined Eibon, "is a contingency which need not

trouble either of us. Shall we start?"

THE TWO Hyprboreans had been following a defile that wound away from the lake of fluid metal among hills whose vegetation thickened and grew more various as their height decreased. It was the valley that had been indicated to the sorcerer by the topsy-turvy biped. Morghi, a natural inquisitor in all senses, was plying Eibon with questions.

"Who, or what, was the singular entity that disappeared in a cavern just before I accosted you?"

"That was the god Hziulquoigmnzah."

"And who, pray is this god? I confess that I have never heard of him."

"He is the paternal uncle of Zhothaqquah."

Morghi was silent, except for a queer sound that might have been either an interrupted sneeze or an exclamation of disgust. But after a while he asked, "And what is this mission of yours?"

"That will be revealed in due time," answered Eibon with sententious dignity. "I am not allowed to discuss it at present. I have a message from the god which I must deliver only to the proper persons."

Morghi was unwillingly impressed.

"Well, I suppose you know what you are doing and where you are going. Can you give me any hint as to our destination?"

"That, too, will be revealed in due time."

THE HILLS were lapsing gently to a well-wooded plain whose flora would have been the despair of Earthly botanists. Beyond the last hill, Eibon and Morghi came to a narrow road that began abruptly and stretched away in the distance. Eibon took the road without hesitation. Indeed there was little else to do, for the thickets of mineral plants and trees were rapidly becoming impenetrable. They lined the way with serrate branches that were like sheaves of darts and daggers, of sword-blades and needles.

Eibon and Morghi soon noticed that the road was full of large footprints, all of them circular in form and rimmed about with the marks of protruding claws. However, they did not communicate their misgivings to each other.

After an hour or two of progress along the yielding ashy thoroughfare, amid the vegetation that was more horrent than ever with knives and caltrops, the travelers began to remember that they were hungry. Morghi, in his haste to arrest Eibon, had not breakfasted; and Eibon, in his natural hurry to evade Morghi, had committed a like omis-

sion. They halted by the wayside, and the sorcerer shared his parcel of food and wine with the priest. They ate and drank with frugality, however, since the supply was limited, and the landscape about them was not likely to yield any viands that were suitable for human sustenance.

With strength and courage revived by this little refection, they continued their journey. They had not gone far when they overtook a remarkable monster that was plainly the originator of the numerous footprints. It was squatting down with its armored haunches toward the travelers, filling the whole road for an indeterminate distance ahead. They could see that it was possessed of a myriad short legs; but they could form no idea of what its head and forequarters were like.

Eibon and Morghi were much dismayed.

"Is this another of your gods?" asked Morghi ironically.

THE SORCERER did not reply. But he realized that he had a reputation to sustain. He went boldly forward and cried out, "Hziulquoigmnzah" in the most resonant bellow that he could summon. At the same time he drew his sword and thrust it between two plates of the horny mail that covered the monster's hindquarters.

Greatly to his relief, the ani-

mal began to move and resumed its march along the road. The Hyperboreans followed it; and whenever the creature slackened its pace Eibon would repeat the formula which he had found so effective. Morghi was compelled to regard him with a certain awe.

They traveled on in this manner for several hours. The great luminous triple ring still overarched the zenith, but a strangely small and chilly sun had now intersected the ring and was declining toward the west of Cykranosh. The forest along the way was still a high wall of sharp metallic foliage; but other roads and paths and by-ways were now branching off from the one that the monster followed.

All was very silent, except for the many-footed shuffling of this uncouth animal; and neither Eibon nor Morghi had spoken for miles. The high priest was regretting more and more his rashness in pursuing Eibon through the panel; and Eibon was wishing that Zhothaqquah had given him the entree to a different sort of world. They were startled out of their meditations by a sudden clamor of deep and booming voices that rose from somewhere in advance of the monster. It was a veritable pandemonium of unhuman guttural bellowings and croakings, with notes that were somehow suggestive of reproof and

objurgation, like shrewish drums, as if the monster were being scolded by a group of unimaginable entities.

"Well?" queried Morghi.

"All that we are destined to behold will reveal itself at the proper time," said Eibon.

THE FOREST was thinning rapidly, and the clamor of tremendous bellows was drawing closer. Still following the hind-quarters of their multipedal guide, which was crawling on with reluctant slowness, the travelers emerged in an open space and beheld a most singular tableau. The monster, which was plainly of a tame and harmless and stupid sort, was cowering before a knot of beings no larger than men, who were armed only with long-handled goads.

These beings, though they were bipeds, and were not quite so unheard-of in their anatomic structure as the entity which Eibon had met by the lake, were nevertheless sufficiently unusual; for their heads and bodies were apparently combined in one, and their ears, eyes, nostrils, mouths and certain other organs of doubtful use were all arranged in a somewhat unconventional grouping on their chests and abdomens. They were wholly naked, and were rather dark in color, with no trace of hair on any part of their bodies. Behind them at a little distance were many edi-

fices of a kind which hardly conformed to human ideas of architectural symmetry.

Eibon strode valorously forward, with Morghi following discreetly. The torso-headed beings ceased their scolding of the fawning monster and peered at the Earthmen with expressions that were difficult to read on account of the odd and baffling relationship of their features.

"Hziulquoigmznzhah! Zhothaquah!" said Eibon with oracular solemnity and sonority. Then, after a pause of hieratic length, "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh!*"

The result was indeed gratifying, and was all that could be expected even from a formula so remarkable; for the Cykranoshian beings dropped their goads and bowed before the sorcerer till their featured bosoms almost touched the ground.

"I have performed the mission, I have delivered the message given me by Hziulquoigmznzhah," said Eibon to Morghi.

FOR SEVERAL Cykranoshian months the two Hyperboreans were the honored guests of this quaint and worthy and virtuous people, who called themselves the Bhlemphroims. Eibon had a real gift for languages and made progress in the local tongue far more readily than Morghi. His knowledge of the customs, manners, ideas and beliefs of the Bhlemphroims soon became extensive; but he found

it a source of disillusionment as well as of illumination.

The armored monster that he and Morghi had driven before them so valiantly was, he learned, a domestic beast of burden that had strayed away from its owners amid the mineral vegetation of the desert lands adjoining Vhlorrh, the chief town of the Bhlemphroims. The genuflections with which Eibon and Morghi had been greeted were only an expression of gratitude for the safe return of this beast; and were not, as Eibon had thought, an acknowledgment of the divine names he had quoted and the fearsome phrase, "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh.*"

The being that Eibon had met by the lake was indeed the god Hziulquoigmznzhah; and there were dim traditions of Zhothaquah in certain early myths of the Bhlemphroims. But this people, it seemed, were most regrettably materialistic and had long ceased to offer sacrifice and prayer to the gods; though they spoke of them with a sort of distant respect and with no actual blasphemy.

Eibon learned that the words "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh*" doubtless belonged to a private language of the gods, which the Bhlemphroims no longer understood; but which, however, was still studied by a neighboring people, the Ydheems, who maintained the ancient formal wor-

ship of Hziulquoigmnzhah and various related deities.

THE BHLEMPHROIMS were indeed a practical race, and had few if any interests beyond the cultivation of a great variety of edible fungi, the breeding of large centipedaḷ animals, and the propagation of their own species. The latter process, as revealed to Eibon and Morghi, was somewhat unusual: though the Bhlemphroims were bisexual, only one female in a generation was chosen for reproductive duties; and this female, after growing to mammoth size on food prepared from a special fungus, became the mother of an entire new generation.

When they had been well initiated into the life and customs of Vhlorrh, the Hyperboreans were privileged to see the future national mother, called the Djhenquomh, who had now attained the requisite proportions after years of scientific nourishment. She lived in an edifice that was necessarily larger than any of the other buildings in Vhlorrh; and her sole activity was the consumption of immense quantities of food. The sorcerer and the inquisitor were impressed, even if not captivated, by the mountainous amplitude of her charms and by their highly novel arrangement. They were told that the male parent (or parents) of the forthcoming

generation had not yet been selected.

The possession of separate heads by the Hyperboreans seemed to lend them a remarkable biologic interest in the eyes of their hosts. The Bhlemphroims, it was learned, had not always been headless but had reached their present physical conformation through a slow course of evolution, in which the head of the archetypal Bhlemphroim had been merged by imperceptible degrees with the torso.

But, unlike most peoples, they did not regard their current stage of development with unqualified complacency. Indeed, their headlessness was a source of national regret; they deplored the retrenchment of nature in this regard; and the arrival of Eibon and Morghi, who were looked upon as ideal exemplars of cephalic evolution, had served to quicken their eugenic sorrow.

THE SORCERER and the inquisitor, on their part, found life rather dull among the Bhlemphroims after the first feeling of exoticism had worn off. The diet was tiresome for one thing — an endless succession of raw and boiled and roasted mushrooms, varied at rare intervals by the coarse and flabby meat of tame monsters. And this people, though they were always polite and respect-

ful, did not seem to be greatly awed by the exhibitions of Hyperborean magic with which Eibon and Morghi favored them; and their lamentable want of religious ardor made all evangelistic endeavor a thankless task. And, being fundamentally unimaginative, they were not even duly impressed by the fact that their visitors had come from a remote ultra-Cykranoshian world.

"I feel," said Eibon to Morghi one day, "that the god was sadly mistaken in deigning to send this people a message of any sort."

It was very soon after this that a large committee of the Bhlemphroims waited upon Eibon and Morghi and informed them that after long consideration they had been selected as the fathers of the next generation and were to be married forthwith to the tribal mother in the hope that a well-headed race of Bhlemphroims would result from the union.

Eibon and Morghi were quite overcome by the proposed eugenic honor. Thinking of the mountainous female they had seen, Morghi was prone to remember his sacerdotal vows of celibacy and Eibon was eager to take similar vows upon himself without delay. The inquisitor, indeed, was so overwhelmed as to be rendered almost speechless; but, with rare presence of mind, the sorcerer tem-

porized by making a few queries anent the legal and social status which would be enjoyed by Morghi and himself as the husbands of the Djhenquomh. And the naive Bhlemphroims told him that this would be a matter of brief concern; that after completing their marital duties the husbands were always served to the national mother in the form of ragouts and other culinary preparations.

THE HYPERBOREANS tried to conceal from their hosts the reluctance with which they both regarded the coming honor in all its sages. Being as usual a master of diplomatics, Eibon went so far as to make a formal acceptance on behalf of himself and his companion. But when the delegation of Bhlemphroims had departed he said to Morghi, "I am more than ever convinced that the god was mistaken. We must leave the city of Vhlorrh with all feasible dispatch, and continue our journey till we find a people who are worthier to receive His communication."

Apparently it had never occurred to the simple and patriotic Bhlemphroims that the fathering of their next national litter was a privilege that anyone would dream of rejecting. Eibon and Morghi were subjected to no manner of duress or constraint, and their movements were not even watched. It was

an easy matter to leave the house in which they had been domiciled, when the rumbling snores of their hosts were ascending to the great ring of Cykranoshian moons, and to follow the highway that led from Vhloorh toward the country of the Ydheems.

The road before them was well marked; and the ring-light was almost as clear and brilliant as full day. They traveled a long distance through the diversified and always unique scenery which it served to illumine, before the rising of the sun and the consequent discovery of their departure by the Bhlemphroims. These single-minded bipeds, it is likely, were too sorely perplexed and dumb-founded by the loss of the guests whom they had chosen as future progenitors to even think of following them.

THE LAND of the Ydheems (as indicated on an earlier occasion by the Bhlemphroims) was many leagues away; and tracts of ashen deserts, of mineral cacti, of fungoid forests and high mountains intervened. The boundary of the Bhlemphroims — marked by a crude sculpturesque representation of the tribal mother beside the way — was passed by the travelers before dawn.

And during the following day they journeyed among more than one of those unusual races

who diversify so widely the population of Saturn. They saw the Djhibbis, that apterous and Stylitean bird-people who roost on their individual dolomites for years at a time and meditate upon the cosmos, uttering to each other at long intervals the mystic syllables *yop*, *yeep* and *yoop*, which are said to express an unfathomed range of esoteric thought.

And they met those flibbertigibbet pygmies, the Ephiqhs, who hollow out their homes in the trunks of certain large fungi, and are always having to hunt new habitations because the old ones crumble into powder in a few days. And they heard the underground croakings of that mysterious people, the Ghlonghs, who dread not only the sunlight but also the ring-light, and who have never yet been seen by any of the surface-dwellers.

By sunset, however, Eibon and Morghi had crossed the domains of all the aforementioned races, and had even climbed the lower scarps of those mountains which still divided them from the land of the Ydheems. Here, on a sheltered ledge, their weariness impelled them to halt; and since they had now ceased to dread pursuit from the Bhlemphroims, they wrapped themselves more tightly in their mantles against the cold, after a

meager supper of raw mushrooms, and fell asleep.

THEIR SLUMBER was disturbed by a series of cacodemonical dreams in which they both thought they had been recaptured by the Bhlemphroins and were forced to espouse the Djhenquomh. They awoke shortly before dawn, from visions whose details were excruciatingly vivid, and were more than ready to resume their ascent of the mountains.

The slopes and cliffs above them were desolate enough to have deterred any travelers of inferior hardihood or less cogent fears. The tall woods of fungi dwindled ere long to tiny growths, and soon they lessened to forms that were no bigger than lichens; and after these, there was nothing but black and naked stone. The wiry and slender Eibon suffered no great inconvenience from the climb; but Morghi, with his sacerdotal girth and bulk, was soon winded. Whenever he paused to recover his breath, Eibon would say to him, "Think of the national mother," and Morghi would climb the next acclivity like an agile but somewhat asthmatic mountain-sheep.

They came at noon to a pinnacle-guarded pass from which they could look down on the country of the Ydheems. They saw that it was a broad and fertile realm, with woods of mam-

moth mushrooms and other thallophytes that excelled in size and number those of any other region they had yet traversed. Even the mountain-slopes were more fruitful on this side, for Eibon and Morghi had not descended far when they entered a grove of enormous puffballs and toadstools.

They were admiring the magnitude and variety of these growths, when they heard a thunderous noise on the mountains above them. The noise drew nearer, gathering to itself the roar of new thunders. Eibon would have prayed to Zhothaquah, and Morghi would have supplicated the goddess Yhoundeh, but unfortunately there was no time. They were caught in a mighty mass of rolling puff-balls and toppling toadstools overthrown by the huge avalanche that had started on the heights above; and, borne with increasing momentum, with vertiginous speed and tumult amid an ever-growing heap of shattered fungi, they finished their descent of the mountain in less than a minute.

ENDEAVORING to extricate themselves from the pile of thallophytic debris in which they were buried, Eibon and Morghi noticed that there still seemed to be a good deal of noise, even though the avalanche had stopped. Also, there were other movements and heavings than

their own in the pile. When they had managed to get their necks and shoulders clear, they discovered that the commotion was being made by certain people who differed from their late hosts, the Bhlemphroims, in that they possessed rudimentary heads.

These people were some of the Ydheems, on one of whose towns the avalanche had descended. Roofs and towers were beginning to emerge from the mass of boulders and puff-balls; and just in front of the Hyperboreans there was a large temple-like edifice from whose blocked-up door a multitude of the Ydheems had now tunneled their way. At sight of Eibon and Morghi they suspended their labors; and the sorcerer, who had freed himself and had made sure that all his bones and members were intact, now took the opportunity to address them.

"Harken!" he said with great importance. "I have come to bring you a message from the god Hziulquoigmnzhah. I have borne it faithfully on ways beset with many hazards and perils. In the god's own divine language, it runs thus: '*Iqhui dlosh odhqlongh.*'"

Since he spoke in the dialect of the Bhlemphroims, which differed somewhat from their own, it is doubtful if the Ydheems altogether understood the first part of his utterance. But Hziulquoigmnzhah was

their tutelary deity; and they knew the language of the gods. At the words: "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlongh,*" there was a most remarkable resumption and increase of activity, a ceaseless running to and fro on the part of the Ydheems, a shouting of guttural orders, and a recrudescence of new heads and limbs from the avalanche.

Those who had issued from the temple re-entered it, and came out once more carrying a huge image of Hziulquoigmnzhah, some smaller icons of lesser though allied deities, and a very ancient-looking idol which both Eibon and Morghi recognized as having a resemblance to Zhothaquah. Others of the Ydeems brought their household goods and furniture forth from the dwellings, and signing the Hyperboreans to accompany them, the whole populace began to evacuate the town.

EIBON AND MORGHI were much mystified. And it was not until a new town had been built on the fungus-wooded plain at the distance of a full day's march, and they themselves had been installed among the priests of the new temple, that they learned the reason of it all and the meaning of: "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlongh.*" These words meant merely: "Be on your way;" and the god had addressed them to Eibon as a dismissal. But the coincidental coming of

the avalanche and of Eibon and Morghi with his purported message from the god, had been taken by the Ydheems as a divine injunction to remove themselves and their goods from their present location. Thus the wholesale exodus of people with their idols and domestic belongings.

The new town was called Ghlomph, after the one that the avalanche had buried. Here, for the remainder of their days, Eibon and Morghi were held in much honor; and their coming with the message, "*Iqhui dlosh odhqlongh*," was deemed a fortunate thing, since there were no more avalanches to threaten the security of Ghlomph in its new situation remote from the mountains.

The Hypberboreans shared the increment of civic affluence and well-being resultant from this security. There was no national mother among the Ydheems, who propagated themselves in a far more general manner than the Bhlemphroims; so existence was quite safe and tranquil. Eibon, at least, was really in his element; for the news which he brought of Zhothaquah, who was still worshipped in this region of Cykranosh, had enabled him to set up as a sort of minor prophet, even apart from the renown which he enjoyed as the bearer of the divine message and as the

founder of the new town of Ghlomph.

Morghi, however, was not entirely happy. Though the Ydheems were religious, they did not carry their devotional fervor to the point of bigotry or intolerance; so it was quite impossible to start an inquisition among them. But still there were compensations: the fungus-wine of the Ydheems was potent though evil-tasting; and there were females of a sort, if one were not too squeamish. Consequently, Morghi and Eibon both settled down to an ecclesiastic regimen which, after all, was not so radically different from that of Mhu Thulan or any other place on the planet of their birth.

SUCH WERE the various adventures, and such was the final lot of this redoubtable pair in Cykranosh. But in Eibon's tower of black gneiss on that headland of the northern sea in Mhu Thulan, the underlings of Morghi waited for days, neither wishing to follow the high priest through the magic panel nor daring to leave in disobedience of his orders.

At length they were recalled by a special dispensation from the hierophant who had been chosen as Morghi's temporary successor. But the result of the whole affair was highly regrettable from the standpoint of the

hierachy of Yhoundeh. It was universally believed that Eibon had not only escaped by virtue of the powerful magic he had learned from Zhothaquah, but had made away with Morghi into the bargain. As a conse-

quence of this belief, the faith of Yhoundeh declined, and there was a widespread revival of the dark worship of Zhothaquah throughout Mhu Thulan in the last centuries before the onset of the great Ice Age.

It Is Written . . .

As we end volume one, we should like to report to you on the general trend of your reactions as indicated by your letters, ballots, etc. Full returns from you are in on the first three issues; a few letters have been received on the fourth, as our schedule requires that all copy for this issue go to the printer not long after the fourth issue went on sale. We can add an extra paragraph a month from now, by which time we will have an adequate idea of how you rated the May issue, but we could not send on very much last-minute copy. That is why you will see very little comment on the stories we ran in the May issue; these will have to wait until next time.

Over 150 stories have been nominated for reprint, and more suggestions keep coming in. This, plus your expressed approval of our offering you some works of the Old Masters, but more from magazines and hard-cover collections of twenty years back and earlier, shows that you approve of our reprint policy. You have also consistently asked for new stories, and these we will offer you as we can obtain items which we feel are up to the standard you desire. With your nominations for reprint: some of these, for one reason or another, are not available to us; but very many are, and we shall follow your wishes as early as possible. Please do not hesitate to send us lists; even if your list contains nothing which we do not already have, it can guide us; for when we are trying to decide which of possible stories needed to balance out an issue we should use first, one which has a large number of votes will take precedence.

Mark Ownings writes from Baltimore, "My trying to suggest stories seems somewhat disrespectful, and reminding someone with a memory like *yours* of a story is downright ridiculous."

But it isn't, Mr. Ownings. In addition to the reason listed above, our memory for stories we have read, while good, isn't perfect. A number of good stories suggested turn out to have been ones we'd forgotten about. And, in addition, we haven't read everything.

The question of reprinting stories by H. G. Wells, Ambrose Bierce, and Rudyard Kipling continues to be lively. Your reactions to the Wells tales we have offered has shown something like four to one in favor, and he has received far more comment than the other two. Reactions to Bierce and Kipling have been nearly split. Pending further returns which might indicate a change of majority opinion, the suggested course is to offer you more Wells, but restrict

Bierce and Kipling to stories specifically nominated; however, we may not present Wells as continuously as we have been doing.

"In regard to your note on *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, writes James Turner, "I feel that this should be reprinted, even though I already have a copy and it will be a waste of space so far as this reader is concerned. Still, for the benefit of those who haven't copies of *The Outsider and Others*, the later 1945 reprint, or even the original fanzine appearance of this article, I think that the publication of this might cultivate a sense of appreciation in real fantasy literature: most modern readers don't seem to realize that there are good authors outside of Arkham House and Edgar Rice Burroughs. And yet, I'm almost certain that most of your readers will express their disappointment with it; Lovecraft was so very disorganized in his format, and also one must consider how dated it is, being written back in the 1930's and completely oblivious of the important mass of heroic UNKNOWN WORLDS type of fantasy which was to come after HPL died."

Hank Luttrell writes from Kirkwood, Mo., "As to the question about non-fiction in your pages: I don't want to see articles about strange happenings, or fantasy-that-really-happened, or this type of thing. I can find this elsewhere. I read your magazine for fiction. I would like to see Lovecraft's essay. Or other non-fiction on fiction, for that matter. Let's try to keep our magazine (I believe that is a favorite expression of editors) fiction, or about fiction, shall we?"

Franklin Hiller writes from Rochester, NY, "I'll have to abstain from voting on the publication of the specific article mentioned, Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature* since I have a copy of it published by Ben Abramson, but my vote on the general question of articles in MAGAZINE OF HORROR is no. In any event I'd rather not see articles included on a regular basis. There is little enough space available for the stories themselves and I know of only one other magazine that publishes stories of this sort . . .

"I'm sure I don't have to remind you that it would be as foolish to ignore H. P. Lovecraft's stories, and other stories of this type, as it would be to print nothing else but this type. So I hope that you will continue to run an occasional Lovecraft tale. . . .

"How about printing as many as possible of the horror stories mentioned in Lovecraft's essay?"

These are the first comments on the question we raised in our last issue about reprinting the Lovecraft essay. We are aware that the essay is far from up to date but feel that the comment on earlier material might be of value. However, this is a subject on which you, the readers, shall have final say and we will not be hasty in deciding; many more votes must be received before we can come to a conclusion.

The expression "our magazine" was first seen in science fiction in the letter columns of the old Gernsback AMAZING STORIES and it was a reader who originated it.

As to what she considered the best story in the May issue, Rachel C. Payes writes, "No contest. H. G. Wells was so far out in front that he was completely out of sight of the rest. If you'd fill your magazine with this kind of story, you could change the name from MAGAZINE OF HORROR to MAGAZINE OF HUMOR. I liked it."

Mrs. Payes is one of our readers who do not care for horror stories, but like the strange, unusual, and humorous. This does, however, bring up a point. We have tried to change pace now and then with a touch of humor — not the flippant sort which undermines the medium, but the genuinely amusing which

Coming Next Issue

The next entry was again a portion of a letter, patently a reply to one from Grandfather Whateley.

"You ask who is responsible for those *ridiculous* tales about the Marshes. Well, Luther, it would be impossible to single out any one or a dozen people over several generations. I agree that old Zadock Allen talks too much, drinks, and may be romancing. But he is only one. The fact is this legendry — or *rigmarole*, as you call it — has grown up from one generation to the next. Through three generations. You have only to look at some of the descendants of Captain Obed to understand why this could have come about. There are some Marsh offspring said to have been too horrible to look upon. Old wives' tales? Well, Dr. Rowley Marsh was too ill to attend one of the Marsh women one time; so they had to call Dr. Gilman, and Gilman always said that what he delivered was less than human. And nobody ever saw that particular Marsh, though there were people later who claimed to have seen *things moving on two legs that weren't human*.

Following this there was a brief but revealing entry in two words: "Punished Sarah."

This must mark the date of Sarah Whateley's confinement to the room above the mill. For some time after this entry, there was no mention of his daughter in Luther's script. Instead, his jottings were not dated in any way, and, judging by the difference in the color of the ink, were made at different times, though run together.

"Many frogs. Seem to bear in on the mill. Seem to be more than in the marshes across the Miskatonic. Sleeping difficult. Are whipporwills on the increase, too, or is this imagination? . . . Counted thirty-seven frogs at the porch steps tonight."

There were more entries of this nature. Abner read them all, but there was no clue in them to what the old man had been getting at. Luther Whateley had thereafter kept book on frogs, fog, fish, and their movements in the Miskatonic — when they rose and leaped from the water, and so on. This seemed to be unrelated data, and was not in any way connected to the problem of Sarah.

There was another hiatus after this series of notes, and then came a single, underscored entry.

"Ariah was right!"

But about what had Ariah been right? Abner wondered. And how had Luther Whateley learned that Ariah had been right? There was no evidence that Ariah and Luther had continued their correspondence . . .

You will not want to miss this novella, in which August Derleth develops an incompleted Lovecraft story linking the Innsmouth and Dunwich themes.

THE SHUTTERED ROOM

by H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth

Continued from Page 122

nonetheless respects it. But we haven't asked you how you feel, and would like to hear from you on this score.

From Ontario, Canada, George Rogers writes, "Although I agree with some of your readers who do not wish your magazine to become a copy-machine, reproducing only classical stories from the early part of this century, I must also add the thoughts of my generation. I am a second-year university student at Carleton U., here in Ottawa, and because of my age — 18 — and my position — Canada — have missed much of the early works of such masters as Fitz-James O'Brien, H. P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe, H. G. Wells, Arthur Machen, etc., etc. It is only through magazines of your kind that I, and others of my proclivities, can ever hope to enjoy these works.

"So I ask you to continue in your present enjoyable format of "something old, something new", and not let the field of horror-writing disappear from our present-day society."

Your votes and comments show the following to have been the best-appreciated stories in our May issue: (1) *The Dreams in the Witch-House*, by H. P. Lovecraft; (2) *The Mark of the Beast*, by Rudyard Kipling; (3) *What Was It?*, by Fitz-James O'Brien; (4) *Beyond the Breakers*, by Anna Hunger; (5) *A Dream of Falling*, by Attila Hatvany. As we anticipated, the most controversial story in the issue was Lovecraft's, though dislike votes were less than half the number of first-place votes. RAWL

In the May issue, we announced a special contest open to all readers. If your ballot or letter or postcard lists the top five stories in the order in which they finally appear, you will receive a free copy of the issue containing the announcement of it. (Subscribers will have an extra copy added to their subscription.) This is the same offer we make to readers first to suggest a story for reprint that we are able to use.

There is no winner this time, but — who knows — next time there might be several! Please send in your opinions and votes; they are very helpful to us, if they list five or more stories in the order of your preference.

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INTRODUCTION (Continued From Page 4)

this was the Depression. A two-dollar book was out of the question. A one-dollar cheap edition might be possible at birthdays or Christmas. **Dracula** was to be had at the library, but not **Frankenstein**; somehow an extra quarter a month could be found for **Weird Tales**, when the latter novel was reprinted in 1932.

Around 1931, I started corresponding with science fiction readers, whose letters I saw in the readers' departments of the various science fiction magazines. We talked about the reprint question, and I found that the situation was pretty good for fans living in New York and some of the other big cities. Libraries had hard-cover science fiction, and back issues of **Argosy** and the other Munsey magazines could be found for nickels and dimes; second hand dealers did not realize the prices they could ask for these, in many instances. But with fans from towns and villages, it was an entirely different story; many of them envied me when I told them what was to be had at the Darien library.

Now, in 1964, things are better, you think. Not so very much so, if you read the letters I receive. People living in small towns do not, by any means, find these old stories "readily available". RAWL

If You Missed Our Previous Issues

There are still a few copies left! Here is a partial list of contents, showing best-liked stories in the first four issues.

August 1963: *The Man With a Thousand Legs*, by Frank Belknap Long; *The Yellow Sign*, by Robert W. Chambers; *The Unbeliever*, by Robert Silverberg; *The Last Dawn*, by Frank Lillie Pollock; *Babylon: 70M*, by Donald A. Wollheim.

November 1963: *Clarissa*, by Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Space-Eaters*, by Frank Belknap Long; *The Charmer*, by Archie Binns; *The Faceless Thing*, by Edward D. Hoch; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, by Rudyard Kipling.

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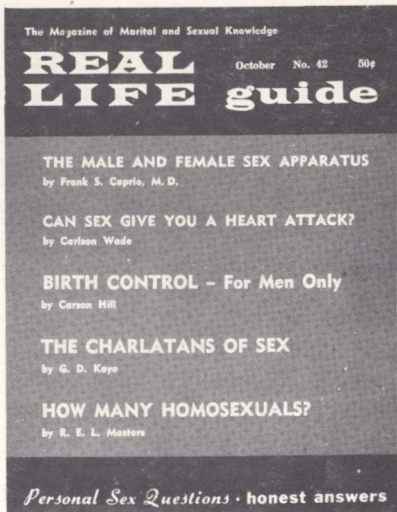
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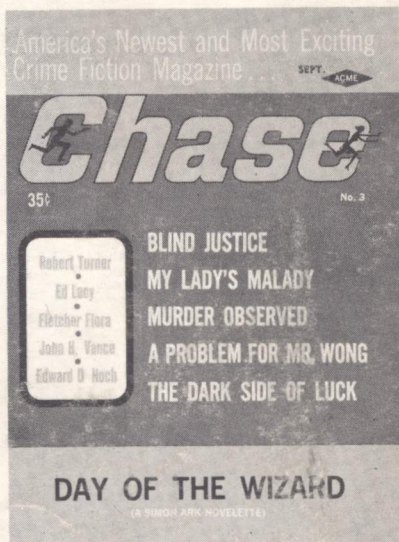
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